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Shaw-mei Dee Yang Hsieh

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Webster Smith

Major professor

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PIERO DI COSIMO'S ADORATION OF THE CHRIST CHILD

IN TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART

BY

Shaw-mei Dee Yang Hsieh

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

PIERO DI COSIMO'S ADORATION OF THE CHRIST CHILD

IN TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART

By

Shaw-mei Dee Yang Hsieh

Piero di Cosimo's Adoration of the Christ Child is problematic in its dating and subject matter. The painting can be dated to the first decade of the sixteenth century, probably before 1505, by stylistic analysis. The subject matter of this painting is the dual role of Christ as priest and sacrifice and the role of the Virgin as celebrant and co-redeemer, which is in accordance with the text of the book from which the Virgin reads. The unusual quietness of this painting marks it as belonging to a type of painting made to incite meditation. Its tondo format, which was mostly used in domestic or civic commissions, make it more likely to have been designed for contemplation in private.

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Introduction

Piero di Cosimo's Adoration of the Christ Child at the Toledo Museum of Art (figs. 1-4) is, like many of his other paintings, problematic in its dating and even in its subject matter. This thesis represents a first attempt to study this picture, and its problems, at length.

The painting is executed in the format of a tondo, measuring sixty three inches in diameter, and the medium of the painting is oil on wood panel. No written document nor commission record has been found for this painting. According to Crowe and Cavalcaselle there exists a tradition that Lorenzo de' Medici presented this tondo to a lady of the Guiducci family,¹ but many scholars have doubts about this. The painting was owned by the Guiducci family, then it passed to a Mr. Metzger, a picture dealer in Florence, and from his heirs it came into the possession of Alexander Baker of London in the late nineteenth century, and was attributed to Luca Signorelli in Baker's collection.² It came into the collection of Edmund Street, R.A., of London in 1874 and was in the collection of Arthur E. Street, Esq.,

¹ J.A. Crowe and G.B. Cavalcaselle, A History of Painting in Italy: Umbria, Florence and Siena, V: Umbrian and Sienese Masters of The Fifteenth Century, vol. 5, ed. T. Borenius, (London:J. Murray, 1914), 5:88 n.3.

² B. M. Godwin, "An Important Italian Painting," Toledo Museum of Art Museum News, 78 (March 1937): 1111.

in London in 1893.³ In the exhibition of works by Luca Signorelli and his school at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London in 1893 the painting was reattributed to Piero di Cosimo by analogy with the Dresden Holy Family with the Infant St. John.⁴ (fig. 5) It was purchased by Edward D. Libbey from the Duveen Brothers in 1937 and was presented to the Toledo Museum of art as a gift that year, thus becoming one of the museum's most important paintings from the Renaissance.

The painting shows the Madonna kneeling in a richly flowered meadow adoring the Christ Child. Her hands extend toward the Christ Child, her eyes gaze on the open prayer-book in front of her, her face is calm and solemn as though she were in meditation. The Christ Child is naked and asleep. He is reclining on a cushion, over which is spread a blue wrinkled cloth. He is lying on a rock ledge and two streams of water run from the left side of this ledge into a small pond below. A bird perches in between the streams of water, a tree stump stands before the streams, and in the pond are thirteen tadpoles. An isolated rock formation is located behind the Madonna and Child. On the left of the picture St. Joseph wears a cloak and is asleep on the

³ Ibid., p.1111.

⁴ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, A History of Painting in Italy, 5:88 n. 3.

ground; the ox and ass are nearby. Behind the sleeping St. Joseph appears a town or city, beyond which are hills and a harbor. On the right of the picture, behind the rock formation, a flock of sheep on a green hillside, beyond which are water and more hills. The whole painting looks very calm, even motionless, except for a few fleecy clouds in the blue sky.

The painting is surrounded by a Renaissance style frame which Waagen judged to be one of the finest of this kind that he had seen,⁵ but certain doubts have been raised concerning its authenticity. This frame is executed in a fine Renaissance style, with scrolls attached at twelve, three, six and nine o'clock, respectively, and these spaces between the scrolls are filled with delicate botanical designs painted in blue against the gold background. Arturo Grassi, an art dealer and restorer, has pointed out that this frame was probably made by Vannoni, a Sienese who still lived in Florence around 1960.⁶ Grassi says that Vannoni made all the fine Renaissance-style frames offered by the Duveen Brothers.⁷ Duveen denies Grassi's statement by claiming that the frame was with the picture when they

⁵ G. F. Waagen, Treasures of Art in Great Britain, vol.2 (London: Cornamrket Press, 1970), 2:126.

⁶ Memorandum, Toledo Museum of Art, May 16, 1956.

⁷ Ibid.

purchased it, and picture and frame together are mentioned in Christie's catalogue of 1874, when the Alexander Baker collection was dispersed at public auction.⁸ Richard Brettell points out that Italian Renaissance frames, at least those most admired and discussed during the period, were richly carved and gilded, and they have often proved more fragile than the pictures they surrounded; certain frames are so sculpturally assertive, so covered with protrusions, that they are virtually impossible to move or carry.⁹ He further points out that because of their very complexity as forms, most Renaissance frames survived either as fragments of their original forms, or in a regilded or refinished state.¹⁰ At any rate, the argument over the authenticity of the Toledo Tondo frame has never been settled.

The tondo format was, by the last third of the fifteenth century, ubiquitous in domestic and civil commissions, although rarely in churches. It was frequently employed for paintings of religious narrative subjects, for images -sculptured as well as painted- of the Madonna and

⁸ B. S. Boggis, Letter to Toledo Museum of Art, May 21, 1956.

⁹ Richard R. Brettell, The Art of the Edge: European Frames 1300-1900, ed. Richard R. Brettell and Steven Starling, (Chicago: the Art Institute of Chicago, 1986), p.12.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.12.

Child or Holy Family, and also for heraldic devices.¹¹

Scholars have made various suggestions concerning the source of the idea for the isolated tondo painting: possibly it was derived from the medallion or the glory, or the circular spandrel, or the pinnacle or predella decorations included in altarpieces, painted or sculpted oculi on architectural elevations, or the painted deschi da parto.¹² The tondo has no axial orientation, leaving the designer free either to define a top and a bottom by means of applied decoration, or to impart a sense of rotary movement through decoration.

Ever since the painting was reattributed to Piero di Cosimo in 1893, its authenticity has not been questioned, and scholars have assigned various dates to it, from 1490 to Piero's late period. They have also made various proposals concerning its subject matter. Many agree that it is an Adoration of the Christ Child, but Michael Jaffe suggested it is a Rest on the Flight into Egypt.¹³ Jakob Rosenberg thought that the sleeping Child is perhaps an allusion to Christ's Crucifixion.¹⁴ More recently, Donald Hallmark

¹¹Timothy Newberg, George Bisacca, and Laurence Kanter, Italian Renaissance Frames, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), p.27.

¹²See Moritz Hauptmann, Der Tondo, (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1936), pp.11-20; Newberg, Bisacca and Kanter, Italian Renaissance Frames, p.27.

¹³Memorandum, Toledo Museum of Art, January 31, 1961.

¹⁴Memorandum, Toledo Museum of Art, October 29, 1960.

thought that the sleeping Child is perhaps an allusion to Christ's Crucifixion.¹⁴ More recently, Donald Hallmark suggested that the painting alludes to the Lamentation and the sacrifice of Christ, but he agreed with Jaffe that it is also, at the same time, a Rest on the Flight into Egypt.¹⁵

Up to now, no extensive research on this painting has been done. There are only two articles which deal exclusively with this painting: B. M. Godwin's "An Important Italian Painting" published in the Toledo Museum of Art Museum News, gives a brief introduction to Piero's artistic career as well as this painting; Donald Hallmark's unpublished paper Piero di Cosimo's Adoration of the Child: An Iconographical Study, discusses the iconography of this work.

The painting still deserves extensive study. It is a very good example of Renaissance art in transition. Piero di Cosimo was an artist of the late-Quattrocento and early-Cinquecento who was receptive to new ideas. The Toledo Tondo seems like an attempt to combine Cinquecento monumentalism with traditional Quattrocento decorativeness. That the figure of the Virgin Mary is exceptionally large in

¹⁴Memorandum, Toledo Museum of Art, October 29, 1960.

¹⁵Donald P. Hallmark, "Piero di Cosimo's Adoration of the Child: an Iconographical Study", p.11.

this painting that give it a sort of contradictory quality and actually bring a unique charm to it. The inclusion of an isolated figure of the sleeping Christ Child, which probably is the only appearance of this kind in late-Quattrocento and early-Cinquecento Florentine painting, makes the iconography of this painting unique.

Part of the purpose of this thesis is, then, to study the style and the iconography of the Adoration of the Christ Child; to understand the place of this picture in the chronology of Piero di Cosimo's work, and to identify the subject matter. I will also speculate on what particular purpose it might have served. In the first chapter a date for this painting will be proposed by means of comparisons with Piero's other works as well as with some by his contemporaries. In the second, third and fourth chapters I am going to examine each of the painting's iconographical elements. The final chapter will discuss the nature and purpose of the painting.

Chapter 1

A Suggested Date for the Adoration of the Christ Child

Piero di Cosimo (b. ca. 1461-d. 1521) was active around 1480 to 1520, a period of great stylistic change in Italian Renaissance art. As he was one of the late-Quattrocento, early-Cinquecento artists who were receptive to new ideas, a more precise chronology for his works would not only help us understand his artistic development, but also the transitional period as a whole. Scholars disagree on Piero's chronology in general; they disagree on the date of Toledo's Adoration of the Christ Child, and the dates of most of his other works as well. Knapp seemed to accept the tradition communicated by Crowe and Cavalcaselle that this picture was commissioned by Lorenzo de' Medici as a gift for a lady of the Guiducci family. Therefore, although he did not assign a definite date for this painting, it would have to have been made before April 9, 1492, the date of Lorenzo's death.¹⁶ Haberfeld considered it an early work of Piero's because of the apparently strong influence of Signorelli's style of sharp lines and plastic forms¹⁷ - Piero would have come into contact with Signorelli in Rome in the

¹⁶Fritz Knapp, Piero di Cosimo, (Halle: Verlag von Wilhelm Knapp, 1989), p.41.

¹⁷Hugo Haberfeld, Piero di Cosimo, Ph.D. dissertation, (Breslau: Dr. R.Galle's Buchdruckerei, 1900), p.57.

early 1480's when both artists were engaged in the wall decoration of the Sistine Chapel; and again in Florence in the 1480's. Haberfeld thought that the lyricism of the tondo derives, on the other hand, from early Filippo Lippi and from Fra Angelico, and that it is also influenced by Lorenzo di Credi's sentimentality.¹⁸ He believed that the Virgin's hands in the picture were copied directly from one of the shepherds in Hugo van der Goes's Portinari Altarpiece,¹⁹ which had arrived in Florence by 1483 (fig. 6). At any rate, Haberfeld thought a date before 1490 would be proper.²⁰

Hauptmann again placed the work before 1490, as he too, perceived the influence of Signorelli, especially that of his large figural compositions, such as the large Madonna in Signorelli's Medici Tondo.²¹ Mina Bacci related the Adoration of the Christ Child to the Visitation (fig. 7) and dated it, again, around 1490.²² Venturi saw an affinity in form and color of the Toledo Tondo to the Madonna Enthroned with Saints (fig. 8) in the Spedale degli Innocenti, and

¹⁸Ibid., p.59.

¹⁹Ibid., p.59.

²⁰Ibid., p.59.

²¹Hauptmann, Der Tondo, p.234.

²²Mina Bacci, Piero di Cosimo, (Milan:Bramante Editrice, 1966), p.72, Bacci, L'opera Completa di Piero di Cosimo, p.88.

dates both of these works to around 1490.²³ Donald Hallmark agreed with the date of 1490, as he, too, considered the Toledo Tondo to be an early work of Piero.²⁴ Langton Douglas, like Knapp, accepted the tradition as told by Crowe and Cavalcaselle and dated it to before April 9, 1492.²⁵

Van Marle grouped Piero's works according to what he saw as a succession of influences from other, contemporary, artists, starting with his teacher Cosimo Rosselli, then Verrochio, Signorelli, Filippino Lippi's later style, Lorenzo di Credi, and Leonardo da Vinci. He sees Lorenzo di Credi's influence in the Toledo Tondo and dates it around 1495. Other works which Van Marle included in this Crediesque period are the St. Mary Magdalen in the Galleria Nazionale of Rome, the Borghese Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and Two Angels, the Louvre Madonna and Child, the Lichtenstein Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist, the Adoration of the Child with St. John the Baptist and an Angel in the National Gallery in Washington, and the Story of Jason.²⁶

²³A. Venturi, Italian Paintings in America, Vol.2, (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1933), 2:288.

²⁴Hallmark, "Piero di Cosimo's Adoration of the Child, p.3.

²⁵Langton Douglas, Piero di Cosimo, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1946), p.43.

²⁶Van Marle, The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting, Vol.13, (The Hague, 1931), 13:352-53.

Blake-More Godwin saw the influence of Lorenzo di Credi and agreed with Van Marle's date of 1495.²⁷ Katharine Neilson dated The Adoration of the Christ Child between 1494 and 1497, the time in which she believed that Filippino Lippi and Piero showed strong reciprocal influence.²⁸ She pointed out that the Virgin's long, slim fingers, carefully drawn, suggest those of Filippino Lippi.²⁹ The leaning pose of the Virgin with her draperies spreading about her, forms a triangle of the sort which Filippino used as the basis of his Warren picture (fig. 9).³⁰ The arrangement of the striped veil over the head of the Virgin is again reminiscent of Filippino's work.³¹

Luigi Grassi dated the work around 1495-1500 because of the close association he saw in it with Piero's Visitation.³² In Degenhart's chronological listing of all of Piero's works, the Toledo Tondo is considered to be a

²⁷B. M. Godwin, "An Important Italian Painting", p.1103.

²⁸Katharine Neilson, Filippino Lippi, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), p.131.

²⁹Ibid., p.131.

³⁰Ibid., P. 131.

³¹Ibid., p. 131.

³²L. Grassi, Piero di Cosimo e il Problema della Conversione al Cinquecento nella Pittura Fiorentina ed Emiliane, (Rome, 1963), p.54.

very late work.³³ Louise Richter did not give a particular date to the Toledo Tondo, but saw the influence of Leonardo here,³⁴ and therefore must have seen it as dating from after 1500, when Leonardo returned to Florence after his long absence in Milan.

Although Piero's style did not, as Vasari has claimed, change from one painting to the next,³⁵ he did undertake varied subjects in his paintings and his style was inconsistent. Even in their technical standards, his paintings are considerably uneven. Sometimes this unevenness can be found in a single painting, perhaps revealing the hands of numerous assistants. In addition, Piero always seemed to be under the influence of his contemporaries, as he constantly introduced other artists' ideas and motifs into his paintings. Furthermore, there exist very few written documents relating to his artistic activities, and this deficiency makes it even more difficult to establish a precise chronology for his works.

³³B. Degenhart, "Piero di Cosimo", Thieme-Becker, vol.XXVII, 1933, 27:16.

³⁴Louise M. Richter, "The Old English and Italian Masters at Burlington House," The Connoisseur, 8 (March, 1904), p.170.

³⁵Vasari, The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, translated by A. B. Hinds, vol. 2, (New York: Dutton, 1963), 2:176.

There are a few documented dates for Piero's artistic career. According to Vasari, Cosimo Roselli took Piero with him to Rome when he was summoned by Pope Sixtus IV to decorate the Sistine Chapel.³⁶ Therefore, Piero was in Rome from 1481-1482 to work with Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Perugino and Signorelli. Vasari further states that Piero did a beautiful landscape in one of the scenes and also painted the portraits of Verginio Orsino and Ruberto Sansovino in some scenes in the Sistine Chapel.³⁷ Scholars have suggested the possible involvement of Piero di Cosimo in the Sermon on the Mount in that series.³⁸ The second definitely-known date in Piero's career is January 25, 1504. On that day he attended the meeting regarding the placement of Michelangelo's David.³⁹

Stephanie Craven's research into the activities of patrons at the end of the Quattrocento also has yielded several other quite definite dates in Piero's life.⁴⁰ The Visitation was originally the altarpiece for the chapel of

³⁶Ibid., p.176.

