

## Spiritual and Sensual Visions: Four paintings of the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine by Correggio

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Morehead, Elizabeth
Citation	Morehead, Elizabeth. "Spiritual and Sensual Visions: Four paintings of the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine by Correggio". Master's Thesis, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. 2021.
Rights	Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International
Download date	2025-11-05 19:28:42
Item License	<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/136">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/136</a>



**John Cabot University**

Department of Art History

Master of Arts in Art History

Spiritual and Sensual Visions:  
Four paintings of the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* by Correggio

Elizabeth Morehead

First Reader  
Dr. Carolyn Smyth

Second Reader  
Dr. Sarah Linford

Spring 2021

## Abstract

Italian Renaissance artist, Antonio Allegri da Correggio, has been considered a purely sensual artist by generations of scholars due to limited documentation of his life. Correggio received several commissions in Parma and Mantua at Benedictine churches and monasteries and in the second half of the twentieth century, a certificate of ‘brotherhood’ from the reformed Benedictines, the Cassinese Congregation, was published which further illuminated this association. In light of this relationship with the Cassinese, who focused on the study of sacred scripture and the writings of Church fathers, Correggio’s work may be considered with regard to the spiritual and intellectual influences in his life. Correggio returned to the *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria* four times, a subject rooted in intimacy and divine love. This thesis will consider these four paintings and the artist’s intelligent and sensitive visions of the subject through close formal analysis and with consideration of his personal association with the Cassinese Congregation.

## **Dedication**

To my family, for their love and support

To the cloud of witnesses who have interceded for me daily

To my creator, I pray we grow in divine love throughout my life

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents, Bruce and Karen Morehead, for cheering me on, for their constant support in my education and personal growth, and for encouraging me to pursue my dreams and go where I am called. Thank you for sharing in my joys and listening through all my tears, I look forward to when we can enjoy Rome together.

Thank you to all my family and friends who have encouraged and supported me during this Master of Arts program. Your prayers carried me through, and I am so blessed to have you all in my life.

I am so grateful to my cohort members for sharing their knowledge, for helpful peer reviews, and for their friendship. It has been a joy to work and do life together for the last two years. Cameron Bello, Elizabeth Paris Bermudes, Lauren Holman, Odette Lopez, Yuko Medvigy, and Lynette Turnblom - I was so lucky to be part of this group of intelligent and kind women. Also included in this group is Madison Pierson, who offered steadfast support even after our original class necessarily divided into smaller groups. A special thank you to Lynette Turnblom who reformatted my final thesis to fit the official template.

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Smyth, for sharing her knowledge and enthusiasm for Correggio during this project. I would like to thank Dr. Yawn and all the professors I learned from at John Cabot University who taught with passion and respect and helped me take advantage of the extraordinary benefits of studying Art History in Italy.

Thank you to the staffs at the Frohring Library of John Cabot University, and the Arthur and Janet C. Ross Library at the American Academy in Rome. Finally, I extend a heartfelt thank you to all the institutions who have generously shared sources online through databases like Internet Archive which has been invaluable to my research, particularly in times with limited access to libraries.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
1. State of the Literature.....	4
General Correggio Studies .....	4
The Cassinese Congregation .....	8
Cult of St. Catherine of Alexandria Studies .....	11
2. Subjects of the Paintings.....	14
Literary Traditions.....	14
St. Catherine narrative .....	14
Mystic Marriage .....	17
Visual traditions of Catherine’s Mystic Marriage.....	20
3. The Modest <i>Mystic Marriage</i> Paintings (1510’s).....	26
The Washington Mystic Marriage.....	26
The Detroit <i>Mystic Marriage</i> .....	32
4. Impassioned <i>Mystic Marriage</i> Paintings (1520’s).....	39
The Naples <i>Mystic Marriage</i> .....	39
Paris <i>Mystic Marriage</i> .....	44
Conclusion .....	49
Figures.....	51
Bibliography .....	68

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Correggio, The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, 1510-15, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, D.C. ....	51
Figure 2: Correggio, The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with Saints John the Baptist, Anne and Joseph, 1510-1511, Oil on panel, Detroit Institute of Arts. ....	52
Figure 3: Correggio, Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine, 1520-1522, Oil on panel, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples. ....	53
Figure 4: Correggio, Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria with Saint Sebastian, mid 1520s, Oil on panel, Louvre Museum. ....	54
Figure 5: Monument to Correggio, 1870, Parma. ....	55
Figure 6: Barna da Siena, The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine, c.1340, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. ....	56
Figure 7: Barna da Siena, The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine, c.1340, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. ....	57
Figure 8: Francesco Morone, Virgin and Child, with Saints Onuphrius, Sebastian, Justine, and Ursula, c.1500, Philadelphia Museum of Art. ....	58
Figure 9: Correggio, Madonna and Child with Saints Francis, Anthony of Padua, Catherine of Alexandria and John the Baptist, 1514-15, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden. ....	59
Figure 10: Andrea Mantegna, Madonna della Vittoria, 1496, Louvre. ....	60
Figure 11: Lorenzo Costa with collaborators, The Virgin and Child with Saints, 1498-1502, The National Gallery, U.K. ....	61
Figure 12: Lorenzo Costa, The Holy Family, c. 1490, The Museum of Fine Arts, Lyon. ....	62
Figure 13: Lorenzo Costa, Allegory of Isabella d'Este's Coronation, 1505-06, Louvre. ....	63

Figure 14: Andrea Mantegna, The Virgin and Child with Saints, 1490-1505, The National Gallery, U.K..... 64

Figure 15: Giorgio Ghisi, after Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine by Correggio (Naples), 1575, The British Museum. .... 65

Figure 16: Giovanni Battista Mercati, after Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine by Correggio (Naples), 1620, The British Museum..... 66

Figure 17: Unknown Italian artist, Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine after Correggio (Naples), sixteenth century, Musei Capitolini. .... 67

## Introduction

Among his religious paintings, Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1489-1534) painted the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* four times, each representing a unique artistic and spiritual visualization. Correggio learned traditional painting practices in sixteenth century Northern Italy, and brought a new sensuality to familiar subjects. These four paintings visually tell his technical development but more significantly they show the artist's intelligent, spiritual visions of the story from deep reflection. Correggio's personal association with the reformed Benedictine group, the Cassinese Congregation, is a significant recent discovery to understand his work.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have acknowledged this group of paintings of the same subject without particular study of Correggio's spiritual life which is key to his sensitive conceptualizations. I will study the paintings' functional contexts through close formal analysis, and Correggio's shifting visions and incorporation of sensuality to portray profound spiritual intimacy with regard to the artist's personal connection to the Cassinese Congregation.

Correggio was regarded as a purely sensual artist in literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. His personal association with a Reformed Benedictine group, the Cassinese Congregation, challenges this notion that he was interested in emotion or sensuality for its own sake.<sup>2</sup> Rather, his ability to create affecting images of tenderness developed at the same time as his friendship with the Cassinese Congregation. His study and personal understanding of spiritual love informed and aided his artistry. This group of *Mystic Marriage* paintings by

---

<sup>1</sup> Andrea Muzzi, "Alcuni aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio e del Parmigianino," in *Correggio: a cura di Lucia Fornari Schianchi*, ed. Lucia Fornari Schianchi (Milano: Skira, 2008), 115.

<sup>2</sup> Muzzi, "Aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio," 115.

Correggio also demonstrates how he represented the conjunction in modest reverence or in stimulating personal reflection.

In general, most scholars have divided Correggio's career, based on his stylistic developments, into two phases, early (1510's) and mature (1520s to his death in 1534). While the chronology of the artist's paintings is notoriously problematic as he never dated his works and documents are scarce, it is still possible to study the four *Mystic Marriages* in pairs in either of the two phases. Each of the four paintings have their own merit and reflect Correggio's intelligent design which considered function, emotion and reverence for the subject. The first two works demonstrate some dependence on important local artists and conventional, static compositions. The third and fourth show Correggio bursting into his own style, with a perception of Christian love, inspired by his Benedictine affiliations, fully and visually absorbed.

The paintings, none in their original locations, are held in museums today and as the subject is the same, they may be differentiated by their locations. The first and probably earliest is in The National Gallery in Washington D.C., *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* from c.1510/1515 (fig 1), and another of the subject estimated to be from about 1512, is held by the Detroit Institute of Arts (fig 2). These two early works are similar in their compositional structures with a shallow space for the full-length figures, their staged placement along the ground line and secondary figures who observe the marriage ceremony. The rigid postures and simplistic faces of these paintings are often criticized in comparison to his later works. These qualities, unsurprising as early endeavors in the artist's development, need further consideration; the formal function of the works and even poor condition have been overlooked in scholarship.

*The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* in The Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte in Naples dates from 1520-22 and is the third example in this group (fig 3). This painting shows

only the three essential figures of the subject, kneeling close together in a landscape, in a cropped format. The softness of the figures is now recognizable as Correggio's mature manner and demonstrate the refinement of his skills. Most importantly, a new personal intimacy departs from the formality of the early works. The joy and tenderness in the Naples *Mystic Marriage* reflect Correggio's growing ability to integrate spirituality and emotion in his painting, and his personal sensitivity to the subject. His last treatment of the theme, *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria with Saint Sebastian* (fig 4), from the mid 1520s in the Louvre Museum in Paris, pushes the emotional depth to represent the overwhelming experience of divine love. The closeness from the cropped composition, scale of the figures and graceful gestures, invite the viewer to enter personal contemplation and participation.

# 1. State of the Literature

## General Correggio Studies

Giorgio Vasari offered the earliest documentation of Correggio in *The Lives of the Artists* in 1568.<sup>3</sup> While his account of Correggio was minimal and often erroneous, Vasari did compose a positive visual assessment of his artistic skills. Vasari praised Correggio for his dedication to artistic craftsmanship and assured that if he had visited Rome and studied antique art and quality modern art, “his style would have gained immeasurably and he would eventually have reached absolute perfection.”<sup>4</sup> Even so, Correggio was considered a master of painting particularly for his skills with color. Among the list of his abilities were his exquisite painting of flesh which appeared real and his detailed, delicate painting of hair.<sup>5</sup> Correggio spent his life in the region of Tuscany with commissions in several cities but particular work in Parma in both large and small scale. Vasari cited Correggio as a hard-working artist, dedicated especially to support his family and not afraid to work through difficult artistic problems, as shown in the extreme foreshortening of figures in frescoes in San Giovanni Evangelista in Parma.<sup>6</sup> These few comments about his work and personality, including “He was motivated by his inherent goodness of soul,” offered a glimpse of Correggio but no catalogue of his works or greater context of his life.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Artists of the Renaissance: A Selection from 'Lives of the Artists,'* (1568) trans. George Bull (New York: The Viking Press, 1978), 201.

Vasari's original *Lives of the Artists* did not have a section devoted to Correggio but later editions expanded the artists featured.

<sup>4</sup> Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 201.

<sup>5</sup> Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 203.

<sup>6</sup> Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 201.

<sup>7</sup> Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 201.

Renewed interest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to new studies and publications of archival documents which shed more light on Correggio's life. Girolamo Tiraboschi wrote *Biblioteca modenese* in six volumes from 1781-1786, including the first biographical outline of Correggio.<sup>8</sup> This writing was pivotal for its publication and commentary on archival documents previously unknown to the academic world at large. Correggio had many artistic followers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Rafael Mengs who was a dedicated emulator of Correggio's use of color and light, and also wrote *Memoirs concerning the Life and Works of Correggio*.<sup>9</sup> In the early nineteenth-century, Padre Luigi Pungileoni published a three-volume set, *Memorie Istoriche di Antonio Allegri detto Il Correggio* (1817), which although was largely criticized, some scholars valued his new contributions despite the confusing structure.<sup>10</sup> *Studi intorno il Correggio* (1865) by Pietro Martini was republished in a second edition in conjunction with a monument honoring Correggio in Parma in 1870 (fig 5).<sup>11</sup> The significant monograph, *Antonio Allegri da Correggio*, by Julius Meyer was also published in 1870.<sup>12</sup> Meyer's catalogue of Correggio's works refined prior attributions and was fundamental to later scholars.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Girolamo Tiraboschi, *Biblioteca modenese, o Notizie de' pittori, scultori, incisori, e architetti nati degli stati del serenissimo signor Duca di Modena*, vol. vi. (Modena: 1786).

