Pope Nicholas IV and the Feast of the Assumption: Style as Propaganda

Kerry Noelle Barrett
Art History Honors Thesis
Fall and Winter 2002-03
Advisor: Professor George Bent

Table of Contents

List of Plates

INTRODUCTION

On the eve of August 15th, pilgrims gathered in the piazza of St. John Lateran, each carrying a candle to light their journey to Santa Maria Maggiore (Plate 1, locations 1 and 7), the early Christian church located only a few blocks away. This procession marked the beginning of the Feast of the Assumption that celebrated Mary's bodily Ascension into Heaven, reuniting her body and soul with her son, Jesus Christ. The procession, initiated under Pope Stephen II in the seventh century, centered on the icon of the *Acheropita* (Plate 2),[1] which led the pilgrims to the *Hodegetria* icon, or Madonna who "shows the way", an image of the mother and child known as the *Salus populi romani*. Pilgrims could thus interconnect personally with the spiritual implications of the Feast by participating in the ceremony.[2]

The procession began when members of the confraternity of the Saviors, the protectors of the *Acheropita*, removed the icon from the altar in the Sancta Sanctorum and carried it to the waiting crowd of pilgrims. The icon shows Christ as emperor, placed on a throne with a scroll in his left hand while blessing with his right. According to legend, the painting of the *Acheropita*, meaning "not made by hand," was begun by the Evangelist St. Luke, but finished by an angel. The image has since become associated with the glory of Rome and is often considered an authentic image of God that resides in Rome as the protector of the city. The *Acheropita*, deemed among the most important

---

[1] Herbert L. Kessler and Johanna Zacharias, *Rome 1300: On the Path of the Pilgrim* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 65-68.

[2] William Tronzo, "Apse Decoration, the Liturgy and the Perception of Art in Medieval Rome: S. Maria in Trastevere and S. Maria Maggiore," in *Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance: Functions, Forms and Regional Traditions: Ten Contributions to a Colloquium Held at the Villa Spelman, Florence,* Vol. 1, ed. William Tronzo (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 175.

icons in Rome, left the private chapel of the Sancta Sanctorum only once a year, on the Feast of the Assumption.[3]

The *Acheropita* led the crowd of pilgrims across the city of Rome. The procession moved through the heart of the ancient center, marching specifically through the Arch of Titus. This monument commemorated his conquest of Jerusalem, but now served as a reminder of recent Crusades. Among the spoils of war the Emperor Titus brought back from the Holy Land was the *Acheropita*. Legend had it that the icon cured Titus' father, thus the procession for the Assumption encompassed that original miracle, for God's chosen victors were the people of Rome. Rome was the New Jerusalem.[4]

After weaving through the Roman Forum, the *Acheropita* led the procession up the Esquiline Hill just as the sun broke through the darkness. At dawn, on August 15, the pilgrims celebrating the Feast of the Assumption reached the ultimate destination of Santa Maria Maggiore. If the crowd were to turn around, they would see St. John Lateran in a direct line of sight, for the original patrons of the Marian church intended for it to face the Lateran to form a relation between the two basilicas.[5] The lay brothers directed the procession into the church where the mother and son met. The *Salus populi romani* icon in Santa Maria Maggiore (Plate 3), possibly the oldest icon in Rome, depicts a half-length portrait of the Virgin holding the Christ Child who blesses the worshippers.[6] The *Acheropita* was placed on the Gospel pulpit within the *schola cantorum* while the *Salus populi romani* icon sits across from Christ in the Epistle pulpit. The sermons begin, based on the Song of Songs, which emphasizes Mary as the bride of Christ,

---

[3] Kessler and Zacharias, 60-63.
[4] Ibid. 92-93.
[5] Ibid. 126.
[6] Ibid. 138.

symbolizing her equality as a heavenly being, as the facing icons visually act out the marriage described by the sermon for the pilgrims.[7] This event relates to Mary's Assumption into heaven, thus converting Santa Maria Maggiore into Heavenly Jerusalem.[8]

In 1288, Pope Nicholas IV took advantage of the popularity of the Feast of the Assumption among pilgrims and centered his program of patronage on the two churches involved in the procession: St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore. In his decorative program, Nicholas adhered to the iconic conception to reenact the liturgy visually through the *Deesis* in the apse of St. John Lateran and the *Coronation of the Virgin* in the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore, using icons as a way to bring the ceremony to life. Pope Nicholas IV realized the importance of the image, not only for worship, but also for propaganda. Throughout his pontificate, Nicholas grappled with spiritual and political issues that revolved around the city of Constantinople and the kingdom of Sicily. In order to send these powers a message of Rome's authority, Nicholas not only used depictions that originated from these entities, but also commissioned an artist capable of imitating the Byzantinizing style that prevailed in both Constantinople and Sicily. However, Nicholas then asserted Rome's supremacy by inserting predominantly Western theological ideas into his mosaics. Thus, the Feast of the Assumption becomes more than a religious celebration, but a declaration of power, claiming Rome as the center of Christendom as the New Jerusalem, for Rome had the favor of the Virgin.

---

[7] Ibid. 142.
[8] Erik Thuno, "The Dating of the Façade Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome," *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 7 (1997): 68.

CHAPTER 1 – POPE NICHOLAS IV

Jerome of Ascoli

Pope Nicholas IV began his ecclesiastic career as a humble Franciscan, Jerome of Ascoli. Although St. Francis, the founder of the Franciscan Order, had wished for his monks to model their lives on the apostles using poverty, simplicity and devotion,[1] Jerome quickly rose through the church's ranks becoming a powerful figure. In 1272 Pope Gregory X sent Jerome East as the Provincial minister of Dalmatia, located in present day Yugoslavia. Considered an indispensable moderator between the church in the East and the church in the West, he was elected Minister General by his own Order in 1274. Jerome attempted to decline the position because of his duties to the Apostolic See, but the Franciscans would not allow it. He held the office until 1277, when Pope Nicholas III appointed him Cardinal.[2]

Pope Nicholas III, a member of the "royal" Roman Orsini family, had strong ties to the Franciscan order. From 1261-1262, Nicholas III held the position of protector of the Franciscan Order. Once elected Pope he transferred the honor to his nephew, Matthew Orsini, but continued to favor the Order.[3] In 1279 Nicholas III, with the aid of Jerome, delivered the bull *Exiit qui seminat*, which established the rule concerning poverty among the Franciscans. In order for the Mendicants to be serviceable, the friars needed to be protected and well-educated, and therefore needed secure religious houses and access to books. This bull permitted the Pope to act as owner of material things used by the Order, which allowed them to retain their vow of poverty while remaining useful

---

[1] John R.H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origins to the Year 1517* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1968), 16.
[2] Ibid. 178-179.
[3] Paul Hetherington, *Medieval Rome: A Portrait of the City and its Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 22.

to the church.[4] Jerome's personal involvement in *Exiit* exemplifies his emphasis on aiding the church over his vow of poverty. He realized the potential power the Franciscans could have in serving the church. This belief did not go unrewarded. Nicholas III's successor, Martin IV, appointed Jerome as bishop of Palestrina, followed by the Savelli Pope, Honorius IV, promoting Jerome to Cardinal-Bishop of Praeneste. On February 15, 1288 the Cardinal College elected Jerome of Ascoli their next pope. After an intense eleven-month conclave, in which six cardinals died due to the intense heat, they found middle ground with Jerome. He tried to forfeit the nomination out of Franciscan humility, but Jerome was reelected and finally accepted the Papal throne. He took the name Nicholas IV in honor of Nicholas III. Nicholas IV became the first Franciscan Pope in the history of the Church.[5]

Two major themes shaped Jerome of Ascoli's life: his role as a Franciscan and his work for the Apostolic See. In particular, Jerome devoted his energies to the reunification of the East and West churches. The relations between the two churches went from bad to worse in the thirteenth century. Although the official split dated to 1054, the seeds of the schism went all the way back to Constantine's 330 move from Rome to Constantinople. Constantine inadvertently created two Christian centers competing for primacy. Both political and doctrinal differences separated the two cities. Theologically, the East believed Latin use of the unleavened bread and their addition of the *filioque*, stating the procession of the Holy Spirit from both Father and Son, into the Apostle's Creed, was heretical and violated the seven Ecumenical Councils.[6] The West,

---

[4] Moorman, 179.
[5] Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Popes: The Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul II* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1997), 226.
[6] Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art,* Oxford History of Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.

meanwhile, believed the Byzantine church should simply adopt those Latin customs.[7] However, these differences acted as a façade for the true nature of the split. The root of the problem was a political, not a doctrinal, question. Both cities believed they headed Christendom. In the West, the Pope claimed primacy through the so-called Donation of Constantine, a decree given to Pope Sylvester by Constantine that transferred the power of the emperor in the West to the Pope. The East believed its authority came directly from the Roman Empire, which never died but merely transferred its capital to Constantinople. Moreover, the East did not believe the leader of the Western church had more right than any other Patriarch to head the church, and would not recognize the Bishop of Rome as Pope.[8]

The problems came to a head in 1204. Rather than attacking the "infidel" that controlled Jerusalem, the leaders of the Fourth Crusade assaulted their own church and stormed Constantinople, proving the intensity of the rift between the Churches. The Crusaders pillaged and destroyed the city, sparing no religious building. As a result, the Latin Kingdom of Constantinople emerged and began its reign.[9] However, the East never forgot the Venetian Betrayal, as the Fourth Crusade came to be known. Pope Innocent III, though shocked and appalled that the West had attacked its fellow Christians, could not help but initially celebrate the submission of Constantinople to the Roman Church. It was his joy rather than his condemnation that the Greeks remembered. The Latin rulers did not even try to appease the conquered East, and forced conversion to Catholicism upon the Greeks. In addition, the Crusaders displaced the Greeks from the best posts and

---

[7] Steven Runciman, *The Eastern Schism; A Study in the Papacy and Eastern Churches During the XIth and XIIth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 32, 42.
[8] Ibid. 1-12.
[9] Ibid. 146-149.

estates. In return, the clergy and populace of Constantinople refused to accept the rule of the Latin state and many went into exile in parts of the Byzantine Empire the Crusaders had failed to conquer. The potential offered by the Fourth Crusade to form one united Christian Church was squandered by petty greed.[10]

In 1261, Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, ruler of the Greek state of Nicaea, began attacking cities around the Aegean Sea, campaign that culminated with a surprise attack on Constantinople. Michael VIII reconquered Constantinople for the Greeks and began the Palaeologan dynasty. He immediately began a restoration of the city and its churches known as the Palaeologan Renaissance, which renewed monasteries, intellectual life and gave the empire a new spirituality that could be considered a proto-Renaissance.[11] Despite the hatred and battles between the East and West, hopes for reunification remained alive. In 1274, at the Council of Lyons, the Greek Church consented to the primacy of the Latin Church. At face value it appears that Michael VIII came to an agreement with Western theologians, but as usual, thirteenth century rulers put politics before religion.[12]

Throughout the 1270's Constantinople faced the threat of an invasion led by Charles, Count of Anjou and brother to Louis IX of France. Charles became the Papal champion in 1263 when he acted as peacekeeper in Guelf Tuscany for French Pope, Urban IV. This position as protector paved the way for his election as Senator of Rome, which placed a foreigner in control of the civic rule of the Papal city. At the time the Papacy did not see Charles as a threat, and continued to plead for his help to curb the

---

[10] Ibid. 151-158.
[11] Thomas F. Mathews, *Byzantium From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 151-152.
[12] David Abulafia, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms, 1250-1500: The Struggle for Dominion,* The Medieval World (New York: Longman, 1997), 57.

rising power of Sicily. Sicily had recently come under the control of the Hohenstaufen family, the inheritors of the Holy Roman Empire, through marriage. The Papacy's struggle continued throughout the thirteenth century in part because the Hohenstaufens became vassals to the Pope when they claimed the throne of Sicily.[13] Through Charles, the Papacy hoped to regain control over the temporal rule of their vassal, the Hohenstaufens. In 1266, Charles defeated the Hohenstaufen army and proclaimed himself king of Sicily.[14] However, Charles' ambitions did not stop there. Within a year Charles conspired with the deposed Latin emperor of Constantinople to retake the city from the Greeks. In order to avoid attack the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus hoped that by compromising Orthodox beliefs, the Pope would agree to assert control over his vassal Charles, King of Sicily.[15]

Despite the opposition of his Greek subjects, Michael VIII felt that his empire could only be saved through a union with Rome. This agreement, officially declared at the Council of Lyons, was a political maneuver for Michael VIII, but the Western churchmen under Gregory X believed in the sincerity of the merger. The Papacy had a history of using friars in diplomatic assignments to the East. Beginning in 1234, Gregory IX called upon the Franciscan Minister General, Haymo of Faversham, to go to Byzantium on a unification mission. Innocent IV made a similar choice in 1249, asking members of the Mendicant Order to act as intermediaries. The Franciscan emphasis on prayer that led to a mystical union with God, their devotion to Mariology and the use of the "Jesus Prayer", which had Eastern origins, suggested intimate connections between Franciscan spirituality and the beliefs of Greek Orthodoxy. The friars were ideal

---

[13] Ibid. 14-16.
[14] Ibid. 57-59.
[15] Ibid. 64.

candidates as Papal missionaries. Gregory X, in 1272, followed the wisdom of his Papal predecessors when he sent a delegation of Franciscans to Constantinople. Representatives included Jerome of Ascoli and John Parastron, a Greek sent to teach Michael VIII Palaeologus Latin doctrine.[16] Jerome played a key role, for he obtained the imperial acceptance of the Roman confession in February of 1274, claiming the primacy of the Roman church and authorizing the union.[17] Jerome returned with the agreement to the Council of Lyons, led by Franciscan Minister General Bonaventura, and proclaimed the union official. The Western church owed this success to the work of the Franciscans.[18]

The union lasted only seven years. By 1281, the schism reopened and the Papacy turned once again to the Franciscans to preach unification. The struggle to assert the primacy of Rome as both a political and theological center defined the last half of the thirteenth century. When Jerome of Ascoli was elected Nicholas IV, he played a key role in the Church's hope to control Sicily and the Holy Roman Empire temporally, and rule Constantinople spiritually.

Nicholas and Rome

Jerome of Ascoli was born the son of a scribe. Unlike most Popes who ruled Rome during the thirteenth century, he did not belong to a prominent Roman family. Various "royal" Roman families who vied with one another for power ruled Rome in the thirteenth century. The one status a family could use to overpower all other clans was to

---

[16] Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25.
[17] Deno John Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West; Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 195-203.
[18] Moorman, 300.

claim a family member as Pope. However, in order to maneuver one's way through the vindictive behavior of these clans, the backing of a "royal" Roman family was essential.[19] Jerome understood the political need to have the support of a powerful Roman clan, and chose the Colonna as his adopted family.[20] The decision was not haphazard, for Nicholas' connections with the Colonna went back nearly twenty years.

The Colonna possessed considerable political power in the Roman government, and occasionally held positions in the Senate. The Colonna represented an odd mixture of vicious, power-hungry politicians who also exhibited extreme piety. The best example of this fusion can be found in Margherita Colonna, sister to the often senator, Giovanni Colonna, and to Cardinal Giacomo Colonna. Against family wishes, Margherita wished only to express her intense devotion to the faith as a cloistered nun.[21] In 1274 Nicholas, as Minister General, helped Margherita's plea to leave behind earthly desires and allowed her to take up the habit of the Claresses, female followers of St. Francis. At her death, the Colonnas considered Margherita a saint, a fame gained through the aid of Nicholas.[22] Nicholas' connections to the Colonnas went from spiritual to political during the reign of Martin IV. Cardinal Giacomo Colonna aided in Nicholas' elevation to Cardinal,[23] possibly to repay Nicholas' previous favor. After Margherita's death, the Colonnas wished to keep the cult that grew around Margherita alive. Nicholas convinced Pope Honorius IV to allow the nuns into the care of six friars at the house of San Silvestro in Capite. As Pope, Nicholas revisited favors on this house with the privilege of

---

[19] George Holmes, *Florence, Rome and the Origins of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 32.
[20] Robert Bretano, *Rome Before Avignon; A Social History of Thirteenth-Century Rome* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 101, 148.
[21] Ibid. 173-174.
[22] Ibid. 178.
[23] Daniel Waley, *The Papal State in the Thirteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 214.

immunity.[24] The connection between the Colonnas and Nicholas stretches its tentacles to Nicholas' own Mendicant Order. Giovanni Colonna provides the earliest association when he influenced Innocent III to accept the Franciscans as a legitimate Order in 1215.[25]

The support of the Franciscans acted as common ground for Nicholas and the Colonnas. The Colonna's Franciscan leanings seem logical when one considers the generation of Colonnas including Giovanni, Margherita and Giacomo, were equally Orsini in heritage, although the Colonnas were supposed enemies of that family. The Orsini, like the Colonna, were staunch supporters of the Franciscan Order. Giovanni rose to the rank of Cardinal thanks to his Orsini relation, Nicholas III. Margherita's "Franciscan" piety may be connected to the Orsini's strong support of the Franciscans.[26] Nicholas IV, as Jerome of Ascoli, benefited from his earlier Colonna connections, for the Orsini Pope, Nicholas III, had favored Jerome. The Colonna may have also aided in Nicholas' rise to Cardinal Bishop, for the Colonna controlled Palestrina.[27] I am not certain why the Colonna chose to back Jerome. Maybe they identified with his Franciscans vows or maybe they saw his potential as a leader. Either way, the Colonna's investment in Jerome of Ascoli paid off.

Once elected Pope, Nicholas unashamedly favored the Colonnas throughout his rule. He appointed one Colonna a Cardinal and another senator of Rome, thus allowing the Colonna control of both the church and state of the city.[28] Despite this powerful foundation within Rome, Nicholas had to deal with the consequences of the earlier part of

---

[24] Bretano, 242-243.
[25] Ibid. 180.
[26] Ibid. 183.
[27] Julian Gardner, "Pope Nicholas IV and the Decoration of Santa Maria Maggiore," in *Patrons, Painters and Saints, Studies in Medieval Italian Painting* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993), 1.
[28] McBrien, 226

the century. Nicholas still hoped to reunify the church after the 1281 schism. He believed the combined forces of the East and West could support the Latin Crusader States suffering under the pressure of possible Muslim attacks. Unfortunately, this wish came to naught. In 1291 the last Crusader State, Acre, fell to the Muslim forces. Nicholas' cry for Crusade fell on deaf ears, maybe due to a threat closer to home, Sicily.[29]

After the death of the Papal victor, Charles of Anjou, Nicholas IV attempted to crown his son, Charles II of Salerno, King of Sicily, despite the wishes of the Sicilians. In 1285 Charles II had been the captive of Peter of Aragon, who claimed the right to the throne of Sicily through his wife Constance, the daughter of Manfred and last link to the Hohenstaufen dynasty.[30] Once again, this would allow the Holy Roman Emperor also to act as King of Sicily, a vassal to the Pope. Peter died later that year, but his heir Alfonso continued to hold Charles II in captivity. Only the hostility of Nicholas IV caused Alfonso to release the prince.[31] The Pope then attempted to restore Sicily to France, despite the legitimate claim of Alfonso's brother, James of Sicily, to the throne,[32] perhaps in hopes of French support for Nicholas' much desired Crusade to reconquer Jerusalem, which fell to the Muslims in 1244.[33]

In the face of these setbacks, the Franciscans and the Colonnas continued their support for Nicholas. Nicholas' patronage of the arts stands out as the highlight of his pontificate. Through his artistic projects Nicholas revealed his political and spiritual

---

[29] P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Chronicle of the Pope: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Papacy from St. Peter to the Present* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 122.
[30] Abulafia, 84.
[31] Ibid. 88.
[32] Maxwell-Stuart, 122.
[33] Kurt Weitzman, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (Locust Valley, NY: JJ Augustin, 1966) 51.

propaganda while honoring his advocates. Rome, not Sicily or Constantinople, was to be the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER TWO – THE ROMAN RENAISSANCE

If one were to construct a timeline of papal patronage during the thirteenth century, a pattern would soon emerge. Between the Pontificates of Innocent III (1198-1216) and John XXI (1276-1277), little or no artistic activity occurred within the city of Rome. Perhaps the political events of the first three quarters of the century consumed the energy of the Papacy, both inside and outside the borders of Italy, causing the Popes to ignore their papal home. However, a turn of events occurred with the election in 1277-1278 of Nicholas III, whose pontificate jump-started a Roman Renaissance that continued until the turn of the century. His program of patronage had a specific goal: to reclaim the city as the cultural, political, and theological center of the world.[1]

For sixteen years, from 1261-1277, the papal palace of the eternal city sat empty. Neither Pope Urban IV, a Frenchman, nor Pope Clement IV entered Rome, choosing instead to rule the Apostolic See from nearby cities. Both Popes allowed Charles of Anjou, the brother of King Louis IX of France, to rule Rome as a political governor. However, Nicholas III, a Roman citizen born Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, returned to the abandoned city to establish papal control there. Nicholas immediately set out to reclaim the city for its citizens, who had been ruled by foreigners, such as Charles of Anjou, since 1263. In 1278, Nicholas made his first attempt to expel foreign forces from Roman soil with his declaration *Constitutio super electione senatoris Urbis*, an order that forbade any nobleman and any foreigner - be he emperor, king or prince - from ruling Rome as Senator, thus disenfranchising Charles.[2] This allowed Nicholas, aided by his family's position in Roman

---

[1] Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: A Profile of the City, 312-1308* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 203.

[2] John White, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1250-1400,* Pelican History of Art (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1966), 145.

society, to appoint himself Senator, and thus Nicholas became the first man to hold the position of Pope and Senator simultaneously, marking the merger of church and state in a single person. Three of the next four Popes - Honorius IV in 1285, Nicholas IV in 1288 and Boniface VIII in 1297 - made use of this decree to appoint themselves Senators for life.[3] This ostentatious ruling asserted two key concepts: First that the Pope now could rule alone, spiritually and temporally, and second that Rome no longer needed foreign powers for its protection, as the city was a force unto itself. This second idea suggested that the Pope held unique powers, for neither the Eastern emperor, the Patriarch of Constantinople, nor the Holy Roman Emperor could attain such power, for neither held both temporal and spiritual powers. Pope Nicholas III obtained supremacy over Rome, and wished to create a city that mirrored this imperial thirst for domination.

Nicholas III's sweeping program to renovate Rome included fresco cycles in the major churches and pilgrimage sites of Old St. Peter's, San Lorenzo, San Paolo Fuori le Mura and Sancta Sanctorum.[4] Artists from across Italy were called to the city to execute projects commissioned by the new Pope. Among those who came to Rome was Cimabue, whose name appears in a legal document from the archives of Santa Maria Maggiore dated 1272.[5] Unfortunately, scholars can only speculate about Cimabue's role in the Roman Renaissance, for scholars have yet to find evidence connecting Cimabue's name to particular projects. Nonetheless, we must assume that Cimabue came in contact with other artists taking part in Nicholas' restoration, based on a document in the archives of Santa Maria Maggiore from 1273, recording Pietro Cavallini's presence in Rome. This suggests

---

[3] Hetherington (1994), 22. Only Celestine V, a devoutly ascetic cleric, refused this honor, as he did all other trappings of power.
[4] Alastair Smart, *The Dawn of Italian Painting 1250-1400* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 22.
[5] White (1966), 175.

that these two artistic giants knew each other and each other's work even before Nicholas III's election as Pope.[6] Surely, this artistic hotbed would have been too tempting for artists Jacopo Torriti and Fillipo Rusuti to resist, although no documentation has surfaced placing either artist in the city as early as 1273.

Regrettably, most of Nicholas' renovations have been destroyed. His restoration of the fresco cycle in San Paolo fuori le Mura exists only as drawings, prints and watercolor copies due to the fire of 1823. However, most regard the copies as accurate representations of the original frescoes. Each nave wall contained a narrative cycle in two layers, each scene separated by twisted columns. On the right side were scenes from the Old Testament, and on the left, scenes from the *Lives of Peter and Paul*, both attributed to Pietro Cavallini between the years 1277-1280. Based on these drawings, the frescoes must have shaken the artistic foundations of Rome.

Cavallini used a truly innovative approach to space and compositional layout that provided a steppingstone between Cimabue and the work of Giotto in the Arena Chapel.[7] However, this advancement lacks consistency, due in part to the nature of Cavallini's job, which was to restore a pre-existing fifth-century cycle. Based on the drawings, in some cases the artist left original early Christian scenes untouched. Areas that Cavallini expanded upon depicted architectural imagery functioning not as two-dimensional backdrops, but as actual spaces occupied by figures. By comparing the ten Old Testament scenes that appear original to Cavallini's thirteenth-century additions, the importance of the artist's work becomes clear. For example, the *Plague of the Locusts* (Plate 4) characterized the fifth-century technique with a single, foreshortened building from a bird's-eye point of

---

[6] Ibid. 175.
[7] John White, *Studies in Late Medieval Italian Art* (London: Pindar Press, 1984), 84-85.

view. Cavallini learned from and expanded upon this Early Christian style. The architecture extends across the width of the scene, allowing the figures greater movement, as seen in *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife* (Plate 5). Joseph twists and bends, as the pulled cloak forms a diagonal adding action to the fresco.[8] Potiphar's wife sits within the building, the architectonic bed acting as a space for her to inhabit. Through the study of Early Christian art Cavallini breathed new life and realism into narrative painting, making a clear break with his contemporaries in his use of space and movement.[9]

ASSISI AND ROME

Cavallini's name and work have been inextricably bound to the most baffling artistic project of the age. The church of San Francesco in Assisi, founded in 1228 and consecrated in 1253, was from its very conception the acknowledged center of the Order. The double basilica, with an upper and lower church superimposed upon one another, uses the Latin-cross plan.[10] The interior contains the most comprehensive fresco decoration in all of Europe, with works in the upper and lower churches produced over a seventy-year period spanning the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Sometime before 1263, an anonymous Master painted the nave walls of the lower church with a cycle depicting the Life of St. Francis and the Passion of Christ.[11] Work continued into the upper church with a Gothic workshop creating stained glass windows throughout the 1260's. Activity in the basilica continued during the leadership of Pope Nicholas III, who had held the position of protector of the Franciscan Order until 1262. Nicholas reinitiated the decoration of the basilica, a process that came to a halt between 1269-1272. Surely his interest in this church

---

[8] Ibid. 86-90.
[9] White (1966), 148.
[10] Ibid. 23.
[11] Elvo Lunghi, *The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi* (Florence, Italy: Scala, 1996), 21-22.

explains why nearly every Roman artist involved in Nicholas' Roman Renaissance - Cimabue, Jacopo Torriti and Filippo Rusuti - also left his imprint on this church.[12] Cimabue decorated the transepts and choir from 1278-1280, and then moved down to the lower church, where he painted a version of the *Maesta*. Following Cimabue's contributions came the massive project to decorate the nave of the upper church. Between 1288-1292, artists such as Jacopo Torriti, Filippo Rusuti and the Isaac Master frescoed the upper halves of the north and south walls with a biblical cycle.[13] Soon thereafter, work on the lower half of the nave commenced with the narrative cycle of the Life of St. Francis. Upon completion of the decoration in the upper church, the adornment of the lower church reinitiated and continued into the mid-fourteenth century, as Simone Martini, Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti, and even Giotto himself contributed scenes and cycles to the basilica. The Assisi project helped form some of the major artistic personalities of late medieval Italy.[14]

The most important artistic developments of the last quarter of the thirteenth century seem to have bounced back and forth between Assisi and Rome, thus connecting the two centers intimately. One can well imagine the electric atmosphere within the church, as the leading artists of the century worked and learned from one another within that single space. However, what has become known as the Assisi problem in part derives from the large number of artists and workshops within the church. Artists in the thirteenth century worked in large workshops, making fresco attributions nearly impossible. Masters rarely signed their works, and documentation stating who was where and doing what does not exist. Even attempting to date the fresco cycles instigates debate. Still, it seems clear

---

[12] Ibid. 26.
[13] Ibid. 28, 45, 48.
[14] White (1966), 348.

that the transept and nave cycles in the upper basilica of Assisi were painted between 1280 and 1300, thus coinciding with the dates of the Renaissance in Rome.[15] Cimabue, Jacopo Torriti, Fillipo Rusuti, and the enigmatic Isaac Master all worked there before the 1290's and yet, surprisingly – and inexplicably - Cavallini, perhaps the greatest of all Roman artists, seems not to have worked in Assisi at all, although stylistic links may be drawn between him and the Isaac Master. In order to understand what transpired in Rome during the reign of Nicholas IV, the Assisi problem must be tackled.

Cimabue appears to have been the first artist connected with the Roman Renaissance to work in Assisi. In his *Lives,* Vasari characterized Cimabue's art as beholden to the *maniera greca.* The famous chronicler did not intend the description as a compliment, but rather as foil to Giotto's revolutionary style. When describing Cimabue's training, Vasari notes that "some Greek painters were summoned to Florence by the government of the city for no other purpose than the revival of painting," which suggests that the Florentine Cimabue learned from Greek masters. We cannot be sure whether this is true, for Vasari often bent the truth in order to make a point. In this case, he wanted to emphasize the importance of Byzantine models in Cimabue's work, and surely Byzantine art played an important role in the development of late dugento painting in Italy.[16] However, Vasari fails to address why Cimabue would want to imitate a Greek style and, furthermore, how the Eastern technique shaped the Roman Renaissance and the Assisi project.

