Love, Triumph, Immortality: The Mythic and Pictorial Tradition of the *Corona Borealis*

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Abstract. The Corona Borealis or Northern Crown is a bright constellation that shines conspicuously in the early summer sky. Among the oldest recognized constellations visible in the northern hemisphere, its distinctive configuration is easily discernible. Once a group of nine stars, it was the only stellar ring visible to early Greek astronomers who named it Στεφανοσ, the Wreath. It was later distinguished as πρωτοσ and Βορεοσ (first and northern) and ascribed a positive astrological influence. The constellation was associated with the myth of Bacchus and Ariadne as early as the third Century BCE. In this myth, the Crown was most often identified as Ariadne's wedding crown which Bacchus hurled into the sky at her death as a memorial of his undying love for her. Although there are variations in the telling of the myth in ancient texts, the constellation was firmly identified with the triumph of Ariadne, and her transformation into a goddess. The pictorial tradition was adapted in images of the Virgin Mary with a starry crown, as well as those representing her Coronation by Christ.

Introduction

The *Corona Borealis* or Northern Crown is a bright constellation that shines conspicuously in the early summer sky. Among the oldest recognized constellations visible in the northern hemisphere, its distinctive configuration of seven stars is easily discernible. Once a group of nine stars, it was the only stellar ring visible to early Greek astronomers, who named it Στεφανοσ, the Wreath. It was later distinguished as πρῶτοσ and βορεοσ (first and northern), and ascribed a positive astrological influence in all sources.[1] The stars in the constellation were

[1] Richard Hinckley Allen, *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning* (Dover, NY: 1963), pp.174–75.

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considered beneficent in both ancient and later sources and were said to have the nature of Venus and Mercury by Ptolemy, whose opinion was followed in the Renaissance.[2] This paper will first discuss the variations in the pictorial tradition of the *Corona Borealis*. Then, using a selected group of Renaissance and Baroque paintings, I demonstrate how the meaning of the constellation was employed to express themes of love, triumph and immortality in European art of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

The constellation was associated with the myth of Bacchus and Ariadne by the third Century BCE when it appears among early Greek sources for astral myths. In the *Phaenomena*, the important astrological/astronomical poem of Aratus (c. 315/310 BCE–240 BCE), the constellation is identified as Ariadne's wedding crown. Ancient Greek texts and Latin commentaries on them vary as to the moment when the crown was hurled into the sky. Some sources have it at Ariadne's triumphal wedding to Bacchus-Liber, and others after her death when Bacchus hurled it into the sky as a memorial of his undying love for her.[3] Still, in other sources and commentary, the constellation is said to be Ariadne herself who was physically immortalized in the constellation. The origin of the crown and what it was made of also varies, most commonly between being seen as a wreath of flowers or of gold with glowing gems.[4] Despite these variations, the crown of stars was firmly identified in antiquity with the triumph of Ariadne, with Bacchus' love for her, and with her acquisition of immortality. The pictorial tradition, as a vehicle of these themes, was adapted to images of the Virgin Mary with a starry crown, as well as those representing her Coronation by Christ or the Trinity.

The constellation was probably first conceived as a coronal wreath of flowers, rather than one of oak or laurel, which Richard Hinckley Allen long ago suggested was the original significance of Aratus'

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[2] Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. F.E. Robbins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), I.9.

[3] Aratus, *Phaenomena*, trans. G.R. Mair (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1927), I.71–72.

[4] There are a very large number of classical sources for the asterism and the origins and nature of the Crown and the myth of Ariadne, summarized here: http://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/Ariadne.html#Corona. For a recent discussion of the Aratus text and its commentaries, plus an analysis of the lost text of Eratosthenes and the *Poetica Astronomica* of Hyginus, see *Eratosthenes and Hyginus: Constellations Myths with Aratus' Phaenomena,* trans. Robin Hard, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Στεφανοσ.[5] Nevertheless, in Renaissance representations it does appear as an oak wreath as, for example, in a mid-fifteenth century Italian manuscript of the astral myths of Hyginus and the Latin Aratus ascribed to Germanicus Caesar.[6] The Crown of Ariadne is represented as an oak wreath, the ancient Roman crown denoting victory given by Jupiter. Tied at the back with streaming ribbons, it is studded with acorns. In applied gold leaf on the parchment (invisible in reproduction) are the nine stars observed in antiquity (fig. 1) .

