



A Terracotta *Madonna and Child with a Book*

Ascribed to the Master of the Unruly Children:
New Physical Evidence and Interpretation

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The terracotta sculpture of the *Madonna and Child with a Book* in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 1) is one of a group of works depicting the Virgin and the infant Christ or Charity (with a group of minors) attributed to the so-called Master of the Unruly Children, a name coined by Wilhelm Bode to describe the anonymous artist he believed responsible for a collection of sculptures in the former Kaiser Friedrich Museum.² Bode placed this artist in the circle of Donatello (c. 1386-1466) but more recent scholarship has convincingly dated the sculptures to a slightly later period, c. 1510-20, in the light of notable similarities to the output of Verrocchio (1435-1488) and his workshop. Much conjecture has surrounded the authorship of these works, with suggestions most recently including Rustici (1475-1554), but the varying quality and styles evident in the corpus indicate that they are probably products of the Florentine Renaissance workshop system and therefore the output of several hands.³ This study is concerned not so much with connoisseurship as with situating the Rijksmuseum terracotta more firmly in a historical context by examining its subject and possible function in the light of new physical evidence discovered during cleaning and technical examination.⁴

The Materials and Their History

The sculpture, depicting a seated Virgin holding a book in her raised right hand and an animated Christ Child on her lap, revealing her breast, is made of terracotta and painted. The figure is hollow; the back unpainted and flat. Through the thickly painted surface layers one can still perceive the expressive work of the artist's fingers in the clay. The modelling is precise and detailed.

Fig. 1
MASTER OF THE
UNRULY CHILDREN,
Madonna and Child,
Amsterdam,
c. 1500-25.
Terracotta, h. 55.5 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum, gift
of the Vrienden van
het Nederlandsch
museum voor
Geschiedenis en
Kunst, BK-NM-12996.
Frontal position
and turned 45° to
the right.



Recent technical research indicates that the present appearance of the sculpture differs from the original concept in many ways. The original thin paint layers were overpainted at least twice. The latest paint layer can be dated to the nineteenth century.⁵ It is thick and so disguises the subtle details of the terracotta modeling. The presence of large pigment particles creates a granulated surface that is in stark contrast to the fine, even texture of the original layers. The palette changed too, from bright pure colours to a range of soft tones.

The figures have also undergone a fundamental transformation that affected the naked parts of the two figures. The right breast of the Madonna and the genitals of the Child were remodelled with a kind of plaster. The naked breast was dressed and

Fig. 2
Destroyed paint layers on the genitals of the Child.



draperies were added around the Child's hips. These modifications were later removed and cannot now be seen, but the damaged surfaces of the sculpture indicate where they once were. The removal was roughly done, and the original paint layer beneath was destroyed (fig. 2).

The nineteenth-century overpaint also hides repairs to the Virgin's right arm, which was broken at the wrist. The hand was reattached with glue and the join was filled. The book was probably also broken at this point and was evidently impossible to repair, since the greater part of the book and the fingers supporting it have been reconstructed. This was done with a light orange material that perfectly imitates terracotta. The position of the right arm and the palm of the hand were not affected by this restoration. These parts are original, as are the two fingers folded on the right pages of the book.

The Original Paint Layers

Recent study has focused primarily on the original carefully executed paint layers.⁶ The original polychromy of Mary's garments was bright and pure: azurite blue on the cloak, verdigris green on the inner side of the cloak and vermillion red for her dress (fig. 3). The shawls wrapped around the right shoulder and around Mary's hair are ochre yellow. The skin hues are light pink with some darker pink shades. The paint contains fine lead white pigments and vermillion. Brown earth colours are reserved for the figures' hair and for the rock on which the Virgin sits.⁷ No evidence of decorative patterns on the clothing could be found, nor is there any gilding, which would seem to indicate that the original polychromy may have been quite sober. Textured effects were, however, achieved with glossy red and green glazes on the clothes that would have contrasted with the matt azurite blue paint of the cloak (fig. 4).



Fig. 3

Sample no. 188/6:
Mary's dress, x 200.
(Photographed
and analyzed by
Arie Wallert.)

5. Varnish layer.
4. Nineteenth-century top layer: red lead and white lead pigments, vermilion.
3. Nineteenth century: whitish ground: calcium carbonate, and white lead pigment. Presence of iron and copper.
2. Original: thin red glaze. Earth and white lead pigments?
1. Original: light red underlayer consisting of pure vermilion. Presence of a few white lead particles.

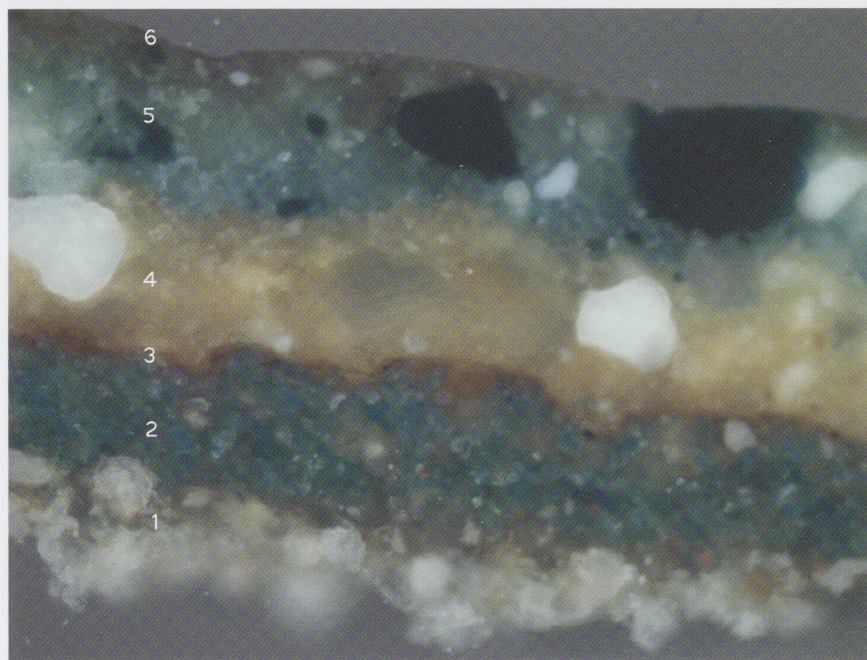


Fig. 4

Sample no. 188/4:
Mary's cloak, x 200.
(Photographed and
analyzed by Arie
Wallert.)