---

[15] James H. Stubblebine, *Assisi and the Rise of Vernacular Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 43-45. Stubblebine argues a date as late as 1300.

[16] Otto Demus, *Byzantine Art and the West* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 207-208

Anne Derbes addressed this problem by suggesting that the Franciscans, who had houses throughout Tuscany and Umbria, provided a direct link to Byzantine images.[17] She notes that the Order played an active role in the East, exemplified by their negotiation work prior to the Council of Lyons, which stated the primacy of the Roman Church. Their work in the Levant caused Franciscans to establish houses throughout the East, where they immersed themselves in Byzantine culture in hopes of converting the Greeks, and the Friars carried works of art from East to West and vice versa. The Franciscans needed to understand Eastern Orthodoxy in order to have success combating it. The mendicants therefore learned Greek, acquired a number of Greek codices, and decorated churches they occupied with Latin images.[18] Through their mission, the Order gained an aesthetic taste for Italo-Byzatine images, and thus chose artists in Italy who met their stylistic preferences when selecting painters to execute projects for them. The Byzantinizing style that Cimabue employed – perhaps learned directly from Greek art or artists - surely made him a fitting candidate for Franciscan projects.

Cimabue, we know, was a popular painter among the Friars Minor. The friars in Santa Croce, the Franciscan stronghold in Florence, hired Cimabue to create what is now known as the *Santa Croce Cross* (1280-1285) (Plate 6). Medieval Byzantine painting used a certain formula, which Otto Demus describes as a "three-or-four-tone system," in which one or two darker or lighter colors modify the base color of a medium tone. The colors did not blend, but instead made a geometric division.[19] Cimabue used this modeling technique

---

[17] Derbes, 16.
[18] Ibid. 24-26.
[19] Demus, 12-15. The West absorbed that painting recipe, as illustrated by Cennino Cennini's discourse on painting, *Trattato*, which includes multiple Byzantine painting formulas.

in the Santa Croce Cross;[20] thus the color, style and composition of the Cross prove his dependence on Byzantine models. Derbes asserts that Cimabue's contact with Franciscan sites enhanced his use of Byzantinizing forms. In particular, she calls attention to his use of the transparent loincloth, a specific appropriation of an Eastern element found, for example, in a twelfth-century icon from the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai (Plate 7) and in a mosaic from the narthex of Hosios Lukas. The *Cross* also contains features similar to those in a fresco at Sopocani in Yugoslavia, created during the Palaeologan Renaissance. Although Cimabue did not see these images, one can argue that copies of these images traveled via Franciscan missions to the West, where Cimabue would have seen them.[21] By hiring artists who imitated the Byzantine style, like Cimabue in Assisi, the Franciscans paid homage to their work for the Apostolic See.[22]

Cimabue seems to have worked in Assisi prior to his painting in Santa Croce. Sometime around 1280 he began a series of murals for the choir and transepts of the Upper Church, dedicated to scenes from the *Passion*, the *Life of the Virgin,* the *Lives of St. Peter and St. Paul*, and five scenes from the Apocalypse, along with the Four Evangelists in the crossing (Plate 8). Unfortunately, the murals in the crossing are in ruins,[23] due to the fact that Cimabue painted these murals using the *a secco* technique rather than the more resilient *buon fresco* method, which resulted in the oxidation of the paintings. Thus, the pigment has faded and chipped, and chemical changes have caused the painting to appear

---

[20] Derbes, 28.
[21] Ibid. 30.
[22] Ibid. 33.
[23] Fortunately, the recent earthquake did little apparent damage to Cimabue's work in the choir. The damage was mostly confined the upper nave, particularly the Vault of the Four Doctors.

as photographic negatives, causing all stylistic assertions made to be tentative.[24] Two stylistic threads can nonetheless be woven through these scenes.

If Cimabue based his *Sta. Croce Cross* on Byzantine models, then the *Crucifixion* (Plate 9) in the right transept of Assisi appears to be the prototype for the later *Cross*. While the damage does not allow us to see if Cimabue used a transparent cloth at Assisi, the stylized pose of Christ at S. Croce can still be distinguished at Assisi. Each figure forms an S-curve, ribs and stomach protruding, while taut arms hold the weight of the body. Christ's head droops, the eyes closed, suggesting the humanity of Christ. The similarities indicate that Cimabue perfected his Byzantine technique at Assisi.[25] In his *Cross*, Cimabue appropriated an Eastern version of Christ, thus continuing the Order's adherence to a Byzantine style in the most important Franciscan basilica in the world.[26]

In addition to Eastern influence, a second theme exists in Cimabue's work at Assisi, which revolves around the artist's knowledge of Rome. Roman monuments appear in the murals of the *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, to the right of the apse, and in the image of *St. Mark* in the vault of the crossing. The *Crucifixion* (Plate 10), which originates from a design in the cycle from the Life of St. Peter on the portico of Old St. Peter's in Rome, contains a structure to the right that represents the Pyramid of Romulus while to the left stands a building symbolizing Castel Sant'Angelo[27], a direct reference to the Orsini family, owners of the monument. Those buildings, pointed out in the *Mirabilia*, locate the martyrdom of St. Peter to the Vatican, which in turn indicates the sacredness of Rome. The martyrdom,

---

[24] White (1966), 179-181.
[25] Smart, 8. It seems possible that Cimabue learned and modified the work of Giunta Pisano, whose cross from 1236, now lost, once hung in San Francesco. Giunta receives credit for revolutionizing the depiction of the Crucifixion in the thirteenth century, from Christ triumphant to *Christus patiens*, the suffering God.
[26] Derbes, 11-12.
[27] Both located near the Vatican.

then, reminds viewers of the holiness of Assisi, which houses the relics of Peter's spiritual follower, St. Francis.[28]

The similarity of the narratives in the transept at Assisi and the lost cycles in the nave at S. Paolo allows for a direct comparison between the styles of Cimabue and Cavallini. Cavallini's revolutionary approach, based on an antique vocabulary, which uses architecture as three-dimensional spaces for the placement of figures, has no place in Cimabue's mural. Cimabue made little use this innovation, although he possibly saw Cavallini's progress while in Rome. Instead, his buildings act as backdrops that serve as spatial organizers. In *St. Peter Healing the Lame* (Plate 11), each of the three buildings marks positions of the three groups. The left building frames St. Paul, the dominant central structure emphasizes St. Peter and the cripple, and the right building denotes the crowd. Whereas architecture brings together the narrative moment in the work of Cavallini, it divides Cimabue's mural into three unrelated sections.[29]

The groin vault over the crossing (Plate 12) contains not only references to the city of Rome, but to a specific event. The vault depicts each Evangelist in his own triangular space, seated at a lectern writing his gospel and accompanied by his apocalyptic symbol. To the right of each man rises a cityscape that represents the part of the world where he wrote his gospel. Of particular note is the city of *Ytalia* in the vault of *St. Mark* (Plate 13).[30] Here Cimabue compresses the city of Rome behind its Aurelian Walls. Several identifiable monuments emerge, including the two seen below in the *Crucifixion of St. Peter*, as the letters "S.P.Q.R." written on the portrait of the Senatorial Palace, along with the Orsini family coat of arms, take on special importance. This not only connected

---

[28] Kessler and Zacharias, 46-47.
[29] White (1966), 189.
[30] Ibid. 182.

Nicholas III to the Assisi project, but also provided scholars with an approximate date for the choir and transept murals, no small feat considering the scanty documentation concerning the decorative projects in the upper church. S.P.Q.R refers to the "senate and people of Rome," a motto that dates back to the Republican period of the Ancient Rome. The combination of the motto with the coat of arms specifies Nicholas' rise to Senator of Rome, thus dating Cimabue's work to 1278-1280 and suggesting that Nicholas used this forum for his own political ends.[31]

Cimabue's work in the choir underscores Bonaventura's biography of St. Francis. The *Legenda Maior* stresses Francis' devotion to the Virgin Mary as both secular mother and Queen of Heaven. The murals in the choir express this love for her through the narrative cycle of the *Life of the Virgin.* The *Last Hours* (Plate 14) and the *Dormition* (Plate 15) form a pair to the left of the altar and the *Virgin and Christ Enthroned* (Plate 16) and the *Assumption* (Plate 17) form a pair to the right.[32] The *Virgin and Christ Enthroned* clearly relates to the Order of Friars, as the Virgin acts as an intercessor to Christ by summoning toward her kneeling Franciscans. The Virgin's kindness results in a blessing given by Christ to the mendicants, who wished to emulate Francis' devotion to the Virgin by honoring the mother of God with a position behind the altar where priests presented the Body of Christ to worshipers during Mass.[33] As one looked to the raised Host, he too would see the Virgin seated next to Christ in heaven, a reminder of the Virgin's bodily Assumption, depicted next to this scene.

---

[31] Lunghi, 28. Including that event in the Assisi image not only suggests the Orsini's devotion to the Order, but also serves as a reminder of Nicholas' 1279 bull, *Exiit qui seminat*, which allowed Franciscans to hold property with the Church acting as owner.
[32] White (1966), 189-190.
[33] Lunghi, 33.

The work Cimabue began at Assisi was only a part of a decorative program that was to span the entire basilica. However, soon after the completion of the transept, work in Assisi lay dormant until the pontificate of Nicholas IV, probably because neither Martin IV nor Honorius IV renewed the Franciscan privilege that allowed the order to use alms collected in the basilica for decoration. Within two days of his election as pontiff, Nicholas IV reinstated this privilege and soon thereafter sent gifts and large sums of money to the church. On April 30, Nicholas banned any other religious order from building a sacred place in the vicinity of Assisi in order to ensure all alms would go to San Francesco. In order to encourage pilgrims to visit the church he gave San Francesco multiple indulgences to accelerate the decorative process.[34] These actions reflect Nicholas' efforts to revitalize the decorative program at San Francesco, for he clearly wished to pay homage to the Franciscans, the Order which enabled his ascension to the Papal throne.[35]

Most scholars agree that the Franciscans hired Roman painters to create the Biblical cycle in the top registers of the upper church, started shortly after Nicholas' generous donations (Plate 18). However, attributing specific scenes there to specific artists causes almost as much controversy as attributions to specific artists of certain scenes in the cycle of the *Life of St. Francis*, located in the lowest register of the nave. Sixteen scenes comprise the Old Testament cycle on the north side of the nave, four scenes in each of the four bays ranging from the *Creation of the World* to *Joseph and his Brethren*. To the south, eighteen New Testament narratives, ranging from the *Annunciation* to the *Pentecost,* extend from the crossing to the entrance. Mirroring the north wall, four scenes comprise each of the four nave bays while two scenes decorate the entrance doorway. In order to

[34] Ibid, 48. Nicholas reinitiated the Assisi project with an Old Testament cycle in the nave, thus suggesting the Biblical scenes date from 1288 until the early 1290's.
[35] Ibid.

sequentially read the narrative, the viewer travels down the north side from the crossing, viewing the top register, and then following the same route, views the lower register. The south wall must be studied in the same manner.[36] As with Cimabue's cycle in the transept, the Roman connection plays a key role in the iconography of these pictures, for the Biblical scenes in Assisi replicate the Old and New Testament scenes in Old St. Peter's and the recently completed Old Testament scenes in San Paolo by Cavallini.[37]

The first hurdle to overcome when analyzing the cycle is determining the order in which each image was created, for the production did not follow the cycle's narrative order. For logistical reasons the scaffolding set up in the nave was moved bay by bay, from top to bottom (Plate 19). Therefore, both the right and left sides of the first bay were completed before moving onto the second bay. Any attempt to assign authorship based on the narrative sequence is therefore impossible.

The sides of each bay must be treated as single entities.[38] The *Creation of the World* (Plate 20) begins the cycle and seems a likely candidate as the first scene painted, thus placing the first scaffold on the right side of the nave. However, scholars have different opinions as to which painter initiated the cycle. Romans Jacopo Torriti and Filippo Rusuti are prime suspects, due to the stylistic affinities between these scenes and images they are known to have produced in Rome. For Torriti this included the apses of Sta. Maria Maggiore and St. John Lateran, and for Rusuti, the facade of Sta. Maria Maggiore. James Stubblebine[39] and John White attribute the *Creation* to Torriti[40], while

---

[36] The setup of the nave narrative does not lend itself to a procession; the worshipper constantly moves back and forth in order to read the scenes properly.
[37] White (1966), 199, 202.
[38] Ibid. 200.
[39] Stubblebine, 41.
[40] White, 202

Jens Wollesen prefers to credit Rusuti[41]. Yet, with no documentation to place these artists in Rome or Assisi, art historians can only use style as evidence of a fresco's authorship, which becomes part of the problem.[42]

Most scholars seem to agree that Torriti created the *Deesis* vault (Plate 21) in the second bay of the nave, based on similarities between the Virgin Mary in the vault and Torriti's Virgin in Santa Maria Maggiore from the 1290's.[43] The *Deesis*, as seen in many Byzantine vault mosaics, usually depicts Christ blessing two intercessors, John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. However, at Assisi Torriti added a new twist. Now Francis, too, holds a position of honor in the vault fresco, suggesting the Saint's divine power as the *Alter Christus* and his role as an intercessor.[44] While Torriti's Byzantinizing style makes a good match for the Greek motif, his insertion of Francis puts his *maniera greca* in the employment of a Western cult figure.

This attribution places Torriti in the second bay. Practically speaking, if the scaffold started on the right side of the nave in the first bay, then moved to the left side, the *Deesis* vault was probably produced only after artists completed the south side of the second bay. Stepping back, a comparison between the *Deesis* and scenes in the south side of the first bay may shed some light on this tangle. The vault indicates that Torriti worked in a Byzantine style similar to the technique used by Cimabue in the transept. In this bay, those frescoes that continue in the style suggest the authorship of Torriti. In the *Marriage at Cana* (Plate 22), for example, a comparison between the bride and the Virgin in the vault

---

[41] Jens T. Wollesen, *Pictures and Reality; Monumental Frescoes and Mosaics in Rome around 1300* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998), 126.
[42] Cimabue influenced the biblical frescoes attributed to these Roman artists, making their hands almost impossible to differentiate.
[43] Wollesen, 98.
[44] Ibid. 78.

indicates that Torriti painted both frescoes. Like Mary, the bride has the same oval face and aquiline nose formed by the extension of the eyebrows. Torriti not only replicates the faces, but also uses similar hand gestures. Moreover, the *Marriage at Cana* shows a Byzantine influence particularly with the bird's-eye-view of the table, as Torriti's approach to space seems *retardataire* when compared to Cavallini's sophisticated understanding of the subject. In addition, the diadem worn by the bride makes a clear connection to an Eastern influence. The crown with hanging pearls, worn by Byzantine Emperors and Empresses, was repeated in mosaics throughout the eastern empire. However, Torriti easily could have seen this crown appearing in Roman in mosaics at the churches of Sta. Agnese fuori le Mura or Sta. Maria in Trastevere. In the mosaic at Sta. Agnese (Plate 23), dating from 630, the depiction of the patron Saint shows Byzantine qualities, which suggests the work of a Greek artist in Rome, or an Italian artist familiar with an Eastern idiom.[45] Regardless of the authorship, a comparison of St. Agnese with the facial features of the bride suggests Torriti's intimate knowledge of Eastern art. It seems likely that Torriti's workshop worked in the first bay on the south wall and, based on the movement of the scaffold that he probably worked in the second bay on the south side before moving to the vault.

Attributing to Torriti's hand the entire second bay becomes problematic, for this second bay contains the much-debated image of the *Arrest of Christ* (Plate 24). This scene, seemingly more "Cavallinesque" than the other images in the cycle, makes a huge leap from the schematic Byzantine *Marriage at Cana*.[46] In the *Arrest* the draperies mold to the bodies; for example, Judas' toga pulls across his striding leg, articulated by a white

[45] John Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art,* Pelican History of Art (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 149.
[46] Smart, 27.

highlight. This opposes the shapeless cloth covering the figures in *Cana.* Moreover, whereas the action in *Cana* comes through a series of stiff, singular poses, the figures in the *Arrest* communicate with one another through sweeping gestures, adding a sense of movement and drama to the scene. The *Arrest* portrays a much more sophisticated approach to storytelling. Why would Torriti make such an advance from the first bay to the second bay, only to return to his former style in the *Deesis* vault? The only logical answer is that Torriti did not paint the *Arrest.* The artists at Assisi worked left to right and top to bottom to prevent dripping paint and plaster from harming images below; thus the workshops completed the uppermost scenes first and then moved down to the next row. This would mean the *Arrest* would have been the last scene completed before Torriti began work in the vault. The vault covers the vast expanse of the nave and included the patron saint of the basilica. The size of the vault, as well as the importance of the images to the Order, may have caused Torriti to relegate the *Arrest* to a member of his workshop so that he could begin preparations for the ceiling. In fact, Torriti may have begun his reliance on this workshop member as early as the time of the production of the *Nativity*, located directly above the Arrest, for here we also find a stylistic anomaly. Joseph, located at the bottom left, sits covered in crisp drapery and his carefully modeled face shares a likeness with Peter, located in the bottom left of the *Arrest.* The complicated composition and an attempt at spatial recession in the *Arrest* bear no relation to the previous work of Torriti.[47] This artist managed to eclipse his master.

The uniqueness of the *Arrest* surprisingly did not carry into the next expanse. The scaffold, moved across the nave to the north side, allowed Torriti to begin the *Creation of*

[47] Torriti, however, probably painted important areas, such as the head of Christ, for it bears a likeness to the Christ in the *Deesis* vault.

Eve (Plate 25). If he learned any lessons from his workshop member, he did not show it, as Torriti continued painting in his same style. The nature of the narrative makes a good comparison to the *Creation of the World* (Plate 20), where our problem of authorship began. God appears there in the guise of Christ *Pantocrator* in the *Creation of the World*, a predominantly Byzantine iconography. The blue robe, unlike the robe seen in the other frescoes, relies less on modeling, and instead uses incised gold lines, a style often found in the East. Although the *Creation* artist relied on Byzantine models like Torriti, a comparison to the figure of God in the *Creation of Eve* indicates that two different artists painted these scenes. God in the *Creation of Eve* has a longer, thinner face with subtler modeling, while God in the *Creation of the World* has a rounded head with heavier shadows. A comparison to Christ in the *Deesis* vault indicates that the *Creation of Eve*, with the narrow-faced God, should be attributed to Torriti.[48] This claim therefore negates those of White[49] and Stubblebine[50] in their attribution of the *Creation of the World* to Torriti. I am inclined to agree with Wollesen's opinion that Rusuti completed the fresco, especially when a comparison is made to the Christ found that artist's later mosaic for the façade of Santa Maria Maggiore, produced a few years later, where Christ sits enthroned as the Creator (Plate 26).[51] This Christ *Pantocrator* found in the center of the façade of Santa Maria Maggiore has similar facial features and a rounded head, like the Assisi Christ. By the time scaffolding had moved from the north side of the first bay to the south side, therefore, the Master workshop had also changed, and yet their similar styles, particularly in their adherence to Byzantinizing traditions, made both artists attractive to their

[48] However, the poor condition of the fresco places this assertion on shaky ground.
[49] White, 202.
[50] Stubblebine, 41
[51] Wollesen, 126.

Franciscan patrons. However, the Franciscans, in hopes of keeping continuity between scenes, hired Torriti's workshop because of his stylistic similarities to Rusuti, namely, in the use of an Eastern technique in both of their works.

The Biblical cycles began as a result of decrees from Nicholas IV to encourage pilgrimage. However, Nicholas' wish to increase pilgrimage did not apply to Assisi alone. Major churches in thirteenth-century Rome competed with lesser churches interspersed throughout the city. In hopes of attracting pilgrims, and their money, to the major basilicas, Nicholas increased indulgences at St. Peter's, St. John Lateran and Sta. Maria Maggiore.[52] Nicholas was also responsible for adding a number of feast day celebrations relating to important basilicas in Rome.[53] Most importantly, Nicholas realized that in order to get pilgrims excited, and to cause them to return home and communicate that enthusiasm to their kinsman and to make them want to journey to Rome, he had to put on a show. Art made that performance possible, and Nicholas understood the power of the image. In 1289 Nicholas gave one-half of all papal revenues to the cardinals, in hopes that these men, who often came from rich and powerful families, would use the windfall to spend money on artistic projects to glorify Rome.[54]

In 1290 Nicholas recalled Torriti from Assisi to commence work on St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore, two Roman churches associated with his adopted Colonna family.[55] Later, Rusuti became involved in the project, decorating the façade of Santa Maria Maggiore. The Assisi/Rome connection is key to Rome's artistic development in the 1290's. It seems plausible that Nicholas witnessed the progress of the work of

---

[52] Hetherington (1994), 77.
[53] Wollesen, 13.
[54] Ibid. 104.
[55] Gardner, 2.

Torriti and Rusuti in Assisi and liked Torriti's style in particular. The Pope requested that he come to Rome while still at work in Assisi, for a fracture in the stylistic approach to the adjacent images becomes clear: proof of this can be found in the north side of the third bay, where the mysterious Isaac Master suddenly appears below frescoes by Torriti's workshop.

The Pope surely chose his artists carefully, and his selection of Torriti came at the expense of the most important artist working in late thirteenth-century Rome. At this time, Pietro Cavallini was the standard bearer of innovative art, and had recently completed his work at San Paolo's. One would think Nicholas would want an artist of that caliber. Yet, the pope instead chose Torriti. This indicated that in Torriti Nicholas saw something in the artist's style that he wanted pilgrims from across Europe to see and to associate with his name. I believe Torriti's adherence to a Byzantine tradition, as opposed to Cavallini's *all'antica* approach, attracted the Pope to him. Nicholas wanted Eastern images so that pilgrims would make associations with his (and the Franciscans') work in the East for the unification of the two churches. Moreover, Nicholas wanted to assert that Rome was the center of Christianity - politically and spiritually – rather than Sicily or Constantinople, the two powers with which he struggled throughout his pontificate. Nicholas not only used a Byzantine style found in the public art of both powers, but also borrowed their iconography in order to make clear his message of Roman primacy. Nicholas chose Torriti as his primary artist because his Byzantinizing technique – and the symbolic ramifications of that style - met Nicholas' political agenda.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF JACOPOP TORRITI

The work of Jacopo Torriti in St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore for Nicholas IV provides the only concrete evidence of Torriti's existence, for the apse of each church bears the signature of the named artist. At the Lateran, the mosaic is signed, "Jacobus Torriti Pictor", with an inscription dating the mosaic to 1291, and four years later, Torriti signed and dated his work at Santa Maria Maggiore, but the eighteenth-century restoration left only his name.[1] Drawings of and documents for a signed tomb mosaic for Boniface VIII records Torriti's presence in Rome, but the essence of the work calls into question the veracity of the attribution.[2] Any reference to Torriti's work in Assisi is based solely on stylistic comparisons to his signed work in Rome. These scanty records leave a void in our understanding of Torriti's training in the Byzantine style and his whereabouts in the years preceding the work attributed to him in Assisi and Rome.

One of the few sources to turn to is Vasari who, as usual, appears to have his facts mixed-up. The chronicler identifies Torriti as 'frater Jacobus" and attributes the mosaics at the Florentine Baptistery to Torriti's hand. Most scholars acknowledge Vasari's misattribution by suggesting that two different Jacopos existed, Jacopo Torriti and a Florentine Jacopo. It seems impossible for our Roman Jacopo to have had any involvement with the Baptistery mosaic, dated between 1280-1300, but Vasari's claim that Jacopo was a Franciscan fits nicely into our scenario. A Franciscan artist would naturally receive preference from the friars at San Francesco and from Nicholas IV, the first Franciscan Pope. It has even been suggested that a portrait of Torriti in the guise of a friar exists in the Lateran mosaic (Plate 26). In the register below the apse, two friars kneel between the

---

[1] White (1966), 152.
[2] H. Henkels, "Remarks on the Late 13th-Century Apse Decoration of S. Maria Maggiore," *Siniolus* 4 (1971): 131.

second and third apostles on each side. The friar to the left, holding a compass and ruler (Plate 27), may be a self-portrait of Torriti. On the right, an inscription identifies the second monk holding a hammer as Frater Jacopo Camerino, the 'magister operus" (Plate 28). This title indicates that friar Camerino was the overall supervisor of the project that included the addition of Gothic windows and an ambulatory. The hammer, ruler and compass may represent his position as a builder and architect, but not as a painter. This suggests that the first kneeling friar may not represent Torriti, but an anonymous Franciscan architect.[3] The only reasons to assume Torriti was a friar rest on the unreliable word of Vasari and one's interpretation of the Lateran apse. On the other hand, it seems only natural for the mosaicist to be paired with the architect, thus suggesting the friar to the left does represent Torriti. This would only further my argument that the Franciscans admired and purposely imitated the Byzantine style, and took that regard to the point where artistic members of their Order were trained in an Eastern idiom. The only answer is: we simply do not know whether or not Torriti was a member of the Franciscan Order. Either way, Torriti's Byzantinizing style attracted commissions from the Mendicants.

TORRITI AND ROME

We have established that Torriti's Byzantine technique attracted Franciscans, but evidence of where he learned this style does not exist. We have only his works in Assisi and Rome as proof that he trained with a Byzantinizing Master, or possibly with a Greek artist.[4] We do not know Torriti's origins or where he trained, but a safe place to start an investigation would be in Rome during Nicholas III's Renaissance. With the large number of artists needed to work on multiple restoration projects, Torriti probably gained

---

[3] Henkels, 131-132.
[4] The presence of Greek artists in Rome will be addressed later.

employment in the city. While in Rome Torriti surely benefited from viewing the public art dotting the city. In particular, the twelfth-century mosaics in S. Clemente and Sta. Maria in Trastevere and the ninth-century mosaics in S. Prassede influenced directly Torriti's mature works in both St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore apses. For example, Torriti repeated the vegetal motif, placed against a heavenly gold background in the apse mosaic of S. Clemente, in the design at Santa Maria Maggiore, and the composition of saints flanking a central motif, as seen in S. Prassede, can be found at St. John Lateran. Moreover, Rome bustled with well-known artists including, Cimabue, who resided in Rome until he began work in Assisi, and Torriti must have come in contact with these Masters. As mentioned earlier, scholars can only speculate about what Cimabue may have produced during his stay. Luciano Bellosi suggests that both Cimabue and Torriti worked together on the frescoes in Sancta Sanctorum, the private papal chapel attached to the Lateran between 1278-1280, at the beginning of Torriti's career.[5]

This proposal implies that Torriti learned his Eastern style directly from Cimabue. In fact, parallels can be drawn between work in Assisi and the frescoes appearing in Sancta Sanctorum. For example, the *Crucifixion of St. Peter* (Plate 29) in Sancta Sanctorum uses the same iconography as Cimabue's scene found in Assisi (Plate 10), for in both paintings we find representation of the pyramid of Romulus and of Castel Sant'Angelo. Cimabue surely saw these monuments first-hand while working in Rome.[6] Bellosi then connects a young Jacopo Torriti to Sancta Sanctorum, attributing to him the *Redeemer Enthroned* (Plate 30), based on (art historian) Serena Romano's comparison of the head of the angel in

---

[5] Kessler and Zacharias, 38.
[6] Luciano Bellosi, *Cimabue*, trans. Alexandra Bonfante-Warren, Frank Dabell and Jay Hyams (New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 1998) 87.

the *Redeemer* to the Virgin in the Assisian *Deesis* Vault.[7] Although similarities in modeling and facial features connect these two projects, the heavy restoration on the frescoes in Sancta Sanctorum makes stylistic attributions questionable. However, placing Cimabue and Torriti together in Rome provides an excellent explanation for their similar dependence on Eastern techniques. The Byzantine tonal system, found in the frescoes at Assisi, was also used in Sancta Sanctorum, while the stylized bodies and draperies in the Roman frescoes indicate an adherence to the *maniera greca* tradition.[8] The connection between Cimabue and Torriti also explains the Franciscan decision to employ Torriti for the decoration project in Assisi. Torriti continued Cimabue's work in the transepts, and by commissioning an artist who learned from Cimabue, the friars could ensure some stylistic continuity between the narrative cycles.

EAST MEETS WEST

While there can be no doubt that both Cimabue and Torriti were influenced by the Byzantine style, it is equally doubtful that either artist ever left Western Europe. In order to have a Greek style so engrained in their work, Italian artists clearly needed intimate connections with the East. After Constantine's 330 move from Rome to Byzantium, the Eastern Empire slowly developed an artistic tradition of it own. Byzantium had vast stores of Hellenistic statues and reliefs that served as inspiration for their art. However, medieval Byzantine artists did not merely copy these Hellenistic sources, but divided the complicated figures into simplified geometric forms. The divided format then gave the artists ready-made models that could be cut and pasted into different narratives. This method became

[7] Ibid. 82.
[8] Ibid. 67-69.

emblematic of a Byzantine style that became a popular tradition in the West to copy.[9] The Latin reproduction of this Eastern technique gives rise to what is known as the "Byzantine Question": how much does the development of the Western Medieval style that blossomed into the early Renaissance owe to the East? Furthermore, how did Western artists obtain Greek models? Unfortunately, much evidence was destroyed during the Fourth Crusade and by the Ottoman Turks, who conquered the Empire in the fifteenth century.[10] What does survive are portable objects, such as Greek Manuscripts and pattern books, that came West through various embassies or merchants, and the work of Byzantine artists in the West hired by Latin patrons.[11] Yet, the flow of art was not one-sided, for Western art and artists traveled East to the Crusader States.[12] The merging of the styles came to a head with Emperor Michael VIII's Palaeologan Renaissance after the reconquest of Constantinople.[13] This is the art that came to the West in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and played an essential role in the development of Italian art and its Roman Renaissance.

