

Of Her Substance: Dress and Fecundity in Renaissance Painting

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**Abstract**

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Garments do not merely adorn women's bodies; dress shapes and crafts femininity. This dissertation centers a common Italian Renaissance female dress shape, a forward swell of skirts above the womb, usually mistaken by beholders as a visual indication of pregnancy. I term this silhouette gravid dress. I examine how early modern dress illustrated and tailored Renaissance gender norms, particularly in terms of promoting pregnancy and motherhood as the key womanly virtues. I argue early modern women's clothing championed pregnancy through sartorial accommodation by encouraging Renaissance wives to fill their luxurious skirts with new life and imbue the expensive pleats with purpose. My study analyzes paintings, particularly portraits, surviving dress objects, and sixteenth-century costume books to examine how early modern fashion dictated the shape and scope of women's bodies. It intertwines feminism and gender studies, fashion history and theory, art history, and book history.

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“To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth—what a work to be in any way present at, to assist in, though only as a lamp-holder!”

—George Elliot, *Middlemarch*

“Thin cloths, thick, new, and old ones, with broken and entire plaits; sweet ruffles, shaded ones, and less shaded, reflected and not reflected, expeditious and confused ones, according to the distance and various colors; and garments according to rank, long and short, flying and stiff according to the movements; such as fit to the figures, or fly and with the seams flutter upward, or downward according to the plaits, and as such cling to the feet and keep from them, according to the posture of bending or turning or thrusting of the legs within them; such as fit to the joints or keep off from them, according to the thread, or the movement, or the wind, which is feigned; and that the plaits be accommodated to the quality of the cloths, transparent or opaque.”

—Leonardo da Vinci on the dress of his day, *Libro A*, 1505

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## Introduction: Why Does She Look Pregnant?

Dress fashions selfhood. In much Renaissance visual culture costumes communicate sitter identity. A green sable-lined dress pooling on the floor. Wealth spilling between gaps in gowns and dagged sleeves. A headpiece lined with seed pearls and draped in gauzy lace. Painted cornflower gowns appearing across panels to whisper secrets of hidden love and beauty cut short by death. Painted dyes signaling personal virtue and fervent spirituality. Flying draperies visualize magical energies as a strange antique nymph dances across a Biblical scene. Symbolic animals, fruits, and flowers embroidered onto gowns fit for public promenades. A grieving widower's initials and family crest brocaded onto a yellow silk day dress. Clothing, a worn art form touting aesthetic multidimensionality, was essential to the Renaissance.

Fashion is social control; it is both content and relationship.<sup>1</sup> Garments touched all aspects of early modern life, incorporating disaggregate concepts such as religion and sexuality. Mary spun in the temple. John 19:23 chronicles that Christ wore a seamless gown at his crucifixion.<sup>2</sup> The bodies of upper-class women were generally off limits, but in public ladies wore light-catching and elaborately-ornamented fabrics that begged viewers to look but not touch. It has even been proposed that married couples did not entirely disrobe in the conjugal bed, keeping their chemises on for the carnal act.<sup>3</sup> Strictly gendered clothing generally began in

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Carter, *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes, Dress, Body, Culture*, (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2003), 67.

<sup>2</sup> King James Version, John 19:23.

<sup>3</sup> Jill Burke, *The Italian Renaissance Nude*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 50-51. See also the marginal note in Florimond de Raemond's copy of Montaigne's *Essays*, "I have often heard the author say that although he, full of love, ardor and youth, had married his very beautiful and very lovable

the early-to-mid-fourteenth century, the repercussions of which still reverberate down to us, nearly six hundred years later.<sup>4</sup>

In the Renaissance, fashion imaged the deep absence of parity between men and women. Clothing rendered women as expensively-decorated living dolls tasked with diligently signposting familial honor and personal morality through their appearance. Women married young and set to the business of extending family lineages. Fashion played no small part in this process. Dress inflicted motherhood on Renaissance women, demanded a justification of all the money carried on their backs.

Within this *milieu*, women's adornment took on a similar, strange form. It is not difficult to locate. Indeed, the query underlying this introduction, and which serves as its title, is one that often comes up in a Renaissance art history course. A slide of a beautifully styled lady is projected. Her body curves strangely about the waist. The figure was considered flawless during her lifetime, but her physical form is quite different from our twentieth century beauty norms. A student raises her hand and asks, "Why does she look pregnant?" It is a complicated question. Why do modern viewers read her body as pregnant? The artist did not conceptualize the figure as

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wife, yet the fact is that he had never played with her except with respect for the honor that the marriage bed requires, without ever having seen anything but her hands and face uncovered, and not even her breast, although among other women he was extremely playful and debauched." Quoted by Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live, Or, A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer*, (Other Press ed. New York: Other Press, 2011), 159.

<sup>4</sup> While headgear and tunic length (at the hemlines and sleeves) differed for men and women in Middle Ages, separate garments tailored for specific, gendered bodies largely emerged in the Quattrocento. Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, (New ed. Oxford: Berg, 2003), 42-58.

sustaining an actual gestation. The shape is a mystery. This study was born in such classroom discussions, and my journey to codify the specific silhouette led me to a set of diverse inquiries: what did expectant women wear before the twentieth-century advent of maternity garments?<sup>5</sup> In a society that fetishized both clothing and childbirth, how did Renaissance culture pair the two together? Why was a larger midsection on depicted women so common within Renaissance picture making? Where did the shape begin? Did Renaissance viewers read larger female figures as featuring “the creature in the womb?”<sup>6</sup> Despite the tremendous scholarly and popular attention paid to early modern depictions of women, these questions persist. I endeavor to provide answers.

Pictures of clothed women executed across the Italian peninsula between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries often exhibit a similar body type. Irrespective of format, style, or genre, tight bodices frequently relent to projecting midsections beneath empire waistlines. Fantastical goddesses, brides-to-be, married women, and virginal saints all showcase rounded torsos beneath lavish gowns in Italian art. The shape is grounded in form, fashioned through modeling, and expressed by pose, drapery, and gesture. The central question my dissertation pursues is: why was a protruding midsection, often read by scholars and lay art viewers alike as indicative of pregnancy, an accepted trope of female pictorial representation through much of the early modern period? While a wide swath of Renaissance female bodies by modern standards appear

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<sup>5</sup> Maternity wear as a specifically designed clothing genre is an outgrowth of first- and second-wave feminism.

<sup>6</sup> This euphemism for a fetus comes from the period advice manual *Delle medicine partenenti all'infermità delle donne*, quoted by Rudolph M. Bell, *How to Do It Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 73.

fleshy and voluptuous, my dissertation exclusively treats those that objectively and hyperbolically resemble a pregnant form by bowing convexly outwards from a tight waist. Gravid dress comprises a spectrum of drapery that overly emphasizes the female belly, the visual expression of germination through garb. My project establishes the iconography of the mysteriously-pregnant body.

My study participates in the relationship between gender and period artistic practice by focusing directly on female bodies presented as gestating or potentially gestational. To confront this topic, my project cuts across the disciplines of women's and gender studies, art history, and costume history by examining Renaissance representation and visual culture through art historical methodology. It cannot be said that the seemingly-pregnant midsections prevalent in representations of Renaissance women were caused exclusively by idiosyncrasies of any single pictorial genre. History paintings, religious scenes, and secular images all boast slender women whose belly-centered bodies showcase a forward swell directly above waistlines. While the implications of such a search are widespread, I narrow my focus by examining specific groups of objects that elucidate larger cultural claims.

This study considers the early modern anxiety piqued by painting women's bodies with suggestively-generative bellies, especially pointed in the case of holy women. The project's title is drawn from an apposite primary text. Florence's archbishop between 1446 and 1459, Antonio Pierozzi, bemoaned the Renaissance proclivity to apply artistic license to sacred imagery. Pierozzi writes, "Painters are to be blamed when they paint things contrary to our faith—when they represent...in the Annunciation, an already formed infant, Jesus, being sent into the Virgin's womb, as if the body he took on were not of her substance."<sup>7</sup> A few lines later, he admonishes

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition

artists further with the denunciation that “they are not to be praised, either when they paint apocryphal matter, like having midwives at the Nativity...”<sup>8</sup> Absent from the archbishop’s scrupulous diatribe, however, is mention of the Virgin’s swelling body. Indeed, Frank Ferrie believes this quote may be read as an implicit approval of the contemporary penchant to paint Mary with a pregnant midsection inflating beneath her azure vestments in Madonna del Parto imagery.<sup>9</sup> In his original text Pierozzi uses the Latin, word “*substantia*,” which developed into the Italian term “*sostanza*.” *Sostanza* inherited from its Latin etymological mother connotations of essence, reality, or livelihood. Other valences include the philosophical notion of transcendence, change, and *genericus* or generation.<sup>10</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the English word “substance” at its earliest to the fourteenth century, where my project begins.<sup>11</sup> The first valences of the word in this linguistic system are theological, pertaining to the inimitable and unexplainable substance that is the Christian Godhead. I also wish to engage the word “substance” for its ontological roots. This project takes as a point of departure that Renaissance painters often embedded pregnancy, sexuality, and fertility into their artwork, but mostly because

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 43 and 163. In the original Latin: “Vel in Annuntiatione Virginis parvolum puerum formatum, scilicet Jesum, mitti in uterum Virginis, quasi non esset de substantia Virginis ejus corpus assumptum.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Ferrie, “Piero Della Francesca’s Madonna Del Parto and the Function of Images of the Pregnant Virgin Mary,” *Dandelion: Postgraduate Arts Journal and Research Network* 2, no. 1 (2011): 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> “Sostanza s.f.” In *Vocabolario Dizionario Treccani Online*, l’Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani S.p.A.

<sup>11</sup> “Substance, N.” In *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, n.d.

they strove to recreate the natural world, and women dressed to exaggerate their midsections in reality. Pregnancy and its pursuit were deeply part of a woman's life—her substance—in the Renaissance period. If “marriage is a key to the past,” then the product of marriage, a legitimate heir, further unlocks the door.<sup>12</sup> This project investigates imagery and clothing, intertextual nodes illuminating a spectrum of Renaissance substance, to better understand why women's bodies often inhabit a *trompe l'oeil* “pregnancy.”

To remark on the continuum of women's bodily shapes is to transverse complicated art historical terrain. How can we ever be sure a woman is truly depicted pregnant? While this is an avenue of inquiry that swirls within my dissertation, answering it in regards to any given picture is not my main goal. Throughout the text, I indicate when scholarship generally agrees a female figure is truly (and exceptionally) depicted pregnant. Figure 82 is one putative example. However, my aim is to demonstrate that the shape's orthodoxy across early modern imagery—in pictures generally regarded as containing a pregnancy or not—destabilizes this very question. I argue the dichotomy of pregnant/not pregnant is semipermeable and, in the end, largely unhelpful. The question, therefore, is not: is she pregnant? Return instead to the title of this introduction. Why, indeed? The persistent shape provides the project's etiology.

## **Approach**

Hundreds of photographic reproductions of fashionable Renaissance women lie before me, all draped the same way: beautifully and elegantly domelike. The costume shape this project interrogates—one that styles its female host as illusorily or suggestively fecund—I have labeled

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<sup>12</sup> Andrea Bayer ed., *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; New Haven; Yale UP, 2008), 9.

gravid dress. I find this term particularly useful when harnessing all its etymological roots, both early modern and modern, towards defining it within my project. In 1598, the term “gravid” meant “Woemen when they are gravide with Childe.”<sup>13</sup> The late sixteenth-century version finds foundation in the Latin word *gravidus*, meaning ‘laden, pregnant,’ and from *gravis* or ‘heavy.’ In our post-modern world, the term gravid still holds associations with childbearing, but also connotes a fullness of meaning, or a specified quality. Combining both senses of the term illustrates the iconographic weight of gravid dress. As we will see, this trend in female dressing was caused by clothing and was not representative of the female body beneath. It does not indicate that a figure in a portrait, history scene, or minor object is truly pregnant. However, gravid dress was—if the reader will permit—pregnant with meaning. I argue it was vividly linked with the pursuit of pregnancy, and the close association between women’s bodies and their role as future and current mothers.

It is necessary to delineate the scope of gravid dress within Renaissance images, including conceptual and visual zones in which the shape cannot be traced. Gravid dress does not appear on antique statuary, the inexhaustible well of artistic precedent for Renaissance painters. This is likely because the shape was caused by sexual difference in early modern dress, and Classical clothing was largely gender neutral. In Greek sculpture, the arrangement of a chiton may help determine whether a figure is a goddess or a mortal woman, but those garments did not extend outwards about the waist. Rounded bellies offset by small waists were unique to the late medieval and Renaissance eras. As the period advanced and the female form replaced the male as the palette for exploring beauty, the shape remained relatively constant. It is sparse in early medieval depictions of women, and does not exist in the non-gendered clothing trends that

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<sup>13</sup> “Gravid, Adj.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, n.d..

dominated much of pre-Renaissance costume in the Western world. Later, the bulging midsection generally disappears from depictions in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, delimiting the timeframe of the “pregnant” female body from as extending from c. 1400 into the seventeenth century.

My dissertation surveys images of women from a birds-eye perspective to document that to be fashionably fleshy was solely a Renaissance *topos*. It pinpoints the widespread presence of the illusorily-gravid female body as reflected in paintings, prints, early illustrated books, and manuscripts. While not strictly linear, this study traces the dissemination of gravid dress across artistic tropes from medieval forerunners to the end of the representative chain. While the presence of the misleadingly-pregnant body type is too widespread for any one study to successfully encompass, my dissertation creates a chronological timeline of the strangely-gravid body, highlighting when the shape first entered into artistic discourse, its consolidation as a visual standard, its dissemination and evolution across genre and figure type, and finally its exit from visual culture.

This idiosyncratically Renaissance taste for curvaceous feminine bodies is further confined to painting, prints, and illustrations. Indeed, the shape seems closely associated with two-dimensional imagery. Even Luccia della Robbia’s *Visitation* scene—a Biblical story where pregnancy is crucial to the plot—does not showcase a pregnant Mary or Elizabeth. Moreover, the only instance in secular Italian sculpture I have located that incorporates an illusorily-pregnant body is the funeral effigy of Ilaria del Carretto in Lucca Cathedral (fig. 1). Most likely sculpted and installed in 1406, the lovely effigy is attributed to Jacopo della Quercia.<sup>14</sup> Scholars debate if

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<sup>14</sup> Allan Marquand, “The Tomb of Ilaria Del Carretto.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 19, no. 1 (1915): 24-25.

Ilaria's body is meant to signal the cause of her untimely childbed death at twenty-six years old in 1405.<sup>15</sup> Ilaria lies in repose, her dress a topographic survey of her possibly-gestational body. However, the deceased mother's folded hands clasped over the belly is a common pose enacted by funerary figures from the medieval period onwards. With the known impetus of her death and its potential presence in her posthumous portrait, Ilaria del Carretto is a sculptural counterpart to the painted Giovanna Tornabuoni discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. However, I do not believe Ilaria is represented as truly pregnant, but *suggestively* pregnant. My project tackles this crucial distinction throughout. Her gown, with its high collar, underlayers, and tight belting, though French in style, projects the typical below-waist swell I have identified in costumes across Europe.

Sculptors other than della Quercia shied away from rendering women with bulging bellies. As will be examined throughout this project, depicting actual pregnancy was largely considered indecorous throughout the early modern period. The subtractive process necessitated a male sculptor putting his hands on marble to create a pregnant female body, a body that clearly had engaged in sexual intercourse (saintly players notwithstanding). The undeniable presence and tactility inherent in the sculptural medium would have made chiseling a pregnant form too visceral.

In the translation from reality to fictional representation, painted drapery continues to enact its power. While my dissertation employs a wide range of late medieval and early modern pictorial artifacts, portraiture plays a major role. I follow John Shearman's contention that of all Renaissance art, portraiture "gave the impression of the most frequent and the most varied

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<sup>15</sup> Jacqueline Musacchio, for example, believes she is. Jacqueline Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 30.

communication with the spectator.”<sup>16</sup> Alexander Nagel locates the origin of Renaissance portraits in Byzantine icons, but the body type of flattened, nearly shapeless Marys in stiff hieratic poses cannot be the impetus for suggestively-pregnant female bodies.<sup>17</sup> This genre additionally provides rich evidence of the meticulous attention paid to costume, especially feminine garments, in early modern paintings in both Northern and Southern Europe. Female faces were highly idealized, but clothing and jewelry was often rendered in careful detail. The genre records clothes rather than women. While male Renaissance portraiture, on the other hand, may express subject identity, I argue pictures of women instead communicate the agenda of artist or patron. Because the “pregnant” bellies in likenesses of women both fantastical and veristic rarely signal actual pregnancy, I claim instead that larger forms on women were reflective of an ideal (and idealized) shape. Period writing abounds with remarks affirming that the exemplary female body was fleshy and curvaceous. For instance, in a diatribe condemning material excess, Saint Bernardino derogatorily observed that beneath female public dress laid “fine linen undergarments, of cloth so soft and fine that [the] flesh stays smooth and fat.”<sup>18</sup> I believe this wider cultural standard is reflected in much Renaissance pictorial representation in portraits and beyond.

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<sup>16</sup> John Shearman, *Only Connect--: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts ; 1988, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Nagel, “Icons and Early Modern Portraits,” in *El Retrato Del Renacimiento*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2008), 423-424.

<sup>18</sup> Bernardino da Siena, *Le Prediche Volgari*, translated by Luciano Banchi, Tipeditall’insegdi S. Bernardino, (1880), 141.

Although fleshy bodies undulating beneath sumptuous fabrics were sexually desirable during the Renaissance, a fully swollen midriff appears rarely on nudes in Italian painting.<sup>19</sup> Undraped female bodies in Italian art infrequently exhibit the slender waisted, large-bellied body type combination, proving that costuming is largely responsible for the seemingly-gravid body. This dichotomy appears in painted depictions of Boccaccio's Griselda story in the *Decameron*, such as the National Gallery's *spalliera* panels (figs. 2 and 3). Patient Griselda—a character whose narrative epitomizes the transformative power of clothing in the period—is forced to disrobe before a crowd. As Griselda publicly sheds her thick layers and returns to her father's house wearing only her shift, her large midsection deflates. The shape lives in the clothes, not her actual body. Nudes are a standard for exploring femininity in art, but the gravid shape I pursue is caused by drapery, not the body beneath. Through highlights and chiaroscuro, early modern artists modeled rounded midsections on nude females from Botticelli's *Venus* to Titian's *belle donne* lounging before mirrors, busy at their toilette, to Marcantonio Raimondi's lascivious *I Modi* print series, yet bellies that read as straightforwardly parturient are missing in both the imagery and attendant scholarship. Even at their fleshiest at the end of his career, Titian's late nudes would not be described as seemingly with child. Ann Hollander argues that throughout history, clothing shaped the body, not the other way around.<sup>20</sup> My research confirms her claims.

For artists, an illusorily-gravid torso signaled essential femininity, equally as important for expressing a woman's form as breasts, inward curving waistlines, or long hair in completed pictures of draped women. Joanne Bernstein suggests the introduction of live female models in

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<sup>19</sup> My dress-centered study focuses little on Northern Renaissance art, where a wider predilection for nudes with swelling abdomens can be traced.

<sup>20</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 92.

the artist's studio may be traced in the resultant images, noting that the model's unprecedented presence in the late fifteenth century coincided with a spike in the production of female nudes.<sup>21</sup> Prior to this, the translation from an in-studio boy model to the drawn female figure necessitated adding breasts and a larger belly. In the coming chapters, I argue gravid dress found completion in the addition of clothing, and its outward curve telegraphed the female body. This Renaissance influx of female models added an element of sensuality to the studio space and the figures of women produced therein. Bernstein explains "the postures [of female figures] were constructed so that the bodies unraveled outwards from a central axis into the pictorial space."<sup>22</sup> Twisted and contorted female bodies flirtatiously hide pudenda while exposing breasts and stomachs, passively and palatably offering these corporeal elements to the male viewer. For instance, Raphael's *Fornarina*, likely drawn from a live model, presents unblushing sensuality through the sitter's curvaceous torso.<sup>23</sup> The half-nude baker's daughter may be described as fleshy, but would not be mistaken as pregnant.

If Bernstein is correct, then the bodies of women in Renaissance visual tradition may reflect the actual bodies of Renaissance women. This further substantiates my overarching theory that the ideal female body during the early modern period was overwhelmingly one that was voluptuous and plump. Yet this does not answer the question posed in the title of this introduction. The ideal Renaissance female body was larger, but the shape I pursue was caused by costuming. Most Italian nudes, whether in allegory, myth, or genre, did not showcase the

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<sup>21</sup> Joanne G. Bernstein, "The Female Model and the Renaissance Nude: Dürer, Giorgione, and Raphael," *Artibus et Historiae* 13, no. 26 (1992): 58.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

strangely-pregnant midsections of properly clothed women.<sup>24</sup> The gravid shape, therefore, cannot simply be dismissed as a reflection of ideal feminine beauty.

Nudes proliferated at the time, but very little writing—including treatises penned by Renaissance artists themselves—was dedicated to designing women’s midsections. Yet at the same time, meticulous understanding of the human body was the backbone of Renaissance artistic pursuit. The art making process grounded in *disegno* was described by several period artists, such as Leon Battista Alberti and Albrecht Dürer.<sup>25</sup> However, resurrecting what early moderns thought of female bellies from these sources is difficult; decorum disallowed such lewd musings in treatises. Further, the sources seem unconcerned with describing women’s stomachs. The definitive Renaissance man himself, Leonardo da Vinci, was much more interested in dissecting human bodies than adumbrating their proportions.<sup>26</sup> While painting manuals attest to

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<sup>24</sup> Beauty conventions differed radically between clothed and unclothed female bodies. While idealized, draped bodies affect seemingly-pregnant contours, nudes largely do not, despite a growing interest in fleshiness in the period. From Ferrara to Florence, young unmarried women depicted in the nude are thin with bellies that are soft but not gravid.

<sup>25</sup> Painting manuals by Cennino Cennini, Leonardo da Vinci, Benvenuto Cellini, Giorgio Vasari, Anton Francesco Doni, Orfeo Boselli, Leon Battista Alberti, and Albrecht Dürer were assessed.

<sup>26</sup> Between 1510 and 1512 Leonardo da Vinci created the first known study to correctly show the position of a human fetus gestating within a womb, an innovative moment preceded by highly detailed drawings of male and female viscera. However, da Vinci’s direct observations from live dissections stalwartly adhere to the imperative that the female body was largely the same as the male, differing only in the reproductive organs. Joanne Bernstein elucidates this clearly: “Leonardo’s extant drawings of female anatomy...are restricted to the female genitalia and reproductive organs, whereas the extant anatomical drawings of the male include a wide range of detailed studies of the muscular and skeletal systems as well

the attention artists paid to the fascination with female bodies as a whole, these sources are surprisingly mute on the subject of the correct depiction of womanly curves. In his *Autobiography* (1558-1566), Benvenuto Cellini bragged about his sexual relationships with multiple female models, but does not describe the bodies of those very women, who, in his words, “I made [to] serve my pleasure, out of spite against her husband, jeering at them both the while.”<sup>27</sup> Alberti’s *On Painting* (published 1435), a commanding treatise on the Renaissance merger of mathematics and art, only briefly touches on the portrayal of human bodies. Alberti writes, “with regard to size, therefore, one must observe a certain ratio, which in calculation it is certainly useful, in painting living beings, to screen out at first, by skill, the bones.”<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately for my purposes, Alberti does not specify these ratios. Instead, he advises

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as the reproductive organs.”<sup>26</sup> In da Vinci’s imaginative presentation of a male and female couple locked in coitus, for example, the x-ray-like image of their respective interiorities fully delineates the man’s body (demonstrating the inner workings of extramission sight theory), but his partner is made up of a swath of detailed lines at the reproductive organs that gradually fade then disappear past her breasts. It is no small coincidence, then, that the *Vitruvian Man* is a man. Bernstein, “The Female Model and the Renaissance Nude: Dürer, Giorgione, and Raphael,” 51. For more da Vinci’s obsession with human anatomy, see Leonardo, da Vinci, *Leonardo on the Human Body*, (New York: Dover, 1983), Martin Clayton, *Leonardo Da Vinci, Anatomist*, (London: Royal Collection Publications, 2012), and *Leonardo Da Vinci: The Anatomy of Man: Drawings from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II*, 1st ed., (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts; Boston), 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Benvenuto Cellini, *Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, translated by John Addington Symonds (2003), Chapter XXXIV.

<sup>28</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *Leon Battista Alberti: On Painting: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, translated by R. Sinisgalli, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 56.

prospective painters to turn to the visually nurturing world around them for guidance, declaring “moreover, as Nature herself displays to the common good all these proportions arranged well, so the diligent painter will find no little usefulness in examining them through his own work from Nature herself.”<sup>29</sup> Throughout this chapter, the writer does not distinguish between depicting men and women.

Underwriting Alberti’s text is the Aristotelian theory that regarded the female body as a corrupted version of its masculine foil. Contemporary voices are equally reticent to separately describe making male and female bodies. Dürer, a prolific writer, laid plans to publish his *Four Books on Human Proportion*, which went to print posthumously in 1528.<sup>30</sup> Dürer shares Alberti’s theory that drawing women begins with drawing a man, just as God pulled Eve from Adam’s rib. Unlike his Italian counterpart, however, Dürer painstakingly explains how he arrives at accurate proportions in meticulous detail and precise measurements. Yet for all his geometry, Dürer does not describe stomachs. Faces, hands, feet, and height are all delineated with care, but the text does not remark upon torso curvature. Seemingly-pregnant bellies existed between the lines of the canon of proportions.

Dürer’s illustrations in *Four Books on Human Proportion*, however, tell a different story. His studies inflate female midsections but do not treat male figures the same way. Figure 4, a simple anatomical drawing labeled “a normal woman,” curves the belly outward above her hips when shown in profile. The “slender youth,” a male, does not exhibit nearly the same convexity (fig. 5). Alternate versions of this study display a similar focus and expansion of this specific

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Albrecht Dürer, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, translated by William Conway, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 229.

region on female bodies. In figure 6, Dürer identified the parts of the woman's body. Directly above the stomach is "in navel," while below is "end the hips," and "end the belly," but he does not point out the curving midsection itself. Added flesh equated to a female body.

Dürer does not call attention to this gendered dichotomy in his anatomical labels, but in the companionate images. In his drawings, such as figure 7, Dürer further emphasizes his enlarged bellies on women. In this example, the figure even places her hands on her midsection to call further attention to her exaggerated contours. In his treatise, Dürer writes, "and so in all figures, be they hard or soft, fleshy or thin, one part must not be fat and another bony...for all things must be agreed together in symmetry and not be falsely mingled. Things that agree in symmetry together are considered beautiful."<sup>31</sup> Dürer therefore believes his drawings, projecting bellies and all, are proportional and beautiful. Yet these treatises, for the little work they do to explain how to correctly draw curvaceous women in studies, elucidate even less the presence of swollen bellies on finalized, clothed figures.

To fully interrogate the significance of seemingly-pregnant dress, my study relies on several theoretical frameworks. However, very little scholarly work on the strangely-pregnant shape predates my project. To address this, my dissertation interlinks three overarching humanities fields: art history, women's and gender studies, and fashion history and theory to draw connections between aesthetics, biology, and costume. Additionally, much of my work turns to primary Renaissance treatises on etiquette, beauty, and art making.

Despite its widespread occurrence, art historical scholarship has yet to elucidate the illusorily-pregnant shape's origin. Jill Burke noted in her academic blog that in modern art criticism misogynist language pervades the reading of nude females with relaxed torsos. A red

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<sup>31</sup> Dürer, *The Writings of Albrecht Dürer*, 246.

chalk drawing of a naked woman by Rosso Fiorentino in the Uffizi, which famously displays a slack midriff, is often interpreted as pregnant due to its fleshiness.<sup>32</sup> Burke maintains that the inflated area prevalent on images of women, including Michelangelo's strangely-embodied *Night*, signposts not a body fixed in a gestational moment, but a postpartum one, wearing the resultant shape like a badge of honor.<sup>33</sup> In contrast with Burke, I do not believe that larger female bodies are indicative of the lived experience of pregnancy save in rare instances. Instead, the shape was a standard for female beauty in the period, which explains its ubiquity notwithstanding the marital status of the figure. There are a handful of other art historians who have noticed the shape in a myriad of contexts. The work of Stephen Campbell, Joanna Woods-Marsden, Penny Howell Jolly, and Diane Wolfthal will be discussed at length in respective thematic chapters.

A significant preoccupation in Renaissance art history concerns the concept of period response to images. The power of art to elicit a reaction in the viewer (whether premeditated or unintentional) was expansively documented by David Freedburg in his 1989 watershed study.<sup>34</sup> Each section of the dissertation contemplates clothing within theories of psychological spectator response. I believe costume itself was animated towards the expectation of pregnancy in both pictures and lived reality. My study begins by proposing women enjoyed a special, haptic relationship with clothing and drapery both within images and in daily Renaissance life. I then

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<sup>32</sup> Jill Burke, "'Is She Pregnant, or Just out of Shape?' Misogyny and Description in Art History," *Jill Burke's Blog*, June 18, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> David Freedburg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

argue costume books further spread this response to the reading public of Europe. In the following section, I transition to the few extant portraits of pregnant sitters, to argue that these pictures insist the spectator acknowledge the sitter's physical state through gesture and direct optical communication. Finally, I propose that images of impossibly gravid female saints solidified in the minds of female viewers that pregnancy was a virtuous, ideal state to be attained. This section then turns Marian imagery to argue the Virgin's often overtly-exaggerated midsection cued a physical and spiritual response in the female viewer, used by women to engender successful pregnancy.

Material concerning women and gender in the early modern field is vast. To assess the unwieldy amount of scholarship concerning Renaissance womanhood, this dissertation makes a targeted intervention at the crossroads between pregnancy, costume, and feminine experience. My dissertation engages with the work of: Patricia Simons, Elizabeth Cropper, Judith Brown, Adrian Randolph, Fredrika Jacobs, Caroline Murphy, Mary Garrard, Babette Bohn, and many others across the following pages. The work of David Alan Brown, for example, curator of the 2001-2002 exhibition *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women* at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and editor of its accompanying catalogue, is paramount to my study. Similarly, Andrea Bayer's edited collection of essays *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* is an essential source. While the former catalogue surveys female portraiture, the latter focuses on minor objects associated with marriage and thus women's lives. My study brings together both to paint a full picture of "pregnant" dress and its significance across Renaissance art. These and countless other directed enquiries have disrupted the claim made by Jacob Burckhardt that the rise of humanist education effected gender equality during the

Renaissance.<sup>35</sup> Armed with feminist theory, scholars have reconstructed a view of the early modern world that elucidates female lived experience through its presentation within patriarchally-dominated visual culture.<sup>36</sup>

While the gravid dress shape was not meant to indicate actual pregnancy, I argue throughout this project it is directly linked to gender norms that consistently considered women in tandem with childbirth and gestation. Essential to my treatment of early modern women, therefore, is an in-depth consideration of Renaissance pregnancy. Whether Titian's 1559 dramatic revelation of Callisto's pregnancy to Diana (wherein the offending nymph's body looks no different from any other figures', including the ever-virginal goddess) or Bocaccio's Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello tormenting poor Calandrino into thinking he's going to have a baby, pregnancy was everywhere in the Renaissance. Several advice manuals on conception, pregnancy, and birth informed early modern women about the details of their changing bodies and how to make a boy.<sup>37</sup> However, it appears rarely in the portraiture record. Figure 85, for example, is a representative of typical birth scenes on trays made for expectant and new mothers. A parturient woman sits upon a birthing stool, her midsection bulging in labor. Her body is meant to signal actual childbirth. However, her gravid shape is not at all unlike the majority of

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<sup>35</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 3rd ed., (Arts & Letters, London: Phaidon, 1995).

<sup>36</sup> For an extended historiography of the key feminist Renaissance studies conducted since Joan Kelly's catalytic essay "Did women have a Renaissance?" (1977), the first major reconceptualization of Burckhardt's claim, see Judith C. Brown and Robert Charles, *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy, Women and Men in History*, (London; New York: Longman, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> See Bell, *How to Do It Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, 23.

representations treated in this study. Early modern artists did not make a distinction between a pregnant woman and a woman who was expected to fall pregnant in the future.

The study of early modern pregnancy is a journey into pain and death. Jacqueline Musacchio is the primary expert on the presence of pregnancy in Renaissance artwork. Musacchio argues pregnancy and the Renaissance were more deeply interconnected than in previous centuries.<sup>38</sup> The bubonic plague swept through fourteenth-century Europe, taking with it thirty to sixty percent of the continent's population.<sup>39</sup> Musacchio believes this loss deeply reverberated throughout early modern culture, and may be read across Renaissance literary and visual art. I situate gravid dress as an extension of Musacchio's communal rebuilding theory.<sup>40</sup> Her groundbreaking work calls attention to the fact that scholars have shied away from truly engaging with pregnancy. The topic exists within a contradiction. While it was a near-constant presence throughout an early modern woman's life, it is difficult to track. History erases women's lived experience; much of Renaissance art history subsequent to Jacob Burckhardt has attempted to resurrect it. However, at the same time I sense a hesitation in the field to acknowledge, study, and fully address early modern womanhood, especially within the realms of pregnancy and childbirth. My dissertation considers pregnancy a transformative process situated at the crossroads between magic, religion, and science, the investigation of which may elucidate a distinctly female response to images and art objects.

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<sup>38</sup> Jacqueline Musacchio, "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 172.

<sup>39</sup> Suzanne Austin Alchon, *A Pest in the Land: New World Epidemics in a Global Perspective*, 1st ed. Diálogos (Albuquerque, N.M.; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 21.

<sup>40</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 177-179.

The role of dress is pivotal to my project. Fashion in the Renaissance was simultaneously a means of delineating social roles and a destabilizing force. In pictures, clothes break time, exercising an authority that at once firmly fixes an image to a historical moment while also disrupting *istoria* narrative. Fashion “disregards the logical progression of linear time, finding a contemporaneity in the past that breaks through to the present.”<sup>41</sup> Off and on canvas, garments “are not simply ‘transmitters’ of social meanings, they are also key elements in the business of symbolic exchange.”<sup>42</sup> My study focuses on clothing that stresses uterine body parts. While this is not unique to garments worn by early modern Western European women, I see the shape as a primary fashion norm in the period.<sup>43</sup> Fashion, as both a process and an artform women interacted with as part of their daily lived experience, provides critical insights into my main thematic questions.

Historical costume inquiry is also extensive. While most fashion historians focus on the modern period, much critical work is dedicated to documenting late medieval and early modern clothing trends and their meaning. On the theoretical end, compendiums such as *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes (Dress, Body, Culture)* offer my study conceptual fashion fundamentals such as the nature of authorship and psychoanalysis.<sup>44</sup> On the practical side, scholarship dedicated to Renaissance dress and its particular inflections and meanings buttresses

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<sup>41</sup> Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, (New York : Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ; Distributed by MIT Press, 2010), 91.

<sup>42</sup> Carter, *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes, Dress, Body, Culture*, 156.

<sup>43</sup> For the ways fashion design highlights women’s reproductive and erogenous zones throughout history, see *Ibid.*, 114 and 133.

<sup>44</sup> Carter, *Fashion Classics from Carlyle to Barthes (Dress, Body, Culture)*.

my project. My study is deeply indebted to the work of pioneering dress historians Carole Collier Frick, Ann Hollander, and Rosita Levi Pisetzky above all.<sup>45</sup> Any study of dress is challenged by a lack of extant historical artifacts. Textiles decay at rates relatively faster than other artistic media. Further, between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries, much of clothing scraps went into the creation of rag pulp paper. Images of clothing, therefore, provide sources for costume research. To this end, my dissertation lives at the often fraught intersection between painted and actual dress.

My project also employs Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass' investiture theory, a landmark theoretical shift in historical costume studies. Defined at length in the following chapter, investiture (also called transnaturing) theory is close to response theory in that they both shift the lens from creator to consumer. Jones and Stallybrass argue textiles and dress objects in the early modern world were believed to hold memory and cultural narrative in a quasi-magical mode, transferring the past and its power from wearer to wearer. Though Jones and Stallybrass do not discuss or reference *The Power of Images*, I believe a cross-contemplation of investiture and response will yield new insights into Renaissance culture—especially pertaining to gender norms—that reflect back upon and expand both models.

The mystery surrounding suggestively-pregnant midsections on images of women inflects meaning across Renaissance art making. The puzzlingly-pregnant silhouette is grounded in the visual. In other words, it is an art historical problem. Crafted for male gazes by male hands, larger, convex midsections are a distinctly feminine component of Renaissance design.

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<sup>45</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*; Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Rosita Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del costume in Italia* v. 2 & 3, I Milano: Istituto editoriale italiano, 1964).

## Chapter previews

To address this project's larger central question, the text is portioned into four subsections. Rather than proposing one hypothesis that may apply to all Italian art, this project is distilled into collections of related key images that consistently present female subjects as maintaining a fictive or real gestation. The project is organized to prove that the apparently gravid body operated in many artistic contexts and across a myriad of figure types.

Chapter One serves as the dissertation's exposition. This section establishes my overarching theory that the gravid shape is not directly indicative of actual pregnancy in the majority of female figures or sitters, but instead illustrates the Renaissance's strictly divided male and female worlds. Inside and outside picture frames, gravid dress visually reinforced period gender roles. Chapter One answers both the *how* and *why* dominating the epicenter of this overall project. First, it surveys gravid dress in images to excavate the many specific ways actual women used their garments to create the silhouette. This chapter traces the history of gravid dressing from the shape's conception within early Renaissance fashion to its withdrawal from sartorial trends in the mid-to-late seventeenth century. It offers a historiography of other costume scholars who have mentioned (usually only in passing) the silhouette at the center of my project. Chapter One also examines period texts (letters, inventories, and popular treatises) concerning fertility and beauty towards the same purpose. This chapter most directly deals with costume, and links together women's period clothing, beauty standards, and gendered decorum expectations.

Chapter One is directly followed by an interlude. This section relies on the theoretical foundation laid in the primary chapter by applying it exclusively to sixteenth-century costume books. It extends much of the work done in Chapter One through the lens of book arts and

reception. Glossing several popular costume books written by Italian, German, Spanish, and French fashion chroniclers, it takes a broader, continental approach to the gravid dress topic. I argue these books, circulated throughout upper-class settings across Western Europe, played a major role in disseminating and normalizing gravid dressing. The interlude utilizes a pictorial record separate from portraiture to confirm the style was consistent across Western European images. Portable, private objects held between the hands, these early modern books evidence an intimate relationship Renaissance viewers enjoyed with studying and consuming contemporary and historical costume, including illusorily-gestational styles.

Chapter Two moves to the other side of my topic, taking up portraits of women generally regarded by scholars as depicted in a state of literal gestation. It is the first comprehensive study of Raphael's exceptional 1507 Palazzo Pitti panel *Donna Gravidia*. The picture is both a remarkable moment in Italian portraiture, and a hallmark for understanding every stage of early modern pregnancy: fertility, conception, gestation, confinement, childbirth, and motherhood all in one carefully-constructed package. I read the image within the overall cultural, social, scientific, and artistic context of Renaissance pregnancy. Chapter Two continues its case study of *Donna Gravidia* through a close comparison to other extant images of pregnant Renaissance ladies. Relative to overall Renaissance artistic output, these images are extremely rare. Drawing from Jacqueline Musacchio's foundational work on Renaissance pregnancy, I argue these precious images celebrate pregnancy as virtuous and honorable.

Gravid dress appears in a number of artistic contexts outside of images of young, marriageable women and actually pregnant mothers. To address this final content gap, Chapter Three turns towards metaphorical and holy gestation. Part one examines gravid dress in secular contexts, such as mythological figures in courtly settings. I argue that these images, while still

directly linked to fertility, are largely allegorical and their gestation symbolic of artistic or humanistic mental labor. Part two then analyzes gravid dress within the sacred sphere. This passage focuses on the saintly body as well as pregnant and “pregnant” female saints, such as the Madonna del Parto trope. Chapter Three argues pictures of extremely pregnant Marys were believed to possess magical abilities in the Renaissance, and that women used these images towards conception and fruition.

An early twelfth century epistolary manuscript, *Holy Maidenhood*, explained in acerbic detail how pregnancy disrupted the female frame: “your rosy face will grow thin, and turn green as grass; your eyes will grow dull, and shadowed underneath, and because of your dizziness your head will ache cruelly. Inside, in your belly, a swelling in your womb which bulges you out like a water skin...”<sup>46</sup> This candid list of symptoms attests to how medieval and early modern women understood the physical changes demanded by pregnancy. The process altered the body and life itself. Jones and Stallybrass’ contention that early modern Europeans believed that donning a specific outfit could, likewise, alter a person’s core identity finds fruition in contemporary writing and artwork. From Boccaccio’s denuded Griselda to Catherine de Medici’s apocryphal corset, clothes vibrated a richness that could transport its wearer to higher social stations, or convey her from one mode of existence to another. For Renaissance women, both pregnancy and clothing transformed personhood.

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<sup>46</sup> *Hali Meidenhad: An Alliterative Homily of the Thirteenth Century*, Frederick James Furnivall and Thomas Oswald Cockayne, eds. Rev. ed. Early English Text Society (Series) Original Series, 9 No. 18. 1866, 1922, for 1920, London: Pub for the Early English Text Society, by H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1922), 488-489.

## Chapter 1: Fashioning Fertility

Antonio Pollaiuolo's Berlin *Portrait of a young woman* is a touchstone for the study of Renaissance female beauty (fig. 8). Scholars agree the sitter personifies perfect Petrarchan standards: light complexion, eyes bright and flashing, hair blonde, expertly coiffed, and plucked to the mid-forehead.<sup>47</sup> Largely unremarked, however, is the unknown subject's body. Strict profile view calls attention to the figure's physical contours, most aggressively at the sartorial nexus where her skirts bunch and spring convexly from a tightly-cinched waist. Pollaiuolo's young woman is not unique. Across Renaissance pictorial media, draped, distended stomachs were a common trait of ideal female beauty, as carefully rendered within panels as faceted jewels or elaborate hairstyles.

Though gravid dress was pan-European—bizarrely dilated skirts can be seen in Renaissance paintings in museums across the continent and United Kingdom—my project focuses on the Italian peninsula, where the shape was especially popular, to evaluate how it makes meaning within female portraiture. Indeed, in her authoritative costume history series, Rosita Levi Pisetzký describes the “large round” stomachs are “characteristically Italian,” in contrast with more International styles.<sup>48</sup> In the carefully coded Renaissance world, images of women with bulbous skirts sprouting before their abdomens could not have been a simple quirk of representation or fashion, as across early modern media clothing and drapery communicate a range of meaning. Careful attention was paid to clothes from an outfit's conception, to its tailoring, and its painted record in portraiture.

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<sup>47</sup> David Alan Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 90.

<sup>48</sup> Levi Pisetzký, *Storia del costume in Italia* v.3, 222.

The illusorily-pregnant silhouette is not a depiction of pregnancy, but rather a systematic reinforcement of the inseverable tether between Renaissance women, their worn garments, and childbirth. Gravid dress irrevocably bound together women's attire with fertility potential. In the case of figure 8, for example, the sitter's assumed fecundity is accentuated by the costume shape and its brocaded pomegranate design. Understanding the gravid style's many implications clarifies Renaissance gender difference. This chapter treats Renaissance costuming and images containing costumes through the lens of feminist theory, illuminating how both fashion norms not only reflected but also constructed early modern social mores. My goal in this chapter is twofold: to examine how the shape was made, and consider why it was popular. I survey portraiture, *istoria* paintings, and lived dress articles to excavate the many ways women molded their bodies as blossoming with prospective fertility. I then sketch a method for reading the common Renaissance dress style as an implicit assertion of biological essentialism and sexual submission.

### **(Re)historicizing “pregnant” dress**

The most famous example of the shape central to this project appears in Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini double portrait* (fig. 9).<sup>49</sup> Arnolfini's wife collects her extensive skirts in her left hand and presses the excess fabric to her abdomen, causing lay viewers and experts alike to read her

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<sup>49</sup> Recent scholarship has proposed the sitters may be Giovanni di Arrigo Arnolfini and his wife Giovanna Cenami. Edwin Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal: Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of Van Eyck's Double Portrait*, California Studies in the History of Art, (Discovery Series 3, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994), 4-7.

body as possibly pregnant.<sup>50</sup> *Gardner's* introductory text—used to shepherd budding art historians into the field—blames the iconic green dress, claiming “the bride is not yet pregnant, although the fashionable costume she wears makes her appear so,” before immediately moving on.<sup>51</sup> Kleiner offers no explanation for *why* the drapery causes the illusion and simultaneously dismisses the underlying question. However, Kleiner’s observation calls attention to a critical point concerning Renaissance gender expectation and fashion; the crucial “yet” speaks volumes. This highly-gendered world produced widely disparate male and female lived experiences. While a man generally married in his third or fourth decade, allowing him ample time to grow his business or estate, women became brides ideally between the ages of thirteen and seventeen in order to take full advantage of breeding years. Women were expected to and generally did spend the majority of their married life with child. The requirement to bear heirs remained ever-present, coded within clothing. Arnolfini’s wife is not pregnant in the picture, but Kleiner correctly implies that period norms assumed she soon would be. Scholarly consensus holds the portrait was not made to document a wedding ceremony, but objects alluding to future pregnancy pepper the composition, from the ripened fruit arranged on the windowsill to the wooden statuette of

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<sup>50</sup> Anxiety concerning the presence of pregnancy in the portrait is so common the London National Gallery’s website addresses the issue on the second line of the *Arnolfini double portrait’s* explanatory text: “His [Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini’s] wife is not pregnant, as is often thought, but holding up her full-skirted dress in the contemporary fashion.” “Jan van Eyck | The Arnolfini Portrait | NG186 | National Gallery, London,” Accessed May 13, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Fred S. Kleiner, Helen Gardner, and Christin J. Mamiya, *Gardner’s Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective*, 11th ed. / Fred S. Kleiner, Christin J. Mamiya, Richard G. Tansey, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 562.

Saint Margaret, the patron saint of childbirth, overcoming the dragon of heresy on the bedframe. The ermine-edged dress itself may be lined, literally, with pregnancy expectation. Musacchio argues that martins, either living or dead, could signal pregnancy or the capacity for future pregnancy in Renaissance artwork.<sup>52</sup> It is also vital to note that a dress shape that has connoted pregnancy for five hundred years was the height of fashion in the fifteenth century. Diane Wolfthal agrees that although Arnolfini's wife is not pregnant, "the panel alludes to the proper goal of sexual relations through the wife's protruding belly...her gesture...brings attention to her womb," and believes that the few coeval viewers who came into contact with the *Arnolfini portrait* would have understood and recognized this signaling.<sup>53</sup>

Ann Hollander notes pervasive "pregnant" forms in her comprehensive survey of clothing within Western European painting. For Hollander, accentuation of female bellies was the crux of Renaissance fashion in both Northern and Southern contexts. Hollander insists quite pointedly "in the erotic imagination of Europe, it was apparently impossible until the late seventeenth century for a woman to have too big a belly" in images of clothed women.<sup>54</sup> Swelled stomachs were a required element of early modern *haute couture* and the most desirable of

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<sup>52</sup> Musacchio, "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," 172. The green hue may also be linked to fertility. Victoria Finlay, *Color: A Natural History of the Palette*, (1st Ballantine Books ed. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 267-269.

<sup>53</sup> Diane Wolfthal, *In and out of the Marital Bed: Seeing Sex in Renaissance Europe*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 40-41.

<sup>54</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 98.

feminine contours; “all dress for women...was unvarying in its emphasis on the stomach.”<sup>55</sup>

Artists and costumers alike situated the female torso as the erotic epicenter of the body.

Though cultural tastes demanded “big female stomachs” throughout the early modern period, pregnancy was a rarely visited painterly subject.<sup>56</sup> While Hollander offers no further explanation for why larger bellies remained trendy for centuries, it is significant that she assumes an entrenched connection between fashionably thickened midsections and gestation. However, the shape did not convey to period viewers that a woman was actually pictured with child.<sup>57</sup> According to Hollander’s framework, rounded midsections may only indicate actual pregnancy if the artist also “show[s] an otherwise unwarranted disarrangement of clothing: stays unlaced a little from the bottom, for example, or corsets left off entirely and extra loose folds of smock noticeable in front.”<sup>58</sup> Contrastingly, my research has revealed pregnancy portraiture eschews disorder. In the few extant images of truly pregnant women, the sitter’s dress is strictly controlled to mitigate the unusual and perhaps quasi-inappropriate circumstances of sitting for an artist while pregnant.

Hollander insists rounded midsections were purposefully exaggerated on women to display a husband’s ability to lavishly feed and clothe his wife. The larger the body, the more real estate to demonstrate rich fabrics.<sup>59</sup> Hollander explains the notorious silhouette touted by the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>56</sup> Hollander does not point to any images she believes illustrate a truly pregnant woman, instead referencing Visitation scenes. Ibid., 97-109.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

bride in *The Arnolfini Portrait* (and countless portraits spread throughout the early modern period) exist because swelled midsections connoted elegance and luxury on the part of the wearer and her male keeper.<sup>60</sup> Extensive and heavily-weighted sleeves and skirts likewise emphatically broadcast that upper-class women never engaged in manual labor. Hollander rightly insists that it is not the bride's body, but her fur-lined green gown, which creates the shape: "the stomach [is] enhanced by the clothes."<sup>61</sup> While I agree with Hollander that these bulbous midsections are "too conventional a female attribute to be useful for specific references of pregnancy," and generally do not symbolize that the sitter is indeed with child, I do not likewise believe that the distended belly reflects a well-fed woman.<sup>62</sup> In portraits like figure 8 or 9, women with convex abdomens are otherwise slender in the face, neck, shoulders, thighs, arms, hips, and waist. If the suggestively-fecund shape simply referenced ample food, then Renaissance women's bodies would be consistently fleshy, rather than boasting targeted expansions. Agnolo Firenzuola in *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* (1542) states, "one likes a robust body, with nimble, capable limbs, well placed and well proportioned. But I would not want my ideal beauty to be too big or very fat."<sup>63</sup> I maintain tastes Firenzuola's like are on the same spectrum as gravid dress.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>63</sup> Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 49.

