

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



# From Carnival to Pious City: Scenes of Urban Life in Leandro Bassano's The Months

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Volume 44, numéro 2, printemps 2021

Experiencing the Environment in the Early Modern Period: Seasons, Senses, and Health  
Saisons, sens et santé : l'expérience de l'environnement au seuil de la modernité

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082698ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37523>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Moldovan, A.-D. (2021). From Carnival to Pious City: Scenes of Urban Life in Leandro Bassano's The Months. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(2), 113–146. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37523>

Résumé de l'article

Cette étude examine l'environnement urbain dépeint par Leandro Bassano dans son cycle des douze mois, en se concentrant plus spécifiquement sur les mois de février et de mars et sur les changements iconographiques importants que ces derniers présentent par rapport à l'imagerie typique des travaux agricoles. Dans cette oeuvre, Leandro a associé le mois de février au thème du carnaval et le mois de mars à celui du carême, rompant ainsi avec l'orientation agricole qui caractérise le reste de ce calendrier, pour introduire une nouvelle division du temps obéissant à des rythmes civiques et religieux. La présente étude soutient que cette transformation de l'iconographie s'est produite de façon concomitante avec la réforme du Missel romain et avec l'émergence de la commedia dell'arte. Enfin, cet article analyse la relation dialogique qui s'esquisse entre la représentation que Leandro fait du mois de février et l'image qu'il donne du mois de mars, en se demandant ce que cette iconographie reflète plus généralement au sujet de l'expérience culturelle et saisonnière de la ville vénitienne dans le contexte post-tridentin.

# From Carnival to Pious City: Scenes of Urban Life in Leandro Bassano's *The Months*<sup>1</sup>

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*This work examines the urban environment depicted by Leandro Bassano in his cycle of the Twelve Months during February and March, and the notable iconographic shift it presents with respect to the typical imagery of farming labours. Leandro represented the themes of Carnival in February and Lent in March, breaking up this otherwise agricultural calendar to introduce the division of time according to civic and religious rhythms. It is argued that this transformation in iconography occurred at the intersection of the reformed Roman Missal and the emergence of the commedia dell'arte. Finally, this article explores what the dialogic relationship between Leandro's February and March conveys about the deeper cultural and seasonal experience of the Veneto city in the post-Tridentine context.*

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## Introduction

The English gentleman Fynes Moryson, who travelled to Italy between 1594 and 1595, declared in his journal that “In generall, the Italians are said to be mad twice in the yeere, at Shroftide (for their unspeakeable luxury in meate, wantonnesse, and all pleasures), and in Lent (for the no lesse wodenfull

1. This article is a synthesis of an extended study examined in my PhD thesis at the University of Warwick (2020), 213–81. It will be further developed in the forthcoming monograph: *Illustrating the Renaissance Year: New Perspectives on Italian Calendars*. I would like to thank Marie-Louise Lillywhite and Sara Miglietti for their insightful suggestions when preparing this manuscript. I am also grateful to Nicholas Terpstra for his constant support and encouraging feedback.

Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme 44.2, Spring / printemps 2021

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37523>

superstitions of that time).<sup>2</sup> However biased his view, Moryson's words explained the radical changes in behaviour that marked the passage of time in the Italian Renaissance city from one celebration to the next. This work endeavours to show that this juxtaposition of conduct was also depicted in one of the few well-known Italian cycles of the months dating from the end of the sixteenth century, namely the set of twelve canvases painted by Leandro Bassano, otherwise known as Leandro dal Ponte (1557–1622). Specifically, it will explore how the idiosyncratic iconography of Carnival (fig. 1) and Lent (fig. 2) integrated within the rest of the Bassano cycle, what changes it proposed with respect to the traditional imagery, and what it conveyed about the seasonal experience of the Veneto city in the post-Tridentine period as opposed to the countryside. This study recognizes the environment as the physical and cultural set of human interactions with both the natural and urban space. It ultimately aims at understanding the broader cultural implications of the seasonal urbanization of the months in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.

Leandro trained in the family workshop, led by his acclaimed father Jacopo (1510–92) in Bassano del Grappa, until 1588 when he went to Venice to join his elder brother Francesco (1549–92).<sup>3</sup> The Bassano family created two known series of the Twelve Months, both preserved in an incomplete state and exhibiting a similar iconographic program. The first was painted by Francesco around the mid-1580s and is dispersed across various institutions in Madrid.<sup>4</sup> Most probably this series is the one sent by Ferdinand I de' Medici as a diplomatic gift to the Florentine embassy in Spain in 1590.<sup>5</sup> Leandro signed the second series before 1595, and it is now held between the Kunsthistorisches Museum

2. Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell Through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sweitzerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland & Ireland*, 4 vols. (Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1907–08), vol. 3 (1908): 456. In the original edition (London: John Beale, 1617) this quotation is found in part 3, book 1, page 51.

3. Carlo Corsato, "Dai Dal Ponte ai Bassano: L'eredità di Jacopo, le botteghe dei figli e l'identità artistica di Michele Pietra, 1578–1656," *Artibus et Historiae* 37.73 (2016): 195–248.

4. Francesca Del Torre Scheuch, "Sales and Transfers of 'Months,' Leandro's Masterpiece, Revealed from Venice to the Habsburgs: The Many Voyages of a Cycle of 12 Bassanos (but One is Missing)," in *Venezialtrove 8: Almanacco della presenza veneziana nel mondo*, ed. Fabio Isman (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), 121–31, 124–25 (text in Italian: 111–20); José María Ruiz Manero, *Los Bassano en España* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 2011), 142.

5. Del Torre Scheuch, 125.

in Vienna and the Prague Castel Picture Gallery.<sup>6</sup> Based on the accounts of Carlo Ridolfi, scholars have identified Leandro's *Months* with the cycle sent by Jacopo Bassano to Emperor Rudolf II (1552–1612).<sup>7</sup> The two preserved series are in accordance with the encyclopedic style of the Bassano brothers, manifested through the borrowing of elements from different sources, from prints to previous repertoires of the workshop, and elements from Flemish artists, displayed in densely populated landscapes.



Figure 1. *February*, Leandro Bassano, *The Twelve Months*, before 1595, oil on canvas, canvas size 144.5 × 190 cm. © KHM-Museumsverband, Inv. Gemäldegalerie, 4293.

6. William R. Rearick, "The Life and Works of Jacopo dal Ponte, Called Bassano c. 1510–1592," in *Jacopo Bassano c. 1510–1592* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Beverly Louise Brown and Paola Marini (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1993), 45–171, 146–47, n. 305; Del Torre Scheuch, 123.

7. Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori Veneti e dello stato* (1648), 2nd ed. (1835; Padua: Cartallier, 1837), 147. See Rearick, 146–47, n. 305; Bernard Aikema, *Jacopo Bassano and His Public: Moralizing Pictures in an Age of Reform, c. 1535–1600*, trans. Andrew P. McCormick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 140–41; Del Torre Scheuch, 126–27.



Figure 2. *March*, Leandro Bassano, *The Twelve Months*, before 1595, oil on canvas, canvas size 145.5 × 216 cm. © KHM-Museumsverband, Inv Gemäldegalerie, 4296.

This study focuses on Leandro's paintings of *February* and *March* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, Inv. 4293 and 4296) since the respective canvases from Francesco's set were destroyed in 1915.<sup>8</sup> It also introduces an intact set of small-size replicas produced most probably in Leandro's workshop, originating from the estate of the Count of Bobrinsky, in Bogoroditsk, now in the Regional Museum of Fine Arts in Tula.<sup>9</sup>

8. Most probably, Francesco's lost Months were close to Leandro's compositions, as the *February* canvas from a set of replicas held in Murcia demonstrates. Antonio Martínez Ripoll, *Catálogo de las pinturas de la antigua Colección D'Estoup, de Murcia* (Murcia: Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, Universidad de Murcia, 1981), 101–02; Manero, 150–51.

9. M. N. Kuzina, *Тульский областной художественный музей* (1990), [artpoisk.info/article/tul\\_skiy\\_oblastnoy\\_hudozhestvennyy\\_muzei/](http://artpoisk.info/article/tul_skiy_oblastnoy_hudozhestvennyy_muzei/). Consulted on 2 April 2019. I am grateful to Maria Kolpakova for helping me in this investigation.

Parallels between Leandro's Months and northern European art have already been drawn, particularly with regards to Pieter Bruegel's Seasons.<sup>10</sup> To date, no scholarly effort has been made to integrate Bassano's paintings within the Italian iconographic tradition of calendars. This article seeks to fill this lacuna in the literature, identifying new sources and touching on the emergence of the *commedia dell'arte* in Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> It aims at taking the iconographic investigation of the Bassano canvases in a new direction by paying due attention to printed representations and showing how seasonal imagery intersected with contemporary religious and cultural changes in Italian society.

