

Article

# The Lion and the Wisdom—The Multiple Meanings of the Lion as One of the Keys for Deciphering Vittore Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion*

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**Abstract:** The current paper will concentrate on the lion featured in Vittore Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion*. The multiple meanings of the lion in primary sources will serve as a key towards demonstrating the concept of prophecy, one of the multi-level meanings referring to all three figures featured in the painting—Job, Christ and St. Jerome. To this, an interpretation not discussed hitherto with reference to the *Meditation* will be added—the lion as alluding to the concept of wisdom as referred to in the book of Job. Furthermore, the lion and the wisdom will be discussed as an allusion to the self-image of Venice during the period in which the painting was executed, and thus add another, social and civic, reading.

**Keywords:** Vittore Carpaccio; *Meditation on the Passion*; animal symbolism; Job in Venetian Art; iconography of Job

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The current paper will discuss the iconography of Vittore Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion*,<sup>1</sup> offering a reading based on the long and well-established tradition of interpreting Biblical figures and verses as having multiple meanings.<sup>2</sup> The traditional multiple meanings of the character of Job have also been discussed in literature,<sup>3</sup> and the application of the concept of interpreting the figure of Job in multiple ways in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venetian art was introduced by Heidi J. Hornik, who interpreted the images of Job as having a dual role of both intercessor and prophet.<sup>4</sup> Based both on the ancient, traditional way of interpreting the figure of Job and on Hornik's interpretation, the current paper will add the multiple meanings of the lion in various sources. An attempt will be made to connect the lion to the three main figures—Job, Christ and St. Jerome, corroborate the Christian interpretation of Job as a prophet, and add a reading of the painting as a contemplation on wisdom and its manifestations in the book of Job, and as an allusion to the Venetian self-image, demonstrated in local iconography.

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<sup>1</sup> Vittore Carpaccio (Italian, ca. 1464–1525/6), *Meditation on the Passion*, ca. 1490–1510, oil and tempera on wood, 27<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 34<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (70.5 × 86.7 cm), New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>2</sup> On the Christian hermeneutical tradition of ascribing multiple meaning to Biblical figures and verses, see Smalley 1964.

<sup>3</sup> For a short review of the multiple meanings of the figure of Job, see Moscovich 2015, pp. 134–35.

<sup>4</sup> Hornik 2002. The other works of art featuring the figure of Job include Giovanni Bellini's (Italian, 1435–1518) *San Giobbe Altarpiece*, Ca. 1445–1487, Oil on Wood, 15 ft. 5<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. × 8 ft. 6 in. (471 × 258 cm), Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia. Giovanni Bellini's *The Sacred Allegory*, ca. 1490–1510, oil and tempera on wood, 29 × 47 in. (78 × 119 cm), Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. Vittore Carpaccio's *Dead Christ*, 57 × 72<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (145 × 185 cm), tempera on wood, ca. 1510–1520, Berlin, Staatliche Museum, Gemäldegalerie. To this list, addressed by Hornik, one should also add *St. Job and St. Francis*, a marble relief above the Church of San Giobbe by Pietro Lombardo (Italian, 1435–1515), and Marcello Fogolino's (Italian, 1470/1488?–1548) *Madonna and Child between Saints Job and Gothard*, 79<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 63 in. (203 × 160 cm), oil on wood, ca. 1508, Milan, Pinacoteca Brera.

## 1. Carpaccio's Meditation on the Passion

Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion* (Figure 1) is a rectangular, horizontal painting, depicting three figures in an open space, surrounded by animals. It is unusual, due to several of its iconographic features. Usually, dead Christ is depicted in art flanked by the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist, or carried by angels, though there are versions that feature additional figures. These compositions, known as *Pietà*, were developed in Venice, in particular by Giovanni Bellini.<sup>5</sup> In Carpaccio's *Meditation*, however, other saints, whose identity we shall discuss, flank the figure of dead Christ. Another unique feature is the abundance of animals, which usually do not appear in the *Pietà* iconography, and have yet to be explained.



**Figure 1.** Vittore Carpaccio (Italian, ca. 1464–1525/6), *Meditation on the Passion*, ca. 1490–1510, oil and tempera on wood, 27<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 34<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (70.5 × 86.7 cm), New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Dead Christ is depicted in the center of the painting, naked, except for a loincloth, his eyes closed and his wounds bleeding. He sits on a broken marble throne with an engraved inscription, which is seemingly written in ancient Hebrew, albeit most of which is undecipherable, and a crown of thorns is propped up against the throne, close to his feet.

Two saints are seated, one on each side of Christ, both of whom have white hair and long beards. The saint on the right side of the painting is thin, his torso is hunched, his face is wrinkled, and he is wearing a red loincloth. He is seated on a chiseled, partially broken cube-shaped stone. This chiseled stone is also engraved with ancient Hebrew letters, and as we shall see below in the literature review, the lettering lead to the identification of this saint as Job.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It might be that one of them (Giovanni Bellini, *Pietà*, 1460–1465, canvas, 45<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. × 10 ft. <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. [115 × 317 cm], Venice, Doge Palace), a rare composition featuring Christ and two saints, was a precedent to Carpaccio's *Meditation*.

