

kann auch im Hinblick auf das außerordentlich breite Spektrum an Bildmotiven und Zeichentechniken als konzise bezeichnet werden. Dem Katalogteil angegliedert sind lesenswerte Textauszüge zur Zeichnung von Giorgio Vasari, Benvenuto Cellini und Alessandro Allori.

Im Anhang finden sich neben der Bibliographie schließlich Kurzbiographien der in der Ausstellung vertretenen toskanischen Künstler sowie der Anmerkungsapparat des Katalogteils.

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**Bernard Aikema: Jacopo Bassano and His Public. Moralizing Pictures in an Age of Reform ca. 1535-1600.** Transl. Andrew P. McCormick. Princeton NJ: University Press 1996; XVI + 257 pp., 147 + XII plates; ISBN 0-691-04395-7; \$ 45,-

**Paolo Berdini: The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano – Painting as Visual Exegesis.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997; XIV + 208 pp., 43 + VIII plates; ISBN 0-521-56170-1; £ 40,-

**Jacopo Bassano** (1510c.-1592) (*Bollettino del museo civico di Bassano, N.S. 17-18, 1996-1997*); Bassano del Grappa: Museo – Biblioteca – Archivio 1998; 108 pp., 32 plates; ISBN 88-85821-04-9; Lit. 20.000

The last three years saw the publication of three books on Jacopo Bassano; two of them with more or less the same scope: the study of iconography in the painters' oeuvre. The third is the publication of three lectures held in the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice in 1992, and published by the Museo Civico of Bassano del Grappa. These lectures respectively treated aspects of style, patronage and iconography. As a result of the fourth centenary memorial exhibition in Fort Worth and Bassano del Grappa in 1993, the image of Bassano and his oeuvre apparently was in need of revision. On the one hand no painter, working in or around Venice in the sixteenth century, seems farther removed from the general context of sixteenth-century Venetian art; and yet at the same time Jacopo Bassano was considered by Marco Boschini to be one of the four most important painters of his time<sup>1</sup>. The success of his work is documented by the many versions painted in the workshop, by his sons Leandro and Francesco, and widely diffused, from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, through prints<sup>2</sup>. Without any doubt his painterly language was positively received by many patrons, suggesting an accessible and clear iconographical content. But it is exactly this aspect of his work which has long remained a puzzle, because of his

<sup>1</sup> Peter Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven/London 1995, p.218.

<sup>2</sup> Michele Cordaro/Enrica Pan, *Jacopo Bassano e l'incisione. La fortuna critica dell'arte bassanesca nella grafica di riproduzione dal XVI al XIX secolo*, Bassano del Grappa 1992.

hitherto unfamiliar use of motifs. Most studies on the painter, including recent ones, assume his primary interest to be the painting of bucolic scenes, in which biblical episodes are a mere pretext for the depiction of pastoral motifs. The naturalism of his works tends to negate deeper layers of meaning to the modern eye, and has led scholars to assume that Bassano only depicted his daily rural surroundings. This idea was developed already in the seventeenth century, and most clearly described in 1715 by Roger De Piles. Aikema and Berdini offer different solutions for understanding Bassano's iconography, and through them an explanation of the success of his workshop.

The publication of more archival material, especially the „account book“ of the workshop by Michelangelo Muraro in 1992, has shed more light on the patrons of a number of paintings executed by Francesco the Elder and Jacopo dal Ponte approximately between 1530 and 1560<sup>3</sup>. This fact has been taken by *Bernard Aikema* as a lead to try and unravel the meaning of Bassano's paintings. His scope, however, is not to explain them in a traditional iconographical way, but rather to regard Bassano's works as constructed of an „exceptional visual language“ – i.e., an individual visual vocabulary. Motifs, according to Aikema, are used as signs with which various moral lessons were visually explained. But these signs can have different functions, and the meaning of any painting can only be interpreted properly when seen in the context of the patron and his ambiente. The edition of the account-book is logically the basis for this study. Aikema takes a selection of paintings, and explains their function in connection with devotional movements in sixteenth-century Venice. This is done in chronological order, presumably following the development of this visual language. The general outcome of this study is that Jacopo Bassano catered to upper middle-class patrons, in contact with ecclesiastical and social reformers active in the city and the terraferma. Social changes were proclaimed by preachers through the renewal of Christian virtues, and by founding hospitals, orphanages and other charitable institutions. Compositional elements offered the viewer of Bassano's paintings underlying moral examples, by devising a dialectical structure. In contrast with the devotional scene, Aikema always finds an opposing figure, signifying tepidity in devotion, and thus committing the sin of sloth. In the first work documented in the *Libro di dare ed avere* – the „Supper in Emmaus“, altarpiece for the cathedral in Cittadella –, the cat spying on the sleeping dog stands for the devil watching the apathetic believer, who renounces his faith. Sloth, one of the seven deadly sins, was actively opposed in sermons and devotional treatises, as Aikema argues. In the composition, several elements according to him can be recognised in this sense: the innkeeper, not reacting to the appearance of Christ, and the sleeping dog, being watched by the cat, who is the devil in disguise. The disciples – in accordance with the biblical story – are the only ones to recognise the Saviour. The maid in the background, according to Aikema's reading of the image, is the only other participant in the Revelation of

