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The mariology of St. Bonaventure as a source of inspiration in Italian late medieval iconography

La mariología de San Buenaventura como fuente de inspiración en la iconografía bajomedieval italiana¹

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Abstract: The central hypothesis of this paper raises the possibility that the mariology of St. Bonaventure maybe could have exercised substantial, direct influence on several of the most significant Marian iconographic themes in Italian art of the Late Middle Ages. After a brief biographical sketch to highlight the prominent position of this saint as a master of Scholasticism, as a prestigious writer, the highest authority of the Franciscan Order and accredited Doctor of the Church, the author of this paper presents the thesis developed by St. Bonaventure in each one of his many “Mariological Discourses” before analyzing a set of pictorial images representing various Marian iconographic themes in which we could detect the probable influence of bonaventurian mariology.

Key words: Marian iconography; medieval art; mariology; Italian Trecento painting; St. Bonaventure; theology.

Resumen: La hipótesis de trabajo del presente artículo plantea la posibilidad de que la doctrina mariológica de San Buenaventura haya ejercido notable influencia directa en varios de los más significativos temas iconográficos marianos en el arte italiano de la Baja Edad Media. Tras esbozar una breve síntesis biográfica para resaltar la elevada posición de dicho santo como maestro de la Escolástica, prestigioso escritor sacro, máxima autoridad de la Orden Franciscana y acreditado Doctor de la Iglesia, el autor del artículo expone las tesis desarrolladas por San Buenaventura en cada uno de sus múltiples “Discursos Mariológicos”, antes de analizar un conjunto de imágenes pictóricas representativas de diversos temas iconográficos marianos en las que se podría detectar esa probable influencia de la mariología bonaventuriana.

Palabras clave: Iconografía mariana; arte medieval; mariología; pintura italiana del Trecento; San Buenaventura; teología.

Summary: 1. Personality and influence of St. Bonaventure. 2. The mariological doctrine of St. Bonaventure and its possible reflection in the late medieval Italian iconography. 2.1. Around the four great Marian liturgical feasts. 2.1.1. The Birth of Mary. 2.1.2. The Annunciation. 2.1.3. The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple. 2.1.4. The Assumption. 2.2. Around other Marian themes. 2.2.1. The virginal divine maternity and the perpetual virginity of Mary. 2.2.2. The Coronation of the Virgin. 2.2.3. The *Maestà* of Mary. 3. Conclusions. Sources and Bibliography.

¹ This article is the product of the research activity that the author develops as Director of the Research Group CAPIRE, assigned to the Art History Department I (Medieval) at the Complutense University of Madrid, and as a member of the Research Group of the CNPq of Brazil “Arte, Filosofia e Literatura na Idade Média”, coordinated by Dr. Ricardo da Costa, effective Professor (Associate III) of the Department of Theory of Art and Music at the Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Vitória, Brazil.

1. Personality and influence of St. Bonaventure

St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio or Bagnorea (c.1217 / 21-1274), whose real name was Giovanni Fidanza, was a famous Franciscan philosopher, theologian and mystic.² After studying philosophy and theology at the University of Paris, he entered in 1238 the Order of Friars Minor, the official appellation of the Franciscan Order, before teaching, from 1248 to 1257, theology and Bible at the University of Paris. He became the most conspicuous exponent of the Franciscan current of Scholasticism, of a Platonic-Augustinian approach, arising in clear contrast to the clearly Aristotelian Dominican current, led by St. Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Elected Minister General of the Friars Minor, he governed for seventeen years (1257-1274) the Order, whose Rule he contributed to interpret correctly, by promulgating in 1260 the *Narbonnean Constitutions*,³ reason for which he is considered as “the second founder of the Franciscan Order”.⁴ Displaying an exemplary steadiness and a prudent balance, he assumed the difficult responsibility of saving the deep divisions that arose in his Order between the currents of the “conventuals” and the “spirituals”, followers of the rigorist ideas of the abbot Gioacchino da Fiore. In this sense, he tried to harmonize as far as possible the antagonistic conceptions that each one maintained about the monastic life, according to their opposite interpretations of the teaching and the example of St. Francis of Assisi, especially, on how the evangelical poverty preached and lived by *il Poverello* should be lived.

Appointed in 1273 Cardinal-Bishop of Albano by Pope Gregory X, St. Bonaventure played a leading role as a legate of the Pope at the Ecumenical Council of Lyons (1274), contributing to the rapprochement between the Christian Churches of East and West, whose effective union the Pope Gregory X and the Byzantine emperor Michael Palaeologus sealed formally.

In the end, St. Bonaventure will be credited –thanks to his authorized teaching and his luminous philosophical, theological and mystical writings— a solid prestige throughout Christendom⁵ and a strong influence in the circle of the

² For an illustrative synthesis on the biography, writings and thought of St. Bonaventure, see “Introducción general”. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*. Vol. I. *Dios y las criaturas*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968, 3ª edición revisada, pp. 3-139.

³ “Introducción general”. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*. Vol. I. *Dios y las criaturas*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968, 3ª edición revisada, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 12-13.

⁵ On the enormous prestige that St. Bonaventure enjoyed as a teacher of Christian thought, the anonymous author of the “Introducción General” cited in our Note 1 expresses: “Orador de gran estilo, la palabra divina era recibida de boca del Doctor Seráfico [St. Bonaventure: NdR] con gran avidez en todas partes, de tal forma que, según afirma Francisco de Fabriano, ‘in cujus praesentia ubique terrarum, omnis lingua sileret’. La obra oratoria del Santo es verdaderamente imponente. Mas de 750 páginas dedica a sus sermones la edición de Quaracchi, sin contar la triple serie de *Collationes*; además de esto, no hay que olvidar que una gran parte de los 434

highest civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies.⁶ Not in vain the Church would end up distinguishing him as one of its outstanding Doctors, granting him the honorary title of *Doctor Seraphicus*.

For all that this brief biographical synopsis reveals, St. Bonaventure seems to profile himself –before it is confirmed in this way by the main theses of his Mariology, which we will analyze immediately— as an unavoidable source of doctrinal inspiration for the late medieval creators of Marian images, especially for those who worked by direct commission of the Franciscans or by the indirect way of donors sensitive to the Franciscan spirituality.

To tell the truth, in the 13th century few Christian thinkers could enjoy such high prestige and so celebrated authority as the Seraphic Doctor, being as he was a prestigious professor of theology and Bible at the University of Paris, undisputed leader of Franciscan Scholasticism, Minister General of the Order of the Friars Minor, bishop and cardinal very close to the papacy, respected Doctor of the Church, and prolific author of brilliant doctrinal writings, widely disseminated and with huge ascendant throughout Western Christianity.

In that order of ideas, such extraordinary credentials as a teacher of Christian thought would seem to be able to guarantee St. Bonaventure a very probable influence on the iconographic programmers and the artists involved in the visual representation of Marian scenes. We do not pretend to assure in an apodictic way that the Seraphic was the only inspiring source of late medieval Marian iconography. Thoroughly analyzed his Mariological writings, the only thing that we venture as working hypothesis is the strong probability that St. Bonaventure has influenced to a large extent this iconography, after having expanded and enriched with his writings the already consistent *corpus* of Mariology, which many Church Fathers and theologians had been configuring during the preceding centuries, and that will be consolidated even more in the subsequent centuries.

2. The mariological doctrine of St. Buenaventura and its possible reflection in the late medieval Italian iconography

As an important preliminary clarification, it must be emphasized that the thought of the Seraphic Doctor is extremely complex. He usually structures his reasoning into multiple ramifications, almost always tripartite, each of whose branches he subdivides in turn into as many ternas, according to the classical

sermones del tomo IX de esta edición no son más que *reportaciones* reducidas a unas cuantas líneas.” (*Ibid.*: 22-23).

⁶ In that order of ideas, the anonymous author to whom our three previous notes refer states: “Las altas jerarquías eclesiásticas y civiles recibían con frecuencia la palabra divina de boca del Santo. Predica en el Concilio Ecuménico de Lyon el 26 de mayo y 29 de junio de 1274; en presencia de Urbano IV, Clemente IV y Gregorio X, igualmente que en los Consistorios en la Curia pontificia en Viterbo, Orvieto, Perusa y Lyon. Dirige varias veces la palabra ante las familias reales de Francia y Navarra. Las universidades de París y Montpellier, el clero y cabildos de París, Rouen, Reims, Gubbio y Lyon se disputan el honor de su palabra. Como es natural, el Santo se dirige preferentemente a las almas consagradas a Dios por los votos: franciscanos, dominicos, cartujos, monjes de Cluny, benedictinos de Saint-Denis y de Génova, religiosas clarisas y de otras órdenes han oído las divinas enseñanzas predicadas por el Santo.” (*Ibid.*: 23).

scholastic method. In addition, his language becomes complex in countless twists and turns, with a discourse full of metaphors, allegories, parallels, hyperbole and antithesis. Such a peculiar way of thinking makes his doctrine a problem of difficult intellection, to the point that his discourse must in no case be assumed according to a mere linear or literally reading. Now, within the immense doctrinal system of St. Bonaventure, Mariology stands out with exceptional relevance and eidetic richness. In this order of ideas, even though in almost all his writings one can find allusive data to the Virgin, the Seraphic focuses and condenses his Mariology⁷ into a large series of sermons or lectures (the so-called “mariological discourses”), which he wrote in order to commemorate the four most important Marian feasts celebrated by the Church: the Birth of Mary, the Annunciation, the Purification of Mary and the Assumption.⁸

2.1. Around the four great Marian liturgical feasts

In order to try to make our working hypothesis understandable, we will analyze these four celebrations separately, exposing in the first place the essential ideas developed by the Franciscan mystic in each of the sermons written for the feast in question, before examining in second place some late medieval works of art in which these ideas could be reflected in some way

2.1.1. The Birth of Mary

Lacking biblical and historical documents that prove the circumstances of the birth of the Virgin, these were built early on in various fanciful oral legends, later fixed in the form of interdependent apocryphal writings. The three main apocryphal texts on the birth of Mary are the *Protoevangelium of St. Jacques*⁹ (2nd century) –whose original title is *Nativity of Mary*–, the *Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew*¹⁰ (4th century), and the *Book of the Nativity of Mary*¹¹ (synthesis of the preceding apocrypha, made around the 9th century).

Now, based on the certain fact that the Virgin was born at some point –even when her specific incidences are unknown, and apart from the inability to assume as true the apocryphal fables about it–, the Church established after a few

⁷ For a compact synthesis of the Mariological doctrine of the Seraphic Doctor, see “Introducción” (to the chapter “Discursos mariológicos”) written by the editors of *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*. Vol. IV. *Teología mística*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1963, 2ª ed., pp. 491-504.

⁸ “Discursos mariológicos”, *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*. Vol. IV, op.cit.: 505-770.

⁹ *Protoevangelio de Santiago*. Bilingual text Greek/Spanish. Published in Aurelio de SANTOS OTERO, *Los Evangelios Apócrifos* (Colección de textos griegos y latinos, versión crítica, estudios introductorios y comentarios por Aurelio de SANTOS OTERO), Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 13ª impresión, 2006, pp. 130-170.

