In the years before World War I, a young Italian artist undertook an audacious illustration project, bringing a highly original vision to one of the most revered prayers of Christendom.

Illustrator Ezio Anichini (1886-1948) is widely recognized for his colorful art nouveau-styled covers for Scena Illustrata, the popular Italian journal of arts and culture. Less known and understood is his series of 46 images based on the honorific titles of the Virgin Mary in the traditional Catholic prayer form, the Litany of Loreto. As the son of a working artist, Anichini doubtless benefited from the reputation and commercial contacts of his father. After studies in figurative drawing and sculpture, he quickly emerged as an illustrator for several Florence-based periodicals of the early 20th century.
Many early efforts—such as an armor-clad knight for *Scena* in 1906—seem to spring from youthful Romanticism. Indeed, his storybook knight figure would develop and reappear many times over the course of Anichini’s career—from slaying a dragon on the cover of Giuseppe Lombardo Radice’s educational treatise *La Milizia dell’ Ideale* to enlivening the pages of Elena Primicerio’s *L’Invincibile Cavaliere*, a retelling of the legend of El Cid for Italian children.

Exactly how Anichini became involved with the Litany project is unknown. But whether the subject matter reflected his own Catholic piety or was suggested by others, its first publication was the result of the young artist’s inroads at *Scena Illustrata*. In 1912, the magazine issued the entire set of devotional illustrations as a 12-page premium for its subscribers, accompanied by a letter from the publisher.

While the artist is credited on the title page of the portfolio—“Le Litanie Lauretane, Illustrate da Ezio Anichini”—the publisher’s personal note speaks mainly of the special effort involved in its production, down to the quality of the paper. And he adds an explicit hope that readers will respond to this gift by their “benevolence and trust” toward *Scena Illustrata* in the future. A footnote explains that subscribers in good standing can obtain the images as postcards “collected in an elegant case.” (At two lire, they were “much less expensive than the usual ones, which are often insulting or vulgar compositions.”)

Regardless of its inspiration, tackling the complete Marian themes of the Litany of Loreto was an audacious undertaking for an artist in his 20s. It followed the precedent of renowned Augsburg engraver Joseph Sebastian Klauber in the 18th century. But where Klauber’s classic illustrations are filled with complex symbolism and scriptural allusions, Anichini’s treatments are emotionally engaging and invite the viewer to imagine story lines that extend from picture to picture.
The Litany of Loreto is associated with the Shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, where it was in use as early as 1558. It received the formal approval of Pope Sixtus V in 1587. The 46 titles of Mary illustrated by Ezio Anichini reflect the form current at the turn of the 20th century. A growing and developing prayer form, the Litany has been expanded by five additional titles over the intervening years—e.g., “Queen of Peace,” added by Benedict XV during World War I.

Cardinal Maffi expressed a desire to see Anichini’s images of Mary reproduced “for example, on the colored glass of our churches.” It would be “a very good contribution to bring her beyond the book and into the room!” At least one known adaptation of these designs by church artisans is the collection of 12 exquisite embroidered panels created at Mayfield Convent, Surrey, England, and now in the collection of the Royal School of Needlework at Hampton Court Palace in Surrey.

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Since its launch as part of a marketing campaign for magazine sales, Anichini’s Litanie Lauretane (now titled Litanie della Madonna) had gained the endorsement of Pisa’s Cardinal Maffi as a significant aid to personal devotion. And unlike the relative anonymity of its first release, Anichini’s role in the project was openly heralded. The later edition cites him as “the famous artist, Prof. Ezio Anichini” and speaks of many expressions of appreciation “to this young genius for this exquisitely artistic gift to the Virgo Virginum, Mater Dei.”

While Anichini’s most enduring legacy would be his extravagantly drawn and colored covers—fashionably exotic women (and occasional femmes fatales)—his early Marian images led to one more project of grand scale—his 1919 illustrations for Dante Alighieri’s Divine Comedy. Perhaps no work of literature could better employ the young artist’s unjaundiced passion for the ideal for opening imaginative windows into the shining architecture of heaven.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR’S DESK

Sarah Burke Cahalan
Director of the Marian Library

Several years ago, using some of the Marian Library’s limited acquisitions budget, I approved the purchase of an old piece of wood that was chipped in places and dotted with wormholes. Dating back to the early 18th century, it is actually a carved block used to make prints for pilgrims to the shrine of Notre Dame de Bon Encontre in southwest France. The Marian Library collections include a considerable number of prints made for similar purposes at other Marian shrines; this object complements those items and demonstrates the technology necessary to produce prints for sale and distribution to pilgrims (as well as demonstrating the fragility and impermanence of such materials). This spring, Andrea Bryan, a student in UDI 204, a primary source literacy class team-taught by multiple librarians, selected this item for her research project. She did such an excellent job—including locating a source that attested to Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon visiting the shrine—that I asked her to adapt her presentation into an article, located on page 6 of this newsletter.

Bryan’s article is not the only piece with a connection to instruction and work with undergraduate classes in this issue. This is no coincidence, since the numbers of class visits and research projects have been on an upward trajectory here in the Marian Library. (One project for the summer is to discuss ways to make this trajectory sustainable for library personnel.) Some classes and instructors are “regulars”; for example, nearly every semester, we host a class on the Gospels, for which we pull historical Bibles in multiple formats and languages. Librarians have also worked with new classes and experimented with new instruction formats, informed by professional standards for teaching about the use and interpretation of primary sources. A book arts class from the Department of Art and Design looked at different bookbinding structures and materials; one of their projects even asked the students to respond to the smells and textures of a series of books! Every student in a history class worked on an assignment related to the Cold War, making use of the pamphlets, newspaper clippings, and newsletters in the Marian Library collection. The article by Melanie Zebrowski on page 5 provides an overview of a class visit in collaboration with UD’s U.S. Catholic Special Collection; the students in this class considered mysticism and miracles. The Marian Library is uniquely positioned to host conversations about the role of the sacred in the modern world—the phenomenon the historian and theologian Robert A. Orsi refers to as the “real presence” of the supernatural.

