

Barbara Longhi's *Saint Justina of Padua*: Pagan Symbolism and Christian Martyrology*

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Barbara Longhi of Ravenna (1552-1638) skillfully created small devotional altarpieces depicting holy saints with their respective attributes of martyrdom, seen in Saint Agnes of Rome (c. 291-304) with an ewe, Saint Cecilia (c. 200-235) with a portable organ, Saint Catherine of Alexandria (c. 287-304) with a broken spiked wheel, and Saint Justina of Padua (c. 3rd century) with a small sword in her chest. For their physical sacrifice, Heaven rewarded them with a palm frond as an honorific spiritual gift. Barbara included some of these saints in her paintings on the theme of holy conversation (*sacra conversazione*; a religious gathering with the Madonna and Child) and depicted the female saints as a single panel—solo image—for private devotion or supplicatory assistance. Most of the biographies and historicity about the lives of these saints are recounted by Jacobus de Voragine (1222-1298), Archbishop of Genoa, in his *Golden Legend* (*Legenda Aurea*, 1275). This essay only comments on the iconography of one of Barbara's female saints, *Saint Justina of Padua*.

Keywords: Barbara and Luca Longhi, palm frond, martyrdom, *Saint Justina of Padua*, Christian iconography, pagan symbolism

Introduction

In the sixteenth century in Ravenna, Barbara Longhi included in her *oeuvre* sacred devotional paintings associated with the love and tenderness between the Mother of God and her Child (Madonna and Child) along with female saints. These paintings reveal a fusion between spiritual love and Christian heroism and are steeped in the culture of Ravenna and Counter-Reformation artistic patronage (Schroeder, 1955, pp. 215-217).¹ Barbara's fervor for the grace of God and the Madonna (Virgin Mary) expanded into an admiration for holy female saints: Saint Agnes of Rome (c. 291-304), Saint Cecilia (c. 200-235), Saint Catherine of Alexandria (c. 287-304), and Saint Justina of Padua (c. 3rd century). The latter saint is the focus of this study, which is composed of two parts: (1) an account of the life and martyrdom of Saint Justina; and (2) an iconographical interpretation of Barbara Longhi's *Saint Justina of Padua*.²

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¹ Schroeder, O. P. H. J. *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1955), 215-217, on the importance of religious images for the devotee: "We adore Christ and venerate the saints whose likeness they bear," from Twenty-Fifth Session, "On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images."

² In this article I refer to Barbara Longhi simply as "Barbara" in order to distinguish her from her father, Luca Longhi, who is also referenced in the article.

The Life and Martyrdom of Saint Justina of Padua

Saint Justina of Padua is often confused with Saint Justina of Antioch. In the accounts of Jacobus de Voragine in the *Golden Legend*, the Latin and Roman etymology of the name Justina derives from the Latin word justice (*iustitia, justicia*), referring to a moral virtue. In the *Republic*, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (429-347 BCE) noted: “Wisdom is the chief and leader [of the virtues], next follows temperance, and from the union of these two with courage springs justice” (Book 4:427-434; and *The Laws*, Book I, 631). In Christian scholasticism, the medieval Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in the *Summa theologiae*, considered these Platonic moral virtues as divine gifts and grouped them as four cardinal virtues (fortitude, justice, prudence, and temperance) needed to form a person with a moral character (*Summa Theo.*, I-II, Q. lxi, aa.2 and 4, Rickaby, 1908). The conflation of classical and Christian meanings about Justina’s name thus indicates that her persona is associated with the personification of moral Justice.

There are several accounts of Justina’s life and legend, addressing her personality and cultural customs. In the *Golden Legend*, the Christian lives of saints, Saint Justina of Padua is described as a person of good appearance with a good inclination, being compassionate, having patience, and a good sense of humor (De Voragine, 1998; 2020; Bollard, 1643; Thurston & Attwater, 1963). Her father was Valerious Vitalinus, a king of the city of Padua during Late Antiquity. After her conversion to Christianity, she was also an obedient and reverent follower of the laws of God (de Voragine, 1998, pp. 243-247; Bollard, 1643, pp. 663-666). An early Latin poet in the Merovingian Court, Saint Venantius Fortunatus (530-609), Bishop of Poitiers, noted that Justina was among the most illustrious virgins of royal birth; her name was as famous in Padua as were the names of Euphemia in Chalcedon and Eulalia in Merida (George, 1995, pp. 25-33).³ In his Life of Saint Martin, Fortunatus further mentioned Justina. He encouraged pilgrims to visit Padua and kiss the sacred sepulcher of the blessed Justina (Roberts, 2001, pp. 257-285, esp. 258). Clearly, the early Christian Church honored Justina’s sanctity and martyrdom (Kaftal, 1978, pp. 580-582; Réau, 1999, p. 220; Prevedello, 2004, pp. 115-117).

The cult of Saint Justina was perpetuated in Padua in the early fifth century. Curiously, in 1117, a forged document of her passion (suffering)⁴ claimed that she was baptized by Saint Prosdocimus (d. 100 CE), known as disciple of Saint Peter, and that her relics were found in Padua (Lequeux, 1891/1892, pp. 467-470; Lequeux, 1892, pp. 354-358; Trifone, 1910; Lanzoni, 1927, pp. 911-915; Allard, 1885, pp. 430-432).⁵ This is an impossible account, since Prosdocimus, the first Bishop of Padua, lived before 100 CE and was known to have survived the persecutions of the Roman Emperor Nero (37-68 CE), while it was two hundred years later, under the Christian persecutions of Roman Emperor Maximian (250-310 CE), that Justina was slain with a short sword (*gladius*) for converting to Christianity at the Bridge Corvo of Prato del Valle (Fields of Mars) in Padua

³ Judith George, *Venantius Fortunatus: Personal and Political Poems* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 1995), 25-33; “The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity,” <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06237> (accessed 5 July 2022), citing Venantius Fortunatus’s Latin poem on virginity that mentions Saint Justina in lines 30-34.

⁴ A word associated with the Latin *passus sum*, meaning to suffer or endure.

⁵ There is an older text before Bollard, *Acta Sanctorum*, 38: 663-666, on the Passion of Saint Justina in the *Analecta Bollandiana*, 21 vols. (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1891), 10:467-470; and *ibid.* (1892), 11:354-358, on an account of the alleged discovery of Saint Justina’s relics in 1117. See Basilio Trifone, *Compendium Historiae Congregationis Casinensis* (Sublaci: Typis Proto Coenobili, 1910; originally published in a special edition in the *Rivista Storica Benedettina*, 1910/11); Francesco Lanzoni, *Le diocesi d’Italia*, 2 vols. (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1927), 2:911-915; and Paul Allard, *Histoire des persécutions*, 4 vols (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1885), 4:430-432.

in 304. In commemoration of this brutal death, in the early fifth century an abbey and a church were built in her honor above the location of her tomb and remains.

In 1177 a devastating earthquake partially destroyed this religious area. Not until the fifteenth century, when the Benedictine Reformers (also known as the Italian Cassinese Congregation) took over the restoration of the old abbey, was a new abbey with a large monastery created and was the cult of Saint Justina expanded, proclaiming her feast day to be on the 7th of October (Figure 1) (Collett, 1985; Zampieri, 2006).⁶



Figure 1. Abbey, Basilica, and Monastery of Saint Justina of Padua, 304-1797, Padua.

