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Immagini del nuovo inizio nella cultura italiana

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The Key in the Hand: Features of Birth in the Renaissance Imagery of Lucina

1. Introduction

The material findings and literary bequest that derived from the growth of antiquarian knowledge during the Renaissance heightened the understanding of the classical world, causing a renewed sensitivity to emerge in the intellectual life of the time.¹ Among the many forms of erudition that developed from this relationship with antiquity, the study of ancient mythology appears to be one of the most fruitful areas for the interpretations of the past to be investigated in their many manifestations.² This subject also became a common thematic pattern adopted in the decoration of complex pictorial cycles,³ and artists utilised the antiquarian evidence at their disposal to not only produce more faithful

¹ Eugenio Garin, *L'Umanesimo italiano: filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento*, Bari, Laterza, 1952; Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, Oxford, B. Blackwell, 1969; Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past. Documents of Modern History*, London, E. Arnold, 1969; Ronald G. Witt, *'In the Footsteps of the Ancients': the Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*, Leiden, Brill, 2000; Alan M. Stahl, *The Rebirth of Antiquity: Numismatics, Archaeology, and Classical Studies in the Culture of the Renaissance*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Library, 2009.

² Elisabeth Waghall, *Allusions and Reflections: Greek and Roman Mythology in Renaissance Europe*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015; Giuseppina Zappella, *La lettura iconica e i codici interpretativi dell'immagine*, Manziana, Vecchiarelli, 2015, pp. 165-167; Ferdinando Rigon, *Arte dei numeri. Letture iconografiche*, Milan, Skira, 2006; Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Renaissance Art*, London, Allen Lane, 2005; Bodo Guthmüller, *Studien zur antiken Mythologie in der italienischen Renaissance*, Weinheim, VCH, 1986; John C. Lapp, *The Brazen Tower: Essays on Mythological Imagery in the French Renaissance and Baroque*, Saratoga, Anna Libri, 1977; Salomon Reinach, *La mythologie figurée et l'histoire profane dans la peinture italienne de la renaissance*, Paris, Leroux, 1915.

³ Claudia Cieri Via, *L'arte delle metamorfosi: decorazioni mitologiche nel Cinquecento*, Rome, Lithos, 2003; Eadem, *Immagini degli dei: mitologia e collezionismo tra '500 e '600*, Milan, Leonardo Arte, 1996.

representations but also offer details which were, at times, unconventional and original.⁴ In order to fully grasp the complexity of the multiple mythological iconographies that appeared within this vast artistic production, a plurality of elements must be considered, including textual, literary and figurative sources, general symbolic codes, attributes, original intents, final purposes and technical processes.⁵ Only in this way, can the real influence of iconology on iconographic output be fully understood, which often implied a three-way relationship between patron, iconographer, and artist.⁶

Among the various deities portrayed in the figurative pantheon of the sixteenth century, the goddess Lucina is a particularly interesting case. The imagery of Lucina during the Renaissance appears to be a result of the synthesis and stratification of various elements emerging from the figurative culture of the time.

In antiquity, Lucina was the goddess of childbirth and considered to be the protector of pregnant women and newborns. She was usually associated with the Moon and identified equally with Juno and Diana, who were both related to the Moon and to birth in general.⁷ Although she was linked to other minor goddesses and nymphs, she was even more closely associated with Janus, the god of beginnings, transitions, gates, and doors, in overseeing and assisting women during childbirth. The etymology of her name derived from the Latin word *lucem* (light)⁸ and meant ‘herald of light’, which added even more value to her

⁴ Jean Seznec, *La survivance des dieux antiques. Essai sur le rôle de la tradition mythologique dans l'humanisme et dans l'art de la Renaissance*, Paris, Flammarion, 1980; the collaboration between antiquarian scholars and artists for the creation of specific iconographies is broadly documented throughout the entire Renaissance.

⁵ Giuseppina Zappella, cit., *Lettura iconica*, pp. 221-223; Ernst H. Gombrich, *Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, II, *Symbolic Images*, London, Phaidon, 1975; Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York, Oxford University press, 1939.

⁶ Antonio Pinelli, «Intenzione, invenzione, artificio». *Spunti per una teoria della ricezione dei cicli figurativi di età rinascimentale*, «Ricerche di Storia dell'arte», 91-92, 2007, *Reverse engineering: un nuovo approccio allo studio dei grandi cicli rinascimentali* edited by Émilie Passignat, Antonio Pinelli, pp. 7-42.

⁷ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogiae Deorum*, Venezia, Agostino de Zanni, 1511, IV p. 16 and IX p. 9; Flavio Biondo, *De Roma Triumphante*, Basel, Froben, 1559, pp. 12e and 23b; Alessandro Alessandri, *Genialium Dierum libri sex*, Rome, I. Mazochi, 1522, p. 327a; Johann Roszfeld, *Romanarum antiquitatum libri decem*, Basel, Perna, 1583, p. 53d; Johann Wilhelm Stucki, *Sacrorum sacrificorumque gentilium brevis et accurata descriptio*, Zurich, Wolf, 1598, p. 23b and 30.

⁸ Marcus Terentius Varro, *De Lingua Latina quae supersunt*, edited by G. Goetz, F. Schoell, Leipzig, Teubner, 1910, 5.69.2. Since Lucina started the mechanism of life that the three goddesses of the Parcae developed and ended, she was also considered to be the fourth sister.

mission: just as the moon lit up the night sky, she was thought to bring light and bring new life from the darkness.

