

MITTEILUNGEN  
DES KUNSTHISTORISCHEN  
INSTITUTES  
IN FLORENZ



LXIV. BAND — 2022  
HEFT 2



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# MITTEILUNGEN DES KUNSTHISTORISCHEN INSTITUTES IN FLORENZ

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**Umschlagbild** | Copertina:  
Polidoro da Caravaggio,  
*Elias wird vom Engel geweckt* | *Elia svegliato dall'angelo*  
(Detail aus Abb. 1a, S. 230 | particolare da fig. 1a, p. 230)

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1 Filippo Lippi, *Scenes from the life of the Virgin*, 1466-1469.  
Spoleto, cathedral, apse

## Filippo Lippi's Frescoes at Spoleto, Cardinal Eroli, and the Immaculate Conception

Yumi Watanabe

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The Marian cycle painted between 1466 and 1469 by Fra Filippo Lippi in the apse of Spoleto cathedral (Fig. 1) has been the subject of several studies since its last restoration in 1987–1990.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, a number of rare motifs depicted in the fresco cycle have not been the focus of any discussion. The aim of the present article is to analyse them in the context of the nascent cult of the Immaculate Conception, the doctrine that the Virgin was free from original sin, and to argue that Cardinal Berardo Eroli (1409–1479), bishop of Spoleto, played a decisive role in the elaboration of the programme.

The execution of these frescoes can be followed in the account books of the cathedral.<sup>2</sup> The first expenditure for materials was made on 8 February 1466, and the decoration was finished a day before Christmas in 1469.<sup>3</sup> Two corresponding entries in the *entrata* and *uscita* clearly indicate that Eroli made a

significant contribution of 77 *fiorini* and 95 *soldi* (around 50 ducats) and that he was also involved in another related project, the “cappella della Ymagine”.<sup>4</sup> As suggested by Giordana Benazzi and Paolo Virilli, among others, Eroli was probably the person who asked Lippi to come to Spoleto and played a crucial role in defining the programme.<sup>5</sup>

### The Woman of the Apocalypse

Above the stories of the earthly life of the Virgin, the calotte of the apse shows the *Coronation of the Virgin* in a heavenly setting populated by angels, saints, prophets and other Old Testament figures, and sybils that appears over a mountainous landscape reminiscent of the surroundings of Spoleto itself (Fig. 2). Strangely, Mary is not crowned by Christ but by God the Father. This iconography is rarely found in Umbrian

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<sup>1</sup> See esp. Giordana Benazzi/Paolo Virilli, *Filippo Lippi nel duomo di Spoleto, 1467–1469: notizie dopo il restauro*, Spoleto 1992; Jeffrey Ruda, *Fra Filippo Lippi: Life and Work with a Complete Catalogue*, London 1993, pp. 476f.; *La cattedrale di Spoleto: storia, arte, conservazione*, ed. by Giordana Benazzi/Giovanni Carbonara, Milan/Spoleto 2002; Cyril Gerbron, “Christ Is a Stone: On Filippo Lippi’s *Adoration of the Child* in Spoleto”, in: *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, XIX (2016), pp. 257–283. The most recent publication, Jean K. Cadogan, “Rome and Spoleto: Fra Filippo Lippi and Bishop Berardo Eroli in the Duomo of Spoleto”, in: *Predella*, 47 (2020), pp. 133–146, appeared after I submitted my first version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts have been published in Luigi Fausti, “Le pitture di Fra Filippo Lippi nel Duomo di Spoleto”, in: *Archivio per la storia ecclesiastica dell’Umbria*, II (1915), pp. 1–36; Ruda (note 1), pp. 542–544; *La cattedrale di Spoleto* (note 1), pp. 465–467.

<sup>3</sup> Ruda (note 1), pp. 474, 544.

<sup>4</sup> Of these, only the *uscita* entry has been published; see Fau-

sti (note 2), p. 6; Ruda (note 1), p. 282; *La cattedrale di Spoleto* (note 1), p. 465, no. 96. The corresponding *entrata* reads as follows: “Da messer Santi vicario di Monsignore di Spoliti fiorini cento, quali sonno per commissione di Monsignore, quale vole se paghino parte per la depintore della tribuna et per uno uscio da farse nella cappella della Ymagine, delli quali se ne pagano fiorini 77 soldi 95 ad frate Filippo dipintore di Firenze per dipignere detta tribuna et fiorini 22 soldi 5 ad Piernichola per fattura de detto uscio, chomo appare a uscita c. 2” (Spoleto, Sezione dell’Archivio di Stato di Spoleto, Opera del Duomo, Entrate e uscite, reg. 4, fol. 4r; the transcription has been kindly provided by Dr. Gabriella Battista).