6. Varnish layer.
5. Nineteenth century: blue final layer. The large blue particles are agglomerates of Berlin blue pigments.
4. Nineteenth century: whitish ground. Calcite and white lead particles.
3. Dirt.
2. Original: azurite. Traces of calcium, lead and iron are present.
1. Original whitish underlayer. Contains mainly calcium carbonate.

The original paint layers are extremely thin; this was most probably a deliberate device to preserve the liveliness of the modelling technique. It may also be the reason why the painter did not

follow the customary procedure of systematically applying a ground layer over the whole surface of the sculpture. The pigments in the original paint layers were very finely ground and

the build-up of layers was planned in a minimal and efficient manner. The earth colours on the shawls and on the hair as well as the pink skin hues were laid directly on the terracotta. In these areas the light orange terracotta acts as a coloured underlayer. The other painted surfaces are built up with two or three superimposed layers. The underlayer of each coloured surface was specifically chosen with the intention of enhancing the tone of the upper layer. For instance, the thin red glaze of the dress was applied on to a layer of nearly pure vermillion pigment while the azurite blue pigment and the brown paint of the rock were applied on a whitish ground (figs. 3, 4).⁵ The green glaze consisting of verdigris only lies on two light underlayers: a light ground layer on the terracotta followed by an opaque light green layer.

Holes and Possible Additions

Nine holes in the terracotta, discreetly hidden in the receding parts of the sculpture, were discovered during the investigation of the paint layers (figs. 5, 6). The function of the holes is unknown but their presence suggests that the sculpture, in its present state, is incomplete. These holes are about 4 mm in diameter and 8 mm deep. Traces of original paint inside them prove that they were there from the start. All the holes were filled with a mixture of dust, cocoons and insect fragments. Evidence of insect activity on a sculpture made of terracotta is highly unusual. The only possible explanation is that organic materials like fabrics or wood were involved in the function of the holes.

The position of the holes (fig. 6), which are all in proximity to the naked parts of the figures, suggests that the holes and the naked parts were related. Mary's naked breast had always been hidden to some extent by the book held in front of her chest and, as we have seen, the naked parts were plastered over in the nineteenth century. Hiding



Fig. 5
Detail of *Madonna and Child*,
BK-NM-12996.
Hole above the
Child's right arm.

or covering the nakedness of the figures seems to have been a preoccupation throughout the history of the sculpture. Were these holes also used to cover the naked breast? Slowly, the hypothesis that the figures might have been dressed with draperies fixed into these holes with wooden pins took shape.

The configuration of the holes would seem to indicate that the figures were draped with three separate pieces of fabric. Two may have formed continuations to the terracotta shawl wrapped around the Virgin's right shoulder. The first covered the naked breast. Its left end was fixed in the holes hidden between the folds of the terracotta shawl, level with the Virgin's armpit, while its right end was fixed above the Child's right arm. The vertical hole going through the thickness of the Child's arm suggests that it

Fig. 6
Image of the
Madonna and Child.
Position of the holes
in the terracotta.

- holes in the terracotta
- holes in the terracotta on the other side





Fig. 7
Detail of *Madonna
and Child*,
BK-NM-12996.
Dressed Madonna.

may have accommodated a device for allowing the drapery to be lifted and the breast to be revealed. Holes next to the Virgin's armpit may have held pegs for fabric intended to be completely removed. The second piece of cloth was fixed under the Child's arm and ran along the side of the Child to another fixation point. Since it did not cover anything in particular, it was probably not supposed to be moved and so a drape may have been positioned here just for compositional reasons. The third drapery, finally, covered the Child's genitals. Like the drape

covering the Virgin's breast, it may have been partly removable. The opening device could have been between the left hands of the two figures, and the fixed point at the other end, behind the Child's right hip. A last hole was found at the back of the sculpture on Mary's left side at the juncture of her body and the rock. It is possible that the cloth that covered the Child's genitals continued into the space between the two figures before being fixed in this last hole at the back. The purpose of this drapery would have been to benefit the composition. Experiments in the studio with pieces

of fabric and some improvised wooden pins confirmed the hypothesis that real textile draperies were fixed in the holes (fig. 7). Microscopic examination of the cocoons found in the holes revealed the presence of blue, red, brown and black threads woven into them (fig. 8). Entomologists are currently investigating whether the coloured threads in the cocoons are related to the colour of the textiles. Confirmation of this would be very useful in determining how the fabrics worked in the polychrome scheme of the sculpture as a whole.

It is important to our understanding of the original appearance of the sculpture to note that the textile draperies were not the only realistic features added to it. Holes on the top of each head indicate that halos were positioned there. A round imprint in the Virgin's hand, left by the presence of an artefact, was also observed (fig. 9). The artefact had been pressed into the fresh clay across the right edge of the book and the palm of the Virgin's hand. This part of the book was reconstructed in the nineteenth century or possibly earlier, so the presence of the imprint tells us only that in the nineteenth century the

Virgin held a round object, in addition to her book, which could not be seen by the viewer. What this object was and whether it was part of the original sixteenth-century composition may never be known.

