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#### IV. MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT





## THE "MADONNA DELLA CINTOLA" IN ITALIAN ART

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As a pictorial theme, the *Madonna della Cintola* developed out of the Florentine and Sienese traditions. The variety of interpretations of this imagery, ranging from the ordinary to the extraordinary, was testimony to the popularity of the cult itself. Growing during the Trecento and peaking within the Quattrocento, representations of the *cintola* theme gradually declined during the Cinquecento to the point where they totally ceased being commissioned. Thus, the following article engages a dual purpose: first, to demonstrate how the iconography of the *Madonna della Cintola* developed and was expressed by artists from two different stylistic schools; and second, to explore why this highly favored subject in art suffered so rapid a demise.

The pious legend in which St. Thomas receives the Virgin's sash as proof of her corporeal Assumption was known from apocryphal accounts such as a tenth-century Arabic text and Latin *Transitus* literature,<sup>1</sup> but it entered the pictorial cycle only within the late Dugento when *The Golden Legend*, by Jacobus de Voragine (1230-1298/99), was introduced and popularized. The cult of the *Madonna della Cintola* had fostered the idea of the Virgin's bodily ascent, and, hence, a representation of the *cintola* scene could be looked upon as a quasi-Assumption. The visualization of the theme, however, is distinguished from the *Assumption of the Virgin* in which the miracle of the Virgin's exodus from earth and the various reactions of the apostles are registered. Rather, its one focus is the delivery of the cincture to St. Thomas while the Madonna remains suspended above the tomb.

There are numerous apocryphal stories dealing with the doubting Thomas. In one particular episode recorded in *The Golden Legend*, a tardy St. Thomas, having been absent at the Virgin's deathbed and interment, disbelieved all reports connected with the funeral, such as the miracles that occurred during the procession to the grave, the

<sup>1</sup> Alfred C. Rush, C.Ss.R., "The Assumption in the Apocrypha," *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 116 (1947): 24-25, n. 83; Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 217.

three-day watch at the gravesite, and, above all, the Virgin's glorious exit from the tomb. In order to dispel his incredulity when he did arrive at the Valley of Josaphat, the Virgin let fall from heaven the *cintola*, or cincture, that girded her waist. Thomas received the sash "...and thereby he understood that she was assumpt [sic] into heaven."<sup>2</sup> In another version, Thomas requested that the tomb be opened so that he might gaze upon the beauty of the Virgin one last time. When the sepulchre lid was removed, the body was not seen but only the Virgin's burial vestments and the winding sheet.<sup>3</sup> According to the apocryphal text supplied by St. John Damascene, the sepulchre was filled with roses and lilies.<sup>4</sup> In yet another popular account, Thomas was praying on the Mount of Olives where he was privileged to see the angels carrying the Virgin to heaven.<sup>5</sup> His request for a sign that he might show the other apostles proof of the Virgin's bodily assumption is honored by the gift of her girdle, symbol of chastity.<sup>6</sup>

It was in Prato, a small Tuscan city a few miles northwest of Florence, that the veneration of the Virgin's Holy Girdle grew and spread into a pious cult. According to the medieval story which Agnolo Gaddi recounts in a series of frescoes in the Duomo of Prato during the second half of the Trecento, a canon of the cathedral was given the relic by a Pratese crusader, Michele Dagomari. While in the Holy Land in 1096, he had acquired it as a dowry from his mother-in-law who was entrusted with its safekeeping in Palestine. Dagomari and his wife set sail from Jerusalem for Italy with the treasure but, en route, Michele became deathly ill. It was from this good man's deathbed that the canon of Prato accepted the Holy Girdle, thereby designating his cathedral as the seat of the reliquary.<sup>7</sup>

A piece of the relic is likewise housed in the hospital church of Sta. Maria Annunziata, Siena. Here, during the second half of the Trecento, the Master of the Ovale Madonna also painted an altarpiece of the *Assunta* (now in the Accademia delle Belle Arti, Siena) representing the enthroned Virgin above a circle of angels, with prophets of the Old Testament and saints inserted in the spandrels of the arched altarpiece.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Caxton (London: Dent, 1900), 241; Rush, "The Assumption in the Apocrypha," 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> *The Golden Legend*, 261.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art Chrétien*, 3 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), II, 2:616.

<sup>5</sup> Réau, II, 2:618; James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 217.

<sup>6</sup> James, 217; George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Oxford UP, 1975), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, 19 vols. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1924), 3: 370; Peter Tomory, *The Catalogue of the Italian Paintings before 1800* (The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1976), 25.

St. Thomas, facing away from the viewer, stands below on center stage holding high above his head the sacred girdle. The relics which a church possessed played an important role in determining the iconography of altarpieces,<sup>8</sup> and this was no exception. That St. Thomas is seen completely from the back, in order that the display of the relic might become the main focus, was unique in Sienese iconography and does not appear in subsequent renditions of this subject.<sup>9</sup>

Devotion to the cult of the *Madonna della Cintola* was local, and depictions of this cult-scene did not spread much beyond the environs of Tuscany both in the Quattrocento and especially in the Cinquecento when its popularity began to fade for theological reasons and perhaps for artistic ones as well. There were, however, occasions during the sixteenth century when this subject surfaced in the Veneto and Emilian regions, commissioned, no doubt, by some patron or religious order continuing to nurture, or be nurtured by, this pious devotion.

Nevertheless, representations of the *Madonna della Cintola* grew out of the Florentine and Sienese traditions as previously stated. Probably the earliest monumental portrayal of the theme, however, was executed for the Church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Spoleto.<sup>10</sup> Consideration of this newly established imagery is pertinent to the discussion on how regional artists of Florence and Siena translated the imagery in their own stylistic terms, how they subsequently revised or completely departed from what quickly became the conventional mode.

The Spoleto painting, extensively damaged on its right side, is horizontal in format. St. Francis stands in a separate frame to the left but within the format which may have been planned to resemble a triptych. Because of the damaged right section, one angel in the central scene is totally missing, another partially so. These would be counterparts to the angels on the left who support the mandorla. Also missing is the right-hand counterpart to St. Francis. In the central scene, the Virgin stands frontally within a mandorla while extending the *cintola* with her right hand towards a half-running, half-kneeling St. Thomas in the lower left. St. Francis turns his head directly toward the Virgin, becoming a witness by meditation of the event. Hendrik

<sup>8</sup> H. W. van Os, *Vecchiella and the Sacristy of the Siena Hospital Church: A Study in Renaissance Religious Symbolism* (Kunsthistorische Studien van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome, Deel II, 1974), 6-8.

<sup>9</sup> Van Os, *Vecchiella*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Hendrik W. van Os (*Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der sienesischen Malerei 1300-1450* [Kunsthistorische Studien van het Nederlands Historisch Instituut te Rome, Deel I, 1969], 155, n. 27, fig. 104) suggests that a miniature of a *Gradual* which accompanied an *Introit* of the Office for the Feast of the Assumption (Catalogue, *Mostra della Miniatura* [Rome, 1953], 235) might predate the Spoleto portrayal, although he also places the miniature in the third quarter of the Dugento.