Renaissance scholars and artists usually referred to the *Description of Greece* by the ancient Greek poet Pausanias in order to better appreciate the attributes and features of Lucina.⁹ A full portrayal of the goddess is provided, in which she appeared with a veil, with one hand holding a torch and the other empty and outstretched. Another commonly used source was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, especially the episodes of the *Birth of Hercules* (IX. 295–316) and the *History of Adonis and Myrrha* (X. 421–425). On the basis of the information reported by these classical authors, Renaissance representations of Lucina were generally carried out in birth allegories and mythological episodes linked directly thereto, as can be seen in Titian's *Birth of Adonis* (1506–1508), the engraving of Bernard Salomon's *Birth of Adonis from Myrrha's trunk* (1557), the enamel of Jean de Court's *Myrrha assisted by Lucina* (1560), the *Birth of Adonis* in a fresco painting by Girolamo Sermoneta at Palazzo Orsini in Monterotondo (1560 ca.) and the *Birth of the Princess* (1622 ca.), part of the Marie de' Medici cycle painted by Peter Paul Rubens.¹⁰

Several other sources deriving from ancient literature and antiquarian bases also contributed to developing Lucina's imagery during the sixteenth century. However, only the new interpretations of Festus's *De verborum significatione* brought about an original feature – the key – which opened up some unexpected figurative solutions of symbolic significance.¹¹

The purpose of this study is to analyse the complex development of this unusual attribute of Lucina in Renaissance iconography, which appears to have been influenced by several semantic fields and emerged as a visible phenomenon of a deeper cultural dynamic. The works of artists such as Jacopo Zucchi, Lorenzo Lotto, and Raphael, together with the mythographic treatises of antiquarian scholars such as Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, Giovanni Pierio Valeriano, Vincenzo Cartari and Baccio Baldini, will be examined for the purpose of retracing all

⁹ Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio*, edited by M. H. Rocha-Pereira, Leipzig, Teubner, 1990.

¹⁰ Claudia Cieri Via, *L'arte delle metamorfosi*, cit. p. 133 and 241; see also Philippe Verdier, *Renaissance Enamels*, in *Western Decorative Arts. Medieval, Renaissance, and Historicizing Styles including Metalwork, Enamels, and Ceramics*, edited by Rudolf Distelberger, Alison Luchs, Philippe Verdier, Timothy H. Wilson, Washington, National Gallery of Arts-Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 82–83.

¹¹ Hekate, who was one of the personifications of Diana in antiquity, was often depicted with a key.

aspects of this evolutionary path. What emerges is new material concerning the different perspectives on Lucina during the sixteenth century, including new symbolic readings derived from the philological and textual interpretations that influenced the iconographic building method of that time.

2. *Lucina and the key*

Around 1591 the Florentine artist Jacopo Zucchi decorated the Galleria of the Palazzo Rucellai in Rome, a residence which belonged to the nobleman Orazio Rucellai (1530/1540–1605). Zucchi developed a rich iconographic programme that included various deities from ancient mythology.¹² Among the gods and goddesses portrayed in his frescos, Diana (Fig. 1a) deserves particular attention because she is represented with the attribute of the key, which constitutes a departure from previous depictions (Fig. 1b).

The artist himself discussed this choice of iconography in his *Discorso sopra li Dei de' Gentili*, published in 1602, in which he described and provided explanations for several of his paintings.¹³ Here, he stated that the presence of the key in Diana's left hand recalled the imagery of the Roman goddess Lucina, who was considered to be one of Diana's personifications («vogliono che sopra il partorire fosse delle donne sotto il nome di Lucina chiamata»); according to unspecified ancient sources, her distinctive characteristics included a key symbolising safe childbirth («facilitasse molto la strada a' già maturi parti; et a questo effetto la facessero gl'Antichi con una chiave in mano [...]»¹⁴

¹² Anna d'Amelio in *Storia di una galleria romana: la genealogia degli dèi di Jacopo Zucchi e le famiglie Rucellai, Caetani, Ruspoli, Memmo*, edited by Anna D'Amelio, Philippe Morel, Fernando Rigon, Rome, U. Bozzi, 2013, p. 1. A full bibliographic overview of the Galleria Rucellai is provided in Philippe Morel, *La galleria Rucellai*, *ivi*, p. 47 n. 3, in which mention is made of Ingrid Lohaus, *Der Freskenzyklus von Jacopo Zucchi im Palazzo Ruspoli in Rom*, Baden-Baden, Deutscher Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2008; Ulrich Pfisterer, *Weisen der Welterzeugung: Jacopo Zucchis römischer Götterhimmel als enzyklopädisches Gedächtnistheater*, in *Sammeln, Ordnen, Veranschaulichen: Zur Wissenskompiletorik in der Frühen Neuzeit*, herausgegeben Frank Büttner, Markus Friedrich, Helmut Zedelmaier, Münster, LIT, 2003, pp. 325-359.

¹³ A full bibliographic overview on Zucchi's *Discorso* is provided in Philippe Morel, *La galleria Rucellai*, *cit.*, p. 47 n. 2, in which mention is made of Fritz Saxl, *La fede negli astri: dall'antichità al Rinascimento*, edited by Salvatore Settis, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1985, and Maria Giulia Aurigemma, *Spunti dal "Discorso" di Jacopo Zucchi*, in *Studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Denis Mahon*, edited by Maria Grazia Bernardini *et alii*, Milan, Electa, 2000, pp. 44-52.