The Byzantine style had penetrated the West as early as the sixth century, when Emperor Justinian placed his stamp of authority on Italy with his mosaic projects in Ravenna.[14] Both icons and Greek Gospel books trickled into the West, but various Crusader campaigns, particularly the Fourth Crusade, opened the floodgates for the presence of Byzantine Art. Crusaders brought back relics, icons, manuscripts and luxury items, which exposed Western artists to current Eastern themes. Panel painting, usually in

---

[9] Demus, 10-13.
[10] Ibid. 1-3.
[11] Ibid. 22-23.
[12] Ernst Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies,* ed. W. Eugene Kleinbauer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), 367.
[13] Cormack, 192.
[14] Kitzinger, 47.

the form of icons, especially impacted the Western development of the altar panel.[15] Through these looted objects, Latin artists learned modeling, composition and iconography based on Eastern sources.[16] However, the Crusaders were not solely responsible for trafficking Byzantine objects. As mentioned earlier, the Franciscans, due to their missions to the East, carried home Greek goods. Unlike the Crusaders, the Franciscans instigated a flow of artistic objects in both directions, for as the Order brought Eastern treasures West they also carried to the East Western manuscripts. The friars then added Western idioms to Eastern monuments and churches, exemplified by the scenes of the Life of St. Francis in the Kalenderhane Camii in Constantinople. The Franciscan influence can be found throughout the Byzantine Empire, including Crete, Cyprus and the Crusader States. The role of the Franciscans in the movement of art proves that though the West is indebted to Byzantine art, the development of the Roman Renaissance in the late thirteenth century came from a fusion of the East and the West.[17]

The travel of Byzantine artists perhaps provided a more direct impact on Western art, particularly in Italy. In 1050, the Abbot Desiderius imported Byzantine mosaicists to Montecassino to adorn the recently built monastery. In the twelfth century, the kings of Sicily and the Doges of Venice followed Desiderius' lead and hired Byzantine workshops, surely to connect themselves with the imperial grandeur of Byzantine mosaic styles. At San Marco in Venice, local artists worked with the Byzantine mosaicists while the mosaicists at Cefalu, the Palatina and Monreale in Sicily were all of Byzantine origin.[18] The implications of the presence of Eastern artists in Italy are considerable, particularly

---

[15] Demus, 205-208.
[16] Ibid. 212.
[17] Derbes, 26-27.
[18] Demus, 121-122.

when we realize that many traveled through Italy in search of work after the completion of their commissions. Innocent III employed the mosaic workers from Sicily to decorate the apse of Old St. Peter's, which in turn jumpstarted a revival of large scale mosaics in the late twelfth century, for soon after, Honorius III commissioned the Venetians trained by Byzantine mosaicists for the apse of San Paolo. Torriti and Cavallini then revisited those twelfth-century techniques during the Roman Renaissance.[19] The presence in Italy of Greek artists, as Vasari suggested, gave Italians a perfect opportunity to learn the Byzantine style directly from Greek masters. In short, the presence of Byzantine artists in Italy created immediate sources of Greek artists to train Western artists.

The availability of Eastern monumental art was useless unless Western artists closely examined the technique and style used by the Greek artists. Latin artists surely understood that there existed a need for intimate study of the Eastern techniques, for Medieval pattern books that contain copies of Byzantine works.[20] These books became prized possessions within workshops, handed down from generation to generation, and similarities between frescoes across Europe prove their popularity (Plate 31).[21]

Indeed, both objects and artists traveled between the East and West, but it was the Latin occupation of the Crusader States and of Constantinople that created daily contact between the East and West. Both Western and Eastern artists mixed and matched their native styles, which suggests an attempt to express the newly shared experiences between

---

[19] Krautheimer, 220.

[20] Demus, 36, 159-160. For example, the *Death of the Virgin* in the St. Swithin's Psalters, an uncommon scene in English manuscripts, may be based on the mosaic in Palermo. Most likely an English painter used a model book with copies of the Palermo mosaics, though one cannot discount the influence of actual Byzantine works in England. Due to the constant use of these books, few survive. The *Wolfenbuttel* Pattern Book from the early second quarter of the thirteenth century provides us with a rare example. This book contains a near contemporary Byzantine lectionary. It is not hard to imagine that multiple pattern books of this nature existed in the thirteenth century in all workshops. Apprentices would be trained using these books, thus engraining a Byzantine spirit into their style.

[21] Demus, 31.

the two societies. Artists and patrons had a choice between their own styles or that of a newly encountered one, suggesting that the decisions could be based on many different possibilities.[22] Despite the Latin interest in the Byzantine style, the Crusaders destroyed Eastern monuments and allowed Constantinople to fall into ruin during their occupation of the city. As a result, Michael VIII Palaeologus began a program to rebuild the past glories of the Greek city after his reconquest of Constantinople in 1261. The reestablishment of the Hagia Sophia as an Orthodox center took precedence. The Greek Liturgy was refitted into the church rituals and a new mosaic was added to the west side of the central bay of the South Gallery. This mosaic features the *Deesis* (Plate 32) created in 1261, and was an artistic *tour de force*. The *Deesis*, or "petition," depicts the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist on either side of Christ, interceding for mankind. The *Deesis* here takes on the role of an icon, because the viewer uses the Virgin and the Baptist to communicate with Christ, and in fact, the face of Christ in this mirrors a thirteenth-century icon from Sinai.[23] This iconographic choice by Michael VIII was intentional. On August 15, the Festival of the Assumption, Michael VIII triumphantly marched through the Golden Gate of Constantinople and into Hagia Sophia. Leading the ceremony was the revered icon, the Virgin *Hodegetria*. The Patriarch Arsenius then crowned Michael VIII emperor.[24] Perhaps the emperor wished to thank Mary, protectress of the city, for interceding on his behalf. However, what makes this mosaic revolutionary is the beautiful modeling of the figures. The drapery relies less on striations to show form, and careful shaping of the faces shows a

[22] Cormack, 192.
[23] Ibid. 201-203.
[24] Beckwith, 302.

technical advancement whose only parallel may be found in thirteenth-century Italy in the works of Cimabue, Torriti and Rusuti.[25]

Nicholas IV, as Jerome of Ascoli, and other Franciscan missionaries saw the *Deesis* and works like it while in Constantinople during their missionary work in Byzantium throughout the thirteenth century. It is impossible to suppose that Nicholas never set foot inside the Hagia Sophia, for one would think that this cultural and political center would be a vital stop during his tour. Indeed, Nicholas must have heard stories of the triumphal return of the emperor on the Feast of the Assumption in 1261. Could it be a coincidence that Nicholas, like Michael VIII, chose to decorate the two churches in Rome involved in this Feast, St. John Lateran and Sta. Maria Maggiore, in an effort to claim Rome's spiritual domination over Hagia Sophia and the Eastern Church? Nicholas needed to overshadow the Byzantine mosaics both here and in Sicily in order to assert his temporal rule. Through his personal contact with the Byzantine images, the presence of Eastern objects in the West, and an intentional choice of an artist who could fulfill Nicholas' stylistic ideal, the Pope sent messages of Rome's power through his mosaic programs in St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore.

---

[25] Cormack, 201-203.

CHAPTER 4: ST. JOHN LATERAN

In the year 312, the Emperor Constantine founded the church of the Lateran and dedicated it to Christ the Savior. Six hundred years later, the church was renamed St. John, after the presence of relics from both St. John the Baptist and the Evangelist.[1] The Lateran did not remain the imperial church for long. With Constantine's departure for Byzantium, Rome lost its political authority and its citizens turned to the Pope to fill this void. In 1000, the Holy Roman Emperor returned to Rome to reclaim the political authority that the Byzantine emperor had enjoyed. This set up within the city a struggle for domination between the Pope and Germanic emperor that continued into the Renaissance. The Papacy perhaps adopted the Lateran because it came to represent both the spiritual and political force given to the Pope by Constantine, without the stigmatism of imperial rule, which the basilica of St. Peter had because it was there that emperors historically received their authority.[2] Nicholas IV selected the Lateran as an emblem of papal power in Rome and as a monument to demonstrate the developing influence of the Franciscans at the end of the thirteenth century.

Common to most churches built by Constantine, the exterior of the Lateran appears surprisingly austere (Plate 33). The first public Christian structures tended towards modesty, perhaps as a reaction against the opulence of pagan structures. However over the centuries, a series of patrons, particularly during the reign of Nicholas III, expanded on this simple design. Nicholas redecorated the *Sancta Sanctorum*, the private chapel of the Pope connected to the Lateran, in 1278, perhaps in an attempt to remind Christians of the *Donation of Constantine* and of Rome's prestige as the first city

---

[1] Kessler and Zacharias, 14-16.
[2] Ibid. 14.

with public Christian structures[3], both symbols of power in Rome embodied by the Lateran. Nicholas IV then continued this project, with its political implications, by rebuilding the crossing, and redecorating the apse and façade with mosaics (Plate 34).[4] Indeed, the restoration of the Constantinian apse at the Lateran acted as a focal point for Nicholas IV's program. The decorative motif produced by Jacopo Torriti centered on the procession of the Feast of the Assumption, which began at St. John Lateran, the original Cathedral of Rome and home to the Pope.

The construction of the apse involved the talents of Torriti, the friar Jacopo Camerino and an anonymous Franciscan designer. Unfortunately, Pope Leo XIII redesigned the apse and the chancel in 1884, destroying the original apse mosaics by Torriti, leaving us with only poor copies of the original thirteenth-century work. Thus, the apse cannot serve as a model of Torriti's mature Byzantinizing style, but only as a symbol of the ideals important to Nicholas during his pontificate.

The Apse originally depicted a form of the *Deesis* that Nicholas had possibly seen in Constantinople in 1274. Here, the Virgin and John the Baptist stood on either side of a jeweled cross, representing Christ. Various Saints spanned the mosaic, each imitating the hand gestures of the Virgin and John the Baptist. Beginning on the left stood Saints Paul, Peter and Francis, mirrored by Saints Andrew, John the Evangelist and Anthony on the right. The Saints were placed in a specific order, forming partnerships between the figures. Peter and Paul connected as princes of the Apostles and patron Saints of Rome. Peter was also related to Andrew, his brother, and the patron Saint of the East. John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, meanwhile, formed brackets at the beginning and end of

---

[3] The Baptistery was the first Christian structure in Rome, dating to c. 316. Jerusalem did not receive structures until c.326, when Helen made her famed pilgrimage to the East.
[4] Krautheimer, 227.

Christ's life, shared a feast day until the consecration of the Lateran, and had the same name. The Biblical Saints were equal to the height of intercessor Saints, Mary and John the Baptist; however, Francis and Anthony rose to only half their height. The inclusion of recently canonized Saints must have been surprising to a Roman audience, possibly explaining their reduced size.[5] This specific addition of Franciscan Saints next to Biblical ones made a clear statement about the importance of Nicholas' Order, as the pope did not want pilgrims failing to notice his role as the first Franciscan Pope. Thus Nicholas placed himself between Francis, the saint he wished to emulate, and Mary, the essential intermediary Saint of the Franciscan Order and all Christians in general. Nicholas knelt in Papal regalia with his hands pressed together in a gesture of prayer, as Mary touched his head and looked to Christ, interceding on Nicholas' behalf. The apse therefore showed the function of the Deesis it depicts.

The bejeweled cross in the center of the composition floated in water poured from the mouth of the dove of the Holy Spirit, a reference to the sacrament received at the nearby Baptistery. Paired with the cross, this suggested Christ's triumph of resurrection. The sacred water flowed down to the City of God, guarded by Saints Peter and Paul, in a distinct allusion to the city of Rome. There, the Tree of Life grew with the phoenix seated on one of its branches, symbolizing the resurrection and eternal life granted through the Holy Water. The Four Rivers, representing each of the Four Gospels, surrounded the Tree and poured forth into the River Jordan, a reference to Christ's Baptism. Above the Saints floated the Head of Jesus Christ against a blue background. Originally, this quarter of the apse represented the Holy Trinity, but the right hand of God

[5] White (1966), 153-154. However, White argues that their small size is due to Torriti trying to maintain the original apse design, thus having to make the Franciscan Saints and Nicholas small in order for them to fit into the composition.

that once came down above the Seraph was destroyed.[6] The three members would have formed a line leading the eye directly to the cross, whose flowing waters would lead the pilgrim's gaze across the apse. These saints adhered to the Trinity and filioque that stated the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and Son, a pictorial testimony against Orthodox belief.

It appears that Torriti's job would also have entailed a restoration. Similar to what Cavallini did at San Paolo, Torriti included in his own design parts of the fourth-century mosaic, such as the bucolic landscape. Unlike Cavallini, Torriti's reasons were not always stylistic, particularly in reference to the bust of Christ.[7] Torriti removed the bust, located at the top of the mosaic, from the original Early Christian apse and incorporated it into his design due to the legend of Christ's appearance in that exact spot during the building of the church. In addition, the bust refers to the Lateran *Acheropita* (Plate 2), the icon removed from Sancta Sanctorum on the eve of the Feast of the Annunciation that led the procession to Sta. Maria Maggiore.[8]

The bust of Christ represents only the first reference to the Feast procession. The crucifix in the center of the apse resembles the massive silver gilt crucifix the subdeacon of the Lateran carried as he led the pilgrims on their journey to Santa Maria Maggiore (Plate 35).[9] Both sides of that cross contain large roundels in the center surrounded by four smaller circular frames, all of which contain scenes from the Old Testament. Only the Crucifixion, carved on the center roundel on the back of the cross, shows a scene from the Gospels. This medallion forms the counterpart to the center roundel of the Fall

---

[6] John Baptiste de Troth, *The Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, a Brief Historical and Artistic Guide* (Rome, Italy: Tipografia Poligotta Vaticana, 1967), 20-21.
[7] de Troth, 19.
[8] Wollesen, 109.
[9] The original mosaic may have resembled the processional cross more closely.

on the front of the cross in the apse. Viewers would recognize the Old Testament and New Testament connections here, for they believed that the wood of the cross on which Christ died had come from the tree that had once held the fruit that Adam and Eve had eaten. Christ's sacrifice relieved man of his sins, and thus the cross became the new Tree of Life.[10]

Similar to the processional crucifix, the center of the cross in the apse depicted the nimbed Adam and Eve, while the cross itself referred to the Crucifixion. The pairing of the Old and New Testaments works well with the *Deesis*, for both Mary and John the Baptist straddle the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, Christians prayed to these Saints as intercessors for the forgiveness available through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Thus, the apse in the Lateran originally included specific references to the Feast of the Assumption.

Nicholas' choice to refurbish the *Deesis* mosaic located in the cathedral of the Bishop of Rome paralleled Michael VIII Palaeologus' choice to commission a *Deesis* mosaic (Plate 32) in the seat of Constantinople's Patriarch, Hagia Sophia, also associated with the Feast of the Assumption. Through the Lateran mosaic, Nicholas asserted the primacy of Rome by using a composition Hugo Buchthal describes as "the most Byzantine of Byzantine images".[11] Byzantium had become the home of many icons and relics that originated from the Holy Lands after the focus of pilgrimage shifted from Jerusalem to Constantinople with the failure of the Crusades and the Venetian Betrayal of 1204. Of all the churches in that city, the imperial church of Hagia Sophia housed the largest number of cult objects. The church stood as the focus of the city that had

[10] Kessler and Zacharias, 67.
[11] Hugo Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 2.

inherited both the spiritual force of Jerusalem and the temporal rule of the Roman Empire, and as such represented precisely the power that Nicholas wished to appropriate through his emphasis on a new pilgrimage to Rome.[12] His choice to restore the *Deesis* in the Lateran, the center of Western spirituality, attempted to eliminate the widely held belief that the Hagia Sophia should remain a center of Christian faith.

The composition, though particularly popular in eleventh-century Byzantium, rarely appeared in Western works, thus making Nicholas' choice all the more important. The Roman liturgy for the Feast of the Assumption derived from the Song of Songs, draws a parallel between the Virgin's miraculous Assumption and her role as an intercessor, for in the Medieval period the Assumption was viewed as an allegory for the salvation of man. Thus the theme of intercession played a central role in the Assumption Feast.[13] The use of the *Deesis* in the Lateran shifted the focus of pilgrimage away from Constantinople and transplanted it to Rome.

THE FRANCISCANS AND THE LATERAN

The sixteenth-century destruction of the original apse poses a stylistic problem for the modern viewer. While we can only guess how the mosaic originally appeared, the Assisi vault by Torriti may provide the stylistic link to the Lateran. The dating of these two projects suggests that the Assisi vault, completed between 1288 and 1292, represents the original appearance of the Lateran apse, executed between 1290 and 1295. The format of the Assisi *Deesis* (Plate 21, 36) allows us to compare Torriti's style with forms produced during the so-called Palaeologan Renaissance, exemplified by the Hagia Sophia *Deesis* from 1261, seen by Nicholas IV during his stay in Constantinople in 1273. The

[12] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 192-195.
[13] Tronzo, 182.

similarities between the two images are striking. Each representation of Christ confronts the viewer directly. The carefully modeled, oval heads feature distinct chins underneath dark beards attached to the lower part of the face. The hair of the figures at Assisi, like that of the characters of the Hagia Sophia *Deesis*, follows the contours of the face and tapers at the neck. Both Christs bless worshippers with their right hands using a Western blessing. In the Hagia Sophia *Deesis,* this may reflect the absorption of Western iconography during the Latin occupation, or perhaps the work of a Western artist working for an Eastern patron. Moreover, each holds a different document in the left hand; at Assisi, a scroll, a typical Western component, and a codex at Hagia Sophia. In addition, the portrayals of the Virgin and John the Baptist at Assisi follow the Hagia Sophia mosaic intimately, which verifies the probability that Nicholas IV hired Torriti for the Lateran *Deesis* based specifically on his ability to assimilate the Palaeologan style, as seen in the Assisi *Deesis*. Torriti's Byzantine technique allowed Nicholas to transfer the artistic innovations of the Palaeologan Renaissance, in particular a recent image placed in the Hagia Sophia (the seat of the Eastern Patriarch), to the papal seat of St. John Lateran.

The associations between Assisi and Rome extend beyond these stylistic similarities. The Lateran apse mosaic, like the Assisi vault, adds figures to the Hagia Sophia *Deesis* composition. In Rome, Nicholas IV wanted Saints Francis and Anthony to stand among Biblical Saints. Their inclusion must have surprised pilgrims, unaccustomed to the authority now granted to two thirteenth-century saints, but perhaps this caused viewers to reflect upon their significance. Nicholas IV not only paid homage to his order by including Francis and Anthony here, but also stressed the importance of preaching and the missionary journeys that they had emphasized during their ministries.

Those missions had prompted the Franciscans to journey to the East, and had eventually caused the Order to gain a role in executing diplomatic missions for the Papacy. Nicholas IV, as a Franciscan, had seen one of them, traveling East on a Papal mission for unification in 1273. In a very real sense, the appropriation of the Hagia Sophia *Deesis* in Saint John Lateran now represented Nicholas' former successes in the East and his hope for Christian unification once more, and he looked to Franciscan support to preach this spiritual union.[14]

The composition told pilgrims that Franciscan friars had prevailed in the past, and that only through the Franciscan Order would the church prevail again in the future. Nicholas' program at the Lateran made a pointed statement about Rome's position in the Christian hierarchy. By centering his patronage on the Feast of the Assumption, Nicholas commented on Michael Palaeogus' triumphal march to Hagia Sophia on August 15th and set up a competition between the churches in the East and West, each representing the seat of each city's spiritual power. The use of the *Deesis* and an artist capable of imitating the Palaeologan style, told worshippers that pilgrimage to Rome could take precedence over Constantinople, and that Rome was now the New Jerusalem.

---

[14] Moorman, 18-19. Including Francis in the Lateran apse not only referred to his spiritual work, but also to Francis' struggle to get the Papacy to sanction the Order officially. In 1215 Francis and his eleven followers traveled to Rome to gain acceptance of the Rule, the code by which friars intended to live. However, Pope Innocent III stood against increasing the number of religious Orders, and though impressed by the high standards of their Rule, dismissed Francis until the Order showed signs of success. Shortly thereafter, however, Innocent had extraordinary dreams of St. John Lateran collapsing until a poor man arrived and put his shoulder under the structure, thus saving the church. Innocent identified the man as Francis and realized that he must sanction the Rule because the Franciscan Order would rescue the church from a future of decay. Those dreams indicated the potential power of the Franciscans and the Order appropriated onto that ideal. Illustrations of the Dream of Innocent III became a staple in narrative cycles of the Life of St. Francis. Indeed, Innocent's prediction came true, and the Franciscans came to be an invaluable asset to the Apostolic See. By including Francis in the apse at the Lateran, Nicholas IV expressed his belief that the Franciscans in fact maintained the power of the church, just as Innocent II predicted, and that it would be through the Franciscans that Rome triumphed spiritually.

CHAPTER 5 – SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE

The Church of Sta. Maria Maggiore, the final destination of the procession in the Feast of the Assumption, is Rome's principle church dedicated to the Virgin Mary on the Esquiline hill (Plate 37). Upon reaching the basilica, the pilgrim can turn around and see the Lateran in a direct line of vision, representing their connection as the two most holy churches in Rome.[1] Nicholas IV's decorative program of Sta. Maria Maggiore represented the largest and most complicated campaign of the thirteenth century, which included the addition of a transept and mosaic decoration of the apse and façade.[2] Nicholas' death in 1292 prohibited him from seeing the completion of the project, but his choice of iconography left a theological and political impact that reflects Nicholas' interest both within and outside the city of Rome.

According to the apse inscription at Santa Maria Maggiore, in 1290 Jacopo Torriti began execution of the monumental mosaic for the Pope Nicholas IV.[3] The basic program of design places the *Coronation of the Virgin* (Plate 38) in the center of the apse, with Christ placing the crown on Mary's head. Featured on either side of the Virgin and Christ stand the principle patrons and saints, along with eighteen angels, supporting the circular frame containing Mary and Christ. Below flows a river surrounded by a bucolic landscape. Beneath the apse stretches the narrative cycle of the Life of the Virgin in five separately framed scenes. In the triumphal arch surrounding the apse, the twenty-four elders process towards the center with offerings surrounded by the symbols of the Four Evangelists. This decorative program is the crown jewel of the patronage of Nicholas IV.

---

[1] Kessler and Zacharias, 126-127.
[2] Gardner, 2.
[3] Kessler and Zacharias, 145.

The *Coronation of the Virgin* may be the first depiction of this scene in the history of Italian Christian art. Mary and Christ sit enclosed in a blue-green frame studded with stars, before a heavenly setting (Plate 39). Mary, to Christ's right, receives from him a golden crown set with red and blue jewels, a motif echoed throughout the design. The Virgin looks not to Christ, but to the viewer. Her hands rise up, symbolizing Mary as the *Avvocata*, or intercessor. Christ's right hand places the crown on Mary's head. His gaze seems focused on her, while Mary looks out to the viewer below. The worshipper needs Mary as an intermediary to reach Christ, who physically connects to the Virgin through eye contact. This implies that Mary provides the pilgrim access to the Heavenly Realm of Christ. She is the Queen of Heaven, dressed regally in a blue robe with golden accents indicating the folds in the robe showing her body beneath the cloth. Her knees protrude at a diagonal, giving the Virgin mass and volume.

Christ, like Mary, has a golden halo, but His contains a jeweled cross which matches the pattern of Her crown. Christ wears a red tunic with a sash extending down from his right shoulder to his foot. The swirling cloth of his robe and his protruding knee suggest a massive body. However, Christ's robe is gold with blue accents, the opposite of Mary's attire In his left hand Christ holds a book opened to the inscription, "Come my beloved and I will place you on my throne," a phrase that recalls the Song of Songs which serves as the textual source for the image of Mary and Christ sitting together on one throne.[4]

The tremendous gold throne contains the same circular red and square blue stones that adorn Mary and Christ. They share an ornate cushion with flower and vegetal decoration. The ends of the cushion push upwards, suggesting the weight of Mary and

[4] Ibid. 142.

Christ. Below the throne float two circles, to the left is a silver circle and the right a golden circle, suggesting the sun and the moon, sunrise and sunset. The sun sets on the mortal life of Mary, beginning her eternal life as the Queen of Heaven. Below the circular frame of the composition spreads the inscription from the Assumption Day liturgy based on the Song of Songs, "The Virgin Mary is received into the celestial bridal chamber in which the King of Kings is seated on a starry throne. Mary, the holy bearer of God, is elevated into the Kingdom of Heaven, above the choirs of angels."[5] The mosaic creates a pictorial message for this description.

Framing the heavenly couple, nine angels on each side approach and kneel with their hands raised in the gesture of prayer. Standing next to their left side (Plate 40) are three saints and Pope Nicholas IV, identified by an inscription at his foot. Nicholas wears the Papal crown, gloves and his coronation robes, and like the angels, he kneels in the gesture of prayer. Standing hierarchially behind the Pope are Saints Francis, Paul and Peter, all with haloes outlined in red. St. Francis wears the robes of the Franciscan order with the five parts of the stigmata prominently featured. St. Paul follows with his right arm raised while his left hand holds a scroll. Peter stands closest to Nicholas with his hands held in the same position as Paul, which imitates the gesture of Mary's right hand, suggesting their role as intercessory saints for Rome. Mirroring these four figures on the other side are Cardinal Giacomo Colonna, Saints Anthony, John the Evangelist and John the Baptist. Anthony matches Francis as his follower in the Franciscan order. He too wears the robes of the mendicant order. Inclusion of Francis and Anthony recalls their presence in the apse of the Lateran and the importance of the Franciscan Order to Nicholas IV. John the Evangelist corresponds to Paul, while the Baptist aligns with

[5] Ibid.

Peter. Matching Nicholas kneels Cardinal Giacomo Colonna, wearing the ornate robes and ring of his ecclesiastical status. After the death of Nicholas IV, Jacopo carried out the completion of apse, thus his inclusion in the apse suggests his status as co-donor.

The eight figures stand upon a bucolic landscape, which stretches across the bottom of the apse, a reference to Paradise. A Lamb stands below the crowned Virgin, reminding the viewer of the humanity of Christ. In the center is a seraph bearing a sword surrounded by two enthroned figures, Enoch and Elijah, mirroring Christ and Mary because they, too, ascended into heaven. The seraph locates the four sources of the river from which two harts drink, suggestive of the living waters of Paradise that symbolize Christ's sacrifice that offered redemption to mankind.[6] This landscape represents the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, the city Rome has now become. Moreover, the landscape reminds the pilgrim of the landscape in the apse of the Lateran, bringing the procession full circle.

Surrounding the golden apse swirl vegetal vines that grow up from the bucolic landscape, similar to those decorating the apse of San Clemente. The red and blue colors create the design and unify the composition. Four Peacocks, symbols of resurrection, perch upon the vines, framing the vegetal motif. The plants lead the eye up to a semicircle decorated as a canopy in green, red and blue, a sign of Mary and Christ's royalty. Again, the circular red jewels and the square blue gems decorate each layer of color. In the center, connected by a golden string, hangs a Greek cross. A vegetal border springing from fruit filled vases surrounds the apse. The veins loop around to create nine roundels, which contain eight haloed angels similar to those in the apse. The center roundel frames the chi-rho sign with the Alpha and Omega on either side. This is a

[6] Ibid. 146.

subtle, yet powerful message, putting both the Greek and Latin symbols for Christ within a single border.

The Triumphal arch encloses the apse, now representing a different sphere. No longer is the background gold: it becomes a deep blue, the same shade that surrounds the Heavenly sphere of the Coronation. The twenty-four elders approach the scene of the coronation, each carrying a crown with covered hands. In 1288, Nicholas IV wrote a letter to Jacopo Colonna outlining the program of the apse in which he described Mary as the "woman clothed in the sun with the moon beneath her feet," an apocalyptic reference to the Coronation that the elders confirm.[7] Above the elders float the symbols for the four evangelists in the clouds of heaven: the Lion as Mark, the Angel as Matthew, the Eagle as John and the Ox as Luke. Each Evangelist represents the next chapter in the life of Christ, connecting the Old Testament of the Elders to their New Testament. Directly above Christ and Mary a large circular roundel encloses the Lamb of God in a starry backdrop, standing on a platform identical to the footstools of Mary and Christ. The Lamb's placement above the Coronation makes a direct reference to the humanity of Christ, solidifying Mary's divine role as the Mother of God.