Encountering artifacts is part of Catholic tradition. Librarians, archivists, and curators are also familiar with the echoes of the past and the voices of the long dead that resonate in artifacts. At the risk of romanticizing jobs that can be just as mundane, task-oriented, and email-heavy as any other jobs, there is something powerful about preserving and providing access to objects that have a long history of ownership and use—of allowing voices from the past to speak in the present day. Catholics (and those of other faith traditions, to be sure) are familiar with practices that make us think about time periods longer than one human’s life on Earth: praying through the saints, praying for the dead, and using devotional objects and devotional spaces that have been used before by others on the same journey. One of the very special aspects of the Marian Library collection is that it documents the long and varied history of theological inquiry and popular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and brings that tradition right into the present-day work of the students and faculty of the University of Dayton.
Librarians at the Marian Library have hosted some interesting class instruction sessions lately. From a book arts course in which art and design students explored some of our oldest rare books through an aesthetic lens to a history class that examined manuscripts from the late Middle Ages, we have found ways to help professors incorporate our collections into hands-on learning experiences for students of many majors. Most recently, we hosted a class with an unusual focus of study: Miracles, Mysticism, Madness, and Modernity—a religion course taught by instructor and doctoral student Josh Wopata.

This course aims to teach students about religious topics outside of the norm—ones that don’t necessarily fit into our conceptions of modern-day religious experience: faith and reason; the differences and similarities between miracles of science and miracles of God; famous mystics and their place in society; how the passage of time can change the nature of religion in society. It challenges students to think deeply about their assumptions and preconceived ideas through questioning and self-reflection. So, how was the Marian Library able to help?

Besides our more well-known collections of books, artwork, and Nativities, we also have an extensive archives collection. Many of these materials and artifacts aren’t used as often because of their obscurity and specific nature. However, for a class exploring these obscure and specific topics, some of our artifacts proved to be a perfect fit.

During an interactive learning session, our librarians grouped these artifacts into three specific topics for students to explore — medicine and miracles; flowers and herbaria; and oil and water. The items included:

- Medical journals detailing healing miracles at Lourdes
- Holy cards made from natural materials found at sacred sites
- Photos of statues weeping blood and water
- Leaf etchings of famous Marian apparitions
- Miraculous rose petals
- Holy water from famous shrines
- Ex-votos (physical offerings of devotion made in return for a healing miracle)

As the students examined the items, discussions arose over the validity of such objects. Students ranging from the skeptical to the devout expressed intrigue and wanted to know more. For librarians, that is the best part. Providing students with tangible objects and experiences to supplement their learning allows them to engage more fully with the topics of inquiry. The class was a great success, and we hope to continue providing experiences like it in the future.
The shrine of Our Lady of Good Encounter is located in southern France. According to tradition, this shrine was founded around 1550 when a shepherd discovered his ox bowing to a statue of the Virgin Mary in a field. The statue was removed, but it miraculously returned to the same spot the next day. Bon Encontre began as a small, local shrine. Local shrines in premodern Europe provided the average lay person with opportunities to visit religious sites and bring their spiritual needs to a religious figure, usually the Virgin Mary. The shrine fulfilled the religious, medical, and communal needs of the Catholic community.

The print produced from this woodblock, which was made in 1724, emphasizes the medical role of shrines in premodern society. This image contains ex-votos, usually small objects or images left at or hung on sacred sites as devotions, forms of remembrance, or signs of thanks for healing. They are usually wax replicas of body parts or other objects associated with pilgrims' afflictions. This shows that pilgrims came to the shrine to offer up their sufferings and to ask the Virgin Mary for her healing intercession.

Local shrines were often small; if one was popular enough, it could grow into a church and even stimulate growth of the surrounding town. Bon Encontre was one such place. It received royal patronage in the 1600s, when Marguerite of Valois, a queen of France, founded a royal chapel and monastery at the site. A basilica was built on the site in 1859. The town around the basilica today is called Bon Encontre after the shrine. It is likely that this town was built around the original chapel.

Tourism to shrines of medieval and early modern Europe helped to finance the sites. As pilgrimages grew, so did the tourism economy, which provided goods and services to cater to pilgrims’ needs. Religious objects such as prints from this woodblock were not just souvenirs, but objects to strengthen pilgrims’ faith and prayer life when they returned home. This type of memento could have been used as a devotional object. This is suggested by the prayer to Mary at the bottom of the print. It could be placed somewhere in the house where the person would pray daily.

This shrine has a connection to Marianist history. In the early 19th century, the founder of the Marianist sisters, Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon, wrote about visiting the shrine and how it was desecrated during the French Revolution.

In the process of researching this object, I noticed a gap in the historiographical record on local European shrines. The Bon Encontre shrine has a basilica associated with it and therefore is likely to have historical records on location. Even so, few scholarly works on the shrine at Bon Encontre are written in or translated to English. Bon Encontre has received next to no attention compared to shrines such as Lourdes, one of the most popular shrines in modern Europe. The lower visibility of other Catholic shrines in Europe may be a reason for gaps in their historiography.

Shrines are places of living history where Catholics can still interact with their faith just as people did 50 years ago or 500 years ago. Catholic shrines today are not just accounts in history books; they are meant to be holy places of pilgrimage.

— Andrea Bryan is a 2019 graduate of the University of Dayton. She researched this woodblock for her term project in the archives course UDI 204, This is UD.
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