

Corn, Pope Leo X, and the New World in Giovanni Della Robbia's *Temptation of Adam and Eve*

Barnaby Nygren

Loyola University Maryland

[Abstract] Il Walters Museum di Baltimora ospita una *Tentazione di Adamo ed Eva* attribuita a Giovanni Della Robbia che è notevole per due aspetti: fu apparentemente commissionato per commemorare l'ingresso di Papa Leone X a Firenze nel novembre 1515 e contiene quella che potrebbe essere la prima rappresentazione europea del mais. L'articolo collega l'inaspettata inclusione di questo elemento sia all'iconografia dell'opera che al programma ideologico del papato di Leone X. Il testo sostiene che l'inclusione del mais nella rappresentazione della *Tentazione* di Della Robbia deve essere compresa nei termini di un'idea di palingenesi del Nuovo Mondo e dell'identificazione di Leone come *Christus Medicus* che rinnoverà la Chiesa e realizzerà una nuova Età dell'Oro.

Parole chiave: Leone X; Mais; Nuovo Mondo; Età dell'Oro; Giovanni Della Robbia.

El Museo Walters de Baltimore alberga una *Tentación de Adán y Eva* atribuida a Giovanni Della Robbia que es notable en dos aspectos: aparentemente fue encargada para conmemorar la entrada del Papa León X en Florencia en noviembre de 1515, y contiene lo que puede ser la primera representación europea del maíz. Este artículo conecta la inesperada inclusión de este elemento en relación a la iconografía de la obra y a la construcción del imaginario del papado de León X. El artículo argumenta que la inclusión del maíz en la *Tentación* de Della Robbia debe ser entendida en términos de ideas de la época tales como palingénesis y Nuevo Mundo, y por la identificación de León X como un *Christus medicus* que restaurará la Iglesia y traerá una nueva Edad de Oro.

Palabras clave: León X; Maíz; Nuevo Mundo; Edad de Oro; Giovanni Della Robbia.

The Walters Museum in Baltimore houses a *Temptation of Adam and Eve* attributed to Giovanni Della Robbia that is notable in two respects: it was apparently commissioned to commemorate the entry of Pope Leo X into Florence in November 1515 and it contains what may be the earliest European representation of corn. This paper connects this most unexpected inclusion to both the iconography of the work and the fashioning of Leo X's papacy. The paper argues that the inclusion of corn in Della Robbia's depiction of the Fall of Man must be understood in terms of period ideas of palingenesis, the New World, and Leo's standing as a *Christus medicus* who will restore the Church and bring about a new Golden Age.

Key words: Leo X; Corn; New World; Golden Age; Giovanni Della Robbia.



Fig. 1 - Della Robbia, Giovanni and workshop. *Temptation of Adam and Eve*. 1515-1516. 279.5 x 212 cm. Glazed terracotta. Baltimore, MD, Walters Art Museum.

Photo: The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

The glazed terracotta *Temptation of Adam and Eve* attributed to Giovanni Della Robbia in the Walter's Museum (Fig. 1) depicts Adam, Eve, the serpent, a fig tree and a vegetal background with birds and animals¹. As we shall see, it also includes what is perhaps the first depiction of New World corn or maize in European art. The surprising presence of this American plant in a work depicting the Temptation and dedicated to Leo X will be the focus of this paper, which will argue that this corn should be understood in the context of the Pope's personal and pastoral interest in the New World.

¹ The richness of the setting and the poses of the figures attest to the influence of Albrecht Dürer's 1504 print of the same subject, which the artist certainly knew (Marquand 1920, p. 92). The original location of the work is unknown. Gregory Bailey (2018, pp. 71-73) gives an account of the later history of the work. The work was substantially damaged at some time. Large sections were replaced either via glazed pieces (green in Fig. 2) or with painted plaster (red in Fig. 2) (Bailey, 2018, pp. 70-72). In the upper part the pieces were reassembled in sometimes arbitrary ways that are perhaps indicative of larger alterations and indicate to Bailey (2018, p. 70) that the work was substantially reconstructed, perhaps from a larger monument. I am deeply indebted to Gregory Bailey both for his conservation of the work and for his illuminating discussions of what he found in this process.