¹⁰ *Evangelio del Pseudo Mateo* (Bilingual text Latin/Spanish). In SANTOS OTERO 2006: 173-236.

¹¹ *Libro de la Natividad de María* (Bilingual text Latin/Spanish). In SANTOS OTERO 2006: 238-252.

centuries the liturgical celebration of the Birth of Mary, which is celebrated on September 8 of each year. In fact, before the fervent mariological context promoted by the Council of Ephesus (June-July 431) –in which, under the leadership of St. Cyril of Alexandria, the dogma of the divine maternity of Mary was firmly affirmed, defined without hesitations like *Theotókos* (Mother of God)—, the cult to Mary intensified since then in a considerable way, especially in Syria. With the heat of that vital ambience of fervent Marian devotion, it is in Syria or Palestine (probably in Jerusalem) that the liturgical celebration of the Nativity of Mary seems to have begun in the 5th century, before spreading rapidly through other Middle Eastern enclaves. In the Byzantine area, this liturgical solemnity spread in the early years of the 8th century thanks to numerous sermons preached by St. Andrew of Crete (660-740) and by other Fathers and theologians of the Eastern Church.

On the contrary, in the West the feast of the Birth of Mary, for being derived from suspicious apocryphal sources, does not seem to have been widely celebrated during the 8th and 9th centuries, and even two centuries later St. Fulbert of Chartres (1028) referred to it as a party of recent implantation. From the 11th-12th centuries this feast was established in almost the entire Western Church, so that Pope Innocent IV will not hesitate to supplement this liturgical celebration by establishing in 1243 the corresponding octave. These liturgical avatars did not prevent that, first in the Byzantine East, and then in the European West, an emotive iconography of the Birth of the Virgin Mary developed from the 10th century.¹²

Being this Marian feast already consolidated at that time with such firm official legitimacy, St. Bonaventure writes four important sermons to celebrate it.¹³ In the first of them¹⁴ he points out that the birth of Mary was noble, useful and delightful, like light. It was noble, because it was pure light itself and without the darkness of sin (*sine macula*), incorruptible light by consolidating grace, and inextinguishable light by the confirmation of grace.¹⁵ In his opinion, the birth of the Virgin was also useful, as it influenced in a healthy way to give light and direct the lost souls.¹⁶ Finally, the birth of Mary was delightful, because she is a new light (thanks to her prerogative of being unique and unparalleled), beautiful (by virtue of her absolute purity) and gentle (due to her sweetness, maternal clemency and peace).¹⁷

¹² We have dealt with this iconographic theme in the following articles: “Lo sobrenatural y lo cotidiano en la iconografía medieval de *La Natividad de María*: Breve aproximación a una leyenda popular”, *Espéculo. Revista de Estudios Literarios*, XIV (43), Madrid, noviembre 2009-febrero 2010, Universidad Complutense de Madrid; “*Et vocavit nomen eius Mariam*. Aproximación iconográfica al *Nacimiento de María* en la pintura gótica española”, *De Medio Aevo*, nº 3, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, enero-junio 2013, pp. 121-152.

¹³ *De Nativitate B. Virginis Mariae*. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV. *Teología mística*, op. cit.: 732-770.

¹⁴ *De Nativitate B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo I*. In *Ibid.*: 732-737.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 732-734.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 734-736.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 736-737.

In his second speech on the aforementioned liturgical celebration,¹⁸ the Seraphic Doctor examines the ascending progress of the Virgin in her life, comparable to that of the sun. According to the author, in her birth, Mary had beauty, by her uncontaminated grace of all sin, to beautify the universe and to be delightful in the eyes of material and spiritual beings.¹⁹ In her evolution, the Virgin progressively increased her merits, by promoting grace, by her unrestricted obedience to the designs of the Most High, and by being permanently centered around Christ.²⁰ In the sublimity of her position, Mary had transcendent height, by the perfecting grace that makes her incomparably superior to other terrestrial and celestial creatures, to enlighten the Church and her permanent incorruptibility.²¹ Ultimately, the Virgin resembles the sun—a spiritual sun—for the virtuosity of her effects, because she communicates light, warmth and life.²²

In his third dissertation on the birth of the Virgin²³ the Seraphic considers this as an *admirable Glass, the work of the Most High*, for being virtuous, beautiful, graceful and copious. She is virtuous, for her holiness, rectitude and integrity. She is beautiful, for her honesty, virginity, charity, sincerity and other virtues.²⁴ She is graceful, for her fullness and superabundance of grace.²⁵ She is copious, for her discretion, her refection and her joy.²⁶

In his fourth sermon on the birth of Mary,²⁷ the mystic theologian insists on the biblical metaphor that she is the “admirable Glass” of God, for her purity, for the ardor of her chaste love, for enlightening the Church and for her total beauty.

These fervent considerations of St. Bonaventure on the liturgical feast of the Birth of Mary, by supplementing and enriching in a considerable way the already abundant patristic and theological *corpus* on that subject, will have in all probability influenced in some measure the iconographic programmers and artists who represented this—so exceptional in the West—Marian iconographic motif. We would dare, in this sense, to suspect that the Bonaventurian lyrical exegesis could have influenced the interpretations of the subject made by Pietro Cavallini, Giotto di Bondone and Pietro Lorenzetti.

¹⁸ *De Nativitate B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo II.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 738-751.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 739-742.

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 742-746.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 744-746.

²² *Ibid.*: 746-751

²³ *De Nativitate B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 751-755.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 752-753.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 753-754.

²⁶ *Ibid.*: 754-755.

²⁷ *De Nativitate B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 755-770.



Fig. 1. PIETRO CAVALLINI, *The Birth of the Virgin*, c. 1296-1300. Apse. Church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome. Image from Web Gallery of Art (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Pietro Cavallini (c.1250-c. 1330), in his mosaic of the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome (Fig. 1),²⁸ highlights the labor of childbirth suffered by Ana—fully clothed, according to the rules of modesty of the time—, by placing her semi-reclined on the bed, with her right hand on the belly and the left on the thigh, a pose that recalls her effort to facilitate the delivery. Two maidservants provide food and drink to the woman in labor, while a couple of midwives bathe the newborn, the eldest of whom holds the naked newborn in her lap, while putting her left hand into the bathtub to measure the temperature of the water that the younger midwife pours with a pitcher. Resembling almost all the iconographic programmers and medieval artists who, in the Byzantine orbit and in Western Europe, interpreted this episode, Cavallini also insists on the naturalistic details of the process of giving birth—the painful effort of Ana, the solicitous comfort of the servants, the presence of the midwives, the bath of the newborn—, with the clear purpose of showing that the birth of the Virgin was a common and ordinary birth, like that of other mortals.

²⁸ PIETRO CAVALLINI, *The Birth of the Virgin*, c. 1296-1300, mosaic in the apse. Santa María in Trastevere, Rome. Illustrated in Alastair SMART, *The Dawn of Italian Painting 1250-1400*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1978, s.p., fig. 34; and in Joachim POESCHKE, *Fresques italiennes du temps de Giotto, 1280-1400*, Paris, Citadelles & Mazenod, 2003, p. 170, fig. 43.



Fig. 2. GIOTTO, *The Birth of Mary*, c. 1303-1305. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

With an even more “realistic” sense than Cavallini, Giotto (1267-1337) interprets this matter in his *Birth of Mary* of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (Fig. 2).²⁹ This is evidenced by the Florentine master in the following details: one of the two midwives squeezes the towel used in the bathroom, while the other opens with her fingers the eyes of the newborn, already wrapped in tight sashes; one of the two maids to the side of the bed gives in the arms of Ana (semi-stuffed in the bed linen) her newborn, who appears for the second time in the same situation as when wrapped in sashes, while the other maid seems to bring to the parturient something comforting (food? ointment or perfume?) in a box or square container; meanwhile, under the porch and before the door of the house a young woman (perhaps a neighbor or friend of the newly calved) gives to another woman an element (of imprecise identification) destined for the new mother or her child. In such a simple geometric scene, Giotto condenses a series of convincing daily details that impregnate the prodigious birth of the Mother of the Savior with a “naturalistic” character.

²⁹ GIOTTO, *The Birth of Mary*, c. 1303-1305, fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. Illustr. in Giuseppe BASILE (ed.), *Giotto. La Cappella degli Scrovegni*, Milano, Electa, 1992, 74 (whole) and p. 79 (central detail); in Anne MUELLER VON DER HAEGEN, *Giotto di Bondone, hacia 1267-1337*, Colonia, Könemann, 2000, p. 57, fig. 70; and in POESCHKE 2003: 107.



Fig. 3. PIETRO LORENZETTI, *The Birth of the Virgin*, 1342. Museum of the Cathedral, Siena. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Pietro Lorenzetti (c.1280-1348), in his *Birth of the Virgin*, 1342, from the Museum of the Cathedral of Siena (Fig. 3),³⁰ adds many other realistic details with respect to Giotto's earlier model. The following features, for example, are strikingly realistic: the complex vaulted architecture—a curious mix of Gothic and Renaissance elements—, where the conjugal bedroom and the adjacent gallery, open at the back to other interior spaces of the house, are juxtaposed; two servants approach the recumbent mother to give her drink in a jar and hot food, covered with a cloth to keep its warmth, while a third maid fan the woman in labor to provide relief in her suffocating labor; the two midwives perform the ablution of the newborn with the traditional gestures of pouring water into the pool and testing its temperature by introducing the hand into it. However, the situation of greater realism is played by Joachim, father of the newborn, who, excluded from the scene of birth—a domain of exclusive female domain, according to the conventions of the time— receives with great expectation in the antechamber of the bedroom some news about the event in progress that a girl whispers in his ear.

³⁰ Pietro LORENZETTI, *The Birth of the Virgin Mary*, triptych, 1342, tempera on wood, 187 x 182 cm. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence. Illustr. in Curt H. WEIGELT, *Sieneese painting of the Trecento*, New York, Hacker Art Books, 1974, s.p., pl. 87; in SMART 1978: s.p., fig. 117; in Paul HILLS, *The light of early Italian painting*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987, p. 102, fig. 62; in Hayden B.J. MAGINNIS, *Painting in the age of Giotto. A historical revaluation*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, s.p., pl. 8; and in Hayden B.J. MAGINNIS MAGINNIS, *The world of the early Sieneese painter*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001, s.p., fig. 30.