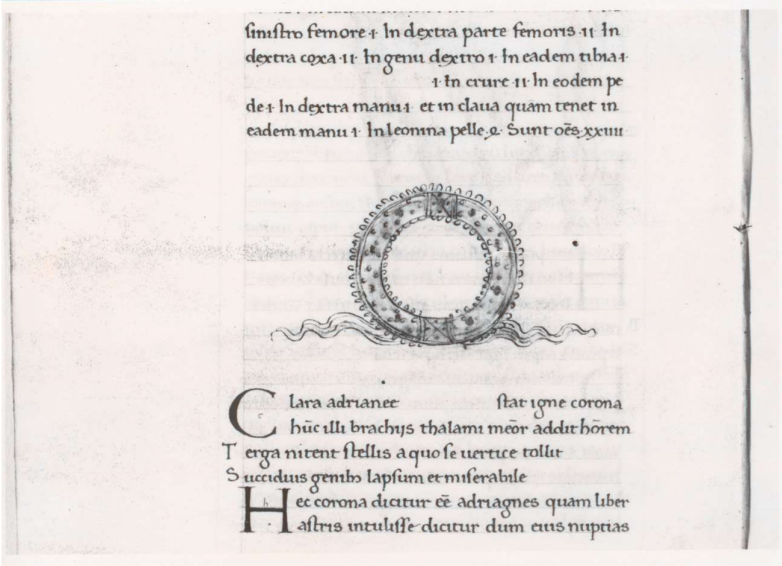

Fig. 1. *The Wreath*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 1358, fol. 8V.

The *Catasterismoi* of Eratosthenes also names the Northern Crown as Ariadne's. However, in that work it is not described as a wreath, but as a crown made of gold and studded with gems.[7] We find this same motif in the Latin translations of Aratus by Cicero and Germanicus. In these, the Crown is said to have been a gift of Aphrodite and the Horai to Ariadne at her wedding. In eternal memory of their happy union, Bacchus-Liber

[5] Allen, *Star Names,* p.175.
[6] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 1358, fol. 8v.
[7] *Erastosthenes and Hyginus,* pp.31–32.

hurled the Crown into the sky. As it reached the celestial sphere, its gems grew brighter and became the stars of the constellation. Ovid's *Fasti,* and the *Poetica Astronomica* of Hyginus, both among the most important sources for Renaissance programmers, mention it in similar fashion. Among many examples, the Northern Crown was represented in this way in the famous star map drawn by Albrecht Dürer and printed in 1515, as well as in a printed version of Hyginus, *Fabulorum Liber*, published in Basel in 1535.[8] (fig. 2)


LIBER III. 89

in utraq; manu ſingulas, ſed clariorem dextram, & ſub ea alterem obſcuram, & in cubito dextro claram unam. In zona unam clarius cæteris lucentem, hæc ſtella arcturus appellatur, in utriſq; pedibus ſingulas quæ omnino ſunt xiiii.

Corona.

Corona ſeptentrionalis octo habet ſtellas, quæ ferè omnes quartæ ſunt magnitudinis præter Alphetam, quæ ſecundæ eſt magnitudinis.

Coronam humero ſiniſtro prope contingere Arctophylax uidetur, quam engonaſin dextri pedis calce coniungit, hæc cancro & leone exoriente occidere, cum ſcorpione exoriri perſpicitur. Habet autem ſtellas nouem in rotundo diſpoſitas, ſed ex his tres clarius cæteris lucentes.

Engonaſin ſiue Hercules.

Hercules inſigniores ſtellas habet in capite, in humero dextro et ſuper adiutorium dextrum, & ſuper humerum ſiniſtrum, quæ ſingulæ tertiæ ſunt magnitudinis, reliquæ ferè omnes ſunt quartæ & ſextæ magnitudinis.

