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TACITO PREDICATORE: THE ANNUNCIATION CHAPEL AT THE MADONNA DEI MONTI IN ROME

BY

CAROLYN H. WOOD AND PETER IVER KAUFMAN*

Trent could not have been clearer. Images were permitted in churches to instruct the faithful and confirm their faith. And bishops should approve only those commissions and depictions that would serve such purposes. Late in 1563, the council's twenty-fifth and final session explicitly advised that "stories of the mysteries of our redemption . . . in paintings and other representations" enable visitors to reflect on articles of the faith challenged at that time by Protestants less well disposed to the use of images. Trent, to be sure, issued guidelines. Nudity was frowned on. Ambiguity ought to be avoided. Scriptural stories should be presented simply, as they had been told. The council aimed to answer reformers' complaints and to counter Reformation iconoclasm. Prelates in attendance echoed Pope Gregory I's sanction of images—his characterization of art as scripture for the illiterate—while instructing artists on their religious obligations. And no bishop took the council's decrees on images more seriously than did Gabriele Paleotti, who attended the last session before returning to his see of Bologna.¹

Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* impressed on prelatial patrons the importance of controlling what the faithful see. Unlike the widely read post-Tridentine treatises on art by his colleagues Carlo Borromeo and Giovanni Antonio Gilio, Paleotti's *Discorso* was particularly attentive to the susceptibilities of simple folk (*gl'idioti*).² Sermons tended to confuse them, Paleotti suggested; auditors could not help but form at-

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¹*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, Illinois, 1978), pp. 215–217.

²A.W.A. Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent* (2 vols.; The Hague, 1974), I, pp. 133–141, usefully compares the treatises: Paleotti's *Discorso* (Bologna, 1582), Giglio's *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (Camerino, 1564), and Borromeo's *Instructiones fabricate et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae* (Milan, 1577), which are reprinted in the second and third volumes of *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento tra Manierismo e Controriforma*,

tachments to preachers that interfered with the transmission of the mysteries their words tried to convey. Words also interfered. Auditors must know language's subtleties fully to understand what was said from the pulpit or on the printed page, and few auditors have the necessary learning. But everyone perceives and immediately apprehends images. Paleotti insisted that there were no better way to present mysteries and no better leverage for that claim than the Incarnation. God gave his son in the flesh, his Word and his image made flesh, palpable, pictorial. And the mystery of the Annunciation was better served by images as well. The irony, of course, is that the angel Gabriel announced the Incarnation with words, which it might also be prudent to depict. The *Discorso* was circulating in Rome, as elsewhere, soon after 1582, carrying Paleotti's conviction that painters were uniquely effective as "silent preachers." Six years later, the Annunciation chapel at the Madonna dei Monti was completed to confirm the faith of *gl'idioti*, if Paleotti's counsel held, specifically, to confirm the new faith of the *conversi*.³ (Fig. 1 and cover illustration)



Fig. 1 View of the Madonna dei Monti (also called Santa Maria ai Monti) in Rome. Engraving by G. B. Falda from *Il nuovo teatro delle fabbriche di Roma* (Rome, 1665–1699).

edited by Paola Barocchi (Bari, 1961–1962). Paleotti mentions that sacred painting principally served *gl'idioti* (Book 2, chap. 52, in Barocchi, II, 500).

³Paleotti, *Discorso*, pp. 496–497 (“i pittori dell’imagini sacre, che sono taciti predicatori del popolo”). Earlier in the *Discorso* (pp. 139–142), Paleotti argued that images, unlike words—written or spoken—were universally and easily understandable and the most effective way to instruct and inspire the faithful. Much as orators, paintings were meant “persuadere il popolo e tirarlo col mezzo della pittura ad abbracciare alcuna cosa pertinente alla religione” (p. 214), and painters were “teologi mutoli” (p. 496).

