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The Art Bulletin, Vol. 65, No. 2. (Jun., 1983), pp. 238-253.

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Antonello da Messina's *Saint Jerome in His Study*: An Iconographic Analysis

Penny Howell Jolly

Scholars interested in the artistic relations between Flanders and Italy during the Early Renaissance have recognized extensive Flemish influence in the *oeuvre* of Antonello da Messina.¹ His *Saint Jerome in His Study* (London, National Gallery; Fig. 1),² painted in oil in a highly detailed style, has long been recognized as a work influenced by Flemish art; in fact, a now lost work by Jan van Eyck may have been its source.³ Yet there has been no attempt until very recently to provide an iconographical analysis of the *Jerome*.⁴ If Marcantonio Michiel's sixteenth-century attribution of the painting to Jan van Eyck were still accepted, certainly the work would have been explored from an iconographical point of view. At least since Panofsky's publication of *Early Netherlandish Painting*, disguised symbolism has been established as a consistent factor worthy of analysis within Jan's *oeuvre* and that of other Flemish artists.⁵ Yet art historians have been far more reticent about such analyses of the works of Italian Renaissance artists. Did Antonello create in his works iconographical programs incorporating extensive disguised symbolism? I believe that a careful analysis of the *Saint Jerome in His Study* will demonstrate that such an iconographical program does exist. I also wish to

suggest that it could not have been the artistic tradition of Antonello's homeland of Sicily that taught him such complex use of symbolism. More probably it was in the Neapolitan milieu, where Antonello was in contact with the art of Jan van Eyck and other Flemings, that he acquired a taste for such elaborate iconographical programs. If this is so, Antonello should be viewed as one of the Italian Renaissance artists most deeply touched by fifteenth-century Flemish art.

In Antonello's *Saint Jerome in His Study* we see Jerome reading at his desk on a raised platform which forms the floor of his study. Around him are numerous objects: to our left are a cat, a soiled towel, and a hanging lamp, and below them are two potted plants, one a carnation, the other a small tree (Fig. 2); a pair of discarded shoes lies at the bottom of the steps; paraphernalia line the shelves, including writing equipment and books, a stoppered, clear-glass carafe, a Crucifix, apothecary jars, and two oval pyx boxes, one above the other. This carrel is set within a much larger stone-vaulted building, with bipartite windows on an upper level, which open onto a view of the sky, and rectangular windows below, through which the

I wish to thank Dr. Charles I. Minott of the University of Pennsylvania for reading an earlier version of this manuscript.

¹ A general review of and bibliography on the relationship between Antonello and Flanders can be found in J. Wright, "Antonello da Messina: The Origins of His Style and Technique," *Art History*, III, 1980, 41ff.

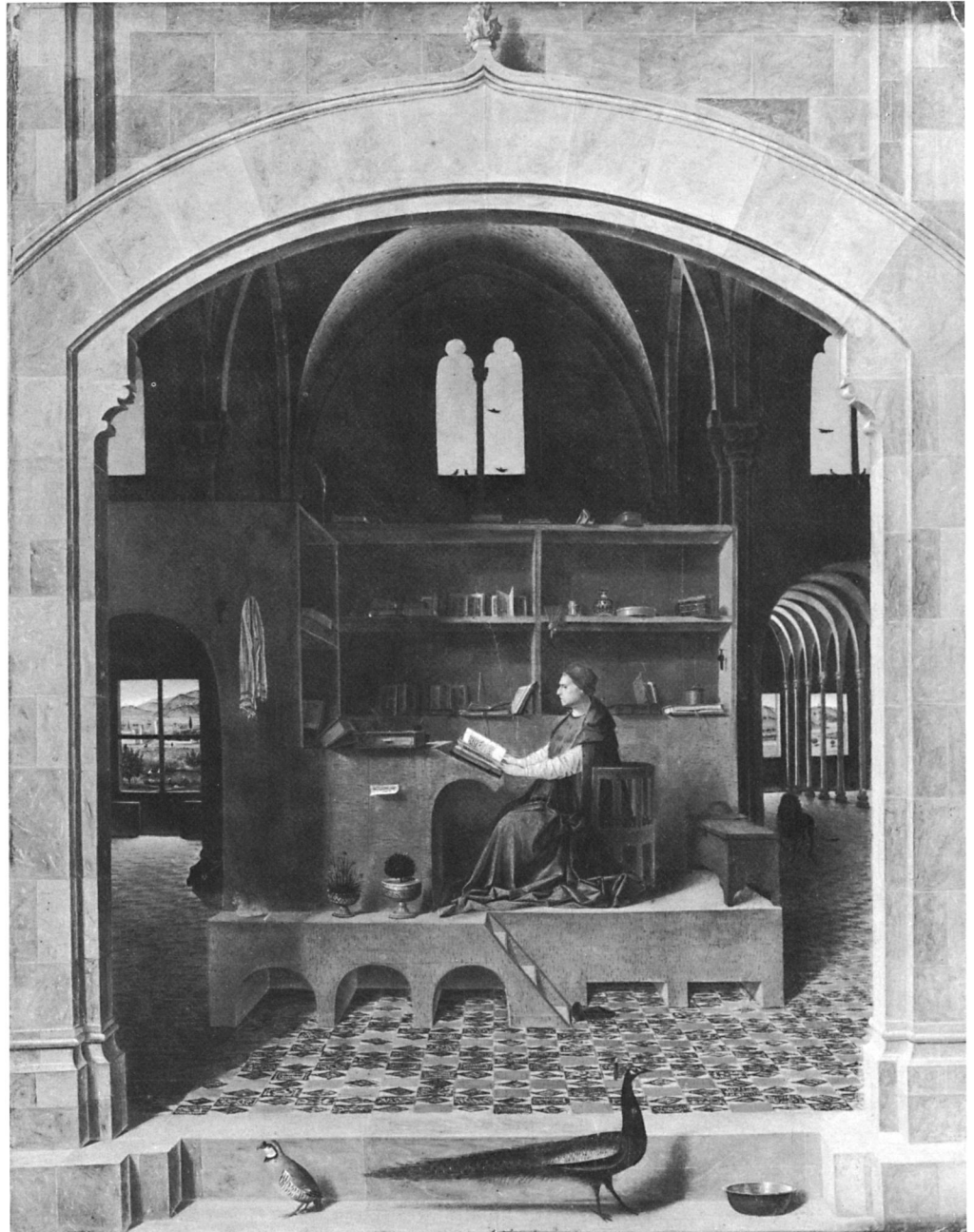
² Oil on panel, 46 x 36.5cm; see M. Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, 2nd ed., London, 1961, 40f. The painting is universally attributed to Antonello today, although there is disagreement regarding the date of the work. N. Little, "A Note on the Date of the London 'St. Jerome in his Study' by Antonello da Messina," *Arte veneta*, xxx, 1976, 154ff., and Jolly, 27f., review that problem.

³ Jan's now lost Lomellini Triptych was in Naples in King Alfonso V's collection when Bartolommeo Fazio described it there by 1456 in his *De Viris Illustribus*. The exterior shutters had portraits of Battista Lomellini and his wife, while the interior consisted of an *Annunciation* flanked by John the Baptist and "Jerome like a living being in a library done with rare art: for if you move away from it a little it seems that it recedes inwards and that it has complete books laid open in it, while if you go near it is evident that there is only a summary of these" ("Hieronymus uiuenti persimilis. biblioteca mirae artis. quippe quae si paulum ab ea discedas uideatur introrsus recedere et totos libros pandere. quorum capita modo appropinquanti appareant"). The translation is that of M. Baxandall, "Bartholomaeus Facius on Painting: A Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of the *De Viris Illustribus*," *Journal of the Warburg and*

Courtauld Institutes, xxvii, 1964, 102 and 103. R. Weiss, in his "Jan van Eyck and the Italians," *Italian Studies*, xi, 1956, 9f., discusses Alfonso's acquisition of the triptych.

⁴ This study was already written when Friedmann published his *A Bestiary for St. Jerome*, which includes a chapter on the iconography of this painting. I found his book helpful in several respects, as will be noted below, but Friedmann's analysis has not altered my views. I hope that my discussion will prove a more far-reaching and complete analysis of the painting. A criticism of Friedmann's often fine text is that he generally limits his iconographical analyses to the animal elements in paintings of Jerome, ignoring other symbols used in the images that would lead to a far more complete understanding of the iconography. Other general treatments of the theme of "Jerome in His Study" include A. Venturi, *L'arte a S. Gerolamo*, Milan, 1924; A. Strümpell, "Hieronymus im Gehäuse," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, II, 1925-26, 173-252; M. Meiss, "French and Italian Variations on an Early Fifteenth Century Theme: St. Jerome in His Study," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, sér. 6, LXII, 1963, 147ff.; and O. Pächt, "Zur Entstehung des Hieronymus im Gehäuse," *Pantheon*, XXI, 1963, 131ff. Friedmann includes an extensive bibliography on Jerome.

⁵ See in particular the very important chapter V ("Reality and Symbol"), Panofsky, I, 131ff., which defines the characteristics of disguised symbolism, so much a part of Flemish art in the 15th century.



1 Antonello da Messina,
Saint Jerome in His Study.
London, National Gallery
(photo: by courtesy of the
Trustees)

landscape is seen. A lion walks from a second vaulted space which lies perpendicular to the main hall (Fig. 3).⁶ This entire scene is viewed through a large, basket arch stone doorway which cuts across the foreground of the painting. On its threshold are a partridge, a peacock, and a basin of water. The sun streams in brightly onto Jerome through this open doorway, while the cat, partridge, and peacock remain stationary and subdued.

