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Epidemics and Cultural Rebirth in Early Modern Worlds

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Editorial: Epidemics and the Arts

Under Michel Foucault's incisive gaze, the "plague city" (*ville pestiférée*) revealed itself as an unprecedented place of repression – segmented, immobile, frozen – a political dream of control.[1] Foucault meticulously described the power dynamics designed to transform the chaos unleashed by the plague into a system of order, and showed how the authorities implemented quarantine, fumigation or public registration measures with a single goal in mind: to drive the plague out of the city. In the face of these hard and frankly crushing restrictions on the individual, therefore, it is remarkable that the forces of the plague city did not also result in the death of creativity. Visual and literary artworks related to epidemics can be found everywhere in the Early Modern period, in every local, transregional and global context. While scholarship on the relation between Early Modern epidemics and their artistic responses has progressed in recent decades, the field remains more fragmented than historical, socio-economic or anthropological approaches. In 2005, the exhibition *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500–1800* at the Worcester Art Museum made important strides, not only by bringing together works of art representing the responses of the Italian city-states over the centuries, but also by making the strategic decision to focus, on the one hand, on common patterns like the ubiquitous representation of St Roch, and on the other, on local and therefore unique responses of the cities through case studies such as the artistic interaction with the cult of St Rosalie in Palermo.[2] This two-sided approach also characterises the volume *Plague Image and Imagination from Medieval to Modern Times* (2021) edited by Cristos Lynteris, but with an important adjustment: here, the subject is expanded to a global scale and more atten-tion is paid to visual-anthropological, medical and postcolonial perspectives.[3] However, the volume largely concentrates on the third plague pandemic (1894–1959), with only one article on plague images from the entire period between 1250 and 1630.[4]

Accordingly, this special issue of *Kunsttexte* focuses on the Early Modern period by presenting a methodologically diverse, interdisciplinary and global approach that extends from Europe to the Americas. In her contribution, Daniela Wagner (1) analyses the so-called *Krankheitspersonifikationen* or visual personifications of the plague, comparing them with images that circulated during the most recent COVID-19 pandemic. Wagner argues that the artistic impulse to represent diseases in anthropomorphic form should be understood as another mechanism for controlling the uncontrollable, in this case through an imagined social connection between humans and epidemics. From this perspective, the creatively rich spectrum of visually personified and anthropomorphised images of diseases across time seem to be united by the effort to rationalise the horrors of the plague through comparisons with human actions, desires and grievances. This social dimension of art related to plagues and epidemics is also addressed in the contribution by Nils Weber (2), which focuses on two sixteenth-century plague images produced in Early Modern Venice. Weber demonstrates that the two paintings *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Intercedes with Christ the Redeemer for Plague Victims* by Palma Giovane and *St Roch Visits the Plague Victims* by Jacopo Bassano speak to entirely different audiences, divided by social status and wealth: the Venetian elite on the one hand, and the *popolani* on the other. Both paintings, however, are united by their accurate representation of the buboes, confirming that

the artists were attentive observers of the specific visual markers symptomatic of plague pathology. As such, the images may be regarded first of all as credible products of direct observation, and second as visual evidence supporting the scientific hypothesis that it was indeed the bubonic plague that struck the city in 1575.

The text by Emma Ferrari (3) takes us from sixteenth-century Venice to seventeenth-century Milan, where the 1630 epidemic not only triggered the production of literary masterpieces like Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*, but also set a new course for Milanese visual art. This entailed artworks by a new generation of post-epidemic artists – influenced, trained and conditioned by the epidemic through their compulsory duty as guards of the city gates – as well as the rise of a local tradition of printmaking, with the plague as one of the most popular subjects. Apart from their effects on Early Modern image production and literary output, epidemics also had an impact on architecture and urban landscapes. Fabio Gigone (4) analyses this phenomenon with his case study situated in Baroque Rome. The architect Domenico Castelli was tasked with building structures to control, separate and disinfect goods and people, producing a new cartography of Rome which Gigone considers as a point of discontinuity and rupture in the city's architectural history, documented in a series of engravings still unpublished to this day.

Meanwhile in the Americas, a smallpox epidemic in Mexico City led to the production of a specific type of plague poetry in five-line stanzas known as *quintillas*. Paulina León (5) carefully reads the *quintillas* poems, highlighting not only how the impact of the epidemic on daily life is described with dramatic intensity, but also how the poets explore the reasons for the epidemic, in particular the environmental conditions of the disease. The "sick sun" (*sol enfermo*) that unleashes the disease upon the population emerges as a suggestive poetic image, linking the outbreak to the relationship between humans and their lived environment and drawing inspiration from Nahua mythology.

Finally, it should be noted that the articles in this special issue demonstrate how resilience during and after Early Modern epidemic outbreaks depended not only on a thorough system of public rules imposed by local governments, but also on the creative efforts of people who found ways to express grief, cope with fear, maintain a sense of community and lay the groundwork for a revitalization of cultural and public life in the face of widespread loss. This continues to hold true not only for the historical experience of Early Modern epidemics, but also for the pandemics of the twenty-first century.

Endnotes

1. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris 1975, pp. 197–201.
2. Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Anthony van Dyck, the Cult of Saint Rosalie, and the 1624 Plague in Palermo*, in: *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500–1800*, Chicago 2005, pp. 118–136.
3. Christos Lynteris (ed.), *Plague Image and Imagination from Medieval to Modern Times,* London 2021.
4. Sheila Barker, *Painting the Plague, 1250–1630*, in: *Plague Image and Imagination from Medieval to Modern Times,* London 2021, pp. 37–68.

Title

Daniela Wagner

Pest und Pandemie

Zur Personifikation als ontologische Metapher im Bild

Als die Corona-Pandemie im Jahr 2020 begann, war zunächst wenig über die Eigenschaften von SARS-CoV-2 bekannt. Für die von dem Virus ausgelöste Krankheit gab es kein Gegenmittel, bezüglich der Ansteckungsgefahr herrschte zunächst Unsicherheit und auch die richtige Verwendung der Begriffe – Corona, COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2 – musste erst erlernt werden. Frühzeitig informiert war die Allgemeinheit allerdings über das Aussehen der neuen Bedrohung. Elektronenmikroskope lieferten Aufnahmen des für das bloße Auge nicht erkennbaren Virus, die dann in stilisierter Form in wissenschaftlichen Publikationen, aber auch in den Massenmedien verbreitet wurden.[1] Während die mittlerweile fast ikonische Darstellung von Alissa Eckert und Dan Higgins die detailreiche Struktur eines Virions abzubilden suchte, waren die einfachsten Modelle Kugeln mit sich nach außen verdickenden, keulenartigen Auswüchsen.[2] Es waren also nicht die im Labor entstandenen mikroskopischen Aufnahmen, die den unsichtbaren Feind anschaulich machten, sondern die davon abgeleiteten Illustrationen. Sie verankerten die Vorstellung von SARS-CoV-2 als stachelige Kugel im globalen Bildgedächtnis.

Mit diesen Bildern gerieten die tatsächliche Größe und die physische Beschaffenheit des Virus vorübergehend in Vergessenheit. Während die mikroskopischen Aufnahmen mal unförmige, mal allenfalls annähernd kreisförmige Blasen (noch besser passt das im Englischen häufig verwendete Wort *blob*) mit einem Kranz (lat. *corona*) aus Spike-Proteinen zeigen,[3] sind die gezeichneten Modelle in der Regel strukturell vereinfacht. Sie basieren auf einem Kugelkörper, sind einheitlich und regelmäßig geformt. Für die Allgemeinheit gewann das Virus so nicht nur eine ins Spektrum des Sichtbaren gerückte Größe, sondern auch eine vorstellbare, fast an das Greifbare heranreichende Körperlichkeit.

Die Bildkünste reagierten ebenfalls auf diese neue, fingierte Materialität des Virus. Vor allem in den üblicherweise schnell auf aktuelle Ereignisse reagierenden Kunstformen Karikatur, Comic und Streetart entstanden auf Basis der umkränzten Kugel Bilder, die das Virus nun als anthropomorphe Figur zeigten: Die Spike-Proteine und die Kugelform blieben als wichtigstes Merkmal erhalten, aber ausgestattet mit Armen, Beinen und Gesichtszügen, die auf Verschlagenheit und böswillige Absichten schließen ließen, wurde das Virus zu einer Personifikation und gewann eine an das Menschliche angelehnte Lebendigkeit. In dieser Stilisierung und Gestaltung handelte das Virus nicht aus seinem Dingcharakter heraus, wie dies für Anthropomorphismen von unbelebten Gegenständen charakteristisch wäre, sondern mit dem vollen Potenzial und Bewusstsein eines menschlichen Gegenübers, das nur zufällig die Gestalt einer stacheligen Kugel mit Armen und Beinen besaß.[4]

Doch das personifizierte SARS-CoV-2-Virion ist nur eine der jüngsten Erscheinungen in einer langen Tradition der Personifizierung von Krankheiten. Krankheiten zu verlebendigen, ihnen sprachlich und bildlich Körperlichkeit und menschengleiche Handlungsmacht zu verleihen, ist eine Praxis, die sich weit in die Geschichte zurückverfolgen lässt. SARS-CoV-2 am nächsten steht wohl das personifizierte HI-Virus, wie es in den 1980er und 90er Jahren in verschiedenen Aufklärungskampagnen anzutreffen war. Gestalterische Ähnlichkeiten sind vorhanden, denn auch das HI-Virus besitzt Oberflächenproteine, die sich nach außen hin verdicken. Was als Ikonographie des Corona-Virus geläufig ist, begegnet also bereits einige Jahrzehnte früher: Das HI-Virus als mit Auswüchsen versehene Kugel, die menschliche Gliedmaßen besitzt.[5] Bereits im frühen 20. Jahrhundert wurde die Influenza personifiziert[6] und ein Werbeplakat aus dem späten 19. Jahrhundert lässt die Personifikation des als hygienisch und desinfizierend beworbenen Papier d'Arménie gleich mehrere Infektionskrankheiten (Typhus, Cholera, Croup und Pocken) sowie den Tod vertreiben.[7]

Geht man noch weiter zurück und blickt in die Vormoderne, trifft man oft auf die personifizierte Pest. Auch eine an die Grippe erinnernde Epidemie und damit gewissermaßen ein Vorläufer von SARS-CoV-2 wurde personifiziert, wie das spätmittelalterliche Fastnachtspiel um den Tanawäschel zeigt. Letzterer ist eine personifizierte Krankheit, deren Symptome Mattigkeit, Kopfweh, Husten und Erbrechen sind. Doch während das Corona-Virus unserer Zeit mit medizinischen Mitteln und von medizinischem Personal bekämpft wurde, wird der Tanawäschel vor Gericht gestellt, verurteilt und dem Henker überantwortet.[8] Neben diesen Personifikationen ansteckender Krankheiten sind auch andere gesundheitsbezogene Personifikationen in der Vormoderne anzutreffen, ein höchst anschauliches Beispiel hierfür bietet die frühneuzeitliche allegorische Erzählung *Condamnation de Banquet*, in der die von übermäßigem Essen hervorgerufenen Leiden als Personifikationen in Text und Bild veranschaulicht werden.[9] War die Personifikation nicht nur im Bereich der Gesundheit bis in das 19. Jahrhundert ein weit verbreitetes Mittel der bildenden Kunst, so rückte sie im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts deutlich in den Hintergrund. Erst im Zuge der Corona-Pandemie kam es zu einer weltweiten Wiederbelebung des Mediums.

Die neue Popularität der Mittel Verlebendigung, Verkörperung und Personifikation während der Corona-Pandemie soll im Folgenden als Folie dienen, der Nutzbarmachung von Personifikationen in historischen Gesundheitszusammenhängen nachzugehen. Die während der Pandemie zu beobachtende Aktivierung der Personifikation als Medium der Kommunikation kann, so die Überlegung, dazu beitragen, die Funktionalität von Personifikationen auch in historischen Kontexten besser zu verstehen. Wenngleich die Rahmensetzungen in der historischen Perspektive andere sein müssen – etwa in Hinsicht auf Wissensstand, Adressat:innen oder mediale Bedingungen –, so unterliegt die Personifikation als rhetorische und ontologische Figur doch grundlegenden Prinzipien, die eine diachrone Perspektive zulassen.[10] Dabei kann es im Rahmen dieses Beitrags nicht das Ziel sein, eine Geschichte der Personifikation im Bereich der Gesundheitskommunikation zu schreiben. Vielmehr sollen mit einem schlaglichtartigen Blick auf zwei Personifikationen der Pest neue Perspektiven bezüglich der Schnittmenge der Themenfelder Kunst und Gesundheit eröffnet werden. Im Fokus steht die Frage, welche Vermittlungsaufgaben der Personifikation in gesellschaftlichen Gesundheitszusammenhängen und Epidemien übertragen wurden und welcher Nutzen daraus gezogen wurde. In anderen Worten: Was ist gewonnen, wenn eine Krankheit oder ein für das bloße Auge nicht sichtbarer Krankheitserreger personifiziert und damit in einen menschenähnlichen Körper überführt wird?

Personifikation

Die während der mittlerweile selbst schon historischen Corona-Pandemie neu erstarkende Popularität der Personifikation in Sprache und Bild ist auch der Forschung nicht verborgen geblieben. Vor allem die Sprach- und Kommunikationsforschung hat sich mit den Vermittlungsformen des Anthropomorphismus und der Personifikation in Hinblick auf die Pandemie beschäftigt.[11] Anhand der Beobachtung, dass noch bis ins 20. Jahrhundert die Pest als Krankheit und vor wenigen Jahren dann das SARS-CoV-2-Virion, aber nicht die Krankheit COVID-19 personifiziert und zu etwas Sichtbarem wurden, lässt sich sowohl das Einsatzgebiet als auch das, was eine Personifikation zu leisten vermag, veranschaulichen.

Die Personifikation dient im klassischen Verständnis der antiken Rhetorik als Figur der Verkörperung von Abstrakta (man denke etwa an die Personifikationen der Tugenden und Laster, der Liebe, des Todes), der Verlebendigung von unbelebten Dingen und der Vergegenwärtigung von Abwesendem.[12] Virus und Virion sind durchaus gegenständlich und fallen auch nicht in den Bereich der konzeptuellen Vorstellungen (etwa von Gemeinschaften wie der städtischen Kommune), die ebenfalls immer wieder personifiziert wurden. Doch ähnelt ein Virus aufgrund seiner geringen Größe einem Abstraktum: Es ist für das bloße Auge unsichtbar und für die Allgemeinheit daher nicht oder nur schwer greifbar. Wird es vermenschlicht, rückt es in die Nähe von Personifikationen natürlicher Phänomene oder (geographischer) Sozietäten. Sie alle sind konkrete Entitäten, aber aufgrund ihrer physikalischen Beschaffenheit (Wind), ihrer Komplexität (Stadt) oder ihrer Größe (Virus) nur bedingt fassbar. In der Vormoderne, als das medizinische Wissen geringer und we-

der der Erreger der Pest noch genaues Wissen über sein Wirken bekannt waren, ist die Personifikation einer Krankheit als Entität zu fassen, die als Erklärungsmuster für etwas Unbekanntes und in seinem (vermeintlichen) Handeln Undurchschaubares dient.

Tatsächlich gelangen Personifikationen häufig zum Einsatz, wenn ausgehend von den Eigenschaften solcher Phänomene ein intentionales Verhalten abgeleitet oder fiktiv entworfen wird. Aus Körperlichkeit wird Handlungsfähigkeit. Der Grund dafür liegt im Gebrauch von Metaphern und auf Handlung basierenden Anthropomorphismen, die sich in der alltäglichen wie in der Fachsprache immer wieder finden lassen.[13] Aus dem Gesundheitskontext lassen sich schnell drei Beispiele nennen: Zucker greift die Zähne an, die Grippewelle hat das Land erfasst, eine Krankheit fordert Opfer. Neben der Sprache, die Metaphern und auf Handlung basierende Anthropomorphismen gebraucht und so Verlebendigung generiert, ist die menschliche Vorstellungskraft an der Entstehung von Personifikationen beteiligt.[14] Bereits frühe menschliche Kulturen schufen Entitäten, um Unerklärliches sinnhaft werden zu lassen – die Götter. Und so werden auch Krankheiten wie die Pest mit dem ihnen zugeschriebenen Handeln zu Verwandten der Götter. Der Körper ist dabei weniger relevant als die damit einhergehende Handlungsfähigkeit. Ereignisse wie Naturkatastrophen oder Epidemien konnten so als Wille einer Entität verstanden werden. Bedrohungen erhielten eine Begründung, eine Ursache, auf die mit dem eigenen Verhalten – etwa mit Gebeten – reagiert werden konnte. Es bestand Hoffnung, unbeeinflussbare Dinge beeinflussen zu können. Der Mensch erhält durch den Akt der Personifikation ein ihm ähnliches Gegenüber.

In personifizierter Form weist sich eine Krankheit, weist sich ein Virus durch Gestik, Mimik und Handlung als Feind oder Freund aus, kommuniziert, provoziert, bedroht und wird so Teil eines fiktionalisierten Geflechts des sozialen Miteinanders. Die Gestaltgebung kann bei der Bewältigung von Krisen helfen, da die Bedrohung so fassbarer wird und in den Bereich des Bekannten, des Vertrauten rückt. Anders als zu einem Abstraktum oder etwas Unsichtbarem kann zu einem personifizierten Gegenüber eine Beziehung aufgebaut werden. Ihm kann entgegengetreten, Schuld und Verantwortung zugewiesen werden. In beiden Fällen,

Pest und COVID, fehlte ein konkretes Gegenüber, ein de facto physischer Gegner, der zur Verantwortung gezogen, adressiert, bekämpft werden konnte. An dieser Stelle bietet das Mittel der Personifikation Abhilfe. Sie schafft zwar keinen faktischen Ausgleich zum fehlenden Gegenüber, füllt aber die Leerstelle. Das einer Personifikation innewohnende Potenzial, soziale Beziehungen zwischen Mensch und Abstraktum zu spiegeln, ist schon lange bekannt. Berühmt ist der Fall Boethius: In *Der Trost der Philosophie* (*De consolatione philosophiae*, um 525) macht der spätantike Gelehrte Fortuna für sein Unglück verantwortlich. Philosophia weist ihn jedoch darauf hin, dass Fortuna gibt und nimmt, von ihr daher kein beständiges Glück zu erwarten sei. Das Trost spendende Zwiegespräch mit der personifizierten Philosophie schrieb der wegen Hochverrat zum Tode Verurteilte im Gefängnis, während er auf seine Hinrichtung wartete.[15] Auch lässt sich mit Bezug auf Lakoff und Johnson festhalten, dass eine ontologische Metapher wie die Personifikation einer Krankheit uns nicht nur eine bestimmte Art bietet, über das Personifizierte nachzudenken, sondern auch ihr entgegenzutreten, das heißt konkret, mit der Pest oder SARS-CoV-2 umzugehen.[16] Lakoff und Johnson nutzen als Beispiel die Inflation, die jedoch problemlos durch die Pest ersetzt werden kann, denn beide werden als unsere Gegnerinnen stilisiert. „We think of inflation as an adversary that can attack us, hurt us, steal from us, even destroy us. The INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY metaphor therefore gives rise to and justifies political and economic actions […].“[17]

Wenn beim Personifizieren menschliche Eigenschaften auf Abstrakta, Konzepte, Entitäten und Sozietäten oder Naturphänomene übertragen werden, geht es nicht darum, ein umfängliches Bild zu schaffen. Selektion ist vielmehr Teil des Prozesses[18] und Vollständigkeit nicht notwendig. Mithilfe sowohl der durch das Personifizierte selbst als auch durch die menschliche oder menschenähnliche Gestalt gesetzten kognitiven Rahmen ist für die Betrachter:innen eine erste Möglichkeit zur Einordnung gegeben. Kontext, Konventionen und Signale rufen gewisse Assoziationen oder Erwartungen auf. Durch die selektiven Aspekte des Verkörperten, die zur Gestaltung der Personifikation herangezogen werden, präzisiert sich das Gemeinte. Bei der Personifizierung geht es zunächst

um eine Typenbildung, die in der Regel über die Visualisierung normativer Eigenschaften vollzogen wird und gegebenenfalls um individuelle Hinzufügungen ergänzt und so spezifiziert werden kann. So sind dann ebenfalls selektive Präzisierungen in Bezug auf das Verständnis des Verkörperten möglich und üblich. Je stärker die Personifikation spezifiziert wird, desto mehr rückt sie weg vom Allgemeinen und wird sie zu einer Vorstellung ihrer selbst.[19] Ein Abstraktum, Konzept oder das physische Etwas, das personifiziert wird, gewinnt für die Betrachter:innen zugleich an Klarheit, da es durch die Betonung von bestimmten Charakteristika und dem Auslassen anderer einer Komplexitätsreduktion und zugleich einer damit einhergehenden Konkretion unterzogen wird. Die Konkretion bezieht sich dabei auf jene zuvor ausgewählten Charakteristika, da so eine bestimmte Perspektive auf das verkörperte Abstraktum eingenommen wird. Ein anschauliches Beispiel bietet die personifizierte Minne, also die Liebe, die häufig mit Pfeilen auf die Liebenden schießt und damit zwei Aspekte betont: Liebe verletzt und Liebe ist etwas sich im Körper Vollziehendes. Auch hier zeigt sich: Bei der Gestaltung einer Personifikation wird in der Regel auf Konventionen, das heißt die Eigenschaften zurückgegriffen, die dem von ihr Verkörperten traditionell zugesprochen werden.

Die akute Bedrohung

Wie Personifikationen die Wesenszüge einer bestimmten Krankheit als Aussage realisieren, lässt sich anhand einer Darstellung der Bedrohung durch die Pest aus dem 15. Jahrhundert (Abb. 1) veranschaulichen. Zu finden ist sie auf einer Sieneser Biccherna-Tafel des Jahres 1437, die sich heute in Berlin befindet.[20] Biccherna-Tafeln dienten als Buchdeckel für die jeweils ein halbes Jahr umfassenden Rechnungsbücher der sienesischen Finanzverwaltung. Die Berliner Tafel ist in drei Bereiche geteilt: Die obere Hälfte nimmt die Darstellung des Angriffs der Pest ein, sie ist durch eine Wappenreihe von dem unteren Teil abgegrenzt, in dem eine Inschrift die Verantwortlichen der Finanzbehörde nennt und den Zeitraum des Rechnungsbuches angibt.

Dass es sich bei der im oberen Bereich befindenden Szene um eine Darstellung der Pest handelt, ist schnell erkennbar: Von links sprengt ein kräftiges schwarzes Pferd heran, sein geflügelter und ebenfalls vollständig schwarzer Reiter hält Bogen und Pfeile bereit, an seinem Gürtel ist eine Sense befestigt. Unter dem Pferd liegen Menschen, sie sind dem Reiter bereits zum Opfer gefallen – er ist der in Gestalt der Pest kommende Tod. Die Bedrohlichkeit der Figur und damit dessen, was sie verkörpert, wird deutlich durch die Farbe von Reiter und Pferd, den weiten Sprung des Tieres und die wortwörtlich obskure Gestalt des Reiters. Pest und Tod werden im Rückgriff auf bekannte Ikonographien – die Reiter der Offenbarung des Johannes und die Pestpfeile als Strafe Gottes – zu einer anthropomorphen Figur verschmolzen. Das anvisierte Ziel von Pferd und Reiter ist die in der rechten Hälfte der Szene zu sehende Figurengruppe. Durch einen Rundbogen eröffnet sich der Einblick in einen Innenraum, in dem sich fünf männliche und eine weibliche Figur zu Unterhaltung und Spiel zusammengefunden haben. Deutlich ist, dass der hier zu sehende Rückzug ins Häusliche als Schutz vor der Ansteckung mit der Pest nicht ausreichend ist, denn vier Figuren sind bereits von Pfeilen getroffen. Eine davon ist ein Knabe, erkennbar an der fehlenden Kopfbedeckung, der über die Schulter eines anderen Mannes, vermutlich seines Vaters, schaut. Die beiden von rechts an die Gruppe herantretenden Figuren blieben bisher verschont, in ihren Körpern stecken keine Pfeile. Doch da der schwarze Reiter seine Waffe bereit hält, ist anzunehmen, dass er die beiden Männer als nächstes anvisieren wird.

Die Pest der Biccherna-Tafel fokussiert sich in ihrer Aussage auf den todbringenden Charakter der Krankheit. Sie zeigt, dass die Pest über Distanz wirkt und sich schnell ausbreitet. Auch die Unsichtbarkeit des Feindes wird hier adressiert, denn die von der Pest angegriffene Gruppe sieht weder die Angreiferin noch den Angriff – also die Pfeile – und auch dass sie bereits die Pest in sich tragen, also bereits von den Pfeilen getroffen wurden, ist ihnen noch nicht bekannt. Die Pest, obwohl eine große und mächtige Gegnerin, bewegt sich unter den Menschen, ohne wahrgenommen zu werden. Erst wenn sich die Symptome zeigen, wird erkennbar sein, dass die Pest unter den Menschen war.

Abb. 1 Deckel des Sieneser Amtsbuches (Biccherna) für 1437, Tempera und Gold auf Pappelholz, 43 x 28 cm, 1437. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum.

