A Source for Rubens’s Modello of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin: a Case Study in the Response to Images

Apart from its pictorial brilliance, what is striking about the modello is its iconographic originality. As in all his later representations of the Assumption, Rubens has here combined the group of apostles surrounding the Madonna’s tomb with a number of female figures. While these women are not usually shown to be present at the actual scene of the Assumption, nor are described thus in any of the textual sources, their inclusion may be explained by the fact that they were said to have been present at the funeral of the Virgin, after having washed and shrouded her body. The rolling away of the stone cover of the sepulchre (here inscribed MARIA) is also unusual, and so is the absence—or relative lack of prominence—of the sarcophagus in which she was laid to rest. But what is most unusual in the modello is the upper half of the composition. It is true that the angels (and their variety) are emphasized in all the accounts and commentaries, and the fact that the Virgin is on Christ’s right depends on the reading from the forty-fourth psalm in the liturgy for the Feast of the Assumption. But what exactly is the scene? Is it an Assumption of the Virgin, a Coronation, or both? We know that in all Rubens’s later Assumptions the Virgin ascends heavenwards towards a sculpted figure of Christ, God, or the Trinity placed outside the painting. But here she kneels at the feet of Christ. If the scene is a Coronation, then it is surprising to find the Virgin being crowned by Christ alone— for ever since the beginning of the fifteenth century, the standard Netherlandish Coronation was effected

one of the standard art-historical exercises is the search for the pictorial sources of individual works of art. The purpose of this article is to suggest that this exercise need not constitute an end in itself, as it usually does, but that it can yield valuable information about the status of an image in a given social context and about the response it evokes. Rubens’s modello of The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin in Leningrad1 (Fig. 2) raises a number of iconographic problems; these in turn are largely resolved by the discovery of an important pictorial source for the work. That source and its relation to the work by Rubens may be used as an illustration of some of the ways in which it is possible to determine the associations which the seventeenth-century beholder made when looking at works of art—even when they were not actually recorded by the beholder himself. While it can never be possible to recover the full range of such associations—because many would have been too personal and idiosyncratic—the art historian may regard it as his province to reveal at least some.

The Leningrad modello has been shown beyond reasonable doubt to have been one of the two projects which Rubens presented to the Cathedral Chapter on 22nd April 1611 for the High Altar of Antwerp Cathedral.2 It is also likely that the painting of The Assumption of the Virgin in Vienna3 (Fig. 3), which reproduces the bottom half of the Leningrad composition, and which comes from the Lady Chapel of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp, was originally intended for the High Altar of the Cathedral.4

* I am indebted to Michael Hirst for a number of pertinent observations on several of the issues raised here, and to Elizabeth McGrath for a critical reading of a late draft of the text. The Central Research Fund of the University of London made a grant towards the costs of research. The same source as the one discussed here was noted by T. L. GLEN: Rubens and the Counter Reformation. Studies in His Religious Paintings between 1609 and 1620, New York [1977; originally presented as the author’s thesis, Princeton University, 1975], p. 151, which appeared after this article was written. But the purpose of the present discussion is not simply to identify a source for Rubens’s composition; it is to examine some of the implications of this kind of relationship.


3 Oil on Panel, 458 by 297 cm.; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Inv. No. 518.


* These are usefully gathered together in J. FOURNÉE: ‘Himmelfahrt Mariens, Lexion der Christlichen Ikonographie, II [1970], cols. 276-77.


* Golden Legend, ed. cit., pp. 90, 94, 101 (Cherubim and Seraphim); cf. also notes 36 and 38 below.


* Cf. ROOSES, op. cit., II. No. 335, pp. 168-69 (Vienna); No. 358, pp. 170-72 (Düsseldorf); No. 359, pp. 173-80 (Antwerp); the circumstantial evidence that this also applies to the paintings in Brussels (KL. d. K. [1921], p. 120), Augsburg (Ibid., p. 300) and Liechtenstein (Ibid., p. 352) is considerable. At this point it should be added that the adoption of the lower half of the Leningrad modello and the rejection of the upper half for the painting first intended for the High Altar (i.e. the picture in Vienna) may have been due to the unusual nature of the iconography discussed here, but it may also have been as a result of a decision by the Cathedral Chapter to have a sculpted figure or group crowning the Virgin, as in all the later works listed above.
A SOURCE FOR RUBENS'S MODELLO OF THE ASSUMPTION AND CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

