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FORGING CULTURAL UNIVERSES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN RENAISSANCE

Altarpieces in Sardinia, Prints by Raphael, and Connections with the Flemish and Spanish Worlds

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Cultural exchanges and maritime traffic, led by the expansionist and trading ambitions of the Crown of Aragon, connected the territories of the Western Mediterranean.¹ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the strategic security guaranteed by Sardinia, Sicily, and the Balearic Islands, which at the same time provided supplies for various goods (cereals, tuna, leather, coral, salt), allowed these outposts to circulate a wide range of languages and styles, and—together with commodities—sailors and agents from the worlds of business, the church, diplomacy, and politics.

This process is particularly verifiable for Sardinia between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The island, included within the Catalan-Aragonese and later Habsburg dominions, participated in this political conjuncture. Its cultural geography meant its painters manifest close alignment with the artistic currents of the Iberian Peninsula. These were identity-based choices aimed at reaffirming the Catalan-Aragonese Gothic heritage and affinities with foreign (Spanish and Flemish) interpretations of Raphaellesque painting and early modern Roman models.

As we will see, these affinities can be traced by examining both stylistic trends and the movements of painters. The island was a key port of call with its royal port cities, Alghero and Cagliari, around which revolved trade—especially in the Catalan “colony” in the north, with its management of coral fishing—and political life—especially in the south, where each *estament* or *braç* (military, royal and ecclesiastical) took part in the meetings of the Parliament of the Kingdom.

The movement of leading figures in Spanish society, as well as new settlers, brought about the transformation of large swathes of the island—in particular the city of Alghero, repopulated by Catalans—smoothing the way for the new Catalan-Aragonese political leadership.² At the same time, the granting of privileges to Catalan merchants and fiefdoms to the nobility—often newly ennobled but still “foreign” at the outset of this political turn—was aimed at achieving a capillary remote control of the territory.³ The installation and diffusion of early modern Sardinian *retablos* has therefore been described as a “colonial phenomenon.”⁴

Itinerant or immigrant artists, eager for self-promotion and visibility, were often attracted by the networks of power active in Southern Italy, including religious orders, as well as the families of the prominent feudal lords, both those allied to the Crown, and those in open competition with the pervasive settler communities. Among the protagonists of city life who managed the circulation of artworks, capital, and ideas, were groups of merchants.⁵ Theirs was a shifting presence, indeed the nationality of these colonies was varied—Provençal, Ligurian, Catalan—so much so as to require regulation, often enacted in favor of the Catalan-Aragonese.⁶

At the same time, mendicant orders, city elites, feudal lords, and noble families of Catalan, Aragonese, and Valencian origin, could pursue advantage through their loyalty to the Crown and then to the Empire of Charles V. Religious sites, such as the church of San Francesco di Stampace in Cagliari, established a veritable gallery of Gothic-Catalan and Flemish-Iberian *retablos*. In fact, the Friars Minor were no longer subject to the mendicant congregation of Tuscany, but were appointed and protected by the Crown. The order had contributed to the “pacification” of the island, following its conquest, by actually participating in the “Catalanization” of its administrative and political apparatus and visual culture.

In the Mediterranean Renaissance—and in particular in Sardinia—there are clear signs of a layered visual culture in which models and painters from different origins intertwined. They came from Barcelona, Valencia, Tortosa, probably also through the Balearics, and later from Naples. They manifest a complex imagery, never exclusively Catalan or Aragonese. This is because those cities, to which Sardinia was connected by politics and trade, also welcomed itinerant and immigrant artists with northern backgrounds: Flemish, Burgundian, and Provençal.⁷

Looking at the origins of the painters of altarpieces during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is noteworthy how Joan Mates, Rafael Tomàs and Joan Figuera, Joan Barceló, the Master of Castelsardo, and the Master of the Nativity, all come from the Catalan-Aragonese-Valencian world.⁸ Some shipped their works abroad, others shuttled between the two shores, Iberian and Sardinian, and others—namely Joan Barceló—neglecting coveted commissions in Barcelona, preferring to take care of business interests on the island in person, setting up a workshop and taking a wife. These were not painters in decline, moving away from competitive Barcelona before their artistic star set, but enterprising artists.⁹

There are resonances between visual culture on the island and Flemish taste appreciated and promoted by Alfonso V of Aragon (1396–1458) and Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504).¹⁰ These preferences—in the higher political spheres of the Catalan-Aragonese and then Castilian-Aragonese kingdoms—were accompanied by similar choices among the mendicant orders affiliated to the Crown. The Franciscans displayed paintings that sustained this predilection for Flemish styles, combining it with staple elements of the Iberian tradition, such as the constant presence of the Archangel Michael, the *retablo* format equipped with *guardapols* (small oblique side paintings that protected the work from dust) on the top, and textured gold backgrounds or *estofado de oro*, favored into the sixteenth century to emphasize the lustre emanating from holy bodies.¹¹

The preference for Flemish models is attested in Valencia, Barcelona, and Naples, both at the Angevin court and subsequently during the Aragonese rule of the city.¹² In the first half of the fifteenth century, the arrival of works and artists in the fertile heart of southern Italy can be traced back to Alfonso the Magnanimous,¹³ anxious to compete, in terms of assertive refinement and humanistic cosmopolitanism, with his predecessors and with the Burgundy court itself.¹⁴ But in the second half of the sixteenth century, the presence of foreign artists in Spanish Italy and especially in Naples—now immigrants and no longer

itinerant—took on the dimensions of a more deeply rooted and thriving colony, with Flemish businessmen-painters systematically winning prestigious commissions.¹⁵

On the island, references to Flemish models known in the Spanish Levante, emerged in a diversified way, blended with elements of Catalan-Aragonese heritage and compositional ideas taken from prints, both northern and Italian. Among the first models that must have been known through the mediation of traveling painters are Jan van Eyck's altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (1432, Ghent, St. Bavo's Cathedral). The memory of this model is attested in Barcelona, in the *Virgin of the Councillors* (now at the MNAC), by the Valencian Lluís Dalmau (1443–45).¹⁶ In 1431, the painter had gone to Flanders at the instigation of Alfonso the Magnanimous to familiarize himself first hand with the style and technique of northern painting.

