NIGRA SUM: PERCEPTION, TRANSFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION OF BLACK VIRGINS

Angelica Federici

Introduction

In 1994, I was wandering through the remote central Italian village of Bagnolo in the province of Viterbo. Inside the church above the main altar stood a proud, black representation of the Virgin Mary and child. A child myself, I had never seen a black Madonna. I asked the local priest for an explanation, the lack of a suitable one has led me almost thirty years later, to produce this article. The existence of black Virgins, but also of Christ and several saints represented with dark skin, has created one of the most fuelled art historical debates relating to the medieval Romanesque period. Undeniably, the study of black Madonnas goes beyond a precise academic discipline and treating this phenomenon only in its visual manifestation inevitably conceals the study of the different signifiers at play. Strictly speaking a black Madonna is an iconographic representation (painting or sculpture), typical of Christian iconography, of the Virgin Mary, frequently accompanied by the Christ child, whose face has a dark black or brown colour. There are several hundred specimens of black Madonnas in public places of worship all over Europe, in north-eastern Africa and in several countries in South America. Whatever its symbolic value, evangelical purpose or theological justification their diffusion in the West has been associated with ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean basin and the East (Groppo, Girardi, Pelizzaro 2012). Traditions and popular devotions tied to these artefacts conceal issues that involve religious, artistic, historical, anthropological and social aspects. Several legends exist around the arrival of the cult of the black Virgin in Europe, ranging from Arianism to Iconoclasm and the Crusades (Begg 2006). The objective disappearance of numerous specimens along with the existing wide range of theories and considerations has proven quite daunting to scholarly research, at times causing their adoption in the context of esoteric or mystical literature (van Cronenburg 2004; Huynen 1972). For this reason, the study of this phenomenon is often tied to amateur mystical contemporary writings which incorrectly associate these artefacts to Holy Grail literature and Templar legends. In addition to the objective difficulty in establishing their origin, the absence of a diachronic evolution complicates matters further. Over time the meaning attributed to these

artefacts has been incredibly mutable - for example signifying life, death or resurrection, or even good and evil - as further testified by their 'cryptic coloration'. In fact, over time black Virgins have changed colour from white to black and/or vice versa as a way of surviving persecutions. This paper argues that this was, at least in part, due to contrasting sentiments black Virgins were invested with by the observer, as a commentary on medieval society's ambivalent relationship towards the feminine.

From the twelfth century onwards, black Virgins depicting the Madonna and child in majesty have often been adored, persecuted or misinterpreted. In addition to normal losses due to the wear of time, a trait common to other artefacts, Madonnas with dark skin have been victims of actual suppression campaigns. Rarely, however, has this phenomenon been examined in the context of its reception as a creative or transformative process, accounting for the fact that these artefacts are extremely heterogeneous in terms of chronology, technique and style. There is a certain tendency to consider the reception of art as a passive activity, which also assumes that the meaning and/or significance of artworks remains fixed over time and is comprehensible to all. Black Virgins challenge the reception of artworks in various contexts and by various means as an inherently critical act. They may in fact be considered as a commentary on the relics of the past, even transforming them according to the needs of the present. This research is set the task of interpreting or making sense of their history, questioning the status quo, and envisioning a future endowed with critical distance. Ultimately, our aim is to examine not only the creation, interpretation, and transformation of black Virgins by means of reception, but also the faculty of these artworks to create, interpret, and transform the past.

The Great Mother

Besides being the expression of an exquisitely Christian phenomenon, black Virgins also act as a vehicle for the reception/transformation of both the female archetype and religious pagan relics from the Mediterranean basin and the Orient (Barral i Altet 2009). Rather than expressing ethnicity, as Idalie Vandamme (2006) rightly suggests, the pigmentation of the Virgin is tied to her chthonic nature, thus implying an obvious relationship to the cult of the Great Mother or the Goddess. During the Stone Age, the divine archetypal feminine appears in paintings and sculptures from Siberia to the Pyrenees seemingly suggesting the presence of a unitary world view centred around the Great Goddess (Graves 1992). Ancient civilizations perceived the Great Mother as pervading the universe of the Earth with fertility and abundance. Thus, she was characterized by a naturalistic and sensuous form, while her aspect as ruler over

