S. Maria Del Pianto: Loss, Remembrance and Legacy
In Seventeenth Century Naples

by
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A thesis submitted to the Department of Art
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Masters of Arts

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
October, 2007

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the creation of the church of S. Maria del Pianto and its altarpieces commissioned in the wake of the Neapolitan plague of 1656. The church and its sacred images are representative of the devotional shift that occurred in Naples after such catastrophic loss of life – in particular devotion to the souls in Purgatory. An exploration of the church’s commission, the people involved as benefactors, and the significance of the site upon which it was built proved central to the identification of the possible meanings of the altarpieces for their seventeenth-century audience and are examined in detail in this study.
I would like to thank my advisor Sebastian Schütze for pushing me to make this thesis truly my own. His questions, insights and advice, particularly during the editing process, have been invaluable. Also, my sincerest thanks go to David McTavish who kindly filled in as proxy advisor during my defense. I am also indebted to the other committee members: Joan Schwartz, Cathleen Hoeniger, Peter Thompson and Ross Kilpatrick for their interest and support of my work.

I am very appreciative of the many friends and colleagues at Queen’s who shared the absurdities and joys of this experience – particularly Susan Cahill, Krista Bennett, Billy Woon, Ann Marie Piekenbrock and Devin Therien.

I thank David Bershad for his unaffected love of art history and its teaching, for his support of me, but mostly for his willingness to play the hell out of a piano. I thank Leo who spent hours warming my lap as I typed and made innumerable contributions of his own only to have them erased. But this, his final effort, shall remain xzzzzzzzzzzzznm2;\’pppp pppppmmmmmk. Most importantly, I thank Matteo for his insistence on unhurried pleasures, his calm confidence and his absolute support of my decision to pursue this degree away from home. I thank Gerry for his humor and perspective and lastly I thank my mother Jullian for everything and then some. This is for her.
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In 1503 troops from Spain entered Naples and dispossessed the French. The King, Ferdinand II of Aragon, made Naples the capital of his vice-realm and the region was then ruled by Spain for almost two centuries. This shift ushered in the age of the Spanish viceroys, whose overarching task was to enforce taxation of the local population in order to fuel the imperial and military machinations of Spain.\(^1\) This is not to suggest, however, that we should characterize the Neapolitan’s feelings towards the Spaniards as typified by bitterness and resentment. The Spanish “ruled over southern Italy by the standards of the times, and with the means... that their cultures allowed them.”\(^2\)

During this period Naples was subject to the political and personal ministrations of no less than forty-five Spanish viceroys of varying capabilities, but with one feature in common - patronage of the arts. Naples as we see it today stands as a legacy to the grand building campaigns instigated by these viceroys, who ordered the erection of new churches, palaces, roads and public fountains in addition to numerous painting and sculpture commissions. This artistic flourishing was further stimulated by competing religious orders vying to create sumptuous and extravagant churches and monasteries. The city still exhibits, in both custom

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and character, a fascinating exchange of cultural, artistic and religious practices that occurred between Spain and the Kingdom of Naples. This convergence surfaced repeatedly in the research for this thesis. Far from simply pillaging Naples of its financial, cultural and artistic resources, it is clear that the Spanish left a unique and indelible mark upon the city and its people, creating a distinctive palimpsest of ideas, tastes and rituals.

Neapolitan society was “known for its fervent piety and devotion [and was] often susceptible to superstition” in part because it was “constantly threatened by natural disasters, such as the plague or the eruption of mount Vesuvius…” In the seventeenth century this ardent religious fervour was both circumscribed and innervated by post-Tridentine Roman Catholicism. It was within this cultural and religious climate that the plague of 1656 appeared and ravaged the city. At its violent peak that summer the contagion felled ten to fifteen thousand people each day, and ultimately reduced the population by more than half. In December of 1658, approximately one and a half years after the plague, Don Gaspar de Bracamonte, the Count of Peñaranda, assumed the vice regency where he remained until 1664; his tenure required skillful and tempered leadership following a singularly destructive first half-century, not the least of which was dealing with the restoration efforts after the plague.

5 Painting In Naples 1606-1705, 1982, 17.
CHAPTER 1

The social burden of this outbreak required decades for recovery, of which art was an essential part. This assertion will be revisited throughout this thesis and is one that I believe is central to understanding the motivations for establishing the plague church of S. Maria del Pianto.\(^6\) The church, which was begun immediately after the plague’s cessation and its three altarpieces later commissioned by viceroy Peñaranda, address a critical part of Naples’ social and spiritual recovery and they are the focus of this thesis. Exploring the impetus behind the church’s commission, those involved in its erection and decoration, the significance of the site upon which it was built and its devotional function are critical for understanding the sacred images commissioned for its sanctuary. Each of these factors will be explored in detail in order to situate the church and the altarpieces within the context of mid-seventeenth century Naples.

Chapter Two contains a brief history of the plague beginning with the Black Death in 1348. It traces the literary descriptions of outbreaks from antiquity, as well as describing some of the visual traditions that developed and were formalized in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. Chapter Three focuses specifically on the Neapolitan plague of 1656, exploring the civic and ecclesiastical responses and comparing those efforts with other Italian cities battling similar outbreaks. Additionally, an examination of the artistic traditions that were invoked in Naples during the plague, and the imagery that developed out of the devastation are central to placing the images created for S. Maria del Pianto within their social,

aesthetic and religious milieu. Chapter Four positions the church of S. Maria del Pianto within its broader Neapolitan context by exploring the commission and the many benefactors who contributed to its creation. This chapter will illuminate the church’s specific function and creation as a response the devotional demands necessitated by the plague, in particular devotion to the souls in Purgatory. Lastly, Chapter Five will present a careful and detailed examination of the three altarpieces painted by Andrea Vaccaro and Luca Giordano and commissioned by viceroy Peñaranda.

Above all with this thesis, I intend to demonstrate that S. Maria del Pianto and its three altarpieces are indicative of the devotional concerns that preoccupied Neapolitans after the devastation of the plague. The examination of this small cemetery church and its paintings is valuable because together they help illuminate the complexities of and negotiations between life and death in early modern Naples.
CHAPTER 2

The Plague: Some Literary and Visual Sources

It is safe to say that if there had been no plague in Naples in 1656 there would have been no church of S. Maria del Pianto. The plague and its persistent threats were not new either to the people who built the church or to the iconography that influenced its altarpieces. There is in fact a very long history, which connects the plague with religious belief and building. This history, which will be discussed in the present chapter, is made visible and accessible in the church of S. Maria del Pianto.

After centuries in abeyance the plague resurfaced in Europe in 1348; it arrived from Asia via the Mediterranean Sea and took hold in harbour cities and then spread inland. For the next three hundred and fifty years it continued on what was seen as a mysterious but deadly course. The plague’s inexplicable pattern of killing and sparing could only be articulated by the people as a sign of Divine retribution.

Not until 1897 did Alexandre Yersin at the Pasteur Institute, discover that the pathogen “Yersinia Pestis” was spread through the bites of infected fleas that

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transferred microbes into the human body where they were easily diffused. The success of the disease rests largely upon the inability of the infected flea to digest its victim’s blood, which forces it to continue biting in its search for nourishment. There are three types of plague that can manifest depending on the mode of entry. The most common is the bubonic form typified by painful swelling in lymphatic glands called buboes, followed by a protracted and anguished death. Death is too swift from the pulmonary and septicemic forms for the buboes to develop. The pathogen of the pulmonary form enters through the lungs, while the septicemic form enters directly through the blood stream. It was not uncommon for all forms to be present in an outbreak, which accounts for its alarming success.

During the medieval and early modern periods in Italy most of the theories surrounding the cause of the plague were derived from antiquity, and the overarching belief was that pestilence was sent from the Divine as a form of punishment for collective sin. While opinions about the mode of transmission varied, only a very few believed that the epidemics were the exclusive result of natural causes. More common theories viewed the pestilence as the result of “evil

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9 Christine Boeckl, *Images of the Plague and Pestilence* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2000), 10. With the reappearance of the plague in Europe in 1347-8 through to the seventeenth century almost every epidemic disease was referred to as the plague, even in the absence of Plague buboes- the diseases' most distinctive indicator.


11 Boeckl, 2000, 14-18; Mormando in *Hope and Healing*, 8-10: Mormando, 18, discusses the plague-provoking sins such as violation of justice, unpunished killing, pride and ambition, devil
conjunctions” and alignments of the planets and stars or, as the Jesuit Antonio Possevino believed, the causes were various types of sin while secondary causation, for which God was also responsible, were such things as the bad quality of humours and corruption of the air known as miasma. While doctors and natural philosophers tried to explain the disease and civic authorities developed protocols aimed at limiting outbreaks, most believed that the only real antidote could be found in the spiritual realm. However, defensive and offensive precautions such as shutting down ports, patrolling city walls and gates, transferring the afflicted to lazaretti or locking them in their houses and burning their worldly goods were all part of the expected civic response. These precautions were generally understood as necessary, but were viewed as less effective than the invocation of spiritual assistance thorough votive offerings, the building of new religious spaces such as S. Maria del Pianto, the performance of supplication and acts of remittance to pacify an angry God.

For early modern societies the two types of remedies for combating the disease were known in contemporary Italian parlance as rimedi temporali and rimedi spirituali. The rimedi temporali were the medical, social and political procedures implemented by the authorities to contain the epidemic; and the rimedi

worship and acts against nature to name a few. See also Robert Gottfreid, The Black Death: Natural and Human disaster in Medieval Europe (New York: the Free Press, 1983). 
12 Antonio Possevino, “Cause et remedii della peste, et d’alter infermita” (Florence, 1571), in David Gentilcore, Healers and Healing In Early Modern Italy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 12.
spirituali were the religious measures proposed by the Church, enacted by ministers and invoked by the faithful.\textsuperscript{14} However, it is arguable that the distinction between these two spheres was not as clearly defined as this suggests. In fact the two often overlapped. Civic leaders, for example, believed in miracles and made vows to saints as part of their duties as public officials, and priests and monks cared for and nursed the afflicted in hospitals and lazaretti. As will be explored in the following chapters the intersection of these spheres is nowhere more evident than in Naples during the outbreak of 1656. The Catholic Church promoted the view that the disease was a ‘gift’ sent by God to cleanse sins or as a warning against sin meant to be borne with patience, but always that it should be viewed as an opportunity for redemption.\textsuperscript{15} There were also unsanctioned measures or rimedi taken in many societies (Naples in particular) that included superstitious rituals and beliefs that bordered on magic. Gentilecore argues that this third source of remedy should be understood as popular therapy and it took many forms in Italy such as the devotion to thaumaturgic living ‘saints’ not sanctioned by the Church, or the use of charlatans to dispense folk medicine or spells. This suggests that Italian societies subscribed to the belief that God put both spiritual and temporal remedies for illness at man’s disposal but often the choice of remedy depended on class, gender or personal proclivity.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Mormando in \textit{Hope and Healing}, 2-4.
\textsuperscript{15} Gentilecore, 192.
\textsuperscript{16} For an extensive study on popular remedies in Naples see Gentilecore, 96-125, 156-177. For many of the ‘religious’ superstitions that bordered on magic rather than orthodoxy in Naples see: Michael Carroll, \textit{Catholic Cults and Devotions: A Psychological Inquiry} (Kingston, Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1970), 57-78.
In order to understand the imperative behind the construction of S. Maria del Pianto it is necessary here to investigate the perceived influences of the plague on society. David Herlihy, in his study on the effects of the plague in Europe, argues that the temporary effect of the disease on a population was “shock, and social fissures, tears in the fabric of society which undermined social discipline and cohesiveness.” At the same time the afflicted societies and their institutions developed what were understood as efficacious strategies to cope with the social, spiritual, and psychological impact of the plague. Their strategies reflect a population’s understanding of health and medicine, and provide valuable insight into both collective and private religious beliefs, rituals and superstitions. Literary accounts of different plagues and the imagery created as a response to the disease support this idea and will be explored in detail in relation to early modern Naples and the outbreak of 1656.

Recent studies concerned with disease in medieval and early modern Europe suggest that the presence of sickness and disease was more typical than good health. This notion is beginning to alter the way historians understand recurrent outbreaks and individual societies’ responses in both the short and long term. Randolph Starn suggests that we should not view fourteenth - through seventeenth-century societies as “caught in the grip of plague year panics or waiting to be delivered by modern medicine,” but rather as “experienced

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17 Herlihy, 59.
18 For information on recent demographic studies focusing on the plague see Giulia Calvi, Histories Of A Plague Year, trans. Dario Biocca, (Berkeley: University of California press, 1984), 255.
populations...with organized institutional responses.”

So while it is clear that plague outbreaks impacted upon life very deeply, the civic and ecclesiastical responses were generally understood to be effective. This is not to suggest that people were not compelled by fears, insecurities and superstitions about the plague, but rather that they developed systems that helped explain, protect and deliver them from it. The church of S. Maria del Pianto facilitated a number of the devotional practices associated with these systems, and for this reason it should not be viewed as a simple cemetery church. Its function was more complex, as the sacred works commissioned for its sanctuary attest.

Indeed many of the artworks created in the wake of other plague outbreaks confirms this conclusion, as such images generally served a narrative, devotional or prophylactic function. Such images captured the immediacy of contemporary experience, inspired remembrance and provided a focus for continued religious observance. It seems obvious that the production of sacred imagery was an essential part of Italian society’s response to adversity; but notably most historical studies overlook images in preference of written accounts. Louise Marshall’s 1994 article “Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy” argues instead that art created in response to the plague allows for direct access to the

19 Randolph Starn, Introduction to Giulia Calvi, Histories Of A Plague Year (1984), X.
20 When writing about ‘plague art’ I am referring to art that was created specifically about plague or in response to plague. While there are certain saints and other figures associated with plague such as St. Sebastian and the Archangel Michael, their presence alone does not necessarily indicate a plague scene.
21 Our privileging of the word over image does not represent the vast majority of the medieval and early modern populations of Europe most of whom were illiterate.
ways those surviving the outbreak believed they could “articulate and manipulate their situation” both during and after an outbreak.\(^2\)

The works of art in such circumstances are not simply passive indicators of a particular historical devotion or records of a popular aesthetic, but were integral components of the spiritual conversations between those in heaven and those on earth; this relationship was endorsed and promoted by the Church. Many of these images were both prescriptive and descriptive. They guided the faithful through devotions, kept them actively engaged in their salvation and often included representations of popular devotion or illustrated plague scenes. These works and the devotions they facilitated were spiritually activated by a ritual of exchange in which the supplicant performed devotions to the depicted celestial intercessor(s) and was rewarded for the special dedication with spiritual mediation and protection. Marshall describes the importance of this relationship in the context of a plague epidemic:

\[\text{A}n\ \text{understanding of the expectations attached to images and the ways in which they were believed to operate is crucial in evaluating the long term effects of the plague. In setting up hierarchical relationships of mutual obligation between worshipper and image, those who lived during the pandemic were not neurotic and helpless, but were taking positive—and in their eyes effective—steps to regain control over their environment.}\(^2\)

Historians for the most part have tended to view plague survivors as “gripped by ‘neurotic and all pervading gloom [and]…, reduced to terrified

\(^{22}\) In Renaissance Quarterly, 47 (1994): 487. Of course, this would hold true for any disaster not just the plague.

helplessness in the face of disaster.” Marshall’s contention, however, is more persuasive and Boeckl and Mormando among others have endorsed it. If these images operated in the ways Marshall describes then it is reasonable to accept them as reflections of belief in grace and mercy - messages of hope suggesting that the collective and the individual might also wield some influence in what appeared to be uncontrollable conditions. Such images reminded the beholder of the necessity, availability and efficacy of the rimedi spirituali.

... Three hundred years before S. Maria del Pianto was built, the specific pictorial language for plague imagery began its development with the Black Death of 1348. However, from antiquity there existed a literary tradition of writing about the disease that requires some investigation because of its ultimate influence on this study. The first literary reference to plague is in Homer’s Iliad, followed by Thucydides’ description of an epidemic in the History of the Peloponnesian War. Ovid discussed two plagues in his Metamorphoses, and it was a passage from Virgil’s Aeneid that inspired Raphael’s drawing of The Plague at Phyrgia ca. 1512 (fig. 1), which was engraved by Marcantonio Raimondi ca. 1520 and titled

24 Philip Ziegler in Black Death as cited by Marshall, 1994, 487. Millard Meiss, Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951). Meiss has been an extremely influential proponent of this view as well and is often cited by other plague historians such as Gottfreid, 1993.
The work represents the only secular plague representation from the sixteenth century and it became the most influential visual model for subsequent plague imagery. Boeckl among others has noted that all of its groupings - the dying mother with the child grasping for her breast, the man pushing the child away while holding his nose, and the other figures - find their equivalent in subsequent plague images made by innumerable artists throughout Europe, including many in Naples both before and after 1656.

The dying mother and child grouping was both a literary and an artistic convention taken from Pliny the Elder’s ekphrasis of a famous Greek painting by the painter Aristeides of Thebes representing a sacked city. Pliny described the mother as dying from her wound but fearful that her child, who was trying to suckle, would drink blood instead of milk. Raphael appropriated Pliny’s description, transforming it into a plague icon. Moreover, the figure of the man covering his nose can be found in plague imagery throughout the Middle Ages and into the seventeenth century. His gesture expresses not only the stench of death but

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25 Boeckl, 2000, 92-5. The author makes a very convincing argument about the differences between Raphael and Raimondi’s images and their meanings.

26 For a discussion of ancient literary sources relating to the plague see Boeckl 2000, 35-44; P. Salway, W. Dell, “Plague at Athens,” Greece & Rome, 2 (1955): 63-70; Mormando in Hope and Healing 12-15. If or how any of these texts influenced the visual traditions that grew out of the fourteenth century still needs more detailed investigation, aside from Virgil’s Aeneid that inspired Raphael. It is also important to note that this image was not used only as a model for other artists; its diffusion was also due to the rapidly developing art market as collectors vied for copies of ‘Raphael’ for their personal collections. Raphael and Raimondi were instrumental in the early development of the print market in Italy.

27 Boeckl, 2000, 49-51, 91-95.


29 The success of this image in Italian art, in addition to its diffusion through prints, might be found in the associations connected to an image of a nursing mother with child, which evoked feelings of maternity, charity, mercy and love. Raphael’s use of this tender and intimate image makes the pathos already associated with the plague all the more poignant.
also an act of protection against miasmatic air. Raphael’s decision to have this figure interact so intimately with the mother and child undoubtedly helped facilitate their transformation from ancient literary description to plague icon. Apart from ancient literary accounts of the plague, the public would of course have been most familiar with the many descriptions of the disease in the Bible.

Actually, considering the number of plagues in the Bible, surprisingly few of these stories have been represented in art.\textsuperscript{30} The one that is most frequently cited comes from the life of King David, painted by both Giorgio Vasari and Luca Giordano among others (figs. 3, 4, and 5).\textsuperscript{31} In this episode King David sinned by numbering Israel and Judah, thus violating the will of the Lord because the people belonged to God not to King David. The prophet Gad was sent by the Lord to offer David the choice of seven years of famine, three months of war, or three days of pestilence for his disobedience. David chose pestilence upon which an angel of the Lord appeared to deliver the reckoning. Only after seventy thousand men had died did the Lord, in an act of mercy, stay the angel’s punishing hand. Then the prophet Gad returned to King David and instructed him to build an altar unto the Lord in

\textsuperscript{30} Certainly these examples of ‘plagues’ did not necessarily mean Bubonic plague, but rather any sort of epidemic disease. These biblical plagues however remained relevant to contemporary discussion about Divine justice, retribution, mercy and salvation. Boeckl (2000, 38-39, appendix) provides a fairly detailed account of the major plague episodes in the Bible as well as those from antiquity though she links very few of the accounts with actual works of art. For an interesting debate about the literary source for Michael Sweerts’ Plague in an Ancient City, 1652-54 see Mormando in Hope and Healing, exh cat., pl. 6, 189.

\textsuperscript{31} Giorgio Vasari’s San Rocco Altarpiece was created for the church of the Compagnia di San Rocco in Arezzo. The main panel is now in the Museo Statale d’Arte Medievale e Moderna and the predella is in the Museo Diocesano. For a brief discussion of Luca Giordano’s paintings see Mormando in Hope and Healing, 21. Other depictions of this subject include Lucas van Leyden’s etching of King David in Prayer of 1520 and Pieter de Grebber’s beautiful depiction of King David Praying ca. 1635, in Utrecht at Museum Catharijneconvent.
atonement and thanksgiving for the deliverance of his people from further penalty.\(^{32}\) Mormando notes that because of this episode King David developed into the preeminent biblical figure associated with the plague partly because the scripture illustrated so clearly the relationship between man and God. It is also possible that such representations might have been used as a warning or reminder to temporal rulers that their misdeeds directly affected their people.\(^{33}\) Louise Marshall’s examination of Vasari’s *San Rocco Altarpiece* (fig.3) which depicts this episode, suggests that it likely functioned to encourage those in the midst of an epidemic or other affliction to piously endure their adversity. Righteous suffering and forbearance brought about Divine mercy, forgiveness and ultimately salvation - a view the Church encouraged well into the seventeenth century.\(^ {34}\) Above all, building altars, commissioning votive art works or erecting new churches such as S. Maria del Pianto were essential components of civic and ecclesiastical responses to the plague and were explicitly mandated by King David’s biblical precedent. These buildings or chapels were in fact frequently erected *ex-voto* (in fulfillment of a vow).

\(^{32}\) This episode is recounted in both 2 Samuel 24: 1-25, and 1 Chronicles 21:1-30. There are slight differences in the accounts. In 2 Samuel the Lord stops the plague before the altar is built but instructs David to erect it and in 1 Chronicles it is not until after the altar is built and sacrifices made that God delivers the Israelites from the disease. This subject was most commonly found illustrated in personal illuminated Bibles. Boeckl, 2000, 54-5, 101-2.

\(^{33}\) Mormando in *Hope and Healing*, 19-20; Boeckl, 2000, 38, 54.

\(^{34}\) Marshall (1994, 519) examines the differences between depictions of God sending the plague as punishment to humanity as opposed to Christ. For a more detailed analysis of Vasari’s *San Rocco Altarpiece* see: Christine Boeckl, “Giorgio Vasari’s *San Rocco Altarpiece*: Tradition and Innovation in Plague Iconography,” *Artibus et Historiae*, 22 (2001): 29-40. This article discusses Vasari’s personal interest in plague imagery, some of his literary sources as well as the changing views on disease during the Renaissance. There is, unfortunately, very little written about the Luca Giordano depictions of the same subject. Of the two canvases by Giordano of this subject, only one (fig. 5) is included in: Oreste Ferrari and Giuseppe Scavizzi, *Luca Giordano*. L’opera completa, Vol. 2 (Naples: Electa, 2000), 663, A372. The other (fig. 4), which has been illustrated in Mormando’s essay for *Hope and Healing*, 21, n. 90 is in a private collection in Australia. The same subject also appears in Giordano’s Escorial decoration.
during an epidemic, such as *Il Redentore* in Venice after the plague of 1575 and *S. Maria della Salute* also in Venice after the plague of 1630-31.\(^\text{35}\)

Like Vasari and Giordano, Poussin’s famous painting *The Plague of Ashdod* ca. 1630 (fig. 6) is also derived from an Old Testament narrative in which God visits a horrific plague upon the Philistines in retribution for conquering the Israelites and removing the Arc of the Covenant to their own temple at Ashdod.\(^\text{36}\) Poussin’s classicizing and complex composition incorporates many of Raphael’s inventions, including his dying mother with child group, further securing its status as a plague icon.

In addition to the Bible there were other very important literary accounts of the plague, including Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and Petrarch’s *Triumph of Death*, both of which were written in response to the destruction caused by the Black Death of 1348.\(^\text{37}\) In the seventeenth century Cesare Ripa’s widely published *Iconologia* provided an allegorical representation of the plague as a filthy old woman, which was then disseminated in plague imagery.\(^\text{38}\) There are, of course, many other important sources such as monastic and secular chronicles, medical treatises, plague sermons, prayers and poems that document the plague. Their

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\(^{35}\) Other examples include the Karlskirche in Vienna, and in a more complicated fashion Suor Orsola Benincasa’s Hermitage in Naples.


relationship to the development of plague imagery should be studied in the concrete historical context of the single works under consideration.

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By the time S. Maria del Pianto was built in 1656, social views of life and death had undergone centuries of complex development and the great plague of 1348 was one important factor of this process. Traditionally, the plague of 1348 has been designated a watershed event that altered the ways in which medieval societies viewed mortality. This included the Church’s modifications aimed at alleviating some of the fears and punishments associated with death for the faithful. Some historians assert that it was only after the 1348 plague that medieval society became preoccupied with death, and Millard Meiss believes that this preoccupation is visible in post-1348 imagery. Others argue convincingly that this preoccupation predates 1348 and was already established in pictorial tradition. Medieval societies were certainly well acquainted with the ravages of disease and death, and expressing these in art might be considered part of the

40 Millard Meiss, (1951, 74-5). The author discusses the Triumph of Death in Siena and argues for the date of 1350 after the Black Death though many others argue for an earlier date such as Joseph Polzer, see footnote 35.
41 For further information see Joseph Polzer, “Aspects of the Fourteenth-Century Iconography of Death and the Plague,” in The Black Death: the Impact of the Fourteenth Century Plague, ed. D. Williman (Binghampton: State University, 1982). Polzer studies a number of images of death, which support the view that the images from Pisa’s Camposanto predate the plague by some forty years. Boeckl and others have backed this view.
wider set of coping strategies. For example, Boeckl notes that pictorial themes such as the Triumph of Death, the Dance of Death and the use of memento mori had been in existence for some time and were closely related to contemporary debates on eschatology.42 Because very little plague imagery from the Middle Ages survives, it is difficult to calculate the impact of the Black Death on art. But the plague continued to assault Europe throughout the seventeenth century and imagery associated with it became more prevalent. Boeckl ascribes the development of medieval plague imagery less to the devastating effects of the disease and more to evolutionary changes in theology.43 But it was arguably a combination of both these elements. Undoubtedly, the contemporary debates regarding end times would have been a central topic in the wake of plague devastation. This was certainly the case in Naples in 1656 where the eschatological message is evident in each of the altarpieces created for S. Maria del Pianto.