W. van Os<sup>11</sup> suggests that the picture was painted by a follower of Cimabue who was familiar with the latter's frescoes at Assisi. He also recognizes the singularity of the moment in which the painting was executed, for it was at a time in which the Franciscan Matthaeus of Assisi was formulating his thoughts about Mary's Assumption.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, Matthaeus's ideas on the Assumption endorsed the theology, for Van Os indicates that it was the Franciscans who early on viewed the Assumption as a manifest reality (*eine handgreifliche Realität*), and that it was they who figuratively put the girdle into the hands of the doubter to indicate to the faithful the reality of the mystery.<sup>13</sup> That St. Francis appears as an observer of the doubting Thomas in a painting not far from Assisi seems to acknowledge the Franciscan Order's germinating support of the Virgin's physical glorification.<sup>14</sup>

The pictorial format of the *cintola* scene was thereby established, and was utilized again, according to Richard Offner,<sup>15</sup> by the Florentine, Bernardo Daddi (c. 1290-1349/51), in a lost composition for the chapel in Prato built to securely house the sacred relic after an attempt to steal it in 1312 was aborted. Offner<sup>16</sup> suggests that the illuminated Antiphonary (Impruneta, Collegiata di Sta. Maria), probably from the first half of the Trecento and by the Master of the Dominican Effigies, might have been modeled on Daddi's composition. Here, the Virgin is enthroned and frontal, her hands folded while a knotted *cintola* slips down from her lap towards a bust-length figure of Thomas in the lower left. The scene is combined with a Dormition in the initial letter, while the Translation of the Virgin's Body takes place in the lower margin.

The early Florentine interpretations of the apocryphal text, then, positioned Thomas to the left of the composition, while the central Virgin either stood or sat in a frontal disposition. The action of Thomas catching the girdle and the Virgin's own active participation in the release of the gift were to become the distinguishing features of the Florentine school. As for the early Sienese painters, they undoubtedly

<sup>11</sup> Van Os, *Marias Demut*, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Van Os (*Marias Demut*, 155) writes: "In einer Zeit also, worin der Franziskaner Matthäus von Assisi seine Gedanken über Mariens leibliche Himmelfahrt formulierte, entstand unweit seines Klosters, in Spoleto, ein Wandgemälde der Assumption Mariens, auf dem Franziskus selber und der zweifelnde Thomas zugegen sind."

<sup>13</sup> Van Os states (*Marias Demut*, 155): "Die Franziskaner verstanden das Thema der Verherrlichung Mariens als eine handgreifliche Realität. Gerade sie gaben dem Zweifler den Gürtel in die Hände."

<sup>14</sup> Van OS, *Marias Demut*, 155.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, 8 vols. (New York U.: Institute of Fine Arts, 1957), VII, 3:48.

<sup>16</sup> Offner, VII, 3:48.

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followed Pietro Lorenzetti's pictorial image of a frontal *Assunta* painted for an altarpiece in Sta. Maria della Pieve, Arezzo. Here she sits with folded hands amid densely packed angels in the pinnacle of the high altar polyptych. The Sienese capitalized on the frontal type of Virgin with folded hands while shifting the figure of Thomas from the left side to the central axis of the Virgin, thereby creating a hierarchic composition. The Master of the Ovile Madonna, as previously mentioned, as well as Bartolo di Fredi and his son, Andrea di Bartolo, depicted the *Madonna della Cintola* in such wise,<sup>17</sup> as did the later Sienese, Giovanni di Paolo, in his painting in the Collegiata of Asciano, Siena, and Vecchietta, in his altarpiece of 1461 in the Duomo of Pienza. Both Giovanni di Paolo and Vecchietta, however, include the receiving Eternal Father or God the Son within the pictorial field and, as well, group the Old Testament prophets and saints to the left and right of the composition above the angelic choir. They set the tone for later elaborate and hierarchic compositions whose skies are densely populated and whose angelic hosts and enthroned Virgins are richly and elegantly robed. Vecchietta's Pienza altarpiece inspired Matteo di Giovanni's composition of 1474, in the National Gallery, London (fig. 1), particularly in the gracefully dangling angel forms and in the vigorously foreshortened Christ-figure hovering over the rigid Virgin.<sup>18</sup> Again, Matteo follows Vecchietta's idea of the Virgin who floats above an empty sarcophagus, a vast but microscopic landscape, and St. Thomas, who is only slightly moved away from the central axis. The Virgin's flower-spangled drapery, a typically Sienese motif, recalls St. Bernard of Clairvaux's flower imagery which refers to Mary's virginity in her maternity. St. Bernard writes:

For a Virgin is the fruitful twig, the flower her Son . . . He is the flower of the field . . . So blossomed the womb of the Virgin, thus inviolate, whole, and chaste . . . whose beauty will not suffer corruption, whose glory will never diminish . . .<sup>19</sup>

By enhancing the Virgin's drapery, it would appear that Matteo and the Sienese painters in general were also enhancing the devotee's admiration of the Virgin by drawing attention to her countless privileges, such as her Perpetual Virginity, Divine Maternity, and Assumption. This totally poetic piece is further enriched by the Gothic trefoil format which compartmentalizes and compresses the figures in the uppermost region.

<sup>17</sup> Bartolo di Fredi's *Assumption/Madonna della Cintola* is in the Pinacoteca, Siena, and Andrea di Bartolo's painting is in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA; also, Offner (*Corpus VII*, 3: 49, n. 2) lists other early Sienese examples chronologically.

<sup>18</sup> George H. Edgell, *A History of Sienese Painting* (New York: Dial, 1932), 230; the painting in the National Gallery, London, is entitled *Assumption of the Virgin*. Iconographically, however, it should be read as a *Madonna della Cintola*.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Caroline Feudale, "Iconography of the Madonna del Parto," *Marsyas* 7 (1957): 16.



