

Kongo Ambassadors, Papal Politics, and Italian Images of Black Africans in the Early 1600s

It might seem a little odd to begin a talk about Italian images of black Africans in the early 1600s with the illustration of the coat of arms of a famous contemporary German. On the screen right now is the official heraldic device of Joseph Ratzinger, better known as Pope Benedict XVI. The Catholic Church's dominant emblem, the cross, is visible but somewhat dwarfed by the Papal tiara and crossed keys of St. Peter – no surprises here. But why does the bust of a crowned black African wearing an earring also loom large in the modern Papal coat of arms? The historical answer is that Ratzinger had served as bishop of Freising in Bavaria, an administrative entity which for almost 700 years has used the bust of a black king as its heraldic emblem. But the practical answer is that the modern Catholic Church sees black Africa and people of African descent as tremendously important, both as a rapidly growing constituency within the Church and also in terms of their potential for further evangelization. Ours is not the first era in which the Church took this view, and my presentation will explore the substantial visual record of a much earlier Papal focus on black Africa.

While the political and economic power of Italian states was declining in the Seventeenth Century, Italy's cultural authority remained influential, especially in the visual arts and, of course, religion, even though Europe had been split into faith-based fragments by the Protestant Reformation after 1517. By around 1600 the Catholic Church had completed wide-ranging reforms, and the popes of this era had ambitious expansionist agendas which sought to take evangelical advantage of the imperial and colonial successes of the Catholic powers, led by Habsburg Spain. The leaders of the papal church did not neglect the visual arts in the pursuit of these goals, and from the 1590s to at least the 1620s Rome is undoubtedly the most interesting Italian city with regard to depictions of black Africans.

Well before the 1590s interest in black Africans had been building among Italian churchmen. In the 1550s Cardinal Giovanni Poggi, returning to Italy after serving as an envoy at the Spanish court, had commissioned a fresco for a family chapel in the church of S. Giacomo in Bologna showing John the Baptist preaching to an ethnically diverse crowd which includes both a black man and a very conspicuous black woman. In the early 1570s the Roman church of S. Maria degli Angeli installed a somewhat crude but fascinating image of what we might call pious celebrities venerating Mary, and in addition to the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V of

Habsburg, and many other sovereigns, nobles and clerics, we find two black Africans. In the middle of the lower male group appears Tefsa Sion, the abbot of the recently founded Ethiopian hostel/monastery of S. Stefano degli Abissini located within the precincts of the Vatican itself. We are unfortunately not sure about the identity of the black woman wearing a turban-like headdress in the female group, but she was probably part of the Ethiopian community in Rome as well.

Inside the Vatican palace, a series of papal commissions highlight black Africans as both neophytes and especially as loyal Catholics who embody the Church's global reach. The earliest of this group is a fresco of *Philip Baptizing the Ethiopian Eunuch* of 1576-1578, but this small composition in a suite of dressing rooms was not a conspicuous work. A c. 1588 fresco in the larger Sala Sistina records the presence of Ethiopian monks at the ecumenical Council of Florence in 1441. (In 1450 the doors of old St. Peter's were decorated with a bronze relief by the sculptor Filarete of what was then a recent event, but the visit of the Ethiopian monks was not taken up again as a subject in the visual arts during the intervening 140 years.) Much grander is the fresco of *The Baptism of St. Clement* of c. 1599-1600 by Giovanni and Cherubino Alberti in the Sala Clementina, again in the Vatican. To the left of the glorious central baptism of the patron Pope

Clement VIII's early Christian namesake, a beautiful pale angel holding two crowns leads three charming and pious black African children toward the sacramental event. (A recent photo I stumbled upon on the Web gives an idea of the monumental size and lavish decoration of this room, and the presence of a black Cardinal at the right nicely echoes the theme in the frescoes.)