Both Boeckl and Bynum connect the development of eschatological themes in imagery to the third Avignon Pope and theologian, Benedict XII and his statute Benedictus Deus of 1336.44 In it he proclaimed that at the moment of death an individual’s judgment would be performed immediately rather than postponed until Judgment Day.45 Benedict XII also confirmed the flaming tortures that would greet

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42 Boeckl, 2000, 69. That this debate was occurring is confirmed by Dante’s consideration of the soul’s experience after death in his Divine Comedy.
43 Christine Boeckl, Louise Marshall, and to a lesser degree Franco Mormando have been at the forefront in researching the developments in plague imagery as a response to changing Church doctrines aimed at meeting the needs of the laity.
44 Boeckl writes (2000, 55) that Benedict was elected because of his reputation as a renowned theologian.
the damned after this initial judgment and “vividly described the increase of suffering which depends on the grouping of the sinners at the *Judicium terribilis* in response to Christ’s words, ‘Gather all the weeds and bundle them to burn.’” The Pope’s pronouncement on the soul’s immediate judgment and his affirmation of hellfire has, with profound implications, remained the official view of the Church. Benedict’s edict represents a pivotal moment in Catholic theology regarding the relationship between body and soul. As a result greater emphasis was placed on the soul, its immediate judgment after death, and subsequent journey. This was a major shift from the deep and longstanding medieval concern for the physical body and its importance for resurrection on Judgment Day. The theological implications of this were not immediately represented in art, but the growing concern over the status of the soul after death combined with the social trauma accompanying the plague certainly would have hastened the process. Furthermore, because the Black Death occurred only twelve years after Benedict’s edict it is difficult to distinguish their individual effects on medieval and early Renaissance imagery, but each would have had deep implications for the other and would profoundly influence subsequent plague-related commissions such as S. Maria del Pianto. Much of the Medieval and early Renaissance plague imagery that does

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46 Christine Boeckl, “The Pisan Triumph of Death and The Papal Constitution Benedictus Deus,” *Artibus et Historiae* 18 (1997): 55-57 at, 57. Benedict ruled that the blessed would enjoy the presence of God immediately but that their joy would increase after the Last Judgment at the point in which they would be united with their eternal body.

47 Bynum, 1995. The importance placed on the body by medieval society and its connection to resurrection is the focus of Bynum’s entire study, which she traces from 200 C.E. through to 1336. This shift from focus on the body to the soul had ramifications for the doctrine of Purgatory, which is central to my arguments about the Church of S. Maria del Pianto and its imagery and will be discussed in the next chapter.
survive concentrates mainly on the miraculous healing of the body or the deliverance of an afflicted city from the plague by powerful thaumaturgic saints such as Giovanni di Paolo’s 1456 St. Nicholas Saving Florence (fig. 7).

However, more central to this thesis is the awareness that the continued presence of the disease accelerated popular belief in the already burgeoning concept of Purgatory, which in turn fueled an increase in funeral services, prayers, plague masses and masses for the souls in Purgatory, and ultimately led to an increase in Purgatorial imagery.\(^48\) By the Second Council of Lyon in 1274-5, understanding Purgatory as a dwelling place for the expiation of sin was already considered as doctrine in the west, although at the time of the Black Death it was still relatively undefined conceptually. Additionally, while Purgatory was not referred to by name in his 1336 papal decree, Benedict XII did make reference to the purification of the soul after death.\(^49\) It has been suggested that the Black Death served to strengthen the faithful’s attachment to Purgatory because it offered spiritual focus for the living, the promise of reunion with God, and a more compassionate view of the afterlife, and is exemplified by the increasing popularity of masses for the dead.\(^50\) Le Goff writes,

The existence of a Purgatory also depends on the idea that the dead are judged.\(^\) The particular form of judgment that allows for the existence of Purgatory is quite a novel one. In fact two judgments are involved: one at the time of death and a second at the end of time. In between...every human soul becomes involved in complex judicial

\(^{48}\) Cohn (1992, 160) examines the development of the cult of remembrance in the wake of the Black Death. He studies the responses to the plague in six Italian cities by examining the changing trends found in the testaments of numerous individuals—usually wealthy ones. See also Boeckl, 2000, 74.

\(^{49}\) Boeckl, 2000, 74.

\(^{50}\) Boeckl, 2000, 74.
proceedings concerning the possible mitigation of penalties. The belief in Purgatory therefore requires a projection into the afterlife of a highly sophisticated legal and penal system.\footnote{Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 5-6. There is a rigorous debate regarding the development of Purgatory. Le Goff argues that it developed from both elite and popular belief, and was already popularized to the point of having cult status in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. Carroll among others have criticized Le Goff for not adequately supporting his argument that Purgatory had any kind of real popular support in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. Carroll notes that while Purgatory had its doctrinal roots in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century it was not until the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries that real popular devotion to souls in Purgatory developed. See Michael Carroll, *Veiled Threats: The Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 119-123.}

The connection between Purgatory and plague is a sympathetic one, since the rites associated with purgation provided the survivors of the plague with a way to ritualize their dead and maintain a spiritual connection between heaven and earth.\footnote{Le Goff (209) argues that Purgatory was popularized mainly through sermons.} This relationship is one of the central features to be explored in relation to the church of S. Maria del Pianto, which clearly finds its origins in the Middle Ages. Along with the growing concern over the personal journey through Purgatory the impulse to secure in life the details of one’s death became more pronounced.\footnote{See Cohn, 1992, 5,160; Le Goff, 289. The immediate and devastating effects of the plague created awareness about the dangers associated with an ill-prepared death as so many were buried without rites. As well, the plague could wipe out whole families, leaving no one to perform the death rituals so people increasingly left funds for masses to be carried out in perpetuity on their behalf as recorded in wills and testaments.} It is important to note that while the medieval Church did profess the importance of the Sacrament of confession for ‘good death,’ a greater emphasis was placed on a truly penitent heart at the time of death in order to attain salvation.\footnote{Boeckl, 2000, 73. Along with the emphasis placed on Purgatory came an increased focus on celebration of the Eucharist.}

Central to the development of churches like S. Maria del Pianto were the social impact of the plague, the emergent focus on the soul and the increasing emphasis of salvific themes which all influenced the commissioning of art works by
individuals as well as religious institutions.\textsuperscript{55} For example, in the second half of the fourteenth century and in the fifteenth century there was an increased focus on passion imagery that exemplified pious endurance of suffering in life in return for rewards after death. Additionally, the access to spiritual intervention was emphasized in sacred devotional imagery, as saints associated with the plague such as archangel Michael, St. Sebastian (fig. 8), St. Rosalie and St. Roch grew in popularity.\textsuperscript{56} Traditional votive themes such as the \textit{Madonna della Misericordia} were often reinterpreted in plague imagery (figs. 9, 10) and Marshall argues that this reinterpretation of a traditional theme is a “strong testimony to the continuity of attitudes across the presumed divide of 1348.”\textsuperscript{57} As already noted, along with the re-appearance of the plague in 1348 came its associations with apocalyptic themes. The Book of Revelations supports this connection with a number of eschatological references that mention the plague as a precursor to final judgment.\textsuperscript{58} Early imagery expressing this link between the apocalypse and plague developed primarily in prints such as this image of \textit{Christ as Judge} (fig. 11). But this specific iconography did not find full expression until the Renaissance and Baroque

\textsuperscript{55} Cohn, 1992, 246-8.
\textsuperscript{56} Boeckl, 2000, 75-80.
\textsuperscript{57} Marshall, 1994, 510. Marshall notes that in this process the traditional image of the \textit{Madonna della Misericordia} was drastically transformed. Earlier the emphasis was placed on the Virgin’s motherly attributes and mercy. But in connection with the plague she was transformed into a spiritual agent, acting with autonomy and authority. A similar development happens in Neapolitan \textit{Madonna of Purgatory} imagery. Both of these developments would eventually be challenged by the reformed church as the authorities tried to reassert the traditional celestial hierarchy.
\textsuperscript{58} Matthew 24: 7, Revelations 16: 2, Revelations 21: 9.
periods and, as will be shown, is a defining feature connecting the three altarpieces commissioned for S. Maria del Pianto.\textsuperscript{59}

It was during the Renaissance that most plague iconography became formalized, and while a narrative tradition emerged, the central votive function of such imagery remained unchanged. Likewise eschatological references in plague works were added to and embellished throughout the sixteenth century which Boeckl suggests were linked to the strong preaching tradition in the Renaissance articulating and promoting the imminence of the second coming.\textsuperscript{60} As already noted, the single most influential Renaissance plague representation was Raphael’s \textit{Plague at Phrygia} (fig. 1), which informed plague iconography for centuries. The growing trade in prints was instrumental in the formalization of plague iconography and actually began in Italy with the partnership between Raphael and the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi. Considering Raphael’s artistic ability, fame, and his foray into the print trade, it is not surprising that his inventions became so influential.\textsuperscript{61}

One of the Renaissance narrative traditions directly connected to the plague was the depiction of saints or clergy ministering to the sick in hospitals. This became even more pronounced in the seventeenth century as the Church sought to affirm the importance of the clergy in light of the Protestant attacks.\textsuperscript{62} For example,

\textsuperscript{59}Boeckl, 2000, 87-88; Marshall, 1994, 158.
\textsuperscript{60}Boeckl, 2000, 91.
\textsuperscript{61}See Lisa Pon, \textit{Raphael, Durer, and Marcantonio Raimondi : copying and the Italian Renaissance print} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. Raphael’s \textit{Madonna di Foligno} (fig. 53) also informed the development of plague imagery especially with its use of common eschatological symbols such as the rainbow and comets. Both Correggio and Sodoma painted very similar votive images for plague confraternities. See Boeckl, 2000, 92; Elizabeth Schröter, “Raphael’s \textit{Madonna di Foligno. Ein Pestbild?” Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 50 (1987): 47-87.}
\textsuperscript{62}Schröter, 1987, 55-60.
there are innumerable paintings in Europe of the penitent Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo, performing sacramental rites for the sick and dying in hospitals and lazaretti, and others showing him piously and fearlessly leading his people in penitential processions (fig. 12). Images of his singular devotion to the body of Christ during the plague (fig. 13) and his ministrations to the diseased served as an anchor for subsequent images of clergymen portrayed as physical and spiritual shepherds to their flock and whose example was to be imitated. Priests, nuns and monks were often depicted tending to the physical ravages of the plague as well as the spiritual needs of the afflicted. Such plague imagery ennobled the clergy by accentuating their selfless and Christ-like but heroic devotion to the care of others. While it was clearly shown that salvation was to be mediated by the clergy, the didactic message inherent in such imagery was one of faith, love and charity. Barker cites a telling story that underscores this message in the wake of the plague in Palermo in 1624:

[The anecdote] describes how the Friars addressed the Universal Malady that the physicians could never cure, our mortal nature. At a lazaretto run by the Capuchins, a plague victim asked a doctor why God should allow the Capuchin fathers, his faithful servants to die as they carried out their charitable work. The doctor replied, “Medicine did not educate me to investigate the judgments of God, but I can say this: that the Capuchin fathers teach us in life how we ought to live, and herein death they teach us how we ought to die; they die before us with our same diseases, and thus we learn, may it please God, that

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63 Carlo Borromeo was instrumental to the Council of Trent’s success and was a staunch advocate for reaffirming the traditional doctrine of the church. He also wrote a treatise on religious building and art which expanded on the perfunctory Tridentine decrees on sacred art. The book published in 1577, was titled *Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae*. 
a true Christian dies resigned to obey God’s will, contrite and humble, just as we have seen his servants the Capuchins die.\footnote{Sheila Barker, “Plague Art in Early Modern Rome,” in \textit{Hope and Healing}, exh cat., Worcester Art Museum, 2005, 49.}

This account draws attention to the Tridentine emphasis on obedience and submission to God’s will, and most contemporary imagery supports this view by reaffirming the clergy’s traditional mandate as mediators between God and man. This same message is clearly endorsed and advocated in the altar paintings of S. Maria del Pianto.

Indeed, art was a valuable tool for reestablishing and disseminating traditional Catholic doctrines, as well as assisting the Counter-Reformation Church in asserting its authority. Furthermore, because of the proliferation of religious orders and confraternities competing for power and privilege within the reform system, narrative images that espoused and upheld the Tridentine decrees grew in popularity. These same religious institutions commissioned much of the baroque imagery associated with the plague and, depending on the patron, the commission might emphasize their ministry, the miracles of their particular saints, or celebrate the celestial favours enjoyed by the institution. While these commissions of narrative plague representations became extremely popular, they did not replace regional or local votive traditions, which always remained strong.\footnote{Boeckl, 2000, 107-9.}

At the twenty-fifth and final session of the Council of Trent in 1563 the decision to ‘control’ sacred imagery as part of the imperative to reestablish Church
authority was formalized under the heading “On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images.” On the use of images, it stated:

[T]he saints, who reign together with Christ, offer up their own prayers to God for men; that it is good and useful supplicantly to invoke them...bishops shall carefully teach this, that, by means of the histories of the mysteries of our Redemption, portrayed by paintings or other representations, the people [be] instructed, and confirmed in the habit of remembering, and continually revolving in mind the articles of faith; also that great profit is derived from all sacred images, not only because the people are thereby admonished of the benefits and gifts bestowed upon them by Christ, but also because the miracles which God has performed by means of the saints, and their salutary examples, are set before the eyes of the faithful; that so they may give God thanks for those things; may order their own lives and manners in imitation of the saints; and may be excited to adore and love God, and to cultivate piety... Moreover, in the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and the sacred use of images, every superstition shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished; finally, all lasciviousness be avoided...And that these things may be the more faithfully observed, the Holy Synod ordains, that no one be allowed to place, or cause to be placed, any unusual image, in any place, or church, howsoever exempted, [unless] that image [has] been approved of by the bishop: also, that no new miracles are to be acknowledged, or new relics recognized, unless the said bishop has taken cognizance and approved thereof.66

Along with clarity, obedience and decorum, Baroque sacred images were expected to excite the senses towards piety and intensify religious feeling. Such dramatic appeals to the emotions were meant to stimulate spiritual fervor and buttress faith. Above all, religious imagery was a powerful propagandistic tool that the Church

used to impart to its faithful the glory of the Catholic Church, Rome and the Papacy while denouncing the Protestant claims. The implication of this for seventeenth-century plague imagery was that its narrative and devotional focus stressed the efficacy of all seven sacraments, the authority of the clergy, and the affirmation and invocation of saints. These are all essential principles when considering the altar paintings within S. Maria del Pianto’s sanctuary.

68 Because of a lack of specific data, many of these spiritual trends can only be analyzed in general terms. Katherine French and John O’Malley point out that the Counter-Reformation is a complex and fluid time, which should not be viewed as monolithic. Though trends are by nature general, there were many exceptions to the Counter-Reformation ‘rules’ in Neapolitan art some of which will be noted in subsequent chapters. See Gentilcore, 1998, 178,181-2, 193-4.
CHAPTER 3

The Neapolitan Plague of 1656

The religious and sociopolitical motives behind the swift erection and decoration of the church of S. Maria del Pianto after the plague of 1656 were complex and manifold. For one thing, religious building in the city took on a great significance after the plague of 1656 due in part to a sequence of events that involved a revered Neapolitan holy woman. In 1582 a tertiary nun named Suor Orsola Benincasa arranged an audience with Pope Gregory XIII. She had already gained notoriety in Naples among the populace and local authorities for her extreme piety and her ecstatic revelations. She was determined to reveal to the Pope the dire warning she had received from God about the devastations that would befall the city of Naples if the people did not curb their wickedness. Eventually, in the Pope’s presence she was overcome by her ecstasies, was unable to deliver her message and, instead, aroused his suspicions. Fearing she might be possessed of evil spirits the Pope arranged for a committee led by Philip Neri to examine her. After nine months of investigations, interrogations, and exorcisms including the complete shaving of her body to ensure that there were no marks of witchcraft, the committee found her to be a good and simple soul. She was allowed to return to her unfinished hermitage in Naples, but was forbidden ever to preach.
or prophesy again.\textsuperscript{69} This restriction did not stop her co-religious from documenting her ecstatic revelations of impending ruin in which she declared that Divine punishment could be averted if only the faithful would complete the building of her hermitage (fig.14). Suor Orsola Benincasa declared:

\begin{quote}
Woe to you, Naples, if this hermitage is not built as soon as is possible. Woe to the whole world; the Divine Will does not accept impediment or the slightest delay. If only the Neapolitans and their leaders could know the scourges that will come from the sky and pour down onto their heads should this work not immediately rise from the ground; there would be none that would not rush to give his hand and help with the building even at the cost of neglecting bread for his own children. And we would see even the most rich, proudly bringing on their shoulders their chests of cement, stones, and tiles to help with this work of paradise.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

The fulfillment of her prophecies seemingly began when in 1607 the Kingdom of Naples was hit by a disastrous famine; in 1631 Vesuvius erupted in one of its most violent explosions; and in 1647 Naples was drawn into a violent struggle over taxation against its Spanish overlords in the Masaniello revolt.\textsuperscript{71} Finally, in 1656 the plague decimated over half of the city’s population; only then, at the behest of her devoted nuns, were Suor Orsola’s warnings made public by pamphlet and pulpit and the wickedness of the population revealed.\textsuperscript{72} This message to Neapolitans was

\textsuperscript{69} David Gentilcore, \textit{Healers and Healing In Early Modern Italy} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 168.

\textsuperscript{70} Salvatore De Renzi, \textit{Napoli Nell’ Anno 1656} (Naples: 1867; reprint, 1968), 41-2. This prophecy continued on at great length regarding the damnation of Naples. De Renzi’s work remains the most comprehensive study of the Neapolitan plague of 1656 and provides detailed accounts from primary archival sources most of which have not been published elsewhere.


\textsuperscript{72} Estimates of the numbers of dead vary. See Christopher Black, \textit{Early Modern Italy: A Social History} (London: 2001), 23. See also Galasso, 1982, 47; Cipolla, p. 100. Innocenzo Fuidoro,
so powerful that the Spanish viceroy the count of Castrillo, Garcia de Avellaneda y Haro, who had long suppressed any official recognition of the plague, was the first to go to Orsola’s hermitage where he was seen digging twelve baskets of dirt with his own hands. Neapolitans, on the other hand, faced a clear indictment of sin through her message as well as an opportunity for redress. Like the majority of early modern Italians they saw the plague epidemic as the reckoning of an angry God, and just as King David built an altar in response to a punishing plague, the Neapolitans rushed to complete Suor Orsola’s hermitage.

At this same time the construction of the church of S. Maria del Pianto as a memorial to the victims of the plague was also set in motion, although the impetus behind its creation is somewhat more complicated than that of the hermitage. Establishing a framework for the motivations behind the church’s commission requires an investigation and analysis of civil, political and religious conditions within the city both prior to and at that point at which the church was erected.

The Neapolitan plague of 1656 was one of the most damaging to hit the peninsula since the reappearance of the disease in 1348. The widespread devastation was caused by overcrowding in the city proper, as well as the incompetence of officials that bordered on malfeasance. The response of both civil and ecclesiastic authorities was underwhelming and ineffective compared with the

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Giornali di Napoli dal MDCLX al MDCLXXX (Naples, 1934), vol. 1, 54. Interestingly, Fuidoro reports that in September 1660 the first celebration was held in honor of the city’s principal protector St. Januarius for delivering Naples from Vesuvius, the revolution, and the plague collectively illustrating that these devastations were viewed as of a kind.


74 De Renzi, 40-42.
leadership displayed in other Italian cities and states and historians have described the Kingdom of Naples’ public health laws as “ad hoc and piecemeal.”\textsuperscript{75} Unlike other cities such as Florence and Venice, Naples had no central health board until the plague had killed so many people that the authorities were forced to create the Magistrato della Sanità in 1656.\textsuperscript{76}

As early as 1652 officials in Genoa and Florence were working together to keep the contagion from their cities and they requested that officials in Rome and Naples cooperate with them in sharing information and adopting strict guidelines for managing epidemics including trade control and port closures. Rome agreed only to maintain regular correspondence with Florence in these matters and Naples was even less responsive to the request. The Spanish Viceroy in Naples responded to the Florentine overtures first by remarking that he had no faith in the local health officials who numbered only two and that they had purchased their position only for the gains to be made in bribes. He then asked that the Florentine Ambassador not bother the King of Spain with these matters but to deal directly with him. The Ambassador then showed him the agreement with Genoa hoping to persuade him, but to no avail. The viceroy gave assurances that Naples followed the same good practices in preparation for such eventualities, but he stressed the fact that Naples was under Spanish dominion and could not work with Genoa or Florence if the

\textsuperscript{75} Gentilcore, 1998, 39.  
\textsuperscript{76} Gentilcore, 1998, 38-40.
question of suspending trade with Spanish territories arose. He concluded by
pledging that all prudent precautions would be taken, and the matter was closed.\textsuperscript{77}

Contrary to those assurances, we learn from a number of chroniclers of the
period that the Spanish viceroy had purposefully - with knowledge of the epidemic -
allowed infected ships into Naples’ harbour. For months he denied the plague’s
presence and even incarcerated the doctor who had recognized the signs of the
disease at the Annunziata hospital. By June, some five months after the first victims
were reported, the death toll had become so alarming that the Papal nunzio, Giulio
Spinoza, one of the few leaders who made a real effort to address the damage, was
finally able to convince the viceroy to order interventions. The nunzio compiled a
list of instructions that had been adopted by other cities and gave them to the
viceroy.\textsuperscript{78} It is important to note that historians still debate the deleterious effect of
the viceroy’s delayed response and whether or not early precautions would have
made a difference. But for the Neapolitans there was no argument - precautions
were understood to be effective, and precautions were not taken, which for this

\textsuperscript{77} Carlo Cipolla, \textit{Fighting the Plague in 17\textsuperscript{th} Century Italy} (Wisconsin, 1981), 46-50. Cipolla
describes these negotiations in detail. The book is a great source for understanding Early Modern
policy on public health issues. It also provides a number of well-researched case studies of different
Italian cities’ responses to the plague. His study makes it clear that Venice, Milan, Genoa, and
Florence were the most advanced in terms of planning for epidemics and their health related
organizations were the most developed in Italy and throughout Europe at the time.

\textsuperscript{78} Salvatore De Renzi, 48-50. De Renzi was quoting Carlo Botta a writer who lived in Naples during
the outbreak along with another chronicler named Florio. Unfortunately, Florio’s given name is not
provided in De Renzi and I have been unable to find any mention of it elsewhere though his
chronicle is entitled \textit{Cladis Epidemicae}, 1661. De Renzi (57-59) also noted that many other doctors,
fearing the Viceroy’s rage if they revealed the true nature of the epidemic, promoted the idea that
the ‘fevers’ were the result of people eating low quality food. See (59-60) for a complete list of the
measures recommended by Spinoza. See also Galasso (41-43) who described the need for more
lazarettos to deal with the huge numbers of corpses that were starting to be dumped in church
vestibules.
CHAPTER 3

study is a critical point.\textsuperscript{79} The inaction of the Spanish viceroy reveals that he and therefore the Spanish Crown were less concerned about the overall health of the Kingdom of Naples than with its importance as an economic engine for Spain. This added fuel to the fires of discontent that had erupted in the Masaniello revolt in 1647.\textsuperscript{80}

Finally, when the epidemic could no longer physically be ignored, certain safety measures were taken that included the issuing of passes and public health certificates, placing guards at city gates, removing sick to the \textit{lazareti} and appointing doctors and surgeons to each district of the city. Even so, the nunzio was disturbed by the feeble management of the situation. He observed that infected houses remained open, that physical contact with the family of infected persons was not prohibited, contaminated goods were not destroyed and money and medicines were only distributed occasionally. He was equally horrified that “if the house of some poor wretch was boarded up, no thought was given as to how to feed him, so that, with even greater scandal, many people died out of simple want.”\textsuperscript{81}

The ecclesiastic response was managed only slightly better. In order to keep his priests and monks from fleeing the contagion, Cardinal Archbishop Asciano

\textsuperscript{79} De Renzi, 48-59. He provides various contemporary sources reporting on the plague and the response by various levels of officials.

\textsuperscript{80} See Galasso, 1982, 44; De Renzi, 56-7; Romeo de Maio, \textit{Religiosità A Napoli 1656-1799}. (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1997), 28-30. De Maio discussed the pastoral decline of Cardinal Asciano Filomarino after the Masaniello revolt and his subsequent abandonment of duties during the plague of 1656.

