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Byzantine Sources of the Crucifixion

Jean-Pierre Caillet, Fabienne Joubert

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FABIENNE JOUBERT - JEAN-PIERRE CAILLET

BYZANTINE SOURCES OF THE CRUCIFIXION IN
ITALY. REVISITING THE ROLE OF THE
MENDICANTS

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FABIENNE JOUBERT – JEAN-PIERRE CAILLET*

BYZANTINE SOURCES OF THE CRUCIFIXION IN ITALY.
REVISITING THE ROLE OF THE MENDICANTS

SUMMARY

Here, we take over the topic of the «crowdy» *Crucifixion* as attested in Italian Art of the Duecento and early Trecento. Then, some particular iconographic features appear in clue works, as Cimabue's fresco in the Assisian upper church and the Pisani's pulpits in Pisa (baptistery and cathedral) and Pistoia: i.e., the position of Mary and saint John close to each other on the same side of the cross; the valorisation of the centurio on the other one; the angels respectively helping *Ecclesia* to approach Christ and repelling *Synagoga* from him; and the presence of the two thieves.

We draw attention on the fact that these features were previously – and quite contemporarily – in use in Byzantine painting: we especially mention the case of Abu Gosh in Holy Land, but also several other significant samples. Then, we tend to show that these topics were probably known by Franciscan – and eventually Dominican – missionaries, and correspond precisely to what is expressed in texts emanating from these two Orders, or from individuals belonging to their circle; and in particular, the Italian realizations here taken in account appear to have been commissioned by some of them. So, it is possible to stress more again the Mendicants' crucial role in transmitting from the Byzantine sphere some very important contents, becoming soon firmly rooted in Italian achievements.

Keywords: *Crucifixion*, Cimabue, Assisi, Pisani's pulpits, Italian Art, Byzantine Art.

A lot has been written about the new Western imaging of the Crucifixion, during the thirteenth century – in central Italy especially – and about

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its links with post-iconoclastic Byzantine Painting. Among that, some famous reference studies given by Hans Belting¹ or James Stubblebine,² and some more, provided specific investigations about Byzantine models. Elizabeth Roth focused on a notable amplification of the scene, which intervened beside the traditional Calvary, and she dealt with the development of a more or less crowded representation; but in spite of the mention of some byzantine antecedents (like Chludov Psalter), her purpose was mainly Western Art,³ and Gothic and Post Gothic Period.

The specific iconography of Christ was insightfully studied too; so the replacing of *Christus Triumphans* by *Christus Patiens*, first of all in the painted crosses during the first quarter of the thirteenth century, is well known too: the Part played by the Franciscan Order was rightly emphasized, and the question was particularly investigated by Ann Derbes, in her precious work, who gave a sharp analysis of affinities between Orthodox and Franciscan communities, and of the appropriation and transformation of Byzantine Models in Gothic Italy.⁴ Her study, and some other ones, evoke, more or less precisely, presence of Mendicants, in the whole Byzantine area, in the same time. So, our subject is not new, but, in our opinion, the weight of Byzantine authority, as the specific involvement of Mendicants – Franciscans, and a little later, Dominicans – is especially notable in the complexity of Western Crucifixion.

Drawing now attention again on some clue Italian works, we want to emphasize several features which did not yet arouse comments enough, regarding the impact of Eastern antecedents. First of all, let us consider the famous Crucifixion by Cimabue in the southern transept of San Francesco upper church in Assisi (fig. 1). Here, we can notice the figures of Mary and saint John, close to each other on the left side of Christ's cross, the apostle gently taking the Mother's right hand, and both heads converging in an expression of profound grief. Then, we draw attention toward the figure of the centurio, the second one at the right side of the cross but evidently valorised by his position to the fore and, furthermore, by the halo surrounding his head.

We have now to move to the no less illustrious pulpit by Nicola Pisano in the baptistery of Pisa (fig. 2). By the way, we also note here the proximity of Mary and saint John on the same side of the cross, but with the particu-

¹ Cfr. BELTING 1991, especially pp. 301-304, 405-406.

² Cfr. STUBBLEBINE 1966.

³ Cfr. ROTH 1958 (1967).

⁴ Cfr. DERBES 1996.