The fascination exerted by the Ghent altarpiece can be seen also in Sardinia, in the *Retablo of Saint Bernardino* (c. 1455, Cagliari, Pinacoteca Nazionale), commissioned by Miquel Gros, guardian of the convent of San Francesco di Stampace, and Francesch Oliver, merchant and first counselor of Cagliari. It was painted by the Catalan artistic duo of Rafael Thomàs and Joan Figuera, for a fee of 250 gold florins of Aragon.¹⁷

There are also deep affinities between major Franciscan commissions in Southern Italy, such as Colantonio's *retablo* with the *Delivery of the Franciscan Rule*, for San Lorenzo Maggiore in Naples (1444–46, Capodimonte Museum), as attested on the other Mediterranean shore in the *Retablo of the Porziuncola* (Cagliari, Pinacoteca Nazionale) by the Master of Castelsardo,¹⁸ who went back and forth between Barcelona and Sardinia, and, in the early sixteenth century, in the *Retablo of the Holy Christ* (Oristano, Antiquarium Arborense) by Pietro Cavaro.¹⁹

This common ground was fostered by the Mediterranean's shared visual horizon, supported on the island in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries by the Franciscans, in Alghero, Oristano, and especially Cagliari. The *Retablo of the Nativity*,²⁰ painted by the Master of the Nativity, and the *Retablo of the Porziuncola*,²¹ by the Master of Castelsardo, were both produced for the church of San Francesco di Stampace in Cagliari. These two itinerant painters would have respectively made ideal companions of the Valencian Joan Reixach and the Catalan Jaume Huguet, considering their common iconographies and the affinity between their stylistic sources.

The evocation of models painted in the Flemish-Iberian area was rooted in a desire to attest cultural affiliation.²² The longevity of certain patterns makes clear that the expectations of the clients and the origins of the artists were attuned to the devotional and stylistic preferences of the Spanish Levante.²³ Dalmau's *Virgin of the Councillors* for Barcelona in 1443, the emblem of Marian devotion and political power in the city,²⁴ was recalled by Cagliari's civic elite through the *Retablo of the Councillors* (now in Palazzo Civico), painted during the 1530s (Figure 4.6.1). The decision to establish a line of continuity, based on the symbolic value of a guiding model in defining the image politics of the Sardinian and Catalan-Aragonese kingdoms, bridged the interlude in time between the two artworks.

In Dalmau, we see the willingness to put into practice the new technical possibilities of oil painting and the acquired familiarity with the fresh realism of Early Netherlandish art. These qualities were exploited to exalt the "stage presence" of the lifelike portraits of the city councilors, as large as the Madonna herself, before whom they are illusionistically kneeling. Moving from Barcelona to Cagliari we find the same visual formula. In its new appearance, however, the image of the *Virgin of the Councilors* intertwined its Catalan roots no longer with the Flemish style, but with the manner of Raphael's followers in Southern Italy.



Figure 4.6.1 Raphaelesque painter from Southern Italy (Naples). *Retablo of the Councillors*. 1530s. Oil on panel, 475 × 300 cm. Cagliari, Palazzo di Città.

Some painters are particularly representative of these stratifications, while the sum of multiple consonances undoubtedly finds a significant example in the Master of Castelsardo.²⁵ Furthermore, Northern prints by Master F.V.B., to Master E.S., Master I.A.M. of Zwolle, Schongauer, van Meckenem, up to Dürer were often used to make sacred scenes richer in detail and dramatic tension.²⁶ In the same panel, a variety of graphic sources may be applied, sometimes in intrepid and ingenious ways. In Sardinian *retablos*, such a use of prints shows how the island was a detached site of experimentation. In the sixteenth century, the Master of Ozieri would combine Dürer's prints to subvert—in a subtly grotesque, restless way—the increasingly normative canon propagated by Marcantonio Raimondi's Raphaelesque prints.²⁷

The travels of artists such as Antoine de Lonhy (1446–90),²⁸ Juan de Flandes (1460–1519),²⁹ and Joan de Borgonya (1465–1525)³⁰ linked northern lands (Burgundy, Flanders) with those of Mediterranean Iberia. However, the harmony between the different Mediterranean kingdoms was not only stylistic. It has ideological parallels in the identification of common enemies.