Several factors encourage the viewer to look for disguised symbolism. The unusual nature of the objects surrounding Jerome is perhaps the most glaring, but their arrangement is also significant. Although the painting ap-

pears convincingly spacious in an illusionistic, three-dimensional sense, an analysis of its two-dimensional surface reveals a division into nine parts. The triple arrangement of the windows on the uppermost level is repeated by the triple arrangement of landscape/Jerome/landscape in the middle portion of the painting, and by the triple arrangement of partridge/peacock/basin on the lowest level. For all the amazing naturalness of the individual objects within the painting, there remains an artificiality about the overall scene. I will explore the meanings of these objects and offer a textual source that may account for the unusual nature of the scene. Of course, one of the

⁶ J. O'Gorman, *The Architecture of the Monastic Library in Italy, 1300-1600*, New York, 1972, 14, has identified this peripheral area as an example of the new architectural type for the monastic library that was

developed in central Italy in the mid-15th century. Michelozzo's S. Marco library in Florence of ca. 1440 is the earliest.

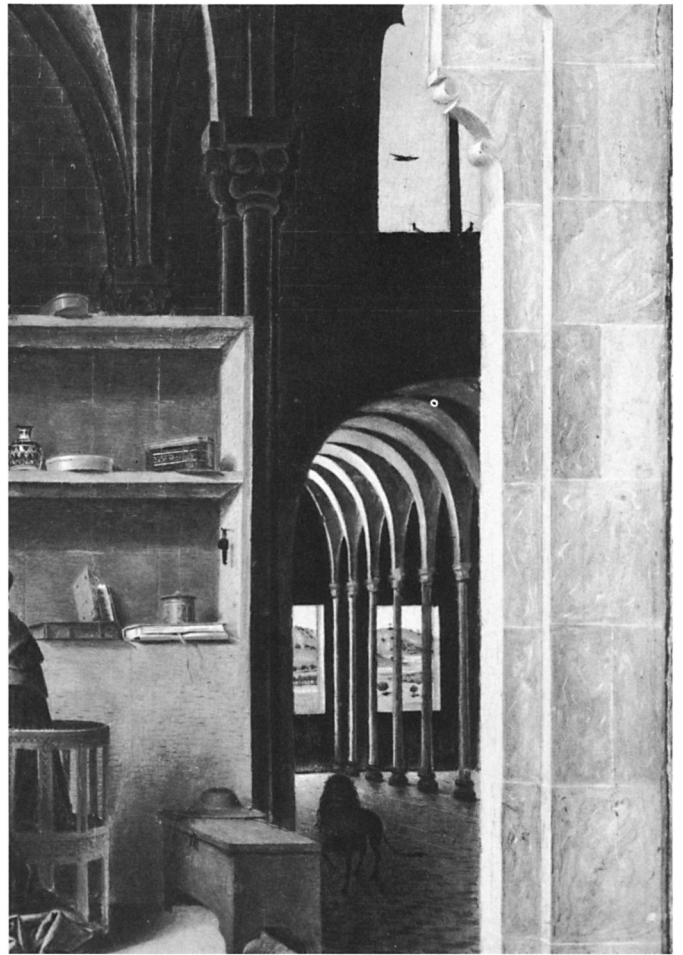


2 Detail of Fig. 1

difficulties in dealing with the symbolism of this image is the fact that the painting includes numerous objects, many of which have more than one accepted meaning within the fifteenth century. The peacock, for instance, is a well-known symbol for vanity, but is also a celestial bird found in Paradise settings. Several controlling factors exist that will aid in the interpretation of these disguised symbols. First, a number of them — e.g., the basin, towel, clear-glass carafe, and pyx boxes — are often found together, and have relatively predictable meanings, although they appear more commonly within the context of Mariological scenes where they refer to Mary's virginal womb and her purity. The question here would be why they are included in this scene of Saint Jerome. The second controlling factor is the imagery found in Jerome's Epistle 22, the text that I believe is the principal source for the painting. It both accounts for the inclusion of Mariological references in the painting and offers additional themes, such as penitence and the dangers of the worldly existence, which are found as a common thread of meaning within a num-

⁷ General treatments of the symbolism of the peacock can be found in Charbonneau-Lassay, 618ff.; Rowland, 1978, 127ff.; and Friedmann, 284ff.

⁸ The basin of water is associated with purification through its association both with the cleansing of the priest's hands during the celebration



3 Detail of Fig. 1

ber of the other objects included in Antonello's painting. Third, I believe that the grid-like structure of the painting allows some of the symbols to be "read" both vertically (indicating an association among one group of objects) and horizontally (indicating an association among another group), so that multiple levels of meaning are sometimes appropriate for a single object.

Our exploration of the meaning of Antonello's painting begins with the observation that it is remarkably similar to an Annunciation. Like the Virgin Annunciate, Jerome is seated and reading, and faces towards the left where the angel would commonly appear. Also like her, he is surrounded by objects, almost every one of which, from carafe and pyx to peacock and carnation, is found in fifteenth-century paintings of the Annunciation (cf. Figs. 4 and 5). Thus Antonello seems to establish for us a context within which we can begin to read these symbols. The peacock should be seen in a positive light, as a symbol of celestial immortality or incorruptibility,⁷ and the basin of water next to it as a reference to purification.⁸ The pyxes

of the Mass, and with baptism. That similar basins were used during the "Lavabo" in the 15th century can be seen in the painting of the *Mass of Saint Gregory* (Brussels, Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts; Panofsky, II, fig. 227), sometimes attributed to Robert Campin. Regarding the symbolism of the "Lavabo," consult J. A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite:*

on the shelves above would refer to Mary's womb which held the body of Christ,⁹ and its virginal condition is indicated by the stoppered, clear-glass carafe at the left end of the middle shelf.¹⁰ The apothecary jars probably refer to Christ the Apothecary, an image that signifies the healing of mankind's ills through the Incarnation of Christ.¹¹ The potted tree would be an indoor version of the enclosed garden of Mary's virginity (cf. Figs. 4 and 6),¹² and the potted carnations a reference either to Mary's betrothal to Christ, or to the Incarnation and/or Passion of Christ.¹³ The towel and the cat — and, as will be suggested later, also the unlit hanging lamp — introduce a contrasting set of ideas, and it is significant that they are in a shadowy area of the painting. The towel in fifteenth-century Annunciations is in pristine condition because it is a reference to Mary's untouched, virginal state. Here it seems to be a symbol by

contrast: purposefully sullied, it implies a non-pure nature. Cats, too, are most commonly used as negative symbols in medieval and Renaissance literature; they are only rarely seen in fifteenth-century art, but, again, the negative connotations predominate.¹⁴ They are associated with the Devil waiting to trap men's souls, and with sexual promiscuity. This brief examination of Antonello's painting has "set the scene," so to speak, by recognizing a dual pattern: Mariological symbols that refer to the Incarnation and the states of virginity and purity, and other symbols that represent opposing states.

Antonello's painting is not the only fifteenth-century painting of Jerome that makes references to the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation: the association in others has generally been explained by the fact that Saint Jerome was one of the earliest defenders of the perpetual virginity of

Its Origins and Development, rev. and abridged ed., New York, 1961, 349ff., and A. Fortescue, "Lavabo," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913, ix, 44. C. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton, 1982, 26ff., discusses the relation of the towel, pitcher, and basin in the Ghent Altarpiece *Annunciation* to the celebration of the Mass, and includes references to the writings of both modern iconographers and medieval theologians. Durandus specifically refers to the basin used by the priest as representing the purification possible through baptism and penance (cited by Purtle, 27, n. 44). Similar basins are used in a variety of 15th-century images of the Baptism of Christ, e.g., Ghiberti's in his *Gates of Paradise* on the Florentine Baptistery, and the Limbourgs' in their *Belles Heures* (fol. 211v) in *The Cloisters*, New York.

⁹ On the identification and meaning of the pyx, see M. Lavin, "The Altar of Corpus Domini in Urbino: Paolo Uccello, Joos van Ghent, Piero della Francesca," *Art Bulletin*, xlix, 1967, 18; and Bergström, 16f. Panofsky, 305 and esp. 305², notes the likelihood of Jan van Eyck having popularized the motif of the rounded pyx hanging out over a shelf.

¹⁰ Although the carafe is at the far left, on the darkened end of the shelf, there is a strong highlight on it. This suggests the familiar Eyckian symbol of the untouched womb ("As the sunbeam through the glass, / Passeth but not staineth . . .") discussed by M. Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings," *Art Bulletin*, xxvii, 1945, 179f., and by Panofsky, 1, 147. The carafe is also womblike in its low, bulbous shape and in containing the living water, Christ. Bergström, 12f., further associates the carafe with the "fountain sealed" of the Song of Solomon 4:12, again a symbol of Mary's virginal womb, and suggests that the carafe may also be a reference to the Fountain of Life. In his "Disguised Symbolism in 'Madonna' Pictures and Still Life: II," *Burlington Magazine*, xcvi, 1955, 346, Bergström notes a *Vanitas* by Jan Davidsz. de Heem (Brussels, Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts) where the glass carafe is labeled "Aqua vitae." See the discussion below of the theological associations between the Fountain of Life and Mary's womb. Such carafes were also used by alchemists for various alchemical conjunctions, thus maintaining their generative qualities. See, for example, L. S. Dixon, "Bosch's *Garden of Delights* Triptych: Remnants of a 'Fossil' Science," *Art Bulletin*, lxiii, 1981, 103f.

¹¹ See Bergström, 4ff., on this use of the apothecary jar, and see below for additional material on Jerome as a healer of mankind.

¹² Potted trees appear often in 15th-century Annunciations and other Mariological scenes, usually in ones without exterior garden views. That

they are miniature gardens signifying virginity is made clear in the Strassburg *Doubting of Joseph* (Fig. 6): the rim of the pot is crenellated, indicating its fortified nature, and the story depicted is of the angel approaching Joseph to assure him that Mary's virginity is indeed intact. Antonello includes a potted tree in his *Syracuse Annunciation*, and other examples include the Upper Rhenish *Annunciation* in the Reinhart Collection, Winterthur; several engravings by the Master E. S., including the *Nativity* (Lehrs 22) and *Madonna and Child with Bird* (Lehrs 70); Baldovinetti's *Annunciation* in the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.; and the 1504 *Annunciation* by Francesco di Simone da Sta. Croce (Bergamo, Accademia Carrara).