### **February and March in Leandro's series of The Months: the city as focus**

According to Rearick, the Bassano cycles of the Twelve Months gradually developed from the various series of Four Seasons created by Jacopo and Francesco from the mid-1570s onwards.<sup>12</sup> In the Seasons, the artists imagined the human relationship with the environment through land-labouring and animal husbandry. From the previous four-set canvases, The Months borrowed the layout of the composition and re-employed various motifs.<sup>13</sup> The canvases

10. Ludwig Baldass, "Les tableaux champêtres des Bassano et la peinture réaliste des Pays-Bas au XVIe siècle," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 45 (1955): 143–60; Allesandro Ballarin, "Osservazioni sui dipinti veneziani del Cinquecento nella galleria del castello di Praga," *Arte Veneta* 19 (1965): 59–82, 68–70; Stefania Mason, "Appunti per Paolo Fiammingo," *Arte Veneta* 19 (1965): 95–107; Paola Marini, "Jacopo Bassano Seen Anew," *Jacopo Bassano c. 1510–1592*, ed. Brown and Marini, 13–44, 35; Aikema, 133–37, 144; Stefania Mason, "Animali, masserizie e paesi: 'minor' pictura a Venezia nel tardo Cinquecento," in *Il Rinascimento a Venezia e la pittura del Nord ai tempi di Bellini, Dürer, Tiziano*, ed. Bernard Aikema and Beverley Louise Brown (Venice: Bompani, 1999), 558–67.

11. The term *commedia dell'arte* was first used by Goldoni in 1750. On the meaning and origin of this term, see M. A. Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte 1560–1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 18–20.

12. Rearick, 45–147, especially note 303. On the various Bassano series of Four Seasons, see Kim Suzanne Ellis, "'Seasonal Allegory with Adam and Eve,' by Leandro Bassano" (MA diss., University of Auckland, 1999), and Carlo Corsato, "Production and Reproduction in the Workshop of Jacopo Bassano: Four Matrices for the Four Seasons in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna," *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien* 12 (2010): 40–53.

13. See for example the canvases of *Summer* and *Autumn* in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (ca. 1580, oil on canvas, Gemäldegalerie, Inv. 4287 and 4289).

of *February* and *March* are the only ones that are not elaborations of the rural social and natural order depicted in the *Seasons*. Instead of rendering typical countryside scenes—e.g., weather phenomena; agricultural production; peasants, bailiffs, and wealthy landowners hunting or enjoying the fruits of their lands—*February* and *March* rather concentrate on figures and activities that are characteristic of the urban realm, such as the consumption and selling of foods.<sup>14</sup>

Parallel to the development of a taste for pastoral themes, the second half of the sixteenth century witnessed a growing interest in documenting the city, for example through books of costumes like those famously composed by Cesare Vecellio (1590).<sup>15</sup> As quoted at the beginning of this article, travellers also offer detailed accounts of the city and its marketplace—as a hub for social and economic activities and for civic and religious celebrations, but also as a place of moral corruption, of charlatans, comedians, and beggars.<sup>16</sup> Leandro's paintings document this diversity of the city square—the ultimate symbol of the urban environment—during its seasonal transfiguration from Carnival to Lent.

The Carnival season generally lasted from about Saint Stephen's Day, on 26 December, until Ash Wednesday. It was a period of liberation before the forty days of Lenten rigour.<sup>17</sup> In Venice, masquerades, fights, and bull chases, held especially on "Fat Tuesday," released the social tensions that had been accumulating over the year and facilitated the renewal of the political and

14. Tom Nichols noticed the difference between the early works of the Bassano, which focus on scenes of farm labour, and later developments by Jacopo's sons, in "Jacopo Bassano, Regionalism, and Rural Painting," *Oxford Art Journal* 41.2 (2018): 147–70, 163–67, dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kcy010.

15. Cesare Vecellio, *De gli habitati antichi, et moderni di diverse parti del mondo* (Venice: Damiano Zenaro, 1590).

16. Thomas Coryat, *Crudities* (1611), 2 vols. (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905), 1:411–12 [1611 ed., 274–75]. See also Evelyn Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400–1600* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 55–61.

17. On Carnival, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (1965; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 97–123; Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 158–61, dx.doi.org/10.1515/9780691201351, and *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (1997; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 89–124; Welch, 108–09.

religious hierarchy. For the rich, this was a period of weddings, banquets, and theatrical performances, of ostentatious foods and fashions.

In the scene of *February*, Leandro illustrated an episode of Carnival taking place in an imaginary setting composed of a pastiche of ruins, obelisks, and structures evocative of the perspectival theatrical sceneries developed during the sixteenth century, chiefly by Sebastiano Serlio (fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> Relying upon Vitruvius's work, Serlio divided the stage of the classical theatre into three categories, offering indications accompanied by woodcuts for the construction of each type: comic, tragic, and satirical. While the satirical stage showcased a rural scenery, the first two genres used instead urban settings. For the comic scene, Serlio recommended private dwellings of "*cittadini*, lawyers, merchants, 'city parasites' and other similar people," constructed with windows and modern porticoes, a bawdy house, a great inn, and a church.<sup>19</sup> He advised that the houses of the tragedy should be instead those of lords and kings, since the respective plays concern the actions and destinies of great personages.<sup>20</sup> The tragedy woodcut shows columns, obelisks, and a triumphal arch surmounted by statues closing the scene in the background, just like in the *February* canvas (fig. 1). It appears that Leandro sought to convey the inversion of established values and conventions by placing Serlio's "professional parasites" into a noble set.<sup>21</sup> In this universal Veneto city, the artist recreated the atmosphere of Carnival celebrations as a theatre of human behaviours, with the figures grouped around three main activities.

The greeting gesture of the unmistakable Pantalone standing on a semi-circular platform, on the left side of the foreground, invites the viewer into the depicted scene. His presence, together with that of his fellow actors of the *commedia dell'arte*, differentiates this painting from previous representations of Carnival, as will be discussed in the second part of this article. The professional comedy emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century and was born at

18. On the relationship between theatre and the Bassano, see Cecil Gould, "Sebastiano Serlio and Venetian Painting," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 25.1/2 (1962): 56–64, dx.doi.org/10.2307/750541; Paolo Berdini, *The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8; Ellis, 22–23.

19. Sebastiano Serlio, *Libro primo [-quinto] d'architettura* (Venice: Francesco De Franceschi and Johann Criegher, 1566) [first: Paris, 1545], fol. 45v.

20. Serlio, fol. 46v.

21. Serlio, fol. 45v.



the crossroads between literary societies and street performers.<sup>22</sup> Its actors were organized in itinerant troupes which held paid performances in both public and private contexts. They improvised their scenarios around a framework of stock plots, generally borrowed from erudite comedy. In his canvas, Leandro depicted a scene of the typical plot of *gli innamorati*, featuring a courtesan, her lover, and Pantalone. The avaricious old merchant from Venice bears the typical mask covering half of his face, with the hooked nose and the white-pointed beard. He wears a long cloak and a bonnet, both of black colour, and underneath, tight-fitting red hose with the prominent padded codpiece, betraying his comic intention to conceal his real age and show off his virility.

From the street, the spectator steps into the right side of the foreground, where Leandro depicted the interior of a kitchen, considering the dishes and cooper pails displayed above the figure of a woman plucking a hen over a green tablecloth. The artist illustrated an impressive array of foods and domestic tools, part of the rich rustic vocabulary of the Bassano.<sup>23</sup> The table showcases plates of ravioli—a dish cited in the carnivalesque popular writings of Cesare Croce (1550–1609).<sup>24</sup> Hens, ducks, quails, hazel grouse, doves, and even a turkey inhabit the space of the kitchen, some still waiting to be butchered in preparation for the Carnival meal.<sup>25</sup> Next to the table, a masked reveller, who

22. On the *commedia dell'arte*, see Pierre Louis Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy: The Improvisation, Scenarios, Lives, Attributes, Portraits, and Masks of the Illustrious Characters of the Commedia dell'Arte*, trans. Randolph T. Weaver (1929; New York: Dover, 1966); M. A. Katritzky, "Italian Comedians in Renaissance Prints," *Print Quarterly* 4.3 (1987): 236–54; M. A. Katritzky, "A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte 1560–1562: With Special Reference to Visual Records," 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1995); Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell'Arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Christopher Cairns, ed., *The Commedia dell'arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo*, conference proceedings (Lewiston: Mellen, 1989). Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*.

23. Raffaello Borghini described Jacopo's naturalistic portrayal of humble realities, in *Il riposo* (1584), ed. and trans. Lloyd H. Ellis Jr. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 268.

24. Giulio Cesare Croce, *La Solenne et trionfante entrata dello squaquarattissimo, e sloffeggiantissimo signor Carnevale in questa città* (Bologna: Bartolomeo Cochi, 1618), sigs A5r–v.

25. Known in Renaissance Italy as *gallo d'india*, the turkey was first brought to Rome from the Americas in the second decade of the sixteenth century, and by the 1540s it was also introduced in Northern Italy. Sabine Eiche, *Presenting the Turkey: The Fabulous Story of a Flamboyant and Flavourful Bird* (Florence: Centro Di, 2004); Jacopo De Grossi Mazzorin and Ilaria Epifani, "Introduzione e diffusione in Italia di animali esotici dal Nuovo Mondo: Il caso del tacchino (*Meleagris gallopavo* L.)," in *L'Idomeneo* 20 (2015): 55–74.

left his companions performing in the street, drinks wine from a canteen to wash down his lavish feast.