³⁷Ibid., p.176

³⁸Bacci, L'opera Completa di Piero di Cosimo, p.85.

³⁹Saul Levine, "The Location of Michelangelo's David, the Meeting of January 25, 1504", Art Bulletin, 56 (1974):31-49.

⁴⁰Stephanie J. Craven, "Three Dates for Piero di Cosimo", Burlington Magazine, (September 1975):574.

Saint Nicholas in Santo Spirito. Piero Capponi commissioned Clemente del Tasso to build a frame for the altarpiece in 1489.⁴¹ Craven stated that the Quattrocento practice of building the frame first is likely to have happened in the case of the Capponi Altarpiece.⁴² The decoration of Santo Spirito followed a uniform program; all the altarpieces were of the same size. In the same church, Giuliano da San Gallo carved the frame for the Bardi Altarpiece before Botticelli was employed to paint it. Therefore 1489 would be the earliest possible date for the Visitation.⁴³ Most Scholars agree on 1490.

According to the accounts of Filippo Strozzi, a small payment had been made to Piero for the "mummerie" which Craven suggested could be the "Mummeria dei Morti"- the Mummary of the Dead.⁴⁴ Vasari related that one of Piero's chief efforts when he was already mature was to design the procession of the Dead with his pupils.⁴⁵ The payment agrees with Vasari's report. The same account book also mentions a series of payments to Piero in 1510 for the

⁴¹Ibid., p.574.

⁴²Ibid., p.574.

⁴³Ibid., p.574.

⁴⁴Ibid., p.574.

⁴⁵Vasari, The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, P. 179.

decoration of Filippo's anticamera.⁴⁶ Craven suggested that payment was made for Piero's Liberation of Andromeda (fig. 10). It is mentioned in Vasari's Lives that Piero painted a picture of Perseus rescuing Andromeda for Filippo Strozzi the Elder, but this Filippo Strozzi died in 1494; Vasari probably mistook Filippo Strozzi the Younger for the Elder. In addition, the date 1510 coincides with Filippo Strozzi's marriage to Clarice de' Medici.⁴⁷

Gould, Zeri and Fahy saw the influence of Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari (fig. 11) in Piero's Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs, (fig. 12) and dated it no earlier than 1504.⁴⁸ In fact, the resemblance between these two paintings was probably close enough as that Cecil Gould could use Piero's Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs to reconstruct Leonardo's original Battle fresco.⁴⁹ Zeri again drew attention to the close relationship between Piero's Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs and Leonardo's battle fresco.

⁴⁶Craven, "Three dates for Piero di Cosimo", p.575.

⁴⁷Melissa Bullard, Filippo Strozzi, and the Medici: Favor and Finance in Sixteenth-century Florence and Rome, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.45-60.

⁴⁸Cecil Gould, "Leonardo's Great Battle-Piece: A Conjectural Reconstruction," Art Bulletin 36 (1954):117-129. Federico Zeri, "Rivedendo Piero di Cosimo," Paragone, 115 (1959):44. Everett P. Fahy, Jr. "Some Later Works of Piero di Cosimo," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, series 6 number 65 (April 1956):208.

⁴⁹Gould, "Leonardo's Great Battle-Piece: A Conjectural Reconstruction," p.117-129.

Zeri says, "a densely interlocked group of men and centaurs attack one another furiously while to the side and more to the foreground wildly galloping centaurs enter the foray and others attempt to flee."⁵⁰ Fahy pointed out that some of the charging centaurs in the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs have their closest parallel in Leonardo's sketches for the galloping horses in the Battle of Anghiari.⁵¹ Since in the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs Piero shows the figures in extraordinarily complicated poses, employing daring foreshortening and a remarkable series of lost-profiles which are unprecedented in the Quattrocento, many scholars nowadays incline to agree with a date later than 1504.

Zeri and Bacci again saw Leonardo's influence on Piero's Cini Madonna and Child with Angels (fig. 13) and date this picture from 1504-7.⁵² Zeri points out that the monumental triangular composition of the Cini Madonna was doubtless influenced by Leonardo.⁵³ The softening of the Angels' faces is also Leonardesque. Bacci pointed out a

⁵⁰Zeri, "Rivedendo Piero di Cosimo," p.44.

⁵¹Fahy, "Some Later Works of Piero di Cosimo," p.206.

⁵²Zeri, "Rivedendo Piero di Cosimo," p.39. Bacci, Piero di Cosimo, p.91-92.

⁵³Zeri, "Rivedendo Piero di Cosimo," p.39.

preparatory drawing for the Cini Madonna⁵⁴ (fig. 14). The intertwining poses of the Christ Child and the angels in the drawing is almost like a reverse copy of Leonardo's intertwining poses of the Christ Child and the lamb in the Madonna and Child with St. Anne in the Louvre (fig. 15). Since Leonardo's Madonna and Child with St. Anne is generally dated 1508, Piero's Cini Madonna was perhaps not painted earlier than that.

From the Visitation of c. 1490 to the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs, after 1504, Cini Madonna and Child with Angels, after 1508, and the Liberation of Andromeda, quite likely from 1510, Piero's style can be seen to change dramatically. Progress can be traced from earlier linear and detailed effects (as in the Visitation), to a fascination with bizarre detail and distorted figural composition (as in the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs), to a monumental, detailless composition (as in the Cini Madonna), and finally to sfumato (as in the Liberation of the Andromeda).

The Toledo Tondo betrays no sign of the almost Botticellian linear style which is a marked feature of the Visitation, a relatively early work. In the Toledo Tondo, the figures have more shadow, are less linear, and less

⁵⁴Bacci, L'opera completa di Piero di Cosimo, p.93.

delicate, although in other ways the work is somewhat bound by the old Quattrocento principle of employing many painstakingly rendered small details, such as the flowers around the Madonna. Such features suggest a date earlier than the less detailed, more generalized Cini Madonna and Liberation of Andromeda. The Leonardesque sfumato which distinguishes Piero's late style is not at all present in the Toledo Tondo.

The Toledo Tondo has always been considered closely related in time to the Dresden Tondo (fig. 5), a work that is, again, variously dated. Both works show the same, chubby, rubbery Christ Child and a prominent rock formation in the background. And both make the kneeling full-length figure of the Virgin quite large in relation to the format. In both paintings Piero placed the Christ Child on the edge of a rock ledge close to the picture plane, which recalls Leonardo's Madonna and Child with a Yarn Winder (fig. 16), dated 1501, and the Louvre's Madonna of the Rocks (fig. 17).⁵⁵

⁵⁵The original painting was lost, but various copies and a study for the Madonna's torso give us a good idea of its appearance. This painting is dated in 1501 because Fra Pietro da Novellara wrote, after 1500, that he had been introduced to Leonardo and found him at work on a Madonna and Child for Florimond Robertet, secretary to the French King. He described the picture—the Child has seized Our Lady's yarn winder and, holding it as if it were the Cross, gazes at it lovingly. See Martin Kemp, Leonardo Da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 219.

The Toledo Tondo is particularly reminiscent of Leonardo's Madonna of the Rocks in several features. Both paintings include a pond in the foreground, and such a thing is rarely seen in other Florentine paintings at that time. The adoring pose of Piero's Virgin is similar to the pose of St. John the Baptist in the Madonna of the Rocks. The prominent and somewhat strange rock formation behind the Virgin and Child also suggests a knowledge of Leonardo's Madonna of the Rocks. Scholars argue over whether or not the Louvre version of this picture was painted in Florence before Leonardo's departure for Milan in 1483 and was carried to Milan as a demonstration piece.⁵⁶ As Piero was in Rome with Cosimo Roselli in 1481 to 1482, there would have been little chance for Piero to have known the Madonna of the Rocks before 1500 even if the painting was indeed executed in Florence before 1483. In addition, there is no evidence of Piero's awareness of Leonardo's style before 1500, after the return of the latter from Milan in that year. The apparent relationship of Toledo's Adoration of the Christ Child to Leonardo's Madonna of the Rocks suggests a date no earlier than 1500 for the Toledo Tondo. The lack

⁵⁶See Martin Davies, Leonardo Da Vinci, The Virgin of the Rocks in the National Gallery, (London: Order of the Trustees, 1947), Martin Davies The Earlier Italian Schools, second revised edition, (London: Order of the Trustees, 1961), and Kenneth Clark, Leonardo Da Vinci, (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), p.90.

of sfumato suggests a date no later than 1510. He probably painted it at some time during the first decade of the sixteenth century.

The light of the Toledo Tondo, instead of being evenly diffused throughout the whole painting, is concentrated on the foreground figures, the Madonna and Child, and especially on the Child. Such a concentration of light on one or more figures is even more pronounced in Piero's Uffizi Immaculate Conception, (fig. 18), which was originally made for the Chapel of the Tedaldi in the church of the Servite friars.⁵⁷ In the Uffizi's Immaculate Conception a strong light emanates from the Holy Spirit in the sky onto the Virgin, who stands on an elevated pedestal. The lighting effect in this painting concentrated on the Immaculate Virgin, seems theatrical, and is also symbolic. The painting is generally dated after 1505 to 1510 on the basis of its strong ties with contemporary works of Fra Bartolommeo and Mariotto Albertinelli (fig. 19).⁵⁸ In a preparatory drawing (fig. 20) for this painting the poses of the two figures on the right side of the Madonna seem as

⁵⁷Vasari, The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, p.179.

⁵⁸S.J. Freedberg, Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence, vol. 1, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p.73, Everett P. Fahy, Jr. "Some Later Works of Piero di Cosimo," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, series 6, number 65 (April 1956), p.208.

though copied from St. John the Evangelist and St. Bernard in Fra Bartolommeo's Vision of St. Bernard, dated from 1504 to 1507 (fig. 21). Its general composition, involving a central figure elevated on a pedestal and surrounded by standing and kneeling saints, belongs to the peculiarly Florentine genre of devotional images later epitomized by the Frate's Salvator Mundi altarpiece in the Pitti and by Piero's student Andrea del Sarto's Madonna of the Harpies. The typical Leonardesque feature of the handling of St. John the Evangelist on the left side, where the contours and the surface are softened, again, supports a date of 1505-1510.

Both the Uffizi's Immaculate Conception and the Toledo Tondo are provided with background detail, the former depicting the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the Nativity, and the Flight into Egypt, the latter depicting the sleeping Joseph with the ox and the ass and the scattered sheep and lamb. Piero's insistence on involving small narrative details in these two pictures suggests again a similar dating for them.

The appearance of the unnatural looking cylinder-shaped tree in the background to the right and the strange rock formation relate the Toledo Tondo to the period in which Piero produced a number of panels mainly on mythological themes, such as: The Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs,

The Discovery of Honey, The Discovery of Wine, two Marine Thiasos panels, The Hunt, and The Return from the Hunt, in which he began to show his personal fascination with bizarre forms in nature.⁵⁹ The two Marine Thiasos (figs. 22-3) together with The Discovery of Honey (fig. 24) and The Discovery of Wine (fig. 25) have been identified by Fahy as the decorative panels which Piero made for a chamber in the house of Giovanni Vespucci.⁶⁰ These panels are often dated about 1500, because the house in the Via dei Servi, where Vasari saw the paintings, was purchased by the Vespucci on March 5, 1499.⁶¹ This date is established by a note appended to a Portata alla Decima filed by Giovanni's father Guidantonio Vespucci.⁶² On the basis of the document, Horne suggested that Vasari was mistaken when he wrote that these paintings were done for Giovanni Vespucci.⁶³ Giovanni, however, was married a year after the purchase of the house, and it is possible that he commissioned the decorations for his new bride.⁶⁴ However, Fahy points out that these panels have in common extraordinary precision,

⁵⁹Vasari, Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, p.180.

⁶⁰Fahy, "Some later works of Piero di Cosimo", p.201-205.

⁶¹Ibid., p.202.

⁶²Ibid., p.202.

⁶³Ibid., p.202.

⁶⁴Ibid., p.202.

almost Flemish in their realism, in which even the minutest details are described by Piero's brush.⁶⁵ Such detailed rendering tends to be characteristic of Piero's early paintings, but, at the same time, as Fahy suggests, the "x" composition of the Discovery of Honey and the Discovery of Wine seems to be an attempt to impose order on a scene that might have become anarchic in a late-Quattrocento picture. Thus again on stylistic grounds a post-Quattrocento date is possible, perhaps c. 1500.

The light in these panels has changed from the general illumination of the earlier paintings to spot-lit areas and pronounced shadows,⁶⁶ which is characteristic also of the Toledo Tondo and the Uffizi Immaculate Conception. Moreover, in addition to the similar lighting effects, these panels share with the Toledo Tondo a similar way of rendering the figures by contrasting light and shadow. They also share anthropomorphic tree trunks with the Uffizi Immaculate Conception.

The Toledo Tondo may seem related also to the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs because of the appearance in both paintings of the cylinder-shaped tree in the background.

⁶⁵Ibid., p.202.

⁶⁶Michelle Vanderzant, Piero di Cosimo's Simonetta Vespucci, (M. A. Thesis, Michigan State University), p.16.

The Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs is probably datable to no earlier than 1504, and the Toledo Tondo may well be fairly contemporaneous with it.

In addition to the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs, The Madonna with Saints and Angels (fig. 8) for the Pugliese chapel in the Spedale degli Innocenti also uses the cylinder-like tree in the background. Freedberg assigns a date of 1503 to this painting,⁶⁷ and in fact it shares certain features with other paintings presumed to be of about that time; the contrasting light and shade, and the monumental saints flanking the majestically enthroned Madonna and Child are characteristic of this time. P. T. Rathbone points out the resemblance of this picture to the St. Louis Madonna Enthroned with Saints (fig. 26), the Discovery of Honey, and the Misfortunes of Silenus (fig. 27).⁶⁸ Rathbone points out that in all of these pictures we find a similar preoccupation with cast shadows, effects of luminous atmosphere, and carefully described landscapes.⁶⁹ Rathbone suggests a date of around 1501 for the St. Louis Madonna Enthroned with Saints, and similar dates of around

⁶⁷Freedberg, Painting in Italy 1500 to 1600, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p.59.

⁶⁸P.T.Rathbone, "The Madonna Enthroned with Saints by Piero Di Cosimo," Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis, (October, 1940), p.47.

⁶⁹Ibid., p.47.

1500 for the Discovery of Honey and Misfortunes of Silenus (fig. 27).⁷⁰ Rathbone points out that the figures of the youthful Christ and John the Baptist in the center predella panel are perhaps derived from the diminutive Dominican embraced by an angel in the lower right corner of Botticelli's Mystic Nativity (fig. 28), which was finished around 1500.⁷¹ Thus an early sixteenth -century date seems likely for the St. Louis Madonna Enthroned with Saints and the Madonna with Saints and Angels in the Galleria dello Spedale degli Innocenti.

It seems likely that Piero's Toledo Tondo was painted in the first decade of the Cinquecento, or, to be more exact, probably between 1500 to 1505, due to similarities with paintings by Piero which most scholars now agree date from that time. These paintings reveals an awareness of the developing monumental style of the High Renaissance, although they are still bound by certain Quattrocento conventions. The bizarre elements have already begun to show up in the background landscapes, on the other hand, they are not as prominent as they are to become in his later paintings, such as the large anthropomorphic tree in the Liberation of Andromeda. Piero has already begun to employ contrasting light and shade at this time, but there is no

⁷⁰Ibid., p.47.

⁷¹Ibid., p.47.

sign of sfumato yet.

CHAPTER 2

The Adoration of the Christ Child in Renaissance Painting

Piero di Cosimo's Toledo Tondo depicts the Virgin Mary adoring the Christ Child, a subject very popular in late fifteenth and sixteenth century Italian painting, especially in those by Filippino Lippi, Lorenzo di Credi, and related artists. The Adoration of the Christ Child is, as a subject, close to the Nativity and was embraced by the piety of the time. Louis Reau stated in his Iconographie de L'art Chretien that the theme of the Adoration of the Child replaced the Byzantine theme of the Nativity in the art of the Western world, and he dates this phenomenon as occurring toward the end of the fourteenth century.⁷² From then on, according to Reau, the Virgin is portrayed kneeling, with hands joined, before the naked and glowing Infant, who lies on a bed of straw or on a part of her cloak.⁷³ Reau suggested that the idea of having a kneeling Virgin probably derives from Greek mythology. The Greek goddess of childbirth, Ilithye, was nick-named "engonasi" (Kneeling) because she gave birth to Telephe while kneeling.⁷⁴ He

⁷²Louis Reau, Iconographie de L'art Chretien, 3 vols, vol.1, (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), p.224.