by the whole Trinity.10 What, then, is the particular iconographic moment that Rubens has chosen to depict, and on what could he have based his representation? Such questions may be regarded as splitting hairs about the meaning of a scene which is, after all, not very difficult to interpret. Rubens presumably knew Ludovico Carracci's altar-piece of 1601 in Corpus Domini in Bologna, which also shows the reception of the Virgin into heaven accompanied by music-making angels, as well as several other elements used by Rubens in his later Assumptions.11 But a specific answer is provided by the penultimate plate (Fig.6) in Jerome Nadal's Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia, of which the illustrated section is entitled Evangelicae Historiae Imagines.12 Hieronymus Wierix's engraving (after Bernardo Passeri)13, provides not only the source of Rubens's composition, but also the key to the precise theme it represents. As the engraving by Wierix occurs in the sequence of four plates (Nos.150–53) devoted to the various stages in the Death, Burial, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin, it also clarifies the position of this particular moment in the sequence.14 It is the third in the series, and is entitled Sussitatur Virgo Mater a Filio, while it is only the following plate which combines the scenes of the actual Assumption and Coronation (Fig.5). The textual discussion of this plate (as well as the caption on the plate itself) refers to the event as the reception of the Virgin into heaven by her Son.15 I do not want to suggest that Rubens himself wished to distinguish consciously between the various stages in the sequence of events leading up to the Coronation of the Virgin in the way that Nadal did, nor that he intended his painting to be given the same title as Hieronymus Wierix's print. It is likely that he did not, and he may simply have used the print because it seemed a pictorial invention which suited the iconographic terms of his commission. But there can be no doubt of Rubens's indebtedness to it, for the puzzling top half of his composition at any rate (despite some differences, the bottom half comes closer to traditional forms). Not only is the Virgin placed on a lower level on Christ's right (as required by the text cited above) in almost identical poses and the same relation to each other, but the arrangement of clouds and angels is strikingly similar. On the lower bank of clouds are the younger putto-like angels (represented by heads only in the print), while the older ones are arranged on clouds which extend diagonally to the topmost corners of the print, exactly as in the work by Rubens. Admittedly, they do not play musical instruments in the engraving, but their music-making activity is insisted upon a number of times by both the annotations and the explanatory text.16 It should perhaps be noted that Wierix's print presents the Virgin's sepulchre as securely closed (in contrast to Rubens, who shows the rolling away of the stone), and she stands on the crescent.17 But for the rest the similarities are very close.18

In itself the relationship between Rubens's modello and the Wierix print is not an especially significant discovery; but the immediate context of the print has wide-ranging implications, especially in terms of the issues raised at the beginning of this discussion.

Nadal's book, written at the instigation of St Ignatius himself,19 may at first sight seem to be only one of the many aids to meditation which were published in the wake of the Spiritual Exercises.20 But (as Thomas Buser has recently

12 These plates were first published separately in 1599, but the editio princeps of the work as a whole was HIERONYMUS NATALIS: Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia, et in saeculo missae sacrificio, uti annum legatur, cum evangeliorum concordantia historiae integritati subjicitius. Accedit Index historiarum [post Evangelicam in ordinem imporxis Vitae Christi distributum]. M. Nutius, Antwerp [1599]. Fol.; but a later edition, published by the Planen press in 1607, will be referred to here — not only because it is chronologically closer to the work by Rubens, but also because it is a revised and corrected version (Editio ultima, in qua Sacer Textus ad emendationem Bibliorum Ss. et Clementis VIII restitutus) with an additional preface to be discussed here. For the various editions (and on Nadal himself), see the basic work by M. BARAU: Jeronimo Nadal, S.I. (1507–1580), sive obus et doctrinas espirituales, Madrid [1949], pp.114–31, where information about the genesis and posthumous publication of the book may also be found. See now, for a recent assessment of its significance, T. BUSER: 'Jeronimo Nadal and Early Jesuit Art in Rome', The Art Bulletin, LVIII [1976], pp.424–25, with still further bibliographical material.
13 The size of each plate is 230 by 155 mm. Almost all the plates in the book were by Wierix after drawings by Bernardo Passeri, 126 of which are at Windsor Castle (L. VAN PUYVELDE: The Flemish Drawings at Windsor, London [1948], No.156).
14 For the participation of Marten de Vos in this project, see L. VAN PUYVELDE: 'Bernardo Passeri, Marten de Vos and Hieronymus Wierix', in Scurti di storia dell'arte in onore di Lionello Venturi, II, Rome [1956], pp.59–64; but see also ALFONSO RODRIGUEZ G. DE CERULLAS: 'Las “Imágenes de la Historia Evangelica” del P. Jeronimo Nadal en el marco del jesuitismo y la contrariforma', Trazas y Baza [1974], 84–85.
15 A not altogether dissimilar division into the different stages of scenes usually conflated may be found in the plates devoted to the Entry into Jerusalem (PL.85–87), the Carrying of the Cross (PL.124–25, and even the Three Martyrs at the Sepulchre (PL.135–36). All of these may naturally be used to determine the precise iconographic moment of other representations of these subjects, as in the case of the subject painted by Rubens under discussion here.