the spirits and the dead stressed her unnatural, unreal and spiritual quality (Neumann 1952). This primordial archetype embodied both positive and negative elementary characteristics. While, the former sprang from the mother child relationship, negative elementary attributes originated in the inner experience of horror, danger, fear, and loss experienced at birth interpreted in the context of analytical psychoanalysis as the dialectic relation of growing consciousness both in the child and the adult (Klein 1932; Neumann 1951). The classical world naturally inherited the cult of the Great Mother, translating these contrasting attributes into the adoration of three deities who were very popular in the West during late paganism and were depicted at one time with black skin: Artemis, Cybele and Isis (Preston 1982). Images and powers attributed to black Virgins at once severe and maternal are invoked in matters of pregnancy, the fertility of the land, birth and in the resurrection of stillborn children (Vandamme 2006: 72). According to Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet (1990; 2012) these cultic aspects further the connection between dark skinned Greco Roman goddesses and Madonnas. Moreover, she claims that in southern France shrines associated to black Virgins are often found in the same sites associated to Roman temples of female deities offering further proof towards the Great Mother connection (Cassagnes-Brouquet 2012). On the contrary, Elisa Foster claims that this is at large a 'modern conceit' and not strictly speaking a medieval one (Foster 2016: 5). Marcello Montanari pushes this claim forward stating that the reasons and explanations related to the female pagan deities, whose dark or black colour was associated to fertility does not apply to the black Virgin, given that also Christ's face and those of several other Saints in the Christian pantheon are black (Montanari 2012). In my view the dark pigmentation of the Christ child and that of Saints does not necessarily invalidate the Mother-Virgin association. I agree it is problematic but not necessarily a disqualifying agent altogether. To a certain extent one may argue that although there was not a conscious choice in evoking the ancient goddess archetype, these similarities should be read and interpreted as a commentary on the expression of the symbol of the primordial feminine and the profound influence it expressed in both Western and Eastern civilisations. While evidence towards the relationship of black Virgins and ancient female deities is indeed conspicuous their blackness undoubtedly had multiple layers of complementary and contrasting signifiers. Once again, this predisposition towards change is possibly the most characteristic quality of black Virgins.

From white to black …

It is however diminishing to solely reduce the phenomenon of black Madonnas to a manifestation of the maternal paradigm, as intended by Erich Neumann (Neumann 1951). While these dark images obviously share a number of characteristics with other female deities

of the pagan pantheon their reception has generally remained problematic and unfixed throughout history. There is a multi-layered complexity to their darkness. As noted by the art historian Conceptió Peig, some Virgins – notably the Virgo de Montserrat – underwent a century long process of blackening and un-blackening (Peig 2012). One may argue that the change in perception of the Virgin's colour is not so much a critical act of recognition as opposed to a spiritual response, an acceptance of change as a sign of divine will. *La Moreneta* of Montserrat, to give it it's Catalan name, is a Romanesque statue of the Virgin and child in the *sedes sapientiae* fashion and likely dates to the twelfth century (Altés 2003). Due to restorations carried out in 2001 we know that the statue was originally conceived as white and gradually darkened as a result of the oxidation of white lead (Xarrie and Porta 2003; Barral i Altet 2001). In order to give the sculpture a greater degree of uniformity, archaeologists discovered that several layers of dark varnish were subsequently applied. Surviving textual evidence does not shed any light as to when this transformation took place, nevertheless, it is clear that rather than maintaining its original colour, the darkness of the artefact was accentuated. It is impossible to determine the underlying motives with absolute certainty. However, given *La Moreneta's* status of sanctity it is likely that the darkening was seen as a divine proceeding as a tangible evidence of the artefact's holiness. This new-found blackness was first accepted and subsequently became the statue's central and defining motif. Maintaining the darkness on the wooden sculpture of Montserrat over the centuries may be acknowledged in relation to the sacralised wonder it embodied in the eyes of worshippers. This element differentiates it from other wooden sculptures of the Virgin who do not enjoy such privilege or sacredness and are mere representations of what is sacred. One may indeed argue that the statue's change in colour testifies to the transformation of art as a creative process and that its reception is both mutable and unfixed ultimately attempting to make sense of the sacred or the unknown.

