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Picturing Carnal Temptation and Sin in Italian Post-Tridentine Imagery

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Cover image: Giacomo Franco, St Francis' Exemplary Chastity (detail), 1593.
Orig. photo: Istituto Storico Cappuccini, Museo Francescano, Rome

Åbo Akademi University Press
Tavastgatan 13, FI-20500 Åbo, Finland
Tel. +358 (0)2 215 4793
E-mail: forlaget@abo.fi

Sales and distribution:
Åbo Akademi University Library
Domkyrkogatan 2–4, FI-20500 Åbo, Finland
Tel. +358 (0)2 -215 4190
E-mail: publikationer@abo.fi

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Åbo Akademis förlag | Åbo Akademi University Press

CIP Cataloguing in Publication

Hamrin, Minna.
Picturing carnal temptation and sin in Italian post-Tridentine imagery / Minna Hamrin. - Åbo : Åbo Akademi University Press, 2018.
Diss.: Åbo Akademi University.
ISBN 978-951-765-913-0

ISBN 978-951-765-913-0
ISBN 978-951-765-914-7 (digital)
Painosalama Oy
Åbo 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In December 2011 a friend brought me along to a book presentation in Biblioteca Angelica in Rome. It was a new biography of the Devil, and the discussion of the evening circled around the role of the Devil and his demons in contemporary Catholicism. The Devil tempts the religious it was said – it is crucial to resist him! Martin Schongauer's famous sixteenth-century etching of the tempted St Anthony, hovering in the air and encircled by demons, came to my mind. That evening I left excited, a seed of interest had been planted. I later got an opportunity to meet two renowned exorcists of the Catholic Church. When I asked them to further elaborate on the subject of devilish temptation and possession, I was told that only profoundly religious people were at risk of becoming potential victims. Thus, it seemed as if devilish temptation really was seen as a confirmation of one's loyalty to God, and a possibility to further prove it. I realised that there must be more saints than St Anthony who had been battling against the Devil and his temptations, and the art historian in me was determined to look further for their temptation scenes in the visual tradition. Thank you, Line, I am ever so grateful that you brought me along and exposed me to what would develop into this wonderful research project that has been my life companion now for years.

Many have contributed to the success of this work. I want to thank my supervisor Prof. Lars Berggren, Åbo Akademi University, who has supported my research project throughout the process. He has underlined the importance of studying the material first hand and has encouraged me to do so. It enabled me to undisturbed spend the majority of my six-year-long research period in Italy, something for which I am very thankful. I am also much obliged for all the knowledgeable help and well-needed positive encouragement that my second supervisor, Docent Martin Olin, Head of Research at Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, has offered me during the years. His expertise on seventeenth-century imagery has been vital. Docent Kari Kotkavaara, Åbo Akademi University, has through many engaging conversations given me a deeper insight and greater sensitivity towards questions regarding the religious arts and for this I am indebted.

The finished version of this work also owes much to the constructive comments and knowledge of the preliminary examiners of my thesis,

Prof. Genevieve Warwick, the University of Edinburgh and Prof. Paul Gwynne, the American University of Rome. Docent Marie-Sofie Lundström, Head of Research at the Art History Department, Åbo Akademi University, has, in turn, through her strenuous supervision and administration been of most vital importance for the concluding work on this project. I would also like to thank my other colleagues at the Art history Department: Pia Wolff-Helminen, Heidi Pfäffli, Fred Andersson and Bo Ossian Lindberg, who, together with the members of our research seminars have given valuable criticism and feedback on my work. A special heartfelt thank you goes to my fellow doctoral student and dear friend Sofia Aittomaa, who, regardless of geographical distances, always has been only a phone call away to offer support and understanding whenever work with the thesis has been difficult and uninspiring.

For the most part of my work with the thesis, I have been employed by the Art history Department at Åbo Akademi. I have, however, also been fortunate enough to receive generous research and travel grants from several Finnish and Swedish foundations. Konststiftelsen Merita and the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland founded my initial year of research. The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland also supported, along with Waldemar von Frenckells stiftelse and Harry Elvings legat, my Doctoral exchange studies at the Università di Bologna during the academic year 2013/2014. Istituto Svedese degli studi classici a Roma – The Swedish Institute in Rome – granted a research fellowship for the academic year 2015/2016. Through the travel grants provided by Stiftelsen Gihls fond and Fondazione famiglia Rausing, I was able to carry out several larger research trips around the Italian peninsula. Finally, my last and concluding year was financed through grants from Johan och Jakob Söderbergs stiftelse, and Anne-Marie Cronströms minnesfond.

Throughout this project, I have met many helpful people in archives, libraries and museums. I would especially like to thank Marcella Culatti at the photographic archive at Biblioteca Zeri in Bologna and Father Yohannes Teklemariam Bache at the Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini – Museo francescano in Rome, for their kind help with finding and providing image material for my research. I am also indebted for the support and advice given to me by the priests, friars, monks, church caretakers, locals and even mayors that I have had the fortune to meet during my travels to various locations and small towns around Italy. They have opened locked doors, suggested

literature and provided new information about the different works of art included in this study. A special thanks goes to Matthias, my life and travel companion whose skills and forthrightness has provided me with photographs of works I would never have gained access to alone.

The work with this book also brought me to Rome and to Bologna, two cities that have become my second homes and in which I have met wonderful people that I am now lucky enough to call my dear friends. Indeed, the aid and support of my family and my friends has been essential, and I thank you all for it.

Lastly, however, I want to thank St Francis, St Anthony, St Benedict, St Jerome, St Thomas, St Eligius and St Philip for resisting. This project would never have been possible if you had fallen for the temptation.

Berlin, October 2018

Minna Hamrin

1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I examine depictions of carnally tempted male saints, defending their chastity against transgressive women. The images were produced in post-Tridentine Italy, in a newly reformed Catholic culture where chastity was seen as a virtue and sexual lust as a gateway to sin. Only male saints have been made protagonists of these scenes. It uncovers well-established misogyny; the female gender is presented as an immediate danger to the patriarchal order, eager to corrupt innocent, pious men by inducing them to engage in the sin of fornication.

The sixteenth century was an age of significant church reform. In 1545, about two decades after the Protestant Reformation, a group of bishops from different Catholic Countries[1] gathered in Trent, then the capital of the Bishopric of Trent in the Holy Roman Empire. They intended to discuss Catholic dogma and reform changes in what would be known as the Tridentine Council (the Latin name of Trent, or Trento, is Tridentum, hence Tridentine), the central movement of the Catholic Reformation (also known as the Counter-Reformation).[2] The Council met in twenty-five sessions during a time span of eighteen years (1545–1563, fig 1.).[3] One of the questions discussed during the Council was the rule of mandatory celibacy for the clergy. Protestants had abolished the tradition and, instead, encouraged their priests to

1 The number of participants varied. When the council officially opened in December 1545, thirty bishops were present. During its last session in December 1563, there were 255 members present, including four papal legates, two cardinals, three patriarchs, twenty-five archbishops and 168 bishops. Italian participants constituted the vast majority, about two thirds. The Spanish delegates constituted the next largest group of the participants. The French delegates initially boycotted the council and participated only during the last period from 1562–1563. O'Malley 2013, 31ff.

2 Although both terms often are used in parallel, the event is more often called Counter-Reformation by Protestant historians, as the prevailing idea is that the Protestant Reformation provoked the Catholic Church to reform itself. Catholic historians, on the other hand, are somewhat resistant to this assumption and argue that the Tridentine Council took place because of a universal revival of spiritual well-being within the Church, something that would have happened regardless of the Protestant Reformation. As it is often suggested that the spiritual revival of the Church already started in the Middle Ages, the term 'Catholic Reformation' is preferred. See Randell 1990, 1f.

3 The history of the Council is divided into three distinct periods. The first ten sessions, presided by Pope Paul III were held 1545–1549. After a few years break, the Council continued its work in session eleven to sixteen under the supervision of Pope Julius III 1551–1552. A longer pause of ten years then followed until Pope Pius IV led the last eight sessions between 1562 and 1563. None of the three Popes attended the council in person, instead specially appointed delegates represented the Papacy.

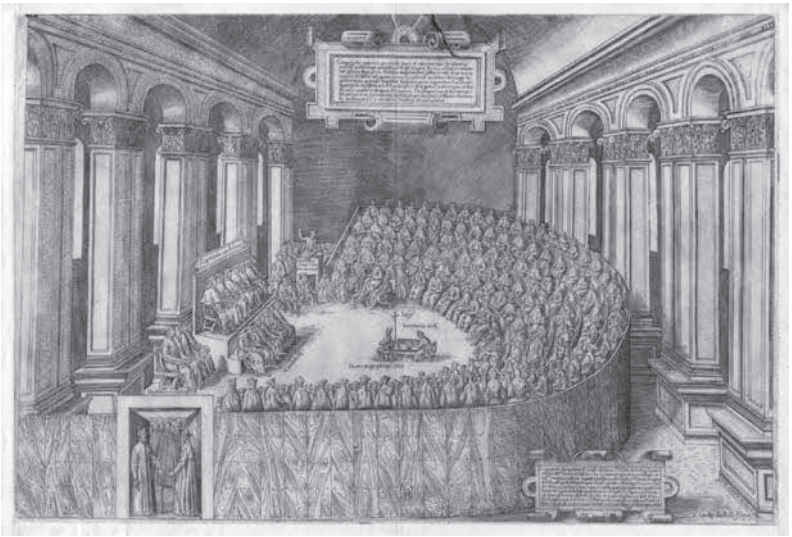

Fig.1 Anonymous engraver, *the Council of Trent*, in S*peculum Romanae Magnificentiae*, 1565. Etching and engraving, 33.5 x 49.7 cm.

marry and have children. Concurrently, many Catholic priests had a hard time respecting the rule of sexual abstinence: as many as a third lived together with concubines and often also had children. Critical voices regarding the Catholic Church's lack of control and consistency towards the sexual misconduct repeatedly performed by their clergy were raised both within the Church as well as by their Protestant opponents. By reaffirming the rule of compulsory celibacy in the Tridentine Council, the Catholic Church accentuated the essential importance of celibacy and claimed its connection to the true Christian doctrine. Subsequently, the Catholic Church applied a more rigid position, which actively and harshly condemned all kinds of extramarital sexual activity. Stronger emphasis on penance was enforced when sins of the flesh had been committed.

Carnal temptation has been a recurring theme in Christian imagery since the Middle Ages. The best-known example of the motif is *The Temptations of St Anthony the Great*, which became popular especially north of the Alps during the Renaissance and famous through interpretation by artists such as Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516), Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), Matthias Grünewald (1470–1528) and Martin Schongauer (1448–1491). In the wake of the Catholic Reformation, new temptation scenes were introduced, and older, already established iconographic themes were elaborated in a manner that better corresponded with the religious climate of the

period. St Anthony was now far from the only saint pictured fighting for his chastity: the temptations of St Benedict of Nursia and St Francis of Assisi, to name two, occur quite frequently in the pictorial tradition of the early modern period. Until now, however, most of the motifs have received limited attention, while some of them have even been completely overlooked.

1.1. Purpose and Scope

This thesis is the first comprehensive study on the carnal temptation motif in Italian post-Tridentine pictorial tradition. The analysis of images of carnally tempted male saints yields insights into the early modern approach to the human body, its sinfulness and, not least, to its sexuality. When I began studying this theme, my first questions were: Why do these images exist? What is their purpose? The images date from a period when Catholic dogma, through church reform, emphasised the superiority of the virginal state and the danger of carnal desire. My hypothesis, which I develop further in this study, was that the explicit and emphasised condemnation of sexual misconduct, and above all the glorification of the virginal state, was also reflected in the visual culture and that the images of tempted male saints express these tenets and the changing attitudes to sexuality.

Michel Foucault views the post-Tridentine period as holding fundamental importance concerning the history of western sexuality. He asserts that the elaboration of the practice of confession, in the aftermaths of the Tridentine Council, resulted in 'the transformation of sex into discourse': for the first time in western history, sexual acts, as well as thoughts and desires, had to be described in language.[4] Furthermore, the responsibility for recognising sexual misconduct shifted; it was now placed on the penitents themselves: everyone should meticulously examine his or her conscience and actions since desire and lust were seen as evils that afflicted the whole human. Priests were advised not to ask overly detailed questions, but to rely on the penitent's initiative.

Expanding on Foucault's statement, I argue that the stricter moral code of the Catholic Church, as well as an increased verbalisation of sexual sin in confession, created a demand for visual representations. Hence, I propose that the Council's decree reaffirming the importance of chastity played an essential role in the introduction and elaboration

4 Foucault 1978, 20.

of new temptation imagery. Additionally, those images of tempted, yet withstanding, male saints served to promote the heightened sexual morality of the post-Tridentine Church. In order to strengthen my hypothesis, I will examine, firstly, how the temptation episodes of the saints are communicated through images in order for them to function in a promotional role, and secondly, how the images – inadvertently in most cases – also reflect the current attitude to gender and sexuality.

Temptation is a recurring theme in the saints' hagiographies. It is there reported how the Devil repeatedly tries to allure devoted servants of God through sexual enticement, but also by offering them comfortable beds, luxurious food, wealth and fame. Even though carnal temptation is the most recurring of the different temptation themes in the visual tradition, images picturing saints exposed to temptation through wealth and food also exist. In many cases, the significance of a pictured temptation (temptress) remains ambiguous. Wealth, in the form of money, jewellery and gold have traditionally served as the symbols of vanity, which, in turn, was closely associated with the female gender. Furthermore, delicious food, money and carnal desire were all included in the pleasures of the world that pious men pursuing an ascetic and devout life were expected to avoid. Luxuria, the vice of lust, has generally been pictured as a lasciviously dressed woman holding a golden goblet filled with golden coins and other treasures in her hands – not surprisingly, the female temptations of the saints are often presented as a representation of Luxuria. [5]

In some examples numerous different temptations are included in the same scene: images picturing the temptations of St Anthony often contain several, with both female and male figures, in human as well as demon form, offering various temptations to the Saint. There are versions of this motif where solely lascivious women harass St Anthony (see, for example, Domenico Tintoretto's interpretation fig. 56), versions that show both women and beasts tormenting him (as seen in Paolo Veronese's painting fig. 44) and versions which show the Saint surrounded exclusively by male demons and monstrous figures (see for example Giacomo Cavedone's version, fig. 57). The central focus of this dissertation lies on images of pious men tempted by illicit women, and this is why I have mostly chosen images portraying a saint

5 Luxuria, Latin for extravagance, has not solely been translated as the vice of lust, although almost all definitions of the sin include the aspect of disorderly carnal desire. St Jerome used Luxuria for a number of sins, including sexual excess (but also drunkenness etc.). Gregory the great, in turn, translated Luxuria as disordered desire and named it as one of the seven capital sins. Jordan 1998, 38f.

in the company of a temptress. Consequently, I have omitted most versions of the motif *The Temptations of St Anthony* that only include male demons and beasts. A few examples are included to serve as iconographic references.

However, entirely omitting images because of the lack of a female presence is problematic and risks giving a skewed representation of the visual tradition concerning the carnal temptation motif. It is particularly true for episodes picturing saints exercising bodily mortification in order to overcome sexual desires, as many of these images do not include the object of their desire. Still, they illustrate famous and important episodes from the lives of the Saints, episodes that a devoted audience immediately would have recognised as examples of sexual torments. I have, therefore, included images picturing scenes that, in the hagiographies of the saints, recall incidents in which they were either carnally tempted or suffered unwanted carnal lusts. Entirely omitted from this study are motifs illustrating temptation stories that lack elements of carnal desire.[6]

Furthermore, as the focus of this study lies on a rather particular subject matter in religious art, i.e. saints who are led into, but succeed to overcome, sexual temptation, I have also omitted episodes mainly focusing on the sacrifices made by holy men and women when desiring to lead virgin and chaste lives devoted to God. These include, for example, images of early Christian virgin martyrs like St Agatha (231–251) and St Lucy (283–304) who are tortured and humiliated for refusing to give up their virginity and faith by marrying heathen men. Or, St Alexius of Rome (–417) who fled his wealthy life and arranged marriage by leaving his new wife on their wedding night, thus saving his virginity in order to lead a life entirely devoted to God.

The borders of modern-day Italy determine the geographical scope of the study. Although the unification of the country took place more than 200 years after the majority of the studied images were produced, I follow a praxis often used by scholars and consciously simplify things by referring to the geographical area as 'Italy' and to the images as 'Italian'. My choice to focus on Italy is justified by the closeness to the Church in Rome. Guidelines introduced by the Tridentine Council were followed more determinedly, although far from consistently, on the Italian peninsula than in the rest of Catholic Europe.

6 An example of such a motif is a famous episode from the life of St Francis of Assisi, where the Devil tempts the Saint by placing a sack of money on the road on which St Francis and his companion travel. St Francis immediately anticipates that the Devil mocks them, and as his companion approaches, the coins are transformed into snakes.

1.2 Visual and Textual Sources

The study's visual source material is extensive and heterogeneous. It consists of around 60 images showing temptation scenes from the lives of St Anthony the Great, St Francis of Assisi, St Benedict of Nursia, St Jerome, St Philip Neri, St Thomas Aquinas and St Eligius. The selection of saints is entirely dependant on the occurrence of their temptation episodes in visual culture. Some of the motifs are far more common than others. While numerous interpretations of St Anthony's meeting with female demons in the wilderness have been found, only two Italian seventeenth-century examples of the scene where St Thomas Aquinas chases a prostitute out of his room have been traced. Furthermore, some motifs were based on an already established iconography while others emerge only during the latter half of the sixteenth century: scenes showing naked women dancing outside St Benedict's monastery can be found already in the fourteenth century, while St Francis' encounter with a female prostitute is not introduced until the 1580s. I have, as far as possible, included a few examples from previous centuries in order to give a presentation of the iconographic developments of a specific motif.

The studied images consist of paintings, drawings, engravings and sculptures, all produced in Italy during the 'long seventeenth century', a period that extends from the mid-sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries. The material has been collected from the entire Italian peninsula – from Apulia in the South to Piedmont in the North. A number of the artworks were painted for churches and monasteries, in which many of them can still be seen *in situ*. Others were private commissions that initially formed a part of famous private collections. Today, many are found in public museums. In a few cases, the images' current whereabouts are unknown, and I have, therefore, only been able to consult them through photographs in archives or the literature.

The photographic archives of Biblioteca Hertziana in Rome, Fondazione Federico Zeri in Bologna and Georgio Cini in Venice have been of great initial help for tracing images. Some motifs have also been found through illustrations or mentions in literature, while others have been discovered – perhaps not surprisingly – by regularly browsing through a Google image search.[7] Once I learned that the Franciscan temptation motif was introduced only in the latter half of the sixteenth century, I began my search for monasteries with wall

7 Using keywords such as 'tentazioni carnali'. 'tentazione carnale' 'tentazione di un santo' 'tentazione di san …' 'castitá essemplaria' 'santo tentato'.

decorations erected during the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries. It led me to visit around twenty Franciscan monasteries (most of them still in use) spread over the peninsula. In roughly half of them, I found the temptation scene.

Artistic quality has not been a criterion when I have selected the artwork. Although some of the most renowned artists of the period, such as Jacopo Tintoretto, Paolo Veronese, Simon Vouet, Ludovico Carracci and Domenico Zampieri executed the majority of the images discussed here, many of the Franciscan monastery murals I have included were made by local craftsmen and friars. Some of these works are not masterpieces; my intention is not to praise the Great Masters but to investigate the dissemination and meaning of a specific motif.

Illustrated printed *Vite,* lives or biographies of saints, constitute another important source of material. The post-Tridentine religious culture favoured narratives celebrating virtuous and saintly lives, and it became exceedingly popular to present an individual's deeds and miracles in printed books through both text and image. Many temptation episodes, previously occurring predominantly in hagiographies, were also presented visually in the form of illustrations for devotional texts. Books were relatively easy to access and, thus, possible to disperse throughout Italy as well as the rest of Catholic Europe; in many cases, their graphic illustrations and new iconographic themes influenced other and more monumental art forms. It is evident in the Franciscan pictorial tradition, where the episode showing St Francis meeting with a prostitute was introduced through illustrated books, and only thereafter appeared also in oil painting and murals.

The illustrated books studied here are: *Vita St Antonii Abatis* illustrated by Antonio Tempesta (1597), *Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Patris Benedicti,* illustrated by Bernardino Passeri with engravings by Aliprando Capriolo (1579–), *Vita del beato p. Filippo Neri fiorentino fondatore della Congregazione dell'Oratorio,* illustrated by Luca Ciamberlano (1622), *Vita di San Francesco* illustrated by Philippe Galle (1582/1587), *Vita del Padre S. Francesco* illustrated by Giacomo Franco (1593) and *Seraphici patri S. Francisi historia*, probably published in Italy around the turn of the seventeenth century with illustrations by an unknown artist.[8]

8 These illustrated books have been consulted in the collections and library of Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini - Museo Francescano, Rome.

All temptation motifs included in the study are found in texts. The written iconographic sources are primarily included in the *Vite*, *Life* of the Saints and in their writings. The temptations of St Anthony the Great are found in *Vita S. Antoni*, written by Athanasius in the fourth century. Athanasius's text was included in the comprehensive hagiography of the Desert Fathers (and Mothers), the *Vitae Patrum*. In 1330 Domenico Cavalca translated *Vitae Patrum* to the Italian vernacular under the title *Vite dei Santi Padri*, thus making the text known to a broader readership.[9] The temptations of St Benedict are found in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues II*, written at the very end of the sixth century, while the temptations of St Jerome may be found in one of St Jerome's epistles, written in the fourth century. St Jerome's life is also included in *Vite dei Santi Padri*.

An often overlooked Franciscan textual source is Bartholomew Rinonico's *De Conformitate Vitae B. P. Francisco ad Vitam Domini Nostri Iesu Christi* ('The book of conformities') from 1385. The text was enthusiastically received when it first appeared and earned new actuality in the sixteenth century when three editions of the book were printed in Italy.[10] Despite the popularity of the Latin text, the book has never been fully translated into any other language.[11] It may also explain why it so rarely has been used as a reference in modern studies of Franciscan iconography. Rinonico's book contains the first written reference to the motif depicting St Francis meeting with a prostitute in Bari, and is, therefore, an essential textual source for this study. The temptations of St Francis is also one of the topics in Thomas of Celano's *Vita Seconda di San Francesco* (Second Life of Saint Francis), written in the mid-thirteenth century, as well as in *I Fioretti* (The Little Flowers), a translation and re-edition (by an anonymous[12] Italian author in

9 In 1615 the Flemish Jesuit priest Heribert Rosweyde published a re-edited version of Vitae Patrum divided into ten books. It was a part of Rosweyde's much broader work Acta Sanctorum, which in turn examined the lives of Catholic saints, organised according to their feast days. By 1634, fifteen years after Rosweyde's death, the two first volumes covering January were printed. The work was perhaps too ambitious as it would take over 300 years to finish – the last and sixty-eighth folio including December was published in 1941.

10 The first two printed editions were published in Milan 1510 and 1513. The third edition was printed in Bologna 1590. Short 2017, 253.

11 Ibid., 254. Christopher Stace has kindly brought to my attention that there exists one translation of Conformities in the Italian vernacular. It is a manuscript made by a Franciscan called Dionysio Pulinari in the sixteenth century, the original of which is in the Bibl. Nazionale Florence. However, it does not follow precisely the text of Conformities.

12 A certain Fra Ugolino da Santa Maria (identified by modern scholars as the Minorite brother Ugolino Brunforte) has often been suggested as a probable author of the text.)

the latter half of the fourteenth century) of Ugolino Boniscambi of Montegiorgio's thirteenth-century Latin text 'The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions'.

The temptations of the sixteenth century saint, Philip Neri, were collected by his biographer and disciple Antonio Gallonio (1556–1605), in *Vita beati p. Philippi Neri Florentini Congregatione Oratorio fondatoris in annos digesta*, published in Latin in 1600, and translated into the Italian vernacular soon after that. St Thomas Aquinas' temptation episode was recalled by the Saint's first biographer Guglielmo di Tocco (–c. 1323) in *Ystoria sancti Thomae de Aquinas* (1323).

Jacobus da Varagine's *Legenda Aurea* – The Golden Legend, originally written c. 1250/60, is another source which must be mentioned. Varagine edited the first 182 chapters, including, among others, the lives of St Anthony, St Benedict, St Jerome and St Francis. After Varagine's death, an additional 147 chapters were added, among them the lives of St Thomas Aquinas and St Eligius. The compilation was a real bestseller of its time. The first printed book was published in 1470, and by the year 1500 over one hundred editions of the work had been published in Latin, French, Italian, English, Low German and Bohemian.[13]

Tractates dealing with the use and abuse of images in the Italian post-Tridentine pictorial culture belong to another important set of historical written sources, primarily Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582), and Raffaello Borghini's *Riposo* (1584), in addition to contemporary art criticism: Carlo Cesare Malvasias' *Felsina Pittrice: vita de pittori Bolognesi* (1678–), Giovanni Pietro Bellori's *Vita de'pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* (1672), and Francesco Scanelli's *Il microcosmo della pittura* (1657).

1.3 Research Tradition, Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach

Examining a certain iconographic theme and studying its occurrences, variants and change over time is a well-established approach in art historical research, as it is in related disciplines, such as classical archaeology. Although the practice is not restricted to students or followers of Aby Warburg (1866–1929), Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) or scholars like Ernst Gombrich (1909–2001), with a connection to the Warburg Institute in London, it is widely referred to as the

13 Ott 1910.

Warburg school or Warburg tradition. Its heyday can be said to have been c. 1930–1960, when the diaspora of, in particular, Jewish art historians brought the systematic study of imagery to the Anglophone world. The best-known works in the Warburg tradition are those where a forgotten, at times even deliberately hidden, content or 'message' was revealed through the study of literary, philosophical or theological textual sources. The *locus classicus* is chapter V[14]in Panofsky's *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953), where everyday objects in pictures are shown to have symbolical meanings that are not immediately evident. It should be remembered, however, that studies of more or less easily recognisable iconographical themes are a frequent, probably much more frequent, type of research. Identifying, for example, Ovidian subjects in Renaissance painting and establishing the iconographies of the Christian saints constitute a sort of indispensable basis for art historical research that may, on the one hand, be regarded as old-fashioned, but that should not, on the other, be subject to the criticism levelled at speculative interpretations of hidden symbolism.

My thesis, obviously and broadly speaking, belongs to the – still flourishing – traditional study and interpretation of (conventional) Christian iconographical themes. Its focus on the motif of a man being tempted by sin but choosing virtue is a Christian parallel to the moral subject reflected in the classical tradition discussed by Erwin Panofsky in *Hercules am Scheidewege und andere antike Bildstoffe in der neueren Kunst* (1930), where the author investigates the ancient allegorical parable *Hercules at the crossroads* and how it has been illustrated. He follows the motif through the Italian Renaissance and in its broad historical and cultural context. As often in Panofsky's work, the focus is on the permutation of a classical subject, in this case, a moral-philosophical one, and its adaption and absorption during the Renaissance into the Christian belief system. Although there are correspondences/consistencies with the theme of the present study, my ambition has not been to follow the temptation motif and its transformation over time, but rather to examine its appearance and role in Italian visual culture during the period c. 1550–1700, which I have chosen to treat as one 'cultural moment'.[15] This said the textual sources and theological commentary discussed in some cases date back to late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

14 'Reality and Symbol in Early Flemish Painting "Sprirtualia Sub Metaphoris Corporalium"' (pp.131–148).

15 Thus, the study covers the period that, since the late nineteenth century, is referred to as the Baroque era.

The historiographical discussion of the Warburg tradition has argued that its bias lies in the fact that it favours interpretations based on philological and philosophical questions.[16] Furthermore, a preference in classical studies and the thinking behind Renaissance Humanism, has, it can be argued, excluded other interests.[17] Only relatively recently has the importance of post-Renaissance theology for the visual arts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy – as addressed in this dissertation – become a topic studied in accordance with the Warburgian perspective, although there are exceptions.[18] The analysis of imagery related to marginalised groups has also only lately been integrated into the main current of iconographical studies. Recent examples include Michael Massing's studies in which the motif 'The Washing of an Ethiopian' is investigated. The motif illustrates the proverbial impossibility of washing an Ethiopian white. Massing traces its origin to antiquity and follows the explicitly racist motif through sixteenth-century theology, early modern emblem literature, children's books and nineteenth- and twentieth-century soap adverts.[19]

The present study focuses not only on the tempted saints but also on the temptresses. Images depicting female transgression and lasciviousness created within an early modern religious context have been the subject of several art- and cultural-historical inquiries. Examples include Christa Grössinger's *Picturing Women in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (1997), where the author examines the misogynist representation of women in European art from the late medieval and Renaissance period, and Yona Pinson, who, in her article 'The Femme Fatal–Eve/Venus/Luxuria' (2006), studies the image of the female temptress, the *Femme fatal,* through its theological and cultural origins. Like Grössinger, Pinson's visual examples are almost exclusively from the Northern and Central European Renaissance period. While it is true that this misogynist

16 See Woodfield 2001.

17 Generally, criticism has been directed towards Panofsky's iconological method. An often recurring deconstructionist critique states the impossibility to conduct an objective (philological) study of an image. See Sauerländer 1995, 386.

18 See, as an example, Askew, Pamela, 'The Angelic Consultation of Saint. Francis of Assisi in post-Tridentine Italian Painting' in *The Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XXXII 1969.

19 Massing's studies are presented in three separate articles: 'From Greek Proverb to Soap Advert', 'Washing the Ethiopian or the Semantics of an Impossibility' and 'Washing the Ethiopian once more', which are all collected in the author's Studies in Imagery Vol II: The world Discovered (London, 2007). Also see *The Image of the Black in Western Art* Vol III, Harward University Press, 2011.

iconography was widespread, above all, in German Renaissance imagery, my study is focused on the less famous corpus of Italian temptress iconography.

In early modern Italy, the temptresses were often identified as prostitutes. These women were considered the real epitome of transgression in society. When creating the temptation motif and the temptress, the artist often applied the quite well-established courtesan iconography, seen predominantly in sensuous half-length portraits, prevalent mainly in Venice during the sixteenth century. Art historical studies of Venetian courtesan imagery include Anne Junkermann's dissertation *Bellissima donna: An interdisciplinary study of Venetian sensuous half-length images of the early sixteenth century* (1988). Junkermann observes that the pictured women (like the temptresses) often were depicted wearing only an undergarment, a so-called *camicia,* and, therefore, she names the image type 'Camicia Portraits'. Junkermann furthermore states that the Venetian half-lengths are among the first works of art since antiquity that portrays the female body as a visual, erotic object.

Concerning the effect that the Counter-Reformation and its new disciplinary regime had on the culture of prostitution, Tessa Storey's *Carnal Commerce in Counter-Reformation Rome* (2008) offers valuable insight. She provides a survey on the life of women who lived and worked as prostitutes in Rome between 1560 and 1650. Storey shows that the notion that the Papacy managed to rid the city of prostitutes after the Tridentine Council is largely a misconception. In reality, prostitution was flourishing in post-Tridentine Rome. However, strong measures were taken in order to reform the city's sinful women. Converting a prostitute and turning her into a penitent Catholic was seen as a great act of piety. Examples of such conversions often also appeared in the contemporary pictorial tradition, not least in the images of the penitent Mary Magdalene that became increasingly popular during the period, but also through the temptation motifs and predominantly the images showing St Francis of Assisi converting a young prostitute.

The image of the temptress is created in an utterly misogynist religious culture, so profoundly rooted in Christian writing that it cannot be separated from its religious origins. Feminist theology generally asserts that Christian misogyny was vindicated through the Fall of Man when it was Eve and not Adam who initiated the transgression. In *Beyond God the Father* (1973), Mary Daly points out

that the story of the Fall was created exclusively by men in a male-dominated society and, therefore, reflects the substandard social agreements of that time. She asserts: 'Its great achievement was to reinforce the problem of sexual oppression in society, so that woman's inferior place in the universe became doubly justified. Not only did she have her origin in the man; she was also the cause of his downfall and all his miseries.'[20] In her renowned book, *Carnal Knowing, Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West,* historian of theology Margaret R. Miles examines the predominantly negative connotations ascribed to images of female nakedness in Christian culture from the early Middle Ages to the early modern period. Miles' material includes images, texts and religious practices and is studied from a feminist perspective. The author argues that 'the flesh' was marginalised because of the sexism of Christian societies:

> 'By identifying men with rationality and 'woman' with body, and by rhetorical and pictorial practices that denigrated women in relation to men, Christian societies effectively ghettoized the flesh, undermining even the strongest doctrinal ratifications of 'the body'. […] In Christianity the body scorned, the naked body, is a female body.'[21]

Male nakedness was, by contrast, usually not connected to carnality and sin. Leo Steinberg observes in his famous study *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Morden Oblivion* (1983) that the image of the naked Christ served to underline his humanity. In fact, in several temptation scenes the pious body of the male saint is shown undressed, sometimes even more so than the female. The temptation motif, I argue, thus offers an opportunity to examine the construction of the ideal Catholic male juxtaposed with the imperfect female (body).

In the studied motif, the temptresses represent everything that the holy males are not – lascivious, carnal and sinful. The motif undeniably has, I argue, a place in the cluster of material studied within the historical field concerning issues related to human sexuality. The impact of Michel Foucault's four-volume study *History of Sexuality* on later scholarship within the field can hardly

20 Daly 1985, 45f.

21 Miles 1991, 185.

be overstated.[22] In recent years the interest in research on the history of sexuality during the early modern period has grown. Historian Gerhard Oestreich was first to discuss the religious (Catholic, Protestant as well as Anglican) authorities' engagement in the process of the 'social disciplining' of the populace, through, e.g. regulations against prostitution, condemning of illicit sexual activities and by making sodomy a capital crime.[23] A more recent enquiry on the subject of Church and sexuality include Merry Wiesner-Hanks' *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World,* where the author explores the connection between sexuality and Christianity during the early modern period. Her focus is 'on the ways in which people used Christian ideas and institutions to regulate and shape (or attempt to regulate and shape) sexual norms and conduct'.[24] Wiesner-Hanks aptly concludes that by reaffirming clerical celibacy and by confirming marriage as a sacrament but simultaneously also affirming virginity and celibacy as superior to marriage, the celibate priesthood managed to ensure their position as a moral elite.

There are a number of art historical studies on erotic images dealing with issues concerning sexuality in early modern culture, including Bette Talvacchia's book *Taking Position: On Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (1999). Her study examines erotic imagery, more precisely Giulio Romano's famous *I Modi* – drawings showing copulating couples in various sexual positions – and the origins, creation and distribution of such erotically explicit material in Italian Renaissance culture. In *In and Out of the Marital Bed: Seeing Sex in Renaissance Europe* (2010), Diane Wolfthal, in turn, examines late medieval to the early modern visual culture that presents both illicit sexuality (sodomy, prostitution, adultery) as well as 'chaste sexuality' (sexual acts between married couples). The studied material mostly covers central European imagery (although some Italian images are included) and shows the complexity of the early modern attitudes towards sexuality.

22 Foucault has been criticised, not least by feminist scholars. One recurring criticism holds that his *History of Sexuality* is only a history of male sexuality. For a more in-depth discussion on the subject, see Foxhall 1998 and Diamond & Quinby (Eds.) 1988.

23 The term 'Social Disciplining' – 'Socialdisziplinierung' was invented by Oestreich. See Oestreich Gerhard, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Transl.) David McLintock, (Ed.) by Brigitta Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

24 Wiesner-Hanks 2010, 3.

The temptation motifs occupy an ambivalent position in the broad spectrum of imagery depicting human sexuality. The studied images are not showing sexual acts, but represent a clear sexual conflict. It is a battle between the sexes with the chaste and virgin man on the one side and the illicit woman on the other. While it could be argued that the overwhelming majority of the images predominantly served to warn the spectator of illicit sexual relations, and simultaneously also glorify the chastity of the resisting saint, my study shows that, in several cases, the temptress is pictured as being sensual, even erotic. Thus, it brings one to wonder if the inclusion of a male saint in reality mainly served as a pretext for erotic imagery.

Moving on to the research concerning post-Tridentine art, the field of art history has, as far as I can see, generally overlooked the manner in which visual culture has been impacted by the Tridentine decrees dealing with sexual decorum and, as specifically studied in this thesis, the Council's decree reaffirming the importance (and superiority) of clerical chastity. The focus has, instead, almost exclusively been the Tridentine Council's decree concerning sacred images. However, of all the issues discussed during the eighteen year-long Council, art was one of the subjects that received the least attention: the use and function of sacred images were debated in haste and in very general terms during the Council's twenty-fifth and final session, held in December 1563. They were first discussed in the session 'On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images' and again on the following day, in a session focusing on the 'Decree concerning Indulgences'. John O'Malley aptly concludes in *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (2013) that the Council was not a uniform and monolith event led by a unified Catholic Church, but one that extended over two decades and was deeply affected by both internal conflicts and European politics. Thus, O'Malley asserts: 'The issue of the sacred images was not only not a major issue at the Council, but until the very last minute, not an issue at all.'[25] The main reason for this was probably that the vast majority of the participating bishops came from Italy, Portugal and Spain and, therefore, had no experience with iconoclasm. Figurative art did not pose a problem,

25 O'Malley 2015, 31.

simply because no one questioned its existence.[26]

Most recent scholars have rejected the idea of a 'post-Tridentine art', claiming that the guidelines given by the Church were too vague and too general to influence the artist in a common direction. I also subscribe to O'Malley's statement that the Tridentine decree dealing with sacred images had a limited effect, at least as it concerned the temptation motif studied here. However, as many studies have shown, the decree had its effect on the post-Tridentine authorities. It becomes evident in how the importance of images as devotional aids was emphasised, not least for the illiterate worshippers. Religious images were intended to instruct and encourage the spectator to adopt an avid adoration of God. This, in turn, evoked a new concern for the Church that now had to make sure that the passionate gaze of the viewer was provoking his spiritual and not his carnal desires. Hardly surprising, the image of the classical female nude, which earlier had been accepted, now became problematic, if not indecorous. Post-Tridentine rhetoric often warned that looking at a beautiful female figure could lead to the ruin of the spectator's soul. Against this background, it is, thus, essential to discuss how the sometimes explicitly erotic female temptress appearing in the images next to a male saint should be understood.

As my methodological approach for this study is based on iconography, the images are examined in close relationship with their textual sources, e.g. the hagiographies of the saints. When discussing the theoretical approach of the Warburg School, one is invariably confronted with Panofsky's three levels of iconographic/iconological analysis, as presented in *Studies in Iconology* (1939). I have not consciously departed from this schematic presentation or any later explication of it, but in a general way, I believe that the images are to be seen as cultural and religious expressions of their time. It is, therefore, necessary for the examination to be conducted with the help of different scholarly practices, primarily theology, gender studies and

26 In France, on the other hand, where iconoclasm had broken out in the 1520s, the issue of sacred images had already been discussed almost twenty years before the first session of Trent, during the council of Sens, held in Paris in 1527. The French initially boycotted the Tridentine Council (Francis I saw that it strengthened his enemy Charles V) and when they finally decided to participate, it was only in a small group during the Council's third session. However, they proved to be very influential when it came to bringing forth the issue of images: just six weeks after the French arrival, they presented a memorandum of thirty-four articles on reform, of which one dealt exclusively with sacred images. The Pope, in turn, responded by referring to the seventh synod of the Council of Nicaea II, which condemns iconoclasm. According to O'Malley this only further underlines the fact that the issue of images was only seen as a minor concern for the Council's legates and the Pope. Ibid., 31ff.

history, as presented here above. Thus, I am primarily following a Warburgian scholarly tradition in which works of art and images are seen in a broad cultural-historical context and evaluated through an interdisciplinary approach.

1.3.1 Is Carnal Temptation Always Heteronormative?

A contemporary spectator of temptation scenes may wonder whether the hagiographic narratives only deal with heteronormative temptation. As far as I can see, the hagiographic tradition leaves room for certain erotic ambiguity. Not all temptation accounts found in hagiographies that recall incidents in which the temptation of the flesh overcomes a saint contain an explicit statement that a woman provoked the temptation. Some of the motifs, where a female temptress is lacking, show the saint in the company of a male demon instead. For instance, in an episode recalled by Thomas of Celano, St Francis of Assisi's (1181/82–1226) first biographer, the Devil once put into Francis 'the most grievous temptation of lust'.[27] This incident does not mention a woman, only that the Devil left St Francis very sexually aroused. In the Venetian artist Giacomo Franco's illustrations of the episode, included as a secondary scene in an illustration for *Vita del Padre S. Francesco*, published in Venice 1593, Francis is seen lying down on his side and facing a demon walking towards him (fig. 2, see fig. 66 and p.86) for an extensive presentation of the whole image, which illustrates St Francis' exemplary chastity): Franco's demon is monstrous and may, thus, be interpreted as a symbol of the foulness of St Francis' carnal lust, rather than as the object of it. Nevertheless, the scene depicts carnal temptation.

A temptation episode, which, in turn, could be understood as homoerotic, can be found in *The life of St Philip Neri*. Here, Antonio Gallonio, St Philip Neri's (1515–1595) former disciple and biographer, recalls how the Saint encountered a demon in the guise of a naked beggar one day, in the year of 1538, when he was passing the Colosseum on his way to the Lateran Basilic. The sight of the undressed man aroused St Philip, and Gallonio writes: 'An impure thought did cross his mind at the sight, but he took refuge in prayer and the temptation ceased at once.'[28] St Philip would later recall the episode and tell

27 Thomas of Celano 'The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul', Book 2: Ch. LXXXII, 2000, 324f. The event is also included in Bonaventure's *Legenda Major* Ch. V:4.

28 Gallonio 2005, II:11.

Fig.2. Giacomo Franco, *The Temptation in the Snow*, a secondary scene in the image illustrating 'St Francis' Exemplary Chastity' in *Vita del Serafico S. Francesco*, Venice 1593. Engraving, 20 x 14 cm.

his disciples that it was the Devil and not a human who caused the temptation, and that 'he was quite convinced that the beggar was indeed a demon, not a man, even though it presented itself to him under the *attractive form of a man*' (italics mine).[29] Hence, unlike St Francis, St Philip was undeniably attracted to the demon. Moreover, Gallonio asserts that it is well known that the Devil attacks holy men 'in this or similar manner' and observes that the most famous example is seen in the temptation inflicted upon St Benedict (of Nursia).[30] Thus, he indirectly compares St Philip's temptation episode to an incident in which St Benedict was overwhelmed by carnal desires when a memory of a certain girl came to his mind. The temptation was so strong that Benedict plunged naked into thorns and nettles to overcome it (an important episode that will be discussed in chapter 3). In Gallonio's account, no real distinction is made between male and female agents of temptation.

When examining Luca Ciamberlano's visual interpretation of the episode[31] (fig. 3), we can quickly conclude that the male temptation episode is given limited importance. The incident is presented as a

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 The images were included in an illustrated version of the Life of Saint Philip Neri, published by the Oratorian Pietro Giacomo Bacci in Rome 1625: *Bacci P.G., Vita del beato p. Filippo Neri fiorentino fondatore della Congregazione dell'Oratorio. Raccolta* da' *processi fatti per la sua canonizzazione, Andrea Brugliotti,* Rome, 1622. See also: Vettori 2014, 85.

Fig.3 Luca Ciamberlano, *St Philip Neri Tempted by Demons* in P.G, Bacci *Vita del beato p. Filippo Neri fiorentino...* Rome 1622. Engraving, 31,5 x 22 cm.

smaller secondary scene in the background. It shows St Philip and his companion conversing in front of a naked male demon seated by the Colosseum and the arch of Constantine. The demon appears to be seeking attention from the holy men and is pointing at them with his right hand; however, they ignore him. In the foreground, St Philip appears again, this time in the company of two other Oratorians. At this point, the Saint is indicating a small demon standing on

top of an ancient ruin, dressed as a rambler in a simple tunic and carrying a walking stick. The text beneath the image indicates that Ciamberlano has combined the episode with another event to which it has no real connection. This second diabolic encounter took place later that year, at the ruins of Diocletian's baths:

> Vide il Demonio alle Terme di Diocletiano che in varie forme gli appariva e indurlo a'brutte imaginazioni, et simile gli occorse pasando pel Coliseo.
> (He sees a demon at the Diocletian Baths that under various guises was appearing to him in order to induce him to foul thoughts, and the same thing happened to him as he was passing the Colosseum).

Even though the text mentions that the demon 'caused him foul thoughts', the emphasis is still directed towards a more general assertion that declares that the Saint battled the Devil and his demons on several occasion, something that, in turn, served to underline Neri's purity and devotion.[32]

While the textual source of this particular example contains elements which would appear 'gay' to a modern reader, it is important to bear in mind that homosexuality and 'gay' identity are modern constructions and are, therefore, difficult to apply on historical episodes. It is also the only example that I have been able to find where the agent of temptation is a male figure. Nevertheless, it still demonstrates that the object of desire seems to have been of less importance – the fundamental part was to resist it.

1.3.2 Where are the Tempted Women?

This study analyses exclusively motifs picturing tempted male saints. Scenes picturing temptation episodes of the reverse order, that is, of female saints tempted by men, or by male demons, have not deliberately been omitted; they are absent in the pictorial tradition. One likely explanation is that female sanctity gained less recognition than male. It should also be remembered that male saints significantly

32 The illustrated edition of St Philip's life included another four episodes in which the Saint encounters the Devil. These plates are nr: 2) On his way to St Sebastian's catacombs, St Philip met two demons in horrible form who tried to scare him; 11) A demon appeared before St Philip in various forms in order to disturb him during prayer; 22) When St Philip visited the sick he often saw demons flee as he entered the room, and 24) St Philip performed exorcisms and freed many possessed from demons.

outnumbered female saints.[33] However, while carnally tempted female saints are conspicuously absent in the pictorial tradition, several written accounts of holy females who suffered carnal temptations are found in hagiographies. The majority of these saints are early Christian and belong to a group of former prostitutes, traditionally referred to as the holy harlots.[34]

The only visual example of a carnally tempted holy harlot I have come across is not Italian; it is seen in a Flemish engraving (fig. 4), produced by Jan Sadeler (1550–1600) after an image by Martin the Vos (1532–1603). It recalls an episode from *Life of Mary*, niece of Abraham the Hermit.[35] She had initiated an ascetic life while still a child; from the age of seven, she lived with her uncle, Abraham in the desert. When she was older, the Devil tempted her. She was seduced by a monk who 'defiled and polluted her by intercourse out of wicked iniquity and

33 It is surprisingly tricky to find indicative numbers on the percentage division between male and female saints. It is partly because the exact number of saints remains unknown. The Roman Catholic Church's official Martyrology (*Martyrologium Romanum*), first published in 1584, includes a list of approx.10.000 martyrs, saints and blessed persons, venerated by the Church. The Bibliotheca Sanctorum, also known as the *Encyclopaedia of Saints*, and composed after Vatican II, contains around 30,000 saints, blessed, venerable servants of God and biblical figures from the Old and New Testament. Because of the nature of the sources, scholars that have intended to study the number of female saints in comparison to their male counterparts, have only been able to give approximate figures. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg who has studied female sanctity in the Middle Ages reports that of the saints canonised during 500–1099, as listed in the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, only 14% were female (332 of 2274 saints), Schulenburg 1998, 61. Margret King gives more optimistic figures and reports that 55% of the canonised lay saints between 1350–1500 where female. In these figures, however, she omitted the almost exclusively male group of saints coming from the clergy, King 2003, 181. Simon Yarrow claims that 25% of the canonised saints from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century were female, while the amount after that fluctuated by around 15% until the seventeenth century, Yarrow 2016, 88. King and Yarrow do not specify their sources, and neither is it clear how they calculated their data. Lastly, a quick calculation of the 7577 saints listed on 'Catholic online' http://www.catholic.org/ showed that just slightly over 10% (784) of the saints were women. http://www.catholic.org/saints (access-date: 20.3.2017).

34 One of the most prominent of the holy harlots was St Mary of Egypt (c. 344–c. 421), who in present day terms appears to have been more of a nymphomaniac than a prostitute; for seventeen years Mary led a sinful life by sleeping with countless men 'as a free gift'. After fleeing into the desert to escape her earlier life, she spent another seventeen years struggling 'with the wild beasts of huge and irrational desires' (*Life of Saint Mary*, Ch. XIX). Mary is usually depicted as an elderly woman either naked but covered by her long hair, or dressed in brown cloth. She is never seen struggling against her carnal desires in the desert; instead, the two most commonly occurring scenes present her encounter with the monk Sossima (her first human contact after 40 years as an ascetic) and her burial during which a lion digging Mary's grave assists Sossima. See 'Life of Saint Mary by Sophronius, bishop of Jerusalem, translated into Latin by Paul, deacon of the holy church of Naples', in Ward, 1987 (pp. 35–56). See also Burrus 2008, 150ff.

35 Her hagiography *Life of St Mary the Harlot* was written by Ephraim, Archdeacon of Edessa and was originally an extract from his work *The Life of Abraham* (c.370). The text is included in *Vitae Patrum* (1615), compiled and edited by Heribert Rosweyde. English translation included in Ward 1986, 92–101.

Fig. 4. Jan Sadeler, *Maria the Niece of Abraham*, mid seventeenth century. Engraving.

lust'.[36] The image shows two huts in a desolate landscape. Abraham, an elderly man, dressed in a monastic cloak with a rosary attached to a rope belt, is seen in the first hut, where he kneels and prays in front of a crucifix. Mary sits in the second hut with a book in her hand. She is turning her face to a man, elegantly dressed in sixteenth-century attire, who stands outside her door and lets his hand rest on the doorway. Mary's smile suggests that she is yielding to the charming man who, in contrast to the written source, is a man of the world and not a monk. Unlike the tempted male saints, Mary is not resisting temptation. She is not even presented as holy; there is no crucifix in her hut like the one in her uncle's. Mary is only a secondary figure in the shadow, in the background; she is a woman of the world who still has a long way to go before she can be like her virtuous uncle. The text under the image foretell us Mary's faith:

> Abrami neptis inveni dum credit amanti
> Exit desertum luxuriaque vacat.
> Post pertasa probi, repetit quam liquit eremum,
> Et moritur Claris cincta caput radiis.