<sup>6</sup> Hartt 1940.

On the left side of the painting is another saint, swathed in a white cloth with his gaze directed towards the viewer. This saint was identified as St. Jerome (ca. 347–420), because of the prayer beads, the book and the lion,<sup>7</sup> which will be the focus of the current paper. This identification is corroborated by the presence of the other animals in Carpaccio's *Meditation*, an intrinsic part of the iconography of St. Jerome, based on his letter from 384 A.D. to his friend Eustochium, where he complains, "I had no companions but scorpions and wild beasts".<sup>8</sup> This iconographic tradition of St. Jerome, known as *St. Jerome in the Desert*, or *St. Jerome in the Wilderness*, starting in Italy in the early fifteenth century, was very popular in Venice.<sup>9</sup> To this, one may also add the hand on the chest, the familiar posture of St. Jerome beating his chest, another one of his iconographic features, in addition to the animals, which source can be traced to St. Jerome's same letter, where he says "ceased not from beating my breast till tranquility returned at the chiding of the Lord".<sup>10</sup>

Contrary to Job, who is sitting on a chiseled stone, St. Jerome is seated on a pile of rough rocks. A parallel difference is also apparent between the two halves of the landscape depicted in the painting: on the right side, Job's side, the landscape is green, blooming and partially cultivated—there are buildings, paved paths and terraces—while on the left, on St. Jerome's side, the wild landscape consists of rocks and caves.<sup>11</sup>

Numerous animals are dispersed throughout the painting. Clockwise, above Christ's head, a bird can be seen flying skyward. To the right, between Christ and Job, there is a tiger following a stag. Behind Job's back, one can see a pair of hares, and in front of them, a weasel. In front of Job, on the ground, is a red parrot. There is a lion next to St. Jerome (Figure 2), and above him, to the left, is a grazing stag, a fox, at the mouth of the cave, and a tiger or a leopard devouring a stag—and finally, closing the circle, is a goldfinch on the back of Christ's throne.



**Figure 2.** The lion. Vittore Carpaccio, *Meditation*. Detail.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips 1911, p. 145; Borroughs 1911, p. 183; for the sources of the legends relating St. Jerome with the lion, see Jacobus de Voragine, vol. 5, pp. 203–5; Friedmann 1980, pp. 19–22, 231–49; Rice 1985, pp. 37–45, 157–58.

<sup>8</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters*, 22:3, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001.htm>; the connection between this letter and this tradition was identified by Friedmann 1980.

<sup>9</sup> Friedmann, *ibid.*, p. 65; see also Rice 1985, pp. 75–76.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Jerome, *Letters*, 22:3.

<sup>11</sup> Borroughs 1911, p. 192; Hartt 1940, pp. 25–35; Balentine 1999, pp. 269–89; Terrien 1996; Hornik 2002, p. 543.

## 2. Provenance and Literature Review

Not much is known about the provenance of the painting. The original patrons or owners are not documented. The relatively small size of the painting and its multiple foci might enhance the possibility that it was commissioned by a private patron, for personal meditation. Another possibility is that the painting was commissioned by a small group, such as a *scuola* (perhaps *Scuola di San Giobbe*), or a professional guild, for their meeting room.<sup>12</sup> This eventuality would also allow the viewers to examine the painting more closely while meditating on or discussing its meaning.

In 1632, the *Meditation*, along with Carpaccio's *Dead Christ*, were part of Roberto Canonici's collection,<sup>13</sup> both bore forged Mantegna signatures and were owned by the Canonici family until ca. 1850.<sup>14</sup> Later, they were both found in Sir William Neville Abdy's collection.<sup>15</sup> Claude Phillips, who named the painting *Meditation on the Passion*, recognized the left-hand figure as St. Jerome.<sup>16</sup> Frederic Hartt, based on the deciphering of the allegedly ancient Hebrew inscriptions on the chiseled rock where the other saint sits, alluding to the words "my redeemer liveth" (*Job*, 19:25), identified him as Job.<sup>17</sup> Phillips suggested and Borroughs confirmed that Mantegna's signature, which appeared on the painting at that time, was false and that the painting should be attributed to Carpaccio.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Carpaccio's signature was revealed through an X-ray in 1945.<sup>19</sup>

Phillips suggested: "Perhaps careful search through the voluminous writings of St. Jerome might afford a clue to the mystery and a more complete explanation of this, in conception, unique work".<sup>20</sup> Identifying the saint as Job also enabled Hartt to note the connection between Job and St. Jerome through St. Jerome's writings, which will be discussed in detail in the section dedicated to Job as a prophet.<sup>21</sup>

Hartt was also the first to mention that St. Gregory the Great's (ca. 540–604) *Moralia in Iob*, which had an immense influence on the conception of Job during the Middle Ages, was reprinted in Venice twice at the end of the fifteenth century, in 1480 and 1495.<sup>22</sup> Kathi Meyer expands the context by adding that St. Gregory's book was actually a paraphrase on St. Jerome's commentaries on the Book of Job, which embraced the symbolic or allegorical point of view,<sup>23</sup> and this piece of information forges a closer connection between the commentaries on the Book of Job and Carpaccio's painting in general, and St. Jerome in particular.

