

Article

Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*

and the Function of Images of the
Pregnant Virgin Mary

Frank Ferrie



DESPITE RECENT STUDIES, THE FUNCTION OF the *Madonna del Parto* in the late medieval period remains unclear. In the limited scholarly literature on the subject, the majority view is that this image 'type', which shows the pregnant Virgin isolated and with a naturalistic swelling to her abdomen, was used as an aid in matters of childbirth and fertility. To support their claims, writers commonly cite the modern-day practice of pregnant and recently delivered women placing flowers and other offerings in front of such images.¹



Piero della Francesca, *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1455–60)

At first glance, the history of Piero della Francesca's late *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1455–60) appears to confirm these views. As early as 1828, a visiting cleric to the church of Santa Maria a Momentana, on the eastern borders of Tuscany, where Piero's fresco was originally sited, recorded that the altar in front of the painting was 'properly kept' and that the congregation sang 'an antiphon to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Expectation of Childbirth'.² Local belief in the fresco's powers as an aid in childbirth was so strong that in 1954 the mayor of Monterchi, fearing the consequences of its absence, refused to lend it out for a prestigious exhibition in Florence.³ The long-established role of the Virgin, as 'Mother of Mercy', and the need for a powerful and sympathetic intercessor at times of recurring plague and population collapse in the late medieval period, seems to add weight to these claims.⁴ However, there is no contemporary fourteenth- or fifteenth-century evidence to support the notion that the *Madonna del Parto* was venerated or used in this way.

Focussing above all on Piero's fresco, this article aims to clarify the contemporary function of the *Madonna del Parto* in relation to two other interrelated issues. The first of these concerns the decline of the image. As far as we know, naturalistic images of the pregnant Madonna first appeared in early fourteenth-century Tuscany. Why, after a period of popularity in the mid-fourteenth century, had commissioning slumped so dramatically by Piero's time? Given the wide iconographic variations amongst the group of images the article will also challenge the conventional view of the *Madonna del Parto* as a definitive 'type' with a common set of meanings and functions.

The Rise of Naturalism

A brief account of the surviving images of the pregnant Madonna will give a sense of the variety of ways in which the Madonna's condition was represented.⁵ In Tuscany, we know of perhaps three or four examples of the *Madonna del Parto* in the fifteenth century, Piero's monumental version (c. 1455–60), in which the Virgin's pregnancy is most graphically indicated, being the last of these. In contrast, between 1320 and around a century later, approximately seventeen examples were produced.⁶ With the exception of the Visitation, the only other Tuscan images we have of the Virgin shown pregnant come from the earlier period, in illuminated manuscripts. There is, for example, an extremely rare example of Mary depicted fully pregnant at the moment before the birth of Christ in a fourteenth-century Florentine illustrated manuscript of *Meditations*.⁷ A limited number of other Italian manuscripts depict the moment when Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant. One example is a mid-fourteenth-century Venetian text, *Vita gloriosissime virginis Mariae* (The Glorious Life of the Virgin Mary), in which Joseph is shown distraught to find Mary visibly pregnant.⁸

What is clear about all of these images is that there was no consistent convention for the way to visualize Mary's condition or indeed, *when*, in the course of her pregnancy, to show her with a distended abdomen. In some illustrations Mary is shown fully pregnant and in others her condition is suggested merely by an indicating hand or a cloak opened around her abdomen.⁹ In the two manuscripts to which I have just referred, Joseph's response to Mary's unexpected pregnancy is predictably emotional, but in contrast to the Venetian *Gloriosissime*, the same 'moment' in *Meditations* does not show Mary with an enlarged abdomen.¹⁰ Indeed, although Florentine images of the Visitation generally conceal the Virgin's condition under a cloak or voluminous maternity garment, they also display inconsistencies.