None of these characteristics has been found on other works by the Master of the Unruly Children, and this calls for a specific explanation. The evidence suggests that drapes were almost certainly employed when the sculpture was viewed or used. It is therefore drapery and the specific way that it is used here that requires investigation. We shall look at two issues relating to clothing and the terracotta, beginning with an examination of other 'covered' Renaissance images, most notably relics and miracle images, to see if there are any similarities to the present work. The subject matter of the terracotta requires clarification, with the possible use of drapery in mind. It is clear that our attention is being drawn to the book, breast and genitals but a satisfactory reading of this emphasis will have to be proposed. We will consider the possible location and function of the sculpture and contextualize the work within the artistic output of Renaissance Florence.

Fig. 8

Detail of a cocoon seen under research microscope, x100: blue threads and frass grains on the underside.

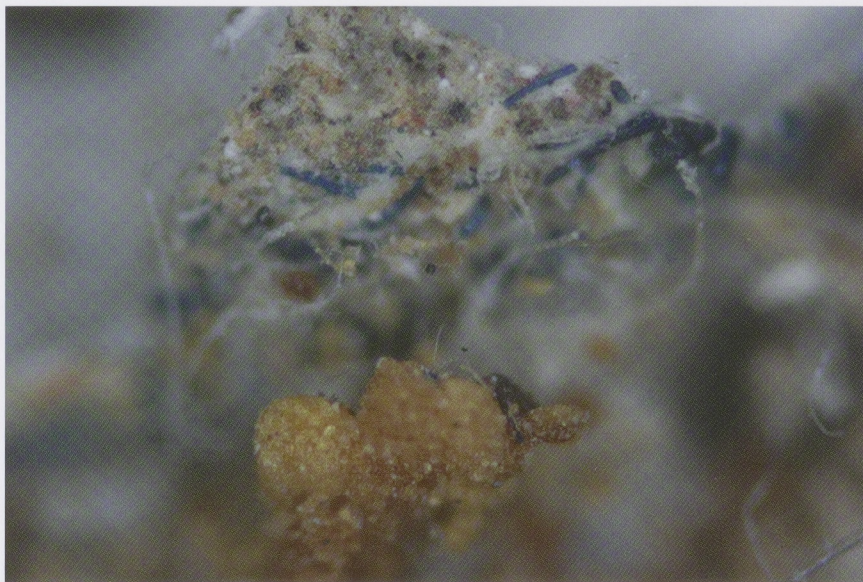




Fig. 9
Detail of *Madonna
and Child*,
BK-NM-12996.
Imprint on the book
and right palm.

Dressing Sculptures

The dressing of images, and particularly sculpture, was a widespread practice in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. There are many other works with holes for the addition of rosary beads or metal halos or crowns (fig. 10), and the holes on the tops of the two heads in the present work were almost certainly intended for such use.⁹ Several works without holes are also known to have been dressed with crowns, jewellery and opulent cloaks. What is unusual about the Rijksmuseum Madonna is the use of both terracotta and 'real' drapery, and the positioning of the holes which suggests that additional drapery was intended to conceal the nudity of the two figures. Prudery may account for this and for the position of the Virgin's book, which further conceals her breast from the front, but this does not seem consistent with the art of this period

when such nakedness was often commonplace and symbolically necessary.

Where concealment rather than adornment appears to have been a motive, it raises the question as to what other contemporary objects received such treatment. Much work has been done to reappraise religious practices in Renaissance Florence, describing a society in which the use of miraculous images was routine.¹⁰ These miraculous images were often covered or veiled to protect them and their 'magical' properties, and respect for them was upheld through this means of controlling their viewing.¹¹ Such images came in many forms (and many media) but by far the most popular were those of the Virgin. Three of the most famous were the Madonnas at Santissima Annunziata, Or San Michele and Impruneta. We know that these works were 'activated' through their covering and uncovering with cloth.¹²

The connection between the veiling of images described above and the draping of the Rijksmuseum terracotta may be significant. The dressing and undressing of miraculous images was an important part of their ritual use and the donation of fabric was part of their veneration, which could have social and political significance as well as a mystical one.¹³ Dressing an image of the Virgin as a devotional act and the covering of a miraculous image were practices that are not entirely distinct, and may even be related. On occasion miraculous images and reliquaries appear to have been completely covered by a curtain, but in some cases they were clad in fine garments. It is often the dressing of an image after its 'awakening' that serves to signify its miraculous nature.¹⁴ Clothing the Virgin could thus act both as a containment of her powers and a cue for veneration. There

is also evidence that miraculous images were not just veiled and unveiled but that this process, as we suggest was the case for the present sculpture, could be performed in stages. In describing a procession of the Madonna of Impruneta into Florence, Richard Trexler writes that when the image was 'placed on an ornate platform, segments of her vestments were removed'.¹⁵ This work by the Master of the Unruly Children may have been conceived in a way similar to a miraculous image, even to the extent of emulating a pattern of ceremonial undressing associated with one.

The present work, itself one of a group of similar subjects, may also reflect the fact that miraculous images were often replicated. There are several examples of miraculous images being reproduced, often on a smaller scale or in a different medium, for

Fig. 10
WORKSHOP OF
ANDREA DELLA
ROBBIA, detail of
Virgin and Child,
c. 1500.
Glazed terracotta,
h. 52.1 cm. Boston,
Museum of Fine Arts,
gift of Charles
C. Perkins, 76.700.



personal use.¹⁶ Power and usage, both earthly and miraculous, were bound up with the employment of these copies; the multiples possessed power inherited from the 'original', and it was believed by some that the duplication of images could also increase the 'magical potency' of the original.¹⁷ The replica image may also have allowed an 'active engagement' with the object that was perhaps not appropriate or possible with the original.¹⁸ The use of tokens in both paper and lead, which represented miracle images and could be bought and used at home, has been documented.¹⁹ These were thought to carry the power of the image they imitated, transferred first to the token and then to the supplicant for miraculous healing. For example, a sick boy is recorded (1505) as having been cured as soon as the figure of the 'most Glorious Madonna Virgin Mary' of Santa Maria delle Carceri in Prato touched his flesh.²⁰ Moreover, Jacopo di Cione, at an earlier date (c. 1380), is known to have made copies from the Madonna at Santissima Annunziata, and, indeed, his workshop 'may well have specialized in copies of the miraculous image, ranging from full compositions to abbreviated versions'.²¹ Such replication of famous miracle works in different media and in whole or part could therefore explain the number of variations of this subject (in the same composition) attributed to the Master of the Unruly Children.