36 Ch. III; 'Life of St Mary the Harlot, niece of Abraham the Hermit…'1987, 92–101.

> (See Abrahams's niece, as she puts her faith in a lover, she leaves the desert, and she is available for luxury. After she has been filled with discust for her disgrace, she returns to the herimitage that she had left, and dies renowned, her head bound with rays.)[37]

Here, Mary is put in a slightly more positive light than in her hagiography where it is said that Mary, after having fled her uncle's hut to become a prostitute in the town, was saved, not by her own merits, but on Abraham initiative: He found her in the brothel, begged her to return to her ascetic life, and encouraged her to ask repentance for her sins.[38]

Mary Magdalene is the most famous example of a sinful, tempted and then repentant female saint. She has often been referred to as a former prostitute, although neither the Bible nor her hagiography mentions this role.[39] The Italian post-Tridentine pictorial tradition is filled with images of a penitent Mary Magdalene, who, filled with remorse, asks forgiveness for her sins. Similar to St Jerome, she has been pictured as a hermit meditating before a skull and a crucifix. Unlike the scenes picturing her male equivalent, the tone is often sensual: Mary is pictured young and attractive. Her body is shown uncovered and placed on display for the spectator. Occasionally she is seen supported by angels who chase away male demons, symbolising her earlier sinful life. One example is Guido Cagnacci's (1601–1663) *Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity*, 1660 (fig. 5), where Mary Magdalene is pictured naked on the floor, next to her clothes and jewellery, symbols of vanity and sin that she has removed from her body in the act of penitence. In the background, an angel (virtue) is fending off a demon (vice).

Images of the repentant Mary Magdalene have been omitted from this study for the simple reason that they do not picture a holy woman who is tempted to sin: Mary Magdalene is the opposite; she *is* a woman in sin who is asking for forgiveness. The focus lies on her enlightenment and transformation from a prostitute to a woman full of grace. An essential difference between these holy women and their male counterparts is that they, unlike the male saints, have *fallen* for

37 I thank Prof. Paul Gwynne for the translation.

38 Ch. III; 'Life of St Mary the Harlot, niece of Abraham the Hermit…'1987, 101.

39 In Legenda Aurea Voragine asserts that Mary Magdalene led a sinful life before her conversion: 'Before her conversion she remained in guilt, burdened with the debt of eternal punishment.' He does not, however, mention her as a prostitute, but he affirms that she was leading a life full of luxury and worldly pleasures: 'Magdalene, then, was very rich, and sensuous pleasure keeps company with great wealth. Renowned as she was for her beauty and her riches, she was no less known for the way she gave her body pleasure–so much so that her proper name was forgotten and she was commonly called "the sinner."' Varagine Legenda Aurea Ch. 96, 1993, 96.

Fig.5 Guido Cagnacci *Martha Rebuking Mary for Her Vanity*, 1660. Oil on canvas, 229 x 266 cm. Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena.

temptation. The moral of their stories are, therefore, different as they present redemption rather than resistance. They brought the hope of salvation for all sinners; if harlots could be saved, then anyone could.

Presenting images of pious females facing devilish carnal temptation in the guise of handsome young men would probably have questioned their new virtues and seemed disgraceful in a strongly patriarchal society such as that of the early modern era. A sexually aroused female saint would most likely not have worked as a promoter of chastity for a male audience – it might even have had the opposite effect and functioned as sexual provocation.[40]

40 Lisa Tickner has made an insightful remark on the subject, suggesting that it is not the female sexual desire per se that is seen as dangerous for men but what it awakes in them; 'Female lust is insatiable and provocative only in so far as it is arousing to masculine desire, and often only as a prelude to her submission before the phallus'. Tickner 1978, 237, also quoted in Miles 1991, 216, n. 11.

1.4 Earlier Research

The carnal temptation motif has received limited attention by scholars. Images that have been the subject of earlier studies have predominately been analysed in the context of the individual artist's production. However, the motif *The temptation of St Anthony the Great* is an exception, as it has been included in a number of studies in different historical and geographical contexts. The first overall study is Claude Roger Marc's article 'Les Tentations de Saint Antoine' (1936). Charles D. Cuttler's dissertation *The Temptation of Saint Anthony in Art From Earliest times to the First Quarter of the Sixteenth Century* (1952) and his article 'Some Grünewald sources' (1956) are the first comprehensive enquiries into the motif's occurrence, development and iconography, primarily in Central and Northern European painting during the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Unlike in my thesis, both Marc and Cuttler include material from a vaster geographical area and a longer time span. Furthermore, these earlier studies do not deal exclusively with the Saint's carnal temptations. They make no clear division between the Saint's female temptation and his torments by demons.

The catalogue *Die Versuchung des heiligen Antonius von Hieronymus Bosch bis Max Ernst* of the 2008 exhibition *Schrecken und Lust* at Bucerius Kunst Forum in Hamburg also includes an enquiry of the motif from a longer historical period. Though some of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century examples are Italian, such as Jacopo Tintoretto's altarpiece in San Trovaso, Venice, the catalogue offers no in-depth analysis of the motif. It should also be noted that the exhibition, like the earlier mentioned studies, did not deal exclusively with the carnal temptations of St Anthony, and many of the images included scenes where the Saint is harassed exclusively by aggressive demons.

Laurence Meiffret, *Saint Antoine Ermite en Italie (1340–1540),* presents early Antonite images in Italy. Her study offers an overview of the pictorial tradition before the Tridentine Council and, therefore, provides insight into earlier temptation iconography. However, the enquiry includes whole cycles picturing the life of the saint and is, thus, not concentrated on the carnal temptation motif, although a number of such episodes are included. The works of Roger Marc, Cuttler and Meiffret, have, therefore, served as support for an overview of the motif's historical development and iconographical sources.

A recent article 'Virtù und Vizio im Kryptoportrait zu Jacopo Tintorettos Versuchung des hl. Antonius Eremita' by Thomas Weigel offers an analysis of Jacopo Tintoretto's interpretation of the temptations of St Anthony in San Trovaso, Venice. His article provides new information on the patron of Tintoretto's altarpiece and argues that this knowledge provides evidence of the patron's motivation in selecting the topic for the altarpiece of his burial chapel, something that can be seen in the iconographic details of the image. Although Weigel's article mentions earlier examples of the motif for iconographic reference, it provides no space for a more general discussion on the temptation motif. Nor does Weigel discuss the impact of Tintoretto's work on later interpretations of the motif.

With regard to studies of the pictorial tradition presenting St Francis of Assisi's life, it should be noted that the general reviews on Franciscan imagery and its iconography primarily concentrate on the period from the latter half of the thirteenth century, e.g., the decades after the Saint's death, until the early sixteenth century. Since the Franciscan temptation motif emerged as late as the latter half of the sixteenth century, it is, therefore, omitted in these earlier studies. The motif also receives limited attention in studies presenting Franciscan post-Tridentine imagery. Servus Gieben is the first to mention the motif in *Philip Galle's Engravings Illustrating the Life of Francis of Assisi* (1977). He gives a detailed presentation of the Antwerp engraver Philip Galle's 1587 series of engravings representing the life of St Francis. Although Galle's engravings introduced the temptation motif in Franciscan art, Gieben makes no mention of it; instead, he presents the scene along with the other fifteen engravings in the book. However, he observes the iconographical impact the images had on later prints and mentions several later publications, which have provided a source of information also for this study.

Interest in Franciscan post-Tridentine imagery began to emerge in the late 1960s. Pamela Askew was one of the first to discuss the impact the Tridentine Council had on Franciscan iconography in her article 'The Angelic Consolation of St Francis of Assisi in post-Tridentine Italian Painting' (1969). Askew observes that the post-Tridentine period brought forward and favoured new motifs that emphasised the virtues of St Francis. Furthermore, she argues that the focus was often directed towards the Saint's love of poverty, chastity and God. According to Askew Franciscan, post-Tridentine imagery should, however, be seen as a combination of reinterpretations of the medieval

literary sources along with an entirely new selection of motifs. She states that the narration of St Francis' life became something of secondary importance; the main focus lay on conveying the Saint's subjective experiences through the senses, involving both joy and suffering as a 'spiritual phenomena', as well as visionary experiences at prayer.[41] Indeed, the motif presenting the carnal temptations of St Francis constitutes a theme that underlined not only the Saint's love of chastity but also his tireless longing to save lost souls. Both themes are brought together in the Franciscan temptation motif.

L'immagine di San Francesco nella Controriforma (Ed. Simonetta Prosperi Valenti Rodinò), published in connection with an exhibition organised to commemorate the eight hundred year anniversary of the Saint's birth in 1983, includes articles by scholars from different fields of cultural history, and is the first vast presentation of Franciscan spirituality, art and architecture in the period following the Catholic Reformation. Though none of the articles explicitly mentions the temptation motif, they offer essential information on the context in which the images were created and distributed. One of the articles of particular relevance for my study is Claudio Strinati's 'Riforma della pittura e riforma religiosa', in which the author reviews the developments in Franciscan late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century imagery in light of the increased production of religious images in post-Tridentine Italy. In 'La diffusione dell'iconografia Francescana attraverso l'incisione', Simonetta Prosperi Valenti Rodinò gives examples of engravings and book illustrations, produced in the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, that more consciously than earlier presents and emphasises Francis' piety, chastity and love of poverty. Prosperi makes an important observation by showing how the printed images, because of their extensive and rapid distribution, served as important iconographic models for other visual art forms. As I have not found any examples of St Francis' carnal temptation episode before the 1587 book illustration by Philippe Galle, Prosperi's conclusion is accurate. The motif began to occur in monumental art forms only by the first decades of the seventeenth century.

For my study on St Benedict of Nursia's Temptation episodes, *Il Chiostro dei Carracci a San Michele in Bosco* (1994) by Maria Silva Campanini (ed.) has been of great value. It constitutes the most recent and comprehensive study of Ludovico Carracci's decoration project for

41 Askew 1969, 281.

the Bolognese Olivetan cloister of San Michele in Bosco. The pictorial cycle, which was executed by the artist in collaboration with a group of his former students in the first years of the seventeenth century, can be regarded as the most important Benedictine decoration project of the post-Tridentine period and forms the central part of my study on St Benedict. Campanini has, unlike me, studied the cloister decorations as a larger project. She has omitted a comprehensive iconographic study of the individual wall paintings. Instead, she gives a thorough description of the creation of the decoration project and describes the reception of the paintings both by their contemporary viewers and by later generations of visitors and artists. Her study includes a reconstruction of the pictorial programme's original position, which has been helpful since the wall paintings are no longer visible and are known only through engravings done in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Bernardino Passeri's 1579 illustrated version of Gregory the Great's *Life of St Benedict* is an essential source for the iconography of the Benedictine imagery in this study. In her article 'The Devil's Hem: Allegorical Reading in a Sixteenth-century Illustrated Life of St Benedict' (2007), Evelyn Lincoln analyses a few of the images included in the illustrated book. She attempts to understand the practice of *reading* images in a late sixteenth-century Benedictine religious cultural context by conducting an allegorical analysis of one of the book engravings. Although Lincoln does not explicitly mention any of the two temptation episodes included in the illustrated book, her brief historical overview includes a discussion on the use of illustrated *Vite* in a Benedictine religious context.

In the Hieronymite pictorial tradition, St Jerome's life has been depicted through a considerably reduced number of episodes. The penitent St Jerome in the wilderness became one of the most frequently dispersed scenes from the Saint's life during the post-Tridentine period. The temptation motif can be seen as a variation of this motif. It is, however, somewhat rare, and has, therefore, received limited attention by earlier scholars. Nevertheless, one of the few known examples of the motif was executed by the famous Baroque painter Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri) for the Hieronymite monastery of Sant'Onofrio in Rome, and the image has been the subject of study for Domenichino's artistic production. Filippo Trevisani, *Domenichino nel portico di sant'Onofrio* (1996), and Richard E Spear, *Domenichino's early frescoes at S.Onofrio* (1966)

give rather comprehensive accounts of the image's commission history and discuss the artist's iconographical influences. The image is, however, not examined from the broader perspective of artistic and cultural settings.

St Philip Neri became one of the most influential saints of the seventeenth century after his canonisation in 1620. There is vast literature concerning his pictorial tradition. He has frequently been commemorated through altar paintings and adoration pictures in churches and is predominantly pictured in 'Gloria', kneeling before the Virgin and Christ Although he became famous both as a practising exorcist and for successfully combatting the temptations of the Devil and his demons, his carnal temptations are found only in his illustrated *Vita.* The episodes have not, as far as I know, been studied in an art historical context.

1.5 Thesis Outline

In addition to the introduction, the thesis is divided into six chapters. In chapter two, the aim is to summarise the theological and cultural background in which the early modern temptation iconography emerged. The chapter discusses some visual examples from the early modern period that – like the temptation motifs – represent the female gender as lascivious and sinful. The intention is to show that the temptation theme was only a small part of a much larger and well-established pictorial tradition. The chapter brings forward episodes in which women have the leading role and are executing (sexual) power over men, found primarily in the 'Power of Women-Topos', an increasingly popular theme during the Renaissance and Baroque.

In chapter three, the study on the temptation motif is initiated by a presentation of early examples of temptation accounts found in the *Vita Patrum*. These stories emphasise how the female gender was presented as part of the material world that the desert ascetics had fled in their attempts to lead a life devoted to God. It is followed by an enquiry on images depicting episodes in which saints practice bodily mortification in order to overcome forbidden desires. In these scenes, the female temptation is generally absent. I am investigating how the idea of the 'sinful eye' and 'sinful thoughts' was presented visually. The included images show St Benedict, St Francis and St Jerome in acts of self-punishment in order to overcome sinful carnal lusts provoked by the Devil through memories of attractive

women the holy men had encountered. Although the practice of self-mortification had been principally abandoned in the early modern monastic culture, these scenes (which can be found already in the Middle Ages) were continuously produced in post-Tridentine Italy. The scenes are mainly found in monastic settings intended for an audience of devotees.

Chapter four focuses on the *Temptations of St Anthony the Great*. St Anthony became famous through stories and images in which he is combatting demons; some of them are aggressively attacking him, while others appear in the guise of attractive young women. The written stories recalling the third-century Saint's temptation in the Egyptian desert offer the first examples of carnal temptations in a Christian context. The images of the tempted Saint were reproduced for laymen to a more considerable extent than those of other saints; they were increasingly produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and frequently seen in church decorations and altar paintings as well as in private, upper-class and aristocratic homes. The aim is to investigate the developments of the motif during the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries in order to discuss the motif's function as a moral pointer, targeted mainly towards laymen.

Chapter five focuses on episodes where prostitutes attempt to seduce St Eligius, St Thomas Aquinas and St Philip Neri. The female prostitute recurrently epitomised the illicit female temptress in early modern visual culture. The chapter aims to study the images against the historical context of the policy concerning prostitution in early modern Italy. The pictured pious men were famous for either condemning prostitution or for working actively in order to convert sinful women to good Christians. I am arguing that the images served a dual function: firstly, to condemn prostitution, and secondly, to draw attention to the chastity and the piety of the individual saint.

Chapter six is a continuation of the same theme, by presenting the motif known as *The Exemplary Chastity of St Francis of Assisi,* depicting an episode where the famous Saint meets, resists and ultimately converts a female prostitute. Although the motif presents a well-known episode in the Franciscan written tradition, it was not introduced into Franciscan imagery until as late as the late sixteenth century, first through illustrated books and, subsequently, in more

monumental art forms such as oil paintings and murals. The motif stands out from the others as it focuses on the Saint's exemplary chastity rather than his resistance of sexual temptations.

The last chapter presents the two Benedictine temptation images included in the wall decorations of the octagonal cloister in the Olivetan monastery, San Michele in Bosco, Bologna. The project was the most important post-Tridentine Benedictine decoration project. It was conducted under the leadership of Ludovico Carracci, who also painted one of the two studied images. The paintings were carried out in a closed environment and made for Olivetan monks, where they, as I will show, were meant to function as visual support for the residing monks.

2 VIRGINITY, SIN AND MISOGYNY IN POST-TRIDENTINE ITALY

In Christian thought, sexual desire was intimately connected with earthly life as a result of the Fall of Man. Visual representations of carnal agony and temptation, therefore, also functioned as reminders of human sinfulness, the constant presence of evil and the fundamental importance of resistance. Before turning towards the sexual temptation motif, this chapter aims to briefly discuss the early modern Catholic view on carnal lust as well as the favoured alternative – chastity and virginity. In a patriarchal culture such as early modern Catholicism, women, the object of male desire, unavoidably became the dangerous other. Thus, as was the case with temptation motifs, images that epitomised the female sex as lascivious and sinful, gained popularity in the early modern period. Misogyny is an essential component in the creation of this visual tradition.

2.1 Sinful Sexuality

A central concern of the Tridentine councils was the moral code and decorum regarding those sides of human life which modern mind connects with sexuality. By the mid-sixteenth century, the rule of mandatory celibacy for the clergy had become quite a problem for the church; many members of the clergy lived lives that had little to do with the early Christian idea of chastity. Reports from several representatives in the Council showed that priests living openly with a concubine (often also with recognised children) had become a rule rather than an exception.[1] This moral degradation was a serious issue, not least because one of the Protestant accusations against Rome concerned hypocrisy in matters regarding the rule of compulsory celibacy. Doubts about its real value began to rise also among Catholics, and many claimed that the Protestant critique was justified.[2] The question was discussed in committee by the Council for years, and when clerical celibacy ultimately was reaffirmed during the Council's very last twenty-fifth session, held on 4 December 1563,

1 Wiesner-Hanks 2010, 133.

2 An end to the mandatory celibacy of the Catholic clergy was claimed, e.g., by the delegate representing the Catholic Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria who saw chaste marriage as a preferable option to 'sullied celibacy'. Also, the delegates sent by Emperor Charles V and Ferdinand I argued for the possibility of married priests. See Ibid.

it was only after personal interference by Pope Pius IV (1559–1565) himself.[3] The condemnation of those who, like the married members of the Protestant clergy, broke the vows of chastity was expressed in strong and uncompromising terms:

> How shameful, and how unworthy it is the name of clerks who have devoted themselves to the divine service, to live in the filth of immodesty, and unclean concubinage, the thing, itself doth sufficiently testify, in the common offence of all the faithful, and the extreme disgrace entailed on the clerical order.[4]

Clerics living with concubines were urged to end their relationship immediately, indicating that the delegates no doubt understood that the battle in favour of sexual abstinence was going to be difficult. In fact, no other Tridentine decree contains as many levels of punishment.[5]

Reaffirming clerical chastity continued a tradition that, at the time, had been practised in the church for over a millennium. The negative and highly constrained attitude toward human sexuality was intimately connected to Greek philosophy, found in Platonism and Stoicism, where striving for pleasure and delight had been considered an expression of bad judgement. According to the Greek philosophers, a wise man was tranquil and his mind peaceful; only fools would let their passions control their mind.[6] Great and dangerous power was ascribed to the sexual act, as desire and

3 Ibid.

4 Buckley 1851, Session 25 Ch. 14 'The Manner of Proceeding against Clerks guilty of keeping Concubines is prescribed'.

5 A priest who refused to give up his concubine was initially punished by having a third of his monthly income taken away. If he, after that, still were 'persisting in the same crime' he would be dispossessed of his whole income and suspended from his work for as long as necessary. If he, regardless of these corrections, continued to have female relations, he was to be deprived of his position forever. The last level of punishment for a priest who had been discharged from his position but none the less decided to continue relationships with 'scandalous women of any sort' were to 'smitten [him] with the sword of excommunication'. Clerks who, unlike priests, did not hold any ecclesiastical benefices or pensions, should 'according to the quality of their crime and contumacy, and their persistence therein' be punished with imprisonment and suspension from their order by the bishop himself. The punishment of clergy for this sort of crime included everyone: 'Bishops also, if, which far be it! They abstain not from crime of this nature, and, being admonished by the provincial synod, do not amend, shall be by the very fact suspended; and if they persevere, they shall even be reported by the said Synod to the most holy Roman Pontiff, who shall animadvert upon them according to the character of their guilt, even with deprivation, if need be'. Buckley 1851, Session 25 Ch. 14 'The Manner of Proceeding against Clerks guilty of keeping Concubines is prescribed'. See also Wiesner-Hanks 2010, 134.

6 Brachtendorf 1997, 290.

pleasure were believed to derange a man's sense of reason. Rational humans (men) were thus required to master their sexual urges – a life free from sexual commitments was a sign of wisdom.[7]

When adapted to the Christian tradition, sexual abstinence was presented as the most honourable way of life, as it permitted an undisturbed devotion to God. St Paul, for one, encouraged his devotees to follow his example and live in chastity by reminding the believers that '[t]he unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided' (I Cor. 7:32–34).[8] A further argument for the Christian promoters of chastity was the belief that angels were sexless and, therefore, no marriage and no sexual acts and desires existed in Paradise: 'For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven'(Matt 22:30). A life in celibacy was thus believed to be a foretaste of life after the resurrection and made it possible to live on Earth as in Heaven. Jesus fortified this argument when he claimed that those living in celibacy had made themselves sexless for the sake of heaven (Matt: 19:12).[9] However, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, the problem for Christianity was never (as it had been for the Stoics) penetration or domination, as much as it was the fear of erection, that is, of desire itself.[10]

Church Father Augustine of Hippo (354–430) connected human sexual desire with original sin. He believed that the Fall had dramatically weakened human will and that it had made man incapable of fully controlling his body. Hence, man's insubordination to God resulted in the body's disobedience to man, which forced humans to live 'as the beasts do, subject to death: the slave of his own lust, destined to suffer eternal punishment after death'.[11] Indeed, according to Augustine, Adam, while still in paradise, could control his erection – a condition

7 Bóasdóttir 2011,50.

8 All bible citations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV, 2001) as given on 'Bible Gateway' https://www.biblegateway.com.

9 Matt: 19:12: 'For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.'

10 Foucault 1999b, 186.

11 Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 12, Ch.22, 1998, 531; Clack 2002, 21.

that later changed for all men.[12] It was, therefore, not the sexual act per se which was considered sinful, but the pleasure connected with it. In the *City of God*, Augustine even claims that if the Fall would never have taken place, Adam and Eve would have continued to love and have children in Paradise, yet without lust, because before the Fall man inseminated woman as the hand-planted seeds in the soil, with a peaceful soul and without any violence inflicting the integrity of the body.[13]

Augustine concluded that longing for pleasure or sexual satisfaction was the worst of all human desires, as it corrupted the body and, in that way, also the mind and the soul.[14] This conviction derived from St Paul, who reminded the religious that fornication, unlike all other sins, was committed against the penitent's own body, which was given by God to be a temple of the Holy Spirit:

> Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (I Cor.6:18-20)

Thus, it seems clear that living a spiritual life entailed repression and submission of all signs of sexual desire, at least in as much as Catholic monasticism and clerical celibacy were concerned.

Early sixteenth-century Protestant thinkers considered sexual desire to be so powerful that few people could be expected to live a truly chaste life. Augustine's link between sexual lust and original sin only confirmed this standpoint.[15] Instead, marriage was recommended for priests as well as for laymen, and the former Augustine friar Martin Luther set an example for his followers by marrying the former nun, Katharina von Bora.

12 Saint Augustine, *The City of God,* Book 14, Ch. 17, 1998, 615. See also Jeanrond 2010, 66; Friedman 2009, 30.

13 Augustine further writes: 'And therefore that marriage, worthy of the happiness of Paradise, should have had desirable fruit without the shame of, had there been no sin.' Saint Augustine, *The City of God Book* 14, Ch. 23, 1998, 624. See also Jeanrond 2010, 66; Casagrande & Vecchio, 2000, 151.

14 Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 14, Ch. 15–26, 1998, 601ff. See also Casagrande & Vecchio, 2000, 151.

15 Wiesner-Hanks, 2010, 77; 132.

Both Catholics and Protestants accepted sexual acts solely within the institution of marriage. Even though the Council of Trent reaffirmed the sacrament of marriage, however, the marital state was still valued less than virginity and celibacy. The Council even condemned anyone who (like the Protestants) was claiming the opposite: 'If any one saith, that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema.'[16]

Marriage was seen as a plausible option for those who were not expected to be able to carry out a celibate life. Clearly, it only concerned lay people; clergy who had given vows of celibacy and then, like Luther, broke them in order to marry were condemned harshly.[17] Thus, for the Catholics, the improvement of sexual ethics was, just like the Catholic Reformation, on the whole, a battle against Protestant ideas. By retaining mandatory celibacy, the Catholic Church signalled to the faithful that, unlike the Protestants, it was following the true doctrine. The Church Fathers paid great attention to sexuality and chastity in their writings, and almost every one of them produced a treatise on virginity. The majority of the most important persons in the New Testament are unmarried (e.g. living in sexual abstinence) – even though Mary and Joseph were betrothed, Mary gave birth to the Son of God as a virgin.

2.2 Art and the Council of Trent

When the Catholic Church, in turn, defined its position regarding sacred pictures during the same twenty-fifth and last session of the Council of Trent, held during two days in December 1563, it largely reaffirmed positions which were as old as the Church. Namely, that images were the main means of religious education of the illiterate and provided an example, a stimulus, which was essential for increasing and strengthening the devotion of all. The Council condemned iconoclasm, thus echoing the seventh synod of the Council of Nicaea II (787).[18] The concepts expressed by the delegates in Trent did not differ much from those stated by the Church of Rome on many earlier occasions, all of which had had a limited effect on the expressive freedom of the figurative arts.

16 Waterworth 1848, 193, 'Doctrine on the Sacrament Of Matrimony', Session 24 canon 10 (November 1558).

17 Ibid.

18 Paleotti 2012 (1582), 61.

Modern scholars have largely disagreed on the importance the decree had on the arts, and many more recent studies claim that the Council's effect was tenuous.[19] Indeed, it has been shown that the decree on sacred images was anticipated earlier in the century in writings, chiefly based on a discussion on the theological tradition of pictures.[20]

It is a fact that the Council hastily debated the decree, first in the session 'On the Vocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images', and the next day, in the session dealing with a 'Decree Concerning Indulgences'. Nonetheless, as Paolo Prodi observes, the decree still contains several important theological principles. Even though it was affirmed that Christ 'is our alone Redeemer and Saviour'[21], the faithful were encouraged to invoke the Saints as Christ's intercessors. The Catholic Church has always condemned any rejection of the cult of the Saint and the Council considered relics and images of the Saints, Christ and the Virgin Mary as being fundamental for devotion, not because they contained any magical power, 'but because the honour which is shown unto them is referred to the prototypes which they represent'.[22] Encouraging the use of art for religious purposes was nothing new, but what changed with the Tridentine Council's decree was that sacred images were ascribed a didactic function.[23] Bishops were encouraged to educate laymen through art:

> […] by means of the histories of the mysteries of our Redemption, portrayed by paintings or other representations, the people is instructed, and confirmed in (the habit of) remembering, and continually revolving in mind the articles of faith; as also that great profit is derived from all sacred images, not only because the people are thereby admonished of the benefits and gifts bestowed upon them by Christ, but also because the miracles which God has performed by means of the saints, and their salutary examples, are set before the eyes of the faithful; that so they may give God thanks for those things; may order their own lives and manners in imitation of the saints; and may be excited to adore and love God, and to cultivate piety.

19 See Hall, 2011, 7.

20 Ibid., n 22.

21 Waterworth 1848, 234 'On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images' Session 25 (December 1563).

22 Ibid.

23 Prodi 2012, 10.

Sacred images were to provide a reminder of God's grace and to set good examples for the faithful by giving the Saints the function of role models while encouraging a stronger faith in God. They were given a dual function, which was both narrative and devotional.

The Bolognese Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti later refined the notions formulated by the Council in his famous treatise *Discorso alle immagine sacre e profane* (Discourse on sacred and profane images), published in 1582 and written with the intent to set out the reformed Catholic Church's idea concerning the function and content of sacred art. Paleotti affirmed that sacred images served multiple functions by evoking piety and devotion and glorifying God and his saints. Furthermore, he believed that an important function of art was to delight its audience: 'With respect to delight, experience tells us that, in everyday terms, there is perhaps nothing that pleases our eyes and brings them sweet refreshment as much as a well-executed picture.'[24] His text emphasised the importance of a rhetoric prominently used in Baroque images, namely that devotional pictures served to motivate their audience: 'There is another very notable and important effect deriving from Christian pictures, which is to *persuade* the people, as orators do, and draw them, by means of pictures, to embrace anything pertinent to religion'(Italics mine).[25] Paleotti's work was influential and has often been regarded as an essential inspiration for the birth of the Baroque, which has been considered the style 'par excellence' of the Catholic Reformation.

It is against this background that the increased production of images depicting tempted male saints needs to be understood. The temptation motifs narrated scenes from famous male saints' lives and encouraged the believer to recognise the holy men's struggle, meditate over their piety and, ultimately, to take inspiration from their actions.

2.3 Illicit Images and Transgressive Women in Early Modern Thought and Visual Culture

A large part of Paleotti's treatise deals with inappropriate pictures. There was a legitimate reason for this: by the sixteenth century, religious pictures had become sensuous, even erotic, and presented a problem for the church. Marcia Hall asserts that the Virgin Mary, who, in the early sixteenth century, was pictured as an ideal beauty

24 Paleotti 2012 (1582), 109 (1:20).

25 Ibid ., 111 (1:21).

with a sensuous presence, by the second quarter of the century, had become hard to distinguish from a seductively presented Venus.[26] As the same sensual appeal was often used for sacred as well as profane images, it became essential to protect religious pictures, not only from the iconoclastic tendencies brought forward by Protestantism but also from what later, often, has been considered as the profane, illicit gaze created during the Renaissance and the Mannerism.[27]

The Council clearly affirmed that all forms of immodesty were to be abolished, 'all lasciviousness [should] be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust', and furthermore 'nothing seen that is disorderly, or that is unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing indecorous, seeing that holiness becometh the house of God'.[28] It fell on the bishops to ensure that the artworks that decorated the churches in their dioceses followed the idea of the Council in content as well as in execution and to eliminate everything that could be seen as indecent or unsuitable. The concepts were, however, so broad and open to a variety of interpretations that it was impossible to reach a homogeneous policy, and, as a consequence, the way the decree was applied significantly varied from diocese to diocese.[29] In some cases, the new 'rules' resulted in a removal of pictures that were seen as inappropriate. In the late 1560s, the bishop in Ascoli Piceno, Pietro Camaiani, removed images of the Madonna, Saint Catherine and Saint Lucy, because he saw them as indecorous.[30]

Even though the Tridentine Council and Cardinal Paleotti condemned the production of 'licentious' images, the demand for them did not lessen. Instead, artists and their patrons turned to subjects that enabled a multifaceted interpretation. Sensual and even erotic pictures of biblical and mythological women with a questionable reputation, such as Venus, Bathsheba, Delilah, the daughters of Loth and the wife of Potiphar, were frequently produced. These women where tainted, impure and no longer virgins; their bodies could be exposed and eroticised. These images were tolerable, perhaps even called for, since they offered attractive examples of transgression and deceitfulness.

26 Hall, 2011, 6.

27 Prodi, 2012, 11.

28 Waterworth 1848, 235f, 'On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images' Session 25 (December 1563). See also Prodi, 2010, 11.

29 Boschloo 1974, 144.

30 Hall 2011, 126.

The condemnation of immoral images was meant to protect the pious bodies of the Virgin Mary and female saints from the illicit male gaze. It demonstrates a twofold outlook on the female sex, which best could be likened to the Freudian Madonna-whore complex, wherein one is an adored, pure and chaste virgin, while the other is a sexually enticing and dangerous temptress.

The Church passionately venerated the Virgin Mary and positioned her as the ultimate female ideal. As she was simultaneously both a virgin and a mother, however, she offered a female role model that was impossible to imitate. Instead, in a patriarchal culture that repressed carnal desires, women inevitably became the dangerous other and temptresses who should be resisted in order to keep the monastic and clerical male body intact and holy.

In Christianity, the lascivious female temptress can be found already in the first woman, Eve. She was the reason for man's downfall, she fell for the serpent's temptation, and she enticed Adam to sin as well: 'Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and was in sin' (Tim 2:14). Church Father St Ambrose (340–397) presented Eve as a devious temptress who sinned with foresight, deliberately making Adam participate in her misdeeds. She ate the fruit first and, therefore, her eyes opened first, which is why she ought to have known that she was sinning. She then made Adam a part of the evil that she knew existed: 'She should not have invited her husband to share in her sin. By enticing him and by giving him what she herself had tasted she did not nullify her sin: rather she repeated it.'[31] Woman, who was made to assist man, instead initiated his, hence, humanity's fall. [32]

Eve's inferior position was motivated by the fact that she was created from Adam's left side – thus forever bent – which made her, to use the words of another Church Father, namely Tertullian (c.160–c.225), 'a sort of second human being'.[33] After all, as Paul maintained, God created man in his image and woman from man's side as an image of man: 'he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of

31 Ambrose, 'On Paradise', 6:33, also quoted in Miles 1991, 91.

32 See Miles 1991, 91.

33 Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, 5. Over a thousand years later, the bent female form was brought up again when the two Dominican priests, Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Springer, declared in their treatise on witchcraft Malleus Maleficarum (1487), that the 'defect in the formation of the first woman' made her bent 'as it were in a contrary direction to a man' which, in turn, left her predisposed to lascivious behaviour: 'She is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations.' *Malleus Maleficarum*, part I, question VI, 4. See also Miles 1991,121.

man' (1 Cor 11:7).[34] Tertullian confirmed all women as descendants to Eve: 'And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? […] You are the Devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law.' Thus, he made women equally responsible for the Fall.[35] When, following St Augustine's conviction, carnal lust is viewed as a consequence of the Fall, it becomes clear that female guilt is compounded: not only is she responsible for the existence of sexual desire, she is simultaneously also the object of that male desire. It meant that women did not only create sexual sin, every part of them actively led men into it. In the fourteenth century, the Dominican Guglielmo Peraldo stated, 'Non c'é un parte del corpo femminile che non possa essere usato come un laccio per imprigionare gli uomini o come una spada per colpirli' ('There is not a part of the female body that cannot be used as a snare to imprison men or as a sword to strike them'), thereby proclaiming all women as potentially dangerous for men.[36]

The Virgin Mary became the 'second Eve', who restored the God-man relationship and saved humanity from its ruin.[37] The Annunciation of the Virgin was, in many ways, the antithesis of Eve's disobedience. While Eve disobeyed God's command, Mary obeyed, and while Eve threw man out of Paradise, Mary brought humankind back to Heaven. Thus, one brought misery and sin, the other happiness and salvation. The parallelism of Eve and Mary is apostolic in its origin and also found in the doctrine of the early Church Fathers.[38] It takes a visual form in Giovanni Battista Cavalieri's (1526–1597) pair of engravings *Allegory of Sin* and *Allegory of Grace* (fig. 6a and 6b). This image pair was included as one of two allegorical counterparts (the other displaying Life and Death) in *Ecclesiae militantis triumphi* (1585), a series of prints made for a Jesuit audience, reproducing the late sixteenth-century frescoes depicting early Christian martyrs in Santo Stefano Rotondo, Rome. The allegorical images did not form part of the original murals,

34 Note, however, that in Genesis 1:27, it is said that both male and female are created in the image of God.

35 Tertullian, 'On the Apparel of Women', Book 1; Ch. 1.

36 Peraldo, summa, II, III, 3, 16. Quoted in Casagrande & Vecchio, 2000, 156.

37 Mary as the second Eve has its origin in Saint Paul's Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5:12: 'Death through Adam, alive through Christ', which in turn by St Jerome was extended into the proverb 'Death by Eve, life by Mary'(Jerome epistle 22).

38 Newman 1952, 17f. Namely St Justin Martyr (120–165), St Irenaeus (120–200), and Tertullian (160–240).

Fig.6a. (Left) Giovanni Battista de'Cavalieri, *Allegory of Vice*, in E*cclesiae militantis triumphi*, Rome, 1585. Engraving, 22 x 15 cm.
Fig.6b. (Right) Giovanni Battista de'Cavalieri, *Allegory of Virtue*, in *Ecclesiae militantis triumphi*, Rome, 1585. Engraving, 22 x 15 cm.

instead, as Kristin Noreen suggests: '[T]he allegories illustrate the Tridentine position on grace, sin, and justification to stress the joint importance of faith and works for the process of salvation.'[39] Though the exact audience of the prints is not clear, Noreen proposes that new priests used them on their missions to the Protestant north.[40]

An iconographical reading of *Allegory of Sin* (fig. 6a) reveals a narrative, which emphasises Eve's particular guilt in the Fall of Man. A globe – the world – is ensnared by the Devil, a snake with an apple in its mouth as a reference to original sin. The globe appears heavy, as it is carried before a nearly naked Eve – kneeling in the midst of a shrub under a tree with her hands wrapped in prayer – by death in the guise of a skeleton, and a black child with the word 'PECCATVM' inscribed on his forehead. The text under the picture reads 'A muliere initium factum est peccati, et per illam omnes morimur' (Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her, we all die, Eccl. 25:33-35). We learn that through Eve's actions sin and death were brought into the world.

39 Noreen 1998, 693.

40 Ibid., 692.

In the *Allegory of Virtue* (fig. 6b), the globe has shrunken. A little white child with the word 'GRATIA' written on top of its head is carrying the globe to the Virgin Mary, who blesses him (and the world) with the sign of the cross. The snake is meandering on the ground by the child's feet, and Death has turned around to flee. On the ground, a fig leaf is seen between the legs of death and in the very same spot in which Eve was positioned in the *Allegory of Sin*. This small, yet not insignificant detail may be understood as a confirmation of the liberation from the shame brought on humanity through the Fall. The landscape is not as wild as in the *Allegory of Sin*; and in the background, there is a church and a town. The text at the bottom of the image reads: 'Qui me invenerit inveniet vitam et hauriet salutem a Domino' (For those who find me find life and receive favour from the Lord, Proverbs 8:35). Hence, through the presence of the Virgin eternal life is brought to humanity and Death is defeated. The black child has become white as grace replaces sin.[41]

2.3.1 Hercules at the Crossroads, the Choice Between Virtue and Vice

In many ways, Eve and the Virgin Mary represented the same set of opposites – *Virtue* and *Vice* – that Hercules faced in the famous ancient allegorical parable *Hercules at the crossroads*. The story, invented by the sophist Prodicus, and reported by Xenophon, narrates how Hercules arrives at the crossroads, where he meets two women that both try to persuade him to adopt their way of living. One of the women represents Excellence (Arete) and the other Happiness (Eudamonia) or Pleasure (Kakia). The first woman points towards a steep hill crowned by a temple and the promise of immortal glory, while the second offers the young man easy and immediate happiness and satisfaction.[42] Hercules chooses to follow Excellence and, consequently, he becomes a hero whose strength lies in his capacity to be guided by reason rather than passion, and who is qualified to decide what is morally right. The story became

41 The racist reference to the black child as the personification of sin is found already in the patristic literature. In Vita Antonii, Athanasius recalls how the vice of fornication appeared to St Anthony in the shape of a small black boy declaring to the Saint 'I am the friend of whoredom […] I am called the spirit of lust How many have I deceived who wished to live soberly, how many are the chaste whom by my incitements I have over-persuaded!' Athanasius, 'Life of Saint Anthony', Ch. 6. Moreover, in an episode recalled by St Gregory in 'Dialogues II', St Benedict witnesses how a black child pulls a monk out of Mass. 'Dialogues II'; Ch. 24. See also Brakke 2001.

42 Miller 2008, 167.

a popular motif during the Renaissance and Baroque periods along with the fashion of employing Greco-Roman mythology for allegorical interpretations. Erwin Panofsky gives comprehensive treatment to the motif's iconography in his *Hercules am Scheidewege* (1930), and asserts that the popularity of the motif was primarily due to the fact that it raised the essential philosophical question of moral choice. Consequently, it conveyed a philosophical application of the difficulty of human life.[43]

The motif also provided an excellent possibility to glorify its patron with the help of allegory. Such an example is seen in Annibale Carracci's (1560–1609) famous interpretation of the episode (fig. 7). The painting was the centrepiece of the decorative programme depicting stories of Hercules and other heroes on the ceiling of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese's (1573–1626) Camerino[44], commissioned as part of the massive decoration project for Palazzo Farnese in Rome.[45] Odoardo's librarian, the humanist Fulvio Orsini created the iconographic programme of the room; it was intended as a celebration of virtue's victory over vice – in particular, the cardinal's victory over vices. The story of Hercules was meant to serve as a poetic allegory of the young cardinal's life – Odoardo, who was made cardinal at the young age of eighteen, was in his early twenties when the decoration project was initiated. Like the young Hercules, Odoardo intended to walk the path of faith and virtue while engaging in his rapid ecclesiastical career. The image, thus, simultaneously served as proof of the cardinal's moral uprightness and a reminder to himself to avoid the temptation of pleasure and worldliness.

In Annibale's painting, the young Hercules, intended to be identified as Odoardo Farnese himself, is seated between two female figures, which are allegorical personifications of Virtue, to the right of the hero, and Vice (or Voluptuousness as Giovan Pietro Bellori named her[46]) to the left. The first is respectably clothed in a blue dress and red

43 Panofsky, 2010.

44 The Camerino was a small, private study of the Cardinal on the piano nobile of the palace. While the exact use of the room remains unclear, it is assumed that it functioned as the Cardinal's bedchamber or office. Odoardo's Camerino was Annibale's first commission for the cardinal upon the artist's arrival to Rome in 1595. See Cavalli 1956, 210.

45 In the seventeenth century, the painting was removed from its original location (where a modest copy replaced it) and sent to Parma. In the eighteenth century, it came to Naples, along with many other artworks from the Farnese collection, where it is still preserved in the National Museum of Capodimonte.

46 Bellori 2005 (1672), 77.

Fig.7. Annibale Carracci, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1596. Oil on canvas, 66 x 237 cm. Galleria Capodimonte, Naples.

robe and holds a parazonium – a dagger– the symbol of Arete. She points towards an uphill climb – the difficult path of virtue – at the top of which Pegasus, as the symbol of virtue and means of ascension to heaven, stands as Hercules's prize. In the left corner, at her feet, the poet Laureate sits ready to recite the hero's deeds, if he chooses the right direction. The woman on his opposite side is half-naked, only slightly covered with almost transparent veils. She offers Hercules-Odoardo a smooth path with flowers, instruments and musical scores, playing cards and theatrical masks, referring to the pleasures of life, but also the deceitfulness (symbolised by the masks) of these worldly occupations.[47] The young hero seems undecided about which path to choose, but his sidelong glance, which is directed towards Virtue, suggests that eventually, this will be the path he is going to walk.[48]

47 Panofsky connects the iconography of the playing cards and the instruments to the personification 'Scandalo' in Cesare Ripa's Iconologia: An elderly bearded man who holds a pack of playing cards in his right hand, a lute in his left hand and a flute at his feet. Panofsky 2010, 176. See also Ripa (1593) 1986, 159.

48 Erwin Panofsky shows in his analysis of the painting that Annibale's composition originates from a Roman relief from the Augustan age (copy of a Greek original) depicting Hercules at the crossroads, (today part of the Villa Albani collection). The seated hero, his nakedness and his position between the two female figures, are all elements that are found in the painting by Annibale. Panofsky also shows how Annibale's Hercules at the Crossroads became the canonical reference for most of the painters who later designed the motif: E.g. the seated Hercules, the pointing gesture of Virtue, as well as the masks at the foot of Pleasure, are elements that, from Annibale onwards, become very frequent in the interpretations of the motif. Panofsky 2010, 177f.

A clear parallel can be drawn between the ancient hero and the sexually tempted saint, who, similarly to Hercules, faces a moral choice between sanctity and the pleasures of the (body) world. An essential part of Christian moral theology is framed around the dynamics of choice, which, in turn, mainly originate from ancient Roman philosophers like Cicero and Seneca. Cicero even used the Hercules legend as an example in his *Officiis* (I.32.118), when he summarised the moral inferiority of easy-win, easy-lose choices such as pleasure and happiness.[49]

2.3.2 Transgressive Women in Early Modern Imagery

Another popular theme in both art and literature of the early modern period was the Power of Woman *topos*. Similarly to the Temptation motifs, it served as a warning against the danger of yielding to female (sexual) power. It presented a divergent reality, a vision of the world upside down, where women challenged the traditional hierarchy of the sexes by taking on roles that were superior and by exercising sexual tricks in order to render otherwise strong, heroic and rational men helpless. The *topos* appeared for the first time in the Patristic period.[50] Susan Smith argues that, in the hands of Christian moralists, the Power of Women *topos* became a weapon used to influence men (and women) 'to adopt an ascetic morality based on fear of and hostility toward the body and toward the female sex with which the body was closely identified'.[51]

Motifs picturing sexually forthright and lovesick women, such as the nymph Salmacis who, according to Greek mythology, raped the young and handsome Hermaphroditus[52], and Armida, the Saracen sorceress, who enchanted the Christian warrior Rinaldo in Torquato

49 Cicero and Seneca were declared legitimate for the Church to use by St Ambrose in 390. Their texts were known to the Church Fathers St Jerome and St Augustine, as well as St Thomas Aquinas, and have played significant roles in forming Christian morality. Furthermore, Petrarch, the father of Humanism and head of the revival of Classical learning, identified a good life with good choices and even explicitly referred to Cicero's discussion of Hercules' choice in his De vita Solitaria (1346). Miller 2008, 168ff.

50 Smith 1995, 20.

51 Ibid., 22.

52 The tale of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus is included in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (book IV.274–388). During the Baroque, the motif *Salmacis (embracing/raping) and Hermaphroditus* was mostly produced in oil on canvas. See for example Francesco Albani's (1578–1660) interpretation in the Galleria Sabauda, Turin.

Fig.8. Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, *Trista è quella casa…*, in *Proverbi figurati,* Bologna, 1678. Etching, 34 x 25 cm.

Tasso's immensely popular epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*[53], became favoured subjects in Italian art of the post-Tridentine period. Equally popular were the scenes with active female characters found in the Book of Judges: Judith Slaying Holofernes, Delilah Betraying Samson, David Falling for Bathsheba's Beauty, and Jael Killing Sisera. The *topos* works metaphorically, Griselda Pollock argues, 'to delegitimate woman from any role other than of subordination since their uppityness signifies only disorder and unnatural reversal of the divinely ordained hierarchy of the sexes.'[54]

53 The motif Rinaldo and Armida was indeed immensely popular during the Baroque and pictured by most of the renowned artists of the period. In Tasso's tale (Gerusalemme Liberata XVI, 17–35) Armida is sent to stop the fierce and handsome Christian soldier Rinaldo. She is about to murder him in his sleep when she instead falls in love. In order to keep him near her, she creates an enchanted garden where she holds the young soldier as her lovesick prisoner. In art the two protagonists are usually pictured as lovers, affectionately embracing in a verdant landscape.

54 Pollock 1999, 116.

An ironic example of such divergent hierarchy is found in Giuseppe Maria Mittelli's *Proverbi illustrati*, (Illustrated Proverbs, 1678) and shows that the *topos* was well-established also in folk culture (fig. 8). The image illustrates the proverb 'Trista è quella casa, dove la gallina canta e il gallo tace' (Sad is the house where the hen crows, and the cock stays silent) and shows a man who is kneeling on the floor at his wife's feet expressing humiliation and complete subordination. It is an act of cross-dressing and an exchange of gender roles; while he is dressed in his wife's dress, she is wearing her husband's pants. She holds a staff and is confidently leaning her hand on her hip while looking down at her husband. It is clear that he is no longer the commander of his own home; he does not dare to meet her eyes. Instead, he awkwardly looks down at his hands with a troubled countenance. The text under the scene, 'Tien Iole il brando, e la canocchia Alcide' (Iole holds the club, Heracles wears the chemise), further refers the image to a famous Ovidian tale of cross-dressing.[55] It is the story of Heracles (the Greek divine hero from which Hercules derives), who, when madly in love, falls completely under her erotic control of the princess Iole. She humiliates the renowned hero by making him dress in her clothes and perform female shores while she holds his club and wears his lion skin. Annibale Carracci also depicted this scene in the decorations of the Galleria Farnese (fig.9). The image shows the ancient hero seated and playing the tambourine – traditionally seen as a female instrument – and though not wearing women's clothes, he is bejewelled with a golden armlet. Iole sits next to him and has taken hold of his attributes and symbols of power – the lion skin and the wooden club. Here, the young Hercules, who determinately managed to choose virtue from vice at the crossroads, is long gone.

The *topos* includes motifs with explicitly erotic or at least suggestive content, depicting women initiating sexual acts, such as in *Loth and his Daughters* and *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*. Portrayals of sexually active women, Bette Talvacchia asserts, 'would have been extremely transgressive of the norms of sexual comportment in both moral and social terms'.[56] These biblical stories, however, provided a theological justification for erotic imagery. Images such as the incestuous love scene between Loth and his daughters gained high popularity. The motif was multidimensional; while narrating a biblical story with

55 Ovid, *Heroides* 9.

56 Talvacchia 1999, 26.

Fig.9. Annibale Carracci, *Hercules and Iole*, 1597. Fresco. Farnese Gallery, Rome.

a moralising connotation, it also provided a respectable pretext for visualising a tantalising taboo.[57] Loth had fled his hometown of Sodom with his wife and his daughters before its destruction. After his wife had been transformed into a pillar of salt as a punishment for her disobedience, he was left alone with the daughters and took shelter in a cave. According to the episode recalled in the Book of Genesis (19:30-38), the daughters were convinced that their father was the only man left alive in the world and, therefore, plotted to seduce him in order to preserve the family line: They offered him wine until he was too drunk to object and then took turns having sexual intercourse with him.

57 Taboo in the sense that the Church in early modern Italy forbade incest. It remains unclear what the ancient opinion on incest was. Other incestuous stories can be found in the Old Testament; Abraham married his sister Sara (Genesis 20:12–13), and Amnon fell in love with, and eventually raped his sister Thamar (II Kings 13:1–15). The latter was, as it happens, another popular motif during the Italian Baroque era, see fig.12).