The chapel's program directly relates to the purposes of the confraternity to which the church was assigned by Pope Gregory XIII—the religious education and care of newly converted Jews and Muslims. In April, 1580, a fresco fragment of the *Madonna and Child with Saints* was discovered in the Monti district of Rome. So quickly were miracles ascribed to it and then expected of it that the pope soon established a church for the fragment and assigned both to the Confraternity of Saint Joseph of the Catechumens and Neophytes. Founded nearly forty years earlier by Ignatius of Loyola, the confraternity already supervised hospices for male and female converts and would later oversee a seminary for neophytes. At the start of its stewardship, which lasted until 1712, the confraternity was under the protection of Cardinal Guiglelmo Sirleto, Vatican librarian and one of Paleotti's frequent correspondents. In 1582, just as the church was completed, a copy of the *Discorso* passed into his hands. Six years later, the Annunciation chapel's *conversi* patrons commissioned the Tuscan artist, Durante Alberti, to begin ornamenting it.⁴ (Fig. 2)

One could make the case that most Counter-Reformation art in Rome corresponds, in intention, if not also in effect, with what Paleotti had in mind; that is, late Cinquecento and early Seicento religious art was meant to instruct the faithful and confirm the faith. The program of the Annunciation chapel, its objectives, and the circumstances surrounding its commission, however, suggest a special application of Trent's decree and Paleotti's ideas to the converts' dedication to their new faith and to catechumens. Tourists tend to miss the chapel, tucked away at the foot of the Quirinal, just off the via dei Serpenti. But historians interested in the art, piety, and proselytism of the Counter-Reformation cannot afford to forget their treasures.

The iconographic program of the Madonna dei Monti emphasizes the beginning and end of Jesus' presence on earth. (Early in the seventeenth century, an Ascension was painted on the nave vault.) One chapel depicts the Nativity; another, the Pietà; a third, the Crucifixion.

⁴For Sirleto's receipt of the *Discorso*: Paolo Prodi, *Ricerche sulla teorica delle arti figurative nella riforma cattolica* (Rome, 1962), p. 145; for the church of the Madonna dei Monti, Liliano Barroero *Guide Rionali di Roma. Rione I—Monti*, Vol. III (Rome, 1982), pp. 39–52; for the confraternity, Lance Lazar, *Bringing God to the People: Jesuit Confraternities in Italy in the Mid-Sixteenth Century* (Toronto, 2004). Also see the essays and documents related to the confraternity and its work in *Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma*, 10 (1998).



Fig. 2 *Annunciation* by Durante Alberti, 1588, Chapel of the Annunciation, Madonna dei Monti, Rome (photo Carolyn Wood).

Alberti was responsible for the decorative program and altarpiece of the Annunciation chapel. He completed both in 1588. The vault contains scenes from the New Testament, a Last Supper occupying the center. Saints watch from the walls—Peter, Paul, Bartholomew, and Andrew—accompanied by smaller images of Anthony of Padua, Lucy, Dominic, and Francis on the pier pilaster. Alberti painted the larger, side-wall saints in oil on canvas. The rest of the program is in fresco, including the half-length figures of Saints Stephen, Lawrence, Margaret of Antioch, and Catherine of Alexandria. A woman on the soffit of the arch above is difficult to identify.⁵ There is no obvious unifying logic to Alberti's program and little to distinguish it from narrative scenes and saints in the other three chapels.

The unusually tall altarpiece of the Annunciation, tallest in the church, features Mary's bridal bed, the approach of the angel from the left, and his interruption of Mary's reading. (Cover illustration and fig. 2) The vertical alignment signals the union of heaven and earth, divine and human. Alberti directed the viewer's gaze from God the Father and the heavenly host at the top, down through the Holy Spirit, into the bed-chamber and onto the altar where the Eucharist was celebrated. The three flowers in bloom on Gabriel's branch conceivably indicate that he has delivered his message, that Mary has conceived, and, consequently, that the divinity is a Trinity. Gabriel bows in homage to the divine presence on earth. Mary looks reverentially to heaven.

She has forgotten her book, no doubt; yet the painter, patrons, confraternity, and new converts could not. It has fallen fortuitously face forward so that the text is clearly visible. Oddly, perhaps, for an altarpiece depicting the Word made flesh, words are still prominent. Alberti assured that viewers could read the passage from Isaiah 7 that Mary was reading when the angel appeared. They would read, that is, the fourteenth verse, which was ordinarily associated with the Annunciation: "Behold a virgin shall give birth to a son and she shall name him Emmanuel." Alberti's debt to traditional representations of the *lectio* is obvious; yet he improvised rather distinctively. He put the text in Hebrew and included a second, seldom specified part of Isaiah's prophecy, "Butter and honey shall he eat . . ." (7:15). (Fig. 3) Hebrew was likely inscribed for historical authenticity, but the primary reason was almost

⁵Milton J. Lewine, "The Roman Church Interior, 1527-1580" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1960), pp. 330-332, suspects she is St. Cecilia, although her red and blue robes, her hands in the orans position, and the accompanying angels, suggest the *Assunta*.



