Antonello da Messina, the Devotional Image, and Artistic Change in the Renaissance

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The technical brilliance and originality of the paintings of Antonello da Messina earned the artist, from an early date, the reputation not only of an exceptional practitioner, but of one who changed the paradigm of art itself. Within half a century of his death, in the late 1520s, his works were being prized and discussed, in Venice, by some of the first recorded connoisseurs and collectors of what were beginning to be thought of as 'works of art'.[1] In the mid-sixteenth century Giorgio Vasari, upon whatever uncertain historical basis, presented Antonello's alleged introduction of oil painting into Italy as the inaugural event of a golden age of art, the very period celebrated in the climactic third part of the *Lives of the Artists*: '…it is by means of this invention that craftsmen have since become so excellent, that they have been able to make their figures all but alive.'[2] Since the technique was apparently unknown to the classical world, Vasari mused further that Antonello had given moderns the means to distinguish themselves from the ancients. Within the context of the new manner and appreciation of painting recorded in the *Lives*, this artist was assigned a vital, foundational role. Not merely an excellent craftsman, Antonello had been identified as one who changed the very nature of the art he practised.

In the Vasarian narrative, Antonello was presented as a key contributor to the emergent image of the artist, not as a maker of diverse objects to serve multifarious functions, but as an original creator of works of art. Thus was inaugurated the idea that the appearance in the sixteenth century of the artwork which could be appreciated for its own sake marked a definitive break with history. A technical and stylistic innovation, perceived in the work of Antonello da Messina and a small handful of contemporary painters, was identified with the birth of the autonomous artwork made for aesthetic contemplation. Since Vasari, this claim has remained remarkably persistent. For all the willingness of more recent commentators to criticise the bias of Vasari's particular standpoint, they have been strikingly reluctant to challenge, let alone to abandon, his myth of historical rupture. And yet it is a myth. For as long as art history continues to construct itself as a sequence of chronological turning-points, history will rise up to question and complicate the narrative. The present essay is intended to show how the truth of this generalisation manifests itself in a reconsideration of Antonello da Messina's religious paintings.

Modern critical appraisal of Antonello, even while identifying partially different qualities in his art, has tended to move within similar conceptual

1. Antonello da Messina, *Annunciate Virgin*, oil on panel, 42.5 x 32.8 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemälde-sammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich (photo: © Scala Archives).

parameters to those of Vasari. Current thought on the artist was inaugurated in an essay published exactly a century ago by the young Roberto Longhi.[3] For Longhi, inspired by the spheres and cylinders and the palette of Cézanne, the key to understanding style in Renaissance painting was the use of form and colour to create in the viewer a sense of the relationship of figures in space. Although ostensibly presented as a transcendent, formalist model for the history of style, Longhi's argument was in fact personalised in a somewhat Vasarian fashion: the fountainhead of all that was new in fifteenth-century painting – summarised as 'the perspectival synthesis of form and colour' – was identified by Longhi in Piero della Francesca. From Piero, it was brilliantly (if tenuously) argued, two lines of development derived. One, developed and transmitted by Giovanni Bellini, prioritised the spatial effects of colour, light and atmosphere. The other, for which Antonello was responsible, showed its debt to Piero by the construction of all forms as geometric solids. This holy trinity of painters of the Quattrocento, according to Longhi, were united in their understanding of art as something quite different from 'realism' (the besetting limitation of Van Eyck and any artist influenced by the Flemish school). Instead, their perspectival concerns required them to work with 'intellectual elements'. By the formal and painterly ways in which they distinguished themselves from simple artisans or copyists of nature, Piero, Antonello and Giovanni developed their medium to the point at which one could 'enjoy art as art, and not as mere imitation'. Together with the other two, Antonello was presented as an intellectual artist, one of the first Renaissance painters whose works demand to be studied 'as art'.[4]

Doubly influenced as they were by the contemporary attempt by the Futurists, De Chirico and others to establish a new basis for making art in the modern world of the early twentieth century, and by a simultaneous artistic re-engagement with the classical tradition, both Longhi's geometrical analysis of style and his particular focus on Piero della Francesca need to be historicised.[5] The impact of his arguments continues, however, to be felt in recent discussion of Antonello. Indeed, Ferdinando Bologna, presenting the exhibition of the artist's work held at Rovereto in 2013-14, was at pains to press the continuing validity of the Longhian view.[6] For other modern scholars, also, although with different stylistic emphases from those given by Longhi and Bologna, Antonello stood on the threshold of a new kind of painting: one which, by technical and intellectual means, had changed the terms on which it asked to be viewed. The Rovereto exhibition was itself conceived as a celebration of Antonello's presumed modernism as the inventor of a new kind of portraiture, the display of his paintings being paired (in a gallery dedicated to modern and contemporary art) with a parallel show of twentieth- and twenty-first-century portraits.[7]

A distinguished and influential recent argument along similar lines has

been that of Hans Belting, according to whom the medieval 'age of the icon' was succeeded, towards 1500, by the Renaissance and the associated 'age of art'.[8] Like others before and since, Belting invokes Antonello da Messina as a particular witness to this hypothetical turning point of culture. In an essay published in 2006, Belting analyses in this light Antonello's *Virgin Mary* now in Munich (fig. 1).[9] Having posited a sharp break between the icons of the Middle Ages – 'not the visible record of our world but the epiphany of another, a transcendental world which they were meant to represent' – and the Renaissance image – which 'demanded radical visibility resulting in the equation of the visible with the real in our gaze' – Belting goes on to claim that Antonello, conscious of the fundamental diversity of these alternative models, embarked upon a deliberate attempt to reconcile them. The painter, Belting writes, 'was ambitious enough to tackle the impossible task of integrating two different paradigms, the religious icon and the modern portrait as a creation of mimetic art, in one and the same picture.'[10] While he recognises the picture's debt to older religious painting – indeed, he posits a specific model in a cult image in the Marche which (on not very strong grounds) he supposes Antonello to have seen – Belting is convinced that the new naturalism of this Marian image ultimately negates the power traditionally understood to lie within the holy image. By contrast with older sacred images from which such naturalistic traits are absent, it is argued, once the image is seen – as this one seems to ask to be seen – as a likeness, the viewer is made aware of its departure from reality, because the model must, by definition, be elsewhere. As Belting concludes his discussion: 'The portrait, in the modern sense, closed the door to transcendence in the icon and instead mirrored real space in front of the painting.'[11] Antonello's picture is held to encapsulate the alleged break with the medieval past and the corresponding dawn of modernity.

Whether, however, this is a historically convincing account of the painting may be open to debate. That it plays on diverse modes of representation seems clear; but the question is, To what end? The initial impact of the animated gesture of the Virgin's hands and her slightly opened mouth is offset by her oblique and enigmatic gaze, which resists familiarity. The geometric form of her robe is blocked out against the surrounding void, which creates an ambiguity about the space she occupies. The claim that the figure is a 'portrait' of a real woman is questionable, in view of the geometric and idealised treatment of the face and of its particular features. And the dark background, which Belting associates with the newly developing *genre* of secular portraiture, may more plausibly be associated in this context with an ahistorical dimension beyond human time and space. The subtle interplay between these spatial and psychological elements may not be so easily reducible as Belting supposes to the simple alternatives of a door to the transcendental which is either open or closed.

It is ironic that Belting, whose important studies on the migration of Greek icons to the West have done much to bring this phenomenon to the attention of western art historians, has committed himself to the familiar western chronology of the Christian Middle Ages ('the age of the icon'), overtaken *c.*1500 by the Renaissance (the 'age of art'). In his model there is no room for the possibility of continuity in visual response and modes of behaviour around devotional images across this hypothesised divide between 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' cultures. That the period witnessed new currents of public and domestic devotion, to which developments in religious art in certain ways responded, is clear. At issue here, however, is the claim that the paintings of Antonello mark a momentous break in the perceived nature and meaning of art itself.

