

## 9 Art Grotesques in the Counter-Reformation

**Summary** 9.1 Introduction. – 9.2 Reformation and Images. – 9.3 Counter-Reformation and Images. – 9.4 The Counter-Reformation and Grotesques. – 9.5 Symbols and Grotesques.

### 9.1 Introduction

Gots hewser seind hewser daryn Got allein gecheret, angeruffen und angebet soll werden. Als Christus spricht: Mein haus ist ein haus des gebets unr ir macht ein gruben der morder daraus [Mt 21:13]. Betrügliche bilder ermorden alle yre anbeter und brenser als geschrien steht. [...] Drumb mogen unsere tempell billich morders gruben genenth warden, das unser genst in yenen ertodt und erschlagen wirt.

This is the opening of a short treatise on the removal of images, *Von Abtuhung der Bylder*,<sup>1</sup> written and published in 1522 by Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486-1541),<sup>2</sup> one of Luther's fellow theologians in Wittenberg. His work expressed iconoclastic views and

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**1** Karlstadt 1522, 1-2.

**2** On his thought in general, see Sider 1974.

formally gave birth to the controversy over figurative art during the Reformation.<sup>3</sup> Karlstadt's statement is extremely effective:

God's houses are buildings in which God alone should be glorified, invoked, and adored. As Christ says: My house is a house of prayer, and you make it a murderer's cave. Deceitful images bring death to those who worship them [...] Therefore, our temples might be rightly called murderer's caves, because in them our spirit is stricken and slain.<sup>4</sup>

Owing to the presence of deceitful images ("betrüglische bilder") that lead to the death of the spirit, churches can be compared to murderers' caves ("gruben der morder"). This concept is drawn from the gospel of Matthew, even if the biblical text does not directly refer to images but more generally to corruption in the episode of the *Cleansing of the Temple*. With the German word *grube* (cave), Karlstadt translated the Greek σπήλαιον (cave), from which the Latin term *speluncam* (cave) is derived. During the sixteenth century, *grube* and *spēlaion* had a strong semantic relationship with the Italian *grotta* (cave), from which the word *grotesche* was coined.<sup>5</sup> This lexical con-

3 Scavizzi 1981, 51-63.

4 Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 19-20.

5 The etymology of the word *grotesca* was widely investigated during the Renaissance, at the point that it became a sort of hermeneutical device used by scholars to first understand, and later criticise, role and function of grotesques within art. Since the first attempts to identify its origins, scholars tended to link the signifier of the Italian word *grotesca*, which meant a specific type of paintings, with *grotta*, which was the environment in which these paintings were originally found. Albeit the first occurrence of the word, today dated back to year 1500 and found in the *Antiquarie prospettiche romane*, apparently demonstrates some kind of etymological awareness, alluding to a link between the paintings and the place in which they were rediscovered (v. 373: "Hor son spelonch'e ruinate grotte" and 380: "per essere più bizzarri alle grotesche"), its first explicit etymology is found in Philandrier 1544, 228 ("Picture genus Italis dictas grotescas, credo quod in terra obrutis veterum aedificiorum fornicibus, quas Grottas, quasi Cryptas appellant, primum invenerint"), where *grotta* and *grotesca* were connected to the Latin term *crypta*. This pattern was expanded in following years, for example by Pirro Ligorio, who connected these forms to the Greek κρυπτή (hidden) and γρόνη (cavernous), see Acciarino 2018, 108: "Grotta, dunque, viene dal nome greco per voce corrotta da' vulgari usata, perché in due modi l'usano scrivere, ΚΡΥΠΤΗ, onde i latini *crypta*, che deriva dalla voce ΚΡΥΠΤΑΛΙΟΣ o vero ΚΡΥΠΤΑΔΙΟΣ, che suona a noi occulto o riposto luogo o segreto, donde il verbo ΚΡΥΠΤΩ o ΚΡΥΠΤΥΨΩ, che suona nel latino *ABSCONDO*, *locus secretum*, o vero *habeo arcanum teneo*, là onde nella nostra ci significa ascondo et nascondo, per cosa segreta o ascosa e occulta. Altri la fanno venire dalla voce ΓΡΩΝΗ, ch'è foramine, luogo scavato et speco, come in tal parola detta fu da Nicandro, dicendo egli ἐνιγρόνην ἄν' ἔαυσαν μύδοκοις [Nicand. *Theriac.* 795], che non è altro a dire che forame et speco et grotta et spelunca. ὁ σπήλαιον κοίλη πέτρα, ὅπη τῆς πέτρας διῆς τὰ σχοινία πρὸς τὴν τῶν νεῶν στάσιν ἠφαλίζοντο [Aelian. *VH* 13.1.30; Hesych. γ 965], in maniera, dunque, grotta non è altro che luogo segreto et sicuro, o di fabrica o di pietra scavata, perforata et posta in qualche uso et fatta per addito, et luogo fatto nella parte bassa della casa et per ripostorio

vergence creates a perfect (and unexpected) bond between the two movements developing simultaneously during the Renaissance: grotesques in ornamental art and iconoclasm in worship.

Since its origins, Christianity has had a controversial and unstable relationship with imagery.<sup>6</sup> This is in part due to two contrasting tendencies in its ideology: one deriving from its Jewish roots that forbade any kind of representation of the divine; the other deriving from its Gentile legacy which instead made ample use of images of the gods for its cults. This inherited tension produced an extensive and abundant literature on the matter throughout the centuries. This often engendered reformations of style and iconography based on a changing ideal of appropriateness; at times it resulted in the destruction of statues and other types of figurative representation. Tertullian, Lactantius, and Bernard of Clairvaux are just some of the most eminent authorities involved in this long-lasting debate. They greatly influenced the nature of sacred art and inspired later religious re-

et per tempio, o per luogo e fondo di una nave, et fatto sotto delli alberghi per commodità". Ulisse Aldrovandi noticed affinity between the Italian noun *grotta* and the Dutch verb *crupen* (to creep), also drawing connections with Hebrew and Aramaic; see Acciarino 2018, 94-5: "la grotta è una caverna, o vero una volta sotto terra in qualche monte escavata detta dalli greci κρυπτή, dal verbo κρύπτειν che significa occultare, quasi che dicessi occulta o vero loco occulto. Dal qual verbo greco gli Barbanti dicono crupen, che vuol dire andare carponi, rampare per terra, imperoché quelli che cercano di occultarsi pare che vogliono andare in groppone, et spesse volte, quando vogliono nascondersi nelle spelonche et caverne, sono sforzati andare con le mani et piedi per terra, et così andare (come si dice) in gattone, il che fa argomento che le grotte sono basse. Questo nome grotta è formato da κρυπτή cangiando il cappa nella sua media gamma et mutando l'ypsilon (che secondo i più dotti si deve pronunciare non come *i*, ma come la *u* appresso francesi) in *o*, il *π* in *t*, sì come in tutte le voci volgari si vede farsi, come da *scriptum* latino 'scritto', et βαπτισμός 'battesimo', et così formaremo da κρυπτή \*γροττα 'grotta'. [...] Da gli Hebrei è detta la grotta מְהָרָה (meharah), il qual nome vogliono alcuni che deriva dal verbo infinito עָרוּהוּ (haroth), che significa dinudare, perché la spelonca over grotta sia in luoco denudato et voto; il che mostra che sia inetta alla pittura essendo priva della luce, non potendo vedere gli colori se non per mezzo del lume del sole o del fuoco. 'Haroth' non solamente è verbo, come habbiamo detto, ma nome del numero del più de עָרָה (harah), che significa loco pieno di verdura et gramigne, da' latini chiamato *graminetum*, di modo che 'haroth' dinotarà *gramineta*, cioè luochi di gramigna et herbe verdeggianti adorni. Però alcuni per questo vocabulo vogliono che si intenda le rive de' fiumi, per causa della nudità et cavità che per l'onde sono di sotto escavate, ma di sopra con bellissime herbe vestite, sì come veggiamo alcune volte le fontane ave, che mostrano una bellissima verdura". Aldrovandi also proposed to rename grotesques with a different term coming from Greek language, τερατογραφία to focus on their monstrous essence, even if it was not compatible with their meaning, because monsters existed in nature, but grotesques did not; see Acciarino 2018, 93: "Aristofane chiama la pittura mostruosa τερατογραφία, dal verbo Greco τερατογραφέω, che significa dipingere mostri over cose mostruose. Questo vocabolo τερατογραφία converrebbe giustamente alle pitture stravaganti, che hoggi con uso cioè moderno nome sono chiamate grotesche, percioché sono pitture veramente mostruose, anzi più che mostruose non havendo corrispondenza con le cose istesse, come di sopra habbiamo accennato, ma le mostruose hanno per corrispondenza i mostri istessi, da' quali sono state ritratte".

6 Bettetini 2006; Lingua 2006, 27-80.

formers such as John Wycliff, the Lollards, Jan Huss, Bernardino da Siena, and Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>7</sup>

In the early modern period visual art became not only a fundamental tool to investigate and understand creation, but also an instrument to help idealise and imagine the spiritual universe. It was just a matter of time before this influenced the Reformation. Protestant ideas in this regard combined the traditional critique against figurative art (drawn by Sacred Scripture and patristic texts) with the abuses denounced in Luther's 95 theses. As a result, throughout the entire sixteenth century the removal of images and the issue of idolatry became battlefields where Catholics and Protestants engaged each other in an effort to promote and re-establish doctrine and a liturgy of the Primitive Church.<sup>8</sup>

Grotesques were never explicitly mentioned by Protestants or Catholics in any of these polemics, at least until the end of the sixteenth century. As far as written sources are concerned, it appears that Protestants did not take this ornamental style into consideration at all in their attacks against imagery. However, grotesques ended up entering into Protestant polemics against images 'naturally'. This was because of their widespread presence in almost all decorated buildings of the time, including churches. It is thus reasonable to assume that, even if Protestants did not directly address their critique against decorations of this type, their rhetoric could also be construed by Catholics as an attack on grotesques, which were present and visible in Catholic imagery (especially in Italy).<sup>9</sup>

7 Palmer Wandel 1995, 38; Boespflug, Fogliadini 2017.

8 Scavizzi 1981, 130-43.

9 Some convergences among the iconoclastic tendencies of the Reformation and the polemics against the grotesques, which contributed to anger the reaction against the Renaissance rebirth of Pagan art (Saxl 1939, 346-67; Wind 1957; Gombrich 1975, Monfasani 1992, 45-61; Warburg 1999; Godwin 2002; Bull 2005), could be found in several literary sources of the first half of the sixteenth century; see e.g. Catharinus 1542, 61-73 especially 64, or the letter of Olaus Magnus bishop of Uppsala dated 8 June 1552 on the decorations of cardinal Marcello Crescenzi's palace in Rome (Hipler-Zakrzewski 1886, 211: "Doleo super certis abusibus illius cardinalis, quos admisit fieri Romae. Vidi enim in palatio eius, dum floreret, super ianuas eius spectra, faunos, satyras et nudarum imagines mulierum [...] sed forsitan haec sunt gentiliū antiquitatum, ut habetur in bella videre Belvedere, in quo nullus securior est quam caecus", also in Roggero 1969, 153 fn. 18), as well as the interesting analysis of the vocabulary related to images and their doctrinal meaning in Protestant contexts given by Flacius 1567, 543-4, where images and likenesses were deemed as unfaithful dreams and groundless projections of imagination ("Longe alia igitur significatio est, cum imago pro rebus imaginariis, aut evanidis crebro usurpantur, cuius significationis exempla adscribi non est opus. Ab hac vero significatione venit, quod saepe res existentes ob suam levitatem imago dicuntur, sicut Latini somnium hominis, pro nihil homine dicere solent"). Also interesting in this regard are the two dedicatory letters by Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola for the two editions of his poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis*, addressed respectively to Lilio Gregorio Giraldi and to Konrad Peutinger. These letters

In humanistic circles, grotesques stimulated a heated debate among those who sought to understand their nature and function within art, whether their figurations carried any symbolic, hidden, or arcane meanings, or whether they could be dismissed simply as deceitful images, as maintained by classical sources such as Vitruvius and Horace. In this regard, some of the positions advanced on the Reformation side of the debate on images aligned with those used in the debate on grotesques, creating unexpected reactions against this artistic category on the Catholic side. Curiously enough, this outburst of Protestant polemics against images coincided with the universal diffusion of grotesques in Renaissance art. In fact, just a few years before Karlstadt's book, Raphael completed the decorations of the Vatican Loggias (1516-19) with a series of grotesques. This would go on to become one of the most famous and renowned examples of this style during the Renaissance.<sup>10</sup>

described the ancient statues placed in the Belvedere Garden as Pagan abnormalities not acceptable anymore in Christian times, the imagery of which evoked that of the grotesques (see Pico 1513a, vv. 187-96: "Linquite fallacem Babylona, relinquite molles | Illius illecebres permistaque mella veneno. | Huc etenim nimium nimiumque nocentia monstra | Migravere truces Scyllaeque et Gorgones, atque | Harpyiae in mediis posuere sedilia templis. | Nec non quae Atlantem olim, et quae Titana parentem | Agnorunt, artis nec dedicere vetustas, | Semiferaeque etiam caprearum rupe recentis | Mutavere domos Babylonis, et aurea tecta | atque super sacra sidunt Acheloides aede"). According to recent studies (Piana 2020), the letter to Giraldis pointed out that this imagery had a negative influence on the spectators, who were deceived by their imagination and transformed into animals (Pico 1513a, *Ep.*: "Nam bruta esse iis in locis non parum multa dicuntur ac bellvas cum notas tum ignotas per hosce colles expatiantur, Ianiculum aliquas, aliquanto plures colles, caeteros: at Vaticanum et plurimas alere et ingenteis, | quarum id insitutum, | ut nisi flante Zephyro mansuescant. Cunctum habentur veluti cicures ipsis esse omnino ferociores. Quod genus bruti nec Aristoteli nec Aeliano nec Cnidio Ctesiae copertum: Novisse id aliqua ex parte Magnum Albertum: sed non prodidisse nondum eius satis explorata natura: Nec enim ferae illius tempestatis tam noxi[e] tamque efferate degebant vitam"), establishing a parallel with the enchantress Circe and her cave in which Ulysses' crew was transformed into pigs (Pico 1513a, *Ep.*: "Nec te admiratio nedum stupor teneat tot in bellvas homines trasformatos: quando iis in oris non unica solum est Circe ternaque Siren sed sirenum solisque filiarum Myriaden numerares bene plane integram"); in the letter to Peutinger, he underlined the fragmentary aspect of these artworks, which signified the victory of the light emanated by true religion against the darkness of the false gods (Pico 1513b, *Ep.*: "Sed sane eo in simulacro simul et artificii ingenium licebat suspicere: et simul admirari vanae superstitionis tenebras verae luce religionis ita fugatas, ut nec ipsorum Deorum imagines nisi truncae, fractae et pene prorsus evanidae spectarentur").