Fig.10. Francesco Furini, *Loth and his Daughters*, ca.1634. Oil on canvas, 123 x 120 cm. Prado Museum, Madrid.

Francesco Furini (1600–1646) presents us with a quite sensual scene where Loth is embracing his two naked daughters (fig. 10). One is reaching for his robe while the other is offering him wine in a silver cup. Both daughters are turned away from the spectator to face their father and, thus, form an intimate unity that efficiently excludes all additional participants. The spectator is, instead, given the role of a voyeur who, undisturbed, can admire the naked women – not least the behind of the standing daughter which is provokingly revealed to us through her transparent veil. The women's pale luminous skin stands in sharp contrast to the vibrating blue background and their father's dark hands placed on their backs and shoulders. Furini's interpretation is exceptionally provocative; by picturing both daughters naked, he provides an enticing fantasy of an erotic love triangle, where two young women seduce a much older man. The painting was made on commission by Grand Duke Ferdinand II of Medici and was later given as a wedding gift to Philip IV of Spain and Maria Anna of

Austria upon their marriage in 1649. At the Spanish court, the painting was placed in the private chambers of the queen, probably because of its provocative content.[58]

Though well hidden in Furini's painting, a moral connotation can be read into the biblical account. It is confirmed that Loth was drunk when his daughters had sex with him: '[H]e perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose'. Thus, he is acquitted of active participation in the events; if anything, he is a defenceless victim. St Jerome asserts that even though the daughters might have had good intentions: '[T]hey may have acted as they did more from a desire of offspring than from love of sinful pleasure', they were well aware that their father, 'the righteous man', would have refused unless he was intoxicated. Therefore, St Jerome concludes that Loth's 'sin was not wilful'. Nevertheless, his drunkenness becomes a cautionary tale against losing control and giving in to improper behaviour, for, in the end, both daughters became pregnant and the resulting offspring proved to be disastrous. St Jerome concludes that 'his error was a grave one, for it made him the father of Moab and Ammon, Israel's enemies, of whom it is said: Even to the fourteenth generation they shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever'.[59] Thus, the motif's primary function – besides providing accepted imagery for a forbidden erotic fantasy – was to serve as a warning against the dangers of female seduction.[60]

Likewise, the motif *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife* served as much as an example of female lasciviousness and deceit as one of male virtue and chastity. Like *Loth and his daughters,* the motif gained considerable popularity during the Baroque and was portrayed by most of the celebrated artists of the period. Indeed, the episode where a young Joseph refuses the seduction of the unnamed wife of Potiphar is one of the most frequently depicted sexual aggression scenes in Christian imagery.[61] The story appears in chapter 39 in the Book of Genesis. Joseph's brothers sold him to slavery and Potiphar, the captain of the Pharaoh's palace guard, became his master.

58 Maffeis 2007, 200, cat. 24.

59 St Jerome, *Letter to Eustochium*; 22:8.

60 It should, however, be noted that in some theological discussions of the episode, the daughters are seen in a slightly more positive light, as it has also been stressed that they sacrificed their virginity in order to secure their family line.

61 For an in-depth discussion of the motif in the broader context of rape imagery in medieval and early modern Europe, see Wolfthal 1999, 161ff.

Fig.11. Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (Guercino) *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*, 1649. Oil on canvas, 123 x 158 cm. National Gallery of Art, New York

Fig.12. Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (Guercino) *Amnon and Tamar,* 1649. Oil on canvas, 123 x 158,5 cm. National Gallery of Art, New York.

Potiphar grew fond of his young slave and put him in charge of his whole household. Joseph's situation, however, soon grew difficult, as he was the favourite not only of his master but also of his master's wife:

> Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. He is not greater in this house than I am not, nor has he kept back anything from me except you because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' (Genesis 39:6-10).

Despite Joseph's rejections, the sexual advances continued. One day, she called him to her room, grabbed him by the cloak and once again urged him 'Lie with me'; Joseph escaped and left his cloak in her hands. In Guercino's (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591–1666, fig. 11) version, Potiphar's wife is presented as a classical, idealised young woman lying on a bed naked, with her bosom fully exposed. Her red hair is neatly braided. With one hand, she reaches out to grab Joseph's face as if trying to steal a kiss, while the other takes a firm grip at the end of his blue robe. Joseph tries to wrestle away from her outreached arm while waving for her to stop. He appears distressed while Potiphar's wife has a calm but determined facial expression. The artist has emphasised Joseph's chaste and pure character by arching Joseph's torso away from the naked woman, and by directing his eyes upward to the ceiling. From the biblical account, we learn that the woman is as lascivious as she is deceiving; when Joseph has fled her room, she calls for her guards and accuses Joseph of sexual assault, using his robe as evidence.

By rendering the lascivious female as young and beautiful, the artist can further emphasise Joseph's moral struggle; *even though* she is attractive and offers herself to him, the young man can stand his ground. A Sig. Aurelio Zanoletti formerly owned the painting which formed a pair with a painting depicting *Amnon and Tamar* (fig. 12). Both scenes illustrate escape, but while Joseph escapes remaining a virgin, Tamar is chased away by her half-brother Amnon, to whom she just lost her virginity through rape. As a pair, the episodes depict *Castità virtuosa* (Virtuous Chastity) and *Castità fallita* (Failed

Chastity).[62] In these images, chastity is manifested through the male body that, like Joseph's, is victorious and untouched, while Tamar's female body, despite her efforts to counter her violent brother, is tainted and unchaste.[63]

Allegory of Sin/Allegory of Grace, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, *Loth and his Daughters* and *Joseph and Potiphar's wife* all offer different interpretations of the virtue vs vice theme. The observant reader can, by now, also conclude that vice, in all the motifs mentioned above, has been represented through a female character. The post-Tridentine church demanded images that could easily be read and understood by the masses. In *Discorsi,* Paleotti reflects on the nearly impossible task of executing a satisfying representation of virtues and vices: 'It would be extremely beneficial to human life if it were possible to express the true image of the virtues and vices so that the beauty of the first and the deformity of the second could be imprinted more effectively on our senses.'[64] Paleotti concludes that virtues and vices are best presented through allegorical representations and recommends the artist 'to depict a person who is excelled in the virtue that one wants to signify, or who was victorious over the vice that one wants to blame'.[65] He refers to a number of examples given in the seventh synod of Nicaea, which declares that chastity is best exemplified to a person who has fallen in love with a prostitute through the use of the image of Joseph: '[I]f someone has fallen in love with a prostitute, the Church purposes to him the image of the chaste Joseph, who execrated adultery and overcame it through temperance.'[66] Thus, Paleotti concludes 'to battle avarice, celebrate liberty, and exalt patience, truth, honesty, and similar other virtues, it is perfectly possible to depict the images of persons notable and renowned for those virtues'.[67] Likewise, vice was best presented through its foulness. Even though Paleotti never suggested that the opposite of virtue was to be presented through a female body,

62 Mahon 1991, 20.

63 Diane Wolfthal notes that Amnon's rape of Tamar, along with other rape stories, often were included in French medieval Bibles moralisées, which contained biblical stories with theological commentaries. The rape stories were here often interpreted as allegories representing the struggle between Christianity and heresy. Tamar was made to represent the many victims of rape committed by the clergy, thus being presented as a victim rather than as a sinner. Wolfthal 1999, 52.

64 Paleotti, 2012 (1582), 284 (II:44).

65 Ibid., 286 (II:44).

66 Ibid., 286 (II:44) Convil.Nic.II, act VI (Surius, III, p.177).

67 Paleotti, 2012 (1582), 286 (II:44).

it is easy to conclude that a scene that aims to demonstrate Joseph's virtue and chastity must also present the woman as trying to induce him to sin. Therefore, she is not only his opposite but the opposite of the virtue he represents.

The stories of Joseph and Loth provide examples of carnal temptation episodes with different outcomes. While Joseph successfully resisted the sexual advances of his master's wife, Loth failed to guard himself against his enticing daughters. In Christian thought, temptation was perceived as an inevitable part of the human condition. Christ's temptation in the wilderness underlines his humanity; he was tempted as a man since he was born as a human. 'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin' (Heb 4:15). By taking on human weakness, by submitting to temptation and by suffering as a human, the Saviour expresses his compassion for humanity and offers consolation: 'For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted' (Heb 2:18). Consequently, narrating episodes through text and images that included elements of temptation served to emphasise some of the many struggles humankind had to face.

3 CARNAL TEMPTATION IN AN ASCETIC CONTEXT

Sexual temptation is a constant feature in saints' hagiographies and in all monastic literature, which implies that it served an important purpose. The word *Temptation* has its origins in the Greek πειρασμός (peirasmos) meaning to tempt, trial or test, the Hebrew מַסָּה (maccah) signifying a test, trial, or proving, and the Latin *tentatio*, suggesting that something is being subjected to a test. Thus, one of the main functions of temptation is to prove one's loyalty or disloyalty, faith or unbelief. As declared in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Lord is 'testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you could keep his commandments or not' (Deut 8:2). Accordingly, temptation has often been presented as God's way of testing whether the faithful are worthy of his grace. If, however, the temptation is seen as a solicitation to evil, a God who is only capable of good cannot tempt. It is, therefore, rather a question of God permitting Satan to use his demons to attack and beguile the religious through different wicked tricks.

When occurring in an ascetic context, the temptation was, as a rule, provoked by the Devil. Often, the victims were young, aspiring ascetics who had taken refuge in remote settings in the wilderness. When these stories were introduced through the visual traditions of the thirteenth century, they rarely included female temptresses. Instead, the focus was placed on the male ascetics' self-chastisement and included acts of mortification of the flesh. Though this practice had, for the most part, been abandoned in early modern Catholicism, the images continued to be produced. They were included in image cycles recalling the life of pious male saints such as St Benedict, St Francis and St Jerome, and sometimes also occurred as independent scenes in oil painting.

3.1 Carnal Temptation in Early Monastic Literature

Some of the first accounts of monastic carnal temptations are found in the early Christian compendium *Vitae Patrum* (c. fifth-eight centuries). It concerns the lives and sayings of the Egyptian Desert Fathers – a group of men (and some women) who isolated themselves in the desert during the third to the fifth centuries. The Desert Fathers lived their lives in solitude, silence, prayer, poverty and life-long celibacy to escape the evils of everyday life and focus on the source of sin that

they believed was to be found in the human heart. The accounts of *Vitae Patrum* reveal that their lives in the desert were difficult; many of them were tormented by the Devil, who took the shape of both wild beasts and attractive women. Christa Grössinger holds the Desert Fathers particularly responsible for creating the image of the woman as a temptress. '[F]or they fled the world with its temptations and led a life of extreme asceticism in the desert. Evil for them was identified with the flesh. In art, *The Temptation of St Anthony* best reflected [a] fear of women', Grössinger aptly concludes.[1]

It is no coincidence that it was in the desert that the holy men were tempted. The desert has often been presented as the Devil's dwelling and a place of supernatural dangers,[2] and it was in the desert that Christ was tempted during his forty eremitic days. Christian demonology is deeply rooted in the literature of the Desert Fathers, and it is in their stories that the Devil's character assumes the form that would persist well into the early modern world.[3]

Traditionally, the majority of the biographies included in *Vitae Patrum* have been attributed to St Jerome. However, it is now widely accepted that the included texts are works by numerous different authors, some known and others anonymous. The grouping under the title has been loose and inconsistent, and stories from later dates that fit the central theme have been added over the years. The compendium is primarily formed around St Anthony the great, who was seen as the prominent leader of the Desert Fathers and venerated as the founder of monasticism. St Anthony's dreadful demonic temptations in the desert are in keeping with the temptations of Christ, undoubtedly the best-known occurrence of the temptation motif in Western culture. The motif played a fundamental role in creating the visual character not only of the Devil but also of his demons and of the female temptress. Before returning to a more detailed presentation of the subject of St Anthony's temptation, the following chapter aims to discuss the visual and written narrative of the carnal torments of young male ascetics in the wilderness, many of which resulted in violent attempts of self-chastising.

1 Grössinger 1997, 1.

2 See, for example, Matt.12:43 'When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none.'

3 Grössinger 1997, 1.

3.2 Early Temptation Iconography Inspired by the *Vita dei Santi Padri*

Vitae Patrum was widely read. It was a vital source of knowledge regarding the life of the Fathers and gave insight into the culture of early monasticism. In the 1330s Domenico Cavalca translated the *Vitae Patrum* into the Italian vernacular with the title *Vite dei santi padri,* thus making it available to a broader public. Cavalca's text appeared in numerous Italian editions until the mid-nineteenth century, some of which were illustrated.

The many fanciful stories in *Vite dei santi padri* inspired an early iconography of temptation scenes, which were included in the so-called *Thebaid* paintings, an image genre which had a sudden and brief appearance in early Renaissance Tuscany.[4] They became popular during a religious revival that swept across Europe in the fourteenth century and resulted in reforms undertaken in various monastic communities to reaffirm the eremitic origins of the monastic experience.[5] One of the most famous *Thebaid*, attributed to Francesco Traini (1321–1363), is in Camposanto Pisa. The mural is probably the first iconographic example in Tuscan painting (fig. 13a). It depicts a landscape with roads and smaller dwellings and chapels, and does not show one particular scene but simultaneously on-going events: hermits, who mind their daily businesses, perform miracles and fight against the temptations of the Devil. One of the few women depicted is found in the centre of the image. She is a demon in the guise of a female pilgrim and is visiting an anonymous hermit monk's dwelling (fig. 13b). [6] The unsuspicious monk greets her by shaking her hand but does not appear to notice that her feet are those of a bird. In the scene above, he chases her away from his cave by poking at her with a long stick. Another hermit, perhaps St Anthony the Great, is being beaten up by demons outside a chapel.[7]

The *Thebaid* images show us a world predominantly inhabited by men. They visualise stories from the *Vite dei santi padri,* where

4 Callman 1975, 3.

5 Palladino 2005, 33.

6 Cuttler identifies the episode as one of St Anthony's Temptations, although he claims that the scene is unusual and has no source in the literature. Cuttler 1952, 51. While it is true that Athanasius gives no account of such an episode in the *Vita Antonii*, *Vitae Patrum*, however, includes an episode in which the Devil in the disguise of a female pilgrim visits an unknown monk. I, therefore, believe that it is correct to refer to the scene as one which pictures an unknown generic monk rather than the famous Egyptian saint.

7 See Mattia 1982.

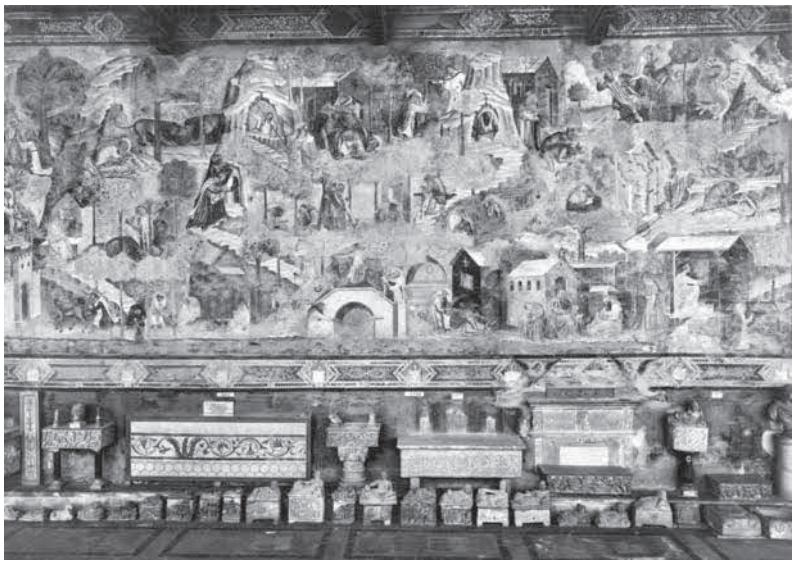

Fig.13a. Francesco Traini, *Thebaid* 1330–1335. Mural, 610 × 1565 cm. Camposanto, Pisa.

Fig.13b. Francesco Traini, *Eremite greeting a demon in the guise of a female pilgrimw* in *Thebaid* (detail).

pious women are conspicuously absent. Instead, the female gender is present merely as thoughts, memories and fantasies in the ascetic monk's mind, or as demons taking a female form. The many temptation stories made the work function as a kind of behavioural guide for the religious. Often the protagonists of the stories are young,

anonymous male monks who seek comfort and advice from the holy Fathers. Some stories offer the reader concrete suggestions on how to overcome sexual temptation. One example is the story of a monk who is tempted carnally by the memory of a certain beautiful woman he once met. When he hears that she died, he visits her; the smell of her corpse immediately liberates him from his illicit carnal thoughts, and, henceforth, the monk only remembers her rotting carcass every time he thinks of women.[8]

The stories often include a conflict between the protected life in the monastery and the dangers of the world outside. When forced into the world, the men encounter real flesh-and-blood women and end up carnally tempted. Sometimes they fail to resist, they have sexual relations and break the vow of chastity. As a rule, the tempted young monks show great remorse afterwards and ask for forgiveness for their sins. The reader is, thus, to understand that forgiveness is given to those that ask for it with a humble heart.[9]

An early printed and illustrated version of Cavalca's text, *Vita de sancti padri historiate*, was published in Venice in 1491. It includes several small woodcuts showing some of the main episodes, and a number of them picture carnal temptation events. One of the more fascinating images illustrates the chapter on the life of the famous Desert Father St Pachomius (fig. 14). Pachomius' Italian name 'Pacomio' appears twice on the woodcut: at the bottom, under the image of a naked man seated in a cave with two wild animals licking his feet, and then again at top right, above a second scene. Here, what appears to be the same man stands with a sad countenance while holding a snake, which is biting his genitals. There is no reference to the image in the text. Legend has it that St Pachomius could walk freely in the desert without being bitten by snakes and scorpions, which is not the case suggested here.[10]

8 Cavalca 1523; Ch. 75.

9 One story reports an incident where two young monks visit the city to buy goods. While one of them leaves to do the shopping, the other one stays in a guesthouse where he is tempted by the Devil and fornicates with a woman. The regretful young monk then tells his friar brother what happened, claiming that it would be impossible for him to return to the monastery. Persuaded by the other monk, however, the young man eventually goes back to his cell, where he confesses his sins and expresses his hopes to receive God's forgiveness and as a result, liberation 'dala morte eterna de linferno doue sono tinuti tormeti' (from the eternal death and tournaments of hell). His prayers are heard, and his sins are forgiven. Ibid.,Ch. 76.

10 Dominic 2008, 31 (Vita S.Pachomii Ch. 19 col. 241).

Fig.14. Unknown artist, *The Life of St Pachomius* in *Vita de sancti padri historiate*, Venice 1491. Woodcut, ca. 4,9 x 7,5 cm.

A probable iconographic reference to the image is instead found in Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*[11] The story recalls the life of a monk called Pachon who lived an ascetic life in the Egyptian desert and suffered greatly from various carnal temptations. Pachon shared his gruesome experiences with Palladius and reported how he, during twelve years, had been under attack by a demon, which left him in a desperate state of constant sexual arousal. He saw no other way but to take drastic measures in order to liberate himself from his hardships:

> I preferred to die in an irrational manner rather than act improperly through bodily passion. And having gone out and explored the desert, I found a hyaena's cave. In which cave I laid myself down naked in the daytime, in order that the beasts, when they came out, might eat me. So, when evening came […] the beasts came out, male and female, and smelt me, licking me from head to foot. And when I was expecting to be eaten up, they left me.[12]

When returning to his cell, the demon appeared again, this time in the shape of an Ethiopian maiden whom Pachon recalled having seen in his youth. 'She sat upon my knees, and she aroused me to such an extent that I thought I was having intercourse with her. Driven mad,

11 Palladius Historia Lausiaca Ch. 23 (1904), 75.

12 Ibid.

I hit her on the ear, and she disappeared.'[13] Left on Pachon's hand was a foul smell that would not wear off for two years. One day he found a small snake as he was wandering in the desert. Filled with despair, he decided to place it on his penis 'so that I might die by being bitten in this way.' Although Pachon rubbed the head of the snake against his genitals 'since they were the cause of my temptation', he was not bitten. Instead, he heard a voice in his mind, calling him: 'Go, Pachon, struggle on. For this is why I have left you to be tyrannized over, that you should not be proud, as if you had any strength, but recognizing your weakness should not trust in your manner of life, but run for the help of God.'[14] These words encouraged Pachon who, henceforth, no longer suffered from carnal desires.

The story offers an illustrative example of how carnal temptations served to combat pride, to ensure that pious men were reminded of their humanity, and finally, to make known that liberation from carnal suffering was entirely in God's hands. This notion was also brought forward by John Cassian (360–435), one of the first ascetic and monastic theological writers, who asserted that temptation was a way to combat both 'carnal pride' (parading one's fast, chastity, or poverty before other people) and 'spiritual pride' (the belief that 'one's progress is all due to one's own merits').[15] According to Cassian, no one should ever consider themselves as being beyond the risk of falling for sudden carnal desires, especially the purest and ascetic of men: '[W]hen someone begins to enjoy lengthy purity of heart and body, it is very natural that they think that they can no longer slip from that purity'. Therefore, when tempted to fornication, it should be seen as a sign from God to remind the overconfident of the fact that the weakness of the flesh will always be a threat.[16] The absence of Grace should, thus, also be seen as a form of Grace itself; by allowing the ascetic to undergo humiliating sexual temptation, the Lord brings him back to reality and makes him remain humble in his character: 'For when ardent desire is enkindled, it pushes a person to endure hunger, thirst, vigils, nakedness and all sorts of bodily labours not

13 Ibid. See also Brakke 2001, 525.

14 Palladius Historia Lausiaca Ch. 23 (1904) 75.

15 Cassian, 'Institutions', XII, 2. See also Foucault 1985, 15.

16 Cassian Conf. XII, 6, 1993, 36f.

only patiently but freely.'[17] To further underline the importance of carnal temptation, Cassian even asserts that eunuchs are not able to achieve such Grace as their total absence of carnal lust leaves them 'slothful and tepid in the pursuit of virtues' and, therefore, 'no one of them strives for perfect renunciation'.[18]

Not being castrated by the snake thus encouraged Pachon to stay vigil and humble. However, contrary to the written story, the image pictures a snake holding a steady grip on the monk's genitals: His manhood has been replaced by the snake, which, in turn, could be understood as a symbolic image of the Devil and an indirect reference to Eve and the Fall of Man. Thus, the image represents a man whose genitals are harassed and controlled by the Devil: e.g., a man who suffers from severe carnal passions.

Palladius' (368–431) *Historia Lausiaca* includes the history of the monks of Egypt and Palestine. It contains shorter stories and anecdotes gathered from several of the monks whom the author met during his years in the desert, among them Pachon.[19] No doubt this is the story illustrated in the Venetian fifteenth-century edition of *Vita dei santi padri*. *Historia Lausiaca* was included in the *Vitae Patrum* and later also translated to the *Vita dei santi padri.* The easiest explanation for why the woodcut incorrectly referrers to Pacomio/Pachomius is that Pachon was confused with 'Pachom' – the Coptic translation of Pachomius.[20]

3.3 Tempted Bodies in Thorns

The stories in *Vitae Patrum* were soon followed by other monastic texts and hagiographies recording incidents in which carnal desires tormented pious men. These stories indicate that the temptations usually affected young men who were in a state of solitude. Typically, the sexual provocation appeared when meditation and prayer were practised in monk cells, chapels, or remote places in the wilderness. The Devil usually managed to overwhelm them with carnal desires

17 Ibid., 35. Similarly, Francis of Assisi warned his followers of the danger of being too confident in their virtue: 'When one is too secure, one is less wary of the enemy. If the Devil can hold on to one hair of a person, he will soon make it into a plank. And if for many years he cannot pull down the one he is tempting, he does not complain about the delay, as long as that one gives in to him in the end. This is his work, day and night. He is not concerned about anything else.' Thomas of Celano 2000, (Book 2: Ch 79) 323.

18 Cassian, Conf.XII. 5, 1993, 34f. See also Kardong, 1993, 16.

19 Fortescue 1911.

20 I thank Prof. David Brakke, who kindly brought this to my attention.

by inducing a memory of a woman they had seen. Diverse actions were taken in order to overcome the desires of the flesh, usually by inflicting pain or discomfort on the body by whipping it with a cord, taking cold baths or leaping naked into snow or nettles and thorns. Although this practice had mostly been abandoned in early modern monastic culture, images of saints like St Benedict, St Francis and St Jerome practising self-punishment were not only still produced in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the motifs were refined through the introduction of new iconographic themes.

3.3.1 St Benedict in Thorns

Images picturing St Benedict thrusting his naked body in thorns to overcome the intense carnal desire he felt for a young Roman woman constitute one of the more famous temptation motifs. The scene, known as *The Temptations of St Benedict* (*Le tentazioni di San Benedetto*) or *St Benedict in Thorns* (*San Benedetto nelle spine*) occurs in Benedictine imagery from the thirteenth century. It kept its popularity throughout the post-Tridentine era. The scene is generally found in picture cycles, on wall paintings and in illustrated books aimed at an audience of monks following the Benedictine rule. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, the motif began to appear also as an independent scene in oil paintings.

The scene illustrates an episode included in *Dialogues II*, a text, written about fifty years after the Saint's death and traditionally attributed to St Gregory the Great (540–604).[21] St Benedict was born in 480 as the son of a wealthy noble family in Nursia, Umbria. Like many wealthy youngsters of his time, he was sent to study in Rome. Almost immediately after his arrival, he realised that the eternal city was scandalous and that his study companions lived licentious lives. He decided to flee from the city to take refuge in the countryside. He spent several years in a cave in the mountains close to Subiaco, about 60 km east of Rome. Initially, Benedict lived in complete isolation and was fed by a priest named Romano, who was the only person

21 *The Dialogues* of St Gregory the Great, written in 593–594, consists of four books. The first and third each include 50 chapters and accounts the lives of 49 holy persons, while the second book only presents the life and miracles of St Benedict in 38 chapters. The fourth and last book is a discussion about the life of the soul after death. The texts are written as a dialogue between St Gregory and St Peter. The texts were later combined, shortened and re-written as a narrative, which eliminated the dialogic description. Jacopo da Varagine added references to the Bible when including them in the Legenda Aurea in the second half of the thirteenth century (vulgarised by Domenico Cavalca at the beginning of the fourteenth century).

informed about his remote dwelling. In the wilderness, the young man was repeatedly troubled by the Devil, who tried to disrupt his solitary life of devotion. One day the Devil broke the bell which Romano used to inform Benedict when he brought food, and another time he came in the shape of a blackbird that flew in circles around the Saint. Benedict was annoyed by the bird and performed the sign of the cross in order to fend it off, whereupon it immediately disappeared. Shortly after, however, the young man's thoughts drifted back to Rome and a beautiful girl he had known there. Soon Benedict was overwhelmed with carnal lust so intense that he was on the brink of leaving his solitude in the cave to join life out in the world. With the grace of God, the Saint was, nevertheless, able to come to his senses; he stripped naked and rolled himself in spines and nettles until his body was lacerated. Thus, the pleasure was turned into pain, and the wounds of his flesh could mend the wounds of his soul.[22]

3.3.1.1 The Motif

The episode is included already in the first narrative cycle presenting scenes from the life of St Benedict, painted in the lower church in Sacro Speco, Subiaco.[23] These frescoes date back to the thirteenth century and, by tradition, were attributed to a certain Magister Conxolus.[24] In this version of the temptation episode, Benedict is shown lying on his side next to his cave in the midst of thorns, flowers and nettles (fig. 15). The thorns have lacerated his skin, leaving drops of blood running down his body. The Saint is pictured alone. However, God's arm is reaching out towards him through a half circle at the top of the image, offering Benedict support by blessing him with the sign of the cross. It is, thus, made clear that God recognised the pious man's pains to overcome unwanted desires.

22 'Dialogues II', Ch. II 1945, 7f. See also Lentini 1978, 25.

23 Other early cycles from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, made by the Roman school of painting, are the murals made for S. Agnese fuori le mura in Rome, today in the Pinacoteca Vaticana. As examples of better-preserved cycles, an unknown follower of Giotto in the church S. Maria in Sylvis in Sesto al Reghena in Lombardy can be mentioned, along with another early Lombard example, dated to the late thirteenth century in Abbazia di S.Pietro a Villanova di San Bonifacio. Also, San Michele in Bosco had murals including 11 scenes from the life of Benedict, executed in 1463 by Onofrio da Fabriano. As these formed part of the older monastery building; they were probably almost destroyed when the Carracci project started. One scene depicting the dressing of a monk ('vestizione di un monaco') has been detached and moved to the corridor of the earlier dormitory, today the Rizzoli hospital, Roli 1971, 199.

24 More recent research, however, claims that the artistic qualities of the murals are higher than Magister Conxolus' other works and, therefore, refers to the artist as 'The Master of the stories of S. Benedict'.

Fig.15. (Attributed to) Magister Conxolus, *St Benedict in Thorns*, thirteenth century. Mural. Chiesa inferiore, Sacro Speco, Subiaco.

St Benedict, pictured alone and naked in a shrub in the wilderness, continued to be the most common iconography of the motif, also during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1579 Spanish Benedictine monks in Rome published the first illustrated *Dialogues II* in print. It was titled *Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Patris Benedicti* and included the thorn bush event (fig. 16) along with forty-nine other folio-sized engravings designed by the Roman painter, printmaker and print designer Bernardino Passeri (c. 1540–c. 1590).[25] The book became widely popular and was reprinted four times in less than two decades.[26] Its images, in the form of wooden reliefs, also adorn the choir stalls of at least two Benedictine monastery churches: San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice and San Vittore al Corpo in Milan.

As often seen in books illustrating the life of saints, each image included in the *Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Patris Benedicti* is divided into several scenes. In this way, the image could be 'read' as a devotional text by its audience. Thus, the image showing the thorn bush event does not only depict St Benedict in spines but also the events preceding it. In the background, St Benedict is standing by his cave performing the sign of the cross to fend off the blackbird, which inflicted him with the carnal temptation. In the centre, he takes off his habit so that he can overcome his carnal passions in the thorny shrub, pictured in the foreground. By creating a simultaneous

25 The images were engraved by Aliprando Caprioli (active in Rome 1575–1599). 'Passeri, Bernardino' in Dictionary of Art Vol. 24, London 1996, 239.

26 In 1584; 1594; 1596; 1597. The fifth edition, however, included only 22 of the originally 50 illustrations. Campanini 1994, 28 n 37. See also Carpanese, 1985.

Fig.16. Bernardino Passeri, *St Benedict in Thorns* in *Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Patris Benedicti*, Rome 1579. Engraving, 287 x 194cm.

succession of the temptation event, attention is directed not only to the Saint's act of self-deprivation in the rose-bushes: his fending off the blackbird reminds the reader that temptation overcame him through devilish interference, and by including the image of him undressing, the young man's eagerness to continue his monastic life is emphasised. It could even be argued that Passeri, by placing the stripping saint in the centre of the image, made St Benedict's unrobing, rather than his self-deprivation in the rose thorns, the critical element of the image.

Fig.17. D'Enrico Antonio (Tanzio da Varallo), *St Benedict in Thorns*, ca. 1630. Oil on canvas, 89,5 x 114,5. Private collection.

Examples of the motif as independent scenes in oil paintings began to appear during the latter part of the sixteenth century.[27] One example is seen in the interpretation (fig. 17) of Antonio D'Enrico's, also known as Tanzio da Varallo, c.1575/1580–c.1632/1633). Much like Passeri's book illustration, D'Enrico designed the image as a narrative: a smaller scene in the background shows the Saint seated in a cave receiving a basket of supplies. The central scene in the foreground shows him in a rampant setting. He is pictured as a young man with blonde locks, laying naked on a thorn-covered rock. His robe is thrown next to him; his eyes are tear-filled and gazing towards the sky in search of heavenly aid. He is alone in a landscape filled with animals such as rabbits, deer, foxes, birds and goats. Nothing indicates that he is trying to overcome a sexual temptation; no demon or female temptress is present. Instead, the image rather manifests redemption, self-chastising and punishment of a sinful body.

A slightly different vocabulary was used fifty years earlier by Alessandro Allori (1535–1607, fig. 18). In his interpretation of the incident, young Benedict is pictured as a hermit, calmly meditating before the Bible and a skull while laying in his thorn shrub. Though

27 See Lecchini Giovannoni 1970, 45 cat.n.54; Lecchini Giovannoni 1986, p.31; Lecchini Giovannoni 1991, 647.

no embodied divine presence is depicted, God is symbolically manifested behind the Saint in the form of a stone altar with a large crucifix. Behind the cross, a fleeing demon and a female figure are pictured. The demon is a male dressed in a yellow cloak and with large goat horns on his forehead. To the right, slightly further in the background, the scantily clad female figure is seen. The divine power chasing the two evils away seems to be powerful; both figures are escaping in a hurry with their arms raised in fear.

Allori's painting is one of the earliest examples of the episode as an independent scene. It was probably made as a private commission for don Filippo Guilliccioni, the director of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence, since in August 1586, a painting by Allori presenting 'Santo Benedetto ignudo che fa penitetia con paese e altre figurette' was delivered to Guilliccioni.[28]

The motif seems to have been well received on the private market, as Allori made another oil on panel version of the episode roughly in the same period. [29] Unfortunately, this painting's present whereabouts are unknown, and I have only been able to consult the image through black, and white photo reproductions of rather poor quality (Fig.19)[30]. Though the composition mostly resembles the version mentioned above, Benedict is here pictured as being younger. He has no halo above his head, and there are no objects of religious meditation beside him. Instead, his hermit status is accentuated through a piece of fur, which only ever so slightly covers his naked body. The connections to Allori's teacher, Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572), and the Florentine late Renaissance tradition are here more apparent; the Saint's figure is twisted in an intricate Mannerist style. A white lily placed in his left hand confirms his chastity and repeats a symbolism often seen in Florentine Renaissance paintings. As in the other version, Allori has included an altar illuminated by two candles behind the Saint. A fleeing female figure with exposed breasts represents the vanquished temptations, here chased away by

28 Quoted in Bagnesi 1916, 263. Even though the measurements given in this document (h br. 5/8, lbr 1/1/2) do not fully correspond with the actual size of the painting, Lecchini Giovannoni believes that it is the said painting. Lecchini Giovannoni, 1991, 266.

29 The painting's last known location is in the Weingall collections in Baltimore. See The Collecting Muse 1975, 18f; kat 42A drawing of a nude male figure, included in the Uffizi Gallery's drawing and print collection, shows the laying Saint in different postures. It resembles more those of the Baltimore painting. See Lecchini 1970, 45 cat.n.54; Lecchini Giovannoni 1991, 647.

30 See The Collecting Muse 1975, 18f; kat 42.

Fig.18. Alessandro Allori, St Benedict in Thorns, 1586 (?). Oil on canvas, 40.8 x 59.3 cm. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Fig.19 Alessandro Allori, St Benedict in Thorns, 1586 (?). Oil on canvas. Unknown collection.

an angel. The divine presence is also manifested through an angel hovering above the Saint and holding a text, which probably describes the pictured episode.[31]

The story of the tempted St Benedict in the rosebushes was one of the most critical episodes taking place during the Saint's youth, as it resulted in Benedict being granted immunity from carnal passions for his remaining life. In *Dialogues II* it is affirmed that after the Saint had weltered in the thorns, 'he found all temptation of pleasure so subdued, that he never felt any such thing'.[32] Being liberated from the vice of lust made St Benedict 'a master of virtue', and an important mentor for other young men who followed his example, abandoned the world, and eventually became his disciples. Equally as important, and more than just as a means of encouraging believers to take inspiration from his actions, the image of the holy man wallowing in thorns is to be understood as a glorification of the determinate act to protect a virgin and chaste body.

3.3.2 St Francis of Assisi in Thorns

Parallel to the images of St Benedict in thorns, there were others showing a tempted St Francis of Assisi (1181/1182–1226) in a similar setting. The motif began to appear on the Italian peninsula by the end of the fourteenth century, and the motif has traditionally been referred to as *San Francis in Thorns* (*San Francesco nelle spine*) or occasionally also as *The Temptations of San Francis* (*Le tentazioni di San Francesco*). One of the earliest versions is seen in Ilario da Viterbo's frescoes in Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi, from 1393 (fig. 20).[33]

It is, however, not until the late fifteenth century that images showing St Francis in thorns occur on a more regular basis, and it is only during the latter part of the sixteenth century that the motif seems to become some of the standard scenes of St Francis's iconographic programme. Like the images of St Benedict, the motif has mainly been included in murals and illustrated books connected with the Franciscan monastic order.

3.3.2.1 The Motif and its Textual Sources

St Francis of Assisi was born almost seven centuries after St Benedict but was, along with his followers and biographers, well acquainted

31 It is merely my assumption based on the fact that the Latin word 'spinas' (thorns) can be seen under the right arm of the angel.

32 'Dialogues II', Ch. II, 1945, 7f. See also Lentini 1978, 25.

33 See, for example, Kaftal 1965, 478.

with Benedict's writings and familiar with the thorn bush event. In a number of Franciscan fourteenth-century sources an incident, which resembles the Benedictine thorn bush story, is mentioned. [34] It has been referred to as 'St Francis granted the Portiuncula Indulgence'[35] and takes place outside Francis' Portiuncula[36] chapel in Assisi. St Francis was praying in the chapel when he suddenly was interrupted by the Devil who started to question the holy man's habit of self-punishment: 'Francis, do you want to die prematurely?' the Devil asked him, 'Why are you punishing yourself so harshly in vigils and prayers?' Immediately Francis went out of his cell, stripped himself naked and entered in a large bush full of thorns and thistles. He said: 'It is better for me to experience and come to know and feel the sufferings of the passion of the Lord than to give in for the comfortable suggestions of the enemy.' As the thorn shrub tore bloody wounds into his skin, the spines were magically turned into blooming roses. Soon angels arrived at the Saint's side and told him that he no longer needed to torture his body. Francis got out of the bush, got dressed and brought twelve of the roses with him as he was escorted back to the Portiuncula chapel by the angels. When he placed the roses on the altar, Christ and the Virgin Mary emerged before him. Francis was then, upon Christ initiative, granted the indulgence given to sinners in that church.[37] The most important source including the story is the *Tractatus* de

34 Including: Francis of Bartoli Tractatus de Indulgentia Portiunculae (The Portiuncula Indulgence) (1334–1335), the 'Diploma of Conrad, Bishop of Assisi' (c.1335) and the 'Narration of Michele Bernardi', a popular version of the 'Portiuncula Indulgence', based on a confession made by Michele Barducci, (found also in the 'The Chronicle of The XXIV Ministers General of The Order' (1369–1374)), which probably inspired both Francis of Bartoli's and Bishop Conrad's texts. All texts found in Muscat 2012.

35 The 'Portiuncula Indulgence' or 'The pardon of St Francis' is the plenary remission of all sins traditionally granted anyone visiting the Church Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi during the celebrations of the feast 'Our Lady of the Angels of the Portiuncula' on August 1 and 2. According to legend, the event celebrated took place on 1 August 1216 when Christ, the Virgin Mary and angels appeared before St Francis in the Portiuncula Chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli. During this vision, Francis asked God to grant indulgence to all pilgrims who visit the church. His wish was granted and approved by Pope Honorius III a few days later. Devoted followers of Francis have, after that, made pilgrimages to the Portiuncola Chapel, found inside the Santa Maria degli Angeli, to receive indulgence between the afternoon of 1 August and sunset on 2 August. The permission to grant indulgence was later extended to all Franciscan churches.

36 The Portiuncula was a small fourth-century chapel found in the countryside outside Assisi (the word 'Portiuncula' refers to a small portion of land that belonged to the Benedictines on which the chapel was found). It was here Francis first recognised his vocation in 1208. The Benedictines gave the (at the time ruinous) building to Francis who restored it and began to live in a hut next to it. The chapel became the cradle of the Franciscan order and is today found inside the Santa Maria degli Angeli basilic.

37 'The Tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula…' (1334–1335) 2012, 39f.

Fig.20. Ilario da Viterbo, *St Francis in Thorns*, 1393. Painted wood panel. Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi.

Fig.21. Francesco Villamena, *St Francis in Thorns* in *S. Francisci Historia*, Andrea de Putti, Rome 1594. Engraving, 11 x 7,5 cm.

Indulgentia Portiunculae (*The Portiuncula* Indulgence), which was written by the friar minor Francis Bartoli in the 1330s. It is, however, not included in the Saint's official hagiographies.[38]

The practice of self-mortification is given a far more central role in Franciscan texts and images than in the Benedictine. It can be seen in the Franciscan thorn bush motif, which differs from the Benedictine in that its iconography occasionally includes Francis beating himself with a whip while standing or kneeling in thorn bushes, thus clearly presenting an act of self-punishment. An engraving by Francesco Villamena (1566–1625) offers an example of such composition (fig. 21). The image was included in an illustrated *Life of St Francis*, published in Rome in 1594 by Andrea de Putti. Francis is here seen holding a whip in his left hand while kneeling naked in a thorn bush blooming with roses. Two angels have come to his aid and are hovering on a white cloud above him. One is pointing towards heaven while the other is indicating a horned demon with a tail and bat wings to the right in the scene. By lifting his left arm in a disarming gesture while turning around to escape, the demon signals that he is defeated. Latin and Italian texts are included under the image that explains the event. It indicates that the publisher aimed to reach a broader audience than just Franciscan friars.

A similar iconography is frequently seen in Franciscan monastery murals, the majority of which were painted during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In one of the lunettes forming a part of a picture programme presenting stories of St Francis' life in the Franciscan monastery in Montefalco, Umbria (fig. 22), the Saint is depicted in a thorn bush with a scratched and bleeding torso. Also here, two angels accompany him: one standing on the ground behind him while the other is hovering on a cloud by his side. Both angels are facing the Saint and are gently holding his outstretched right arm in their hands. And here too, in the far left corner, painted as a red silhouette, a small demon is fleeing. As in the illustrated

38 According to an additional legend, quite likely relatively modern, St Francis, when visiting the Benedictine monastery in Subiaco in the 1220s, went to the place where St Benedict once had lacerated his body in the thorns. Passionately inspired, he undressed and followed St Benedict's example. It was the month of January, but according to the tale, drops of blood from St Francis' body miraculously transformed the thorns into red and white roses. The episode was commemorated in an eighteenth-century mural erected on the wall of what is still a small rose garden outside the monastery. Today the fresco has almost completely vanished, but according to a nineteenth-century description, it depicted both St Benedict and St Francis in the thorns. See Seroux D'Agincourt 1829, 340.

Fig.22. The workshop of Giuseppe Nicola Nasini, *St Francis in Thorns*, ca. 1700. Fresco. Chiostro S. Francesco, Montefalco.

books, explanatory text is written in Italian on the ornamental frame surrounding the scene.

The account given in *The Portiuncula Indulgence*, which most likely was the iconographic text source for this motif, does not explicitly mention any devilish carnal temptations affecting the Saint. Thomas of Celano inturn gives, along with Francis other biographers, several accounts of how the Saint wallowed in spines and ice in order to overcome carnal passions. The penitent St Francis is indeed a recurring theme in the saint's hagiographies, where it is described how he – especially during his youth – experienced such insensitive carnal desires that he was forced to self-punishment. Francis also encouraged his disciples to follow his example in bodily mortification, which they did: in the *First Life of St Francis,* Celano describes how the Saint, along with his followers, often were 'stripping themselves naked in the sharpest frost, and piercing their whole body with thorns so as to draw blood'. [39] Bodily mortification was a prominent theme throughout medieval hagiography, and the accounts of Francis and his followers' practices closely resemble those described centuries earlier. in the *Dialogues II*. These accounts, on the other hand, include neither

39 Thomas of Celano 1999, Ch.14, 219.

the element of the miraculous as found in *The Portiuncula Indulgence*– when roses wondrously emerge from the Saint's blood–nor do they mention Francis receiving angelic aid.

The accounts, given in the Saint's official hagiographies, however, seem to have inspired an alternative version of the Franciscan thorn bush motif, which can be found from the sixteenth century and onward. Here the angelic presence is absent. Francis is instead pictured in the sole company of a demon. Often the demon is male, as seen in Giacomo Franco's (1550–1620) illustration for the *Vita del Padre S.Francesco* (1593, fig. 23), but in a few examples, it is pictured in the form of a she-devil. In Justus Sadeler's (1583–1629) illustrated *Admiranda Historia Serafica Francesco,* the Saint's female company is a monstrous demon with a female torso (fig. 24). Her shapeless hanging breasts are those of an old woman and resemble the contemporary iconography often seen in female witches. The rest of her features are animal-like and hardly connote eroticism or lasciviousness. Horrid, old female bodies were often included in Baroque emblem books such as Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, where they illustrate evils such as heresy.[40] This iconography relates to a long medieval tradition concerning the dangerous foulness of women taking place after the termination of their youth and fertility.[41] At best, the female demon harassing Francis could be understood as a representation of the ugliness of carnal lust. Most probably she represents the demonic character of the female sex.

More often, however, the female demon, when appearing in the thorn motif, is pictured attractive. One of the most exciting examples of such iconography is found in the decorative murals in the Chapel of St Francis in the Church of Sant'Orsola (fig. 25), connected to the female monastery of the Order of St Clair in Como. Here, Francis is placed on the ground in the midst of roses and thorns. He is in the company of a voluptuous she-devil who is trying to entice him by exposing her breasts and her left leg. She is gathering her loosely draped clothes and simultaneously caressing her right breast with one hand while sticking the other in between her legs right at the height of her genitals. Though the unknown artist has pictured the Saint visibly distressed, the silhouette of a fleeing demon in the background indicates that Francis is about to overcome his carnal agonies. Rays of light are beaming from Francis' head, creating a halo and accentuating his holiness.

40 'The personification of Heresy is an ugly old woman of terrifying aspect, almost nude and with her long dried out breast exposed[…]' in Maser 1990, 96.

41 Petherbridge 2013, 15.

Fig.23. Giacomo Franco, *St Francis in Thorns* in V*ita del Serafico S. Francesco*, Venice, 1593. Engraving, 20 x 14 cm.

Fig.24. Justus Sadeler, *St Francis in Thorns* in *S.P.S Francisci… Admiranda Historia*, early seventeenth century Copper engraving, 18,5 x 27 cm.

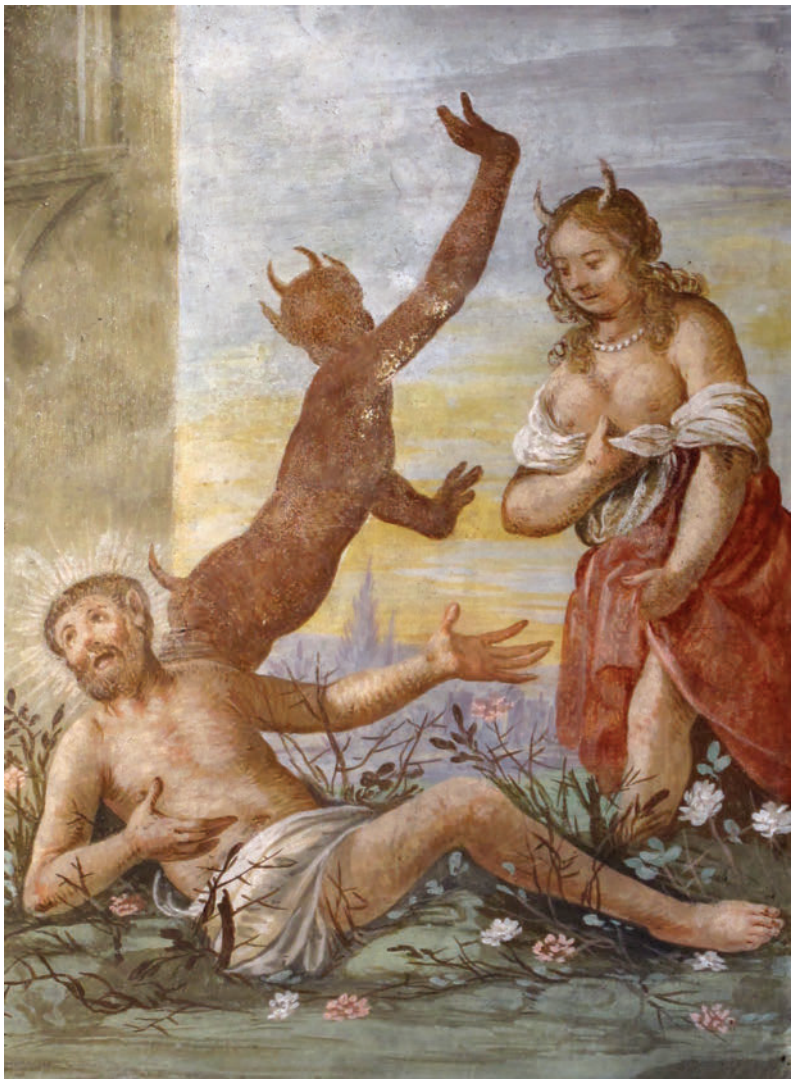

Fig.25. Unknown artist, *St Francis in Thorns*, first decades of the seventeenth century. Mural. Cappella di san Francesco, Sant'Orsola, Como

We will return to this image a bit later in the text (see p.182f.), it should, however, be noted that although the iconography is somewhat unusual a similar interpretation can be found in an illustrated edition of the *Life of St Francis* (fig. 26). The book, with images designed by Jonas Umbach (c.1624–1693) and engraved by Andreas Mattheus Wolfgang (1660–1736), was published in Augsburg by Bavarian Capuchin monks in 1694.[42] Here, as in the Como version, a beautiful female demon is approaching St Francis with outstretched arms.

42 The book was later reprinted in 1704 and 1706.

Fig.26. Andreas Mattheus, *St Francis in Thorns* in *Vita et admiranda historia seraphici Francisci*, Augsburg, 1694. Engraving, 16,3 x 8,8 cm.

