

## *AUF DEN SPUREN DER NAZARENER:*

Re-reading *Vittoria Caldoni*:

Friedrich Overbeck's 'Portrait' in the Neue Pinakothek

by *Charles Davis*



One of the indubitable masterpieces of the somewhat uneven collection of paintings displayed in the Neue Pinakothek in Munich is Johann Friedrich Overbeck's seemingly perfect *Vittoria Caldoni*. During a recent Sunday morning visit to the museum, undertaken with the intention of looking at the Nazarene paintings in the collection, the portrait of Vittoria Caldoni exercised its curious fascination, and, as pictures often do, it appeared increasingly puzzling upon prolonged inspection. Only much later did I come across Keith Andrews's conclusion to his brief commentary upon this painting in his seminal book of 1964, *The Nazarenes*, a work instrumental in reviving a more widespread interest in these long-neglected and often disparaged painters. Of Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni*, the author writes: "The frontal disposition draws the spectator into the picture and forces him, intentionally, to seek a meaning beyond mere portrait representation" (pp. 113-114). Nowhere does Andrews enlarge upon what this 'meaning' might be, but nevertheless his observation, if inadvertently, corresponds to the agendum of the present essay. Although a book published in 2011 by the Akademie Verlag in Berlin describes Andrews as a 'Scottish scholar' and a 'non-German art historian', it might be remembered that he was born as Kurt Aufrichtig in Hamburg on 11 October 1920.



Friedrich Overbeck, *Vittoria Caldoni*, 1821. Neue Pinakothek, München

Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni* is universally referred to as her portrait, but, paradoxically, in his representation the artist is at pains to attribute to the young girl from Albano whom he portrays a social rôle in the world of work which she, in reality, did not perform. This rôle is that of a worker in the wheat fields, and this circumstance is made clear first by the simple clothing that she wears, and then by the sickle, by the grain sack on which she sits, and by the field of wheat behind her, all three images conceived, in the realm of the painting, as timeless pictorial attributes to identify the figure represented. Upon its arrival in Munich in 1821, very soon after its completion, the painting was identified simply as the

“*Bäuerin*”. In most of the very numerous portraits of Vittoria Caldoni, she is shown as a fairly fine young lady, although her father was identified by contemporaries as poor. Among the portraits of Vittoria, Overbeck’s is an absolute exception: he depicts her as a field labourer, an almost plebeian ‘working girl’.



Overbeck, *Vittoria Caldoni*, 1821. Neue Pinakothek, München

In reality, the young Vittoria Caldoni was the daughter of a vineyard keeper, a wine-maker (*Winzerstochter*), as she is shown in her portrait from 1826 by Paul Emil Jacobs.



Paul Emil Jacobs,  
*Vittoria Caldoni in einer Weinlaub*, 1826.  
Private Collection, Österreich



Theodor Rehbenitz, *Vittoria Caldoni*, 1860.  
Museum Behnhaus, Lübeck

In Overbeck's portrait every plausible attribute that earlier paintings might have suggested for a daughter of the vineyard are missing: no grapes, no wine, no grape vines, stalks or leaves. A simple internet image search, with search terms such as 'Winzerstochter', 'Weinprinzessen', or 'Weinkönigen', etc., suggests, in addition to these, other images that might have occurred to Overbeck to portray Vittoria's rôle and status in world of work: a wine-fiasco or wine bottle, a glass of wine in hand, a wine cask, a setting in an *osteria* or a *cantina di vino*; at the very least some grapes or a few grape leaves, and possibly a slightly plunging neckline. But all of this is missing. A further consideration is that the economy of Albano (after 1872, 'Albano Laziale') is overwhelmingly tied to the production of wine and to the cultivation of vineyards, as it has been in most of its long history. Wheat plays no important rôle.

Margaret Howitt, the young English lady to whom Overbeck's adoptive daughter entrusted the writing of her father's 'authorised' biography, observes that prior to her 'discovery' Vittoria never left her parents' house except to go to church, or "zur Arbeit in den Weingarten" (1886, I, p. 480). In 1850, August Kestner, who claims to have discovered her in 1820, had reported more extensively:

*"Sie hatte außer einigen weiblichen Arbeiten nie etwas gelernt, als die Gebete in ihrem Gebetbuch zu lesen, aber auch diese Uebung verloren, nachdem sie dieselben auswendig wußte – und denn die Hacke im Weingarten zu führen und die Weinranken im Juni abzupflücken"* (*Römische Studien*, p. 83).

Thus the question: why does a ‘*Winzerstochter*’ sit before a field of wheat instead of before a vineyard? And why beneath a fig tree, and not under a grape arbour? Why is she not “*Vittoria, die schöne Winzerin von Albano*”, as August Kestner, “Ph. D.”, identified her in the title of the ninth essay in his *Römische Studien* (Berlin 1850). Certainly artists of the time were not at a loss to find images suitable to identify a *Winzerstochter*. Leafing through Marianne Bernhard’s *Deutsche Romantik: Handzeichnungen* (München: Rogner & Bernhard, 1973), for instance, one sees many examples that testify to this fact, in drawings by artists such as Franz Horny, Friedrich Nerly, Theodor von Rehbenitz, Johann



Friedrich Nerly,  
*Mädchen unter Weinranken.*  
Cantiduggia Mampieri a Olevano”,  
Kunsthalle, Bremen



Friedrich Nerly, *Italienerin.*  
“Ornella 7 Venerdì Ottobre Cajano”  
Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig

Anton Ramboux, and Carl Rottmann. Nerly's *Mädchen unter Weinranken* ("Cantiduggia Mampieri a Olevano", Bremen, circa 1830) belongs to this group, as does his *Italienerin* ("Ornella 7 Venerdi Ottobre Cajano").

It is often mentioned in passing that Overbeck's portrait occupies an exceptional position among the many portraits of Vittoria Caldoni: his portrait appears different from the others – although the differences are seldom specifically identified. In the present context, it seems significant that Vittoria Caldoni is, in comparison with other portraits of her, 'de-individualised' in Overbeck's painting – the marks of specific identity are erased. Not only are the features of her face far more idealised than in most other portraits, but they are rendered with greater monumentality and with an emphatic volumetric plasticity. Thus Vittoria Caldoni appears at first much older than her fifteen years.

Her, according to all reports, too slender and delicate body appears in the painting sturdy and earthbound. A concrete indication of the de-individualisation that has taken place is the omission of her red coral-bead necklace in the painted portrait. Vittoria's own necklace is still present in Overbeck's preparatory study of her head, now belonging to the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung (München), as it is in numerous other portraits of her. Further, Overbeck seems to have emphasized the essential volumes of her forms so as to produce an idealization of his sitter. Beauty, for Overbeck, is "purity of all accidental or inessential faults, which interrupt the form too minutely or which disturb or weaken the impression" (*Diario*, 1.10.1811, in: Howitt, 1886, I, p. 182: "*Schönheit! d.h. Reinheit von allen zufälligen oder außerwesentlichen Mängeln, die die Formen kleinlich unterbrechen und den Eindruck stören oder schwächen.*").



Overbeck, *Vittoria Caldoni*,  
preparatory study of head,  
Graphische Sammlung, München

It is also often emphasized that Overbeck's '*Bäuerin*' wears the local costume (*Tracht*) of Albano, as she does in very many other portraits of her. But it can scarcely be overlooked that the broad surfaces of the materials from which her clothes are fashioned are drawn, that is, painted in a flat and unspecific manner, all executed in Overbeck's favoured contrasting local colours, and the costume is portrayed in terms of generalised outlines and universal features. The relatively small picture – less than a metre high – shows a full-figure in an almost unreal close-up view, although the figure is nowhere truncated by the frame; despite her closeness, she remains complete and somewhat removed. In her entirety Vittoria appears monumental and slightly abstract, the latter quality reflected even in her remote, abstract, almost absent mental state – all this as if Overbeck has declined portraying the figure he represents in a conventional portrait, as if he has sought to transform her into someone else. Although the figure is often described – in early texts as well as in quite recent ones – as almost life-size, this is far from true.

For the moment, let us look for signs of a new identity, first in terms of simple pictorial attributes, the signs and symbols of identity. The field of wheat behind Vittoria functions as a classic landscape or background attribute: closest to us, the stalks of wheat still grow high; further distant the field appears to have been reaped, but this may be only an illusion.

The wheat field is the place of the maiden's work. This is confirmed by the presence of an instrument of labour at her side: the sickle for harvesting grain, represented in the foreground large and nearly within our reach. The white *sacco* ('sack') beneath her, on which she half-way sits, at the same time, shielding it from pilferers, is her sack of grain, containing the fruits of her work. It should be noted that she, in fact, sits and supports her weight upon a low half-circle step-like ledge of earth, which rises from the ground upon which her feet rest. The position of Hagar in Overbeck's *Hagar in the Desert* is quite similar.



Ludwig Gruner after Overbeck, *Hagar in the Desert* (1837-1841)

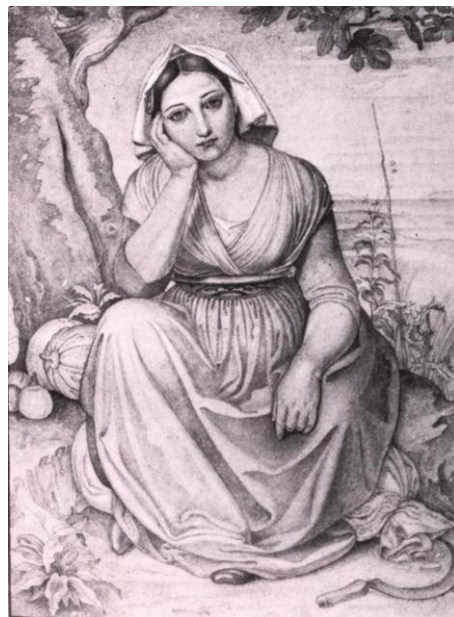
The various small plants and fruits (two figs, an apple, two melons, or, just possibly, *zucche*) that Overbeck has painted are conceivably meant to convey some meaning, but – plant symbolism aside – they are perhaps simply pictorial accessories, beautiful to see, and ones that lend colour, tone, and atmosphere to the picture.



On the other hand, the trunk of the fig tree, to the left, is quite large, and it occupies a notably significant portion of the picture surface. In the painting in the Neue Pinakothek, the fig tree is not easy to see in all its details. Here strongly lit photographs may help, as can also a painted reduction of Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni*, now in Wuppertal, probably executed by Theodor Rehbenitz, as well as a *Nachzeichnung* by Rehbenitz from the year 1840 (Kiel, Kunsthalle). In all these visual testimonies one sees what appears to be an unhealthy, wasting tree: a large gaping fissure extends vertically from the ground far up the length of the trunk. The outer layer of the trunk bends around the edges of this cleft, still bereft of bark. Above, at the right side of the trunk, a branch has broken off, leaving the raw substance of the tree exposed.



Overbeck, *Vittoria Caldoni*, München



Theodor Rehbenitz, *Vittoria Caldoni*, 1840.  
Museum Behnhaus, Lübeck



Vittoria Caldoni, Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal

Rather than following immediately the implications of this circumstance, let us turn our attention first to the concrete historical circumstances in which Overbeck's painting of Vittoria Caldoni was made: to Overbeck and his circle, to Vittoria Caldoni, to her portrait in Munich and others of her, and to her many admirers in Rome.

To begin, let us ask about the painting in the Neue Pinakothek the questions, 'who?', 'what?', 'where?', 'when?', 'why?', and 'how?'. Brief answers to these questions will consolidate the basis of information for re-reading Overbeck's picture.

#### WHO IS IN THE PICTURE?

As already mentioned several times, we see the fifteen-year-old Vittoria Caldoni. She was born in 1805 in Albano Laziale, southeast of Rome, and, in the 1820s, was unquestionably "*la modella più famosa di Roma*". In 1820 Vittoria was 'discovered' before her house door by August Kestner, the Secretary of the German ambassador to the Vatican. That, at least, is what Kestner claims, although there are a few indications that Vittoria was not then a complete

unknown (cf. Koeltz, 2010, p. 20 and fig. 12). In any event, her ‘discoverer’ describes Vittoria as “*eine Schönheit, so vollkommen, wie seit Menschengedenken hier nichts gesehen war*” (*Römische Studien*, 1850, p. 81). Margaret Howitt, the English biographer of Overbeck, describes her as “*die Tochter armer Winzerleute*” (I, p. 480). Kestner counted forty-four portraits of her that he had seen with his own eyes. As a pictorial subject, Vittoria was especially beloved by the Nazarene painters in Rome, among others by – besides Overbeck – Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Rehbenitz, Ellenrieder, Hess, and Settegast.

#### WHAT IS THE PAINTING?

It is a painting by Johann Friedrich Overbeck (Lübeck 1789-Rome 1869) that at least by 1853 was found in the Neue Pinakothek, and which is still exhibited there today. Oil on canvas, somewhat less than a metre high (89,5 : 65,8 cm). The painting in the Neue Pinakothek is by far the best known of the portraits of Vittoria Caldoni.

#### WHERE AND WHEN WAS IT PAINTED?

The early history of the painting takes place in Rome, beginning in the Winter of 1820-1821. On the reverse side of the painting, the stretcher frame (*Keilrahmen*) bears a slip of paper with the handwritten inscription: “*Vittoria Cardoni [= Caldoni] von Albano. / 15. Jahre alt. / von Joh. Friedrich Oberbeck aus Lübeck / gemahlt zu Rom im Jahre 1821*”.

#### HOW DID THE PAINTING COME TO BE?

Crown Prince Ludwig I of Bavaria, who knew Overbeck as early as 1818, ordered, apparently in late 1820, on the occasion of a subsequent Roman sojourn, an oil painting by Overbeck of the already celebrated beauty, Vittoria Caldoni. Contemporary reports about the commission are sparse. It is sometimes suggested that Ludwig merely bought Overbeck’s painting after it was finished, but the work was, in fact, expressly made on commission for the Crown Prince, as, among other testimonies, a letter of Carl Friedrich von Rumohr to Overbeck (12.09.1821) makes clear: “*Wie steht es mit dem Bilde für den Kronprinz?*” (Friedrich Stock, “*Briefe Rumohrs*”, in: *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, Beiheft zu Band 64, 1943, pp. 33, 117).

#### WHY WAS THE PAINTING MADE?

This is a question difficult to answer completely, and I shall attempt only a provisional answer in what follows (see *infra*). Whether Prince Ludwig thought first of a painting by Overbeck, or whether a desire for a portrait of Vittoria Caldoni came first is not entirely clear from the contemporary testimonies that

survive and have been identified. The portrait of Vittoria appears to be Ludwig's single direct commission to Overbeck, although he did buy Overbeck's *Germania und Italia* in 1833, and later, in 1851, he acquired a drawing by the artist (Howitt, II, p. 425), and, in 1857, Overbeck's *Maria and Elisabeth with their Children*, although again not directly from the artist. On the other hand, the Prince bought a portrait bust of the "schönen Albaneserin" (Vittoria Caldoni) from the estate (*Nachlaß*) of the sculptor Rudolf Schadow, who had died only shortly earlier in Rome (Gold, *Modellkult*, 2009, p. 157; Glaser, *et al.*, 2004, vol. 1/3, pp. 333-335; cf. also Doc. 637; 1,3: *Briefwechsel, Ludwig I. u. Klenze*, 2004; 1830 in the Neue Pinakothek). In 1825, he purchased a further bust of Vittoria from the sculptor Emil Wolf (Wagner, *Briefe* No. 364, 396, 398; *Deutsche Künstler*, 1981). Ludwig also commissioned single portraits of Italian ladies, most notably of his friend, Marianna Marchesa Florenzi (from the Autumn of 1823: Heinrich Hess; see Vignau-Wilberg, 2003, pp. 168-171). A possible connexion of the Caldoni portrait with Ludwig's *Schönheitengalerie* (1823-1850; first mentioned in May 1821) will be examined below.