Florentine compositions contrasted greatly with those of the Sienese, for they always had sparsely populated heavens, and the Virgin's frontality was offset by her slight turn to the left toward St. Thomas who kneels in profile some distance away from the central axis, thereby creating a natural interaction between giver and receiver. This is clearly seen in the fresco in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, executed by Giotto's followers probably before the mid-Trecento. The theme might have been repeated, according to Julian Gardner,<sup>20</sup> in a lost fresco by Taddeo Gaddi for the Baroncelli Chapel in Sta. Croce, Florence. If Gaddi did, in fact, paint a *Madonna della Cintola* here, then, according to Nancy Rash Fabbri's and Nina Rutenberg's<sup>21</sup> conditionally supportive view of Gardner, the painting may have inspired Andrea Orcagna's large tabernacle relief at Orsanmichele, executed sometime between 1352 and 1359. There, although the Virgin is seated frontally, she inclines her head toward the left and extends her right hand toward St. Thomas who reaches for the girdle. The interaction is clearly a natural one. Fabbri and Rutenberg elaborate on the devotional importance of the *Madonna della Cintola* for the confraternity<sup>22</sup> which commissioned the monumental program at Orsanmichele. They point out that in the *laudi* sung by the organization, one third of the hymn eulogizes St. Thomas, his vision of the Virgin, and the delivery of her cincture to him as proof of her corporeal Assumption.<sup>23</sup>

The image of the Virgin handing over the girdle to the apostle was very appealing to a younger generation of Florentine painters and sculptors following Orcagna, who were interested in capturing movement and in suggesting solidity and stage-like space in a two-dimensional world. They began to vary the turn of the Virgin's torso, the bend of the head, the position of the hands, while St. Thomas usually knelt in profile or in a three-quarter view on the left side of the picture plane. These variations are seen in Agnolo Gaddi's fresco for the Chapel of the *Sacro Cingolo* in the Duomo of Prato, c. 1394-1396; in Mariotto di Nardo's panel at the Oratorio di Fonte-

<sup>20</sup> Julian Gardner, "The Decoration of the Baroncelli Chapel in Santa Croce," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 34 (1971): 111, n. 17. Gardner maintains that a valuable composition by Taddeo Gaddi in the Baroncelli Chapel was destroyed when the Pazzi Chapel was built, and that his iconographic program (for the Baroncelli Chapel) inspired Orcagna's tabernacle relief in Orsanmichele. Gardner then suggests that Bastiano Mainardi's fresco, now in the Baroncelli Chapel, is based upon that of Taddeo, possibly in part filtered through Orcagna.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Rash Fabbri and Nina Rutenburg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context," *Art Bulletin* 63 (1981): 400.

<sup>22</sup> The confraternity was the Compagnia della Nostra Donna Sancta Maria e del Beato Messer Santo Michele in Orto (Fabbri and Rutenburg, 386).

<sup>23</sup> Fabbri and Rutenburg, 400.

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lucente, Fiesole, 1398; and in a tryptych in the Accademia, Florence, executed in the 1390s by the Master of the Arte della Lana.<sup>24</sup>

Nanni di Banco's version on the Porta della Mandorla, c. 1414-1421, Duomo of Florence, is a radical departure from Orcagna's tabernacle relief. The youthful Queen is rendered in strong contrapposto: her upper torso turns to the left, her inclined head is seen in profile, her arms open and extend toward St. Thomas on the left while her lower torso is directed toward the right. The angels, too, with their dynamic limbs and billowing draperies convey an unprecedented sense of "aerial locomotion."<sup>25</sup> The busy folds of Thomas's mantle, as well as the triangular sweep of the sculptured format, increase the vibrancy of the scene. Nanni omits the sarcophagus and balances the group with a bear cub and tree motif on the lower right.<sup>26</sup>

Although Benozzo Gozzoli followed the characteristic Florentine format, showing an enthroned Virgin proffering her girdle to Thomas who was positioned on the picture's left side, he completely eliminated the mandorla in his altarpiece of c. 1450 in the Vatican Pinacoteca. Instead, he places the heavenly scene on cloud forms suspended above a flowering sarcophagus. Andrea Castagno does the same in his *Assunta*, c. 1450 (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie), as did Donatello before him in his version for the Brancacci Chapel of 1427 (Naples, S. Angelo a Nilo). By mid-century, the mandorla seems to be a motif of choice rather than one of standard. Benozzo and his contemporary Florentine painters of the *cintola* episode perpetuated the asymmetrical composition. However, Bastiano Mainardi's fresco of 1480 for the Baroncelli Chapel in Sta. Croce, Florence, is an exception. Mainardi orders the scene along a symmetrical plan, but, like his predecessors, places St. Thomas on the left.

Mainardi (1460-1513) acutely observes nature in his representation, logically scaling the figures to the vast and luminous landscape as well as in their relationship to one another. He creates a proportionate and rational scene, although the prearranged folds of the apostle's mantle are distracting. The fresco has reputedly influenced two other Tuscan works, viz., a painting by the Master of the Lathrop Tondo in the Ringling Museum, Sarasota, FL (fig. 2), although here the painter has reversed

<sup>24</sup> See Offner (*Corpus* VII, 3:49, n. 2) for additional and chronologically ordered Florentine examples of the *Madonna della Cintola*.

<sup>25</sup> H. W. Janson, "Nanni di Banco's Assumption of the Virgin," *The Renaissance and Mannerism: Studies in Western Art II* (Princeton: Acts of the 20th International Congress of the History of Art, 1961), 105-106. Janson mentions Nanni's angels as having inspired those of Andrea del Castagno's Berlin *Assumption*, and those of Antonio Rossellino's Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal, as well as Verrocchio's flying figures in the Forteguerri Monument (107).

<sup>26</sup> Janson ("Nanni di Banco," 102) believes that Nanni based the motif on Andrea Pisano's *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise* on the Campanile and suggests that it conveys the idea of a "wilderness of sin."

the position of Thomas, and a panel by the Master of the Kress Landscapes in the Museo Nazionale, Rome, executed c. 1513.<sup>27</sup>

The eclectic style of the Sarasota painting poses a problem of authorship, as to whether the execution is only by the Master of the Lathrop Tondo (variously identified as Antonio Corso, Francesco Botticini, Filippino Lippi, and Amico Aspertini) or by two different painters.<sup>28</sup> Since the painting compares to some extent with Mainardi's fresco, and since there is a loose handling of paint in the figure of St. Thomas and the landscape, it seems likely, according to Peter Tomory,<sup>29</sup> that the painting was begun by one artist familiar with the Florentine style. The tighter, more measured handling in the upper section is consistent with the approach of a second painter from Lucca.<sup>30</sup> Everett Fahy<sup>31</sup> identifies the iconographic prototype as Matteo Civitali's carved altarpiece of c. 1450 for the Michele Chapel of S. Frediano, Lucca, because Civitali mingled half-length prophets with the angels who surround the Virgin. Five of these half-length witnesses shown in the Sarasota painting have been identified as SS. Dionysius, Timothy and Hierotheus, each in oriental headdress, and, on the extreme left, the bareheaded SS. James and Paul.<sup>32</sup> Dionysius, considered a disciple of St. Paul, was presumed to have witnessed the Virgin's Assumption, and Timothy of Jerusalem was credited with having written a homily that implied the belief in her corporeal ascent.<sup>33</sup> The remaining three figures might be St. Epiphanius, the Bishop of Cyprus and contemporary of St. Timothy; St. Gregory of Tours; and St. Melito of Sardis—who all historically qualify as the first defenders of the doctrine. Epiphanius is reputedly the first Christian to initiate the process of the doctrine of the Assumption when he simply questioned the destiny of the Virgin.<sup>34</sup> Melito of Sardis allegedly

<sup>27</sup> Because of its eclecticism, Federico Zeri ("Eccentrici Fiorentini," *Bollettino d'arte* 47 [1962]: 226-227, figs. 13, 14) interprets the work as that of a painter whom he names the Master of the Kress Landscapes. On the other hand, Eugene A. Carroll (*The Drawings of Rosso Fiorentino*, 2 vols., diss. Harvard U., 1968 [New York: Garland, 1976], 2:3, 22-28) attributes the painting to Rosso.