<sup>9</sup> Anton Raphael Mengs, *Memoirs concerning the Life and Works of Correggio*, trans. Chevr. Don Joseph Nicholas D'Azara (London: R. Faulder, New Bond Street & G. G. and J. Robinson, Paternoster Row, 1796).

<sup>10</sup> Luigi Pungileoni, *Memorie Istoriche di Antonio Allegri detto Il Correggio*, vol I-III, Parma, 1817.

Corrado Ricci said, "three volumes, which showed an important advance in research, and contained many fresh details of great interest. Its usefulness is much discounted, however, by its confused and chaotic arrangement, a result of the author's bewildering method of separating his narrative from the documents he quotes or transcribes." Corrado Ricci, *Antonio Allegri Da Correggio: His Life, His Friends, and His Time*, (New York: Ch. Scribner's Sons, 1896), vii.

<sup>11</sup> Unnumbered page following title page in reprint reads, "A Parma promotrice e custode delle piu sublimi opere da Correggio La quale del MDCCCLXX gli addiveniva patria seconda nel MDCCLXX gli'innalzava monumento chiamando ad inaugurarlo gli artisti italiani questa pagine consacra l'autore fra'cittadini di essa non ultimo nell'amarla e nel desiderar di celebrarne insieme con le passate le glorie presenti."

Pietro Martini, *Studi intorno il Correggio*, (Parma: Pietro Grazioli, 1865).

[reprinted in *Il Correggio: studi*, Parma, 1871]

See Figure 5 of monument

<sup>12</sup> Julius Meyer, *Antonio Allegri da Correggio*, (1870) (London: Macmillan and Co, 1876).

<sup>13</sup> Cecil Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, (London: Faber, 1976), 160.

In 1896 Corrado Ricci, director of the Galleria Nazionale of Parma, sought to contextualize Correggio in his monograph, *Antonio Allegri Da Correggio: His Life, His Friends, and His Time*.<sup>14</sup> This book was commissioned, it seems, to honor the quatercentenary of Correggio's death, 1894.<sup>15</sup> The first and updated second edition in 1930, were impactful for examining the refined oeuvre in its cultural context which included considering contemporary artists and powerful people in the region. These added layers to Correggio's lived experience aimed to illuminate his personal demeanor and understand the artist beyond scant biography. This book also presented illustrations of Correggio's works and of the towns he spent his life in to aid the conceptualization.<sup>16</sup> The connections between Correggio and other artists, including Andrea Mantegna and Leonardo da Vinci, had a lasting impact on scholarship by defining the formative influences of the artist's development.

Georg Gronau republished the artist's oeuvre in photographs in 1907 in *The Work of Correggio: Reproduced in one hundred and ninety-six illustrations*, with a biographical introduction that walked through his life and many of his works.<sup>17</sup> Gronau noted the celebrated artists whose work Correggio had access to in Mantua - Andrea Mantegna, Lorenzo Costa, Francesco Gonzaga, Perugini and Bellini.<sup>18</sup> In his short biography he used the word "genius," revealing the nineteenth-century philosophy of the artistic "genius" from Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*, 1892.<sup>19</sup> After the renewed excitement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the twentieth century passed quieter for Correggio as art historians focused on

---

<sup>14</sup> Ricci, *Antonio Allegri Da Correggio*.

<sup>15</sup> Cecil Gould theorized Ricci was commissioned in light of an exhibition in 1894 in Parma to honor the quatercentenary of Correggio's death. Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 160.

<sup>16</sup> Ricci, *Antonio Allegri Da Correggio*, x.

<sup>17</sup> Georg Gronau, *The Work of Correggio: Reproduced in one hundred and ninety-six illustrations*, (1907) trans. to English in 1913.

<sup>18</sup> Gronau, *The Work of Correggio*, 5-6.

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, (1892) trans. JH Bernard (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000).

Mannersim, which necessarily moved him further into the background.<sup>20</sup> Although there was undoubtedly Correggio scholarship in the early twentieth century, the tide had ebbed which accounts for the jump to the next scholar.

British art historian, Cecil Gould, produced another essential monograph in 1976, *The Paintings of Correggio*.<sup>21</sup> Gould favored stylistic analysis, with interest in the artist's developing technical skills. Following chronological presentation of Correggio paintings, Gould assessed his artistic style and growing significance by the number and value of commissions. He used comparison frequently and, by extension, often overlooked personal connection or intelligent decision-making by the artist in favor of aesthetic sensibilities. Correggio was compared to neighboring artists and contemporary trends in Northern Italian painting, not a harmful method, but with limited allowance of individual agency. Gould's work contained improved dating accuracy, updated catalogue, clearer references to English writers, and transcriptions of documents, and remains an important reference.

David Ekserdjian, another English scholar published a new modern monograph, *Correggio*, in 1997.<sup>22</sup> This book again updated the list of the artist's works and explained newly attributed paintings and drawings since Gould. Ekserdjian, like his predecessors, organized the artworks by estimated chronological date and built on their evidence to write an updated comprehensive book on the artist. He used drawings and x-rays of paintings that showed beneath the surface, as well as copies to study the creative thinking of Correggio. Questions of patronage and process specifically intrigued Ekserdjian and received particular attention in his book.

---

<sup>20</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 160.

<sup>21</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*.

<sup>22</sup> David Ekserdjian, *Correggio*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

Andrea Muzzi contributed “Alcuni aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio e del Parmigianino,” to a collection of scholarship on the artist in 2008, and investigated the religious context of Correggio’s personal life.<sup>23</sup> The limited view of Correggio as a purely sensual artist was faulted as scholars began to recognize the central importance of his patronage at San Benedetto Po in Parma by the Cassinese Congregation. Correggio had particular skill to portray erotic or sensual scenes, but that did not separate him from deep spiritual knowledge. Muzzi’s reconsideration of Correggio’s religious affiliation lead to a new understanding of the humanity and intimacy of his interpretation of the spiritual. His personal affiliation with the Cassinese reveals Correggio as a spiritually intelligent artist which is essential to this study.

### **The Cassinese Congregation**

An important component in Correggio’s spiritual background was the Cassinese Congregation of which he was a lay member.<sup>24</sup> This organization was formed in the fifteenth century to reform Benedictine monastic life, with annual chapter meetings and elected leaders.<sup>25</sup> The Cassinese were first established at Santa Giustina in Padua in the early fifteenth century and spread quickly through Italy, the abbey of Montecassino joining in 1505 which gave the name, ‘Cassinese’.<sup>26</sup> Sacred scripture and patristic writers were the two core tenants to Cassinese study. A few of these valued Christian writers included St. Jerome, St. John of Chrysostom, and Origen of Alexandria.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Muzzi, “Aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio,” 115-120.

<sup>24</sup> Muzzi, “Aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio,” 115.

<sup>25</sup> Barry Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: The Congregation Santa Giustina of Padua* (Oxford Historical Monographs) (New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> Muzzi, “Aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio,” 116.

<sup>27</sup> Collett, *Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation*, 67-68.

Correggio was commissioned to paint the organ doors and podium at the Benedictine Monastery of San Benedetto Po, near Mantua, on September 8, 1514.<sup>28</sup> This was Correggio's introduction to the Benedictine-Cassinense community, and more work soon followed. Although the date is unknown, scholars estimate the decoration of the Camera di San Paolo in Parma around 1518-1520.<sup>29</sup> The Camera di San Paolo was the private apartments of the abbess of the Benedictine nunnery of San Paolo and Correggio's work consisted of fresco decoration on the wall lunettes, the chimney, and the vault.<sup>30</sup> The abbess, Giovanna da Piacenza, was the sister-in-law of Cavaliere Scipione Montino della Rosa, a figure with political connections whom scholars have long agreed facilitated this commission.<sup>31</sup> Gould explained that Montino della Rosa was familiar with the rulers of Correggio which connected him to the artist, and in 1518 he returned to Parma after a period of exile and called Correggio to paint the apartments of his sister-in-law.<sup>32</sup> The continued relationship between Correggio and the Benedictine communities is plausible simply from the prior commission, but these social connections aided that affiliation. A third request swiftly came for Correggio to paint the interior of San Giovanni Evangelista, a Benedictine church in Parma. This extensive decoration would entail the entire nave ceiling, the cupola, pendentives and arches, the Del Bono chapel, apse, choir, and tympanum of the North

---

<sup>28</sup> Emilio Menegazzo is cited by Gould for publishing the archival document Emilio Menegazzo, "Contributo alla Biografia del Folengo," in *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica*, II (1959) 383. Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 176.

<sup>29</sup> This date range is an estimate based on Correggio's surrounding projects. Muzzi places this commission before the organ shutters at San Benedetto Po. Muzzi, "Aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio," 115.

Gould places the decoration of the Camera di San Paolo between the organ shutters of San Benedetto Po and the large decoration of San Giovanni Evangelista.

Gould dates the Camera di San Paolo to "shortly before 1520."

Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 25, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 242.

<sup>31</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 25.

<sup>32</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 25.

transept door.<sup>33</sup> Documents of payment to Correggio for this project span July 6, 1520 to January 23, 1524.<sup>34</sup>

Correggio grew close to the Cassinese congregation in Parma and learned from their methods of study, Muzzi even credited his artistic choices to their education.<sup>35</sup> A “decree of brotherhood” from the president of the Cassinese congregation, Girolamo del Monferrato, was presented to Correggio at a meeting on May 15, 1521, in recognition of his exceptional devotion and granting him a form of membership in the community.<sup>36</sup> Though he remained a layperson, Correggio and his family were under their patronage and he was welcomed into their social and scholarly community, perhaps afforded certain privileges through this official status.<sup>37</sup> This was also a form of protection for the artist and his family from the French who were occupying Parma at the time.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 246.

<sup>35</sup> Muzzi, “Aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio,” 116.

<sup>36</sup> Lucia Fornari Schianchi, ed., *Correggio: a cura di Lucia Fornari Schianchi* (Milano: Skira, 2008), 175.

<sup>37</sup> Muzzi asserts that Correggio’s artistic choices could not have developed without the Cassinese scholars and their libraries, suggesting his own participation in personal or guided studies with the monks. Details about the privileges this certificate afforded Correggio still need to be studied.

Muzzi, “Aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio,” 116.

<sup>38</sup> The document Gould alluded to was published by Emilio Menegazzo (1959) and Lucia Schianchi (2008). Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 28.

## Cult of St. Catherine of Alexandria Studies

St. Catherine of Alexandria (c.287-305) is a significant subject in hagiographic and art historical studies. She was an early saint popular in the Christian veneration, but her mysterious origins lead to her feast's removal from the General Roman calendar in 1969 by Pope Paul VI. It was however, restored in 2002 by Pope John Paul II.<sup>39</sup> Against this controversial background, the history of the person of St. Catherine has been the center of much investigation. The narratives of her life have been the focus of research in their own rights. Scholars who focus on elements besides the historical development or accounts of her life at least explain them briefly before diving into specialized studies.