Borroughs also noted that every detail in the painting has a specific significance, which would be deciphered after identification of the second saint.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, even after the saint was identified as Job, attempts to decipher the meaning of said details, i.e., the animals, or connect them to the saints in the painting, were quite limited and not comprehensive. Nonetheless, the background against which the animals were placed received a certain degree of scholarly attention.

Hartt notes "the symbolic nature of the representation authorizes us to look for further religious meanings in the marvelous landscape in which the figures are placed, and in the beasts which live and

<sup>12</sup> For the *scuole* and their important part in the Venetian society, see Pullan 1971; for the specific significance of the *scuole* for interpretation of artworks featuring the figure of Job—see Moscovich 2015, p. 137 ff.

<sup>13</sup> For details of *Dead Christ*, see endnote No. 3 above.

<sup>14</sup> See below, in the Literature Review section.

<sup>15</sup> Phillips 1911, p. 144; Borroughs 1911; The Metropolitan Museum of Art website, <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110000284>.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips 1911, p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Hartt 1940, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Phillips 1911, p. 145; Borroughs 1911.

<sup>19</sup> Pease 1945, pp. 1–4.

<sup>20</sup> Phillips 1911, p. 146.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips 1911, p. 146; Hartt 1940, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, (<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoraliaIndex.html>); Hartt 1940, pp. 28, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Meyer 1954, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Borroughs 1911, p. 192.

move in that landscape".<sup>25</sup> However, he only makes a partial attempt at deciphering the meanings of the animals.

Patricia Emison suggests that there is no need for an elaborated, symbolic reading in order to understand the connection between St. Jerome, the wilderness and Rome (the ruins) and Job, with fertile agricultural land and the Holy Land (oriental people, by which she probably means the Christian faithful).<sup>26</sup> We shall see below, however, that the elaborated symbolic reading is significant.

Friedmann suggests that in Carpaccio's *Meditation* some of the animals are redundant from the symbolic point of view, although this approach can be doubted.<sup>27</sup> However, in his separate explanations for each of the animals, he does not fully explain the meaning of these animals in this particular painting.

Heidi J. Hornik cites two metaphors of predators from the Book of Job, which enrich the reading of the painting: Job, haunted by his friends, is described as someone preyed on by a wild animal,<sup>28</sup> and Job describing himself as a person saving the poor from predators.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Hornik also reminds the reader that "Job ultimately obtains peace from the beasts (*Job*, 5:23)".<sup>30</sup>

Brigit Blass-Simmen refers to only one of the stag's symbolic meanings, suggesting that the motif of the stag is to be understood as a symbol of the Eucharist.<sup>31</sup> She dedicates her paper to identifying the formal sources of the animals, such as drawings by Pisanello, Mantegna and others, and suggests that the work has a "patchwork" effect, since "the parakeet, the marten, the pair of rabbits, and the leopard-stag group seem glued onto the landscape".<sup>32</sup>

Below, as will be exemplified by the detail of the lion, we can see that no "patchwork" exists in Carpaccio's *Meditation*, since, just as Borroughs maintained, every detail in this magnificent, mysterious painting, is well calculated.

### 3. Symbolic Animals in Ancient and Medieval Literature

Since ancient times, primarily during the Middle Ages, there has been an abundance of literature, bestowing animals with anthropomorphic characteristics and seeing them as symbols of human behavior—whether appropriate or not. A review of this literature, with its various nuances, is found in Simona Cohen's book, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art*.<sup>33</sup> Among other issues, her book addresses their persistency during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and connects this literature with other paintings by Carpaccio—*The Christian Knight* and *Two Venetian Ladies*—both of them characterized by an abundance of animals scattered throughout the painting, much like the *Meditation*.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most important literary genres in this respect were the *Bestiaries*, written between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, and which were especially popular during the thirteenth century.<sup>35</sup> However, their influence on culture extended beyond that period.<sup>36</sup> Books of this genre, translated into

<sup>25</sup> Hartt 1940, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Emison 1995, p. 132.

<sup>27</sup> Friedmann 1980, p. 49; on enhancing the message by repeating symbols that have a similar meaning, see Baxter 1988, pp. 27, 72, 78.

<sup>28</sup> *Job*, 16:9–14; 10:16; Hornik 2002, p. 554.

<sup>29</sup> *Job*, 29:17.

<sup>30</sup> Hornik 2002, p. 554.

<sup>31</sup> Blass-Simmen 2006, pp. 75–90, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Blass-Simmen, *ibid.*, 87.