She is young and attractive, dressed in a transparent gown, which reveals her high breasts, thin waist, round hips and legs. Her devilish nature is revealed by her snakelike tail, which twists behind her, her forehead with horns and her long claw-like nails. At her feet, the Saint lies entangled in thorns. His holy character is well-defined by the halo and rays of light beaming out around his body. Unlike the Sant'Orsola version, this image includes the Portiuncula on a hilltop in the background and, like in Sadeler's images (fig. 24), a friar witnessing the incident is partly hidden behind a tree trunk.

Most likely the German image is not connected to the Como mural. Roughly 300 km separates Como from Augsburg and printed books from the German city would most probably have been distributed in Como. As all signs suggest that the chapel's decorations were created much earlier than the book, it is rather unlikely that the artist in Sant'Orsola used the German image as an inspiration when executing the wall paintings. Conversely, it also quite improbable that Umbach was inspired by the rosebush scene in Como when he designed his illustrations for the book, as none of the other scenes included in the illustrated book resembles the

murals in Sant'Orsola. Therefore, most probably these two images were created independently. Perhaps, they were even inspired by yet another, but hitherto unknown, iconographic source.

As we have seen, images presenting St Benedict and St Francis in thorn shrubs were not primarily focusing on their temptations, but rather on the actions taken in order to overcome them. The stripped saintly bodies in thorns could also be read as a parallel to that of the repentant Mary Magdalene in the desert, which, following a post-Tridentine visual culture, focused on her penitence and consequently became a symbol of the sacrament of Penance. Another important and common detail in St Benedict's and St Francis' temptation stories is that both saints were tempted through memories of women. Thus, in other words, they were punished for having practised dishonest (willing or unwilling) gazing, which, as a consequence, evoked their carnal desires. This notion recalls how, in Matthew 5:28, unchaste eyes are declared sinful: 'But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart'. When St Jerome (342–420) emphasised the dangers of carnal lust by singling out some of the most powerful men overcome by female seduction, he chose to emphasise how it was namely David's illicit gaze that became his downfall:

> David was a man after God's own heart, and his lips had often sung of The Holy One, the future Christ; and yet as he walked upon his housetop he was fascinated by Bathsheba's nudity, and added murder to adultery. Notice here how, even in his own house, a man cannot use his eyes without danger.[43]

St Jerome was perhaps drawing on his personal experiences. As a young man studying in Rome, he had occasionally joined other students in promiscuous behaviours – something for which he later suffered terrible guilt. When his desire to lead an ascetic life eventually led him to the Syrian desert, his bad experiences in Rome haunted him. Although, while in the desert, he spent long periods

43 St Jerome 'Letter to Eustochium' 22:12. The above-cited text by Jerome is almost identical to a text passage found in a third-century letter by an anonymous author (earlier attributed to Clement of Rome) written to the Christians at Corinth on the subject of virginity. It is cited by Smith, who acknowledges the letter as the first known use of the Women in Power topos. Like Jerome, the anonymous author uses the example of Samson, David and others as proof for the impossibility of men and woman living together in moral safety. According to Smith, Jerome must have been familiar with the anonymous text. Smith 1995, 21, 26. See also Smith 1995, 21 n 3.

without food and sleep, which left him emaciated and only barely alive, he often found his mind wandering to the enjoyments of Rome. He would imagine dancing women, involuntarily awaking his carnal desires.

3.3 St Jerome's Dancing Temptations in the Desert

Jerome gave a vivid account of his carnal agonies in the desert in a famous and often cited letters written years later to his young female disciple Eustochium:

> Now, although in my fear of hell I had consigned myself to this prison, where I had no companions but scorpions and wildbeasts, I often found myself amid bevvies of girls. My face was pale and my frame chilled with fasting, yet my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust kept bubbling up before me when my flesh was as good as dead.[44]

Although the text passage was later also included in Jacobus de Varagine's *Legenda Aurea,* St Jerome's carnal temptations have been given limited attention in the visual culture. The reason might be that the Church Father's life has rarely been pictured through image cycles.[45] Consequently, the Hieronymite iconography is limited to a rather small number of motifs. St Jerome was a popular subject in post-Tridentine art, and even though attention was often directed towards his religious visions and acts of penitence during his time in the wilderness, he has generally been presented as an elderly man seated by a crucifix and a bible, beating his chest with a rock – implications of sensual allurements are generally absent.

3.3.1 Domenichino's *The Temptation of St Jerome* in Sant'Onofrio, Rome

A rare interpretation of St Jerome's temptation episode can, however, be seen in a lunette at the entrance portico of the Roman Church of Sant'Onofrio on the Janiculum hill (fig. 27). The mural, included in a cycle of three images depicting the Church Father's life, was painted by the Carracci Academy schooled Domenico Zampieri (1581–1641) known as Domenichino, in the first years of the seventeenth century. Sant'Onofrio's decoration project is almost unique. One of the few other recognised cycles with scenes from the Saint's life is found

44 St Jerome 'Letter to Eustochium' 22:8.

45 The pictorial cycle is today partly ruined. Kaftal 1978, 477ff.

Fig.27. Domenico Zampieri (Domenichino), *The Temptations of St Jerome in the Desert*, 1605-06. Fresco. Sant'Onofrio, Rome.

among the partly ruined frescoes in S. Maria della Scala, Verona. It is significantly larger than the Sant'Onofrio cycle and includes twenty-five scenes, painted in fresco by Giovanni de Badile 1443–4. One scene shows St Jerome in the wilderness, much like in Domenichino's mural. In the Veronese fresco, the Saint is, however, seen in a cave surrounded by wild beasts while the female temptation is omitted.[46]

Compositionally, the Sant'Onofrio mural, often referred to as *The Temptations of St Jerome*, is based on the classical theme of the penitent Jerome in the wilderness. Domenichino has pictured the Saint in a hilly verdant landscape, seated next to a rock shelf with a pile of books and a crucifix. He is naked – though partly covered by a violet cloth – and is grabbing a stone with one hand while pointing towards the sky in a blessing gesture with the other. An angel leaning vertically over the Saint brings its face intimately close to Jerome's while seemingly whispering something in his ear. One of its hands is tenderly placed on the Saint's, preventing him from beating his chest, while the other is indicating towards the sky.

The artist has abandoned the conventional iconography in that he presents Jerome as young and vigorous. A group of three dancing women, seen on a meadow in the background, represents the Saint's

46 Ibid.

Roman fantasies. By including a glimpse of an ancient arcade behind the dancing women, the artist indicates that the Saint intended to leave Rome and its temptations behind. Nonetheless, the eternal city along with its worldly pleasures and enticing women remained a vivid memory in his mind. Placing the women at a distance from the holy man creates an illusionary effect, thus implying that they are not a part of a tangible reality. The crawling demon at the Saint's feet, which, in distress and agony, dodges at the arrival of the divine presence, highlights Jerome's triumph over his carnal hardships. Thus, Domenichino's mural shows a victorious young St Jerome who, through the arrival of heavenly aid, has overcome the carnal temptations inflicted upon him in the wilderness.

Cardinal Girolamo Agunucci (1555–1605), namesake of the Saint, commissioned the murals for Sant'Onofrio, which at the time functioned as a Hieronymite monastery. The Cardinal was also the nephew of Cardinal Filippo Sega, the former 'titolare' of the church and monastery until his death in 1596. Shortly after Domenichino's arrival to Rome from Bologna, in 1602, he was hosted by Cardinal Girolamo's brother, Monsignor Giovanni Battista Agnucci, who also was his patron.[47] According to Domenichino's artist colleague Giovanni Baglione, Cardinal Agnucci had been so impressed by the skills of his brother's young protégé when presented with Domenichino's *Saint Peter in Prison* (1604), that he chose him for the Sant'Onofrio commission.[48] It is likely that the work was initiated in late 1604, and was suspended in connection with the Cardinal's death the following year in 1605.[49] The death of the patron could explain why only three of the six lunettes were painted, even though there is no other evidence that the initial plan was to paint all of the lunettes. In fact, Trevisiano suggests that the temptation scene, along with the two other images – *the baptism of St Jerome* and *St Jerome's vision*[50] – may be read as a triptych presenting the religious journey of the Saint's youth.[51]

47 Trevisiani 1996, 178.

48 '[O]nde il Cardinale facegli, poco appresso, dipignere a fresco tre lunette cõ historie di S.Girolamo nel Portico della Chiesa di S.Onofrio suo titolo, delle quali Zampieri riportò lode.', Baglione 1642 (1995). See also Spear 1966, 223.

49 Spear 1966, 223.

50 Jerome's vision recalls an episode when Jerome, during an illness, fell into a feverish dream in which he was standing before the tribunal of Christ for neglecting his bible studies to read the ancient philosophers. Jerome was whipped as punishment, and when he awoke, his back was bruised. St Jerome, 'Letter to Eustochium' 22:30.

51 Trevisiani 1996, 178.

Fig.28. Giorgio Vasari, *The Temptations of St Jerome*, 1541. Oil on canvas, 169 cm x 123 cm. Galleria Palatina, Florence.

At the time Domenichino designed and executed the mural, access to prior visual models was limited. The only known earlier rendition of the episode is Giorgio Vasari's (1511–1547) allegorical interpretation, which was executed in two similar versions; currently in the collections of Galleria Palatina (1541, fig. 28.) and the Art Institute of Chicago (1541/48). Vasari's scene is a variation on the popular *The penitent St Jerome* motif. Consequently, Jerome is conventionally presented as an older man, kneeling before a crucifix and beating a stone against his chest in the act of penitence. His attributes – a skull, a book and a lion – lay on display before him. Venus accompanied by cupids here symbolises the Saint's carnal enticement, while two turtledoves and a blindfolded Amor aiming his love-arrow at the Saint represent the worldly aspect of love.

Vasari's two paintings have little in common with Domenichino's composition, which follows a close reading of St Jerome's twenty-second letter to Eustochium. An essential part of this text is written

under the scene in Latin and Italian, flanking an oval medallion with the cardinal's coat of arms,[52] thus providing the necessary information for the spectator.[53]

The Sant'Onofrio decoration project was Domenichino's first important public commission; he was still quite inexperienced as an artist, as is seen in the rather simple composition and literal interpretation of the text sources. Indeed, the Saint positioned seated by an altar-like cliff in the company of an angel almost literarily portrays the concluding passage of Jerome's description of the event:

> Whenever I saw hollow valleys, craggy mountains, steep cliffs, there, I made my oratory, there the house of correction for my unhappy flesh. There, also – the Lord is my witness – when I had shed copious tears and had strained my eyes towards heaven, I sometimes felt myself among angelic hosts, and for joy and gladness sang: because the savour of your good ointments we will run after you (song of Songs 1:3-4).[54]

His Bolognese teacher, Annibale Carracci strongly inspired Domenichino, and Spear observes that, quite soon after arriving in Rome in 1602, the young artist adapted his Bolognese style to Annibale's naturalistic and idealistic Roman painting.[55] More importantly, Domenichino was also the direct heir to Annibale and acquired several of his drawings. It is widely known that Domenichino used them for his commissions. Indeed, the seventeenth-century art critic Scanelli, in his *Microcosmo della pittura* (1657), asserts that 'dipinse anch'egli [Domenichino] co'disegni del maestro' (also he [Domenichino] was painting after drawings of his Master).[56] With the Sant'Onofrio project, Domenichino initiated a complex system of borrowing that he would practice throughout his artistic carrier.[57] Annibale's design can be found in several details in the murals; not least when it comes to the

52 The coat of arms is no longer visible. According to Trevisisani it was composed by the Cardinal's brother Giovanni, and consisted of a bull assembled with the coat of arms of Cardinal Sega; three lilies above the bull, a saw, a two-headed eagle under the red Cardinal's hat and equipped with twelve tassels. Ibid., 183.

53 The Italian vernacular version reads:
S. Girolamo ad eustochio.
O. Quante. Volte. Essendo. Io. Solo. Nel. Eremo.
In. Companie. Di. Fiere. E. Scorpioni. Mezzo. Morto. Da.
Digiuni. E. Penitenze. Pure. Mi. Pareva. Esser. Presente.
Alle. Delitie. Romane. Et. Alli. Cori. Delle. Fanciulle.

54 St Jerome, 'Letter to Eustochium' 22:8.

55 Spear 1966, 227.

56 Scanelli 1657, 354 (also quoted by Spear 1966, 227).

57 Spear, 1966, 223.

Fig.29. Annibale Carracci, *The Love of Gods/The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1602. Fresco. Palazzo Farnese, Rome.

figure of St Jerome in the temptation scene, which on several occasions has been directly referred to in connection with Annibale's *Phineus* in the Galleria Farnese.[58] Domenichino was well-acquainted with these frescoes as he assisted Annibale in completing them during the same period as he worked with the decorations in Sant'Onofrio, 1604–1605.[59] Furthermore, it has been suggested by Spear that the crouching position of the demon by the Saint's feet originates from Annibale's *Hercules and Cacus* fresco in Palazzo Sampieri in Bologna.[60] Since these murals were in Bologna, however, Domenichino was probably working from Annibale's drawings: The drawing of the painting still exists, and Jaffé also recognised Domenichino's use of it.[61] One can also find some resemblance between Domenichino's dancers and Annibale's nymph playing the tambourine in the Farnese centre panel *The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne* (fig. 29).

58 Serra called Domenichino's St Jerome 'Una palese imitazione della prima figura a sinistra nell'affresco della Galleria Farnese' Serra 1909, 10. Spear concludes that 'It is well known that the figure of Jerome is related to Annibale's Phineus in the Galleria Farnese' Spear, 1966, 226f.

59 Pepper 1986, 343.

60 Spear also asserts that the monster in Ludovico's Destruction of Enceladus, in turn, inspired Domenichino for the Devil's face and the position of its arms. Spear 1966, 228.

61 Jaffé 1956, 12f. Domenichino's former pupil and later biographer, Giovanni Battista Passeri (1610–1679), defended his teacher's habit of using Annibale's figures for his compositions and claimed that it was not to be considered as a weakness. Instead, Passeri argues, Domenichino chose which details to use with an utter awareness of his needs and his composition: 'poiche in quell suo furto fece scoprire una saggia avedutezza, che seppe valersi d'una attitudine molto a proposito per lo suo bisogno applicandola cosi adattamente'. Passeri 1934, 24f.


Fig.30. (Left) Francisco Zurbaran, *The Temptations of St Jerome*, 1629.
Oil on canvas, 290 x 235 cm. Monastery of San Jeronimo, Guadalupe.
Fig.31. (Right) Juan Valdes Leal, *The Temptations of St Jerome*, 1657.
Oil on canvas, 224 x 247 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Seville.

The Temptation motif, as introduced by Domenichino in Sant'Onofrio, had few followers in Italy. In the religiously conservative Spain, the episode seems to have gained greater popularity. A painting by the famous Francisco Zurbaran (1598–1664), for the Monastery of San Jerónimo, Guadalupe in 1639, offers a composition, which entirely differs from the Sant'Onofrio mural (fig. 30). Jerome is presented in a traditional manner as a grey-haired elderly hermit kneeling by the Holy Scriptures and a skull. He is looking directly at the spectator while fending off a group of young female musicians, beautifully and richly dressed in contemporary early seventeenth-century attire. A similar composition can also be seen in Juan Valdés Leal's (1622–1690) version, made about twenty years later for the Monastery San Jerónimo de Buenavista in Seville (fig 31). Also here, the Saint is tempted, not by a group of dancing nymphs but by female musicians dressed in contemporary seventeenth-century fashion. Unlike these Spanish examples, Domenichino's mural is explicitly tied to the Italian iconographical tradition where nymphs and other elements from the pagan culture of ancient Rome were used to picture illicitness and sin.

3.3.2 *The Temptations of Saint Jerome* in Modena

An oil painting today found in the collections of Galleria Estense in Modena constitutes one of the few additional Italian examples of the Hieronymite temptation motif (fig. 32). Its author has not been established with certainty. Traditionally, the painting has been placed in an Emilian ambience in the circle of Guercino. Adolfo Venturi hypothesised that the painting might be a collaboration between two

Fig.32. Unknown artist (Bartolomeo Gennari/ Giuseppe Maria Galeppini), T*he Temptation of St Jerome*, ca. 1645. Oil on canvas, 116 cm x 227 cm. Galleria Estense, Modena.

different artists, one of whom painted the seated Jerome to the left while the other painted the group of people – the Saint's temptation – to the right.[62] More recently Bartolomeo Gennari (1594–1661) has been suggested as one of the possible authors, as St Jerome bears some resemblance to St John the Evangelist in an altarpiece, made by Gennari in the church San Filippo Neri in Forli, depicting the Evangelist with his disciples.[63] As a possible second artist, Giuseppe Maria Galeppini (1625–1650) has been suggested.[64] As Guercino, Gennari and Galeppini were all guests of Duke Francesco I of Este during winter 1649, the year could provide a possible date for the painting. However, its whereabouts before 1685, when it was registered for the first time in the Este ducal collection, remains undocumented.[65]

Given that the subject is rare, it is possible that the artist was acquainted with the Domenichino lunette in Rome. The image has some likeness to the mural as it is divided similarly, with St Jerome

62 Venturi 1882, 465.

63 Unpubl. Galleria Estensi 2016.

64 Ibid.

65 Venturi 1882, 465.

seated on the left and the worldly allurements in the background to the right. The iconography, however, differs. While Domenichino's mural shows a young Jerome receiving heavenly aid at the moment of his temptation, the Modena painting presents the Church Father more traditionally, as an older man seated meditating before a crucifix at a desk with books and a skull, and with the lion at his feet. There is no divine company present; the temptation episode instead appears as a memory of St Jerome's youth, brought to his mind in his later days.

The group of celebrating men and women in the right half of the image appears to be more temptation of worldly delights than solely carnal lust. Several references to Renaissance art and culture can be found, not least in the naked woman in the front, which is a direct reference to Titian's *Bacchanal* (fig. 33). Even though the d'Este family formerly owned Titian's painting, it was brought to Rome already in 1597 when Ferrara came under the Papal rule, and the family moved to Modena. If the dating of the Modenese temptation scene is correct, Titian's Bacchanal was in Rome at the time of the painting's execution. It is, however, likely that the author of Jerome's temptation episode could have seen reproductions of Titian's painting since an engraving by Giovanni Andrea Podestà (1620–1673) was produced at the end of the 1640s.[66]

The participants of the group are engaged in amorous activities amidst food, beverages, music and other enjoyments. Their light-hearted behaviour brings to mind the *Garden of love* - topos, which was a popular theme in vernacular literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The most famous examples are found in Boccaccio's *Decamerone,* (c. 1353), in which a group of young Florentine men and women escape the outbreak of the plague and live a carefree existence in a pleasant countryside residence. In the Renaissance pictorial tradition, the *Garden of Love - topos* shows men and women in a green blooming garden with bubbling fountains; a place of love, beauty and seduction.[67]

Assuming that the painting was made during a longer stay at the Este court in the winter of 1649, it may be possible to draw iconographic parallels to artworks which, during the mid-seventeenth century, were found in the Este family collections and, therefore, could have been consulted by the artist(s). The illuminated *De Sphaera*

66 Bartsch, XX, pp 169–173; (*The Illustrated Bartsch*, 45 1982.).

67 Krohn 2008, 151.

Fig.33. (Left) Titian, *Bacchanal*, 1523-26. Oil on canvas, 175 x 193 cm. Prado Museum, Madrid
Fig.34. (Right) Unknown Lombardian master, *Garden of Love*, ca. 1470. Tempera and gold on parchment, 25 x 16,5 cm. Biblioteca Estense, Modena.

Fig.35 Andrea Mantegna, Parnaso, 1497. Tempera and gold on canvas, 159 cm x 192 cm. Musee du Louvre, Paris.

manuscript, a treatise on astrology, painted by an unknown Lombard artist around 1470 includes an example of the *Garden of Love topos*. The illumination, known as the *Garden of Love* or the *Fountain of Youth,* shows a private garden sealed with a brick wall and with a large fountain in the centre in which naked men and women are bathing (fig. 34). A couple is kissing in the grass while a group of men are playing music and singing. The mood is merry; there seems to be an abundance of food and drinks. As indicated by the title, the fountain in the garden is the mythological *Fountain of Youth,* which, according to legend, was created when Jupiter transformed the nymph Juventas into a youth-giving fountain where elderly men and women would bathe, regain their youth and engage in amorous activities under the watching eye of cupid. References to the illumination in Jerome's temptations scene are found in the similarly joyful mood as well as in the kissing couple and the musicians.

The fountain behind the celebrating group next to St Jerome is crowned – not by cupid – but by a marble sculpture of the triumphant love goddess Venus herself; and though no one is bathing in the fountain, it could still be interpreted as a fountain of love. Indeed, the celebration the group is engaged in seems to be that of Venus. An additional marble statue of the love goddess, pictured in the form of the famous Aphrodite of Knidos is seen next to the group of dancers. The Greek sculpture, initially made by Praxiteles (400 B.C.), is renowned as the first devotional sculpture of a female nude and was immensely popular and often copied during the Roman period.[68] For the Romans the sculpture served no devotional function; instead, it was principally used as garden ornaments by the rich – a tradition which was reassumed during the Renaissance.[69] Venturi asserts that the dancing females imitate Raphael's female figures in *The Hours of the Day and Night.*[70] Mantegna's *Parnaso* (fig. 35), initially made for Isabella d'Este 1496 – today in the Louvre – may also have inspired the female dancers in the seventeenth-century painting. A similarity between the two female groups is, above all, seen in the colour scheme and the movements of the dancers' bodies.

The architectural structures in the painting recall the buildings of ancient Rome. Not least the rounded structure in the background, which resembles the Pantheon. I would, however, suggest that St Jerome's temptation, in this particular example, is not ancient Rome, but the

68 The most famous and well-preserved Roman copy of the lost Greek original is found in the collections of the Vatican Museums. See Haverlock 1995.

69 See Haverlock 1995.

70 Venturi 1882, 465.

worldly frivolous Renaissance. The image thus becomes a celebration of ascetic celestial love on one side and carnal love and foolishness on the other. The use of Renaissance imagery as a metaphor for St Jerome's indecent temptations could, I surmise, be seen as a condemnation of the lasciviousness of the earlier generation's Renaissance culture.

3.4 Temptation as the Means of Purification

St Benedict, St Francis and St Jerome were all overcome by carnal lust provoked by the Devil. Equally as important, it happened when they were alone while pursuing an ascetic life. It reminded the believer that devilish temptations were to be considered a significant threat – they could occur at any time, anywhere and affect anyone, even the most pious of men. The images also highlighted another essential function of temptation, namely that it could work as a cleansing process. According to the third-century scholar Origen Adamantius (184/185–253/254), temptation should be seen as a blessing, for it manifests the content of the soul. It gives the pious fuller knowledge of his true nature and reveals the most well-hidden evils.[71] Geoffrey Galt Harpham asserts that ascetics, who had retired into the desert for meditation and prayer, saw all types of thoughts other 'than the thoughtless thoughts of perfect prayer' as a reminder of the world and evidence of an impure and desiring will. Suffering from sexual temptation was, therefore, important for the male ascetic's inner dynamic of temptation and resistance and provided essential energy for the ascetic way of life. Temptation through unclean thoughts could reveal well-concealed secrets and desires and, thus, encourage self-criticism. Being aware of one's desires could, Harpham notes, serve as a tool for 'burning off impurities'.[72]

The sterner moral control that followed the Catholic Reformation increased the power ascribed to the Devil. Although the Devil's position remained mostly unchanged after Trent (in fact, the Council made no statements affirming the Devil's existence, only because no one was challenging it), the post-Tridentine religious culture made the responsibility to combat the Devil and his temptations a private affair. Earlier centuries had seen God, Christ or the whole Christian community as the Devil's opponent; when being attacked by the Devil and demons, one could feel like part of a great army on which one could

71 Origen, *On Prayer* 19:29. See also Harpham 1993, 46.

72 Harpham, 1993, 55f. See also Miles 2006, 75.

always rely.[73] After the sixteenth century, it was, instead, the individual alone against the Devil. Even though no one denied that the grace of God protected the faithful, the new Christian challenge was the responsibility of each to examine his or her souls for signs of weaknesses that would invite the Devil in.[74] According to Jeffrey Burton-Russel, an important factor was the inward turn of the Christian conscience, found both in Protestantism and the new self-examining character of Catholicism, which was practised, e.g., by the theologian and founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556). Loyola was convinced that the Devil's demons were everywhere, in every part of the world, and that no one at any time could be free from the temptations suggested by them. The Devil sought to convince humans that worldly pleasure and sexual delight brought happiness, but the consequences of being tricked into yielding were always anxiety, despair and misery. The only effective way to defeat the Devil was steadfast faith in Christ.[75]

73 As an example, Gregory the great could be mentioned; he saw the world as a battleground in which humans were soldiers of Christ See Burton Russel 1984, 100.

74 Burton Russell 1986, 31.

75 Ibid., 51.

4 THE TEMPTATIONS OF ST ANTHONY

Vita de Sancti Padri played a chief role in providing an iconographic text source for early monastic and ascetic temptation episodes. The most famous motif is undoubtedly the one presenting the desert father St Anthony the Great's meeting with monstrous creatures and illicit female demons in the Egyptian desert. For the visual tradition, the episode played a fundamental role in creating the visual character not only of the Devil but also of his demons and the female temptress. The motif was immensely popular in northern Europe during the Renaissance, not least through the interpretations by artists such as Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), Matthias Grünewald (1470–1528), Martin Schongauer (1448–1491) and Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516). In Renaissance Italy, however, the motif fell out of fashion and was only sporadically produced. During the last decades of the sixteenth century, there seems to be a change, and the motif's popularity grew. It is likely that the increased interest in the subject could be attributed to the post-Tridentine tendency to ascribe the Devil and his demons an increased power over man. The fascination of the theme may also be found in the conflict between Good and Evil. It presents the miraculous and mystical aspects of human existence and offers a possibility to show a theme that is both sensuous and fear-provoking.[1] The presentation of a respected patriarch like St Anthony encountering, but also withstanding gruesome devilish aggressions functioned as a reminder for the contemporary spectator that the battle between Good and Evil was constantly ongoing.

4.1 The Introduction of the Antonite Temptation Theme in the Italian Pictorial Tradition and its Written Iconographic Sources

The Temptations of St Anthony was introduced into the Italian pictorial tradition in the thirteenth century: the oldest preserved example of the motif is seen in the late thirteenth-century Barletta San Sepolcro fresco (fig. 36)[2]. It shows three female figures approaching St Anthony

1 Cuttler 1952, 1.

2 The first known visual representation of the carnal temptations of the Saint is, according to Charles Cuttler, found in one of the twelfth-century stained glass windows of the Chartres Cathedral. Here Anthony is pictured together with the personification of Luxuria, the vice of lust – presented as a woman dressed in a long green gown holding a mirror. Ibid.,42.

Fig.36. Unknown artist, *The Temptations of St Anthony*, late thirteenth century. Mural. Chiesa del Santo Sepolcro, Barletta

while holding their bare right breasts between their left hand's index and middle finger as if squeezing milk. The presence of God's support is seen as a hand reaching out from a circle above the Saint's head.[3] The limited diffusion of this particular iconography implies that the artist was following a textual source from the Western tradition that is now missing.[4]

The more conventional rendering of this motif shows the Saint encountering a naked or richly dressed female demon. The literary source for the scene is found in *Vita Antonii* (*Life of St Anthony the Great*), a text written in the fourth century by Anthony's follower and friend, the Church Father and Doctor of Church, St Athanasius the Great of Alexandria (c. 296–373).

3 According to Cuttler, this motif has no source in Western hagiography, and only one follower, which is found in a Venetian illustrated Vita de Sancti padri from the late fifteenth century (printed by Gianni Ragazzo for Lucantonio Giunta in 1491). Here, three women are approaching Anthony from the right. They hold their hands on their breasts but are not reviling them as in the Barletta scene. Ibid.,50.

4 Ibid., 50f.

4.1.1 St Anthony, the Desert Fathers and the Temptation in the Desert

In *Vita Antonii,* St Anthony is presented to the reader as an ideal ascetic. He had not yet turned twenty when the death of his parents left him responsible for his sister and their family wealth. As an act of devotion, young Anthony decided to follow Jesus' counsel: 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me' (Matt 19:21). He donated his family fortune to those in need, placed his sister in a monastery and began a life devoted to God. Athanasius recalls how St Anthony spent his time in the company of older hermits in order to learn from their example and imitate their way of life.

Initially, he lived on the outskirts of his hometown Coma in Lower Egypt and was deeply respected and loved for his virtuous manners. The Devil hates what is good, Athanasius reminds us and, therefore, tempted the young man in all possible ways. Anthony was reminded of his previous wealth, offered abundant meals and comfortable beds. When the Saint determinedly resisted all attempts to persuade him to give up his devout life, the Devil finally turned to 'the weapons, which are "in the navel of his belly"': Anthony was harassed day and night with vulgar thoughts; his body was burning with lust and his struggles evident for anyone encountering him.[5] As the last blow, the Devil visited the Saint one night in the guise of a beautiful young woman 'and imitated all her acts simply to beguile Anthony'.[6] The young man once again managed to resist. Nevertheless, Athanasius underlines that although Anthony was a pious man, he was saved not by his merit but by God's grace: 'the Lord who for our sake took flesh and gave the body victory over the Devil, so that all who truly fight can say "not I but the grace of God which was with me"'.[7]

Athanasius' text about St Anthony's life was originally written in Greek. A few decades later, by the end of the fourth century, it was translated into Latin by Evagrius and was eventually included in the early Christian compendium *Vitae Patrum* (c. fifth–eight centuries). It was Domenico Cavalca's fourteenth-century translation into the Italian vernacular and the *Vite dei santi padri* that made the Egyptian desert father known to a larger Italian public. As earlier mentioned,

5 Athanasius, 'Life of Saint Anthony' Ch. 5.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

Cavalca's text was popular and appeared in several Italian editions until the mid-nineteenth century. Many of the illustrated versions include the image where St Anthony is seen being enticed by a female demon.

4.1.2 Medieval and Renaissance Examples of *The Temptations of St Anthony*

An early example of the demonic carnal temptation scene is included in the Venetian fifteenth-century edition of *Vita dei santi padri* (see Ch. 3.1). Here, the tempted St Anthony is shown in two scenes: first, allured by a female demon to the left and then, beaten by a male devil to the right (fig. 37). The female demon attempting to seduce the Saint is naked: her face, high small breasts and rounded belly are those of an attractive woman, while her feet, bat wings and horns reveal her demonic origin. Anthony is seated in front of a small chapel. He is presented as an elderly man with a long beard. His halo and his monastic habit accentuate his holiness. He holds a book in one hand while he covers his face with the other in an attempt to avoid looking at the Devilish enticement. Behind the chapel, the Saint is pictured again, kneeling on the ground. A small male devil is sitting on his shoulders, beating him with a stone. Also, here, the Saint is trying to guard himself against the devilish harassment by raising his hand – not to cover his eyes this time, but to protect himself from the coming hit.

Fig.37. Unknown artist, *The Temptations of St Anthony*, in *Vita de sancti padri historiate*, Venice 1491. Woodcut, ca. 4,9 x 7,5 cm.

Fig.38. Andrea del Cagno(?), *The Temptations of St Anthony*, mid fifteenth century. Fresco. Church of Saint Francis, Montefalco.

A similar iconography can be found in an early fifteenth-century mural in the Church of St Francis in Montefalco, Umbria (fig. 38): although, in this case, the female demon is elegantly dressed and not naked, her devilish nature is revealed by the high horns on her forehead and her birdlike claw feet. She appears in front of a small building in which St Anthony stands at a window. The Saint, pictured as an elderly, bald and bearded man, tries to fend off the female enticement by making the sign of the cross.

During the fifteenth century, the motif is included in pictorial programs, predominantly murals in churches, showing scenes from the Saint's life. As a rule, St Anthony's temptation episodes are presented as two separate events. Often, therefore, as seen in the Montefalco mural, the Saint's female temptation episode is pictured

Fig.39. Giacomo Jaquerio, *The Temptation of St Anthony*, 1420's. Fresco. Chiesa Sant'Antonio di Ranverso, Buttigliera Alta.

as an independent scene. In a few cases, the episodes are depicted in one image, which, like the book illustration, is divided in two scenes: the carnal temptation to the left and demonic aggression to the right. A 1420s mural, located in the choir of the Abbey Church of Sant'Antonio di Ranverso in Buttigliera Alta, Piedmont, includes a series of frescos devoted to the life of St Anthony and is attributed to Giacomo Jaquerio. Here, the Saint's temptation episodes are combined into one image (fig. 39). To the left St Anthony is approached by a luxuriously-dressed female demon. Behind her, a group of bat-winged and skull-faced demons are beating the Saint, now lying on the ground.[8]

Picturing the temptress dressed in luxurious attire, usually worn by the high aristocracy and royals, could be understood as a general representation of female lavishness and the luxuries of the world. When presented holding a mirror, as in Jaquerio's mural, which is the attribute of both Luxuria – the vice of lust, and of Superbia – the vice of pride, the temptress personifies two of the seven deadly sins. It is an iconography that, although it can occasionally be found in Italy, was, during the fifteenth century, more often included in interpretations that were produced north of the Alps. Along with the whole region of Piedmont, Buttigliera Alta was still under the Duchy of Savoy in the fifteenth century. French influences were, thus, dominant. The

8 Cuttler 1952, 66.

temptress in the Sant'Antonio di Ranverso fresco is also wearing a headpiece, which resembles a crown. It could be understood as a reference to an alternative temptation episode, which was translated from Arabic by the Dominican monk Alphonsus Bonhomnis in 1342.[9] This story recalls St Anthony's encounter with the Devil Queen and her maidens at the river where she is bathing. When the Saint attempts to flee, the queen convinces him to stay by expressing a desire to learn about salvation. The Saint is then carried to her town in a chariot. The city is beautiful and richly decorated. Anthony is brought to the castle, where the queen demonstrates her miraculous abilities by healing the sick. Ultimately, she asks the Saint to become her lawful husband, but when she attempts to take off his monastic habit, Anthony recognises that she is a devil and says, 'I will not take off the habit which our Lord himself put on me. What other defence have I against the Devil?' He then makes the sign of the cross, after which the queen and her whole city turn into devils that attack the Saint aggressively and leave him severely wounded.[10]

The Sant'Antonio di Ranverso fresco might, thus, show this concluding episode: when St Anthony refuses the Queen's marriage proposal and performs the cross sign, she and everyone around her transform into the demons pictured to the right. The story appears in the French *Life* of St Anthony from 1555 and various German editions of *Vitae Patrum*, both in the vernacular and Latin.[11] It was also included in an abundantly illuminated *Vita Antonii*, completed for the abbey of Saint-Antoine de Viennois in Dauphiné, the head house of the Order of the Hospitallers of St Anthony, in 1426. Today known as the *Valetta manuscript*,[12] it includes almost 200 pictures, of which seven show St Anthony's encounter with the Devil Queen.[13] A duplicate of the book is found in the Laurentian Library in Florence. It belongs to a collection of manuscripts originally collected by the Medici. The dispersion of the iconography of the Devil Queen seems to have been rather limited in Italy, however, the Abbey of Sant'Antonio di Ranverso

9 The Story of the Devil Queen is one of the tales that were likely initially preserved by Egyptian Anthonian monks that Alphonsus Bonhomnis translated from Arabic during his sojourn in Cyprus 1342. Graham 1933, 8. See also Cuttler, 1952, 18, note 65.

10 Graham 1933, 17ff.

11 Cuttler 1952, 66f.

12 When the order was suppressed in 1775 it was included in the Order of Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem; in 1781 the manuscript was sent to their head house in Malta where it was later placed in the public library of Valetta. Graham 1933, 1.

13 For a full study on the illustrated manuscript, see Graham 1933.

belonged to the Order of the Hospitallers of St Anthony, and though the frescos are of a slightly earlier date than the Valetta manuscript, the Antonians who commissioned the murals were likely familiar with the episode.

After the Tridentine Council, the story of Anthony and the Devil Queen eventually disappeared from orthodox iconography as the Church applied a rather severe enquiry into the legitimacy of the medieval additions to saints' hagiographies. The Valetta manuscript, nevertheless, inspired Antonite iconography well into the sixteenth century: Graham suggests that the Florentine version of the illuminated *Vita Antonii* was well-known to Artist Antonio Tempesta (1555–1630), who, at the end of the 1590s, made a series engravings of scenes from the life of St Anthony. These images were published in Rome 1597 under the title *Vita S.Antonio Abbatis*.[14]

4.2 The Temptation Episode in Antonio Tempesta's *Vita S.Antonio Abbatis*

Antonio Tempesta's richly illustrated *Life of St Anthony* gives an account of the life of the Egyptian Saint. It includes twenty-seven etchings through which the reader is invited to follow St Anthony from his birth to his death in the desert. The presence of the Devil and his demons are seen in nearly half (eleven to be precise) of the scenes: Anthony is harassed and beaten by demonic monsters, he is visited by the Devil in monastic disguise, disturbed by demons during prayer, and tempted by the Devil both carnally and through riches. In addition, the Saint is shown performing no less than three exorcisms.

Tempesta's engravings were timely; after Trent, there was an increasingly higher demand for prints with religious subjects, not least because of their easy distribution. The artist, primarily famous as a painter, understood the potential profit to be gained from the industry of prints. From the 1580s and onward, he concentrated almost all his artistic activities on graphic art: first, as an inventor but later, also as an engraver. He was immensely productive and became one of the most renowned artists in Rome.[15]

The title page of *Vita di S. Antonio Abate* includes the artist's dedication to Cardinal Cinzio Passeri Aldobrandini, an important

14 Ibid., 25.

15 *The Illustrated Bartsch* Vol. 35(ii) 2007, 242.

patron of the arts and *nipote* of Pope Clement VIII.[16] The page includes an illustration of the Cardinal's coat of arms flanked by two angels. The patron of this particular work has been debated, and it is probably not the Cardinal. Dedicating his work to a famous patron of the arts should, rather, be understood as an attempt by Tempesta to emphasise his social position. By the end of the 1590s, Tempesta was a well-established artist, both in Rome and abroad. In the first edition of the prints, the frontispiece lacks a publisher's address, which suggests that the artist was publishing his own work.[17]

Tempesta's engravings are based on the murals made by Giovanni Battista Lombardelli (c.1535–1592) and Cristoforo Roncalli (c. 1552–1626) in the 1580s for the Roman Antonite church Sant'Antonio Abate all'Esquilino. The church belonged to the Order of the Hospitallers of St Anthony (The Canons Regular of St Anthony of Vienne), i.e., the same order that commissioned the Valletta manuscript. Giovanni Antonio Bruzio suggested, already in the seventeenth century, that the manuscript's illuminations served as Lombardelli's and Roncalli's primary inspiration, something that has commonly been accepted by later scholars.[18] Unfortunately, the murals were partly destroyed during a seventeenth-century restoration of the church. Although several of the preserved scenes include St Anthony's encounters with the Devil, his female temptation episode is not seen, and it also remains unknown whether or not the scene was included in the original pictorial program.

According to Graham, it is probable that Tempesta, who was Florentine by birth and occasionally worked in that city, had studied the Laurentian library's duplicate of the Valetta manuscript in person. It is indeed hard to rule this out by concluding that Tempesta only indirectly was inspired by the manuscript through Lombardelli's and Roncalli's frescos: not all episodes included in Tempesta's engravings can be found in the murals. Since some of the murals were destroyed, however, we cannot know if these scenes corresponded with Tempesta's images. When comparing the existing frescos with Tempesta's engravings, it is clear that the wall paintings served as an important

16 Cardinal Aldobrandini was, e.g., the patron of Torquato Tasso, who dedicated his Dialogo delle Imprese to him. Ibid.

17 The text 'co provilio' in the lower left corner suggests that he also had the rights to his prints. The second version of the frontispiece includes the excudit of Giovanni Orlandi, while the following carries the names Matthäus Greuter and Domenico de Rossi. Ibid. See also Leuschner 2005, 315ff.

18 The Illustrated Bartsch 35(ii) 2007, 242.

Fig.40a. (Left) Antonio Tempesta, *The Temptations of St Anthony* in *Vita S. Antonii Abbatis*, Rome 1697. Engraving, 23.5 x 16.5 cm.
Fig.41. (Right) Unknown artist (Master of the Valetta Manuscript), *St Anthony Assaulted by devils* in *Vita Antonii* (known as the Valetta Manuscript), 1426.

source of inspiration. He has, however, modified the sequence of Lombardelli's and Roncalli's frescoes, combined some of their scenes and introduced new details. His etchings are, therefore, independent interpretations of the episodes and, thus, far from reproductions of the murals.[19]

The image picturing *The Temptation of St Anthony* is missing in Sant'Antonio Abate all'Esquilino. In Tempesta's version, the Saint is seen laying in a coffin while being attacked by fanciful demonic beasts (fig. 40a). Tempesta is, thus, repeating an iconographic misinterpretation that is included in the Valetta manuscript, where the Saint is pictured not in an Egyptian tomb chamber but a sarcophagus (fig.41) According

19 Ibid.

to Athanasius, the Saint moved into an old Egyptian tomb – a cave-like structure – after having survived his initial demonic temptations, including the female temptress. Anthony asked an acquaintance to close the door of the tomb behind him so that he would be locked in and only occasionally be brought bread and water. It, unfortunately, did not prevent the Devil's demons from breaking down the door and entering. One night, the Saint was so badly beaten up by monstrous demons that he was only barely alive when he was found the next day.[20] Tempesta's images show fragments of the destroyed sarcophagus lid (instead of a tomb's door) on the ground by the demons' feet. The Saint's harassers are pictured as anthropomorphic monsters with animal features. They are loud and aggressive: while some of them beat the Saint with clubs and sledgehammers, others are creating noise by playing drums and trumpets.

When Tempesta produced the engraving in the 1590s, the popularity of the motive was increasing, predominately in the north of Italy, where both Veronese and Tintoretto had made famous interpretations of the episode. Even though there existed a contemporary Italian iconography for the temptation motif, Tempesta chose to present the demons through models most commonly found north of the Alps. This northern iconography was refined during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and brought forward by artists such as Matthias Grünewald, Hieronymus Bosch and Martin Schongauer. Indeed, Tempesta's demons bear some unmistakable likenesses to Schongauer's interpretation, and it is probable that he was well-acquainted with the image (fig. 42).[21] Tempesta's engraving, thus, shows that, at the end of the sixteenth century, these northern iconographic models were used and considered to be current, also in the south of Europe. An explanation might be found in the lack of interest for the episode in Italy during the Renaissance: while the motif was immensely popular in northern Europe, it was only sporadically produced in Italy during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It had fallen out of fashion. Cuttler asserts that the mystical outlook of the temptation theme simply could not be identified with the humanistic philosophy of the Italian Renaissance culture.[22]

20 Athanasius, 'Life of St Anthony' Ch. 9.

21 This print was spread to most countries in Europe and made a deep impression on young Michelangelo who, in the 1470s, as a young teenager made a famous colour version, currently being preserved in the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

22 Cuttler 1952, 69.

Fig.42. Martin Schongauer, *St Anthony Tormented by Demons*, 1470. Copper engraving, 30 x 21.8 cm.

Tempesta has included the Saint's carnal temptation episode as a smaller secondary scene in the background (fig. 40b). Anthony is seen kneeling by a little house with a cross next to it. His hands are wrapped in prayer, and his gaze is directed towards the sky. Beside him stands his female temptress. She makes herself known by placing a hand on the Saint's shoulder. Her demonic origin is revealed only through the small horns on her forehead. Otherwise, she is pictured as a nymph or an ancient goddess dressed in an airy light gown with a veil attached to her hair. Thus, unlike the demons' aggressions taking place in the foreground, the rendering of this scene is exclusively contemporary Italian. Tempesta was well-acquainted with Florentine high Renaissance art with its frequently pictured nymphs and ancient goddesses. The artist's other productions also include several mythological scenes. One of his most popular graphic works was the illustration of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was produced a few years after the *Vita di Sant'Antonii*. A female figure almost identical to Anthony's temptress is seen in the depiction of the sorceress Circe


Fig. 40b. Antonio Tempesta, *The Temptations of St Anthony* (detail) in *Vita S. Antonii Abbatis.*
Fig.43. Antonio Tempesta, *Circe Attempting to Transform Picus to a Bird* (from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) after 1606. Engraving.

attempting to transform Pictus to a bird (fig. 43). The temptress' heathen and mythological origins, thus, accentuate her illicit character. It is an iconographic approach that was introduced in the Italian temptation motifs by the latter half of the sixteenth century, and that would grow to be increasingly popular during the post-Tridentine period.

The engravings in *Vita di S. Antonio Abate* present a traditional composition of primary and secondary scenes commonly seen in book illustrations. Thus, the temptation episode is divided in a manner often seen in older versions of the motif where the carnal temptation was pictured as an independent event. At the latter half of the sixteenth century, Italian artists started to combine the scenes in a fashion that is often seen in the northern European pictorial tradition, where the Saint was, most commonly, pictured battling aggressive demons and monsters while, at the same time, being carnally tempted by lascivious women.

4.3 The Combined Temptation – Paolo Veronese's *The Temptations of St Anthony*

In 1552, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga commissioned young Paolo Cagliari from Verona, known as Veronese (1528–1588) to execute an altarpiece for a chapel dedicated to St Anthony in the cathedral of Mantua. Veronese's painting shows St Anthony being attacked by both a male and a female demon and is probably the first Italian example of a combined temptation episode (fig. 44). The artist has pictured the Saint as an older man with a long grey beard and dressed in a dark red robe. He lies on the ground on his back. Above him, a naked, muscular

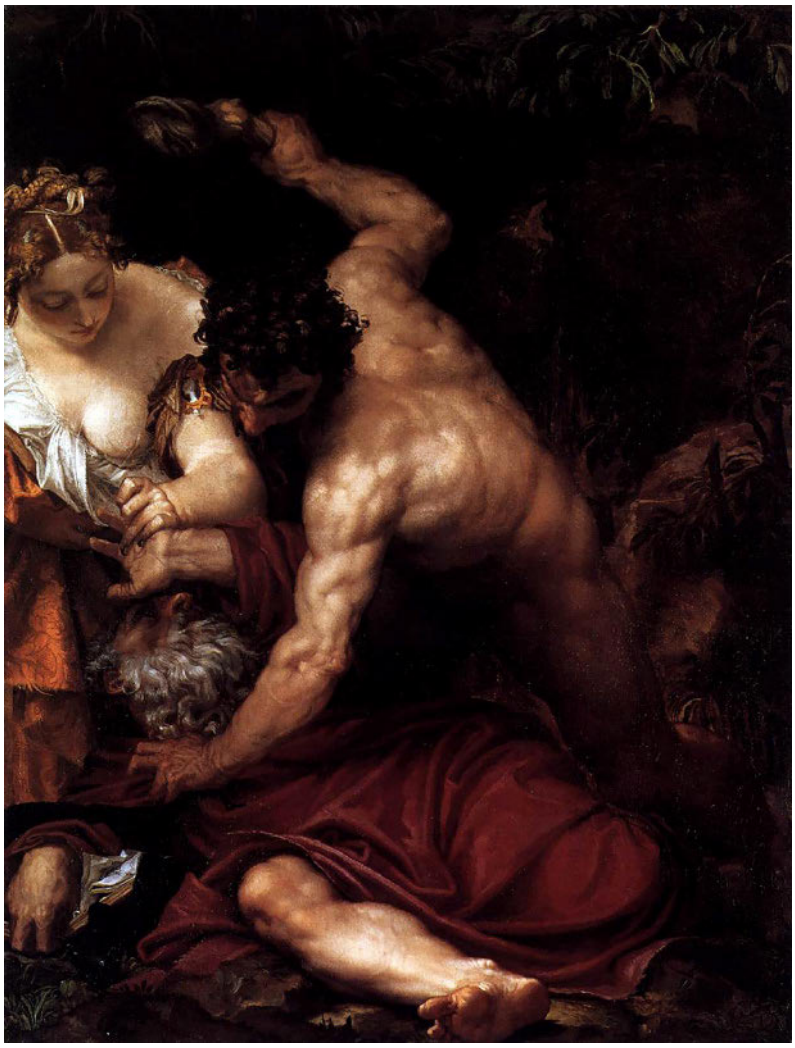

Fig.44. Paolo Veronese, *The Temptation of St Anthony*, 1552. Oil on canvas, 198 x 151 cm.Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen.

male figure is violently pushing him down while threatening to hit him with a club in the shape of a horse's foot. A female demon stands behind the Saint, to the left in the image: she grabs hold of Anthony's hand, thus preventing him from protecting himself against the coming blow. Long black nails pierce the Saint's palm. Her chemise has slipped down, and her left breast is fully exposed. Her blonde hair is neatly braided and, on her forehead and just like on her male counterpart's, she has two small horns. Anthony's face is full of fear as he looks at his tormentors. His bare right leg seems to be pushing out through the image surface, exposing the naked palm of his foot to the spectator.

The other leg is bent backwards in an awkward position as if he was sitting on his knees rapt in prayer when he was attacked. In his right hand, he is still holding two of his attributes, the bible and a bell.

Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga was the younger brother of Duke Federico II of Mantua. After his brother's death in 1540, the Cardinal ruled the city on behalf of his two young nephews, Francesco and Guglielmo, until they came of age. The ducal family's court artist, Giulio Romano (1499–1546), had been in charge of the redecorations and modernisations of the Cathedral of Mantua during the 1540s. Subsequently, Cardinal Ercole ordered Giovanni Battista Bertani, a man with the title Prefect of Ducal Fabrics, to find artists for the decorations of the church's chapels. The budget was low, and Bertani ended up commissioning the paintings from four nearly unknown artists from Verona, one of them being Veronese.[23] Each altarpiece was to represent the Saint to whom the chapel was dedicated, and it fell on Veronese to paint St Anthony the Great. Giorgio Vasari would later praise Veronese's painting as the best of the group when he, in the *Life* of Girolamo da Carpi, discussed the commission of the altarpieces in the Mantua Cathedral. He stated, 'one, which was the best of the group, although all of them are most beautiful, in which Saint Anthony beaten by the Devil in the guise of a woman who tempts him, is by the hand of Paolo Veronese'.[24] The exact position of the painting has long been debated, but it was probably placed in the second chapel to the left until January 1797, when the Napoleonic army removed it and brought it to France.[25]

According to Xavier Salomon, it is probable that Bertani chose the subjects.[26] A preparatory drawing of the painting is preserved in the Louvre. It offers a composition that considerably differs from the final execution and, therefore, also suggests that the patron declined Veronese's first proposal (fig. 45). In the drawing, as in the altarpiece, the Saint is seen lying on the ground: here, he is, however, turned in the opposite direction and away from the spectator. His facial features, therefore, remain hidden and his reaction to the demonic aggressor unknown. Furthermore, the Saint's two tormentors are presented as being far more passive and make the scene less dramatic

23 The other three were Battista del Moro who depicted Mary Magdalene, Paolo Farinati St Martin and Domenico Brusasorci St Margret. Salomon 2014, 60.