#### ARRIVAL IN MUNICH:

Under pressure from the North, the painting was apparently completed more rapidly than Overbeck wished and then consigned to the Crown Prince's agent in Rome for shipment to Munich in November 1821. A contemporary wrote in the *Kunstblatt* (Nr. 18, 4.03.1822, S. 70 f.): „Schade, daß unser Künstler genöthigt war, dieses Bild auf einen bestimmten Termin abzuliefern, und er den Händen nicht diejenige Vollendung geben konnte, welche sonst im Ganzen Gemälde so erfreut". The contributor of the "Nachrichten aus Rom" signs his report "Joh. v. F.", which is, in reality, a pseudonym used by Johann David Passavant ('Johannes v[on]. F[rankfurt].; see also: Overbeck to Rumohr; 5.01.1822: "als ich genöthigt war, das Bild aus den Händen zu geben"; Stock, p. 33, no. 23). On 17. November 1821 the notice of receipt in Munich reads: a "Bäuerin von Albano" (Gold, 2009; Hagen, 1926, p. 19; Howitt, I, p. 481, note 2; II, p. 407). In August 1823 a frame for the painting was made: "Für die Albaneserin" (Messerer, 1966, p. 599, No. 514/4). Also in 1823: Overbeck's "Albanerin" (Messerer, 1966, p. 576, No. 496/6). Thus it appears that the picture was – rather than as a portrait of a specific, known person – viewed as a characteristic representative of a place-specific (Albano) or a work-specific type. Nowhere is the painting mentioned as a portrait of 'Vittoria Caldoni', or even 'Vittoria', as a distinct and well-known cult figure (see: Gold, *Modellkult*, 2009, pp. 166 ff.).

#### OVERBECK AROUND 1820:

In 1820 Overbeck had been in Rome for a decade. His closest friend, Franz Pforr, had died ten years earlier. The height of the *Lukasbund* is long past. With the Casa Bartholdy frescoes the first public artistic success has been attained. Two years earlier, Overbeck had married, and his son, Alfons, was born on 23 August 1819. The work on the Casa Massimo frescoes is proceeding in a desultory fashion, not least owing to Overbeck's dwindling enthusiasm for Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, which was proving to be ill-adapted for treatment as a religious allegory (Andrews, 1964).

#### OVERBECK AND PORTRAITURE:

Aside from self-portraits, family-portraits, and 'friendship'-portraits (all personal concerns of the artist), Overbeck was seldom active as a portraitist. Although his drawings show Overbeck to have been gifted in capturing likenesses, he appears to have painted no formal portraits on commission. In later years, he was, however, willing to undertake a portrait of Pius IX, and around 1856 the Pope granted sittings for his portrait (Atkinson, 1882, p. 45). But Pius IX's portrait was *eo ipso* a Christian picture. In her extensive list of his works, Overbeck's early biographer, Margaret Howitt, mentions only four portraits, all from Overbeck's first years in Rome. It was in these early years that Barthold Georg Niebuhr, the Prussian ambassador to the Vatican, mentions Overbeck's less than favourable financial circumstances, in a letter to Overbeck's father (13.06.1818) written to recommend the young painter's engagement to Nina Hartl. Niebuhr's hope is that Overbeck will persuade his present patron, the Marchese Massimi, "*ihm zu erlauben, von Zeit zu Zeit Porträts zu malen, eine Arbeit, die einen solchen Künstler hier sehr reichlich bezahlt wird (...)*." (I hope that Marchese Masimi can be induced to allow him to paint portraits from time to time, a task for which such an artist is very well paid here. [Hasse, 1888, pp. 173-174; Frank, 2001, p. 72]). But even Niebuhr thought that the "*bewundernswürdigen Cartone der Massimischen Malereyen*" were vastly more important. It is not clear that Overbeck's wishes in this matter corresponded to Niebuhr's hopes. In Overbeck's situation, portraits were to be painted to achieve financial independence and not to achieve greatness in art. Overbeck looked upon himself as a history painter ('*Historienmaler*'; Andrews, 1964, p. 53), and he subscribed to the traditional hierarchy of genres. (Stock, 1943, p. 14: Rumohr's *Vertrag* with Overbeck: drawn up by Overbeck: "[...] *zwischen Herrn Friedrich Overbeck Historien Maler gegenwärtig in Rom*", 1819).

In reality, Overbeck appears to have avoided portrait commissions. In later years he did not even want his works to be shown in exhibitions, as he explained in a letter to Graf Raczyński (Valentin, 1888). Overbeck's credo was expressed in his *Triumph der Religion in den Künsten* (1840; Städelsches Kunstinstitut).



Overbeck, *Triumph der Religion in den Künsten*, 1840  
Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main

In the time around 1821/22, when the Nazarene painter Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld was enthusiastically preparing to paint his portrait of the beautiful “*Albaneserin*” for Johann Gottlob von Quandt, Schnorr's letters cast a new light on Overbeck's views concerning such a portrait commission. Schnorr approached his commission with his typical engagement and industrious, optimistic enthusiasm. After a first attempt to paint his portrait of Vittoria Caldoni, one in which the girl was shown with a spindle in her hands and had momentarily interrupted her work, looking out from the picture towards the beholder, Schnorr attempted to formulate a new conception for the portrait. In October 1822, Schnorr wrote to Quandt about a conversation he had lately had with Overbeck about the portrait he was painting: Overbeck had called Schnorr's attention to the circumstance that Schnorr's first idea for the portrait, in its overall “*Anordnung sich nicht mit dem wahren Porträtstile vertrage.*”

“*In dem er mir die vorzüglichsten Porträts vergegenwärtigte, zeigte er mir, daß die größten Meister in diesem Fach es vermieden, die porträtierte Person in*

*irgendeiner Handlung zu zeigen. Es ist nicht, als sähe man diese Personen zufällig, sondern als stellten sie sich dem Beschauer geflissentlich in dem Grunde ihres Wesens dar*” (p. 415). Thereby Overbeck comes close to Burckhardt’s conception of the ‘*Existenzbild*’ – “*ohne überfrachtende erzählerische Momente*”: the representation of a “*ruhigen Daseins*” as an almost universal and timeless moment, rather than a picture of character.

Although Overbeck writes in his diary on 11 September 1811, “*Beim Portraitmalen soll der Endzweck sein, den Charakter der vorzustellenden Person richtig aufzufassen und mit möglichster Treue nachzubilden; dies zu erreichen kann auch die Bekleidung und selbst der einfachste Hintergrund mitwirken*” (Howitt, 1886, I, pp. 173-174), in the painting in the Neue Pinakothek, Overbeck appears studiously to avoid portraying the girl’s nature and character. Even her youth is veiled. In the commission for a portrait of Vittoria Caldoni for a royal German patron, Overbeck’s evasion of classical portraiture in the sense of the likeness of a specific person, characterized as an individual, goes far beyond the escape into essentiality that defines *Existenzmalerei*. If perhaps in her picture Vittoria Caldoni remains a model, she is a model who at the same time seems to become someone else, in an image that proposes a shift, or shifts in genre.

#### RUTH AND BOAZ, 1818, OR HOW NINA OVERBECK IS RUTH:

Overbeck’s engagement and marriage took place in Rome, distant from his parents and family in Lübeck. His parents were destined never to see his fiancée Nina Hartl, who became Overbeck’s wife in October of 1818, and, indeed, they never saw their son again, after his departure for Italy in the Spring of 1810. Having earlier promised his parents a portrait of Nina, by mid-December 1818 Overbeck had prepared an elaborate and very finished drawing depicting the story of Ruth and Boaz, associating the theme with his own marriage and taking Nina as the model for the figure of Ruth.



Friedrich Overbeck, *Ruth in the Fields of Boaz*, 1818  
Museum Behnhaus, Lübeck

To introduce his wife to his parents, Overbeck sent this drawing to Lübeck as a gift, writing upon the dispatch of the drawing that “*eine Gestalt darin nach meiner Nina gezeichnet ist. – Es ist Ruth auf dem Acker des Boaz, die ich eigentlich für Nina zeichnete, die Sie als Geschenk von Ihr anzusehen haben.*” On its arrival in Lübeck, Overbeck’s overjoyed father wrote to his son:

“*Sie ist eingetroffen, die süße Nina=Ruth, samt Boas dem weidlichen Manne! O wie haben wir geschweigt, wie haben Freunde und Bekannte geschaut, bewundert! Wie sind wir selig in diesem Besitz!*” (Howitt, I, p. 440).

In applying the epithet ‘*weidlich*’ (well-to-do) to Boaz, Christian Adolph Overbeck appears to have held the Biblical description of Boaz in his memory, or perhaps he had inspected his son’s drawing in light of the Book of Ruth.

“Es war auch ein Mann, der Naemi Mannes Freund, von dem Geschlecht Elimelechs, mit Namen Boas, der war ein weidlicher Mann.” (*Ruth* 2: 1; Luther Bible, 1545).

A separate study of Overbeck’s wife Nina as Ruth, made at this time (now National Gallery of Canada), was exhibited at the Frankfurt Nazarene exhibition in 1977 (p. 257, No. E 50). Inscribed, “*Villa Palombara d. 9th Nov. 1818*”, it



shows Nina, “*wie sie einmal zufällig mit aufgeschürztem Rock aus dem Garten herauskam.*”



Friedrich Overbeck  
*Nina Overbeck: Study for the figure of Ruth*  
 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

In the finished drawing, still in Lübeck, the head of Ruth was not quite a portrait, but still recognisably Nina, as Overbeck wrote: “*Wenn gleich der Kopf gerade kein Portrait zu nennen ist, doch das übrige so getreu nach ihr gezeichnet ist, daß jedermann sie darin erkennt.*” Overbeck further promises to send a proper portrait drawing with the “*Züge ihres Gesichts*” (Jensen, 1962, p. 364). This may be the pencil drawing, *Portrait of the Artist’s Wife* (1818; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) identified by Andrews (*Nazarenes*, 1964, p. 100, No. 18b).



Overbeck, *Portrait of the Artist’s Wife, Nina*.  
 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Overbeck, *The Artist and his wife, Nina*.  
 Detail from: *The Artist's Family*,  
 Museum Behnhaus, Lübeck

If Nina's features exhibit a slightly plainer Germanic beauty in the Ashmolean portrait than in the Lübeck *Ruth and Boaz*, the portraits of the two drawings are not very different, both expressions of Overbeck's ideal female type. Similarly, Nina's face often seems to lie behind Overbeck's images of the Madonna, in particular, in that in Copenhagen.

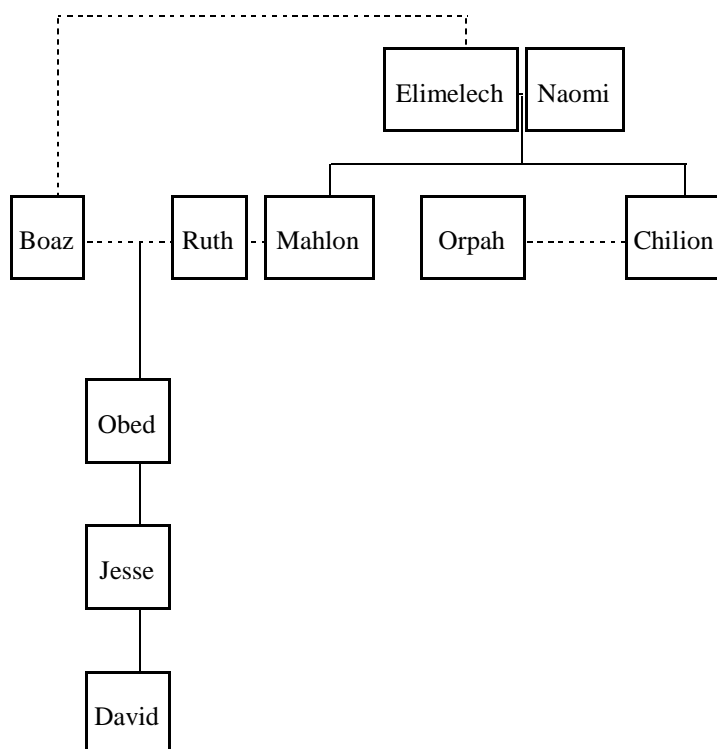


Overbeck, *Madonna and Child*, 1819.  
 Thorvaldsen Museum, København

A further instance in which Overbeck represents his wife (and son) in a biblical illustration, *Das Scherflein der armen Witwe*, is found in a pencil drawing (Private collection, circa 1820) shown at Lübeck in the Overbeck exhibition of 1989 (cat. no. 103).

In the biblical-historical drawing sent to his parents in Lübeck, Overbeck has objectified the likeness of his wife to assimilate her into the Old Testament narrative. Ruth's reception by Boaz in his grain field in Bethlehem and their subsequent marriage constitutes the resolution of her story in the Book of Ruth, and transforms her into a central figure of the Christian narrative as the progenitrix (*Stammutter*) of the royal house of Israel, the great-grandmother of King David, the founder of the House of David, who was chosen to become King from among the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem, and who was ultimately the royal ancestor of Christ.

#### GENEALOGY: THE DESCENT OF DAVID FROM RUTH



Represented is the scene where Ruth, who, having come with Naomi to Bethlehem from her native Moab, has gleaned grain left by the reapers in Boaz's

wheat fields. It is the moment when Boaz first shows his favour to Ruth. In Overbeck's drawing Boaz welcomes the young newcomer, receiving her in the circle of his workers.

5. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?

6. And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:

7. And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

8. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

9. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. (*Ruth*, 2:5)

Even in the landscape of the background the two levels of meaning – biblical narrative and topical reference to the present – are maintained. The two 'townscapes' to the left and right do not show the Holy Land. At the left, behind Boaz, is an Italian mountain town, apparently referring to Overbeck's spiritual home in Italy, and, at the right, behind Ruth, a Gothic German city, which some have identified with Vienna, where Nina Hartl was born, dual topographical references to the present-day 'actors' in the scene. Thus the story of Ruth assumes a quasi-universal character, as a marriage-picture, applicable to Overbeck's own life. In the words written about the drawing by Overbeck and by his father, there is no suggestion that the double-identity of Nina-Ruth presented either of the men a problem, either of presentation or of comprehension. The image had simply two levels of reality. Nina provided the model for Ruth, and, within the narrative, she is Ruth, but Ruth as enacted by Nina, and, cast in this rôle, she is, at the same time, recognizably Nina. Nina is also more than a model, for her portrait within the narrative allows the beholder to apply the story to her marriage.

*Ruth*, *Ruth and Boaz*, and *Ruth and Naomi*: all these were or became, perhaps in Overbeck's wake, subjects beloved by the Nazarenes, depicted especially in the 1820s, and, in particular, by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld and Philipp Veit,

both men close to Overbeck, and also by Joseph Anton Koch, who represented the meeting of Ruth and Boaz in drawings and paintings at least sixteen times.



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Ruth and Boaz*. 1827.  
Kupferstichkabinett, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



Joseph Anton Koch, *Landscape near Olevano with Ruth and Boaz*.  
Private Collection, 1823/1825

Returning to Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni*, it has doubtlessly occurred to some readers that Overbeck may have cast her in the rôle of Ruth. A closer

examination of the painting will yield a number of confirmations for this conclusion.

When Overbeck completed his *Italia and Germania* (Neue Pinakothek) in 1828, he wrote to Johann Friedrich Wenner, the man who was buying this work begun in Overbeck's youth, in 1811, that in completing the painting (which initially was to represent 'Shulamit and Maria'), he had felt the need to clarify his youthful conception by settling upon a more definite meaning, as if to answer the often asked question, 'What does this painting actually make visible? What does it mean?' (*“Es trat nämlich in späterer Zeit der Ausarbeitung natürlich das Bedürfniß ein, der jugendlich unklaren Vorstellung eine bestimmtere Bedeutung unterzulegen, wozu schon die häufige Frage: was denn das Bild eigentlich vorstelle? veranlaßte.”*).

#### WAS DENN DAS BILD EIGENTLICH VORSTELLE?

As noted above, wheat fields are the site of Ruth's work, as she gleans on the lands of Boaz.



2. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after *him* in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

3. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field *belonging* unto Boaz, who *was* of the kindred of Elimelech. (*Ruth*, 2: 2-3).



J. A. Koch, *Landscape with Ruth and Boaz*,  
ca. 1823-25. Milwaukee Art Museum



(Detail)



Eduard Bendemann, *Ruth in the Wheat Fields of Boaz*, 1830.



"Boaz and Ruth"  
By James Faed (1821-1911)



Gustave Doré, *Ruth*; detail from: *Boaz and Ruth*, after 1850.

Stalks of wheat become Ruth's primary attribute:



Hugues Merle, *Ruth*, 1876.



*Ruth*



Louis Bruck-Lajos, *Ruth*

Some of the representations of Ruth could as easily be a personification of Summer, as in this drawing by Overbeck's friend, Edward von Steinle, which belongs to a set of *Die Vier Jahreszeiten* (1861) (A. M. von Steinle, *Edward von Steinle*, 1910, no. 362):





Hugues Merle, *Ruth*, 1876.



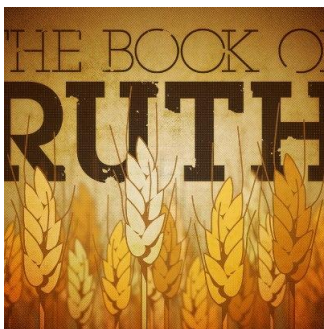
Edward von Steinle, *Summer*, 1861.



Alexandre Cabanel, *Ruth*, 1866/68.



In the modern visual imagination, wheat fields or stalks of wheat alone have provided almost a logogramm of Ruth:



The hand-held sickle with a curved blade (sometimes depicted as a scythe) is not strictly speaking a proper attribute for Ruth, for the activity that she performed in Boaz's fields was not that of reaping, or harvesting, using a sickle to cut the stalks of wheat, binding them in sheaves, and piling the sheaves in conical heaps, but that of gleaning, that is, collecting the remains of grains, spiklets, and stalks of wheat left behind by the reapers. Nevertheless, the sickle serves as a referential attribute to identify the locale of the story in Overbeck's *Ruth und Boas* (Lübeck, 1818) and Julius Schnorr von Carolfeld's subsequent

representations of the same theme (Vaduz, 1825; Hamburg, Kunsthalle, 1826 and 1827; London, National Gallery, 1828) and thereby to reveal the identity of the main actors.



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Ruth and Boaz*, 1828.  
National Gallery, London

Paintings are not photographs of biblical histories, and painters avail themselves of visual expedients in their exposition. As such, Overbeck has placed the sickle prominently in the foreground, to the right. Its blade points to the white sack or bundle, over which Vittoria Caldoni sits and which she partly conceals.



Ruth gleaned in the fields and won the heart of Boaz.  
Her son was the grandfather of King David.



If the sickle is not an instrument of work that Ruth is shown holding in her hand in biblical histories (but single figures of Ruth do sometimes hold a sickle), the bundle or wheat sack is not *sensu stricto* something that pertains to women

working in the field to harvest wheat. If Vittoria is merely cast as a field worker, her task is to cut the stalks and bind them into sheaves. Why then does she sit on a grain sack? The bundle or sack containing wheat belongs instead to gleaners. Sometimes it assumes the form of the gleaner's apron, drawn upward to collect the spiklets and grains of wheat. Ruth is the archetypical gleaner.



Jean-François Millet, *The Gleaners*, 1857. Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Pieter Fransz. de Grebber, *Ruth and Naomi*, Museum der Bildenden Kunste, Kopenhagen



Antonio Cortina Farinós (1841–1890), *Ruth*, Museu de Belles Arts, València



Jan Victors, *Boaz and Ruth*, 1653.  
Art Market, New York

In the fields of Boaz, Ruth gleans the remains of the wheat harvest, and finds favour and protection from Boaz (*Ruth 2*):

8. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

9. *Let* thine eyes *be* on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of *that* which the young men have drawn.

10. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I *am* a stranger?

11. And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and *how* thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

12. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

13. Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.



Rembrandt, *Ruth finds Favour with Boaz*, circa 1637-40.  
Kupferstichkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, Berlin

Later, at Naomi's urging, Ruth returned at night to Boaz, to the threshing floor where he slept:

14. So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor."

15. He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of wheat and placed the bundle on her. Then he returned to his house in the town (*Ruth*, 2: 14-15).

Thus Boaz confirms his promise to marry Ruth by casting grain into her veil. Rembrandt represents this scene from the Book of Ruth, showing Boaz filling Ruth's veil or shawl, which, wrapped into a bundle or wheat sack, he placed upon her. From this union issues the Tree of Jesse.



Rembrandt, *Boaz casting Grain into Ruth's Veil*, ca. 1645.  
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

The visual prominence of the 'sacco' beneath Vittoria Caldoni is owed to its whiteness, a colour determined first of all by Overbeck's pictorial *Regie* in the painting, a work of unusual colouristic brilliance. Although today wheat sacks are often white, in Overbeck's day ordinary ones were brown, made of fibres such as hemp, as in Julius Schnorr's *Ruth and Boaz* in London (*supra*).



Andrea Del Sarto, *La Madonna del Sacco*,  
SS. Annunziata, Firenze

In the realm of pictures, so present in the imagination of a retrospective artist such as Overbeck, it is difficult not to recall Andrea Del Sarto's *Madonna del Sacco*, which is also identified as a '*Riposo*' and where the white sack is a travel sack, perhaps suggesting an association of the journeys of Christ's parents with the journey of Ruth and Naomi from Moab to Bethlehem, Naomi's native town and the place where Boaz's fields were located.



*Defert Arpa socrum . sequitur Ruth, fretis, et inquit  
'Est meus et populus, et Deus ille tuus.'*

*Die Arpa en Moabten, in Sussgraswey lufft ziehen hin.  
Ruth an Naomi holt treu und lufft, an ir. Cist wabrumbt das das lufft.*

Hendrick Goltzius, *Orpah leaving Ruth and Naomi*, 1576.

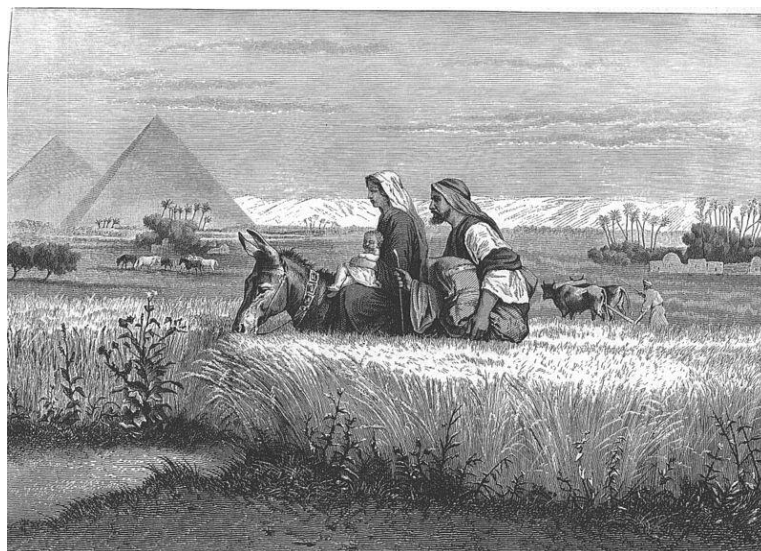




A further painting called the '*Madonna del Sacco*' was found in Florence, where Overbeck visited for a length stay in the summer of 1821, and where he was initially a guest of Carl Friedrich von Rumohr:



Pietro Perugino, *Madonna del Sacco*, 1500 circa.  
Galleria Palatina (Pitti), Firenze



Alexander Bida, *Flight into Egypt*, 1874.

Other paintings of the *Flight into Egypt* in which the ‘*sacco di viaggio*’ figures prominently are:



Fra Angelico, 1451-53  
Museo di S. Marco, Firenze



Caravaggio, 1596-1597  
Doria-Pamphili, Roma



Murillo, 1647-1650  
Detroit



Cavaliere d'Arpino  
MFA, Boston

The wheat field, the sickle, and the sack or bundle of grain all relate to the locale of Ruth's meeting with Boaz in his wheat fields and to their subsequent union and issue. The same elements are found in Julius Schnorr's depictions of this subject, seen above: Ruth and Boaz, the wheat field, the sickle, and Ruth's bundle of wheat. Schnorr also includes the water vessel from which, following Boaz's instructions, Ruth is to drink.



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Ruth in the Fields of Boaz*, 1827.  
Kupferstichkabinett (Inv.-No. 1954/211), Kunsthalle, Hamburg

*Ruth*, 2, 9: Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

## THE FIG TREE:

But what are we to make of the fig tree before which Vittoria Caldoni sits? Fig trees grow in vineyards, as many Nazarene paintings, drawings, and prints testify, but the maiden is not shown in a vineyard. Does the fig tree have a connexion with the story of Ruth? A striking trait of Nazarene paintings are large ‘symbolic’ trees planted beside or behind the principal actor or actors in a picture. The allegorical, attributive or referential significance of such trees is often associated with places or with nationality. In the mural paintings of the Casa Bartholdy, Wilhelm Schadow shows Jacob as the Vine of Israel, represented almost growing from his shoulders.



Wilhelm Schadow, *Die Klage Jakobs um Joseph*, 1816-1817.  
Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin (formerly Casa Bartholdy, Rome)

The same motive recurs in the Vine of Israel that grows upward on the centre willow tree in Eduard Bendemann's *Jews Mourning in Exile* (1831/1833).



Ferdinand Ruscheweyh after Eduard Bendemann, *Jews Mourning in the Babylonian Exile*.



Eduard Bendemann, *Jews Mourning in the Babylonian Exile*. 1831/1832.  
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Köln.

Inscription in the angles of the lunette:

“An den Wassern zu Babilon saßen wir und / weinten, wenn wir an Zion gedachten.”

In Philipp Veit's lunette of *Die Sieben fetten Jahre*, an allegory of plenitude, the palm tree with dates in the centre stands for Egypt, the scene of the Egyptian captivity of the Children of Israel in Egypt.

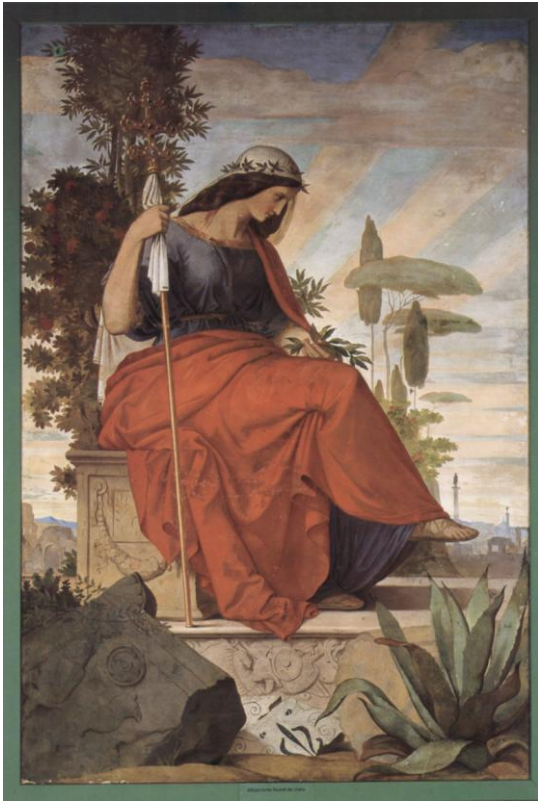


Philipp Veit, *Die sieben fetten Jahre*  
(formerly Casa Bartholdy, Rome), 1817.  
Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin



Philipp Veit, drawing: *Die sieben fetten Jahre* (five assembled sheets).  
Sold at auction, 21.04.2007: Van Ham, Köln

After Veit returned to Germany, prominent trees function as national or nationality attributes:



left: *Italy*, 1834. Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main. Laurel, Cypress, Pine.  
 right: *Germany*, 1834. Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main. Oak.

In Overbeck's *Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael by Abraham* (Altona Museum, Norddeutsches Landesmuseum in Hamburg; 1830/34-1841), the vine in the centre symbolises the line of Israel which will now pass through Isaac, while, at the left, the large fig tree identifies the land and nation of Israel from which the Egyptian handmaiden of Sarah and her son must depart for the Desert of Paran

in Arabia. The closed contour and intimate emotional relationship of the group of Sarah seated upon the floor with Isaac both closely recall Michelangelo's ancestors of Christ of the Sistine Ceiling.



Overbeck, *Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael by Abraham* , 1830/34-1841  
Altona Museum, Norddeutsches Landesmuseum, Hamburg

Joseph von Führich's *Jacob and Rachel at the Well* (Wien, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, 1836) shows, at the right, the flight of Esau, and, at the centre and left, the meeting of Jacob and Rachel, from which issued Joseph and the continuation of the line of Israel, indicated by the fig tree at the left border. The vine, the fig tree and the olive are all associated with Israel, and the fig tree is a fit emblem of the nation of Israel, for in many biblical references, the fig and the fig tree constitute a reference to Israel.



Joseph von Führich, *Jacob and Rachel*, 1836.  
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Wien

*PARABLES:*

A sturdy oak tree anchors the composition of Overbeck's illustration of the 'Parable of the Wheat and Tares' (*Gleichnis vom Unkraut unter dem Weizen*). The 'tare' (*biblical*) is a darnel, a noxious grass, or weed, that grows in grain fields.



17. Overbeck, *Parabola de bono semine et de zizaniis*  
(*Das Gleichnis vom gutem Samen und vom Unkraut*), n. d. [circa 1850].  
"Franciscus [Franz] Keller sculpt."



This image appears in Overbeck's *Darstellungen aus den Evangelien* (40 plates), which was published in German, French, Italian, and English editions in the 1840s and 1850s, beginning in 1843. In the parable of the wheat and tares (*Matthew* 13: 24-30), the Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his wheat field. But, "while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (*Matthew* 13: 25). The owner of the field instructed his workers to let both wheat and tares grow until harvest, and, only then, first reap the tares and burn them, bringing then the wheat to his barn. When Christ's disciples asked for an explanation of the parable of the tares of the field, in Christ's explication (*Matthew* 13: 36-44), the Sower of tares is the devil, the Sower of good seed, the Son of Man; the good, the Children of Heaven, are the wheat, the wicked, the tares. The harvest is the day of judgement, when the children of the Kingdom will be saved and the evil burned.

The significance of the large tree has not been identified, but in Abraham Bloemart's *Wheat and Tares* (Baltimore), the sleepers lie beside four large oaks supporting a wooden house with doves, perhaps a reference to the House of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven (*Reich-Gottes; Himmelreich*), although the Baltimore museum sees it as an allegory of sloth.



Abraham Bloemart, *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares*, 1624.  
Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

The oak is, however, a sacred tree, and the birds may simply be the birds of heaven, as Joseph Ritter von Führich portrayed them in his *Gleichnis von den Lilien des Feldes und den Vögeln des Himmels* (*Matthew* 6: 26-31), a minutely drawn sheet from 1873, where Christ and his disciples sit under a massive oak

on which come to rest the Birds of Heaven. The birds sow not, and reap not; they have neither storehouse nor barn.



Joseph von Führich,  
*Gebet die Lilien des Feldes und die Vögel des Himmels*, 1873  
 Drawing; inscribed:  
 “Nach Matthius Cap. 6. Vers 26-31. Führich inv. & del. A.D. 1873.”

Führich’s massive oak nearly seems inspired by Overbeck’s representation of the *Wheat and Tares* in his *Evangelien*, and perhaps it, too, should be seen as a reference to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The episode of the Wheat and Tares was included in Overbeck’s *Evangelien*, and, although it might seem a somewhat obscure event, *Matthew* 13 contains one of the central answers of Christ in the scriptures about the use of parables in his teaching (13: 10-17 and 34-35). When his disciples asked why he spoke in parables, Christ answered (13: 11): “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given”, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Esaias.” 34: “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them.” 35: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (13: 34-35). Overbeck’s fascination with parables, in particular, and that of the Nazarenes, in general, can scarcely be over-estimated. The study of this topic was begun in a ground-breaking article by Frank Büttner in 1979.