Below both sides of the Elders, in separately framed spaces, are scenes of Saints Mathias and Jerome. Red outlines ornamented with blue gems surround both the triumphal arch and the apse, serving as a connector between the two spaces. The right scene features St. Matthias, chosen to take the place of Judas after the Ascension and later appointed bishop of Jerusalem, who appears here as a Roman figure through his association with St. Helena.[8] The left scene depicts St. Jerome on an architectonic throne

---

[7] Ibid. 145.
[8] Ibid. Helena supposedly brought Matthias' relics to Santa Maria Maggiore.

with his vulgate Bible open (Plate 41). He is richly dressed in the robes of a thirteenth-century Cardinal. Two women dressed in red and blue kneel before Jerome, shown here as a Doctor of the church, best known for his translation of the Bible from Greek to Latin and his fight against heretical movements against the church. The remains of St. Jerome, who gave Rome its first Latin text, were moved from the Church of the Nativity in Jerusalem to Santa Maria Maggiore. The scene specifically relates to a moment in the Saint's life and to the Feast of the Assumption. The two women are identified as Paula and Eustochium, the recipients of the letter attributed to Jerome that argues for the Assumption of Mary, read during the liturgy for the Feast.[9] Pilgrims could not miss the significance of this scene, for the words "Cogitis me" (think of me), which began his letter, are inscribed in the book in the mosaic.[10] The spoken word and the picture worked together, enhancing the experience of the worshipper.

The pictorial narrative of the Life of the Virgin runs across the bottom of the apse in five separately framed scenes. However, Torriti, unlike Cavallini who portrayed a similar cycle at Santa Maria in Trastevere, did not place the scenes in chronological order. Although the *Annunciation* followed by the *Nativity* begin the cycle, the *Dormition of the Virgin* comes next, taking center stage below the *Coronation*, allowing the *Dormition*, *Assumption* and *Coronation* to become a narrative within a narrative. The *Adoration of the Magi* and the *Presentation in the Temple* then end the cycle. This band refers to Mary's saintly life on earth, for which she was rewarded with her Assumption into heaven.

---

[9] Kessler and Zacharias, 148. The letter was actually written in the ninth century by Paschasius Radbertus.
[10] Ibid.

The *Annunciation* (Plate 42) depicts Mary seated with her hands in a gesture of surprise, looking toward the angel Gabriel. Gabriel raises his right hand, about to tell Mary of her fate. The angel's wings recall the color gradations of those in the church's apse, and balance the left half of the composition opposing Mary's throne. Although she stands in front of an architectonic throne, the Virgin does not wear any jewels, for she is not yet the Queen of Heaven. The throne encloses Mary in a semicircular niche with a rounded canopy, recalling the apse itself. Above, hovers God the Father, reminding viewers of the importance of the Trinity in Latin theology.

The *Nativity* (Plate 43) takes place in a pastoral landscape. Mary reclines on a white and red patterned blanket in a recessed cave. She leans over to lift Christ out from his cradle as the Ox and Ass look on from a house-like stable. Christ's halo, like that in the apse, is gold with a cross, foretelling the events to come. Joseph sits slightly apart and scratches his head in wonder, conforming the medieval perception of Joseph as a cuckold.[11] To Joseph's right, two sheep look over to the shepherds, who hail the angel bearing a scroll to announce the birth of Christ. Five additional angels stand to the left. Two converse with each other while a third looks at the baby Jesus. A bright star encircled with blue, shoots a ray that marks the Christ child, a motif derived from eleventh-century Byzantine mosaics in Delphi and Daphni. This scene is more sophisticated than it appears, for the figures communicate with each other through a series of glances that allows the viewer to understand the narrative. The facial expressions of the figures also add a more complex understanding of the figures involved. The worshipper can see that Joseph is confused, based on his furrowed brow, while the

---

[11] Meyer Schapiro, " 'Muscipula Diaboli,' The Symbolism of the Merode Altarpiece." *Late Antiquity, Early Christian and Mediaeval Art.* Selected Papers (New York: G. Braziller, 1979), 4-6.

shepherds are wide-eyed with excitement. This scene demonstrates the powers of Torriti as an artist.

The *Adoration of the Magi* (Plate 44) flanks the right side of the *Dormition*. The Three Magi kneel before their King, Christ, each bearing a golden chalice. Christ sits on the lap of Mary, who again occupies an architectonic throne that alludes to Mary's future as Queen of Heaven. A silver star emits rays, which touch the head of Christ while an angel flies above, guiding the Magi to Christ. This scene shows that Christ presides as the King of Heaven and implies Mary's position fulfilled in the apse.

The *Presentation in the Temple* (Plate 45) forms the final scene in the cycle. To the left of a baptismal font stands Mary holding the child, with the smaller figure of Joseph taking a subsidiary position. A square arch frames the Holy Family, while an identical structure frames Anna and Simon. Simon reaches out for Christ, his arms covered in cloth. He wears pink robes, like Joseph, while Anna wears blue, like Mary, creating a pattern across the surface, which continues the red and blue themes found throughout the apse.

The center of the cycle depicts the *Dormition of the Virgin* (Plate 46), part of the Christian tradition since the tenth century. The *Dormition* as the center scene emphasizes the vertical ascent of Mary's body and soul into Heaven to reside at Christ's right side as His Queen and intercessor. The Virgin lies on a jewel-encrusted bed, her hands crossed over her chest. Jesus stands above the Virgin holding the Infant Virgin[12], ready to carry her to heaven. A rainbow mandorla encloses Christ and the Virgin, along with John the Evangelist who weeps over the Virgin's Head. At the Virgin's feet, St. Paul leads a procession of Saints who come to pay homage to the dead Virgin. To the left, St. Peter

[12] Which denotes her bodily Assumption into Heaven.

swings a censor while a group of Saints and ecclesiastical figures marches towards the Virgin. Below the bed kneel three other figures, two of whom wear the robes of the mendicants and one with tonsured hair. We are unsure who these three men represent. Perhaps they refer to former Minister Generals of the Franciscan Order. The friars to the left may be Bonaventura, Minister General of the Franciscans immediately before Nicholas, while the other represents Matteo Aquasparta, Minister General from 1287-89.[13] The third figure in red, behind Bonaventura, may refer to Nicholas while still a cardinal, the position he assumed after his time as Minister General. By including the Franciscans, Nicolas recalls Francis' devotion to the Virgin and the Order's fervent support of her Assumption. This scene in the center implies the *Dormition*, *Assumption* and *Coronation* as one moment in the Life of the Virgin, consistent with the liturgy for August 15th, the Feast of the Assumption.

The Coronation of the Virgin

In order to understand the political and theological reasons for Nicholas' choice for this decorative program, the history of the Life of the Virgin, theologically and pictorially, must be considered. The *Dormition*, *Assumption*, and *Coronation* of the Virgin provide the most important theological themes of the Feast of the Assumption. According to the Gospel of John, at the Last Judgment body and soul will unite, and Christ will come down from heaven to judge the saved and the damned. However, at the time of her death, Mary was both bodily and spiritually assumed into heaven, giving the Virgin a special position in Christianity as the only being to reside bodily in heaven. Yet, the *Death*, *Assumption* and *Coronation* of the Virgin come to us as apocryphal legend, for no Evangelist accounted for these stories in his gospel. Although depictions of the

[13] Gardner, 10. Aquasparta defended the assumption of the body and soul of the Virgin into heaven.

Dormition and the *Assumption* originated from the Byzantine tradition, the *Coronation of the Virgin* was a strictly Western invention that contradicted Eastern Orthodox hierarchies by placing Mary on the same throne as Christ.[14] Throughout the Middle Ages, various theologians fostered the concept of the Coronation. The church initially attributed the miraculous tale to Melito, the disciple of John, and occasionally even to John himself.[15] The Triumph of the Virgin grew in popularity in West during the twelfth century, paralleling the interest in the Old Testament Canticles, the Song of Songs, which interpreted the Virgin, the symbol of the Church, as the Bride of Christ. The Coronation furthers this belief, for the Virgin becomes not only Christ's mother, but his Queenly bride as well.[16] In the thirteenth century, Jacob of Voragine's *Golden Legend* traced the life of Mary from the Incarnation of Christ to her Coronation. Here, Voragine told of Mary's elevation as the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven at the moment of the Annunciation, thus emphasizing Christ's dual nature as human and divine. The Golden Legend never describes the actual Coronation of the Virgin; instead, Voragine tells the reader that Christ said to Mary, "Come to me to Lebanon my spouse, come and be crowned," words taken directly from the Song of Songs. Although the Coronation is only implied, in the thirteenth century those words were used to assert the royalty of Mary.[17] Thus, on the eve of the procession Nicholas juxtaposes the Byzantine-derived *Deesis,* at St. John Lateran, with a Latin theological idea, the *Coronation*, at Santa Maria Maggiore.

---

[14] Cormack, 190.
[15] Emile Male, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources,* ed. Harry Boer, trans. Marthiel Mathew, Bollington Series; 90:3 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 247.
[16] Andrea Petzgold, *Romanesque Art,* Perspectives (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 131.
[17] Male, 254-255.

The Marian church provided the perfect location for Western Christians to display their belief that Mary should be considered an equal to Christ, for it was the focus of the cult of the Virgin. Furthermore, the initial decoration of the church in 432 came on the heels of the Council of Ephesus, which proclaimed Mary as the mother of God and of the church, giving her a special place in Christian hierarchies. The *Coronation* in the apse took that ruling one step further by pictorially showing the Western belief of Mary's special place in heaven.[18] The *Coronation of the Virgin* shows Mary's regality as she sits with Christ, forming a composition and theological idea that the East refuted. Thus, Nicholas intentionally chose the image of the *Coronation* to decorate the apse of the church featuring the cult of the Virgin Mary, in order to illustrate Rome's primacy over Constantinople. Rome had the favor of the Virgin Mary.

The depiction of the Coronation of the Virgin was unusual to areas south of the Alps.[19] One possible candidate for the earliest Coronation in Italy is the circular window for the choir wall of the Duomo at Siena (Plate 47), dated to 1288, based on a record recording payment for the window. In Siena we find from bottom to top, the Dormition, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin by Christ surrounded by the Four Evangelists. In addition to the vertical reading, the technical advancements in the window clearly impacted late dugento art. John White attributes the window to Cimabue based on a similar style found in his work in the Assisi choir[20], where Cimabue paired the *Virgin and Christ Enthroned* with the *Assumption*, and the *Last Hours* with the *Dormition*. The choir may be the basis for the structure of the window. By placing the scenes in the

---

[18] Hetherington (1994), 86-87.
[19] Male, 256-257. It was not until 1250 that French portals showing Christ placing the crown on the head of the Virgin appear, indicating that the Virgin's divinity had grown to the point that only the Son of God could crown his mother and bride.
[20] White (1966), 191-195.

choir, the worshipper would be reminded of Christ's human nature during the transubstantiation of the Eucharist. The humanity of Christ caused the elevation of the Virgin to her role as Queen, for she was viewed as Christ's equal as the Mother of God.

Nicholas clearly knew the vertical reading of the Last Hours of the Life of the Virgin, transplanted from Northern Europe to Siena, but his knowledge of it does not explain his decision to include the composition at Maggiore. Perhaps the Pope's association with the Franciscan Order may shed light on this matter, for the popularity of the Assumption developed in Italy due largely to the efforts of the Franciscans. The cult of the Virgin held a special place for the Mendicants because of St. Francis' devotion to her. In emulation of Francis, St. Bonaventura preached a sermon on the Feast of the Assumption, in which he emphasized the *Coronation of the Virgin* and her noble place in Heaven.[21]

This view may well have influenced the decorative program in Assisi, in which the Enthroned Virgin was placed in a central location. Nicholas worked under Bonaventura during the Council of Lyon and succeeded the saint as Minister General, thus it seems likely that Nicholas would honor the beliefs of his predecessor. Furthermore, the decoration at Assisi is largely based on St. Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior* from 1266, the official biography of the Life of St. Francis. Bonaventure stressed Francis' devotion to the Virgin as Queen and Mother intercessing for mankind.[22] The choir illustrated these themes, for the Enthroned Virgin shows Mary intercessing on behalf of the Friars.

---

[21] Gardner, 10.
[22] White (1966), 186.

Nicholas in turn illustrates this idea at Maggiore through the skills of Torriti, who worked in Rome with Cimabue and saw Cimabue's work in Assisi. Nicholas surely has seen the choir of Assisi and wanted a similar theme replicated in Rome, and the Byzantinizing styles of Cimabue and Torriti, which the latter possibly learned directly from the former while in Rome, made these two artists the perfect conveyers of the message. The murals in Assisi then set a model for Nicholas' program in Rome, in which the Feast of the Assumption – revived by the Franciscans – was prominently featured. At Maggiore, Torriti takes Cimabue's composition a step further, assuming the worshipper understands the Assumption of Mary based on the central position of the *Dormition.*[23] The Maggiore apse omits the *Assumption* altogether, because the vertical movement from the *Dormition* to the *Coronation* implies that part of the apocryphal legend.

The Coronation and Sicily

While the apse design of St. John Lateran, where the feast procession began, focused on Rome's spiritual control over Constantinople, the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore sends a political message to the second power with whom Nicholas struggled throughout his pontificate, the kingdom of Sicily. The prominent placement of the Coronation may indicate the Papal domination over temporal rule. Roger I, in 1098, regained Sicily from the infidel for the Roman Church. Byzantine clergymen dominated the Christian Church in Sicily, but with the recovery of Sicily, Latin ecclesiastical officials soon replaced the Greeks. Despite attempts to bring the Sicilian church under the Latin hierarchy, Roger began to impose a Byzantine style of monarchy. Similar to

[23] The scene of the Coronation originated in Gothic France as sculptural reliefs in tympanums. In particular, Notre Dame du Chartres provides a predecessor to the vertical reading at Maggiore in which the central portal of the North transept depicts the Coronation of the Virgin above the Dormition and Assumption.

the Byzantine Emperor, the King of Sicily adopted the divine right policy, making the King a God-like figure. This conviction evolved out of the belief that this Norman kingship revived the monarchy of David, making Sicily the New Jerusalem, led by a theocratic King, who dominated both church and state. The small catch in this monarchy was that Roger remained a vassal of the Pope, and that Sicily was a fief of St. Peter's. Yet Roger placed himself in a position superior to the Pope, enraging the Papacy for Sicilian monarchs dared to rule over the Latin Church. In the thirteenth century the Sicilian Kings strengthened their claims through marriage to the Hohenstaufen dynasty. As Pope, Nicholas IV believed he presided over the Christian Church, and no temporal ruler should have any control over him. Nicholas borrowed motifs from the Sicilian Cathedral of Monreale and incorporated them into his program at Santa Maria Maggiore, suggesting that Rome was the New Jerusalem.

The choice of Monreale as a source for Maggiore's mosaics may be based on the similar dedication of the two churches. Under the reign of William II, the royal charter for Monreale was made on the Feast of the Assumption in 1176, and the church was eventually dedicated to the Assumption.[24] Prior to their destruction in the eighteenth century, a narrative cycle of the life of the Virgin decorated the northern half of the entrance, similar to that seen at Sta. Maria Maggiore. Once inside the church the only remainder of the narrative cycle, the *Hodegetria,* the protectress of kings, resided over the entrance portal. Below, an inscription stated, "The bride of her offspring. Star, bring forth the sun, pray for all, but more for the king." As in Maggiore, the Virgin acts as the bride of Christ, but instead of honoring the Virgin with a Coronation, the Sicilian program uses the Virgin's powers as intercessor to pray for the king.

[24] Ibid. 52.

The *Coronation of the Virgin* was a Latin invention, and the Sicilian monarchs wished to emulate their Byzantine counterparts. This may explain the use of Byzantine mosaicists for the cathedral and the use of Eastern iconography. The Greeks traditionally chose to show the Virgin as an enthroned, but uncrowned Queen. In Monreale the Virgin appears twice as an enthroned Queen, in the donation panel (Plate 48) and in the central apse (Plate 49). In the apse, Mary appears as the Immaculate One, *Panachrantos*, immortal, born free of sin. Monreale refers to the dedication of the church through this mosaic, without borrowing the Latin depiction of the Assumption, thereby asserting the Sicily's independence from church rule. Moreover, the seated Virgin and Child allude to the Throne of Wisdom. Eve Borsook suggests that the Greek mosaicists at Monreale based the *Panachrantos* in the apse of Hagia Sophia, which symbolizes the dedication of the Eastern Church to the Holy Wisdom.[25] Hagia Sophia, the imperial church of the Byzantine Emperor, served as the source of theories adopted from the East by the Sicilian king for his church, an indication that Sicily ruled over the East as the New Jerusalem.

In the imperial church of Hagia Sophia, the Byzantine Emperor received his crown from the Eastern Patriarch. King William II realized the significance of that coronation, for it gave the Church the power to crown the emperor, suggesting the church's rule over the state. Although William II was crowned in Palermo by the Archbishop of Salerno, Sicilian kings considered their rule came by the power of God, which William illustrated in a mosaic in the crossing of Monreale directly above his throne (Plate 50). Marble lions articulate the throne, a reference to Solomon's court, and the text and imagery of the mosaic above derive from Davidian texts. In the mosaic Christ sits enthroned with an opened book in his left hand and, in his right, the crown

[25] Ibid. 57-58.

bestowed on the head of William. The inscription surrounding William derives from Psalm 88:22, which tells of the divine crowning of David, thus embodying the ideals of the Sicilian monarchy. The composition shows William as the heir to David and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, while the Psalm suggests his divine right to rule. The hand of Christ crowns the King, suggesting that the monarch answers only to God, while William's throne below suggests not only his inheritance of Jerusalem, but also the thrones of Mary and Christ, from whom he receives his divine rule.[26] The idea of a King's coronation by Christ is not unique to Monreale, for Roger II (Plate 51), William's grandfather, depicted himself receiving his crown from Christ in the costume of a Byzantine Emperor in the Palatine Chapel, an early attempt to state Sicilian claims on the Byzantine throne.[27] William's adoption of this motif suggests that he not only rivaled the Byzantine emperor as imperial ruler of Christendom, but in fact surpassed the Eastern monarch, for Christ bestowed the Sicilian crown.

The Sicilian belief that the King reigned as supreme ruler continued into the thirteenth century. Nicholas IV knew the theocratic mentality of the kings of Sicily and clearly wished to curb that power by removing the Hohenstaufens from the kingdom. Kings may have had the right to rule their kingdoms, but the power of God on earth came through the Pope and the Pope alone, and William's pictorial assertations were a direct threat to Papal spiritual sovereignty. Placing the image of the *Coronation of the Virgin* in the pilgrimage church dedicated to the Feast of the Assumption not only espoused a Western theological principle, but also made clear a statement of the Pope's authority over kings and emperors. Only Mary, mother and bride of Christ, had the right to receive

---

[26] Ibid. 67-68.
[27] Kitzinger, 165.

a crown from the Son of God for she symbolized Ecclesia, which carried within her the Son of God in the form of the Eucharistic elements. Mary in this context referred to the divine power of the church under the leadership of the Pope. Moreover, the Papacy had, since the pontificate of Nicholas III, led Rome both spiritually and temporally as both its Bishop and its Senator. Thus the crown in the hand of Christ in Sta. Maria Maggiore represented the Papal right to rule over the state, as much as it did the spiritual power of the church.

A comparison between the two mosaics shows undeniable similarities. The Monreale mosaic places William at Christ's right hand, receiving the crown in imperial splendor. His hands are raised, as if appealing to Christ. In Santa Maria Maggiore, Mary, like William, sits at Christ's right hand with her hands in the same gesture, in the pose of a Mary, *Madonna Avvocata*, or Virgin of Intercession. This type of Virgin, uncommon to Coronation scenes, not only suggests Nicholas' dependence on the Monreale predecessor, but makes a specific reference to the Feast of the Assumption. The intercessory theme played a central role in the Feast, standing for the Virgin's powers for the salvation of man.[28] Unlike Monreale, where Mary prays only for the King, in Santa Maria Maggiore Mary appeals to Christ for the salvation of every pilgrim who had journeyed to Rome. Whereas the kings of Sicily used Greek artists to complete their mosaics in an attempt to imitate Byzantine theocratic rule, Nicholas IV used Torriti, an artist who worked in that same Byzantinizing style, to suggest that Rome, rather than Sicily or Constantinople, was the New Jerusalem.

---

[28] Tronzo, 173, 182.

Santa Maria Maggiore and Rome

Within the boundaries of the city of Rome, the apse decoration of Santa Maria Maggiore cannot be fully analyzed without consideration of the mosaics produced at Santa Maria in Trastevere. In the 1140s, under the patronage of Pope Innocent II, the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere bore a triumphant image that celebrated the church's recent victory over schism and the church's unification under one Pope. Here we find the crowned Virgin embraced by Christ, both sharing a throne, in what William Tronzo believes is the source for Torriti's *Coronation* in Maggiore.[29] However, the distinct differences that exist between the two apses suggest that the image in Santa Maria in Trastevere represents a proto-*Coronation* or *Triumph of the Virgin*, rather than a full-fledged *Coronation* (Plate 52). Trastevere embodies the Medieval tradition of the Virgin as the church, or ecclesia, a static image without time, while Santa Maria Maggiore depicts a narrative event with a specific historical time and place represented.[30] Despite the symbolic differences, Trastevere, like Santa Maria Maggiore, included an inscription in Christ's book from the Office of the Assumption. Christ's embrace indicates Mary as his bride, and they share a throne as equals, thus suggesting that the mosaic at Santa Maria in Trastevere was a preliminary iconographic step for Torriti's *Coronation*.[31]

Nicholas' invocation of the twelfth-century mosaic underscores the importance of familial primacy in medieval Rome. Santa Maria Maggiore had long been a Colonna stronghold, indicating that Nicholas' choice to decorate this church had political, as well

---

[29] Ibid. 167.
[30] Tronzo, 192.
[31] Gertrude Coor-Achenbach, "The Earliest Representation of the Coronation of the Virgin," *Burlington Magazine*, XCIX (1957) 330.

as spiritual, motivations. Nicholas made that connection explicit by including in the apse an image of Cardinal Giacomo Colonna, archbishop of the church.[32]

The program of patronage focused on the glorification of the Virgin in an attempt to compete with Santa Maria in Trastevere, the first church in Rome dedicated solely to the Virgin.[33] Trastevere gained notoriety in the eighth or early ninth century as the site of the Fons Olei, the spring of oil that flowed at the moment of Christ's birth. Direct competition between the churches began when Pope Gregory IV (827-844) built a Praesepium in the basilica to contend with Maggiore's Praesepium of the Grotto of the Nativity, dated to the seventh century. Although the imitation did little to enhance the reputation of Trastevere, the miracle of the Fons Olei remained popular, attracting many worshippers.[34]

The church gained additional fame as a pilgrimage site in 1215 at the inauguration of the Fourth Lateran Council. Pope Innocent III took advantage of an audience that included churchmen from Constantinople and Jerusalem and held a regal procession from the Lateran to Santa Maria in Trastevere, to re-consecrate the Marian Church.[35] Trastevere received a special position in the church hierarchy after the Fourth Lateran Council, which included canons that united the Eastern and Western Churches under one leader and claimed the primacy of the Pope over all other Patriarchs.[36] Moreover, Trastevere housed a cult image, the *Madonna della Clemenza*, which competed with the *Salus Populi Romani* icon at Santa Maria Maggiore, with both *Hodegetria* icons

---

[32] Gardner, 2.
[33] Hetherington (1994), 93.
[34] Thuno, 71-72.
[35] Hetherington (1994), 82-82.
[36] Tomas Hancil, "The Fourth Lateran Council (1215)," *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. IX, 1910. [Online.] Available: http://www.newadvent.org./cathen/09018a.htm [2003].

depicting the Virgin holding the infant Christ.[37] Nicholas intentionally chose to update the apse in Maggiore to tell both Romans and pilgrims to the city that the principle Marian basilica was Santa Maria Maggiore, rather than Santa Maria in Trastevere.

The similarities between Santa Maria Maggiore and Santa Maria in Trastevere are not limited to the central apse design. In Trastevere, a narrative band dedicated to the Life of the Virgin runs below the apse, which, at first, appears identical to the cycle in Santa Maria Maggiore. However, closer inspection suggests not only distinct differences, but also indicates that the mosaics in Santa Maria in Trastevere copied those in Santa Maria Maggiore in an attempt to regain the Marian primacy that it had recently lost. Pope Nicholas IV died in 1292 before the completion of the apse, but Cardinals Giacomo and Pietro Colonna faithfully carried out the project to its completion in 1295.[38] During this time, the rivalry between the two Marian churches intensified as a result of familial rivalries. The Stefaneschi family defended the legitimacy of the election of the Caetani Pope, Boniface VIII, which the Colonna rejected. In May 1297 Boniface dismissed and excommunicated the Colonna, leading to a war between the Colonna and Stefaneschi. In 1298, the Colonna surrendered to the Pope, losing their properties and noble status in Rome.[39] The Stefaneschi commissioned the narrative band of the Life of the Virgin Santa Maria in Trastevere in the midst of this family dispute. It is my belief that the Stefaneschi added the cycle to update their twelfth-century apse in order to compete with the images of the Colonna stronghold of Santa Maria Maggiore.

Bertholdo Stefaneschi hired Pietro Cavallini to add to the apse a program designed by his brother, Giacomo Stefaneschi. Jacopo clearly derived this project from

---

[37] Wollesen, 100.
[38] Gardner, 12.
[39] Thuno, 73-74.

his enemy, Giacomo Colonna, but unlike the innovative design at Santa Maria Maggiore, Stefaneschi chose instead to order the scenes sequentially, and add a sixth scene, the *Birth of the Virgin*. At Trastevere no scene takes center stage because of the even number of panels; thus, the church lacks Santa Maria Maggiore's vertical axis that links the top and bottom halves of the apse.[40] Until recently, specialists believed Cavallini to be the innovator of the narrative cycle, based on a 1291 dating by de Rossi in the 1870's, but Paul Hetherington has argued, based on the cycle's reliance on the verses by Giacomo Stefaneschi and the stylistic development of Cavallini, that the mosaics ought to be dated to c. 1300. Hetherington offers as evidence the three lines of Latin hexameter verse below each narrative scene, composed by Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi. These lines appear again in a codex by the Cardinal in the Bibliotheque Nationale, proving his fluency in Latin learned at the University in Paris. He returned to Rome on December 21, 1291; the date is based on a bull that mentions his presence in the city. This indicated the mosaics could be dated to the early 1290's. However, an examination of Cavallini's career indicates that he was occupied at Sta. Cecilia between 1289-1293, thus leaving the period between 1293-1300 open as the probable period of time for the completion of the Trastevere mosaics.[41]

The later dating lends strength to the argument that the Stefaneschi intended their addendum to rival the Colonna program at Santa Maria Maggiore. What we have, then, is a case where Nicholas IV originally looked at the twelfth-century apse at Trastevere to rival the Santa Maria Maggiore for primacy. The Stefaneschi then imitated Santa Maria Maggiore in their commission at Santa Maria in Tratsevere in order to regain the prestige

---

[40] Ibid. 169-170.
[41] Paul Hetherington, *Pietro Cavallini: A Study in the Art of Late Medieval Rome* (London: The Sagittarius Press, 1979), 143.

it had first lost. Instead of hiring Torriti, who had recently completed his work at Santa Maria Maggiore, the Stefaneschi chose Cavallini to produce their cycle, thus employing the most fashionable artist working in Rome, whom the Franciscans and Nicholas IV had apparently overlooked in their decorative projects. In Cavallini, the Stefaneschi chose an artist whose technique reflected a classical stylistic tradition, which competed directly with the more archaic Byzantinizing style of Torriti.

The different compositional arrangements of the Life of the Virgin in the two churches also demonstrate the use of two different stylistic traditions. The use of the *Dormition* as the central scene in the composition at Santa Maria Maggiore was unusual in Western narrative cycles. The focal image was, however, common in Byzantium in the vita icon, which showed a central sacred figure surrounded by smaller scenes of his or her life. In the thirteenth century, the West adopted the vita icon into panel form, called vita retables (Plate 53). The first retable was devoted to St. Francis[42], suggesting that Nicholas' choice of a vita icon motif in Santa Maria Maggiore reflects upon the Franciscan work in the East and their trafficking in Byzantine art. Santa Maria Maggiore emphasized an Eastern influence through the Byzantine style of Jacopo Torriti, and by implication, the papal interest in reappropriating images that created a visual connection to the Empire in the East. The mosaics at Santa Maria in Trastevere conversely stressed an Early Christian heritage by commissioning Cavallini, indicating the Stefaneschi's attempt to claim Trastevere as the primary Marian church by adhering to a style that recalled imperial Rome.

A comparison between the Marian scenes in the two Roman churches supports the assessment that Cavallini's work was completed between 1293 and1300. Beginning with

[42] Tronzo, 187-188.

the *Annunciation* (Plate 54) we can see that Cavallini relied on Torriti only for the composition, and that Cavallini elaborated on Torriti's work. In Trastevere, Gabriel no longer stands solemnly, but advances forward, his weight shifting off his right foot, allowing his robes to blow behind his body. The Virgin now holds a prayer book, a recent addition in the West, proving Cavallini's innovative style.[43] Furthermore, the Virgin physically occupies her throne, similar to Cavallini's earlier work in San Paolo fuori le mura. The mass of her body inhabits the entire space, while Torriti's Virgin perches on her seat. Cavallini employed an illusionary style of great sophistication while relying on distinctly modern iconography.