The dressing of terracotta figures could also allude to the tradition of relics and perhaps to the use of some relics in particular. The covering of miraculous images and that undertaken to protect relics is often linked and they are even viewed as dependent on one another in their ritual function and veneration.²² Hans Belting points out that neither Christ nor the Virgin left behind any bodily relics, unlike the saints who achieved an impressive 'presence' through an image-relic combination.²³ Perhaps, therefore, the

numerous miraculous images which focused on the Madonna and Child grew out of this absence of artefact. Sculptural form such as the present work, in particular, might convey a sense of bodily presence and be better equipped to serve as the focus for devotion or veneration.²⁴ In any case, the scarcity of relics associated with Christ and the Virgin led to the special veneration of the very few that were known to exist, especially if they were linked to the body in some sense. For example, the Confraternity of the Virgin's Milk in the Florentine provincial town of Montevarchi grew up around the relic of a crystallized drop of milk that leaked from the lips of Christ during the flight into Egypt. The relic was well known and especially venerated. A dedicated chapel for it was decorated, in terracotta, by Andrea della Robbia (1480-90, only fragments survive) and its centrepiece was probably a terracotta Madonna suckling the Christ Child, which could have been an important precursor to the present work.²⁵

The subject of the above works, all images of the Madonna, and their various uses accord with those of the terracotta discussed here. There is no evidence to suggest that the Rijksmuseum terracotta was associated directly with a relic, but this is possible. A relic or associated object may account for the missing object in the Virgin's right hand, although we only have nineteenth-century evidence of its existence. The drapery could therefore be accounted for by a blurring between images and relics, as described by Belting, resulting in a votive sculpture that is reminiscent of a reliquary or miracle-working image.²⁶

Virgo Lactans and Incarnation

The terracotta can be regarded in some ways as a traditional *Virgo Lactans*, the seated Madonna nursing her child who, although not actually suckling, nonetheless playfully exposes her

breast. However, with the additional draperies and other attributes it also differs from the standard iconography. Even without the drapes this work is not a straightforward *Virgo Lactans* since for this to be the case lactation would need to be the principal theme. Here, though, the crucial breast is obscured by a book, which must be significant as it provides the focal point for both the Virgin and Child. A Virgin with a book is not uncommon in other subjects – this is often seen in depictions of the Annunciation and in independent images of the Virgin as *Madonna Sapientiae* – but the combination of breastfeeding and reading is less typical. Adding to this the removable drapes (which would hide or reveal the breast and the Christ Child's genitals), we have a conjunction of symbolic elements in the work which far exceeds the accepted scope of a *Virgo Lactans*.²⁷

As the drapes appear to have been designed primarily to cover the naked parts of both figures and to have been removable, both nudity and its absence would have been important in understanding the work. One interpretation of such nakedness in depictions of the Madonna and Child is offered by Leo Steinberg, who suggests the deliberate depiction of the Christ Child's genitalia is evidence of his Incarnation or alludes to his Circumcision.²⁸ He observes that in many paintings of this period attention is drawn to the genitalia, either by the hands of the Virgin or Child or by their drapery. He provides numerous illustrations where the Child or Virgin's garments could so easily conceal this nudity but where it is deliberately and conspicuously left 'revealed'. Images alluding to the Incarnation thus benefited from the visual evidence of Christ's genitals. The Incarnation was 'the word made flesh' and according to Augustine 'made in all parts of a man'. The highlighted genitals provided 'evidence of the pledge of God's humanation'.²⁹ Augustine also cited

hunger as evidence of humanity because Christ needed nourishment like any human baby, and 'Mary's breast sustained the God-man'.³⁰ So the combination of genitals and breast, according to Steinberg, should be read as referring to the Incarnation. He also suggests that by the fifteenth century the dual revelation of Mother and Child had become 'dramatized nakedness choreographed as an active withdrawal of garments', which seems especially applicable to the work under discussion.³¹

The use of drapery in the present work to imply or call attention to 'hidden' nudity echoes other works which do the same. The drapery in Titian's *Altarpiece of the Incarnation of Our Lord*, for the Church of San Salvatore in Venice (c. 1560, fig. 11), has been interpreted as a substitute for the actual flesh of Christ.³² Not only does Paul Hills describe the type of veil seen in this picture as a 'membrane between two worlds', which would perhaps explain why it has such importance in a miracle-working context, but he says that 'the veil seems a synecdoche for the body or part of the body'.³³ We are also reminded of the presence and importance of veils or cloths when we read the Franciscan Meditations on the Life of Christ which describe the Virgin's actions having just given birth: 'she washed her son in the milk of her breasts and wrapped him in the veil from her head and laid him in the manger.' Here wrapping or veiling and feeding are once again linked in these primary actions.