The Alhambra Decree (1492), also known as the Edict of Expulsion, issued by Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, prescribed the expulsion of the Jews from the territories of their kingdoms, allowing only *conversos* or *cristianos nuevos* to stay. Throughout the sixteenth century, the island—which had a population of *moriscos*, sometimes employed as servants—was also involved, as a “contact zone” and borderland, in the campaigns against the expansion of the Ottoman Turks.³¹ Charles V and his fleet made convenient stops in Cagliari and Alghero, respectively, on the occasion of the voyages against Tunis (1535) and Algiers (1541).³²

The construction of an “affective community,” functional to the pacification and control of the territory, also called into play a common devotional imagery. In particular, the iconic

power of some Marian and passion images perpetuated models of Flemish-Iberian origin. Such is the case of the *Pietà* by the Master of Castelsardo and the Master of Sanluri (both, Cagliari, Pinacoteca Nazionale), which pointedly evoke Bartolomé Bermejo.³³

Furthermore, in the *Mater Dolorosa*³⁴ by Pietro Cavaro (Cagliari, church of Santa Rosalia), we discover the Mediterranean interpretation of a model, originating with Quentin Metsys and sent to Lisbon (it is now at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga), but known in other centers of the Iberian Peninsula. These examples form a constellation of interconnected images potentially eliciting a sense of belonging and consensus. They preside like sentinels over the confederation of states and kingdoms, held together precisely by a network of allegiance to the sovereigns, first Aragonese and then the Habsburg.³⁵

The success of Flemish and Flemish-Iberian painting can be imputed to acquisitions of important works or to traveling painters who worked in Naples itself, as well as in Sicily, or, to stay with the theme of “navigating the islands,” also in Mallorca and Madeira. This predilection traveled along the same routes as the trade in commodities: while in Alghero, the protagonist was the red gold of coral, in Madeira, it was white gold, sugar.³⁶

Such taste preferences involved Alfonso the Magnanimous himself, whose third marriage was to Isabella of Portugal. Moreover, Isabella I of Castile, Queen consort of Aragon, favored Flemish painting as a medium for profound and lyrical mystical experiences.³⁷ The predilection for the Flemish style, enhanced by political, dynastic, and devotional reasons, permeated the Iberian and Mediterranean kingdoms, through artistic mobility along the same maritime routes. Some of these, inaugurated by Catalan merchants, connected the Mediterranean islands not only with Naples but also the Iberian coast, and as far away as Flanders by sea.

An ideological adherence to the taste of the rulers and allegiance to their visual horizon supported the longevity of the predilection for Flemish-Iberian painting in the Mediterranean kingdoms. This trend remained alive in Sardinia throughout the first half of the sixteenth century, coexisting with the rise of southern Raphaelism.

At that time, a generation of Spanish painters who traveled to Lombardy, Florence, and Rome engaged with the experiments of Leonardo and Bramantino, Raphael and Michelangelo. I am referring here to Pedro Fernández (1480–1521), Fernando Llanos and Fernando Yañez (1475–1537), Pedro Machuca, and Alonso Berruguete.³⁸ By following their movements, along the north/south axis, we can reconstruct the grand backdrop against which the history of painting in Sardinia developed in the early sixteenth century. The artists active on the island showed that they were fully aware of these exchanges and encounters. Their similar interpretations of the Italian “modern manner” testify to a renewed concord.

From the 1510s onwards, painting in Sardinia seemed to move towards an Italianate style while intermittently turning away from the Catalan-Aragonese one—in other words, to a complete shift in the geographical-cultural orientation of its painting. We find affinities with Paduan-Ferrarese painting in the Master of Castelsardo, with Carlo Crivelli in the Master of the Nativity, with Bernardo Pinturicchio in the Master of Sanluri, and with Raphael in Pietro Cavaro, and the Master of Ozieri.

This apparent “change of course” might be said to correspond to simultaneous trends in the Iberian lands. They were determined by the arrival in Valencia of the Italian Paolo da San Leocadio, the propagation in Spain of the prints by Raimondi and companions, and the return of early modern Spanish painters after their fertile sojourns between the Florence of Andrea del Sarto and Rosso Fiorentino, the Rome of Raphael’s Vatican projects, and the Spanish Naples of Andrea Sabatini and Polidoro da Caravaggio.³⁹

Familiarity with Flemish-Iberian styles and the Gothic-Catalan heritage persisted with the arrival of prints from Raphael's Rome. In addition, another set of connections can be found between painting on the island and the work of Polidoro in Naples and Messina, as well as Iberian artists active in Italy, such as Fernández and Machuca.⁴⁰ The latter followers of Raphael may have even sent works to southern Italy from the 1520s onward, while some studies have also suggested that Machuca could have played some role in the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* (Figure 4.6.2; Cagliari, Museo del Duomo), thus assuming a stop on the island during a return journey to Spain.⁴¹



Figure 4.6.2 Iberian painter close to Polidoro and Proto-Mannerist trained in Naples. *Retablo of the Beneficiaries*. 1530s. Oil on panel, 253 × 214 cm. Cagliari, Museo del Duomo.

The altarpiece is thought to be a collaboration of two artists who exemplify two facets of Raphael's painting, or the Roman "modern manner."⁴² One, the author of the *cimasa*, with the *Crucifixion* between the two thieves and the lateral compartments with the *Saints*, was undoubtedly familiar with the language of Polidoro and Machuca in Southern Italy, rich in energetic verve and heated drama, with narrative scenes infused with a troubled *pathos*. The other is a painter with the same training who follows a different outcome of Raphaelism, seeking formal, cool (pre-mannerist) elegance.

The *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* offers a multifaceted interpretation of Raphael that recalls some of his key followers working in the Vatican Loggias.⁴³ Indeed, the background of the scene with *Isaac and Rebecca spied on by Abimelech* is quoted in the side panel with the *Angel of the Annunciation*. The figurative sources disclosed by the painters of the *retablo* include Michelangelo himself, with the conspicuous quotation of the Sistine *Crucifixion of Haman*.