The walls of the kitchen metamorphize into ruins which open into a market square in the middle-ground of the canvas. Here, the third group of figures is engaged in a bull chase, known otherwise as *caccia al toro*. What might appear to the modern eye as gruesome entertainment was once a favourite carnival enjoyment of Venetians, as described in the diaries of the travellers who visited Venice until 1802, the year in which it was conclusively banned.<sup>26</sup> Leandro painted the moment when two beasts were brought on the stage, each led by its horns with a long rope held by *tiradori*, who volunteered from among butchers, gondoliers, and shop apprentices. During the fight, dogs trained to bite the bull's ears were set against the beast, while the *tiradori* helped it escape the attack by loosening or tightening the cord. Their skills resided in making it perform spectacular falls, called *molàe*. After three or four *molàe*, the beasts were led to the slaughterhouse.

The bull represented by Leandro is not merely the animal slaughtered to be consumed by humans—a sacrifice interpreted by Raymond Williams, in his seminal study on the country house poems of seventeenth-century England, as “the providence of Nature.”<sup>27</sup> Rather than a natural act, the killing of the bull—an indispensable help in the rural life, seen transporting corn in June and leading the plough in October<sup>28</sup>—becomes a cultural performance “symbolizing the city's fertility” in the inversed order of the carnivalesque celebrations.<sup>29</sup> As Bakhtin argued, the beast embodying the old world had to be abused and derided so that its death would give birth to the new year.<sup>30</sup>

26. Marino Sanuto, *I diarii: 1496–1533*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin et al., 58 vols. (Venice: F. Visentini, 1879–1903), 44:171 (1895); 46:611 (1897); 49:422 (1897); 54:295 (1899). See also Michele Battaglia, *Cicalata sulle cacce di tori veneziani* (Venice: Tipografia G. B. Merlo, 1844), 30–31. On the *caccia al toro*, see Giuseppe Tassini, *Feste, spettacoli, divertimenti, e piaceri degli antichi Veneziani*, 2nd ed. (Venice: Filippi, 1961), 64–69; Danilo Reato, *Storia del Carnevale di Venezia* (Venice: Amministrazione della provincia di Venezia, Assessorato alla cultura, 1988), 35–41; Robert C. Davids, “The Trouble with Bulls: The Cacce dei Tori in Early Modern Venice,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 29 (1996): 275–290.

27. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 29–30.

28. Leandro Bassano, *June*, The Twelve Months, before 1595, oil on canvas, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Inv. Gemäldegalerie, 4294, canvas size 145 × 216 cm; in the same set, *October*, Prague Castle, Picture Gallery, Inv. č. O 21, canvas size 146 × 216.7 cm.

29. Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 178; Bakhtin, 202.

30. Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 178; Bakhtin, 202.

Leandro further developed the opposition between rural and urban in the canvas of *March*, when the typical occupation of pruning the vine is relegated to the background, and the church, once isolated outside the walls of the city, becomes the centre of attention (fig. 2). The artist depicted a procession of men and women going to attend the Lenten Mass, with an attentive eye at documenting an urban social diversity that is reminiscent of the above-mentioned costume books. The left side of the canvas shows two pages entering the church, figures dear to the imagery of the father Jacopo, while a noble lady with her retinue is arriving from the opposite side of the painting. Indeed, Vecellio depicted noblewomen going to the Lenten service dressed in a dark colour, with kerchiefs and little ornaments. He also illustrated the damsels who accompanied their mistress to church, since they were deemed pure and trustworthy.<sup>31</sup>

The transformation in the atmosphere of the city from February to March is well conveyed by Moryson's words. The Englishman described the immoral conduct of Italians during Carnival, the opulence of food and wine and the high number of courtesans. He noted the sudden change occurring on Ash Wednesday, when people sprinkle their foreheads with ashes and "with sadd looks flocke to the Churches, as if it were in their power to repent truly at pleasure upon an howers warning."<sup>32</sup> Italians fasted, confessed, and gave alms, as suggested by the presence of the beggar painted by Leandro on the stairs of the church: a figure pertaining to the imagery of the market square, often depicted in Jacopo's religious paintings.<sup>33</sup>

The shift from the excess of Carnival to the abstinence of March is also mirrored in the products of the Lenten market. Leandro painted on the left side of the foreground an old woman selling garlic, spring onions, parsnips, and spinach, and on the right, a fish stall. Fish was a type of food reserved for the

31. Vecellio, fols. 132v, 148v.

32. Moryson (14 June 1626), part 4, book 3: "Of Italy Touching Religion," fols. 396r–397r, unpublished notes transcribed in Graham David Kew, "Shakespeare's Europe Revisited: The Unpublished Itinerary of Fynes Moryson (1566–1630)," 4 vols. (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1995), 3:1044–46. The manuscript of part 4 of Moryson's itinerary is held at Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MSS 94.

33. For example, in Jacopo Bassano, *Lazarus and the Rich Man*, ca. 1554, oil on canvas, Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Inv. 39.68. M. Elisa Avagnina, in *Jacopo Bassano c. 1510–1592*, ed. Brown and Marini, cat. 24: 308–10. On the figure of the beggar, see Tom Nichols, *The Art of Poverty: Irony and Ideal in Sixteenth-Century Beggar Imagery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

city, and the *pescherie* in the lagoon, as well as the direct connection with the Adriatic Sea through the river Brenta, supplied the Venetian market and the close cities in the *terraferma* with a large variety, a plentifulness attested by the descriptions of Sanuto and Moryson, and celebrated by Leandro.<sup>34</sup>

### The Bassano and the popular traditions of Carnival and Lent

The contrast between Carnival in February and Lent in March reminds one of the battles between the two feasts, such as the one famously depicted by Bruegel in 1559, showing the dispute between the hordes of fat Carnival and gaunt Lent, both armed with their characteristic foodstuff.<sup>35</sup> Such pageant fights were widespread across Western Europe and had a rich visual and textual counterpart.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Leandro likely drew upon the imagery tradition accompanying the popular carnivalesque writings in his depiction of the diet relative to February and March.<sup>37</sup> An example is shown in the vignettes decorating the *Contrasto di Carnesciale e della Quaresima* published around

34. Sanuto, *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae ovvero la città di Venetia (1493–1530)*, ed. Angela Caracciolo Aricò (Milan: Cisalpino-La Goliardica, 1930), 30–31; Moryson, vol. 4 (Glasgow, 1907): 87–88. On the consumption and selling of fish during the sixteenth century, see Welch, 74, 103; Maria Lucia De Nicolò, *Il Mediterraneo nel Cinquecento fra antiche e nuove maniere di pescare* (Pesaro: Museo della Marineria Washington Patrignani, 2011); Allen J. Grieco, “Fiordiano Malatesta da Rimini and the Ichthyological Treatises of the Mid-Sixteenth Century,” in *Food, Social Politics and the Order of Nature in Renaissance Italy* (Florence: Villa I Tatti / Milan: Officina Libraria, 2019), 144–55.

35. On Bruegel’s painting, see Claude Gaignebet, “Le combat de Carnaval et de Carême de P. Bruegel (1559),” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 27.2 (1972): 313–45, dx.doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1972.422502; Samuel Kinser, “Presentation and Representation: Carnival at Nuremberg, 1450–1550,” *Representations* 13 (1986): 1–41, 13–16, 30, dx.doi.org/10.2307/2928492; Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 89–92.

36. Luigi Manzoni, *Libro di Carnevale dei secoli XV e XVI* (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1881); Martine Grinberg and Sam Kinser, “Les combats de Carnaval et de Carême. Trajets d’une métaphore,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 38.1 (1983): 65–98, dx.doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1983.411039; Riccardo Pacciani, “Gli ‘edifici’ di carta. Le feste del Carnevale a Firenze da stampe e disegni fra XV e XVI secolo,” in *Il Carnevale: Dalla tradizione arcaica alla traduzione colta del Rinascimento*, conference proceedings, ed. M. Chiabò and F. Doglio (Viterbo: Centro studi sul teatro medioevale e rinascimentale, 1990), 409–28; Carlo Avilio, “Naturalism and the Picaresque in Jusepe De Ribera’s Work,” 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2016), 1:153–55.

37. Avilio, 409–28.

1494 in Florence and reprinted several times in sixteenth-century Venice.<sup>38</sup> Here one finds Carnival in the guise of a glutton eating and drinking at a table, while an attendant is roasting chicken in a kitchen filled with plucked poultry hanging from the walls (fig. 3). The fact that Leandro also illustrated a kitchen abundant with poultry and a figure drinking wine in February demonstrates the affinity of the canvas with this popular carnivalesque imagery (fig. 1).



Figure 3. Carnival, *Contrasto di Carnesciale e della Quaresima* (Florence: Lorenzo Morgiani and Johann Petri, ca. 1492–95), 4°, woodcut. ©British Library Board, IA.27918, sig. a1r (detail).

38. *Contrasto di Carnesciale et della Quaresima* (Florence: Lorenzo Morgiani and Johann Petri, ca. 1492–95), 4°. ISTC ic00874000; GW M: 7460; USTC 999811. Copy in London, British Library, IA.27918. *El contrasto di Carnesciale & la Quaresima* (Venice: 1520), 4°. USTC 815143. Copy in the British Library, C.20.c.22.(21.). *El contrasto di Carnesciale & la Quaresima* (Venice: 1525?), 4°. USTC 820261. Copy in the British Library, C.57.l.7.(48.).