<sup>33</sup> Cohen 2008, pp. 3–50.

<sup>34</sup> For the persistence of this literature during the Renaissance, see Cohen, *ibid.*, *passim*, esp. Introduction; for the connection with Carpaccio's *oeuvre*, see Cohen 53–134.

<sup>35</sup> Baxter 1988, pp. 166–67; Hassig 1995, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Cohen 2008, pp. 4, 6, 8.

vernacular languages, were widespread in England, France and Italy (and specifically in the Veneto region),<sup>37</sup> where this tradition presumably lasted longer than in other places.<sup>38</sup>

The *Bestiaries* were compendiums describing the characteristics of various animals, both real and imaginary, the ancient classical legends associated with them, and lessons derived therefrom, most of which were based on a book titled *Physiologus*, probably written in Greek, in Alexandria, in the fourth century A.D.<sup>39</sup> The *Bestiaries* use the *Physiologus* as a core text; over the centuries, however, a large amount of materials from other sources was added to them. The number of animals grew larger, as did the amount of comments bestowing moral significance on them.<sup>40</sup>

Ron Baxter and others have already demonstrated that the meaning of these books was mainly symbolic and allegoric, with religious strata, with no biological, zoological or medical intention.<sup>41</sup> Baxter's conclusion is based on several grounds. The limited or false zoological information featured in the books;<sup>42</sup> the Christian morality that accompanies most of the entries, manifested by the limited number of roles played by many figures, i.e., the predators are the devil and their prey is humankind;<sup>43</sup> and the religious message repeats itself under various guises, which enhance it.<sup>44</sup> Simona Cohen also observed that the religious context of the *Bestiaries* is demonstrated by their content—the large number of texts in the *Bestiaries* related to vices and virtues, to penitence, and to the lives of saints—as well as the usage of vernacular language, all lead to the conclusion that they were used for sermons.<sup>45</sup> Baxter finds further attributes indicating that these texts were used for sermons, such as the repetition of the same idea in order to emphasize it.<sup>46</sup> He also concludes that these texts are religious because of the use of illustrations for further enhancement of the religious message,<sup>47</sup> and considering the order of the chapters in the books he analyzed, which were not zoological but theological, and which had a common theological denominator for each group of chapters.<sup>48</sup> An additional reason is the fact that the books were owned by monasteries and found in the theological sections of their libraries.<sup>49</sup>

All the above will enable us to concentrate on the Christian meanings and associations of the lion and connect them with the figures featured in Carpaccio's *Meditation*.

#### 4. The Conception of Job as a Prophet

The ancient sources identifying Job as a prophet can be traced to the Book of James, mentioning Job among the suffering and patient prophets:

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have

<sup>37</sup> Several manuscripts written in Italian, most of them in the Tuscan dialect, were studied over a hundred years ago, see McKenzie 1905, 380–433. However, one of these manuscripts, written in the Venetian dialect (probably *od. C.R.M.248* [C, G, K], was found in the Museo Civico di Padova [Bibl. Comun.]. McKenzie does not provide enough information on this point. Yet, the provenance of the manuscript written in the Venetian dialect, is probably Venice, and perhaps was in Venice when Carpaccio's *Meditation* was painted. Also see Cohen 2008, p. 6; Hassig 1995. A list of bestiaries can also be found on the online catalogue of bestiaries, [http://www.bestiary.ca/articles/family/mf\\_other.htm](http://www.bestiary.ca/articles/family/mf_other.htm).)

<sup>38</sup> Cohen 2008, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> (Early Greek copies of the book did not survive, and the earliest texts known to us today are Latin translations from the eight-century A.D. The book was also translated into several Mediterranean languages. See Cohen 2008, p. 4. Baxter, xiii, 29; *Aberdeen Bestiary*; Hassig 1995, pp. xvi, 5; Sobol 1993, 160–62. The additional sources added during the ages to the text of the *Physiologus* in the *Bestiaries* are listed in Hassig 1995, pp. 5–8; see also Cohen 2008, p. 5.)

<sup>40</sup> From Aberdeen University website, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/what.hti>; Sobol (1993) maintains that the book was written in the first or second century A.D.

<sup>41</sup> Baxter 1988, pp. 25, 184, 211.

<sup>42</sup> Baxter, *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> Baxter, *ibid.*, pp. 27, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Baxter, *ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>45</sup> Cohen 2008, p. 5; Baxter, *ibid.*, pp. 192–93, 209, 212.

<sup>46</sup> However, he also found texts written at a later date, and adapted for private reading, see Baxter, *ibid.*, pp. 202–5.

<sup>47</sup> Baxter, *ibid.*, pp. 72, 82.

<sup>48</sup> Baxter, *ibid.*, esp. pp. 37–62.