**10** For a general overview on Raphael's Loggias, see Edwards 1989; Nasselrath 1984; Dacos 1986; 1988; Torriti 2014; Lapraik Guest 2015, 536-51; Karafel 2016; Zamperini 2019.



This Old Testament injunction was corroborated by several examples in the New Testament, where passages from Paul's letters were used to demonstrate the absolute convergence between the Old and the New Law on the use of images in liturgy. This was especially evident in 2 Cor. 5:16, which specified: "itaque nos ex hoc neminem novimus secundum carnem et si cognovimus secundum carnem Christum sed nunc iam non novimus". In this light, if the understanding of Christ was impossible through the human senses - tied irreparably to a material dimension (that is, the flesh) - images in religious contexts lost any actual function, becoming only a deceitful device fostering idolatry.<sup>13</sup>

This led to a more significant and impactful conclusion: that images were no longer considered suitable for teaching religion:

Dieweil nun dye bilder stum | vnd taub seind | konden weder sehen noch horen. weder lernen oder leren. vnd deuten | auff nichts anders dan vff lauter vnd blos fleisch | das nicht nutz ist. Volget vestiglich. das sie nicht nutz seind. Aber das wortt gottis ist geystlich | vnd allein den glaubigen nutze.

By affirming that "images are deaf and dumb, can neither see nor hear, neither learn nor teach and point to nothing other than pure and simple flesh which is of no use", and that "the Word of God is spiritual and alone is of use to the faithful",<sup>14</sup> Karlstadt targeted one of the strongest criteria for the admissibility of images in churches and cults ever developed on the Catholic side: the *Biblia pauperum* or Bible for the poor or illiterate.<sup>15</sup> Its acknowledged creator was Pope Gregory I (r. 590-604), who formulated this theory in a pastoral letter of ca. 599 to Bishop Serenus of Marseille (*PL* 77, 1128 C), stating that it is one thing to worship a painting, another thing to teach through paintings what should be worshipped. In fact, a painting presents to an illiterate person what a text transmits to a reader, since people who do not know how to read could understand and actually 'read' what should be followed.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 6-11.

<sup>14</sup> Karlstadt 1522, 24-5; Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Nellhouse 1991; Corsi 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory's letter to Serenus was included in the *Decretum Gratiani* and circulated in its many editions with glosses published along the Renaissance. It was placed in book III [*De consecratione*] distinctio III canon xxvii [*De imaginibus sanctorum non violandis*]: "Perlatum ad nos fuerat, quod inconsiderate zelo succensus sanctorum imagines sub hac quasi excusatione, ne adorari debuissent, confregeris. Et quidem, quia eas adorari uetuisset, omnino laudauimus, fregisse uero reprehendimus. Dic, frater, a quo factum sacerdote aliquando auditum quod fecisti? Aliud est enim picturam adorare, aliud per picturae historiam quid sit adorandum addiscere. Nam quod legentibus

To undermine this deeply rooted justification, Karlstadt focused on two main aspects of Christian doctrine extrapolated from the Scriptures.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, he wanted to re-establish the superiority of the word (*logos*) over the image (*eikona*), because transposing

scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa etiam ignorantes vident quid sequi debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt. Unde et praecipue gentibus pro lectione pictura est". However, according to its glosses, the passage could bare a two-fold meaning. At the beginning, Gregory seems to praise the prohibition of adoration of sacred images, but at the same time he blames their destruction; see e.g., *Decret. Gratian.* 1612, 2147-8: "Casus: Severus [*sic*] episcopus sanctorum imagines vetuit adorari, et ira motus eas fregit, unde Gregorius eum commendat, quia eas vetuit adorari, sed redarguit eum, quia eas fregit. Nam quod facit scriptura legentibus, hoc faciunt imagines et picturae illiteratis. *Laudavimus*] Hic colligitur, quod intentio approbetur, reprobat tamen ipsum factum, [...] Item est argumentum quod in uno facto potest reprobari quiddam, et aliud approbari". Canon xxvii is strictly connected with the following two canons xxviii [*Imagines sactorum memoria sunt et recordatio praeteritorum*] and xxix [*Non in agni sed in hominis specie Christus est figurandus*]. Canon xxviii expanded the memorial and historical function of sacred images: "Venerabiles imagines Christiani non deos appellant, neque seruiunt eis, ut diis, neque spem salutis ponunt in eis, neque ab eis expectant futurum iudicium: sed ad memoriam et recordationem primitiuorum uenerantur eas et adorant, sed non seruiunt eis cultu diuino, nec alicui creaturae", also through the glosses, which established a distinction between *latría* / λατρεία (supreme veneration of God) and *dulia* / δουλεία (veneration dedicated to the saints); see *Decret. Gratian.* 1612, 2149: "Casus: quaesitum fuit quare Christiani uenerentur imagines et picturas, cum deitatem in eis esse non credant, nec spem salutis in eis ponant. Et responderetur, quod hoc faciunt in memoriam sanctorum et ad recordationem primitiuorum olim factorum, id est, rerum gestarum. *Et adorant*] s. prox. c. contra. Sed aliud est adorare latría, quod ibi prohibetur, aliud *dulia*, quod hic permittitur. *Cultu*] scilicet latría, in qua tria exiguntur, charitas dilectionis, et multitudo sacrificorum, et ueneratio. In *dulia* uero unum solum, scilicet ueneratio; et in hoc sensu possumus quamlibet rem sacram adorare, idest uerentiam exhibere". Canon xxix instead touches an issue of iconography, establishing that Christ should be represented only through a human figure, and not through symbols, i.e., the lamb: "Sextam sanctam sinodum recipio cum omnibus canonibus suis, in quibus dicitur: In quibus scripturis sanctarum imaginum agnus precursoris digito ostensus depingitur, qui in figuram transit gratiae, uerum nobis per legem Moysi premonstrans agnum Iesum Christum Dominum nostrum [*Ex.* 12:1-14]. Antiquis ergo figuris et umbris, ad ueritatis prefigurationem ecclesiae sanctae traditis, uale dicentes, gratiam et ueritatem preferimus, et sicut plenitudinem legis recipimus. Verum igitur agnum Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum secundum imaginem humanam amodo etiam in imaginibus pro ueteri agno depingi iubemus". This last article is particularly significant in terms of admissibility of symbols in sacred art, in that it excludes all non-human figures to depict Christ. As it emerges from the glosses, this statement attempts to overturn John Chrysostom's claim that Christ were to be portrayed as a lamb [*Chrysost. Catech.* 3.13-19]; see *Decret. Gratian.* 1612, 2149: "Casus: Quia Ioannes Chrysostomus demonstrans ait: ecce agnus Dei, ideo quidam pingebant Christum sub specie agni, uerum quia umbra mortis transiuit, et Christus uerus homo, in forma humana debemus ipsum depingere"; on this issue, see Agustín 1587b, 73: "C. Sextam sanctam synodum recipio cum omnibus canonibus suis, in quibus dicitur: in quibus scripturis sanctarum imaginum. A. Scripturis positum est pro picturis, est enim hoc caput XXCIII Trullianum, in quo est, ἐν τισι τῶν σεπτῶν εἰκότων γραφαῖς [*Conc. Oecum. Nicen. Secund. (787)* 81.9]". Canon xxvii was also used to comment upon John of Damascus's works, especially on orthodox faith IV. 17 [*De sancto- rum imaginibus*]; see Billy 1577, 323<sup>b</sup>-324<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 9-12.



God's message in images would have meant converting it into a different semiotic vehicle, thereby distorting the original sense of the message. On the other hand, the use of images to teach Scripture meant that the clergy and laity were not equally placed; the former had some sort of pre-eminence over the latter, and this would break the unity of Christianity itself, creating two categories of the faithful: one that could directly access the message of salvation and another that instead was subjected to false rituals:

Bildnis seind der Leyhen bucher | alß hette er gesprochen. Die Leihen sollen kein Junger Christi sein | sollen auch nymer frey werden vons teuffels panden | sollen auch nit in gotlich vnd Christlich weßen kumen.<sup>18</sup>

Karlstadt's positions were clear: "saying that likenesses are the books of the laity is precisely the same as saying that the laity ought not to be disciples of Christ, should never be free from the bonds of the Devil and should also not enter into godly and Christian life". The influence of his words can be found mostly in reformed environments, where he had a powerful impact on the ensuing debate on images and idolatry. It gave birth to a tradition of works by both Catholics and Protestants that either aligned with or contradicted his ideas.<sup>19</sup>

The first response is perhaps one of the most meaningful. It was written in German in 1522 by the Catholic apologist Hieronymus Emser who, in his *Das man der heyligen Bilder yn den Kirken nit abthon, noch unheren soll. Und das sie in der Schriff nyndert verboten seyn*, literally explained the reasons why images should not be removed from churches and other religious buildings, should not be dishonoured, and were not forbidden in Scripture.<sup>20</sup> In Emser's view, images were allowed for three main reasons: first, because served as a reminder

**18** Karlstadt 1522, 9; Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 27-8.

**19** After *Von Abtuhung der Bylder*, the works published in sequence are the following: a short Latin treatise by Johannes Eck on the same topic (1522); Luther's eight sermons *Invocavit* (1522) and his *Widder die hymmelischenn Propheten, von den Bildern und Sacrament* (1525), in which he opposed iconoclastic positions and proposed a judicious use of images together with a reformation of iconography; Johannes Stumpf's collection of sermons (1523) and Huldrych Zwingli's *Vorschlag wegen der Bilder und der Messe* (1524) that is, literally, proposal concerning images and the Mass; up until Jean Calvin's chapter XI of the first book of his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (1536) and Heinrich Bullinger's *De origine erroris* (1539), especially the chapter IX. *De deorum falsorum religionibus et simulachrorum cultu erroneo* [Bullinger 1539, 38<sup>a</sup>-42<sup>a</sup>]. For further Protestant positions, it was later re-proposed in Flacius 1569, 12.863.16. For a Catholic response in the first half of the sixteenth century, see Scavizzi 1981, 130-53.

**20** Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 41-88; Emser 1522.

and kept track of events; second, because they could teach illiterate people, according to the scheme of the *Biblia pauperum*; and, third, because they inspired faith in the observer.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, Emser had to admit that images were occasionally misused, specifically in the iconography of the Virgin Mary and the saints.<sup>22</sup> He attributed the origin of this misapplication to the Devil, who created a series of deceitful idols with the intent of being worshipped in place of the real God (“Den missbrauch dises obgenanten und and heydischen bilder | hat der teuffel im selber gotliche Herz zu zuzihen | angericht”).<sup>23</sup> In addition, Emser stated that “these pagan images and idols through which the Devil is invoked, and God is robbed of his divine honour, are an abomination before God and have been condemned not only by the canonical Scripture but also by wise and intelligent pagans themselves”.<sup>24</sup>

Dise heidische bild und abgoet | darinnen der tauffel angeruffen | und Got seyn Goetliche her entfromdet wirt | sint ein grewel vor Got | unnd nit alleyn von der Canonischen schrift | sonder | ouch von den clugen und weysen Heyden selber vornicht worden.

Karlstad, Emser and all their followers had precise targets in mind when they formulated their respective attacks or attempted defences of the *status quo*. They referred mostly to statues and licentious paintings, but also in more general terms to artworks and furnishings that distracted people’s attention from the Word of God or endangered the administration and reception of the liturgy.<sup>25</sup>

If all these debates are considered retrospectively, they are perfectly compatible with the critique on grotesques advanced in the second half of the sixteenth century in Catholic environments: the deceitful nature of images, the impossibility of teaching or transmitting a message through them, and the veneration of infernal divinities. Given the above, one can further extrapolate that the attacks against grotesques developed during the Counter-Reformation came about as a direct consequence of the Protestant polemics against images.

**21** Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 12-14.

**22** Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 14.

**23** Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 46.

**24** Mangrum, Scavizzi 1991, 51.

**25** Simpson 2002, 383-457.

### 9.3 Counter-Reformation and Images

Even if sporadic attempts to oppose the growing iconoclastic impulses developing in Protestant regions can be seen during this time, no official Catholic response emerged prior to the decrees on invocation, veneration of the relics of Saints, and the sacred images (*de invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum et sacris imaginibus*) promulgated by the Council of Trent in 1563.<sup>26</sup> The Tridentine pronouncements sought to restore the honour of figurative art in Christian cults and worship, adopting the traditional arguments that sacred art promoted memory, learning, and faith. These decrees also encouraged an improvement to the iconography to help increase the effectiveness of the images and reinforce the reasons for their use – “in such wise that no images, (suggestive) of false doctrine, and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated, be set up”.<sup>27</sup>

The Tridentine decrees set the ground rules for the bishops to re-interpret images; they did not, however, discuss specific cases, thereby leaving bishops free to apply the regulations as they saw fit for their dioceses. Guidelines, however, soon followed. The first work that gave a series of concrete examples for what should and should not be depicted in sacred art was composed by the Flemish scholar and theologian Jan Vermeulen (1533-85), also known as Johannes Molanus. In 1570 he published *De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris*, a treatise on the correct use of images that sought to give shape to the Council’s more general procla-

<sup>26</sup> In the first half of the sixteenth century, Catholic polemicists did not give a systematic response on the issue of veneration of images. Among the most eminent figures of the catholic side, worthy of mention are Erasmus and Alberto Pio da Carpi, Ambrosius Catharinus and Konrad Braun, and of course the discussions carried out at the Colloquy of Poissy, which were capable to deeply influence the outcome at the Council of Trent. In this regard, see Jedin 1935; Alberigo 1958, 239-98; Roggero 1969; Firpo 2010; Noyes 2013; Prodi, 2014; Pigozzi 2015; Firpo, Biferali 2016; Hecht 2016, 30-70.