Nonetheless, the conflicting account from 1177 about Saint Justina's baptism and conversion persisted throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern era (Lanzoni, 1927, pp. 911-915). Another unclear account suggests that during the Renaissance, Gregorio di Allegretto (active 1442-1476) carved in relief the effigy of the saint in front of a sarcophagus. The image represents "a figure lying on a bier and covered with a cloth. At the ends are reliefs of angels swinging censers."⁷ Allegretto re-carved or re-used an ancient Roman sarcophagus for the creation of this new Renaissance coffin of Saint Justina. In his book, Girolamo Zampieri noted that the sarcophagus at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London might have been the one designed in 1476 for the church of Santa Giustina at Padua (Zampieri, 2006, pp. 119-154). It is not clear at this time if Saint Justina's remains from the original tomb were transferred into this new sarcophagus.

⁶ Barry Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation: The Congregation of Santa Giustina of Padua* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Girolamo Zampieri, *I sepolcri padovani di Santa Giustina: il sarcofago 75-1879, del Victoria and Albert Museum di Londra e altri sarcophagi dalla Basilica di Santa Giustina in Padova* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2006), for discussion on the Paduan sculptor Gregorio di Allegretto and the Renaissance sarcophagus of Saint Justina of Padua.

⁷ Victoria and Albert Museum entry, bibliography, and image: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93386/sarcophagus-of-santa-justina-sarcophagus-allegretto-gregorio-di> (accessed 5 July 2022).

Throughout the centuries, until the suppression of religious orders by Napoleon in 1810, this Paduan religious center became one of the most important for the cult of Saint Justina in Italy encouraging other Italian regions to worship the saint. During the Middle Ages, Ravenna fell under this religious spell of the cult of Saint Justina, building a small church with the name of Santa Giustina in Capite Porticus (Mazzotti, 1971). Unfortunately, at an unknown date, the church was demolished and transformed into a secular and modern edifice (Bendazzi & Ricci, 1987, p. 173). Today a section of the interior wall from the old medieval church can be seen through another edifice, Palazzo Ferruzzi, and a partial section of the fifteenth-century façade inserted into the modern construction is still visible (Figures 2a and 2b).



Figure 2a. Church of Saint Justina in Capite Porticus, remains of interior, 13th century, Ravenna.



Figure 2b. Church of Saint Justina in Capite Porticus, partial exterior view, 15th century, Ravenna.

The Iconography of Barbara Longhi's *Saint Justina of Padua*

This section addresses four matters: (1) Barbara Longhi's depiction of holy conversations that include Saint Justina of Padua; (2) Barbara's solo portrayal of Saint Justina of Padua; (3) a comparative study (*paragone*) of Barbara's and Italian Renaissance painters' solo images of Saint Justina of Padua; and (4) the appropriation of pagan and Christian symbolism of the palm frond as one attribute of Saint Justina's martyrdom.

After the account of Venantius Fortunatus encouraging the pilgrimage to visit Justina's relic in the Benedictine Abbey and Basilica of Saint Justina in Padua (Thurston & Dattwater, 1963, p. 50), her veneration expanded from the surrounding areas of the Venetian dominion to the neighboring Emilia-Romagna region, including Ravenna. As evidence, see the inclusion of Saint Justina's image in the female saints' procession represented in mosaics in the nave's frieze of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (504-561 CE) in Ravenna (Figures 3a and 3b). This astonishing Byzantine church was for centuries historically praised for its mosaics and their symbolism. In the thirteenth century, Ravennate devotees continued to honor Saint Justina by building a church in her honor, as mentioned earlier: Saint Justina in Capite Porticus, at the crossing of Ponte Coperto in Ravenna (Mazzotti, 1971, pp. 369-386).

Undoubtedly, Barbara Longhi visited these historical religious localities in her city and was also familiar with the iconography of the stunning mosaics of her city and its pagan and Christian significations. Most of Barbara's religious paintings referring to historical events—for instance, the Lives of Mary, Christ, and the saints—narrate a story, while her devotional paintings focus on the viewer's relationship to the image and are designed to foster a life of Christian faith amid worldly distractions. Barbara depicted two versions of Saint Justina of Padua: including the saint in holy conversation with other saints, in particular with depictions of the Madonna and Child (Figures 4 and 5); and as a single figure or solo devotional image (Figure 6).



(a)



(b)

Figures 3a and 3b. Female Procession toward Enthroned Madonna and Child, 547-561 CE, mosaic.

Basilica of Saint Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna.

Photo credit: Nick Thomason for Creative Commons.



Figure 4. Barbara Longhi, *Venice Madonna and Child with Saint Justina*, c. 1600-1605, oil on canvas, 48 × 42 cm.
Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice.
Photo credit: Bridgemanimages.com.



Figure 5. Barbara Longhi, *Madonna and Child with Saint Justina*, c. 1600, oil on canvas, 55 × 4 cm. Private Collection.

Credit line: Piguet Hôtel des Ventes, Genève.

Photo credit: Piguet Hôtel des Ventes, Genève.

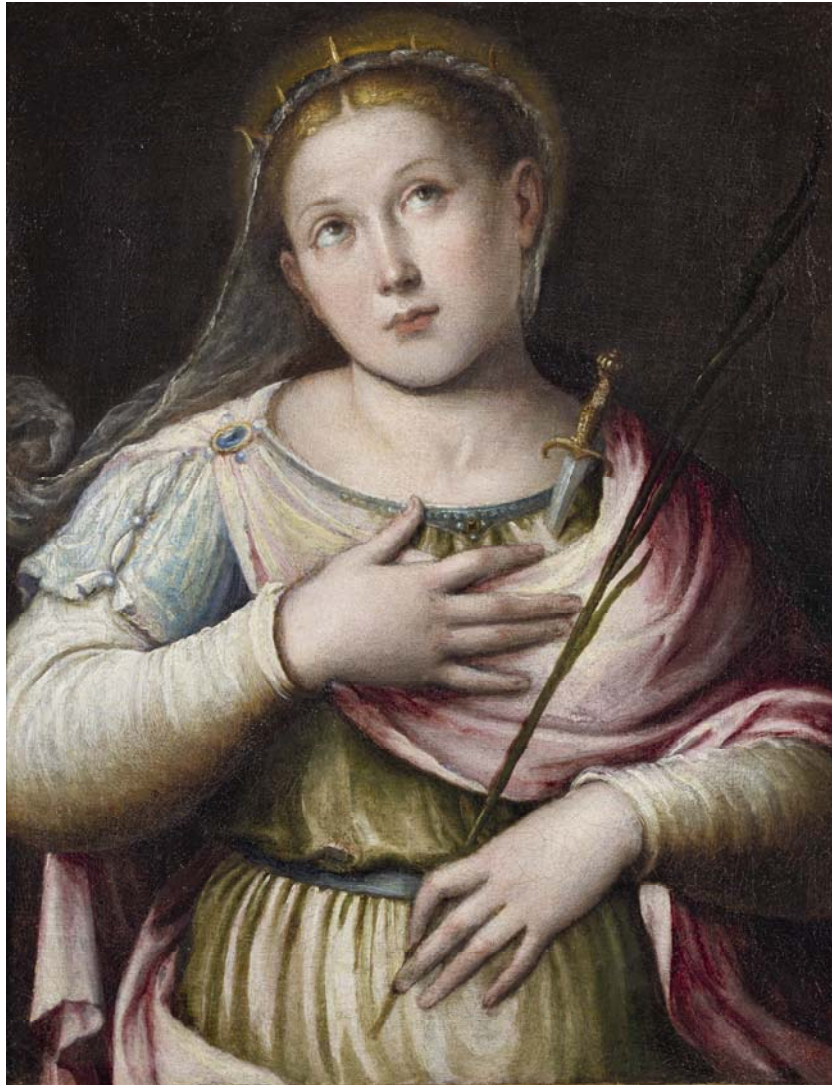


Figure 6. Barbara Longhi, *Saint Justina of Padua*, 1595-1600, oil on canvas, 38 × 39.5 cm.
 Van Ham Kunstauktionen, Cologne, Germany. Now Private Collection.
 Photo credit: © VAN HAM Kunstauktionen, Saša Fuis Photographie.