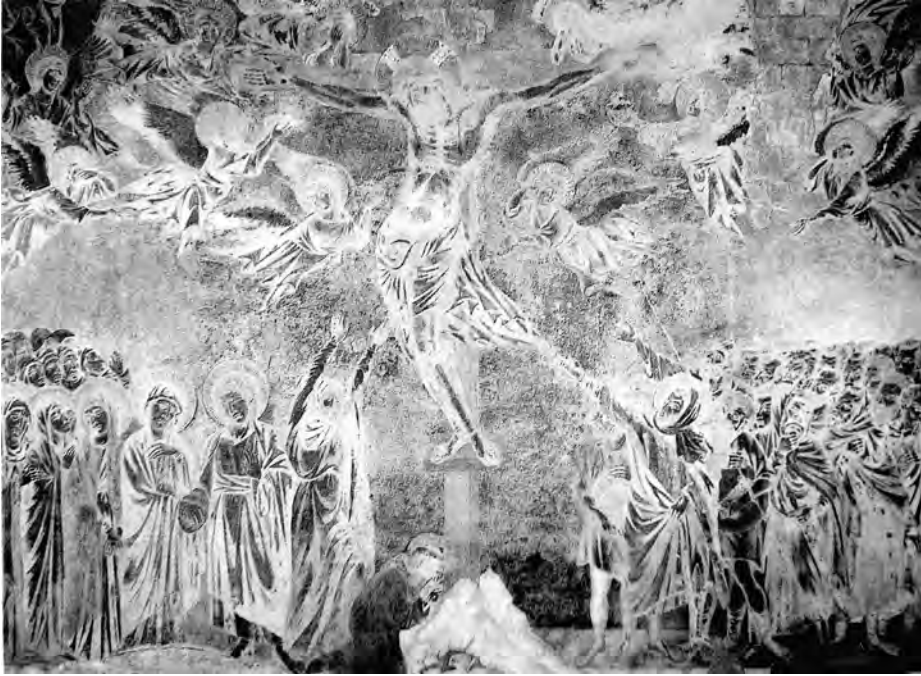


Fig. 1. - CIMABUE, *Crucifixion*, fresco, Assisi, southern transept of San Francesco upper church.

larity of Mary's collapse, out of our present purpose, and yet well studied by Amy Neff and others;⁵ we also note the prominent place assigned to the centurio. But we want to enhance another important characteristic: i.e., on both sides of the upper part of Christ's cross, the two angels respectively helping the personification of *Ecclesia* to approach the Saviour in order to collect His blood in a chalice, and pushing away the personification of *Synagoga*.

We shall now evoke the pulpit achieved by Giovanni Pisano for the Sant' Andrea church in Pistoia (fig. 3), where another of our prominent features is clearly attested: here, in addition to what just mentioned about the placing of Mary and John, the enhancement of the centurio and the role played by the angels with *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*, the cross of the Saviour is flanked by the two thieves' ones. And we may also distinguish, even if it is

⁵ Cfr. especially NEFF 1998.



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Fig. 2. - NICOLA PISANO, *Crucifixion*, marble, Pisa, baptistery, pulpit. Fig. 3. - GIOVANNI PISANO, *Crucifixion*, marble, Pistoia, Sant' Andrea, pulpit.

not yet particularly marked, a difference in the facial expression between the two of them: on the left, the «good thief» is characterized by what might be interpreted as a supplicatory address to Christ, whose head precisely reclines in His direction; whereas, on the opposite side, the expression of the «impenitent thief» corresponds well enough to the uttering of invectives whose the Gospel informs of.

And if we go one step further, and consider then the pulpit by the same Giovanni Pisano in the cathedral of Pisa (fig. 4), we get absolute confirmation of what was slightly formulated at Pistoia: here in effect, the attitudes of the two thieves not only strongly stress the divergence of their respective meanings, but the consequences of it becomes openly signified by the role of two angels more, collecting the “good” one’s soul, and repelling the other’s one (doubling, so to speak, what is played by the angels associated with *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*).

It is time now to return toward the Byzantine antecedents whose we, here above, postulated the reality. The Crucifixion in Sopoćani has been frequently invoked, especially regarding Cimabue’s work in Assisi. But we don’t think that this rapprochement is mostly opportune: because, prime



Fig. 4. - GIOVANNI PISANO, *Crucifixion*, marble, Pisa, cathedral, pulpit.

of all, the date currently admitted for the paintings of the Serbian church, i.e. toward 1263-65, has recently – and convincingly – be contested,⁶ with the result that this program should be considered as contemporary, and not really earlier than the one in Assisi.