<sup>49</sup> Baxter, *ibid.*, pp. 156–61, 179–81. *Bestiaries* that were not owned by monasteries, monks or clergy were very rare, see Baxter, *ibid.*, p. 199.

heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.<sup>50</sup>

On later generations, the verse “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth”,<sup>51</sup> which is chiseled on the rock where Job sits in Carpaccio’s *Meditation*, was a departure point for the Christian exegesis that saw Job as a prophet. As first noticed by Hartt, St. Jerome, who is featured in Carpaccio’s *Meditation*, was the first exegete who attributed a Christian meaning to this verse.<sup>52</sup> In a letter to Pammachius against John of Jerusalem, he writes:

What can be clearer than this prophecy? No one since the days of Christ speaks so openly concerning the resurrection as he did before Christ. He wishes his words to last for ever; and that they might never be obliterated by age, he would have them inscribed on a sheet of lead, and graven on the rock. He hopes for a resurrection; nay, rather he knew and saw that Christ, his Redeemer, was alive, and at the last day would rise again from the earth.<sup>53</sup>

In his book *Moralia in Iob*, St. Gregory the Great reiterates the idea of Job as a prophet, stating that “blessed Job very frequently so relates things done, as to foretell things to be done”.<sup>54</sup>

As previously stated, Hartt connected the notion of Job as a prophet with St. Gregory’s *Moralia in Iob* and Carpaccio’s *Meditation*. Hartt also notes that in his writings, St. Jerome referred to *Job*, 19:25, which has now become the key to the entire painting, especially since it is preceded by the following verses: “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!”<sup>55</sup> Hartt sees the painting as a realization of Job’s prophecy—his words are indeed engraved on the stone he is seated on, opposite the Biblical commentator, who was the first to notice the meaning of this verse as a prophecy. The connection between this conception of Job as a prophet and the lion featured in Carpaccio’s *Meditation* is discussed in the next section.

## 5. The Lion in Carpaccio’s *Meditation*

On the left side of Carpaccio’s *Meditation*, next to St. Jerome, a lion can be discerned, hidden in the shadows (Figure 2). It is reasonable to presume that the lion is featured in the picture within the context of the legend concerning St. Jerome’s life, which made the lion a nearly permanent attribute of St. Jerome.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, the lion has many additional symbolic meanings. Among others, it also symbolizes Christ and his Resurrection, based on a legend told by Isidore of Seville (Spanish, A.D. 560–636), “When they give birth to a cub, it is thought to sleep for three days and nights, until the place where it sleeps is shaken by the roar of the father, which wakes it”.<sup>57</sup> Guillaume le Clerc (William le cleric of Normandy, French, ca.1210/1211—1227/1238) repeats this legend in his thirteenth century *Bestiaire*.<sup>58</sup> *The Aberdeen Bestiary* adds a specific Christian meaning associated with Christ’s Resurrection: “Thus the Almighty Father awakened our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day; as Jacob says: ‘He will fall asleep as a

<sup>50</sup> James, 5:10–11.

<sup>51</sup> Job, 19:25.

<sup>52</sup> Hartt 1940, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> St. Jerome, *Contra Joannem Hierosolytitanum*, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, pp. 439–40, [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0347-0420,\\_Hieronymus,\\_Contra\\_Joannem\\_Hierosolytitanum\\_Ad\\_Pammachium\\_Liber\\_Unus\\_\[Schaff\],\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0347-0420,_Hieronymus,_Contra_Joannem_Hierosolytitanum_Ad_Pammachium_Liber_Unus_[Schaff],_EN.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, II: XX, xl, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Job, 19: 23–24.

<sup>56</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, vol. 5, pp. 203–5; Friedmann 1980, pp. 19–22, 231–49; Rice 1985, pp. 37–45, 157–58; Levi D’Ancona 2001, pp. 149–50.

<sup>57</sup> Isidore of Seville, 12:2:3–6, <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast78.htm>; Levi D’Ancona, *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>58</sup> Guillaume le Clerc <http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast78.htm>.

lion, and as a lion's whelp he will be revived' (see *Genesis*, 49:9)".<sup>59</sup> This legend also occurs within the context of the Immaculate Conception in Franciscus de Retza's *Defensorum inviolatae virginis Mariae*, where the text accompanying the illustration of this legend reads, "If the lion can resurrect its cubs with its roar, why couldn't Virgin Mary become pregnant by the Holy Spirit?" It is possible<sup>60</sup> that in Northern Italy, the legend was also known from its depiction in Giotto's fresco in Cappella Scrovegni, Padua. There is another interpretation that associates the resurrection of the cubs with the Last Judgment,<sup>61</sup> which might be pertinent to Carpaccio's *Meditation*, since the painting refers to Job's prophecy concerning the Return of Christ, "he shall stand at the latter day, vpon the earth".<sup>62</sup>

The legend of resurrecting the cubs appears in the *Bestiaries* next to another legend—also an allegory of Christ—of the lion sleeping with its eyes open. According to *The Aberdeen Bestiary*, this is the reason the lion represents Christ:

Thus our Lord, falling asleep in death, physically, on the cross, was buried, yet his divine nature remained awake; as it says in the Song of Songs: 'I sleep but my heart waketh' (5:2); and in the Psalm: 'Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep' (121: 4).<sup>63</sup>

Thus, one might suggest that in Carpaccio's *Meditation*, dead Christ is sitting with his eyes closed, indicating his human nature, and the open-eyed lion next to him indicates his Divine nature. Thus, these two implied legends might suggest Job's capacity as a prophet.

