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Bird Symbolism in Italian Devotional Paintings from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century

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Bird Symbolism in Devotional Paintings from the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century

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Abstract

Madonna and Child images represent a significant portion of the paintings produced during the Medieval and Early Modern periods. Beginning in the thirteenth century, Italian painters began to embed symbolic birds into these works to create further points of reference and significance. This paper will examine the long history of bird symbolism and why Christian artists used different species of birds to create specific meanings. Hundreds of Madonna and Child paintings which include a bird were made between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, but there has been no in-depth analysis of this motif in over seventy years. Since the publication of Herbert Friedmann's book *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in Devotional Art,* scholars have made generalizations about avian symbolism and have not fully recognized the individual and intricate connotations that each bird suggests.

This study presents details on the origins and development of birds within Madonna and Child paintings in order to understand the significance of the different species in the following four paintings: the *Orsanmichele Madonna and Child with Angels* of 1346-1347 by Bernardo Daddi, the *Madonna of the Quail* of 1420 by Pisanello, the *Madonna Litta* of 1490, which is associated with Leonardo da Vinci, and the *Madonna of the Swallow* of 1620, which is associated with Guercino. An analysis of these works provides insight, that is currently lacking, on how artists created distinct meanings through avian forms and how they symbolized the natural world.

Executive Summary

The art of the Medieval and Early Modern eras relied upon a complex system of symbols and metaphors that may be unfamiliar to many today. Art historians analyze an image by examining every facet of its creation, but without a proper understanding of the symbolic values imbued in a painting, it would be impossible to comprehend its intended impact for contemporary viewers. Madonna and Child paintings, that is, works which show both the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus, often incorporate different symbols to create a variety of messages. The purpose of this capstone paper is to examine paintings from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century that include the motif of a symbolic bird placed in conjunction with the Madonna and Child.

I first became interested in exploring this subject when I encountered the painting *The Madonna and Child with a Swallow* by Francesco di Antonio di Barolomeo in the Denver Art Museum. My art history professors had briefly mentioned the significance of bird symbolism in previous classes, but I had never noticed representations of swallows in the many Madonna and Child paintings that I had seen while studying abroad in Florence and during my visits to numerous museums around the world. When I attempted to learn more about the swallow in the painting in the Denver Art Museum, I was unable to find sources that I felt adequately answered my questions. I began to look at the many other examples of paintings that included birds and was astounded to find a lack of scholarship on the numerous species of birds, other than the goldfinch, that are portrayed with the Madonna and Child.

Bird imagery and symbolism has been a part of numerous cultures throughout history, and indeed Christian artists incorporated goldfinches, swallows, sparrows, siskins, parrots, and other species into their religious artworks. The vast quantity of these paintings is striking, and it

is clear that the motif was widely and readily adapted, as it appeared in numerous media and in nations across Europe. Artists incorporated birds into hundreds of Madonna and Child paintings over the course of approximately five hundred years. Furthermore, its inclusion in devotional paintings of all sizes, from large, public altarpieces to small, portable works intended for personal devotion, demonstrates that it appealed to the entire population. Due to the fact that the highest concentration of this motif can be found in Italian paintings, this paper will address works originating solely from that region.

Several authors have written generally about birds in art, but there has been little literature concerning birds in Madonna and Child paintings. Seventy years ago, Herbert Friedmann, an ornithologist by training, wrote the single example of a book dedicated exclusively to this topic. This book, while a critical resource to understand specific historical concepts, is problematic. Firstly, Friedmann only addressed the symbolism of the goldfinch, which is, admittedly, the most common bird found in Madonna and Child paintings. By ignoring the host of other species found in these images, or even at times wrongfully equating them, Friedmann does not adequately address the religious and artistic choices that artists, patrons, and theologians made. Secondly, Friedmann does not satisfactorily discuss the lengthy history of animal symbolism that has been an integral part of Christianity since its origin. To understand the intentions of those involved in the creation of these kind of images, it is critical to address how they would have actually viewed the birds, both physically and metaphorically. Given the wealth and intellectual backgrounds of most Italian art patrons, it would be expected that they would have had a certain degree of knowledge of both historical and contemporary avian symbolism.

The aim of this paper is to further fill in the current gaps of knowledge of the birds' roles in Madonna and Child images. To do this, I began by examining the textual and pictorial history relating to birds, from the Roman era to the Early Modern period at the tail end of the popularity of the motif. I read Greek and Roman scientific encyclopedias, biblical passages, early Christian treatises on nature and allegory, Medieval writings, particularly bestiaries, and Early Modern texts. I selected specific paintings that represented different time periods, locations, and purposes, and, most importantly, different species of birds, to serve as my primary examples. These works, all together, are used to explain the developments of the motif and what the different types of birds signify. I discuss a number of important Madonna and Child images that include birds, but the paintings I focus primarily on are: the *Orsanmichele Madonna and Child with Angels* of 1346-1347 by Bernardo Daddi (1280-1348), the *Madonna of the Quail* of 1420 by Pisanello (Antonio di Puccio Pisano, 1395-1455), the *Madonna Litta* of 1490, which is associated with Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), and the *Madonna of the Swallow* of 1620, which is associated with Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591-1666).

To conduct a proper analysis of these paintings, I examined sources regarding the individual artists and the history of the paintings themselves when available. This gave me the necessary background to understand why these specific artists may have chosen to use the motif and why they depicted particular birds. Yet, the host of literature on each artist or individual painting generally fails to pay close attention to the birds depicted in the works. Despite their symbolic and physical centrality to all of these painting, the birds are often seen by scholars as almost cursory details, meant to convey a single idea. For example, the goldfinches in the *Orsanmichele Madonna* and the *Madonna Litta* are almost only discussed as symbols of the Crucifixion of Jesus, due to a legendary tale. In my paper, I examine the other interpretations of

the goldfinch and recognize its complex history. I conduct this same analysis of the quail and the swallow, which both have been written about since the ancient Roman era. By analyzing the inclusion of birds in Madonna and Child paintings, I recognize and expand upon the understanding of the Medieval and Early Modern approach towards symbolizing the natural world.

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Introduction

From the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, Italian artists made hundreds of paintings of the Madonna and Child that include a small bird, which is used as a symbolic device to relate a message of deeper religious significance. Birds such as goldfinches, swallows, sparrows, parrots, siskins, and several others entered the pictorial tradition. The centrally important quality of these paintings, for the purposes of this paper, is the presence of a bird and both the Madonna and Child. The bird is most commonly held by either Mary or Christ, but it can also be seen in proximity to the holy figures, sometimes only an arm's length away from them or as a spatially removed element in a different section of the painting. This motif is evident in images produced all across Europe during the period in question, including Italy, France, Spain, Germany, the Low Countries, and Russia. Perhaps the best-known example, Raphael's *Madonna of the Goldfinch* (fig. 1), demonstrates that even the most famous Renaissance artists used this motif. This bird iconography originated in French sculpture during the late thirteenth century, but successive generations of Italian artists developed and used it in painting more often than artists in any other European region.[1] Due to the frequency of the inclusion of birds in Italian devotional paintings, this paper is dedicated exclusively to Italian examples.

In all cases, regardless of the actual species that artists chose to depict, the bird is utilized as a symbol to convey another level of meaning within the traditional compositions of the Madonna and Child, which had already been popular in prior centuries. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to offer a more thorough understanding of bird symbolism in Madonna and Child images and to question the generalizations that have been made regarding the significance of different species. Four paintings will be used to accomplish these goals, the first of which is Bernardo Daddi's (1280-1348) *Orsanmichele Madonna and Child with Angels* (fig. 2) of 1346-

47. Made for the grain market and church of Orsanmichele in Florence, it is the third and final painting that served as a miracle-working image associated with that church. The Madonna and Child are enthroned in the center of the painting, and Mary looks out to the viewer as she holds Christ in an odd, almost haphazard, position. Eight angels surround the lavish throne and are stacked one on top of the other against a gold ground typical of paintings of the period. Christ touches Mary's cheek with his right hand, as he tightly clutches a goldfinch in his left one. The goldfinch's wings are partially open, creating a shape which resembles a cross. Mary's face is situated precisely in the middle of the painting, and the position of the goldfinch and the Child's head creates a triangle, which guides the viewer's eyes around the image. The bird is a distinct part of this triangle, making it a pivotal symbolic and physical element of the painting.

The second example is a painting by Pisanello (Antonio di Puccio Pisano, 1395-1455), the *Madonna of the Quail* (fig. 3), of c. 1420. This picture centers on a more distinct and unusual bird than Daddi's. The Madonna and Child sit in the center of the panel on the ground in front of a rose bush, from which two goldfinches are likely eating their most famous food source – thorns. At the top of the painting, two angels crown Mary. A quail, specifically the indigenous common or European quail, stands on the ground in the lower right-hand corner of the composition. Both Mary and the Christ child gaze towards the quail, thereby providing a directional focus for the viewer. Details such as the goldfinches and incredibly precisely rendered flora then capture the eye, creating a rich and spatially convincing depiction. As a rare example of a Madonna and Child painting that includes a quail, this work will permit further exploration of how the motif changed and allowed artists to experiment with iconography and naturalism.

The third painting to be considered, the Leonardesque *Madonna Litta* (fig. 4) of c. 1490, has a complex and little-understood history, and its inclusion of a partly concealed goldfinch is difficult to interpret. In this work, the Madonna and Child occupy the interior of a building that has arched windows and overlooks a stunning landscape. The windows are symmetrical, and Mary is in the center of the painting. She holds Christ in an awkward position as he nurses from her right breast. The goldfinch, which Christ holds between his and his mother's body, is a detail that is easy to miss. Were it not for the bird's bright, distinctive red head, it would be largely indistinguishable from Christ's right hand. The inclusion of the goldfinch here, although it is much more understated than the previous examples, indicates that even innovative artists such as Leonardo and those influenced by him continued to use conventional symbols from prior centuries. This specific goldfinch will help to answer questions about how artists and patrons thought about the motif over two hundred years after it first appeared in Italian painting and how the relationship between the human and non-human world continued to change.

The final work to be analyzed is a painting associated with Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591-1666) and his workshop, the *Madonna of the Swallow* (fig. 5) of 1620. The work, which appears to have been derived from another image, shows an intense moment between Christ, Mary, and an angel. In it, Christ holds a swallow at arm's length near the painting's left edge, as far from his body as possible. His expression is pensive, if not preoccupied. Mary glances in the opposite direction of the swallow, her brow furrowed, as Christ nestles on her lap. The angel, on the far right of the composition, gazes reverently and expectantly at Christ. The viewer's eye is drawn horizontally across the image, from face to face, but ends on the left side with the swallow. The bird's prominence in this painting and the long

historical tradition associated with it makes the message of this work clear, which is the deep emotions of the figures contemplating the Resurrection.

These four paintings provide a relatively broad chronological survey of the period during which the motif was most popular in Italy. This is critical in order to see how the motif and thoughts regarding the iconography changed. The geographic origins of these paintings also demonstrate the widespread appeal and use of the bird in Madonna and Child paintings in some of the major and minor Italian schools of painting. Additionally, these four paintings provide an opportunity for further study of two extremely different depictions of goldfinches, a swallow, which is a quintessential small bird, and a quail, which rarely appears in art. These four images also provide the opportunity to discuss the various purposes that the paintings served, as their size and commissions indicate. The distinct qualities of each work will enable a fuller analysis of the motif than the existing scholarship offers.

While hundreds of surviving paintings include images of birds, the meanings of some of those avian creatures are difficult to interpret today. In his book published in 1946, *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in Devotional Art*, whose subject is the bird most commonly seen in Madonna and Child paintings, Herbert Friedmann provides numerous interpretations of the motif. Of all of these interpretations, which range from the goldfinch as a protective symbol against the plague, to its relationship to the mythical charadius bird, the most enduring has been the idea that the goldfinch is a symbol of Christ's Passion, which encompasses his death and resurrection.[2] Art historians have largely extrapolated that all small birds, regardless of species or placement within a painting, ultimately represent both the Christ child's future crucifixion and resurrection.

This generalization, which has been applied to birds ranging from swallows, sparrows, siskins, to any unidentifiable or purposefully ambiguous species, is problematic for a number of reasons. Notably, the sources of Friedmann's specific goldfinch symbolism are unclear. The goldfinch's association with the Passion likely derives from two biological and theological factors. First, its diet partially consists of thistles and thorns, which automatically evokes a symbolic relationship to Christ's crown of thorns. Secondly, according to tradition, because of its diet, the goldfinch approached the crown of thorns during the crucifixion. Subsequently, the bird's head was permanently dyed red with the blood of Christ. In reality, all birds with red feathers, particularly the robin, were thought to relate to Christ's blood and sacrifice.[3] It is unclear when this concept first developed, as there is no written record of it from before the period when the motif first emerged in Madonna and Child representations. It is also difficult to determine whether the goldfinch had the strongest association with the Passion, or that it symbolized the Passion and subsequent Resurrection in a more profound way than any other bird did for medieval and Renaissance Christians.