It seems much more pertinent, without any doubt, to take in account what is displayed in the church of Abu Gosh (figs. 5-6-7), a site identified as Emmaus during the times which concern us.⁷ We recognize in the Crucifixion all the features that we just pointed out in the Italian works: it is at once the most evident for the vicinity of Mary and John (their heads reclining to each other, as in Cimabue's fresco in Assisi), for the angels introducing or repelling, respectively, *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* (these two last ones as half-length figures, matching so perfectly what can be seen on the three pulpits by the Pisani), and for the two thieves. Because of the alteration of the fresco in the right lower part, the similitude is perhaps a little less



Fig. 5. - *Crucifixion*, fresco, Abu Gosh (Israel), church of the Hospitaliers' convent (now Resurrection Monastery).

⁶ Cfr. TODIĆ 2002 and 2006-07.

⁷ Cfr. CARR 1982; and more recently GADRAT-OUERFELLI – ROUXPETEL 2018, especially pp. 44-51 and 53-56.

obvious regarding the centurio; nevertheless, it is not too difficult to identify him in the figure to the fore on the right side of the cross, closely valorised by his halo⁸ as, again, Cimabue's fresco in Assisi (fig. 8).

We do not ignore of course that this church in Abu Gosh belonged then to the Order of Hospitaliers, i.e. a Latin congregation established in the Holy Land with charge, according to a Papal charter, of taking care and defending the *loca sancta* for, in particular, the western pilgrim's benefit. But it is equally obvious that this pictorial program, achieved toward 1160/70, and, of course, with full approval of the Hospitaliers, was realized by Byzantine masters. A first witness of it is provided by the mixing of Greek and Latin captions associated with figures. But also, it is

ascertained by the fact that we do not have, in the contemporary Western iconography, attestations of the features here discussed: Mary and John are



Fig. 6. - *Crucifixion*, left part, fresco, Abu Gosh (Israel), church of the Hospitaliers' convent (now Resurrection Monastery).

⁸ Recently, the identification of the centurio as been rejected by BOESPFLUG – FOGLIADINI 2018, 114 (n. 17), who bring forward that the figure in question is not dressed as a soldier, has her head covered by a veil and, consequently, should rather be a woman (Mary Magdalen?). But several other examples – starting with the Italian ones we are here dealing with – show a centurio with equally covered head, and not particularly dressed as a soldier; at most, a sword is attached to his belt in the baptistery of Pisa – and in Abu Gosh, perhaps, his left hand was reclining on a shield (today in the lacuna) as is the case, for instance, in the “new church” of Tokali that we mention hereafter. Anyhow, Sophia Kalopissi-Verti has produced the most comprehensive argumentation in favour of the identification of the centurio in the Crucifixion scene: cf. hereafter.



Fig. 7. - *Crucifixion*, right part, fresco, Abu Gosh (Israel), church of the Hospitaliers' convent (now Resurrection Monastery).

constantly separated by the cross; *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* are present since Carolingian times, but always as standing full-length figures. At Carolingian times again, one can meet the representation of the two thieves, but very seldom;⁹ some occurrences may also be noticed in Ottonian manuscripts,¹⁰ but it is no more in use during the Romanesque and Early Gothic periods – and we are going to discuss later the isolated case of a Lucchese painted cross.

On the other hand, the features here in question appear to have been firmly rooted in the Byzantine tradition. So – and not pretending, of course, to the exhaustivity of the occurrences – the vicinity of Mary and John is already attested toward the end of the tenth century in the so-called “New Church” of Tokalı in

Cappadocia (fig. 9) (and due to the high quality of the frescoes, perhaps in connection with the wealthy Phocas family, it probably reflects something then in use in prominent circles);¹¹ and we meet it again, for instance, on a beautifully painted templon epistyle with Twelve Feast Scenes (fig. 10),

⁹ See especially the front ivory of Drogo's *Evangeliar* (Paris, BnF, Lat. 9388): cfr. LAFITTE – DENOËL 2007, pp. 201-203, n° 54.

¹⁰ See especially the notice regarding fol. 83v-84v in the *Egbert Codex* by F. RONIG, in FRANZ (ed.) 2005, pp. 163-167.