## 6. The Conception of Wisdom in the Book of Job

Notwithstanding the Christian interpretations of Job as a prophet, the gap between Divine and human knowledge is central to the Book of Job. Job's point of view within the Biblical text is quite limited—he never knows, not even by the end of the book, that he is a subject in an experiment conducted by God and Satan, and he wonders about the sources of wisdom, asking twice: "But where shall wisdom be found? and where *is* the place of understanding?"<sup>64</sup> Later, he reaches the conclusion that the only one who knows the answers to these questions is God, who tells the human to be content with a specific kind of wisdom that is suitable for mankind, a wisdom comprised of fearing God and good deeds: "And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom; and to depart from evil *is* understanding".<sup>65</sup>

St. Gregory the Great also refers to this disparity with his interpretation of the verse "I am an alien in their sight".<sup>66</sup>

While they thought only of the things they could see, they were unable to perceive in the Lord the things they could not see; for whilst they contemn the flesh that was to be seen, they never reached to the unseen Majesty.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Aberdeen Bestiary*, Fol.7v, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/7v.hti>; Hassig, 50, 162, 256; Also see the list of the Christian authors who repeated the legend in Charbonneau-Lassay 1940, p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Franciscus de Retza, *Defensorum*, [https://archive.thulb.uni-jena.de/ufb/rsc/viewer/ufb\\_derivate\\_00002796/Xy1-00008\\_012r.tif](https://archive.thulb.uni-jena.de/ufb/rsc/viewer/ufb_derivate_00002796/Xy1-00008_012r.tif); Also quoted in Levi D'Ancona 2001, p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> Levi D'Ancona (*ibid.*, p. 148) quotes Fillippo Picinelli, *Mundus Symbolicus*, which is a late source, from the seventeenth century, but it is quite possible that this interpretation existed at an earlier date.

<sup>62</sup> *Job*, 19:25.

<sup>63</sup> *Aberdeen Bestiary*, Fol.7v, <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f7v>.

<sup>64</sup> *Job*, 28:12; 28:20.

<sup>65</sup> *Job*, 28:28.

<sup>66</sup> *Job*, 19:15.

<sup>67</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, Vol. II, Book XIV, xli, 49.



Another legend that can be connected with Carpaccio's *Meditation* is the life of St. Eustace,<sup>68</sup> who throughout his life was faced with trials parallel to those of Job, and told explicitly about this parallelism.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the saint is connected both with Job and the concept of prophecy. Secondly, some hints to the life of St. Eustace can be found in some of the animals found in Carpaccio's *Meditation*. First, there are the stags, which evoke the story of St. Eustace's conversion after seeing a vision of Christ in the antlers of the stag. In addition, both the lion and the ambiguous predator of the *Canidae* family, which can be either a wolf or a fox, and appears in the mouth of the cave above the lion, can also hint to the wild beasts that took St. Eustace's sons. However, due to divine intervention, the lion had mercy and sent the child free, intact, and the other son was also delivered safe and sound from the wolf, by some ploughmen. Later, another lion has mercy on St. Eustace and his entire family who were sent by the emperor to be devoured alive. These lions are also parallel to the harmless lion from the life of St. Jerome, and to the compassionate predator on the right side of Carpaccio's *Meditation*, following the stag yet not hurting it. This compassion is consistent with the Franciscan worldview, and one should bear in mind that the San Giobbe Church in Venice, a church dedicated to Job, for which some of the aforementioned artworks featuring the figure of Job were commissioned, was a Franciscan church.<sup>70</sup> This compassion can be connected, too, with the verse "and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee".<sup>71</sup>

In addition, all these animals are connected in the legend of St. Eustace through the idea that human knowledge is limited—he does not know that the stag is actually Christ, he does not know that the animals did not devour his sons, and the emperor does not imagine that the lion will not kill St. Eustace and his family. To this, one might add the writings of Lorenzo Giustiniani (1381–1456), the first patriarch of Venice, who preached several times at the San Giobbe church. The sermons manuscripts, in which he refers to contemplating visible and invisible things, were circulated in Venice and saw print in 1490.<sup>72</sup> Below, we see various manifestations of wisdom as they are manifested through the lion and its surroundings in Carpaccio's *Meditation*.