The twelfth century saw an unprecedented rise in the cult of the black Virgin. Geographically this phenomenon was primarily, but not exclusively, confined to France, Italy, Spain, and Germany. While the majority of black Madonnas are sculpted in wood and embody the prototype of the *sedes sapientiae*; a number of Virgins take the form of icons either in the Hodegetria or the Agiosortissa mode. These Virgins have been the objects of intense worship, to the point of being accused of fostering idolatry. The scientific debate reasoned around the sudden popularity of this phenomenon in Central Europe has to date not yet reached a general consensus. Certain scholars including the art historian Xavier Barral i Altet are refuting the existence of black Virgins in the medieval Continent altogether (Barral i Altet 2009; 2012). In

the paper delivered at the 2010 conference on black Virgins in Oropa, Lombardy, he argued that Romanesque black Virgins were originally conceived as white and were blackened during the course of the fourteenth century (Barri i Altet 2012). However, he only considers two examples in detail, namely the aforementioned *Moreneta* and the black Virgin from Le Puy-en-Velay in the Auvergne, France. As far as the Virgin of Montserrat is considered Barral i Altet, has a strong case however, his argument loses momentum in relation to Le Puy-en-Velay Virgin (Barral i Altet 2000; 2012). The latter was placed at the centre of a great dramatic and liturgical apparatus, full of symbolic valence, and was a common destination of frequent pilgrimages from the onset. According to Barral i Altet, the Madonna acquired a new and renowned fame when she was covered with a black patina, which suddenly charged her with an oriental connotation. Although the medieval statue was lost in the eighteenth century, the source that allows us to reconstruct the closest appearance to the original consists of a miniature of the late fifteenth-century *Book of Hours* of Margaret of Austria, made in Toul or Nancy, and now preserved in the Vienna National Library (Barral i Altet 2012). In this miniature, *Our Lady of Le Puy* is sitting on a throne and holding the child on her knees: both are depicted with black faces, but the hands of the Virgin are white. According to the scholar - and as the miniature seems to testify - this indicates that the blackening was put into effect through one or more intermediate stages. Given that medieval texts do not comment on the Virgin's pigmentation and that no investigations may be carried out on the twelfth-century sculpture I believe this is not sufficient proof to argue for the statue's polychromatic character. Therefore, while the dark pigmentation of the Virgin cannot merely be ascribed to the oxidation of paint, varnish, silver plaques, or, even to candle smoke neither can it be settled as the gothic desire to validate the supernatural through physical tangibility, and therefore assume that the blackening was utilised as a strategy to concretely visualize the divine. Another possibility might be that the sudden appearance of black Virgins in Europe was linked to a fascination with the Orient and the Far East. Indeed, many myths ascribed to black Madonnas are interwoven with those of the crusades, and suggest that these statues originated in the East and were brought back by pilgrims (Foster 2016). As Vandamme rightly observes these legends are the expression of a western medieval imaginary tied to the Orient, the 'Other' and the unknown; interconnecting eastern mystery cults and Coptic apocryphal literature from Egypt (Vandamme 2006: 70; Courtès 1979). Moreover, their dark pigmentation was associated both to αίθιοπία the Greek term which literally means 'burnt faces' and to their dark-skinned Orthodox counterparts, namely icons depicting the Virgin Mary attributed to Saint Luke (Benvenuti 2012: 67; Bacci 1998; Snowden 1970). Finally, the black Virgin's association with Orthodox icons and their 'supernatural' identity may also be read in connection to the tradition of the *mandylion* from

Edessa (Barral I Altet 2012: 100; Balicka-Witakowska, E. 2004; and Rosenqvis 2004). In this respect, the phenomenon of black Virgins testifies to the reception of art as an artistic strategy, by means of which art itself is set the task of interpreting or making sense of history, questioning the status quo, or envisioning the Other and the unknown with critical distance.

A Jesuit fabrication?