16 NATALIS, p.386: Excipit illum Filium Deus Deae lunae effectus, & immensa gratulatione (more briefly on the plate as Excipit eum Christus gratulatione maxima).
17 See below, p.435. These angels are repeated — almost as if this modello were a preliminary study — in the panels of the Music-making Angels in Liechtenstein (Kl. d. K. [1921], p.66).
18 In reference to the Virgin as the Apocalyptic Woman, ‘Mulier amicta sole et luna sub pedibus eius et in capite eius corona stellarum duodecim’ (Apoc. 12:1).
19 Although the holy women — whose presence is explicable on the iconographic grounds referred to in note 6 above — are absent in the engraving, it should be noted that they are present in the two preceding scenes of the Death and Burial, (PL.150–51). In the light of their presence there, Rubens may have felt there was no reason to omit them at the very following event — apart from the aesthetic grounds he may have had for their inclusion.
stressed the significance of this popular work lay in the emphasis placed on the illustrations and on their rôle in the meditative process. These illustrations, of which there are 153 grouped together at the end of the text, were each provided with a sequence of letters (usually between four and six) placed close to the chief incidents or elements in the composition. The captions below each print in turn provided a short explanation of these letters. But the real importance for the reader of this system of annotation only becomes apparent when one consults the text. This is divided into chapters (arranged according to the gospel readings of the entire year) bearing the same titles as the illustrations. Each chapter (conceived as a meditatio) contains, in the first place, a short adnotatiuncula corresponding to the caption beneath the relevant print. There then follows a much longer adnotatio which, although it is still arranged according to the letters on the print, contains an expanded meditation on each of the elements therein, as well as on the print as a whole.

How, then, was the book intended to be used? What was the rôle assigned to the illustrations? It is worth asking these questions, not only because this system of annotation was adopted, whether in a modified form or not, in a whole series of some of the most popular devotional works in the Netherlands but also because it provides an insight into an important aspect of the function of images in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Fortunately, an almost complete answer to these questions may be found in the two prefaces (or the foreword and the preface) to the text. The first, to Clement VIII and signed by Jacobus Ximenes (Diego Jiménez), makes it clear that the work was originally intended for members and novices of the Jesuit order, with the illustrations to be used as an aid to meditation. What is significant, however, is the concern displayed for the quality of the illustrations: deliberate care was taken that they should not be engraved by an unattractive hand, and cause boredom by the very multitude of images. They were to be as skilled, elegant and attractive as possible, and by the best possible artists, in order to encourage assiduous meditation. To achieve the required quality, great expense was involved, and a number of difficulties encountered in the process, but these were finally overcome. Here is a clear statement of the validity and purposes of art in a religious context, in an age when — certainly from a Protestant point of view and usually from a Catholic — pictorial imagery was consistently underplayed in favour of a renewed emphasis on words, or specific texts.

What is important here, and without which this work would be unthinkable, are the illustrations. They are to be the very basis of the meditative process — and one is dealing here with real images, not the mental images of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. It is an awareness of the fact that art preceded the calling up of mental images.

The second preface (to the reader; present in the edition of 1607 but absent in the earlier ones) makes it clear that the work had now been adapted for wider circulation. And because further guidelines might be needed on how to meditate on each image (and on what, therefore, to think), the decision was taken to include an adnotatio not only below each picture but also an expanded one in the body of each chapter, along with the appropriate section from the Gospel. It is precisely these adnotationes which enable the art historian to gain some idea of how the seventeenth century ‘read’ these images; and with the Life of Christ divided into 153 different scenes one is thus provided with an insight into how almost every religious representation within this cycle would have affected the beholder, and what sorts of associations were open to him.

In the case of the image to which Rubens was indebted in the Leningrad modello, the print headed Suscitatur Virgo Mater a Filio (Fig.6) is, as we have noted, the third of four scenes dealing with the Virgin. We need not here deal with the first two, illustrating the death and burial of the Virgin, but it should be noted that all four scenes are dealt with in the final and longest section of the text, subsumed under the general heading of The Assumption of the Virgin. Fifty-three closely printed folio pages of double column text deal with this subject as a whole. But to return to the adnotatio to the particular print under discussion. Here the explanatory caption of the print (and the identical adnotatiuncula in the text) is expanded by the addition of words and whole phrases, which not only enlarge the description of the various elements in the scene, and call into play a range of purely theological associations, but are also sensual and emotive.