¹¹ Cfr. JOLIVET-LÉVY 1991, pp. 94-108; and more recently, BEVLACQUA 2013, pp. 236-249 (with others references, and discussion about the identification of the donors pp. 247-248).

belonging to the Sinai Monastery and probably dating from the twelfth century.¹²

As to the angels with half-length figures of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*, we can send back to the Crucifixion in Studenica, painted at about 1200, and for which it has long been admitted that the Serbian dynasts called Byzantine masters from one of the major centers of the Eastern Empire, who here displayed the iconographies currently favoured by the Greek Church.¹³ By the way, it is not superfluous to remind that, as in Western World, the position of the Jews was not too comfortable in Byzantium.¹⁴

Regarding to the two thieves, we can mainly rely on the thorough analysis by Sophia Kalopissi-Verti who, in her key study of the mid-thirteenth century program at Haghia Triada near Kranidi (fig. 11), gave an extensive list of attestations from the Late Antique period



Fig. 8. - CIMABUE, *Crucifixion*, detail with the centurio, fresco, Assisi, southern transept of San Francesco upper church.

¹² Cfr. GERSTEL 2006.

¹³ Cfr. VELMANS 1999, p. 183, with argumentation in favour of a Constantinopolitan origin of the painters.

¹⁴ Benjamin of Tudela mentions, of course, for the mid-12th century, several Jewish communities flourishing enough, economically speaking, in Constantinople as well as in Asia Minor and in the Balkans. But since, in particular, the connections with the opponents to the images stressed by the worshippers of those last ones after the end of the Iconoclasm, the Jews have endured a strong religious hostility: and after forcible conversions decreed by Basil I and Romanus Lecapenus in the 9th-10th centuries, one can particularly send back to the prescriptions of Judaism decided under Theodor I Angelos in Epira and at Thessaloniki, and under John II Vatatzes in the Nicenan Empire, both of them during the first half of the 13th century. Cfr. in particular TREAGOLD 1997, pp. 701-702, and also CHARANIS 1947.



Fig. 9. - *Crucifixion*, fresco, Tokalı (Cappadocia), New Church, main apsis (courtesy of Catherine Jolivet-Lévy).

to the end of the Middle Ages.¹⁵ For our present purpose, it is especially significant that attestations of this feature became very frequent after the end of Iconoclasm: for instance, it appears no less than four times in the *Evangelies Paris Grec 74* belonging to the Bibliothèque nationale de France, probably produced at Constantinople during the eleventh century;¹⁶ and if Sophia Kalopissi-Verti underlines a slowing down in the 12th and 13th centuries, she mentions however few occurrences in Greece (possibly reflecting more numerous ones, if we consider the eventuality of multiple destructions).

As to the valorisation of the centurio, we are indebted again to Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, who pinpointed the fact that, in Haghia Triada near Kranidi, this figure is enhanced by a halo (fig. 14), so proceeding from a tradition emerging toward the end of the tenth century: its first attestation is to be seen once more in the “New Church” of Tokalı in Cappadocia¹⁷ (fig. 9), and the occurrences become fairly numerous during, in par-

¹⁵ Cfr. KALOPISSI-VERTI 1975, pp. 97-101.

¹⁶ Cfr. GERMAIN 1992.

¹⁷ Cfr. JOLIVET-LEVY 1991 and BEVILACQUA 2013 (loc. cit. supra n. 11).