Figure 4. Lent, *Contrasto di Carnesciale e della Quaresima* (Florence: Lorenzo Morgiani and Johann Petri, ca. 1492–95), 4°, woodcut. ©British Library Board, IA.27918, sig. a8v (detail).

The luxurious foods of February are replaced by the mundane onions and garlic of March, when austerity takes the place of Carnival's wantonness and pleasures. Returning to the Florentine *Contrasto*, one finds the same correspondence between the month of March in Leandro and the woodcut representing Lent (fig. 4). Both images depict on the right the fish market; on the left, women selling products associated with Lenten restraint and fasting (fig. 2).<sup>39</sup> Already by the fourteenth century, Antonio Pucci evoked this shift in the foodstuff of

39. On Carnival and Lenten fare, see Franco Cazzola, "La città e il pane: Produzioni agricole e consumi alimentari a Ferrara tra medioevo ed età moderna," in *A tavola con il Principe. Materiali per una mostra su alimentazione e cultura nella Ferrara degli Estensi*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Jadranka Bentini et al. (Ferrara: Gabriele Corbo, 1988), 21–37, 31–33; Victoria Avery and Melissa Calaresu, ed., *Feast & Fast: The Art of Food in Europe, 1500–1800*, exhibition catalogue (London and Cambridge: PWP / University of Cambridge, The Fitzwilliam Museum, 2019), 199–209; Allen J. Grieco, "Vegetable Diets, Hermits and

the Mercato Vecchio in Florence: “for carnival capons and chickens / depart from their clods, / to make themselves at home in the city. / For Lent then they are garlic, onions / and parsnips and no more meat, / as the Holy Church pleases and requires.”<sup>40</sup> As Evelyn Welch noticed, the liturgical calendar was as important in determining the availability of foodstuff in urban markets as were the natural seasons.<sup>41</sup> The products depicted by Leandro echo the variations of sacred and profane time in the city, a space found at the intersection of natural and cultural influences.

The canvases of *February* and *March* illustrate thus a double set of contrasts: one between the activities and diets specific to Carnival and Lent, and a second one between the cycles, foods, and figures featuring in the respective city and rural environments. These latter two ecosystems do not exclude each other, since the countryside never entirely disappears from the scene, but it persists in the background as a point of opposition as well as of confluence.<sup>42</sup> The profile of the white peaks that enclose each painting unifies *February* and *March* with the rest of the cycle and suggests that the predominant rural mountainscape of Bassano del Grappa remained a reference for Leandro after he departed for Venice.<sup>43</sup> The killing of the bull and the pruning of the vine remind one of the interdependences between the urban space and the surrounding countryside, manifested in physical, climatic, and economic terms. This is all the more relevant when considering that one of the main patrons of the Bassano were

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Melancholy in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy,” in *Food, Social Politics and the Order of Nature*, 243–62, 247–49.

40. Antonio Pucci, “Proprietà di Mercato Vecchio” (XIV secolo), in *Raccolta di rime antiche toscane*, ed. Pietro Notarbartolo, 4 vols. (Palermo: Tip. di G. Assenzio, 1817), 3:385–11, 309: “Per carnasciale capponi e galline, / partendosi dal viver tra le zolle, / vengono a farsi a’ cittadin vicine. / Di quaresima poi agli e cipolle, / e pastinache sonvi, e non più carne, / siccom’a santa Chiesa piacque e volle” (my translation). Welch, 109.

41. Welch, 107.

42. The contrast between countryside and city permeated early modern medical thought: see Sandra Cavallo and Tessa Storey, *Healthy Living in Late Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83–89, dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199678136.001.0001; Sandra Cavallo, “Health, Air and Material Culture in the Early Modern Italian Domestic Environment,” *Social History of Medicine* 29.4 (2016): 695–716, dx.doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkw029; Sara Miglietti and John Morgan, “Introduction: Ruling Climates in the Early Modern World,” in *Governing the Environment in the Early Modern World: Theory and Practice*, ed. Miglietti and Morgan (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2017), 1–21.

43. Ellis, 17–18.

rich Venetian patricians, who increasingly in the mid-sixteenth century reorientated their business activities towards the *terraferma*, building villas on the riverbanks of the Naviglio del Brenta both as agricultural farms and summer retreats.<sup>44</sup>

The examination of the economic, cultural, and social environment depicted by Leandro in the canvases of *February* and *March* raises important questions. What determined the urbanization of the imagery? Where did this imagery originate, and what does it say about the way seasons were understood and symbolized in sixteenth-century Italy?

### **The iconography of Carnival and Lent in cycles of The Months before and after Bassano**

Prior to the Bassano series, one can find references to either Carnival or Lent in some Italian cycles. The theme of the courtly dance appears during February in the calendars of the *Borromeo* and the *Torriani Hours*, both decorated in the last quarter of fifteen-century Milan (fig. 5).<sup>45</sup> In both examples, a peasant is digging the soil in the garden outside the ballroom, alluding to the traditional agricultural activities taking place in February as well as to the interlocking of urban and rural experiences of the seasons. The spreading of manure and the commencement of dances are mentioned also in the Latin inscription at the base of the tapestry dedicated to February, from the series designed by Bramantino for Gian Giacomo Trivulzio at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>46</sup> While the main scene of February possibly refers to the Roman Lupercalia, it is the tapestry of January which shows the actual street celebrations.<sup>47</sup>

44. Ellis, 33; Cavallo, "Health, Air and Material Culture"; Nichols, "Jacopo Bassano," 153.

45. *Borromeo Book of Hours*, 1471, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MSS S.P.42, fol. 3r; *Torriani Book of Hours*, 1495–1500, Chantilly, Musée Condé, MSS 83/1385, fol. 3r. On the calendar illustrations of the two manuscripts, see Monica Visioli, "L'iconografia dei mesi nei calendari lombardi del Quattrocento," in *Il Libro d'Ore Torriani*, commentary volume, ed. Pier Luigi Mulas (Modena: Panini, 2009), 85–122.

46. *February*, Benedetto da Milano and Bartolomeo Suardi (il Bramantino), *Trivulzio Tapestries*, Vigevano, 1501–09, silk and wool, Milan, Castello Sforzesco, Inv. 30–39, 28–29. Nello Forti Grazzini, *Gli arazzi dei Mesi Trivulzio: Il committente, l'iconografia* (Milan: Comune di Milano, Ripartizione cultura e spettacolo, 1982), 52–54; Giovanni Agosti and Jacopo Stoppa, *I mesi del Bramantino* (Milan: Officina Libraria, 2012), 92–99.

47. *January*, *Trivulzio Tapestries*, Castello Sforzesco, Milan, Inv. 30–39, 28–29. Agosti and Stoppa, 86–91; Forti Grazzini, 50–52.





Figure 5. *February*, Cristoforo de Predis, *Borromeo Book of Hours*, Milan, ca. 1471. ©Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS S.P.42, fol. 3r.

The advent of professional comedians in the second half of the sixteenth century transformed the scene of Carnival, as it was presented for example by Bramantino. Little pictorial evidence of this change, however, is found in the cycles of the months preceding the Bassano family. All the known examples were depicted either by northern European painters, or by Italians in close connection with the latter. A Flemish artist who arrived in Venice around 1573 and was associated with the representation of stock characters is Lodewijk Toeput, Italianized as Ludovico Pozzoserrato (ca. 1550–1605).<sup>48</sup> Luigi Menegazzi noted the importance of Leandro for Toeput's work, underlining the collaboration between the two.<sup>49</sup> Given these contacts, Bernard Aikema hypothesized that Leandro could have been inspired by the Flemish artist to incorporate the Carnival in his series of the Months.<sup>50</sup> As will be shown, although Leandro may have elaborated on certain motifs from Toeput's works, the overall iconographic program of his Months originated from another source. Moreover, one must consider the entire corpus of paintings by the Bassano family illustrating the *commedia dell'arte*, which included among the sets of Months—now mostly in Vienna, Madrid, and Tula—a *Carnival* held in Potsdam attributed to Leandro (Bildergalerie in Sanssouci).<sup>51</sup> In fact, Katritzky has shown that these paintings often served as models for Toeput's own designs.<sup>52</sup>

Katritzky has tentatively attributed to Toeput a set of the Twelve Months held in the sacristy of Lima's cathedral, traditionally assigned to the Bassano School.<sup>53</sup> The Lima Months display a strong Bassanesque language and are stylistically far from the cycle in the Villa Chiericati Longa di Schiavon in Vicenza, around 1585–90, where Toeput was influenced by Veronese's

48. M. A. Katritzky, "Lodewijk Toeput: Some Pictures Related to the 'Commedia dell'Arte,'" *Renaissance Studies*, 1.1 (1987): 71–125.

