

**Column, light and clouds in Titian's *Annunciation*  
in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples**

ティツィアーノ作《受胎告知》における円柱、光と雲について  
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**Abstract**

The infrared and X-ray show that Titian's underdrawing of the *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples had several alterations and the result reveals the thoughts and ideas of the artist for the work of art. Titian originally divided the figures area into two relatively independent regions. The left was for the complete image of Gabriel and the right was for Mary with a row of columns behind her. However in the final representation, the row of columns was changed to one column with a figure-sized pedestal on which a relief related to a Christian subject other than Annunciation is painted. The altering makes the column, the relief, the light and clouds the key to understanding the work of art, and a thorough study of the column, the relief, the light and clouds in the religious contexts respectively is necessary. The historical development of the association of Mary with theological texts and symbolic motifs sheds light on the interpretation of the combination of Mary, column, relief and light and clouds. The examination of the artist's initial idea and the final representation leads to a deeper understanding of Titian and the work of art. Different from the artist's other *Annunciations*, Titian exerts a unique combination of Mary, the relief, the column, the light and clouds to convey complicated religious connotations. Titian's art is not simply the visualization of the theological texts, but it realizes the religious subject in both form and content. The innovation that has been intentionally made by Titian is related to the complicated contemporary artistic, religious and social contexts, which discloses Titian's profound understanding of the Christian subjects narratively, religiously and aesthetically. Titian's realization of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* attests to the artist's iconographic innovation in his mature years and the religious work of art demonstrates himself as a master of *colorito* integrated with both pictorial practice and humanist considering.

**Keywords:** Titian, Annunciation, Mary, Column, Relief

**Introduction**

Titian produced at least five *Annunciations* in his career life. The *Annunciation* at Treviso (or the *Malchiostro Annunciation*) in 1519, the *Annunciation* at Scuola Grande di San Rocco in 1530, the lost *Annunciation* in 1535 that can be observed by Jacopo Cararglio's engraving after Titian in 1537, the

*Annunciation* at Naples in 1557 and the *Annunciation* at Venice in 1562.<sup>1</sup> The development of Titian's *Annunciations* indicates the artist's varied ideas for the same subject. The first one was finished when the artist was a young master. The use of perspective and the bright color tone evoke the close relationship of Titian with Bellini and Giorgione. The rectangle composition of the San Rocco *Annunciation* recalls the contemporary international style from the central Tuscany and Rome. The last two *Annunciations* in Titian's late years indeed testify the master's mature and innovative ideas for the repeated subject. Although the two *Annunciations* are similar in composition, color tone and pictorial style, and both exhibit so called late style of Titian, *Annunciation* at San Salvador apparently has drawn more attention due to the grand size, location and relatively well-reserved condition while the less famous Neapolitan *Annunciation* is noticed and mentioned largely for its similarity to the Venetian one. The study of the differentiation of the *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples from the famous Venetian one elucidates Titian's thoughts and intentions of the very Christian subject in the various contexts.

Nevertheless the scholarship on Titian's *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples is handful, scholars have provided valuable studies and documentary on this work of art.<sup>2</sup> Luba Freedman puts up Titian's contemporary sixteenth century writer Bartolomeo Maranta's *Discourse* to interrogate the work of art *Annunciation* of Naples through a more macroscopic lens and links Titian's intentions for the Neapolitan *Annunciation* to the contemporary humanist context.<sup>3</sup> Although Maranta's *Discourse* provides the patronage documentary and aesthetical criticism, the focus of the contemporary essay is mainly on Titian's elegant representation of Gabriel, the depiction of Mary and the architectural background in the work of art have not been fully discussed. The modern scholars continue the study of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* by analyzing the comparison of Titian representation of Gabriel in the work of art with "Diana" in the artist's *The Death of Actaeon* and discuss to some extent the artist's pictorial style, the color tone, the coarse brush, the use of light in the late fifties and afterward. Daniela Bohde attempts at the materiality in Titian's figurature of body and skin and how Titian's brush of color materializes the figures and makes the viewer interact with the scene on Titian's canvas. Daniel Arasse studies Italian *Annunciations* through *perspective* applied in Italian *Annunciations* and puts up that how *perspective* plays the role spatially in connecting the divine world and the earthly world.<sup>4</sup> Still, the work of art lacks sufficient discussion as a whole and in details of its innovations. The uniqueness of the San Domenico Maggiore *Annunciation* has not been touched, especially, the relief on the column in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* that conveys the multiple layers of religious connotations is overlooked. Clarifying the subject of the relief painted by Titian leads to more questions pertaining to the artist's ideas of the architectural background, the composition, the representations of the angels and the association with Mary. The work of art needs further examination and a series of questions require more extensive studies and deeper interpretations, more specifically, the significant roles that the column, the light and the clouds play respectively and as a whole in the very *Annunciation*.