Fig. 2 - Della Robbia, Giovanni and workshop. *Temptation of Adam and Eve* showing state of conservation. 1515-1516. 279.5 x 212 cm. Glazed terra cotta. Baltimore, MD, Walters Art Museum. Photo: The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

The work's subject and connection to Leo are clearly indicated by two inscriptions located on the frieze below the main field of the sculpture². The one on the right reads «ADAM PRIMUS HOMO DA[M]NAVIT SECMULA (sic) POMO», or «Adam the first man damned by the apple». On the left, another inscription «LEO X PON[TIFEX] MAX[IMUS] INGRES[S]US EST FLO[RENTIA] XXX^A DL[EM]» can be translated as «Pope Leo X entered in Florence on the 30th day», referencing the Pope's ceremonial entrance into the city on 30 November 1515 and providing a *terminus post quem* for the work³.

² Despite loss and damage, testing has shown that the inscription is original to the period as indicated in Bailey (2018, p. 71, Fig. 2).

³ Allan Marquand (1920, p. 91) read the last two letters as "Dp". Recent cleaning has shown that it might instead be read as a partial, fragmentary "D" containing a small "l", perhaps an abbreviated "*diem*". Unlike the inscription on the right, this inscription uses word separators; this might be a result of its heavy abbreviation, but it raises some doubt about whether both inscriptions were originally from the same work (Gregory Bailey in conversation). The awkward placement and the smaller size of the lettering of this inscription also led Marquand (1920, p. 91) to suggest that this might indicate a period re-purposing of the monument to serve as a tribute to Leo X. The second part of the inscription is quite

“By emphasizing the link between the New World and the dream of a new Christian Golden Age under the Medici Pope, the work (Temptation of Adam and Eve) and its corn reinforces those key themes of renewal, salvation, and palingenesis that were central to Leo’s papacy.”

The reference to Leo X in the inscription is reinforced in the center of the *predella* by his arms. Leo’s arms are flanked by two others belonging to (on the left) the Buondelmonti and (on the right) the Salviati families (Marquand, 1911, p. 38)⁴. Buondelmonti’s arms indicate that one donor was Filippo di Lorenzo Buondelmonti. While initially an advocate for the anti-medician government, Buondelmonti later became a strong supporter of the return of the Medici and was appointed to government positions after their restoration (De Caro, 1972, pp. 203-205; Butters, 1985, pp. 77, 167, 173). When Leo X was elected, he was sent to Rome as a Florentine ambassador and knighted by the Pope (De Caro, 1972, p. 204). Moreover, Buondelmonti was a member of the *Otto di Practica* and oversaw preparations for Leo’s entry into the city (Ciseri, 1990, p. 17)⁵.

The other patron was certainly Jacopo Salviati, husband of Lucrezia de’ Medici, Leo X’s sister (Marquand, 1911, p. 28). After the return of the Medici, Salviati helped to govern the city and was an advisor to both Giuliano and Lorenzo de’ Medici (Butters, 1985, pp. 168, 169, 193, 194, 230, 231, 239, 243). He was also Leo X’s banker, a permanent Florentine ambassador in Rome, and one of the ambassadors sent to Rome on Leo’s election (Ciseri, 1990, p. 36). Further confirmation of this is provided by the “LX” on the Salviati coat of arms. In connection with Leo’s entry into Florence, Jacopo Salviati was given Leo’s arms (the “LX”) and made Count Palatine (Marquand, 1920, p. 92). Given the identity of the patrons, the work clearly functioned as a statement of their loyalty to the Medici and their involvement in Leo’s entry into the city.

However, none of this is the immediate concern here and it is the presence in the work of that unexpected plant, corn or maize (*Zea mays*), that will be dealt with here⁶. The most obvi-

problematic. The beginning of the “E” in “*ingressus*” and a small section of the molding above is restoration and the letter sizes are notably reduced. This, together with the missing “s” in “*ingressus*”, presents the possibility that the “*esus*” might come from a different source. With «*FLO[RE]NTIA[M]*», the text and molding indicate that there is likely at least one letter and part of the abbreviation marker currently missing. The terminal “a” is also broken near its right edge making it impossible to definitively determine if additional text might have been present. See Bailey (2018, p. 75, n. 2) for a discussion of both inscriptions.

⁴ These coats of arms have suffered damage but are largely original as indicated in Bailey (2018, p. 71, Fig. 2).

⁵ Ciseri (1990, p. 17) also identifies the patron as Filippo di Lorenzo Buondelmonti.

⁶ Subsequent to my presentation of an early version of this paper at the RSA conference, Lia Markey (2016, p. 14) also noted the presence of this plant in the work.