49. Luigi Menegazzi, "Ludovico Toeput (il Pozzoserrato)," *Saggi e Memorie di storia dell'arte* 1 (1957): 167–223.

50. Aikema, 142.

51. On the Potsdam *Carnival*: Katritzky, "A Study," 146–47.

52. Katritzky, "Lodewijk Toeput," 88–89.

53. Katritzky, "Lodewijk Toeput," 86–88; Katritzky, "A Study," 146–48. The Lima Months were part of Melchor de Liñán y Cisnero's collection, archbishop of Lima (1676), viceroy of Peru (1678–80), and a Jesuit supporter. Guillermo Lohmann Villena et al., *La Basílica Catedral de Lima* (Lima: Banco de Crédito, 2004), 253–63.

experience in Villa Barbaro.<sup>54</sup> Contrary to Leandro's canvas, the comedy masks occur in both the Lima Months and Villa Chiericati during January, set in vast panoramas, with the zodiac signs represented in small roundels at the top of each scene. Unlike in Leandro, the masked figures attributed to Toeput move away from the urban space towards an uncultivated nature, to suggest their itinerant character.

Following Leandro's *February*, the masks of the *commedia dell'arte* started to appear with more frequency in cycles of the months. Antonio Tempesta (1555–1630), who trained in Florence under Jan Van der Straet, illustrated their performance in his series of prints.<sup>55</sup> In *February*, Tempesta depicted the view of a square with Zanni and other carnival revellers. Even more significant is the copy of this series made by Jan Sadeler I (1550, Brussels–1600, Venice), with the addition of lettering, which reproduces verses describing occupations, found for the first time in a broadsheet calendar printed in Venice by Bernardino Vitali between 1501 and 1503.<sup>56</sup> These are mostly unchanged except for *February*, where Sadeler replaced the original couplets mentioning the fertilization of the soil and the breaking of the ice with "I am February, who fattens the soil, / And with Carnival swiftly I pass every hour."<sup>57</sup> Such variation indicates a wider diffusion of the iconographic shift from the typical agricultural labours. However, March does not replicate Leandro's Lenten theme, and both the broadsheet and Sadeler recommend the pruning of the vine for this month.

Two Italian calendars illustrate the Lenten season during March, with figures praying or going to church, both dated to fifteenth-century Tuscany and included in breviaries related to conventual contexts. The first is the *Breviarium fratrum minorum* decorated by Sano di Pietro for the Clarissan nuns of Santa

54. Mason, "Animali, masserizie e paesi," 565–67.

55. On Tempesta's series, see Fabia Borroni, "Le due serie dei Mesi di Antonio Tempesta in rapporto all'iconografia e all'arte," *La Bibliofilia* 53 (1951): 126–47. On the *February* print, see Katritzky, "A Study," 83–86 and Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 121–22.

56. *Lega contro il turco (recto) Calendario perpetuo, lunario, feste (verso)* (Venice: Bernardino Vitali, 1501/03), f<sup>o</sup>, 1 fol. ([2] p.). A copy is found at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, Inv. VEAE145200. On this calendar, see Victor Masséna Essling, *Les livres à figures vénitiens de la fin du XVe siècle et du commencement di XVIe*, 3 parts in 6 vols. (Florence and Paris: L. S. Olschki / H. Leclerc, 1907–14), part 1, vol. 1 (1908): 115–17, n. 1.

57. "Febraro io son, che il terreno ingrasso, / E con il Carnaval presto ogn'hor passo." *February*, published by Jan Sadeler I, after Antonio Tempesta, 1572–1600, engraving, London, British Museum, Inv. 1874,0613.2687 (my translation).

Chiara in Siena, around 1460.<sup>58</sup> The scene dedicated to the month of March depicts the agricultural occupation of hoeing the vineyard side by side with nuns kneeling in prayer and a basket filled with fish, to suggest Lenten fasting and prayer.<sup>59</sup> A reference to Lent is found in the Breviary for the Vallombrosa Rite, created in the last quarter of the fifteenth century and originating from the abbey of San Salvo, in the diocese of Florence.<sup>60</sup> Here, the reader is invited to emulate the pious conduct of the men and women going to church. None of these cycles represents both Carnival and Lent as celebrations taking place in consecutive months and so the iconographic sources of the Bassano series must be further investigated.

### **The imagery pattern of February and March in the Venetian *Missalia Romana* before Leandro's series**

A fruitful line of inquiry has been to compare Leandro's series with the calendars included in the *Missalia Romana* printed in sixteenth-century Venice. The missal is a liturgical book containing the texts and songs necessary for the celebration of the Mass.<sup>61</sup> It opens with a calendar, which includes the religious feasts of the year and sometimes vignettes illustrating the occupations of the months. A systematic approach to the imagery program of the calendars found

58. *Breviarium fratrum minorum*, ca. 1460, Siena, Biblioteca Comunale, MSS X.IV.2, fol. 2r. Alessandro Guidotti, "Agricoltura e vita agricola nell'arte Toscana del Tre e Quattrocento (di alcune miniature fiorentine e senesi del XV secolo)," in *Civiltà ed economia agricola in Toscana nei secoli XIII–XV: Problemi della vita delle campagne nel Tardo Medioevo*, conference proceedings (Pistoia: Presso la sede del Centro, 1981), 53–82, 69–70, 76; Raffaele Argenziano, "L'iconografia del Breviarium Fratrum Minorum miniato da Sano di Pietro per il convento di santa Chiara di Siena (Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, MSS X.IV.2)," in *Le immagini del francescanesimo*, conference proceedings (Spoleto: Fondazione CISAM, 2009), 59–90.

59. Guidotti, 73–74.

60. Breviary, Use of Vallombrosa, last quarter of the fifteenth century, London, British Library, MSS Egerton 2973, fol. 4r. *British Museum Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts 1916–1920* (London: British Museum, 1933), 307–08.

61. Herbert Thurston, "Missal," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference, on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline and History of the Catholic Church*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al., 16 vols. (London: Caxton; New York: Robert Appleton, 1907–22), vol. 10 (1913): 354–57. For a bibliography on the missal, see F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, ed., "Missal," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. 3rd rev. (1957; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1099.

in the missals of Roman Rite places Leandro's cycle in a wider iconographic and cultural context.<sup>62</sup> Through the charting of 164 of around 225 known editions printed in Venice between 1477—the year when Alvisius de Siliprandis issued the first surviving Roman Missal—and 1588, this study traces an iconographic shift analogous to that found in the Bassano Months.<sup>63</sup>

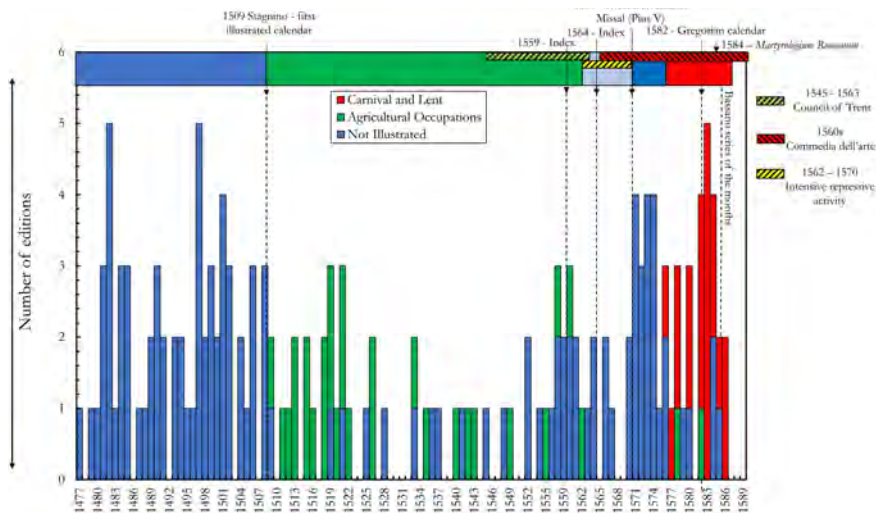


Figure 6. *Missalia Romana*, Venice, 1477–1589. Patterns of February and March.

62. The reason for such a selection stands in the fact that the *Missalia Romana* were constantly published in a high number of editions during sixteenth-century Venice. On the missal for the Roman rite, see Josef Andreas Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origin and Development (Missarum sollemnia)*, trans. Francis A. Brunner, 2 vols. (1949; Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2012).

63. A predominantly religious iconography replaced the pattern of Carnival and Lent in 1589. This later imagery goes beyond the scope of the present study. A complete list of the *Missalia Romana* with the printing history included in figs. 6 and 9 is presented in Anca-Delia Moldovan, "Illustrating the Year: The Calendar in Northern Italy during the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2020), 1:287–97 (see note 1, above). The primary reference for this database was Victor Masséna Essling, *Les missels imprimés à Venise de 1481 à 1600* (Paris: J. Rothschild, 1896). The latter was corroborated with established databases, namely the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC), Censimento nazionale delle edizioni italiane del XVI secolo (Edit16), the Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC), and the *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in Italy and of Italian Books Printed in Other Countries from 1465 to 1600 Now in the British Library*, 2nd ed. (1958; London: British Library, 1986), 383–84.

An analysis of the missals printed before 1570 has identified five prototypes, all following the pattern that shows in February the spreading of manure and the resumption of the work in the field, and in March, the pruning of the vine (figs. 7–8).<sup>64</sup> Figure 6 classifies the Venetian *Missalia Romana* into three main categories. The blue-coloured bars represent the editions which include calendars not illustrated. The iconographic pattern showing the fertilization of the soil in February and the pruning in March is represented by green bars. The red bars chart calendars presenting an iconography still to be discussed.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 7. *February*, in *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Bernardino Stagnino, 3 July 1509), 4°, woodcut. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, F150.c.2.11, sig. \*2v (detail).