But see the proviso regarding psychological associations at the conclusion of the first paragraph here, as well as those engendered by the aesthetic aspects of the work of art on p.441 below. I am aware that much of what follows could be found in any number of texts, ranging from patristic sources through medieval devotional practices to seventeenth-century meditational handbooks. But we are here concerned specifically with an audience such as Rubens might have had — even though they might, either consciously or unconsciously, have been acquainted with related manifestations of the same tradition.
The *adnotatio* is deliberately calculated to help the reader realize the emotional qualities which the image is likely (or supposed) to arouse. This may be achieved quite simply, as in the case of the annotation to the sepulchre of the Virgin (marked B on the print), where the simple caption ‘Christ rouses his Mother from the closed tomb and heaps the greatest gifts upon her body and soul’ becomes ‘He (re)joins the soul of his Mother with her body, and both body and soul are filled with the most excellent honours and gifts; and straightway he brings his Mother forth from the closed tomb’.33 The piling up of synonyms (which may of course be found in other devotional treatises, especially Jesuit ones) and the addition of evocative words (here simply ‘straightway’) are intended to stir the emotions of the beholder and are carried to a greater pitch in the annotations which follow. When one looks upon the Virgin (here marked by the letter C) one sees her ‘coming forth with the most radiant garment of immortality, adorned with glory, surrounded by a variety of honours and gifts, golden and blessed . . .’34 ‘The Son welcomes his Mother [D on the print between the two figures, indicating the act of welcoming] with ineffable happiness and immense joy’.35 When one’s eyes turn to the hosts of angels (E), one observes that ‘they and all the other blessed spirits pay homage and do reverence to her, the Queen and Mistress of heaven and all the Earth, the Mother of omnipotent God’.36 While Rubens has omitted the crescent on which the Virgin stands, his portrayal of the Assumption and the resurrection of Christ emphasizes the relationship of the Virgin to each of the persons of the Trinity: she kneels before the Father with whom she conceived her eternal son, before the Son whom she conceived, gave birth to, fed and nourished, before the Holy Spirit cuius operatione . . .38

While it is not necessary to suggest that Rubens followed precisely this text, it should be borne in mind that in these respects all his paintings of the *Assumption* follow it far more closely than do the engravings by Wierix. There are, it is true, some additional elements in the paintings, like the miracle of the roses (an attractive part of the tradition found in the *Golden Legend*39 which Rubens found difficult to resist),

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88 *Clauso sepulcro suscitat Matrem, animam eius & corpus maximi demis cumulat*.
89 *Annam Matri corpori unit, & replet excellentissimis deis ac ditibus & anima & corpus; ac statum & cælo sepulcro Matrem educit*, NATALIS, op. cit., p.586.
90 *Exspect illum Filium Deus laetiis insinabit, & immensa gratulatione*, Ibid.
91 *Hil obediendum & reverentiam exhibeat Angeli & ali biest spiritus omnes, Reginarum ac Dominiar coeli suique orbis universi, Matri Dei omnipotentis*, Ibid.
92 *For an effective attempt, see the discussion of the relationship between certain Italian devotional handbooks and paintings of the Annunciation in M. RANZONI, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy, Oxford [1972], pp.45-56.
93 *Circumvolant Angelicae omnium ordinum cohortes cum sanctis altis spiritibus psallentes ac sublantes*. Cum hoc triumpho praelarissimissimo, caelestis, divino exhibito ad caelum empyream Virgo Dei puerum: ei Angeli, & species creatas gubernant, & caelorum motores transuncti genuo cœravit, & obedientiam deferunt Regiae suae & Dominæ*, NATALIS, op. cit., p.587.
94 *Genibus nixa divina Virgo adorat trium Deum & unum: Patrem, cui Filium aeternum genuisset, eumdem ipsi dedita generavit; Filium quem conciperat, genuerat, lactaverat, nutraverat, subdum in terris habuerat & obedieniam; Spiritum sanctum, cuius operatione & virtute Filii Dei conceperat*, Ibid.; Something like these notions may also be found in earlier texts — compare, for example, the *Golden Legend*, ed. cit., p.100.
95 As quoted in the preceding note; but cf. also note 60 below.
96 **Aperit septulchro corpus non inenarravit, sed ea tactummodo, cum pulvis fusi composi tum & sepulrum**, NATALIS, op. cit., p.587; Again cf. p.439 below, and note 68.
97 Cfr. also the *Golden Legend*, ed. cit., p.104.
98 *Simul fuerunt odoris suscitatae admirabilis repleti ex sepulchro spirantis. Ad caelum igniar soulae & corporis & mentis attulentis toti fuerunt in contemplatione restituitatique, assumptionis, & gloriae Virginis beatissima* (continues the quotation in the preceding note).
99 The *Golden Legend*, ed. cit., p.89.
but these would only have served to enhance the associations – in this case, for example, of the sweet smell coming from the tomb – indicated by Nadal's text.