<sup>28</sup> Tomory, *Catalogue*, 27-29.

<sup>29</sup> Tomory, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Tomory, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Everett Fahy, "A Lucchese Follower of Filippino Lippi," *Paragone* 16 (1965): 19.

<sup>32</sup> Tomory, *Catalogue*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> "Assumption of the B.V.M.," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1966 ed.; S. Meo, "Assunta. II-Dogma. Storia e Teologia," *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, a cura di Stefano De Fiores e Salvatore Meo (Edizione Paoline, s.r.l., 1985), 167.

<sup>34</sup> F. M. Abel, O. P., "The Places of the Assumption," *The Thomist* 14 (1951): 109; "Assumption," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 1967; Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp., "Assumption of Our Lady, The," in *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Michael Glazier Inc., 1982), 56; S. Meo, "Assunta. II-Dogma. Storia e Teologia," 167.



Fig. 1. Matteo di Giovanni, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1474. London, The National Gallery (photo: Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees, The National Gallery, London).



Fig. 2. Master of the Lathrop Tondo, *The Assumption of the Virgin with St. Thomas (La Madonna della Cintola)*. Sarasota, Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (photo: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida).



Fig. 3. Benvenuto di Giovanni, *Madonna della Cintola*, 1498, whereabouts unknown (photo: reproduced from Bernard Berenson's *Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, v. 2, 1968, with permission of Phaidon Press, Ltd.).



Fig. 4. Francesco Granacci (d'Andrea di Marco), *The Assumption of the Virgin (Madonna della Cintola) with St. Thomas and St. John the Baptist, St. James, St. Lawrence and St. Bartholomew*, c. 1515-1520, Sarasota, Florida, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (photo: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida).

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recorded the Death and Assumption in an apocryphal text, and Gregory of Tours was the first of the Church Fathers to formulate the doctrine in the West.<sup>35</sup>

The altarpiece by the Master of the Kress Landscapes recalls Mainardi's fresco in its synthesis of figural scale and landscape, but the painter transforms Mainardi's symmetrical plan into an asymmetrical one by shifting the sarcophagus slightly off-center and placing St. Thomas to the extreme left. The Master of the Kress Landscape's individualism comes through in his paralleling of the figures to the picture plane and in the rather boisterous effect his painted celestial court seems to create. The *cintola*, too, is not immediately evident, and so, almost humorously—certainly not irreverently—the blond cherub at the feet of the blond Virgin points directly overhead to it, as if to assure Thomas that its own little scarf with its more easily accessible ends is not to be mistaken for the real relic. The overly-lit sepulchre vies for attention, probably not because of its iconographic import, but because this very young artist had not quite learned to modulate the lights and shadows throughout the painting.

During the late Quattrocento, when Florentine painters of the Assumption no longer engaged saints in side panels of polyptychs, but relegated them, as well as benefactors, to positions within the pictorial field as Botticini in 1475-1476, and Perugino, c. 1480, had done in their Assumption frescoes, compositions of the *Madonna della Cintola* similarly changed, and thus a new iconography was created. Fra Diamante (c. 1430-1498), for example, compositionally balanced four saints and a donor along with St. Thomas in his *Madonna della Cintola* (Prato, Galleria Comunale), painted within the last quarter of the century. Cosimo Rosselli (1439-1507) sets the figures of SS. Thomas and John the Evangelist and SS. James and Bartholomew on either side of the flowering tomb in his altarpiece in a Russian private collection. The latter panel might have been executed contemporaneously with those of Botticini and Fra Diamante, i.e., between 1475 and 1480. Rosselli's style, though, is lifeless and wooden. Except for the four flying angels of Verrocchian character, the scene lacks motion and spirit. The Virgin, seated within the cherub-filled mandorla, could have been inspired by Alesso Baldovinetti, for there is a refined air about her. She readies the *cintola* for release, holding it daintily and perpendicularly to Thomas. In the tilt of the sarcophagus and the graded descent of the striated clouds beneath the Virgin, Rosselli creates an exercise in perspective, leading the eye towards the distant landscape. Yet, the solid block of shapes across the foreground prohibits the viewer from entering the setting. With reason, the devotee must take a meditative

<sup>35</sup> Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., *Fundamentals of Mariology: A Study of Our Lady* (New York: Benziger, 1956), 187; "Assumption Apocrypha," in *Theotokos*, 60.

position outside the pictorial tableau and in front of the sepulchre. It is a place which Rosselli preordained, allowing a respectful distance between image and reality.

On the other hand, in place of a group of saints, Pinturicchio and assistants substituted a recognizable personage in the *Madonna della Cintola*, c. 1492-1495, housed in the Borgia Apartments in the Vatican. It is a faithful, realistic portrait of a pious and serious person, although not all agree that the portrait is of Francesco Borgia, Papal Treasurer of Calixtus III.<sup>36</sup> St. Thomas already possesses the Virgin's sash and kneels in rapt veneration as the glances of both Virgin and saint meet. The motifs are the customary, seemingly uneventful ones of clasped hands, enthroned Virgin, seraph-bordered mandorla, rose-filled casket. Yet, Pinturicchio expands the meaning of the scene by the addition of the crown held tentatively by two seraphim above the Virgin's head. With this motif, the Virgin's intercessory role as Queen of heaven and earth is evidenced. The immediate recipient of her prayers is the ecclesiastic kneeling to the right of the composition.

Pinturicchio is credited with having painted this figure and probably the two angels on the right.<sup>37</sup> Perugino's influence is noticeable in the landscape and in the figure of Thomas, but these are generally accepted as the work of assistants. Bright, festive colors have been used throughout the composition, and Pinturicchio adds touches of gold appliqué, a technique long since in disuse, thereby creating a rich and decorative ambiance for this medieval subject.

Sienese painters like Benvenuto di Giovanni and his son Girolamo, Pietro di Domenico, and Vincenzo Tamagni also added saints to their *cintola* representations, but they never diverted the apostle from his central position beneath the Virgin nor altered the Virgin's folded hands, and only late and reluctantly did they modify her frontal pose. Benvenuto's *Madonna della Cintola* of 1498 (fig. 3), formerly of the Metropolitan Museum, NY (whereabouts presently unknown), is analogous to Matteo di Giovanni's ideals of a monumentally conceived Madonna attired in flower-spangled draperies and floating above the sarcophagus. The arched format, however, allows Benvenuto to freely outstretch the Eternal Father's arms and grant more space to the half-length patriarchs and prophets, rather than congesting them within the trefoil as in his model. The hilly landscape with the city's Duomo in the left distance is a Byzantine decorative display, more symbolical than real, in keeping with the spirit of the altarpiece. SS. Francis and Anthony of Padua contemplate the apocryphal happening.