<sup>5</sup> Benazzi/Virilli (note 1), p. 7; Alessandro Novelli, “La nobile casa-ta degli Eroli e il palazzo della famiglia a Narni”, in: *Museo della Città in Palazzo Eroli a Narni*, ed. by Daniele Manacorda/Francesco Federico Mancini, Florence et al. 2012, pp. 115–169: 118. For other works Eroli was probably involved in, cf. Alessandro Novelli/Lucilla Vignoli, *L’arte a Narni*





2 Filippo Lippi,  
*Coronation of the Virgin*.  
Spoleto, cathedral, apse

and Tuscan paintings of the *Coronation*, but Filippo Lippi also adopted it in his earlier *Maringhi Coronation* (Fig. 3).<sup>6</sup>

A suitable explanation for this peculiarity is the intention to allude to the teaching of the Immaculate Conception. Based on Proverb 8:24 and Ecclesiasticus 24:14, Mary was considered as being born in the mind of God long before her actual birth for the salvation of humanity.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, God the Father was connected to Immaculate Conception iconography; more-

over, his presence in Filippo's *Coronation* fresco seems to emphasize the bodily assumption of the Virgin as well, advocated by Franciscan theology.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most striking motifs in Spoleto is the huge rayed sun behind the Virgin and God the Father. While the feature can be found in Gentile da Fabriano's *Valle Romita Polyptych*,<sup>9</sup> here it is given far more prominence and radiance. This detail most certainly refers to the Woman of the Apocalypse, that is,

tra Medioevo e Illuminismo: nuove acquisizioni, letture, proposte su maestri, opere e committenti, Perugia 2004, pp. 70f.

<sup>6</sup> See Eve Borsook, "Cults and Imagery at Sant'Ambrogio in Florence", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, XXV (1981), pp. 147–202; Jeffrey Ruda, "Style and Patronage in the 1440s: Two Altarpieces of the Coronation of the Virgin by Filippo Lippi", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, XXVIII (1984), pp. 363–384; *idem* (note 1), pp. 136–147, 422–426.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Emma Simi Varanelli, *Maria l'Immacolata: la rappresentazione nel Medioevo. Et macula non est in te*, Rome 2008, p. 211.

<sup>8</sup> This tradition belongs to the so-called R text (cf. Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 8f.). Saint Anthony of Padua is also known to have given a message on the bodily assumption on the feast day (Martin Jugie, *La mort et l'assomption de la sainte Vierge*, Vatican City 1944, p. 383, note 3).

<sup>9</sup> Matteo Ceriana/Emanuela Daffra, in: *Gentile da Fabriano e l'altro Rina-*



the “mulier amicta sole” (“woman clothed with the sun”) of the Book of Revelation (12:1): “A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.”<sup>10</sup> Such a vision was traditionally interpreted as an allegory of the Church or of the Virgin as the embodiment of the Church.<sup>11</sup> It was also the basis for the iconography of the Virgin of Humility, which became a popular subject in the fourteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Millard Meiss pointed out that the two images – the Virgin of Humility and the Woman of the Apocalypse – correspond to the Virgin’s dual humble and sublime nature.<sup>13</sup> Saint Augustine, followed by Oecumenius, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Saint Bonaventure, had interpreted the biblical passage as a reference to the kingdom of God and the sun that cloths the Virgin as the Sun of Justice (“sole ipso iustitiae”) or an embodiment of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

In the Spoleto *Coronation*, a small moon and a sun are depicted beneath the main protagonists. These are rare features in Florentine paintings of the subject but can be found in the late thirteenth-century apse mosaic of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (Fig. 4) as well as in Coronation scenes outside Tuscany, especially in the Veneto.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, these motifs sometimes appear in representations of both the Virgin of the Apocalypse<sup>16</sup> and the Virgin of Humility, the latter again primarily from the Veneto (Fig. 5).<sup>17</sup>

The connection between the Virgin as Queen of Heaven and the Woman of the Apocalypse is made explicit in a letter by Pope Nicholas IV (r. 1288–1292) of 27 September 1288 concerning the apse mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore. There he clearly considered the two figures identical: “Hec est mulier amicta sole et luna sub pedibus eius, que cum virginitate fecunda nobis genuit Salvatorem.”<sup>18</sup> Yet the Woman



—  
3 Filippo Lippi,  
*Coronation of the Virgin*  
(*Marinighi Coronation*).  
1439–1447, detail. Florence,  
Gallerie degli Uffizi, Galleria  
delle Statue e delle Pitture

scimento, exh. cat. Fabriano 2006, ed. by Laura Laureati/Lorenza Mochi Onori, Milan 2006, pp. 128–135, no. III.I.