Mit den Darstellungen der Corona-Pandemie hat die Biccherna-Tafel gemein, dass sie sich auf den Moment der Bedrohung fokussiert. Auf der Tafel wird die Pest während einer Epidemie gezeigt und auch die SARS-CoV-2-Personifikationen adressieren zumeist die momentane, also die zum Zeitpunkt ihrer Entstehung noch höchst akute Bedrohung, die von dem Virus ausgeht. Hervorgehoben wird hier wie dort das bereits angesprochene intentionale Handeln, das aus den Ereignissen abgeleitet oder als fiktionale Charakterisierung entworfen wird. Ist die Intentionalität in der Biccherna-Tafel vor allem im Zielen und Abschießen der Pfeile zu erkennen, steht in Darstellungen des personifizierten SARS-Cov-2 neben zielgerichtetem Handeln oft ein bewusst böswilliges, heimtückisches Verhalten im Vordergrund. Ein Beispiel bietet ein Mural von Stra, das im Jahr 2020 in Porto entstand.[21] Der Künstler lässt zwei Figuren auftreten: Die kleine grüne Gestalt ist durch ihren mit ‚Spikes' besetzten Kugel-

körper und die giftgrüne Farbe schnell als Virus identifizierbar. Ihre dürren Beine enden in klobigen Turnschuhen, unter dem schelmisch lächelnden Gesicht mit großen Augen hält sie ein Schild mit der Aufschrift: „Free Hugs". Das Angebot ist jedoch trügerisch, eine Falle, mit der das Virus seine Ausbreitung befördern will. Wird das ‚Social distancing' außer Acht gelassen, also das während der Pandemie allgegenwärtige Gebot des Abstandhaltens und der Einschränkung von Kontakten, profitiert das Virus von der durch die Nähe erhöhten Ansteckungsgefahr. Das Schild fungiert gleichzeitig als Attribut, das die Personifikation im zeitlichen und kulturellen Kontext verortet und ihr einen zwielichtigen Charakter verleiht. Wenngleich Viren nur an Reproduktion interessiert sind, also nicht denken, keine intellektgeleiteten Absichten verfolgen, den Menschen schlicht als Wirt nutzen, schreibt Stra SARS-CoV-2 hier zielgerichtetes Handeln, Täuschungsfähigkeit und als Konsequenz daraus menschliche Intelligenz zu. Auch Stra überblendet die Personifikationen von Virus und Tod und aktualisiert damit gewissermaßen die spätmittelalterliche respektive frühneuzeitliche Ikonographie: Der Schatten, den die niedliche, harmlos wirkende Figur wirft, bildet nicht deren Umrisse nach, sondern formt eine gänzlich andere Gestalt, den personifizierten Tod. Das Schattenspiel liest sich zudem als popkulturelle Referenz auf ein berühmtes Filmplakat (1999) der Star-Wars-Saga, auf dem der große Schatten des Kindes Anakin Skywalker dessen zukünftige Existenz als Darth Vader, mit seinem langen schwarzen Mantel und der Maske eine modernisierte Todesgestalt, vorzeichnet.[22]

In der Biccherna-Tafel und auch in dem Beispiel aus der COVID-Pandemie werden den Betrachter:innen grundsätzliche Aspekte vermittelt, die über die Art der Bedrohung aufklären: den drohenden Tod, die Unsichtbarkeit der Gefahr, das trügerische In-Sicherheit-Wiegen. Wird eine Krankheit hingegen nicht im realen oder fiktiven Rahmen einer akuten Bedrohung dargestellt, können andere Aspekte an Bedeutung gewinnen, kann die Gestaltung der Personifikation anders ausfallen und auch der ontologische Gehalt ist unter Umständen anders zu bewerten. Dies zeigt ein Blick nach Venedig, wo Giusto Le Courts allegorische Historie der Befreiung Venedigs von der Pest eine auf die Epidemie zurückblickende Perspektive einnimmt.

Abb. 2 Giusto Le Court: Vertreibung der Pest aus Venedig, Marmor, ca. 1670–1674. Venedig, Santa Maria della Salute.

Die überwundene Pest

Im Jahr 1630 brach in Venedig die Pest aus. Der Rat der Lagunenstadt ordnete aus diesem Anlass noch im Juni desselben Jahres Prozessionen an, die sowohl San Marco als auch die Kirche San Rocco, also des Pestheiligen, ansteuerten.[23] Am 22. Oktober 1630 wandten Senat und Doge sich mithilfe des damaligen Patriarchen von Venedig, Giovanni Tiepolo, an die Jungfrau Maria und baten sie um die Errettung Venedigs vor der Pest.[24] Wenngleich Maria seit diesem Ausbruch der Pest sicher nicht das erste Mal um Hilfe angerufen wurde, wurde nun ein Gelübde abgelegt: Es solle eine der Jungfrau Maria geweihte Kirche errichtet werden. Auch sollte von dem Tag an, an dem Venedig offiziell als von der Pest befreit erklärt wurde, diesem Ereignis jährlich in der zu errichtenden Kirche gedacht werden. Schon im November wurde eine Kommission benannt, die sich mit der Suche nach einem geeigneten Ort befassen sollte. Wohl bereits im Dezember 1630 wurde ein Wettbewerb ausgelobt, um einen Entwurf und einen Architekten zu finden. Im Januar 1631 wurde Holz für das Fundament bestellt und am 1. Februar wurde festgelegt, dass der Grundstein am 25. März gelegt werden solle, dem Tag der Verkündigung

und der mythischen Gründung Venedigs. Gelegt wurde der Grundstein dann eine Woche später, am 1. April, und bereits zu diesem Anlass wurden Medaillen mit der später auch im Fußboden der Kirche eingebrachten Inschrift „UNDE ORIGO INDE SALUS" ins Fundament gelegt. Die Inschrift ist doppeldeutig gewählt, kann doch *salus* als Heil und Gesundheit verstanden werden. Im Juni 1631 fiel die Entscheidung dann zugunsten des von Baldassare Longhena eingereichten Entwurfs. Die Arbeit an der Kirche begann mit der Anlage der Fundamente im September desselben Jahres und am 21. November 1631 wurde die Stadt schließlich frei von der Pest erklärt.

Das architektonische Konzept Longhenas sieht vor, dass beim Betreten der Kirche durch das Hauptportal der Blick durch die Rotonda direkt auf den Hochaltar fällt.[25] In dieser Perspektive erscheint letzterer durch die sich ergebenden Durchblicke mehrfach gerahmt durch Säulen, das sich vor dem Altarraum aufspannende Gewölbe des Umgangs der Rotonda, das wie ein Baldachin erscheint, wenngleich der Altar erst dahinter steht, und schließlich durch die Säulen, Pilaster und den Bogen des Chores selbst. Diese Rahmung

wurde dann der von Giusto Le Court gefertigten Skulpturengruppe zuteil, die die Befreiung Venedigs von der Pest darstellte (Abb. 2).

Das zwischen 1670 und 1674[26] entstandene marmorne Ensemble erzählt das historische Ereignis in einer allegorischen Komposition. Die zentrale Gestalt des Werks ist Maria, sie befindet sich an der Spitze der sich hinter dem Altar auf einem polygonalen Sockel erhebenden Dreieckskomposition. Aufrecht auf einer von Wolken getragenen Mondsichel stehend, trägt sie das Christuskind im linken Arm. Mit ihrer sanft nach unten ausgestreckten rechten Hand wendet sie sich der zu ihren Füßen knienden Personifikation der Stadt Venedig zu. Venezia blickt zur Gottesmutter empor, ihre linke Hand liegt locker auf ihrer Brust, während die rechte nach unten gestreckt ist, den Gläubigen entgegen. Sie tritt hier als Fürsprecherin der Venezianer:innen auf, bittet um Beistand bei der Überwindung der Pest. Besonderes Augenmerk hat der Künstler auf die Kleidung Venezias gelegt: Sie trägt einen mit ornamentalen Bordüren gesäumten Mantel, darunter ein an den Ärmeln gerüschtes und mit Spitze besetztes Kleid aus einem floral gemusterten Stoff, der an ein wertvolles, mit Goldfäden durchwirktes Samtgewebe denken lässt. Ihre Handgelenke sind mit doppelten Perlenbändern geschmückt. Venedig wird hier als reiche, prächtige, schöne und für ihre Bürger:innen eintretende Stadt charakterisiert.

Gegenüber der dankbar aufblickenden Stadtpersonifikation und damit zur Linken ihrer Schutzpatronin Maria ist eine gänzlich andere Szene zu sehen. Hier bedroht ein geflügelter Putto eine alte Frau, die personifizierte Pest, mit einer brennenden Fackel (Abb. 3). Will man der Fackel in dieser allegorischen Historie ebenfalls eine Bedeutung zusprechen, so wäre an das Feuer des Glaubens zu denken, mit dem auch die christliche Tugend Fides häufig erscheint.[27] Auch die Logik der Erzählung würde hierfür sprechen, wurde die Pest doch mithilfe des Glaubens überwunden. Die personifizierte Pest flieht mit in Furcht erhobenen Armen, ist barfuß und in ein unordentlich wallendes Gewand gekleidet, das ihre Gliedmaßen immer wieder entblößt. Der zahnlose Mund ist weit geöffnet, die Haut des ausgemergelten Gesichts liegt straff über den Knochen. Die Figur bewegt sich nach rechts, doch

ist ihr Blick zurück und damit Maria mit dem Christuskind zugewandt.

Die Personifikation der Pest als alte Frau mit einem ausgezehrten Körper ist eine Fortführung einer allgemeineren Form der Personifikation von Krankheit, spezifiziert für die Pest findet sie sich in Cesare Ripas *Iconologia*. In dem Druck von 1603, der ersten mit Bildern versehenen Ausgabe, heißt es unter dem Eintrag „PESTE ouero PESTILENTIA":

„DONNA vestita di color tanè oscuro, hauerà la faccia smorta, & spauenteuole, la fronte fasciata, le braccia, e le gambe ignude, la veste sarà aperta da'fianchi, & per l'apertura si vedrà la camiscia imbrattata, & sporca; parimente si vedranno le mammelle anch'esse sozze, & ricoperta da vn velo trasparente, & à piedi d'essa vi sarà un Lupo. […] DONNA, vecchia, macilenta, & spauenteuole, di carnaggione gialla, sarà scapigliata, & in capo hauerà vna ghirlanda di nuuoli oscuri, sarà vestita di color bigio, sparso d'vmori, e vapori, di color giallaccio, starà sedere sopra alcune pelli d'agnelli, di pecore, & altri animali, tenendo in mano vn flagello con le corde accolte sanguinose."[28]

Abb. 3 Giusto Le Court: Vertreibung der Pest aus Venedig, Detail: Pest, ca. 1670–1674. Venedig, Santa Maria della Salute.

Ein Bild der Figur findet sich in dieser Ausgabe nicht, doch lässt die Beschreibung ein Bild vor Augen treten, das jenem von Giusto le Court für Santa Maria della Salute geschaffenen in vielerlei Hinsicht gleicht. Die dortige Personifikation der Pest ist wie die meisten ihrer Artgenossinnen weiblich, ihr Gesicht ist erschreckend, die Arme und Beine nackt, der Körper abgemagert. Wenngleich nicht um die Stirn, so ist doch um den Kopf ein Stoff gewickelt, der einem Verband ähnelt. Das Gewand ist geöffnet, verrutscht, gibt den Blick auf die linke Brust der Figur frei.

Und wenngleich die Marmorgruppe ungefasst ist und damit keine Hinweise auf die Farbe von Haut und Kleidung gibt, so scheint die Imagination diese Leerstellen allein aufgrund des restlichen Erscheinungsbildes doch den Beschreibungen Ripas entsprechend zu füllen. Ripas Pest hat das Aussehen einer Kranken, sie weist eine gelbliche Haut, ein blasses Gesicht und einen ausgezehrten Körper auf.

Das Wesen der Pest und das Wesen des Glaubens

Wie sich in der Beschreibung des Aussehens der Figur zeigt, bezieht die Spezifikation durch Ripa und in dessen Nachfolge Le Court kaum Merkmale der Krankheit selbst oder ihre Symptome ein. Vielmehr ist das Äußere ein Abbild des Inneren, des Charakters. Vermittelt werden – anders als in der Biccherna-Tafel in Berlin – vor allem moralische Aspekte.[29] Der Träger für diese Informationen ist wiederum der Körper, während die Handlungsfähigkeit hier auf eine andere Vermittlungsebene abhebt. Kann Körperhaftigkeit in der Sprache auch nur auf einzelne Aspekte bezogen werden, etwa wildes Haar oder fahle Haut, so ist bei bildlichen Darstellungen immer der gesamte Körper mitzukonfigurieren. Hierin liegt wohl einer der größten Unterschiede zwischen der sprachlichen und der bildlichen Personifikation. Über den gestalteten Körper einer Personifikation wird den Betrachter:innen etwas über ihren Charakter mitgeteilt. Dies beginnt bei der Einordnung in die normativen Kategorien ‚schön' oder ‚hässlich', die sich auch bei Le Courts Figurengruppe zeigt, in der die normschönen Figuren Maria und Venezia der formal devianten Figur der Pest gegenübergestellt werden. Die Pest ist ‚hässlich' und damit cha-

rakterlich schlecht, ein verachtens- und vertreibenswertes Geschöpf, ihre Bedrohlichkeit kommt kaum zum Tragen. Zugleich ist die Gegenüberstellung von Maria und Venezia auf der einen und der Pest auf der anderen Seite eine Trennung in die ebenfalls normativen Kategorien ‚jung' und ‚alt'. Verstärkt wird diese Kontrastierung durch den Putto, der als kindliche und damit junge Figur die ausgezehrte, alte Pest mit der Flamme des Glaubens vertreibt. Auffällig wird gerade in der Dreierkonstellation zudem, dass Venezia in ihrer Erscheinung Maria angenähert ist. Die formale Erscheinung spiegelt den Charakter, den Venedig sich selbst zuspricht, als tugendhafte, fromme und dadurch schöne Gemeinschaft, die durch die ihr zuteilwerdende Gnade Marias ausgezeichnet ist. In Fortführung der Idee der Christoformitas zeigt die formale Ähnlichkeit eine innere, geistige Annäherung. Der Körper Venezias ist damit nicht nur die Personifikation der Stadt selbst, sondern auch ein allegorischer Körper, der über seine Konfiguration auf weitere ihm eingeschriebene Eigenschaften hinweist. Gleiches gilt für die Figur der Pest. „Der Körper, wie er uns in Kunst, Literatur, Film oder auch Geschichte begegnet, ist ein vermittelter, ein repräsentierter und ästhetisierter Körper", schreiben Miriam Oesterreich und Julia Rüthemann in Bezug auf die allegorische Verkörperung.[30] Zugleich wird dieser Körper „von uns auf bestimmte Weise wahrgenommen und damit wieder ästhetisiert".[31] Auch der kranke Körper wird mit unserem Blick und dem Wahrnehmen einer Abweichung von dem gesunden (und damit dem normierten Ideal entsprechenden) Körper zu einem ästhetischen Körper. Eine solche Wahrnehmung trug auch zur Gestaltung der Pest-Personifikation in Santa Maria della Salute respektive zur Beschreibung der Pest in Cesare Ripas *Iconologia* bei. Was das Wesen der Pest ausmacht, also welchen Seinsbereich die Personifikation als ontologische Figur adressiert, ergibt sich jedoch erst unter Einbezug der Figurenbeziehungen und ihrer Handlungen, wie wir es bereits in der Biccherna-Tafel und dem Blick auf das Corona-Virus gesehen haben. In Santa Maria della Salute ist ein Zeitpunkt adressiert, an dem die Pest bereits überwunden ist. Die Darstellung ist eine allegorische Historie, das Ereignis wird im Rückblick und unter Rückgriff auf Personifikationen dargestellt, wie es in der venezianischen Tradition seit längerem zu be-

obachtenist.[32] Die Pest wird in der Votivkirche zwar aufgrund ihrer äußeren Erscheinung als erschreckend und abstoßend dargestellt, ihre Präsenz ist zwar noch immer die einer Gegnerin, aber nicht mehr die einer akuten Bedrohung. Auch über ihre Eigenschaften als Krankheit erfahren die Betrachter:innen kaum etwas. Die Botschaft ist hier eine andere. In dem auf das Jahr 1631 zurückblickenden Handlungsarrangement wird hervorgehoben, dass die Pest überwindbar ist, dass sie vertrieben werden kann. Die fliehende Personifikation der Pest in Santa Maria della Salute ist damit ein Zeichen der Erneuerung und auch der Hoffnung. Vermittelt wird, dass mithilfe des Glaubens auch das Schlimmste überstanden werden kann. Indem Personifikationen Aussagen über die Eigenschaften und den Charakter des personifizierten Etwas treffen und dabei auf Wirklichkeitsbezügen aufbauen, lassen sie sich, wie bereits angesprochen, als ontologische Metaphern begreifen. In der Santa Maria della Salute ist die Pest jedoch weniger als eine eigenständige ontologische Figur zu verstehen, die das Wesen der Pest vermittelt. Sie fungiert vielmehr als ontologische Hilfsfigur, die uns etwas über die Macht des Glaubens und der Gnade Gottes und Marias mitteilt und uns zugleich zeigt, wie Krisen bewältigt werden können.

Schluss

In personifizierter Form weisen sich Virus oder Krankheit durch Gestik, Mimik und Handlung als Feind oder Freund aus. Sie kommunizieren, provozieren, bedrohen, können aber auch vertrieben werden und werden so Teil eines fiktionalisierten Geflechts des sozialen Miteinanders. Die Gestaltgebung kann bei der Bewältigung von Krisen helfen, da die Bedrohung so fassbarer wird und in den Bereich des Bekannten, des Vertrauten rückt. Auch die Pest ist etwas sehr Konkretes, eine Krankheit. Doch hier war nicht bekannt, wie sie ausgelöst wurde, weshalb sich die Frage nach der Darstellung des Pest-Erregers in der Vormoderne schlicht nicht stellte. Zugleich war im Fall der Pest die todbringende Bedrohung unsichtbar und geriet damit ebenfalls zu einem in den Grundzügen als ansteckende Krankheit zwar verständlichen, aber hinsichtlich des Ausmaßes der Bedrohung, ihrer Unbeherrschbarkeit und der damit einhergehenden sozialen Disruption

nur schwer erfassbaren und noch schwerer zu bewältigendem Ereignis. Beide Phänomene werden also eher als Abstrakta denn als Konkreta wahrgenommen – das Corona-Virus aufgrund seiner Größe, die Pest aufgrund ihrer Unsichtbarkeit, ihrer Unbeherrschbarkeit und des Ausmaßes der Bedrohung, das schier überwältigt.

In den hier behandelten bildlichen Darstellungen generiert die Personifikation eine produktive Fiktion[33] oder zumindest eine ‚Quasifiktion‘[34] des eigentlich vertrauten Alltagsgeschehens ‚Krankheit‘, die auf der Reduktion der Komplexität des verkörperten Abstraktums oder belebten Konkretums basiert. Das Abstraktum wird in der Personifikation neu entworfen. Die Personifikation steht damit als Vermittlungsfigur zwischen Abstraktum (oder dem als solchem Wahrgenommenen) und Mensch. Sie eröffnet eine neue Kontaktzone, indem sie beide Seiten in ein neues Verhältnis – gewissermaßen von Mensch zu menschenähnlich – zueinander setzt und so zunächst unüberwindbar scheinende Differenzen aufhebt. Es ist also auch die soziale Dimension der Beziehungen zwischen Mensch und Epidemie, die von der Personifikation reflektiert und in ihrem Wesen veranschaulicht wird.

Endnoten

1. Rebecca Frumkin, *How to Draw the Coronavirus*, in: *The Paris Review*, 18. Mai 2020, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/05/18/how-to-draw-the-coronavirus/ (24.11.2024).
2. Cara Giaimo, *The Spiky Blob Seen Around the World. How C.D.C. Medical Illustrators Created the Coronavirus Pandemic's Most Iconic Image*, in: *The New York Times*, 1.4.2020 / 9.10.2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/health/coronavirus-illustration-cdc.html (letzter Zugriff 02.12.2024).
3. Siehe die zweite Abbildung bei Frumkin 2020, *How to Draw the Coronavirus*.
4. Vgl. etwa Isidor von Sevilla, *Etymologiae*. II, 13: „Personifikation liegt vor, wenn unbelebte [Dinge] mit einer Persönlichkeit und mit Sprache gedacht werden." *Die Enzyklopädie des Isidor von Sevilla*, übers. von Lenelotte Möller, Wiesbaden 2008, S. 95. Deutlich wird dies beispielsweise im Mural von Guiles: Qual lado da corde você tá, das 2020 in Sao Paolo entstand. https://web.archive.org/web/20250208071535/https://images.impresa.pt/expresso/2020-06-23-Brasil-coronavirus/original/mw-1280 (letzter Zugriff 02.02.2025).
5. Gleich mehrere diesbezügliche Funde lassen sich in der Online-Sammlung der Wellcome Collection in London machen, siehe https://wellcomecollection.org/collections (letzter Zugriff 24.11.2024). Als Beispiel sei etwa verwiesen auf die Kampagne „Don't share needles" aus Hongkong (https://wellcomecollection.org/works/a2ka43qv; letzter Zugriff 24.11.2024) oder die sich gegen den gesellschaftlichen Ausschluss infizierter Personen wendende Postkarte „Killer virus from outer space" (https://wellcomecollection.org/works/aqehrxaq; letzter Zugriff 24.11.2024).
6. Ein Beispiel hierfür ist die vermutlich 1918 entstandene Karikatur „A-TICH-OO / Good evening I'm the new influenza!!" des Illustrators Ernest Noble. London, Wellcome Collection, 24069i,

https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mm6hadt4 (letzter Zugriff 18.12.2024).

7. Werbeplakat für Papier d'Arménie, 1890(?), Farblithographie, London, Wellcome Collection, 549316i, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/pz96auum (letzter Zugriff 18.12.2024).

8. *Tanawäschel*, ed. Beatrice von Lüpke und Derk Ohlenroth, in: *Frühe Tiroler Fastnachtspiele*. Edition und Kommentar, hg. von Patrizia Barton u. a., Berlin 2022, S. 73–95. Für den Hinweis auf den Tanawäschel danke ich Beatrice von Lüpke.

9. Cornelia Logemann, *Das große Fressen. Tapisserien und Texte der 'Condamnation de Banquet'* (Rombach Wissenschaft. Quellen zur Kunst 36), Baden-Baden 2021.

10. Die Literatur zur Personifikation ist Legion, weshalb nur auf einige für die Bildkünste grundlegende Publikationen hingewiesen werden soll: Cornelia Logemann, *Prinzip Personifikation. Frankreichs Bilderwelt im europäischen Kontext von 1300–1600*, Heidelberg 2023; Walter S. Melion und Bartholomeus A. M. Ramakers, *Personification. An Introduction*, in: *Personification. Embodying Meaning and Emotion*, hg. von dens., Leiden / Boston 2016, S. 1–40; Christian Kiening, *Personifikation. Begegnung mit dem Fremd-Vertrauten in mittelalterlicher Literatur*, in: *Personenbeziehungen in der mittelalterlichen Literatur*, hg. von Helmut Brall u. a., Düsseldorf 1994, S. 347–388; Ernst Gombrich, *Personification*, in: *Classical Influences on European Culture AD. 500–1500. Proceedings of an International Conference Held at King's College*, Cambridge April 1969, hg. von Robert R. Bolgar, Cambridge 1971, S. 247–257.

11. Siehe u. a. Nea Ehrlich, *Viral Imagery. The Animated Face of Covid-19*, in: *Visual Resources* 36 (3), 2020, S. 247–261; *Embodying Contagion. The Viropolitics of Horror and Desire in Contemporary Discourse*, hg. von Sandra Becker u. a., Cardiff 2021, DOI: https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/18802 (letzter Zugriff 16.12.2024); Stefano Bloch, *COVID-19 Graffiti*, in: *Crime Media Culture* 17 (1), 2021, S. 27–35.

12. Vgl. Quintilian: *Institutio oratoria*, IX.2.29–32.

13. Noch immer grundlegend: George Lakoff und Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago / London 2003 [1980].

14. Auf den Zusammenhang von Sprache und Imagination in Bezug auf die Bildung von Personifikationen wiesen bereits Gombrich 1971, *Personification*, und Kiening 1994, *Personifikation*, hin.

15. Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Trost der Philosophie*. Lateinisch und deutsch, hg. und übers. v. Ernst Gegenschatz und Olof Gigon, 6. Aufl. Düsseldorf/Zürich 2002, hier Buch 1.

16. Lakoff / Johnson, 2003 [1980], *Metaphors We Live By*, S. 34.

17. Ebd. (Hervorhebung im Original).

18. Vgl. Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, *Ways of Personifying*, in: *Style* 31 (1), 1997, S. 1–13.

19. Vgl. dazu Edgecomb 1997, *Ways of Personifying*, S. 6.

20. Deckel des Sieneser Amtsbuches (Biccherna) für 1437, Tempera und Gold auf Pappelholz, 43 x 28 cm, 1437. Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, K 9224.

21. https://www.instagram.com/p/CGj487mFyRs/?utm_medium=copy_link; letzter Zugriff 02.12.2024).

22. https://web.archive.org/web/20250208120210/https://filmartgallery.com/cdn/shop/files/Star-Wars-Episode-1-The-Phantom-Menace-Vintage-Movie-Poster-Original-British-Quad-30x40.jpg?v=1699650188 (letzter Zugriff 08.02.2025).

23. Andrew Hopkins, *Baldassare Longhena and Venetian Baroque Architecture*, New Haven 2012.

24. Die im Folgenden wiedergegebene Chronologie der Ereignisse nach Rudolf Wittkower, *S. Maria della Salute*, in: *Saggi e Memorie di storia dell'arte*, 3, 1963, S. 31–54, 147–170.

25. Zu Longhenas Entwurf Wittkower 1963, *S. Maria della Salute*; Andrew Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute. Architecture and Ceremony in Baroque Venice*, Cambridge u. a. 2000.