In the *Annunciation*, and throughout the Trastevere narrative cycle, each scene takes place in a landscape, adding a sense of naturalism that derives from early Christian art. Torriti's only adds a natural setting in the *Nativity*, and there only because medieval iconography placed the birth within a cave, while the ox and ass watched over the Messiah. In addition to his adherence to a natural background, Cavallini included yet another unprecedented tradition in his *Nativity* (Plate 55), a shepherd boy playing the pipe among a group of sheep accompanied by a dog and goat. Hetherington suggests that those figures derived from a Byzantine tradition.[44] While I do not doubt that assertion, it makes me question why a Byzantinizing artist such as Torriti chose not to include that group, for Torriti adhered to the tradition of including the star-light to identify Christ, found in compositions throughout the East, while Cavallini chose to ignore this motif. Perhaps, the differences come as a result of the caliber of the artist, for Cavallini had the faculties for more complex scenes of the natural world, which Torriti chose to ignore

[43] Hetherington (1979), 16.
[44] Hetherington (1979), 17-18.

because he did not have that ability to imitate nature. The appearance of the shepherd and animals do not come as a strict allegiance to the Byzantine style, but as a way to prove Cavallini's superior capabilties as an artist. The Stefaneschi then emphasize that dominance by incorporating the miracle of the Fons Olei at the base of the grotto, suggesting the privileged place of the basilica in Marian history.[45]

Similar to the *Annunciation*, Cavallini exhibited his ability to depict mass and space in the *Adoration of the Magi* (Plate 56), for the Virgin physically occupies her throne, the weight of her body grounded upon the seat. Cavallini elaborated on Torriti's composition by allowing the Magi to move across the surface, bending at different angles, lending a sophistication to the narrative. Moreover, Cavallini included the city of Jerusalem within the scene, an uncommon addition, whereas the city appears at Santa Maria Maggiore, but on its triumphal arch. On the other hand, Cavallini deletes the guiding angel, common to Adoration scenes. This suggests Cavallini's confidence in the creation of uncluttered, legible narratives. Cavallini's pioneering iconography then continues in the *Presentation in the Temple* (Plate 57) where Simeon is shown holding the Christ child, unlike the scene in Santa Maria Maggiore, where Torriti opted for a more traditional scene in which the Virgin cradles the infant.[46] The only scene in which Torriti outshines Cavallini is the *Dormition* (Plate 58), although this may be attributed to the large expanse with which Torriti had to work. This brief comparison between the apse mosaics at Santa Maria Maggiore and at Santa Maria in Trastevere indicates that the Stefaneshi family chose Pietro Cavallini and his classicizing style as a way to refer to the

[45] Thuno, 73.
[46] Hetherington (1979), 18-19.

ancient foundation of Rome, thus suggesting the superiority of Santa Maria in Trastevere as the first Marian church.

The Facade

Propaganda for familial dominance was not confined to the interior of the church. The political messages incorporated into the façade decorations similarly suggest the Colonna family's counter attempt to lure pilgrims to Santa Maria Maggiore after the new Cavallini additions at Trastevere. However, dating the façade at Santa Maria Maggiore poses a problem. The lower register presents compositions identical to scenes found in the Legend of St. Francis in the upper basilica at Assisi, completed in 1302. The question of influences now comes into play, as a pre-1300 date for the façade decorations indicates that Santa Maria Maggiore served as the compositional model for the Assisi image, while a post-1300 date suggests the opposite.[47] In order to resolve this problem the decorative style of the façade along with the political intrigues between the Colonna family and Pope Boniface VIII need further examination.

The façade of Santa Maria Maggiore (Plate 59) depicts the story of the foundation of Santa Maria Maggiore through the illustration of the "Legend of the Snow". In 345, a wealthy, yet childless Roman, John the Patrician prayed to God asking what he should do with his fortune. That night, the Virgin Mary appeared to John in a dream and told him to use his money to fund a basilica in her honor. Simultaneously, the Virgin appeared in a dream to Pope Liberius, telling him that snow would fall in Rome on August 4-5, and requesting that a basilica be erected on that spot in her honor. John immediately told the Pope his dream, and he discovered that the Pontiff, too, had had a similar message, thus

[47] Thuno, 61.

verifying both dreams. On the specified date, the miraculous snowfall occurred and on that spot, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore was built.[48] This Legend, however, did not become popular until the twelfth century and probably came about as a way to compete with the growing popularity of the Legend of the Fons Olei. Just as the flowing Oil represented the purified location of Santa Maria in Trastevere, the white snowfall suggested the sanctity of the Santa Maria Maggiore. In fact, the program of the façade responds specifically to the image of the Fons Olei in the Nativity scene at Trastevere.[49]

The design of the façade divides the space into two registers. The lower register depicts the "Miracle of the Snow" in four scenes through the *Dream of Pope Liberius* (Plate 60), the *Dream of John the Patrician* (Plate 61), *John Before Liberius* (Plate 62) and the *Founding of the Basilica* (Plate 63). The zone above features iconic images of an enthroned Christ in a heavenly mandorla (Plate 64), surrounded by Mary, Paul, James and Jerome to his right and John the Baptist, Peter, Andrew and Matthew to his left (Plate 65). Beneath the judging Christ appears a signature that attributes the work to Filippo Rusuti. Each register compositionally acts on its own, forming the root of the dating problem, for that disparity suggests that the façade project could have been completed in two phases.[50]

Perhaps a look into the career of Filippo Rusuti may shed some light on this dating problem. Little evidence exists about Rusuti's career and movements, save for his signature on the Roman façade and a 1308 document placing Rusuti in Poitiers, France.[51] This latter reference suggests that the completion of the façade occurred before Rusuti

---

[48] Kessler and Zacharias, 127-128.
[49] Thuno, 73.
[50] Ibid. 63.
[51] Gardner, 28.

moved to France, creating a *terminus ante quem* of 1308. Rusuti appears to have been connected to Roman artists working in Assisi during the late 1280's, suggested by the similar style found in the Biblical frescoes at Assisi and the upper register of the façade at Santa Maria Maggiore. The Roman decorative programs of Nicholas IV relate to the Franciscan motifs at San Francesco, due to their similar compositions, the repetition of specific theological ideals and the use of the same artist, Torriti, for both projects. It seems likely, therefore, that the Colonna hired Rusuti based on this similar Franciscan connection. The Colonna had been strong supporters of the Franciscans and these connections only strengthened with their adoption of Nicholas IV, the first Franciscan Pope, as an ally. The Franciscan association is reinforced when we compare the compositions of the lower zone of the façade of Santa Maria Maggiore to the cycle of the Life of St. Francis in the upper basilica at Assisi.

Rusuti, like Torriti, participated in the decorations of the Biblical cycles painted in Assisi between 1288-1292. Rusuti's hand can be discerned in the *Creation of the World* fresco (Plate 20), based upon similarities between the Christ Pantocrator (Plate 64) there and the image of the enthroned Christ on the upper register of the façade at Santa Maria Maggiore.[52] The artist used the same facial features for the figure of Christ at Assisi as he did for the Christ in the façade at Santa Maria Maggiore, both shown with centrally parted hair with a wisp falling onto the forehead. Each beard falls into small sections below the chin, which forms the bottom of Christ's ovoid head. Other similarities between the Roman and Assisian projects proliferate. The decorative frames on the façade use an illusionistic perspective that derives from the framework at Assisi, which in turn imitates antique prototypes. Although better articulated in Assisi, the lower zone

[52] Wollesen, 126.

uses fictitious pilasters that cater to an audience looking up at the façade, helping pilgrims to understand the separation of the scenes.[53] By hiring Rusuti, an artist capable of imitating both antique and Byzantinizing forms[54], the Colonna attempted to rival the recent decorative additions in Trastevere completed by 1300, where Cavallini's style recalled early Christian Rome. The Colonna surely wanted the façade to invoke Rome's Christian heritage, which the more Byzantinizing style of Torriti fails to accomplish at Santa Maria Maggiore, in order to prove the primacy of Santa Maria Maggiore and the family's position of power as patrons of the church.

Similarities with the Franciscan basilica were not confined to imitating the borders at Assisi. The Dream sequences of the *Vision of the Palace* (Plate 66), the *Dream of Innocent III* (Plate 67), and the *Dream of Gregory IX* (Plate 68) at Assisi relate directly to Santa Maria Maggiore's façade. The parallels between these scenes and the Dream scenes on the façade form the core of the dating controversy. In all four dream sequences the same architectonic bed frames the figures of the sleeping pontiffs and patron. However, at Maggiore, the facade omits the fictive architecture found at Assisi, largely because those buildings relate to specific places associated with the Life of St. Francis. For example, the recently constructed Lateran Palace built in 1297 and illustrated in the image of the *Dream of Innocent III*, could not be inserted into the Roman image of the "Legend of the Snow", which had occurred eight hundred years earlier. Thus the use of buildings cannot be used as evidence to confirm a specific date.[55] However, gestures and compositions are another story. The hand under the chin of Gregory IX at Assisi mirrors the positions of the hands of both Liberius and John in the

---

[53] Ibid. 115-116.
[54] His Byzantinizing technique helps to create continuity with the apse.
[55] Thuno, 76-77.

façade at Santa Maria Maggiore. Moreover, the squatting figures beneath Innocent III's bed also appear in the Roman bedchambers.[56]

The last two scenes of the Legend of the Snow, confirm these connections to Assisi. The image of *John Before Liberius* provides a mirror image of the *Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule* (Plate 69), as the main protagonists occupy similar places and strike similar positions, while both Popes bless in the same manner wearing identical robes. The last scene at Santa Maria Maggiore, the *Founding of the Basilica* (Plate 70), continues the Assisi-Rome trend, as the same grouping of the two small boys in front of a woman in the crowd appears in the fresco of *Francis' Renunciation of his Father's Inheritance.*[57] The iconography of the compositions on the façade of Santa Maria Maggiore and in the Life of St. Francis at Assisi leave no doubt that one served as a model for the other, however, the upper register needs examination before we determine which came first.

A recently discovered drawing in the National Gallery of Scotland shows an accurate record of the original façade.[58] In this drawing, two Cardinals kneel on either side of the enthroned Christ, identified as Pietro Colonna on the left and Giacomo Colonna on the right.[59] This reference surely caused all viewers to relate the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore to the Colonna family, underscoring their position as the primary family of Rome. Despite slight differences and stylistic changes from the original

---

[56] Wollesen, 117. This composition does not necessarily originate with either of the Dream sequences, but with another fresco found at Assisi. Amongst the biblical cycle, the scene *Esau before Isaac* provides the prototypes for the later Dream motifs. Regardless of the dating of the façade, the stylistic model existed in Assisi as early as 1290.

[57] Gardner, 40-41.

[58] Ibid, 22-23. Adding to our dating difficulty, in the seventeenth century, Pope Clement X destroyed the thirteenth-century mosaics, leaving the twenty-first century viewer with mere copies. The upper zone, more so than the lower zone, is affected by this. The role of the Colonna as patrons, although no longer found in the reconstructed mosaic, originally existed in the thirteenth-century originals.

[59] Ibid.

mosaics, the reproductions remain largely faithful to the thirteenth-century design. The program of the upper façade relates both to the Feast of the Assumption and to the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore. In the upper register the enthroned Christ sits with a book opened on his lap inscribed with an excerpt from the Day of the Last Judgment. This motif neatly fits into the Assumption ceremony, for the Feast also focused on the Day of Judgment. Furthermore, on either side of Christ stand Mary and John the Baptist, forming a *Deesis,* seen earlier in the procession at the Lateran. The Assumption intimately related to Mary's intercession for man, for she shared the throne in Heaven with the Judge of Mankind. The framing Saints, like the judging Christ, relate directly to the Roman Feast. Peter and Paul remind the pilgrim of the supremacy of Rome, Andrew and James recalled the importance of the apostles in spreading the word of Christ, and Jerome and Matthias reminded viewers of the presence of their relics in that church. The structure of the apse recalled the interior: a central motif of an enthroned Christ surrounded by Saints, placed over a narrative cycle. Thus the façade wove together the three themes of the Assumption, the Intercession and the Last Judgment into a single motif. Pilgrims were reminded of what they saw and what they would see inside the Marian church. The Colonna clearly designed the upper zone as part of the decorative program initiated by Nicholas IV, implying a date of 1292-1297, when the family carried out the program after the death of the Pope.[60]

Each zone of the facade presented pilgrims with two forms of teaching Christian doctrine. The upper zone acted as a didactic principle, while the lower zone was a narrative cycle. The two registers did not depend on one another, and easily could have been carried out during two separate periods, a theory confirmed by a stylistic

[60] Thuno, 67-68.

comparison between the two zones. The tesserae in the upper zone tend to be cleanly cut and precisely laid out, forming regular outlines and delicate shading. This technique was popular in the late thirteenth century, particularly in the works of Torriti and Cavallini. However, the *Legend of the Snow* uses a different method. Here, the artist loosely set irregular tesserae in an impressionistic style, causing the figures to seem less plastic. Gardner suggests the difference has nothing to do with two separate periods of work, but with legibility. He argues that when viewed at a great distance in the piazza surrounding Santa Maria Maggiore, the looser technique allows for an easier reading of the narrative cycle. However, the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore would also be seen at a distance and adheres to the former style. It seems impossible that Rusuti would have executed the two zones with two contrasting stylistic approaches.[61]

Thus, I am inclined to disagree with Gardner's theory, for not only does the program of the upper zone, with the *Deesis*, relate to Nicholas IV's program for the Feast of the Assumption, the precise setting of the tesserae also reflect the same style as seen in the apse. This indicates that the upper register was completed between 1292-1295, before Boniface exiled the Colonna. When Jacopo Colonna returned to Rome in 1306, when Pope Clement V reinstated the family, he returned to his position of archpresbyter at Santa Maria Maggiore, and the family began gathering the property they had lost during exile. While trying to amass their power, the Papacy moved to Avignon, creating not only a political vacuum in Rome, but an artistic void, for many artists left for France to take advantage of Papal patronage.[62]

---

[61] Thuno, 69.
[62] Ibid.

When the Colonna returned to Rome in 1306, they wished to regain the political position they once held during the reign of Nicholas IV. Completing the lower zone of the façade, with a legend that competed with the Stefaneschi church at Trastevere, provided a perfect outlet to challenge the powers of the Stefaneschi and claim power they had once held in the 1290's. The two columns in the lower zone, below Saints Peter and Paul, affirm this claim. The columns represent the Colonna coat of arms, and by placing them below Peter and Paul, the Colonna clearly asserted themselves as intregal players in Roman politics.[63] However, the Babylonian Captivity left Rome devoid of artists, forcing a lesser artist to complete the lower façade.[64] Moreover, only the upper zone contains Rusuti's signature, suggesting that another artist, one familiar with the St. Francis Cycle, designed the lower register. Possibly this anonymous artist worked in Assisi as an assistant, and after completion of the famed cycle in 1300 came to Rome. His credentials of working at Assisi would have attracted the Colonna, based on their history as Franciscan supporters. I believe that the lower zone at Santa Maria Maggiore was completed around 1306, thus making Assisi the compositional prototype.

Santa Maria Maggiore was the ultimate destination for pilgrims on the Feast of the Assumption, and Nicholas did not fail to give them a sensory experience that made the long journey worthwhile. His program needed to be extraordinary to attract pilgrims to Rome and to prove the city as the New Jerusalem. Moreover, Nicholas took advantage of the large crowds to instill a message concerning his struggle for political dominance outside of Rome with the Sicilian monarchy, and within the city through familial conflicts. Nicholas, through the support of the Colonna, proved Rome worthy as the

---

[63] Kessler and Zacharias, 1.
[64] Thuno, 71-72, 75.

center of Christianity through his decorative campaign surrounding the Feast of the Assumption.

CONCLUSION

The procession on the Feast of the Assumption traveled from St. John Lateran to Santa Maria Maggiore, bringing the icon of Christ, the *Acheropita*, to the *Hodegetria* icon the *Salus populi romani*. This ceremonial meeting implies the theme of honor. Christ, the son of Mary, comes to her church to pay homage to his mother on her day of glory. Based on the mosaic programs initiated by Pope Nicholas IV, the theme of honor extends to the Franciscan Order, the Colonna and most importantly to Rome, as the spiritual and political center of Christendom, and Nicholas does this under the overarching theme of the Assumption.

The decorative programs of the two Roman churches intimately connect not only to the political and theological controversies of the period, but also to the stylistic problems started during the Roman Renaissance, initiated by Pope Nicholas III, and continued into the Franciscan Church of Assisi. It was through the Franciscans that the West gained an aesthetic taste for the Byzantinizing approach, indicative by the friar's choice of artists at Assisi, including Cimabue, Jacopo Torriti and Filippo Rusuti. It was there that Nicholas first came in contact with Torriti, whose Byzantinizing technique fit Nicholas' propagandistic program in Rome.

Nicholas chose the Feast of the Assumption as the center of his patronage, which reflects upon Michael VIII Palaeologus' triumphant march led by the Hodegetria icon into Hagia Sophia, reclaiming Constantinople for the East. This victory becomes linked to the image of the *Deesis* in the Hagia Sophia, commissioned by Michael as a symbol of Eastern primacy. Nicholas surely saw that image when he arrived in the city as part of the Franciscan embassy to reunify the church. For Nicholas, the restoration of a *Deesis*

image in a church that was the Western equivalent of Hagia Sophia reflects on his hopes to unify the church, and then inserted Francis and Anthony, as symbols of his reliance on the Franciscans to achieve that goal.

Nicholas' hope for spiritual dominance of the Western church extends to the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore. The use of the *Coronation of the Virgin*, a strictly Western theological belief promoted by the Franciscan order, reflects on his belief that the Latin church controlled the Greeks, for the West had the aid of the Virgin interceding on their behalf. In addition to the theological interpretation of the Coronation, the crown implies the church's control over temporal rule. The second power Nicholas IV grappled with during his pontificate was the Kingdom of Sicily. Sicilian monarchs, beginning in the twelfth century, believed their rule came from God, yet they remained vassals to the Pope. Nicholas attempted to confound that belief by borrowing the composition of William II crowned by Christ in Monreale, a church dedicated to the Feast of the Assumption, to tell all Christians that only Mary had the right to receive a crown from the hand of the Son of God. Mary protected Rome and supported the Pope, thus her crown symbolized the Pope's control over both church and state.

The apse of Santa Maria Maggiore also included implications directed specifically at the city of Rome. Pope Nicholas IV, son of a poor scribe, needed the backing of a powerful Roman family in order to maneuver his way through the vindictive politics of the city. The Colonna supported Pope Nicholas IV, which in turn placed the family on the highest rung of the socio-political ladder in the city. In order to prove their position, the Colonna helped patronize the *Coronation*, an updated version of the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere, a church controlled by the Stefaneschi that vied with Santa Maria

Maggiore for primacy as the Marian church in Rome. The Life of the Virgin and the façade of the Santa Maria Maggiore also cannot be fully understood without examining the feuds between the royal Roman families for primacy as the first family of Rome.

Thus, Pope Nicholas IV used the Byzantine style of Jacopo Torriti as propaganda to convey to pilgrims his hope to claim Rome as the New Jerusalem. St. John Lateran and Santa Maria Maggiore worked together within the confines of the Feast, for both the *Deesis* and the *Coronation of the Virgin* convey important theological themes of the Festival, which directly relate to the liturgy the pilgrims would hear on the morning of August 15th. With a single festival Nicholas IV communicated to pilgrims from across Europe the Primacy of Rome over Constantinople and Sicily, along with his reliance on the Franciscan Order and the Colonna to attain that position.

WORKS CITED

Abulafia, David. *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms, 1250-1500: The Struggle for Dominion.* The Medieval World. New York: Longman, 1997.

Beckwith, John. *Early Christian and Byzantine Art.* Pelican History of Art. New York: Penguin Books, 1979.

Bellosi, Luciano. *Cimabue.* Translated by Alexandra Bonfante-Warren, Frank Dabell and Jay Hyams. New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 1998.

Belting, Hans. *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art.* Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Borsook, Eve. *Messages in Mosaic: the Royal Programmes of Norman Sicily (1130-1187).* Clarendon Studies in the History of Art. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Brentano, Robert. *Rome Before Avignon; A Social History of Thirteenth-Century Rome.* New York: Basic Books, 1974.

Buchthal, Hugo. *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957.

Coor-Achenbach, Gertrude. "The Earliest Representation of the Coronation of the Virgin," *Burlington Magazine* XCIX 1957.

Cormack, Robin. *Byzantine Art.* Oxford History of Art. New York: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2000.

Demus, Otto. *Byzantine Art and the West.* New York: New York University Press, 1970.

Derbes, Anne. *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

de Troth, John Baptiste. *The Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, a Brief Historical and Artistic Guide.* Rome, Italy: Tipografia Poligotta Vaticana, 1967.

Gardner, Julian. "Pope Nicholas IV and the Decoration of Santa Maria Maggiore." In *Patrons, Painters and Saints, Studies in Medieval Italian Painting.* Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993.

Geanakoplos, Deno John. *Constantinople and the West; Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

Hancil, Tomas. "The Fourth Lateran Council (1215)," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. IX, 1910. [Online]. Available: http://www.newadvent.org./cathen/09018a.htm 2003.

Henkels, H. "Remarks on the Late 13th-Century Apse Decoration of S. Maria Maggiore." *Siniolus* 4, (1971): 128-149.

Hetherington, Paul. *Medieval Rome: A Portrait of the City and its Life*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

_____. *Pietro Cavallini*. London: Sagittarius Press, 1979.

Holmes, George. *Florence, Rome and the Origins of the Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Kessler, Herbert L., and Johanna Zacharias. *Rome 1300: On the Path of the Pilgrim*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

Kitzinger, Ernst. *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies.* Edited by W. Eugene Kleinbauer. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976.

Krautheimer, Richard. *Rome: A Profile of the City, 312-1308.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Lunghi, Elvo. *The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.* Florence, Italy: Scala, 1996.

Male, Emile. *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Iconograohy and Its Sources.* Edited by Harry Boer, Translated by Marthiel Mathew. Bollington Series; 90:3. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Mathews, Thomas F. *Byzantium From Antiquity to the Renaissance.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.

Maxwell-Stuart, P.G. *Chronicle of the Pope: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Papacy from St. Peter to the Present.* New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997.

McBrien, Richard P. *Lives of the Popes: The Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul II.* San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1997.

Moorman, John R.H. *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origins to the Year 1517.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Petzgold, Andrea. *Romanesque Art.* Perspectives. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995.

Runciman, Steven. *The Eastern Schism; A Study in the Papacy and Eastern Churches During the XIth and XIIth Centuries.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955.

Schapiro, Meyer. *Late Antiquity, Early Christian and Mediaeval Art.* Selected Papers. New York: G. Braziller, 1979.

Smart, Alastair. *The Dawn of Italian Painting 1250-1400.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978.

Stubblebine, James H. *Assisi and the Rise of Vernacular Art.* New York: Harper & Row, 1985.

Thuno, Erik. "The Dating of the Façade Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome," *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 7. (1997): 61-82.

Tronzo, William, Editor. *Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance: Functions, Forms and Regional Traditions: Ten Contributions to a Colloquium Held at the Villa Spelman, Florence.* Vol. 1, *Apse Decoration, the Liturgy and the Perception of Art in Medieval Rome: S. Maria in Trastevere and S. Maria Maggiore*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Waley, Daniel. *The Papal State in the Thirteenth Century.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961.

Weitzman, Kurt. "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 Locust Valley, New York: JJ Augustin, 1966.

White, John. *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1250-1400.* Baltimore, MD: Penguin Press, 1966.

_____. *Studies in Late Medieval Italian Art.* London: Pindar Press, 1984.

Wollesen, Jens T. *Pictures and Reality; Monumental Frescoes and Mosaics in Rome Around 1300.* Hermeneutics of Art. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998.

Plate 1

Map of Pilgrimage route for the Feast of the Assumption in Rome, c.1290-1300

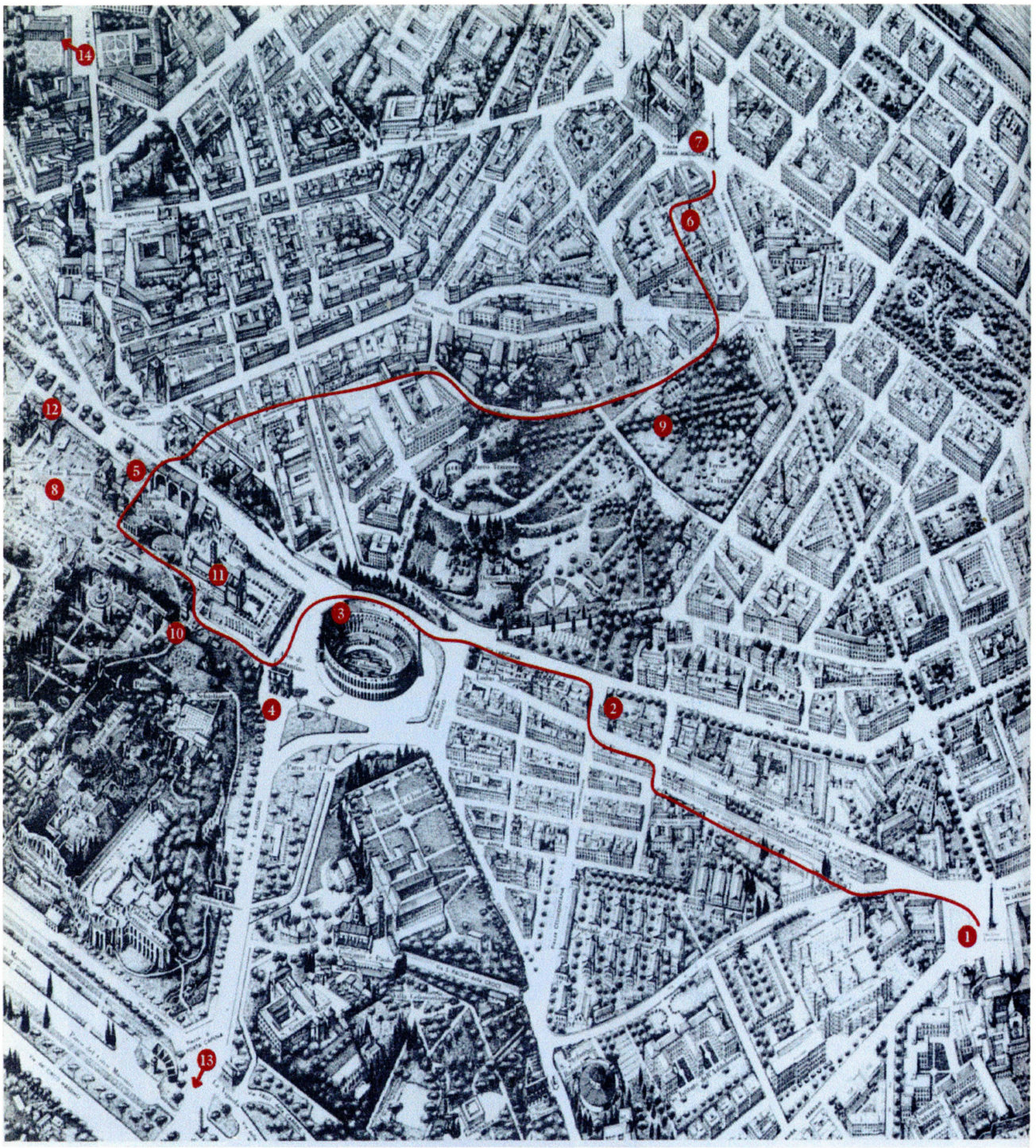


Plate 2

Acheropita,
St. John Lateran
Painting on Cloth
Late 7th – early 8th century

Plate 3

Salus Populi Romani
Santa Maria Maggiore
Painting
13th century repainting of earlier work

Plate 4

Pietro Cavallini
The Plague of the Locusts
San Paolo Fuori le Mura
Barberini Drawing after Fresco
1282-1290

Plate 5

Pietro Cavallini
Joseph and Potipher's Wife
San Paolo Fuori le Mura
Barberini Drawing after Fresco
1282-1290