Pointing to the increasing scarcity of images of the Virgin's pregnancy a number of scholars have suggested that there may have been a growing sensitivity about the subject in a region where naturalism in art was particularly prevalent. According to this view, the images became increasingly ambiguous from a religious perspective. Shorn of the schematic symbolic devices used in Byzantine antecedents, the Virgin's naturalistically illustrated pregnancy inevitably evoked human sexuality and therefore sin.¹¹

Specific concerns regarding images of the Madonna's pregnancy were expressed by the archbishop of Florence, Antonino, writing between 1446 and 1459:

Painters are to be blamed when they paint things contrary to our faith—when they represent [...] in the Annunciation, an already formed infant, Jesus, being sent into the Virgin's womb, as if the body he took on were not of her substance.¹²

Antonino's sermon reflects contemporary preoccupations with the humanity of Christ and suggests that there was nothing problematic about the *Madonna del Parto*, an image that after all promoted the notion of Mary's natural-term pregnancy and therefore Christ's humanity. His words appear to be directed more towards northern European and Byzantine-inspired representations of the pregnant Virgin, where the Christ-child is pictured whole within or in front of the Virgin's womb or breast.¹³ However, there was the occasional misdemeanour, in Antonino's terms, suggested in fifteenth-century Tuscan art. For example, in Gentile da Fabriano's *Annunciation* (c. 1425), a ray of light or energy transmitting Christ's essence, contrary to the conventional practice of directing this towards Mary's upper body or head, is focussed just above the Madonna's distinctly enlarged abdomen and passes fully into her body.

It is not clear whether such images were meant to suggest that Mary became immediately pregnant with a fully developed Christ or whether the enlargement is simply a kind of artistic shorthand—it was probably the latter. Nevertheless the image appears to fall within the heretical subjects highlighted by Antonino and it was produced in Florence. One might go on to argue that because the *Madonna del Parto* did not isolate a precise moment from the scriptures (like the Visitation), it risked being interpreted by the viewer as taking place at the moment of the Annunciation and Incarnation. Indeed, there is a strong visual and symbolic association between scenes of the Annunciation and the *Madonna del Parto*. In the latter, Mary commonly carries a closed book, which is thought to be a reference to the open prayer book she is shown contemplating at the Annunciation.¹⁴ At the very least, Antonino's words indicate that the appearance of Mary's pregnancy was a highly sensitive issue more than a century before the Council of Trent in 1563. This may explain why the last-known Tuscan example of the naturalistically pregnant and isolated *Madonna* (by Piero della Francesca) was commissioned in a provincial district on the borders of the region, not in Florence.

The Council of Trent

Although Piero's *Madonna* is unusual amongst the *Madonna del Parto* examples for the amount of related historical documentation that survives, the record we have is partial. Like a number of the others, Piero's painting was cut down, altered and moved from its original location. The church where the fresco was painted no longer exists, there are no records of the commission and what remains of the fresco in all probability constitutes half its original size. In fact we have no contemporary documents concerning the fresco until after the Council of Trent.

All that we can say for certain, before that date, is that Piero's fresco was the high altarpiece in a rural church and that it replaced an earlier fresco on a similar subject (a *Madonna and Child with Angels*).¹⁵ Reconstructions of the church suggest that it was of a simple Romanesque oblong design, just over four-and-a-half metres wide,¹⁶ suggesting that Piero's fresco, which, even in its present fragmentary state measures approximately two metres square, was the

dominant feature. Scholars disagree on the significance of Mary's overtly-shown pregnancy in the fresco. Whilst the majority contend that the painting was the site of devotion for pregnant mothers, others claim that it had a predominantly Eucharistic significance with the Madonna symbolically pictured as the vessel for the Word (Christ). In more general terms, the monumental size of the Madonna, compared to the diminutive angels to her sides, means that she can be interpreted as *Maria Ecclesia*; symbol of the Church itself.

After the Council of Trent, it appears that the painting lost its status as the focal point of the mass. Contemporary documents from 1563 and 1568 record that the fresco and altar were 'duly ornate', but that between 1583 and 1697 the altar 'was completely barren or unadorned; devoid of the cross, candlesticks, table cloths and especially the sacred stone, making it impossible to celebrate mass there'.¹⁷ It has been suggested that the reasons for this abandonment can be found in the Council's decree 'On the invocation, veneration, and relics of saints, and on sacred images':¹⁸

And if any abuses have crept in amongst these holy and salutary observances, the holy Synod ardently desires that they be utterly abolished; in such wise that no images, (suggestive) of false doctrine, and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated, be set up [...]