All this is followed in the last chapter of the book by a long final meditation De Virginis Deiparae Laudibus. In its forty-eight pages (pp.506–636) every aspect of the Virgin's Assumption is dwelt upon in a series of headed paragraphs. Every possible relationship is brought into play, every possible epithet used to describe the Virgin or the significance of the event. Here, for example, may be found the whole range of references to the Song of Solomon, the Old Testament text most frequently drawn upon for its sensual prefiguration of the Virgin and her relationship with Christ, God, and the Trinity (it is worth recalling that the basis for the identification of the Leningrad modello with the project of 1611 is the fact that Otto van Veen's rival modello represented 'Christ calling his bride from Lebanon to be crowned', in other words the Coronation of the Virgin – referred to, as it often was, in terms of the Song of Songs). Certain passages are analysed at extraordinary length. Each word of the phrase Ecce tu pulchra es is elaborated into an expansion of the idea contained in the sentence as a whole, in an almost scholastic way. Indeed, the Virgin's beauty forms the main burden of many of these paragraphs, in a manner that seems to the present-day reader to call out for pictorial realization. And so it seemed to Nadal as well, as we may judge from the prefaces. He realized, in a way that the writers of other meditational works did not, that pictorial images could take priority over literary ones, and could be used to stimulate the further visualization of everything that was written out at length in these pages. The chapter concludes by listing not only the evangelical but also the patristic statements related to the Assumption, and emphasizes the inevitable parallelism between the Virgin and the Church (the Virgo Ecclesia relationship). One could scarcely wish for fuller evidence of the possible range of associations available to the beholder of the images of the Assumption with which we have here been concerned.

The importance of Nadal's work lies in its use of detailed illustrations and the relationship of text to image. But there are other meditational handbooks of the time which, even if they are not illustrated themselves, may be used to cast light on the response to images. It is not only for this reason, but also because several aspects of Rubens's paintings which do not feature prominently in Natalis are further clarified, that it seems worth examining one such handbook. We may turn to one of the many works by Francisius Costerus,51 De Vita et Laudibus Deiparae Mariae Virginis Meditationes Quinquaginta, in order to supplement the evidence of Nadal, as well as to demonstrate the relationship of the latter with other writers of the time.

The preface to this work insists on the correct method of contemplation – which it then spells out – but in doing so draws a parallel with the various ways of responding to painted pictures. One could of course respond on different levels, from the superficial to the profound. Coster puts it briefly: 'Just as it is of great import whether we look at a painting casually or intently, in passing or directly, atten-
vatively or thinking of something else, whether we are moved or we admire the art, so it is of great importance that we meditate on the Virgin with a definite method'. How did this 'method' operate? Although it is spelt out in rather diffuse detail in this preface, it is systematically exemplified, with great precision, in the body of the text. The subject of each of the fifty meditations is carefully divided into its constituent elements. These are further subdivided according to the various issues they raise: every moment in the event and every emotional juncture is considered, in a strict system of enumeration. Each subdivision beings with the injunction 'Consider', followed by a series of numbers. It is a method (whose origin may be found in medieval handbooks such as those attributed to St Bonaventure as well as in the practice of meditating on the Rosary) which demands that the reader calls up before himself a specific mental image; and this image then provides the basis for meditation. It is the same function which is assigned to the composizione viendo el lugar of the Ignatian exercises. By these means, therefore, the work compensates for its lack of physical images; and the system of numbering each division (i.e. each image) and

51 On Costerus (recte di Coster, 1559–1619) see R. Neefs in Biographie Nationale de Belgique, V. Brussels [1876], cols. 11–16, with an extensive listing of the works by him, and R. Hardeman: Francisius Costerus Vlaamse Apostel en Volksredenaar, Alken [1933].

52 FRANCICUS COSTERUS: De Vita et Laudibus Deiparae Mariae Virginis Meditationes Quinquaginta, Ingolstadt, David Sartorius [1588], 12° (with an Antwerp Approbatio of 1587).

53 This distinction seemed to be especially important to theological commentators on art in general in the sixteenth century; in the case of an artist such as Rubens it must have seemed crucial (although a modern observer might argue against the existence of the distinction at all). For a similar concern over the possibility that the beholder might be more aesthetically than spiritually moved, cf. the remarks at the end of the Preface to the Reader in Nadal's work: 'ad spiritualum fructum . . . non satis esse imagines curiosae persolvere, aut illorum artem & pulchriorum admirari; sed in singulis esse tibi singulos, vel etiam plures dies insistendum, Adnotationum capita sententia perlegenda, meditandum, contemplandum omnes denique orationes partes exercendae . . .'. For reservations about the effects of works of art by other writers in the sixteenth century, see my article cited in note 26 above.