Engonaſin. Hic poſitus inter duos circulos arcticum & æſtiuum, utriſq; pedibus & dextro genu quẽ ante diximus arcticum circulum finit. Ita tamen ut dextro pede prioribus digitis circulum terminet, ſiniſtro autem toto caput draconis opprimere conetur. Humeris autẽ uelut ſuſtinens circulum æſtiuũ & manu dextra proiecta tangens. Leua aũt è regione ad ſiniſtrũ genu porrigens, ęquali interuallo circuli æſtiui & genu ſiniſtri. Hic occidẽs capite prius quam reliquo corpore deuenit ad terram, qui cum totus occidit* ut pendere pedibus ex arctico circulo uideatur, exoriẽs antè pedibus quàm reliquis membris. Habet autẽ in capite ſtellam unam. In ſiniſtro brachio unam. In utroq; humero ſingulas clare lucentes. In manu ſiniſtra unam, in dextro cubito unam. In utroq; latere ſingulas ſed clariorem in ſiniſtro. In dextro fœmore duas: In genu unã, In poplite unã, in crure duas, in pede unam quæ dicit clara*. In ſiniſtra manu quatuor, quas pellẽ leonis nõnulli eſſe dixerũt. Ita ſunt omnino decẽ et nouem.

Lyra.

Lyra, quæ & uultur cadens, habet ſtellas decem, quarum inſignior eſt Vega primæ magnitudinis.

Lyra. Hæc poſita eſt contra regionẽ eius loci qui eſt inter genu & manũ ſiniſtrã eius qui Engonaſin uocatur, cuius ipſa teſtudo ſpectat ad arcticum circulũ. Summũ autem cacumen ad polum Notium contendere uidetur, hæc lyra uirgine exoriente occidere uidetur, & cum ſagittario exoriri perſpicitur, habet aũt in ipſis teſtudinis lateribus ſingulas ſtellas. In ſummis cacuminibus eorum quæ in teſtudine ut brachia ſunt coniecta ſingulas in mediis, iiſdẽ quas humeros Eratoſthe-

Draco ſub II eſt. Bootes ſub ♍ & ♎

ita figuratur; &c. uel ſimile quid deeſſe uidetur

h nes fingiſ

Fig 2. *Corona* and *Engonasin* from Hyginus, *Liber Fabularum…*, Basel, 1535, p. 89.

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[8] C. Julii Augusti Liberti *Fabulorum Liber,* Basel, Ioan. Hervagium, 1535, p.89. Albrecht Dürer drew the maps of both northern and southern celestial hemispheres with the help of two contemporary mathematician/astronomers: Johannes Stabius (1450–1522) and Konrad Heinfogel (c. 1455–1517) which were printed in numerous editions, some hand colored.

A carved ivory from the early sixth century (c. 520 CE, fig. 3), shows the development of the imagery of triumph associated with both the figure of Ariadne and her crown. Made either in Christian Constantinople or Alexandria, it shows Ariadne holding a thyrsus and a kylix (an ancient wine bowl) while being crowned by two winged infants with a wreath crown. The meaning of this image is Ariadne's apotheosis as the wife of Dionysus/Bacchus. The question of whether an image like this would have been unusual as late as the early sixth century in Christian Constantinople or Egypt is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the ideas connoted by this sculpture would, as with many other pagan representations of its kind, be adapted to the iconography of the Virgin Mary, and from that, have a very long pictorial history.

Fig 3. *Ariadne with a Wreath Crown*, ivory, c. 520 CE, Musée de Cluny, Paris. Possibly made in Alexandria; discovered near Trier.

The figural conception of the constellation as a wreath continued to be prominent throughout the late medieval and Renaissance periods. We have seen it represented as an oak wreath, but a similar conception of it as a coronal wedding wreath of flowers was also common and persistent. In his *Uranometria* of 1603, Johann Bayer represented it in this way with an interesting aspect. The then eight stars of the Crown, as well as the surrounding stars, are represented as rosettes in his copper plate engraving of 1603 (fig. 4).[9]