¹⁴ Jacopo Zucchi, *Discorso sopra li dei de' gentili, e loro imprese; con vn breue trattato delle attioni de li dodici Cesari, con le dichiarazioni delle loro medaglie antiche*, Rome, Domenico Gigliotti, 1602, p. 38;

This attribute was not entirely new to Zucchi since he had previously depicted the goddess Diana with a key in the Hall of the Muses (*Camera delle Muse*) at the Villa Medici in Rome, which was decorated between 1584–1586 and commissioned by the Florentine cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici.¹⁵ The coffered ceiling of the Hall was made up of seven panels with mythological representations of the Muses carrying specific features of ancient deities. In the panel entitled Melpomene-Sun and Thalia-Moon (*Melpomene-Sole e Thalia-Luna*), the muse-goddess is depicted with all of Diana's attributes, which includes a key lying beside her foot (Fig. 2a, 2b).¹⁶

Another work carried out in around 1572, which was again painted by Zucchi and commissioned by Ferdinando, on the *Salone di Diana* at the Palazzo Firenze in Rome¹⁷ is closely linked to the two previous cases in terms of substance and in all likelihood represents the archetype for these images. The hardboard entitled *Diana e le sue Ninfe*, which is now exhibited at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence,¹⁸ portrays the various personifications of Diana (Fig. 3a),¹⁹ including a figure holding a key in her left hand (Fig. 3b) that can be quite clearly identified as Lucina, which confirms Zucchi's explanatory text on the frescos in Palazzo Rucellai.²⁰

see also Ferdinando Rigon in *Storia di una galleria romana*, cit., pp. 125–6.

¹⁵ Philippe Morel, *La Villa Médicis*, III, *Le Parnasse astrologique: les décors peints pour le cardinal Ferdinand de Médicis: étude iconologique*, Rome, Academie de France-École Française, 1991, pp. 24–33; Alessandro Cecchi, *La collezione di quadri di Villa Medici*, in *Villa Medici: il sogno di un cardinale: collezioni e artisti di Ferdinando de Medici*, edited by Michel Hochmann, Rome, De Luca, 1999, pp. 59–66; Idem, *Jacopo Zucchi da Firenze a Roma*, ivi, pp. 105–114; for a biographical overview of this figure, *Ferdinando I de' Medici, 1549–1609: Maiestate tantum*, edited by Monica Bietti, Annamaria Giusti, Livorno, Sillabe – Florence, Firenze musei, 2009.

¹⁶ All symbols related to Diana: a moon-shaped crown, a sceptre with the bull, a statue of Diana Ephesia in her right hand and a tambourine; the reason for the blending of the muse and Diana lies in the statement made by Marsilio Ficino, who established the equivalence between the nine muses and the planets: Thalia corresponded to the Moon; see Giovan Paolo Lomazzo, *Della forma delle Muse cavata da gli antichi autori greci, et latini, opera utilissima a pittori, & scoltori*, Milan, Pontio, 1591, pp. 26–27.

¹⁷ Philippe Morel, *Jacopo Zucchi al servizio di Ferdinando de' Medici*, in *Villa Medici*, cit., pp. 115–125.

¹⁸ It decorates the ceiling of the Sala delle Carte Geografiche.

¹⁹ Philippe Morel, *Le Parnasse astrologique*, cit., pp. 13–16.

²⁰ Maria Giulia Aurigemma, *Palazzo Firenze in Campo Marzio*, Rome, Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 2007, pp. 183–184: Aurigemma recognised the goddess Lucina in the figure holding the key, but without giving a substantial explanation for her reasoning; she simply connected this feature to a general birth of knowledge ('parto della conoscenza')

The recurrence of this detail in Jacopo Zucchi's imagery of Diana Lucina reveals that the key had become a constant feature in his iconographic choices for this goddess. As previously stated, Zucchi attributed this feature in his representation of Lucina to the influence of ancient sources («la facessero gl'Antichi»). An analysis of the flourishing antiquarian culture of the period, however, points to a more complex web of references.²¹

It is likely that Zucchi's iconography of the key developed during his apprenticeship under Giorgio Vasari in Florence around 1560–1570,²² but not from his master's repertoire: in fact, the three images of Diana painted by Vasari – one

or to the hypothetic pregnancy of Clelia Farnese Cesarini in 1572. See also Philippe Morel, *Le Parnasse astrologique*, cit., p. 15: Morel is not sure of the identification of the images of Diana in this artwork. He instead states that Zucchi blends different attributes of Lucina, Isis and the Moon. It is uncertain whether Zucchi received iconological supervision in the setup of these decorative programmes. Morel affirms that Duke Francesco I Medici sent the humanist Pietro Angelio da Barga (1517–1596) to support the painter. Today it is not possible to reconstruct the influence of this scholar on Zucchi's mythological figures and, more specifically, his Diana Lucina; see Philippe Morel, *Jacopo Zucchi al servizio di Ferdinando de' Medici*, cit., p. 115; see also Tim Ould, *Jacopo Zucchi, Artist-Iconographer*, «Electronic Melbourne Art Journal», 2, 2007.

²¹ Parallel occurrences of female figures depicted holding a key can be found during the Renaissance period, but not in relation to Lucina. One case, which was documented for the first time by Albricus Philosophus in his mythographic collection *De deorum imaginibus libellus* (late fourteenth century), concerns Cybele, goddess of the earth and mother of the gods (*terram autem constat matrem esse deorum*), who is depicted with a key (*umquam simulacrum eius, cum clave pingit*), which was used to change the seasons, closing winter and opening spring (*nam terra tempore verno aperitur; claudit hyemali*); see Albricus Philosophus, *Allegoriae poeticae*, Paris, Ioannes de Marnef, 1520, I, p. 4. This interpretation of Cybele's key was given in many other mythographic treatises: see Alessandro Alessandri, *Genialium Dierum libri sex*, IV, p. 12 and Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini de i dei de gli antichi*, Venice, Valgrisi, 1571, p. 201; a Cybele holding keys can be found also in fifteenth century frescos of Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara: see *Il Palazzo Schifanoia a Ferrara. The Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara*, edited by Salvatore Settis, Walter Cupperi, Modena, Panini, 2007. A second case can be identified in the *impresa* of the Flemish scholar Adriaen de Jonghe (1511–1575), which was included in his *Emblemata* collection from 1565. The illustration, entitled *Vxoriarum virtutes*, represents a female figure standing on a turtle, Angerona, with her left hand covering her mouth, signifying silence, and with a key in her right hand, representing the security of the home; see Adriaen de Jonghe, *Emblemata*, Antwerp, Plantin, 1565, p. 56 and 141; Riccardo Drusi, *Venere, Galania e la testuggine: alle radici di una 'fabula' del Marino* (Adone, XV, 171–181), in *Tra boschi e marine. Varietà della pastorale nel Rinascimento e nell'età Barocca*, edited by Daria Perocco, Bologna, Archetipolibri, 2012, pp. 477–511. Although none of these two examples appear to have inspired Zucchi's Lucina – and the explanation given by de Jonghe himself excludes any possible connection – these two figures may have represented a general pattern that gradually influenced this imagery.