Belting's chronology finds support in the recent work of Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood. In the context of their stimulating discussion of 'anachronism' in the Renaissance, these scholars have drawn attention to the 'vogue' for supposedly ancient and eastern icons in the late fifteenth-century West, and also to an active interest in Byzantine icons on the part of certain Italian collectors at this period.[12] They believe that their western owners understood all of these icons to be antiquities: traces of a distant past; 'anachronistic' survivors into the modern age; and by this token distinguished from the works of art made by known contemporary artists. Whether all of the images of reputedly oriental origin which were the object of active cults in fifteenth-century Italy, or the high-quality miniature mosaics acquired by Renaissance popes and princes, were really viewed as antiques, survivors from another time, is open to further question.[13] But in any event, the argument of Nagel and Wood is a familiar one, according to which a symptom of the Renaissance attitude at the end of the fifteenth century was a newly historical perception not only of the value, but also of the remoteness, of antiquity. In this respect, at least, their notion of what they call the 'anachronic Renaissance' resembles very closely the Renaissance of Burckhardt and all those who have followed him.[14]

Writing more recently about both the Munich *Virgin* of Antonello and the related Marian image by the artist in Palermo (fig. 2), Nagel has followed Belting in identifying a problematic tension between the evident debt of their bust-length and close-up composition to Byzantine icons of ancient appearance, and the naturalistic, this-worldly presentation of their human subject.[15] Antonello unquestionably introduced into these pictures an unprecedented potential for the psychological engagement of the beholder. The expressions in their vividly drawn faces, and the intense light that falls upon them, indicate the otherwise invisible presence of the angel of the Annunciation, and crystallise their iconographic subject.[16] But like Belting, Nagel sees here a turning point, away from the holy icon and towards the mundane work of art.

2. Antonello da Messina, *Annunciate Virgin*, tempera and oil on panel, 45 x 34.5 cm, Palazzo Abatellis, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, Palermo (photo: © Scala Archives).

Having emphasised the need, when presented with the Palermo *Virgin*, of a process of imaginative reconstruction of the Annunciation story before the viewer could recognise the image as 'a work of religious art', Nagel goes on to state: 'The Annunciation is no longer, strictly speaking, the subject of the painting so much as a framework for understanding how a work of art comes to acquire meaning. The collision of temporalities, the quizzical colloquy, the mobilization of narrative structures, these might be ways of understanding what happens when a work of art engages a viewer.'[17] In this modern account, the sacred character of the traditional religious image has allegedly been appropriated by the artist to serve as 'a framework for understanding… a work of art.'

It is an assumption of the analyses both of Belting and Nagel that an image which uses naturalistic affective techniques to evoke an unfolding human story set in the world cannot have been intended primarily to function as the catalyst of transcendental, atemporal and other-worldly experience. Others have developed similar arguments concerning these paintings. Klaus Krüger, also focusing on the humanity of its principal subject, has described the artist's invention in his annunciate Virgin as a 'fictionalization of the icon'. Once the subject of a picture is understood by the viewer as an actor in a drama, so this argument runs, the manner of engagement has ceased to be that of the icon worshipper ready to be transported to an other-worldly encounter.[18] Pursuing an analogy with the cinematic techniques of the close-up and the implied off-scene, Lorenzo Pericolo has identified an artistic novelty in the way in which these pictures imply a narrative 'before' and 'after', prompting the viewer to expand their this-worldly story in the imagination.[19] All of these interpretations are unexceptionable, so far as they go. What they are reluctant fully to acknowledge, however, is a remaining element in the pictures: the element of uncertainty. A fuller account of them might run as follows. Antonello's evocation of *both* the story *and* the underlying mystery of the incarnation is strengthened by theatrical devices and techniques, notably the play of light and darkness, animation and suspense, mimesis and abstraction. The observer is helped by these visual prompts to reflect *both* on the historical actuality of the event *and* on the various levels, material and transcendent, of its meaning. These tensions and alternatives are deliberately left unresolved within the picture. Antonello's images draw much of their life from the very ambivalence of these internal formal relationships.

The formal appearance of an image, moreover, is only one of the circumstances conditioning the viewer's response. The documented history of the use in practice of devotional pictures during the later Middle Ages is replete with reports of real presence encounters, in which pious beholders reported their sense of being caught up in the animated life and shared space of the image. In these accounts, the reported sense of vivid actuality is consistent with the conviction of a supernatural encounter. By speech, expression or movement, the depicted figure was said to have manifested the truth of a holy presence. If the majority of images reputed in this period to be miraculous were more or less old and outmoded in style, it is also the case that images by Giorgione and Michelangelo acquired such popular reputations in the sixteenth century, demonstrating (if demonstration were needed) that there is no simple correlation between formal technique and sacred potential. A response which attributes to the subject of an image a supernatural role within a personal or local drama has never depended entirely upon the formal qualities (naturalistic or otherwise as these may be) of the representation.[20] Antonello certainly used artistic means to give an unprecedented degree of help to the devout

viewer of his religious paintings. He did not, however, fundamentally alter the scope of Christian art.

Underlying all of the scholarly analyses of the work of Antonello da Messina that have been cited is a set of assumptions about its modernity, which, however, as already indicated, invite critical reflection. It should be possible to recognise the creative brilliance of an original painter, who engaged in stimulating ways with older and current trends in the use of images, without necessarily subscribing to the thesis that such innovation altered the very nature of art itself. The way in which the larger understanding of the period of the Renaissance continues to be bedevilled by received ideas of its modernity is epitomised in the scholarly image of Antonello. From the sixteenth century to the present, the related literature has been dominated by a recurrent concern to present this artist as one of the founders of modern western culture. Antonello has been the object of repeated praise, on the one hand, for his novel conception of painting as an art of spatial geometry, and on the other, for his naturalistic representation of the world, served by his much-studied technique in oil paint; for the humane, psychological realism of his portraits; and for the emotional sensitivity of both his secular and his religious images. Scholarly debate has circled around the question of the painter's debt to other contemporary artists, the group as a whole being perceived as the founding generation of a new artistic and human vision of the world. It is striking, in this connection, that the two recent major exhibitions of Antonello's paintings, in 2006 and in 2013-14, were as much preoccupied as were their predecessors, in 1953 and 1981, with questions of technique and attribution.[21] On these matters, the curators and the corresponding catalogues have had much to contribute to our knowledge of the artist. Remarkably little, however, has been written about the function and use of Antonello's pictures in the historical context of the late fifteenth century.

Fundamental to the prevailing opinion on Antonello have been assumptions, whether explicit or implied, about the qualifications of fifteenth-century Sicily, part of the deep south of the Italian *Mezzogiorno*, to be cast in the role of the cradle of modern culture. The tone was established early by Crowe and Cavalcaselle: '…that he did not learn much in Sicily is clear.'[22] Roberto Longhi was categorical in his view that the art of the south was devoid of intellectual content, and that Antonello could have derived nothing from this but a merely artisanal competence.[23] In Longhi's opinion, Antonello's work was 'too difficult' for his compatriots, and he had necessarily to leave the reactionary climate of Messina in order to benefit from contact with more sophisticated artists and patrons in Rome and central Italy.[24] In his recent monograph on the artist, Mauro Lucco, although aligning himself with other art historians in his emphasis on Antonello's encounters with Venetian painters and his wider Mediterranean culture in preference to Longhi's citation of

Piero, is at one with his predecessor in insisting that, in the absence of a local school of artists worthy of the name and in a cultural environment which was deeply provincial, the creative genius was compelled to migrate: 'He had to leave Sicily.'[25] The motif of slighting disregard with respect to southern culture is not entirely unexpected in a northern perspective; but even Sicilian historians have sounded the same note. One of these, Gioacchino Barbera, has insisted that 'the artistic culture of Sicily was…too old-fashioned and too focused on devotional commissions to absorb Antonello's sophisticated language.'[26] Another, Salvatore Tramontana, has gone out of his way to state that the poor quality of local painting, and its narrow concern with 'moving the soul to piety', are revealing of 'a general cultural backwardness'.[27] A natural response to this prejudice has been strenuous contradiction: the Messinese Salvatore Bottari, in his recent book on Messina and the Renaissance, has defied the critics, cataloguing evidence of cultural vitality to make the case that 'Messina and Sicily enter modernity with the fifteenth century'.[28] Bottari seconds the judgement of the historian of early modern Sicily, Giuseppe Giarrizzo, that by 1500 'medieval Sicily was dead: dead in its values, its symbols, its customs, its faith.'[29] The real trouble with this characteristic of the published scholarship on Antonello and his cultural context is that it continues to reify and to perpetuate a presumed opposition between tradition and modernity, and insists upon casting Messina and its region in this struggle either in the part of an aged relation doomed to be left behind by the thrusting new generation of modern Europeans about to seize the reins of history, or as one of the midwives attendant at its birth. A review of the religious climate in which Antonello was formed, lived and died suggests that this opposition is too stark, and that the binary terms of this discussion are unhelpful.