26. Maichol Clemente, *White Marble and Black Death. Giusto Le Court alla Salute*, Venice 2019, S. 28, 47, 51; Hopkins 2000, *Santa Maria della Salute*, S. 77.

27. Unter anderem auch an der Pestsäule am Graben in Wien, wo Fides das Kreuz tragend neben dem die Fackel schwingenden und damit die Pest vertreibenden Putto steht.

28. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia Overo Descrittione Di Diverse Imagini cauate dall'antichità, & di propria inuentione*, Rom 1603, S. 397.

29. Zur Sichtbarmachung des Inneren durch das Äußere und dessen Moralisierung, das schon seit dem Mittelalter ein weit verbreitetes Darstellungsmuster ist, siehe etwa Valentin Groebner, *Ungestalten. Die visuelle Kultur der Gewalt im Mittelalter*, München 2003, und Daria Dittmeyer, *Verrutschte Gewänder, verzerrte Gesichter. Zur Charakterisierung und Funktion der Schergen in Passionsbildern*, in: *Verrückt, verrutscht, versetzt. Zur Verschiebung von Gegenständen, Körpern und Orten* (Schriftenreihe der Isa Lohmann-Siems Stiftung 8), hg. von Daria Dittmeyer u. a., Berlin 2015, S. 191–210. Auch die Personifikation ist ein Mittel, das unsichtbare Innere nach außen zu tragen, worauf Kiening 1994, *Personifikation*, hingewiesen hat. Bei der Personifikation der inneren Eigenschaften und Gefühlswelten wird allerdings eine Aussonderung der personifizierten Aspekte vorgenommen, keine visuelle Überblendung.

30. Miriam Oesterreich und Julia Rüthemann, *Körper-Ästhetiken. Allegorische Verkörperungen als Prinzip: Eine Einleitung*, in: *Körper-Ästhetiken. Allegorische Verkörperungen als Prinzip*, hg. von Cornelia Logemann u. a., Bielefeld 2014, S. 13–60, hier S. 24.

31. Ebd.

32. Siehe hierzu etwa David Rosand, *Myths of Venice. The Figuration of a State*, Chapel Hill / London 2001.

33. Die produktive Fiktion geht zurück auf Hans Vaihinger, *Philosophie des Als-Ob. System der theoretischen, praktischen und religiösen Fiktionen der Menschheit auf Grund eines idealistischen Positivismus*, Leipzig 1927 (zuerst Berlin 1911), S. 175–181; mit Blick auf die bildende Kunst Odo Marquard, *Kunst als Antifiktion – Versuch über den Weg der Wirklichkeit ins Fiktive*, in: *Funktionen des Fiktiven* (Poetik und Hermeneutik 10), hg. von Dieter Henrich und Wolfgang Iser, München 1983, S. 35–54.

34. Marquard 1983, *Kunst als Antifiktion*, S. 47.

35. Siehe hierzu Albrecht Koschorke, *Ein neues Paradigma der Kulturwissenschaften*, in: *Die Figur des Dritten. Ein kulturwissenschaftliches Paradigma*, hg. von Eva Eßlinger u. a., Berlin 2010, S. 9–34.

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Abbildungen

Abb. 1: Deckel des Sieneser Amtsbuches (Biccherna) für 1437, Tempera und Gold auf Pappelholz, 43 x 28 cm, 1437. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum. Bildnachweis: Saturia Linke CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. https://id.smb.museum/object/906935/deckel-des-sieneser-amtsbuches-biccherna-f%C3%BCr-1437

Abb. 2: Giusto Le Court: Vertreibung der Pest aus Venedig, Marmor, ca. 1670–1674. Venedig, Santa Maria della Salute. Bildnachweis: Didier Descouens, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Santa_Maria_della_Salute_%28Venice%29_-_Main_altar_-_Sculptures_by_Giusto_Le_Court.jpg

Abb. 3: Giusto Le Court: Vertreibung der Pest aus Venedig, Detail: Pest, ca. 1670–1674. Venedig, Santa Maria della Salute. Bildnachweis: Maichol Clemente, *White Marble and Black Death. Giusto Le Court alla Salute*, Venedig 2019, S. 192

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag widmet sich Krankheitspersonifikationen in den Bildkünsten. Ausgehend von der Beobachtung, dass das Mittel der Personifikation während der CO-VID-19-Pandemie allgegenwärtig war, blickt der Beitrag in einer diachronen Perspektive auf die Personifikation des Corona-Virus sowie auf jene der Pest in einer sienesischen Biccherna-Tafel des Jahres 1437 und in Giusto Le Courts Skulpturengruppe in Santa Maria della Salute, Venedig, aus dem 17. Jahrhundert. Gefragt wird nach der Konstitution und Konfiguration der Personifikationen und der von ihnen vermittelten Inhalte. Zentraler Bezugspunkt ist dabei das Verständnis der Personifikation als ontologische Metapher nach Lakoff und Johnson. Es wird gezeigt, dass die Personifikationen nicht allein auf die Vermittlung gesundheitsrelevanter Aspekte abzielen und damit der Krisenbewältigung dienen, sondern auch reflektieren, dass Krankheit und Gesellschaft in einer sozialen Beziehung zueinander stehen.

Autorin

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Titel

Nils Weber

Two Sixteenth-Century Venetian Plague Images

Fig. 1: Il Redentore, Venice.

Introduction: The Plague of 1575 in Venice

On 8 September 1576 in Saint Mark's Square, the Doge of Venice, Alvise Mocenigo, addressed his people at a time of utmost desperation for the Republic. The plague had been raging in Venice since the spring of 1575, and the death toll was rising exponentially. At the time of Mocenigo's speech in the late summer of 1576, the situation had peaked with approximately 2,000 people dying each day in their homes, in the lazzaretti and on the streets.[1] In the highest political ranks of the Republic, there was no doubt that Venice had to react with drastic measures, and the Doge's speech was the vehicle to communicate this response. Several versions of the speech are preserved in the Venetian archives, but all sources agree that the Doge delivered it under the greatest emotional distress.[2] Exploring the reasons for this disaster, Mocenigo borrowed his arguments from a school of thought that goes back not only to the time of the Black Death (1346–53), but even to the first appearance of the disease during the First Plague Pandemic (541–750). In this interpretation, the plague was sent by God to punish sinful behaviour.[3]

The Old Testament was the main source for this widespread belief, in particular the story of the ten plagues which God inflicted on biblical Egypt as well as an event from the life of King David in which God punished David's wrongdoing with a pestilence that killed 70,000 Israelites. In his speech, Mocenigo identified himself explicitly with the Old Testament king, acknowledging his own shortcomings as Doge of Venice

in a rare moment of self-criticism.[4] This religious interpretation of the plague's origins, however, was not the only aspect present in public discourse; from the very start of the epidemic in 1575, the Doge and the Venetian senate had implemented a series of measures based on early modern scientific knowledge and past experience. Among them were the isolation of infected patients, curfews and the disinfection of contaminated goods.[5] As far as we know today, these measures helped reduce the spread of *Yersinia pestis*, the bacteria responsible for the plague, at least to a certain degree. But they were not enough to completely control the spread of the disease. The plague can appear in three variants: the pneumonic, the less common septicemic and the bubonic, with the difference between them being the location of the infection and the transmission of the bacteria. In the bubonic plague – the most common variant – the lymph nodes are infected. Their swelling and black discoloration are known as 'buboes', the unmistakable characteristic of the disease. Due to its aggressive nature, the likelihood of surviving the plague without effective treatment is estimated to be only 40 to 50 percent.

Against this background, and with so much suffering in his city at the high point of the disease, the Doge Alvise Mocenigo understandably faced enormous pressure with regard to the question of what to do next. Following David's example, Mocenigo decided that only a collective act of humility could calm the divine anger. Only through public displays of repentance in processions, daily prayers at home and ultimately through charitable acts could God be persuaded to intervene. And because of this, the Doge announced in his speech that all the financial means of the Republic would be mobilised to build a church dedicated to Christ the Redeemer on the Giudecca Island: Il Redentore (fig. 1).[6] What followed was a process in which the image of the Redeemer became a devotional icon and also something similar to a 'motto' for Venetian efforts to fight the plague through religious devotion, alongside the more widespread cults of the plague saints St Roch and St Sebastian. In the following, the painting *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Intercedes with Christ the Redeemer for Plague Victims* (fig. 2) will be considered as a case study to explore the circumstances for this Venetian fixation with the iconography of the

Redemption during one of the most devastating health crises in the Republic's long history.

Fig. 2: Palma Giovane, *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Intercedes with Christ the Redeemer for Plague Victims*, c. 1590, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona.

Palma Giovane and 'Il Redentore'

The painting in Verona is the subject of controversy with regard to its attribution, which must be considered first before diving into its complex iconography. Stefania Mason initially attributed it to Palma Giovane based on stylistic considerations and a remark by the Venetian chronicler Marco Boschini.[7] In his *Carta del Navegar Pittoresco* (1660), Boschini offered the following description of a painting of 'la peste' by Palma Giovane in the Ca' Correggio: 'Se 'l Palma ha fato mai cosa esquisita, / Se 'l Palma ha fato mai cosa perfeta, / Questa tra le famose xe l'eleta: / Questa è una peste che ghe dà la vita'.[8] Unfortunately, however, Boschini provides no further details about the plague image, and the attempt to trace the painting in the records of the Ca' Correggio collection has been fruitless.[9]

These uncertainties gave way to a new, but ultimately unconvincing proposal by Andrea Piai, who argues that the plague image was created by Andrea Vicentino, a painter of the generation of the so-called 'sette maniere'.[10] Piai bases his theory on ostensible similarities between the image and two paintings by Vicentino in the Frari church in Venice and the Chiesa di S. Stefano in Rovigo. The comparisons, however,

lack substance, and this argument would need more evidence in order to supersede Mason's initial claim.[11]

A drawing in the Morgan Library (fig. 3) by the artist Marcantonio Bassetti, a friend and colleague of Palma Giovane, seems to offer more promising evidence.[12] In his drawing, Bassetti adopts the compositional features of the painting as well as figurative details such as the buboes on the back of the far-right figure, which are carefully rendered in a delicate brown wash. The upper part of the drawing has been cut off, eliminating the figure of Christ the Redeemer, which led to the false claim scribbled on the drawing in a later hand that the composition showed the Doge Nicolo Contarini and the Virgin rather than Doge Alvise Mocenigo and Christ the Redeemer.[13] Bassetti does indeed seem to be an interesting artist when it comes to plague art in Venice, since he not only carefully studied Palma's painting, but also invented his own compositions, for example in another plague drawing in the Morgan Library that depicts people dying and suffering from the disease.[14] Furthermore, Ridolfi mentions that during the 1630 plague, the artist worked as a 'deputato' for a plague relief service in the city of Verona, helping the population and ultimately dying from the disease due to his efforts.[15] It thus seems that Bassetti had a special interest in the disease and that in this pursuit, Palma's painting was an important reference point for him.

Fig. 3: Marcantonio Bassetti, *Plague Victims (after Palma Giovane)*, c. 1615–1630, Morgan Library, New York.

The iconography of Palma's plague image has to be considered within the context of the widespread distribution and influx of Christocentric images in Venice following Mocenigo's pledge to build the Redentore church. In his painting, created probably 10 to 15 years after the epidemic outbreak, Palma shows the moment of intercession between Mocenigo, the signoria and Christ the Redeemer in front of a church that resembles the design of the Redentore church. Another fascinating example of this exact constellation of figures is found in the 'oselle', the annual commemorative medals issued as the Doge's Christmas gift to the Venetian nobility. Virtually all of the sample proofs for the year 1576 (fig. 4) show the same subject: a standing or seated Christ worshipped by the Doge Alvise Mocenigo on the obverse and various architectural proposals for the design of the Redentore church on the reverse.[16]

Fig. 4: Oselle, Alvise Mocenigo and Il Redentore, 1576, British Museum, London.

Apart from the quite astonishing variety of proposals, it should also be noted that in these medals, the image of the Redeemer and its new architectural representation in the city were translated into a much more tangible medium that allowed a much wider range of circulation not only of the possible design for the church, but also of the very idea that it was Christ who could save and redeem the Venetians from the plague. This idea, and its wider implications with regard to the ubiquitous need for salvation and the sheer weakness of

the Venetians in the face of the epidemic, was given another interesting figuration in a 'bozzetto' (fig. 5) by Tintoretto. As in Palma's plague image and the 'oselle', Tintoretto shows Alvise Mocenigo kneeling in front of Christ the Redeemer, but in Tintoretto's version Mocenigo faces the viewer. As Benjamin Paul has rightly pointed out, Mocenigo's body appears rather small in proportion to the rest of the painting, and the fact that he is not facing Christ directly should be interpreted as a deliberate choice by the painter, underlining Mocenigo's appearance as a humble sinner.[17] This same self-representation is also an explicit part of Mocenigo's speech.[18] Furthermore, the lion of the St Mark, the symbol of Venice, can be seen in a shadow – a clear symbolic allusion to the darkness the plague had cast on the Venetian Republic.[19]

Fig. 5: Jacopo Tintoretto, *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Presented to the Redeemer*, c. 1577, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Compared to Tintoretto's plague image, Palma (fig. 2) chooses a much more direct, less symbolic and in part even graphic visualisation of the plague disease. His painting clearly emphasizes the bodies of the plague victims, which are piled up in the foreground of the image – a possible reference to the well-known practice of burying the dead in layers on top of each other on the quarantine islands of Lazzaretto Vecchio and Lazzaretto Nuovo.[20] Because of this compositional choice, Mocenigo and his entourage are literally pushed and crowded into the background on the stairs in front of the Redentore church. Also important to note is the attention to detail with which the bodies of the plague victims are shown. Palma clearly has a keen eye for the appearance of the buboes, which can be identified on the back, in the armpits and on the loins of several figures. These details in Palma's painting can be considered important evidence for the fact that it was in-

deed the bubonic variant of the disease that caused the plague outbreak of 1575 in Venice.

The web of images associated with the construction of the Redentore church thus demonstrates that the Venetians produced a highly diverse and multifunctional panorama of Christ-centred images during the years of the plague crisis, in the form of paintings, coins, buildings and the procession of the 'Festa del Redentore' in July 1577 – a true creative outburst, orchestrated by Venetian culture against the horrors of the disease.[21] However, the veneration of Christ the Redeemer was by no means the only reference point for the Venetians in this process. As the next example will make clear, the Redemption iconography was appreciated first and foremost by the ruling class, while the commoners of the Venetian Republic put their trust in other candidates, like St Roch.

Jacopo Bassano and St Roch

When it comes to the details of sixteenth-century Venetian plague images, Jacopo Bassano's painting *St Roch Visits the Plague Victims* (fig. 6) should be considered as the most accurate.[22] The painting was executed for the high altar of the Chiesa di San Rocco in Vicenza and was later transported to the Brera Museum after the fall of the Venetian Republic. As in Palma's painting, Bassano shows the suffering and agony related to the plague disease in the foreground. We see, for example, St Roch blessing a young mother, who kneels next to her dead child. This powerful symbolic allusion to the heartbreaking loss of loved ones during epidemics was first developed in arguably the most famous plague-related image of the Renaissance: Raphael's *Morbetto* print, where we find the opposite constellation of an infant grieving for his dead mother. Nor was the accuracy and attention to detail with which Bassano depicted the bodies of plague victims lost on early modern chroniclers. Boschini, for example, observes that 'quegli ignudi sono propriamente carne viva da farne scaturir il sangue col pungerla'.[23] In addition, the examination of the bodies is present not only in the relation between painting and viewer, but also within the painting itself, in the case of the doctor who examines the body and in particular the buboes of the dead infant. The buboes are indeed

among the most striking visual elements of the painting, especially in comparison with the recognisable, but overall looser depictions in Palma's painting. Bassano demonstrates keen first-hand knowledge of the swollen, discoloured lymph nodes as well as their form, although their placement on the figure is somewhat arbitrary and in many cases does not correspond to the actual location of lymph nodes on the human body. Another interesting visual strategy that Bassano uses to distinguish between the sick and the healthy is the figures' clothing: the healthy population are fully dressed, while the sick are shown nude or semi-nude. The exception to this rule is St Roch, who wears his pilgrim robe, but with his right leg exposed, clearly revealing a swollen black bubo.

Fig. 6: Jacopo Bassano, *St Roch Visits the Plague Victims*, c. 1576, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

St Roch was indeed a prominent figure in sixteenth-century Venetian plague art. Titian, for example, painted his *St Mark Enthroned with St Cosmas and St Damian, St Roch and St Sebastian* (1510) at the beginning of the century, though in a much less graphic manner than the later works by Palma and Bassano, with only a few visual clues relating to the plague of 1510. These clues can be found first and foremost in the figure of St Roch, who points at the bubo on his right leg, while the doctors St Cosmas and St Damian also acknowledge St Roch's wound. In this context, the gaze of St Roch toward the two doctors, and from them to St Mark, patron saint of Venice, are deliberate choices by the artist, creating a system of visual references that link the plague with the city of Venice. Despite this influential early example, arguably the most important authority on St Roch in Venetian painting was Tintoretto, with his iconic works in the Scuola Grande and the Chiesa di San Rocco in Venice. In his painting *St Roch Healing the Plague-Stricken* (1549), Tintoretto shows the saint in the dimly lit environment of a plague hospital, examining the buboes of a patient. Here, the muscular bodies of plague victims, crouching and suffering in agony, are introduced into the canon of Venetian painting.[24]

Interestingly, during the plague epidemic of 1575–77 the cult of St Roch manifested itself not only in paintings, but also in two rather obscure instances of public disobedience. The Venetian chronicler Rocco Benedetti recalls the following event:

"Comparve in Piazza tre sere, una sera dopo l'altra, un huomo incognito, che fu stimato una bonanima d'un gentilhuomo vestito d'habito di confraternita, con un crocifisso grande in mano cantando con flebil voce le letanie seguitato da molte persone. Il che fu cagione che tutte le contrade della città si missero ad imitarlo, visitando la chiesa di S. Rocco. Ma perché s'intendeva che molti infetti per speranza che Dio gli risanasse ci andavano et infettavano gli altri sani fu vietato l'andar così attorno in processione fuor che alla chiesa di San Marco."[25]

In a second incident, a 'poverino impazzito' falsely informed the Venetians that the plague had ceased and once again led a large, cheering crowd to the Chiesa di S. Rocco.[26] The government acted quickly against such events, since the authorities were concerned about the increased risk of contagion associated with 'superspreading events' as well as the imminent radicalisation of the populace. Consequently, they decided to limit the area for authorised processions to the piazza of S. Marco.[27] Both episodes represent an apparent disconnect between the ruling class around Doge Alvise Mocenigo and the Venetian *popolani*, which made up almost 90 per cent of the Venetian population. The latter were apparently less moved by the elaborate words and images carefully chosen by their superiors in the fight against the disease. Rather, they put their trust in traditional plague saints like St Roch and 'proven' locations of worship like the Chiesa di S. Rocco. Thus it seems only logical that in the Venetian province of Vicenza, where reactions to developments and new trends from the capital were often significantly delayed, an expensive plague image like Bassano's *St Roch Visits the Plague Victims* was commissioned with the popular plague saint as the main protagonist.

Conclusion: The Visuality of the Plague

When considering early modern images related to epidemic outbreaks, it is important to note that compared to other deadly diseases like typhus, the bubonic plague had an unmistakable visual characteristic: the buboes. Both Palma and Bassano painted them in large numbers and with great accuracy in their plague images, demonstrating first-hand experience of the disease. The visual evidence provided by the paintings, however, is only one piece of the puzzle that should be considered when studying epidemic outbreaks in conjunction with demographic records, contemporary political statements or archaeological excavations. Despite the wealth of source material, it seems to me that the different kinds of information available on historic disease have been left virtually untouched in their respective fields. In recent years, this situation has come under increasing pressure with the advent of new scientific disciplines such as ar-

chaeogenetics and their ability to provide new sets of data, including recent discoveries on the origins of the Black Death.[28] While close reading of the visual material at hand remains as important as ever, I would like to suggest that the study of epidemic outbreaks in Venice and the cultural responses of the Venetians can profit enormously from the systematic combination of the available source material.

In fact, more secure grounding in the identification of historic diseases can stabilise some of the existing hypotheses when it comes to Venetian plague images. A final example is Titian's *St Sebastian* (fig. 7).

Fig. 7: Titian, *St Sebastian*, c. 1576, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

The painting was among a handful of works in Titian's studio at the time of his death on 27 August 1576, all of them executed in his peculiar late style and often la-

belled as 'unfinished'.[29] Because of these difficulties in ascertaining its provenance, function or even basic technical status, *St Sebastian* has been treated with only mixed interest by modern scholarship.[30] David Rosand, for example, analyses the painting in the context of Titian's own oeuvre and his various depictions of St Sebastian throughout his long career.[31] This argument is based on the inner workings of Titian's artistic development, but unfortunately overlooks the surrounding circumstances in which Titian applied the final touches to his painting: that is, the devastating outbreak of the bubonic plague in Venice in 1575–77 and St Sebastian's long-established role as the most important plague saint alongside St Roch. From this perspective, the vibrant colour palette of the painting – at times resembling bursts of fire, at times drops of blood – that underlines the agony of the saint can be interpreted as a concrete visual manifestation of the precarious conditions in the Lagoon City during the plague years. In addition, the dark spots, rendered in strokes of thick black paint on the saint's skin, especially on his chest and thighs, closely resemble the depictions of buboes in the two contemporary plague images by Palma and Bassano.[32] It might seem odd, therefore, that the connection between the painting and the plague outbreak of 1575–77 has not been considered in more detail. But one has to remember that debate over the nature of the epidemic has been going on for a long time, and although the plague has always been a prime candidate, scholars have also considered other agents such as an 'Ebola-like virus' or 'famine fever'. In the discipline of art history, such uncertainties in the correct identification of the disease have necessarily led to ambiguities when it comes to the interpretation of images created during these years.[33] However, recent excavations in the Lazzaretto Vecchio and Lazzaretto Nuovo seem to suggest beyond doubt that it was indeed the bubonic plague that struck the city. This new hard data therefore provides the opportunity to consider the Venetian plague images again in their original context: namely as a first-hand symbolic expression of the suffering and longing for redemption of the Venetian population in the face of health crisis and within a wider scientific framework as visual evidence for the presence of bubonic plague in Venice.[34]

Endnotes

1. Samuel Cohn, *Cultures of Plague: Medical Thinking at the End of the Renaissance*, Oxford 2010, p. 21.
2. For the most extensive record of the speech in the Biblioteca Marciana, see BNM, MS It. VII. 364 (7934), fols. 66–7. Other sources are summarised in Benjamin Paul, *"Convertire in se medesimo questo flagello": autocritica del Doge Alvise Mocenigo nel bozzetto di Tintoretto per il dipinto votivo a Palazzo Ducale*, in: *Celebrazione e autocritica. La Serenissima e la ricerca dell'identità veneziana nel tardo Cinquecento*, ed. Benjamin Paul, Rome 2014, pp. 143–144.
3. 'Per nessun altra causa…questa città sostiene questo flagello di mortalità se non per li grandi et enormi peccati nostri'; see BNM, fol. 66.
4. On Mocenigo's extraordinarily eventful tenure as Doge of Venice, which included not only the epidemic of 1575–77 but also the war against the Ottomans, see Benjamin Paul, *Introduction*, in: *Celebrazione e autocritica. La Serenissima e la ricerca dell'identità veneziana nel tardo Cinquecento*, ed. Benjamin Paul, Rome 2014, pp. 9–16.
5. See Richard Palmer, *The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy, 1348-1600*, Canterbury 1978, esp. Chapter 5.
6. 'Cosi noi, con l'autorità del senato, et in nome del popolo facciamo l'atto d'edificare una chiesa dedicate al nome del Redentore nostro'; see BNM, fol. 67.
7. Stefania Mason Rinaldi, *La peste e le sue immagini nella cultura figurativa veneziana*, in: *Venezia e la peste 1348/1797*, Venice 1980, p. 253, no. a26, Stefania Mason Rinaldi, *Aspetti del modelletto a Venezia nel secondo Cinquecento*, in: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ölskizze vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, Braunschweig 1984, pp. 25–34 and Stefania Mason Rinaldi, *Palma il Giovane. L'opera completa*, Milan 1984, p. 149, no. 598.
8. Marco Boschini, *La carta del navegar pitoresco*, Venice 1660, ed. Anna Pallucchini, 1966, p. 601.
9. Linda Borean, *La quadreria di Agostino e Giovan Donato Correggio nel collezionismo veneziano del Seicento*, Udine 2000, p. 86.
10. Andrea Piai, cat. no. 286, in *Museo di Castelvecchio: Dalla metà del XVI alla metà del XVII secolo*, ed. Paola Marini, Ettore Napione and Gianni Peretti, Milan 2018.
11. Piai's remark, for example, that 'il Redentore è quasi sovrapponibile, nella posa, al Cristo in atto di apparire a san Francesco nella tela dei Frari' is unsubstantiated, because Christ's gestures in the Frari painting are guiding St Francis into heaven, while in the painting in Verona, Christ is rushing down to meet the signoria with the victory banner in his right hand.
12. For their correspondence, see e.g. Giovanni Bottari, *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura*, II. Rome 1979, pp. 484–486.
13. The handwriting on the sheet reads: 'Doge Nicolo Contarini praying to the Virgin during the plague of 1630 ?'. However, no figure of the Virgin is visible in the drawing, and it is clear that the author of this note was not aware of the connection to the painting in Verona.
14. Morgan Library, inv. no. 140929.
15. Ridolfi seems to be well-informed with regard to Bassetti's *Vita*, due also to a personal visit he had paid to Bassetti's studio in Verona in 1628. See Carlo Ridolfi, *Le meraviglie dell'arte ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln, Berlin 1914/1924, II, pp. 241–242.
16. For the design of the Redentore church and its heated debate in the Venetian senate, see Deborah Howard, *Venice Disputed: Marc'Antonio Barbaro and Venetian Architecture, 1550–1600*, New Haven 2011, pp. 98–109. The 'oselle' are catalogued in *Venezia e la peste 1348/1797*, cat. a132.
17. Paul (2014), pp. 152–154.
18. See the archival sources summarized in note no. 2.
19. This pictorial device was first developed in Titian's plague image *St Mark Enthroned with St Cosmas and St Damian, St Roch and St Sebastian* (1510); see Paul (2014), p. 137.
20. Rocco Benedetti, *Venezia 1576, la peste*, ed. Donatella Calabi, Luca Molà, Simone Rauch and Elena Svalduz, Verona 2021, p. 43 uses the term 'monte de cadaveri'. See also Ambika Flavel and Daniel Franklin, *Camposanto, a Cemetery in the Venetian Lagoon*, in: *Mediterranean Archaeology* (2022), pp. 169–180 for the most recent archaeological excavations at the Lazzaretto Nuovo.
21. The first 'Festa del Redentore', which marked the end of the plague on 13 July 1577, was described in detail by the chronicler Muzio Lumina in his text *Liberatione di Venetia* (1577).
22. See esp. Enrico Noè, cat. no. 11, in: *Pinacoteca di Brera. Scuola veneta*. Milan, 1990, Livia Alberton Vinco da Sesso, cat. no. 47, in *Jacopo Bassano c. 1510–1592*, Bologna 1992 and Rosella Lauber, *Milano. La Pinacoteca di Brera*, Udine 2012, cat. 204.
23. Marco Boschini, *I gioelli pittoreschi virtuoso ornamento della città di Vicenza*, Venice 1677, p. 116.
24. See also Mason (1980), pp. 209–86, for a first attempt at compiling a catalogue of Venetian images connected to plague outbreaks in Venice. For a short introduction to the Saint Roch iconography in Venice, see Andrew Hopkins: *Combating the Plague: Devotional Paintings, Architectural Programs, and Votive Processions in Early Modern Venice*, in: *Hope and Healing. Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500-1800,* Chicago 2005, pp. 138-140.

