

A THEME OF COUNTER-REFORMATION IN WESTERN ART: MARY OF LORETO



BATI SANATINDA BİR KARŞI-REFORMASYON TEMASI: LORETO MERYEM'İ

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to examine the depictions of Mary of Loreto, as a theme that mainly found in Italian art, its emergence and relation to the religious environment of the period in which it emerged, as well as its transformations within the context of the Counter-Reformation principles. The first examples of its appearing in the period of Counter-Reformation, the theme of Mary of Loreto increased its effect throughout the same period by introducing Loreto as a Catholic center of pilgrimage. Several approaches to the Marian cult, such as the one that postulated by the Catholic Church in accordance with decisions of the Council of Trent and the approaches of the Jesuits and Franciscans are also the subjects to be discussed here, due to their important roles in the development of the cult. Following a short explanation on the legend of the Holy House (Santa Casa) in the Holy Land and the protection of Santa Casa during the Crusades, the article dwells on the architecture and the architectural decoration of Sanctuary of the Holy House (Basilica della Santa Casa) which moved from Nazareth to Loreto. Starting from the earliest examples of Mary of Loreto, the main part of the study defines the forms of the scene in terms of presentation by focusing on the development of the Marian cult within the framework of the Counter-Reformation principles. The conclusion evaluates the iconographic development of the depictions of Mary of Loreto in Italian art with regard to the same principles.

Keywords: Loreto, Madonna and Child, Italian Art, Iconography, Counter-Reformation,

Öz

Bu makalenin konusu, İtalyan sanatına özgü bir tema olarak seçkinleşen Loreto Meryem'i betimleri ve bu betim tipinin ortaya çıkışı, dönemin dinsel ortamıyla ilişkisi, ele alınan sahne şemasının gelişimi oluşturmaktadır. Loreto Meryem'i, ilk örnekleri bu

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Bu çalışma 2016'da Doç. Dr. Serap Yüzcüoğlu danışmanlığında tamamlanmış olan "Sanat Tarihinde Loreto Meryem'i Betimlerinin İkonografisi" başlıklı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

dönemde verilen, Loreto'nun Katolik Kilisesi'nin hac merkezlerine katılmasıyla İtalyan ikonografisine özgü bir temaya dönüşen ve etkisini Karşı-Reformasyon süreciyle artıran bir betim tipidir. Bunun yanı sıra Karşı-Reformasyon döneminde Trento Konsili kararları gereğince Katolik inancının öne sürdüğü Meryem kültü ve bu kültün gelişiminde önemli rol üstlenen Fransisken ve Cizvit tarikatlarının yaklaşımları ele alınan konular arasındadır. Kutsal Ev'in efsanesine ilişkin incelemenin ardından Nasıra'dan Loreto'ya taşınan Ev için inşa edilen Basilica della Santa Casa'nın (Kutsal Ev Bazilikası) mimarisine değinilmiştir. En erken örneklerinden başlayarak İtalyan sanatındaki Loreto Meryem'i betimleri ele alınmış ve gösterim biçimi açısından sahne kalıpları saptanmıştır. Karşı-Reformasyon ilkeleri bağlamında Meryem kültürünün yükselişi ve Loreto Meryem'i temasının etkili olduğu dönem üzerine odaklanılarak bu temayailişkin örnekler yer verilmiştir. Sonuç bölümünde ise, Loreto Meryem'i betimlerinin İtalyan sanatındaki ikonografik gelişimi ve Karşı-Reformasyon ilkeleri bağlamında temanın ele alınışı üzerine bir değerlendirme yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Loreto, Meryem ve Çocuk İsa, İtalyan sanatı, ikonografi, karşı-reformasyon,

Introduction

Mary of Loreto, being theme specific to Italian art, was born in the late Middle Ages borrowing many components from the iconography of Mary. The legend, which does not have a place in biblical narratives, is about the translation of the Holy House from Nazareth to the land of Italy, dates back to the late 13th century, while its iconographic depictions emerged during the 15th century. It became widespread as a propaganda element during the Counter-Reformation period and was depicted from this period until the 18th century. In 1597, the legend of Santa Casa (Holy House) was first written by the historian Father Orazio Torsellini (1545-1599) in Latin, under the name of *the History of Loreto*. According to Torsellini's text, the earliest record of the Basilica of Santa Casa in Loreto is a papal document which referred to translation of the Holy House, signed by the Pope Paul II on 1 November 1464. In addition, in the 15th century narratives of Pietro di Giorgio Tolomei (Il Teramano), who served as the director of the Santa Casa Basilica, and Carmelite priest Baptista Mantuanus (1447-1516) who visited Loreto, are other written sources of the legend. On the other hand, William Garratt's *Loreto the New Nazareth and Its Centenary Jubilee* (1895) and Godfrey E. Phillips's *Loreto and the Holy House: Its History Drawn from Authentic Sources* are the most recent sources which explain the legend of Santa Casa in detail.