²² Alessandro Cecchi, *Jacopo Zucchi da Firenze a Roma*, cit., pp. 105–114.

in Casa Vasari, 1548 (*Diana Ephesia*) and two in Palazzo Vecchio (*The Chariot of the Moon* in the *Sala degli Elementi*, 1555; and the *Allegory of Fiesole*, 1563–1565) – neither match Zucchi's creations nor feature a key.²³ Instead, this idea probably stemmed from a series of notions that he acquired in erudite environments in 1565 while working with Vasari to organise the celebration of the marriage of Francesco de' Medici, son of Grand Duke Cosimo I, with Joanna of Austria, daughter of Emperor Ferdinand I.²⁴

On this occasion, the scholars and artists worked together to prepare a parade of chariots representing gods and goddesses from ancient mythology to celebrate the event.²⁵ In the *Discorso sopra la Mascherata della Genealogia degl'Iddei de' Gentili* (1565), the humanist Baccio Baldini made particular note of the imagery used for the celebration, describing for the first time the detail of the key in relation to Egeria, a minor deity associated with birth. When describing the Chariot of the Moon, Baldini made reference to this nymph holding a key, adding that she was invoked by pregnant women («Egeria, la quale invocavan le donne antiche quando eran gravide»), who usually held a key in their hand to propitiate childbirth, as reported by the Latin grammarian Festus («di questa Dea fa mentione Festo Pompeo [...] et gli dette in mano una chiave [...] percioché l'apriva la via al parto»)²⁶

²³ See Giorgio Vasari, *Ragionamenti sopra le inuentioni da lui dipinte in Firenze nel palazzo di loro Altezze Serenissime*, Florence, Giunti, 1588, pp. 12 and 169.

²⁴ Alessandro Cecchi, *Jacopo Zucchi da Firenze a Roma*, cit., p. 106.

²⁵ The case of Vincenzio Borghini and Cosimo Bartoli are very significant; see *Filologia e invenzione nella Firenze di Cosimo I*, edited by Gino Belloni, Riccardo Drusi, Florence, Olschki, 2002; see also Giorgio Vasari's letters: *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, herausgegeben und mit Kritischen Apparate von Karl Frey, Munich, G. Muller, 1934.

²⁶ Baccio Baldini, *Discorso sopra la mascherata della genealogia degl'iddei de' Gentili*, Florence, Giunti, 1566, p. 63; see also Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, *De deis gentium varia & multiplex historia*, Basel, Oporinus, 1548, p. 160; Johann Wilhelm Stucki, *Sacrorum sacrificorumque gentilium*, cit., p. 30b. However, in the preparatory drawing of this chariot (BNCF, ms. Pal. C.B. III. 53/1, c. 93) made by Alessandro Allori, who was one of the artists involved in setting up the parade, no key is attributed to Egeria. The researchers who recently published these illustrations noted that although the right hand was empty, it must have been intended to hold an object, almost certainly a key, as described in Baldini's explanatory notes (*ma avrà trovato posto sicuramente nella mano destra*), since all the drawings are very closely aligned with the iconological indications of Baldini (e.g. the flint stone in the left hand is also recorded); see <http://mascherata-firb.ctl.sns.it>; see also Stefano Pierguidi, *Baccio Baldini e la «Mascherata della genealogia degli dei»*, «Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte», 70, 3, 2007, pp. 347–364; for the relationship between Zucchi and Baldini's text, cf. Philippe Morel, in *Storia di una galleria romana*, cit., p. 53.

Baldini referred specifically to Festus's *De verborum significatione* as the source of his iconography. However, this statement regarding the key cannot be found in Festus's treatise, which makes reference to Egeria as the protector of childbirth only from the etymology of her name ("Egeriae nympphae sacrificabant praegnantes, quod eam putabant facile conceptum alvo egerere").²⁷ Reference to the key can be found under the word *clavim* (key), which is related to birth in general, with Festus stating that a key was donated to pregnant women in order to ensure a safe birth (*Clavim consuetudo erat muliebris donare ob significandam partus facilitatem*).²⁸ From this, it is possible to infer that there is a strong likelihood that Baccio Baldini amalgamated the two passages, thereby creating a new source which offered original solutions.

This framework does not yet provide a full explanation of Zucchi's iconography of Diana Lucina, but this is the first occurrence of a key being connected to a deity of birth.