<sup>10</sup> On the “mulier amicta sole” see Bernard Le Frois, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap. 12): Individual or Collective?*, Rome 1954, pp. 13–31, 38–58, esp. pp. 17f.; Ewald M. Vetter, “Mulier amicta sole und Mater Salvatoris”, in: *Münchener Jahrbuch für bildende Kunst*, 3rd s., XI/X (1958/59), pp. 32–71: 34; Maria Giovanna Muzj, “Iconografia medievale della *Mulier amicta sole*”, in: *Theotokos*, VIII (2000), pp. 219–244.

<sup>11</sup> Enzo Bianchi, “La ‘donna’ di Apocalisse 12”, in: *Maria: testi teologici e spirituali dal I al XX secolo*, ed. by *idem et al.*, Milan 2000, pp. LX–LXIV; Muzj (note 10); *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, XII. Revelation*, ed. by William C. Weinrich/Thomas C. Oden, Downers Grove, Ill., 2005, pp. 170–195, esp. pp. 173f.

<sup>12</sup> Millard Meiss, “The Madonna of Humility”, in: *The Art Bulletin*, XVIII (1936), pp. 435–465: 463; Vetter (note 10), p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Meiss (note 12), p. 462.

<sup>14</sup> Le Frois (note 10), p. 35; Vetter (note 10), pp. 34, 39; Isaac J. Goff, “*Mulier Amicta Sole*: Bonaventure’s Preaching on the Marian Mode of the Incarnation and Marian Meditation in His Sermons on the Annunciation”,

in: *Medieval Franciscan Approaches to the Virgin Mary: Mater Misericordiae Sanctissima et Dolorosa*, ed. by Steven J. McMichael/Katherine Wrisley Shelby, Leiden/Boston 2018, pp. 53–83: 70f.; José María Salvador-González, “The Symbol of Light’s Ray in Images of the Annunciation of the 14th and 15th Centuries According to Greek Patrology”, in: *História Revista*, XXV (2020), 3, pp. 334–355.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance the *Coronation* by Paolo Veneziano (1358, New York, The Frick Collection) as well as Gentile da Fabriano’s aforementioned *Valle Romita Polyptych* (ca. 1408, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera).

<sup>16</sup> See the illustrations in the *Facundus Beatus* (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, ms. Vit. 14-2, fol. 186v) or in the *Trier Apocalypse* (Trier, Staatsbibliothek, Cod. 31, fol. 37r).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. for example paintings by Lorenzo Veneziano (London, National Gallery), Ranuccio d’Arvari (Porto di Legnago, Madonna della Salute), and Paolo Serafini (Modena, Galleria Estense).

<sup>18</sup> Alessandro Tomei, *Iacobus Torriti pictor: una vicenda figurativa del tardo Duecento romano*, Rome 1990, pp. 103, 154. Saint Bonaventure also associated the Madonna of the Revelation with the Virgin: cf. Goff (note 14), p. 55.



4 Jacopo Torriti, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1296. Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore, apse



5 Lorenzo Veneziano, *Madonna of Humility with Saints Mark and John*, ca. 1366-1370, detail. London, The National Gallery

of the Apocalypse was also intimately linked to the notion of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>19</sup> Commentaries on the Book of Revelation with a focus on its twelfth chapter were central in the debates on this doctrine.<sup>20</sup> On the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the quoted passage from that chapter (12:1) was recited twice during the office.<sup>21</sup> The vision was associated with the doctrine because of the triumphal battle with the serpent (12:14), which meant the Virgin was immaculate, or free from original sin.<sup>22</sup> She is depicted with the sun and the moon to infer that she had existed before sin was introduced into the world.<sup>23</sup> Often connected to Ecclesiasticus 24:5,<sup>24</sup> the notion that Mary existed before the beginning of the world in the

mind of God was a vital component of the Immaculate Conception. We should also note that Mirella Levi D'Ancona has shown that Coronation iconography was used to indicate the Immaculate Conception.<sup>25</sup>

### Humility and Temperance of the Virgin

Two virtues related to the Virgin illuminated her immaculate state: humility and temperance. In the Spoleto frescoes, the first is conveyed by the Virgin's kneeling posture in the *Coronation*, whereas temperance is associated with the hourglass in the *Annunciation* (Fig. 6). This object – an instrument connected traditionally to personifications of temperance<sup>26</sup> – is

<sup>19</sup> Augustin M. Lépiciér, *L'Immaculée Conception dans l'art et l'iconographie*, Spa 1956, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Simi Varanelli (note 7), p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> In the sixth response in Matins and the first lesson in None (Lépiciér [note 19], p. 18).