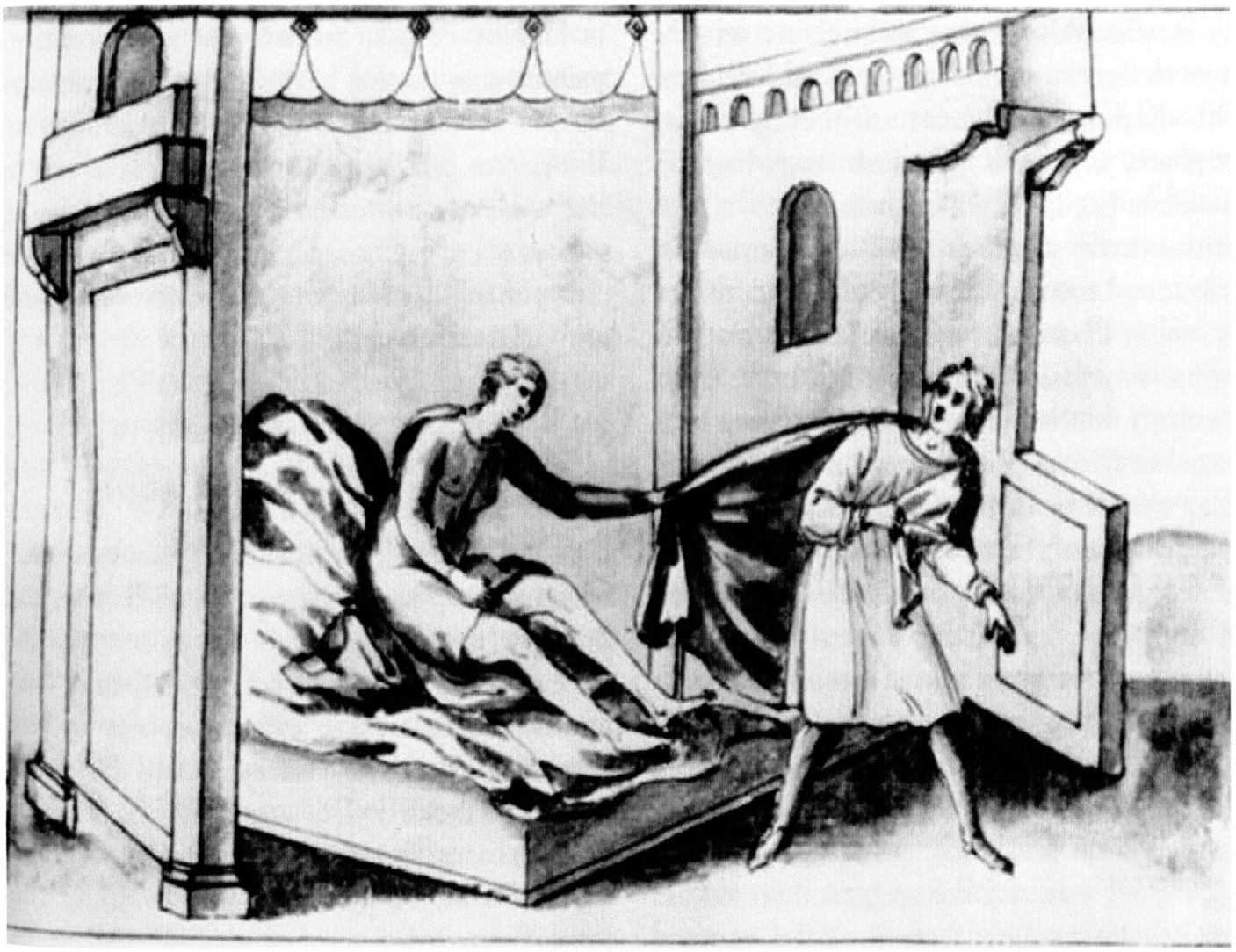


Plate 6

Cimabue
Sta. Croce Crucifix
Paint on Panel
1280-1285

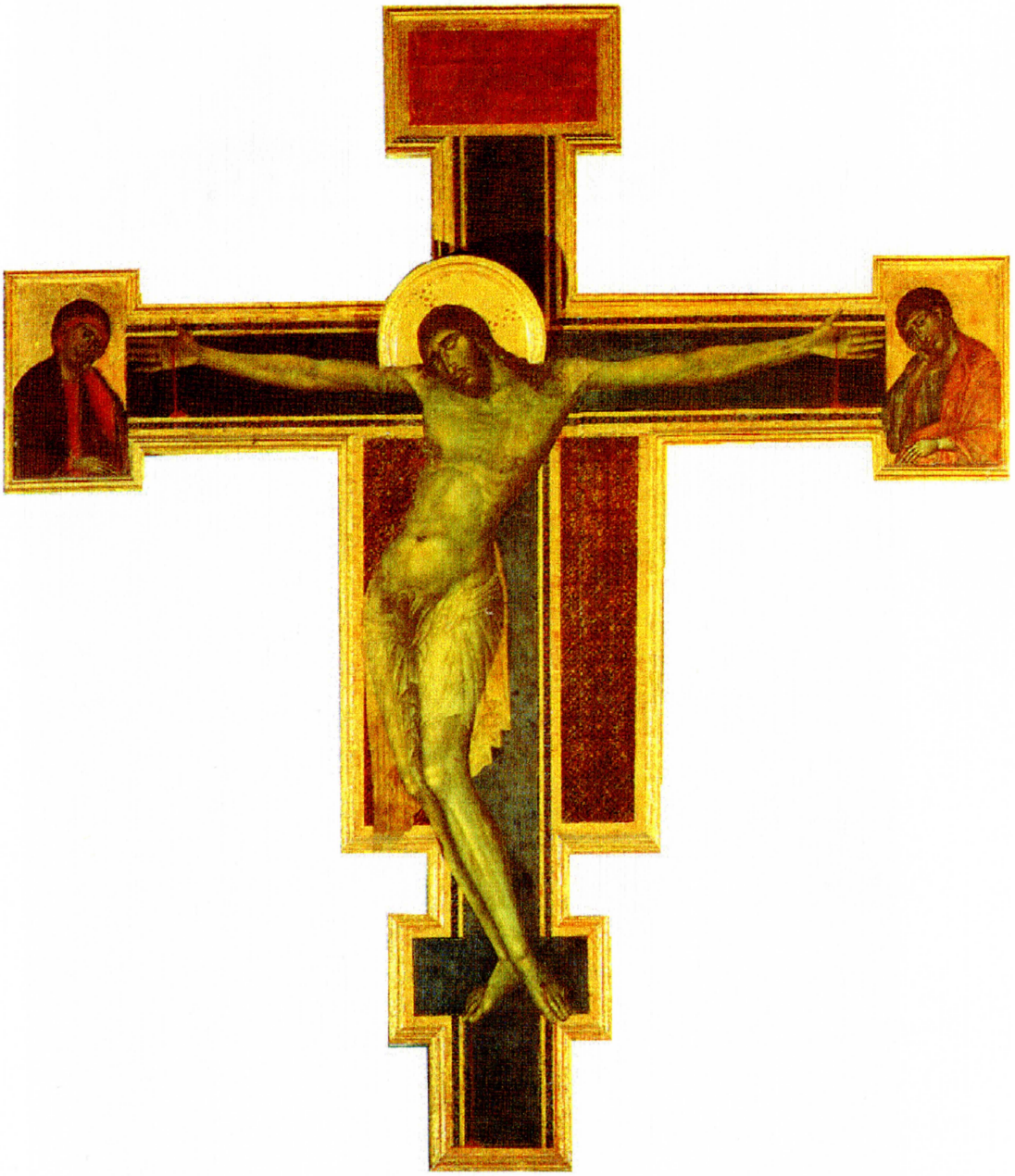


Plate 7

Crucifixion
Paint on Panel
Monastery of St. Catherine
Mt. Sinai
1200

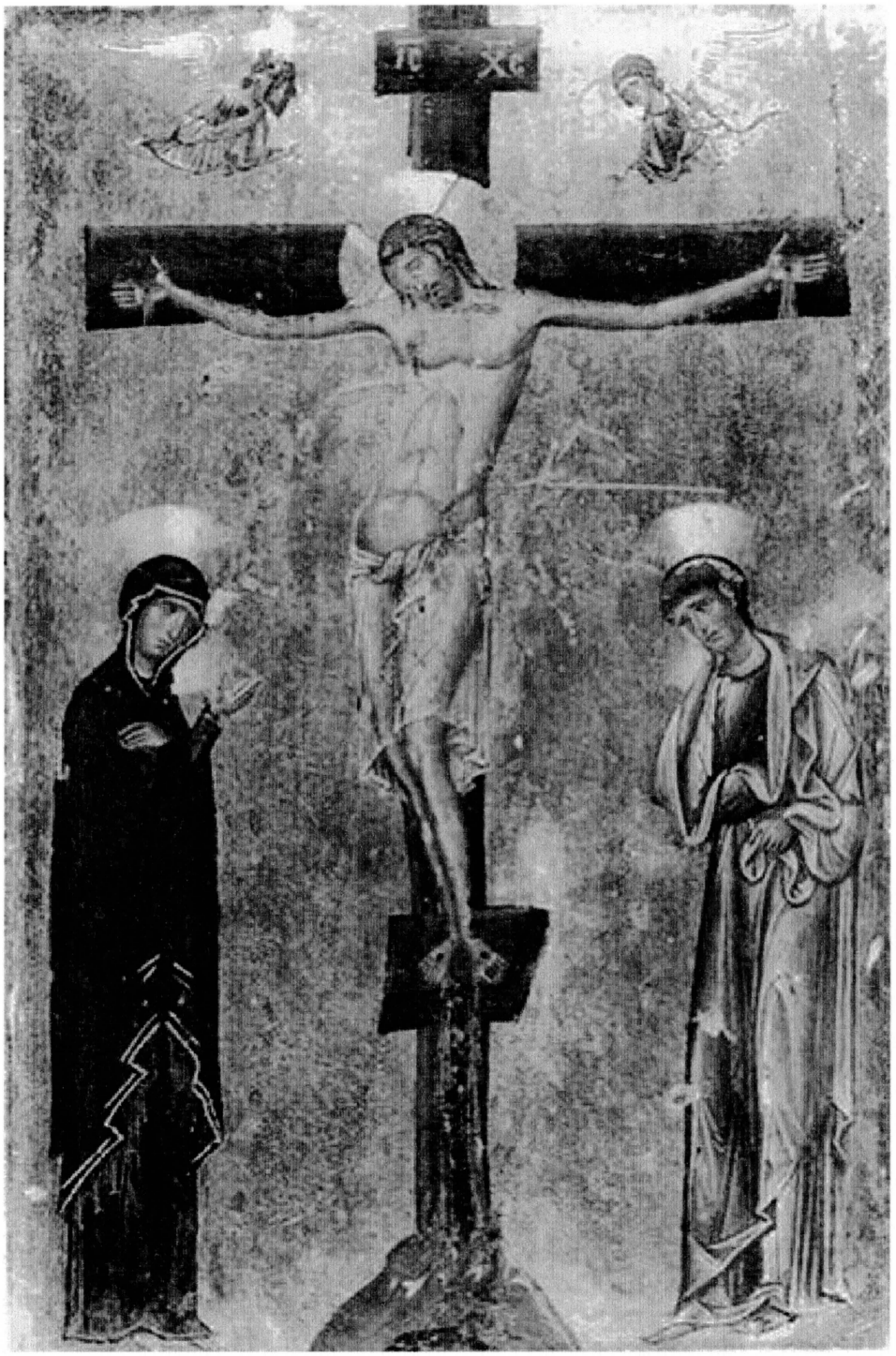


Plate 8

Upper Basilica Choir
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

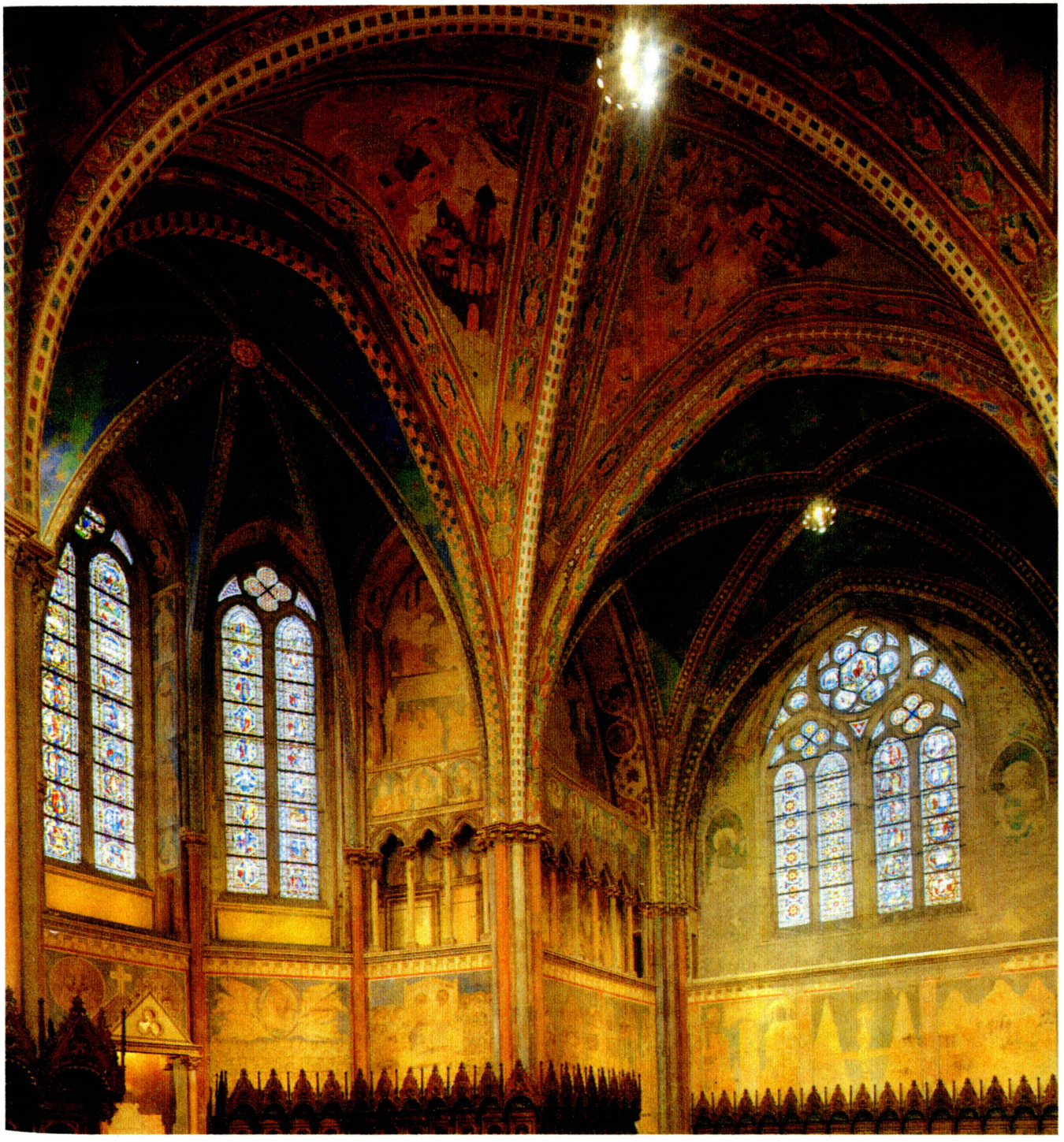


Plate 9

Cimabue
Crucifixion
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Crossing
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

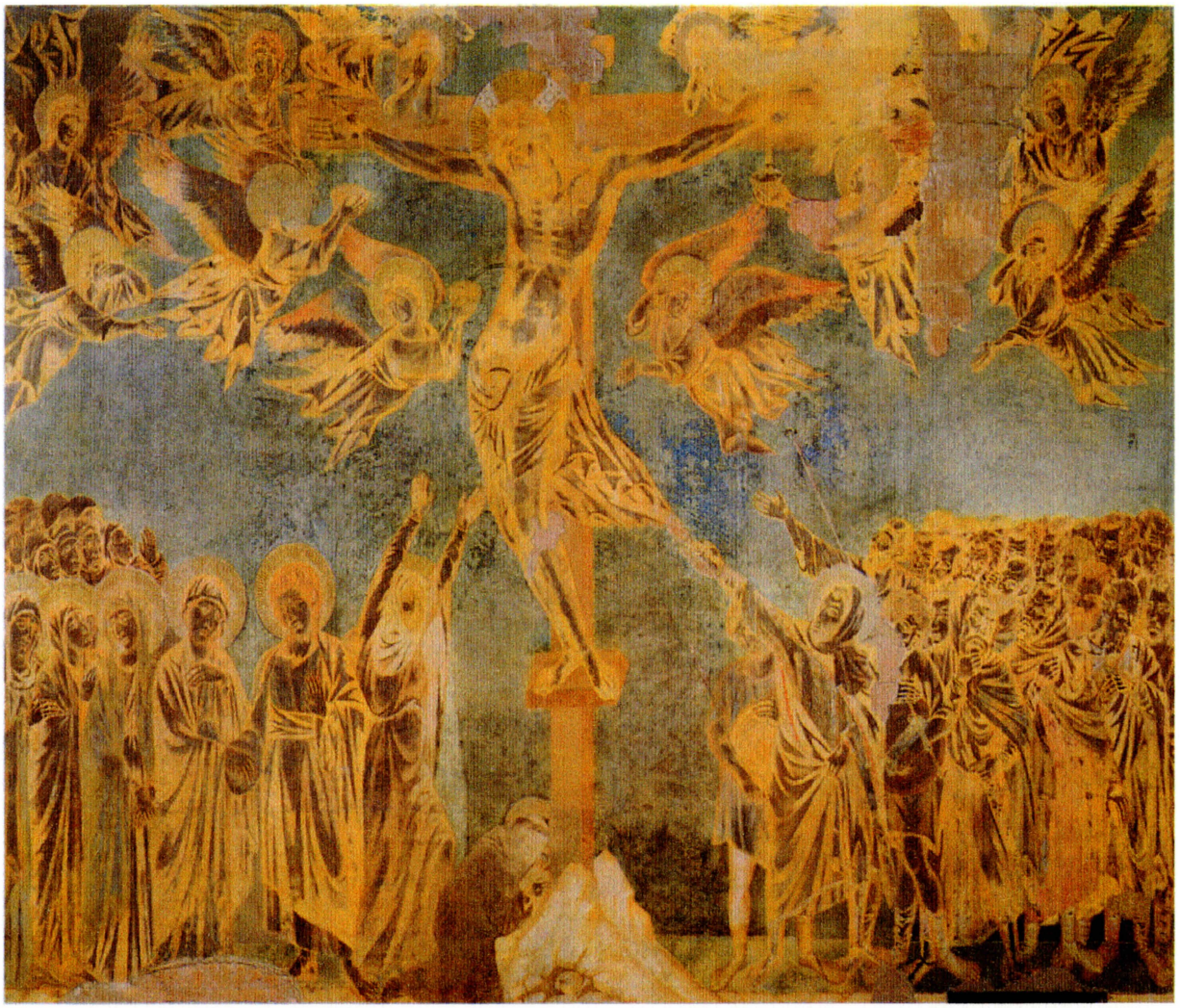


Plate 10

Cimabue
Martyrdom of St. Peter
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Crossing
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

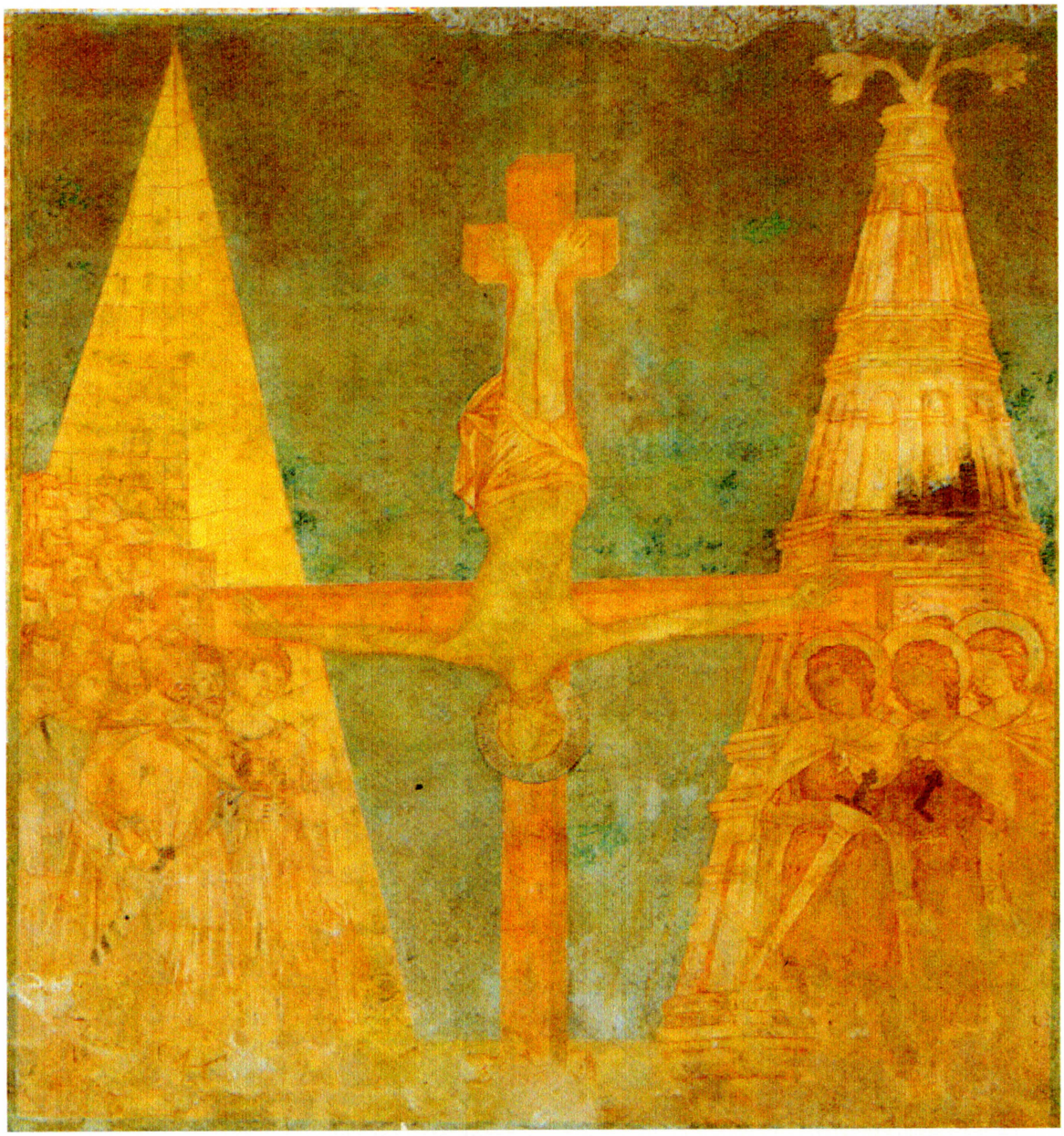


Plate 11

Cimabue
St. Peter Healing the Lame
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Crossing
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

Plate 12

Cimabue
Four Evangelists Vault
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Crossing
San Francesco, Assisi

1278-1282

Plate 13

Cimabue
St. Mark
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Crossing
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

Plate 14

Cimabue
Death of the Virgin
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Choir
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

Plate 15

Cimabue
Dormition of the Virgin
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Choir
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

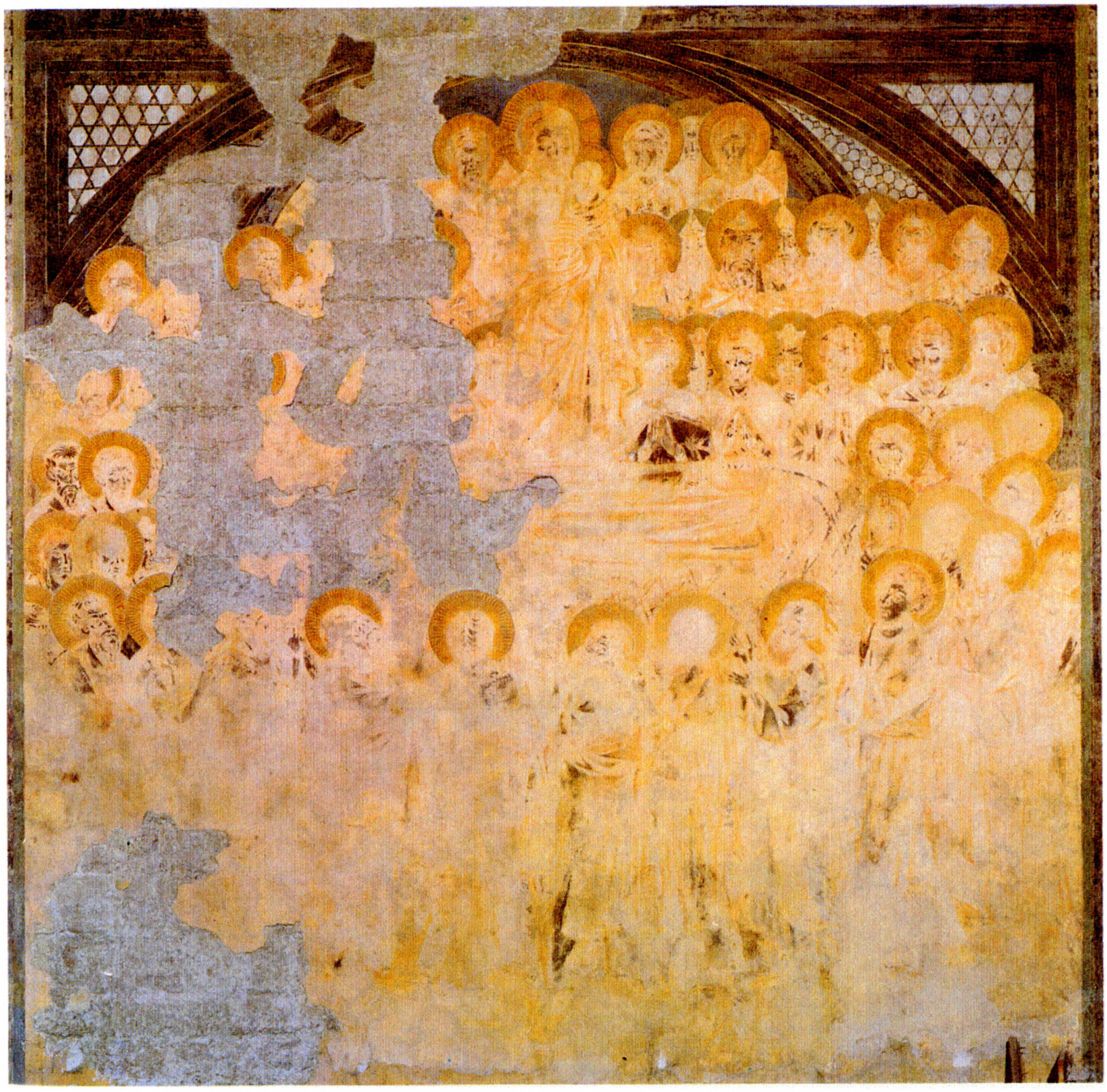


Plate 16

Cimabue
Christ and the Virgin Enthroned
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Choir
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

Plate 17

Cimabue
Assumption of the Virgin
Painted Mural
Upper Basilica Choir
San Francesco, Assisi
1278-1282