54 Lam vero, sicul formulum referit, quoniam externos oculis pictam tabulam inueniatis, lesist, an fox; oblique an dirc; attentia an alid cogitatis; ut movaris, an ut artem admireris: etsi ad utilitatem nostram multum interest, ut certa methodo haec de Virginie meditationes insitiusam, affectusque in nobis variis excitamur,' Costerus, op. cit., p.15

Meditat. com. baud aucto, etiam plures dies insistendum, Adnotationum capita sententia perlegenda, meditandum, contemplandum omnes denique orationes partes exercendae . . .


much in a similar a mood in the Spanish mystics. The joy of this reunion having been considered, the second consideration is the glorious entry of the Virgin into Heaven, the third consideration her welcome by the heavenly hosts (with more references to the Song of Songs). We wonder at 1: the glory accorded to her by the sterile world (an allusion to the desert referred to in Canticles 6 and 8), 2: the spiritual delights gained thereby, 3: the honour she deserves in heaven.

The next section of this meditation on the Assumption, De Corpore non intenso which is of more direct relevance to the Leningrad modello. It deals with Thomas's doubt about the (official her passage from the closed tomb) and explains that once the sepulchre was opened, 'nothing was found except the funeral shroud', in which Christ too had been wrapped. Here is a sufficient explanation for the rolling away of the tombstone in the Leningrad modello, and the careful representation, in all Ruben's Assumptions, of the examination of the shroud.

The final twelve meditations in the book are devoted to each of the stars (the twelve stars referred to in Revelation 12:1) of the Virgin's crown. Each one is taken to signify a particular virtue, from the generic (the first star equated with Fides, the second with Contemplatio) to the specific (the twelfth star seen in terms of the positive aspects of maternity, De Bonis Matrimonii). And the symbolic significance of each star is spelt out in great detail. Here the meditative process and the associative method are carried to greatest length. It is unlikely that more than a small number of adepts pondered images of the Assumption to the extent of dwelling carefully on each of the stars of the Virgin's crown (and many

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44 See too, for example, the annotations to Chapter IV (on Cant. 7:8, 'Thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine', and 8:1: 'O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother') of the 1647 Dutch translation of ST THERESE'S Meditationes sobre los Cantares: Bredygeons Vrede-Kus o.f Bemerkinghen oan de liefde Gods. Gemaak door de H. Moeder TERESA van IESUS op sonomige overeenkomsten van Salomonens Saghen. Met Annotationen vanden Eer. P. Hermogenus Gratianus of. Caroulfet: Oorheestert uyt de Spansche in onze Nederlandsehe tale door den Eer. P. Antonius van IESUS, Caroulfet. Distals., Antwerp, Widow Jan Coenbraedt [1647], 12°, esp. pp.66-67.

45 Considera 2. aequatoribus illustribus hic Virginis in coelum ingressus, & quam admirabils triumphus'. op. cit., COSTERUS, p.349.

46 Considera 3. sanctissinam Matriem in 1600 coelestis aditus a filio introductam, Filij sui gloriam, loci maiestatem, Angelorum ordines, omnem illius beatissimae regionis insignitatem longe maiori gaudio admiratam fuisse, quam olim Regina Saba . . . Iisque admirablis cunctam; & Quae est ista quae ascendent de deserto . . . Quae est ista quae propter deum consergentur'. Ibid., pp.345-44 (the final two questions here from Cant. 8:5 and 6:9 respectively).

47 Considerant 1. tantam gloriam de huius mundi deserto ac sterilitate 2. tantas spiritualitates delitas in homini 3. tantos honores Matri, quae a Deo in coelos vehatur', COSTERUS, op. cit., p.344.

48 Ibid., pp.345-47.

49 Usefully discussed in J. Hiebdt: Die frühesten Darstellungen der Himmelfahrt Mariens, Das Münster, IV [1951], pp.1-12.


51 Thomas had been absent from the death and burial of the Virgin, and so 'a collegia suis Apostolis ceteris obtinuit, ut corpus Virginis exhumaretur, uterum aperto sepulchro, nihil requiritum est praeter ponere sepulchrae, quaeles Christus Dominus a mortuis resurgens in monumento suo reliquerat', Zbid., pp.348-49. Cf. note 41 above.

52 A SOURCE FOR RUBEN'S MODELLO OF THE ASSUMPTION AND CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

53 Each subdivision (i.e. each of the thoughts the former aroes) corresponds to the use of letters In Nadal - except that the use of numbers enables Coster to be still more precise about every component of the meditational process, a fact necessitated to some extent by the absence of illustrations.

The Meditation on the Death of the Virgin is divided into three sections - on the events preceding her death, on her death itself, and on her burial. In the last section one finds again an emphasis on the sensual aspects of the image. Here too the musical component is emphasized, as well as the glorious light that pervaded the scene, and the sweet-smelling flowers spread by the apostles. These are sensual flowers, but they are also metaphorical ones (for they are the flowers of the Virgin's virtues). Similarly, the apostles light real torches as they accompany her bier, but divine light ('because while she lived the Virgin was the light of the world') pervades the scene, and so on.