As far as Germany is concerned, Monique Scheer puts forward an interesting claim: these Madonnas were originally white, and in order to attest to the antiquity of their cult, were blackened by the Jesuits in response to the Protestant crisis during the Counter-Reformation (Sheer 2002). On the contrary Giuseppe Fazio argues that by commissioning copies of celebrated black Virgins, the Jesuits were less responsible for the blackening of statues than for the promotion and encouragement of their cult (Fazio 2012). Indeed, during the sixteenth century numerous replicas of the Madonna of Loreto were spread throughout Europe by the Order. As stated above, rather than solely increasing the flow of pilgrims to Catholic shrines, this was primarily done to counteract the growing criticism of Reformed Lutherans towards Marian cults practiced by the Roman Church. Nevertheless, Jesuit efforts could not counteract the suppression campaign advanced by the Lutherans (Sheer 2002). In France, of the approximately one hundred and ninety *Vierges Noires* inventoried on the territory at the beginning of the sixteenth century, at least twenty-five were destroyed during the religious wars that followed the Protestant Reformation. The other big attack against the Black Madonnas was launched by the Jacobins between 1793 and 1794 in the heart of the years of the Reign of Terror (Sheer 2002). By 1795 forty-six Marian effigies were burnt in public squares. The most ancient and revered icons of France such as the Virgo paritura of Chartres and the Virgin of Notre Dame de Puy perished under the hands of the Jacobins. The Age of Enlightenment could not accept surviving beliefs of medieval obscurantism of which the black virgins were considered one of the greatest expressions (Sheer 2002). The survival of numerous statues during this neo-Jacobin iconoclastic fury was due to the intervention of worshippers in small towns, who would hide their miraculous image before it could be located and destroyed. Most of the statues burnt during the Terror were replaced by copies in the nineteenth century. Yet, while being important for the restoration of the ancient Marian cults, these replicas are almost useless in the study of their origins. These events underscore the artefacts' active transformation in the construction of meaning throughout the centuries, through which art itself actively constructs, deconstructs, interprets and reinterprets history. At the same time, they testify to the reception of artists and artwork in various contexts and by various means as an inherently critical act, which may in fact be seen as a commentary on the

relics of the past, even transforming them according to the needs of the present.

I am black but beautiful

In the Jewish tradition the *Song of Songs,* (Šîr Hašîrîm) literally the most excellent of all poems, is interpreted as a metaphor of God′s love for his people that manifests itself through Israel's history (Segal 1937; Piatti 1953). This reading likely influenced subsequent interpretations which substituted the Bride as Israel with the Christian church, ~~of~~ the individual soul, and the Virgin (Segal 1937). The *Song of Songs* constitutes an extremely interesting example of the Bible's influence within medieval culture: in fact, there are over eighty commentaries in Latin paraphrases and sermons based on this enigmatic sequence of love lyrics. Philologically the phenomenon of the black Virgin has been traced to verses 1:5, 6 of the *Song of Songs* in the Vulgate, '*Nigra sum sed formosa*' (I am black but beautiful); 'Origen's [AD 184-253] commentary on the *Song of Songs* contains an anthology of scriptural texts and a cluster of interpretations on the theme of negritude which set the tone of all later exegesis, both Greek and Latin' (Matter 1987: 304; Courtès 1979: 202, 14; Bernardi 2012; Smith 1984: 245). Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs was of crucial importance for all subsequent Christian interpretations; only that of Hippolytus of Rome [AD 170-235] precedes it and was known in the medieval West only in fragments quoted by Saint Ambrose [AD 340-397] in *Exposition of Psalm 118* and *On Isaac and the Soul* (Smith 1984: 11). (Matter 1987; Smith 1984:3; Meloni 1981: 856). Although Origen posed some theological problems, his interpretation of the *Song of Songs* was presented to Latin Christianity as the basis for all subsequent interpretation. The bride represents the Church, 'she is black by reason of the obscurity of her origins' (Courtès 1979:15). The dark beautiful bride states that she has attracted God's glorified radiance and the perfect copy of His nature, which has made her beautiful 'the initial subjective statement is replaced by the objective judgement' (Courtès 1979: 203). The spirituality of eleventh-century reformers is the prelude to the period of maximum fertility in the production of Christian commentaries on the Song. The Benedictine abbot Williram of Ebersberg [d. 1085] in his *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum* presents the Canticle as a mystical love story in which both the soul and the Church must overcome sin in order to be worthy of Christ, the bridegroom, promoting in this sense the reforms that were underway in Cluny (Matter 1987; Bartelmez 1967). The twelfth century saw the culmination of the exegesis of the genre and the songs of love became with increasing frequency guiding indications for spiritual life. There are a great number of interpretations of this kind. Authors such as Honorius of Autun [1080-1154] use the four senses as a model for a multiple understanding of the Song; others like Rupert of Deutz [c.1075-1129] interpret it as a love