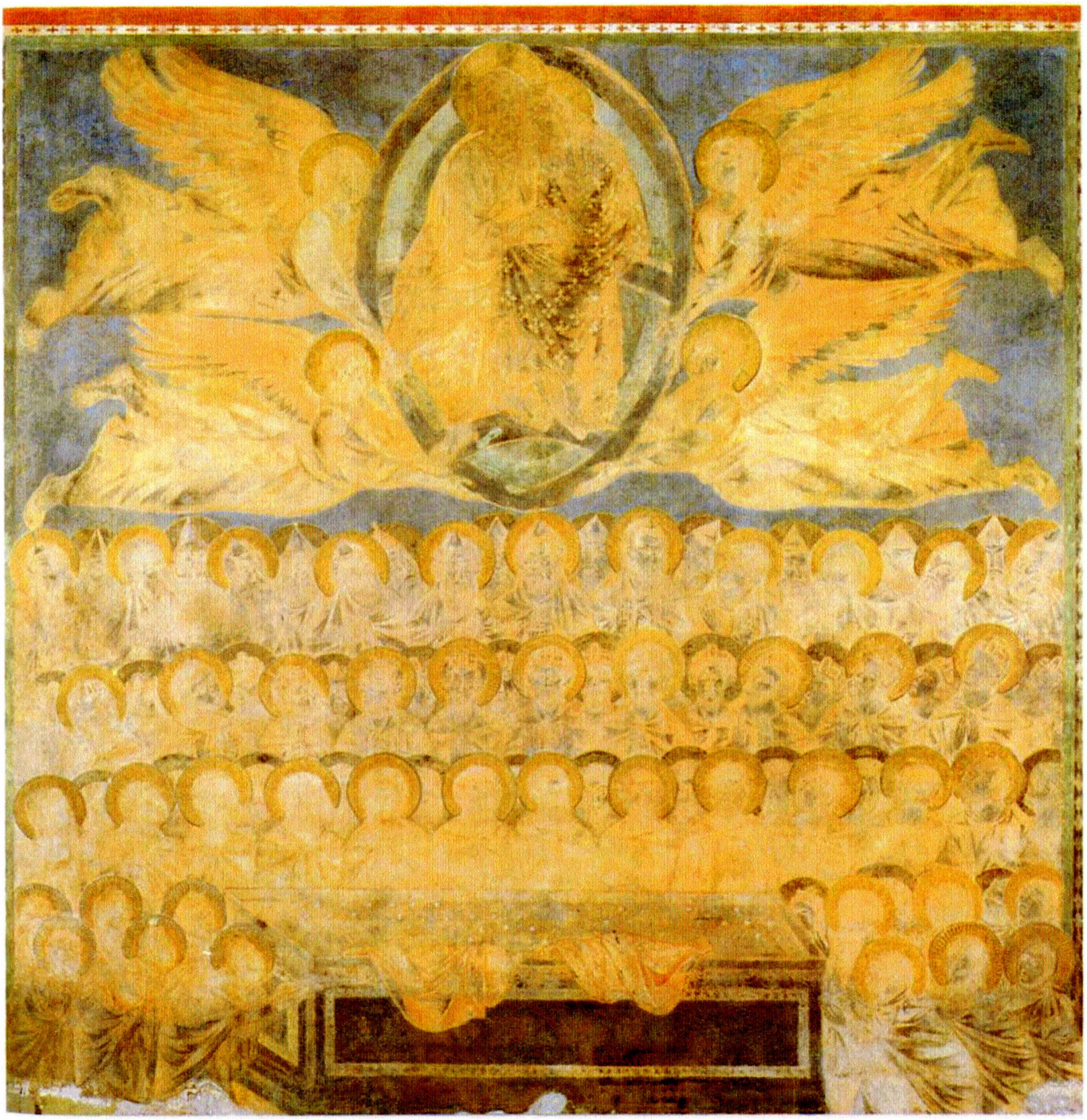


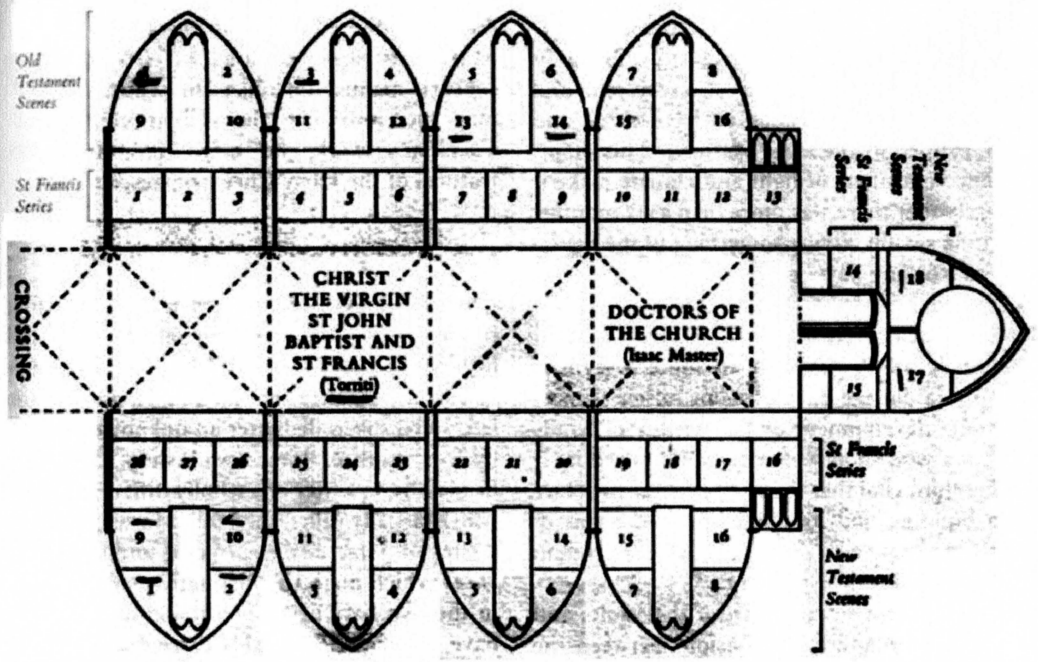
Plate 18

Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1310

Plate 19

Floor Plan
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1310

114. **Assisi, S. Francesco, upper church, scheme of decoration of the nave**



THE LEGEND OF ST FRANCIS

Right lower wall

1. St Francis and the Madman of Assisi
2. St Francis giving away his Cloak
3. Dream of the Palace
4. St Francis before the Crucifix in S. Damiano
5. St Francis repudiating his Father
6. Dream of Innocent III
7. Confirmation of the Rule
8. Vision of the Fiery Chariot
9. Vision of Fra Leone
10. St Francis and the Demons at Arezzo
11. Trial by Fire
12. St Francis in Ecstasy
13. Institution of the Crib at Greccio

Entrance wall

14. Miracle of the Spring
15. Preaching to the Birds

Left lower wall

16. Death of the Knight of Celano
17. St Francis preaching before Honorius III
18. Apparition at Arles
19. Stigmatization
20. Death of St Francis
21. Apparitions of St Francis
22. Funeral of St Francis
23. Mourning of the Clares
24. Canonization of St Francis
25. Dream of Gregory IX
26. Healing of the Man of Ilerda
27. Resuscitation of a Woman
28. Liberation of Peter the Heretic

Plate 20

Filippo Rusuti
Creation of the World
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1290

Plate 21

Jacopo Torriti
Deesis Vault
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1290

Plate 22

Jacopo Torriti
Feast at Cana
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1290

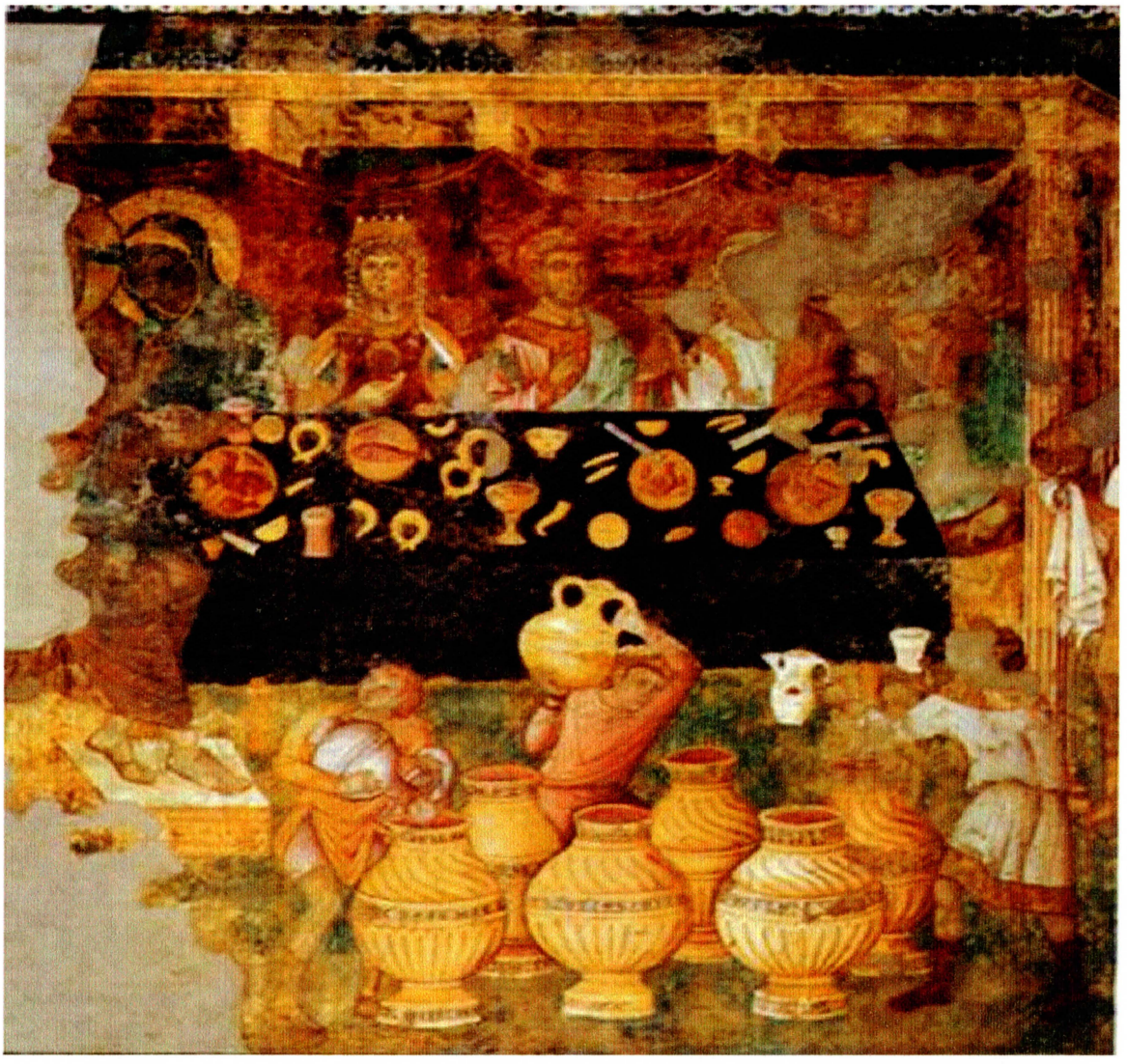


Plate 23

St. Cecilia
Apse Mosaic
Santa Cecilia, Rome
c. 800-815

Plate 24

Jacopo Torriti
Kiss of Judas
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1290

Plate 25

Jacopo Torriti
Creation of Eve
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1290

Plate 26

Jacopo Torriti
Deesis
Mosaic
Apse, St. John Lateran, Rome
1290-1295

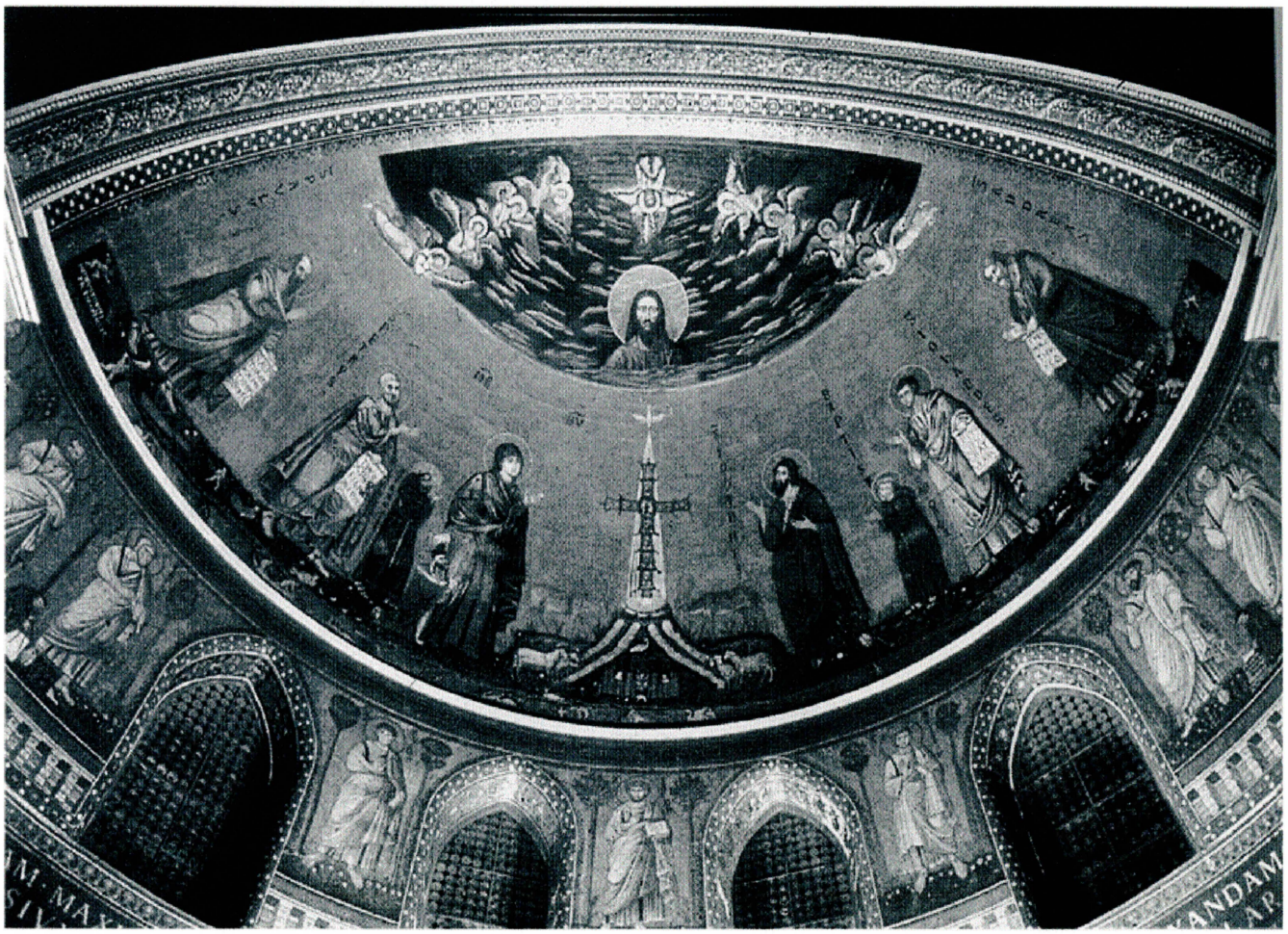


Plate 27

Jacopo Torriti
Builder (Frater Jacopo Camerino)
Apse Mosaic
St. John Lateran, Rome
1290-1295

Plate 28

Jacopo Torriti
Artist (Jacopo Torriti?)
Apse Mosaic
St. John Lateran, Rome
1290-1295

Plate 29

Cimabue
Martyrdom of St. Peter
Fresco
Sancta Sanctorum, Rome
1278-1280

Plate 30

Jacopo Torriti
Angel
Fresco
Sancta Sanctorum, Rome
1278-1280

Plate 31

Figures from the Harrowing of Hell
Wolfenbuttel
Pattern Book
c. 1200

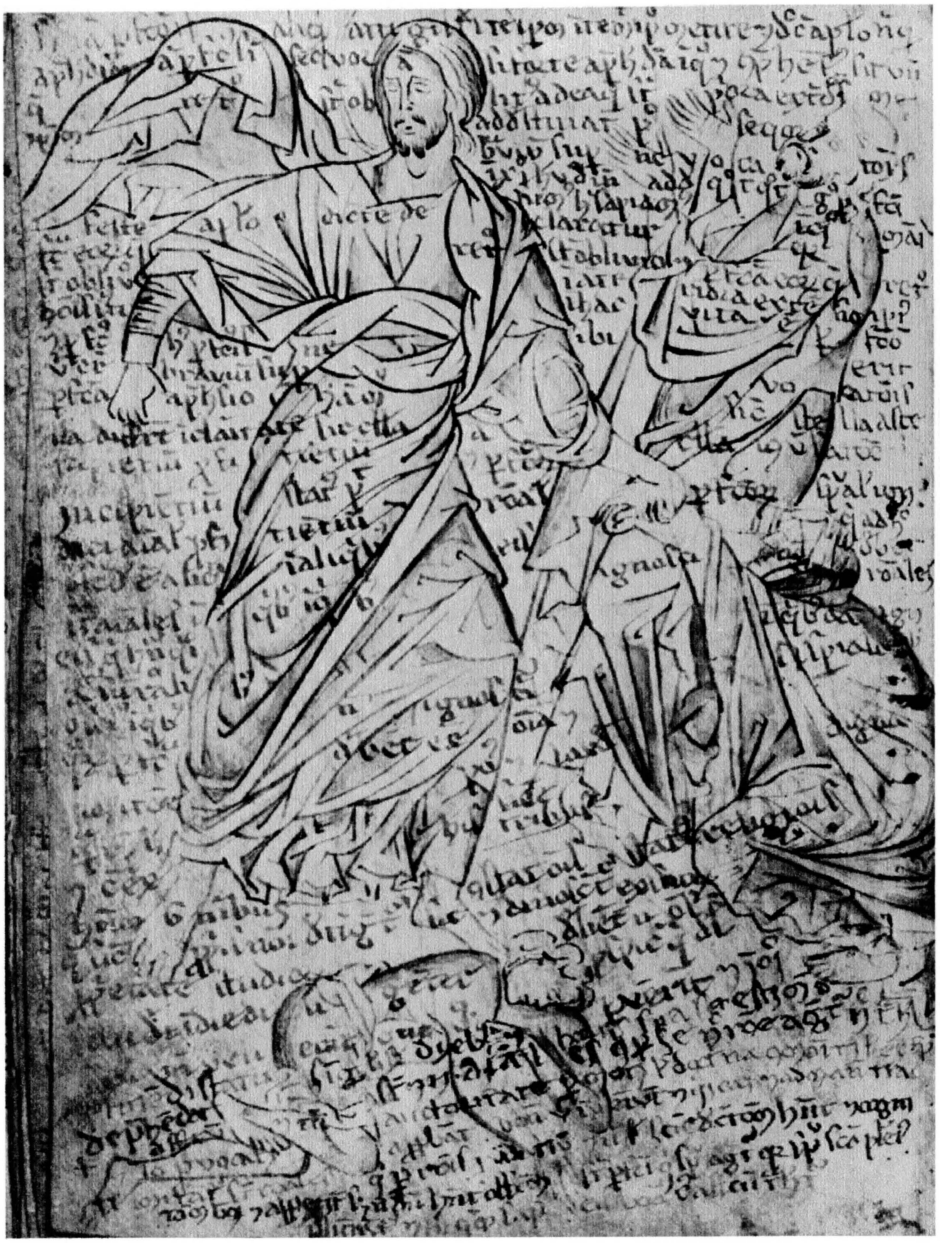


Plate 32

Deesis
Mosaic
Hagia Sophia
Constantinople
1263-1265

Plate 33

St. John Lateran, exterior
Photo: 2000

Plate 34

Jacopo Torriti
Deesis
Mosaic
Apse, St. John Lateran, Rome
1290-1295

Plate 35

Processional Cross (back)
St. John Lateran
Silver guilt, five feet
1285-1300

Plate 36

Jacopo Torriti
Christ Pantocrator
Deesis Vault
Fresco
Upper Basilica nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1288-1290

Plate 37

Santa Maria Maggiore, façade
Photo: 2000

Plate 38

Jacopo Torriti
Coronation of the Virgin
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

Plate 39

Jacopo Torriti
Coronation of the Virgin (Close up)
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

Plate 40

Jacopo Torriti
Pope Nicholas IV and Saints (close up)
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

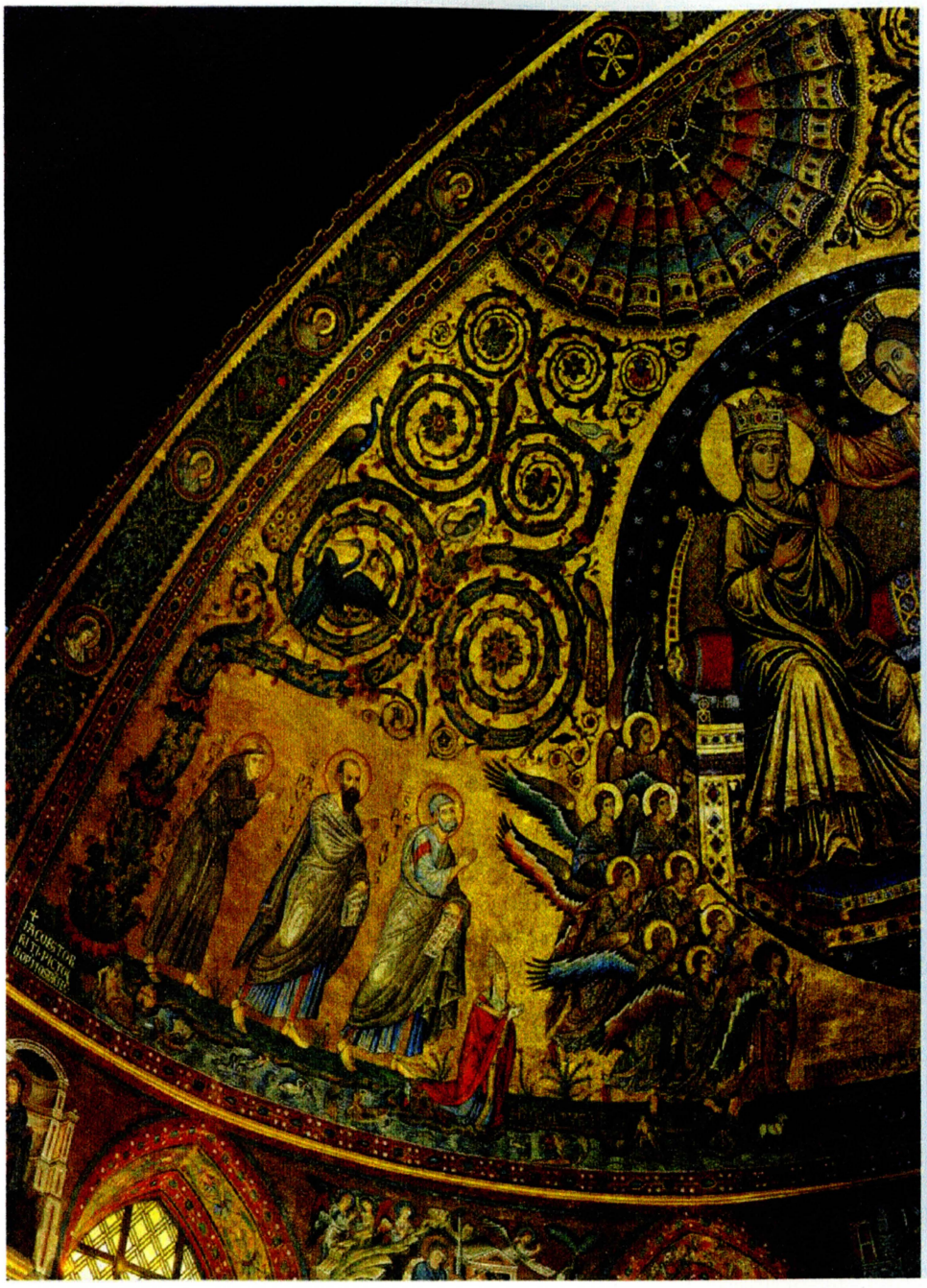


Plate 41

Jacopo Torriti
St. Jerome Reading to Paula and Eustochium
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

Plate 42

Jacopo Torriti
Annunciation (Life of the Virgin)
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

Plate 43

Jacopo Torriti
Nativity (Life of the Virgin)
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

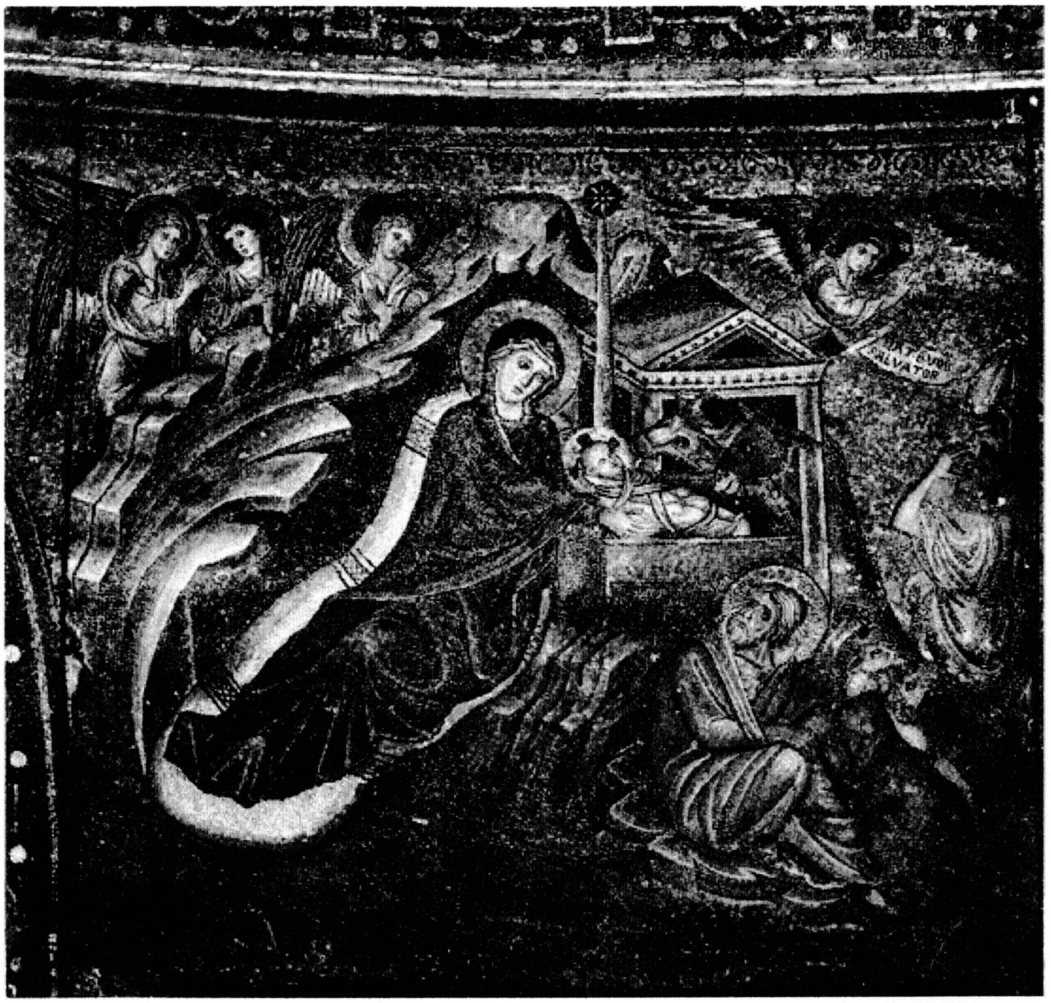


Plate 44

Jacopo Torriti
Adoration of the Magi (Life of the Virgin)
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

Plate 45

Jacopo Torriti
Presentation (Life of the Virgin)
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

Plate 46

Jacopo Torriti
Dormition (Life of the Virgin)
Apse Mosaic
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1291-1295