The Italian scholarship sheds light on Titian and his *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore. Particularly, the scholars provide vital information of the various conditions of the work of art via the modern technology, which leads to a rethinking of the interpretation of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. Marcel Grosso states Titian's *Annunciations* in the artist's life and analyzes the artist's style pertaining to portraying figures in Titian's each varied *Annunciation* and the use of colors.<sup>5</sup> Anna Chiara Alabiso, Marco Cardinali, Maria Beatrice de Ruggieri and Bruno Arciprete in the book *Tiziano per Napoli: l'Annunciazione di San Domenico Maggiore: vicende storico-artistiche, tecnica di esecuzione e restauro* state the restoration of Titian's Neapolitan *Annunciation* in the modern times, provide historical accounts related to the process of the restorations and discuss in detail the procedure of the production of the work of art.<sup>6</sup> In this paper I discuss the roles of the column, light and clouds that play in the work of art and the religious connotations of those with Mary. I suggest that Titian reconciles the column, light, clouds and Mary as a whole to convey the multiple connotations of the identity of Mary in *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples. I examine Titian's underdrawing of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, analyze the religious connotations of the column, light and clouds in Titian's art, and discuss the artist's intentions of the work of art.

### **Titian's underdrawing of *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples**

Titian's *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples, oil painting of a size of 232x192cm,<sup>7</sup> prepared and finished in 1557-1562,<sup>8</sup> was commissioned by Cosimo Pinelli for his family Chapel in the Neapolitan basilica of San Domenico Maggiore. (Fig. 1) The work of art was produced in the late years of the artist and installed at the Church of San Domenico Maggiore in Naples as an altarpiece. The Neapolitan *Annunciation* exhibits the critical moment in Christianity when the archangel, depicted in his profile, descends from the left of the canvas and enters Mary's chamber. Gabriel, with the wings closed and a bunch of lilies in his left arm, stretches out his right arm to Mary. The contour of the angel's two legs are underlined so that the concrete shapes of the left leg ahead of the right leg under the robe and the shadows on the floor are vividly displayed. Mary occupies almost the right edge of the canvas, dressed in a typically blue-red robe and a mantilla veil with a long headdress. She crosses her arms over her chest, half-kneeling, lowers her head, and bows. A column with a large pedestal, standing between Gabriel and Mary, roars into the upper area of the canvas, which is occupied by putti, angels and piles of clouds. The dove, signifying the Holy Spirit, hovering in the central area of the upper canvas, casts a bright golden light through the clouds and the column towards Mary. The work of art reproduces the scene of *Annunciation* that Gabriel delivers God's message to Mary that she is chosen to carry Christ, the son of the Lord, in her womb. At the same time, Mary receives the message from the Lord and carries the baby Christ simultaneously while remaining the virginity. Nevertheless the painting does not remain all the same from its underdrawing. After experiencing a sequence of historical transitions, the work of art currently locates on the second floor at the Capodimonte Museum. A restoration

program of the painting was conducted in 2007.<sup>9</sup>

Anna Chiara Alabiso and Bruno Arciprete accomplish a survey to evaluate and analyze the condition of the work of art by means of various techniques including radiographs, UV, IR, Stratigraphy and XRF, and the survey provides specific historic documentation and vital information of the preparation stage of the restoration.<sup>10</sup> The result discloses the differentiation between Titian's original underdrawing and the final representation of the work of art. Arciprete states a number of producing details of the work of art in *Il Restauro dell'Annunciazione di Tiziano a San Domenico Maggiore* and points out that there is actually a seam in almost the middle of the painting that measures 75cm and 119cm respectively.<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 2) The vertical line of



Fig 1 left: *Annunciation* in 1562, oil on canvas, 232x190cm. San Domenico Maggiore, Naples

Fig 2 middle: underdrawing under the infrared and X-ray

Fig 3 right: underdrawing under the infrared and X-ray

seam, locating to the right of the archangel's profile, is underlined by thickening the paint of the line that makes the seam quite visible even currently.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in the final representation, the vertical line of seam seems to cut through Gabriel's forearm, which is not a usual arrangement for a portrait of a figure. Although the ratio of the seamed parts was normally decided by the canvas weaving techniques as well as the artist's design, thickening the seam line evidently makes it easier to be detected. The X-ray and infrared show Gabriel's right arm was depicted higher and shorter in the underdrawing, almost touching his own profile, and the left forearm was reduced to just a little more than a hand.<sup>13</sup> The position of the left leg was half-pace forward and the angel's tunic was painted a little rightward accordingly. Hence, in the original underdrawing, the seam actually divided the canvas into two portions. The left portion included the complete image of Gabriel with a higher and shorter right arm and a more straight and upward body that makes the physical figure of the archangel entirely fit into the left portion. The right portion divided by the seam also has some changes however in different ways. (Fig. 3) The radiographic investigation and the infrared reveal the procedure of the painting varied from five to seven layers and the Virgin's robe is particularly transparent to infrared, which indicates no significant changes made to Mary but marginal corrections and re-profiling, some

adjustments of the contours. The drapery of the mantle and her dress appear in large masses with decisive brushstrokes, which again indicates the depiction with speed and confidence.<sup>14</sup> It is assumable that the representation of Mary was satisfactory and the final image accords with Titian's original ideas.