Moreover, in the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, every superstition shall be removed [...]

In fine, let so great care and diligence be used herein by bishops, as that there be nothing seen that is disorderly, or that is unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing indecorous, seeing that holiness becometh the house of God.¹⁹

This decree indicates the Council's determination not only to eradicate heretical subjects, but the inappropriate invocation and veneration of what we might term 'legitimate' images and relics. This decree has been cited by a number of commentators to support claims of iconoclasm in the *Madonna del Parto*,²⁰ and perhaps such beliefs echo the reasons suggested by the rise of naturalism in Tuscany for the sharp decline in commissioning in the early fifteenth century. However commentators are never specific about exactly what was so objectionable, in the Council's terms, regarding naturalistic images of the pregnant Virgin.

One could argue that images of the pregnant Madonna were invoked improperly as 'superstitious' objects, but there is no evidence of any systematic destruction.²¹ Bruno Giorni contends that the removal of the sacred stone meant that Piero's *Madonna del Parto* was considered 'unorthodox'. Indeed, he notes that the local diocesan bishop, Niccolò Tornabuoni (1560–95), was 'a diligent and strong supporter of the Tridentine council',²² suggesting a decisive link between the abandonment of the altar and the Council of Trent. What is significant I think, is that although the fresco was considered unsuitable or ambiguous, it was not destroyed or replaced.²³ This strongly suggests that the

use of the fresco, as a permanent part of the high altar, was the main source of concern, not its appearance alone (if that was indeed an issue).

Perhaps of greater importance for the *Madonna del Parto* than the Council's decree about images is that Trent sought to emphasize the significance of the Eucharist. The 'Decree Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist' indicated that the veneration of the Eucharist was considered on a par with the worship of God himself and Christ:

Wherefore, there is no room left for doubt, that all the faithful of Christ may, according to the custom ever received in the Catholic Church, render in veneration the worship of *latría*, which is due to the true God, to this most holy sacrament.²⁴

The Council's decree included a direction that the Eucharist was to be kept in a sacred place. When put into practice, this meant that the Tabernacle (the actual vessel for the Eucharist) was now to be stored permanently upon, and used as an integral part of, the high altar (formerly the Eucharist was stored away from the altar).²⁵ This is an important change because the Church has always maintained that although the Virgin Mary should be especially venerated above the other saints (*hyperdoulia*), only God and Christ were to be worshipped (*latría*).²⁶ Arguably, if Piero's *Madonna* acted as a symbolic holder of the Eucharist, this emphatic statement that the Eucharist itself was to be worshipped as a permanent part of the high altar meant that there was now a conflict of interests in the church. There was now a risk that where the Virgin was depicted, or more exactly, *positioned*, as a symbolic vessel for the Eucharist, she might be incorrectly worshipped (*latría*) rather than venerated (*hyperdoulia*). I am putting these arguments forward tentatively because we have no records of the order to abandon the altar.

At the very least, the local bishop's request in 1583 for an official canonical visit to assess the position indicates that there was a significant worry about the status of the fresco. However, this took 114 years to arrange. In the meantime, the fresco fell out of use. It was still apparently revered, but had now become simply an image of the expectant Madonna, even after the canonical visit, which found that it was 'well and to order'.²⁷

This brief account does not, of course, preclude the use of the image for other purposes. However, in all the records of pastoral and episcopal visits from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries there is no mention of any devotion to Piero's *Madonna*. In the first half of the seventeenth century its beauty is admired and the painter's name is recorded ('*I Pictoris Petri de Franciscis*'), but the altar is described as 'barren and unadorned' and the visiting cleric notes each time that mass was not said there. Indeed, in a series of devotional poems by the rector of Monterchi, Federigo Nomi (rector from 1682 to 1705), in which the writer exalts sacred religious images in the area, the *Madonna del Parto* is not mentioned.²⁸ The fresco was not even recorded in the documents relating to the establishment of the cemetery church which almost completely replaced the original after an earthquake in 1785.