poem between God and the Virgin (Haacke 1974; Matter 1992; Norris 2003). Both authors make the direct link of the Bride with the Virgin Mary, as opposed to her role as *ecclesia*. Indeed, medieval Mariology interpreted what was essentially a dialogue between two lovers, possibly Solomon and either a Shulamite or the Queen of Sheba, as a metaphor of Christ's love for the Virgin Mary (Forsyth 1972). Although this interpretation is not exemplified in Bernard of Clairvaux's [1090-1153] *Sermones super Cantica canticorum*, his theological dogmas on the Virgin likely influenced his successors' reading of the *Song*. Additionally, Bernard explains that there is no contradiction in the verse 'I am black but beautiful' because the form refers to the structure while the blackness to colour (Fazio 2012: 29). He goes on to explain that not everything that is black lacks grace or beauty. Fazio argues that although Mary's name is not expressly mentioned it was likely implied. There is an undeniable quality to this blackness, which was also associated to humility. Indeed, the use of the phrase *Nigra sum sed formosa* marks an important shift in emphasis: it is no longer a black image of Mary that is spoken of but an image of a black Mary. Bernard's sermons ultimately gave rise to the French Alain de Lille's work, *In Cantica Canticorum ad laudem Deiparae Virginis Mariae compendiosa elucidato* where the above-mentioned relationship becomes explicit (Benvenuti 2012). Fazio argues that this interpretation of sacred scriptures stands alone in justifying the phenomenon of the black Virgins (Fazio 2012). While as far as the German context is considered Williram's version provided the model for an anonymous commentary which was the subject of much study and was known as the Canticle of St Trudpert (Matter 1987). This text was addressed to a community of religious women and presented an essentially Marian interpretation in which the Madonna was portrayed as the model of the devout soul. E. Ann Matter elucidates how in a certain sense the various interpretations of the Canticle represent an understanding of divine love through terrestrial love and are, thus, linked to a salient datum of Augustinian anthropology, which may explain its wide acceptance in the Middle Ages (Matter 1987). While Irene Forsyth disputes the literary influence of the *Canticle of Canticles*, claiming that it does not justify the blackening of the Christ child, it is undeniable that the theological debate around the *Song of Songs* between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries had an impact on the aesthetic identity of the black Virgin (Forsyth 1972). Similarly, Montanari states that the reference to the biblical verse of the Canticle does not convince him: 'I am dark but beautiful … because the sun has tanned me' (Song of Songs 1, 5-6), because this phrase should not apply to Jesus and the saints. Montanari does not believe biblical texts, often placed in different contexts, can be forced to explain facts and phenomena of later or contemporary eras (Montanari 2012). But let us look more closely at an example.

> This image of the glorious Virgin Mary was painted by order of the Most Serene Prince and Lord Wenceslaus, King of the Romans and of Bohemia, in the likeness of the image that is in Roudnice, painted by St. Luke, in his own hand. The year 1396.
>
> National Gallery of Prague

This inscription, in gothic characters, on the reverse side of the panel, depicting the Madonna Kykkotissa, from Březnice, is currently preserved in the National Gallery of Prague. Presumably the painting reproduces an icon in Roudnice, which originally travelled from Cyprus to Bohemia as a gift of the Lusignan Dynasty. The dating of the Březnice copy is controversial; some identify it as late fifteenth century, while others confirm the 1396 date on the inscription (Evans 2005; Gentile 2012; Suckale 2009). Nevertheless, the Bohemian copy assumingly returns the original's character and also mimics the dark tones of the flesh determined in the prototype with a dark green base. By itself, the imitative reproduction of an icon widely venerated and attributed to Saint Luke does not constitute a special case: the careful reproduction of each element was intended to preserve the *virtus* and the effectiveness of the miraculous effigy. However, the large aureole around the head of the Virgin of Březnice bears the inscription in Gothic letters: 'Nigra sum sed formosa filie Ier [usalem]' and is placed in a way to justify and explain the connotation of the dark face. This image demonstrates the rather precocious interpretation of the dark face of a Marian image in the light of the biblical quotation. Indeed, the Březnice inscription testifies to the allegorical and mystical exegesis of the *Song of Songs* by the fourteenth century.