In the Meditation on the Assumption itself, the first point to consider, according to Coster, is the welcome accorded by Christ to His Mother. The emotional component is even stronger than in the related passage in Nadal, but our feelings are aroused by dwelling on the same things. Although the description of Christ kissing His Mother and wiping away her tears is not to be found in Nadal (nor represented in paintings) it is followed by an insistence on recollecting Christ's relationship with His Mother in His infancy which we have already noted. By these kisses Christ repays those maternal ones frequently given to Him as a child; now he reciprocates His Mother's action in wiping away His childish tears; He recalls how she cradled him in her arms, gave him to suck, nurtured and fostered Him. There is
representations of the Coronation do not show them), but the fact that this was possible at all provides a remarkable demonstration of the psychological complexity of the response to images. Even if subliminal associations, and those which have nothing to do with religion are omitted, the complexity of choice open to the beholder of images in the seventeenth century could not be more clearly attested.

Now in purely psychological terms all this is perhaps rather obvious, and the foregoing may seem to be couched in terms of truisms which need not be analysed. But the aim of this article is to show that the response to images is amenable to historical investigation as well, and to a greater extent than is generally recognized. There is no reason (other than the difficulty involved) why art historians should not be concerned with the response of people who did not actually write about such matters. But here we are confronted again with the full weight of the problems which an analysis of this kind must raise.

The two texts I have considered were both written by Jesuits, and for fairly specific groups. Nadal's work was originally written for a Jesuit audience, and for novices in particular, while Coster's book was intended for the young (male) members of the Sodality of the Virgin at the College in Douai. But we know from the prefaces to Nadal's book that it had a wider circulation than the audience for whom it was at first conceived, and there can be no doubt that the same applies to the work by Coster, one of the most popular and prolific writers of small devotional handbooks in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Now although both works would only have been immediately accessible to the Latin reading public, they provide evidence of a mode of response which was not restricted to this audience alone. They are not, of course, unique; indeed, their value depends on their very typicality. They may be counted amongst the most representative works in this period of a tradition which has its roots in much earlier meditational methods (there are some striking similarities, for example, with the Meditations de Vita Christi attributed to St Bonaventure) and which found its expression in a great variety of outlets, ranging from meditations on the rosary to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola, as well as to the meditative practices of the other religious orders. But the works discussed here are two of the fullest and most complex handbooks of the Counter Reformation in Flanders, with the clearest exposition of their subject-matter. Nadal's book is, of course, of special relevance, as I suggested at the beginning of this article, not only because of its use of actual images and their relationship with paintings by Rubens, but also because of its sophisticated method of annotating these illustrations. In this it was followed by many other works, such as the even more popular books by Johannes David, Antonio Sucquet and Jodocus Andries, all of which were translated into the vernacular, thus ensuring a still wider audience. But the evidence that it provides is much less complete, and their illustrations of a decidedly lower quality. The fact that Coster's book was written specifically for youths, rather than restricting its applicability (as one may at first be inclined to think) makes it all the more useful, precisely because it has to spell out all the guidelines for minds not yet practised or proficient in the associative process.

At this point one may encounter several objections which an analysis of this kind is likely to raise. In the first place, have we not here been dealing with the responses of theologians or, at best, the responses which they would have liked to be present in the minds of the populace? In other words, is there not a distinction to be made between what writers such as Nadal and Coster wanted people to think and what associations they actually made? The answer is surely that the distinction cannot have been so absolute that there was no common ground between them — especially where one is concerned with popular and thoroughly known sub-

71 I hope to deal elsewhere with further aspects of this problem, and in particular with what may be deduced from the strictures of the literate on the responses of the illiterate.
72 See note 19 above.
73 'Cuius Virginis patrocinium, ut alacrius imploretis, has vobis offero de vita laudibusque septemtriplici titulorum serie distinctum, ut in B. Virginis odorem curramus, et Christus Schildwacht teghen de valsche waersegghers, Tooveraers, enz., die cena tua in memoriam, per iconas quinquaginta duas repraesentata, Necessaria ad salutem scientia, partim necessitate medii, partim necessitate personae, per iconas quinquaginta duas representata, Antwerp, C. Woons [1654], 8'°; and his Perpetua Crux, sive Pascua Jesu Christi a puncto Incarnationis ad extremum vitae; icobus quadragenae expliacta (together with Altera perpetua crux Jesu Christi a fine vitae usque ad finem mundi in perpetuo altaris sacrificio), Antwerp, C. Woons [1649], translated as Het ghederghig Krygs oft Pastiche Jesu Christi, Antwerp, C. Woons [1650]. Most of these received a number of subsequent editions and translations into other languages. The works of David and Sucquet have often been called emblem books, but the description is perhaps not entirely accurate. The above is only a small selection of these authors' works; for their other writings, and for concise discussions of their lives, see, in the case of David (1545-1613), P. A. Snelart, in Bibliographie Nationale de Belgique, IV, Brussels [1873], cols.712-52; in the case of Sucquet (1574-1628), A. Poncelet, Ibid., XXIV, Brussels [1926-29], cols.237-41; and in the case of Andries (1588-1658), Augustin de Backer with C. Sommervogel and Alois de Backer, Bibliothèque des Écrivains de la Compagnie de Jésus, Liège-Lyon [1889-96], I, pp.18-20, VII, p.24. Several of these writers — all Jesuits — are referred to briefly in the work by Nicolaus cited in note 12 above, pp.174-9.
74 Although David in particular merits further analysis, for the evidence that may be found in his works of other aspects of the response to images, especially the sorts of allegorical interpretations current amongst the less visually sophisticated sections of the public.
A SOURCE FOR RUBENS'S MODELLO OF THE ASSUMPTION AND CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