It is worth dwelling on these quotations, as they show a desire to display first-hand knowledge of the by then canonical works of the Roman "modern manner." These quotations give proof of the "foreign" novelties that the painters prided themselves on knowing how to handle with effortless wit, to the extent of making them more artificial and sophisticated—for example, the *Madonna with Angels Holding a Curtain* in the central panel—or, on the contrary, to deprive them of mannered elegance and immerse them in the expressionistic vein of Polidoro (see *St. Jerome*, in the left panel).

These Mediterranean affinities created a "*lingua franca*" with a thousand accents, based on the sharing of common models and on stylistic concordances, which found their interpreter, in the first half of the sixteenth century, in the Master of Ozieri. His paintings show him to be one of the most polyglot artistic presences in the panorama of the southern Renaissance. He knew the works of Polidoro and Machuca, and probably the Polidoro follower Marco Cardisco, while his landscapes—with wild woods, broken trunks, karst ravines and rocky peaks, blue depths, bird's eye views, and milky-white yet topographically convincing turreted cities—demonstrate knowledge of northern landscapes, from Joachim Patinir to Jan van Scorel.⁴⁴ In this he reveals himself to be an itinerant, "foreign" painter, who reunites the threads of his training in both northern and southern Europe.⁴⁵

The contexts in which Raphael's prints were selected and reworked tell us a lot about painting on the island, far from the stereotype of Sardinia as colony backwater. A striking case is the *Holy Family* (Ploaghe, Quadreria Spano) (Figure 4.6.3) by the Master of Ozieri,⁴⁶ ingenious and dissonant, an alternative version of the so-called *Virgin with the Long Thigh* (1520–25, Bartsch X4.65.57), a print by Raimondi from a design by Raphael. The variations from the print are significant: a large *estofado de oro* curtain is inserted; the architecture ceases to be an archaeological-antiquarian background, and seems manneristically abstract and almost malleable; Raimondi's boy in the background is transformed into an athletic adolescent raising a curtain, reminiscent of Michelangelo's Sistine *Ignudi*. He is a paradoxical figure, characterized by a "Lilliputian" Michelangeloism.

St. Joseph undergoes a transformation into a scowling man, with an argumentative air. He recalls the St. Nicholas in the *Polyptych of St. Nicholas of Bari* (1520), by the Master of Stella Cilento, now attributed to Machuca⁴⁷ as well as *Christ Blessing* (c. 1519, Paris, Étienne Bréton/Saint-Honoré Art Consulting), equally attributed to the Spanish painter.⁴⁸ St. Joseph is the counterpart to several edgy old men by Polidoro and Machuca in the Vatican Loggia frescoes.



Figure 4.6.3 Master of Ozieri. *Holy Family*. 1540s. Oil on panel, 144 × 150 cm. Ploaghe (SS), Quadreria Spano. Ministero della Cultura—Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Sassari e Nuoro.

The maternal scenario of the *Holy Family* (Ploaghe, Quadreria Spano) is transformed to become more restless and almost otherworldly. Similar is the precarious embrace between Virgin and Child in the central panel of the *Retablo of Our Lady of Loreto* (Ozieri, Diocesan Museum), also by the Master of Ozieri.⁴⁹ The interactions between the Virgin and Child offer an openly less-soothing and less-lofty interpretation of Raphaelism. On the same wavelength is Machuca, in the *Virgin and the Souls of Purgatory* (1517, Madrid, Museo del Prado), in the *Madonna and Child* (1518–19, Rome, Galleria Borghese), and in the *Holy Family* (1520, Jaén, Diocesan Museum of the Cathedral).

The pursuit of a colloquial and affectionate, overwhelming and restless Raphaelism, as well as the reworking of the innovative languages of Polidoro and Machuca, brings the Master of Ozieri closer to Cardisco. Indeed, the Madonna of Loreto in Ozieri reveals correspondences with his *Virgin Crowned by Angels with St. Anthony of Padua and St. Michael the Archangel* (c. 1527–30, Ro Ferrarese, Cavallini-Sgarbi collection), once in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie Maggiore in Caponapoli.⁵⁰

The grumpy attitude of several of the figures painted by the Master of Ozieri—the St. Joseph of Ploaghe or the gruff character with hood and spade who screams in the *Invention of the True Cross* (Benetutti, church of Sant’Elena Imperatrice)⁵¹—overturn Raphaelesque rhetoric, imposing on it a nervous, subversive energy. Here again we sense the rapport between the painter and the more extreme works of Machuca: with the convulsive, overflowing panels of the *Dormition* and *Assumption of the Virgin* (c. 1530, Naples, Capodimonte Museum) and of the *Descent of the Holy Ghost* (c. 1520–30, Ponce, Museo de Arte). Polidoro’s spasmodic *pathos* belongs in the same circle of references, for instance, in his *Madonna and Child in Glory with the Souls in Purgatory* (1527–28, Albertina, inv. 313; Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 990383) for the altar of Santa Maria delle Grazie alla Pescheria in Naples.



Figure 4.6.4 Master of Ozieri. *Crucifixion*. Early 1550s. Oil on panel, 148 × 143 cm. Benetutti, church of Saint Elena Imperatrice. Ministero della Cultura—Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Sassari e Nuoro.