¹³ See below, n. 22, for the carnation as a symbol of betrothal. The carnation is additionally associated with the flesh of Christ, particularly at the moment of his Incarnation or at the Passion. Even the etymology of the English words "incarnation" and "carnation" suggests these links between the flower and the flesh. Cf. *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, ed. J. A. H. Murray, Oxford, 1893, ii, 124, s.v. "carnation" (from the Latin *carnatio*, meaning fleshiness, corpulence) and x, 144, s.v. "incarnate" (from the Latin *incarnatus*, meaning made flesh). On these aspects of its symbolism, see R. Koch, "Flower Symbolism in the Portinari Altar," *Art Bulletin*, xlvii, 73 and 76, and Bergström, 13, n. 24 (unfortunately, I have been unable to consult his more extensive *Den symboliska nejlikan*, Malmö, 1958). M. B. McNamee, "The Medieval Latin Liturgical Drama and the Annunciation Triptych of the Master of the Aix-en-Provence Annunciation," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, sér. 6, lxxxiii, 1974, 40, discusses its use in the Aix *Annunciation*.

¹⁴ The cat will be discussed below, and n. 36 includes a number of Mariological paintings with cats. On their symbolism in general, see McCulloch, 102; White, 90f.; Rowland, 1973, 50ff.; M. O. Howey, *The Cat in the Mysteries of Religion and Magic*, New York, 1931; and F. C. Sillar and R. M. Meyler, *Cats: Ancient and Modern*, New York, 1966, who mention Antonello's *Jerome* on p. 42 and cite unconvincingly a child's rhyme as the source for the cat. K. Clark, *Animals and Men*, New York, 1977, 45f., observes that the number of cats in works of Western art is very small, particularly in comparison to images of dogs. Friedmann, 162, states, and I concur, that this is the only painting of Jerome that includes a cat. He sees no symbolic significance for the cat in Antonello's painting, but see n. 36 below for an earlier reference of his to cat symbolism.



4 Crivelli, *Annunciation*. London, National Gallery (photo: by courtesy of the Trustees)



5 *Annunciation*, in *Saint Jerome, Minor Works*, Vat., Bibl. Apostolica Vaticana, ms lat. 362, detail of fol. 1 (photo: Vatican)



6 Strassburg Master, *Doubting of Joseph*. Strassburg, Musée des Beaux-Arts (photo: Museum)

the Virgin Mary.¹⁵ Two of his works are treatises on the matter, the *Liber adversus Helvidium, de Perpetua Virginitate B. Mariae* of 383, and the *Adversus*

¹⁵ Two of the images of Jerome that have elicited discussion on the relationship between Jerome and Mary are the *Saint Jerome in His Study* in the Boucicaut Hours (fol. 171v) of ca. 1405-08 — where a white lily is displayed conspicuously on the nearby chest — and the Eyckian *Saint Jerome in His Study* in Detroit (Fig. 12), which includes a stoppered, clear-glass carafe, a covered jar, a *theriaca* container, and an apple, all of which have Mariological significance. On the Boucicaut *Jerome*, see Bergström, 14, and Friedmann, 164, n. 185. Other images of Jerome with a nearby lily include those illustrated in Friedmann as figs. 40, 173, and 185. On the iconography of the Detroit *Jerome*, see E. Panofsky, "A Letter to St. Jerome: A Note on the Relationship between Petrus Christus and Jan van Eyck," *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, ed. D. Miner, Princeton, 1954, 102ff.; Bergström, *passim*; E. Hall, "Cardinal Albergati, St. Jerome and the Detroit Van Eyck," *Art Quarterly*, xxxi, 1968, 3ff., and his "More About the Detroit Van Eyck: The Astrolabe, the Congress of Arras and Cardinal Albergati," *Art Quarterly*, xxxiv, 1971, 180ff.; Friedmann, 134ff. (in relation to a *Jerome* by Cranach); and J. Hand, *Joos van Cleve and the Saint Jerome in the Norton Gallery and School of Art*, West Palm Beach, 1972, *passim*. Many questions have arisen concerning the attribution of the Detroit panel. I believe that if it is not an original, it is a very faithful replica of a work by Jan van Eyck. See Jolly, 28, n.3. A sampling of other 15th- and early 16th-century images of Jerome with a clear-glass carafe and/or apothecary jars includes those illustrated in Strümpell, pls. xl-C, xliii-A, xlii-A, xlii-B, xlviii-B, xlix-A, B, C, and D; G. Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy*, Florence, 1978, fig. 604; Friedmann, figs. 1, 15, 40, 104, 166, and 200. Friedmann, 253ff., has identified what he believes to be another Mariological symbol that is sometimes found in conjunction with Jerome, particularly in Italian art: the lioness. He believes that the fact that Jerome defended the perpetual virginity of Mary is the basis for this association, and tentatively suggests that the specific source for the symbol may have been Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, which states that the lioness "is never pregnant twice."

Jovinianum of 393.¹⁶ There is a third work, however, that was very well known in the fifteenth century and that also dealt with this subject, in this case offering Mary's conduct as a model of behavior for a young follower of Jerome, Eustochium. This is Jerome's famous Epistle 22, composed in Rome in 384, only shortly after his first great treatise on Mary's virginity, and written in honor of the occasion of Eustochium's vow to remain a virgin.¹⁷ Three main themes can be isolated within the rather long letter. First, the letter is to be read as a handbook for salvation. Jerome outlines for Eustochium an ascetic manner of life, a life of isolation and mortification in the wilderness, which he almost assures her will result in her being admitted to the ranks of the Blessed in Paradise. Secondly, time after time the letter defends virginity as being the human state which is most like the divine, and which is far preferable to any other, even to that of Church-sanctioned marriage. Last, although it may seem paradoxical to us in a defense of virginity, Jerome turns frequently to the richly erotic language and allegory of several of the Old Testament books, especially of the Song of Solomon. Throughout this letter praising abstinence and chastity, Jerome makes use of the Song of Solomon's images of lovemaking, betrothal, and marriage. In Jerome's view of salvation, Eustochium's goal is to be like the Old Testament bride who, already in Jerome's writings, functions as a type for the Virgin Mary. Eustochium is to make a covenant and become the Bride of Christ. Like the Virgin, whom she is to emulate, she will become spiritually united with the Bridegroom and bear the fruit of her efforts in her womb. These are the themes that I believe are fundamental to the iconographical program in Antonello's *Jerome*.

Jerome makes reference in Epistle 22 to the Annunciation and other Mariological themes noted above in Antonello's painting. For instance, the letter opens with an exhortation to Eustochium that immediately creates a parallel between her and the Virgin Mary: "Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear," a quotation from Psalm 45:10 that was interpreted in the Middle Ages as a type for the Annunciation and used to uphold the

well-accepted theory that the actual conception of Christ took place through the ear of the Virgin Mary.¹⁸ Jerome specifically counsels Eustochium to be like the Virgin Mary in another passage which makes reference to the Annunciation:

Set before your eyes the blessed Mary, whose purity was such that she earned the reward of being the mother of the Lord. When the angel Gabriel came down to her in man's form, and said: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured; the Lord is with thee," she was filled with terror and consternation and could not reply; for she had never been greeted by a man before. . . . You too may be perhaps the Lord's mother.¹⁹

Jerome urges Eustochium to be like the Virgin Mary in still other ways. Not only is she to be the Mother of Christ, but she is also to be his Bride. Jerome uses the word "sponsa" for Eustochium throughout the letter. He writes, for instance: "He [Christ] having been conceived grows to manhood, and as He becomes older regards you not as His mother but as His bride."²⁰ Elsewhere he includes quotations from the Song of Solomon 5:8 and 4:12 when referring to her as the "sponsa":

Let the seclusion of your own chamber ever guard you; ever let the Bridegroom sport with you within. If you pray, you are speaking to your Spouse: if you read, He is speaking to you. When sleep falls upon you, He will come behind the wall and will put His hand through the hole in the door and will touch your flesh. And you will awake and rise up and cry: "I am sick with love." And you will hear Him answer: "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a garden shut up, a fountain sealed."²¹

The potted carnations (Fig. 2) are Antonello's means to demonstrate this marriage-like commitment to Christ which is necessary for salvation. In the fifteenth century, the carnation appears in many secular images as a symbol

¹⁶ The former is printed in Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, xxiii, 183-206, and is translated by J. Hritz, *St. Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, Washington, D.C., 1965, with an introductory discussion of the text. The latter is in Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, xxiii:211-338, and is translated in J. G. Nolan, "Jerome and Jovinian," Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1956. According to M.L.W. Laistner, "The Study of St. Jerome in the Early Middle Ages," in F. X. Murphy, ed., *A Monument to St. Jerome*, New York, 1952, 250, although the text against Helvidius was known and quoted, the *Adversus Jovinianum* was Jerome's most popular treatise in the Middle Ages. It is listed in at least twenty library catalogues between the early 9th and 12th centuries.

¹⁷ Laistner, 252, and Antin, 324f., confirm that this was Jerome's most popular letter during the Middle Ages, and was widely known and quoted. It is in Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, xxii:394-425, and English translations are available in Wright, 52ff. (juxtaposed with the Latin) and in C.

Mierow, *The Letters of St. Jerome* (Ancient Christian Writers, xxxiii), London, 1963, 134ff.

¹⁸ Ep. 22:1; Wright 52/53 (Latin text/English text). Eustochium, in one of the very few paintings we have of her, holds a book with these opening lines on it (Master of the Strauss Madonna, Rome, Vatican; illustrated in G. Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*, Florence, 1952, fig. 411, text col. 360). It is significant that her attribute there and generally is the white lily. It refers to her virginity and again reminds the viewer of Eustochium's relation to the Virgin Mary and to the Annunciation. Schiller, I, 41f., and Y. Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine*, Boston, 1957, 295ff., discuss the aural conception of Christ and include quotations from patristic writers through those of the late Middle Ages.