Black: colour or race?

At the same time these artefacts, whose reception is simultaneously creative and problematic, exorcise a contrasting approach to divinity and colour in general. As stated by Monique Scheer there is no mention of the blackness of the Virgins in either contemporary texts nor in visual testimonies (Sheer 2002; Fazio 2011). In *The Image of Black in Western Art* (1979) Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat affirm that the perception of colour was mainly symbolic – as opposed to ethnological – until the fifteenth century. Indeed, Jean Marie Courtès argues that in patristic literature explicit mention of persons of colour is extremely rare and not very significant. She states that blackness is not regarded as a specific racial difference but simply as the darkest of the darkest shades of colour found among the Mediterranean basin (Courtès 1979). Foster disputes this claiming that the colour black is associated loosely to forms of ethnicity and ultimately stands to represent sin. According to her this is exemplified by St Jerome's declaration 'We are all Ethiopians' or, as she puts it, sinners (Foster 2016: 6). Frank Snowden

came to the highly optimistic conclusion that among the men of antiquity there existed not a trace of anti-black racism, nor was there even a consciousness of racial differences (Snowden 1991). According to Jean Devisse his view is that it was simply a matter of 'climate and that climatic differences, a mere "accident", could not beget a sense of inequality in human relations' (Devisse 1979: 40). Although the historian acknowledges the limits of Snowden's claims he admits that on an ideological level it is true that antiquity showed no racism *vis-à-vis* the blacks, nor even a sense of racial inequality (Devisse 1979). Additionally, Devisse asserts that 'on a level of principle both Christianity and Islam are called to proclaim the absolute equality of the races of men and to repudiate the idea of an inequality in all its forms along with racism and the exploitation of inferiors by self-styled superiors' (Devisse 1979: 43). It is tempting to assume that until the fifteenth century there was an absence of race consciousness. Black Virgins were likely an accepted and normal phenomenon for medieval men. However, the perception of their blackness was later reinterpreted, as in the above-mentioned case of the Jesuits, or that of the Huguenots, the latter of which viewed devotion to these Virgins as a form of idolatry and promoted a massive campaign to destroy them. These artefacts challenge our understanding of artistic content as fixed and immediately comprehensible and to the role of art as an active vehicle in the transformation, reception, and creation of aesthetic content.

This case study exemplifies the power of art objects in creating unfixed meanings and connotations. Multiple theories surrounding the phenomena of black Virgins do not merely suggest that art evolves with its audience, but also its inherent capacity to reinterpret and transform its own historical momentum. The medieval female religious body is both problematic and polysemic; too often read by feminist and gendered historiography as an enantiosemy, pushing interpretations towards a virgin-whore dichotomy (Gilchrist 1994; Dressler 2007; Bynum 1982; and Martin 2012). At times simplistic, this reading may hold a certain degree of truth, especially in so much as the religious body was interpreted by medieval contemporaries. Ultimately, black Virgins are the receptors of an ambivalent relationship towards the feminine, making it almost impossible to produce an exegetical interpretation tied either to their anthropological background or to the philological study of primary sources. To a certain extent they represent the ideal compromise between the perfect figure of the Virgin and its demonized counterpart Eve. Is it possible that Madonnas with dark skin were the product of an attempt to reconcile the pre-Oedipal split perception of the mother? The black Virgin is to a certain extent duplicitous like Great Mother deities because she is invested with opposing sentiments by the believer. This could account for her camouflaging quality, as if a fixed stable existence was too problematic. It is my opinion that this may at least in part be

traced back to Melanie Klein's ego development and object relation of the infant (Klein 1975 [1921]; [1930]; [1932]). Ildiko Mohacsy goes as far as saying that that we never fully grow out of the paranoid schizoid position and that during the Middle Ages women were divided into the contrasting opposing types of the 'celestial' and 'killer' woman, a stereotype that was furthered by the rise of Neoplatonism during the later medieval period (Calma 2016).[1] While it might be a stretch to read black Virgins as manifestations of the paranoid schizoid position it is undeniable that their reception and existence was extremely problematic, highlighting that their own existence had to be mutable to give them a chance at surviving. Something they seem to be quite successful at.