It is the architectural background in the underdrawing that differs a great deal from the final phase of the construction in the painting, especially the column. As the infrared and X-ray show, it is visible that a row of columns might originally have been depicted, and the columns covered the vacant space from right to the vertical line of seam through the space behind Mary. The depiction indicated the columns ran leftwards and vanished to the small landscape at the lower point of the seam. The perspective of the columns can be testified by another discovery via the modern technology. On the right edge of the canvas, there was a prie-dieu, on the base of which TITIANUS P. is written.<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 4) The signature appears to align with the vanishing point of the columns, that vanished into the small landscape on the lower middle area of the canvas. In another word, in the underdrawing, the architecture would have occupied almost two thirds of the painting, reaching to the profile of Gabriel. However, in the final representation of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, the row of columns was substituted by one frontal column, more specifically, by the pedestal, the size of which is almost as large as the figure of Mary, and that makes the pedestal spacious enough to obtain the comprehended relief. (Fig. 5)

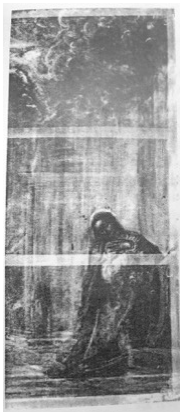


Fig 4 left: underdrawing under the infrared and X-ray



Fig 5 right: detail

As a summary of the underdrawing, the vertical seam divides the canvas into left and right two parts. The left area was supposed to include the image of the archangel, while the right area contained not only Mary but also a row of columns. Then for certain reasons, Titian changed the columns to a frontal column with a figure-size pedestal on which relief is painted. The combination of the columns and Mary right to the seam in the original underdrawing becomes the combination of Mary, the column and the relief that we can observe today. So does the archangel. The long right arm depicted in the final presentation functions as a line leading the eyesight of the viewer to the area where the combination of Mary, column and the relief resides.

Arasse's study on the Italian *Annunciations* links *perspective* to displaying the heavenly world and the earthly world at the same canvas. The divine locates at the end of the distance and the human world locates at the foreground<sup>16</sup>. A row of columns with *perspective* is a traditional way to represent a scene of both the divine and the human regions as Titian applied in his other *Annunciations*. Nevertheless, the idea was changed by Titian in the final representation of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. The result of the radiographic investigation aligns with the development of Titian's *Annunciations*. Grosso provides analysis on the pictorial style and historical contexts of all Titian's five *Annunciations*.<sup>17</sup> The continuity and coherence of Titian's development of *Annunciations* are mentioned however the inner links among all Titian's *Annunciations* are not much discussed. Alabiso and Italian scholars point out that the *Annunciation* in Naples seems to be the testing ground for the subsequent realization of the *Annunciation* at the San Salvatore of Venice.<sup>18</sup> (Fig. 6) This point of view partly explains the noticeable similarity of the two later *Annunciations*. In addition to the resemblance, the Venetian one is almost twice the size of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* and the date of the Venetian piece is around 1562, a few years later than the Neapolitan piece, the late fifties, which are the probable reasons why the Neapolitan *Annunciation* is readily considered the prototype of the Venetian piece. However, Titian's earlier *Annunciation* in ca.1535 is more likely the blue print of the two following and more mature *Annunciations*. Although the original work of art is lost, Jacopo Caraglio's engraving in ca.1537 after Titian, which is also the most well-known copy, resembles the original depiction of the lost one. (Fig. 7) From the engraving *Annunciation*, the composition began to remain vertical that the canvas is divided into the upper and lower areas referring to the heavenly world and the earthly world and such composition reoccurs in Titian's following two *Annunciations*. In the engraving *Annunciation*, Mary is, on the right of the canvas, the humble type and depicted as the posture of crossing her hands over her chest. Gabriel's right arm is stretching upwards with the index finger pointing to the heaven. The row of columns is depicted at the place behind Gabriel, not Mary. The combination of the columns behind Gabriel, as a matter of fact, reappears in Titian's *Annunciation* at the San Salvador of Venice, with a different image of Gabriel of varied posture. The Neapolitan *Annunciation* is clearly different from the other two similar *Annunciations*.



Fig 6 *Annunciation* San Salvador of Venice, 1564. Titian.

Fig 7 *Annunciation* copy after Titian. 1537. Jacopo Caraglio.

Fig 8 *Pesaro Maddona* Frairi BASillica in Venice, 1526. Titian.

For the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, the examination of the underdrawing reveals the artist's initial idea that the columns belong with Mary and the final representation exhibits the combination of the column with frontal pedestal, relief and Mary, which is an innovation among Titian's *Annunciations*. It is without doubt that each part plays an important role in understanding the uniqueness of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* of Titian. I suggest, Mary and the column with relief are reconciled as a whole in order to convey the multiple implications of the identity of Mary of the *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples. The column certainly plays a significant role in understanding the complexity of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*.