Carole Collier Frick noted the illusorily-pregnant shape in her seminal study of Renaissance dress and speculated its possible relation to pregnancy.<sup>64</sup> She advances two overarching theories for why early modern women's skirts drape in such a distinctive manner: practical necessity to avoid tripping on long trains, or to cover evidence of being with child. I find both unconvincing. While it is true that typical fifteenth-century female gowns covered the wearer from waist to feet, and were so long she was forced to carry her skirts to walk unhindered, the visual record points to a simple fix showcased by many women in early modern paintings: to pin overly long skirting to the bodice or waist, as seen in images such as Petrus Christus' *A Goldsmith in His Shop, Possibly Saint Eligius* (1449) (fig. 10). According to Cesare Vecellio, his female Venetian contemporaries wore extended trains that swept public cobblestones to impress onlookers, but once within the privacy of their homes mitigated their lengthy skirts, "with pins or a silk tie, this is sewn to the point of the bodice in the back and has a little hook to which they attach their train, or coda as we [Venetians] like to call it."<sup>65</sup>

Frick implies the bowed shape is caused by fabric-clutching hands, and women adopted the style to conceal pregnancy.<sup>66</sup> Frick explains, "Renaissance art often shows women holding a good handful of the ample yardage of their skirts in front of their abdomens. This mannerism, which both facilitated walking and *hinted at fecundity*, may have originated in a self-conscious attempt to *conceal pregnancy* that women continued to affect even when pregnant or past

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<sup>64</sup> Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 93.

<sup>65</sup> Cesare Vecellio, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas : Cesare Vecellio's Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, (London ; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 140.

<sup>66</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 93.

childbearing.”<sup>67</sup> Yet to simultaneously indicate and camouflage pregnancy is a contradiction. Further, ladies in Renaissance pictures are *not* pregnant. Women sat for portraits before marriage, occasionally to entice a potential mate but more often to celebrate impending nuptials.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, pictures of women recorded during actual gestation are extremely rare and hotly debated, especially in Italy. However, Frick later asserts that Renaissance women’s wardrobe required ample skirting to “accommodate regular pregnancies,” mirroring Kleiner’s conclusion that expectation towards maternity linked together all aspects of life for Renaissance women.<sup>69</sup>

The suggestive-fecund shape likewise appears on women whose hands are empty or clutch handkerchiefs, refuting the notion that the contour is constructed exclusively by grasping and elevating skirts. Frick acknowledges this: “Working-class women, usually with their hands

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<sup>67</sup> Emphasis mine. Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Joanna Woods-Marsden keenly asserts that “of the key moments in the female life cycle then—marriage, childbirth, widowhood—only the first was commemorated in portraiture.”

Though childbearing was a rite of passage, it does not often appear in portraits, likely considered too indecorous. Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 64.

<sup>69</sup> Frick bases this contention on Lawrence Langer’s *The Importance of Wearing Clothes*. Langer argues “as with the women in Botticelli’s paintings, pregnancy has taken on a new form of beauty, which...was briefly expressed in bulging clothing.” By “briefly” Langer means relevant to the entire history of worn garments, maintaining that the shape was constant throughout the early modern period. Lawrence Langner, *The Importance of Wearing Clothes*, 59-60, (New York: Hastings House, 1959). Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 159, n. 28.

full of things other than fabric, achieved the same casually fecund look by pulling their overskirts up over a belt to create a poof of fabric (and in doing so, revealed a wide band of underskirt beneath, usually of contrasting color).”<sup>70</sup> In Renaissance communities, the wealthy fixed clothing trends that slowly trickled downwards into working-class circles. Lower rungs of the fashion ladder are represented in the paid attendants at work in Domenico Ghirlandaio’s *Birth of John the Baptist* (fig. 11). The restrictive lacing down the side of a servant woman’s dress crinkles and bunches her orange overdress as she reaches for baby John the Baptist in his birth scene. In the background, a maid offers water and wine in glass decanters, her skirt thick and curving below a cross-hatched decorative trim. The older, veiled women standing to the side pick up their dresses to assume the “poof of fabric” identified by Frick.

Frick’s contention that early modern women of various social standings and childbearing abilities used their clothing to hint at fertility and purposefully arranged their clothing so that their bodies appeared gestational finds purchase in the pictorial record. Ghirlandaio’s Sassetti chapel scene wherein Saint Francis restores life to a Spini Child who has fallen from a window in the family’s palace provides a key example. To the left stand two Sassetti women, both dressed in fashionable gowns that extend roundly below cinched girdlesteads (fig. 12). Women of all age groups maintained the shape. The woman in white is a forerunner to the young girl in blue, a visual guide for the proper patrician lady she will grow into, as upper-class girls were conditioned towards motherhood from childhood.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, a young Sassetti boy in *Confirmation of the Rule*, unburdened by the duty to carry and bear family heirs, does not adopt

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<sup>70</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 193.

<sup>71</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 21.

the suggestively-fecund style (fig. 13). His waistline is situated much lower than his female relatives, and his robes lie flat. The boy's clothing reflects his corporal freedom.

My research into the pervasiveness of the gravid dress style confirms that it was curated purposefully. Fabric-clutching hands resting directly atop midsections draw attention to gravidity by directing the gaze towards the subject's womb as in figure 9. Renaissance women would not have concealed successful gestation. Indeed, pregnancy symptoms would have flowered hope in the life of a patrician woman. The onset of regular nausea or the cessation of menstruation was the surest sign a woman had that she carried a child, possibly signaling her fulfillment of her chief wifely responsibility.

Moreover, a barren wife could be repudiated in social circles. If a married couple proved infertile, fragile female biology was generally blamed. As women's humors were considered cold and damp, wombs were more susceptible to infertility caused by imbalance. Successful pregnancy was advertised rather than hidden. In 1348 Francesco Dantini wrote that "pregnant women were alleged to seek entertainment, parties, and dancing."<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the women he observed at such gatherings wished to be seen in society before their confinement period in the third trimester. While both partners were considered responsible for creating children, the requirement fell most heavily on the shoulders of the wife. Lucas Cranach the Elder's 1526 diptych of the recently married Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora spells out the driving force behind marriage through Latin epigrams (fig. 14). Luther's reads "In silence and confidence shall be your hope," while von Bora's translates to "She will be blessed by begetting children." The inscriptions float between initials and likenesses, linking text with identity. While

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<sup>72</sup> Francesco di Marco Dantini and Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato, Francesco Di Marco Datini, 1335-1410* ([1st American ed.]. Datini, Francesco Di Marco. New York: Knopf, 1957), 166.

these messages are of course simultaneously tinged with a celebration that both Luther and his bride have thrown off celibacy for fruitfulness, the gendering is nevertheless clear. The couple's child-making duties fall to von Bora, who fulfilled the caption's prophecy by bearing three daughters and three sons. Within this ethos, fertility was a highly desirable trait in a wife, and its lack could devastate a married woman's reputation.<sup>73</sup> Later, in 1381, Dantini, happy father to four sons, boasted in a letter to his childless brother-in-law, "tell [your wife] Margarita that [my wife] will lend her one or two of her sons, but she will not donate them, because Margarita has not proven that she can make them herself."<sup>74</sup> This biting remark speaks to the broader obsession with pregnancy underwriting much of early modern Italian culture, including dress. Erhard Schoen's 1530 woodcut *The Twelve Exemplary Women of the Old Testament* goes so far as to make overcoming infertility a celebratory iconographic attribute of Sarah and Rachael (the former stands second to the left, the latter fourth) (fig. 15). The printer tells the viewer of these virtuous pregnancies through gravid dress in two ways. While Rachael's body projects forward below her girdle, Sarah gathers her drapery before her stomach. Schoen's print is a rare instance in which gravid drapery does indeed cover actual gestation. In the vast majority of early modern images, however, projecting drapery signals not pregnancy but possibility. The "ample yardage" Frick recognized did not conceal pregnancy, but in fact stimulated it through sartorial accommodation.<sup>75</sup> Gravid silhouettes encouraged upper-class wives to fill their large skirts with new life, and imbue the expensive pleats with purpose.

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<sup>73</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 21.

<sup>74</sup> ASP, *Archivio Dantini*, 1103, loose folio (19 August 1381). Quoted by Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 21.

<sup>75</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 162.

## Displaying fertility

Gravid dress aligns with Renaissance ideals. In her seminal essay, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” Joan Kelly-Gadol answers her titular question with a resounding *no*.<sup>76</sup> She argues that in the gradual breakdown of the feudal system and the rise of the middle class, sexual and reproductive control over women’s bodies became paramount.<sup>77</sup> Loyalty to one’s ruler was no longer stipulated by a contractual agreement between lord and vassal, but by bloodlines, ushering in the obsession with female chastity that runs deep through much of Renaissance material and literary culture.<sup>78</sup> When Renaissance texts or images treat chastity, they speak of fertility. Symbols and allegorical stand-ins for marital chastity abound in period female portraiture: lilies, unicorns, sapphires, pearls, and lapdogs to name only a few.<sup>79</sup> Renaissance culture centralized sexual purity, even in circles wherein women stepped into a masculine profession. Before their respective marriages, women artists Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana preceded their names with the Latin word, “*virgo*,” in painted epigrams.<sup>80</sup> Virginity became the critical

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<sup>76</sup> Joan Kelly-Gadol, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 176-178.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-178.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-180.

<sup>79</sup> For a detailed account on how paramount female chastity was to Renaissance culture, see Jacques Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> Caroline Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 42. The term “*virgo*,” was likewise used as “a catchphrase for a female representation of learning or chaste wisdom,” as well as female intellectual

precursor to fertility. As a result of this paradigm shift, civic and religious authorities safeguarded patrilineal lineages, and exercised strict control over women's bodies and their inclinations. This new emphasis on virginity for only half the population thinly camouflaged fear of illegitimate pregnancy. Kelly-Gadol insists these new norms "bound the lady to chastity, to the merely procreative sex of political marriage, just as her weighty and costly costume came to conceal and constrain her body while it displayed her husband's noble rank."<sup>81</sup> While many scholars have deepened and nuanced Kelly-Gadol's claims, Renaissance costume nevertheless illustrated and tailored coeval gender roles, particularly in terms of championing pregnancy and motherhood as the key womanly virtues. Penned and painted archetypes advertised the optimal woman: blonde, pale-skinned, demure, virtuous—and fertile.

Renaissance writing considered a lady's loveliness in association with her ability to produce children. Alberti states the centrality of fecundity within beauty standards clearly in *Della Famiglia*. As he describes what makes a woman beautiful, he immediately conflates fruitfulness and attractiveness: "Thus I believe that beauty in a woman can be judged not only in the charms and refinement of the face, but even more in the strength and shapeliness of a body apt to carry and give birth to many beautiful children."<sup>82</sup> In the very next line he adds that "the first prerequisite of beauty in a woman is good habits," which included engendering (or at least

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proWess and accomplishment. It is possible Anguissola and Fontana simultaneously wield both connotations of the epigram. Lisa Jardine, "'O Decus Italiae Virgo', or The Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance." *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 4 (1985): 805, n. 24.

<sup>81</sup> Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," 196.

<sup>82</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *The Albertis of Florence: Leon Battista Alberti's Della Famiglia*, (Bucknell Renaissance Texts in Translation, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1971), 122.

not hindering) constant pregnancy.<sup>83</sup> Alberti's outlook reflects the early modern mindset that beauty and reproductive capacity were one and the same, which women could express outwardly through their adherence to contemporary rules of decorum. Pregnancy was known to be dangerous, but deemed worthy and necessary. At the end of this passage in *Della Famiglia*, Alberti pointedly concludes: "chastity has always been worth more to anyone than beauty," confirming Kelly-Gadol's argument.<sup>84</sup>

As fecundity was bound up with beauty in the period, judging female charms included evaluating latent motherhood. When assessing if Fiametta Adimari was a suitable match for her son Filippo, Alessandra Strozzi describes the potential wife's attractiveness: "she seemed to me to have a beautiful figure and to be well put together (ch'ell avesse una bella persona e ben fatta)," later adding "she looks healthy."<sup>85</sup> The devoted Strozzi mother was scrutinizing the girl's "figure" or "persona" for its childbearing capacity. In March 1467, Lucrezia de' Medici reported to her husband Piero de' Medici after scrutinizing Clarice Orsini's bridely aptitude towards a union with their son, the de facto prince of Florence Lorenzo de' Medici (Il Magnifico did in fact marry Clarice).<sup>86</sup> Lucrezia segments the shy Clarice to her smallest attributes, describing her hair color, hands, and posture to Piero the Gouty. However, Lucrezia complains *twice* in the same letter that she could not get a clear look at Clarice's body. Lucrezia grumbles that her intense

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>85</sup> Strozzi letters dated August 24, 1447- April 14, 1470. Macinghi and Alessandra Strozzi, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, (Bilingual ed. Biblioteca Italiana; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 155.

<sup>86</sup> Janet Ross, *Lives of the Early Medici: As Told in Their Correspondence*, (R.G. Badger), 108-109.

parental vision was impeded by a Roman *lenzuolo* (a long, breezy cloak) the girl wore, objecting: “in this dress she seemed to me handsome, fair, tall, but being covered up I could not see her to my satisfaction.”<sup>87</sup> A few lines later Lucrezia continues to decry her inability to speculate on the girl’s form, lamenting “Her bosom I could not see, as here the women are entirely covered up, but it appeared to me of good proportions.”<sup>88</sup> Lucrezia de’Medici was denied data Alessandra Strozzi was able to collect via her maternal gaze. Both mothers needed to know whether or not the prospective adolescent bride seemed physically qualified for childbearing.

Paralleling text, portraiture systemized the distinctly Renaissance preoccupation with chastity and fertility by harnessing the gaze. Fra Filippo Lippi’s *Portrait of a Woman and a Man at a Casement* (c. 1440), for example, is a painting about looking and being looked at (fig. 16). The couple’s refusal to make direct eye contact with one another entices the viewer to appraise the painting for its intricacies through the penetrative beholding gaze. Likely commissioned to celebrate the depicted couple’s wedding or the birth of a son, this panel toys with interiority and exteriority, while framing the female sitter within Florentine patrician gender norms.<sup>89</sup> The

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<sup>87</sup> Macinghi and Alessandra Strozzi, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, 155.

<sup>88</sup> On Lucrezia’s official visit to the Orsini household, Clarice wore a less protective day-dress (“la quale era in una gonna istretta alla romana, e senza lenzuolo”), allowing her prospective mother-in-law to fully assess her body. Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Cesare Guasti, *Tre lettere di Lucrezia Tornabuoni a Piero de’ Medici ed altre lettere di vari concernenti al matrimonio di Lorenzo il Magnifico con Clarice Orsini ricordo di Nozze nel gennaio 1859, ([Cesare Guasti] per Felice Le Monnier, 1859)*, 9. Lucrezia’s concern proved needless, as Clarice gave birth to ten children, six of whom survived into adulthood to perpetuate Medicean dominance over Tuscany.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits*

bride's cuff is embroidered with the word "lealt[a]" (loyalty), an obvious allusion to conjugal fidelity.<sup>90</sup> Once the viewer spots this message hidden in plain sight, the gaze is ushered from the fur-trimmed edging on the bride's sleeve, to her gloved hands (with rings worn atop the silk), to a close bunching of fabric piled directly atop her womb. Patricia Simons argues Republican Florence, lacking a monarchy, developed a "display culture," wherein "the outward display of honor, magnificence, and wealth was vital to one's social prestige and definition, so that visual language was a crucial mode of discourse."<sup>91</sup> This public pageantry Simons locates within coeval female portraiture. While likenesses of men signal identity and erudition through humanistic discourse, women are relegated to beautiful objects and expensive outfits rather than people in highly patrilineal Florence.<sup>92</sup> Portraiture tracks gender convention. Simons argues women in profile portraits particularly are denied ocular agency, while the male gaze becomes "a metaphor for worldliness and virility."<sup>93</sup> However, when actual Renaissance women all over Western Europe—rather than only those residing in Florence—stepped into the public realm they put

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*of Women*, 18.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>91</sup> Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames, the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *History Workshop Journal* 25, no. 1 (1988): 4–30, 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-13. On page 13 Simons observes a contradiction between the "strict orderliness of the profile portrait," and contemporary Renaissance writing, which held women to be wild, narcissistic, lusty, and vain. I maintain Renaissance female portraiture does not contrast with the misogynist literature, but rather adheres perfectly, refitting chaotic and unpredictable females into regulated molds of decorum, including sexual control.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

themselves on display. *De re uxoria* (written 1416) encourages its female readers to style their outfits to be seen, to dress knowing they will be lovely objects paraded through a sea of active sightlines.<sup>94</sup> Protagonists in Renaissance pictures often point to the central focus of the image, guiding viewer response and vision. I believe female skirt gathering pointed to the abdominal swell in the same way, requiring the viewer to rest eyes on the womb. A woman's dress was a sign of her valor and her value.<sup>95</sup> Within this framework, women's clothing in both images and lived experience advertised the assigned role of future mother by suggesting fecundity to both male and female onlookers. If the male gaze is virile, the female body is receptive and fertile.

Simons' crucial work on gender refers exclusively to women's visibility in the public sphere. Yet the pursuit of pregnancy bled from the private realm into the communal. I believe gravid dress operated within both these two distinct yet interconnected Renaissance worlds. Conception was located in the house, but publicizing fertility was an endless task for early modern women. Botticelli's *Portrait of a Young Woman* (sometimes considered to be the aforementioned Clarice Orsini), dated circa 1485, depicts a woman in simple indoor dress (fig. 17). The intimacy displayed by the figure's dress is rare in the period, and offers a unique glimpse into how public and private textiles diverged. The gown is tailored from a plain brown material, possibly cotton, in stark contrast to intricately patterned and brightly dyed silks. However, while this young woman lacks jewels, brocade, and has swapped a byzantine coiffure for a simple cotton cap, the silhouette remains unchanged. Her skirts push forward, and are so

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<sup>94</sup> Francesco Barbaro, *Francisci Barbari De re uxoria liber*, (Nuova ed. / per cura del socio corrispondente Attilio Gnesotto a Remigio Sabbadini. Padova]: Accademia Patavina de scienze, lettere ed arti, 1915, Venice, 1548), 44.

<sup>95</sup> Simons, "Women in Frames, the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," 10 and 17.

full with extra fabric that she has shoved her hands into their depths via pockets. Renaissance female portraiture stylized young, marriage-bound women as flawless, a perfection which assumed the ability to gestate and bear children.

The ubiquity of seemingly-pregnant garment shapes across Renaissance pictorial media attests to their reality. Rare extant women's ensembles from the sixteenth century additionally confirm it was a lived dress style and not solely a pictorial trend. Dorothea Sabina von Pfalz-Neuburg's gown is displayed in the Bavarian National Museum with sufficient undergarments to stage a bulbous belly inflating beneath an extended bodice (fig. 18). A crimson silk velvet dress in the Museo di Palazzo Reale in Pisa boasts a shorter bodice, and showcases a swelling skirt, which is gathered in deep pleats (fig. 19).<sup>96</sup> The flared silhouette is composed of straight and triangular panels.<sup>97</sup>

While very few examples of complete dresses survive from the early modern period, Frick glossed archival letters, documented sumptuary laws, and Florentine merchants' *ricordanze* to prove representations of costume may be used to analyze period clothing. In her essay on the scope and limits of reliability between actual fifteenth-century dress practices and clothing represented in coeval paintings, Frick located discrepancies in textile types but not silhouettes.<sup>98</sup> Primary sources and material evidence verify that male and female clothing was tailored from similar fabrics, and both sexes enjoyed displaying bright colors and complex

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<sup>96</sup> Lydia Edwards, *How to Read a Dress: A Guide to Changing Fashion from the 16th to the 20th Century*, (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2017), 24.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 201-224.

patterns in their daily public costume. The pictures, however, are deceptive. Men chose to pose in portraits in sober black attire, while female clothing tended to reflect reality.<sup>99</sup> Off canvas, however, both men and women's clothing was often tailored from the same brilliant, colorful textiles.<sup>100</sup>

Dress representations in paintings and prints, therefore, reliably track Renaissance clothing trends in most cases. Renaissance women utilized their attire to display crucial fertility. As no full ensembles survive from the fifteenth century, a survey of images provides dependable sources for how the shape was created across different contexts. Gravid dress was constructed in several ways: under-cushions, layers, and body-shapers such as the farthingale (a stiff hoop-shaped petticoat). In images, the shape was also often made by hands gathering skirts.

Hollander believes many women created a projecting midsection with cushions stuffed under robes.<sup>101</sup> Women's clothing trends in the early modern period occasionally find root in men's attire, including padding and puffing. A miniature page from the *Tacuium sanitatis* c. 1380 showcases a man wearing a white-leaf patterned padded jacket that broadens his chest above a belted waist (fig. 20). In the following centuries, however, men's padding migrated upwards to the widen shoulders, "hanging with the fullness evenly disposed all round" beneath fitted tunics and jerkins.<sup>102</sup> Women's padding remained concentrated around the hips and belly.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>100</sup> McCall argues that black fabric, while less "lustrous and glossy," than patterned brocade or silk, was nevertheless ostentatious and fine. Timothy McCall, "Brilliant Bodies: Material Culture and the Adornment of Men in North Italy's Quattrocento Courts," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16, no. 1 (2013): 445-487.

<sup>101</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 52.

<sup>102</sup> Geoffrey Squire, *Dress, Art And Society 1560-1970*, (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 30-41.

While none of these pads survive, Hollander maintains “skirts were exaggeratedly padded or stiffened around the pelvis to hold them away from the legs, since the actual hips, suppressed by the stays, offered insufficient support for the heavy folds.”<sup>103</sup> When Firenzuola insists in *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* that the ideal female body shape features intense curves, he states of lackluster waists and hips that “these parts can be helped with wadding and padding, and, in a word, by the tailor’s art.”<sup>104</sup> On Stuart and Tudor stages, young boys playing pregnant characters in dramas such as Thomas Heywood’s *The Golden Age* (1610) likely stuffed cushions under their skirts to embody a pregnant female character.<sup>105</sup> The *OED*’s entry for “cushion” cites John Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* (1649): “And thus his pregnant motives are at last prov’d nothing but a Tympany, or a Queen Maries Cushion.”<sup>106</sup> Desperate to provide an heir for Philip II of Spain, Queen Mary I Tudor was rumored to wear a cushion beneath her gowns in a series of falsified pregnancies.<sup>107</sup> While her case is an outlier, it is possible the exaggerated swell worn by women in paintings could be produced by a cushion.

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<sup>103</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 100.

<sup>104</sup> Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 65.

<sup>105</sup> Sara B.T. Thiel, “Maternal Revision in Middleton’s More Dissemblers Besides Women,” in *Stage Matters: Props, Bodies, and Space in Shakespearean Performance*, Shakespeare and the Stage (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Vancouver: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), 143-158.

<sup>106</sup> “Cushion, N.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, n.d.

<sup>107</sup> Eleanor Bolza, *A Supplement to German-English Glossary of Forest Products Terms*, (South Melbourne: Commonwealth of Australia, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, Division of Forest Products, 1962, London: George Bell and Sons, 1881), 167.

Most often, however, gravid dress was the result of heavy layering patrician women wore as routine conspicuous consumption. Layering is at the core of Renaissance attire. According to Frick, “Renaissance Florentine outfits were composed of many garments and accessories layered together to form a coherent ensemble that could be altered for comfort, when the weather was warm or turned chilly by subtracting or adding a layer.”<sup>108</sup> Considering how often women across Europe (Florence being a fifteenth-century fashion forerunner) were pregnant, moments requiring the removal or decrease in layers must have also included gestation.

Pictorial and material records concur that ample layers shaped female bodies as gravid in the height of fashion during the fifteenth century.<sup>109</sup> Trendy gowns positioned female waistlines above the hips, accentuated the waist with a belt or girdle, and generously poured uninterrupted volumes of fabric towards the feet.<sup>110</sup> Alternatively, a belt could be used to secure layers towards the desired shape. The Biblical heroine Judith in Matteo di Giovanni’s *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, c. 1493-1494, wears a distinctly Renaissance dress, complete with a puffy midsection created by the admixture of two belts, one beneath her breasts and a second tied below the stomach (fig. 21). Her poof is decorated with a metal chain extending from her necklace. A wealthy early modern woman wore at least three—often four—complete layers of clothing in public. Beneath their sumptuous gowns, women typically wore a chemise (*camicia*) covered by an over-dress. This exterior-most gown was hemmed at the ankles or floor, which

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<sup>108</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 147.

<sup>109</sup> Kleiner, Helen Gardner, and Christin J. Mamiya, *Gardner’s Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective*, 562.

<sup>110</sup> Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 90.

may be referred to in period inventories as a *gonna*, *gonnella*, *sottana*, *gamurra*, or *cotta* interchangeably. A lavishly designed *giornea* of velvet or silk brocade faced the evaluating world.<sup>111</sup> An outer garment alone could require eight *braccia*, or a little over five yards (4.5 meters) of fabric. Eleanora de Toledo's precious funeral dress (probably made around 1562) in the Pitti Palace Costume Gallery when laid flat and unfurled confirms extensive Renaissance skirt yardage (fig. 22).

Inventories from the estate of Francesco Inghirrami, meticulously made by state officials on November 8<sup>th</sup> 1471 as well as the Trousseaux of Andrea Minerbetti, surveyed in 1511, confirm the massive amount of clothing and undergarments held in a typical upper-class Italian household. The Inghirrami inventory distinguishes *camicie* worn by men and women, so the difference in tailoring must have been great enough for officials to note.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, *camicie* tailored for men would have been much shorter. Men's clothing, often hemmed to the knee, does not showcase a distended midriff. Even priests, whose clerical robes extended to their feet, do not appear in paintings with dramatically rounded midsections.

Even on its own, an underblouse was of significant volume. Tintoretto's protagonist in *Susanna and the Elders*, executed 1555-1556, has discarded her beaded gown and lace-edged *camicia* upon the ground, exposing her body to the prying eyes of the lecherous elders (fig. 23). The painting diminishes the Biblical damsel into another toilette item arranged haphazardly before the mirror leaning against the garden wall. Susanna's wadded underdress is a formidable mass of white textile. This density can be confirmed by viewing a c. 1575-1600 linen smock held

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<sup>111</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 162.

<sup>112</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 158.

in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute collection (fig. 24). Whether lain flat or displayed on a dress form, this embroidered chemise is copious and capacious.

An upper-class woman's clothing was thick, voluminous, and dense. All of these combined undergarments and multilayering bunched when belted, bodiced, or tied at the waist. When standing, it created a forward swell. When sitting, this effect would have doubled or tripled—eight or nine feet of fabric had nowhere else to go and was redistributed about a woman's waist. Indeed, close reading of Pollaiuolo's *Portrait of a young woman* reveals the sitter's dress encases her waist in gathers. Tight lacing marches down her bodice and overdress over her projecting skirts. Women often sit in portraits as a means of preserving decorum, but this is also possibly because their clothing was simply so much heavier than men's.

While layering gowns was a popular mode of creating an abdominal swell in the fifteenth century, body shapers worn beneath gowns delineated even more intense silhouettes. Later Renaissance fashion also used several under-implements to style a female body as fertile. The mid sixteenth-century embrace of the farthingale tied by points or laces to the bodice solidified gravid silhouettes. This migrated the belly-bump lower down, below the waist.<sup>113</sup> Called a *guardinfante* in Italian, this petticoat could be layered as many as three times beneath a woman's gown and require as much as three yards of fabric.<sup>114</sup> *Guardinfante* emphasized the wearer's

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<sup>113</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 103.

<sup>114</sup> The *guardinfante* is also referred to as *faldiglia* or *verducato*, and appears in the late fifteenth century. Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del costume in Italia* v.3 69. Jones and Stallybrass argue undergarments in early modern writing and images are highly gendered and deeply associated with carnality. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, (Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press,

hips, a critical part of the body for surviving childbirth. In England, an extra accessory was added in addition to the farthingale, known as the “bum roll” in period sources. The 1599 *Micro-cynicon* describes a noblewoman wearing this implement as “placing both hands upon her whalebone hips, puft up with a round circling farthingale.”<sup>115</sup> The worn results of the farthingale (and perhaps accompanying bum roll) may be seen in Lorenzo Lotto’s *Lucrezia* of 1530-1532 (fig. 25). The Roman heroine’s underlayers form a tightly compacted waterfall beneath a shiny silk gown of contrasting orange and green panels and stripes. Lucrezia wears at least one fine *camicia*, as it has been pulled through the exquisite fur-lined slits in her sleeves and above the bodice.

Sixteenth-century body-shaping implements were associated with pregnancy from their earliest forms. The introduction of the stiff corset into European female undergarments is apocryphally attributed to Catherine de’Medici in 1579.<sup>116</sup> According to a popular legend, the fecund Queen consort, who was with child nine times during her marriage to Henry II of France, desired a wearable instrument to shore up the contours of her post-partum figure.<sup>117</sup> Sixteenth-

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2000), 231-232. See also Cecil Willett Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992), 35 and 49.

<sup>115</sup> *Micro-Cynicon*, 1599, Satyre 3, “Insolent Superbia,” 40.

<sup>116</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 2-7.

<sup>117</sup> Catherine de’Medici understood well how to weaponize “acceptable notions of female behavior,” including trying to become pregnant as often as possible, and promoting her own maternity as a sign of loyalty for her chosen nation. Katherine Crawford, “Catherine de Médicis and the Performance of Political Motherhood,” *Sixteenth Century Journal: Journal of Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 3 (2000): 645.

century corsets were hyper restrictive cages that kept the spine straight and the stomach flat, but did not cinch waists. Later they would be stiffened with whalebone or buckram stays and busks.<sup>118</sup> Early bust-length corsets assisted in creating an inflated midsection by further forcing undergowns and underskirts to brim out at the waist, especially when paired with a bum-roll. As the sixteenth century advanced, corsets tended to grow longer and tighter, raising anxieties towards the health of fetuses. John Bulwer's *The Artificial Changeleing* (1653), which drew heavily from Ambrose Paré's earlier sixteenth-century surgical treatise *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine*, believed "straight-laced Garments, Busks, Rollers, of Breeches, bring forth Children awry."<sup>119</sup> Busks, a stiff length of horn or whalebone inserted into the front center slot of corsets and tied with ribbon, were particularly feared. In 1595 Stephen Gosson wrote of the stiffener: "The baudie buske...keeps down flat/The bed wherein the babe should breed."<sup>120</sup> Gosson's deployment of the word "bawdy" here may imply that a flat stomach, according to late sixteenth-century tastes, was sexually attractive but deviant, as opposed to the gravid swell, which signaled the proper early modern female's sexual role. Alternatively, it is possible

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<sup>118</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History*, 7.

<sup>119</sup> J. B. John Bulwer, fl. *Anthropometamorphosis, Man Transform'd, Or, The Artificial Changeling Historically Presented in the Mad and Cruel Gallantry, Foolish Bravery, Ridiculous Beauty, Filthy Fineness, and Loathsome Loveliness of Most Nations, Fashioning & Altering Their Bodies from the Mould Intended by Nature: With a Vindication of the Regular Beauty and Honesty of Nature and an Appendix of the Pedigree of the English Gallant*, (Early English Books Online. London: Printed for JHardesty, 1650), 338-339.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen Gosson, *Pleasant Quippes for Vpstart Nevvfangled Gentlevvomen*, (Early English Books), quoted in Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 70.

“bawdy” women used busks to avoid or terminate pregnancy. Busks, the opposite of gravid dress, deterred pregnancy and could even be used to disguise it by flattening a telltale growing belly. Indeed, Jones and Stallybrass believe the late sixteenth century introduction of the busk and corset arrangement, which stiffened women’s torsos on all sides, is effectively to blame for ending the gravid shape in Italy and beyond, noting “the prebusked body shape of the full-bellied, empire waisted Venetian noblewoman of 1490 contrasts strongly to the disciplined posture and form of the upright busked English noblewoman of the late sixteenth century.”<sup>121</sup>

The Spanish farthingale, which can be seen in the visual record as early as the 1470s, exploded in popularity in Italy and the rest of Europe by the mid-to-late sixteenth century, along with Spanish dress trends in general. The farthingale created extremely exaggerated abdominal swells, as worn by ladies in Pulzone Scipione’s portraits of women like figure 26 (1594). The stylish lady (possibly Maria de’Medici) places her hand over her domelike belly, its outward push highlighted by two rows of intricate lace. The silhouette was often further accentuated with dangling waistlets, decorative trim, and overgowns parting to expose underskirts. In a supposed portrait of Elenora de Medici attributed to Lavinia Fontana, pregnancy and fertility are further linked with the shape through the presence of the sitter’s son pressed up against her skirts (fig. 27). Like Catherine’s corset, the Iberian farthingale (*guardinfante* in Spanish) arose in Iberian courts in relation to pregnancy. Queen Joan of Portugal possibly used the supportive undergarment not to suggest pregnancy, but to hide two illegitimate bastards from her cuckolded

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<sup>121</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, “Busks, Bodices, Bodies,” In *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 87 and 90-92.

husband, purposely promoting a style that radically reshaped female midsections.<sup>122</sup> The *guardinfante* was banned in 1639, possibly because of its link to Queen Joan's royal scandals and a persistent association with illicit pregnancy.<sup>123</sup>

While these body-shapers are associated with gestation, a lack of curvature about the midsection, in contrast, could indicate a notorious refusal of pregnancy. Catherine Howey argues Queen Elizabeth I used her wardrobe to signal her indefinite virginity to the English court and all of Europe beyond.<sup>124</sup> While Howey asserts colors, accessories, cosmetics, and jewelry visually maintained Elizabeth's virginal status, I believe her gown also proved a useful tool.<sup>125</sup> After being crowned Britain's sovereign, across Elizabeth I's portraits the monarch wears bodices that taper dramatically to a v-shaped point, literally pointing to the supposedly chaste, virginal womb. The Virgin Queen's ever-present corset shielded her womb from the globe's gaze, and acted as a powerful brand for her identity as a chaste ruler.<sup>126</sup> While the v-shaped corset originated in Spain, Elizabeth lent it new meaning in her specific, monastic British context. Whether heralding fertility or avoiding it, women's clothing, layer by layer, was deeply tethered to their reproductive systems.

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<sup>122</sup> Amanda Wunder, "Women's Fashions and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Spain: The Rise and Fall of the *Guardinfante*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 134-139 and 144.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>124</sup> Cl. Howey, "Dressing a Virgin Queen: Court Women, Dress, and Fashioning the Image of England's Queen Elizabeth I," *Early Modern Women-An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4 (2009): 201-8, 201-204.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-203.

<sup>126</sup> I am indebted to Fredricka Jacobs and my stalwart writing partner Emily George for the theory of virginity symbolism tailored in Elizabeth I's corset.

Seemingly-pregnant midsections on full-length depictions of women in portraits are also often created by a specific combination of drapery and pose.<sup>127</sup> Renaissance women handle their drapery. Across format, style, and genre, early modern women grasp clothing in their hands and engage somatically with the material worn on their bodies. Feminine hands twist, caress, pull, and collect textiles with gloved or naked fingers. In pictures, women grasp clothing in their hands and engage tactilely with the material worn on their bodies. This fabric-gathering pattern is ubiquitous but uniquely enacted by female figures, perhaps because men did not wear long skirts. However, I believe drapery gathering should be thought of as a gesture—a specific arrangement of hands towards expression and meaning. Renaissance hands do not engage in gesture arbitrarily, but serve as the locus of interaction between viewer and sitter. Considering the distinct relationship early modern women enjoyed with textiles and drapery makes legible the significance of female drapery-touching.

In Renaissance art, the arrangement of fingers and display of palms relays information to the viewer in a way facial contortion or even body language cannot rival.<sup>128</sup> Hands communicate emotion or a relationship between figures.<sup>129</sup> While male hands in portraiture may convey agency, female hands touching textiles instead display the virtue of her husband and her familial

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<sup>127</sup> Hollander argues the awkward foreword posture traceable in late medieval imagery also caused extended bellies. Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 97.

<sup>128</sup> Adrian W. B. Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-Century Art*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 19.

<sup>129</sup> Fredrika Herman Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27.

obligations. Women touch their clothing, but unlike male hands, their digits do not express creative prowess or inimitable individuality.

Fear of wayward female hands pervaded Renaissance thought. Women's hands were inherently wicked, the devil's workshop when not properly occupied in an authorized hobby like embroidery (for the elite) or the spinning (for the working classes). At the same time, female patrician hands show decorum and elite status by always lying placidly at rest. The popular handbook for upper-class maidens, the *Décor Puellarum* (printed in Venice in 1471) urged young ladies "not to touch yourself, nor others, nor any part of the body with your hands, except when absolutely necessary. Your right hand must always rest upon your left, in front of you, on the level of your girdle."<sup>130</sup> Young girls out in society did not want to invite unwanted attention by holding their hands up or outwards, which the female half of *A Bridal Pair* accomplishes, signaling that she welcomes the advances of her parti-colored suitor (fig. 28).<sup>131</sup> This advice must have been taken seriously by the general public, given its widespread showcasing in period imagery of respectable young women. Tucking hands around waistbands ensured female decorousness. Yet, as mentioned above, often in images women's hands touch and grasp drapery. I believe this is not a break in decorum but rather a meaningful nuance. It was socially safer for women to touch clothing or accessories rather than allow their hands to wheel through open air, or make contact with their own bare skin or other people. Through the haptic site where

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<sup>130</sup> Domenico Pellegrini, *Decor puellarum [in italiano]*, translated by Nicolas Jenson, (c. 1420-1480, 1471), 70.

<sup>131</sup> The observe of *A Bridal Pair* is a vanitas image, displaying the ruinous effects of inappropriate sexuality on the two young lovers, who have decayed into corpses.

hands and fabric interact, female figures declare their presence and their association with the production of heirs in images.

Renaissance women both real and imaginary performed display culture by activating their worn fabric. By moving their dresses with hands or walking belly-forward, women flaunted their robes at their fullest extent of sumptuous potential. They made silk sing by rustling it and catching sunlight on reflective patterning. Only by picking up their gowns could women truly display the sheer amount of fabric that went into creating them. By gathering and dropping drapery, women enlivened it. The motion animates. Renaissance women often lifted their hemlines to traverse space. Drapery-gathering figures announce impending movement, evidencing painterly ability to make still, two-dimensional figures look lifelike and brimming with potential action.

Further, the gathering and raising of skirts may be read as potentially erotic. When women picked up their skirts, they revealed also the copious undergarments usually obscured during genteel social exchange. Arbiter of manners Baldassare Castiglione declared this affectation delightful:

Have you ever noticed when a woman, in passing through the street to church or elsewhere, thoughtlessly happens (either in frolic or from other cause) to lift her dress high enough to show the foot and often a little of the leg? Does this not seem to you full of grace, when you see her tricked out with a touch of feminine daintiness in velvet shoes and neat stockings?<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Baldassare Castiglione, *The Courtier of Count Baldessar Castilio, Deuided into Foure Bookes. Verie Necessarie and Profitable for Young Gentlemen and Gentlewomen Abiding in Court, Pallace, or Place*, (Early English Books Online, London: Printed by Iohn Wolfe, 1588; Venice), 67.

The gesture reveals bodily zones usually concealed, converting the place where hands and fabric meet into epicenters of erotic possibility. This gesture, then, highlights the paradox of Renaissance women's lived experience: that to be modest meant to be virtuous, but to reproduce required sexuality. Young women *had* to be sensual to some degree, in order to generate required and desired heirs. When expressing his disinterest towards his arranged marriage to Beatrice d'Este, Ludovico il Moro praised his mistress Cecilia Gallerani not only for her flower-like beauty, but because she was pregnant with his bastard: "gravida et bella come un fiore."<sup>133</sup> This period maieusiophilia is reflected in several period writings beyond il Moro's love for his fertile mistress. In his thirteenth-century *De secretis mulierum*, Albert the Great explains that "A woman...never desires sex so much as she does when she is pregnant," and encourages husbands to indulge such yearnings to keep their gestating wives happy, quipping "medicine is most needed in the time of greatest illness."<sup>134</sup> In Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Elissa relays the story of a Sieneese man named Rinaldo who is hopelessly in love with "a most beautiful gentlewoman," and longs "to have of her all he desired."<sup>135</sup> The lady is pregnant when Rinaldo falls head-over-heels with her, and the two begin a tryst. In his *Autobiography*, Cellini reminisces about a rowdy party during which attendants begin to touch a gorgeous young woman (who in reality is beautifully disguised a sixteen-year-old Spanish boy named Diego) after they discover 'she' is with child:

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<sup>133</sup> Giacomo Trotti to Ercole d'Este, Milan, 8 November 1490, translated by Malaguzzi Valeri, (1913-23, vol. 1), 467.

<sup>134</sup> Albertus Magnus, *Comm. In Sent. 4.31.22.1*, Quoted by James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 451-452.

<sup>135</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, (Firenze : Parigi F.: Le lettere ; Dde Selliers, 1999), Seventh Day, Novel III.

At last the conversation of those loose women vexed my beauty, whom we had christened Pomona for the nonce; and Pomona, wanting to escape from their silly talk, turned restlessly upon her chair, first to one side and then to the other. The female brought by Giulio asked whether she felt indisposed. Pomona answered, yes, she thought she was a month or so with a child; this gave them the opportunity of feeling her body and discovering the real sex of the supposed woman.<sup>136</sup>

Cellini used the boy in drag to “pla[y] so fine a trick” on his unsuspecting friends, who fully believe Diego is a woman. The party guests’ behavior reflects common attitudes towards pregnant ladies.<sup>137</sup> Luke Syson describes this proclivity towards eroticizing pregnancy succinctly: “naturally enough, it was considered important that young married women should be sexually active and alluring. How else would the husband acquire his much-longed-for progeny?”<sup>138</sup> Fertility was attractive.

Each image considered underscores Hollander’s argument that when a beautiful early modern woman walked in public, her belly was meant to lead.<sup>139</sup> The arrangement of undergarments and outer drapery created contrast. An inward curve of the waist and its

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<sup>136</sup> Cellini, *Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, Chapter XXX.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, 252. See also Adrian Randolph for a discussion of Botticelli’s c. 1480 drawing *Abundance* for its visualization of desirable female fecundity. Adrian Randolph, *Engaging Symbols : Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 47-49 and 71.

<sup>139</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 100.

horizontal bloom were emphasized by the juxtaposition of lengthy, vertical skirts.<sup>140</sup> Early modern artists were acutely aware of this, constantly wrestling with what Elizabeth Cropper has termed the beauty problem—how to render an aesthetic woman?

According to Cropper, artists and thinkers drew ideal Renaissance beauty standards—specifically faces and moral fortitude—from medieval romantic poetry.<sup>141</sup> Petrarch’s Laura provided the golden hair, light complexion, and unshakable virtue that became standards of feminine perfection. Missing from his poems, however, is her body type. Though Petrarch ruminated at length on his ladylove’s rosy lips, pearl-like teeth, captivating eyes, and radiant yellow locks, he made no reference to Laura’s legs for example, or—most important for my purposes—stomach.<sup>142</sup>

Cropper believes early modern painters turned to beauty manuals to locate pleasing female shapes. In his *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne*, Firenzuola decrees beauty by meticulously describing women’s bodies. As the speaker moves downwards, carefully expounding the merits of lovely parts—hair, eyes, lips, chin,—he metaphorizes pottery to ruminate on “the other parts down the legs,” below women’s breasts.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>141</sup> Elizabeth Cropper, “On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style,” *The Art Bulletin* 58, no. 3 (September 1, 1976): 376-386. See also Nancy J. Vickers, “Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 265-79.

<sup>142</sup> Victoria Kirkham, “Poetic Ideals of Love and Beauty,” in *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 57.

<sup>143</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, 65.

Firenzuola pens the early modern male gaze when he declares perfectly beautiful women overwhelmingly are equipped with dramatic curves, a bulbous belly pushing outwards from a slender hourglass form. Cropper calls the gravid shape the “amphora-like body” and the “convex oval body,” terms she unearthed from close reading of Pietro Testa’s 1650 personal notes on painting, which Testa based on Firenzuola.<sup>144</sup> Both Testa and Firenzuola are obsessed with the notion that “the curving arcs of her body” should render a woman vase-like.<sup>145</sup> The beautiful vase (versus the ugly) “has sides that swell out...making it appear more slender, and this resembles the ideal, fleshy-hipped woman, who needs no belt to set off her slender midriff.”<sup>146</sup> Firenzuola continues his study: “the hips should be quite pronounced and should let the bosom rise from them, straightforward and elegant.”<sup>147</sup> The outward curvature must contrast harmoniously, resulting in wide, childbearing hips and the swelling womb shape.

Vessels contain. The connection to a vase objectifies the body, and links to gestation. Penny Howell Jolly noted a direct association between Mary Magdalene’s oil jar and the capacity of the former prostitute’s body to be spiritually endowed with Christ’s forgiveness and

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<sup>144</sup> Cropper, “On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style,” 381.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>147</sup> “Quello è il busto d’una donna che s’alza in su’ fianchi.” Firenzuola, Agnolo. *Novelle di A. Firenzuola; seguite dai discorsi Delle bellezze delle donne, e dai Discorsi degli animali* (Collezione diamante. Firenze: GBarbèra, 1886), 303.

wonder.<sup>148</sup> According to Jolly, the saint's jar is a surrogate womb, and a potent symbol of pregnancy.<sup>149</sup> In Marian apocrypha, the Virgin's encounter with Gabriel deals directly with a vessel and its capacity to hold things, particularly sacred pregnancy; "And she took the pitcher, and went out to fill it with water. And, behold, a voice saying: Hail, you who hast received grace; the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"<sup>150</sup> I believe the beautiful vase operates in a similar way, perhaps even in reference to Aristotelian science, which makes the direct comparison between pregnancy and pottery.<sup>151</sup> Under Aristotle's theory, women supplied the matter in generation, and male seed granted that matter form.<sup>152</sup> In this system, the female body is secondary but necessary.<sup>153</sup> The woman is the clay, but the man is the potter who molds and

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<sup>148</sup> Penny Howell Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430-1550: Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*, (London: Routledge, 2017), 131.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>150</sup> Paul Foster, *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (T & T Clark Biblical Studies. London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 43-44.

<sup>151</sup> Carol C. Gould, and Wartofsky, Marx W., *Women and Philosophy : Toward a Theory of Liberation*, (Capricorn Books. New York: Putnam, 1976), 54-80.

<sup>152</sup> Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, 27.

<sup>153</sup> While Aristotle's epigenetic theory is certainly patriarchal, some scholars have recently noted that his views are less corrosively sexist than those of his contemporaries, because he assigns a modicum of generative influence to female biology. T. Samaras, "Aristotle on Gender in Politics I." *History of Political Thought* 37, no. 4 (2016): 604, n. 35.

shapes with his commanding hands.<sup>154</sup> In Aristotle’s words, “that which desires form is matter, as the female desires the male.”<sup>155</sup> The woman is both clay and vessel. The vase’s curves may be aesthetically pleasing, but the overall vase—the uterus—is an object that waits to receive and house valuable material.

Firenzuola’s authoritative treatise also boldly connects women’s beauty to their maternity. During his examination of the torso (for which Firenzuola uses the word “bosom,” *busto*, to refer to the breasts, midriff, and hips as one general area), the speaker pauses at the chest to expound, “besides their usefulness in distilling nourishment for little babies, the breasts have a certain splendor, with such novel charm, that we are forced to rest our eye upon them in spite of ourselves.”<sup>156</sup>

Early modern female clothing and purity culture cannot be unwound. Several of Firenzuola’s terms defining beautiful women circle around the concepts of virginity and modesty. Firenzuola outlined several qualities for the ideal woman, such as *Venustà*, meaning “the feminine counterpart of male dignity is noble, chaste, and virtuous, springing from celestial rather than terrestrial love.”<sup>157</sup> Cropper admits that these terms are slippery and ill-defined (*non so che*), but at the same time integral to how artists thought about women’s likenesses in the sixteenth century.<sup>158</sup> Firenzuola also insists the perfect woman is well-bred and from a noble

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<sup>154</sup> Sophia M. Connell, *Aristotle on Female Animals: A Study of the Generation of Animals*, Cambridge Classical Studies (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 168 and 185-186

<sup>155</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, I.9.192a, 20-25.

<sup>156</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, 31.

<sup>157</sup> Cropper, “On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style,” 380 n. 34.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 380

family, recalling the obsession with patrilineal heredities in this period.<sup>159</sup> Firenzuola further gestures to unquestionable lineage by pointing out Florentine nobles wish their children to resemble their parents: “And your handsome little sons and elegant little daughters will attest to it to all those people who will not have had opportunity to admire you, for all your features are reflected in your children,” reflecting a common hope found in many fifteenth-century treatises.<sup>160</sup> Neither Testa nor his inspiration Firenzuola were directly committed to reminding viewers about women’s roles as mothers, but both thinkers picked up and maintained a deeper, more entrenched gender norm which informed overall beauty standards and ideals. Pregnancy haunted women’s dress in every sphere, and at each stage of premenopausal life.