64. By “prototype” is meant a cycle or a group of cycles of the months sharing a specific design; by “pattern,” a prototype or a group of prototypes that can be of distinct designs but that have in common the same theme for all twelve occupations of the year (e.g., they all depict the warming up by the fire in January, the fertilization in February, the pruning in March, and so on).

65. From the 164 editions examined, 115 do not have an illustrated calendar, compared to forty-nine, which include vignettes showing occupations of the months of one sort or another. These parameters vary and in certain periods the number of missals with illustrated calendars surpasses those without woodcuts.



Figure 8. *March*, in *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Bernardino Stagnino, 3 July 1509), 4<sup>o</sup>, detail of woodcut. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, F150.c.2.11, sig. \*3r (detail).

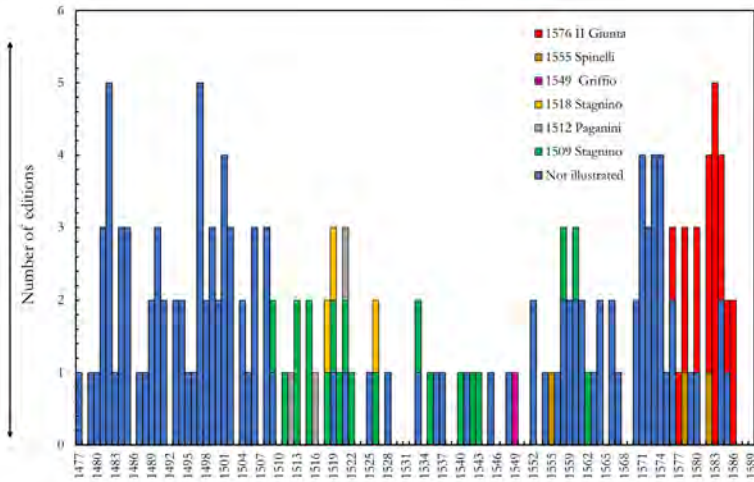


Figure 9. *Missalia Romana*, Venice, 1477–1589. Prototypes of *February* and *March*.

Figure 9 presents the data with the occurrence of all the five prototypes. It shows that the most recurrent images derived from the initial woodcuts used in 1509 by Stagnino, which were employed, either through copies or recycled woodblocks, in twenty of the editions examined between 1509 and 1562 (figs.

7–8).<sup>66</sup> The second prototype appeared in the Missal printed for Paganini in 1512, and was replicated in three editions until 1521.<sup>67</sup> Stagnino introduced prototype 3 in 1518, used in three editions of small format.<sup>68</sup> An edition printed in 1549 by Giovanni I Griffio used the prototype 4.<sup>69</sup> Finally, prototype 5 was encountered in the Missal printed by the brothers Spinelli in 1555, and was not used again until twenty-three years later.<sup>70</sup> The five prototypes present remarkable iconographic similarities that are manifested both in the choice of the occupations and in the recurrence of elements of design, such as the motif of the manure wagon depicted in *February* (fig. 7). This analysis raises the hypothesis of a common archetype and shows that until the mid-sixteenth-century, parallel prototypes following the same iconographic pattern of the months circulated in Italian print.

A considerable decrease in illustration featured the period after the mid-sixteenth century, when out of the twenty-two examined editions printed between 1550 and 1567, only four include woodcuts showing occupations.<sup>71</sup> After 1562, no missal with an illustrated calendar was issued for over a decade, and no edition survived for the years 1568 and 1569. The decline in the use of cycles of the months in printed missals coincided with changes in the cultural and religious climate following the Council of Trent (1545–63).<sup>72</sup>

66. Over 67 percent of the total compositions follow the pattern of manuring in February and pruning in March.

67. *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Giacomo Penzio, for Alessandro Paganini, 16 September 1512), 4°. Edit16 CNCE 11515; USTC 819852.

68. *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Bernardino Stagnino, 6 February 1518), 8°. Edit16 CNCE 11524; USTC 819854.

69. *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Giovanni I Griffio, 1549), 4°. Edit16 CNCE 11571; USTC 820381.

70. *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Andrea and Giacomo Spinelli, November 1555), f°. Edit16 CNCE 11578; USTC 820449.

71. Spinelli, *Missale Romanum*; *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Girolamo Scoto, 1558), 4°. Edit16 CNCE 11582; USTC 820473. *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Girolamo Scoto, 1560), f°. Edit16 CNCE 11593; USTC 820506. *Missale Romanum* (Venice: Girolamo Scoto, 1562), 4°. Edit16 CNCE 11599; USTC 820535.

72. For an overarching discussion on the post-Tridentine reform, see John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); on image reform, see Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper, ed., *The Sensuous in the Counter-Reformation Church*, conference proceedings (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), and Marie-Louise Lillywhite, *Reforming Art in Renaissance Venice* (forthcoming).



In Venice, the book market was generally protected from foreign interference, and the lay organization of the Esecutori contro la bestemmia handled the book legislation. As shown by Paul Grendler, the Venetian patriciate gradually started to support aspects of Tridentine reform around the 1560s, worried by the surge of heretical books.<sup>73</sup> A representative of the Holy Office—the congregation founded in Venice in 1547 to succeed the suppressed inquisition—was involved in the process of book licensing in 1562. This moment marked the beginning of intensive repressive activity of book censorship in the Republic of Venice.<sup>74</sup> No record of a ban on woodcuts included in religious books exists, however, and the indications of the 1563 Decree on Sacred Images deliberated by the Council of Trent were vague. Michael Douglas-Scott demonstrated that images were generally regarded more permissively than texts, provided that they were decent.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, book illustrations could have been included in the application for privileges, and therefore they would have gone through the process of pre-licensing.<sup>76</sup>

A determining factor for the absence of calendar illustration was the reform of the liturgical texts. One of the main points addressed during the Council concerned the uniformity of the Mass.<sup>77</sup> Recommendations for a unified missal were made already in 1546, but no consensus was reached, and the Council assigned the pope with the task of implementing the liturgical book reform during its last session on 4 December 1563.<sup>78</sup> It took until 1569 for the first official revised Breviary to be published, followed by the Missal in 1570, and the Little Office in 1571. The reform of the liturgical books had an unequivocal impact on the form in which calendars were presented. The

73. On book printing during the Catholic Reformation, see Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press: 1540–1605* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

74. It is, however, arguable as to how effective this censorship ever was; see Grendler, xx.

75. On license for images: Michael Douglas-Scott, “Prohibition of Text and Licence of Image: Painters and the Vernacular Bible in Counter-Reformation Venice,” in *Il Rinascimento Italiano di fonte alla Riforma: Letteratura e arte*, ed. Chrysa Damianaki, Paolo Proccacioli, and Angelo Romano (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 2005), 231–52.

76. Douglas-Scott, 240.

77. Jungmann, 1:133; Cristina Dondi, *Printed Books of Hours from Fifteenth-Century Italy: The Texts, the Books, and the Survival of a Long-Lasting Genre* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2016), 216–18.

78. Hubert Jedin, “Das Konzil von Trient und die Reform der liturgischen Bücher,” *Ephemerides liturgicae* 59 (1945): 5–38. Klaus Ganzer et al., ed, *The Oecumenical Councils of the Roman Catholic Church: From Trent to Vatican II (1545–1965)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 176–77; Jungmann, 1:133–35.

new calendar did not contain illustrations (deemed perhaps too profane); it drastically reduced the number of saints days and excluded all apocryphal and astrological references.<sup>79</sup>

In the Bull of introduction to the new Missal, Pope Pius V (1566–72) commanded that only the reformed Mass book should be consulted.<sup>80</sup> The church granted universal exclusive printing privileges for ten years to Giovanni Varisco and the heirs of Faretti, to ensure control over the printing and circulation of the Roman Missal.<sup>81</sup> The printers issued two editions in Rome and eleven in Venice, between 1570 and 1573. The monopoly of print and the inflated price of the Reformed Missal were met by objections from the Venetian bookmen, who continued to violate the ban until the eventual relaxation of the printing privilege by the end of 1573.<sup>82</sup> Three years later, the calendar was again illustrated, and a new iconographic pattern was developed.

### **Giunta's *Missale Romanum* (1576) and the new pattern of Carnival and Lent**

The graphs presented in this article codify with the colour red the editions representing Carnival and Lent, considered here to be the predecessors of the iconographical shift observed in Leandro's *Months* (figs. 6, 9). This imagery first appeared in the Missal printed by Lucantonio II Giunta in 1576 (figs. 10–11).<sup>83</sup> The theme is found in nineteen editions all representing the same prototype. In the years from 1576 to 1588, almost 68 percent of the calendars include the new series of Carnival and Lent, 25 percent are not illustrated, and only around 7 percent depict agricultural labours.

79. On the changes introduced by the Reformed Missal, see Jungmann, 1:136; Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 394–97; Dondi, 219–21.

80. *Pius Episcopus Servus Servorum Dei ad Perpetuam Rei Memoriam. Quod primum tempore in Missale Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum* (Venice: Giovanni Varisco and the heirs of Bartolomeo Faletti & C, 1570), f°. See also Manlio Sodi and Achille Maria Triacca, ed., *Missale Romanum: editio princeps (1570)* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana, 1998), 3–4.