25. Benedetti (1576), p. 76.
26. Benedetti (1576), p. 24.
27. See also Paolo Preto, *Peste e società a Venezia nel 1576*, Vicenza 1978, p. 85.
28. Maria Spyrou et al., *The Source of the Black Death in Fourteenth-century central Eurasia*, in: *Nature* 606 (2022), pp. 718–724.
29. Sheila Hale, *Titian. His Life*, London 2012, p. 720.
30. See Tamara Fomichova, *The Hermitage Catalogue of Western European Painting: Venetian Painting Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Florence 1992, no. 261 and recently Peter Humfrey, *Titian: The Complete Paintings*, Ghent 2007, no. 291. For a long time, the Russian authorities considered the painting in the Hermitage a damaged work of poor quality, contrary to the excellent condition the *St Sebastian* is actually in. Only increased interest and more substantial scholarship on Titian's late work has made it possible to slowly correct this thinking.
31. David Rosand, *Titian's Saint Sebastians*, in: *Artibus et Historiae* 15, no. 30 (1994), p. 37.
32. St Sebastian's wounds and the arrows that pierced his skin were a ubiquitous part of early modern plague iconography; see Louise Marshall, *Reading the body of a plague saint: Narrative altarpieces and devotional images of St Sebastian in Renaissance art*, in: *Reading Texts and Images*, ed. Bernard Muir, Exeter 2002, pp. 237–272. Interestingly, Rocco Benedetti (1576), p. 46, also uses this metaphor in his description of the repercussions of the epidemic outbreak of 1575–77 in Venice: 'In somma delle somme il Prencipe spendeva un tesoro in mantener tanta gente et in far cotante spese, e la prattica era fatta un caos ove ogni savio restava confuse, non vedendo come si potesse supplire a tanti bisogni né qual via si dovesse tenere per ripararsi da tanto nembo di saette fioccate dalla peste per ogni verso.' The literary basis for this metaphorical association is the *Iliad*, where Homer describes the plague inflicted on the Greeks by Apollo as caused by Apollo's arrows.
33. See e.g. Sheila Hale (2012), p. 710–11, who acknowledges the connection between the *St Sebastian* and the epidemic of 1575–77, but unfortunately fails to explore the full depth of the linkage between image and bubonic plague. In addition, her account of the epidemic in Venice is no longer up to date, especially in regard to the circumstances and aftermath of Titian's death. For a full discussion of this argument, see my forthcoming book, *Veronese und die Krisen der venezianischen Spätrenaissance*.
34. See most recently Flavel/Franklin (2022).

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Maria Spyrou et al., *The Source of the Black Death in Fourteenth-Century Central Eurasia*, in: *Nature* 606 (2022), pp. 718–724.

Figures

Fig. 1: Il Redentore, Venice.
Credit: Didier Descouens, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chiesa_del_Redentore_(Venice).jpg

Fig. 2: Palma Giovane, *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Intercedes with Christ the Redeemer for Plague Victims*, c. 1590, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona.
Credit: Sailko, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0,
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Fig. 3: Marcantonio Bassetti, *Plague Victims (after Palma Giovane)*, c. 1615–1630, Morgan Library, New York.
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Credit: ©Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan – MiC

Fig. 7: Titian, *St Sebastian*, c. 1576, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.
Credit: Wikimedia/Hermitage Museum
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Titian_sebastian.jpg

Abstract

This article analyses the effects of the plague epidemic of 1575–77 on the visual culture of Early Modern Venice. To this end, two plague images, i.e. Palma Giovane's *Doge Alvise Mocenigo Intercedes with Christ the Redeemer for Plague Victims* and Jacopo Bassano's *St Roch Visits the Plague Victims*, are compared to explore how each artist responded to the crisis through visual symbolism, narrative structures, and pictorial details. This approach highlights how the visual strategies employed in the fight against the plague also reflected a deeper social divide – between the elite's preference for an iconography associated with the theme of redemption and the *popolani*'s identification with the iconography of St Roch.

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Title

Emma Ferrari

In my End is my Beginning

Painters in Milan after the Plague of 1630

Fig. 1: Giovanni Battista Crespi Cerano, Melchiorre Gherardini, Gerolamo Chignoli, *Madonna delle Grazie*, 1631, Oil on canvas, 210 x 315 cm, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milano.

As history runs its course, there are times when humanity witnesses the collapse of its own identity, sociopolitical system, and cultural order. Recent studies have made clear how history is, on closer inspection, punctuated by catastrophes and sudden changes in the forces in equilibrium, and how such changes, even when chaotic, need to be understood.[1] To phrase it in the words of Spinks and Zika:

"Disaster wreaks terrible havoc in the lives of individuals and communities. It destroys infrastructure, brings death, and produces violent emotions and trauma. But it also reinforces coping strategies and develops new pathways to recovery."[2]

When addressing the complexity of such periods, epochal events are frequently regarded solely as endpoints, thereby obscuring the potential for transforma-

tion or regeneration that they might offer. In this context, Button and Schuller argue that scholarly analyses often focus solely on the triggering event, neglecting the broader disaster continuum, which includes the preceding historical context and the long-term recovery process.[3]

This phenomenon is particularly evident in studies of 17th-century Milanese art. Historiography, especially since the Enlightenment, has largely portrayed Milan's period under Spanish rule (1554–1700) as one of decline.[4] The pessimistic view is reinforced when considering the aftermath of the 1630 epidemic, an epoch-making event that profoundly influenced the city's history.[5] This era is often seen as a time of profound crisis in the arts, devoid of significant initiatives, and marked by what has been interpreted as a lethargy in pictorial production throughout the city, which lasted for approximately twenty years. However, this

harsh judgment contrasts sharply with the accounts of Milan found in the *Guide*—scholarly narratives from the eighteenth century that are fundamental to the city's artistic historiography—offering detailed and highly regarded descriptions of its treasures.[6] In their efforts to create a portrait of the city, the *Guide* restore a flourishing image that had been overshadowed by subsequent centuries, thereby enhancing the significance of the artworks to celebrate the historical legacy of Milan. For instance, Carlo Torre's *Il ritratto di Milano* (1714) and Serviliano Latuada's *Descrizione di Milano* (1737) present a vision of the city rich with numerous artworks created between 1630 and 1650, dispersed throughout its many churches. Certainly, the Austrian Habsburg (1700–1796) and Napoleonic (1796–1814) dominations of the city obliterated a sizeable portion of the seventeenth-century artistic treasures—dispersing artworks and destroying churches[7]—a loss that may account for the obscurity surrounding many artists who worked during the twilight of the epidemic.

In 1630, the epidemic struck Milan for the second time in a short span, following the outbreak of 1576–1577. It resulted in the death of one-third of the population and had significant economic consequences.[8] However, beyond the immediate devastation, the plague became a defining element of Lombard identity, leaving indelible marks on the city's social and cultural fabric. From these traces Alessandro Manzoni drew inspiration for his classic novels *I Promessi Sposi* and *Storia della Colonna Infame*,[9] where he poetically depicted the era. Indeed, Mina Gregori referenced Manzoni's vision when, for the first time, she considered how the period of crisis had also impacted the figurative arts.[10] In her article in the inaugural issue of *Paragone* journal, the scholar was the first to address this theme, effectively initiating a phase of recovery and renewed appreciation for 17th-century Lombard art, which had gone largely unrecognized for centuries. A well-defined interpretative paradigm was established for the first time, codifying the characteristics of 17th-century Lombardy. Two landmark exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues contributed to this renewed recognition in a significant way: Giovanni Testori's *Mostra del Manierismo Piemontese e Lombardo del Seicento*[11] and the 1973 *Seicento Lombardo* exhibition held in Milan at the Palazzo Reale[12].

The artistic production of the entire century was closely associated with the work of the so-called "Borromean masters", who were active during the period between the two major plague epidemics (1577–1630): Giovanni Battista Crespi, known as Cerano (1573–1632), Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli, known as Morazzone (1573–1626), Giulio Cesare Procaccini (1564–1625), and, to some extent, Daniele Crespi (1598–1630). This canon was precisely characterized and framed by the curators within the historical-religious context in which it developed, namely during the archbishoprics of Carlo Borromeo and his cousin Federico Borromeo.[13] Naturally, Cerano was acknowledged as the primary figure of this Milanese artistic period due to his privileged relationship with Archbishop Federico Borromeo, who supported him through commissions and appointed him master of the painting class at the Accademia Ambrosiana.[14]

This critical assessment successfully defined the traits of *Seicento Lombardo* as a period with a remarkable capacity to convey powerful images in painting, marked by dark tones and dramatically depicting human experience in its rawest truth and suffering. Nonetheless, it is essential to remember that, struck by plague and fate, the leading figures of this artistic school perished alongside the fervent patron of that memorable era, Federico Borromeo, who passed away in 1631.[15] As a result, the year 1630 and the outbreak of the plague were considered the ultimate chronological markers for describing the entire artistic period of the 17th century. Therefore, while the exhibitions and their critical approach laid the foundation for studies on the theme, they also significantly influenced the historiographical perspective, which, to this day, tends to overlook the period following the plague. The relationship between the arts in Milan and the plague epidemic has been explored concerning the 16th-century outbreak involving St. Charles Borromeo, rather than through an in-depth examination of the 1630 epidemic.[16] Yet, the apocalyptic event, which marked an unbridgeable break with what had preceded it, represents a beginning for a new generation of artists who became protagonists of a new artistic season.

Indeed, Cardinal Federico Borromeo, who passed away on 21 September 1631, appeared to have already sensed the shift in the artistic landscape he had

briefly witnessed. In his final sermon, delivered at Milan Cathedral on Pentecost in 1631, he proclaimed:

"The arts are akin to the sciences, and the sciences resemble a ladder. If someone at the higher step of the ladder falls, those positioned lower, and considered inferior, must advance step by step, ascending gradually. Over time, they will eventually reach the same height that the first had attained."[17]

Borromeo's image is eloquent and effectively captures the dynamics of Milan's artistic context after 1630. The death of the great masters who had defined an artistic era in the city compelled those who survived the plague—having trained in the shadows of these masters—to step forward and continue their legacy. This generation of painters who emerged in Milan during the 1630s includes Melchiorre Gherardini (1603–1668),[18] Gerolamo Chignoli (?–1670),[19] Carlo Biffi (1605–1675),[20] and Ercole Procaccini the Younger (1605–1680).[21] These artists, homogeneous in age and biography, were collectively shaped by the teachings of Cerano and the Accademia Ambrosiana. On July 11, 1621, Carlo Biffi and Ercole Procaccini the Younger were enrolled in the painting class taught by Cerano, alongside Melchiorre Gherardini, who, in 1626, joined the master's workshop, where Gerolamo Chignoli was already being trained.[22] In the wake of the profound changes brought about by the plague epidemic, the careers of these artists testify to the resilience of the arts, which were not entirely dormant in the aftermath of the epidemic. Thus, the plague can be regarded as an icon of renewal and reconfiguration of collective existence. Painters operating in Milan after 1630 continued the legacy of the Borromean masters with a determined commitment to remain faithful to their tradition, maintaining an active artistic presence for two decades. Consequently, a revision of the existing paradigm is due: the epoch-making event of the plague will now serve as the starting point for the investigation.

To approach this topic systematically, it is important to note that the first historically documented point of contact between the survivors and the epidemic is their involvement in patrols, where artists were called to stand guard at the city gates. Caprara[23] identifies this information in the State Archives of Milan, specifically within the dossier *Notificati gli abitanti nelle rispettive parrocchie della Città di Milano dagli Anziani innanzi al Tribunale di Sanità per destinar Guardie e soprintendenti delle Porte in tempo di contagio sospetto,*[24] which outlines the involvement of citizens in gate patrols during times of contagion. Careful observation reveals that artists participated in these duties for a decade. Gherardini was appointed to the parish of San Salvatore in May 1632, and in 1633, Gerolamo Chignoli was also enlisted, alongside Carlo Biffi.[25]

Fig. 2: Melchiorre Gherardini, *Dal Orto il mio bel nome,* 1633–36, Etching, 123 x 152 mm, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. © Gallica.bnf.fr.

The second, far more tragic element illustrating how the circumstances created by the epidemic shaped the new generation is the abundance and violence of the deaths it caused, which created a significant void among the artists, as previously mentioned. It is essential to emphasize that this void extended beyond a professional level; it also signified a profound transformation within the artistic community, marked by the loss of family members, loved ones, masters, and fathers. In this context, it is particularly emblematic that three of the featured artists found themselves inheriting the family workshop. Carlo Biffi and Ercole Procaccini experienced the death of their fathers due to the plague, thereby inheriting their workshops, clients, and commissions. However, the most substantial void to fill was undoubtedly that left by Cerano. All the artists had spent a formative period either in his workshop (in the cases of Chignoli and Gherardini) or at the Accademia

Ambrosiana (in the cases of Biffi and Procaccini).[26] The artist was highly prominent in Milanese commissions, engaged in a diverse range of projects that would be inherited by Melchiorre Gherardini[27] upon his death. In fact, Gherardini not only had a professional relationship with Cerano but was also betrothed to his daughter, Camilla. The wedding, which was already planned, was expedited by the dramatic circumstances surrounding the tragic death of the painter; the marriage was celebrated only five days after the master's passing, thus formalizing the transfer of responsibility, facilitated by the young woman's dowry, which enabled Gherardini to complete the pending works.[28] Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite their tragic nature, these deaths marked a significant turning point in the lives of the surviving artists, coinciding with the beginning of their independent careers. With Cerano passing,[29] Gherardini assumed leadership of the most important and prolific painting workshop in Milan at the time.[30] Meanwhile, Gerolamo Chignoli, who was also part of Cerano's enterprise, embarked on establishing his own business.[31] The survivors of the plague were called upon to fill the void left by their predecessors, carrying forward a legacy imbued with expectations. By analyzing several significant images produced during this period, including some that depict the plague itself, we can consider how a tragic rupture serves as a starting point for the careers of these artists. It also provides an opportunity to define their artistic identities in dialogue with their predecessors, thereby influencing their work to a considerable extent.

One final factor deserves consideration: the representation of the epidemic made by the artists themselves, which serves as a significant element in understanding the impact of the epidemics on the arts. Indeed, Milan is no exception in the 17th century, which offers a substantial collection of depictions of plague and pestilence that mirror the epidemic's spread throughout Europe. As Cohn suggests, the plague spurred artistic creativity, becoming a key theme in both representations of the disease and the narrative of liberation from it.[32] Following the epidemic, Milan experienced a surge in images depicting the plague and saints believed to offer protection. Ex-voto paintings naturally dominated the commissions for surviving artists. Therefore, the analysis of some significant images produced during this period can illuminate the impact of the epidemics on the arts.

One image sums up these instances and becomes the perfect example for our discussion, both representing the moment of crisis and operating as an icon of redemption: the *Madonna delle Grazie* painted by Cerano, Melchiorre Gherardini and Gerolamo Chignoli for the homonymous Milanese church[33] (fig. 1).

The painting was the first significant image produced in Milan at the close of the epidemic, created between 1630 and 1632.[34] Commissioned by the friars of the Dominican Order of Santa Maria delle Grazie, it served as an ex-voto for the cessation of the plague, designed to adorn the lunette above the entrance to the chapel of Our Lady of Grace. Within this chapel, a perpetually burning lamp, according to the tradition gifted by the Madonna, symbolized the protection of Our Lady of Grace, anchoring the devotion of Milan's citizens. During the epidemic, the Dominican friars distributed oil from this lamp to the population, as it was believed that its devotional application as an ointment could prevent contagion and ensure the healing of the sick.[35] This practice, along with the lamp's perceived miraculous power, is memorialized in the lunette, which stands as a visual testament to the city's recovery from the plague.

Fig. 3: Valletto Francesco, Cesare Bassano, *Descrittione della esecutione di giustitia fatta in Milano*, 1630 ca, Etching, 363 x 420 mm, Civica raccolta delle stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milan © Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

Fig. 4: Anonymous, *L'oglio pietoso*, 1630 ca, Etching, 243 x 190 mm, Civica raccolta delle stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milan © Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

The lunette is historically precise, providing a faithful portrait of the specific Milanese epidemics. The organization of the scene adheres to a pyramidal structure, with earthly figures positioned in the lower section and a divine apparition of Our Lady of Grace in the upper portion. The Virgin is shown walking on clouds, accompanied by two angels, one of whom presents an object. Traditionally, scholars have identified this object as a censer; however, it is, in fact, the lamp containing the miraculous oil, personally presented to the Dominican friars by the Virgin. Thus, the lunette fixes the image of a historical event deeply rooted in Milanese devotion and the circumstances of the epidemic. The friar gazes towards the bystanders as he distributes the ointment to the people, who are stretching out containers to be filled. In the lower part of the composition, Milanese humanity gathers, hoping for a miracle. The figures are arranged in diagonal lines, extending their arms to converge towards the lamp, directing attention to it. Even a man in the foreground, already in a state of agony, extends his arm toward

the lamp in a final gesture of seeking salvation. On the left side of the painting, a desperate mother cradles one of her two children while having abandoned the other, who is already dead.[36] A pestilential boil is already blooming on the woman's breast as she tries to bridge her other son towards the ointment.

The articulation of the scene, along with the originality of the design and iconographic motifs, all highlight the genius of Cerano. The somber and leaden tone of the composition, rendered in shades of brown, effectively captures the tragic nature of the depicted event, and aligns closely with the style of the master's later works. For instance, parallels can be drawn to similarly dramatic works such as the *Mass of Saint Gregory the Great* or the *Lamentation of Christ by Mary Magdalene,* whose tumid and tactile execution reveals the hand of the master. Notably, the use of light, starkly contrasted by a divine apparition, is organized through decisive diagonal lines, emphasizing the dramatic and almost swollen representation of the weary brown bodies. The painting was initially commissioned solely to Cerano. However, the artist was already in the terminal phase of his career, overwhelmed with commitments, and would die within a year during the pandemics, before finishing the lunette.[37]

It is therefore not surprising that, upon close examination, the style confirms that the execution of the work can be attributed entirely to Gherardini and Chignoli. Both painters were still operating within Cerano's workshop and remained faithful to his artistic methods, although their execution was still somewhat rigid and in process of refinement when compared to the master's more mature and developed style.

Surely, the plague serves as both the subject of the image and its source, as the young painters captured on canvas the experiences of the apocalyptic times they lived in. This artwork is marked by the epidemic not only because it illustrates the catastrophic event but also because it displays Chignoli and Gherardini completing the work initiated by their master Cerano, thus encapsulating the transition between two generations of painters.

A second type of images must be taken into consideration. Indeed, after the outbreak of the plague, the art of engraving which had been dormant at the beginning of the century, emerged in Milan with renewed vi-

gor.[38] It is safe to say that the diffusion of printing in Milan reached unprecedented levels, due to its affordability in the complex economic landscape that followed the epidemic.[39] Artists like Carlo Biffi and Melchiorre Gherardini created drawings specifically for engraving, commissioned by discerning patrons.[40] This provided painters a more accessible and less demanding income opportunity compared to involvement in large frescoes cycles, the production of which had slowed during the plague years.

Fig. 5: Angelo Gallo, Giovanni Paolo Bianchi, *Madonna coi santi Rocco e Sebastiano*, 1630 ca. Etching, 342 x 243 mm, Civica raccolta delle stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milan © Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

Various images can be presented as examples, as the engraving production in Milan during these years encompasses a range of themes, from the representation of triumphal arches to the creation of maps and the realization of portraits.[41] However, focusing on the depictions of the plague allows to examine how the epidemic was not only an opportunity for the development of technique but also the very subject of representation. A good example is Melchiorre Gherardini's engra-

ving *Dal Orto il mio bel nome*,[42] of which several authors have highlighted the narrative effectiveness and the significance as a historical testimony[43] (fig. 2). The print shows a scene set along Corso di Porta Orientale leading to the city gate, characterized by a powerful perspective that features highly foreshortened buildings on the right side. In macabre detail, wagons laden with corpses traverse the street, making their way towards the Lazzaretto.

Thus, it can be said that this flourishing production, while influenced by crisis factors, also introduced a significant novelty: for the first time, it was not foreign artists practicing graphic art, but a local generation of artists dedicated to engraving alongside their painting activities. In fact, other printed works portraying events related to the epidemic can be recalled, such as the one featuring some figures kneeling in prayer as carts filled with corpses traverse the streets, while individuals suspected of spreading the disease (untori[44]) face brutal executions[45] (fig. 3). Another example is the print that encapsulates, as a sample, all the events of the epidemic[46] (fig. 4). Once again, we recognize, in a perspectival view of the city, the carts laden with corpses being removed, the execution of the plague spreaders, and the figures in prayer who gather in the background near the miraculous image of the Madonna delle Grazie, above which a lamp burns. On the other hand, some prints take on a more ex-voto character, such as the depiction of the *Pietà* with Saints Roch and Sebastian, who are venerated as protectors against the epidemic[47] (fig. 5).

Two more commissions linked to the experience of the plague are notable in the realm of pictorial production: both Chignoli and Gherardini created an ex-voto painting. Gherardini produced an image of *Santa Felicita* for the community of Turbigo, near Milan, in 1631[48] (fig. 6). This painting depicts the saint upon whom the community relied for deliverance from the disease, as indicated by the cartouche stating "ob liberatione a peste" and it is signed by the painter as "gerardinus 1631".

Chignoli, on the other hand, is credited with a monumental altarpiece representing the Madonna flanked by Saints Roch and Sebastian, an ex-voto characterized by the presence of the Madonna positioned between the patrons of the disease.[49]

Shortly after these initial works, both painters began to establish themselves in the Milanese artistic scene, alongside Ercole Procaccini and Carlo Biffi. The careers of this group flourished with the creation of numerous altarpieces and several frescoes in Milanese churches.[50] In the span of two decades, these artists had firmly established themselves as prominent figures. The workshop of Ercole Procaccini the Younger[51] emerged as a new focal point for the training of young Milanese painters, with Chignoli and Gherardini being sought after for extensive fresco cycles in Milan and for significant projects beyond the city borders.[52]

Fig. 6: Melchiorre Gherardini, *Santa Felicita*, 1631, Oil on canvas, 132 x 93,5 cm. Santa Maria Assunta, Turbigo. © Laboratorio San Gregorio - Archivio parrocchiale di Turbigo.

As the mid-century approached, however, new, and more distinctly Baroque influences began to emerge in the city, and new figures asserted themselves on the artistic scene.[53] Over time, the arts in Milan flourished across a variety of forms and languages, and the generation of artists who had survived the plague gradually set aside its earlier style.[54]

While the post-plague artists sought to navigate and adapt to the emerging artistic trends, they occasionally struggled to fully embrace them. Milan was once again on the verge of transitioning into a new era, this time not through tragic or abrupt changes, but through a gradual evolution that led to new artistic possibilities.

Nevertheless, it is essential today to reconsider the two decades of Milanese art following the plague of 1630 and to focus on the recognition of the figures of its protagonists: a generation of artists who, precisely because of the apocalyptic event that heralded the end of times, witnessed the beginning of their own history. The epidemics provided an opportunity for new commissions and marked a critical juncture in the artists' careers, allowing them to flourish and gradually assume control of Milan's artistic landscape for two decades.