### **Renaissance maternity wear: investing the female body**

Associations between marriage, pregnancy, and costuming were frequent in early modern culture. Nuptial celebrations generated a wealth of clothing for brides. Dress made up the majority of the counter-dowry and dowry, occasionally up to fifty percent.<sup>161</sup> Clothing was also directly tethered to childbirth and pregnancy. New mothers wore mantles and jackets during the requisite lying-in phase after giving birth.<sup>162</sup> The 1500s also debuted of the first maternity tunic, which enfolded the waist in pleats.<sup>163</sup> Period inventories speak of attire specifically designed for

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 385

<sup>160</sup> Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, 26.

<sup>161</sup> Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 65.

<sup>162</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance*, 37-38.

<sup>163</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 118.

confined and post-partum women, often suffixing “*da parto*,” to articles of clothing, such as “*tunica da parto*,” “*camicia da parto*,” or “*busto da parto*.”<sup>164</sup> In late-stage pregnancy, women walking public streets donned special cloaks referred to as “*mantili da parto*,” “*mantiletti da parto*,” or “*mantiluzi da parto*,” in Florentine inventories.<sup>165</sup> While none of these objects survive from the Renaissance, Susan North believes an early seventeenth century English jacket held in the Victoria and Albert Museum may have been created for and worn by an expecting mother at home (fig. 29).<sup>166</sup> The drape is loose and long ribbons allow for expansion as needed. The needlework embroidery showcases flowers and fruit, common symbols of fecundity throughout the early modern era.

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<sup>164</sup> See the glossary and appendices (particularly the Inghirrami inventory) of Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance*, for an exhaustive list of clothing items associated with pregnancy and birth.

<sup>165</sup> Period inventories only sometimes helpfully attach the descriptor “*da parto*” to the term “*mantello*.” Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance*, 37-38. The word “*mantello*,” was used to describe both men and women’s cloaks, even though the latter were cut much longer, to the feet or ankle. Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 155-57 and 163. Other terms used to describe these diverse garments were *vescapo* and *guascapo*. Levi Pisetzky acknowledges how difficult it is to pin down the specifics of Renaissance cloaks “women’s mantel (*i mantelli femminili*) fashions were changeable and are difficult to identify.” Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del costume in Italia* v.2, 353 and 245. Generally, it seems pregnancy cloaks specifically were finer, dyed with brighter colors, and more often ornamented with gemstones or decorative trimming.

<sup>166</sup> Avril Hart and Susan North, *Historical Fashion in Detail: The 17th and 18th Centuries*, (London: V & A Publications, 1998), 22 and 24.

Pregnancy clothes did not hide a woman's physical state, but exhibited it to friends and family. Garments made for and associated with late-stage pregnancy were designed to beautify the wearer and possibly even set her apart from women who had not yet conceived. In 1476 the Florentine Bartolomeo Sasseti bought his servant woman "special clothes," when she was pregnant.<sup>167</sup> Vests, shirts, cloaks, dresses, slippers, and veils were all made for expectant women.<sup>168</sup> These clothes were often embroidered or fringed, such as the pink nightshirt lined with fur and ribbons Giovanni Strozzi bought for his pregnant wife in 1471, or a pink birth *mantello* edged in gray fur and studded with seed pearl buttons Bernardo di Giorgio commissioned for his in 1414.<sup>169</sup> These articles also were very colorful, and it seems pink was a favored hue.<sup>170</sup> The common use of pink may be due to the lighter red tones favored by the Virgin Mary, or the prosaic association of the color with love and marriage.<sup>171</sup> In both images and lived reality, clothing associated with pregnancy announced the well-dressed wearer's being with child with pride.<sup>172</sup> The blaze of white undergarments between opening laces on the sides or

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<sup>167</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance*, 13 n. 33.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 37-38.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 38.

<sup>171</sup> Andrea Bayer, "Paintings of Love and Marriage in the Italian Renaissance | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History.

<sup>172</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance*, 27.

front of gowns would have been unmissable in public.<sup>173</sup> These expensive, pretty clothes rewarded mothers-to-be for their fertility.

Yet what did an early modern pregnant woman wear before her third trimester and subsequent confinement? No primary account speaks of a woman altering her clothing due to pregnancy.<sup>174</sup> In a period when the creation of clothing was lengthy and difficult, constantly re-tailoring dresses when women became pregnant was impractical. These accounts are not missing. Instead, all Renaissance female dress was potential maternity dress. I believe pregnancy expectation, which spiked during the Renaissance, paired with the uniquely female act of child bearing *evolved* women's overall fashion during the period.

Clothes were not always cut along gender bias; this is a phenomenon that emerged only in the mid-fourteenth century. During the medieval period, for example, both upper-class men and women wore the houppelande, which was belted or pinned according to masculine and feminine norms, but was not tailored respective to gender. A popular medieval mode of dress, the bliaut (a similar gender-neutral garment), which made its debut on European shores in 1099 in the wake of the First Crusade, featured an unrelentingly tight bodice and located waistlines around the hips. This gown had to be altered during pregnancy through "opened seams and added gussets and gores," an expensive and time-consuming endeavor.<sup>175</sup> During the Renaissance a solution was found in the much more forgiving empire waistline, which allowed

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<sup>173</sup> This practice may be said to parallel slashing in sleeves to show off expensive underlayers.

<sup>174</sup> Hart North, *Historical Fashion in Detail: The 17th and 18th Centuries*, 22 and 24.

<sup>175</sup> Mary Ellen Snodgrass, "Maternity Clothes," in *World Clothing and Fashion: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Social Influence*, (Armonk, NY: Sharpe Reference, 2014), 432-434. .

for the free expansion of the abdomen during all stages of gestation.<sup>176</sup> Notice the gown worn by the new mother in Bartolomeo di Fruosino's *desco da parto* dated April 25<sup>th</sup> 1428 (fig. 30). This scene is an accurate slice of Renaissance life: a cutaway interior reveals the proud mother in her bed, her baby held by an attendant on the floor, while her friends gather to congratulate her on the successful birth.<sup>177</sup> The woman wears a red maternity jacket, but her high-waisted, loose-fitting gown is not at all dissimilar from any gown worn by Renaissance women across minor objects and portraiture.

Period manuals on women's reproductive health give little advice on dressing. For example, *The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives*, the most popular early modern pregnancy manual, does not mention clothing. It is much more concerned with the mother's

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Entertaining soon after giving birth was common in the period. On May 8<sup>th</sup> of 1469 Alessandra Strozzi wrote to her son Filippo of his wife Fiammetta's active social life surrounding the birth of their son Alfonso, "And Fiammetta had the baby and we had lots of people here." Later, in the same letter, Alessandra relays that Fiammetta tried to use her pregnancy to avoid attending a Medici wedding, not because she was confined to her childbed, but because it would be rather expensive, "I told Lorenzo he should tell you how Mona Lucrezia di Piero [de'Medici] had invited Fiammetta to the wedding twice before she had the baby. I replied that she'd have to excuse her as she was expecting a baby and she might still be in bed. Since then, as she's heard that Fiammetta had had the baby, she sent us another message to say she really wanted to her to come, and we shouldn't say no. She doesn't want to go, first because you're not here and also because if she does go we'll have to spend several hundred florins." New mothers in such circles proudly showed off their newborns to friends and family, and were expected to rejoin society as soon as they were healthy enough for parties. Macinghi and Alessandra Strozzi, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, 213-215.

bodily habits, including her diet, exercise, and any pre-existing medical conditions.<sup>178</sup> This is likely because women's garments needed little adjustment for pregnancy. Those writings which do mention how to dress when expecting do not counsel the reader to buy new clothes, only to wear fewer or looser cords in her existing ones.<sup>179</sup> Doctors recommended women dress in light, wide-fitting clothes that laid free and easy on the body with little tightness or fastenings so as not to impede the expansion of the womb.<sup>180</sup> Clothes a woman owned before falling pregnant sufficed during the earlier (and lengthier) stages of gestation.

In 1571, Eleanor of Toledo owned multiple court gowns that fastened up the back and laced up the sides, “an arrangement that would allow the opportunity for progressive loosening.”<sup>181</sup> The 1471 Minerbetti Trousseaux discussed above meticulously records in fastidious detail every item of clothing in the household down to color and fabric type.<sup>182</sup> However, this *ricordanza* does not mention particular pregnancy clothing.<sup>183</sup> Andrea Minerbetti had three wives and several children, so multiple mothers would have lived and given birth under

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<sup>178</sup> Eucharius Rösslin and Wendy Arons, *When Midwifery Became the Male Physician's Province: The Sixteenth Century Handbook : The Rose Garden for Pregnant Women and Midwives*, (Newly English, ed. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland &, 1994), 29-100.

<sup>179</sup> Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, 67.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>181</sup> Karen Hearn, “A Fatal Fertility? Elizabeth and Jacobean Pregnancy Portraits,” *Costume: The Journal of the Costume Society*, no.34, (2000): 42.

<sup>182</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 139.

<sup>183</sup> See Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, Appendix 4, 233-239.

his roof before it was inventoried. It is possible these items were sold, lost, or recut for the children, but it is also likely his wives did not need to radically alter their attire for pregnancy and its processes.<sup>184</sup> Pregnancy-specific clothing is not necessarily missing, because normal daily wear easily doubled as maternity wear. No distinctive clothes were tailored for new fathers.<sup>185</sup> During the Renaissance, women's daily clothing was threaded with reproductive encouragement.

Clothing played a far more significant role in the life of the early modern wearer than broadcasting rank. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass maintain that clothing had the power to alter the life of its bearer in a process they term transnating or investiture.<sup>186</sup> Clothing did not simply broadcast the wearer's social status; it shaped social transition. A coronation was legitimized through the placement of the royal jewels on a monarch's head, or a man became a servant of God by donning priestly vestments. In this system, investiture was a transformative act, "permeating the wearer," and molding his identity.<sup>187</sup> Renaissance raiment was animated towards this process. Jones and Stallybrass do not include pregnancy in their study, but I find investiture theory applicable to the gravid shape worn by women both real and imaginary. The style extolled women's capacity as potential child-bearers and as such upheld period female idealization, which demanded premarital abstinence, fertility, and motherhood.

Pregnancy was a transformative act. For Renaissance women, the transition from virgin to mother was a momentous shift in identity and status, one undertaken with grandiose

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<sup>184</sup> Adult clothing was often retailored for offspring, which likely meant that the very same gowns used to cue a woman's body towards motherhood could have clothed the body of her ensuing children.

<sup>185</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance*, 153.

<sup>186</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 1-7.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

ceremony. Both marriage and birth rituals utilized the power of clothing to invest upper-class women with a new status, that of bride and more importantly, mother to future generations. Bridal and pregnancy adornments literally invested women's identities with wifedom and maternity.<sup>188</sup> Further, an early modern woman's clothing suggested pregnancy—to her family, friends, and most importantly to her own body. The act of dressing, donning layer atop layer, was an act of haptic suggestion. Pressure to sustain decorum compounded with gendered tactility activated the powerful transnating process. If, as Jones and Stallybrass maintain, clothing in the early modern world acted as a “second skin imbued with the power to name” its wearer, then drapery could rename a woman as wife and mother.<sup>189</sup> Under the investiture system, sensorial participation with drapery activated the transnating power of clothing towards the duty to future maternity.

Early modern women experienced an exceptional, gendered relationship with worn drapery and dress. Women's clothing and accompanying undergarments boasted far more differentiation than their male counterpart's.<sup>190</sup> As the period advanced, men's hemlines ascended higher and higher up stockinged legs, ultimately culminating in the need for the first iterations of the codpiece in the mid-to-late fifteenth century. In contrast, women's legs remained consistently hidden before, during, and after the Renaissance. Female bodies simply hosted more fabric. Art theoretical treatises cleaved a divide between the body and its textile adornment in

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<sup>188</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance*, 150.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>190</sup> Women's elongated skirts and sleeves, alongside a higher number of underlayers, gendered clothing. Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 162.

gendered terms, wherein the underlying bodies of figures represented across artistic practice are masculine, and the adorning draperies are secondary and feminine.<sup>191</sup>

During the period, women were also more closely associated with ostentatious fashion and drapery. Castiglione confirms my theory when he laments in *The Courtier* that Italian men do not know how to dress themselves. Eliding sartorial excess with femininity, Castiglione insists he: "...would like our courtier always to appear neat and refined and to observe a certain modest elegance, though he should avoid being effeminate or foppish in his attire and not exaggerate one feature more than another."<sup>192</sup> Women's dress was more often remarked upon in books similar to *The Courtier*, and across Italy the majority of sumptuary laws regulated women's outfits.<sup>193</sup> More ink was spilled over women's clothing, because more was at stake in women's clothing.

The life-size portraits of Tornabuoni women in the prominent Florentine family's chapel in Santa Maria Novella highlight how gravid dress upheld female decorum, maternity expectation, and investiture. Several of the Tornabuoni sacred dolls showcase the suggestively-fecund shape.<sup>194</sup> Most scholarship on the female-dominated moments in the fresco cycle rightly

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<sup>191</sup> Estelle Lingo, "Beyond the Fold: Drapery in Seventeenth-Century Sculptural Practice and Criticism," in *Unfolding the Textile Medium in Early Modern Art and Literature*, ed. Tristan Weddigen, *Textile Studies*, vol. 3. Berlin: Edition Imorde/Gebr. Mann Verlag, (2011): 80-84, 81.

<sup>192</sup> Castiglione, *The Courtier of Count Baldessar Castilio, Deuided into Foure Bookes. Verie Necessarie and Profitable for Young Gentlemen and Gentlewomen Abiding in Court, Pallace, or Place*, 136.

<sup>193</sup> Elizabeth Currie, "Prescribing Fashion: Dress, Politics and Gender in Sixteenth-Century Italian Conduct Literature," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 2 (May 1, 2000): 157-77, 168.

<sup>194</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 210.

focuses on the figure of Giovanna degli Albizzi da Tornabuoni. Giovanna married into the prominent Florentine family in 1486, and tragically passed away after succumbing to complications connected to her second pregnancy in 1488, before the chapel's completion. Ghirlandaio recorded her likeness—at least twice, possibly thrice—at her widower's (Lorenzo da Tornabuoni) behest.<sup>195</sup> Giovanna is considered a model Renaissance woman according to contemporary standards, following the physiognomic tradition that championed outer beauty as a clear and trustworthy indication of inner virtue. The seventeen-year-old Giovanna was situated for motherhood from her betrothal; included in her *donora* (the period catchword for bridal gifts outside of the counter-dowry and *trousseaux*) from her fiancée's family is “a pinchbeck box for the midwife.”<sup>196</sup> After her heartbreaking death, Poliziano wrote an epigram intended as her epitaph, tying her identity to both her wifhood and maternity, “By birth, beauty, child, wealth, and husband I was fortunate, and also by talent, character and mind.”<sup>197</sup> It is no coincidence, therefore, that the fertility-promoting gravid style is present on the most iconic Tornabuoni lady. While several scholars have established that Giovanna's representations are irrefutably connected to pregnancy, I expand on their observations to add that Giovanna acts as an exemplar for the other young, marriageable Tornabuoni women within the fresco cycle.

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<sup>195</sup> Maria Deprano, “‘No Painting on Earth Would Be More Beautiful’: An Analysis of Giovanna Degli Albizzi's Portrait Inscription,” *Renaissance Studies* 22, no. 5 (2008): 617–41, 621.

<sup>196</sup> See Gert Jan van der Sman, *Lorenzo and Giovanna: Timeless Art and Fleeting Lives in Renaissance Florence*, (Rev. English ed. Florence: Mandragora, 2010), 34.

<sup>197</sup> Angelo Poliziano, *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite*, translated by Isidoro Del Lungo, (Nachdr. d. Ausg. Florenz 1867. Hildesheim ; New York: Olms, 1976), 154-155.

Giovanna is one of a very shallow pool of identifiable Renaissance women, rarer still because multiple likenesses of her have come down to us. She stands full-figured in the *Visitation* scene within the Tornabuoni funerary chapel (fig. 31), and wears the same dress, jewelry, and hairstyle in the strikingly similar stand-alone Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza portrait (fig. 32). In both, Giovanna is depicted in strict profile to cue the viewer to the posthumous nature of the portrait. Her stance is also emblematic of virtue itself, borrowing from ancient Roman numismatic precedent.<sup>198</sup> Recently, Patricia Simons and others have argued that the previously unknown young lady in a pink overdress decorated with shining gold patterning in *Birth of Saint John the Baptist* may also be a still-living Giovanna (fig. 33).<sup>199</sup> Scholars speculate over whether or not Giovanna is depicted with child in all three images. Indeed, Maria DePrano contends that in *Birth of Saint John the Baptist* “the sitter’s swollen, ailing appearance may reflect the illness that led to Giovanna’s premature death while pregnant in autumn 1488.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 193.

<sup>199</sup> See Maria DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018, Patricia Simons, “Giovanna and Ginevra: Portraits for the Tornabuoni Family by Ghirlandaio and Botticelli,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 14/15 (January 1, 2011): 103–35, and Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 204. Sman believes *Birth of Saint John the Baptist* commemorated the birth of Giovanna and Lorenzo’s first and only surviving son, Giovannino. Sman, *Lorenzo and Giovanna: Timeless Art and Fleeting Lives in Renaissance Florence*, 95-102.

<sup>200</sup> Deprano, *Art Patronage, Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 122.

While I disagree that the pink-wearing Giovanna presents debilitating medical symptoms in the fresco, her body is indeed classically suggestive-fecund. The forward thrust of her midsection is even more apparent in Ghirlandaio's preparatory drawings for the fresco (fig. 34). In both study and final product, hands rest neatly atop her midsection, just below the midpoint where her loose *giornea* meets the dramatic inward cinch of her bodice and causes her midsection to bloom outward. In both the *Visitation* and Thyssen-Bornemisza portrait, references to the implicit confluence of fertility, chastity, and pregnancy abound, including pearls, a coiled dragon, white flowers, and the severe curvature of her gown over her pronounced womb.<sup>201</sup> Giovanna's outfit in all three images forgoes a belt, a potent symbol of chastity. Giovanna's body, arrested in late-term pregnancy, was buried in Santa Maria Novella with the child in utero. Entombed in the chapel, Giovanna's representations operate in the immediate vicinity of her physical remains. Her portrait, therefore, commemorates feminine perfection as martyred maternity. Even if Ghirlandaio did not paint Giovanna with child, pregnancy is nevertheless at play. In all three representations, Giovanna performs her own idealization as a wife who died in pursuit of progeny.<sup>202</sup> Her likenesses hint at the somber cause of her death while simultaneously alluding to

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<sup>201</sup> For a complete list, see DePrano, *Art Patronage, Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, pages 141-166. DePrano makes the convincing observation that the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza portrait shows far more of Giovanna's body than Ghirlandaio's other portraits of women. DePrano surmises that the "unbelted womb surely refer[s] to her gravid state at her death," on page 165.

<sup>202</sup> Scholars agree Ghirlandaio based the portrait and fresco likenesses on one another, although it remains unclear which came first, or if both images were created from the same cartoon. Patricia Simons believes

her honorific sacrifice, showing her as the model living mother she was meant to be.

Ghirlandaio's exercise was to record in pigment the lost lady's virtues, so that they would always be associated with her representation, her resting place, and her memory. Giovanna was the perfect Renaissance woman in both life and death.<sup>203</sup> Her silhouette plays no small role in this signaling.

Yet the gravid dress shape is also apparent on Lodovica Tornabuoni, daughter to the head of the Tornabuoni house during the chapel cycle's creation, in *Birth of the Virgin* (fig. 35). A sculpted bodice tightens then gives way to a swelling midsection above trumpet sleeves. The alternatively-patterned second dress and *camica* cause her falsely-pregnant belly. At the time of the chapel's decoration, Lodovica lived in her father Giovanni's house and was thus virginal. As mentioned above, one of the attendants in *Birth of the Virgin* likewise sports a bulging midsection, but also is probably not pregnant. The profiles of these women are not radically dissimilar from Giovanna's. Whereas the suggestive-fecund shape celebrates and commends Giovanna's real-life pregnancies, it refers to fertility potential in the other Tornabuoni women

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the portrait came first. Simons, "Giovanna and Ginevra: Portraits for the Tornabuoni Family by Ghirlandaio and Botticelli," 115.

<sup>203</sup> It is safe to assume Lorenzo da Tornabuoni, Giovanna's widower, adored her. Not only did he oversee the two aforementioned Ghirlandaio portraits, but also commissioned Ghirlandaio's *Visitation* altarpiece for Santa Maria Maddalena di Cestello, and paid for masses safeguarding her soul to be spoken before it weekly for a hundred years. It is even possible Lorenzo, in collaboration with Poliziano, wrote the famous epigram on the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza portrait. Her death must have affected him severely, even in an age where men often lost their wives in childbed. See Deprano, "'No Painting on Earth Would Be More Beautiful': An Analysis of Giovanna Degli Albizzi's Portrait Inscription," 618-624.

throughout the fresco cycle. Further, Giovanna models ideal wifehood for these other young, marriageable women.

The red robed, veiled young woman standing behind Giovanna in the *Visitation* has been identified by Simons and others as Ginevra Gianfigliuzzi da Tornabuoni, the second wife of Lorenzo, whom he married in 1491.<sup>204</sup> She stands behind her deceased predecessor, literally in her wake.<sup>205</sup> Giovanna and Ginevra are connected across Tornabuoni art patronage. In Niccolò Fiorentino's double-sided portrait medal, Giovanna's name appears after the inscribed words, "wife of Lorenzo Tornabuoni" (fig. 36). On the obverse, three nude graces dance arm-in-arm above an epigram reading "Chastity, Beauty, Love," proclaiming not only the lady on the other side's complete personhood, but also that these three desirable traits link together as naturally as the three Roman goddesses embrace.<sup>206</sup> In his funerary epigram, Lorenzo eternalized his late wife's connection with the three graces in text: "The Graces gave her wits and Venus beauty, The goddess Diana granted her a chaste heart."<sup>207</sup> Ginevra also appears accompanied by three graces in Botticelli's 1490-1491 frescos upon a wall in the Tornabuoni villa at Chiasso Macerelli (fig. 37).<sup>208</sup> DePrano has pointed out that in antique literature, the three graces often appear in

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<sup>204</sup> Simons, "Giovanna and Ginevra: Portraits for the Tornabuoni Family by Ghirlandaio and Botticelli,"

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

<sup>206</sup> The two frontal nudes on the back of Giovanna's portrait medal are typically fleshy, but their bodies cannot be considered possibly pregnant, in striking contrast to the lady they characterize.

<sup>207</sup> Quoted by Jean K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 277.

<sup>208</sup> The white-clad minor goddess clutches her drapery above her womb to create a gravid shape.

stories “encouraging...and bestowing fertility,” in new brides.<sup>209</sup> This fertility-promoting device then links together both Giovanna and Ginevra as Tornabuoni wives.<sup>210</sup> While scholars have noted that Giovanna likely serves as an emblem for Ginevra in the *Visitation* (but not through the Three Graces), I would expand that she is a guiding light for all the potential mothers in the frescoes.<sup>211</sup>

It is no accident that Giovanna anachronistically breaks time to participate in the *Visitation*, a moment in the Gospel of Luke which takes pregnancy as its central narrative. Many contemporary Tornabuoni women participate in Biblical scenes related to holy pregnancy and childbirth. Nagel argues: “for good reasons, the effigies of Tornabuoni women were consistently placed within scenes of childbirth and pregnancy.”<sup>212</sup> Frick refers to scenes in which contemporary Tornabuoni women interrupt these moments in divine history as “fertility narratives.”<sup>213</sup> While many contemporary women participate in scenes of sacred pregnancy, Giovanna leads by standing nearest the most significant of the three moments, the *Visitation*, a pregnancy narrative which divides history from the Age of Law and ushers in the Age of Grace.

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<sup>209</sup> Deprano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence*, 64-67.

<sup>210</sup> Ginevra bore three children, a son and two daughters, one of whom was named Giovanna. The girl’s namesake may very well be Giovanna degli Albizzi da Tornabuoni, a woman the child never met but whose multiple likenesses she probably grew up seeing. Sman, *Lorenzo and Giovanna: Timeless Art and Fleeting Lives in Renaissance Florence*, 128.

<sup>211</sup> Simons “Giovanna and Ginevra: Portraits for the Tornabuoni Family by Ghirlandaio and Botticelli,” 119.

<sup>212</sup> Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 25.

<sup>213</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 204.

The visual language of the fresco confirms Giovanna's conceptual centrality within the fertility narrative triad. Giovanna is the only woman in the entire fresco cycle to appear more than once. Though grouped within the fifteenth-century figures, Giovanna is isolated. Two *grisaille* pillars draw the eyes downward to where she stands. A highlighted brick wall boxes her in, as if to frame her apart from the other women. Directly above Giovanna's head, stalactites of fast, shadowy lines buzz and cascade. A bush of three-pronged leaves springs out just before her womb, further drawing the viewer's eye towards her belly. A similar bush hovers above her head, and is repeated over Ginevra, connecting together Lorenzo's two wives. These distinctive plants may reference the Holy Trinity, an encapsulation of the Passion Cycle. The *Visitation* is the only fertility narrative which takes place out-of-doors, allowing these unique plants to flourish beneath the Tuscan sunlight. Textile leaves are a prominent embellishment on the *Birth of John the Baptist* Giovanna, a dagged edge of oak leaves trims her rose-colored gown, further connecting her many likenesses across the Tornabuoni fresco cycle.

The primary occupation of these women was to mother future generations, to further bloodlines and social legacies. The scene speaks the lady's idealization. Giovanna performs civic pride as a member of the successful and prominent Tornabuoni family. She has passed away, but her image lives on through her carefully costumed likeness, possibly in a votive sense, a practice which thrived in contemporary Florence.<sup>214</sup> Nagel adds that the painted likenesses of the married or marriageable Tornabuoni women stand near saints to activate the votive connection to

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<sup>214</sup> See Aby Warburg, "The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), 189-190.

Biblical, miraculous pregnancies.<sup>215</sup> However, the contours of the two sacred pregnancies in the center of the *Visitation* composition remain completely hidden behind large cloaks. Both Mary and Saint Elizabeth are pregnant, but it is Giovanna's body that hints at gravidity. Women prayed to these divine figures in hopes of gaining intervention in their pregnancies, but Ginevra and the other Tornabuoni women may have also looked to Giovanna as a source of guidance and inspiration. She wears gravid dress to champion its close association with the apotheosizing of maternity at the heart of Renaissance marriage. The message encompasses all Tornabuoni women. The older, veiled lady standing before Ginevra and directly behind Giovanna is identified as Lorenzo da Tornabuoni's mother, who at the time of the fresco's completion had also died in childbirth.<sup>216</sup> Though she is the departed matriarch of the family, it is Giovanna who acts as primary lady. Frick argues that young Florentine women dressed to honor the commune and God.<sup>217</sup> This conclusion may be drawn out to include that married women, therefore, dressed to best ready their bodies for further perpetuation of the population.

Renaissance patricians of both sexes wore their finest raiment when sitting for group or stand-alone portraits. Ghirlandaio's fresco program meticulously recorded in paint a gown style that invested the body with fertility. Frick argues that the clothes donned by the Tornabuoni women—setting them in stark contrast against the *all'antica* draped Biblical figures—are not only accurate, but also materialize the male gaze.<sup>218</sup> The gowns were tailored by male Florentine

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<sup>215</sup> Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 25.

<sup>216</sup> Emma Micheletti and Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Domenico Ghirlandaio*, Library of Great Masters, Firenze: Scala, 1990, 50.

<sup>217</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 224.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-206.

textile workers, and designed by the male Tornabuoni head of household.<sup>219</sup> These costumes assume patrilineal honor.<sup>220</sup> In the end, it does not really matter if Giovanna is meant to be read as actually pregnant or not. What is truly important here is that she lived, loved, and died in a world that expected pregnancy from her.<sup>221</sup> In a similar vein, portraits of women were highly idealized, often to the point of sacrificing physiognomic accuracy. Giovanna's body, in parallel, is idealized as potentially maternal. The Tornabuoni women are located in direct conversation with sacred pregnancy, solidifying their connection to their marital duty within a charged religious space. Their costume identifies them as fifteenth-century mortal women anachronistically witnessing the paramount pregnancy in Christian history.

### **Gravid dress out of style**

The suggestive-fecund style is indexical of Renaissance gender difference. I submit this shape is the feminine counterpart to the most masculine of sixteenth-century fashion accessories: the codpiece. Exaggerated bellies on women's gowns generally fell out of fashion around 1590, about the same time as the codpiece.<sup>222</sup> Often emerging in portraits directly above or below a nobleman's prominent sword hilt to doubly symbolize masculinity, the codpiece was the ultimate sartorial expression of male ego in early modern fashion. It is widely associated with male virility and fertility. Fashion historians link the accessory to masculine reproductivity, and "with

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>221</sup> The same may be said of Ilaria del Carretto.

<sup>222</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 110.

sexual conquest, and specifically with phallic penetration.”<sup>223</sup> The accessory signals male erotics of power, allowing its wearer to perform sexual or militaristic prowess. Gravid dress correlates by promoting constant pregnancy. The codpiece, at its trendiest, “assumed the shape of a permanent erection.”<sup>224</sup> Just as the suggestive-fecund style may have been a response to the need to repopulate Europe, scholars contend assertions of masculine power and virility became integral to male identity in the wake of the Italian Wars and the tumultuous political and economic landscape of sixteenth-century Italy.<sup>225</sup> The juxtaposition of the masculine codpiece and the feminine bulging belly reflect Renaissance medical theory that men provided the active ingredient in child generation, while women were merely receptive vessels to house fetuses. If the codpiece represents power, gravid dress then emblemizes women’s value to their patriarchal society.

It is possible both the codpiece and gravid dress exited the visual and material record at the same time and for the same reason: the widespread crackdown on flamboyant dress and blatant references to sexuality during the Counter Reformation.<sup>226</sup> New decency norms likely killed both trends. Pressure to reproduce and restrictions on sexuality did not dissipate in the seventeenth century, but anxiety concerning sexualized fashions prevailed.

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<sup>223</sup> M. Bella Mirabella, *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 102.

<sup>224</sup> Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 62.

<sup>225</sup> Carole Collier Frick, “Boys to Men: Codpieces and Masculinity in Sixteenth-Century Europe,” In *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, edited by Naomi J. Miller, *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 169.

<sup>226</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 110.

Domelike bellies contour female bodies, fragmenting womanhood into motherhood. The gravid dress style was animated towards the expectation of pregnancy in both pictures and lived existence in the early modern period. Renaissance women performed motherly potential—fantasized fertility—by wearing loose-fitting, layered garments. Women’s clothing, the closest item to their skin in both lived experience and reflected depictions of reality, imbedded textile materiality with gendered familial expectation. Whereas an upper-class woman’s central enterprise was to be with child as often as possible, the shape was so integral to early modern femininity it persisted in all social groups, even those which did not seek pregnancy such as prostitutes and nuns.<sup>227</sup> According to Frick, “women continued to affect” the bunching of drapery around their midsections “even when pregnant or past childbearing.”<sup>228</sup> This affectation can clearly be seen in the older, veiled woman and pink-clad woman in figure 33. Suggestive fecundity was so pervasive that women could never leave it behind. They adopted it as girls, poured their hopes into their fabric as fruitful wives, and still bunched up their skirts when at an age that modern viewers would consider postmenopausal. Renaissance images argue that if a woman could be pregnant, she could be perfect.

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<sup>227</sup> See Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 142, for how clothing in nun’s dowries differed drastically from typical dowries. Young girls bound for nunneries needed far less fabric, partially because they would never become mothers, but nevertheless wore ample skirting with the textiles available to them.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

### Interlude: Gravid Dress Abroad

Gravid dress existed beyond the borders of Renaissance painting to embellish the pages of sixteenth-century costume books.<sup>229</sup> Between 1562 and 1601, approximately one dozen costume books were printed and sold throughout continental Europe.<sup>230</sup> Efforts to travel and record contemporary dress trends firsthand began even earlier, in the 1520s.<sup>231</sup> Marking the genesis of a fresh, consumable media, sixteenth-century costume books are the distant forebears of the vast array of fashion publications extant today. These books are generally organized by geographic location, and the costume wearers marching across the pages are often identified by gender, ethnicity, class, faith, and occupation. Rather than reporting rapidly changing styles, as modern fashion periodicals do, these books evidence Renaissance humanists' need to document and intellectualize European dominance and global otherness. Advertised as visual, anthropological treatises preserving national culture for the academically curious, costume books are key cultural touchstones for investigating the history of dress and fashion trends across early modern Europe.

Costume books foreground difference to reinforce social, racial, and ethnic otherness. Yet across the genre, in hundreds of illustrations, women's torsos remain largely similar. As established in Chapter One, the gravid style died out in the late sixteenth century, replaced by stiff corsets that created a flat torso. The costume books published in the latter quarter of the

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<sup>229</sup> This survey is not exhaustive of the silhouette; it appears here and in other contemporary costume books more often than I have noted.

<sup>230</sup> Charlotte Colding Smith, "'Depicted with Extraordinary Skill': Ottoman Dress in Sixteenth-Century German Printed Costume Books," *Textile History* 44, no. 1 (2013): 26-39. See also Jo Anne Olian, "Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," *Dress* 3, no. 1 (1977): 20-21.

<sup>231</sup> Olian, "Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," 21.

century generally reproduce images from earlier sources. Therefore the books mostly showcase early-to-mid-century sixteenth styles and trends previous to the Cinquecento. Bronwen Wilson noted a “bell-shaped form” in Abraham de Bruyn’s book repeated across multiple female Danish figures, but I located the same shape in every costume book held in the Lipperheide Costume Library in Berlin, which houses one of the most complete collections of early modern costume books in the world.<sup>232</sup> In a genre that strove to record the diversity in contemporary and historical fashion, gravid dress is a constant. The style crossed European cultural lines.

The costume books tell a story about gravid dress not dissimilar from the Renaissance media examined in Chapter One. This section of my overall study acts as an interlude, borrowing the methodological and theoretical framework of the previous chapter, which established how and why gravid dress was constructed. My aim is to repeat (and therefore reinforce) my argument by treating the costume books as a case study. These gravid figures are not pregnant, but their clothing choices—which the costume books claim to report—make them appear so. Examples drawn from the costume books uphold my theories, especially concerning the prevalence and methods of constructing the shape. Costume books were written by Spanish, German, French, and Italian chroniclers who documented active, lived styles across Western Europe. My intention is not to read the costume books as lexicons of cultural memory and national identity (which they certainly are), but instead as further evidence of the actuality of gravid dress across early modern Western Europe.

Costume book scholarship is nascent. The most comprehensive study of the genre was undertaken by Jo Anne Olian, who traced the appropriation patterns between books, and

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<sup>232</sup> Bronwen Wilson, *The World in Venice : Print, the City and Early Modern Identity*, (Studies in Book and Print Culture. Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 72.

established much of the scholarly groundwork concerning their audience, dissemination, and overall publication history.<sup>233</sup> Eugenia Paulicelli focuses specifically on the most famous of the genre, Cesare Vecellio's *Degli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo* (*The Clothing, Ancient and Modern, of Various Parts of the World*), first published in 1590.<sup>234</sup> Ann Jones and Margaret Rosenthal translated this volume into English and edited it for a modern audience, the only costume book to receive such updates.<sup>235</sup> Ulrike Ilg seeks to understand the books as lexicons of racial classification and nation-building.<sup>236</sup> Scholars like Charlotte Colding Smith read the books in the context of global art history, as markers of cross-cultural exchange between Europe and the Middle East in particular in the sixteenth century. Most critical work on costume books focus on ideologies of race rather than gender. Additionally, costume book scholarship largely does not take into account the volumes' materiality and scale, which I address throughout this interlude. By reading these costume books within my theories of gravid dress, I hope to add a brief but specific contribution to this burgeoning field.

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<sup>233</sup> Jo Anne Olian, "Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," 20-48.

<sup>234</sup> Eugenia Paulicelli, "Mapping the World: The Political Geography of Dress in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books," *The Italianist* 28, no. 1 (2008): 24-53.

<sup>235</sup> Cesare Vecellio, eds. Ann Jones and Margaret Rosenthal, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas : Cesare Vecellio's Habiti Antichi et Moderni*. (London ; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008).

<sup>236</sup> Ulrike Ilg, "The Cultural Significance of Costume Books in Sixteenth-Century Europe," In *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650*, edited by Catherine Richardson, (History of Retailing and Consumption. London, [England] ; New York, New York: Routledge, 2016), 29-47

Costume books are pluralistic in subject matter. The books foreground the notion that dress itself is indexical of personal and national identity. In the sixteenth century, the Italian word *costumi* connoted both one's dress and appearance, as well as manners or lifestyle.<sup>237</sup> The books showcase both valences. In their encyclopedic approach to costuming, the volumes highlight far more than clothing surfaces. Indeed, viewers were treated not just to daily fashion touted by upper-class men and women, but also military and clerical garb. The cartography of taste indulged depictions of emperors, popes, prostitutes, flagellants, archers, pilgrims, and carnival party-goers. Many books include maps or depictions of local pastimes, such as figure 38, a foldout page from a 1560-1594 *Trachtenbuch*, for which no attribution has been assigned, detailing a couple pulled across snowy ground by a charging reindeer.<sup>238</sup> Bundled in thick furs, the pair crouch in a boat-like sled. Within the books, sartorial diversity is the organizing principle. Each boasts an array of textiles and patterns, which saw a marked increase in availability and variety in the period. Even the processes behind the fashion industry are portrayed in some, such as figure 39, (also from the aforementioned *Trachtenbuch*) depicting a group of workers crawling over the carcass of a beached whale. As onlookers watch, the giant creature is surveyed before butchering to extract whalebone for corset ribbing. Some of the books request audience participation, such as Petrus Bertelli's *Diuersaru[m] nationum habitus: centum et quattuor iconibus in aere incisis diligenter expressi item: ordines duo processionum, unus Summi Pontificis, alter Sereniss* (1594-1596), in which the reader is enticed to flip open the curtain on the litter of a "Neapolitan Noble" to reveal the lady riding inside (fig. 40). Or,

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<sup>237</sup> Ilg, "The Cultural Significance of Costume Books in Sixteenth-Century Europe," 46.

<sup>238</sup> The understanding reader will please forgive the presence of the author's fingers in some images; the Lipperheide Costume Library has a strict no-scanning policy.

scandalously, the perusing bibliophile is tempted to lift the flower-pattern skirt of a “Venetian Courtesan,” and is rewarded with a view of her bloomers, hosiery, and towering chopines (fig. 41). These pages joke with the viewer and invite him or her to take part in anthropological discovery.

Even if a volume lacked foldouts or hidden images, the costume books are always audience-centered. Vecellio, for instance, addresses the reader directly in his text, often using the formal Italian pronouns for “you” when describing outfits. Wilson has shown that owners would add personal coats of arms to mark purchased books as their property.<sup>239</sup> Figure after figure acknowledges their audience, staring directly out of the pages, including women who break decorum with bold eyesight. The books found an enthusiastic readership in their time. Indeed, growing print technology in the sixteenth century gave rise to a book market in which a much wider swath of the population could buy books than ever before. Costume books were in high demand, and enjoyed a large, diverse audience of artists, scholars, armchair researchers, and socialites who utilized the books to proclaim their worldliness and good taste.<sup>240</sup>

Printing, inherently replicable as well as far less expensive and time consuming than previous bookmaking techniques, lent itself well to such sixteenth-century globalizing desires. The costume books were produced according to various methods made available by the advantages of printmaking with its faster, cheaper output. *Civitates orbis terrarum* (published in several volumes between 1572 and 1617), for example, was the brainchild of writer Georg Braun and printmaker Frans Hogenberg, while Cesare Vecellio composed all the text and engraved

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<sup>239</sup> Wilson, *The World in Venice : Print, the City and Early Modern Identity*, 258.

<sup>240</sup> Olian, "Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," 21 and 35.

every illustration for *Degli Habiti*.<sup>241</sup> The scale of the books themselves varies between small, handheld and hand-width portable volumes and largescale books on par with medieval illuminated manuscripts meant to service an entire community at once, not intended for travel but display in a public, domestic space. Some compilers sequenced their images with Latin or Arabic numbers, while others forgo any kind of numerical marking. The relationship between image and text in the genre varies from minimal to elucidatory. The vast majority of the costume books attach a simple label to each image, printed or sometimes in illegible handwriting, while a small set offer a paragraph of explanatory text or even a short poem. Most of the images across the books are woodcuts, though some utilized engravings.<sup>242</sup> A few are hand painted in watercolor. Some books often offset figures with elaborate frames, while most allow its characters to stand on unspecified ground. The majority of illustrations across the books privilege dress above all else, forgoing backgrounds and setting, surrounding each figure with negative space. Fashion, in the mind of artists and writers, harbored the power to describe an entire country.

As was common in period art making, costume book compilers borrow images from other books with no regard for citation. Some even cribbed from illustrations in pre-existing publications, or copied figures from paintings.<sup>243</sup> For example, Alexandro de Fabri's book (1593) lifted an image depicting a woman sun-bleaching her hair blonde from Cesare Vecellio's (published 1590) (Figures 42 & 43, respectively). Abraham de Bryun, in 1581, made a very close approximation of Nicolay d'Arfeuille's 1567 "Nobilis Foemina in Alsatia" print, renaming the

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<sup>241</sup> Ilg, "The Cultural Significance of Costume Books in Sixteenth-Century Europe," 38.

<sup>242</sup> Olian, "Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," 21

<sup>243</sup> Ilg, "The Cultural Significance of Costume Books in Sixteenth-Century Europe," 33.

figure “Nobilis Femina Suevica.”<sup>244</sup> In his visual translation, de Bryun changed the figure’s hometown, showcasing the fluidity between dress styles. This practice of replicating images allows the books to simultaneously confirm and question one another. A figure may maintain her heritage between books, or gain a new nationhood in another volume. This flexibility of meaning may be widened out to include the entire costume book genre, as well as fashion itself. Within the pages, gowns may be deeply read as both pictures and indicators of actual clothing practices and norms. The illustrations within the books not only tell historians what people wore, but also claim that clothes are indexical of humanity itself. For period viewers, changing styles signified a shifting societal landscape. Costume book writers wished to strictly control cultural and sartorial lines, but the power of fashion refused to be pinned down. Gravid dress, in its multitudinous forms, operated within such a paradox.

Inside the costume books, the gravid shape occasionally appears in ahistorical contexts. For instance, the book featuring the unfortunate whale discussed earlier also treats the reader to a Roman noblewoman, labeled “Antiquus Augustae Habitus,” in three-quarter pose (fig. 44). The figure leans against a pillar, thrusting her belly forward. Her body is encased in pink robes of many shades, and the inner-most layer adheres to her form so diligently that her nipples and belly button are visible, perhaps a painted translation of the wet-drapery carving seen on antique sculpture. What is certainly not adopted from Classical precedent is the outward swell of her rosy midsection. Renaissance artists revered their Greco-Roman progenitors, but could not help assigning anachronistic, round bellies to depictions of *all’antica* clothing. The accuracy of any individual plate in a costume book is a matter of debate, but the sheer ubiquity of enlarged

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<sup>244</sup> This borrowing practice was arduous, as the copier often re-engraved the design onto his own plate.

Olian, "Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," 27-28.

midsections and puffed-up skirting across the entire genre attests to the reality of gravid dress in Renaissance costume. In a century of clothing variety never previously seen on the continent, the shape appears habitually.

Costume books offered readers an endless array of ladies wearing stylishly-hyperbolized midsections. A German manuscript of a *Trachtenbuch* dating between 1580-1600, for which no authorship information is known, contains several examples. This book exists in loose pages, each of which is beautifully painted in watercolor. A lady in an orange-and-white patterned dress, standing in profile, provides an example of visual elegance created by a rounded midsection (fig. 45). The calligraphic label is extremely stylized and difficult to read (this is not uncommon for the less well known sixteenth-century books), and has been pasted onto the Lipperheide Library's folio, perhaps after the creation date. The figure wears an ankle-length veil secured to her head with a band, black gloves, matching black shoes, lace edging on her sleeves and a high, crimp-edged collar. Cosmetics enhance her face. She enjoys the height of fashion, including the extreme, outward curve of her decorated gown. The swell completes the outfit. Puffing out the midsection in an unmistakable and eye-catching convex dome above one's womb area was as crucial to achieving correct fashion as shoes, headgear, and accessories. Belly-forward was fashion-forward.

Renaissance socio-political structure foregrounded chastity, loyalty, and motherhood in women, and the costume books as products of that system are no exception. Symbols for these expectations may be found within their pages, such as the unicorn lying on the ground near a hooded lady hailing from an unknown colony (fig. 46), or the martin, possibly connoting pregnancy, scurrying behind a "Greek Woman," in the Bertelli book (fig. 47).<sup>245</sup> It is possible

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<sup>245</sup> Musacchio, "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," 172.

female figures in the act of spinning connote fertility.<sup>246</sup> This may be seen on such examples as “Women’s dress in Languedoc” page numbered CXXVII in Christoph Weiditz’s *Trachtenbuch* from 1529 (fig. 48). The figure tucks her spindle beneath her arm so that the distaff tilts above her bulging midsection. She shows off a thread she’s created to the reader. Indeed, marital status was so intrinsic to Renaissance society that the costume books repeatedly use the titles of virgin, bride, wife, or widow to label female figures. The male counterparts are, by contrast, usually identified by rank or occupation. Readers therefore assume, in keeping with period norms, that wife or virgin is in fact the female figure’s occupation. A woman’s attachment to her male keeper and patriarchal state is treated as her main defining characteristic. The costume books profess that knowing what a woman wore as maiden, mother, and crone granted the reader the full scope of women’s raiment. As such, these books conjured objectivity to inform the bibliophilic spectator that women’s identities were inevitably associated with maternity expectation.

While fertility expectancy may not be as outwardly present in costume books as painting, the gender norm is nonetheless persistent in the clothes. Many of the books pair women with their children to show off the dress of young people, but do not do the same with male figures, as child-rearing was considered women’s work. For example, mothers walk to church with their children in tow in Sigmund Heldt’s book (discussed in detail below) (fig. 49). A woman in a multi-layered dress holds her son’s hand in the 1560-1561 *Trachtenbuch* (fig. 50). All the women wear large, projected skirts, perhaps associating the shape with maternity.

Within Jean Jacques Boissard’s *Habitvs Variarum Orbis gentium* (1581) married women, virgins, widows, and even courtesans wear gowns with swollen midsections. Notice how

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<sup>246</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 118.

differently male figures with extra girth are depicted by Boissard. A page featuring three Frenchmen, all aristocrats and dressed accordingly, bedecked with sabers, buttons, ruffs, slashing, and hats, shows each with a large, protruding belly as was common for men's attire in the late sixteenth century (fig. 51). The swell, likely created by pads or cushions, extends above the men's waistlines. A fashionable, abdominal poof in female figures, however, is positioned below the waist and over the womb. Boissard demonstrates this with a page of three women of varying rank and origin. The two flanking figures clasp their hands over extended, seemingly-parturient bellies, while the middle woman does not wear the gravid style (fig. 52). The resultant contouring creates a dissimilar silhouette from the French noblemen. This differentiation between male and female waistline shape and draping is cut along gender lines. The woman on the right is labeled "femme," the French word for both woman and wife, further calling attention to the shape's inherent meaning.

Gravid dress likewise crossed social status. The Weiditz *Trachtenbuch* features figures from many societal strata, such as the "Girl carrying water in Hennegau," plate CXXLL (fig. 53). This young lady, captured midstride about her daily routine, obviously works for a living. Weiditz demonstrates her manual worker status with the two water jugs heavying her person. A waving outer layer adheres to her skirts, creating a bulge. This figure has pinned up her skirts for easier walking and working. Gravid dress weaves through the costume books, adorning farm girls and princesses alike. The Weiditz *Trachtenbuch* is particularly comprehensive of ranks and occupations, its folios brimming with knights and cardinals. Sigmund Heldt copied Weiditz's *Trachtenbuch*, edited the pages (according to an untraceable logic), and published his updated

version between 1560 and 1580 in Nuremberg.<sup>247</sup> Weiditz was a woodblock carver who made all the prints, and also wrote the text; Heldt copied both his labels and images.<sup>248</sup> Both the original and painted copy are rife with rounded midsections on figures representing differing social levels. For example, “A wife of Dagsburg,” is clearly a very rich lady, marked by her two necklaces, twin snoods, and the hunting hawk balanced on her right arm (fig. 54). Her pleated, swelling purple skirts, another sign of extreme prosperity, part to reveal a white underlayer. Her hand gestures simultaneously to her midsection and bird, drawing attention to both her material wealth and the potential wealth of her womb.

The book, while mostly concerned with clothing, is also a travelogue, portraying scenes that have little to do with the fashion industry, such as loading potable water and horses onto a ship, or public punishment of criminals. This copy of Heldt’s book is huge, thick with hundreds of pages hemmed by a heavy wooden cover.<sup>249</sup> It was meant to grace the libraries and tables of the wealthy, a showpiece to astonish guests. Heldt inherited Weiditz’s playful approach to figuration and color scheme, resulting in a book much less serious than some of its literary brethren. Like most of the books, the images are fashion-focused. Many figures have only four fingers, but their worn brocades and ornamental headgear are carefully rendered. The crudeness allowed readers to replace the everyman (or everywoman) faces and bodies with their own, and to project themselves amongst the fashionable figures.