<sup>3</sup> Michelangelo Muraro, *Il libro secondo di Francesco e Jacopo dal Ponte, Bassano del Grappa* 1992.



Christ, which in the opinion of Aikema is shown by her „brusquely“ pulling aside the curtain – but she could just as well be attending her business of serving guests. Aikema’s interpretations are thus supported by allround devotional concepts, which are being read into Bassano’s pictures. The dialectical structure, fundamental to Aikema’s iconographical interpretation, is nowhere proven by contemporary texts themselves; they are the result of Aikema’s compositional descriptions. Patrons are then placed within this context of spiritual reform, to prove that they actually recognised the given motifs. Neither are these motifs, however, mentioned in detail in the given texts, like the cat and the dog, or the innkeeper.

In Aikema’s eyes, the active participation of the Christian is one of the ever-returning ideas depicted by Bassano; and central to that is the concept of the pilgrim. The „pilgrimage of life“ and the contempt of wordly matter is metaphorically depicted in several versions of the „Flight into Egypt“; the added figures in pilgrims’ dress follow the example of Christ and leave their home to arrive ultimately at Mount Sion, depicted in the form of Monte Grappa in the background of the painting. When the identification of the mountain in the background – result of the romantic view on Bassano as representing his immediate surroundings, which was rejected in Aikema’s foreword – is unnecessary, the interpretation of the peasants as pilgrims seems both formally and iconographically true. The direct relation between the Holy Family and their „followers“ certainly points the viewer to his own pilgrimage. The pastoral figures in Bassano’s paintings thus do not represent meaningless additions to the central religious scene as has been formerly supposed, but enhance his paintings with moral examples. Paintings as the „Good Samaritan“ (Hampton Court) and „Lazarus and the rich man“ (Cleveland) underline the same dialectic system of moral examples leading to an active participation of the viewer in this campaign of moral renewal. In the Pasadena „Flight“, Aikema however interprets one of the pilgrims as a negative example, as opposed to the positive pilgrims. The drinking soldier behind the donkey on which Mary is seated embodies the selfish human being, not looking after his spiritual well-being: he fakes his pilgrimage. This traditional theme was often treated in sermons by Savonarola, and ultimately taken from the City of God by Saint Augustine; but, was this specific text ever read in relation to the painting? The function of the „Flight“ (Museo Civico, Bassano di Grappa) as an altarpiece could connect these sermons with the visual expression of this iconographical theme. This, however, is not proven. Apart from that, the unusual angel in the Pasadena painting, explained by Aikema as the angel appearing to Joseph to show him the way as described in the Gospels, can at the same time be regarded as the guardian angel. This concept was developed in the sixteenth century to provide the faithful with a more acute sense of divine presence and assistance<sup>4</sup>. Without willing to present this as possible explanation here, in my view the function of the painting as altar-piece –

<sup>4</sup> LCI IV, S. 127-8; Anton Pigler, *Barockthemen* I, 2. Aufl. Budapest 1974, p. 532-8; and John B. Knipping, *Iconography of the Counter. Reformation in the Netherlands I*, 2. Aufl. Nieuwkoop/Leiden 1974, p. 120-89, esp. 127.

as Aikema mentions, the first one with the Flight devised for the context of an altar, and thus highly interesting – is the ultimate clue for its iconography. This problem can however not be solved by only referring to general ideas; the liturgy of this specific altar in its specific ecclesiastical setting should be described.