Endnotes

1. See Belmonte/Scirocco 2019.
2. Spinks/Zika 2016, p. 4.
3. Button/Schuller 2016, p. 3.
4. See Signorotto 2000.
5. The year 1630 was the peak of the plague outbreak. The epidemics began to spread in 1629 with effects that persisted until 1632. See Ferro 1973.
6. See Carrara/Visioli 2020.
7. The dispersal of Milanese heritage is primarily the result of the suppression of religious orders during the Austrian Habsburg era, alongside the repercussions of the similar phenomena occurring during the Napoleonic period. See: Ferro 1999; Castiglioni 1958; Valsecchi 1959; Rota 1959, p. 42–43.
8. See Sella 1982.
9. See Manzoni ed. 2021; ed. 2023.
10. Gregori 1950, p. 7–20.
11. Testori 1955.
12. Dell'Acqua 1973.
13. The plague of 1576–1577 is commonly referred to as the plague of St. Charles (Carlo Borromeo) due to the significant personal involvement of the archbishop during this crisis. The legacy of St. Charles in terms of religious and artistic policies was, to a certain extent, continued by Federico Borromeo, a complex and multifaceted figure extensively analyzed in various studies. See Jones 1993; Giuliani 2007. Additionally, the concept of a distinct Borromean Lombardy—a phase in Milanese history closely associated with the endeavors of these two cousins—has also been a focus of scholarly investigation. See Pissavino/Signorotto 1995.
14. Instituted by Borromeo himself, the academy was designed to train the next generation of artists in Milan. See Bora 1992; Jones 1993.
15. See Frangi 1999. This text is the first to address the issue of the post-plague period and its aftermath, significantly highlighting the generational aspect of this phenomenon. A thorough understanding of 17th-century Lombardy remains grounded in knowledge of the "Borromean masters", facilitated by existing monographic works on the key figures of Morazzone, Cerano, and Procaccini. See Gregori 1962; Rosci 2000; Rosci 2005; H. Brigstocke/D'Albo 2020.
16. See Ferro 1973a; Ferro 1973b; Jones 2005; Pavesi 2023a; Pavesi 2023b.
17. Borromeo 1632, 568–569. The translation provided has been completed by the author. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and clarity, there may be slight variations or interpretations that reflect the author's understanding of the original text.
18. For Gherardini's life see Bona Castellotti 1978; Coppa 1989a; Spiriti 2000; Cavalieri 2005 and particularly about the year of birth Ferrari forthcoming.

19. Girolamo Chignoli was probably born in the first decade of the XVII century. See Milantoni 1980; Valsecchi 1961b; Coppa 1995a; Coppa 2003; Cavalieri 2005.
20. See Bossaglia 1968.
21. See D'Albo 2016.
22. See Rosci 2000, p. 295–296; Caprara 2001, p. 329.
23. Caprara 2001, p. 327–354.
24. The title of the dossier can be translated: "the inhabitants of the parishes of the City of Milan are notified by the Elders before the Tribunal of public Health to assign Guards and overseers for the Gates during times of suspected contagion".
25. The dossier (Archivio di Stato di Milano, Atti di governo, Sanità parte antica, c. 286 bis) identified by Caprara has facilitated the discovery of several new documents pertaining to the lives of the artists under consideration. For the sake of brevity, only the key dates are provided here. Furthermore, it is interesting to note a parallel in Rome: during the plague of 1630, which did not directly affect the city, arrangements were made for the walls surrounding Rome to be guarded by two artisans assisting a nobleman, similar to the situation in Milan. See Nussdorfer 1992; Caprara 2001.
26. Studies have often overlooked the training of this generation of artists within the Accademia Ambrosiana and, more broadly, under the tutelage of Cerano. In the later years of the master's career, Chignoli and Gherardini assisted him with the numerous commissions that he could no longer manage alone. See Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, P. 239 SUP, Regole dell'Accademia del disegno nella Biblioteca Ambrosiana, handwritten dossier transcribed in Nicodemi, 1957, p. 653-696. See also Bora 1992; Rovetta 2005.
27. The terminal designs for the reliefs of the overdoor of the Duomo are particularly noteworthy (Stoppa, entries in Il Cerano, 1573–1632, p. 198–202), as well as those in which Gherardini himself participated: Cerano, *La Battaglia di Muret*, oil on canvas, 500 x 650 cm, Cremona (Rosci 2000, p. 269–272); Cerano and Melchiorre Gherardini, *Madonna col Bambino, San Pietro e San Bruno*, oil on canvas, 104 x 174 cm, Pavia, Pinacoteca Civica Malaspina (Rosci, 2000, p. 272–273); and the lunette *Madonna delle Grazie*, which we will discuss shortly (see related note). Also remarkable is the commission for the *Sposalizio della Vergine* in San Giuseppe, requested to Cerano in 1629 by Scipione Toso, which was never completed and whose execution must therefore be attributed entirely to Gherardini.
28. See Rossetti 2024 and the previous note.
29. Cerano died on the 23 of October 1632 for asthma and dropsy (older term for edema, a condition involving fluid retention and swelling). The documents related to the death are preserved at the State Archives of Milan, ancient population section (Fondo popolazione, parte antica), folder 120. See Pevsner 1928, p. 48; Rosci 2000, p. 296.
30. See Rosci 1964; Rosci 2005.
31. See Valsecchi 1961b.
32. Cohn 2010, p. 110–117.
33. Cerano, Melchiorre Gherardini and Gerolamo Chignoli, *La Madonna libera Milano dalla peste*, 1632 ca, oil on framed canvas, 210 x 315 cm, Milan, Santa Maria delle Grazie, entrance to Madonna of the Rosary Chapel. Rosci 2000, p. 174.
34. Bora 1983, p. 175–178.
35. Ferrari 2019, p. 315, note 41; Bellagente 2004, p. 31–33.
36. Boeckl 1993, p. 45–68.
37. See note 29.
38. See Alberici 1973; Bora 1995; Bianchi 2012.
39. For Gherardini's oeuvre, we have access to a comprehensive catalogue compiled in Bartsch's annotated edition. In contrast, our knowledge of Biffi's work remains limited, relying primarily on Bossaglia's brief biographical entry for the time being. See Viganò 1987; Bossaglia 1968.
40. See Bianchi 2012.
41. Curiously, records indicate that votive prints were utilized for thaumaturgical purposes—specifically, as contact objects to ward off the plague—in 17th-century Naples. It is plausible that similar practices may have occurred in Milan; however, further research is required to substantiate this possibility. See Boeckl 1993, p. 60.
42. Melchiorre Gherardini, Scenes of the 1630 plague in San Babila, *From the Garden, my beautiful name*, 1631 ca, etching, 137 x 168 mm, Brescia, Museo di Santa Giulia, inv. ST 3475. Viganò 1987, p. 174–175. The print is part of Gherardini's second series of etchings, showcasing the artist's mastery of the graphic medium and serving as a remarkable example of post-plague artistic production. See Nicodemi 1922. The title of the print refers to the play on words between *Orto* (garden) and *oriente* (east), alluding to the direction of what is now Porta Venezia. The verses also imply a bitter reference to the *occaso*: the sunset of life at the Lazaretto, which takes place in the east, the direction where the sun rises. See Pavesi 2023b, p. 150.
43. See Nicodemi 1922.
44. The term refers to individuals believed to spread contagion through malicious means, often the use of ointments or other substances. The term, rooted in Italian folklore and paranoia, reflects the fear and social scapegoating during epidemics, when certain people were accused of intentionally spreading illness to harm the population and were often prosecuted or even executed without legitimate cause. See Clini 2021.
45. Francesco Valletto (designer) and Cesare Bassano (engraver), 1630 ca, engraving, mm 365 x 420, Milan, Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, inv. A.S. m. 3-69; A.S. m. 51-16.
46. Anonymous, *L'oglio pietoso*, 1630 ca, engraving, mm 243 x 190 Milano, Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, inv. A.S. p. 9–32.
47. Angelo Gallo (designer) and Giovanni Paolo Bianchi (engraver), 1630 ca, engraving, mm 342 x 243, Milan, Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, inv. Tri. M. 3-43.
48. Melchiorre Gherardini, *Santa Felicita*, 1631, oil on canvas, 132 x 93,5 cm, Turbigo, Santa Maria Assunta. See Coppa 1995b.
49. About saints protecting from the plague including Roch and Sebastian, Boeckl 1993, p. 45–68.
50. While a detailed exploration of the artists' production cannot be conducted with the attention and precision it requires, a brief mention will now be made regarding the stylistic evolution of their work and their most notable masterpieces painted for Milan. For an overview see Frangi 1999. This topic is currently under investigation for my doctoral thesis, to which I will refer upon its completion. Chignoli contributed to the fresco decoration of the choir of Santa Maria della Pace, realised canvases for the Church of Santa Maria del Paradiso, and collaborated with Ercole Procaccini the Younger on the now-destroyed frescoes in the Ducal Palace, the seat of the Milanese government. See Valsecchi 1962, p. 267–275 and Torre 1714, p. 341–342. Procaccini was also active in painting at the Church of San Vittore, while Melchiorre Gherardini worked in San Giuseppe, San Vito al Pasquirolo and San Paolo Converso. All these artworks were completed before the mid-century and reflect a vibrant revival of the artistic life in the city. See Pesenti 1968; Frangi 1997; Ferro 2003; Paleari 2023. Indeed, despite the challenges posed by the epidemic, artistic production continued unabated, as evidenced by the ongoing decoration of the Duomo, which serves as a significant reference point for artistic development in Milan. See Valsecchi 1961a; Valsecchi 1961b.
51. Ercole operated an art academy devoted to the teaching of drawing and the representation of the human body (Accademia di nudo), first documented in 1667 by the Bolognese art historian Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616–1693); see Arfelli 1961.
52. Melchiorre Gherardini completed in 1643 the altarpiece Martirio di San Giorgio (oil on canvas, 283x183 cm, church of San Giorgio, Montagna, signed "MELCHIOR GERAR/PINGEBAT"). The painting is a key reference in the artist's body of work due to the presence of the signature and the date of execution. Both Gherardini and Chignoli also worked at Sacro Monte in Varallo. See Coppa 1995, p. 284–285; Gentile 2019, p. 242–244.
53. This critical issue has been extensively explored in academic studies, particularly through monographic works focused on the most representative figures in the field: Francesco Cairo (1607–1665), Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1608–1662), Johann Cristoph Storer (1611–1671). See Frangi 1998; Ferro 2003; Appuhn-Radtke, 2000.
54. The reflections of this transformation are evident, for example, in the late works of Ercole Procaccini the younger, and Melchiorre Gherardini, which shift towards a gradual lightening of their palettes, increasing the use of hazy tones and softly undefined shapes. In Milan, they collaborated again in 1653 on the now-lost frescoes of the Portinari Chapel in the Church of Sant'Eustorgio and on the decoration of Palazzo Durini, dating to the close years. In the surviving frescoes of Palazzo Durini the artists reveal a newfound fluidity in their brushstrokes, as well as an unprecedented brilliance and lightness in their color palette, enriched by airy yellows, greens, pinks, and reds. See Bora 1989; Geddo 2001.

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Figures

Fig. 1: Giovanni Battista Crespi Cerano, Melchiorre Gherardini, Gerolamo Chignoli, *Madonna delle Grazie*, 1631, Oil on canvas, 210 x 315 cm, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milano.

Fig. 2: Melchiorre Gherardini, *Dal Orto il mio bel nome*, 1633-36, Etching, 123 x 152 mm, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
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Fig. 3: Valletto Francesco, Cesare Bassano, *Descrittione della esecutione di giustitia fatta in Milano*, 1630 ca, Etching, 363 x 420 mm, Civica raccolta delle stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milan.
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Fig. 4: Anonymous, *L'oglio pietoso*, 1630 ca, Etching, 243 x 190 mm, Civica raccolta delle stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milan.
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Fig. 5: Angelo Gallo, Giovanni Paolo Bianchi, *Madonna coi santi Rocco e Sebastiano*, 1630 ca. Etching, 342 x 243 mm, Civica raccolta delle stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milan.
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Fig. 6: Melchiorre Gherardini, *Santa Felicita*, 1631, Oil on canvas, 132 x 93,5 cm, Santa Maria Assunta, Turbigo.
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Abstract

The article examines the impact of the 1630 plague epidemic in Milan, an event that profoundly shaped the city's history and was poetically depicted by Alessandro Manzoni. While much research has focused on the social and historical consequences, less attention has been given to the rise of a new generation of artists during this time.These artists, trained under Giovanni Battista Crespi il Cerano (1573-1632) and the Accademia Ambrosiana, experienced the epidemic firsthand. They guarded the city gates and witnessed the deaths of their mentors, friends, and fellow students while continuing to create paintings and engravings. These surviving artists like Melchiorre Gherardini, Gerolamo Chignoli, Carlo Biffi, and Ercole Procaccini the Younger carried forward the legacy of the Borromean masters while staying true to their tradition and their work influenced Milanese art for the next two decades.

By analyzing key artworks from this period, this study explores the connection between painters and the plague – both as witnesses and as creators of representations of the crisis – challenging the traditional view of the epidemic as merely destructive, instead presenting it as a catalyst for artistic renewal and transformation in Milan's art history.

Author

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Title

Fabio Gigone

Vedute without Viewers

The Plague in Rome in Domenico Castelli's Drawings (1656-1657)

I. Introduction[1]

Although the complexity of artistic production in the Roman context cannot be reduced to a mere reflection of the political and social changes of the 17th century[2], the diachronic and cross-disciplinary analysis of the artistic and cultural events of the century can offer a privileged perspective for reassessing how theories and practices, or elements of resistance and discontinuity, contributed to the development of the culture of a particular historical period. Historical analysis must consider long-term cultural phenomena and how temporally and contextually limited trends emerge within them, necessarily revisiting conclusions for further analysis that can never be deemed definitive[3].

The study of the representation of the city, juxtaposed with architectural production during times of social and political crisis, is perhaps the most evident confirmation of this. For this reason, this paper aims to briefly trace the trajectory of printed works focusing on the city, which found its epicentre of economic, political, and religious interest in Rome, marked by the brief episode of the plague of 1656–57.

The goal is not to demonstrate an indeterminable rupture in representational systems due to the epidemic, but rather to enrich their epistemological scope by arguing that the drastic social reorganisation during the epidemic was a consequence of architecture's role as the principal expression of prophylaxis policies. Furthermore, graphic representation did not fail to highlight the technical-spatial role of architecture — what we might today call social engineering or biopolitics— in proposing an economy of social and political survival in the Rome of Alexander VII. Nonetheless, this approach requires a necessary step back.

Rome in the 17th century

Baroque Rome in the 17th century has been considered the paradigm of the contemporary metropolis[4]. The Roman empire of which the city remained symbolically heir was concretely founded on its infrastructural system of communication which radiated from the city to the ends of its most remote borders. The territory was governed by a legal system that will lay the foundations for the constitution of the modern European state. Despite the Medieval oblivion, Rome's uniqueness consisted of being the heir of a previous and extinct empire —something common to other cities— but at the same time in being the only city to have survived this collapse. The political and military influence of the Roman Empire was replaced by the religious authority embodied in the Holy Apostolic See. In the 16th century the Renaissance matured in Rome, and determined the emergence of the city as the undisputed centre of the arts in Europe. In the 17th century, the exceptional works of individual artists gave way to the systematic interventions on an urban scale. Especially in the case of Pope Alexander VII Chigi (p. 1655—67), the city changed again, and from a political-military nerve centre it became an architectural theatre of representation of a self-referential power that reached a level of magnificence without equal in the rest of Europe.

However, considering the economic, social, and political aspects, the history of Rome at the dawn of the 17th century followed a downward parable. The public debt initiated by Pope Clement VII in 1526 through the erection of the *Monte della Fede* grew exponentially by the end of 16th century. While the Pope Medici indebted the Apostolic Chamber through the sale of 2000 *luoghi di monte* for a total price of 200000 ducats at 10% interest, the complexity of the debt institution grew to such an extent that by the time of Alexander VII's death the Church had accrued a debt of 50 million ducats[5]. The success of this form of investment was due to the administrative capacity recog-

nised to the Camera Apostolica[6]. However, interest payments were not counterbalanced by investments but by further debt issuance —and the plague played a crucial role— making the institution subject to economic penetration by foreign banks.

From the political perspective, the papacy's temporal power faded on the European scene. The evidence included the diplomatic failure at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and the Pope's absence at the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659. Both events saw cardinal Fabio Chigi as —failing or missing— protagonist. As Innocent X's diplomatic envoy in Münster, he failed to prevent the loss of the Roman Church's rights on the Protestant territories, and was absent during the armistice meeting that ended the Thirty Years' War between the Christian powers on the *Île des Faisans*.

Moreover, the city of Rome became the privileged site where foreign powers claimed the right of diplomatic extraterritoriality. Therefore, the Pope's jurisdiction lost control of a third of the urban territory, most of which was controlled by France and Spain, the same Christian Crowns that excluded the Pontiff from the negotiations on the European stage[7]. Finally, the 17th century saw the outbreak of two raging plague epidemics that reduced the rising demographic parabola, disrupted trade, and therefore caused periods of severe famine.

The plague in Rome

The second plague outbreak of the century occurred in Rome in 1656, a year after the election of Alexander VII. As has been observed, the phenomenology of the spread of the plague in the early modern period has traditionally triggered a recurring narrative that places the accounts, and thus the counter-measures, in an ahistorical framework. The manifestation of the plague, and the concatenation of its causes and consequences, thus seem to emerge and arrange themselves on a backdrop that is more mythical than historical that remains constant: "The irruption of the scourge, introduced by an agent external to the city (ships, soldiers, beggars, goods) induces the latter to exorcise the evil through a series of collective expiations (processions, new cults), while the identification of an agent internal to the community triggers the persecution of the possible human spreaders of the epidemic (witches, anointers, Jews, heretics, revolutionaries)[8]." The case of Rome was no exception.

The plague was apparently introduced from Nettuno by a fishmonger from Naples. The first victims, a hostess and her son, were identified on June 6, in the Rione Trastevere, a popular district on the right side of the Tiber[9]. Soon after, her husband and innkeeper himself, got sick and died. Fear spread throughout the city, and with it, rumors also circulated about objects responsible in spreading the contagion. In his diary, Giacinto Gigli recounts how a sailor died at the Hospital of San Giovanni due to an infection caused by a ring with a ribbon sent to him by his wife. The ring also caused the death of another person in Trastevere, a place that increasingly seemed to be the receptacle and source of the epidemic.[10]

The female origin of the object responsible for the contagion is confirmed by the account of the Jesuit Francesco Maria Sforza Pallavicino, who likens it to the mythological tale of the Shirt of Nessus[11]. A mythological origin therefore, but supported by the cowardice of those patrons from Trastevere who, although they frequented the tavern at the origin of the contagion, fearing the inconveniences of quarantine, shunned the call to appear before the magistrate[12].

The plague was not only perceived as a danger to life, but also as an obstacle to trade. Pallavicino hastened to exonerate his friend Alexander VII from his association with those who would have advised him to conceal the first signs of the spread of the disease. Such information would therefore have threatened trade relations with other countries, as well as seriously damaging the city's grain supply from the subjected cities. On the contrary, the Pope —in the Jesuit's laudatory account— did not want to shirk his responsibilities, and decreed the suspension of trade with Naples. Moreover, he arranged the borders' defence on a geographical scale, appointing three commissioners who were assigned to control the area from Montalto to Terracina, from Terracina to Rieti, and from Rieti to Ascoli and the Adriatic Sea[13]. Finally, the Pope declared the state of emergency in the city of Rome by granting the legislative and governmental powers to the Congregation of Health.

II. Politics of Emergency under Pope Alexander VII

The Congregation of Health

The most conspicuous institution for the containment of the plague was the Congregation of Health (It. 'Congregazione della Sanità'), that was reactivated in May 1656. Originally, the Congregation was founded by Pope Urban VIII in 1630 with scope of facing the first great epidemic of plague of the 17th century. Part of the new course were eleven Cardinals[14], the General Treasurer, and the Governor of Rome. The Congregation met regularly at the Quirinal, residence of Alexander VII. Other prelates also took part in the meetings, along with the Pope's brother Don Mario Chigi, the conservators of the Municipality, and two physicians. The Congregation was an institution directly answerable to Alexander VII, and therefore every governmental act had to be considered as the direct will of the Pontiff.

Although the Congregation had initially underestimated the risk of plague, failing to diagnose the case of the Trastevere family, it issued a series of coercive edicts from May 1656. The most restrictive ordinance regarded the segregation of Trastevere and the Jewish Ghetto. The first was isolated between June 22 and June 23, 1656. Cardinals Barberini, von Hessen, and Imperiali, in secret and at night, went to the site and with the help of soldiers, erected two concentric palisades known as the Trastevere fence, which remained in use until October 11. Cardinal Pallavicino commented that the purpose was to "amputate, according to the rules of surgery, the vitiated and ignoble part by the majority and the best of the body[15]."

The Jewish Ghetto was segregated on July 18, and a lazaret was established within it. According to Gigli, there were initially no confirmed cases of the plague in the Ghetto, while Pallavicino emphasised that their separation from the rest of the city was a voluntary choice. The inclusion or separation of the sick bodies was crucial in the early modern strategies to face the plague. As Michel Foucault reflects: "The exile of the leper and the arrest of the plague do not bring with them the same political dream. The first is that of a pure community, the second that of a disciplined society. […] The leper and his separation; the plague and its segmentations. The first is marked; the second analysed and distributed[16]." In this approach, the sick were not expelled from the city, but rather incorporated into it. This mechanism, which might seem practical, mirrors an immune-based approach: as 19th century virology would teach us, the inoculation of nonlethal virus quantities stimulates the formation of antibodies that can neutralise pathogenic effects at an early stage. To use the words of Roberto Esposito, "Life combats what negates it through immunitary protection, not a strategy of frontal opposition but of outflanking and neutralising. Evil must be thwarted, but not by keeping it at a distance from one's borders; rather, it is included inside them[17]." Emblematic examples are the lazarets established by Gerolamo Gastaldi, a prelate with a background in jurisprudence, appointed as commissioner general of this institution. If only two of already existing structures converted into lazarets were outside the city (the monastery of San Pancrazio and the Casaletto of Pius V), the other ones were strategically located within the Aurelian Walls. In line with Foucault's interpretation, all of these became spaces where people (patients and medical personnel) were accurately divided between 'dirty' (It. "sporchi", meaning sick), and 'clean' (It. "puliti", suspected or convalescents). Therefore, San Pancrazio and the Casaletto were designated for the infected (later on, the former to the convalescents). In the city the buildings converted to lazarets were the whole Isle of San Bartolomeo (half for the "brutti", and half for the "puliti"); the Carceri Nuove in Via Giulia (for the convalescents of the Isle); the monastery of Sant'Eusebio (for the quarantine of the relatives of the infected), and that of San Giuliano (the first station for the infected from outside the city). Other structures were at Santa Maria della Consolazione, in the San Saba complex, in Vicolo del Carciofolo (today Vicolo Alibert), San Giacomo degli Incurabili, in the Palazzetto of Santo Spirito, at the Lateran, at San Michele in Sassia, and, finally, in Trastevere and in the Jewish Ghetto[18].

In addition, nine of Rome's gates were closed and those that remained open (Porta del Popolo, Porta Angelica, and Porta San Giovanni) served as checkpoints for goods and people. Doctors and surgeons were forbidden to leave the city, while all public gatherings of people and even masses were suspended.-

The quarantine did not only concern the sick individuals, but was extended to the whole city, making it forbidden to visit others' houses. Capital punishment was instituted for those who did not submit to the restrictions of the Congregation's proclamations. Those whose punishment was changed to work in the lazarets had to proceed around the city with a cross so that the population could avoid them.

Medical culture during this era was still influenced by Hippocratic ideas concerning environmental conditions, such as site exposure to winds and air quality. The ancient tradition of Galen on the putrefaction of animal and vegetable bodies as a cause of pestilence continued to have an impact, and therefore the integration of the Presidency of the Streets with the administrative structure of the Masters of the Streets facilitated the establishment of the *Taxae Viarum*, which made citizens responsible for cleaning the streets and banks from the carcasses of slaughtered animals and various rubbish[19]. This affected also the stray cats and dogs that were killed[20].

Moreover, objects were considered vehicles for the transmission of contagion, and the dirt that invaded public and private spaces was identified as a contextual cause to support the miasma theory. For this reason, the practice of wearing a waxed jacket, on which infectious particles and fleas could not adhere, spread probably from France at the beginning of the 17th century[21]. As Carlo Cipolla notes, in the Seicento, they were on the verge of discovering the causes of contagion, which was, however, hindered by the prevailing thought that fleas were annoying but harmless animals[22].

Consequently, two structures for disinfecting goods ("spurghi"), like correspondence and clothes, were established outside the city, while the belongings of the infected people were burned. Finally, the plague as a deadly and symbolic phenomenon accentuates the belief that contagion can be transmitted through gaze[23].

The gaze of Alexander VII

The gaze is the central protagonist of a dream described by Alexander VI in a letter to his nephew, Cardinal Flavio Chigi[24]. The dream begins with an encounter between the two, whose path is blocked at the exit of Porta del Popolo by guards stationed at the

gates ('rastelli'). Recognised by a prelate, the emergency setting transforms into the desired urban reality, and the two proceed along the streets of Babuino, Condotti, and the Corso, before dining together. From the balcony of the Quirinal overlooking the city, they continue their journey towards Piazza Navona and Piazza di Spagna, via Ripetta to San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, crossing Ponte Sant'Angelo and walking along the Lungara, encountering ladies in carriages and drinkers at taverns. However, the plague abruptly shatters the dream, infiltrating Alexander's visions. Houses are barred with the inscription "Sanità"; stretchers carrying the infected pass by, accompanied by men in waxed suits; the entrances to palaces, churches and the gate leading to the Ghetto are sealed; and "nothing is heard but talk of the sick, the dead, and the lazarets[25]."