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<sup>247</sup> Christoph Weiditz, *Authentic Everyday Dress of the Renaissance: All 154 Plates from the “Trachtenbuch”* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 21-24.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Like many early modern books, costume books were often bound by the recipient.

The Weiditz and Heldt take full advantage of coloration to express the unprecedented diversity in sixteenth-century textiles. The Renaissance rise of beautiful, expensive, and complicated patterns correlates with that of gravid dress, perhaps because the fabulous new brocades and embroideries demanded increased visual attention. In addition, loud patterns boldly distinguish bodily contours. Heightened swells about female waists allowed for dramatic and sweeping silhouettes on which to display more fabric. The full spectrum of lace, patterns of stripes, zigzags, and florals, and motifs organic and geometric can all be found throughout the pages.

Since the shape was a fashion constant for Renaissance women of all ages and the upper social levels, various methods existed for creating the much-desired torso dome. Costume books illustrate the methodology behind creating a falsely-large midsection in the same way contemporary paintings do, with undergarments, posing, and body shapers. Renaissance women began their dressing practice every morning by draping their bodies with layer after layer of undergarments before donning the final outer-wear. While the costume books do not break propriety by depicting women in their underwear, these important undergarments can be seen in the illustrations. Earlier costume books, like the Weiditz updated through Heldt, display these primary layers. Underlayers are pulled through slashing on sleeves and at the joints where garments constructed of several pieces are tied together. Overlayers, like aprons and dense secondary skirting, as can be seen on an egg seller in the 1580-1600 *Trachtenbuch*, also create the shape across the costume books (fig. 55).

Heldt's women likewise craft exaggerated torsos with their hands. "A Bride of Hamburg" presses her red outer gown to her torso below her belt (fig. 56). In addition to producing a trendy shape, her gesture has the added bonus of exposing her pink-and-green striped underdress to the

viewer. Even more hyperbolized is figure 57 from Weiditz “Brides going to church in Holland.” The Netherlandish bride picks up her long skirts and bunches them against her torso, creating an odd protrusion before her stomach. Her profile position augments her amplified shape. The fact that both these figures are brides lends further credence to the importance of gravid dressing to young, virginal women, and the shape’s connotation with reproduction. As in paintings, these women are shown picking up their skirts to avoid tripping on hemlines or dragging expensive fabrics through dirty streets, while simultaneously advertising their potential maternity to readers. Additionally, female figures in costume books often gesture to their midsections, as was recommended by period etiquette manuals discussed in the previous chapter, further calling attention to this part of their attire. The figure in plate CLIV in the Weiditz, “Dress worn by Portuguese women,” places one hand on a large belt knotted above the outward curve of her dress (fig. 58). Similarly, a red-clad woman in the 1580-1600 *Trachtenbuch* rests her hands over her swollen womb curvature (fig. 59). A handkerchief is clasped between them, associating erudition and taste with gravidity. Hands and accessories worked in tandem to guide sightlines to that specific section of a woman’s body.

Later costume books, such as the Vecellio and Jost Amman’s 1586 *Habitus praecipuorum populorum, tam virorum quam foeminarum Singulari arte depicti*, display the wide range of body-shaping implements later sixteenth-century women used to manipulate their bodies towards fertility-emphasizing hips and midsections. Cushions, pads, farthingales, petticoats, and bum-rolls all make an appearance.

Gravid dress appears frequently in the costume book genre’s zenith, Cesare Vecellio’s

*Degli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*. First published in Italian in 1590, Vecellio later released an expanded second edition in 1598 in both Latin and the vernacular.<sup>250</sup> Both editions held at Lipperheide Costume Library are small and portable with thin but sturdy pages, designed to be handled and flipped through by readers. Costume books on this scale were fashion accessories themselves, showcasing the intelligence and trendiness of the owner. The author, a nephew of the master *colore* painter Titian, carved all 503 woodcuts and wrote every line of text.<sup>251</sup>

Paulicelli argues Vecellio's *Degli abiti* exists at a bustling sixteenth-century intersection between fashion, capitalism, Counter Reformation politics, nationhood, and an explosively growing globalism.<sup>252</sup> The result is an extensive lexicon of not only clothing choices across Europe and beyond, but also manners, ranks, and quirky outliers. For example, Vecellio marvels at how the women he illustrates possibly walk freely in all their finery, and pays special attention to held accessories such as fans and handkerchiefs. As the woodcuts are unpainted, he often reports hair color and fabric dye hues. His labels profess that clothes may express emotional states like "innamorato." Vecellio often posed both men and women from behind if the shape of their clothing was more aesthetically pleasing and interesting from the back than the front. It should be noted that Vecellio therefore posed each costume to its greatest figural advantage,

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<sup>250</sup> Paulicelli, "Mapping the World: The Political Geography of Dress in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books," 24. The latter version was renamed *Habiti antichi, et moderni, di tutto il Mondo*.

<sup>251</sup> Vecellio, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas* : Cesare Vecellio's *Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, 8.

<sup>252</sup> Paulicelli, "Mapping the World: The Political Geography of Dress in Cesare Vecellio's Costume Books," 24-49.

which often meant stressing a female figure's full belly. Throughout Vecellio's expansive second edition, bowed midsections appear most often in the geographical category of Italy. While the style, as we have seen, is not solely the purview of the upper-classes, ladies with high status tend to outnumber their inferiors, likely because stacking layers was costly and hampered movement. Vecellio's many male fashionistas, by contrast, do not have the shape. Vecellio's uniquely comprehensive tome provides further insight into the crossroads of dress and fertility, and better clarifies the iconographic pattern of large torsos in women's fashion.

Vecellio's figure titled "Married Noblewomen of Milan and Other Places in Lombardy," wears a dress that pushes out above her womb (fig. 60). The artist explains women of this region wear "patterned *damasco* or patterned velvet."<sup>253</sup> Interestingly, the damask decoration mirrors her body with its flaring vessels from which curving acanthus plants spring. Vecellio may simply be reproducing a pattern from his research, or the presence of the vase on her dress could be a wink to the intellectual reader about the contemporary aesthetic theory that women's bodies should curve like vases.<sup>254</sup>

*Degli habit* explains several gravid dressing techniques and procedures. The wide range of silhouettes on parade in the book shows how women used different combinations of the same types of undergarments to create specific bodily contours. Often the shape is constructed of layered underblouses rather than body-shapers. Vecellio likely gathered the bulk of his data and began engraving before the widespread introduction of the corset-and-busk combo that would become much more common in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. An elegantly

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<sup>253</sup> Vecellio, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas* : Cesare Vecellio's *Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, 186.

<sup>254</sup> Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," 376-386.

bowed midsection appears clearly in figure 61, which details what women wore in fourteenth-century Rome. Vecellio explains this very dramatic outward curvature was curated from a “silk undergown...without a bodice.”<sup>255</sup> Another fecund shape made with an underskirt and *camicia* and no bodice can be seen on a girl from Genoa (fig. 62). Layering of stacked *camicie* lent themselves to a curvature about the waist. A “Donna Venetiana” of the early sixteenth century achieved the suggestive-fecund look with a “bodice that ended above the hips, without coming to a point...comfortable and unstiffened,” and *camicie* which are surreptitiously displayed through the windows on her slashed sleeves (fig. 63).<sup>256</sup> Unmarried girls of Tuscany also used *camicie* to bolster their midsections (fig. 64, labeled “Citelle Moderni”).

A *carpetta*—an undergown but in the Venetian context also a hoopskirt—was also used towards suggestive fecundity. Vecellio dates an example, a Venetian noblewoman’s attire, to after 1303, pointing out her “full skirts and an overgarment with a long train” (fig. 65).<sup>257</sup> Her *carpetta* “kept [her skirt] standing out in a bell shape.”<sup>258</sup> This woman places her hand on her abdomen in typical decorum, calling attention to her convex midsection. Combinations of aforementioned underwear could also be employed to create an apparently-gravid body. A contemporary Venetian noblewoman in winter garb creates a belly with both *camicie* and *carpetta* and a shift called a *sottanella* (fig. 66). Indeed, the shape is prevalent within the many

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<sup>255</sup> Vecellio, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas* : Cesare Vecellio’s *Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, 79.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

illustrations of Venetian dress. A principal lady of nearby Milan achieves a similar shape with a *sottana* (fig. 67).

The “Antica di Toscana” plate, a style the chronicler dates to the twelfth century, proves how a *faldiglia*—a hoopskirt or farthingale, the source for which Vecellio locates in Spain—pressed with such tension against an overdress as to create a widening, ovular gap over the woman’s midsection as though her buttoned overdress cannot contain the massive volume of her undergarments (fig. 68). “A Woman of Romanga” wears a wooden-hooped *faldiglia* to push her midsection outwards (fig. 69). Also apparent is her multi-tiered skirting. “A Noblewoman of Conegliano” shows another outcome of the use of the wooden-hooped *faldiglia* towards suggestive fecundity (fig. 70). A very similar approach may be found on a coeval married Florentine noblewoman (fig. 71). Here the female subject also employs several layers of heavy damask and silk fabric towards a fashionably-sizable belly.

Vecellio specifically names the style at the center of my inquiry when examining a matron of contemporary Northern Italy whose bodice “gives a rounded shape to the belly of the *sottana* (undergown)” (fig. 72).<sup>259</sup> This lady wears a blend of several *camicie*, a *verducale* (hoopskirt) and a “floor-length” undergown to curate a curved torso. The tight belting or lacing where the bodice met the skirt caused the intersection of undergarments to stack and spring. Vecellio proves the widely popular “rounded shape,” was especially at home on the Italian peninsula. In a 1605 account, Vecellio wrote Venetian women “lap [linen] about their bodies, to

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 130.

make them seem fat, the Italians loving fat women.”<sup>260</sup> Larger torsos (including the gravid shape) were all the rage across the territory.

Vecellio is the only one of his fellow costume chroniclers to directly remark on maternity wear. Figure 73, the “Antiche di Cent’anni,” also labeled “Venetian Clothing of Former Times, From Only a Hundred Years Ago or Slightly More,” might be pictured pregnant.<sup>261</sup> Vecellio seems particularly fixated on this woman, as she is one of the few figures in hundreds of images that bears an alternative title. She is Venetian, which, according to the author, guarantees her costume and lifestyle are more important than examples from any other country. Her maternal state appears not in her two titles on the plate, but is preceded in the table of contents, where Vecellio describes the figure under the heading “Abuso delle donne gravide,” or “abuse of pregnant women.” The woman, spreading her fingers over her stomach while the other hand picks up her long gown (again showcasing the artist’s attention to women’s movements), advances across the frame in near-profile. A small, non-descript plant springs from the background. Although her body looks no different from the scores of other women throughout the book, Vecellio focuses on her to platform his disapproval of seemingly-dangerous clothing choices. What is abusing this poor lady and her unborn fetus? Vecellio explains her clothes are the culprit. The artist disdained the long, flat bodice this stylish lady wears as unnatural and anti-maternal. He warns the reader that the implement was dangerous to the main female duty of childbearing. Vecellio states the “long-bodices...cause discomfort. Warnings were issued that

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<sup>260</sup> Quotation from Meryson's *Itinerary* in Philippe Erlanger, *The Age of Courts and Kings; Manners and Morals, 1558-1715*. 1st U.S. Ed. ed. Manners and Morals. New York: Harper & Row, 1967, 160.

<sup>261</sup> Vecellio, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas* : Cesare Vecellio's *Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, 93.

this was the cause of many injuries to pregnant women.”<sup>262</sup> He then commends the Venetian republic for banning iron stays in bodices notorious for causing injury to pregnant women, saying “and so it was prohibited by law and discontinued, along with many other styles of dress and hair.”<sup>263</sup> The author then turns towards describing the remainder of her outfit in much less polemical language. It is significant that he condemns steel-girded corsets, as throughout the volumes he rarely criticizes the costumes, opting instead to praise or render foreign and domestic styles with studied impartiality. Vecellio’s appreciation of outfits that did not threaten fertility and motherhood evidences an entrenched association between women’s clothing and the status of their wombs in the early modern period. *Degli habit*i and its ilk ensured the proliferation of this connection across early modern Europe.

I am unable to confirm Vecellio’s claim that multiple sumptuary laws were passed by the Magistrato sopra le Pompe to eradicate pregnancy-threatening bodices, gowns, and hairstyles. However, in 1430, Venetian authorities did prohibit the wearing of platform chopine shoes, for fear pregnant women sporting such footwear would fall and miscarry.<sup>264</sup> Vecellio’s book gives researchers the clearest glimpse into sixteenth-century Venetian culture, including the brief but significant anxiety concerning pregnant women.

Costume books revel in early modern global life. Each attempts to record the dress habits of outer-European groups with varying success. While some foreigners are depicted with relative

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy, 1200-1500*, (Oxford Historical Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52. For more on Venetian sumptuary laws, see Giulio Bistort, *Il Magistrato Alle Pompe Nella Repubblica Di Venezia; Studio Storico*, (Spese Della Sodieta, 1912).

respect, many were othered through the strangeness of their clothing. For example, two gravid ladies appear out of European contexts in *Recueil de le diversité des habits qui sont de present en vsaige tant es pays d'Europe, Asie, Affrique et Illies sauvages, Le tout fait apres le naturel* by the printmaker Richard Breton (1562). “A Girl of Turkey” and “A Girl of Africa” face each other on successive pages (fig. 74). The latter figure stands in profile, her face a physiognomic caricature. Absurdly, her breasts can be seen beneath her thick fur coat. It is no accident that Bertelli’s book is also full of monsters. Ugly and bizarre mermen menace the pages, intercut with persons from non-European countries, possibly drawing a racist parallel between race and monstrosity (fig. 75).<sup>265</sup> Gravid dress is an odd pilgrim, appearing outside of the European confines of these eclectic volumes. The chroniclers, worldly as their ambitions were, generally were far less accurate when recording the clothing patterns of Asians, Africans, and indigenous peoples of the New World, which may explain why the shape materializes in these incongruous contexts. If gravid dressing did in fact exist outside of occidental countries, the ways in which extra-European women constructed the style would have been very different than the methods used by Italian women towards the specific shape. If we accept Olian’s claim that “the writer of the costume book tended to impose a European social structure onto the non-European cultures he

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<sup>265</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones argues the monsters in the *Recueil* are anti-papal caricatures of Catholic clergy, but based on the vicinity with non-European peoples, I believe they may also be interpreted as racist. Even if not intended as overtly xenophobic, the casual reader unaware of religious politics may have made such a connection. Ann Rosalind Jones, “Habits, Holdings, Heterologies: Populations in Print in a 1562 Costume Book,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 110 (2006): 114-118.

illustrated,” then it is possible the costume chroniclers attempted to enforce the gender codes reinforced by clothing hypothesized in my study onto other cultures.<sup>266</sup>

Between covers, inside the painted and printed worlds of the costume books, the gravid dress style is a universal, equalizing force. In the introduction to *Degli abiti*, Vecellio himself acknowledges that fashion (and continental borders) in his volatile time shifted too rapidly to effectively catalogue, and accepts the impossibility of his endeavor to truly capture every contemporary dress style. In his address to the reader, Vecellio poetically notes:

And it is very true, as I said in the beginning of this work, that clothing as a subject allows no absolute certainty, for styles of dress are constantly changing, according to the whim and caprice of their wearers. Add to this, if you will, that many regions of the world now are too far away for us to have news of them, although they are nonetheless being discovered; we hardly know the names of many places discovered within our and our fathers’ memories, let alone their costumes and customs; and dress shares the changeability to which all worldly things are and always have been subject.<sup>267</sup>

These books epitomize the terminological shift identified by Jones and Stallybrass concerning the turn of the English word “fashion” from the verb “to make” to quickly-shifting trends.<sup>268</sup> Vecellio’s world was expanding at a rate he seems to have found alarming. Perhaps his effort, shared by all costume chroniclers, were intended to maintain tradition and order through the stratified, governable markers of illustrated dress. The artist laments that fashion changes fast,

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<sup>266</sup> Olian, "Sixteenth-Century Costume Books," 21.

<sup>267</sup> Vecellio, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas* : Cesare Vecellio’s *Habiti Antichi et Moderni*, 52.

<sup>268</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 1-7.

but in the prints he created a chronology of bodily shapes that crop up over and over like Warburg's Pathosformel, emotionally resonant and hauntingly repetitive. These books reassured readers all over Europe that women's silhouettes remained predictably belly-focused. Styles changed quickly; gender norms stood fixed. Gravid dress in this context is nostalgic. In attempting to show the *habiti diversi* of the entire known world, costume book creators unintentionally showcased and reinforced a cross-cultural constant: the exaggeration of women's bodies about the waist, usually through extensive skirting. While it is unlikely all intended recipients of these books connected certain styles to fertility expectation, the concept is nevertheless present. The costume books, marketed as objective slice-of-life media, endorsed Renaissance gender expectation through dress. All Western European cultures, it seems, wished to manipulate female forms.

## Chapter 2: *Donna Gravida*: Raphael's Pregnant Patroness

Renaissance women spent the majority of their married lives pregnant, but the era yielded few portraits of genuinely pregnant women. Likenesses of early modern ladies feature cinched waistlines and bulbous skirts but avoid explicit depiction of gestation. A largely neglected Raphael, known as *Donna Gravida* or occasionally *Donna Incinta*, is an extremely rare example of a pregnant subject (fig. 76). While we will never be completely sure, scholars generally agree the sitter was with child when she sat for the young painter.<sup>269</sup> Relatively little contextual information has endured the half-millennium since the picture's completion in Florence around 1507, yet the panel has much to say concerning early sixteenth-century pregnancy and portraiture.<sup>270</sup>

*Donna Gravida* should be considered as a solidifying moment in Raphael's biography when he was formulating his personal style within the pantheon of contemporary Florentine painters. The most prolific of his artistic brethren, Raphael played a major role in advancing the state of portraiture.<sup>271</sup> After his move to Rome, Raphael would continue to apotheosize the genre to soaring new heights, fulfilling commissions that emanate the physical and psychological presence of the sitter. In working towards these artistic goals, *Donna Gravida* reassesses several portraiture types—female, friendship, and double—simultaneously. Examining Raphael's pregnant patroness in tandem with his adjacent portraits produced during his Florentine and

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<sup>269</sup> See Mina Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine* (Firenze: Electa, 1984), 99.

<sup>270</sup> Some sources pinpoint *Donna Gravida*'s inception to 1505, others to 1506 or 1507.

<sup>271</sup> Marcia B. Hall and Raphael, *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 120-121.

Roman tenures clarifies its significance. While the first part of this chapter assesses the image within the context of early modern depictions of pregnancy, the second shifts focus to the significance of the panel itself, glossing every aspect of *Donna Gravida* for its denotation. Finally, the third continues to consider specific details within the panel to argue *Donna Gravida* may be read as a moment of female agency. The painting makes meaning through its costume, accessories, and a fundamental defiance of early modern female portraiture norms, including imagery surrounding pregnancy. This Raphael is carefully curated, deftly sidestepping gender conventions to make a subtle but formidable statement about maternity by fashioning the sitter as a proper Renaissance wife and proud mother.

*Donna Gravida* is wholly without precedent yet widely ignored within historiography. The panel is disadvantaged by a want of archival data. No preparatory studies or contemporary accounts concerning its commission or execution survive.<sup>272</sup> Infra-red photography confirmed the panel lacks any traceable underdrawing.<sup>273</sup> Its earliest record dates to 1666 in the estate of Cardinal Carlo de' Medici.<sup>274</sup> The sitter has been called “*gravida*” or “pregnant” since 1710, when it was inventoried in the Palazzo Pitti collection.<sup>275</sup> In 1813 the panel was referred to as a

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<sup>272</sup> Luitpold Dussler, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Pictures, Wall-Paintings and Tapestries*, translated by S. Cruft, (First American Edition. London, New York: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1971), 18.

<sup>273</sup> Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, (Landshut: Arcos, 2001), 300.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Dussler, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Pictures, Wall-Paintings and Tapestries*, 18.

“pregnant woman dressed in red, with a net on her head” in a Galleria Palatine portrait survey.<sup>276</sup> Major Raphael monographs often do not mention this painting, maintaining through absence its obfuscating distinctiveness within the artist’s *oeuvre*.<sup>277</sup> The sitter is completely unknown, and attempts to assign an identification have been continually rejected. In 1925 Emilia Pia da Montrefeltro was proposed, but this supposition does not hold when compared against the established medal and portrait of the countess.<sup>278</sup> Erroneously attributed to Ridolfo Ghirlandaio in 1885, the picture has since been unanimously undisputed as a Raphael.<sup>279</sup> Due to its deficiency in provenance documentation, discovering *Donna Gravida*’s true meaning relies heavily on close formal analysis.

*Donna Gravida* is oil on panel. The superior tone modulation and blending of color assured post-nineteenth century art historians that the portrait was undeniably by Raphael’s hand.<sup>280</sup> The paint is laid down with immaculate and careful precision, from the gold metallic

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<sup>276</sup> ASF I.R. Corte 1356, c. 144, quoted by Mina Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

<sup>277</sup> It is not included in: Bette Talvacchia, *Raphael*, (London; New York: Phaidon, 2007), Hugo Chapman, *Raphael: From Urbino to Rome*, (London: National Gallery Co; New Haven, CT, 2004), Marcia B Hall and Raphael, *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), or Jürg. Meyer zur Capellen *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, (Landshut: Arcos, 2001). The most thorough account of *Donna Gravida* is Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

<sup>278</sup> Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

<sup>279</sup> Dussler, *Raphael, a critical catalogue of his pictures, wall-paintings & tapestries*, 18.

<sup>280</sup> *Donna Gravida* was thought by A.M. Brizio to have “perfect coloring.” Dianne Elizabeth

threads in the figure's snood to the few lighter fly-aways curling rebelliously away from her hairstyle. The transparent lace lining her shoulders accurately shifts in tone where it overlays the black velvet bordering her bodice. A consistent light source outside of the left-side frame falls correctly across Donna Gravida's skin and costume.

The subject's wealth is evident. Her dress declares her a member of a moneyed Florentine class. Raphael carefully recorded the double-stranded metal chain tucked into her bodice, and the delicate gold threads woven into her hair net. While snoods were popular accessories for women in the period, Donna Gravida's is particularly ostentatious. The body of her hairnet is entirely cloth-of-gold threads anchored to her hairline by a length of fine, miniature embroidery. A floral motif hovers directly above her parted hair, is repeated near her ear, and disappears beneath her hairline. Two animals rest on a plinth between the vegetal ornamentation. The background of the embroidered band shimmers, perhaps also spun of cloth-of-gold. The hairband's decorative details are offset by a crimped edge of gold lace on one side, and another line of the trimming juts off the band and rests elegantly against the netting. The glimmer within the snood is picked up by the bejeweled rings sprinkled across Donna Gravida's fingers on both hands. Her jewelry is subdued but of high caliber. Mina Gregori believes Donna Gravida wears a necklace hosting a hidden religious symbol, most likely because *La Muta* (which Raphael completed concurrently with *Donna Gravida*), features a Greek-style cross (fig. 77).<sup>281</sup> It was not

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Vance, *A Concise Look at the Variety of Raphael's Panel Painting Techniques*, (National Library of Canada: Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 1995), 149.

<sup>281</sup> Of all Raphael's rendered ladies, *Donna Gravida* shares most in common with *La Muta*. Both lack a background, accost the viewer with bold eye contact, hold an accessory, and wear a similar dress style.

uncommon in the period for portraitists to repeat studio props or accessories between patrons.<sup>282</sup> If Gregori's assumption that a Christian symbol dangles from the chain on the pregnant lady's neck, hidden from the viewer, then Donna Gravida's cross presses directly against her heart. An accessory is tucked beneath the sitter's hand.

Donna Gravida's dress carefully navigates the fine line between flamboyance and modesty. Her elegant attire aligns with coeval sumptuary laws. The rings on her fingers and her pinned-up hair attest to her wedded status, as young Italian women only wore their hair down to announce marital availability. She has severely plucked her eyebrows towards the illusion of a lengthy, expansive forehead. No cosmetics obscure her face, a signal of internal virtue and moral purity in the period.<sup>283</sup>

Yet *Donna Gravida* departs from typical early modern portraits of women in a myriad of visual turns. The sitter is not a Petrarchan beauty.<sup>284</sup> Her hair is auburn, and while her skin is clear and beautifully modulated, it is not the unnaturally near-white tone favored by many Cinquecento painters.<sup>285</sup> It was not uncommon for Renaissance artists to generalize a female sitter's facial characteristics into an amalgamated ideal. Raphael, however, focuses on the

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The two diverge most severely in body type. Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>284</sup> Kim Butler, *Full of Grace: Raphael's 'Madonnas' and the Rhetoric of Devotion*, (Johns Hopkins University, 2003), 130.

<sup>285</sup> The sitter's flush skin tone may be a sign of the natural changes to blood circulation that occur during pregnancy.

woman's specific, idiosyncratic features such as her ovular jawline and short fingers. He does not shy away from rendering a realistic human woman, rather than one that would fit squarely into the narrow limits of early sixteenth-century beauty standards.

Depicting a patrician woman arrested in late-term pregnancy, and posing the sitter so that her gestation is centralized via gesture and position, is a singular oddity within Italian Renaissance portraiture. *Donna Gravida* raises the unavoidable question: why did Raphael make this picture? A likely conclusion is that a hopeful upper-class Florentine patrilineal faction endeavored to document a potential child and heir.<sup>286</sup> However, the family could have chosen to follow tradition and paint the mother with child once born, or perhaps even the father with his successor. The former may be seen in Veronese's *Countess Livia da Porto Thiene and her Daughter, Porzia* (c. 1551) (fig. 78). The countess clasps her small daughter close. The presence of the living child in the portrait may have a talismanic property; she is proof that the noble lady has produced healthy progeny and survived to be painted. In a world where imagery surrounding pregnancy was often imbued with protective magic, the young daughter provides a visual anchor to future successful procreation and childbirth. In contrast, *Donna Gravida* clearly depicts a pregnancy, but does not shift attention away from its female sitter to her child. The unprecedented *Donna Gravida* must, therefore, be tinged with deeper meaning.

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<sup>286</sup> Gregori maintains, "to make a portrait of oneself in this condition, as the gesture of the hand supported on the stomach seems to suggest, could in fact be justified only by the arrival of a long-needed heir."

Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

## Framing Maternity

Early modern pregnancy exists everywhere and nowhere at once. Musacchio has argued pregnancy and the duty to reproduce deeply permeated Renaissance culture to an extent still largely unacknowledged in scholarship.<sup>287</sup> Pregnancy is an understudied facet of early modern life, due in no small part to the scarcity of information regarding women's lives. Musacchio's work documents the critical role childbirth played in Europe between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries to recover from heavy fatalities in the wake of serial black plague outbreaks.<sup>288</sup> Her theory is especially applicable to Italy, where the death toll tallied between seventy-five and eighty percent of the total population in the epidemic of 1348.<sup>289</sup> In this view, early modern culture was obsessed with pregnancy, and life circulated around the birth of children. Fertility was salvific. Infants were so precious adult women were allowed to stray from convention to protect them. In *Inferno* Canto 23, Dante praises mothers who so love their children they are willing to break decorum rules in life threatening situations: "My guide snatched me up instantly, just as/ the mother who is wakened by a roar/ and catches sight of blazing flames beside her,/ will lift her son and run without a stop-/ she cares more for the child than for herself-/ not pausing even to throw on a shift."<sup>290</sup> Marital chastity was likewise paramount. Sulpitia, faithful wife of Fulvius Flaccus, earned her place in Boccaccio's pantheon

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<sup>287</sup> Musacchio, "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," 172.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-179.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>290</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2017), Canto 23 23.37- 23.40.

of *Famous Women* for her untouchable conjugal purity.<sup>291</sup> This virtuous lady was the most chaste matron of all her peers in ancient Rome. It is no coincidence that in Pietro Orioli's c. 1493-1434 depiction of *Sulpitia*, the figure is gravidly dressed; the shape visualized such norms (fig. 79). The wife and mother is not currently pregnant, but her capacity to birth children within the proper confines is celebrated by a conspicuous yellow vent in her red gown.

Musacchio argues the Renaissance world encouraged repopulation through its art and visual culture. Her work has revealed how pictures visualized pregnancy through weasels and cooked poultry, for example.<sup>292</sup> Further, Musacchio declares that the best way to know a Renaissance woman "is through the objects that helped construct" female identity, which include pregnancy imagery.<sup>293</sup> Marieke de Winkel applies Occam's razor to the lack of portraits of pregnant women, stating that pregnancy "was not regarded as attractive and therefore was concealed as far as possible" because "the condition was considered indecorous."<sup>294</sup> Scholarship debates whether pregnancy was a physical state considered shameful and in need of concealment under drapery, suspecting that Renaissance women wore expansive skirts to hide near-constant

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<sup>291</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, (I Tatti Renaissance Library ; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), Chapter LXVII, 137-138.

<sup>292</sup> Jacqueline Musacchio, "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," and "Pregnancy and Poultry in Renaissance Italy," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 16, no. 2 (1997): 3-9.

<sup>293</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 150.

<sup>294</sup> Marieke de Winkel, "the Interpretation of Dress in Vermeer's paintings," in *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan Gaskell, and Michiel Jonker, (Studies in the History or Art 55, Symposium Papers XXXVIII, Washington 1998), 327-34.

pregnancy.<sup>295</sup> However, in Chapter One we saw the many ways fertility, gestation, and childbirth was publicized, celebrated, and even eroticized in the early modern period. Yet suggesting pregnancy in reality and images is not the same as directly asserting and recording it in pictorial form, especially portraiture. To see a pregnant woman depicted in *Donna Gravida* fashion disrupts custom, as the portrait advertises her physical state with pride. Analyzing the panel in conjunction with the variegated depictions of early modern pregnancy explicates its daring breech of decorum by posing Raphael's heavily gravid patroness as a paragon of marital chastity and feminine patrician poise.

The erasure of Renaissance pregnancy takes place between minor objects and humanist graphic media. Rendering actual pregnancy was so aberrant that gestational female bodies do not appear on prints wherein the central narrative hinges upon pregnancy, such as the legends of Pope Joan or Sabina Poppaea in Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*.<sup>296</sup> In fifteenth-century illustrated editions, both characters appear barely pregnant or with flattened bellies. In contrast, the ubiquity of pregnancy symbols—dragons, oranges, pinecones, eggs, weasels, pomegranates, pearls—demonstrates the high saturation of pregnancy throughout Renaissance society. Musacchio documented the immense amount of material culture commissioned and executed for expectant mothers in Renaissance Italy, including painted birth trays, maiolica bowls, and

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<sup>295</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 93.

<sup>296</sup> Pope Joan was ousted as a woman when she gave birth during a public papal procession, and Sabina Poppaea, the second wife of the Roman Emperor Nero, was killed by her sadistic husband by a powerful kick to her pregnant belly. Susan Gaylard, "De Mulieribus Claris and the Disappearance of Women from Illustrated Print Biographies," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 18, no. 2 (2015): 291-296.

clothing.<sup>297</sup> Cloaks, nightshirts, slippers, special veils, and embroidered gowns, were all ordered for pregnant women and used during birth rituals. The new mother wore these items during and after her recovery.<sup>298</sup> These objects were multiplied throughout patrician spheres, as premenopausal upper-class women gave birth to five to seven children on average. Pregnancy is found in religious narrative, advice manuals, and literature, but is largely absent from female portraiture.<sup>299</sup> It would have been visibly present throughout an early modern home, but expunged from painting studios.

*Donna Gravida* has never been considered in concert with confirmed representations of pregnant Renaissance women. Open depictions of early modern pregnancy are often associated with lower classes. A peasant in the family way toils in Duke de Berry's field in the September page of the *Tres Riches Heures*. Her belly is hyperbolically swollen beneath her white apron, an eye-catching clue to reward the thorough reader. A sketch by Rembrandt is thought to be of a working-class pregnant woman based on her shabby clothes, and a disrobed, possibly-pregnant prostitute in Georges de la Tour's *Woman Catching Fleas* picks pests from her thin tunic.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Musacchio, *Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 37-38.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Leon Battista Alberti's *Della Famaglia*, which champions childbirth, was a popular gift for new brides in Renaissance Florence. Alberti cites the generation of children as a chief reason to marry, and encourages men to seek brides who exude childbearing potential. Leon Battista Alberti, *The Albertis of Florence: Leon Battista Alberti's Della Famiglia*, (Bucknell Renaissance Texts in Translation. Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1971), 122.

<sup>300</sup> This list is not exhaustive. For a more complete catalogue of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century examples of pregnant women in Italian paintings, see Sara Piccolo Paci, "Le Vesti Della Madre:

Combined with the laboring mothers in maiolica wear, pregnancy in the early modern world is visually associated with class difference and lack of social decorum.

Picturing pregnancy appears more frequently in Elizabethan and Jacobean England's visual record. Tate London holds two tradition-breaking portraits of upper-class pregnant women, *Portrait of an Unknown Lady* (fig. 80) and *Portrait of a Woman in Red* (fig. 81), both by Marcus Gheeraerts II.<sup>301</sup> With *Donna Gravida*, these images pointedly render the maternal sitter with dignity and sumptuous elegance. In the period, wealth also connoted health, which was critical to sustaining fertility. Unlike Botticelli's *Woman at a Casement* (fig. 82), whose possible pregnancy hinges on her outrageously expensive silk indoor gown, *Donna Gravida* shares extravagant costuming with Marcus Gheeraerts II's ladies. All three figures wear the height of fashion for their location and use it to proudly advertise pregnancy.<sup>302</sup> They stood for their portraits to best show off their parturient contours. Gheeraerts, who did not travel outside England, could not have known Raphael's painting, but the similarities are striking, conceivably pointing to congruous motivations.<sup>303</sup> Gheeraerts perhaps made a long career out of painting pregnant women, as *Portrait of an Unknown Lady* and *Portrait of a Woman in Red* are dated c.

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Considerazioni Socio-Antropologiche dalla Preistoria al XX Secolo D.C.' in *Da Donna a Madre*, (Firenze, 1996).

<sup>301</sup> I wish to thank the University of Washington undergraduates in my Women in the Renaissance course held Winter Quarter 2018 for their brilliant and detailed insights into these portraits.

<sup>302</sup> Both English women wear trendy fabrics, starched ruffs, tight bodices, large sleeves, and belled skirts in keeping with period British fashion.

<sup>303</sup> Karen Hearn, and Tate Britain (Gallery), *Marcus Gheeraerts II: Elizabethan Artist* (Tate Publishing, 2002), 11-15.

1595 and 1620, respectively.<sup>304</sup> Like *Donna Gravida*, both English sitters touch their stomachs in a self-aware assertion of their late-term pregnancy while locking eyes with the viewer. The woman in *Portrait of an Unknown Lady* even smiles at the spectator, acknowledging the celebratory occasion.<sup>305</sup> Like *Donna Gravida*, both Gheeraerts' patronesses seem to have waited until their third trimester to sit for the artist. The lady in *Portrait of a Woman in Red* occupies a stage-like set complete with red curtain drawn back for dramatic revelation, theatrically celebrating her gestation.<sup>306</sup> Gheeraerts uses a similar conceit in another of his surviving pregnancy portraits, *Anne Hale, Mrs. Hoskins* (1629) (fig. 83). All three women broadcast high social standing through ostentatious dress. *Donna Gravida* relies on analogous patterns, treating fashionable dress as a protective screen behind which the sitter may comfortably display her evidently pregnant state. Together, these images reflect a latent early modern tendency to

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<sup>304</sup> *Portrait of a Lady in Red* may belong to the Constable family of Yorkshire and conceivably identified as Anne, the daughter of Sir William Roper based on the 'R' incorporated into her forehead pendant. The ring looped into the black ribbon tied about her wrist may point to her marriage. Anne is known to have had many children between 1618 and 1630. Karen Hearn, "A Fatal Fertility? Elizabeth and Jacobean Pregnancy Portraits," 39-43.

<sup>305</sup> The sitter in this image assumes typical English beauty with her high forehead, plucked eyebrows, and blazingly white skin that contrasts against the black background. She may be wearing a black pregnancy mantle. All these elements come together to profess her pregnancy is beautiful and elegant.

<sup>306</sup> The color red is used in this portrait to overwhelmingly signpost the sitter's wealth and power. The figure possessively drapes her hand over the red-upholstered chair and stands beneath the aforementioned red velvet curtain. However, the most possessive presence of red is in her skirt rising over her parturient belly, claiming that the baby itself is precious.

visually privilege rather than ignore pregnancy. In the hands of Gheeraerts and Raphael, pregnancy itself is linked with superiority.

Gheeraerts' images, like *Donna Gravida*, may also be read as exemplars of wifely excellence. Karen Hearn speculates that so-called English "pregnancy portraits," as she dubs them, not only document successful dynastic progression, but also a timeless likeness of a beloved wife, daughter, or mother who was in imminent danger of a tragic but honorable death.<sup>307</sup> Following Mary Garrard's contention that "portraits of young Florentine women were sometimes ordered by their families to preserve their memory after they had married and left the household, or in the event they should die young," *Donna Gravida* may have acted as a pre-emptive simulacra should an unfortunate fate befall the sitter during delivery.<sup>308</sup> Raphael would go on to paint his friend Castiglione a decade later, between 1514-1515. Castiglione imagined the portrait stood for him in his absence from Rome, a substitute suitable enough for his wife to converse with.<sup>309</sup> While Hearn's remembrance theory is bolstered by the notorious hazardousness of early modern pregnancy, I believe that the main impulse motivating both Gheeraert patronesses was optimistic and triumphant rather than nihilistic. Both women in *Portrait of an Unknown Lady* and *Anne Hale, Mrs. Hoskins* exude impending excitement by smiling at the viewer. These images are sober, but rebuff fatalism. Pregnancy portraiture is *both* serious and celebratory.

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<sup>307</sup> Karen Hearn, "A Fatal Fertility? Elizabeth and Jacobean Pregnancy Portraits," 40.

<sup>308</sup> Mary D. Garrard, "Who Was Ginevra de' Benci? Leonardo's Portrait and Its Sitter Recontextualized," *Artibus et Historiae* 27, no. 53 (2006): 30.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 and 37

Chastity is intertwined with female portraiture; these niche images champion an equally important but less often seen shade of virtue: marital chastity. All three of Gheeraerts' patronesses foreground the unflinching legitimacy of their conditions through lapidary symbolism.<sup>310</sup> The figures all wear pearls, common symbols of purity throughout Europe. Signaling conjugal fidelity is maximized in *Portrait of an Unknown Lady*, as her costume is blanketed with pearls from the pins in her hair, to the points of her highly-starched ruff, and stitched across the monochrome fabric. Strings of identical pearls spill between both her shoulders and pile atop her convexity. The sitter picks up the strands to run them through her fingers. A knotted pearl necklace also brushes against the protruding pregnancy in *Portrait of a Woman in Red*. Pearls are symbols of pregnancy itself, as the gemstone is an attribute of Saint Margaret of Antioch.<sup>311</sup> Pearls therefore not only indicate live pregnancy, but also could have been used by early modern women as a means of beseeching Saint Margaret in her capacity as the patron saint of childbirth.<sup>312</sup> Pearls were also medicinal. Pearls were ground into a powder

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<sup>310</sup> The association of the shiny white surface of pearls with purity and virginity finds its roots in both Biblical and Classical sources. The round shape of pearls signified the luminescent moon, the symbol for the Virgin Mary as well as the virginal Greek goddess Diana. Karen Raber, "Chains of Pearls: Gender, Property, Identity," in *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, edited by Bella Mirabella, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 159.

<sup>311</sup> The name Margaret is the Greek word for pearl, Marguerite. Pearls were also believed to have healing properties. Raber, "Chains of Pearls: Gender, Property, Identity," 159 and 163. See also Karen Hearn, "A Fatal Fertility? Elizabeth and Jacobean Pregnancy Portraits," 42.

<sup>312</sup> Karen Hearn, "A Fatal Fertility? Elizabeth and Jacobean Pregnancy Portraits," 42.

and consumed in a draught to prolong life.<sup>313</sup> They were considered a heart healthy gemstone when worn or imbibed.<sup>314</sup> One sixteenth-century lapidary lauded the pearl as a “gendred of the deaw of heuen” that will “helpe against the Cardiacle passion, and against sounding or fayling of hart, against féeblesse that commeth of the bloodie flire, & against flire of the wombe.”<sup>315</sup> Gheeraerts’ use of pearls across his pregnancy portraits may have invoked such auspicious associations in his patronesses and viewers. Across pregnancy portraiture, babies are associated with precious jewels.<sup>316</sup> *Donna Gravida* likewise utilizes jewelry as a tool to confirm matrimonial chastity.<sup>317</sup> No doubt concerning the validity of her pregnancy is allowed to surface, as her wedding ring makes direct contact with her enlarged midsection. The contiguous symbols of wifely merit—her rings, pinned-up hair, modest refusal to show skin or cleavage, perhaps even the hidden cross pendant—are all vigilantly situated to mediate the patroness’ gravid state.

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<sup>313</sup> Cassandra Auble, “The Cultural Significance of Precious Stones in Early Modern England,” *Dissertations, Theses, & Student Research, Department of History*, (June 1, 2011), 26.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>315</sup> Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, (London: 1582), 262.

<sup>316</sup> Even if these artists did not know the story of Cornelia Africana, the virtuous Roman nobleman who famously declared “my sons are my jewels,” the shared sentiment that healthy children (especially males) are more valuable than gemstones runs rampant throughout much Renaissance art and literature. For more on this vanity-shunning lady, See J. Lea Beness, and Tom Hillard, “Insulting Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi,” *Antichthon* 47 (2013): 63.

<sup>317</sup> Raphael also embedded marital chastity in *Portrait of Maddalena Doni* through the tiny, barely perceptible unicorn hanging from the sitter’s pendant.

Pregnancy fascinated period scientists. Printed medical images of technically-pregnant women, such as the Roman *Tabulae Anatomicae*, popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are a far cry from imagery created for expecting mothers.<sup>318</sup> A birth tray painted by Francesco Xanto in approximately 1530 offers an unapologetic glimpse into a genuine birthing chamber (fig. 84). A naked woman extends upon a bed amongst messy sheets, with a midwife and female assistant in attendance. Another *desco da parto* made in 1580 presents a gravid woman in labor perched on a birthing chair, concentration tightening her face, midwife crouched before her to catch the newborn (fig. 85).<sup>319</sup> In early female anatomical images, such as figure 86, which only became significant forms of representation in the sixteenth century, female skin is peeled back to reveal babies growing amongst crudely delineated organs. The cartoon-like designs often show a tiny fetus tucked inside the womb, as if suggesting that the female body was incomplete unless pregnant. The women in these books are styled as aesthetically-pleasing Classical statues. Clinical prints like figure 86 thereby sterilize and gild early modern pregnancy, diluting probable danger or unpleasant consequences. *Donna Gravida* operates between these two extremes, preserving both the corporeal autonomy and quiet dignity of the sitter.

Evaluating *Donna Gravida* within Raphael's artistic output likewise reveals new insights. With mother and fetus both present, Raphael's *Donna Gravida* is a double portrait, replacing the traditional husband and wife pairing. Renaissance matrimonial portraiture situates the wife as a living exhibition of her husband's wealth and social status. She glitters next to the often dressed-down husband, a human *trousseau* displaying his generous lavishing of textiles, jewels, and

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<sup>318</sup> Karen Hearn, *Marcus Gheeraerts II: Elizabethan Artist*, 46.

<sup>319</sup> Made by the workshop of the Patanazzi family, in the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche, in Faenza. Musacchio, *Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 4.

accessories upon her person. Often her likeness is idealized, and any individuality squashed beneath societal norms for good wifely behavior. She shows off his business acumen and success, an extension of his person, his livelihood, and his family. By contrast, *Donna Gravida* is a double portrait that refuses to subvert a woman's personhood for her husband's. With the fetus present but unseen, the mother occupies the sole focus. She acknowledges the baby's presence with her hand, but does not simply exist as an expensively decked doll. Her husband—unmentioned anywhere in the painting, other than the ring on her finger—was likely a wealthy man, but *Donna Gravida* is not a visual advertisement for him.

*Donna Gravida* may also be considered in tandem with *Self-Portrait with a Friend* (fig. 87). Raphael excelled at the friendship genre of portraiture, wherein two men visually document and celebrate their platonic, mutual philia. *Self-Portrait with a Friend* is considered the strongest of Raphael's portraits and occasionally praised as the zenith of his career.<sup>320</sup> The image shares many notable similarities with *Donna Gravida*. Raphael used both panels to re-examine the boundaries of genre and social convention.<sup>321</sup> Like the mother-to-be, the identity of Raphael's companion has been lost to history and long provided stimuli for speculation.<sup>322</sup> The identity of the two figures is subservient to their relationship. The world outside the frame is acknowledged

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<sup>320</sup> Hall, *Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, 130-1.

<sup>321</sup> For how *Self-Portrait with a Friend* challenges the norms of friendship portraiture as well as Renaissance notions of Platonic relationships, see Maritere López, *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700*, Edited by Daniel T. Lochman, (1 edition. Farnham: Routledge, 2010), xiv.

<sup>322</sup> Roger Jones, and Nicholas Penny, *Raphael*, (Reprint edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 171.

but largely unimportant in relaying the central message. One sitter is higher in the composition, perhaps an indication of advanced status. Eyes gaze from the frame and connect with the viewer, insisting on acknowledgment of the relationship detailed within its confines. The two interior characters share a haptic connection. Raphael's companion extends his right hand and points to the viewer, perhaps one specific onlooker.<sup>323</sup> If *Donna Gravida* similarly assumes one imagined spectator, it is likely her husband and father of her child, represented in absentia by her wedding ring. The relationship is tender and intimate. While its precise nature is lost to history, I believe the maternal pride inherent in the portrait points to a woman self-fashioning as a mother. If *Self-Portrait with a Friend* epitomizes the end of Raphaellesque portraiture experimentation, *Donna Gravida* marks a beginning.

### **The Pregnant Woman**

The earliest written record concerning *Donna Gravida* is a single-line inventory of Cardinal Carlo de' Medici's property in 1666. The sitter is described as wearing "the costume of a servant," in the original script: "*una donna un abito di serva, con machine rossa e cuffia in testa.*"<sup>324</sup> This obviously mistaken report attests to the chronicler's fashion standards. Decked in their excessive braiding, ribbons, heeled shoes, and panniers, a typical seventeenth-century viewer would have judged *Donna Gravida*'s outfit ludicrously simple. However, a careful reading of every aspect of the dress reveals how very lavish and coded it is for circa 1505.

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<sup>323</sup> Hall, *Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, 130-1.

<sup>324</sup> ASF, G. 758 c. 20, quoted by Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

Donna Gravida dons a gown very similar in style to the ensemble worn by Maddalena Doni and the unknown young virgin in *Lady with a Unicorn* (figs. 88 and 89, respectively). However, while Maddalena Doni's bodice is dramatically rounded to emphasize her curves, Donna Gravida's is modestly flattened.<sup>325</sup> Her costume is that of a proper patrician woman, complete with detachable red sleeves and a transparent, lace-trimmed translucent partlet covering her exposed shoulders. This sheer veil-like material was imported into Florentine fashion circles from Bolognese textile production houses.<sup>326</sup> A short, yellow-gold watered silk moiré bodice is trimmed in black velvet. A fine white *camicia* has been expertly pulled from the gaps in her sleeves, another opportunity to show off the wealth of the sitter's family.<sup>327</sup>

The upper sections of the gown in *Donna Gravida* are fashionably customary. Her shiny gold bodice and brilliant red sleeves dominate the canvas and usher the viewer's eye into the frame. No other of Raphael's ladies possess such a vivid red in her dress. A combination of vermillion and red lake were applied in a single layer to create it.<sup>328</sup> Indeed, the detachable sleeves of the sitter's gown are a jubilation of red. Early modern red paint made with vermillion

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<sup>325</sup> Lauren Dodds, "Portraiture as Metamorphosis: Reconsidering the Doni Portraits and their Paintings," (Southern Methodist University, 2011), 63.

<sup>326</sup> Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 94.

<sup>327</sup> Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99. See also Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, 300. Alternatively, this may be due to an early modern inclination to associate public display of pregnancy with lower social strata.

<sup>328</sup> The red rests above layering of gesso and *imprimatura*. Vance, *A concise look at the variety of Raphael's panel painting techniques*, 66.

proved very challenging to work with; it was difficult to mix, and capricious even when properly synthesized.<sup>329</sup> Period color manuals apply a concomitant range of meanings to the color red: love, fire, the blood of martyrs, Christ's passion, and an alleviant for post-partum hemorrhages, many of which may be applied to *Donna Gravida*.<sup>330</sup> Vermillion, more specifically, was linked to alchemy, transubstantiation, and generation.<sup>331</sup> Albertus Magnus in his 1260s *Book of Minerals*, used the analogy of procreation to explain the labyrinthine process of making vermillion:

Sulphur...is not the 'Father' except [in the sense] that the male, out of his own substance, produces [offspring] in something else—that is, in menstrual blood—and that is the way Sulphur acts upon Quicksilver, but does not produce anything at all itself...Quicksilver is to the material substance of metals as the menstrual fluid is to the embryo: out of it, by the force of the Sulphur that digests and burns it, all metals are produced.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Anne Dunlop, *Andrea Del Castagno and the Limits of Painting*, *Renovatio Artium*. Studies in the Arts of the Renaissance (London ; Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2015), 123.

<sup>330</sup> Moreover, the combination of red and white finds significance in a range of early modern alchemical, theological, medicinal, and literary contexts. Red and white is directly tied to marriage in the writing of the fifteenth century humanist Rabelias in his novel *Gargantua* (published 1534). Georgie Aughterton Gurney, *Rabelais and Renaissance Color Symbolism*, (1974), 24, 45, 65, 118 119, 251-252, 266.