<sup>27</sup> *Concilium Tridentinum*, session XXV (3-4 December 1563) [*De invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum et de sacris imaginibus*]: “In has autem sanctas et salutaris observationes si qui abusus irrepserint: eos prorsus aboleri sancta Synodus vehementer cupit ita ut nullae falsi dogmatis imagines et rudibus periculosi erroris occasionem praebentes statuatur. [...] Quodsi aliquando historias et narrationes Sacrae Scripturae cum id indoctae plebi expediet exprimi et figurari contigerit: doceatur populus non propterea divinitatem figurari quasi corporeis oculis conspici vel coloribus aut figuris exprimi possit. Omnis porro superstitione in sanctorum invocatione reliquiarum veneratione et imaginum sacro usu tollatur omnis turpis quaestus eliminetur omnis denique lascivia vitetur ita ut procaci venustate imagines non pingantur nec ornentur; et sanctorum celebratione ac reliquiarum visitatione homines ad commessiones atque ebrietates non abutantur quasi festi dies in honorem sanctorum per luxum ac lasciviam agantur. Postremo tanta circa haec diligentia et cura ab episcopis adhibeatur ut nihil inordinatum aut praepostere et tumultuarie accommodatum nihil profanum nihil que inhonestum appareat cum domum Dei deceat sanctitudo. Haec ut fidelius observentur statuit sancta Synodus nemini licere ullo in loco vel Ecclesia etiam quomodolibet exempta ullam insolitam ponere vel ponendam curare imaginem nisi ab episcopo approbata fuerit”.

mations. It also referred to the former tradition of treatises on art and iconography stemming from humanistic circles and to the strong iconoclastic tensions that had erupted in previous decades in Protestant areas.

Molanus never mentioned grotesques openly in his work, despite occasionally alluding to their ornamental figurations. He referred, for example, to those mysterious hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptians (“aenigmata pingebant Aegyptij”) that were often associated with the enigmatic print of grotesques after the fifteenth century discovery of Horapollo and Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>28</sup> Molanus stated that these depictions had never been admitted in ecclesiastical contexts (“Numquam item Ecclesia approbabit Aegyptiorum morem”) because they could serve as idols of the pagan gods (“inter Aegyptios, quosdam aenigmatum artifices qui idolis serviebant”). In fact, if hieroglyphs were considered to be profane idols bearing some kind of obscure meaning, then they should be excluded from Christian temples.

In chapter 30, entitled *Prophana non esse sacris intermiscenda, nec in templis, nec in monasterijs*, Molanus connects the exclusion of profane iconography from churches or sacred buildings with the pronouncements of the Council. This openly recalls the words of the decrees stating that nothing profane or indecent should appear, because only sanctity is appropriate in the house of God. Such a statement in fact was against those who mixed the sacred with the profane in churches.<sup>29</sup> Molanus concluded this discussion by quoting Bernard of Clairvaux’s famous invective against the strange figures (*curiosas depictiones*) that were ubiquitous in medieval monasteries:<sup>30</sup>

Quid [in claustris] facit illa ridiculosa monstruositas, mira quaedam deformis formositas, ac formosa deformitas? Quid ibi immundae simiae? Quid feri leones? Quid monstruosi centauri? Quid semihomines? Quid maculosae tigrides? Quid milites pugnantes? Quid venatores tubicinantes? Videas sub uno capite corpora mul-

<sup>28</sup> Molanus 1570, 3<sup>p</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Molanus 1570, 62<sup>b</sup>-63<sup>a</sup>: “Nihil prophanum, nihiloque inhonestum appareat cum domum Dei deceat sanctitudo: contra eos, qui in Ecclesijs prophana sacris admiscunt”. The bibliography on Molanus’s work is limited, one can rely mainly on Hecht 2016, especially 287-99 and Freedberg 1971, 229-45.

<sup>30</sup> Molanus 1570, 63<sup>b</sup>-64<sup>a</sup>. The passage of Bernard’s *Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem*, chapter XII. *Luxum et abusum in templis et oratorijs exstruendis, ornandis, pingendis, arguit* [PL 182 0916A-B] cited by Molanus is anticipated by a reference to *Ps.* 25:8 (“Domine dilexi decorem domus tuae et locum habitationis gloriae tuae”), which very much recalled Karlstadt’s beginning of his iconoclastic pamphlet. Even if Molanus probably used this reference to attack grotesques in churches, Bernard invective was generally evoked to attack excessive decorations of churches, as it emerges from the use that other scholars made of it, for example in the Magdeburg Centuries (Flacius 1569, 864 [XII.6. DE CEREMONIIS – *Quae contenta in templis*]), or in other treatises on sacred art and architecture (see Paleotti 1582, 237<sup>b</sup>; Hospinianus 1603, 42; Junius 1694, 148).

ta, et rursus in uno corpore capita multa. Cernitur hinc in quadrupede cauda serpentis, illinc in pisce caput quadrupedis. Ibi bestia praefert equum, capram trahens retro dimidiam, hic cornutum animal equum gestat posterius. Tam multa denique, tamque mira diversarum formarum ubique varietas apparet, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus, quam in codicibus: totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando.

Bernard asked himself: why is this ridiculous monstrosity represented [in cloisters], this marvellous deformed beauty or beautiful deformity? Why are foul monkeys found here? Why fierce lions? Why horrific centaurs? Why half-men? Why speckled tigers? Why soldiers in battle? Why hunters sounding their horns? You see many bodies under one head and again one body with many heads. You can see on one side a four-legged-animal with a snake as a tail, on the other side the head of a four-legged-animal on a fish. Here, a beast is half horse in the front and half goat in back; there, a horned animal gives birth to a horse. This surprising and rich variety of heterogeneous forms appears everywhere, so much so that people prefer to 'read' statues rather than books: they prefer to waste their time staring at these images rather than contemplate the Law of God's words helped Molanus give a precise shape to those 'mixed' figurations present in churches.

His detailed description reflected imagery comprised of dynamic figures. These combined vegetal, animal, and human features that, in the 1570s, inevitably evoked the usual iconographies of grotesques. However, beyond this significant coincidence, greater attention should be paid to his final statement, which suggested that these images distracted the faithful from Christian truth. Bernard's remark, though originally written in the twelfth century, echoed Karlstadt's polemic against the *Biblia pauperum* and Gregory the Great. It identified for the first time the deceitful images that were to be excluded from the canon so as to avoid confusing and ambiguous messaging.

Carlo Borromeo followed up this position by adding further details in his *Instructionum fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae libri duo*, a Counter-reformation work on images published in 1577. In chapter 17, *De sacris imaginibus picturisve*, Borromeo devoted several passages to the appropriateness of the imagery within religious environments.<sup>31</sup> In the first section on what kind sacred images should be avoided and saved (*Quae in imaginibus sacris cavenda, quae rursus servanda sunt*), he set a first parameter in order to reject figurations from the iconographic system still in use during his time.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Borromeo 1577, 42-5.

<sup>32</sup> Borromeo 1577, 42: "Praeterea sacris imaginibus pingendis sculpendisque, sicut nihil falsum, nihil incertum apocryphumve, nihil superstitiosum, nihil insolitum adhiberi

Borromeo reported that in painting and sculpting sacred images, nothing false, uncertain, apocryphal or superstitious must be displayed; and that everything profane, depraved or obscene, shameless or impudent must be avoided; similarly, everything unusual, which does not educate the people at devotion or can offend the minds of faithful, again, must be forbidden. Borromeo then specifically explained what should be excluded from the canon of sacred images. In the section on side-works and marginal apparatus for ornament (*De parergis et additamentis ornatus causa*), he issues his famous sentence on marginal decorations, thereby condemning the imagery that was typical of grotesques, though he does so without mentioning them explicitly.<sup>33</sup>

*Parerga*, utpote quae ornatus causa imaginibus pictores sculptoresve addere solent, ne prophane sint, ne voluptaria, ne deliciose ne denique a sacra pictura abhorrentia, ut deformiter efficta capita humana quae *mascaroni* vulgo nominant, non aviculae, non mare, non prata virentia, non alia id generis, quae ad oblectationem deliciosumque prospectum atque ornatum effinguntur.

Borromeo thought that the *parerga* [accessories],<sup>34</sup> which painters or sculptors usually add to images as ornaments, should not depict any-

debet, ita quicquid prophanum, turpe vel obscaenum, inhonestum procacitatemve ostentans, omnino caveatur; et quicquid item curiosum, quodque non ad pietatem homines informet, aut quo fidelium mentes oculique offendi possint, prorsus vitetur item”.

**33** Borromeo 1577, 44-5.

**34** The definition ‘accessory’ is drawn from Passignat 2017, 428. Borromeo cites the term *parerga* (from the Greek πάρεργον), attributing to it the meaning of ‘marginal decoration’, and adds a rather broad number of iconographies that should be excluded from its imagery. The word πάρεργον is extensively attested in Greek literature, in Latin literature instead *parergum* is extremely rare. In order to understand Borromeo’s use of the term, one must consider its etymology, i.e., παρα-, implying an addition, and ἔργον meaning ‘work’ (also of art). Hesychius attributed to it a negative connotation, by defining it as something spurious or unnecessary (*Hesyc. Lex.* π 847: πάρεργον· νόθον, ὡς μικρόν τι τῶν ἀναγκαίων). In Latin, *parergum* is utilised as a technical term in the field of art in just one occasion, i.e., when Pliny reports that the painter Protogenes represented some ships in margin of a picture of Nausicaa (*Plin. nat.* 35.10.36: “adiecit parvulas naves longas in iis, quae pictores parergia appellant”). Renaissance scholars were fully aware of this shift, as e.g., Vincenzo Borghini’s definition of *parerga*, attested in the so called *Selva di notizie* [Kunst. ms. K 783.16] dated approximately 1564; see Carrara 2000, 266: “Quae pictores parerga appellant etc. chiaman così quelle cose che sono per ornamento, ma fuori della historia, come città, fiumi, campagne, monti etc”. The Greek word was known during the Renaissance thanks to Guarinus Favorinus’s Greek *Thesaurus*, who cited Hesychius’s exact definition (Favorinus 1523, 413<sup>b</sup>), and to Guillaume Budé’s *Commentaria* on Greek language, which connected it to Pliny, hence postulating the existence of painters specialised in the realisation of these decorations (Budé 1529, 710: “παρεργογραφεῖν ἐστὶν πάρεργα γράφειν καὶ ζωγραφεῖν. Sunt autem πάρεργα, quae praeter praecipuam et destinatam imaginem ornatus gratia adduntur, ut flores, ut arbores et similia, ut apud Plinium libro XXXV”).

thing related to nature (he mentions: birds, seas, green prairies, and in general anything that might seek to produce a pleasant landscape or delightful ornament) in order to be neither profane, nor voluptuous, neither luxurious nor abhorrent of sacred art, such as those human heads usually depicted that the people call *mascaroni* [big masks].<sup>35</sup>

Budé created a first list of iconographies which recurred in the *parerga*, such as flowers, trees etc., and again, by relying on Pliny, he added also ships. This input was received by Robert Estienne's *Thesaurus* of Latin language, which appears to improve Budé's definition (Estienne 1531, 611<sup>b</sup>: "PARERGVM, parergi, n.g. Quod alicui rei praeter propositum additur, ut si Pictor lunonem pingens, ornandae tabellae gratiae, arbusculas et aviculas, sive naves mariaque, aut aliquid aliud huiusmodi addiderit"). Borromeo clearly drew his statement on *parerga* from this latter author ("non aviculae, non mare, non prata virentia"), also combining it with the monstrosities and deformities typical of grotesques. The fact that *parerga* and *grotesche* were strongly linked in Renaissance perception of art – in light of their function and their aspect – is proven by the French translation of Pliny [*nat.* 35.10.36] Pinet 1566, 649: "et neantmois fit en la \*Crotisque, de petites fustes, pour monstrer le petit commencement de son art. [\*Parergon]". The term *crotisque* recalls inevitably Michelle de Montaigne's later (1580) passage of the *Essais* (1.28: "Que sont-ce icy aussi, à la vérité, que crotisques et corps monstrueux, rapiecez de divers membres, sans certaine figure, n'ayants ordre, suite ny proportion que fortuite?"). No Renaissance vernacular translation of Pliny goes that far in interpreting *parerga* (e.g. Landino 1476, [766]: "egli v'arrose picciole navi lunghe tra le cose, le quali e' pittori chiamano *parerga*, perché sono per ornamento"; and Holland 1634, 542: "he devised certain borders without, wherein hee painted among those byworks [which painters call *parerga*] certaine small gallies and little barkes"), but this is due to Antoine Du Pinet's translation technique, see Tomlinson 2012. It is important to notice that *πάρεργα* entered the artistic vocabulary only in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, again thanks to the mediation of Budé and Estienne, and perhaps also thanks to Du Pinet's mediation; see Vigenère 1578, 272<sup>b</sup>: "Ny plus ne moins que les peintres parmy leurs ouvrages sont des perspectives, figures d'arbrisseaux, de bestions, vieilles ruines, et demolitions d'edifices, montaignes et valees; ebsemble tel autres accessoires et incidens, qui servent pour enrichir, et donner grace a leur besongne, et replir ce qui sans cela demourrot inutilement desnue et vuide, en danger d'offencer la veuë. Les Grecs les appellent *πάρεργα*, ou adioustemens supernumeraires, outre ce qui fait besoin".