Fig. 3 Detail of the *Annunciation* by Durante Alberti, 1588, Chapel of the Annunciation, Madonna dei Monti, Rome (photo Carolyn Wood).

certainly to explain the prophecy to the newly converted. Jews heard the verses often. Isaiah 7:14 was standard polemical fare. When cited in connection with the Incarnation, it accused them of denying the truth of their prophet, whom St. Jerome called “more evangelist than prophet” and author of the “fifth gospel.” Within the precincts of the Madonna dei Monti, the altarpiece’s reminder of Isaiah’s “behold” urged recent converts to complete the passage from Judaism to Christianity.⁶

Comparisons are instructive. Representations nearly always suggest that Mary was reading, a common devotional practice during the later medieval period and through the Renaissance. Understandably, she forgets her book as soon as Gabriel appears; so artists rarely yielded much information about it. A century before Alberti’s work began at the Madonna dei Monti, Filippino Lippi dragged the lectern and Mary’s book with it to the margin of his *Annunciation* (1483/84), now in the Museo Comunale of San Gimignano. A century later, Alberti’s more famous contemporary, Ludovico Carracci, caught Mary reading, right before she was distracted. But in Carracci’s *Annunciation* (ca. 1585), at the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna, the text’s cover faces viewers, who, therefore, are unable to join Mary as readers. Undoubtedly, knowledgeable sixteenth-century viewers guessed the prophetic passages in Isaiah and remembered how the “fifth gospel” related to the Lucan narrative.⁷ Paolo Veronese’s *Annunciation* (ca. 1580), at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, left the book open, but the writing there is illegible to viewers, who, in any event, probably followed Mary’s prompt and turned their attention, as she turned hers, to the angel. Another Veronese *Annunciation*, painted several years later and now in the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas, simply closed Mary’s book.

Our thirty years of travel in Europe and North America and a search through Daniel Arasse’s ample *L’Annonciation italienne*, which, however, does not include Alberti’s altarpiece at the Madonna dei Monti, yielded no other *Annunciation* that presents Mary’s text of Isaiah in He-

⁶For Isaiah and Jerome, see John F.A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel. Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1-2, 43-45, and 101-107.

⁷The idea that Mary was reading Isaiah’s prophecy at the time of the *Annunciation* possibly derives from the *Revelations* of Elizabeth of Hungary. Nicholas Love conflated the passages in Isaiah and Luke—adding that Mary was reading the former—when, in the early fifteenth century, he translated the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* attributed to Bonaventure, for which, see Michael G. Sargent, *Nicholas Love’s Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus: a Critical Edition* (New York, 1992), pp. 260-261.

brew.⁸ When visible, the script is often illegible or recognizable as Latin and, infrequently, as Greek. Alberti's Hebrew, though, is not only recognizable but conspicuously so. It falls into the foreground of the picture, nearly into the hands—and certainly in the faces—of viewers.

Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son. . . . Butter and honey shall he eat.

That was the reading for the altarpiece sermon. The relevance of “behold a virgin” is self-evident, but “butter and honey” baffled many early modern interpreters assigned to explain it. In the early church, newly baptized adults drank milk and honey to signify that the faith they had just accepted assured them access to paradise, but, from the early tenth century on, there is no liturgical record of their drinking.⁹ So, in 1621, Antonio Lamberti in Bologna received a panicky letter from Claudio Achillini, a fellow Bolognese then at the Ludovisi court in Rome, who was searching for an explanation. Achillini had been attending bi-weekly discussions of biblical passages and theological concepts at the Quirinal Palace, where the papal household was summering. He was one of several literati asked by Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi to analyze Isaiah's “butter and honey,” a *luogo misteriosissimo*, said Achillini, begging Lamberti for help.¹⁰ We are not told that Lamberti obliged, and we do not know what Achillini finally contributed, but a fellow Bolognese poet, Girolamo Preti, supplied a postscript to another of the latter's letters, assuring Lamberti that their mutual friend acquitted himself marvelously.¹¹

If so, Achillini likely cited one or both of the two principal patristic interpretations of the “butter and honey” passage. Tertullian suggested that neophytes be given milk and honey to signify their rebirth into a new

⁸Arasse, *L'Annonciation italienne. Une histoire de perspective* (Paris, 1999) contains illustrations of the Annunciations mentioned here, with many more. Neither that survey nor ours has been exhaustive; so we welcome word of any Annunciations that put Mary's text in Hebrew. Hebrew on lintels or bed frames, as in Cima da Conegliano's *Annunciazione* of 1495, at the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, are no exception to our “rule,” which concerns and concentrates on Mary's text.