The development of this imagery derived also from other iconological interpretations in contemporary antiquarian treatises. In 1571 the Italian mythographer Vincenzo Cartari published a revision of his *Imagini de gli dei de gli antichi*, an inventory of the mythological attributes of ancient gods that were usually adopted by artists in their works. Far from being a mere revision of previous editions, this volume for the first time included a description of Lucina that could have inspired Zucchi's representations. In discussing the various personifications of Diana, Cartari affirmed that when the goddess was identified with the Moon, she had positive effects on childbirth («perché dicono che la luna per la humidità sua ha forza di fare il ventre della donna molle in modo che facilmente si apre nel partorire») and was therefore identified with Lucina for this reason («nominandola Lucina»).²⁹ He then described the attributes of the goddess with an open, empty and outstretched hand («l'una delle mani era distesa, senza alcuna cosa»), in which a key could very well have been placed («et vi havrebbero ben potuto mettere una chiave») as a good luck token for pregnant women, as described

²⁷ Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De verborum significatu*, edited by Wallace M. Lindsay, Leipzig, Teubner, 1913, 67.25.

²⁸ Ivi, 49.1.

²⁹ Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini de i dei*, cit., pp. 106-111. The former editions of this work date back to 1556, 1566 and 1567. The 1571 edition was the first to include new antiquarian material and to be provided with an iconographic apparatus; for Cartari as one of the sources of Zucchi, see Philippe Morel, in *Storia di una galleria romana*, cit., p. 87.

by Festus («perché Festo scrive che la solevano donare gli antichi alle donne, mostrando con questa che è stromento da aprire, che desideravano loro un parto facile»). Cartari concludes his discussion by theorising that the open hand could have had the same symbolic meaning as the key («ma forse, che vollero mostrare il medesimo con quella mano di Lucina distesa, et aperta»)³⁰ Cartari, therefore, gives a correct reading of Festus's text and one can assume that he attempted to amend Baldini's previous interpretation. However, when reading Cartari's passage, Zucchi may have considered the key to be a real attribute of the goddess and not simply an iconographic option.

3. *Lucina and the open hand*

The detail of the key was not included in previous editions of Cartari's work (1556, 1566 and 1567), that only mentioned Lucina's outstretched hand («stendeva l'una mano»);³¹ this reference is likely to have derived from other sources such as the *De deis gentium* (1548) by Lilio Gregorio Giraldi (*et manum alterum in rectum porrigeret*),³² which was taken directly from Pausanias.³³ This feature was also reported by Natale Conti in his *Mythologia* (1567), in which he stated that the goddess was portrayed with an empty outstretched hand (*Effingebantur imago Lucinae [...] quae altera manum vacuum porrigebat*).³⁴ Therefore, the association of the open hand with Lucina is fundamental in terms of understanding the presence of the key because it emerged as an alternative figurative possibility.

The first literary example of this figuration can be identified in a humanistic poem in octave rhyme, *Silve* (1521 ca.), which was written by the Italian poet Antonio Fileremo Fregoso.³⁵ In the section entitled *De i tre pretegrini* (The Three Pilgrims), three characters travelled in a sacred oneiric dimension and the goddess Lucina was represented as their guide in the chapter entitled *Del chiostro di Lucina* (The Cloister of Lucina). Fregoso described Lucina holding a torch in

³⁰ Vincenzo Cartari, *Le imagini de i dei*, cit., p. 109.

³¹ Vincenzo Cartari, *Le Imagini con la spositione de i Dei de gli antichi*, Venice, Marcolini, 1556, p. 23.

³² Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, *De deis gentium*, cit., p. 502.

³³ Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio*, cit., I, 18.5.

³⁴ Natale Conti, *Mythologiae, siue Explicationum fabularum libri decem*, Venice, Fontana, 1567, pp. 90-92.

³⁵ Special thanks to Stefano Pezzè for his advice.

her right hand and assisting the birth process with her left hand («una facella in la man destra tene,/ [...] con l'altra poi ogni mortale aita/ entrar per quella via ch'al mal e al bene/ conduce sempre ognun che peregrina/ pel l'uman stato, e chiamasi Lucina»³⁶).

Renaissance artworks can offer visual evidence of what was being expressed in erudite and literary writings of the time. In one of the engravings of the *History of Juno* (1560) by Giulio Bonasone (ca. 1498–1574), an Italian painter from Bologna, Juno is represented as Lucina assisting childbirth (Fig. 4a) with an open and empty hand (Fig. 4b). Together with the drawing, Bonasone's verses evoke a direct relationship between Juno and the Moon, the “celestial goddess of birth, holy Lucina” («Celeste Dea del parto, alma Lucina»), which recalls the basic iconographic traits of the goddess.³⁷

This feature also recurs in an engraving of Giovanni Antonio Rusconi in the *Trasformazioni* of Lodovico Dolce, a poetic translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1553). In chapter XIX, where the birth of Hercules is narrated, Lucina appears in the form of Juno. Juno was also Jupiter's wife, and Hercules was Jupiter and Alcmena's love child. For this reason, Lucina (the personification of Juno) became hostile to Hercules's mother, using her influence on the birth process to increase the pain of labour, obstructing the delivery of the child. Ovid describes the episode in detail (*Met.* IX, 270–273): as Lucina attended on a stool while Alcmena was giving birth to her son, she linked the fingers of her hands together and placed them between her legs in order to impede the birth process (*dextroque a poplite laevum | pressa genu digitis inter se pectine iunctis | sustinuit partus*).³⁸ Only a servant, who was aware of the goddess's plan to inhibit the positive influence of her open hands on pregnant women (*divam residentem vidit in ara | brachiaque in genibus digitis conexa tenentem*),³⁹ found a way to make her open them; at that moment, the spell was broken and Alcmena was finally able to give birth (*exsiluit*

³⁶ Antonio Fileremo Fregoso, *Silve. Dei tre Peregrini*, Rome, Biblioteca italiana, 2005, vv. 170–176; it is unclear from the text whether her left hand was open and empty; it is only stated that she used it during childbirth. However, in the following verse, Lucina calls the pilgrims with her voice and beckons to them with her hand («Con la voce e con la mano»); this implies that she was using her left hand and not her right hand, which was holding the torch; see Fregoso, *Silve. Dei tre Peregrini*, 23.