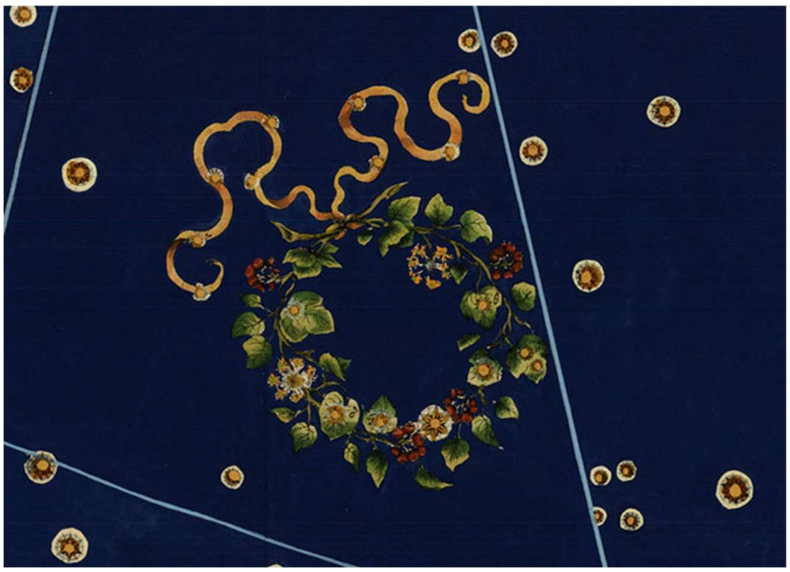

Fig. 4. Johann Bayer, *Corona* as a wreath of flowers, copper plate engraving, *Uranometria*, Augsburg, 1603. (Image courtesy of Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps).

[9] Bayer's *Uranometria* (Augsburg, 1603) was the first atlas to cover the entire celestial sphere, including 51 star charts on engraved copper plates. After the 1603 edition, there were subsequent printings of the plates without the text with some color variations from 1624–1689 (Cf. Jürgen Hammel, *Die Himmelsvermessung des Johannes Bayer* (Gerchsheim: Kunstschätzeverlag, 2010). The map image in fig. 4 was provided courtesy of Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps (www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/50654). I am grateful to Mr Ruderman and his staff for their kind assistance.

Represented in this way, the image also recalls a particular Roman iconographical detail: stars and rosettes were interchangeable in Roman art through the early Christian period.[10] This fact should be kept in mind with regard to both earlier and later representations of the *Corona Borealis.*

Shifting now to Renaissance and Baroque painted representations of the constellation, perhaps the most memorable and beautiful example is Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*, now in the National Gallery of Art in London (fig. 5).[11]

Fig 5. Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1519-23, National Gallery, London (Art Resource, NY).

[10] On rosettes and stars being equivalent in Roman art, as for example, in the coffers of the Pantheon, see Marion Brackett, 'The Coffering of Hadrian's Pantheon: Precedent, Interpretation, and Tradition', (Master's Thesis, University of Georgia, Athens, 2004), pp.66–67, (https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/brackett_marion_c_200405_ma.pdf). On this equivalency beginning in the ancient near east and continuing in Greece and Rome, see Matteo Compareti, 'The Eight Pointed Rosette,' *Parthica: Incontri di Culture nel Mondo Antico* 9 (2007): pp.205–209.

[11] Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 191 cm., 1519-1523 (inv. NG35).

Alfonso I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, had a fairly wild youth. In his teens he and his friends donned crowns of ivy and walked naked and drunk through the streets of the city. Although rather scandalous, it was harmless, and probably endeared the heir apparent to the ducal throne to the population of Ferrara.[12] At the wedding celebrations in Ferrara, Alfonso surprised the guests by doing an acrobatic dance, half-naked, with his illegitimate half-brother Don Giulio, and then returning to the stage, still sweating, to play a concerto on his viola da gamba with five other musicians.[13] More significantly, this event led to a lifelong self-identification with Bacchus, as lover and peace-bringer, that would inform the iconography of the paintings he commissioned for his *Camerino d'alabastro*, a spectacular room full of important paintings that was dismantled in 1598 when the Este line expired. It can be seen, for example, in a portrait of the Duke as 'Bacchus the Peace Bringer', probably to commemorate Alfonso's successful negotiation of the return of Modena and Reggio to his Duchy. Probably a copy of an earlier painting by Dosso or Battista Dossi, it bears an inscription that reads: ALFONSO DUCA TERZO CON IL FIASCO ET IL BI CHIERE CONSERVO IL DUCATO DI FERRARA E RICUPERO QVELLO DI MODENA E REGGIO QVANDO ALL VI DI MARZO MDXXVII S'ABOCCO CON BORBONE NEL FINALE.[14]