⁷³Ibid., p.219.

⁷⁴Ibid., p.225.

further points out that the Adoration of the Christ Child may also derive from the theological doctrine of the childbirth without pain, favored by the advancing cult of the Virgin.⁷⁵

Gertrud Schiller conducted a thorough survey of the derivation of the Adoration from the Nativity. She gives a thorough theological background for the development of the Adoration and suggests how the image of the Adoration of the Christ Child first came into being around 1300, and gradually developed into a more complex one around the middle of the fifteenth century.⁷⁶ The next few paragraphs will briefly summarize Schiller's findings in order to provide some theological background for Piero's program.

The piety which manifests itself in many ways in the art of the Renaissance has its spiritual roots in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁷⁷ The mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux -central to which was love of the

⁷⁵Ibid., p.225.

⁷⁶Schiller's dating of the appearance of the Adoration of the Christ Child to early fourteenth century is much earlier than Reau's dating. Since Schiller was able to supply examples from the early fourteenth century, I am inclined to agree with her. See Gertrud Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art, translated by Janet Seligman, 2 vols, vol. 1, (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1971), p.76.

⁷⁷Ibid., P. 76.

Christ Child and of the suffering Lord- was a powerful influence. In his meditations on the Christmas story he stressed the poverty of the stable and manger which housed the Lord on earth, a concept which was to assume paramount significance for St. Francis of Assisi fifty years later.⁷⁸ The aggressive piety of Francis and his order had stronger repercussions in art than did Bernard's meditations.⁷⁹ The Christmas festival which Francis celebrated with his followers during the last years of his life in the forest of Greccio, when he brought in an ox and an ass and set up a manger with hay, shows how he strove to represent realistically the events of Christ's life in the human and earthly sphere and how he encouraged members of the community to participate in this re-enactment.⁸⁰ This festival gave new life and a popular character to the manger plays, which had originated in the liturgical celebration round the manger erected in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.⁸¹ From the thirteenth century onwards they were performed outside the church and, like the religious literature of the period, passed on many themes to the visual arts.⁸² The manger plays would seem to have inspired the use of curtains

⁷⁸Ibid., p.76.

⁷⁹Ibid., p.76

⁸⁰Ibid., p.76.

⁸¹Ibid., p.76.

⁸²Ibid., p.76.

manger plays would seem to have inspired the use of curtains as a framing device in many Netherlandish paintings of the Nativity (Such as Hugo van der Goes' Nativity in Berlin (fig. 29).⁸³)

One of the Meditationes vitae Christi describes a vision seen by a Franciscan. It says: "When the hour of birth had come, at about midnight on the day of the Lord, Mary rose and leant against a column which was there; Joseph sat by, perhaps because he was unable to make the necessary preparations. He rose, took hay from the manger, and threw it at the feet of Our Lady and turned away. But then the Son of God left his Mother's womb entirely without pain. As he had been in his Mother's womb, so he was outside it on the hay at his Mother's feet.....The Mother, however, knelt down, worshipped and spoke her thanks to God: 'I thank thee, Son, and I worship thee, eternal God, and thee, Son of the living God and my son.' Joseph worshipped the Child in the same manner. We are told that the hosts of angels also worshipped the Lord, afterwards announcing the tidings to the shepherds and ascending into heaven with songs of exultation".⁸⁴

⁸³Barbara G. Lane, "'Ecce Panis Angelorum': The Manger as Altar in Hugo's Berlin Nativity," Art Bulletin, vol.57, no.4 (December 1975):476-486.

⁸⁴Meditationes vitae Christi, cited by Schiller, p.76.

This last motif, of the ascending angels, occurs in visual representations as early as the eleventh century, but the description of the Birth and Adoration is new and is characteristic of the religious feeling of the age.⁸⁵ It was actually as early as 1300 that it inspired the new pictorial type which depicts the Adoration of the Christ Child, sometimes by Mary alone, sometimes with Mary and Joseph, and sometimes with the shepherds and the angels. The images of the Mother and Child in the thirteenth-century had drawn the Mother and Child closer together, but this motif, later on, when transformed into the Adoration of the Christ Child, indicates a devotional relationship. Despite the tender and inspired expression on her face - derived from images of the Mother and Child, a distance is maintained between the two figures.⁸⁶ They still interact, but less directly. The Child often answers Mary's prayer with a movement of His hand, which may be interpreted as a gesture of blessing. The Child lies on a corner of His Mother's mantle or garment close before her as she kneels and prays, thus reminding the spectator of the bond between the Mother and the Son she has borne.

The earliest known example of the Adoration of the Christ Child is an illustration in an initial D to the

⁸⁵Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art, p.76.

⁸⁶Ibid., p.77.

Introit of the first Mass of Christmas in the Gradual of Gisela von Kerksenbrook, dated 1300.⁸⁷ (fig. 30) Mary kneels alone in front of the Child in the manger. The text of the Psalm (2: 7), which the initial begins, occurs again on the scrolls in the miniature, on the one in the hand of God the Father: "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee" and on the one in the hand of the Son: "The Lord hath said unto me."⁸⁸ Below Mary are the words: "Him whom I have borne I worship."⁸⁹ Joseph and the beasts are absent because this is an illustration of a sentence in the text of the Mass and not a representation of the Nativity story. This type of depiction provided, later on, a model for the formation of the non-narrative subject: the Adoration of the Christ Child.⁹⁰

A fourteenth-century Italian illuminated manuscript by Johannes de Caulibus (Pseudo-Bonaventure) illustrates the Nativity story in three consecutive scenes.(fig. 31) The first scene shows Mary leaning against a column; the child lies before her on the ground on a bundle of hay, half covered by the lower part of her mantle. Joseph has turned away, the saddle has been put ready as a seat for Mary. The

⁸⁷Ibid., p.77.

⁸⁸Ibid., p.77.

⁸⁹Ibid., p.77.

⁹⁰Ibid., p.77.

second drawing shows Mary seated holding the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes in her arms and Joseph has turned to face him. In the last drawing the Child lies in the manger; Mary and Joseph kneel before Him and worship Him; so do the beasts. Schiller thinks this illuminated manuscript was copied after the roundel of the Arbor vitae by Pacino di Bonaguida, who worked for Franciscans. At any rate, these three consecutive scenes agree with the description in the Meditationes vitae Christi.

All the above mentioned motifs can be found in later representations of the Nativity, although these representations all tend to emphasize the Adoration of the Child. The motifs of looking at the Child and of adoring Him are both expressions of devotion. The Child may lie in the manger, in Mary's arms, or, from the second half of the fourteenth century onwards, on the ground. Italian art sets the pattern for the new composition. A protective roof attached, as in the work of Giotto, to the Early Christian tugurium is combined with the traditional cave.⁹¹

In the later fourteenth century another literary source began to influence the Nativity and the Adoration of the Child. Around 1370, in the last two years of her life, St. Bridget of Sweden, made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and

⁹¹Ibid., p.77.

shortly before her death, she wrote down in Swedish an account of the visions she had seen in the holy places. These visions become known very quickly, because her account of Christ's Nativity in Bethlehem was being painted in full detail, including the figure of St. Bridget, by about 1380 in Italy.⁹² The text of the vision reads:

'When I was present by the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem...I beheld a virgin of extreme beauty...well wrapped in a white mantle and a delicate tunic, through which I clearly perceived her virgin body...With her was an old man of great honesty, and they brought with them an ox and an ass. These entered the cave, and the man, after having tied them to the manger, went outside and brought to the virgin a burning candle; having attached this to the wall he went outside, so that he might not be present at the birth. Then the virgin pulled off the shoes from her feet, drew off the white mantle that enveloped her, removed the veil from her head, laying it by her side, thus remaining in her tunic alone with her beautiful golden hair falling loosely down her shoulders. Then she produced two small linen cloths and two woolen ones, of exquisite purity and fineness, that she had brought, in which to wrap up the child who was to be born...And when all was thus prepared, the virgin knelt down with great veneration in an attitude of prayer, and her back was turned to the manger, but her face was lifted up to heaven, towards the east. Thus with her hands extended and her eyes fixed on the sky she was standing as in ecstasy, lost in contemplation, in a rapture of divine sweetness. And while she was standing thus in prayer, I saw the child in her womb move and suddenly in a moment she gave birth to her son, from whom radiated such an ineffable light and splendour, that the sun was not comparable to it, nor did the candle, that St. Joseph had put there, give any light at all, the divine light totally annihilating the material light of the candle, and so sudden and instantaneous was this way of bringing forth, that I could neither discover nor discern how, or by means of which member, she gave birth. Verily though, all of a sudden, I saw the glorious infant lying on the ground naked and shining. His body was pure from any kind of soil and impurity. Then I heard also the singing of the angels, which was

⁹²Ibid., p.78.

of miraculous sweetness and great beauty...When therefore the virgin felt that she had already born her child, she immediately worshipped him, her head bent down and her hands clasped, with great honor and reverence and said unto him, Be welcome my God, my Lord and my Son.'⁹³

The mystic light of the Christ Child is also mentioned in the Arundel Manuscript of the fourteenth century, where it says: "As the hour drew nearer, the power of God began to appear. And Mary stood there, looked up to heaven and turned snow-white...but when the light began to shine, Mary worshipped him whom she saw she had borne. But the Child himself gave forth powerful rays all about him like the sun and was most lovely to behold...And the light itself that had been born increased and the brilliance of its radiance dimmed the sunlight."⁹⁴ From 1400 onwards works began to appear which show Mary kneeling alone before the naked Child, who is surrounded by a supernatural light.

Unlike the Meditationes, which record the Birth and the Adoration as two separate passages, both Bridget's writing and the Arundel Manuscript show the Birth to have been a part of the ecstasy of adoration during which it occurred, and Birth, Adoration, and emission of the light are one.⁹⁵

⁹³Cited by Henrik Cornell, The Iconography of the Nativity of Christ, (Uppsala: A. B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1924), p.12-13.

⁹⁴Cited by Schiller, p.79.

⁹⁵Ibid., p.79.

St. Bridget's influence on the Nativity image is observable throughout the fifteenth century in three ways: the vision is sometimes exactly reproduced; the Adoration is sometimes represented by the solitary figure of Mary; and sometimes certain motifs, such as the Madonna of Humility, are absorbed into representations of the Adoration of the Christ Child.⁹⁶

Works based on St. Bridget's visions, in which St. Bridget herself appears, always show Mary kneeling, her hands folded, usually looking upwards, as the text describes her. Her mantle, her discarded shoes and the cloths she has prepared lie beside her. A good example of paintings of this kind is the one by a Pisan master which shows the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child in the center, with St. Joseph and St. Bridget, each on their own in a cave. (fig. 32) St. Joseph is shown carrying a candle which is a symbol of the earthly light which was outshone by the divine. The Child is mostly naked, surrounded by a golden radiance or as though in the center of a sun on the ground. Although St. Bridget did not mention the appearance of God the Father, He was included in Nativities after St. Bridget's vision had become known. God the Father was shown in heaven with rays of light streaming from Him; often, the dove representing the Holy Ghost is shown above the Child.

⁹⁶Schiller, p.79.

God appears as the power who sends the Son and the Holy Ghost to earth.

In the middle of the fourteenth century some renderings of the Adoration of the Child began to take on aspects of the Madonna of Humility; an image of Mary seated on the ground, her hands folded in prayer and her gaze directed downwards to the Child lying in her lap- an allusion to Christ's Passion.⁹⁷ The early form of this type of Madonna appeared in the Nativity (fig. 33) which forms one of the seven parts of an altarpiece by Giovanni da Milano around 1350-65 in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, the central scene of which shows the Crucifixion and one of lower ones the Lamentation over the Dead Christ.⁹⁸ In the Miraflores Altarpiece (fig. 34) of Rogier van der Weyden, the link between the Adoration panel and the Passion is again established by a second panel showing the Lamentation over the Dead Christ. The suppressed grief of the pensive Mary of the Adoration is repeated in both paintings.⁹⁹ This type of the image also sometimes connects to the Pietà. The Christ Child is often depicted lying asleep on His Mother's lap while she contemplates His future Death. This merging of the mysticism of suffering with images of the Nativity

⁹⁷Ibid., p.83.

⁹⁸Ibid., p.83.

⁹⁹Ibid., p.83.

receives literary expression in a vision of St. Bridget.¹⁰⁰ After the Vision of the Nativity she describes another vision in which Mary revealed to her that "when she looked at the little hands and feet of the Infant Jesus which were one day to be pierced, she was overwhelmed by grief and took comfort only from the knowledge that Jesus Himself wished it so and permitted it to happen so."¹⁰¹ Piero's Toledo Tondo can be related to this type of Adoration. Here the Christ Child is asleep, reminding us of his future Death.

Henrik Cornell pointed out in his Iconography of the Nativity of Christ that Florentine artists were responsible for developing the Nativity into a scene of the Adoration of the Christ Child.¹⁰² By the time of Filippo Lippi this pictorial theme is already fully developed.¹⁰³ Frederick Hartt has pointed out that Filippo Lippi's Berlin Adoration of the Christ Child (fig. 35), which depicts Mary kneeling and adoring her Child in the midst of a wilderness—a forest in which are many chopped-down trees can be seen as a new subject in Christian art; and is appropriate to a new phase

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.79.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.79.

¹⁰² Cornell, The Iconography of the Nativity of Christ, p.42.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.42.

of Quattrocento thought and feeling.¹⁰⁴ He believes that the painting was influenced by the teachings of St. Antonine. St. Antonine proposed to penitents a life of religious meditation in what he called "the little garden of the soul", which may put one in mind of the garden plot in Filippo's painting.¹⁰⁵ "First one should cut down the trees, then uproot the stumps and brambles, then fence in the garden and appoint a guardian for the gate, and only then will the flowers of a good life spring up. He claims that the true penitent can identify himself with the Virgin, and through creating the 'garden of the soul' the Christ Child can be born again in our hearts."¹⁰⁶ So in Filippo's painting, flowers spring around the Child up to form a garden protected by St. John and St. Romuald, while cut-down and uprooted trees fill the background. Filippo's Berlin Adoration influenced later Florentine painters who were likely to show Mary adoring the Christ Child in a wilderness with flowers inhabited by holy figures. Such as Pier Francesco Fiorentino's Adoration of the Child (fig. 36) in Cleveland.

¹⁰⁴ Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1987,)p.220

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.220.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.220.

As time went on the image of the Adoration of the Child became more naturalistic as well as more elaborate symbolically. From 1440 onwards the Christ Child is made to lie on hay, a small cloth, or the corner of His Mother's mantle, sometimes also in a willow basket or in a manger.¹⁰⁷ Mystic light or radiance disappears, and the emphasis shifts from the Christ Child's divinity to his humanity. The urge for realistic representation produces a descriptive manner involving not only the human beings who adore the Child, but also, to an increased extent, the environment- the place, and the surrounding landscape. And things of this world are transformed into symbolic allusions. For example, the open book symbolizes the prophecy that has been fulfilled (as in the Toledo Tondo); the bread and wheat-sheaves allude to the Eucharist (as in Lorenzo di Credi's Adoration of the Shepherds in Uffizi (fig. 37)). Flower symbolism was also brought into the Adoration. The central panel of the Portinari Altarpiece of Hugo van der Goes shows two vases placed very prominently in the foreground of the picture; one contains a tiger-lily and three irises, in the other are columbines. The red lily, on account of its color, refers to Christ's Passion and the iris to the sword which would pierce Mary's soul.¹⁰⁸ The seven columbines signify the

¹⁰⁷ Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art, p.81.

¹⁰⁸ Erwin Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 2 vols, vol.1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 1:333.

Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost and the Seven Sorrows of Mary.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, works of this type which embrace the beauty and variety of the earthly world seek to prove that Christ's nativity is a world-transforming event. The stable also disappears; the Adoration is now frequently situated in a landscape; sometimes rocky, sometimes with a distant seascape. Either one of them can be seen as symbolic -The Virgin Mary has always been described as the port of Salvation, and the rocks are associated with Christ's Incarnation and Passion. Architectural symbolism also begins to appear. A ruin appears to house the Holy Family as a representation of the decline of the ancient world and of Jewry and it is related to the 'tabernacle of David that is fallen' of Amos 9: 11.¹¹⁰ The castle-like building with David's coat-of-arms appearing in the tympanum in the Portinari Altarpiece alludes to the city of Bethlehem, known as the "city of David".¹¹¹ Representations of the city of Bethlehem appear very often in Nativities and Adorations, in Italian as well as Netherlandish art of the fifteenth century.

Piero's Toledo Tondo belongs to a mature type of the Adoration of the Christ Child. Various aspects of the above

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 333.

¹¹⁰ Schiller, The Iconography of Christian Art, p.81.

¹¹¹ Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 1:334.

Piero's Toledo Tondo belongs to a mature type of the Adoration of the Christ Child. Various aspects of the above mentioned symbolism are incorporated into the picture. The Virgin adores the Christ Child in a wilderness with flowers surrounding both her and the Child. Two types of flowers here have been identified by d'Ancona as the dandelion and Lady's bedstraw.¹¹² D'Ancona points out that the dandelion is a symbol of the Passion of Christ, and when it appears with the Madonna and Child, the two ideas of Passion and Incarnation are often combined; and it is also known as the "blessed herb".¹¹³ She identifies the flower in front of the small pond in Toledo Tondo as the dandelion and thinks that here it represents the "blessed herb".¹¹⁴ I think the dandelion in this picture also represents Christ's Passion and Incarnation, because here it is seen together with the Madonna and Sleeping Christ Child, and, moreover, it has gone to seed. In the foreground, there is some Lady's bedstraw;¹¹⁵ Lady's bedstraw is the plant which was mixed with the straw which lined the bed in which Mary lay in the stable of Bethlehem. It is a symbol of the Virgin Mary.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Mirella Levi D'Ancona, The Garden of the Renaissance, (Firenze: Leo S. Olsuhki Editore, 1977), p.126 & 199.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.127.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.127.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.199.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.200.

Furthermore, behind the kneeling Mary, a lily can be found, which is a symbol of chastity and virginity.

Behind Mary in the left part of the painting appear the ox and the ass, the animals always associated with the Nativity of Christ. According to Mrs. Jameson, the introduction of these two animals rests on an antique tradition mentioned by St. Jerome, and also on two texts of prophecy, from Isaiah 1:3: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;" and Habakkuk 3:4: "He shall lie down between the ox and the ass."¹¹⁷ Those two animals have always been interpreted as symbols, the ox as an emblem of the Gentiles, the ass of the Jews.¹¹⁸ Behind the ox and the ass St. Joseph lies asleep in front of the shed, with his head resting on his hand, a pose derives from that of the classical philosopher and is one of the oldest motifs in Nativity representations.¹¹⁹ This inward attitude alludes to meditation or the revelation of divine mysteries. Scripture has it that Joseph was visited in his dreams three times by an angel, first, to announce the Virgin birth of the Saviour, then, to warn him to flee with Mary and the Infant

¹¹⁷ Mrs. Jameson, Legends of the Madonna, 3rd edition, (London: Longman, 1864), p.206.

¹¹⁸ Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 1:470.

¹¹⁹ Sheila Schwartz, The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, (New York: New York University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1975), p.75.

into Egypt, and the lastly, to advise him to return to Bethlehem.¹²⁰

Behind St. Joseph is a city, probably Bethlehem. One of the architectural components has been identified as one of the earliest known depiction of Old St. Peter's.¹²¹ According to Krautheimer and Fraser "the buildings are drawn in poor perspective and are unreliable in detail, but it nonetheless presents with remarkable clarity the outstanding features of the old basilica: to the right, the tall gatehouse, followed by the side walls of the atrium; then the narthex; the facade of the basilica with two rows of windows, six to each row; the cavetto atop the facade surmounted by a triangular gable, opening in an oculus; the nave, its clerestory with only seven windows, all filled with gothic tracery; the nave roof terminated at its western end by the slope of a hip roof; the south aisle, its windows, again with Gothic tracery, partly hidden by chapels, such as the chapel of Sixtus IV, easily identified; the obelisk and the rotunda of S. Maria delle Febbre,

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

¹²¹ R. Krautheimer and A. Fraser, Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Rome, vol. V. This statement later on has been reconfirmed by Arbeiter in his Alt-St. Peter in Geschichte und Wissenschaft. see Achim Arbeiter, Alt-St. Peter in Geschichte und Wissenschaft, (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1988,) p. 153.

formerly St. Andrea, and finally the transept."¹²² St. Joseph has been recognized as the protector of the Church and theologians drew an analogy between him and St. Peter.¹²³

On the right side of the painting, behind the sleeping Christ Child and the big rock formation, there are several sheep and a lamb in the landscape. In Christian art, the Lamb is a symbol of Christ, and the sheep are symbols of the Apostles. In John 1:29: "The next day, John saw Jesus coming to him, and he saith: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sin of the world." Andre Grabar points out that the Lamb is also a symbol of Christ as victim, sacrificed for the salvation of men; the sheep are the apostles, they also are all the Christians.¹²⁴ An early example can be found on a Roman sarcophagus of the fourth century, where on the principal register, Christ is represented between two rows of six Apostles and on the narrow register below, two rows of six sheep flank a lamb (fig. 38) The sheep and the Lamb are related symbolically to the tomb-like rock formation on the left and the sleeping Christ Child in the front. The tomb-like rock formation alludes to Christ's death and also represents the tabernacle

¹²² Ibid.,

¹²³ This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

¹²⁴ Andre Grabar, Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins, (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p.136.

on the altar in the Mass. The sleeping Christ Child again alludes to the Death of Christ, and he is sleeping on the rock ledge as the Host rests on a stone altar. All these images relate to the Sacrifice of Christ, which is the major theme of this painting and which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The focal point of the painting is the open book which the Virgin is reading. The text has been identified as chapter one, verses ten through twelve of St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. The Verses read as follows:

verso: ET TV INPRINCI/PIO TERRAM FVN/DASTI ET

OPERA / MANVVM TV/ARVM SVNT CE/LI IPSI

PRIBV/NT TV AVTEM / PERMANEBIS

recto: [ET] OMNES SICVT /VESTIMENTVM /

VETERASCENT / [PVXILG..] OPV/ANTINO SVE

RE/OPE[R]AN[DI]..../V..ISVEPICTINOIT /

PIONNTORO INSEV PII¹²⁵

"(And: Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth:and the works of thy hands are the heavens. They shall perish, but thou shalt continue: and they shall all grow old as a garment. And as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the selfsame,

¹²⁵ Dario A. Covi, The Inscription in Fifteenth Century Florentine Painting, (London & New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986,) p.459.

and thy years shall not fail.)"¹²⁶ The text derives from St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews I, 10-14, in which he quoted from verses 26 and 27 in Psalm 101. The Epistle to the Hebrews discusses Jesus as the true Messiah, His role as the High Priest, His superiority over the angels and over Moses.¹²⁷ The particular text cited in Piero's painting proclaims the eternity of God.¹²⁸ Covi thinks these are the words which the Virgin speaks to her sleeping Son.¹²⁹ Van Buren points out that the Epistle to the Hebrews is the Epistle for the third and most important Mass on Christmas day, and that the Virgin is here performing a sacerdotal function.¹³⁰ This text thus agrees with the theme of Piero's painting, which concerns the sacrifice of the Christ as well as the Incarnation.

The distant landscape in the background comprises a body of water enclosed by some hills. A landscape like this is likely to be associated with the Virgin, for she is often

¹²⁶ The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate, (Baltimore & Maryland: John Murphy Company, 1914,) p.247.

¹²⁷ The Anchor Bible: To the Hebrews, translation, commentary and conclusion by George Wesley Buchana, (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972,) p.10.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.11.

¹²⁹ Covi, The Inscription in Fifteenth Century Florentine Painting, p.75.

¹³⁰ Anne Van Buren, "The Canonical Office in Renaissance Painting: Raphael's Madonna at Nones," Art Bulletin, (Vol. 57, no. 1, March 1975,) p.44, n. 24.

described as the Port of Salvation for the shipwrecked soul. According to St. Augustine, the Virgin is the Port of the shipwrecked, and St. Bernard combined the image of the Virgin as the Star of the sea with her image as the Port of the shipwrecked calling her "star directing us to God, to the port of our salvation."¹³¹ Filippino Lippi's Virgin and Child with Angels (fig. 39) in the Corsini Gallery in Florence actually depicts a golden star on the Madonna's left shoulder and a distant sea port in the background. A sea port appears again in Leonardo's Annunciation.

To sum up, Piero's Toledo Tondo is at once a Nativity and an Adoration of the Christ Child, two subjects that begin to be seen as though fused together into a single image in European art by the mid-fifteenth century. But, at the same time, the central figure, that of the sleeping Christ Child, also alludes to the Passion of Christ, and it is unusual to find this particular significance underlined, as it is here, in a painting of the Adoration of the Christ Child, or of the Nativity, or of both at once.

¹³¹Hartt, Renaissance Art, p.339.

Chapter 3

The Sleeping Christ Child in Renaissance Paintings

With Piero's Toledo Tondo we have the unusual appearance in Florentine art of the sleeping Christ Child. Knapp and Godwin claimed that Piero's sleeping Christ Child is the first appearance of this motif in Florence.¹³² Millard Meiss, however, pointed out several earlier examples. A painting by Neri di Bicci shows the Christ Child lying on His Mother's lap and holding a scroll (fig. 40). Several terra cotta reliefs reflecting the style of Donatello and Michelozzo depict the Madonna holding the sleeping Christ Child close to her cheek (figs. 41-43). A terra cotta sculpture reflecting the style of Ghiberti shows the Christ Child lying asleep on the Virgin's lap (fig. 44).¹³³ Nevertheless, Piero's Toledo Tondo is probably the first Florentine depiction which separates the Madonna and sleeping Child- instead of lying on His Mother's lap, the Child lies on the edge of a rock with His Mother at His feet adoring Him. Such a representation, which physically separates the Mother from the sleeping Child, had perhaps never been seen before in Florentine art, although it was

¹³² See Knapp, Piero di Cosimo, p.234, Godwin, "An Important Italian Painting," p.1103.

¹³³ Millard Meiss, The Painter's Choice, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p.228, p.239, n. 96.

popular among the Northern Italian painters as well as among the Venetians of Giovanni Bellini's circle.

Scholars have suggested various interpretations of the motif of the sleeping Christ Child. Kuenstle thought that the sleeping Christ Child is one of the many manifestations of a genre tendency in the Renaissance treatment of the Madonna and Child theme.¹³⁴ According to the research of Creighton Gilbert, around 1400 there is change of style in the religious paintings in Italy which move away from hieratic images toward realistic contemporaneity, and thus the sleeping Child might appear almost like a genre motif, although this kind of depiction would in fact still serve religious purpose.¹³⁵ Gilbert points out that Cardinal Giovanni Dominici favored images of the sleeping Child.¹³⁶

"The first regulation is to have pictures of saintly children or young virgins in the home, in which your child, still in swaddling clothes, may take delight and thereby may be gladdened by acts and sights pleasing to childhood. And what I say of pictures applies also to statues. It is well to have the Virgin Mary with the Child in arms, with a little bird or apple in His hand. There should be a good representation of Jesus nursing, sleeping in His mother's lap, or standing courteously before Her while they look at each other. So let the child see himself mirrored in the Holy Baptist clothed in camel's skin, a little child, who enters the desert, plays with the birds, sucks the honeyed flowers and sleeps on the grass. It will not be amiss if he sees

¹³⁴ Karl Kuenstle, Ikonographie der Christlichen Kunst, vol. 1, (Freiburg, 1928), p.633.

¹³⁵ Creighton Gilbert, "On Subject and Not-Subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures", Art Bulletin, 1942, pp.207-8.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.207.

Jesus and the Baptist, Jesus and the boy Evangelist pictured together; the slaughtered Innocents, so that he may learn the fear of weapons and of armed men...I should like them to see...other such representations as may give them with their milk love of the Virgin, a longing for Christ, a hatred of sin, make them despise vanity, avoid bad company and begin through the contemplation of the saints the contemplation of the supreme saint of saints. For this reason you should know the representations of the angels and saints are permitted and intended for the instruction of the unlearned."¹³⁷

From this long citation Gilbert concludes that the sleeping Child would not simply be a genre motive; that the function of the image is to induce a religious attitude. It is not theological but moral on a very simple level, working from the genre aspects, so to speak, of our own life.¹³⁸ The early terra cotta sculptures in Florence which depict the intimacy between the Virgin and Child are good examples of this type.

Millard Meiss sees a considerable range of meaning in the sleeping Christ Child motif during the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance: "At times it is primarily lyrical; at others funereal; occasionally it alludes to redemption, and, finally, the problem with which the Quattrocento was greatly occupied, the relationship, or rather the coexistence, of the human and the divine."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Cited by Gilbert, "On Subject and Not-Subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures", p.207-8.

¹³⁸ Gilbert, p.208.

¹³⁹ Meiss, Painter's Choice, p.119.

Meiss points out that the painting by Neri di Bicci in which the Infant holds the scroll on which is inscribed "I sleep and my heart watches" is an example of this concern.¹⁴⁰

This inscription, which quotes a line from the Song of Songs, was interpreted in the Middle Ages to mean withdrawal from the world through sleep for contemplation of God, but when applied to Christ it would seem to refer particularly to His role as the shepherd of souls.¹⁴¹

Firestone regards the sleeping Christ Child as a symbolic prefiguration of the death of Christ.¹⁴² In the Toledo Tondo, Piero separates his Virgin and Child, showing no intimacy between them; the Child, instead of sleeping in his mother's arms, or on her lap, now lies on an altar-like rock structure, thus reminding the viewer of His sacrifice.

Firestone shows that the motif of the sleeping Christ Child as an allusion to the death of Christ can be traced back into late Medieval art.¹⁴³ Around the thirteenth century, she points out, under the influence of Franciscan

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.228.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.228.

¹⁴² Gizella Firestone, "The Sleeping Christ-Child in Italian Renaissance Representations of the Madonna," Marsyas, II, (1942). p. 43.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.43.

teaching, the pathetic image of the suffering Christ emerged as the supreme symbol of the deity.¹⁴⁴ The episodes of the Passion which speak of the suffering of Christ and of the sorrows of the Virgin are now represented with unprecedented frequency.¹⁴⁵ This consciousness brought together the association of the image of the Madonna and Child with the images of Christ's Passion. As early as the thirteenth century, the Madonna was commonly juxtaposed with the Crucifixion in diptychs, or flanked by several scenes from the Passion in tabernacles.¹⁴⁶ Passion symbols also began to appear in images of the Madonna and Child. This tendency led to images such as the Child holding a goldfinch, whose blood-red markings associate it with the sacrifice of Christ, or the Child toying with the veil of the Virgin, which refers to His burial shroud.¹⁴⁷ In the Toledo Tondo a bird identified ordinarily as a goldfinch stands in the foreground of the painting before the sleeping Christ Child. Although Melvin Block, Curator of Birds at the Toledo Zoo, has identified the bird as a bunting,¹⁴⁸ art historians such as Knapp believe it to be a goldfinch.¹⁴⁹ As a painter,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.44

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum, January 24, 1964.