⁹Mario Righetti, *Manuale di storia liturgica*, 2nd rev. ed. (4 vols.; Milan, 1959), IV, 125-126.

¹⁰Claudio Achillini's letter implies that Pope Gregory XV asked for the exegesis, but the Cardinal Nephew, Ludovico, was the likelier source. He founded the Accademia dei Virtuosi for such summer colloquies. For Achillini's report, see *Giambattista Marino: Epistolario*, ed. A. Borzelli and F. Nicolini, Vol. II (Bari, 1912), pp. 161-163.

¹¹Preti wrote that Achillini was “on fire” (“Insomma il signor Achillini è un demonio. Domenica nell'accademia egli fece spiritare tutto il mondo”), *Marino: Epistolario*, p. 161.

world of wisdom.¹² Jerome and Chrysostom took the verse as a reference to the humanity and divinity of Jesus, to the Incarnation.¹³ “Butter comes from the milk of animals and thus signifies the humanity.” “Honey, sublimely sweet, appears mysteriously as the dew descends from the sky; honey, therefore, represents divinity.” That elaboration is Andrea del Monte’s. He, too, was drawn to the cryptic butter and honey passage as he composed his *Confusione dei giudei* (*Confusion of the Jews*). His explanation braces his arguments for the virginity of Mary, the messianic mission of Jesus, and, specifically, Isaiah’s prophecy of both. Andrea worked over Isaiah 7:14–15, word for word, raking butter, honey, and *balma*—the Hebrew word for maiden or, contestably, virgin—along with other scraps of information into his arraignment of “confused” Jews who denied Jesus’ divinity in both the first and sixteenth centuries.¹⁴

Andrea del Monte was born Josef Zarfati and changed his name in 1552, on converting to Roman Catholicism.¹⁵ Eight years later, Pope Pius IV appointed him *scrittore per la lingua ebrea* at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, where he translated the Tridentine decrees into Hebrew. His responsibilities included interpreting “Oriental” documents for officials in the papal chancery and, after 1566, for students at the Sapienza, where he held the equivalent of a faculty chair in Hebrew literature. Pope Gregory XIII appointed him to preach to Rome’s Jews in 1576.¹⁶ A few years later Montaigne heard him in the pulpit, *un fort fameux doctor*, and pronounced his learning “admirable.”¹⁷ By then, An-

¹²Tertullian, *De Corona*, 3.3 (CCSL 2:1042–1043).

¹³See Jerome’s commentaries on Job (PL 26, 669D) and on Isaiah (PL 26, 110 B) and Chrysostom’s commentary on Isaiah (SC, 304: 320–325).

¹⁴Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Fondo Neofiti, 37: *Confusione dei giudei, e delle lor false opinioni*, Book II, Chapter 7 (*Della virginità della gloriosissima vergine Maria, madre dal s.r Nostro Gesù Christo*), p. 187. Also: BAV, Vat. Lat. 14627.

¹⁵See Romeo De Maio, *Riforma e miti nella Chiesa del Cinquecento* (Naples, 1973), pp. 356–359, for supplemental, biographical information.

¹⁶In 1574, Gregory established obligatory “conversion” sermons which sixty members of the Jewish community in Rome were required to attend every Saturday afternoon after their Sabbath services. For Andrea’s part and post as Preacher to the Jews, see Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta*, ed. George Bruner Parks (Rome, 1969), pp. 75–82, and Renata Martano, “La missione inutile: la predicazione obbligatoria agli ebrei di Roma nella seconda metà del Cinquecento,” in *Itinerari Ebraico-Cristiani. Società, cultura, mito* (Fasano, 1987), pp. 93–110.

¹⁷Montaigne, *Journal de voyage en Italie par la Suisse et l’Allemagne en 1580 et 1581*, ed. Charles Dédéyan (Paris, 1946), p. 234. “Il y avoit d’excellans precheurs, come ce Rabi renié qui preche les Juifs le Sammedi après diner, en la Trinité. . . . Celui étoit un fort fameux doctor parmi eus; et par leurs argumans mesmes, leurs rabis, et le texte de la bible, combat leur creance. En cete sciance et des langues, qui servent à celà, il est admirable.”