Pope Clement VIII was certainly interested in black Africa, and his 1596 establishment of the new diocese of S. Salvador in the kingdom of Kongo in Central Africa had both sacred and secular significance. Since 1484, when the Portuguese had first traveled to the inland capital of the ruler of the kingdom of Kongo, Christianity had attracted a number of converts in this part of Central Africa, and in 1520 Henry, son of King Afonso of Kongo was appointed bishop of a Kongo diocese, though this administrative structure did not last. While the Portuguese were willing to maintain ties to and control over the Kongo church, they obstructed direct Kongo relations with Rome. By the 1570s Portuguese colonial encroachment in nearby Angola spurred new Kongo contact with Rome, and the pope was now seen by Central African Christians as a potential political ally. Once the new diocese of S. Salvador was set up in 1596 Pope Clement asked that Kongo ambassadors come to Rome, and the black children in the Sala Clementina

frescoes may have something to do with this request. Two 1599 paintings on the walls of the papal hospital of S. Spirito, not far from the Vatican, may also be connected to Clement's interest in black Africa. These images are part of a cycle which celebrates the life of Pope Sixtus IV, who had ruled the Church in the 1470s and 1480s, and had been a great patron of this hospital. The scene on the left shows Sixtus accepting the thanks of Christian sovereigns from Eastern Europe; behind the Russian Tsar and his Byzantine princess wife is a kneeling black woman, and an armed black man is prominent at the left. Even more striking is the black African in the scene on the right, who dominates the foreground as he converses with a papal guard; behind these figures, Pope Sixtus pursues his dream of rebuilding Rome. (Sistine Chapel) According to some sources, the Ethiopian hostel/monastery of S. Stefano had been founded around the time several Ethiopians visited Rome in the early 1480s, which may account for the presence of this dark skinned figure.

For a few years there was no response to Pope Clement's request for a Kongo ambassador, but in 1604 King Alvaro II of Kongo decided to send a cousin, Antonio Manuel, Marquis of Ne Vunda, as an official and high-level envoy to the pope. This embassy took well over three years to arrive in Rome, traveling via Brazil, Lisbon and Madrid. The Spanish, who had

annexed Portugal and its empire in 1580, were also loathe to permit direct contact between the pope and Kongo, and Clement VIII had died and been replaced by Pope Paul V before Ne Vunda was able to reach the Eternal City. Pope Paul, however, was extremely eager to greet this embassy, and had arranged an elaborate protocol for Ne Vunda's entrance during the first week of 1608. He was to be officially received in the Sala Regia at the Vatican (where the leaders and emissaries of foreign states were given papal audiences), and there was to be a procession on Jan. 6, the feast of the Magi (Epiphany). But the long trip had taken its toll, and Ne Vunda was very ill when he entered Rome on Jan. 2. He was immediately given comfortable quarters in papal apartments in the Vatican, and the great honor of a papal visit to what proved to be his deathbed. He died on the evening of Jan. 5. The Sala Regia reception – which the Spanish envoy had objected to on the grounds that the kingdom of Kongo was not an independent state but tributary to Spain – did not take place, and the Jan. 6 procession became a funerary one, though still quite splendid. Ne Vunda's body accompanied by several members of his African entourage was brought to the great Early Christian basilica of S. Maria Maggiore rather as if his cadaver were one of the Three Kings coming to adore Mary and her Child. Indeed, a recently refurbished medieval replica of the manger at Bethlehem (known as the

“Presepio”) was one of the most famous features of the church, which also contained a venerated early icon of the Madonna and Child.