It would seem, therefore, that the employment of drapes on the sculpture aided the comprehension of its subject as well as its use, and allusion to the Incarnation explains their location and partial nature. Drapery thus not only performs a secondary function, to conceal, protect or venerate the image beneath, but it is essential to understanding the work. The drapery signals the breast and genitalia of the



Fig. 11
TITIAN, *The Annunciation*, c. 1560.
Oil on canvas,
403 x 235 cm.
Venice, San Salvatore.
Photo Bridgeman
Art Library.

holy figures, indicating the Incarnation of Christ, and recalling the actions of the Virgin following his birth, but it also signifies the Incarnation itself, as a metaphor for flesh. There is perhaps some incongruity in the present work when describing the use of drapery in these terms, as it is not the Virgin who wraps or unwraps her child but us, since she is preoccupied with her book. Nevertheless, the work still manages to make allusions to the Incarnation that would have been both appropriate and well understood. In any case, the sculpture is not a representation of the Incarnation but

rather refers to the incarnate quality of Christ. The actual Incarnation occurred and is celebrated at the Annunciation, the subject of Titian's altarpiece. There is evidence to suggest that the Incarnation could have also been celebrated in images depicting the Christ Child once he was born, as we see in Andrea della Robbia's altarpiece at La Verna (1485), but this bears little resemblance to the Rijksmuseum work.³⁴ For this reason it is perhaps clearer to describe the revelation of genitals seen in this sculpture as the 'humanation' rather than Incarnation of God as man. This would fit with the presence in this work of the book, which can itself be connected with ideas relating to the Incarnation.

References to the Incarnation, lactation and reading a book, all visible in the terracotta, can be linked to a further mode of representing the Virgin, as the Madonna of Humility. This image type, derived from the Annunciation, normally shows the Madonna seated on the ground, breast feeding and often with a book or lily. The book here, as in the Annunciation, most probably alludes to the Magnificat, a hymn of praise spoken by the Virgin at the Incarnation, which states 'it is the humble who are exalted'. Alternatively, the book may be the Old Testament where the Incarnation is prophesied, since it was a popular belief that the Virgin possessed all the knowledge of the prophets. The Madonna of Humility tradition shows how Annunciation motifs could be transferred to images of the Madonna and Child. Although not seated on the ground, the Rijksmuseum Madonna is barefoot and situated on a rocky base which connects her to the earth. If we take this in conjunction with the book and the lactation, which was regarded as 'indicative of low status' and is thus connected to humility, we have to link the Rijksmuseum Madonna to this tradition.³⁵ The drapery too could have operated in this context,



Fig. 12

FRANCESCO
GRANACCI,
*Madonna della
Misericordia*, c. 1500.
Florence, Ospedale
degli Innocenti.
Photo Scala, Florence.

sors with God. Their milk is, in each case, a symbolic outpouring of divine love, nutrition and instruction. Charity had a dual meaning as the love not only of God, but also of one's neighbour, and alms-giving to the poor and sick constitutes an important part of her persona, especially in the sixteenth century when the emphasis shifted towards her more earthly role.³⁷ In this she relates to the *Madonna della Misericordia* tradition, which can easily be regarded as a compositional forerunner to Charity figures with children at their feet.

Blood is a recurrent theme in images of both the Madonna and Child and Charity, and it may also be relevant to the terracotta. Passion symbols are well known and easily identified in most scenes of the Virgin and Child.

Fig. 13

MASTER OF THE
UNRULY CHILDREN,
Charity, c. 1510.
Terracotta, h. 54.5 cm.
Birmingham, Birming-
ham Museums &
Art Gallery, P1714'85.

in the same way that it did in the case of the miraculous *Annunciation* at Santissima Annunziata in Florence. This was among the most venerated images of its day, and not only celebrated the Incarnation and showed the Virgin with a book, but was intermittently veiled and unveiled.³⁶

Charity

There are also links between the present work and other images of the Virgin, including the *Madonna della Misericordia*, and ties, too, with the sculptural groups of Charity attributed to the Master of the Unruly Children (figs. 12, 13). These groups are virtually identical to the Madonna and Child discussed here, apart from the addition of extra children. This cannot be accidental nor entirely due to the adaptation of a basic compositional idea for the art market. There are several reasons to link the figure of the Madonna with Charity. Their shared iconography as breastfeeding Christian women is due to their emblematic roles in representing the love of God and the Church or as being interces-



As well as foretelling Christ's Incarnation, the book also prophesies his death, while the swaddling of the Child prefigures the wrapping of the dead Christ in his shroud. The genitals of the Child may also be a reference to his Circumcision and the first spilling of blood, and thus a portent of the sacrifice to come. The theme of blood can also be linked, by way of the Virgin, to Charity. Breast milk was believed to be processed menstrual blood and therefore in suckling the Child the Virgin literally gives of her own lifeblood, while Charity or *Carità* can etymologically be linked to *caro*, which can mean flesh. Not only could this indicate that Charity too gives of herself but that she is also representative of the incarnation of God's love on earth.³⁸

The amalgamation of the Madonna with the book, and notions of breastfeeding and Charity, as seen in the sculpture, all relate to the teachings of St Bernard of Clairvaux, whose writings were extremely popular at the turn of the sixteenth century, as were depictions of the saint in art.³⁹

Much of this literature and art focuses on the Virgin and, indeed, the human nature of Christ. Amongst the saint's earliest writings was a work in praise of the Blessed Mother and Child in which he meditates on the Annunciation and Incarnation. The saint had miraculous visions of both the Christ Child and the Madonna, and his association with the Virgin is specifically linked to her lactation. A miraculous encounter with her and the Christ Child involved milk from her breast symbolically wetting his lips. His legend also records the importance of his own mother's breastfeeding. She would not allow her children to be nursed by other women but insisted that she would infuse them with her own goodness through her milk.⁴⁰ In fact, St Bernard stressed the importance of the Virgin's lactation, not just as nourishment but as

this transference of goodness; and in images of his vision there is often a scroll which reads 'monstra te esse matrem' – show thyself to be a mother. For St Bernard the Virgin was the mother not only of Christ but also of all mankind, and therefore she was a figure of benevolence and mercy. Her breasts were symbols of the pouring out of affection and instruction and it was only through her as a 'gateway' that man could enter the kingdom of heaven. Unsurprisingly, St Bernard's teachings also included meditations on the role of Charity.⁴¹