A significant difficulty, which in part explains the void in the existing literature, is the catastrophic destruction of primary sources for the history of Messina and eastern Sicily in general, to which the earthquake of 1908 made a terrible contribution. We are not, however, entirely ignorant of the environment of Messina during Antonello's lifetime; and to recall certain aspects of that world is to recover part of the cultural horizon within which, and against which, Antonello's religious painting must be judged. The elements of the religious culture of fifteenth-century Messina to be considered here, as relevant and influential contexts for the paintings of Antonello, are, first, images popularly venerated as miraculous; second, the flourishing world of lay confraternities; and third, the revitalised mendicant tradition of the Observant Franciscans.

Whatever importance he attached to his travels, Antonello consistently identified himself in the inscriptions on his pictures as a citizen of Messina, the city in which he grew up, acquired a family house in 1464, and chose to be buried at his death in 1479.[30] This was a city in which certain devotional

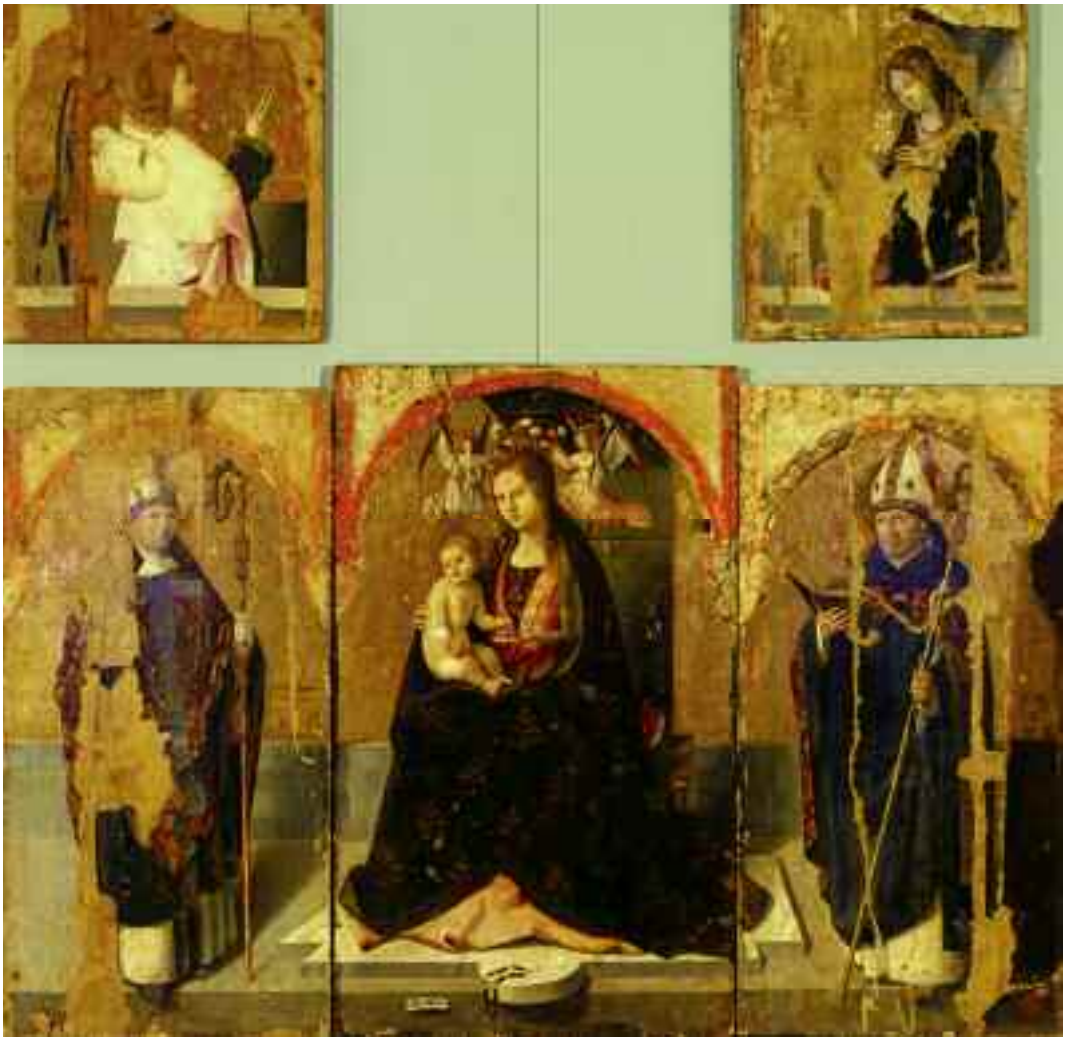
3. *La Madonna della Lettera*, formerly in Messina Cathedral, engraving in P. Samperi, *Iconologia della gloriosa Vergine* (Messina, 1644) (photo: public domain).

images enjoyed enormous prestige, deriving from Messina's Greek Christian past and from the legendary connotations of individual images. During Antonello's formative years, we can identify with confidence the single image which enjoyed the greatest prominence in the lives of all citizens of Messina. This was a panel painting in the cathedral known as the *Madonna della Lettera*. Destroyed in the last century and replaced by a modern copy, its appearance is recorded in earlier versions, including a seventeenth-century engraving published in 1644 by Placido Samperi in his treatise on the miraculous images of the city (fig. 3). Of uncertain date of origin, the *Madonna della Lettera* was venerated as testimony to one of the Christian city's foundation legends, according to which St Paul had delivered to Messina a letter addressed to its population by the Virgin Mary herself. Both legend and image came to enjoy increased prominence in the city during Antonello's lifetime, as the governors of Messina drew on sacred history to bolster their challenge to Palermo for preeminent status in the island under Aragonese rule. Constantine Lascaris, who from 1468 held a chair of Greek in the city, was recruited to produce a

4. *La Madonna della Ciambretta*, mosaic, formerly in the monastery church of San Gregorio (Santa Maria fuori le Mura), Messina. Museo Regionale, Messina (photo: Museo Regionale di Messina).

learned study of the Madonna's letter, marrying the latest scholarship to pious civic tradition: so far from marking a break with medieval icon cults, the new humanism found part of its *raison d'être* in the defence of the ancient holy image.[31] The image itself was credited with miraculous interventions on behalf of the community, limiting the impact of the plague in 1348 and of an earthquake in 1456, and its fame was publicised through copies displayed in several of the city's churches.[32] Susinno, in the inventive biography of the artist which he wrote in 1724, claimed that the young Antonello was stimulated by the example of the Byzantine mosaics in Messina cathedral.[33] This is plausible; but we may be even more certain that from childhood the artist knew intimately this *palladium* of the city: an icon of superhuman powers which no apprentice painter of devotional images can have afforded to ignore.