2.1.2. *The Annuntiation*

The second great Marian liturgical feast to which St. Bonaventure consecrates a special catechetical interest is the Annunciation. In fact, he composed six sermons on this festival,³¹ simultaneously Christological and Mariological, because this event marks the beginning of the Redemption when the Redeemer was conceived at the precise moment of being announced. In the first of these speeches³² the lyrical thinker exposes the nobility of the one who conceives, the purity of the conception and the sublimity of the conceived Offspring. In his opinion, the nobility of the one who conceives, Mary, derives from three virtues that characterize her as a singular dowry: her deep humility (like a land that germinates), her unwavering firmness (like the root that sprouts) and her generous charity (as the source that flows).³³ In addition, the virginal purity of the conception is expressed by three biblical figures: the bush that burns without being consumed, the dried stick of Aaron that turns green, and the fleece of Gideon, which is soaked with dew, while the ground on which it is found remains dry.³⁴ In the third place, the sublimity of the conceived Offspring derives from the double perfect nature –human and divine— of Jesus: as a man he possesses the fullness of qualities and virtues; as God he possesses eternity and insurmountable dignity.³⁵

In his second panegyric on the Annunciation³⁶ St. Bonaventure discusses the fertile virginity and the virginal fertility of the Savior's Mother, and the fruits of such conception. In his view, the fertile virginity of Mary entails the beauty of incorruption, the simplicity of intention, and the sincerity of love in granting her consent to the divine message, as prerequisites for conceiving the Son of God.³⁷ The author further states that the fertile virginity of Mary is an immaculate virginity, for she gathers in herself the bodily and the spiritual virginity.³⁸ On the other hand, this virginal fertility is admirable with respect to the Mother, with respect to the Son and with respect to the conception itself, and is unparalleled to any other conception, since it rescues us from sin and death.³⁹

In his third sermon on this feast⁴⁰ the Franciscan prelate exposes the mystery

³¹ *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae*. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 574-682.

³² *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo I*. In *Ibid.*: 574-583.

³³ *Ibid.*: 575-576

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 576-578.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 578-583.

³⁶ *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo II*. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 583-609.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 583-587.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: 587-596.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 596-609.

⁴⁰ *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III*. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 610-626.

of the incarnation based on three essential motives:⁴¹ the benignity of God as reason or motive; the benefit that the incarnation reports to the Virgin, defined as unirrigated but very fertile land;⁴² and the usefulness of the healthy effects of incarnation to obtain various virtues.⁴³

His fourth talk on the Annunciation⁴⁴ deals with the different ways that God has for inhabiting men. He lives corporately in Mary's womb, in a real sense, because she is the nuptial bed, the royal throne and the tabernacle of the Son of God.⁴⁵ He lives sacramentally in the militant Church, in allegorical sense, with the purpose of sanctifying, instructing and sustaining his people.⁴⁶ In the third place, God dwells spiritually in the faithful soul, in a moral sense, establishing charity, humility and poverty in the believer.⁴⁷

In his fifth sermon on the Annunciation,⁴⁸ the Bagnoregio's thinker reflects on the salutation of the angel, when he describes Mary as "full of grace",⁴⁹ and in that sense explains with great complexity of nuances that fullness of grace of the Virgin.⁵⁰

In his sixth approach to the same feast⁵¹ the Seraphic speaks with similar subtlety about the laudatory and blessing words addressed to Mary both by the archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation and by her cousin Elizabeth at the Visitation.⁵²

Now, as far as the late medieval iconography of the Annunciation⁵³ is

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 612-615.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 615-620.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 620-626.

⁴⁴ *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 626-648.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 627-633.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 633-640.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 640-648.

⁴⁸ *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo V.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 648-663.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 649-655.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 655-663.

⁵¹ *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo VI.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 664-682.

⁵² *Ibid.*: 664-682.

⁵³ We have investigated this Marian theme in the following works: "In virga Aaron Maria ostendebatur. Nueva interpretación del ramo de lirios en *La Anunciación* gótica española a la luz de fuentes patrísticas y teológicas", *Anales de Historia del Arte*, nº 24, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014 (forthcoming); "Flos campi et lilium convallium. Tercera interpretación del lirio en la iconografía de *La Anunciación* en el Trecento italiano a la luz de fuentes patrísticas y teológicas", *Eikón Imago*, nº 5, enero-junio 2014, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, pp. 75-96; "Flos de radice Iesse. Aproximación hermenéutica al motivo del lirio en la pintura gótica española de *La Anunciación* a la luz de fuentes patrísticas y teológicas", *Eikón Imago*, 4, julio-diciembre 2013, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, p. 183-222; "La Virgen de la Anunciación, un paradigma de humildad en la doctrina y

concerned, it is necessary to recognize that practically all the artists once again approached (usually, several times) this inescapable Marian theme, included almost always in some section of the polyptychs consecrated to Christ or Mary. For this reason, it is impossible to attempt to suggest a convincing cast of artists who treated the subject. By way of mere examples, we analyze here only three Italian Annuntiations of the period under study.



Fig. 4. JACOPO TORRITI, *The Annuntiation*, c. 1296-1300. Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Jacopo Torriti (mid-13th-early 14th century), in his mosaic in the apse of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (Fig. 4),⁵⁴ represents the Virgin in an upright posture, after having suddenly risen from her luxurious throne, by fear and surprise at the unforeseen arrival of the archangel Gabriel. This one, standing in front of the maiden, points with his right hand towards the top, to indicate the origin of the celestial message that he brings. In tune with such a gesture, on the top of the scene, God the Father, like a glowing nimbus bust in a blue mandorla, is present contemplating / choosing Mary, while sending to her head the ray of life, on whose golden stele the fertilizer Holy Spirit flies in the form of a white dove. Torriti thus paints the intervention of the three divine Persons in this supernatural event, in which, by the action of God the Father (*the power of the Most High will cover you with his shadow*)⁵⁵ and the Paraclete (*the Holy Spirit will come upon you*),⁵⁶ the conception of the Redeemer Son of God (*you will*

la imagen de la Edad Media”, *Mirabilia. Electronic Journal of Antiquity & Middle Ages*, nº 15, julio-diciembre 2012, Institut d’Estudis Medievals, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, pp. 189-220.

⁵⁴ JACOPO TORRITI, *The Annuntiation*, c. 1296, mosaic in the apse of the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome.

⁵⁵ Lc 1, 35. In *Biblia de Jerusalén* (Edición española. Dirección: José Ángel Ubieta López, Coordinador general: Víctor Morla Asensio), Bilbao, Desclée de Brouwer, 2009, 4ª ed. totalmente revisada, p. 1.496

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

conceive in the womb and you will give birth to a son whom you will call Jesus)⁵⁷ is accomplished in that same moment.

There is no room for doubt about the eventual influence of the teachings of St. Bonaventure in this scene, not only because the painter Jacopo Torriti was a Franciscan friar, but, above all, because the monumental set of mosaics made around 1296-1300 by Torriti in the apse of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore (including this Annunciation) was commissioned by the Franciscan pope Nicholas IV, who, before being elected Supreme Pontiff, had replaced St. Bonaventure himself (recently deceased) in 1274 as Minister General of the Franciscan Order.



Fig. 5. SIMONE MARTINI, *L'Annunciazione tra i Santi Ansano e Margherita*, 1333. Uffizi, Florence. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Simone Martini (c.1284-c.1344), in his *Annunciazione tra i Santi Ansano e Margherita*, 1333 (Fig. 5),⁵⁸ depicts on the abstract background of gold leaf that supernatural dialogue: kneeling before the enthroned Virgin, the Angel offers her with his left hand a bouquet of olive tree, while with the right indicating upwards to announce that the Most High will cover her with his fecundating shade (*virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*).⁵⁹ The divine message is also illustrated in the epigraphic inscription with the salutation *Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum*,⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Lc 1, 31. In *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ SIMONE MARTINI (with LIPPO MEMMI), *L'Annunciazione tra i Santi Ansano e Margherita*, 1333, tempera and gold on wood, 184 x 210 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

⁵⁹ Lc 1, 35. In *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam. Nova editio (logicis partitionibus aliisque subsidiis ornata a Alberto Colunga et Laurentio Turrado)*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 12ª edición, 2005, p. 1011.

⁶⁰ Lc 1, 28. *Ibid.*

which, coming out of the Gabriel's mouth, reaches Maria's ear, retracted with fear and modesty on her throne, while holding ajar in her left hand the prayer book. In the absence of God the Father and the usual fecundating ray, the divinity manifests itself here only through the dove of the Holy Spirit, framed this time by a mandorla of red cherubs. At the center of the composition, forming an axis with the divine Spirit, a vase full of lily stems metaphorizes the dogmatic contents of the virginal divine maternity of Mary, the central nucleus of this heavenly announcement.



Figs. 6 y 6-1. LORENZO VENEZIANO, *Polittico Lion*, 1357-1359 (whole and detail). Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Lorenzo Veneziano (act 1356-1372), in his *Annunciation* of the *Lion Polyptych*, 1357-59, an altarpiece originally on the high altar of the church of Sant'Antonio di Castello, and today at the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice (Figs. 6 and 6-1),⁶¹ interprets the theme with extraordinary complexity throughout its central area. To analyze the identity and function of each of the various prophets and saints that populate the side panels of the altarpiece does not offer major interest for our research objective. In that order of ideas, we only have the detail –very important for our purposes— that St. Francis of Assisi appears in the last panel on the right: such detail denotes that the donor, Domenico Lion –figured kneeling in a tiny scale next to the Virgin's feet—, undoubtedly shared the Franciscan spirituality, of which the Seraphic Doctor is one of the primordial champions. The essential theme of the *Lion Polyptych* is the simultaneous Annunciation / conception of the incarnate Son of God, which is illustrated in its two central panels. In the upper one, God the Father, half-length, generously opens his arms, as if to signify at the same time the sending of his divine Son to the world and his benevolent welcome (“with open arms”) of the Virgin Mary, when she accepts the divine design to become *Theotókos*. In the lower panel, at the top of which God the Son, under the appearance of a child's head, and God the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descend from heaven, the

⁶¹ LORENZO VENEZIANO, *Polittico Lion*, 1357-59, tempera and gold on wood, 126 x 75 cm, the lower central panel, y 121 x 60 cm, each one of the four lower side panels; 82 x 85 cm, the upper central panel, y 67 x 60 cm, each one of the four upper side panels. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Virgin bows her head and crosses the arms on her chest, in a sign of humble obedience (as *ancilla Domini*) to the divine will, while clearly showing her pregnant belly, as a sign of having already conceived –after her unrestricted assent (*Fiat mihi secundum Verbum tuum*)⁶²— this incarnate Son of God, who becomes visible by flying over her. Clearly the designer of the iconographic program of this splendid altarpiece wants to emphasize that the virginal conception of the Messiah, produced at the conclusion of the Annunciation, is, as we have already said, a joint work of the three divine Persons, figured here in perfect genetic order –God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit— in the vertical axis that “covers” the already pregnant Virgin of Nazareth.

2.1.3. *The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple*

St. Bonaventure elaborated three sermons to commemorate this feast, in which the Virgin fulfilled the double rite of her own purification and the oblation of her First-born, even though neither she needed to be purified nor Christ required a legal offering / rescue.⁶³ In the first of these speeches⁶⁴ the saint explains the two purifications received by Mary. The first was an interior and real purification (*secundum veritatem*),⁶⁵ which was necessary to free her from original sin through grace.⁶⁶ The second was an exterior purification and merely symbolic (*secundum exteriorem repraesentationem*), since, being exempt from all current sin, the Messiah’s Mother did not require this purification, to which however she submitted to fulfill the Mosaic law, receiving thus at the same time the three purifications: the legal, the prophetic and the evangelical.⁶⁷ In fact, the author concludes, the Virgin carries with it all the purifying and perfecting graces.