Holy Conversations with Saint Justina of Padua

The Holy Conversation compositional scenes show Saint Justina with the Madonna and Child in an intimate setting. Barbara repeated many vignettes and symbolic allusions—such as the open window motif, views of rural landscape, and interior areas decorated with a cloth of honor—which were depicted in other paintings of holy conversations, for example the *Ohio Holy Family* (Figure 7) (Viroli, 2000, pp. 204-206; Thornton, 1991, pp. 27-30). In this painting, the interaction with the holy figures takes place in an interior setting. An open window shows a rural landscape with a church, a large farmhouse, and other small houses. Assimilating the Leonardesque *sfumato* technique, Barbara painted the exterior space with an aerial perspective, visual distance, and natural light effects that contrast with artistic or artificial light perceived in the inside space. This artistic license brings the religious image closer to the viewer, showing Barbara's careful rendition of the figures and the application of vivid colors to their attires and chamber's decor. In composing the bond among

the holy figures, Barbara created a suspended spiritual moment, revealed by the figures' intimate expressions of gentle hand-touching and loving gaze.



Figure 7. Barbara Longhi, *Ohio Holy Family*, 1589-1590, oil on canvas, 37.5 × 30.3 cm. Previously in Dayton Art Institute, Ohio. Now Private Collection.

Barbara's *Venice Madonna and Child with Saint Justina* (Figure 4) is an example of the first version on the theme of holy conversation including Saint Justina. Subtle changes occur in the depiction of the landscape seen behind the holy figures. A winding road leads to a small church and continues toward a village. A large mountain leads the viewer's eyes to an open celestial sky. This compositional landscape element is borrowed from her previous compositions in which the natural depiction of a landscape is background to the spiritual event in the foreground. A large tree with foliage acting as a curtain is seen behind the holy group, while in the distance there is an atmospheric landscape and skyscape. On one of the hills, a small church is seen, probably alluding to the old church of Saint Justina Capite Porticus in Ravenna (Mazzotti, 1971, pp. 369-386). It is not by accident that Barbara was interested in depictions of landscapes with rural farms and open fields. Her family owned agricultural estates (*tenute*), and she administrated them, as noted in her wills (Simoni, 1999).

In *Venice Madonna and Child with Saint Justina* (Figure 4), Barbara has conflated the symbolism of two virgin martyrs: Saint Justina of Antioch and Saint Justina of Padua (Réau, 2000, pp. 219-220). In the foreground of this painting, the viewer again sees the presentation of a nude Infant Christ in a cruciform position. Barbara's composition and the gestures of the Madonna and Child recall an *imago pietatis* or lamentation scene like the notable marble sculpture of Michelangelo's *Vatican Pietà* (1498), where the Madonna extends her hand toward the viewer in an act of presenting the dead body of her son and pleading for prayers of courage, while on her lap rests her son's dead body with a lifeless dangling arm and bare bent legs. In Barbara's painting also, the Madonna points to her nude infant, recalling the biblical passage: "And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14), implying the physical, human existence of God in Christ for the salvation of humanity (Steinberg, 1983).⁸

Barbara's infant Christ rests his head on two pillows while a loincloth covers the crib or table (symbolic of a sacrificial altar) where he is placed. The reverent Madonna, veiled, in simple garments and with downcast eyes, offers her child to the viewer. She barely touches one of his feet while offering a rose or carnation to the donor or religious companion. The rose alludes to the traditional meanings of love as well as of suffering because of its thorns, hence its association with the Passion of Christ; while the carnation, also a symbol of love, is closely associated with Mary and marriage and brides (D'Ancona, 1977, pp. 330-355, esp. pp. 331-332 for the rose, p. 80 for the carnation). In Barbara's *Ohio Holy Family* (Figure 7), Mary gives the flower to Saint Joseph as a symbol of love and matrimony; here the figure of Saint Joseph is replaced by Saint Justina, who is also a guardian of the Christian faith. The female saint is elegantly attired, and a lace veil both covers and reveals her golden braided tresses. She gazes at the viewer, one hand on her breast, showing where a sword has pierced her, while the other hand rests on one of the pillows below Christ's head. In this manner, Barbara has connected the martyrdom of Saint Justina with her salvation and her devotion to God.

For Barbara, Saint Justina's patronage had a special significance, not just because she was a noblewoman who converted to Christianity and defended her honor and religious beliefs but also because the saint's name was associated with Barbara's sister-in-law Giustina. The depiction of the saint appears to be an actual portrait, because of her hand pointing to herself, distinct facial features, and direct eye contact with the viewer, contrasting with the Madonna's downcast eyes. Barbara probably dedicated this work to (or in honor of) Giustina Merlini [Longhi], wife of her brother Francesco, who had two children, Felicia and Isabetta. Barbara was very attached to her niece Isabetta, as indicated by the generous inheritance she left her in the Wills and Testaments (1624 and 1630), in which Isabetta is the full heir to her estate (Simoni, 1999, pp. 59-72). Probably Saint Justina is a portrayal of either Giustina, Barbara's sister-in-law, or Isabetta, her favorite niece (Christiansen, Weppelmann, & Rubin, 2011, pp. 64-76).⁹

On the same topic of holy conversation is the *Madonna and Child with Saint Justina* (Figure 5). This painting, auctioned on 26 September 2018 by the Pignet Hôtel des Ventes in Geneva, was earlier attributed to

⁸ Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983; rev. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), on the physical materiality and humanity of Christ.

⁹ Keith Christiansen, Stefan Weppelmann, and Patricia Lee Rubin, *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 64-76, on portrait likeness.

her father, Luca (Viroli, 2000, p. 206).¹⁰ The background is decorated with a cloth of honor. Adjacent to it, there is an open window with an atmospheric landscape, and a small farmhouse or monastery is included on the grounds. Seated in front of the window, the Madonna tenderly looks at her child, who has stopped nursing in order to gaze at the viewer. Behind the holy figure is Saint Justina, who stands as an angelic figure protecting the holy group. She is depicted with her attributes of martyrdom: a sword and a palm frond. The dagger is inserted in her shoulder; its handle in the shape of a cross alludes to her conversion to Christianity and associates her vicious execution with Christ's horrific Crucifixion. The palm frond she holds with two hands rests on the Madonna's shoulders, connecting Justina's quest and reward for her chastity and purity with the Madonna's similar virtues.

Recalling the noble birth of this saint, Barbara adorns her veiled head with a crown of gold. With subtlety, she has also crowned the Madonna as the Queen of Heaven; underneath her veil, a headband of silvery color is adorned with a frieze containing a crown motif. Both female holy figures cast their eyes downward in pensive meditation, a delicate *paragone* between the two holy female figures by the painter.