These expressive outbursts are rooted in a transgressive interpretation of Raphael models, as proudly displayed in a cornerstone of the southern Renaissance, the *Road to Calvary* (1534, Capodimonte) by Polidoro, a competitive and alternative response to Roman rhetorical restraint. There is therefore a connection that unites the southern activity of Polidoro, the post-Loggias Machuca, the works of the Polidoro follower Marco Cardisco, and the figures of St. John the Baptist in the *Crucifixions* by the Master of Ozieri (Stuttgart, Benetutti, Ozieri, Cannero) (Figure 4.6.4).

This state of affairs was the result of common encounters, simultaneous sojourns in Naples and elsewhere, and immersion in the same culture of Spanish Italy, so perceptively described by Polidoro in his drawings of masses and processions (c. 1527, Musée du Louvre, inv. 6074; c. 1530, Windsor Castle, RCIN 902349; Uffizi, GDSU, inv. 1776 F) or his *Road to Calvary* (1534, Capodimonte), scattered with tragic, sorrowful groups, filled with human contrition and popular grief.⁵²

It is significant to reflect on how one of the most successful prints, the *Deposition* by Raimondi after Raphael (1520–25, B. XIV.37.32), is used in a painting attributed to the Master of Ozieri (Ozieri, Diocesan Museum) (Figure 4.6.5).⁵³ The prototype is immersed in a livid hue, while the whole scene is pervaded by an orange twilight, thus recalling the dramatic atmospherics of Sebastiano del Piombo, an artist favored by the Spanish network in Rome.⁵⁴

At the same time, in the female group in the foreground, the shapely arms and vigorous plasticity, as well as the face of the Virgin, with its extreme pallor and strongly chiaroscuro orbital recesses, testify how the painter has joined the most dramatically expressive ranks of the post-Raphael chorus. The affinity between the thundery *Deposition* now in Ozieri (1540s) and the *ante litteram* picaresque *Descent from the Cross* (c. 1520) by Machuca, now at the Prado, is remarkable. Raphaelism swollen with deliberately ungainly emotion also connects Machuca's Italian and Spanish works to the Polidoresque St. Johns in the *Crucifixions* by the Master of Ozieri.



Figure 4.6.5 Iberian Mannerist. *Deposition*. 1540s. Oil on panel, 148 × 98 cm. Ozieri, Museo Diocesano. Ministero della Cultura—Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Sassari e Nuoro.

As with the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* and the *Retablo of the Councilors*,⁵⁵ there is no certainty about the identity of the author of the Ozieri *Deposition*. What is important to emphasize is that the island cannot be trivially dismissed as a “periphery,” shrouded in “cultural delay,” barely refreshed by the arrival of prints bringing the Roman “modern manner.” While the *Annunciation* panel of the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* quotes the pope’s faldstool in the Vatican *Mass at Bolsena* by Raphael of 1512, the right panel of the *Retablo of the Councilors* quotes the Magdalene from Raphael’s Bologna *Ecstasy of St. Cecilia* (c. 1514–17), probably through the print by Giulio Bonasone (B. XV.130.74).

The quotation of the face of St. Cecilia is not a slavish one, but a polemical homage. The Raphaelesque model—radiant and normatively proportioned—is transformed, enlivening an equally monumental figure, but with a gaze pervaded by a vigorous tension. This face is reminiscent of the one in Berruguete’s vigorous and Michelangelesque *Allegory of Temperance* (1513–16, Prado),⁵⁶ testimony to Berruguete’s Italian period between Florence and Rome. The same dissonant register is found in the quotation of Michelangelo in the *cimasa* of the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* (Cagliari, Museo del Duomo), as well as in the reference

to Raphael in the *Holy Family* of Ploaghe, by the Master of Ozieri, a painter who illustrates the non-reverential freedom guaranteed by this land of passage.

Studies on Spanish Italy have revealed that Spanish networks in Rome and Naples, and the “soft imperialism” in areas not officially under the Iberian government, generated highly influential artistic and political dynamics.⁵⁷ In Sardinia, Spanish governance and the possibility of stopping off on trips between Southern Italy and the Iberian Peninsula made it possible to lay fertile ground for diversified explorations of Raphaelism.

Artists sought to subvert it, producing, in some cases, dissident figures close to those of Polidoro and Machuca. Consequently, the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* and the *Retablo of the Councilors*, prove to be complex works in which Raphaellesque patterns are exacerbated or made a little mannered. We can detect this attitude in the dramatic accentuation of the Crucifixion in the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* and then in the riotous, restless, and melancholy figures of the Master of Ozieri. Southern Raphaelism assembles and transforms various quotations from Roman prints and painted models, challenging their normative canon already in the same vein as visual culture in the wake of the Vatican loggias.⁵⁸

In addition, during the sixteenth century, the affinities with the northern world were refined: the Flemish landscapes of the Master of Ozieri were joined by the “Flemish Michelangeloism” of his *St. Sebastian* (Sassari, MUS’A), as evidenced by extraordinarily developed muscles (to the point of paroxysm), which ideally matches similar experiments by Jan van Scorel and Bernard van Orley.⁵⁹ However, the far-flung combinations should not make us imagine a lack of artistic identity. The concept of identity should in fact be questioned, since it is a slippery label, as for a long time was that of “influence” or “periphery.”⁶⁰

Hermann Voss,⁶¹ in a pioneering essay on these *Crucifixions*, pointed out the coexistence of “modern” and Gothic motifs, attributing this paradoxical coexistence to the remote geographical nature of Sardinia. He referred, on the one hand, to Raphaellesque volumes and plasticity and, on the other, to the persistence of the medieval Crucifix, a painted translation of a wooden sculpture. This can be found repeatedly in the *Crucifixions* by the Master of Ozieri and in almost all the *cimase* of the Cavaro family and workshop, in the southern part of the island (Cagliari area).