*The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (2016), by Christine Walsh, is a study of St. Catherine of Alexandria's legend across mediums, with particular emphasis on written texts, to look at the origins of her cult and to follow its growth into a widespread devotion.<sup>40</sup> Walsh, like other scholars, accepts the possibility that St. Catherine is a composite person of multiple virgin-martyr stories, consolidated into one identifiable figure. No matter the dubious origins of the figure of St. Catherine, she was effectively a singular, honored saint in liturgical sources by the eighth century, with the earliest surviving example of her inclusion in a litany in Syriac from the seventh century.<sup>41</sup> Walsh categorized dozens of manuscript examples, the earliest from the ninth century, and these refer to even earlier versions that are now lost. The oldest stories of St. Catherine, the *passio* or martyrdom, tell of her disputation with philosophers in Alexandria and her martyrdom. The first example of St.

---

<sup>39</sup> Cynthia Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art: Case Studies in Patronage* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2014), 165.

<sup>40</sup> Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, 24.

Catherine's mystical marriage to Jesus, the central narrative in the *conversio*, appears in an old French poem from 1251.<sup>42</sup> The Mystic Marriage was an important part of her cult in the Renaissance but since it does not appear in early Christian and early Medieval narratives, it is not studied in detail by Walsh.

Cynthia Stollhans, in *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art: Case Studies in Patronage*, looks at how St. Catherine's cult took root in Rome in the Renaissance despite the initial lack of relics, and the unusual emphasis placed on her intelligence rather than her virginal status. Stollhans studies the saint as an emblem or patron saint for different people and families. At this point in time, St. Catherine did have certain associations or saintly patronage, but her veneration in artworks varied to represent particular values. Different aspects of her life were emphasized for each patron's purpose; her status as preacher to pair well with Ambrose of Milan for a chapel in San Clemente, her rich dress presented as a high born Italian on several occasions rather than a Byzantine princess, and so on.<sup>43</sup> St. Catherine was a useful saint to honor as her particulars were flexible to reflect what tie or personal identity one saw in her. Her story remained the same but her persona could vary from princess, to humble virgin, teacher, martyr, or bride. Stollhans studies artistic examples in Rome to demonstrate this adaptive use of St. Catherine and the rich source of inspiration she was to Christians. She was a beloved, accommodating figure, who could be adopted as patron to many things and represent the values of diverse people and religious orders. The study of St. Catherine has been centered on historiography and identity, her origins, her cult in Italy and its various establishments. Research has concentrated on her legend and the development of her veneration, while few

---

<sup>42</sup> Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, 168.

<sup>43</sup> Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art*, 63, 81.

studies have examined aspects of her iconography in the visual arts, such as the *Mystic Marriage*.

The subject of the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* enjoyed widespread popularity in Italian Renaissance painting. This study will look at the visual variety in one group of paintings of the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* by Correggio. This story became beloved by Renaissance Christians and was painted again and again with widespread appeal. But a singular artist visualizing such different iterations of the singular story is intriguing. Just as Catherine is diverse as a patron saint, so her marriage can be inspiring in mixtures of earthly and religious values and experiences, for which Correggio was particularly skilled.

## 2. Subjects of the Paintings

### Literary Traditions

#### St. Catherine narrative

There are two traditions of the life of St. Catherine of Alexandria, the *passio* and the *conversio*. They are separate narratives that originated at different times and contain stories from different times in the saint's life. The *passio* (passion), is the older story that centers on the events of St. Catherine's martyrdom in extant recorded texts from the Middle Ages. The *conversio* (conversion) introduces the story of Catherine's marriage to Christ and is traced to the thirteenth century. The narratives may be treated together, as the *conversio* did not contradict the *passio*; it added to the account of Catherine's life and both are now legitimate elements of the canon.

The earliest surviving *passio* texts are in Latin from the ninth century, but these are translations from late eighth century Greek examples which are now lost.<sup>44</sup> These oldest examples are identified fragments, while the earliest complete text is from the eleventh century.<sup>45</sup> The *passio*, as the historically earliest story of St. Catherine of Alexandria, has been well studied and was widely circulated in text among Christians by the late Middle Ages. This story was widely disseminated in the Latin Vulgate version in the eleventh century and also by Jacobus de Varagine in the *Golden Legend*, organized as a calendar for feast days in the Christian year,

---

<sup>44</sup> Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, 155.

<sup>45</sup> Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art*, 9.

created in 1260.<sup>46</sup> It did not however, include the story of her mystic marriage, although it is important to note that Catherine did refer to Jesus as her spouse multiple times within the *passio*.<sup>47</sup>

St. Catherine's *passio* presents a beautiful young girl of about 18, the daughter of King Costus of Alexandria in the early fourth century.<sup>48</sup> She is a devoted Christian and rebukes the Emperor Maxentius, who is visiting Alexandria, for offering sacrifices to the pagan gods. He is unable to properly debate, so he calls 50 of the greatest philosophers to Alexandria to oppose her. Catherine, filled with the Holy Spirit, not only defends her faith, but succeeds in converting the philosophers to Christianity. This famous disputation led to her imprisonment and ultimately a death sentence. All of her converts are killed, the philosophers, soldiers, and even the Emperor's wife who visited her in prison. Catherine is offered one last chance to renounce her faith and receive a position of power in the Emperor's household but she refuses. A torture device, a wheel with spikes, is brought for her execution, but when Catherine touches it, it miraculously shatters.<sup>49</sup> She is instead beheaded and her body is carried away by angels to Mt. Sinai.

The *conversio* text of St. Catherine developed after the established martyrdom story, and forms the second narrative for the saint. As previously mentioned, the earliest reference to the mystic marriage of St. Catherine is found in an Old French poem from 1251.<sup>50</sup> The *conversio* narrative that first survives in the 1251 poem and is found in its complete form in the Latin text

---

<sup>46</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 720.

<sup>47</sup> Carolyn Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms: The Mystic Marriage in Northern Renaissance Art* (London; Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2012), 18.

<sup>48</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 720.

<sup>49</sup> This brutal method of execution involved the victim's limbs being broken, possibly by the rolling of the wheel over them, and then the broken appendages woven through spokes in a wheel to be placed on a pole several feet off the ground and left to die.

<sup>50</sup> Walsh, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, 168. Appendix A Table A.1

from 1337.<sup>51</sup> The story of the mystic marriage developed in the late thirteenth century as St. Catherine's cult grew.<sup>52</sup> Two scholars, Hermann Knust and Hermann Varnhagen, contributed to this research in the late nineteenth century while each studied examples of St. Catherine's legend in various languages. Both scholars identified the earliest complete Latin version of the mystic marriage in a text dating from 1337, Varnhagen even publishing the complete story in *Zur geschichte der legende der Katharina von Alexandrien*, in 1891.<sup>53</sup> These early writings remain the only significant efforts in large scale study of the *conversio*.<sup>54</sup>

In this expanded version in Latin, Catherine is brought as a child to a hermit by her mother after refusing to marry. The hermit gives Catherine an icon of Mary and Jesus and tells her she will have a worthy husband someday. In a dream, Jesus in the icon turns away from Catherine, demonstrating that she was unacceptable to him. She returns to the hermit distressed and he tells her to consecrate herself to Jesus to be united to him. After she does so, Jesus faces her and presents her with a ring to mark their divine union. Giancarla Periti attributes the *conversio* story to Medieval and Early Modern female mystic writers who had particular motherly or spousal devotion to the child Jesus.<sup>55</sup> This narrative became the second essential story to the figure of St. Catherine of Alexandria and enriched her Christian identity and avenues of patronage in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.

---

<sup>51</sup> Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art*, 112.

<sup>53</sup> Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Giancarla Periti, "Art and Reform: Correggio's Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with St. Sebastian," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no. 3 (2007): 702.

## Mystic Marriage

Mystic Marriage is an ancient concept in the Christian tradition and scholars have studied its manifestation through textual and visual materials. In *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, E. Ann Matter introduces her study of the “Mystical Marriage” with the historical origin of this spiritual concept in the Jewish faith.<sup>56</sup> “As early as the formative period of the Talmud (fifth and sixth centuries CE) the relations between God and Israel were conceptualized as a spiritual marriage.”<sup>57</sup> Yahweh was the bridegroom to Israel as bride, which was understood as the collective Jewish people.<sup>58</sup> Marriage serves as a human metaphor for divine union which is uniquely intimate and difficult to conceptualize. Different iterations of those in the spousal role to the divine can be seen throughout history. Within the Christian faith, both the Old and New Testaments contain references to this marriage and the interpretation of the union with God was adapted for Christian faith.

In Christianity, Christ is often the bridegroom to *Ecclesia* (a personification of the Church), the Virgin Mary, or a saint in the role of *sponsa christi*.<sup>59</sup> Christ is identified as the bridegroom of the Church in the holy scriptures, particularly in the letter to the Ephesians.<sup>60</sup> The allegorical figure of *Ecclesia* continues the tradition of a group of people who are beloved and protected in relationship with God. The Virgin Mary is the first individual person to fill that role

---

<sup>56</sup> E. Ann Matter, “Mystical Marriage,” in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Lucetta Scaraffia, and Gabriella Zarri, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Matter, “Mystical Marriage,” 31.

<sup>58</sup> Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Paul’s letter to the Ephesians presents this clearly, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the words, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Ephesians 5:25-27

Jesus as the bridegroom to the Church is also referred to in scripture elsewhere including Matt 25:1-13, Rev 19:5-9 and most prominently, Song of Songs.

through her cooperation with God to bear his incarnate son. Mary also became a symbolic figure of the Church, housing Jesus in her body and giving her life to his will. She was a popular role model in this relationship, by which other saints' mystical connections could be understood and accepted. Diskant Muir identifies twelfth century liturgy for the Nativity and Assumption of the Virgin Mary that exemplify her role as the bride of Christ.<sup>61</sup>

This intimate and individualized bond was especially attractive for consecrated religious women. From the early days of the Church, religious women were encouraged to see themselves as brides of Christ by spiritual leaders, including St. Jerome.<sup>62</sup> It was not only a lens taught to them, religious women were called to close relationship in their vocation and gladly adopted the title.<sup>63</sup> This has been a constant perspective for consecrated religious women and as Periti argued with the origin of the *conversio*, has lead to stories and visual traditions that aid and promote this form of female spirituality. The Christian interpretation of Christ and his bride opened the idea of mystic marriage from a metaphor for God's provision for his people to a deep, personal encounter experienced and lived by the devout in their own spiritual life.

One of the most significant religious writings related to mystic marriage in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the book of Song of Songs.<sup>64</sup> Traditionally attributed to Solomon, the son of King David, sometime in the tenth or ninth century BCE, it has been recognized as one of the five *megillot* (scrolls) within the *Ketuvim* (writings) in the Jewish canon since approximately 100 CE.<sup>65</sup> Matter and other scholars have recognized its importance in this area of study, as well as

---

<sup>61</sup> Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Matter, "Mystical Marriage," 35.

<sup>63</sup> Matter, "Mystical Marriage," 36.

<sup>64</sup> "Judeo-Christian" is not always an accepted term as the two faith systems differ greatly, but in this case both religions recognize the same book from their shared origin.

<sup>65</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 6.

other places in sacred scripture that draw on elements of marriage.<sup>66</sup> Early Christian writers composed homilies and commentaries on the Song of Songs, for theological education. Origen of Alexandria made significant contributions to the study and interpretation of the Song of Songs and was a valued scholar in the Cassinese Congregation.

Origen's commentaries and homilies on the Song of Songs were important to the early Church, about which St. Jerome is often quoted in a letter to Pope Damasus, "While Origen surpassed all writers in his other books, in his *Song of Songs* he surpassed himself."<sup>67</sup> He was the first Christian writer to assert the validity of the metaphor of the bride as the Church or the Christian soul.<sup>68</sup> Origen also interestingly lived from the late second to middle third century (c.184-c.253) and was born in Alexandria, Egypt, just before St. Catherine's life and legend took place there (c.287- c.305). Although their lives did not overlap, they both faced religious persecution in Roman Alexandria which shaped them as Christians. Origen wished to be martyred with his father but ultimately became a renowned scholar and teacher in the Christian faith. In her legend, St. Catherine was martyred in the Diocletian persecution, and was also venerated for her gift of Christian philosophy and learning. The historical record that places St. Catherine at the moment of Origen's defense of the bride as the individual soul could well be more than coincidental.