In Overbeck's 'Vittoria=Ruth', if the fig tree is meant to suggest a reference to the nation or people of Israel, it is also an attribute of place, of the Holy Land. Its function is as a 'Tree of Jesse', standing for the Genealogy of Christ, for the renewal of the line of Elimelech by Ruth and Boaz, and for their establishment of the House of David through their son Obed, the father of Jesse, who, in turn, fathered David, the King of Israel, of whom Jesus of Nazareth was a descendant.

Possibly Overbeck intended with his image of the wasting, fissured, and broken tree to suggest an allusion or symbolic reference to the parable of the barren fig tree (*Gleichnis vom Feigenbaum ohne Frucht*) and its parallel in the story of the broken line of Elimelech and Naomi, which, through Ruth, was renewed and became fruitful again. In both the renewal symbolised is that of Israel.

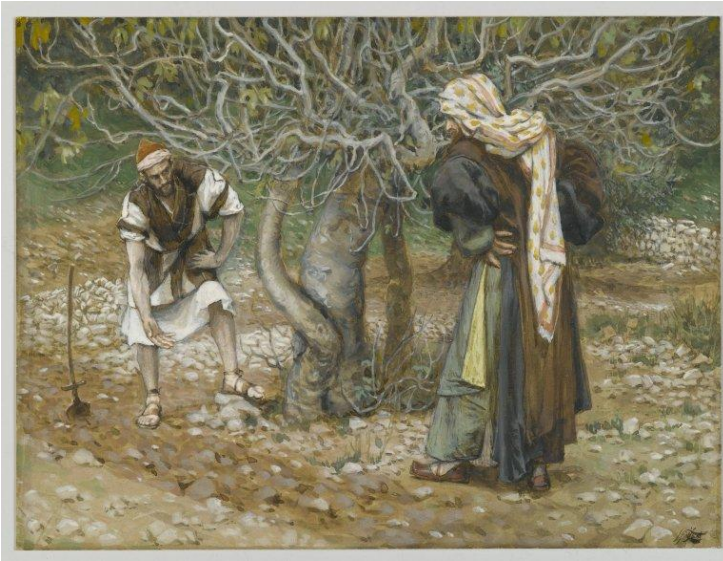
THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG TREE:



Carl Rahl (1812-1865), *The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree*  
 Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Wien  
 "Lucas Cap / 13 Vers 7. 8."

In the brief parable of the Barren Fig Tree, the planter of a vineyard sought figs on a barren fig tree and, finding none, ordered it to be cut down. But the vineyard keeper appealed to allow the tree another year to bear fruit (*Luke 13: 6-9*), holding out hope that a barren fig tree will bear fruit next year.

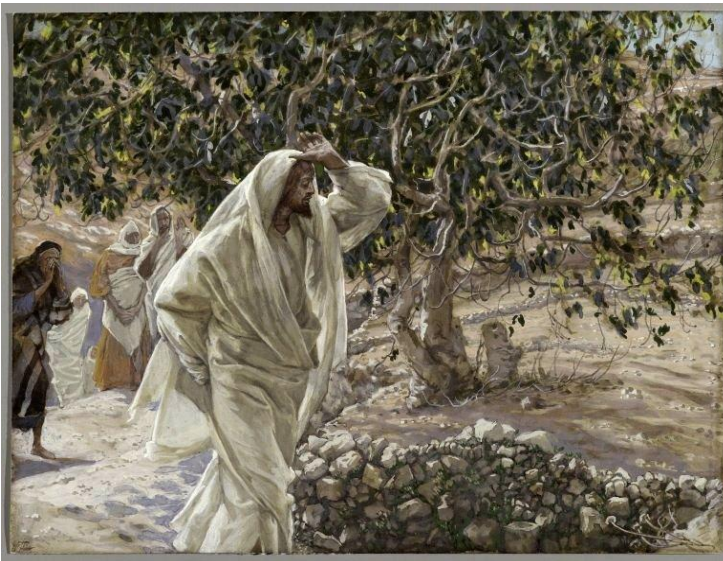
7-8: "And he answered unto him, Lord, let it alone this year, till I shall dig about it, and dung it."



James Jacques Joseph Tissot,  
*The Vine Dresser and the Fig Tree*, 1885-95.  
The Brooklyn Museum



*Parable of the Fig Tree*, from:  
*Mothers Stories from the New Testament*, Philadelphia 1906.



*Christ and the Barren Fig Tree*,  
James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1885-95.  
The Brooklyn Museum



*Christ and the Fig Tree*, from:  
*Mother Stories from the New Testament*, Philadelphia 1906

The planter is usually seen as a figure of the Lord (or Christ), and the vineyard keeper, as Christ. The parable, as reported by Luke, is often identified with Christ's curse of a barren fig tree (*Mark 11: 12-20*), that it never bear fruit again, an incident that follows just after his entry into Jerusalem. Mark gives another

version of the incident (12-14): Christ “found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet.”

*The Parable of the Budding Fig Tree:* This equally brief parable of a second fig tree (*Gleichnis vom Feigenbaum*), now a budding one, is a sign of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God or, alternatively, of the re-establishment of the nation of Israel, in which the fig tree is an image of the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel was a representation of the true Kingdom of God. *Hosea 9:10* shows the link between the nation of Israel and the fig tree. The parable of the fig tree teaches that a new tree will spring from the root, that is, the nation of Israel will revive.

*Hosea 9:10:* „I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree in its first season.“

#### THE STORY OF NAOMI:

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth, her husband and sons dead, the line of her family was at its end. Naomi was old and childless, and not fertile, but bitter and barren, not unlike the fig tree in Jesus’s parable of the barren fig tree (a figure of the Children of Israel). Only through Ruth, her son’s widow, and Boaz, a relative of her dead husband, Elimelech, could it be re-established.



*Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19-22)*

By marrying Ruth, Boaz preserved the name of Elimelech, Naomi’s deceased husband, and his line. The first born of Ruth and Boaz was considered a son of Elimelech’s lineage. Boaz had purchased the family lands that Naomi had sold, and restored them to Elimelech’s lineage (*Ruth 3, 7–10*). When Obed, the son of Ruth and Boaz, was born, it was perceived that a son had been born to Naomi (*Ruth 4:13–17*).

14. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

15. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

16. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

17. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

**Then are recited the generations of Christ, in a genealogical appendix that reads almost as a magical liturgical chant (4:18–22):**

18. Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron,

19. And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab,

20. And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon,

21. And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed,

22. And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.



Simeon Solomon, *Ruth, Naomi, and Obed*,  
Pen and brown ink over pencil, 1860.  
Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery



“*Naomi and the Child Obed*” / “S. Solomon, del”,  
ca. 1862; published in *Dalziel’s Bible Gallery*, 1881



Emil Lèvy, *Ruth and Naomi with Obed*, 1959.  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen

In its significance the parable of the barren fig tree forms an apposite parallel to the story of Naomi and Ruth and the rebirth of the line of Naomi and her husband through the birth of the son of Ruth and Boaz, which yields the family tree of Christ, the Tree of Jesse. After Boaz and Ruth are married, they have a son named Obed (who by Levirate customs is also considered a son or heir to Elimelech, and thus to Naomi). In the genealogy which concludes the story, it is pointed out that Obed is the father of Jesse, and thus the grandfather of David. Ruth's position as the origin of the Tree of Jesse makes her the great-grandmother of King David, and a progenetrix of the line of Christ. The childless Naomi becomes through Ruth fertile again. Overbeck's fig tree thus stands in the place of the Tree of Jesse, from which issues Christ. It bears fruit again.



Tree of Jesse, Master of James IV of Scotland  
 Flemish, 1510-1520  
 Getty (Ms. Ludwig IX 18, fol. 65)

#### CHRIST IS THE SUCCESSOR OF DAVID:

Upon the ascension of King David, Nathan prophesied the coming Messiah (2 *Samuel* 7:1-17) who would come from the seedbed of future descendants. Paul writes, “Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead (2 *Timothy* 2:8).” Therefore, Christ is rightly called “The Son of David” (*Matthew* 22:42) and will one day return and reign physically in Jerusalem.

#### DOGMA:

As religious artists the Nazarenes were intensely serious, first among them, Overbeck. Behind appearances they saw spiritual meanings in a kind of covert symbolism. The fig tree was a preferred motive of Overbeck, which he employed, at times, when another species of tree might have appeared a more obvious choice. One instance is his *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (original 1819; Howitt, II, p. 406).

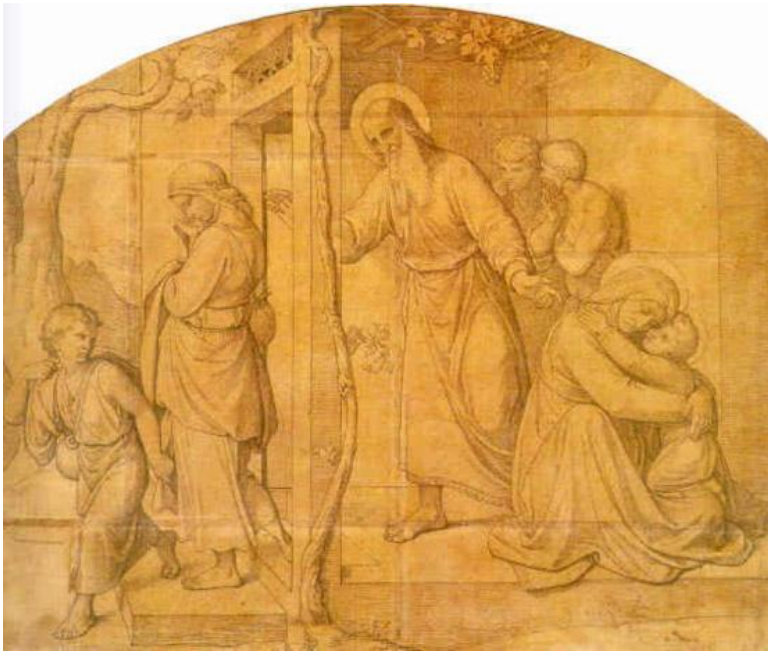




Ferdinand Ruscheweyh, after Friedrich Overbeck, *Ruhe* (Flight into Egypt); 1826 (1819).

Traditionally the *Riposo* shows Joseph gathering dates from a bowing palm tree, but Overbeck follows a much more obscure tradition, and, in the engraving, Joseph gathers figs in a basket from the branches of a fig tree. A biblical, apocryphal, or legendary source for the fig tree in the context of the Flight into Egypt does not appear to exist. There are, however, pictorial and literary precedents for the fig tree from the later fourteenth century (cf. Meister der Madonna von Covarrubias, *Riposo*, 15 C., Städel; *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, *ad vocem* 'Flucht nach Ägypten', col. 1149). In Overbeck's picture, Maria sits with the Child, resting against the massive trunk of a fig tree, as if it were the tree of Israel. This composition is reflected in Overbeck's Vittoria Caldoni, painted about two years later.

The covert symbolism of the fig tree indicating the land of Israel was seen earlier in Overbeck's painting, *Abraham verstösst Hagar und Ismael*, 1841, Altonaer Museum, Norddeutsches Landesmuseum (Dauerleihgabe), Hamburg.



Overbeck, *Abraham verstoßt Hagar und Ismael*  
 Sold Sotheby's München, 29.11.1989

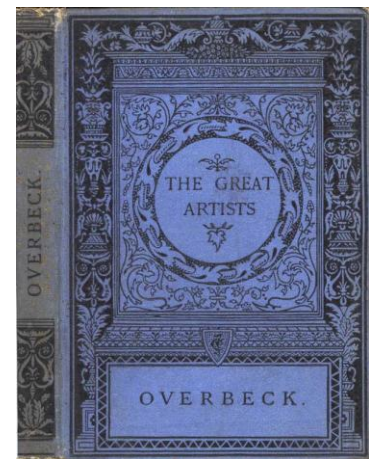


Friedrich August Ludy, after Friedrich Overbeck, *Hagar and Ishmael*

DOGMA: *Overbeck the Christian artist*

As early as 1820, Carl Friedrich von Rumohr wrote of Overbeck that “*seine Empfindungsart im reinsten Sinne christlich ist*”, and that he “*nicht selten, um sich deutlicher zu machen, zu symbolischen Beywerken Zuflucht nimmt, die er mit Sinn wählt, und mit Geschmack unterzuordnen weiß*” (*Kunst=Blatt*, No. 55, 10. July 1820, p. 219).

In 1882, the Englishman Joseph Beavington Atkinson published a somewhat neglected book about Overbeck in English, in a series dedicated to great artists. Overbeck was still deemed worthy of inclusion in a series alongside the ‘greats’ of Italy from Giotto to Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian, together with such contemporaries and near contemporaries as Wilkie, Vernet, Delaroche, Landseer, and Millet. Beavington Atkinson’s book preceded Margaret Howitt’s *Friedrich Overbeck: Sein Leben und Schaffen* by four years.



If Atkinson did not have access to Overbeck’s papers, he had an advantage that Miss Howitt did not have: he knew the artist personally and frequented his studio, and Beavington Atkinson also wrote about the art of his time, as Overbeck’s ‘authorised’ biographer did not. Among other books: Beavington Atkinson, *An Art Tour to Northern Capitals*, London: Macmillan 1873; *The Schools of Modern Painting in Germany*, New York 1881. Overbeck converted to Catholicism in 1813, and Atkinson describes him and his wife as fanatic Catholics: “Overbeck grew more and more the recluse; he shortly became a proselyte to the Romish Church, shut himself out from other associations, and thus after a time devoted his pencil exclusively to Christian Art” (p. 16). In time, “certain commissions could not be entertained, secular subjects had been long eschewed, religion and the Church were alone accounted worthy of service” (p. 41).

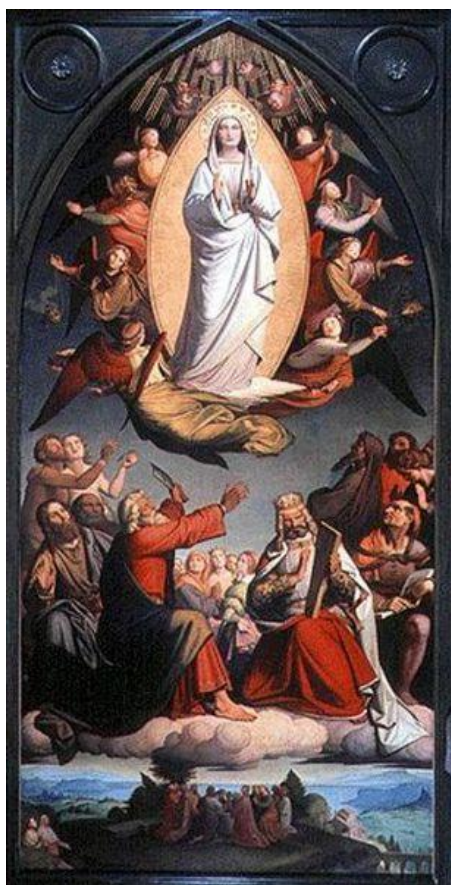
Atkinson writes, “Overbeck and his adherents declared that they sought for nothing else than truth, only they held that nature should not be studied superficially, but with the end of deciphering her hidden meanings” (p. 11), describing Overbeck as “a spiritual and esoteric artist” (p. 23). He ascribes shortcomings in Overbeck’s later works to two causes: “first, advancing age, with increasing loss of power; secondly, the confirmed habit of slighting art and ignoring nature in order to magnify some favourite dogma” (p. 43). Of Overbeck’s *Seven Sacraments*, Atkinson writes: “The scheme embodies types in the Old Testament with their fulfilment in the New; both conjoined are brought to bear on the teachings of the Church concerning the Sacraments. Some of the analogies may appear, at least to outsiders, rather fanciful and far-fetched” (p. 44; cf. Fasert, 1996).