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Mayberry, "The Controversy over the Immaculate Conception in Medieval and Renaissance Art, Literature, and Society", in: *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, XXI (1991), pp. 207–224: 213.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> "Ego ex ore Altissimi prodivi, primogenita ante omnem creaturam" ("I came out of the mouth of the most High, the firstborn before all creatures"). Cf. Rona Goffen, "A Franciscan Victory and a Franciscan Defeat", in: *eadem*, *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice: Bellini, Titian, and the Franciscans*, New Haven, Conn., 1986, pp. 73–106: 76.

<sup>25</sup> Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance*, [New York] 1957, esp. pp. 28–32.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance the figure of Temperance in the decoration of the Sala dei Nove in Siena; cf. Lynn White, "The Iconography of Temperantia and the Virtuousness of Technology", in: *Action and Conviction in Early Modern*





6 Filippo Lippi, *Annunciation*, 1466–1469, detail with sandglass. Spoleto, cathedral, apse



7 Jacopo da Verona, *Annunciation*, 1397, detail. Padua, Oratorio di San Michele

not easily visible, because it was painted *a secco* and is much abraded.<sup>27</sup> Similar hourglasses also appear in paintings of the *Annunciation* by Giusto d'Alemagna in Santa Maria di Castello in Genoa (1451)<sup>28</sup> and by Jacopo da Verona in the Oratorio di San Michele in Padua (Fig. 7), where they denote the continence of the Virgin. Filippo may have known the latter work from his youthful sojourn in that city.

Over time, the mystery of Incarnation through the Annunciation was related to the Immaculate Conception,<sup>29</sup> and by the

end of the fifteenth century the Franciscans used the subject to imply the doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the emphasis on the Virgin's temperance in the Spoleto *Annunciation* suggests that in this case, too, the reference to the Immaculate Conception was intentional.

### The Precursors of the Virgin

A further element conjoining the fresco to the Immaculate Conception are the two groups of prophets and Old Testament figures below the Coronation scene. Many are prototypical pre-

*Europe: Essays in Memory of E. H. Harbison*, ed. by Theodore K. Rabb/Jerrold E. Seigel, Princeton 1969, pp. 197–219: 208.

<sup>27</sup> On Filippo's use of the *a secco* technique, see Leonetto Tintori, "Conservazione, tecnica e restauro degli affreschi", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, XIX (1975), pp. 149–180: 155; Benazzi/Virilli (note 1), pp. 16f. On the motif, see Yumi Watanabe, "Filippo Lippi's Spoleto Frescoes: Focusing on the Sandglass in the *Annunciation* fresco", in: *Bijutsushi: Journal of the Japan Art History Society*, LXVII (2018), pp. 252–265.

<sup>28</sup> Serena Romano, "Giusto di Ravensburg e i pittori svizzero-tedeschi a Santa Maria di Castello", in: *Genova e l'Europa continentale: opere, artisti, committenti, collezionisti. Austria, Germania, Svizzera*, ed. by Piero Boccardo/Clario Di Fabio, Cinisello Balsamo 2004, pp. 32–47, esp. pp. 32, 35, figs. 2, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Duns Scotus emphasized the close ties between the Annunciation and

the Immaculate Conception. See Judith W. Mann, "The Annunciation Chapel in the Quirinal Palace, Rome: Paul V, Guido Reni, and the Virgin Mary", in: *The Art Bulletin*, LXXV (1993), pp. 113–134: 117; Alessandra Galizzi Kroegel, "A proposito dei santi nelle bizzarre *Annunciazioni* di Francesco Francia e Timoteo Viti: proposte per l'iconografia e la committenza", in: *Notizie da Palazzo Albani*, XXXII (2003), pp. 47–72: 66; Thomas M. Izicki, "The Immaculate Conception and Ecclesiastical Politics from the Council of Basel to the Council of Trent: The Dominicans and Their Foes", in: *Archive for Reformation History*, XCVI (2005), pp. 145–170: 147.