Barbara's paintings of the Madonna with Saint Justina denote a holy bond between Mary and her son with Justina (Figures 4 and 5). This subject is reminiscent of her father Luca's holy conversation painting of *Madonna and Child with Holy Figures* (Infant John the Baptist, Saint Rock, Nicola da Tolentino, and Justina of Padua; Figure 8) (Viroli, 2000, p. 67). Luca Longhi signed and dated the painting in the pilaster as LUCAS DE/LONGIIS/RAVENNAS/.P./M.D.LXII. Below the signature is a design with the coat of arms of a donor (unknown currently). John the Baptist not only points to the painter's signature and patron's device but also holds his attribute of the cross with a *cartellino* wrapped around it. The Latin inscription in this *cartellino* identifies his Christian role and his proclamation of Christ as Divine Savior: "Ecce Agnus Dei" (Behold the Lamb of God) that was recorded in the Gospel of the apostle Saint John the Evangelist (John 1:36).

In the *Madonna and Child with Holy Figures*, Luca Longhi created a complex composition separating the holy figures into two groups and using a hanging drapery as motif above the figures (Figure 8). The theatrical design of the drapery reveals a large tree branch to the right of the infant John the Baptist, defining the first group, which includes him, the Madonna, and Child, and behind them, Saint Justina of Padua. The second group, at the righthand side, includes two saints. Saint Rock (1295-1327) was identified as a patron of the Plague. He was a French nobleman, who became a priest of the Third Order of the Franciscans (Réau, 2001, pp. 147-151). During his trip to Italy, he was infected with the plague and survived; hence he dedicated most of his life curing those afflicted with the plague. In the painting, he stands carrying a pilgrim pole, wearing a pilgrim habit, and revealing a plague sore in his leg. Next to Saint Rock kneels Nicola da Tolentino (1245-1305), known as the patron of the Holy Souls, belonging to the Order of Hermits of Saint Augustine. He wears typical Augustinian black garb. In the chest area of his habit, there is a design of a large shining star, a symbol of nocturnal guidance. Legend recounts that during Nicola's nightly visits to his church, a brilliant star would appear in the sky illuminating the dark path (Réau, 1999, pp. 442-444). Saint Nicola's arms are folded across his chest as a symbol of reverence and spiritual piety, and he holds a small Crucifix, another sign of his devotion.

¹⁰ Viroli, *I Longhi*, 206. The painting is now attributed to Barbara Longhi, oil on canvas and auctioned on 26 September 2018, Lot 792, by Pignet Hôtel des Ventes in Geneva. Originally it was part of art collection of Silvio Palazzi, MD (1892-1979), Comte Bonin Nievo of Vicenza. In 1979, his heirs released it for sale; see <https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/barbara-longhi-1552-c-1638-la-vierge-lenfant-jesu-792-c-27642428f1> (accessed 15 April 2022).



Figure 8. Luca Longhi, *Madonna and Child with Holy Figures* (Infant John the Baptist, Rock, Nicola da Tolentino, and Justina of Padua), 1562, oil on canvas, 105.5 × 126 cm. Staatliche Museen Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

Opposite to Saints Rock and Nicola, Saint Justina of Padua stands admiring with reverence her source of devotion and martyrdom. Tastefully attired and with a hairdo featuring braided tresses forming a crown, Justina carries a *gladius* in her chest. She points to herself while holding a palm frond, indicating to the viewer or devotee her Christian fervor and sacrifice.

Significantly displayed in the composition is also the Baptist's hand gesture that parallels the design of the tree branch. Incongruously, this tree branch supports the hanging drapery, an intricate association and symbolism with Christ's martyrdom and Crucifixion. Iconographically, the tree branch alludes to the tree or wood used in Christ's Crucifixion, and the long hanging drapery wrapped around the tree refers to Christ's loincloth when his body rested at the foot of the Cross, after the Descent from the Cross, and then this loincloth (drape) was wrapped around his body for his burial.

In another holy conversation painting, *Madonna and Child with Saints Justina and Mary Magdalene* (1571, now in a private collection in New York, Figure 9) (Viroli, 2000, p. 82), Luca Longhi depicted an open window with a view of the sky and clouds, referring to the religious and spiritual nature of the scene. In the center of the holy figures resides the Madonna, who receives a rose from Mary Magdalene, while her child, the

infant Christ, reclines on a table covered by a cloth, resting his hand on a globe. To Saint Justina's traditional attributes of a palm frond and a sword, Luca added a closed book, referring to a book of codes or laws. Traditionally, such an attribute was associated with the personification of Justice because it implies the concept of righteousness codified and transmitted through texts for the verification of truth (de Tervarent, 1997, p. 298). The composition of these paintings about holy conversation by the Longhi painters (Barbara and Luca) reveals the mystical union between holy figures and the Madonna and Child; their bond is not historical or physical, since the existence and lives of these biblical figures and saints were separated by many years, but their connection is spiritual or metaphysical, continuing to mark the path of Christianity.



Figure 9. Luca Longhi, *Madonna and Child with Saints Justina and Mary Magdalene*, 1571, oil on canvas, 52 × 49 cm.
Private Collection, New York.

Photo credit: © Fototeca della Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna.

Solo Devotional of Saint Justina of Padua

Barbara Longhi depicted a beautiful solo image of *Saint Justina of Padua* for devotional prayers (Figure 6).¹¹ In an undistinguishable interior setting, a $\frac{3}{4}$ -length female figure stands frontally. Barbara colored her image with pastel and iridescent Mannerist colors of yellow-green, bluish-white, and crimson-pink. The saint is dressed in her finest courtly attire, decorated with jewels. On her shoulder, her pink mantle (himation) that wraps around her body is clasped to her chemise (chiton) by an oval golden brooch with a lapis lazuli stone. The center edge of her chemise features another brooch with a golden frame; a carnelian stone surrounded by three pearls. Her golden crown holds a vaporous silk veil in place on her blond coiffure. This type of garment ornamentation alludes to her noble birth.

The two attributes of Saint Justina's martyrdom, small sword and palm frond, are well displayed. The sword penetrating her breast has a golden handle whose shape recalls Christ's Cross, alluding to suffering and sacrifice as mentioned in other depictions of Saint Justina in holy conversations. The palm frond is placed diagonally across her waistline to parallel the shape of the cross, indicating her celestial reward for her Christian martyrdom. The parallel placement of her hands also has symbolic meaning. The one on her chest points to herself and her source of death—the sword. The other, next to her belt, rests on her abdomen, while holding the palm frond, which implies respect for her virginal nature and upholding her Christian belief. Her morality and belief challenged the pagan values of her Roman persecutors, who cruelly punished her with a violent death.

In the depiction and iconography of a solo image of Saint Justina, Barbara Longhi was visually influenced first by her father Luca's painting and then indirectly by two artistic traditions: classical and Renaissance. In 1562, Luca Longhi painted a small panel of *Saint Justina of Padua* (Figure 10) (Viroli, 2000, p. 70) while working on an altarpiece for the Benedictine monks in Padua. In this city, he probably visited the famous and holy Basilica of Saint Anthony and studied the Rogati-Negri sarcophagus of 1350, where the image of Saint Justina of Padua is carved in a niche (Figure 11). Inside this niche, the haloed figure of the female saint is shown in front of a parapet. She holds a large palm frond in her left hand while gently raising her right hand, dispensing a blessing to the viewer. The motion of the raised open hand and palm outward signifies distributing blessings and thanksgivings as noted in the Bible: "Open your hand ... is filled with good things" (Psalm 104:28). This gesture is also a physical and metaphysical sign for royal greetings as well as favors imparted and received when acting morally. This conceit is ascribed to and partakes of the cardinal virtue of Justice. Hence Saint Justina's hand motion is associated with her noble birth, her name (Justina), and her persona as a personification of Justice (Cooper, 1978, p. 42; Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, p. 466; O'Reilly, 1988, pp. 112-162; Kaczor & Sherman, 2008, pp. 73-82).