In his dream, Alexander clearly mentions the things he has recently seen: the shock of the scenes produced by the epidemic creates vivid images in his imagination. However, what is more important is how his state of joy is associated with walking –almost flying– through the streets and squares that he would contribute to designing and making an essential part of his urban project just a few years later. Equally emblematic is the scene of the view of Rome from the balcony of the Quirinal, a palace that dominates the city from the highest hill, which he, as the first Pope, chose as his residence as the sovereign of Rome[26].

It is in the Quirinal Palace, specifically in his chamber, that Alexander VII keeps what is likely the first wooden model of the entire city of Rome, as reported by Ferdinando Raggi, the agent of the Republic of Genoa: "The Pope has all of Rome crafted in wood in a most distinguished and curious chamber, as one whose greatest ambition is to beautify the City […] and he discusses it as if he were about to enter it[27]."

The Chigi papacy was thus a period in which the gaze became a tool for planning as well as orientation, and due to the plague, the city itself became a device for observing and controlling the social body. On one hand, in the 17th century, the representation of the city and its monuments continued to be a means to exhibit a reality to be admired, in line with previous centuries[28]. On the other hand, prints and engravings increasingly became an operational tool that influenced

the shared set of values of the time, to the point that the building activity of Alexander VII shaped what became customarily defined 'Roma moderna'[29].

III. Engravings in the Early Modern

To understand the historical perspective on the immaterial and physical condition of an urban context, it is essential to consider the production of visual material through which an era represented the city, from technical, commercial, and cultural viewpoints. Without delving into a phenomenology of spatial perception, it is useful to recall how contemporary individuals' exposure to images dramatically differs from that of individuals of any other historical period.

Beyond social class, which obviously made a significant difference, the number of images and the duration of exposure were extremely limited compared to contemporary standards. This consideration underscores the potential impact that the representation of the city had on the understanding and depiction of a space that was typically constructed through direct experience.

In this context, Rome, as the primary destination for pilgrims and antiquarians across Europe, became the paradigmatic site for the development of printmaking, the most widespread method of reproduction until the advent of photography. In this field, alongside reproductions of famous artworks and contemporary artists' *invenzioni*, views of ancient buildings and city maps constituted a significant portion of the commercial sector.[30]

Initial developments in the 16th century
The flourishing of graphic production, particularly with the De Rossi workshops that sought papal privilege for the representation of the city, disseminated the image of Rome to a vast audience of visitors who increasingly crowded the city and directly contributed to its wealth. However, the production of maps also had its historical legacy.

Traditionally, late medieval city representations incorporated a cosmic order that corresponded — through symbolism, graphic conventions, etc.— to the *mappae mundi*. During the early Renaissance, however, some architects employed trigonometric and topographic concepts to develop representational mod-els where spatial relationships between different points transcended mere symbolic connections. Foremost among them was Leon Battista Alberti, who in his *Descriptio Urbis Romae* (1443–55) described the trigonometric methodology that allowed him —although a true graphic representation has never reached us— to reconstruct the Rome of the 15th century. A well-known example is Leonardo's plan of Imola, created during his service to Cesare Borgia in 1503. As has been remarked, the plan of Imola is the first ichnographic plan, meaning a representation that incorporates "a new conceptual attitude toward the representation of cities, in which quantitative topographical relationships were given visual priority over both symbolic values and the actual appearance of the city[31]."

Leonardo's first ichnographic map, as well as Leonardo Bufalini's plan of Rome from 1551, do not rely on the human gaze, just as late medieval maps did not. Instead, the certain and measurable spatial and temporal dimension of a represented phenomenon replaced the symbolic or experiential dimension of medieval representations. More generally, the representation of urban space in the 17th century benefited from the development of printing techniques which, in the absence of other means of instant reproduction, became a widespread commercial phenomenon. The first to understand its potential was Raphael, who undertook engraving to promote his paintings. The peculiarity of this activity lay in the fact that he entrusted his preparatory drawings to a circle of engravers —among them Marcantonio Raimondi. Subsequently, he handed the engravings to a printer and then took care of selling the finished product. This artistic and entrepreneurial procedure shaped the printing system of the following decades.

Several other publishers, printers, and sellers entered the market, whose complexity was based on the sale and use of already produced engravings — the case of the purchase of Raphael's plates by the Milanese Antonio Salamanca is emblematic— as well as the roles played by these three figures. In particular, the printer and the publisher were the key figures: the former was the one who simply managed the act of printing from a plate in his possession. However, this did not necessarily mean that the printer owned the plate. More likely, it was the publisher who some-

times used the services of a restorer to modify the names engraved on the copper by previous printers and publishers in the case of purchased plates[32].

Thanks to a series of phenomena —Raphael being the first, and the second being the massive presence of pilgrims— Rome became the centre of engraving production in the 16th century. The activity of publishers and printers such as Antonio Lafrery, Antonio and Mario Labacco, Stefano Duchet, and others anticipated what, in the 17th century, became an almost monopolistic production centre, namely the De Rossi workshops located near Santa Maria della Pace and in Piazza Navona.

This latter branch included Gianbattista De Rossi, whose activity lasted until 1672 and encompassed the publication of maps of the city of Rome —such as the one engraved by Lieven de Cruyl in 1665— and antiquities, and his son Matteo Gregorio, who was active until the end of the century. More prolific was the enterprise established next to Santa Maria della Pace, whose founder was Giuseppe De Rossi, who likely began the fortunes of the workshop by acquiring plates in the early 17th century. His son, Giovanni Giacomo, was the most active protagonist of the Roman scene. His prints were produced between 1638 and 1691 and were engraved by illustrious authors such as Giovanni Battista Falda[33]. The fortunes of the Pace branch continued under the aegis of Giovanni Giacomo's son, Domenico, who continued the work until 1720[34]. The catalogue he printed with the available subjects is vast and includes city and geographical maps, battle scenes, modern architectures, antiquities, copies of artistic works, and portraits of princes, Popes, and other religious figures, 'invenzioni', 'vedute', and, not least, scenes of relevant events[35].

Documenting the plague
Among these events, the plague of 1656–57 was one of the most extensively covered socio-political phenomena of the 17th century[36]. The epidemic's origins and effects were addressed in political, diplomatic, and medical literature. Within the latter field, new treatises and manuals were reprinted and written.[37] From a legal perspective, the Congregation of Health issued and disseminated more than 350 edicts, regulations, and briefs[38]. Their communication soon took over the

urban space, utilising traditional gathering places such as churches, main streets, and squares to reach individuals, who were subject to capital punishment in case of transgression. Consequently, the urban perception changed radically: both public and private spaces were meticulously aligned with the results of the emergency bureaucracy established by the Pope and implemented by Gerolamo Gastaldi[39]. Evidence of this geometrisation of the legal and administrative production of the Congregation of Health is provided by a series of prints attributed to Louis Rouhier and published by Giovanni Giacomo de Rossi, later included in Gastaldi's *Tractatus de avertenda et profliganda peste politico-legalis*[40].

Fig. 1: Louis Rouhier, and Giovanni Giacomo De Rossi, *Ordini diligenze e ripari fatti con universal benefitio dalla paterna pietà di N.S. PP Alesandro VII et eminentissimi cardinali della santa congregazione della sanità per liberare la città di Roma dal contagio*, February 1657. Acquaforte e bulino, 418 x 528 mm. (Print I)

These three prints are arranged in four (the first) or five (the second and third) horizontal strips with captions illustrating the measures implemented by the Congregation against the plague epidemic. Three main themes emerge throughout the prints: health legal devices manifested as social segregation and disinfection of objects; the pervasive normative framework and the punishment of transgressors; and finally, the city as a space of conflict. Evidence of the first theme is found in the upper strip of the first print (fig. 1), where the social body afflicted by the disease and housed at the Island of San Bartolomeo proceeds towards San Pietro in Montorio to begin the 'dirty' convalescence at

San Pancrazio. Other groups descend from the latter to head to the Carceri Nuove to start the 'clean' quarantine. Architectural references such as the Acqua Paola, the dome of St. Peter's, and the top of Castel Sant'Angelo emerge from the rugged landscape of the hill, indicating that the first health safety measures were implemented outside the city.

Segregation within the Aurelian Walls is clearly depicted in the second strip of the first sheet, where Don Mario Chigi, the Pope's brother, is portrayed in a carriage distributing alms to people secluded inside their homes. His Holiness the Pope surrounded by soldiers is the second notable figure depicted, blessing the newly established lazaret and purging facilities at San Bartolomeo and the Marmorata. Rouhier also covers the nighttime view of the city, where people are seen chanting the *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria*, and *De Profundis*, while a carriage transports corpses to the banks of the Tiber, and the "sbirri" and the commissioner patrol the empty streets. The first sheet concludes as it began, with two emblematic scenes outside the walls. The first is outside Porta del Popolo: the walls become a boundary enclosed by palisades, where provisions allowed into the city are measured. Most notably, coins are dipped in vinegar to prevent their infectious potential, as with other objects. Finally, at Porta Pia, another gate filters the entry of livestock traded from the countryside.

Fig. 2: Louis Rouhier, and Giovanni Giacomo De Rossi, *Ordini diligenze e ripari fatti con universal benefitio dalla paterna pietà di N.S. PP Alesandro VII et eminentissimi cardinali della santa congregazione della sanità per liberare la città di Roma dal contagio*, February 1657. Acquaforte e bulino, 418 x 528 mm. (Print II)

In the second print, the movement and transport of objects and people are represented through a strategy that transforms the emergency into the processional imaginary (fig. 2). The visual narrative implies the representation of the body from the discovery of the infection to its becoming part of a regimented social class, to its removal through burial in mass graves near San Paolo fuori le Mura. The "analysis and distribution" evoked by Foucault clearly emerges from the crowds directed from the lazaret to the Carceri Nuove for quarantine. This is also evident in the separation of Christian and Jewish corpses on barges headed to the two mass graves at San Paolo, where they will be further separated.

Another major theme is the relationship between normative enforcement and punishment, whose visual evidence exploits the public space of the city to enhance its effects. The city thus becomes a palimpsest for communicating the assumption of legislative and governmental power by the Congregation. An example is a group reading a proclamation from the Congregation posted on a wall, or another group fleeing from the action of the "sbirri." In the third print, finally, the transgressors of the Congregation's law are publicly hanged, shot ("archibugiati"), or beheaded (fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Louis Rouhier, and Giovanni Giacomo De Rossi, *Ordini diligenze e ripari fatti con universal benefitio dalla paterna pietà di N.S. PP Alesandro VII et eminentissimi cardinali della santa congregazione della sanità per liberare la città di Roma dal contagio*, February 1657. Acquaforte e bulino, 418 x 528 mm. (Print III)

This excess of punishment is symptomatic of how the spread of the plague marks the moment in Italy when traditional civic powers —the curia in the case of Rome— are stripped of power by health institutions through violence[41]. In this way, the city during the plague emergency becomes a space of conflict where

surveillance's gaze becomes both a tool for controlling and defining what exceeds the prevailing authoritarian power, and a means of providing an example of what happens in case of transgression of the imposed norm.

The demand for the relationship between urban structure and science is clear: in Rouhier's etchings, circulation in public space is regarded as a form of threat to health safety, and, therefore, it is challenged in favour of devices of containment and segregation.

IV. Domenico Castelli

The same devices of segregation and control, visually purified from social and legal consequences, were designed and represented by Domenico Castelli in 47 full-page illustrations published posthumously in Gastaldi's *Tractatus de avertenda et profliganda peste politico-legalis* in 1684.

Castelli (1582?–1657) was an architect originally from Melide in Ticino, and present in Rome since 1611. Under Pope Urban VIII until his death, he held the role of 'misuratore' (responsible for assessing the work done by masons, stonecutters, and stucco workers on various building sites) and superintendent of his palaces[42]. From 1624 to 1657, he worked almost continuously as an architect for the 'Fabbriche della Reverenda Camera apostolica'[43]. Castelli also worked for the secular part of the municipal government of Rome: in July 1631, he was appointed by the Conservators of the 'alma città di Roma' as the architect of the *Studium Urbis*, a position he held until September 1632, when he was succeeded by Francesco Borromini[44].

Starting in 1646, he was part of a list of architects used by the Presidency of the Roads, collaborating with well-known architects such as Carlo Maderno and Borromini himself. His strategic role in urban space management is confirmed by a series of additional roles he held, as evidenced by the petitions of various professionals seeking to fill his positions after his death: architect of the Acqua Paola, the Capitoline Hill, and the waters (Chiane, Fiumicino, Ponte Felice, and similar); as well as for the Archconfraternity of the SS. Annunziata, the Hospital of San Giacomo degli Incurabili, the monastery of San Silvestro, the monastery of the Virgins, the monastery of San Cecilia, and the Archconfraternity of the Gonfalone[45].

Therefore, thanks to his extensive experience, Castelli was appointed by Gerolamo Gastaldi as the architect of the prophylaxis systems required by the Congregation of Health. However, this was not the only reason: apparently, the strategic and artistic plans of Alessandro VII for the city of Rome had been developed before the advent of the plague, and those entrusted with implementing them —Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Pietro da Cortona— were precautionarily placed under strict quarantine at the Palazzo di Montecavallo[46].

Consequently, Domenico Castelli was designated as the architect to operate in the field, as a handwritten account by him, preserved in the Apostolic Library, illustrates his direct involvement in the realisation of the architectural and urban devices depicted in the *Tractatus*[47].

Castelli and the plague

The *Tractatus* was an accurate description of the evolution of the plague of 1656–57 in Rome, its outcomes in terms of the sick and dead, the related medical theories and practices, the organisation of lazarets, and the measures issued by the Congregation through the drafting and dissemination of 245 edicts concerning the epidemic[48].

The abilities of Gastaldi were immediately recognised by Alexander VII, to the extent that Pallavicino recounts how the Pope was astonished that some men blind in one eye —such as the Ligurian prelate— could see better than others with both eyes available[49]. The innovation in Gastaldi's actions lay in prevention, which was a direct consequence of the penetration of the concept of contagion into the mentality of common people, a concept coined only a century earlier by Girolamo Fracastoro[50]. This prevention involved the prior separation of individuals considered healthy, suspected, and confirmed sick, and the consequent segmentation of the sick population through phases of quarantine for illness and convalescence.

The edicts issued by the Congregation, with the obvious influence of Gastaldi who had become the general health commissioner, included the control and description of objects and people through the city's open

gates. Double "cancelli" were created so that people and goods coming from outside would not encounter those inside. It was ordered that "no one should be allowed to enter without a bulletin, in which the name, surname, homeland, age, stature, hair colour, and origin of each person were expressed[51]."

This precise analysis and description of possible vehicles and objects of contagion reveal a scientific method in the approach to the disease, which would form the basis for a true statistical method. Those hospitalised in the lazarets were registered in a special book with their "name, surname, age, homeland, and domicile. A bulletin with a string was then attached to their neck, repeating these indications, to identify them. In case of death, the day was noted in the mentioned book, marking the indication with a cross[52]." Additionally, Gastaldi imposed a moral and legal obligation on all citizens to report suspected cases, the sick, and deaths (even of non-suspects) to a notary of the 'rione'[53]. Finally, burials at San Paolo fuori le Mura took place in mass graves where the corpses were distinguished by religious belief into Catholics (numerically counted) and Jews (more numerous but not counted)[54].

Domenico Castelli's drawings constituted the architectural and spatial representation of Gastaldi's actions. The arrangement of the defence measures follows repetitive patterns and is adapted to the pre-existing conditions, as confirmed by the descriptions[55]. The authorship of the 47 drawings is acknowledged by detailed descriptions of all the architectural and urban interventions written by the architect[56]. The drawings employ various representation techniques and depict urban areas, buildings, or mechanisms at different scales and for different purposes. Both urban-scale, architectural, and object-like devices can be categorised into four groups according to their function: *filtering*, *disinfecting*, *segregating*, and *removing*.

Filtering
Filtering affects both people and goods and is implemented at all levels, often intertwined with the other categories. The primary filtering device is delegated to the eight gates that remained open. An example is Porta del Popolo, one of the three designated access points for individuals from outside the city (the others

being Porta Angelica and Porta San Giovanni). This gate served as the primary entry point from the north into the city via the Flaminia. Castelli presents two drawings: the internal view[57], displaying the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo against the Aurelian Walls and the gate's intrados. It showcases a recent architectural arrangement by Bernini, created for the triumphal entry of Queen Christina of Sweden in December 1655, featuring the papal mountains' coat of arms and the Chigi star emblem. On the outside (fig. 4), Castelli depicts three wooden "casini" covered with boards, serving as shelters for the Commissioner, the Prelate deputy, and the soldiers, respectively. Opposite these structures, towards the outside, are the "obices" (obstacles) and the "cancelli", which are the access gates.
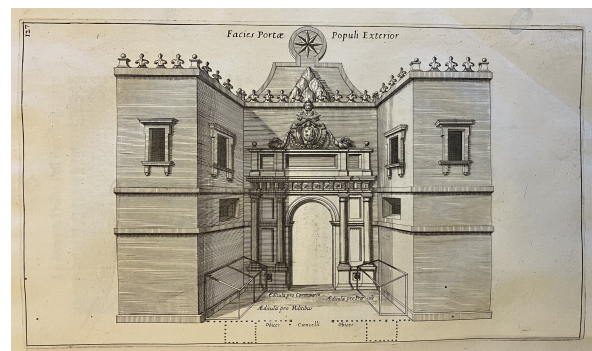

Fig. 4: Domenico Castelli, *Facies Portæ Populi Exterior*. Acquaforte e bulino. In: Gerolamo Gastaldi, *Tractatus*, p. 127.

The organisation of Porta Pia is more complex[58]. Located to the east, in an agricultural area, it included a palisade and an area for sheep grazing with access to the Via Pia towards Santa Costanza. The existing architecture housed the keeper's dwelling, the refectory, the commissary and porters' cubicle, and space for the soldiers. The outer part served as a place for trading livestock, which was subject to inspection upon entry.

The third gate depicted is the 16th century Porta San Giovanni (then erroneously called Porta Celimontana). The gate is shown only from the outside, and the position of the "casini" for the militia is indicated beside the rusticated pillars[59]. While Porta San Giovanni was the physical entrance to the city, the boundary where the exchange of goods ("grascia") took place was moved immediately outside, at the in-

tersection of the main road and the bridge over a small stream called Marana[60]. There, a market for supplies was designed. It was enclosed with fixed barriers to separate the citizens from outsiders. A large shelter made of interwoven wood was erected there, where merchants and livestock could gather and take shelter from the rain. Another similar, but larger, structure was built in the countryside, divided into two cells, where crops and grains could be stored during bad weather. A small house was also prepared for the commissioner, next to the riverbank, serving as a common water source and washhouse[61]. Filtering measures were also applied to the other access route, the Tiber River (fig. 5). To prevent boats from entering, a rope was stretched at Porta Portese, which was controlled on both banks and supervised by officials (see also fig. 3, 5th row).
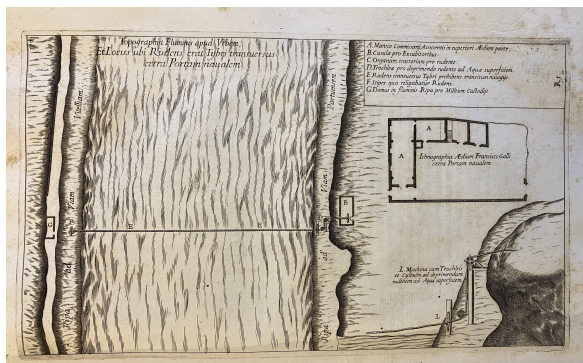

Fig. 5: Domenico Castelli, *Topographia Fluminis apud Urbem, Et Locus ubi Rudens erat Tybri transversus extra Portam navalem*. Acquaforte e bulino. In: Gerolamo Gastaldi, *Tractatus*, p. 157.

Disinfecting

Since the beliefs of the time regarded objects as potential carriers of the virus, the layout of locations and the design of devices for handling objects and goods were of great importance in the strategy set by Gastaldi, and therefore 15 of Castelli's 47 drawings concerned disinfection, then called "spurgare".

The Tiber River served as the primary route for provisioning the city, and all goods needed to undergo inspection and disinfection: upon landing on the riverbank, goods were deposited in an open area enclosed by palisades whose access was forbidden to Roman citizens. Along the Via Flaminia, stables were provided for livestock, and a buffer for trading functioned as filter between the countryside and the city domain. On

the opposite side of the road towards Porta del Popolo, on a property belonging to the Colonna family, an existing building was adapted by Castelli to house boilers ("caldare") for heating water to boil objects or create steam for disinfecting foodstuffs[62].

Disinfection also extended to the clothing of those interned in the lazarets. All clothing items were transported outside the city walls to specially prepared locations and laid on wooden frames for disinfection using perfumes and vapours. On the property of the Sannesio family, on the land between the Tiber River and the Via Flaminia, a pool was constructed for washing clothes. Meanwhile, even the horses became potential 'suspects' and had to be monitored within a designated building (fig. 6)[63] while inside the Aurelian Walls —but nonetheless within the "disabitato"— the vast Baths of Caracalla were used to lay out the purged clothes arriving from the lazarets[64]. The washing of this large quantity of clothes required the presence of running water. For this purpose, buildings were identified in the Marana area south of Porta San Giovanni, where fulling mills were constructed and installed[65]. In the same area, a building was used to disinfect correspondence and gold or silver coins found in the letters, that were stacked on a sieve next to which fires were lit to fumigate the room[66].
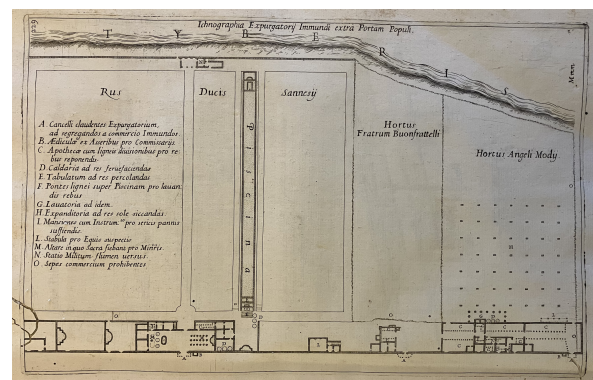

Fig. 6: Domenico Castelli, *Ichnographia Expurgatorÿ Immundi extra Portam Populi*. Acquaforte e bulino. In: Gerolamo Gastaldi, *Tractatus*, p. 229.

Segregating

As mentioned earlier, the Congregation's strategy to combat the plague involved quarantine as a measure of enforced segregation for both the sick and those suspected of being sick. Gastaldi's motto was to pro-

tect the healthy rather than to cure the sick. This necessitated the separation of the sick from the healthy. Specific areas of the city were isolated, such as Trastevere[67] and the Ghetto, and lazarets were established. The first of these was the Island of San Bartolomeo, now known as Tiber Island. As the number of infected individuals grew, other structures were converted into lazarets. Castelli's representations include Santa Maria della Consolazione where men and women were divided[68]; Casaletto of Pio V[69], San Pancrazio[70]; the Carcere Nuovo of Via Giulia, having separated baths for men and women[71]; the Monasteries of San Giuliano and Sant'Eusebio[72]; the San Saba complex[73]; and San Giacomo degli Incurabili for the beggar women[74]. All of these structures, except for two, were located within the city walls.

In addition to the pragmatic nature of this group of drawings, which served to define the spaces appropriated by Gastaldi and designated for lazarets, it is noteworthy that Castelli predominantly employs plan projection, with the exception of an external view of the Carcere Nuovo of Via Giulia. The drawings completely forgo the representation of the context —including the view of the prison— while incorporating elements such as the metric scale and the designation of functional spaces.
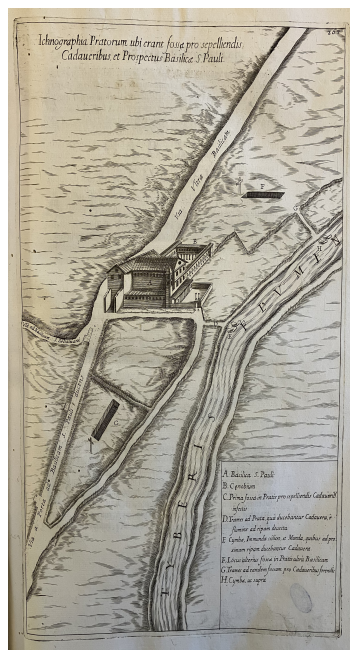

Fig. 7: Domenico Castelli, *Ichnographia Pratorum ubi erant fossæ pro sepelliendis Cadaveribus, et Prospectus Basilica S. Pauli*. Acquaforte e bulino. In: Gerolamo Gastaldi, *Tractatus*, p. 267.

Removing

Finally, the clothing and belongings of the infected were incinerated, while the bodies of the deceased were initially transported on a barge along the Tiber and then on carts (fig. 2) for burial in two large mass graves near San Paolo fuori le Mura (fig. 7). The final depiction by Castelli stands out from all others, being the only aerial view that considers the landscape as the ultimate place following the ordeal of the plague. Nonetheless, the pragmatic minds of the duo Gastaldi and Castelli do not dwell, as in the case of Louis Rouhier, on the representation of social implications, and, therefore, do not depict the intensification of emotions. On the contrary, the few written notes in this drawing indicate how even the large scale of the landscape becomes a device in the service of the long therapy implemented by the Swiss architect, where even the concealment of the corpse and its covering with quicklime responded to the belief that the disease could reawaken in a short time. This approach demonstrates how Castelli's representations incorporate the tools of a scientific technique —obviously shaped by the knowledge of the time— that had a specific governmental purpose, namely to regulate society during a crisis such as the plague. And it is for this reason that the Swiss architect's drawings were never published as standalone sheets, but found their *raison d'être* in accompanying Girolamo Gastaldi's medical treatise.