**35** The word *mascaroni* (or more commonly *mascheroni*) mentioned by Borromeo in this passage refers to the technical term meaning 'a sculpture or any other artwork representing a human or animal face as an ornament'. With this sense, it was used e.g. by Benvenuto Cellini (*Vita* XIX: "Era questo vaso ornato con dua bei manichi, con molte maschere piccole e grande, con molti bellissimoi fogliami, di tanta bella grazia e disegno, quanto immaginar si possa" [*GDLI*, 9: 865]) or by Giorgio Vasari (*Vite* [1550], *Intr.* I: "e fontane con teste di varie maschere intagliate con grandissima diligenza" [*GDLI*, 9: 865]). However, Borromeo confers to the word a negative connotation, implying that these ornamental masks were actual grotesques. This position is probably rooted in the idea that the mask as a decorative feature was an allegory of deception and falsity, e.g., the idiom 'dipingere le maschere' current in ancient Italian meant 'to lie' (see Luca Pulci's *Ciriffo Calvaneo* VII. 81.6: "Non vo' che più le maschere dipinga" [*GDLI*, 9: 868]). Parallely, if one considers that grotesques depicted dreamlike figures, which were considered false and deceiving as well (on grotesques as dreams see Zagory 2018a; 2018b), and not founded in any real model (see Lapraik Guest 2015, 257 and 276-7), the link between mask-shaped ornaments and grotesques intended as dreamlike images emerges clearly. This becomes explicit in the famous letter addressed by Annibal Caro to Taddeo Zuccari on 11 November 1562, in which the iconographic programme of Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola is described. Here, Caro says that Morpheus, one of the gods of sleep, should be portrayed in the act of making masks, re-interpreting a pas-

In Borromeo's view, *parerga* should feature only that which pertains appropriately to the sacred history represented.

If Borromeo's passages are read alongside those of Molanus, it becomes clear that Catholic apologists sought to weaken Protestant positions on imagery after the decrees of the Council of Trent. Attempting to break the Protestants' unity, they argued that not all images were deceptive or distracting – as Karlstadt and most of his followers suggested – but only those that did not conform to precise iconological patterns. In this light, images could still be included in Christian liturgy; however, Catholics needed to remove those that had been improperly used and preserve those that served their purposes (memory, education, inspiration) and safeguard them from future attacks.

#### 9.4 The Counter-Reformation and Grotesques

Even if both Molanus and Borromeo alluded to those representations that were, in their words, enigmatic and undecipherable, hybrid and monstrous, false, uncertain, apocryphal, superstitious, profane, depraved, obscene, shameless, impudent, unusual and deceitful, a definitive scapegoat for Catholic figurative art was identified only in 1582 by Gabriele Paleotti in his *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*.<sup>36</sup>

sage of Ovid [*met.* 11.631-47]; see Greco 1957-61, 3: 138: “Morfeo è chiamato da Ovidio artefice, e fingitor di figure, e però lo farei in atto di figurare maschere di variati mostacci, ponendoli alcune di esse a' piedi” and Frangipani 1869, 83: “Lungi dal suo letto vedesi Morfeo, portentoso fabbricatore di maschere, di che dicesi fosse l'inventore”. The word *mostaccio* utilised by Caro literally means ‘face’, sometimes with a negative sense. Caro's letter was certainly renowned in the last decades of the sixteenth century, in that it was published by Giorgio Vasari in his 1568 edition of the *Lives*, specifically in the one of *Taddeo Zuccherò*. The same passage of Ovid mentioning Morpheus is cited by Paleotti, in the attempt to prove that, if caves (*grotte*) were an allegory of night due to their darkness, then the paintings found in caves (*grottesche*) were comparable to false dreams (see Paleotti 1582, 231<sup>b</sup>: “Al che si puotero muovere ancor per altra ragione, considerando essi che queste grotte per la loro opacità rappresentano a certo modo la notte et il luogo del sonno coi parti suoi, che sono aggramenti in aria, chimere, fantasmi e bizzarie molto stravaganti; onde finsero quella esser figlia del Chaos e moglie d'Erebo, e questo, tra una gran schiera de figli, averne tre principali, de' quali ciascuno si mutasse in varie forme, chi d'uomini, chi di fiere, d'ucelli, di serpenti, di sassi, di tronchi, et altre loro fantasie, come lascio scritto Ovidio dicendo: At pater e populo natorum mille suorum | Excitat artificem, simulatoremque figurae | Morphea, sed solos homines imitatur, et alter | Fit fera, fit volucris, fit longo corpore serpens: Hunc Icelon superi, mortale Phobetora vulgus | Nominat; est etiam diversae tertius artis | Phantasos: ille in humum saxumque undamque trabemque | Quaeque vacant anima, fallaciter omnia transit. | Regibus hi ducibusque suos estendere vultus | Nocte solent, populos alii plebemque pererrant”). See also Giraldis 1548, 431: “Primum Morphea, artificem simulatoremque figurae, μορφή quippe formam et figuram significat”. On the grotesque masks in Renaissance art and their negative reception, see Winkler 1986.

<sup>36</sup> For a general overview on Paleotti's role in Counter-Reformation art theory and his *Discorso*, see Bianchi 2008; Prodi 2014; Hecht 2016, 306-22; Morrison 2019.



It was here that grotesques (*grottesche*) appeared to embody all the negative aspects of art that should be excluded from the canon, both in sacred and profane contexts.<sup>37</sup>

Paleotti devoted six chapters of the second book to this ornamental style (XXXVII-XLII) – the most extensive section of his treatise. This part is preceded by twelve chapters (XXV-XXXVI) in which he discussed single negative aspects of art. Here, he gradually deleted any features that required condemnation and a thorough reformation of others to not be censured. He indicated precise categories that were to be rejected and others that could be acceptable if aligned with certain fixed parameters. As indicated in his subsections, he focused on lying and false pictures [XXV], on nonverisimilar pictures [XXVI], on inept and indecorous pictures [XXVII], on disproportionate pictures [XXVIII], on imperfect pictures [XIX], on vain and otiose pictures [XXX], on ridiculous pictures [XXXI], On pictures that bring novelty and are unusual [XXXII], On pictures that are obscure and difficult to understand [XXXIII], On indifferent and uncertain pictures [XXXIV], on fierce and horrendous pictures [XXXV], on monstrous and prodigious pictures [XXXVI].<sup>38</sup> Grotesques seemed to embody all these imperfections simultaneously:

<sup>37</sup> Paleotti took active part in the Council of Trent during the years 1562-64 (Prodi 1959, 121-92 and 1967, 527-36 where the genesis of his *Discorso* is dated back to 1578); this means that he could access directly the discussion on images (1563) and bear in mind the guidelines established during these sessions, from which he then developed his *Discourse* in line with the spiritual and political needs that emerged during the Council.

<sup>38</sup> McCuaig 2012, viii. See Paleotti 1582, 172-221 [XXV. *Abusi communi alle pitture sacre et alle profane. E prima delle pitture bugiarde e false*]: “Questa falsità dunque potrà considerarsi in due modi, o perché l’immagine rappresenterà uno oggetto falso, o perché, essendo l’oggetto vero, ella lo figurerà falsamente”; 177-81 [XXVI. *Delle pitture non verisimili*]: “non verisimili si diranno quelle che repugnano non alla certezza, che non si sa, ma alla credenza e commune opinione che si ha delle persone o delle cose di quei luoghi”; 182-5 [XXVII. *Delle pitture inette et indecore*]: “ma intendiamo trattare di quello errore che si commette col non darsi alla condizione della persona quello che se li deve”; 185-8 [XXVIII. *Delle pitture sproportionate*]: “sproportionate saranno quelle [figure] che mancheranno di questa tacita intelligenza tra loro”; 188-90 [XXIX. *Delle pitture imperfette*]: “Diciamo dunque che si formano talora alcune opere che mancano o nelle parti sue integrali, o nel numero delle cose da esprimersi, o in altra circostanza necessaria”; 191-6 [XXX.\* *Delle pitture vane et oziose*]: “chiamiamo in questo proposito vane quelle pitture che [...] né mirano cosa rilevante, ma solo a pascere gli occhi senza sodo frutto”; 196-202 [XXXI. *Delle pitture ridicole*]: “A queste pitture dunque, che peccano nei principii e fondamento dell’arte, talche non solo sono sconvenevoli, ma ancora causano deriso”; 202-9 [XXXII. *Delle pitture che apportano novità e sono insolite*]: “onde, quando si pecca in simili pitture, se bene il difetto e proprio della invenzione, che non figura la imagine come deve, si dimanda nondimeno errore dal tempo che si pubblica al popolo, perché inanzi non era conosciuto, e però si chiama peccato di novità rispetto agli occhi del popolo”; 209-13 [XXXIII. *Delle pitture oscure e difficili da intendere*]: “Così nella pittura, chi possederà bene e fondatamente quello che e per ritrarre, e saperà il fine a che e ordinato quel misterio, o a che mira quella figura, non e dubbio che lo porgerà molto più chiaramente, e con maggiore espressione per le particolarità che vi inserirà, che non farà un altro poco intendente”; 213-15 [XXXIV. *Delle pitture*].

Se ciascuno dei difetti discorsi in questo trattato in varij capi deprime assai la dignità di quest'arte, che avverrà in questa sorte d'opera, dove tutti insieme o la maggiore parte d'essi concorrono, non potendosi chiamare simili pitture se non bugiarde, inette, vane, imperfette, inverisimili, sproportionate, oscure e stravaganti? Per tal causa scrive Philone, come altrove abbiamo detto, che Moisè scacciò dalla sua republica li artefici di statue e pitture che con bugie corrompessero la verità.<sup>39</sup>

Paleotti affirmed that “if each of the defects discussed in various chapters of this treatise greatly lowers the dignity of this art, what will be upshot of this kind of work [i.e. grotesques], in which all, or the greater part of them come together? What else can one call such pictures but lying, inept, vain, imperfect, nonverisimilar, disproportionate, obscure, and extravagant?”<sup>40</sup> This position is perfectly in line with Renaissance critiques on the grotesques that began almost from their re-discovery in the Domus Aurea (ca. 1479) and continued throughout the entire sixteenth century. Pomponio Gaurico (1504 and 1531), Guillaume Philandrier (1544), and Daniele Barbaro (1556 and 1567) are some of the most significant figures who questioned these decorations with the aim of rejecting any anti-naturalistic or irrational figuration from the artistic canon.<sup>41</sup>

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*re indifferenti et incerte*: “Si trovano anco pitture che per altra ragione rendono confusione a molti, e ciò nasce perché si veggono diversamente fatte in varii luoghi, onde lo spettatore, trovando questa diversità, sta sospeso tra sé se sia il medemo soggetto, o se questo o quello sia falso”; 215-17 [XXXV. *Delle pitture fiere et orrende*]: “in quelle che chiamiamo orrende, perché esprimono senza alcun fine virtuoso certi atti che la natura degli uomini aborrisce”; 217-21 [XXXVI. *Delle pitture monstruose e prodigiose*]: “Questi mostri dalla natura diciamo che si possono dipingere, pero con occasione quando ricerchi così il soggetto che s’ha per le mani; et allora non solo non averanno deformità, ma più tosto commendazione, per rappresentare la verità di quello che è stato”.

<sup>39</sup> Paleotti 1582, 235<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> McCuaig 2012, 274

<sup>41</sup> Pomponio Gaurico never mentioned the word *grotesche* in his works, but apparently refers to the imagery proper of grotesques in Gaurico 1504, [13] (see also Chastel, Klein 1969, 16, 60-3, 246) and in Gaurico 1541, [3]. See Philandrier 1544, 228 (and the French edition Lemerle 2000), Barbaro 1556, 187-8 and Barbaro 1567, 242-4 (the former is the Italian edition, the latter the Latin one), and Gilio 1564, 75<sup>a</sup>-77<sup>a</sup> (also published in Barocchi 1961, 1: 305-7). For a general overview on the Renaissance literature about grotesques, see Barocchi 1977, 3: 2621-98.