Michelangelo

The work of the Master of the Unruly Children's contemporaries shows that such subjects were widespread. Many of the same themes can be found in Michelangelo's depictions of the Madonna. His unfinished *Manchester Madonna* (c. 1497) bears a notable resemblance to our work (fig. 14).⁴² The rocky ground underfoot is almost identical to that in the sculpture, while both Virgins hold books, have one breast exposed and contend with an animated infant. The drapery of the Madonna's dress is also highlighted in Michelangelo's panel in that the child stands on it and attempts to scale it. We are also given reason to read the work, as Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt has done, in relation to the theme of Incarnation since the lap of the Virgin can be interpreted as the womb, and the drapery of her dress symbolically veiled Christ's mortality.⁴³ Weil-Garris Brandt suggests that the book held by Michelangelo's Virgin is the Old Testament, as Christ is thrusting his fingers into it to indicate a different page from the one his mother is reading. If the Virgin is reading the Old Testament prophesy of Incarnation, then the open page could represent the present, with Christ now flesh, while Christ reminds us of the Annunciation and Immaculate Conception.⁴⁴ Weil-Garris Brandt also points out that,



Fig. 14
MICHELANGELO,
detail of *Manchester
Madonna*, c. 1497.
Tempera on wood,
104.5 x 77 cm.
London, National
Gallery, NG 809.

in the conventional Virgin and Child format with allusions to the Incarnation, the child stays on his mother's lap and reaches out, rarely touching the 'mortal earth' below. In Michelangelo's work, by contrast, the Child is climbing from earth on to the Virgin's lap, using her drapery. This reversal of

the usual progression from womb to earth via mother, or heaven to earth via Virgin, is attributed by Weil-Garris Brandt to the borrowing of imagery from depictions of Charity, most notably Mino da Fiesole's *Charity* in the Badia. This image itself takes the place of the Virgin in its particular setting. Michelangelo's unfinished *Medici Madonna*, made for the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo (1519-34), provides a further comparison with our sculpture. In his assessment of the New Sacristy design and the placement of the Madonna in it, James Hall has convincingly linked breastfeeding with St Bernard, Charity and healing.⁴⁵ In this case the association between the Virgin and Charity is key to the beneficial and potentially healing effects that could be connected to contemplation of the Madonna Lactans. In the saint's sermon on the Song of Songs he says 'Your breasts are better than wine, redolent of the best ointments'.⁴⁶ Michelangelo's Madonna, which was designed for the Medici (whose name literally means doctors), contends with a voraciously suckling child. The self-sacrificing and sustaining nature of the Virgin and the healing properties of the milk are strongly underscored, as they are in our work.

Functional Context and Audience

This discussion of subject matter must reflect on the likely use and location of the Rijksmuseum terracotta and raises the question as to where and how the terracotta may have been housed, bearing in mind both its subject and its possible associations with miraculous images.

The sculpture is similar in subject to a range of Madonna images seen in the charitable institution of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, both in painted panels and works in terracotta (fig. 15). Representations of the Madonna and Child were particularly pertinent to an organization that dealt



Fig. 15
 LUCA DELLA ROBBIA,
Madonna and Child,
 c. 1450.
 Glazed terracotta,
 h. 75 cm.
 Florence,
 Ospedale degli
 Innocenti. Photo
 Scala, Florence.

with abandoned children and had a largely female audience.⁴⁷ Breastfeeding and wet-nursing were core activities of the hospital, while other women and children (many of the female children remained in the Ospedale until adulthood) were employed in textile work. The hospital was actually built and managed by the guild of silk workers, known as Por Santa Maria. Children, feeding, fabric and Mary could provide a possible context for our terracotta. The hospital, next door to the Santissima Annunziata, was also home to several tabernacles which were dressed and undressed by the women. Our work could easily have been associated with the Ospedale or a Florentine institution very much like it.⁴⁸

St Bernard's writings may be helpful in assessing the likely audience for the terracotta since they were often concerned with the division of religious contemplation into three realms: corporeal contemplation, which required images; spiritual contemplation, where images were in the mind; and intellectual contemplation, where no images were needed. These divisions were linked to intellect, so an audience of uneducated women and children in the Ospedale degli Innocenti would have needed a visual prompt. A multi-sensory stimulus could be regarded as being even more effective, however, and the importance of touch and sight is also stressed in the use of miracle images and reliquaries.⁴⁹ In fact polychromed terracotta was often preferred to other materials because of its ability to achieve life-like or realistic effects. A painted Madonna and Child in this medium would not only have appeared real, and so aided devotion, but could feel real too, thanks to the additional draperies. Lucia Sandri tells us that the tabernacles of the Ospedale degli Innocenti were not only conceived within the tradition of relics, icons and devotional practice but were also used in the hospital as a means of teaching young girls correct behaviour.⁵⁰ As well as instruction, health would have been another important focus for such a community, and the healing associations described in relation to miracle images together with the milk described by St Bernard could have also been invoked.

It may be rash to assert that the present Madonna once belonged to or was used by an establishment such as the Ospedale degli Innocenti, but the type and function of similar works in the institution does provide directly comparable material. It could also be argued that such small scale terracotta works were intended for use at home, again in a context of a female audience but one concerned with fertility, pregnancy and child-rearing.⁵¹

The iconography of the sculpture and similar works, taken together with their reproduction and relationship to votive images, expands our comprehension of the significance and function they may originally have had. In fact, comparison of our work with Michelangelo or with other compositional precursors (such as Leonardo's versions of *The Madonna and Child with St Anne*) may thus extend beyond subject matter or style. Trexler asserts that 'artists like Alberti and Leonardo boldly proclaimed that they were the ones who imbued objects with such [miraculous] powers' and that there were 'certain forms that, if incorporated into images by mortal men, were thought to have particularly efficacious impacts upon the attitudes of the devotees'. This is surely an

argument for an aesthetic which, as Trexler says, was 'based on knowledge of psychological attitudes toward different types of representations'.⁵² Our *Madonna and Child with a Book*, and the related Madonnas and Charities attributed to the Master of the Unruly Children, operated in a system of semiotics and belief which not only exploited the ready understanding of iconographic symbols but valued their repetition. Potency, whether magical or associative, was still the result. Although evidently customized to meet the specific demands of patrons, in emulating the great inventions of Leonardo and Michelangelo the Rijksmuseum's terracotta stands at the interface between high art and popular votive images.