The Song of Songs, Origen's writings, and St. Catherine of Alexandria all received a renewed attention that began in the late Middle Ages and gained attention in the Italian Renaissance. A return to the classical era, Ancient Rome and Greece, was the driving force of

---

<sup>66</sup> Diskant Muir named the books of Hosea, Jeremiah and other prophets in the Old Testament, and references made by Paul, John and Matthew from the New Testament.

Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R.P. Lawson (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957), 265.

<sup>68</sup> Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 2.

the Renaissance; a rebirth of their ancient principles of art and philosophy, for which it was later named. These fields of study and cultural knowledge were reinvigorated in the sixteenth century with broad devotion to the classics. Christianity founded in antiquity added another layer in this pursuit. Although this faith was at odds with those early Western civilizations during their dominions, the rebirth of ancient ideals was intricately bound to the strength of Christianity in the sixteenth century.

Although the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* was a later addition to her cult, the concept is rooted in ancient Abrahamic religion. Originally utilized to represent the fidelity of God to his people, in later conceptualizations it developed into a literal marriage between the Divine and an individual. This transformation into a reality in some saints' lives reminds others of the ultimate goal of communion with God in Heaven which will surpass human imagining. Mystic marriage is a rich idea that resulted in diverse visualizations, even when observing one lineup, such as St. Catherine and Jesus, within a single artist's oeuvre.

### **Visual traditions of Catherine's Mystic Marriage**

In the Middle Ages, St. Catherine of Alexandria's identity in Christian devotion was founded in the *passio* as the first account of her life and role in the faith; she was foremost a martyr, blessed with intelligence and preaching abilities. Medieval spirituality focused on physical suffering and its salvific qualities, the section on St. Catherine from the Golden Legend considers the etymology of her name and suggests, "Or Catherine's name may be taken for *catenula*, a small chain, for by her good works she fashioned a chain for herself by which she climbed to heaven."<sup>69</sup> Martyrs were the regular example of holiness for Christians and the

---

<sup>69</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 720.

sacrifice of Catherine's life adhered to these values. The Renaissance saw much growth and reflection in Christianity which led to individualized spirituality and personal devotions. Catherine's visual representations followed this order as well, with emphasis on her martyrdom in the Middle Ages and a transformation to her personal connection to God that reflected late Medieval and Renaissance perspectives. St. Catherine took on a new character as a model of individual, mystical, yet real, union with Christ through intimate, personal devotion.

From the *passio* narrative, St. Catherine is described as the young, beautiful daughter of the King of Alexandria, "She was indeed lovely to behold, of truly incredible beauty, and was seen by all as admirable and gracious."<sup>70</sup> Artistic depictions adhere to these reverential but simple words and Catherine is generally portrayed as a youthful, beautiful girl in aristocratic dress. She is compelling in her virgin freshness and the quiet dignity and peace in her expression. Although Catherine is approximately 18 years-old in the *passio* and an adolescent in the prefiguring *conversio*, images of the *Mystic Marriage* broadly portray the teenage Catherine marrying Christ, blending the two narratives. Like most other sixteenth-century examples, none of Correggio's *Mystic Marriages* show the *conversio* narrative as it occurs in text; the exchange is an amalgam of the literary tradition, with Catherine as a teenager in the marriage ceremony. Catherine does not receive a ring from an icon of Jesus, they are both present in the setting and she is the age she would have been at her martyrdom.<sup>71</sup> It is as if this is the experience of Catherine after her martyrdom, uniting with Jesus in paradise.

---

<sup>70</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 721.

<sup>71</sup> Interestingly the Metropolitan Museum has a fifteenth-century cycle of the life of St. Catherine of Siena including, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena* (1460) by Giovanni di Paolo, which shows an adult Jesus reaching out from within an icon to present her with a ring. These panels were based on a biography of the saint written by her confessor, Raymond of Capua. This biography was intentionally aligned with the hagiography of St. Catherine of Alexandria to present Catherine of Siena's life as a holy emulation of her third-century predecessor. "The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena," Met Museum, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438021>. Matter, "Mystical Marriage," 58.

The identifying attributes of St. Catherine of Alexandria are a spiked wheel, whole or usually fragmented, a palm frond, crown, and sword. The torture wheel and sword are derived from the *passio*, and the palm frond and crown are honorific symbols of Christian martyrs. St. Catherine's crown is also related to her status as princess of Alexandria. Not all objects must be present in images of St. Catherine, and some of them may be emphasized to portray a specific role of the saint or function of the art. These elements serve as identifying attributes and are never wholly excluded, even when her marriage to Christ is the subject of the image.

The two critical figures in images of the mystic marriage are St. Catherine of Alexandria and Jesus, although there may be secondary figures related to the patron's devotions or the intended location, for example. Periti cites strong female devotion to Jesus as a child for the development of Catherine's marriage narrative, "Medieval and early modern female mystics were filled by the desire to nurse and care for the baby, or to marry him."<sup>72</sup> She does not acknowledge the earliest example of the *conversio* in a thirteenth-century poem, but says it was developed in the writings of fourteenth-century female mystics.<sup>73</sup> Although it did not originate from these religious women, the story of Catherine's union to Christ inspired them and flourished from their interest and literature. Following the narrative of the *conversio*, Jesus is frequently portrayed as a child in images of the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*. Several fourteenth-century paintings however, represent Jesus as an adult: a panel of the subject by Barna da Siena from c.1340 (fig 6) now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and another by Giovanni del Biondo from c.1379 (fig 7) in Allentown Art Museum in Pennsylvania are two such examples. These demonstrate changing customs for the subject, and although Jesus was

---

<sup>72</sup> Periti, "Art and Reform," 702.

<sup>73</sup> Periti, "Art and Reform," 702.

portrayed as an adult in *Mystic Marriage* images in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, from the sixteenth-century onward he is consistently a child.<sup>74</sup>

Mary is also a key figure in paintings of the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*. She is the seat for Jesus and often guides his hands towards his bride to help bestow a ring. Mary is the mediator of this exchange, helping her infant son establish this union and encouraging Catherine to approach. She may hold Catherine's hand, bringing the two parties together and reassuring the young saint, as she does in Correggio's Naples and Paris versions (figs 3 and 4). In the Detroit *Mystic Marriage* by Correggio, Mary holds Jesus while he manages the ring and holds Catherine's hand himself (fig 2). Jesus exercises a similar agency in the Washington DC example, although it is difficult to be sure of the placement of Mary's right hand (fig 1). Mary facilitates the marriage in these paintings, applying her role as the advocate between mankind and God and helping not only the female martyr Saint, but all Christians come closer to the divine, especially as they contemplate these marriage images.

It was this human intimacy that Correggio depicted in all of his religious subjects through his contact and discussions with the reformed Benedictines of San Benedetto Po, the Cassinese, and by means of his own talent in painting. Correggio's astonishing development and creation of a warm, sensual representation of Christian love, can be studied through a careful analysis of his mode of representation.

The crux of paintings of the *Mystic Marriage* is the exchange of the ring, the confirmation of the saint's bond to God.<sup>75</sup> Which of Catherine's hands receives the wedding ring is evenly represented by Correggio, two paintings show her left hand offered and two show her

---

<sup>74</sup> Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 32.

<sup>75</sup> St. Catherine's wedding ring itself spouted a large tradition among pilgrims who upon their pilgrimage to Mt Sinai where her body lay, would be given or would purchase a ring as a token for their trek. This tradition is still in practice today.

right. There are modern traditions for both, in Western Roman Catholicism the fourth finger on the left hand is used in marriage, and in Eastern Orthodoxy the right hand is used. For much of human history the customs and purposes of rings were regionally specific. Rings for contractual purposes were in existence long before Christianity but were adopted by the religion as an emblem of marriage without precise wearing requirements.<sup>76</sup>

Stefano Rapisarda traces the tradition of rings relating to lovers and spouses on the left fourth finger to Ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>77</sup> An ancient idea that a vein connected that particular finger directly to the heart has been persistent in the mythology which made it the appropriate choice for a symbol of love. Rapisarda consulted Ancient Roman writers for ring traditions and in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, he found the explanation of the finger with the precious vein dignified with a ring, and that as precious gemstones were added to rings, they were worn on the left hand to be protected from daily use.<sup>78</sup> The same romantic idea of the left fourth finger connected to the heart persisted in the Italian Renaissance. Rapisarda mentions that wedding ring practices varied until the Roman rite of 1592 at which point the left ring finger was the standard for Catholic weddings, likely to reserve the right hand for bishops' rings.<sup>79</sup> Although, in the Greek Orthodox Church, the long-standing tradition for wedding rings is the placement on the fourth finger of the right hand.<sup>80</sup> This nebulous history obscures any specific reasons for the left or right hand in Correggio's early *cinquecento* representations. Compositional consideration

---

<sup>76</sup> "The Curiosities of Antiquity: Hand Rings," *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* 1, no. 1 (1853): 11.

<sup>77</sup> Stefano Rapisarda, "A Ring on the Little Finger: Andreas Capellanus and Medieval Chiromancy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 69 (2006): 178.

<sup>78</sup> Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, trans. Percival Vaughan Davies, (New York and London: Columbia University Press: 1969), 498.

Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, vn.13.

Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, vil.13.11-1.

Rapisarda, "A Ring on the Little Finger," 177, 178. Footnotes 9 and 12.

<sup>79</sup> Rapisarda, "A Ring on the Little Finger," 176. Footnote 4.

<sup>80</sup> Rapisarda does not mention this difference between Western and Eastern Catholic Church.

may be one of the motivations, perhaps either hand could have been selected to serve the intended effect of the painting.

### 3. The Modest *Mystic Marriage* Paintings (1510's)

#### The Washington *Mystic Marriage*

*The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* from 1510-1515 is believed to be the first time Correggio approached the subject (fig 1). The National Gallery of Art in Washington DC which houses it today, lists its earliest known location as Ferrara, Italy in the possession of Count Giovanni Battista Costabili Containi I [d. 1841], after which it passed to his nephew.<sup>81</sup> The commission and early years of this work is unknown, but it passed by inheritance for generations in Italy until it was sold to the Samuel H Kress Foundation in New York in 1932. It was gifted to the National Gallery in 1939.<sup>82</sup> Of the four examples by Correggio, this early piece is narrowly the smallest at 27.7 x 21.4 cm.<sup>83</sup> Its size suggests use as a private devotional work for contemplation and its composition is that of an altarpiece. The condition of the figures in this painting is rather poor. Deterioration of the surface and its early date in Correggio's development as an artist both contribute to this.

The Washington *Mystic Marriage* is the only time Correggio placed this scene rigidly in an architectural space. The organization of this small panel mimics compositional standards of large altarpieces with full-body figures arranged orderly on the ground line in a shallow space. Altarpieces in the *cinquecento* were designed with large figures, often lined up at the base of the panel, in equal scale to be clearly visible to members of a congregation. Small panel paintings

---

<sup>81</sup> "The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, 1510/1515," National Gallery of Art, Collection, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.224.html#bibliography>. Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 277.

<sup>82</sup> National Gallery of Art, "The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, 1510/1515."