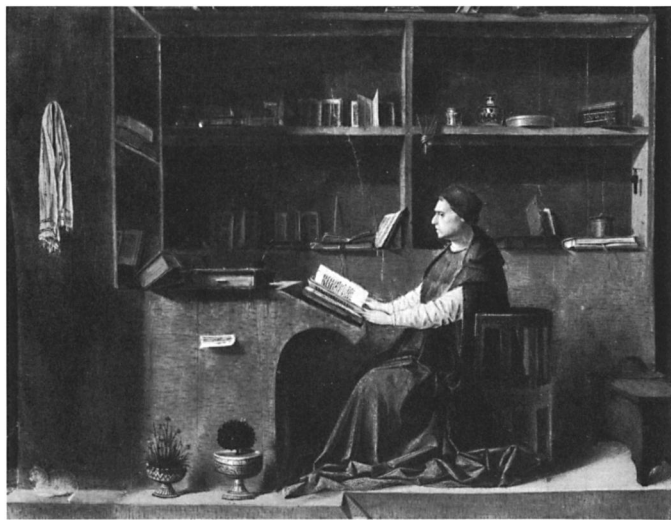
¹⁹ Ep. 22:38; Wright 146/47.

²⁰ Ep. 22:38; Wright 148/49.

²¹ Ep. 22:25; Wright 108/09.



7 Antonello da Messina, *Virgin Annunciate*, Messina, Museo Nazionale (photo: Museum)



8 Detail of Fig. 1

²² Many examples are illustrated or listed in the following discussions of carnations: F. Mercier, "La valeur symbolique de l'oeillet dans la peinture du moyen-âge," *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne*, lxxi, 1937, 233ff.; E. Wolffhardt, "Beiträge zur Pflanzensymbolik," *Zeitschrift für Kunstwissenschaft*, viii, 1954, 190ff., and 184ff., discusses its medicinal properties, including its use as a love potion; G. de Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane, 1450-1600*, Geneva, 1958-1964, 1, col. 288f.; M. Levi d'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance: Botanical Symbolism in Italian Painting*, Florence, 1977, 79ff., and who also notes the carnation's association with divine love; and L. Behling, *Die Pflanze in der mittelalterlichen Tafelmalerei*, Weimar, 1957, 149 and n. 504.

²³ See above, n. 13, regarding the carnation and the Incarnation.

of betrothal. One finds it most commonly in portraits, but also in images of engaged couples in gardens.²² Carnations also appear in Annunciations (e.g., Fig. 4), probably because that is the moment when Mary accepts the role of both Mother and Bride.²³ Antonello's own *Annunciation* from his S. Gregorio Polyptych of 1473 (Fig. 7) includes carnations reaching up behind the shelf alongside the Virgin. Jerome repeatedly reminds Eustochium that in order to become the Bride of Christ, she must be like Mary and maintain her virginity. The potted tree next to the carnations suggests just that, for it has been seen that it is a miniature version of the "garden enclosed" of virginity.²⁴

Others among the objects surrounding Jerome continue the imagery of Salvation through Mary/Eustochium, the fertile Bride who remains virginal. Jerome writes of wombs in several passages, discussing variously Mary's virginal womb and other non-virginal wombs. For example: "Eve continually bore children in travail. But now that a virgin has conceived in the womb a child ... the fetters of the old curse are broken."²⁵

We observed above the two oval pyxes (Fig. 8) which refer to Mary's womb as a container of the body of Christ. The stoppered, clear-glass carafe proclaims its unchanged state as it conceived, held, and gave birth to Christ the living water, and also makes reference to Mary's womb as the "fountain sealed" of the Old Testament, which then miraculously gave forth the *aqua vitae* that cleanses and redeems mankind.²⁶ The apothecary jars on the middle shelf again refer to this redeeming power of Christ made possible by the Incarnation, for Christ is the cure-all "medicine" that heals mankind. Jerome writes: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who healeth all thy diseases. ..." ²⁷

The negative connotations have been cited of the soiled towel and cat found in the shadowed area to the left of Jerome. The text of Jerome's Epistle 22 allows their significance to be better understood, as it does that of the hanging lamp to the left of the towel. One goal of Jerome's letter is to assure Eustochium that her vow of virginity is appropriate if she wishes to become the Bride of Christ and be saved. But Jerome goes further than that, for he

²⁴ See above, n. 12. It is interesting that Carpaccio, in his *Dream of Saint Ursula* (Venice, Accademia), a scene that he represents in a composition very similar to an Annunciation, except that Ursula is asleep in bed and the angel enters from the right, includes on the back window ledge a pot of carnations and a potted tree. Carpaccio's plants also seem to refer to virginal betrothal to Christ, for Ursula, like Eustochium, had committed herself to Christ rather than to her earthly bridegroom. The association of the carnation with the Passion of Christ may additionally be appropriate, for the angel foretells the return to Cologne and Ursula's martyrdom there. It is not known whether Antonello's *Saint Jerome* was already in Venice when Carpaccio painted his Ursula series, for Marcantonio Michiel does not record its presence there until 1529 (quoted in T. Frimmel, *Der Anonimo Morelliano [Marcantonio Michiel's Notizia d'opere del disegno]*, Vienna, 1888, 98).

²⁵ Ep. 22:21; Wright 98/99.

²⁶ See above p. 241 and nn. 9-10 on the symbolism of the pyx and carafe.

²⁷ Ep. 22:18; Wright 88/89. Jerome here quotes from Ps. 103:2. See above, n. 11, on apothecary jars.

counsels her to become a recluse, leaving behind the sinful life of the worldly existence in Rome. Always the satirical pedagogue, he makes his points to Eustochium by contrasting good behavior with bad, citing example after example from the cosmopolitan Roman milieu in which they were living. Although this letter proposes a rather pallid existence devoid of contact with the colorful world, it is itself a source of rich worldly images from both the Old Testament and from fourth-century Rome. The three objects in the shadowed area represent the dangers of this life so repugnant to Jerome, and that, as will be seen, he associates with city living.

The hanging lamp next to the soiled towel is obviously unlit.²⁸ This refers to specific passages in Epistle 22 concerning the foolish virgins, from the parable in Matthew 25. Jerome warns Eustochium not to be like the "foolish virgins, who, having no oil in their lamps, are shut out by the Bridegroom."²⁹ He repeats this theme of the wise virgin remaining within the chamber of the Bridegroom later, in the section immediately following a lengthy passage describing the sinful city: "Go not from home. . . . Dinah went out and was seduced. . . . Let foolish virgins roam abroad; do for your part stay within with the Bridegroom."³⁰ Jerome refers to this parable to remind Eustochium that being a virgin is not enough; to ensure salvation, one must be on guard against temptation, yet be ever prepared to accept Christ.

The cat, then, is a particularly appropriate symbol in this context, for its ability to wait and then pounce on mice was interpreted as analogous to the Devil's waiting to capture the souls of men. Jerome repeatedly warns Eustochium to guard herself against the traps of the Devil, as in his passage regarding avoidance of the vice of

vainglory: "You must also avoid with especial care the traps that are set for you."³¹ Cats, however, were sometimes associated with a particular type of entrapment. Aristotle's belief that the libidinous nature of the female cat tempted the male of the species into sexual intercourse was still held in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.³² That the belief in both these aspects of the evil nature of the cat persisted into the fifteenth century is shown by Sebastian Brant in his *Narrenschiff* of 1494. There, in a prelude to the section "Of Adultery," it is evident that he believes in the cat's capacity to entrap, as well as its sexual promiscuity.

If through his fingers one can see
And lets his wife promiscuous be,
As cat she views the mice with glee.³³

Then in the main text Brant adds:

The cats pursue the mice in haste
When once they've had a little taste.
Women who try out other men
Become so bold and shameless then
That deep they sink into the mire
And only think of their desire.³⁴

It is exactly this entrapment that Jerome particularly warns Eustochium of, for her greatest treasure, as Jerome insists, is her virginity. "Far from trumpeting the praises of virginity, I only wish to keep it safe. To know what is good is not enough; when you have chosen it you must guard it with jealous care."³⁵ Thus the cat represents the lure of sexual temptation, and waits to ensnare the in-

²⁸ For the identification of this object with a lamp, see the lighted one in Mantegna's painting *Saint Jerome in Penitence* in São Paulo, Museu de Arte, ill. in E. Camesasca, *Mantegna*, Milan, 1964, pl. iv.

²⁹ Ep. 22:5; Wright 62/63.

³⁰ Ep. 22:25 and Ep. 22:26; Wright 108/09 and 112/13.

³¹ Ep. 22:27; Wright 112/13.

³² Rowland, 1973, 52f., notes the persistence of Aristotle's position, stated in his *Historia Animalium*, II (540a).

³³ S. Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, trans. with commentary E. Zeydel, New York, 1944, 136, and see comments in his n. 1. The original German reads

"Wer durch die fynger sehen kan/ Und loßt syn frow eym andern man/
Do lacht die katz die muß susß an" (from S. Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*, ed. M. Lemmer, Tübingen, 1962, 51).

³⁴ Zeydel, 138. The German reads: "Eyn katz den musen gern noch gat/
Wann sie eynst angebissen hat/ Welch hatt vil ander mann versucht/
Die wurt so schamper und verrucht/ Das sie keyn scham noch ere me acht/
Irn mutwill sie alleyn betracht" (Lemmer, 53).