¹⁴⁹ Knapp, Piero di Cosimo, p.43.

as Knapp believe it to be a goldfinch.¹⁴⁹ As a painter, Piero might not have paid attention to the detailed differences between a goldfinch and a bunting. I tend to agree with Friedman that it is a goldfinch. In any case, it is quite likely that Renaissance viewers would have identified this little bird in the context of a religious picture as a symbolic image. The goldfinch would have been recognized as a symbol of Christ's Sacrifice because, according to legend: as Christ was carrying the Cross on the way to Calvary, a goldfinch swept down to pull out a thorn which was digging into His brow; The bird was thus spattered with some of Christ's blood, thus receiving the characteristic red spot on its head.¹⁵⁰

According to the research of Firestone, the motif of the sleeping Child seems to have originated in Venice in the fourteenth century, and the earliest example is a Venetian panel of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Venetian art furnishes other early fifteenth century examples, and at this period the motif is also found in Ferrara in Antonio Alberti's altarpiece in the Urbino Gallery dated 1439. It reached Florence later in the

¹⁴⁹ Knapp, Piero di Cosimo, p.43.

¹⁵⁰ Herbert Friedman, The Symbolic Goldfinch, (Washington, D. C.:Pantheon Book, 1964), p. 9.

century and eventually spread to Rome.¹⁵¹ The sleeping Christ Child remained popular, however, only in Northern Italy, and that it was intended as a prefiguration of the death of Christ is proved by the symbols of death and the Passion in many of the examples and, more explicitly, by the postures which the Child is made to assume. Most striking of these postures is that of the dead Christ of the Pietà.¹⁵² Firestone points out that "the association between the Pieta and the Madonna and Child was perhaps inevitable. Both images are more devotional than narrative, devoid of all extraneous local and temporal associations; both are reduced to the relation between Mother and Son."¹⁵³ In the beginning, the Pietà was in fact conceived in the image of the Madonna and Child, with certain suggestions from the type of the mourning mothers in representations of the Massacre of the Innocents.¹⁵⁴ St. Bernardino writes that "when the body of the dead Saviour reposed in the lap of the Virgin, she was reminded of the days of Bethlehem; she imagined that He had fallen asleep and she cradled Him in her arms; and the shroud in which she enveloped Him she thought to be the swaddling clothes."¹⁵⁵ The evidence can

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵² Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.48.

be found in representations of the dead Christ who is hardly larger than a child on the lap of the Virgin¹⁵⁶. As in an early 14th century sculpture in Rhen, the Virgin clasps her hands in a gesture which resembles the gesture of the Virgin adoring the Infant¹⁵⁷ (fig 46). In this example the dead Christ is substituted for the Infant within the Madonna and Child scheme.¹⁵⁸ Perugino's two frescoes on either side of the choir of the cathedral in Spello present the Madonna and Child and the Pietà as antithetic terms.¹⁵⁹ The Virgin in these two frescoes is seated on almost identical thrones against identical backgrounds to heighten the pathetic contrast between the death and the infancy of Christ.¹⁶⁰ Later on, as the consciousness of the Passion had filtered into representations of the Madonna and Child, the sleeping Infant began to substitute for the dead Christ within the Pieta scheme.¹⁶¹ Piero di Cosimo himself painted a Pietà with Saints and Angels, which depicts the Virgin adoring the adult dead Christ (fig. 45), and it so happens that here the Virgin's gesture, her two hands held somewhat apart, is similar to that of the Toledo Virgin. This point of

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.45.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.46.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.46.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.46.

similarity between these two otherwise very different paintings by Piero supports Firestone's theory of the interchange between the Pietà and the Adoration of the sleeping Christ Child. Firestone also observed that the Child in the Pietà posture is found in paintings of the Madonna and Child in Venice, in Ferrara, and in the Marches, the very centers in Italy where the Pietà itself was especially popular.¹⁶²

As Firestone has pointed out, there are three different types of representations of the sleeping Christ Child in the posture of the Pietà. The first type depicts the Christ Child with one arm dropping limply to the ground, and the other falling across His body or held by the Virgin. The second type has the Christ Child's arms folded across his body as shown in the traditional posture of the Entombment. Although the first type of posture came into existence later than the second type, it is the more vividly descriptive of death and was more frequently employed by artists, especially in Giovanni Bellini's circle. Firestone attributes to Bellini the invention of this type,¹⁶³ although this is doubtful because the terra cotta sculpture attributed to Ghiberti (fig. 44) already employs the posture. This type of representation, especially in the

¹⁶² Ibid., p.46.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.47.

Bellini circle, sometimes has the Christ Child lying on a stone slab or on a pillow. The stone slab alludes to the Entombment as well as to the altar. The motif of a pillow used as a support for a funereal effigy has a lineage that can be traced back to the Etruscans.¹⁶⁴ The lids of cinerary urns commonly provide a couch or bed for the deceased who often support themselves with cushions.¹⁶⁵ The half-sitting, half-reclining position was adapted, along with the couch and pillow, for the monumental tombs in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.¹⁶⁶

The third type of sleeping Child was directly influenced by the reclining tomb-figures or by the antique sleeping putti, according to which the Christ Child reclines on His side, His head supported on one elbow, His other arm along His side or falling across his body.¹⁶⁷ The dead are represented in this reclining posture as though they are alive; on the other hand, the live but sleeping Christ Child assumes this pose to remind viewers of His

¹⁶⁴ Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas", Art Bulletin, vol. 57, no. 4, (December 1975), p.503.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.503.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.503.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.51.

death. Michelangelo's famous lost sleeping Cupid supposedly assumed this posture (fig. 46).¹⁶⁸

The sleeping Christ Child in the Toledo Tondo assumes the first type of posture. The Child lies on the pillow-like sack on the edge of a throne-like rock with one of his arms dropping on the ground as the other arm lies on his stomach. On the right, beside the sack, there is a broken tree trunk. Firestone points out that the dead tree trunk calls to mind the sculpted tree trunks frequently found marking graves, and the rock structure upon which He lies suggests a sacrificial altar.¹⁶⁹ Although scholars are not able to find a particular piece of sculpture which influenced Piero's sleeping Child, there is a very good possibility that Piero designed his sleeping Child according to some existing figures in bronze or marble. The isolated sleeping Child is unique in Florentine painting of the period, and the rock structure which the Child lies on could possibly be seen as though it were the base of a sculpted figure.

Many Eucharistic symbols are found around the sleeping Christ Child. The broken tree trunk beside the Child could

¹⁶⁸ Charles de Tolnay, The Youth of Michelangelo, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969,) p.202,

¹⁶⁹ Firestone, p.56.

be a marker of the grave, and it also could refer to the tree of Jesse which is broken because of the death of Christ. The rock structure can be read as a symbol of the sacrificial altar and the cloth upon which the Christ Child rests might well have reminded one of the sheet in which the body of the Saviour was taken from the cross, and thus of the corporal which is spread upon the altar for the consecrated wafer to rest upon. Similar Eucharistic representations can be found in many other paintings of the sacrifice of Christ. In Bernardino Luini's Madonna in the Louvre (fig. 47) the young St. John spreads a cloth upon the ledge to receive the sleeping Child, just as in the Mass a cloth is spread upon the altar for the consecrated Host to rest upon.

There are two streams of water running from the side of the rock structure. These could be said to correspond to the streams of blood and water which flowed from the side of Christ on the Cross when he was pierced by St. Longinus. John 19:34 reads: "But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water."¹⁷⁰ . An analogy is perhaps also being drawn by Piero between the water which flowed from Christ's side and the water which Moses drew from the rock which he struck with his rod in Sinai. Exodus 17:6 reads "'Behold I will stand

¹⁷⁰ The Holy Bible, p. 130.

there before thee upon the rock Horeb: and thou shalt strike the rock, and water shall come out of it that the people may drink'. Moses did so before the ancients of Israel."¹⁷¹

St. Paul makes the connection between these events in Corinthians 10:4 "And all drank the same spiritual drink. (and they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ)."¹⁷² These two streams of blood and water symbolize the two fundamental Sacraments of Christianity: the Eucharist, in which the wine is equated with the blood which Christ shed on the Cross, and Baptism, which is performed with water.

In Piero's painting these two streams of water run into a small pond in the foreground in which the thirteen tadpoles are swimming. One of the tadpoles is separated from the rest of the twelve by a dandelion; These tadpoles are likely to allude to the Apostles, of whom twelve ministered to the Jews and one, St. Paul to the Gentiles. John 7:37-38 reads: "And on the last, and great day of the festivity Jesus stood and cried, saying: if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth in me, as the scripture saith, out of his belly flow rivers of living water."¹⁷³ and Revelation 22:1 reads "And he showed me a

¹⁷¹ The Holy Bible, p. 80.

¹⁷² Ibid., p.195.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.114.

river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb."¹⁷⁴. All these passages emphasize Christ as the source of life.

Behind the sleeping Christ Child, uses a huge rock-formation. This rock-formation, with a door-like opening in the center, apparently alludes to Christ's tomb as well as to the tabernacle behind the altar, as I already suggested above, in Chapter 2. A similarly prominent rock-tomb structure is seen in Roger van der Weyden's Entombment in the Uffizi (fig. 48). Roger's Entombment was painted around 1450, after his visit to Italy, and was made for the chapel of the Medici villa at Careggi.¹⁷⁵ This painting, as suggested by Paul Hills, influenced Leonardo's unfinished Adoration of the Magi.¹⁷⁶ Piero, too, was probably familiar with Roger's Entombment. Roger's Entombment was inspired by Fra Angelico's Munich Entombment. Both of these paintings are not only depictions of the biblical event but also represent the sacrifice of the Mass, following an iconography which was developed from the legend of the Mass

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.296.

¹⁷⁵ Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 1:273.

¹⁷⁶ Hills thinks that Leonardo's youngest Magus was inspired by Roger's Mary Magdalen. Paul Hills, "Leonardo and Flemish Painting" The Burlington Magazine, vol. 122, no. 930, (September 1980):610.

of St. Gregory in the fifteenth century.¹⁷⁷ Christ's body, instead of lying horizontally, is held upright by Mary, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and St. John in order to display His wounds. He is wrapped around by a white cloth, and stands on a flat tomb slab which symbolizes the altar. In front of the stone slab, on the grass, stands the chalice. Behind Christ, the big rock cave which is cut into a rectangular doorway, serves as the image of the tabernacle in the church.¹⁷⁸ Piero's Toledo Tondo, which offers a similar display of iconographical elements, likewise alludes to the Sacrifice of Mass.

A most unusual feature of Piero's painting is the positioning of Mary's hands. Instead of clasping her hands in prayer, Mary holds them out above an open book. Figures of Mary in this pose are almost never to be found in Florentine paintings, and very few depictions of this kind can be found in Northern Renaissance paintings. Scholars suggest that Piero copied this open-handed gesture from the second and the third angels in from the foreground, nearest Christ, on the right side in Hugo van der Goes's Portinari altarpiece. McNamee points out that the angels in the Portinari altarpiece wear the vestments of the assistant

¹⁷⁷ Schiller, Iconography of Christ, 2:200.

¹⁷⁸ Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Paintings, 1:247.

ministers at the first Solemn High Mass of a young priest.¹⁷⁹

According to McNamee, "at such a mass, the arch priest, who functions as a sort of master of ceremonies, wears the cope; the Deacon and Subdeacon, as in ordinary Solemn High Mass, wear the Dalmatic, under which the Deacon wears the stole passed across his breast and suspended on his right side. All the assistant ministers wear the linen alb underneath the vestments just mentioned."¹⁸⁰ McNamee points out that it is precisely these vestments that the angels are wearing in the Portinari Altarpiece: "The angels at the top left and the most conspicuous one kneeling in the lower right-hand corner are wearing the cope customarily worn by the archpriest at a first Solemn High Mass or frequently by any or all of the subministers in the Middle Ages; while the two angels immediately to the right of the kneeling angel in the cope, wear the Dalmatic, a garment with short sleeves and slits up the side; the kneeling angel at the lower left closest to the frame is wearing the alb and stole, and the one behind him only the alb; the two kneeling angels in the rear and all those in the air, except the one in the cope, are wearing the long alb-like linen garment which is worn by the acolytes or minor ministers at a Solemn High Mass."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ M.B. McNamee, "Further Symbolism in the Portinari Altarpiece", Art Bulletin, vol.45 no.2, (June 1963), p.142.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.142.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.142.

Thus McNamee concludes that Hugo van der Goes intended his picture to suggest the Sacrifice of the Mass which would continue the Sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacrificial offering which the Christ Child in the picture seems to be making of Himself at that very moment.¹⁸² Here at the Nativity, where Christ begins visibly His sacrificial life, He Himself is both the Victim being offered and the priest making the offer.¹⁸³ The chasuble that He wears is His human flesh which He assumed at the Incarnation precisely that He might offer Himself as the victim for sin.¹⁸⁴ And that is one of the reasons why the Divine Infant is always represented in these paintings nude - to emphasize the fact that it was His assumed human flesh that was the sign of His function as a priest assuming the guilt of mankind and making the sacrificial offering of Himself for man's redemption.¹⁸⁵ In fact, the association of Christ's Incarnation with the ceremony of Transubstantiation has a long and complex history.¹⁸⁶ Katzenellenbogen traced the source of the relationship between these two miracles to Christ's words in John 6:51: "I am the living bread which

¹⁸² Ibid., p.142.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.142.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.142.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p.142.

¹⁸⁶ Barbara G. Lane, The Altar and the Altarpiece, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), p.41.

came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."¹⁸⁷ The text on the open book in Piero's painting affirms the nature of Christ as High Priest- just as he is seen again in this role, at least by implication, as McNamee points out, in the Portinari altarpiece.

Barbara Lane identifies the source of the idea of Christ's dual role as "priest and sacrifice" in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ is extolled as the eternal priest who offers his blood for Man's Salvation.¹⁸⁸ "In the early Christian period Augustine emphasized the interdependence of Christ's roles as 'priest and sacrifice'".¹⁸⁹ The Church officially recognized both functions in 1215, in the opening decree on Transubstantiation of the Fourth Lateran Council.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, Piero's apparent copying of the hand gesture from Hugo Van der Goes' angels could be a conscious and purposeful one. Piero's Toledo Tondo implies that Christ is a high priest who offers Himself as His own sacrifice for the redemption of mankind, and that His priesthood began at

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p.41.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p.107.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p.107.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p.107.

the Nativity, the moment His Incarnation began. That the Virgin Mary assumes the hand gesture of the assistant priest in the Solemn High Mass implies Her subsidiary role in the Nativity as the vessel for Christ's Incarnation.

A very similar open handed gesture of the Virgin is also seen in the figure of the Virgin in Petrus Christus' Nativity in the National Gallery in Washington, dated around 1445 (fig. 49). In this painting The Virgin is joined in her adoration by Joseph and four angels in liturgical dress, and the scene is framed by an arch that includes, in the form of simulated sculpture, Old Testament scenes depicting the story of Cain and Abel.¹⁹¹ Loel Upton points out the sacramental nature of this painting, by relating the sacrifice of Cain and Abel portrayed in the center two archivolt scenes to the immanent sacrifice of Christ, who lies directly below them.¹⁹² He further points out that the shed in the painting is the "altar of the first Mass" and the Infant's mandorla is the "golden paten" on which the Host lies during the ceremony.¹⁹³ The open hands of the Virgin and little angels are almost identical to those in the Portinari Altarpiece and in the Toledo Tondo. Here

¹⁹¹ Barbara G. Lane, "Ecce Panis Angelorum": The Manger as altar in Hugo's Berlin Nativity", Art Bulletin, vol.57, no.4 (December 1975), p.484.

¹⁹² Ibid., p.484.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.484

Christ is incarnated through the Virgin at the Nativity, just as the priest turns the bread into the Host at the Mass.