<sup>83</sup> The example in Naples is slightly larger at 28.5 x 23.5 cm.

could not serve as public altarpieces, yet this one is designed as “an altarpiece composition in miniature that may well precede any actual altarpiece by Correggio.”<sup>84</sup> This grand scale in minuscule execution is unusual but not wholly unique. *Virgin and Child, with Saints Onuphrius, Sebastian, Justine, and Ursula* c.1500 (fig 8) by Francesco Morone in the Philadelphia Museum of Art is another example of a small surface with figures in monumental scale. It is larger than the Washington *Mystic Marriage* at 56.8 x 46.7 cm, but it does not approach the scale of a regular altarpiece. It functioned as a portable altarpiece which explains its composition and scale.<sup>85</sup> This is a likely function for the Washington *Mystic Marriage* as well.

This small panel shows Correggio’s study of other artists like Andrea Mantegna (c.1431-1506) through composition, relief ornaments and garlands which scholars have long noted.<sup>86</sup> The group is centered in a raised edifice with a throne for the seated figures. The Virgin Mary holds the baby Jesus and behind them is Saint Anne, Mary’s mother.<sup>87</sup> It was not unusual for St. Anne to accompany Mary and Jesus in devotional images in the Italian Renaissance; her own cult was growing from apocryphal stories, including those in *The Golden Legend*. St. Anne looks out to the viewer and holds her hands up in blessing over the group with her mouth ajar, as if in prayer. In the background the garlands with lemons and oranges outline the niche, a common detail in Renaissance images calling on artistic practices from Antiquity, and more directly from Mantegna. Thin, gold highlights behind St. Anne outline the throne, but the shadowed niche and dark chair blend together so that the *putti* give the impression they are

---

<sup>84</sup> Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 35.

<sup>85</sup> “Virgin and Child, with Saints Onuphrius, Sebastian, Justine, and Ursula,” Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed October 10, 2021, <https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/101963>.

<sup>86</sup> Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> She is identified by comparing Correggio’s recurring treatment of Sts. Anne and Elizabeth who each have recognizable types. Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 32.

floating, holding a halo. At the bottom of the throne is a relief medallion of St. Catherine's death.<sup>88</sup>

St. Catherine kneels to the left of the throne looking at her hand, while Jesus gazes intently at her and holds her finger to receive his ring. As discussed earlier, there were no ordinances in the placement of a wedding ring although soon after Correggio's life the Western tradition was solidified to the fourth finger on the left hand. In this painting, Catherine offers her right hand and Jesus conducts the placement of the ring. She wears an olive green dress, gold shawl on her shoulders, and a thick, red mantle falls over her legs. Catherine's red mantle associates her with Mary's dress, and the green and gold are echoed in the decoration of the architecture. Her overall presentation is elegant but not lavish - her hair is loose and gathered very little, possibly with a gossamer veil that is almost indiscernible. A golden crown has been placed on the steps next to her attributes of a broken wheel and a sword. The priceless crown has been set aside while she awaits an even more precious treasure binding her to Jesus.

St. Catherine is frequently depicted with a crown which shows her rank as an Alexandrian princess, but also may be interpreted as a crown of martyrdom.<sup>89</sup> The earliest depictions of St. Catherine in icons represent her as a Byzantine princess, emphasizing her rank with a golden crown and rich dress. A third reason for a crown associated with St. Catherine comes from her veneration as a teacher from the *passio*. Stollhans explains that in a written discussion from the thirteenth century a Franciscan, Eustace d'Arras, cited St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Mary Magdalene to argue that women could earn the *aureola*, or golden crown, reserved for teachers.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 277.

Previously Ricci thought it was Abraham sacrificing Isaac.

<sup>89</sup> Sources of her life vary whether she is the daughter of the King of Alexandria or a nobleman. Either version shows her elevated rank and comfortable living which adds to her virtue in choosing to defend her faith at the risk of martyrdom than lead a comfortable life.

<sup>90</sup> Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art*, 64.

Any or all of these may apply when a crown is present in a painting of St. Catherine of Alexandria. It may nod specifically to one of these roles because of a particular devotion of the patron. Despite the uncertainty of its inclusion here, it has been removed and placed with other articles which have served their purpose. For this reason, the crown in this painting likely serves as a symbol of her royalty on Earth to commemorate her life and martyrdom as she enters in the spiritual life as Jesus' bride.

Two male mendicant saints flank the central group, St. Francis of Assisi on the left and St. Dominic on the right. St. Catherine of Alexandria was adopted as a favorite saint for the Dominican order early in their formation. The particular vocation of the Dominican order, the defense of the orthodoxy of Christian doctrine and their emphasis on scholarship, naturally aligned them with a devotion to St. Catherine. Stollhans cited the many altarpieces connected with the Dominicans that include St. Catherine for this long-standing association.<sup>91</sup> "St. Catherine appears as a saintly model of erudition for the Dominicans as she preached and defended Christianity against the 50 philosophers. She, therefore, is a suitable role model for all members of the Order of the Preachers."<sup>92</sup> St. Francis of Assisi's inclusion is still unaccounted for apart from Ekserdjian's commentary about both saints founding mendicant orders and as occasional co-patrons.<sup>93</sup> St. Dominic is featured slightly more prominently, with brighter illumination and more in the foreground as he echoes Mary's reserved observation. St. Francis is more shadowed, but he stands in a position of intimacy behind Catherine, he inclines his head and body and holds his hand with the stigmata to his chest, watching the marriage intently. He takes on a kind of advocate role to Catherine, reminiscent of a sponsor for sacraments of

---

<sup>91</sup> Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art*, 108.

<sup>92</sup> Stollhans, *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 35.

initiation to the Church.<sup>94</sup> As a bearer of the stigmata, he also reminds the viewer of the adult Jesus and his sacrifice of laying down his life for his people, which in a smaller way Catherine matched in her martyrdom for him.

The first surviving document related to Correggio's life is a baptismal certificate where he served as a godparent in the town of Correggio between January 17 and 22 in 1511.<sup>95</sup> Correggio's own experience with this responsibility in the Church began around the creation of this painting which may have impacted his tender approach to St. Francis. There is a facial resemblance between the Washington St. Francis and St. Anthony in the Dresden *Madonna with St. Francis* (1514-15) (fig 9). This altarpiece was commissioned on August 30, 1514 for the church of San Francesco in Correggio, and has been in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden since mid-eighteenth century.<sup>96</sup> Gould proposed the Dresden St. Anthony was a long-overlooked self-portrait by Correggio based on the gaze, posture, and most convincingly, the namesake of the artist.<sup>97</sup> There is not an overt motivation for Correggio's portrait in the Dresden altarpiece, but the spiritual responsibility he undertook in 1511 may have inspired introspection that was subtly incorporated in the supportive figure of the Washington Francis around 1510-1514. These connections remain speculative, but they do align with the thoughtful and devout Correggio of recent scholarship who matured under the patronage of the Benedictines. Gould

---

<sup>94</sup> In the chapter, "The Sponsorship of Adults," Lynch cites Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia and contemporary of John of Chrysostom, a priest at Antioch at the time, and his catechetical sermons instructing on the sacrament of baptism in the Early Church, both liturgical and practical actions. This includes that the sponsor stands behind the kneeling catechumen while they are anointed.

Joseph Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 108.

<sup>95</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 188.

<sup>96</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 175, 202.

<sup>97</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 22.

also misidentified the female saint to the right of the Virgin as St. Catherine of Siena who is in fact St. Catherine of Alexandria.<sup>98</sup>

As his first entrance into the subject with unknown commission conditions, Correggio used many of the conventions of the time to present the *Mystic Marriage* fused with two other artistic themes. The second theme of The Virgin and Child with Saints, or the *sacra conversazione*, is clear in the traditional composition and group of figures, and the two mendicant saints with their shared vocation of preaching are the third. Ekserdjian identifies the Washington *Mystic Marriage* as a re-imagination of Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* (1496) (fig 10) through organization of figures and the relief decoration on the bottom of the throne.<sup>99</sup> Lorenzo Costa's *The Virgin and Child with Saints* from about 1498-1502 (fig 11) is another visually similar example, and Gould noted that Costa, as the new court painter in Mantua, had the most influence on Correggio at this time in his career (1510-1520).<sup>100</sup>

The presence of the mendicant saints brings together the two roles St. Catherine had been venerated for in the Christian faith. The occasion is the marriage ceremony derived from the *conversio*, here with the blessing of the founders of the orders of preachers. St. Catherine had long been associated with the Dominicans by her disputation in the *passio*. In this painting, the two identities of St. Catherine come together as the mendicant preacher saints support and honor her in this marriage. St. Francis stands behind and supports Catherine and St. Dominic observes as a focused witness. This panel claims her Medieval identity as a preacher and martyr with her Renaissance identity as the bride of Christ.

---

<sup>98</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 201.

<sup>99</sup> Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 29.

In his early years, the Washington *Mystic Marriage* already demonstrates Correggio's creativity to integrate three themes in one composition and his personal sensitivity to the central subject through the gentle emotion in the figure of St. Francis and the attentiveness of all of the figures to the marriage. In Francesco Monroe's *Virgin and Child with Saints* (fig 8), each figure stands in their own attitude, detached from one another or their shared environment. Correggio allows the extraordinary marriage to be the focus of the figures in this painting. Before his relationship with the Cassinese too, this arrangement demonstrates the devout engagement with the subject from the artist and a nod to Christian initiation practices may be read in Francis and Catherine. The conventional composition distracted scholars from recognizing the artist's deep engagement with the subject and his ingenuity beginning to develop. The origins of the mature Correggio are present in the unobtrusive uniqueness of the Washington *Mystic Marriage* which would flourish with his artistic development and deepening spirituality in relationship with the Cassinese Congregation.

### **The Detroit *Mystic Marriage***

*The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with Saints John the Baptist, Anne and Joseph* in the Detroit Institute of Arts measures 156 x 123 cm, and was therefore likely completed as an altarpiece. The details of its commission are unknown but Gould suspects it was completed around 1510-11 based on the figure's dress.<sup>101</sup> David Alan Brown remarks that the altarpiece was likely painted for a chapel in Mantua where Correggio was working at the time.<sup>102</sup> The

---

<sup>101</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 24.

<sup>102</sup> David Alan Brown, "Correggio's 'Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine' and its Sources," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 60, no. 3-4 (1982): 101.

earliest accepted ownership of this painting is from 1627 by the Gonzaga Family.<sup>103</sup> It was sold at auction a number of times before entering the Detroit Institute of Arts collection by gift in 1926.<sup>104</sup> The Detroit *Mystic Marriage* was first attributed to Correggio by Karl Friedrich von Rumohr in 1838 and was not included in Ricci's first edition in 1896.<sup>105</sup> Although its acceptance to the artist's catalogue came late, it is now undisputed in scholarship and the poor condition and early estimation in Correggio's development account for this delay.<sup>106</sup> Much of the dark underpainting shows through due to several restoration and conservation efforts in the twentieth-century which rubbed away the surface paint; St. Catherine and the landscape behind her are the best preserved areas.<sup>107</sup> Correggio keeps the kneeling Catherine and pyramidal composition motifs, but has adapted the subject from the Washington panel to function as a public altarpiece. Here, Correggio attempts to present the intimate subject with the attendance of secondary figures that add to the monumentality of the work and also allow for diverse reflection.

The figures are arranged in a group at the edge of the painting in the foreground, with a dark forest comprising the left half of the background and a mountainous landscape to the right. Gould notes that Correggio consistently used this compositional device with a tree blocking the left background.<sup>108</sup> The Virgin Mary kneels in the outdoor setting and raises one knee to support the infant Jesus who sits on her lap and slides the ring on St. Catherine's finger. St. Catherine

---

<sup>103</sup> "Correggio: The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, between 1510 and 1514," Detroit Institute of Arts, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/mystic-marriage-saint-catherine-41473>.

<sup>104</sup> Detroit Institute of Arts, "Correggio."