The Messinese church of San Gregorio, a formerly Greek monastery which was by the later Middle Ages inhabited by Benedictine nuns and rededicated to the Virgin Mary, housed an almost equally venerable and miraculous cult image, the *Madonna della Ciambretta*: a mosaic depiction of the Vir-



5. Antonello da Messina, *San Gregorio Polyptych*, tempera on panel: *Virgin and Child Enthroned*, 129 x 77 cm; *St Gregory* and *St Benedict,* each 125 x 63 cm, Messina, Museo Regionale (photo: Museo Regionale di Messina).

gin and Christ Child with a kneeling figure of St Gregory, the supposed founder of the original monastic community (fig. 4). The mosaic medium and the mixture of Latin and Greek in the inscriptions, together with the style of the restored work, now in the civic museum, dates its manufacture to the period of the Norman kingdom in the twelfth century. Its epithet, 'the Madonna of the little chamber', evidently (as was already noted by Samperi) refers to the niche within which it was recessed. In 1473 the nuns commissioned from Antonello a new painting (the term they used in the document is *ycona*), of which substantial parts survive (fig. 5).[34]

The central panel displays monumental figures in the artist's new and distinctive style, but behind these, a gold background which Longhi singled out as archaic.[35] However, rather than merely old-fashioned, Antonello's use of gold in this case may have been a deliberate tribute to the celebrated mosaic. The

perspectival painting of the cloth of honour above the head of the Virgin indicates the cavity of the fictive conch beneath which she sits. Significantly anticipating the Early Christian mosaic conch in the background of Giovanni Bellini's *San Giobbe Altarpiece* of the early 1480s, Antonello's immediate influence for the placement of his Madonna within a golden niche was surely the *Madonna della Ciambretta*.[36] The borrowing underlines the extent to which the development of new forms of altarpiece at this period was rooted in a keen awareness of older historical models and cultural prototypes. The angled position of the central figures in Antonello's image, on their off-centred throne, shows that the artist had been directed to connect his commission to another focus within the building. It is a reasonable inference that his Madonna and Christ Child were intended to be positioned on the south side of the church, where they will have looked towards the apse, site of the niche containing the *Madonna della Ciambretta*.[37] To the laity coming into the nave of the church, to whom the liturgical east end will normally have been inaccessible, Antonello's depiction offered mediated access to the miraculous figures of the Virgin and Child with St Gregory in the mosaic. In this new version, the figure of Pope Gregory has been supplemented by St Benedict as patron of the nuns' Order. But neither its iconographic elaboration nor its formal difference from the Norman mosaic made Antonello's painting any the less a restatement of the earlier image. To those who prayed before his picture in the late fifteenth century, prompted by the rosary beads included by the artist as a stimulus to intercessory invocation of the Virgin Mary, the enthroned Queen of Heaven will have been recognised as a fresh instantiation of the particular Madonna of this sacred place, the anciently venerable *Madonna della Ciambretta*.[38] The enhancement of this more ancient cult, which was effected by the installation of Antonello's picture, was analogous to the renovation of certain older icons, which is recorded in the same period. In 1469, two other painters of Messina agreed with the nuns of Santa Chiara that in 'the chapel where there is the image of the glorious Virgin Mary', they would paint 'around that same image four angels holding in their hands a gold cloth'.[39]

Antonello engaged further with traditional practices surrounding devotional images in the extensive work he undertook for confraternities based in Messina, Catania and other towns of western Sicily and southern Calabria. Confraternities were at the heart of lay devotion in late-medieval Italy, and recent historical study has made them much better known; but their influence upon the making and use of sacred images has yet to be fully explored.[40] Antonello worked with these organisations throughout his career, from the Messinese company of San Michele dei Gerbini, to which he delivered his first recorded panel before 1457, to the guild of San Michele dei Disciplinati in Catania for which his son Jacobello took over a commission incomplete at Antonello's death in 1479. His last surviving painting, the *Saint Sebastian* now

6. *Gonfalone*, formerly Forza d'Agrò, province of Messina, Church of the Santissima Trinità (stolen in 1977). (photo: public domain).

7. *Gonfalone*, Gallodoro, province of Messina, Church of Santa Maria dell'Assunta (photo: Salvatore Mosca).

in Dresden, was made for a guild of San Rocco in the Venetian church of San Giuliano.[41] Within his native region, Antonello is known to have been responsible for no fewer than a dozen commissions to provide painted *gonfaloni*: wooden panels, painted on both front and reverse, for processional use, and typically enhanced with elaborately carved and gilded frames, the latter as expensive a part of the contracts as the painted elements. Unlike the cloth banners carried by confraternities in central and northern Italy, the *gonfaloni* of the late-medieval south were normally of painted wood. It seems possible that this form was influenced by the history of Greek presence in the area. In Byzantium, guilds made regular processions with painted wooden icons representing the holiest images in the possession of the emperor. In the West, however, lay confraternities enjoyed the freedom to select and to promote the cults of particular favoured images, which they likewise carried in procession.[42] The identity of these bodies was focused above all in the *gonfaloni* with which they processed, and the importance attached to them was underlined by the competitive language of many commissions to artists, who were regularly required to make a new image on the model of that of another guild, but 'more beautifully'.[43] Not one of Antonello's numerous *gonfaloni* survives –

being regularly in use, they required frequent repair and eventual replacement – but the related documents indicate that their themes focused on the Virgin Mary and the Passion of Christ.[44] That commissioned in 1457 for a confraternity of San Michele in Reggio di Calabria included a Madonna on the front, and a Passion on the reverse with, above, an image of St Michael holding the scales of the souls in the Last Judgement and trampling on Satan.[45] Two examples of the *genre*, the work of different craftsmen at the turn of the century, indicate the type of image which so many of these devotional groups sought from Antonello (fig. 6, 7). Forza d'Agrò and Gallodoro, the homes of these two *gonfaloni*, lie on the hills above Taormina, in the hinterland of the city of Messina: they are very close to the world Antonello knew and for which he worked.[46] The former having been the victim of theft, that at Gallodoro remains alone in the island of Sicily to represent a formerly enormous population of painted confraternity *gonfaloni* in the pre-modern Italian south. The present near-invisibility of this class of object is the paradoxical consequence of the great importance attached by each confraternity to its respective standard. Battered by exposure to the elements and to the dramatic enactments in which it was the protagonist, the *gonfalone* would be renewed in each generation, by the available artists of the day. Yet in the eyes of its guardians, for whom this ensign embodied much of their sense of community and their hope of spiritual protection, the image remained always the same. So it will have been for Antonello's works in this *genre*, in whose novelty the guild members saw something far more ancient.

The supposed opposition between 'tradition' and 'modernity' is in this context particularly misleading. It has been claimed in the past that confraternity patronage was naturally conservative: an assumption born once again from the supposed binary opposition between a medieval world of icon veneration and a Renaissance culture of stylistic innovation. Renaissance art historians display a recurring tendency to ascribe creativity in the arts exclusively to the patronage of aristocrats and merchant princes. Geneviève Bresc-Bautier blamed the confraternities, in part, for what both she and others have called the 'archaising aspects of Sicilian painting':

> …in particular, the late retention of the gold background, an element of richness which it was found hard to abandon, and also the traditional and invariable type of composition in which the Virgin, whether with the Child or crowned, smiles imperturbably, surrounded by rigid saints, contained and lined up beneath their firmly delimited arcades.[47]

Yet the members of these lay devotional societies, with whose officers Antonello and other artists discussed the commissions, should not be thought constricted in their attitudes. A few decades before Antonello painted a *gonfalone* for the Messinese confraternity of San Nicola della Montagna, there were numbered among the membership of this guild a shoemaker, a spice-

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merchant, a silversmith, a goldsmith, and a notary, together with a socially more elevated *nobilis* or patrician of the city.[48] The prominence of this broad, middling social group within the cities of the south increased during the fifteenth century, and in Messina in particular this led to a political challenge to the aristocratic élite which had traditionally dominated urban government. Although the popular revolt which erupted in 1464 was concluded by the firm reassertion of aristocratic power, these prosperous craftsmen and professionals would continue to find an outlet for their values, their self-esteem and their political ambitions in the confraternities.[49] Nor were these patrons blind to the artistic possibilities of the day. The Forza d'Agrò and Gallodoro *gonfaloni* give some indication of the scope which artists might find for creative innovation, within a format and a set of cultural practices which remained traditional.[50] The bold compositional and painterly treatment of figures, landscape, and perspective in the Gallodoro *gonfalone* has caused this work to be attributed to a follower of Antonello.[51] By the same token, the Gallodoro example probably gives a fair indirect impression of the older artist's work in this *genre*. The traditional form, devotional functions and social significance of the confraternity *gonfalone* drew fresh potency from the innovative stylistic contributions of Antonello and his contemporaries.