Birds have been viewed as symbols by many civilizations throughout time and have been used as both symbolic and literal figures in art for millennia. Proof of their symbolic interpretation can be seen in texts, particularly Classical sources. Greek and Roman philosophers and historians, such as Aristotle and Pliny, began the tradition of compiling knowledge of and observations about the world in natural histories, and it is from these sources that it is possible to derive the earliest understanding of how Western civilizations interpreted birds. Early in the history of Christianity, writers composed interpretive texts, which took precedence over the older, pagan sources. The goldfinch was not included in these classical or early Christian writings, leading to the important question as to how the goldfinch became popular so early and

why other birds were then later used in art. These ancient sources did, however, describe many other birds in great detail, providing important resources from which artists or their iconographical advisors may have drawn inspiration for the depiction of symbolic birds in devotional images.

Friedmann does not make extensive references to these textual sources, nor does he ask these vital questions about the origins and actual development of the motif as a whole. Despite his impressive catalogue of paintings that integrate goldfinches—he analyzed close to five hundred works—he did not present a rigorous study. He did briefly discuss goldfinches in other Christian paintings, such as scenes of the Nativity, the Flight into Egypt, and the Adoration of the Shepherds or the Magi. Friedmann emphasized the fact that the goldfinch is not seen in devotional paintings of Christ at an age older than that of an infant or very young child.[4] Likewise, the goldfinch is never seen in pictures of the Crucifixion, although it may have been redundant to paint a symbol of the Passion within an image of the narrative. Yet, it may be noted that one symbolic bird, the pelican, was occasionally shown alongside the Crucifixion. One such example is Silvestro de' Gheraducci's *The Crucifixion* (fig. 6) of 1365.

Friedmann was not, in fact, a trained art historian. Instead, he was an ornithologist and an employee of the Smithsonian Institute. While his scientific background did give him authority on the general study of birds, his analysis of an entire motif in art history seems to lack substantiated proof from textual history and wrongly ignores all birds other than the goldfinch. Additionally, Friedmann's book was published in 1946, over seventy years ago, and therefore relies on outdated art historical methods. A reexamination of the use of birds in Madonna and Child paintings is necessary for their proper interpretation.

The appeal of the Madonna and Child with a bird was clearly undeniable for patrons and artists in the thirteenth century. The symbolic import and charming properties of the small, often beautiful birds allowed the motif to spread rapidly across the European continent. Through the five-hundred-year history of its use, the motif was transformed, even as painting itself changed radically in terms of style and technique through this time period. The changes in depictions of birds, and the eventual use of a greater variety of bird species and more complex compositions, shows the evolution of the symbolism and the relationship of these creatures with holy figures and the contemporary viewers.

Part 1: The Origins and Significance of Bird Symbolism in Text and Art

The Beginning of the Bird in Art

Birds can be seen in the earliest prehistoric European art. Their continued presence in art in the millennia that followed is evidence of how humans interpreted and interacted with the natural world. Given their power of flight and their mysterious migratory patterns, birds have served as symbols of various concepts for much of human history. The most ancient examples of artistic representations of birds are seen in prehistoric French caves (fig. 7) dating from over 32,000 thousand years ago. The meanings of these birds are not fully understood, thus the earliest bird images for which symbolic interpretations can correctly be made date from ancient Egypt, over four thousand years ago. Within art from this region and period, many of the birds were included as naturalistic elements of scenes of daily life (fig. 8), but specific examples serve as evidence that birds were also used symbolically. Different species were linked to certain deities, with the most famous examples including the falcon and Horus, the ibis and Thoth, and the vulture and Nekhbet.[5] These associations were explicit, and the gods were often shown with avian heads (fig. 9). The other key understanding of birds in Egyptian culture was their use as symbols to represent the everlasting human soul, known as the *ba* or *ka.*[6] Later Christian artists often used birds and winged beings in similar capacities, to indicate the symbolic soul, a practice perhaps derived from the Egyptian belief in the *ba*.[7] A bird which is close to Christ or Mary can, first and foremost, be symbolically read as a human soul. The Egyptian usage of avian images and symbols to signify their gods and the eternal human soul was just one ancient cultural phenomenon involving birds, which would influence later Christian practices.

The Classical Bird

Philosophers and historians in ancient Greece and Rome originated the tradition of recording and explaining the known facts and myths related to specific species of birds. These texts account for the earliest interpretations and knowledge of the natural world, and their lasting influence throughout the successive centuries and millennia is profound. The authors strove to explain the known natural world and, while not all of the information they conveyed is accurate by today's standards, they were the first to offer a concise written account of the total knowledge of the time. The first major compendium was Aristotle's *Historia animalium* of the fourth century BCE. This work's focus on conveying accepted "scientific" facts would influence later authors, particularly the Roman writer Pliny the Elder.[8] One of the most important sources regarding classical animal information is Pliny's *The Natural History*, of 77 to 79 CE. The thirty-seven books that comprised this text provide an encyclopedic analysis of much of the existing knowledge, which contained data about the natural and imaginary worlds. Pliny offered insight into the lives of real and fantastical birds and other creatures and made judgments concerning the animals' cultural value based on their physical or biological traits. During the first century, these myths concerning natural elements were taken as facts, and the beliefs in the supernatural powers and symbolism of animals persisted into the Medieval period.

Pliny discusses birds in the tenth book of *The Natural History*. Within this section, he describes numerous species; but, particularly noteworthy are his writings on the swallow and the quail. In chapters 34, 35, and 49, Pliny's account of the swallow ranges from its eating and prudent nesting habits to its migratory patterns and to its role as a messenger bird that brings positive tidings. The facts he conveys and the analysis he provides about the swallow are exceptionally positive. As will be further discussed, the swallow was continuously interpreted as

a positive symbol well into the seventeenth century, when the *Madonna of the Swallow* was painted.

Conversely, Pliny's discussion of the quail in chapter 33 focuses on this bird's reputation as a negative omen.[9] He begins by highlighting its lack of strength, which elucidates why it usually stays on the ground, rather than flies. Yet, when quails do fly, a flock of them may sink ships just by their weight when they land on the sails. He then writes that quails frequently fall prey to hawks, which are their primary predators. Pliny continues this chapter by discussing the quail's diet of poisonous seeds, which makes the bird inedible for human consumption. His conclusion consists of the warning that the quail is the only animals other than humans that can suffer from epilepsy.[10] Christian authors would later create a new meaning for the quail, which was diametrically opposed to Pliny's negative description. As will be shown, the transformation of the quail from an ominous symbol to a positive one enabled Pisanello to focus on this bird in the *Madonna of the Quail* in the early fifteenth century.

The Natural History, which is Pliny's only surviving text, was one of the best examples of an encyclopedia and it influenced the way authors wrote about the natural world in the centuries that followed. Some of his claims persisted for many years, although other sources emerged that played a more important role in the evolving Christian societies of Europe.

The Christian Bird

Beginning in the first century CE, Christianity became a driving force behind the way that people interpreted the natural world. New texts emerged in the early years of the faith, which gave credence to its new theology. These texts echoed the structure and select sentiments of earlier writings, such as Pliny's. Earlier, pagan conceptions of animals were incorporated, but

Biblical stories and legends took precedence in the interpretation and use of specific symbols, including birds. The dove immediately became the bird with the greatest symbolic value within Christianity. European pagan cultures had previously associated the dove with Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of love, beauty, and sexuality.[11] The Abrahamic religions, on the other hand, associated it with the originally Jewish story of Noah and the Ark in Genesis 8:11. Within this story, the bird is a symbol or a positive omen of peace and safety. Even more importantly, the Holy Spirit takes the physical form of a dove, as described in accounts of the Baptism of Christ in Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:22. It is the later belief in the avian form of the Holy Spirit, which led to the greatest number of bird representations in Christian art, as the dove has become one of the most important icons of Christianity. Under this new religion, the mythological symbol related to love, beauty, and sexuality was appropriated to signify the holiness and purity of God and peace and security.

Sources beyond the Bible that provided a context for early Church teachings soon emerged. The most influential of these was the *Physiologus*, which was written in Greek by a now anonymous author between the second and fourth century CE. It originally contained approximately fifty chapters replete with information related to real and imaginary animals, plants, and stones. As will be discussed below, later authors of moralizing texts drew inspiration from this source. Like Pliny, the author of the *Physiologus* provided "objective" information about specific gems and creatures, including some birds. Yet the majority of the text was dedicated to describing the relevance of animals to Christian theology, as explained through allegory. Due to the explicit religion-focused information about certain animals, this is more of a direct theological text than a treatise on the natural world. The author of the *Physiologus* focused his explanations, in order to conform to and reinforce the dogma of the new religion. His

allegorical stories provided a new context for animals, which had previously been assigned pagan or non-Christian meaning.

The swallow is again discussed in the *Physiologus*, but, in contrast to Pliny, its author emphasized the erroneous fact that the swallow produces only a single offspring in its life. Michael Curley suggests that the author of the *Physiologus* purposefully reported this incorrect detail on the reproductive habits of the swallow to create a direct allegory to Christ, whose birth, life, death, and resurrection are singular in history. [12] This reproductive information directly contradicts ancient sources such as Pliny, which more accurately stated that the swallow usually hatches clutches of approximately five chicks. Curley suggests that, because the swallow is the traditional symbol of spring's onset, the author of the *Physiologus* reinvented the interpretation of the swallow to relate it more closely to the idea of Christ as the harbinger of a new age.[13] This idea of the swallow makes Guercino's painting even more meaningful, as in it the angel stares reverently at the symbol for the Resurrection and the New Age, and the human figure who actually served as the impetus for its inauguration.

Whereas the swallow had an entire chapter dedicated to it in the both *The Natural History* and the *Physiologus*, the quail is not mentioned in this latter Christian writing. The earlier classical writings survived, but the *Physiologus* became the more important source for interpreting the symbolic meanings of birds for many centuries.

In the seventh century, long after the emergence of the *Physiologus*, Isidore, Bishop of Seville, compiled the *Etymologiae* (also called the *Origins).* Isidore was a prolific author of history, science, and religious texts.[14] He relied on Christian and pre-Christian sources and encyclopedias, especially Pliny's *The Natural History*, to compose his twenty book compendium, which was left incomplete at the time of his death in 636.[15] His primary aim in the

Etymologiae was, as its title implies, to use etymology or the study of words, to provide context for the proper interpretation of religious and non-religious aspects of the world. Isidore focuses on birds in book eleven, chapter seven of the *Etymologiae*. This text resembles *The Natural History* much more closely than it does the *Physiologus.* It does not contain Christian moralizing lessons and conveys many of the same facts presented in Pliny's work. The notable exception is the inclusion of the goldfinch, which Isidore explains is so named in Latin as *carduelus* because it feeds on thorns and thistles, or *carduus.*[16] Another, quite minor, change that Isidore made was to exclude the erroneous belief that quails can cause shipwrecks.[17] His information regarding the swallow is much the same as Pliny's. The *Etymologiae* was also a widely known and read text, and it represented a departure from the idea that the natural world must be interpreted strictly according to a Christian frame of rationality. Isidore specifically opted to use the classical sources and to forgo relying on the *Physiologus,* and so demonstrates how conceptions regarding animals varied and shifted.

The non-canonical Gospels were other sources which undoubtedly also affected the representations of birds in Madonna and Child paintings. One important story, which suggests a connection between the young Christ and birds, can be found in the *Infancy Gospel of St. Thomas.* This apocryphal book is considered a gnostic, or mystical, text, and was written in Greek in the second century CE. It concerns the childhood of Jesus from approximately the ages of five to twelve. It did not enter the biblical canon due to some of its problematic stories, yet the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* was popular throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. All surviving versions of this text include an account of how the five-year-old Jesus took clay from a spring that he had purified, from which he then molded twelve birds that he subsequently brought to life. Certain versions of the text specify that the clay sculptures were intended to be sparrows.[18]

The symbolism of the number of birds Christ made has a clear relationship to the twelve apostles, but the significance of the sparrow is less apparent. The *Physiologus*, which was likely written around the same time, makes no reference to the sparrow. These kinds of stories gave artists and the theologians who advised them further sources of inspiration. It was perhaps Christ's youthful association with sparrows in this story that contributed to the Guercino workshop's painting of the *Madonna of the Sparrow* (fig. 10) in 1616.

The Medieval Bird and Natural Philosophy

By the twelfth century, bestiaries succeeded the *Physiologus* as authoritative sources on animal symbolism. Bestiaries became popular beginning in the twelfth century, but were produced in the greatest numbers during the thirteenth century. Their production had all but ceased by the end of the fourteenth century.[19] One of the most famous examples of this type of text is the twelfth-century Aberdeen Bestiary from England. Like later editions of the *Physiologus*, these texts were accompanied by elaborate and detailed illustrations (fig. 11). These uniquely decorated codices explained animal symbolism in a similar, religious way as the *Physiologus.* Simona Cohen has analyzed bestiaries that date from the later period, indicating that their structure and additions reflected how these texts were widely used by preachers and in the liturgy.[20] If the concepts of birds were indeed conveyed to the public through sermons, the contents of bestiaries would have been familiar not just to the upper echelons of literate society, but also to the illiterate population.[21] The authors of bestiaries often elaborated beyond what the *Physiologus* offered, and added information from other Medieval sources. For example, the Aberdeen Bestiary integrated entire passages from the *De avibus*, which, at the time it was written, was the only religious text dedicated exclusively to the analysis of birds. It was written

by the French author Hugh of Fouilloy between 1132 and 1152 and was originally directed towards a monastic audience and gave moralizing interpretations of different bird species.[22] Despite its original purpose as a monastic text, it appealed to a much broader audience and was duplicated within bestiaries across the continent.