³⁵ Ep. 22:23; Wright 102/103. Cf. also Ep. 22:25 and Ep. 22:26, from which some lines were quoted above, in which Jerome warns Eustochium about seduction and about protecting herself.

cautious virgin.³⁶

I have noted that Antonello expresses Jerome's didactic use of comparison and contrast through including symbols with both positive and negative connotations, and through brightly lit and shadowed areas. Antonello does this even more clearly in another way, for he has included two landscape views, one to either side of Jerome (Figs. 2-3). It is noteworthy that one of the landscapes — the one adjacent to the cat, towel, and lamp — includes a view of a city and people and animals, while the other excludes all man-made objects, people, and animals. This is a reference to Jerome's association of the worldly existence with life in the city, and of Salvation with the contemplative life of the hermit in the wilderness. Jerome advises Eustochium to "forget also thine own people and thy father's house, and the king shall desire thy beauty."³⁷ He exhorts her to leave her own land, which is of the demons, and "escape to the Mountain"³⁸ if she wishes to be betrothed to Christ the Bridegroom, as Israel before her was betrothed to God in the wilderness:

As in the ark there was nothing but the tablets of the

covenant, so in you let there be no thought of anything outside. . . . [He frees you] from the cares of this world so that you may leave the bricks and straw of Egypt and follow Him, the true Moses, through the wilderness and enter the land of promise.³⁹

He warns her about existence in the city:

I would not have you seek the Bridegroom in the public squares; I would not have you go about the corners of the city. . . . The Bridegroom cannot be found in the city squares. "Strait and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life."⁴⁰

Thus Eustochium the Bride is to be like Israel and isolate herself in the wilderness in order to make a covenant (betrothal) with Christ. For Jerome and other hermits, enduring the isolation of the wilderness became a means to salvation, and the wilderness itself was transformed into a paradise on earth.⁴¹ As Jerome relates to Eustochium, he had earlier done penance in the wilderness, and we are reminded of that cleansing by the presence of the Crucifix

³⁶ It is interesting that the cat does gain in popularity in art in the 16th century, particularly but not uniquely in Venice, and then often in the context of the Annunciation or scenes of the Holy Family. Hirn (as in n. 18), 289f., discusses the use of the cat in Annunciations and Last Suppers as "the Evil One." The idea of the evil overtone is correct, but I suspect that the cat more specifically represents, as it does in Antonello's *Jerome*, the lure of sexual temptation. See, for instance, Giulio Romano's well-known painting of the *Madonna della Gatta* (Naples, Capodimonte) and also his *Two Lovers Upon a Couch* (Leningrad, The Hermitage). Both paintings contain similar cats that stare at the viewer. Certainly in the latter painting, the cat has erotic overtones, and probably it does in the former, where it may suggest Mary's victory over sexual temptation and her miraculously virginal conception. Other Annunciations with cats include ones by Veronese (Washington, D.C., National Gallery), Alessandro Vitale (Urbino, Galleria Nazionale), Lotto (Recanati, Sta. Maria Sopra Mercanti), and Lelio Orsi (private collection). H. Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch*, New York, 1946, 95, refers to the cat as representing the "physical, lustful, bestial part of man's nature" in two paintings of the *Virgin and Child*, one by Dosso Dossi and an earlier one from the circle of Cosimo Tura (both in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Johnson Collection). In both of these the cat is contrasted to the goldfinch, a bird symbolic of the spiritual part of man. Leonardo did drawings of the *Virgin and Child with a cat*, and Barocci painted a *Holy Family with Cat* (London, National Gallery). That sexual temptation is connoted by the cat is also suggested by the fact that the cat begins to appear in images of Adam and Eve in Eden, for instance in Dürer's engraving *Adam and Eve* of 1503, in Bosch's left wing, with *Adam and Eve*, of his *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych (Madrid, Prado), and in later ones by Franz Floris and Jan Bruegel. Although Panofsky's interpretation of the cat and the four humors is certainly correct (*The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 4th rev. ed., Princeton, 1971, 84f.), I believe this second symbolic level is also present. Also of interest is the *Annunciation* in the Prayerbook of Duke Wilhelm IV of Bavaria of 1535. The *Annunciation* is surrounded by four Old Testament scenes, including the *Fall of Adam and Eve*. In the *Annunciation* proper is a small dog which is near Mary, while below the scene is a cat with a mouse. Probably the faithful dog is contrasted to the preying, promiscuous cat (ill. in E. Guldán, *Eva und Maria*, Graz and Cologne, 1966, fig. 67). The Eyckian miniature *The Birth of John the Baptist* in the Turin-Milan Hours (Turin, Museo Civico) also pairs a dog with a cat in the foreground: the dog

calmly eats a bone, while the cat looks up from a dish and arches its back, apparently responding to something on our side of the picture plane. I am not presently ready to interpret its meaning, but would note that this is a scene of a miraculous birth, and does include pyxes and a clear-glass carafe. It may be that the cat and dog signify a sort of duality of sexual natures.

³⁷ Ep. 22:1; Wright 52/53.

³⁸ Ep. 22:1; Wright 54/55.

³⁹ Ep. 22:24; Wright 106/07. Williams, 17ff., 28ff., and 39ff., deals with this popular patristic idea that isolation in the wilderness is a cleansing process which is a means to salvation. He also discusses the closely related theme, which Jerome here evokes, of the wilderness as a place of nuptial bliss between Israel and God because of the covenant formed there (pp. 15ff). On the specific parallels between Christ and Moses in the wilderness, see his pp. 22f.

⁴⁰ Ep. 22:25; Wright 108/09.

⁴¹ For further discussion of and bibliography on the theme of the evil city and the paradisiacal desert in Jerome's writings, see Antin, 104ff., 141ff., 291ff., and 295f. Jerome specifically transforms his mortification in the wilderness into a joyful preview of Paradise, as he relates in Ep. 22:7, Ep. 14:10, and elsewhere (see Antin, 143 and 293). Jerome's writings reflect the growing faith in the early Church in the paradisiacal quality of the penitential wilderness, and this becomes an important theme in later theological writings. See Williams, 12ff., and *passim*, who notes this dualistic nature of the wilderness: it is a place of testing and punishment, yet also is an earthly paradise; it threatens death, while at the same time it offers rebirth and redemption. See also G. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, Cambridge, 1959, 309ff. and 341ff., and H. Anderson, "The Terrestrial Paradise," Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Buffalo, 1973, 245ff. and 266ff. The desert wilderness is a particularly interesting substitute for Paradise, because the word "paradise" itself comes from the Persian word for "garden," and theologically speaking Paradise can be considered a return to the Garden of Eden. For general discussion of Paradise, see Williams, 10ff.; Ladner, 63ff.; Anderson, 2ff and 16ff.; and J. Daniélou, "Terre et paradis chez les pères d'église," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, xxii, 1953, 433ff. While Paradise is described as a garden, lush with vegetation, the desert exhibits these qualities only in a spiritual way to the penitent ascete.

at the top of the shelves in front of him.⁴² In the difficult year following the writing of the letter to Eustochium, he determined to leave the evils of Rome and set out for the Holy Lands, once again to become a hermit.⁴³ Antonello has depicted these choices available to Eustochium by contrasting a populated landscape with an uninhabited one. Although the view out of the left window of a city, a couple in a boat, and other people walking is not inherently evil, it suggests the tempting pleasures of the worldly existence; its dangers are made clear by the cat, towel, and lamp which Antonello juxtaposes to it. On the other side, walking from the direction of the isolated landscape, is Jerome's faithful companion acquired while he was in the desert at Bethlehem, the lion. It functions here as an attribute of both Jerome and of the cleansing wilderness from which it came. The paired landscapes, with their contrasting natures, also establish positive and negative sides in the painting, and these are continued in the foreground objects and the uppermost windows, as will be indicated. This opposition is suggested formally, too, for while the vaults behind the arched opening near the lion are well lit, and create a light, arched shape within the darkened rectangle of the wall, this contrasts with the darkened area immediately under the lighter archway near the cat.⁴⁴

Turning to the figure of Jerome himself (Fig. 8), it is significant that he is reading, for in the letter Jerome urges Eustochium to do just that. Essentially, he advocates for her the contemplative life:

Read the Gospel, and see how Mary sitting at the feet of the Lord is preferred to the busy Martha. . . . Be thou too Mary, and prefer the Lord's teaching to food. Let your sisters run to and fro, and see how they may entertain Christ as a guest. Do you once for all cast away the burden of this world and sit at the Lord's feet, and say: "I have found him whom my soul sought; I will hold him,

I will not let him go."⁴⁵

He counsels her to read whenever possible: "Read often and learn all you can. Let sleep steal upon you with a book in your hand, and let the sacred page catch your drooping head."⁴⁶ Eustochium must obtain the knowledge necessary for Salvation; in particular, it is the Gospel — "The Lord's teaching" — that will be to her like food.

The basin and the two birds on the foreground sill (Fig. 9) further enrich and clarify the themes of the letter symbolized by the images in the middle section of the painting. The basin of clear water, I believe, has two different but related meanings here, one achieved when it is read vertically, in conjunction with the lion and uninhabited landscape, the other when it is associated with the peacock and partridge. Looking at it in conjunction with the landscape and lion, the basin is a symbol of purification, as discussed above.⁴⁷ It repeats Jerome's position that it is through isolation from the worldly existence that one is purified and then able to attain salvation. The combination of objects on the foreground sill, however, recalls the simple Paradise garden images of Early Christian art.⁴⁸ These gardens regularly include birds, particularly the peacock, and some form of water or wine. The water is a reference to the Fountain of Life, located in Paradise, from which the four rivers of Paradise flow. Peacocks were associated from Early Christian times through Antonello's day with the Paradise garden, because it was believed that their flesh was so hard that it never putrefied.⁴⁹ Consequently they symbolize resurrection and immortality, and are common inhabitants of celestial settings. Paul Underwood, in his monumental treatment of the iconography of the Fountain of Life, discusses several complex Carolingian images, and demonstrates that the peacocks present there — because of these associations — specifically refer to the function of the Fountain as a baptismal font which offers rebirth and salvation.⁵⁰ The par-

⁴² The famous passage describing Jerome's torment in the desert — "... in that lonely waste, scorched by the burning sun, which affords to hermits a savage dwelling-place, how often did I fancy myself surrounded by the pleasures of Rome! ..." — is from Jerome's letter to Eustochium (Ep. 22:7; Wright 66 and 68/67 and 69) and is the textual source for images of Jerome in Penitence which become so popular in the 15th and 16th centuries. These images virtually always include a Crucifix, which seems to serve as a model for Jerome's bodily torture. In the mid-15th century, however, Crucifixes appear only sporadically in scenes of Jerome in his study. See M. Meiss, "Scholarship and Penitence in the Early Renaissance: The Image of St. Jerome," *Pantheon*, xxxii, 1974, 134ff. for a general treatment of the theme.