While the skill of particular painters and woodcarvers in these images was evidently appreciated, the life of the *gonfalone* icon was kindled by its dramatic use on ceremonial occasions. Ritual processions regularly staged the mutual encounter of diverse standards, when the Madonna of one society would greet the patron saint of another in their images. The animation of the *gonfalone* on these occasions was described by a mid-seventeenth-century witness in the region of Palermo:

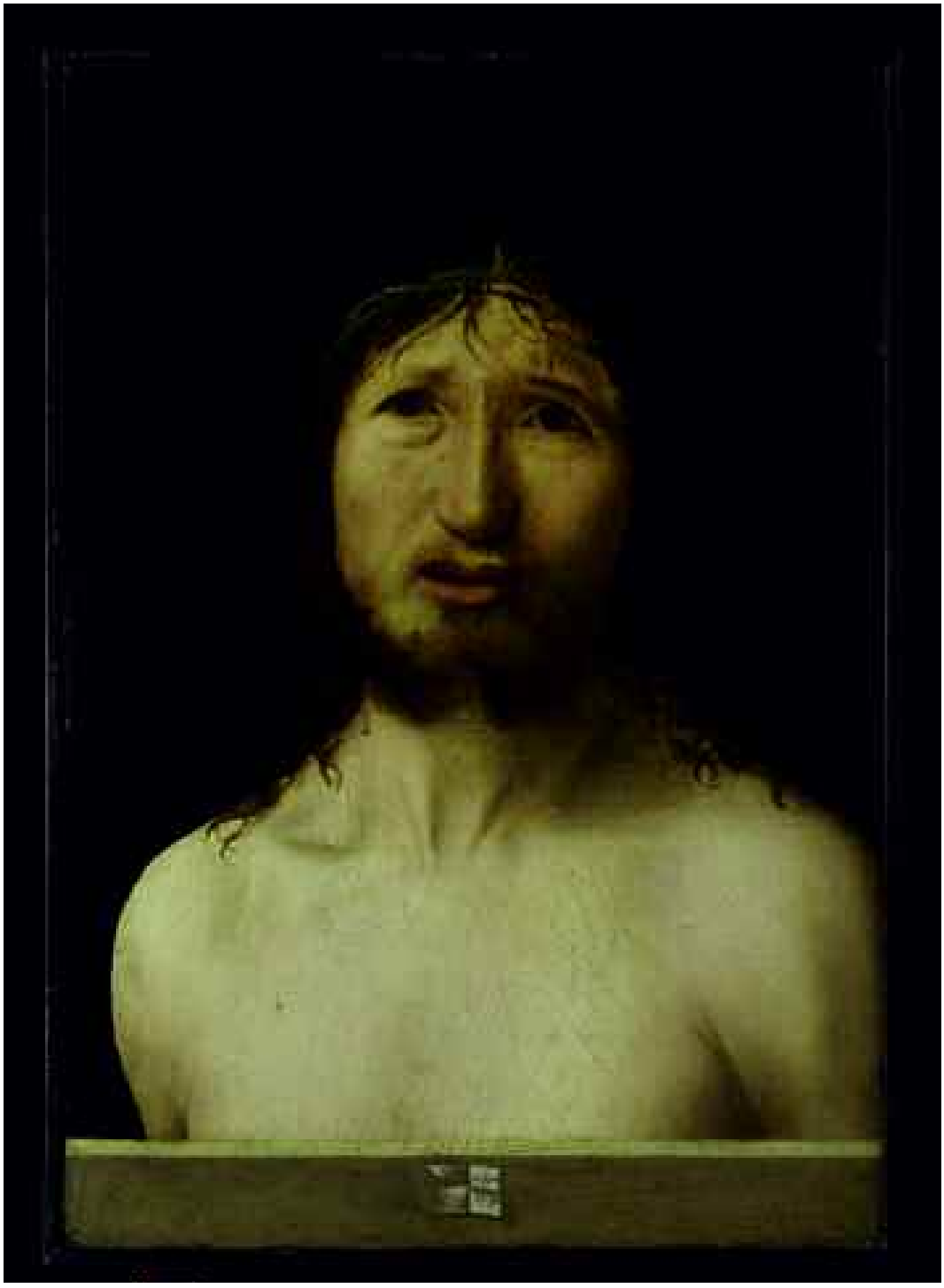
> These *gonfaloni* are carried in saints'-day processions with flowers everywhere, and a great variety of banderoles of multicoloured silk and tinsel attached to their tops which blow in the wind. They go preceded by harps and cymbals and other musical instruments, and are carried with wonderful dexterity, now in the palm of one hand, now in the other, or on the shoulder, whence in the blink of an eye they jump to the forehead, the chin, the teeth, and various other positions, all the while dancing, and the valiant and well-practised *gonfalone*-bearers compete so fiercely as to stupefy the watchers in these festivals and public celebrations of the saints.[52]

A modern instance of these rites, which in all likelihood has late-medieval origins, is the double procession of the just-cited, adjacent communities of Gallodoro and Forza d'Agrò, which annually follow their respective confraternity standard to a point on their common territorial boundary. At this place, the images 'embrace' one another with a 'kiss'.[53] Similar theatrical performances in which holy images met to exchange greetings are recorded in

medieval Constantinople, Rome, and other places: it is reasonable to envisage Antonello's works for confraternities being employed in this way.[54] A panel painting in this context was one element caught up in the service of a larger complex of social and religious aspirations, in which participants' sense of identity was invested in personal and collective memories of local tradition; long histories of mutual relations and rivalry with neighbouring communities; and a persistent loyalty to divine patrons whose images, however many times repainted over the years by diverse artists, continued to guarantee the same ancient holy presences.

Finally, if we are better to understand the context and use of such a devotional image as Antonello's portrayal of the *Annunciate Virgin* or his intimate, concentrated and shocking *Ecce Homo* (fig. 1, 2, 8), it is no less relevant to recall that both Messina and Antonello were deeply affected by the activities, including their use of images, of the Observant Franciscans. The principal founders of the Franciscan Observants, the Sicilian Matteo of Agrigento and Bernardino of Siena, made frequent and at times controversial use of images in preaching.[55] Those who came under their influence would regularly draw spiritual inspiration from domestic icons. When Matteo of Agrigento fired crowds in Messina with his oratory in the mid-1420s, Mascalda Romano, the wife of a distinguished merchant and patrician, being unable to join the Franciscan Order as a nun, became instead a member of the Third Order, and embarked on a career of good works in the city.[56] The consequences for her daughter Esmeralda were even more momentous. Looking at a picture in the family house representing the Virgin Mary, the mother would remember that her husband had been moved by the beauty of the Madonna as she appeared in this panel to desire a daughter who might resemble her.[57] Naturally, the young Esmeralda developed a close attachment to the household images, and one day, returning home from a sermon, she knelt at the head of the stairs beneath a painting of Christ, from which there appeared to her to emanate a bright circle of fire which enveloped her, so that she fainted.[58] This was at the beginning of a career of piety, in the course of which she would come to be regarded as a living saint by her followers, a number of whom collaborated immediately after her death in 1485 to compile her biography. As soon as she was able to shake off family pressures to marry, she joined the convent of Franciscan nuns in the city, taking the name of Eustochia. Although her subsequent life of self-mortification and devotion to Christ, first with the Poor Clares but later in the reformed Observant house of Montevergine which she founded in 1460, was pursued in voluntary isolation from the surrounding urban population, the controversy generated by her example sent shock-waves throughout Messina. Prominent families were provoked into bitter argument concerning their daughters who chose, sometimes in defiance of their parents, to join Eustochia's community: while the Montevergine house, and the

8. Antonello da Messina, *Christ Crowned with Thorns*, oil, perhaps over tempera, on wood, 42.5 x 30.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931, New York (photo: The Metropolitan Museum).