\textsuperscript{81} Gentilcore, 1998, 40. Gentilcore’s information on the papal nunzio is cited from Giulia Calvi, “L’oro, il fuoco, le forche: la peste napoletana del 1656,’ \textit{Archivo Storico Italiano}, cxxxix, (1981), 442-3. Worse yet- medicine was difficult to find because of the ban on bringing goods into the city.
Filomarino published strict orders along with a detailed list of spiritual and physical punishments should any of them abandon their duties. Priests were ordered to stay in their parishes and were assigned friars and other religious from their district as assistants. The archbishop extended the powers of confession and absolution to monks and arranged for twelve special priests called *penitenzieri* to deal with the most difficult or grave confessional cases. Finally, he ordered that the Eucharist be displayed in all of the churches for forty-eight hours, during which time donations would be collected and distributed to the poor. After this series of orders was given he quickly removed himself from harm by retiring to pray for the remainder of the outbreak in the elevated and isolated monastery of the Carthusians - the Certosa di San Martino (fig. 14).

Although the response by the authorities was less than effective, it was recorded that many devoted priests and monks took care of confessions, administered the viaticum and organized processions while pious civil authorities arranged for the removal of dead bodies from the streets and squares. Additionally, the jubilee ordered by Pope Alexander VII included many indulgences that could be extended to the dead not just the living. In fact there was a belief at the time.

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82 De Renzi, 56-7. The author cites his source again as Florio, *Cladis epidemicae*, 1661. For further description of the ecclesiastical response see Galasso, 45. This Ecclesiastic response stood in stark contrast to the celebrated effort by the Archbishop of Milan Carlo Borromeo during that city’s plague of 1576. Imagery celebrating Borromeo’s sacramental and penitential efforts on behalf of the stricken can be found throughout Italy including Naples; the dissimilarity with their own archbishop could not have been more obvious.

83 De Renzi, 37-38. De Renzi noted that both Carlo Celano and Florio commented on the praiseworthy and pious work of numbers of priests, monks as well as noblemen. Priests often administered communion to those dying in the lazaretti at the end of a long stick in order to avoid unnecessary contact with the afflicted. On indulgences for the dead see Christine Boeckl, *Images of*
that to die during the plague was the safest way to get to paradise because of the
number of indulgences offered as well as the work of heavenly intercessors.\textsuperscript{84} 
While Reform ideology and teachings had shifted the clerical focus from the
miraculous healing of the body to matters of spirit, miracle cures were still very
much a part of the Southern Italian belief system. In that light every member of the
clergy was a potential healer given the spiritual remedies at their disposal. De
Renzi suggests however that in the absence of very many ‘miracle cures’ death
acquired value as a cleanser - a means by which man was regenerated. Sinful
humanity might emerge from a disastrous plague cleansed and those who survived
redeemed.\textsuperscript{85} Plague as a form of purgation thus corresponds to the Church’s system
of sin, punishment and redemption. Devastating though it was, the plague fit within
the hierarchy of the divine plan emphasized by the post-Tridentine church. The
clergy who died administering to the sick within this divine plan were understood
as victims of Christian charity (\textit{victima christianae caritatis}), which lead many to
call for those who died caring for the sick to be deemed martyrs.\textsuperscript{86}

While the perception of the plague as punishment for collective sin
prevailed in Naples, it did not stop the according of blame to various groups or the
rise of factionalism. The Church officials and the Spanish blamed the plague on the

\textit{the Plague and Pestilence} (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2000), 74. Boeckl notes that
gaining indulgences for the dead was already advocated by Pope Gregory I ca. 604.
\textsuperscript{84} De Renzi, 37-8.
\textsuperscript{85} De Renzi, 38-42.
\textsuperscript{86} Sheila Barker, “Plague Art in Early Modern Rome,” in \textit{Hope and Healing}, exh cat., Worcester Art
Museum, 2005, 56, n. 40. Barker outlines the contentious debate about those caring for the sick
being named martyrs after death. However, a number of treatises calling for this martyr designation
were eventually put on the index of prohibited books.
Neapolitans as a punishment for the Masaniello rebellion of 1647 in which the people had fomented an uprising against the legitimate possessor of divine right, their Catholic Lord the King of Spain. This accusation was trumpeted from every pulpit in the city as a means to effect social control. The political agitators accused the Spaniards of engineering the introduction of the plague into Naples as a vendetta for the revolt. Finally, there was some speculation by both the Spanish and the Neapolitans that the French were responsible for introducing the plague as a strategy against their rival Spain.\(^87\)

This attempt by so many to relinquish responsibility is understandable when reading Domenico Antonio Parrino’s grim report, which stated that “Physicians, surgeons, and barbers were dying for treating the body, priests and monks for treating the soul, gravediggers for giving corpses a burial.”\(^88\) Carlo Celano, writing about the seemingly endless cycle of death that gripped the city observed that:

> There was no more room to bury, nor anyone who could bury [the dead]; with my own eyes I saw this strada di Toledo where I lived paved with corpses so that carriages going to the Palazzo could not proceed but over baptized flesh. I cannot describe this tragedy further because I could not do so with out tears.\(^89\)

\(^87\) De Renzi, 48-50. The author outlined innumerable contemporary accounts of factionalism that arose during and after the plague in Naples. Regardless of the primary cause there were a few doctors who, like Girolamo Gatta, were outraged that the authorities allowed commerce, congregating, and processions to continue; they believed that gatherings during the plague were a mortal sin.

\(^88\) As quoted in Gentilcore, 1998, 40.

\(^89\) I have relied on James Clifton’s translation of this Carlo Celano passage in his “Mattia Preti’s Frescoes for the City Gates of Naples,” The Art Bulletin 76 (1994): 479. For the original in Italian see: Carlo Celano, Notizie del bello del’ antico e del curioso della Città di Napoli (1692; 1856; Naples, 1970) 1401-2.
The devastation expressed in these contemporary accounts was captured on canvas by Domenico Gargiulo in his painting *Largo del Mercatello* ca.1656-60 now in the Museo di San Martino, Naples (fig. 15). The scene shows the market square crowded with the dead and dying. The man on horseback gestures at the scene as other men try to gather the endless supply of bodies.\(^9^0\) The whole enterprise appears futile, as the cart laden with corpses has overturned and more bodies are carried into the piazza. Above the carnage on a bank of clouds the diminutive Virgin is shown pleading with her son to end Naples’ suffering while an angel tries to hold back Christ’s unremitting sword. In the background towards the right is the gate of Santo Spirito, which at the time led to the strada Toledo, which Celano vividly described as filled with “baptized flesh.” This extraordinary visual document was, however, based less on first-hand knowledge than on contemporary accounts, because the painter was safely installed at the Certosa di S. Martino during the plague.\(^9^1\) The human toll of the outbreak recorded by these chroniclers and the artist Gargiulo reflect precisely the primary cause for which the church of S. Maria del Pianto was built.


\(^91\) Certainly, Gargiulo would have had some familiarity with the epidemic before and after his stay at the elevated monastery. Clifton, in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 113. Clifton suggests that such works attempted to “recuperate disastrous and anarchic events for positive political, religious or personal reason.”
After months of unmitigated transmission the disease spread beyond temporal controls, and the only recourse that remained was spiritual. In mid-May, months after the epidemic hit, the Deputati della Salute (health officials) officially invoked the saintly intercession of the Virgin Immaculate along with others most notably St. Januarius - the city’s assiduous patron saint. This public vow, and the subsequent ex-voto imagery commissioned by the Eletti (civil delegates) promised to defend the Immaculate Conception in exchange for the Virgin’s help in restoring the city’s health and favour with the Lord. It is important to note that the sponsorship of the Immaculate Conception and the promotion of its cult had decidedly Spanish connotations and were an extremely controversial political issue for the papacy at this time either to endorse or dismiss. The vow by the Eletti underscores the strong artistic, cultural and religious exchange between Naples and Spain and the successful translation of a politically charged Spanish cult to Naples. This exchange between Naples and Spain is a critical element of this thesis and will be developed further in relation to the art works commissioned for S. Maria del Pianto by the Spanish Viceroy.

92 The vows made by the Eletti are published in full by De Renzi, 58-9. The account also describes the many religious processions that employed miraculous images of the Virgin in order to seek relief from the plague.


The Neapolitan acceptance and assimilation of the cause of the Immaculate Conception is not surprising given Southern Italy’s very strong attachment to Marian imagery. De Renzi describes how, after the public vow invoked by the Deputati della Salute, the Eletti ordered that the Immaculate Conception be painted above each of the city’s seven gates. They commissioned Mattia Preti to design and execute all of the frescoes, which were explicitly to include the Virgin Immaculate holding the Christ Child in her arms with Saints Januarius, Francis Xavier, and Rosalie.\textsuperscript{95} Because the Gate frescoes would take a significant amount of time to complete, the Eletti ordered that a print of the same subject be made and distributed freely to the Neapolitan people as part of the vow to celebrate and defend the Virgin’s primacy. Nicholas Perrey, a French engraver living in Naples, was given the print commission and it conforms to the same strict instructions set out by the Eletti for the gate frescoes (fig. 16).\textsuperscript{96} The engraving shows a traditional rendering of the Immaculate Virgin as Apocalyptic Woman with the exception that she carries the Christ Child in her arms - a distinction the Eletti had insisted upon.\textsuperscript{97} The saints are situated just below her where they plead for her mercy upon the

\textsuperscript{95} De Renzi, 58-9; Clifton, in \textit{Hope and Healing}, 2005, 103. There was a great scandal caused by the Eletti’s inclusion of certain saints at the expense of others for the gate frescoes. The atmosphere was very charged as competing Religious orders vied to have their saint(s) included in the important civic commission. Clifton, (1994, 490-497) offers a detailed account of the saints that were included in the images and their association to the plague. Upsetting many, the much beloved St. Gaetano was excluded from the commission—a decision that was later remedied by the inclusion of his bust on the interior face of each of the gates.


\textsuperscript{97} Clifton, in \textit{Hope and Healing}, 99-100. The Apocalyptic Woman is described in Revelations 12:1. It describes her as “A woman clothed with the Sun, and the Moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” The Immaculate Virgin is often represented with one or a combination of these symbols.
city’s faithful pictured at the bottom. Bodies of the dead are shown along with those lowly men whose task it was to remove them; a group of citizens prays in the left middle ground while a religious figure on the right is shown administering a Sacrament. This combination of civic and religious remedy reinforced and reminded the population the remedies available to them, especially a clergy working on their behalf here on earth, as well as a hierarchy of celestial interlocutors actively seeking intervention for them.

All of the gate frescoes completed by 1659 were damaged in the earthquake of 1688 and aside from the darkened fragments of the fresco at the Porta S. Gennaro, the rest have since been completely destroyed.\footnote{Clifton, 1994, 483. Clifton (Hope and Healing, 2005, 99) states that all of the frescoes have been destroyed. John Spike, Mattia Preti: Catalogue Raisonné (Florence: Centro, 1999) 194. Spike notes that the fresco over the porta San Gennaro is still extant.} What remains are two of Preti’s oil sketches for the compositions located in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte (figs. 17, 18) as well as a chalk sketch of figures related to the project which has recently appeared on the art market.\footnote{Clifton in Hope and Healing, 2005, 99. For information about the chalk sketch see 116, n.5. I have been unable to locate an image of the sketch at this time.} Both oil sketches are similar in composition and adhere to the Eletti’s guidelines but also include elements presumably left to Preti’s discretion or specified by the Eletti in conversation, such as the archangel Michael sheathing his sword to indicate the end of the epidemic.\footnote{Since St. Gregory’s vision of the angel atop Castel Sant’Angelo during the Roman plague of 590 an angel sheathing his sword was understood as a plague emblem of deliverance. Angels have long been associated with the plague. In biblical episodes about pestilence God would most often send an angel as his agent of punishment.}
Preti’s treatment of the plague corpses is especially impressive. Strewn across the immediate foreground in both sketches and startling in their realism, the corpses are rendered beautiful and tragic, even theatrical in death. This treatment proved both innovative and influential especially when considering one of Luca Giordano’s paintings for S. Maria del Pianto that clearly references Preti’s foreground scenes. While Preti’s rendering of the Virgin and Child is certainly linked to some Neapolitan sources, it also clearly resembles Raphael’s Sistine Madonna type with the forward stride of the Virgin holding the Christ Child, the cloud swells and billowing drapery (fig. 19). Preti’s Immaculate Virgin is flanked by saints, the most important being St. Januarius, Naples’ thaumaturgic patron saint who had been the Bishop of nearby Benevento, martyred in 305. St. Januarius’ value to the Neapolitans in times of civic disaster cannot be overstated and not surprisingly the saint features prominently in one of Luca Giordano’s altar paintings for S. Maria del Pianto.

By the seventeenth century the iconography of the Immaculate Conception as the Apocalyptic Woman was well established, and her association with the

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101 John Sherman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources 1483-1602* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 1394-5. Sherman notes the complete lack of early documentation for the Sistine Madonna. See also Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of his Paintings* (Arcos, 2003) 107. It seems that prints after the Sistine Madonna only become known after the picture’s arrival in Dresden in the 18th Century. As Sebastian Schütze suggested, it is possible that Preti would have been exposed to Raphael’s image through a more indirect transfer from the work of another artist.

102 St. Januarius’s martyred blood was kept in two vials, which would liquefy each year on certain feast days. These blood miracles were particularly popular in Naples and somewhat in the surrounding territories. They grew in popularity throughout the seventeenth century with many other cults developing around saints performing similar miracles. See: Clifton in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 101; Jordan Lancaster, *In the Shadow of Vesuvius: A Cultural History of Naples* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 5-8; Michael Carroll, *Catholic Cults and Devotions* (Kingston Montreal: Queen’s McGill University Press, 1989), 57-78.
plague was not new. In New Castile, Spain, for example between 1575 and 1580 the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady was invoked through vows in forty-two villages as protectress against the plague. The invocation of the Virgin in her most pristine state lent itself to combating a disease as corrupt as the plague. This idea is revealed in a sermon given in Naples on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1659 when the preacher referred to her as the “impenetrable wall against the original plague” neatly and unmistakably linking plague and Original Sin - the hereditary stain from Adam that introduced death. Images of the Virgin Immaculate abounded in Naples but Clifton convincingly argues that the direct visual source for the Eletti’s commission for the city gates of the Virgin Immaculate with Child was a statue located in the Church of the Immaculate Conception connected to Suor Orsola’s hermitage (fig. 20). This statue was carried in procession in times of public anxiety such as the eruption of Vesuvius in 1631 and during the Masaniello revolt in 1647. Clifton concludes, however, that the real origins of this “unusual motif” of the “exceedingly rare” and not “adequately explained” Apocalyptic Woman with Child belonged to the teachings of St. Gaetano of Thiene one of the founders of the Theatine order who spent the final

103 Clifton, in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 100-1.
105 Clifton, in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 100. Clifton explains that the inclusion of the Child with the Virgin Immaculate was extremely unusual though not without precedent. For an extremely detailed discussion of the doctrine associated with the Immaculate Conception and its early representation in works of art see: Mirella Levi D’Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (College Art Association of America, 1957) especially, 20-38.
four years of his life in Naples, where he died in 1547. St. Gaetano insisted that images of the Virgin Immaculate always be coupled with the Christ Child in her arms.\textsuperscript{108} Based on Clifton’s evidence, the statue is very likely the direct visual source for the Eletti’s commission, and certainly St. Gaetano’s endorsement of such a grouping influenced the diffusion of the Immaculate Virgin with Child iconography in Naples. However, contrary to Clifton’s assertion, the iconography itself was not at all “unusual” or “rare.” In fact there are numerous comparable images throughout Naples and Campania, many of which actually predate St. Gaetano’s stay in the city, demonstrating that the iconography’s primary origins must be found elsewhere. Additionally, because of the civic and communal nature of the vows and the subsequent gate decoration they engendered, it is more conceivable that the Eletti would have commissioned works with strong local associations and developed visual traditions rather than requisitioning an “iconographically singular” image as Clifton suggests.\textsuperscript{109} It is more reasonable in my view, that these frescoes, commissioned during a time of social upheaval, reflected recognizable and reassuring themes and that the Virgin Immaculate holding the Christ Child fulfilled this role.

\textsuperscript{108} Clifton, 1994, 489. The author argues that Gaetano’s views were further disseminated by Francesco Maria Maggio, an obscure Theatine theologian and writer, and biographer of Suor Orsola Benincasa living in Naples during and after the plague of 1656. Additionally, D’Ancona (1975, 26) notes that the iconography of the apocalyptic woman from the middle ages through the Renaissance was often associated and combined with other Marian personalities such as the Queen of Heaven, the Virgin of Humility, the Virgin of the Rosary, and the Immaculate Conception. Consequently, the combination of the Immaculate Virgin image holding the Christ Child is not so unusual.

\textsuperscript{109} Clifton, 1994, 489.
Indeed, the iconography of the Virgin Immaculate holding the Christ Child was well established in Naples and there are a number of such images in the city and the surrounding areas beginning in the mid-fifteenth century such as: The Madonna of Graces (fig. 21) by an unknown artist for the church of S. Maria delle Grazie Maggiore in Naples ca. 1450; Angiolillo Arcuccio’s Madonna of Graces and the Souls in Purgatory (fig. 22) ca. 1470 in the church of S. Maria Annunziata in Aversa; Giovanni da Nola’s relief sculpture (fig. 23) of the Madonna of Graces and the Souls in Purgatory in Naples at the church of S. Agnello a Caponapoli ca. 1520. The Madonna and Child on a crescent moon also figure prominently in Alessandro Baratta’s engraving of the grand view of Naples ca. 1629 (fig. 24). The iconography continues into the eighteenth century as seen in the frontispiece of Serafino Montorio’s Zodiaco di Maria from 1715 (fig. 25). So, while the exact origin for such imagery remains obscure, the same cannot be said of the image of the Virgin Immaculate holding the Christ Child itself.

Interestingly, many images of the Immaculate Virgin and Child throughout Italy are related in some manner to the dead. This underscores the aforementioned

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110 It is entirely possible that there are even earlier images of the Immaculate Virgin and Child grouping in Naples. For information on this veduta see Cesare De Seta, Le città nella storia d’Italia: Napoli (Bari: Laterza, 1981), 150-151.
112 It would be worth investigating this iconography in its Spanish context as well. One interesting image from Spain is Luis de Varga’s Allegory of the Immaculate Conception from 1561 in the Seville Cathedral. While this painting was influenced by Vasari’s work in Florence of the same subject, De Varga’s Spanish image depicts the Virgin Immaculate with the Christ Child in her arms and Vasari’s does not (figs. 26, 27). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for the iconography of the Immaculate Conception to be used in combination with other Madonnine imagery. For example El Greco’s Assumption of the Virgin of 1577-79 now in the Chicago Art Institute was based principally upon Titian’s painting of the same subject for the Frari in Venice except that El Greco adds the Immaculist symbol of the crescent moon under the Virgin’s feet in Her Apotheosis (fig. 28).
preacher’s statement that the Immaculate Virgin stood as an “impenetrable wall against the original plague [sin]” meaning by extension that she stood against sin and mortality - she triumphed over death. In both Italy and Northern Europe similar but earlier Virgin Immaculate and Child images were often combined with symbols of death such as skeletons or skulls. Of one such image D’Ancona states:

The iconography...is thus a representation of the Immaculate Conception in its complete form: The Virgin was conceived immaculate and conceived Christ immaculately. The immaculacy of the Virgin is shown by her triumph over sin and death...and the Christ Child in the arms of the Virgin refer to the reason for her immaculacy.113

This insight provides plausible context for Preti’s images associated with the plague as well as illuminating their potential significance for Neapolitans. If we apply D’Ancona’s argument, Preti’s images imply a deeper meaning. Beyond death by plague, or protection, or the public vow to defend the Immaculate Conception for deliverance, the Virgin triumphed over original sin and mortality, and she was able immaculately to conceive Christ the only vehicle for human redemption from man’s original sin and death - a means to attain life everlasting. Romans 5:12-15 states that "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men....But not as the offence, so also the gift. For if by the offence of one, many died: much more is the grace of God and the gift, by grace of one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many."114 Understood in this context the images for the gates of Naples would have reinforced for the viewer the

113 D’Ancona, 1957, 26-7. She notes that the connection between the two conceptions (of Mary and Christ) was very common by the end of the fourteenth century and that the two ideas merged into a single iconography, which persisted well into the seventeenth century.
114 Adam by his fault transmitted to mankind not only death but sin.
efficacy of belief in the Virgin’s intercessory power over both the cycle of sin and
mortality and her particular role in the process of redemption through her son -
since death by any means was understood in terms of sin and possible salvation. At
a time when so many had died one can imagine how reassuring this message might
have been. As the Virgin triumphed over original sin she held in her arms the
means by which Neapolitans could similarly overcome both the immediate plague
as well as the “original plague.”

It should also be noted that the implicit task of the fresco-crowned gates was
to protect against and keep out undesirables such as disease, heretics, or ill-
intended foreigners. The fresco of the Virgin Immaculate on the gates symbolized
her purity and intercessory powers that could counteract the threat of disease or
attack. Therefore the prophylactic nature of the gates and the images that adorned
them were complete in both function and symbol.115

The Madonna as intercessor was depicted in many other plague related
images in Naples, and the name of the church suggests she was probably from the
very beginning intended to be prominently represented in the altar paintings at S.
Maria del Pianto. She also played a central role in an ex-voto plague painting by
Domenico Gargiulo made for the Carthusians. The painting, Ex-Voto for the
Carthusians Escape from the Plague ca.1657 (fig. 29) was made for the very same
monastery that Archbishop Filomarino retired to for the duration of the epidemic.
The painting still resides at the Certosa di S. Martino high on the hill above Naples.

115 Clifton, in Hope and Healing, 2005, 104.
The main scene is situated in a central courtyard with an arcade looking out to the Neapolitan cityscape including mount Vesuvius. At the center of the painting, above a large gathering of monks, the Virgin is depicted along with Saint Bruno trying to quell Christ’s wrath by pleading with him. Filomarino is easily identified by his cardinal’s robes and Gargiulo represents himself at the far right with his palette and brushes. The disgusting hag referred to by Cesare Ripa in his *Iconologia* as ‘plague’ makes her way towards the gathering but is thwarted in her campaign by the titular saint of the Monastery Saint Martin of Tours.\textsuperscript{116} The Carthusians, unlike the monks from other orders who worked and died among the plague stricken population, stayed shut away in their lofty retreat to pray for deliverance accepting no contact from outsiders.\textsuperscript{117} This work seems to be a sort of visual apologia emphasizing the equally important efforts made by the Carthusians in their struggle to release the city from Divine punishment through pious prayer. It also expounds the effectiveness of their intercessory saints and the efforts that the Virgin made on their behalf because all of their community survived the plague. Their action was consistent with the ‘solitude emphasized by their rule’, which was celebrated in their ex-voto painting.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{116} Clifton, in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 106. Both Domenico Gargiulo and Luca Giordano stayed at the monastery during the outbreak and both survived—as did the rest of the Carthusians.

\textsuperscript{117} Carlo Riaco as cited in Clifton (2005, 107 and 1994, 493) notes the extraordinary high number of deaths among the religious. Once the disease penetrated an enclosed and communal space such as a monastery or convent the numbers of dead were extremely high. It is suggested that of 600 Dominicans in Naples 400 died, most if not all of the reformed Franciscans died, 190 Capuchins died with only enough remaining to perform the necessary official duties. Of the nearly 300 Jesuits only 8 survived and of the Theatines 70 of 250 lived.

\textsuperscript{118} Clifton, in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 107.
The many private devotional or ex-voto works created in response to the plague included a painting by Mattia Preti depicting the *Madonna of Constantinople* ca. 1656 in S. Agostino degli Scalzi in Naples (fig. 30). This painting was made in reference to the cult of the Hodegetria, which found roots in sixteenth-century Naples after the city was besieged by war, famine and plague and was subsequently liberated by the Madonna of Constantinople.\(^{119}\) It was commissioned as an ex-voto by a wealthy lawyer and his son, Giovanni and Marino Schipani, to be placed in the church of S. Agostino degli Scalzi in gratitude for their deliverance from the epidemic. Included in the image are saints Rosalie, Januarius, Roch, Joseph and Nicasius. Clifton notes that there is nothing that ties this image to the plague aside from its inscription, which is true except for the inclusion of Saints Rosalie and Roch both of whom were very prominent plague saints.\(^ {120}\) So while linked to the events of 1656 the image signaled the fundamental role of the Madonna of Constantinople beyond the original context.\(^ {121}\)

An example of a private devotional work created after the Neapolitan epidemic is *St. Francis Xavier Interceding for the Plague Victims* by Luca Giordano dating from the late 1650s (fig. 31), today in a private collection in Naples. Its early provenance is not known though there are indications that it was commissioned by

\(^{119}\) The Neapolitan church of the Madonna of Constantinople had what was believed to be a miraculous image of the Virgin and Child. There were numerous processions to this church during the 1656 epidemic as well as prayers made to this Madonna.

\(^{120}\) Clifton, in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 106. The importance of the prominent plague saints tying this image to plague was kindly pointed out by Dr. Sebastian Schütze.