Fig. 3 - Della Robbia, Giovanni and workshop. *Temptation of Adam and Eve* detail of fig. 1. 1515-1516. Glazed terracotta. Baltimore, MD, Walters Art Museum.

Photo: Author.



Fig. 4 - Della Robbia, Giovanni and workshop. *Temptation of Adam and Eve* detail of fig. 1. 1515-1516. Glazed terracotta. Baltimore, MD, Walters Art Museum.

Photo: Author.

ous location where corn appears in the work is atop Adam's left elbow (Fig. 3). The yellow ear of this plant presents a clearly dimpled aspect that is most corn-like; the segmented stalk on which it is placed is also typical of corn⁷. To Eve's left is a similar plant complete with a glaze-painted dimpled yellow body part of the way up the stalk (Fig. 4). Similar ears can also be found between her calves (Fig. 5). While their sometimes indistinct appearance challenges definitive identification, a number of features indicate that these plants are indeed corn: the shape of the leaves, the segmentation of the stalks, the likely presence of ears both at the top of the plant and lower down, the foliage around the ears, and the appearance of the ears in terms of color and seed organization. Taken together, these features, even if not always perfectly depicted, argue against an identification as millet, a plant which, while it has a similarly

⁷ This section of the work has been damaged, but the stalk and ear are largely original. The lower section of the ear gives the clearest indication of what the whole ear might have looked like. Although partly original work, the upper section has been augmented on the right side and it is also possible that it came from a different section of the work, perhaps from the top of the stalk to the right of Eve, since this is a later replacement, albeit on an original stalk. This is discussed in Bailey (2018, p. 75, n. 14).



Fig. 5 - Della Robbia, Giovanni and workshop. *Temptation of Adam and Eve* detail of fig. 1. 1515-1516. Glazed terracotta. Baltimore, MD, Walters Art Museum.

Photo: Author.

shaped ear, lacks these identifying features⁸. The depiction of corn in this work is perhaps its earliest representation in Europe. Moreover, the presence of this grain also unexpectedly associates the Garden of Eden with the New World and links both of these places to Leo X, who, as we shall see, had a strong interest in the Americas shaped by his own self-fashioning, period discourse linking the New World to the Golden Age, and to ideologies of religious renewal.

Corn

Although authors in the sixteenth century were frequently confused on this point, corn was unknown in Europe prior to encounters with the New World, where its presence is recorded in the earliest sources (Weatherwax, 1954, pp. 28-43). While the diary of Christopher Columbus's first journey has been lost, its transcription by Bartolomé de las Casas confirms that Columbus encountered corn on this voyage. According to Las Casas (1989, pp. 89, 90, 138, 139), Columbus noted that in the Bahamas «all year they sow *panizo* and harvest it», while

⁸ Bailey (2018, p. 75, n. 14) has raised doubts about this identification due to the condition of the surviving pieces and the concern that the ears, as represented on the stalks, are terminal and not multiple. On the contrary, the presence of the corn at various levels in the work suggests that they are meant to be read as emerging from different places on the stalk and, even if he is correct, such a confusion would not be surprising for an artist confronted by a new plant. Additionally, while wheat is often represented in works from the Della Robbia workshop, other less exotic, and less historically interesting, grains like barley, millet, and sorghum suggested by Bailey (2018, p. 75, n. 14) as alternatives are, to the best of my knowledge, absent.

Columbus again recorded the presence of «that same *panizo* in Cuba»⁹. While the word “*panizo*” means millet or sorghum, Columbus was undoubtedly referring to corn, which he had not seen before and characterized by reference to a known grain (Weatherwax, 1954, pp. 29, 30).

We can also trace the early consideration of corn in Europe. Peter Martyr d’Anghiera, an Italian humanist resident at the Spanish court, described the plant in the first decade of his *De orbe novo*, published in 1511 but written as a series of letters in 1493-94. He explains that the Indians:

«make bread with a kind of millet [*panico*] [...] This [ear of] millet [*panicula*] is a little more than a palm in length, ending in a point, and is about the thickness of the upper part of a man’s arm. The grains are about the form and size of peas [...] This kind of grain is called *maiz*.» (translation from Martyr d’Anghiera, 1912, vol. 1, p. 64)¹⁰.

The detailed nature of this description demonstrates that Peter Martyr had seen corn firsthand.