Of note is the account of the swallow in the Aberdeen Bestiary. While its author did indeed draw from Hugh of Fouilloy's text, this borrowing was selective. The description of the swallow in the *De avibus* is mixed in tone, and Hugh stated that, "by its nimble flight the swallow symbolizes pride and inconsistency of the heart, the uncleanliness of which forthwith blinds one, nor does it permit him to see what he was before." To contrast or even contradict this negative characterization, Hugh then discussed its nest-building and migration habits as symbolic of devotion to Christ and God.[23] The Aberdeen Bestiary includes these two different interpretations, but only after it praises the swallow for its, "special loving care, shrewd intelligence, and extraordinary quality of its understanding," a level of praise that does not appear in the *De avibus*.[24] Despite the potentially negative interpretation of the swallow, the overwhelmingly positive nature of its meaning as expressed in the bestiaries and other texts makes it more evident why it was adopted as a symbol used in Madonna and Child paintings.

The luxurious and impressive marginal decorations of many Medieval illuminated manuscripts exemplify the secular and religious relationships between humans and birds. Such books ranged in size depending on their purposes, but even in diminutive texts, marginal decorations were elaborate and often showed birds. This decorative tradition began and flourished in England and France in particular. The first examples of manuscripts with images of birds date from the seventh century. In these earliest examples, birds were incorporated into zoomorphic designs (fig. 12) on the margins of the pages. The first works with more accurate

depictions of birds were made in the middle of the thirteenth century in England. Throughout the rest of that century and during the early years of the fourteenth century, the appearance of birds in English manuscript margins reached a peak. It was at the end of the fourteenth century that this decorative element became as prevalent in France and the rest of the continent as it was in England.[25] Throughout the centuries, artists painted numerous bird species in the margins of manuscripts.[26]

However, according to William Brundson Yapp, the birds were often solely decorative in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were not always directly relevant to the text; they primarily served to enliven and enrich the illustrations.[27] Charles Vaurie likewise explains that exclusively decorative birds were often used, although symbolic birds were also present, particularly the goldfinch.[28] The extensive use of birds can be seen in many works, including the illuminations by the mid-fourteenth-century artist Jean Le Noir (fig. 13). To a certain extent, the painters who created these images strove for accuracy, but because they often copied other artistic representations, their birds were not always anatomically correct. Other manuscripts, and even model or pattern books, few of which survive, often served as their primary sources. Moreover, artists invented hybrid birds, using their imaginations to create more elaborate and impressive ornamentation. The tradition of replication and invention was not adopted by every artist, as some clearly turned to a more reliable source – the birds themselves.[29]

During the Medieval period, a number of small birds, including the goldfinch, were greatly admired for their plumage and beautiful songs. The lower classes often kept them in their residences, primarily in small cages. Similarly, the goldfinch was a typical pet in upper-class residences. In certain occasions, the upper classes preferred to listen to birds' songs rather than play instruments themselves or hire musicians.[30] Nobles and kings also began to keep aviaries,

that is, large enclosed environments for birds, near their palaces.[31] Although artists certainly copied images of animals from other illuminated manuscripts or pattern books, Caroline Bugler indicates that artists working for monarchs and nobles especially would have had the opportunity to observe these animals in aviaries and to depict them accurately.[32] The visual appeal of birds and their physical presence in the domestic sphere contributed to their inclusion first in illuminated manuscripts, then in sculpture, and, finally, in paintings. This introduction of their much-beloved animals, who were not always symbolic or relevant to the stories within the illuminated manuscripts, into the texts requires a further examination of the theology regarding birds in the century when they were first introduced to Madonna and Child compositions.

By the thirteenth century, Christian theologians were markedly concerned with the symbolism of the natural world and how it was divinely ordered. This period produced a great deal of philosophical literature regarding the ways humans derived knowledge. As we have seen above, the idea that natural elements were imbued with Christian symbolism stretches back to the origins of the religion, as seen in the *Physiologus*. By the thirteenth century, when Christianity was the single most dominant force within Europe, it became important to unify scientific understanding and the religious doctrines of the time. In the Middle Ages, the physical world was unanimously thought to hold deeper religious implications, beyond the visible, physical level. Each being was believed to have been derived from a divine thought, and thus possessed Christian significance. Most importantly, according to Emile Mâle, "in the depths of each creature are inscribed the figure of the sacrifice of Jesus, the idea of the Church, and the image of the vices and virtues."[33] Many theologians of the time expanded upon the complex symbolic meanings about which previous authors had written. These include a philosophical treatise by Vincent of Beauvais, the popular encyclopedia *Speculum maius* (the *Great Mirror*), of

1244. The first book of this encyclopedia, entitled *Speculum naturale* (the *Mirror of Nature*), is a compendium of thirteenth-century scientific knowledge of the natural world, with a focus on how it relates to Christian ideology. The information he provided was an explicit reflection of the belief in the divine order of creation. This book and other theological texts like it ultimately played a critical role in guiding belief and practice in life and the arts during the thirteenth century.[34]

Given the deeply significant interpretations of the natural world, which flourished during the Middle Ages, it is perhaps surprising to reflect on the profound lack of symbolism attached to the birds in manuscripts, especially from the same time period. Numerous thirteenth-century authors, including Vincent of Beauvais, attempted to answer questions about the workings of the universe by reaffirming the divine order created by God. Yet, in practice, so it would seem, birds, as natural elements, were simple reflections of daily life as seen by artists in cages, aviaries, in the countryside, or in other illustrations. The emerging images of the Madonna and Child with a bird thus had the symbolic import that the earlier manuscript depictions did not possess.

The First Depictions of a Bird with the Madonna and Child: French Sculpture

French sculptors were the first to adopt the motif of the Virgin or the Christ Child holding a bird (figs. 14 and 15). Friedmann suggested, with almost complete certainty, that these types of sculptures originated in France in the early thirteenth century, and that the iconography then spread to other European countries by the 1270s.[35] The proliferation of bird decoration in French manuscripts, combined with the fact that France saw an unparalleled explosion of church construction and monumental, sculptural decoration in the early twelfth century, provides

context as to why this motif first appeared in French sculpture.[36] The emergence of this iconography also coincided with conscious efforts to create more affectionate portrayals of the Madonna and Child than those made during the Romanesque period. This stylistic and iconographic change was partially a result of the growth of the cult of the Virgin Mary, who was venerated as a chief intercessor, the Bride of Christ, the Queen of Heaven, and the personification of the Church [37] Although it is impossible to identify the first example of this kind of sculpture, the motif was clearly readily adapted, as countless examples were produced across the European continent in sculpture and painting in successive years.

Given the fact that most examples have lost a great deal of their original polychromy, it is difficult to determine whether the birds in these sculptures were specific species, or if they were purposefully left nondescript. These early examples of the motif may have been intended simply to depict the holy figures holding a creature that was emblematic of the human soul. If these birds were indeed particular species, there are specific birds that could have added further layers of meaning to an artwork. The dove is one such species, as it was a common Christian symbol. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, is often in scenes of the Annunciation, so its appearance with the Madonna and the Child would be iconographically appropriate. Indeed, one painted example by Niccolò di Pietro Gerini of c. 1370 (fig. 16) shows a dove descending towards Christ, who sits on the Virgin's lap. The swallow would also be a well-suited symbol due to the extensive writings related to this species in the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries. One other logical possibility for the unidentified bird in the French sculptures is the sparrow, as it is the bird Christ crafted from clay in the story recounted in the aforementioned *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. All of the evidence considered, given the lack of textual history, it is difficult to assume that these original birds were goldfinches.

This depiction of two of the most important Christian religious figures, one of whom holds a small bird, in part played an important role in humanizing the Virgin and Child. These sculptures generally portrayed the Virgin as a regal figure, or the Queen of Heaven, complete with a crown and adorned in luxurious garments. She either stands or sits upon a throne, as she holds the Christ child in her arms or on her lap. These are features that were repeated in numerous paintings that incorporate birds, including, as we shall see below, the *Orsanmichele Madonna*. On a spiritual level, the air of unattainable richness and importance that characterizes these Medieval sculptures of the Madonna and Child, could make it more difficult for the lower classes to identify with the divine figures. To most viewers, however, seeing a natural and familiar element such as a child holding a bird, aided in creating more human religious figures, who could inspire greater piety and devotion. Song birds were not only kept in the domestic sphere, but, throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, they were also often presented to children to play with and were frequently tethered to a string or chain.[38] Beginning in the fifteenth century, portraits of children began to reflect this custom. For example, Marco d'Oggiono depicted Francesco Maria Sforza, "Il Duchetto," grasping a goldfinch in the portrait (fig. 17) of 1493. Birds in child portraits appeared long after the origin of the motif in sculpture and painting, but this association between children and birds remained a constant for centuries and represented pedagogical metaphors.

In the French sculptures, Jesus participates in a familiar pastime of children, playing with a bird. Birds also brought an element of movement and life to otherwise static images (fig. 18). This, again, allows for an enhanced religious experience, as devotees were able to connect with a seemingly more "alive" religious icon. Additionally, the story from the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas,* may have, in part, inspired these sculptures. The way that artists sculpted the birds

recalled the way Christ sculpted the sparrows in the story. This echoing of a divine story would have resonated with many viewers familiar with this tale.

Early Modern Bird Imagery

The role of the *Physiologus*, which was influential in the Middle Ages, diminished during the Early Modern period. While authors continuously transcribed certain ideas from this ancient text into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, symbolism in general was changing during this era. In his essay on the importance of this ancient religious text, Dietmar Peil argues that authors of this time did not rely on the *Physiologus* as a key source for emblem books.[39] The undeniable changes in iconography and symbolism related to the natural world during the Renaissance provide greater insight into changes in contemporary social structures and values. The artistic and social changes, which occurred in Italy in the sixteenth century, must be recognized in order to understand if Guercino's painting of 1620 held the same message and impact as the earlier works.

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ideas about birds in art became more complex. On the one hand, treatises on art did not focus on the symbolic meanings of individual species in and of themselves. In the late sixteenth and the seventeenth century, printed emblem books by authors such as Cesare Ripa and Andrea Alciati became important textual and visual sources to explain the significance of specific pictorial elements. As opposed to early texts dating from the classical and Medieval periods, these were not dedicated to specific animals. Rather, they were used to explain how allegorical figures were supposed to be shown. However, many of the surviving examples of these early modern emblem books demonstrate the persistent symbolism attached to birds. In Cesare Ripa's highly influential *Iconologia* of 1593, birds are

part of numerous, positive allegories, including "Fecondità" (fecundity) especially, in which a woman, surrounded by rabbits, hens, and chicks, holds a nest of goldfinches. Additionally, Ripa explained the rational soul as a female figure with large wings (fig. 19) said to represent her "celerity in spiritual matters."[40] Certainly, by the time that Guercino painted the *Madonna of the Swallow* in the early *seicento*, birds had gained additional formal meanings as compared to Daddi's *Orsanmichele Madonna*, painted three hundred years earlier.

Birds continued to appear in Madonna and Child paintings well into the seventeenth century, and in the final centuries of its inclusion in art, artists also had to confront the development of a more scientific approach to the study of the natural world. For example, the Swiss author Conrad Gessner penned one of the most well-known encyclopedias of the sixteenth century. Gessner compiled this text, the expansive *Historia animalium*, between 1551 and 1558. He wrote in a similar manner to that of the authors of the early encyclopedias, and provided biological details about different animals. Due to his goal of conveying contemporary scientific knowledge, primarily derived from his own and his peers' observations, Gessner did not address the symbolic values of the birds or digress into tangential or fanciful tales of the animals as did Pliny and the author of the *Physiologus*.[41] This distinctly secular text appeared in the middle of the intermediary years between the painting of the *Madonna Litta* and the *Madonna of the Swallow*, in 1490 and 1620.

Avian symbols have long been part of thought and art-making practices. Beginning in ancient Egypt, clearly defined meanings were attached to these creatures. Later authors in Greece and Rome codified these meanings, providing facts and analyses in enduring encyclopedic texts. As Christianity evolved, these earlier interpretations were altered to serve the purpose of reinforcing the principles of the religion by creating allegorical stories and other explanations.

By the Middle Ages, the relationship between humans and the natural world was increasingly complicated. While in theory, every aspect of the natural world, including birds, was a reflection of the divine order, people derived more than just profound religious meaning from their interactions with nature. The appearance of the motif in which the Madonna and Child are shown with a bird reflects the complexity of this relationship. The mere fact that something as natural and commonplace as a bird was included in these statues was just as important as the creature's religious significance, which had developed through the centuries. The changing nature of painting in Italy before the seventeenth century reflects the persistent desire to bridge the divide between the material and immaterial worlds.

Part Two: The Emergence of the Bird Motif in Italian Painting

Transformation in Painting

The iconography of the Virgin and Child with a bird originated in medieval French sculpture, but Italian painters soon adopted it, and the motif quickly took on a new life. Under their influence, the motif transformed, relying on the ability to use color and light and to create a three-dimensional space with additional figures. The development of varied compositions allowed the bird to take on new meanings.