jects. And here a further problem may arise. Clearly, in the case of a subject like the *Assumption*, where the pictorial, literary, and liturgical tradition is of so wide-ranging a nature it would be impossible to determine all the thoughts which such a subject might have generated, or to isolate them. Social groups must also be a determining factor, and I am aware that I have omitted reflections which could have been engendered by the purely aesthetic qualities of the work of art concerned—an omission which may be especially serious in the case of Rubens. But despite the particular affiliations of the writers I have considered, they are inextricable from the general cultural matrix, and they offer meticulous documentation of notions which were current but which would otherwise not have been committed to paper (to a large extent because they were taken for granted).

On the other hand—and here one encounters a third objection—it might be argued that few would have paused long enough before a particular work of art to make any of the associations suggested above; perhaps, it might be maintained, most people bestowed no more attention on an image of the *Assumption* than they do in any small village in one of the Catholic countries now. But we are concerned precisely with those who did pause to look, for however long; and I suspect that this argument is an oversimplification of the question of the response to images, even today. Religious images always partake of at least some totemic or supernatural qualities. People may not consciously be aware of the associations they make when they see an image; they may even appear to be more concerned with other things.

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Note: The Agdollo collection numbered seventy-eight pictures by thirty-seven artists, all specified except for one case. The predominance of seventeenth and eighteenth-century artists reveals the collector's personal taste, especially for Baroque art. However, the Renaissance was also represented by a few but celebrated names: Schiavone, Sarto, Veronese, Titian. The Baroque examples range from the most famous names, such as Reni, Rubens and Poussin, to minor or quite unknown masters such as Monsieur Pitre (probably French) whose name I have been unable to find in any of the contemporary artistic repertories.

AGGIO CORTE

The Agdollo Collection of Paintings: an inventory of 1741

The name of Gregorio Agdollo as an art collector in Florence during the late 1730's appears in the printed catalogue of an exhibition which took place in that city in 1737. On that occasion Agdollo contributed seven pictures.

The complete list of his collection is now available to scholars, having been found among the papers of a Florentine family. Agdollo's collection was to have been acquired by this family but, as we shall see later, adverse circumstances prevented this.

By the time of the inventory of 24th April 1741, the

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1. Note dei Quadri e Opere di Scultura esposti per la Festa di San Luca dell' Accademia del Disegno nella loro Cappella e nel Chiostro secondo del Comiento dei Padri della SS. Nonzia di Firenze, Florence [1737].
2. Fabio Borrini Salvadori: "Le Esposizioni d'Arte a Firenze, 1674-1767", in Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz [1974], I, p.156. Five out of the seven works exhibited in 1737 are to be found in the 1741 inventory.
3. See Document No.II.

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GINO CORTE

The Agdollo Collection of Paintings: an inventory of 1741

The name of Gregorio Agdollo as an art collector in Florence during the late 1730's appears in the printed catalogue of an exhibition which took place in that city in 1737. On that occasion Agdollo contributed seven pictures. The complete list of his collection is now available to scholars, having been found among the papers of a Florentine family. Agdollo's collection was to have been acquired by this family but, as we shall see later, adverse circumstances prevented this.

By the time of the inventory of 24th April 1741, the Agdollo collection numbered seventy-eight pictures by thirty-seven artists, all specified except for one case. The predominance of seventeenth and eighteenth-century artists reveals the collector's personal taste, especially for Baroque art. However, the Renaissance was also represented by a few but celebrated names: Schiavone, Sarto, Veronese, Titian. The Baroque examples range from the most famous names, such as Reni, Rubens and Poussin, to minor or quite unknown masters such as Monsieur Pitré (probably French) whose name I have been unable to find in any of the contemporary artistic repertories.

The number of pictures by a given artist in the collection varies from a maximum of seven paintings to a single example.

This inventory is a model of its kind because with rare exceptions it is accompanied by the essential information: the subject represented, dimensions and name of the author. No monetary estimates were made, but for the most import-