Vedute without viewers

What differentiates this epidemic from previous ones is that in the 17th century, the "spatialisation" of knowledge occurred, which, according to Foucault, "was one of the factors in the constitution of this knowledge as a science[75]." According to the French philosopher, the epistemological revolution in the sciences could not have occurred without incorporating spatial notions and references. Natural sciences were thus founded on the priority given to the observation of natural phenomena. This led to the ability to discern differences, that is, to classify the elements studied. Finally, spatialisation is achieved through the representation of the phenomenon, and in this, the printing technique played a decisive role.

In the case of the plague in Rome, the alliance between medical knowledge and spatial management

played a crucial role in transforming the epidemic crisis into a form of power in the hands of the Congregation, and thus the Pope, as the Congregation was a direct emanation of his authority. This power adopted the empirical method of observing the phenomenon of contagion, adapting its jurisprudence to this observation. This resulted in social classification based on religion (Christians and Jews), morality (prostitutes were expelled, beggars removed from the streets), gender (women were excluded from public space), control (doctors, policemen, notaries, commissioners were designated), as well as actual health (healthy and sick individuals) and presumed health (suspects and "brutti," those who had contact with the sick). These scientific procedures were echoed in printed publications: manuals, treatises, pamphlets, as well as briefs and edicts, and finally drawings of urban and architectural devices that ultimately made the social reorganisation perfectly superimposable on the physical space of the city.

In this sense, Castelli's representations contain a variety of subjects. First, they are obviously representations of Rome, like the views of Giovanni Battista Falda. However, unlike these, their purpose was not large-scale commercial printing, nor the direct representation of the Pope's achievements. Rather, they were the pure representation of the Congregation's normative choices. Second, the drawings contain — and do not anticipate— prescriptions formulated in political settings: they are the visual vehicle of norms established to limit the use of urban space by people. They define the paths and positions of the subjects in charge of controlling the same space. Thus, the norm, the prohibition, (and by difference, what deviates from the norm) is represented. Third, Castelli appropriates the *veduta* as a type of representation: but his *vedute* are devoid of viewers. Unlike the commercial views of the 17th century, these drawings do not involve the point of view of an observer looking at the city, but imply the scientific gaze of medicine that 'visits' the sick social body of Rome, apparently absent, but which, on the contrary, exists and is subject to its techniques of analysis and treatment.

The '*vedute* without viewers' are the association of views, plans, and technical devices combined into a single corpus of drawings. In this sense, in the repres-

entation of reality (classical views), the geometric and 'spatialising' rigor of the plans insinuates itself, constructing a discourse where a particular medical condition, and thus social and governmental, is associated with the position in space. Meanwhile, technical devices such as grates for fumigating correspondence or those for diverting the stream's water into the sewers demonstrate how Castelli (and thus the Pope through Gastaldi) implemented —and drawing is a fundamental tool— "a practical rationality governed by a conscious goal[76]."

V. Conclusion

The epidemic of 1656–57 struck Rome at a particularly significant historical moment. Domestically, the papacy was experiencing an economic crisis, while on the European front, its political influence was being overshadowed by the very Christian powers —France and Spain— on which the Pope relied in his battle against the Reformation. Moreover, the legal status of the city of Rome was contested. The development of the concept of extraterritoriality had allowed the expansion of diplomatic quarters through the imposition of the *franchises du quartier*. Rome had become the centre of European diplomacy: the major European kingdoms maintained diplomatic missions within the urban territory. However, this implied the presence of a potential internal enemy for the Papacy that required to be managed and countered. Consequently, political strategies for governing the territory and society were necessary, which Alexander VII would manifest through the architectural and urban works that characterised his *Roma Moderna*.

During this period, another internal enemy emerged that would affect the entire Roman society: the plague epidemic. Alexander granted full legal and governmental powers to the Congregation of Health, which, in turn, acted on the 'sick' social body by imposing governmental techniques that entailed the total reorganisation of public and private spaces. Medical science became the right hand of the actions of a prelate with a doctorate in law, Girolamo Gastaldi, who implemented it through the separation of the sick from the healthy, the confinement of the former, and quarantine for the latter. This governmental technique of society was not possible without adopting a different 'gaze' on the city,

capable of imposing 'norms' on the randomness of the late-medieval city and the diversity of the recent foreign presence in Rome. In this sense, the techniques of medicalization are not solely associated with pure welfare and the health of the population, as evidenced by the massive and pervasive deployment of the police force by the Congregation.

This gaze became, therefore, Alexander VII's tool for achieving his future architectural development plan for Rome, whose ambition cannot be deciphered without considering the experience of spatial governance during the biennium of the plague. Contributing to this was the brief but crucial work of Domenico Castelli —who likely died of this disease in 1657— whose drawings and *vedute* without viewers marked a pivotal shift in the urban policies of 17th century Rome.

Endnotes

1. This work was supported by the Carlsberg Foundation under Grant CF23-1239.
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5. Luciano Palermo, *Ricchezza privata e debito pubblico nello Stato della Chiesa durante il XVI secolo*, in: *Studi Romani* 22, (3), July 1, Rome 1974, pp. 298–311.
6. Fausto Piola Caselli, *Banchi privati e debito pubblico pontificio a Roma tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, in: *Banchi pubblici, banchi privati e monti di pietà nell'Europa preindustriale. Administration, operational techniques and economic roles*, Genoa 1991, pp. 463-495.
7. Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity*, Columbus 1999.
8. Giulia Calvi, *L'oro, il fuoco, le forche: la peste napoletana del 1656*, in: *Archivio Storico Italiano* 139 (3), Florence 1981, pp. 405–458. My translation.
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12. Ibid., p. 16.
13. "Congregazioni della Sanità tenute nel palazzo di Monte Cavallo, e loro risoluzioni" (Cartaceo; fascicoli legati, Roma, 1656), Fondo Corsini, Cors. 170 (34 C 6), ff. 1r-162r, 227r-251r, 253r, 335r, Biblioteca dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, f. 14. Mentioned in Pietro Savio, *Ricerche sulla peste di Roma degli anni 1656-1657*, in: *Archivio della Società romana di storia patria* XCV, 1974, pp. 113–142.
14. Francesco Barberini, Giulio Sacchetti, Gilberto III Borromeo, Decio Azzolini, Lorenzo Imperiale, Federico Pietro Sforza, Pietro Vito Ottoboni, Camillo Astalli, Giovan Carlo de' Medici, Marcello Santacroce and Friedrich von Hessen. In Savio 1974, pp. 113–142.
15. Sforza Pallavicino 1839, p. 8.
16. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York 1995, p. 198.
17. Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, Cambridge 2011, p. 8.
18. Giovanni Andrea Lorenzani. "Il contagio [peste] di Roma [e di Napoli] principiato dal mese di maggio 1656 e terminato del mese di novembre 1657 nel pontificato di Alessandro VII di gloriosa memoria" (Rome, 1702), Urb.lat.1704, ff. 222r-227v, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. The document has been analysed in Savio 1974, pp. 113–142.
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20. "Chig.H. III.57" (Roma, Agosto 1660), Chig.H. III.57, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: f. 481v.
21. On the introduction of the waxed jacket during the plague epidemics, see C. Salzmann, *Masques portés par les médecins en temps de peste*, in: *Æsculape* (22), 1932, pp. 5–14, and more recently Herbert J. Mattie, *Men in Tights: Charles De Lorme (1584–1678) and the First Plague Costume*, in: *European Journal for the History of Medicine and Health*, 81 (1) 2023, pp. 1–13. The practice of wearing a wax jacket in 1656–57 Rome is demonstrated by Gastaldi who explains that physicians "praeferri iubebat facem ardentem e cera, & vas aceto plenum, in quod immittebat manus antequam appropinquaret ad aegrotum, pulsus tentandi causa; indumentum sibi aptaverat e lino novo infusa cera macerato." Gerolamo Gastaldi, *Tractatus de avertenda et profliganda peste politico-legalis eo lucubratus tempore, quo ipse loemocomiorum primo, mox sanitatis commissarius generalis fuit, peste urbem inaduente anno MDCLVI & LVII*, Bononiae 1684, p. 70. The passage is mentioned in Carlo M. Cipolla, *Il pestifero e contagioso morbo: Combattere la peste nell'Italia del Seicento*, Bologna 2012.
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24. Alessandro VII, "Chig.H. III.57" (Roma, 1656), Chig.H. III.57, ff. 493v-498v, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
25. Ibid., f. 497r.
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41. Carlo Cipolla, *Faith, Reason, and the Plague in Seventeenth-Century Tuscany,* New York 1981, pp. 2-3.
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52. Ibid., p. 5.
53. Sonnino 2006.
54. For an estimate of the dead in the Jewish Ghetto, see Sonnino 2006.
55. The Congregation followed some strategic plans already adopted during the plague of 1630, hence the choice in 1656 to repurpose some of the same churches and other buildings as lazarettos. See Simona Benedetti, *La peste a Roma: disegni di Carlo Rainaldi (1633)*, in: *Palladio: rivista di storia dell'architettura* (33), Rome 2004, pp. 29–54.
56. Domenico Castelli, "Barb.lat. 4991" (1657 1656), Barb.lat. 4991, ff. 3r-46v, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. The payment for his work is documented in Leandro Ozzola, *L'arte alla corte di Alessandro VII*, Rome 1908, p. 40. I owe the knowledge of this to Barker 2006.
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60. Ibid., p. 141.
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Abstract

Architectural historiography has considered 17th-century Roman art and architecture as a form of self-celebration for the Pontiff, the Roman *curia*, or one of the city's renowned noble families. Consequently, the major achievements in the representation of architecture and the city—from Tempesta, Maggi, and Greuter to Falda and Cruyl—have been linked to the same historiography. Scholars have attributed the technical development and content depicted in 17th-century maps and views to the recognition of built space as an element inseparable from the rise in power of the emerging social classes of the time. These representations constructed an image of Rome designed to orient masses of pilgrims along the stages of the Christian faith, to legitimise papal power through association with the glory of Imperial antiquity, or more simply, to show the emergence of new powers on the Roman scene. However, social, economic, and biological crises bring about new forms of representation that often contribute to readjusting policy objectives and values in relation to the built environment. The plague epidemic of 1656-57 in Rome was one such disruption. The architectures designed by Domenico Castelli to control, separate, disinfect, and dispose of goods and people produced a new cartography of Rome, often disconnected from the baroque epic. Moreover, Castelli's series of 47 full-page engravings (some of which are still unpublished) contained in the posthumous *Tractatus de avertenda et profliganda peste politico-legalis* (1684) by Gerolamo Gastaldi exemplify a new representation of Roman urban space. Therefore, this contribution aims to show how the plague became the phenomenon through which the techniques and purposes entrusted to architectural representation, as developed by Domenico Castelli, determined a point of discontinuity in the history of urban representation of Rome that historiography has not yet fully considered.

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Title

Paulina León

The Sick Sun: Poetics of Contagion in Seventeenth-Century Mexico City*

"Of all the forms attributed to pandemics, we rarely see poetic ones," writes Lakshmi Krishnan, "yet it is poetry that disposes of endings"[1]. This statement holds particularly true for the context of the early modern Spanish empire. Across the vast territories of the empire, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, poetic texts often accompanied or commemorated festive processions dedicated to interceding patron saints, bringing together the heterogenous population of cities ravaged by epidemics to celebrate the end of contagion[2]. Urban poetry, circulated in small chapbooks, honored the miraculous intercession and accompanying festivities held in honor of figures such as Santa Rosalía during Palermo's plague of 1624, the Virgin of Guadalupe during Madrid's plague of 1682, and Jesus the Nazarene and Mary Magdalene during Cádiz's epidemics outbreak of 1681[3]. Poetry and festivities, both narratively and performatively, offered a formal resolution to plague's devastation—a resolution that, though officially instituted, was also collectively and socially affirmed.

This article focuses on the relationship between poetry and epidemics. Building on Krishnan's remarks, it explores how poetry in seventeenth-century Mexico not only disposed of epidemic endings; it also encouraged its diverse audience to reconceptualize time, and in so doing, reconsider their past and recent outbreak experiences. To show this, I analyze a series of *Quintillas* (five-lined stanzas) that narrate the festive processions held for the Virgin of Los Remedios (hereafter referred to as Remedios) in Mexico City, 1668, celebrating her divine intercession in ending a *viruela* outbreak and bringing rainfall after a period of drought[4] Within the linear narrative traced by the *Quintillas* — progressing from the sorrow of pestilence and drought to the of joy of rainfall and deliverance from contagion — a cyclical understanding of epidemic outbreaks and natural disasters emerges. Articulating ecological and spiritual imaginaries at the intersection of Catholic faith, European theories of contagion, and Nahua mythology, this poetic composition is shaped and informed by the historical experiences of past epidemic outbreaks and natural disasters in the central valley of Mexico.

Scholarship on epidemic outbreaks has traditionally adhered to an event-based linear perspective. In his provocative 1989 article, "What is an Epidemic?," Charles Rosenberg argued that health crises unfold as a drama following a basic sequence: "Epidemics start at a moment in time, proceed on a stage limited in space and duration, follow a plot line of increasing and revelatory tension, move to a crises of individual and collective character, then drift towards closure"[5]. Generative as Rosenberg's paradigm has been, several scholars nowadays have summoned us to defy the conventional notions of outbreaks' temporal limits. In the introduction to the special issue of pandemic histories, for example, Jacob Steere-Williams and Claire Edington ask the question: "While historians of disease have long used the language of "framing," and considered the "dramaturgy" of epidemic events, what other conceptual tools do we have at our disposal to narrate epidemics in ways that help to capture the diversity of experiences with epidemics at both a local and global scale?"[6] The *Quintillas* analyzed below continually resist the linear chronology of epidemic outbreaks, turning instead to a cyclical understanding of them grounded on a *long durée* memory. Beyond a linear chronology, the poetics of contagion unveil a cultural memory of pandemics in seventeenth-century Mexico City that inform how these episodes were experienced and interpreted.

A Bibliographic Note

These *Quintillas* are the subject of an attribution debate. We have knowledge of two different editions: the first one, printed in Mexico City in 1668 by the

printing house of Bernardo Calderón, is nowhere to be found today, but is listed in several bibliographic repositories including that of José Mariano Beristáin de Souza (1756-1817) and Antoni Palau i Dulcet (1867-1954). The second edition (fig. 1) was published 57 years later, in 1725, in the port city of Cádiz, in Spain[7]. This article's research is based on this edition, nowadays kept at the *Centro de Estudios de Historia de México* in Mexico City (082.172 V.A and gathered within Book 22,146). Another copy of this edition is kept at the Benson Latin American Collection (GZ 282.7 P752).

Until recently, both these editions were attributed to Alonso Ramírez de Vargas, about whom little biographical information survives. According to the Beristáin de Souza, Ramírez de Vargas was born to noble parents in Mexico, held several administrative posts in the colonial government, including local governor (*capitán*) and regional magistrate (*alcalde mayor*), and was well-regarded by the ruling elites of the viceroyalty[8]. Martha Lilia Tenorio's anthology of New Spain's poetry shows Ramírez de Vargas was a prolific writer of festive accounts (*Relaciones de fiestas*), folk songs (*Villancicos*), and loose poems. The reason for this attribution is straightforward: the 1725 edition claims the author of the *Quintillas* was Ramírez de Vargas.

In 2013, Judith Farré Vidal cast doubt on this attribution. While at the John Carter Brown Library, she discovered a set of *Quintillas* identical to those of the 1725 edition signed by Ramírez de Vargas, but authored by friar Alfonso de Ena and printed in Mexico by Juan Ruiz in 1668 (BA668 .E56d). Farré Vidal suggests that the false attribution to Ramírez de Vargas may have been part of an editorial strategy common at the time, where printers published works attributed to more famous authors in order to boost sales[9].

Determining the authorship of these *Quintillas* is beyond the scope of this article. After all, the argument holds regardless of who their author is. However, this bibliographic conundrum speaks not only to the popularity of Remedios as a Marian devotion across the Spanish empire. It also reinforces, as Domenico Cecere and Alessandro Tuccillo argue, that early modern emergencies generated a widespread
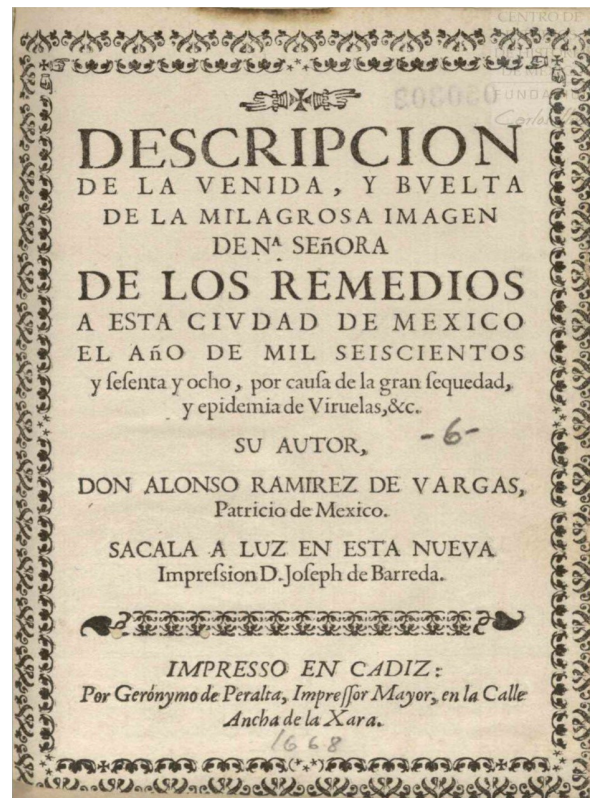

Fig. 1: Frontispiece of the 1725 edition of the Quintillas, 1725. Print, 14 x 19 cm. Cádiz, Spain. Centro de Estudios de Historia de México. (Digitized image by Centro de Estudios de Historia de México).

demand for information, concern for experiences of crises elsewhere, and communicative exchanges across the Iberian Peninsula and other territories of the Hispanic Monarchy, a claim that has yet to fully account for poetic forms like this one[10]. Persuaded by Farré Vidal's claim, and until I am able to consult the version of Alfonso de Ena, the analyses of this article mostly refer only to the *Quintillas* (corresponds with plural) or 'the author,' to avoid assuming or reproducing a possibly mistaken attribution.

Remedios and the Seasons of Adversity

Literary scholars have long regarded poetry as a cornerstone of the cultural and social life of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Martha Lilia Tenorio explains "almost all Novohispanic lyrical verse is collective and civic, committed to describing and praising the festivities to which it is linked." By the seventeenth century,

poetry—often commissioned by ecclesiastic or government authorities or motivated by literary contests—constituted "a sort of collective memory, in which the circumstantial became essential." These circumstances were, of course, immensely diverse: from theological disputes to canonizations; from the arrival of a viceroy to the city, to miraculous events. And yet, a Baroque formula for poetry and celebrations can be clearly articulated: "celebration, which presupposes social cohesion and ideological intent, and poetry, which, in turn, implies a certain degree of cultural cohesion—a literature created by few, but enjoyed and celebrated by many[11]".

Titled *Description of the coming and going of the miraculous image of Our Lady of los Remedios to this City of Mexico on the year of 1668, on account of the great drought and viruela epidemic*, the *Quintillas* adhere to the Baroque formula identified by Tenorio. They center around the festive procession held for Remedios on June 13, 1668. For nearly three centuries of colonial rule in Mexico City, Remedios was the most popular deity for which processions were held outside the liturgical calendar[12]. Experts like Rosario Granados Salinas assure Remedios's cult was inextricably attached to the memory of the conquest; the Virgin was often called the *conquistadora*[13].

But as Granados Salinas also notes, the memory of the conquest was not static throughout Mexico's three centuries of colonial rule, and neither was the association of this Marian image with Spanish oppression. Remedios might have aided conquistadors in their favorable military deed but, according to popular belief, her statue had been miraculously found by an Indian cacique or headman of the otomí people, Juan Ce Cuautli, hiding in a maguey, around 1540, an image that became a trope in Remedios' iconography well into the eighteenth century (fig. 2). It was on this spot where, allegedly, her shrine had been built. Possibly created by the caciques of Tacuba as a way of exalting their Christian faith, this myth nevertheless promoted a widely successful adoption of the Virgin amongst Indigenous populations.

In his chronicle of Remedios's origins and miracles in Mexico, the Mercedarian friar Luis de Cisneros meticulously describes a procession held on

Fig. 2: Miguel Cabrera, *Finding of Our Lady of Remedios*, ca. 1750. Church of Merced de las Huertas, Mexico City. Image from Fernando Franciles López.

June 11, 1616, to honor her after a long period of drought ended, offering a detailed blueprint of how such processions unfolded. These processions involved carrying the statue of Remedios—housed in her shrine, 11 kilometers northwest of Mexico City—to the Cathedral in the central plaza of Mexico City. Her voyage towards New Spain's capital city was a sumptuous and ceremonial event. Secured within a silver tabernacle, Remedios's crossing would begin early, at around 7 a.m. Transported on an elaborate float decorated with golden cloths and carried by priest porters, the Virgin's entourage traversed through the *Calzada de Tacuba*. Indigenous authorities from the surroundings were responsible for holding up a canopy to protect the holy statue. At around 11 a.m., the cortège sheltered themselves from noon's heat in the Franciscan convent of Tacuba.

Finally, they reached the parish church of Santa Veracruz, where the official procession began.

At this point, Remedios and her already large convoy were joined by religious and secular authorities: the city council (*Audiencia*), the Viceroy, ecclesiastic authorities, religious orders, the city's confraternities, and the common people. All were arranged in a strict order that reflected social and political hierarchies. Regimented, they made their way to the Cathedral in the city center. This strict order, however, does not diminish the festive atmosphere of seventeenth-century religious processions. Cisneros evokes a jubilant and emotive quality to the event: music from wind instruments, fireworks, and blasts from artillery salutes. Approaching the Cathedral as dusk was setting in, people lit candles and torches from decorated balconies and roofs. In Cisneros's account, the setting darkness is defied by the hundreds of lit candles that surrounded Remedios. Remedios' arrival to the Cathedral was triumphant and stirring.

Contagion and the Sun

The *Quintillas* similarly summon this gradual build-up towards celebratory relief that took place in Mexico City, in June 1668. Made up of 154 five-lined stanzas and following the conventions of festive accounts, the poem follows a linear chronology that can be divided into 5 parts: First, an invocation to Urania, the Greek goddess of astronomy and astrology (stanzas 1-4). Next, the author sets up the scene of the outbreak's inception, striving to be precise about the climatic conditions it develops in (stanzas 5-12). Stanzas 13 to 66 paint a bleak picture of the effects of diseases and drought on people, flora and fauna—men, women, dogs, birds, lambs, myrtle leaves, mulberry trees— these stanzas pulse with dramatic intensity as an inverted pastoral landscape throbs with death, thirstiness, and misery. Subsequently, stanzas 67 to 120 describe the kickoff of Remedios's procession, following the viceroy's orders, who was, at the time, Antonio de Toledo Molina y Salazar (1622-1715), commonly known as the Marqués de Mancera. This section is packed with embellishing descriptions of the Virgin's voyage—taking off from Tacuba and moving through the city—along with the crowds that follow and are moved to contrition by the sight of her: guilds, pious communities, and religious orders meld with secular clergy, and city councilors. In these scenes, contagion brings together, if only temporarily, a diverse and segmented community that gathers to pray for divine intercession. Briefly, all survivors are affiliated through the fear of death and Catholic piety. Finally, once divine relief has been granted, stanzas 121 to 154 close off the poem by asserting the people's gratitude and appreciation to God, and Remedios's intercession.

Alongside this linear narrative arc, the *Quintillas* introduce a cyclical temporality through various elements of the poem. Structurally, the five-line stanzas with an alternating rhyme scheme in octosyllabic lines create a lighter tone that nods towards a degree of familiarity with a kind of event that repeatedly upends daily life but is nevertheless expected to end. This is further reinforced by the author's strategic use of the *jocoserio* style at key moments of the poem; what Alain Bègue describes as a combination of mockery and seriousness used to critique social vices[14]. In the *Quintillas*, this seriocomic style critiques the social and medical failings exposed during outbreaks, while the dominant use of the past tense distances the suffering from the moment of recitation. Humor and verb tenses together create a sense of detachment from the shock of the outbreak and drought, emphasizing that the present is no longer under their threatening grip. Let us look at the *Quintillas* to illustrate these dynamics.