Even seemingly genre-like paintings as the „Two hunting dogs“ (Louvre, Paris) are explained by Aikema as moralizing images by referring to the patron and his ambiente. Using the accepted iconographical definitions of the motifs found in the Uffizi-version of this painting, Aikema comes to a religious iconography explaining the dual mode of human being. The choice between the *cose corporali* and the *cose spirituali* point at the attachment of man to the corporeal world, of which he has to free himself to be able to concentrate on spiritual life. Antonio Zentani commissioned the second version of the composition in the Louvre; and the ambiente of this versatile Venetian patrician included the charitable institution of the Ospedale degli Incurabili. Acts of piety with a tendency to the *vita activa* included the washing of the feet of the patients in this hospital, and were acted out by the members of the hospitals' board. Imitation of Christ was thus a strong link in this structure of social reform. According to Aikema, devotional literature by Battista da Crema documents these spiritual movements, of which the „Two hunting dogs“ offer an emblematic visual document. If Zentani in particular read these books, or interpreted these images, we do not know. In any case, the commission for the painting does not offer any clue, for only the restriction of the subject – only dogs – is provided there. Neither is it clear, for what setting the work was meant – and thus the mental adjustment of the viewer. Was this painting meant to be seen in the context of a villa, or within a chapel?

In the second part of the book, treating the later works of Bassano after 1555, Aikema notices a change in compositional and stylistical devices. Larger figure-groups and more dramatic lighting mark the contemporaneous change of subjects from New Testament to predominantly Old Testament scenes. However, the absence of documentation on patrons of these later paintings poses a serious problem to Aikema's argumentation; the *Libro secondo di dare ed avere* only provides material up to around 1560. By comparison with motifs found in earlier works, and reconstructing the general socio-economic climate of the later sixteenth century like the plague of 1575-76, Aikema comes to iconographical explanations not diverting much from those reconstructed by Aikema in the first part. The noticed change in style according to Aikema did not affect the iconographical message. Comparison with Flemish and Dutch genre-paintings by Beuckelaer and Aertsen furnishes additional arguments to the pictorial language, although the iconographical reading of their works is still a matter under discussion<sup>5</sup>. The connection between foreground motifs like market

<sup>5</sup> See for example Reindert L. Falkenburg, 'Alter Einoutus': Over de aard en herkomst van Pieter Aertsens stillevenconceptie, in: *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 40, 1989, p.41-66; and Hans Buijs, Voorstellingen van Christus in het huis van Maria en Martha in het zestiende-eeuwse keukenstuk, in: *ibidem*, p.93-128. On still-life painting in Italian art, see for example *Luigi Salerno, Natura morte italiana: Italiensche Stillebenmalerei aus drei Jahrhunderten*. Sammlung Silvano Lodi, Florence 1984; and *idem, New Studies on Italian still life painting*, Rome 1989.



scenes and still-life, and religious stories depicted in the backdrop is again regarded as a dialectical system. The comparison is supported only by supposed iconographical similarities; the exact influence of Aertsen and Beuckelaer on Bassano (or vice versa) has so far not been researched. Aikema's reference to a comparable spiritual culture surely points in the right direction, but should have been elaborated upon.

The second part of the book seems thus to contradict the introduction more than the first. Isolated motifs, contrary to the statement given there, are not infused with meaning according to the specific patron's ambiente, but are ultimately seen as bearers of an established meaning which has been traced in the first chapters along general trends in spirituality. The iconographical conclusion in most cases is rather limited – the paintings document the choice in life between the good and the bad road, and admonishes the viewer that even on the good way temptations can threaten moral integrity. This does not really surprise, as motifs infused with the same general meaning can ultimately lead only to highly identical moral lessons. The general reception of Bassano's compositions by a wide audience does point to this conclusion. The example of the family Brueghel, where sons of Pieter the Elder most faithfully copied their fathers' compositions well into the sixteenth-century, also suggests such a supposition<sup>6</sup>. It does however contradict Aikema's own observations on a change in compositional devices, and poses serious questions on the connection between the evolution in spiritual culture and iconographical developments precisely in the second half of the sixteenth century. And ultimately, the connection suggested between the individual patron and the iconography is therefore relatively unimportant, other than for reasons of research.