After losing his first wife, Anna Sforza, without issue, Alfonso was married to Lucrezia Borgia, daughter of Pope Alexander VI, in 1501. Popular mythology notwithstanding, it bears repeating, even here, that Lucrezia was never the character that the slander against her father and especially her brother generated. She was the capable and beloved helpmate of her husband who was compelled to spend most of his reign at war.[15] When peace finally came in 1513 with the death of Pope Julius II,

[12] The event is first recorded in an entry for 6 August 1497 in *I Diari venetiani* of Marino Sanudo, along with other dispersions on his character as a youth. Cf. Luciano Chiappini, *Gli Estensi* (Ferrara, 2001), p.231. Rachel Erlanger, *Lucrezia Borgia* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1978), p.195.

[13] Erlanger, *Lucrezia Borgia*, p.195.

[14] *Portrait of Alfonso d'Este as Bacchus, the Peace Bringer*, Venice, private collection, oil on canvas, 110 x 89cm (43.5' x 35'). On Alfonso's identification with Bacchus as lover, conqueror and peace bringer cf. Andrea Bayer, 'Dosso's Public: The Este Court at Ferrara,' in *Dosso Dossi: Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), pp.37–39.

[15] I have discussed this issue previously in Claudia Rousseau, 'Lucrezia Borgia d'Este, Illustrious Lady, Dearest Wife', *Italian Renaissance Studies in Arizona edited by Jean R. Brink and Pier R. Baldini. Rosary College Italian Studies 3*

Alfonso began creating the *Camerino,* commissioning the greatest artists of the moment. An original commission to Raphael for a painting representing a *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne* was never fulfilled. In a forthcoming publication, I have argued extensively that the *Bacchus and Ariadne* was commissioned from Titian in the fall of 1519, after the untimely death of the Duchess, whom Alfonso loved so dearly that he actually fainted at her funeral, remaining disconsolate for many months. Lucrezia had died in childbirth on June 24, and Alfonso's letters show his unmitigated grief. It can be demonstrated that showing the contemporary eight stars of Ariadne's crown in the sky is a clue to the underlying meaning of the image, beyond poetic sources. By indicating three nearby constellations that follow the Crown in figures following Bacchus' chariot, the new program of Titian's painting was intended to commemorate, astrologically, both the day of Alfonso and Lucrezia's wedding, as well as the moment of her death when she too, like her mythological counterpart, would be receiving her celestial reward.[16]

The Crown of Ariadne was also extensively employed to celebrate both public and dynastic triumph and its mythological meaning extended in both political and religious ways. We can see this in a painting by the Venetian master Jacopo Tintoretto. Completed in 1578, it was part of a series of four allegorical works intended for the Atrio Quadrato of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, but later moved to the Sala dell'Anticollegio where these paintings were restored in 1978.[17] The allegories they were intended to represent are described in an archival document dated 10 November 1578, which specifies that Tintoretto's painting represented Ariadne discovered by Bacchus on the shore. She is being crowned by Venus with the starry crown as Bacchus places a ring on her hand. According to Carlo Ridolfi's 1648 description of the work, the allegory denotes 'Venice, born along the

(1989): pp.131–54. Although the truth about Lucrezia's character and life has been known at least since Gregorovius' biography in the nineteenth century, the myth of the poisonous seductress persists. For a recent biography see Sarah Bradford, *Lucrezia Borgia* (New York: Viking, 2004).

[16] Claudia Rousseau, '*Signum Amoris:* On the Meaning of Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*' (forthcoming).