References

Altés, F.X., Camps, J., and de C. Laplana, J. (2003). *La imtage de la Mare de Déu de Montserrat*. Montserrat: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat.

Bacci, M. (1998). *Il pennello dell'Evangelista: storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a san Luca*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS.

Balicka-Witakowska, E. (2005). The Holy Face of Edessa on the frame of the 'Volto Santo' of Genoa: the literary and pictorial sources *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzantine Culture: papers read at a colloquium held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul* (1-5 December, 1999) 100-32 (ed.) J. O. Rosenqvis. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell. London: Bloomsbury.

Barral i Altet, X. (2009). I volti scuri: una questione irrisolta dell'arte religiosa medievale *I Santi venuti dal mare (atti del V Convegno Internazionale di Studio, Bari-Brindisi, 14-18 dicembre 2005)* 265-76, Rotte mediterranee della cultura (ed.) M.S. Calò Mariani. Bari: Adda Editore.

Barral i Altet, X. (2000). (Ed.) *La Cathédrale du Puy-en-Velay*. Geneva: Skira.

Barral i Altet, X. (2001). Era negra la Mare de Déu de Montserrat? *L'art i la politica de l'art* 278-80. Barcellona : Galerada.

[1] Mohacsy (1984) makes these statements in relation to the unicorn legend, but they may be applied also to the time period relating to black Virgins, please also refer to Ildiko Mohacsy (1988).

Barral i Altet, X. (2012). Madonne Brune che non lo erano in epoca romanica (con alcune riflessioni sulla diffusione del Volto Santo di Lucca non annerito) *Nigra Sum. Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)* 95-109. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Bartelmez, E.H. (1967) (Ed.) *The "Expositio in Cantica Canticorum" of Williram Abbot of Ebersberg 1048-1085*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.

Begg, E. (2006). *Il misterioso culto delle madonne nere* (trans.) M. Mendoliccio. Turin: Edizioni l'Età dell'Acquario.

Benvenuti, A. (2012). Il manto della Vergine. Aspetti della devozione mariana tra Medioevo e prima età moderna *Nigra sum. Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)* 225-33. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Bernardi, C. (2012). Vergine, Madre, Regina, Madonna Nera *Nigra sum. Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)* 347-51. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Bynum, C.W. (1982). *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*. Berkley: University of California Press: Berkeley.

Calma, D. (2016). *Neoplatonism in the Middle Ages. New Commentaries on 'Liber de Causis' and 'Elementatio Theologica'*. 2 vols. Turnhout: Brepols.

Cassagnes-Brouquet, S. (1990). *Vierges noires: regard et fascination*. Rodez : Editions du Rouergue.

Cassagnes-Brouquet, S. (2012). Madonne Nere della Francia meridionale: forma e diffusione di un culto *Nigra Sum . Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)* 111-22. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Courtès, J.M. (1979). The Theme of 'Ethiopia' and 'Ethiopians' in Patristic Literature *The Image of Black in Western Art. Vol II. From the Early Christian Era to the 'Age of Discovery', part 1: From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood* 199-214 (ed. D. Bindman and H. L. Gates, Jr.). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Devisse, J. and Mollat, M. (1979). *The Image of the Black in Western Art. Vol II: From the Early Christian Era to the Age of Discovery, part 2: Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World. 14th to 16th century.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Dressler, R. (2007). Continuing the Discourse: Feminist Scholarship and the Study of Medieval Visual Culture *Medieval Feminist Forum* 43 (1): 19.

Evans, H.C. (2005). The Madonna of Březnice in Prague *The Crown of Boemia 1347-1437* (eds.) B. Drake Boehm and J. Fajit, 216-17. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Fazio, G. (2012). *La Madonna di Tindari e le vergini nere medievali*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.