Early Modern Italian paintings of the Madonna and Child with a bird were made in a variety of dimensions, which reflects their intended purposes as public commissions for communal worship spaces or for more secluded spaces in family chapels, and even for portable or domestic devotions. Daddi's, Pisanello's, Leonardo's, and Guercino's works represent at least two of these common uses of paintings, although the original intended purpose of the *Madonna of the Swallow* is entirely unclear. These varied images allow a glimpse into the dramatic changes that can be seen in the pictorial composition of this distinct iconography. The very earliest paintings to include the motif, which first appeared in Italy in the late thirteenth century, were static, and the figures were relatively isolated. Like the French sculptures, popular paintings of the time portrayed the Madonna holding the Christ child as she stood or sat upon a throne and the Child or the Virgin held the bird. This was certainly the visual standard in the earliest years, as can be seen in the *Madonna and Child with Saints Michael and John the Baptist* of the second quarter of the fourteenth century (fig. 20) by an anonymous artist from Pisa. The work also showed additional figures and narratives, yet the patron, advisor, or artist made the conscious choice to paint a very small goldfinch in the Child's hand (fig. 21). While the Virgin and Child

dominated the picture and Christ is dressed in luxurious garments, the bird helped to ground the figures and make this small panel more approachable.

The new compositional type of the *sacra conversazione*, in which angels or saints appear next to the enthroned Madonna and Christ, allowed artists to create more personal engagements between figures through the mediation of a bird. Daddi's *Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels* (fig. 22) of 1345 is one example of the way that painters took advantage of the additional figures and the bird motif to create a dynamic moment, rather than a purely static image (fig. 23). Other artists dramatically altered the relationship between the bird and the human figures by spatially removing them from one another. Examples include the works of Jacopo del Sellaio of 1441-42 (fig. 24) in which two birds sit on the right armrest of the throne, and a picture by Carlo Crivelli that dates from after 1490 (fig. 25), in which a swallow is perched at the top of the Madonna's elaborate throne. These works highlight how the positioning of a bird could communicate an idea. This separation between the symbolic birds and the humans could signify an attempt on the part of the Madonna and Child to distance themselves from their future suffering. It is unclear why this separation of pictorial elements became popular, but Friedmann argues that the placement of the birds and the interaction of secondary figures arose out of an artistic desire to create variety and unique presentations of a familiar subject.[42] Yet clearly these interactions, or the lack thereof, are intended to alter the viewer's perception and force them to question the physical and metaphorical relationship between the bird and the humans. Daddi's, Pisanello's, and Guercino's paintings all depict at least one additional figure, as opposed to the comparatively intimate *Madonna Litta*, which shows only the Virgin and her child.

Shortly after the motif of the bird came to Italy in the thirteenth century, the compositions of Madonna and Child paintings became more complex, presenting new details, such the *sacra*

conversazione and more naturalistic backgrounds, as opposed to solid gold or fictive fabric. Due to their earlier dates than the other paintings that are the focus of this paper, it is not surprising that Daddi's *Orsanmichele Madonna* and Pisanello's *Madonna of the Quail* utilize the typical gold backgrounds of the time. Pisanello, however, attempted to create a more elaborate and realistic setting in an outdoor space, and so placed the birds in their natural environment on the ground or in a rose bush. The nearly sixty years that passed between the creation of these two paintings saw changing priorities in artistic representation. It could also be said that when the *Madonna Litta* was painted in 1490, the artist, too, inserted the bird into its "natural environment," as fifteenth-century viewers would have recognized the domestic sphere as an appropriate setting for songbirds. These more developed settings further highlighted the physical location of birds during the late Medieval and Early Modern period.

The Motif Throughout Time and Space

In his thorough, yet dated, study of the motif of the goldfinch in Madonna and Child paintings, Friedmann paid particular attention to its dissemination across Italy from the beginning to the end of its popularity in Italian painting. He was especially interested in the frequency of its appearance in all of the major and minor Italian schools and the variance.[43]

We have seen above that Friedmann identified over four hundred Italian paintings, which include the goldfinch, and then provided additional data on these paintings' respective locations, dates, and the artists who created them. He indicated that the first painting (fig. 26) in Europe that he could identify that depicts a goldfinch was made in Florence in the second half of the thirteenth century, by the so-called "Maestro della Maddalena." The motif then rapidly spread to all of the major schools across Italy, as Friedmann made clear through the extensive details he

provided. This goldfinch was regularly used until the second half of the sixteenth century, although artists continued to show it in later years. The final appearance of the goldfinch that Friedmann identified in this type of composition dates from 1770, when Giovanni Battista Tiepolo completed his *Madonna and Child* in which a goldfinch prominently appears (fig. 27). Friedmann explains that Tiepolo's painting was an outlier, appearing long after the motif's popularity ended.[44]

Of all of the artistic schools, Friedmann discusses that of Florence to the greatest extent, because this is where the image appeared more than anywhere else, representing over half of the images he identified, and the greatest number of artists of any city. The period of its greatest production in Florence was the second quarter of the fourteenth century.[45] Daddi's *Orsanmichele Madonna* is a particularly good example of the Florentine interest in this motif. Not only is this painting an impressive, large-scale altarpiece, but it was also reputed to be a miracle-working image. Indeed, its thaumaturgic prominence may have inspired the extensive use of the motif.

Friedmann discusses specific artists who used the motif, but never fully answered the question as to why they did, and others did not. While an artist may not have painted the bird into every devotional image to avoid repetition, there were many artists who never used a bird in their Madonna and Child paintings. It is clear that specific groups of artists chose to depict birds in their compositions of the Madonna and Child. Artists working in the early fourteenth century, and who were likely students of Orcagna and Giotto, such as Daddi, were more prone to incorporate birds in their paintings of the Madonna and Child. Birds can be seen in the paintings of the Cione brothers, Taddeo and Agnolo Gaddi, Giovanni del Biondo, Giovanni dal Ponte, and many others. These artists, frequently painted unidentifiable birds, a goldfinch, or, in the case of Giovanni dal Ponte's *Virgin and Child Enthroned between Saints Lawrence and Stephen* (fig.

28) of 1425-26, a sparrow. [46] These facts could perhaps indicate that there was a high level of influence that teachers imparted to their students as to the importance of certain symbols. Patrons in specific time periods also may have been accustomed to or had a preference for certain symbols or motifs.

Why the Goldfinch?

Friedmann admits that the birds in the French medieval statues are difficult to identify, but that when the motif entered Italian painting, the goldfinch became a standard symbol. These small birds were selected because they were the most beloved and honored birds of the time due to their beauty, their role in the domestic sphere, and their association with Christ's Passion. He explains that the earliest Italian works clearly depicted goldfinches, as evidenced by their bright plumage.[47] The goldfinch, specifically the European goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), is one of the most common bird species on the continent. A person of any social class would have had the opportunity to see one in the wild, or one that was kept as a house pet. They are easily recognized by their red heads, brown and white bodies, and yellow and black wings. Their coloration calls to mind the treatise *Summa theologica* of 1440 to1454, by St. Antoninus of Florence, who wrote about color and theology. He codified white as symbolizing purity, red as symbolizing charity, yellow or gold as symbolizing dignity, and black as symbolizing humility.[48] The goldfinch thus embodies all of these virtues in one creature.

Oddly, the primary symbolic meaning of the goldfinch, the Passion, simply did not seem to be a part of the visual vocabulary or textual history of the thirteenth century. As discussed above, the birds in religious manuscript margins, of which the greatest percentage were goldfinches, may have possibly been symbolic, but it is not clear, and there was often no

connection to the central information or images. Almost none of the major sources on the natural world dating from the classical and Medieval periods discuss the goldfinch, with the exception of Isidore of Seville, who only comments on its thorny diet. While stories highlighting the virtues of swallows are present in all of these texts, the goldfinch never is.

The sudden appearance of goldfinches in association with holy figures is representative of both the deepening interest in the human qualities of religious figures and the desire to introduce new symbolism into artistic canon. The origin of the Passion myth surrounding the goldfinch is not known, but the goldfinch was undeniably popular, and it appeared in approximately seventy-five to eighty percent of images of this type.[49] It was only one such symbol which was frequently seen in Madonna and Child paintings. Other symbols, such as cross-shaped staffs and pomegranates, were employed to allude to Christ's future Passion.

Today, the goldfinch is unconditionally and universally accepted as a symbol of the Passion. Friedmann's book about the symbolic goldfinch includes an extensive analysis of all of the possible meanings attached to this bird, but its relationship to the Passion is the most important. According to Friedmann, "the presence of even a spot of red in the plumage was sufficient to serve to connect any small bird with the theme of sacrifice and of martyrdom." He then explains that the goldfinch's head was permanently dyed red by the blood of Christ when it approached the Crown of Thorns.[50] This story is cited in any discussion of this motif, but Francesco Sorce admits that it is has thus far been impossible to uncover where and when this story first originated.[51] Traditions certainly vary by region, and in his book of 1923 on birds in popular mythology, Ernest Ingersoll explains that it was actually the robin that was believed to have been the bird in this tale.[52] George Ferguson simply states that because it eats thorns, the goldfinch can be used as an tacit reference to the Passion, which intimates the separate concept

of Christ's Resurrection.[53] Ultimately, the fact that so many artists focused on varied species over the course of the Early Modern period demonstrates that there was more to the motif than just the ideas associated specifically with the goldfinch.

The development of bird representation in the Renaissance, both in devotional images and in secular artworks, relates to the social, religious, and artistic trends of these centuries. The symbolism of birds became a critical issue, particularly as they were introduced into the most important composition of the time-the Madonna and Child. The reasons for its inclusion, or lack thereof, varied by artist and location. It is unclear whether it was market demands or more personal reasons that contributed to its fluctuation in popularity. Simply looking at these wider trends does not reveal a great deal of insight, but by using specific paintings from the periods of greatest production, it will become more evident why this motif was employed for five hundred years.

Part Three: Case Studies

Bernardo Daddi's Altarpiece

The *Orsanmichele Madonna and Child with Angels and Saints* is an excellent example of the use of the motif of the Virgin and the Christ Child with a goldfinch. It is an important altarpiece that dates from the period of the greatest production of this motif: the early fourteenth century. Daddi painted the *Orsanmichele Madonna* in 1346-47, and it is one of his latest works. Daddi more often executed small-scale paintings and even miniatures, but the *Orsanmichele Madonna* is a large altarpiece that measures 250 by 180 centimeters.[54]

The work by Daddi was the third painting at the location of Orsanmichele to depict the Madonna and Child, all of which were reputed to effect healing miracles; it was made to replace the second of those miraculous Madonna paintings. Orsanmichele is a former grain market,[55] which is located in the center of the city, and so had a place of prominence. In 1292, the first image, a fresco of the Madonna and Child on one of the grain market's piers, began to work miracles. This fresco was lost in 1304, as it was destroyed in a fire. A replacement was made shortly thereafter and installed within the new loggia at Orsanmichele, and it, too, began to work miracles.[56] While there was no damage to the second image, in 1347, Daddi's altarpiece replaced the second miraculous painting (fig. 29).[57] By commissioning a new painting which more closely resembled the first than the second work, the Compagnia which oversaw the miraculous image and the area may have attempted to gain further financial support.[58] Diana Zervas doubts that this was the purpose of the commission, however, and suggests that the Compagnia instead desired a painting worthy of the brand-new building and an image to honor the intercession of Mary, at a particularly difficult economic and agricultural period.[59]

The details and style of this painting are appropriate, as those who commissioned this painting may have wanted to evoke the moral and devotional ideals of the past and establish continuity with the earliest image.[60] The inclusion of the goldfinch is one of the most significant details, as the second Orsanmichele Madonna did not contain a goldfinch. In their article about both the miraculous Madonna paintings and the famous tabernacle in which it is housed, Nancy Rash Fabbri and Nina Rutenberg suspect that the original version did indeed contain a goldfinch, as artistic depictions of the original painting show it as such.[61] This iconography was just entering Italy at the time the first painting was completed in the late thirteenth century, and it would be significant if it was employed in this painting, as it would demonstrate the rapid assimilation of the motif into sacred imagery. Daddi's work likely played an important role in inspiring other artists who painted the same subject, especially in subsequent years as it was further enshrined within Andrea di Cione's (who was better known as Orcagna) tabernacle (fig. 30). This large and highly ornamented structure was intended to protect and enhance the miraculous image; both Daddi's painting and Orcagna's architectural structure have been in situ since the tabernacle was completed in 1359.[62]

Perhaps Daddi's patrons requested that he paint the goldfinch as a way to repeat the iconography of the original miraculous fresco. If the first image truly contained a goldfinch, this could certainly help to explain the popularity of the motif of the Madonna and Child with a bird, especially in Florence. Yet, there is also the possibility that Daddi introduced the iconography himself, with his patrons' and advisors' approval. Daddi made several small-scale devotional panels and triptychs in his later career, which likewise integrated the bird motif. Other paintings in which he utilized a symbolic bird include, but are not limited to, *Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels* of 1345 and *Virgin and Child* (fig. 31) of 1345-48. The use of goldfinch

imagery throughout his career is notable, and Friedmann reports that thirty-four paintings of the Madonna and Child with a goldfinch can be attributed to Daddi and his followers. He records also, that close followers of Giotto like Daddi were the most prolific producers of pictures with this motif.[63] Daddi's generation of artists, those painting in the mid-fourteenth century, was simply more inclined to depict the birds in their works.[64]

While Friedmann discusses the relationship of the goldfinch to the Passion, a significant portion of his text regarding the symbolic meaning of the goldfinch concerns the bird's role as an augur of disease. One of Friedmann's central arguments is that the goldfinch is a tangible replacement for the mythical creature called the Caladrius.[65] Stories of this bird originated in the classical period, but, like many other species, these tales were adapted by the author of the *Physiologus* to possess Christian meaning.[66] The myth was repeated within the medieval bestiaries, which describe a pure-white bird with the ability to cure cataracts, predict when someone was near death, or physically remove the sickness from a person. If a person was fated to recover, the Caladrius absorbed the sickness and burned it off as it flies close to the sun. The Caladrius is perhaps one of the most potent symbols of Christ himself, due to the specific miracles it performs.[67] Friedmann insists that the goldfinch was intended to replace the Caladrius in the Christian tradition, despite the lack of any kind of substantive proof connecting the two birds. Friedmann does explain how the idea of protection against disease became another layer of symbolism attached to the goldfinch during the plague.[68] However, Daddi painted the *Orsanmichele Madonna* before the first major outbreak of the Black Death in Florence in 1348, when Daddi himself succumbed to the disease, so the goldfinch could not have been portrayed in order to guard against the Bubonic Plague. Nevertheless, this image was believed to have miraculously healed many ailing Florentines. A connection with the Caladrius is therefore

tenuous at best, but the goldfinch's prominent place in a healing image could perhaps have created another level of symbolic meaning for this bird.