Paleotti's originality can be found, however, in his final statement where he attempted to overturn the very strict Mosaic condemnation of images (*Ex. 20:4-5*)<sup>42</sup> – he said: “this was the reason, as Philo

**42** Paleotti had the chance to discuss this passage of the Old Testament in bk. I ch. XIII [*Che cosa siano idoli, simulacri, sculptili et altri simili nomi*], see Paleotti 1582, 42<sup>b</sup>-45<sup>a</sup>. His intent was to mitigate the restrictions that could be drawn by the Scripture in terms of images and idolatry by enlarging its interpretation. This entire passage is founded on Origenes's homilies (Origen. *Hom. Ex. 6.217-23*) and annotations on Exodus (*PG 17.16-17*), in which it was stated that not all images had the same value, establishing a duality between εἶδωλον (*idol*) and ὁμοίωμα (*likeness*) – Paleotti had in mind its Latin translation carried out by Jerome and published during the Renaissance in several editions, included Origenes 1503, 41<sup>a</sup> [VIII]: “Non facies tibi idolum, neque omnem similitudinem eorum, quae sunt in coelo et quae subter terram. Longe aliud sunt idola, et aliud dii, sicut ipse Apostulus docet. Nam de diis dixit: sicut sunt dii multi et domini multi [1 *Cor. 8:5*]. De idolis autem dicit, quia nihil est idolum in mundo. Unde mihi videtur non transitorie haec legisse quae lex dixit. Vidit enim differentiae deorum et idolorum et rursus differentiam idolorum et similitudinum. Nam qui de idolis dixit quia non sunt, non addidit quia et similitudines non sunt. Hic autem dicit non facies tibi ipsi idolorum, neque similitudinem omnium. Aliud est ergo facere idolum, aliud similitudinem. Et siquidem Dominus nos ad ea, quae dicenda sunt, inluminare dignetur. Ego sic arbitrator accipiendum quod (verbi causa) si quis in quolibet metallo auri, vel argenti, vel ligni, vel lapidis faciat speciem quadrupedis alicuius, vel serpentis, vela vis, et statuat illam adorandam, non idolum, sed similitudinem fecit. Vel etiam si picturam ad hoc ipsum statuat, nihilominus similitudinem fecisse dicendum est. Idolum vero facit ille, qui secundum Apostolum dicentem, quia idolum nihil est [1 *Cor. 8:4*], facit quod non est. Quid est autem quod non est? Species quam non vidit oculis, sed ipse sibi animus fingit. Verbi gratia, ut si quis humanis membris caput canis, aut arietis formet, vel rursum in uno hominis habitu duas facies fingat, aut humano pectori postremas partes equi, aut piscis adiungat: haec et iis similia qui facit, non similitudinem, sed idolum facit. Facit enim quod non est, nec habet aliquem similem sui, et idcirco haec sciens Apostolus dicit: quia idolum nihil est in mundo [1 *Cor. 8:4*]. Non enim aliqua ex rebus extantibus adsumitur species, sed quod ipsa sibi ociosa mens et curiosa repererit. Similitudo vero est, cum aliquid ex his quae sunt vel in coelo, vel in terra, vel in aquis formatur, sicut supius diximus. Veruntamen non sicut de iis, qui in terra sunt, vel mari similitudinibus in promptu est pronuntiare, ita etiam de coelestibus, nisi siquis dicat de Sole et Luna et stellis hoc posse sentiri. Et horum namque formas exprimere gentilitas solet. Sed quia Moyses eruditus erat in omni sapientia Aegyptorum, etiam ea quae apud illos erant in occultis et reconditis prohibere cupiebat, [...] vel etiam ad vitanda mala, quae nunc sermo Dei universa complectens simul abiurat et abiicit, et non solum idolum fieri vetat, sed et similitudinem omnium, quae in terra sunt, et in aquis, et in coelo”. The clue aspect of Origenes's thought lay in the fact that, while ὁμοίωμα (*similitudo*) found a model in the natural world, εἶδωλον (*idolum*) instead was completely detached from reality. Despite Origenes affirmed that Moses condemned both idols and likenesses – also because the latter could recall hieroglyphics – this duality allowed Paleotti to differentiate images that were idols and images that were not. The features of idols in fact, consisting of hybrid figurations, could easily overlap grotesque imagery, and could be condemned in consideration of their nature and their aim (veneration of false gods); the latter instead were condemned in a Jewish context, but could be vice versa accepted in a Christian one, given the renovated perception of the Word – in fact, these images were admitted as long as they were not venerated; see Paleotti 1582, 43<sup>b</sup>-44<sup>a</sup>: “Ma il nome di idolo et simulacro et sculptile et conflatile ordinariamente si piglia in cattiva parte, come di cosa reprovata dalle leggi; et questo in due modi: overo perché rappresenta cosa che non è né mai è stata, overo perché la rappresenta con altra ragione da quello che è stata. Nel primo modo si figura una sfinge o tritone, o uomini con la faccia di cane, o altre cose che mai non si sono vedute. Onde s. Paolo disse, quod idolum nihil est in mundo [1 *Cor. 8:4*]. E Teodoro lo dichiarò dicendo: Idolum nullam habet

writes and as we have already mentioned, that Moses drove out of his republic makers of statues and pictures who corrupted the truth with their lies". By relying on Philo of Alexandria's allegorical reading of the book of Genesis (*De gigantibus*), Paleotti argued that Moses drove away artists from his community because they depicted "useless and fabulous" things and "because they vitiate truth with falsehoods, visually deluding easy and credulous souls".<sup>43</sup> According

subsistentiam; et quoniam gentiles ea, quae nusquam forent, effingebant, ut Sphinges, Tritones et Centauros, Aegyptii vero homines sub effigie canina et bovina, ea Sacrae Literae idola solent appellare [Theodoret. *Quest. in Oct.* 127.9]; dalla voce εἶδος, come dice Tertulliano [PL 1.0665A (*De idololatria* III)], che vuole dire forma, et il diminutivo εἶδωλον, *idest formula*, che significa la forma di una cosa apparente, ma che manca di subsistenza et verità, ancor che altri dicano Idolum, idest εἶδοςδύνη, che vuoi dire species doloris, per la ragione che da essi è scritta [Fulgent. *Myth.* 1.1 (*Unde idolum*)]. Nel secondo modo si figura la effigie di qualche uomo, o di alcun animale, o del sole, o delle stelle, perché abbiano da essere adorate, et però cadono sotto nome d'idolo; perché, se bene esse quanto alla sostanza et forma loro sono state vere, il fine però a che ora si formano è molto diverso dalla condizione di esse. Onde s. Agostino disse: Pagani ea colunt quae sunt, sed pro Diis colenda non sunt [PL 42 0371 (*Contra Faustum Manichaeum* XX. V)]. E queste tali cose Teodoro le comprende sotto il vocabolo di similitudine, qual nome anticamente la legge proibiva, dicendo: Non facies tibi sculptile, neque omnem similitudinem; il che si intendeva ad effetto di adorarle, perché dice: ut adores ea [Lv. 26:1], si come dai dottori santi è stato dichiarato [Thomas Aquinas ST I. II. q. 100. a. 4 (37871)]". In discussing about idols, Paleotti makes reference also to Sonnius 1557, 71<sup>a</sup> [I. XVII. *De usu legitimo imaginum*], Alexander Halensis 1575, 388<sup>a-b</sup> [II q. CLVIII. *De idololatria* m. I. *Quid sit idolatria?*] and probably kept into consideration also Thomas Aquinas ST II. II. q. 94. *De idololatria* a. 1-4 (43008-44). The Greek word εἶδοςδύνη is not attested in Greek literature; it is a transliteration from the Latin form *idodin* attested in Renaissance editions of Fulgentius (e.g., Fulgentius 1535, 136 or Fulgentius 1543, 17). Among these, only Fulgentius 1521, [I. *Unde Idolum dicatur*] offers an interpretation of the term according to its Greek origins: "Idodin: lege idodynin, εἶδος species dicitur, δύνη dolor, ἀδύναω dolore affligor; quails dolor etiam feminis parturientibus ascribere potest". Modern critical editions instead read *idos dolu*.

**43** McCuaig 2012, 237; Paleotti 1582, 194: "sì come parimente non vietamo al pittore o scultore qualunque disegno, benché non sia di istoria sacra, anzi molte ne accettiamo delle etniche, molte delle moderne, che non si contengono nei libri sacri, purché da quelle ne possa uscire probabilmente giovamento, come più chiaramente altrove si è esplicato. Altrimenti come vane meglio seria il tralasciarle, peroché qual utile renderà a chi mirerà una facciata piena di grottesche? che utile la trasfigurazione di Dafne? che utile Acteone convertito in cervo? che utile una danza? che utile quei mascheroni et animali contrafatti? E di qui scrisse Philone che, per solere i pittori dipingere spesso cose inutili e favolose, *ideo Moyses laudatus elegantesque artes, picturam atque statuariam, e sua republica eicit, quod veritatem mendacis vicent, illudentes per oculos animabus facilibus et credulis*". The Latin translation of Philo of Alexandria's original Greek text [Philon. Jud. *Gigant.* 59-60: παρὸ καὶ εὐδοκίμου καὶ γλαφυρὰς τέχνας, ζωγραφίαν καὶ ἀνδριαντοποιίαν, ἐκ τῆς καθ' αὐτὸν πολιτείας | ἐξήλασεν, ὅτι τὴν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ψευδόμενα φύσιν ἀπάτας καὶ σοφίσματα δι' ὀφθαλμῶν ψυχᾶς εὐπαράγωγους τεχνι τεύουσι] quoted by Paleotti comes from the version carried out by the Czech humanist Gelen 1552, 192: "Ideo ludatas elegantesque artes picturam atque statuariam e sua republica reiecit, quod veritatem mendacis vitent, illudentes per oculos animabus facilibus et credulis". One must notice that the Latin word *picturam* rendered the Greek ζωγραφίαν, which literally means 'painting after nature' or 'live painting', given the etymology ζωός (alive) or ζωή (living) + γράφος (painter / writer). The word ζωγραφία was directly linked to the debate on grotesques, as Ulisse Aldrovandi, in

to this interpretation, the function of images prevailed over the images themselves. It is not by chance that Paleotti accompanies these words with an attack on grotesques, affirming “how could it possibly benefit anyone to look at a façade full of grotesques? [...] Where is the utility [...] in all those masks [*mascheroni*] and counterfeit animals?”.

By linking a typically profane art (grotesques) with the reception of sacred art during the Reformation (idolatry), Paleotti brought the profane dimension of grotesques directly into the debate on idolatry. In so doing, he succeeded in mitigating the inflexibility of the Mosaic precepts by orienting his focus toward the Protestant interpretation of the Old Testament, while at the same time identifying a category of profane painting on which to centre the iconoclastic fears that had emerged in the previous decades. Thus, not all sacred art was to be excluded from the liturgy, but only art that appeared deceitful – that is to say, the grotesques.

Then Paleotti went even further and addressed a question that implicitly pervaded his entire treatise; if images could be realised according to incorrect parameters that ended up deceiving the observer, which were the correct ones to follow? The answer was straightforward: those imitating nature as accurately as possible.<sup>44</sup> His position, rooted both in Aristotelian precepts and scriptural passages, emerged after a long epistolary exchange with Ulisse Aldrovandi.<sup>45</sup>

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a letter to Paleotti dated 20 January 1581, explained that ‘painting after nature’ was opposed to the hybrid and dreamlike imaginations typical of grotesques, which had no model in nature; see Acciarino 2018, 92-3: “Laonde la pittura si chiama γραφή, (che ancor significa scrittura); et non solamente con questo nome vien detta la pittura ζωγραφία, dal verbo Greco ζῶ, che vuol dire vivere, et da γραφέω over γράφω, che significa dipingere, come dicesimo pittura fatta al vivo. Da qui si chiama ζωγράφος il pittore, et quivi si vede che le grotesche immeritamente sono chiamate pitture, percióché non sono fatte dal vivo, ma secondo il vario capriccio del pittore, né hanno alcuna corrispondenza con le cose naturali, né furono né sono né saranno mai in natura, come ben disse il prencipe de gli architettori Vitruvio. Platone chiama la pittura, cioè quello che è dipinto al vivo et secondo il naturale, ζωγράφημα”. Paleotti, by quoting Philo of Alexandria’s Latin translation, which had *pictura*, argued that Moses banished from society all those artists that depicted and portrayed unnatural or antinaturalistic figurations, while Philo, by using the term ζωγραφία in the original, intended that Moses banished from society all the artists, including those who imitated nature, for covering the truth (ψευδόμεναι) and illuding (ἀπάτας) the spectators. In this light, it is clear that Paleotti filtered Philo’s words through Aldrovandi’s reading of the term ζωγραφία, which was opposed to grotesques also in reason of Plato’s *Cratylus*, where the term ζωγράφημα signified a painting having a concrete object (πραγμάτων τινῶν) as a model [Plat. *Cratyl.* 430b.3: Οὐκοῦν καὶ τὰ ζωγραφήματα τρόπον τινὰ ἄλλον λέγεις μῆμηματα εἶναι πραγμάτων τινῶν;]. Paleotti’s interpretation was possible only because the source was cited in its Latin translation, in that *picturam* offered a more generic connotation compared to ζωγραφίαν, which allowed Paleotti to overturn the sense of the former in order to adjust the latter to its needs.

<sup>44</sup> Prodi 1967, 527-9.

<sup>45</sup> Acciarino 2018, 83-107; for a general overview of Aldrovandi’s method, including his vision of figurative art, see Olmi 1992.

The point of his argument gravitated around a statement found in Paul's letter to the Romans [1.20] that proclaimed that through the visible world it was possible to see and understand the idea of the invisible ("invisibilia Dei, per ea quae visibilia sunt, conspiciuntur").<sup>46</sup> In this light, Paleotti could easily affirm: "if art imitates nature, then grotesques fall outside the bounds of art".<sup>47</sup>

This was directly related to the real function of art itself. Thanks to this position, Paleotti could present the argument in favour of the *Biblia pauperum* in a new light.<sup>48</sup> The imitation of nature created an alphabet that the public could understand perfectly and it developed a language that could not transmit fraudulent or dishonest messages. In this regard, Paleotti's exchange with Aldrovandi is essential for our understanding of the development of Paleotti's positions. This is because it points to Aldrovandi as the person who provided the scientific knowledge that was to be applied to a visual art. Aldrovandi assembled a multiplicity of biological categories that could be drawn directly from nature and a source for iconographies, thereby showing how the immense variety of natural phenomena could offer orig-

<sup>46</sup> The passage of the Letter to the Romans cited by Aldrovandi is not literal, both Jerome's and the Sixtine and Clementine *Vulgate* read: "Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur". Other patristic sources attest closer versions to the one mentioned by Aldrovandi, such as Gregory the Great's *Commentarii in librum I Regum* (III. iv. 20 [PL 34 0020]: "In ista etenim vita, cum ad contemplanda aeterna sustollimur, supernarum rerum similitudines capere de rebus istis infimis et visibilibus nitimur: ut iuxta egregii doctoris vocem, Invisibilia a creatura mundi, per ea quae visibilia facta sunt, cognoscamus"), in his *Epistulae* (IX. 52 *ad Secundinum* [PL 77 0991A-B]: "Imagines quas tibi dirigendas per Dulcidum diaconum rogasti misimus. Unde valde nobis tua postulatio placuit, quia illum toto corde, tota intentione quaeris, cuius imaginem prae oculis habere desideras, ut te visio corporalis quotidiana reddat exercitatum, ut dum picturam illius vides, ad illum animo inardescas, cuius imaginem videre desideras. Ab re non facimus, si per visibilia invisibilia demonstramus"), and in Augustine of Hippo's *De doctrina Christiana* (I. iv. 33 [PL 79 0194C]: "ut invisibilia Dei, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciantur, hoc est, ut de corporalibus temporalibusque rebus aeterna et spiritualia capiamus"). The references to Gregory's and Augustine's works were clear to Paleotti, which he cited in his *Discorso* (respectively Paleotti 1582, 75<sup>a</sup> and 128<sup>a</sup>). This verse of Paul's letter to the Romans was thoroughly discussed in all the commentaries of the New Testament (e.g., *Gloss. Ord.* 1617, 24-6; Erasmus 1516, 420; Martin Luther in Buzzi 1991, 209-12; Beza 1559, 434; 1565, 137; 1589, 137-8).