³⁷ Giulio Bonasone, *Amori sdegni et gelosie di Giunone*, 1560.

³⁸ Publius Ovidius Naso, *Le metamorphosi*, a cura di Guido Paduano, Milano, Mondadori, 2007, IX, 295–299.

³⁹ Ivi, IX, 308–309.

*iunctasque manus pavefacta remisit | diva potens uteri, vinclis levor ipsa remissis).*⁴⁰

This passage was translated by Dolce and served as the model for Rusconi's representation.⁴¹ In fact, Rusconi's engraving depicts Lucina with her hands clamped between her legs in order to prevent Alcmena from giving birth to her child («Presso l'uscio in un canto si ripose / e stretta l'una man nell'altra pose. // Mise il destro ginocchio sopra il manco: / e, come io dico, strinse ambo le mani; / così impediva il parto»)⁴² Only when the goddess finally opened her hands did Hercules come to light («levata da seder le mani aperse / alhora io partori'»)⁴³

Therefore, it is clear that Rusconi used these literary sources to represent Lucina's hands: she can be easily identified in the scene (Fig. 5), confirming the fundamental relevance of this iconographic trait in her imagery.⁴⁴

Even the iconography of Juno in one of the frescos of the *Loggia di Amore e Psiche* at the Villa Farnesina in Rome, which Giovanni da Udine and Giulio Romano rendered from a drawing by Raphael,⁴⁵ appears to have been designed with the traits of Lucina in mind (Fig. 6a).

In the rib vault representing the three goddesses, Venus, the goddess of beauty, is depicted nude; Ceres, the goddess of crops, is presented with grain spikes on her head; and Juno is displayed with a peacock by her feet. Thus far, the position of Juno's hands has been interpreted as a "rhetorical" gesture in an attempt to placate a furious Venus, directly citing Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (5.31) (*Sed eam protinus Ceres et Iuno continentur. [...]*).⁴⁶ However, this passage does not provide a full description of Ceres and Juno's poses nor does it give specific de-

⁴⁰ Ivi, IX, 315-316.

⁴¹ Giuseppe Capriotti, *Le Trasformazioni di Lodovico Dolce: il Rinascimento ovidiano di Giovanni Antonio Rusconi*, Ancona, Affinità elettive, 2013; Bodo Guthmüller, *Nota su Giovanni Antonio Rusconi illustratore delle Trasformazioni del dolce*, in *Umanesimo e rinascimento a Firenze e Venezia. Miscellanea di studi in onore di Vittore Branca*, Florence, Olschki, 1983, II, pp. 771-779.

⁴² Lodovico Dolce, *Trasformazioni*, Venezia, Giolito, 1553, p. 197.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ For a general picture on the iconography of Lucina in the Renaissance editions of Ovid, see Giuseppina Zappella, *La lettura iconica*, cit., pp. 157-158.

⁴⁵ Rosalia Varoli-Piazza, *Un esempio di "concinnitas"*, in *Raffaello. La Loggia di Amore e Psiche alla Farnesina*, a cura di Rosalia Varoli-Piazza, Rome, Istituto centrale per il restauro, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, 2002, pp. 57-69: 61-62. Regarding these paintings, see also Stephan Mols, *La Villa della Farnesina. Le pitture*, Milan, Electa, 2008; Giulia Caneva, *Il mondo di Cerere nella Loggia di Psiche*, Rome, Palombi, 1992.

⁴⁶ Christoph Luitpold Frommel, *Venere, Cerere e Giunone (Scheda 39)*, in *La Villa Farnesina a Roma*, edited by Christoph Luitpold Frommel, Modena, Panini, 2003, II, p. 171.

tails regarding their hands. Instead, a subsequent passage rarely included among the sources for this figuration describes Psyche imploring both Ceres and Juno to protect her from Venus's wrath (Apul. *Met.* 6.4), praying the former for her "fertile" hand (*frugiferam tuam dexteram istam deprecor*) and evoking the latter as "Lucina" protector of childbirth (*et omnis occidens Lucinam appellat [...] Quod sciam, soles praegnatis periclitantibus ultro subuenire*). Since the hand of Ceres is in full accordance with these words, it could be hypothesised when observing the fresco that Juno's pose could also have been influenced by this same invocation, applying the iconographic characteristic of Lucina to her figure (i.e. the open hand) (Fig. 6b). Furthermore, since the hands of the goddess were always described in the plural form in the verses of Ovid referring to the birth of Hercules (*iunctas manus | ambo le mani*), the fact that Lucina was depicted with both hands open does not create a conflict with her general imagery, which allowed iconographic variations to manifest. Therefore, the representation of Juno as Lucina in this fresco may acquire an iconographic meaning that strengthens the links to her mythological tradition.

The feature of the open hand as one of the distinctive traits in the iconography of Lucina can be found in other representations directly related to the semantic field of the goddess and the Moon.⁴⁷ An interesting example can also be seen in the portrait of Lucina Brembati (Fig. 7a) by the Italian artist Lorenzo Lotto, which was painted between 1518 and 1523, and in which the noblewoman featured appears to have her left hand open (Fig. 7b), perhaps intentionally evoking the attribute of the goddess Lucina as the protector of birth.