81. Grendler, 173.

82. Grendler, 181.

83. *Missale Romanum, ex decreto sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum* (Venice: Lucantonio II Giunta, 1576), f°. Edit16 CNCE 11642; USTC 820746. Essling, *Les missels imprimés*, no. 163.



Figure 10. *February, Missale Romanum, ex decreto sacrosancti Concilij Tridentini restitutum* (Venice: Lucantonio II Giunta, 1576), f<sup>o</sup>, woodcut.  
©Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, 12. 9.H.1, sig. +4v (detail).



Figure 11. *March, Missale Romanum, ex decreto sacrosancti Concilij Tridentini restitutum* (Venice: Lucantonio II Giunta, 1576), f<sup>o</sup>, woodcut.  
©Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, 12. 9.H.1, sig. +5r (detail).

The 1576 Missal exhibits the same dialogic relationship between the imagery of February and March as that encountered in Leandro's cycle. The woodcut of February, first considered in this article, depicts an early and unique visual document of the comic group of the master Pantalone and his servant Zanni performing at a courtly banquet (fig. 10).<sup>84</sup> The characteristic mask and pose of the greedy Pantalone, who leans forward with one hand behind and one in front, recalls the gesture of the analogous figure in Leandro's canvas. His servant Zanni wears the typical clothes of the Bergamasque peasant porter, with loose, ankle-length trousers and a long-sleeved jacket of light-coloured linen.<sup>85</sup>

84. On the group of Pantalone and Zanni, see Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 44–58, 187–95.

85. Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 189–92.

For the month of March, both the woodcuts and Leandro show pious men and veiled women on their way to attend a sermon, as required during the Lenten season (figs. 2, 11). The occupation of pruning the vine reappears in the background of the vignette, shifting the attention to the motif of the church. Another recurrent feature is the beggar seated on the steps of the church with his bowl and walking stick. In the case of the missal, the steps are placed in the middle of the composition, giving a particularly prominent position to the semi-naked figure of the poor.

It is possible that Leandro's series followed the imagery pattern encountered in these printed calendars. Rearick's observations of the role of prints in Jacopo's paintings are particularly relevant for the process through which this iconographic assimilation could have happened. According to Rearick, the primary function of prints "was motivic and not stylistic, since Jacopo virtually never drew in pen and ink, the creative parallel to a line print. Instead, each [print] served as a starting point for his visual imagination."<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the relationship between Leandro's *February* and the woodcut depicting the carnivalesque banquet could appear somewhat strained, as it is mediated through various other sources including repertories from previous Bassano works and possible motifs from northern artists operating in Venice. In comparison, *March* exhibits a more direct connection (fig. 11). By placing Leandro's canvases in a contextual relationship with the calendrical developments of the *Missalia Romana*, one can better explain the deep cultural implications of the transformations occurring in the iconography of the months in the second half of the sixteenth century. Through the passage from Carnival to Lent, both woodcuts and Leandro introduce themes that elaborate on central ideas of the Tridentine reform.

The social disorder instigated by Carnival raised concerns for both lay and religious authorities, who tried systematically to impose their control over this period of the year.<sup>87</sup> These efforts intensified during the post-Tridentine

86. Rearick, 59.

87. Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 151–81. During the second half of the sixteenth century, the Jesuits proposed sacred representations and deployed the practice of the *Quarant'ore*, the public exposure of the Blessed Sacrament for forty hours, as alternatives to popular Carnival entertainments. Claudio Bernardi, *Carnevale, Quaresima, Pasqua. Rito e dramma nell'età moderna (1500–1900)* (Milan: Euresis Edizioni, 1995), 43–46.

period when the church tried to reaffirm its role in society.<sup>88</sup> The years of the Council of Trent were also the years in which the first masks of the *commedia dell'arte* were developed in Italy. If both woodcuts and canvases illustrate the theatrical masks in February, the different hypostasis in which these are represented in the two respective cycles is meaningful. The missal exhibits a private performance that relates to the tradition of noble celebrations during Carnival, shown, for example in the *Borromeo* and *Torriani Hours* (fig. 5). As Peter Burke argued, when referring to Jesuit Ottonelli's (1584–1670) attacks on actors, the church directed its disapproval mainly against market-place performances.<sup>89</sup> If the inclusion of a more accepted form of theatre in missals must be credited to a certain caution due to the religious context of the book, it appears that during the Carnival season, public acts, such as that illustrated by Leandro, were generally considered more profitable than courtly staging.<sup>90</sup>

The street performance of the plot of *gli innamorati* depicted in *February* particularly raised high moral issues. The introduction of women on the stage, acting for financial gain in the 1560s, was severely condemned by the church.<sup>91</sup> The year 1580 saw the appearance of two theatres for comedies in Venice, where performances were licensed by the Council of Ten strictly for the period of Carnival.<sup>92</sup> Concerns regarding the perpetuation of immoral conduct led to their dismantlement in 1585, and the ban of comedies in both private and public spaces, which was considered to be a Jesuit victory. The reissuing of the Venetian ban in the years following 1585 shows that, in fact, such entertainments were still taking place.<sup>93</sup>

In light of the ban, Leandro's depiction of comedy masks during the last two decades of the sixteenth century appears perplexing, especially considering the relationship with the Jesuits, who commissioned a number of works from

88. Bernardi, 43–46.

89. Burke, 208–09.

90. Angelo Solerti and Domenico Lanza, "Il teatro ferrarese nella seconda metà del secolo XVI," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 18 (1891): 148–85, 165, 168; Katritzky, "A Study," 23–24.

91. Bernardi, 31–38. Coryat, 1:386 [1611 ed., 247], recorded seeing women actresses in Venice: "a thing that I never saw before."

92. Eugene J. Johnson, "The Short, Lascivious Lives of Two Venetian Theaters, 1580–85," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55.3 (2002): 936–68, dx.doi.org/10.2307/1261561.

93. Johnson, 957; Melanie Zefferino, "Dramatic Figures in the Venetian Republic: Performance, Patronage, and Puppets" (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2014), 77.

the Bassano workshop.<sup>94</sup> Paintings of the *commedia dell'arte* were possibly intended for a non-Venetian public. Both Ferdinando I de' Medici and Rudolf II, who acquired such cycles, enjoyed theatrical entertainments by professional companies.<sup>95</sup> It is more convincing, however, that Leandro sought to convey and develop a didactic message in line with that of the Missal.



Figure 12. *February*, Leandro Bassano or his workshop, *The Twelve Months*, end of the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century, 80 x 121 cm. ©The State Institution of Tula Region Culture the Association Historical, Regional & Art Museum, Inv. ZH 219–230.

94. Marie-Louise Lillywhite, "The Decoration of the Jesuit Church of the Madonna dell'Umiltà in Venice, 1560–1606," *Artibus et Historiae* 77 (2018): 161–200, 173–74.

95. Anne MacNeil, "The Divine Madness of Isabella Andreini," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 120.2 (1995): 195–215, [dx.doi.org/10.1093/jrma/120.2.195](https://doi.org/10.1093/jrma/120.2.195). M. A. Katritzky, "German-Speaking Countries," in *Commedia dell'Arte in Context*, ed. Christopher B. Balme, Piermario Vescovo, and Daniele Vianello (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 98–105, 100, [dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781139236331.009](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139236331.009).

Aikema has underlined the moral aspect of Leandro's paintings, but more needs to be added.<sup>96</sup> Although Aikema drew attention to the moralizing idea behind *February*, particularly concerning the vice of *gula*, he argued that the stock-mask characters were not subject to negative interpretation, except for the figure of the courtesan.<sup>97</sup> A deeper investigation suggests a different intention since the segment on the left side of the canvas has been cut at some point in the past. A watercolour cartoon of the *February* canvas reproduced by Katritzky, together with the Tula replica of the same painting, demonstrates that in the original composition Pantalone was accompanied by two servants (fig. 12).<sup>98</sup>

The two unaltered examples depict a Zanni at the back of his master, pulling out his tongue and making the sign of horns to imply that Pantalone's mistress has cuckolded him for the young lute player, a central theme of sixteenth-century Italian comedy.<sup>99</sup> Leandro illustrated a dog in front of the approaching couple, a symbol of fidelity held by a blinded cupid deprived of his wings. This is better perceived when examining the close composition of the Potsdam *Carnival*, where the *innamorati* are preceded by a masked cupid.<sup>100</sup> In the Potsdam painting, a monkey carrying a roast chicken on a spit depicted just beneath Pantalone completes his characterization and denounces the month of February as a period of folly, gluttony, sin, and sexual promiscuity. Indeed, the contemporary medical literature linked the consumption of birds and wine, which Leandro depicted in connection with the well-established carnivalesque iconography, to the heating of the body and the inclination to lust.<sup>101</sup>

96. Aikema, 142–43. Berdini and Ellis, 35–47, also recognized the moralizing and allegoric intent behind the rustic scenes of the Bassano, when discussing the series of the Seasons. Rearick, 146, and Pietro Zampetti, *Jacopo Bassano* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1958), 39, stake out opposing sides of the debate.