An instance of the centrality of Christian symbolism in Overbeck’s work is this image of the *Annunciation* from the *Darstellung aus den Evangelien nach vierzig Originalzeichnungen von Friedrich Overbeck*, im Besitze des Freiherrn Alfred von Lotzbeck auf Weyhern, gestochen von B. Bartoccini, Prof. Jos. Keller, Fr. Keller, F. Ludy, F. Massau, H. Rüsser, F. A. Pflugfelder, X. Steifensand u. A., Düsseldorf, Verlag von August Wilhelm Schulgen, n. d.



Overbeck, *Angelus Gabriel annuntiat Mariae Conceptionem Jesu* (Der Engel Gabriel verkündet Mariä die Empfängnis Jesu), 1845. “Fried. Ludy sculpt.”

The holy event is almost subordinated to a Christian symbol set in the very near foreground and in the precise centre of a highly symmetrical composition: a lily in a vase placed on an overturned composite, or Roman capital. The sacred 'history' is thus nearly overwhelmed by its symbolic interpretation. This explicit image possibly reflects discussions which led to the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin by Pius IX in 1854. In Overbeck's *Assumption* in the Cathedral at Cologne, he includes elements generally found in the Immaculate Conception: the forefathers, prophets, kings, and women of the Old Testament, whose words and deeds prefigured the Immaculate Conception.



Overbeck, *Assumption*, 1855  
Dom, Köln

OVERBECK'S *VITTORIA CALDONI* AND MICHELANGELO'S *SISTINA*:

The early Nazarene painters's admiration of Albrecht Dürer is testified to by many sources, among them Franz Pforr's *Dürer and Raphael before the Throne of Art*:

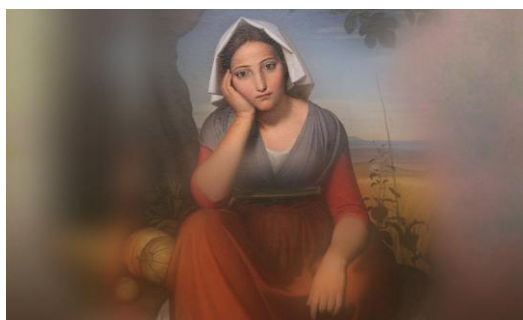


Franz Pforr, *Dürer and Raphael before the Throne of Art*, 1808.  
Etching by Carl Hoff

Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main

(cf. Overbeck, *Dürer und Raffael vor dem Throne der Kunst*, Albertina, Inv. No. 23.694)

Dürer's *Melancholia I* is almost universally invoked as *the* visual model for Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni*, and the print is often considered the key to reading the psychological state of Overbeck's figure: sad, weary, gloomy, desolate, in short, melancholic.



Overbeck, *Vittoria Caldoni*



Dürer, *Melancholia I*, 1514

Despite's Dürer's undeniable appeal for the Nazarenes, upon closer examination this comparison appears to be a sort of red herring that distracts attention from Overbeck's real inspiration. A figure actually modelled upon Dürer's

famous *Melancholia* might look more like that of *Die Kunst* drawn by Edward von Steinle, with, *inter alia*, her crown of leaves, her long strands of hair, and her head supported on a closed hand.



Edward von Steinle, *Die Kunst*, 1835, Pencil drawing  
(after A. M. von Steinle, *Steinle*, 1910, before No. 274)

In point of fact, Overbeck had painted only a few years earlier a figure who closely resembles his Vittoria Caldoni. This is figure of Mary, clad in red and white, whose pose is little more than that of Vittoria Caldoni, seen from the side, one in which the positions of arms and legs are reversed. She is inspired by Michelangelo's pensive, self-contained seated figures on the lunettes and spandrels of the Cappella Sistina. Immediately behind and above her is an apostle of Christ, St. Peter, whose features are patterned on those of Michelangelo himself. Behind him, the apostle Jacob, who is a portrait of Raphael. Seen through the open doorway is the parable of the Good Samaritan.



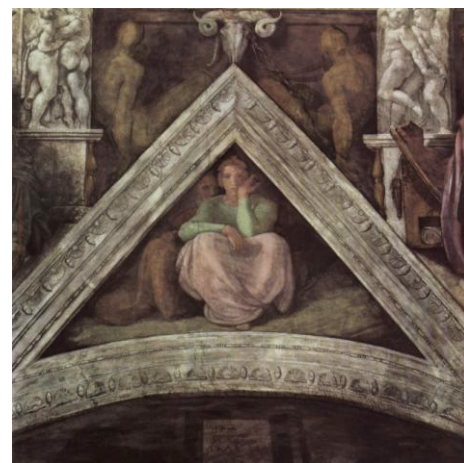
Overbeck, *Christ with Mary and Martha*, 1812–1816.  
Nationalgalerie, Berlin

More directly relevant to Overbeck's painting of Vittoria Caldoni was the study of the early Roman Nazarenes in the Cappella Sistina, and specifically the figure which Tolnay identifies as the young mother of Jesse and found in the spandrel above the lunette with the central inscription "IESSE / DAVID / SALOMON". Her resemblance to Overbeck's 'Vittoria Caldoni/Ruth' is striking. Tolnay's description of this spandrel could almost be a description of Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni*: "Staring steadily into space and sitting in a full frontal view with her legs crossed, the young mother of Jesse is resting her face on her left hand while her right arm falls passively across her knees." In the spandrels of the Sistina the pose, sitting on the ground, becomes a visual attribute of the ancestors of Christ, for in the eight spandrels all of the fifteen adult ancestors of Christ are shown sitting, or occasionally reclining on the bare ground.





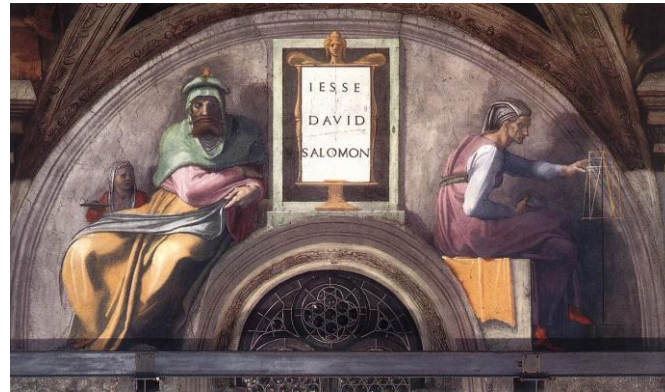
After Restoration: the details of the eyes were removed.



Before restoration.

The three figures of this spandrel are identified by Tolnay as Obed, the mother of Jesse, and the child Jesse, but identifying the ancestors of Christ on the Sistine Ceiling is a complex exercise in iconographic interpretation that must account for all the fourteen lunettes and eight spandrels. Historically

identifications have been highly variable, and no complete consensus has been reached. In light of the inscription in the lunette above (“*Iesse / David / Salomon*”), Overbeck may well have seen here in the old man, Boaz, in the young woman, Ruth, and in the child, Obed.



A plan of the pictorial elements of the ceiling shows the locations of the representations that are here of interest.



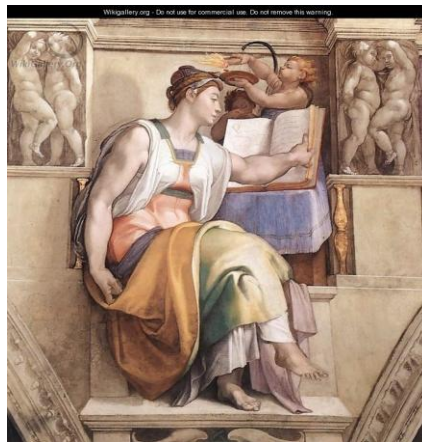
Plan of the pictorial elements of the Sistine Ceiling

The interest of the early Roman Nazarenes for Michelangelo's art has received less attention than that for early German painting and for Italian painters such as Perugino and the early Raphael. Yet the impact of the prophets and sibyls of the Cappella Sistina is very evident in the paintings of the Casa Bartholdy, not only in those by Overbeck but also in others by his companions, such as Peter von Cornelius.



Friedrich Overbeck  
*Die sieben mageren Jahre*, 1816  
 Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin

In 1820/1821, when in Rome, Athanasius Count Raczyński ordered from Overbeck a painting of a “*Sibylle*”. It was never delivered, but the only remaining visual testimony to this commission, a pen and ink drawing in Poznań, shows Overbeck's deep indebtedness to the contrasting and contraposed placement of limbs, which constitutes a so prominent aspect of the Sistine prophets and Sibyls. Overbeck's drawing applies Michelangelo's principles of figural *disegno* to a more slender figural canon, rather than simply retracing Michelangelo's motives.



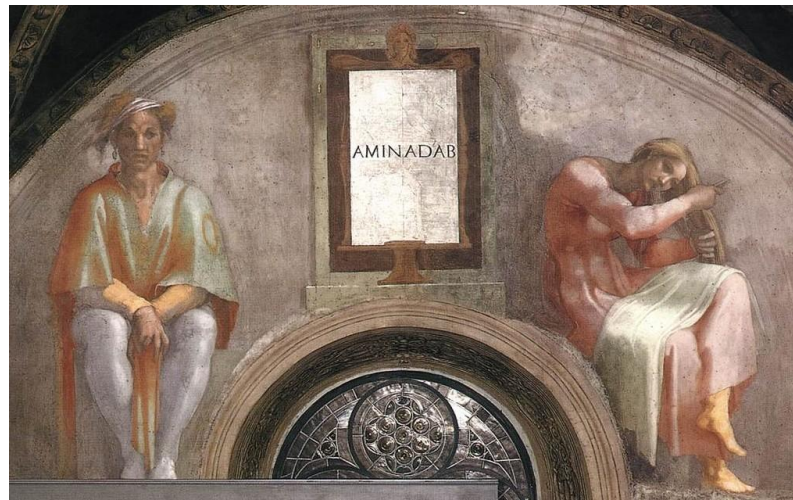
Overbeck, *Sibylle*.  
Muzeum Narodowe, Poznań

In 1810 Overbeck's closest companion, Franz Pforr made a drawing showing a sort of apotheosis of the three – for Pforr – greatest artists of Italian Christendom, in an unusual threesome, comprised by a standing Raphael and Fra Angelico, accompanied by a seated Michelangelo, the latter clothed in a typically Sistine attire.



Franz Pforr, *Raphael, Fra Angelico, and Michelangelo on a cloud over St. Peter's in Rome*, 1810.  
 Städelsches Kunstinstitut; Frankfurt am Main

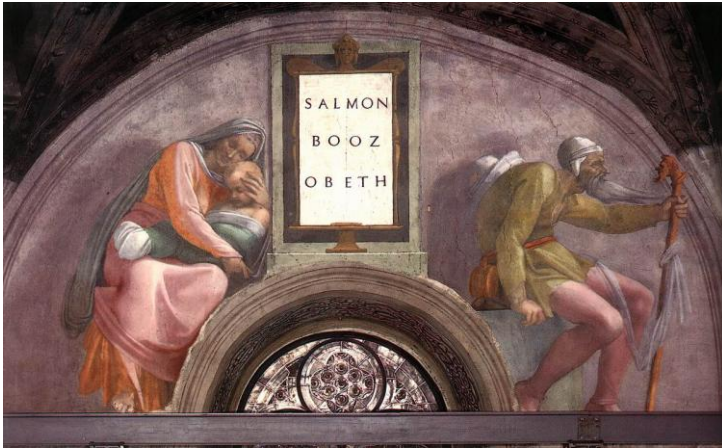
Franz Pforr's interests in Michelangelo's paintings at the Vatican may be followed more closely in a drawing he made in the Cappella Sistina in March 1811, which he inscribed, "*Zum Andenken an den schönen Morgen in der Kapella Sixtina und an Ihren Freund / Rom d 21 (?) Marz 1811.*", and signed, "*Franz Pforr*", apparently before Pforr gave the drawing to an unidentified dedicatee, who had brought a friend along.

Michelangelo, *Aminadab*

Franz Pforr, *Aminadab*, 1811.  
after Michelangelo,  
Seated figure from a lunette in the Cappella Sistina  
Kupferstichkabinet, Berlin

In the Sistine Chapel, Franz Pforr has drawn the figure of *Aminadab*, taken from the lunettes showing the ancestors of Christ. It is possible that, on this or a similar day, Pforr was accompanied by his closest friend and constant companion of these years, Friedrich Overbeck. From the opposing wall of the Chapel, the *Aminadab* lunette faces the lunette of 'Jesse-David-Salomon', nearly directly opposite it at the same end of the ceiling. Pforr's image and inscription thus reveal where in the Chapel he and his friends were drawing after Michelangelo on a cold March morning. A letter of 29 September 1810 from Overbeck to his father records at great length his extraordinary enthusiasm for Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, as well as his resolve to return there to draw and study every fourteen days (Hasse, 1887, pp. 39-41). "*Michelangelo [soll] meine höchste Autorität sein. Michelangelo der Einzige, der Unvergeßlicher!*"; "*Kurz in allem ist er Muster!*". Of the Sistine: "*Wahrlich es ist das Höchste und Herrlichste, was vorhanden ist*".

In the Sistine the group of young artists may also have noticed the lunette now identified as representing the figures of Ruth and Boaz, although the inscriptions were then far less legible than they are today.



The depth of Overbeck's concern with the ancestors of Christ in the Sistine is evidenced again his composition of the *Massacre of the Innocents*, where not only the central grouping of figures but other figures as well are inspired by the passionate actions and groupings of the lunettes and spandrels of Michelangelo's Chapel.



8. Overbeck, *Infanticidium* (Der Kindermord), 1843. "Franz. Massau sculptt."

## RECEPTION IN GERMANY:

As we have seen, among the many artists who portrayed Vittoria Caldoni, Friedrich Overbeck was alone in showing her seated on the ground, and he was alone in showing her in a full-figure representation (although Julius Schnorr, who knew Overbeck's painting, made a sketch for a full-length seated portrait: circa 1822; Dresden, SLUB). Is this another indication of Overbeck's resistance to the royal commission to paint a pretty model? How the crown prince reacted to the portrait is unknown, but a letter of Carl Friedrich Rumohr to Overbeck on the picture's arrival in Munich suggests that the appearance of the painting came as something of a surprise. This and two other little-regarded contemporary texts place the question of Vittoria Caldoni's portrait in a somewhat new and different focus (cf. Koeltz, 2009, p. 113f.).