Andrea had been writing polemic far longer than he had been delivering sermons, and he continued at the desk after he was told to stop preaching in 1582, when church officials judged that his virulence in the pulpit was alienating rather than attracting the city's Jews.¹⁸ Likely, his treatises were no more popular among officials, though the *conversi* conceivably were gratified to have his learned explanations of the Old Testament's laws and of prophets who purportedly heralded the coming of Christ. The converts already accepted that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah for whom their Hebrew ancestors had been waiting, *Messia e vero Dio*. They could only have welcomed confirmation and the arsenal of arguments against their Jewish critics who interpreted the Old Testament differently and, to them, misleadingly. Andrea supplied just that in his two treatises, one of which, his *Lettera di Pace*, he dedicated to Cardinal Sirleto, the Protector at the papal court of the Confraternity of Neophytes and Catechumens from 1567.¹⁹

The dedication to Sirleto, of course, was not Andrea's only connection with the confraternity. He was probably welcomed into its house reserved for young Jewish and Muslim men who declared their intention to convert. He would have remained there for forty days, preparing for his baptism. We may infer from silence in the documents that he was a man of means. Had it been otherwise, he would have received grants so that destitution could not drive him back to the ghetto. But Andrea apparently needed no subsidies to keep his distance and owned a home near the Madonna dei Monti when he died in 1587, several years after Pope Gregory XIII turned the church over to Sirleto and the confraternity. Before that, according to an unannotated comment in Karl Hoffmann's pioneering study of the mission to the Jews in Rome, Andrea was named bursar of sorts at the Collegio dei Neofiti, where converts studying for ordination may have read his *Confusione* and *Lettera di Pace*.²⁰

¹⁸According to Hermann Vogelstein, *History of the Jews in Rome*, trans. Moses Hadas (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 291, Andrea was so hated in the Jewish community that a bodyguard had to accompany him to sermons. Martano, "La missione inutile," pp. 104–106, interprets his dismissal from his preaching post as evidence of church authorities' relative indifference to the sermons that were becoming more a matter of ritual repetition than real intervention.

¹⁹*Lettera di Pace. Della verità della venuta del Messia alli Hebrei* (BAV, Fondo Neofiti, 38). Andrea's other treatise, *Confusione dei giudei, e delle lor false opinioni*, was dedicated to Pope Pius V (1566–1572).

²⁰Karl Hoffmann, *Ursprung und Anfangstätigkeit des ersten Päpstlichen Missionsinstitutes: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Katholischen Juden und Mohammedanermision im sechzehnten Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1923), p. 185–186. As *Maestro di Casa*,

Andrea and his wife Cristofora, then, lived a few years near the Madonna dei Monti. Progress on their family chapel in the church apparently had been made when they died within days of each other, leaving instructions to pay for the masonry and ironwork. Cristofora died first and named Andrea her sole heir. He made her nephew, Ugo Boncompagni, another convert, his executor and heir, directing him to apply 150 *scudi* to complete the chapel and, in effect, to prepare it to receive his sermons.²¹

Boncompagni converted as the Madonna dei Monti was going up or immediately thereafter, in the spring of 1582. On his simultaneous baptism and confirmation in the Cappella Gregoriana at St. Peter's, he took the name of the pope, Ugo Boncompagni, Gregory XIII, who must have played an important, although unspecified, part in the convert's rite of passage, and who gave the new Ugo permission to use the family coat of arms.²² As Solomon Corcos, a banker with the reputation of being one of the richest Jews in Italy, the new Ugo presumably attended one or more of his uncle Andrea's sermons in the early 1580's, but late Cinquecento documents attributed his conversion to Filippo Neri and the Oratorians.²³ Of course, conversions interested everyone in Rome and involved many. Members of the confraternity of catechumens and neophytes would have listened to the forced sermons at the Oratorians' church of SS. Trinità dei Pellegrini (then called San Benedetto in Arenula). Neri certainly knew about the confraternity's work and of the pope's patronage. But the new Ugo's first, clearly attested involvement with the church and confraternity was as executor of his uncle's will.²⁴

Andrea, along with the Rector, was responsible for governance of the College. See rule 41, *Ordini, e costituzioni fatte per il Collegio dei Neofiti*, Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Sacra Congregazione della Visita Apostolica, Vol. 4, Acta Sacrae Visitationis Apostolicae S.D.N., Urbani VIII, pars tertia, 1624-1630, fols. 1110-1111.