The Iconography of the *Madonna del Parto*

The centrality of Christ in *Madonna del Parto* images is corroborated by one of the very few contemporary texts dealing with the subject. A mid-fourteenth-century Florentine manuscript includes a miniature *Madonna del Parto* with two diminutive angels (as in Piero's example). The illumination accompanies the text of a *Lauda del Signore* ('Hymn of Praise to Our Lord'), which focuses upon the humanity of Christ as the fruit of the Virgin's womb.²⁹ The Virgin is a vital component here in establishing Christ's humanity. Her importance in this respect goes back at least to the Council of Ephesus (431 CE) when she was declared officially 'Mother of God'. However, the emphasis here, as the title of the hymn suggests, is upon the *Word* (Christ) and God.

The majority of surviving examples of the *Madonna del Parto* are too small to have been the focus of high altarpieces. However, three early examples of a seated pregnant *Madonna of the Magnificat* from the 1330s and attributed to Bernardo Daddi, were the central panels of small altarpieces or tabernacles.³⁰ It may well be that other *Madonna del Partos*, previously assumed to adorn the side walls of chapels (as the Taddeo Gaddi fragment does today),³¹ played a far more Christ-centred and liturgical role. A number, including an example from the church of Santa Maria in Campo, Florence, have been cut down or detached from their side-panels, and may have been central panels of altarpieces.³² The early *Madonna della Ninna* (c. 1340) survives as a single framed panel, but has the characteristic gabled top of an altarpiece. The scale (208cm x 80cm) of a much-fragmented fresco attributed to Nardo di Cione, in the Church of San Lorenzo, Florence, perhaps indicates a similarly centralized role for the *Madonna del Parto*.³³

In Piero's fresco, Eucharistic symbolism is clearly indicated by the tent in which Mary stands. The tent flaps are held open by a pair of diminutive angels—a common iconographical feature of tabernacle imagery.³⁴ The meaning is emphasized by the Virgin's greatly enlarged abdomen, the blaze of white from her undergarment revealed by the large front opening slit to her maternity dress, and her indicating right hand. The fundamental components of the tent in Piero's painting conform closely to accounts in Exodus, where God instructs Moses on the construction of a 'tent-sanctuary' or 'sacred tabernacle' in which he was to dwell amongst mankind. In Marian and Loretian litanies Mary is claimed (amongst other attributes) as the *Foedoris Arca* (Ark of the Covenant). Mary as the vessel for Christ was thus Ark of the New Covenant.³⁵ Piero had placed a New Testament 'container' (the Virgin) within an Old Testament one (the Tabernacle), vividly bringing scripture and daily ritual together. Arguably this complex and dynamic relationship reflects contemporary preoccupations with Christ's simultaneous humanity and divinity.³⁶ Indeed, there are at least two other Tuscan *Madonna del Parto* examples in which Mary is shown within a tent or in front of a canopy or backcloth: the fourteenth-century Santa Maria in Campo version, and Rosello di Jacopo Franchi's early fifteenth-century panel.

However, there are other important symbolic elements in Piero's fresco, showing that a range of meanings (and uses) may co-exist side by side. With reference to the contemporary influence of Saint Francis, Giulio Renzi

emphasizes the importance of the Incarnation in the painting. In the Virgin's naturalistically and emphatically distended abdomen, it is the union of Christ's divine and human natures that is simultaneously highlighted, the source of man's Redemption. Renzi quotes from Saint Francis's *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in which Mary is venerated as the Church itself: '*che sei la Vergine fatta chiesa*' ['because you, Virgin, are made Church']. The Virgin shown pregnant was thus the *Madonna dell'Attesa* (the Madonna in Waiting) and, for Renzi, it is only in more recent times that she acquired the epithet and concomitant universal meaning suggested by '*Madonna del Parto*' (Madonna of Childbirth).³⁷

Mary's portrayal as the Church was also symbolized by her monumental form next to the diminutive angels in Piero's fresco.³⁸ This meaning was unmistakably conveyed by at least two other examples of the *Madonna del Parto* where the Virgin was shown adorned with symbols from the Apocalypse of the New Testament:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. (Revelation 12:1–2)