Paul V immediately decided to have these events recorded visually. The sculptor Francesco Caporale was commissioned to produce a funerary bust from what must have been a death-mask; some sort of monument was already installed in S. Maria Maggiore later in 1608, though the bust in its current arrangement dates to 1629. The initial plan was to erect it in the chapel of the Presepio, but the 1629 version was placed in the Summer Choir, a chapel on the right side of the nave which now serves as the baptistry, where it is still visible. The bust itself, in colored marble with a deep green-black stone denoting Ne Vunda’s complexion, equips him with a net-like shirt known as a *nkutu*, an article of clothing worn by Kongo nobles, and with a quiver of arrows. (The arrows evidently signify the arms that a person of his stature would be expected to bear, but with an exotic twist, though we are not sure if Ne Vunda himself appeared with them.) The bearded head with its close-cropped hair and staring inlaid eyes is stiff but dignified. The use of colored marble fit the taste and techniques of the day, and also may have been prompted by familiarity with the many cameos of black Africans carved in dark stone produced in the preceding decades. The classicizing architectural forms of the wall tomb also frame an engraved

Latin inscription which makes clear the additional patronage of Urban VIII, the ruling pope in 1629.

There are few European precedents for such a monument to a contemporary black African. Its creation under the auspices of two ambitious popes, Paul V and Urban VIII, and its installation in such a major Roman church, reveals how symbolically important Ne Vunda's embassy was to a papal Church seeking to reassert both its evangelical mission and its political sovereignty. If the envoy's unfortunate demise prevented Paul V from using him as a living component of public pageantry, the memorializing visual arts could make the same sort of statement. As the construction of the bust and tomb went forward, other related initiatives were undertaken. A medal was struck in 1608 showing a kneeling Ne Vunda, wearing a longer *nkutu* made of the same net-like fabric seen in the bust, pledging his fealty to Paul V, who in turn offers the envoy a benediction. The inscription reads: "and Kongo acknowledges its shepherd." Because of Ne Vunda's illness, such a ritual encounter never took place, but a fresco by G. B. Ricci in the Sala Paolina in the Vatican palace from 1610-1611 actually shows a moving event which did occur. In this scene from a series of compositions narrating the life of the pope, Paul V offers a benediction to a bedridden Ne Vunda, who clasps his hand in

prayer and looks gratefully toward the pontiff. Three of the black African members of Ne Vunda's entourage kneel and stand nearby, showing their appreciation of this exceptional papal visit. To further broadcast news of Ne Vunda's embassy and death – which were also extensively reported in European diplomatic dispatches – at least two engravings approved by the papal authorities appeared in 1608. One, designed by Guillermus Du Mortier, depicts Ne Vunda with the netted *nkutu* shirt and quiver, as he appears in the funerary bust, although here he also holds a bow and arrow in one hand. In the other engraving Ne Vunda is shown in elegant European dress and holds a document, presumably a letter from King Alvaro II to the pope. Six small scenes of his departure, arduous travel by land and sea, arrival in Rome, deathbed papal visit and funeral procession are also included. We know that foreign dignitaries visiting the pope were often required to wear prescribed courtly garments, but there is also evidence that European dress had already been adopted by some members of the Kongo elite. The elaborate inscription on this engraving notes at the end that black Africans often wear next to nothing, but that Ne Vunda chose to wear European dress for his visit to Rome. In any case, it is fascinating that printmakers perceived there was an audience for Ne Vunda's likeness in both forms of dress, which speaks to one of the paradoxical elements of the

envoy's appeal: that he was both immeasurably foreign – coming from 8,000 miles away according to one observer – and in his Christianity and loyalty to the pope reassuringly attached to European culture.

There is a further Roman depiction of Ne Vunda which in many ways is even more significant than those already considered, though it is part of a fresco decoration with many other components. The papal summer palace of the Quirinal (now the residence of the Italian president) was built in 1573, and Paul V had a new wing constructed beginning in 1606. In 1616-1617 one of the most imposing rooms of this new zone, the Sala Regia, was frescoed by a team of painters, including Giovanni Lanfranco, Carlo Saraceni, and Agostino Tassi. Like the Sala Regia in the Vatican – where Ne Vunda had been scheduled to meet formally with the pope – this room was a ceremonial space for the pope to receive rulers and envoys of sovereign states. The elaborate faux architecture of the frescoes emphasized a series of eight balconies, each packed with a dynamic group of representatives of distant nations. One of these balconies is dominated by Antonio Manuel Ne Vunda, instantly recognizable from his likeness in the 1608 engravings and Caporale's bust. Flanked by two young European courtiers, he gazes down toward one end of the floor of the room, while his right hand points downward in the opposite direction, as if gesturally