In his second eulogy on the same liturgical solemnity,⁶⁸ the Seraphic emphasizes the double and complementary moral quality of Mary, who, on the one hand, did not need to be purified because she was not unclean, while she became a perfect example of absolute holiness, for being a receptacle overflowing with the fullness of God's grace, already received before birth.⁶⁹ In the opinion of the Franciscan mystic, the Virgin was also a clear mirror of all sanctification, for having reflected at all times a virtuous behavior. It was also a perfect model of “temple of God”, because in it dwells the divine wisdom,

⁶² Lc 1,38. In *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, op. cit.: 1011.

⁶³ *De Purificatione B. Virginis Mariae*. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 505-573.

⁶⁴ *De Purificatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo I. Ibid.*: 505-532.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 508-511.

⁶⁶ St. Bonaventure, in agreement with almost all previous theologians and contemporaries to him, thought that Mary was born contaminated with the original sin, like any human being.

⁶⁷ *De Purificatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo I.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 511-521.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 532-559.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: 532-535.

goodness and holiness.⁷⁰

In his third discourse⁷¹ on the Purification of Mary the intellectual of Bagnoregio points out that the presentation of Jesus at the time was to fulfill, inquire, care and explain the Law.⁷² The author takes advantage of this Christological episode to designate as “temple of God” the virginal breast of Mary, because the Divinity lived bodily into it.⁷³

Returning now to the realm of images, the polyvalent iconography of the Purification of Mary –usually confused with that of the Presentation of Jesus to the temple, and even with that of the Circumcision of Jesus— is inspired by the Gospel of St. Luke.⁷⁴ According to Luke, when the days of the purification were over, Jesus was taken to the temple in Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord, according to the Mosaic Law.⁷⁵ A just and pious man named Simeon, who awaited the consolation of Israel, seeing the Holy Family in the temple, took the Child Jesus in his arms and, after singing a song thanking God for having allowed him to meet the Savior of Humanity, prophesied his Passion and the pain of his Mother, to whom a sword would pierce the soul.⁷⁶ At the same time, an old prophetess named Ana, who did not leave the temple, serving God night and day, when she saw the Child Jesus, spoke of Him to all those who awaited the redemption.⁷⁷

Developing subtle dogmatic and catechetical exegesis on that story of St. Luke, the Seraphic wrote the aforementioned three sermons on the festival of the Purification of Mary, thus expanding and enriching the solid patristic and theological core on the subject. In this sense, it seems reasonable to imagine that the teachings of St. Bonaventure on the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple may have influenced in some way the iconographic programmers and the late medieval artists who represented these Marian themes. We will try to perceive that possible bonaventurian influence in three works by Giotto, Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Bartolo di Fredi.

Giotto, in his *Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus in the temple*, c. 1315-1320, of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi (Fig. 7),⁷⁸ complicates the story both by the scenery and by the characters. First of all, he turns the Jewish temple of Jerusalem into a monumental Italian Gothic church with three naves. In this great building the artist distributes the numerous characters in two groups clearly divided to show the altar and an ark or reliquary –symbol of the Hebrew

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 537-546.

⁷¹ *De Purificatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV op. cit.: 559-573.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 560-563.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 563-573.

⁷⁴ Lc 2, 22-38. In *Biblia de Jerusalén*, op. cit.: 1.498-1.499.

⁷⁵ Lc 2, 22-24. *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Lc 2, 25-35. *Ibid.*: 1.499.

⁷⁷ Lc 2, 36-38. *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ GIOTTO, *The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple*, c. 1315-1320, fresco. Northern transept of the lower Church of the Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi.

Ark of the Covenant—, which occupy the apse of the temple: on the left, accompanied by five friends or relatives, Mary and Joseph are placed, the latter, semi-obscured by a pillar, carrying the two turtledoves of the ritual offering for the Mary's purification; on the right, next to two scribes or priests and a strange person kneeling in an attitude of supplication in the foreground, one observes the prophetess Ana, with a phylactery with inscriptions, and Simeon, holding Jesus in his arms.



Fig. 7. GIOTTO, *The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple*, c. 1315-1320. Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

The incorrect sliding (very frequent among the artists dealing with the subject) incurred by Giotto in this fresco is not irrelevant when he attributes Simeon—a simple “just and pious man, [who] expected the consolation of Israel”⁷⁹—the role of priest in charge of officiating the rite of the Purification of Mary, and receiving the offering of the parents for the rescue of the First-born. That this work of Giotto is inspired by the St. Bonaventure's doctrine about the Purification of Mary does not seem to offer any doubts for two essential reasons: this fresco is part of the decoration of the lower church of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, the emblematic headquarters of the Franciscan Order; furthermore, as an accredited teacher of Christian doctrine, a charismatic promoter of Franciscan Scholasticism, official biographer of St. Francis and Minister General of the Order of the Friars Minor for seventeen years, the Seraphic Doctor enjoyed a decisive predicament on the designers of the various iconographic programs that make up the set of decorations of the lower and upper churches of the *Poverello's* Basilica in Assisi.

⁷⁹ Lc 2, 25. In *Biblia de Jerusalén*, op. cit.: 1.499.

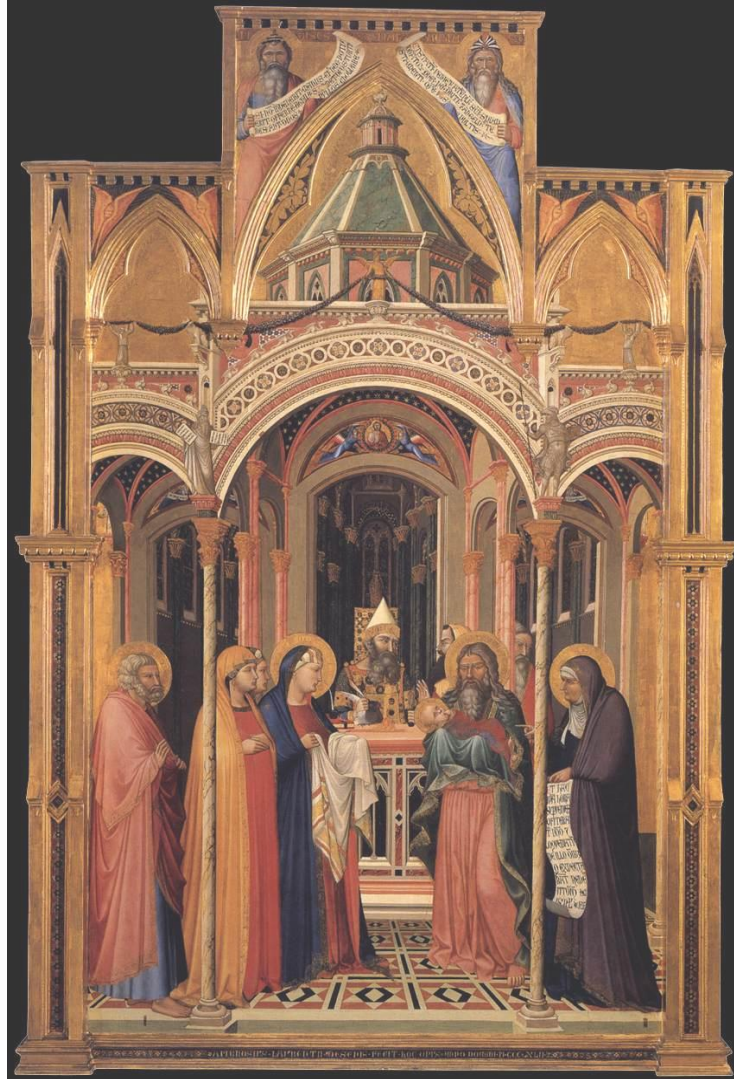


Fig. 8. AMBROGIO LORENZETTI, *The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple*, 1342. Uffizi, Florence. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1285-1348), in his *Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the Temple*, 1342, in the Galleria degli Uffizi (Fig. 8),⁸⁰ adds certain elements of greater verisimilitude to Giotto. Under the arcades of this splendid dome-shaped temple, of deep perspective, Lorenzetti structures the scene in three groups this time: on the left, the presence of the Virgin, accompanied by two women, and Joseph (although without the usual pair of doves) refers to the Purification of Mary; to the right, Simeon holding the Child in his veiled arms (as a sign of respect for the sacred), and the elderly prophetess Ana with her phylactery full of inscriptions make reference to the Presentation of the Jesus to the temple; between both groups, in the background after the altar, the high priest, assisted by two other scribes or priests, can allude in perfect coherence both to the rite of the Purification of the Mother and to the Presentation of the First-born to the Temple, in which such ritual officiants were required. In any case, Ambrogio Lorenzetti offers here a more classic and serene version than the dynamic and expressive interpretation of Giotto.

⁸⁰ AMBROGIO LORENZETTI, *The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple*, 1342, tempera and gold on wood, 257 x 168 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Fig. 9. BARTOLO DI FREDI, *The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple*, 1388. Musée du Louvre, París. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Bartolo di Fredi (c.1330-1410) offers in his painting of the Louvre, 1388 (Fig. 9),⁸¹ a much more primitive and confusing reading than the recently analyzed ones by Giotto and Ambrogio Lorenzetti. It is not only the circumstance of reducing the temple to a tiny kiosk or hexagonal canopy of implausible constructive “logic”. The most surprising thing is that Bartolo di Fredi confuses here three different and distant episodes in time: the Circumcision of Jesus, the Presentation of the Child to the temple and the Purification of Mary. In effect, the circumcision of all Jewish men, a rite in which they receive their name, is performed eight days after birth, and, usually, it is accomplished in one's father's house, and not in the temple. Di Fredi refers incorrectly to that ritual by means of the two converging details: the high priest writing the name of the child in the book resting on the altar; and the gesture of the child turning towards Mary and detaching from Simeon, a gesture that here, as in others many similar paintings, translate the natural reaction of the baby seeking maternal protection before the pain produced by the ablation of the prepuce. The presentation of the first-born Jewish male to the temple thirty-one days after his birth must be made by the father (not the mother), who, in order to rescue or redeem his first-born, instead of consecrating him to God, has to pay five silver coins to a *cohen*. Di Fredi

⁸¹ BARTOLO DI FREDI, *The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple*, c. 1388, tempera and gold on wood, coming from the church of Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Musée du Louvre, París.

alludes here to that ceremony through the presence of Joseph, Jesus and a priest or *cohen* in the temple. Finally, the purification of the Jewish mother was performed forty days after the birth of any of her sons –male or female, first-born or not— by the offering of a one-year-old lamb as a holocaust and a pigeon or turtledove, as sacrifice for sin, or a pair of turtledoves, when the mother could not pay for the lamb. Bartolo di Fredi refers to this ritual of purification through the presence of Mary in the temple accompanied by Joseph with his two turtledoves for the purification's offering. For the rest, the inclusion of Simeon (with the Child in his arms) and the prophetess Ana (with her unfolding phylactery) are explained –in this as in the other paintings of the same theme— by the ambiguous formulation (¿gaffe?) with which Saint Luke himself narrates this complex episode in his Gospel. This is what the evangelist expresses:

When the days in which they had to purify themselves were fulfilled, according to the Law of Moses, they brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of the Lord: *Every male first-born shall be consecrated to the Lord and offer a couple of turtledoves in sacrifice or two young pigeons*, according to what is said in the Law of the Lord.⁸²

With such a confusing enunciation in plural –"When the days were fulfilled in which *they* [who?] should purify themselves"—, Luke seems to match the Presentation of Jesus to the temple (which should be done thirty-one days after the first-born was born) with the alleged Purification of Mary (of obligatory fulfillment for the mother on the forty days of being born any son).