This woman is often associated with the Virgin Mary, who, thus adorned, simultaneously represents the Church itself.³⁹ In Nardo di Cione's *Madonna del Parto* (Fiesole) and the *Madonna delle Virtù* (Florentine School), symbols of the Apocalypse—the sun, moon and stars—are shown schematically at the head and feet of the pregnant Virgin. Such symbolism can be linked securely with the contemporary promotion of Mary's corporeal Assumption and Coronation in Heaven,⁴⁰ attributes that were strongly associated with the Virgin as a special intercessor.⁴¹ Indeed within the two examples mentioned above, there is a concentration upon other traits of the Virgin. In the former, upon her mediating role as the *Madonna della Misericordia* (the Madonna of Mercy) and in the latter, as the title suggests, the image includes prominent devices symbolising the Madonna's virtues. In the Fiesole *Madonna* there is a bold inscription around the border, invoking the Madonna's mercy as she glances downwards towards a diminutive donor.⁴² In the large schematic halo around Mary's head another inscription reads: 'REGINA COELI' (Queen of Heaven). Apocalyptic referencing, which was especially prevalent in images of the *Madonna of Humility*,⁴³ whether schematically indicated or otherwise, is not a consistent feature of the naturalistic type.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, in common with the Fiesole *Madonna*, there are diminutive supplicants present, and therefore a strong mediating role for the Virgin, in at least six of the other Tuscan examples. In three of these, the sole or principal donor pictured is a monk or friar,⁴⁵ which appears odd given the overarching claim for the *Madonna del Parto* as a patron of childbirth.

We have already discussed the Eucharistic meaning signified by the canopy in the *Madonna del Parto*, but Piero's *Madonna* is perhaps the only one where such a connection can be established with any confidence. The others are much plainer and do not conform to the descriptions in Exodus. The use of the tent

motif was in fact widespread in religious art after the mid-fifteenth-century, and the canopy in Piero's *Madonna* can be seen, in part, as a development of the medieval 'cloth of estate' held up by angels to honour the subject (as in the *Rosello* example above). Both the tent and the cloth of estate celebrated the Virgin as 'Queen of Heaven',⁴⁶ an attribute, as we have seen, associated with her role as a special intercessor. These symbols—the diminutive donors, the cloth of estate, the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, as the Apocalyptic Woman, and as a paragon of virtue—indicate, to varying degrees, an emphasis upon the Virgin, not Christ. We can see, therefore, that, depending upon factors such as iconographical features, the location and form of images, as well as contemporary events and attitudes, a range of meanings and uses is indicated for the *Madonna del Parto*. It is also apparent from the symbols used, whether schematic or naturalistic, that meanings (and types) can merge with one another in the same manner in which the figures of Christ and the Virgin are interdependent.

Conclusion

This essay has asked whether the slump in commissioning of images of the *Madonna del Parto* may help us to understand the function of such imagery. Its brief survey of Tuscan, naturalistic images of the pregnant Virgin indicates that, whether in narrative form, or where the Madonna was isolated, there was a marked decline in the popularity of the subject from the early fifteenth century. This suggests that it was indeed the appearance of the images that was at the root of the problem. Archbishop Antonino's sermon suggests that, long before the Council of Trent, the moment *when*, in the course of her pregnancy, the Madonna was shown visibly pregnant, could be ambiguous or even controversial.

However, the fate of Piero's *Madonna* suggests that the reasons for the decline were more complex, that the function and location of such images could also be highly sensitive. Indeed it appears from the brief iconographical comparison between Piero's fresco and other images of the *Madonna del Parto*, that there was a range of meanings and uses, and that these could change with time. Whilst some, as altarpieces, centred upon Christ and the liturgy, others tended to focus on the powers of the Virgin as an intercessor. However, a number of images within the *Madonna del Parto* group contain prominent elements of both characteristics, demonstrating that this apparent divergence is not always distinct.