The approach chosen by *Paolo Berdini* diametrically opposes Bernard Aikema's treatment. Rejecting traditional ways of iconology and iconography, he tries to open up a new perspective – the reason why this book has been published in the Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism. Berdini regards the compositional whole as a paraphrased text; the painter in his view is not someone who depicts a given story, but an interpretation provided by reading this text. Bassano thus receives an active role in iconographical developments. The comparison between word and image is elaborated further by equating the viewers' reaction to a painting to that to a text; more specifically, the Bible. The four different ways of interpreting Gods' Word – literally, allegorically, tropological and anagogical – offer thus ways for reading paintings. This method leaves the historical approach behind, and offers instead an anthropological-theological method.

This theoretical approach is elaborated upon in four chapters each dealing with specific aspects of Bassano's paintings. The first discusses the reception of divine manifestation, and the reaction to that by human beings. The „Moses and the

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<sup>6</sup> See the exhibition Essen/Vienna/Antwerp 1997/98 and catalogue *Pieter Brueghel der Jüngere, Jan Brueghel der Ältere: flämische Malerei um 1600*, Tradition und Fortschritt, Lingen 1997, where the strong workshop tradition of the family sustained the same iconographic themes from the early sixteenth until the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Burning Bush" (Uffizi, Florence) shows Moses in a lying position, thereby expressing both reverence and fear towards the Creator. According to Berdini, Bassano here offered a way out of the problem of how to depict the invisible and unapproachable God of the Old Testament, by focussing on the recipient. This problem however was non-existent in the sixteenth-century, as is proven by depictions of God the Father by numerous other painters and even by Bassano himself, for example in the „Trinity“ for the church of Santa Trinità (Angarano). The reason for employing the motif of the lying figure in New Testament scenes, as in the „Saint John in the Desert“ (Museo Civico, Bassano del Grappa) or the „Annunciation to the Shepherds“ (National Gallery, Washington) is even more questionable. The origin of the motif of the reclining figure is traced by Berdini in Roman art, in the figure of Endymion, which received new attention in Renaissance art. In a predominantly neoplatonic context, the lying pose expressed the readiness of the figure to receive divine manifestation. Moreover, to the opinion of Berdini this motif was merged with another tradition, where the shepherds were described as most qualified to receive divine influence because of their poverty and simplicity. In the Annunciation, the reclining shepherd thus documents a new valuation of rural society and its members as moral examples for the higher classes. In the second chapter Berdini describes the functioning of a painting as parable; the iconography of the „Parable of the Sower“ (Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid) is here explained as an act of allegorical reading. By transcending everyday reality the listener to a parable comes to understand the moral significance; the visualisation of the parable by Bassano in a comparable way should lead the viewer to the recognition of the extraordinary signs in the picture, and through this to iconographical understanding. Compared to the narration of the story in the Synoptics, the Bassano painting deviates from the given facts. Textual expansion – the effect of reading and interpreting – has been used to give this image its specific meaning. The women in the foreground, not mentioned in the text, provide the clue by their miraculous response to the bread in the midst of the group. The viewer by referential response regards the bread as metaphor for the eucharist. The sower in the background, allegorically the preacher of Gods' Word, is thus related to the result of the bread. But where the biblical parable focusses on the competence of the sower, the paintings concentrates on the believer. The peasant women are the ones seeing the bread, and hearing the word. Bassano introduced thus a shift of accent in the story from action to result, and again a revaluation of rural existence. Lacking in Berdini's interpretation, more than in Aikema's, is the concept of the patron or the imagined viewer; and thus the predisposed frame of mind in which the painting was perceived. Without this, the reaction to the composition, undoubtedly cleverly described by Berdini, remains a mystery.

In chapter three the relation between narrative and non-referential compositional elements in genre scenes is investigated. The dialectical relation assumed by Aikema between the secular elements and religious meaning of paintings is negated by Berdini; as is the tendency of secularisation within religious pictures as a whole. In the „Journey of Jacob“ (Palazzo Ducale, Venice) the abundance of animals and