<sup>105</sup> Ricci later accepted this attribution around 1899.

Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 199.

<sup>106</sup> The Detroit *Mystic Marriage* is universally considered Correggio's first altarpiece. Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Brown and Gould both note the photographs in Gronau's *Klassiker der Kunst* (1907) (*The Work of Correggio* in English), show additions on top and bottom that are no longer there.

Brown, "Correggio's 'Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine,'" 107.

Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 199.

<sup>108</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 32.

kneels upright with her left hand resting on the fractured wheel and her right hand offered to Jesus. Behind them stands St. Joseph, holding a book and observing the marriage from above in a priestly role. St. Anne stands behind Mary, heavily cloaked and in shadows but with two fingers gently touching Mary's shoulder in bright light, showing their connection as mother and daughter. St. John the Baptist stands on the far left; although farthest from the kneeling group, he points directly at the marriage and looks out at the viewer which balances the tight group on the right.

The child Jesus is brightly illuminated from the left which highlights his naked limbs, stomach, and face.<sup>109</sup> He is active and reaches forward as he slides the ring on Catherine's finger. Mary supports his foot in her palm, her left hand barely visible holding his leg and keeping him upright on her lap. She is pleased with a calm expression, and a deeply bowed head that conveys loving attention which is derived from Mantegna and Costa. *The Holy Family* in the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon (c.1490) (fig 12) and the figures in the *Allegory of Isabella d'Este's Coronation* (1505-06) (fig 13) by Costa demonstrate the bowed posture he favored, and there is a similar inclination in the figure of Mary in Mantegna's *The Virgin and Child with Saints* from 1490-1505 (fig 14). In the Detroit painting, Mary's face is half illuminated in the strong light that also illuminates Jesus while strong smokey darkness obscures much of the figure, due to the poor condition. Mary is witnessing this union but, as in the Washington painting, she does not guide Jesus or directly engage with Catherine. Jesus manages the marriage ceremony himself, his little left hand is cupped under Catherine's palm and he guides

---

<sup>109</sup> Gould says in this altarpiece Correggio is close to defining volume by contrast of light and shadow only and not relying on outlines.  
Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 33.

the ring; even as a child he establishes this spiritual union. He is a knowing and devoted bridegroom and Lord.

St. Catherine is youthful with a pale complexion and flushed cheek and is reserved in emotion while she embodies poise. She receives this ring with a regal countenance, kneeling quite upright, with the posture and air of royalty. Her bent head toward Jesus shows her focus on this highest occasion while her posture and expression show reserved piety and dignity. She wears a small, jeweled tiara which signals to her royal status instead of the large crown in the Washington panel. A small burgundy veil covers the top of her head but wavy, golden locks are visible around her face and a single ringlet lies on her exposed shoulder. St. Catherine is dressed in a modest, orange gown that falls freely with shining gold hems at her neck and hand, the single ornamentation is a small, golden bead or brooch at the neckline. Palm fronds sprout from her wrist, while her grey mantle acts as a barrier between her hand and the shattered wheel it rests upon. This delicate detail is like the corporal on the altar that touches the host or the cloths that veil the precious vessels in the mass. Catherine is the precious vessel in this situation, she is honored as becomes a bride, no longer only a martyr, and here a veil protects her from that death in her new life as *sponsa christi*. These elements acknowledge the event that won Catherine a place in heaven, and which is now sealed in the mystic marriage.

The figure who is most likely St. Joseph stands directly above the kneeling group, presiding over the marriage in a priestly role.<sup>110</sup> His vocation was the protector of Mary and Jesus, and as Mary represents the Church, the blessed dwelling place of God, he is the exemplary figure to priests. These three figures that make up the *Holy Family* are an example to Christian

---

<sup>110</sup> Gould notes that most scholarship identifies the two elderly figures with St. Joseph and St. Anne. Suida (1903) preferred St. Zacharias and St. Elizabeth as Ekserdjian (1997) later did. The theological roles these figures fill in the altarpiece leave no doubt for the more frequent identification of Joseph and Anne. Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 199.

people as the first domestic church formed by parents and child. St. Anne frequently serves as a seat for Mary in late Medieval and Renaissance images, and while the Detroit Mary is without a throne or seat, St. Anne stands in a similar supportive position behind her with two fingers gently on her shoulder. The condition of the painting darkens the deep shadows that cover most of St. Anne, but the harsh light from the left softly touches her cheek, chin and nose and show her elderly face and the two fingers touching Mary in a blessing posture. The patches of St. Anne's face are a faint echo of Mary's more illuminated face and neck, and the same light radiates on Jesus' exposed flesh. A series of curved outlines in the same progression unite the three figures, beginning with the posture of St. Anne leaning forward, the strong curve of Mary's bowed head and shoulder, and the farthest right is Jesus who leans forward with the ring.

St. John the Baptist on the left is also in a curved position with his back and leg, slightly removed from the group of three in a clear sequence of curved outlines, but in a related position that serves to enclose the scene.<sup>111</sup> John the Baptist is the only figure looking out and not at the marriage ceremony. His right hand points to Jesus and the marriage, reflecting his spiritual role as messenger of Jesus' coming to mankind.<sup>112</sup> Correggio places John the Baptist as a device for the viewer, directing attention to the focus of the painting but also as another spiritual theme to contemplate. John the Baptist steps into the harsh light that features Jesus to fulfill his role in the altarpiece and theologically in the Christian tradition.

---

<sup>111</sup> A.E. Popham recognized St. John the Baptist's figure from a woodcut by Albrecht Durer, which in turn may be derived from a drawing by Leonardo.

Brown, "Correggio's 'Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine,'" 105.

<sup>112</sup> "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" Isaiah 40:3

"He said: 'I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said.'...The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" John 1:23,29-31

In this earliest known altarpiece by Correggio, the artist has envisioned the *Mystic Marriage* anew for its purpose in a chapel, rather than in the private function of the Washington panel. To open up the subject and visualize it as a public altarpiece, Correggio focused on the three essential figures and turned to familiar saints whose presence would be functional in the space and sources for individual contemplation. The supposed location as a chapel in Mantua, as the scale does not befit a high altar, brings to mind small masses and private prayer in a shared space. A chapel sits between the large setting of the high altar which would entail a throng of congregants as viewers, and the private devotion of small paintings. This intimate subject does not lend itself to include a crowd of onlookers in the design either, as might the *Crucifixion* or *Assumption of the Virgin Mary*. Instead, the secondary figures are selected for relationship with the three main figures and allow the viewer to feel welcomed to contemplate the *Mystic Marriage* as it is not exclusive, or to consider the individual roles of the supporters. All three of the secondary figures reveal their responsibilities on Earth and their theological roles in the Church. This informative design allows for various themes in personal prayer and services different feasts in the Church. As each figure reveals their individual role in Christianity, the viewer may also be drawn to consider their own relationship to God and role in the Church.

Although scholars including Gould and Ekserdjian pointed out awkward figures and the difficult challenge to scale the intimate subject into an altarpiece, they did not consider Correggio's intricate Christian understanding of the subject and the intended space for the Detroit *Mystic Marriage*.<sup>113</sup> Correggio worked hard to strike the balance between adapting the

---

<sup>113</sup> Gould says this altarpiece was an attempt to monumentalize the Mystic Marriage but that it sacrifices the intimacy of the event and was less successful in its function than the Washington panel. Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 35. Ekserdjian notes the Virgin Mary is "crude" compared to later examples by Correggio Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 35.

subject for an altarpiece and maintaining opportunities for individual reflection, which the subject naturally lends itself to. The artist was familiar with the subject and the first two examples in this group show an impressive ability to rethink it and create dramatically different visualizations that suit their intended functions and maintain the personal character of the intimacy of the *Mystic Marriage*.

## 4. Impassioned *Mystic Marriage* Paintings (1520's)

### The Naples *Mystic Marriage*

The *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* by Correggio at the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte in Naples from approximately 1520-22, features the small group of the Virgin Mary, the child Jesus and St. Catherine happily huddled together over the placement of a wedding ring on Catherine's finger (fig 3).<sup>114</sup> The early provenance is uncertain but it is likely the painting by Correggio that Contessa Barbara Sanseverino offered to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua in 1596.<sup>115</sup> It never reached Gonzaga, as Sanseverino was a suspected participant in a conspiracy against the duchy of Parma and her possessions were confiscated in 1612.<sup>116</sup> Several notes in the seventeenth century follow its provenance in Parma until it joined the Farnese collection in Naples in 1734, where it has stayed since 1815, after a brief period in Palermo.<sup>117</sup> No commission document has been found for this particular painting, however its small format is consistent with the understanding that Correggio received many commissions while in Parma, including some for small devotional paintings between his large-scale projects. These small

---

<sup>114</sup> This date is an approximate range I have determined from previous scholarship. Gould noted that the Naples MMoSC was typically dated to late 'teens, but stylistically it aligns better to the early 'twenties. Gould, *Correggio*, 88.

Ekserdjian recorded the Naples painting's date as the 1520s, also claiming it could not be any later than 1521-22 upon comparing its compositional similarities of the Madonna and child to copies of drawings for the *Madonna della Scodella*.

Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 138, 231.

<sup>115</sup> Gould includes this in references of the Naples painting rather than provenance, but it is an association now present in several listings of the painting. Gould cites Luzio, *La Galleria dei Gonzaga venduta all'Inghilterra ...*, 1913, p.98, n.I, "un quadro del Correggio chiamato il Sposalizio di S. Caterina, piccolo, una gioia di estrema bellezza" and translates, "a picture by Correggio called Marriage of St. Catherine, small, a jewel of great beauty." Gould, *Correggio*, 231.

<sup>116</sup> Helge Gamrath, *Farnese: Pomp, Power and Politics in Renaissance Italy* (Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2007), 123.

<sup>117</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 230-31.

paintings were notably of subjects appropriate for private reflection, including the *Virgin* and the *Passion of Christ*.<sup>118</sup>

The Naples *Mystic Marriage* measures 28.5 x 23.5 cm and the treatment of the subject demonstrates a new, intimate approach for Correggio, and the size confirms it is meant to engage with an individual viewer. The two earlier examples set this story in a formal setting, detailing the events and figures, and both paintings served the solemn activity of mass. In this example the function of the image for devotional contemplation allows for exploration and a new conceptualization. Correggio employs a psychological approach that brings together story with spiritual intimacy and sensory stimulation. This new element of sensuality to the purpose of deep spiritual contemplation in the Naples painting, was appreciated in the sixteenth century and this painting was copied several times and prints were widely disseminated.<sup>119</sup> His technique of painting has matured as well; an increased tactility of brushstroke resulting in soft figures and more diffused light that emphasizes the curves of figures.

Correggio has chosen to depict only the three essential figures in the Naples *Mystic Marriage* without hierarchical organization, kneeling on the same level. The Virgin Mary and St. Catherine lean toward each other creating a pyramidal composition, while Jesus sits on Mary's lap and the diagonal of his leg echoes Catherine's pose. The group is arranged very like the group in the Detroit *Mystic Marriage*, but here they are in a close format where the figures fill the composition and are even cropped slightly by the frame. The figures are handled with assurance from the artist and with a mastery of *chiaroscuro* and treatment of volumes through light.<sup>120</sup> Bright light from the left touches each of the figures with a distinctly warm tone,

---

<sup>118</sup> Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 137.

<sup>119</sup> Figures 15-17 are a sample of prints and copies after the Naples *Mystic Marriage* of St. Catherine

<sup>120</sup> Gould noted this progress of using light to represent volume in relation to the Detroit altarpiece. In the Naples *Mystic Marriage*, Correggio has mastered this skill.

highlighting the faces and hands especially. Mary's blue mantle and Catherine's pale green cloak outlines their forms and together frame the group.