The claim that images of the naturalistically pregnant Virgin were used as aids in fertility and childbirth remains unproven. The documented history of Piero's *Madonna* between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (when it was abandoned), its likely liturgical use in the early Renaissance, and the centrality of Christ in a number of other examples, strongly suggest that childbirth was not a consistent or defining focus of at least some of the images. This demonstrates the difficulties caused by grouping works of art solely on the basis of similar iconographical characteristics and the dangers of 'tracking back' from modern-day practices. The study shows that, if we are to understand the

functions of such images and how these may have changed with time, they need to be considered on an individual basis. Clearly then, it is thoroughly misleading to think about images of the isolated, naturalistically pregnant *Madonna del Parto* as a definitive 'type'.

Birkbeck College, University of London

Notes

1. See Brendan Cassidy, 'A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century', *Gesta*, 30.2 (1991), 91–99; Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2002), p. 194; Ronald W. Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), p. 187; Julia Miller, 'Miraculous Childbirth and the Portinari Altarpiece', *Art Bulletin*, 77.2 (June 1995), 259; and Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 144. Jillian Harrold sees a complexity of use in the *Madonna del Parto*, but suggests that a collective function of the images was as an aid in 'fertility, pregnancy and birth', 'The *Madonna del Parto* in Trecento Tuscany: Symbolic Meaning and Ritual Use', unpublished MA thesis (Kingston, Ontario: Queen's University, 1997), p. 62.
2. Quoted in Bruno Gorni, *Monterchi* (Monterchi: Comune di Monterchi, 1999), p. 155 (my translation, as are all subsequent translations from this text).
3. Piero Bianconi, *All the Paintings of Piero della Francesca*, trans. by Paul Colacicchi (London: Oldbourne, 1962), p. 43.
4. Musacchio claims that the high mortality rate in childbirth was one of the principal reasons why objects and images to do with childbirth, including the *Madonna del Parto*, proliferated in the centuries after the Black Death in 1348 (p. 17, p. 144).
5. The name *Madonna del Parto* is also loosely applied to images where the Virgin is shown with the Christ-child pictured whole and in miniature within or in front of her body. See Ermes Ronchi, *La Madonna nell'attesa del Parto: capolavori dal patrimonio italiano del '300 e '400* (Milano: Libri Scheiwiller, 2001).
6. Although the change is not so dramatic between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the decline in popularity of the *Madonna del Parto* is consistent for the whole Italian peninsula. See Ronchi, pp. 67–86.
7. An 'unprecedented' image, according to Ragusa and Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS. Ital. 115*, ed. by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, trans. by Isa Ragusa (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 409.
8. *Vita gloriosissime virginis Mariae atque venerabilis matris filii dei vivi veri et unici* (fourteenth-century manuscript), Oxford, Bodleian MS. Canon. Misc. 476, fol. 025r.
9. See Caroline Feudale, 'Piero della Francesca: An Enquiry into the Origins and Sources of his Style', unpublished MA thesis (New York: New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1957), pp. 131–32.
10. Indeed there are two illuminations that show Joseph lamenting Mary's pregnancy—neither image shows Mary with an enlarged abdomen (Ragusa and Green, pp. 21–24).
11. Cassidy, p. 91.
12. Quoted by Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 43.
13. See for example, Jacopo del Fiore, *Triptych of the Madonna della Misericordia*, 1430s, Accademia, Venice.
14. The *Madonna del Parto* often represented simultaneously separate moments in the life of the Virgin (Feudale, p. 130). Interestingly, the detail of the book was not included by Piero.
15. See Giuseppe Centauro, 'La *Madonna del Parto*: le vicende storiche e i restauri precedenti', in Anna Maria Maetzke, and others, *Piero della Francesca: la *Madonna del Parto*: restauro e iconografia* (Venice: Marsilio, 1993), pp. 41–56.