24 Cited by Ibid., 61.

25 Ibid., 60f.

26 Ibid., 60.

Fig.45. Paolo Veronese, *Temptations of St Anthony*, 1552. Pen and chalk on paper, 41,4 x 35,6 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

and somewhat tedious. The female temptress' attempted seduction is absent: no interaction between her and the Saint takes place. Instead, she is turning her side to Anthony and merely appears to be gathering his robe. Indeed, it is uncertain if she is even meant to be understood as a carnal enticement. No part of her body that typically would be rendered as sensual, such as breasts, stomach and legs, are revealed. The only exposed part of her body is her right arm and shoulder, which are as massive and muscular as those of the male demon. She appears, instead, to be an additional demon aggressor who, like her male counterpart, is intending to scare and terrorise the Saint physically rather than to seduce him.

Veronese's final execution instead pictures a scene that is both sensuous and violent. Though Veronese has applied the north European tradition of combining the temptations of the Saint in one scene, his composition is entirely different from the northern ones: instead of presenting Anthony's demon aggressors as fanciful beasts, the artist has pictured the male demon in a human form.

What then inspired this iconography? Alessandra Zamperini has suggested that the demon's horse-foot club is a reference to the story where the Saint encounters a centaur. This episode was initially accounted by St Jerome in *Life of St Paul the Hermit* and has often been interpreted as a story of temptation to vainglory. It begins when Anthony, at the age of ninety, believes himself to be alone and the first to dwell in the desert. In a dream, he receives information about his predecessor Paul and, therefore, sets forth to find him. On his journey, St Anthony first meets a centaur and then a small, old man with horns who declares himself to be 'a corpse, one of those whom the heathen call satyrs, and by them were snared into idolatry".[27] The satyr later asked to be saved by the Saint and is converted to Christendom. Zamperini asserts that the artist, by employing this iconography, revealed his artistic skill by managing to include the whole story of the Saint in a new 'synthesis of Storytelling'.[28]

A reference to the centaur episode is partly plausible: the mythological figure of the centaur, half man and half horse, has often been equated with fauns and pagan demons. However, the figure attacking Anthony is not a centaur. One of his muscular human legs is clearly pictured. Instead, I would argue that the demon figure has a more complex meaning. Veronese has, in this example, turned to a contemporary Italian Renaissance iconography that was inspired by ancient Roman mythology. The male and female demons are depicted as a nymph and a satyr. By presenting St Anthony's tormentors as such, Veronese has created a temptation scene that simultaneously is pagan, aggressive and filled with erotic tension, as the relationship between the two mythological figures has often been presented as lascivious. The temptress' cameo brooch, attached to the fabric around her arm, has a miniature profile portrait of a male figure with horns. In the early modern period, such miniatures were often used as personal mementoes and were shared with lovers: in this context, it further accentuates the bond between the two aggressors.

Contemporary images of nymphs and satyrs, with often playful and sometimes even explicitly erotic content, unmistakably inspire this iconography. A number of famous examples can be found, especially in the artistic production of Giulio Romano; in his engraving picturing a satyr carrying a naked nymph on his shoulder (fig. 46), and in the celebrating nymphs and satyrs in the mural decorations of Palazzo Te's Hall of Psyche (fig. 47). Giulio Romano was an artist whom Veronese

27 Cited by Bacchus, Francis in 'Saint Paul the Hermit'.

28 Zamperini 2014, 40.

Fig.46. Antonio Salamanca (after Giulio Romano), *Satyr Carrying a Nymph*, early sixteenth century. Engraving, 19.3 x 12.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum.

Fig.47. Giulio Romano, *Hall of Psyche* (detail), 1532. Fresco. Palazzo Te, Mantua

Fig.48. Paolo Veronese, *Honor et Virtus post mortem floret*, 1562. Oil on canvas, 219 x 170 cm. The Frick Collection, New York.

admired. Salomon observes that the artist probably was acquainted with Romano's work from his hometown Verona, where Romano had provided cartoons for the frescoes of the city's cathedral, later executed by Francesco Torbido. When receiving the Gonzaga commission, Veronese could study a vast number of Romano's work in Mantua and, through them, the Roman art of Raphael and Michelangelo.[29] Veronese's satyr is far more muscular than any male figure in his earlier works, and scholars have often stressed the Michelangelesque manner in which the male aggressor's body is painted. Some critics have even suggested a resemblance between the bearded elderly saint and Michelangelo's Moses in San Pietro in Vincoli.[30] The dramatic pose of the male demon with the raised horse-hooved left hand is, according to Cocke, directly inspired by Rosso Fiorentino's *Hercules and Cacus.* Veronese was probably familiar with the picture through an engraved reproduction by Jacopo Caraglio (1525).[31] The influence undoubtedly also derived from the muscular and grotesque gods in Giulio Romano's frescoes in Palazzo Te and, especially, those in the 'Sala dei Giganti'.

Picturing the temptress with demonic features such as horns and clawlike nails expresses the artist's intention to remain faithful to St Anthony's hagiography. However, her neatly braided hair, scant clothing and armlet also recall contemporary depictions of mythological women by artists such as Titian, Raphael, Correggio and Giulio Romano. A few years later a character similar to the female temptress would also appear in another of Veronese's paintings. The 1562 painting *Honor et Virtus postmortem floret* (Honour and virtue shall flourish after death, The Frick Collections) – sometimes also referred to as *Hercules at the Crossroads* – depicts a man's struggle between virtue and vice (fig. 48). Vice, seen from behind, is dressed in attire resembling that of Anthony's temptress. Her chemise is revealing and decorated with jewellery, and she is wearing her blonde red locks neatly braided. Most importantly, however, her right hand's long claw-like nails are revealed as she raises her hand towards the young male figure. As a personification of vice, this female figure, like Anthony's temptress, demonstrates a deceitful female beauty – attractive and enticing at first glance but slothful and deceiving when one takes a

29 Salomon 2014, 61.

30 Pedrocco 2004, 74 (Cat.7).

31 Cocke 1971, 730.

closer look. The young man in the image appears to have discovered her real character since he turns his back to her and seeks comfort in the arms of virtue.

In Veronese's interpretation of the temptation scene, Anthony battles his temptation alone. No aid seems to be coming his way. Violently pushed to the ground he defends both his chastity and physical body. A similar composition, possibly inspired by Veronese's altarpiece, is applied in a 1595 oil painting by Camillo Procaccini (1551–1629). The image shows St Anthony harassed by two male and one female demon (fig. 49). The scene takes place in a dark space, perhaps a cave. Like in Veronese's image, Anthony is pictured lying on his back on the ground, dressed in his usual monastic habit. The male demons are satyr-like with hairy goat legs, donkey ears and horns. On their backs, both have bat wings, and a long snake is entangled between the hairy legs of the demon seen to the left. Thus, rather than presenting the demons as pagan, mythological figures, Procaccini seems to have placed the demons in the realms of hell, in an atmosphere with flickering warm red light, which illuminates the scene from the left, and a fire burning in the background.

Procaccini's scene is violent and intense. One of the demons is pushing Anthony's head with his big hand while the other is raising a metal-chained whip, ready to hit the Saint. Anthony is not facing his male tormentors; instead, his terrified gaze is directed towards a young blonde female who is reaching towards him. Procaccini is bringing forward the female temptation as the most threatening for the Saint. Her long black claw-like fingernails are silhouetted against her pale skin when she holds her left hand against her chest. She is luxuriously dressed in contemporary attire and lavishly bejewelled; around her neck, she wears a pearl necklace, she has golden earrings in her ears and neatly curled and braided hair that is beautifully decorated with pearls and jewellery – and a pair of red horns.

The painting was probably made as a private commission and was first registered in the collection of Marchese Soranzo Picenardi di Torre at the beginning of the seventeenth century.[32] Procaccini was born in Parma and active mainly in Bologna, but he completed commissions in other larger north Italian cities such as Reggio Emilia, Milano, Venice and Mantua, where he likely also became acquainted with Veronese's altarpiece. Influences from Veronese's other works can

32 Bocchi 2003, 145.

Fig.49. Camillo Procaccini, *The Temptations of St Anthony*, 1590–95. Oil on canvas, 255 x 190 cm. Galleria Nobili, Milano.

also be seen in the painting, mainly in the female figure whose blonde, curled hair and rich bejewelling bears many similarities to Veronese's *Lucretia* (1580–5) and Judith in *Judith beheading Holofernes* (1580–5).

Presenting the Saint in a dark and violent scene in which he was battling his demons alone, informed the spectator of the devious temptations of the world and, likewise, stressed the individual's responsibility to resist them. In a post-Tridentine religious culture, where the invocation of saints had received a new vitality, the

submissive position of the Saint who has been pushed to the ground by demons, as well as the complete lack of a divine presence could, however, be perceived as indecorous. The composition was eventually replaced by others in which the heavenly aid of Christ was given a central position. Nevertheless, the iconography introduced by Veronese, in which the female sensual temptation was combined with the aggressive attack of male tormentors and in which characters from ancient mythology or at least highly inspired by that iconography was included, continued to inspire later interpretations of the episode.

4.4 *The Temptations of St Anthony* by Jacopo Tintoretto

Jacopo Tintoretto's (1519–1594) famous version of the episode constitutes a paradigm shift in the execution of the motif within the Italian pictorial tradition (fig. 50). It shows a composition that fundamentally differs from Veronese's Mantua altarpiece as well as earlier interpretations of the episode. Tintoretto's painting was commissioned two decades after Veronese's, in the 1570s, and clearly shows influences from a newly reformed religious culture and a change of decorum. St Anthony is placed in the centre of the image, surrounded by four demon figures, two male and two female.[33] Here, he is not pictured as the suffering man harassed by demons. Tintoretto's image shows the instance in which the Saint victoriously overcomes the Devil's temptations through heavenly aid. The Saint is standing up and turned to Christ, who is coming towards him with outstretched arms. Instead of picturing Anthony lying on the ground, Tintoretto has placed a demon in that position, at the Saint's feet. It is a clear signal of the Saint's triumph over Evil.

The scene is nonetheless forceful. The demons are aggressively tearing Anthony's loincloth and cloak in opposite directions. The Saint's Bible and rosary are broken and thrown to the ground and, in the foreground, his attribute, a pig, is fleeing the scene. The image unmistakably refers to Athanasius' text, also found in the *Golden Legend*, which describes how Anthony, after having fought the demon for a long time until the Saviour finally came to his aid, asked; 'Where were thou? Why did you not appear at the beginning to make my pains

33 Carlo Ridolfi describes the demons as figures 'in the guise of delicate, elegant women.' without mentioning their male counterparts. Ridolfi 1984 (1642), 44. In her 1911 biography of Tintoretto, Evelyn March saw three of the four demons as females and suggested that they represent Avarice, Impurity and Indolence. March 1911, 109. Echolds and Ilchman, in turn, describe the four demons as 'brutal males, and seductive females'. Echolds & Ilchman, 2009, 147.

Fig.50. Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Temptation of St Anthony,* 1577. Oil on canvas, 282 x 165 cm. Chiesa di San Trovaso, Venice.

to cease?'[34] After which Christ answered him: 'Anthony, I was here, but I waited to see your fight; wherefore since you have endured, and hast not been worsted, I will ever be a succour to you, and will make your name known everywhere.'[35] Accordingly, by including the presence of divine aid in the pictured temptation scene, the spectator was reminded that all temptations remained under God's watchful eye. This notion draws back to St Paul who asserted: 'No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it' (I Cor 10:13).[36]

Rays of golden, holy light beam from Christ and illuminate the nocturnal scene and the two female demons on opposite sides of the Saint. A male demon in the background seems to flee from the holy light and the sudden appearance of the Saviour, turning his muscular back to the spectator.

The painting was made on private commission for the 'cittadino' Antonio Milledonne, who had risen to the rank of Secretary of the Venetian state. It was to be placed on the altar of his burial chapel in San Trovaso in Venice. Milledonne shared his name with the Saint and possibly saw him as his role model of virtue. From his biography, we learn that Milledonne was a righteous man dedicated to defending what he considered decent and correct. In 1545 he was appointed the secretary of the 'Esecutori alla bestemmia'– the magistrate in charge of the protection of morality and decorum.[37] In this light, the motif he chose for the altarpiece of his burial chapel seems obvious for a man who wanted to be commemorated as someone, who like St Anthony, had lived in a world of sufferings and temptation, but managed to withstand them through a steadfast devotion to God.

Tintoretto's first biographer, Ridolfi, refers to the artist's work as 'truly most rare' and opines that the artist 'demonstrated how well he knew to bring his paintings to an exquisite finish when he judged it opportune and when the occasion and the quality of the place required

34 Athanasius, 'Life of St Anthony' Ch. 10.

35 Ibid.

36 Indeed, Paul's assertion was also used by the Tridentine Council on the occasion of condemning clerical matrimony and those who considered themselves unable to live a chaste life even though they had taken the vow of chastity: 'God refuses not that gift to those who ask for it rightly, neither does He suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able.' Waterworth 1848, 193, Session 24 canon 9 (November 1558).

37 Galtarosa 2010.

it'.[38] Echolds and Ilchman find the painting one of Tintoretto's most effective vertical altarpiece compositions: 'Characteristically for Tintoretto, the figures define the space in the painting. Here, they are placed far forward, close to the picture plane […] the use of a different point of view in the upper and lower parts creates the effect of motion.'[39] Indeed, the floating Christ and the laying demon constitute distinct opposites in the composition, divided by the golden light in the centre. Anthony is moving upwards towards Christ, their hands are about to touch, and it is clear that he does not belong in the earthly, violent, carnal world represented by the demons.

Tintoretto's famous image is full of details and has been subject to various interpretations. References to Milledonne in Tintoretto's St Anthony have been emphasised. Pietro Arduino, an early biographer of Milledonne, states that the Saint, pictured as a grey-haired elderly man, is a portrait of the donor.[40] Echols and Ilchman approve of this, as the old man is painted very precisely.[41] Furthermore, Thomas Weigel notes how the holy light illuminates the three middle fingers of the Saint's right hand, which is lifted towards Christ: Milledonne had only a few years earlier become paralysed in his right hand and thus deprived of his ability to write. The illumination of Anthony's hand is, according to Weigel, a direct reference to Milledonne, who, in the image, gets his damaged hand healed by Christ.[42]

The demons in the scene could be understood as depictions of the various vices present in the Saint's temptation. The powerful male demon behind the Saint seems to represent violence, perhaps even the deadly sin of Ira, as emphasised by the whip on his shoulder. The female characters, in turn, represent two different temptations – and deadly sins. The one to the left is holding a thick gold chain in the same hand that is pulling at Anthony's cloak, while the other hand is reaching down for coins in an overfilled cup on the ground behind her. She personifies *Avaritia*, the sin of greed and reminds the Saint of his previous wealth and the comforts of the world.

The second female demon stands out from the group; instead of goat horns like the others, she has a pair of what looks like insect antennae or perhaps rays of light beaming out from the sides of her

38 Ridolfi 1984 (1642), 44.

39 Echolds & Ilchman 2009, 147.

40 Arduino 1635, 39. See also Pallucchini & Rossi 1981, 1:208 cat.370.

41 Echolds & Ilchman 2009, 147; Ilchman 2007, 77.

42 Weigel 2001, 109.

head. Around both arms, she is wearing armlets, quite similar to the one on the temptress in Veronese's painting (fig. 44). This jewellery had been fashionable in the ancient world and was often depicted on *mythological women* such as Venus and other Goddesses in the early modern period. She could, thus, be understood as a reference to the pagan world, worldly pleasures and carnal love. Furthermore, she holds her right hand against her exposed breast. Her gesture is not necessarily erotic; by separating her index and middle finger in a manner reminiscent of a nursing mother, familiar through the *Maria Lactans* motif, she could be seen as an allusion of female tenderness and the family Anthony's ascetic lifestyle had denied him. In her left hand, she holds a ball of fire, which may be interpreted as the fires of lust. She is, thus, standing before Anthony as a manifestation of female temptation, including worldly love, motherhood –and *Luxuria,* the deadly sin of lust.

Fire is also one of the Saint's attributes, with the flames inherent to the disease *erysipelas*, also known as 'St Anthony's Fire'. It was believed that the sick could be healed by prayers directed to the Saint and through invocation of his relics.[43] Fire is, therefore, not only a reference to carnal lust but also a reminder that God granted Anthony the ability to heal disease and to serve as a protector from the eternal fires of Hell. Fire occurs as a recurring theme in the Saint's hagiography, Athanasius compares it to lust, worldly desires, Satan's breath, and 'the fire prepared for the demons who attempt to terrify men with those flames in which they themselves will be burned'.[44] The shade of Anthony's left hand appears in front of the fire as a possible reference to Gaius Mucius Scaevola, a young Roman nobleman who mistakenly killed the scribe of the Etruscan king Lars Porsena instead of the king himself. When caught, he immediately admitted his crime and said that he was as ready to die as he was to kill his enemy. 'Look, that you may see how cheap they hold their bodies whose eyes are fixed upon renown', he said, and then thrust his right hand in the fire and left it there to burn as if it did not cause him any pain at all. The king was so impressed with his bravery that he did not punish him.[45] The myth presents a man in possession of an outstanding will and would, thus, fit a person like Milledonne well.

43 Butler 1963, 109.

44 Athanasius, 'Life of St Anthony' Ch. 24.

45 Titus Livius 12:6-16. See also Weigel 2001, 109.

4.4.1 The Legacy of Tintoretto's Temptation Scene

Tintoretto's highly refined interpretation of the temptation episode was much admired and influenced several later versions of the motif. An example is seen in Paolo Farinati's (1524–1606) interpretation, executed in the early 1580s (fig. 51). As in the San Trovaso altarpiece, Anthony's temptations come in the form of multiple demons. Farinati has emphasised the carnal temptation, as three of the four demons are scantily clad females. Like in Tintoretto's image, the Saint's temptations thus appear as being multifaceted and could also be interpreted as representations of the deadly sins. The only male aggressor pictured is lifting his arm to hit the Saint with a horse jaw – often seen with the deadly sin of Wrath, Ira. He is cheered on by a temptress who is leaning forward with outstretched arms and a bare bosom. She is the only one of the females with small horns on her forehead, thus representing the demon disguised as a woman and sent by the Devil to entice the Saint carnally. Between her feet, a second woman, inspired by the Tintoretto painting, is sitting with her hand in a pot. She is holding some of its contents – possibly money – between her fingers while glancing towards the saint. She is the only one dressed in contemporary attire with a headscarf wrapped around her hair. Nonetheless, her dress is revealing, and her left leg is completely exposed. She allures Anthony with the temptations of the world: luxury, money and illicit female beauty that, like anything else, can be bought. A third temptress is standing to the right, pulling at the Saint's robe. Her body is draped in fluid layers of fabric wrapped around one shoulder in a style seen on mythological and ancient characters. Her hair is neatly braided with a ribbon. She may be understood as a reference to the pagan, ancient and mythological world and, as such, a temptation to immorality and transgression.

Anthony is pictured lying on the ground in a position resembling the one in Veronese's painting; his exposed left leg is outstretched so that the sole is directed towards the image surface. Farinati was well-acquainted with Veronese's painting since the two artists collaborated on several occasions and were both involved in the decorations of the Mantua Cathedral. Different from Veronese's altarpiece, but similar to Tintoretto's, Farinati has included a divine presence in the form of rays of light, beaming down from the top left corner. Though inspired by both Tintoretto and Veronese, Farinati's image is, nevertheless, an independent interpretation of the motif.

Fig.51. Paolo Farinati, *The Temptations of St Anthony*, ca 1585.
Oil on canvas, 87,5 x 68. Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw

Unlike his forerunners, the setting of Farinati's scene is visualised as a place in the wilderness, next to a large boulder – perhaps the rock in which the Saint had his dwelling. The provenance of the painting is unknown, but its rather small scale suggests that it was included in a private collection.

A few years after Tintoretto's execution of the altarpiece in San Trovaso, Annibale Carracci completed an engraving of the painting, which resulted in a broad distribution of the motif and made the work even more celebrated and influential (fig. 52).

In the early 1600s Giacomo Cavedone (1577–1660), who had been one of Annibale's 'incamminati' (students in the Carracci school of art in Bologna), was commissioned to paint an altarpiece on

Fig.52. Annibale Carracci, *The Temptations of St Anthony,* 1582. Engraving, 32,9 x 48,2 cm.

Fig.53. Giacomo Cavedone, *The Temptations of St Anthony*, ca 1605. Oil on canvas, 252 x 155 cm. Chiesa di San Benedetto, Bologna.
Fig.54. Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665-1747), The Temptations of St Anthony, 1690. Oil on canvas, 248 x 175 cm. Chiesa san Nicolò degli Albari, Bologna.

the theme of St Anthony's temptations for a chapel in S. Benedetto in Bologna (fig. 53).[46] It is likely that the patron, Antonio Orlandi, who like Milledonne bore the name of the Saint, chose the iconographic program. The composition of the motive shows clear similarities with Tintoretto's painting in San Trovaso, a fact that seems to have been overlooked by most of Cavedone's earlier scholars.[47] Cavedone indubitably knew Annibale's 1582 engraving of the San Trovaso altarpiece. He could even have seen the original painting since he probably visited Venice at an early stage of his career.[48] In Cavedone's St Anthony altarpiece, the Saint is surrounded by a group of figures that, just like in the san Trovaso altarpiece, violently pull Anthony's clothes in opposite directions. The muscular demon bodies, twisted and turned at angles similar to Tintoretto's, are reduced to three figures – in this case, no female temptress is present. The Saint is, here, fully dressed; he reaches out both arms to the sides and faces Christ who arrives to his aid from the top right corner – a compositional design deriving from Carracci's mirror image engraving. Cavedone, however, altered the cloud on the opposite side of Christ by placing a couple of angels on it.[49]

46 The exact year of the execution of this painting has been under debate; Cicatelli dates the altarpiece to the period before Cavedone's presumed trip to Venice around 1600, hence suggesting a date roughly equal to the church: late 1590s (Cicatelli, 1931, 3f. [my numbering]). Roli dates the altarpiece to about 1603–1604, chronologically around the same time Cavedone worked with the frescoes in San Michele in Bosco. (Roli, 1956, 38) Calvesi instead postpones it to 1606, the year the decoration at S.Benedetto presumably was completed (Calvesi, 1959, 96.) while Emiliani points out that an inscription on the painting, hardly visible today, reads 1607 (Emiliani, notes to Malvasia (1686), 1969), a date later approved by Negro and Roio who, in turn, state that it can be affirmed by the painting's stylistic qualities (Negro & Roio, 1996, 99f.). The work was initially placed in the second chapel to the left, bestowed to Antonio Orlandi in 1598, upon the promise that he would commission its altarpiece. (Bologna, Archivio di Stato, Demaniale, S. Benedetto, 15/4906, first mentioned by Cicatelli, 1931, 3 [my numbering]). After remodelling done in the church in later centuries, the painting has been moved and placed to the right of the main entrance in a dark space which, unfortunately, makes it hard to see today.

47 Cicatelli even declared that 'non c'è traccia di influssi Veneziani' (not a trace of Venetian influences) in the painting, thus concluding that it was executed before the artist's presumable trip to Venice. Cicatelli, 1931, 4 [my numbering]. The clear connection to Tintoretto's altarpiece is, however, affirmed by Giles, who interestingly notes that Cavedone's design depended on Agostino's engravings of Venetian works more than ones. It can for instance also be seen in his 'Holy family with St Francis and John the Baptist' (Bologna Amministrazione provinziale, in 1986 on deposit at the Ospedale Psichiatrico Roncati, earlier attributed to Ludovico) based on a 1582 Carracci engraving after Paolo Veronese's altarpiece 'holy family with Saints, John the Baptist, Cathrine and Anthony Abbot' in S.Francesco della Vigna (1552). Unlike the St Anthony altarpiece, this one is not reversed but is in the same direction as the original painting. Giles (unpubl.) 1986, 69.

48 According to Tiraboschi, the trip would have taken place around 1600, shortly after the death of Annibale. Tiraboschi 1786, p. 361.

49 A further source of inspiration can be seen in Ludovico Carracci's Saint Michael, Saint George and the Princess (San Giorgio e Siro, Bologna). Roli, who first brought it to attention, saw Anthony's tormentors as 'parenti stretti' of the two devils flanking Saint Michael in the upper part of the Carracci painting. Roli 1956, 38. Illustration found in Brogi 2001 cat.159.

An additional *St Anthony Tempted by Demons*, albeit from almost a century later and derived from Tintoretto and Carracci, is found in Bologna, in the altarpiece in the church san Nicolò degli Albari. It was made by a young Giuseppe Maria Crespi (Bologna 1665–1747, fig. 54). Carlo Cesare Malvasia commissioned the painting which highly praised by its contemporary public.[50] Later critics, judged it as one of the most extraordinary examples of Bolognese late baroque painting. Here, the legacy of Tintoretto seems to take a clear path through Cavedone and Ludovico to Crespi. Once again Anthony is pictured standing with outstretched arms while gazing towards Christ, who is floating on clouds in the company of angels and putti just above the Saint. Also here, Anthony is surrounded by three aggressive figures; one is armed with a wooden club and another with a heavy chain, and, yet again, the female temptation is lacking. Crespi has let the saint's body dominate the scene by placing it on the diagonal with the left leg trusted forward. The demons, clearly disturbed by the holy light radiating from Christ, are imaginatively portrayed – not least the grotesque figure in the lower corner whose legs have been replaced by octopus tentacles – but bear witness to the influences from the Venetian and Bolognese predecessors.

4.5 *The Temptations of St Anthony* in a Private Setting

The pictures of the temptations of St Anthony have, to a much greater extent than other temptation motifs, been commissioned by private patrons and placed in private homes, or private chapels. The Saint's temptation episode was multidimensional, as it included many participants. It, therefore, offered a possibility to create a didactic image where the figures represented different vices and sins, such as Wrath/Ira, Lust/Luxuria and Greed/Avarice, and, thus, illustrate what the Saint was resisting. The motif provided a more comprehensive presentation of the difficulties of human existence in the early modern world, and when used as decoration in private burial chapels, the subject could function as a metaphor that glorified a patron who wanted to present the Saint's virtues as their own.

In a private home away from the controlling eyes of the Church, the Temptation motif could be adorned with a stronger sensuous appeal. In some examples, the Saint's temptations are presented as

50 Crespi's son Luigi confirmed, in his 1769 biography, that the altarpiece was presented for an enthusiastic audience in 1690 'e questa si fu quell'opera principalmente che finì di renderlo noto per quel valente professore che egli era', Crespi 1769, 207. See also Viroli 1990, 12f.

exclusively female, thus recalling more traditional renderings of the motif. However, unlike the older version of the motif, where the Saint was pictured as being allured by one sole temptress, the enticing women are often multiple.

An example can be seen in a drawing by Ludovico Carracci (1555–1619), which is today in the collections of the Royal Library of Windsor Castle (fig. 55). Here, the Saint is shown caught in a bacchanal with nymphs and satyrs. Anthony is placed in a verdant landscape, leaning on a slope. He is encircled by a group of young naked women who are resting on the greens around him. The scene is relaxed, almost joyous: a male satyr-demon with horns and hairy legs is the only one harassing Anthony by pulling on his robe. Another satyr is lurking by the Saint with a little monstrous figure resting on the rocks next to him. A group of nymphs are conversing with each other in the foreground, paying little attention to the pious man. Coins from a large overturned urn provide an additional temptation. Little is known about this drawing. There is no other known version of the motif to which the drawing could have served as a sketch. It, nevertheless, provides an almost secular

Fig.55. Ludovico Carracci, *The Temptations of St Anthony*. Ink and chalk on paper, 19,3 x 24,3 cm. Royal library of Windsor Castle.

Fig.56. Domenico Tintoretto, *The Temptations of St Anthony*, 1590's. Oil on canvas, 185 x 111 cm The Harrach collection, Schloss Rohrau, Vienna.

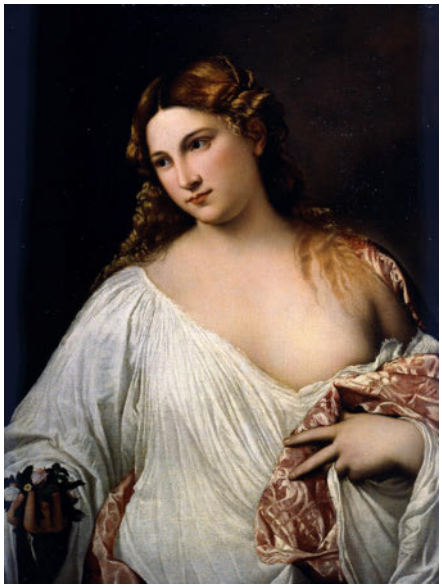
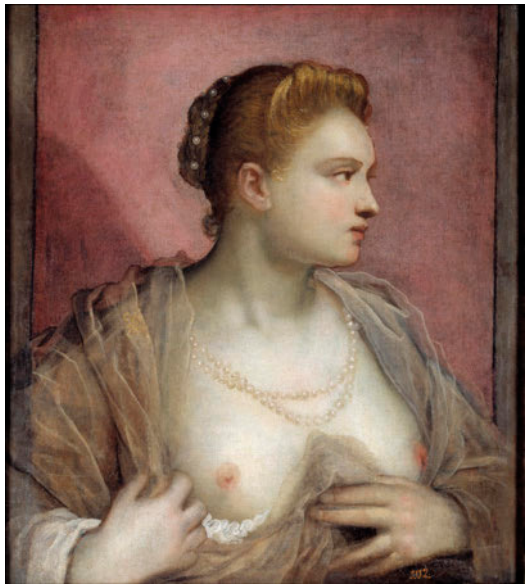

Fig.57. (Left) Titian, *Flora*, 1515-17. Oil on canvas, 79.7 x 63.5 cm.
Galleria Uffizi Florence.
Fig.58. (Right) Domenico Tintoretto, *Lady Revealing her Breast*, 1580-90.
Oil on canvas, 62 x 55,6 cm. Prado Museum, Madrid.

interpretation of the episode and gives yet another example of how the pagan mythological figures provided popular characters for the temptation motif.

In Domenico Tintoretto's (1560–1635) interpretation of the motif, the temptations of St Anthony have become entirely female (fig. 56). Although the image has some clear resemblances to his father's famous San Trovaso altarpiece (fig. 50), Domenico's version is unique in that the Saint is pictured as a young man dressed in the monastic habit of the Antonite order, with a *Tao* on his chest. He is encircled by a group of scantily clad and partially naked women. They are rather aggressively trying to tear off his robe. Even Anthony's pig is forced into the female revelry by a woman seated on the floor between the legs of her friend: while she is pulling at the Saint's robe with one hand, she is embracing the pig with the other. In the foreground, a seated woman dressed in a chemise is gripping her exposed left breast. The gesture could be understood as a reference to the nursing female breast and motherhood. She is, however, pictured as far more provocative than the temptress in the San Trovaso altarpiece: her legs are exposed through a transparent veil, and her arms are draped in a golden luxurious fabric.

The Saint's temptresses are pictured in contemporary late sixteenth-century attire. Their dresses are lavish, and their exposed breasts, shoulders, arms and legs unmistakably turn them into representations of female illicitness, as ascribed to prostitutes and courtesans. The artist has followed a pictorial tradition which was established by Venetian masters like Titian and internationally renowned for its sensual female images. The sixteenth century was a period of wealth for the city of Venice, and the courtesan culture flourished. From the beginning of the century, half-length portraits showing women in the act of undressing or wearing only an undergarment, a so-called *camicia,* became increasingly popular. One of the most famous examples of a half-length portrait is Titian's *Flora* showing a fair-haired young woman in a *camicia* that has slid down her left shoulder to reveal most of her left breast (fig. 57). Draped over her shoulders and waist is a pink damask fabric and, in her hands, she holds a little bouquet of flowers. Her hair is loose – a typical sign for sexual availability. Christine Anne Junkermann has named the image type 'Camicia Portraits' and notes that the Venetian half lengths are among the first works of art since antiquity that portray the female body as a visually erotic object. The images had a high impact on the coming Western tradition of sensual depictions of the female body.[51]

Domenico Tintoretto also earned fame as a result of his portraits of revealingly dressed Venetian women. His painting *Lady Revealing her Breasts* (fig. 58) shows a young woman uncovering her breasts to the viewer. Like St Anthony's temptresses, she is elegantly dressed and, like the seated woman pictured in the foreground of the temptation scene, the young woman in the portrait is draped in a transparent fabric. The erotic tone is further created through details like her laced undergarment enticingly revealed under her bare breasts, her neatly braided strawberry blonde hair and pearl necklace. She is presented as a *Cortigiana honesta* – some have even suggested that she portrays the famous courtesan and poet Veronica Franco (1546–1591).[52] Indeed, beauty and the 'Venetian strawberry blonde' hair was a trademark for the Venetian courtesans and made them a tourist

51 Junkermann 1988, 13.

52 Veronica Franco was so renowned for her beauty and intelligence that when Henry III of France visited the city, he requested not only to meet priests, politicians and famous artists, including Titian and Tintoretto, but also the famous courtesan. Ibid., 306. See also Jones, 1986.

attraction for travelling men from all over Europe.[53] The Venetian strawberry blonde hair also appears on the temptresses. Thus Domenico used a well-established Venetian courtesan iconography in order to present the lascivious and transgressive character of the females tempting a pious young Anthony.

St Anthony is not left alone with his female tormentors. From the upper part of the image, Christ is diving down head first to the Saint's rescue. A group of putti surround the Saviour. They are echoing the circle formation of the women, thus creating a vivacious whirling movement in the composition in which the legs of the woman in the foreground and those of Christ become counterpoints. The patron of the painting is unknown. Its sensuous appeal quite clearly suggests that it was made for a rather private male audience. By placing a group of enticing women in a scene depicting a famous Saint's temptation, the artist created a pretext for erotic imagery, which simultaneously was devotional.

In early modern Italy, the female prostitute was the prototype of a sinful woman, who, like Eve, brought misery and sin. Courtesans also symbolised disorderliness, not only because they lived illicitly, but also because they could climb the social ladder and challenge the class system by exercising a sinful life: some of the courtesans became exceedingly wealthy, wore expensive clothes, and had beautiful homes and servants.[54] It was a widespread perception that wealth came far too quickly to these dishonest women. In Domenico's interpretation, just like in the san Trovaso altarpiece (fig. 49) and Farinati's version (fig. 50), a golden goblet and a casket full of gold and jewellery are placed by the feet of the seated temptress. Picturing riches next to illicit women could be understood as an additional temptation for the Saint: the vice of lust was considered generative and closely linked to pride, social ambition, vanity and Superbia. These were all sins that prostitutes and courtesans were believed to commit and, consequently, were sins that they endeavoured to entice pious men.

53 Keeping up appearance was, and courtesans who were not naturally blonde coloured their hair by washing it with a liquid called *Bionde* – made from orange peel, ashes, egg shells and sulphur – and then bleaching it in the sun. The process took hours, and in order not to get a tan, they covered their faces with a sort of screen hat called *Solana* onto which the hair was spread out. Levi Pisetzky 1966, Cat. 65.

54 Storey 2008, 46f. For a more comprehensive account on the sin Superbia, see also Sekora 1977.

Not surprisingly, there are several other temptation stories, both written and illustrated, recalling incidents where holy men have their virtue tested through the sexual enticements of beautiful young prostitutes. The following two chapters are, therefore, devoted to a number of motifs presenting male saints encountering prostitutes and courtesans. In the Reformed Catholic Church, a strong emphasis was placed on redemption and the granting of forgiveness for sinners. The meeting between holy men and sinful women is, therefore, not only focused on temptation and resistance, but also on the deed of converting sinners.

5 FENDING OFF LASCIVIOUS PROSTITUTES

Prostitutes were perceived as the embodiment of disorder, of unregulated female sexuality.[1] They illustrated what happened when women lived without male control, in short, as Story aptly asserts: 'they epitomized everything that a woman should not be, or do'.[2] Female sexuality was dangerous, not only because of what it could evoke in a man but also because it was believed to be uncontrollable. Images showing male Saints carnally tempted by a female prostitute presented the female as the complete antipode to the pious man: woman, promiscuous and sinful. Indeed, her mere presence highlighted the holiness of the pictured man.

5.1 St Eligius and the Demon Courtesan

Examples can also be found of temptation scenes where the temptress appears as a demon in the guise of a female prostitute. The difference between the two types – the lascivious woman and the demon taking the shape of a lascivious human woman – is somewhat fluid. After all, prostitutes were often referred to as a tool, which the Devil used to entice men so as to send them to eternal torment in the flames of hell.

An oil painting by Giacomo Cavedone shows an encounter between St Eligius (also known as St Eloy or Loy, 588–660) and a female demon (fig. 59). Eligius was a blacksmith and venerated as the patron saint of goldsmiths and other metalworkers.[3] St Eligius' biography, originally composed by St Ouen in the eighth century, is included in *Legenda Aurea*. The story of the encounter between the Saint and a female devil is, however, not found there. Instead, the event is based on a popular legend according to which the Devil one day appeared in the Saint's smithy in the guise of a woman. The trick did not deceive Eligius: in the story as well as in Cavedone's image, the Saint scares the she-devil off by pinching her nose with his red-hot pincers.

Cavedone presents the Saint as an elderly grey-haired and -bearded man, dressed in a red cloak and a brown tunic with pants of the same colour. Around his waist may be seen a belt with a hammer attached

1 Storey 2008, 234.

2 Ibid., 4.

3 Van der Essen 1909.

Fig.59. Giacomo Cavedone, *The Temptations St Eloy,* ca. 1625. Oil on canvas, 215 x 165 cm. S. Maria della pietà, Bologna.

to it, and above the Saint's head hovers a thin, barely recognisable halo. Eligius stands with his legs wide apart. In his right hand, he holds large pincers with which he pinches the nose of the woman standing in front of him. The pain makes her bend backwards. She lifts her hand in a disarming gesture and, thus, reveals her long claw-like nails. The woman's forehead is crowned by two horns. With her luxurious dress and chopines,[4] revealed to us as she lifts the hem of her skirt, she seems somewhat misplaced in such a dwelling. Her colourful gown – bright red bodice, dark red sleeves and a deep yellow skirt over a purple one – indicates that she is meant to be seen as a courtesan. A contemporary spectator would have been well aware that honest women only wore brightly coloured attire during the first years after their marriage, as it was believed that bright colours signalled fertility, sexual availability and

4 Chopines or Pianelle (It) is a type of platform shoes used by women during the fifteenth-seventeenth century. The shoes were popular mainly in Venice where they were worn by both the city's patrician women and courtesans. They indeed also existed in Bologna. Museo medioevale di Bologna has a few pairs in its collection.

beauty. These qualities were essential also for prostitutes when trying to attract male attention.[5] When presenting herself to the Saint dressed as a courtesan, she becomes an intruder, essential to fend off. By pinching the she-devil by her nose, St Eligius ridicules her – he makes her lose face (both literally and figuratively).

Right behind the woman, in the otherwise gloomy room, a fire is burning. A sharp chiaroscuro illuminates the two figures and increases the dramatic feeling. The scene lacks spatial depth; it is as if the figures are set in a shallow niche. Eligius is pictured from the front standing on the same line in the foreground as the female devil, which gives the figures a paper doll-like effect. The Saint's left foot, placed slightly in front of the woman's white shoe, creates only a slight intrusion into the foreground. Cavedone has paid attention to small details (the exquisitely painted embroideries on the temptress' shoe), which along with his vibrant use of colour shows excellent craftsmanship.

The painting may still be seen *in situ* in 'cappella dei fabbri' in Santa Maria del Carmine in Bologna. Originally three paintings by Cavedone, all of which depicted scenes from Saint Eligius's life, were decorating the chapel. Two of them remain in the chapel: the Temptation scene is accompanied by a painting in which St Eligius is healing a horse.[6] The main altarpiece, Cavedone's masterpiece from 1614, was removed from the church by Napoleonic troops in 1796.[7]

Little is known about the commission of the painting as well as the exact year of production, but scholars have generally agreed that the temptation scene along with the horse miracle, are of a later date than the altarpiece.[8] Most recent studies date them to the early to mid-1620s.[9] John Evelyn is the first to mention Cavedone's paintings in

5 Storey 2008, 174.

6 Also, this motive is linked to the Devil: as Eligius thought demons possessed the horse, he cut off the horse's foreleg and re-shod the hoof on the amputated leg while the horse stood on the remaining three legs and watched. He then miraculously re-attached the leg to the horse that immediately was healed.

7 It was brought to Paris and exhibited at the Musée de Napoléon until 1815 when it was returned to Bologna and placed in the recently founded Pinacotec. Giles 1986, 314.

8 Cicatelli suggests that the two lateral paintings were 'forse posteriori' of the altar painting, basing her statement mainly on stylistic grounds. She further refers to a document dated 27 October 1617, which stated that the works on the chapel still were not finished. Cicatelli 1931; 'Archivio di stato, Memoriali dell'Arte dei Fabbri, sec. XIV-XVII.' The document does not give any indication of what remained to be done in the chapel but mentions a resolution made by the 'homini del consiglio' who are giving up their salaries in order to help pay for the finishing of the chapel. Giles, 1986, 395.

9 Roli saw it as improbable that the lateral paintings would have been made more than a few years later than the altarpiece and suggested 1616–17 as dates. Roli 1956, 50. Giles considered them to be stylistically much 7too different from the altarpiece and therefore purposed a date somewhat later than Roli, around 1622–26. Giles 1986, 397.

the 'cappella dei fabbri' when he, in his 1645 Italian travel journal, mistakes them for paintings by Guido Reni ('At the mendicanti are the Miracles of St Eligius, by Reni, after the manner of Caravaggio, but better').[10] About twenty years later, Antonio Masini became the first to attribute the paintings to Cavedone,[11] while the first to comment on the temptation scene was Malvasia in his *Felsina Pittrice*: 'sotto forma d'impudica femmina il diavolo ascoso, la rovente tagliala gli mozza il naso' (The Devil concealed in the shape of an impure woman, the hot cutters sever her nose).[12]

In creating a theatrical and somewhat simplified setup, Cavedone is effectively able to achieve the painting's didactic purpose. The post-Tridentine church encouraged production of images with a message that was supposed to help the spectator to understand and take part in the lives and miracles of the Saints. Cavedone created an image that illustrates a juxtaposition that is often seen in temptation scenes. Here, we are not only faced with the conflict between male and female, holy and unholy, virtue and vice, but also with the contrast between the honest, simple worker and the lascivious, extravagant courtesan. The artist presents the episode in a rather austere yet down-to-earth manner, typical of Bolognese painting at the time.[13]

5.2 Prostitution – a Necessary Evil

The Catholic Church's attitude towards prostitution was ambivalent. Although prostitution was condemned, it was also primarily perceived as a necessary evil through which unmarried men's sinful behaviours could be kept under control. Extramarital sexual acts were sinful, but going to a prostitute, a 'common woman', was tolerated simply because it entitled unmarried men to have sexual relations without disturbing the social order: they did not corrupt a virgin, and they did not dishonour the sacrament of marriage, which officially was made a dogma during the Tridentine Council.[14]

10 Evelyn (1645) 1895, 156.

11 Masini 1666, 15.

12 Malvasia 1678, 135. See also Giles, 1986, 395.

13 Giles 1986, 154.

14 Canon I, session 24. It was, however, not the first time in the history of the Catholic Church that marriage was referred to as a sacrament. 1439 the Council of Florence (the seventeenth Ecumenical Council of the Catholic held in Basel-Ferrara-Florence 1431–1449) declared in the Decree for the Armenians that: 'the seventh sacrament is matrimony, which is a figure of the union of Christ, and the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: 'This is a great sacrament, but I speak 'in Christ and in the Church'. Lehmkuhl 1910.

Seeing prostitution as an unavoidable requisite was not new, and had been expressed already in the patristic literature. St Augustine even declared that sin would increase if prostitution were to be abolished:

> What can be called more sordid, more void of modesty, more full of shame than prostitutes, brothels and every evil of this kind? Yet remove prostitutes from human affairs and you will pollute all things with lust; set them among honest matrons, and you will dishonour all things with disgrace and turpitude.[15]

St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)[16], philosopher, theologian, and the father of the philosophical school known as Thomism shared St Augustine's view on prostitution as the evil guardian of virtue. Not only did it help prevent men from committing the serious sin of adultery with married women, but Thomas also maintained, above all, that it served to stop men from performing homosexual acts. Prostitution was, he asserted: 'like filth in the sea or the sewer in a palace. Take away the sewer, and you will fill the palace with pollution. […] Take away prostitutes from the world, and you will fill it with sodomy.'[17]

5.3 St Thomas Aquinas and the Prostitute

St Thomas Aquinas is one of the most influential authors of texts concerning the Catholic standpoint on sexuality and sin. He was a stern believer in chastity and claimed that the only purpose for marriage was to conceive children without sin and to keep the population free from the dangers of sexual misconduct. He had

15 Augustine On Order (de Ordine) II:4, quoted in Ditmore 2006, 389.

16 Date of birth is based on his date of death. According to Guglielmo di Tocco, the Saint's first biographer, Thomas died his 49th year, having begun his 50th, 'Vita S. Thomae Aquinatis auctore Guillelmo de Tucco' in Prümmer, D. & M.-H Laurent (Ed.) *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis notis historicis et criticis illustrati (Fasc. II)*, (pp. 59–169), 138, cited in Torrell 2005, 1. [Main sources of St Thomas's life are assembled by Prümmer D & M.-H Laurent (ed.) *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis notis historicis et criticis illustrati I-VI* (1911–1936). Thomas' three oldest biographers are Guglielmo di Tocco (–1323), Bernardo Gui (1261–1331) and Pietro Calò (-1348).].

17 St Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula* XVI; See also Ditmore 2006, 389. Indeed, homosexual acts posed a great threat to the social order, also in early modern society; in Renaissance Florence sodomy had been considered such a problem that the city's government in the early fifteenth century established an Office of Decorum, the explicit aim of which was to attract foreign prostitutes into the city in the hope of turning young men away from homosexuality. Inviting foreign prostitutes to Florence was, in turn, an attempt to protect the reputation of Florentine women. Storey 2008, 61. See also Trexler 1991, 380.

successfully resisted the sexual enticements of a female prostitute in his youth and had, thus, been rewarded with immunity to sexual lust, which made him the quintessential virgin. [18]

This temptation episode was first told by St Thomas' first biographer, Guglielmo di Tocco (- c. 1323), in *Ystoria sancti Thomae de Aquinas* (1323). It seems to have been popular, as it exists in several slightly altered versions.[19] As the youngest son of the family, Thomas was, according to the customs of his time, destined for a life devoted to the Church. At a young age, he was sent to the Benedictine monastery of Montecassino, probably with the anticipation that he would one day become its Abbot. In order to obtain a more profound theological schooling, Thomas eventually moved to Naples, where he enrolled at the *Studium Generale* in 1239. Here, the young man quickly became acquainted with Dominican friars who inspired his vocation and ultimately, a few years later, gave him the habit. Thomas' parents, who had not given up their dream of a son as Abbot of Montecassino, were not happy with his decision.

Consequently, Thomas' two older brothers were ordered to capture and place him in custody at the family's castle in Montesangiovanni. The following two years, Thomas was kept in what could be likened to a house arrest while his family tried to persuade him to return to his old life at the Benedictine monastery. As things did not seem to sort themselves out, his brothers eventually decided to take more radical measures: one night a young, beautiful prostitute was sent into Thomas' room in the hope that she would induce him to sin. However, young Thomas did not yield to the woman's lascivious suggestions. Instead, he chased her out of his room with a burning log from the fireplace.

18 A telling anecdote is given by Tocco who, according to his account, had a vision of Thomas on his way back from Avignon (where had been given testimony for Thomas' miracles in the hearings held by the pontificate as a part of the beatification of the Saint in 1321). He told that the Saint when hearing that Toccos he had written his biography, confirmed everything that had been written about the merits of his virginity. […una visione di Tommaso nel corso della quale, dopo avergli dichiarato di avere scritto la sua biografia, avrebbe ottenuto direttamente dalla sua bocca la conferma di quanto aveva scritto in merito alla sua verginità.] Vecchio 2004.

19 Tocco recalls the incident: 'Nam miserunt ad ipsum solum existentem in camera… puellam pulcherrimam, cultu meretrico perornatam, quae ipsum aspect, tactus, ludis, et quibus posset aliis modis, alliceret ad peccandum. Quam cum vidisset… et sentiret in se carnis insurgere stimulum, … accepto de camino in spiritu titione, iuvenculam cum indignation de camera expulit, et accendes in spiritus fervore ad angulum camerae, signum Crucis in pariete cum summitate titionis impressit'. In other more popular versions, the woman is said to be of Saracen origin.

Fig.60. Francesco Gessi, *The Temptations of St Thomas Aquinas*, ca 1630. Oil on canvas, 93 x 132,5 cm. Museo Civico di Reggio Emilia.