Observant Franciscans in general, gained the widespread support of Messinese testators in the course of the fifteenth century, other interests were hostile, with the result that no-one in the city can have been unaware of the controversy.[59] Certainly Antonello, who as a resident in the *contrada* of the Sicopanti was a close neighbour of the nuns of Montevergine, will have followed the debates with interest.[60] Facing the opposition of powerful men in the civic élite, Eustochia once experienced a vision in which she saw an army in white, and she was given a *gonfalone* to carry before it, with the instruction: 'Go out and fight like a man.'[61] A number of further visions were experienced by the *beata* in front of particular images.[62] On the altar of the church of her foundation at Montevergine, Eustochia placed an image of Santa Maria degli Angeli, presumably with the intention to recall, or even to reproduce, the venerated picture in the church of that dedication at Assisi.[63] A single, battered, fourteenth-century icon of the Virgin Mary, with a provenance from the house of Montevergine, survives as a faint echo of the important role of images in the convent during the later fifteenth century.[64] The original male house of Observant Franciscans in Messina, Santa Maria di Gesù Superiore, was itself built around a miraculous icon, which had been inherited from Carmelite nuns previously on their site.[65] The culture of these Observant communities clearly resonated with the painter, for in his testament, Antonello delivered a remarkably outspoken statement in their support, declaring his wish to be buried at Santa Maria di Gesù, clothed in the habit of the house, and that the funeral arrangements should be in the sole hands of the Observant monks.[66] In addition to the miraculous *palladia* and the confraternities of Messina and its region, therefore, it would appear that personal regard for the reformed Franciscans of the Observance drew Antonello into a culture of particular respect for holy images. We know that he kept in his home at the time of his death a domestic devotional image ('huna cona di cammara'), protected by a red silk cloth ('huna avanticona di sita russa').[67] In the light of the emphatic tone of his expression of commitment to the Observants in his will (no others, and especially no other religious, were to handle his body), it seems probable that Antonello was a member of a confraternity linked to the Order, and certain that he engaged actively in the visual culture of devotion in Messina which has been evoked in the preceding paragraphs.

In the contemporary view, no conceptual distinction separated the personal devotional image produced by a known Sicilian painter from an anonymous icon of eastern and Orthodox origin. Either might serve as a means of access to the real presence of God. Perceived distinctions of status between one image and another resulted not only from the mind and hand of the artist but also from particular patterns of use and veneration. Faced with a commission to paint a Madonna, it is not plausible that Antonello would have conceived his challenge in the binary and incompatible terms proposed by Belting, as an impossible marriage of 'icon' and 'portrait'. To introduce the

naturalistic techniques of the portraitist, as Antonello did, to a degree, in his Munich Madonna, was not to render his image unserviceable as a means of access to a supernatural being who was, after all, venerated for her human qualities. The ambivalence which modern commentators have identified in the Marian paintings in Munich and Palermo is a symptom, not of a schizophrenic disjuncture between types of image, but of the artist's attempt to capture the arrest of history at the instant of Christ's incarnation. The suspended animation of the Madonna's pose in each case points at once both to the human drama and to the transcendent significance of that moment. Maintaining focus on both aspects simultaneously, the ideal vision of these pictures is stereoscopic. A similar observation applies to Antonello's harrowingly vivid renditions of the suffering Christ (fig. 8). The presentation of Christ in the *Ecce Homo* panel now in New York comes closer than the annunciate Virgin Mary to resembling a secular portrait, and indeed this is part of its shocking effect.[68] The subject's arresting gaze, like that of the sitters in Antonello's secular portraits, engages directly and inescapably with that of the viewer. The parapet and the attached authorial label appear as though intended innocently to present another image of worldly human success. This renders all the more powerfully affecting the vulnerable, naked torso, and the drawn and beseeching features of Christ as his eyes transfix the devout observer. Late-medieval Christian piety attached increasing importance to the humanity of both Jesus and his mother, and in this context new forms of artistic naturalism found their spiritual *raison d'être*.

But whatever the levels of artistic ingenuity and technique in a given image, its perceived potency depended also upon its use over time and upon the layering of history. A merely visual analysis cannot capture this. The experience and memory of the beholder – in this as in other visual cultures – made all the difference. The recognized power of the *Madonna della Lettera* in Messina cathedral derived from centuries of public veneration and crises surmounted. A processional *gonfalone* became charged with the honour and the sense of antiquity of its confraternity members. The tender presence of a domestic icon of the Virgin was the more affectionately felt because the head of the household had once said that he hoped his child would grow to resemble her. An altarpiece representing the Madonna of the Angels within a new community of religious women was respected because it embodied a link with a reputedly miraculous image, with the heroic early days of the Franciscan Order in the thirteenth century and with St Francis, on whose life the foundress modelled her own existence. These spatial contexts and temporal patterns in the history of images were not brought to an end by changing artistic techniques at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, any more than they were at any other date in the history of art.

Antonello was, without question, an extraordinarily talented painter. The

visual evidence seems entirely to justify the claim, made explicitly by Roberto Longhi and implicitly by the more recent critics reviewed in this essay, that he brought an 'intellectual element' to his art. The originality of his religious paintings certainly contributed to contemporary currents in the devotional use of images. What, however, the evidence does not support is the suggestion that he 'turned his back' on inherited practices in the making and use of sacred pictures. To revisit those practices is the better to appreciate both the artist's rootedness in history, and the operation of his exceptional creative ability within that context. For Antonello, modernity was bound up in tradition, and there was no opposition between art and cult.

1) J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, D. Gordon, and N. Penny, *Giotto to Dürer. Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery*, New Haven/London 1991, 318.
2) Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, G. Milanesi (ed.), 9 vols (Florence, 1878-85), II, 563-73, esp. 573. Quoted from G. Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, transl. G. du C. de Vere, D. Ekserdjian (ed.), 2 vols London 1996, I, 424-9, esp. 429. These citations refer to the 1568 edition of the *Lives*; Vasari had given the same account of Antonello in the first edition of 1550. *Le Vite del Vasari dell'edizione del MDL*, C. Ricci (ed.), 4 vols, Milan/Rome 1927, II, 89-96.
3) R. Longhi,'Piero dei Franceschi e lo sviluppo della pittura veneziana' [1914], reprinted in R. Longhi, *Scritti giovanili 1912-1922*, 2 vols, Florence 1961, I, 55-106.
4) Longhi, *op. cit.*, (note 3) 72 ('sintetismo prospettico di forma-colore'); 78 ('il peso di elementi intellettuali' in Antonello's oeuvre); 86 (the comparison of Antonello with Cézanne); 88 (Antonello's art opening the way 'gioire dell'arte come arte e non come mera imitazione').
5) See R. Longhi, *Piero della Francesca*, Milan 1927; M. Mimita Lamberti, 'Le campagne di Piero: Longhi, Soffici, Morandi', in M. Mimita Lamberti and M. Fagiolo dell'Arco (eds.), *Piero della Francesca e il novecento*, exh. cat. Sansepolcro (Museo Civico), Venice 1991, 21-53.
6) F. Bologna and F. de Melis (eds.), *Antonello da Messina*, exh. cat. Rovereto (MART), Milan 2013, esp. 4, 64, 88. Bologna was responding in particular to the argument of Mauro Lucco, presented in the context of the exhibition of Antonello's work held in Rome in 2006, that the debt to Piero had been overstated (and was undocumented). See M. Lucco (ed.), *Antonello da Messina: l'opera completa*, exh. cat. Rome (Scuderie del Quirinale), Milan 2006, 19.
7) G. Rosser, review of 'Antonello da Messina' and 'L'Altro Ritratto', *Burlington Magazine*, 156 (2014), 57-8.
8) H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Age of Art* [1990], transl. E. Jephcott, Chicago 1994, 14-16, 470-80.
9) H. Belting, 'The Invisible Icon and the Icon of the Invisible: Antonello and New Paradigms in Renaissance Painting', in *Watching Art: Writings in Honor of James Beck*, L. Catterson and M. Zucker (eds.), Todi 2006, 73-83. Belting first proposed a version of this thesis in his *Likeness and Presence* (note 8), 346-8.
10) Belting, *op. cit.* (note 9), 73.
11) *Ibid*., 80.
12) A. Nagel and C. S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York 2010, 97-107.
13) Apart from a single reference by Cardinal Jacopo Ammanati, who noted in the collection of Pope Paul II (1464-71) 'images of saints of ancient workmanship brought from Greece, which they call icons', little evidence appears to be cited for the assertion that 'the dating of such works was regularly off by a thousand years or more'. See Nagel and Wood, *op. cit.* (note 12), 101. Nor is it evident that the western collector's appreciation of fine materials and exquisite workmanship in high-quality icons precluded their use as devotional objects in the customary mode of holy images. On the collectors of Byzantine micromosaics at this time, see R. Duits, '"Una icona pulchra". The Byzantine icons of Cardinal Pietro Barbo', in *Mantova e il rinascimento italiano. Studi in onore di David S. Chambers*, P. Jackson and G. Rebecchini (eds.), Mantua 2011, 127-42. For cult images, see note 22 below.
14) Nagel and Wood, *op. cit.* (note 12), 97-122.
15) A. Nagel, *The Controversy of the Renaissance Art*, Chicago 2011, 43-9.