2.1.4. *The Assumption*

St. Bonaventure prepares five sermons to celebrate this Marian solemnity.⁸³ In the first of them⁸⁴ he states that during her earthly life the Virgin was the top of the mountain on which the Church was based, due to her personal grace, in which the promises, thanks, virtues and merits of the patriarchs, the prophets and the apostles, on whom the Church is founded, were concentrated and realized.⁸⁵ And in her celestial life, Mary is a singular creature in heaven, for she is situated far above the heavenly angelic hierarchies and the earthly human hierarchies, including patriarchs, prophets, apostles, saints and people of all nations.⁸⁶

In his second talk on the Assumption,⁸⁷ the Seraphic speaks about how the Virgin is worthy of praise and glory in heaven, by her similarity, proximity and

⁸² Lc 2, 22-24. In *Biblia de Jerusalén*, op. cit.: 1.498-1.499.

⁸³ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae*. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 683-731.

⁸⁴ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo I*. In *Ibid.*: 683-696.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 683-687.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 688-696.

⁸⁷ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo II*. *Ibid.*: 697-704.

nobility with respect to God,⁸⁸ and by her supereminence with respect to angels, saints and other created beings.⁸⁹ His third sermon to celebrate this festival⁹⁰ is about the honors surrendered to Mary in the Assumption, who is welcomed with love for her Son, King of Kings, with the whole heavenly court,⁹¹ before being enthroned and seated by Him at his right hand.⁹² In his fourth Marian panegyric on the occasion of the Assumption,⁹³ he deals with the grace of the Virgin in her origin (as a small, humble and alive source, that grows with incessant flow and remains sealed),⁹⁴ in her increase (as inexhaustible and fecund river, for having engendered God the Son),⁹⁵ and in her consummation (as sunlight, full of radiance and warmth). In the opinion of the lyrical thinker, Mary receives on her throne of glory the tribute of honor of heaven, earth and hell.⁹⁶ In his fifth lecture on the same celebration,⁹⁷ St. Bonaventure is entertained in the merits of the Virgin and in the three successive phases of her Assumption: her departure from the place of miseries,⁹⁸ her ascent over all celestial hierarchies,⁹⁹ and her entry into the garden of eternal delights.¹⁰⁰

It is well known that, strongly stimulated by a well-established patristic and theological tradition, the iconographic theme of *The Assumption of Mary into Heaven*¹⁰¹ presents a broad and progressive development in the late medieval art of Western Europe since the 12th century, when its first implicit expressions can be verified, before being explicitly stated and widely disseminated in subsequent centuries.¹⁰² In the Italian art of the Trecento and Quattrocento this theme

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: 697-699.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*: 699-704.

⁹⁰ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III.* In *Ibid.*: 704-712.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: 704-710.

⁹² *Ibid.*: 710-712.

⁹³ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV.* In *Ibid.*: 712-725.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 712-720.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: 720-723.

⁹⁶ 723-725.

⁹⁷ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo V.* In *Ibid.*: 725-731.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: 725-728.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*: 728-730.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: 730-731.

¹⁰¹ For a rigorous study of the subject of the Assumption from the historical and theological point of view, see José María BOVER, *La Asunción de María. Estudio teológico histórico sobre la Asunción corporal de la Virgen a los cielos*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1947, 450 pp.

¹⁰² We have approached this issue in these three works: “La iconografía de *La Asunción de la Virgen María* a la luz de sus fuentes. Análisis de ocho obras pictóricas del Quattrocento italiano”. En *Perspective Contemporane asupra lumii medieval*, nr. 2/2010, Pitesti, University of Pitesti (Rumania), Editura Tiparg, 2010, pp. 237-246; and “La iconografía de *La Asunción de la Virgen María* en la pintura del Quattrocento italiano a la luz de sus fuentes patrísticas y teológicas”, *Mirabilia. Online Journal of Antiquity and Middle Ages*, nº 12, Institut d’Estudis

branches into a set of typological variants, many of which, as can be seen in the three paintings that we will analyze immediately, include the legendary episode in which –according to the apocryphal Pseudo Joseph of Arimathea¹⁰³— the Virgin brings her girdle to the apostle St. Thomas while she was assumed to heaven by the angels.

Now, it seems reasonable the hypothesis that the fervent glosses of St. Bonaventure on the liturgical feast of the Assumption, by endorsing the already copious patristic and theological doctrine on this dogmatic issue, may have inspired to some extent the Italian iconographic programmers and the artists of the Late Middle Ages that shaped this Marian event. In our opinion, this possible bonaventurian influence could be detected in the paintings of Paolo di Giovanni Fei, Andrea di Giusto and Giovanni di Paolo that we analyze below.



Fig. 10. PAOLO DI GIOVANNI FEI, *The Assumption*, c. 1385. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Image from <http://www.flickr.com> (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Paolo di Giovanni Fei (c.1345-c.1141) places in his *Assumption*, c. 1385, of the National Gallery of Washington DC (Fig. 10),¹⁰⁴ eleven apostles contemplating the

Medievals, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, enero-junio 2011, pp. 189-220; “*Nardus mea dedit odorem suum*. Interpretación iconográfica de *La Asunción de María con sepulcro florido* a la luz de fuentes patrísticas y teológicas”, *De Medio Aevo*, nº 1, enero-junio 2012, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, pp. 67-116.

¹⁰³ PSEUDO JOSÉ DE ARIMATEA, *De Transitu Beatae Mariae Virginis [auctore Pseudo-Iosepho ab Arimathea]*, XVII-XXI. In SANTOS OTERO 2006: 649-652.

¹⁰⁴ PAOLO DI GIOVANNI FEI, *The Assumption*, c. 1385, tempera and gold on wood. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

Mary's sarcophagus full of flowers, while, in the background and with his back to his companions, the incredulous apostle Thomas is waiting to receive the girdle of the Virgin being assumed to heaven, seated on her throne of clouds among a cortege of musical angels. According to the apocryphal Pseudo Joseph of Arimathea, in fact, Thomas, retained in India for his tasks of evangelization, was the only apostle who, absent during the Virgin's death and burial, enjoyed the privilege of seeing her at the moment of being elevated to heaven, and the only one to receive his girdle from her. This apocryphal legend firmly took root as a true fact in medieval Italy, especially in Tuscany, to the extent that the cathedral of Prato boasts of having the authentic girdle (*la sacra cintola* or *il sacro cingolo*) that the Virgin gave to Thomas during her Assumption. This is also the reason why the iconographic theme of the Assumption with the delivery of the Marian belt to Thomas (*Madonna della Cintola*) was spread with special extension in late medieval Italian art, as attested by the three copies of Assumption that we are analyzing here.



Fig. 11. ANDREA DI GIUSTO (ANDREA MAZZINI), *Madonna della Cintola con Santa Catalina di Alessandria e San Francesco di Assisi*, 1435. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

Andrea di Giusto, also known as Andrea Mazzini,¹⁰⁵ (late 14th/early 15th century-1455), in his *Madonna della Cintola con Santa Catalina d'Alessandria e San Francesco di Assisi*, 1435, from the church of Santa Margherita in Cortona, and today in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence (Fig. 11),¹⁰⁶ poses a quite

¹⁰⁵ See Francesco SORCE, "MAZZINI, Andrea". In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Volume 69 (2007). Treccani (digital version), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-manzini_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-manzini_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (Last access: 03/09/2014).

¹⁰⁶ ANDREA DI GIUSTO (ANDREA MAZZINI), *Madonna della Cintola con Santa Catalina di Alessandria e San Francesco di Assisi*, 1435, tempera and gold on wood. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

similar situation, albeit in a simpler way. In the absence of his other companions of the apostolic college, only Thomas is present before the sepulchre, at the moment of receiving, on knees, the belt of the Virgin, whom a choir of angels raises to heaven sitting on her throne of glory. On both sides St. Catherine of Alexandria, with its cogwheel, and St. Francis of Assisi, showing his stigmata, attend the scene as privileged witnesses. The inclusion of this last saint confirms the execution of this altarpiece in the orbit of Franciscanism, which reinforces the probability that the conceptualizer of the iconographic program of this altarpiece could reflect the teachings of St. Bonaventure on the Assumption.



Fig. 12. GIOVANNI DI PAOLO, *The Assumption with four saints (Pala di Staggia)*, 1475. Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Giovanni di Paolo (1398-1482) in his *Pala di Staggia*, of the Pinacoteca Nazionale of Siena (Fig. 12),¹⁰⁷ coming from the church of Santa Maria Assunta in Staggia Senese (Siena), offers a situation similar to that of Andrea Mazzini. As Mazzini did four decades before, Giovanni di Paolo also represents a huge Virgin being raised to heaven on her throne by a cohort of angels, while the miniaturized apostle Thomas receives the Marian belt alone before the empty sarcophagus. Like Mazzini, also Giovanni di Paolo includes, on the sides of the altarpiece, as witnesses of the exaltation of the Mother of God, St. Francis of Assisi, St. John the Baptist, St. Michael the Archangel and another holy bishop, not clearly identifiable. In this sense, it seems logical to conclude that this altarpiece, of clear Franciscan spirituality, could have been directly influenced by the doctrine of St. Bonaventure on the Assumption.

¹⁰⁷ GIOVANNI DI PAOLO, *The Assumption with four saints (Pala di Staggia)*, 1475, tempera and gold on wood. Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena.

2.2. *Around other Marian themes*

In the context of the profuse mariological discourses just analyzed, the Seraphic develops an abundant plexus of ideas referring to a number of Marian iconographic motifs. In order not to make our study too tedious we will outline only three of those great additional themes: the virginal divine maternity of Mary (in intimate relation with her perpetual virginity), the Coronation of the Virgin and the *Maestà*.