## 7. The Throne, the Wisdom, and the Venetian Self-Image

It might be possible that in the Venetian-specific context, the lion, located next to the ruined throne, also alludes to Virgin Mary. The close connection between the Christian religion and the Venetian State, which considered itself as a 'Christian Republic', was apparent in various aspects of the city's life. Many authors observed this, and in the following lines, I will summarize this matter.<sup>73</sup> This close connection existed, for example, in the 'Myths of Venice'. Common beliefs have long associated between important dates in the history of the city and important dates in the Christian calendar, e.g., the belief that the city was founded on the date of the Immaculate Conception—March 25, 421.<sup>74</sup> One can also see the close connection between the religious and secular traditions and authorities, for

<sup>68</sup> Voragine, vol. 6, pp. 83–94; for other versions and sources—see Heffernan 1975. However, since Voragine's Golden Legend was translated into Italian by Nicolò Malerbi and published in Venice by Nicholas Jenson in 1475 (see Pignatti 1965), therefore it was, most probably, the source used by Carpaccio. Heffernan (p. 67) also mentions that St. Eustace first appears in the pseudo-Jerome Martyrology. It might worth further research, whether this text might have been known—and still attributed to Jerome—in Carpaccio's milieu, which would form another connection with St. Jerome, and thus with the *Mediation* as well.

<sup>69</sup> On the narrative parallels and linguistic similarities between the Life of St. Eustace and the Book of Job, see Heffernan, *ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>70</sup> The artworks commissioned specifically for San Giobbe are Lombardo's relief and Bellini's *San Giobbe Altarpiece*, both featuring St. Francis and Job. For an interpretation of the legend of St. Eustace as reflecting human compassion to all living creatures, due to its Buddhist sources, and for Buddhist influence on Franciscan reverence to all forms of life, see Wilson 2009, esp. pp. 179–83, 188–91, 192. See Heffernan 1975, for another opinion, rejecting the suggestion on the Buddhist source (p. 69), yet referring to the emphasis on the motif of compassion (p. 66).

<sup>71</sup> Job, 5:23.

<sup>72</sup> Schmidt Arcangeli 1998, p. 43.

<sup>73</sup> Richardson 1979, pp. 21, 118–20; Rosand 2001, 96 ff. Goffen 1986a, esp. pp. 40–61, 138–54; Pincus 2010, pp. 245–71.

<sup>74</sup> Richardson 1979, p. 118; Goffen, *ibid.*, pp. 48, 139, 157; Rosand 2001, p. 100; for other dates in the history of Venice that were 'adapted' to the myths, see also Richardson, *ibid.*, p. 108; Goffen, *ibid.*, p. 149.

example, in the proximity between the most important church in the city, St. Mark's, and the central civilian government building, the Doge Palace.<sup>75</sup> These myths were also demonstrated in the local iconography, such as the pictorial and sculptural tradition of depicting the Madonna blessing the Doge, the secular governor of the city, upon entering his tenure.<sup>76</sup> This special connection can also be found, for example, in Giovanni Bellini's paintings where the Virgin sits beneath a canopy that was usually used by the Doge of Venice.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, the connection between the state and religion was notably demonstrated by devotion to the Virgin Mary. The number of the churches and altars dedicated to the Virgin also serve as evidence of the extent of her cult in Venice during the fifteenth century. In 1457, there were twenty churches and three hundred altars in Venice dedicated to the Madonna.<sup>78</sup> Attributes of the Virgin were ascribed to the city: it was perceived as a pure city, a "virgin" city, because it was never conquered.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, if we turn again to the local iconography, we shall find a close resemblance between the personifications of Justice, the City of Venice and the figure of Virgin Mary, all depicted as young women. More importantly, this resemblance also included the usage of the same attributes—the sword, the scroll, and the throne flanked by two lions.<sup>80</sup> David Rosand observed that the attributes of wisdom were transferred in literature to the Virgin Mary, and thus, Virgin Mary becomes the embodiment of justice and as well as wisdom, as she herself is a throne of wisdom, *Sedes Sapientiae*.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the lion next to the throne can also be read as a hint to the aspect of the self-image of the city, seeing itself as a kind of seat of wisdom. To this, one may add the possible allusion to the lion as a symbol of Venice itself, due to its patron saint, St. Mark. The throne flanked by lions was also the throne of the wisest of all kings, King Solomon. As a throne of justice, it is also a throne of wisdom.<sup>82</sup>

Therefore, the throne of Christ in Carpaccio's *Meditation* could be interpreted as alluding to the throne of Solomon, and thus as an implied reference to King David's dynasty and to Christ, who is considered as one of his descendants.<sup>83</sup> In addition, it is possible that the throne of Solomon is an indirect way of referring to the prophecy of the coming of Christ.<sup>84</sup> This idea would connect both prophecy and wisdom. One may add the fact that the lion is a traditional symbol of Judah, the tribe from which the dynasty of the kings David and Solomon—as well as Christ—came from, based on Jacob's blessing to his sons, "Judah is a lion's whelp".<sup>85</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Rosand 2001, p. 96