The first depictions of the Marian cult of were encountered in the Roman catacombs of the 2nd century, while the cult was started to be used more frequently during the attempts of remodeling the catacombs¹ in the Late Middle Ages and also

1 Parlby, 2007, 110.

in the Counter-Reformation period. Some of the main reasons of the relative popularity of the cult is the use of *Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea* - 1275) as an important iconographic resource, a legend that has detailed description of Mary's life, and the prevalence of the Apocryphal New Testament in the Western geography with its French and German manuscripts. The Dominican, Franciscan and Jesuit orders, commissioned by the Catholic Church were also influential in the spread of Marian cult in this period. As a result, during the plagues and epidemics of the Late Middle Ages, the most well-known of them being "Black Death", and during the troubles of wars, the people asked for the help Mary, who was regarded as "the most blessed" of the saints.

The development of the depictions of Mary of Loreto is similar to the other depictions of Mary. In the 11th and 12th centuries, Mary appeared as "Maria Ecclesia", usually seen sitting on the throne, symbolizing the Church as the theocratic power, the Papacy as its center and the Pope as its representative with this type of representation.² (Fig. 1) In the 13th and 14th centuries, this theme becomes the coronation ceremony of Mary. The rising influence of aristocratic and chivalry culture in painting and literature had also an important role in such illustrations of Mary on the throne. Besides the role of Mary in Christian theology, some of the motifs that were found in themes such as "Coronation of Mary", "The Majesty", "The Immaculate Conception" and "Misericordia" were also transferred to the depictions of Mary of Loreto.

"Seven Sorrows of Mary" and "Misericordia" which are pointing to the protection of Mary, are embraced by the faithful who take shelter in the sacred people in order to alleviate their suffering and to demand healing in such disasters of war and disease. In these depictions called Misericordia; Mary, in a large and wide cloak, opens her arms to



Fig. 1: Cimabue, *Maesta*, 1285-1286, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. (Web Gallery of Art)

2 Visscher, 2007, 180.

Fig. 2:
Piero della Francesca,
Misericordia,
1460-1462, Museo Civico di
Sansepolcro.
(Web Gallery of Art)



the sides and protects the people who take shelter in her. One of the people who ask for her shelter is the donor of the painting and is presented to Mary by the patron saint. (*Fig. 2*) The Immaculate Conception is a type of depiction

which is frequently used in both the Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation period, and it means that Mary's conception was spotless and sinless. This type of depiction that emerged during the Counter-Reformation period turns into a celestial scene with the depiction of the angels descending through the clouds and with the scene of the Birth of Mary. In addition, among the more recently produced themes are the Madonna of Humility, which is a theme that emerged in Florence and Siena in the first half of the 14th century, following the scheme where Mary leans on a low pillow on the ground and showing Child Jesus looking at audience while being breast-fed him on her lap.³ This depiction, unlike *Maria Ecclesia* (or the Majesty) in which Maria sits on the throne, is more ordinary and closer to the people (or people's way of life), and takes the principle of modesty which was emphasized by the Franciscans more into account.⁴

3 Meiss, 1978, 132-133.

4 Hall, 1983, 223.

The Legend of Santa Casa (The Holy House)

The legend of Santa Casa which narrates the translation of the Holy House in Nazareth to the town of Loreto,⁵ has its origins in the time of the Crusades. In this period, the Christians built a basilica on the Holy House in Nazareth and this basilica was destroyed twice. In the first destruction in 1090, the house was not damaged and the Crusaders rebuilt the basilica. In the second destruction in 1263, the Crusaders tried to protect the Holy House, but this time they were not be able to rebuild the basilica and thus the Holy House was undefended. Historically, the period when the Holy Land is under Muslim domination is concurrent with the date on which the legend of Loreto was based. Indeed, according to the legend, when the Crusaders lost control of the Holy Land in 1291, Jesus sent the angels to the Holy House and asked them to carry the house away from the enemies at his birthland.⁶ On 12 May 1291, the angels carried the Holy House to a small town called Trsat in Dalmatia (located in the territory of Croatia), under the leadership of the archangel Michael. The town's people were surprised to see the house on a very early morning. When they entered the house, they saw the altar which was made of rock with an icon of Mary holding Child Jesus. Child Jesus, who blesses with his right hand, holds a golden globe with across in his left hand representing the world and both have crowns.⁷ A few days later, Mary appeared to a priest in this town, by explaining that the house came from Nazareth, and through the intercession of Mary, the priest, who has been ill for a long time suddenly healed and publicly revealed this miracle. Thus the Holy House became a pilgrimage site. The inhabitants of this small town also protected it by building a small structure on the Holy House. But according to the legend, the Holy House did not stay in Trsat for a long time, and it disappeared on 10 December 1294, exactly in a 3-year-and-7-months period. The people of Trsat built a replica on the same place after the disappearing of Holy House.⁸ The Holy House, after being seen in several places in the same region on 10 December of 1294, moved for the third and last time to the middle of a forest full of laurel trees before the end of 1295 and gave its name to a town in Italy. This place is Loreto, which is believed to be the place where Santa Casa (the Holy House) is located today. Loreto, the last stop of the house, is the subject of St. Francis of Assisi's prophecy, who visited the Holy House in Nazareth in 1220. Coming to Loreto after the visit to Nazareth, St. Francis of Assisi predicted that "Loreto would be one of the world's most sacred places one day". According to the legend, after the prophecy of the saint,