²¹For Andrea's will, consult Archivio Storico del Vicariato di Roma (ASVR), Archivio della Pia Casa dei Catecumeni e Neofiti, Instrumenti Ufficiali, Vol. 79 (September 19, 1587), fols. 414-415. In addition to leaving most of his extensive library to the Collegio dei Neofiti and 150 *scudi* to finish the Annunciation chapel, Andrea bequeathed five *scudi* to the house for catechumens, one *scudo* to the Madonna dei Monti, and small gifts to several members of the confraternity.

²²Accounts of Solomon Corcos' baptism and confirmation, and of his instruction in the faith before his baptism by Filippo Neri and the Oratorian fathers are found in newsletters of the day, the *Avvisi di Roma*, Cod. Urb. Lat. 1050, April 21, 1582, fols. 122 and 124; June 16, 1582, fol. 210; and June 20, 1582, fol. 215.

²³The *Avviso di Roma* of April 21, 1582 (BAV, Cod. Urb. Lat. 1050, fol. 122) calls Solomon "uno delli primi ricchi di tutto l'hebraismo d'Italia."

²⁴Andrea's will of September 19, 1587, names "Hugonem Boncompagnum civem romanum" his universal heir, ASVR, Archivio della Pia Casa, Instrumenti Ufficiali, Vol. 79,

Subsequently, as his uncle's executor and member of the confraternity, he commissioned Alberti to decorate the Chapel of the Annunciation. He paid him fifty *scudi* in mid-November, 1588, and the *ultimo pagamento* of sixty five *scudi* on the last day of that month.²⁵ Historians are sometimes misled by the Boncompagni coat of arms on the keystone of the chapel arch facing the nave and (twice) on the balustrade. They assume the pope had some significant role in the commission. But Gregory's *stemma*, which also appears several times in the church, is surmounted by the papal tiara and keys, whereas the new Ugo's is surmounted by a knight's helmet. And helmets, not tiaras, are atop the Boncompagni insignia associated with the chapel.²⁶ (Fig. 4) But to say Ugo was principally responsible for the commission and program would also be misleading. True, an inscription on the chapel wall, *fieri fecit*, seems to make that claim; yet Andrea and his wife, as we learned, supplied the funds, and Andrea's sermons, which have not survived, appear to have been sources for the inscriptions, making Alberti, the artist, Andrea's "silent partner," and making them both what Paleotti called "silent preachers."

Along with the verses from Isaiah 7 that Alberti inscribed in Hebrew in Mary's dropped book ("Behold a virgin . . . butter and honey"), two other scriptural passages, then associated with the Mass for the Annunciation on March 25, signal Andrea's posthumous "participation." "Behold the handmaid," the words with which Mary accepted her part in the Incarnation (Luke 1:38), alerted *conversi* viewers to the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah. Prophecy and fulfillment were often paired iconographically, conspicuously so in banners held by Luke and Isaiah in Antonio Liberi's *Annunciation* in Loreto (after 1510). In Andrea's chapel in the Madonna dei Monti, Alberti painted Mary's confirmation in Latin in a cartouche at the bottom of the altarpiece.

fols. 414-415. From 1588 and for at least ten years, Ugo was a member (syndic) of the Confraternity of Catechumens and Neophytes and attended their monthly meetings, ASVR, Archivio della Pia Casa, Istrumenti Ufficiali, Vol. 80, fol. 58. Unlike his uncle Andrea, his name was never followed by the designation "*neofito*." Instead, he is identified as a Roman citizen. In 1583, soon after his baptism, he was named *caporione* by the Roman Senate and, in this capacity, he participated in the Senate's decision to declare April 26, the day that the miraculous image of the Madonna dei Monti was discovered, a feast day or holiday. See Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-198.

²⁵See: Giustiniano degli Azzi, "Archivio Alberti (San Sepolcro)," in *Gli Archivi della Storia d'Italia*, Series II, Vol. 4 (Rocca S. Casciano, 1915), p. 227.

²⁶Lewine, *op. cit.*, p. 331, makes that mistake, suggesting that the Pope donated the balustrade and intended to assume patronage of the chapel before it was granted to Andrea.



Fig. 4 Ugo Boncompagni's coat of arms on the balustrade of the Chapel of the Annunciation, Madonna dei Monti, Rome (photo Carolyn Wood).