<sup>36</sup> Corrado Ricci (*Pinturicchio: His Life, Work and Time*, trans. Florence Simmonds [London: William Heinemann; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1902], 98) specifies that the portrait is Francesco Borgia; Enzo Carli (*Il Pinturicchio* [Milan: Electa, 1960], 50) simply states that the portrait is identified by some as that of Francesco Borgia.

<sup>37</sup> Ricci, 98; Carli suggests the hand of Il Pastura (50).

Girolamo's imitation of his father's style and format, to the inclusion of the same saints at the sepulchre, can be viewed in his painting of c. 1498 (Diocesan Museum in Montalcino). The Virgin, however, takes a standing position and is ensconced in a voluminous cloak rather than in a mandorla. St. Thomas and some of the landscape elements are reversed from Benvenuto's, and each figural group occupies a more definite zone, stressing the hierarchic order similar to the sculptured celestial program of a Gothic cathedral portico. Girolamo again repeats his father's formula in the fresco of 1509 in the oratory of the Madonna delle Nevi at Torrita, but here places the figure of Thomas alone at the base of the composition. The strictly frontal Virgin, surrounded only by angels, is already crowned as *Regina coeli* and *Regina angelorum*, while the named patriarchs and prophets occupy the frame arching over her like the Old Testament figures in the archivolts of Chartres Cathedral.

Pietro di Domenico's interpretation, c. 1498 (Buonconvento, Museo d'arte sacra della Val d'Arbia), reveals his allegiance to Girolamo, but also manifests his personal penchant for rendering figures solidly and monumentally. SS. Sebastian and Gregory the Great are plastically conceived, and the tall standing figure of the Virgin deliberately turns away from a rigid frontality. Yet, Pietro's more modern figural treatment is offset by his use of the old Sienese criteria of a densely populated heaven with its hierarchic arrangement and by the stiffened symmetry of the lower zone. Both Girolamo and Pietro, however, move towards a more open conflation of the *cintola* and *Assunta* iconographies by means of the Virgin's heavenward glance towards the receiving figure of Christ. As late as 1527, the Quattrocento format of the Sienese is found in a *cintola* scene executed for the church of the Madonna del Soccorso, Montalcino, by Vincenzo Tamagni (c. 1492–after 1537). Again, the floral-gowned Virgin, accompanied by angelic choirs, is enthroned before a mandorla whose interior is colonized with faint cherub-heads—a timid use of Raphael's vocabulary—and a crown of glory is held above the Virgin's head. In the lower zone, SS. Thomas, Sebastian, and Roch form a triangle intersecting the rose-filled tomb, while focusing the viewer's attention on the unusual roundel inscribed in the sarcophagus, that of the *Man of Sorrows* standing in his tomb. The iconographic significance of this theme in the *Madonna della Cintola* is perplexing, unless it was Tamagni's testament to the corporal deaths of both Son and Mother which ended in triumph over the grave.

The pictorial type of the *Madonna della Cintola* makes a rare appearance in Vicenza in 1500 with a painting by Giovanni Speranza (1480–1536) in the Museo Civico di Vicenza. The figures are statuesque, and the open arms of the Virgin may derive from Mantegna's *Orante-Assunta*, while the rocky terrain might indicate observation of Carpaccio's paintings.<sup>38</sup> In spite of the inept handling of the Virgin's arms with

<sup>38</sup> Franco Barbieri, *Il Museo Civico di Vicenza* (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1962), 250.

their graceless twist at the elbows, long forearms, and enormous hands,<sup>39</sup> there is a naïve charm about the encircling angel heads that become less and less visible the closer they are to God the Father. The swirling ring also appears to accent the height and rigidity of the Virgin. Speranza was obviously knowledgeable in the Sienese tradition in which God, as Eternal Father or as Christ, hovers above the immobile Madonna within the same pictorial field, for he imitates this trait as well as the passivity of the Virgin who never actively handles the *cintola* as she does in Florentine interpretations.

The younger Florentine painters' sensitivity to movement, plasticity, emotion, and drama helped to enlarge upon the style and iconography of the *cintola* episode during the first two decades of the Cinquecento. To see these elements at work, one need only to compare the nervous energy that skirts about the *Madonna della Cintola*, c. 1502-1503 (Florence, Castagno Museum, Sant' Apollonia) from the School of Filippino Lippi, with the static composition of the non-Florentine Speranza, or the stiffened figures of the older Florentine, Cosimo Rosselli. In the Sant' Apollonia painting, the striated clouds float evenly across the picture plane like extensions of the flapping angel wings that edge the luminous ellipse behind the Virgin, and the moving border of the Virgin's mantle activates her flat silhouette. The *cintola* now loops and arches into the hands of a scraggly-haired Thomas in the act of standing up (or kneeling down) to receive the sacred treasure. In open-mouthed astonishment rather than quiet contemplation, a youthful Franciscan saint acknowledges the event while extending a ball of licking flames with his right hand and holding a book in his left—attributes usually accorded St. Anthony of Padua.<sup>40</sup> The slanted sepulchre lid meshes with the undulating hills, all forming a fitting background for the show of lilies and other flowers growing up and out of the open grave. It is a lively, lyrical panel which one might conjecture was destined for a Franciscan chapel.

A refreshing change from the seated Madonna is the Sarto-like standing figure in the *Madonna of the Cincture with Four Saints*, c. 1514-1516 (Volognano, S. Michele), a work that has been attributed to Rosso,<sup>41</sup> but which here will be considered the eclectic work of an anonymous member of the Sarto school. The Virgin's violet mantle is now held by playful, smiling angels as if it were the mandorla. This motif recalls Fra Bartolomeo's *Madonna of Mercy*, 1515, in Lucca, and there is something almost Pontormesque in the standing blond putti with their deeply shadowed eyes.

<sup>39</sup> Barbieri, 250.

<sup>40</sup> The figure is incorrectly identified as St. Francis by Katharine B. Neilson (*Filippino Lippi: A Critical Study* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1938], fig. 87).

<sup>41</sup> Luciano Berti (*Il Primato del disegno* [Milan: Electa, 1980], 191) attributes the Volognano work to Rosso Fiorentino.



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The clouds upon which the Virgin stands conceal wispy angel heads, a paraphrase of Raphael's *Madonna of Foligno*, c. 1511-1512, and *Sistine Madonna*, c. 1513. To Thomas as she extends her cincture held between outspread hands, while three contemplators of this action register a range of different emotions. The foreshortened sarcophagus has contracted into a lion-footed urn bursting with roses in a rather singular touch.