encouraging a group of envoys to make their obeisance to an enthroned pope. His mouth is open, as if he is speaking such encouragement as well. Ne Vunda wears simple clothing of European type, and in fact his group is the only one of the eight not to show some hint of exotic dress or adornment; perhaps his complexion was sufficient in this regard.

But, remarkably, Ne Vunda is far from being the only person of color in the room's frescoes. Other dark-skinned figures appear on three more of the balconies, so that fully half of the groups include characters with dark complexions. The clearest and most distinguished of these three is a powerfully built man with deep brown skin and African features and hair who dominates his balcony. He has a furious expression but a calm pose, and points to one end of the room. His simple but voluminous yellow robe might almost be antique in design, but under it there appears a greenish garment with a net-like design (*nkutu*) similar to that worn by Ne Vunda in Caporale's bust and Du Mortier's engraving. The five figures around him are all light-skinned. While it is conceivable, given the fabric worn by the African, that he was intended as another emissary from Kongo, a 1677 history of the popes indicates that the room's frescoes included an ambassador from the Christian emperor of Ethiopia, and he is a plausible candidate for this role. While the records of Paul V's rule do not reveal any

data about a visit by an Ethiopian delegation, there had been semi-official Ethiopian visitors to the pope in the 1530s, and the continuing presence of the Ethiopian hostel/monastery of S. Stefano right by the Vatican palace had certainly kept these African Christians in the consciousness of the papal court. One of the papal prototypes for the decoration of the Sala Regia was Antonio Filarete's c. 1450 reliefs on the bronze doors of St. Peter's (mentioned earlier) depicting Eastern visitors to the ecumenical Council of Florence, and these included a relief of Ethiopian monks from Jerusalem. Indeed, one of the papal objectives in closer relations with the Kongo was to get the Kongo sovereign to send emissaries to Ethiopia and construct an alliance of African Christian states.

As for the remaining six groups on balconies in the Sala Regia, all but one can be at least partly identified: there are two groups of Persians (embassies to Rome of 1609), and one each of Armenians (1610), Japanese (1615), and Nestorian Christians from Central Asia (1610). Rather surprisingly, one of the groups of Persians includes a dark-skinned man with wavy hair and facial features that are not, by European standards, especially typical of black Africans; this may be an attempt to show a South Asian person. The so-far unidentified group also contains a figure with brownish skin but whose physiognomy seems more Mediterranean. The action on this

balcony is especially puzzling: the dark man cries out as he is being beaten with a stick by a man in European armor. Nevertheless, despite these mysterious details, the general thrust of the decoration is completely clear: the veneration of the pope as religious leader and secular sovereign by emissaries from far-flung nations, either Christian or at least well-disposed toward papal power. Paul V's decision to emphasize these diverse groups rather than the European powers whose ambassadors much more frequently presented themselves at the papal court gives some idea of the hopes attached to a continued geopolitical role by the popes of this era.

In this respect, it is worth considering the frescoes in the Sala Regia at the Quirinal as marking an important moment in the whole history of Christian Europe's visual representation not only of black Africans, but of all peoples from the wider, extra-European world. The frescoes not only remind us of Filarete's images of Eastern delegations to the Council of Florence, but they also resemble a much earlier Italian artwork: the frescoes from the 1230s in the tower adjoining the monastery of S. Zeno in Verona, in which the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II – a great rival of the popes – is shown receiving the homage of 29 representatives of the world's peoples, including four black Africans. The centuries-long European tensions and disputes between popes and emperors (and other European sovereigns) about

who held ultimate global authority is recapitulated in these visual subjects. The Sala Regia frescoes were an expression of papal ambition at a time when the Holy Roman Empire had become much weaker, and divisions within the Habsburg family had created space for other claims to hegemony.