16. Centauro, p. 41.
17. Paraphrased by Giorni, pp. 148–49.
18. Giulio Renzi, *Gli affreschi di Piero della Francesca ad Arezzo e Monterchi: luogo teologico mariano* (Poggibonsi: Lalli, 1994), p. 24; Giorni, p. 149.
19. *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. by J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), pp. 235–36.
20. Eugenio Battisti, *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1971), p. 71; Elly Cassee, 'La Madonna del Parto', *Paragone* XXIX, 345 (1978), 94–97 (p. 95); Carlo Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, trans. by Edward Farrelly (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 206; Maurizio Calvesi, *Piero della Francesca*, (New York: Rizzoli, Partridge Green, 1998), p. 98. An isolated case of destruction in Italy is recorded in Vicenza in 1613 (*Corriere della Sera*, 24 March 2000). However, the proliferation and survival of examples beyond Italy after Trent puts the notion of systematic iconoclasm in doubt (Thomas Martone, 'La Madonna del Parto de Piero della Francesca e la sua iconografia', in Maetzke and others, pp. 103–19 [pp. 103–04]).
21. See Renzi, p. 24.
22. Giorni, p. 149.
23. Renzi notes this distinction (p. 24).
24. *Council of Trent*, p. 79.
25. See Evelyn Carole Voelker, 'Charles Borromeo's *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae*, 1577: A Translation with Commentary and Analysis', unpublished PhD thesis (New York: Syracuse University, 1977), p. 15, p. 160, p. 166; Martone, 'La Madonna', p. 106; Renzi, p. 24.
26. Hilda Mary Graef, *A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2009), p. 299.
27. Giorni, p. 152.
28. Giorni, p. 152.
29. See Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, Sect. 3, Vols 4 and 5 (New York: New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1934, 1947), p. 28; H. W. van Os, 'Marginal Notes on "The Great Age of Fresco"', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 4.1 (1970), 6–12 (p. 12). The miniature, which appears in *Lauda*, Cod. II, 1, 212, c.X v, R. Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, is reproduced in P. D'Ancona, *La miniatura fiorentina (secoli XI-XVI)* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1914), pl. XVIII.
30. The first of these, *The Madonna and Saints Catherine and Zenobius*, c.1334, is claimed as one of the earliest associations between the Virgin and the liturgy of the mass (Martone, 'La Madonna', p. 127).
31. Harrold, pp. 86–87.
32. See Offner, p. 28.
33. Indeed, this fresco was concealed behind an eighteenth-century canvas to the high altar, San Lorenzo, before its restoration in 1952 (Feudale, p. 128; Martone, 'La Madonna', p. 132).
34. Pamela Zanieri, *A Guide to the Places of Piero della Francesca* (Florence: Scala, 2007), p. 79.
35. Calvesi, pp. 99–100; Lavin, pp. 197–99.
36. Thomas Martone, 'Review of Carlo Ginsberg, *The Enigma of Piero*, and Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca's Baptism of Christ*', *Art Bulletin*, 70. 3 (September 1988), 523–28 (p. 524).
37. Renzi, pp. 24–25. Feudale's early analysis of the painting concludes that it had both a Eucharistic and powerful Marian intercessional purpose (Feudale, p. 128, p. 141, p. 146), however Feudale's explanation of the fresco's latter role, with the Virgin as *mater omnium* ('the compassionate mother of mankind'), is flawed by her belief that the church of Santa Maria a Momentana was from the beginning a cemetery chapel.
38. Lavin, p. 194.
39. In the early Church the Apocalyptic Woman was identified as representing the Church alone (Graef, p. 22, p. 103).
40. Such a connection can be traced back as far as the sixth-century Greek philosopher Oecumenius (Graef, p. 103).
41. Feudale, p. 127.

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42. The inscription reads: 'AVE REGINA MISERICORDIA DI ME MADRE DI PIATA CHE SON MISERO SERVO VIRGHO VIRGINIS'.
 43. See Offner, p. 28; Millard Meiss, 'The Madonna of Humility', *Art Bulletin*, 18.4 (December 1936), 435–65 (p. 462); Beth Williamson, *The Madonna of Humility: Development, Dissemination and Reception, c.1340-1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 17–19.
 44. Feudale, p. 126.
 45. The San Martino alla Palma *Madonna*, the Fiesole example, and the late fourteenth-century *Madonna* attributed to Antonio Veneziano.
 46. Lightbown, p. 194.

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