Francesco Granacci portrays this subject in three panels datable 1512-1515, 1515-1516,<sup>42</sup> and 1515-1520. The panel in the Accademia, Florence, c. 1512-1515, consisting of the Virgin and SS. Thomas and Michael, is a labored piece in comparison to the more inspired later panel of 1515-1520 in Sarasota's Ringling Museum (fig. 4). This work, which Vasari called Granacci's masterpiece, was commissioned initially for the Medici Chapel in S. Piero Maggiore, Florence. Granacci had conceived this *Madonna della Cintola* in the spirit of a *sacra conversazione* with SS. John the Baptist and James on the left and SS. Lawrence and Bartholomew on the right, each standing in rapt meditation on the central action. The Virgin is seated in contrapposto upon cherub-supported clouds, while two adult angels hold a sunburst mandorla of bright shooting rays alternating with electrified squiggles of the quattrocento type. Her head in profile is a variation of Fra Bartolomeo's Virgin in his *Vision of St. Bernard*, 1506 (Florence, Accademia), and the position of her knees—the right one raised considerably higher than the left—recalls the Virgin in the Frate's *Madonna and Child*, c. 1512 (Besançon Cathedral). Vasari's delight in the turned figure of St. Thomas prompted him to suggest that Michelangelo could have created it.<sup>43</sup> It is in fact derived from the Virgin in the latter's *Doni Holy Family*, c. 1503 (Uffizi). Granacci's composition is dominated by reds, hot pinks, and orangy-yellows. The Virgin's dress is of the deepest red and her blue mantle is lined with the same brown as the tassled cord she lowers. These colors are balanced by the cool sky, the gray-blue marble sarcophagus, and the lavender of St. Bartholomew's cloak. The same reds and browns of the Madonna's robes are reflected in different degrees in the draperies of SS. Thomas, John the Baptist, and Lawrence. Granacci's color scheme was surely intentional in bonding the last two saints to the main event. He may have chosen to draw attention to these saints because of their connection with the Medici family. John, the patron saint of Florence, recalls Giovanni de Medici, then Pope Leo X, while Lawrence was the patron saint of both Lorenzo the Magnificent and the younger Lorenzo, nephew of Leo X and Duke of Urbino, who had died in 1519.

<sup>42</sup> The panel, datable 1515-1516, is presently in Warwickshire, Warwick Castle, Earl of Warwick collection. It is reproduced in Christian von Holst, *Francesco Granacci* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1974), fig. 36, cat. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*. Ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1906), 5:343.

Fiocco wrote that Granacci's art was often confused with that of Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio (1483-1561).<sup>44</sup> Since they were friends, it is likely that stylistic and compositional exchanges were readily made. Ridolfo's admiration for Leonardo as well as for Raphael underlies his composition in the Duomo of Prato, c. 1514-1515. Venturi described Ridolfo's painting as possessing "a gleaming enamel-like quality, shadowy mists, a totally realistic treatment of details, angular contours, and a novel way of lengthening formerly clumsy figures which results in peculiar and rigid shapes, thick at the bottom and thinning upwards towards very small heads."<sup>45</sup> These strange elongations and angularities are most obvious in the Virgin and two angels. As for the six saints, kneeling rigidly upright, their heads only very slightly bend or turn away from their axes. Of special effect and inventiveness, however, is the changed mandorla, now an incandescence shaping a cloth of honor behind the Virgin seated upon thick cushion clouds.

Iconographically relevant in the painting is the medallion-relief of the *Nativity* inserted into the panel of the sarcophagus. Tradition linked the mystery of the Assumption of the Virgin with the mystery of her maternal role.<sup>46</sup> During the Middle Ages, for example, a liturgical hymn for the feastday of the Assumption celebrated these mysteries: "Rejoice Mother in the fruit of thy womb,"<sup>47</sup> and the Gothic Missal for the feastday reads: "It is right that you have been received in your Assumption by Him whom you holily received to be conceived through faith; so that not being of the earth you could not be held within the rocks [of the tomb]."<sup>48</sup> In addition, Antoninus of Florence held the Assumption as dogma, and in mid-fifteenth century he confirmed that the "belief in the corporeal Assumption as the fulfillment of the maternity is considered obligatory without definition *ex cathedra*."<sup>49</sup>

With Ridolfo's obvious awareness and display of this spiritual bond, one wonders if the *cintola* in his painting might not convey a triple intent, viz., that of recalling Mary's virginity, that of alluding to her "miraculous maternity,"<sup>50</sup> and, finally, that of signalling her incorruptibility—the ultimate gift for her acceptance of her role in the redemption of man.

<sup>44</sup> Giuseppe Fiocco, "La data di nascita di Francesco Granacci e un ipotesi michelangiolesca," *Rivista d'arte* 12 (1930): 208.

<sup>45</sup> Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte Italiana*, 11 vols. (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1901-1939), IX, 1: 498-499. This passage from Venturi is my own free translation.

<sup>46</sup> Feudale, "Madonna del Parto," 16.

<sup>47</sup> Feudale, 17, n. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Feudale, 18, n. 42.

<sup>49</sup> Feudale, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Feudale, 17.

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Granacci had likewise recorded the analogous bond between the Annunciation and the Assumption in the panel relief on the sarcophagus of his depiction in the Accademia. It is a gentle reminder of the Virgin Annunciate reaching the epitome of her role as *Virgin Assunta*.

Again, the motif of the Annunciation can be identified, although vaguely represented, in another *Madonna della Cintola* (Florence, Museo di San Marco). The Museum has assigned the painting to Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, although Fra Paolino has also been suggested as its author because the figures are rounded and the flesh is handled with the frate's soft transparency.<sup>51</sup> Carlo Gamba,<sup>52</sup> on the other hand, felt that the work was executed by Ridolfo's young and close associate, Michele (Tosini) di Ridolfo, who based this early composition on the Prato altarpiece while he was yet inexperienced. Nevertheless, the attentiveness of the Virgin as she lowers her sash to make contact with St. Thomas is identical in the *cintola* scenes of Granacci (fig. 4) and Ridolfo Ghirlandaio (Prato). The four holy witnesses in the Museo di San Marco panel—SS. Francis, John the Baptist, Ursula, and Elizabeth of Hungary—take standing positions similar to Granacci's Sarasota painting. The sarcophagus, too, more greatly elevated than that of the Sarasota work, assumes the appearance of an altar of veneration.

Another Florentine rendition of the *Madonna della Cintola*, 1521, in the Museo di San Marco, is presently ascribed to Giovanni Sogliani (1492-1544).<sup>53</sup> Again, the Virgin is quite similar to Granacci's Sarasota Madonna especially in the turn of her upper torso, the inclination of her head, and the crook of her left arm. Also, the space between the Virgin and the figures within the earth's sphere has been abbreviated in both paintings. Hence, the length of the sash lowered towards the apostle is similarly shortened. Likewise, as in the Sarasota painting, the four standing saints (SS. John the Baptist and a Martyr-King on the left, and SS. John Gualbert and James on the right) flank the flower-laden sarcophagus and the apostle. On the front panel of the sarcophagus, inscribed in a tondo, is the date, A.D. M.CCCC XXI.

<sup>51</sup> Venturi ascribes it to Fra Paolino (*Storia* IX, 3:390).