The dark-skinned and often exotically dressed characters on the walls of the Sala Regia would have reminded any contemporary viewer of the story of the Three Kings, and in fact an image of the Adoration of Magi was on display in an adjoining part of the Quirinal, the Cappella del Presepe (chapel of the manger). A frescoed *Adoration* was painted near the altar in 1611 by Baldassare Croce, a Bolognese artist who had already produced another *Adoration* for the nave of S. Maria Maggiore, where Ne Vunda was buried. The most dramatic figure in Croce's Quirinal composition is a young black African Wise Man, third in line as usual, wearing an earring and both a crown and a turban; just behind him is a beautiful African boy at the head of a crowd of Magian retainers. Though the images of the black Magus/King and his servant are perfectly standard for this period, the figures should be understood as reiterating the emphasis on pious black African visitors found in so many other papal commissions around this time. A consciousness of the well-established role of black Africans in the story of the Magi underlies most of the artworks and ritual events discussed in this

section. Ne Vunda's public procession through Rome was deliberately scheduled to take place, and his funerary procession did take place, on Jan. 6, the feast day of the Magi. A letter sent to Cardinal Alessandro d'Este on Jan. 9 describes Ne Vunda as "a new black King come from 8,000 miles away, renewing the triumph and the religious offering of the Magi/Kings." On Oct. 13th, 1608, Paul V wrote to Alvaro II of Kongo and emphasized the Magian import of the recent embassy. The initial planned burial site of Ne Vunda in the chapel of the Presepio at S. Maria Maggiore already contained a famous medieval sculptural group of the Magi.

When Ne Vunda's monument was finally installed in the Summer Choir of the same church in 1629, it bore the names not only of Paul V and Urban VIII, but also that of another influential churchman, Monsignor Juan Bautista Vives (1545-1632). A wealthy and distinguished native of Valencia, he had come to Rome in 1575, and by 1608 was urging priests to undertake foreign missions. He must have been extremely interested in Ne Vunda's embassy and therefore have come to the attention of Alvaro II, who appointed him Kongo ambassador to Rome – that is to say, as Ne Vunda's successor – on Feb. 27, 1613. Vives actively exercised this function until at least 1622. But he had other related projects of a grander sort. In 1613 he bought a huge palace in Piazza di Spagna, evidently with the idea that it

could be the home of a new evangelical organization that he and others were promoting. On Jan. 6, 1622 (again, the feast day of the Magi), Pope Gregory XV founded the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide), which by 1633 was fully installed in Vives's donated palace. The Propaganda, as it is usually called, soon became and has remained the most powerful institution for the spread of Catholicism – and our modern use of the word “propaganda” testifies to its influence. The building also housed the Collegio of the Propaganda, which trained foreigners for the missionary priesthood. In 1634 Gian Lorenzo Bernini was commissioned to reconfigure the palace of the Propaganda, and planned a striking oval chapel for the interior. The new head of the Congregation of the Propaganda, Urban VIII's nephew Cardinal Antonio Barberini, decided late in 1634 that the chapel should be dedicated to the Christ Child adored by the Magi, an extremely rare choice. (magi not exactly saints) In 1634-1635 Giacinto Gimignani painted an *Adoration of the Magi* with a massive and prominent black Magus/King (and a conspicuous black Magian attendant) for the high altar of this space, eventually redesigned by Borromini and completed in 1666. In 1635 Urban VIII issued a bull granting plenary indulgence (time off in Purgatory) to those who visited the chapel on the feast day of the Magi. Gimignani's painting remains in place, and has served for centuries as the

presiding visual image of the palace of the Propaganda, and many black African priests in training must have attended mass before it. By the 1770s Ethiopian masses were being conducted in the chapel, and in the Nineteenth Century the recitation of polyglot masses there on Jan. 6 became one of the great religious events of the city; the American radical Margaret Fuller attended in 1847, and judged the best of the priestly performers to be a “Guinea negro.” Though Gimignani’s picture is hardly a masterpiece, there can be few images of the black Magus/King which held such intense and profound meaning for those who saw it.