Upon his return to Germany after his second *Italienreise*, Rumohr took up residence for a time in Munich, where he apparently enjoyed an influential voice in matters of art at the court. Soon he resumed writing letters to Friedrich Overbeck. The correspondence of these years survives only fragmentarily and is dispersed among several repositories (Stock, 1943). On 12 September 1821, Rumohr wrote to Overbeck in Rome, adding, almost parenthetically near the end of his letter, "*Wie steht es mit dem Bilde für den Kronprinzen?*" As the editor of the letter, Friedrich Stock, recognised (1943, p. 33), the picture for the Prince is the *Vittoria Caldoni*, now in the Neue Pinakothek. This is the first direct indication of Rumohr's interest in the picture, and of his possible involvement in the commission. Overbeck's answer to Rumohr's question is apparently lost, and eighteen weeks pass before there appears Overbeck's response to a subsequent letter from Rumohr, which he had received only the day before. At this point in time, on 5 January 1822, Overbeck's painting has only recently arrived in Munich, and Overbeck's letter indicates that its appearance has raised questions. Overbeck responds immediately, he writes, because the painting has arrived in Munich so unexpectedly early:

*“Es ist nemlich das so unerwartet frühe Eintreffen meines Bildes in München, was diese meine Eile veranlaßt; ganz frisch, und ohne Firniß, auf bestimmte Ordre trotz meiner Vorstellungen, hier eingepackt und fortgeschickt, kann es wohl nicht anders als schinkengelb angekommen seyn; weshalb ich Dich, mein theurer Freund! aufs Dringendste gebeten haben will, sogleich dafür zu sorgen, daß es an Licht und Luft gestellt werde, um die Farbe wieder auszufrischen, und sodann mit einem Mastyx-Firniß überzogen. — Vor Deinem Urtheile ist mir nun herzlich bange, so wie vor dem der dortigen wackern Künstler, denn ich fühle gar wohl, wie wenig ich in diesem mir durchaus neuen Fache leisten konnte und geleistet habe; daß ich aber geleistet habe, was ich eben leisten konnte, indem ich es an gewissenhaftester Anstrengung nicht habe fehlen lassen, gab mir allein*



*eingelebte Beruhigung als ich genöthigt war, das Bild aus den Händen zu geben. Also verfährt gnädig damit! — Wie eine ganze Figur daraus geworden? Eigentlich zufällig; nachdem ich einen frühen misslungenen Versuch verworfen hatte, glaubte ich das erste beste ergreifen zu müssen, was mir vorschwebte, und so ward es denn eben so wie es geworden ist; auch hatte mich die Rivalität mit Philipps (vortrefflichem) Bilde von Fr. Stein eingeschüchtert, und ich wollte dem Vergleich möglichst ausweichen. — ” (Stock, 1943, p. 33).*

The arrival of the picture in Munich earlier than Overbeck had anticipated has caused the artist alarm. Evidently the picture was taken from the painter's hands (“*als ich genöthigt war, das Bild aus den Händen zu geben*”) and packed up and sent to Munich, against his will but, as ordered by the court there, before it received its finishing touches. Without a coat of varnish it must have arrived looking as yellowed as an old ham (*schinkengelb*). Overbeck entreats his friend Rumohr to see that the painting is set out in the sun and fresh air to brighten the colours, and then see that it receives an appropriate application of “*Mastyx-Firniß*” (*Mastixfirnis*; mastic varnish). From the text of Overbeck's letter it appears that Rumohr is in a position to accomplish all this, and that he is the logical person to satisfy Overbeck's requests, which are not atypical of artists's concerns about their new works. All this seems to indicate that Rumohr's involvement in the commission was much deeper than has been recognized. Indeed, Overbeck makes clear the importance he attaches to Rumohr's judgement of the picture, as well as that of enlightened artists in Munich.

Apparently in a missing letter Rumohr has, while not passing a full judgement upon the painting, raised a question about it, one which casts light on its initial reception in Munich. When Overbeck writes, “*Wie eine ganze Figur daraus geworden?*” (“How did it turn out to be a full figure?”), he is clearly responding to a question Rumohr has asked. It is implicit that a full figure is not what was expected on the part of the commissioner, *Kronprinz* Ludwig, that is, not a portrait showing the portrayed from head to foot, but a more conventional bust or a half-length portrait.

Overbeck's answer to the question, “*Wie eine ganze Figur daraus geworden?*”, is remarkable, and, to say the least, evasive. How did it come about? Actually just by chance, answers the artist to Rumohr's challenge. Then Overbeck reports that he made a first design for the work, which he judged to be a failure. Then, in his desperation, he felt he must follow the first idea that came into his head, and so, dear friend, the picture turned out to be what it turned out to be.

Overbeck thereby disclaims responsibility, and it might appear that he does not really feel that he need be asked such questions. Then he adds, rather lamely, that he has been intimidated by Philipp Veit's (excellent) new portrait of *Fraulein von Stein*, and he wanted to avoid rivalry and comparison of his work

with that of Veit. He is new, writes Overbeck, to the genre of portraiture, fully aware of how little he can accomplish in this genre, and of how little he has accomplished, despite his conscientious exertions, but then the picture was taken away from me before I was finished. Here Overbeck invokes typical topoi of modesty in his defence.

What emerges is that in Munich a much more conventional portrait was expected, and that Overbeck has painted something quite different on his own initiative. Other contemporaries underline that Overbeck has painted the girl as a full figure: “*Das Bild ist nicht sehr groß, dennoch ist das Mädchen in ganzer Figur wenig unter Lebensgröße gemalt*” (Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, 16.11.1821); “*Es ist eine ganze Figur, etwa halbe Lebensgröße; das Mädchen sitzt etwas gebückt (...)*” (Johann David Passavant, 4.03.1822).

The impression that all was not well with the picture in Munich is supported by a further, somewhat later letter from Rumohr, now in Rothenhaus near Lübeck, written on 24 November 1823. This letter appears to have been overlooked in comments about Overbeck’s *Vittoria*.

“*Corn[elius]. [Peter von Cornelius] hat zu Münch[en] Dein Bildnis sehr vertheidigt, was mich freut, obgleich ich deßhalb damals Angelegenheit hatte. Ich sehe daraus, daß er dir herzlich anhängt.*” (“Peter von Cornelius has greatly defended your portrait [*Vittoria Caldoni*] in Munich, which I am happy about, although I already had had earlier occasion to do so. Thereby I see how sincerely he is attached to you”; Stock, 1943, pp. 37-38). Overbeck’s painting was exhibited at the ‘Kunstaussstellung der königlichen Akademie der bildenden Künste’ in Munich in 1823 (No. 520).

Thus Rumohr’s letter affords a very direct testimony to a critical and clearly in part negative reception of Overbeck’s *Vittoria Caldoni* in Munich, a reaction which was still alive a year after the painting arrived, towards the end of 1822.

#### WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM:

The most common complaint of laymen about portraits is that the likeness is unsatisfactory: the portrait does not look like the sitter, and, if Ludwig had seen *Vittoria Caldoni*, as is entirely possible, this factor may have played a rôle. But, in attempting to identify more closely the problem that Overbeck’s *Vittoria Caldoni* presented in Munich, it may be useful to examine two other early responses to the painting, the one by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, and the other by Johann David Passavant, before considering what the expectations of the Crown Prince might have been.

JULIUS SCHNORR VON CAROLSFELD:

Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld wrote about Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni* in a letter to Johann Gottlob von Quandt, written from Rome on 16 November 1821, at the point in time in which the painting had just been completed and shortly after Schnorr saw it for the first time. He describes the painting, concentrating upon the guise in which Overbeck has shown her, sitting at rest upon the ground.

*“Das Bild ist nicht sehr groß, dennoch ist das Mädchen in ganzer Figur wenig unter Lebensgröße gemalt. Sie ist ganz treu, wie sie leibt und lebt, gemalt. Mit ihrer Gestalt war nichts anzufangen, denn sie ist ganz unansehnlich; doch fürchtete Overbeck aus dem Charakter zu fallen, wenn er sich hierin Änderungen erlaubte, er wählte daher eine Geberde [= Gebärde], bei welcher die kleine Person in ihrer eigensten Eigentümlichkeit doch sehr anmutig erscheint. Er malte sie nämlich, als ob sie von der Feldarbeit ausruhe; lieblich zusammengeduckt sitzt sie unter einem Feigenbaum, stützt mit der rechten Hand das Gesicht, die linke liegt auf dem Schoß. Hinter einem nahen Kornfeld zieht sich die römische Campagne nach dem Meer zu, welches mit einigen fernen Gebirgen den Horizont schließt. Dieser Hintergrund giebt vollkommen den Eindruck, den die Aussicht von Albano nach dem Meere zu auf uns macht. Trotz der Mangelhaftigkeit dieser Beschreibung werden Sie, bei Ihrer lebhaften Einbildungskraft, von der Lieblichkeit des Bildes sich leicht einen Begriff machen, so daß es keiner weitern Beteurungen bedarf”* (Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Briefe aus Italien*, 16.11.1821, pp. 370-371).

In his letter to Quandt, Schnorr continues, raising doubts about the success of Overbeck in rendering the exceptional beauty of Vittoria's face:

*“Der Wahrheit zulieb muß ich aber auch dessen gedenken, was mir an dem Bilde nicht lieb ist. Das Gesicht ist nämlich durch die stützende Hand auf der rechten Seite ungünstig umrissen, die Nase zu groß, so daß die glänzende Schönheit des Kopfes nicht ganz befriedigend gegeben ist”* (p. 371).

Possibly this objection was echoed in Munich, for in Overbeck's painting, Vittoria's face is characterized with a heavy volumetric emphasis. This and her statuesque quality have been likened to the women of Picasso's neo-classical phase (Gert Schiff, in: *German Masters of the Nineteenth Century*, New York: Metropolitan, 1981, p. 17). Contemporaries compared the perfection of her features to ancient statuary heads. Schnorr's own interpretation of her beauty leaned far more towards slenderness and elegance.

JOHANN DAVID PASSAVANT:

A further episode in the broader reception of Overbeck's painting in his homeland is found in an again little-noticed report from Rome, published in the *Kunstblatt* on 4 March 1822. It has not been recognized that the author of this very early discussion of the painting, who signs himself "Joh. von F." (sometimes "Johannes v. F." ["v. F." = 'von Frankfurt'] is Johann David Passavant (cf. *ADB*, vol. 25, 1887, pp. 198-203), who as a young artist in Rome had by this time become a friend of Overbeck, and had, in 1820, already written favourably about the artist in his *Ansichten über die bildenden Künste* (Heidelberg und Speier 1820):

*"Overbeck nicht weniger reich [als P. Cornelius] in der Erfindung, zeichnet sich hauptsächlich durch etwas sehr Gemüthliches aus; dabei hat er ein durch alles durchgehendes Schönheitsgefühl, welches sich in Ausdruck, Gebärde, Form und Anordnung gleich anziehend ausspricht. (...) (p. 90).*

In the *Kunstblatt*, No. 18, 4. March 1822, in *Nachrichten aus Rom* (Beschluß; pp. 69-72, signed "Joh. von F."), at page 70, Passavant writes.

*"In dieser, und noch in vielen anderen Hinsichten sehr befriedigend ist das Bildniß der schönen Vittoria aus Albano, welches Overbeck für Se. Königl. Hoheit den Kronprinzen von Bayern gemalt hat. Es ist eine ganze Figur, etwa halbe Lebensgröße; das Mädchen sitzt etwas gebückt, sich mit dem Knie auf dem Ellbogen stützend, unter einem Feigenbaum. Die Sichel und Feldfrüchte liegen neben ihr; höchst anmuthig kommt der Blick dem Beschauer entgegen und es ist selbst etwas Reines und Klares darin, was mir mehr dem Künstler, als dem Original des Bildnisses anzugehören scheint. Die feine Nase, der zarte Mund, so wie das ganze Oval des Kopfes sind auch von großer Schönheit und auf vortrefflichste ausgeführt. Daß Overbeck der Carnation ein frischeres Colorit gegeben hat, als die etwas kränklich=blasse Farbe des Mädchens, wird wohl Niemand tadeln; auch besonderes Lob verdient unser Künstler, daß er durch die sitzende und ganz für ein Landmädchen passende Stellung, ihre etwas unansehnliche [page 71:] Gestalt zu verbergen wußte. Die an sich schöne Frauentracht in Albanergebirge hat übrigens Overbeck mit viel Geschmack behandelt, denn nur allzuhäufig sieht man sie von Künstlern so benutzt, daß das Landmädchen zu einer vornehmen Dame wird, oder theatermäßig aussieht. Die Beywerke, so wie die Landschaft, ein Waizenfeld mit der großen Ebene vor Albano und endlich das Meer sind vortrefflich ausgeführt. Schade, daß unser*

*Künstler genöthigt war, dieses Bild auf einem bestimmten Termin abzuliefern, und er den Händen nicht diejenige Vollendung geben konnte, welche sonst im ganzen Gemälde so sehr erfreut.”*

The first part of Passavant's *Bericht* was found in the previous number of the *Kunstblatt*, dated 6 February 1822, and the entire report was probably written before this earlier date. Passavant sees the 'Vittoria craze' and its object with a certain distance, and in this he was possibly influenced by Overbeck's own views. He also confirms that the artist was constrained to consign the painting earlier than he wished. His remark that the hands were not quite finished is somewhat mysterious, for they seem as finished as the remainder of the painting. But Schnorr had observed that the raised hand interrupted the perfect outline of Vittoria's face, and a drawing of her full-figure in Berlin (Nationalgalerie; ill. in Stock, 1943, p. 34) shows the fingers of her left hand in slightly different positions (cf. *infra*). Several observations suggest that Overbeck has not aimed at an exact likeness, but at an ideal likeness, according to his own lights ("*etwas Reines und Klares darin, was mir mehr dem Künstler, als dem Original des Bildnisses anzugehören scheint*"). He has also improved on her pale, sallow colouring, and through her sitting pose has disguised flaws in her figure. And, lastly, in his treatment of her traditional Abanese dress, he has shown good taste, avoiding excessive particulars and an exaggerated stage-like costume, with the result that much of the local colour and characteristic details are lost.

#### OVERBECK'S PROBLEM WITH PORTRAITURE:

In Overbeck's letter of 5 January 1822 to Rumohr, cited above, he wrote that he had little experience as a painter of portraits, adding, "*auch hatte mich die Rivalität mit Philipps (vortrefflichem) Bilde von Fr. Stein eingeschüchtert, und ich wollte dem Vergleich möglichst ausweichen.*"

Philipp Veit's portrait of Therese vom Stein (113 x 88 cm, Summer 1821, Schloß Cappenberg) is a fairly conventional three-quarter length portrait, but it possesses a distinctly Nazarene air, owing to the screen of trees in the background and the somewhat severe dress, sometimes described as '*altdeutsch*', and the Italianate note of the laurel foliage. A friend of the commissioner, Christian Karl Freiherr von Bunsen, wrote from Rome, in a letter of 19 February 1822, that the portrait "*findet allgemeinen Beifall bei Künstlern und Nichtkünstlern, bei Kennern und Nichtkennern*" (Suhr, *Veit*, 1991, p. 53).



Philipp Veit, *Fraulein Therese vom Stein*, 1821  
 Albrecht Graf von Kanitz, Schloß Cappenberg  
 (bei Dortmund)

The critical reception on the part of the ‘*Kenner*’ was prompt. In a report from Rome in August 1821, we read:

*“Eine andere neuere Arbeit des Veit ist das Porträt der Fräulein von S. . . , welches als eines der vorzüglichsten muß betrachtet werden, die in der neueren Zeit entstanden sind. Die Stellung ist höchst einfach, ein rothes Kleid mit weißen Buffen der ganze Schmuck; der im vollen Licht beleuchtete Kopf hebt sich gegen ein Buschwerk von Lorbeer und Buchsbaum stark ab; ein Stückchen Landschaft und etwas Himmel, welche das zarte Laub durchblicken läßt, erhöht den Reiz des Ganzen; aber die getreue Nachbildung des schönen Originals bleibt der anziehendste Ruhepunkt für das Auge. Durch dieses Porträt und ein früheres des Abbé M. hat sich Veit als ein ausgezeichnete Bildnißmaler bewährt”* (*Kunstblatt*, No. 64, 9 August 1821, p. 255).

This report remained unsigned, as the promised continuation does not seem to have appeared. A further positive notice appeared in the *Morgenblatt* (No. 174, 1821, p. 696).

Perhaps Overbeck was genuinely impressed by the public reception of Philipp Veit's portrait, but it is difficult to believe that he was truly intimidated by the portrait itself. For all its merits, the portrait of Therese vom Stein appears somewhat stiff and plain when set beside the female portraits that Veit painted later in Frankfurt. Instead of the usual fragment of an entire person presented in bust, half-length, and three-quarter length portraits, Overbeck presents the complete figure, isolated in her own microcosm and divorced from the world of 'modern' life. How different and abstract Vittoria Caldoni appears in her almost timeless world apart.



*Marie von Guaita*, 1836  
Städel, Frankfurt am Main



*Freifrau von Bernus*, 1838  
Städel, Frankfurt am Main

As a Christian painter the severe Overbeck may have been able to come to terms with the "*Beywerk*" of trees and landscape in Fraulein vom Stein's portrait, but he might have balked at the luxus and social affirmation of Veit's Frankfurt portraits. To defend his Vittoria Caldoni in Munich, he claimed, "*Ich wollte dem Vergleich möglichst ausweichen*"; he wanted to steer clear of comparisons.