5 Loreto, whose origin from the Latin word "Lauretana" means the laurel tree. In the apocryphal gospel, Anna, the mother of Mary prays to God to have a child under a laurel tree (Sarıkoğlu, 2005, 50). In addition, the laurel leaves are used as victory crown in ancient times; infinity because the leaves are not spilled; and virginity for the dedication of Vestal (Ferguson, 1955, 40).

6 Phillips, 2012, 30.

7 The details of this scene (crowns, the golden globe with cross) are seen in many depictions of the Mary of Loreto, which will take place later in this work.

8 This replica church named "Lady of Trsat" continues to serve as a Franciscan church in Croatia since 1453.

seventy-four years later the Holy House moved from Nazareth to Loreto. Because of his prophecy, it is assumed that Mary had seen and had already announced Loreto to him.⁹ Based on this story, the Franciscans continue their duties there, preserving both Loreto and the basilica for centuries.

The Basilica of Santa Casa (The Holy House)

The Basilica of Santa Casa that was built in a small Ancona town of Loreto, is believed to be the protection of the Holy House. It is officially approved as a holy place with the papal certificate signed by the Pope Sixtus IV in 1491 and is considered one of the most sacred places on the pilgrimage routes of Christianity today. This building was constructed in 1468 by the bishop of Recanati Niccolo dell'Aste (? -1470) and was designed as a late Gothic church in 1469. The architects of the rectangular basilica are Giuliano da Maiano (1432-1490), Giuliano da Sangallo (1443-1516) and Donato Bramante (1444-1514). The basilica as a whole is a common product of the famous architects and painters of the period. The facade of the church, which was completed in 1587, was transformed into a Renaissance structure with the design of Antonio da Sangallo the Young (1484-1546). The bell tower, richly decorated was built by Luigi Vanvitelli (1700-1773) between 1750-54 and was a tall tower weighing eleven tons. The octagonal dome of which the construction started by Giuliano da Maiano, was completed in eight months by Giuliano da Sangallo. Its pillars strengthened by Bramante and designed under the influence of Brunelleschi, the dome carries the traces of the Cathedral of Florence. Inside the dome, the frescoes of Maccari include scenes from Litany of Loreto and the theme of Immaculate Conception. At the same time, Bramante designed and built the cross-sectioned side chapels connected to the naos. There are twelve chapels in the structure, six of which are on each side.¹⁰ Cardinal Basso della Rovere (1434-1507), during his tenure at the Basilica of Santa Casa in the 1480s, wanted to enrich the interior decoration to attract attention to the importance of the pilgrimage. According to him, the basilica had to look aesthetic as a propaganda element. He also commissioned Melozzo da Forli (1438-1494) and Luca Signorelli (1445-1523) for the decoration of these chapels between 1479 and 1489. Melozzo da Forli depicted every facade of the Chapel of St. Mark in detail with architectural details and panoramic views. On these depictions, along with the Old Testament prophets, there are angels bearing the objects associated with Jesus' passion. The main fresco in the chapel is the "Entry into Jerusalem" scene, and other depictions are elements of preparation for this main fresco. This panoramic fresco cycle complements the Holy House, which symbolizes Jesus' Incarnation doctrine. While the chapel of St. Mark represents the Holy Land, the St. John Chapel, in which Luca Signorelli worked, reaffirms the authority of the Catholic Church in the history of Christianity.¹¹ Especially the frescoes of Luca Signorelli emphasize the power of the