Thus, as a crossroads of cultures, the Mediterranean Kingdom of Sardinia was characterized by references that ranged in a geographical but also temporal sense. This synergy—the coexistence of Gothic tradition and the Renaissance—was also seen in Northern Europe. This argues in favor of a renewed concordance with what was happening in neighboring kingdoms from a political point of view. The preference for Gothic elements in Northern Europe and Mediterranean kingdoms was rooted in the fact that clients recognized it as having the power to “convey spiritual authority, while often serving as signs of corporate identity.”⁶²

Being included in a great confederation of states, now under Charles V, seemed to result in a new visual continuum—sought through “Renaissance Gothic” and the sharing of common ground: Flemish-Iberian Gothic roots, the similar stylistic interpretation of Raphaelism, and the combined use of prints. The constant of the “tragic Gothic” Crucifix, the re-emergence of gold backgrounds, the drapery in *estofado de oro*, or the homage to iconic and emblematic medieval Marian and civic images—such as Dalmau’s *Virgin of the Councilors* in Barcelona—should lead us to nuance the critical dichotomy between “modern” and Gothic, between up-to-date and “antiquated.”

Some Marian icons, such as the *Processional Banner with the Virgin and Child*,⁶³ preserved in the Diocesan Museum of Sassari, and the Crucifix in the Sardinian *cimase*, contain

references to older models. Their startling persistence is owing to their ability to re-activate the sacred and miraculous power of the devotional models to which they reconnect. Consciously late Gothic choices are rekindled where it is necessary to amplify salvific or epiphanic power: as in Machuca's *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Capodimonte Museum, where a crowd of shocked and bewildered apostles, rendered in a melodramatic Raphaelism, is surmounted by late Gothic ranks of angels.

The centrality of the "local antiquity," linked to the history of visual imagery and the patrons' political self-promotion, is also crucial in the conception of the *Retablo of the Holy Christ* (Oristano, Antiquarium Arborense), painted by Pietro Cavaro for the church of San Francesco in Oristano.⁶⁴ The Gothic wooden crucifix, still venerated in the same church, must have originally been set within the polyptych.⁶⁵ From this sculpture springs the widespread devotion that led to its pictorial translation and multiplication in the *cimase* of the Sardinian *retablos*.

In the Iberian Peninsula itself, in the Netherlands of the Habsburgs, and in southern Spanish Italy, ancient and modern compositional ideas and disparate stylistic modes co-existed, without apparent friction, creating new and distinctive languages. The painters' paths must have been accompanied by the journeys of the works themselves, and, in particular, of drawings and prints, so much so that the author of the *Retablo of the Councilors* had a wide range of models available to him, from Raphael's Rome and Polidoro's Naples. He showed off his wide-ranging visual culture by including, in the top of the *retablo*, a flagrant quotation/translation, no less, of Raphael's *Ezekiel's Vision* (1518, Florence, Palazzo Pitti).

At the same time, in the Madonna from the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries*, we find Raphael's *Bridgewater Madonna* (1507, Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland) elegantly disguised. Dwelling on cultural exchanges, traveling artists, and the reuse of models, the *Crucifixion* of the *Retablo of the Beneficiaries* with its thief from the Sistine, the dark colors, and the raw drama is the forerunner of the Polidoresque *Crucifixions* (Stuttgart, Benetutti, Ozieri, Cannero) by the Master of Ozieri.

These *Crucifixions* in fact belong to a family of dramatic paintings in dark colors by Perino del Vaga, Machuca, and Polidoro, including Polidoro's *Christ Carried to the Tomb* (c. 1527) and, culminating in the Sicilian *Road to Calvary*.⁶⁶ Reciprocal observations, trips, and exchanges occurred between Rome, Naples, and the islands.⁶⁷ Finally, southern Raphaellesque artists and Spaniards could undertake overseas commissions, disembarking in Cagliari. Likewise, the Master of Ozieri, like the Cavaros, had to venture elsewhere, moving in a circuit joined by maritime trading and political connections.

Acknowledgements

This chapter forms part of the dissemination activities of the research project: "Communities of Concord: Building Contentment and Belonging through Emotional Images in Early Modern Europe and Beyond," acronym COMCON. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101028785. This essay reflects only the author's view, and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Notes