<sup>30</sup> Alessandra Galizzi Kroegel, *Flying Babies in Emilian Painting: Iconographies of the Immaculate Conception circa 1500*, Diss., Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University, 1992, p. 181; *eadem*, "Franciscan Wordplay in Renaissance Annunciation", in: *The Canadian Journal of Rhetorical Studies/Revue Canadienne*



cursors of Christ and Mary. Lippi groups them according to gender. On the left are Adam, John the Baptist, Daniel, Elijah, Micah, Joshua, Amos, and Jonah and on the right Eve, the Tiburtine Sibyl, Rachel, Bathsheba, Leah, the Erythraean Sibyl, Esther, and Judith (Fig. 8). This impressive array can be understood as referencing the Immaculate Conception thanks to an important sermon on the doctrine by Francesco della Rovere, the future Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471–1484), written in 1448 for the new bishop of Padua, Fantino Dandolo (1379–1459), which concentrates on the *generaciones*.<sup>31</sup> As Della Rovere explains, after the Fall, the Virgin and Christ alone were generated in a state of grace. Except for Adam and Eve, all the ancestors and precursors of the Virgin were conceived in sin.<sup>32</sup> At the moment of the Incarnation, the Virgin declared that “all generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48) and, according to Della Rovere, because of this response to the angel Gabriel, all generations of Mary, past and future, will be saved through Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

In Lippi’s fresco, the prevalence among the Old Testament figures of Mary’s female precursors – Eve, Rachel, Esther, Bathsheba, Leah, and Judith – suggests an intimate relationship with near contemporary teaching about the Immaculate Conception. The two pagan sibyls prophesied the coming of a sav-

iour, born to a virgin, a belief that provided a useful type for the Virgin as an instrument in the history of salvation.<sup>34</sup> Related to that was the concept of Mary as the new Eve, which had a long-standing tradition in the Church. It had first been proposed by Justin the Martyr (ca. 100–165) and further developed by Saint Jerome, whereas Saints Ambrose and Augustine explored parallels between Eve and Mary, and Mary and the Church.<sup>35</sup>

The idea of Mary as the person who fulfils the prophecies of the Old Testament goes back to Aldhelm (ca. 639–709) and Bede the Venerable (672/73–735),<sup>36</sup> but it was unusual to include the Hebrew heroines in depictions of the Coronation, and they are indeed rarely represented even in other contexts. Those heroines, and in particular Judith and Esther, were of primary importance for the developing theology of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>37</sup> Della Rovere’s 1448 homily on the doctrine typologically related the Virgin to Judith.<sup>38</sup> For Saint Jerome, the female Old Testament figures embodied the Church.<sup>39</sup> This interpretation was referred to on numerous occasions by the Florentine bishop Saint Antoninus (1389–1459), who enjoyed a close relationship with Erolì.<sup>40</sup> As the vanquisher of Holofernes, a symbol of concupiscence and arrogance, Judith was herself associated with the “Church triumphant”.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Judith was

*d’Etudes Rhétoriques*, XL (1994), pp. 63–78; *eadem* (note 29); *eadem*, “Quando il centro usa prudenza e la periferia osa: l’iconografia dell’Immacolata Concezione in Emilia e nelle Marche (con una postilla sulla *Vergine delle rocce* di Leonardo)”, in: *Emilia e Marche nel Rinascimento: l’identità visiva della ‘periferia’*, ed. by Giancarla Periti/Maria Grazia Albertini Ottolenghi, Azzano San Paolo 2005, pp. 215–251.

<sup>31</sup> Dino Cortese, “Francesco della Rovere e le *Orationes* sull’Immacolata del vescovo di Padova Fantino Dandolo (1448)”, in: *Il Santo*, 2nd s., XVII (1977), pp. 197–225: 201; Sarah Blake McHam, “Visualizing the Immaculate Conception: Donatello, Francesco della Rovere, and the High Altar and Choir Screen at the Church of the Santo in Padua”, in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, LXIX (2016), pp. 831–864. This sermon became the basis for the later bulls establishing the feast of the Immaculate Conception (Simi Varanelli [note 7], p. 45).

<sup>32</sup> Kim E. Butler, “The Immaculate Body in the Sistine Ceiling”, in: *Art History*, XXXII (2009), pp. 250–289: 257. The genealogy of Christ was also referenced in sermons of Marian feasts (cf. Edgar Wind, *The Religious Symbolism of Michelangelo: The Sistine Ceiling*, ed. by Elisabeth Sears et al., New York 2000, p. 10).

<sup>33</sup> Levi D’Ancona (note 25), pp. 17f.; Butler (note 32), p. 257.

<sup>34</sup> Emile Mâle, “Une influence des mystères sur l’art italien du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in: *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, XXXV (1904), pp. 89–94; Angelina Rossi, “Le sibille nelle arti figurative italiane”, in: *L’arte*, XVIII (1915), pp. 209–221, 272–285, 427–458; Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l’art Chrétien*, Paris 1955–1959, II.1, pp. 420–430; Robin Raybould, *The Sibyl Series of the Fifteenth Century*, Leiden/Boston 2017. According to Saint Jerome, the sibyls have restored their virginity by prophesying.