NOTES

* With thanks to Frits Scholten for his advice and input.

- 1 Cat. Sculpture Rijksmuseum 1973: *Beeldhouwkunst in het Rijksmuseum*, Jaap Leeuwenberg and Willy Halsema-Kubes (eds.), The Hague/Amsterdam 1973, no. 604.
- 2 Wilhelm Bode, *Florentine Sculptors of the Renaissance*, Jessie Haynes (trans.), Berlin 1908, pp. 172-77.
- 3 Recent monographs on Rustici to discuss the Master of the Unruly Children include Philippe Sénéchal, *Giovan Francesco Rustici, 1475-1554*, Paris 2007, and Tommaso Mozzi, *Giovanfrancesco Rustici*, Florence 2008. Peta Motture, in her entry on the V&A Charity attributed to the Master of the Unruly Children for the exhibition catalogue David Franklin (ed.), *Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and the Renaissance in Florence*, Ottawa 2005, suggests it is clear that when discussing the sculpture of the Master of the Unruly Children we are dealing with the work of more than one artist.
- 4 It should be stressed that the research is ongoing and that the findings discussed here are an interim report of conservation work.
- 5 The sculpture has been overpainted twice: the first overpainting was limited to the skin hues, and to the yellow ochre and green

areas of the clothes. Some details of the dress are gilded. The painting technique is very similar to the original and the colours are nearly identical. The second overpainting covers the whole surface. It differs radically in technique and concept: the paint layers are thick and the colours soft. It is roughly executed. The texture of the paint and the materials employed suggest that this was done during the 19th century.

- 6 No other surface layer could be identified between the surface of the terracotta and these paint layers. A survey of the corpus of sculptures attributed to the Master of the Unruly Children reveals the majority were originally painted. The pigments of the paint layers were analyzed by Dr Arie Wallert, research scientist at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, using Polarized Light Microscopy and X-ray Fluorescence.
- 7 Light and warm brown on the Child's hair, cold brown on Mary's hair and very dark brown on the rocks. The pigments used on the hair have not been identified. The dark brown pigment on the rocks could not be specifically identified. The high iron content indicates that it is an earth pigment.
- 8 The light ground layers of the original polychromy are based on calcium carbonate.

- A small amount of white lead pigment was added. Calcium sulphate was not identified.
- 9 Some of the most obvious evidence for the attachment of beads can be seen on the *Madonna and Child* attributed to Andrea della Robbia in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which has fixture points – two holes – under the ears of the Virgin and Child.
 - 10 Richard Trexler, 'Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image', *Studies in the Renaissance*, Chicago 1972, vol. 19, pp. 7-41; *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York 1980; and 'Being and Non-Being, Parameters of the Miraculous in the Traditional Religious Image' in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (hereafter *Miraculous Image*), Erik Thuno and Gerhard Wolf (eds.), Rome 2004, pp. 17-27 (hereafter Trexler 1972, 1980, 2004).
 - 11 Trexler 1972, op. cit. (note 10), p. 17, quotes a law governing the restricted viewing of such images which was passed in 1435.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17, remarks on Landucci's account of the number of 'rich coats' and 'cloth pieces', including gold brocade from the Medici that were presented to the Madonna of Impruneta in 1511 when she was asked to stop the persistent rain. He notes that the 'charity of the populace evidenced the efficaciousness of the *tavola* as well'.
 - 14 Trexler 2004, op. cit. (note 10), p. 20, stresses that ornamentation is at the 'inception of the myth of image discovery'. He describes accounts of images being revived and complaining of neglect. As a 'sign of new devotion, they ask for clothing or its equivalent'.
 - 15 Trexler 1972, op. cit. (note 10), p. 12.
 - 16 Robert Maniura (note 19), Megan Holmes (note 21) and Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser all discuss the replication of miraculous images in their chapters for *Miraculous Image* (note 18).
 - 17 This is discussed by Geraldine Johnson, 'Art or artefact? Madonna and Child reliefs in the early Renaissance', *The Sculpted Object 1400-1700*, Currie and Motture (eds.), Cambridge 1997, p. 10.
 - 18 Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, 'Translations of the Miraculous Cult Images and their Representations in Early Modern Liguria', *Miraculous Image*, p. 207
 - 19 Robert Maniura, 'The Images and Miracles of Santa Maria delle Carceri', *Miraculous Image*. Maniura discusses evidence provided by a 'miracle book' entitled *Historia della apparitione et miracoli di Madonna Sancta Maria del Carcere di Prato* written by Giuliano di Francesco Guizzelmi in 1505.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 - 21 Megan Holmes, 'The Elusive Origins of the Cult of the Annunziata in Florence', *Miraculous Image*, p. 108.
 - 22 This idea is developed in Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago/London 1994, pp. 59, 301.
 - 23 Belting suggests relics began to be incorporated into images of the Virgin or Christ in an attempt to borrow the status of a reliquary and give these figures their due prominence, *ibid.*, p. 302. Bodily relics of Christ overlooked by Belting may include Christ's foreskin and umbilical cord.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 302.
 - 25 Cavallucci's suggestion, based on analysis of the chapel's iconography, that a Madonna and Child formed the centrepiece is discussed by Alan Marquand in *Andrea della Robbia and his Atelier*, Princeton 1922, vol. 1, pp. 123-27, where he provides a full description and photographs of the existing fragments.
 - 26 John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics, Theological Perceptions and Visual Images in Sixteenth Century Europe*, Oxford 1999, p. 14. Dillenberger quotes Article 16 of the articles agreed upon by the faculty of sacred theology in Paris in 1542 which states, 'for if relics and garments are honoured in memory of saints, the reason is not less applicable to images'. Following Belting's lead, he suggests that this is evidence of 'relics becoming the basis for understanding images'.
 - 27 It is not clear what the object once placed in the Virgin's palm may have been, nor if it was part of the original conception. We have therefore necessarily excluded it from our assessment of the iconography of the work, which is based on the present visual evidence.
 - 28 Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, Chicago 1997.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
 - 30 Steinberg discusses this on pp. 132-33, quoting Augustine's sermon for Christmas (Sermon 1, 23-24 [Ben.51]; Sermons, pp. 52-56).
 - 31 Steinberg, op. cit. (note 28), p. 35.
 - 32 Paul Hills, 'Titian's Veils', *Art History* 29 (2006), pp. 771-95.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 771, 773.
 - 34 This altarpiece was previously considered an Adoration of the Child but identified as an Incarnation by Pope-Hennessy, who based his observation on a more accurate reading of the inscription below the work. Pope-Hennessy, 'Thoughts on Andrea della Robbia', *Apollo* 109 (1979), pp. 176-97.