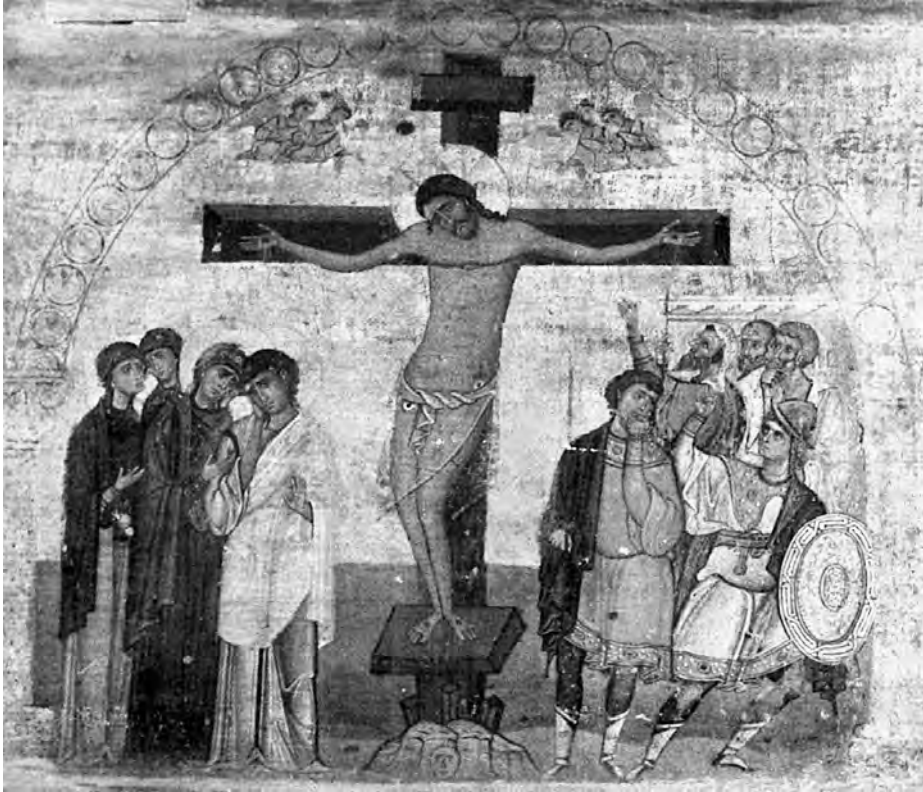


Fig. 10. - Central part of a painted templon epistyle with Twelve Feast Scenes, Sinai Monastery.

ticular, the second half of the twelfth century and during the thirteenth century.¹⁸

It should also be noted that this representation of the centurio, characterized by his looking and raising the right hand toward Christ, is also frequently distinguished by the denomination *Longinos* conferred to the figure: this relies on a hagiographic inflexion – about which Symeon Metaphrates and the Basil's *Menologion* provide testimony since the tenth century¹⁹ – an inflexion transferring to the Roman officer who recognized the

¹⁸ Cfr. KALOPISSI-VERTI 1975, pp. 101-102.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* For Symeon, cfr. J.-J. Migne, PG, 115, col. 31-44; for Basil's *Menologion*, PG, 117, col. 111-112.



Fig. 11. - Studenica (Serbia), Virgin's church, fresco with *Crucifixion*.

divinity of Christ, the name of the one who previously pierced the side of Him with his spear; the centurio *Longinos* having later endured himself the martyrdom and being consequently venerated as a saint.

It is exactly the same particularities – only missing the nominative legend, as for every other figure – that we observe in the fresco by Cimabue in Assisi (fig. 1); and if the centurio does not bear halo on the Pisano's pulpits, his attitude clearly matches, too, what is attested in most of the Mediobyzantine occurrences.

Now, after having recalled the existence of those Byzantine antecedents, the priority is to assert the capacity of knowledge of them by the



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Fig. 12. - *Crucifixion*, detail of the upper part, with *Ecclesia*, fresco, Studenica (Serbia), Virgin's church. Fig. 13. - *Crucifixion*, detail of the upper part, with *Synagoga*, fresco, Studenica (Serbia), Virgin's church.

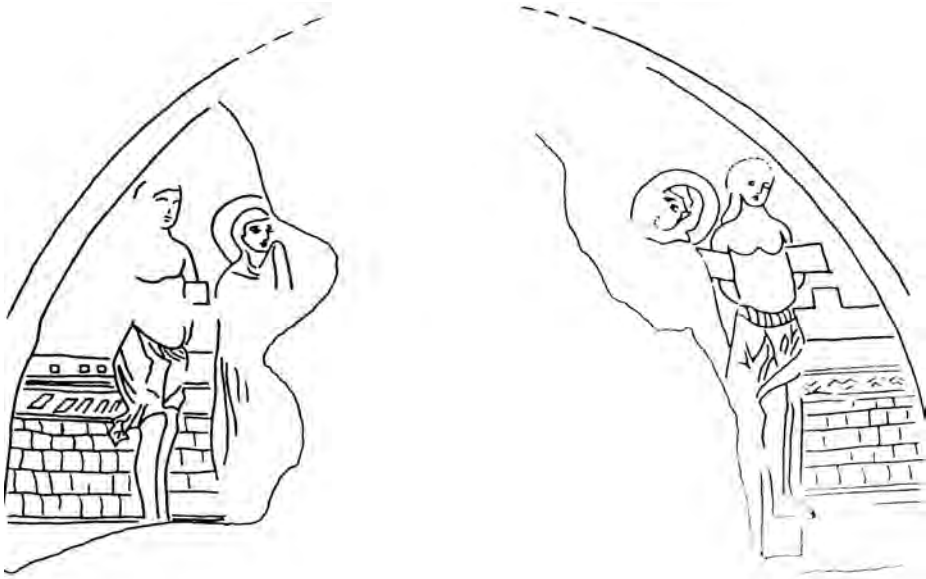


Fig. 14. - Hagia Triada near Kranidi in the Peloponnese (Greece), apsis, design of the *Crucifixion* (after Sophia Kalopissi-Verti).