Other evidence from the same source shows that this is the case. In a letter to Cardinal Sforza dated May 1494 Peter Martyr tells the cardinal that his «messenger will also deliver to Your Eminence some of those black and white seeds out of which they make bread» (translation from Martyr d’Anghiera, 1912, vol. 1, p. 84). The presence of these seeds in Spain in 1494 indicates that Columbus had brought corn back from his second voyage. Moreover, if Columbus is to be believed, corn was being grown in Spain not long after. In the account of his third voyage Columbus (1988, vol. 2, pp. 22, 23) writes that natives made a bread «from maize, which is a plant bearing an ear like an ear of wheat, some of which I have brought home and there is now much in Castile»¹¹.

However, even if corn may have been grown in Spain shortly after its discovery, the mass cultivation of the grain in Italy was a development of the second half of the sixteenth century (Messedaglia, 1922-23, pp. 911-25). Nevertheless, it is probable that corn was grown in Italy as a garden curiosity prior to that time. Leonhard Fuchs’ herbal *De historia stirpium commentarii insignes* of 1542 indicates that corn was found in German gardens and this was possibly true in Italy too, perhaps much earlier (Messedaglia, 1922-23, pp. 928-930).

Pictorial evidence supports this idea. The earliest representation of corn in Rome is in the *Villa Farnesina* built for Agostino Chigi¹². Painted by Giovanni da Udine in 1516-17, the festoons which decorate the *Loggia of Psyche* depict close to two hundred botanical species including some from the Americas, such as New World squash, beans, and corn (Caneva, 1992, pp. 17, 82-84, 91, 92, 98, 129, 130) and there are no fewer than eight bunches of corn depicted on the ceiling (Fig. 6), all with yellow-orange kernels (Janick and Caneva, 2005, pp. 71-80).

⁹ Translation from cited text. Translations by author unless noted.

¹⁰ The last sentence containing the word “*maiz*” is found in the 1516 but not the 1511 edition. While the letters on which the first decade were based were written in 1493-94, the text was revised prior to its publication in 1511 and again in 1516 (Weatherwax, 1954, pp. 32, 33). The comparison to millet is typical. As Weatherwax (1954, p. 29) notes, in the absence of a word for corn, early writers regularly used both words for and comparisons to millet and sorghum.

¹¹ Translation from cited text.

¹² Portères (1967, pp. 500, 501) was the first to note the presence of corn here.



Fig. 6 - Da Udine, Giovanni.
Detail of corn from garland surrounding
Venus in Her Chariot in the Loggia of Psyche.
1516-1517. Fresco.
Rome, Villa Farnesina.

Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York.

While the dimples and interlocking kernels on some of the ears and the corn-like shanks throughout raise some doubts about their identification, at least three of the eight bunches are very corn-like in appearance, while the other, less corn-like ears are likely the result of artistic misunderstanding (Janick and Caneva, 2005, pp. 75-77).

These depictions have led to speculation that corn was grown in the garden, or *viridarium*, attached to Chigi's villa (Janick and Caneva, 2005, p. 76), a claim supposedly justified by the nature of these gardens. Blosio Palladio's poem *Suburbanum Augustini Chisii* (c. 1512) frames the gardens and villa in terms of a return to the classical age and praises the exotic nature of the *viridarium*:

«Why should I tell of the other fruits shining far and wide under innumerable trees, and the weights making the branches so heavy? [...] As many as powerful Nature poured out through the whole world; as many as the Moors have, as many as the Thracians, as many as the Spaniards and the Indians, and finally as many as Pliny collected in his golden books.» (translation from Quinlan-McGrath, 1990, pp. 128, 129).

The mention of both the “whole world” and, together, “the Spaniards and the Indians” refers to the fact that the garden contained some of the exotic New World flora depicted in Giovanni da Udine's decorations. The display of such rarities was undoubtedly intended to create an impression of marvelousness and, as discussed below, also referenced ideas of the Golden Age and the Earthly Paradise (Caneva, 1992, pp. 84, 85).

Closely related to the depictions of corn in the *Farnesina* are those in the *Logge* of Leo X in the Vatican Palace, painted between 1517-19. This is not surprising; Raphael and his workshop, including Giovanni da Udine, were responsible for the decoration of both. Ears of corn were painted twice by Giovanni da Udine among the garlands found in the lunettes of Leo's *Logge*. These ears might have been based on those already painted at the *Farnesina* or on plants from the *Farnesina* gardens (Janick and Caneva, 2005, p. 76).