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 - 20 Spissu, in Limentani Viridis and Spissu, *La Via dei Retabli*, 211–15 (with references to previous studies).
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- 33 The dramatic works of Bermejo finds a heartfelt response in Sardinia, in the *Pietà* by the Master of Sanluri (1510s, *Retablo of Sanluri*, Cagliari, Pinacoteca Nazionale). In addition, the Master of Sanluri converses, on the one hand, with the Aragonese Martín Bernat, and, on the other, with the Naples-based painter of the *San Severino Enthroned with Saints* (c. 1472, Capodimonte Museum). See Spissu, in Limentani Viridis and Spissu, *La Via dei Retabli*, 216–23. Joan Molina Figueras, ed., *El universo pictórico de Bartolomé Bermejo: proceedings of the international symposium* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2021); Francesc Ruiz i Quesada, eds., *La pintura gòtica hispanoflamenca: Bartolomé Bermejo y su época* (Barcelona, 2003).
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- Gli spagnoli a Napoli: il Rinascimento meridionale* (Napoli: Arte'm, 2023). The term “*comprimari*” originates with Roberto Longhi, “Comprimarij spagnoli della maniera italiana,” *Paragone. Arte* 43 (1953): 3–15; and idem. “Ancora sul Machuca,” *Paragone. Arte* 20 (1969), 231: 34–39. The result has been a tendency to interpret the works of the Spanish artists as symptoms of the “influence” of their Italian sojourn and of their resulting eclectic practice, thereby implying that Spanish artistic culture was subaltern and derivative—ideas still deeply rooted in present historiography.
- 41 Giovanni Previtali, “Recensione a L.G. Kalby, Classicismo e maniera nell’officina *meridionale*,” *Prospettiva* 4 (1976): 51–54; Giovanni Previtali, *La pittura del Cinquecento a Napoli e nel vice-reame* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 47 note 2; Giovanni Previtali, ed., *Andrea da Salerno nel Rinascimento meridionale* (Florence: Centro Di, 1986), 20, 24 note 11; Liliana Campos Pallarés, *Pedro Machuca en Italia y en España: su presencia y huella en la pintura granadina del Quinientos* (Jaén: UJA Editorial, 2021), 86–9, 142–45.
 - 42 Spissu, in Limentani Viridis and Spissu, *La Via dei Retabli*, 260–67. The first author is a Polidoresque painter who brings to mind the pursuit of a restless and moved Raphaellesque style, like Marco Cardisco. The second painter finds his ideal interlocutor in the southern (sometimes affected and cool) Raphaellesque Giovanni Filippo Criscuolo.
 - 43 Liliana Campos Pallarés, *Pedro Machuca en Italia y en España*, 119–21; Nicole Dacos, *Le Logge di Raffaello: l’antico, la bibbia, la bottega, la fortuna* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2009); Anna Bisceglia, “Roma e gli spagnoli agli inizi del Cinquecento: la Sistina, Raffaello, le Logge vaticane,” in *Norma e capriccio*, 106–19. Manuel Arias Martínez, *Le “aquile” tra Napoli e la Spagna all’inizio del Cinquecento e alcune incognite su Alonso Berruguete*, in *Gli spagnoli a Napoli*, 100–21.
 - 44 Riccardo Naldi, ed., *Marco Cardisco, Giorgio Vasari: pittura, umanesimo religioso, immagini di culto* (Naples: Arte'm, 2009).
 - 45 Maria Vittoria Spissu, *Il Maestro di Ozieri. Le inquietudini nordiche di un pittore nella Sardegna del Cinquecento* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2014b).
 - 46 Spissu, *Il Maestro di Ozieri*, 286–98.
 - 47 Liliana Campos Pallarés, *Pedro Machuca en Italia y en España*, 52–4, 118–19.
 - 48 Orazio Lovino, in Andrea Zezza and Riccardo Naldi, eds., *Otro Renacimiento. Artistas españoles en Nápoles a comienzos del Cinquecento* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2022), 264–66; Riccardo Naldi and Andrea Zezza, eds. *Gli spagnoli a Napoli*.
 - 49 Spissu, *Il Maestro di Ozieri*, 153–201; Spissu, in Limentani Viridis and Spissu, *La Via dei Retabli*, 280–85.
 - 50 Andrea Zezza, in *Otro Renacimiento. Artistas españoles en Nápoles*, 280–82.
 - 51 Maria Vittoria Spissu, *Il Maestro di Ozieri. Le inquietudini nordiche*, 202–61; Spissu, in Limentani Viridis and Spissu, *La Via dei Retabli*, 286–93.
 - 52 Pierluigi Leone de Castris, *Pittura del Cinquecento a Napoli*, 36–59 and 278–86; David Franklin, *Polidoro da Caravaggio*, 69–149. Stephen John Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto’s Italy* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 86–96. Usually, drawings with emotive and dramatic scenes are pigeonholed into the southern sojourns, explained through their proximity to the *milieu* of the pietistic confraternities and the popular devotional climate, allegedly peculiar to those regions. Nevertheless, we should remember that experimentation around a more intimate and heartfelt Raphaelism had already begun in Rome at the time of the narrative style of the Vatican Loggias, whereas the stays between Naples and Messina are sprinkled with references to the erudite, classical, and antiquarian world, especially in the design of ancient-style altars and triumphal arches.
 - 53 The choice of this model is an instance of broad success of Raphaellesque prints in Spain. See Ana Avila, “L’influenza di Raffaello nella cultura spagnola del Cinquecento attraverso le stampe,” in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna, eds., *Raffaello e l’Europa* (Rome: Ist. Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1990), 677–99. Ana Avila Padrón, *Influencia de Rafael en la pintura y escultura españolas del siglo XVI a través de estampas* (Madrid: Instituto Diego Velázquez, 1984); Spissu, *Il Maestro di Ozieri*, 262–74. Lia Markey and Maria Vittoria Spissu, “A Deposition in Sardinia from the Mid-Cinquecento: Raphael, Engraving, and the Iberian Artistic Network,” in Michael Cole and Alessandra Russo, eds., *Spanish Italy and the Iberian Americas*, 2021: <https://siia.mcah.columbia.edu/object/deposition-sardinia-mid-cinquecento-raphael-engraving-and-iberian-artistic-network>.
 - 54 Miguel Falomir Faus, “Sebastiano e il ‘gusto spagnolo,’” in Claudio Strinati, Bernd Wolfgang Lindemann, and Roberto Contini, eds., *Sebastiano del Piombo 1485–1547* (Milano: Motta, 2008),