9 Phillips, 2012, 23.

10 Murray & Murray, 2004, 304-305.

11 Hamilton, 2008, 44.

Catholic Church by drawing attention to the defense of the church and to the period after the resurrection of Jesus. A chorus of angels is listed in the vault of the chapel, while just under the four Gospel writers; Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint Gregory and Saint Ambrose, together with the Church Fathers. These two chapels take attention to the history of Christianity (the Holy Land in the East) and the period in which the frescoes were made (the Catholic Church in the West), gathering the sacred people and doctrines under one roof, and such synthesis embodied in this place functions as a reinforcement of the faith in the cult of the Holy House. Santa Casa (Holy House) is located in the middle of the basilica as a marble structure with a square plan just below the dome. It was designed by Bramante and the reliefs covering all the facades of the structure were made by many successful sculptors of the 16th century, among are Andrea Sansovino (1467-1529), Girolamo Lombardo, Baccio Bandinelli (1493-1560), Guglielmo della Porta (1500-1577). The rich, fine reliefs on the four sides depict scenes from the Old Testament, as well as the Birth of Mary, the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Translation of the Holy House to Loreto.¹² The western wall of the Holy House is set to face the apse and the Annunciation scene which is depicted on this face. The relief of Bramante thus also refers to the knowledge that Gabriel entered the house of Mary from the window of the western wall.¹³ Thus, the architecture of the Holy House and the scenes depicted on its relief has become a design that reflects all the elements of the legend that the House in Nazareth was moved to Loreto. In addition to this, the scenes of “the Adoration of Shepherds” and “the Adoration of Magi”, touching on to the first persons who worshiped to Child Jesus, referred to the journey of the pilgrimage and the purpose of it. In a sense, the first pilgrimage center Nazareth (Holy Land) and Loreto as the new pilgrimage center of Christianity (Italy, the center of the Papacy) are brought together. Pilgrims visiting the site witness the canonical narratives and the combined legend while looking at these marble reliefs. As in how the Assumption of Mary reminds us of Mary’s victory against the death, the Translation of the Holy House emphasizes Mary’s power to show a miracle. The prophets of the Old Testament surrounding these descriptions which take the place as the foretellers telling the coming of Jesus has the role of attracting attention to the theological connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the niche equipped with the rich jewels inside the structure, there is the icon of the Black Madonna enrobed with clothes from the Dalmatian region.¹⁴ As this original icon and iconostasis were destroyed by fire in 1921, the Black Madonna exhibited today was made after the fire and crowned in 1922 by the Pope Pius XI (1857-1939).

The most well-known replica of the Basilica of Santa Casa, whose other examples were built in Europe from the 16th and 17th centuries onwards, is located in Prague named the Loreta Church. The Loreta Church was built by the commission

12 Garratt, 1895, 160.

13 Grimaldi, 1993, 147.

14 Some of the paintings of the Mary of Loreto are depicted with this icon.

of Katharina von Lobkowitz in 1626. During the government of Ferdinand II (1578-1637), the Church was commissioned in the hope to convert Protestant Bohemians to the Catholic faith again after the White Mountain War in 1620 which took place in the period of the Counter Reformation. The replica in Prague has the same marble arrangement and dimensions as the Holy House in Loreto, and is found in the courtyard of the church. After the commission, architects were sent to Loreto and a replica was asked to be constructed in the same way as in the Holy House, which takes place in the Basilica of Santa Casa. In the 17th century, the Loreto Church was one of the symbolic structures of the Counter-Reformation period by the Jesuits in order to spread the cult of Mary as a powerful propaganda element and to influence Protestant Bohemians. In their own biblical education, the Jesuits give importance to Mary of Loreto, which they see as a proof of the genuineness of the Bible.¹⁵

The Form Of Scene In The Depictions Of Mary Of Loreto

Dating back to the 13th century, the legend of the Santa Casa was reflected in Italian visual art during the 15th century. The earliest examples of these depictions called Mary of Loreto, were made as frescoes mostly by local fresco masters and this local theme is therefore depicted in the Umbria and Marche regions, which is in close proximity to Loreto. The theme, along with the Counter-Reformation movement, were preserved by the Franciscans, Jesuits and Carmelites who worked in these regions, in accordance with the decisions of the Council of Trento. The first examples of Mary of Loreto depictions, which were seen in the 15th century and became widespread during the Counter-Reformation period, can be classified as below with regard to the scene layouts and the figures they contain.

In the early examples of Mary of Loreto found in the frescoes in the churches of Perugia, the Holy House in Nazareth is represented as a kiborion-shaped¹⁶ structure. This structure, surrounded by columns, is the simplest representation of the Holy House when the later depictions of Mary of Loreto are observed. This form, which is commonly found in the frescoes of the churches in Perugia, does not include the motif of moving the house or raising it to the sky; however, the representation of the angels holding the columns of the kiborion refers to the translation. In these fresco cycles, there are usually depictions of Mary and Child Jesus on the Throne (Maesta or The Majesty) alongside Mary of Loreto. Such form, while reminding us the examples of Mary carrying Child Jesus in her arms, the depiction of standing Mary¹⁷ and the angels holding the columns on either side of the kiborion structure are the distinguishing features that define the scene as Mary of Loreto. The fresco in the Church of San Giovanni di Panaria, dating to 1400-1449, is an

15 Bulgarelli, 1990, 87.

16 Kiborion is a small baldachin overlaying the altar in the church or the cover similar to the bower (Sözen & Tanyeli, 2007, 53).