However, Nicole Dacos (1969, pp. 61; 1977, p. 36) has drawn attention to elements in the *Logge* that seem to betray an interest in the fauna of the New World, identifying in the decoration two birds and one lizard indigenous to the Americas. Dacos argues that these elements

might be related to the gifts which King Manuel of Portugal gave to Leo X in 1514. Much of the material given to the Pope came from Asia and Africa; however, gifts also included a Mexican manuscript and, perhaps, flora and fauna from the Americas (Bedini, 1997, pp. 25-27, 71-74). As the Pope kept a menagerie, an aviary, and a botanical garden in the Cortile del Belvedere, one can imagine such New World rarities finding a home in these collections (Dacos, 1969, p. 61; Dacos, 1977, p. 36; Bedini, 1997, p. 27; Coffin, 1991, pp. 203, 210, 211).

New World and Golden Age

Leo X's interest in horticulture together with Palladio's poem and the Portuguese gifts tend to confirm that corn was known to Leo when the Walters relief was made. However, this does not explain why the grain appears in the work. To better account for the presence of corn, the relief must be placed into a broader context, starting from the relationship of the New World to Renaissance ideas of the Earthly Paradise and the Golden Age.

The idea of a revival of the classical Golden Age had much currency in the Renaissance via the key Roman textual sources, Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Virgil's *Eclogue 4* and *Georgic 1*. The vision of the Golden Age which emerges from these texts marks it as a time of peace when there was no private property and when the Earth gave up its gifts without labor. As Virgil writes in the *Georgics* (1:125-128): «no tillers subdued the land. Even to mark a field or divide it with bounds was unlawful. Men made gain for the common store, and Earth yielded all, of herself, more freely, when none begged for her gifts» (translation from Virgil, 1935, p. 89). In the *Eclogues* (4:18-20, 28-30) Virgil again expresses similar ideas, highlighting the land's abundant production of grain and other food. Ovid too provides a highly detailed account of this fecundity in the *Metamorphoses* (1:101-112) similarly emphasizing the way that the Earth provided food, including wheat, without effort and in an idyllic spring-like world.

These ideas were later transposed into a Christian context in which the Earthly Paradise was described in terms borrowed from the classical tradition (Giamatti, 1966, pp. 11-86). Key elements of the Christian-Classical paradisiacal garden included water, perpetual springtime, fertility, numerous fruits and animals, and strong fragrance (Giamatti, 1966, pp. 70-82). Dante's description of the "selva antica" of Eden in canto 28 of the *Purgatorio* continued this tradition in the Middle Ages; early in the canto he mentions the birds, foliage, streams, and fragrances of the place, while later he discusses the fertility of the garden, the fruits that grow in its eternal spring, and the fountain that is the source of its rivers (Giamatti, 1966, pp. 105-107). Later Lorenzo de' Medici (1992, pp. 482, 483) was also attracted by the idea of the Golden Age, describing it in largely traditional terms in his *Selve d'Amore*.

When confronted by the exotic Americas, writers and explorers were so steeped in the tropes of the Golden Age that they inevitably projected them onto the New World:

«What struck the European eye most perceptibly [...] was the absence of European paraphernalia [and] since the negation of existing customs and institutions had been the principal method for describing the golden age, a large amount of coincidence was inevitable.» (Levin, 1969, p. 61).

When this was added to the climate and the land's fecundity, it was very easy to cast the New World in terms of this preexisting construct, even when confronted with discordant elements such as conflict and cannibalism.

Cannibalism aside, the trope of describing the New World in terms of the Earthly Paradise or the Golden Age finds expression in the earliest New World accounts. Columbus's (1988, vol. 1, pp. 4-9) 1493 letter to the King and Queen of Spain mentions the fertility of land and notes that inhabitants go about naked, have no steel or iron weapons, and no sense of private property¹³. In the account of his third voyage, Columbus (1988, vol. 2, pp. 38, 39) even argued for the geographical proximity of the Earthly Paradise to the recently discovered lands.

The Florentine Amerigo Vespucci expressed similar ideas in his third letter (1502) to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and in the (para-Vespuccian) *Mundus Novus* (1502-1503). The latter evokes ideas of both the Golden Age and the Earthly Paradise:

«The land of those regions is very fertile and pleasant [...]. Great trees grow there without cultivation, and many produce fruits delicious to the taste and beneficial to the human body [...]. There are no kinds of metal there except gold [...]. Certainly, if anywhere in the world there exists an Earthly Paradise, I think it is not far from these regions.» (Translation from Vespucci, 1992, pp. 51, 52).