The idea of regarding the Virgin as the sacrificial celebrant developed from the idea of Bernard of Clairvaux of the Virgin's compassion.¹⁹⁴ "By comparing Christ's Passion with her compassion, he concludes that Mary has suffered more than the martyrs since she endured greater agony in spirit than any bodily suffering can impart."¹⁹⁵ In the thirteenth century, meditations on Mary's compassion increased in realism as well as in number and popularity. Albert the Great defines Mary's dignity as that of co-adjutrix in the work of redemption because, as he puts it, "persevering on Calvary, she received in her heart the very wounds Christ suffered in His body, thus fulfilling Simeon's prophecy: 'Thy own soul a sword shall pierce...' (Luke 2:35)."¹⁹⁶ St. Albert also said that Christ wanted to make his mother partaker of the "benefice of Redemption" and as all mankind is indebted to God for his Passion, so it is also indebted to Mary for her Compassion.¹⁹⁷ A further

¹⁹⁴ Otto G. von Simson, "Compassio and Co-redemption in Roger van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross", Art Bulletin, vol. 35 no.1 (March 1953), p.12.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.12.

clarification of Mary's role as the co-redemptrix was introduced by the writing of St. Bonaventure; in commenting on Mary's share in the sacrifice on Calvary, he describes her as the "valiant woman" of Proverbs 31:10: "Under the Cross Mary accepted and agreed with the Divine will; she agreed even to offer up the fruit of her womb for Man's Redemption."¹⁹⁸ In one of his sermons on the Purification, St. Bernard addressed to the Virgin: "offer your Son, sacred Virgin, and present the blessed fruit of your womb to God, for the reconciliation of us all, offer the holy Host (which is) pleasing to God."¹⁹⁹ The Virgin is here seen as the sacrificial priest, a heroic figure whom St. Bonaventure compares with Judith, and with Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his own son.²⁰⁰ Mary's compassio then became a central motif of popular devotion and pious meditation later

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁹⁹ De Purificatione, (B. Mariae Sermo III, 2) as cited by Lang, Altar and Altarpieces, p.71.

²⁰⁰ von Simson, "Compassio and Co-redemption in Roger van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross, p.12. In fact, although the question of Mary's priesthood is highly controversial, there are paintings, such as Le Sacerdoce de la Vierge (fig. 50) in the Louvre, one of a series of paintings commissioned annually for the Cathedral of Amiens, which depicts Mary in the garb of the High Priest of the Old Testament, as described in Exodus 28:1-35; the liturgically vested Virgin prefigures the New Testament priest, Christ, just as the figures of Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek on the altarpiece behind her foreshadow his inevitable sacrifice. She holds the hand of the youthful Christ as if to encourage his participation in the Mass, in the nave of a church that may portray Amiens Cathedral itself. See Lane, Altar and Altarpieces, p.71.

in that century in the Low Countries. Simson suggests that Roger van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross (fig. 51) is a representation of Mary as the co-redemptrix.²⁰¹ He points out that in Roger's painting Mary swoons, and in collapsing her body assumes a pose almost identical with that of her dead Son; like Christ's body, hers faces the onlooker frontally and, like His, it is held up by two pious assistants. This repetition of poses between Mary and Christ alludes to Mary's role as co-redemptrix as the fruit of her compassio. Piero, who, as has been suggested by scholars, was strongly influenced by Northern Renaissance paintings, could have understood the role of the Virgin as co-redemptrix as well as the meaning of the liturgical-seeming gesture of the hands held some what apart from one another over the Christ Child. He probably had some reason for assigning this gesture to the Virgin in the Toledo Tondo as well as in the Perugia Pieta.

In all, Piero's Toledo Tondo is not merely a depiction of the Virgin adoring the Christ Child. It alludes also- as do all other Adorations- to the Nativity of Christ; and it refers, besides, to the Sacrifice of Christ and the Sacrifice of the Mass. It recalls the nature of Christ as High Priest, who sacrificed Himself for the redemption of

²⁰¹ Von Simson, "Compassio and Co-redemption in Roger van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross," p.12.

mankind, as well as the role of the Virgin as the co-redemptrix.

Chapter 4
The Rest on the Flight into Egypt in Renaissance Painting

Professor Michael Jaffe suggests that Piero's Toledo Tondo also depicts the Rest on the Flight into Egypt.²⁰² As evidence, he points out that the Child's head rests on the sack holding the belongings of the Holy Family, that the donkey is shown drinking from a stream, and St. Joseph, wrapped in a mantle and holding a walking stick.²⁰³

Sheila Schwartz has done in depth research on the iconography of the subject in her Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt. In this chapter I will summarize some of her important points in order to follow up on Jaffe's suggestion concerning the Toledo Tondo. Schwartz points out that the story of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt is told only in apocryphal infancy narratives;²⁰⁴ according to the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the Holy Family fled into Egypt to escape Herod's decree to have all newborn infant boys killed. On the third day, they interrupted their journey:

And it came to pass on the third day of their journey, while they were walking, that the blessed

²⁰² William Hutton, Memorandum for the Documentary File of the Toledo Museum, January 31, 1961.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Sheila Schwartz, The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, p.2.

Mary was fatigued by the excessive heat of the sun in the desert; and seeing a palm tree, she said to Joseph: Let me rest a little under the shade of this tree. Joseph therefore made haste, and led her to the palm, and made her come down from the beast. And as the blessed Mary was sitting there, she looked up to the foliage of the palm, and saw it full of fruit, and said to Joseph: I wish it were possible to get some of the fruit of this palm. And Joseph said to her: I wonder that thou sayest this, when thou seeest how high the palm tree is; and that thou thinkest of eating of its fruit. I am thinking more of the want of water, because the skins are now empty, and we have none wherewith to refresh ourselves and our cattle. Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: O tree, bend thy branches, and refresh my mother with thy fruit. And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit, with which they were all refreshed. And after they had gathered all its fruit, it remained bent down waiting the order to rise from Him who had commanded it to stoop. Then Jesus said to it: Raise thyself, O palm tree, and be strong, and be the companion of my trees, which are in the paradise of my Father; and open from thy roots a vein of water which has been hid in the earth, and let the waters flow, so that we may be satisfied from thee. And it rose up immediately, and at the roots there began to come forth a spring of water exceedingly clear and cool and sparkling. And when they saw the spring of water, they rejoiced with great joy, and were satisfied, themselves and all their cattle and their beasts. Wherefore they gave thanks to God.²⁰⁵

Although this source is a fifth-century apocryphal Gospel, the first images of the Rest on the Flight do not appear until the second quarter of the fourteenth century, and the earliest pictorial representations which Schwartz found are

²⁰⁵ Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, as translated in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Chapter 20, 377.

all manuscript illuminations.²⁰⁶ Although these Rest-on-the-Flight manuscript illuminations were intended as autonomous narrative scenes, they already have certain features dictated by the text that will become conventional for later images of this subject: the Virgin has already alighted from the donkey and is seated on the ground, holding the child; Joseph is tending the donkey, offering water from the miraculous fountain, or joining the Virgin and Child in plucking fruit from the bending palm.²⁰⁷

The Rest on the Flight become popular because of the theological doctrine of seeing Joseph as typus apostolorum and nutritoris domini. The first appearance of the Rest on the Flight outside the context of manuscript illumination is on the interior at the lower right of Meister Bertram's Grabower Altarpiece(1379-83), as one of the 24 painted panels which depict the Old Testament subjects ranging from the Creation through four scenes of the Patriarchs to the Infancy of Christ.²⁰⁸

In the Grabower Altar Joseph appeared in two scenes: the Nativity (fig. 52) and the Rest on the Flight. In the

²⁰⁶ Schwartz, The Iconography of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt, p.6.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p.42.

Nativity scene of the altar, Joseph covers the rear-most part of the shed, a position that Portmann interprets as follows: "Joseph is completely occupied in holding up the ruined hut of David. On the spot where he found himself, the posts are falling...he is support and post." Schwartz agrees with Portmann's association of Joseph with the Patriarchs. Portmann also furthers his association by noting that Joseph's physiognomy is identical with that of Isaac in the Isaac and Esau panel.²⁰⁹ It is Joseph's lineage in the House of David that explains the most unusual aspect of this Nativity composition: he appears to be handing the Christ to the Virgin--a rare alternation of the traditional Nativity iconography, where his role is normally peripheral.²¹⁰ Schwartz points out that among the reasons given by theologians for the Virgin's marriage to Joseph, one of the commonest was that only such a marriage would enable Christ's generation to be traced to the House of David since, under Jewish law, a child's genealogy was traced through the father.²¹¹ Peter John Olivi, a Franciscan who advanced the cult of Joseph, writes in his commentary on Matthew that Joseph "is the key of the Old Testament, in whom the dignity of the patriarchs and prophets attains its promised fruit...He alone possessed

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p.47.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.47.

²¹¹ Ibid., p.48.

bodily what the divine condescension had promised to them."²¹² Thus, Joseph's presentation of the Child to the Virgin in the Grabower Nativity can be understood as a visualization of his role in the redemptive scheme.²¹³

Joseph again appears in the Rest panel (fig. 53), in which he stands in the right part of the panel with a key dangling from his purse. The depiction of the dangling key in this panel, on one hand, repeats the idea of seeing Joseph as the last of the Patriarchs, the key of the Old Testament, and on the other hand, as had been suggested by Schwartz, relates to the idea of seeing Joseph as a type of St. Peter, a typus apostolorum.²¹⁴ This idea derives from an exegetical correspondence between the marriage of Christ and Ecclesia and the marriage of Joseph and Mary, in which Joseph becomes a type of Christ as the Virgin is a type of the Church.²¹⁵ By extension, Joseph, through his marriage to the Virgin, becomes a type of bishop, the spiritual Shepherd of the Church, who protects, administers, and propagates Her work of salvation.²¹⁶ Thus, the image of Joseph as a typus accounts for the symbolic key hanging from

²¹² Ibid., P.48.

²¹³ Ibid., P.48.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.48.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.49.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.49.

his purse and his association with St. Peter and the Petri-kirche in Hamburg.²¹⁷

The focus of the Rest panel is on nourishment. Three of the four figures in the panel are eating or drinking: the Child suckles at his mother's breast, Joseph munches a piece of bread, and the donkey grazes. The Virgin will soon be refreshed for Joseph proffers a canteen of water. The Virgin looks not at the Child or Joseph, but directly at the canteen placed almost centrally in the composition. According to the theological discussion of Joseph's marriage to the Virgin, we find another reason for the marriage: so that Joseph may provide for the Virgin during the Flight into Egypt.²¹⁸ The Venerable Bede commented that Joseph taking the Virgin and Child to Egypt was a figure of the Holy Doctors or preachers who carried the Word of Christ to the Gentiles.²¹⁹ Schwartz suggests that the reason why the bending palm was omitted is to play down the child's part in providing for the Virgin, and to emphasize the role of Joseph as the nutritoris domini to the Virgin.²²⁰ Therefore, Schwartz concludes that the choice of the Rest on the Flight for the last panel of the Grabower Altar was

²¹⁷ Ibid., p.49.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.51.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.50.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.51.

determined by a desire to exalt Joseph as the Virgin's nutritoris domini during the Flight into Egypt; and the idea of Joseph as a typus apostolorum cannot be separated from this, for the figure of Joseph as bishop, providing for and protecting his spouse the Church, must underlie Bertram's image of Joseph providing sustenance for the Virgin.²²¹

In the Toledo Tondo, there is a group of church-like buildings which has been identified by scholars as the Old St. Peter's complex, behind the sleeping Joseph. The idea of placing St. Peter's behind St. Joseph probably derives from the above mentioned analogy of St. Joseph as the provider and protector of the Church. In addition, there is a direct theological analogy between Piero's foreground figures and his background landscape in the Toledo Tondo. There is a flock of sheep and a lamb in the pasture behind the Sleeping Christ Child. The depiction alludes to Christ's role as the Sacrificial Lamb. A body of water and a port are placed behind the Virgin; which may allude to the Virgin's role as the Port of our Salvation. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the idea of the Toledo Tondo as a depiction of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt is doubtful.

According to the research of Schwartz the Rest on the Flight become popular in the sixteenth century, because of

²²¹ Ibid., p.53.

the rising trend in devotion in that time towards regarding Joseph as nutritoris domini.²²² An additional significance was also ascribed to them: along with visualizing Joseph as nutritoris, they became reflections of the newly-developed and more extensive devotion to the Holy Family.²²³ Devotion to the Holy Family began with a fifteenth-century development in Josephology; in the early fifteenth century, the virginal marriage of Joseph and Mary became, for several theologians, the central factor in Joseph's veneration.²²⁴ The importance of the marriage in religious commentary had three results: it gave a new emphasis to the Holy Family--to the earthly Trinity of Jesus, Joseph and Mary; within this Family, Joseph assumed the role of "Lord and Master" over the Virgin and the incarnate Christ; and it made Joseph the most potent and efficacious intercessor for the individual devotee as well as for the universal Church.²²⁵ For Joseph as intercessor for the individual devotee, his intimate association with the Virgin and Child-his love, affection, and solicitude-can only instill, according to Gerson, "les sentiments qui furent siens."²²⁶ Joseph becomes the exemplar of personal piety and the special patron of all

²²² Schwartz, p.62.

²²³ Ibid., p.95.

²²⁴ Ibid., p.95.

²²⁵ Ibid., pp.95-6.

²²⁶ Ibid., p.99.

Christian families by reason of his office as head of the Holy Family.²²⁷ For Joseph as intercessor to the universal Church, the idea came from the earlier theological concept of Joseph as typus apostolorum, the guardian, protector, and administrator of Christ's church.²²⁸ St. Antoninus, Bishop of Florence, pointed out that since the Church existed in miniature in the Holy Family, St. Joseph is thus truly patron and unique protector of the Church.²²⁹ Therefore, once the Holy Family became the visual focus of devotion, this new function could be extended to the Rest on the Flight-the only Infancy scene whose narrative centers exclusively on Christ, Mary, and Joseph.²³⁰ Moreover, the Rest, unlike the Flight, had compositional affinities with the Holy Family image, since it required a group of three static figures. Thus, the Rest on the Flight was elevated to the status of an independent devotional image instead of appearing only in a series of Infancy narratives.²³¹ Moreover, there had always been a tendency among Italian religious writers to censure the Apocrypha and particularly their miraculous Infancy legends, and the Rest on the Flight became an acceptable and increasingly popular theme in

²²⁷ Ibid., p.99.

²²⁸ Ibid., p.101.

²²⁹ Ibid., p.101.

²³⁰ Ibid., p.106.

²³¹ Ibid., p.106.

Italian art only when the means were sufficiently developed to mute its apocryphal tone by alluding to the miracles rather than by actually rendering them; and when the three protagonists of the Rest narrative began to benefit from the growing devotion to the Holy Family.²³² Therefore, the Rest on the Flight in Italian art is but a variation on the theme of devotion to the Holy Family.²³³ Thus, in the majority of the paintings of the Rest on the Flight, Joseph usually takes a prominent role in the composition, as he does in paintings of the Holy Family.

But in the Toledo Tondo, Joseph has no such prominence.²³⁴ He is relegated to the middle distance, and he is asleep. Actually, a sleeping Joseph is more likely to be found in paintings of the Nativity. Those theologians who glorified Joseph, such as Bernardino da Feltre, gave strong criticism to the depiction of the "sleeping" Joseph in this

²³² Ibid., p.126.

²³³ Ibid., p.126.

²³⁴ There are Rests on the Flight in which the role of St. Joseph is minimized. There is a common Northern type of Rest on the Flight, which derives from the Madonna of Humility composition, depicting the Virgin and Child in a landscape with a small figure of Joseph in the middle or far distance, performing his traditional duties of plucking the fruit, getting the water, or even tending the donkey. Moreover, there is also an Italian trend in depicting the Rest on the Flight in the form of a sacra conversazione, in which the Virgin and Child appear with a group of Saints before a landscape; and here, too, the role of Joseph is minimized. (Schwartz, pp. 92, 121 & 184.) However, Joseph is not asleep in these images.

scene.²³⁵ It would have been thought especially inappropriate to have a sleeping Joseph in the Rest on the Flight, where the role of Joseph is glorified. In addition, the theme of nourishment, which is the central theme of the Rest on the Flight, is not present in the Toledo Tondo. The Virgin in the Toledo Tondo, instead of nursing the Christ Child or holding Him on her lap, is adoring Him in meditation, and there is no intimate feeling between the Mother and Child.

Piero's Dresden Tondo, on the other hand, is a good example of the Italian combination of the Holy Family and the Rest on the Flight. In this painting Joseph takes a prominent position on the left with his finger pointing toward the Christ Child. In the bottom center of the painting there is a canteen, which is one of the emblems of the Rest on the Flight. The little John the Baptist is also present, an allusion to the legendary meeting of the two children during the Flight. Angels also appear in the upper part of the painting.²³⁶ Since the iconography of the

²³⁵ Schwartz, p.74.