⁴³ Jerome made many enemies in Rome, because of his outspoken criticism of the Christian community there. In 385 he left Rome, which he bitterly referred to as "Babylon" (Ep. 45:6-7), and set out for Palestine. Eustochium and her mother Paula heeded the advice in Epistle 22 and joined him there. All three died in Bethlehem.

⁴⁴ It is unusual that Antonello, when so clearly establishing "good" and "bad" sides to his painting, did not honor the tradition of making the picture's right be the "good," and vice versa. I can only assume that the original location of the painting in some manner dictated this reversal.

⁴⁵ Ep. 22:24; Wright 106 and 108/07 and 109.

⁴⁶ Ep. 22:17; Wright 86/87.

⁴⁷ See above n. 8.

⁴⁸ See H. s'Jacob, *Idealism and Realism, A Study of Sepulchral Symbolism*, Leiden, 1954, 147 and 161ff., and Schiller, III, 177f.

⁴⁹ Augustine, for instance, commented on this (*De Civitate Dei* xxi.4; see Rowland, 1978, 127), and the later bestiaries also note this quality (White, 149, and McCulloch, 153f.). Examples of 15th-century Paradise garden scenes with peacocks include both Italian ones — such as Stefano da Verona's *Madonna and Child in a Rose Garden* (Verona, Museo di Castelvecchio) and his fresco (attributed) of the *Madonna and Child* (Illasi, Chiesa Parrocchiale) — and Flemish ones, e.g., several of *The Virgin and Child in a Garden*, with or without additional saints, by the Master of 1499, the Master of the Catherine Legend, and the Master with the Embroidered Foliage (in the Richmond, Virginia, Museum; in Granada, Capilla Real; and in Amsterdam, Proehl Collection, respectively).

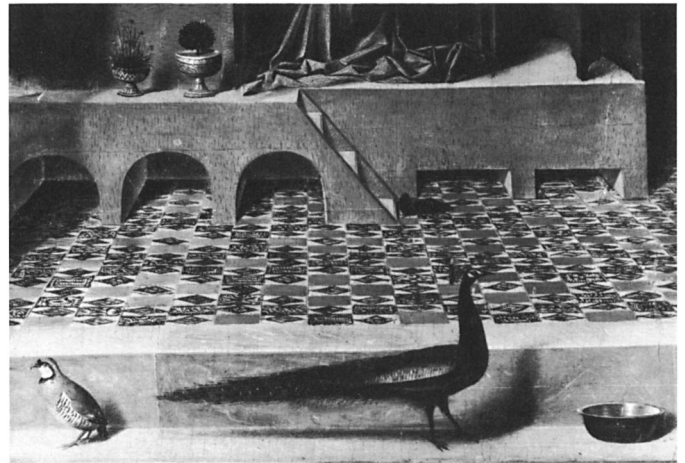
⁵⁰ Underwood, 88 and 114. The Carolingian *Fountain of Life* miniatures that he discusses are those in the Godescalc Gospels (Paris, Bibl. Nat., Nouv. acq. lat. 1203, fol. 3v) of 781-83 and in the Soissons Gospels (Paris, Bibl. Nat., lat. 8850, fols. 6v and 11v) of the early 9th century.

tridge, or a bird of similar build but with less readily identifiable anatomical form, is also sometimes found in such representations (Fig. 10).⁵¹ Thus, just as the potted tree is an indoor, miniature version of the Paradise garden, so the basin, partridge, and peacock are an abbreviated reference to Paradise and the redemptive power of the cleansing waters of its Fountain of Life.

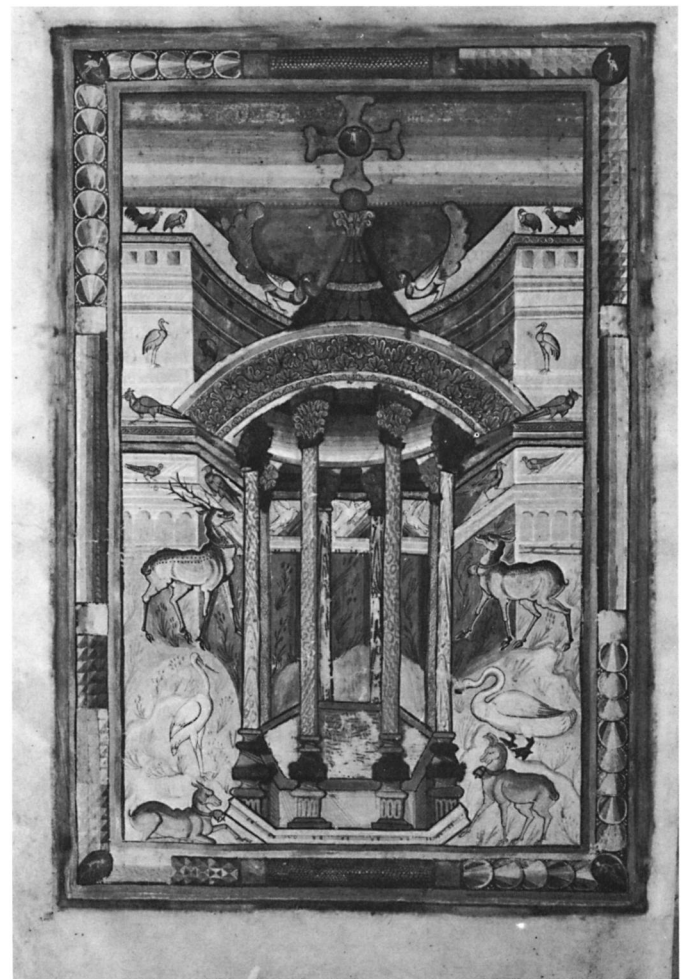
It is striking that this painting exhibits such a large number and variety of windows and doors — and of varying architectural styles — for open and closed windows and doors are leitmotifs in Epistle 22. Although Antonello does not seem to have taken any single passage from the letter and literally transformed it into a visual image, I suspect that the placement and treatment of openings may be significant in the painting, and deserve careful observation. Jerome makes statements such as:

... hear the words of Isaiah: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee ... Why need the door of your heart be closed to the Bridegroom? Let it be open to Christ but closed to the devil ... Daniel when he could no longer remain below withdrew to an upper room, but he kept its windows open towards Jerusalem. Do you too keep your windows open on the side where light may enter and you may see the City of God. Open not those other windows of which it is said: "By our windows death came in."⁵²

Is the foreground portal, which is distinct stylistically from the background architecture, a *porta coeli* where light enters from the heavenly City of God? The paradisiacal group of the peacock, partridge, and basin may be but intimations of the glory to be revealed when one passes through this portal and actually ascends to the Heavenly City of God. Although Jerome is not yet in Paradise, spiritually he anticipates what is to come. "Transport yourself in thought to Paradise" — Jerome counsels Eustochium in the concluding paragraph of his letter — "and begin to be now what you will be hereafter."⁵³ Antonello predicts Jerome's future in Paradise by locating the peacock directly below him, and by the small birds above. After the Last Judgment, some souls will make that transition to Heaven successfully, while others will not; just which will achieve Salvation is suggested in the third and uppermost level of the painting. There, birds are seen only in the two sets of windows above Jerome and the uninhabited landscape. Noting the care with which Antonello depicts these small creatures in these central



9 Detail of Fig. 1



10 *Fountain of Life*, Soissons Gospels. Paris, Bibl. Nat., lat. 8850, fol. 6v (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale)

⁵¹ I refer to the partridge-like birds in front of the cocks at the top of the Godescalc *Fountain of Life* and of one Soissons *Fountain of Life* (fol. 6v). Fifteenth-century examples include Pisanello's Paradise garden scene of the *Madonna of the Quail* (Verona, Museo di Castelvecchio), which actually includes a partridge, not a quail, and Stefano da Verona's similar painting in the same museum.

⁵² Ep. 22:26; Wright 111 and 113/110 and 112.

⁵³ Ep. 22:41; Wright 158/59. This expresses the monastic hope for attainment of an "internalized paradise" here on earth, and is closely

related to the spiritual anticipation of Paradise while in the wilderness. On this interior paradise — or paradise of the soul — see Williams, 50ff.; Ladner (as in n. 41), 69ff.; and Anderson (as in n. 41), 210ff. In the later Middle Ages the cleansing "wilderness" becomes more and more internalized, until it becomes a state of mind independent of physical location.

and right-hand upper windows — he even includes a bird in the narrow strip of window visible at the far right — it is significant that the window above the populated landscape is barren. Small birds were long a symbol of the Christian soul flying up to Heaven. Jerome specifically makes reference to this in his Epistle 22 in an apocalyptic passage discussing the Judgment of Souls which will determine their destiny. He reassures Eustochium that she will be carried “up to the stars,” and concludes: “and then you will joyfully sing: ‘Our soul is escaped as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken and we are escaped.’”⁵⁴ These birds are the souls of good Christians who followed Jerome’s example and have escaped to Paradise. By contrast, those souls which inhabit the sinful world and do not recognize Christ as their Bridegroom will remain forever ensnared. The devilish cat lies in wait at the side of the small doorway which leads back through the darkened area to the window and its inhabited landscape. The window above them remains empty, for, like the foolish virgins in the parable, they will never pass through the heavenly portal that leads to the realm of Paradise.⁵⁵

The foreground objects do more than just establish the celestial nature of the foreground portal, for they must be read vertically as well as horizontally. As already noted, the peacock below Jerome probably suggests his future celestial immortality, while the basin refers to the cleansing quality of the wilderness. The location of the partridge at the left, however, near the sinful landscape and still life, causes us to reexamine it cautiously. Certainly this position carries a potentially evil connotation, yet this is modified by the fact that all three paradisiacal objects on the sill are isolated from the mundane middle-ground and background by the raised step of the *porta coeli*, and all three are in the bright light of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Further, although not located directly below Jerome, the partridge seems to have a special relationship to him. Both are rigidly profiled figures which face into the divine light coming from the picture’s right side. I believe that Antonello had a special reason for choosing the partridge from among several possible paradisiacal birds, and that its significance is threefold. Conjoined with the other two foreground objects, it represents Paradise, as noted, but it also relates to sinful worldly existence and to Jerome himself.