[17] Save Venice, Inc. carried out the conservation of the paintings, with the cooperation of the Superintendency of Fine Arts of Venice. The organization's website has an article citing the archival document ('Jacopo Tintoretto (1519-1594), Mercury and the Three Graces, The Forge of Vulcan, Minerva, Mars and Peace, Bacchus and Ariadne). The letter was an evaluation of the fresco by two contemporaries of Tintoretto; Paolo Veronese and Palma il Giovane. In summarizing the subjects, they remarked that all four of them 'signify union'.

seashore, abounding in every earthly good through heavenly grace, but crowned with the crown of liberty by the divine hand, [she] whose domain is inscribed in eternal characters in Heaven'. The constellation is called the 'crown of liberty' because, Ridolfi says, according to Ovid, Bacchus-Liber changed Ariadne's name to Libera when she was inscribed among the celestial images.[18]

In 1597, Cardinal Odoardo Farnese commissioned Annibale Caracci to decorate the vault of a *camerino* in the new Palazzo Farnese in Rome that had been designed by Michelangelo. As the Cardinal probably intended the room as a gallery to contain the family's impressive collection of ancient sculpture, its frescoes represent a plethora of scenes from pagan mythology primarily alluding to the loves of the gods. Carried out between 1597 and 1608 according to an elaborate program – the author of which remains unknown – the central scene is a *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne.* Here, carried in her own chariot, Ariadne is crowned by a winged figure with a golden crown with gems and a ring of shining stars above it. The selection of this myth as the central scene, and the meaning of Carracci's paintings, remain a subject of some dispute among art historians. It seems convincing that the placing of *Bacchus and Ariadne* in the center of the cycle is a reference to the marriage of Duke Ranuccio Farnese to Margherita Aldobrandini, niece of the then reigning Pope Clement VIII. On the other hand, the subject may just as well have been meant in more general terms to allude to the immortality of the Farnese family and their triumphant successes in sixteenth century Italian politics.[19]

A similar message is conveyed in a fresco covering the vault of a large room in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome painted by Pietro da Cortona between 1633 and 1639. Known by the title *Triumph of the Reign of Urban VIII Barberini*, the central area features a personification of Divine Providence gesturing upwards toward a flying figure of Immortality who is shown ascending with a crown of stars toward the combined symbols of

[18] Carlo Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie dell'Arte* (Venice, 1648), pp.43–44, cited in Tom Nichols, *Tintoretto, Tradition and Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp.228–31. The Ovid reference is from *Fasti,* Book III, 505–16.

[19] On the commission and interpretation of the Farnese Gallery frescoes, see Clare Robertson, *The Invention of Annibale Carracci,* Studi della Biblioteca Hertziana, 4 (Rome-Milan, 2008), pp.142–77, esp. pp.162–64; and Stefano Colonna, *La Galleria dei Carracci in Palazzo Farnese a Roma* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2009), both publications summarizing previous bibliography on the subject.

the Barberini family and the papacy.[20] A similar figure personifying Eternity and holding a ring of stars intended to represent the *corona immortalitatis* is seen in a fresco painted c.1670-75 by David Klöckner that allegorically celebrates the *Great Deeds of Swedish Kings* in the *Ritterhaus Versammlungsaal* (House of Knights or Lords) in Stockholm.[21] In these, the stars number twelve, but the image derives its significance from that of the celestial Northern Crown.

I earlier suggested that the pictorial tradition of the constellation, with all that it signified, was adapted to images of the Virgin Mary to indicate her glorious status as Mother of God and Queen of Heaven. Her crown is often represented with 12 stars, as in a Dürer woodcut of about 1510-11, where the stars are arranged in a circlet above her head.[22] This iconography, that is, of the Virgin crowned with stars (or as in later adaptations, displayed in a circle behind her head) is most often connected to the woman clothed with the Sun in *Revelations* 12:1. Although *Revelations* may indeed be a textual source for the crown of stars, I would argue that the constellation, carrying its meaning of immortality, is the *pictorial source* of the iconography. This argument is borne out by many pictorial representations as well as in theological commentary. For example, Sergei Bulgakov has suggested that the crown of 12 stars