While there is an element of make-believe in Veit's portrait of Therese vom Stein, with her old-fashioned dress and set against an Italianate foil of foliage, it represents a retrospective and almost escapist fantasy world seen from today. In his portrait of Therese vom Stein, Veit has clearly taken his cue from Julius Schnorr's portrait of Clara Bianca von Quandt (1820; Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin), a similar fantasy of a visitor in Italy, dressed in a Renaissance,

Raphaelesque costume and placed before a Mediterranean orange tree. Overbeck, in comparison, seems to show a timeless Italy, in a picture composed with the conventions of religious painting, and not a portrait, where ‘sitters’ sit on chairs to facilitate taking their likeness, and not on the ground. Vittoria Caldoni sits on the ground at the foot of a large tree. Both components of this constellation are drawn from the repertoire of Overbeck’s Christian images.

#### THE MODEL AND THE PRINCE:

Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld was far more engaged with making Vittoria Caldoni’s likeness than was Friedrich Overbeck. Many of his letters from Italy touch upon his project, first undertaken for Quandt. One of these, which appears to have escaped notice, shows that the Crown Prince was involved in the making of Overbeck’s painting, beyond simply giving a commission for it. On 11 January 1822 Schnorr writes to Quandt about his portrait of the “*Albaneserin*”, adding: “*Auch ist es wahr, dass Overbeck ihr auf Anordnung des Prinzen von Bayern ein sehr ansehnliches Geschenk (ich glaube in zwölf Louisdors bestehend) dafür, daß sie ihm saß, gemacht hat*” (p. 380). Thus *Kronprinz* had paid handsomely for sittings, which suggests he may have wanted a genuine portrait of the famed beauty.

At least eleven portraits of Vittoria Caldoni by Schnorr have survived (Koeltz, 2009, pp. 248-249), and as Schnorr wrote to his father, he saw his study in Italy as a preparation for his future works of art. As Overbeck’s ‘Nina=Ruth’, Schnorr’s portraits of Vittoria found their way into his portrayals of the biblical Ruth, although this circumstance seems to have been overlooked. A particularly clear instance is Schnorr’s drawing of Ruth alone in the fields of Boaz, with sack and an amphora for water at her feet. Her face is a portrait which closely resembles Schnorr’s presently lost painted portrait of Vittoria Caldoni made for Johann Gottlob von Quandt and other portrait drawings of Vittoria by Schnorr (Teichmann, 2001, pp. 118-123).





Schnorr, *Ruth*, 1826.  
Kunsthalle, Hamburg



Schnorr, *Vittoria Caldoni*, 1822.  
Graphische Sammlung, München



Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Portrait of Vittoria Caldoni*, 1823.  
formerly Berlin (present location unknown)

In this guise Vittoria Caldoni made her way into Schnorr's Picture Bible.



Julius Schnorr, *Ruth and Boaz*, 1825.  
National Gallery, Washington (formerly Ratjen, Vaduz)



Julius Schnorr, *Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 2: 2-13)*, 1851-1860,  
in: *Die Bibel in Bildern*, Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1860

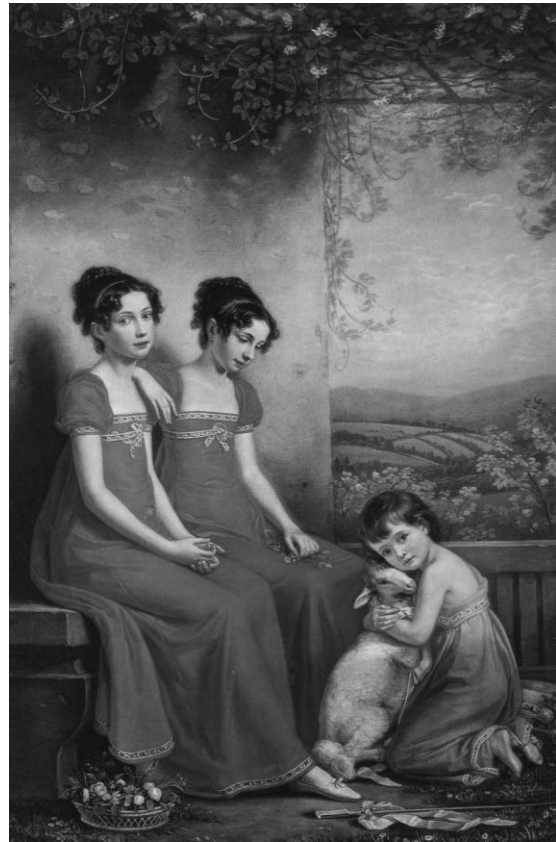
A complete Nazarene picture bible (*Bilderbibel*) belonged to the programme of the movement from the earliest years of the *Lukasbrüder* (cf. Overbeck, Sutter, Cornelius, Schadow, Scheffer, Richter, Steinle, Friedrich Olivier, and others), but Schnorr's *Bilderbibel*, completed in 1860, constituted perhaps the most comprehensive realization of the project's aims (see Schnorr, *Die Bibel in Bildern*, Neuss, 1982-83).

What Crown Prince Ludwig appreciated at this time in a female portrait is reflected in his commission to Heinrich Maria von Hess (1823-1824) for the full-length portrait of his beloved, Marianna Marchesa Florenzi, who, hat in hand, sits on a stone bench, as if half-waiting upon an assignation within an interior, hidden in an angle of an imposing Italian architectural loggia, like that of the Villa Medici, with a view out onto the garden, with a fountain and pines grown to form an arch, through which is seen a vista from the Pincian Hill of St. Peter's in the distance, as in the view from the Villa Malta, a prestigious portrait of a lady, fitting for a crown prince. During the execution of the work, Ludwig visited Hess's studio often, together with the Marchesa, for sittings, and the pair took an active part on the progress of the work. The Prince kept the rather daring painting at first in Rome, almost as a secret and to be seen by none (Schnorr, *Briefe aus Italien*, p. 464), but soon, by 1829, it was in Munich (Catalogue: Neue Pinakothek, *Spätklassizismus und Romantik*, ed. Thea Vignau-Wilberg, München: Hirmer, 2003, pp. 168-170).

The idea of the portrait of the Marchesa is not very different from that of a triple portrait from ten years earlier of Ludwig's half-sisters, the *Prinzessinnen von Bayern* (Elisabeth, Amalie und Caroline; 1814; Hase, 1971, Pl. I, cat. 42), daughters of Maximilian I., which the *Kronprinz* would certainly have known.



Heinrich Maria von Hess, *Marianna Florenzi*, 1823-24.  
Neue Pinakothek, München



Joseph Stieler, *Prinzessinnen von Bayern*, 1814  
Private collection (Bayern)

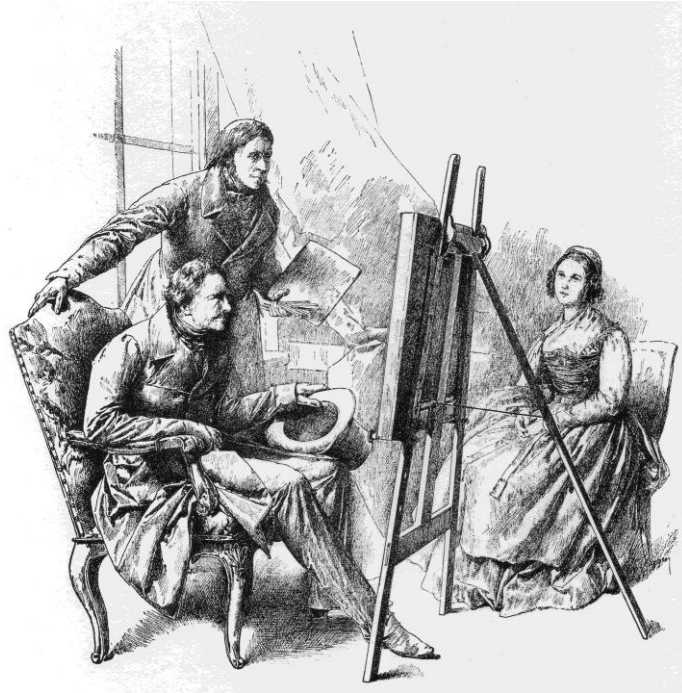
The two young twin princesses sit on a stone bench before a wall, with, above, a green bower of vines, and, beyond, a view onto a distant landscape, a formula Ludwig may have remembered in his instructions to his painter in Rome.



*Prinzessinnen von Bayern, 1814*

#### LUDWIG'S *SCHÖNHEITENGALERIE*:

The history of Ludwig's *Schönheitengalerie*, now housed at Schloss Nymphenburg (earlier *Münchner Residenz*), has been illustrated recently by Gerhard Hojer, in his *Die Schönheitengalerie König Ludwigs I.* (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2001; see also Hase, 1971, and *Wikipedia*, with images of all the portraits). The Gallery of beautiful women consists of thirty-six portraits, nearly all by the painter Joseph Karl Stieler. The earliest surviving mention of the plans for this "*Sammlung der schönen Köpfen*" is found in a letter of Stieler to the Crown Prince of 19 May 1821, that is, just after Ludwig's return from Italy and at almost the same time as the Crown Prince's commission to Overbeck for his portrait of Vittoria Caldoni. But the Prince's first commissions for portraits of ladies date even earlier, including that of a mistress camouflaged as a 'Madonna' in 1817, and a first painting for the *Schönheitengalerie* was exhibited in 1832. The Prince and later King took a close interest in this project, most often determining the choice of models and sometimes details of their dress, as well as making visits to Stieler's atelier during the course of sittings.



Joseph Flügger (1842-1906),  
*Ludwig and Stieler during an atelier sitting with Helene Sedlmayr*

The portraits of beautiful women are a somewhat mixed group, noble ladies beside the bourgeoisie, many from Bavaria, but also foreign women and royal mistresses. The portraits range from bust to half-lengths; the beautiful and often fine clothing is observed in luxurious detail. Marchesa Florenzi is represented with a broad expanse of bare flesh.



Stieler, *Marchesa Marianna Florenzi*, 1831.

In at least two instances the portraits are clearly treated as *Rollenporträts*, where the sitter is presented in the guise of a mythological, allegorical, historical, or literary personage, for example, Lady Theresa Spence (1837), with her laurel crown, a cithara, and a chiton with fibula and meander border – all Greek ornaments, which have suggested her identity as Sappho, although she might as well be playing the part of Erato, the Greek muse of lyric poetry.



Stieler, *Lady Therese Spence*, 1837.



*Antonia Wallinger*, 1840

A second *Rollenporträt* in Ludwig's Gallery is that of Antonia Wallinger (1840) cast as Hebe, the mythological cup-bearer of the gods and herself the goddess of youth, who offered a popular portrait disguise in many portraits. A third, little noticed, but genuine *Rollenporträt* in a narrow sense is that of the actress Charlotte von Hagn dressed in her costume as Thekla, Wallenstein's daughter, in Friedrich Schiller's *Wallensteins Tod*. Stieler also portrayed the actress Caroline von Heygendorf (1829) als Porcia in the *Kaufmann von Venedig* (Hase, *Stieler*, 1971, no. 139) and a model named Cati Bock as the *Madonna* (1846, no. 230).

The portrait of the stunning Katharina Botzaris (1841) constitutes a different case, one in which the personal beauty and identity is eclipsed by her exotic indigenous costume and her foreign national identity, underlined by the Greek landscape of the background. Botzaris was the daughter of a fallen hero in the battle for freedom in Greece. Her dark beauty is characterised as a type by her Grecian costume: her red cap with its long heavy tassel, her fur-trimmed jacket with gold brocade, her white dress. It is her 'otherness' that is the centre of



interest: an exotic beauty from a far away land.



*Katharina Botzaris*, 1841

The picture was a great success, a “*Treffer*” with the public, as Dr. Heinrich Merz wrote in the *Kunstblatt* (1843, No. 89, p. 370):

*“Hier war immer der größte Zudrang; ein zierliches Gesicht, ein weisser Teint, ein wenig sagender Blick, eine zinnoberrothe Lippe und dazu die kleidsame Griechentracht; aber ein südlicher Kopf, ein griechisches Auge ist es doch wohl nicht? Ich habe das Original vor zwei Jahren zu München in der St. Salvatorkirche, während eines ganzen griechischen Gottesdienstes, lange und genau gesehen und kann von der Farbe reden. Ihr bräunlicher, nichts weniger als feiner Teint, ihr minder offenes, längliches Auge und der ganze griechisch-slavische Typus konnte zu Fallmerayers Griechenland ein Titelkupfer liefern.”*

Dr. Merz was interested in Katharina Botzaris as a *Fremde*, at pains to show himself as expert in the types of ‘otherness’, to parse Botzaris as a “griechisch-slavische Typus”. Distance, rather than an ethnographic aspiration to see others from the inside out.

VITTORIA CALDONI AND THE *SCHÖNHEITENGALERIE*:

It seems inescapable that the *Kronprinz*'s taste and his expectations of portraits constituted part of what he wanted from Overbeck. One must only glance through the pictures of his beauties to sense immediately that Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni* simply does not fit in. She is, however, but a few centimetres too large, and it is not simply that she has been cast in a rôle as someone else or that she might be seen as a type typical of a foreign place dressed in local *Tracht*, for both of these exceptions found their way into the royal gallery of beauties.

But a full figure does not fit the programme at all, and clearly a full figure was not what was expected in Munich. And further there was her lowly station, a *Bäuerin*, seated on the bare earth, with all the connotations of this posture: humility, poverty, and primitivism – almost as a representative of an earlier, more backward phase of civilization, of the primitive past of mankind. But *Vittoria Caldoni* was first of all a *Schönheit*. Ludwig arrived in Rome for a long sojourn very shortly after her 'discovery' in the Summer of 1820, and he certainly heard of her and may well have seen her. While the abstract perfection of her face has been preserved, her famed beauty has been concealed by a veil of plainness. Hers is a very serious appearing picture, whereas Ludwig seemed to like his girls elegant, even richly dressed, and often light-hearted and sometimes merry. Many smile, and others look at the beholder engagingly, and some are quite sensuous and exposed.

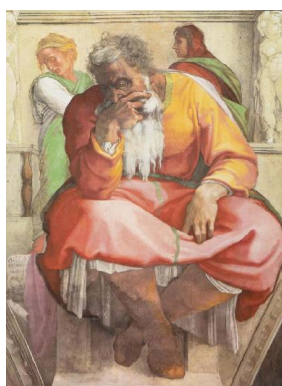
Both Passavant and Schnorr described *Vittoria*'s pose and bearing. Passavant observed that "*das Mädchen sitzt etwas gebückt, sich mit dem Knie auf dem Ellbogen stützend (...) auch besonderes Lob verdient unser Künstler, daß er durch die sitzende und ganz für ein Landmädchen passende Stellung, ihre etwas unansehnliche Gestalt zu verbergen wußte.*"

Schnorr returns to the point of how *Vittoria*'s seated, slightly bent over posture conceals her defects: "*Mit ihrer Gestalt war nichts anzufangen, denn sie ist ganz unansehnlich; doch fürchtete Overbeck aus dem Charakter zu fallen, wenn er sich hierin Änderungen erlaubte, er wählte daher eine Geberde [= Gebärde], bei welcher die kleine Person in ihrer eigensten Eigentümlichkeit doch sehr anmutig erscheint. Er malte sie nämlich, als ob sie von der Feldarbeit ausruhe; lieblich zusammengeduckt sitzt sie unter einem Feigenbaum (...)*" (p. 370).

If one wishes to see Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni* as a representative of a pictorial genre representing curious and exotic local types, it must be admitted that this genre was flourishing and much in demand at Rome at the time. Bartolomeo Pinelli had some time earlier began issuing his various prints of Roman and Italian low-life, and several of his prints were dedicated to Albano.

Moreover, Pinelli was not the first or only practitioner of this topographical or chorographical genre, focused on picturesque local types, usages, and costumes, a genre very popular with visitors to Italy. Kestner wrote that “*Genre-Maler pflegten eine Bäuerin, ein armes Mädchen oder gar eine Magd zu machen*” (Gold, *Modellkult*, 2009, p. 159; cf. Kestner, 1850, pp. 85-87). This was not a kind of painting or a category of painter to which Overbeck would have felt any attraction; indeed his probable reaction was that of aversion.