Gaspar de Bracamonte Count of Peñaranda, Viceroy from 1658 to 1664. The painting depicts St. Francis Xavier the co-founder of the Jesuits and is very closely allied with one of Luca Giordano’s paintings commissioned by viceroy Peñaranda for the church of S. Maria del Pianto. Both paintings include in the foreground a similar figure with nose and mouth covered shown dragging a corpse amongst wagons laden with dead.\textsuperscript{122} Ferrari and Scavizzi believe that it was completed before work commenced on the paintings commissioned for S. Maria del Pianto as a kind of proof for the larger commission.\textsuperscript{123} St. Francis Xavier is shown with his arms and hands outstretched as though trying physically to hold back the punishing Christ or to sacrifice himself in the stead of Naples. The artist positioned the saint as a physical barrier between Neapolitans and the plague rather than assuming the more traditional attitude of prayer and supplication. While many such ex-voto and devotional images were created in direct response to the plague any intercessory image could act as an initiating point for the invocation of \textit{rimedi spirituali}, hoping to gain release from the disease.

Finally, in a purely secular work, the Neapolitan artist Carlo Coppola chose to depict a scene of the plague, and while it too made use of some established

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\textsuperscript{122} Oreste Ferrari, and Giuseppe Scavizzi, \textit{Luca Giordano: L’opera Completa} (Electa Napoli, 2000) Vol. 1, A76, 262
\textsuperscript{123} There was a conflict between the Theatine supporters of St. Gaetano and the Jesuits’ St. Francis Xavier regarding each saint’s official role in combating the plague of 1656. The commissioner of this work would have been making a statement in support of one over the other. It is somewhat surprising that if the new Viceroy had commissioned this work that no documentation remains. But it is reasonable to assume that he would have personally supported the Spanish Jesuit St. Francis Xavier. See also Giuseppe Galasso, \textit{Napoli Spagnola Dopo Masaniello} (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1982), 49-50. Galasso describes the rivalry between the Jesuits and the Theatines, which intensified after the Plague of 1656. Fuidoro’s contemporary account supports this claim as he reports the trouble caused by Spain’s promotion of St. Francis Xavier over their beloved St. Gaetano, (vol. 1, 64).
conventions it is more candid and raw in its portrayal of misery. His *Pestilence of 1656 in Naples* (fig. 32) painted ca. 1656, now in the Princeton University Art Museum depicts a detailed scene of plague workers collecting and transporting corpses in what has been described as “a journalistic image more associated with print culture.” There is no evidence of Divine intervention, and there are no priests, monks, or grieving family members present, only death in its least celebrated form. This image reflects the solitude that greeted so many Neapolitan plague victims as the society’s fundamental beliefs, customs and religious practices were severely undermined; family members abandoned one another along with the important religious rites so central to early modern life.

A very similar scenario has been described by a contemporary chronicler of the Neapolitan plague. Florio, relating the horrifying spectacle at the site upon which the church of S. Maria del Pianto was later built, wrote that:

> Mounds of corpses taken out of houses and streets and many dying or in delirium were brought to an enormous blind cave that was called

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124 This work has been associated with the genre paintings of the Roman Bamboccianti.

125 Franco Mormando, in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, pl. 26, 229. Note as well the infant suckling its mother’s breast. Like Raphael and Poussin the grouping’s associations with the ancient story of a dying mother concerned about blood in her milk has been transformed into signifying the presence of the plague.

126 There are a number of studies, which focus on the social fissures created by epidemic disease in the medieval and early modern period. The chronicler Florio as described in De Renzi (1968, 71-72) commented that the 1656 plague in Naples was so dark that friends would not see even their dearest friends consoled and tended in their sickness. Similarly the bonds linking servant and lord, father and son, husband and wife, and mother and child were often severed. See also Samuel Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and The Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Giulia Calvi, *Histories of a Plague Year: The Social and the Imaginary in Baroque Florence*, trans. Dario Biocca (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Carlo Cipolla, *Public Health and the Medical Profession in Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). When the plague was over there was an impulse by many to set right these insults against the dead, which will be explored in relation to the church of S. Maria del Pianto in Chapter 4 and 5.
the grotto of the Sportiglioni [Neapolitan dialect for Bats] at Poggio Reale. And it is written that no less than sixty thousand bodies were gathered there. Some corpses were brought by their dear relatives, who were rushing to dump in that abyss, their own children and parents, relieved to be able to flee from the horrendous spectacle without the hint for any of them [the dead] of a religious rite.\footnote{Florio as cited by De Renzi, 1968, 71-72. The Chronicler noted in his 1661 \textit{Cladis epidemicae} that: Often, such was the number of cadavers, that after having filled the wagons, others were tied up with ropes and dragged. In many cases with no other means of transportation they were just amassed in piles and burned in pyres. Other cadavers still were secretly brought to the isolated beach of Chiaia and thrown where the Sebeto river reaches the sea, and those corpses, pushed back by the waves, were returned to the beaches deformed where they would remain, preyed on by the dogs, at least until some pious man who putting charity before his own safety would find a way to bury them in the sand and others in gardens, cellars and even cisterns.}

This grim report illuminates the depth of fear and shock associated with the plague and the suspension of a crucial religious observance. The commissioning of S. Maria del Pianto, built on the sight of this mass grave, reflects the spiritual concerns and devotional practices of Neapolitans after such catastrophic loss. It will become clear in the following chapters that this church likely functioned in different capacities for different people. It stood as a possible political solution to ease unrest. It was a memorial recording the communal desire to address the pitiful end suffered by so many. It was an attempt to sanctify the death of thousands cut off from comfort or custom. It was a place of worship where good works combined with devotion to the souls in Purgatory, reinforcing the bond between the living and the dead.
CHAPTER 4

S. Maria del Pianto: The Commission

The Church of S. Maria del Pianto (figs. 14, 33, 34) was built outside the walls of seventeenth-century Naples in the district of Poggio Reale known for its fresh air, stunning views and one of the most celebrated Renaissance villas (fig. 14). During the Neapolitan plague of 1656 certain areas of the district were used to dump and inter victims of the epidemic. S. Maria del Pianto was erected above one such area known as the Grotta degli Sportiglioni - that wretched cave filled with some sixty thousand bodies so vividly described by Florio in the preceding chapter. The church was not conceived ex-voto as has been suggested; such an interpretation is a misunderstanding of the nature of the commission and its significance to the Neapolitan people. S. Maria del Pianto was built as a memorial chapel to the unnumbered plague dead who lay beneath it; the majority of whom had not received the Church’s final sacraments. It functioned primarily as a place

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128 The villa Poggio Reale, situated very close to the church of S. Maria del Pianto, was designed by Guiliano da Maiano for Alfonso II ca. 1480 and was admired for its beauty and wonderful gardens and amusing water features. The actual villa is only known to us through a drawing by Serlio, though there is much debate about its real architectural features. See George L. Hersey, “Poggio Reale: Notes on a Reconstruction and an Early Replication,” Architectura 1 (1973): 13-22; David Marshall, “A View of Poggio Reale by Viviano Codazzi and Domenico Gargiulo,” The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 45 (1986): 32-46. Additionally, Charles VIII, in 1495 entered Naples (then part of his Kingdom) and for months stayed at the Villa Poggio Reale for the pleasure of its beauty, gardens, deer park, statues and waterworks. The King’s visit and primary source descriptions of the villa from members of the Kings court are discussed at length in, Malcom Letts “Some French Travellers in Naples in the Sixteenth Century,” English Historical Review 34 (1919): 476-8. This article also describes Poggio Reale’s earliest connection to the plague when in 1528 Lautrec stationed his troops there for a siege of Naples. After cutting off the water supply (an aqueduct) to the Neapolitans the area flooded much to the surprise of Lautrec. The water grew stagnant and his troops were infected by the plague.

129 De Renzi, 1968, 71-72. Sportiglioni is Neapolitan dialect for bats.
of worship dedicated to the performance of Catholic rituals known to ease the passage of souls through Purgatory.\footnote{Boeckl, 2000, 132, Oreste Ferrari and Giuseppe Scavizzi, in \textit{Luca Giordano. L'opera completa}, vol. 1 (Naples: Electa Napoli, 2000) and Whitfield in \textit{Painting In Naples 1606-1705: From Caravaggio to Giordano}, 1982, 175, have incorrectly described S. Maria del Pianto and the art works associated with it as ex-voto. Clifton in (\textit{Hope and Healing}, 2005, 109-110,) argues against this view and I agree with his assessment. A careful reading of the primary source material clearly shows that it was built as a memorial to the dead and not in fulfillment of a vow such as much of the Neapolitan plague imagery discussed in Chapter 3.} 

There were other confraternities and churches in Naples dedicated to the souls in Purgatory such as S. Maria del Purgatorio ad Arco built ca. 1562, but the plague acted as a great devotional catalyst that both popularized and strengthened Neapolitans’ attachment to S. Maria del Pianto. The facts surrounding its commission and its quick erection support this claim.\footnote{The devotional practices associated with the dead are many-fold in Naples. Some occur within the ecclesiastical institution such as the cult of the souls in Purgatory and some occur outside orthodox religion such as the cult of the abandoned dead, which veers into more superstitious and magical practices. The Neapolitans constructed a very complex system regarding Purgatory and the negotiable relationship between this world and the next, which will be discussed in some detail.} Its necropolitic location combined with its sacred imagery provided a compelling visual reminder of the efficacy of private and public devotional duties by anchoring pious ritual to a contemporary event revealing early modern Neapolitans’ spiritual interest in the afterlife and the rites associated with it. Masses, prayers and almsgiving for the souls in Purgatory were believed to shorten a soul’s purgatorial tenure; consequently, this church provided both a physical setting for remembrance as well as an opportunity for the re-establishment of religious familial obligations abandoned during the epidemic.\footnote{Boeckl, 2000, 74-5.}
This chapter will examine the history of S. Maria del Pianto, its commission and the complexities of the belief system associated with Purgatory that made its construction and decoration so imperative to post-plague Neapolitans. This will include a study of the patronage of the church as well as its meaning as part of a negotiable, flexible system of active exchange between living and dead - the economy of remembrance and obligation.

The first known reference to the church occurs on the eighth of January 1657 in a document outlining the donation of a section of land by Ferrante Spasiano in the Poggio Reale district of Naples. In the very preliminary stages the church was to be dedicated to S. Maria dei Martiri but the name was later changed to S. Maria del Pianto. On the fourteenth of January 1657 an agreement with the stoncutters was reached by the Neapolitan priest Giovanni Lionardo Spano, which included an explicit directive that the stone for the building was to be measured month by month for il magnifico Ingegnero Francesco Antonio Picchiatti. This is the first and only mention of Picchiatti in the existing sources associated with the church and there is some disagreement about his official role given that the remaining documents name Pietro da Marino as the engineer. Most likely

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133 All known archival documents related to the construction of S. Maria del Pianto have been compiled and recorded in Franco Strazzullo, “Documenti per la Chiesa di S. Maria del Pianto,” Napoli nobilissima 4 (1965): 222-25. James Clifton has recently written about the church in “Art and Plague at Naples,” in Hope and Healing, exh cat., Worcester Art Museum, 2005. See also, James Clifton, “Images of the Plague and other Contemporary Events in Seventeenth-Century Naples,” diss., Princeton University, 1987, 63-80. Strazzullo (1965, 223) notes that the name S. Maria dei Martiri was dropped early on but by the thirteenth of May 1660 the church was called S. Maria del Pianto. No reason has been recorded for this but it is possible that the change was initiated by the viceroy of Naples Gaspar de Bracamonte Count of Peñaranda.

134 Strazzullo, 1965, 223, see also Franco Strazzullo, Architetti e Ingegneri Napoletani dal’500 al ’700 (Benincasa, 1969), 267. In 1656 Francesco Picchiatti was nominated Ingegnere Maggiore del regno.
Picchiatti, the principal architect of the Kingdom, provided the designs for the church and da Marino directed the construction.\footnote{Definitive evidence identifying the actual architect for the church cannot be found in the existing documents or contemporary accounts of the church. Strazzullo (1965, 224) credits Picchiatti with the designs for the church because of his position as major architect of the kingdom of Naples and the document dated the 14 of January 1657 notes that the stones were to be cut and measured month by month for Picchiatti. While I am inclined to agree with this assessment Strazzullo (1965, 224) incorrectly argues that the designs were very likely Picchiatti’s “considering that the construction was favored and largely financed by the Viceroy Gaspar de Bracamonte the Count of Peñaranda who would have likely employed his principal engineer.” Gaspar de Bracamonte though instrumental in the later construction of S. Maria del Pianto was not involved by 1657 as he did not become viceroy until December 1658. Harold Wethey, “The Spanish Viceroy, Luca Giordano, and Andrea Vaccaro,” Burlington Magazine 109 (1967), 678, disagrees with Strazzullo’s assessment citing a payment document from 23 of July 1661, which refers to “il disegno del Sig. Pietro da Marino,” and concludes that this design refers to the church. Wethey does not cite his information but is likely referencing a document from Strazzullo, 1965, 223, and incorrectly notes the date as 1661 rather than 1660. This document describes a payment for the price and value of the land needed to widen the road, which had to be enlarged for the carriages to access and be serviced at the church. It is not absolutely clear from the wording that da Marino’s designs refer to the plans for the new road and space for the carriages but it is very unlikely that this ‘design’ refers to the design of the church as Wethey asserts. The document states: “Banco della SS. Annunziata. Pagate duc. 50 al Sig. Ferrante Vespasiano per lo prezzo e valuta di tanto territorio per servizio della strada che s’have d’accomodare et dilatare per poserno saglire le carozze sopra detta chiesa, e largo per servizio di quelle, e per lo piano et altro juxta il disegno del Sig. Pietro de Marino.” See also Gennaro Galante, Guida Sacra Della Città di Napoli (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1985), for his entry on S. Maria del Pianto. For further information on the careers of both Pietro da Marino and Francesco Picchiatti both of whom trained under Francesco’s father Bartolomeo Picchiatti, see Anthony Blunt, Neapolitan Baroque and Rococo Architecture (London: A. Zwemmer Ltd, 1975), 91-97. It should also be noted that the engineer Onofrio Tango was later brought in to help da Marino as recounted in Strazzullo, 1965, 224.}

The church was consecrated sometime during the early spring of 1662, documented by the payment to the master of ceremonies Don Anello Ricciardone for the blessing of the bell and the new church.\footnote{Strazzullo, 1965, 223. Sig. Ricciardone was paid for his ceremonial duties on 10 June 1662.} In May the contemporary chronicler Innocenzo Fuidoro wrote:

On the 18\textsuperscript{th}, the day of Ascension, the first mass was said in the new church of Santa Maria del Pianto outside the Porto Capuana built above the grotto of bats, paid by the donations of the faithful Neapolitan Christians. Here [mass] is celebrated for the souls of the dead from the last plague of the year 1656 [who were] buried in the grotto and in other places in Naples; each day the faithful go around
the city with their containers asking for donations for the said souls and the church.\footnote{137}

Fuidoro’s statement that the church was built through the munificence of many people confirms the communal nature of the commission and is borne out in other primary sources.\footnote{138} Additionally, his report demonstrates that the donations were collected not only for the completion of the building but also for the souls themselves who would be remembered through the continued celebrations of mass.

The range of contributors suggests broad support for the project and reinforces the importance of S. Maria del Pianto to the recovering city. Along with the financial contributions collected through alms from the general population the most distinguished and historically well known benefactors recorded by the treasurer were Marco di Lorenzo, an affluent milliner and shop owner, Gaspar Roomer and Jan van den Einden the exceptionally wealthy Flemish merchants and art collectors and Gaspar de Bracamonte the Count of Peñaranda, who had taken over the Spanish Viceregency in December 1658.\footnote{139} There were also substantial

\footnote{138}Carlo Celano, \textit{Notizie del' bello e dell' antico e del curioso della Città di Napoli} (Naples: 1692; reprint, 1865), 466-7. Celano notes the early and extraordinary efforts made to collect donations by “the good priest Lionardo Spavo (Strazzullo, 1965, 222 cites his name as Lonardo Spano) and other gentlemen.” but provides no further information as to their involvement. He then writes of the generosity demonstrated by the Viceroy Gaspar de Bracamonte the Count of Peñaranda, his donation and involvement, 467-8.
\footnote{139}Giuseppe Galasso, \textit{Napoli Spagnola Dopo Masaniello} (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1982), 149. The only information we have regarding Marco di Lorenzo and his business comes from Galasso’s reporting of a problem surrounding the inheritance of di Lorenzo’s fortune after his death ca. 1670. His milliner shop was on the strada di Toledo described by Celano as filled with corpses in Chapter 3. The complete list of donors given by Strazzullo (1965, 222-225) aside from those already noted
donations made by the very wealthy and powerful silk and goldsmith guilds. A compelling argument can be made here that many of the individual and institutional supporters were affiliated through their economic and political ties. Unfortunately, the known documents provide insufficient information to determine exactly how the patronage of the church developed.

Though the church was begun the year before the Count of Peñaranda became Viceroy of Naples, he became its most distinguished benefactor and assumed a measure of control over the entire project. It was not unusual for the Spanish Viceroy's to support church building through substantial personal endowments but this practice was epitomized by the Count of Peñaranda. The acknowledgement of the special connection between the Viceroy and the church of S. Maria del Pianto is demonstrated clearly in Domenico Antonio Parrino’s *Teatro eroico e politico de’ governi de’ vicerè del regno di Napoli* of 1694. The include: Biagio di Boliage, Angelo Felice Gezzi, Alonzo d’Angelo, Giovanni Battista Cammarota, Giuseppe Felice and the Banco della Pietà which donated 300 ducats. See also: Eduardo Nappi, *Aspetti della società e dell’economia napoletana durante la peste del 1656; Dai documenti dell’Archivio Storico del Banco di Napoli*, Naples, 1980, quoted by James Clifton in *Hope and Healing*, 2005, 116, n.21. Gaspar Roomer and Jan van den Einden worked closely together as business associates and Roomer was instrumental in forming the artistic taste of Jan van den Einden and his son Ferdinand who was to inherit 90 pictures of his choosing from Roomer’s collection as stipulated in his will. See: Renato Ruotolo, “Mercanti-collezionisti fiamminghi a Napoli: Gaspar Roomer e I Vandeneyden,” *Ricerche sul ’600 Napoletano* (Naples, 1982), 9. For a closer examination of their relationship as merchants and art collectors see pages 12-18.

140 Strazzullo, 1965, 224.
142 Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32. There were varied and complex reasons for vice-regal support of ecclesiastical building such as the need to maintain papal favor and the promotion of Spanish orders like the Carmelites. Hill notes that “the weakness of the Spanish power meant that viceroys needed the moral and economic support of the church,” this was partly assured through the viceregal support for building campaigns and patronage. See also Franco Strazzullo, *Edilizia e Urbanistica a Napoli dal ‘500 al ‘700* (Naples: Arturo Berisio Editore, 1968).
section detailing the Count of Peñaranda’s tenure opens with a portrait of the Viceroy, and clearly visible through the window behind his left shoulder stands the church of S. Maria del Pianto - his legacy to the Neapolitans (fig. 35). The first reference to the viceroy in connection with the church occurs in a document dated 30 April 1660 when a payment of ten ducati was made to the engineer Pietro da Marino for his labour. The record specifies that those ten ducati were part of the sum of five hundred ducati donated by the Count of Peñaranda. An observation by Fuidoro two and a half months later on 13 July appears to confirm the viceroy’s stewardship of the project. He reported the following:

In these days S. E. [the Viceroy] called upon the consul of the Silk Guild, Geronimo Pisano, because he wanted him [Pisano] to establish a tax on his noble art so that the construction of the church above the grotto of the bats could be completed as the donations collected during celebrations around Naples by devoted people were not sufficient to this end. S. E. was inclined to give the church to the Padri Scalzi…and as a result wanted it to be finished. So the consul had a number of [tax] notices printed out and distributed to all silk merchants; and every one of them put the money in the bank….

Strazzullo’s ‘documenti’ for the church include an entry from 13 October 1660, indicating that the Silk guild donated a total of 900 ducati as petitioned by His Excellency the viceroy. Putting out such a tax notice was common practice for raising funds and was seen as a way to make a collective effort involving all

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143 Domenico Antonio Parrino, *Teatro eroico e politico de’ governi de’ vicerè del regno di Napoli*, 1694 as cited by Galasso, 1982, 71. This image has been noted by Wethy, 678, and later by Clifton, 1987, 64 n. 157.
144 Strazzullo, 1965, 223.
145 Fuidoro, vol. 1, 39.
146 Strazzullo, 1965, 224.
members of a guild as a public demonstration of civic responsibility.\textsuperscript{147} Aside from this one direct petition to the silk guild by viceroy Peñaranda, there are no other documents indicating that funds were similarly solicited from other donors.\textsuperscript{148} Still, it is not unreasonable to imagine that the viceroy requested financial contributions from others within his social and political network especially given the above statement that the funds collected during celebrations were insufficient to complete the church.

We know that the Count of Peñaranda was well acquainted with one donor, the Flemish merchant and art collector Gaspar Roomer. In the months that the Count waited in Naples to assume his office as viceroy he lived with Roomer in his villa at Barra.\textsuperscript{149} Unfortunately, we do not know if the merchant made his donation to the church before or during the Count of Peñaranda’s tenure in Naples. In addition to being a wealthy ship owner and merchant in Naples, Gaspar Roomer’s connections to the Spanish are well documented; he was a financier to the King of Spain, Philip IV, and lender to the viceroy’s. It is reported that he was proud of his

\footnote{147}{That this method of taxation was a common practice was pointed out to me in conversation with Sebastian Schütze; he indicated the possibility that the guild was able to negotiate some special “favor” from the viceroy in exchange. Fuidoro’s reporting of the guild’s donation supports the idea that such taxes were customary but also a practice worthy of public record.}

\footnote{148}{Strazzullo (1965, 224) does note 300 ducati donated to His Excellency the Viceroy by Sig. Angelo Gezzi for the service of the church but it is not clear if this money was solicited by the viceroy or given simply as a donation. Unfortunately the dates when others donated money are not included in the extant documents so that we can not know with any surety if they were made during the Viceroy’s tenure on the project or before. Strazzullo (1965, 224) includes documents that record amounts given by others but do not include the date of the donation.}

\footnote{149}{Coniglio notes (275-6) that there was great tension between the incoming viceroy the Count of Peñaranda and the sitting Viceroy Garcia de Avellaneda y Haro the Count of Castrillio whom he was replacing. Apparently, the Count of Peñaranda did not provide a ship for the Count of Castrillio’s return to Madrid, which caused a diplomatic row. The crown subsequently ordered that viceroys were never to meet again. This edict was not abided—even by The Count of Peñaranda and his replacement with whom he was very gracious. The trouble with Castrillo continued well into Peñaranda’s vice-regency as will be seen.}
ability to lend large sums of money to the King for emergencies of state. Along with such lending came a great increase in political power and prestige, which Roomer enjoyed until his death in 1673. The new viceroy and the leading merchant in Naples formed an alliance aimed at securing mutual political and economic benefit, and it is reasonable to imagine that Roomer’s contribution to the viceroy’s project was part of that exchange of favors. Roomer’s propensity to charity increases the likelihood of such a connection. The viceroy and the merchant also held in common a mutual devotion both in public and in private to the Discalced Carmelites and were great benefactors of this powerful Spanish order. Moreover, during the Count of Peñaranda’s stay with Roomer he became acquainted with the merchant’s outstanding art collection and his patronage of the artists Andrea Vaccaro and Luca Giordano, both of whom were later commissioned by the

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150 Giuseppe Ceci, “Un mercante mecenate del secolo XVII: Gaspar Roomer,” Napoli Nobilissima 1 (1929): 161. See also Francis Haskell, Patrons and Painters: A Study in the Relations Between Italian Art and Society in the Age of the Baroque (Yale University Press, 1980), 205. One can imagine that because of this lending power, Roomer would have been extremely influential in matters relating to commerce and trade. His good relations with the viceroy would have assured continued good fortune. Clovis Whitfield in Paintings in Naples 1606-1705 From Caravaggio to Giordano, exh. cat., London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1982 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 63, remarks that Roomer’s reputation as a money lender survived him in the form of a proverb: ‘Do you take me for a Roomer?’ in order to dissuade requests from persistent borrowers.

151 In keeping with the Tridentine church’s promotion of charity and good works as a means to salvation, Roomer, like so many other wealthy people donated huge sums to charity. His wealth, estimated according to Haskell (1980, 205) at 5 million ducats—allowed Roomer to give in an order unmatched by others. For example, while alive he gave over seventy-five thousand ducats to the Carmelite monastery of Santa Teresa, which subsequently changed its name to Santa Maria Maddalena de pazzi, the nun/saint to whom he was particularly devoted (she was canonized in 1669 by Clement IX). Whether this name change was at Roomer’s behest or done in thanks for his patronage remains unclear. After his death he left the same monastery his three palaces, their contents and another 200, 000 ducats. He also named the Hospital of Santa Maria del Popolo degli Incurabili as his universal heir, leaving it the perpetual donation of 20,000 ducats per year, to help the institution recover from economic disasters of that century. For further reading on the finances of Naples under Spanish dominion see: Antonio Calabria, The Cost of Empire: The Finances of the Kingdom in Naples in the Time of Spanish Rule (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1-67.
viceroy to paint the altarpieces for S. Maria del Pianto. Roomer’s donations to the church might at the same time reflect personal motivation since, unlike the victims entombed in the grotto, he believed himself cured of the plague in 1656 without the help of doctors. Roomer attributed his miraculous cure to the divine intercession of his patron, the Carmelite Maria Maddalena de Pazzi who was not canonized until 1669.