The relationship between Lucina Brembati and this goddess had already been established in previous studies that demonstrated the mythological allusions of the portrait.⁴⁸ However, no reference was ever made to the left hand

⁴⁷ Even in Renaissance paintings depicting pregnant women or themes related to childbirth, iconographic features recalling this imagery can be found. For example, in the portrait of the Arnolfini carried out by the Flemish artist Jan van Eyck (1434), a veiled woman with an open hand is represented: it is likely that no direct relation with Lucina can be established, but it would be interesting to see if this gesture passed in this work through the Middle Ages through the iconography of Saint Margaret of Antioch, the protector of pregnant women and childbirth. See Saint Margaret of Andrea del Sarto (ca. 1510) and Guercino (1622), where the left hand is open and extended in both cases.

⁴⁸ Elsa Dezuanni, *Lorenzo Lotto ritrattista. 36. Ritratto di Lucina Brembati*, in *Lorenzo Lotto* edited by Renzo Villa, Giovanni Carlo Federico Villa, Milan, Silvana editoriale, 2011, pp. 210-211; Peter Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 66-70; Au-

being a canonical feature of Lucina. Usually, the right hand of the noblewoman was interpreted as a feature of childbirth because it was pressed down on her womb, representing the position of a pregnant woman. However, if this new interpretation of her left hand is accepted, the entire portrait could acquire a new meaning, reinforcing its allegorical nature: Lucina Brembati could, therefore, be fully identified as a personification of the goddess Lucina.

4. *Janus and Lucina*

In order to consider the imagery of Lucina in relation to this new iconographic element as a whole, it is necessary to take into account other functions she covered. As the guardian of doors, this may have in some way evoked the attribute of the key, favouring further its applicability. Lilio Gregorio Giraldi and Natale Conti defined her as *Prothyrea* (προθύρεια), which means “standing in front of a door”,⁴⁹ and Fregoso described her as a doorkeeper («e una portinara, anze una diva,/ la fatal porta subito li apriva»), confirming the early diffusion of this epithet during the Renaissance.⁵⁰ Generally, in ancient symbols, the door was an element related to birth, almost as “a door to life”.

Lucina was also an allegory of Pudency (*Pudicitia*), as stated by the Italian humanist Giovanni Pierio Valeriano.⁵¹ In *Hieroglyphica* (1556), the largest dictionary of symbols published during the Renaissance, he testified that this iconography appeared to recall the Roman numismatic imagery in which Pudency was one of the personifications of the Moon, represented by Diana and Juno in the form of Lucina (*modo IVNO, quod eadem Lucina est: modo PVDICITIA, quod Iuno, Luna, Diana, et idem Proserpina numen*).⁵²

In his view, *Pudor*, the male counterpart of Pudency, also could have been represented with a key, personifying the god Janus, the protector of beginnings,

gusto Gentili, *Lorenzo Lotto e il ritratto cittadino: Leonino e Lucina Brembate*, in *Il ritratto e la memoria. Materiali 1*, edited by Augusto Gentili, Rome, Bulzoni, 1989, pp. 155-182; Bernard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto*, edited by Luisa Verteva, Milan, Abscondita, 2008, pp. 50, 72 and 108.

⁴⁹ Lilio Gregorio Giraldi, *De deis gentium*, cit., p. 501; Natale Conti, *Mythologiae*, cit., p. 91.

⁵⁰ Antonio Fileremo Fregoso, *Silve. Dei tre Peregrini*, vv. 167-168.

⁵¹ Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica siue de sacris Aegyptiorum literis commentarii*, Basel, Michael Isengrin, 1556, p. 161b: *pudicitiam a Romanis velata facie pingi sculpisque solitam* as confirmed also by a series of coins that carried her name in the legend (*Quod vero in nummis et monumentis alijs antiquis velatae nonnumquam facies observantur cum inscriptione PVDICITIAE*); see also ivi, p. 296b; and the ancient coin RIC (Aurelius) 779.

⁵² Ivi, p. 328b.

ends, and doors (*qui Ianum dicit ad pudorem et sanctimoniam, domorum primum valuas, seras et claves excogitasse, ab eosque ianuas appellatas*).⁵³ Valeriano linked this key to pregnant women in labour and to childbirth (*erat enim olim ritus, ut nuptialibus inter alia clavis quoque muliebris traderetur*), reporting that the custom of giving a key to pregnant women was in order to assist the opening of the womb (*ad partus facilitatem [...] et hoc significatio [...] vulvam aperire*).⁵⁴ Valeriano also stated that, when Janus was depicted with a key in his hand (Fig. 8), he was identified with the ancient Roman god Portunus because he was considered to be the protector of doors (*Ianus tantum cum clavibus, verum et Portunus cum clavi figurabantur in manu: nam, et portarum Deus esse putabatur*).⁵⁵ This strong bond between Lucina and Janus may have fostered potential iconographic exchanges due to the semantic field they shared.⁵⁶

It is very likely that all of the above figurative prototypes contributed towards influencing Zucchi's imagery of Lucina, further justifying her association with a key. In fact, even when decorating the Hall of Palazzo Rucellai in 1591, it is interesting to note that Zucchi portrayed Janus holding a key in his hand on the opposite side of his Diana Lucina (Fig. 9).⁵⁷ No mention is made in his *Discorsi* as to its symbolic meaning:⁵⁸ Zucchi simply described Janus as Saturn's brother («che Saturno hebbe con il fratello Giano») and that he carried a key in his hand («tiene il detto Giano da una mano una chiave»). Nevertheless, given the sig-

⁵³ Ivi, p. 360b.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ A Janus *claviger*, protector of doors had already appeared in the parade of chariots for the wedding of Francesco Medici of 1565, described by Baccio Baldini («et in una mano gli dette una chiave [...] come guardiano di tutte le porte»), depicted by the artist Alessandro Allori and similarly represented by Vincenzo Cartari in 1571 («Giano fu creduto un medesimo nome con Portuno, il quale era stimato un dio guardiano, e custode delle porte, e perciò così mettevano gli antichi in mano a costui una chiave, come a Giano»); see Baccio Baldini, *Discorso sopra la mascherata*, cit., pp. 123-124; Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *I saturnali*, edited by Nino Marinone, Turin, UTET, 1977, I. 9.7; <http://mascherata-firb.citl.sns.it>. Cartari added that the key was introduced into Janus's imagery through his identification with the Sun, which opened and closed the day of light («e gli posero in mano [...] una chiave [...] e per questa che ei l'apre quando viene il dì ad illuminarlo, e lo chiude quando partendo lascia che la notte l'adombri»); see Vincenzo Cartari, *Le immagini con la spositione*, cit., pp. 47-48.