<sup>331</sup> Dunlop, *Andrea Del Castagno and the Limits of Painting*, 125.

<sup>332</sup> Albertus Magnus, *Book of Minerals*, translated by Dorothy Wyckoff, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 205 and 207.

While Raphael may not have known Magnus' provocative metaphor, the artist nevertheless could have been aware of the arcane association between vermilion pigment and lifeblood common in the period and deemed it apposite for this portrait.

The vermilion sleeves bear a raised, textured pattern, unmentioned in historiography. Red-dyed fabrics have a long historical pedigree of association with wealth.<sup>333</sup> A hue of such high saturation required the slaying of innumerable Old World cochineal insects, whose bodies were crushed for textile dyes.<sup>334</sup> While the configuration is only partly legible, palely-delineated petals around which larger flower shapes circle may be seen on Donna Gravida's sleeves towards the wrist. This velvet style was widely popular in Renaissance Italy, with variants produced in Florence, Venice, and Milan, throughout the fifteenth century.<sup>335</sup> It was a popular, expensive textile. Several comparable Italian examples endure. The pattern is sometimes referred to as *ferronnerie*, and was used within a wide range of textile contexts.<sup>336</sup> A superior survival, once part of a chasuble and produced in Venice in the last quarter of the fifteenth century is held in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 90). Large, undulating flower petals surmount points of spade-

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<sup>333</sup> Gurney, *Rabelais and Renaissance Color Symbolism*, 251-266.

<sup>334</sup> Italy would transition to New World cochineal for its fabrics in the 1540s. Lisa Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets*, (London: New York: Victoria & Albert Museum, 2012), 157.

<sup>335</sup> For more extant swatches of this red velvet pattern see Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets*, 88-91, and 187, Antonino Santangelo, *A Treasury of Great Italian Textiles*, (First edition. H.N. Abrams, 1964), colorplate 56, and Landini, Roberta Orsi, *I Velluti. Nella Collezione Della Galleria Del Costume Di Firenze-The Velvets. In the Collection of the Costume Gallery in Florence*. Mauro Pagliai Editore, (2017), 89-93.

<sup>336</sup> Santangelo, *A Treasury of Great Italian Textiles*, colorplate 56.

like ornaments, just as in the clearest part of Donna Gravidia's sleeves. Its variegated texture caused shadowing and changes to the red as the sitter moved. Based on the number of extant samples, I believe Donna Gravidia's sleeves may be an actuality rather than a textile fantasy Raphael imagined into graphic life.<sup>337</sup>

Donna Gravidia's worn accessories shed equally bright light upon the portrait's significance. The sitter wears an embroidered band outlining her *cuffia*, with figural decoration arching above her face.<sup>338</sup> Shapes organic and geometric range from flowers, leaves, sickles, and one thick, swelling line.<sup>339</sup> Scholars have yet to identify the symbols. The embroidered band has been classified as bearing "orientalizing motifs,"<sup>340</sup> or a pair of buffalo.<sup>341</sup> Tom Virzi argued the latter hints that the sitter belonged to the Bufalini family of Castello, but his interpretation has been widely disregarded because steadfast sources confirm Raphael was stationed in Florence when the picture was made.<sup>342</sup> The small, embroidered images must make meaning, as of all Raphael's portraits of women, Donna Gravidia is the only one whose hair accessory boasts

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<sup>337</sup> Perugino used a similar pattern to decorate the orange-red inner sleeves of Mary's dress in his 1500 *Madonna and Child* and on the garment of Joseph of Arimathea in the 1490s *Lamentation*.

<sup>338</sup> Also known as a *scuffia*. Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal. *The Clothing of the Renaissance World: Europe - Asia - Africa - The Americas*, (London; New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 586.

<sup>339</sup> Perugino often elaborated the edges of his figures' robes with similar linear geometric symbols. Raphael repeats this lesson on the saint's robes in his *Coronation of the Virgin*, among others.

<sup>340</sup> Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, 300.

<sup>341</sup> Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

<sup>342</sup> Tom Virzi, *Raphael and the Portrait of Andrea Turini*, (David Nutt, 1910), 105.

intricate decoration. Rather than identifiers of heraldry or personal icons, I believe the figuration on the hairband instead further emblemizes the sitter's marital chastity as well as implies the portrait's creator.

Flowers with rounded, repeating petals flanked by club-shaped leaves are not uncommon on Renaissance textiles.<sup>343</sup> The sickles directly above the matron's forehead may be waxing moons, a reference to Diana, the Greek goddess of chastity and childbirth, or one of the many attributes of the Virgin Mary, a meaningful visual symbol for an expecting mother hoping for a successful birth.<sup>344</sup>

At a direct diagonal to the sitter's left eye reside two greyish animals with feet tucked beneath their bodies, resting on a brown plinth. The two animals bear slight physiognomic differences. Rather than a pair or single buffalo, I believe the horned, bovine animal may be an ox and therefore a reference to Saint Luke, the patron saint of painters. Using the rich artistic legacy of Florence as a firsthand resource, Raphael would have had several local examples of the painter-saint's bull to access and copy. The tamed, seated posture of the animal with all four limbs tucked beneath its bulk, head twisted three-quarters, one eye but both horns visible, is not radically dissimilar from Saint Luke's bull on the ceiling of the Tornabuoni chapel, for example

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<sup>343</sup> See Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets*, 27 and 63.

<sup>344</sup> It possible Raphael referenced the Virgin Mary here and overall in the panel. *Donna Gravida* may be a partial quotation of Piero della Francesca's circa 1457 *Madonna del Parto* (figure 149), which the young artist may have seen during his time in Florence. He doubtless was familiar with della Francesca's work. Both female figures sit in the three-quarter position, look directly out at the viewer with somber, dark eyes set in long, pale foreheads, and touch their hands to white skirting that bends over actual pregnancies.

(fig. 91). The embroidered bull also resembles the animal in *Saint Luke Painting the Virgin* housed in the Reale Accademia di San Luca, (sometimes attributed to Raphael but also to Federico Zuccaro) which directly calls attention to the bull as a symbol for painters (fig. 92). Raphael possibly invokes his heavenly intercessor, giving him prominent placement within the portrait. It is possible the patron was unaware of this assertion of painterly identity, or perhaps was interested in indulging an emblem from the rising young artist.<sup>345</sup>

The other creature remains more enigmatic. Based on its resemblance to animals prominently featured in Italian media, I believe it is either a dragon or a griffin.<sup>346</sup> If the former, it may be a symbol of the patron saint of pregnancy, Saint Margaret.<sup>347</sup> However, when measured against Renaissance textiles bearing animal designs, the latter seems more likely. The prominent beak and comb of the animal, along with its tiny, extended arms, one of which engages with the object dividing the two creatures, is similar to a confirmed griffin of Perugia on a surviving tablecloth (fig. 93).<sup>348</sup> While the Perugian griffin is often paired with its affiliate lion, it may appear alongside many other beasts real and imagined. Between the two animals is a line

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<sup>345</sup> Raphael would later slip his self-portrait into the Stanza della Segnatura *Philosophy* fresco.

<sup>346</sup> While I have discovered no design that is a bull on one side and a griffin on the other, surviving Renaissance textiles attest to the wide diversity of imagined combinations of flora and fauna. See *I Velluti. Nella Collezione Della Galleria Del Costume di Firenze-The Velvets. In the Collection of the Costume Gallery in Florence*, Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets*, and Monnas, Lisa. *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings, 1300-1550*, (1st edition. New Haven Conn: London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>347</sup> Karen Raber, "Chains of Pearls: Gender, Property, Identity," 163.

<sup>348</sup> Santangelo, *A Treasury of Great Italian Textiles*, 38.

bursting at the top with red-orange streaks, which I believe refers to the fountain on the Perugian insignia. Perhaps the sitter's family had ancestral or mercantile ties with the city. It is also possible Raphael inserts himself into the frame once again, referencing the locale out of which his teacher operated a second studio, and where Raphael himself had recently completed the *Oddi Altarpiece*. Alternatively, this vertical line with wavy appendages may be a flower vase, a common device on Italian Renaissance textiles.<sup>349</sup> Similarities found within Raphael's *oeuvre* assist in clarifying the headband. A decade after the completion of *Donna Gravida*, Raphael decorated the ceiling of the Loggetta of Cardinal Bibbiena in the Vatican with a bull and griffin (fig. 94). Both animals are superiorly detailed, clearer modulated versions of their tiny counterparts on *Donna Gravida's cuffia*.

Donna Gravida's jewelry also plays a substantial role in the picture. A matrimonial ring decorates the traditional finger of the sitter's left hand, which rests possessively atop a suggestively enlarged midsection.<sup>350</sup> In the period, the left hand was associated with marital love, a practice based on Ovidian testimony that a major vein in the left arm flows directly to the heart.<sup>351</sup> Donna Gravida wears three rings in all, each a thick gold band set with a single stone. The ring closest to the viewer appears to be slightly beveled, while the others remain smoothly polished. These rings may be read as further signals of the sitter's untouchable marital chastity. Rings played a crucial role in Renaissance marriage, wielding visual power to publicize the

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<sup>349</sup> Two griffin-like monsters facing one another between a sprouting vase make up part of the *grotteschi* in Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura ceiling.

<sup>350</sup> Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, 63 and 100.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

joining of two patrician houses.<sup>352</sup> The design of wedding rings varied in the period, sometimes inscribed with figuration such as clasped hands or generalized profiles of couples, or simple bands set with single, faceted or unworked gems such as the one in the portrait.<sup>353</sup> The accessories were exchanged at various moments during typically lengthy Renaissance marriage ceremonies, and were a pivotal part of the public declaration of engagement. No other piece of jewelry was so closely tied to early modern nuptial contracts and rituals.

Gemstone symbolism additionally is at play within *Donna Gravida*. The ring on the figure's fourth finger possibly boasts a garnet due to its dark red hue.<sup>354</sup> Her index-finger ring contains either a sapphire, believed to protect chastity, or an emerald, which in addition to promoting health was likewise associated with purity.<sup>355</sup> Period manuals on women's health professed emeralds could prevent miscarriages.<sup>356</sup> The ring closest to the viewer appears to be a

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<sup>352</sup> Deborah L. Krohn explains succinctly, "rings made the marriage." *Ibid.*, 63

<sup>353</sup> Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, 100. See also Diana Scarisbrick, *Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection*, (New York: Abrams, 1993), 17-19 and 49-51.

<sup>354</sup> Gale R. Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward. *Encyclopedia of Dress and Textiles in the British Isles C. 450 1450*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill Academic Pub, 2012).

<sup>355</sup> Some period sources hold that an emerald would shatter if the wearer's virtue was sundered.

Nicols, Thomas, *Arcula Gemmea: Or, A Cabinet of Jewels.: Discovering the Nature, Vertue, Value of Pretious Stones, with Infallible Rules to Escape the Deceit of All such as Are Adulterate and Counterfeit*, (London: Printed for Nath: Brooke, at the Angel in Cornhill, 1653), 85, 96.

Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity*, (UK ed. edition. Manchester; New York: New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 98.

<sup>356</sup> Bell, *How to Do It Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, 81

ruby, thought to promote bodily and moral fortitude.<sup>357</sup> Rubies could also warn its bearer of impending danger or illness,<sup>358</sup> and may also suggest a wearer's fertility.<sup>359</sup> They were the gemstone most frequently gifted to brides for their properties of promoting bodily strength and prosperity, as well as their ability to negate lust and sadness.<sup>360</sup> Rubies, sapphires, and emeralds were also believed to guard against poison.<sup>361</sup> A coded, haptic link then exists between Donna Gravida and her jewelry. The medicinal power residing in rings was activated by direct contact with the skin.<sup>362</sup> Together these gemstones radiate a magical field of strength, health, and chastity around the sitter.

### **Picturing Agentive Pregnancy**

*Donna Gravida* is a study in female agency. Female imagery centers not sitter selfhood, but association with her patriarchal and wedded lineage, as well as the potential of her womb.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation and Identity*, 98.

<sup>358</sup> Auble, "The Cultural Significance of Precious Stones in Early Modern England," 27.

<sup>359</sup> Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-Century Art*, 110.

<sup>360</sup> Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Portrait of a Lady, 1430-1520." In *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 65.

<sup>361</sup> Auble, "The Cultural Significance of Precious Stones in Early Modern England," 16-17.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> For a longer discussion of agency and female portraiture, see Andrea Pearson, *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity* – Routledge, (Routledge,

*Donna Gravida* should be apotheosized as one of the few works in which female self-fashioning may be located in Renaissance portraiture. One of the most famous examples of an agentive female sitter is Leonardo da Vinci's iconic *Ginevra de' Benci*, painted in Florence circa 1474-1478.<sup>364</sup> The obverse side of the portrait proclaims Ginevra's literary intellect through the inclusion of a laurel leaf, which connects to her strong moral character via the palm frond. Both symbolic plants encircle a sprig of juniper, a pun on the sitter's given name. A banner displays the Latin motto "VIRTUTEM FORMA DECORAT," or "Beauty adorns virtue."<sup>365</sup> This phrase may be easily applied to Raphael's obviously-pregnant sitter. Ginevra de' Benci's personhood

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2008).

<sup>364</sup> While writing surrounding *Ginevra de' Benci* often celebrates Leonardo da Vinci's artist genius, or centers the debate concerning the impetus behind the panel's conception—whether is it a betrothal portrait, a friendship portrait, or possibly commissioned by Ginevra de Benci's Platonic lover Pietro Bembo as a celebration of their warm but celibate bond, or a combination of these suggestions—I find Mary Garrard's defense of Ginevra's active role in the creation of the image most compelling. As a poet, Ginevra was an artist herself, and Garrard believes may have lent her own creative sensibilities to her likeness, from its pose and perplexing facial expression to the invention of the motto. Strikingly, Garrard even suggests that Ginevra, in a remarkably proto-feminist turn against coeval norms, may have excused herself from becoming a mother. A letter penned by Ginevra's friend known only by his initials, G.L.N., reads: "from excessive haughtiness [you] refuse to present us mortals with [your] descendants—well, have it your way." Garrard recasts Ginevra as a strong-spirited intellect who likely collaborated with both da Vinci and Bembo towards the portrait. Garrard, "Who Was Ginevra de' Benci? Leonardo's Portrait and Its Sitter Recontextualized:" 25-29 and 43-47.

<sup>365</sup> David, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 64.

resides in her wit and intellect. *Donna Gravida's* is broadcast by her unerring conjugal fidelity and devotion to the sacred calling of motherhood. It is a Raphael that demonstrates an exceptional moment of female agency by foregrounding the uniquely female act of pregnancy. Careful yet untraditional details in the sitter's dress and held accessory combined with a focus on heavy pregnancy reveal a pictorial rhetoric dedicated to maternal instrumentality. Hers is not a gestation that demurely progresses within the stringent confines of sexual regulation of Renaissance women. *Donna Gravida* is not passive, but consciously using dress, the chief tool available to Renaissance women, to self-fashion her key attribute, prideful motherhood.

Aside from her prominent pregnancy, *Donna Gravida's* rendered costume speaks the panel's internal logic loudest. *Donna Gravida's* dress confirms her gestational state. Typical fifteenth-century Italian fashion favored the empire waistline, which tailored skirting to intersect with a short bodice just below the breasts. The sitter's gown swells to accommodate her pregnancy. Her various undergarmenting has never been called into question. Scholars habitually assume the figure wears a simple *gonna* over a *camicia*, but the fabric that peaks through the sleeves is of a different texture than that lining her bodice at the neckline. The sitter therefore wears not a single under-layer but several. The white textile of La Muta's apron bears a superficial resemblance to *Donna Gravida's* skirt—both are tightly ruched—but upon closer reflection is strikingly different. La Muta's apron is likely of a heartier fabric, linen or cotton. She wears a pink tie from which her rectangular linen apron is tucked, as was typical in the period.<sup>366</sup> It may be attached to the simple belt with cartridge pleating. In contrast, note the sheen on *Donna Gravida's* skirt; it is instead silk. Its flutes are finer, thinner, and lighter. Both the

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<sup>366</sup> Juneaux Duchess, "A Simple Leather Apron (The Costumer's Creation)," *Renaissance Magazine* 18, no. 6 (2013): 32.

expensive, stout fabric and its fine details would have been an unlikely choice for an apron.<sup>367</sup> I believe this superior-quality skirt is no skirt at all; the delicate white expanse is an underskirt. Donna Gravidia has disrobed.

Donna Gravidia's dress is strictly contemporary, yet lacking an overskirt. I maintain the patroness' main skirt has been removed to accommodate her late-term pregnancy. Typical sixteenth-century Florentine fashion tastes dictated that skirts were of the same fabric as the bodice, to provide a vibrant color contrast with detachable sleeves, which could be shuffled between dresses. Skirt fabric was thick, often embroidered or brocaded, voluminous, and structured. The skirt may therefore be a *cotta*, the layer of dress worn under the more elaborate *giorena* in summer or private places. Though an underdress, these garments were still lavish, occasionally dyed blue or red, for example.<sup>368</sup> The rare and difficult to maintain color white was associated with purity, especially in women's garments.<sup>369</sup> The absence of an overskirt, combined with her several rings and forgone belt together demonstrate that Donna Gravidia is indeed *gravida*.

Comparison with *La Muta* affirms that Donna Gravidia wears underwear as outerwear. *La Muta*'s skirt is of a dark green in keeping with her bodice, and she has tied her apron over it. White public-facing dresses were uncommon in the Renaissance, as they dirtied easily. Removing or loosening exterior layers to display a gestational midsection is not unknown in early modern art. *Mildred Coke, Lady Burghley*, attributed to Hans Eworth (1563), highlights the

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del costume in Italia* v.2, 252-253.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 415.

sitter's rare geriatric pregnancy at thirty-six (fig. 95).<sup>370</sup> Lady Burghley has unhooked and thrown back her black satin overgown to display her protruding midsection. Anthonis Mor's 1552 portrait *Catherine of Austria, Queen of Portugal* exhibits the monarch with the top four fasteners of her gown unbuttoned to emphasize her large belly (fig. 96).<sup>371</sup> A gold and bejeweled girdle is clasped over her stomach as if to safeguard the growing heir. It is in the shape of a crest, perhaps a nod to her royalty. Her satin dress shimmers as it rounds her gestational contours, further calling attention to her unfastened state. *Donna Gravida's deshabelle* operates correspondingly.

Women in Renaissance pictures display their underwear very rarely, and overwhelmingly in an erotic sense. Exceptions to this trend provide key counterpoints. Many of Jacopo Palma Il Vecchio's women, notably *Young Woman in a Green Dress*, has unlaced the front of her dress to entice the viewer with her ruched undergarment. In this particular instance, the subject's loosened gown signals not sensual potential for a lusty male viewer, but a personal level of comfort with both artist and spectator. It is possible, then, that *Donna Gravida* resided in a private interior space within a patrician household, available only to the most privileged of eyes.

Expecting Renaissance mothers were often confined to the home during late-stage pregnancy.<sup>372</sup> To avoid the waste of wearing full costume in the home when receiving friends and relatives, it was not uncommon for pregnant patrician women to dress down, even to the point of displaying their undergarments.<sup>373</sup> Period inventories of closets across Italy prove

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<sup>370</sup> Hearn, "A Fatal Fertility? Elizabeth and Jacobean Pregnancy Portraits," 39-40.

<sup>371</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Musacchio, *Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 42-46.

<sup>373</sup> Levi Pisetzky, *Storia del costume in Italia* v.2, 285.

women owned several fine *camicie* of diverse lengths, even possessing various shirts to be worn during different times of day or seasons.<sup>374</sup> *Donna Gravid* perhaps is a picture of a confined, pregnant woman receiving friends at home.<sup>375</sup> This intimacy may be seen in Botticelli's Pitti Palace *Portrait of an Unknown Woman* in a plain brown dress, in which the profiled sitter is pictured indoors wearing typical private daywear, much subdued as opposed to the type of costume an upper-class woman would adopt for public outings (fig. 17). Botticelli's aforementioned *Woman at a Casement* also sports a relaxed (but very fine) over-gown meant for indoor use.

A strip of black velvet creates a boundary between the traditional bodice and sleeves of the patroness' costume and her atypical underdress. *Donna Gravid* hooks her thumb into a loose point in the trim, directly touching the top of her pregnancy. Here the sitter's midsection commences its outward swell. While many images of early modern women can *appear* pregnant when they are not, I believe the subject's lack of a belt proves that she was indeed recorded in paint with a child in utero. In adjacent Renaissance portraits, the presence or absence of a belt or girdle on a woman's body becomes the epicenter of debate concerning potential gravidity. Botticelli's *Woman at a Casement* is often cited as another rare moment of gestation in part because the sitter has foregone a belt. Speculation over Giovanna da Tornabuoni's possible pregnancy in both Ghirlandaio's portraits of the deceased mother hinges on her missing belt, paired with the knowledge that she died and was buried while with child (figures 31 and 32). Countess Lucia da Porto was confirmed pregnant when Veronese executed her portrait. While

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<sup>374</sup> Musacchio, *Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 42-46.

<sup>375</sup> *Donna Gravid*, however, declines to declare a geographic location, yet another significant break from coeval pictures of women.

the countess lacks an enlarged belly, her condition is alluded to by the marten fur draped over her arm, her hand indicating her womb, (her daughter, then, points to her impending sibling growing beneath her mother's lavish silk skirt), her loose-fitting clothing, and the metal waistlet dangling slackly over her stomach.<sup>376</sup>

By comparing the thin black band circling Donna Gravidia's waist to the belt worn by the unmarried young virgin in Raphael's *Lady with a Unicorn*, a crucial distinction becomes clear. *Lady with a Unicorn* boasts a separate, detachable accessory about her waist, in accordance with typical Renaissance fashion accoutrements, such as figure 97, held in the Metropolitan Museum's costume collection. In contrast, Donna Gravidia does not wear a belt; that thick black line is instead the edging of the bodice, a decorative trim. The belt or girdle was a potent symbol of chastity during the period, which a woman would only eschew if married and appropriately pregnant. Belts could be removed from dresses to allow for free expansion of the abdomen as a woman's body changed throughout gestational stages. The sitter has decisively strayed from costume norms to self-fashion impeccable motherhood. If *Lady with a Unicorn*'s attribute is her virginal chastity, then Donna Gravidia's is her marital chastity.

Donna Gravidia grasps an agentive clue. In the hand closest to the audience, the figure clutches an object that has been identified as a handkerchief or pair of gloves. The first is unlikely due to the attached string. While ladies across Renaissance paintings often hold handkerchiefs as a sign of sartorial and personal refinement, I am unaware of any surviving or rendered handkerchiefs that are lined with string, even as an impractical decorative feature. Raphael reverently pictured his patron Pope Julius II with a handkerchief gripped in his bejeweled hands. The artist rendered the accessory with voluminous weight and hearty textile

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<sup>376</sup> Musacchio, *Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 136.

presence. The fabric in Donna Gravida's hand is not imbued with the same energetic mass. La Muta also clutches a bunching fabric accessory commonly identified as gloves. Though we see a much narrower swath of it, the object seems to possess no strings.

I believe the identification of the object lies in its addition of a string, which is wholly unmentioned in the literature. I would like to advance another *possible* theory; it may be a small lady's handbag, based on the presence of the cord unfurling across the parapet. A simple cross-comparison with the necklace looping the sitter's neck attests that this is a non-metallic string rather than a carefully-rendered linked chain. Cloth purse makers (*borsai*) were a minor but prosperous clothing guild in Florence at the time.<sup>377</sup> Small women's handbags surviving from the period prominently featured drawstrings laced across the top seam (fig. 98). While ladies did not always carry coinage in these small purses, they are directly tethered to money in paintings. When pulled closed, the fabric at the top of these coin purses bunches, much like the folds sticking out atop Donna Gravida's possessive hand.

Raphael was a meticulous artist; no section of this painting is incidental. If this object *is* a purse, it may hint at cash Donna Gravida boasts from her dowry.<sup>378</sup> The presence of a purse in

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<sup>377</sup> Both men and women carried purses, but lady's bags (including high-end purses made of silk) are thought to have been made by female artisans. Leather purses were also popular in Renaissance Florence. Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 35 and 44-45.

<sup>378</sup> It is also possible *Donna Gravida* is a portrait of a young, pregnant widow. If the accessory in the sitter's hand is a purse, it may hold monies bequeathed to her, or the heir growing in her womb, from her late husband's estate. While the sitter does not wear traditional mourning garb, she nevertheless affects a somber mien.

portraits symbolizes wealth tied to an estate or business, and in all other instances of Renaissance imagery appears exclusively in male hands. Caroline Murphy offers a similar argument in her book on Lavinia Fontana's portraits of married women and widows who declare provisional ownership over their husband's estate in his absence, or reclaim their dowry after his death.<sup>379</sup> In Fontana's images, however, wives and widows handle jewelry and gemstones, symbolizing a shift away from patriarchal power through highly feminized objects. The haptically-receptive end of Donna Gravida's index finger engages with the possible purse string. Her wealth is literally situated at her fingertips.

Donna Gravida's relationship with her potential purse furthers her uniqueness. Lucas Cranach and his contemporaries created a slew of morality paintings featuring women surreptitiously sliding their hands into their mismatched husband's purses (fig. 99). The women are young, beautiful, and wickedly seductive, while their chosen mates are by contrast older men who vacillate between senile and lecherous. These bags bulge with capital and feature drawstrings. These images are meant to be both erotic and moralizing, a visual trap for the viewer-sinner. The message is clear: men should guard their purses well, lest a woman reach in and steal their money. No trace of Cranach's misogynistic bent stains *Donna Gravida*. She is responsible but not greedy, lovely yet dignified. Raphael is not warning a male viewer that she has stolen property from his unsuspecting brethren. This potential purse may also be read as a symbolic reflection of the sitter's body, protecting and hiding precious material within, perhaps a reference to purse-shaped metal medieval reliquaries. Donna Gravida is the vessel; her baby is

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<sup>379</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, 146.

the miracle. If she indeed holds a purse, its presence would further isolate this painting within Renaissance female portraiture.

Most scholars identify the textile object as a pair of gloves.<sup>380</sup> Lacking documentary evidence, its identification hinges entirely on visual analysis and the addition of the string. A young man wearing red, whom Raphael documented in 1505, holds a pair of gloves that *are* structured with drawstrings (fig. 100). However, they are of the same color as the gloves' main body. As fragmented, fluid bodily objects, gloves fluctuated in nuance as they exchanged owners. Gloves in Renaissance portraiture signal refinement, but may also act as a token passed from a woman to her lover.<sup>381</sup> Gloves on women indicate adherence to period rules of decorum, which here may further serve to mediate the breach of being painted while pregnant. If Donna Gravida holds gloves, they signal her wealth and status, broadcasting that she does not engage in manual labor and needs to protect her delicate skin.<sup>382</sup>

Gloves ennoble the wearer while simultaneously restricting manual movement. If, as Randolph contends, hands “are a privileged site for commentaries on the subjects/objects of the artist, the work, and spectator,” then Donna Gravida’s hands play a pivotal role in the relational message of the picture.<sup>383</sup> Hands elicit viewer empathy, and act as a painted body’s most agentive feature. If the accessory is in fact gloves, Donna Gravida has purposefully removed

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<sup>380</sup> Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, 300.

<sup>381</sup> Mirabella, *Ornamentalism: The Art of Renaissance Accessories*, 85.

<sup>382</sup> Gregori describes the gloves in her hands as an “accessory of austere elegance.” Gregori, *Raffaello a Firenze. Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentine*, 99.

<sup>383</sup> Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-Century Art*, 19.

them to foreground hapticality and prime the spectator to accept her heavily-pregnant state by inviting them into the scene. *Anne Hale, Mrs. Hoskins* (the only extant Gheeraerts pregnancy portrait for whom the sitter is known) similarly calls attention to the power of touch. The figure removes her gloves and touches her rounded stomach. The choice allows for a tactile encounter with the pregnant belly, rendering female hands both maternal and possessive. Two distinct layers of textile protrude from the sitter's curled fingers; could she be holding both a purse *and* a pair gloves at once? Donna Gravida is both agentic and sophisticated in her sartorial presentation, particular in how she utilizes her hands.

Through careful manipulation of color and light, Raphael highlights his patroness' ungloved hand above her white underskirt, drawing the viewer's eye towards her pregnancy. While her left hand refers to her womb, her right rests on a parapet, gesturing to the world outside the fiction of the painting, acknowledging and breaking into the viewer's space.<sup>384</sup> While her gaze acts as a welcoming gateway into the panel, her pregnant belly connects a potent visual bridge between sitter and spectator. Bold eye contact with her audience seems to communicate insistence upon a witness, perhaps even a legal witness, outside the frame. While solemn expressions are not uncommon in early modern portraiture, Donna Gravida's fixed stare and serious brow adopts a new mien when viewed within the trauma of Renaissance childbirth.

It is possible, therefore, *Donna Gravida* documents not only a pregnancy but also the moment of legitimizing a will. Many Renaissance portraits may be thought of as legal documents, or supplementary material towards legal documentation, from marriage portraits to

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<sup>384</sup> Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, 300.

dowry inventories.<sup>385</sup> Katherine A. McIver argues Rolando Pallavicino, the sonless marchese of Roccabianca, commissioned Alessandro Araldi to paint his daughter Barbara Pallavicina as his true heir, or at least a conduit for future male progeny.<sup>386</sup> Caroline Murphy argues that the extensive detail paid to the elaborate gowns and jewels of Bolognese noblewomen by Lavinia Fontana act as painted dowry inventories.<sup>387</sup>

Pregnancy was a serious enterprise in early modern Europe. Due to the dangers of childbirth, women often wrote their wills upon confirming their pregnancy.<sup>388</sup> While the arrival of a healthy baby showered Italian mothers with visits from friends and relatives bearing gifts of new serving ware and invigorating foodstuffs, preparation for labor was also morbid.<sup>389</sup> On December 26<sup>th</sup> of 1447 Alessandra Strozzi pragmatically wrote to her son Filippo concerning her daughter (and Filippo's sister), "I gather you've heard from Marco that Caterina is pregnant and expecting the child in the middle of February. As that's the case I think we should take out some insurance so we won't lose the five hundred florins they're owed from the [dowry] fund, as we

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<sup>385</sup> Upon her husband's death, a Bolognese woman's dowry passed back to her, the first time in her life she had access to its wealth. Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, 146.

<sup>386</sup> Katherine A. McIver, "Daddy's Little Girl: Patrilineal Anxiety in Two Portraits of a Renaissance Daughter," in *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity*, (Routledge, 2008), 85-98.

<sup>387</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, 88.

<sup>388</sup> Musacchio, "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," 177. See also Stanley Chojnacki. "Dowries and kinsmen in early Renaissance Venice," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 5, (1975): 587.

<sup>389</sup> Musacchio, "Pregnancy and Poultry in Renaissance Italy," 7.

could lose her and the money at the same time. We could lose it if God has other plans for her.”<sup>390</sup> A woman in third-term pregnancy would prepare herself mentally and spiritually for the worst outcome. In a particularly grim English account from 1622, Elizabeth Joscelin purchased a death shroud for herself when she felt her baby kick. Her sad prediction turned out to be true; while her newborn daughter survived, Elizabeth succumb to “a violent fever,” nine days after giving birth.<sup>391</sup> *Donna Gravida* may broadcast the sitter’s intention to record not only her presence, but also a continued legacy should the delivery of the fetus in the picture prove fatal to her.

Donna Gravida chose a pivotal moment in her gestation to sit for Raphael. Medieval and early modern fetuses were not considered imbued with personhood until capable of shifting within the womb independently of the mother.<sup>392</sup> This developmental phase, referred to in the period as the quickening, happened approximately six months into pregnancy, during the third and final trimester. Based on the size and shape of her midsection, I maintain Donna Gravida is in fact in this ultimate stage of gestation. Her fetus has quickened, and received individuality in accordance with Renaissance obstetrics and theology. Her hand gestures to a living, autonomous human. Donna Gravida’s baby has a soul.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Macinghi and Alessandra Strozzi, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi*, 51.

<sup>391</sup> Hearn, *Marcus Gheeraerts II: Elizabethan Artist*, 45. See also Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, 189.

<sup>392</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, (First Oxford Edition. Dublin, 1771), 388.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

Absence also provides clues to *Donna Gravida*'s meaning. In a departure from his other portraits, Raphael eradicates the background in favor of a deep black field.<sup>394</sup> This choice simplifies the composition, and is an implement possibly borrowed from Flemish portraits such as the veiled Protestant ladies with hands reservedly clasped, painted by Robert Campin and his ilk.<sup>395</sup> No landscape or casement communicates her social circumstance. *Donna Gravida* emerges from nothing, grounded in negative space. Within the frame she is whole, her gestation the central identifying aspect of her likeness. Simons determined that public display of patrician women was carefully managed during the Renaissance. Women were revealed and walked openly through city streets during proposal and marriage processes.<sup>396</sup> Once deflowered, however, the upper-class wife often remained inside, protected from potential harm and safe from the scrutiny of inappropriate and uninvited gazes.<sup>397</sup> While my arguments in the previous chapter complicated Simons' claims, third-term pregnancy nevertheless took place in the Renaissance home. *Donna Gravida*'s lack of obvious interiority, therefore, marks yet another gesture towards female agency. A purposeful choice, the monochromatic blackness cannot reassure the viewer that *Donna Gravida* sits securely indoors. The black field is vague, existing neither in nor outside. The sitter coyly refuses to graphically state her location, therefore disobeying convention that sequestered late-stage pregnant women inside. Raphael could have

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<sup>394</sup> A restorative cleaning in 1983-1984 revealed that the black was indeed Raphael's original conception, and not due to loss or corruptive varnishing. Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His*, 300.

<sup>395</sup> *La Muta* likewise lacks a background.

<sup>396</sup> Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames, the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture." *History Workshop Journal* 25, no. 1 (1988): 9.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

used the background to mitigate the bizarre, unblushing exhibition of pregnancy in this portrait, but deferred to ambiguity. Botticelli, for instance, opts for impunity by undeniably placing *Woman at a Casement* at home. The open shutter behind Botticelli's sitter secures interiority behind the subject. Gheeraerts' *Lady in Red* drapes her arm over a lavishly-upholstered chair and stands before a drawn curtain, signaling that her pregnancy percolates in a controlled, indoor setting. *Donna Gravida* again carves out its own pictorial space, circumnavigating decorum restrictions by allowing the viewer to decide if the soon-to-be mother is in an indoor private or public location. It could be her domicile, or Raphael's studio. *Donna Gravida*'s clothing and accessories brook no argument concerning her social status or standing as a faithful wife. Her space, in contrast, is liminal.

Raphael insists *Donna Gravida* sees and is seen. The young painter-on-the-rise likely reveled in the opportunity to reassess the limitations of multiple portraiture genres at once. The three-quarter position was a mid-to-late fifteenth century iteration in the Italian Renaissance evolution of portraiture. In contrast to the profile view, three-quarter pivots the figure towards the viewer, fully turns the face, and allows for a larger swath of the body to be seen, therefore permitting more visual contact between audience and sitter. Intimacy is heightened.<sup>398</sup> Like much of Renaissance pictorial trends, the three-quarter view was first applied to male figures in the mid-fifteenth century and to women two decades later, in the 1470s.<sup>399</sup> Simons reads the denial of female ocular agency required by the profile view as a reflection of early modern sexual boundaries and control.<sup>400</sup> Profile relegates the female subject to passive object, eyes locked

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

forward and gaze diverted outside the frame, observed but unable to observe. Combined with the idealization of women, and the focus on their clothing and accessories rather than their facial features or physiognomic structure, profile eradicates agency. It renders women innocuous and decorous.<sup>401</sup> Profile upheld Renaissance gender conventions by framing women as pieces of consumable property within a man's estate, valuable not as people but as mannequins on which to display economic prowess. It emblemizes the sitter.<sup>402</sup> By shifting towards the spectator, *Donna Gravida* offers information more about the figure, declining to remain a passive object and instead opting to participate in mutual visual exchange with the viewer.<sup>403</sup> Emphasis on eye contact therefore renders Raphael's pregnant patroness distinctive within female portraiture. Raphael demands the viewer make eye contact with Donna Gravida by swiping a bright highlight of white directly beneath her left eye, vibrating in contrast to her dark iris. She refuses to adhere to early modern rules of female decorum by casting her eyes downwards or astray, instead leveling her gaze unflinchingly towards Raphael and any observer. The viewer locks eyes with *Donna Gravida* and she returns in kind. She exudes no restraint and refuses to apologize for or

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>403</sup> In the early sixteenth century, animating female figures with ocular agency was still a relatively new trend. While female sitters positioned in the three-quarter view, allowing eyesight interaction with the viewer, became more conventional after 1470 (spearheaded in part by da Vinci's experimental images like *Ginevra de' Benci*), the profile view for women persisted even later. See Garrard, "Who Was Ginevra de' Benci? Leonardo's Portrait and Its Sitter Recontextualized," 25. Further, I side with Simons' view that a change in pictorial tastes did not amount to an alleviation in oppressive attitudes towards women. Simons, "Women in Frames, the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," 24.

deflect away from her presence in the portrait. Her gaze is active, and disables its misogynist and debilitating male counterpart. The painting takes risks, eschewing the restrictive orderliness at work within the profile view, rendering *Donna Gravida* more than the sum of her clothing and jewels. Self-fashioning theories usually map inaccurately onto images of women for a number of reasons discussed here. *Donna Gravida*, however, casts all aspersions aside and claims motherhood and agency may be visualized as one and the same.

A central endeavor of a Renaissance master painter was to create images so realistic they could fool the eye, transforming the painterly frame into a window to another, fully-realized world. Raphael was no stranger to this dream.<sup>404</sup> Indeed, Vasari believed Raphael especially gifted at imbuing his figures with life, calling “those [pictures] by Raphael life itself, for in his figures the flesh trembles, the very breath may be perceived, the pulse beats and the true presentment of life is seen.”<sup>405</sup> Raphael was likely engaged with notions that codified artistic production as sexual procreation. *Donna Gravida* conveys the sitter—it situates a pregnant woman as a successful mother, loyal wife, and self-sufficient agent—but it also conveys its creator, a sentiment possibly announced by the animals in the headband. Perhaps in *Donna Gravida* the clever young painter toys with the allegory of painting-as-gestation that runs

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<sup>404</sup> Fredrika Herman Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21-23.

<sup>405</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari's Lives of the Artists; Biographies of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1946), 350.

through much of early modern artistic pursuit.<sup>406</sup> Donna Gravida gestates an heir; Raphael generates an inimitable portrait. Together, painter and sitter create life. Raphael arrived in Florence in 1504, new to the art scene.<sup>407</sup> Of his many portraits, *Donna Gravida* manifests the most *Mona Lisa* influence, from the shaved eyebrows towards an elegantly-elongated forehead, bold eye contact, pose, emphasis on hands, indistinct expression, careful modulation of the flesh and shadowing around the neck, and triangular composition. Both artists rendered their sitters with unapologetic verisimilitude. Within *Donna Gravida*, Raphael fully unleashes his newly-acquired adaptation of Leonardesque *sfumato*, atomizing the sitter into angelically-invisible brush strokes.<sup>408</sup> Like da Vinci's enigmatic *La Gioconda*, *Donna Gravida* teems with life. Yet Raphael's sitter also bears life.

Close reading of every detail within *Donna Gravida* illuminates this dark Raphael for its previously undiscovered idiosyncratic features. Hailed as "the most mature work among the artist's pre-Roman period," *Donna Gravida* may now be read as an early Raphaellesque re-imagining of the edges of images of women in general and pregnant women specifically.<sup>409</sup> In another artist's hands, *Donna Gravida* could have been far less sensitive or daring. Before he rose to the rank of Renaissance darling, Raphael rallied form and content towards a wholly inimitable study of womanhood through one specific woman. *Donna Gravida* has no parallel or

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<sup>406</sup> Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, 27.

<sup>407</sup> Hall, *Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, 15.

<sup>408</sup> Alexander Nagel, "Icons and Early Modern Portraits," In *El Retrato Del Renacimiento*, edited by Miguel Falomir. Madrid, (2008): 421.

<sup>409</sup> Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, 300.

equal within the artist's body of work, nor the broader genre of sixteenth-century portraiture. Raphael told a visual story of an upper-class woman declaring her fulfillment of the chief Renaissance wifely duty by announcing her impending motherhood. Harnessing its potent visuality, *Donna Gravida* defies the early modern erasure of illustrated pregnancy.

### Chapter 3: “Pregnant” Goddesses and Saints

The convex emerald bodice on the woman in the *Arnolfini Portrait* is the most common instance of mistaken pregnancy in the history of Western art (fig. 9). Yet Jan van Eyck repeated the controversial shape in a much less likely and unremarked-upon moment, reusing the confusing dress on Saint Catherine in his *Dresden Triptych* (fig. 101). Saint Catherine, standing in the right panel, wears a blue gown and white overtunic picked out in black dots. The saint’s drapery-covered midsection juts from beneath the gospel book balanced in her hand. She bunches her skirts against her stomach. The resultant frontal dome is the exact same shape achieved by the woman in the *Arnolfini Portrait*, which created the epicenter of an art historical mystery for over a century.<sup>410</sup> Within the *Arnolfini Portrait*, both pregnancy symbolism and expectation is at play, but the woman in the green dress is not pregnant. Catherine, like most female saints, was a virgin pledged to no other man than Christ and therefore cannot be with child. The former is a secular woman in gravid dress, but the latter is a virgin martyr in gravid dress, and therefore the presence of the suggestively-pregnant belly in this sacred image is particularly significant and necessitates further contextualization.

As established throughout this project, a seemingly-pregnant shape was not uncommon on female figures throughout Renaissance art. A much-quoted Leo Steinberg truism holds that

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<sup>410</sup> The *Arnolfini Portrait* was acquired by the National Gallery in 1842, and the question of pregnancy began even before its accession. “Jan van Eyck | The Arnolfini Portrait | NG186 | National Gallery, London.” Accessed December 11, 2018. In 1700, for example, an inventory from the Spanish royal collection describes the wife as “a pregnant German lady...who is giving her hand to a man.” Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal: Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of Van Eyck’s Double Portrait*, 4-7.

“Renaissance artists repeatedly used the physical body to express abstract theological ideas.”<sup>411</sup>

This chapter discusses fantastical examples of illusory pregnancy so far on the periphery of my study: muses, goddesses, and saints. Painters exercised artistic license to add bizarrely-pregnant bellies to mystical and sacred figures in *istoria* scenes in which the narratives are often bereft of actual pregnancy, therefore providing a unique access point into elucidating gravid dress.

Through this figural group, this chapter establishes a semiotics of pregnancy, tracing the sign and signifier of the female body to the meaning of its suggestive “pregnancy.” I argue the presence of large bellies on female figures that are not pregnant in both secular and sacred contexts allegorize fertility in a number of ways. This chapter is divided into two parts, “Secular” and “Sacred,” each treating the presence and significance of misleading pregnancy. The “Secular” section focuses on muses and goddesses, and situates gravid dress as the impetus for pregnancy as allegory. I argue in such images, pregnancy is often pictured as a conduit for visual authorship and the laborious process behind artistic genius. This section also briefly discusses the one moment in early modern media wherein the nude and gravid dress interact, dowry chests. In the previous chapter I argued that pregnancy and wardrobe were inexorably knitted together for Renaissance women. Clothing held the power to transmit memory and meaning. Here I will add that religion also played a key role. As such, the “Sacred” segment examines virtuous figures, treating a wide swath of virginal saints who seem to be painted pregnant. This section makes up the majority of this chapter. “Sacred” narrows to the most important instance of sacred gravid dress, that enacted by the Virgin Mary. In Renaissance images, Mary’s Miraculous Conception collapses time. Artists enlarged the Virgin’s midsection not only in Visitation images, but also Marian cycle scenes in which she no longer gestates Christ. I argue her gestational body is part

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<sup>411</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 35.

of Marian iconography during the Renaissance, which was taken up by actual women in the pursuit of pregnancy, an ideology most clearly at work in the chapel of the Sacred Girdle in Prato Cathedral. For upper class women, pregnancy was part of personal piety, ignited by the power inherent in both images and dress objects. Laced gowns, a common Renaissance dress type, appear in both sacred and secular images and are discussed throughout both sections.

Within the Catholic imagination, God's omnipotence seeps into every aspect of life, and is shown back into the faces of the faithful through beautiful objects and sparkling spaces.<sup>412</sup> An all-consuming obsession with material splendor to glorify the unknowable beauty of God finds purchase in painted dress. Renaissance painters delighted in the careful and demanding depiction of velvets, cloth-of-gold, spun silk, lace, pearls, metallics, and extensively piled cloth about women's waists. Reiterating my findings in Chapter One, that women in both images and lived experience enjoyed a special connection to wearable drapery, this chapter will discuss how many of the common trappings of Catholicism—paintings, reliquaries, cathedral interiors, and especially costuming—were all employed in the pursuit of pregnancy.

## **Secular**

The blonde muse stares directly out at the courtier, velvet drapery suspended between her open legs. Cosmè Tura's *Calliope* of Ferrara, completed around 1455-1460, is a benchmark for a Renaissance trope that flits and in out of historiography: pregnancy as allegory or artistic fantasy (fig. 102). Gravid dress appearing on allegorical figures, goddesses, muses, and even *cassone* nudes is spread wide within the sphere of secular Renaissance art, each further unraveling the

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<sup>412</sup> Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, United States: University of California Press, 2001), 9-19.

enigma of the strange shape. Suggestive pregnancy allowed Renaissance painters to explore concepts connected to sexuality and the art-making process itself.

These fantastical females touch their drapery much more often than typical portrayals of Renaissance ladies, gathering folds around thighs to define voluptuous stomachs. In most instances, inflated midsections are not meant to be read as actual gestation, but are symbolically valent of fertility. Botticelli, for example, (one of the few Renaissance artists who may have depicted actual pregnancy) seemed to greatly favor a pear-shape for his fecund women, particularly in his Medicean masterwork *Primavera*.<sup>413</sup> The titular goddess, Flora, boasts a domelike midsection crafted by her flower-patterned gown. While her companions Chloris and the three dancing graces do not share the gravid shape, Venus seems to have adopted it with her off-white frilled drapery. Flowers sprout everywhere, and oranges ripen in the canopy above, threading the theme of fertility throughout the image's players and flora. The suggestion of pregnancy in such instances celebrates sensuality and abundance. Randolph argues female figures like Flora may be identified as a *Dovizia*, a Florentine visual type whose drapery bunches emphatically about the waist. He describes the uncanny ability of the *Dovizia*'s garments to signify fecundity, arguing "particularly noteworthy are the high waistlines formed by the fabric folded and bunched at the hips, producing a visual emphasis on the breasts and midriff that would seem to have been intended to underscore the figure's symbolic fertility."<sup>414</sup> Randolph

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<sup>413</sup> See Langner, *The Importance of Wearing Clothes*, 59-60 for the discussion of the unique shape of Botticelli's figures. Consider also the above discussions of Botticelli's *Portrait of a Lady* and *Woman at a Window*.

<sup>414</sup> Randolph, *Engaging Symbols : Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 21-27 and 38-49.

argues, therefore, that the stakes of gravid dressing can be quite high, as the *Dovizia* can stand for an entire sovereign state. The *Dovizie* allegorize plenty, abundance, fertility, wealth, politics, and the life-giving Florentine clothing industry as well as the city's republicanism.<sup>415</sup>

*Primavera* hung in a Florentine city palace from at least 1499, a fitting location, as fantastical “pregnancy” is often found in aristocratic settings. Stephen Campbell argues that larger, bellies on Tura's clothed Ferraran muses were designed to stimulate an erotic response in the courtly viewer with their loosened gowns and widely spread legs.<sup>416</sup> The muse program, executed by Tura and his team between November of 1447 and likely finished in 1460, was commissioned for the princely *studiolo* of the Este family in their Belfiore Palace outside Ferrara.<sup>417</sup> The Este duke and his entourage of courtiers and intellectuals made up the muses' primary audience. Campbell argues that the muses have many meanings within the Ferrarese court setting, such as “humanist pedagogy and Classical scholarship, the revival of particular kinds of Latin verse, the painting and viewing of pictures, the cultivation of a private or public self-image.”<sup>418</sup> Muses in mythology and Renaissance reinterpretations of Greco-Roman folktale may be read for a stimulating medley of sexuality, theatricality, and even prostitution.<sup>419</sup> Combined with the court's culture of poetry and public performance, Tura's painted muses also

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Stephen J. Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics, and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 39-59.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 29-34.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 41 and 56.

reflect the frank verses on lust and vulgarity regularly written and recited within Este spaces.<sup>420</sup> Love and seduction are central *studiolo* themes, substantiated and celebrated by the presence of the gravidly dressed muses.

Where bunched fabric around midsections allegorized Florence, lacing ruled Ferrara. In conceiving these mythological beauties, Tura added the decidedly Renaissance convention of gowns with opening laces.<sup>421</sup> Clothing in antiquity did not include such built-in adjustments. Out of the nine, those muses most closely associated with physical or mental germination exhibit the most gleefully exaggerated bellies beneath vented laces. Four muses unfasten their gowns: Terpsichore, Thalia, Erato, and Calliope. These dresses have been previously identified as period pregnancy wear, and Campbell is quick to point out their close similarity with the dress worn by Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*.<sup>422</sup> Campbell identifies that both Mary and Tura's muses wear drawstring dresses, but does not tease out any implications from the sartorial resemblance. He offers the caveat, however, that while the muses tenaciously charm the amorously-inclined viewer, della Francesca's Virgin denies any such lechery. I agree that these

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>421</sup> In a letter (dated November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1447) to his patron Leonello d'Este, Gaurino, a poet involved in the Belfiore project, describes plans for many of the muses' dresses, but no laces are mentioned. Instead, the lyricist focuses on color and texture, "varied colors and patterns will be wove into her garments, like silken drapery in the ancient manner," or patterning "let her drapery be decorated with flowers and leaves." Quoted by Michael Baxandall, "Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 186-187.