Beyond the attempts to humanize the Madonna and Child or reference the Passion and perhaps healing, Daddi and other artists may have also created a play on words. The goldfinch's Italian name, *cardellino*, is quite close to the Italian word for a small scroll, *cartellino.* The motif of Christ holding a scroll is very old, and a medieval example is the early thirteenth-century *Madonna and Child* (fig. 32) by the Lucchese artist Buonaventura Berlinghieri. This pun would have been an easy way to introduce a naturalistic element to these paintings and create an even more engaging and clever image.

Additionally noteworthy is one of the important sculptures on the exterior of Orsanmichele, which were commissioned by the various guilds of Florence. The *Madonna of the Rose* (fig. 33)*,* the oldest surviving sculpture, was produced for the doctors and apothecaries' guild, the guild to which painters also belonged, in 1399. While the seated figure of Mary is fairly severe, with an austere expression and a prominent crown on her head, she delicately holds a rose in her hand. Her reserved countenance contrasts with Christ's innocent smile, and his playful movements as he reaches for the rose and plays somewhat roughly with the wing of a bird on his lap. The bird interacts with the Child, twisting its body, to look at how Christ holds its wing. Despite a lack of color that would identify it as a goldfinch, the prominence of Daddi's bird in the painting on in the interior of the church may have inspired the sculptor, Pietro di Giovanni Tedesco, to include the motif in his work. Interestingly, in 1625, the *Madonna of the Rose* also became renowned as a miracle-working image and was moved to the interior of the church for a period of time.[69] The bird's inclusion on a statue dedicated to medical professionals does help to bolster the theory that the goldfinch is indeed a symbol of protection against disease.

Daddi's painting serves as an excellent example of how a goldfinch was incorporated into Madonna and Child paintings during the peak of the iconography's popularity. Its place within one of the most important miraculous images in Florence cements it as an undeniably popular motif. Daddi and other fourteenth-century artists used the brightly colored bird to enhance the image, create a nominal pun, and add the symbolic layers of the Passion and healing through divine means. Ultimately, the multi-faceted aims of using the goldfinch produced a deeply meaningful image. Further, compositionally, the goldfinch is part of the triangle formed by Mary and Jesus' bodies, particularly Christ's arms. The viewer's gaze is directed from the Madonna's face, to Christ's face, and then to the cross-shaped goldfinch. Through this triangular composition, which is only achieved by the inclusion of the bird, Daddi created a sense of stability and permanence.

Pisanello's Quail

Pisanello's *Madonna of the Quail* of c. 1420, is a radically different painting from Daddi's in terms of its style, function, and iconography. Pisanello's depiction of the quail, which stands on the ground in the lower right-hand corner of the painting, is an anomaly, but the development towards a more natural representation, both of the quail and goldfinches and their verdant setting, reflects his interests and the changing use of the motif during the early fifteenth century. It is difficult to date this painting, but most scholars agree that it was made around 1420 in Verona.[70] It is unclear who commissioned this work, but as a small panel, it was likely portable and used for private devotion.

Antonio di Puccio Pisano was more commonly known as Pisanello, or "the little Pisan," due to his birth-city of Pisa and his diminutive statue. He was born before 1395 and died in 1455.

He worked in the courts in Mantua, Ferrara, Pavia, Milan, and Naples where he made drawings, paintings, frescos, and portrait medals for his noble patrons. He has become most recognized for his medals, as many of his paintings have been lost.[71] Of additional note are his spectacular nature drawings, which were unparalleled during the early fifteenth century and can provide a better understanding of the *Madonna of the Quail*.

Pisanello's work reflects the shifting styles and iconography of the early fifteenth century. While there are Gothic elements conserved from the older style in this painting, such as its arched top and the use of a gold ground, Pisanello introduced new artistic elements and, for the purposes of this paper, deviated from standard symbolic traditions. The painting's style can generally be categorized as International Gothic, but Pisanello's focus on realistic elements, gave this work an extra dimension of naturalism.

The *Madonna of the Quail* is a Madonna of Humility image. This iconographical type shows Mary sitting the ground, occasionally on a cushion, as is the case with the *Madonna of the Quail.* This type of image emerged in Italy during the middle of the fourteenth century and continued to be popular over the subsequent centuries. The purpose of these paintings is to provide the viewer with a meditative experience, in which the Madonna can be seen connecting more directly with the world. These types of images encouraged a direct connection between lay people and the naturalistic Virgin.[72] Other symbolic details such as a lily or a book, the sun, moon, and stars, or Mary nursing Jesus were commonly represented in Madonna of Humility works. These elements are intended to recall the Annunciation, the Madonna of the Apocalypse, and the Nativity, which all may have inspired the origins of the Madonna of Humility iconography.[73] Rather than use the more familiar symbols, Pisanello included the quail to inspire viewers to consider symbolism beyond the ideas of the typical Madonna of Humility. The quail

was wisely utilized, as it allowed for the bird to be within arm's reach of both the Madonna and Child, both of whom sit directly at the bird's level on the ground.

The use of the quail in this panel is unprecedented, as there are no other known examples in which the quail appears in a picture of the Madonna and Child. Despite the quail's long symbolic history, it is infrequently depicted in other types of paintings or narratives. A textual history related to the quail, describing its biological and metaphorical qualities, dates at least to the fourth century BCE, as ideas about this bird appear in the writings of Aristotle and Pliny the Elder. As mentioned above, it had negative connotations associated with it within these classical texts. Beliefs regarding the quail ranged from the idea that they were stupid or lazy, that they were dangerous to consume and sick animals, and that they could even cause shipwrecks.[74] Ignoring these negative and false suppositions, Pisanello or his artistic advisors may have drawn only on the ancient reports that quails generally stay on the ground. Personal observations of living specimens could have confirmed this fact as well. It is a logical choice to employ a terrestrial bird in a Madonna of Humility painting, because it allowed for a physical closeness between the humans and the bird.

Pre-Christian sources characterized the quail as a negative symbol, but the bird also appeared in a particular biblical story. Its role within the Christian tradition originates in the Old Testament, in Numbers 11:31-34. These verses relate the story of how, during their time in the desert, the Israelites complained of their desire for meat and were given a huge flock of quails to eat. Their greed incurred God's wrath, who subsequently struck them with a plague. This story insinuates that quails are associated with sin and punishment. However, by the medieval period, this story and the migratory habits of the quail that Pliny had described in antiquity, were combined to offer a more positive interpretation. In the Aberdeen Bestiary, the quail is discussed

as a symbol of protection against sin and an exemplar of following only righteous leaders, particularly God himself.[75] This radical, new meaning certainly proves that quail symbolism was transformed over time, and yet, despite this positive alteration, the quail was, as stated above, almost never depicted in art.

When Pisanello painted the *Madonna of the Quail*, the creature was also well known as a game bird. In Medieval and Renaissance traditions, hunting was an important pastime and sport for the wealthy.[76] Moreover, it was an important training practice for young noblemen. For those in the privileged class, hunting supposedly prevented melancholy and poor choices, protected honor and health, and provided martial training.[77] This possible reference to hunting within a devotional painting may at first seem strange, and in some ways, it contradicts the peacefulness and humility of the Madonna and Child. Nevertheless, the concept of hunting as an activity that boosts vitality and skill, would make the quail a symbol of actively bettering oneself. If indeed the quail is a reference to hunting, the *Madonna of the Quail* could certainly have been used to reflect on the necessities of a proper life for a young nobleman, which include pious devotion and a pursuit of virtue through hunting. If the patron was a young, noble man, he would have seen the layers of meaning embedded into the small-scale painting of Mary and Jesus next to a quail.

Given the rarity of quails in Renaissance devotional images, it is important to consider a different reason Pisanello chose this specific bird, rather than adhered to the more typical image of a goldfinch or similar small bird. While remembered for his outstanding surviving paintings and his invention of the commemorative Renaissance medal, Pisanello is also celebrated for his draughtmanship. Animal representations are present in great quantities within the large number of his surviving drawings. He was immensely interested in nature studies, and he is noted as one

of the first artists to study living or preserved specimens of numerous animals, and to draw them in either watercolor or ink.[78] As a painter who worked at several courts, he would have had access to their animal menageries in order to conduct his studies.[79] Vasari even discussed Pisanello's fondness and great skill at painting and drawing animals, and specifically mentions *The Vision of St. Eustace* (fig. 34) in the *Lives of the Artists.* He claims Pisanello depicted the dog in the painting, which had "so much animation, that a living dog could not do it better."[80] In addition to this lively dog, numerous other animals, including many birds, are shown in the forest in *The Vision of St. Eustace*.

There are a greater number of surviving nature studies and drawings by Pisanello than any other contemporary artist.[81] Pisanello made drawings of both exotic and more endemic or native reptiles, mammals, and birds, but none of his surviving drawings are of a quail. However, he did make two sketches of partridges (fig. 35 and fig. 36), which are medium-size birds that belong to the same family as the quail. They are drawn in strikingly similar poses as the quail in the *Madonna of the Quail.* A comparable drawing of a quail, that has not survived, could have easily served as the model for the bird in this panel. Pisanello also recorded the appearance of goldfinches, as there are two surviving drawings of this bird (fig. 37), both of which appear on the same piece of paper. The pose of one of the goldfinches in the drawings mirrors that of the bird at the left of the painting. The pose of the goldfinch at the right of the panel is strikingly similar to one of Pisanello's drawings of a Eurasian jay (fig. 38). Pisanello or his patron may have been interested in incorporating these observations from nature directly into the painting of a Madonna and Child, who are physically connected to the world. Indeed, it is likely that Pisanello used drawings such as these as references to paint the quail and the goldfinches in the *Madonna of the Quail*.

Pisanello's early collaboration with Gentile da Fabriano (1385-1427), may have had a critical impact on the young artist. The two worked together between approximately 1415 and 1422, when they painted in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice.[82] Their partnership could provide greater insight into how or why Pisanello painted the *Madonna of the Quail.* Gentile da Fabriano was likewise noted for his naturalistic paintings,[83] and he also made at least one painting with a bird, *The Madonna and Child with Saints Lawrence and Julian* (fig. 39) of 1423-25. Pisanello's interest in naturalism and the symbolism of birds may have derived, in part, from his exposure to Gentile's work.

The choice of a quail was an unconventional one and was clearly not influential, as it was never appropriated by other artists. However, Pisanello's interest in the natural world is easy to discern in this work. Beyond the detail paid to the modeling and coloring of the birds and plants, Pisanello was attentive to the actual habits of the creatures he portrayed. He nestled the goldfinches among rose bushes, where they could feed on thorns. The quail is on the ground, as is typical of this species, where it complements the motif of the Madonna of Humility. Millard Meiss explains that the "garden type" Madonna of Humility had developed in Italy around 1380.[84] This popularized setting was sensibly used in the *Madonna of the Quail,* to introduce animals. Pisanello's contemporary Stefano (di Giovanni) da Verona is currently believed to have painted the complex image *Virgin and Child with St. Catherine in a Rose Garden* (fig. 40).[85] This painting, which is also dated to 1420, importantly shows a number of goldfinches, two peacocks, robins, and several other undetermined species. There is also, quite notably, a small black and white speckled game bird in the lower right corner. Enio Sindona discusses the influence of Stefano on the young Pisanello as related especially to the *Madonna of the Quail*, and the naturalistic decorative programs and the extremely graceful bodies seen in both artists'

works.[86] While the use of a garden setting and the inclusion of birds is an important part of both paintings, Pisanello focused on the relationship between the holy figures and the quail, in order to a create a more cohesive message of pious and proper devotion. The quail's symbolic value changed radically throughout history, but when Pisanello painting this work in 1420, the bird was recognized for its role as a symbolic dedicated follower of God and its identification as a game bird, which may have suggested appropriate behavior for a young nobleman.