Vespucci's description of the inhabitants of the New World in the letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici also evoked the Golden Age:

«[They] have no law or religious faith; they live as nature dictates [...]. They have no private property among them, for they share everything. They have no borders of kingdoms or province; neither do they have a king or anyone they obey; each is his own master. They do not administer justice, which is not necessary for them, since greed does not prevail among them.» (Translation from Vespucci, 1992, pp. 31-33).

Such absence of greed and private property comes directly from the poems of Ovid and Virgil.

Finally, the first and second decades of Peter Martyr d'Anghiera's *De orbe novo* contain similar imagery. While he also describes the fertility of land and other Golden Age features, Peter Martyr's most direct evocation of the Golden Age is his characterization of the people:

«It is proven that amongst them the land belongs to everybody [...]. They know no difference between meum and tuum, that source of all evils. It requires so little to satisfy them, that in that vast region there is always more land to cultivate than is needed. It is indeed a golden age.» (Translation from Martyr d'Anghiera, 1912, vol. 1, pp. 103, 104).

Leo X

In addition to linking New World and Golden Age, Peter Martyr's text also demonstrates Leo X's interest in the New World. Both the second and third decade (1514 and 1516) were dedicated to Leo and in the second decade he makes it clear both that Leo was aware of his text (Martyr d'Anghiera, 2005, vol. 1, p. 248) and that his work was inspired by Leo's interests:

¹³ Las Casas (1989, pp. 67, 89, 93, 101, 105, 111, 139, 143, 185, 235, 255, 281, 285) in his account of Columbus's first voyage also associates the New World with the Golden Age via the fertility of the land and the peacefulness of the inhabitants.

«Galeazzo Butrigario of Bologna sent by Your Holiness, and Giovanni Accursi of Florence, sent by that glorious Republic, [...] besought me, as well on their own behalf as in the name of Your Holiness, to complete my writings [...] and to send a copy to Your Beatitude so that you might understand to what degree, thanks to the encouragement of the Spanish sovereigns, the human race has been rendered illustrious and the Church Militant extended. For these new nations are as a tabula rasa; they easily accept the beliefs of our religion and discard their barbarous and primitive rusticity after contact with our compatriots.» (translation from Martyr d'Anghiera, 1912, vol. 1, pp. 187, 188).

Moreover, in a letter dated 5 December 1515, Peter Martyr writes that he had been told that:

«the Pontiff himself, on the day we celebrate the feast of St. Michael [September 29], read to [his] sister who was a guest and to a large number of cardinals certain books that I wrote about the New World.» (translation from Martyr d'Anghiera, 1992, pp. 118-121).

Thus the Pope, in the presence his sister Lucrezia (the wife of our patron Jacopo Salviati, who may have also been present), was learning about the New World via Peter Martyr's text just two months before his entry into Florence.

Leo's interest in these newly discovered lands was in keeping with the fashioning of his papacy. The religious and pastoral implications of the New World are present in the passage by Peter Martyr quoted above and in a related passage from the same decade where Peter Martyr explains that he has written his account to convince the Pope of the tractability of the New World peoples and to emphasize the importance of their conversion (Martyr d'Anghiera, 2005, vol. 1, p. 254). Here, Peter Martyr was echoing an aspect of Leo's self-fashioning. Leo X was elected Pope on a "peace platform" and it was expected that he would bring about a revival of the Church (Shearman, 1972, p. 14; Reeves, 1992, p. 102). While these expectations evoked a return to a Golden Age, they also suggested the action of the Church in a broadened world including the newly discovered Americas (Shearman, 1972, pp. 16-20, 83; Prosperi, 1992, pp. 278-288).

In his *Oratio ad Leonem X* of March 1513, Pietro Delfin (1724, c. 1213) called upon Leo to minister to the people of the barbarian nations subject to him. Vincenzo Quirini and Paolo Giustiniani (1775, cc. 612-719) in their *Libellus ad Leonum X* from 1513 asked Leo to convert the Jews and the Muslims and minister to the Christians in Asia and Africa, and significantly also dedicated an entire section of their letter to the conversion of the idolaters in the newly discovered lands, emphasizing the importance of this action to the renewal of the Church. Finally, Aldus Manutius (1513, unpaginated) in his *Supplicatio* from the preface to his *Omnia Platonis Opera* called upon Leo X to send his apostles to the Indies and «the other people, who were recently discovered by the Spanish in the western ocean».