⁵⁷ Fernando Rigon, *Pittura e scrittura. L'impresa di Jacopo Zucchi nella superba e ricca galleria di palazzo Rucellai*, in *Storia di una galleria romana*, cit., pp. 109-196: 138-139.

⁵⁸ The relationship between Saturn and Diana are fully explained by Philippe Morel in *La galleria Rucellai*, cit., p. 58.

nificant level of iconological interference that occurred between the attributes of Janus and those of Lucina, it is possible to conclude that these two representations not only have precise correlations in their external features but may even lead to uncover additional hidden meanings in the iconographic programme.⁵⁹

5. Conclusions

What has emerged thus far is founded on the methodological processes applied by Zucchi in developing the iconography of the key in relation to Lucina during the Renaissance. Reference has been made to various ancient and modern sources, taking figurative prototypes and archetypes, parallel and divergent imageries into consideration. In this light, the association of the key with the goddess during the Renaissance appears to be a result of the synthesis and stratification of various elements from the same semantic field, which found tangible representation in the figurative culture of the time but which, as of today, can be found only in Zucchi's mythological paintings.⁶⁰

It is now clear that this attribute stems from the evolution of the canonical iconography of Lucina's open hand, which represented the most recognisable feature in her imagery for the protection of women in labour and of childbirth. In fact, the key as described by Festus became a parallel occurrence which was perfectly compatible with this feature and its many meanings.

⁵⁹ Iacopo Zucchi, *Discorso*, cit., pp. 14-15. If in this case the two gods embodied the Moon and the Sun respectively, this may be indicative of the alternation between day and night. And if one adds to this interpretation the chromatic differences between the two keys, one silver and one gold, further conceptual correlations could be hypothesized, embracing hidden meanings beyond textual and visual sources, taking on even esoteric implications, such as the disclosure of knowledge, the entrance to the door of mysteries, the symbolic access to alchemy, and the sublimation of metals. For a methodological overview on the relationship between iconology and alchemy during the Renaissance, see Mino Gabriele, *Alchimia e iconologia*, Udine, Forum, 2008; Maurizio Calvesi, Mino Gabriele, *Arte e alchimia*, Florence, Giunti, 1986; for a general overview on alchemical tradition in the Renaissance, see Michela Pereira, *Arcana Sapienza. L'alchimia dalle origini a Jung*, Rome, Carocci, 2001; *Mystical Metal of Gold: Essays on Alchemy and Renaissance Culture*, edited by Stanton J. Linden, New York, AMS press, 2007; *Esotérisme, gnosés & imaginaire symbolique: mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre*, edited by Richard Caron, Leuven, Peeters, 2001.

⁶⁰ In one of the decorations of the *Camerino* at the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, which was carried out by Annibale Carracci around 1599, a female figure depicted in a monochrome tympanum sitting on the side of the south-eastern door is holding two keys in her right hand, vaguely recalling the imagery of Zucchi's Lucina. This iconography carried out by Carracci years after Zucchi's Lucina in Palazzo Rucellai (1599) may very well have been inspired by it.

If the representation of Janus in direct relation to Lucina is also considered, the tie between the goddess and the key appears even stronger, especially since Lucina was described as the protector of doors, directly recalling the imagery of Janus, linking the attribute of *Prothyrea* with that of *Portunus* and fostering an iconographic exchange.

It remains unclear whether the archetype of this figuration was developed by Baccio Baldini while he worked on the Florentine parade for the wedding ceremony of Francesco de' Medici in 1565 or when he came across Cartari's description of Lucina in 1571. Regardless of its origin, the key, which Zucchi depicted three times in thirty years, certainly benefited from his personal experience and readings.



Acciarino, fig. 1a



Acciarino, fig. 1b



Acciarino, fig. 2a



Acciarino, fig. 2b



Acciarino, fig. 3a



Acciarino, fig. 3b



Acciarino, fig. 4a



Acciarino, fig. 4b



Acciarino, fig. 5



Acciarino, fig. 6a



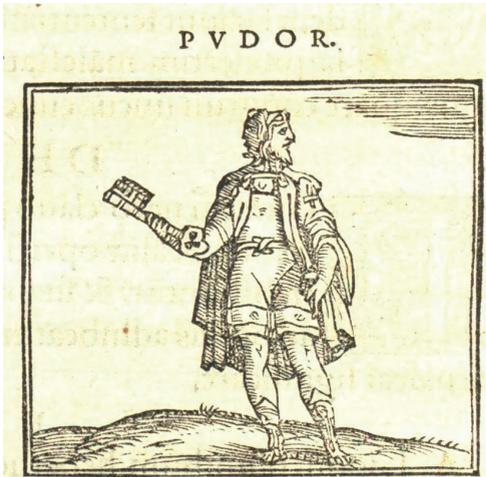
Acciarino, fig. 6b



Acciarino, fig. 7a



Acciarino, fig. 7b



Acciarino, fig. 8



Acciarino, fig. 9

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