The complete passage, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done unto me according to thy word,” appears in carved and gilded Hebrew in the marble lintel above. (Fig. 5) Kenneth Stow rakes that inscription into the heap of Hebrew translations that Roman church officials commissioned, he says, to expedite conversions, but Jews were unlikely to have visited Alberti’s chapel. They were permitted outside the ghetto to attend the prescribed sermons Andrea and others delivered at the SS. Trinità dei Pellegrini. Recent converts, however, were often at the Madonna dei Monti. The Confraternity of Catechumens and Neophytes managed the church and offered them at low rates apartments that it owned and rented in the vicinity. Scholars enrolled in the Collegio dei Neofiti, linked to the confraternity by Sirleto, presumably assisted with the celebration of the Mass and with Vespers every feast day. Saturdays, they sang the *Salve Maria*. Stow, therefore, may be right about the many scriptural passages in Hebrew that he assembles, but the Hebrew in the lintel above the *Annunciation* was part of the program articulated at Trent and endorsed by Paleotti to confirm the faith of new converts rather than to convert those of another faith.²⁷

Andrea might have ordered the gilded Hebrew inscription. Record of his payment for stonework in the chapel could refer to that Lucan text in the lintel.²⁸ Yet it may also refer to the stucco banner above it, which contains our second additional passage, drawn from the Psalms and painted in gold Latin letters: “Harken oh daughter, see and incline thy ear and forget your people and leave the house of your father” (44:11–12).²⁹ (Fig. 5) Andrea was known to have reinterpreted the Psalms in his sermons. Gregory Martin mentioned his answers to rabbis

²⁷Archivio Segreto Vaticano, misc. arm. viii, Vol. 29, fols. 22–24. From the figures for later baptisms of converted Jews at the Madonna dei Monti, we may reasonably infer that, as early as 1614, such ceremonies were common there. From 1614 to 1633, for example, at least forty-five baptisms were celebrated, many of which involved multiple families or family members. At the Lateran, during that same period, there were fewer. Consult Wipertus H. Rudt de Collenberg, “Le baptême des Juifs à Rome de 1614 à 1798 selon les registres de la “Casa dei Catechumeni,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 24 (1986), 91–231. For the use of Hebrew as a conversion strategy, see Kenneth R. Stow, “Conversion, Christian Hebraism, and Hebrew Prayer in the Sixteenth Century,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 47 (1976), 217–236.

²⁸See ASVR, Archivio della Pia Casa, Instrumenti Ufficiali, Vol. 78 (February 6, 1584), fol. 88, a contract to pay two stone masons (*scarpellini*) ninety *scudi* for the ornamentation of the chapel of Andrea del Monte, *neofito Romano*, with “opera et manufactura scultura et . . . factis ac de omnibus lapidibus precio. . . .” A passage in Andrea’s will (1587) explicitly refers to script and lettering; see note 20, above.

²⁹The words painted on the stucco banner are all but obliterated, but a few are still leg-