2.2.1. *The virginal divine maternity and the perpetual virginity of Mary*

In the first sermon on the Annunciation, St. Bonaventure affirms that the virginal purity of the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary is expressed by three biblical figures: the bush that burns without being consumed, the dry stick of Aaron that turns green, and the Gideon's fleece, which soaks itself with dew, while the land on which it stands stays dry.¹⁰⁸

In his second speech for the same liturgical celebration, he insists on the virginal divine maternity and the perpetual virginity of the Mother of the Messiah, when enunciating:

Hence, speaking to the Virgin Mary in Chapter 4 of the Song of Songs, the Spouse says: *You are a closed garden, my sister and wife, a closed garden, a sealed fountain. Your shoots make a delicious garden.* Three times he says that she is closed, to show that she was a virgin before giving birth, in childbirth and after childbirth [...].¹⁰⁹

And in the third of his sermons for the Annunciation, the mystical thinker explains the virginal fecundity of Mary in conceiving Jesus through the metaphor of the dry land that can only germinate if it is irrigated in some prodigious way, in this particular case, through the miraculous intervention of the Paraclete. This is what the Seraphic declares:

just as the land abandoned to its aridity is impossible to germinate, but irrigated with water becomes fertile, so also the virginity, abandoned to its infertility, does not conceive if it is not fertilized by divine grace. And since it is not incredible that a previously arid land should

¹⁰⁸ Speaking of the virginal conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary, St. Bonaventure says: "Sequitur de secundo, (quod est) puritas conceptionis, quia fuit mirabilis et supernaturalis, scilicet sine corruptione carnis, sine successione temporis, sine delectatione libidinis: ideo tribus mirabilibus et supernaturalibus metaphoris est figurata, scilicet rubi mirabiliter candentis, virgae subito virescentis, velleris supernaturaliter madentis." (*De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo I.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 576).

¹⁰⁹ "Unde Sponsus Virginem Mariam alloquens Canticorum quarto dicit: *Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa; hortus conclusus, fons signatus; emissiones tuae paradisus.*— Ter dicit clausionem ipsius, ut ostendat, quod incorrupta fuit in conceptu, in partu et in progressu". (*De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo II.* In *Ibid.*: 597).

germinate after being irrigated with rain, neither is it conceivable for a virgin to fertilize her with the grace of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁰

And in his famous mystic treatise *Breviloquium*, St. Bonaventure elucidates thus the virginal divine maternity and the perpetual virginity of Mary:

As for the manner of the Incarnation, it must be admitted that, announcing the angel to the Blessed Virgin Mary that the mystery of the Incarnation was to be realized in Herself, the Virgin believed it, ardently desired and consented to it, and that to sanctify her and to make her fecund the Holy Spirit came upon her, in virtue of which Mary “conceived as a virgin to the Son of God, to whom staying virgin bore him, and remained a virgin after childbirth.” And she conceived not only the flesh, but the flesh animated and united to the Word; not subject to sin, but absolutely holy and immaculate, which is why the sweetest Virgin Mary is called and is Mother of God.¹¹¹

It is not ruled out, therefore, that the constant and ardent teachings of St. Bonaventure on Mary's exalted privileges, especially her perennial virginity and her virginal divine maternity –in full accordance with the unanimous theological tradition on the matter— have influenced somehow over the Italian iconographic programmers and late medieval artists who embodied the countless iconographic forms of the *Madonna* as a spotless Virgin and as an immaculate Mother of the incarnate Son of God. By way of example, we will try to detect the doctrinal influence of the Seraphic Doctor in three such paintings made by Cimabue, Pietro Lorenzetti and Piero della Francesca.

Cimabue (1240-1302), in his *Virgin in Majesty with SS. Francis and Dominic*, in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Fig. 13),¹¹² offers with undoubted originality one of the multiple iconographic variants with which it is possible to visually interpret the doctrine of the virginal divine maternity of Mary. She appears here with her little Child in her arms, to emphasize her nourishing and protective role before the frail fruit of her bowels –even when He is the

¹¹⁰ “sicut enim si terra relinquatur suae ariditati, impossibile est, quod germinet, sed aquis irrigata efficitur fructuosa; sic et virginitas suae sterilitati relicta, non concipit, nisi fecundetur gratia superna. Et sicut non est incredibile, terram prius aridam, post irrigatam pluviis, germinare, sic nec virginem concipere, scilicet Spiritus sancti gratia fecundante.” (*De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III. In Ibid.:* 615).

¹¹¹ “De modo incarnationis hoc tenendum est, quod Angelo nuntiante beatissimae Virgini Mariae mysterium incarnationis perficiendum in ipsa. Virgo credidit, appetiit et consentit; Spiritus sanctus in eam supervenit, ad sanctificandum et fecundandum, cuius virtute ‘Virgo concepit Dei Filium, quem virgo peperit et post partum Virgo permansit’. Concepit autem non solum carnem, verum etiam carnem animatam et Verbo unitam, nullo peccato obnoxiam, sed omnino sanctam et immaculatam, ratione cuius Mater Dei dicitur et est dulcissima Virgo Maria.” (SAN BUENAVENTURA, *Breviloquium. Caput III. De Incarnatione quantum ad modum*, 1. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe. Vol. I. Dios y las criaturas*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. BAC, 1968, p. 291).

¹¹² CIMABUE, *The Virgin in Majesty with SS. Francis and Dominic*, second half of the 13th century, tempera and gold on wood, 133 x 81 cm. Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

omnipotent Son of God—, while, majestically seated on her throne, receives the homage of angels and saints, in clear sign of being superior to them.



Fig. 13. CIMABUE, *The Virgin in Majesty with SS. Francis and Dominic*, second half of 13th century. Uffizi, Florence. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

On the other hand, the one who conceived the iconographic program of this Cimabue panel emphasizes here the absolute purity and the perpetual virginity of Mary by arranging her in a situation of centrality and dominion among the angels—spiritual and pure spirits *par excellence*— and between St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic of Guzmán, two saints held by the Church as genuine paradigms of perfect chastity. Once again, the presence of the Assisi's *Poverello* in this painting confirms the influence of Franciscan spirituality on its donor and, almost certainly, the direct influence of the Seraphic Doctor's thought on the intellectual and / or material creator of this panel.

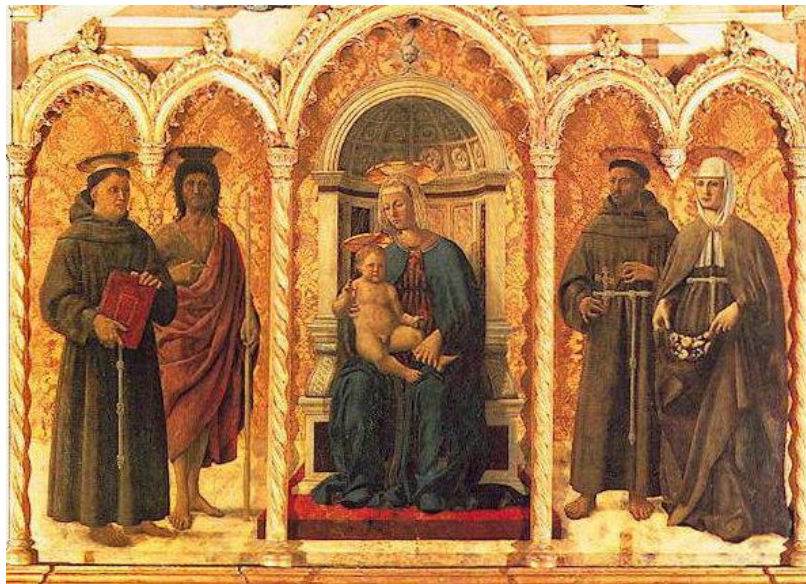
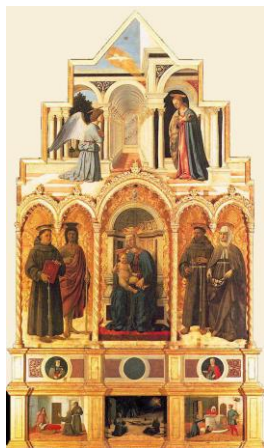
Pietro Lorenzetti, in his fresco *The Virgin between Saints Francis and John the Baptist*, c. 1320, in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi (Fig. 14),¹¹³ poses the same theme with greater economy of means: in a triple frame of pointed arches the painter represents the *Madonna* with her Son in arms between the saints John the Baptist and Francis of Assisi, each of them half body occupying an arch. Intertwining their hands and exchanging their glances in the presence of the courtship of angels housed in the spandrels, Mary and the Child—who also puts his right hand under the veil of his Mother as if wanting to find the breast with

¹¹³ PIETRO LORENZETTI, *The Virgin between Saints Francis and John the Baptist*, c. 1320, fresco. Lower Church of the Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi.

which to feed— are involved here in a tender scene of maternal-filial relationship, which brings to light the theme of the Mary's virginal divine maternity. The inclusion of St. John the Baptist and St. Francis of Assisi – prototypes of both austerity and absolute poverty— in this fresco of the lower church of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi allows us to suspect that this representation of the Virgin Mother of God has as its direct source of inspiration the teachings of the Seraphic Doctor on the subject.



Fig. 14. PIETRO LORENZETTI, *The Virgin between Saints Francis and John the Baptist*, c. 1320. Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)



Figs. 15 y 15-1. PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA, *Polittico di Sant'Antonio*, c.1470 (whole and detail). Museo Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia. Image from Wikimedia (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Piero della Francesca (1416-1492), in his Virgin enthroned between saints, from the *Polyptych of St. Anthony* in Perugia (Figs. 15 and 15-1),¹¹⁴— commissioned by the new Franciscan convent of St. Anthony of Padua in Perugia, and today in the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria of the same city—, is a

¹¹⁴ PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA, *Polittico di Sant'Antonio*, Perugia, 1470, mixed technique on wood, 338 x 230 cm. Museo Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia.

perfect example of the direct influence that the doctrine of St. Bonaventure on the Mary's divine motherhood may have exercised in the late medieval Italian art. After all, with his brilliant mariological discourse, the Seraphic Doctor did nothing but endorse and bring to light the intimate devotion to the Virgin as a kind and protective mother of Humanity, a Marian devotion that the founder St. Francis of Assisi wanted to instill in his friars as one of the most distinctive spiritual attributes of his Order. For this reason, the iconographic creator of this altarpiece placed as a central character a Virgin who, despite being enthroned in a luxurious throne, performs, head down, a humble and protective pose in relation to her Son, who manifests himself with his attitude of blessing as the true protagonist of the scene. To maximize the Franciscan spirituality –and, therefore, the undoubted influence of the mariology of St. Bonaventure— the maternal figure of Mary holding the incarnate Son of God in her lap is completed on both sides with the paradigmatic figures –insuperable models of Franciscanism— of St. Anthony of Padua (to whom the convent was dedicated), St. John the Baptist (primordial prototype of poverty and austerity), St. Francis of Assisi (founder of the Order) and St. Elizabeth of Hungary (princess who became a nun of the Third Regular Order of St. Francis). The Franciscan spirit is completed in this polyptych in the three panels of the predella, with miracles of the three Franciscan saints included in the central body: St. Anthony of Padua resuscitating a child, the Stigmatization of St. Francis, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary saving a boy who had fallen in a well.