### The Column and Immaculate Conception

The column or colonnade is traditionally represented in the scene of Annunciation by Italian artists. David. M. Robb states in *The Iconography of Annunciation in Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries* that, "It is not uncommon to find the angel and the Virgin each occupying a separate bay in a double arcade, this arrangements is almost never absent from Italian representations of Annunciation... the Virgin stands in an open portico while the angel avenues toward her from the left and the column still prevents a complete unification of the space...".<sup>19</sup> Robb points out the implications of dichotomy in Italian traditional *Annunciation* arrangement in order to stress the spatial division between Gabriel and Mary by a portico, the arcade with columns.<sup>20</sup> The portico or arcade is often observed to be symbolized as a row of columns in the works of art by the Italian artists. Besides, in a more secular sense, columns are normally functioned as a part of the architecture where Annunciation happens and the spot where Gabriel enters the chamber or kitchen of Mary and stands. Various samples can be observed, especially the famous Botticelli's fresco *Annunciation* in 1481 and Raphael's *Oddi Annunciation* in ca. 1502. The combination of Gabriel and columns or colonnade can explain to some extent Titian's utilization of the row of columns in his *Annunciation* in 30s and the Venetian *Annunciation*. However, it is still not satisfactory to interpret the unique use of the column in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*.

Helen.S. Ettliger links Titian's representation of the columns to the Immaculate Conception in *The Iconography of the column in Titian's Pesaro Altarpiece* (Fig. 8) and states that Titian's representation of the columns seems to be a direct illustration of the text of Ecclesiasticus 24:7 ". . .*et thronus meus in columna nubis.*"(and a pillar of clouds). Ettliger analyses the evolvement of the Immaculate Conception and points out that Titian's use of the column motif reflects the fact that a larger part of the Ecclesiasticus 24 from verse 5 through 31 had become central to the proof of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>21</sup>

The Immaculate Conception was originally a Feast dedicated to Saint Anne, commemorating her conception of Mary. The idea transmitted to that Mary was freedom from Original Sin at the moment of her conception first appeared after 1100. However the notion was quite controversial since the Augustines argued that the original sin was transmitted through *libido carnalis* (carnal lust) at the moment of conception. After a series of lengthy theological argumentation, the Franciscans shifted the idea of Original Sin and stated that it was the presence of Grace, which was granted by God in order to make Mary worthy to bear the son of God. The notion of Immaculate Conception therefore stresses the purely abstract idea and spiritual implication that it was in the soul from the first moment of conception that made the Virgin immaculate, rather than relating the definition directly to the physical act of conception. However, in the thirteenth century, the idea of Immaculate Conception that Mary was conceived without sin faced challenges due to Mary's father Joachim was a mortal and it was impossible for a mortal's daughter to be conceived without sin. While at the same time, Mary had to be pure enough to be the Holy Mother. As a consequence, a proposal that Mary was sanctified in the womb as was John the Baptist (Luke 1:41) prevailed and was supported by the Dominicans. The dispute between the Immaculate Conception and Sanctification theory hovered throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Under such religious climate, the Ecclesiasticus 24 became a major text in support of the Immaculate Conception. It was firstly used as a definite proof in a treatise (entitled *Liber de Originali Virginis Innocentia*) by Petrus Thomae, a Franciscan lector in Barcelona around 1320 and Scripture was used as a positive proof in support of the Immaculate Conception. The lector states that Mary, being the first-born among all creatures was a priority of dignity, not of time. Then, John of Segovia, the follower of Petrus Thomae, continued to cite Ecclesiasticus 24 as a major authority for the proof of the Immaculate Conception and stressed that it is because of Christ that the Virgin is granted her singular privilege.<sup>22</sup> In summary, in the long debate of theology, the notion of Immaculate Conception is linked to different doctrines. Hence, the visualisation of Immaculate Conception is represented differently.

The first known large scale altarpiece representing the Virgin Immaculate appears around 1350, depicting a seated Virgin and Child used as a symbol for the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In the guise of the Madonna of humility, Mary is seating and holding Christ. The combination of seated Virgin and Child is then traditionally linked to the Immaculate Conception. Botticelli's Bardi altarpiece of 1485, flanked by the two saints, is the famous central Italian Iconography of Immaculate Conception. The younger saint is John the baptist. As John occurs for the long history in the notion of the Immaculate Conception as stated above, the Bardi altarpiece involves John into the visualisation of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>23</sup> The utilisation of the combination of Virgin and Child with saints conveying Immaculate Conception that appears in Venice is Bellini's *Pesaro Triptych* at the church of Saint Maria dei Frari in Venice, the prime Franciscan church in Venice. In Bellini's altarpiece, the Virgin and Child are flanked by saints Nicolas, Peter, Mark, and Benedict.



Titian's Pesaro Altarpiece has gone a step further. The artist includes Virgin and Child, saint Peter and the columns roaring into the cloudy sky, which connects the column to the profound religious implications based on the various theological theories of the Immaculate Conception. From Pesaro Altarpiece to Titian's varied *Annunciations*, the innovative columns occurred repeatedly and continued to allure to the Immaculate Conception to some extent. In the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, the setting of one column behind Mary not only embodies the visualization of "a pillar of clouds", but it conveys more intertwined religious connotations of the column and Mary per se.