The instance is eternalised in a painting attributed to the Bolognese artist Giovan Francesco Gessi (1588–1649, fig. 60). In the painting, believed to have been made around 1630, St Thomas is seen holding up a burning log so as to reach the level of the face of a fleeing and terrified young woman. He is pictured as a young man dressed in the black and white habit of the Dominican order. In the background, we get a glimpse of a fireplace and a doorway. The event appears to be taking place indoors. Naked, grey stonewalls and the man's austere, simple garment constitute a striking contrast to the woman's colourful gown, which flows and wrinkles around her body as she turns away from the man and his burning log. With both arms out-stretched in opposite directions, the young man stands in a posture, which, by taking the shape of a cross, is stable and firm. A small radiating sun on his chest identifies him as Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Little is known of the painting's provenance. It was initially believed to be the work of the young Bolognese painter Giovanni Maria Vanni (1636–1700) but was later reattributed to Gessi by Daniele Benati, who recognised several features typical to Gessi's style. Though the painting has close references to his former teacher, Guido Reni, Benati notes that it has a different variation of light and darkness and a linear, almost mannerist rhythm. He places the

painting in the middle phase of Gessi's artistic carrier, in the 1630s, when the bonds to Reni had loosened, and more personal stylistic and formal solutions had developed.[20]

While the story seems to have been well-known in the written tradition,[21] the episode appears to be rare in the early modern visual culture. Although there exist a few prior versions of this motif, from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries,[22] I have only managed to locate one other Italian seventeenth-century interpretation.[23] The Milanese artist Giuseppe Nuvolone (1619–1703) made the oil painting in question, possibly in the 1670s (fig. 61).[24] St Thomas is also here seen dressed in the monastic habit of the Dominican order, but he is pictured as being older than in Gessi's interpretation, as a middle-aged man. Shown in profile the Saint is standing by an open book and turning towards a young, richly dressed and bejewelled woman. Her gaze is directed toward the glowing piece of wood that the Saint is threatening her with. She is gathering her gown and preparing to escape. The scene has a down-to-earth quality; the softly glowing wood in the Saint's hand seems to be taken right out of the stove.

20 See Benati 1989, for an extensive account of the attribution and dating.

21 Indeed Torrell refers to it as 'the much-talked-of episode of the prostitute', but then leaves out an account of the actual events. Torrell 2005, 10.

22 An example is a panel painting in Gemäldegaleri in Berlin, attributed to fourteenth-century painter Bernardo de Daddi, showing the Saint kneeling in prayer. Two angels stand behind him and gird him with the cord of chastity, while the prostitute is seen fleeing in the background. Kaftal mentions three additional images depicting the subject: One showing the Saint tempted by the prostitute while being imprisoned in a dungeon (Fifteenth-century South Italian school of painting, whereabouts unknown). Kaftal, Iconography in Central and South Italian Schools of Painting, Florence 1965, 1087ff, and two others that shows the Saint being girded with the belt of chastity by angels: a predella (Ligurian school early sixteenth century) in S. Domenico, Taggia, (Kaftal 1985, 639ff), and a panel painting (Venetian school late fourteenth century) today in the collections of Zurich Kunstmuseum, (Kaftal 1978, 973ff).

23 A Spanish interpretation, almost contemporary to Gessi's painting, was made by Diego Velazquez in 1631, today in the Cathedral Museum of Sacred Art in Orihuela. Here, St Thomas is kneeling on the floor by a fireplace supported by angels. A burnt, reeking log lies on the floor before the Saint, and in the background, a woman is seen fleeing through an open door. According to Tocco, Thomas fell into a deep sleep shortly after the escape of the woman. In his dream two angels came into his room and girded him with the cord of chastity, thus eternally liberating him from his sexual instincts and enabling him to dedicate the rest of his life to his faith effortlessly. Indeed, in the Velasquez version, a second angel is standing behind the Saint, holding the chastity cord, a white ribbon, between his hands.

24 The image has hitherto only been published by Filippo Maria Ferro in *Nuvolone, una famiglia di pittori nella Milano del 600'*. A year for the production of the painting is not given, but Ferro notes that Nuvolone had earlier worked for the Dominican order in Cremona. In 1671 the artist made a large-scale oil on canvas picturing a miracle of St Domenico, commissioned by for Father Antonio Maria Bergonzi and the San Domenico Church in Cremona. Ferro 2003, 257f.

Fig.61. Giuseppe Nuvolone, *The Temptations of St Thomas Aquinas*, ca 1670. Oil on canvas. Unknown location.

The effect is much less dramatic than Gessi's interpretation with the burning torch. The dark background and lack of spatial depth create an intimate atmosphere, as the focus is entirely placed on the couple and the silent conflict taking place between them.

In 1567 St Thomas Aquinas was declared – as the first saint in history – 'Doctor of the Church' by Pope Pius V. Even though scholastic Theology, especially in its Thomist forms, had revival decades before the Catholic Reformation, the popularity of Thomas got a boost after this elevation.[25] Thus, it is possible that the Saint's new popularity caused Gessi and Nuvolone to take up this relatively rare subject. Picturing him successfully withstanding an enticing young woman accentuated his status as an exemplary virgin and a promoter of chastity.

5.4 The Dangers of Prostitutes and Prostitution in Seventeenth-Century Moral Images

Post-Tridentine Catholicism's attitude toward prostitution remained mostly unchanged from what it had been in earlier centuries. In fact, the restriction and outlaw of prostitutes were much harsher in non-Catholic areas: while brothels were closed in places like London, Amsterdam and several German cities, the Catholic Church's actions taken against prostitution were far slower and much less dramatic.[26]

25 Malley 2015, 41.

26 Storey 2008, 239.

It should be noted that prostitutes generated a significant income for the local government, as all prostitutes were forced to register and pay taxes. Bigger Italian cities such as Florence, Venice and Bologna even set up special government offices to control prostitution and register its prostitutes.[27]

Prostitutes were divided into two groups: *meretrici oneste* (honest prostitutes) – registered prostitutes who paid tax and were allowed to own property, and *meretrici disoneste* (dishonest prostitutes) who sold sex in secret. It demonstrates the importance of controlling and labelling women. A woman was required to be either an honest woman or an honest prostitute. It was essential that there were no grey zones.[28]

Gender historians have identified the post-Tridentine era as a period in which civic and ecclesiastical authorities strongly reinforced patriarchal control over women. The female independence of action was limited both in public and religious spheres. Women were placed under stricter male control, which imposed a sterner sexual morality and a new behavioural.[29] The Church's attitude towards male sexuality was far more liberal and forgiving. It was well understood that not everyone could be expected to live in celibacy. Marriage was, therefore, strongly encouraged. In cities such as Rome, however, where the number of unmarried men largely outnumbered that of unmarried eligible women, prostitution became a tolerable outlet for male sexual desire.[30]

Acknowledging male sexuality highlighted the purity of the chaste saints who, unlike most of the laymen, could control themselves and their desires. Indeed, the more the ordinary men sinned, the more pious the celibate virgin saints appeared. In this way, the clergy became an ever-clearer celibate elite, that now, even more than before the Tridentine Council, was expected to carry out an entirely chaste life.

27 Ibid., 2f.

28 Ibid., 116f.

29 Honourable women were to be controlled by their families, or if they lived in convents, by the Church's authorities. The Tridentine Council's decree of the enclosure of female convents was reaffirmed by Pope Pius V's bull C. pastoralis 1566. It was a decision motivated by the conviction that the outside world had negative influences on women in religious orders, endangering their purity and chastity. The nuns' earlier relatively free mobility and possibility to engage in social work, such as helping the poor and sick, ended. Their lives were greatly restricted as they were brought under the close supervision of male orders and confessors. The number of women in convents increased dramatically during the sixteenth century, resulting in an increased number of guarded women. In Venice, a reported 54% of the city's patrician women lived in convents in 1581. However, convents were merely for the well-off, as they, like marriage, required a dowry. Ibid., 237f.

30 There were reportedly periods when there were as many as 150 to 178 men per 100 women in the city of Rome. Also, many of the men were single while most of the women were married. Sonnino 1994, 21.

As we have seen, images of beautiful, young courtesans were a recurring element in the pictorial tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Also, during the period, an increased number of 'moral' literature and images were produced through which laymen were warned against the sins and transgressions brought upon society by prostitutes.[31] In some regards, these moralist messages could be ascribed a similar function to the Temptation motifs – as a warning against sexual transgression. Unlike the Temptation motifs, which show victorious episodes from the lives of different male saints and which were aimed predominately at an audience of men, these moralising verses and popular songs, sometimes included in illustrated broadsheets, specifically advised women to avoid promiscuous behaviour and prostitution.[32] Storey notes that, unlike many other images of prostitutes, the illustrated broadsheets were not pornographic, but served a didactic purpose. Often the prints illustrating moral verses were hung in taverns and private homes.[33]

An example of a broadsheet is *La vita infelice della meretrice compartita ne dodeci mesi dell'anno lunario che non falla dato in luce da Veriero astrologo* (The Unhappy Prostitute Compared to the Twelve Months of the Lunar Year, 1692, fig. 62). It presents the story of a woman who starts her year with dancing and enjoyments but then ends it sick in a hospital. It was probably intended to serve as a reminder for women to stay away from prostitution and for prostitutes to change their lives before it is too late. Storey asserts that the critique was particularly harsh against courtesans and wealthy prostitutes.[34] By becoming rich and climbing the social ladder through the use of their bodies, the women were indirectly undermining the position and power of wealthy men – their clients. A number of the moralising stories also include accounts of prostitutes and courtesans who were victims of different kinds of violence. A poem by Venireo, a Venetian nobleman, tells a gruesome story of how the courtesan Zaffetta was mass raped after refusing sex with one of her former clients/lovers. The poem was probably meant as a warning concerning the consequences a woman who exercises (sexual) power over men had to face. Other

31 Storey 2008, 47.

32 Often the stories were sung or told by professional storytellers (Cantastorie or Cantimbanchi) in public places. In that way, the message reached even the illiterate, i.e. the vast majority of the early modern Italians. Ibid., 13.

33 Ibid., 24.

34 Ibid., 81.

Fig.62. Unknown artist, *La vita infelice della meritrice comparata ne dodici mesi dell'anno lunario che non falla dato in luce da Veriero astrologo* (The Unhappy Life of the Prostitute Compared to the Twelwe Months of the Lunar Year), 1692. Engraving.

stories recalled young men who courted prostitutes, fell in love with them and then were ruined forever. Often they got diseases (Syphilis) from their illicit lovers.[35]

The post-Tridentine moralising texts and images concerning prostitution essentially served to reassert men's power over women (prostitutes). Prostitutes and courtesans often referred to themselves as 'free women', as they were economically independent. Venireo's poem, instead, clearly states that female sexuality and freedom always remained under male control. Men that did not manifest male power, but instead chose to court prostitutes, fell in love with them and, thus, showed weakness in character, were ridiculed. In conclusion: prostitution was a danger for everyone – prostitutes included.[36]

5.5 The Many Temptations of St Philip Neri

Even though many prostitutes worked in brothels, the situation for some started to change from the beginning of the sixteenth century, when it became more common for prostitutes to establish themselves as independent workers.[37] Some of them became wealthy and were

35 An example is seen in 'The life of the Rake' (Vita del lascivio c.1660 Venice), an illustrated broadsheet that presents the destiny of a young man who is engaged with prostitutes and finally dies poor and sick. Kunzle, 1973, 281f.

36 Storey 2008, 53.

37 Junkermann 1988, 314.

often considered a more significant threat to the moral order than the poor ones working in brothels. The most successful prostitutes were often women who were considered beautiful – they could ask for more money from their clients and, thus, had greater possibilities to establish themselves as courtesans. In other words, it was their beauty and not predominantly the wealth of these women that posed the most significant threat. It was also primarily young prostitutes who were considered beautiful which were offered a place in one of the *Case di Convertiti* – homes for converted prostitutes.[38]

In the stories that referred to male saints being induced by prostitutes, the temptresses are never presented as poor, desperate women working in brothels. Instead, the beauty and wealth of these women are stressed through both text and image. They are shown dressed in luxurious clothing and, if they invite the Saint to their home, they live in beautiful quarters. Examples of such stories are found in the *Life* of St Philip Neri (1515–1595). The text, written by Neri's former disciple, Antonio Gallonio, includes several incidents in which the Saint encounters beautiful and lascivious Roman prostitutes.

Known as the third apostle of Rome, Neri was engaged with society's most vulnerable: the poor, the sick and the outcasts. He visited their homes and dwellings. He converted criminals and made friends with 'the most sinful of men' without ever being spoiled by their evil. 'Like Jesus, he was equally able to enter into the human misery present in the noble palaces and the alleys of Renaissance Rome', Gallonio concludes.[39] However, when it came to prostitutes, St Philip avoided them determinedly. In fact, Neri avoided associating with all women as much as he could, as he saw them as a considerable threat to his chastity. Despite this, his virginity was put on trial several times by a number of illicit women.

Often these temptations were believed to have been provoked by the Devil. Gallonio asserts that sinful women (he refers to them as whores) were not only a threat to male chastity but also closely associated with the Devil. Neri was well aware of the Devil's existence: he was one of the most outstanding mystics of the post-Tridentine era and was noted for his spirituality. He reportedly underwent numerous ecstatic religious experiences during which the Devil and demons occasionally harassed him.

38 Indeed, Storey further asserts that in 1566, Pope Pius V took rather drastic measures in order to control prostitution in the eternal city: in addition to instructing all prostitutes to attend mass, he explicitly ordered the most beautiful ones (worth more than 200 scudi) to either convert or marry. Storey 2008, 74.

39 Gallonio, 2005 (1600), II:11.

Two of the Saint's temptation incidents are included in Luca Chiamberlano's 1622 illustrated *Life of Saint Philip Neri.*[40] As often in illustrated books, the image presenting Neri's temptations shows two separate events (fig. 63).[41] The first one, pictured in the foreground, shows an incident which reportedly took place when the Saint was in his twenties. Unsuccessful in his earlier attempts to lure St Philip with the help of demons, the Devil decided to incite envy against the pious man's virginity by a group of young men. As a result, they locked the Saint into a room where two female prostitutes were hiding. As St Philip was unable to escape, he began to pray and asked God to protect his virginity. His prayers were heard: the women felt such discomfort by the situation that they did not dare to even look at the pious young man, let alone approach or talk to him.[42]

Chiamberlano's illustration shows a cross-section of a house. In a room to the left, St Philip is seen kneeling in prayer. A bed is seen in a room behind him. It is perhaps the one he was supposed to lie in with the elegantly dressed woman who is taking refuge through the door. Unlike the written account, she appears to be alone. On the other side of the wall an older woman, perhaps her servant, and two elegantly dressed men are waiting. The man at the front looks at the fleeing female with a determined face and is pointing upward with his index finger. Unlike her, he seems to have recognised the divine presence and is indicating towards heaven so as to confirm it.

The event is most likely taking place in the fleeing woman's own home. Prostitutes and courtesans, as a rule, entertained their customers and friends in their private dwellings.[43] The men who locked St Philip into the room with the prostitute, and who are pictured waiting outside, are, therefore, not a casual group of young men. They are her friends and, as such, probably also her customers.

40 Bacci, P.G., *Vita del beato p. Filippo Neri fiorentino fondatore della Congregazione dell'Oratorio. Raccolta da' processi fatti per la sua canonizzazione*, Rome 1622.

41 The text under the scene reads, 'Gli Furono intromesse in camera alcune done di mala vita, egli in oration, non hebbero ardire nè meno di parlare, onde confuse si partirono: si come restò confusa una famosa meretrice che machinò alla sua pudicità.' [Several bad women were brought to his room and he threw himself into prayer. The women did not speak and, confused, they departed. One of the prostitutes schemed against his modesty.]

42 Gallonio, 2005 (1600), Ch. II:11.

43 Storey, who has studied sixteenth-century inventories of prostitutes' belongings, reports that even women living in simple conditions often owned many chairs. It indicates that they could entertain large amounts of guests in their houses, or at least, larger groups of people could be sitting in their homes. Storey 2008, 190.

Fig.63 Luca Ciamberlano, *The Temptations of St Philip Neri* in *P.G, Bacci Vita del beato p. Filippo Neri fiorentino…* Rome 1622. Engraving, 31,5 x 22 cm.

When one of them is shown recognising the holy presence by pointing towards the sky, we are led to understand that he is one of the many sinful men that Neri successfully managed to convert during his life.

Neri's urge to convert sinners is emphasised even more explicit in the second temptation episode, which is included as a smaller secondary scene in the background of Chiamberlano's illustration. St Philip is seen walking down a staircase with his palms pressed

together in prayer. His holiness in accentuated through a radiant halo around his head. A woman is standing on top of the stairs with a stool in her hands that she is pointing at the Saint. This episode took place almost fifteen years later. A beautiful prostitute called Cesaria – a woman who according to Neri's biographer was 'entangled in the Devil's nets' – assists the Devil by tempting Neri.[44] Unlike in the earlier prostitute episode, Cesaria here plays an active role. Gallonio recalls how she followed the Devil's suggestion and participated in a bet: a group of young men offered her a large sum of money if she succeeded to seduce St Philip. 'So what did the woman decide, *what did the Devil suggest to her*?' (italics mine) Gallonio asks rhetorically and, after that, describes how she called for St Philip through a messenger, pretending to be dying and expressing a wish to confess her sins. She begged the pious man to help a soul in danger. St Philip's compassion for sinners overcame his fear of prostitutes: after all, he wished for salvation for all humankind and was content that he was offered an occasion to save her soul. Happily unaware that it was an evil plot, he entered her house:

> But hardly had Philip climbed the stairs before the evil woman, that instrument of the Devil, cast off all modesty and shame and exposed herself to him naked; save for a veil drifting across her body, hoping that it would fall off attractively in front of him and achieve her object. But as God willed, and as He provided His assistance, Philip's simplicity overcame her cunning, his chastity her lust.[45]

This time, St Philip was able to escape; he was determined that sexual temptation was the sole temptation that could not be resisted through confrontation. Cesaria was furious and threw a piece of furniture after the Saint, hoping to kill him. St Philip, however, remained unscathed.[46] The episode also shows how the social sphere around a prostitute included far more vices than that of fornication. A prostitute entertained her guest with drinking, music, dancing, singing and, as is presented here, gambling, as Cesaria participates in a bet.

Chiamberlano's decision to place the episode with Cesaria in the background must have been made solely for compositional reasons. The scene is given far more importance in Neri's biography than the

44 Gallonio 2005 (1600), II:11.

45 Ibid., IV:36.

46 Ibid., IV:36.

one presented in the foreground. Indeed, it was one of the most critical episodes in the Saint's life, as his virtuous action was reward generously by God, who granted him full immunity from carnal desires for the rest of his life. Neri valued his virginity to such an extent that, on his deathbed, he even told his confessor that from all the gifts God had given him, his virginity and immunity from carnal passions were his most treasured.[47]

St Philip Neri was canonised by Pope Gregory XV (1621–1623) in 1622. He was, thus, highly relevant when the Oratorian Pietro Giacomo Bacci published the illustrated book during the same year. Chiamberlano's image cycle included text references and constituted the most extensive supplementary material to the biography of the Saint. The book was highly popular; it was republished multiple times until the nineteenth century and came to function as an iconographic foundation for subsequent figurative elaborations.[48] As a founder of the Congregation of the Oratory, St Philip gathered a significant amount of devoted followers during his life. After his death, a vast production of pictures and portraits of St Philip were produced, showing that there was a high demand from devotees of images of the holy man. The post-Tridentine Church favoured episodes from the lives of saints recalled both in literary and illustrated form. Chiamberlano's illustrated stories were based on a combination of famous anecdotes, historical facts and testimonies given by Neri's disciples and followers. The emphasis was put on miracles, pious deeds, mystical abductions, remarkable incidences and intense spirituality. It was aimed at a devoted audience who, through the pictures, could study Neri's life and be inspired by it. As such, it also functioned as a moral guide for the religious.

St Neri's prostitute temptation stories highlighted an important action, namely that of converting sinners. It formed an essential part of the Catholic belief and something that was emphasised even stronger after the Tridentine Council. It could also be understood as a reaction against the Lutherans' stressing the significance of original sin and their belief that man remained a sinner despite baptism and good works. Instead, the Catholic's underlined that free will made man responsible for his destiny and that penitence was an essential part of active Christian life. The Tridentine Council affirmed that someone asking for forgiveness earned justification:

47 Ibid., IV:37.

48 Vettori 2014, 85.

> Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend, that so he may be an heir according to hope of life everlasting.[49]

Helping someone to repent his or her sins, earn justification and lead a more pious life was considered a highly virtuous act. Furthermore, if the transgressor happened to be a prostitute, the act of assisting her towards a more pious life achieved two goals at once, as it also meant preventing her from leading more men into sin. Indeed, to convert a prostitute and make her into an honest woman was considered such a rewarding act that in seventeenth-century Rome, male prisoners were even offered amnesty if they promised to marry a prostitute.[50]

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Franciscans introduced a new iconographic theme in which St Francis of Assisi met, resisted and converted a female prostitute. In the following, this motif, which hitherto has remained largely overlooked by earlier scholars, is examined.

49 Waterworth 1848, 34, 'Decree concerning justification' Council of Trent Session 6 Ch. VII (January 1547).

50 Storey 2008, 117 n. 8.

6 DEPICTING EXEMPLARY CHASTITY – THE TEMPTATION OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

St Francis of Assisi became one of the most highly celebrated saints of the post-Tridentine Church. Presented as the most Christ-like man that ever walked on earth, humble in spirit and striving to achieve a perfect union with Christ, he embodied the highest ideals of the new Catholic spirituality. During his lifetime Francis had been determined to live in the world among ordinary people in order to preach the word of the Gospel as effectively as possible. He encouraged a personal relationship between man and God, underlining the equality of all humans in relation to the Creator. Francis saw the Gospel as a way of life; he used penitence as a step towards spiritual freedom and prayer as a means of communion and worshipping God. These were all spiritual ideals emphasised by the post-Tridentine Church, a fact that made Francis an important role model.

Although the Saint had led a somewhat libertine life in his youth, St Francis' biographer, St Thomas of Celano, affirmed that Francis remained a virgin until his death. In fact, St Thomas declares that Francis was so restrictive with his female relations that he actively avoided talking to women. If he was requested to do so, the holy man never looked them in the face. He talked in a loud voice so that everyone around could hear what was said and he tried to keep the conversation as brief as possible. Francis was convinced that shunning female relations was the best way to avoid falling for carnal temptation. He asserted that, except for a few 'approved men' (himself included), the act of associating with women without being infected by their impurity was as easy as '[walking] in the fire without burning the soles of one's feet' (Proverbs 6:28).[1] The phrase appears to be illustrated in a drawing (fig. 64) by the French artist Jacque Stella (1596–1647), who was active in Italy during the years 1616–1634. Francis is pictured standing in a furnished room with his bare feet in a fire. He is in the company of a richly dressed woman who is lifting her hand in a shocked gesture. She seems to have intruded into the holy man's private chamber: a pile of books and a skull are seen on a table behind her, and one of the images pinned on the walls shows

1 Thomas of Celano 2000, (Ch. 78) 322.

Fig.64. Jacque Stella, *The Temptations of St Francis*, first half of the seventeenth century. Ink and watercolour on paper, 15,1 x 18,1 cm. Graph. Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

across. Although smoke emerges from the fire under Francis' feet, the Saint is indeed unaffected by the heat. He is looking upwards with an adoring countenance while rays of light beam around his head and form a halo.

Another motif, not unlike the scene depictured by Stella, shows a naked Francis lying on a stack of burning charcoal and in the company of a female prostitute. It started to appear in Franciscan imagery in the latter half of the sixteenth century – first in a printed illustrated *Life* of Saint Francis and later in oil paintings and murals. It is known as *The Exemplary Chastity of Saint Francis* (La castità essemplaria di San Francesco) or *The Temptations of Saint Francis* (Le tentazioni di San Francesco). The motif forms part of the new iconography, which developed as a result of the post-Tridentine devotion of St Francis. The focus was placed on the Saint's mystical experiences, which often were related to his dedication to and identification with Christ's passion, and on presenting Francis' different virtues: his poverty, humility and chastity.[2]

2 Prosperi Valenti Rodinò 1982a, 159.

6.1 Francis' Encounter with the Prostitute – a New Motif

The Saint's meeting with a lascivious prostitute was likely introduced in Italy through an illustrated version of *Vita di San Francesco* (*The Life of Saint Francis*), published in Antwerp in the 1580s with engravings by the Flemish artist and publisher Philippe Galle (1537–1612, fig. 65) [3]. Unlike images included in earlier manuscripts, which primarily served a decorative purpose, Galle's illustrations are believed to represent the first set of book illustrations created to glorify Francis' life and miracles and to popularise the teachings of the Franciscan order.[4]

The Franciscans used the graphic arts to spread the ideological message and iconographic themes that better summarised the official ethic-religious spirit of the order and the reformed church. They favoured scenes that recalled episodes from Francis' legends and that focused on the life and miracles performed by him rather than relying on conceptual elaborations, something that Simonetta Rodinó claims was unique for the order in comparison with other religious groups.[5]

Galle's images present a series of scenes that were lived and experienced by Francis, *per exempla*, and represent the Saint's different virtues – purity, chastity, sanctity and poverty – with primary scenes in the foreground and secondary scenes in the background.[6] The reader is introduced to the wonderful story (*admiranda historia*) of Francis' life, encouraged to reflect upon it and invited to follow the same difficult road filled with temptation and challenges.

The image cycle exists in two editions. The first version included 16 engravings and was published in Antwerp. The exact date is unknown, but according to Servus Gieben, the publication must have been made before 1582.[7] In 1587 a second and revised edition was published, now

3 Servius Gieben has studied the engravings of Galle's and asserts that it was published twice. The first edition was probably published in 1582 and contains 16 engravings. Five years later, in 1587, a revised edition with 20 engravings was published. A couple of scenes were retouched, some eliminated, and others added. The scene depicting Francis and the prostitute remained untouched apart from an addition in the inscription and a minor change in detail in one of the secondary scenes. The engravings presented here are from the first edition. Both editions are found in Museo Francescano's (MF) archive. [MF V_BA_2a and MF V_BA_2b]. See Gieben, 1977.

4 Gieben, 1977, 62.

5 Prosperi Valenti Rodinò, 1982a, 159.

6 Ibid.

7 Serves Gieben revised his earlier presumption that the first edition was published 'soon after the defeat of the Calvinists in Antwerp on 17 August 1585 by Alexander Farnese, possibly to celebrate the re-entry of the friars to the city' (Gieben 1977, 43), when he came across A.J.J Delen's *Oude Vlaamse graphich. Studies en aantekeningen* 1943, Antwerpen/Amsterdam, P. 144 note 166, where a document of payment was made on 21 May 1582 for two copperplates illustrating Vita S.ti Francis is noted. Therefore, an ante quem for the dating of the first edition can be determined. Prosperi Valenti Rodinò 1982a, 164, note 34. See also Hoeberichts, 2006, 138, note 76.

consisting of 20 engravings, of which 14 are revised versions of the first edition's original plates.[8] Jan Hoebericht has counted 85 larger and smaller scenes depicted in the second edition.[9] Ten of these deal with Francis' different temptations and encounters with the Devil and four of them refer directly to the Saint's carnal temptations. The theme of Francis and the Devil is given far more attention in Galle's engravings than in its medieval sources and earlier Franciscan imagery. However, in the primary scene of the plate *Castimonæ ac virginitatis exempla* (Examples of Chastity and Virginity, number 6 in the first edition and number 9 in the second) illustrating Francis meeting with a prostitute, the Devil is neither mentioned nor depicted. Four scenes are engraved on the same plate, each marked with a letter: A) The encounter with the prostitute B) 'The temptation in the Snow', where Francis creates a family of snow in order to convince himself that he is aimed for a life of chastity (see p.27) C) 'Francis' Encounter with the Bishop' where the Saint is rejecting his father's wealth by undressing his worldly clothes and D) 'The Miracle in the Snow' where Francis manages to pick blooming flowers in January, a reference to the Saint's immaculate character.

The Latin text under the scene refers to Bonaventure's *Legenda Maggiore*, written in 1263, and to Minorite brother Bartholomew of Pisa's (also known as Bartholomew Rinonico, died in 1401) *De Conformitate Vitae B. P. Francisco ad Vitam Domini Nostri Iesu Christi* (hereafter referred to as *De Conformitate*) from 1399.[10] *De Conformitate* includes two different versions of the Saint's meeting with a prostitute: one of which is also found in *I Fioretti di san Francesco* (hereafter referred to as *Fioretti*)[11].

8 The reason for revising the first edition is given in the dedication letter of the second edition, written by the Franciscan historian Henry Sedulius of Cleve: while thanking the unknown publisher of the lovely engravings in the earlier edition, he claims to have found errors in the images and, therefore, wishes to review them accurately and have them modified so that every scene reflects historical facts. Sedulius chose to put aside two of the plates from the older edition; number 10, Examples of Greatest Sanctity and 14, Symbols from the Old Testament Regarding Francis and replaced them with five new plates in which only some details from the erased plates were included; nr 1) a Front piece, nr 6) Amazing Transfiguration of the Man of God, nr 15) Origin of the Stigmata and Examples of Greatest Holiness, nr 18) Most Wonderful Standing of St Francis' Corpse and nr 20) The Most Celebrated Followers of the Seraphic Institute. Gieben notes that the revisions seem to have been made in a hurry and quite negligently – traces of the old design is seen in all engravings. Gieben 1977, 20; 42.

9 Hoebericht, 2006, 137.

10 The work with the book began in 1385 and was formally approved by the general Ch., held at Assisi in 1399.

11 *The Little Flowers*, 1958, (Ch. 24) 94.

6.2 Iconographic Text Sources

De Conformitate consists of a series of texts recalling events from Francis' life that highlight his conformity with Christ. The work with the book began in 1385 and, in 1399, the general chapter held at Assisi formally approved it. It was first printed in Milan in 1510 and 1513 and was enthusiastically received and spread throughout the Catholic world.[12] *Fioretti,* on the other hand, consists of stories from the life of the Saint as it was presented by and for Italians about a hundred years after Francis' death. The text is an anonymous Italian translation and re-editing of the Latin text 'The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions' by Ugolino Boniscambi of Montegiorgio (written c.1328–1337).[13] The oldest preserved version of *Fioretti* dates to 1390 and is currently stored in Berlin; the first printed version was published in Vicenza in 1476.[14]

The first version of the story of Francis and the prostitute, included in both *Fioretti* and *De Conformitate,* took place in Babylonia during a journey Francis carried out with twelve of his companions in 1219. The group was captured, beaten up and brought to the Sultan Melek-el-Kamel. Here, Francis preached 'under the guidance of the holy spirit', which made the Sultan feel devotion to the Saint. He released him together with his friars and the group was permitted to preach freely in the Sultan's kingdom. To more effectively spread the word of the Gospel in the pagan land, Francis commanded his group to split up in pairs, and each group was told to choose an area in which to preach. One night Francis and a brother went to have a rest at an inn in the district where they were campaigning. The Saint was there acquainted with a woman who was 'very beautiful in face and body but very foul in mind and soul'. She tried to seduce the holy man and convince him 'to have the most shameful act with her'. Francis, determined to save the woman's soul, tricked her into believing he was interested in her suggestions and ordered her to follow his lead. He turned down the offer of following her to her bedroom and instead proposed an alternative, but 'very beautiful bed'.[15] According to the *Fioretti,* Francis led the woman to a large fire that was burning in one of the rooms:

12 Robinson 1907.

13 *Francis of Assisi – The Prophet: Early Documents III* 2001, 429ff.

14 Robinson, 1909.

15 *The little flowers* 1958 (Ch. 24) 94.

> And in fervour of the spirit he stripped himself naked and threw himself down on the fire in the fireplace as on a bed. And he called to her, saying: 'Undress and come quickly and enjoy this splendid, flowery and wonderful bed because you must be here if you wish to obey me!' And he remained there for a long time with a joyful face, resting on the fireplace as though on flowers, but the fire did not burn or singe him. [16]

Witnessing such a miracle terrified the young prostitute and made her feel repentance. Francis forgave her sins and evil intention. She was, thus, 'perfectly converted to the faith of Christ, and through the merits of the holy Father she became so holy in grace that she won many souls for the Lord in that region'.[17]

A parallel can be drawn to the *whore of Babylon* in the Book of Revelations (Rev. 17-18), usually read as a symbol of sin as well as of the fall of an unholy kingdom or power. The prostitute Francis encounters at the inn can, thus, be seen as a condensed image of all the sin and ungodliness of the whole pagan population in her country. Even though she is a heathen and unholy, Francis manages to save and convert her to the Christian faith.

The second story referring to Francis' meeting with a tempting sinful female is only found in *De Conformitate.* This time the event took place in Bari, Italy, and the man in power was not the Sultan but Emperor Fredrick II (Hohenstaufen). Fredrick II was known for his many adulterous love affairs and, thus, indirectly, in need of Francis' help. When Francis arrived in Bari – according to his later biographers, in the late autumn of 1221[18] – he thought it best to publicly preach on chastity and abstinence in one of the city's piazzas. It offended Fredrick who, considering his indecent style of life, felt accused. To test if Francis practised what he preached, Fredrick devised a plot. The Saint was invited to the court for a festive dinner after which he was requested to stay the night in one of the castle's finer chambers. According to Bartholomew, the following happened:

16 Ibid. The story is identical in De Conformitate AF, V 11.

17 *I fioretti*, 1958, (Ch. 24)132 (English translation Brown 1958, 94f.).

18 Terzi is giving a detailed and chronological account for all the important events in Francis' life and allows the Bari legend to substitute Fioretti's story about Francis' encounter with the prostitute in Egypt.

> When Saint Francis had preached in the city of Bari, the emperor, that is to say, Frederick II, was there with his court. Blessed Francis had spoken against the sin of lust, which he strongly detested. It displeased the courtiers, who were deceitful and carnal, and so he was invited with his comrade to dine with the emperor. Finally, he was given a room to rest in, and there in the room, a very beautiful young woman had been hidden. When the room had been closed from the outside, the woman came out from her hiding place and started to tempt the blessed Francis with a heinous act. Meanwhile, the emperor and his followers were hearing and seeing everything through the door gap. Thus, blessed Francis who realised he was being mocked, and since there were plenty of burning charcoals left from the day's fire (for it was winter) there, suddenly he pulled of his robe, spread out the burning charcoals and placing himself, naked, on top of the charcoals while saying to the woman that, if she wanted to, she could sleep with him on such a bed. Seeing this the woman immediately fled. The emperor and the others entered the room and seeing blessed Francis standing on top of the charcoals with not an injury from the fire or any burned flesh, and they were greatly astounded. So from that time on they showed reverence and devotion towards blessed Francis.[19]

Francis knew that Fredrick was mocking him and that the woman was placed in his room to test his chastity. Nevertheless, the holy man did not order her to leave immediately. Francis wanted to demonstrate more than his exemplarily chaste character. By staying in the room, undressing and performing his Babylonian charcoal-bed act again, he was able to teach her, Fredrick and his courtiers a well-needed lesson while also demonstrating the greatness of God to the sinful and unrighteous. However, unlike the Babylonian prostitute, the Bari woman is barely a subsidiary character, an instrument used by Fredrick; Francis neither saves her nor is she asking forgiveness for

19 The original text reads: In civitate Barensi cum praedicasset beatus Franciscus et ibi imperator cum sua esset curia, scilicet Fredericus II, et contra vitium luxuriae beatus Franciscus multa detestando dixisset, et curialibus, utpote lubricis et carnalibus, displicuisset, invitatus cum socio ad coenam per ipsum imperatorem comedit: et demum data eidem et soli camera ad quiescendum, abscondita est ibi in camera una pulcherrima invenis. Clausa igitur a foris camera, mulier ex abditis exiens, coepit beatum franciscum de actu nefando sollicitare, omnia tamen andientibus et videntibus per rimas ostii ipso imperatore cum suis. Beatus igitur Franciscus videns sic se delusum et, cum ibi esset magna pars prunarum ex igne diurno relictarum, quia hiems erat, subito tunica habituali exuta, et sparsis prunis, nudum se super prunas posuit dicens mulieri, quod in tali lecto, si vellet, cum ipso concumberet. Quod cernens mulier statim ausugit. Imperator vero et alii intrantes camera et beatum Franciscum cernentes stetisse super carbones, et nullam laesiounem ignis, nec adustionem habere in sua carne, valde sunt miratu, et ex tunc habuerunt ad beatum Franciscum reverentiam et devotionem.*De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Iesu,* Fr. Bartholomaeus de Pisa (Bartolomeo da Rinonico), in *Analecta Franciscana* IV, X, p. 477–478 (1906). Transl. Robin W. Böckerman, 2016.

her sins. When she sees the Saint on the fire, she does not recognise it as a miracle and runs away. The miracle he performs worked, however, as it made the emperor and his followers show 'reverence and devotion' towards the Saint (and God).

6.3 The Introduction of the Franciscan Temptation Theme in the Graphic Arts

In Galle's prints, the encounter between St Francis and the young prostitute is placed in the foreground (fig. 65). The event takes place outdoors. Francis' is naked, lying in a half-seated position on a stack of burning charcoal; the woman is walking towards him from the left. Unlike the Saint, she is dressed, yet her clothes are quite sensual: her dress is showing a great part of her décolletage and is open on the side to reveal her right leg up to the upper thigh. She has light sandals, and her long curly hair is seductively blowing in the wind. Francis and the woman are facing each other. He has lifted his right arm and is pointing at her with his index finger: she responds by pointing a finger at herself, seemingly to ask if the Saint is referring to her. Galle has chosen to depict the moment in which Francis is asking the woman to join him on the burning bed. The caption connects the scene to the Bari incident: 'Illectus ad venerem in aula Frederici Imp[erator]' (Seduced to lovemaking in the court of Emperor Fredrick). By placing Francis outdoors instead of in 'aula Frederici', the artist can underline the Saint's chaste, virginal character further through the secondary scenes in the background.

The easy accessibility of printed books such as Galle's enabled a wide dispersion of the material in Italy as well as the rest of Catholic Europe and resulted in the dissemination of many new devotional iconographic themes to a point where the graphic arts strongly influenced later generations of Franciscan imagery.[20] According to Rodinò, Galle's work should, from an iconographic point of view, be considered the most important of the series of engravings picturing the Saint's life.[21] The influence of the Dutch engraver's work is evident when studying the illustrated *Life of Francis* printed in Italy at the end of the Cinquecento period. The Venetian engraver Giacomo Franco's nine illustrations in *Vita del Padre S.Francesco,* published in

20 Prosperi Valenti Rodinò, 1982, 159.

21 Ibid., 179.

Fig.65. Philipe Galle, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity* in *D. Seraphici Francisci totius evangelicae perfectionis exemplaris admiranda historia*, 1587. Engraving, 16 x 24 cm.

Venice in 1593 (with a second and the third edition in 1598 and 1608)[22], consists of slightly elaborated and italicised mirror images of Galle's engravings.

Franco's images amount to less than half of Galle's, yet he chooses to include the print picturing Francis' extraordinary chastity (fig. 66). Like Galle, Franco has pictured events from Francis' life, divided into primary and secondary scenes, and provided them with letters and explanatory texts. The scenes included in the print showing Francis' extraordinary chastity are the same four scenes as in Galle's: A) The encounter with the prostitute pictured in the foreground and as secondary scenes in the background; B) 'The temptation in the Snow', C) 'Francis' Encounter with the Bishop' and D) 'The Miracle in the Snow'.

In the primary scene, Francis is once again pictured outside, naked on burning charcoal. He is facing the woman entering the scene from the right. Also here, she is pictured dressed in a sensuous manner:

22 *Vita del serafico s. Francesco. Sctitta da S Bonaventura. Tradotta in volgare et di nuovo. Aggiuntovi le figure in Rame, che rappresentano dal vivo con molta vaghezza et divotione, le attioni, et miracoli di questo glorioso Santo in Venetia, Presso gli Heredi di Simon Galigani*, Venice, 1593.

Fig.66. Giacomo Franco, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity* in *Vita del Serafico S. Francesco*, Venice 1593. Engraving, 20 x 14 cm.

bare feet and a dress that has a deep cut neckline and is made of light fabric that is blowing in the wind to reveal her left leg. The woman is provokingly touching her left breast with her right hand (fig. 66b). Her hair forms two horn-like shapes on her forehead. It gives her a demon-like look, but this was also a popular hairstyle in Venice at the time. During the sixteenth century, coiffures where the hair was curled high on the forehead and then braided along the head, became immensely popular among the city's courtesans as well as patrician women. The

Fig.66b. Giacomo Franco, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity* (detail).
Fig.67. Giacomo Franco (1550–1620), *Cortigiana Famosa* (Veronica Franco: the Famous Courtesan), in *Habiti delle Donne Venetiane*, Venice 1610. Engraving, 28 x 21 cm.

fashion received harsh critique; the hairdo was considered indecent and was later prohibited by the authorities. Regardless of the moralists' and rulers' protests, the fashion continued and eventually became a distinctive feature for Venetian women.

Franco has, thus, pictured the prostitute as a Venetian courtesan. We find an almost identical image in one of Franco's contemporary works *Habiti Delle Donne Venetiane* (The Clothes of Venetian Women c. 1591–1609, published in Venice in 1610). The similarities with the image *La Cortigiana Famosa* (The Famous Courtesan, fig. 67) which, according to tradition depicted the famous courtesan and poet Veronica Franco, are many; the high coiffeurs are identical, and the dresses have a similar low-cut neckline and high collar. Even the jewellery is similar; both women are wearing longer and a shorter necklace. By picturing the temptress as a Venetian courtesan, Franco is connecting the scene to his hometown. Even the architecture is, if not typically Venetian, at least notably Italian.

Galle's influence is also recognised in the illustrations found in *Seraphici patri S.Francisi historia*, which was probably published in Italy around the turn of the seventeenth century (fig. 68).[23] The artist is unknown, but according to Servus Gieben, the Italian and Latin inscriptions suggest an Italian origin, which must be taken as a plausible assumption.[24] The engravings were well received and were later copied at least three times.[25] Like in Galle and Franco's versions, the scene with the caption CASTIMONIÆ EI'EXEMPLA takes place outside with Francis and the woman presented in the foreground.[26] This time the female is standing still in the left corner of the image. The artist has pictured her wearing a light fabric dress similar to the one in Galle's engraving. The neckline is so low cut that the woman's breasts are almost entirely uncovered. Her left leg is exposed through a slit on the side of the dress. A long veil, fastened in her hair, is blowing in the wind. The design of the dress, as well as the long veil, suggests that she is a dancer, a profession that traditionally was associated with prostitution. Similar depictions of female dancers have ancient origins and can be found in Mantegna's *Parnaso* (fig. 35), as well as in Antonio Tempesta's mythological scenes (fig. 43).

Francis is lying on the ground with swelling muscles. Like in the earlier versions of the scene, the Saint looks at the woman and gestures towards her with his right hand while pointing at his charcoal bed with the other. This time, however, the female is not facing Francis, but instead, she is reluctantly looking down at the ground while holding her left hand against her chest. It represents the moment after that which is depicted in Galle's and Franco's versions. The woman has walked up to Francis and noticed that he is lying on burning charcoal; he has already asked her to join him, upon which she realises that a

23 (MF VII-BA-6 [tav 18]).

24 Father Matthew Verjans has suggested the Flemish painter and engraver Maarten de Vos as a possible artist, an idea that Gieben rejects. Gieben, 1977, n. 180, 64.

25 A reversed copy with French and Latin inscriptions, probably printed in Paris and edited by Thomas de Leu, was published between 1602–1614. Another copy was produced in Italy by the mid seventeenth century, probably in Tuscany, by the engraver Vittorio Serena, with Italian inscriptions. Approximately at the same time, a third copy was published with engravings by Giovanni Fiorimi and inscriptions in both Latin and Italian – like in the original version. Fiorimi's engravings were later reproduced in 1926 in connection to the 700th anniversary of St Francis' death. (MF V_BA_5 [bis]).

26 The scenes in the background are similar to those in Galle and Franco's versions: 'The Temptation in the Snow', 'The Encounter with the Bishop' and 'The Miracle in the Snow'. The inscription in the vernacular Italian reads: 'A. Tétato alla lusuria il S. Huomo si getta sopra il fuoco é chiamase la meret. B. Tétato á libidine dal Demonio si getta nella neve nudo é di quella sacédone fantocci burla il Diavolo so dirti questa é mia moglie questi li figli e queste le --- C.---- dal padre … al vescovo spogliase nudo e a quello ----- D. Franc' specchio di castità di Genaro raccoglie rosenato per virtu --'.

Fig.68. Unknown artist, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity* in *Seraphici patri S.Francisi historia,* ca 1600. Copper engraving, 18,1 x 26,4 cm.

miracle is taking place. She is, here faced with the option to either continue her sinful way of life or to convert to Christianity. Her hand on the chest is not provocative as in Franco's engraving, but should be understood as a devotional gesture; she is asking for forgiveness and salvation, like the repentant Mary Magdalene.

During the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, several illustrated versions of the *Life* of Saint Francis were published in different parts of Catholic Europe. Francis' meeting with the young prostitute was included in most versions and indicates that the new iconographic motif introduced by Galle had become an established part of the post-Tridentine Franciscan imagery.

Through the illustrated book, the new Franciscan temptation iconography quickly spread to Franciscan convents all over the Italian peninsula. The scene was included in murals depicting episodes from the saint's life and painted in lunettes in the cloister's cortile. [27] Indeed, a direct interpretation of Giacomo Franco's image can, for example, be seen in a mural in the Franciscan monastery in Senise, Basilicata

27 So far, 13 versions of the scene have been found in Franciscan monasteries in the regions of Piemonte (Sacro monte d'orta), Emilia Romagna (Lugo), Umbria (Trevi, Montefalco) Abruzzo (Raiano) Marche (Urbania), Tuscany (Borgo a Mozzano) Lazio (Celleno, Poggio bustone), Basilicata (Senise), Puglia (Bitetto, Valenzano, Gravina di Puglia).

Fig.69. Unknown artist, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, seventeenth century. Fresco. Ex Chiostro di san Francesco, Senise.

(fig. 69). Although the unknown artist has omitted the secondary scenes in the background and the event takes place inside a bedroom, Francis and the woman are painted directly after Franco's engraving. Details of the room are barely recognisable, as the image is in quite a bad condition and the background is very dark. Next to Francis we see the overturned barrel, a glimpse of a bed, his monk's garment on a chair and a male figure watching the scene from a window. The text under the image confirms that the event took place at the court of Fredrick II.

6.4 Murals

The majority of the monastery murals have been painted during the seventeenth century, but a few examples from the eighteenth century have also been found. They are no masterpieces; with a few exceptions, they were executed by local artists or artistically talented friars, and many are, today, found in a state of decline. Some have been restored amateurishly, which has lowered their artistic qualities even further. Except for some local historians, scholars have mostly overlooked their existence. Nevertheless, the compositions also show examples of great creativity, as they often differ from the book illustrations.

When the episode was included in a vaster picture program, there was no longer a need to divide it into primary and secondary scenes.[28] Francis and the woman are, therefore, moved to an indoor setting and, thus, the images more truthfully follow the original text source. Even

28 The mural in Poggio Bustone (Fig. 13), however, breaks this rule: through what seems to be an open door on the right, a rocky landscape is seen. There, on the snow-covered ground, a naked figure is lying surrounded by at least five human shapes, hence the temptation in the snow.

though the composition differs from the engravings, the pedagogical approach is similar; they are included in a series of scenes depicting the life of the Saint with explanatory inscriptions in Italian under the images[29] Monks, strolling around the courtyard, could read the murals like a large illustrated book while meditating over the life and miracles of Francis.

6.4.1 The Temptation in Bari Pictured in Southern Italy

In the south of Italy, the story of Francis' temptation at the court of Fredrick II in Bari was a well-established popular legend. It connected the Saint to the region and confirmed his former presence there. In his *Historia di Bari, Principal Cittá di Puglia*, published in Naples in 1637, Father Antonio Beatillo includes the story as a historical event and even fails to refer to *De Conformitate* – the only official Franciscan work in which the episode is included.[30] While Beatillo includes details and phrases of his own, his story is identical to the one in *De Conformitate*. Beatillo finishes the story by assuring its truthfulness by stating that it was recorded in the chronicles of the Minorite brothers' 'Stà ciò registrato nelle Croniche de' Frati Minori'. He further confirms that even if the chronicle says that it happened in the city of Puglia, without specifically mentioning Bari, it can be stated that it happened there. Indeed, in the castle of Bari, a chapel dedicated to Saint Francis, 'à memoria del già narrato miracolo '(in memory of the just recorded miracle), can be found.[31] The main difference between Beatillo's account and the story in *De Conformitate* is that the young prostitute, and not only Fredrick II, is forgiven for her sins.

Raffaele Licinio, Professor of medieval history at the University of Bari, rejects that a meeting between Francis and Fredrick could have taken place, as, in 1221, Fredrick II was not even in Bari. Also, the castle was not restored until the years 1231–1233, hence five years after the death of Francis – even if Fredrick was in Bari at the time, he could, therefore, not have invited the Saint to the castle for dinner

29 The mural in Lugo is still partly whitewashed making it impossible to determine whether it has had an inscription or not.

30 Modern scholars also fail to connect the story to De conformitate. Ethnologist Anna Maria Tripputi claims that its origin is popular, but that, with time, it became mythologised as devotional literature, the purpose of which was to condemn the arrogance of the powerful and to underline Francis' simple and holy character. See Tripputi 1988, 128f and Triputi 1998, 191f. The episode in the Castle of Bari is also included in Bonaventura da Fasano 1656; Bonaventura da Lama 1723–4; and Wadding 1931–34.

31 Beatillo 1978 (1637), 124. (Transl. mine)

Fig.70. Fra Giuseppe di Gravina (?), S*t Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, ca 1600–1620s. Fresco. Chiostro di San Sebastiano, Gravina in Puglia.

and accommodation.[32] Thus, Bartholomew of Pisa either based the account in *De Conformitate* on an already existing legend or created it himself. What is certain, however, is that Franciscan monasteries started to include (and create) the iconography of the temptation scene only after the Counter-Reformation and the first printed versions of *De Conformitate* as well as the illustrated *Life* of Saint Francis.