2.2.2. *The Coronation of the Virgin*

The doctrinal contributions of the mystical thinker of Bagnoregio to the idea and the image of the Virgin crowned as Sovereign of Heaven are also multiple and vigorous, substantive contributions that enlarged and strengthened the already strong *corpus* of the iconography of the Marian Coronation. Thus, in his second homily on Assumption St. Bonaventure points out the following:

[Mary] Was, finally, enriched over all the Saints in terms of the excellence of dignity or condition; because, being Mother of the supreme Emperor, she is by her dignity and condition the most worthy of all creatures; and for this cause she was not without reason elevated above them and placed to the right of her Son in a magnificent throne.¹¹⁵

And in his third discourse on the same celebration, the Seraphic highlights the honors that surrender Mary in her Assumption, when she is received with love for her Son, King of Kings, along with the entire heavenly court. In this regard, the author describes the first of those honors rendered to the *Assunta* in these

¹¹⁵ “Super omnes Sanctos nihilominus facta est nobilis quantum ad dignitatis sive generis excellentiam; ipsa enim genere et dignitate, cum sit Mater Imperatoris altissimi, est omnium creaturarum nobilissima; et idcirco super omnem creaturam et ad dexteram Filii sui fuit non immerito exaltata et in solio sublimissimo collocata.” (*De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo II.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 700-701).

rhetorical terms:

The first honor is the departure of the sovereign King [Jesus Christ] to meet him. We must believe with eyes closed, without giving rise to any doubt, that not only the King, but all the celestial curia left solemnly in procession to receive the Virgin, who ascended to heaven: — Proceed the Angels, flying to get to see their Lady; the Patriarchs descend quickly to see their daughter; the Apostles go out to meet their Master; the martyrs hurry up to see their exhorter; the married women and the widows rush out to see their companion and sister; the virgins flock to recreate seeing their prelate and abbess [...].¹¹⁶

And in another passage of that same sermon he corroborates that the Son of God enthroned with all his excellency his Mother and sat her with infinite love at his right hand on the heavenly throne.¹¹⁷

The praiseworthy glosses of St. Bonaventure on the privileged condition of Mary as the supereminent Queen of Heaven—in full harmony with the unanimous criterion of theological orthodoxy—will undoubtedly have influenced those who, as intellectual authors and / or material executors, embodied in the Late medieval Italy the iconographic theme of the Coronation of Mary.¹¹⁸ In that order of ideas, we will seek to confirm this conjecture by analyzing three Marian representations performed by Jacopo Torriti, Giotto and Jacopo di Cione.¹¹⁹

Commissioned by the Franciscan pope Nicholas IV¹²⁰ to the painter and Franciscan friar Jacopo Torriti to preside over the apse of the basilica of Santa

¹¹⁶ “Primus ergo honor est obviatio summi Regis. Omnino enim credendum est et nullatenus dubitandum, quin hodie solemnī processione obviatum sit Virgini ascendenti non solum a Rege, verum etiam a tota curia caelesti.— Praevolant Angeli videre dominam suam; desiliunt Patriarchae videre filiam suam; occurrunt Apostoli videre magistram suam; accelerant Martyres videre exhortatricem suam; irruunt maritatae et viduae aspicere sociam et sororem suam; confluent consorores videre praelatam et abatissam suam”. (*De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III*. In *Ibid.*: 706).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 710-712.

¹¹⁸ For an excellent analysis of this iconographic theme, see Philippe VERDIER, *Le couronnement de la Vierge. Les origines et les premiers développements d'un thème iconographique*, Paris, Librairie J. Vrin, 1980, 277 pp. Equally documented, although more oriented towards the iconography of the Assumption of Mary, is the dense monograph of Marie-Louise THEREL, *Le triomphe de la Vierge-Église. Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 1984, 374 pp.

¹¹⁹ We have approached this topic in Chapter 6 of the book of our authorship *Ancilla et Regina. Aproximaciones a la iconografía mariana en la Edad Media*, Saarbrücken, Editorial Académica Española, 2012, pp. 175-209; and in the article “La iconografía de *La Coronación de la Virgen* en la pintura italiana bajomedieval. Análisis de casos”, *Eikón Imago*, nº 3, enero-junio 2013, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, pp. 1-48.

¹²⁰ Pope Nicholas IV, whose real name was Girolamo Masci, entered the Franciscan Order in his youth, and as such acted in 1272 as a papal legate in Constantinople, with the mission of achieving the participation of the Orthodox Church in the XIV Ecumenical Council to be held in Lyons in 1274. That same year he succeeded St. Bonaventure (suddenly deceased in Lyons

Maria Maggiore in Rome, this vast mosaic of *The Coronation of the Virgin* (Fig. 16),¹²¹ signed and dated in 1296, is the first work in Italy that represents on a monumental scale this iconographic subject. In the huge starry circle (symbol of heaven) in the center of the composition, Jesus Christ, whose left hand holds an open book with the legend *Veni Electa mea et ponam in te Thronum meum*, places with his right hand a luxurious crown on the head of Mary, both sitting on a double throne of gold and precious stones.



Fig. 16. JACOPO TORRITI, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1295-1296, mosaic. Santa Maria Maggiore, Roma. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 05/09/2014).

Even in her role as newly crowned Queen of Heaven, the Virgin maintains in this mosaic of Torriti a prayer pose, with her arms open upwards, to signify her intercession before God in favor of humans. Surrounding the throne, two armies of angels escort and pay tribute to the enthroned celestial couple, while at both ends of the scene six saints celebrate the triumph of their Sovereign: on the left, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Paul and St. Peter, in front of who appears kneeling the donor Pope Nicholas IV; to the right, St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist and St. Anthony of Padua. Both for the personalities of the donor (the Franciscan pope Nicholas IV), the performer of this mosaic (the Franciscan painter Torriti)

during the fifth session of the Order's General Chapter) as Minister General of the Order of Franciscans.

¹²¹ JACOPO TORRITI, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1295-1296, mosaic. Apse of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome. Illustr. in David TALBOT RICE, *Byzantine art*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, Coll. Pelican books, 1968 [1935], p. 140, fig. 109; in Alastair SMART, *The Dawn of Italian Painting 1250-1400*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1978, s.p., fig. 32; in VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 46 y 47; in Steffi ROETTGEN, *Fresques italiennes de la Renaissance, 1400-1470*, Paris, Citadelles & Mazenod, 1996, p. 397, fig. 113; and in POESCHKE 2003: 23.

and the designer of its iconographic program (perhaps the pope himself?), as well as for the characters included (saints Francis of Assisi, Anthony of Padua, John the Baptist), it seems evident that this monumental *Coronation of Mary* of Santa Maria Maggiore has probably received the strong ascendancy of the doctrine of the Seraphic Doctor on the subject. We must not forget—a detail we have already pointed out when analyzing *The Annunciation* of Torriti—that pope Nicholas IV, contracting party of this monumental cycle of mosaics in the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore (1296-1300), had succeeded St. Bonaventure in 1274 in the government of the Franciscan Order as its General Minister.



Figs. 17 y 17-1. GIOTTO, *The Coronation of Mary with angels and saints* (*Baroncelli Polyptych*), c. 1328-1334 (whole and detail of the central panel). Baroncelli Chapel, church of Santa Croce, Florence. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 03/09/2014).

In the Marian Coronation of the altarpiece of the Baroncelli Chapel (Figs. 17 and 17-1)¹²² in the Franciscan church of Santa Croce in Florence, Giotto altered the compositional prototype of Torriti, proposing a new model that, with slight variations, will later adopt the Late medieval interpreters of this iconographic motif. In addition to changing the pose of Christ, crowning the Virgin with both hands, and without an open book, Giotto also modifies the Mary's gesture and attitude, by capturing her with her hands interlaced, instead of open upwards.

Structuring the composition in perfect symmetry, Giotto completely fills the four side panels of the altarpiece with a pleiad of standing saints and several choirs of kneeling angels, many of them playing wind instruments. In the central panel he models the Marian Coronation, placing Christ and the Virgin seated on a broad common throne, while four kneeling angels pay tribute to their newly exalted Queen of Heaven. In that order of ideas, everything seems to point to the fact that the planner of the iconographic program of this *Baroncelli Polyptych*—which expresses with such sumptuousness such a Franciscan theme as the Marian Coronation for the Franciscan church of Santa Croce in Florence— would have been inspired to a large extent in the prestigious teachings of the Seraphic on the subject.

¹²² GIOTTO, *The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints* (*Baroncelli Polyptych*), c. 1328-1334, tempera and gold on wood, 185 x 323 cm. Baroncelli Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence. Illustr. in MUELLER VON DER HAEGEN 2000: 126-127, fig. 147 (whole), y pp. 128 y 129, figs. 148 y 149 (details of the side panels).



Figs. 18 y 18-1. JACOPO DI CIONE (attributed), *Altarpiece of The Coronation of the Virgin with Saints*, 1370-1371 (whole and detail of the central panel), National Gallery, London.
Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Attributed to Jacopo di Cione (c.1320 / 30-c.1398 / 1400) or to his workshop, this altarpiece, originally painted for the church of the Benedictine nunnery of San Pietro Maggiore in Florence, and today at the National Gallery in London (Figs. 18 and 18-1),¹²³ interprets –closely following Giotto's model in the *Baroncelli Polyptych*— the Coronation of the Virgin in the central panel, which is attended by two groups of saints in the side panels, among which St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic of Guzmán are distinguished at both ends. Even when Christ and Mary wear here poses and garments similar to those of Giotto in the altarpiece just analyzed, Jacopo di Cione makes the giottesque model more complex by multiplying and bringing on greater dynamism to the musical angels at the base of the central panel, while other angels stand firm in escort of honor to both flanks of the exuberant Gothic throne. Although intended for the Benedictine nuns of the aforementioned Florentine convent, this splendid triptych also seems to be influenced by the Franciscan mariology of St. Bonaventure, as even the presence of St. Francis of Assisi among those attending the regal exaltation of the Virgin makes us suspect.

2.2.3. *The Maestà of Mary*

You can find also countless passages in which St. Bonaventure proclaims the exalted plenitude of Mary's grace and virtues, and therefore her unequaled supereminence over angels, saints and other creatures, before whom she manifests herself as sublime Sovereign. That regal supereminence is illustrated with clarity in the iconographic theme of the Marian *Maestà*, in which the Virgin –almost always seated on a luxurious throne— appears escorted by various angels and saints, who render her a fervent tribute of honor and glory.