16) Despite the element of initial uncertainty, which is crucial to the impact of each of these pictures, their identification in both cases as the Virgin of the Annunciation seems beyond doubt. The isolated Madonna, without the Christ Child, is rare in both Byzantine and western iconography (although not unknown: see two examples by Niccolò di Piero Gerini (d.1415), respectively in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, and in Christ Church Picture Gallery, Oxford. See C. Syre, *Früher italienische Gemälde aus dem Bestand der Alten Pinakothek*, exh. cat. Munich (Alte Pinakothek), Munich 1990, 52 ff. and cat. no. 4; J. Byam Shaw, *Paintings by Old Masters at Christ Church Oxford*, London 1967, 34, cat. no. 8, and pl. 10). Zeri's attempt to reconstruct Antonello's Palermo panel as the wing of a diptych paired with the annunciating angel has, however, rightly been abandoned in the more recent literature. See F. Zeri, 'Un riflesso di Antonello da Messina a Firenze', *Paragone* 9 (1958), 16-21; Lucco, *op.cit*. (note 6), cat. no 35. The angel is, therefore, an invisible presence, implied in each case by the light of the image. But *pace* John Shearman and Mauro Lucco, the viewer of these images is not cast as the Archangel Gabriel: such hubris would have been thought indecorous, and is beyond plausibility. See J. Shearman, *Only Connect…Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton, NJ 1992, 35; Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 6), 234.
17) Nagel, *op. cit.* (note 15), 48.
18) K. Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren. Ästethische Illusion in der Kunst der früher Neuzeit in Italien*, Munich 2001, 101-2.
19) L. Pericolo, 'The invisible presence: cut-in, close-up, and off-scene in Antonello da Messina's Palermo Annunciate', *Representations*, 107 (2009), 1-29.
20) J. Garnett and G. Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles. Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present*, London 2013, 25-30 and *passim*. On miraculous image cults in this period see also E. Thunø and G. Wolf (eds.), *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Rome 2004 and M. Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, New Haven 2013.
21) G. Vigni and G. Carandente (eds.), *Antonello da Messina e la pittura del '400 in Sicilia*, exh. cat. Messina (Palazzo Comunale), Venice 1953; A. Marabottini and F. Sricchia Santoro, (eds.), *Antonello da Messina*, exh. cat. Messina (Museo Regionale), Rome 1981; Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 6); Bologna and de Melis, *op. cit.* (note 6).
22) J.A. Crowe and G.B. Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy*, T. Borenius (ed.), 3 vols, London 1912, II, 416.
23) Longhi, *op. cit.,* (note 3), 78.
24) R. Longhi, 'Frammento siciliano', *Paragone*, 47 (1953), 3-44.
25) M. Lucco, *Antonello da Messina*, Milan, 2011, 28.
26) G. Barbera, 'The Life and Work of Antonello da Messina', in G. Barbera, K. Christiansen and A. Bayer, *Antonello da Messina. Sicily's Renaissance Master*, exh. cat. New York (Metropolitan Museum), New York 2005, 17-30, esp. 30.
27) S. Tramontana, *Antonello e la sua città*, Palermo 1981, 66.
28) S. Bottari, *Messina tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento. Il 'caso' Antonello, la cultura, le élite politiche, le attività produttive*, Messina 2010, 41.
29) G. Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia moderna*, Florence 2004, 17-18.
30) The extant documents concerning Antonello have been conveniently published in Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 6), 353-66; and Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 25), 288-98.
31) Bottari, *op. cit.* (note 28), 59-60; P. Samperi, *Iconologia della gloriosa Vergine Madre di Dio Maria Protettrice di Messina*, Messina 1644, 71-2.
32) Samperi, *op. cit.* (note 31), 51-82. The *Madonna della Lettera* was also said to have appeared on the walls of the city during its siege by Charles of Anjou in 1282. Messina's central role in the Christian reconversion of Sicily was celebrated in the cult of the Madonna della Romanella, which the Norman Count Roger had received from Messina as a *palladium* at the moment of his invasion in 1058 and which he had then deposited in the Basilian Greek monastery founded by him in the city, Santa Maria dei Greci. By Antonello's day the Greek monks had left the house; but the icon continued to be regarded as one of the city's most powerful protectors. Samperi, *op. cit.* (note 31), 586-8. Samperi's enormous catalogue includes cults whose origin was recent: the decades around 1600 saw a great expansion of the phenomenon of the miraculous image. But those noted here are among a number with authenticated medieval origins.
33) F. Susinno, *Le vite de' pittori messinesi*, V. Martinelli (ed.), Florence 1960), 17-29.
34) Lucco, *op. cit*. (note 6) 186-8, 360 (doc. XXIII).
35) Longhi, *op. cit.* (note 24), 29.
36) The creative consequences of the relationship between these two painters once Antonello reached Venice in 1475 have been much debated. See O. Bätschmann, *Giovanni Bellini*, London 2008, 159-71.
37) Samperi, *op. cit.* (note 31), 409-17. Lucco presents clear evidence that the commission derived from the nuns as a community. He also notes the marked angle of the enthroned Madonna, but does not make the connection to the cult image in the church. See Lucco, *op. cit.*

