

The Body and the Divine in Early Modernity

A panel series sponsored by the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies

Victoria College – University of Toronto

The Body and the Divine in Early Modernity II: Blood, Consumption, and Salvation

Panel Organizer: Marco Piana (Smith College)

Chair: Marco Piana (Smith College)

Paper Proposals

1) Christ's Blood in Mantua: Imperial Aspirations and Empirical Legacies of Byzantium

Sally Hickson (University of Guelph)

This paper explores the relic of the Precious Blood in Mantua and its role in cultivating an image of the Gonzaga as the western heirs to the Paleologue dynasty of Byzantium. The Council of Mantua, held in 1459 in an attempt to reunite east and west after the Fall of Constantinople, focused new attention on the city's most famous relic, and inspired Leon Battista Alberti's church of San Sebastiano, one of the earliest western Renaissance churches to be inspired by Byzantine centrally-planned churches. Alberti's later church of Sant'Andrea was built with a special crypt to house the precious relic which, in its material form, consisted of blood-tinged earth said to be from the base of Christ's cross. A relic of the Holy Blood had existed in the Maria Chapel of the Imperial Palace of Bucoleon in Constantinople, and brought to the west in the Crusade of 1204. This paper demonstrates that Gonzaga devotion to the relic of the Precious Blood is linked to the framing of Mantua as the heir to Constantinople and the New Jerusalem, a campaign tied to Gonzaga imperial ambition. Allusions to Constantinople and the New Jerusalem are seen in works by Mantegna, and both Constantinople and Jerusalem were part of the decoration in the map room of Francesco II Gonzaga. Byzantine imperial aspirations run through Gonzaga history. These ambitions were partially fulfilled in 1532, when Federico II Gonzaga married Margherita Paleologa (Paleologus), the last princess of the Paleologue dynasty of Byzantium. After Federico II was elevated to Duke, the relic of the Precious Blood became a pilgrimage destination for emperors from Charles V to Philip II.

Keywords: Leon Battista Alberti, Paleologue Dynasty, Relic Worship, Blood Devotion

General Discipline Area: History of Art, History of Religion

2) *The Devout City: Music for St. Januarius and the Co-Patrons Saints of Naples in the Early Modern Age.*

Paologiovanni Maione (Conservatorio di Musica “S. Pietro a Majella”, Naples, Italy)

In the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the liturgical calendar in Naples is increasingly centered on the numerous patron saints, who, along with St. Januarius, protect the city from natural and supernatural disasters. The principal religious institutions created a dense ceremonial schedule aimed to observe both ordinary and extraordinary celebrations, producing religious services and performances in which the most skilled composers (such as Scarlatti and Porporas), painters, architects, and stage technicians are involved. Since the second half of the 17th century musical programs related to the celebrations of St. Januarius are meticulously defined, with distinctions between those contemplating the blood miracle and those remembering the Saint’s intercession against the dangerous Vesuvius. This paper will examine some of these liturgical, and para-liturgical events, to reconstruct the elaborate performances (including processions, cantatas, serenatas, etc.) promoted by the religious orders as well as by public and private institutions.

Keywords: Naples, Saint Januarius, Relic Worship, Blood Devotion

General Discipline Area: History of Music, History of Religion

3) *Dying Well: The Eucharistic “Comfort Food” of the Condemned in an Italian Renaissance Comforters’ Manual*

Molly Morrison (Ohio University – Athens)

During the Renaissance in Italy the poignant task of comforting the condemned was assumed by the laity - members of confraternities called *conforterie*. Unique to Italy, these *conforterie* spiritually and psychologically prepared a prisoner for bodily death as well as the for the afterlife awaiting him. By abandoning the physical reality around him for a spiritual ecstasy, the criminal “morphed” into a martyr. He therefore actively participated in his own death. Proper consuming of the Eucharist, the “spiritual banquet,” offered food for the soul - eating Christ’s flesh was a gateway for the prisoner to eternal life. The “comfort food” of the Eucharist is distinct from other consolations because it is incorporated or taken into the body; thus it has physical, as well as psychological and emotional effects. The *conforteria* worked to get the condemned to accept his fate and even share in creating the meaning of the event of his execution. He shed his old identity of criminal to become a martyr or even a victim. The paper also argues that today’s last meal allowed by American prison systems, albeit devoid of its former spiritual connotations, is the final fragment left of the process of ceremony, ritual, and labor of the Italian *conforteria* on behalf of the malefactor.

Keywords: Conforterie, Eucharist, Relic Worship, Blood Devotion

General Discipline Area: History of Art, History of Religion

4) *Blood cults between Saints and Nuns in Naples (XVI-XVII century)*

Elisa Novi Chavarria (Università degli Studi del Molise), and Giulio Sodano (Università della Campania Luigi Vanvitelli)

Although widespread in other contexts, the miracles of blood liquefaction had a widespread devotion in the Kingdom of Naples. The phenomenon of San Gennaro was not unique, but it is part of a socio-religious context that values the presence of blood as an essential element of the worship of saints. During the 16th century in Naples, there was a plurality of prodigious phenomena related to the relics of blood. Giulio Sodano intends to explore the presence of the prodigies of blood in the processes of canonisation of saints who lived in Naples between the 16th and 17th centuries. Elisa Novi Chavarria explores the world of the prestigious women's monasteries of Naples, full of daughters of the upper aristocracy town, where a series of chain miracles occurred between 1577 and 1578. The contribution will try to shed light on the religious and social meanings that these miracles assumed in the atmosphere of eschatological expectation of Counter-reform.

Keywords: Saint Januarius, Naples, Relic Worship, Blood Devotion

General Discipline Area: History of Art, History of Religion