Guiding his doctrine in that thematic direction, the Seraphic assures, in his first speech on the Assumption, that Mary is in her celestial life a unique creature in heaven, since she is situated far above the heavenly angelic hierarchies and the earthly human hierarchies, including patriarchs, prophets, apostles, saints and

¹²³ JACOPO DI CIONE (attributed), *The Coronation of the Virgin with saints*, 1370-1371, tempera and gold on wood. National Gallery, London.

people of all nations.¹²⁴

And in the second sermon for that same liturgical celebration he highlights how worthy of glory and praise is the Virgin in heaven, for her similarity, closeness and nobility with respect to God, and for her supereminence with respect to angels, saints and other creatures. Therefore the mystic Doctor does not hesitate to proclaim:

This woman [of the Apocalypse] is the Virgin Queen, who is described as dressed with the sun, that is, with the beauty of the Sun of justice; and as the courageously despised moon, which grows and decreases like the moon; and in her head a crown of twelve stars, that is, all the honor and dignity, glory, excellence and nobility of condition granted to the twelve orders of Saints, meaning in the twelve resplendent stars, nine of which refer to the celestial spirits and three to the triple state of men: that of the active, that of the contemplative and that of the prelates; because all the dignity and glory granted to them in part, was totally granted to the Blessed Virgin.¹²⁵

In the fourth sermon on the Assumption, St. Bonaventure indicates that the Mother of Jesus receives on her throne of glory the tribute of honor of heaven, earth and hell.¹²⁶ And in his fifth speech on the occasion of the same festival, he expresses the enthronement of Mary as Queen of Heaven –in a situation of supereminence over all celestial hierarchies— with these emphatic assertions:

From this state of perfect merit the Virgin passed to the glorious prize, meaning when it says: *You will be crowned* [...]. Mary was crowned with a glorious, luminous and precious crown, according to the triple dignity that corresponds to merit. That is why it is said that the Virgin comes out of this world, that she hurries joyfully towards the homeland: *You will be crowned*. Hurry, because a glorious crown will be placed on your temples, which will resemble the majesty of the Eternal Father [...].¹²⁷

¹²⁴ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo I.* In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*, Vol. IV, op. cit.: 688-696.

¹²⁵ “Mulier ista est Virgo regia, quae dicitur amicta sole, id est decore Solis iustitiae; et luna sub pedibus eius, id est munda gloria strenuissime conculcata, que ad modum lunae modo est in defectu, modo est in augmento; et in capite eius corona stellarum duodecim, id est omnis honor et dignitas, gloria et sublimitas generisque nobilitas duodecim Sanctorum ordinibus per duodecim stellas fulgidas designatis concessa, quarum novem sunt spirituum supernorum, tres vero triplicis status hominum, scilicet activorum, contemplativorum et praelatorum. Quidquid enim dignitatis et gloriae istis partialiter est collatum sacrae Virgini integraliter est concessum.” (*Ibid.*: 701-702).

¹²⁶ *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV.* In *Ibid.*: 723-725.

¹²⁷ “De hoc autem perfecto merito transivit Virgo ad gloriosum praemium, quod notatur in hoc quod dicitur *coronaberis* [...]. Coronata autem fuit Maria corona gloriosa, luminosa et pretiosa, secundum triplicem dignitatem correspondentem ex parte meriti. Dicitur igitur Virgini de hoc saeculo egredienti, ut cum gaudio festinet ad patriam: *coronaberis*. Festina namque, quia

And, to emphasize even more the singular superiority of Mary over all the celestial and earthly creatures, in a status of hierarchical privilege according to which only God is superior to her, the author affirms shortly after:

She, in fact, occupying a throne of glory superior to that of the other blessed ones, appears as if she were in the hand of God as example of union and ardent desire. Wherefore she is seated at the right hand of the eternal King, as the queen of heaven [...].¹²⁸

The enthusiastic commentaries of St. Bonaventure on the celestial sovereignty and the unparalleled superiority of the Virgin over the angels and the saints of celestial Eden –privileges also defended by an uncountable legion of Church Fathers and theologians— do not seem, in our opinion, to have passed unnoticed to those who in late medieval Italy were responsible for designing the doctrinal content of the various iconographic variants of the *Maiestas Mariae*, especially in the cases of artistic representations resulting from the direct commission of the Franciscans or from paintings whose donors sympathized with the spirituality promoted by the *Poverello* of Assisi. We will try to confirm our hypothesis through the analysis of three modalities of *Maestà* produced by Duccio di Buoninsegna, Giotto and Ambrogio Lorenzetti.



Fig. 19. DUCCIO DI BUONINSEGNA, *La Maestà*, 1308-1311. Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Duccio di Buoninsegna (c.1255 / 60-c. 1318/19), in his famous *Maestà*, monumental double altarpiece of the Cathedral of Siena (Fig. 19), depicts a great Madonna with Child, seated on splendid marble throne and symmetrically

coronaberis corona gloriosa, per quam efficieris conformis maiestati Patris aeterni”. (*De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo V. In Ibid.: 728-729*).

¹²⁸ “Ipsa namque, in gloria prae ceteris excelsior, quasi in manu Dei ostenditur ad exemplum unionis et accensionis desiderii. Unde ipsa tamquam regina caeli sedet ad dexteram Regis aeterni”. (*Ibid.*).

surrounded by two triple rows of angels and saints. Among these are, kneeling in the foreground, the four saints of Siena, Saint Ansanus, Saint Sabinus, Saint Crescentius, and Saint Victor, together with the two patron saints Saint Agnes and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, standing upright at both ends of the altarpiece. One can also distinguish, standing in the background, Saint Paul and Saint John the Evangelist in the left sector, and Saint John the Baptist with Saint Peter on the right. The set is completed by twenty angels, who make up an upright procession of honor. Although this splendid *Maestà* by Duccio – immediately converted into a prestigious model for many other late medieval Medieval interpretations of the same subject— does not seem to offer clear indications of Franciscan spirituality at first sight, it is not ruled out that the enlightened Mariological teachings of the Seraphic Doctor could have influence in some measure on the conceptual design of this shocking exaltation of Mary as Queen of the angels and the blessed of Heaven.



Fig. 20. GIOTTO, *The Virgin in Maestà (Madonna di Ognissanti)*, c. 1310. Uffizi, Florence. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Giotto, in his *Madonna di Ognissanti*, c. 1310 (Fig. 20),¹²⁹ from the church of Ognisanti in Florence, and today in the Galleria degli Uffizi, draws a perfect, synthetic but effective model of Marian *Maestà*, which became soon an obligatory reference for many artists interested in this iconographic motif. In his vast altarpiece, Giotto depicts a gigantic Virgin solemnly enthroned with her Child on a precious throne, while she is guarded in a symmetric cohort of honor bay some saints and several offering angels. On knees in the foreground, two

¹²⁹ GIOTTO, *The Virgin in Maestà (Madonna Ognissanti)*, c. 1310, tempera and gold on wood, 325 x 204 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

angels dressed in white offer the Madonna lilies and white and red roses, while, standing in the background, two other angels bring to her a chest and a golden crown. These obsequious tributes of the angels and the venerable attitude of the saints next to the throne translate the recognition of each other before the sovereignty of Mary as Queen of Heaven, and her supereminence over the angelic hierarchies, the saints, the prophets, the virgins, the martyrs, the confessors and the blessed of heavenly Eden. Such is precisely the mariological doctrine of St. Bonaventure, so it is very likely that this doctrine has been able to inspire the iconographic programmer of this important Giotto panel.



Fig. 21. AMBROGIO LORENZETTI, *The Virgin in Maestà*, c. 1330-1335. Museo d'Arte Sacra, Massa Marittima. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 03/09/2014)

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, in his *Maestà di Massa Marittima*, c. 1330-1335 (Fig. 21),¹³⁰ follows with great fidelity the monumental models of that theme originally designed by Duccio (three decades earlier in his *Maestà* of Siena's cathedral) and by Simone Martini (twenty years earlier, in his *Maestà*, 1315, of the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena), although Lorenzetti introduces numerous variants with respect to his two inspiring models. With respect to Duccio's prototype, which is the closest to his, Lorenzetti, while retaining the rigid symmetrical alignment of the apostles and saints on the abstract golden background, gives more dynamism to the characters in the first planes, especially the kneeling angels musicians and the allegorical figures of the three cardinal virtues, Faith (*Fides*), Hope (*Spes*) and Charity (*Caritas*), seated in the steps of the throne. It is

¹³⁰ AMBROGIO LORENZETTI, *The Virgin in Maestà*, c. 1330-1335, tempera and gold on wood, 155 x 206 cm. Museo d'Arte Sacra, Massa Marittima.

precisely with that frank dynamism and that greater somatic expressiveness with which Ambrogio approaches the model of Simone Martini, without detriment that Duccio remains his great reference in this case. For the purposes of our working hypothesis is not negligible the detail that, among the many characters who pay tribute to their Lady in this *Maestà*, Lorenzetti also include Saint Francis of Assisi (the second saint kneeling on the left edge together to Saint Catherine of Alexandria): such detail allows us to conjecture that the Franciscan mariology of St. Bonaventure has been able to influence with certain probability the designer of the iconographic program of this magnificent altarpiece.

3. Conclusions

At the end of this research, the essential results inferred from it could be synthesized that way:

For his numerous and transcendent functions as a professor at the University of Paris, as the primary promoter of the Franciscan school of Scholasticism, as prolific author of luminous doctrinal writings, as Minister General of the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor, as cardinal bishop of Albano, with great prestige over the papal curia and as an egregious Church Doctor, with great ascendancy over all Christendom, St. Bonaventure possessed all the necessary credentials to become, as he did in fact, one of the most influential teachers of Christian thought.

Within the immense philosophical, theological and mystical *corpus* established by the Seraphic Doctor, the bonaventurian mariology occupies a prominent place for its eidetic richness, its dogmatic density, its sharp symbolism and its poetic subtlety. His mariology is condensed, above all, in an abundant series of sermons (the so-called “mariological discourses”), in which, on the occasion of commemorating the four most important Marian feasts –the Birth of Mary, the Annunciation, the Purification of Mary and the Assumption—, the author runs in abundance on the various attributes, virtues and privileges of the Virgin.

With such excellent credentials as a teacher of Christian orthodoxy, especially in the field of mariology, St. Bonaventure soon emerged as an inescapable reference and an inexhaustible source of doctrinal inspiration for the iconographic designers and the late medieval Italian artists who created Marian images, especially, for those who worked for the Franciscans directly or indirectly for patrons aware to Franciscan spirituality.

The influence of the Seraphic Doctor on Marian iconography in Late Medieval Italy is perceptible, above all, in the themes of the Birth of Mary, the Purification of the Virgin, the Annunciation, the Assumption, the Virgin and Child, the Coronation of the Virgin and the *Maestà*.

It is not intended to affirm that the Bagnoregio’s intellectual was the “inventor” of all those Marian iconographic motifs, which pre-existed long before him. Neither is it intended that he was the only source of inspiration for Marian iconography for the late medieval creators.

The main working hypothesis that we believe to have demonstrated is the strong probability that St. Bonaventure has influenced to a large extent on each

and every one of the aforementioned iconographic themes in the Italy of the period under scrutiny, by virtue of which he was able to expand and enrich with his accredited writings the already strong system of Mariology, configured during the preceding centuries by numerous Church Fathers, Doctors and theologians.

* * *

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