### **The Column and Mary**

Steven Ostrow in *Paul V, the Column of the Virgin, and the New Pax Romana* states the religious history of the column associated with the Virgin.<sup>24</sup> Early Rome inherited the practice of placing statues of men on columns from the Greeks, in order to elevate the subject presented by the statues above all other mortals. From imperial Rome through the late sixteenth century, the column was linked to a number of various purposes, glorifying an emperor and his military victories, proclaiming a city's civic identifier, celebrating the triumph of Christianity, and lauding virtues of a ruler.<sup>25</sup> The connection of the column to the immortals is the architectural tradition from Vitruvius's surviving texts, associating the orders with specific gods. Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554) endeavoured to bring Vitruvius theory up his book *Regole general di architecture* published in 1537, "the ancients dedicated the Corinthian column to the goddess Vesta, tutelary deity of virgins... I would certainly say if you have to build a sacred temple in this Order, you should dedicate it to the Mother of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, who was not only a virgin before, but was a virgin during and after giving birth".<sup>26</sup> Thus links the column to the purported house where Annunciation happened and to the Virgin Mary. In the scriptural exegesis, hymns, and prayers, Mary was directly associated with a column. Passages in the Old Testament, in Exodus (13:21-22 and 33:9-10), Numbers (12:5 and 14:14), Deuteronomy (31:15), and 2 Esdras (9:12), in which God is described as appearing in a pillar of Clouds (*columna nubis*) and a column of Fire (*columna ignis*) were interpreted as signifying the Virgin.<sup>27</sup> Mary, as the column of Fire, guided the Israelites to the Promised Land, who offered the faithful an illuminated path to Heaven. In the twelfth-century *Psalterium Beatae Mariae Virginis*, Mary is the "*columna novae legis*" (Column of the New Covenant). In the late medieval hymn "*Hortus rostrum dei genitricis Mariae*" She is the *columna nostrae fide* (column of Our Faith). In the words of the Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor, Mary is the *columna rectitudinis*, (the column of Rectitude).<sup>28</sup> During the theological evolution, the column is dedicated to the immortal deities, to the perpetual virginity, and then becomes a symbol read as the Virgin per se.

The physical position of Mary to the column also manifests the Virgin's close and continual association with the column. *Nuestra Señora del Pilar* represents the statue of Mary standing on the column based on the vision of St. James that Mary, surrounded by angels, appeared on a column and gave the apostle a statue of herself holding the infant Christ and a pillar of jasper, and instructed him to erect an altar and

church on that site.<sup>29</sup> Besides, in those paintings depicting *Madonna and Child, Nativity*, the Virgin was normally shown beside or leaning closely against a tall column.<sup>30</sup> Initially, column is involved with Mary and baby Christ together and such composition can be often observed in Titian's paintings. Then the columns join in Titian's various *Annunciations*. For the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, the depiction of the column locating closely behind Mary evidently strengthens the inner association between Mary and the column and enhances the religious implications of immorality and virginity in the combination of the Virgin and the connotative column. Hence, the column read as Mary per se is underlined through the deliberate position of Mary to the column that has been changed from the underdrawing of the Neapolitan painting and such composition differs from Titian's other *Annunciations*.

### **The light, clouds and the Incarnation**

Nevertheless multiple implications of the column relate to Mary, the eloquent representation of the light and clouds in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* can not be overlooked. Rosand in *Titian's Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple and the Scuola della Carita* discusses Titian's utilization of light and clouds, and how the light and clouds are associated with the religious subjects.<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 9) As Rosand states, Titian was very aware of the importance of the lighting even in the conception stage. In the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (1534-38), Mary is holding a candle, an allusion to her symbolic role as the candlestick bearing the light that is Christ. Titian uses the super natural light in contrast to that in the natural world, and exhibits the diffusion of that divine light into the world. The text "*Ego sum lux mundi*" (I am the light of the world) from the Gospel of St. John (8:12) initiates the connection between the light and our Lord.<sup>32</sup> In the Book of Proverbs and in the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus, Mary's virtues and attributes were early transferred to the person of Mary, becoming a basic part of the liturgical celebration of the Virgin.<sup>33</sup> Hence, that the light and clouds related to Mary is closely associated with the Divine Wisdom text. In Ecclesiasticus (24:5-7): "I came out of the mouth of the most High, the first born, before all creatures: I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth, and as a *cloud* I covered all the earth: I felt in the highest places, and my throne is a *pillar of cloud*. As Christ himself was the *Sol splendidissimus*, Mary was symbolic as the cloud containing the light.<sup>34</sup> Such texts are never vividly realized than that in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. Titian utilizes the metaphor of the light and cloud in the earlier *Treviso Annunciation* in 1519 and the final representation delivers an alienated distance therein. (Fig. 10) However in this Neapolitan case, each part is closely connected: Mary is leaning beside the column, the column roars high and vanishes into the clouds, huge piles of clouds split up and the golden light from the dove casts through the column and towards Mary. This represents the very moment of the Incarnation, which is the crucial core of the Annunciation. At this moment, the light, the clouds, the column and Mary are united intimately as a whole and the Incarnation happens. The particular depiction of the clouds underlines the sacred moment. The pictorial style of the clouds evidently

differs from the clouds in the artist's own Pesaro Altarpiece, *Presentation of the Virgin*, and even *Treviso Annunciation*. The coarse brushstrokes emerging from the artist's late years create the dense layer and solid volume of the cloud and it makes the clouds feel tangible and material in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. Daniela Bohde points out the link between Titian's color, body and corporeality and states in Titian's late art color is increasingly perceived as a material.<sup>35</sup> The resemblance of the clouds in the San Salvador *Annunciation* attests to Titan's attempt at the materiality in his late years. Such materiality for the Neapolitan painting again enhances the rich connotations of the column, light, clouds and most importantly the Incarnation per se.