²³⁶ Angels often appear in the Rests to assist the Holy Family-to bend the tree and to draw the water. St. Thomas Aquinas sees life as a dangerous road on which men must travel and for which they need angels to guide them; and Christ, too, has a guardian angel who ministers to him on the unsafe road of life. The analogy well describes the Holy Family's situation during the Flight into Egypt, so that the Flight becomes an exemplum of the dangerous road. It has been suggested by Falkenburg that many Rests on the Flight as depicted by Joachim Patinir and his circle allude

Dresden Tondo bears little similarity to that of the Toledo Tondo, there is little possibility that the Toledo Tondo is a depiction of the Rest on the Flight.

The Joseph and the ox and ass in the Toledo Tondo, are all indications of the Nativity. Joseph sleeps under a shed, the stable of the Nativity. The ox and the ass are traditionally part of this event, and the ass goes on to play a part in narrative paintings of the Flight, but the ox is never present in representations of the scene. The "sleeping" motif appears in Nativity scenes as early as the sixth century, and it alludes to his first dream in which the angel comes to him to announce the Virgin Birth of the Savior and to inform him of his place in the redemptive plan.²³⁷ It seems to me that the role of Joseph in Piero's Toledo Tondo is a kind of emblem or attribute of the Nativity, and is part of a whole chain of associations. St. Joseph with the animals is part of the Nativity story, just as the figure of Joseph and the view of St. Peter are also interconnected in a symbolical way. The Nativity, in turn, reminds us of the Incarnation; and the Incarnation, in turn reminds us of Christ's Passion, which is recalled by the

to the Pilgrimage of Life. (Schwartz, p.87, Reindert L. Falkenburg, Joachim Patinir: Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life, translated from the Dutch by Michael Hoyle, (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988).

²³⁷ Schwartz, p.75.

figure of the Sleeping Christ Child, by the goldfinch, by the altar-like rock ledge and tomb-like rock formation. In fact, the whole painting focuses on the mystery of Salvation. The figures of the Virgin and the Sleeping Christ Child are not primarily narrative figures, although they do make reference to the Nativity and other stories through the addition of narrative details. Thus, it is possible that Piero added some small details which may lead the viewer to think of the Rest on the Flight, which is one of major narrative events in Christ's Infancy, but the painting itself is not a pure depiction of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt or of many other event. The picture is not narrative, but mediational. It is close in nature to a type of representation which Panofsky called "Andachtsbild", which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Mediational Paintings in the Renaissance

Piero's Toledo Tondo, compared to most other contemporary Adorations of the Christ Child, conveys an unique kind of quietness. There is no interaction between the figures in this painting: the Madonna, instead of looking at the Christ Child, is looking at the open text in front of her and is in deep meditation; the Christ Child is sleeping all by himself on the rock ledge; St. Joseph, with his cloak wrapped around him, is also asleep. In addition, there is no actual interaction between the Madonna and Child and the background landscape. The Madonna and Child are large in proportion compared to the other elements of the composition. There is no actual biblical narrative which exactly corresponds to Piero's iconographical program. As I have mentioned in previous chapters, the painting depicts the Madonna adoring the Christ Child and the event is the Nativity, although some small details in this painting do not really belong to the iconography of the Nativity, and the central theme of the painting actually is the Sacrifice of Christ for the Salvation of Mankind.

The lack of any display of emotion or communication between figures goes against the growing trend toward naturalism in art around 1500. Paintings of similar subject

matter by Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael at the same time emphasized the love and caring between the Madonna and the Christ Child. Leonardo's Louvre Virgin and Child with St. Anne shows Mary looking at the Christ Child with motherly affection, and she is grasping Him tightly as though she wants to save him from his destiny. Raphael's Bridgewater Madonna also shows Mary trying to prevent the Christ Child from "sacrificing" Himself. In addition, this type of quietness is very rarely seen in Piero's own paintings of similar subject matter. His Cini Madonna and Child with Angels shows Mary holding the Child on her lap, the Christ Child holding the Angel on the left, and both the Child and the angel smile sweetly. His Strassburg Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Francis and St. Jerome (fig. 54) is more somber in mood but the Christ Child and the little St. John embrace in the foreground.

Nevertheless, if we examine Renaissance paintings in general of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we will see quite a number which again, have a quiet, meditative, non-narrative character like Piero's Toledo Tondo. These paintings are quite detached in mood and do not have an exactly corresponding biblical narrative. In fact, some examples of this type of painting can be found as early as the fourteenth century in Italy. The San Remigio Lamentation in the Uffizi (fig. 55) is a good example. If we compare

this painting with Giotto's Lamentation in the Arena Chapel we find that the artist was aware of Giotto's composition but deliberately avoided Giotto's outwardly expressive kind of representation. All the figures in the picture seem frozen in their poses; there is not much action, the picture is quiet and somber. The fourteenth century Nativity, attributed to Naddo Ceccharelli, in the Museum of Aix-en-Provence (fig. 56), also belongs to this type of representation. The Christ Child is lying alone in the manger; the Virgin is lying in front of Him, but she turns her head away from Him, as though she does not even acknowledge His existence; Joseph is sleeping on the lower right corner of the picture. In the foreground and the background the artist has depicted the Child's first bath and the Message to the Shepherds. But overall, the painting is quiet in mood and there is not much action, and no interaction between the main figures. The Christ Child in the first bath scene in the foreground is wrapped in a shroud, which is an allusion to his Passion and Death.

As we move into the fifteenth century, we find more and more paintings of this meditative kind. Fra Angelico's frescoes for the monastery of San Marco, dated 1438-45 are particularly quiet in nature. The Annunciation (fig. 57) at the head of the staircase, compared to his earlier Cortona Annunciation, is much calmer and more contemplative in mood.

Mary, instead of reading, is now in meditation. She sits on a stool, her clean chamber stripped of furniture, looking on the world through a barred window. Hartt suggests that the iconographical programs of these frescoes were directed by St. Antonine, the prior of San Marco at that time.²³⁸

According to Hartt, the architectural depiction of this painting reminds the viewer of St. Antonine's admonition to sweep clean the room of one's mind, and to distrust the eye, the window of the soul.²³⁹ Other frescoes, especially those in the monks' cells, are even quieter in mood. They are visual aids for the monks in conducting their daily contemplation.

Some paintings by Fra Angelico's contemporary Filippo Lippi also possess this meditative character. his Pitti Tondo (fig. 58), for example, showing the Madonna and the Christ Child enthroned with, in the background, the Birth of the Virgin and the Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Gate. The spatial juxtaposition in this painting is so abrupt as to indicate total discontinuity between the figures and their setting. Although there is a degree of interaction between the figures in the background scenes, the interaction between the Madonna and Child is minimized. Jeffery Ruda points out that the discontinuity in this

²³⁸ Hartt, Renaissance Art, p.212.

²³⁹ Ibid., p.212.

painting makes perfect sense, because of the temporal separation between two different stages in the life of Mary, and, more important, because of the theological distinction between the timeless Madonna and Child group and the historical narrative with Joachim and Anna.²⁴⁰ According to Ruda, the role of the background is that of an attribute of the Madonna and Child; the Birth of the Virgin and the Meeting at the Golden Gate were crucial illustrations for contrasting theories of the moment of Mary's purification from sin, either at her birth (maculist) or at the conception of her body (immaculist); the Carmelites, Fra Filippo Lippi's order, had been prominent in this controversy since the fourteenth century.²⁴¹

The mediational type of painting was most commonly found in Venice and the Netherlands. In Venice, especially in Giovanni Bellini's circle, we can find quite a few paintings of this kind, mostly of the Madonna and Child, which show the figures as isolated against the background landscape; the Madonna always looks severe and there is no interaction between the Holy Figures and their outdoor setting, and the disparity in scale between the Holy Figures and the background landscape is always great.

²⁴⁰ Jeffrey Ruda, "Flemish Painting and the Early Renaissance in Florence: Questions of Influence", Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, (1984):222.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p.223.

Rona Goffen points out that Bellini's paintings of the Madonna and Child are under the influence of the art of Byzantium.²⁴² Most of his Madonnas, with tapered oval faces, straight narrow noses, small mouths, and large eyes, recall Byzantine Madonna icons.²⁴³ Bellini's Madonna of the Meadow (fig. 59) is a good example of this kind. It illustrates a massive Madonna adoring the sleeping Christ Child with a town in the background. The pose of the sleeping Christ Child recalls Christ in the Pietà, His sunken eyes and shadowed face again allude to His death.²⁴⁴ The Holy figures are entirely detached from the landscape, as Goffen has pointed out that this dissociation may imply a spiritual separation,²⁴⁵ or perhaps the separation between the timeless Madonna and Child and the real world. The stork attacking a snake, seen in the distance to Mary's right, perhaps represents the combat of good and evil, or as Cesare Ripa was to suggest in his Iconologia, it may signify Religion.²⁴⁶ Once again, the theme of this painting is Christ's redemption of mankind through His death.

²⁴² Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas", Art Bulletin, 57 (December 1975):487.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 487.

²⁴⁴ Rona Goffen, Giovanni Bellini, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989). p.62.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p.62.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.63-63 & p.299, no.41.

Bellini's San Zaccarias Madonna and Saints, (Fig. 60), an altarpiece, presents, as Hartt pointed out, a remoteness in which each saint is wrapped in his own meditation and is isolated from the others.²⁴⁷ Of the seven figures in the painting, no one looks at another, and the only one who looks at the spectators is the angel playing a viol. However, the painting is richly supplied with symbols: an ostrich egg, symbol of the Virgin Birth of Christ, attached to the chain of a silver and crystal lamp which hangs above the saints; the throne is decorated with a carved head perhaps representing King David, reminding us of their lineage, and a brocade panel behind the throne is another luxurious regal emblem.²⁴⁸ The female saints are martyr saints, each holding her martyr's palm, and they offer their martyrdoms to Christ.²⁴⁹ The painting, as suggested by Goffen, concerns the Resurrection.²⁵⁰ Goffen points out that the pose of Christ with one of his feet raised above the Virgin's outstretched hand probably alludes to His stepping out of the tomb.²⁵¹ She notes, further, that Easter was celebrated at San Zaccarias with a ducal procession that was

²⁴⁷ Hartt, Renaissance Art, p.416.

²⁴⁸ Goffen, Giovanni Bellini, p.172-173.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p.176.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p.177.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p.177.

one of the most significant and prestigious civic rituals of the Republic.²⁵² Perhaps Bellini intended to evoke the Resurrection of the adult in the stance of the Child, so that the imagery of his altarpiece would have special relevance to this sacred and political celebration on the occasion of Christ's triumph over death.²⁵³

Giorgione's Enthroned Madonna with St. Liberalis and St. Francis, (fig. 61) an altarpiece in the Cathedral of Castelfranco, is even more quiet and detached. The Virgin and Child are highly elevated so that Hartt suggested that they have become completely inaccessible to the viewer.²⁵⁴ Giorgione reduced the numbers of the figures in his composition which makes the distance between each figure become wider; thus, the interaction between figures is reduced. His figures, instead of blending into the landscape are cut off from the landscape background by a wall. The narrative function of this painting is gone, it is only the heavenly Virgin sitting high up with her Christ Child in a solemn mood.

The mediational type of painting occurs in fact very rarely in altarpieces; it is only in Venice and its

²⁵² Ibid., p.177.

²⁵³ Ibid., p.177.

²⁵⁴ Hartt, Renaissance Art, p.591.

territory, where mediational paintings are most popular, that we find some altarpieces, such as the San Zaccaria or the Castelfranco, where the figures would seem entirely still, wrapped up in themselves.

Bellini's Saint Francis (fig. 62) in the Frick Collection is perhaps the most spectacular example of paintings of this type. The subject matter of this painting has been identified by John Fleming in his book From Bonaventure to Bellini as the ecstatic communication between St. Francis and God. The underlying concept of the painting is St. Francis as the Second Moses, and even the Second Christ.²⁵⁵ According to Fleming, every detail in the painting is symbolic: the grey heron, the bitten and onager are emblems of eremitic life;²⁵⁶ the rabbit hidden in the rocks is Moses, the jug behind St. Francis is Elijah, and St. Francis standing in between Moses and Elijah is an allusion to Christ's Transfiguration;²⁵⁷ the slender sapling and the water flowing from a stone spout are references to the burning bush and the water struck from the rock;²⁵⁸ the

²⁵⁵ John V. Fleming, From Bonaventure to Bellini, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

²⁵⁶ Ibid., ch. 2.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., ch. 2.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., ch. 2.

cave behind St. Francis is the tabernacle.²⁵⁹ John Fleming thinks that Bellini's painting is constructed according to the ideas of Joachimism.²⁶⁰ He points out that "Joachimism is merely a peculiarly biblical view of human history in which human time and divine time could be reconciled and in which current events could be seen as the reflex and afterlife of biblical events."²⁶¹ "This mode of thought was once fundamentally shared by Francis and his followers; and a kind of radical biblicism, though by no means unique to the Franciscan Order, is the invariable characteristic of Franciscan history and art."²⁶² A classic Franciscan text, the Sacrum Commercium for example, is built phrase by phrase with biblical words, just as a classic Franciscan painting is built image by image of biblical things.²⁶³ Thus, to view a painting of this kind requires the spectator to move from one image to the other and to meditate upon their significance and relationships.

The characteristics of the type of paintings I have discussed above are in accordance with those of the type called the "Andachtsbild". Erwin Panofsky, Sixten Ringbom

²⁵⁹ Ibid., ch. 3.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.24.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p.25.

²⁶² Ibid., p.25.

²⁶³ Ibid., p.25.

and Reindert L. Falkenburg used this term to refer to images, such as "Virgin and Child" and "Man of Sorrows", which do not have a direct biblical narrative reference. The term "Andachtsbild" was introduced by German art historians who wished to describe a group of iconographical innovations in German fourteenth-century sculpture- the Pieta, the German Man of Sorrows, and Christ With the Sleeping St. John.²⁶⁴ Some of these images, together with other ones such as the Christ as a Child and the Virgin in Childbed, were considered as pictorial creations based on visionary experiences.²⁶⁵ "Andachtsbilder" were defined by Dehio as certain sculptural representations which did not suit the liturgical conditions of the altar service.²⁶⁶ According to Dehio a characteristic feature of the "Andachtsbilder" is their expression of the religious sentiment in the form of a group of figures, an arrangement otherwise basically foreign to the medium of sculpture.²⁶⁷ Pinder regarded the "Andachtsbild" as an exponent of German mysticism, and according to him "it consisted of a fixation on a lyrical element of the Gospel narrative and formed an expression of the desire to isolate the emotional center,

²⁶⁴ Ringbom, From Icon to Narrative, 2nd edition, (Davaco Publishers, 1984), p.53.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.53.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p.53.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p.54.

the symbol of feeling from the stream of action."²⁶⁸ This fixation was in sculpture achieved by isolating the central figures or the main protagonists from a narrative composition, much as the Christ with the Sleeping St. John was isolated from the Last Supper, Christ Carrying the Cross from the Carrying of the Cross, etc..²⁶⁹ However, a much wider application of the term was proposed by Panofsky in his famous 1927 article. He extended his definition to include painting as well as sculpture, a modification which widened the scope both chronologically and geographically.²⁷⁰ According to him the concept of "Andachtsbild" can be delimited in two ways; "first, as distinguished from the "scenic history" picture (szenische Historienbild), and secondly, as opposed to the hieratic of "cultic" "representational image".(kultische Repräsentationsbild)"²⁷¹ He thinks that "'szenische Historienbilder' depict events with of a brief time-span, while 'kultische Repräsentationsbilder' present a static figure independent of both time and action."²⁷² According to him "the two types depict the divine in a 'gleichsam undurchdringlichen Dasein,' and are thus unsuitable for devotional purposes,

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.54.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p.54.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.54.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p.54.