17 The other types of Mary, in which she is portrayed as standing, are The Immaculate Conception, Misericordia and Mater Dolorosa.

example of this form. (Fig. 3) In the fresco in the Church of San Giovanni Battista, where the perspective is used more profoundly, the four columns of the kiborion, in which Mary and Child Jesus are located, seem to be held tightly by the angels, while two other angels beneath the structure help the translation by supporting the structure from the bottom with their hands. This representation indicates that the house is moved towards the sky. (Fig. 4)

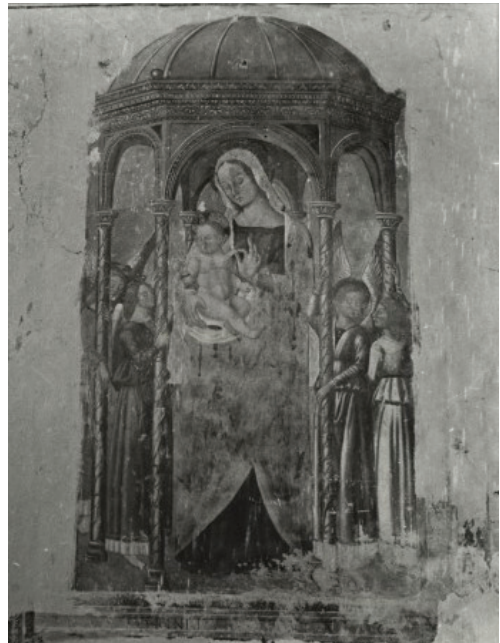
The Holy House is depicted as other architectural forms as well as the structure with kiborion in the early examples. The most common and well-known form of its representation is with a basilical church. In this schematic form, Mary and Child Jesus are depicted above the Holy House which is in the form of a basilica church and carried by the angels. An example of a 16th century local artist in the Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Bellomo in Sicily, depicts Mary and Child Jesus sitting on the Holy House and the angels carrying the house. (Fig. 5) The Holy House is a two-storey basilical structure, with a rose window and a bell tower, which is carried by three angels on the sides and by a putto from below, and this time Child Jesus is not on the lap of his mother but on the roof of the church.

One of the most remarkable example of this form is the painting of Saturnino Gatti (1463-1518) which is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. In this painting, two angels and a cherubin carry the structure above



▲ Fig. 3: *Madonna di Loreto*, 1400-1449, Church of San Giovanni di Panaria, Perugia. (Fondazione Federico Zeri)

▼ Fig. 4: *Madonna di Loreto*, 1400-1499, Church of San Giovanni Battista, Perugia. (Fondazione Federico Zeri)



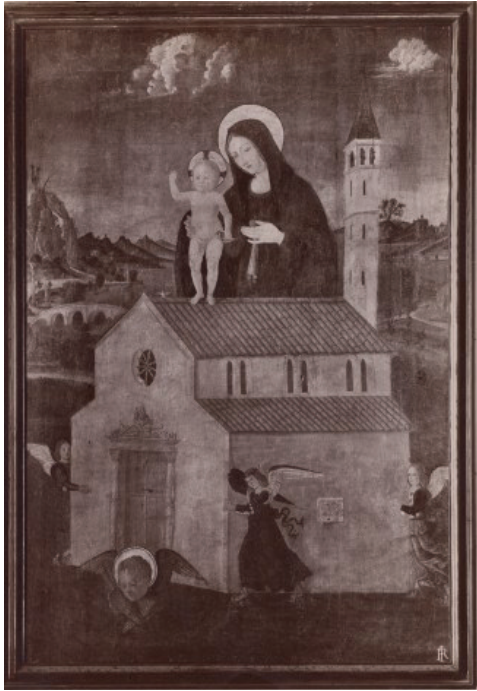


Fig. 5: *Madonna di Loreto*, 1507, Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Bellomo, Sicily. (Fondazione Federico Zeri)



Fig. 6: Saturnino Gatti, *The Translation of The Holy House of Loreto*, 1510, Metropolitan Museum, New York. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

the sea, while two other angels are crowning Mary. (*Fig. 6*) The scenes of The Coronation of Virgin, as a depiction of the coronation by Jesus or directly by God after her death and assumption while not being based on a canonical or apocryphal text, is a form of representation that became widespread in 15th century Italian painting.¹⁸ The angels, Church Fathers and the saints are also included in these scenes where the Holy Trinity is shown together from the Counter-Reformation period onwards. Unlike the first examples, Mary and Child Jesus on the Holy House and the upper angels on the clouds, displays that the translation of the Holy House is underway. Child Jesus holds a globe with cross (globus cruciger) in his hand.¹⁹ This globe with cross is a common symbol of Christianity

¹⁸ Tükel & Yüzgüller Arsal, 2014, 95.