Fig 9 left: *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* 1534-38. Titian

Fig 10 right: *Treviso Annunciation* 1519. Titian

### The relief on the Column and The Materiality

The relief on the pedestal of the column in Titian's Neapolitan *Annunciation* is overlooked in the study of Titian. It can be observed that two angels and a crown are clearly painted on the front face of the pedestal. The angels are depicted at the action of passing the crown towards Mary and about to coronate the Virgin while the actual figure of Mary is painted standing beside the column. (Fig. 5) The depiction of Mary crowned by angels is often seen in other subjects like *Mary and Child* or *Virgin Mary Reading*. Albeit handful, there are examples that show Mary wearing a crown in *Annunciation*, however on which case, the crown is actually painted on Mary's head. The famous examples are *Santissima Annunziata* and its copies and followers' works.

The rare subject Annunciation-Coronation is inspiring. Elizabeth Valdez Del Alamo states the works of art *Annunciation-Coronation* mostly seen in Iberian Peninsula as the localized subject prevailed within Spain to show the veneration of the Virgin Mary during the early Christian and Byzantine.<sup>36</sup> The *Annunciation-Coronation* is considered one combined subject, in which Mary is usually depicted as wearing the veil signifying her perpetual virginity and coronated by the flying angels. Gabriel is represented with a pose of kneeling to show reverence to the Regal Mary. Mary is coronated after the scene of Assumption by Christ and God the father.<sup>37</sup> *Annunciation-Coronation* underlines Mary's identity as the Virgin and the Queen of Heaven. However in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, Gabriel is depicted as a conventional messenger to deliver the Word rather than a kneeling servant to the queen Mary. The status of Mary is not exactly as the

one in *Annunciation-Coronation* at Iberian Peninsula that Mary has already been coronated as a queen to Gabriel as well as the Virgin in *Annunciation*.

In the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, I suggest, Titian deliberately reconciles two scenes in one canvas. In another word, two subjects are represented, one is undoubtedly *Annunciation*, and the other is *Coronation*. More specifically, the unique combination of *Coronation* and *Annunciation* is not simply a juxtaposition of two subjects, but *Coronation* is represented as a relief on a column, which underlines the role of the column of rich religious connotations as an indispensable part to understanding the manifold implications of the work of art.

As a matter of fact, it is not unusual that *Coronation* occurs at the scene of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. The posture of Mary that she crosses her arms over the chest plays an important role in alluding to the likelihood of *Coronation* on the column. The humble posture of crossing arms over chest denotes the laudable condition of *humility* that traces back to one earlier *Annunciation* in Florence possibly by Maestro di Barberino.<sup>38</sup> Julia Miller and Laurie Taylor-Mitchell state that the depiction of Mary with her arms crossed over her breasts was firstly visualised as *humility* that appeared in the fresco *Annunciation* at Ognissanti, the Humiliati church, in 1369. Although the Ognissanti *Annunciation* copied from the legendary *Santissima Annunziata*, several details altered including the very significant posture of Mary. The representation of Mary with her arms crossed over her chest in the Ognissanti *Annunciation* strengthens the veneration of Mary to protect from death due to famine and plague that frequently took place at that time period. The humble Mary posture was “implicitly identifying the Virgin Annunciate attitude with the instrument of Christ’s martyrdom” so that the representation of the crossed arms is associated with the condition of *humility* meanwhile foretells the sacrifice of Christ. Thus the “sacrificial humility” is associated with the very posture. Mary with crossed arms firstly appeared at the terminal of the crucifix from Giotto around 1320. Then the pose was taken into the paintings of *Annunciation* and *Coronation* to stress Mary’s “sacrificial humility” by various artists for the Ognissanti and other Humiliati churches from the second half of the fourteenth century through the sixteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Hence Mary with crossed arms occurs in the scenes of *Annunciation*, *Crucifixion* and *Coronation*.

Likewise, Mary with crossed arms in the Neapolitan *Annunciation* evokes such associated scenes. The representation of humble Mary in *Annunciation*, the long white veil that references to Christ’s shroud, and the *Coronation* on the column together emphasize the “sacrificial humility”, which is a unique setting only for the Neapolitan painting among Titian’s *Annunciations*. The representation of Mary with such posture and white long veil justify the *Coronation* on the column deliberately designed by Titian.