This association of the divinely illumined partridge with the non-virginal world of the dark side of the painting is actually appropriate, for the symbolic meaning of the par-

tridge is quite similar to that of the cat. First, the bestiary tells us that the partridge is a “cunning, disgusting bird” and perverted in a sexual sense.⁵⁶ Particularly astonishing is its unquenchable thirst for sexual intercourse. “Frequent intercourse tires them out. . . . Desire torments the females so much that even if a wind blows toward them from the males they become pregnant by the smell.”⁵⁷ It is also similar to the cat in its association with the Devil, for there is the old story of the female partridge stealing eggs of another bird and raising them as her own.

The Devil is an example of this sort of thing. He tries to steal the children of the Eternal Creator, and, if they are foolish or lacking in a sense of their own strength, Satan is able to collect some of them somehow, and he cherishes them with the allurements of the body.⁵⁸

Unlike the cat’s, however, the partridge’s evil nature is mitigated in the bestiary since her egg stealing was interpreted as an analogue of God’s way of testing Christians to see if they would recognize their true master. The bestiarist goes on: “But when the call of Christ is heard, the wise ones [among the stolen young], growing their spiritual plumage, fly away [from the partridge] and put their trust in Jesus.”⁵⁹

The source for the story about the partridge stealing young is biblical (Jeremiah 17:11). It and its exegesis — written by Jerome himself — were well known, and can in Antonello’s painting be interpreted with regard to the themes of Jerome’s letter already expressed by the shadowed objects on the dark side of the painting: the contrasting of the wise and foolish birds recalls the empty lamp of the foolish virgins; the story of the devilish partridge lying in wait to steal souls and its sexual promiscuity recall the cat; and the “allurements of the body” recall the soiled towel. Even the final, positive outcome of the legend, with its theme of leaving behind the worldly, and recognizing and responding to Christ’s call, is exactly the message represented by the paired landscapes and is a key lesson of the letter. But this interpretation of the bird, though it does apply here, does not go far enough, for it leaves the partridge symbolizing the Devil. Because of the light on the partridge, the similarity of its posture to Jerome’s, and its placement in the celestial setting, one suspects that something additional is intended. Oddly enough, the solution is to be found in the

⁵⁴ Ep. 22:3; Wright 58/59. I am pleased to see the tacit confirmation in Friedmann that these small birds are unidentifiable. Hand (as in n. 15), n.p., discusses early 16th-century paintings which relate Saint Jerome to the Last Judgment. He states that to the best of his knowledge, Joos van Cleve was “the first artist to combine three normally distinct types: Jerome as scholar, as penitent, and as witness to the Last Judgment.” We see those themes here, too, however.

⁵⁵ Regarding the role of the portal in images of the wise and foolish virgins, see I. Ragusa, “*Terror demonum and terror inimicorum*: The Two Lions of the Throne of Solomon and the Open Door of Paradise,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, xl, 1977, 107ff. This parable of the wise

and foolish virgins foreshadows the judgment of souls.

⁵⁶ White, 136.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 137. For further negative symbolism regarding this bird, see Charbonneau-Lassay, 501ff.; Rowland, 1978, 123ff.; and McCulloch, 152f. Note that this is not a quail, but specifically a European red-legged partridge. The quail is generally associated with positive symbolism.

⁵⁸ White, 136.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* (my additions in brackets). Friedmann, 282ff., and *passim* (see index), deals extensively with the symbolism of the partridge.

second quality of the bird: its extraordinary ability to produce young, a special significance of the partridge that Panofsky astutely recognized.

In writing about a painting remarkably similar to, although later than, Antonello's, an *Annunciation* by Titian of the 1530's (Venice, Scuola di S. Rocco), Panofsky noted the inclusion in the foreground of a red-legged partridge, just the bird in Antonello's painting. He related the usually deceitful and libidinous symbolism associated with the bird, but then remarked that the amazing reproductive power of the female "was susceptible of a positive interpretation."⁶⁰ In Picinelli's *Mundus Symbolicus*, a partridge is described as "afflatu fecunda" ("fruitful by a breath of air") and as "audita voce fecunda" ("fruitful by hearing a voice"). Picinelli, and Panofsky following him, relate both of these descriptions to the Annunciation and Mary's non-physical conception of Christ, specifically to the tradition that Mary conceived through the ear.⁶¹ Thus Jerome's partridge is yet another reference to the miraculous Incarnation of Christ within Mary's womb. Further, we may recall the very opening phrase of the letter: "Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ...", the Old Testament passage that foretells the Annunciation and the aural impregnation of Mary.

I suggested above that the partridge's significance was threefold, and with that in mind would like to offer the following hypothesis. Jerome's posture echoes that of the partridge because Jerome, too, was made fertile aurally, and like the Virgin at the Annunciation, created a means to Salvation. This is a fundamental analogy between Jerome and Mary, independent of the text of Epistle 22, which I believe was well established by the fifteenth century. Through divine inspiration, Jerome produced the Vulgate Bible and established the authenticity of the four Canonical Gospels which record the life of Christ. This act parallels Mary's conception of Christ, because these books are the means of spreading the knowledge necessary for the Salvation of mankind. In order to demonstrate that this was generally known by Antonello's day, I will offer evidence from the Carolingian period through the fifteenth century that Jerome and his translations were considered a source of Salvation.

As Herbert Kessler has stated, Jerome "came as close as

any mortal to 'authoring' the full Bible."⁶² Although he was not the original author of any of the books, Jerome's new translation from old Hebrew, Greek, and other texts became the accepted form of the Bible, and replaced the often inaccurate Old Latin version. Further, he was instrumental in establishing the authenticity of these particular books, and this, it will be seen, was particularly important with regard to the four Canonical Gospels. Kessler points out that in the Carolingian period Jerome was recognized as having "revivified" the Psalms of David through his translation, and became so closely linked to David and the text that portraits of Jerome are commonly found in Psalters.⁶³ Such images of Jerome, which continue the author portrait tradition of antiquity, are also found at the beginnings of Bibles and of Gospels, and so attest to the importance given to Jerome's role in their production.

The place where Jerome "gave birth" to the Vulgate — Bethlehem — may also be significant with regard to the analogy between him and Mary. After leaving Rome in 385, Jerome traveled extensively in the Holy Lands and Egypt before settling permanently at Bethlehem in 386. Jerome was greatly impressed by the holy sites in and near Bethlehem, particularly with the grotto of the Nativity.⁶⁴ He founded his monastery within sight of Constantine's Basilica of the Nativity, this latter built over Christ's grotto, and established himself in a nearby cave. Although Jerome had worked extensively on his translation of the four Gospels while in Rome, it was not until his residence in Bethlehem that he completed it and carried out the greater part of his work on the rest of the Vulgate translation, a task that was to occupy him until 405 or 406. Jerome further arranged that he would be buried in one of the underground caves under the north aisle of the Church, close by and connected to the grotto in which Christ was said to have been born.⁶⁵ In the later Middle Ages Jerome's residence in Bethlehem was still remembered. In the early thirteenth century, when Jerome's body was removed from its cave and translated to Rome, it was reinterred in the Basilica of Sta. Maria Maggiore in the Chapel of the Crèche.⁶⁶ When Jacopo da Voragine wrote his account of Jerome in his *Golden Legend*, he stated:

After thus doing penance [in the desert] for four years, he went to the town of Bethlehem, and obtained permission to dwell at the Lord's Crib like a

⁶⁰ E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian: Mostly Iconographic*, New York, 1969, 30.

⁶¹ F. Picinelli, *Mundus Symbolicus*, 2 vols., Cologne, 1694, ed. A. Erath, New York, Garland repr., 1976, 320; and Panofsky, 1969, 30, n. 11. See above, n. 18, regarding Mary's conception through her ear.

⁶² H. Kessler, *The Illustrated Bibles from Tours*, Princeton, 1977, 149.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 92 and 149. The earliest portrait known of Jerome is on the ivory cover of the Dagulf Psalter of ca. 795 (Paris, Louvre), where David is portrayed on the front and Jerome on the back (illustrated, *ibid.*, figs. 133 and 145).

⁶⁴ See Williams, 36ff., for a discussion of the significance of caves, par-

ticularly that of the Nativity, for the ascete in the wilderness. As Williams discloses, in the Eastern liturgy, Bethlehem was considered to be in the wilderness, so that monks who retired to their wilderness caves were reliving the birth of Christ and were *reborn* there. Further, the cave was considered to be both the womb of Mary and to be Paradise itself. Jerome and his disciples in Bethlehem inhabited caves, using monastic structures for communal activities.

⁶⁵ See J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*, London, 1975, 332 and n. 37 regarding Jerome's grave.

⁶⁶ See Migne, *Pat. Lat.*, xxii, 237-240, for an 18th-century account of the alleged translation.

domestic animal. Fasting each day until evening, he read over his own books . . . Thus he persevered in his holy resolution, and laboured for fifty-five years and six months at the translation of the Scriptures.⁶⁷

To be analogous to the Virgin Mary, Jerome must be viewed not only as an author-like source of the Bible, but also as a means to Salvation. There is considerable evidence that Jerome's product — the Vulgate — was held to make Salvation possible for mankind just as Mary's product — Christ — did. Underwood has discussed this in some detail in his analysis of the multi-layered meaning of the image of the Fountain of Life. With texts from Jerome's time through the later Middle Ages, he establishes clearly the nourishing and healing qualities of the four Canonical Gospels, and demonstrates the close association of the Gospels with the Fountain of Life. The Gospels were actually called the "*fontes vitae*," because they were interpreted as being salutary like the four Rivers of Paradise: they flowed from Ecclesia and carried Salvation to all four corners of the world.⁶⁸

Jerome is also like the Virgin Mary in that not only his product, but he himself was considered to be curative of mankind's ills and in that way a source of Salvation. Reginald of Canterbury (1050-1109) sees Jerome as a font of wisdom which heals and nourishes the world:

Wisdom holds you up as a light, granting you
eloquence
Wherewith, in sevenfold stream, you happily
gleam:
From your heart seven living rivers flow,
Curing the hearts of the languid.
The knowledge of your wares is a food for the
mind; a banquet
For one desiring to approach the full table of
knowledge.
You are a guide, and a leader on the way;
You are a fount, and the splendor of wisdom
Lighting the path before those desirous of
devouring wisdom.⁶⁹

This image of Jerome as a healer of mankind may be

⁶⁷ G. Ryan and H. Ripperger, *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, Arno repr., New York, 1969, 589.