As important as the Propaganda Fide was in the Church’s evangelical program, it was hardly the only force. The new and powerful Jesuit order quickly became deeply invested in evangelical work abroad, and in 1542-1543 tried to make converts in Mozambique. The Jesuits became influential within the Propaganda Fide and an anonymous 1655 painting now in the Jesuit Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome depicts their papal patron Gregory XIII founding Jesuit seminaries and colleges for a wide array of foreign clerics, including a prominent black figure who looks very much like the image of Ne Vunda as seen in the Quirinal frescoes. It is also worth looking at the Franciscan order. The cult of the humble and saintly Sicilian Franciscan Benedict the Moor (d. 1589, canonized 1807) experienced most

of its growth in Spain, Portugal and their overseas empires rather than in Italy, but there is one extraordinary picture still in the Palermo church of the Badia Nuova that depicts this black Afro-European friar. This altarpiece by the dominant local painter of the day, Pietro Novelli (il Monrealese), depicts St. Francis giving his famous rope belt to St. Louis King of France, a miracle that transpires while the sovereign is kneeling before the Host at an altar. At the right, in front of the altar, kneels a young black African in Franciscan robes, holding a pair of lit white candles. Though Benedict was not even beatified (the first step to sainthood) in the late 1630s when the picture was probably painted, his popular cult was growing, and in 1652 he was proclaimed a pious protector of Palermo. There is a hint of a halo visible above the black friar's head. Benedict's famous humility is expressed by his kneeling posture and downward glance, but in conjunction with the kneeling St. Louis, the standing Pope Innocent III who transfers the belt, and the glowing host above the altar, which according to Catholic doctrine has become Christ's own body, the viewer is strongly reminded of the Magi making their offerings to the Child. And once again, papal authority is part of the message.

Benedict was in no sense a missionary, though his veneration was mostly promoted to draw Africans and African Americans into the church,

but the Franciscan order to which he belonged was active in proselytizing campaigns in various parts of the world. The most significant Franciscan initiative in black Africa was probably the Capuchin mission to Angola begun in 1644, which was assisted by the Propaganda Fide. One of the Capuchins, Fra Giovanni Cavazzi, wrote a history of the mission. Cavazzi's amateurish but vivid watercolors of Angolan life and syncretic Christianity are fascinating, but they were not intended for and did not reach a wide European audience until much later.

Rome was also a significant center for the production of images of blacks in Seventeenth Century Italian secular art (and secular details in sacred subjects). By 1610 Rome had become a center of production for an unusual sort of sculpture: heads and entire figures of people of color assembled from fragments of ancient statuary in colored marble and other stone, which were either partly recut and/or joined to newly fabricated elements. The key figure in the making of these objects was the French sculptor Nicolas Cordier (il Franciosino), who was in Rome from 1592 until his death in 1612. A poem of 1613 celebrates his creation of a statue of a black African youth, known as the *Moro Borghese* because it was created for the great art patron Cardinal Scipione (Caffarelli) Borghese, the nephew of the reigning Pope Paul V. The statue was famous enough to give its name to

one of the rooms in Scipione's villa (now the Galleria Borghese), though it is presently at Versailles. Cordier's name turns up in the Borghese archives for the first time in 1607, so the statue must have been made between 1607 and 1612. Since Ne Vunda arrived (and expired) in Rome in the first days of 1608, it is highly probable that the commission for Cordier's sculpture from the pope's nephew was prompted by the new fascination with black Africans the Kongo ambassador's visit inspired. (Scipione Borghese had tried to visit Ne Vunda's sickbed, but the ambassador was too ill to receive him.) The *Moro Borghese* had a pendant of a statue of a young black woman, also praised by the same poet, which may have been made by Cordier as well, and there are several other surviving works of the same type. The matching female figure, still in the Villa Borghese, is known as the *Zingarella*.