subsidiary figures has traditionally led to an appreciation of the biblical story only as pre-text for the painting. Through the Christian interpretation of Old Testament stories, and the connection made in the liturgy of the Vespers between the history before and after Revelation, a different solution is offered. The journey of Jacob starts during nighttime, the time of the Vespers, and is directed towards the light of dawn, signifying the coming of Christ. The animals and servants accompanying Jacob stand for the creation as a whole, including humankind, which in the Old Testament is searching for Redemption. Abundance of genre-motifs can also be found in other compositions by Bassano, like the „Animals entering Noah’s Ark“ (Prado, Madrid). The question of how all the animals entered the ark peacefully and in an organised way was related to the status of man at the apex of Creation; the painting is regarded as representing the harmony and hierarchy of nature and man, installed by God, and stressed in various ways in liturgical texts. The depictions of „Christ in the House of Mary and Martha“ (S. Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston) are read by Berdini as referring to social aspects of liturgy, and the separate place occupied by women in the Church. Instead of regarding Mary and Martha as opposing examples, they should represent two stages of following Christ’s Word – from reception to assimilation. The often made comparison between the representations of this scene by Bassano and Aertsen is here negated, on account of the different position of the women in the composition. Aertsen, according to Berdini, indeed depicted the opposition between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. In his opinion, Bassano’s work does not have any relation to this Northern development.

Chapter four retraces the meaning of nocturnal scenes in the oeuvre of Jacopo Bassano by linking them with liturgical and seasonal events. The boy in the foreground of „The Adoration of the Shepherds“ (Galleria Corsini, Rome) displays the agrarian feast of the “renewal of the season”, which coincided with Christmas. In this way night-time in paintings referred not to the historical circumstances of the biblical event, but to the time of day when the matching liturgy was celebrated. The most conspicuous example of such a “resetting” is the „Baptism of Christ“ (private collection, New York). The liturgy of the Paschal Night connects the Passion of Christ to the coming of the divine light of Revelation. As a text by St. Paul explains, baptism is a likeness of Christ’s death; through baptism the Christian receives the Light of God. In this context the light falling on Christ in „Christ Praying in the Garden of Gethsemane“ (Galleria Estense, Modena, by the Bassano workshop) can be regarded as an the effect of an exemplary mode of prayer, when the soul is touched by divine illumination. Here, in concordance with a sermon by Panigarola, the contrasting positions of the bodies of Christ and his disciples express ways of receiving divine manifestation.

Chapters three and four of Berdini’s book contain the material which is more amply treated in his lecture published in *Jacopo Bassano (1510c.-1592)*. Here, the connection between the night-time setting and the meaning of genre-motifs is again made, with more specific attention to the time of the Vespers and its liturgy. The Vespers evoke by means of light-symbolism the transition from Old to New Testament;

moreover the reformation of the liturgy in the sixteenth century by the Cardinal of Santa Croce and Pius V underlines according to Berdini their actuality; the physical connection between the liturgy and the paintings in the setting of the church however remains unconsidered. Only christian hermeneutics are referred to in explaining „Jacob’s Journey“ (Palazzo Ducale, Venice) as a journey of salvation from Old to New Testament, by man and all other creatures. Other paintings are expounded within this context, like the „Animals entering the Ark“ (Prado, Madrid), where the twilight setting conveys the same meaning of transition and redemption. The Old Testament paintings thus do not simply illustrate a given text, but are read in concordance with the New. By the more profound explanation of the connection between Vesper-liturgy and iconography, this article offers a slightly more perspicuous reading of Berdini’s complicated and theoretical treatment provided by his book. However, the method of reading images is mainly supported by anthropological theories of perception, and ignores traditional iconography, liturgical setting of the paintings, and sometimes plain logic. When describing the lying figure in the „Moses and the Burning Bush“ and the „Annunciation to the Shepherds“, Berdini traces the development of this pose from antiquity; its relevance in sixteenth-century art is however far too little elaborated upon. It remains unclear if other painters in Bassano’s time included comparable elements in their paintings. Some examples can sustain Berdini’s assumptions, like the „Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence“ by Titian (Church of the Gesuiti, Venice), where the saint in lying position receives the light of God and even reaches his hand towards it; the „Adam“ by Michelangelo (Sixtine Chapel, Rome) can be regarded in the same way, and several depictions of Danae, in Italian and northern European art, depict her receiving the Golden Rain while lying on her bed. The outstretched arm in all examples, like in the „Moses and the Burning Bush“, points out the active participation of the recipient; this is lacking in the „Annunciation to the Shepherds“. One iconographical example of the lying figure, important in this context, is omitted by Berdini: the depictions of „Jacob’s Dream of the Heavenly Ladder“. Indeed, here the lying figure is receiving God’s message; but does not the sleeping figure normally lie on the ground? The first question to be asked, is if the position of the figure could not be the result of normal human behaviour. The shepherd in the foreground of numerous Bassano-paintings could simply refer to the context of the story – the shepherds were sleeping when the angel appeared to them<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, Berdini provides the reader no specific historical contextual relationship between Bassano’s works and the cited texts – most of them are treated as generally valuable theological works. Neither does Berdini argue why these texts should be seen in relation to the paintings, for example by considering position and function of altarpieces with regard to liturgy. In short, the context of the viewer or patron is not taken into account, thus omitting the possibility of checking the interpretations arrived at.