⁶⁸ Underwood, 47ff., 72ff., 105ff., and 127ff.

⁶⁹ From his preface to Jerome's *Vita Malachi*, quoted along with original Latin text in Murphy (as in n. 16), v-vi.

⁷⁰ G. Ring, "St. Jerome Extracting the Thorn from the Lion's Foot," *Art Bulletin*, xxvii, 1945, 189.

⁷¹ Chantilly, Musée Condé, fol. 25r, of ca. 1416.

⁷² On the symbolism of the snail, see Friedmann, 291f., and Charbonneau-Lassay, 926ff. On this aspect of the lion, see Charbonneau-Lassay, 37ff.; Rowland, 1973, 119; White, 8f.; and McCulloch, 137. Regarding the conflated image of the Fountain/ font/ tholos, see Underwood, 49ff., 95ff., 105f., and *passim*.

⁷³ See above n. 15.

⁷⁴ Levi d'Ancona (as in n. 22), without further comment, notes the inclu-

sion of a variety of plants and herbs associated with salvation and healing in images of Jerome: e.g., rosemary, sage, oak, and fern (pp. 358, 360, 254 and 134 respectively). It is also striking that while the scholarly Jerome acquires Mariological symbols which stress his great role in bringing about mankind's salvation, so Mary's role as scholar is also of increasing interest to the late medieval world. See Schiller, 1, 42; M. Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Limbourgs and Their Contemporaries*, New York, 1974, 1, 114; and E. Hall and H. Uhr, "Aureola and Fructus: Distinctions of Beatitude in Scholastic Thought and the Meaning of Some Crowns in Early Flemish Painting," *Art Bulletin*, lx, 1978, 258ff.

found in another context. Grete Ring points out that the story of the thorn removal was moralized in the *Gesta Romanorum*, a Latin text compiled in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.⁷⁰ There a hunting knight cures the lion by removing the thorn. The commentator explains that it is baptism that draws out the "thorn" of original sin. This kind of analogy may explain why the Limbourgs, in their *Saint Jerome Removing the Thorn* of ca. 1408-09 (Fig. 11), include a large hexagonal font in the landscape outside the monastery adjacent to where Jerome sits removing the thorn from the lion. This is no simple water source for the monastery, but the Fountain of Life, and includes references to the baptismal font of rebirth and the tholos of the Resurrection. On close inspection one realizes that it is less elaborate but very similar to the Fountain of Life painted by the Limbourgs in their later *Garden of Eden* in the *Très Riches Heures*:⁷¹ both have four lion-headed spouts, and snails sit on the capitals of the six supporting columns. Lions and snails recall the triumphant Resurrection of Christ from the tomb, appropriate in conflated images of the Fountain/font/tholos.⁷² Thus in the early fifteenth century Jerome's removal of the thorn from the lion is visually associated with the cleansing and healing power of the Fountain of Life. Jerome's healing capabilities are not limited to images of the thorn removal, however. The Detroit *Saint Jerome in His Study* (Fig. 12) includes both a clear-glass carafe and an apothecary jar labeled "Tyriaca."⁷³ I believe that these objects are more than simply references to Jerome's writings about Mary. Jan has borrowed Mariological iconographical symbols for Jerome because Jerome, too, is a fountain of life and carries out a therapeutic role in man's Salvation.⁷⁴

Theologians of the period confirm this. In two fifteenth-century manuscripts of the Office of Saint Jerome, the texts of which probably originated in the circle of Johannes Andreas in the fourteenth century, Jerome is called "auctor / Noster salutis."⁷⁵ In more specific reference to Jerome as a fountain-like source for the healing of man's spiritual ills, Johanns von Neumarkt describes him in the following terms: "Jerome is the wholesome water of the deep well spring from whose gentle flow all ailing humanity may slake its thirst."⁷⁶ While

⁷⁵ From the "Ad laudes Ymnus" as recorded, for example, in a Breviary, Naples, Biblioteca, Cod. Neapolit. VI E 16. See J. Klapper, "Aus der Frühzeit des Humanismus. Dichtungen zu Ehren des heiligen Hieronymus," *Bausteine: Festschrift Max Koch zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Böhlich and H. Heckel, Breslau, 1926, 276ff.

⁷⁶ Trans. in Friedmann, 36, n. 11, who also includes the German text.



11 Limbourg Brothers, *Saint Jerome Removing the Thorn*, *Belles Heures*, detail of fol. 186v. New York, The Cloisters (photo: Museum)

Mary is remarkable because she was the means of making the Word flesh, Jerome has a special relation to the Word because of his physical manifestation of the *Verbum*.⁷⁷ Thus generative and healing symbols appear in numerous images of Jerome in the fifteenth century in recognition of his role.⁷⁸

Returning to Antonello's painting, one may now understand the reasons for the extensive Mariological symbolism. Like Mary at the Annunciation, Jerome is bathed in a celestial light and visited by a divine presence. His discarded shoes confirm that he is on holy ground.⁷⁹ We see the exact moment of this visitation, for Jerome specifically states to Eustochium, in a passage quoted more fully above, "if you read, He is speaking to you." The nearby figure of the partridge, echoing his posture, attests to this ability to become "fruitful by hearing a voice." Thus Antonello has turned both to the traditional view of Jerome as a source for Salvation and to the specific text of Jerome's Epistle 22 in order to create a complex image of the saint.

⁷⁷ Bergström, 14, in his discussion of the Detroit *Jerome*, had already recognized that "van Eyck justly regarded Saint Jerome as particularly closely connected with the *verbum* in a special way because of his Latin translation of the Bible."

⁷⁸ The examples are too numerous to list, but some of them were included already in n. 15 above.

⁷⁹ This tradition is biblical in origin, as Jerome notes to Eustochium: "In the same way Moses and Joshua were bidden to take off their shoes before they walked on holy ground" (Ep. 22:19; Wright 94/95).



12 Jan van Eyck (copy after?), *Saint Jerome in His Study*. Detroit, Institute of Arts (photo: Museum)

Although it is impossible to know the extent of the influence of Jan van Eyck upon Antonello's painting of Jerome,⁸⁰ it should not be overlooked that Jan's Lomellini Triptych included an *Annunciation*, along with images of John the Baptist and Jerome in his study, and was present in Naples in Alfonso's collection. In all likelihood that now-lost triptych included a number of the still-life details typically found in Marian works by Jan van Eyck and which we find in Antonello's *Jerome*. Other features — such as the use of a strongly articulated Divine Light en-

⁸⁰ I have elsewhere proposed (Jolly, 27ff.) that this image of Jerome is a disguised portrait of Alfonso I, King of Naples from 1442 until his death in 1458. Was Jan van Eyck the source for this idea? Although we do not know whether or not the Lomellini *Jerome* was such a portrait, the Detroit *Jerome* has been convincingly shown to be one. (See Panofsky and Hall, as in n. 15 above.) The fact that Antonello's painting includes a portrait of Alfonso does not negate the reading of the symbolism that I have here proposed. The Detroit *Jerome* similarly includes an elaborate iconographical program involving Jerome and Salvation, yet additionally includes references to Nicholas Albergati. The circumstances of the com-

tering from the picture's right and an extensive and complex iconographical program making use of disguised symbolism — may have come from Antonello's exposure to this triptych or to other Flemish works in Naples. A better understanding of Antonello's use of iconography will be arrived at, however, when other of Antonello's paintings are explored iconographically. In all likelihood, we will find that Antonello da Messina's *Saint Jerome*, like any single painting by Jan van Eyck, is not an iconographic aberration within his *oeuvre*. Antonello was an intelligent and inventive artist who responded to Flemish art and profited not only from study of the style and technique, but also from study of its content.

Skidmore College
Saratoga Springs, N.Y. 12866

mission of Antonello's *Jerome* are unknown. It may have been a flattering gift to Alfonso, or possibly, I wonder, a posthumous tribute to him. The prominent doorway in the foreground, an old symbol associated with transition from this world to the hereafter, would then additionally be Alfonso's access to Paradise. J. Białostocki, "The Door of Death: Survival of a Classical motif in Sepulchral Art," *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen*, xviii, 1973, 7ff., discusses this motif in general. This hypothesis might explain, too, why Antonello used a profile portrait for Alfonso, rather than the more life-like, Flemish-styled three-quarter pose which he helped to make popular in Italy and used for all his other extant portraits. While there may have been influence from the Italian tradition for creating images of rulers in profile, the preference for the more easily transcribed profile view in posthumous images has been noted by J. Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, Princeton, 1966 (35ff. and 155f. regarding the traditions for posthumous and ruler portraits). The date of the painting would then be ca. 1458, which accords with my view and some others' that the *Jerome* was painted during the undocumented interval of Antonello's career from 1457 to 1460. See G. La Corte-Cailler, "Antonello da Messina, studi e ricerche," *Archivio storico messinese*, iv, 1903, 417f., regarding Antonello's documentation.

Verrocchio and Venice, 1469

Dario A. Covi

in memory of Ulrich Middeldorf

The purpose of this article is to assess the artistic significance of a documented, but until recently un-

I particularly wish to thank Professor Craig Hugh Smyth for his interest in the subject of this article; I have benefited from a number of discussions about it with him and from his paper, cited in the bibliography, which he permitted me to read while it was still in a formative stage. I also wish to thank Dr. Gino Corti for generous help with the documents,

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noticed, visit that Andrea del Verrocchio made to Venice and one other city in the Veneto, Treviso, in 1469 — more

and my wife for criticism and patient attention to my observations. Finally I am indebted to the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation for a grant in support of my research in Venice and Treviso in 1979 and to the Allen R. Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville, for additional support of my research efforts.