<sup>52</sup> Carlo Gamba, "Ridolfo e Michele di Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, II," *Dedalo* (1928-1929): 546.

<sup>53</sup> According to the entry on this painting (G.F.S., Inv. 195, no. 8642: 178), the panel seemingly belonged to the Chiesa delle Monache di S. Giuseppe alla Porta a Pinti, but it was transferred in 1714 to the monastery of Sta. Maria sul Prato di Firenze, and probably belonged to these latter originally, since nothing in the painting alludes to the Augustinian monks of S. Giuseppe nor to the titular saint of their church. While the painting was in "possession" of the monks at S. Giuseppe, it was considered to have been by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio. After the painting had arrived at the Accademia in 1870, a few connoisseurs reattributed it to Giovanni Sogliani, not by reason of any documents, but obviously on the basis of style (my thanks to Dott.<sup>ma</sup> Silvia Meloni Trkulja, Direttore del Gabinetto Fotografico in Florence, for graciously supplying me with this information).

Difficult to account for is the almost instantaneous halt of pictorial representations of this cult theme throughout the Tuscan regions after the third decade of the Cinquecento. Whether it was a case of a theme having been pictorially exhausted, of painters' and patrons' tastes having shifted towards the new dynamics of the miraculous exodus from the tomb, or of a precautionary measure toward the unorthodoxy of the pious cult at a time when the Church was under fire from Luther for its excesses cannot be determined. The opinion of the Protestants and especially the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1467-1536) on the superstitious use of images and cults were countered by the polemical writings of, among others,<sup>54</sup> the Dominicans Tommaso de Vio (Cardinal Cajetano, 1469-1534) and Archbishop Ambrogio Catarino (1484-1553).<sup>55</sup> These debates may have contributed to the leveling period of the cult-image of the *Madonna della Cintola*. Nevertheless, a sudden hiatus occurred. That the apocryphal text continued to be sought in commissions as long as it had is a wonder, for the Archbishop of Florence, Antoninus, had frowned upon it in his exhortation of 1450 to painters. At that time, he stated: "But neither are they to be praised when they paint apocrypha, such as midwives at the Virgin's delivery, or her girdle being sent down by the Virgin Mary in her Assumption to the Apostle Thomas on account of his doubt, and the like."<sup>56</sup> It was apparent that the cult was strong, and its devotees far more persistent and successful than were the admonitions of even an archbishop as saintly as Antoninus. Nor were his views completely heeded, as has been seen, during the first three decades of the Cinquecento. In addition, the *cintola* motif periodically punctuated Assumption scenes, as if to placate those whose devotion to the *Madonna della Cintola* was deeply ingrained. The interesting point is that many of these *Assumption-Cintola* scenes appeared in the Northern regions of Italy during Tuscany's hiatus, viz., in the Veneto, Lombardy, and the Piedmont.

Girolamo da Carpi of Ferrara (1501-c.1557) painted the cult theme while fusing other iconographies within the same presentation. Having been commissioned by

<sup>54</sup> Ragne Bugge ("Il dibattito intorno alle immagine sacre in Italia prima del decreto Tridentino del 1563," *Sodalizio tra studiosi dell'arte. Colloqui del Sodalizio* 5 [1975/76]: 73-74; 76-77) speaks of innumerable debaters and writers between 1523 and 1563 in defense of the subject of cult-imagery. Among these defenders were Alberto Pio, count of Carpi (1475-1531), Agostino Steuco, prefect of the Vatican Library (1497-1548), and Luigi Lippomano, bishop of Verona (1500-1559). Their defense upheld images not as idols, or magic figures, but as reminders of virtue and the virtuous, and pointed out that some of these images were proven to be miraculous, i.e., as having caused miracles. One wonders if there might have been a miracle connected with the image of the *Madonna della Cintola* which could account for the sudden rash of these images during the second decade.

<sup>55</sup> Bugge, 74-76.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Creighton Gilbert, "The Archbishop on the Painters of Florence," *Art Bulletin* 41 (1959): 76.

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Giulia Muzzarelli for the Church of S. Francesco, Ferrara, sometime in the 1540s, the painting ultimately found its way to Rome when Ferrara became a papal state.<sup>57</sup> It is presently in the Kress Collection, National Gallery of Washington. The painting has been entitled *Madonna in Cloud with Angels*,<sup>58</sup> but Girolamo confounds the viewer with an accretion of ideas drawn from the *Assumption*, the *Madonna della Cintola*, and the *Apparition of the Virgin*. A portrait bust of Giulia Muzzarelli seems to rise up from the real world into the lower left quadrant of the pictorial world where she watches, prayerfully and intently, a very substantial vision of the seated Virgin supported by weighty angels. The Virgin turns her illuminated face and upward gaze toward the source of light beyond the confines of the picture, in the manner of an *Assunta*. In the distance, as though included as an afterthought, a miniature St. Thomas has just caught the Virgin's sash which apparently dropped out of the clouds passing over Girolamo's lyrical landscape. The addition of the *cintola* motif might have been suggested by the donor in response to the devotion she knew and maintained. Hence, the painting seems to be that of an apparition of the *Assunta*/*Madonna della Cintola*—with the stress on "apparition."

The decline of the *Madonna della Cintola* as a pictorial theme is indicated by the fact that Girolamo's painting is a solitary example in its time. The theme all but totally disappeared during the two decades, i.e., 1545-1563, that the Council of Trent met, within which time Calvin had circulated his admonition against relics in general and Marian relics in particular.<sup>59</sup> The Council Fathers' own deep concern over superstitions and their firm declaration regarding the veneration of relics and the use of sacred images was brought to light in their carefully formulated decree at the twenty-fifth and final session of the Council (1562-1563).<sup>60</sup> The decree placed full responsibility on the Bishops regarding the didactic qualities of art. Paintings and other representations were to instruct the people on the mysteries of redemption, to confirm them in their faith, to assist them in rendering homage to God, and to articulate a model for their own lives based on the saints imaged before them.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools*, 3 vols. (New York: Phaidon, 1968), 2:81.

<sup>58</sup> F. Antal, "Observations on Girolamo da Carpi," *Art Bulletin* 30 (1948): 84, n. 21.

<sup>59</sup> John Calvin, "An Admonition Showing the Advantages Which Christendom Might Derive from an Inventory of Relics," *Selected Works of John Calvin*, Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, eds., 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1983), 1:318, 319, 341.

<sup>60</sup> Relics, the Council Fathers cautioned, were to be thoroughly investigated and approved only by the bishop after having consulted both theologians and pious members of the Church (H. J. Schroeder, O.P., trans., "On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images," *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* [St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1950], 216, 217).

<sup>61</sup> "On the Invocation," 217.

