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Title: Plague and calamity: Visualization from 1300-1600

Abstract: The session addresses issues about the formation, transmission, and consequences of plagues as well as the physical and spiritual impact of these and similar calamities in their respective societies. Some plagues were pandemic while others were endemic. The three major pandemic plagues were: the Plague of Justinian (524; the Black Death Pestilence (Bubonic Plague) of 1347, described by Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Petrarch; the Asian Bubonic Plague (Manchuria, Mongolia and India) of 1855/1866, which affected the dominions of the British Empire. Other plagues not as pandemic but as brutal in their calamities and horror were those experienced in Venice in 1576, Lombardy, 1629, Andalusia, 1637, London, 1665, and others. Representations in paintings and prints dramatically visualize the physical and emotional disasters and distresses for humanity.

Chair/Organizer: Liana De Girolami Cheney, President of ATSAH
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Speakers:

1. Stacey Vellante, New England College, NH
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It's the End of the World As We Know It: The Triumph of Death in 14th and 15th century Italian Art

Abstract: On November 4, 1333, the Arno River flooded the city of Florence killing 3,000 people. Then, on January 25, 1348, a powerful earthquake felt in Verona and surrounding cities led inhabitants to believe that the world was coming to an end. In that

same year, the Black Death spread across the Italian peninsula claiming an unprecedented number of lives at a time when the Tuscan region was already suffering from severe famine.

To the devout Catholic inhabitants of Italy in the 14th century, this sequence of devastating events could be perceived as acts of God – “punishment” according to Boccaccio, who in his *Decameron* claimed that the plague “signif[ied] God’s righteous anger at our iniquitous way of life”. If Boccaccio’s description of the pestilence and possible wrath of God mentioned in the *Decameron* is accurate, how could there not be a preoccupation with death and morality among Trecento Italians?

Although artists of the time may have found inspiration in the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, it is likely that art produced immediately following the Black Death was influenced by these catastrophic events. In particular, the fragmentary remains of Orcagna’s *Triumph of Death* in the Florentine church of Santa Croce remind us how significant the effects of a pandemic can be. Although similar to the fresco cycle in the Camposanto of Pisa, created prior to the arrival of the plague, Orcagna’s representation in Florence reflects the psychological climate of a city only just recovering from the potential wrath of God.

2. Brian Steele, Texas Tech University

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Mediating Pestilence and Senescence: Titian's Late St. Sebastian

Abstract: Although Titian’s St. Sebastian (c. 1570-75) remained incomplete in the artist’s shop until his death, it warrants sustained examination in view of the facts that Titian elected to return to the saint’s representation some forty years after his previous versions of the subject, formulated a distinctive mode of presentation vis-à-vis his earlier practice, and sufficiently finished principal portions of the image to establish essential concepts. David Rosand has elucidated the paragone with antique sculpture which the image embodies, and I expand investigation with regard to heroic characterization, allusion to Apollonian beauty, and variations on sculptural prototypes by comparison with textual accounts of the saint and with images by Titian and other Venetian painters. In particular, iconographic components and the saint’s striding stance intimate a narrative prolepsis that moderates static representation as bound martyr and amplifies resonant thematic conceits. In turn, this close reading facilitates consideration within contexts of St. Sebastian as plague saint and guarantor of safety, Venetian political circumstances, and Christ-like sacrifice of personal significance to the artist. Titian’s St. Sebastian, within a nocturnal atmosphere pierced by pyrotechnic flashes, presents an evolving image of righteous character, pained but confident and trusting in divine mercy, who actively confronts present and future. Perhaps motivated initially by Venetian hostilities leading to the Battle of Lepanto, St. Sebastian incorporated implications of the divine origin attributed to the plague, but, through Titian’s practice of inhabiting all emotions depicted, evolved into an expression of the aged painter’s faith in redemption.

3. Tina Waldeier Bizzarro, Rosemount College, PA
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Plague in Palermo: Santa Rosalia Halts the Pathogen

Abstract: In an ironic twist of fate, the lethal corona virus pandemic thwarted last year's celebration of the 396th annual *festa* of Palermo's patroness Santa Rosalia, whose miraculous intervention in Palermo's sacred history in 1624 delivered the city from the Black Death in a type of processional "passover." Two eponymous celebrations were halted: the magnificent multi-day July celebration of "La Santuzza" (or the "Little Saint" as she is colloquially and affectionately known), complete with a colossal vessel-shaped chariot, garlands of roses, angels, serenading musicians, the cult statue of Santa Rosalia, and drawn through the city streets by a team of oxen; the second, the early September evening torch-lit pilgrimage climb up the *strada vecchia* to visit and venerate Rosalia in her cave sanctuary within Palermo's Monte Pellegrino, where her relics were found in 1624.

In this examination of the structure and the liturgical and acoustic paraphernalia of these monumental *feste*—perhaps the largest and grandest of all of Western Europe—we will consider these Christian processional heterotopias. These transformative counter-sites feature and map graves, bones, and death, mirror where heaven and earth meet, where time collapses, where privileged, forbidden, and perfect spaces—alternative to the quotidian spaces of home, city square, or marketplace—turn our reality upside down. Sicilian celebrations of the great plague saint Rosalia, continue—with the ritual panoply of sermons, prayers, purifications, chants, hymns, concerts, processions, fireworks, grand liturgical appliances, and time-honored traditional foods—to cyclically mark breaks with traditional time, ushering us into the static and sacred locus of epiphany and transformation.