<sup>47</sup> McCuaig 2012, 274; Paleotti 1582, 235<sup>a</sup>: "Se l'arte imita la natura, dunque le grottesche non sono secondo l'arte; se le pitture hanno da servire per libri agl'idioti, ch'altrò potranno essi imparare da queste, che bugie, menzogne, inganni e cose che non sono? L'anima della pittura è il giovare, e dove non è questo fine è come un corpo morto, che diremo di queste, che non solo non giovano, ma possono intricare le menti de' semplici in mille errori?".

<sup>48</sup> Paleotti expresses his vision of the *Biblia Pauperum* at chapter XXIII [*Che le immagini cristiane servono grandemente per ammaestrare il popolo al ben vivere*] and chapter XII [*Abusi delle pitture profane, e se elle cristianamente debbono essere admesse*] respectively of the first and the second book of his *Discorso*; see Paleotti 1582, 71-3 and 126-30.

inal figurative patterns that released artists from resorting to anti-naturalistic imagery.<sup>49</sup>

To support this position, Paleotti was forced to assume that drawing, and hence painting, preceded writing in human history.<sup>50</sup> This assumption was necessary to break down the hierarchy of the written word over the image. The written word was indeed considered a more complex system of communication than imagery, and hence more proper to God. However, Paleotti attempted to prove that writing had been developed by man from drawing in a subsequent phase of civilisation, even if this did not exclude the existence of the written word in some early cultures. This hypothesis entailed the idea that God's message could be conveyed beyond its vehicle, such as when God himself spoke directly to his people at a time when writing (and books) were not yet available to mankind.<sup>51</sup> To sustain this

**49** This is clear in a letter dated 3 November 1581, where Aldrovandi explicitly mentions all the categories of the natural world from which artists could gain inspiration; see Acciarino 2018, 103-7 [*Enarratione di tutti i generi principali delle cose naturali et artificiali che ponno cadere sotto la pittura*] and Barocchi 1961, 1: 923-9.

**50** This in book II chapter V [*Se la introduzione delle immagini sia stata anteriore ai libri, e che convenienza abbia con essi*]; see Paleotti 1582, 17<sup>b</sup>-18<sup>a</sup>: "E però da questo si verria a concludere che le immagini fossero anteriori alle lettere, perché di due cose significanti un'altra cosa, quella che immediatamente significa è prima di quella che mediamente la mostra, come sanno i dotti". Aldrovandi did not agree with Paleotti on this point. In a letter dated 20 January 1581, he argued that writing preceded painting since the origins of communication (Acciarino 2018, 92: "le lettere siano antichissime et molto più antiche che non è la pittura"). In order to support this statement, Aldrovandi relied on Pliny the Elder [*Plin. nat. 7.56*] and the Epistle of Jude [*Jd 1: 14-15*], which reported some of the earliest examples of writing, and mentioned a more extensive analysis of the subject he carried out in his so called *Bibliologia* (BUB Aldrov. 83 I [*Farrago historiae papyri ab Ex. mo viro Ulysse Aldrovando* dated 1580] and II, ff. 1-317 [*De Academiis et de linguis*]). However, both Aldrovandi and Paleotti were aware of the semantic interchangeability between writing and painting, which was proven by the words signifying these concepts in ancient languages such as Greek and Hebrew; see Acciarino 2018, 42-3 and 92-5, and Paleotti 1582, 16<sup>a</sup>.

**51** Paleotti 1582, 18<sup>a</sup>: "Ma sopra tutto stimiamo d'importanza quello che si cava dalle Lettere Sacre, vero fondamento delle cose, perché, essendo commune consenso de' dottori santi, che il primo autore de' libri ch'oggi si trovano al mondo sia stato il profeta Moisè, superiore a tutti gli altri scrittori gentili di gran spazio di tempo, chiaro è che molto inanzi a lui si trova essere stato l'uso delle immagini, sì come di sotto a' suoi luoghi si mostrerà [...] Al che serve molto a proposito quel che scrisse S. Giovanni Crisostomo [*PG 49.105-6*], ricercando la cagione perché la sacra Scrittura fosse pubblicata così tardi, come fu dopo la creazione del mondo almeno 2370 anni; ove egli risponde che ne' primi tempi volse Iddio ammaestrare gli uomini per l'istesse opere sue e cose create, che potessero essere universalmente apprese da tutti, allegando il detto del salmo [*Psal. 18:2*]: *Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei et opera manuum eius annunciant firmamentum*. [...] E si serve a questo proposito del versicolo del salmo detto di sopra: *Non sunt loquelae neque sermones quorum non audiantur voces eorum*, intendendo egli che voglia dire: Non ci è gente o lingua o condizione di persone, che non possa intendere bene quelle voci tacite [*PG 49.106.12-15*: καὶ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς βαδίζων ταύτης ἀκούσεται τῆς φωνῆς; οὐ γὰρ δι' ὠτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ὄψεως εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν ἐμπίπτει τὴν ἡμετέραν] ch'escono dall'opere create d'Iddio, le quali rappresentano la grandezza e maestà sua, come scrisse ancora il Nazianzeno [*PG 36.612.2-11*]; la quale ragione ciascun



strong declaration – which overturned Protestant beliefs regarding the pre-eminence of the written word over images – Paleotti relied on John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus. They both defended the view that images were far more intelligible than writing as a means of communication because they were closer to the original that they represented. Thus, Paleotti could easily affirm: “there is no people or language or class of persons that cannot easily understand the unspoken words uttered by God’s created works, which [...] represent his grandeur and majesty. Anyone can see how well this line of reasoning applies to images, which represent God’s very creatures in their form, and consequently make themselves known to and understood by all, which books certainly cannot do”.<sup>52</sup>

This argument helped to consolidate his critique on grotesques: if the Word of God could be understood through his creation (i.e., the natural world), then whatever images fell outside of this category should be excluded from the list of admissible images. In other words, if nature could transmit God’s message, then all images that closely imitated nature were suitable for this task.

Yet, one additional problem connected to this theory had to be solved to protect the entire figurative system of sacred art in Catholic environments from future attacks. It was proposed by one of the apologists of grotesque paintings, Pirro Ligorio, in a letter he sent to

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vede quanto ben faccia al proposito delle imagini che rappresentano l’istesse creature di Dio nella loro forma [PG 36.612.6-11: αἷς καταμερίζεται τὰ γινόμενα, λόγοις ἀρήτοις τασσόμενα, καὶ οὐκ ἀθρόως ἀναδιδόμενα τῷ πάντα δυνατῷ Λόγῳ, καὶ ᾧ τὸ νοῆσαι μόνον, ἢ εἰπεῖν, ἔργον ἐστὶ παριστάμενον. Εἰ δὲ τελευταῖος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀνεδείχθη, καὶ ταῦτα χειρὶ Θεοῦ καὶ εἰκόνι τετιμημένος, θαυμαστὸν οὐδέ ἐν], e conseguentemente si fanno conoscere et intendere da tutti: il che così non possono fare i libri”. Here Paleotti refers to the Latin translations of these two Greek Church Fathers: for John Chrysostomus, see Brixianus 1521, 45 [*Homilia IX*]: “Quod et Propheta demonstrans dicebat: Coeli enarrant gloriam dei. Quomodo igitur narrant? Dic mihi. Vocem non habent, os non possident, ipsis non est lingua, quomodo igitur narrant? Per ipsum aspectum. [...] Tacet coelum, sed ipsius aspectus vocem tuba clariorem emittit, per oculos, non per aures nos docens : hic enim sensus a natura est illo certior et manifestior. Si enim per libros docuisset et literas, literarum quidem peritus scripta didicisset, nesciens vero nihil inde adiutus abijisset, siquis alius non induxisset. [...] Visibilium autem participatio eadem, neque differens sicut linguarum. In hunc pariter librum et idiota et sapiens intueri poterunt, et pauper et dives, et quocunque quis venerit, in coelum respiciens, sufficientem capiet doctrinam ex aspectu, quod quidem et ipse Propheta, innuens et demonstrans quod vocem creatura Barbaris emittit, et Graecis et omnibus universaliter hominibus sic intelligi facilem, dicebat: Non sunt loquela neque sermones, quorum non audiantur voces eorum. Quod autem dicit, tale est: Non est gens neque lingua, quae hanc vocem intelligere non possit”; for Gregory of Nazianzus, see Billy 1569, 536 [*Oratio in novam Dominicam*]: “quae creata sunt dividuntur et distinguntur, arcanis rationibus ordinata atque constituta, nec confertim in rerum naturam ab omnipotenti illo Verbo producta, cuius sola cogitatio vel solus sermo confectum opus repraesentat”.

52 McCuaig 2012, 68.



Paleotti while his *Discourse* was still in progress.<sup>53</sup> Ligorio was one of the theorists of the symbolic and hieroglyphic dimensions of grotesques, actually made for symbolic display (“nondimeno, non si può, se non per consideratione de tutte le cose, che non siano fatte et accettate in essa pittura per symbolica ostentatione”),<sup>54</sup> which represented a cryptic alphabet that could be decoded by initiates and which transmitted the secrets of nature. As Ligorio points out, although grotesques appear supernatural, they reflect nature, and they were tools utilised by the ancient poets to cover the secrets of physics:<sup>55</sup>

Quantunque parano come false fuori di natura, sono pure cose che dichiarano le cose della riflessa natura, per la vaghezza sono agli occhi grate, per la acutezza dell’ingegno delle figure delle favole, muoveno l’animo, dan materia di parlare [...] et havemo da credere che non siano altro che cose coperte dell’antichi poeti in le cose della physica.

Furthermore, the fact that grotesques represented a sort of ‘language’ allowed Ligorio to establish a meaningful parallel between their iconographic apparatus and libraries, as if they were a type of book to be read by the spectator.<sup>56</sup>

ma furono fatte et ornate de tale pittura per cosa morale da edificare gli ingegni et l’animi di tutti coloro che vi dimoravano, per ciòché nelle ville non mancavano le librerie et le cose necessarie alle bisogne delle eruditione che edificano questa vita de’ mortali.

**53** Acciarino 2018, 108-28. Ligorio sent three letters at the beginning of year 1581 to Giulio Masetti and Alessandro Manzoli to discuss the issue of grotesques: the first one to Masetti, dated 9 January 1581; the *terminus ante quem* for the second and the third, addressed to Manzoli, is 22 February 1581. The first and the second letter are actually taken from the extensive section on grotesques Ligorio already composed for his *Libri di Antichità*, in the book on ancient painting entitled *Trattato di alcune cose appartenente alla nobiltà dell’antiche arti, e massimamente de la pittura, de la scoltura e dell’architettura* (ASTo ms. a, II, 16 [vol. 29]), which was published in Barocchi 1977, 3: 2666-91. The third letter instead features many original elements. This because it was written in response to another letter written to Alessandro Manzoli by the scholar Giovanni Battista Bombelli, who attacked Ligorio’s positions on grotesque painting in general and especially on his beliefs on the cryptoporticus; see Acciarino 2018, 129-34.

**54** Acciarino 2018, 117; Garton 2019, 546.

**55** Acciarino 2018, 117; Garton 2019, 547. On the issue, see also Hansen 2018, 219-40 who very cleverly connects grotesques with the philosophical notion of “nature as a creator of images and the artist as a person who accomplishes nature’s latent imagery” (222). In this light, grotesques represent the link between “nature and culture”, where forms combined themselves in a “semiabstract” (226) dimension in an interplay between the idea and its final realisation.

**56** Acciarino 2018, 115.

This passage gave strength to concerns that grotesques were a potential target for Protestant polemicists, especially since they incorporated a parallel medium for reading creation, one which required knowledge of a mystic and oneiric language from which it was impossible to deduce a clear message. Paleotti strongly rejected these positions by stating that ancient authors themselves did not recognise allegorical meaning in these extravagant paintings. However, he also conceded that, even if they had, it would have been so impenetrable that they would have been deceptive rather than didactic:<sup>57</sup>

Ma noi, lasciando per ora scrittori grandi, che simili favole hanno giudicato non dovere essere tollerate sotto pretesto d'alcuna allegoria, et altri c'hanno scritto chiaramente che questo è stato un modo di colore o di velame imaginato da alcuni per coprire in qualche modo la bruttezza o sciochezza di quelle favole, e che i Romani non volsero mai admettere simili allegorie; noi, quanto al