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<sup>7</sup> See Marc 2, 8-10.



Two other aspects of Bassano as a painter are offered by David Freedberg and John W. Rearick in *Jacopo Bassano (1510c.-1592)*. Freedberg describes the stylistic development from 1535 until 1592, with special attention to naturalistic tendencies. The painter in an extraordinary way combined realistic and mannerist modes of depiction, which poses him at the same time within and outside the Venetian context. This stylistic valuation of Bassano's works provides an interesting parallel to its iconographical language, which also combined unfamiliar with traditional elements. A painter like Titian was influenced by Bassano's solutions, thereby documenting his position of importance; and at the same time Tintoretto had an impact on Bassano from 1550 on. The development in Bassano's work towards and ultimately beyond *Maniera* around 1555 echoes Aikema's observations on stylistic change in mid-century. Without negating the fact that this peculiar style could be sustaining an iconographical meaning, Freedberg does not discuss this in depth. Arguments like the rustic surroundings of Bassano are still regarded as central to the painters' iconographical language – and as the central appeal to his patrons. The article by Rearick provides information on the context of these patrons, but largely in a social and geographical sense. His results are in agreement with Aikema's definition of the group of patrons, from lower noble-class, but with sufficient means. By explaining the connections between different buyers, Rearick describes the evolution of the workshop from small Bassano-centered to important firm for altarpieces and private commissions in the entire Veneto; thereby offering insight in the growing popularity of his works in an expanding area. Again, the position of Jacopo Bassano as an outsider of importance in the Venetian art-world is elaborated upon. Rearick regards this development in the light of a firm providing its clients with a successful product – without asking why this product was a success. In connection with iconography, the notion of Bassano selling paintings through Alessandro Spiera, art-dealer in Venice from 1540 until 1543 poses an interesting problem. Works were obviously painted without prescribed iconography, suggesting that their meaning was familiar to a large public. What this public expected is a topic that Aikema and Berdini tried to explain, neither of them providing the answer. The contradictions between their solutions makes clear, that all questions remain open to debate.

The lying figure in the „Adoration of the Shepherds“ (Galleria Borghese, Rome) is regarded by Aikema as a representation of the “wicked shepherd”, ignoring Christ as the Redeemer of mankind. Elements like the flute, carrying negative associations of instincts, and the shabby clothing of the figure point to his status as *furfante*. He stands for the bad pilgrim, ignoring the means of his salvation. In this context Aikema cites texts by Luther and Erasmus on the problem of beggars and fake-pilgrims in the early sixteenth century. According to Aikema, these texts were so well-known, that every viewer of Bassano's composition would be reminded of these ideas. Berdini arrives at an altogether different explanation, by regarding the lying pose of the figure to be the exemplary position of attending to the unveiling of Christ's humanity, and thus showing his reverence and fear towards God's Son. In the case of the „Adoration of the Shepherds“ of some ten years later (Galleria



Nazionale di Palazzo Corsini, Rome), Aikema points out the function of the kneeling boy in the foreground, his back towards the adoring shepherds and the Holy Family, as another example of ignorance and sloth, whereas Berdini explains this same figure as pointing at the time of the year in which the liturgy of the Nativity was celebrated. The renewal of the seasons was acted out in the feast of the tizzoni, when in agrarian societies young boys symbolically revived the fire from smouldering coal. The boy in the foreground of the „Adoration“ thus points to something outside of, and independent of the iconography of the Adoration, but connects the iconography with the liturgical calendar. Finally, in „Jacob’s Journey“ (Palazzo Ducale, Venice, but known in many other versions) Aikema regards the figures of Jacob, his wife and servants as bound to earthly possessions, whereas the shepherds in the foreground display the right mentality of (spiritual) pilgrimage. The connection of Jacopo Contarini, who commissioned a version of „Abraham’s Journey“, with the general trend of evangelical spirituality and asceticism, through his brother, remains however rather vague. The supposition of biblical persons depicted as the example of false piety is questionable, to say the least. Berdini’s account of the same painting focuses, as explained, on salvation in general, without noticing the details taken as starting-point by Aikema. The *Concordia Veteris et Novi Testamenti* according to Berdini leads the viewer to acknowledging the Journey of Jacob as an exemplum of mankind seeking for Redemption, the people of the Old Testament looking for the revelation of God through Christ. The central status of the Vespers in conveying this message is offered as proof. In the article the historical context of the Vespers is better explained than in the book, but even there not satisfactory. The function of the painting within this liturgy is totally forgotten, and thus its meaning remains unclear.