¹¹ The painting was recently sold in Lot 513, on 19 May 2022 at the Van Ham Kunstauktionen in Cologne, Germany, now in a Private Collection. I am grateful for the notations of Prof. Daniele Benati of Bologna and Drs. Davide Dossi of Wan Ham Auction House, and Alessandra Masu of Boston, MA. Recently, Farsettiarte's auction house sold an attributed Luca Longhi's *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*. This picture is painted with the same Mannerist coloration as Barbara's *Saint Justina of Padua*, <https://www.farsettiarte.it/uk/auction-0153-1/luca-longhi-santa-caterina-dalessandria.asp> (accessed 3 September 2022).



Figure 10. Luca Longhi, *Saint Justina of Padua*, 1562, oil on canvas, 35 × 29 cm. Museo Civico, Padua.

Luca Longhi's devotional painting depicts the saint at bust length with glowing golden tonalities throughout the picture plane. The portrait of this delightful young woman resembles his daughter, Barbara. The Longhi scholar Giordano Viroli noted that Luca employed his daughter as model because of her being "young and having a beautiful body" (*essendo giovane e bella del corpo*) (Viroli, 2000, p. 86; Hub & Kodera, 2021, pp. 27-61).¹²

In *Saint Justina of Padua*, Luca portrayed the pious female turns her head away from the viewer, gazing at something beyond the picture frame. Her blond tresses are capped with a golden crown, an emblematic reference to her royal birth, while a small sword inserted in her shoulder recalls her brutal martyrdom. Saint Justina's simple attire of gold colors matches the color of her hair. The saint's frontal position contrasts with the turning of her head and a large hand diagonally placed in the foreground. This motif is to emphasize the meaning of her holding of a palm frond. Its diagonal movement, but opposite to the holding hand, points to the sword, indicating the divine and honorific gift of the palm due to her heartless death.

¹² Viroli, *I Longhi*, 86, entry 49; Berthold Hub and Sergius Kodera, eds., *Iconology, Neoplatonism, and the Arts of the Renaissance* (New York/London: Routledge, 2021), 27-61, on Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic concept of physical and spiritual beauty in Italian Renaissance art.



Figure 11. Saint Justina of Padua, 1350, marble, det., from Rogati-Negri Sarcophagus. Basilica of Saint Anthony, Padua.

Curiously, as Luca Longhi took pictorial license that enhances the iconographical meaning and visual experience on seeing this painting, he paralleled the diagonal movement and placement of palm frond next to the sword. Luca continued this pictorial union in using similar tonalities of gold, green, and white in Saint Justina's garments. The green color of the hem at the end of the sleeve matches that of the palm frond and of the sword's handle. The white color around the trimming of the wrist's sleeve balances with the border of the dress's neckline. Cleverly, the artist selected the golden color of the female's hair for the overall tonality of her attire. The coloration is symbolic: the white color referring to innocence and holiness of life, the green color to triumph and rebirth, and the gold or yellow color to the sacredness of the image (Ferguson, 1996, pp. 151-152). Thus in Christian terms, Luca Longhi depicted Saint Justina's purity of soul (white color), faith (green color), and sainthood (gold color), following the decree of the Counter-Reformation to create an image of devotion and meditation (O'Malley, 2012, pp. 28-48; Schroeder, 1978, p. 216; Bosch, 2020, pp. 37-51; O'Malley, 2002).

In *Saint Justina of Padua* (Figure 6), Barbara was not only inspired by the compositional parallelisms of sword and palm frond seen in her father's *Saint Justina of Padua* but also from his other solo depictions of holy female saints such as *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (Figure 12). In this painting, the saint casts her eyes upward to communicate with the divine in order to receive God's approval and blessings for her martyrdom

and faith, and her hands, pointing to the self and to the instrument of martyrdom, carry symbolic significance (compare Figures 6 and 12) (Cheney, 2022, pp. 17-37; Zama, 2011, pp. 48-49; 2002, pp. 79-84; Simoni, 2013, pp. 71-75).¹³



Figure 12. Luca Longhi, *Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, 1575-1580, oil on canvas, 64 × 47 cm.

Altmani & Sons Collection, Pesaro.

Photo credit: Altmani & Sons Collection, Pesaro.

¹³ Luca and Barbara Longhi composed many paintings on the theme of Saint Catherine of Alexandria as religious portraits and self-portraits. For a discussion on this topic, see Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Barbara Longhi of Ravenna: A Devotional Self-Portrait," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* vol. 12, no. 12 (January 2022): 17-37; Raffaella Zama, "Barbara Longhi," Entry 7, in M. Pulini, ed., *Le Terre della pittura tra Marche e Romagna* (Cesena: Litografia Stampare, San Carlo, 2011), 48-49; Raffaella Zama, "Un'inedita Santa Catherina segnalata Barbara Longhi," *Romagna Arte e Storia* 65 (2002): 79-84; and Serena Simoni, ed., *Spigolando ad Arte: Ricerche di storia dell'arte nel territorio ravennate* (Ravenna: Fernandel, 2013), 71-75.



Figure 13. *Medici Venus*, Hellenistic, late second century BCE, 1.53 m., marble.
Tribuna, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

For certain, both Ravennate painters (Barbara and Luca) appropriated images from classical sculptures for the female's hand gestures—for example, classical sculptures or engravings of the type of *Venus Pudica* (Modest Venus), the ancient Goddess of Beauty and Love, covering her genitals and breasts with her hands, exemplified in the second-century BCE marble *Medici Venus* (Figure 13) (Havelock, 1995).¹⁴ Undoubtedly, the Longhi artists were also familiar with the newly discovered Roman relief of the Julio-Claudians Augustus and Livia in Ravenna. This original marble fragment was found near the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (425-450) in the sixteenth century and is now in the National Archeological Museum of Ravenna (Figure 14) (Viroli,

¹⁴ See <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/medici-venus> (accessed 5 July 2022); and Christine Mitchell Havelock, *The Aphrodite of Cnidos and Her Successors: A Historical Review of the Female Nude in Greek Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

2000, p. 197).¹⁵ In the relief, a clothed Venus Genetrix (or Livia) stands in a contrapposto stance next to Emperor Augustus. She bends her arm close to her chest to hold on to her mantle and offering; these same gestures, along with the treatment of the drapery, are seen in Barbara's *Ravenna Saint Agnes of Rome* (Figure 15) (Cheney, 2022). With her left hand, the saint holds the folds of her garment, and she raises her right hand close to her heart while holding the palm frond, an attribute of her martyrdom. In the iconology of her paintings, Barbara Longhi continued to merge pagan symbolism with Christian iconography.



Figure 14. *Livia and Augustus*, 37-41 CE, marble, det., Julio Claudian Relief.
National Archeological Museum, Ravenna.
Photo credit: Joe Geranio and John Polini.