- 67–71; Piers Baker-Bates, “Sebastiano del Piombo: The Normative Sacred Image between Italy and Spain,” in Chiara Franceschini, ed., *Sacred Images and Normativity: Contested Forms in Early Modern Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 204–21.
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- 56 Tommaso Mozziati, “Alonso Berruguete o Giovan Francesco Bembo. Salomé,” in *Norma e capriccio*, 17–47; C.D. Dickerson III, “The Experience of Italy,” in C.D. Dickerson III and Mark McDonald, *Alonso Berruguete: First Sculptor of Renaissance Spain* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2019), 18–35; Manuel Arias Martínez, in *Otro Renacimiento. Artistas españoles en Nápoles*, 271–2.
- 57 “Spanish Italy & the Iberian Americas” (2016–2023), research project co-directed by Michael Cole and Alessandra Russo (Columbia University), thanks to the Getty Foundation “Connecting Art Histories” grant: <https://siia.mcah.columbia.edu/>; Kelley Helmstutler Di Dio and Tommaso Mozziati, eds., *Artistic circulation between early modern Spain and Italy* (New York; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020); Piers Baker-Bates, “*Tierra tan extraña*: Spanish artists in Rome: 1516–1621,” in Ariane Varela Braga and Thomas-Leo True, eds., *Roma e gli artisti stranieri, integrazione, reti e identità* (Rome: Artemide, 2018), 157–73.
- 58 By the 1520s this normative canon has come to consist not only of Raphael’s Vatican frescoes but also of works well-known in Spanish Italy: see the *Holy Family with the Archangel Raphael, Tobias, and Saint Jerome*, or the *Virgin with a Fish* (1513–14, Prado), commissioned by Geronimo del Doce for the chapel of Saint Rosalia at the Monastery of San Domenico in Naples, and *The Way to Calvary* (1515–16, Prado), for the Olivetan monastery of Santa Maria dello Spasimo in Palermo.
- 59 See the strong affinities between the *Crucifixion* of Benetutti by the Master of Ozieri and the *Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John* (c. 1525) by van Orley in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Or those between *Saint Sebastian* (MUS’A, Sassari), by the Master of Ozieri, and *Saint Sebastian*, painted by Scorel (1542), in the same museum. These are parallel interpretations departing from Raphaellesque or Michelangelo’s models, of which certain aspects are exasperated, transforming the source into a more lyrical and moving work or a more rugged and untamed one. The Master of Ozieri also seems to subvert the Lombard model well known in Naples and represented by the gentle and harmonious figures painted by Cesare da Sesto: Antonia D’Aniello, “Il Maestro di Ozieri: cultura locale e maniera italiana in un pittore sardo del ’500,” in *Il Maestro di Ozieri* (Ozieri: Il Torchietto), 1982, 7–18; Pierluigi Leone de Castris, *Pittura del Cinquecento a Napoli*, 1–35, 86–132.
- 60 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 58–62; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Maria Vittoria Spissu and Caterina Limentani Viridis, *La Via dei Retabli*, 2018; Stephen John Campbell, *The Endless Periphery*, 2019.
- 61 Hermann Voss, “A Problem of Sardinian Painting,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 56 (1930): 271–2.
- 62 Ethan Matt Kavaler, *Renaissance Gothic: Architecture and the Arts in Northern Europe, 1470–1540* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2012).
- 63 Caterina Limentani Viridis, “Stendardo Processionale, Museo Diocesano di Sassari,” in M. Carmen Morte García and José Ángel Sesma Muñoz, eds., *Fernando II de Aragón, el rey que imaginó España y la abrió a Europa* (Zaragoza: Centro del Libro de Aragón, 2015), 312–13; Caterina Limentani Viridis, “Sardegna, Spagna, Fiandre e dintorni più o meno immediati fra Quattro e Cinquecento,” *Archivio storico sardo* XXXVI (1989): 129–52.
- 64 Kathleen Christian and Bianca de Divitiis, *Local Antiquities, Local Identities: Art, Literature and Antiquarianism in Europe, c. 1400–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
- 65 Marcella Serreli and Umberto Zucca, “Ipotesi di ricostruzione del ‘Retablo del Santo Cristo’ in Oristano,” *Biblioteca francescana sarda* 8 (1999): 325–336; Spissu, in *La Via dei Retabli*, 238–43.
- 66 Pierluigi Leone de Castris, *Polidoro Da Caravaggio fra Napoli e Messina* (Milano: Mondadori, 1988); Pierluigi Leone de Castris, *Polidoro da Caravaggio*, 287–466; David Franklin, *Polidoro da Caravaggio* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 2018), 69–149; Stephen John Campbell, *The Endless Periphery*, 86–96.
- 67 In such dissonant Mediterranean Renaissance, stylistic harmony also unites Severo Ierace, Agostino Tesaurò, the Master of Barletta, and Pietro Negroni, in Southern Italy, and Michele Cavaro and Francesco Pinna, in Cagliari. Their works display close interpretations, such as those linking the *Pietà* in the *Retablo of the Councilors* and the *Pietà* (Salerno, San Matteo Diocesan Museum) by Sabatini.

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