<sup>422</sup> Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics, and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495*, 39-59. See especially page 42.

dresses are extremely alike, but a separate argument must be made for why Mary (like other female saints) dons a pregnancy gown. Campbell then turns to the potential blend of eroticism and pregnancy implied by the muses' unlaced dresses. It is beyond question that the muses are sexualized.<sup>423</sup> Yet it is here I sense a contradiction in Campbell's analysis:

It is perhaps not meaningful to draw firm distinctions between the iconography of fertility and a more general figuration of sexuality at this time, but the attention of recent students of iconography has focused rather narrowly on one end of the spectrum. Fifteenth-century observers may have been less likely to reduce the 'fertility' of the Muses to such a narrow level of referentiality. *If pregnancy is denoted by the unlaced dress, this was not incompatible with a frankly erotic appeal.*<sup>424</sup>

Campbell seems to downplay then immediately confirm the connection. As discussed in the first chapter, an association between eroticism, fertility, and resultant pregnancy was common in both period images and text. Throughout the muse series and the dress choices therein, Tura toys with the association of fecundity, sexuality, and resultant pregnancy.<sup>425</sup> Procreative intercourse between heterosexual married couples was the only church-granted form of sexuality in the Renaissance, so the association between pregnancy with carnality is understandable. I believe Campbell's final statement is the most meaningful. The muses enact erotic enticement partially through their suggestively-fertile bodies shaped by drawstring gowns. In exploring the Belfiore

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<sup>423</sup> Stephen J. Campbell, "'Sic in Amore Furens': Painting as Poetic Theory in the Early Renaissance." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 6 (1995): 150.

<sup>424</sup> Emphasis mine. Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics, and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495*, 42.

<sup>425</sup> Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics, and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495*, 42.

program, my point is not that every male beholder was struck by these associations, but that this linkage exists within the muses and elsewhere in Renaissance culture. By recontextualizing the muses within fashion history and theory, particularly pertaining to their laced gowns, I extend the direct link between desirability and fertility previously examined in this study. Each muse nuances this association, together imaging a constellation of concepts pertinent to the Duke and his court: the production of heirs, the meaning of specific fashion choices, male artistic skill, and masculine heteronormative sexuality.

To truly understand these four muses and the threaded ruptures splitting the bodices of their dresses, one must consider laces within the period context, as living dress objects the artist and his patrons would have seen and even interacted with daily. Women in the Este court could have easily worn a garment akin to *Terpsichore's* expensively-patterned gold and red gown, for example, which opens directly over her pleated midsection (fig. 103). *Terpsichore*, the creator of dance, presides imperiously over the naked forms of three gamboling babies, perhaps a reference to progeny and aristocratic lineage, as the children are unmistakably male. For the contemporary male viewer, sexuality and legacy were inexorably linked.

Tura furthers the coalescence of fecundity, love, and carnality in *Thalia* (fig. 104). As the muse connected to the idea of flourishing, Thalia is usually exhibited with flowers and plants, which the artist adheres to in his Ferraran series. A tiara of wheat crowns her head and luscious fruits arch in wreaths above, held by chubby *putti*. Thalia's yellow laces separate her pink gown not only over her midsection but also in a large breach running beneath her arms to her hips, calling attention to the power of lacing to both clothe and unclothe the female body. The very act of dressing, of the lace point thrust in and out of eyelet-holes, often held erotic connotations

throughout the early modern period.<sup>426</sup> Visualization of sexuality and fecundity through parting laces appears in another Este court decoration, in the Hall of the Months in Schifanoia Palace, also located in Ferrara. Female musicians in Francesco del Cossa's c. 1470 *April* scene wear front-lacing gowns (fig. 105).<sup>427</sup> While not strictly pregnancy dresses, these laced gowns nevertheless lent themselves to the eroticization of fertility in both art and reality. This fresco is also referred to as the *Triumph of Venus*, April being the month sacred to the goddess of love and sexuality. The figures engage in amorous activities, most blatantly the kneeling couple at the front of the composition. The teal-clad woman has opened her laces over her midsection. Her lover takes advantage of this by sliding his hand into the gap between her legs while planting a kiss on her cheek. The drawstring dress is read as an open invitation of sexuality.

*Erato* continues the pattern (fig. 106). She is the most aggressively seductive of her sisters, uniquely paused in the act of untying her bodice herself. She stares straightforwardly out at the viewer, the only of the four laced muses to do so. The red sandal sliding off her foot confirms her willingness to undress.<sup>428</sup> *Erato's* purview over marriage, love, progeny, and erotic poetry would have been known by the erudite court viewer.<sup>429</sup> Comprehension of the muses and their respective realms here is rewarded with open sensuality.

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<sup>426</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 20-21.

<sup>427</sup> Jane Bridgeman, "'Troppo Belli E Troppo Eccellenti:' Observations on Dress in the Work of Piero Della Francesca," in *The Cambridge Companion to Piero Della Francesca* (Cambridge Companions to the History of Art. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 83 and Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics, and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495*, 42.

<sup>428</sup> The red shoe could also be a low patten protecting a matching red (and very costly) slipper.

<sup>429</sup> Campbell, *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics, and the Renaissance City, 1450-1495*, 33.

*Calliope* is the most noteworthy of Tura's muses. She poses on a throne decorated with golden dolphins. One hand planted atop her knee, she casts her gaze askance. The fissure in her gown parts white over her gravid midsection. The expressive golden laces marching down her bodice are picked up on the side of the deep blue gown. The thread comes undone below her waist, dangling over her mantle and tempting the viewer to reach into the frame and completely disrobe her. As the muse of knowledge and education, *Calliope* best demonstrates the allegory of pregnancy as artistic capacity. The muses are about to give birth to Tura's genius.

Larger bellies on the muses are metaphors for artistic creation. Fredrika Jacobs highlights an entrenched connection between artistic creation and physical procreation in the Renaissance, inspired in part by Aristotelian science.<sup>430</sup> While women gestated fetuses passively, male artists birthed creative inspiration through an active, imaginative process. Lifeless matter was converted into stunning artistry. The language around male versus female procreation was highly gendered, with the former considered more advanced. This slippage and flexibility of meaning applies to Tura's visibly pregnant muses. The muse's body lent itself well to Renaissance artists' unrelenting pursuit of *fantasia* over mimesis.<sup>431</sup> Painters purposefully generated *melancholia*, the humor associated with depressive moods and lurking in an excess of black bile, which when properly exploited by an artist's brain flourished great works of art. Melancholy was also linked with pregnancy in the period.<sup>432</sup> This association further explains why artists plant illusory

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<sup>430</sup> Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, 27.

<sup>431</sup> Linda C. Hulst, *The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 29-32.

<sup>432</sup> Bell, *How to Do It Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, 94.

gestation throughout their secular artwork. While mothers were tasked with avoiding bouts of saturnine dispositions to protect their unborn babies, male artists employed their melancholic natures to perpetuate their own genius. Mystical pregnancy is analogous to intellectual or artistic generation.

Laced gowns, a style of garment that crafted the female form, further facilitated the metaphor of artistic genius painted into Tura's muses. Laces in Renaissance gowns were attaching forces, and the act of lacing literally stitched a garment together. The vital cords connected bodice to skirt and sleeves to gown, "making and unmaking the body."<sup>433</sup> Tura, likewise, threaded together the many meanings of the muses during the artistic process. Lacing also exposed layers. In public, separating laces allowed the wearer to advertise the luxurious quality of their undergarments. In images, laces part to allow for conceptual density, complementing the intellectual and material richness of the Este court. Drawstring gowns symbolized the painter's artistic prowess in a meta-commentary on the nature of art-making.

These painted laced gowns enticed not only their creator, but also the spectator. In examining Tura's muses, it is essential to note that the laces are not open, but dynamically pictured in the act of opening. The cleaving gowns beg the viewer to finish undressing the muses. Much of Renaissance art provokes audience response in a conscious attempt to stimulate the viewer, in this case the prince or male courtiers, to erotically engage with the muse. Campbell and others believe the muse panels would not have been installed at eye level, but higher on the *studiolo* walls, forcing the viewer to look up at them.<sup>434</sup> The downward-tilting

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<sup>433</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 23-25.

<sup>434</sup> "Cosimo Tura | *A Muse (Calliope?)* | NG3070 | National Gallery, London." Accessed December 11, 2018.

heads of many of the muses confirm the angle. The viewer, in his mind, would have needed to physically reach upwards to tug on the proffered cords and free the muses from the confines of their gowns. The series literally situated sexuality on a higher plane. In reality, lacing was an arduous chore reserved for servants. Undressing and dressing a woman required a second set of hands.<sup>435</sup> Loosening a lady's laces was the purview of her chambermaid or lady-in-waiting. Therefore Tura's images confiscate such power from female hands and place it in those of the Este Duke and his male guests. Laced gowns, being so difficult to remove, barred physical admittance to women's bodies.<sup>436</sup> It is possible, therefore, the muses and their accessible laces allowed for an open expression of sexuality, what Freedburg terms "an acceptable pornography of discourse," denoted here through a garment that simultaneously teased and obstructed sexual contact.<sup>437</sup> A remark from Manuel Chrysoloras, an early fifteenth-century scholar and diplomat from Constantinople, attests to the Renaissance notion that eroticizing images was more socially acceptable than gazing upon living women, arguing "the beauties of the statues are not unworthy things to behold; rather do they indicate a nobility in the intellect that admires them. It is looking at the beauties of women that is licentious and base."<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 23-25.

<sup>436</sup> It is possible Renaissance women's clothing was intentionally designed to be difficult to remove, a direct response to the pervasive policing of sexuality during the Renaissance.

<sup>437</sup> Freedburg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, 317.

<sup>438</sup> Chrysoloras' indictment is not necessarily sexist here, despite his pointed inclusion of the word "women." The writer continues with more gender-neutral language a few lines later: "It is that we admire not so much the beauties of bodies in statues and paintings as the beauty of the mind of their maker."

Male courtiers could stare at Tura's clothed muses in scopophilic awe. Married women, on the other hand, only gazed upon painted sexuality in specific settings, such as nude figures in bedroom images. One of the few contexts where the gravid shape appears consistently on secular Renaissance nudes is on the inside of *cassoni*, or dowry chests. While nudes in the period may be described as fleshy and voluptuous, women on *cassoni*, while not strictly suggestively-pregnant in a way usually reserved for draped females, are often more rotund than similar nude female figures. In these adjacent contexts, larger bellies were a synecdoche for sexuality and fruitful marriages.

While Renaissance bedrooms were not strictly private (often serving as receiving rooms for friends or business clients), they were nonetheless spaces where sexuality lived within the home. Lounging within Renaissance domestic spaces, these fleshy nudes visually reinforced the teleology of sexual contact between married couples. One the best preserved *cassoni*, the so-called Adimari *cassone* created in Florence in the 1440s, falls directly into the rare trend of nude gravidity (fig. 107). Even on the box's exterior, clothed female figures with emboldened midsections abound, including a lady seated at the left in a puffing yellow overdress. Three women in profile process to trumpet song through the scene, each with poufy torsos rendered in dark tones, hands humbly resting on their bellies. Female figures inside *cassone* images, such as figure 108, the interior of the Adimari box, exhibit protruding torsos through shadowing and shading. This emphasis becomes particularly apparent when compared against the male counterpart on the opposite chest, shown on the left of figure 108. His stomach is so flat the viewer is treated to a set of abdominal muscles. Undressed fleshiness appears on a similar

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Quoted by Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350-1450* (Oxford-Warburg Studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 82.

fifteenth-century *cassone* interior depicting a sleeping woman (fig. 109). As the passive figure rests with eyes closed, the viewer, who was often female, could gaze unhindered at the clear black line and shading delineating her large belly.

As containers made specifically to hold bridal wardrobe and dowry assets, *cassoni* were heavily connoted with marriage, reproduction, and childbirth. *Cassone* images with their overt sensual themes from Classical mythology served to educate maiden brides about their impending sexuality.<sup>439</sup> It is also possible newlywed couples were encouraged to visually consume nude *cassone* images in order to elicit sexual arousal and future progeny production.<sup>440</sup> Scholars have also argued that the presence of nude baby boys on dowry chests and similar objects crafted for the Renaissance bedchamber harnessed the maternal imagination to aid in the generation of healthy male heirs, demonstrating that these nude images were crafted for both male and female response.<sup>441</sup>

Figures such as Tura's muses and *cassone* nudes connected women's curving forms with a spate of allegories and metaphors. Artistic creation and sexuality all appear in the myriad images of suggestively-pregnant goddesses, muses, and analogous figures. Yet exaggerated female forms in the secular sphere tell only part of the story. The body which requires the most explanation is the seemingly gestational female saint.

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<sup>439</sup> Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, 129-134.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

## Sacred

Renaissance artists experimented with extended abdomens in some rather unlikely places. Obviously-rounded female bellies on sacred figures pepper the visual record. An unlabeled woman in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel sharing a lunette with Christ's ancestors Roboam and Abias, points to her seemingly-pregnant belly and spreads her legs above New Testament narrative in the lower registers, as if about to give birth to sacred history (fig. 110). She is not exactly a Sybil, but her presence seems to imply Christian lineage and the density and power therein. Her body swells with clairvoyant foresight; her "pregnancy" is prophecy. Figure 111, the *Stigmatization and Faint of St Catherine of Siena* by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, called Sodoma (or possibly by his school), for example, radically highlights the protruding belly of the chaste saint beneath her clothes. While not explicitly "pregnant," the wet drapery nevertheless enlarges virgin's body above her womb. Catherine's expanded stomach is clearly documented in the formal elements, but cannot be justified in the saint's story. Though the "pregnant" saint is a common visual oxymoron in early modern art, pregnancy is not included in women saints' hagiographic legends.<sup>442</sup> Hardly unique to the Virgin, actual and seemingly-pregnant bellies are frequent in depictions of female saints both maternal and virginal. The shading on these saints is deliberate; the bellies are created not by hard contour but gradated modeling. As there exists no single reason for why virginal female saints often appear pregnant, I intend to argue that the trend is largely symbolic of Christian spirituality or transformation, or sometimes meant to evoke a specifically female spectator response.

Puzzlingly-pregnant saints are mostly limited to painting. There are few moments of gravid dress in three-dimensions, such as figure 112, a circa 1470 polychrome sculpture housed

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<sup>442</sup> Save for Mary and Elizabeth in Visitation scenes.

in Marburg. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary's midsection swells inexorably outwards beneath her buckled belt. In this instance, the sculptor purposefully extended her stomach instead of choosing to further chisel it flat. Francisco de Zubarán's two-dimensional panel of the same saint unmistakably extends her torso (fig. 113). Perhaps both artists reference Elizabeth of Hungary's previous life before her dedication, during which she gave birth to several children.<sup>443</sup> Elizabeth of Hungary is the only example my research uncovered of a female saint whose previous life as a mother may be present in depictions.

In spite of the proliferation of such images, there have been few studies addressing the strange appearance of gravidity in female saints. Most germane to my project is Penny Howell Jolly's investigation of "pregnant" Mary Magdalenes in Northern Renaissance painting. Focusing on kirtle laces that spread open before the Magdalene's womb, Jolly argues the illusorily gravid body of the sinner-saint acts as a visual metaphor for her spiritual rebirth as bride of Christ.<sup>444</sup> The saint, once a prostitute turned fervent follower of Christ, is a strange choice for exhibiting gravid dress. Her post-conversion shape should harbor no aspect of carnality. Yet illusory gestational Mary Magdalenes are a common visual type in Renaissance art. Jolly argues that within its Northern context, the Magdalene's "pregnant" belly symbolized her transformation from sinner to devotee of Christ. Pregnancy lent itself well to picturing the lengthy and taxing process of conversion, culminating in a dramatic rebirth of Mary Magdalene's

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<sup>443</sup> The pregnant belly, in Elizabeth of Hungary's case, may symbolize of her charity, the Christian virtue for which she is most closely associated. The allegory of charity in Catholic spaces is a nursing mother, so a seemingly-parturient body could serve the same purpose.

<sup>444</sup> Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430-1550: Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint*, in *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*, 2-6.

once-wayward soul. Jolly's book specifically interrogates the prostitute-turned-intercessor, and therefore her arguments apply only to the Magdalene. I intend to expand Jolly's assertions to other female saints by looking at Italian artists. Jolly is interested in the ties; I intend to analyze represented clothing and the saint's bodies shaped by opening laces, tight girdles, and generous skirts in order to holistically illuminate the entire genre of the "pregnant" female saint.

Luca Signorelli is one of the few artists outside of the low countries to paint the "pregnant" Mary Magdalene.<sup>445</sup> Deviating from his Northern counterparts, Signorelli seemed decidedly less interested in exploring conversion symbolized by gravidity, and instead painted his Mary Magdalenes radiant with illusory pregnancy to meditate on theology and to encourage beholder participation. Signorelli created the gravidly dressed sinner-saint in two surviving altarpieces for the Bichi Chapel and Annalena Convent. The former prostitute appears in the left wing of the Bichi Chapel altarpiece, dated to 1491 and originally installed in Siena's Sant'Agostino (fig. 114). Mary Magdalene served as a chief saint to the donors. Holding her typical oil jar attribute, wrought here of crystal and bejeweled gold bands, she stands with her saintly cohorts Saint Clare and Saint Jerome. The Magdalene's midsection beneath her green dress protrudes unambiguously. A red outer cloak lined with a faux-Latinate text mixed with pseudoscript shuffles around her extended belly, refusing to be ignored. Signorelli further enlivens this section of her body with gold diagonal hashmarks across her belly. In the original

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<sup>445</sup> Signorelli does not appear in Jolly's Northern focused analysis. Additionally, he was not unfamiliar with the depiction of gravid female forms, such as his seemingly-pregnant Israelite in the Sistine Chapel *Testament and Death of Moses*, dated c. 1482. The front-facing woman balancing a toddler on her shoulders wears a semi-transparent gown that reveals a bulging midsection, complete with a prominent navel.

sacred context, nearby candles and lamps would have animated the gilding, rendering her midsection's outward curve unmissable. Mary Magdalene is the only saint in the composition to receive this formal attention. It is possible the strangely "pregnant" saint held special significance for Eustochia Bichi, the family's first daughter, who may have had a hand in the decoration of the chapel, since she was responsible for the program beginning October 1487.<sup>446</sup> As the ranking female Bichi, Eustochia's job was to produce heirs through actual pregnancy.

Signorelli spent his entire seventy-eight years in central Italy, so it is unlikely he was directly familiar with the trend of "pregnant" Magdalenes executed by his northern contemporaries.<sup>447</sup> However, it seems he enjoyed toying with the visual pun of expanding the Magdalene's skirts to mimic the capacity of her oil jar. The vessel itself is a potent material object when placed in concert with Mary Magdalene, as Jolly succinctly describes, "the container itself functions mnemonically for viewers by recalling multiple episodes in her narrative, including her life as courtesan, her conversion at Christ's feet, her later anointing of Christ when 'the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment' (John 12:3), Christ's Passion, and the *Noli me tangere*."<sup>448</sup> It is possible Signorelli meditated on such multivalence when painting illusorily-pregnant Magdalenes holding aloft their symbolic jars. The artist may have in tandem been engaging with the wider Italian trend of associating women's painted bodies with vessels.

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<sup>446</sup> Eustochia's husband, Cristoforo Bellanti, passed away in 1482. Tom Henry, *The Life and Art of Luca Signorelli* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2012), 72-73.

<sup>447</sup> Henry, *The Life and Art of Luca Signorelli*, 17-37.

<sup>448</sup> Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430-1550: Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint*, 131.

Signorelli's boldest engagement with a "pregnant" Mary Magdalene is his Florentine *Saint Mary Magdalene before Christ on the Cross*, created between 1496-98 for the Annalena Convent, which the artist painted while living in Cortona. The iconography is unique (fig. 115, now held in the Uffizi). While Mary Magdalene is often included in crucifixion scenes, rarely is she completely isolated at the foot of the cross with no other figures so near the dying Christ.<sup>449</sup> Upon completion, the altarpiece was subsequently shipped north and installed in the Annalena Convent church's chapel.<sup>450</sup> Founded in 1450 by Annalena Malatesta, a devout Florentine widow in the Medici circle, the convent offered a religious lifestyle to the women of the prosperous city.<sup>451</sup> Signorelli's altarpiece, therefore, was conceived of and created exclusively for women viewers, the full implications of which have never been fully explored. Flanking Christ, biblical heroines rule this crucifixion scene.

Mary Magdalene crouches resplendent at the foot of the cross. Golden hair, deeply parted and artfully knotted, streams over her shoulders. White undergarments peek between the gaps in her swoop-necked blue gown with detachable sleeves. Yellow slippers emerge from beneath her skirts. A translucent *bavero* rests around her shoulders. Gathered around her kneeling legs is a bright red drapery. Mary Magdalene typically bears a red outer layer, a symbol of the Passion and her close relation to Christ. Mary Magdalene cannot control her clothing; her bodice unlaces at the womb. Her "maternity laces," as Jolly dubs them, spread over her midsection beneath the

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<sup>449</sup> Henry, *The Life and Art of Luca Signorelli*, 147.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Stefanie Solum, *Women, Patronage, and Salvation in Renaissance Florence: Lucrezia Tornabuoni and the Chapel of the Medici Palace* (Taylor and Francis, 2017), 244.

gap in her overdress.<sup>452</sup> As with the muses, this gown is a pregnancy gown. Jolly argues these disobedient laces are meant to be read as indicative of sexuality, as in Tura's muses, to recall the Magdalene's former life as a prostitute, but also point to her transformation into a saint.<sup>453</sup> While the extravagant dress may represent Mary Magdalene's pre-conversion lifestyle of vanity and materialism, I believe it also helps to clarify the unique female centrality of the altarpiece.

While many scholars have aptly praised Signorelli for his insights into the nude, I believe his vestments in the *Crucifixion* scene also adumbrate his particular genius. In the background, the Virgin Mary meets her son's tragic fate with typical sober acceptance, hands clasped. Signorelli connects the two Marys through their gowns. Christ's mother wears a red gown with a blue surcoat, the very opposite attire of the Magdalene in the foreground, directly linking the two women together by opposite, balanced colors. Mary's blue mantle confirms gravid dress around her midsection. Christ is framed by the two women who loved him and were most closely associated with him. Both figures are theologically fruitful. The Virgin's pregnancy represents her actual carrying of Christ, while Mary Magdalene's refers to her spiritual rebirth. In Signorelli's hands, both gravid gowns became the ideal conduit to objectify pregnancy-as-message. The rhetoric of dress may have held special significance in Florence, a hub for both the raw materials and fashion trends of Europe's clothing industry.

Signorelli's Annalena *Saint Mary Magdalene before Christ on the Cross* showcases the roles played by the women in Christ's story, likely a powerful message for the nuns of the convent. The titular figure extends her hand outwards to the spectator, inviting her into the

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<sup>452</sup> Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430-1550: Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint*, 19.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

image. Mary Magdalene places her other hand on the back of the True Cross, perhaps referring to the post-resurrection moment when the saint is the first individual to witness Christ's emergence from his tomb, but forbidden from touching his physical body. In the altarpiece, Mary Magdalene engages instead with the implement of his torture. The first bride of Christ, the Magdalene enjoyed a special place in devotional convent settings. Annalena gave permanent sanctuary not only to virgins but also widows.<sup>454</sup> Therefore, many of the women praying before the figure of the Magdalene might have sustained a pregnancy during their previous life as a laywoman. Mary Magdalene's spiritually pregnant body, therefore, would have been especially significant to its maternal audience.

Canonized virginity pictured as representational pregnancy provides new avenues of inquiry into cryptic gravid dress. The saint's body is meant to be devoid of carnality. Mary Magdalene's pregnancy is not biological, but metaphorical of the pain and struggle of conversion. The pregnant belly of many female saints acted as a prime candidate for visualizing the allegory of change or spiritual enlightenment. Yet while many saints have strangely "pregnant" bodies for symbolic purposes, the Queen of Heaven sustains actual pregnancies in Renaissance art.

### **Mother Most Holy**

Mary conceived Christ through her ear, but she gestated his human likeness in her womb. The open depiction of Mary's carrying of Christ is largely a Renaissance phenomenon. Mary's body swelling in miraculous pregnancy generally follows the trajectory of gravid dress outlined

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<sup>454</sup> Solum, *Women, Patronage, and Salvation in Renaissance Florence: Lucrezia Tornabuoni and the Chapel of the Medici Palace*, 244.

in Chapter One: Byzantine and medieval Marys are depicted with flat stomachs, while early modern Virgins embrace curves. Likewise, Mary's pregnant form evolves alongside her change from Theotokos to Queen of Heaven. As the Renaissance advanced, artists from Lippi to Raphael dared to dilate Mary's belly. A comprehensive study of Marian imagery, beginning with Visitation scenes then expanding outwards to the entirety of the Virgin's cycle is required to fully resolve the issue of gravid dress.

The most holy of pregnancies occupies an exceptional place in the record of Renaissance art. Strikingly, the prohibition against depicting obvious pregnancy in imagery discussed in Chapter Two does not apply to the God Bearer. Indeed, pregnancy in art history is densest in visual Mariology. Frank Ferrie has argued that the surge of images of pregnant Mary, especially in the Madonna del Parto type, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries may be read as part of the larger trend of the return to naturalism in the period.<sup>455</sup> However, if Renaissance artists depicted pregnancy in Marian art because they wished to render in paint a comprehensive simulacrum of the natural world, then pregnancy in secular genre scenes and portraiture would have been commonplace as well. Artists in the period took great care to avoid creating overtly sensual Virgins.<sup>456</sup> Mary's mystical pregnancy, unlike gestations undertaken by Renaissance wives, did not fall under aesthetic embargo because it is devoid of human sexuality and the sin of mankind.

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<sup>455</sup> Ferrie, "Piero Della Francesca's Madonna Del Parto and the Function of Images of the Pregnant Virgin Mary," 3-4.

<sup>456</sup> According to an often-cited anecdote, Leonardo da Vinci added a beard to an alluring painting of the Virgin to subvert his client's desire for the image. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, 322.

Gravid dress is a staple in Marian iconography during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, especially in depictions of her holy pregnancy. While Mary's rising gravidity is a clear lineage from flat to obviously gestational, I see the Renaissance as the artistic moment in which Mary's pregnant body is most clearly and lovingly detailed in two-dimensional media. It seems most artists ignored da Vinci's warning that "the garments of figures should be in keeping with their age and decorum... and avoid as much as possible the dress of your own day."<sup>457</sup> In these images, Mary's style is anachronistic, citing not her lifetime but rather early modern gender roles. The contemporary shape rendered her more maternal and approachable to Renaissance viewers, especially women. The outward sweep of her drapery was a humanizing tactic.<sup>458</sup>

The clearest moment in which Mary's miraculous gestation of Christ is apparent is the Visitation, the passage in the *Gospel of Luke* (1:39-56) when Mary and Elizabeth meet and rejoice over their impending births. Mary is a minor player in the New Testament, but takes center stage across several Apocryphal stories, most notably in *The Protoevangelium of James*, sometimes referred to as the *Gospel of James*. No text describes Mary's body (for obvious decorum purposes), but the non-canonical gospel makes clear that Mary's belly grew so noticeable she needed to hide it from judging eyes: "And she remained three months with Elizabeth; and day by day she grew bigger. And Mary being afraid, went away to her own house, and hid herself from the sons of Israel."<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Leonardo Da Vinci, *Leonardo Da Vinci's Trattato Della Pittura (Treatise on Painting)*, Edited by Kate Traumann Steinitz, (Library Research Monographs ; v. 5. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1958), 107.

<sup>458</sup> Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 55-65.

<sup>459</sup> Foster, *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, 43-44.

Medieval versions of this critical point in the Marian cycle usually exclude physical manifestations of pregnancy. For example, in the *Visitation* jamb sculptures of the central portal of the west façade of Reims Cathedral (c. 1230-1255), both Mary and Elizabeth's bodies are columnar. Another *Visitation* sculptural group attributed to Master Heinrich of Constance, c. 1300-1320 indexes both pregnancies by inseting rock-crystal cabochons onto the front of Mary and Elizabeth's robes (fig. 116). This clever conceit is an obvious message that the fetal Christ and Saint John the Baptist are precious jewels. However, the gemstones are attached to both figures' hearts, not wombs. Indeed, many Byzantine and early medieval Marian images, such as figure 117, visualize the miraculous conception with Christ as a medallion or floating fetus pasted atop his mother's chest, fully removed from the natural process of childbearing.

In contrast, primary examples of distinctly-Renaissance portrayals of Marian pregnancy in Visitations include the fourteenth-century fresco in Pomposa Abbey (fig. 118), or Giotto's treatment of the same scene in both the Scrovegni Chapel (fig. 119) and Basilica di San Francesco (fig. 120). The *Visitation* fresco in Orvieto Cathedral, dating to the first half of the fourteenth century, calls careful attention to the Biblical heroines' gestational contours (fig. 121). Elizabeth places her hand on her cousin's bulging belly, while her own womb swells in turn. The same may also be said of a fifteenth century alabaster panel held in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 122). Both women touch and guide sightlines to large bellies and forward swaying posture. In the Northern context, pregnancy is even more pronounced across two-dimensional media. Rogier van der Weyden (fig. 123) and Jacques Daret (fig. 124), for example, produced exceptionally productive Marys and Elizabeths. Marx Reichline inserted not only fully-pregnant bellies, but also tiny floating babies shining through skin and cloth (fig. 125).

Perhaps the most intriguing *Visitation* to come out of Italy is Ghirlandaio's Louvre version, dated 1491 (fig. 126). Elizabeth kneels before Mary, while Mary Iachobi and Mary Salome (helpfully labeled by the artist) watch from the sidelines. This altarpiece was one of three funerary images commissioned by the grieving Lorenzo Tornabuoni at the death of his wife, Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni. Combined with the fresco discussed in Chapter One, Ghirlandaio created two Visitation scenes to honor the late patrician mother.<sup>460</sup> Although Giovanna ultimately was buried in Florence's Santa Maria Novella, across town in Santa Maria Maddalena di Cestello (now Santa Maria Maddalena de'Pazzi), Lorenzo arranged for weekly masses to be said for his late wife for the period of one hundred years. Ghirlandaio's Louvre *Visitation* was installed there.<sup>461</sup> While all three of Ghirlandaio's commemorative scenes elicit the haunting sadness attached to the story of Giovanna's death, the Louvre *Visitation* is particularly striking in its treatment of the physicality of pregnancy, especially as it pertains to the body of Saint Mary Iachobi.

In Visitation imagery, a rotating cast of women often accompany the expectant Virgin to visit her cousin. However, Maria DePrano discovered the inclusion of Mary Iachobi and Mary Salome is unparalleled in Italian imagery.<sup>462</sup> As in the Santa Maria Novella *Visitation*, physical indication of narratively-critical pregnancy is outsourced to an ancillary female figure. Mary Iachobi's hand and parting pink drapery call attention to an obviously-parturient body. Enhanced by its bright white highlight, the viewer's eye is called to the apparent bulge. Further, Mary

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<sup>460</sup> Including the stand alone Thyssen-Bornemisza portrait..

<sup>461</sup> Maria Deprano, "Per La Anima Della Donna: Pregnancy and Death in Domenico Ghirlandaio's Visitation for the Tornabuoni Chapel, Cestello," 326.

<sup>462</sup> DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 160.

Iachobi wears a pregnancy cloak.<sup>463</sup> DePrano convincingly argues both women are included to represent successful motherhood, as apocrypha holds they gave birth to six sons between them.<sup>464</sup> Before her death during her second pregnancy, Giovanna Tornabuoni had given her husband a son. DePrano argues Mary Iachobi therefore may have been read by Giovanna's grieving family as a stand-in for their departed relative, a portrait not in likeness but through the aura of shared pregnancy.<sup>465</sup>

Little has been said about the figure of Mary Salome in the Louvre *Visitation*. DePrano argues the figure may have been interpreted by period viewers as both Mary Salome and Salome, the disbelieving midwife in the *Golden Legend*, pointing out that the knotted headscarf she wears appears in contemporary depictions of midwives.<sup>466</sup> DePrano's conclusions, that this altarpiece is about childbirth, may be expanded. The Louvre *Visitation* also treats rebirth after death through Christ, particularly the second life Giovanna enjoys in heaven.

Mary Salome may also be read as a nympha, an archetype correlated with exuberant life and regeneration, an interpretation previously unexplored. The nympha trope, identified by Aby Warburg in his obsessive study of Florentine painting, holds multi-layered meanings that I believe further illuminate the unparalleled inclusion of Mary Salome in this *Visitation* scene.<sup>467</sup> Warburg himself associated the nympha with the dancing, sinful Mary Salome.<sup>468</sup> The nympha

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 160-161.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 163-164.

<sup>467</sup> Estelle Lingo, "Mochi's Edge," *Oxford Art Journal* 32, no. 1 (2009): 7-8 and note 21 and 22.

<sup>468</sup> Randolph, *Engaging Symbols : Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 43.

figure, however, contains multitudes, and flurries through this altarpiece to emblemize the virtues of the late Giovanna as well as symbolize the monumental grief encumbering her family after her death. The young woman leaps into the frame, legs parted in her haste, one sandaled foot before the other, knee bent in imminent movement with draperies fluttering in an otherwise still atmosphere. In typical nympha style, her gravity-defying fabrics flirt with the boundaries of decorum by adhering to her legs, revealing nubile thighs. No other figure in the composition exhibits such potential kinetic energy while wearing *all'antica* robes and open-toed shoes.<sup>469</sup> Warburg believed the nympha, alongside the other visual tropes resurrected from ancient Roman carvings that together formed his overarching collective of the *Pathosformel*, carried with her emotion and motion across centuries into the Renaissance.<sup>470</sup> Ghirlandaio was not the only early modern artist to splash a nympha into a *Visitation*. Pontormo and Francesco Salviati both did so in the sixteenth century, but Ghirlandaio may have been the first.<sup>471</sup> DePrano shows that Mary Iachobi, with her enlarged pink midsection, is a substitute for Giovanna. I believe Ghirlandaio visually associated Mary Salome with Giovanna as well. Together the two figures bookmark the miraculously pregnant Virgin and Elizabeth, who embrace beneath a symbol laden archway, creating a sacred conversation in which the late patrician mother is both mourned and celebrated.

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<sup>469</sup> Female feet and footwear that exposes skin appear rarely in Renaissance art.

<sup>470</sup> Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, translated by David Britt (Texts & Documents. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 10-21.

<sup>471</sup> See Lingo, "Mochi's Edge," 8 and note 26.

Typically, the *nympha* suggests natural abundance and beauty.<sup>472</sup> The *nympha* type is also associated with mourning, which would further substantiate DePrano's reading of the altarpiece as one of the few known funerary works of art dedicated to a patrician woman. Mary Salome here acts as Warburg's beloved *nympha* to apply those same attributes to the late Giovanna. Often the figure breaks into a scene holding an object, such as a basket of fruit or a gown to clothe a naked goddess. Mary Salome instead folds her hands in supplicative prayer, yet they are not empty. "Miss Hurrybring" in this case carries not physical but spiritual gifts, conveying with her Christ's saving grace.<sup>473</sup> Mary Salome therefore is at once *nympha*, saint, and mother in Holy Kinship with the Virgin. If considered in tandem with Mary Iachobi and her large, pregnant belly, these two conspicuous figures may have allowed Ghirlandaio an acceptable outlet to portray Giovanna's body as fertile, youthful, beautiful, and heavy with child at the time of her death.

The Mary Salome-*nympha* also wears an unusual surcoat, a detail unexamined by previous scholarship. The garment bears a distinct shape, short yet flowing, and is banded with stripes solid and patterned. Even considering the wide diversity of Renaissance cloaks it is unique. I advance that, due to its shortened, thigh-hemmed length, this surcoat may in fact be a man's coat.<sup>474</sup> Men wearing outer *mantelli* cut above the knee can be seen in figure 107. While the *nympha* is not particularly gender-crossing, Warburg's friend André Jolles did describe her

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<sup>472</sup> Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, 10-21.

<sup>473</sup> Christopher D. Johnson, *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images* (Cornell University Press, 2012), 101

<sup>474</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 160-161.

enchancing “boy-like grace.”<sup>475</sup> Could this strange accessory be a subtle nod to the grieving Lorenzo? Years earlier, Ghirlandaio inserted the widower into Giovanna imagery through the “L” stitched onto her *giornea* in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza portrait. Lorenzo not only paid for but also was heavily involved in the Cestello chapel’s overall decoration, including the *Visitation* altarpiece.<sup>476</sup> In Florence, certain types of men’s cloaks “symbolized citizenship.”<sup>477</sup> When the chapel was commissioned on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1490, Florence was enjoying a time of prosperity and optimism under Lorenzo de’Medici, whom Lorenzo Tornabuoni and his family were closely tied.<sup>478</sup> The Medici were associated with the Tuscan silk industry from the time of Cosimo the Elder. Indeed, the striped garment could be tied to the city-state more widely. In figure 115, the Florence-bound Annalena altarpiece, Signorelli swaps Christ’s dirty and humble loincloth found in more traditional crucifixions for a red silken waistcloth, edged with vibrant, horizontal stripes. Both striped, dyed garments may reference Florence’s booming silk industry, as silk became much more affordable in this period. Mary Salome’s introspective visage and praying hands could easily stand for a grieving family member—including Lorenzo—finding solace in Christian spirituality.

The time-traveling antique bacchante that so fascinated Warburg may be seen in all three Ghirlandaio images painted in tribute to Giovanna da Tornabuoni. Ghirlandaio famously placed

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<sup>475</sup> Quoted by Randolph, *Engaging Symbols : Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 43.

<sup>476</sup> DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 153-166.

<sup>477</sup> Levi Pisetzký, *Storia del costume in Italia* v.2, 353.

<sup>478</sup> See DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 152 and Sman, *Lorenzo and Giovanna: Timeless Art and Fleeting Lives in Renaissance Florence*, 123.

the running, windswept figure in *Birth of John the Baptist*, and (less often discussed) in his Santa Maria Novella *Visitation*, in which Giovanna may be present wearing her rose-toned gown.<sup>479</sup> In the Louvre altarpiece meant to comfort two grieving families, the nympha is disguised as Mary Salome. In the Tornabuoni chapel *Visitation*, the archetypal woman hurries beneath an archway in the background, typical fruit basket balanced on her head. This triad of nymphas therefore appears in three Ghirlandaio paintings either dedicated to Giovanna or directly featuring her likeness. In a fourth (and final) inclusion, the chambermaid pouring water into a bronze pot to wash the newborn Virgin in *Birth of the Virgin*, may also be said to be a nympha (fig. 35). Therefore, the Florentine master in four separate moments linked together the wild bacchante with the act of birth, particularly sacred Biblical childbirth and its association with the Tornabuoni women, but most especially Giovanna. Warburg's nympha "stood for the tempest of Fate and Fortune that rampaged through [the Florentine's] lives."<sup>480</sup> He associated her with both fertility and even midwifery.<sup>481</sup> The windswept figure navigates between scenes meditating on Giovanna's sad end. For Ghirlandaio, the combination of nympha, Visitation narrative, birth, and Giovanna must have held the significance of the passing of time, which robbed two families of a beloved daughter and potential heir.

Further Visitation scenes provide fertile ground for the study of gravid dress. Albrecht Dürer's *Visitation* woodcut sustains the Northern Renaissance proclivity to openly showcase both Mary and Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancies (fig. 127). The Virgin's posture thrusts her

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<sup>479</sup> For Ghirlandaio's Santa Maria Novella chapel images, see figures 11, 31, 33, and 35.

<sup>480</sup> Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, 14.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 and 19.

already exaggerated belly forward into the middle of the composition. The two gestating midsections touch directly in a vertical line with Dürer's promotional monogram, the self-assured mark of his artistic genius.

Pregnancy is very much at home in Visitation scenes, but gravid dress on the Virgin appears throughout her cycle. Indeed, Dürer skirts the line between obviously-pregnant Mary and illusorily-pregnant Mary in his *Life of the Virgin* print series created between 1503 and 1511 held at the British Museum (to which figure 127 belongs). Actual pregnancy is realized in the *Visitation*, but gravid dress appears often throughout the series. Notice Mary's curving contours contrasted with a small waist in: *The Betrothal of the Virgin* (fig. 128), *The Circumcision of Christ* (fig. 129), *The Presentation of the Christ in the Temple* (fig. 130), and *Christ Taking Leave of His Mother* (fig. 131). A variant of a rounder shape appears in all.

The *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* is especially intriguing in terms of treating Mary's body (fig. 132). A young Mary is quickly conducted into the columnar sanctuary of the temple, her back to the viewer. Meanwhile, Saint Anne points to her enlarged belly, the sinless vessel from which the chosen girl emerged. This combination of drapery and gesture link together the immaculate and miraculous conceptions through a series of hands—first the handmaid who ushers the young Virgin inside, then to Saint Anne's extended middle finger, pointing out her stomach. We do not see the Virgin's face. Instead, in this crucial stage in the Marian cycle when she transforms from a good Jewish girl into the vessel of the savior of mankind, the viewer sees Mary's connection with the unbroken lineage of holy gestation. *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* assures the devout viewer that Mary remained sexually pure throughout adolescence. Dürer used gravid dress to secure her place as the God-bearer. Another fascinating moment in the series is at *The Death of the Virgin* (fig. 133). As Mary lies in

repose, eyes shut as she passes serenely into Dormition, Mary places her hand on her stomach. While during the Renaissance women touching their girdles held many meanings, her midsection is clearly elevated beneath the resting fingers. At the end of her life, Mary's body still holds its parturient shape. Nearly half the prints in Dürer's series call attention to Mary's body as either potentially pregnant or sustaining the realized miraculous conception of Christ. The constant presence of gravid dress in this series is strange considering Mary's role as the ultimate virgin, so pure her parents conceived her without sin.

Many Renaissance artists beyond Dürer imbued the Virgin with a suggestively-pregnant midsection in Marian Cycle stories that did not require it narratively. A 1390s *Annunciation* scene in Florence's Chiesa di Santa Maria a Quinto attributed to the Maestro della Madonna Strauss provides an example (fig. 134). The Virgin is clearly with child, as if the mere presence of the dove of the holy ghost riding a beam of light into the composition has rushed her gestation forward to its final stages. Matteo di Giovanni pushes an illusorily-gravid Mary even further in *The Assumption of the Virgin* (probably 1474) (fig. 135). The Virgin's belly swells out from her tight waist in gestation while the fully grown Christ flies above her. Cosmè Tura so loved the device of unlaced dresses he utilized it in both secular and sacred scenes. In his *Annunciate Virgin* at the Museo del Duomo, the handmaid of the Lord appears pregnant too early in her story, confirmed by the parting laces over her gown front (fig. 136). Here the breaching laces are not sexual but holy.

Each artist mediated the potential of Mary's pregnancy, which according to apocryphal texts was seeded in her story before conception. However, this insertion of physical pregnancy into instances when Mary should be virginal or postpartum is also a collapsing of time and Biblical narrative. It preserves in the mind of the viewer Mary's piety and love for mankind, as

well as the suprahistorical nonlinearity of Christian history. Pregnancy is a temporal state, but the Queen of Heaven's pregnancy is as eternal as her life in the New Jerusalem. Renaissance artists made Mary's pregnancy a part of her iconography and the depiction of her body like no previous artistic generation.

Dürer and his contemporaries consistently used the Virgin's clothing, particularly her mantle, to articulate the metaphor and promise of her sacred body. In scenes in which Mary's body is not seemingly gravid, her costuming still plays a major role. In Dürer's *Visitation*, for example, the Virgin's drapery flutters in the wind, picking up the fabric at her shoulders and knee. This is especially noticeable by contrast, as the robes of the five other characters remain motionless. In the *Annunciation*, her heavily-textured drapery with its deep grooves is realized by the high contrast of the woodcut medium (fig. 137). Two major folds in her cloak twist around her form as if disturbed by the mystical presence of the just-landed Gabriel, and meet at Mary's stomach. In *Christ Among the Doctors*, Mary clasps her hands, creating an implied diagonal to her Son impressing the doctors in the upper register of the image (fig. 138). Beneath her beseeching gesture, her secondary robe folds like a river about her waist and torso. In *The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, Mary's drapery has become so important that it signals the otherworldly majesty of her bodily assumption into heaven (fig. 139). The Virgin's legs are eradicated into folding textiles that double as the cloud on which she levitates. Further, the two flying wings of her exterior cloak meet over her womb. In each of these prints, Dürer uses the Virgin's robes to communicate her importance as the mother of Christ. Pregnancy is central to Mary's character, and Renaissance artists used her clothing to codify it visually.

## Marian wardrobe

Mary's clothing is a major aspect of her iconography, yet little writing is dedicated to the meaning of her sartorial choices.<sup>482</sup> The Queen of Heaven typically wears long and loosely-draped robes of multiple layers in red, white, and blue. According to Marina Warner, Mary wears blue to associate her visually with both the sea and sky.<sup>483</sup> Mary's blues are also often symbolic of her status as a daughter of the line of King David, and therefore Jewish royalty, while the white and red signpost her purity and sacrifice respectively.<sup>484</sup> She rarely appears without a veil, and often wears a belt. Her fabrics were thought to have been spun of silk or linen, varying according to geographic context. These codes of the Virgin's costumes were well set by the Renaissance. My goal in this section is to read two subsets of elusive Marian imagery—the Madonna della Misericordia and Madonna del Parto—within the framework of fashion theory.

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<sup>482</sup> *The Oxford Companion to the Bible's* entry on clothing does not mention Mary. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* equally elides Marian raiment. See and Bruce M Metzger and Bruce Manning, Michael David Coogan, and Oxford University Press, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Ian A. McFarland, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The most authoritative secondary source treating Mary, Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, likewise, has no section exploring the significance of Mary's wardrobe. See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1st Vintage books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

<sup>483</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 266.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Textile creation was closely associated with Mary in the Renaissance to an extent usually unrecognized in art history. The Virgin in *The Protoevangelium of James*, the authoritative text on the Life of Mary in the period, takes an active role in creating altar cloth. According to the story, a council of priests wished to “make a veil for the temple of the Lord,” of royal colors purple and red.<sup>485</sup> To keep the ensuing cloth pure, the priest required it be spun only by virginal daughters in David’s lineage, including Mary: “And Mary took the scarlet, and span it.”<sup>486</sup> In this version of the story, Mary was hard at work spinning during the Annunciation: “And taking the purple, she sat down on her seat, and drew it out. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood before her, saying: Fear not, Mary; for you have found grace before the Lord of all, and you shall conceive, according to His word.”<sup>487</sup> This link between Mary’s pregnancy and her handicraft continues until the Visitation:

And she made the purple and the scarlet, and took them to the priest. And the priest blessed her, and said: Mary, the Lord God has magnified your name, and you shall be blessed in all the generations of the earth. And Mary, with great joy, went away to Elizabeth her kinswoman, and knocked at the door.<sup>488</sup>

Further, the very act of textile creation was associated with the Virgin’s fetal development in the period. Mary spinning the infant Christ in her womb served as a common visual metaphor for her mysterious virgin maternity (fig. 140).<sup>489</sup> Early modern artists were deeply aware of Mary’s

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<sup>485</sup> Foster, *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, 43-44.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 118.

connection to fabric, as a Spanish painting of the *Virgin Mary Spinning* in the temple, circa 1700 captures the young girl in the act of working raw wool on her spindle (fig. 141). Likewise, period devotees would have been aware of this association. A crudely delineated sixteenth-century sculpture of the seated Virgin sewing attached to the choir screen in the North Ambulatory of Chartres would have prompted a visual association with the relic of the virgin's veil on display in the same space (fig. 142). Clothing and its formation is therefore central to Mary's character and backstory.<sup>490</sup>

The Mother of God favors a blue mantle; however, her pregnancy is often accentuated in Renaissance painting by her red underdress. This ruby tone is where her belly blooms in pregnancy, such as in Perugino's previously mentioned *Family of the Madonna*, Pier Francesco di Jacopo Foschi's *Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 143), Ghirlandaio's 1470 *Madonna and Child* (fig. 144), or his *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* (fig. 145), and Matteo di Giovanni's 1462 *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Catherine of Alexandria, Matthew, Bartholomew and Lucy* (fig. 146). In all these pictures, Mary's dark blue cloak drapes over her form to preserve her modesty, all the while contrasting with the eye-catching red that bends over a seemingly-pregnant belly. In the logic of these images, the layer of red drapery is also closest to Mary's physical body, perhaps even touching her bare skin. Across Renaissance imagery and beyond, red is an obvious signal of Christ's passion and sacrifice, and his mother's grief over the inevitable loss of her child. By consistently painting the Virgin's belly with red hues, period artists visually associated Mary's pregnancy with the Passion Cycle and the Age of Grace.

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<sup>490</sup> E. Jane Burns, "Saracen Silk and the Virgin's Chemise: Cultural Crossings in Cloth," *Speculum* 81, no. 2 (2006): 368.