¹⁵ John Polini has discussed this Roman relief as part of an altar or monument depicting the Julio-Claudian dynasty of Emperor Augustus and his wife Livia. See <https://jcreliefs22.wordpress.com/2011/03/24/the-julio-claudian-ravenna-relief-joe-geranio/> (accessed 15 March 2022); and Viroli, *I Longhi*, 197, referring to a Venus-type.



Figure 15. Barbara Longhi, *Ravenna Saint Agnes of Rome*, 1635, oil on canvas.
 Canonica della Cattedrale, Ravenna.
 Photo credit: Bridgemanimages.com.

Comparative Study (*Paragone*)

In 1582, Paolo Veronese (Paolo Caliari, 1528-1588) appropriated a similar design from the paintings of Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) and Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516) (Figures 16 and 17) for a solo version *Saint Justina of Padua* in the Sala del Colleggio of the Ducal Place in Venice (Figure 18) (Marini, 1968, p. 120; Cocke, 2001).¹⁶ The full-size figure of the saint, fashionably dressed in Cinquecento Venetian attire, stands in contrapposto, holding a palm frond while her left hand reaches for the sword penetrating her chest. The exaggerated stance emphasizes her large belt, a motif alluding to her moral valor and chastity (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, pp. 432-433). Of note is the overall stance and composition in grisaille coloration resembling marble sculptures in a niche or free-standing, perhaps indirectly appropriating and honoring the sculpture of

¹⁶ Remigio Marini, *L'Opera complete del Veronese* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1968), 120, dating the painting 1578; Richard Cocke, *Paolo Veronese: Piety and Display in an Age of Religious Reform* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2001).

Michelangelo's *David* (1501-1504, now in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence).¹⁷ Veronese also assimilated Jacopo Sansovino's inventive compositions of standing figures, done between 1538 and 1541, inside the niches of the base in the Loggetta located under the bell tower in Saint Mark's Square in Venice (Bury, 1980; Morresi, 2000).¹⁸



Figure 16. Andrea Mantegna, *Saint Justina of Padua*, 1453, tempera on panel, det., Saint Luke Altarpiece. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

¹⁷ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_%28Michelangelo%29#/media/File:Michelangelo's_David_-_right_view_2.jpg (accessed 15 July 2022).

¹⁸ For the images, see: https://www.artatsite.com/Venice/images/beelden/groot/Sansovino_Jacopo_Minerva_Apollo_Mercurio_Pace_Campanile_San_Marco__statue_statua_Art_at_Site_Venezia_Venice.jpg (accessed 5 July 2022). See also J. B. Bury, "The Loggetta in 1540," *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 122, no. 930 (September 1980): 629-635; and Manuela Morresi, *Jacopo Sansovino* (Milan: Electa, 2000), 213-215.



Figure 17. Giovanni Bellini, *Saint Justina of Padua*, 1470, tempera on panel.
Palazzo Bagatti Valsecchi, Milan.

For the Benedictine abbey and monastery of Saint Justina in Padua, Andrea Mantegna composed an altarpiece of Saint Luke in 1453, now in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan. In this polyptych, Mantegna included among the holy figures Saint Justina of Padua (Figure 16). The skillfully painted image depicts the saint dressed in classical garments, a long chemise gown (chiton), and a wrapped mantle (himation), standing in contrapposto stance, a classical pose. A crown with a halo is placed on her head, and long loose tresses hang along her shoulder, a symbol of her virginal or unmarried status (Cobb-Stevens, 1993, pp. 311-340). The saint is portrayed with a sword plunged in her breast, a symbol of her martyrdom, and holding a palm frond, a symbol of her spiritual reward for her martyrdom, as well as a book, a symbol of Christian teachings. The vertical positioning of the palm frond symbolized victory in Italian Renaissance paintings (Valeriano Bolzani, 1596, p. 492; D'Ancona, 1977, p. 279).



Figure 18. Paolo Veronese, *Saint Justina of Padua*, 1582, oil. Sala del Colleggio, Ducal Palace, Venice.

Inspired by Mantegna's composition, Giovanni Bellini painted a mysterious *Saint Justina of Padua* (Figure 17), which was commissioned by the Borromeo family and now is in the Palazzo Bagatti Valsecchi in Milan. In a parapet, the holy figure stands in contrapposto, dressed in Renaissance courtly attire, and crowned as a majestic saint. She holds her ascribed attributes of martyrdom—a palm frond and a book—while her breast area is pierced with a *gladius*. Her royal status is revealed with the ornamentation of jewels: a golden jeweled belt with pearls and carnelian stones matching the jewel decorations in her sleeve and arm band, and a long pearl brooch holding her mantle. A halo surrounds her royal crown that rests on a double row of tresses braided with lace and pearls. Bellini has created a combination of a mystical and physical space behind the standing holy figure. Using a *sfumato* technique and visually moving from the bottom to the top of the picture plane, the coloration in this background modulates gradually from a creamy lightness into a bluish tonality, a

metaphorical ascent from Earth to Heaven. This conceit is also rendered with the clouds, where a mysterious vaporization in the sky's atmosphere forms of fluffy patches of blue color, alluding to the transit of the soul away from the body or to the transformation of the human form into an angelic being—Justina's martyrdom transforms her into a saint.

These images of Saint Justina of Padua (Figures 16-18) portrayed the figure of the saint as statuary, indicating at least two significant artistic appropriations. One derives from a medieval monument in Padua, a marble statue in a niche of Saint Justina placed inside the Romanesque portal of the Basilica of Saint Justina in Padua. The standing female figure, dressed in medieval courtly attire and wearing a princess's crown, vertically carries a palm frond and holds a sword in her chest (Figure 19) (Prevedello, 2004, pp. 115-117). The other assimilation is from a Renaissance altarpiece, a bronze statue of Donatello's *Saint Justina* included in the High Altar of the Basilica of Saint Anthony in Padua. The graceful image of Saint Justina of Padua, crowned and dressed in princely attire, is holding a palm frond, and extending an open hand. This gesture recalls the image of Saint Justina of Padua in the Rogati-Negri sarcophagus located in the same basilica (compare Figures 11 and 20) (White, 1969a; 1969b; Johnson, 1999).

The columnar stance is a symbol of her courage and fortitude since construction of a column as a vertical axis is an element of support in an edifice. This architectural structure is traditionally emblematic of strength as the ancient Pillars of Hercules (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, pp. 220-223).¹⁹ In Christian iconography, this symbolism is compared or transferred to an individual's inner strength (*fortitude* or *fortezza d'animo*) and personal victory (Judges 16:22-30; Apocalypse 3:11-12). Saint Justina of Padua as a vertically standing figure in a contrapposto, full-size, and frontal view becomes a monument. These female saints are dressed in Renaissance courtly attire; none of them gaze at the viewer but, rather, are to be revered by the devotee. The type of full-stance composition seen in these paintings and conceits are similarly implied in Barbara's *Ravenna Saint Agnes of Rome* (Figure 15) but not in her portrayal of *Saint Justina of Padua* (Figure 6). Here Barbara prefers to compose a bust-length design, perhaps recalling the honorific medallions of holy figures or statuary busts in funerary stelae (commemorative grave markers) seen in Byzantine churches or cemeteries in Ravenna.²⁰

Undoubtedly, Barbara's original composition of a solo image of the saint, in $\frac{3}{4}$ -view and frontally presented to the viewer (*Saint Justina of Padua*, Figure 6), recalls her father's *Saint Justina of Padua* (Figure 10). Luca probably was familiar with the medieval carved image of Saint Justina from the Rogati Negri sarcophagus in the Basilica of Saint Anthony in Padua, and with the Italian Renaissance prototypes that depicted at bust length a portrait of an individual impersonating or imaging a saint, e.g., *Saint Justina of Padua* by Bartolomeo Montagna (Bartolomeo Cincani, 1429-1523) (Figure 21). This panel of 1503-1505 is a portrait-type composition painted with brilliant and rich Venetian colors, representing the portrait of a *fanciulla* as a saint, tastefully dressed, bejeweled in the Renaissance fashion (De Zuani, 2020, pp. 336-337).