Though the stone/complexion of her face is dark, the woman's physiognomy is less typically African, and this along with the cloak she wears that is clasped at the shoulder may have led to her Gypsy nickname. Unlike some of the sacred images prompted by Ne Vunda's visit, these luxurious secular decorative statues do not aspire to ethnic precision.

Another of Cardinal Scipione Borghese's secular commissions in this period soon after Ne Vunda's embassy contains a notable black African figure. In 1611-1612 the Cardinal supervised the construction and

decoration of several small buildings and a garden in an area extremely close to the papal Quirinal Palace, so that he could have a pleasurable retreat in the summers while assisting his uncle the pope. One of the buildings was called the Casino delle Muse (later the Casino Pallavicini-Rospigliosi), and it was frescoed by Orazio Gentileschi and Agostino Tassi (the painter who was soon to help make the frescoes of Ne Vunda and others in the Sala Regia in the Quirinal). The ceiling is covered with an elegant worm's-eye view representation of a musical concert taking place in a balustraded loggia above the spectator's head. Between several groups of musicians is a handsomely dressed young beauty holding a fan, who is attended (and gazed at) by a black African adolescent. There is nothing especially unusual about this earringed page or maidservant, since Italian artists in the 1500s had often shown black Africans in scenes of music-making. Directly or indirectly, the black African figure may also be considered a descendant of the dark-skinned servant on the ceiling of Mantegna's *camera picta* in Mantua of c. 1470. The woman with fan has often been identified as a portrait of the young painter Artemisia Gentileschi, the daughter of one of the artists and the victim of a sexual assault by Tassi, the other artist. (Tassi began serving a year in prison for this crime just after the completion of this work.) There is, however, no evidence that the Gentileschi family owned or

employed black servants, and the function of the attendant in the Casino delle Muse is to ennoble the adjoining young woman.

The painting in the secluded Casino delle Muse pulls us away from the much more public and propagandistic papal images we have so far focused on, and toward the category of courtly art intended for the private enjoyment of the elite. Another instance of black Africans appearing in this kind of private, aristocratic imagery is found in a spectacular little painting made in Genoa in c. 1603-1605. Like a growing number of artworks produced in Seventeenth-Century Italy, this masterpiece was created by a Netherlandish artist who had found employment at an Italian court. Guiliam van Deynen was a native of Antwerp who had arrived in flourishing, cosmopolitan Genoa by 1602. His *Group Portrait of Doge Agostino Doria with His Family and Servants* is a sort of colossal miniature, painted in tempera on animal skin but measuring an unusually large sixteen by fourteen inches. Genoese doges, much constrained by law and tradition, were elected to terms of only two years – 1603-1605 in the case of Doria – and forbidden to commission public works of art celebrating their temporary power. Agostino Doria observed at least the letter of this restriction, since van Deynen's picture due to its size could only have served for display within the family or to a small number of guests. The doge, his wife, and

four children occupy a sumptuously furnished terrace adjoining a handsome, classicizing building which overlooks the Ligurian coastline. Behind a screen of veined marble columns, six other figures look on. The doge's nephew and the painter van Deynen himself are by a doorway at the left, while two bearded guards with halberds are at the right. Behind one of the Doria daughters, and rather tightly framed by two of the massive columns, appears the head and upper body of a bearded black African man. He is dressed in a green outfit and a white collar with lace trimming – respectable clothing, but not at the luxurious level of the doge's family. Though the Doria daughters wear earrings, he does not. Like all the other figures in the painting, the face appears to be the likeness of a particular individual. He looks forward in the general direction of the family group, but seems lost in thought. What is his role in the picture? The upper end of a halberd appears over the African man's head, but he does not wear the military dress of the two guards to the right. He is far too old to be a page. His relationship to a peculiar figure of indeterminate sex further to the left is unclear: this light-skinned character is dressed in a gaudy red outfit with a large ruffed collar, but has unruly hair, a moronic toothy grin, and apparently sightless or crossed eyes. Perhaps both the odd figure in red and the African man are to

be understood as court entertainers, but the African's expression is grave and composed.