A mural created in 1678 by the monk Fra Giuseppe, in the monastery of Saint Sebastian in Gravina in Puglia, shows Francis on a charcoal bed on a black and white tiled floor (fig. 70). The Saint is dressed in white undergarments with his monk's habit placed next to him on the floor. A woman dressed in a yellow skirt, white apron and a violet blouse is standing before him. Her face is no longer visible because of damage to the mural, but her outstretched arms indicate distress. In the background, we see a table with a red cloth and a single candle, a fireplace and blue fabric wrapped around two golden poles, possibly representing the bed. A human shape dressed in black with a white collar can be glimpsed behind the half-open door behind the woman. Again, the image captures the moment when Fredrick II, or perhaps one of his courtiers, and the prostitute are shocked by the realisation that they are witnessing a miracle.

32 Interview by Marilena Di Tursi in Corriere della Sera-Corriere del Mezzogiorno 2/10/2004 http://www.mondimedievali.net/Rec/sanfrancesco.htm (Access-date 17.3.2015).

While Fra Giuseppe probably was acquainted with *De Conformitate,* the texts under the murals are not quotations from the original Latin source. [33] Furthermore, a peculiar detail cannot be overlooked: Francis is holding his left hand towards his stomach, and by joining his thumb and index finger, he is indicating a wound. It is a rather unusual iconography and may be interpreted as a further attempt to link the Saint to Christ. Even though no such detail is included in the *De Conformitate,* Fra Giuseppe makes his own iconographic interpretation of the message given in the text, thus presenting Francis as the true incarnation of the Saviour.

Two slightly later versions of the scene can be found in monasteries in the same region; in the convents of Antonio di Padova in Valenzano (fig. 71) and of holy Giacomo in Bitetto (fig. 72).[34] The Valenzano murals are signed 'Joseph Conversi pi(n)xit pro sua devo/tione' and have, therefore, been attributed to Giuseppe Conversi of Capurso, son of the painter Giambattista Conversi, a native of Matera. No date is given, but according to historian Antonio Gambacorta, a mural depicting saint Domenic in the Church of Saint Domenic in Turi, signed with 'A.D 1751/Conversi Pingebat' could be attributed to the same artist, and I would, therefore, suggest that also the Valenzano murals could be dated to the 1750s.[35] Conversi's temptation scene shows Francis and the woman in an eighteenth-century furnished bedroom. While Francis lies on the floor, the woman is pictured seated on a rather luxurious bed. She is only dressed in her nightgown and has kicked off one of her yellow high-heeled shoes; a piece of yellow fabric thrown on a chair next to the bed is possibly meant to be understood as her dress. Emperor Fredrick, a white-bearded man with a crown, is watching the scene from a small window in the wall.[36]

Little is known about the unsigned and undated lunettes in the convent of holy Giacomo (Beato Giacomo) in Bitetto, situated about fifteen kilometres east of Valenzano (fig. 72). Faustino Ghirardi has suggested that the artist could be Fra Giuseppe da Gravina, the painter of the murals in San Sebastiano in Gravina (fig. 70). Belli D'Elia, in turn, opposes this suggestion by claiming that the Bitetto murals are of

33 The text in the vernacular Italian reads: 'Pretendono vaga donzella del castello di Bari, incitata dal padrone, di fare bottino del celibate del Serafica Patriarca, quale per conservare la vita dell'anima buttò qual salamandra il corpo nel fuoco, con che atterrendo il nemico tra le di quelle fiamme ne restò coronato.'

34 Contrary to what several sources claim, the temptation scene is not included in the sixteenth-century murals in the monastery of Santa Chiara in Galatina.

35 Gambacorta 1975, 274f. See also Noviello 1984, 246, n 358.

36 The text under the scene reads: 'Vieni donna impudica al fuoco vivo ch'll Re che osserva un casto cuor o crede e'l fuoco mio ch'ogn'altro foco accede, non sente il fuoco, e l'amor tuo lasci'

Fig.71. Giuseppe Conversi (1735-), *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, late 1750s (?). Fresco. Convento di Santa Maria di San Luca, Valenzano.

Fig.72. Unknown artist, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity,* mid eighteenth century. Fresco. Convento di Beato Giacomo, Bitetto.

much lower artistic quality than Giuseppe da Gravina's other paintings. I am inclined to agree and, furthermore, believe that both the woman's garments and the interior of the room indicate that the mural in Bitetto was created much later than the ones in Gravina.[37] Instead, it seems likely that it has been made after the Valenzano mural. There are several similarities in the design, but considering how clumsy and amateurishly executed the painting is, it is unlikely that Conversi would have painted his lunettes upon inspiration by these murals.[38]

The unknown artist – possibly a friar – has recreated, to the best of his ability, most of the details seen in Valenzano. Francis is lying on a charcoal bed so copious that it more resembles a red rug. The Saint's monk habit is seen behind him, seemingly hovering in the air. In front of the Saint on the floor is a large cup, in which the charcoal was brought, which is identical to Conversi's, only four times bigger. Francis' temptress is sitting on a bed and, also here, she is kicking off a yellow high-heeled shoe. She is slightly more dressed that in Valenzano, but like that image, she has left a piece of clothing on the chair next to the bed – blue this time, not yellow. The room is bigger than that in Valenzano. It is filled with gilded chairs, sofas, tables and mirrors, covered with green fabric, probably all the luxury a poor Franciscan friar could ever imagine. Above one of the mirrors in the background, there is a darker rectangle in which a face with a crowned head is seen, perhaps a portrait but more probably a window through which Fredrick is observing the events taking place in his castle.[39]

6.4.2 Murals in Central and Northern Italy

The connection to Bari becomes vaguer in Franciscan murals in central and northern Italian convents. For example, usually, the spectators witnessing the event are lacking. Indeed, the mural included in the cortile decorations in SS. Francesco ed Ilaro in Lugo, Emilia Romagna, is a rare exception (fig. 73). Here a rather elegantly dressed man is seen

37 Il Beato Giacomo da Bitetto dei Minori: Vita e documenti, Quaracchi 1914, quoted in Perrone 1999, n. 23, 37.

38 To the unknown artist's defence, it should be added that his murals have been restored over the years by even less talented hands. According to Belli D'Elia, the latest and most famous restoration was made by a certain Turchiano, who proudly also signed a complete remodelling of an 'Adoration of the Maghi' in the same monastery. Belli D'Elia, 1994, n. 24, 38.

39 The text under the scene reads: Il ciel si chiude, e già le faci orrende Ardono in cor d'altera donna impurae già grandeggian le veneree tende lussureggiante fra ria note oscura. Iddio qui vede, e a Francesco rende valor non aspettato in quelle mura mentre in Campion gettatosi nel fuoco. Vieni donna s'hai cor–disse–in tal gioco.

Fig.73. Unknown artist, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, seventeenth century. Fresco. Chiesa della Carmine, Lugo (Emilia Romagna).

holding the drapery of the entrance door, and thus witnesses the miracle taking place in the room. As a rule, however, the northern compositions, remains fundamentally similar to the southern ones, as the event takes place in a luxuriously decorated bedroom and indicates that the artists used *De Conformitate* as an iconographic source. In a mural in Celleno in Lazio, the artist – an anonymous friar monk[40] – has emphasised that a Christian miracle is taking place (fig. 74). Instead of merely requesting that the woman join him on the charcoal by pointing at it, Francis holds a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other.

Two examples of murals that refer to the story in *Fioretti* rather than that in *De Conformitate* can be seen in the convents of San Giacomo in Poggio Bustone in Lazio (fig. 75) and of Saint Francis in Montefalco, Umbria (fig. 76). Both paintings show Francis pictured on the floor in an unfurnished room; in *Fioretti,* Francis requested the woman to join him on 'a very large fire that was burning in that house at that time' instead of the woman's bedroom like in *De Conformitate*.[41] In Poggio Bustone, a further reference to *Fioretti* can be seen to the far right in the scene, where a naked man is lying on the ground in front of a group of seven white figures in an open landscape with snow-covered mountains. It is the temptation in the snow where Francis creates himself an imaginary family of snow (see p.27). It is the same episode, which also was included as a secondary scene in the illustrated books. Thus, here, the temptation pictured in the mural becomes twofold; the prostitute indicates carnal temptations while the snow family is the temptation of commitment

40 The paintings is signed and dated: 'L'anno 1716 è stato dipinto questo chiostro da un nostro religioso' (in 1716 one of our religious painted this cloister).

41 *The Little Flowers* 1958, (Ch. 24) 94.

Fig.74. Unknown artist, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, 1716. Fresco. 'Il convento', Celleno.

and fatherhood. As is the case for most of the monasteries' murals, the artist of the Poggio Bustone paintings is unknown. Another mural in the same monastery has the year 1641written on it. It is probable that the lunettes were painted by the same hand and that they too can be dated to the 1640s. The murals of Montefalco have, in turn, been attributed to the circle of Giuseppe Nicola Nassini (1657–1736) and can, therefore, be dated to the decades around the turn of the eighteenth century.

6.4.3 Picturing Lascivious Women in a Monastic Context

The monasteries' wall paintings were made for a group of Franciscan monks who all had taken vows of chastity. Therefore, it seems natural that the focal point of the scene is not that Francis conquers temptation, but that, through the manifestation of his chastity, he encourages the sinful woman to save her soul. The woman's indecency is insinuated subtly and is suitable for an audience of monks, although, in Poggio Bustone, the woman exposes a naked leg, and she has taken off her red sock, which is thrown on the floor beside her (illogically enough she has then put on her black shoe again, fig. 75). Her tightly drawn corset revealingly pushes up her breasts. An even more immodest example is seen in Urbania, Umbria. The mural was painted by Giorgio Picchi (1550–1605) around the year 1600

Fig.75. Unknown artist, *St Francis exemplary Chastity*, 1640 (?). Fresco. Convento di San Giacomo a Poggio Bustone

Fig.76. The workshop of Giuseppe Nicola Nasini, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, Ca. 1700. Fresco. Chiostro S. Francesco, Montefalco.

Fig.77. Giorgio Picchi (1555–1605), *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, 1600. Fresco. (Ex) convento di san Francesco, Urbania.

and is, thus, the earliest example of the episode I have found in Franciscan monastery decorations (fig. 77). Today, the mural is very fragmented. It is, however, clearly visible that the young prostitute's breasts are completely exposed through the deeply cut opening of her dress. It is quite a remarkable detail in a monastery setting and, perhaps, it was also too much for the monks, because already in 1617, Flaminio Terzi writes in his *Annali* that Picchi 'In Durante ha dipinto nel chiostro delli frati de S.Francesco che ora più non esiste per la riedificazione del convento[…]' (In Durante, he painted in the cloister of the Franciscan friars that no longer exists because of the rebuilding of the convent). The murals were, thus, covered less than two decades after their creation.[42]

Also in the more modest versions of the Franciscan temptation motif, it is made clear that the depicted woman is sinful. Most noticeably this is seen in the use of the colour yellow that the woman is wearing in almost all versions of the scene. It is a colour traditionally connected with prostitution. In ancient Greece, the prostitutes wore saffron-yellow dresses, and in sixteenth-century Venice, the city's courtesans were obliged to wear yellow dresses or scarves in order not to be mistaken for honourable patricians.[43] Also, in Rome, attempts were made to oblige prostitutes to wear yellow garments. In 1592 Pope Clement VII announced that prostitutes were to wear a long yellow sleeve to be easily recognised.[44]

42 Terzi (1617) 1990, 49. See also Moretti, 2005, 206.

43 The regulations appear to have had little effect: most foreigners visiting Venice describe the city's courtesans as being dressed in red brocade dresses. See Pedrocco 1990, 81.

44 Storey notes that the prostitutes were treated much like the Jews who, by Pope Paul IV in 1555, had been confined to the Ghetto and were ordered to wear the colour yellow: men in yellow hats and women in yellow veils. Storey 2008,76.

6.5 The 'Virtuous' Sensuality in the Franciscan Temptation Episode

Not all Franciscan monasteries that were decorated with murals picturing scenes from St Francis life contain the episode with the prostitute. However, many of those lacking the scene have included the motif showing St Francis in the thorn bush. Likewise, in all of the monasteries in which I have found the prostitute episode, the thorn bush motif is included. As this scene also portrays a temptation episode, it may be concluded that the subject was given increased attention in the seventeenth century.

The earlier mentioned mural with the voluptuous demon temptress (p.86 fig. 25) in the female monastery's Church of Sant'Orsola is one of five scenes included in the decoration of the chapel's sidewalls and vault, which frame the altarpiece showing *St Francis receiving the stigmata*. Yet, even though the pictorial program is rather limited, it is not the only temptation scene pictured: St Francis in thorns is seen in the vault to the right of the altar and, on the opposite side, to the left of the altar, the Saint is pictured undressed and seated on charcoal (fig. 78). A woman is standing to the right in the image, facing the Saint while leaning a candle on a table draped in a green cloth. Behind her, we see a wooden pillar and the same green draping, which probably is meant to be understood as a part of a bed. The woman is indeed dressed in contemporary seventeenth-century attire, but on her head, she wears a turban. It is, thus, reasonable to assume that the pictured episode depicts the Babylonia event and that the female is the Saracen prostitute that Francis managed to convert to Christianity after having performed the miracle in the fire.

The saint is pictured seated by a fireplace with one of his legs inside it; a detail that closely follows the textual version given in Fioretti of the event that took place in Babylonia. Contrary to the Bari story, in which it is claimed that the Saint laid down on the charcoal he had placed on the floor, the Fioretti's story states that Francis 'threw himself down on the fire in the fireplace'. [45] The Sant'Orsola mural is, thus, unique, as it is the only Italian example of the Babylonian temptation event I have come across during my research. Although the low cut neckline of the woman's dress exposes her shoulders, she is pictured with a less sensual appeal than in the versions showing the prostitute in Bari. Note, for example, how the table covers the

45 *The Little Flowers* 1958, (Ch. 24) 94.

Fig.78. Unknown artist, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, first decades of the seventeenth century. Mural. Cappella di san Francesco, Sant'Orsola, Como

legs of the woman, which in both the monastery murals and the book illustrations are, as a rule, shown uncovered and barefoot. Here, it is not female seduction as much as the conversion of a sinner which is the focus, and more importantly, the conversion of a Saracen woman to Christianity. Perhaps the toned down sensuality of the scene encouraged the artist to more explicitly stress the Saint's carnal temptation in the thorn bush event (fig. 25)

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Under the two temptation scenes, two images are picturing the Saint having religious visions and in the vault of the chapel a scene showing *St Francis in Glory*. All scenes included in this program were exceedingly popular in the post-Tridentine era when the focus was often placed on the Saint's miracles and religious experiences. It is not unusual that the two temptation episodes are included in a program depicting scenes from the Saint's life. What is somewhat noteworthy, however, is that they are both included in such a reduced program.

The artist behind the chapel's decoration is unknown, and there is no documentation concerning its making. However, when the chapel was documented for the first time in 1634, its murals were also mentioned: 'Altera Capella est dicata D. Francisco cuius imago visitur ibi in icone depicta super altare et est cum suis ornamentis' (Another chapel is dedicated to St Francis, whose image is seen in the altarpiece and its ornaments).[46] It is likely that the local Tridi family, whose coat of arms is seen in the vault of the chapel, commissioned its building and decorations. Furthermore, one of the members of the family, Costantia Tridi, was reportedly a nun in the monastery after having received the habit in 1616. It has, therefore, been suggested that Costantia's father, Francesco Tridi, who donated a substential sum to the monastery, also had the family chapel adorned for his namesake, St Francis.[47]

One may find it odd that two carnal temptation scenes adorn a chapel in a church connected to a female monastery. The nuns' access to the church was, however, very limited due to the Tridentine Council's decree of the enclosure of female convents, which was reaffirmed by Pope Pius V's bull *Circa pastoralis* in 1566. The nuns were confined to what was referred to as the 'Chiesa interna' – a closed section behind the chancel in the choir, where they could participate in mass without being seen. The 'Chiesa esterna' included the rest of the church and was accessible to laymen participating in the religious services. Girls from the aristocracy were educated in the monastery, but it was considered unseemly that they stayed together with the nuns and were, therefore, placed in separate locations. 'Non sta bene che le putte d'educatione stiano insieme con le monache, et dormano con loro; però si deputi un luogo separato per esse, et maestra loro' (it isn't right that the schooled girls stay together with the nuns and sleep there. Instead a separate place

46 Quoted in Rovi 2005, 320.

47 Rovi 2005, 320.

should be assigned for them and their teacher).[48] These young girls would probably also have had access to the 'Chiesa esterna' and could, therefore, see the decorations in the Chapel of St Francis. Though it cannot be argued that the images were solely intended for these young aristocratic women, as the church was accessible also to the broader public, it is reasonable to assume that they regularly frequented the church. Seeing the naked temptress in the thorn bush scene attempting to seduce a pious man into carnal sin would have served as a warning example for the young females. Coming from wealthy families, the girls were also considered to be at great risk of falling for the sin of vanity. The lascivious and devilish temptress, therefore, warned them how dangerous their beauty could be for the most pious of men.

The scene showing St Francis in the company of a naked, voluptuous temptress undeniably also gave a pretext for a representation of 'virtuous' sensuality, where the Saint's chastity contrasted the erotic appeal of the temptress. When gazing upon the attractive temptress, the spectator was inevitably included in the temptation act. However, the image of the chaste, holy man functioned as a chaperone, encouraging the viewer to apply an equally chaste gaze to that of the Saint.

An additional example of such 'virtuous' sensuality, this time in an oil painting, is seen in a work attributed to the Genovese artist Domenico Fiasella (1589–1669). It is a large-scale painting, and while little is known about its original location, the rather explicit nudity most likely rules out that it was made for a church or another sacred setting. Instead, Fiasella probably made the work for an unknown private patron during the first half of the seventeenth century.[49] Here, the female temptress is placed naked on a bed (fig. 79).[50] She is depicted in a half-lying position with her small high breasts and round belly unabashedly exposed. A red blanket is barely covering the lower part of her body, leaving her left knee uncovered. On the floor in front of the bed, Francis is lying on the burning charcoal. They are facing each other; his face has an expression of content calmness, while the female is visibly disturbed. A crease is formed between her eyebrows; the half-opened mouth and the hand that

48 Ibid.

49 The painting is not mentioned in any of Domenico Fiasella's reference works. In Fondazione Federico Zeri's photo library, it is only said that the painting was sold to an anonymous buyer through an antique store in Verona in the 1980s.

50 The painting has been attributed to Domenico Fiasella by Federico Zeri (Fondazione Federico Zeri, Bologna, scheda 60321, busta 0568).

Fig.79. Domenico Fiasella, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, the 1630s. Oil on canvas, 119x152 cm. Unknown location.

she has lifted from the pillow are expressions of agitation. A thin, barely recognisable halo is seen above Francis' bare dome, indicating his holiness. Francis' monk garment and rope belt are neatly placed on a chair. A copper container has been knocked over in order to shovel out the charcoal on the floor. Behind a half-open door, in the shade to the left, a human shape can be seen. Once again the scene is picturing the Bari episode.

Placing the naked temptress on a bed and in the centre of the image adds to the scene's erotic appeal. She is holding a corner of the white sheet covering the lower part of her body in a firm grip in her hand. As spectators, we are left with the thought-provoking possibility that we are witnessing the instance right before she is casting the sheet aside, fully revealing her nakedness, which would then be at eye level with the holy man on the floor. Also, the glowing charcoal under the Saint's body is repeating the same red colour as the woman's blanket and in details on her body – the red ribbon in her hair, her erect nipples, the jewels in her earrings and her necklace – creating a connection between carnality and

sanctity. Thus, this particular interpretation gives a clear example of how a scene from a famous Saint's life was used as a poorly masked pretext for a sensual scene with a female nude. Erotically, suggestive images such as this were often placed in bedchambers or private cabinets (as was the case of Furini's painting of Loth and his daughters given to the Spanish court and placed in the Queen's private chambers, see fig. 10), where only an exclusive crowd could admire them.

6.6 Simon Vouet's *The Temptations of St Francis* in San Lorenzo in Lucina

The Sant'Orsola murals are not the only examples of church decorations presenting Francis' carnal temptations. In 1623 the French artist Simon Vouet (1590–1649) executed a commission for Paolo Alaleone de Branca, the ceremonial master of Pope Urban VIII. The artist had been asked to decorate the Alaleone family's burial chapel in the Church San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome. He created two large-scale oil paintings picturing scenes from the life of St Francis: *The Dressing of St Francis* (Vestizione di San Francesco)[51] and *The Exemplary Chastity of St Francis* (fig. 80). The commission is well-documented.[52] No information is, however, given regarding the subject of the paintings. What is known is that the chapel's dedication to St Francis was made already by its earlier owner, Ludovico Branca, who, on a 1574 headstone, declares that the chapel is dedicated to Santa Maria delle Grazie and St Francis of Assisi.[53]

Vouet's two paintings are still seen in their original position and constitute excellent examples of Italian High Baroque painting with evident Caravaggesque influences. The temptation scene once again presents Francis and the woman in a bedroom with the Saint naked

51 The painting depicts the episode in which the Saint strips off his clothes in front of the Bishop of Assisi to demonstrate that he refuses his family wealth.

52 A document dated 17 September 1622 confirms that Vouet was to be paid five hundred scudi 'per dipingere deta capella tuta la parte di sopra a fresco e la parte di soto a olio cioe il doi quadri dale bande et il quadro di mezo di rintocarlo dove fará bisogno' ('To paint the said chapel, the part above in fresco and the lower part in oil, that is two paintings on canvas, and the painting in the middle to be retouched where it is needed'). Vouet was given six months time to finish the work and if his work was satisfying, as was expected ('come si crede'), Sig. R Paolo would reward him with an extra fifty scudi – a considerable sum. In addition, the artist was given three hundred scudi to cover material costs. [Roma Archivio di stato – 30 Notai Capitolini, Uff. 19 vol. 129 c. 450 r., v.] quoted in Marini 1974, 198. Vouet did not keep his six-month contract: the work was finished only in the summer of the next year according to a document dated 9 August 1624. Nevertheless, the artist got his extra 50 scudi; Paolo Leona was satisfied with the result. Marini 1974, 198f.

53 Ibid.

Fig.80. Simon Vouet, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, 1624. Oil on canvas, 185 x 252 cm. San Lorenzo in Lucina, Rome.

on the floor on a bed of charcoal and the woman standing scantily clad in front of a bed. It is dark; the only source of light is a burning torch on the table in the right corner. The flickering light accentuates the ivory skin of the woman's chest, hands and left knee. By lifting the hem of her gown, she is provocatively revealing her left leg, showing the stocking that has slid down her shin to her ankle, as the violet ribbons holding it up have been untied. On her foot, she wears a pink silk shoe.

She is dressed in a *camicia*, a gown that we recognise from other depictions of courtesans – not least in Titian's sensual half-length portraits (see fig. 57). A further example that indicates how closely associated the *camicia* was with prostitution is given by the sixteenth-century historian Marino Sanudo (1466–1536). In one of his *Diarii*, he recalls a carnival party in Rome where the city's prostitutes were seen among the participants: 'quelli ignudi et queste in camisa' (those naked and those in chemise).[54] Vouet accentuates the prostitute's lasciviousness even further through luxurious details like her pearl earrings, jewelled bracelet and the purple fur robe that she is wearing over the *camicia*. Behind the woman, we can glimpse an unmade

54 Sanudo 1890, 299. See also Junkermann 1988, 35, n 9.

bed as a contrast to the glowing charcoal on the floor. The Saint is, as usual, calling for the woman's attention by pointing towards her; she has once again lifted her hands in a repulsive and shocked gesture.

Vouet has depicted Francis as a muscular athlete, which we also recognise from the anonymous artist's engraving (fig. 67). The contrast between the gloomy room and the light falling on the woman's naked skin and the Saint's swelling muscles encourages us to see a reference to the Roman letters, where Paul is urging the religious to avoid darkness and sin by wearing an 'armour of light':

> The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Rom. 13:12-14)

The symbolism appears to be rather clear: the artist is presenting Francis as a powerful *Miles Christi*, a knight who wears his faith – a symbolic 'armour of light'– against sin. Another reference to such 'armour' is found in the letter to the Ephesians: 'Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the Devil' (6:11). The muscular Francis is also suggestive of an episode in Thomas of Celano's *The First Life of Francis*, where the Saint dreams of becoming a soldier who saves lost souls.[55]

In the background, an open door with a human figure is seen. We are once again presented with the scene from the Bari story in *De Conformitate*.[56] Earlier scholars have often referred to the iconography as unusual and rare.[57] While it is true that there are

55 Thomas of Celano uses all of these terms when describing Francis. See Thomas Celano 1999, (Ch. 5) 191.

56 As far as I have seen, none of Vouet's biographers has identified the motif as *De Conformitate's* event in Fredrick's castle. Instead, the story is usually placed in Egypt and connected to *Fioretti*. A possible explanation could be that *Fioretti* is more easily accessible for a modern reader than *De Conformitate*, which has not been translated into Italian. One of the few who has noted the human shapes in the door opening in the background is William Crelly. He concludes that at least one of them 'wears a plumed cap and seems to have a grotesque face, and is, therefore, probably the Devil himself who sees that his power is useless against the chastity of St Francis.' Crelly, 1962, 37. I believe it is unlikely that Vouet would include the Devil in the scene; such an episode is not mentioned in the Saint's hagiographies. Instead, the presence of the two figures at the door affirms rather explicitly that the written origin of the scene is taken from *De Conformitate*.

57 See Thuillier 1991, 147. Thuillier notes that Olivier Bonfait rightly has observed that the title 'The Temptation of St Francis' is imprecise. Thuillier further concludes that the scene illustrates the episode in Fioretti and that the temptress is the Saracen prostitute the Saint met there. See also Bonfait 1990, pp. 20–31.

only a few examples of the motif in Italian churches, Vouet used an iconography that, by the 1620s, was well-established. It is probable that Alaleone or even Vouet himself consulted Franciscan friars when choosing the iconographic program. The two motifs, *The exemplary Chastity of St Francis* and *The Dressing of St Francis,* are presented on the same image in all three illustrated *Vite* by Galle, Franco and the anonymous Italian. We should, thus, have reason to believe that whoever decided to pair these two motifs in the chapel probably was acquainted with the book illustrations.

San Lorenzo in Lucina belonged to the Clerics Regular Minor (Ordine dei Chierici Regolari Minori), a religious order co-founded in the 1580s by St Francis Caracciolo (1563–1608). Pope Paul V assigned the church to the order in 1606 when Francis Caracciolo was general. Caracciolo was a great admirer of St Francis and changed his original birth name, Ascanio, to Francis in honour of the Saint. Although Caracciolo died fifteen years before Paolo Alaleone's commission, it is possible that he inspired the choice of the motif: St Francis Caracciolo had overcome a similar temptation episode to that of St Francis. This episode is included in the order's chronicles and reportedly happened soon after the order was assigned San Lorenzo in Lucina. A prostitute, who lived nearby the church, noticed the holy man in his room, which was situated close to the church's gates. She stepped in. Caracciolo was shocked and instinctively wanted to send her away. Being in the presence of the holy man, however, suddenly made the prostitute feel repentance for her sins. She left apologetically and returned to the church the next day for confession. She now asked for forgiveness and expressed her desire to retire to one of Rome's many *Casa di Convertite* – Female monasteries for converted prostitutes.[58]

The episode is presented as an example of St Francis Caracciolo's great virtue. Converting sinners, including prostitutes, and making them ask for forgiveness was, as earlier mentioned, seen as a most honourable endeavour. It is, therefore, possible that the motif commissioned by Paolo Alaleone and interpreted by Vouet was chosen because it presented an act of conversion, which was performed not only by St Francis but also by St Francis Caracciolo – the first general of the order in San Lorenzo in Lucina. Moreover, when Vouet's painting was commissioned, San Lorenzo in Lucina

58 De Vives 1684, 520f. See also *Relazione istorica del solenne trasporto*… 1830, 8.

Fig. 81. Giacomo Palma the Younger, *The Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, 1581–82. Oil on canvas, 283 x 490. San Giacomo dall'Orio, Venice.

was situated in one of the most densely populated areas of the city and right next to the *Ortaccio* – Rome's most notorious area of prostitution.[59] The image could, therefore, have served as an inspiration for the devoted men of the church's order and encouraged them to convert the prostitutes and their male clients who frequented the area after the example of St Francis (and St Francis Caracciolo). Likewise, the image could also have been meant to inspire the same prostitutes and their clients to better their ways.

One last iconographic reference should be taken into consideration, namely that of St Lawrence, to whom the church was dedicated. St Lawrence (225–258) was an early Christian martyr and one of Rome's seven deacons. His martyrdom includes him being burned on a grid over burning charcoal. The gridiron of his martyrdom is found in San Lorenzo in Lucina: it was moved there on the initiative of Pope Paschal II in the early twelfth century. Sixteenth and seventeenth-century images of the Saint's martyrdom offer an iconography which, to some extent, is reminiscent of the iconography of St Francis. One of the most famous versions of the motif is the interpretation of Giacomo Palma the younger (1548–1628) in San Giacomo dall'Orio in Venice (fig. 81). The martyr is

59 Pope Pius V took the initiative to create a specified area for prostitutes similar to the Jewish ghetto in 1566. Eventually, a wall with locked doors protected by guards was built around an area called Ortaccio (the nettle bed) in the Campo Marzo in 1569. All prostitutes were ordered to move there. Though it appears to have been quite a short-lived initiative, Ortaccio remained one of the principal areas of prostitution in Rome and was eventually inhabited only by the poorest of the city's prostitutes. Storey 2008, 74f.

pictured placed on a grid over a fire; he is young, naked and victorious. St Lawrence's martyrdom is a story where the Saint sacrifices his body on the fire for his religious persuasion. A parallel can be drawn to the chaste St Francis who also, led by his religious persuasion, places his body on the charcoal – although voluntarily and without getting killed – in order to save a lost and sinful soul.

6.7 The Temptation Chapel in Sacro Monte d'Orta

One of the most significant Franciscan post-Tridentine artistic projects is undoubtedly the *Sacro monte d'Orta.* The site, erected on a hill above Lake Orta in Lombardy contains twenty small chapels dedicated to the life and miracles of St Francis. Although it is only one of many *Sacri monti* (holy mountains) in Piedmont and Lombardy, it is the only one entirely dedicated to a Saint.[60] The project was created during three periods between 1597 and 1756 (nineteen of the twenty chapels were built between the years 1597–1660).[61] *De Conformitate* functioned as the principal source of inspiration and confirmed St Francis status as the second Christ. All chapels are decorated with murals and life-size terracotta sculptures depicting stories from *De Conformitate*. The chapels are arranged so that pilgrims would climb the mountain and then stroll through the buildings while contemplating the life of the Saint – presented to the visitors chronologically from his birth in a stable (chapel one) to his canonisation by Gregory IX (chapel twenty).

Chapel number X is entirely dedicated to the Saint's temptations. The building's octagonal entrance is placed at the top of a flight of steps and flanked by a pair of granite columns with composite capitals supporting a curved pediment (fig. 82). Once the spectator has entered, he or she is invited to contemplate the Saint's carnal sufferings through a beautifully decorated iron railing, which divides the octagonal

60 The most famous of the Sacri monti are: Varallo (dedicated to the passion of Christ), Oropa Biella (dedicated to the Virgin Mary) Serralunga di Crea (dedicated to the assumption of Virgin Mary), Belmonte Valperga (dedicated to the Passion of Crist), Ghiffa (dedicated to the Holy Trinity), Domodossola (dedicated to Golgotha), Varese (dedicated to the mystery of the Holy Rosary) and Ossuccio (dedicated to the Blessed Virgin di Soccorso), all have been included on the UNESCO world heritage list since 2003. For more on the Sacri monti, see, e.g. Zanzi 2005 and Zanzi & Zanzi (Eds.) 2014.

61 The first period was forty years from 1597, when the project was initiated, until about 1640. Work then resumed after nearly ten years, stopped again in 1690, and remained stagnant for an additional fifty years. The commune of Orta took in 1583 the decision to create a Sacro Monte dedicated to St Francis, and the Capuchin monks at the Franciscan monastery created the ichnographic program. St Francis and his friars were included in the decorations wearing the monastic habit of the Capuchin order (characterised by the pointed hoods, which are smaller than that of the usual Franciscan habit).

Fig.82. Chapel X 'La Cappella delle Tentazioni' (The Chapel of Temptations) ca. 1650. Sacro Monte d'Orta.

space in half.[62] The decorations include life-size terracotta sculptures presenting the thorn bush episode and including the Saint, angels and his demon tormentors. The walls are adorned with murals showing four additional temptation episodes: *St Francis harassed by demons during prayer*, *St Francis and the prostitute*, *St Francis in the snow* and *St Francis urged by the Devil to jump from a cliff*.[63] The building works are believed to have been created between 1640–1650. An inventory from 1651, however, notes that 'Tentazione del Santo Padre. Resta da fare',[64] (The temptation of the holy father is yet to be done). In 1654 the chapel was fully completed; it received an enthusiastic reception by the Marquees of Caracena, Governor of the State of Milan upon his visit in April.[65]

62 Information given on site notifies that the railing was made in Milan in 1653.

63 Above the four temptation scenes are images picturing corresponding texts from the Bible and the Gospels. The ceiling shows the theme of the immaculate conception: here, the Virgin is placed standing on a dragon to assure the spectator that it is possible to overcome any carnal temptation, just as the saint did. Also, see Longo 2008, 51f.

64 'Inventario del 1651…' 1982, 57.

65 Ferro 2003, 228.

An eighteenth-century visitor's guide, *Istruzzione al divoto Lettore che desidera visitare il Sacro Monte del S. Francesco d'Orta,* offers a unique insight into how a contemporary devotee was expected to take inspiration from St Francis' temptations:

> Impara ancor tu ò lettore à trionfare nelle tentazioni del demonio, e della carne per riportarne rose immarcescibili di merito cha tanto piacciono à Dio.
> (Also you, dear reader, should learn to triumph over the temptations of the demon and of the flesh to obtain the unfading roses of goodness so welcomed by God).[66]

It is made clear that temptation was seen as an integrated part of human existence and something, which was believed to affect everyone. Thus, the author encourages his readers as well as visitors of the Temptation chapel to follow Francis' example and to please God by learning the importance of resisting evil.

The chapel's murals were made during 1660–1665 as a collaboration between Giuseppe Nuvolone and his brother Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1609–1662).[67] St Francis' meeting with the prostitute is shown on the second mural to the left (fig. 83), right after a scene picturing the Saint being harassed by demons during prayer. It takes place in a luxurious setting in front of a large bed. Francis is fully dressed in the brown monastic robe of the Capuchin Order. He is seated on the floor on a pile of glowing and smoking wood and is gesturing towards the woman in front of him. Her face is destroyed[68], but she is lavishly dressed in a blue gown with striped sleeves and a red robe. Her blonde hair is partly loose and partly braided with pearls. In the doorway a curious child is hiding and, in the background, two figures are seen chatting at a table. One of them has a beautiful hat on his head while the other, probably St Francis again, is bareheaded. This scene appears to represent the dinner in Emperor Fredrick's castle, which took place right before the temptation episode. Picturing the Saint dressed in a monastic

66 *Istruzzione al divoto Lettore…* 2008, 185 (Orig. p 30) (translation mine).

67 As is indicated in an inscription: 'C. Fran. Et Ioseph fr[atr]es. De novoloni busdicti Pamphili mediolanenses faciebant anno domini 1654', see Ferro 2003, 229. The Nuvolone brothers, who painted several of the other chapels at the sacro monte, reportedly initiated their commission in the temptation chapel.

68 According to the current caretaker of the Sacro monte d'Orta, an old legend has it that the face of the prostitute was painted over by a mother of a young girl in the village, who was so alike the temptress that evil rumours about her started to circulate.

Fig.83. Carlo Nuvolone or Giuseppe Nuvolone, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity,* ca 1650, Fresco. 'La Cappella delle Tentazioni', Sacro Monte d'Orta.

robe rather than showing him naked should probably be understood as the Capuchin monks' wish to connect their patron father to their order. It leaves the scene rather orderly and with a lack of the sensual appeal which often is present in other interpretations of the motif.

It is not clear which of the Nuvolone brothers painted which mural in the chapel. The collaboration (if there was such) with the sculptor Dionigi Bussola (1615–1687) also remains uncertain. The life-size polychrome terracotta sculptures were made in 1655 and painted by a certain Antonio Pino during that same year.[69] The sculptural group on the floor of the chapel shows an undressed St Francis lying on his back on the ground (fig. 84). He is surrounded by animals such as rabbits, a goat, a ferret and a deer. Four apple trees with fruits made of

69 Ferro 2003, 229. Bussola is known to have worked with several of the chapels in Orta, but also with the decorations in the Sacri Monti in Varese, Varallo and Domodossola. See also *Un artista del Seicento...* 2006.

Fig.84. Dionigi Bussola & Antonio Pino , *St Francis in Thorns*, ca 1650. Painted terracotta and iron. 'La Cappella delle Tentazioni', Sacro Monte d'Orta.

terracotta and metal further decorate the scene and perhaps also serve as a reminder of the Fall and all bodily sufferings which came with it. On the ground, there are roses and rose leaves made of metal. A dark red demon with bat wings and bird feet is harassing the Saint by making ugly faces, while two other demons and a lion are taking refuge. They are chased away by the four angels who have come to dress Francis and bring him to *Santa Maria degli angeli*. It is thus showing the incident presented in *The Portiuncula Indulgence* (see p. 82f.). The story continues on the wall behind the sculpture group in a mural where the Saint is seen carrying a bouquet of red and white roses. He is walking towards an ancient temple placed on a hill, where Christ and the Virgin, seated on a throne above an altar, are waiting to receive him. The inscription written on a cartouche on the frame of the image quotes Tobit 12:13: 'Quia acceptus eras Deo necesse fuit ut temptatio probaret te' (And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee), thus highlighting one of the most fundamental purposes of temptation – to show one's loyalty to God through the successful resistance to evil. Ultimately, the scene also becomes an introduction to the following chapel XI, which presents the 'Portiuncula Indulgence'.

6.8 *Alcoran Franciscanus* – St Francis in Protestant Satire

In a time of spiritual conflict and fractions within the Christian church, *De Conformitate* became as harshly criticised by the Lutherans and Jansenists as it was loved and celebrated by the Catholics. In 1531 the German humanist, reformer and poet Erasmus Alber attacked the book in his *Alcoranus Franciscanus (Der Barfusser Monche Eulenspiegel*

Fig.85. Bernard Picart, *St Francis' Exemplary Chastity*, in *Alcoranus Franciscanus (Der Barfusser Monche Eulenspiegel und Alcoran)*, Amsterdam 1732. Engraving, 16,5 x 10,2 cm.

und Alcoran), with an introduction written by Luther.[70] Alber's book became widely popular, spread and translated into several languages; a Latin edition followed the same year and, shortly after, French, English[71] and Dutch editions.

Alber's book includes a satirical translation of Bartholomew's text. In short, it was the very idea of comparing St Francis to Christ which did not sit well with the Protestants. Alber declares that it would be a great insult to Christ if one were to believe the miracles

70 In 1607 Henry Sedulius replied to the protestant critique in his 'Apologeticus adversus Alcoranum Franciscanorum pro libro Conformitatum', See Robinson 1907.

71 The first English translation with the title The Alcaron of the bare-foote friers was printed in London 1550 by Richard Grafton. A second edition followed in 1603, also printed in London by William White. See *A Bibliographical Catalogue…* 2016, 55f.

performed by St Francis and his followers. He gives examples: while Christ transforms water into wine once in the Bible, Bartholomew's *De Conformitate* gives no less than three examples of how Francis performs the same miracle. Likewise, Christ has one transfiguration – St Francis has twenty. Moreover, while Christ suffers because of his wounds briefly, Francis walks around with the pain of his stigmata for over two years.

An illustrated edition of Alber's book was published in Amsterdam in 1732, with images by the French engraver Bernard Picart (1673–1733).[72] Bartholomew's work was ridiculed with the extended title seen on the title page: 'c'est a dire, recueil des plus notables bourdes & blasphemes de ceux qui ont osé comparer Sainct François à Iesus ChriSt'(That is to say, a collection of the most notable errors & blasphemies of those who dared to compare Francis to Jesus Christ).[73] Picart has included most of the scenes illustrated 150 years earlier by Galle, naturally with a bit of irony. In his version of Francis' meeting with the prostitute (fig. 85), the Saint seen lying naked in a fireplace with spread legs and an erected penis. On the floor, Francis' gown, rope belt and sandals lie in a messy pile. The woman standing on the floor next to him is wearing a sort of ottoman outfit with a dress over loosely-fitting pants, a small jacket and a ridiculous little fez on her head: Picart has evidently taken inspiration from the Babylonian story. A text under the image reads: 'Une Belle femme sollicitant St François de coucher avec elle. Il se mit au milieu d'un grand feu, lui disant que c'etoit la son lit' (A beautiful woman solicited Saint Francis to sleep with her. He puts himself on a large fire and says it is his bed).

6.9 Male Potency Under Check

Despite the Protestants' critique (and perhaps even partly because of it), *De Conformitate* became, as we have seen, one of the most significant sources for the Franciscan post-Tridentine iconography. The similarity between St Francis and Christ is, I argue, also present in the Franciscan temptation motif. Leo Steinberg has pointed out how the art of the Franciscans, already in the Middle Ages, emphasises Christ's nakedness and thus, also, his humanity. Indeed, the adoration of the nakedness of Christ is present also in one of the most famous credos of the Franciscan Order, 'Nudus nudum

72 MF VII_B_13, Biblioteca Franciscana.

73 The rest of the text reads: 'tiré du grand Liure des conformitez, jadis composé par frere Barthelemi de Pise, cordelier en son viuant'.

Christum sequi'[74] (to naked follow the naked Christ).[75] It was a call to cast aside worldly attributes and wealh, like St Francis did in his youth when he undressed his worldly clothes (in fact, he stripped himself completely naked) in front of the Bishop of Assisi. Thus, when Francis undressed in front of the attractive prostitute, it was not the first (or the last) time he stripped naked in public.[76] The nakedness of Francis and his followers was predominately expressing a desire to imitate Christ and his passions. Thus, the undressed St Francis on the charcoal, performing a miracle and converting a sinner without any additional heavenly aid, may be understood as a symbolic dressing in Christ's body. The lack of fear involved in a close encounter with a sinful female is undeniably also reminiscent of Christ and Mary Magdalene (Luke 7–8).

With regard to the Franciscan-inspired art of the Renaissance, Steinberg observes, in his famous book *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, the accentuation of Christ's genitals as a recurring theme. The phenomenon is, he argues, to be understood as a visual representation of how Christ, through the incarnation, restored humanity to its prelapsarian chaste state. According to Steinberg the emphasis of the Saviour's genitals also underlines his humanity:

> Just as Christ's resurrection overcame the death over a mortal body, so did his chastity triumph over the flesh of sin. It was this flesh which Christ assumed in becoming man, and to declare him free of its burden, to relieve him of its temptation, is to decarnify the Incarnation itself. ..[77]

Furthermore, Steinberg asserts that '[c]hastity consist[s] not in impotent abstinence, but in potency under check'. Indeed, I believe that the very same argument is valid also for the temptation motif and, above all, the images that accentuate St Francis' exemplary chastity. With few exceptions, the Saint is pictured as being naked, muscular and

74 The adage has partristic origins; it was first created by St Jerome, who, in his letters, encouraged his readers to lead a Christ-like life with no material attachments. Mormando 2008, 173f.

75 Steinberg 1983, 17.

76 In his article '"Nudus nudum Christum sequi": The Franciscans and Differing Interpretations of Male Nakedness in Fifteenth-Century Italy', Mormando gives several examples from the Franciscan literature of incidents when the Saint and his friars took their clothes off. One example is the famous episode when Francis, lying on his deathbed, asked to be undressed and placed on the ground so that he could die 'naked on the naked earth'. Mormando 2008, 176ff.

77 Steinberg 1983, 17.

vigorous on his burning charcoal bed. Though it is a pious display of a naked body, the Saint is not, I argue, manifesting impotent abstinence. Instead, what we are presented with is male potency, which, by being disciplined and controlled, emphasises purity.

An additional manifestation of such male 'potency under check' is found in a Benedictine mural in the octagonal cloister of San Michele in Bosco, Bologna (fig. 84). It shows the rose bush event: St Benedict is stripping off his monastic robe next to a shrub in a rocky landscape. Behind him, a fleeing, scantily-clad female demon is seen. Similarly to many of the representations of St Francis on the charcoal, St Benedict is presented here as a vigorous and muscular young man, determined to protect his chastity from devilish carnal temptation in order to continue leading his chaste, monastic life. The image is attributed to Sebastiano Razali, a former student in the Bolognese Carracci Academy. The wall decorations in the octagonal cloister of San Michele in Bosco comprised one the most important artistic projects created for the Benedictine Order during the post-Tridentine period in Italy. The following chapter examines the updated Benedictine temptation iconography, which is seen in two of the murals in the cloister.

7 ST BENEDICT OF NURSIA AND THE LASCIVIOUS WOMEN

It is well known that the Reformed Catholic Church actively encouraged the production of images depicting the lives of Saints. It was believed to motivate the faith of the observers. However, the images created for Benedictine settings tended to be less directed at the general public than, for example, Franciscan images. In comparison to St Francis, St Benedict is not a particularly popular saint, and images of him were primarily produced for an intimate and limited audience and placed in Benedictine monasteries and settings related to them. The Benedictines were a contemplative order, which meant that they focused on inward conversion and personal devotion to the salvation of souls through penitence and prayer. They lived in cloistered communities and with little interaction with the outside world.[1] Nevertheless, the number of congregations following the Benedictine rule resulted in a large number of monasteries and an image tradition and iconography that is both large in quantity and widely spread geographically.[2]

7.1 Benedictine Temptation Iconography Inspired by *Dialogues II*

St Benedict has often been referred to as the founder of western Christian monasticism. His fame mainly derives from his hugely influential book, *The Rule of St Benedict*, which includes precepts for men (and women) living in a monastic setting under the authority of an abbot.[3] It is the basis on which a majority of western monastic groups are instituted. During St Benedicts lifetime, the Saint founded a dozen monastic communities and became an influential authoritarian and a much-respected leader. In sixteenth-century Italy, there were more than twenty Benedictine congregations following the Benedictine Rule, which made the order among the most influential on the peninsula.[4]

1 Steppe 1980, 54f.

2 Roli 1971, 199.

3 Although the Benedictine tradition often emphases that Benedict's Rule is not gender specific, the original text addresses its audience only through masculine nouns (son, brother, man, monk etc.) – it does not include any other reference to the female gender than the Virgin Mary. Different versions of the Rule were introduced for Benedictine monks and nuns already with the monastic reforms of the eight century. See Bradley Warren 2006.

4 Roli 1971, 200f.

St Gregory the Great's (540–604) *Dialogues II* is the main iconographic source for the Benedictine's rich and vivid imagery. In post-Tridentine Italy, images of St Benedict usually depict detailed representations of events from the Saint's life, emphasising his miracles and piety. Through these pictorial narratives, the spectators could follow events experienced by St Benedict during his human life, which gave them knowledge about the true character of the Saint. *Dialogues II* was believed to provide an authentic portrait of Benedict. Indeed, the authority of the text rests on the claim that the principal informants were four of the Saint's disciples, who had not only witnessed several of the recorded incidents but also knew him personally and were, therefore, believed to have given accurate descriptions of his character.[5]

With the changes in religious culture during the sixteenth century, when Protestant, reform-minded humanists began to criticise what they perceived as falsehoods and superstitions in mediaeval piety, *Dialogues* was often cited as the primary source of radical degradation, as it was believed to be based on popular religiosity, miracle and magic, rather than on the Gospel. Philip Melanchthon, a principal collaborator with Martin Luther, was one of the harshest critics and condemned St Gregory as 'the dance-leader and torch-bearer of theology going down the ruin'.[6] Soon, also the authenticity of St Gregory's authorship began to be questioned. The first to challenge it was the Swiss Protestant humanist Huldreich Coccius who, in his 1565 *Opera D. Gregorii Papae huius nominis primi*, expressed his doubts, as strictly based on literary criticism. He claimed that the texts in *Dialogues* greatly differed from the church father's other writings. Even though Coccius never aimed at criticising St Gregory, whose writing and teachings he admired, Protestant critics of the following decades used his claims to conclude that the work was spurious and that the Roman Catholic church systematically falsified texts and, therefore, was not trustworthy. [7] As a result, loyal Catholics vigorously defended both the authenticity of the *Dialogues* and St Gregory's authorship. According to the iconography offered by the

5 These were: Constantinus, who after Benedict became abbot of Monte Cassino – the first real Benedictine monastery, established by Benedict himself around 529 – Valentinianus, who was in charge of the Lateran Abbey, Simplicius, third abbot of Monte Cassino, and Honoratus, abbot at Monte Cassino at the time of Gregory. *The Life of St Benedict by Pope Gregory I*, 2009, 1. See also Emmerich 2011 and Lincoln 2007, 137.

6 Quoted in Clark, 2003, 9. Original text in *Corpus Reformatorum II*, 1843, col 16.

7 Lincoln 2007, 137 n. 8; Clark 2003, 10.

Dialogues II, the images presenting the life of St Benedict, therefore, served not only to promote St Benedict's prominence but also to vindicate the importance of St Gregory's work.