¹⁹ According to the legend, when the Santa Casa is found on Croatian territory, the Child Jesus icon holds a globe with cross (globus cruciger) in his hand. The artist was probably informed of Il Teramano's account of the legend.

from the Middle Ages and symbolizes Jesus' (the cross) dominion over the world.²⁰ "The globus cruciger" is a symbol which is visually based in Rome and is connected with the role of Jesus as Savior (Salvator Mundi) in Western iconography, when it is held by Jesus. The work of Gatti is significant in that it includes the coronation motif.

Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), born in Bologna in 1595, was commissioned to paint "The Translation of the Holy House" by Cardinal Ludovico Madruzzo of the Council of Trento for the altar panel of the chapel which was dedicated to Mary of Loreto of the Church of Sant'Onofrio in Rome. In the picture, Mary sits above the Holy House, a flat-roofed wooden house instead of a basilical church, while the three angels carry the house, both of them - as in Gatti's painting - crown Mary. (Fig. 7) Child Jesus sitting on Mary's knee, is pouring water to those below. In the lower part of the composition, where purgatory was depicted, there is a crowd burning in flames and the pouring water is for them.²¹ The purgatory is the place that will purify the souls with more innocent sins until they encounter God, and the believers must help them by praying to those souls in Purgatory, according to the Catholic Church. Saint Peter Damian tells that on the day of the Assumption of the Virgin (August 15), many souls are released from Purgatory, while the only way the souls shorten their time in Purgatory is worshipping, and Mary helps and saves them on that day. Between 17th and 19th century, the theme of Purgatory, which is frequently seen in Italy, France, Spain and South America and which became widespread after the Council of Trento, is seen in the depictions of "Madonna and Child". While Protestantism rejected the existence of Purgatory, the Catholic Church, with the support of the Dominican, Franciscan, Jesuit and Carmelite orders, fostered belief in Purgatory and the souls there. By the commissions of these orders, the artists worked on purgatory-themed altar paintings.²² At the end of the 16th century, the depictions of Mary of Loreto accompanied by saints and often as visions of saints, began to be seen



Fig. 7: Annibale Carracci, *Translation of The Holy House*, 1605, Church of Sant'Onofrio, Rome. (CARAVAGGISTA)

20 Brubaker, 1987, 564.

21 Vasquez, 1990, 37.

22 Vasquez, 1990, 11-13.

and with the addition of the saints the form of Mary of Loreto's scenes has changed. One of the earliest examples of this form, which is shown with the Saints, is the painting by Bernardino Campi for the San Sigismondo Monastery in Cremona, from the Lombardy Atelier. (Fig. 8) In the painting, the Holy House carried by the angels was described as a small model of the Church of San Sigismondo Monastery. While Mary and Child Jesus are inside in *the mandorla*, a city view is given with bell towers at the back, and at the bottom, Saint Dominic with the bishop hat and scepter with lily presents Mary a donor looking upwards to her, who is kneeling and whose hands are folded. On the right, there is Saint Peter of Verona, a Dominican martyr who lived in the 13th century. He was martyred with an axe. The saint offered his blood to God when he was dying, and he wrote the words "Credo in Unum Deum" (I believe in a God) on the floor with his own blood, which is also depicted with a gesture.



◀ **Fig. 8:**
Bernardino Campi,
*Madonna di Loreto with
Bishop and Martyr Saint
Peter*, 1575-99, Musei
Civici di Como, Lombardy.
(Lombardia Beni Culturali)



▶ **Fig. 9:**
Madonna di Loreto, 1654-
1721, Church of San
Caterina, Comunanza,
Marche. (Fondazione Federico
Zeri)

In a 17th-century fresco in the Church of San Caterina, Mary and Child Jesus are depicted as the icon of the Black Madonna in the Basilica of Santa Casa in Loreto, while the lower part of the scene shows the souls in Purgatory, waiting for forgiveness from Mary. (Fig. 9) There is Joseph holding a stick on the right side of Mary and on the left side is the archangel Michael in armor showing the spirits in Purgatory to Mary by pointing his finger at them. It is significant that Joseph and the archangel Michael joined the theme of purgatory. Mary's being a healer also had an effect on the depictions with saints.²³ In the painting of the Italian painter Antonio Liozzi (1730-1807) for the Church of San Michele in Fermo in 1753, Mary and Child Jesus sitting on the Holy House are depicted

23 Michel de Montaigne, informs in his book *Journal de Voyage* about sick passengers (or pilgrims) who were cured miraculously at the Basilica of Santa Casa during his journey in 1580, where he described his impressions throughout his journey in Europe (Montaigne, 2012, 207-208).