The New Golden Age

This pastoral engagement with the New World was only part of the interest in renewal that was central to Leo's papacy. This ideology found expression via messianic imagery and a recurring concern with the restoration of a Golden Age. Both of these ideas are present in the oration given by Bishop Simon Begnius at the start of the sixth session of the Fifth Lateran Council on 27 April 1513, the first session held under Leo's papacy. Begnius concluded by evoking both

a return to the Golden Age and the messianic role of Leo X: «The peace of the Golden Age shall be revived and we shall proclaim and sing with Isaiah, “Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion, for thy Savior cometh unto thee”» (Begnius, 1714, c. 1688; translation from Shearman, 1972, p. 16). In other contexts, Leo X was compared to Apollo, the king of the Golden Age in Virgil’s fourth *Eclogue* (Davidson, 1985, pp. 20-22; Cox-Rearick, 1984, p. 28). This allegorizing tendency was also present in the pageants and speeches associated with the *solenne possesso* of the newly-elected Pope (Davidson, 1985, pp. 20-22).

While the messianic aspects of the tributes to Leo were connected to the punning casting of the Medici Pope as a *Christus medicus*, Golden Age symbolism had deeper roots. As a matter of fact, it was inspired by a desire to return to the days of Leo’s father, Lorenzo the Magnificent, a time considered as a Golden Age¹⁴. The idea of a post-1512 return of Lorenzo to the Golden Age played an important role in pro-Medici thought in the early Sixteenth century including in the pageants held in Florence in 1513 to celebrate Leo’s election. Described by Vasari, the procession organized by the *Compagnia del Broncone* began with a float depicting the Golden Age of Saturn and ended with one showing that of the Medici (Vasari, 1906, vol. 6, pp. 252-255). The highlight of this last float was a man dressed in rusted armor out of which a child emerged, naked and covered in gold, who «represented the age of gold reviving, and the end of the age of iron, the reappearance and rebirth of which came from the creation of Pope Leo X» (Vasari, 1906, vol. 6, pp. 254, 255).

Art and literature from the time of Medici’s restoration and the election of Leo emphasized many of the same points. In the 1516 version of his *Orlando Furioso* Ariosto, speaking of Lorenzo and thinking of the election of Leo X, writes in canto 35, line 7 of the «famous Lorenzo who made, while he was green, the golden age» (quoted in Costa, 1972, p. 87). Janet Cox-Rearick (1984, p. 130) has argued that Pontorno’s fresco of *Vertumnus and Pomona*, executed at the Medici Villa at Poggio a Caiano around 1520, depicts the revival of the Golden Age of Lorenzo under Leo. Finally, an anonymous Florentine sonnet from 1512 focuses on the restoration of the Golden Age of Lorenzo, also tying it to the newly expanded world:

«That glorious, sublime and green laurel in whose shade Florence flourished; since it died because all things must die, it now puts forth its shoots and the Golden Age returns. Enjoy now, O Florence, such a great restoration, for by their courage and long patience returns to you that pristine excellence which is to remain beautiful from India to Africa.» (Translation from Cox-Rearick, 1984, pp. 23, 24).

The connection of the broadened world, including India and Africa, to a return of the Golden Age found in his sonnet was not unique. A body of literature of early Cinquecento linked the discovery of the New World to the Golden Age, religious revival, palingenesis, the reform of the Church, and, with it, the redemptive promise of Christ (Costa, 1972, pp. 71-76, 87-88; O’Malley, 1976, pp. 185-200; Reeves, 1992, pp. 95, 96, 102-104; Prosperi, 1992, pp. 288, 289). Such ideas find expression in a 1507 discourse given by Egidio da Viterbo to Julius II, and, later, in the 1532 edition of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* (15.21-26) in which the establishment

¹⁴ On Leo as *Christus medicus* see Shearman (1972, pp. 17, 185-88 nn. 77-78) and Davidson (1985, pp. 19, 23). Gombrich (1961, pp. 306-309) and Costa (1972, pp. 42-55) have shown that the age of Lorenzo was called a Golden Age both by poets in Lorenzo’s circle and by later pro-Medici writers.

of a new Golden Age by Emperor Charles V and a forthcoming palingenesis are directly associated with the voyages of Columbus and Vespucci (O'Malley 1969, pp. 325-338; Prosperi, 1992, pp. 290, 291; Costa, 1972, pp. 87, 88).