Mary's cloak, rendered in its celestial ultramarine, is her most essential piece of clothing. I believe it took up new valences associated with pregnancy and the hope for children during the Renaissance. Examining the garment illuminates Marian imagery, ritual, and personal piety. A thirteenth-century book of Marian stories collected by Gonzalo de Berceo, *Miracles of Our Lady*, attests to how important Mary's cloak was to her persona as the Primary Intercessor, especially for period mothers and mothers-to-be.<sup>491</sup> In Miracle Nineteen, "The Pregnant Woman Saved by the Virgin," a "frail pregnant woman" crosses a causeway to attend church on an island.<sup>492</sup> The tide unexpectedly rises and the woman is tragically washed out to sea. The rest of the congregation, helpless to drag her back on land, appeal to Mary. Once the tide subsides, the people are astounded to see the woman walking across the sand holding her newborn son in her arms. Beneath the waves, the Virgin had not only delivered the woman to safety, but also acted as her midwife. The woman explains to the crowd that, like Mary, she gave birth "without care and without affliction, without any pain."<sup>493</sup> She continues, calling attention to the role played by Mary's mantle in the miracle, "While I was in this situation, Holy Mary came; She covered me with the sleeve of Her cloak."<sup>494</sup>

Warner argues Misericordia imagery and its emphasis on the cloak was directly linked to Mary's growing character as compassionate and approachable, as opposed to the stern and judgmental Christ.<sup>495</sup> A fourteenth century Franciscan Exemplum echoes a similar sartorial

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<sup>491</sup> Gonzalo de Berceo, *Miracles of Our Lady* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 89-90.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 326-329

focus: “So when we have offended Christ we should first go to the Queen of Heaven ...and then she, like a mother, will come between thee and Christ, the father who wishes to beat us, and she will throw the cloak of her mercy between the rod of punishment and us.”<sup>496</sup> Mary’s robe plays an essential role in these texts as well as artworks devoted to pregnancy, particularly the Madonna della Misericordia and Madonna del Parto. Considering the Virgin’s mantle, dress, and belt through the lens of fashion theory are all key to decoding these images.

The Madonna della Misericordia image type foregrounds the protective nature of Mary’s clothing. In this genre, an often hierarchically-scaled Mary towers above gesticulating adorers, her cloak spread over them, a shield against the horrors of early modern life. In such pictures, the Virgin’s cloak takes on extreme proportions, filling compositions with a large swatch of blue. The robe itself acts as subject matter and central iconographic signifier. The upper register of Ghirlandaio’s *Madonna of Mercy and Lamentation* provides a clear example (fig. 147). The cloak is so encompassing as to protect an entire community. These images must have held a unique place in the visual lexicon for their authority in popular piety, as some of the period’s most accomplished artists were commissioned to create them. Vasari lavishly praised Piero della Francesca’s version, dating to 1460-1462, as not only the most well-executed work in the town of Borgo San Sepolcro, but also “the best that he ever made” (fig. 148).<sup>497</sup> The Misericordia makes up the largest and central-most image in his large polyptych altarpiece.

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<sup>496</sup> Johann Herolt, *Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, (Broadway Medieval Library. London: Routledge, 1928), xiv.

<sup>497</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari’s Lives of the Artists; Biographies of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1946), 3-16.

While much has been written about Misericordia imagery, I believe that there is still more to be gleaned from the emphasis on textiles. As the cult of Mary grew and flourished, so did devotees' obsession with her clothing. Her bodily assumption to heaven precluded all physical remains for veneration. It is no coincidence then that the most powerful and popular Marian relics are her clothes: her dress, veil, mantle, and girdle.<sup>498</sup> As Warner describes: "[The Virgin's] wardrobe took on fabulous dimensions, and fragments of her clothing or richly embroidered medieval dresses that had belonged to her hung in shrines in Rome, San Salvador, Marseilles, Toulon, Assisi, Arles, Novgorod, the Escorial palace, Limbourg, and Brussels."<sup>499</sup> While these holy objects were not exclusively utilized by women, how women engaged with them further wedges open the narrow gap in women's history. All her secondary clothing relics are linked at least tangentially with Mary's role as a polestar for pregnant women. Her veil, for example, was believed to have been worn during both Christ's conception and birth.<sup>500</sup> In sixteenth-century France, more than one queen was blessed with a miraculous vision of the relic of Mary's chemise, "often in white silk with gold embroidery, to honor and facilitate pregnancy and childbirth."<sup>501</sup> Mary's girdle also played a part in obstetric miracle rituals in the period. However, Mary's chemise was not the only article of clothing linked to labor. I argue Mary's mantle was likewise very closely associated with miraculous childbirth.

Medieval and early modern artists imagined *all'antica* clothing as shapeless robes, which they readily applied to Mary to signpost her modesty. However, the common addition of Mary's

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<sup>498</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 291-294.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>500</sup> Burns, "Saracen Silk and the Virgin's Chemise: Cultural Crossing in Cloth," 368.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

*mantello* in Misericordia (and Visitation) images is an anachronism that I believe welcomed pregnant female worshippers into the world of such images. Cloaks appear in the visual record mostly in *all'antica* scenes and symbolized Christian virtues.<sup>502</sup> Further, cloaks were particularly connected to progeny pursuit. Married women donned a cloak to visually distinguish themselves from younger, virginal girls.<sup>503</sup> Daily ritual robing and disrobing of cloaks was an important part of passage into marriage.<sup>504</sup> When pregnant Renaissance women walked city streets, they often did so wearing a *mantello*, or a *mantello de parto*, a special outer cloak clasped about the shoulders and covering the arms. These voluminous robes were not meant to disguise pregnancy, I believe, but instead show it off in an appropriate and adjustable way. Out of all the layers required of patrician Renaissance wear, the cloak was the most expensive to tailor.<sup>505</sup> The outerwear could be drawn closed with hands, or left parted so a protruding pregnancy could peek through, vacillating between revealing and concealing according to the bearer's whim. It often swept behind the woman in a train. The long, flowing garment was meant to catch communal eyes and allowed the wearer to advertise her happy state. In images, *mantelli da parto* are often brightly dyed in blues and pinks and clasped with bejeweled brooches, certainly not meant to be ignored or hide wearers.<sup>506</sup> In holy spaces, cloaks weighted the shoulders of female worshippers gazing upon Marian imagery. By sharing fashion choices with the Mother Most Holy, Renaissance women directly engaged with Mary's miraculous pregnancy.

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<sup>502</sup> Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, & Fine Clothing*, 218.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 116 and note 273.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>506</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 38.

Early modern women often wore their *mantelli* to church, which meant that as they sat in mass or prayer before images of Mary depicted in the very same garment, they may have enjoyed sharing an experience with Mary by dressing after her. This would have been particularly potent when interacting with a Misericordia painting, wherein the cloak very easily could have been read as a pregnancy cloak, guarding both Mary and her populace. Cloaks protected precious inner clothes from wind, dust, rain, excessive sun, and snow. *Mantelli da parto* performed these same functions, while also safeguarding soon-to-be mothers and their growing fetuses. Commonly-worn cloaks protected maternal wearers, linking the accessory functionally with Mary's mantle in pictures. The Misericordia cloak (and Mary's clothing in general) was believed to have protective powers.<sup>507</sup> The mutual experience of wearing a cloak would have fostered a special connection between Mary and pregnant worshippers. To don a cloak was to opt for a shield. *Mantelli* were also expensive and codified class difference between patrician and less economically-secure mothers. Yet the cloak in Misericordia images would still draw in working-class women, who likely saw themselves represented in the humble masses praying at Mary's feet.

Madonna del Parto imagery likewise foregrounds clothing. The two image types are formally and conceptually related. Ermes Ronichi argues that the latter evolved from the former, and is the "ecclesiological" form of the more symbolic and naturalistic Madonna del Parto.<sup>508</sup> The idiosyncratic Madonna del Parto type, in which Mary places a hand on her parting skirts to

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<sup>507</sup> Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 176-177.

<sup>508</sup> Ermes Ronchi, *La Madonna nell'attesa del parto: capolavori dal patrimonio italiano del '300 e '400* (Milano: Libri Scheiwiller, 2000), 27.

guide sightlines towards her holy gestation, also deals directly with the power and import of Mary's clothing. The genre still holds mystery, with little solid understanding of its iconographic origins or dissemination.<sup>509</sup> Within Mariology, these images stand alone because they do not contain the Christ Child. Absent Christ, these images "implied the Virgin's autonomous sovereignty."<sup>510</sup> He is present in the images, but only as a developing baby in the womb. Unlike Visitations, these scenes are not anchored to any textual moment, existing in a liminal space both before and after the miraculous conception.

The most commonly cited version of the Madonna del Parto trope is Piero della Francesca's nearly life-sized 1460 version (fig. 149).<sup>511</sup> Two diminutive angels sweep aside a curtain, which may allude to Mary as the Gate of Heaven. Vasari contends della Francesca "made some heads from nature, so beautiful and so well executed that speech alone was wanting

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<sup>509</sup> The representational trend is largely but not exclusively Florentine. Brendan Cassidy, "A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century," *Gesta* 30, no. 2 (1991): 93. For more on the Madonna del Parto, see Frank Ferrie, "Piero Della Francesca's Madonna Del Parto and the Function of Images of the Pregnant Virgin Mary," and Gregor Martin Lechner, *Maria gravida: zum Schwangerschaftsmotiv in der bildenden Kunst*. Münchner kunsthistorische Abhandlungen (Bd. 9. München: Schnell & Steiner, 1981).

<sup>510</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 328.

<sup>511</sup> One wonders if painting an obviously-pregnant Mary held a certain significance for della Francesca. If Vasari is to be believed, the painter's father died while his mother was pregnant with him, and the artist was raised without a father. Vasari, *Vasari's Lives of the Artists; Biographies of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy*, 3-16.

to give them life,” which I believe may be applied to his *Madonna del Parto*.<sup>512</sup> The Virgin’s downcast eyes, flushed cheeks, and quavering lips all lend themselves to a figure radiating sorrow and prescient thoughts, in this case the eventual torture and execution of Christ. Vasari goes on to praise della Francesca as the best of his peers who “understood all the best curves drawn in regular bodies better than any other geometrician.”<sup>513</sup> The artist certainly must have been aware, therefore, of how far he strayed from normal proportions in his *Madonna del Parto*.

Della Francesca used Mary’s fashion choices to negate any possible scandalous associations with her enlarged body. Chiefly, this would explain the Madonna’s near-lack of visible hair. Her blonde braids are tightly bound beneath the flat disk of her halo. Women’s hair elicited lust in period viewers and long, unveiled tresses were closely associated with vanity and sexuality.<sup>514</sup> Unlike numerous Marys across medieval and Renaissance art, her dress is quite plain. It is likely a *gamurra da parto*, an adjustable gown worn by pregnant women.<sup>515</sup> Off canvas, Renaissance women wore such dresses with built-in adjustable sizing. Lacing at the hips allowed for torso expansion, while frontal lacing was often helpful for nursing mothers.<sup>516</sup> While unmarred by vainglorious jewels and patterns, the dress is perhaps the most compelling aspect of the composition.

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Brown, *Virtue & Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, 41.

<sup>515</sup> Bridgeman, “‘Troppo Belli E Troppo Eccellenti:’ Observations on Dress in the Work of Piero Della Francesca,” 82.

<sup>516</sup> Jolly, *Picturing the “Pregnant” Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430-1550: Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint*, 20.

The Virgin's noticeable gestational contours are communicated by the woolen blue gown, specifically through the parting laces. It is here the attention to naturalism touted by Vasari comes into play. Though marred by surface loss, the careful detail in Mary's dress shines. In a radical departure from the Mary Magdalenes with parting laces discussed above, della Francesca's Mary has not only loosened her ties at her front, but pulled them from the garment completely. The missing laces are not meant to be read as invitations to sexuality, as in Tura's muses. Mary offers no suspended cords to grab, or spread legs for courtiers to gaze upon. A fully removed tie is unusual not only in images but also actual clothing. Minus the crucial laces, women's garments did not shape onto the body beneath properly. In reality, Mary's unlaced sleeves would have hung listless from her wrists, her bodice would have wrinkled around her torso, and her skirts flapped about the opening at the hips, shuffling at the mercy of any movement. The artist was presumably aware that women's clothing did not function without ties, as Mary in his Arezzo *Annunciation* shows the Virgin's cloak with the laces fully installed and operational (fig. 150). Indeed, Jane Bridgeman has argued della Francesca paid special attention to dress across his *oeuvre*.<sup>517</sup> Though the details are difficult to discern in the fresco's current condition, faded ghosts of once-painted cords still linger on *Madonna del Parto*'s wrists and hips. The most aggressive departure from clothing norms, therefore, comes in the form of the slit vertically dividing the middle panel of the *Madonna del Parto*'s kirtle. While the dress is laced correctly above the chest, the ties entirely disappear where the gash begins. I maintain there would be no purpose for this cord removal of this womb-covering cord other than theological. Even in late-stage pregnancy this dress would have its laces loosely laced but not entirely

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<sup>517</sup> Bridgeman, "'Troppo Belli E Troppo Eccellenti:' Observations on Dress in the Work of Piero Della Francesca," 76-80.

withdrawn, otherwise the wearer would risk unwanted exposure of skin. The vein of white parting against blue above Mary's stomach cannot be ignored. I believe this previously unnoticed detail may hold exegetical meaning.<sup>518</sup> The disappeared laces uphold the centrality of pregnancy in this image. It is possible the threads are gone from Mary's gown because they are now part of her body, absorbed into the Miraculous Conception. Della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* currently spins the Christ Child—the thread of life—beneath her expansive blue skirts.

Bereft of narrative mooring, *Madonna del Parto* imagery remains an enigma, yet most scholars agree the group was venerated by pregnant women throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods.<sup>519</sup> A common element is the curtain, often parted or upheld by attending angels, which can be seen in della Francesca's example as well as figure 151 by an unknown fifteenth-century painter.<sup>520</sup> The latter does not shy away from depicting third-term pregnancy, as Mary's pink, dilated belly dominates her form. Pomegranate motifs on the curtain symbolize fertility. The presence of the curtain may also be associated with miracle-working images, which were often covered with a screen to limit visual access and restrict thaumaturgic influence to

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<sup>518</sup> While some scholars have noted the laced gown, none have noticed that the laces are completely missing. *Ibid.*, 76-82. Also see Frank Ferrie, "Piero Della Francesca's *Madonna Del Parto* and the Function of Images of the Pregnant Virgin Mary."

<sup>519</sup> See Maria DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 159 and Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 144.

<sup>520</sup> See Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, 116-117, for more period associations of the Christ Child with the thread of life.

controlled moments of dramatic revelation.<sup>521</sup> The spreading drapes therefore further animate the performativity of the *Madonna del Parto*. In this way the curtain mirrors the cloak, which both exposes and conceals the magical body of the Virgin. The shutter may also be a reference to the often-cited anecdote from Pliny when the master antique painter Parrhasius created a fictive curtain so realistic he tricked his friend Zeuxis (also a master of hyper-realistic painting) into attempting to lift it.<sup>522</sup> The Renaissance painter treating the *Madonna del Parto* perhaps relished the opportunity to insert himself into the continuum of artistry powerful enough to render a two-dimensional surface as a successfully realistic window to a fictive world.

Mary is the apex mother, often pictured in images heavy with child. In the stirring words of Warner, “The Virgin in the Catholic Church represents motherhood in its fullness and perfection.”<sup>523</sup> For Renaissance women of all ages and social climes, the Virgin was the perfect woman, especially in relation to pregnancy and birth. Marian images that focus on the potential and power of Mary’s body through her clothing, therefore, were important sources of personal piety for mothers and mothers-to-be. Following the notion that “when a woman saw childbirth objects in a sacred painting, she could therefore anchor her devotion to personal experience,” this would have been especially true of images of a roundly-pregnant Mary, especially if she were dressed similarly to the devotee.<sup>524</sup> This veneration continues into present day Italy. Consider the multitude of votive offerings crafted by grateful mothers in response to Jacopo Sansovino’s

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<sup>521</sup> Holmes Megan, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 441.

<sup>522</sup> Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History of Pliny*, translated by John Bostock (H. G. Bohn, 1857), 251.

<sup>523</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 192.

<sup>524</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 10 and 144.

*Madonna del Parto* of San Agostino in Rome, sculpted between 1518 and 1521 (fig. 152). Cloth pink and blue pillows embroidered with the names of healthy babies the Virgin purportedly helped deliver wreath the sculptural group. Candles available for purchase burn. Silver medallions in an array of shapes hang in a wall case. The left foot of the Virgin, which protrudes slightly into the viewer's space, has been worn away by centuries of devotional touching. One appreciative devotee has even left a flowering plant. Sansovino's marble marvel maintains its miracle-working status as a wondrous inroads towards actual pregnancy still used by Roman mothers.

Perhaps art history is still so baffled by the *Madonna del Parto* genre because the imagery cannot be fully comprehended on its own. Full elucidation requires consideration of the meaning of clothing across Marian portrayals. The emphasis on garments within pregnant Marian imagery—the Visitation, *Madonna della Misericordia* and *Madonna del Parto*—should not be removed from consideration. Indeed, many artists such as Ghirlandaio and Piero della Francesca did not work on one of these isolated image types, but rather several throughout their career. Mary and her fellow female saints stood as paragons of womanly virtues in the period, and women were encouraged to meditate on their likenesses for spiritual guidance and inspiration. These images were venerated by pregnant women, and part of that worship included sharing clothing choices with the pregnant Virgin. Through the power of gravid clothing, early modern women participated in pregnancy magic. In this way, gravid dress itself was magical. It offered a woman a mode to alter her body, circumstance, and the world around her. The style served the wearer as a durational, wearable form of magic, the power of which may be evoked in any space or time. The talismanic fabric utilized in the vivifying shape possessed a life of its own.

The belt Mary wore during her sacred pregnancy was just as crucial as her belt, and was accorded particular veneration where it was enshrined in Prato Cathedral, near Florence. The Sacred Girdle is the primary contact relic left behind by the Virgin upon her bodily assumption to paradise. Believed to be worn by Mary during her gestation of Christ, it is the most celebrated relic from her surviving wardrobe. Women hoping to become pregnant made the pilgrimage to the relic in hopes of benefitting from its rare and powerful connection to the central pregnancy in Christianity.<sup>525</sup> While the girdle was also credited with many healing miracles, the object and its enshrinement in Prato Cathedral was especially associated with women worshippers. For example, a story recorded in *Codex 86*, a book of local miracles, reports on August 21<sup>st</sup> of 1484, “Mona Agnola....living in Florence...was crushed by the crowd so that her womb came out. She placed herself in the hands of the doctors at Santa Maria Nuova but found no remedy. She vowed this to the Madonna and afterwards coming to visit her was liberated and healed and was crowned with olive and went to visit the altar of the Girdle of the glorious Virgin Mary.”<sup>526</sup> The Prato site, with the *Sacra Cintola* at the epicenter, was especially efficacious towards women’s bodies and their reproductive health. As with the mantle, the girdle played a major role in imagery and personal piety for Renaissance women.

In Italy, girdles directly related to pregnancy and helped to shape the idealized maternal body. The belt over wide skirts delineating high waistlines produced gravid dress. Belts were

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<sup>525</sup> Gélis, *History of Childbirth : Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, 75.

<sup>526</sup> Biblioteca Roncioniana, Codex 86, No. 31, fol. 6v. Quoted by Robert Maniura, “Image and Relic in the Cult of Our Lady of Prato,” in *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, edited by Sally Cornelison and Scott B. Montgomery. Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies (Series) ; v. 296, (Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 202.

closely associated with marriage, sexuality, and pregnancy, and were commonly given as gifts from groom to bride such as figure 97, which bears a love poem stitched in precious metal.<sup>527</sup> The epigram reads “I will burn even as a phoenix/With the fire of your kisses,/And I will die./Life will return with/The breath of your sighs./Even as the net woven/With the cords of love,/Do you tie me to your heart/As long as you will be faithful to me.” In Israhel van Meckenem’s *Couple Seated on a Bed* from c. 1495-1503, the bride’s expectant state, whether literal or suggestive, is confirmed by the belt slung low around her bulging waist (fig. 153).<sup>528</sup> A collection of keys, showcasing her role as keeper of the house and possibly a brazen joke about unlocked chastity, falls between her legs. The specter of pregnancy is obviously further enhanced by the couple’s presence on the bed. Belts could be removed from gowns once a woman became pregnant to allow for more comfort and room as her body changed. The accessory simultaneously guarded women’s bodies and preserved contact for appropriate sexual interaction within the bounds of matrimony.

The belt appears often as a significant accessory in *Misericordia* and *Madonna del Parto* paintings. Indeed, Brendan Cassidy believes the knotted cord Mary wears in some *Madonna del Parto* images represents the Sacred Girdle itself.<sup>529</sup> Extending Cassidy’s analysis, I believe *Madonna del Parto* imagery upholds worship of the *Sacra Cintola* by suggesting its close connection to Mary’s miracle-generating body. The majority of *Madonna del Parto* images

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<sup>527</sup> Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, 128.

<sup>528</sup> Jolly, *Picturing the “Pregnant” Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430-1550: Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint*, 31.

<sup>529</sup> Cassidy, “A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century,” 91.

declare Mary's girdle paramount in her narrative. A fourteenth-century version located in Pieve di Montefiesole showcases the centrality of the girdle in the representational model (fig. 154).

The expectant Virgin towers over the donors like a benevolent giant, completely unaware of their presence kneeling in the corners. While one hand holds her prayer book, the other absently strokes her undeniably enlarged belly. It is as if the artist has caught the Virgin on a normal day during her gestation, reading her prayer book, bereft of Marian cycle iconography.

The belts in Marian images are not static objects. The cords shift and extend outwards, tracing and highlighting the Virgin's active gestation. The girdle's coloration confirms its prominence, usually depicted in a dark tone to contrast against the jewel-brightness of Mary's gown, such as in Rossello di Iacopo Franchi's early fifteenth century *Madonna del Parto* (fig. 155). The dramatically parting curtain, rendered in bright red, has returned, perhaps a reference to the miraculous nature of the *Sacra Cintola* itself. Franchi's *Madonna del Parto* was on display in Florence's Palazzo Davanzati, so it is quite possible many of its spectators (including the artist) could have journeyed the five miles to Prato to see the actual relic. Unlike many of its sister images, Franchi depicted the Virgin making direct eye contact with the viewer, insisting on her attention. The beholder, very possibly a woman considering the image type's realm of influence, is then drawn towards Mary's hands. One is completely obscured under the Virgin's cloak, allowing the other to touch her girdle. Mary's digital contact with the belt affirms its use by period worshippers.

Yet in some examples Mary's belt imitates art rather than life. Cassidy argues the variation in styles seen on Mary's belt is due to the fact that the actual relic was available for public view rarely, prompting artists to take license.<sup>530</sup> Depictions of Mary's girdle, therefore,

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid., 97.

vary according to local fashions worn by actual Renaissance women or distance from the Prato cult. An imaginative *Sacra Cintola* may be seen in a *Madonna and Child* by the Master of the Straus Madonna, dated 1385-1390 (fig. 156). The Virgin wears a buckled belt rather than a knotted cord. Its excess length is obscured by the Christ Child's tunic, which the artist attempted to clarify by shifting tones. These belts were popular in Europe, especially in the North in the mid-to-late fourteenth century.

The literary context surrounding the *Sacra Cintola* further elucidates its centrality in Mary's lifecycle. In myriad apocryphal legends, Mary's death and following bodily assumption to heaven was witnessed by Saint Thomas. As she floats upwards, the Virgin is so moved by the apostle's sincere sorrow, she gifts him the belt she wore during her conception, carrying, and birth of the savior. The thirteenth-century *laude* "Ave Donna Santissima," included in the *Laudario di Corona* codex makes clear the importance of the girdle and Mary's ritual shedding of it:

The queen was so overwhelmed  
[When she] saw that [Saint Thomas] did not feign:  
Immediately she ungirded herself,  
So great is her kindness.  
"Thomas, take this away;  
With the apostles comfort yourself  
In that I am living, I am not dead;

I was never so alive.”<sup>531</sup>

The song professes that Mary’s belt could soothe the apostles of their grief at her heavenly departure. Its power is both empathetic and sympathetic.

Mary’s girdle resonated with worshippers across Renaissance media. As a dress accessory, the relic provided comfort for both Saint Thomas and pregnant women alike. However, its power was most potent within the visual arts, especially in its original Pratese context. The *Sacra Cintola* was enshrined at Prato Cathedral in the 1270s, and its cult began to flourish in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>532</sup> Following its installation, the girdle was associated with childbirth miracles beginning in the Trecento. Scenes showcasing the belt’s influence and prestige were popular throughout Italy.

*Istoria* images of the Virgin gifting her beloved accessory uphold the close association between the object and pregnancy, calling attention to the linkage between images, magical practice, and Renaissance reality. While much is written on depictions of the Marian Assumption and bestowal of the girdle to Saint Thomas, no study has taken into account its consistent connection to the Virgin’s seemingly-gravid body. I assert that the presence of the belt is directly correlated with a heavily pregnant Mary long after the moment in her narrative when she carries

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<sup>531</sup> Marco Gozzi, Francesco Zimei, and Biblioteca comunale e dell’Accademia etrusca. “Ave Donna Santissima,” *Il laudario di Cortona: Cortona, Biblioteca del Comune e dell’Accademia etrusca, ms. 91*. (Venite a laudare ; 1. Lucca: Libreria musicale italiana, 2015).

<sup>532</sup> Cassidy, “A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century,” 94.

Christ.<sup>533</sup> Raphael, for example, puffs out the already assumed Virgin's midsection in typical gravid dress as Christ crowns her the Queen of Heaven in his 1502-1504 *Oddi Altarpiece* (fig. 157). Directly below the action, Saint Thomas gazes reverently upwards at the higher register, Mary's discarded belt suspended between his hands, creating an implied line for the viewer to follow. Palma Vecchio's circa 1513 *Assumption* similarly depicts a Virgin with gravid drapery hovering above Christ's earthbound apostles, about to drop the belt from the heavenly realm (fig. 158).

Decoration of the Prato Cathedral relic site itself adheres to the trend of gravid dress appearing around *Sacra Cintola* imagery. Though Mary exhibits a seemingly-gravid midsection in many images, pictures where she removes her girdle, especially her representation in the fresco program decorating Prato Chapel, particularly showcase the shape. I believe the exaggeratedly-gravid body of Mary decorating the site directly animates the *Sacra Cintola* Chapel as a space used by women to curate their bodies to engender pregnancy. Prato Cathedral, especially the Chapel of the Sacred Girdle, acted as a conduit space for pregnancy magic. The maternal spectator was treated to a range of imagery surrounding Mary, her girdle, and holy pregnancy from entrance to exit, framing the entire experience.

Prato Cathedral iconography nourished maternal sight. Visitors were reminded of the girdle narrative and its sacred prowess throughout the progress of the cathedral. A pulpit by Donatello and Michelozzo, dating between 1428-1438 and decorated with dancing angels, greets visitors about to enter the cathedral (fig. 159). Twelve angels in various poses parade across its face, each either by Donatello or Michelozzo's hand. The girdle was occasionally removed from

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<sup>533</sup> It is also interesting that the visual trend depicting Mary at her death as youthful and beautiful also often includes a Mary that still exhibits a pregnant form.

the chapel and shown to the public at the pulpit, a tradition continued to today. Renaissance voices tell of this ritualized outdoor display. Vasari in his 1550 *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* wrote “In Prato [Donatello] made the marble pulpit where the Girdle is shown.”<sup>534</sup> The iconography of the nonextant fourteenth-century pulpit (also built for relic display) was even more closely tied to the holy object’s narrative, including the Death of the Virgin, the Assumption with Saint Thomas, the Coronation, and the Recovery of the Relic.<sup>535</sup> This structure was replaced with Donatello’s version in 1433.<sup>536</sup>

The chapel of the Sacred Girdle is the last in the north aisle, and was the main attraction for many visitors, not only to the cathedral but also the city of Prato. Gravid dress inhabits the annunciation scene in Agnolo Gaddi’s early fifteenth-century fresco program within the chapel (fig. 160). Mary’s expansive belly springs from a tight waist covered in pink drapery. While her left hand bookmarks her devotional reading, her right floats above her midsection, directing the viewer’s gaze. The Virgin sits before her bed, a white patterned curtain parted to direct sightlines to her body. She, in turn, looks directly back at Gabriel. Lips slightly parted, the Virgin seems to be speaking her line of assent, “Ecce ancilla Domini: fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.”<sup>537</sup> She places her hand in a reaffirming gesture on her stomach, touching the place where her pink dress extends in exaggerated gravidity. Her body, like those discussed above, foreshadows the

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<sup>534</sup> Vasari, *Vasari’s Lives of the Artists; Biographies of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors of Italy*, 53 and H. W. Janson, and Jenő Lányi, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 122.

<sup>535</sup> Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, 112-113.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>537</sup> Vulgate, Luke 1:38.

Miraculous Conception and therefore the inception of the girdle cult. Mary's body affects the same gestational rotundity beneath eye-catching pink drapery in Gaddi's *Nativity* scene in the *Sacra Cintola* Chapel (fig. 161). Fra Filippo Lippi's 1455-1465 *Madonna della Cintola*, also in the chapel, likewise features a heavily pregnant Mary, reiterating the connection between Biblical narrative and the accessory (fig. 162).

The sheer abundance of Marian imagery in the church styles the building's interior around the miraculous girdle. Across from the *Sacra Cintola* chapel, on the other side of the nave, the Assumption Chapel reaffirms the history and power of the relic. Scenes in which Mary bestows her belt on Saint Thomas, by an artist known as the Prato Master, decorate the walls. Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio's *Assumption* is located on the back wall of the nave, solidifying the reliability of the miraculous girdle as patrons left the church (fig. 163). Throughout their visit, hopeful pilgrims were treated to an endless parade of imagery surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, such as Fra Filippo Lippi's *Birth of Saint Stephen* or episodes of the life of the Virgin lining the walls within the main chapel.<sup>538</sup> The iconography surrounding the altar, uniquely, focuses not on Prato's patron saints as adults, but often their lives as babies or during childhood, such as the devil stealing the infant Saint Stephen from his mother's bedroom and replacing him with a changeling, or Saint John the Baptist's momentous birth, all gorgeously rendered by Lippi. Prato Cathedral offers a rare collection of Renaissance visual stories wherein women advance the plot of Catholic history. Mothers, holy and secular, play central roles in many of the scenes. They give birth to holy babies, fall victim to demonic kidnapping, and raise saints. Prato

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<sup>538</sup> For a thorough account of Lippi's contributions to Prato Cathedral, see Eve Borsook, "Fra Filippo Lippi and the Murals for Prato Cathedral," *Mitteilungen Florenz* 19, no. 1 (1975): 1-XXXII.

Cathedral, its decorative scheme crucially centered on motherhood, was a magical space used towards pregnancy pursuit and successful childbirth.

Pregnancy magic, meaning any process undertaken by Renaissance women to gain or alter pregnancy whether by relic efficacy or folk magical practices, was commonly enacted by women of all social tiers.<sup>539</sup> Magical devices—texts called *brevi*, amulets, prayers, herbs, foodstuffs, stones, as well as miracle-working objects such as the Sacred Girdle—were commonly deployed to help women deliver, protecting both mother and baby.<sup>540</sup> Wax medallions stamped with the image of the Paschal lamb bearing the banner of the Resurrection were thought to aid in childbirth. These were sometimes crafted into jewelry for expectant mothers.<sup>541</sup> Magic was applied to all stages of creating children, from conception to protecting the new baby. Women wore emerald jewelry, for instance, or carried around a lump of clay to prevent miscarriage.<sup>542</sup> Specialized prayers were recited aloud, written on parchment, or even inscribed

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<sup>539</sup> Italian women shared pregnancy magic with their ancient female forebears. The only instance of depicted pregnancy in the ancient world I have located is a Roman votive offering dating 200 BCE-200 CE held in the Wellcome Science Museum Collection in London, reference number A634991. It is a small terracotta votive of an obviously pregnant woman with swollen breasts beneath billowing drapery, likely deposited at a holy site in hopes of a safe delivery.

<sup>540</sup> See DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 158-159, Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 125 and 142-144, and Bell, *How to Do It Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, 82-86.

<sup>541</sup> DePrano, “Per La Anima Della Donna: Pregnancy and Death in Domenico Ghirlandaio’s Visitation for the Tornabuoni Chapel, Cestello,” 332.

<sup>542</sup> Bell, *How to Do It Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, 82.

into butter or cheese and consumed by the mother.<sup>543</sup> Textual prayers were also pressed to the mother's parturient midsection during labor.<sup>544</sup> A popular *peperit* charm was spoken directly to the baby after labor pains began: "Come forth infant, Christ summons you in the name of the Son. Come forth infant, Christ calls you in the name of the Holy Spirit."<sup>545</sup> Later in the mantra, the prayer directly appealed to holy pregnancy by chanting, "Elizabeth bore John, Anna bore Mary, the Virgin Mary bore Christ, the savior of the world, who will free you [name] from birth and your pains, Amen."<sup>546</sup> As DePrano argues:

In the context of misunderstanding and fear that surrounded pregnancy and childbirth during the Renaissance, the miraculous pregnancies and births of the Virgin and Saint Elizabeth, and the holy women's happiness at their expectant state, represented a reassuring and desired ideal to both new and expectant mothers, especially in a society that emphasized reproduction as a crucial role for married women.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 158-159

<sup>544</sup> DePrano, "Per La Anima Della Donna: Pregnancy and Death in Domenico Ghirlandaio's Visitation for the Tornabuoni Chapel, Cestello," 333.

<sup>545</sup> Marianne Elsackers, "In Pain You Shall Bear Children (Gen. 3:16): Medieval Prayers for a Safe Delivery," in *Women and Miracle Stories a Multidisciplinary Exploration*, edited by Anne-Marie Korte. *Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2004), 180.

<sup>546</sup> Quoted by DePrano, *Art Patronage, Family, and Gender in Renaissance Florence: The Tornabuoni*, 158-159.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

This charm was so popular more than sixty versions existed.<sup>548</sup> Mary's name appears in nearly all variants.<sup>549</sup> Pregnant women's bodies were thought to be extremely vulnerable in the early modern period, so all this magical practice was a necessary aspect of medical intervention. Indeed, there existed little to no distinction between medicine and magic.<sup>550</sup> Pregnancy magic was practiced by women throughout Western Europe, but Tuscan mothers enjoyed special access to the specifically obstetric qualities of the miraculous girdle relic cult center housed in Prato Cathedral.

Girdles fall within the realm of early modern magical objects used towards successful pregnancy.<sup>551</sup> At Prato and elsewhere, women touched cords belonging to a statue of Saint Margaret, patron saint of childbirth, and wore the accessory during pregnancy. Indeed, there are many pregnancy miracles associated with girdles recorded in legendaria across Europe. A 1340 poem written by Duccio di Amadore of Prato gives a detailed account of the Duchess of Calabria using the Virgin's belt to right a dangerous delivery. After two days of painful labor "her womb

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<sup>548</sup> Marianne Elsackers, "In Pain You Shall Bear Children (Gen. 3:16): Medieval Prayers for a Safe Delivery," 180.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>550</sup> Katharine Park, "Medicine and Magic: The Healing Arts." In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith C. Brown and Robert Charles, (Women and Men in History. London ; New York: Longman, 1998), 129-149.

<sup>551</sup> Jacques Gélis believes girdles were considered "essential" in bringing about healthy pregnancy in the period. Gélis, *History of Childbirth : Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, 75.

would not release her offspring.”<sup>552</sup> Fearing for both her life and that of her unborn baby, the Duchess “made a vow to the *Sacra Cintola*.”<sup>553</sup> As she could not travel to Prato Cathedral in her precarious state, the Duchess arranged for the power of the Sacred Girdle to be transferred to her childbed: “Then from Prato was brought a new silk thread that had been in contact with the *Sacra Cintola* of the Mother of God.”<sup>554</sup> This enchanted thread was then given to the Duchess, and immediately her child was born healthy. The Duchess, her husband the Duke, and their household rejoiced, “where previously there had been tears.”<sup>555</sup> It is interesting that the saving device and transporter of miraculous efficacy was a thread, closely associated with Mary and women. According to Duccio, the Duchess spread the story of her success to other women in the area, starting a trend of touching belts to the belt, popularizing the miraculous girdle and begetting further miraculous girdles.<sup>556</sup>

The practice of women touching the Virgin’s Sacred Girdle reflects a more general trend of objects, particularly dress artifacts, in which the act of physical adornment activated efficacy and promoted communion with Mary. Jane Garnet and Gervase Rosser call attention to the wearable relics such as the dress worn by a statue of the Madonna and removed from the

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<sup>552</sup> Duccio di Amadore, *Il Cincturale*, translated by C. Grassi. Vol. VIII, (Prato: Biblioteca dell’Archivio Storico Pratese, 1984), 48.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>556</sup> Cassidy, “A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century,” 97.

sculpture to adorn the bodies of Venetian women who sought aid in childbirth.<sup>557</sup> In 1600 the Venetian *popolana* Zanetta Polatti donated a silk dress to the Virgin of the Rosary, also used to aid women in labor.<sup>558</sup> Women would visit the shrine protecting Mary's dress at Notre Dame de l'Aube in Normandy with parcels of linen, and entreat Our Lady of the Garment to bless it, then return home with the consecrated fabric.<sup>559</sup> In Sestri Ponente (a town west of Genoa), a cloak worn by a sculpture of the Virgin Mary was often removed from the artwork and sent to the local homes of women in childbirth.<sup>560</sup>

Though the Sacred Girdle operated through haptic engagement, its power was also active through selective optics. On Marian Feast Days its protective curtain was removed, and the famous contact relic displayed to the admiring public.<sup>561</sup> It was also occasionally detached from its installation and processed. As mentioned above, the girdle was also removed from its installation and displayed on the pulpit throughout the early modern period, as attested to by multiple period accounts.<sup>562</sup> By consistently veiling the relic, its discriminatory visibility on days associated with Marian devotion situated the girdle as a powerful thaumaturgic device to be wielded with caution. The concealing and occasional revealing of the relic to the public,

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<sup>557</sup> Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 175.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176.

<sup>559</sup> Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy, and Birth in Early Modern Europe*, 74.

<sup>560</sup> Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy from the Renaissance to the Present*, 176-177.

<sup>561</sup> Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, 33.

<sup>562</sup> Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, 111-112.

therefore, would have proved a powerful experience for the worshipper. The wide availability of magical and miraculous antidotes mitigated a world in which pregnant women and unborn babies were accosted at all sides by forces physical and metaphysical.

It is possible the power of the *Sacra Cintola* was activated in Prato Cathedral by the phenomenon known as the maternal imagination, the early modern belief that a fetus growing within the body may be designed or reworked through the power of artwork. Robert Maniura and others argue Prato Cathedral was a space ripe for active ritual and immersive devotion, rendering the edifice a prime location for the maternal imagination to flourish.<sup>563</sup> Robust baby boys frequent the interior and exterior decoration to an extent not often seen in Renaissance worship spaces, from the pulpit outside to the decoration of the main altar, as well as reflected in many of the ancillary chapels. The pulpit, built for the express purpose of displaying the relic, maintains this decorative scheme.<sup>564</sup> Period writings hint at the ocular power of this famous Pratese platform. In 1584 Raffaello Borghini describes the scene: “In Prato...[Donatello] made the marble pulpit on which the Girdle of the Glorious Virgin is shown; the dancing children he carved on it are so beautiful and alive that they stun every beholder.”<sup>565</sup> Finally, the original reliquary that housed the girdle during the early modern period, created between 1446-1447 by Maso di Bartolomeo, may have also been designed to respond to the maternal imagination (Fig. 164).<sup>566</sup> Now held in Prato’s diocesan museum, winged, healthy male putti dance across its

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<sup>563</sup> Borsook, “Fra Filippo Lippi and the Murals for Prato Cathedral,” 11-30.

<sup>564</sup> Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, 112-113.

<sup>565</sup> Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo* Book III. Lorenzo Da Ponte Italian Library (Toronto, [Ontario] ; Buffalo, [New York] ; London, [England]: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 177.

<sup>566</sup> The entire *Sacra Cintola* altar was replaced in the eighteenth century.

surface. Additionally, apparently-gravid Virgins within *Sacra Cintola* images may exemplify the belief in the maternal imagination at work, and are directly tethered to the hope for pregnancy. It is possible the repeated visual presence of a “pregnant” Mary within the *Sacra Cintola* chapel was chosen to aid the powerful Sacred Girdle relic towards harnessing the power of images and relic effectiveness to successfully transform the female body into the maternal body. This combination of image and artifact would have been especially potent in the sacred space where female visitors worshipped before the relic itself.

### **Coda: Magic in Motherly Thoughts**

I wish to conclude with a brief discussion of the maternal imagination, a concept underpinning this entire dissertation. Its influence runs beneath early modern artwork, Catholic ritual, and artistic practice. Studying the maternal imagination uniquely illuminates women’s experiences and galvanizes us to better know their lives and losses.

Maternal imagination theory held that the female body was susceptible to external, largely visual influences.<sup>567</sup> Inherently passive and impressionable, its biological permeability was heightened during pregnancy. Early modern fetuses were in constant danger of congenital deformity should the mother suffer exposure to a shocking or horrific sight. The maternal imagination, like much of early modern magic, operated via sympathy, the theory that a representation is numinously linked to the actual physical body of the represented person. The phenomenon was widely accepted across Europe and persisted for millennia. First documented

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<sup>567</sup> Freedburg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, 2-3. See also Herman W. Roodenburg, “The Maternal Imagination. The Fears of Pregnant Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland,” *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 4 (July 1, 1988): 701–16.

in Plinian and Hippocratic medical treatises, the maternal imagination operated through a combination of humoral imbalance and the naturally occurring susceptibility assigned to women's bodies.<sup>568</sup> Nagel asserts that the maternal imagination relied on the process of extramission, the dominant contemporary sight theory, which held that seeing was an active process on the part of the viewer.<sup>569</sup> Invisible rays of light emanating from the eyes of the worshipper caressed pictures, dissolving the boundary between interiority and exteriority within the female body. This powerful mélange of scientific and mystical belief utilized images in both haptic and optical capacity in the hopes of producing a child. While both parents were accountable for responsibly creating heirs, the mother was to blame should she give birth to a monster.<sup>570</sup> Giulio Mancini, writing in 1614, explained: "And similar lascivious pictures are appropriate for the rooms where one has to do with one's spouse; because once seen they serve to arouse one and to make beautiful, healthy, and charming children."<sup>571</sup> Though the theory survived as a viable scientific concept until the early-to-mid nineteenth century, I believe it is

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<sup>568</sup> Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art out of Time*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 217-218.

<sup>569</sup> René Descartes was an early defender of extramission's role in the maternal imagination, but the link between the power of haptic sight and its effects on the body originated in ancient Grecian science. See Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art out of Time*, 217-226.

<sup>570</sup> Gage, *Painting as Medicine in Early Modern Rome: Giulio Mancini and the Efficacy of Art*, 90-91.

<sup>571</sup> Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, (Fonti e documenti inediti per la storia dell'arte Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), I:143. The direct line drawn here between sex, stimulation, and the production of children upholds my earlier points that in the Renaissance, desirability and fertility were one and the same, and we can see this in gravid dress.

most prevalent in the visual record during the Renaissance due to the heightened presence of the power of images compounded with the pressure to repopulate.<sup>572</sup>

The ways in which early modern peoples attempted to combat or control fetal plasticity and vulnerability with art objects are only partially documented. Scholars have argued the presence of healthy baby boys in devotional paintings or houseware like birth trays, for instance, may have been used for this purpose. During both coitus and gestation, women visually consumed applicable artworks to engender a robust male heir. Bedroom images, called *quadri da letto*, were also likely employed for such reasons.<sup>573</sup> It is also possible *cassoni* served similar purposes.<sup>574</sup> Dolls of the Christ Child, included in the dowries of Florentine brides beginning in the fifteenth century, may have also been intended to guide young women towards motherhood and the conception of healthy male heirs.<sup>575</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, in *De re aedificatoria* (1425), wrote “Wherever man and wife come together, it is advisable only to hang portraits of men of dignity and handsome appearance; for they say that this may have a great influence on the fertility of the mother and the appearance of future offspring.”<sup>576</sup> Artists were aware of their

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<sup>572</sup> Nagel, *Medieval Modern : Art out of Time*, 217.

<sup>573</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, 164-174.

<sup>574</sup> Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*, 66.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>576</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *De Re Aedificatoria: On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, (Cambridge, Mass., Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT Press, 1988), 299.

power to literally remake subsequent generations. The world was full of threats to precious babies, and art was the solution.<sup>577</sup> In other words, art was medicinal.

The prevalence of and belief in the phenomenon permeated Renaissance culture and image-making. The maternal imagination relies on the notion of the imprint. Imprinting appears often in the history of art, from literal impressing techniques like stamping, inscriptions, or some printing methods, to metaphors drawn from imprinting processes. Scholars have discussed associations between imprints and religious images, but have not fully considered its possible relation to the maternal imagination.<sup>578</sup> The phenomenon was recognized throughout Europe for centuries, but whether it occurred by natural or supernatural processes was a point of debate.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> For more on the power of art to mediate the maternal imagination, see Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 125, 128-30, 136, and 138.

<sup>578</sup> See Rosemary Betterton. "Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjectivity, and Maternal Imagination." *Hypatia* 21, no. 1 (November 28, 2005): 80–100; Robert Hole, "Incest, Consanguinity and a Monstrous Birth in Rural England, January 1600." *Social History* 25, no. 2 (2000): 183–99; Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993; Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982; Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston. "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth-and Seventeenth-Century France and England." *Past and Present* 92, no. 1 (1981): 20–54; Herman W. Roodenburg, "The Maternal Imagination. The Fears of Pregnant Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland." *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 4 (July 1, 1988): 701–16; Margrit Shildrick, "Maternal Imagination: Reconceiving First Impressions." *Rethinking History* 4, no. 3 (2000): 243–60.

<sup>579</sup> See Gage, *Painting as Medicine in Early Modern Rome: Giulio Mancini and the Efficacy of Art*, 91-92.

Perhaps the imprint provided some period writers with a malleable framework to explain the maternal imagination.

We might apply the notion of the imprint and its meaning to the maternal imagination's relationship to art. Imprinting runs deep in conceptions of medieval and early modern artwork. Bissera Pentcheva, for example, draws a relationship between sealing and icon making in Byzantium by pointing out the intersection of the two processes. Just as a stamp pulls away from the newly imprinted surface, an icon, such as the Veronica or Mandylion, is pressed with a holy face.<sup>580</sup> The original imprinting mechanism departs but the stamp remains. Pentcheva elaborates: "absence turns into a projection, penetrating the physical space. The relief paradoxically is transformed into the materialization of the form of absence."<sup>581</sup> She points out that this relationship was thought to be magical.<sup>582</sup> Likewise, the womb is impressed by a deformed or beautiful body, depending on the care of the mother. A mimetic likeness inhabits the woman's mind and body, visible characteristics irrevocably transferred. Extramission sight causes physical contact. A linkage, whether desired or abhorred, is formed between prototype and trace, leading to a fusion of images across the ether. *Acheiropoieta* like the Veronica or Mandylion are Christ's face impressed on unresisting cloth. The imprint is therefore endlessly replicable, endowed with the ability to spread the power of the original in a chain, like the tactile, life-saving thread-copies of the Virgin's girdle. The maternal imagination, conversely, offered artists and their female clients a means to regulate the usually uncontrollable process of imprinting. Reliance on its

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<sup>580</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon." *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (2006): 635.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 636.

<sup>582</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 33-34.

power lay in the influence of the imprint, which most period artists would have understood and perhaps meditated upon. The slippage, then, from prototype to representation had the highest of stakes: actual human beings, and heirs to continue the community. Renaissance children literally enlivened and embodied artwork. Art made life.

Terms used by period voices uphold the connection between impressed images and women's bodies. Natural philosopher Marsilio Ficino, no stranger to experimentation with magic, wrote in his 1489 *Liber de vita*, "People who are making babies often imprint on their faces not only their own actions but even what they were imagining."<sup>583</sup> Mancini, likewise, echoes the connection between the concept of the impression and the maternal imagination: "because each parent, through seeing the picture, imprints in their seed a similar constitution which has been seen in the object or the figure."<sup>584</sup> Yet even when the theory implicated both parents, the mother held the brunt of the blame for a distasteful birth defect. Fertile and pregnant women were expected to fill their eyes with beauty.

Lavinia Fontana, a woman artist adept at painting women and objects for women, took part in the ancient process of the imprint to engage with the maternal imagination. Caroline Murphy has argued that Fontana was a major producer of *quadri da letto*, bedroom images painted to safely harness the maternal imagination. In Fontana's *Holy Family* pictures (such as

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<sup>583</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Book of Life*, translated by Charles Boer, (Dallas, Tex: Spring Publications, 1998), 143.

<sup>584</sup> Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, I:143. Other sources used by early modern thinkers to justify the belief in the maternal imagination use similar terms for magic, including "engendered," in Heliodorus' second century text, and "effectively transmit" in Saint Augustine's early Christian writings. See Freedburg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, 2-3.

figure 165), she purposefully exaggerated the chubby sleeping Christ Child to encourage women's brains to impress the form of healthy baby boys on their impressionable wombs.<sup>585</sup>

Fontana, who gave birth to eleven children between 1578 and 1595, was probably expecting when she created these images, and likely would have hoped they were working their magic on her as she painted.<sup>586</sup> The maternal imagination invested women with the power to control a vital aspect of period life—the necessity for the healthy birth of a baby boy—but the entire phenomenon rested on the notion that the female mind was weak and susceptible. By engaging directly with this phenomenon through her art (and therefore her livelihood and impetus of her fame in Italy and beyond), Fontana reclaimed a modicum of that power.