Roomer’s closest business associate and fellow merchant Jan Van den Einden also donated money to S. Maria del Pianto but again the archival sources do not specify when or under what circumstances these were made though he certainly would have been acquainted with viceroy Peñaranda because of his close ties with Gaspar Roomer.

Other donations to build S. Maria del Pianto came in swiftly from charity collected by the monastic and lay communities as well as from many levels of Neapolitan society including personal and institutional contributions. The quick response by so many to erect this church for the plague victims’ souls in Purgatory reveals the close ties between politics and religion as well as the breadth of spiritual concern.

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152 Given his own well-documented patronage of both Andrea Vaccaro and Luca Giordano among others it is possible that Roomer advised the Viceroy in such matters as Neapolitan art and collecting. For Roomer’s connection to the artists Andrea Vaccaro and Luca Giordano see Ruotolo, 1982, 6, 13, 16-17. Both artists were very well represented in Roomers collection. See also Ceci, 1929, 164, for an account of the relationship between Roomer and Giordano. The merchant bought works forged by the young Giordano but forgave him and ultimately became a great patron of the Neapolitan artist.


The final document relating to the construction of the church reveals interesting and important information. It dates from 3 October 1665 and records the total cost of the project as 4218 ducati and 10 grana, but of primary interest is the mention of the confraternity that was ultimately charged with the administration of the church. The entry notes that money collected for the congregation of the Souls in Purgatory by mendicant friars with donation baskets built inside the church of S. Maria in Vertecoeli (Verteceli) went towards the building of S. Maria del Pianto.\footnote{Strazzullo, 1965, 224. This lay chapel of S. Maria Vertecoeli is close to the church of SS. Apostoli next to vico SS. Apostoli.} S. Maria Vertecoeli was, in the sixteenth century, a poor chapel with a lay congregation dedicated to collecting donations for the suffrage of the dead.\footnote{Nicola Spinosa, Napoli sacra: guida alle chiese della città, Vol. 2 (Naples: De Rosa, 1993), Ch. 16; Gennaro Aspreno Galante, Guida Sacra Della Città Di Napoli (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1985), 34-5, 45. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of information relating to lesser known congregations or confraternities in Naples, and S. Maria in Vertecoeli falls into this category.} They are likely the same group of “faithful” mentioned by Fuidoro that “go around the city with their containers asking for donations for the said souls and the church.”\footnote{Fuidoro, Vol. 1, 125.} The entry also notes the mendicant friars who collected money for S. Maria del Pianto but whether these mendicants were affiliated with the confraternity of S. Maria Vertecoeli in any official capacity is uncertain. We do know that there was an official group of Padri dell’anime del Purgatorio already well established in Naples by 1664, but it is unknown if these Padri were the same as those who had earlier collected the money for the church.\footnote{Fuidoro, Vol. 1, 255. I have been unable to find a reference to these Padri dell’anime del Purgatorio earlier than 1664 but believe it likely that they had existed in Naples for some time before 1664.} Furthermore, the
viceroy did not ultimately hand the administration of S. Maria del Pianto over to the Padri Scalzi as was, according to Fuidoro, his original intention, and it is unlikely that they were involved with the church since there is no further mention of them. Additionally, no Carmelite imagery distinguishes itself in the artworks of the church or in the documents for the paintings.\footnote{While the Carmelite order was popular in Naples it was decidedly Spanish and arguably not the best choice to govern the church of S. Maria del Pianto given the memory of the less than effective Spanish response to the plague in Naples. The confraternity of the Vertecoeli was thus a wiser option representing the collective interest and support for the project in Naples.} Strong evidence suggests that the lay congregation of S. Maria in Vertecoeli governed the church and this decision seems a natural one since they were a confraternity already associated with suffrage for the dead. Beginning in the late sixteenth century confraternities that focused explicitly on good works dedicated to the release of souls in Purgatory became increasingly popular in Italy.\footnote{Black, 1998, 14.} Unfortunately, not much is known about S. Maria in Vertecoeli in particular, except that the confraternity, articulating that increasingly important space between private and public religious activity, appears to have grown in wealth and prestige in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.\footnote{Gallante, 1985, 34. The congregation grew wealthy enough to rebuild their chapel in 1735 after the designs of Bartolomeo Granucci. It is not clear from the description whether the church was already at vico (little street) SS. Apostoli noted in footnote 28 and rebuilt in the same spot or if it moved to that location. Above the main altar hung a Madonna with Purgatory, by Bernardo Lama (1507-1579) though it is not certain if the congregation had the painting before this date or acquired it for their new chapel.} That the confraternity’s mandate mirrored in large part the devotional practice and preoccupations of Neapolitans after so calamitous a first half of the 1600s explains in part, its surge in popularity. The same is true of the church of S. Maria del Pianto which Strazzullo notes became rich in income and sacred
furnishings in a relatively short period. By the end of the seventeenth century the church had five chaplains who celebrated mass there every day and “through the munificence of the benefactors they had, in very few years, raised the status and decor of the church to a very high level.” The success of the church was assured not only by the popularization of devotion to the souls in Purgatory following the plague, but also by the personal attention of the viceroy and other distinguished patrons.

Because of the beauty of the Poggio Reale district in which it was situated the Church of S. Maria del Pianto became a popular destination for a day’s outing from the city. Fuidoro reports that the year after viceroy Peñaranda’s return to Spain in 1664 the new Cardinal Viceroy Pasquale d’Aragona “was seen at the Church of S. Maria del Pianto at the grotto of the Bats and later took a great stroll around as it was a most beautiful day.” James Clifton, however, refers to a poem written in the Neapolitan Dialect by Giambattista Valentino first published a year later in 1665, which reflects a less contemplative vision of the church and grotto area. It seems that a bar/restaurant had been erected in the vicinity of the church and there were drunkards everywhere. Clifton’s translation of a section of the poem Napole Scontrafatto dapò la Peste reads:

> And that place of eternal memory, I mean the Grotta degli Sportiglioni, that from being a cistern of eternal weeping and wailing became a tavern of so many guzzlers and drunks, as if the dead and plague ridden were alive or even resuscitated. Because six paces

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162 Strazzullo, 1965, 224.
164 Clifton, in Hope and Healing, 2005, 112.
from the cemetery there is a lovely eating place where drunkenness reigns and everyone acts capriciously... with thousands and thousands of women and strumpets curling your hair.  

Apart from the seemingly inappropriate activities described, Valentino’s poem clearly reflects the contemporary intention that the site was meant as a place for somber reflection and continued remembrance of the plague victims. Celano, reporting on the church in 1692, mentions none of the profligate activities reported in Valentino’s poem, but instead marvels at the stunning view from the “tempietto” writing:

[It] has, in front of the atrium, what is perhaps the most beautiful view to be imagined, because, in addition to the city, it shows underneath all the swamps the diversity of grasses seen to almost form a tapestry. One can follow the path of the river and all of the mills that it animates. The air was perfection, no better place in the world.

Unfortunately, the church as it stands today has undergone considerable reconstruction due to the earthquake of 1805 and the only clear illustration of the building is from Parrino’s study on the period of the Viceregency previously noted (fig. 35). It appears from the illustration that the original church had a dome and a two-towered façade. Most likely the general centralized plan of the existing

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165 Clifton (Hope and Healing 2005, 112) writes of the shift in Naples after the plague towards a more celebratory mood. He also cites Fuidoro lamenting that the Neapolitans displayed more licentious behavior after the calamities of the first half of the century. Fuidoro (vol. 1, 52) wrote about the rape of three nuns from the city and testifies that in the kingdom and in Naples before the revolt of 1647 and the plague of 1656 there had been a greater fear of God and his justice - that now everything was luxury and pomp without substance.

166 Strazzullo, (1965, 224) report’s Celano’s views on the site of the church and finishes his study by relating the tragedy that has befallen the area today as the once renowned views are now obstructed by autos and the smoky chimneys of industry. For the full description of the area in the 17th century see Celano, 1692, 468.

167 Wethey, 1967, 678. The paintings are now at the Capodimonte in Naples.
church does indeed correspond to the original plan, which was designed probably in reference to Martyrium church building (fig. 34).\footnote{Though obviously not a Martyrium proper, the church of S. Maria del Pianto certainly finds kinship with one as a gravesite, and while the plague dead were not considered Christian martyrs they could nonetheless be assimilated with them.} Most of the plastered surfaces on the interior and the stone work on the exterior were rebuilt after the earthquake making it difficult to reconstruct the appearance and decoration of the original church in detail.\footnote{Wethey, 678. The author argues that much of the plasterwork on the interior and the stonework on the exterior would have been redone after the earthquake. Additionally, Carlo Borromeo the ardent reformer who was instrumental in organizing and formalizing the 1563 Tridentine decrees also wrote an explicit treatise on proper Church building and designs titled, \textit{Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae}, 1577. He favored cruciform church designs above all but recognized the occasional need for other models. Borromeo criticized centralized plans because of their pagan associations but made allowances for them in certain situations. After the plague of 1576-8 he approved a centralized church to be built in Milan at one of the plague lazarettos – an association very like the site of S. Maria del Pianto. See Evelyn Carole Voelker, \textit{Charles Borromeo’s Instructiones Fabricae et Supellectilis Ecclesiasticae, 1577: A Translation with Analysis}. Ph. D Diss., Syracuse University, 1977, 51, 55-7.}

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The patronage of viceroy Gaspar de Bracamonte, Count of Peñaranda, in Naples is well documented and was an extension of both his private and public persona. From all accounts he was extremely loyal to King Philip IV of Spain and was an able and trusted diplomat as well as a member of innumerable councils to the King; his work as the King’s plenipotentiary was integral in achieving the Peace of Westphalia in Munster ending the Thirty Years War.\footnote{José A. Cabezas, \textit{Negociation of the Peace of Westphalia: Action of the Plenipotentiary D. Gaspar de Bracamonte, Earl of Peñaranda} (Biblioteca Municipal de Peñaranda: Colección}
told the Count of Peñaranda that in Naples, he had achieved with ‘those folks’ what the King had never been able to do. As viceroy he was well regarded and it was generally thought that he governed with equilibrium, intelligence and indulgence. He managed the complex task of balancing the needs of often competing spheres from Spain, Rome, and Naples; he negotiated between factional religious orders, and between aristocratic and popular concerns.

The viceroy was also known for his sponsorship of various Carmelite building projects in Naples, which is hardly surprising, considering King Philip IV’s special devotion to St. Teresa of Avila the Spanish foundress of the Discalced

Bernardino Sánchez, 1998): 17. Digital Peñaranda de Bracamonte archive <http://www.fundaciongr.es/documentos/dosframes4.htm> (accessed and printed on October 13 2006). Cabezas notes the pragmatism that marked the Count of Peñaranda’s diplomatic career. He quotes Peñaranda as stating that “it is necessary to realize for once and all that in Spain there used to be Kings without Flanders and Italy” and he raised doubts about the infinite persistence of the united provinces and even of the “obedient” provinces of Flanders within the Spanish crown.


Coniglio, 1967, 275-280. Coniglio’s (275-283), history of the Spanish viceroys, reports the highlights of the Count of Peñaranda’s successful tenure. As viceroy he was responsible for ordering a new census following the plague to establish with precision the voids created by the epidemic in order to proportionately reduce taxes. This was begun by his predecessor Castrillo but in such a disorderly fashion that it had to be started anew. The Count of Penaranda was also successful at negotiating the difficulties between Naples’ nobility and the Roman Inquisitor Camillo Piazza – notorious for extortion, lust, and luxury coupled with fanatical religious rigor. The Count of Peñaranda had him removed by appealing to his friend Pope Alexander VII and the King of Spain. The King of Spain was also forced to confirm His Crown’s traditional position instituted by Philip II that reduced any power of Spain over the Inquisition in Naples. It is also noted that the Count of Peñaranda celebrated all the important Neapolitan feasts with magnificence and suitable solemnity. As able as he was, most Neapolitans also tended to view him as egocentric and vain and mockingly referred to the flamboyant straw hats with taffeta that he wore as ‘alla Peñaranda.’ It is also worth noting that Fuidoro, (Vol. 1,109) reported that on the 22 of January 1662 the Count of Peñaranda took part in celebrations of an eight-day feast instituted because of Pope Alexander VII’s ratification of the disputed Immaculate Conception.

Carmelites.\(^{174}\) He patronized S. Teresa a Chiaia,\(^{175}\) financed the completion of the Carmelite Convent of S. Giuseppe delle Scalze a Pontecorvo and commissioned Luca Giordano to paint the high altarpiece.\(^{176}\) This endorsement and promotion of “the cult of Spanish Saints” in Naples can be described as a continuous feature of viceregal patronage, and was similar in intention to the promotion of the Immaculate Conception during the plague. This has been referred to as a form of “hispansization” of Naples.\(^{177}\) Similarly, upon his assuming control of the vice regency, the Count of Peñaranda made “St. Teresa of Jesus” the protector of the Kingdom of Naples with a notice of permission from Pope Alexander VII.\(^{178}\) The viceroy had developed a close friendship with the future Pope Alexander VII in Munster when the papal legate acted as envoy extraordinary of Innocent X

\(^{174}\) Erin K. Rowe, “St Teresa and Olivares: Patron Sainthood, Royal Favorites, and the Politics of Plurality in Seventeenth-Century Spain” Sixteenth Century Journal 37 (2006): 721-725. St. Teresa was the only female saint, aside from the Virgin, mentioned by name in King Philip’s will. There was great opposition in Spain regarding the move to have Teresa elevated to co-patron along side Saint James. Rowe believes that the argument (1617-30) was less about theology or liturgical matters than the saint’s connection to the Spanish Crown and Papal authority. Teresa’s promotion was closely identified as a ‘cause’ of the royal court and to the unpopular Count of Olivares (the King’s favorite). St. Teresa’s co-patronage was blocked by the archbishop with the support of the cathedral chapter of Santiago de Compostela. Rowe’s article explores the royal policies and political factions embroiled in the controversy. The Count of Peñaranda’s promotion of the Carmelites in Naples and in Spain situates him not surprisingly, on the side of the Spanish King.

\(^{175}\) Hills, 2004, 32.


defending papal interests during the negotiations.\textsuperscript{179} In addition to the viceroy’s Carmelite patronage he saw to the reorganization of the Palazzo Reale under the direction of Francesco Picchiatti, commissioned a statue of Christ by Michele Perrone for the Royal chapel and restored the fountains of Porto, Poggio reale, dell’Epitaffio and del Monte to name just a few of his other projects.\textsuperscript{180} Of his religious benefaction in Naples the eighteenth-century historian Pietro Giannone declared, “…there hardly existed a holy place that did not receive from him ample and generous alms.”\textsuperscript{181} We know that in addition to S. Maria del Pianto, and the Carmelite convents already mentioned, the Count of Peñaranda put his full support behind the completion of Suor Orsola’s hermitage.

His special involvement in building S. Maria del Pianto and commissioning the altarpieces might be further explained on a more personal level. From his youth the Count of Peñaranda was particularly devoted to the “Holy Mother” believing that she was his “special advocate” and owed to her many special favours after

\textsuperscript{179} Fuidoro, Vol. 1, 23. Fuidoro reports of the friendship between the viceroy and the Pope on many occasions such as: Vol. 1, 23, 77, 86. For information on Fabio Chigi in Munster see: Catholic Encyclopedia online <http://www.newadvent.org> accessed ‘Fabio Chigi’ on May 16, 2007. Fabio Chigi was an ardent defender of Papal interests during the Munster negotiations and made himself an enemy of the French, a consequence that would later plague his pontificate. The French Cardinal Mazarin, never forgave Chigi who opposed him at the conferences of Munster and during the conclave he opposed Chigi as Pope, but was eventually compelled to accept his election as a compromise. Fuidoro, (Vol . 1, 64) reports that Pope Alexander VII (Fabio Chigi) grew to be a strong supporter of the Carmelites even making decisions in their favor against the Jesuits despite the fact that he had many Jesuit advisors and his confessor was Jesuit.

\textsuperscript{180} Eduardo Nappi, “I Vicere e l’arte a Napoli,” Napoli nobilissima 2 (1983): 53. Nappi provides a list of payment documents associated with The Count of Peñaranda’s civic and religious patronage. Strazzullo (Architetti e Ingegneri Napoletani dal’500 al ’700, 1969, 42) reports that viceroy Peñaranda, in order to save the Carmelite friars from more trouble with the Spanish soldiers headquartered in the cloister of the Carmine, had a castle built for their purposes called il Torrione.

\textsuperscript{181} Pietro Gianonne, Istoria Civile del Regno di Napoli, 1762-3, 8:102, as quoted in Hills, 2004, 32. See my footnote n.14 for the main motives behind viceregal building patronage aside from personal legacy, charity and the performance of good works.
having appeared to him while he was sick almost to death during a voyage by sea. He claimed that shortly after her appearance he was cured, and from that point on she conquered his will and he was loyal to her.\(^\text{182}\) In his hometown of Peñaranda, after his tenure in Naples, Gaspar de Bracamonte established a Carmelite convent dedicated to the Virgin, where he was later buried. The convent church was consecrated to Nuestra Señora de Loreto, Our Lady of Loreto.\(^\text{183}\) This was in reference to Italy’s holiest Marian shrine purported to be the house where the Virgin was born and where she conceived and raised the young Jesus, and which was later miraculously translated from Nazareth, first to Croatia and then to Loreto in Italy.\(^\text{184}\) The Madonna of Loreto represents the Virgin in one of her most domestic and maternal attitudes. Peñaranda’s personal devotion to the “Holy Mother” and the dedication of his own church to one of the Virgin’s most maternal personalities was not accidental. He seems to have found a balance between his longstanding protection of the Carmelite order and his personal Marian devotion. Viceroy Peñaranda also helped finance the restoration of the Dominican shrine of San Domenico at Soriano – a site which celebrates a legendary apparition of the

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\(^\text{182}\) Méndez, 1998, 9. Such a mystical experience fit in well with the seventeenth century views on religious vision and ecstatic experience made popular by saints such as St. Teresa or the writings of St John of the Cross. Of course such visionary experiences had a long tradition in the Catholic tradition.


\(^\text{184}\) Catholic Encyclopedia online <http://www.newadvent.org> accessed ‘Holy House of Loreto’ on May 1, 2007. One of the most well known representations of the Madonna of Loreto was painted by Caravaggio for the church of S. Agostino in Rome in 1603.
Virgin, St. Catherine and the Magdalen. Fuidoro frequently reported that the viceroy performed his private devotions at the Carmelite church of the Madonna del Carmine that housed a miracle-working image of the Virgin, affectionately called *Mamma Schiavona* or *Maria la Bruna* owing to her dark colour. While the viceroy supported many institutions during his tenure, the particular attention he paid to the church of S. Maria del Pianto suggests deeper personal interest, which is reflected in Parrino’s image of him with the church in the background (fig. 35).

In addition to the spiritual motivations for Peñaranda’s patronage of S. Maria del Pianto, as a Spanish diplomat he must certainly have been mindful of Spain’s public image and his own legacy, which invites the following investigation of his political motivations. It was widely believed and reported in Neapolitan society that his predecessor the Count of Castrillo had mismanaged the plague outbreak and had purposefully misrepresented the extent of the devastation in his reports to the King. In his *Giornali di Napoli* Fuidoro twice stressed the ignominious nature of Castrillo’s actions, which suggests widespread belief in his mismanagement. On March 3 1661, Fuidoro reported that with viceroy Peñaranda’s consent an ambassador from Naples was sent to the court in Spain bearing an expensive gift for the King in the hope that the Crown would finally provide appropriate remuneration for the still beleaguered city. Fuidoro also stated that the Count of Castrillo continued to insist that his initial report of thirty thousand deaths was

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185 Wehey, 1967, 681. Additionally, on the evening before his return to Spain he donated to the Virgin (*Maria la Bruna*) of the monastery of the Carmelites his coach and six horses.
correct and not the six hundred thousand reported by Neapolitans and their ambassador. One further insult, Fuidoro implied, were the thirty thousand ducats spent by his indebted city to send the ambassador to Spain, which resulted in nothing. Then, on September 19 1662, Fuidoro concluded in regards to Naples’ great plague that “the viceroy, the count Castrillo was guilty for all” and again supplied the conflicting numbers of dead.

The Count of Peñaranda’s consent to appeal to the King for the injustice was bold but astute, given the Neapolitan’s propensity for rebellion against Spain seen just fourteen years previously with the Masaniello revolt. Peñaranda was certainly aware of the Neapolitan perception of his predecessor’s mismanagement of the plague and likely saw S. Maria del Pianto as an opportunity to make a powerful public statement that would present the Spanish monarchy and himself in a more positive light.

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187 Fuidoro, Vol. 1, 74. Fuidoro also wrote that the Count of Peñaranda, having given his consent that an “ambasciatore” be sent to Spain, was seen to be guilty of “poor offices” with the King. Coniglio, (1967, 275-6) as mentioned previously, noted the bitterness between Castrillo and Peñaranda and this meeting with the King and the ambassador would have provided an opportunity for Castrillo to exercise revenge by maintaining the accuracy of his numbers against those of the ambassador and by extension viceroy Peñaranda. It is also important to note here that the Spanish government had by this point acquired great debt perhaps leaving the crown unable and unwilling to help the city. In 1626 the state debt was at 30 million ducats and by 1646 it had risen to 80 million. This was due in part to the Spanish dependence on American Silver, which by 1620 had run extremely low and the monarchy had to manage with a diminishing supply of resources. See Tommaso Astarita, Between Salt Water and Holy Water: A History of Southern Italy (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 2005), 107, 112.

188 Fuidoro, Vol. 1, 145. The Grotta degli Sportiglioni alone held 60,000 dead and it was only one of a huge number of dumping sites in and around Naples.

189 Benedetto Croce, History of the Kingdom Of Naples (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 130-1. Croce suggests that historians should guard against opinions that focus on the Spanish Government’s supposed exploitation of the the Kingdom of Naples. Rather we must evaluate each ‘event’ on its own merits to judge whether or not the burden placed on Neapolitans by the Spanish was heavy, or excessive, or intolerable.
Apart from such personal devotion and political motivations, the construction of S. Maria del Pianto was aimed principally at meeting the devotional needs of the survivors of the plague and the thousands of souls relegated to purgatory. In order to understand this particular impetus, which directly or indirectly influenced all of the contributors, including the viceroy, it is essential to appreciate seventeenth-century views on death and dying and to appreciate the reciprocal nature of the system of beliefs and rituals connected to purgatory.

As with many popular religious practices at the time, donations and charitable acts for the souls in Purgatory were also viewed as a “salvific strategy” for the supplicant, a reciprocity that was certainly essential for S. Maria del Pianto and its many benefactors. Christopher Black observes, “The pursuit of salvation through philanthropy had two aims: the salvation of the receiver, but also that of the giver….And good works did not just include physical or monetary assistance but prayer, frequent confession, communion, and spiritual help for ones neighbor...as well as the spiritual elimosina of praying for the sick and dying...[and] for the souls in Purgatory.”

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190 This shall be further complicated at the end of this chapter through an exploration of the multifaceted relationship that developed between the devotee and the souls in Purgatory after the plague.

191 Christopher Black, *Italian Confraternities In The Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12-17. Black notes that incentives to undertake good works came from the need for practical social help and theoretical ideas about salvation of the donor.
Central to this devotional system for the souls in Purgatory were the masses that the faithful endowed for the dead. An examination of wills and testaments in early modern Italy and Spain shows an increase in bequeathals and stipulations for such masses made by testators in the seventeenth century. Those requests were highly personal and diverse, calling for masses for one’s own soul and those of family, as well as anniversary masses, perpetual masses and masses for the other souls in Purgatory.\textsuperscript{192} The growing demand for those masses was an extremely important aspect of the Tridentine Church for a number of reasons: they served to keep its coffers full, they reaffirmed and promoted the sacerdotal privilege as the only means to salvation and they provided orthodox direction for the faithful.\textsuperscript{193} This is a complex triangulation that has not been fully explored in relation to the Neapolitan clergy and communicants, but it is clear that each was central to S. Maria del Pianto’s function and popularity.

Both the church proper of S. Maria del Pianto and the images commissioned for its sanctuary mirror popular beliefs, official attitudes, and deep concerns of

\textsuperscript{192} For information relating to wills and masses in Campagna see: Pierroberto Scaramella, \textit{Le Madonne del Purgatorio: Iconografia e religione in Campania tra rinascimento e controriforma} (Genova: Marietti, 1991), 263-281. For information on Florence see: Giulia Calvi, trans. Dario Biocca, \textit{Histories Of A Plague Year} (Berkeley: University of California press, 1984). Much of the research in this book is based on the author’s study of the wills of Florentines during and after the plague of 1630-33. For a fascinating primary account of the plague in Barcelona which reports the testament practices of many Spaniards during the plague see: Miquel Parets, trans. James S. Amelang, \textit{A Journal of the Plague Year: The Diary of the Barcelona Tanner Miquel Parets 1651} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 68-70. Both Possevino and Bellarmino (Black, 1989, 16) stressed the importance of charity as a work of piety, as necessary to salvation. Possevino even preached as much to a confraternity in Naples.