Leonardo, Breasts, and Birds

The painting *Madonna Litta*, which was made c. 1490, has an extremely conventional subject matter, but its history is contentious. Tatiana Kustodieva argues that the work should be definitively attributed to Leonardo da Vinci.[87] There is an undeniable connection between the painting and the artist, but recent scholarship by Frank Zöllner in particular, assigns its authorship, either in part or in whole, to Leonardo's northern Italian student Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (1467-1516).[88] Leonardo's level of contribution to the work is unclear, but a certain degree of his involvement in its execution is evidenced by a preparatory drawing by Leonardo of Mary's head (fig. 41). The master may have overseen the execution of the work, if it is by Boltraffio, and ultimately approved his student's choices. Zöllner suggests that Leonardo's secondary involvement in the painting of the *Madonna Litta* was likely due to his participation in the project to execute an equestrian statue for the Sforza family of Milan between 1484 and 1494.[89] While it is always difficult to assign authorship in situations in which a student or a workshop plays a large role, Leonardo's involvement with this painting is undeniable, and it serves as a singular example within his oeuvre. Leonardo made several Madonna and Child

paintings, but this is the only one in which Mary breastfeeds Christ, and the only one in which a symbolic bird, a goldfinch, appears.

It is unknown who commissioned this painting, but it has a relatively well-documented provenance. It is even smaller than Pisanello's *Madonna of the Quail*, and was originally also a panel painting, so it was certainly intended for close scrutiny and probably domestic use. By 1784 Prince Belgioso purchased the painting from Giuseppe Ro, and it then passed into the collection of the Litta family by 1813, from whom its title is derived. It was then sold to Tsar Alexander II of Russia and was eventually placed in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.[90]

In the *Madonna Litta*, the Madonna and the Child are fleshy, three-dimensional figures in the extreme foreground of the painting, and Christ seems to break the picture plane, as his body pushes into the viewer's space. In her analysis of the 1330s painting, *Virgin Lactans* (fig. 42) by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Beth Williamson discusses his attempt to make the figures in this nursing image forcefully present. Ambrogio's composition, which features an almost-identical pose as that seen in the *Madonna Litta,* is intended to invite the viewer to participate in the intimate moment, and to evoke reverence of Mary as an important intercessor.[91]

Beyond the use of the traditional *Madonna Lactans*, or nursing iconography, the artist's concurrent use of the goldfinch necessitates further symbolic interpretation. This particular goldfinch is odd, as it almost seems to be a cursory detail and is purposefully obscured, for the most part hidden between the bodies of the Madonna and Child. The way Mary holds Christ is questionable physically, as she holds him at an odd angle, but adding in a bird makes it even stranger, as realistically it would be extremely uncomfortable to hold a live bird between them. There is clearly a space between their two bodies, and, while Mary cradles Jesus to enable him to

nurse, there is a sense that she physically offers him to the viewer, also due to the rendering and shading of her hands and his body.

In Leonardo's other, earlier paintings of the Madonna and Child such as the *Madonna of the Carnation* (fig. 43) of 1478-80 and the *Benois Madonna* (fig. 44) of c. 1478, he does not show Mary clutching Christ closely. In these paintings, he sits calmly on or next to her lap and reaches for a flower, but there is a clear emotional and physical bond between the pair. In the *Madonna Litta's* composition, Mary looks lovingly down at Christ, but he gazes directly at the viewer as he dispassionately nurses at her breast. There is a physical and metaphorical space between the Mother and Child. The disconnection between the pair in this painting could perhaps reflect a more prominent message of knowing sacrifice, although artists had struggled to depict nursing poses in a logical manner.[92] However, since the goldfinch is a symbol of the Passion, its presence in the space between their bodies could indicate that Mary indeed does offer her son to the viewer in a physical and religious sense. The viewer thus can deduce this message of sacrifice, which becomes apparent both by the pose of the Madonna and Child and the presence of the goldfinch. The goldfinch's connection to the Passion, and the concept of sacrifice is more evident in the *Madonna Litta* than in works such as Daddi's *Orsanmichele Madonna*.

Jacques Schnier acknowledges Friedmann's analysis of the bird, but he also presents the idea that the small bird symbolizes the breast. In his psychoanalytic article, which appeared in the journal, *American Imago* in 1952, he uses this painting and others containing a small bird and the *Madonna Lactans* iconography to draw the conclusion that the bird represents the breast for which people long subconsciously.[93] Schnier also discusses the possibility, "that even the bird of various species appearing in the Madonna and Child compositions… is interchangeable with the Holy [Spirit]." He uses this second argument largely to support his first, that truly any bird in any

artwork is a symbol of not only the breast, but also of the mother and motherhood.[94] This argument differs considerably from any of Friedmann's findings, but Schnier's background in psychoanalysis obviously influenced this claim.

What Schnier did not explicitly state is that the bird, in this context especially, can exemplify aspects of childhood and innocence. As Friedmann explains, the goldfinch, more than most birds, was known throughout Europe as a pet, and, more specifically, as a frequent companion of children. A goldfinch could thus denote the general concept of childhood, and, given the story of Jesus from the *Infancy Gospel of St. Thomas*, there is also a clear connection between birds and the childhood of Christ. Beyond the desire to emphasize the Passion and sacrifice, the *Madonna Litta* offers extremely tangible evidence of the youthful innocence of Christ, both through the act of breastfeeding and the presence of the goldfinch. His other paintings of the Madonna and Child, such as the *Madonna of the Carnation* and the *Benois Madonna*, also highlight a very youthful Mary and a playful child. The *Madonna Litta* possesses a complex iconography, but beyond the symbolic value, the goldfinch must also be considered in a different light.

Leonardo had a clear interest in nature and natural properties. Like Pisanello, he produced numerous nature studies, yet at the same time was interested in the practices of the Middle Ages. Following the typical formatting of the older texts, he wrote his own bestiary. This type of text had reached its peak in popularity during the thirteenth century, but Leonardo was nonetheless interested in the ancient and Medieval characterizations of animals. His twenty-two-page manuscript contains descriptions of eighty-seven animals, both real and mythical. Leonardo followed the traditional formulation of the bestiaries in describing both the habits of certain animals and their symbolic virtues or vices. Simone Cohen suggests that Leonardo consulted two

fourteenth-century texts, the *Fiore di virtù* by an anonymous author, and *L'Acerba* by Cecco d'Ascoli, which was not published until the fifteenth century.[95]

Cohen notes that the very first animal Leonardo describes is the goldfinch, and he listed it under the entry entitled "*Amore di virtù.*" Not only does the goldfinch imply the love of virtue, as Leonardo notes, but it also has power over sickness, indicating whether an ill person will recover from sickness or succumb to it and die.[96] This certainly corresponds closely to Friedmann's interpretation of the goldfinch as an auger of disease and its replacement of the Caladrius, the mythical bird with healing powers. However, in reality, under the heading of "*Amore di Virtù*," Leonardo actually wrote, "*Calendrino è uno ucciello*…" or "The Caladrius is a bird…," indicating his knowledge of the ancient mythical creature.[97] Cohen makes the same assumption as Friedmann that the goldfinch is, in fact, a substitute for the mythical Caladrius bird. As we have seen above, the goldfinch could connote protection against disease, but it is not necessarily a direct substitute for the Caladrius. Cohen is also of the opinion that Leonardo most likely did not actually believe in the long-held traditional mythology of the bird. She also, strangely enough, wrongly identified the bird in the *Madonna Litta* painting as a cardinal, although this may have been a simple translation mistake as the goldfinch in Italian is a *cardellino.*[98] She then claims Leonardo likely utilized a traditional motif and symbol, in part, to show his own skill at depicting flora and fauna. He represented other symbolic natural elements in paintings such as the ermine his is portrait of *Cecilia Gallerani* (fig. 45) and the juniper bush in his portrait of *Ginevra de' Benci* (fig. 46). Cohen concludes that Leonardo valued both the traditional and scientific approach to life and art, and that, "fact and fantasy exist side by side," in his art.[99]

Cohen's argument regarding the scientific approach becomes less believable when one examines the *Madonna Litta*, due to the goldfinch's nearly hidden placement. The bird is

depicted with very little detail, and it is not a conspicuous part of this painting, as opposed to Leonardo's other paintings in which natural elements figure prominently. The *Madonna Litta* also relies on the bird to provide meaning, but the goldfinch is much subtler and less detailed than it is in the other paintings examined here. This belief that Leonardo made works exclusively reliant on the observation of nature does not seem supported when studying the *Madonna Litta*. Further, Leonardo did clearly have an interest, if not a belief, in traditions and allegories, as he made a number of allegorical drawings (fig. 47). He did make bird sketches within his *Treatise on the Flight of Birds* from 1505, but he did not make detailed drawings of any particular species. Cohen's arguments that Leonardo regarded tradition as a way to further promote scientific and naturalistic art does not seem to hold true with this painting. Rather than an exclusive promotion of scientific and naturalistic art, Leonardo may have continued to endorse and apply traditional artistic motifs and values derived from Medieval sources.

While much can be said about Leonardo's artistry and philosophy of nature, it is critical to keep in mind the uncertain authorship of this painting. The most recent scholarship attributes this painting, in part or in full, to one of Leonardo's contemporaries. Leonardo may have had a role overseeing the completion of the painting, but his level of direct involvement is not completely clear. Furthermore, because the patron of this painting is unknown, it is difficult to understand the reason the goldfinch was inserted in this painting. There are many questions that remain regarding the *Madonna Litta*, but it is an excellent example of how subject matter, composition, and goldfinch symbolism could reinforce ideas about Christ's childhood innocence and his future Passion and sacrifice.

Guercino's Swallow

By the time Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (1591-1666), more commonly called Guercino, was working, the motif of the bird in Madonna and Child paintings had long since reached its peak.[100] To achieve a higher amount of diversity in symbolic meaning and species depiction, birds other than goldfinches were shown with the Madonna and Child early in the history of the motif. Pisanello's quail was an anomaly, but artists chose the swallow with some frequency throughout the course of the motif's popularity. For example, in Francesco di Antonio di Bartolomeo's *Madonna and Child with a Swallow* (fig. 48) of c. 1420-1425, he or his patron chose this particular species, rather than the goldfinch, which was the far more common choice at that time. When the meditative and almost iconic *Madonna of the Swallow* was painted two hundred years later, in 1620, the bird's meaning would have been so widely accepted that its Resurrection symbolism, as will be further explained, would have been instantly apparent to those who viewed it. An analysis of this swallow reveals how the significance and reception of this iconography changed in the late period.

Dennis Mahon has long doubted that the *Madonna of the Swallow* is directly by Guercino's hand.[101] It is currently attributed to Guercino and his workshop, but, given Guercino's incorporation of the bird motif in other religious works such as his *Madonna of the Sparrow* (1618) of 1615-16 and the *Holy Family* (fig. 49), also of 1615-16, it is apparent that avian symbolism is certainly not an exception in Guercino's oeuvre. Rather, Mahon's skepticism about the painting's authorship is due, in large part, to its derivation from a larger composition, *St. William of Aquitaine Receiving the Cowl* (fig. 50) of 1620. *St. William of Aquitaine Receiving the Cowl* is an altarpiece, which measures eleven by seven feet, and which Guercino painted for the church of San Gregorio in Bologna.[102] Its composition became widely popular, and numerous

copies were made after it, one of which Mahon suspects is the *Madonna of the Swallow.* The *Madonna of the Swallow* was, however, first catalogued in an inventory of Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici's collection in the Palazzo Pitti in 1687, which indicates that it was undoubtedly made during the seventeenth century.[103]

In *St. William of Aquitaine Receiving the Cowl*, we see the Madonna and Child at the top of the painting as they preside over a scene of the saint being invested into a religious order, as Christ grasps a crucifix a bearded saint offers to him. Guercino included eleven figures in *St. William of Aquitaine Receiving the Cowl*, in order to portray a specific narrative. It is a dynamic painting, but the large number of monumental figures makes it almost overwhelming. In the *Madonna of the Swallow,* on the other hand, the focus is solely on three figures who are completely removed from any clear spatial or narrative context. Christ and the Virgin are positioned similarly in both pictures, but the artist added an angel in the *Madonna of the Swallow*, partially to balance the composition and create a sense of a triangular structure. Instead of depicting a dramatic story, the smaller canvas, which measures approximately four feet by three feet, presents a distinctly serene image of the three figures in a heavenly space. They are engaged in an intense moment in which they contemplate the symbolic swallow, which perches on Christ's hand.