Fontana also made many self-portraits during her long career. The most interesting for my purposes is known as *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo*, created 1579 (fig. 166). The work was a commission requested by a collector known as Ciacón who asked Fontana to send him, “a little portrait of yourself.”<sup>587</sup> Murphy argues that Fontana used the portrait to directly self-fashion as the equal to her male peers, borrowing many common attributes of images signposting successful and learned artists: beautiful clothes, prominent hands, and a Latin inscription.<sup>588</sup> *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* is certainly very scholarly.<sup>589</sup> However, I believe this painting could also be

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<sup>585</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, 164-174.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-47 and 170.

<sup>587</sup> See *ibid.*, 164-174.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>589</sup> For a longer discussion of this portrait, see Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (1st ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 218-222.

interpreted as an earlier moment in Fontana's career in which she engaged with the maternal imagination. Murphy points out that Fontana would have been nearing the second trimester of her pregnancy at the time of the painting's execution.<sup>590</sup> Is it not possible Fontana is self-fashioning her growing baby? She may have used this self-portrait in the same manner as she did her *Holy Family* images, utilizing their pregnancy magic qualities on her own body as she painted. Several operational aspects of the maternal imagination emerge within *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo*. Safeguarding artwork appears in the composition. The sculptures of Mars and Venus dominating the writing desk showcase artistic erudition, but also could fall into the category of images of beautiful bodies to be meditated upon during pregnancy. The active sight of the mother was the most powerful corporeal sense at work in the phenomenon. Although the image cuts the artist off at the waist, Fontana would have constantly looked at the reflection of her pregnant belly in the mirror as she worked, her own maternal gaze, powered by extramission, falling across the painting in the reflection. The mother-painter makes her fetus in her own image, successful and learned, but also following the perfect Greco-Roman sculptures. The fragmented heads and hands stored in the dark cabinet behind Fontana further substantiate her interest in the creation of accurate human bodies as both an artist and parent. *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* may therefore be interpreted as a documentation of pregnancy magic. Even if painting her fetus was not the central concept behind the portrait, the power of the maternal imagination nevertheless could have been on her mind. Fontana was clearly familiar with the theory, as she later utilized it towards financial success.

From Fontana's maternal imagination-employing *quadri da letto*, to devotional panels of the Madonna, investing the female body with pregnancy was the sacred task of a myriad of

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<sup>590</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, 73.

Renaissance artworks and minor objects. *Cassoni*, dolls, girdles, dresses, charms, and written prayers all acted as childbirth talismans. We may therefore think of pregnancy imagery as a genre unto itself. Throughout this project I have maintained Megan Holmes' claim that the late medieval and early modern periods in Western Europe witnessed the apex of frantic religious devotion, including physical and meditative collaboration with an image towards a particular goal.<sup>591</sup> I apply this claim directly to art objects related to pregnancy to argue that the aesthetic and sensorial grandeur surrounding the persistence of gravid dress provided an efficacious outlet for hopeful women engaging in pregnancy magic. A shifting, nebulous combination of science, magic, and religious practices oriented pregnancy as a transformative process—physically, spiritually, and socially—which fascinated artists, nuancing and modulating the female subject across early modern Italian art.<sup>592</sup>

Women's lived experience often erodes within the annals of history. Gravid dress marks the beginning of fashion's centuries-long need to unnaturally reshape women's bodies, squeezing and enlarging feminine contours according to cultural rules. The form, however, is particularly pernicious because it identified womanhood as nonnegotiable motherhood. In solving the mystery of why so many female figures appear pregnant across the broad archive of Renaissance art, I hope to have added a pinpointed flame to the growing illumination upon early modern women's lived experience. Decrypting pregnancy portraits furthers gender studies. The birth chamber was a female space, where a male doctor might only enter if he was needed and invited. It was stocked with items made for and by women. It was audible with women's voices in the

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<sup>591</sup> Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, 5.

<sup>592</sup> Indeed, what is Renaissance artwork itself if not a holistic combination of science, magic, and religion? Painting gravid dress was Renaissance to its core.

form of pregnancy charms and prayers.<sup>593</sup> These objects placed power in the hands of a woman. She could endeavor to control her body, and even thought she might regulate the gender of her child, a power which modern women do not hold. These objects encouraged and awarded pregnancy, and attempted to keep the darkness of loss of mother and baby at bay.<sup>594</sup> Much of this arbitration over life and death, as we have seen, came from clothing. It is “fashion’s *double face* that links it not only to exteriority and social space, but also to the inner space of emotions, personal memories, and to senses like touch.”<sup>595</sup> Clothing is simultaneously individualistic and community-focused, interoceptive and exteroceptive for the wearer. Fashion fabricates gender expectation. Marian imagery, and the sartorial relics connected to it, would have held unique meanings to female viewers, who understood how the parting garments functioned in a way their male counterparts never could. Votives crafted by new mothers hold the memory of successful delivery, stitching together a chain of commemoration and feminine community. The trend of gravid dress underwrote artistic thought and reflects a culture in which women were considered primarily as reproductive vessels, and yet the pattern is much more intricate. The substance of gravid dress elucidates Renaissance womanhood itself.

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<sup>593</sup> Elsackers, “In Pain You Shall Bear Children (Gen. 3:16): Medieval Prayers for a Safe Delivery,” 181.

<sup>594</sup> Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 125

<sup>595</sup> Paulicelli, “Mapping the World: The Political Geography of Dress in Cesare Vecellio’s Costume Books,” 26.

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## Illustrations

Figure 1: Jacopo della Quercia, funeral effigy of Ilaria del Carretto, 1406-1413, Lucca Cathedral, Lucca.



Figure 2: Master of the Story of Griselda, *The Story of Griselda Part I: Marriage spalliera* panels, c. 1494, National Gallery, Washington D.C.



Figure 3: Master of the Story of Griselda, *The Story of Griselda Part II: Exile spalliera* panels, c. 1494, National Gallery, Washington D.C.



Figure 4: Albrecht Dürer, “a normal woman,” in *Four Books on Human Proportion*, c. 1528, MSS Vol. 11 108, British Museum, London.

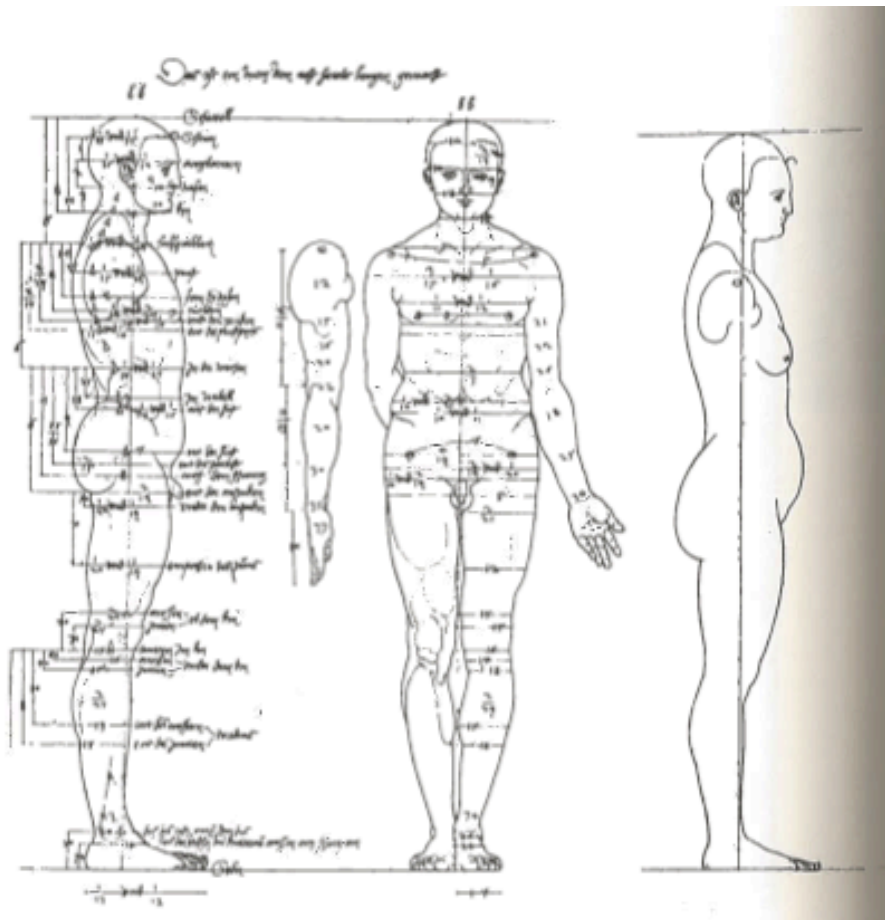


Figure 5: Albrecht Dürer, “slender youth,” in *Four Books on Human Proportion*, c. 1528, MSS Vol. 1 114, British Museum, London.

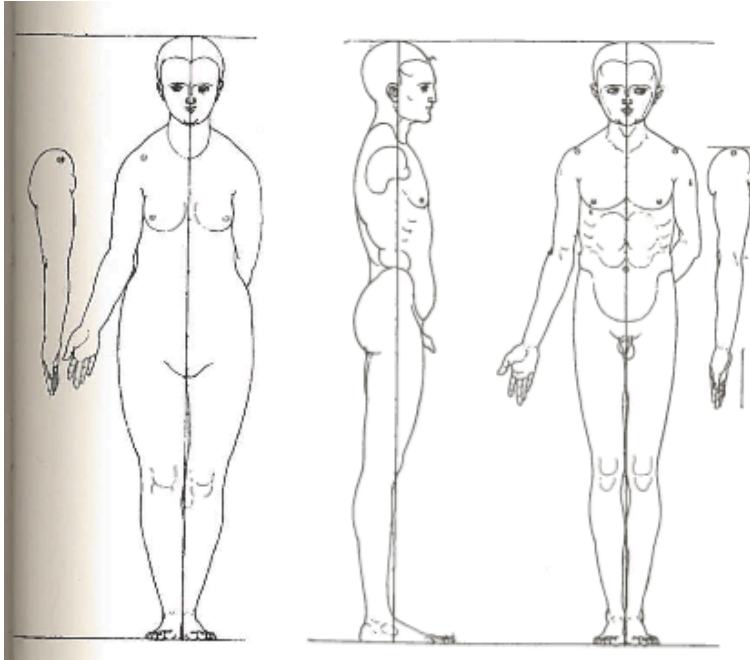


Figure 6: Albrecht Dürer, “proportional woman,” c. 1528, in *Four Books on Human Proportion*, The National Library of Medicine, Bethesda.

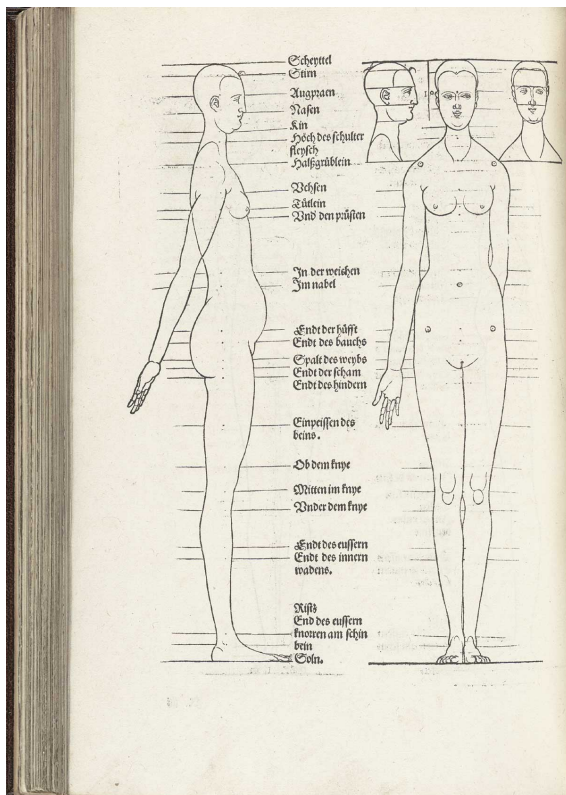


Figure 7: Albrecht Dürer, drawing of a woman, in *Four Books on Human Proportion*, c. 1528, MSS Vol. 1 99, British Museum, London.



Figure 8: Antonio Pollaiuolo *Portrait of a young woman*, 1465, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.



Figure 9: Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434, National Gallery, London.



Figure 10: Petrus Christus, *A Goldsmith in His Shop, Possibly Saint Eligius*, 1449, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 11: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of John the Baptist*, 1486-1490, Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

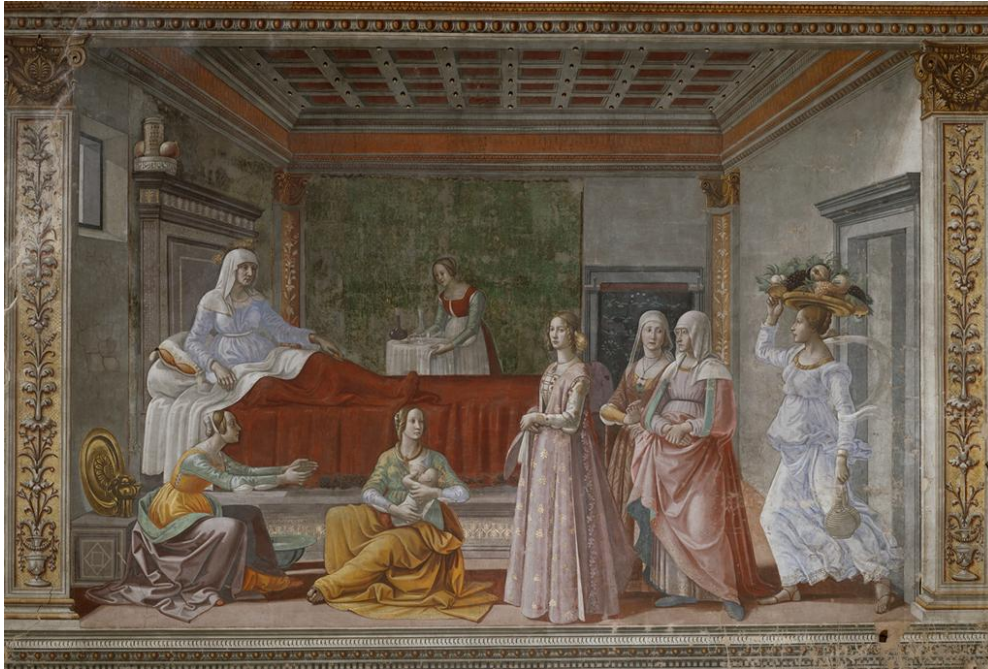


Figure 12: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Saint Francis restores life to a Spini Child* (detail), 1483-1486, Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence.



Figure 13: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Confirmation of the Rule* (detail), 1483-1486, Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence.



Figure 14: Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1526, *Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora*, Herzogliche Museum, Gotha.



Figure 15: Erhard Schoen, *The Twelve Exemplary Women of the Old Testament*, 1530, The Illustrated Bartsch Collection, Dresden.



Figure 16: Fra Filippo Lippi, *Portrait of a Woman and a Man at a Casement*, c. 1440, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 17: Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1485, Galleria Palatina, Florence.



Figure 18: Dorothea Sabina von Pfalz-Neuburg gown, c. 1598, Bavarian National Museum, München.



Figure 19: Crimson silk velvet dress, c. 1550-1560, Museo di Palazzo Reale, Pisa.



Figure 20: *Tacuinum sanitatis* miniature page, c. 1380, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



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Figure 24: Two views of women's linen chemises, embroidered with lavender floss silk and gold thread (probably Venetian), c. 1575-1600, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



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Figure 26: Pulzone Scipione, *Maria de' Medici* (?), 1594, Federico Zeri Foundation, Bologna.



Figure 27: Attributed to Lavinia Fontana, *Portrait of a Lady* (possibly Eleonora de Medici), mid-sixteenth century, location unknown.



Figure 28: *A Bridal Pair*, c. 1470, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.



Figure 29: Woman's English jacket, 1600-1625, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



Figure 30: Bartolomeo di Fruosino, Desco da parto, dated April 25<sup>th</sup> 1428, private collection.



Figure 31: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Visitation* (detail), 1486-1490, Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



Figure 32: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait Giovanna degli Albizzi da Tornabuoni*, c. 1488-1489, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

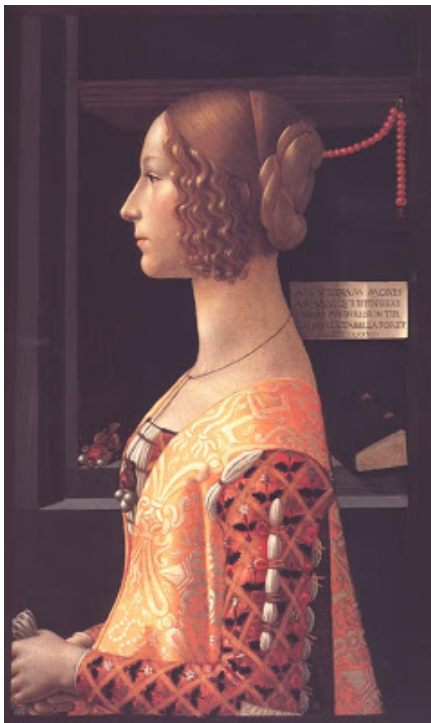


Figure 33: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of John the Baptist* (detail), 1486-1490, Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



Figure 34: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *A woman turned to the left* (Study for the Tornabuoni chapel in the choir of S. Maria Novella in Florence), 1485-1490, British Museum, London.



Figure 35: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin*, 1486-1490, Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



Figure 36: Niccolò Fiorentino, portrait medal of Giovanna degli Albizzi da Tornabuoni, 1486, British Museum, London.



Figure 37: Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of young woman* (possibly Ginevra da Tornabuoni)  
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Figure 38: Sledding figures in *Trachtenbuch*, German, Augsburg (?), 1560-1594, Lipperheide  
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Figure 39: Whale harvesting in *Trachtenbuch*, German, Augsburg (?), 1560-1594, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 40: Petrus Bertelli, "Neapolitan Noble," in *Diversarv Nationvm Habitus...opera Petri Bertelli...Apud Alciatum Alcia*, 1594-1596, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.

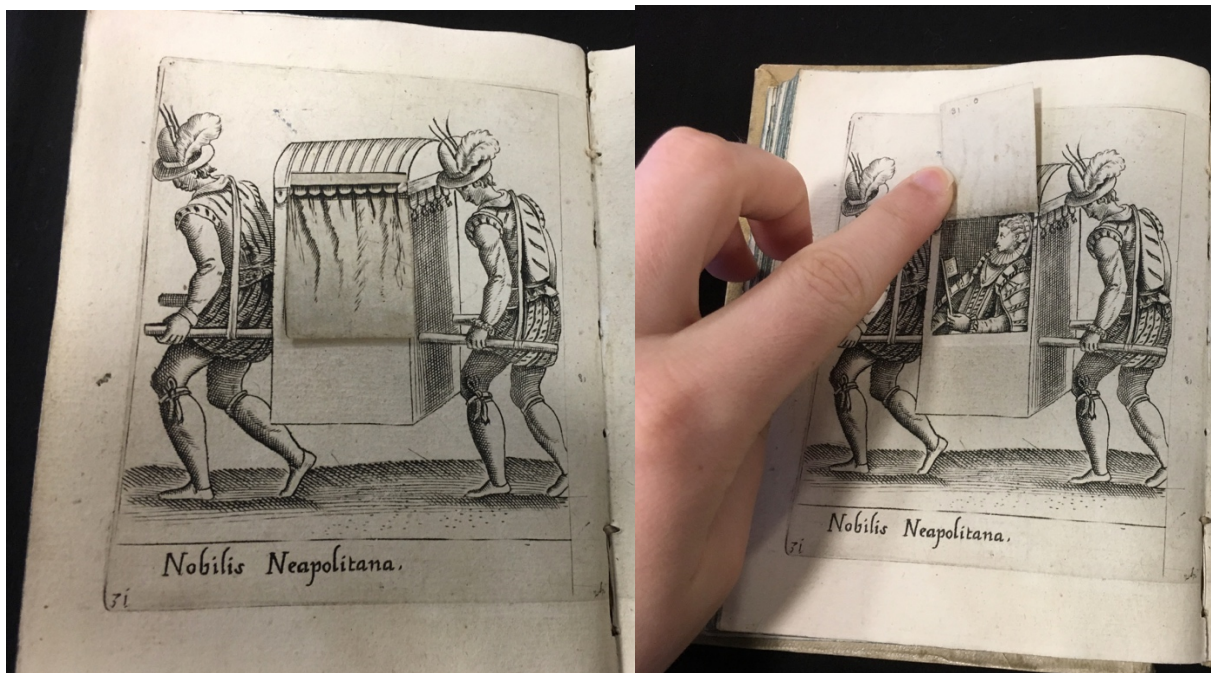


Figure 41: Petrus Bertelli, "Venetian Courtesan" in *Diversarv Nationvm Habitus...opera Petri Bertelli...Apud Alciatum Alcia*, 1594-1596, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.

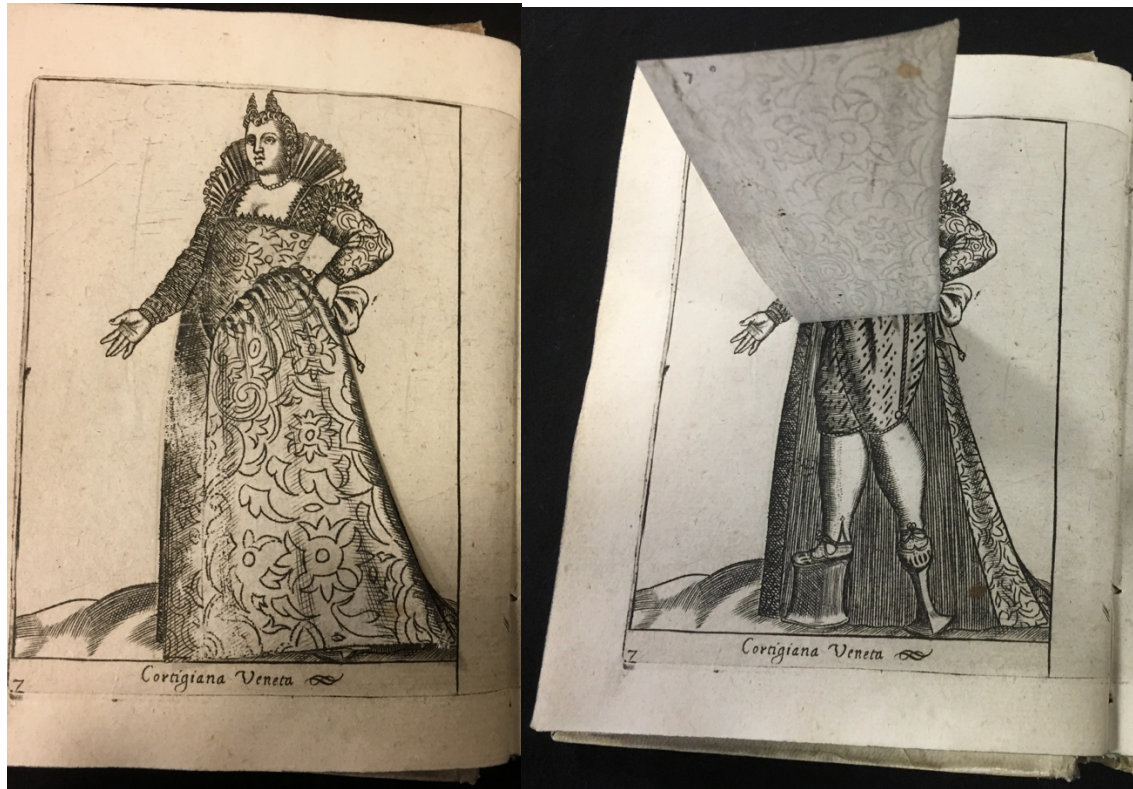


Figure 42: Alexandro de Fabri, "Venetian Woman," *Diversarum Nationum Ornatus*, Padua, 1593, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.

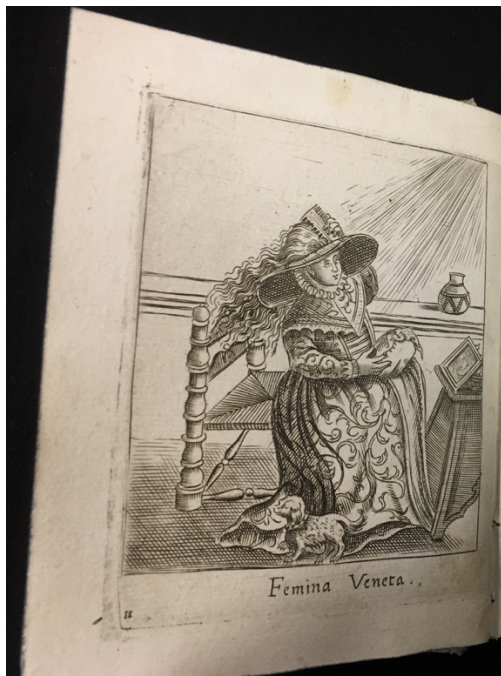


Figure 43: Cesare Vecellio, "Venetian Woman," plate in *Habiti De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Morgan Library, New York City.



Figure 44: "Antiquus Augustae Habitus," in *Trachtenbuch*, German, Augsburg (?), 1560-1594, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 45: Female figure in *Trachtenbuch*. German, Augsburg (?), 1580-1600, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 46: Petrus Bertelli, Female figure in *Diversarv Nationvm Habitus...opera Petri Bertelli...Apud Alciatum Alcia*, 1594-1596, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 47: Petrus Bertelli, “Greek Woman,” in *Diversarv Nationvm Habitus...opera Petri Bertelli...Apud Alciatum Alcia*, 1594-1596, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 48: Christoph Weiditz, “Women’s dress in Languedoc” plate CXXVII in *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz von seinen Reisen nach Spanien und den Niederlanden*, 1531-1532, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 49: Sigmund Heldt, female figures with children, in *Abconterfaltung allerlei Ordenspersonen in iren klaidungen...*, Nuremberg, 1560-1580, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 50: Female figure with child in *Trachtenbuch*, German, Augsburg (?), 1560-1594, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 51: Jan Jacques Boissard, Male figures, *Habitus Variarum Orbis gentium*, Mecheln, Caspar Rutz, 1581, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 52: Jan Jacques Boissard, Female figures, *Habitus Variarum Orbis gentium*, Mecheln, Caspar Rutz, 1581, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 53: Christoph Weiditz, “Girl carrying water in Hennegau,” plate CXXLL in *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz von seinen Reisen nach Spanien und den Niederlanden*, 1531-1532, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 54: Sigmund Heldt, “A wife of Dagsburg,” in *Abconterfaltung allerlei Ordenspersonen in iren klaidungen...* Nuremberg, 1560-1580, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 55: Female figure in *Trachtenbuch*, German, Augsburg (?), 1580-1600, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 56: Sigmund Heldt, "A Bride of Hamburg," in *Abconterfaltung allerlei Ordenspersonen in iren klaidungen...*, Nuremberg, 1560-1580, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 57: Christoph Weiditz, “Brides going to church in Holland,” plate CXXXV in *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz von seinen Reisen nach Spanien und den Niederlanden*, 1531-1532, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 58: Christoph Weiditz, “Dress worn by Portuguese women,” plate CLIV in *Das Trachtenbuch des Christoph Weiditz von seinen Reisen nach Spanien und den Niederlanden*, 1531-1532, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 59: Female figure in *Trachtenbuch*, German, Augsburg (?), 1580-1600, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 60: Cesare Vecellio, "Married Noblewomen of Milan and Other Places in Lombardy," plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 61: Cesare Vecellio, “Gentildonne Antiche,” plate in *Habiti De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 62: Cesare Vecellio, “Antica Genovese,” plate in *Habiti De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 63: Cesare Vecellio, “Donna Venetiana,” plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 64: Cesare Vecellio, “Citelle Moderne,” plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 65: Cesare Vecellio, “Venetiane Nobili,” plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 66: Cesare Vecellio, “Moderne Venetiana,” plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 67: Cesare Vecellio, “Donne Principali,” plate in *Habiti De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 68: Cesare Vecellio, “Antica di Toscana,” plate in *Habiti De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 69: Cesare Vecellio, “Donna di Romagna,” plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 70: Cesare Vecellio, “Gentildonna da Conegliano,” plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 71: Cesare Vecellio, “Nobile Fiorentina,” plate in *Habiti De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 72: Cesare Vecellio, “Matrona,” plate in *Habiti De gli habiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



Figure 73: Cesare Vecellio, “Antiche di Cent’anni,” plate in *Habiti De gli abiti antichi et moderni di diversi parti del mondo*, 1590, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.



Figure 74: Richard Breton, “A Girl of Turkey” and “A Girl of Africa,” in *Recueil de le diversité des habits qui sont de present en vsaige tant es pays d’Europe, Asie, Affrique et Illies sauvages, Le tout fait apres le naturel*, Paris, 1562, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.

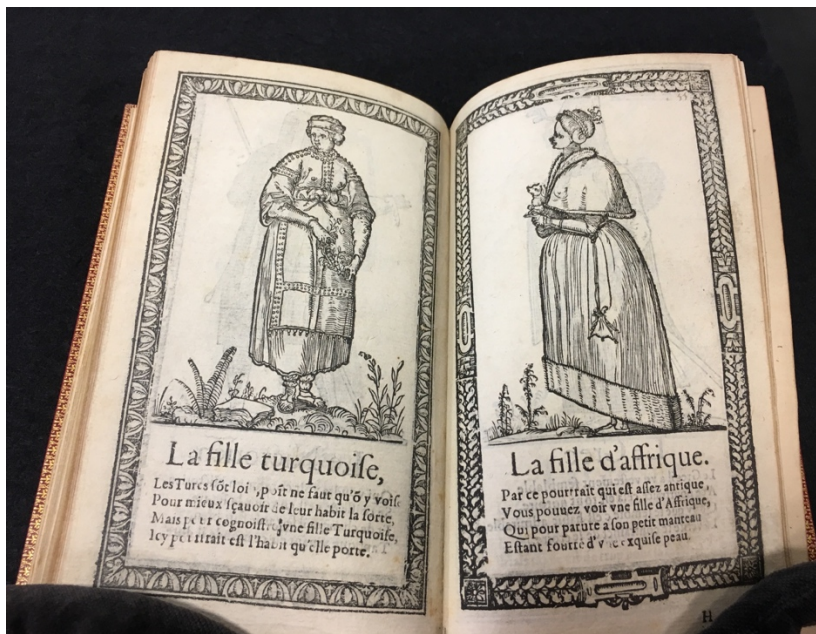


Figure 75: Richard Breton, Monsters, in *Recueil de le diversité des habits qui sont de present envsaige tant es pays d'Europe, Asie, Affrique et Illies sauvages, Le tout fait apres le naturel*, Paris, 1562, Lipperheide Library, Berlin.

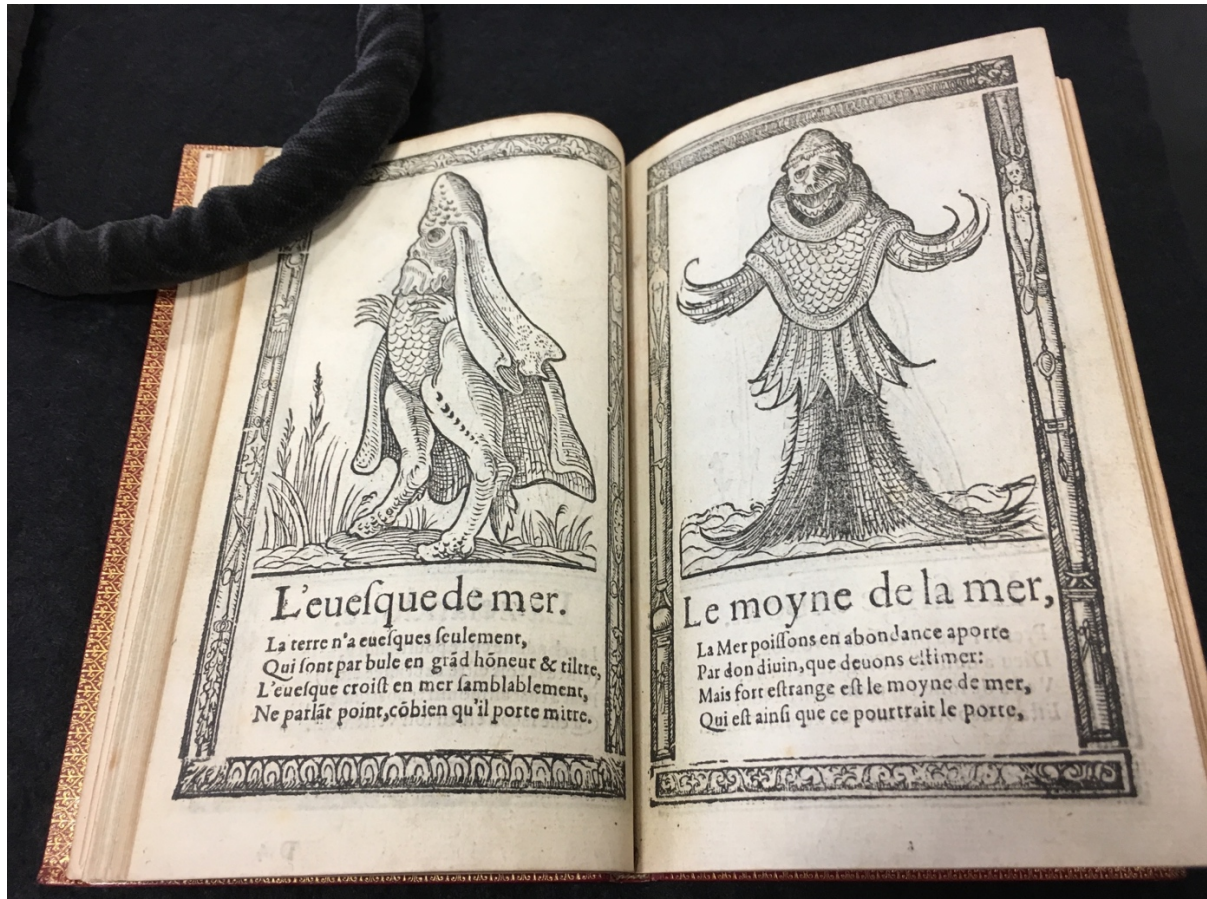


Figure 76: Raphael Sanzio, *Donna Gravida*, 1507, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

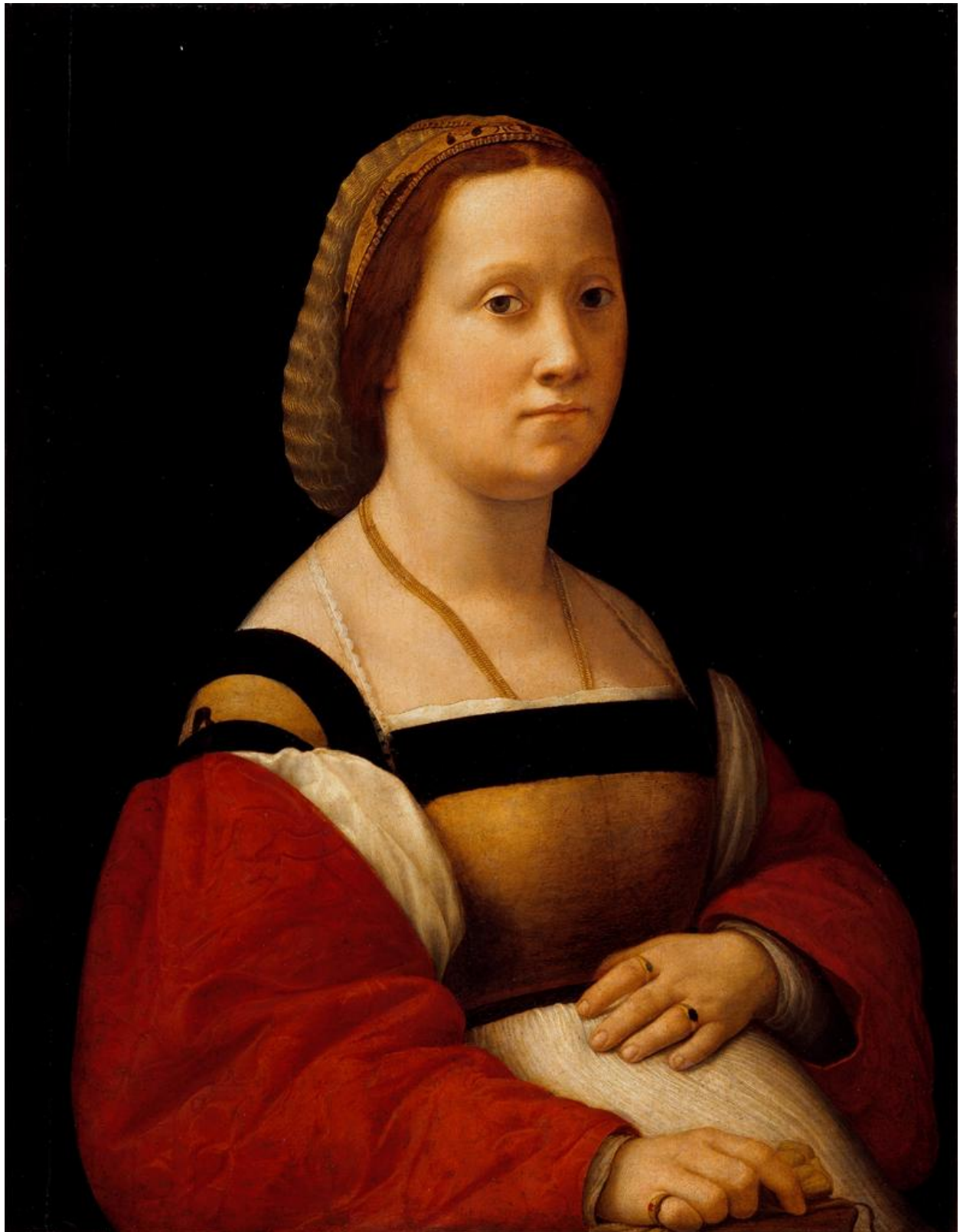


Figure 77: Raphael Sanzio, *Portrait of a Young Woman (La Muta)*, 1507-1508, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.



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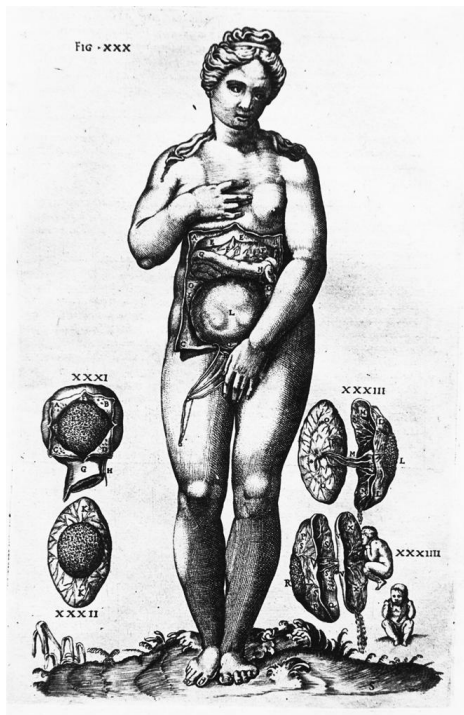


Figure 87: Raphael Sanzio, *Self-portrait with a Friend*, 1518-1519, Louvre, Paris.



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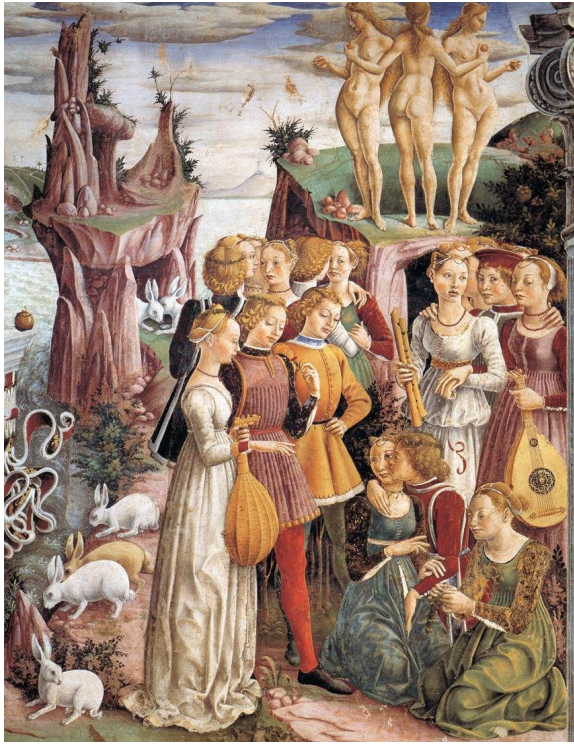


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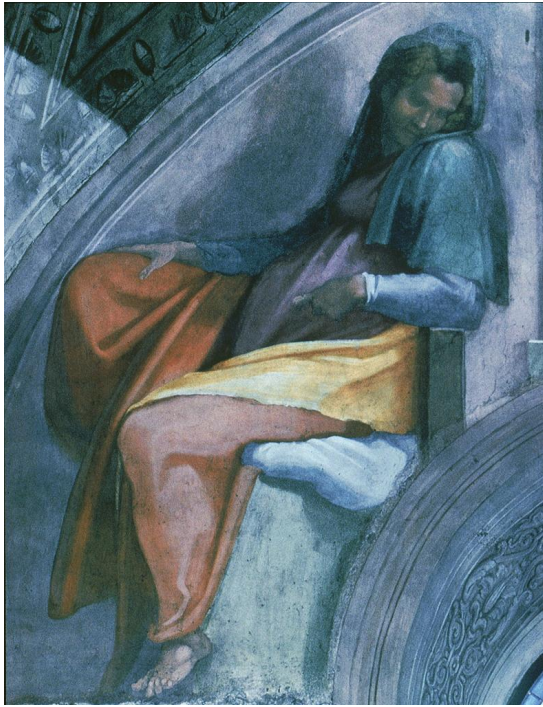


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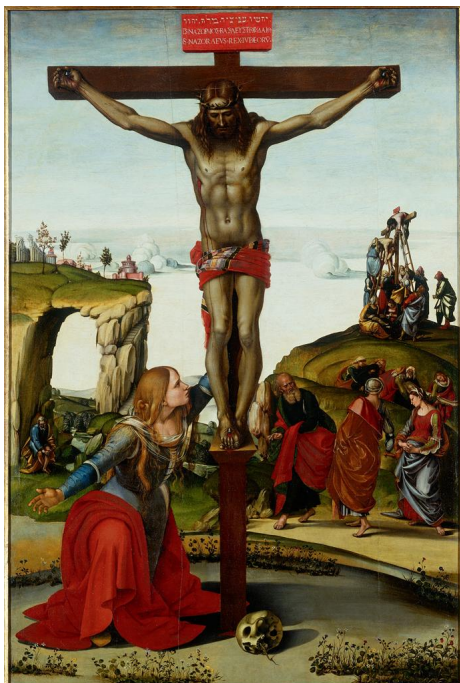


Figure 116: Master Heinrich of Constance, *Visitation*, c. 1300-1320, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.



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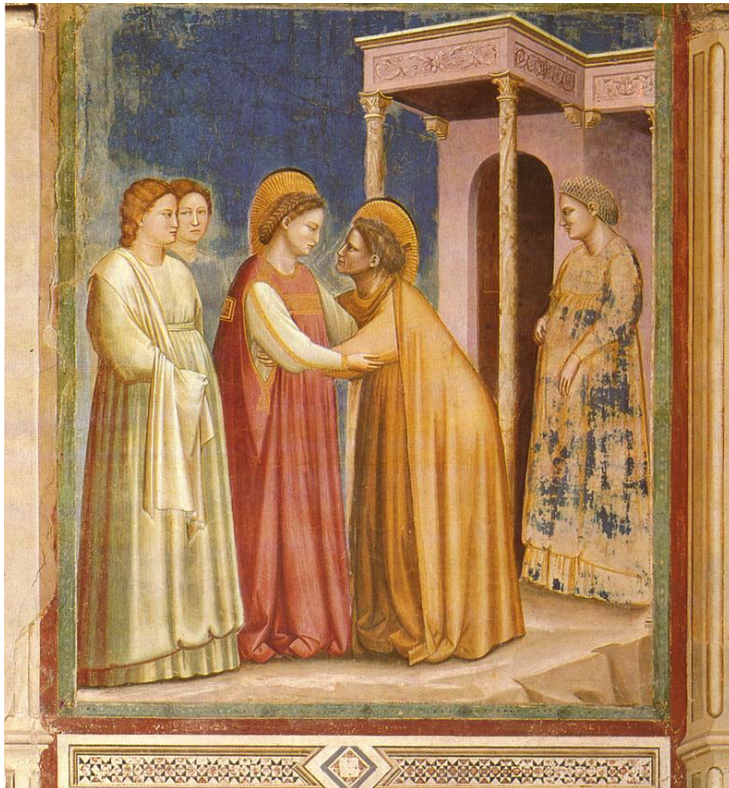


Figure 120: Giotto, *Visitation*, early fourteenth century, Basilica Superiore di San Francesco d'Assisi, Assisi.

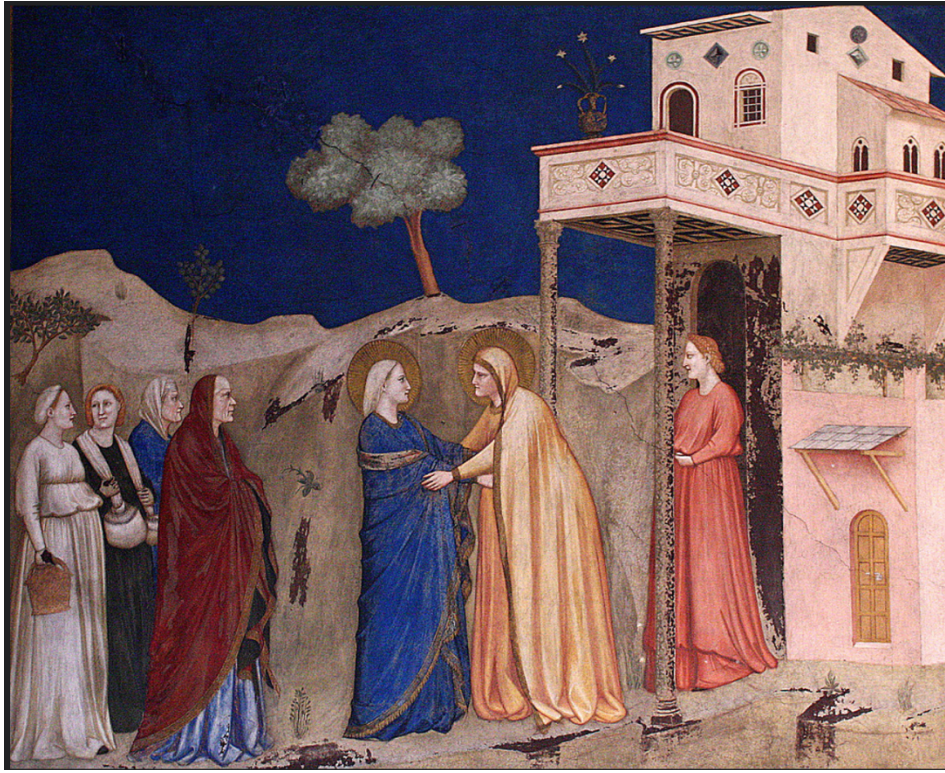


Figure 121: *Visitation*, first half of the fourteenth century, Orvieto Cathedral, Orvieto.



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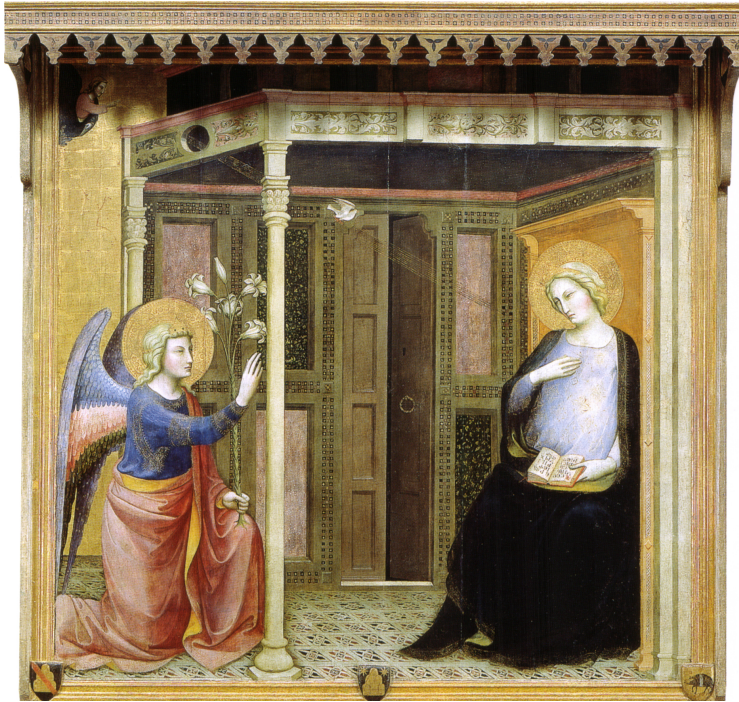


Figure 135: Matteo di Giovanni, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, probably 1474, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 136: Cosmè Tura, *Annunciate Virgin*, circa 1469, Museo del Duomo, Ferrara.



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