Forsyth, I. H. (1972). *The Throne of Wisdom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Foster, E.A. (2016). Out of Egypt: Inventing the Black Madonna of Le Puy in Image and Text *Studies in Iconography* 37: 1–30.

Gentile, G. (2012). Percezione, riproduzione e imitazione di imagini mariana *Nigra sum. Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)* 83-94. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Gilchrist, R. (1994). Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (eds.) S. Kay and M. Rubin, 43-61. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Graves, R. (1992). *La Dea Bianca* (trans.) A. Pelissero. Milan: Gli Adelphi.

Groppo, L., and Girardi, O. (2012). (Eds.) *Nigra Sum. Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)*. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Haacke, H. (1974). (Ed). *Rupert of Deutz. Commentaria in Canticum Canticorum (de incarnatione Domini).* Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis 26. Turnhout: Brepols.

Huynen, J. (1972). *L'Énigme des Vierges Noires*. Chartres: Éditions Jean-Michel Garnier.

Klein, M. (1975) [1921]. The Development of a Child *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945*, 1-54. London: The Hogarth Press: London.

Klein, M. (1975) [1930]. The importance of symbol formation in the development of the ego *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945*, 219-32. London: The Hogarth Press: London.

Klein, M. (1975) [1932]. *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (trans.) A. Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press: London.

Martin, T. (2012). (Ed.) *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*. Leiden: Brill: Leiden.

Matter, E.A. (1987). Il 'Cantico dei Cantici' nel contesto del Cristianesimo medievale: l'eredità di Origene *Aevum* 61 (2): 303–12.

Matter, E.A. (1992). V*oice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Mohacsy, I. (1984). The Legend of the Unicorn: an Illumination of the Maternal Split *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanal*ysis *and Dynamic Psychiatry* 12 (3): 387-412.

Mohacsy, I. (1988). The Medieval Unicorn: Historical and Iconographic Applications of Psychoanalysis *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* 16 (1): 83–106.

Montanari, M. (2012). La Madonna di Loreto *Nigra Sum. Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)* 305-10. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Neumann, E. (1951). *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (trans.) R. Menheim. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Norris, R.A. (2003). (Trans. and Ed.). *The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*. Michigan: Grand Rapids/Cambridge UK: William B. Eerdmans.

Peig, C. (2012). La Madonna di Montserrat e la sua 'nerezza' in epoca medievale. Analisi della definizione plastica e del contesto devozionale *Nigra sum. Culti, santuari e immagini della madonne nere d'Europa. (Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Santuario e Sacro Monte di Oropa, Santuario e Sacro Monte di Crea, 20-22 maggio 2010)* 123-56. Atlas: Ponzano Monferrato: Atlas.

Piatti, T. (1953). Il Cantico dei Cantici alla luce del Libro di Geremia: Un Enigma Biblico Svelato? *Divus Thomas* 56: 179-210.

Preston, J. J. (1982). *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Scheer, M. (2002). From Majesty to Mystery: Change in the Meanings of Black Madonnas from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries *American Historical Review* 107 (5): 1412-40.

Segal, M.H. (1937). Il Cantico Dei Cantici *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* XI (11-12): 477–95.

Snowden, F.M. (1970). *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*. New Haven: Harvard University Press.

Snowden, F. M. (1991). *Before Color Prejudice. The Ancient View of Blacks.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Suckale, R. (2009). (Ed.). *Schöne Madonnen am Rhein.* Leipzig: E. A. Seemann Verlag

van Cronenburg, P. (2004). *Madonne nere Il mistero di un culto* (trans.) T. Gailani. Rome: Edizioni Arkeios.

Vandamme, I. (2006). Dark Ladies from Below. Paradoxical Perceptions in Black Madonna Cults and Miracles: The Case of Our Lady of Halle *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen: Antwerp Royal Museum Annual* VII: 68-93.

Xarrie, J.M. and Porta, E. (2003). Estudis técnics, restauració i resultats referents a la imatge romànica de la Mare de Déu de Montserrat *La imatge de la Mare de Déu de Montserrat* 181-90. Montserrat : Publicaciones de l'Abadia de Montserrat.