(note 6), 186-8. Samperi (411) records that this was located 'in the *tribuna*', and that ex votos had for long been displayed there.
38) Since the identification of the beads as a rosary has been denied by Lucco on the grounds that it has 38 beads, it is relevant to point out that a very similar chain of beads appears at the foot of the figure of St Dominic (with whom the origin of the rosary is associated) in a stray panel from an altarpiece, recently identified, by Antonello. See Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 6), 188 and *Gold Backs 1250-1480*, exh. cat. London (Patrick Matthiesen Fine Art Ltd.), London 1996, 145. (The altarpiece to which this panel and a companion *St Peter* belonged may have been that seen by Vasari in a Florentine collection. See G. Mandel, *L'Opera completa di Antonello da Messina*, Milan 1967, 102). Fifteenth-century rosaries of varying quantities of beads are discussed and illustrated in E. Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game. The Symbolic Background to the European Prayer-Beads*, London 1969, esp. 71.
39) Tramontana, *op. cit.* (note 27), 39. A similar instance is to be seen in the angels added in the early sixteenth century to the thirteenth- or fourteenth-century cult image of the Madonna di Romania in the cathedral of Tropea in Calabria. Central Italian examples are discussed in C. Hoeniger, *The Renovation of Paintings in Tuscany, 1250-1500*, Cambridge 1995.
40) *Ordo fraternitatis: confraternite e pietà dei laici nel Medioevo*, G. G. Meersseman (ed.), Rome 1977; C. F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 2003. The artistic impact is broached in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy. Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, B. Wisch and D. Cohl Ahl (eds.), Cambridge 2000.
41) Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 6), 274-6, 356 (doc. IV), 365-6 (doc. XLII).
42) Byzantine confraternities and processional icons: Belting, *op. cit.,* (note 8), 188-92. Central and north Italian confraternity banners: A. Dehmer, *Italienische Bruderschaftsbanner des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, Berlin 2004; M. Bury, 'The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *gonfaloni* of Perugia', *Renaissance Studies*, 12 (1998), 67-86; M. Bury, 'Documentary Evidence for the Materials and Handling of Banners, principally in Umbria, in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', in *The Fabric of Images. European Paintings on Textile Supports in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, C. Villers (ed.), London 2000, 19-30; P. Rihouet, 'Entre (é)motions et arrêt sur image: la performativité des bannières sacrées ombriennes', in K. Gvozdeva and H. Rudolf (eds.), *Procession et media: Discours et images prémodernes du mouvement rituel*, Heidelberg 2011, 291-306. Dehmer (51) notes that the use of portative images by south Italian confraternities has been little studied.
43) For example, see A. Cutrera, 'Gonfaloni processionali della Sicilia e il gonfalone di Forza d'Agrò', *Bollettino d'arte*, 5 (1925-26), 216-24, esp. 220. For the banner as the essence of a confraternity's identity, see Dehmer, *op. cit.* (note 42), 83.
44) See the documents published in Lucco, *op. cit.*(note 6) 353-66: docs IV, XII, XVII, XIX, XXI, XXII, XXVI, XXXII, XXXIV (exceptionally, this was a question of a painted silk banner), XXXVI, XLII. In one case, at least, Antonello undertook to execute maintenance of the image for free if it were required within six years of delivery of the *gonfalone* (see doc. XXI).
45) See the documents cited in the preceding note (doc. IV).
46) For the Forza d'Agrò *gonfalone*, see Cutrera, *op. cit.* (note 43), 216-24. This *gonfalone* was stolen from the church in 1977; its present whereabouts are unknown. For that of Gallodoro, see *Messina. Il ritorno della memoria*, exh. cat. Messina (Museo Civico), Palermo 1994, 276-8; S. Mosca, *Il gonfalone 'antonelliano' di Gallodoro*, Messina 2011; V. Abbate, '*A guisa d'un albero trionfale…gentil lavoro di legname perforata*: Annotazioni sul gonfalone processionale', in *Manufacere et scolpire in lignamine. Scultura e intaglio in legno in Sicilia tra Rinascimento e Barocco*, T. Pugliatti, S. Rizzo and P. Russo (eds.), Palermo 2012, 645-51. This work is preserved in the parish church of the Assumption in Gallodoro.
47) G. Bresc-Bautier, *Artistes, patriciens et confréries. Production et consommation de l'œuvre d'art à Palerme et en Sicile occidentale (1348-1460)*, Rome 1979, 40. A similar view of the confraternities as essentially conservative is expressed by Tramontana, *op. cit.* (note 27), 99-100.
48) D. Santoro, *Messina l'indomita. Strategie familiari del 'patriziato' urbano tra XIV e XV secolo*, Caltanisetta/Rome, 2003, 335-6 (document of 1392). For Antonello's commission, see the documents cited in note 20 above (doc. XII).
49) The conflict is described in terms of 'a social crisis' by C. Trasselli, *La 'questione sociale' in Sicilia e la rivolta di Messina del 1464*, Messina 1990, esp. 67; relatively muted accounts are given by C. Salvo, *Giurati, feudatori, mercanti. L'élite urbana a Messina tra medio evo e età moderna*, Naples 1995, 137-141, and E. Pispisa, *Messina medievale*, Galatina 1996, 105-19. All, however, agree on the broad outline of social change in the period. Bottari, *op. cit.* (note 28), 28-9, notes the political potential of the confraternities in this period of political tension.
50) On the general subject of the constraints and opportunities represented by confraternity patronage, it has been pointed out that more than one painter produced his most original work for these lay groups. Wisch and Cole Ahl, *op. cit.* (note 40), 1-19, esp. 12.

51) Mosca, *op. cit.* (note 46), 36, 58. Mosca accepts Bottari's dating of *c.*1518 on the basis of a supposed debt to Antonello de Saliba's *Madonna della Catena*, itself apparently dated to that year. However, the *Enthroned Madonna* of the Gallodoro *gonfalone* is equally close to Antonello de Saliba's earlier *Madonna and Child* of 1497 (reproduced in Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 25), 257); so the *gonfalone*'s date remains open between the end of the fifteenth and the first decades of the sixteenth century.
52) G. Cascini, *Di S. Rosalia vergine palermitana libri tre*, Palermo 1651, I, ii, cit. Abbate, *op. cit.* (note 46), 645.
53) Information derived locally in Gallodoro from Salvatore Mosca, local historian, from Padre Francesco Cucinotta, parish priest, and from Alfio Currenti, *sindaco* of Gallodoro, to whom I am most grateful.
54) Belting, *op. cit.* (note 8), esp. 69, 75, 184-5, 245, 320-9; G. Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani. Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilden im Mittelalter*, Weinheim 1990.
55) Around 1420 Matteo d'Agrigento was in controversy with the archbishop of Naples for insisting on processing with a standard bearing Bernardino's device of the Name of Jesus. F. Rotolo, *Il beato Matteo d'Agrigento e la provincia francescana di Sicilia nella prima metà del secolo XV*, Palermo 2006, 103-4.
56) *Ibid.*, 112.
57) F. Terrizzi (ed.), *La beata Eustochia (1434-1485)*, 2nd ed., Messina 1988, 60-1.
58) *Ibid.*, 65.
59) 'Et tanto era lo tumulto de la gente, che tutta la ciptade se mosse contra di noi, et sopra tutti, contra di essa beata [*sc.* Eustochia] proclamavano con innumerabile iniurie, maledictione et biastemie.' *Ibid.*, 154. For the generally increasing trend of support for the Observants, see Elisa Vermiglio, 'La presenza francescana a Messina tra il XIV e XV secolo: lasciti, donazioni e testamenti', in *Francescanesimo e cultura nella Provincia di Messina. Atti del convegno di studio, Messina 6-8 novembre 2008*, C. Miceli and A. Passantino (eds.), Palermo 2009, 383-99, esp. 389-90. The Observant houses in Sicily, by contrast with the eremitical communities first founded in central Italy, were city-based, and deliberately pursued a pastoral role in their lay environments. Rotolo, *op. cit.* (note 55). 77-8.
60) Tramontana, *op. cit.* (note 27), 82-3.
61) Terrizzi, *op. cit.* (note 57), 86.
62) *Ibid.*, 80, 90.
63) Samperi, *op.cit.* (note 31), 342-7; M. Lavin, 'Images of a miracle: Federico Barocci and the Porziuncula indulgence', *Artibus et Historiae*, 27 (2006), 9-50, esp. 12-13.
64) *Madonna Glykophylousa*, tempera on panel, 47 x 33 cm. 14th-century. Messina, Museo Regionale (ex monastery of Montevergine).
65) Samperi, *op. cit.* (note 31), 141-2 and fig.10.
66) Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 6), 362-4 (doc. XXXV): '…Item volo et mando quod cadaver meum seppelliatur in conventu sancte Marie de Ihesu cum habitu dicti conventus et quod in obsequio meo nullus clerus tam maioris messanensis ecclesie quam alius et presertim conventualium debeat in meo obsequio intervenire nisi clerus et monaci dicti conventus sancte Marie de Ihesu.' The church in question was that of the monastery of Santa Maria di Gesù Superiore and not the second Observant house in Messina, founded in 1463, Santa Maria di Gesù Inferiore. See Tramontana, *op. cit.* (note 27), 88-9.
67) See the inventory compiled at the time of the painter's death in 1479, and cited in an agreement between his widow and son: Lucco, *op. cit.* (note 6), 365.
68) On this picture see Barbera, Christiansen and Bayer, *op. cit.* (note 26).