In addition to Mary’s posture, *Annunciation* and *Coronation* are connected closely together by the angels painted on the column as well. Shirley N. Blum states the angelic attendants and their roles in underlining Mary’s queenly and bridal status in Hans Memling’s *Annunciation* of 1482, which is currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She points out that the traditional *Annunciations* are linked to the

convention ritual of Mass that at least three angels attend. The angelic attendants are to be viewed as subministrators of the Mass by the early fifteenth century in Northern paintings.<sup>40</sup> Gabriel joins the Annunciation as messenger and as subminister, and the additional angels, most of whom are smaller than the Archangels, assist with the earthly parts of the tasks hovering around the sacred figures echoing the psychological state.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, attendant angels are often seen in the standard iconography of Mary's Assumption and Coronation. Angelic attendants in *Annunciations* are not unusual as well. They lift or hold of the train of Mary's garment that identifies the Virgin as a royal bride, which is a motif most often associated with her Coronation.<sup>42</sup>

In the *Annunciation* of Naples, two angels depicted to provide physical assistance to put the crown on Mary's head are in accord with the role of the angelic attendants in either Annunciation or Coronation. The queenly and bridal status is to some extent conveyed, however the inclusion of the column evidently underlines Mary's virginity and Incarnation.

By the fifteenth century, the incorruptible virginity of Mary includes two senses, the Immaculate Conception that her own birth free from sin, and the sacred birth of Christ, the Incarnation. As Mary gave the mortal body and life to Christ at the Annunciation, her own immortal body and soul ascended to Heaven at Assumption and Coronation. For that reason paintings of Coronation or Assumption and Annunciation are closely linked to each other, especially scenes of *Annunciation* incorporate references to *Assumption* and *Coronation*.<sup>43</sup>

The column associated with Immaculate Conception that occurred in Titian's Pesaro altarpiece and then continued to be put in this very Neapolitan *Annunciation* sets up a reasonable ground for the relief of *Coronation*. The rich connotations of the column deepen the implications of the *Coronation* on it. The column that originates from being dedicated to the immortal deity and then evolves to be read as Mary per se completes the relief *Coronation* by its religious associations with Mary. The central position of the column in the scene of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* connects the light and clouds in Heaven and Mary in the world, through which the Incarnation is presented and Mary is coronated with her immortal soul and body. Mary's multiple identities and the sacred Incarnation are emphasized by the rich connotations of the column. Moreover, the column also plays a significant role in visualizing the process of beholding for the viewer of the work of art.

For the Neapolitan *Annunciation*, Titian does not provide two equally painted subjects. Instead, Titian shows *Annunciation* and *Coronation* through a peculiar approach. The angels on the column in relatively smaller size and brown tone contrast sharply with the vividly chromatic human-figure-sized Mary and Gabriel. The unbalanced setting of the two subjects, the position, color and size, leads to a peculiar way of looking: a gaze of the work of art from the edge of two sides towards the center. The vivid and chromatic *Annunciation* on the edges of the canvas states the narrative of Incarnation at present and the homochromatic brown-toned

*Coronation* on the column at the center foretells the queenly status of the future. Titian guides the viewer to behold the work of art inwards to witness Mary's life from *Annunciation*, the white long veil that refers to the death of Christ as a shroud, and to *Coronation*; from girl to God-Bearer, and the Queen of Heaven. The usage of the dynamic interaction with the viewer is not alone in the Neapolitan *Annunciation*. In Bohde's study she states that in Titian's San Salvador *Annunciation*, the dialogue between the picture and the beholder is essential and the beholder is to complete what the artist suggests and project his inner images on the canvas. Titian's attempt at the material imitation of the flesh fuses pictorial and real space. The angels are depicted as bursting into the viewer's space, the row of columns connects the site of the Venetian work of art with the interior of the church, and the steps at the bottom are a kind of virtual entrance into to picture.<sup>44</sup>

Although the relatively smaller size of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* (232x190cm) is more tempting to be the testing ground for the grand Venetian one of the huge size (403x235cm), the similarity in the pictorial style, the way of materializing and the same producing time period make it possible that two later *Annunciations* reference to each other. Titian's seek for the particularity for each painting in his late years is undoubtedly indicated. Titian's deliberate reconciliation of the composition, color and style with multiple layers of the religious connotations results in the innovative uniqueness of the Neapolitan *Annunciation*.

## Conclusion

The interpretation of Titian's *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples is dependent on the complete understanding of the work of art, in which Mary and the column, the light and clouds are connected pictorially, narratively and religiously. The unique setting of the column in the work of art articulates the interpretation of *Annunciation* and *Coronation* that the artist deliberately designed for the Neapolitan painting. The column, light, clouds and Mary are united as a whole that indicates profound and multiple layers of connotations to understand the Immaculate Conception, Annunciation, Incarnation and Coronation in the context of the Neapolitan work of art. Besides, the particular approach of beholding touches on the study of Titian's attempt at the aesthetics of the religious paintings in his late years, which deepens and broadens the interpretation of Titian's *Annunciation* in San Domenico Maggiore of Naples. Nevertheless the focus on the iconographic study reveals the significance of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* in Titian's *Annunciations* and religious paintings, there is still more questions to be answered. Although the patronage in historical background is roughly examined, a more thorough study on the patrons and the contemporary religious climate is needed. The similarity of the Neapolitan *Annunciation* and the earlier lost *Annunciation* that was highly praised by the Emperor Charles V and the relationship among the artist, the patron and the successor Emperor Phillip II require more specific interrogation. Especially, the patron Cosimo was appointed to serve as Chancellor of the kingdom by the King Phillip II in the year 1557, at the same time of which, the work of art is about to be finished. Also, the Counter Reformation makes the religious and political climate in Naples

less relaxing than that in Venice. Whether the changes that have been made from the underdrawing is in relation to the patronage and religious-political climate also requires more studies.