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[20] On these paintings, see John Beldon Scott, *Images of Nepotism: The Painted Ceilings of Palazzo Barberini* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991. Scott's analysis underlines the fact that the iconography of Cortona's huge fresco painting (the largest in Rome since the Sistine Ceiling) asserted divine sanction of the family's success. Prior to Cortona's contribution, Andrea Sacchi painted a fresco depicting *Divine Wisdom* in the ceiling of another large room in the Palazzo. George S. Lechner ('Tommaso Campanella and Andrea Sacchi's Fresco of *Divina Sapienzia* in the Palazzo Barberini,' *Art Bulletin,* 58, no. 1 (1976): pp.97–108) has demonstrated that the constellations in this fresco, whose program was devised for the Pope by Campanella, documented the day of his election as Pope (6 August 1623) and that it was meant as a talisman to protect the Pope from untoward astrological influences.

[21] David Klöckner was born in Hamburg in 1628. He studied in Italy between 1654-1661 when he went to Sweden where he soon became court painter and friend of King Charles IX who elevated him to nobility as Klöckner von Ehrenstrahl in 1674. His fresco of the following year in the Great Hall of the Ritterhaus is clearly dependent on Cortona's ceiling in the Palazzo Barberini of the 1630's (see above).

[22] *Nursing Virgin seated on the Crescent Moon with Circlet of Stars above her Head,* the title page of a series of woodcuts illustrating the *Life of the Virgin*, published in 1510-11.

mentioned in *Revelations* was itself an adaptation of the 'astronomical attributes of a pagan goddess' – that is, Ariadne – and, referring to the Zodiac and thus to heaven, turned the starry crown into the language of Christian symbolism.[23] The connections are not difficult to see.

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there are many important representations of the Virgin crowned with stars that were clearly intended to refer to the constellation. An outstanding example of this would be Pieter Paul Rubens' *Immaculate Conception* of 1628-29 now in the Prado.[24] (fig. 6)

This painting is an extraordinary amalgam of symbols, many of which have ancient origins. First, of course, we have the image of the glorified Virgin, crowned with the celestial crown of immortality depicted with the eight stars of the contemporary constellation of the Northern Crown. Two winged children accompany her—we may recall the 6th century ivory of Ariadne crowned here. One *putto* holds up a laurel wreath of triumph. The other holds a palm of victory that he points downward toward the serpent under Mary's feet that holds the apple of original sin in its mouth. She stands on the crescent Moon, probably one of the very oldest attributes of the ancient mother goddess, as in the so-called 'Venus of Laussel' holing the crescent moon in her right hand.[25]

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[23] Sergei Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith, W.B. Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, MI: 2009 (n.p.). Jaroslav Pelikan has pointed out that with regard to the iconography of the Virgin, Christian art often anticipated the development of dogma, which eventually caught up with the iconography: Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), p.194.

[24] Rubens painted this work while in Spain in 1628-29 for the Marquis de Leganès, who gave it as a gift to King Philip IV. He, in turn, gave it to the Monastery of El Escorial. From there it entered the Prado Museum in 1837 (Real Museo, #422).

[25] See the discussion in Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology* Vol. 1 (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p.9.

Fig. 6. Pieter Paul Rubens, *Immaculate Conception*, 1628-29, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid/ Detail of Head with *Corona* (8 stars) oil on canvas.

The iconography of the rather abstract concept of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin had a long development in Catholic art. Although probably of earlier origin, the Immaculate Conception of Mary – that she was conceived without sin – came to prominence around 1100. While accepted as 'pious doctrine' in 1439, it was encouraged by many theologians through the following centuries, although opposed by others. Long before it became dogma in the nineteenth century, it was a popular

belief and devotion in Western and Eastern Christendom.[26] Yet *how* it should be represented in art continued to vary a great deal.