The date of van Deynen's picture is almost exactly that of Shakespeare's *Othello*, first performed in 1604, and though neither the artist nor the Genoese nobility would have known anything of English drama, it seems right to add the African courtier to the set of Early Modern images that one might use to visualize Shakespeare's protagonist. The other striking chronological correspondence is with Ne Vunda, who passed through Genoa in 1607 on his way to Rome. One wonders what the Kongo envoy would have made of an African court servant like the one in van Deynen's picture, and it is a bit startling to note that the 1608 engraving of Ne Vunda in European dress resembles the man in the miniature in his costume and in the cut of his beard.

There is a further unusual echo of the images of Ne Vunda located in another courtly environment in Northern Italy. One of the places where news of the Kongo envoy's arrival in Rome was transmitted was Mantua, where the Gonzaga dynasty of rulers had long favored black African court servants. The Sala dei Fiumi of the Mantuan Ducal Palace, decorated during the 1600s, features a curious bust of a black African in colored stone, which

is similar in certain respects to Ne Vunda's monument in Rome. But this work is as hazy in its date and purpose as Ne Vunda's monument is clear.

The thrust of this presentation has been to argue that the papal church, already increasingly interested in the prospects for expansion in black Africa and among the peoples of the African diaspora in the late 1500s, used Ne Vunda's visit to Rome in 1608 to emphasize the then current papal goals of universal evangelization and the pope's political sovereignty, and that the visual arts played an especially crucial role in articulating these ideas. The Church celebrated Ne Vunda's arrival, even in death, as if it was the second coming of the Magi, and this reinvigorated Magian imagery in the arts and even led to the Magian dedication of the chapel inside the palace of the Propaganda. Indeed, the very foundation of the new institution of the Propaganda (on the feast day of the Magi in 1622) may be said to have been indebted to Ne Vunda's arrival and the visual attention it drew. Monsignor Vives, one of the driving forces behind the Propaganda and the man who donated its palace, was already planning the new institution and highlighting its mission to black Africans a few months after Ne Vunda's death in 1608, and in 1613 he was appointed Ne Vunda's successor as the King of Kongo's ambassador to the pope. But we should be careful not to read the events and images I have described today as telling the whole story about the Catholic

Church and black Africans in this period. Despite official papal pronouncements against slavery, and especially the enslavement of Christians, there were many slaves (including black slaves) in Rome throughout this period; often they were owned by Cardinals and other clerics, and in some cases even official conversion to Catholicism did not free them. We know, for example, that the black African Muslims Ametius and Ali, both from the kingdom of Bornu near Lake Chad in what is now Northern Nigeria, and almost certainly slaves, received baptism in Rome in 1615 and 1616, but we are not sure whether they received their freedom. The Papal Church's fascination with Africa and Africans in the early 1600s did not significantly alter the rising trajectory of Atlantic (or even Mediterranean) slavery.

Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484)

Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585)

Pope Clement VIII (1592-1605)

Pope Paul V (Borghese) (1605-1621)
Cardinal Scipione Borghese (nephew)

Pope Gregory XV (1621-1623)

Pope Urban VIII (Barberini) (1623-1644)
Cardinal Antonio Barberini (nephew)

Pope Benedict XVI (Ratzinger) (2005-)

Tefsa Sion (Ethiopian Abbot of S. Stefano degli Abissini in Rome)

Alvaro II, King of Kongo

Antonio Manuel, Marquis of Ne Vunda (d. 1608)

Mons. Juan Bautista Vives (1545-1632)

St. Benedict the Moor (d. 1589)