Mendicant friars; this, because, independently of the imported icons – that we do not deny, of course, but was investigated enough and that, consequently, we leave here apart – the contact *in situ* with monumental programs has probably been determinant; especially in the case of Crucifixion imagery, with the many protagonists involved in it.

Thanks to the fundamental book of John Moorman as to the Franciscans,²⁰ those of Claudine Delacroix-Besnier and Tommaso Violante concerning the Dominicans,²¹ and ultimately the Nickiphoros Tsougarakis' one about both Orders²² – and some others –, we have got an accurate vision of friar's movements toward the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean world, and of their settlements there, as early as the 13th century; so, we do not have to insist here about general aspects of this expansion. But should we underline at least that the mixing of the friars with native Orthodox communities is sometimes clearly attested: for instance, Nickiphoros Tsou-

²⁰ Cfr. MOORMAN 1968.

²¹ Cfr. DELACROIX-BESNIER 1997, and VIOLANTE 1999.

²² Cfr. TSOUGARAKIS 2012.

garakis paid particular attention to the case of Crete, where a true devotion to saint Francis grew very quickly among local population (the representation of this saint in prominent place in the Panaghia of Kritsa, around 1300, providing a well-known testimony of that²³).

As for the Dominicans, the situation appears different enough, because they were mainly aimed to the conversion of Orthodoxes, by them considered as pure heretics; nevertheless, this purpose itself engaged them to investigate the authentic Greek religious sources, and consequently to establish close relations with monastic circles since at least, the mid-13th century, as analysed by Claudine Delacroix-Besnier.²⁴

Moreover, we want to take particularly in account here the eventuality of a direct contact with a program as significant as the one in Abu Gosh (figs. 5-6-7), just evoked here above; in effect, in the relation of his travel in the Holy Land written in 1283, the Franciscan Burchardus de Monte Sion localizes precisely the site of Emmaus:²⁵ this, very likely, because he had personally visited it. And due to its position along the road leading from Jaffa to Jerusalem, where the Franciscans had established convents, we can imagine that this important place of manifestation of the resuscitated Saviour, had become familiar enough to the friars since the mid-13th, or even slightly earlier.²⁶ But of course, by stressing this case, we do not intend limiting to it the possibility of contact: the friars might well have benefited of similar opportunities in several other places within the Byzantine sphere.

Our further step leads us, again, to the Italian programs selected above because of the new features attested in them; and it is now our duty to underline how the adoption of these features correspond to what intended to express the – more or less direct – initiators of such achievements. Let us begin with Cimabue's Crucifixion in Assisi (fig. 1) – in the very core, so, of the Franciscan order –, it seems particularly relevant to connect the proximity of Mary and John, and the two Mary's sisters in addition, with two passages in the Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes vitae Christi*: i.e., where it is stressed on the common despair of these same protagonists, gathered at the foot of the cross.²⁷ Of course, Magdalen's special attitude, both arms raised toward

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-125 for the general situation of the Franciscans in Crete. For the painted representations of the saint (and among these the one in Kritsa especially), cfr. RANOUTSAKI 2014.

²⁴ Cfr. DELACROIX-BESNIER 1997, pp. 201-271.

²⁵ Cfr. GADRAT-OUERFELLI – ROUXPETEL 2018, p. 55.

²⁶ Cfr. RILEY-SMITH – BALARD 1996, p. 42.

²⁷ Chapter 79, 439, and 80, 440-441. The date of composition of these *Meditationes* is now

the Saviour, does not belong to the Byzantine imagery of the Crucifixion and, as pinpointed by Ann Derbes and Amy Neff, relies on an iconography of the Lamentation on the dead body;²⁸ this, revealing the Italian artists (or, more probably, their patrons) capacity of adapting some byzantine scheme in different manner, for better expressing their own concepts.

On the other hand, we are fully brought back to the Crucifixion's Byzantine models with the centurio figure, decisively enhanced on the opposite side of the cross. And here again, it is possible to establish a relation with the *Meditationes vitae Christi*: i.e., where the Pseudo-Bonaventure does not fail to evoke this one who, at the very moment of Christ's death, openly proclaims His divinity.