<sup>35</sup> “Mors per Evam, vita per Mariam” (*Select Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. by F. A. Wright, London/Cambridge 1954, pp. 98f., no. XXII); Clayton (note 8), pp. 5, 12; Pio XII, “Costituzione Apostolica *Munificentissimus Deus*”,

in: *L’Assunzione di Maria Madre di Dio: significato storico-salvifico a 50 anni dalla definizione dogmatica*, conference proceedings Rome 2000, ed. by Gaspar Calvo Moralejo/Stefano Cecchin, Vatican City 2001, pp. 1–20: 17.

<sup>36</sup> Clayton (note 8), p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Rachel is known as a type for the Church; Esther and Bathsheba, both crowned queens, prefigure Mary’s role as Queen of Heaven; Rachel’s sister Leah was considered the mother of Israel for her exemplary faith and was thus seen as a type of Mary, the mother of all believers (cf. *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, ed. by Mark A. Powell, New York 1989, s.v. Leah, pp. 544f.; Butler [note 32], p. 270).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 251; McHam (note 31), pp. 852f. Saint Bonaventure too mentioned Judith as a type of the Virgin (Goff [note 14], pp. 81f.). Wind (note 32), p. 34, remarks that Judith’s victory also foreshadows Mary’s power to outwit the devil.

<sup>39</sup> “[...] et Judith et Esther, in typo Ecclesiae, et occidisse adversarios, et perituum Israel de periculo liberasse [...]” (Saint Jerome, “Commentariorum in Sophoniam prophetam liber unus”, in: *Patrologiae cursus completus [...] series latina*, ed. by Jean-Jacques Migne, Paris 1844–1866, XXV, coll. 1337–1388: 1337); Esther Gordon Dotson, “An Augustinian Interpretation of Michelangelo’s Sistine Ceiling, Part I”, in: *The Art Bulletin*, LXI (1979), pp. 223–256: 248, note 128.

<sup>40</sup> Giovanni Erolì, *Notizie de’ vescovi Erolì estratte dalle vite de’ Narnesi illustri*, Terni 1852, pp. V–XXI, esp. p. XI; Akari Kitamura, “Michelangelo’s Understanding of Theology and Form in the Pendentives in the Sistine Chapel: David and Goliath, Judith and Holofernes, Punishment of Haman, and The Bronze Serpent”, in: *Fresco ga no Shintaigaku: Sistina Reibaido no Hyosho Kukan*, Tokyo 2012, pp. 317–404: 397. Regarding Erolì, see also Alessandro Calandro, “Il cardinal Erolì alle Tre Fontane”, in: *Roma oggi*, XIX (1976), I, pp. 16f.: 17; Novelli/Vignoli (note 5), pp. 71f.

<sup>41</sup> Kitamura (note 40), pp. 339f.



8 Filippo Lippi, *Coronation of the Virgin*, detail of female Old Testament figures. Spoleto, cathedral, apse

understood as the “pure bride” of the Song of Songs, the book of the Hebrew Bible from which much of the theology of the Immaculate Conception was culled.<sup>42</sup> In the Book of Judith, the heroine is praised by Oziás, the prince of Israel, as above all women on earth in a passage that is echoed in the archangel Gabriel’s greeting in the Annunciation (Lk 1:42) praising the Virgin: “Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most-high God, above all women upon the earth” (Jdt 13:23).<sup>43</sup>

Esther, a model of humility, virtuousness, and prudence, risked her life to save the entire Jewish nation. In defiance of the law that required anyone who wished to approach the ruler of Persia had to be summoned, she spontaneously knelt before Ahasuerus (like the kneeling Virgin in Lippi’s *Coronation*) pleading for the Jews. Ahasuerus took mercy on her proclaiming: “Thou shalt not die: for this law is not made for thee, but for all others” (Est 15:13). Because Esther was exempt from the

law, she was seen as a precursor of the Virgin, who was exempt from original sin; therefore, the story of Esther was frequently depicted in relation to the Coronation of the Virgin and the Immaculate Conception.<sup>44</sup> For this reason, the kneeling position of Esther being touched by King Ahasuerus’ sceptre (Fig. 9) was transferred to the Virgin, who had been exempt from the law of original sin, as can be seen in Vincenzo Frediani’s painting in Lucca (Fig. 10).<sup>45</sup> Just like Esther, Mary is being touched by Christ’s sceptre and told through the scroll that is extending to the left of his face: “Non enim pro te sed pro omnibus hec lex constituta est”, a sentence that was incorporated into the liturgy of the Immaculate Conception by Fra Bernardino de’ Busti (ca. 1430–1513).<sup>46</sup> The connection between Mary and Esther was strengthened when Sixtus IV in 1477 and 1483 issued bulls that officially introduced the feast of the Immaculate Conception into the Roman Church calendar.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Wind (note 32), p. 34; Heinrich W. Pfeiffer, *The Sistine Chapel: A New Vision*, New York/London 2007, p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> Butler (note 32), p. 257.