Correggio's treatment of Jesus is starkly different from the Detroit and Washington examples. Here Jesus is a fleshy toddler with long, curly hair, wearing a simple white tunic. Although Correggio previously depicted him naked in this subject, the charming proportions of a realistic child are still visible in his illuminated thick arms and legs and cherub-like face. Jesus looks up at Mary joyfully as she helps him bring the ring to Catherine's hand. He is particularly happy with his new bride and looks up at his mother as if to make sure he is giving the ring correctly and to remark how wonderful this moment is. In turning away from the action, the Naples Jesus sits in the delight of this marriage and brings essential emotion to the image. Jesus' head is partly blocked from view by Mary's profile, which is a device seen in other works by Correggio in the 1520s.<sup>121</sup> The cropping of the figures and this casual treatment of the subjects shows personal engagement from the artist.

St. Catherine is a fair, young girl in a bright yellow dress, her hair is braided up with a few strands gently flowing down her neck. Her posture is relaxed and natural as she leans in expectantly toward Jesus. She holds a yellow martyr's palm with the sword and shattered wheel on the ground at her knees, and the crown is absent. Catherine's dress is simple and her lack of crown or other jewelry emphasize her humble virtue. A crown would almost certainly be out of place in this intimate setting and as she kneels next to the spiritual superior, Mary, and their heads are inches apart. Her creamy complexion, slight figure, and gently rosy cheeks effectively present her as the teenage youth from the *passio* within the narrative of the *conversio*. This

---

Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 33.

<sup>121</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 89.

blend of the two traditions of her life was noted earlier and is a consistent pattern in Correggio's *Mystic Marriages*.

The Virgin Mary is taller with a fuller figure than Catherine but without many more years, wrapped in rich garments and a gray veil on her hair; as Ekserdjian notes, they appear like sisters.<sup>122</sup> She joyfully engages in this union as she holds Catherine's left hand ready and guides Jesus's hand with the ring. Mary is an essential character in the subject due to her role as the first *sponsa christi*, she helps initiate the next most recognized bride of Christ, St. Catherine. As the primary example of this intimate relationship with the divine, Mary is the archetype for Catherine in her marriage. More generally, Mary is also entrusted as the mother of all Christians and advocate or primary intercessor of souls.

At the center of the painting, the hands express deep tenderness and a taste of the Correggio's sensual spirituality. Jesus, the Word made flesh, entwines his gentle, child fingers with Catherine's as he brings the ring to her. Mary's hands are the external edges, drawing the two together and encouraging them. The physicality of the figures and warmth of the scene allows for a tactile experience of the painting. All of the figures appear warm with a sensitivity to touch in the treatment of the hands, which offers the concept of touching the divine for contemplation. The space between Catherine's and Jesus' right hand is reminiscent of the sliver between Adam and the Creator's fingers in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* in the Sistine chapel ceiling with a similar spiritual electricity. Although in the case of the *Mystic Marriage*, the moment before they meet is not high above the viewer in a vast room, but right in front of one's eyes in a private setting. The verse, "his left hand is under my head and his right hand shall embrace me" from Song of Songs is a tender image and as Diskant Muir noted, was often

---

<sup>122</sup> Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 138.

depicted literally between Christ and the *sponsa christi*.<sup>123</sup> This sensory thrill was new in the *cinquecento* and augmented the spiritual intimacy while contemplating the subject. Flesh and spirit are both touched in this treatment that shows a new emotional spirituality.

Within the estimated dates of the Naples *Mystic Marriage*, 1520-22, Correggio received the certificate of brotherhood from the Cassinese Congregation, on May 15, 1521.<sup>124</sup> Correggio was growing close to and learning from this community around the time of executing this painting. As Barry Collett explains in *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: The Congregation Santa Giustina of Padua* (1985), one of the focuses of Benedictine monasticism was the pursuit of a personal, intimate relationship with God, which testifies to Correggio's own spiritual engagement with painting.<sup>125</sup> Correggio's affiliation also presumably means he was being introduced to the two essential studies in their order, scripture and the writings of the Church fathers.<sup>126</sup> The artist would be familiar with the Song of Songs not only from his private Christian life, but perhaps from guided study by the Cassinese, and with the writings of Origen of Alexandria. Origen, who wrote extensive commentary on the Song of Songs, laid out serious caution to engaging with the book of the Song of Songs:

“But if any man who lives only after the flesh should approach it, to such a one the reading of this Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love's language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal; and he will be turned away from the spirit to the flesh, and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it will seem to be the Divine Scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust!”<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Song of Songs 2:6, 8:3.

Diskant Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms*, 3-4.

<sup>124</sup> Lucia Fornari Schianchi, ed., *Correggio: a cura di Lucia Fornari Schianchi* (Milano: Skira, 2008), 175.

<sup>125</sup> Collett, *Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation*, 61.

<sup>126</sup> Collett, *Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation*, 60.

<sup>127</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs*, 22.

This is a grave warning to take seriously the spiritual depth of the scriptures and not reduce it to merely erotic notions which would be dangerous to one's own soul and a potentially grave offense to employ sacred scripture for sin. One connected to the Cassinese Congregation and rooted in scripture and patristic teachings, as Correggio was, would know of the greater spiritual value in Song of Songs.

In the *Mystic Marriage* paintings from the 1520s when Correggio formed this connection to the order, he attempts to portray the intimacy of that personal relationship with God with a layer of sensuality to enhance the spiritual truth, not to detract from it. As the third time Correggio painted the subject, The Naples *Mystic Marriage* shows the structural organization adapted from the earlier examples, and the progression in his artistic skills. Correggio paints with confidence, no more halting outlines, and he leaves behind the formal compositions and his reliance on other artists to experiment with the intimate nature of the *Mystic Marriage*. Most especially, this painting shows the vibrant spiritual growth that took place for Correggio due to his religious affiliation with the Cassinese Congregation.

### **Paris *Mystic Marriage***

*The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria with Saint Sebastian* estimated from the mid 1520s (fig 4), now in the Louvre Museum in Paris, measures 105 x 102 cm and is the fourth example in this group. From a description by Vasari of a painting for a doctor friend of Correggio, scholars frequently accept Francesco Grillenzoni of Modena as the owner and patron of this painting.<sup>128</sup> This is the only painting of this series that has been addressed for

---

<sup>128</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 236.  
Periti calls him "possible patron" and "owner-viewer,"  
Periti, "Art and Reform," 683.

spiritual associations in a study by Giancarla Periti, who considered the socio-religious context of its likely patron and his circle.<sup>129</sup> At least by 1614 the painting was recorded in Rome, held by Cardinal Sforza, after which it seems to have passed by purchase to Cardinal Scipione Borghese, and then to Cardinal Antonio Barberini who gave it to Cardinal Mazarin in France, from his family it was purchased by Louis XIV and moved between royal residences in the eighteenth-century until it was recorded in the Louvre in 1801.<sup>130</sup>

The square shape of the Paris painting is unusual and although it is larger than the Naples, it too functioned in private devotion and not liturgical use. The infant Jesus sits naked on The Virgin Mary's lap to the left, and St. Catherine kneels in front of them and offers her hand in the right half of the painting while St. Sebastian looks on from behind her. The background is a hillside landscape with two miniature scenes of the martyrdoms of Catherine and Sebastian. The central figures are approximately life-size and are cropped by the frame at half-length which provides an innovative and inviting experience for the viewer. Warm light is diffused from the center of the painting with strong *chiaroscuro* but no faces divided by the shadows, a change from the harsh light from the left which Correggio employed in both the Naples and Detroit versions. The figures have refined, elegant faces and graceful gestures that demonstrate Correggio's advanced technique and his pleasure engaging with the subject for a fourth time.

The Virgin Mary takes up the left of the painting with her tall figure and billowing red gown and blue mantel which melts into shadow. Mary's mouth is small and her thin eyebrows and pale complexion show a sixteenth century conception of refined beauty. She presents Catherine's hand to Jesus, as Mary is entrusted to plead on peoples' behalf and present their

---

<sup>129</sup> Periti, "Art and Reform," 683-703.

<sup>130</sup> Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 237.

prayers to her son. It looks as though Jesus has taken the ring from Mary to give to Catherine, perhaps she was holding it as a mother holds her child's treasures, or it is a gift from the first *sponsa christi* to the next. Mary has no need to intervene, her peaceful expression demonstrates her surety of Jesus' capability. In this painting, Mary is the advocate for Christians and the peaceful mother of God, a welcoming mother to Catherine by virtue of her faith and by marriage to her son.

Jesus is a large baby in this version, he holds the ring in one hand and Catherine's finger in the other. His gaze is intent on the finger that will receive his ring. He is plump as a cherub and sits close to the viewer with his charming baby form in full light. Resting on his mother's red dress and otherwise outlined by dark shadows, Jesus stands out in his naked, endearing form. The natural proportions of his body and careful focus of his actions present a true child trusted with a special task.

St. Catherine waits for her wedding ring patiently with the same pleasant expression as the Virgin Mary. The two women have virtually the same face but Catherine is petite and her presumably kneeling posture places her head lower than Mary's. Their slightly height difference is a subtle reminder of their spiritual positions, both as brides of Christ but Mary as the specially honored mother of God. Catherine wears a simple white gown with an immense golden mantle draped over her left arm. Her hair is braided on her head with seemingly a single jewel in her hair but no crown. Neither of the two later paintings in this group include a crown, which suggests a gradual diminish from a prominent crown to a tiara to absent entirely. This evolution demonstrates the thought process of Correggio as he determined which attributes were important in each context. Her left hand and the elaborate hilt of a sword rest on a broken wheel while her right hand is offered delicately to Jesus.

Interestingly, the object given special adornment is the sword, Correggio elevates Catherine's martyrdom by treating the implement of death as venerable, a Christian perspective that is seen in ornamented crucifixes, reliquaries holding pieces of human remains or even objects touched by holy people. Her simple attributes of martyrdom are present but this time he visually includes it. The episode in the background is a surprising contrast in tone from the pleasant figures in the foreground; the minuscule Catherine raises her hands in desperate prayer while someone approaches from behind with a sword. This hidden detail demonstrates Correggio's knowledge of the traditions of St. Catherine's life and his evident perspective that both the *passio* and *conversio* are truly fulfilling because it results in a blissful existence with Jesus.

St. Sebastian's legendary death is also included in minuscule in the forest on the left, his presence in the Paris *Mystic Marriage* has resulted in debate among scholars.<sup>131</sup> Sebastian stands behind Catherine in the foreground watching the marriage with an intense gaze that is jarring compared to the three other serene figures. Here Sebastian appears like a gleeful, desirous cupid in the form of a youth, particularly with arrows in hand rather than puncturing his body.<sup>132</sup> Periti studied this painting in the context of religious reform in the *cinquecento*, particularly in the life of the supposed patron, Francesco Grillenzoni, through the figure of St. Sebastian. She was not convinced by Ekserdjian's proposal that he functions as a patron saint for Grillenzoni because of an association with a confraternity to St. Sebastian.<sup>133</sup> His membership to the confraternity is unsatisfactorily cited and even if he were a member of such a group, Periti argues that

---

<sup>131</sup> St. Sebastian's martyrdom here has been connected to studies of a cupid tied to a tree by Correggio. Gould, *The Paintings of Correggio*, 236.

<sup>132</sup> Periti, "Art and Reform," 699.

<sup>133</sup> Periti, "Art and Reform," 696. Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 150.