²⁷² Falkenburg, Joachim Patinir, p.22.

preventing the viewer from achieving 'kontemplative Versenkung' in the divine being.²⁷³ When the need arose for a form of image that would meet the demands for individual and highly emotional devotion, the two types were fused to produce the 'Andachtsbild', which enables the pious beholder to 'seelisch gleichsam verschmelzen' with the object contemplated."²⁷⁴ Panofsky argued that artists modified the "Historienbild" and the "Repräsentationsbild" by freezing the action of the former and breathing life into the latter.²⁷⁵ In other words, the action of the "Historienbild" was immobilized by compressing it into a single, isolated figure, while the subject of the "Repräsentationsbild" was given greater vitality and presence, sometimes by adding secondary figures, making it more accessible to contemplative piety.²⁷⁶ However, Panofsky's theory aroused considerable criticism. Berliner thought that the alleged fundamental distinction between Andachtsbilder and narratives does not exist and Aurenhammer argued that Panofsky's categories overlap, the concept of history or narrative is a formal and iconographic one, while "cult Image" is a functional term indicating the use and purpose of the image. However, Sixten Ringbom in his Icon to

²⁷³ Ibid., p.22.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.22.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p.22.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p.22.

Narrative provides a better explanation of Panofsky's concept. According to Ringbom, "Devotional image" is a functional term, while the "Andachtsbild" should be defined by formal and iconographical criteria alone.

"Andachtsbilder" are distinguished on the one hand from narratives, and on the other from static "representational images", they are essentially symbolical representations expressing mysteries of faith, pictorial renderings of concepts such as the suffering Christ, the Triumphant Saviour, the Immaculate Virgin, the Mater Dolorosa, etc.. He agrees with Panofsky's two different approaches to the making of the "Andachtsbilder". According to him several narrative scenes from this period, such as the Deposition from the Cross and the Adoration of the Magi, originated in "Andachtsbilder" of the Man of Sorrows and the Virgin and Child, and could thus be regarded as narrative "Andachtsbilder" themselves. He examined the process whereby those images, following Panofsky's principle of the scenic expansion of the "Repräsentationsbild" by "the accretion of secondary figures, were transformed from 'ahistorical agglomerations of symbolical elements' into 'expressive close-ups' with a coherent narrative." He explains how, that in this process of transformation from "icon to narrative", the affective element became increasingly prominent, although without diluting the symbolic references to the central tenets of the Christian

faith and the mysteries of Salvation.²⁷⁷ Using this transformational model he was able to link various narrative "Andachtsbilder" of the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi by Hugo van der Goes, Gerard David and Hieronymus Bosch with their "source icon" of the Virgin and Child.

One of the examples which Ringbom uses is Andrea Mantegna's Presentation in the Temple. (fig. 63) Mantegna's Presentation depicts the Madonna holding the Christ Child wrapped in swaddling bands and St. Simeon in the foreground, with, in the background, St. Joseph and other bystanders. The dramatic, narrative character is rather faint, and there is no real movement, no indications of a temporal sequence, no before and after in the painting. The absence of motion is stressed by the pose of the Virgin who rests her elbow on the stone sill, a pose which does not fit in with her intended gesture of offering the Christ Child to St. Simeon. The narrative character is thus only apparent, and the figures of St. Simeon and bystanders should rather be seen as attributes of the Virgin than as protagonists of an action. The image has to an eminent degree brought the action to a standstill- a characteristic, we remember, regarded as essential to an "Andachtsbild". Aside from being an illustration of the Presentation, the picture also makes reference to the Passion of Christ; the tightly

²⁷⁷ Ringbom, Icon to Narrative, p.52-59.

wrapped swaddling bands remind the spectator of the shroud in which Christ was to be wrapped after the Passion.

According to Ringbom, Mantegna's profile Madonna is probably inspired by Donatello's marble relief known as the Pazzi Madonna (fig. 64) or another of his similar reliefs which portray the Madonna as though she were seen in a window, where she is turned to the left holding the Christ Child in her arms and leaning her elbow on the stone-sill.

Donatello's Madonna relief provides a basis for an augmented composition comprising additional figures in the form of heads or busts. Nevertheless, the introduction of additional figures around the Madonna and Child does not as such result in a narrative composition, since the figures added in such a case tend to remain passive bystanders with no dramatic connection at all with the Madonna and Child.²⁷⁸ Thus the painting looks calm and motionless, yet, the presence of symbolic details will provoke the spectator's meditation.

In Icon to Narrative Ringbom limits his discussion to half-length "Andachtsbilder". Falkenburg in his Joachim Patinir:Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life expands his discussion to include full length, comprehensive compositions. Falkenburg talks about various kinds of Northern Virgin and Child and Rest on the Flight paintings as "Andachtsbilder". According to him many images, such as

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p.74.

the Virgin and Child and the Rest on the Flight are what Panofsky called "Analogiebildungen", a constant recombination of elements borrowed from existing "Andachtsbilder" in order to create new ones, and they tend to borrow elements from the Madonna of Humility and the Garden of Paradise which both refer to the Virgin's and Christ's roles in Christ's Incarnation and the Redemption of Mankind.²⁷⁹ He points out that in David's Virgin and Child at Granada, (fig. 65) the Christ Child is holding a rosary, which suggests that this "Andachtsbild" is intended as a mediational aid to saying the rosary, a devotion for which indulgences were granted.²⁸⁰

Thus, Piero's Toledo Tondo can be said to belong in the category of "Andachtsbild". The original motif for this picture is that of the Virgin and Child, and it is historicized by the addition of various ancillary figures which refer to the Nativity, the moment of Christ's Incarnation. The setting of this picture recalls the Garden of Paradise, in which various floral symbols could be brought in. The various symbolic elements in the picture encourage the spectators to look at them one by one and at the same time to meditate on the doctrine of Salvation which is always the central theme of paintings of this kind.

²⁷⁹ Falkenburg, Joachim Patinir, p.26.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p.27.

The original purpose of this painting was very likely private. It probably hung in a house as an aid to religious meditation. The tondo format is not characteristic of altarpieces. As was mentioned above in the Introduction, tondos were mostly located in domestic or civic locations, but very rarely in churches, even though their subject matter is usually religious. In addition, as none of the figures in this painting look at the viewer, this utter lack of communication between the figures in the painting and the viewer would also deny that it was an altarpiece. The purpose of an altarpiece mainly is to serve as an intercessor between the viewer and religious doctrine; usually at least one of the figures in the altarpiece will look out at the viewer and welcome him into the painting.

Conclusion

Piero's Toledo Tondo can be dated in the first decade of the sixteenth century, probably before 1505, a period in which the artist is most active. In fact, most of the paintings which have been attributed to Piero di Cosimo appear to have been executed in this decade. The subject matter of this painting, which is in accordance with the text of the open book which the Virgin is reading, is about the dual role of Christ as priest and sacrifice and the role of the Virgin as celebrant and co-redeemer. The painting is very quiet in nature and it contains many symbolic details around the central figures of the Virgin and Child as well as in the background. These characteristics mark it as belonging to a type of painting made to incite meditation. Since a comparable quietness is not encountered in Piero's other paintings, I suspect therefore that its patron probably had a great deal to do with designing its iconographical program. This patron probably would have been familiar with the Eucharistic liturgy. The original setting of the picture was most likely a domestic one. This work is most likely not an altarpiece. It was evidently designed for contemplation in private.

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FIGURES



Fig. 1. Piero di Cosimo, Adoration of the Christ Child.



Fig. 2. Detail, The Adoration of the Christ Child.



Fig. 3. Detail, The Adoration of the Christ Child.



Fig. 4. Detail, The Adoration of the Christ Child.



Fig. 5. Piero di Cosimo, The Holy Family.



Fig. 6. Hugo van der Goes, Portinari Altarpiece.



Fig. 7. Piero di Cosimo, The Visitation.



Fig. 8. Piero di Cosimo, Madonna with Child and Saints



Fig. 9. Filippino Lippi, Holy Family with St. Margaret.



Fig. 10. Piero di Cosimo, Liberation of Andromeda.



Fig. 11. Rubens after Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari.



Fig. 12. Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs.



Fig. 13. Piero di Cosimo, Madonna and Child with Angels.



Fig. 14. Piero di Cosimo, a drawing for the Cini Madonna.



Fig. 15. Leonardo da Vinci, Madonna and Child with St. Anne.



Fig. 16. Copy of Madonna and Child with a Yarn Winder.



Fig. 17. Leonardo da Vinci, Madonna of the Rocks.



Fig. 18. Piero di Cosimo, Immaculate Conception.



Fig. 19. Mariotto Albertinelli, Madonna with Saints.

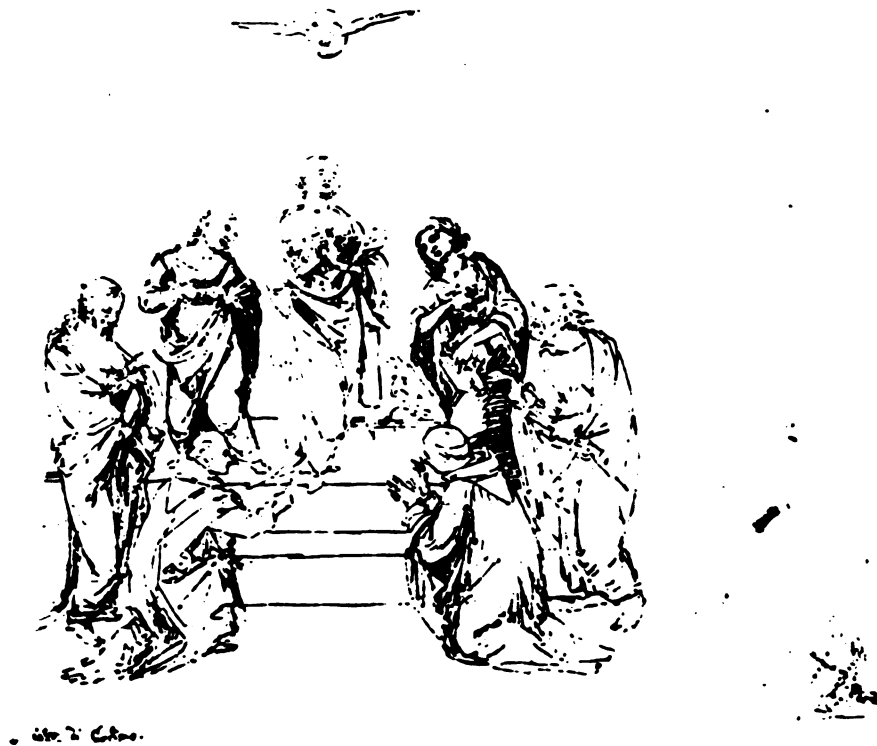


Fig. 20. Piero di Cosimo, drawing for Immaculate Conception.



Fig, 21. Fra Bartolommeo, Vision of St. Bernard.



Fig. 22. Piero di Cosimo, Tritons and Nereids.



Fig. 23. Piero di Cosimo, Tritons and Nereids.



Fig. 24. Piero di Cosimo, Discovery of Honey.



Fig. 25. Piero di Cosimo, Discovery of Wine.

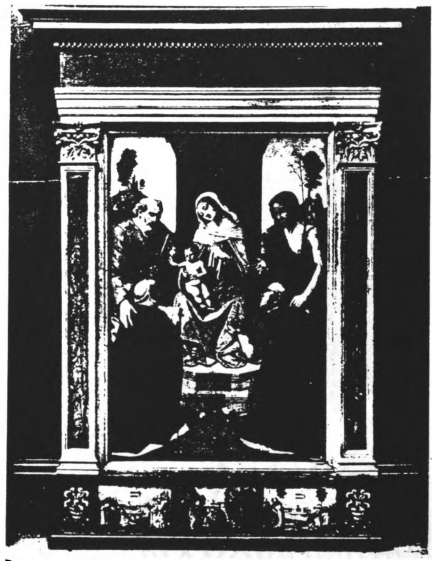


Fig. 26. Piero di Cosimo, Enthroned Madonna with Saints.



Fig. 27. Piero di Cosimo, Misfortunes of Silenus.



Fig. 28. Sandro Botticelli, Mystic Nativity.



Fig. 29. Hugo van der Goes, Nativity, Berlin.



Fig. 30. Manuscript illumination, c.1300.



Fig. 31. Manuscript illumination, c. 14th century.



Fig. 32. Pisan Master, Nativity.



Fig. 33. Giovanni da Milano, Nativity.



Fig. 34. Roger van der Weyden, Miraflores Altarpiece.



Fig. 35. Fra Filippo Lippi, Adoration of the Christ Child.



Fig. 36. Pier Francesco Fiorentino, Adoration of the Child.



Fig. 37. Lorenzo di Credi, Adoration of the Shepherds.

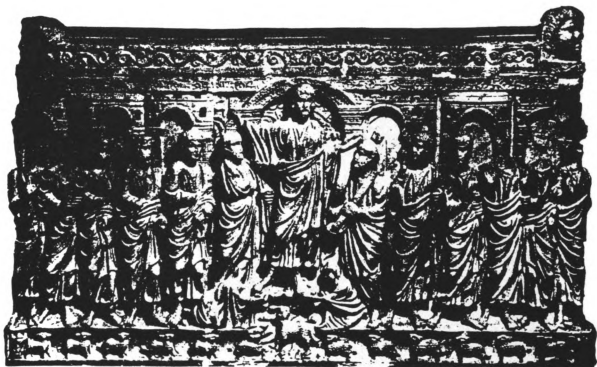


Fig. 38. Christ with the Apostles, Sarcophagus.



Fig. 39. Filippino Lippi, Virgin and Child with Angels.



Fig. 40. Neri di Bicci, Madonna and Child.



Fig. 41. Attributed to Michelozzo, Madonna and Child.



Fig. 42. Attributed to Donatello, Madonna and Child.



Fig. 43. Attributed to Donatello, Madonna and Child.



Fig. 44. Attributed to Ghiberti, Madonna and Child.



Fig. 45. Piero di Cosimo, Pietà.



Fig. 46. Tintoretto, Vulcan Surprising Venus and Mars.



Fig. 47. Bernardino Luini, Madonna and Child with Angels.



Fig. 48. Roger van der Weyden, Entombment.



Fig. 49. Petrus Christus, Nativity.



Fig. 50. Le sacerdoce de la Vierge.

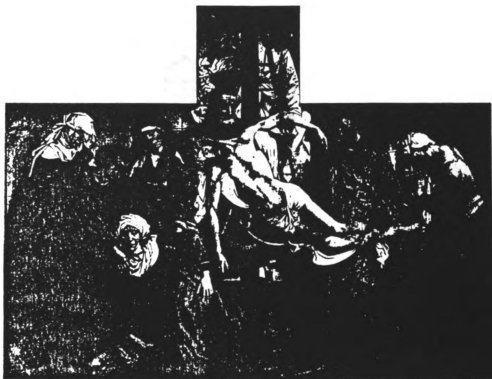


Fig. 51. Roger van der Weyden, Descent from the Cross.



Fig. 52. Meister Bertram, Nativity from the Grabower Altar.



Fig. 53. Meister Bertram, Rest on the Flight.



Fig. 54. Piero di Cosimo, Strassburg Madonna.



Fig. 55. Lamentation.



Fig. 56. Attributed to Naddo Ceccharelli, Nativity.



Fig. 57. Fra Angelico, Annunciation.



Fig. 58. Fra Filippo Lippi, Madonna and Child.



Fig. 59. Giovanni Bellini, Madonna of the Meadow.

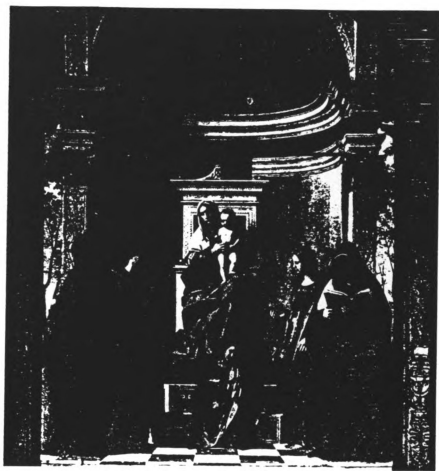


Fig. 60. Giovanni Bellini, Enthroned Madonna with Saints.



fig. 61. Giorgione, Enthroned Madonna with Saints.



Fig. 62. Giovanni Bellini, St. Francis.



Fig. 63. Andrea Mantegna, Presentation.



Fig. 64. Donatello, Pazzi Madonna.



Fig. 65. Gerard David, Virgin and Child.

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