<sup>44</sup> Borsook (note 6), p. 168; Ruda (note 1), p. 151; Vincenzo Francia, *Splendore di bellezza: l’iconografia dell’Immacolata Concezione nella pittura rinascimentale italiana*, Vatican City 2004, pp. 147–173.

<sup>45</sup> On this painting, see Sibilla Symeonides, “An Altarpiece by the

‘Lucchese Master of the Immaculate Conception’”, in: *Marsyas*, VIII (1957/58), pp. 55–66.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. by Heinrich Denzinger/Adolf Schönmetzer, 34th, corr. ed., Barcelona et al. 1967, pp. 346–351; Georg Söll, *Storia dei dogmi mariani*, Rome 1981, p. 312; Francesco della Rovere, *L’orazione della Immacolata*, ed. by Dino





9 Jacopo del Sellaio,  
*Esther before Ahasuerus*,  
ca. 1493. Budapest,  
Szépművészeti Múzeum



10 Vincenzo Frediani, *The Immaculate Conception and Saints Anselm, Augustine, Anthony of Padua, Kings David and Solomon*, 1502, detail. Lucca, Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi

### The Spoleto Apse Frescoes in Context

Provided that the rare motifs in Filippo Lippi's apse fresco – the presence of God the Father instead of Christ, the emphasis on humility and temperance of the Virgin, the huge sun, the small sun and the moon, the types of the Virgin – reference the Immaculate Conception, the question arises: who conceived such a complex programme which was at the forefront of the theological issues of the time? The only person from Spoleto with such a high intellectual profile would be Berardo Eroli, who had donated to the cathedral a considerable sum to commence the work.<sup>48</sup> Born near Narni, Eroli was elected bishop of Spoleto in 1448. In 1460, Pius II made him cardinal priest of Santa Sabina; in 1462–1463 and again in 1471–1474 and 1477 he was papal legate in Perugia, where he instituted the

very first Monte di Pietà, a banking institution that had been promoted by the Franciscan Observants.<sup>49</sup> He was indeed close to the Franciscans, who were fervent promoters of the Immaculate Conception; even though he was not a member of the order, the cardinal used a Franciscan breviary, now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Archivio di S. Pietro, ms. F.29), where the feast day is rubricized.<sup>50</sup> In the fifteenth century, debate over the Immaculate Conception became a sharp point of contention between the Franciscans, who, after the Benedictines, were the first to accept the doctrine, and the Dominicans, who remained maculists.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, it might not be indifferent for the Spoleto frescoes that also the Carmelite order, to which Filippo Lippi belonged, had adopted the teaching of the Immaculate Conception in 1306.<sup>52</sup> Since the painter had included

Cortese, Padua 1985, p. 57; Francia (note 44), p. 51. For the influence of the papal bulls on liturgy and the visual arts, cf. Galizzi Kroegel 2005 (note 30).

<sup>48</sup> On Eroli see Eroli (note 40), pp. Xf.; Anna Esposito, s.v. Eroli, Berardo, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, XLIII, Rome 1993, pp. 228–232.

<sup>49</sup> Eroli (note 40), pp. VIII, 105; Novelli (note 5), p. 117.

<sup>50</sup> Esposito (note 48). The calendar page for December is on fol. 6v.

<sup>51</sup> Levi D'Ancona (note 25), p. 10; Söll (note 47), pp. 311–315.

<sup>52</sup> Claudio Catena, "L'Immacolata Concezione nell'Ordine Carmelitano", in: *Virgo immacolata: acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Romae anno MCMLIV celebrati*, Rome 1955–1958, VIII.3, pp. 19–39: 23; Levi D'Ancona (note 25), p. 10; Corrado Maggioni, *Benedetto il frutto del tuo grembo: due millenni di pietà mariana*, Casale Monferrato 2000, p. 109. For the Immaculate Conception and Carmelite liturgy, see James Boyce, "The Carmelite

God the Father in the *Maringhi Coronation*, as mentioned above, it is likely that he was familiar with the doctrine, although it is another issue whether the altarpiece implicitly alluded to it.<sup>53</sup>