97. Aikema, 142.

98. Leandro Bassano, *February*, chalk and watercolour on paper. Private Collection, Germany, in Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 562, fig. 268, and “Lodewijk Toeput,” 113, fig. 17. The servants are found also in the replica of *February* after Francesco Bassano, held in Murcia; see Ripoll, 101–02.

99. On the theme of cuckoldry in the *commedia dell'arte*, see Katritzky “A Study,” 80–81, 86 and Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 118, 156.

100. See note 51, above. The connection between the cupid in the Potsdam *Carnival* and *February* has been noticed by Katritzky in *The Art of Commedia*, 169–70.

101. Allen J. Grieco, “Botanical Knowledge or Poetic Understanding? Fruit in Italian Quattrocento Poetry,” in *Food, Social Politics and the Order of Nature*, 156–76, 164–65.

As noticed by Burke, the moral disapproval of popular culture, in its carnivalesque street manifestation of charlatans and bullfights, was doubled by theological concerns over the pagan origin of Carnival.<sup>102</sup> Significantly, while most cycles of the months do not depict both Carnival and Lent, the themes appear instead in the Neo-Latin Christian rewritings of Ovid's *Fasti*, created between the end of the fifteenth century and the middle of the sixteenth.<sup>103</sup> These writings opposed the Christian division of time to the festivities of the ancient Romans, asserting the supremacy of the former over the latter. For example, in his *Sacri Fasti* dedicated to Pope Paul III, Ambrogio Fracco assigned the last days of February to carnivalesque celebrations.<sup>104</sup> After the merrymaking Carnival, with its pagan origins in the Lupercalia, follow the superiority of Ash Wednesday and the explanation of the *stationes* of the city during March.<sup>105</sup> A similar moral ascent is proclaimed in the imagery of the missals and the Bassano cycle.

Central to the transformation of conduct experienced during Lent are the figure of the beggar and the act of almsgiving. Tom Nichols commented on the dual symbolic importance of the poor for the urban space.<sup>106</sup> The beggar situated in the proximity of churches established an image of social order and offered the possibility of spiritual elevation through the act of charity. In the March woodcut, the beggar connects the space where the Holy Sacraments are performed to the street, where two drummers and a child holding a scopperel are possible reminiscences of Carnival (fig. 11). In Leandro's work, the street is represented by a young man of the city of Venice, with his characteristic cap of black velvet called a *tozzo*, as described by Vecellio (fig. 2).<sup>107</sup> His fashionable clothes stand in stark contrast to the rags of the mendicant. By acknowledging the latter, the young nobleman is reminded that the beautiful and fortunate ought to give alms and identify themselves with the poor and suffering. Only by doing so can he ascend to the gates of heaven and not share the destiny of

102. Burke, 209.

103. I am thankful to Bobby Xinyue, who informed me about the presence of Carnival and Lent in the Christian *Fasti* of Ambrogio Fracco.

104. Ambrogio Novidio Fracco, *Sacrorum fastorum libri XII* (Roma: Antonio Blado, 1547), 4°, fols 21r-23r.

105. Fracco, fol. 29v.

106. Nichols, *The Art of Poverty*, 136–83, 141.

107. Vecellio, fol. 159v.



the rich man in the parable of Lazarus, a subject painted by Jacopo Bassano around 1554.<sup>108</sup>

The figure of the beggar received increasing attention in the religious art of sixteenth-century Venice as a symbol of Christian piety and humility, particularly close to the ideas promoted by the Jesuit Order.<sup>109</sup> The beggar in the 1576 Missal and in Leandro's painting of March acquires thus an expiatory function. His image contrasts the luxury and vices illustrated in the previous month of February and symbolizes the reinstitution of order in society threatened during the period of Carnival. The actress playing the courtesan in February is replaced by pious women going to church. Pantalone's pompous pose becomes the seller's reverence towards his lord. Restraint in consumption and behaviour in Lent takes the place of carnivalesque excess.

One can thus see in the new iconography of *February* and *March* a mirror of the contemporary efforts of the church to lessen the excess of Carnival and to encourage a strict observation of Lent. It is important to notice that the church did not seek to abolish Carnival but rather proposed alternatives to popular festivities, such as the devotion of the Forty Hours.<sup>110</sup> Catholics particularly tried to emphasize the Eucharist and reinforce the balance between sacred and profane time against Protestant attacks on the feast and fast, famously exemplified by Zwingli's public encouragement of eating sausages during the Lent of 1522.<sup>111</sup> Moryson's unsympathetic description of the "madness" that befell the Italian cities during Carnival and Lent, found in the opening of this article, reflects Protestant and Catholic dissent from this organization of the seasons.<sup>112</sup> The new iconographic pattern of the months responded thus to the post-Tridentine efforts to divide the year according to religious and

108. See note 33, above.

109. Nichols, *The Art of Poverty*; Lillywhite, "The Decoration of the Jesuit Church," 164, 174.

110. See note 87, above. See also Mark S. Weil, "The Devotion of the Forty Hours and Roman Baroque Illusions," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 218–48, dx.doi.org/10.2307/750841; Burke, 230–32.

111. Burke, 215; Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (1996; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 161–65. See also Ken Albala, "The Ideology of Fasting in the Reformation Era," in *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, ed. Ken Albala and Trudy Eden (New York: Columbia University Press), 41–57, dx.doi.org/10.7312/alba14996-004. I would like to thank Christopher Fletcher for our productive discussion on this topic.

112. See note 2, above.

civic rhythms. At the same time, the temporal passage from Carnival to Lent proclaimed the triumph of the spiritual and moral conduct over what Muir defined as “the desires of the lower body.”<sup>113</sup>

Both the 1576 Missal and Leandro opposed the rhythms of the city to the natural seasons, which through the annual labours and astrological cycle disregarded the observation of holy time. Berdini and Ellis's discussion of the relationship between the Bassano and theatre is here important. Based on a tradition which went back to Vitruvius, Berdini linked the pastoral genre to the third type of theatrical scene specific to the satirical style, defining the role of peasants within these plays as auxiliary rather than performative.<sup>114</sup> The historical inactivity of the workers, immersed in their perennial labours in the other ten months, translated according to Aikema and Ellis into moral and spiritual unawareness.<sup>115</sup> This portrayal echoes the suspicious light in which peasants were often seen during sixteenth-century Italy. Indeed, treatises on rural education assigned the patrons of suburban villas with the moral and religious education of their workers, who were often accused of disregarding the feast days.<sup>116</sup> Leandro underlined this didactic intent through the gestural artifice of the pious women pointing towards an outdoor portico, where a priest is addressing the congregation against the backstage of the countryside (fig. 2).

In placing the agricultural occupation in the background of Lenten celebrations, both the woodcut and Leandro's canvas of *March* proclaimed the superiority of sacred over natural time. The predominance of the liturgical over the natural seasons is further emphasized in the canvas through the inclusion of Lenten foodstuffs, inspired by the vignettes decorating carnivalesque writings, such as the *Contrasto di Carnesciale e della Quaresima* (fig. 4).<sup>117</sup> By elaborating on printed models, Leandro chose the performative city to enact didactic messages. These declared the succession of secular and religious celebrations, the superiority of the latter, and the need for moral conduct against popular manifestations of the street. They reflected also on the interconnections between

113. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 91.

114. Berdini, 8; Ellis, 22–23. On the relationship between Leandro and theatre, especially in connection to *February*, see page 119, above.

115. Aikema, 136; Ellis, 39.

116. Elide Casali, “Sacra agricoltura e cristiana mezzadria: Controriforma e cultura contadina in Romagna,” *Studi di storia agraria* 5 (1985): 53–76, 61–63.

117. See note 38, above.

rural and urban environments, in an era that brought deep economic and social changes through the seasonal mobility of the Venetian patriciate to the *terraferma*. To the last-mentioned, the new iconographic pattern of the months entrusted the practice of noble and sacred agriculture, since only through the observation of the holy season could the countryside and its inhabitants truly prosper.

### Conclusions

The series of the Months painted by Leandro Bassano has long been connected to the depiction of the theme by northern European artists. The influence of the latter does not explain, however, the representation of Carnival and Lent in Leandro's cycle, as the dialogic relationship between February and March is not encountered in the Flemish Months.

It was proposed that Leandro took inspiration for his iconographic program from the woodcuts of the Venetian missals printed after 1576. The new pattern was determined: on the one hand, by the relaxation of the exclusive printing privilege for the Reformed Missal; on the other, by the appearance of the *commedia dell'arte* as a new form of entertainment. Through the passage from Carnival to Lent, both woodcuts and Leandro introduced themes that projected some central ideas of Catholic reform into an otherwise agricultural cycle. The extreme shift in behaviour recorded the passage from civic to sacred time, while also warning against the multiple vices and social disorder instigated by the market square. The urbanization of the iconography thus responded to anxieties of the post-Tridentine church about popular culture, the countryside, and certain positions taken by Protestant theologians. It shows how the Catholic Church aimed at reevaluating the relationship between humans and their environment by declaring the primacy of sacred over natural rhythms.

In placing Leandro's cycles of the months within the iconographic developments of sixteenth-century Italy, this article demonstrates the importance of print in the elaboration of the Bassanesque new imagery of Carnival and Lent. It also exhibits the broader cultural, social, and religious implications of these iconographic changes and what they disclosed about the experience of the seasons and the environment in the post-Tridentine context.