By the way, we should note also that the confusion between the centurio and the spear-bearer Longinos is not achieved here: in effect, the symmetric Crucifixion by the same Cimabue, in the northern transept, shows clearly the soldier piercing Christ's side; but there is immediately to add that, even in the contemporary Byzantine sphere, this older illustrative tradition had then, not yet too, entirely disappeared – [as could be seen in Sopoćani, for instance].

In second place, we have to come back to the pulpit in the Pisan baptistery (fig. 2), by Nicola Pisano. This realization is some two decades older than Cimabue's Assisian fresco, in fact. But we consider it after this last one because the connection with Mendicant's orientations is, at once at least, less obvious. In effect, its most probable initiator, Pisan archbishop Federico Visconti, did not belong to any order here in question. However, his links with them were evidently tighten: several of his sermons are dedicated to saint Dominic and saint Francis, and he especially mentions the opportunity he had to hear this last one, at least once; he also, very likely, met Bonaventura when this other one came in Pisa in 1257 (precisely when took shape the project of realization of the pulpit). And even if it cannot be absolutely ascertained that Federico Visconti dictated himself the iconography for the pulpit, it has widely been admitted that it echoes well enough what can be read in his sermons, and appears in many passages strongly impacted by Franciscan spirituality:²⁹ in

discussed: cfr. especially *The Meditationes vitae Christi: a conversation about dating, authorship and contexts*, with communications by Peter Toth, Donal Cooper and Joanna Cannon, London (the Courtauld Institute), 26 April 2017. But even if this text should be slightly post-dated, it remains more than probable that during the previous decades (i.e. those here in question), the main ideas of it were already broadly diffused in the Franciscan circles.

²⁸ Cfr. DERBES – NEFF 2004, p. 460.

²⁹ Cfr. especially TESTI CRISTIANI 1987, pp. 183-192, then AMES-LEWIS 1997, p. 70, and BÉRIOU 2001, pp. 251-256.

particular, the configuration of Christ's cross as a tree corresponding to what Federico Visconti evokes in one of his sermons,³⁰ and to the concept of *Arbor Vitae* especially stressed by the Franciscans. As to the position of saint John beside Mary – and apart of the swooning of this last one, corresponding to a feature out of the Byzantine sphere – we already noticed that it was in concordance with what was suggested in the Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes*. And we have signalled a connection of the same order for the centurio, when speaking of Cimabue's Crucifixion in Assisi.

But as to the other main feature of Byzantine origin here attested, i.e. the two angels respectively associated with *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* (figs. 12-13), which intervene here for the first time in Italian imagery, we might think of what Federico Visconti probably drew from his Parisian sojourns during the years 1230/40:³¹ in effect, the hostility toward the Jews noticeably increased in this circle, at this same period. And as Jacques Le Goff, in particular, stressed it, many Mendicant friars were upholders of this hostile attitude; one of them, Nicolas Donin (Jewish himself converted to the Christian faith), did not hesitate to address pope Gregory IX, aiming at obtain from this one the proscription of the Talmud, considered as an insane and blasphematory writing.³²

Now in third place, we have to come back to the pulpit in Sant'Andrea of Pistoia (fig. 3), where the two thieves are introduced. To be true, it was then no absolute novelty in the figurative programs of the *Duecento*: because this feature is also attested in a painted cross attributed to the Berlinghieri's circle toward 1260/70, now belonging to the collections of Palazzo Barberini in Rome, and originally in San Donnino church in Lucca.³³ But let us remark that this work cannot be included in the group of "crowdy" Crucifixion here in question. And it appears that we simply have to deal with a casual – and isolated – reminiscence of an archaic scheme, precisely mentioned here above for the Carolingian and Ottonian periods; in these last ones, the two thieves are rather undifferentiated, as it was already the case in Protobyzantine samples – and still in the IXth-century Chludov Psalter – on which they probably rely.³⁴ So, it does not seem exaggerated to

³⁰ Sermo 26 (& 4); cfr. BÉRIOU 2001, p. 256.

³¹ Cfr. BÉRIOU 2001, pp. 40-42.

³² Cfr. LE GOFF 1996, pp. 802-805.

³³ Cfr. FERRARA – MERUCCI – PESSO 2009.