Fig. 10: Antonio Liozzi, *Madonna di Loreto with Saint Nicholas*, 1753, Church of San Michele, Fermo. (Wikimedia)

with Saint Nicholas of Tolentino (1246-1305). (*Fig. 10*) Saint Nicholas of Tolentino, who lived in the 13th century, was an Augustinian Friar and a monk at the monasteries at Recanati and Ancona near Loreto. In the paintings he wears, the black Augustinian habit, radiating golden light, holding a lily in his left hand, and the star on his chest is the star that appears in his birth. He suffered from severe illnesses throughout his life, at this time he saw a vision of Mary in his sickbed. He was the patron of the souls in Purgatory and was considered to be protective against the plague like Saint Sebastian. In this painting, Saint Nicholas of Tolentino, who is observed to be pale and ill from his

expression wants healing from Mary by opening his arms towards her. In the work, the scenes of the Translation of the Holy House and the saint's request for healing from Mary were combined.

It is also possible to see the theme of Mary of Loreto in the ceiling frescoes. Giambattista Tiepolo, one of the most important artists of the Italian Baroque, carried out two works on the theme of the Translation of the Holy House, one of which is a fresco and the other one is an oil painting. The oil painting, which is located today in the J. Paul Getty Museum, is the ceiling fresco's study for the Church of Santa Maria di Nazareth in Venice. (*Fig. 11*) The original fresco was destroyed in October 1915, as a result of the bombing of Santa Maria di Nazareth in an airstrike during World War I. (*Fig. 12*) The church, belonging to the Carmelites who attached to the cult of the Holy House, is also dedicated to Mary of Loreto because of its name. The date of 10 December 1744 was the 450th anniversary of the Translation of the Holy House to Italy and the fresco was commissioned to celebrate this important day.²⁴ In a large-scale composition, the subject is the miracle of the Translation of the Holy House, which appears in the sky. In the center

24 Barcham, 1979, 440-447.



Fig. 11: Giambattista Tiepolo, *Transportation of the Holy House of Nazareth to Loreto*, 1743-45, The J. Paul Getty Museum. (Barcham, 1979, 441.)

scene in the fresco, Mary and Child Jesus sit on a modest house, and on their side, Joseph kneels on a cloud and accompanies them. He put his stick aside, raised his hands over his head as if to pray, and he thanks God. A group of angels and putti carrying the Holy House is met by the angels playing the trumpet on the right. The God (Father), surrounded by a triangular rain cloud between these concert groups, opening his arms, meets the Holy House, and thereby the Holy Family. A more complex composition appears at the bottom of the scene. The figures swinging down from the sky and the Oriental group with turbans on their heads and spears in their hands stands out. The dark figures depicted as swinging in

the space symbolizes the heretics, and the ensemble in the Oriental clothes who follow them represent the Muslims who want to harm the Holy House in Nazareth.²⁵ All these figures form a framework for the composition. The reason why Joseph takes part in the fresco was to reflect the devotion of Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) to him, one of the founders of the Carmelites, and Joseph was one of the patron saints of this order. At the same time, the existence of the Holy Family aims as a similarity to the Holy Trinity. On the top of the work, the Holy Spirit, which is represented as the white dove, God and Resurrected Jesus holding his cross in his hand have been united as the Holy Trinity. In this period, that maintains the spirit of Counter-Reformation, the relation between the sacred figures is prioritized. In the fresco, the big moon looking like a halo behind the house is interpreted as a motif pointing that the miracle happened at night.²⁶

25 Barcham, 1979, 443.

26 According to the legend, the Holy House moved to both Trsat and Loreto at night.



Fig. 12: Giambattista Tiepolo, *Transportation of The Holy House of Nazareth to Loreto*, 1743-1745, Church of Santa Maria di Nazareth, Venice. (before 1915) (Piovene, 1967, 109.)



Fig. 13: Caravaggio, *Madonna di Loreto*, 1603-1605, Church of Sant'Agostino, Rome. (Web Gallery of Art)

The Oriental figures representing the Muslims in the work, also refer to the relationship between the historical events and the fresco. Around 1650, the Venetian Republic asked for the help of the Carmelites in the face of the threat of the Ottoman and in the struggle with them. The Carmelites' defense and their deep devotion to the Christian faith were proved effective against the Ottomans. Therefore, the order both won new disciples and intimidated heretics. In this fresco, the representation of Muslims in Nazareth makes them a witness to this miracle. This work of Giambattista Tiepolo presents a multi-component design that brings together the legend, the theology and the historical events.