\textsuperscript{193} Boeckl, 2000, 74. Keith P. Luria, “Popular Catholicism and the Catholic Reformation” in \textit{Early Modern Catholicism}. Eds. Kathleen Comerford and Hilmar Pabel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 115-6. The Author argues that Tridentine Catholicism should not be divided into elite and popular categories. Rather the historian should “assess religious variation by addressing the multiplicity of meanings and widely shared religious practices.”
early modern Neapolitans about the connections between life and death, the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual, as well as between sin and salvation. The complexity of these relationships required that the Roman Catholic Church develop and promote systems for negotiation. Purgatory was an integral part of this system of negotiation because, as Eire suggests, belief in its existence formalized a valuable and permanent connection between the living and the dead – a connection that would appeal to the faithful.\(^{194}\) The concept of Purgatory as a place of purification before a soul was reunited with God - a situation that could be manipulated by the actions of the living - took shape throughout the Middle Ages.\(^{195}\) With the Protestant denial of the existence of Purgatory came the Church’s most vehement reaffirmation of its legitimacy as a fundamental tenet of the traditional Catholic creed. Among the decrees issued at the twenty-fifth and final session of the Council of Trent in 1563 was the short but explicit directive on Purgatory. The council insisted

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\text{that there is a Purgatory, and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful….But let the bishops take care, that the suffrages of the faithful who are living, to wit the sacrifices of masses, prayers, alms, and other works of piety, which have been wont to be performed by the faithful for the other faithful departed, be piously and devoutly performed, in accordance with the institutes of the church….}^{196}
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\(^{194}\) Carlos Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The art and craft of dying in 16\(^{th}\) century Spain* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) 86. Eire argues that the obsession with death dying and Purgatory was a particularly Spanish one but fails to research outside of Spain for similar trends. My research in Mezzogiorno Italy suggests that they share similar concerns notwithstanding regional differences.


\(^{196}\) J. Waterworth, Ed. and trans. *The Council of Trent: The canons and decrees of the sacred...*
This official pronouncement did not, however, remove from early modern discourse the questions regarding the particular varieties of torment suffered in Purgatory or the duration of such punishment. Still, there was some difficulty arising from the transference of material notions of time and suffering into the spiritual realm. Views of the punishments ranged from the physical torments of fire to the more mysterious anguish caused by an absence of the beatific vision of God.\textsuperscript{197} The duration of a soul’s stay in Purgatory was equally ambiguous, with some arguing for tenure as long as two thousand years. But the Jesuit theologian, Roberto Bellarmino, suggested in 1599 that ten years was too long, and Pope Alexander VII wrote that a stay in Purgatory would not exceed ten years.\textsuperscript{198} Against the Protestant heresy by which a Christian was saved by virtue of his or her faith alone came this confirmation of the doctrine of Purgatory which also reaffirmed the Ecclesiastical control over the acts associated with Purgatory such as the administration of masses for the dead, liturgical prayers and indulgences associated with it. It was understood that the souls in Purgatory were lifted by the suffrage of the faithful and above all by the reenactments of the sacrifice of the Eucharist, which were paid for by the charitable donations given to the priests to perform.

\textsuperscript{197} Antonio Piolanti, “Il Dogma del Purgatorio,” in Euntes Docete: Commentaria Urbaniana (Rome: Pontificia Universitas de Propaganda Fide, 1953) 307-8, 310. This document traces the church’s official decrees on Purgatory and its history and outlines major theologians positions on various problems associated with the doctrine.

\textsuperscript{198} Eire, 174, Piolanti, 310.
mass for the souls. This system placed an exceptionally powerful and compelling form of suffrage in the hands of any Catholic able to afford a purgatorial mass making the economy of salvation more accessible to the middle class. As stated earlier, such charitable acts benefited both the souls in Purgatory and the donor in the pursuit of salvation, while reinforcing the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church over the earthly realm. Sullivan observes why it grew so popular:

[F]rom a Catholic nonpredestinarian viewpoint...the sojourn in Purgatory presented a less hopeless picture of the afterlife, animating the faithful with the knowledge that through their efforts in this world, a purification of indeterminate duration in the next, and the suffrages and ministrations of the living they would still aspire to glory.

This was a significant aspect of Counter Reformation theology, which placed an emphasis on mankind’s free choice in matters of salvation and the conviction that good works in life or l’operatio boni were necessary to attain God’s grace and deliverance from sin. Therefore, the doctrine of Purgatory was promoted as an

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202 Sullivan, 80-1. In Giovan Vincenzo Forlí’s 1607 Il Buon Samaritano (fig. 36) at Naples Pio Monte della Misericordia the good samaritan is depicted performing his ‘good work’ as the Virgin and Child and angels look down upon him in postures of esteem and blessing. Such a depiction represents Heaven’s inhabitants as mindful of Man’s good works who, because of their actions are blessed in return.
integral part of the system of charity and good works that were enacted by the faithful but regulated by the Church.  

In Campania, the region that includes Naples, the belief in Purgatory was already well diffused by the 1450s. This resulted in a rich iconography and the production of a vast number of devotional works that dealt with preparations for death, as well as manuals about Purgatory for confessors and preachers to use in their ministry. Contemplations on these same themes had been set out in the doctrine of the Quattro Novissimi - death, judgment, paradise, and hell - and were popularized by devotional books on the art of dying or Ars morendi found throughout Italy. At the close of the sixteenth century Campania led the rest of Italy in the production of such devotional texts. 

Two notable Campanian writers of such texts were Bartolomeo d’Angelo and Luca Pinelli. The popularity of their works profoundly influenced the devotional attitudes and practices throughout the region. The 1575 text by Dominican theologian D’Angelo entitled Ricordo del Ben Morire de’la

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203 For a detailed and engaging study on charity in the 17th century see Christopher Black’s, (1989) chapter titled “Attitudes to Salvation and Good Works.”

204 Scaramella (1991, 250) writes about the various polemics written about the Pope’s authority over Purgatory. See also Pierroberto Scaramella, “Con la croce al Core”Inquisizione ed eresia in Terra di Lavoro” (Naples: 1995). Against such beliefs as Purgatory, Scaramella notes the little studied heretical community operating in and around Naples during the sixteenth century. Of these Italian “philo-protestants” he writes that their ideas infiltrated into some clerical ranks in Naples and were disseminated into the surrounding region. This group’s dissent was protestant in flavor as they disputed such traditions as Mass, confession, the practice of Indulgences and Purgatory. Such dissent likely provoked the production of more texts voicing support and belief.


207 Scaramella, 250-1.
consolazione de penitenti asserted that the physical experience of dying would elicit feelings of guilt for sins from which the dying would seek repentance. His work detailed a set of exercises that demanded daily practice of devotion, charity and penance as a means to prepare for death though he acknowledged the difficulty in preparing for something that seemed distant. The solution to counter this problem according to D’Angelo was to have “practical images” created that would constantly remind the beholder of Hell and Paradise.\textsuperscript{208} The Jesuit Luca Pinelli wrote and published in 1594 a series of small and very popular libretti, the first of which was entitled Libretto d’immagini e di brevi meditazioni sopra i quattro novissimi dell’uomo. Pinelli’s works classified already existing devotional themes and outlined a series of points for meditations and exhortations. Significantly, Pinelli’s libretti renewed popular interest in the condition of souls in Purgatory by detaching the souls from the context of who they were when they were alive, and proposed devotions that identified the souls as an undifferentiated suffering group.\textsuperscript{209} This allowed for the souls in Purgatory to become the objects of charitable devotion collectively rather than simply remaining under the purview of familial devotional obligation. The implication of this distinction would become more pronounced after the Neapolitan plague of 1656 since the scale of death was unprecedented as was the group of Neapolitan souls that found themselves in Purgatory and required the suffrages of survivors. Of course, there would have been

\textsuperscript{208} Scaramella, 251-2.

\textsuperscript{209} Scaramella, (257-9) suggests that these Libretti ca. 1594 were so influential that they “constitute the basis for the painting commissions for at least two decades.”
whole families wiped out by the plague leaving no one behind to perform these important suffrages and so the collective grouping also ensured that each soul was remembered. These devotions for a collective and massive group of suffering souls seems a natural and even pragmatic response to the plague, especially since Pinelli had just formalized this undifferentiated purgatorial grouping in his *Libretti* half a century before.\textsuperscript{210} It certainly would have made the devotions more efficient. In Naples, the focus on good works in combination with numbers of plague dead and the ability of the faithful to endow individual masses strengthened devotion to souls in Purgatory even further.

Consequently, running parallel to the rapid diffusion of devotion to the souls in Purgatory were the masses of suffrage associated with it. Masses, liturgical prayers, donations and fasting were the four actions that could release a soul held in burning fire. The wills and testaments from this period allocated money and outlined very specific instructions about masses to be performed in perpetuity for the souls in Purgatory in addition to the masses for the deceased’s own benefit.\textsuperscript{211} In Naples and the surrounding areas suffrage for the souls was brought into sharp

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{210} Scaramella, 260-74.
\textsuperscript{211} Black, 1989, 125-7, Scaramella, 260-9. These masses became an almost ubiquitous presence in wills from Campania during the 17th century. Scaramella documents a number of wills and testaments from Campania that trend towards more specific requests for masses to be performed on specific days such as death anniversaries and the feast days of special saints. Eire, (284) notes the same trend happening in Spain and provides a number of examples of wills that left money for masses for the souls in Purgatory. Even King Philip II of Spain, after instructing that for nine days after his death, mass for his soul had to be said by priests of the Escorial in addition to the 30,000 to be said for his soul by Franciscan monks, mandated in his will that 2000 masses be said for the souls in Purgatory. See also Samuel Cohn, *Death and Property in Siena, 1205-1800: Strategies for the Afterlife* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) foreword. Cohn argues that even after the Black Death hit Siena there was a shift in will bequeathals as previously small but numerous bequests shifted to larger and fewer with the argued purpose of promoting the memory of the testator.
\end{footnotes}
relief after the plague in 1656 and Scaramella argues that after an event of such magnitude with so profound a loss of life and social upheaval the “bari-center of devotion would logically shift towards a massive utilization of suffrage masses.”

This impulse was surely being addressed when the decision was taken by certain Neapolitans to found the church of S. Maria del Pianto.

Significantly, the relationship between the faithful and the souls in Purgatory was not one-sided; in fact, there was a conviction that it offered reciprocal benefits in addition to the simple acts of charity associated with it. This concept is affirmed by the Jesuit theologian Roberto Bellarmino in a treatise concerning Purgatory titled “Suffragia Ecclesiae defunctis prodesse” as part of his influential Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei adversus hujus temporis haereticos (1586-93). He argued that “It is not unbelievable, even, that the souls in Purgatory pray and sue on our behalf, inasmuch as miracles were performed by the soul[s] of Paschasius and St. Severius....” Explaining his position he stated that:

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212 Scaramella, 280. The author notes (275-80) that during the 1650s the purely devotional interest in the souls in Purgatory became more specific and that a Purgatorial hierarchy developed. Testators left specific instructions that the masses they endowed be targeted specifically at the group of souls just about to leave Purgatory. Perhaps thinking that once the soul was reunited with God their reciprocity towards the devoted supplicant would become even more effective. Secondly, and this happened after the plague, a greater attention was paid to the forgotten souls in Purgatory. Given that the epidemic had wiped out so much of the population including whole families there was the fear that many of the dead would have no survivors left to pray and sue on their behalf. This devotion to the forgotten souls of course finds earlier precedent in Pinelli’s writings about souls being a collective group, but the plague seems to have splintered devotion into distinct groups, complicating Pinelli’s views. The Church promoted Pinelli’s vision but the convoluted devotional attitudes and superstitions of the Neapolitans complicated what was meant to be straightforward. See also Italo Pardo “Life, Death and Ambiguity in the Social Dynamics of Inner Naples,” 24, (1989): 103-123. Pardo, a sociologist writing on devotional practices in the inner city of Naples in the 1970’s connects these same practices, which grew out of the plague, with the development of the cult of the dead that the church now condemns but the faithful will not relinquish.

Furthermore, even if the souls in Purgatory are inferior to us by reason of their torments, they are superior, nevertheless, by reason of grace and charity in which they have already been confirmed. The prayer, therefore, which proceeds from charity, demands this superiority especially, if it demands any; therefore it is probable that [the souls] do pray for us.  

Bellarmino’s view was part of a broader attempt of Jesuit theology to humanize Purgatory “increasing the sense of intimacy between this world and the next.” The Church and, in particular, the Jesuit theologians had seized an opportunity to formalize a belief already present in popular devotion. Furthermore, Scaramella contends that in Campania during the seventeenth century, the souls in Purgatory assumed, “the unequivocal prerogative of protection and power that in other times was exclusive to the Virgin and intercessor saints.” Although this extension of intercessory privileges predates the plague of 1656, it must certainly have been bolstered by its impact as devotion to the souls in Purgatory intensified. This phenomenon however popular in the region of Campania was not exclusive to it, and Sullivan notes many examples of people claiming to have received help from the souls in Purgatory.

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214 Sullivan, 81.

215 Sullivan, 82. He (82-3) also notes that the other major contributor to the development of the belief that souls did in fact mediate on behalf of the petitioner was the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) who, in a section of his Commentarii ac Disputationes Tertiam Partem Divi Thomae titled “De Purgatorio”, wrote that the Holy Souls in Purgatory can Pray for us as well as we for them. Black, (1989, 106) discusses this development in relation the Italian confraternities associated with souls in Purgatory.

216 This notion of reciprocity is conspicuously absent from the Tridentine decree on Purgatory perhaps out of the fear that such an admission could be easily misconstrued by the faithful.

217 Scaramella, 281. Scaramella (280-85) provides numerous examples of people who claimed to have been helped through the intercession of the souls in Purgatory.

218 Sullivan 91- 101; Scaramella, 280-85.
One such example was reported by the Franciscan Fray Dimas Serpi, a Sardinian theologian, who in his 1601 treatise on Purgatory recounted the story of Gertrude who, because of her suffrages on behalf of the souls in Purgatory, was to be spared its torments. She was reassured after a mystical visit from Christ telling her that she should not be afraid because she would be received directly into heaven by the very souls she had released from Purgatory’s torment as her suffrages were paid back to her “a hundred for one.” This is an interesting and powerful distinction because instead of God welcoming her into heaven after the mediation of the Virgin or a saint it was the souls that Gertrude had released from Purgatory who acted on her behalf and would ultimately receive her - demonstrating a manifest traversal of the bond between the living and the dead while also revealing the possibilities offered by their association.

Similar sentiments find voice in the popular writings of Cervantes in Spain. In his play *The Fortunate Ruffian* of 1615, the hero Lugo gives his last *real* to a blind beggar and instructs him to pray to the souls in Purgatory on his behalf. Lugo says, “Take this *real*, and say seventeen prayers, one after the other, for the souls which are in Purgatory” and the beggar piously obliged. Recalling his good works later on, Lugo hopes that his gift to the souls will be repaid to him “a hundred for one,” as he addresses the souls directly saying “Souls in Purgatory, of whom I’ve continuously been mindful, let my anguish be known to you, and my misfortune known; And since charity abandons you not amidst those flames, beg of God He

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*Sullivan, 91-2. Fray Dimas Serpi’s treatise was titled* Tratado de Purgatorio contra Luthero y otros hereges *and was printed in Barcelona in 1601.*
lend an ear to my necessity."\textsuperscript{220} Surely Cervantes’ words reflect a very real conviction about the reciprocal benefits offered to those for whom the practice of suffrage for the souls in Purgatory was a genuine and pious commitment.

This conviction surely inspired those Neapolitans whose donations for the building, decoration, and maintenance of the grotto church of S. Maria del Pianto reflect their beliefs, and dedication to the souls in Purgatory. Their loss was recorded and constantly remembered through the church as it provided an opportunity to satisfy and restore the connection between the living and the dead that had been rent by the plague.

\textsuperscript{220} Sullivan, 18-20. The author offers a focused study not only of Cervantes and Purgatory but of other contemporary popular writings which also include references to that ‘third place’ known as Purgatory.
CHAPTER 5

S. Maria del Pianto: The Altar Paintings

In order to establish a clearer understanding of the church of S. Maria del Pianto and its three altarpieces - *Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory* by Vaccaro, *St. Januarius Interceding with the Virgin and Child for the Plague Victims* and *Crucifixion with the City’s Protector Saints* by Giordano - this chapter will briefly explore the particular role of the Madonna as intercessor in Naples as well as the broader intentions and concerns behind Peñaranda’s commission of the artists and their works. The examination of the paintings will include a short biography of both artists, a description of their altar paintings, followed by an analysis of the iconographic content and tradition and theological meaning.

The dedication of the church to the Madonna of Tears seems perfect when faced with Florio’s description of the Grotta degli Sportiglioni where “mounds of corpses…brought by their dear relatives rushing to dump into that abyss, their own children and parents, relieved to be able to flee from the horrendous spectacle without the hint for any of them [the dead] of a religious rite.” S. Maria del Pianto was built at this site as a monument to the inexplicable loss, and commemorates the inescapable sorrow associated with the grotto and simultaneously signals the Virgin’s role as the primary intercessor for the souls in Purgatory. She is, therefore, a key element in this thesis.

221 De Renzi, 1968, 71-72. There were at least 60,000 bodies dumped at the Grotto before it was closed over.
In spite of the fact that the official Church view refers to the Madonna as a single entity, the cult of the Virgin in Italy and elsewhere is better described as the worship of various supernatural Marian beings. These identities are associated with the official Mary, but have their own particular qualities and devotional demands, and all of them are unified by their extraordinary ability to heal and protect.\textsuperscript{222} The Madonna of Purgatory is one of these personalities. Indeed, the Virgin was so revered by Neapolitans that two hundred years after the plague her eminence remained absolute as the following anecdote so skillfully and unaffectedly illustrates. Working as a doctor during a cholera epidemic, Axel Munthe articulated in his memoirs the affection Neapolitan society held for the Virgin.\textsuperscript{223} He describes the scene at a local pharmacy where the monks gathered daily and discussed animatedly the efficacy and particular virtues associated with various Madonnas around the city. Asking one of the old monks about the continual omission of Christ from their discussions he writes:

The old Frate made no secret of his opinion that Christ owed His reputation solely to His having the Madonna for His Mother. As far as he knew, Christ had never saved anybody from cholera. His blessed Mother had cried Her eyes out for Him. What had He done for Her in return? “Woman,” He said, “what have I to do with Thee?” “Perció ha [sic] finito male, that’s why He came to a bad end.”\textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{222} Michael Carroll, \textit{Madonnas That Maim}. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.) 59.
\textsuperscript{223} De Renzi, 1968, 38. The author’s entire study is filled of primary source descriptions of popular religious activity associated with the plague, including processions, and the visiting of various Marian shrines around the city. \textit{Painting In Naples 1606-1705: From Caravaggio to Giordano}, exh. cat., London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1982 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 35. The author notes all of the miraculous images of the Madonna in the city, which were all carried in procession during the plague of 1656.
\textsuperscript{224} Axel Munthe, \textit{The Story of San Michele}. (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co, 1935), 163. I am grateful to Dr. Pierre du Prey for, among other things, turning me on to Munthe’s account of the cholera epidemic in Naples.
This scene illustrates the sincere affection Neapolitans held for the Virgin and emphasizes their belief in her singular spiritual and intercessory powers.

The dedication of the cemetery church to S. Maria del Pianto is further proof that the Virgin was the most trusted intercessor for Neapolitans; this was due in part to the intimate bond shared with her son. The Marian persona invoked by S. Maria del Pianto was an advocate for the souls in Purgatory and had a long tradition in Naples and throughout Campania; the high altarpiece painted for the church depicts the Virgin in this intercessory role. The lateral altarpieces are also connected to this theme and all three were commissioned at around the same time by viceroy Peñaranda.

Just as Mattia Preti’s gate frescoes provoked a constant reminder of the city’s vows to the Virgin Immaculate and Child, so did the church of S. Maria del Pianto and its altarpieces draw the people to remembrance of the epidemic and focused devotions towards the souls in Purgatory. Created in direct response to the plague, the sacred art reveals exactly how survivors could “articulate and manipulate their situation” both during and after an outbreak. Importantly, these images reflect the spiritual exchange between the living and the dead through the intercession of the Virgin, saints and the souls in Purgatory - all relationships endorsed by the Church.

Above all these images convey the devotional practices Neapolitans used to

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respond to the dramatic experience of the plague - a reminder of the availability and efficacy of the *rimedi spirituali*.

Viceroy Peñaranda understood the value of these spiritual remedies when he commissioned Andrea Vaccaro to paint the high altarpiece and Luca Giordano to paint the two lateral altarpieces. In 1692, Carlo Celano wrote that beyond financial contributions to the building, viceroy Peñaranda, also paid for the chalice, the necessary liturgical equipment, and the paintings for the church. Wethey claims that the paintings were ‘gifts’ from the viceroy but the archival documents published by Strazzullo and Nappi confirm that at very least the funds for Vaccaro’s painting came from two other benefactors. The same document clearly states, however, that the painting was made according to the orders of the

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230 Harold Wethey, “The Spanish Viceroy, Luca Giordano, and Andrea Vaccaro,” *Burlington Magazine*, 109 (1967): 678. Strazzullo’s (1965, 224) documents state the following: “July 17 1660 - Pay for me to the painter S.r Andrea Vaccaro 50 ducats as an advance for the price of the painting that said Vaccaro has taken the trouble to paint, following the orders of S. E [the viceroy] for the icon ‘La cona’ of the church…These 50 ducats are part of the 300 ducats donated by Sig. Angelo Felice Gezzi to His Excellency [the viceroy] for the service of the church.” The next entry says “October 13 1660 – Pay for me…Andrea Vaccaro, painter, 50 ducats as a completion of total 100 ducat value of painting that Andrea is completing as per the orders of S.E. [the viceroy]…and these 50 ducats are part of the sum of 900 donated as charity by…the silk guild workers as petitioned by S.E [the viceroy]. See Nappi as recorded by James Clifton, “Images of the Plague and Other Contemporary Events in Seventeenth Century Naples,” Diss., Princeton, 1987, 65. Clifton points Wethey’s error regarding the paintings being a gift of the viceroy.
The viceroy.⁴ To this evidence Bernardo De Dominici, the famous eighteenth century art historiographer, appends what appears to be a rather embellished and contradictory story about the execution of the paintings.

According to him the viceroy, having just arrived in Naples, was informed that Vaccaro and Giordano were the best living Neapolitan painters, so he asked both of them to prepare bozzetti for the high altarpiece of S. Maria del Pianto representing the Intercession of the Madonna for the Souls in Purgatory.⁴ Giordano, known as Luca fa presto due to his speed of execution and virtuosity, finished first but the viceroy pretended that the picture was not entirely suitable and suggested that he should execute another as a means of gaining time for Vaccaro to complete his work. When Vaccaro presented his bozzetto the viceroy suggested to Giordano that if he conceded the high altar to Vaccaro then both of his paintings would be used for the lateral altars; otherwise only one would be used. Giordano accepted.⁵ However, in De Dominici’s second version of the account from his later Vite of both artists the viceroy, unable to choose between the two artists, he sent their bozzetti representing God’s mercy through the intercession of the Virgin, St. Januarius, and the other Protector Saints to a panel of judges in Rome. This jury consisted of Pietro da Cortona, Andrea Sacchi, Giacinto Brandi, Baciccio, and Bernini among others and the choice for the high altar was left to Pietro da Cortona.

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⁴ Strazzullo, 224. There is no payment document that links Viceroy Peñaranda with Luca Giordano’s two paintings for the church.
⁵ Many leading Neapolitan artists had died during the plague such as Massimo Stanzione and Bernardo Cavallino and Anello Falcone.
⁶ Bernardo De Dominici, Vita del Cavalier D. Luca Giordano (Naples, 1729), 14-15, as noted by Clifton, 1987, 68.
who favored the older, more experienced Vaccaro. It was at this point that the viceroy commissioned the second painting by Giordano representing a *Crucifixion with the City’s Protector Saints* (fig. 39). De Dominici’s first account suggests that Giordano’s *bozzetto* represented the *Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory*, which is clearly not the case as only Vaccaro’s work truly qualifies for that title. De Dominici’s second account instead suggests that Vaccaro’s *Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory* (fig. 37) and Giordano’s *St. Januarius Interceding with the Virgin and Christ for the Plague Victims* (fig. 38) were essentially artistic variations designed for the high altar, while Giordano’s *Crucifixion* was a somewhat late addition. Unfortunately, we cannot base any assumptions on either of De Dominici’s accounts given their contradictions. Each of the three altarpieces present distinct iconographies, and a different choice for the high altarpiece would clearly have altered the focus, tone and meaning of the church.

Most likely, there was a well-established program from the beginning, and Vaccaro’s work was always destined for the high altar. His painting was far more explicit in its depiction of the Madonna as intercessor for the souls - the church’s primary function. Furthermore, the decision to situate Vaccaro’s painting above the high altar seems to coincide with the decision to name the church S. Maria del

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234 Bernardo De Dominici, *Vite De’ Pittori, Scultori Ed Architetti Napoletani*, vol. III 1742-45 (Bologna: Forni, 1971), 145-47, 398-99. The second account by De Dominici ‘creates’ an artistic pedigree of sorts for Vaccaro’s painting as it was sent to a group of very distinguished artists and ‘chosen’ as superior to Giordano’s. There is, however, no other historical evidence for it. See also Clifton, 1987, 69-70.