Spoletto was close to the seat of Franciscanism in Assisi, and its cathedral had been used for the canonization of one of the most important Franciscan saints, Anthony of Padua, on 30 May 1232.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the predominance of Franciscan thought in Spoleto cathedral can be gleaned from the fact that on a plan of the cathedral drawn in 1614, most of its twenty-six chapels were dedicated to Franciscan saints, while only the tabernacle in the Saint Anne chapel was dedicated to Dominican saints.<sup>55</sup> Although this is speculative, we can assume that the Franciscan influence in the cathedral predated the sixteenth century. More directly, the presence of the belief in the Immaculate Conception in Spoleto cathedral at least in the sixteenth century is witnessed by the Cappella delle Reliquie, which still has original wood furniture with eighteen saints, prophets, and sibyls painted by Francesco Nardini, the cousin of Taddeo Zuccari, in 1546–1554. Each figure holds a scroll with a text, many of which are related to the Virgin, and six of the eighteen texts are associated with the Immaculate Conception.<sup>56</sup> It is thus plausible to assume that the belief had some currency in Spoleto cathedral already at the time of Filippo's apse fresco.

The renovation campaign of 1987–1990 revealed the sinopia of a large figure of Christ as part of a *Last Judgement* painted on the counter-façade.<sup>57</sup> While absent from the *Coronation*, Christ was thus facing the Virgin across the cathedral on the same level. If the huge sun depicted in the apse *Coronation* was meant to be the Sun of Justice (*sol ipso iustitiae*), then it probably reinforced the meaning of the counter-façade Christ as a judge, and together with the crown of eternal life received by the Virgin it embodied the hope of salvation for all the

living, thus counterbalancing the menacing aspects of the *Last Judgement* fresco.

So far, studies on the early iconography of the Immaculate Conception have concentrated on works dating between circa 1470 and 1500. Filippo Lippi's apse frescoes in Spoleto cathedral, whose programme was most likely devised by the influential cardinal Erolì, would therefore be one of the very first instances where the concept of the Immaculate Conception is actually expressed visually in an important public artwork. Nothing is known about Pope Paul II's stance regarding the doctrine; however, he held Erolì in high esteem,<sup>58</sup> and considering Spoleto's strategic importance within the Papal State as well as the cardinal's influential position, it seems possible that these frescoes were conceived with the support of at least part of the Roman Curia and perhaps the pope himself.<sup>59</sup>

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Choir Books of Krakow: Carmelite Liturgy before and after the Council of Trent", in: *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, XLV (2004), pp. 17–34. For the iconography of the Immaculate Conception in Carmelite contexts, see Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "The Carmelite Altarpiece (circa 1290–1550): The Self-Identification of an Order", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LVII (2015), pp. 2–41: II, 27–29, 33–36; Fernando Moreno Cuadro, "La Inmaculada carmelitana: concreciones del tipo iconográfico en Europa y Nueva España", in: *Goya*, 370 (2020), pp. 30–47: 30.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Borsook (note 6).

<sup>54</sup> Silvestro Nessi, "La cattedrale nella storia diocesana e civile di Spoleto", in: *La cattedrale di Spoleto* (note 1), pp. 66–71: 68.

<sup>55</sup> *La cattedrale di Spoleto* (note 1), pp. 514f.; Elvio Lunghi, "I cicli pittorici, le opere d'arte medievali e la cappella di Sant'Anna", *ibidem*, pp. 241–251: 248.

<sup>56</sup> Giuseppe Sordini, "La 'cappella delle reliquie' nel duomo di Spoleto",

in: *L'Arte*, VI (1903), pp. 252–264; Giordana Benazzi, "La cappella delle Reliquie", in: *La cattedrale di Spoleto* (note 1), pp. 319–329: 319, 321f.

<sup>57</sup> Lunghi (note 55), p. 244. Supposedly, this fresco was covered by plaster during the renovation of the seventeenth century.

<sup>58</sup> Gaspare da Verona, "De gestis tempore pontificis Maximi Pauli Secundi", in: *Le vite di Paolo II di Gaspare da Verona e Michele Canensi*, ed. by Giuseppe Zippel, Città di Castello 1911 (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2nd ed., III.16), pp. 3–64: 35.

<sup>59</sup> It is well known that the Council of Basel on 17 September 1438 accepted the Immaculate Conception as a doctrine; yet because of the pope's absence at that moment, the decision was later revoked (Sebastian Wenceslaus, "The Controversy over the Immaculate Conception from after Scotus to the End of the Eighteenth Century", in: *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance*, ed. by Edward D. O'Connor, Notre Dame, Ind., 1958, pp. 213–270: 231f.).