On a more general level – the contextual aspects – Aikema and Berdini also disagree. The image of the peasants in Bassano’s work is seen by the former as negative; the latter explains their appearance as a positive sign. Here a diverging idea of public – defined by Aikema, but not by Berdini – comes to light. Was the patron of Bassano part of the urban, Venetian elite culturally centered on the lagoon itself, like Aikema supposes, supported by the facts provided by Rearick, or was Bassano siding with suppressed and underestimated countrymen? The second opinion seems to be derived from an old and apparently tenacious bias. In the modern version of this fairy-tale, Bassano offers the viewer in Venice a positive image of the piety of peasants, contrary to his predecessors. Spiritual renewal is thus connected with social repositioning of rural population, in the time when the Venetians occupied the terraferma. The reaction of Venetian patrons to such modern ideas is not taken into consideration by Berdini, and can in fact be doubted. As Aikema suggests, even with the villa-culture emerging, prejudices about simple peasants remained present in the mind of the Venetian upper classes. But in devotional treatises the shepherd in particular could also be presented as moral example, with regard to his presence in the Adoration. Influence of spiritual ideas on social prejudices is a field of tension in this cultural setting. Indeed, a general devotional trend was developing in Europe as a whole from the sixteenth-century on, due to the printing press and the translation of



spiritual treatises in many languages. The editorial trend consisted of supplying the same text in many different versions and languages, with the gradual disappearance of class-distinctions<sup>8</sup>. This development accelerated after the Council of Trent, and probably had its impact on Bassano's iconography<sup>9</sup>. At any rate, it influenced the response of the public to devotional paintings, and probably in a positive way as the increasing popularity of Bassano after 1575 suggests.

The viewer of Bassano's paintings according to Berdini had no historical or cultural burden whatsoever, whereas Aikema claims that Bassano catered a limited venetian public, whose cultural and social boundaries did not change in the course of more than 60 years. Neither can be completely true, considering the vast area where Bassano sold his works, the changing devotional context, and the popularity of his compositions in Italy and beyond its borders. The naive spectator of Berdini did not exist, and neither the stable Venice-centered spiritual life that Aikema supposes<sup>10</sup>. Where the former leaves the aspect of the public aside, the latter defines, by lack of material on patrons after 1555 and a presupposed way of reading the images as a dialectical system, this public as homogenous in spirituality and social class. The results of Rearick, Aikema, Freedberg and Berdini contradict and contain similarities at the same time. The lack of material on patrons in the latter half of the sixteenth century however is a problem that needs to be overcome, to solve the question raised by these new studies: the paradox of a changing ambiente and a continuously growing reception of his oeuvre. The concept of ambiente, not only in a more profound connection to the patron, but also in the sense of spatial and historical setting could be helpful in gaining a more profound knowledge of Bassano's still intricate iconography.

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<sup>8</sup> See Ugo Rozzo, *Linee per una storia dell'editoria religiosa in Italia (1465-1600)*, Udine 1993; idem, *Biblioteche italiane del Cinquecento tra Riforma e Controriforma*, Udine 1994, where the European dimensions of the bookmarket are described.

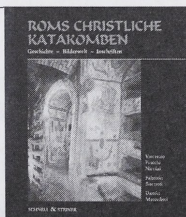
<sup>9</sup> See for example Martin Seidl, *Venezianische Malerei der Gegenreformation*. Kirchliche Programmschriften und künstlerische Bildkonzepte bei Tizian, Tintoretto, Veronese und Palma il Giovane, Bonn 1996.

<sup>10</sup> See Bruno Toscano, *Geschichte der Kunst und Formen des Religiösen Lebens*, in: *Italienische Kunst – Eine neue Sicht auf ihre Geschichte*, hrsg. von Salvatore Settis, München 1991, p. 305-49.

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