The painting *Madonna di Loreto* of Caravaggio (also known as *Madonna dei Pellegrini*, *Madonna of Pilgrims*) presents a completely different and unique scene compared to the typical depictions of the Mary of Loreto showing the Translation of the Holy House. (Fig. 13) In the work of Caravaggio, Mary of Loreto's face is illuminated from a place of unknown origin and she is portrayed as a peasant woman in front of a

typical Roman house door with Child Jesus in her arms. Only the entrance of the house and the steps is seen and with the cracked walls the poverty highlighted. In the step under the part of Mary, there is one male and one female figure kneeling, they pray to her and they carry sticks; this indicates that they are pilgrims. The female pilgrim wears a dirty and worn cap, while the male one has dirty feet after a long pilgrimage and their untidy aspect while kneeling emphasizes their need for and devotion to Mary.

Caravaggio's unique style which is distant from idealization is observable especially on the dirty and callous feet of pilgrims. Mary, as barefooted, has no sacred appearance except for her halo, and her posture is attributed to the concept of depiction in classical sculptures. On the other hand, the cause of the disturbance related to the work at that time is the pose of the model and model used by Caravaggio for Mary. His model was Maddelena Antognetti, well-known as Lena in Rome. She had affairs with many men and had been in trouble with the law many times as a gold digger. Lena, was one of the "Women of Caravaggio" and in the painting she holds her illegitimate son Paolo, born in 1602, presented as Child Jesus. The opposition of the ordinary people, who were represented as the pilgrims in this painting, was because they deem it unacceptable to be praying and worshipping in front of such an immoral figure, rather than philosophical and religious questions.²⁷ From the perspective of our subject, the most striking feature that makes the work an original interpretation is that the Holy House is represented only by the door of a house and Mary and Child Jesus are shown in front of the house, not on the house. In addition, it does not include the motif of the translation, the most typical characteristic motif of the depictions of Mary of Loreto. For this reason, as in many of Caravaggio's works, *Madonna di Loreto* can be regarded as an original interpretation in the context of the depictions of Mary of Loreto.

Conclusion

As discussed above, the theme of Mary of Loreto came from a legend originated in the 13th century but was written in the 15th century. It is the source of the emergence of a pilgrimage center in the town of Loreto near Ancona in Italy. This theme, which is seen only in Italian art, is the visual equivalent of the legend of Santa Casa, supported by St. Francis of Assisi and has been one of the propaganda element of the Counter-Reformation movement used by the Franciscans and the Jesuits at the end of the 16th century.

In the 16th century, Mary of Loreto was described by the High Renaissance and then Baroque artists with commissions of noble families and orders connected to Catholic Church. Although Mary of Loreto emerged as a theme on local scale, it was interpreted by the most famous painters of its period such as Annibale Carracci, Caravaggio and Giambattista Tiepolo. Mary of Loreto, is a theme which could be classified in several iconographic groups and the reason for this is that these descriptions were made for

²⁷ Marini, 2006, 136.

different purposes. Some depictions focus only on the legend, while others represent a scene of vision with saints and take attention to details such as the healing of Mary of Loreto. The earliest examples in 15th century are the representations of the Holy House in a kiborion form, in later years it became a flat-roofed house and even turned into a church form. The Late Medieval period in which Mary of Loreto emerged was a period when the new themes of Mary was started to be seen in Western iconography. In this period, the theme of Mary of Loreto with the effective power of the Counter-Reformation was painted along with depictions such as Sacre Conversazione (Holy Conversation), the Coronation of Mary and the Purgatory, all of which were also the effective themes of that period. With the combination of all these themes, both Mary of Loreto and the most influential doctrines of the Council of Trento allowed Catholicism to become more stronger.

Thus the legend of Santa Casa has become an extension of the Canonical Bible stories both visually and literarily. During this period when resources other than canonical or apocryphal texts were also significant in Western iconography, this legend about the translation of the Holy House from Nazareth to Loreto expressed with Teramano's local and Ricci's universal depictions, reveals the power of the religious and political attachment that the Papacy lost in the Holy Land. These expressions about the translation from Holy Land to Italy, which are dear to Catholic Church, recovered the once lost connection about the origin of Christianity.

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Sources of The Visual Materials

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- Fig. 3: *Fondazione Federico Zeri |Universita Di Bologna| Catalogo Fototeca*: <http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/> (Accessed in 10.05.2016)
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