The swallow and the figures' expressions and body language, are intended to inspire the viewers to reflect on the Resurrection much in the same way that the figures do themselves. Christ's expression is pensive or preoccupied, Mary's brow is furrowed in despair or anxiety, and the angel gazes in awe at the Savior. It is through the addition of the swallow, which has a long textual history, that the message becomes apparent. In his discussion of symbolism, Friedmann distinguishes between the symbolism of the Resurrection and that of the Passion and

presents the idea that the swallow is actually the most appropriate symbol of the Resurrection. It is, however, not an apt symbol to suggest the Passion. He does claim that the symbolism of the Resurrection, "is shared by the goldfinch, the linnet, and by other forms as well."[104] This grouping of goldfinches and other small birds with swallows is problematic for the symbolism of Madonna and Child paintings. Upon examination of the long history of symbolic traditions, it is certainly reductive to believe that these other species of birds convey the same meaning as the swallow, and that they represent the Resurrection in a more clear or profound way than it does.

As discussed above, the swallow has long been considered significant, as seen in Pliny's *The Natural History,* in which it is associated with, among other positive qualities, the beginning of spring. The author of the *Physiologus* then metaphorically connected the swallow to the beginning of a New Age, which only began with the Resurrection of Christ. The reproductive habits of the swallow reported in the *Physiologus* also closely connected the bird with Christ himself and his wholly unique experiences. The Passion and the Resurrection are closely linked, but must be acknowledged as separate concepts when studying avian symbolism. Francesco Sorce goes so far as to say that the swallow's meaning has "hardly anything to do with the Passion of Christ," and everything to do with the Resurrection.[105] It is clear that the swallow's biological habits and the way that authors have presented the bird throughout history make it, more than any other species, an apposite symbol to signify the Resurrection.

The *Madonna of the Swallow* is thus a highly traditional image, which is derivative of the older examples examined throughout this paper, but which utilizes appropriate symbolism to represent the Resurrection. Mary and Christ's deep feelings about the Resurrection makes the emotional tenor of the painting powerful, as the message becomes all-encompassing. There is, however, little connection to the contemporary, scientific observation of nature which Gessner

championed in his *Historiae animalium* of the mid-sixteenth century, and which fascinated Pisanello and Leonardo in the fifteenth century. The actual study of these animals' traits and habits could have potentially altered the way that artists used symbolic birds. However, the Council of Trent (1545–63) officially banned the inclusion of animals that were not significant to a story within religious narratives.[106] It was the strength of the Resurrection allegory or other potent avian symbolism that allowed artists to continue to incorporate birds into post-Tridentine paintings.

In this image, the religious significance relies entirely upon the swallow, which contrasts the use of the birds in the other works examined in this paper. Without the swallow, it would be impossible to determine that the figures are contemplating the Resurrection. However, if Daddi had not included the goldfinch, the altarpiece would still be a typical fourteenth-century painting; without the quail or goldfinches, Pisanello's painting would still be a Madonna of Humility depiction; and without the goldfinch, the *Madonna Litta* would still be a *Madonna lactans* image. The birds in these previous images provide viewers with additional symbolism to make the images even richer. In the *Madonna of the Swallow,* the bird directly denotes the meaning, which explains the figures' expressions. Guercino and his workshop heeded historical precedents and adhered to contemporary religious practices to create a meaningful and emotional painting that would resonate with the viewers.

Conclusion

Artists introduced avian symbolism and figures into Madonna and Child compositions during the Medieval period, and the motif remained a common iconography for centuries. This motif allowed artists to reference pre-classical and classical history, the early history of the Church, Medieval theology, and contemporary interactions between humans and animals. By analyzing birds within the different kinds of texts, it is possible to see the evolution of their symbolic meanings. The advent of Christianity especially altered the way that people thought about nature, and new meanings were attached to small, familiar creatures such as goldfinches, swallows, and quails. Moral lessons were derived from the biological habits of numerous bird species, both real and imaginary.

The original depictions of a bird with the Madonna and Child were seen in French sculptures in the early thirteenth century, but it remains unclear what type of species they were due to paint loss. Regardless of their species, the birds helped to humanize the sculptures and make them more appealing to viewers, as well as to connect the figures to the symbol of the human soul. As the bird motif spread to paintings in Italy, patrons and artists continued to be interested in the symbolic aspect of the iconography, prompting them to choose a bird that was easily recognizable and beloved by the population, which a universally accepted symbolic value. Goldfinches ultimately became the most popular bird to be presented in tandem with the Madonna and Child, due to their vibrant coloration, their place in culture as children's' playthings, and, most importantly, to their legendary and symbolic connection to Christ's Passion. These connections allowed the goldfinch to typify both Christ's youthful innocence and his future suffering. Daddi's inclusion of a goldfinch in the *Orsanmichele Madonna* was proof in

and of itself that the motif was an important aspect of religious iconography to fourteenth-century Italians.

As artists in later periods became more interested in introducing naturalistic elements in their artworks, the birds they depicted became more accurately detailed. The *Madonna of the Quail* painting, especially, serves as an example of how aware artists must have been of historical traditions, which is evidenced by the way Pisanello took the reported biological habits into account. As the history of the *Madonna of the Quail* is uncertain, it is difficult to determine the exact symbolic meaning of the bird within this painting. Christian authors clearly believed the quail was a symbol of faithful devotion to God, and upper-class viewers may have recognized it as a game bird and associated it with the social benefits and practice of hunting. This multifaceted interpretation acknowledges the complex relationship between humans and the natural world that continued to develop during the fifteenth century and undoubtedly influenced Pisanello's art.

Leonardo was also demonstrably interested in the various texts, as he wrote a bestiary in which he contemplated humankind's relationship to nature. The Leonardesque *Madonna Litta* is one such work that addresses tradition and naturalism concurrently. Both art historians and non-art historians have attached numerous interpretations to the goldfinch within Madonna and Child paintings, and while some of these are certainly more valid than others, the bird always provides viewers with additional symbolism. In the *Madonna Litta*, the artist incorporated a small piece of the natural environment with the wonderfully naturalistic Mary and Jesus, to create the poignant message of sacrifice.

Finally, as a late and excellent example of bird symbolism, the *Madonna of the Swallow* portrays a powerful message of Christ's future Resurrection, which is conveyed by the bird that

perches on the extended finger of the Christ child. Guercino's interest in bird symbolism is apparent upon examination of the Madonna and Child paintings with the swallow, the sparrow, and a small brown bird. Due to the ruling of the Council of Trent, which prohibited the inclusion of irrelevant details into Biblical stories, the birds incorporated into works of art had to be religiously relevant. Whomever chose to represent the swallow, whether it was Guercino, his patron, or a member of his workshop, wanted to symbolically present the Resurrection, rather than the Passion.

The tendency in previous scholarship to group all small birds together and to believe they share the same meaning is one which ignores long traditions. By examining the course of the artistic depiction of the motif, of a Madonna and Child image which includes a bird, from its origins to the end of its popularity, it is clear that the meanings of the creatures are multivalent. Friedmann discusses numerous interpretations of the goldfinch in painting, although at times, he makes incorrect assumptions. By examining this specific group of works, this study illuminates why artists or their patrons may have chosen to show the examples of a goldfinch, a swallow, or a quail. While Friedmann's study revealed the many interpretations of the goldfinch, this paper has highlighted the fact that the swallow's and quail's symbolic meanings are just as varied as those of the goldfinch, which is only evident when the long history of Christian symbolism is acknowledged. By studying the origins of the motif, and how it developed over the course of five hundred years in Italian painting, it becomes clearer how birds within Madonna and Child images reveal a profound relationship between the human, non-human, and spiritual worlds.

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Figures

Figure 1 Raphael, *Madonna of the Goldfinch*, 1505-1506, Uffizi, Florence

Figure 2 Bernardo Daddi, *Orsanmichele Madonna and Child with Angels*, 1346-1347, Orsanmichele, Florence, 250 x 180 cm

Figure 3 Pisanello, *Madonna of the Quail*, c. 1420, Castelvecchio Museum, Verona, 50 x 33 cm

Figure 4 Leonardo da Vinci (?), *Madonna Litta*, 1490, Hermitage Museum, 42 x 33 cm

Figure 5 Guercino and Workshop, Madonna of the Swallow, 1620, Galleria Palatina, Florence, 120 x 88 cm

Figure 6 Silvestro de' Gherarducci, The Crucifixion, 1365, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 7 Owl, 30000 BCE, Chauvet Cave, France

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Figure 23 Detail of Christ, Bird, and Angel from *Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels*

Figure 24 Jacapo del Sellaio, *The Virign and Child between Little Saint John and an Angel*, 1441-1442, Deposit of the Louvre at the Petit Palais Museum, Avignon

Figure 25 Carlo Crivelli, *La Madonna della Rodine*, 1490, The National Gallery, London

Figure 26 *Maestro della Maddalena, Madonna and Child*, second half of thirteenth century, Acton Collection, Florence

Figure 27 Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *Madonna and Child*, 1767-1770, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Figure 28 Giovanni dal Ponte, *Virgin and Child Enthroned with the Archangel Michael, and Saints Lawrence, Stephen, George*, 1425-1426 Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina

Figure 29 *Madonna and Child*, early fourteenth century, Pian di Mugnone, Oratorio di Santa Maria Maddalena

Figure 30 Andrea Orcagna, Orsanmichele Tabernacle, 1359

Figure 31 Bernardo Daddi, *Virgin and Child*, 1345-1348, Isabella Stewart Gardner

Figure 32 Berlinghiero, *Madonna and Child*, between 1228 and 1236,Metropoltan Museum of Art

Figure 33 Pietro di Giovanni Tedesco, *Madonna of the Rose*, 1399, Orsanmichele, Florence

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Figure 35 Pisanello, *Codex Vallardi 2459*, Louvre, Paris, water color

Figure 36 Pisanello, *Codex Vallardi 2391*, washed blood paper

Figure 37 Pisanello, *Codex Vallardi 2466*, pen and brown ink and watercolor

Figure 38 Pisanello, *Codex Villardi 2474*, watercolor

Figure 39 Gentile da Fabriano, *Madonna and Child with Saints Lawrence and Julian*, 1423-1425, The Frick Collection

Figure 40 Stefano da Verona*, Madonna of the Rose Garden*, *1420-1435,* Castelvecchio Museum, Verona

Figure 41 Leonardo da Vinci, *Head of a Young Woman in Near Profile*, *Codex Vallardi 2376*, Louvre

Figure 42 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Virgin Lactans*, *1330s,* Museo Diocesano di Art Sacra, Siena

Figure 43 Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna of the Carnation*, 1478-1480, Alte Pinokethek, Munich

Figure 44 Leonardo da Vinci, *Benois Madonna*, 1478, Hermitage Museum

Figure 45 Leonardo da Vinci, *Cecilia Gallerani*, 1489-1490, National Museum, Krakow

Figure 46 Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benici*, 1474-1478, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Figure 47 Leonardo da Vinci, *A Political Allegory*, c. 1495, drawing, Windsor Castle Royal Library, London

Figure 48 Francesco di Antonio di Bartolomeo, *Madonna and Child with a Swallow*, 1420-1425, Denver Art Museum

Figure 49 Guercino*, Holy Family, 1616-1617,* Galleria Palatina, Florence

Figure 50 Guercino, *St. William of Aquitaine Receiving the Cowl*, 1620, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna

Endnotes

[1] Herbert Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in European Devotional Art* (Washington D.C.: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1946), 4. While admittedly Friedmann did not analyze every religious painting which included a small bird from Europe, he notes the ratio of Italian to non-Italian paintings is approximately ten to one.
[2] Ibid., 7. Friedmann's other proposed interpretations include the goldfinch as a symbol of the soul, a symbol of death, a symbol of fertility, a symbol of the Church, and a pun on the Italian word for a small scroll or *cartellino*.
[3] Ibid., 9.
[4] Ibid., 5.
[5] Caroline Bugler, *The Bird in Art* (London: Merrell Publishers, 2012), 8.
[6] Bugler, *The Bird in Art*, 47. The *ba* was the eternal spirit of an individual. The *ba* was depicted in various mediums, including painting and sculpture, as either a hawk or a falcon with the head of a person.
[7] Beryl Rowland, *Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), xiii-xv; Adolphe Napoléon Didron, *Christian Iconography, or The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, trans. Margaret Stokes (London: George Bells and Sons, 1886), 174. Interestingly, Didron also discusses how a butterfly could be used as a symbol of the soul.
[8] Aristotle, *Aristotle's History of Animals, in Ten Books*, trans. Jonathan Gottlob Schneider and Richard Cresswell (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878). Aristotle's book was important, as it was one of the first examples of a textual analysis of animals. However, he was largely concerned with anatomy and other physical traits of animals, rather than any kind of symbolic value ancient Greeks may have had for the birds.
[9] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History,* trans. John Bonstock and H. T. Riley (London: Henry. G. Bohn, 1855), 503-05.
[10] Ibid., 503-05.
[11] Bugler, *The Bird in Art,* 101.
[12] Michael J. Curley, *Physiologus: A Medieval Book of Nature Lore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 58 and 90.
[13] Ibid., 90.
[14] Stephen A Barney et al., eds. and trans., introduction to *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8. The authors provide a list of works by Isidore, showing his wide-ranging interests. His contemporary Braulio compiled this list.
[15] Ibid., 3, 14-15.
[16] Isidore of Seville, The *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, ed. and trans. Stephen A Barney et al. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 269.
[17] Ibid., The *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville, 268.
[18] Tony Burke, "Infancy Gospel of Thomas," http://www.tonyburke.ca/infancy-gospel-of-thomas/. The best-known version is called Greek A. Tony Burke, a professor and scholar of early Christianity, thoroughly explains why this became the most famous version. On his website, he provides the translations of twelve versions, in different languages and from different time periods. Also on his website, he provides a new translation, based on a combination of the oldest texts available. In his translation, he indicates that Jesus was five years old and that he made twelve sparrows.
[19] Robert G. Calkins. "Bestiary." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, 2014. The earliest surviving illustrated version of the *Physiologus* dates from the ninth century and was produced in Reims. The earliest surviving Bestiaries date from the twelfth century and seemingly reached a peak in production during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