By July 1660 at the latest, Vaccaro’s painting was intended to be ‘the icon’ for the church confirming its prominence, and Giordano’s works were relegated to the lateral altars. Despite De Dominici’s conflicting reports, when viewed within Naples’ broader social, aesthetic and religious context, the art works created for the church of S. Maria del Pianto form a coherent iconological program.

Andrea Vaccaro was born in 1604 to a family of distinguished Neapolitan artists. Although nothing survives from his early years, he initially studied with the late mannerist painter Girolamo Imparato (fig. 40). Like so many others in Naples, in the early 1620s he was attracted by Caravaggio’s naturalistic style and bold chiaroscuro, some elements of which he never lost. The stark tenebrism of

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236 Strazzullo, 1965, 223. The timeframe supports this suggestion as the first reference to the church as S. Maria del Pianto occurs on the 13 May 1660 when in the months previous it is consistently referred to as the new church above the grotta degli Sportiglioni. Just a few months later on 17 July 1660 a payment entry for Vaccaro states that his painting Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory was to be the icon for S. Maria del Pianto on the orders of the viceroy. Strazzullo, 1965, 2. The church was only called S. Maria delli (sic) Martiri in one entry dating from 1657, and was likely so-named at the behest of the land donor.

237 This image of 1598 by Vaccaro’s early teacher represents the Madonna del Carmine for the Souls in Purgatory for the church of Santo Spirito. I have chosen it for its subject matter though it is representative of his style.

238 Giuseppe de Vito, “Appunti Per Andrea Vaccaro Con Una Nota Su Alcune Copie Del Caravaggio Che Esistevano A Napoli,” Ricerche Sul ‘600 Napoletano (Napoli: Electa, 1996): 69-70. De Vito notes that according to De Dominici, Vaccaro’s stated opinion was that painting was a practical art and required continual study from nature. Moreover, Vaccaro was connected to the Neapolitan Caravaggisti such as Carlo Sellitto and Caracciolo and reinterpreted many of Caravaggio’s works in Naples such as The Flagellation, St. Sebastian, and David with the head of Goliath. For information on these works by both artists see Painting In Naples 1606-1705: From Caravaggio to Giordano, exh. cat., London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1982 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 123-130, 261-2.
this style was eventually tempered by the influence of Massimo Stanzione, through whom Vaccaro developed an interest in Bolognese classicism, particularly the works of Guido Reni.\textsuperscript{239} Vaccaro’s best work was done in the early sixteen-forties while he was in contact with Bernardo Cavallino. Under his influence Vaccaro derived a certain refinement and expression as he learned to moderate his sometimes rigid academic style.\textsuperscript{240} While Vaccaro is now very often criticized for being “monotonously academic” or described as “an academic Guido Reni,” among his contemporaries he enjoyed an extraordinary popularity that lasted throughout his career.\textsuperscript{241} His \textit{Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory} of 1660, created for the high altar of S. Maria del Pianto, is a representation of his later work and is one of his most important public commissions (fig. 37).\textsuperscript{242} The

\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Painting In Naples}, 1982, 261, 43. In addition, Vaccaro incorporated elements of Van Dyck’s neo-Venetian painterliness, which was known to Neapolitan artists because two of his works were in Gaspar Roomer’s extraordinary collection.

\textsuperscript{240} See also, \textit{Painting In Naples}, 1982, 261. Paola Santucci, “Un Dipinto Firmato Di Andrea Vaccaro E Alcune Riflessioni Sulla Sua Formazione” \textit{Prospettiva: Rivista Di Storia Dell’Arte Antica E Moderna}, (1999): 184. Santucci examines a number of paintings by Vaccaro noting the stylistic influence of various other artists. She refers to his incorporation at times of the pittoricismo or painterliness of Preti, the tremendo impasto of Ribera and his developing interest in Stanzione, Cavallino, and Van Dyck.

\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Painting In Naples}, 1982, 262, Aldo De Rinaldis, \textit{Neapolitan Painting of the Seicento} (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976), 19. Much of this criticism is unwarranted as he painted numerous works that are not only skillful but sensitively rendered. It is also important to note that his work has become so derided that a complete monograph of his work does not exist. This is extraordinary for one of the most popular Neapolitan artists of his age who was also a great favorite of the Spanish. Maria Commodo Izzo, \textit{Andrea Vaccaro: Pittore}. (Napoli: Conte Editore, 1951),133. Izzo, in the most extensive Vaccaro work to date, offers a grim assessment of his painting for S. Maria del Pianto citing “senile decadence and discordant manner.”

\textsuperscript{242} Commodo Izzo, 1951, 133- 4. The oil on canvas painting measures 3.5 x 2.5 m and was removed to the Palazzo Reale after the earthquake of 1980. The painting is now believed to be somewhere in the basement though no one I contacted is really certain where. Unfortunately, I have not been able to access a color image of the painting and I must rely on Wethey’s first hand account of the colors. Giordano’s lateral altar paintings are now in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte.
altarpiece, now at the Palazzo Reale, is signed in gold with the artist’s monogram AV just beneath the Virgin.

The painting combines a simultaneous vision of both Purgatory and Heaven and presents the Virgin imploring Christ, who is seated on a throne of clouds, to release the souls from the flames beneath them. Surrounding and supporting the scene are putti and angels in attitudes of devotion and exaltation. Virtually the entire canvas is filled with figures, fabric and boiling clouds leaving very little neutral space. The extremely strong diagonal from the upper right to the lower left corner on which the Virgin and Christ are set is sustained by a rhythmic succession of clouds and drapery that are uniform in size, shape and tone. This clear line invites the viewer to focus on the exchange between Christ and the Virgin, a device often employed by Vaccaro throughout his career. A muted counter diagonal extends up from lower right to upper left using the well-lit leg of the full figured angel, up through the central cloud upon which Christ’s leg rests, and continues into the clouds beneath the two angels at the top left.

The figures in this painting have a naturalistic modelling, and the moderate light that bathes them is far removed from the heavy chiaroscuro of Vaccaro’s earlier years. The heavenly light filters equally through the picture so that emphasis is not sustained on any single figure leaving the eye free to roam the canvas.

The demure Virgin pleads with Christ on behalf of the souls in the Purgatory below, and from the flames that enfold them these same souls enjoy the privilege of

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243 Wethey (678) notes the strong diagonal and Vaccaro’s repeated use of it in his compositions.
witnessing the heavenly scene unfold. Draped in a dark blue mantle, the Virgin, raised on a billowing cloud held by putti, rests on one knee with her hands joined in pious supplication. Her gently furrowed brow and beseeching upturned eyes suggest her intent; she pleads with her son for the souls’ release from Purgatory.\textsuperscript{244} Furthermore, her somber demeanor connects her with the church’s name - she is Mary of Tears sorrowing for the victims entombed in the grotto.

All of these souls, both male and female, are nude, indicating that death does not distinguish between gender or class which was typical of such representations.\textsuperscript{245} A tonsured monk also features prominently among these souls reminding the viewer that those from the religious community were not exempt from the burden of purgation. The inclusion of the monk was probably intended also as a reference to the huge numbers of religious that died in Naples while administering to the plague-stricken.

Christ is shown swathed in rose colored draperies and seated on a throne of clouds as described in the apocalyptic revelation of Mark 13:26: “And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.”\textsuperscript{246} Here the Son of Man sent to judge inclines his head, lids shut, towards his mother,

\textsuperscript{244} Victor Stoichita, \textit{Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art} (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 166. Stoichita writes about the rhetorical function revealed in the depiction of eyes, which he believes provide context for visionary paintings.
\textsuperscript{245} Clifton, 1987, 73.
\textsuperscript{246} There are innumerable references to Christ as the Son of Man in the Bible many of which refer in some way to the Last Judgment. The most explicit reference aside from the one already cited in the main text comes from John 5: 25-27 which states: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man” (emphasis mine)."
immutable; he extends and opens his right arm towards her indicating gentleness and mercy while revealing the wounds of his Passion. This figure of Christ is a fusion of the Salvator Mundi and the eschatological Son of Man iconographies. As Salvator Mundi his left hand is placed upon a globe, holding a scepter while angels and putti bear witness to the heavenly event in postures of adoration. 247 As the Son of Man he is shown enthroned on a bank of clouds revealing his wounds for Judgment; his right hand is placed palm upward as though ready to welcome the elect. 248 This conflation of iconographies juxtaposes the salvific purpose for Christ’s sacrifice with his ultimate authority as judge over man’s salvation revealing the paintings strong eschatological undertones.

Certainly the depiction was also meant to remind the beholder of the intended targets of their suffrage - the many plague victims entombed in the grotto. Those same souls that seemingly “prayed and sued” on behalf of S. Maria del Pianto’s congregants in recognition of their pious dedication. But the image makes it manifestly clear who it was that exercised ultimate authority over the souls’

247 Clifton (1987, 70, 74-5) indicates that the angels and putti have adopted attitudes of adoration. He observes rightly, that De Dominici mistakenly describes St. Januarius as being present in the scene. Additionally, De Dominici states that Christ was shown as angry at the sins of the Neapolitans and therefore punished them with the pestilence. While this is clearly not the case in Vaccaro’s painting Clifton notes that this description was consistent with most traditional paintings associated with the plague, accounting for the mistaken report. See, De Dominici, vol. III 1742-45, 147. Christ as the Son of man in Michelangelo’s Last judgment greatly influenced such later scenes. Vaccaro’s Christ while certainly more genteel follows this tradition. Though I was unable to locate a copy of Carlo Francesco Riaco’s, Il guidicio di Napoli. Discorso del passato contaggio rassomigliato al Giudicio Universale. Naples. 1658, the very title indicates the strong belief linking the plague and the Last Judgment in Naples.

248 George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 91. In Last Judgment scenes Christ is usually shown seated on a throne with right hand palm up and left palm down indicating the elect and the damned. Typically the mantle he wears is left open to reveal the wound on his chest and his other passion markings are also usually visible. Frequently there are angels and putti, which hover close by bearing instruments of his passion.
liberation. The supremacy of Christ in this painting also reinforces a conservative and orthodox role of the Madonna, a harmonious confirmation of Counter-Reformation views about the Celestial hierarchy. But this was not always the case.

Before the Tridentine demand for decorous and unambiguous subject matter, the Virgin was frequently depicted in Campanian Purgatorial imagery expressing milk from her breast and aiming the charitable streams towards the souls in Purgatory. Examples throughout Campania include Angiolillo Arcuccio’s 1470 central panel of the *Madonna of the Graces and Souls of Purgatory between the Saints Antonio Abate and Caterina, Francesco, Saint Martyrs, and Ecce Homo* in the Neapolitan church S. Maria la Nova (fig. 41) where the iconography of the Immaculate Virgin and Child is combined with the *Virgo Lactans* whose milk succors the souls. The panel is capped by an image of the Savior crowned with thorns and bleeding from his wounds.249 Other examples include Stefano Sparano’s Polyptych of the *Madonna of the Graces and Souls of Purgatory* (fig. 42) in the Neapolitan Museo di S. Martino of 1507 and the early sixteenth century fresco by an unknown artist depicting the *Madonna of the Graces and Souls of Purgatory and Clarisse nuns between the Saints Sebastian and Rocco* at the Neapolitan church of S. Maria Donnaregina Vecchia (fig. 43).250 This iconography enjoyed a

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249 Scaramella, 1991, 8, 20, 44. Moreover, this is another example of the Immaculate Virgin holding the Christ Child as discussed in Chapter Three. This clearly demonstrates how flexible much of the iconography associated with the Virgin was, as the Immaculate Conception is combined with the Madonna for the Souls in Purgatory, the Madonna of Graces and the Virgo Lactans.

250 Scaramella, 1991, 111. The fresco includes two of the most popular saints associated with the Plague St. Sebastian and St. Roche. Additionally Giovanni da Nola’s sculpture of the *Madonna of Graces and the Souls in Purgatory* created for S. Maria delle Grazie Maggiore (fig. 44) in Naples is another example of this iconography demonstrating its extensive diffusion.
great diffusion during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, but it “collided with the discipline and sensibility of the Counter Reformation;” allegory had to be replaced with clarity.\footnote{Scaramella, 1991, Intro. See Chapter entitled “Lac Caritatis,” 25-63 and “Virgo Sollacium Purgatori,” 66-100.} Consequently, by the seventeenth century most purgatorial images in Campania depicted the souls addressing their pleas to the Virgin and Child as intercessors such as Giovan Battista Forli’s early seventeenth century \textit{Madonna and Child and the Souls in Purgatory} in the church of S. Maria della Sapienza (fig. 45).\footnote{Scaramella, 1991, 220-45.} Another example is the already mentioned \textit{Carmine Madonna and the Souls in Purgatory between the Saints Francesco d’Assisi e Francesco di Paola} painted by Vaccaro’s early teacher Girolamo Imparato in 1598 for the church of Santo Spirito (fig. 40). Vaccaro’s altarpiece certainly belongs to this tradition though his inclusion of the adult Christ, as already noted, reestablished the Virgin’s rightful place within the sacred hierarchy.\footnote{Clifton (1987, 73) points out the unusual addition of Christ in Vaccaro’s painting but offers no explanation.} Essentially, Vaccaro’s insertion of the Son of Man as Judge with the Madonna of Purgatory reminds the beholder of Christ’s authority over Purgatory by using an iconographic formula associated with Judgment Day.

Interestingly, while Last Judgment scenes were not commonly represented in Campania or in southern Italy during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, an artistic tradition had developed combining the theme of the Last Judgment with Purgatory.\footnote{Scaramella, 216.} One such example is Michele Curia’s late-sixteenth century \textit{Madonna

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of the Rosary and the Universal Judgment, with Purgatory and Hell at the church of Montecalvario (fig. 46).\textsuperscript{255} This polyptych depicts a traditional Last Judgment Deesis atop a central Madonna of the Rosary flanked by two distinct panels representing the souls in Purgatory and the damned in Hell. While each panel is distinct, the intention strongly connecting them is evident; the Madonna acts in an intercessory capacity, while Christ functions as the ultimate authority. This endorsement of celestial hierarchy was important for the Reformed Church because it restricted the Virgin’s power and autonomy while asserting Christ’s supremacy. Another example demonstrating this same link between Last Judgment and Purgatory is Jacopo Palma’s 1573 Madonna and St Peter Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory from the small town of Montella outside Naples (fig. 47). Christ is represented as the Son of Man of Judgment Day, and the hierarchical dynamic between Christ the Virgin and the souls is very similar to Vaccaro’s painting as are the arrangements of clouds and putti.\textsuperscript{256} Because of Christ’s presence the traditional role of the Virgin as intercessor is reinforced. Such images stand in contrast to other depictions wherein the Virgin acted with independence beyond what orthodoxy and decorum allowed.\textsuperscript{257}

\textsuperscript{255} Scaramella, 216-7. The author connects the eventual development of Last Judgment scenes in Campania to the influence of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel Last Judgment of 1537-4. They would, of course, have to meet more exacting standards of decorum than the Michelangelo’s work. See also Romeo De Maio, \textit{Pittura E Controriforma A Napoli} (Editori Laterza, 1983), 3. There are also obvious references to Michelangelo’s \textit{Last Judgment} in Curia’s work.

\textsuperscript{256} The Christ as Judge figure in Palma’s painting points to the Cross and to Peter’s Keys identifying the means to attain salvation. Through Christ’s sacrifice mankind is saved but only through the mediation of the Church.

\textsuperscript{257} Scaramella, 218-19. Michael Carroll, \textit{Catholic Cults and Devotions} (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 115, 117, 121. Carroll writes about the “scapular promise” relating to the Carmelites, which was an extremely popular belief in Spain and Southern Italy. It promised that any Carmelite devotee that wore a specific brown scapular would be released from Purgatory by Mary who would herself descend into the fire on the Saturday after the person’s death.
An example of the Virgin acting with agency and complete autonomy by deciding which souls would be released from Purgatory can be seen in Teodoro e Luca D’Errico’s 1604 *Carmine Madonna and the Souls in Purgatory* for the Neapolitan church of S. Maria la Nova (fig. 48). Similarly, the Virgin in Massimo Stanzione’s ca. 1638 *Madonna with Child and the Souls in Purgatory* (fig. 49) for the church of S. Maria del Purgatorio ad Arco in Naples, is shown in dramatic gesture as she points emphatically at the fortunate soul about to be released thanks to her Divine authority and sanction.\(^{258}\) This tradition contrasts markedly with Vaccaro’s more modest Virgin. The restoration of the Virgin within the Celestial Hierarchy not only promoted a more Christocentric view but also allowed for the exploitation of the iconography of the Madonna as Ecclesia or Mother Church (Fig. 51).\(^{259}\) Furthermore, it seems significant that the viceroy would have commissioned a painting that emphasizes a very orthodox vision of Purgatory and the celestial hierarchy, given that he acted essentially as an extension of the ‘Catholic King’ of Spain and ‘defender of the true faith.’ For the Spanish crown maintaining such hierarchies was imperative in religious as well as political matters.\(^{260}\)

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\(^{258}\) Scaramella, 1991, 218. Another painting by an unknown artist from the Chiesa dei Morti outside Naples in Nola (fig. 50), is certainly in imitation of Stanzione’s *Madonna of Purgatory* and she exercises the same absolute authority over the Purgatory.  
\(^{259}\) Scaramella, 1991, 218-9. Wenzel Cobergher’s 1594 painting for the Jubilee depicts the Virgin as Ecclesia through which all must pass to attain salvation.  
The *Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory* is also naturally laden with eschatological associations because the souls for which the church was built had died from the plague, and the plague was understood as an apocalyptic prefiguration of Judgment Day.\(^{261}\) This eschatological message is unmistakable especially when viewed in relation to Giordano’s lateral altar works, which will be discussed in greater detail subsequently.\(^{262}\)

Another interesting point of intersection between Purgatory and plague imagery developed in Naples as some purgatorial depictions took on characteristics directly associated with the 1656 outbreak. Filippo d’Angeli’s *Le Anime del Purgatorio* of 1660 (fig. 52), made for the church of S. Domenico Maggiore, unmistakably recalls Domenico Gargiulo’s corpse strewn painting of *Piazza Mercatello in Naples during the Plague of 1656* (fig. 15).\(^{263}\) D’Angeli’s vision of Purgatory was an expression of the catastrophic experience of the plague and his depiction assumed the characteristics of mass death very like the explicit rendering by Gargiulo and both images would certainly have been associated with end times.

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\(^{261}\) Plague along with famine and earthquakes were understood to prefigure the Apocalypse. See Matthew 24:7, Mark 13:24-30, Rev. 10: 1-3, Rev. 16: 2, Rev. 21: 9. Additionally, Innocenzo Fuidoro’s *Giornali di Napoli* are literally filled with ominous sightings from the heavens and superstitious signs. The Neapolitans seemed almost obsessed with ‘abnormal’ activities and the fear that end times were near. Surely this was due in part to the fact that they lived in a region prone to disaster.

\(^{262}\) Christine Boeckl, *Images of the Plague and Pestilence* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2000), 98-100. As noted in Chapter Two the merging of eschatological themes with plague imagery was common in Italy and their coalescence can be seen in Raphael’s *Madonna di Foligno* among others. The *Madonna di Foligno*, 1513 (fig. 53) has a number of eschatological references, which unite the two themes of plague and end times such as the rainbow, comet and the bank of clouds onto which the Christ child descends referring to his future role as judge wherein he comes in the clouds in power and glory seen in Vaccaro’s altarpiece. The Madonna herself is the apocalyptic woman.

\(^{263}\) Scaramella, 1991, 220.
One of the most dramatic and evocative portrayals of plague victims can be seen in Luca Giordano’s altar painting for the left transept of S. Maria del Pianto.

Born in Naples in 1634, Luca Giordano has been described as an artist who epitomized the spirit of the Baroque. He was well-traveled, and much sought after by rich and powerful patrons. His career and his works have been extensively studied, most notably by Ferrari and Scavizzi. Giordano was the son of the painter Antonio Giordano and in his early work was deeply influenced by Jusepe de Ribera, called lo Spagnoletto, with whom he may have trained (figs. 54, 55). He mastered the Spaniard’s Caravagesque naturalism, often imitating his particularly violent and somber compositions of martyrdoms, saints, philosophers and hermits (figs. 56, 57). Around 1652 he left Naples to study in Rome, Florence and Venice. These early travels, combined with his facility at imitating the styles of others resulted in a more colorful and painterly approach by the artist. Upon his return to Naples in 1653 he continued to develop his own baroque style through the study of great decorative painters like Pietro da Cortona, and sixteenth century Venetian Masters such as Titian and Veronese whose works proved pivotal for the

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267 Luca Giordano 1634-1705, exh. cat., Los Angeles, County Museum of Art, 2001 (Naples: Electa, 2001), n. 52. This catalogue notes that many of Giordano’s early drawings done in Rome were after Raphael, Polidoro, Pietro da Cortona and Annibale Carracci.
young artist. It has been said that after these formative travels Luca Giordano’s work in Naples “opened Caravaggio’s windows on to a blaze of light.” His assimilation of other styles continued in Naples where he studied the works of Rubens - particularly his 1633 Feast of Herod in Gaspar Roomer’s collection (fig. 58) and Poussin in addition to drawing upon the style of Mattia Preti. Three years after he returned to Naples the plague struck and he was soon thereafter commissioned by viceroy Peñaranda to paint the two lateral altarpieces for the church of S. Maria del Pianto.

Giordano’s altarpiece depicting St. Januarius Interceding with the Virgin and Christ for the Plague Victims ca. 1660 (fig. 38) has frequently and erroneously been labeled as St. Januarius Interceding with the Virgin, Christ and the Eternal Father for the Plague Victims although no Eternal Father is present in the image. The painting was created for the left transept of the church and is representative of his burgeoning baroque style, which emphasized brilliant color and shimmering light effects. This same style and palette is apparent in other works from the same period such as The Holy Family with a Vision of the Symbols of the Passion from

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269 Painting In Naples 1606-1705: From Caravaggio to Giordano, 1982, 18.
271 In Giordano’s Crucifixion on the opposite side of the chapel (fig. 39), the Eternal Father is pictured though his name is excluded from the title indicating that the two paintings have likely been confused. The incorrect labeling has been made by Ferrari and Scavizzi, 2000, vol 1., XXII, 273 and in Luca Giordano. 1634-1705, exh. cat., Naples, Castel Sant’Elmo-Museo Capodimonte, 2001 (Naples: Electa, 2001), 138, among others. Additionally, there is no indication that the painting was created ex-voto as has been reported by Boeckl (2000, 132) and Ferrari (Painting In Naples 1606-1705, 1982, 175).
272 The oil on canvas painting measures 4 x 3.15 m and is now in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. Giordano’s Crucifixion with the City’s Protector Saints hung on the right transept.
1660 (fig. 59). A billowing heavenly vision fills the top two thirds of the huge canvas and the bottom third narrates the dramatic and horrifying spectacle of a piazza filled with bodies of the dead and the dying. His elegant monogram is situated just below the hem of St. Januarius’s Episcopal robes.

In this painting, which unites heaven and earth, Naples’ patron St. Januarius and the Virgin plead with Christ for mercy on behalf of the beleaguered Neapolitans. The sacred grouping is suspended hierarchically on hazy banks of clouds held aloft by faintly rendered putti. An angel at the top right sheathes his sword and just below him two more putti present attributes connected with St. Januarius. At the bottom of the canvas, depicted near one of the city gates, is a square littered with the victims of the plague.

Several artistic models are evident in the painting. Giordano uses the well-known mother and child grouping made famous by Raphael and Poussin’s plague images, showing the child grasping pitiably at his now dead mother’s breast. Of the painting’s style Wethey observes the similarities with Mattia Preti’s work but notes the singularity of Giordano’s pale and delicate coloring and the freedom of his “sparkling” brushwork. The painting’s over-riding stylistic influence is Rubens, as evidenced by the coloring and flickering light effects.

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273 This painting was commissioned by viceroy Peñaranda for the church of Santi Giuseppe e Teresa a Pontecorvo – another Carmelite institution that enjoyed his viceregal support already discussed in Chapter 3. There are very clear affinities between this image and Giordano’s St. Januarius created for S. Maria del Pianto.
274 Wethey, 1967, 678.
275 Painting In Naples 1606-1705, 1982, 175.
The bold downward angle from left to right of the central third of the canvas and the strong curves of clouds and bodies give the composition a sense of fluidity and movement that we shall see is completely opposite to its counter piece. The dark, sharply-angled timber jutting out over the dramatically foreshortened corpses finds its echo in the less naturalistic heavenly cross above. Similarly, the earthly figures are more fully dimensional and naturalistic in modeling than their heavenly counterparts emphasizing the distinction between the earthly and heavenly realm.

Most of the narrative takes place in the foreground as St. Januarius, the Virgin and Christ hover close to the picture plane just above the corpses below. Though the low, bright dead also share the foreground, their beautifully rendered and wretched limbs bring them even closer to the viewer – as though they invade the viewer's space. The same light source that illuminates Christ, the Virgin and St. Januarius also lights the dead in the foreground, and the clouds which support the heavenly grouping simultaneously cast striking shadows on the victims. It appears that this light also shines on the distant background showing the city walls of Naples, which causes the celestial grouping and cloudbanks to appear fairly shallow.