The Temptation of Adam and Eve

As shown above, corn certainly arrived in Rome by the first half of the 1510s. As Leo X had a demonstrated interest in both horticulture and the New World, it might be argued that the inclusion of corn in the work simply responded to these interests. However, one should instead see corn in the context of a broader ideological program. Leo's pastoral engagement with the New World was concatenated with a revival of both the Church and the Golden Age of the Medici. Given the close conceptual relationship between the verdant New World and both the Golden Age and the Earthly Paradise, corn in Della Robbia's verdant work emerges as a sign of the paradisiacal Golden Age brought about by Leo and promised by the discovery of the New World. As the source of what might be understood as a type of prelapsarian bread in a New World context, corn could be likened in its fruitfulness to the freely-growing wheat which Ovid and Virgil mention in their accounts, and represented an especially apt pictorial expression of New World paradisiacal abundance and religious renewal¹⁵.

This argument is amplified by the strongly messianic construction of Leo. In the same oration in which he evokes the peace of the Golden Age, Begnius (1714, c. 1687; translation from Shearman, 1972, p. 16) makes a punning connection between Leo and Christ when he references *Revelation 5:5*: «Weep not, O daughter of Zion, for behold the Lion of the Tribe of Juda, the Root of David». The representation of a Paradise and Golden Age in the relief might explain why this particular subject made an appropriate tribute to Leo, the new Christ who will lead the Church and redeem Man from sin, erasing the sin of the First Parents and bringing about the revival suggested both by his election and the recent discovery of the New World. Similar ideas find expression in another setting in which corn is represented, the *Logge* of Leo X, where the pictorial program argues for the return of a Christian Golden Age by showing how the "fall of Man" has been erased through the redemption brought about by Christ and his vicar Leo X (Davidson, 1985, pp. 43-48).

With this in mind, we might consider how one of the work's inscriptions could have been imaginatively completed by a contemporary viewer. The work is inscribed: «Adam the first man damned by the apple». Given that the inscription mentions an apple (while the relief depicts figs), a contemporary might have completed this inscription with a phrase like "but redeemed by the *palla*", referencing, of course, the famous ball-like Medici coat of arms sitting in the center of the predella. Such conceptual play with the Medici *impresa* was typical of the panegyrics directed towards Leo and found expression in the decorations associated with the *posse* of 1513, in which *palle* are often linked to Christ, salvation, and renewal. Giovanni Giacomo Penni's account of this pageant, published in 1513 and dedicated to Jacopo Salviati's wife (Leo's sister), describes a scene on a triumphal arch erected by the Florentine merchants in which three kings were shown knelling in adoration not to the Child, but to a *palla* (Penni, 1983, p. 398). The link between *palla* and Christ, together with redemption and palingenesis (and potentially the broadened world), was further emphasized elsewhere on the same arch.

¹⁵ Las Casas (1989, pp. 89, 90) emphasizes the Golden Age-like fertility of corn in the New World.

Penni describes a *tondo* that depicted a flower out of which came a *palla* out of which came two shoots. One shoot produced grain and the other grapes and these in turn framed yet another *palla* in which the world was represented (Penni, 1983, p. 400). Similarly, on another arch there was painted «a laurel, which, in addition to its small seed or fruit, produced some *palle*, in one of which, in the middle that we saw open, exited a little baby with joined hands» (Penni, 1983, p. 401). As this image draws on the traditional Medici symbols of the laurel and *palla* to express ideas of birth and rebirth, it is highly likely that a similar concern with renewal is present in the Walters tabernacle via the implied *palla* that functions in opposition to the sinful apple in the inscription. The corn, understood as the source of New World bread and thus suggesting Christ via the eucharist, would then play a further redemptive role here.

In summary, while unexpected, the inclusion of corn in the *Temptation of Adam and Eve* by Giovanni Della Robbia had great significance both in the context of period understandings of the New World and of the ideological fashioning of Leo's papacy. As with the representations of corn found in the *Logge* of Leo X and Agostino Chigi's *Farnesina*, Della Robbia's corn references the New World and associates these newly discovered lands with paradise. Given its iconography, the *Temptation* is also richly evocative of the key ideological concerns of Leo's reign. By emphasizing the link between the New World and the dream of a new Christian Golden Age under the Medici Pope, the work and its corn reinforces those key themes of renewal, salvation, and palingenesis that were central to Leo's papacy. ■

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