³⁴ Especially in the Rabbula Codex, fol. 13; for this famous manuscript, cfr. mainly the comprehensive study by BERNABÒ (ed.) 2008. For the same topic in the Chludov Psalter, fol. 45v, cfr. for instance CORMACK 1985, pp. 134-136.

concede its particular importance to this topic in the Pistoiese pulpit. And consequently, we first should take in account the personality – and meaning – of its initiator. An inscription displayed on the pulpit itself reports that the donor was a canon denominated Arnoldus.³⁵ But we have immediately to think that, as a canon, he was attached to the cathedral. And progressing one step further, we can imagine that the bishop himself might have been the very one who conceived the project for this church, a sanctuary of very remote origin and corresponding to a pilgrimage station on the most frequented *Via Francigena*. This bishop was Tommaso d'Andrea, who appears to have had, as Federico Visconti in Pisa, privileged relations with the Franciscans: in effect, we know that he was in 1298 present at the consecration of the cemeterial area established beside Saint Francis Church in Siena; at Pistoia itself, he is reported to have laid, in 1291, the first stone of the local church dedicated to the *Poverello*; and, last but not least, he was highly esteemed by the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV, who in 1298 entrusted to him the charge of *Colletore generale* for the entire Tuscany. Regarding especially Sant'Andrea in Pistoia, we also know that, in 1298 again, he consecrated the major altar in the newly rebuilt church for which, precisely, Giovanni Pisano realized the pulpit here in question, achieved in 1301.³⁶

The topic of the two thieves was then not totally neglected, in the Franciscan discourse; but in the *Meditationes* for instance, it is only briefly mentioned. On the contrary, Jacopo di Varazzo's *Legenda aurea* fairly takes over, in chapter 51, what was extensively told in the Nicodeme's Gospel (X, 2) about the two individual's opposite destinies.³⁷ In fact, Jacopo di Varazzo belonged to the Dominican order, and it is well known that this last one has initially been reluctant enough concerning the imagery. But an appreciable evolution intervened during the second half of the 13th century, whose Thomas of Aquinas writings clearly bear witness and whose, as Pavel Kalina underlined it by referring to others Giovanni Pisano's achievements, the Italian area here concerned quickly adopted the orientation.³⁸ So, Jacopo di Varazzo's texts having been mainly conceived for predication and, because of their author's prominent position and numerous relations,³⁹ it would not surprise that a Tuscan bishop, involved himself in a broadly extended

³⁵ Cfr. AMES-LEWIS 1997, pp. 81-82.

³⁶ Cfr. ROSATI 1766, pp. 101-104. Cfr. also BALDASSARRI – ALDI (ed.).

³⁷ Cfr. BOUREAU – GOULLET (ed.) 2004, pp. 266-267.

³⁸ Cfr. KALINA 2003, pp. 93-95.

³⁹ Cfr. the Introduction by A. BOUREAU, in BOUREAU – GOULLET (ed.) 2004, especially pp. xxv-xxxiii.

network, drew inspiration from this source; and let us add here, by the way, that Nicholas IV, who had high consideration for Tommaso d'Andrea, as we said, also favoured Jacopo di Varazzo in 1292 for his accession at the archbishopric of Genova:⁴⁰ so, the connection whose we here postulate the hypothesis might appear so much possible.

The eventual – even probable – immixing of some Dominican trends could get confirmation by considering one of the most primordial realizations in the following years: i.e., the *Maestà* painted by Duccio for the main altar in the Sienese cathedral. In the Crucifixion, we recognize at least three features: John and Mary close to each other, the valorisation of the centurio on the opposite side, and the two thieves crucified with Christ. And out of the fact that, as already pinpointed by Elisabeth Roth, an impact of the Pisani's pulpits is highly probable,⁴¹ we have to take in account that the bishop in charge in Siena was the Dominican Ruggero da Casole who, as opportunely suggested by Giovanna Ragioneri, might very well have played a role in the conception of the iconography of this altarpiece.⁴²

Then, we shall mention another work of exceptional importance, shortly before 1320: the Crucifixion by Pietro Lorenzetti in the south transept of the lower church in Assisi, where, apart from some variants as the centurio among the riders, we are confronted again with the same main features; but we come back, here, to the full Franciscan context which, as we underlined above, was the first involved in this great iconographical renewing. And, for concluding our presentation with these two achievements destined to become major references, let us assert here that both of them provide most eloquent evidences of the Mendicant's decisive action in introducing – and firmly establishing, even if it included some formal and semantic modulations – Byzantine schemas of high relief.

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⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

⁴¹ Cfr. ROTH 1958 (1967), p. 50.

⁴² Cfr. RAGIONIERI 2003, p. 208.

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