Prior to about 1600, programmers of images depicting the Immaculate Conception often employed the imagery of Mary's Assumption, therefore alluding to her Coronation as Queen of Heaven, believed to have occurred immediately upon her arrival in Heaven. The Coronation was also represented as a consequence of the Assumption, with the empty sarcophagus below, or simply on its own as a celestial event. For example, Annibale Carracci's *Coronation of the Virgin* of c. 1595-7 shows the starry crown of immortality placed on Mary's head by Christ and the Father, with the Dove of the Holy Spirit hovering above. The artist's representation of the crown in this painting is interesting as it is identical with the one in Carracci's *Triumph of Ariadne* in the Farnese Gallery of nearly the same date: a golden circlet topped with the eight stars of the constellation.[27]

Therefore, while the starry crown was a part of the schema of symbols associated with the Coronation, paintings meant to represent the Immaculate Conception also included the celestial crown, as in a memorable Spanish example by Juan Carreño de Miranda from about 1650 (fig. 7).[28] In it, Mary is shown with the crown of stars above her head, but the artist has also included a crown of flowers, and other symbols alluding

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[26] The origins of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception may be found in the fifth century writings of Saints Augustine and Ambrose. On December 18, 1439 in the 36th session of the Council of Basel, the Immaculate Conception of Mary was declared 'pious doctrine, in conformity with worship of the church, the Catholic faith, right reason and holy scripture…'. It was declared Catholic dogma by Pope Pius IX in May, 1854. (Pelikan, pp.198–99).

[27] This painting, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1971.155), dates from Carracci's first years in Rome, and contemporary with the inception of the frescoes for the Farnese Gallery, after 1595, and c. 1597. Also probably commissioned by Cardinal Odoardo Farnese, possibly for his private chapel in the Farnese Palace, it was first recorded in an inventory of 1603 in the possession of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, Pope Clement VIII's nephew. A panel above an altarpiece in Santa Caterina de' Funari, Rome attributed to Carracci and assistants is dated 1598-99. In this abbreviated *Coronation of the Virgin*, Christ crowns Mary with a circlet of stars, five of which are visible.

[28] The painting is currently in the Rienzi Collection, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston (#94.824). Although little is known about its origins, it is usually dated c. 1650, although it may be slightly earlier. Juan Careño de Miranda (1614–1685) was a younger contemporary of Velasquez at the court of Philip IV, and a minor rival of that great painter. The image in fig. 7 is courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

to the Litany of the Virgin, presumably at the request of the patron. Among the many invocations of Mary in the Litany, she is called *Mystical Rose, Morning Star* and *Mirror of Justice,* the latter possibly being the object left of the sphere she stands on in this work. It is notable that there is neither serpent nor crescent moon in this image.[29]

Fig. 7. Juan Carreño de Miranda & shop, *Immaculate Conception*, c. 1650?, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Oil on canvas (Image courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts).

[29] Although these invocations have considerably earlier origins, they were collected and approved as The Litany of the Virgin by Pope Sixtus V in 1587. Among other invocations found in it are *Queen of Heaven, Queen of Angels,* and *Queen of Saints.*

The same configuration of the crown seen in Carracci, a conflation of the gold circlet and the circle of 8 stars, can be seen in an oil sketch by Rubens for a *Coronation* of about 1615 in the collection of the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.[30] However, in his large painting of this subject a decade later (1624-26), the crown has turned into a wreath hovering over Mary's head as she is seated over the crescent Moon.[31] The return of the celestial wreath as a crown of flowers can also be seen in a glorious version of this subject of the *Coronation* by Velasquez of about 1635. Mary sits demurely on the clouds. The Trinity confirms her immortality and her triumph with the Wreath crown, an image which has its pictorial roots in the long tradition of the 'talking sky'.[32]

[30] Oil on panel, 46 x 61.4 cm., Samuel Courtauld Trust, P.1978.PG.363). It is not on view, but can be seen on the Institute website: http://www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/images/gallery/a7cd51cd.html.

[31] Oil on canvas, possibly transferred from panel, and possibly painted with the help of Rubens' shop. Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, inv.#162. See https://www.fine-arts-museum.be/fr/la-collection/peter-paul-rubens-et-atelier-le-couronnement-de-la-vierge.

[32] Museo del Prado, oil on canvas, 178.5 x 134.5 cm. (inv. P01168), dated by the museum to 1635-6. Although some scholars have dated it to 1644 or even later, Antonio Palomino's early biography of the artist (1724) suggests the earlier dating. It was painted for the oratory of Queen Isabella in the Alcazar where it completed a series of nine paintings representing feasts of the Virgin. Cf. Jonathan Brown, *Velasquez, Painter and Courtier* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1986), pp.177–78.