¹⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 220-223; Tervarent, *Attributes et Symbols dans L'Art Profane*, 135, citing Pierio Valeriano, Hieroglyph XLIX, on the column as an obelisk that is a symbol of firmness (*firmitas*) or stability.

²⁰ For example, the mosaic roundels in the Byzantine Chapel of Saint Andrew of the sixth century in Ravenna, see <https://www.edificistoriciravenna.it/en/palazzo-arcivescovile/> (accessed 5 July 2020); and ancient Roman stelae in Ravenna, see https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/22/_8432 and <https://www.agefotostock.com/age/en/details-photo/stele-of-the-freedmen-from-the-firmia-family-roman-civilisation-1st-century-ravenna-museo-nazionale-archaeological-museum/DAE-11160937> (accessed 5 July 2020).



Figure 19. *Saint Justina of Padua*, 13th century, marble. Romanesque Portal. Basilica of Saint Justina, Padua.

It was probably part of a larger altarpiece, now disassembled and in view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York or was a portrait of a *nobil donna* in the personification of Saint Justina of Padua. In his *Saint Justina of Padua*, Montagna depicted a portrait-saint, elegantly attired in the Renaissance courtly tradition, her braided hair with blue satin veil and jewels, pearls, and carnelians or rubies matches her jeweled headdress or headpiece. The pearl necklace with a large red stone pendant emphasizes the motif decoration of strings of pearls following the borders of her dress and perpendicularly emphasizes a very large brooch of similar color on the neckline of the dress. The green velvet sleeves are superimposed on her white chemise sleeves and attached with red jeweled bows. Although Montagna has pictured a courtly portrait recalling Justina's royal birth, he also has added to the image elements emphasizing her holiness, such as a suspended and large golden halo contrasting with the silver string crown on her head. In addition, the figure holds vertically with her right hand a palm frond, the same green color of her sleeve. A closer inspection of the left sleeve reveals a foreshortened sword plunged into the saint's breast, the instrument of her martyrdom. Montagna composed another bust-length painting of *Saint Justina of Padua* as portrait-saint (1500, now at the Museo Correr in

Venice, Figure 22). This unusual version depicts the figure of the saint with a languid expression. She is painted with muted colors, showing a simple courtly dress and few jewels. At an imagined open window, the figure frontally faces the viewer, resting one hand with a palm frond on a windowsill. In full view, the other hand with long tapering fingers points to the wound in her chest, reminding the observer of her martyrdom. Montagna's young females look pensive and detached from their surroundings. Their dominant spiritual state is suspended in time, contrasting with the actual delightful decor of their attire, yet Montagna captured, as did Barbara Longhi, the physical beauty and spiritual courage of the saint.



Figure 20. Donatello, *Saint Justina*, 1447-1450, bronze, 153 cm.
High Altar, Basilica of Saint Anthony, Padua.



Figure 21. Bartolomeo Montagna, *Saint Justina of Padua*, 1503-1505, oil on panel, 48.7 × 37.4 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Credit line: Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913.

The Symbolism of the Palm Frond in Saint Justina of Padua

In depicting the palm frond in the imagery of Saint Justina of Padua, Barbara melded ancient, pagan, and classical motifs and symbolism to present a Christian message. The origin of the usage of the palm branch or palm frond derives from religious cultures and burial rites of ancient Near East (Mesopotamia) and Egypt (D'Ancona, 1977, pp. 279-280; Biedermann, 1994, p. 252). Then, the palm frond was considered an attribute of immortality in ancient classical mythology (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, p. 734). This mythical tradition was continued and appropriated in ancient classical (Greece and Rome) religion, but with a change: the glorifying or honoring was not just of gods and goddesses but also of human beings who excelled (*aretê* or *virtù*) in their accomplishments, such as victorious athletes, heroic soldiers, emperors, and empresses. Hence in Antiquity, the visualization of immortality with the depiction of the palm frond was recorded in numismatic, relief sculpture, mosaic decorations, and monuments (Tarbell, 1908; Callahan, 1992).



Figure 22. Bartolomeo Montagna, *Saint Justina of Padua*, 1500, oil on panel, 24 × 28.4 cm.
Museo Correr, Venice.
Photo credit: AKG-Images.

Ancient numismatic imagery provided earlier depictions of the palm frond as held by pagan gods as a symbol of divinity and victory. For example, on the medal's reverse of Antimachus I Theos (185-170 BCE), King of Bactria, dated in the second century BCE, the incised image shows Poseidon, God of the Sea, standing in contrapposto, draped with a himation, and holding a trident and a palm frond (Figure 23a).²¹ This pagan motif for imperial political victory was appropriated in Christian times and used in propagandistic medals by the converted Roman Emperor Constantine I. He aggrandized his image as a divine and Christian ruler through the dissemination of coins, portraying on the recto of the medal his portrait, and on the verso, a device of a female figure personifying victory that holds a palm frond as a symbol of triumph (Figure 23b).²²

²¹ From the Arthur J. Frank Collection. Ex *Münzen und Medaillen AG FPL 318* (November/December 1970).

²² From the Arthur J. Frank Collection. Ex *Münzen und Medaillen AG FPL 318* (November/December 1970).



Figure 23a. Medal of Antimachus I Theos, King of Bactria, 2nd century BCE, silver.
Recto: Portrait; Verso: Poseidon draped in a himation and holding a trident and a palm frond.

Courtesy: Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.



Figure 23b. Medal of Emperor Constantine I, 335 CE, gold.

Recto: Portrait; Verso: Victory holding a trophy, right hand, and a palm frond, left hand.

Courtesy: Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.

One notable ancient Roman sculpture is a relief representing victory inside a niche of a base from a demolished triumphal arch that once stood in Via Latta (Via del Corso) in Rome (Figure 24). The arch was destroyed in 1491 in order to build the church of Santa Maria in Via Latta. In the late sixteenth century, Ferdinando de' Medici (1549-1609), an avid collector of classical art, acquired the base for his gardens in Florence (Bargilli & Rapino, 2010, pp. 41-43). This base is referred to as *Capillatus* or Barbarian Prisoner Base. It contains four niches with original relief carvings, made of marble and dating between 240 and 260 CE and is now located in the Bacchus Courtyard of the Boboli Gardens. One of the niches shows a relief of a standing Nike figure (winged Victory) in contrapposto stance, her elaborate hairdo with long tresses echoing the draped motif of her chiton and himation. She holds a large palm frond while raising a wreath with her other hand.



Figure 24. Victory, 240-260 CE, marble, det., Capillatus, Barbarian Prisoner Base. Bacchus Courtyard, Boboli Gardens, Florence.