**57** Paleotti 1582, 241<sup>a</sup>; here Paleotti makes reference to Plato and to Theodoret of Cyrus. For the former, Paleotti alludes to the second book of the *Republic*, in which it was stated that Greek mythology had to be censured in order to represent a useful tool for schooling the youth with wisdom; this because the youth was not able to clearly distinguish reality from allegory (ὑπόνοια) – argument that fitted very well within the critique against grotesques [Plat. *Resp.* II. 378 d: Ἦρας δὲ δεσμούς ὑπὸ ἕως καὶ Ἥφαιστου ῥίψεις ὑπὸ πατρός, μέλλοντος τῆ μητρὶ τυπτομένη ἀμυνεῖν, καὶ θεομαχίας ὅσας Ὅμηρος πεποίηκεν οὐ παραδεκτέον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, οὐτ' ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὐτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν. ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐχ οἶός τε κρίνειν ὅτι τε ὑπόνοια καὶ ὁ μῦθ, ἀλλ' ἂν τηλικούτος ὢν λάβῃ ἐν ταῖς δόξαις δυσέκνιπτά τε καὶ ἀμετάστατα φιλεῖ γίγνεσθαι]. For the latter, he refers to Zenobi Acciaiuoli's Latin translation of Theodoret's *De graecarum affectionum curatione*, in which Theodoret compared two different positions held by Plato on the use of ancient myths to educate people, [*Tim.* 40 d-e, here myths were considered as a fundamental aspect of the imagery of a community, and *Resp.* II. 378 d]. Theodoret noted that Plato contradicted himself; see Acciaiuoli 1519, 28<sup>b</sup>-29<sup>b</sup>: “Puto autem ego haec quae modo attuli, Platonis verba, vel ab iis etiam qui literarum prorsus ignari sunt, manifeste cognosci quam sint penitus illis contraria quae idem Plato in Timaeo conscripsit. Ibi enim pracepit sine ulla disceptatione et controversia Poetis credendum esse, quamquam nec signis nec demonstrationibus necessariis ad faciendam fidem uterentur. Hoc autem loco impudenter eos accusat, ut qui falsa figmenta et probrosa quaedam commenti sint”. Theodoret carried out this digression while talking about Paul the Apostle's *Rom.* 20: after having commented upon the statement for which the creation (i.e., the natural world) reflected its creator (i.e., God) [Acciaiuoli 1519, 27<sup>b</sup>: “Sapienter igitur quidam nostrorum atque argute inquit, e creaturarum magnitudine ac specie, proportione quadam, generationis authorem spectari. Neque enim qualia sunt opera, talis continuo ipse est opifex, nec quanta haec sunt, tantus et ille est [...] Per ea enim quae videntur, factorem invisibilem cogitamus”], Theodoret warned the readers to avoid the risk of making idols from those elements of the natural world, through which the faithful intended representing God [Acciaiuoli 1519, 28<sup>a</sup>: “Quique devm incorruptibilem nominabant, imaginem sibi corruptibilem corporum extruxerunt. Neque vero cum immortalis animae ideam scirent, divinos honores animae tribuerunt, suamve ad impietatem satis haec illis fuit insania, quod humana corpora, non animas, adorabant, sed ut idem inquit Apostolus, et volucrum et quadrupedum et serpentium simulachra sibi componens, haec etiam deos esse dixerunt”]. On the cultural background in which Zenobi Acciaiuoli's translation of Theodoret took place, deeply penetrated by Girolamo Savonarola's thought, see Assonitis 2006, 55.

proposito delle grottesche, diciamo che esse ordinariamente, come ognuno sa, non hanno ascoso alcuno senso giovevole, ma sono fatte a salti et a capriccij; e quando pure ve ne fosse alcuno, viene ad essere tanto recondito et abstruso, che serve per pochissimi et inganna moltissimi, e però si ha da tralasciare.

As a result, Paleotti admitted that, even if the pagans sometimes needed these paintings as a means to approach wisdom, Christians should follow a completely different path, because for them truth was manifested through Revelation.<sup>58</sup>

## 9.5 Symbols and Grotesques

With these words, constituting an actual *pars destruens*, Paleotti provided the elements to replace grotesque imagery, with all its cryptic suggestions, and establish a *pars construens*. In the following section of his *Discourse*, he devoted a chapter entitled *On pictures of symbols* to describing the correct method for portraying enigmatic imagery. Here, the guidelines for arranging symbolic figurations were set according to a specific (and regulated) iconographic repertoire based on a realistic naturalism.<sup>59</sup> A symbol, properly defined, consisted of “several different images joined together to make a certain corpus

<sup>58</sup> Paleotti 1582, 241<sup>b</sup>: “Sì che concludiamo che, se bene gli antichi, involti nelle tenebre, ebbero qualche probabile ragione di figurare in quei luoghi sotterranei queste grottesche, a noi però, ai quali è apparso il sole della verità, più non convengono simili invenzioni; le quali maggiormente disdicevole sarà di fare nei luoghi pubblici et aperti, per le ragioni già dette, perché, quanto alle chiese, pensiamo che non sarà alcuno così privo di ragione che non confessi che, adorando noi in esse quella suprema maestà, per partecipazione della quale tutte le cose hanno l’essere e sono vere, nessuna cosa più le è repugnante che rappresentare in esse cose de sogni e de falsità”.

<sup>59</sup> Paleotti 1582, 249<sup>a</sup>-252<sup>a</sup> [XXXXV. *Delle pitture dei simboli*]: “col rappresentare alcune cose naturali et artificiali come arbori, piante, fiumi, metalli, stelle, uomini, animali edificii, torri, machine et altre simili cose, nelle quali riluce qualche vestigio del sommo creatore e sianovi riposti non piccioli semi per essercizio della virtù” (249). The reformation of symbols fostered by Paleotti is particularly meaningful also because it was formulated in Bologna. Bologna was the city of Achille Bocchi (1488-1562), founder of the *Academia Hermathena* and author of the *Symbolicae Quaestiones* (1555), one of the most influent scholars in theory of symbolism. Bocchi postulated that symbols represented an alphabet, constituted by a varied imagery including at once naturalistic and non-naturalistic figurations capable of interpreting the physical and the metaphysical world, and expressing both sacred and profane mysteries. Members of this circle included many scholars and artists of the city, among the others Ulisse Aldrovandi, Prospero Fontana, Alessandro Manzoli, and Gabriele Paleotti himself. One could indeed assume that, twenty years after Bocchi’s death, Paleotti tried to rethink and overturn the ideas of symbolism developed in the *Academia Hermathena* by preserving those symbols created according to the natural world and by removing those that drifted away from this purpose. See Bocchi 1555, *ad. lect.* [*Symbolum Symbolorum*] and Angelini 2003, 27-37.

of figures, whether they be humans or animals or plants, [...] which represent some acts, true or verisimilar as it may be, or even feigned, from which there inwardly results another good and moral sense”.<sup>60</sup>

If one compares the elements normally used to arrange symbols, it becomes clear that they could be easily overlapped with those constituting grotesques.<sup>61</sup> The substantial difference lay in the way these figures were formed. In other words, whether they carried some kind of ‘reality’ or ‘verisimilitude’, and accurately reproduced nature by avoiding any kind of supernatural hybridity. Paleotti, in fact, postulated that

a symbol should not, however, be so obscure and difficult that it always requires a subtle interpreter, [...] so, for the greater ease of whoever wishes to make use of them, we see fit to warn the reader that, as well as avoiding a few well-known abuses like depicting lasciviousness or monstrosity or false gods or anything else we have mentioned above.<sup>62</sup>

The aim of this decision was to equate the symbolic dimension of art with the symbolic discourse used by Jesus Christ in the Gospels: the parable, which always conveyed a moral message. In fact, this was the sole rhetorical expedient that avoided sophistry and obscure language in forming symbols. In Paleotti’s view, this must be the model to follow when adopting allegorical patterns, in that “the symbol should convey instruction and utility for living well”:<sup>63</sup>

**60** McCuaig 2012, 287; Paleotti 1582, 250<sup>a</sup>: “questo ch’oggi chiamiamo simbolo consiste ordinariamente di piu e varie imagini unite insieme, che fanno un certo corpo di figure, siano d’uomini o d’animali, di piante o d’altre cose dette di sopra, le quali rappresentano alcun atto vero, o verisimile che sia stato, o altro che sia finto, dal quale ne risulta interiormente un altro senso buono e morale”.

**61** Paleotti 1582, 222<sup>a-b</sup>: “per levare ogni equivocazione che potesse nascere, diciamo che sotto questo nome di grottesche non intendiamo quei lavori de fogliami, tronchi, festoni o altre varietà di cose che talora si pingono e possono essere secondo la natura; ne quelle invenzioni degli artefici, che nei fregi, nei tavolati, nelle opere dette arabesche, nei recami et altri ornamenti proporzionati alla ragione sogliono con vaghezza rappresentarsi; né manco intendiamo di quei mostri, o marini, o terrestri, o altri che siano, che dalla natura talora, se bene fuori dell’ordine suo, sono stati prodotti. Ma solo comprendiamo sotto questa voce quelle forme d’uomini o d’animali o d’altre cose, che mai non sono state, né possono essere in quella maniera che vengono rappresentate, et sono capricci puri de’ pittori et fantasmi vani et loro irragionevoli immaginazioni”.

**62** McCuaig 2012, 288-9; Paleotti 1582, 251<sup>a</sup>: “Il che però non fosse tanto oscuro e difficile, che avesse bisogno sempre di sottile interprete, ne manco tanto triviale e volgare, che non apportasse ne meraviglia, né novità, né trattenimento alcuno all’intelletto; il quale tanto più suole eccitarsi et apprendere le cose, quanto più sono state da lui apprezzate per la loro dignità. Laonde, per qualche maggior agevolezza di chi vorrà servirsene, ci pare di ammonire il lettore che, oltre il fuggire alcuni abusi assai noti, come il dipingere cose lascive, o montruose, o di falsi dei, o di altro da noi di sopra notato”.

**63** McCuaig 2012, 289; Paleotti 1582, 251<sup>a</sup>.

Ma quello che principalmente si avrà da avvertire è che il simbolo porti seco istruzione et utilità al ben vivere; onde, per assicurarsi da questi scogli e camminare senza intoppo, lodiamo noi grandemente quei che sogliono valersi delle parabole evangeliche riferite dal Salvatore nostro.

In this light, a further assumption can be made. The *Hieroglyphica* published in 1556 by Giovanni Pierio Valeriano served as a sort of encyclopaedia of sacred and profane symbols inherited from ancient cultures and intertwined with the creative tension of the Renaissance – from which many artists and iconographers often benefited. In the same way, the renewed Catholic policy on images required analogous tools capable of providing similar iconographic solutions based on Counter-Reformation guidelines.<sup>64</sup>

**64** Valeriano 1556; Pellegrini 2002; Perale 2008; Giehlow 2015, 208-35. Paleotti himself touched briefly upon hieroglyphs during his discussion on symbols, creating an actual semiotic bond between the two forms of significance; however, he decided not to examine in depth the issue, because of the elevated complexity of the issue, which would divert the mind of the readers; see Paleotti 1582, 249<sup>b</sup>: “I simboli dunque vogliono alcuni che abbiano avuta origine dalle note ieroglifiche degli Egizzii, dei quali è stato scritto ampiamente da’ Greci et da’ Latini. Altri dicono che le ieroglifiche erano di due sorti, l’una detta semplicemente ieroglifica, l’altra simbolica; et che della simbolica vi erano parimente tre specie tra sé diverse, una, come dice Clemente Alessandrino, *per imitationem, altera per tropos, tertia per aenigmata* [Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 5.4.20-1: ὑστάτην δὲ καὶ τελευταίαν τὴν ἱερογλυφικὴν, ἣς ἡ μὲν ἐστὶ διὰ τῶν πρώτων στοιχείων κυριολογικὴ, ἣ δὲ συμβολικὴ. τῆς δὲ συμβολικῆς ἡ μὲν κυριολογεῖται κατὰ μίμησιν, ἣ δ’ ὡσπερ τροπικῶς γράφεται, ἣ δὲ ἄντικρυς ἀλληγορεῖται κατὰ τινὰς αἰνιγμοὺς [...]. Τροπικῶς δὲ κατ’ οἰκειότητα μεταγόντες καὶ μετατιθέντες, τὰ δ’ ἐξαλλάττοντες, τὰ δὲ πολλαχῶς μετασηματιζόντες χαραττοῦσιν. [...] Τοῦ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς αἰνιγμοὺς τρίτου εἴδους δεῖγμα ἔστω τόδε]. Ma a noi non importa di fermarci in questo [...]”. The reference to Clement of Alexandria was probably drawn from the Latin translation carried out by Hervet 1551, 153: “Ultimam autem ἱερογλυφικὴν, id est, sacramque insculptur scripturam, cuius unam quidem est per prima elementa κυριολογικὴ, id est, proprie loquens, altera vero symbolica, id est, per signa significans. Symbolicae autem una quidem proprie loquitur per imitationem, alia vero scribitur veluti tropice, alia vero aperte sumitur allegorice per quaedam aenigmata”. Also Erasmus attempted to understand origin and nature of hieroglyphs, defining them as an enigmatic language aimed at expressing the secrets of natural world; see Giehlow 2015, 197-201 and Erasmus 1538, 348: “Sic enim vocantur aenigmaticae sculpturae, quarum priscis seculis multus fuit usus, potissimum apud Aegyptios vates, ac theologos, qui nefas esse ducebant, sapientiae mysteria literis communibus vulgo prophano prodere, quemadmodum nos facimus, sed si quid cognitu dignum iudicassent, id animantium rerumque variorum expressis figuris ita repraesentabant, ut non cuivis statim promptum esset conijcere, verum si cui singularum rerum proprietates, si peculiaris cuiusque animantis vis ac natura cognita, penitusque perspecta fuisse, is demum collatis eorum symbolorum coniecturis, aenigma sententiae deprehendebat [...] Porro hoc scripturae genus non solum Dignitatis plurimum habet, verum etiam voluptatis non parum, si quis modo rerum, ut dixi, proprietates penitus perspectas habuerit; id quod partim contingit solerti contemplatione rerum causarumque naturalium, partim liberalium cognitione disciplinarum”. Echoes of this last statement (i.e., hieroglyphs represent a symbolic means to contemplate nature) could be perceived in Pirro Ligorio’s reference to grotesques as a symbolic language displaying the truth of physics. The contamination between hieroglyphs and grotesques appeared to be delicate at the end of the fifteenth century also because hieroglyphs (or