The beginning of the poem links the past hardships to the natural cycles of the seasons. The opening stanzas make an invocation to Urania, the Greek muse of astronomy and astrology. Daughter of Zeus by Mnemosyne, Urania was also known to be, in the early modern period, the muse of religious verse. [15] The author conflates both of Urania's domains in his text, in which poetry and astrology come together to sing of the drought and *viruela* outbreak that afflicted the inhabitants of New Spain's capital city. By summoning Urania, the author foreshadows two important and related notions that underpin the poem as a whole. First, that there is an inextricable interdependence between celestial bodies, the environment, and living beings, echoing paradigms of the time that conceived the universe as an interconnected whole. Second, and related to this theory, the author advances an inclusive notion of 'life' affected by contagion and

drought, that encompasses not only human life, but also animal and natural life (rivers, seas and plants), as well as cosmic life (the Sun). This expansion of the scale of contagion's damage determines the *Quintillas's* narrative scope. After the invocation to Urania, the poetic persona sets up the scene of the outbreak's inception, striving to be precise about the climatic conditions it develops in[16]:

5. Era el Verano: más no; la verdad fija esté: pues si el <u>Verano</u> invernó, faltaré a la Historia yo, diciendo lo que no fue.	5. It was Summer: but no; let truth be set for if Summer wintered I'll be untrue to History saying what was not.
6. Era el Invierno: tampoco; que hubo calores impíos; a mil dudas me provoco: tiempo fue de escalofríos, conque andaba el tiempo loco.	6. It was winter: neither; Since there was impious heat; a thousand doubts befell me: Time it was for chills, A mad time indeed.
[...]	[...]
8. En fin, por el frenesí de la confusión severa, en su mudanza advertí, sin duda alguna, que era un <u>tiempo de sumesfuí</u>	8. Alas, in the midst of stern confusion I realized this change marked without a doubt a time of *sumesfuí*

A time of sumesfuí. The climatic confusion rhetorically built throughout the stanzas is condensed in the term of *sumesfuí* at the end of stanza 8. The term closely resembles Sumesfuit, the name of a character that appeared in Francisco de Quevedo's anthology of baroque poetry titled *Parnaso Español* (1648). Described as a "pastor vejete," that is, the comic old shepherd, the character of Sumesfuit also features in the *comedias* of Agustín Moreto y Cavana's *Scorn with Scorn* [El desden con el desdén] (1654), and Jorge de Cañizares's *Gyges's Ring* [El anillo de Giges] (1764). According to Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, the name of Sumesfuit is the union of three persons of the Latin verb 'sum', to be: 'sum' and 'es' from the present tense, and 'fuit' from the perfect indicative[17]. In other words, the name literally translates to 'I am-You are-He/She/It was' all joined together. In José de Cañizares's *Gyges's Ring*, Sumesfuit describes himself as "a servant/ of a puppeteer master/ who is seen and not seen/ who walks, runs, and sits still." Playing with his name's performative connotations, he also calls himself 'Oath,' "because they can't call me/ without dropping verbs"[18]. As his name foreshadows, Sumesfuit behaves in erratic and unpredictable ways.

However, in the *Quintillas*, Sumesfuit is not a character. If the author borrowed it from contempora-

ry plays, he transformed it into a locution that represents the period's chaotic climatic phenomena. Additionally, the spelling uses a Hispanicized form, replacing the Latin 'fuit' with the Spanish 'fui,' the first-person singular of the simple past, transforming the phrase into "I am-You are-I was". Diachronic corpuses of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish of the Americas yield no results for this term. Nevertheless, within the stanza that invokes the Baroque trope of *mudanza* (roughly translating to "transformation" or "mutability," as it reflects themes of impermanence and flux), the locution of Sumesfuí underscores the chaos unleashed by the unpredictable behavior of the weather that challenges the common expectations of the seasons. The delirium and bewilderment evoked in stanza 8 are the natural outcome of the poetic persona's constant unsaying in stanzas 5 and 6. By retracting his statements—"It was Summer: hold on, no"; "It was winter; also false"—, and expressing his doubts and fears—"a thousand doubts befell me/ it was a time of shivers"—the author presents the weather not only as a cause of contagion, but also as a prelude to the trials to befall on the population of Mexico City: the beginning of a season of adversity.

By starting off his narrative of contagion with the state of the weather, Ramírez is complying with the period's understanding of the causes of contagious diseases. Recovering Aristotelian doctrine, for example, Galen explained there was a tripartite system of causation of diseases: a cohesive cause, an antecedent cause, and an initial cause. Vivian Nutton explains:

The initial cause was something external—heat, cold, a blow on the head—that led to harmful changes in the body's condition by an alteration of the humours. The antecedent cause was a predisposition of the body to be affected by a disease: some people catch colds more readily than others, even though they inhabit the same environment [...]. Finally, the cohesive cause, which was brought by the other two, acting either singly or together, was a state of an organ or bodily part which prevented it from exercising its proper function[19].

Galen's tripartite system of causation partially supports Ramírez's conception of contagion, as the initial causes—the unruly weather—are carefully described. However, in the following stanzas, after detailing the dryness of March and the scorching heat of June, Ramírez shifts his focus to the Sun, before considering the people affected by disease.

12. En su color admiró	12. In his color [the Sun] perceived
lo populoso y lo yermo	the crowded and the dry
y espantado dije yo:	fearful, I said:
¿Quién ha visto al Sol enfermo?	Who has seen a sickened Sun?
¿Quien con achaque le vio?	Who has seen him ail?
13. Cuyo influjo pestilente	13. Its pestilent influx
ocasionó desatado,	caused without control
en todo el reino doliente,	across the hurting kingdom
muchos males de pensado,	many ailments purposely
muchas muertes de repente.	many sudden deaths.

Astrological explanations for contagious diseases were not infrequent at the time across Europe and the Americas. In fact, astrology played a preeminent role in medical and philosophical explanations of epidemic outbreaks. In Diego de Cisneros's *Sitio, naturaleza y geografía de la Ciudad de México* (1618), for example, he uses astrological knowledge to explain Mexico City's most frequent afflictions, as well as the population's humoral composition. However, the specific illness of the Sun in these verses can also be linked to Nahua mythology.

The Sun played a central role in the cosmogony of indigenous peoples of the Central Valley of Mexico. The plot varies according to sources and regions, but the anthropological work of Guy Stresser-Péan allows us to identify one constant element across the variations of Mesoamerica: a sickly man who was granted the privilege from the Gods to turn into the star that would shine light over the world and its people[20]. According to the version of the *Florentine Codex* (Book 7)—the ambitious project that sought to create a bilingual (Spanish and Nahuatl), illustrated encyclopedia of the belief system and customs of Nahua culture pursued by the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún and his Nahua collaborators—the Gods gathered to decide who would be graced with the honor of becoming the Sun. In a mocking tone, some proposed Nanahuatzin, a man whose name is a nickname for someone suffering from an unidentified skin disease, often interpreted as leprosy or syphilis. Proving them wrong, Nanahuatzin is courageous enough to take on the challenge the Gods set out for him: to immolate himself. On account of his bravery, Nanahuatzin—who bears the Nahuatl suffix -tzin that denotes respect and fondness—becomes the Sun, one of the most highly esteemed deities of the Nahua.
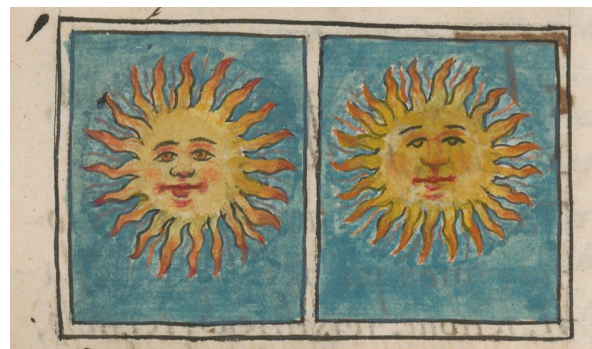

Fig. 3: Image of the Sun in the *Florentine Codex*, Book 7: The Sun Moon and Stars, Folio 1v. Digital Florentine Codex, Getty Research Institute.

Almost a century later from the production of the *Florentine Codex*, the *Quintillas* do not make any explicit relationship between the Sun and Nanahuatzin's myth, and yet both texts personalize the star and remark on its changes of colors as a phenomenon that directly affects the mental and/or physical state of living beings on Earth. In the Spanish text that accompanies Figure 3, for example, an author writes:

Other times, it looks whitish [the Sun], and other times it rises having a sickly color because of the fog or the clouds covering it. When there is an eclipse, the sun turns red. It looks as if the sun is getting restless or upset, or it sways or turns over and becomes very yellow. As soon as the people see this, they immediately become agitated, and a great fear seizes them. And then the women cry out loud, and the men yell as they hit their mouths with their hands. And there would be loud screaming, shouting, and yelling everywhere[21].

The fragment from the Spanish column of the *Florentine Codex* parallels the causality of the *Quintillas*'s verses: first comes the sickness of the Sun, which then results in the altered state of the population, whether it be panic as in the *Florentine Codex*, or spreading infection, as in the *Quintillas*.

The paintings of the Sun in the *Codex* (Fig. 3) further highlight the star's personalization: with varied facial expressions and tones, the two depictions connect the star's physical appearance to its internal mood. The work of Alessandra Russo invites us to approach the visual archives of New Spain beyond the syncretic paradigm and consider instead the "untranslatable" quality of images and objects; that is, the inexhaustible process of translation and interpretation of Iberian art[22]. To do so, one must return objects and images to their *long durée* in order to better grasp the intersections and mixtures of artistic pro-

ductions where American, European, African, and Asian traditions came together and create novel artistic configurations.

Russo's concept of untranslatable images proves particularly insightful when applied to the poetic image of the Sun in the *Quintillas*. While the association with Nanahuatzin's myth is one possible interpretation of the "sick Sun" in these verses, it more broadly highlights the untranslatability of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century New Spain's conceptions and experiences of contagion. These were shaped by an intimate relationship between heavenly bodies and humanity — an ecology forged within a *long-durée* history.

When we think of New World epidemics, we tend to think of the devastating pandemics of the sixteenth century. Despite the controversy between the "high" and "low" estimates of the American continent's pre-contact population, nobody today denies that the encounter between native American populations, Africans, and Europeans triggered a catastrophic demographic collapse of indigenous peoples throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries[23]. In some regions of the continent, more than 90% of the native population died. Massimo Livi-Bacci, however, explains that the issue goes well beyond the numbers: new diseases imported from Europe and Africa became significantly more lethal when combined with the effects of forced labor and enslavement, land dispossession, territorial displacement, and the conquistador's cruelty and violence towards the native population. When these factors are considered, epidemics cease to be exclusively "demographic cataclysms"— purely natural events driven solely by germs—; they rather become cultural phenomena largely shaped, experienced, and endured by people.

The work of Jennifer Scheper Hughes has been instrumental in shifting the focus of epidemic scholarship of colonial Latin America from numbers and demography to cultural dimensions, particularly with regards to systems of belief and religious organization. In her work *The Church of the Dead* (2021), she argues that the mortality caused by the cocoliztli epidemic of 1576–81, which claimed nearly two million lives, plunged Spanish evangelizers into despair while prompting Indigenous survivors to strategically reclaim theopolitical jurisdictions across Mexico's central valley. More recently, in her article "Paying Tribute for the Dead," (2023) she has also argued that this same epidemic outbreak shaped labor practices in colonial Mexico. Scheper Hughes' work demonstrates epidemic outbreaks in the Americas fundamentally shaped socio-political structures throughout the first decades of the colony.

Recurrent waves of epidemic outbreaks significantly affected this region between 1520 and 1580. However, towards the end of the seventeenth century, a change in the disease regime took place. In his *Historia Ecleciastica Indiana*, Franciscan Gerónimo de Mendieta reports an outbreak in New Spain in 1595, but makes a telling observation: "Another general pestilence came about, a mix of *sarampión*, *paperas* and *tabardillo*, from which hardly a man has been left standing, although by the clemency and mercy of our most benign God, not as many have died as they used to in other outbreaks"[24]. Mendieta's observations outline a shift in the disease regime of the region. William McNeill has referred to this as a "modern disease regime" achieved through a "biological balance" that no longer threatened with the mass death of one group[25]. Following Livi Bacci's approach to demographic processes, biological equilibrium must be understood as a multi-factored phenomenon in which *mestizaje*, political stabilization, and the establishment of institutions such as hospitals and universities, contributed to a distinct relationship between hosts and parasites in New Spain.

Despite this disease regime shift, epidemic outbreaks kept affecting the population of the central valley of Mexico throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Charles Gibson lists 16 epidemic outbreaks of diverse nature (cocoliztli, sarampión, viruelas, tabardillo) for the seventeenth century alone[26]. While scholarship has paid much less attention to these outbreaks, focusing on the demographic demise of the sixteenth century caused by epidemics, the *Quintillas* remind us how important and recurrent they were. In these verses, contagion takes place across different types of bodies: a sick sun unleashes the pestilent influx that afflicts the Kingdom, a metonym of both the people and the territory. Thus begins a lengthy description of Mexico

City's ordeals that begins by portraying how disease prompts a swift and vehement decomposition of people's bodies[27]:

14. De viruelas salpicados, a rigores importunos, morían los más pintados; y si escapaban algunos, estos eran señalados.	14. From splatters of viruelas, to untimely harshness, the most tinted ones died; and if any escaped, they did so marked.
15. A muchos hacían fieros las Reumas muy inquïetas hinchándose tan severos, que, aunque fuesen Caballeros, se vieron pobres trompetas.	15. Many were fiercely tormented by the restless reumas swelling up so severely, that even Knights became pitiful trumpets.
16. Unos, que malos se veían, con sangrarse era acabada la enfermedad que sentían; y otros, muriendo, decían: A Dios, con la colorada.[28]	16. Some, looking ill, after bloodletting themselves saw the ailment resume while others, dying, said: Godspeed, with the colored disease.

Harsh *viruelas*, fierce *reumas* that affect the respiratory system, a flushing ailment he calls "la colorada," and later on talk of "erispelas," a type of bacterial skin infection: the enumeration of diseases in these verses vividly portrays the encompassing range of the epidemic outbreak that marks the bodies ("morían los más pintados"), weakens even the strongest, ("que aunque fuesen Caballeros,/ se vieron pobres Trompetas") and claims numerous lives ("y otros, muriendo, decían/ A Dios con la colorada"). These verses vividly illustrate the unique epidemiological landscape of seventeenth-century Mexico City, characterized by its multi-racial composition, including Spaniards, creoles, diverse Indigenous nations, enslaved and freed Black people, and Asian inhabitants. Consequently, epidemic outbreaks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often comprised multiple illnesses, what Woodrow Borah refers to as "composite epidemics"[28]. This overlap of diseases in a multicultural setting gave rise to multi-paradigm disease categories, some medically recognized and others colloquially coined, as the verses illustrate.

The devastation depicted by the *Quintillas* does not stop at the human, as earlier mentioned. Although the *Quintillas* allude to all sorts of animal species, the author of the verses had a clear predilection for birds, all affected by drought: the Cardinal questions his superiority, the Hawk her diligence, the sparrow hawks (gavilán) steal some chickens, the crows (cuervos) desperately seek fruits, the Sun harms the herons (garzas), and the ducks (patos) swim in an empty lake. Although these damages are more explicitly related to the drought, the diversity of birds in Ramírez's poem evoke the material reality of Mexico City, providing a poetic rendering of what Antonio Rubial García and Jessica Ramírez Méndez refer to as "an amphibian city." Throughout the colonial period, Mexico City presented a lacustrine landscape, despite countless efforts to drain and dry its bodies of water[29]. Canoes, canals, and ditches in Ramírez's verses remind the reader of Mexico City's double life: part aquifer, part terrestrial.[30] The *Quintillas* encourage us to reconsider—or at least broaden—our understanding of Borah's concept of 'composite epidemics'. Epidemic outbreaks were not only made up of multiple diseases, but also frequently coincided with other natural disasters, a reality that as the *Quintillas* demonstrate, shapes the cultural dimensions of epidemics.

Let us not forget that the imagery in these *Quintillas* is framed by the miraculous intervention of Remedios and her merciful rescue of the diverse living beings of Mexico City. According to the diary of Antonio de Robles, Remedios was brought to the capital on a Wednesday, "due to illness and lack of water"[31]. At 2 p.m., that same day, as the *Quintillas* also narrate, it began to rain. Relieved and grateful, the *Quintillas* portray a crowd restored with life and serenity. The season of adversity is behind them. It is perhaps Remedios, more than all of the other elements analyzed in this article, who epitomizes the role of cyclical temporalities in the cultural imaginary of epidemics and natural disasters. According to Luis de Cisneros, the first Remedios procession dates to 1577, when viceroy Don Martín Enríquez and Archbishop Don Pedro Moya de Contreras personally escorted the virgin from her shrine to Mexico City, asking for her intercession in one of the land's deadliest epidemic outbreaks of *cocoliztli*. Since then, Granados Salinas calculates Remedios's statue was carried through Mexico City's streets fifty-seven times in three hundred years. Either in the form of petitionary or thanksgiving processions, "forty-five out of [these] fifty-seven times […] the procession took place because of drought, disease, or famine." The *conquistadora* thus became the keeper of the population.

The repetition of Remedios's intercessions protecting the population of Mexico from epidemic outbreaks should not be mistaken for formulaic veneration. This article argues that, at least in the case of epidemic outbreaks—events closely connected to her devotion—the poetic texts and celebratory festivities stemming from her cult preserve and transmit a cultural memory of past hardships. In this sense, poetry operates as a vessel that both archives and updates collective experiences of disease and disaster. Turning back to Tenorio's concise definition, Baroque poetry should be understood as "a civic conversation, a public art, a dialogue between the inner self and the world"[32]. The *Quintillas* civic conversation spans across temporalities, engaging with past systems of knowledge while emphasizing that hardship lies on the future horizon, with Remedios remaining the steadfast support, the people's unwavering protector.

Endnotes

* I want to express my gratitude to Larissa Brewer-García and Martha Lilia Tenorio for their invaluable help in developing the ideas for this article.

1. Lakshmi Krishnan, *Pandemic Forms*, in: *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 79 (no. 4), 2024, p. 311, https://academic.oup.com/jhmas/issue/79/4.

2. In a recent article, Samuel K. Cohn examines the festive cultures marking the end of epidemics in late 16th-century Italy, characterized by poetry recitations, elaborate city decorations, and the boisterous sounds of artillery, trumpets, and tambourines. See Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *Epidemics that End with a Bang*, in: *Centaurus. Journal of the European Society for the History of Science*, 64.1, 2022, pp. 207-216, https://dx.doi.org/10.1484/J. CNT.5.128785. For more on plague poetry in sixteenth century Italy, also see Cohn's chapter *The 'Liberation' of the City and Plague Poetry*, in: *Cultures of Plague: Medical Thinking at the End of the Renaissance*, Oxford 2010, pp. 140-160.

3. In a recently published article, I explore the role of poetry and festivities regarding this epidemic outbreak in Cádiz. Specifically, I demonstrate how poetry fashions a triumphal chronology of the plague outbreak, re-establishing the social and political order of the port city in the aftermath of this health crisis. See *How to End and Epidemic: The Politics of Poetry in Seventeenth-Century Cádiz*, in: *Calíope. Journal of the Society for Renaissance and Baroque Hispanic Poetry*, 29, issue 2, 2024, pp. 235-260 https://scholarlypublishingcollective. org/psup/caliope .

4. Throughout this text, I retain the original terms for diseases such as 'viruela(s)', to avoid equating them with modern disease categories, which risk stripping them of their social and cultural contexts.

5. Charles Rosenberg, *What is an Epidemic?*, in: *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 94, no. 4, 2020, p. 564.

6. Jacob Steere-Williams and Claire Edington, *Introduction: Re-Writing Pandemic Histories*, in: *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 79, no. 4, 2024, p. 293.

7. According to Mario Colín, this edition was financed by José de la Barreda, a nobleman from Asturias who venerated Remedios. Mario Colin, *Bibliografi a general del Estado de Me xico* Ciudad de México, 1963-1964, pp. 2-8.

8. Beristain de Souza's information from *Biblioteca Hispanoamericana Setentrional*, 1883 comes from Martha Lilia Tenorio's *Poesía novohispana* (vol. 1), Ciudad de México 2010, p. 647.

9. Judith Farré Vidal, *Espacio y tiempo de fiesta en Nueva España (1665-1760)*, Madrid 2013, pp. 71-92.

10. Domenico Cecere and Alessandro Tuccillo (eds), *Communication and Politics in the Hispanic Monarchy: Managing Times of Emergency*, Bern 2023, pp. 11-35.

11. Martha Lilia Tenorio, *Novohispanic Baroque Poetry. A Lyric Chronicle of Mexico City*, in: *A Companion to Viceregal Mexico, 1519-1821*, ed. by John F. López, Leiden 2021, p. 407.

12. This claim, and the historical contextualization of the cult of Remedios in this article comes from the work of Rosario Granados Salinas in *Fervent Faith. Devotion, Aesthetics, and Society in the Cult of Our Lady of Remedios (Mexico, 1520-1811)* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012). For a version that includes both an abridged content of the dissertation and additional material, see her article: *Mexico City's Symbolic Geography: Processions of Our Lady of Remedios*, in: *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 11, 2012, pp. 145-173.

13. Granados Salinas, *Fervent Faith* 2012, p. 3.

14. Alain Bègue, *Los límites de la escritura epidíctica: la poesía jocoseria de José Pérez de Montoro*, in: *Criticón* 100, 2007, pp. 147-166, https://doi.org/10.4000/criticon.9399.

15. In *El Parnaso Español* (1648), Francisco de Quevedo refers to Urania as one of the three muses of poets.

16. All translations of the *Quintillas* are my own. In this translation, I have modernized the language, thereby losing, in most cases, the original eight-syllable count and the alternating rhyme scheme. I have retained the Spanish version for reference and note instances where these elements significantly affect the impact of the verses.

17. José de Cañizares, *El anillo de Giges*, ed. by Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, Madrid 1983, p. 130.

18. Cañizares 1983, p. 130.

19. Vivian Nutton, *The Seeds of Disease: An Explanation of Contagion and Infection from the Greeks to the Renaissance* in *Medical History*, 27, 1983, p. 4.

20. Guy Stresser-Péan, *Viaje a la Huasteca con Guy Stresser-Péan* (ed. Guilhem Olivier), Ciudad de México 2008, https://books.openedition.org/cemca/4002? lang=en

21. Digital Florentine Codex/Códice Florentino Digital, edited by Kim N. Richter and Alicia Maria Houtrouw, Book 7: The Sun, Moon and Stars, fol. 1v, Getty Research Institute, 2023. https://florentinecodex.getty.edu/en/book/7/folio/1v? spTexts=&nhTexts=

22. Alessandra Russo, *The Untranslatable Image*, trans. by Susan Emanuel, Texas 2014, p. 6.

23. For this debate, see the succinct synopsis by Massimo Livi Bacci, *The Demise of the American Indios* in *Population and Development Review*, 37, no. 1, 2011, pp. 161-183.
24. Gerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana*, Ciudad de México 1870, p. 515.
25. William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, New York 1998, p. 233.
26. Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519*-1810, Palo Alto 1964, pp. 448-451.
27. Ramírez's poem incorporates plenty of proverbial aphorisms into his writing. "Adiós con la colorada" appears in *refraneros* of early twentieth century, an expression used to refer to bidding farwell to embarrassement. In Ramírez's usage, however, it has a clear link to an ailment that changes the body's tone. The *Diccionario de Español de México* registers 'colorada' as a name for rubella (German measles).
28. Woodrow Borah, *Juicios secretos de Dios: Epidemias y despoblacio n indi gena en Hispanoame rica colonial* ed. by Noble David Cook and W. George Lovell, Quito 2000, p. 20.
29. Antonio Rubial and Jessica Ramírez Méndez, *Ciudad anfibia. México Tenochtitlan en el siglo XVI*, Ciudad de México 2023, pp 14-15. For a study of the hydraulic technologies developed in colonial Mexico City, see Vera S. Candiani, *Dreaming of Dry Land. Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City*, Palo Alto 2014. For a study of the centrality of water in Mexica cosmogony and Tenochtitlán's urbanscape, see Barbara Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City*, Austin 2015, pp. 25-51.
30. Rubial García and Ramírez Méndez 2023, p. 9.
31. Juan R. Navarro, *Documentos para la Historia de México*, vol. tomo II, Ciudad de México 1853, p. 63.
32. Tenorio 2021, p. 422.

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Figures

Fig. 1: Frontispiece of the 1725 edition of the Quintillas, 1725. Print, 14 x 19 cm. Cádiz, Spain. Centro de Estudios de Historia de México. (Digitized image by Centro de Estudios de Historia de México).

Fig. 2: Miguel Cabrera, *Finding of Our Lady of Remedios*, ca. 1750. Church of Merced de las Huertas, Mexico City. Image from Fernando Franciles López.

Fig. 3: Image of the Sun in the *Florentine Codex*, Book 7: The Sun Moon and Stars, Folio 1v. Digital Florentine Codex, Getty Research Institute.

Abstract

This article focuses on the relationship between poetry and epidemics. It explores how poetry in seventeenth-century Mexico not only disposed of epidemic endings; it also encouraged its diverse audience to reconceptualize time, and in so doing, reconsider their past and recent outbreak experiences. To show this, I analyze a series of *Quintillas* (five-lined stanzas) that narrate the festive processions held for the Virgin of Los Remedios in Mexico City, 1668, celebrating her divine intercession in ending a *viruela* outbreak and bringing rainfall after a period of drought. Within the linear narrative traced by the *Quintillas*—progressing from the sorrow of pestilence and drought to joy of rainfall and deliverance from contagion—a cyclical understanding of epidemic outbreaks and natural disasters emerges. Articulating ecological and spiritual imaginaries at the intersection of Catholic faith, European theories of contagion, and Nahua mythology, this poetic composition is shaped and informed by the historical experiences of past epidemic outbreaks and natural disasters in the central valley of Mexico.

Author

Paulina León is Assistant Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Her research explores the cultural dimensions of disease and public health systems in early modern Spain and Spanish America during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Her current book project, *Writing Contagion: Cultures of Plague in the Early Modern Spanish Empire* examines how early modern epidemic outbreaks transformed the purposes of literature and its circuits of production, distribution, and consumption across the Spanish empire.

Title