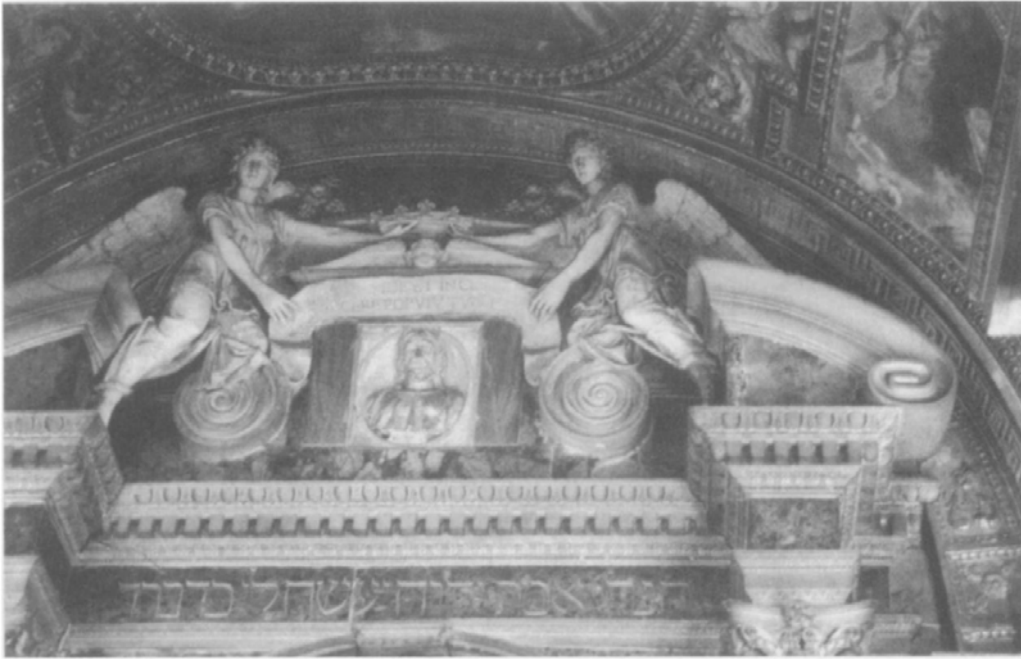


Fig. 5 Detail of the Chapel of the Annunciation showing the marble lintel with Hebrew lettering and the stucco banner with the passage from Psalm 44 above it, Madonna dei Monti, Rome (photo Carolyn Wood).

who “referre[d] all to David.” Indeed, Martin’s now famous report of his visit to Rome is still the best source we have for the polemical context of Andrea’s preaching, which he tremendously admired. “Well [is] this man chosen . . . to confute [Jews] out of their owne bookes and doctors and confound them by their owne peevish opinions and absurde imaginations and foolish practices.”³⁰

Andrea’s strategy was what we might expect. “The principal question is of [the Jews’] messias, whom they looke for yet.” Any pertinent passage that the rabbis read literally, he presented prophetically. Martin identified Psalm 21 as a particularly contested territory and applauded Andrea for having corrected the rabbis’ “manifest corruption” of its orig-

ible: “. . . ilia et . . . ide et incl . . . obliviscere populum tuum et . . .” Passages from Psalm 44, a wedding ode with messianic overtones, were recited throughout the Mass for the feast of the Annunciation. The eleventh verse often begins the reading, yet only half of it. Omitted from the Mass were the words visible in the chapel: “and forget thy people and leave the house of your father.” For the Mass of the Annunciation and the use of Psalm 44 in the Roman liturgy of the time, see J. D. Crichton, *Our Lady in the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1977), pp. 25–26 and 107–108.

³⁰Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

inal meaning. Martin recounted nothing about Psalm 44, “harken oh daughter . . . forget your people,” but it is not difficult to imagine the controversies it could have generated. The rabbis’ refusals to see the imperative to leave “the house” of their fathers, their Judaism, would have revealed to Andrea an “obstinate malice against Christ and Christianitie.” For his part, Andrea preached, wrote, and left Alberti to paint his attachment to both.³¹

Of the three persons we associate with the Annunciation chapel at the church of the Madonna dei Monti, Andrea, for our purposes, is supremely important. His sermons are lost, but, if we are correct, he preaches from the altarpiece that Alberti executed. Of course, without Alberti, the result, a short way from where the *via dei Serpenti* slithers today by the foot of the Quirinal, would be quite different. And Ugo, the third of our three, played a critical part as well. He was Andrea’s heir and executor. As his uncle’s will instructed, he made certain that the chapel was completed, locating the Boncompagni vault in its floor sometime after he joined the confraternity. And, as we heard, he was also closely connected with Filippo Neri and the Oratorians. When papal authorities collected depositions supporting Neri’s beatification, they discovered that Ugo had assisted in the conversion of four of his nephews. As it happened, Neri was preaching while Ugo, in Neri’s library, “argued” with the four, *sopra molte profetie*. One can only guess whether the verses in Andrea’s Annunciation chapel—Isaiah 7, Luke 1, or Psalm 44—were among the controversial *profetie*. Isaiah was named in the documents, but Isaiah 7 was not. Nonetheless, when converts, including Ugo’s four nephews, were catechumens and neophytes, they would have seen it in the book, dropped from Mary’s hands into their field of vision, “Behold a virgin . . . butter and honey.” Andrea, Alberti, and Ugo were doing the work that Trent and Paleotti commended. Their chapel was and still is a special application of Trent’s instructions: it confirmed the faith Andrea’s sermons were delivered to inspire.³²

³¹Ibid., pp. 80–81.

³²See “Il primo processo per San Filippo Neri nel codice Vaticano Latino 3798 e in altri esemplari dell’Archivio dell’Oratorio di Roma,” in *Studi e testi, Biblioteca Vaticana*, part I, Vol. 191 (Vatican City, 1957), pp. 45–47 and 191–199. We are grateful to Domenico Rocciolo, Director of the Archivio Storico del Vicariato di Roma, and to faculty colleagues stateside, Yaakov Ariel, Malachi Hacohen, Nelson Minnich, Lance Lazar, and Julie Mell.