In contrast to this relief of the pagan Victory, an ancient mosaic in the Room of the Ten Women's Athletes ("Bikini Girls") from a Roman summer home, Villa Romana del Casale in Piazza Armerina in Sicily, fourth century CE, illustrates young female athletes engaged in competitive ball games (Odyssey II: 115-116). In the lower section of the mosaic, a female athlete is honored for her victorious athletic achievements in the ball competition, receiving a palm frond and a crown with a floral wreath (Figures 25a and 25b) (N. H. Ramage & A. Ramage 1995, p. 277; Spears, 1984). This historical event recalls the Pythian games given in honor of Apollo, where the winners were crowned with laurel and bestowed with a palm frond (D'Ancona, 1977, p. 279).



Figure 25a. Women's Athletic Contests, fourth century CE, mosaic.
 Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.
 Photo Credit: Patrizio Pensabene and Enrico Gallochio.



Figure 25b. Women's Athletic Contests, fourth century CE, mosaic, det.
 Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily.

In these athletic representations of triumph or competition victory, the winner is honored with the gift of the palm frond. For the ancient Greeks, this pagan honorific motif of *arête* (physical and spiritual excellence) was considered good motivation for an individual or a testament to the human capacity to achieve excellence and one's full potential (Allard-Nelson, 2000, p. 245). And in ancient Roman culture, *virtus* (moral valor, courage, and personal triumph), later appropriated in Italian Renaissance mores as *virtù*, was associated with a moral skill in human action or the ability to achieve success (Livius, 1919; D'Ancona, 1977; McDonnell, 2006; Mansfield, 1998, pp. 6-7; Korey, 2022). This ancient aspect of moral virtue associated with the palm frond and the palm tree continued in Christian ideology but broadened its meaning to include spiritual triumph or the triumph of the soul (D'Ancona, 1977, p. 279; Cessario, 2008).²³ Hence Christian faith combines moral virtue (rectitude) with spiritual jubilation, as seen in the depictions of Barbara Longhi's paintings (Figures 4, 5, and 6). In accordance with Christian martyrology (*Martyres ... cum palmis*), and *Justus ut palma florebit* (Martyrs ... hold palms; the Just shall blossom like the palm) (Durand, 1459) and the precepts of the Counter-Reformation, the depiction of holy images with their visualization should provide recollections (*memoria*) and spiritual arousal (*exitatio*) (Schroeder, 1955, p. 216). These experiences (*exitatio*) would then move viewers "to adore and love God and cultivate piety" (Schroeder, 1955, p. 216) as indicated in Barbara's paintings of *Saint Justina of Padua*.

Coda and Conclusion

In her images of Saint Justina, Barbara Longhi portrayed a young woman with beautiful features, gentle expression, and fine gestures in carrying the attributes of her sacrifice. Barbara's noble heroine inspires admiration and courage. In her visualization of the saint, Barbara did not select or glorify the gruesome moment of the saint's martyrdom as visualized by her father in *The Martyrdom of Saint Justina* (signed and dated *Luchas de Longhis/Ravennas Pingebat/MDLXI*, oil on canvas, 210 × 141 cm., now at the Museo Civico in Padua) (Viroli, 2000, pp. 67-68) and Paolo Veronese's *Martyrdom of Saint Justina* for a private patron (now at the Galleria degli Uffizi, Figure 26) (Niero, 2004, pp. 175-177; Marini, 1968, p. 92).²⁴

²³ D'Ancona, *The Garden of the Renaissance*, 279; Romanus Cessario, O. P., *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), Chapter 6, on the meaning of Christian virtues; and biblical references: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree," Psalm 92:12; and "Christ clothed in white robes and palms in their hands," Revelation 7:9. In Christian art, Palm Sunday was visualized with Christ entering Jerusalem and being greeted by the people carrying palm branches and singing: "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John 12:12-13). See Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, 36.

²⁴ Antonio, Niero, "Santa Giustina e Venezia: il culto prima e dopo la Battaglia di Lepanto," in Nante, *Santa Giustina e il primo Cristianesimo a Padova*, 175-183, esp. 175-177; Marini, *Veronese*, 92, and for another version, now in the Museo Civico of Padua, see 97.



Figure 26. Paolo Veronese, *Martyrdom of Saint Justina*, 1573, oil on canvas, 103 × 115 cm.
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Saint Justina's popularity as a miraculous saint continued through the centuries, to be evoked in particular in the Venetian states during and after the Christian triumph at the Battle of Lepanto, when the Turks invaded Europe on 7 October 1571. The Christian military and naval victory of the Holy League, a federation of Catholic States under the command of Pope Pius V (Antonio Ghislieri, 1504-1572), destroyed the powerful Ottoman fleet at the Gulf of Patras. In commemoration of this historical event, two visualizations occurred, one in metallic form and the other in oil. The Venetian mint produced new coins called *giustine*, an "honorary currency provided by the Doge for the nuns of the church in Santa Giustina" (in Venice) to donate to visitors (Fenlon, 1987, p. 222; Niero, 2004, pp. 175-183); and to honor this historical event and miracle, Veronese was commissioned in 1570 to depict Saint Justina's martyrdom for the high altar of the Abbey and Basilica of Saint Justina in Padua²⁵ (Marini, 1968, p. 116; Salviati, 2012, pp. 11-12). In a tour de force orchestration of colors, diagonal movements, illusionistic space, and human gestures, Saint Justina's martyrdom is received in Heaven by the Holy Trinity and the heavenly court of angels and saints. In the distant foreground, the Basilica is seen,

²⁵ For the image see <https://www.christianiconography.info/Edited%20in%202013/2013%20trip/justinaMartyrdomPadua.html> (accessed 5 July 2022).

while in the immediate foreground the haloed Justina has been executed with a sword piercing her chest. A remarkable modello composed by Veronese for this painting is at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, CA.²⁶

Veronese's *Martyrdom of Saint Justina* at the Uffizi (Figure 26) is a smaller version, less dramatic in composition but equally moving, probably painted around the same time. The narrative scene takes place in a Venetian atrium where Justina's desperate fate unfolds. On a marble floor, she is forced to kneel, framed on her left side by courtly Venetian male aristocrats wearing no hats and on her right by two Turkish soldiers wearing turbans, while the executioner wears a Phrygian cap. He plunges a sword into Justina's exposed breasts. Her royal crown, associated with her original birth, is placed on a step at the feet of the Turkish soldiers. A double row of Ionic marble columns draws the viewer into the background, in the distance, a white marble bridge where Justina hunted and was arrested is in view. Symbolically, the architectural motif of the column, because of its supportive role, is a sign of strength, in this instance of Justina's moral courage and strength (*fortitude* or *fortezza d'animo*) in the face of this massacre.

In her depictions of Saint Justina of Padua, in particular in the solo image of the saint, Barbara focused on the saint's nobility of the soul and the spiritual beauty of her conversion, not on the ugly ordeal of the physical martyrdom. In her images, Barbara combined ancient and Christian symbolism associated with Saint Justina of Padua. Her name means justice, and the vertical stand of the palm frond signifies *rectitudo*—erectness or rectitude—thus also a symbol of justice. As noted in the Bible, the palm is as well associated with a just or a righteous individual: "The just shall flourish like the palm tree" (Psalm 92:12) (D'Ancona, 1977, p. 286). Thus, through the depiction of Saint Justina of Padua—a just martyr who triumphed over death—Barbara visualized the proclamations of the Counter-Reformation movement in depicting religious images of holy figures for private devotion and contemplation.

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²⁶ The Getty Museum owns a finished Veronese's modello "with squaring in black chalk for easy design transfer to a canvas", for the image and text, see <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103R1M> (accessed 5 July 2022).

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