- 35 Beth Williamson, *The Madonna of Humility*, Woodbridge 2009, p. 19.
- 36 For more on the devotional practice surrounding the miracle image of Santissima Annunziata see Holmes, op. cit. (note 21).
- 37 For the changing depictions and status of Charity in art see Edgar Wind, 'Charity, the case history of a Pattern' in *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1 (1938), pp. 322-30, and R. Freyham, 'The Evolution of the Caritas Figure in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 11 (1948), pp. 68-86.
- 38 The often used symbol of Christ's sacrifice, the pelican, which pierces its breast to feed its young on its own blood, is also associated with Charity. The notion of breast milk as processed menstrual blood is discussed by James Hall in *Michelangelo and the Reinvention of the Human Body*, London 2005, pp. 139-66. For the etymological link between Carità and caro see amongst other dictionaries the *Dictionary of Renaissance Latin from Prose Sources*, Leiden/Boston 2006, p. 79.
- 39 St Bernard even had a prominent role in Dante's final cantos of the Paradiso, where he is used as intercessor with his beloved Virgin Mary (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradiso, canto xxxi).
- 40 St Bernard's life is recounted in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, Reading on the Saints*, William Granger Ryan (trans.), Princeton University Press 1993, vol. 11, pp. 98-107. The connection between the intake of milk as a baby and characteristics during adulthood is also reflected in Vasari's account of Michelangelo, who was nursed by a stonecutter's wife and 'took the hammer and chisel ... from my wet-nurse's milk'. Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, (trans. Bondanella, 1991).
- 41 G.R. Evans, *The Mind of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, Oxford 1983.
- 42 Frits Scholten was among the first to bring this comparison to our attention.
- 43 Weil-Garris Brandt in *Giovenezza di Michelangelo*, Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, Christina Acidini Luchinat, James David Draper and Nicholas Penny, Florence/Milan 1999, pp. 334-40.
- 44 Ibid., p. 338.
- 45 James Hall, *Michelangelo and the Reinvention of the Human Body*, London 2005. For Hall's ideas on the links between the sculptural elements of the New Sacristy and his explanation of the depictions of the Medici, the Madonna and Child, and their connection to St Bernard and breastfeeding see chapter five, 'Benefactions', pp. 139-66. His earlier chapter on 'Mothers' in the same volume is also of interest to this discussion, pp. 1-36.
- 46 Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on Song of Songs, c. 1136, as quoted in James Hall, *ibid.*, p. 139. St Bernard is also more generally associated with healing, and particularly miraculous healing and the type of objects discussed previously. He himself was miraculously cured from a serious childhood illness and in adulthood he cured others. He even records, in the 12th century, being healed of an eye infection by the milk of the Virgin Mary (see Henk van Os 'The Culture of Prayer' in *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, Princeton 1994, pp. 52-85). As a Doctor of the Church, Bernard's words were often described in healing terms. His mother's dream, whilst pregnant, predicted her son 'will be a renowned preacher and will cure many by grace of the medicine of his tongue' (Voragine, op. cit. (note 40), p. 98).
- 47 Margaret R. Miles, 'The Virgin's one bare breast: female nudity and religious meaning in Tuscan early Renaissance culture', *The Female Body in Western Culture*, Susan Rubin Suleiman (ed.), Cambridge, Mass. 1985, p. 205. In discussing representations of the Virgin for female audiences, Miles suggests that not only was the Virgin a model for actual women but that a spiritual attachment to the Virgin was presented as an alternative to an attachment to one's own mother. This also reflects the teachings of St Bernard.
- 48 The earliest dressed tabernacles remaining at the Ospedale degli Innocenti date from the 18th century, and although many are of the Madonna and Child they are not very like our sculpture. However, it could easily be the case that later practices and objects were based on a tradition of active devotion in which the present work may have been employed.
- 49 Belting, op. cit. (note 22), Dillenberger, op. cit. (note 26) and Johnson, op. cit. (note 17) all discuss the importance of touch.
- 50 Lucia Sandri in *Madre Figlie Balie, Il Coretto della chiesa e la comunità femminile degli Innocenti*, Stefano Filippini and Elenora Mazzocchi (eds.), Florence (Museo degli Innocenti) 2010, p. 11.
- 51 See Johnson, op. cit. (note 17), pp. 1-24, and Jacqueline Musaccio, 'Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy', *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 52-53.
- 52 Trexler 2004, op. cit. (note 10), p. 19.