Vittoria Caldoni’s true identity seems to have consisted of only two elements: (1) her famed beauty and (2) her birthplace, as a native of Albano, that is, her personal beauty which corresponded perfectly to an abstract and universal classical ideal and her local, but not personal identity, as typical of the inhabitants of a specific place. Both Schnorr and Passavant identify the view into the distance as a view across the plain before Albano to the (distant) sea. What the mountains behind the sea are is an open question. Possibly there is combined a memory of the nearby Lago di Albano. And while Overbeck inevitably represents her local costume, he, as Passavant acknowledges, plays it down, stripping away detail, and even almost hiding one of the most characteristic ‘Albano’ features of her dress, the high and stiff *busto* (*Mieder*) that Vittoria wears, of which only a narrow strip of the green underside is shown, along with an equally exiguous part of the patterned front side, both nearly concealed by the model’s bent-over posture. Even Vittoria’s ample apron has been, unrealistically, fused with her skirt, to form a single garment, with a red drawn tie, from what are in reality two distinct pieces of fabric, but now one, for the sake of a dignified ‘picture’ dress. Vittoria’s dress thus becomes almost as universal as the costumes of Overbeck’s religious histories. She wears not fabrics, but pictorial draperies, woven of paint, much as the immaterial materiality of the timeless, universal garments of Michelangelo’s *Sistina*. Overbeck evades offering a picturesque vision of ethnic costume.



*Jeremiah*

It does not seem very likely that Vittoria's 'other' identity was disclosed in Munich; it would have not helped to diminish the complaints at the court. For what Overbeck has painted is not a portrait in the traditional sense. In Overbeck's execution of his commission from the Crown Prince, it appears that his concept of portraiture was determined by his idea of his art as a strictly Christian art and by the conception of his religious paintings. It has been claimed that, in his *Vittoria Caldoni*, Overbeck expands the genre of portraiture to include an allegorical dimension ("erweiterte das [Porträt-]Genre ins Allegorische"; Mildenerger, 1991, p. 97), but, rather than an allegory of summer or autumn, Vittoria Caldoni becomes a Christian allegory, cast as 'Ruth' sitting at the foot of a tree, a figure of the genesis and generations of Christ. If she is to be seen as a *Rollenporträt*, it is not one like the fashionable *Rollenporträts* of Ludwig's *Schönheitengalerie*. Like many participants in Overbeck's religious histories and those of other Nazarenes who bear the features of the Nazarenes and their families and friends, Vittoria Caldoni assumes a sacred identity. She sits before us on the ground and appears unknowing, absorbed in her inwardness, much as many of the nomadic ancestors of Christ of the Sistine.

When all is said, Overbeck's Vittoria Caldoni is not a *Rollenporträt* in the sense of those of Lady Hamilton as a Circe, a Bacchante, a Cassandra, or an Ariadne, combining classical poses with modern allure, or in the sense of Stieler's Lady Spence as Erato. Overbeck paints Vittoria as a model, as she was, as does Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld in his *Ruth* of 1826.



Julius Schnorr, *Vittoria Caldoni as Ruth*, 1826.  
Kunsthalle, Hamburg

But where Schnorr simply uses Vittoria as a model for his *Ruth in the Fields*, Overbeck transforms his portrait of her into a figuration of Ruth. The two artists depart from opposite ends of a single spectrum, but the operation that they transact is nearly identical. Neither image fits exactly into a conventional genre: Schnorr's Ruth finds its precedents in Nazarene sacred pictures where the sacred personages are portraits of contemporaries, above all in Overbeck's drawing of *Ruth and Boaz* for his family (*supra*). Here, in a further acknowledgement of indebtedness to Overbeck, as he follows in his footsteps, Schnorr shows Ruth's *sacco* white, and not dark brown as in the painting of *Ruth and Boaz* in London. If Schnorr's 'Ruth=Vittoria' is a concealed Vittoria, Overbeck's 'Vittoria=Ruth' is a hidden Ruth, who was completely lost on her public in München. One of the two *Deutungsebene* (levels of meaning) of the painting has been lost. But the painting is also not a simple *Rollenporträt* in which the assumption of a make-believe identity takes the form of a sophisticated form of self-presentation, in a flattering double-identity. Overbeck's Vittoria becomes a kind of pictorial *Doppelgängerin* who loses her own identity. Julius Schnorr wrote, "*Er malte sie nämlich, als ob sie von der Feldarbeit ausruhe*", and he sees the painting as a

*Riposo* of the ‘*schöne Albaneserin*’. She sits there as the unaware ancestors of Christ, blindly and unknowingly waiting for the coming of Christ. In the relatively small gallery of the Neue Pinakothek, where the picture is now displayed on a far wall, the painting of Vittoria=Ruth makes a strong and uncompromising, almost commanding impression even at a relatively considerable distance.

#### VITTORIA CALDONI:

Vittoria Caldoni was shown most often in her portraits as she herself, in portraits of her legendary beauty, a beauty which, as artists and experts proclaimed, was ineffable and almost impossible to capture, and thus portraying her became an artistic challenge, a problem in representation. The focusing of so much attention on her beauty on the part of so many artists and ‘lovers of beauty’ sometimes appears as a form of collective delusion, a ‘craze’ as a form of collective behaviour. The attraction was felt almost exclusively by foreigners. Only two Italians, both sculptors, may be counted among those who portrayed her, Pietro Tenerani (1789-1869) and Raimondo Trentanove (1791-1832). What Mildenerger aptly wrote of August Kestner’s *Römische Studien* applies to much of what has been written and said about Vittoria:

“*Die von Kestner überlieferten biographischen und kulturgeschichtlichen Details sind so typisches Ottocento, daß man sie fast für Zitate aus der zeitgenössischen Romanliteratur halten könnte*” (1991, p. 96).

In reality beautiful girls can be found everywhere. A corollary of Vittoria’s ineffability was the claim that all the portraits of her looked different, and none was satisfactory. But girls look different at different times, perhaps especially to young men. Schnorr had at least two visions or versions of Vittoria’s beautiful face. But, despite all this, her likenesses fall into a very few discrete groups, although recent studies seem blind to this fact.

Overbeck gives his model, who is only a model, a true identity. The handwritten inscription affixed to the back of the *Keilrahmen* of the painting with Vittoria’s name, includes information that came from Rome, but, owing to the haste with which the picture was dispatched, it is not the inscription that Overbeck was expected to supply, and which he never did (*Deutsche Künstler*, 1981, p. 65).

Many of Overbeck's paintings appeared to him in need of explanation, which in several cases he supplied in written form, *e.g.*, the *Triumph der Religion in den Künsten*.

WHY?:

Beyond an aversion to conventional portraiture and, possibly, a feeling that representing colourful local types was beneath the worthiness of his art, Overbeck's self-image may have allowed him to disregard the terms of his commission. A recent book by Mitchell B. Frank has described Overbeck's stylised public persona as the monk-artist and defined his fundamental private self-image as that of the independent man. An aspect of this identity was Overbeck's view of himself as an artist-king, as a component of the independence to which he aspired. He sits before his easel as a person of the highest rank; like a king, he reigns over his brushes (2001, pp. 45-48). He would not exchange places with any king on earth. Thus Overbeck may have experienced ambivalence in the service of a king, or future king, as was the Crown Prince of Bayern.

To Keith Andrews's observation that the picture forces the beholder "intentionally, to seek a meaning beyond mere portrait representation", students of Overbeck have, unintentionally, offered only three answers, some have suggested an allegory of the seasons or of plenty (late summer/autumn, or *Fruchtbarkeit*: Spickernagel, 1996), or similarly, Pomona (Poensgen, 1961, p. 253), or Mariä (Koeltz, 2009, p.116). The first suggestions seem inadequate, the third, incorrect.

One writer has suggested, irrefutably, that until his death Overbeck, in many letters and other written statements, represented his view that art was only to serve Religion and the glorification of God ("*Bis zu seinem Tode vertrat Overbeck in vielen Briefen und schriftlichen Äusserungen die Auffassung, dass die Kunst allein der Religion und der Verherrlichung Gottes gewidmet werden müsse.*").

## ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS:

More than written words, images are susceptible to variable interpretation. If one wishes to look in other directions, one might ask if Theodor Rehbenitz's *Albaneserin* (1832) is not in reality a portrait of Vittoria Caldoni. The likeness seems to fall within the range of her portraits.



Theodor Rehbenitz, *Junge Frau in der Tracht von Albano*, 1832.  
Museum Behnhaus, Lübeck



The staff behind her bears as its apex the obscene gesture of the *Feigenhand*:



FIG. III.

The staff in Rehbenitz's drawing may simply be a *scaramanzia* to ward off evil, as has been maintained, for the model's rôle was not without risks. But it might also be a gesture to say „*cornuto!*“, launched against critics of Vittoria's rôle. The road from model to mistress, and sometimes wife was a short one, and Vittoria ultimately married an artist for whom she modelled. Fathers sometimes vigorously opposed that Ludwig might appear at Stieler's studio in the course of sittings with their daughters. Vittoria was usually accompanied by her mother to sittings. But the relation of artist to model leads to intimacy, the model's rôle demanding obedience and submission, the artist focused for long periods on her face and body, exploring and attempting to fathom her secrets.

As seen above Passavant wrote that in Overbeck's painting the hands were not quite finished („*er den Händen nicht diejenige Vollendung geben konnte, welche sonst im ganzen Gemälde so sehr erfreut*“). Overbeck's drawing of Vittoria in Berlin shows all the fingers of her left hand fully extended downward; in the painting in the Neue Pinakothek instead the two middle fingers are retracted, giving the suggestion of a slightly concealed gesture of the *mano cornuta* (*gesto delle corno*; sign of the horns; *Hörner*) in what again may be an apotropaic

gesture, but may also suggest that the viewer is a victim of cuckoldry, that his or her spouse is unfaithful. Thus Vittoria warns that her beauty carries with it the risk that she may prove seductive to her admirers.



Satyr, *Plaquette*,  
Mantuan, after 1480

Even Ruth was not so chaste as most artists portrayed her, for her 'seduction' of Boaz nearly ends in an erotic adventure in the night, until Boaz saves Ruth's

good name. This aspect of Ruth's history is manifest in the *Ruth* of Francesco Hayez (1791-1882), where, her breasts bared and her upper arm encircled by a golden arm bracelet, she nearly assumes the guise of Raphael's *Baker's Daughter*.



Francesco Hayez, *Ruth*, 1853.  
Collezioni Comunali, Palazzo Pubblico, Bologna



### **FRIEDRICH OVERBECK (1789-1869)**

Much material concerning Overbeck was published during his lifetime or shortly thereafter, including brief biographies in Italian (Laderchi, 1848; Borgia Mandolini, 1872). Difficult to find early periodicals are sometimes to be read online (e.g., *Kunstblatt*: <http://diglit.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/kunstblatt>; cf. *arthistoricum.net*: Themen→ Textquellen digital→ Kunst- und Satirezeitschriften→ Morgenblatt/Kunstblatt). Although significant parts of Overbeck's very extensive correspondence remains unpublished, very many of his letters and those to him have been published (see Hasse, Schnorr von Carolsfeld, Rumohr/Stock; Howitt, Wikisource, Cornelius, etc.).

Although Margaret Howitt's description of Overbeck's life and works (1886) was compiled "*nach seinen Briefen und anderen Dokumenten des handschriftlichen Nachlasses*", the evidential status of her reports is not always clear (cf. Michael Thimann, review of: Mitchell Frank, *German Romantic Painting Redefined*, 2001, in: *Journal für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 7, 2003, pp. 244-249). The Overbeck *Nachlass* in Lübeck is presently accessible; see Paul Hagen, *Friedrich Overbecks handschriftlicher Nachlaß in der Lübeckischen Stadtbibliothek*, Lübeck: Schmidt-Römhild, 1926. The rôle of Franz Binder in the Howitt biography merits consideration. Margaret Howitt was the daughter of William Howitt and Mary Howitt (1799-1888), both very productive British authors. The autobiography of the mother, Mary Howitt: *An Autobiography*, ed.

Margaret Howitt, London: W. Ibister, 1889, contains illuminating material concerning the Howitts's relations with the Hoffmann-Overbeck family (online: *archive.org*).



*Friedrich Overbeck*, 1855  
Fotograph: Franz Hanfstaengl (1804-1877)

Joseph Beavington Atkinson, *Overbeck*, New York (Scribner & Welford) and London (Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington), 1882 ('Illustrated Biographies of the Great Artists'; online: *archive.org*)

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Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, “Friedrich Overbeck”, in: *Thieme-Becker*, vol. 26, 1932, p. 105

Frank Büttner, “Friedrich Overbeck”, in: *Dictionary of Art*, London 1996, vol. 23, pp. 675-678

Useful web-pages about Overbeck are found in various languages at *Wikipedia* (with literature and images).

There is no comprehensive modern monograph dedicated to Overbeck, but see library OPACs for books, articles, and exhibition catalogues, as well as internet search engines for texts and images. Many of these works have been consulted.

Online is found the following work (in large part included in: Frank, 2001):

Mitchell Benjamin Frank, *Friedrich Overbeck Playing the Role of the Monk-Artist*, Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1997 (in Internet: [www.nic-bnc.ca/obi/s4/f2/dsk2/tape16/PQDD\\_0004/NQ27925.pdf](http://www.nic-bnc.ca/obi/s4/f2/dsk2/tape16/PQDD_0004/NQ27925.pdf)) via Google. PDF: FRIEDRICH OVERBECK – Bibliothèque et Archives Canada. Mitchell B. Frank)



OVERBECK, VITTORIA CALDONI, NEUE PINAKOTHEK, MÜNCHEN:

In the *Bestandskatalog* of the Neue Pinakothek, *Spätklassizismus und Romantik*, Overbeck's *Vittoria Caldoni* receives an extensive and nearly comprehensive entry including a full citation of relevant inventories, exhibition catalogues, and literature:

Thea Vignau-Wilberg, ed., *Spätklassizismus und Romantik*, Bayerische Staatsgemälde Sammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Gemäldekatalog 4, München: Hirmer, 2003, WAF 757, pp. 367-371

This is the fundamental reference for the painting. See also: Herbert W. Rott, *Ludwig I. und die Neue Pinakothek*, Köln: DuMont, 2003, p. 265

Subsequently two works treating portraits of Vittoria Caldoni, written as qualifying papers for academic degrees, have been published, nearly simultaneously:

*online:*

Amrei I. Gold (geb. Heitkötter), *Der Modellkult um Sarah Siddons, Emma Hamilton, Vittoria Caldoni und Jane Morris*, Dissertation, 2006, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 2009 (2010) [[http://miami.uni-muenster.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-5345/diss\\_gold\\_amrei.pdf](http://miami.uni-muenster.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-5345/diss_gold_amrei.pdf)]

*print:*

Ulrike Koeltz, *Vittoria Caldoni: Modell und Identifikationsfigur des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010 (Dissertation, Technische Universität, Dortmund, 2009)

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*Die Nazarener*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz, Exhibition Catalogue, Frankfurt am Main, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, 1977

*Die Nazarener in Rom*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz, Exhibition catalogue, Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna, Roma, 1981 (München: Prestel Verlag, 1981), p. 179, No. 79

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For PORTRAITURE in general, see: Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries*, New Haven-London, 1990, with an emphasis on the practicalities of artistic creation.




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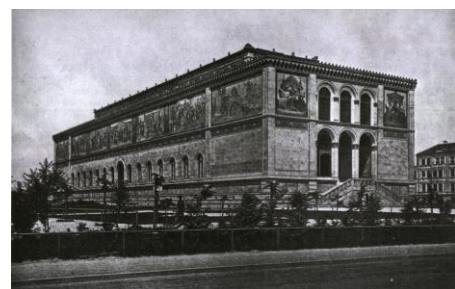
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