The *Dialogues II* includes two temptation episodes. The first was the earlier presented rose thorn event and the second was an incident in which a group of young naked female dancers were sent to dance in the Saint's monastery yard. The latter event took place years after the Saint's temptation in the wilderness. Benedict was now a highly respected abbot in Subiaco. Like St Philip Neri, St Thomas, and St Francis, the successful conquering of temptation in his youth had granted the holy man with immunity to carnal lusts. Thus, he was not affected by the sexual enticements the group of dancers in his yard presented. The invidious priest Fiorenzo, who had sent the girls there, knew this, but he nevertheless hoped that the presence of the dancers would corrupt the Saint's young disciples. Benedict's virtue had encouraged significant numbers of people in the region to join the Christian faith. His accomplishments also generated envy, however, and his reputation for holiness infuriated Fiorenzo, who was a priest in a neighbouring church. Blinded by jealousy and encouraged by the Devil, he had first attempted to kill Benedict by feeding him poisoned bread. Upon failing in this endeavour, Fiorenzo instead aimed to destroy the souls of Benedict's disciples by evoking their carnal lusts to the extent that they would leave Benedict and their monastic lives. Sure that Fiorenzo's hatred of him had caused the attack, Benedict decided to leave his monastery with a smaller group of select disciples. They headed to Monte Cassino, where St Benedict eventually would found the first official Benedictine monastery in 529.[8]

This episode can be found in murals depicting the Saint's life and included in the decorations of a few Benedictine monasteries. The most famous post-Tridentine example is found in the octagonal cloister of the Olivetan monastery, San Michele, in Bosco in Bologna, where both temptation scenes are included.

7.2 The Life of St Benedict in the Wall Decorations of the Octagonal Cloister in San Michele in Bosco.

The wall decorations in the octagonal cloister of San Michele in Bosco was an ambitious project created by Ludovico Carracci (1555–1619) in collaboration with twelve younger artists, all present or former

8 *The Life of St Benedict by Pope Gregory I*', Ch. 8:4, 2009, 42.

students of the Carracci Academy.[9] It was the largest of the academy under Ludovico Carracci's sole leadership, and Malvasia referred to it as 'Opra più grande e di maggior premura che mai facesse Ludovico' (Ludovico's most significant and best executed work).[10] The cloister has also – not unexpectedly – often been referred to as the *Chiostro dei Carracci*. Built on one of the Bolognese hills overlooking the city, San Michele in Bosco had been an Olivetan monastery since the mid-fourteenth century. It had recently been renovated (1587–88) when the decoration work of the octagonal cloister was commenced. [11]

The octagonal shape of the cloister is rather unusual in Italian architecture of the period. William Hood suggests that it probably was Lombard architecture in the Sacro Monte and other buildings commissioned by Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584) that inspired the cloister's design. Borromeo was one of the most uncompromising reformers of the post-Tridentine church and a leading figure during the Catholic Reformation. The closest model for the cloister, in fact, seems to be the octagonal Chiesa del Lazzaretto in Milan, which was designed by the Bologna-schooled architect Pellegrino Tibaldi (1527–1596) for Borromeo in the late 1570s.[12] Updating and remodelling the monastery after ideals endorsed by one of the most influential men of the post-Tridentine church, as well as commissioning wall paintings from the Carracci Academy, was undoubtedly a way for the order to present itself as a prominent congregation.

9 This famous Bolognese art academy, also known as Accademia degli incamminati, had opened its doors in 1582. Ludovico was one of its founding members, along with his cousins, the brothers Agostino (1557–1602) and Annibale Carracci (1560–1609). The Carracci created a pictorial revolution in this private art academy, which would be of utmost importance for Italian painting for the next sixty years. Indeed, Luigi Lanzi observed in an often cited passage in his Storia pittorica dell'Italia (1795/1796) that 'Scrivere la storia dei Carracci e dei loro seguaci è quasi scrivere la storia pittorica di tutta Italia da due secoli in qua' (Writing the history of the Carracci and their followers is like writing the history of painting in Italy from the two past centuries to the present day), as cited in Lanzi 1974, 50. See also Dempsey 1986, 237. The twelve artists working with the cloister's decoration project were: Guido Reni, Lucio Massari, Lorenzo Garbieri, il Galanino, Francesco Brizio, Tommaso Campana, Alessandro Albi, Lionello Spada, Giacomo Cavedoni, Paolo Carracci, Sebastiano Razali and Aurelio Bonelli. Lorenzi, 2006, 20.

10 Malvasia 1678 I, 313; See also Campanini 1994, 28 n. 36.

11 The first monastic complex was built in the fourth century. It was remodelled on several occasions during the Middle Ages and, in the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries, by the Olivetans. The design of the octagonal cloister, as well as the remodelling of the monastery, was carried out by Pietro Fiorini and executed by Guielmo Conti 1602–03. For more details, see Lorenzi 2006.

12 Feigenbaum, 1984, 371.

The Olivetan Order or, *The Order of Our Lady of Mount Olivet*, founded by Bernardo de Tolomei in 1313, was one of the greatest monastic communities under the Benedictine rule (communità conventuali della regola benedittina). From the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century, they enjoyed great expansion in Italy. When Ludovico Carracci initiated the decoration project, San Michele in Bosco was the Olivetan monastery that was receiving the most funds in Emilia Romagna and seen to the whole Olivetan Order it was the biggest Olivetan monastery after the motherhouse, Santa Maria di Monte Olivieto in Naples.[13]

Work with the cloister's walls probably began in the summer of 1604 and was completed the following year.[14] The paintings present the life of St Benedict through twenty-one scenes, seven of which were painted by Ludovico Carracci himself. In addition, sixteen scenes from the life of St Cecilia and St Valeriano were also incorporated in the decorations. An ill-chosen technique consisting of oil painting on a marble powder wall, in combination with the damp conditions of the cloister, caused the paintings' unfortunate and almost immediate decline. In fact, only a year after the completion of the murals, in September 1606, it is noted in the monastery's account books that 'Lire decinove, et soldi quindeci speci in vernice per dare di nuovo à molti quadri del claustro' (nineteen lire and fifteen soldi spent on colour to retouch several of the paintings in the cloister),[15] and by the 1630s, the paintings were in such a dire state that Guido Reni decided to repaint his image at his own expense.[16]

Today, only fragments are left of the images that once were the most refined large-scale, post-Tridentine decoration projects narrating the life of St Benedict. The original compositions of the murals are, however, preserved through engravings included in Carlo Cesare Malvasia's *Il Claustro di San Michele in Bosco* (1694) as well as in Giampietro Cavazzoni Zanotti *Il Claustro di San Michele in Bosco* (1776).

13 Campanini 1994, 23, n.12; Polonio 1972, 381ff, 412.

14 Feigenbaum reports that the monastery's 'Libro delle Fabbriche' shows payments for marble dust and chalk for the plaster and nails for the painters' scaffolds in its June-July entry in 1604. Feigenbaum 1984, 372. On April 9, 1605, Ludovico was paid 1436 lire and 16 sol for 'due quadri grandi et quattro mezani'. The majority of the payments for the other paintings are recorded between April–October of 1605. The 'Libro delle Fabbriche' of San Michele in Bosco (Archivio di stato, Bologna, Conventi soppressi, Convento degli olivetani di San Michele in Bosco di Bologna [177–2349] Fabbriche No.6 1579–1610, folios 111ff) published in Hibbard 1965, 503. See also Foratti 1913, 129.

15 ASB, Demaniale, San Michele in Bosco 177/2349 c.114c, cited in Campanini 1994, 47.

16 Archivio di stato, Bologna, Conventi soppressi, Convento degli olivetani di San Michele in Bosco di Bologna [177–2349] Fabbriche No.6 1579–1610, folios 111f. See Hibbard 1965, 503, n8. For a further account on the decline and restoration of the murals during the centuries, see Campanini 1994, 47ff.

7.2.1 St Benedict in Thorns

The rosebush scene attributed to Sebastiano Razali and earlier painted in the octagonal cloister, is rather unusual, as it shows a temptress next to the young St Benedict. Razali's painting is preserved only through an engraving signed by Giovanni Fabbri and printed in G. Cavazzoni Zanotti's 1776 documentation of the monastery (fig. 86).[17] Though Malvasia mentions the wall painting in *Felsina Pittrice*,[18] where he also attributes it to Razali, he completely omitted the painting in his 1694 illustrated *Il Claustro di San Michele in Bosco*.[19] Zanotti was, therefore, the first to give comprehensive documentation of all images incorporated in the pictorial program of the cloister. The wall paintings ought to have been in quite a ruinous state in the 1770s when Zanotti commenced his documentation. It is, thus, not clear how much of Razali's image remained when the engravings for Zanotti's publication were done. As the engraving of Fabbri is the only known reproduction of the image, it is impossible to know how well it corresponds to the original composition.

Zanotti's reproduction of Razali's mural shows how Benedict is undressing his habit next to a shrub in a rocky landscape in order to overcome his carnal agonies. Behind Benedict, the object of his desire, a young woman in a rather revealing, short-sleeved dress, is fleeing the scene. At first glance she appears to be human: there are no horns on her forehead, and she has no bat wings or bird feet. Her malice is, nonetheless, indicated by the long claw-like nails on her feet and hands.

St Benedict is receiving heavenly aid from three angels hovering on clouds above him; the first one is holding a palm branch, the symbol of the triumph over the spirit of the flesh; the second brings the ancient symbol of victory, a laurel-wreath; the third has lifted both arms in a successful attempt to fend off the female demon. In the circular space created between St Benedict, the woman and the angels, a church or possibly a monastery appears on top of a hill.

17 Zanotti Cavazzoni 1776, plate 6.

18 Malvasia 1678, 578. Also, Antonio di Paolo Masini mentioned Sebastiano Razali in his Bologna Perlustrata, along with the painting in San Michele in Bosco '1600: Sebastiano Razali dipise ne'Claustri di S. Michele in Bosco un Quadro in Muro dove si vede S. Benedetto, che per mortificarsi si getta nelle spine', Masini 1666, 638.

19 *Il Claustro di San Michele in Bosco dipinto dal famoso L. Carracci e altri eccelenti maestri useiti dalla sua scuola*, Bologna, 1694, with engravings executed by Giacomo Giovanini. Malvasia's documentation of the monastery was focused on the key scenes and the paintings made by Ludovico Carracci. Thus, Giovanini's engravings only show 14 of the total 36 episodes – 21 from the life of St Benedict and 16 from the life of St Cecilia and St Valeriano – which were included in the cloister's wall decorations.

Fig.86. Giovanni Fabbri (after Sebastiano Razali's orig. mural in San Michele in Bosco, Bologna 1605), *St Benedict in Thorns* in G Zanotti Cavazzoni, *Il Claustro di San Michele in Bosco*, Bologna 1776. Engraving, 36,5 x 21 cm.

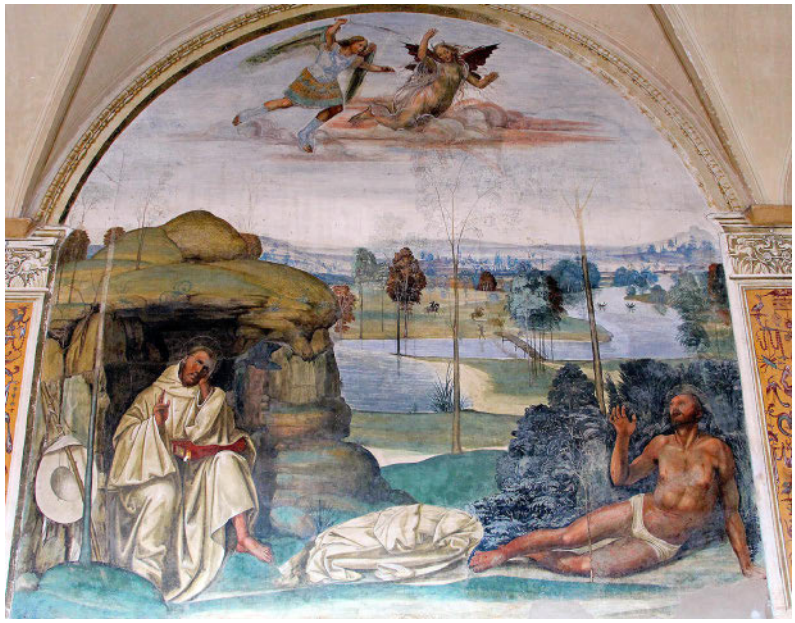

Fig.87. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (Sodoma) *St Benedict in Thorns,* ca 1505. Fresco. Monte Olivieto Maggiore.

There are earlier examples of the rosebush event including a female temptress. One of the most famous examples is seen in Giovanni Antonio Bazzi's (known as Sodoma 1477–1549) Renaissance cycle that decorates the Olivetan monastery Monte Olivieto Maggiore. Also here, St Benedict is receiving heavenly aid to fend off a female demon (fig. 87). Although the temptress is presented as an attractive young woman with long, loose, curly hair and dressed in a transparent gown which fully reveals her naked body, Sodoma has pictured her as being far more demon-like than in Razali's version: she has bat wings, bird feet and horns on her forehead. The image also differs from Razali's in that it is designed as a narrative comprised of multiple scenes: under the flying couple, St Benedict is pictured twice. To the left, he is seated next to his cave. He is dressed in the white gown of the Olivetan order with a large book in his lap, and he is leaning his head on his hand while making the cross sign with the other to fend off the blackbird flying beside him. To the right, he is pictured undressed and seated on the ground. His head is tilted backwards, and his right hand is raised towards the sky, as he is following the victorious battle of the angel taking place above him. Here, the demon's central position makes the carnal sufferings of the Saint's male body unquestionably clear. Most importantly, however, the image shows how St Benedict

victoriously overcomes his desires with the intervention of heavenly aid: the female demon is lifting her hands to the sky, thereby declaring herself defeated.

In the octagonal cloister of San Michele in Bosco, St Benedict is shown in the act of stripping his monastic robe. It is an iconography we have seen earlier in Passeri's illustrated *Dialogues II* (see fig. 16). The interpretation of the scene in the octagonal cloister, nevertheless, constitutes the first, and to my knowledge only, example of such an iconography in an independent scene. The focus is, here, moved from the traditional presentation of the Saint's somewhat passive wallowing in thorns, as seen in Sodoma's Renaissance mural, to an active performance of penance: Benedict strips his human body of its earthly attributes and social status – his monastic habit. It is a crucial moment in the young man's life when he is on the brink of leaving his monastic existence and returning to the world. His undressing, thus, also stresses the ambivalence of the particular situation; it accentuates his humanity and the physiological suffering connected with it. Furthermore, the image shows a muscular and strong St Benedict. He is a man of action, who resolutely strips off his monastic habit in a determined act to protect his virginity. He is no impotent weakling – we are led to understand that the woman constitutes a real threat to his chastity.

The image design is sophisticated. Razali is, however, not a well-known artist. What is known about him is that he was born in Bologna and attended the Carracci Academy.[20] *St Benedict in the Thorns* is his only known commission and, thus, he has largely remained as disregarded as his painting.[21] Razali was one of the lowest paid painters of the decoration project, which indicates that he painted after someone else's design.[22] The sophisticated design of the composition also implies that an artist who is more experienced than Razali must have created it. Indeed, for Zanotti, there seems to be little doubt that

20 Ticozzi 1818, 169.

21 Bellori 1672, 130; Malvasia 1678, 578. Razali is however also mentioned as the designer of a decorative painting for Agostino Carracci's funeral in 1603, Morelli 1603, 23.

22 Razali received 79,10 (settantanove lire dieci sol) for his 'mazzano' (half painting) in April 1605 and later an additional 20,10 (lire venti e mezza) on May 15, 1605: "Per finito pagamento del suo quadro mezzano di S.Bened. nelle spina". In comparison, Giacomo Cavedone and Lucio Massari each received 120 lire for a painting of the same size. Archivio di stato, Bologna, 'Conventi soppressi, Convento degli olivetani di San Michele in Bosco di Bologna' [177–2349] Fabbriche No.6 1579–1610, folios 111f, published by Hibbard 1964, 502 n.8; See Malaguzzi 1895, 71 n.1 who cites a notation in Fabbriche 12. (1632, fo.119).

the creator was his famous teacher Ludovico Carracci: 'è cosi ben inventato, e disposto, che vi si conosce la idea del Grande Maestro' (It is so well designed and arranged that one recognises the idea of the Great Master).[23] A parallel can also be drawn to Ludovico Carracci's earlier design, particularly regarding the female temptress, whose posture closely resembles the torch-bearing Ceres in the decoration of Palazzo Sampieri-Talon in Bologna (fig. 88).

The mural was situated in a rather closed setting and was intended to be seen by the Olivetan monks residing in the monastery. It shows an episode from the Saint's youth, which took place at a moment when he had barely started his monastic life. St Benedict had recently been out in the world and seen the sins of Rome. Though he fled to the wilderness, he brought illicit thoughts with him. The temptation left him in such a state of desperation that he was on the brink of leaving his ascetic life altogether. Such a motif had an essential function in a monastery filled with young aspiring monks who likely rather often found themselves doubting their calling. While their life in the monastery was highly restricted and left them with little contact with the outside world, their minds could be inflicted by sexual temptation at any moment. Seeing that St Benedict also suffered as a young man not only brought them closer to their founding father but also gave them the strength to endure their religious calling.

Fig.88. Ludovico Carracci, *Ceres*, 1593–1594. Fresco. Palazzo Sampieri-Talon, Bologna.

7.2.2 Ludovico Carracci's *St Benedict and the Dancing Girls*

The octagonal cloister's version of the episode with the tempting dancers in St Benedict's yard was erected and designed by Ludovico Carracci (1555–1619 fig. 89). The original composition is preserved through engravings included in both Malvasia's and Zanotti's documentation. In addition, there are some drawings and engravings showing details of the original painting, created by artists who visited the monastery in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[24]

The scene takes place on a verdant slope. The women are arranged in two groups placed in the fore and middle grounds of the image. Three of them are dancing accompanied by a fourth playing the

23 Zanotti, 1776, 29. See also Foratti 1913, 128f.

24 In addition, in the Louvre, Paris, a preparatory sketch for the mural by Ludovico Carracci is preserved.

Fig.89. Giacomo Giovanini, (after Ludovico Carracci's orig. mural in San Michele in Bosco Bologna 1605), *Seven Female Dancers in St. Benedict's Monastery Yard* in Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Il Clausto di san Michele in Bosco...* Bologna, 1694. Engraving, 54,2 x 37,2 cm.

tambourine, while the other three are seated in the grass in the foreground. In the background St Benedict and two friars are seen: they are about to leave. One friar is covering his face with the wide sleeve of his habit, terrified by the female temptation. A glimpse of the monastery is suggested by the top of a dome and a bell tower, merged in the green to the right. The women give a rather carefree and joyful impression; they dance, play and rest in the greenery. One is arranging her coiffure, while another places a flower wreath on her head.

When studying the few other known versions of the motif, it becomes clear that artists have presented the insidious content of the episode quite differently. All versions of the motif that are known to me picture more or less the same instance: the moment when the Saint, in the role of abbot, leads his young monks and disciples away from the dangerous female temptation. One of the first existing interpretations is a fifteenth-century miniature by the Belgian artist Jean de Stavelot (fig. 90), as included in *Beati Benedicti abbatis in veteri lege figurata et per doctores nove legisluculenter approbata* (Liège, 1432). Here, St Benedict and two friars observe the group of dancers, pictured entirely naked and arranged in a circle. In Sodoma's famous Renaissance version of the motif in the pictorial cycle of Monte Olivieto Maggiore, the image is dividedly arranged with St Benedict and his monks on one side and the female dancers on the other (fig. 91). The women are dressed in contemporary and luxurious clothing. Only a few of the women seem to be dancing. Two of them are holding hands in the foreground, while a third woman, standing behind them and facing the spectator, is holding a little black child. Most likely this detail (which seems, quite surprisingly, to have been overlooked by earlier scholars) refers to the vice of fornication and sin. We recognise this racist iconography from the *Allegory of Sin* (fig. 6a).

The Carracci interpretation shows the women as being rather revealingly dressed. It is, nonetheless, primarily the composition that creates the sensual undertone in the scene. The figures are placed one after another in a curving line. The spectator's gaze is, thus, led to follow the line, which starts at Benedict and his friars and continues past the group of dancers down to the woman seated in the very foreground. In the fragmental remains of the painting, the shape of the woman can still be perceived. She is placed so that her bosom is about a metre and a half from the ground, right at the eye level of the spectator. Thus, her round, voluptuous right breast – provocatively accentuated through a thin fabric – becomes the focus of the observer's attention.

Fig.90. Jean de Stavelot, *Seven Female Dancers in St Benedict's Monastery Yard* in *Beati Benedicti abbatis in veteri et per doctres nove legisluculenter approbata*, Liège, 1432.

Fig.91. Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (Sodoma), *Seven Female Dancers in St Benedict's Monastery Yard*, ca 1505. Fresco. Monte Olivieto Maggiore.

Malvasia did not fail to notice this rather explicit detail. In his discussion on the scene, he illustrates the enticement created by the woman's partly exposed breast – appearing to bounce out of its transparent veil – by citing one of the verses from Torquato Tasso's immensely popular epic *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), which compares her to the Saracen sorceress Armida:[25]

> Her breasts, two hills o'erspread with purest snow,
> Sweet, smooth and supple, soft and gently swelling
> Between them lies a milken dale below
> Where love, youth, gladness, whiteness make their dwelling
> Her breasts half hid, and half were laid to show
> Her envious vesture greedy sight repelling;
> So was the wanton clad, as if this much
> Should please the eye, the rest unseen, the touch.[26]

The erotic charge of the image is found in the fine line between nude and clad. While arms, shoulders and feet are fully exposed, the rest of the female bodies are draped in delicate, fluttering and transparent fabrics, which only minimally cover their skin and reveal parts of breasts, buttocks and bellies. The image, thus, inevitably became a visual temptation, also for its intended audience of Olivetan friars, who stood before the scene faced with the choice of letting their eyes rest on the sexually enticing breast in the front or lifting their gaze towards the group of holy men in the background.

The artist has created a sophisticated interplay between the male and female groups and the gaze of the spectator by repeating the positioning of the musician's lifted arm as she plays the tambourine in the image of the female dancer to the right. It creates a falling line which is interrupted by the similarly raised (but in the opposite direction) arm of the friar who is hiding his face in his sleeve. Consequently, the spectator cannot avoid being directed towards the friar when watching the lascivious women, and is, thus, encouraged to follow his example. Furthermore, as both St Benedict and one of the women meet the gaze of the viewer, he is forced to become an even more active participant. As the woman recognises his presence, the spectator can no longer remain a voyeur who secretly admires her attractiveness, and if impure thoughts capture his mind, Benedict is watching him. In fact, the Saint gestures towards the spectator, acknowledging him as his disciple and encouraging him to join the group of fellow friars and leave the female temptation behind.

25 Malvasia, vol I. (1678): 1841, 313.

26 Tas, Torquato, *Gerusalemme Liberata* vol I, canto 4:31.so

7.2.2.1 Sinful Dancing.

The *Dialogues II* gives no further details about the female dancers. Subiaco was, in the fourth century, still partly pagan. It is, thus, likely that the girls brought to the monastery were pagan, but not necessarily prostitutes. St Benedict's nemesis, Fiorenzo, requested that the girls do what only a non-Christian would do – dance naked. The story, thus, reveals how Christians saw pagans as sinful and lascivious. The brazen act of dancing (naked none the less) was intimately associated with pagan rites and celebrations. Female dancers have long had a bad reputation and have often been equated with immorality and prostitution.[27] One of the more famous biblical examples is found in Salome, whose dance caused the martyrdom of St John the Baptist (Matt 14:6; Mark 6:22). In the Western pictorial tradition, she has become equivalent with a lascivious, deceitful and dangerous female temptress who used her beauty for her own gain. The biblical story, on the contrary, merely presents Salome as a victim of her scheming mother and even fails to mention her by name.[28]

The Catholic Church's generally negative view on dancing is motivated by the association between dance and the Devil: St Augustine had an opinion on the topic already in the fourth century when he alleged that those who dance renounced Christ in order to give themselves to the Devil. Furthermore, during the witch hunts in the early modern period, it was commonly believed that the witches entertained themselves by dancing with the Devil.

The connection between dancing and sin is noticeable in early modern devotional texts. In St Francis de Sales' (1567–1622) *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609), an immensely popular early seventeenth-century spiritual guide for laymen, the warnings against the dangers of dancing are numerous. Although de Sales asserted that dancing, *per se,* was not necessarily sinful, the surrounding circumstances when dancing was practised could potentially be full of temptation and danger – not least because dancing often took place at night. Thus, de Sales warned that dancing may encourage illicit behaviour: 'while people's bodily pores are opened by the exercise of dancing, the heart's pores will be also opened by excitement, and if any serpent be at hand

27 Robert L McGrath shows that Medieval and Early Modern visual culture also used male dancers to illustrate sin, paganism and immorality. Acrobatic dancers and jesters were often placed into the borders and margins of illustrated manuscripts, where they served as examples of 'immoral behaviour'. McGrath 1977, 84f.

28 For a recent study on Salome in Medieval and Early Modern imagery, see Baert 2017.

to whisper foolish words of levity or impurity, to insinuate unworthy thoughts and desires, the ears which listen are more than prepared to receive the contagion.'[29] Indeed, as earlier noted, it was well-known that courtesans often entertained their guests in the evenings through drinking, music – and dancing.

Carlo Borromeo who, as we know, was an enthusiastic reformer of the post-Tridentine church, saw it as essential that laymen's occasions to sin would be restricted through firmer moral rules and increased control. As Archbishop of Milan, he campaigned rather aggressively against dancing on Sundays and feast days and even made it punishable by excommunication.[30] The episode picturing enticing females dancing before St Benedict and his monks, thus, clearly brought forward an erotic conflict, which was suitable for an early seventeenth century audience.

7.2.2.2 Later Reproductions of the Motif

Despite the quick decline of the octagonal cloister's decorations, the images immediately became famous. The monastery was, at least to some extent, open to the public and became a rather popular attraction both for the inhabitants of Bologna and for foreign travellers who stopped by to see the cloister during their trips through the city in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When Jean Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) visited the cloister in 1759, he executed a watercolour of the seven dancers (fig. 92). The artist's patron, Abbé Saint Non, with whom he travelled to Italy, commissioned the painting. In his travel diaries, the Abbot complained about the state of the frescoes. As Fragonard seems to have painted only this scene, it is possible that the wall painting was one of the few still visible.[31]

The scene with Benedict and the dancing women attracted great admiration, as it was subject to several later reproductions. The focus has mainly been on the seven young women and, in particular, the woman seated in the foreground, whose sensually emphasised breasts have received considerable attention. Giuseppe Maria Mitelli included her torso as an example of a 'busto femminile' as part of a publication with a series of eleven illustrations depicting different types of human

29 De Sale 2009, part III; ch. XXXIII, 193.

30 Black 2004, 97.

31 Campanini 1994, 138 not 10–15. See also 'Rosenberg Saint Non-Fragonard 1986.'

Fig.92. J. H Fragonard, detail of Ludovico Carracci's orig. mural *Seven Female Dancers in St Benedict's Monastery Yard*, 1759. Watercolour on paper. Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris.

Fig.93. (Left) Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, *Busto Femminile* (Female bosom), detail from L. Carracci's orig. mural *Seven Female Dancers in St Benedict's Monastery Yard*, engraving , ca. 1663–1666, Collezioni d'Arte e di Storia della Cassa di Risparmio, Bologna.
Fig.94. (Right) Unknown artist, detail from L. Carracci's orig. mural S*even Female Dancers in St Benedict's Monastery Yard*. Staatsgalerie, Graphische Sammlung, Stuttgart.

figures (including children, adults, elderly people, men, women, body parts, etc.) taken from paintings by Ludovico Carracci, Guido Reni, and Flaminio Torri. The images were possibly intended to serve educational purposes by aspiring young artists and dilettantes (fig. 93). Mitelli does not mention the origin of the female image.[32] His work is undated but believed to have been created sometime between 1663 and 1666.[33] An additional study of the young woman's torso can be found in an etching, which, at a later date (probably surmised by an art dealer), was falsely attributed to the Bolognese artist Francesco Albani. It is likely due to the reference by Malvasia, in his *Felsina pittrice*[34], of a drawing by Albani depicting Ludovico's 'Le sette Fanciulle', which at the time was found in the collections of Grand Duke Leopold in Florence (fig. 94). This drawing's current whereabouts is, however, unknown.[35]

7.2.2.3 Iconographic References

Earlier studies provide few suggestions regarding Ludovico Carracci's possible iconographic references.[36] It could be argued that an engraving, which for a long time was attributed to Agostino Carracci, showing four nymphs dancing accompanied by a seated lute player (probably depicting *The Apulian Shepherd Transformed into an Olive Tree*), might have inspired Ludovico in his rendering of the dancers (fig. 95a). The print designer, engraver and publisher, Luca Bertelli (c.1550–c.1590), who was active in both Venice and Rome, probably published the engraving in the 1580s. The work is neither dated nor signed, but it is similar in composition, style, inscription and dimensions to another engraving depicting *Aeneas and Anchises* (fig. 95b), which was published by Bertelli in Venice in 1582. Paola DeGrazia affirms that the similarity of the prints makes it highly likely that they are companion pieces and works of the same

32 By contrast to Malvasia, who mentions Ludovico Carracci as the artist of the image showing 'il seno e le braccia della lascivia che tenta S. Bernardino [sic]'. Marzocchi 1983, 148. See also Campanini 1994, 96.

33 Varignana 1978, 237–40 n 102. A See also Campanini 1994, 97.

34 Malvasia, (1678) 1841, 351.

35 Campanini refers to a document cited by Giotti (in *Le Gallerie di Firenze,* Florence 1872, 107), according to which a larger number of sheets (around 4700) were either destroyed or sold in the early eighteenth century when the Mediceo-Lorense art collections were moved from Palazzo Pitti to the Uffizi gallery. Furthermore, as Campanini observes, drawings had a low status still in the nineteenth century and were often dismissed as "copie, e da scarto". See Campanini, 1994, 97(n. 30), 97ff.

36 Foratti 1910–11, n.14; Foratti 1913, 128f.

Fig.95a. (Left) Unknown artist, *Dancing Nymphs* (T*he Apulian Sheperd Turned in to an Olive Tree* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), 1582. Engraving. Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris.
Fig.95b. (Right) Unknown artist, *Aeneas and Anchises*, 1582. Engraving. Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes. Paris.

artist.[37] Indeed, they both picture scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Agostino Carracci worked for Bertelli in Venice the same year, which might explain the earlier attribution to the artist.[38] The first to reject it was Bodmer[39] followed by Ostrow, who noted the lack of Agostino's characteristic use of sharp contrast between light and shadow.[40]

Considering the vast number of preserved prints by Bertelli, he appears to have had a successful business.[41] It seems likely, therefore, that his engravings were also sold in Bologna. It is even possible that Agostino, along with his Venetian engravings, brought many others from Bertelli's shop to Bologna and the Academy for educational purposes. These would, therefore, have been available for Ludovico

37 See also DeGrazia 1979, 390 R.23.

38 Published in Bartsch (113b) as Agostino's.

39 Bodmer, Heinrich 1940, 71; See also DeGrazia 1979, 390 R.24.

40 Ostrow 1966, 30. See also DeGrazia 1979, 390 R.23.

41 DeGrazia 1979, 390 R.23.

when he was working on the San Michele in Bosco project. Even though Ludovico's group of dancers by no means could be considered a direct copy of the dancing nymphs in the Bertelli engraving, there are a number of similar details in the images that are hard to dismiss as coincidences. Notice, for example, how the dancer pictured from behind in both images is kicking with her right foot so that she shows the naked palm of her foot, and how she stretches out her arms in opposite directions – one upwards and one downwards – as she joins hands with her fellow dancers. Likewise, in both images, the woman pictured to the left has placed a hand behind her head. While the seated lute player is removed in Ludovico's image, he has replaced the instrument with a tambourine placed in the hands of a woman to the right, who repeats the arm movement of the dancer to the right in the Bertelli engraving. Ludovico's dancers are more scantily clad, their dresses none the less, bear some resemblance to the Venetian engraving. It could be coincidental, as the dresses in both images are designed in quite a generic ancient manner, often seen in profane scenes. One last detail deserves to be compared, namely the burning castle in the background of the *Aeneas and Anchises* engraving and the monastery in Carracci's temptation scene, which bears some likeness in its design, thereby indicating that the artist possibly had both images at hand when designing his composition.

7.3 St Benedict, the Ideal Abbot

Campanini has suggested that Bernardino Passeri's images, included in the earlier mentioned illustrated *Dialogues II, Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Patris Benedicti* (publ. 1579, see p.54), functioned as inspiration when the cloister's wall paintings were designed.[42] Although it might be true for some of the scenes, Carracci's highly unique interpretation of the episode with the dancers bears no compositional resemblance with Bernardino Passeri's version of the scene (fig. 96). In the illustrated book, the dancing temptation is placed in the background. The women are pictured dancing naked hand-in-hand to form a circle in the courtyard of the monastery. It is an arrangement that shares many similarities with Jean de Stavelot's fifteenth-century miniature (fig. 90). A resemblance between Ludovico Carracci's and Passeri's two interpretations of the episode can instead be seen in their presentation of the Saint: both versions picture Benedict as an authoritarian leader and father figure, concerned for his younger friars' safety. Passeri has placed Benedict in

42 Campanini 1994, 28.

Fig.96.Bernardino Passeri, S*even Female Dancers in St Benedict's Monastery Yard*, in *Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Patris Benedicti*, Rome 1579. Engraving, 287 x 194cm.

the foreground leading a group of five disciples along a tortuous path in a rocky landscape. The saint is turning his back on the temptation while leading his young male monks away from a situation which risks driving them to ruin. They follow their abbot obediently, walking behind him tightly together, seeking his protection and guidance. In the far distance, seen through a gap in the rock, there is a glimpse of a distant settlement, perhaps the location of their new monastery.

Carracci's and Passeri's presentations of St Benedict closely follow the Saint's description of an ideal abbot in his *Rule of St Benedict.* Benedict ascribes a highly authoritarian function to the abbot as the leader of his monastery. The Saint compares the abbot to a shepherd and the monks to his sheep – in the monastery, the abbot represents the person of Christ. The abbot is more, however; he is to 'show both the severity of a master and the loving affection of a father'.[43] He is the moral guide for his monks and ought to be observant of their misbehaviours and sins and correct them accordingly. 'Let him chastise with stripes and bodily punishment, knowing what is written "The fool is not corrected with words"' [Matt.vi.33]. And again: 'Strike thy son with the rod, and though shall deliver his soul from death.' [ps. XXXiii. 19].' For a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Benedictine or Olivetan monk, St Benedict represented not only the foundation of their order; he was a role model, a father figure, a leader and, as an abbot, also the representation of Christ. It is manifested in the Benedictine temptation episodes by both Carracci and Passeri, in that they both lack the presence of any heavenly aid. Instead, the Saint is given the role of protector, not only of the monks pictured in the scene but also of the spectator.

7.4 The Temptation Motif in a Monastic Context

When St Benedict wrote the *Rule of St Benedict,* he was strongly influenced by the writings of John Cassian (c.360–435), noted for bringing the ideas and practices of Christian monasticism to the early medieval West. Cassian's teachings are introduced in his two books, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences.* They were well-known in the Benedictine monastic culture and were recurrently studied by the monks.[44] Both books include essays on the subject of monastic chastity.[45] According to Cassian, there was a higher degree of chastity, which was granted by God. The selected people to whom it was granted no longer needed to battle against carnal temptations. From the hagiographies of the Saints studied here, we know that St Benedict and the others

43 *The Rule of St Benedict* 1948, (Ch. 2) 5.

44 The *Institutes* deal with the outer man, the external organisation of monastic communities, and the *Conferences* is, in turn, focused on the inner man and theological and philosophical questions concerning the monastic experience.

45 These three lengthy texts, institute 6, conference 12 and conference 22, have long been deemed as being sexually frank and, thus, were omitted from most translations made of Cassian's Latin texts. The first and only existing English translation, by Terrence G. Kardong, was published in the pamphlet Cassian on Chastity as late as 1993. See Kardong 1993, 5.

had reached this highest level of chastity. Indeed, a 'chaste' person had, according to Cassian, surpassed all sexual reactions; he was no longer suffering from unwilling erotic thoughts, not even subconscious sexual desire. It was an ideal state of existence. The followers of the Saints, such as the monks residing in the monasteries where images of the holy men's temptations were displayed, were in turn, according to Cassian's teachings, classified as 'continent'. They were not as chaste as the Saints; they still had to engage in a carnal struggle and could be tempted.[46]

Cassian's texts on chastity and carnal agonies are detailed and specific. They deal with a broad set of subjects from masturbation to unwilling nocturnal emission. None of his texts deals with fornication – he is addressing an exclusively male and monastic audience who has taken vows of chastity. Razali's image of the female demon tempting young Benedict in the wilderness and Carracci's scene containing the enticing young dancers, are, thus, not primarily to be seen as warnings against the wickedness of female seduction and illicit sexual relations. The Olivetan monks in the monastery were living highly sheltered lives with minimal contact with the outside world (and, thus, also women). Therefore, the images should instead be understood as instruments, used to challenge and teach the spectator not to apply an unchaste desirous gaze when looking at the depicted women.

Indeed, for Cassian, there were six grades of chastity that had to be passed in order to reach 'inviolable purity'. The first was not to submit to the attacks of the flesh during vigil (e.g., not to practice self-pollution). The second, 'not to dwell on voluptuous thoughts'. The third, not to experience any sexual lust when seeing a woman. The fourth, not to be the least carnally aroused during vigil. The fifth to be able to talk about coitus (if needed) without experiencing any carnal lust, and the sixth and last grade was not to have any erotic dreams.[47] Hence, it could be argued that the pictured women (not least the accentuated breast of the voluptuous seated woman in Ludovico's painting, which clearly is placed on display), were meant to be enticing in order to test (and train) the mental chastity and purity of the spectator, who perhaps one day would be able to attain at least some of Cassian's grades of chastity.

46 Ibid., 8.

47 *Cassian on Chastity*, Conferences 12:7.

8 CONCLUSIONS

When the Catholic Church in the Tridentine Council reaffirmed the rule of mandatory clerical chastity, they confirmed the superiority of the celibate state. In this thesis, I have argued that the function of the temptation motifs was to communicate this message. Images of carnally tempted male saints have been produced within Catholic imagery since the Middle Ages. It is only to be expected, seeing that the Church has endorsed clerical celibacy since the fourth century. However, I argue that the refined iconography presenting carnal temptation, along with an increased number of new motifs, which were introduced from the mid-sixteenth century, clearly show that the Church emphasised, more decisively than before, the importance of resistance against carnal sins. Saints occupied an essential part of the Catholic religious culture, particularly after the Protestants had denied their relevance. In the age of the Counter-Reformation, it was seen as crucial to defend the concept of sainthood from the Protestant's critique through both texts and images. The images included in this study have been analysed in close connection to the (predominantly medieval) hagiographic texts they were illustrating. It shows remarkably clear that the temptation motif was bringing forward episodes that emphasised both the marvellous and the miraculous aspects of saintly lives, aspects, which were particularly criticised by the Protestant reformers. Thus, not only did the images vindicate the importance of the particular saint, but also the texts they were illustrating.

As the Catholics affirmed the importance of images for didactic and devotional purposes, portrayals of episodes from the lives of the saints were encouraged in order to supply the faithful with a good example. The temptation motif should, therefore, be understood as an instrument in highlighting the dangers of carnal desires as well as the importance of sexual abstinence and mental self-control. The chaste body epitomised Catholicism and showed that unlike their Protestant opponents – who, on the contrary, encouraged clerical marriage – they were following the true doctrine. Images that glorified not only holy virginity but also visualised stories where pious men suffered and fought to preserve that precious virginity propagated the idea that sexual abstinence was not only desirable but a requisite for leading a truly pious life. Many of the depicted stories constituted important

events in the lives of the Saints; after successfully overcoming temptation, they were granted immunity to carnal desires for the remaining period of their human lives. It made them quintessential virgins and essential role models for devotees.

Through the hagiographies of the Saints, we learn that temptation served different functions. When the holy men were tempted carnally in the wilderness, the temptation enabled the ascetics to be aware of unclean thoughts and to work actively to overcome them. By presenting self-mortification, these motifs were meant to display acts of detachment from the body and its sinful lusts. It shows that the men performing these acts were less concerned about their mortal bodies than their eternal souls. Equally important, the images often also communicate that the holy men overcame their desires through God's grace. The believer, thus, sees that devilish temptations, regardless of how difficult they may be, always remained under God's watchful eye. The spectator was encouraged to take inspiration from the Saints' actions, as the image of the holy man practising self-mortification, is to be understood as a glorification of the determinate act to protect a virgin and chaste body. It could, therefore, be argued that these images were to be read as a validation of the temptation process as a means of purification. Concurrently, the scenes stressed each's responsibility to castigate a sinful body to manifest one's loyalty to God.

The studied material is heterogeneous. It has been a conscious choice to include images made in different artistic techniques and materials – oil paintings, engravings, murals and sculpture – and of exceedingly diverse artistic quality. It shows that the temptation motif –which until now has been an almost completely overlooked theme in the study on religious imagery – indeed, was quite frequently occurring in the Italian visual culture of the early modern period. These images were ordered for and displayed in, private homes, churches, monasteries and printed books. Some were even sold as engravings on the open market. It has been shown that the scenes depicting male saints struggling against their carnal lusts, were not only increasingly produced, but also addressed to expanding audiences of both laymen as well as monks and priests. Some of the images were knowingly placed in public places, such as churches, to be on display for the masses; and when included in illustrated *Vite*, the explanatory texts were recurrently translated to the Italian vernacular. Many more images were, however, placed in somewhat remote settings where

only an elite audience of monks and clergy could adorn them. It nevertheless shows that the studied scenes served a critical purpose in the broader spectrum of early modern religious culture: to both affirm the excellence of the celibate state as well as the prominence of the individual saint.

The study has shown that some temptation episodes, although based on famous written sources, had a rather limited dispersion. The temptation of St Jerome is one example. Unlike other motifs displaying self-mortification such as the images picturing St Benedict and St Francis in thorns, which were rather recurrently produced in post-Tridentine Italy, artists have rarely presented St Jerome's carnal agonise. Instead, the more well-established iconography of the penitent St Jerome in the desert, which shows the Saint meditating before the Bible while beating his chest with a rock as an act of penitence, has been favoured. *The Temptations of St Anthony*, in turn, constitutes the most well-established iconography of the motifs presented in the study. Recurrently, images of the Saint were placed on display in churches, often decorating private burial chapels and could be seen by the broad public. St Anthony was shown tempted both carnally by a temptress as well as harassed physically by male demons. Thus, the motif's didactic purpose became multidimensional: the many characters represented various vices that effectively informed about the different horrors of sin. When decorating private burial chapels, the pictured scenes could also be ascribed a broader metaphorical meaning, as they glorified not only the Saint but also its patron, who wanted to adopt the Saint's virtues as his own.

The studied images have shown that the iconography of the temptress varies. She is pictured principally in three ways: as a prostitute dressed in contemporary and lavish attire, as a scantily-clad woman with attributes belonging to nymphs and other female characters in mythological scenes, and as a female demon. The latter is always based on one of the two former. Dancing nymphs represent St Jerome's sexual enticements in Domenichino's Sant'Onofrio mural, and in several interpretations of the Temptations of St Anthony nymphs are seen next to the harassed Saint. The mythological character of the female nymph epitomised paganism, lasciviousness and sexual frivolousness. She was a character who was often seen in Renaissance imagery. Thus, when included as the Saint's scheming temptress, the artist denounced, as depraved, not only paganism but also Renaissance culture.

In early modern Italy, female transgression and disorderliness were, however, embodied primarily by the female prostitute. The prostitute became a rewarding representative of the dangerous female sex and constituted the antithesis to the virtuous male saint. Narrating temptation stories through texts and images in which a pious man was brought before a lascivious prostitute effectively accentuated male virtue. Furthermore, as an unmarried and often young male, the tempted Saint represented a typical customer and, consequently, performed a praiseworthy act when rejecting the female allurements. Equally as important, the temptation motif presented women (prostitutes or demons) who failed in their attempt to exercise their sexual power and to seduce a man. The prostitute was essentially an economically independent woman who challenged the social order. A male saint who was shown withstanding his temptress did not only protect his chastity but, in doing so, he also maintained the prevailing power structures between the genders.

Converting a prostitute and turning her into a penitent Catholic was seen as a great sign of piety. It was partly a reaction against the Lutherans who, in turn, were stressing the importance of original sin and the belief that man remained a sinner despite baptism and good works. It motivated an introduction of the conversion theme in the visual culture: scenes picturing attempts to convert sinful women were brought forward in the contemporary pictorial tradition through the temptation motifs. The book illustration from the life of St Philip Neri shows him escaping from a mendacious courtesan's home. She had invited him under the false pretence that she wanted to be pardoned for her sins. Though the holy man usually shunned female company, he was driven by the motivation to save the soul of a sinner. Though he failed to convert the woman, his successful escape from her house still proved his piousness and good intentions.

A successful conversion story is in turn found in the life of St Francis. He saves the sinful soul of a prostitute, invites her to join him in his sanctity by converting her to Christianity. Although the pictured event was well-established in the Franciscan written tradition, it was not included in Franciscan imagery until the late sixteenth century. Post-Tridentine Catholicism venerated St Francis, more distinctively than earlier, as a 'second Christ' and themes such as his exemplary chastity were brought forward to emphasise his virtuous and perfect character. The episode with the prostitute included a miraculous element, as Francis placed his body in a fire without being burned.

The fire has a metaphorical meaning, as it emphasises that neither the fires of lust nor the glowing charcoals burn the Saint. The particular episode, which is rather far from the ordinary ascetic life, should probably not be read as a request to follow the Saints example. Instead, it served as a warning for men leading ascetic lives; as they could not be expected to repeat the miracle of Francis, they should avoid all contact with women.

Francis' temptation scenes unmistakably illustrate an extraordinarily heroic act. Contrary to other male saints like St Thomas, who chased a female prostitute from his cell with a torch, or St Eligius, who pinched the seductive demoness' nose with his smith's nippers, Francis neither attacks nor escapes his temptress. Instead, the Saint places himself in a potentially perilous situation, challenging his chastity by undressing before the woman. Here, the courtesan's room, which usually is the embodiment of a man's downfall, is, through St Francis, transformed into the embodiment of salvation. Furthermore, by presenting St Francis as a muscular athlete, artists could accentuate his masculine power and underline that he was not an impotent weakling. The spectator was to understand that Francis, although the temptress was attractive, managed to resist her merely because there is something more satisfying than carnal pleasure – the absolute and abundant love of God. This celestial love is far more rewarding – it does not satisfy a mortal body, but the eternal soul.

In many versions of the temptation motifs, artists have stressed the sensual appeal of the temptress. Occasionally, she is even erotic. One example is seen in Domenico Fiasella's interpretation of the motif picturing St Francis' Exemplary Chastity, where the woman, the Saint's temptress, is lying completely naked on a bed. The rather explicit sensuality of the images indicates that it was probably made for a private patron and placed in his private chambers. However, St Francis is pictured naked and in the company of a rather voluptuous female demon also in the Sant'Orsola Church in Como. Thus, religious images including naked women were sometimes placed in settings where laymen could see them. It challenges the notion that religious motifs including graphic presentations of nude female bodies were produced exclusively for a private market where they could be used as a pretext for erotic imagery. I argue that within a religious context the temptation motif could be used as visual aids for the audience. When in the company of

a male Saint, the female temptress could function as a supervised temptation for the spectator: He was invited to look at the enticing female body, while the Saint presence encouraged him to follow his example and overcome unclean thoughts. A similar function is seen in Ludovico Carracci's mural at the octagonal chapel in San Michele in Bosco, showing female dancers in St Benedict's monastery yard. Here, it is the Saint, serving as abbot, who is assisting not only the young devotees pictured in the scene but also the spectator to surpass the carnal enticement brought upon them by the female dancers.

There are no equivalent female versions of the carnal temptation motif. As female sexuality was condemned as uncontrollable and even dangerous, displaying a female Saint being tempted, undressed and penitent while withstanding sexual enticement imposed on them by illicit and attractive male demons would therefore not have served as a promoter of chastity. The Virgin Mary was passionately venerated as immaculate and perfect, but she was the mother of God and, as such, without sin. All saints had once been human in flesh and blood and had suffered because of their humanity and their inherently sinful bodies. Women, regardless of their piousness, were believed to have a weaker character and, therefore, not expected to be able to overpower the desires of their carnal body. Instead, the Christian fear and hatred of women enabled a visual tradition in which the female gender was presented as both deceiving and dangerous. Images that, like the temptation motifs, pictured transgressive yet attractive women were increasingly popular in the post-Tridentine period. It provided moral and didactic imagery, which contemporarily offered an important and excellent opportunity to emphasise the holiness of men through the use of female transgressors.

This study has shed light on the early modern and post-Tridentine view on the human, carnal and ultimately also mortal body. While the motif serves to remind us that we are all flesh and that all flesh is weak, it can also be concluded that ideal Catholic chastity is best represented through a suffering but a resistant male body. After all, the studied images show us exclusively male saints whose chastity has been put on trial and victoriously passed the test. Consequently, we are also led to understand that sexual transgression and lasciviousness is best epitomised through the female body. In a further study, far too extensive to be included here, it would be worthwhile to study the iconography of chastity and virginity in the broader perspective, including both female and male saints. It would, ideally, more

comprehensively illuminate the particular characteristics ascribed to female vs male virginity. This thesis is limited to the geographical scope of modern day Italy. Engravings and illustrated books had a large dispersion and were produced for a global market. Arguably, the temptation imagery developed also beyond the borders of Italy, in the rest of Catholic Europe and there are undoubtedly vast amounts of temptation imagery left unstudied. Furthermore, the Franciscans, along with the Jesuits evangelised their teachings in the New world in America and the East. Thus, comparative material and images picturing temptation and the sinful other in the exotics, would no doubt be an exiting continuance to the study presented here.

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Minna Hamrin

Picturing Carnal Temptation and Sin in Italian Post-Tridentine Imagery

Images of male saints defending their chastity against transgressive women were increasingly produced in post-Tridentine Italy – a period when Catholic dogma, through Church reform, emphasised the superiority of the virginal state and the danger of carnal desire. The images show the female gender as an immediate danger to the patriarchal order, eager to corrupt innocent, pious men by inducing them to engage in the sin of fornication. In this thesis, temptation scenes from the lives of various male saints are studied. The material consists of paintings, drawings, engravings and sculptures, all produced in Italy during the 'long seventeenth century'.

Åbo Akademi University Press | ISBN 978-951-765-914-7