<sup>76</sup> Veneziano, *The Virgin Blessing the Doge*, a lunette on the tomb of the Doge Francesco Dandolo, Venice, Santa Maria Gloriosa Dei Frari. A marble relief by Pietro Lombardo: *Doge Leonardo Loredan in front of the Virgin*, Venice, Doge Palace. A painting attributed to Vittore Carpaccio, *The Virgin with SS. Christopher and John the Baptist and with the Doge Giovanni Mocenigo*, 1478–1485, oil on canvas, 9 ft. 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. × 72<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (295.9 × 184.2 cm), London, The National Gallery. Giovanni Bellini, *The Virgin blesses the Doge Agostino Barbarigo*, 1488, oil on canvas, 8 ft. 30 in. × 87<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (320 × 200 cm), Murano, *San Pietro Martire*. Jacopo Tintoretto (Italian, 1519–1594), *The Madonna with the Doge Alvoise Mocenigo and his Family*, c. 1573, oil on canvas, 85 in. × 13 ft. 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (216 × 416.6 cm), Washington, National Gallery. Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Virgin Blesses the Doge Pietro Loredan*, oil on Canvas, Venice, Doge Palace. Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Doge Nicolò da Ponte Invoking the Protection of the Virgin*, 1584, oil on canvas, Venice, Doge Palace.

<sup>77</sup> Giovanni Bellini's above-mentioned (see endnote no. 3) *San Giobbe Altarpiece*, Ca. 1445–1487, and *Sacred Allegory*. See Richardson 1979, pp. 20, 117; Goffen 1986a, pp. 156–57; Bächtmann 2008, p. 138.

<sup>78</sup> Goffen 1986a, p. 139.

<sup>79</sup> Goffen, *ibid.*, pp. 145, 149; Tenenti 1973, p. 32; Richardson 1979, pp. 2, 118 ff.

<sup>80</sup> One can see examples of this iconography in the relief *Venice*, attributed to Filippo Calendario, from the west façade of the Doge Palace, Venice; in the statue *Justice* by Bartolomeo Buon, Porta della Carta, also in the Doge Palace, Venice; in Jacobello del Fiore's *Justice with the Angels Michael and Gabriel*, 1421, oil, 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (35 × 90 cm), Venice, Galleria del'Accademia; and in *Justice* by Bonifacio dei Pitati and his studio, Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia. Also see Goffen 1986a, p. 144; Goffen 1986b, p. 64; Rosand 2001, p. 99ff.

<sup>81</sup> Rosand 2001, p. 96 ff.; Verdier 1952–1953, p. 106 ff.; Rosand 1976, p. 68, n. 74; Richardson 1979, p. 87; Goffen 1989, p. 144; Schmidt Arcangeli 1998, p. 45; Coltellacci and Lattanzi 1981, p.70.

<sup>82</sup> God gave King Solomon superior wisdom, *Kings I*, 3:13; for the Biblical description of the throne, see *Kings I*, 10:18–20.

<sup>83</sup> *Mathew*, 1:1–17; on the special link between King Solomon and the self-image of Venice, see Goffen 1986b, p. 151; Rosand 2001, pp. 96–108.

<sup>84</sup> See Hartt's analysis, Hartt 1940, p. 31.

<sup>85</sup> *Genesis*, 49: 9.

This prophecy is enhanced by the fact that the throne is ruined, which could evoke the association of the fallen Tabernacle of David, which is to be rebuilt with the coming of Christ, depicted almost invariantly in paintings describing the Adoration of the Magi, shortly after the Nativity of Christ.<sup>86</sup> Terrien notes the connection between Job and the signs prophesying the birth of Christ, including the broken roof, symbolizing the fallen tabernacle, found in one of Taddeo Gaddi's (Italian, 1290–1366) fresco in the Camposatno in Pisa.<sup>87</sup> In his writings, St. Jerome himself addresses the throne of the dynasty of David, and the person destined to sit on it—by which he means, of course, Christ.<sup>88</sup>

## 8. Conclusions

The multiple meanings of the lion in Carpaccio's *Meditation on the Passion*—among them, the lion as symbolizing the Lord resurrecting Christ; the lion as symbolizing the Divine nature of Christ; the lion as a hint to Solomon's throne—enhance the reading of the figure of Job in this painting as a prophet, prophesying the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. These multiple meanings also allow the painting to be read as a contemplation on the concept of wisdom, as expressed in the Book of Job and by the throne of the wisest king, King Solomon, as well as in the personifications of Venice.

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<sup>86</sup> *Amos*, 9:11: "In that day will I raise vp the tabernacle of Daudid, that is fallen, and close vp the breaches thereof, and I will raise vp his ruines, and I will build it as in the dayes of old"

<sup>87</sup> Terrien 1996, p. 94.

<sup>88</sup> Explaining the verse "his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly" (*Job* 40:16), which describes the mythological creature Behemoth, St. Jerome translated the Hebrew word "לִּוְיָתָן" as "loins", and explains, "Thus, the descendant of David, who, according to the promise is to sit upon his throne, is said to come from his loins" (St. Jerome 1893, Letter No. 22, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001022.htm>).

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