[20] Simone Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 4-5.
[21] Ibid., 8.
[22] Hugh of Fouilloy, *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouilloy's De avibus*, trans. Willene B. Clark (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1992), xi and 3. The *De Avibus* is the only didactic nature treatise dedicated exclusively to birds. While earlier texts certainly played a role in how Hugh discussed birds, the Bible was the most important text he utilized.
[23] Ibid., 209 and 211.
[24] *Aberdeen Bestiary*, fol. 48r.
[25] Brunsdon Yapp, *Birds in Medieval Manuscripts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 71.
[26] Yapp presents lists of birds within his book, dedicating each section to the quantity and quality of the appearances of each kind of bird.
[27] Ibid., 8. Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 19. This is similar in many regards to the way in which early Christian and pagan sarcophagi were often decorated with ornamental, rather than strictly symbolic, geometric designs, floral garlands, and birds
[28] Charles Vaurie, "Birds in the Prayer Book of Bonne of Luxembourg," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 29, no. 6 (1971): 280. Vaurie repeats many familiar assertions, that the goldfinch is a symbol of the Crucifixion, Resurrection, redemption, fertility, protection against plague, and childhood.
[29] Bugler, *The Bird in Art*, 11.
[30] Christian Heck and Rémy Cordonnier, eds. *The Grand Medieval Bestiary: Animals in Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2012), 470.
[31] Yapp, *Birds in Medieval Manuscripts*, 75-76. The development towards naturalism became more common as large aviaries became more popular. The peak in bird decoration in French manuscripts coincided with the proliferation of aviaries. At this time, birds were often shown in flight, reflecting their natural state, as patrons would have seen them in their aviaries. This is a contrast to the English depictions, which were generally shown standing. The English tradition of keeping birds in smaller cages has a direct impact on the way that the artistic representations were made.
[32] Bugler, *The Bird in Art*, 11.
[33] Émile Mâle, *Religious Art in France, the Thirteenth Century: A Study of Medieval Iconography and its Sources* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 32.
[34] Ibid., 25-27.
[35] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch*, 3.
[36] Arthur Gardner, *Medieval Sculpture in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 9.
[37] Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters. "The Cult of the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/virg/hd_virg.htm
[38] Francesco Sorce, "Guercino's *Madonna of the Sparrow*: Visual Exegesis and Bird Symbolism," 3. https://www.academia.edu/28939609/Guercinos_Madonna_of_the_Sparrow_Madonna_del_passero_._Visual_exegesis_and_bird_symbolism
[39] Dietmar Peil, "On the Question of a *Physiologus* Tradition in Emblematic Art and Writing" in *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays,* ed. Nona C. Flores (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 104. Peil analyzed the manual *Emblemata,* examining over 3,000 emblems from forty-seven emblem books, and explained that only sixty-six emblems relied on fifteen chapters from the *Physiologus* for citation.
[40] Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, trans. Pierce Tempest (London: Benjamin Motte, 1709), 5.
[41] Florike Egmond and Sachiko Kusukawa, "Circulation in the Images and Graphic Practices in Renaissance Natural History: The Example of Conrad Gessner," *Gesnerus* 73, no. 1 (2016): 29-30.
[42] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch*, 117.
[43] Friedmann individually discussed depictions of the goldfinch which originated in the schools of Florence, Siena, Venice, Umbria, Milan, Bologna, Ferrara, Lucca, Verona, Cremona, Pisa, Padua, Naples, Marche, Sicily, Parma, Rome, and more.

[44] Ibid., 62-63.
[45] Ibid., 66, 77.
[46] Ibid., 67-68.
[47] Ibid., 2.
[48] Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), 81.
[49] Jacques Schnier, "The Symbolic Bird in Medieval and Renaissance Art," *American Imago* 9, no. 2 (1952): 92.
[50] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch*, 9. Interestingly, on pages 7 and 8, Friedmann explains that the Resurrection is actually most closely related to the swallow, but that that goldfinch is simply substituted for the swallow in order to achieve the same meaning.
[51] Sorce, "Guercino's *Madonna of the Sparrow*," 5. Sorce makes it clear that while this story has been repeated for decades, neither he nor C. Frugoni were able to actually identify the origins of this legend. Sorce is dubious about the way that this story was "transposed systematically into later literature, with no further analysis."
[52] Ernest Ingersoll, *Birds in Legend, Fable, and Folklore* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923), 114.
[53] George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, (London, Oxford University Press, 1961), 19.
[54] Enrica Ner Lusana, "Daddi [di Daddo], Bernardo," *Grove Art Online*, updated 2012.
[55] Nancy Rash Fabbri and Nina Rutenburg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context," *The Art Bulletin* 63, no. 3 (1981): 386.
[56] Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 69-70.
[57] Fabbri and Rutenburg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context," 388. Numerous scholars believed this second version still survives in the Oratory of Santa Maria Maddelena in Pian di Mugnone, near Fiesole.
[58] Ibid., 386-390.
[59] Diana Zervas, "*Orsanmichele*, 1336-1348: The Commune, the Confraternity and the Guilds," in *Orsanmichele in Florence,* ed. Diana Zervas (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 1996), 64-65.
[60] Ibid., 62-63. Zervas comments on the relationship between Christ and Mary, describing it as a reflection on the belief in the marriage of Mary and God, and their mystical love. The goldfinch, as a symbol of the Passion and sacrifice, also represents love. Fabbri and Rutenberg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context," 389. Fabbri and Rutenburg specify that the Daddi's painting includes details more commonly seen in dugento art, including the shape of the elaborate throne which has high armrests, the flatness of the throne's step, the incense containers held by the angels, and a tender relationship between the Madonna and Child.
[61] Fabbri and Rutenberg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context," 389 n. 5.
[62] Ibid., 385-86.
[63] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch*, 72.
Lusana, "Daddi [di Daddo], Bernardo," *Grove Art Online.* Many scholars believe that Daddi was indeed a student of Giotto. Daddi began his career in the 1320s, and most scholars agree that he trained or was associated with Giotto's workshop in his early life.
[64] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch*, 66-67.
[65] There are various spellings and iterations including Kaladrius, Caladrio, Charadrius, Calandrius, Calandar.
[66] Ibid., 11-12.
[67] *Aberdeen* Bestiary fols. 56v-57r.
[68] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch*, 24-25.
[69] Diane Zervas, "'*Degno templo e tabernacol santo*': Remembering and Renewing Orsanmichele," in *Orsanmichele and the History and Preservation of the Civic Monument* ed. Carl Brandon Strehlke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 9.

[70] George Martin Richter, "Pisanello Studies – I," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 55, no. 317 (1929): 60.
Elisabetta Povoledo, "A Verona Museum's Stolen Paintings Are Found in Ukraine," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/arts/design/verona-museum-stolen-paintings-ukraine.html.The Castelvecchio Museum in Verona eventually acquired the piece, and it remained in the collection until it was stolen in 2015 in a large art theft in which seventeen old master paintings were also stolen. Happily, all of the paintings were found only six months later and returned to the museum. The *Madonna of the Quail* is currently on view and did not suffer damage during the six-month period. Its fortunate return allows for the further study of a work which continues to intrigue historians.
[71] Renzo Chiarelli and J.G. Pollard, "Pisanello," *Grove Art* Online, 2003.
[72] Isle Hecht, "Madonna of Humility" in *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* 70, no. 6 (1976): 10.
[73] Beth Williamson, *The Madonna of Humility: Development, Dissemination and Reception, c. 1340-1400* (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2009), 1.
[74] While these authors did add some other details, one of their discussion points was that quails eat poisonous plants, and thus their flesh can be poisonous to humans. This is in fact true, and the consumption of quail can lead to coturnism, a disease which affects the muscles.
[75] *Aberdeen* Bestiary fols. 57v-58r.
[76] "Medieval and Renaissance Hunting," Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed April 3, 2018, http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/med-ren-hunting/
[77] Christian Heck and Remy Cordonnier eds., *The Grand Medieval Bestiary: Animals in Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2012), 33. These ideas are prominent within the *Livre des trois âges de l'homme provide translation*, a moralizing poem by the French Pierre Choisnet. It was likely written in 1480 for either King Lois IX or Charles VIII. A surviving illuminated manuscript of the poem specifically shows a bird hunting scene.
[78] Bugler, *The Bird in Art*, 144.
[79] Jakob Rosenberg, *Great Draughtsmen from Pisanello to Picasso* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 8 and 10. Rosenberg explains that dogs and horses were the animals which Pisanello drew most frequently. This is unsurprising given that Pisanello was working in courts, and these were the two animals most valued by nobles.
[80] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. E. H. and E. W. Blashfield and A. A. Hopkins, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1896), 98.
[81] Pisanello's drawings are all together in the Codex Vallardi at the Louvre.
[82] Chiarelli and Pollard, "Pisanello," *Grove Art* Online, 2003.
[83] Hellmut Wohl, "Gentile (di Niccolò di Massio) da Fabriano," *Grove Art Online*, updated 2014.
[84] Millard Meiss, "Madonna of Humility," *The Art Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (1936): 448 and 450.
[85] The work is currently also in the Castelvecchio Musuem in Verona, and it is currently listed as a Stefano da Verona painting. Bernhard Degenhart, *Pisanello* (Turin: Chiantore, 1945), 11. Degenhart includes it as a work by Stefano da Verona as well. Esther Moench, "Stefano (di Giovanni) da Verona. *Grove Art Online,* 2003. However, the work has also been attributed to the influential contemporary of both Pisanello and Stefano, Michelino da Besozzo.
[86] Enio Sindona, *Pisanello*, trans. John Ross (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1961), 27-29.
[87] Tatiana Kustodieva, "La Madonna Litta: Storia di un Capolavoro di Leonardo," in *Leonardo: La Madonna Litta dall'Ermitage di San Pietroburgo.* ed. Anna Gramiccia (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2003), 46.
[88] Frank Zöllner, *Leonardo da Vinci*, *1452-1519: The Complete Paintings and Drawings* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), 82.
[89] Ibid., 82.
[90] Ibid., 227.
[91] Williamson, *The Madonna of Humility*, 117.
[92] Ibid., 117.

[93] Schnier, "The Symbolic Bird," 94-95. In addition to the *Madonna Litta*, Schnier discusses Antiono Veneziano's *Virgin and Child* of 1380, which is now in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and Taddeo di Bartolo's *Madonna and Child* of ca. 1400 now in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.
[94] Ibid., 104. Schnier also discusses the representation and symbolism of the Holy Dove itself, and it both masculine and feminine qualities. He is ultimately interested in the connection between the symbolic dove and the concept of the mother.
[95] Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols*, 26.
[96] Ibid., 27-28.
[97] Leonardo da Vinci, *The Literary Works of Leonardo Da Vinci*, trans. Jean Paul Richter. 3rd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Phaidon, 1970), 2:261. It should be noted that Leonardo also refers twice to the swallow in his bestiary. It is first under the heading of Inconstancy, and he claims that they are always moving around because they cannot endure any small discomfort. Shortly afterwards, he describes how the swallow also gives sight to its young by using the celandine plant. He makes one reference to the goldfinch in his writing. "The goldfinch gives a poisonous herb to its caged youth. Death rather than loss of liberty." Ibid., 264, 267, 309.
[98] Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols*, 28.
[99] Ibid., 29.
[100] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch,* 63. Friedmann came to the conclusion that the motif was most popular from the second half of the thirteenth century until the third quarter of the sixteenth century. Friedmann only examined the depiction of goldfinches, so he largely ignored seventeenth-century images, which included other species of birds such as the swallow.
[101] Dennis Mahon, *Guercino: Master Painter of the Baroque* (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 198.
[102] Ibid., 195.
[103] Marco Chiarini and Serena Padovani, eds. *La Galleria Palatina e gli apartamenti reali di Palazzo Pitti: Catalogo dei dipinti* (Florence: Centro Di, 2003), 241.
[104] Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch,* 7-8.
[105] Sorce, "Guercino's *Madonna of the Sparrow*," 6. Sorce also suggests that the swallow may represent the idea of faithful Christians praying to God for mercy.
[106] Ibid., 4. http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch25.htm. During the twenty-fifth session in 1563, the council published the second decree. Part of it stated that "And if any abuses have crept in amongst these holy and salutary observances, the holy Synod ardently desires that they be utterly abolished; in such wise that no images, (suggestive) of false doctrine, and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated, be set up. And if at times, when expedient for the unlettered people; it happens that the facts and narratives of sacred Scripture are portrayed and represented; the people shall be taught, that not thereby is the Divinity represented, as though it could be seen by the eyes of the body, or be portrayed by colors or figures."