Valeriano added a plethora of meanings to traditional and innovative symbolic patterns drawn from a raft of ancient literary and material sources (statues, coins, epigraphs). He moved from the statement that hieroglyphs were used in ancient times to record all the mysteries of nature (“*omnem naturae obscuritatem*”); and, to do so, the elements used for this kind of description were constituted by figures of animals and other things (“*descriptionem huiusmodi, animalium ceterarumque rerum figuris constituisse*”) in which philosophers, poets and historians saw hidden theological messages (“*divinarum etiam disciplinarum sententias delitescere viderunt*”).<sup>65</sup> It comes as no surprise, then, that his work became one of the points of reference in conferring significance to mysterious and cryptic images and grotesques.<sup>66</sup> However, Valeriano then added that this legacy served to

grotesques) were thought to be discovered in catacombs or cemeteries of early Christianity, as pointed out not only by Ligorio (Acciarino 2018, 118: “*Erano da’ gentili nelle grotte dipinte, che, se esse sono state simili a quelle de’ christiani, di grottesche l’ornarono, al contrario che fecero dipoi i nostri christiani, come veggiamo nel coimeterio di San Callisto papa, secondo egli havendo occupate le gentili cathatymbe, ch’hora si dicono catacombe, gli tolse ogni pittura gentile et le smaltò semplicemente, l’usò per dormitorio delli santi martiri, le quali sono nella via Appia nella chiesa di San Sebastiano. Così similmente fu fatto nelle grotte di via Salaria nel coimeterio della Diva Prisca et anchora nella via Tiburtina nelle grotte di San Lorenzo estramuraneo*”), but also by another anonymous correspondent of Paleotti, who recognised these ornaments in the hypogeum of Priscilla in Rome (Acciarino 2018, 139: “*Quanto al quarto, le grotte [di S. Sebastiano] et S. Lorenzo si crede che fussero fabricate da’ christiani per fugir le persecutioni et ivi habitavano e celebravano le sinasi, e sepeivano i morti. Et io ho veduto in questo cimiterio scoperto alcuni giorni sono, che vogliono sij di Priscilla, in un loco dipinto un huomo con alcuni leoni che pareno a modo di grottesche, ancorché alcuni vogliono che sia S. Ignatio*”). Was it Antonio Bosio to solve this conflict, potentially dangerous for the cavernous (or grotesque) implications on sacred art, in his book on the underground Rome, when he established that those paintings found in early Christian cemeteries, which resembled hieroglyphs and grotesques, were nothing but Pagan symbols loaded with Christian messages; see Bosio 1632, 599 [IV. III. *Delle figure indifferenti sospette di gentilità*]: “*Altra difficoltà pareva che fosse circa alle figure indifferenti, sospette di gentilità, che si vedono in alcuni cimiterii. Questa però può essere superata da quello, che si disse nel primo libro, cioè che nella primitiva Chiesa, essendo li Christiani piante novelle traspiantate dal Gentilesimo o Hebraismo nel terreno della medesimo Chiesa, conservavano ancora qualche proprietà dell’antico solo, e per ciò permisero gli Apostoli stessi, e successivamente li Sommi Pontefici, che ritenessero alcune cose usate nella gentilità, le quali non ripugnavano alla nostra religione, convertendole in usi ecclesiastici, con più misteriosi sensi. [...] Così parimente volendo esprimere li concetti loro, si servivano di varii simboli e ieroglyphici, ancorché delli medesimi si fossero serviti i Gentili*”. Bosio devoted the following chapters of his book to explaining the Christian meanings of all the Pagan symbols adopted by early Christians (Bosio 1632, 599-656), which included animals, plants, and various objects.

**65** Valeriano 1556.

**66** Morel 1985; Morel 1997, 115-37. A convergence between hieroglyphs and grotesques was clear to Renaissance scholars and artists; see Pirro Ligorio’s letters of 1581, in Acciarino 2018, 112 and 118: “*onde ad uso di lettere hieroglyphiche fatte*”, and Paleotti 1582, 227<sup>a</sup>: “*Altri le derivano dalle guglie egittiacce ripiene di figure hieroglyphice, ch’havcano sensi alti nella loro lingua*”. However, the changing perception throughout the sixteenth century towards symbolic and cryptic languages also impacted on the

interpret and understand the Bible and other sacred texts, merging the profane dimension of the symbols he collected with the truth of Christian wisdom. Valeriano expounded on this idea: by comparing the reading of hieroglyphs with the parables in the Gospels he created a very dangerous contamination between two extremely delicate areas:<sup>67</sup>

relationship between the two. A clear example of this could be found in the description of the Castello San Martino in Soverzano, near Bologna, by the scholar Giovanni Battista Bombelli. In this treatise, dated 1585, Bombelli said that the symbolic decoration of the castle could be interpreted “hieroglyphically”. This allowed Bombelli to separate grotesques from hieroglyphs, avoiding any potential overlapping; see BUB ms. 2059, f. 70v: “di più emblemi, e simboli, apologi e imprese abbellirano il luogo, e con molte pitture l’ornarono, ma però tutte morali et giuditiose, nelle quali, sopra tutta, et la noia et il contento del perduto e recuperato San Martino si conoscono hieroglicamente”. Bombelli was one of the correspondents of Paleotti on grotesques in 1581 and contrasted Ligorio’s positions; see Acciarino 2018, 53-61 and 129-34.

**67** Valeriano 1556, *Nuncup.*; Giehlow 2015, 229. In this passage, Valeriano quotes *Psalms* 78. However, Jerome’s Vulgate features a different reading [“Aperiam in parabola os meum; loquar propositiones ab initio”], opting for the term *propositiones* rather than *aenigmata*. A similar choice was apparently made by the Greek version of the Old Testament carried out by the Seventies, who adopted προβλήματα (instead e.g., of αἰνίγματα), which inferred, from an etymological point of view, a question unresolved: ἀνοιξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου, φθέγξομαι προβλήματα ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς. The Hebrew version of the Bible, from which both Jerome and the Seventies translated, has הִיחָדָה, which literally means riddle - in this light αἰνίγμα / *aenigma* appears to be more proper than προβλήματα / *propositiones* (also considering that הִיחָדָה was translated with αἰνίγμα / *aenigma* in other cases both by the Seventies [e.g., *Nm.* 12:8] and Jerome [e.g., *Ez.* 17:2] - even if Jerome used *problema* more often [e.g., *Jd.* 14:12]). Why Jerome in *Ps.* 78:2 opted for *propositiones* rather than *problemata* or *aenigmata* is still uncertain. One can assume that Jerome considered *propositio* as an equivalent of *aenigma*, as it emerges from his treatise on the *Psalms* (*PL* 592): “eloquar propositiones ab initio. Pro propositionibus in hebraico habet ‘aenigmata’. Ergo omne, quod dicitur, aenigma est. Aenigma non est hoc quod dicitur, sed aliud quod significatur aenigmatē”. The equivalence of *propositio* and *aenigma* is later confirmed by Gerhoh of Reichersberg (*PL* 193 1588C-D), in his commentary of *Ps.* 78:2: “Propositio est aenigma, quod proponitur ad solvendum”. This semantic variability, perceivable in the Hebrew word הִיחָדָה, was already clear in the Renaissance, as it emerges in Pagnini 1529, 563-4: “הוֹדָה est aenigmatice loqui, seu aenigma, aut problema proponere, obscure loqui. Iudicum 14 versu 13: הִיחָדָה הִיחָדָה הִיחָדָה Aenigmatice loquere aenigma tuum. Hierony. *propone problema tuum*; et versu 16: הִיחָדָה הִיחָדָה i. aenigma aenigmatice locutus es filijs populi mei, et mihi non indicasti. Iechez 17 versu 2: Fili hominis הִיחָדָה הִיחָדָה i. aenigmatice loquere aenigma. Hierony. *propone aenigma*. Iudicum 14 versu 12: הִיחָדָה נָא לְכֶם הִיחָדָה id est, aenigmatice loquar nunc (vel quae) vobis aenigma. Hierony. *proponam vobis problema*, et Nomen הִיחָדָה ut habes in Verbo, et cum Pronomine. Iudicum 14 versu 18: Non invenissetis הִיחָדָה id est, aenigma meum; et plurale Chabba 2 versu 6: Et interpretationem הִיחָדָה id est, aenigmatum; Psalmum 78 versu 2: Eructabo (loquar) הִיחָדָה aenigmata; Numeri 12 versu 7: Et non הִיחָדָה i. per aenigmata; Prover. 1 versu 6: הִיחָדָה i. et aenigmata eorum”. In quoting *Ps.* 78:2, Valeriano very likely relied on the only source accessible at his times which attested *aenigma* in contrast with *propositio*, i.e., the polyglot edition of the *Psalms* (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin and Arabic) completed by Agostino Giustiniani, in which the translation attests: “Aperiam in parabola os meum, loquar aenigmata, quae fuerunt ab antiquo” (Giustiniani 1516).

In nova vero lege novoque instrument, cum Assertor noster ait, Aperiam in parabolis os meum, et in aenigmate antiqua loquar [Ps. 78:2], quid aliud sibi voluit, quam, hieroglyphice sermonem faciam, et allegorice vetusta rerum proferam monumenta?

This obscurity could no longer be tolerated in Counter-Reformation times, especially since it was too convergent with the imagery of grotesques, to the extent that it could be misread and confused with it. Therefore, a thorough rethinking of the concept of a symbol and its crafting was required. This was the case for Antonio Ricciardi's *Commentaria Symbolica* (1591) and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593).<sup>68</sup> Despite both moving from different premises, they provided a first detailed alphabetical list of iconographies compatible with the figurative reorganisation imposed by the Council of Trent.

According to the Flemish scholar Jan van Gorp van der Beke, also known as Johannes Goropius, hieroglyphs were nothing but symbols; and, if symbols were analogous to words, they must refer to a precise, clear and defined object to serve their purposes: they therefore needed to conform to visible images, and express the name signified by the figure.<sup>69</sup> This assertion led to a new way to perceive hieroglyphs: all symbols had to respect the object to which they referred, adapting their features to their original model. Ricciardi, for example, stated that symbols should have some kind of likeness with what

<sup>68</sup> Ricciardi 1591; Ripa 1593. For the relations between Ripa and Valeriano, see the introduction of Maffei 2012, LXXXVIII-XC.

<sup>69</sup> Two works, both posthumous, expressed this opinion, see Goropius 1580 [*Hermathena*], 21: "nomina symbola esse, non solum secundum nudam pactionem, sed iuxta rerum etiam convenientiam et cognationem. Neque vero nota quaevis symboli nomen meretur, sed ea dumtaxat, quae apte convenienterque rei cuiusdam significandae applicatur. At quae hic est convenientia spectanda, si non illa quae de naturae quadam affinitate apta est, ita ut signum congruens et appositum rei denotandae, symbolum vocetur, at notae solo arbitratu nostro nulla naturae cognatione positae, in symbolorum albo minime censeantur. Num quisquam est, qui Aegyptios putet temere, citra omnem delectum, quasvis notas quibusvis rebus dedisse? Non equidem opinor, sed contra diligenter rerum inter se similitudine animadversa, sculpturas sacras, sive hieroglyphicas, notas excogitasse. Iam quae aetatis nostrae homines emblematum nomine litteris mandarunt, ea nihil aliud sunt, quam symbola sententiis quibusdam notandis accommodata"; and Goropius 1580 [*Hieroglyphica*], 13: "Et haec quidem vera est norma ad quam sacra veterum simulacra sive hieroglyphicae notae sunt examinandae: et rursus ea vera est nominum interpretatio, quae vetustissimis sacrorum respondet figuris. Si enim nomina symbola sint, necesse est ut cum ipsis adspectabilibus imaginibus consentiant, et illud exprimat nomen quod figura demonstrat. Hoc igitur sit nobis omnium hieroglyphicum principium et solidum fundamentum, cui omnia nostra quae de id genus imaginibus trademus, innitentur". Curiously enough, Johannes Molanus was the censor who approved the publication of Goropius' works on 21 June 1574 – as it emerges from a note at the end of the *Hermathena*.



they attempt to express, in order to allow an internal understanding through an external perception.<sup>70</sup>

A similar approach can be found in Ripa. In his preface, he details the methodological approach that should be followed in arranging symbolic images. Beyond the principle of similarity, which implied a relationship with the object evoked (“vedendosi che questa sorte d’imagini si reduce facilmente alla similitudine della definitione”),<sup>71</sup> Ripa established four criteria for crafting any type of figuration, clearly referencing Aristotle’s *Physics* (2.3) and *Metaphysics* (5.2): a material cause, an efficient cause, a formal cause, and a final cause.<sup>72</sup> Respecting these norms would ensure a clear understanding of the symbol, without creating confusion for the spectator.<sup>73</sup>

con tutto ciò, dovendosi haver riguardo principalmente ad insegnare cosa occolta con modo non ordinario, per dilettere con l’ingegnosa inventione, e lodevole, farlo con una sola, per non generare oscurità, et fastidio in ordinare, spiegare et mandare a memoria le molte.

This new rational approach to symbolic iconography, which can ideally be opposed to the ‘chaos of the mind’ of grotesques,<sup>74</sup> created a multifarious alternative to those irrational and imaginary figurations. It also set a newly re-established tolerance threshold for sacred art in Catholic environments through rationality and naturalism. This was still a shifting phase, which would lead to a completely renovated style in the application of ornamental art for the following centuries; nevertheless, it guaranteed the survival of a ‘language’ with an age-old tradition that had been questioned by renewed spiritual tensions and religious needs.

**70** Ricciardi 1591, *ad lect.*: “Symbolum est nota cuiuspiam aricanioris mysterii significativa, ut cum Ciconiam dicimus esse symbolum pietatis, et papaver fertilitatis. Et symbolum ea est natura ut similitudine quadam ad alia quaedam intelligenda, quam quae sensui exterior offerunt, animum nostrum deducunt”.

**71** Ripa 1593, *ad lect.*; for Ripa’s method of making symbols, see Maffei 2009.

**72** Ripa 1593, *ad lect.*: “quattro sono i capi, o le cagioni principali, dale quali si può pigliare l’ordine di formarle, et si dimandano con nomi usitati nelle scole, di Materia, Efficiente, Forma, et Fine, dalla diversità de’ quali capi nasce la diversità, che tengono gli Autori molte volte in definire una medesima cosa, et la diversità medesimamente di molte imagini fatte per signicare una cosa sola”.

**73** Ripa 1593, *ad lect.*

**74** Scholl 2004, 95-6. A wonderful example of the symbolic interpretation and use of grotesques during the Renaissance is found in Conticelli 2018.