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Harold E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian Complete Edition : I : the Religious Paintings : II : the Portraits : III : the Mythological and Historical Paintings*. London: Phaidon, 1969, Cat. no.12.
- <sup>2</sup> See AA. VV., *Da mercanti genovesi a baroni napoletani: i Pinelli e la loro cappella nella chiesa di San Domenico Maggiore*, in *ESTRATEGIAS CULTURALES Y CIRCULACIÓN DE LA NUEVA NOBLEZA EN EUROPA (1570-1707)*, 2006, pp. 95-110, Aranjuez (Madrid); Charles Hope, *Titian*, London: National Gallery, 2003; Peter Humfrey, *Titian*, London: Phaidon, 2007. E. Panofsky, *Problems in Titian: Mostly Iconographic*, New York, 1969; David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Stephen J. Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy*, 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> Bartolomeo Maranta, Viviana Tonon and Luba Freedman, "Bartolomeo Maranta's 'Discourse' on Titian's Annunciation in Naples: Translation," *Journal of Art Historiography*, 13 (Dec 2015), pp. 1-26; Luba Freedman, "Bartolomeo Maranta's 'Discourse' on Titian's Annunciation in Naples: introduction 1," *Journal of Art Historiography*, 13 (Dec 2015), pp. 1-48.
- <sup>4</sup> See Daniel Arasse. *L'Annonciation italienne: une histoire de perspective*. Paris: Hazan, 2010.
- <sup>5</sup> Marsel Grosso. "Per la fama di Tiziano nella cultura artistica meridionale, tra letteratura e scienza", *Venezia Cinquecento / Red: Università Di Roma La Sapienza, Facoltà Di Lettere, Istituto Di Storia Dell'Arte*, 2009, pp. 5-42.
- <sup>6</sup> See Annachiara Alabiso, Bruno Arciprete, *Tiziano per Napoli: l'Annunciazione di San Domenico Maggiore : vicende storico-artistiche, tecnica di esecuzione e restauro*, Castellammare di Stabia (Napoli): N. Longobardi, 2010.
- <sup>7</sup> Wethey: 232x192cm; Archpriest: 293x194cm.
- <sup>8</sup> Alabiso: shortly after 1557.
- <sup>9</sup> Alabiso, *op. cit.*, 2010. p.1-11.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49-50.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Arasse, *op. cit.*, 2010.
- <sup>17</sup> Grosso, *art. cit.*, 2009. pp.5-42.
- <sup>18</sup> Alabiso, *op. cit.*, 2010.
- <sup>19</sup> David M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", *Art Bulletin*, 1936, pp. 480-526.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Helen S. Ettlinger, "The Iconography of the Columns in Titian's Pesaro Altarpiece", *Art Bulletin*, 1979, pp. 59-67.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Steven F. Ostrow, "Paul V, the Column of the Virgin, and the New Pax Romana", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 69, no. 3. 2010, pp. 352-377.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> David Rosand, "Titian's Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple and the Scuola della Carita", *Art Bulletin*, 58, no. 1. 1976, pp. 55-84.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> See the book of Daniela Bohde, *Haut, Fleisch und Farbe: Körperlichkeit und Materialität in den Gemälden Tizians*. Emsdetten: Edition Imorde, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Valdez Del Alamo, Elizabeth Valdez, "Triumphal Visions and Monastic Devotion: The Annunciation Relief of Santo Domingo De Silos", *Gesta*, 29 no. 2. 1990, pp.167-188.

<sup>37</sup> Philippe Verdier, *Le couronnement de la Vierge. Les origines et les premiers développements d'un thème iconographique*, Montréal/Paris, 1980.

<sup>38</sup> Julia Miller and Laurie Taylor-Mitchell, "Humility and Piety: The Annunciation in the Church of Ognissanti in Florence", *Studies in Iconography / Western Michigan University*, 2009, pp. 42-71.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54-58.

<sup>40</sup> Shirley Neilsen Blum, "Hans Memling's Annunciation with Angelic Attendants", *Metropolitan Museum Journal / Publ. by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*, 1992, pp. 49-50.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49-54.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Daniela Bohde. "Corporeality and Materiality: Light, Colour and the Body in Titian's S. Salvatore Annunciation and Naples Danae". *Titian / Ed. by Joanna Woods-Marsden. Introd. by David Rosand*, 2007, pp. 25-26.