Some years after the close of the Council of Trent, a Flemish ecclesiastic, Jean Ver Meulen (Molanus, 1522-1597), published his essay *De picturis et imaginibus sacris* in 1570. Although he confessed that he knew little about fine art, Molanus did expound on Christian iconography and its proper use in art.<sup>62</sup> An apocryphal text like the *Madonna della Cintola*, he simply stated, should not be painted, while the *Assumption* should include all the Apostles save Thomas.<sup>63</sup> Molanus's writings circulated North of the Alps, but also influenced the Archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), who, unlike Molanus, was knowledgeable in art and refined in his aesthetic tastes. Paleotti's treatise, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*, published in fragmentary fashion in 1582 and again in 1594, had positive influences on painters like the Carracci.<sup>64</sup> Following the Council's dictum that paintings were to instruct, edify, and stimulate the believer's faith experience,<sup>65</sup> Paleotti advised painters to base their works on authentic documentation,<sup>66</sup> and to refrain from anything "superstitious, apocryphal, false, idle, new, unusual."<sup>67</sup>

And yet, the apocryphal story of the *Madonna della Cintola* was never completely eliminated, as some rare reversions to it appeared—after its long hiatus—in Tuscany, painted by Girolamo Macchietti, Santi di Tito, and Leonardo Mascagni during the last quarter of the century. Macchietti (c. 1535-1592) was commissioned to paint the scene in 1573-1574, for S. Agata, Florence. In this altarpiece, the painter's style teeters between the High *Maniera* of Parmigianino and Vasari, noticeable in the elongated figures with their refined poses and delicate gestures, and the naturalism of reform painters like Santi di Tito, seen in the natural use of light and shadow, the rounding of forms within this natural light, and (in the name of accuracy) the additions of wings on the putti and haloes for the saints.<sup>68</sup> The humanness of the smiling Madonna and cherubs, however, is out of character with the serious demeanor of the holy monk and the ecstatic expression of the female saint, thereby creating an ambiguous atmosphere. Macchietti interestingly looks to the Sienese tradition of placing

<sup>62</sup> Charles Dejob, *De l'influence du Concile de Trente* (Paris: E. Thorin, 1884), 243.

<sup>63</sup> A. W. A. Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent*, trans. R. R. Symonds, 2 vols. (Kunsthistorische Studiën van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome, Deel III, Band I, 1974), 1:138.

<sup>64</sup> Boschloo, 121-122.

<sup>65</sup> Boschloo, 125-126.

<sup>66</sup> Boschloo, 127; see also P. Amato's résumé of Federico Borromeo's standards of art (*De Pictura Sacra*, Milano 1624), "Arte/Iconologia," in *Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia*, 150.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony Blunt (*Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600* [Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1982], 110 and n. 4) quotes the 1594 edition, *Archiepiscopale Bononiense* (Rome).

<sup>68</sup> Jack Johnson Spalding, *Santi di Tito*, 2 vols., diss. Princeton U., 1976 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1976), 69. Spalding mentions that after the Council of Trent, the motifs of wings and haloes were once again restored by the reform critics.

St. Thomas directly below the Virgin to continue her central axis. However, he turns the Virgin toward the right side of the picture while he inclines her head to the left. She extends the *cintola* from the right side to the figure of St. Thomas whose form might have been derived from the kneeling female figure in Raphael's *Transfiguration*, 1517. But Macchietti's figure takes a more plausible posture. The composition is a unified one, but because of Macchietti's ambiguous expressions, tensions do exist.

Again in Florence, Santi di Tito was commissioned to paint a *Madonna della Cintola* sometime after 1585 for the church of S. Stefano al Ponte (it was in 1585 that the Augustinians took over S. Stefano).<sup>69</sup> In ordering a painting of this particular subject, the Augustinians may have been publicizing their special interest in the relic of the *cintola* while leaving one to speculate whether there might not have been a recent miracle connected with the holy relic. In a very natural, unmannered setting, Santi represents a fairly large cast of saints including St. Augustine, St. Monica, and St. Nicholas of Tolentino, an Augustinian monk.<sup>70</sup> All figures are serene, their postures simplified; the composition is lucid, the atmosphere reflective. These were the elements of Santi's reforming style.

Finally, the Pratese painter, Leonardo Mascagni (active 1589-1618), represented a traditional *Madonna della Cintola* in the 1590s which was ultimately acquired by the Gallery of the Palazzo degli Alberti from San Clemente in Prato.<sup>71</sup> In the scene, five saints—Peter, James, Francis, Clare, and Paul (?)—witness St. Thomas's acceptance of the tassled girdle, and St. Paul discreetly jots down the incident. The enthroned Virgin, flanked by symmetrical groupings of reverent angels, concentrates her down-cast eyes upon the Apostle. Thomas is wholly absorbed in the Virgin and her gift. Mascagni was a close follower of Santi di Tito, observing the latter's "canon of composure"<sup>72</sup> which permeates the foreground and is reflected in the serenity of the

<sup>69</sup> Spalding, 372.

<sup>70</sup> In another iconographically curious representation attributed to the Sienese Pietro Sorri (Laura Martini, *L'Arte a Siena sotto i Medici 1555-1609* [De Luca, 1980], 102), the bestowal of Augustinian cinctures appears to be the theme. In this sepia monochrome sketch, c. 1576 (Uffizi), Sorri presents a transmutation of the *Madonna della Cintola* by depicting the Virgin and the Christ Child handing out cinctures to St. Augustine and St. Monica, who, in turn, pass them on to ecclesiastics and the faithful laity. The leather girdle became a necessary part of the Augustinian habit in 1291, which Pope Gregory IX directed the Augustinian friars to wear in order to distinguish them from the Franciscans and other monastic orders (Millard Meiss, "A Documented Altarpiece by Piero della Francesca," *Art Bulletin* 23 [1941]: 55). One might conjecture that the painting is a display of members of the tertiary order of Augustinians receiving cords as tokens of affiliation with the order. The sketch might also illustrate the faithful's endorsement of authentic relics in general as tangible articles which draw them to devotion.

<sup>71</sup> Giuseppi Marchini, *La Galleria del Palazzo degli Alberti* (Milan: Electa, 1981), 30.

<sup>72</sup> Marchini, 30.

landscape. The expressed piety and religious decorum of this apocryphal scene could not but be "an image in service of faith"<sup>73</sup> and, hence, Counter-Reformatory in disposition.

Additionally, it appears that Tuscan Bishops looked the other way where it was a case of the *Madonna della Cintola*, since this apocryphal text had spawned both cult and imagery in the heart of Tuscany. Prato and Siena still housed their pieces of the Virgin's sash. By the 1590s when Mascagni of Prato executed his work, the cultic devotion and its pictorial image, beginning with the Spoleto painting, c. 1290, had become three-centuries old. Yet, the popularity of the cult-image was undeniably on the wane, as has been seen, even before the Council of Trent. The once-thriving subject of the Quattrocento and early Cinquecento raised but a few last sparks before giving way entirely to the *Assumption of the Virgin*, the *Immaculate Conception*, and the Conciliar admonitions countering the use of apocrypha.

<sup>73</sup> Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci*, 138.