Grillenzoni was steeped in intellectual meetings and discussion and was likely a patron interested in spiritually stimulating art.<sup>134</sup> She proposes that Correggio developed a complex identity for the figure of St. Sebastian involving the spiritual idea of “inner transformation,” and *nova creatura*, a being “regenerated and made anew by the love and grace of God.”<sup>135</sup> With this perspective, St. Sebastian takes on characteristics of the pagan god Amor and becomes the “archetype of the soul transformed by the experiences of love and faith.”<sup>136</sup>

As in the Naples example, the hands form the heart of the Paris painting in both visual focus and emotional importance. Three hands meet in an intricate moment of connection and covenant sealed. Mary cradles Catherine’s right hand and they rest palm to palm with Catherine’s fingers draping gently between Mary’s. Jesus’ tiny fingers interlace on top of this, selecting the fourth finger for the ring. This layered arrangement plays with the physical feeling of several hands coming together in this ceremony. Particular attention is given to the delicate tactile experience of a child’s tiny hand offering a ring to a young woman. Viewers of this painting see an intimate moment with an intriguing touch at the center. Three hands have come together, two to be bound by a wedding band and a third to support the event. Hands are the sensitive human means of touch and while other senses simulated in painting can be imagined, a tactile experience could be simulated even while one looks at the painting to feel a certain participation as a viewer.

Engaging with the Paris *Mystic Marriage* is a unique experience among the other paintings in this group. While the first two paintings were organized in altarpiece compositions with the given understanding of onlookers, the later two operate in different contexts. The

---

<sup>134</sup> Periti, “Art and Reform,” 696.

<sup>135</sup> Periti, “Art and Reform,” 699.

<sup>136</sup> Periti, “Art and Reform,” 700.

figures in the Naples painting were chosen by Correggio to portray a private group without an audience. No secondary figures are present and Mary and Catherine face each other with Jesus between so that the viewer engages in an almost voyeuristic experience. The Paris *Mystic Marriage* welcomes onlookers in its intimacy. Although the figures are close to each other and do not posture formally as in the Washington and Detroit examples, they are angled and open up to where a viewer would be.

The Paris *Mystic Marriage* is elevated by Correggio's spiritual and artistic growth through the years. In his fourth engagement with this subject, Correggio has a firm understanding of the traditions of St. Catherine's life, scripture studies and has contemplated the intimate union of the *Mystic Marriage* for years. The peaceful atmosphere of the painting, tinged with the sacrifice of martyrdom and a deeply thoughtful approach to St. Sebastian, show Correggio's understanding of the complicated Christian experience of love for God which moves one to sacrifice everything, transforms them completely, and is the most satisfying love of all.

## **Conclusion**

In the four known paintings of the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* by Correggio, there are a variety of visualizations that demonstrate the artist's ability to rethink the subject with deepening spiritual understanding. The paintings, which span many years in his career, show his artistic growth and development of his own compositional choices and his personal, Christian approach to the subject. His relationship with the reformed Benedictines, the Cassinese Congregation, was an essential tool in his spiritual formation and the effect of this connection is clear in the two later works by the artist's confidence in portraying the intimate spiritual concept of divine union.

The four *Mystic Marriages* have been acknowledged for their shared subject which Correggio returned to multiple times but have never been studied in equal consideration of formal design and context of Correggio's own spiritual life. Each example was intended for a slightly different function which determined its size and tone. The wide range of sizes in this group is impressive as the artist adapted the subject to various functions and scales. The resulting group is a diverse collection of *Mystic Marriage* paintings, almost surprisingly accomplished by a single artist.

Correggio accomplished visual representations of spiritual love by his affiliation with the Cassinese and from deep contemplation of divine love. His most unusual lifelong involvement with the topic of St. Catherine's marriage to Christ also supports this understanding of his own spiritual growth and depth. The variety he achieves of one subject represents his external artistic development but much more importantly his spiritual development due to his patronage and personal relationship with the Cassinese. Correggio has long been reduced to merely a sensual artist without interior reflection, and this insight into his spiritual life will lead to more complete understanding of his religious works in future scholarship.

## Figures



Figure 1: Correggio, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, 1510-15, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, D.C.



Figure 2: Correggio, *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with Saints John the Baptist, Anne and Joseph*, 1510-1511, Oil on panel, Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 3: Correggio, *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, 1520-1522, Oil on panel, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples.



*Figure 4: Correggio, Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria with Saint Sebastian, mid 1520s, Oil on panel, Louvre Museum.*



*Figure 5: Monument to Correggio, 1870, Parma.*



Figure 6: Barna da Siena, *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, c.1340, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.



*Figure 7: Barna da Siena, The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine, c.1340, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.*



Figure 8: Francesco Morone, *Virgin and Child, with Saints Onuphrius, Sebastian, Justine, and Ursula*, c.1500, Philadelphia Museum of Art.



*Figure 9: Correggio, Madonna and Child with Saints Francis, Anthony of Padua, Catherine of Alexandria and John the Baptist, 1514-15, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.*



Figure 10: Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna della Vittoria*, 1496, Louvre.



*Figure 11: Lorenzo Costa with collaborators, The Virgin and Child with Saints, 1498-1502, The National Gallery, U.K.*



*Figure 12: Lorenzo Costa, The Holy Family, c. 1490, The Museum of Fine Arts, Lyon.*



*Figure 13: Lorenzo Costa, Allegory of Isabella d'Este's Coronation, 1505-06, Louvre.*



Figure 14: Andrea Mantegna, *The Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1490-1505, The National Gallery, U.K.



Figure 15: Giorgio Ghisi, after Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine by Correggio (Naples), 1575, The British Museum.



Figure 16: Giovanni Battista Mercati, after Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine by Correggio (Naples), 1620, The British Museum.



*Figure 17: Unknown Italian artist, Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine after Correggio (Naples), sixteenth century, Musei Capitolini.*

## Bibliography

- Allentown Art Museum. "Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria with Donor."  
Collections.  
<http://collections.allentownartmuseum.org/detail.php?term=Giovanni+del+Biondo&module=objects&type=keyword&x=0&y=0&kv=786&record=0&module=objects>.
- Barasch, Moshe. *Light and Color in the Italian Renaissance Theory of Art*. New York: New York University Press, 1978.
- Braham, Allan. *Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*. The National Gallery Schools of Painting. London: National Gallery in association with W. Collins, 1985.
- Brown, David Alan. "Correggio's 'Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine' and its Sources."  
*Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 60, no. 3-4 (1982): 100–107.
- Carr, David M. *The Erotic Word : Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Collett, Barry. *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: The Congregation Santa Giustina of Padua*. (Oxford Historical Monographs) New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Coonin, Arnold Victor, ed. *Old Masters in Context: Romanino's Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*. Memphis, Tennessee: Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, 2003.
- Correggio: a cura di Lucia Fornari Schianchi*. Edited by Lucia Fornari Schianchi. Milano: Skira, 2008.
- DeGrazia, Diane. *Correggio and His Legacy: Sixteenth-Century Emilian Drawings*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1984.

- Detroit Institute of Arts. "Correggio: The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, between 1510 and 1514." <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/mystic-marriage-saint-catherine-41473>.
- Diskant Muir, Carolyn. *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms: The Mystic Marriage in Northern Renaissance Art*. London; Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2012.
- Ekserdjian, David. *Correggio*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Gamrath, Helge. *Farnese: Pomp, Power and Politics in Renaissance Italy*. Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2007.
- Gould, Cecil. "Correggio's Altarpieces." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 120, no. 5189 (1972): 308–26.
- Gould, Cecil. *The Paintings of Correggio*. London: Faber, 1976.
- Gronau, Georg. *The work of Correggio: Reproduced in one hundred and ninety-six illustrations*. New York: Brentano's, 1913.
- Hall, Marcia B. *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Hoffner, Helen. *Catholic Traditions and Treasures: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute, 2018.
- Jacobus de Voragine. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. Translated by William Granger Ryan. 2012 ed. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by J.H. Bernard. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000.
- Louvre. "Allégorie de la cour d'Isabelle d'Este." Collections. <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010059310>.

Louvre. “Le Mariage mystique de sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie en présence de saint Sébastien; dans le paysage, martyres de deux saints.” Collections.

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010062408>.

Lynch, Joseph. *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Macrobius. *The Saturnalia*. Translated by Percival Vaughan Davies. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969.

Martini, Pietro. *Studi intorno il Correggio*. Parma: Pietro Grazioli, 1865.

Matter, E. Ann. “Mystical Marriage.” In *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Lucetta Scaraffia, and Gabriella Zarri, 31-41.

Translated by Keith Botsford. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Mengs, Anton Raphael. *Memoirs concerning the Life and Works of Correggio*. Translated by Chevr. Don Joseph Nicholas D'Azara. London: R. Faulder, New Bond Street & G. G. and J. Robinson, Paternoster Row, 1796.

Met Museum. “The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena.”

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438021>.

Meyer, Julius. *Antonio Allegri da Correggio*. (1870) London: Macmillan and Co, 1876.

Murphy, Roland E. *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*. Edited by S. Dean McBride. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Museum of Fine Arts Boston. “The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine.”

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31540/the-mystic-marriage-of-saint-catherine>.

- Muzzi, Andrea. "Alcuni aspetti del mondo religioso e artistico del Correggio e del Parmigianino." In *Correggio: a cura di Lucia Fornari Schianchi*, edited by Lucia Fornari Schianchi, 115-120. Milano: Skira, 2008.
- National Gallery, London. "The Virgin and Child with Saints: Andrea Mantegna." <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/andrea-mantegna-the-virgin-and-child-with-saints>.
- National Gallery of Art, D.C. "The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, 1510/1515." Collection. <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.224.html#bibliography>.
- Origen. *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*. Translated by R.P. Lawson. Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957.
- Periti, Giancarla. "Art and Reform: Correggio's Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with St. Sebastian." *Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no. 3 (2007): 683–704.
- Philadelphia Museum of Art. "Virgin and Child, with Saints Onuphrius, Sebastian, Justine, and Ursula." <https://www.philamuseum.org/collection/object/101963>.
- Pungileoni, Luigi. *Memorie Istoriche di Antonio Allegri detto Il Correggio*. Vol I-III. Parma: Dalla Stamperia ducale, 1817.
- Ricci, Corrado. *Antonio Allegri Da Correggio: His Life, His Friends, and His Time*. Translated by Florence Simmonds. London: William Heinemann, 1896.
- Rapisarda, Stefano. "A Ring on the Little Finger: Andreas Capellanus and Medieval Chiromancy." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 69, (2006): 175–91.
- Schefer, Jean Louis. *Lumière Du Corrège : Le Mariage Mystique De Sainte Catherine*. Paris: P.O.L, 1999.

- Sevcenko, Nancy. "The 'Vita' Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 53 (1999), 149-165.
- Sevcenko, Nancy. "The Monastery of Mount Sinai and the Cult of Saint Catherine." *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, 2006.
- Scaraffia, Lucetta, and Gabriella Zarri, eds. *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*. Translated by Keith Botsford. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Smyth, Carolyn. *Correggio's Frescoes in Parma Cathedral*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Stollhans, Cynthia. *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art: Case Studies in Patronage*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2014.
- "The Curiosities of Antiquity: Hand Rings." *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* 1, no. 1 (1853): 10–12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20537876>.
- Tiraboschi, Girolamo. *Biblioteca modenese, o Notizie de' pittori, scultori, incisori, e architetti nati degli stati del serenissimo signor Duca di Modena*. Vol VI. Modena: La Società Tipografica, 1786.
- Varnhagen, Hermann. *Zur geschichte der legende der Katharina von Alexandrien*. Erlangen: F. Junge, 1891.
- Vasari, Giorgio. *The Lives of the Artists*. (1568) Translated with an introduction and notes by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Vasari, Giorgio. *Artists of the Renaissance: A Selection from 'Lives of the Artists.'* (1568) Translated by George Bull. New York: The Viking Press, 1978.

Walker, John. *National Gallery of Art, Washington*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1984.

Walsh, Christine. *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe*. London:  
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.