The palette is a simple one composed mainly of reds, yellows and blues that vie for importance off the many shades of neutral browns. Although the eye is first drawn to the brightness of the pale blue robes of St. Januarius, it is immediately attracted to the red of the Virgin’s dress, and then drops to one singularly well-lit, supine body at the bottom of the canvas.
More than just the bright colors of his robes announce St. Januarius’s importance, which is made obvious through his central placement on the canvas, his triangular form, and his luxurious garment detailing. Importantly, Christ’s cross points directly at St. Januarius’s head, connecting him with heaven, while the dark shadows under his arms set him in high relief with the left shadow pointing directly at and mirroring the mottled scene below, which in turn connects him with earth and death, and reveals his intercessory function.

St. Januarius or San Gennaro, as Neapolitans know him, is the city’s patron saint and is both loved and praised for his valiant efforts on behalf of the city whenever disaster looms. Born in the city in the second half of the third century, he took holy orders and became the bishop of the nearby Benevento. Although persecution of Christians was authorized by Diocletian at the time, Januarius risked his life to bring communion to an imprisoned deacon. He was exposed and martyred by decapitation in Pozzuoli in September AD 305. His blood was then collected in two ampoules by a pious Christian woman named Eusebia, and his body was buried. Soon after, under the religious freedom offered by Constantine’s reign, Januarius’s body was taken to his family tomb in Naples and Eusebia presented the ampoules of his blood to the church dignitaries. At the same moment mount Vesuvius erupted and the miraculous liquefaction of St. Januarius’s blood happened for the first time. From the fourteenth century these ampoules have been kept in the cappella del Tesoro di San Gennaro at the Cathedral in Naples and the
blood miracles are to this day still observed on various feast days.\textsuperscript{276} The miraculous liquefaction portends good fortune for the city while its absence portends disaster.\textsuperscript{277} St. Januarius’s central presence in Giordano’s painting celebrates his role as intercessor in liberating the city from the plague and he is attended by putti carrying his bishop’s mitre and the ornate reliquary containing his ampoules of blood. As he kneels on clouds looking up towards the Virgin and Christ, he also gestures towards the grim scene below imploring for the violence against the people he watches over to end.

The Virgin, who shares the same cloudbank as her cross-burdened Son, gently appeals to him for mercy for the plague victims. Simultaneously, the archangel at the top right sheathes his sword indicating the cessation of the plague whose diaphanous appearance leaves the impression that his visionary apparition is about to vanish.\textsuperscript{278} In the middle ground of the bottom third of the painting we see what are likely prisoners who won their freedom by collecting the bodies for removal – if of course they survived. The collector closest to the viewer drags his load with an outstretched arm, which makes him appear to be moving into the narrowing angle beneath the cloudbank. This same figure with facemask and loose

\textsuperscript{276} Jordan Lancaster, \textit{In the Shadow of Vesuvius: A Cultural History of Naples} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005). Fuidoro’s \textit{Giornali di Napoli} is filled with reports about St. Januarius’s blood miracles and liquefactions, which seemed to soothe the extraordinarily superstitious Neapolitans. Alternately, celestial events, eclipses, shooting stars, bad airs (etc) both locally and from elsewhere were widely reported in Naples striking real fear into the city’s easily unnerved inhabitants.

\textsuperscript{277} Michael Carroll, \textit{Catholic Cults and Devotions: A Psychological Inquiry} (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 57-78. The author studies the development of blood miracles in Naples and examines its value throughout the city’s history.

\textsuperscript{278} Plague angels appeared in the Old Testament either as punishing agents bringing the plague or liberating a population from it. The \textit{Golden Legend} recounts Pope Gregory’s (550-604) vision of the angel sheathing his sword above Hadrian’s tomb (now the Castel Sant’Angelo) indicating Rome’s deliverance from the plague.
drapery was depicted by Giordano in the previously mentioned *St. Francis Xavier Interceding for the Plague Victims*, which was also possibly created for viceroy Peñaranda at about the same time (fig. 31).²⁷⁹

The piles of entangled bodies rendered anonymous by their nudity, are an explicit reference to Mattia Preti’s frescoes for the city gates that depicted similarly placed corpses strewn across the foreground (figs. 17, 18). Breeching the rules of decorum, however, Giordano chose to depict the plague victims in a naturalistic process of decay. His virtuosity here is plain to see in the diversity of flesh tones indicating various stages of death and the markings of the plague including incisions made by surgeon’s knives into the diseased flesh. The corpses’ theatrical and pitiable entanglements in this gruesome scene would certainly have reminded the congregants of the innumerable dead - the “baptized flesh” referred to by Celano - hastily dumped into the grotto beneath S. Maria del Pianto, and at the same time, of their own devotional duties associated with the church.²⁸⁰

Significantly, the scene of mortal suffering at the bottom of the canvas is mirrored in the vision of Christ’s suffering above as he labors under the worldly weight of the cross and the knowledge of his sacrifice to come. He is depicted as a mortal man patiently enduring hardship, serving as an example to the faithful that pious suffering in life would be rewarded in death because, through Christ’s death, redemption was possible for themselves and for the souls in Purgatory.

²⁷⁹ See Chapter 3, 49.
²⁸⁰ Luca Giordano was in Naples during the epidemic and would have had at least some first hand knowledge of the piles of bodies and the horrible wounds associated with the plague.
It is important to note that Giordano here alludes to a scene from the gospel of St. John - the only one of the Evangelists who states that Christ was compelled to carry his own cross. John 19:17-18 states, “And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of the skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him...” This verse is the subtle but crucial link that connects Giordano’s two lateral altar pieces; in a very physical sense Christ is bearing His cross from *St. Januarius Interceding with the Virgin and Christ for the Plague Victims* across the transept to the *Crucifixion with the City’s Protector Saints* - the place of the skull on the opposite altar (fig. 39). The deeper effect of this reference is made manifest when considering the sixty thousand skulls interred at the site of the cemetery church, which is a central component of his second altar painting. The message here is clear - through Christ's sacrifice redemption was possible for those who died of the plague as well as for those who survived to mourn them.

The *Crucifixion with the City’s Protector Saints* (fig. 39) is the final painting commissioned by the viceroy for S. Maria del Pianto. In spite of De Dominici’s contradictory accounts regarding how, when and why it was commissioned, the painting was in place at the time of the church’s dedication in 1662.\(^{281}\) Giordano received, as late as 25 June 1665, a payment for the final eight ducats in completion of the one hundred for the entire price of the picture.\(^{282}\) From the same


\(^{282}\) Strazzullo, 1965, 224.
document we learn that Giordano, mindful of the church’s purpose, left the greater part of his payment for the benefit of the souls in Purgatory as his own charity.283

Because of its allusion to the plague through apocalyptic symbols, the painting is a brooding work that visually and symbolically completes the imagery already considered. It is unique in that a meditation upon it offers the viewer a moment of absolute stillness, a suspension of breath, a moment in time in which both heaven and earth stop and appear profoundly silenced. Situated on a parched and barren plateau the Crucified Christ is shown nailed to the cross and bleeding from his wounds. God the Father, surrounded by putti lifting his heavy blue robes, hovers to the left of the cross while Naples’ protector saints look on in reverential worship. An assortment of identifiable human bones is strewn about the base of the cross.284 While traditionally, a single skull is represented beneath the cross in Crucifixion scenes in reference to Adam’s burial place, Giordano’s inclusion of so many human bones here is certainly meant to remind the beholder of the innumerable corpses buried in the grotto degli Sportiglioni.

The composition is divided down the middle with Christ on the right and all other figures on the left; only Christ’s right hand and the kneeling saint’s left hand breach the central line. Three distinct figural sections - God the Father, Christ on the cross and the Protector Saints - fill in the inner portions of the serpentine curve of the background. A powerful pattern is found in the trio of hands of the three saints closest to the picture plane each echoing the other while the kneeling male

283 Strazzullo, 1965, 224
284 Easily identifiable are two skulls, a femur, ribs, and a mandible.
saint’s gesture is also mirrored in the Jesuit’s orant posture above him. The artist creates similar patterns through gestural repetition as the outstretched arms and hands of God the Father mirror sympathetically, the position of his son’s hands nailed to the cross.

Color and tone create intense contrast. The blues, siennas, greys and reds are secondary to the harsh un-warmed white, which is almost blinding against the sinister, pervasive, and inky blacks that envelop most of the painting.

Compounding the impression of foreboding already present in the canvas, Giordano depicts Christ hanging from a cross that is pitched dangerously forward while God, leaning out from the clouds, hesitates protectively above his son. This posture appears to be a composite of God the Father images from Michelangelo’s Sistine ceiling (figs. 60, 61, 62).

The grouping of Neapolitan protector saints looks on in sorrow and adoration. They were chosen from a list of some forty-seven formal protectors of Naples. The standing saints from left to right are St. Baculus who holds a book marked with his name, St. Eusebius, and the Jesuit Francisco Borgia with St. Candida and St. Asprenus kneeling in front. St. Baculus was a seventh century bishop of nearby Sorrento who became the town’s patron saint after his martyrdom. He was born to an ancient and powerful Neapolitan family the Brancaccio, but chose to dedicate himself to quiet study and piety. He was known as a powerful

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286 The saints’ names were at one time written at the bottom of the canvas but only Francisco Borgia’s name remains clearly identifiable.
exorcist in life and in death, and was called upon against the evil powers of Satan by people of Sorrento. His relics were said to emit a miraculous and delicate perfume, which was believed to protect his city from insidious evil.\textsuperscript{287} Such potent power would certainly have been understood to counteract the plague’s corruption. St. Eusebius was a fourth-century priest and ardent defender of the Nicene Creed who preached against the Pope’s subscription to the Arian formula. After being excluded from all churches he continued to hold services in his home and was put under arrest and died soon after.\textsuperscript{288} The Spanish Francisco Borgia, General of the Jesuits, depicted in his order’s black robes, was beatified in 1624 and canonized in 1671. Wethey suggests that Borgia’s presence might be explained by the mutual Spanish heritage he shared with viceroy Peñaranda who most likely ordered the Jesuits inclusion.\textsuperscript{289} Additionally, the presence of Borgia might have been particularly favored by viceroy Peñaranda given that before taking his Jesuit Holy Orders, Borgia was similarly employed as a viceroy in Catalonia by Charles

\textsuperscript{288} Catholic Encyclopedia online <http://www.newadvent.org> accessed ‘St. Eusebius’ on June 5, 2007. See also Luca Giordano 1634-1705, 2001, 138 - 31a. The Nicene Creed is the profession of the Christian Belief common to the Catholic Church, to all the Eastern Churches separated from Rome, and to most of the Protestant denominations. It says in part “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and born of the Father before all ages. God of God, light of light, true God of true God. Begotten not made, consubstantial to the Father, by whom all things were made. This was in conflict with Arianism which denied that the Son is of one essence, nature, or substance with God; He is not consubstantial with the Father, and therefore not like Him, or equal in dignity, or co-eternal, or within the real sphere of Deity. Catholic Encyclopedia online <http://www.newadvent.org> accessed ‘Nicene Creed’ on June 5, 2007.
\textsuperscript{289} Wethey, 681.
V. St. Candida (the elder) and St. Asprenus assume the most favored positions because of their eminent role in the formation of the early Church in Naples. According to Neapolitan tradition apostle Peter arrived in Naples and established an early Christian community there before going to Rome. St. Candida was an elderly woman baptized by the apostle who became an ardent Christian. She converted Asprenus who was then healed and baptized by the apostle and became the first bishop of Naples.

Giordano’s grouping emphasizes the early Episcopal heritage of the region by celebrating and promoting the area’s strong bond with St. Peter - that rock upon which the Church was built. Fuidoro even referred to Naples in his Giornali as “Baptized by St. Peter” saying that “Naples always established itself with real finesse in the true Catholic faith as given to her by the apostle Peter....” This arrangement of protector saints included defenders of the true faith as seen in St. Eusebius’s staunch protection of the Nicene creed as well as those responsible for protecting and spreading “true” Catholicism as entrusted to them by apostle Peter, the first Pope. This was a particularly important point of Roman Catholic doctrine after the recent heretical view endorsed by the Protestants, which denied the authority of the Pope and thereby the authority of the clergy. Giordano’s painting at once affirmed Petrine doctrine and apostolic succession by recalling the

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293 This is known as the Doctrine of Justification.
symbolic transfer of power that Peter had bestowed upon the city’s first bishop, while celebrating the Neapolitans’ legacy as practitioners of the true Catholic faith. Such Tridentine orthodoxy could also fit the agenda of viceroy Peñaranda who commissioned the work and served on behalf of the Spanish Hapsburgs who proclaimed themselves the “Catholic Kings,” promoting themselves as the “foremost defenders of the Catholic faith and legitimate rulers of the world.”

Additionally, the eschatological symbols of the darkened sun and moon, slung low and threateningly on the horizon, underscore the apocalyptic tone of the painting. This biblical imagery is described in the same verses whereby the Son of man comes to judge mankind already discussed in relation to Vacarro’s painting. Mark 13: 24-5 reads, “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. And the stars of Heaven shall fall out of the sky, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” Here then is the direct link to Vaccaro’s central altarpiece depicting the Son of Man coming in the clouds to judge the souls in Purgatory who had died after Naples’ own ‘tribulation.’

294 Apostolic Succession gave bishops special powers transferred from the apostles. The Protestants, however, view the power given to the apostles by Christ as unique to them and not transferable by the ‘laying on of hands’ to others such as popes or bishops, denying any such doctrine of succession.


296 Chapter 13 of Mark tells of Christ’s warnings to his apostles on the Mount of Olives about the end times and his return as ‘Son of Man’ to judge. He admonishes his followers not to be deceived by false Messiahs but to read the signals of his return such as wars, famine, and earthquakes. It would only be after these tribulations, he said, that “the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light...And they shall see the Son of Man coming....”
In the distance Giordano depicted the two calderas of Mount Vesuvius, which situates this vision of the crucifixion within the context of Naples, the plague, and the church of S. Maria del Pianto. Giordano’s Christ, rendered stark white with heavy shadow, is shown dead as his right side has already been pierced. John 19: 33-34 says, “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.” Giordano illustrated this stream of Eucharistic blood and the water of Baptism flowing directly on to a skull beneath the cross. Christ’s sacrifice at Golgotha - the place of the skull, known to be the burial place of Adam - redeemed mankind from Original Sin and offered salvation.  

297 Here the bones at Golgotha become the bones of the Neapolitan grotto as Christ’s blood redeems all. The painting transforms a site of horror into a place of sanctification. Like mankind, Christ is alone in death, as the earthly watch, the heavens wait, and all mourn even with the knowledge that redemption and salvation await.

At a functional level the crucifixion scene represents the initiation of the Eucharistic sacrament - reenacted through every celebration of the mass. The Counter-Reformation Church strove to reaffirm their authority over this sacrament in addition to promoting its literal meaning. As Giordano’s painting implies, through the ministrations of bishops and priests the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice/mass could be translated to mankind as they mediated between heaven

297 Clifton, 1987, 71; Clifton, 2005, 110.
and earth as interpreters of God’s laws and distributors of religious blessings. The belief that the souls in Purgatory were lifted above all by the reenactment of the sacrifice of the Eucharist was reaffirmed in this Crucifixion painting - a literal depiction of the transubstantial miracle. For the church of S. Maria del Pianto such images were central to promoting its function in winning release from Purgatory those souls who died in the plague of 1656.

Viewing the three altarpieces together we observe Christ carrying his cross in the St. Januarius Interceding with the Virgin and Child for the Plague Victims then his death in the Crucifixion with the City’s Protector Saints and finally in the high altarpiece his place as mankind’s judge in the Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory, which illustrates the cycle of redemption implicit in the church’s function. The bodies of the recently deceased in the left altarpiece turn metaphorically into the bones at Golgotha and are redeemed by Christ’s sacrifice in the right altarpiece. Finally, while the bones of the plague victims remain beneath

298 Carroll, 1989, 107. Eucharistic devotion was always a very popular form of spiritual expression such as Corpus Christi processions. In the seventeenth century this also took the form of the Quarant’ore or Forty Hours wherein the Host would be displayed in a monstrance and placed on the altar for the devout to meditate upon. This devotion was seen as a form of reparation for sin. Even archbishop Filomarino ordered its celebration during the plague (De Renzi, 56.) Fuidoro, Vol. 1, 73, 112, notes a number of occasions where the Quarant’ore devotions are instituted in Naples. Additionally, the connection between the crucifixion and the plague was already made hugely popular by Cardinal Archbishop Carlo Borromeo in Milan’s devastating plague of 1576 also known as the “Borromean Plague.” Carlo Borromeo set a standard for adoration of the crucifix during the plague, which can be seen in the innumerable images commemorating his efforts. Giordano’s use of the crucifixion may stem from that tradition in addition to its obvious association with Eucharistic celebrations – so central to S. Maria del Pianto’s function. See Boeckl, 2000, 114-120; Pamela Jones, “San Carlo Borromeo and the Plague Imagery in Milan and Rome.” In Hope and Healing, 2005, 65-96. Furthermore, it is not surprising that Borromeo - that ardent reformer - would have promoted the power of the Eucharistic Sacrament given its central importance to the traditional teachings of the church, which were reaffirmed and promoted during the Counter-Reformation. See also Keith P. Luria, “Popular Catholicism and the Catholic Reformation” in Early Modern Catholicism. Eds. Kathleen Comerford and Hilmar Pabel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 114-127.
S. Maria del Pianto, in the high altarpiece the souls of these same dead are translated to Purgatory where their sins are expiated with every mass and prayer uttered by the faithful.

Those acts of suffrage assisted not only in liberating the souls from Purgatory but served the devoted as a means of achieving grace through charity. This was in addition, of course, to the belief that the recipient souls in Purgatory would plead with God on behalf of the living supplicant.

Though the main purpose of S. Maria del Pianto was as a memorial to the plague victims, it also functioned on many other levels. It stands as a profound part of viceroy Peñaranda’s legacy to Naples, his stewardship and piety. It supported not only local traditions but upheld the Counter-Reformation’s affirmation of the sacraments, and the cult of saints, relics and martyrs. It also represented a chance for the living to do for the dead what they could not do for them when they were alive. Finally, it embodies a message of hope not only for the souls in Purgatory, and the redemption of loved ones, but it also articulates future redemption and salvation for the living.
The purpose of this thesis was to situate the church of S. Maria del Pianto, and more specifically its altarpieces, within the Neapolitan context after the plague of 1656, to elucidate their function and importance to the congregants, and to identify how they represented and facilitated the devotional demands of their time. This research has clearly demonstrated that the impetus behind the erection of the church was not ex-voto as is often suggested, but rather the creation of a memorial for the victims of the plague. Not only was it built commemoratively on the site of a grotto filled with bodies, but more importantly it served as a place of worship dedicated to the suffrage for those same victims’ souls in Purgatory.

Researching the complexities of the belief system associated with Purgatory, typified by remembrance and obligation, reveals that the relationship between the souls and the supplicants was reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Belief in this reciprocity coupled with the extreme loss of life due to the plague outbreak, in addition to the already existing emphasis placed on good works for personal salvation provide a plausible explanation for the acceleration, popularization and ultimate success of purgatorial devotion in seventeenth-century Naples. The close study of these individual beliefs and their intersection reveals the impulse behind the creation of S. Maria del Pianto and the commission of its altarpieces.

In Chapter Two, identification of visual traditions that emerged out of the Black Death combined with a summary of the development of beliefs associated
with Purgatory expose the origins of the traditions that found full expression in S. Maria del Pianto’s imagery. This is followed by an exploration of the notion that church building and sacred image creation, as part of the response to the plague, allow direct insight into the ways in which people believed they could express and influence their circumstances, and possibly be liberated from them. In relation to S. Maria del Pianto this view articulates how Neapolitans’ believed they could react to and recover from a situation, where an entire society had been torn apart by catastrophic death. The rimedi spirituali that once centered on deliverance from the disease was transformed into rimedi that could liberate the plague victims’ souls from Purgatory.

Chapter Three explores the civic and ecclesiastical response during the Neapolitan outbreak and reveals many of the early modern beliefs associated with the plague in addition to exposing some of the possible motivations for viceroy Peñaranda’s personal and political interest in the cemetery church project. Furthermore, many of the Neapolitan plague images and ex-voto works examined in this chapter help contextualize aesthetically and iconographically the altarpieces created for S. Maria del Pianto and indicate the celestial protagonists most called upon by Neapolitans during times of crisis such as the much loved Madonna and St. Januarius.

Central to identifying the possible meanings of the images created for the church and appreciating their value in seventeenth-century Naples is an investigation of the building’s commission and an exploration of its many patrons.
Chapter Four confirms that the support for this cemetery church was as broad as the plague’s devastation - where the usual demarcations between wealth and poverty were all but erased by its violence. Certainly, the special attentions of the viceroy among other distinguished people and institutions account for much of the church’s great success. But their importance did not eclipse the contributions made by ordinary Neapolitans whose personal donations made during economically difficult times helped finance a large part of the construction. Chapter Four closes with an investigation of the doctrine of Purgatory and traces its development in Italy and Naples specifically. These beliefs are absolutely essential to this study when considering the motivations behind the church’s commission, the significance of the site upon which it was built and its function. All of these factors help illuminate the meanings espoused within the sacred paintings created for the church, the findings of which are presented in the fifth and final chapter.

Chapter Five examines Andrea Vaccaro’s painting of the Madonna Interceding for the Souls in Purgatory, Luca Giordano’s St. Januarius Interceding with the Virgin and Christ for the Plague Victims and his Crucifixion with the City’s Protector Saints. All of the altarpieces, created at the behest of viceroy Peñaranda, very likely conformed to a set of his instructions. A close examination of the paintings demonstrates that even though these three altarpieces can be understood, analyzed and meditated upon individually, they were very likely intended as component parts of a continuous narrative and were, from their inception, conceived as a coherent iconological program. The paintings, in addition to
conforming to the wishes of the patron and specific functional demands, can also be seen as an expression of personal experience or belief, painted as they were, by two Neapolitan artists who had survived the outbreak. If the iconography for the three paintings was selected by the patron, their powerful artistic interpretation certainly owed as much to the painters’ discretion and personal vision.

As proposed in Chapter Five there are two parallel but related narratives that unite the altarpieces. The first centres on the cycle of deliverance from sin and the transformation from physical death to spiritual life. The plague victims in the lateral altars are depicted in a physical progression of decay from corpse to bone, while in the high altar they have been translated to Purgatory indicating a spiritual progression towards salvation. This narrative cycle must have helped secure the devotions and prayers associated with suffrage for the souls in Purgatory to the site upon which the church was built. In the second narrative Christ acts as the thread joining the images. It is precisely because of his suffering and sacrifice for mankind represented in the lateral altars that he appears in the high altar enthroned and presiding as judge over the souls in Purgatory below and by extension over the church itself and all of its proceedings. The combination of Christ’s Passion with the Last Judgment sends a particularly strong but encouraging redemptive message. Significantly, the sequential narratives presented in the paintings were conceived to guide the spiritual meditation and reflection of the faithful. Above all, each painting encourages suffrage for the souls in Purgatory.
Each painting articulates and reiterates orthodox Catholic doctrine by reaffirming Christ’s authority, the efficacy of invocation of saints, and the necessity of the clergy in mediating between heaven and earth and promoting the true faith. It is easy to imagine that the powerful didactic qualities of the paintings combined with the eschatological associations of the church and its images would have directed the faithful towards contemplation of judgment and their personal bid for redemption in addition to that of the souls in Purgatory. The largely orthodox messages depicted in the altarpieces can be convincingly interpreted as a mark of viceroy Peñaranda’s influence.

The viceroy’s great admiration for the work of Vaccaro and Giordano is demonstrated by the fact that they were also the artists best represented at his own convent church in the village of Peñaranda de Bracamonte, where the extraordinarily beautiful Agony In The Garden ca. 1660 by Vaccaro, as well as the Via Dolorosa 1660, Christ Mocked 1660, and Annunciation ca. 1650-60, all by Giordano, can still be seen today.299 The viceroy's selection of these paintings might have been in remembrance of his special connection to S. Maria del Pianto and his legacy in Naples or perhaps it is simply an expression of admiration for the two artist's work – certainly the fact that he used the same artists for both projects indicates his partiality.

299 Harold Wethey, “The Spanish Viceroy, Luca Giordano, and Andrea Vaccaro,” *Burlington Magazine*, 777 (1967): 678-87. We know that Peñaranda was a great admirer and benefactor of Giordano given the number of commissions he awarded to the artist.
This investigation has attempted to reconstruct the importance and original meanings that S. Maria del Pianto encompassed and that the altar paintings provoked in their seventeenth-century audience. In this regard the devotional concerns that preoccupied Neapolitans after the devastation of the plague proved to be of particular importance, illuminating the complexities and negotiations between life and death so relevant to the Neapolitan experience. There can be no doubt that S. Maria del Pianto was a place of mourning that became equally a place of comfort - a fulfillment of Christ’s third blessing from his well known Sermon on the Mount found in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5: 4, “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.” For such a small church it bore an inordinately and peculiarly heavy burden, but through the rituals and prayers of remembrance it achieved a unique status in early modern Naples.
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