Plate 47

Cimabue
Dormition Window
Siena Duomo
1287-1288

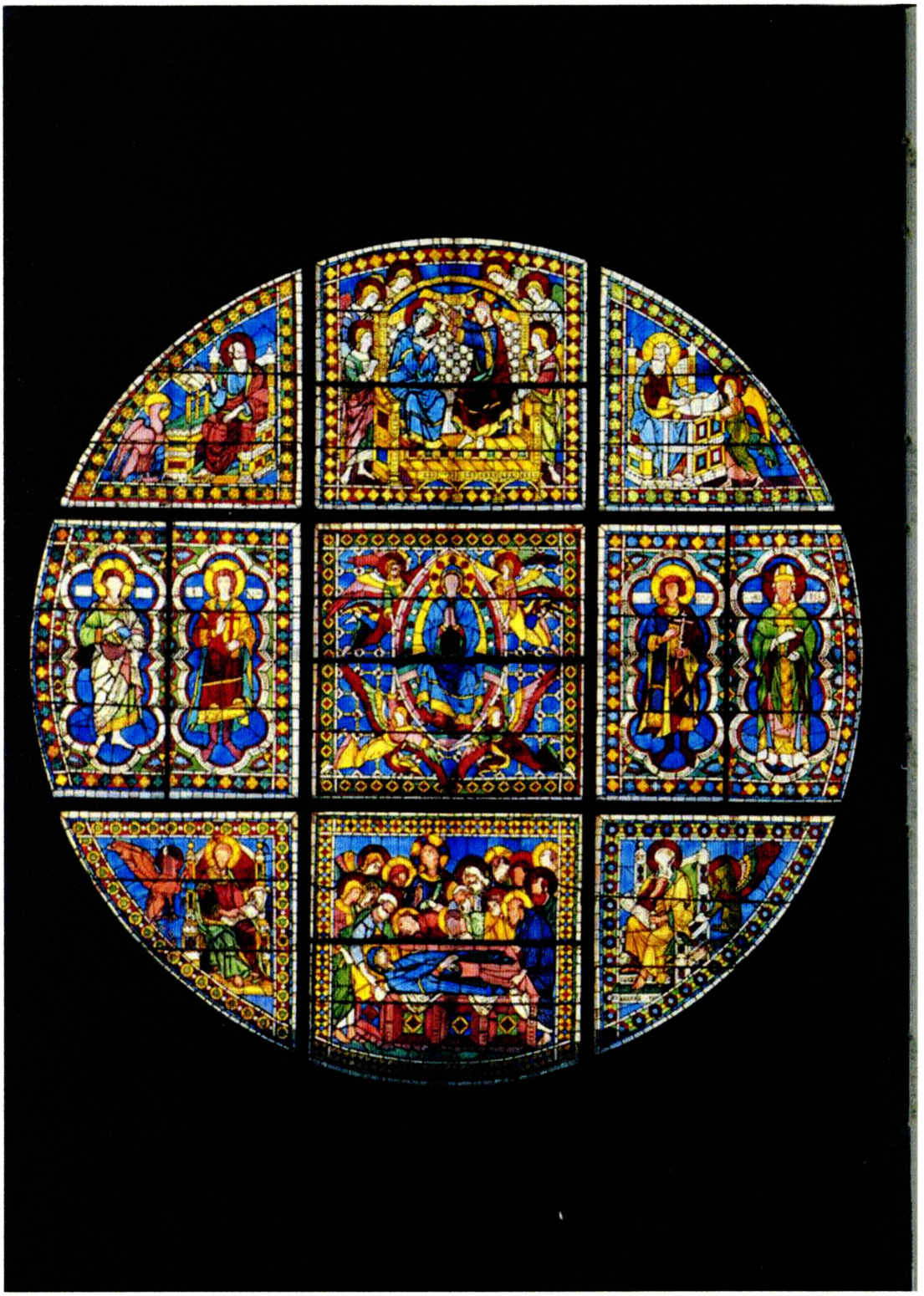


Plate 48

Presentation of Monreale to the Virgin
Mosaic
Monreale, Sicily
1180-1200

Plate 49

Virgin Enthroned
Mosaic
Monreale, Sicily
1180-1200

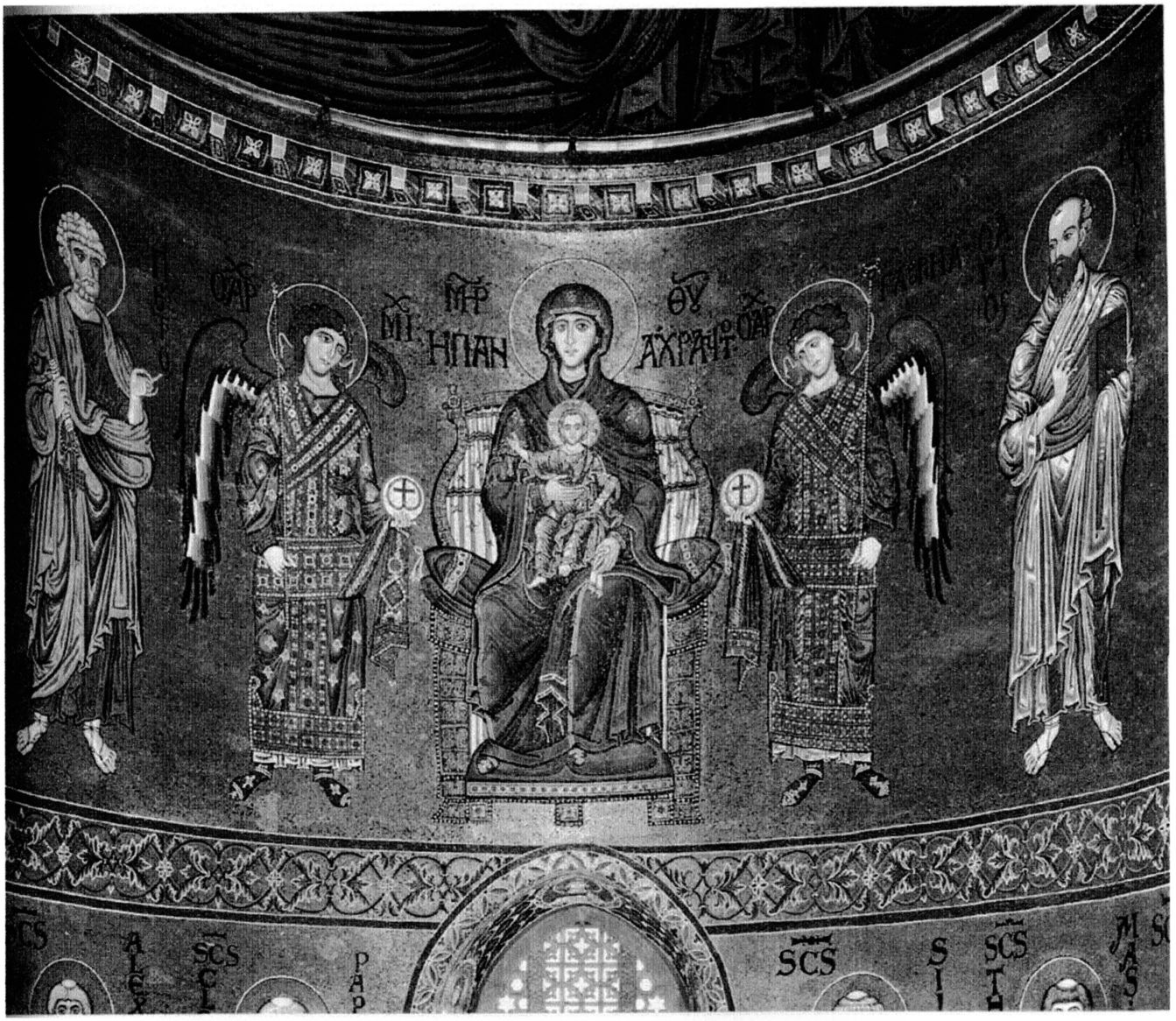


Plate 50

Coronation of William II by Christ
Mosaic
Monreale, Sicily
1180-1200

Plate 51

Coronation of Roger II by Christ
Mosaic
Palatine Chapel, Palermo, Sicily
1140's

Plate 52

Virgin and Christ Enthroned
Mosaic
Apse, Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome
1143

Plate 53

Virgin and Child with
Scenes of the Virgin's Life
Painting on Panel
c. 12th century

Plate 54

Pietro Cavallini
Annunciation
Apse Mosaic
Sta. Maria in Trastevere, Rome
1295

Plate 55

Pietro Cavallini
Nativity
Apse Mosaic
Sta. Maria in Trastevere, Rome
1295

Plate 56

Pietro Cavallini
Adoration of the Magi
Apse Mosaic
Sta. Maria in Trastevere, Rome
1295

Plate 57

Pietro Cavallini
Presentation
Apse Mosaic
Sta. Maria in Trastevere, Rome
1295

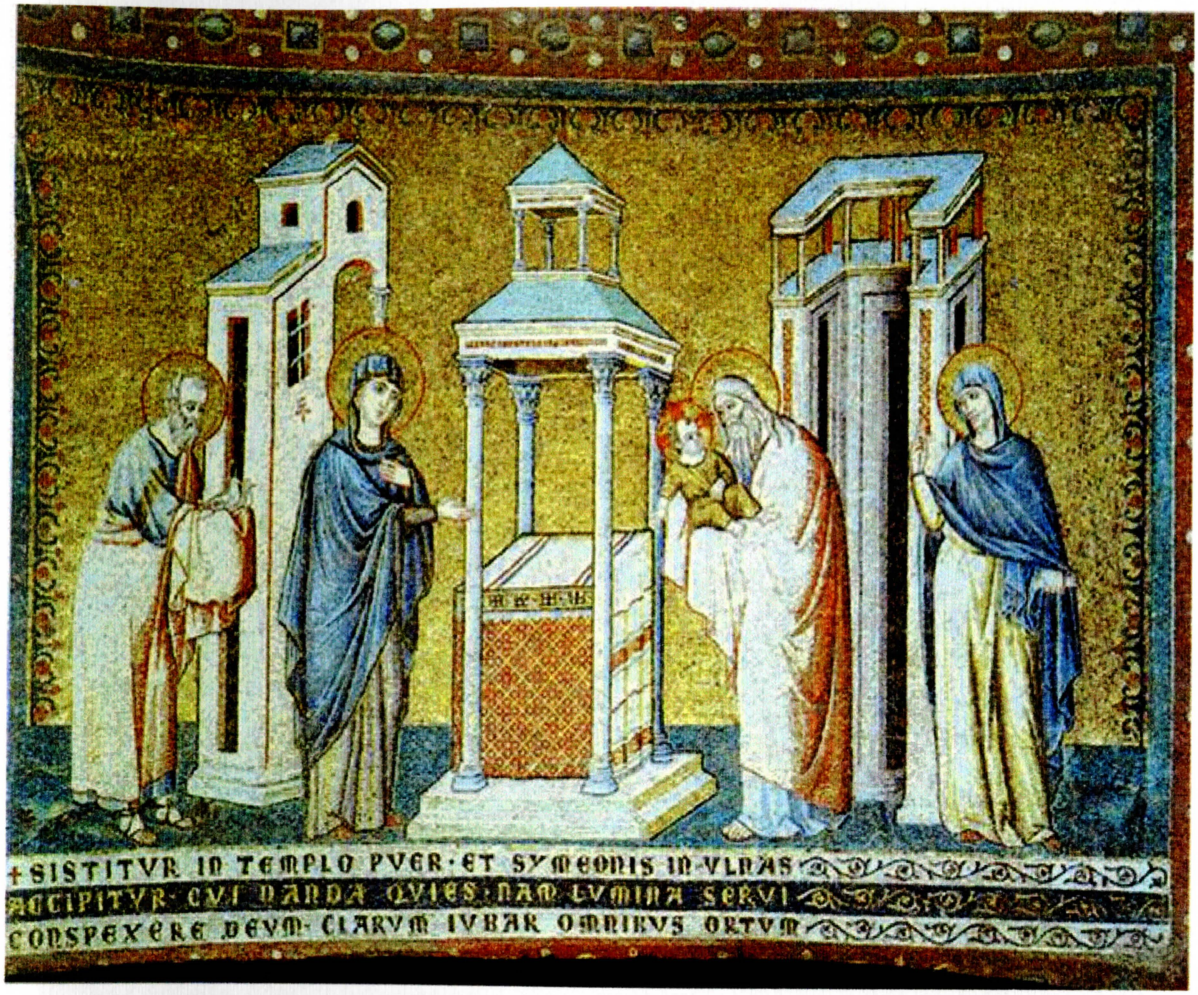


Plate 58

Pietro Cavallini
Dormition
Apse Mosaic
Sta. Maria in Trastevere, Rome
1295

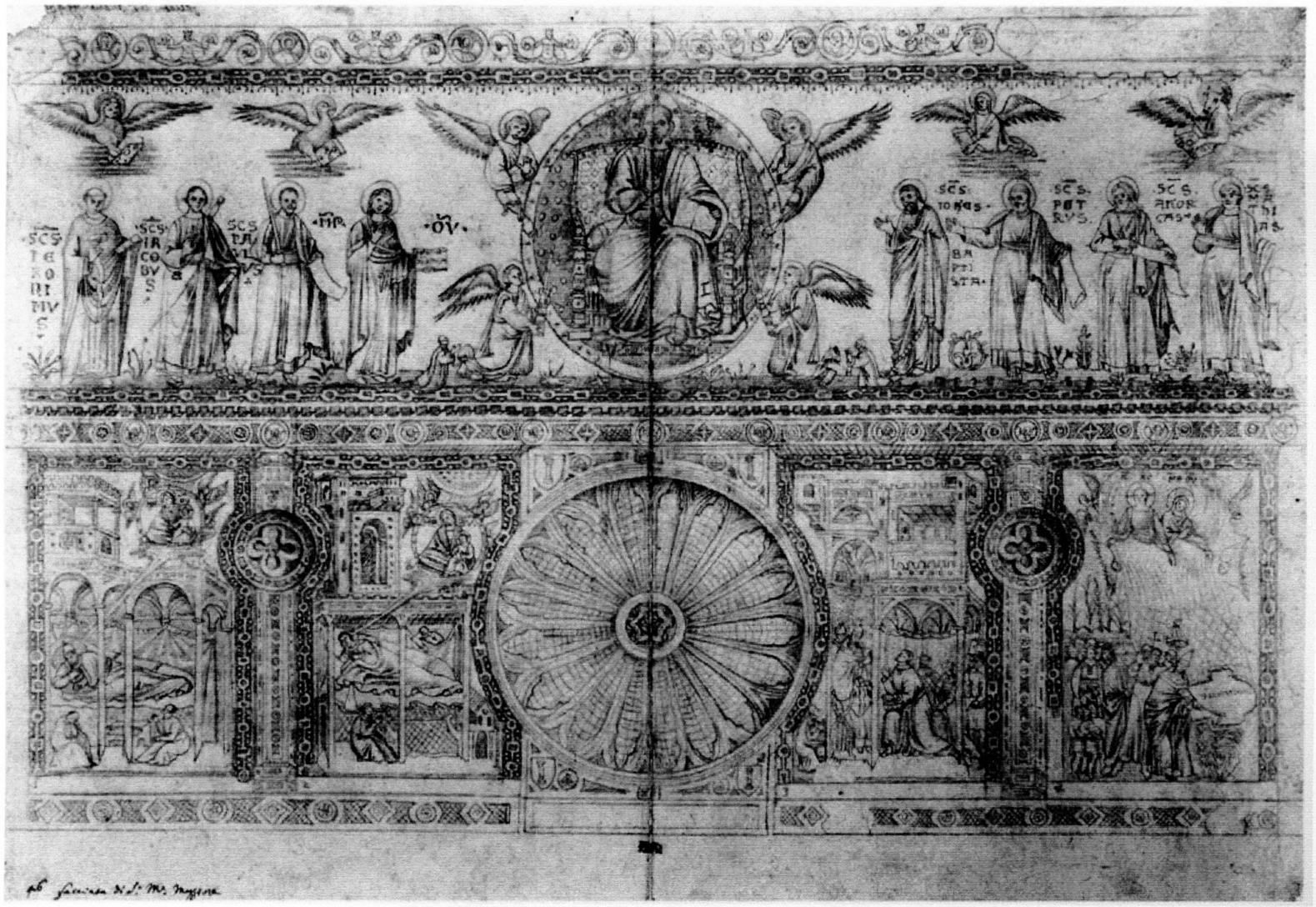


Plate 59

Drawing After Filippo Rusuti
Façade, Santa Maria Maggiore
(Originally) Mosaic

Plate 60

Dream of Pope Liberius
Façade Mosaic, Lower Zone
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
c. 1306

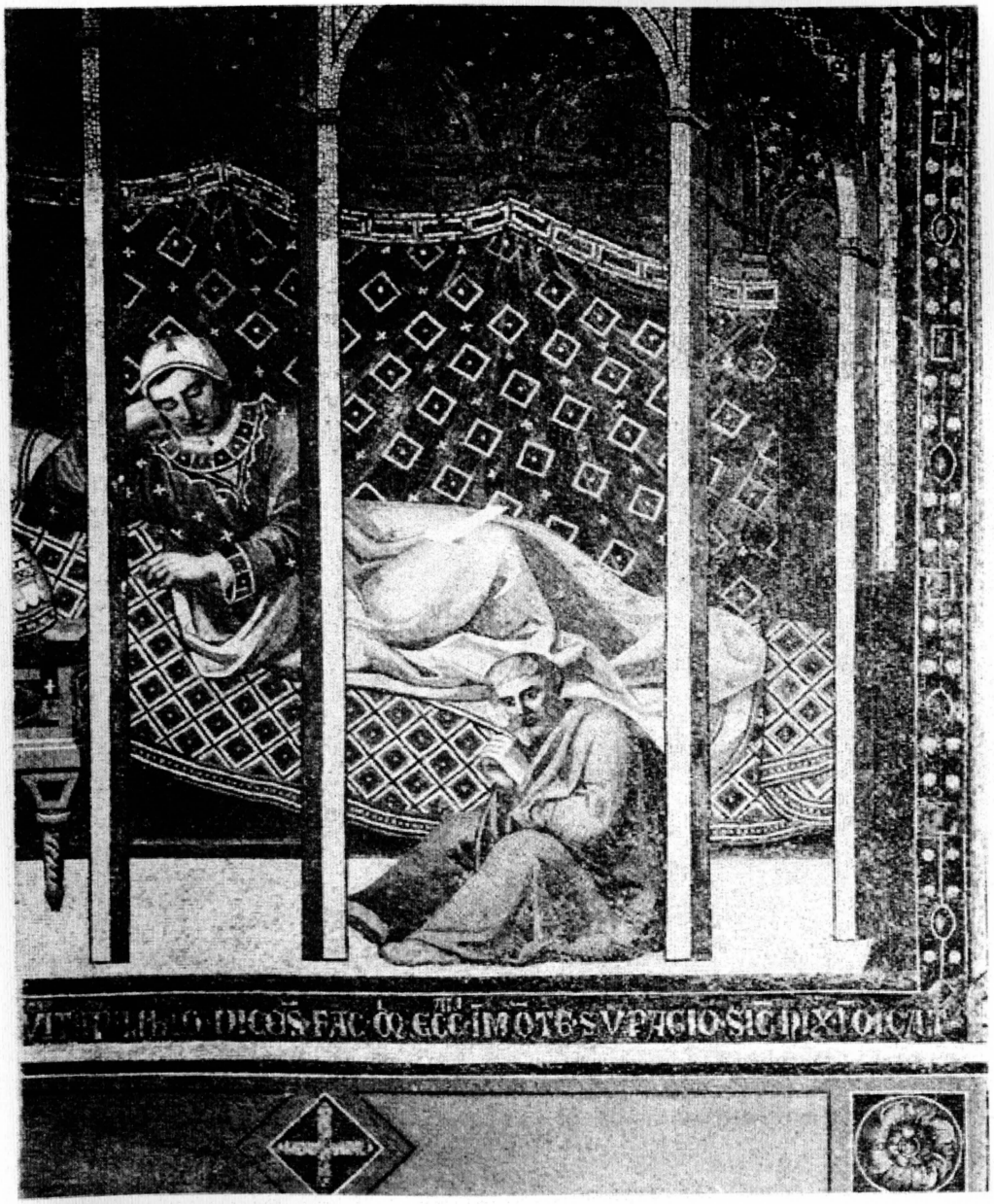


Plate 61

Dream of John the Patrician
Façade Mosaic, Lower Zone
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
c. 1306

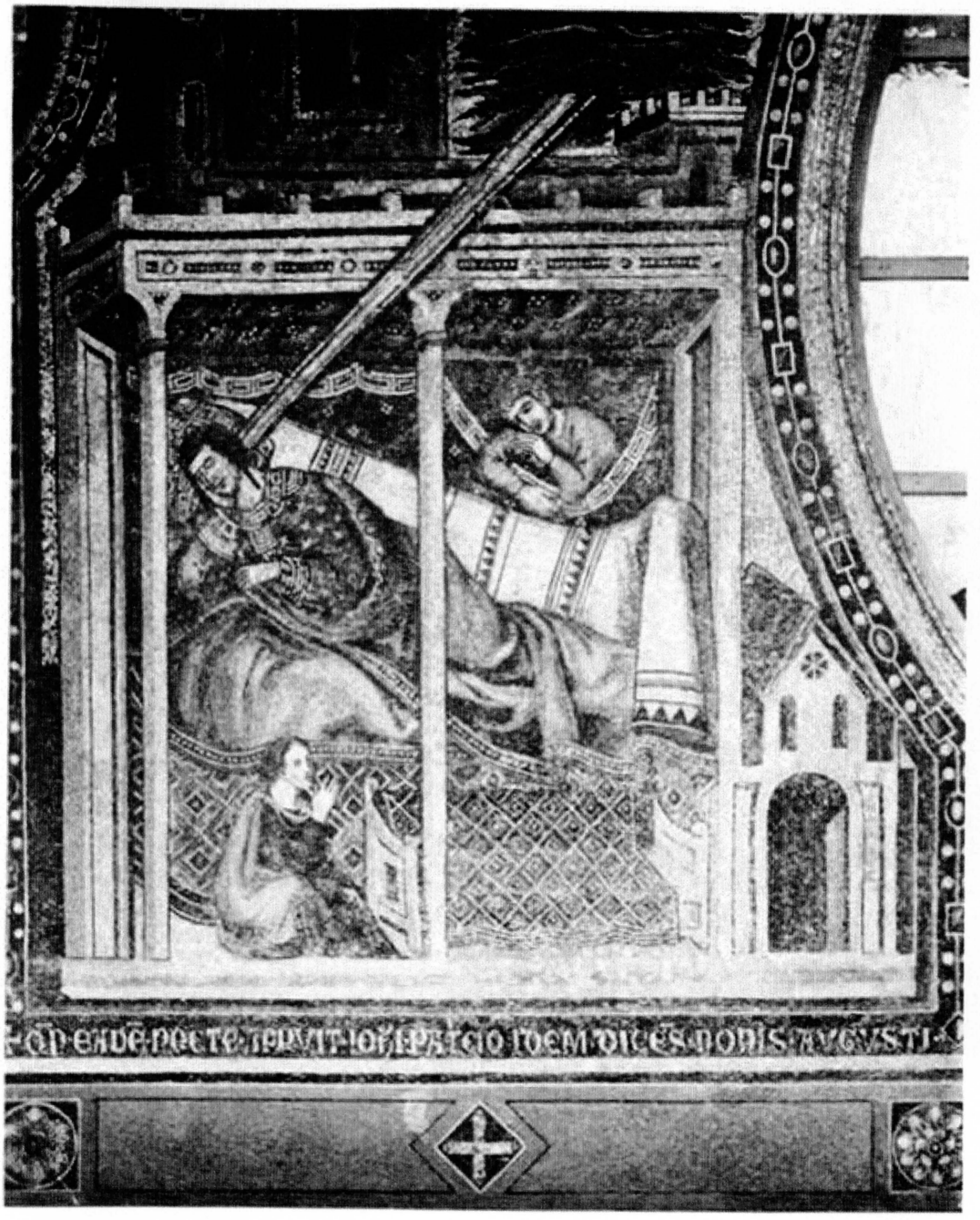


Plate 62

John before Liberius
Façade Mosaic, Lower Zone
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
c. 1306

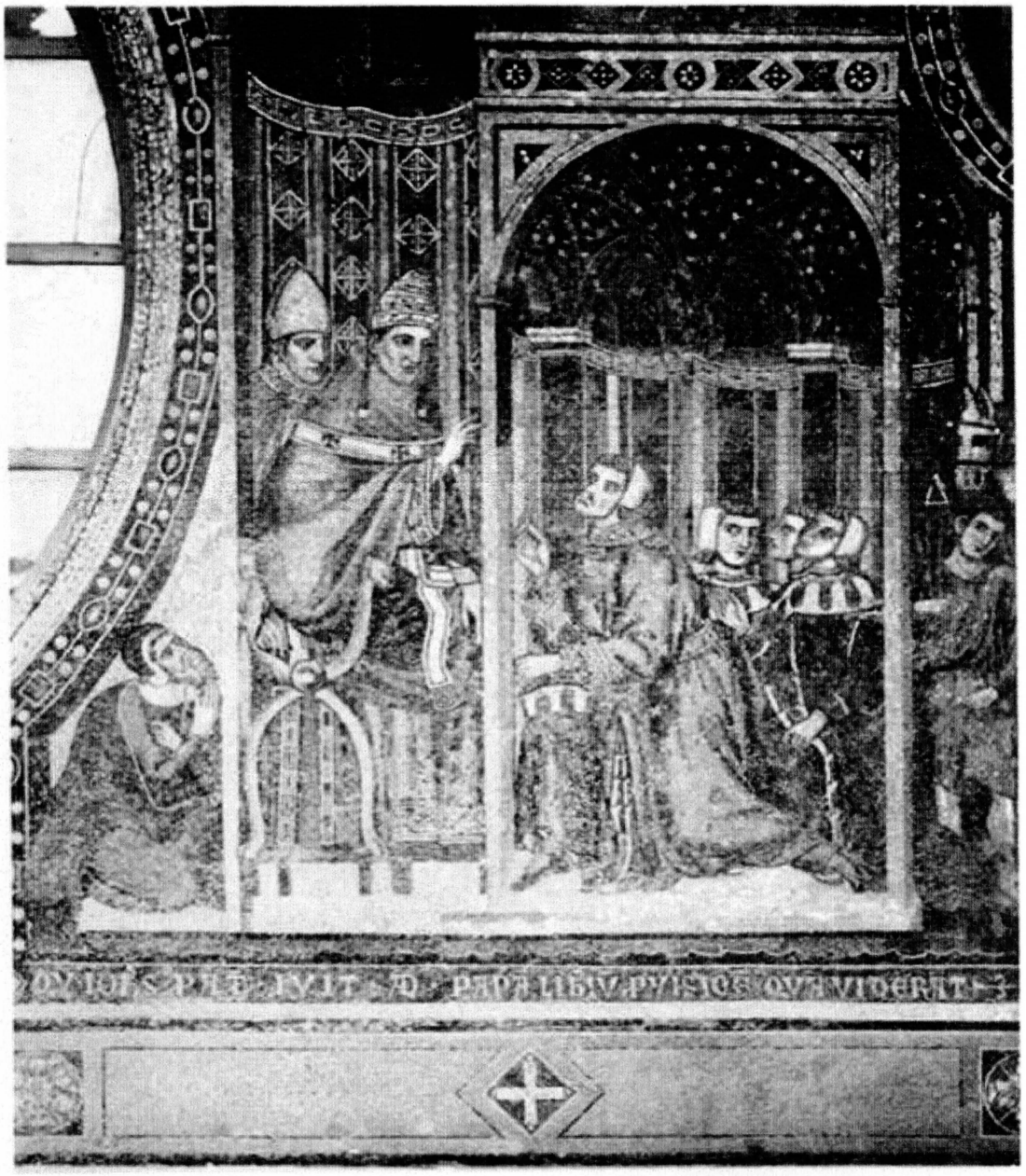


Plate 63

Founding of the Basilica
Façade Mosaic, Lower Zone
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
c. 1306

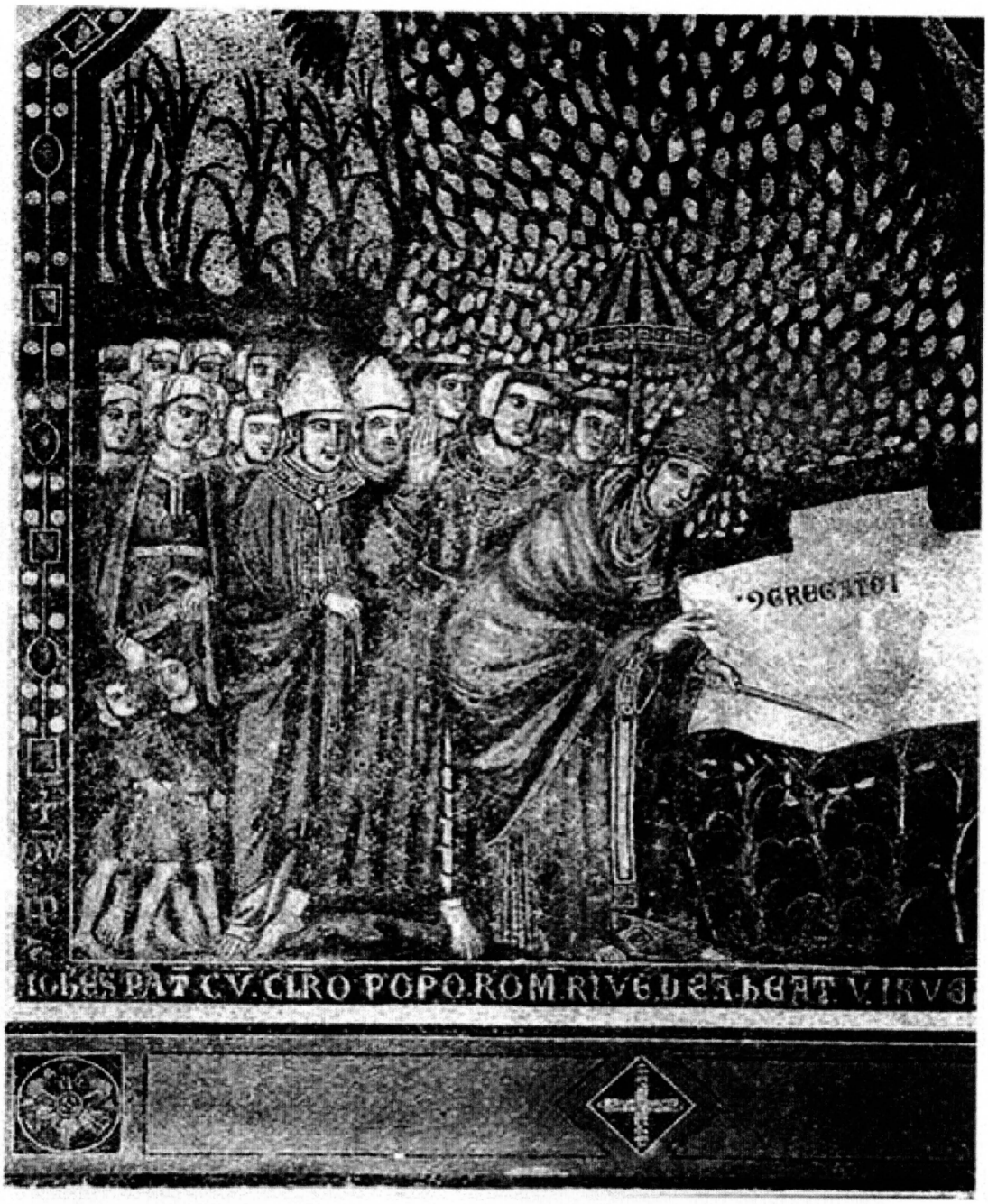


Plate 64

Filippo Rusuti
Christ Pantrocrator
Façade Mosaic, Upper Zone
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1292-1295

Plate 65

Filippo Rusuti
Flanking Saints
Façade Mosaic, Upper Zone
Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome
1292-1295

Plate 66

St. Francis Master
The Vision of the Palace
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1297-1310

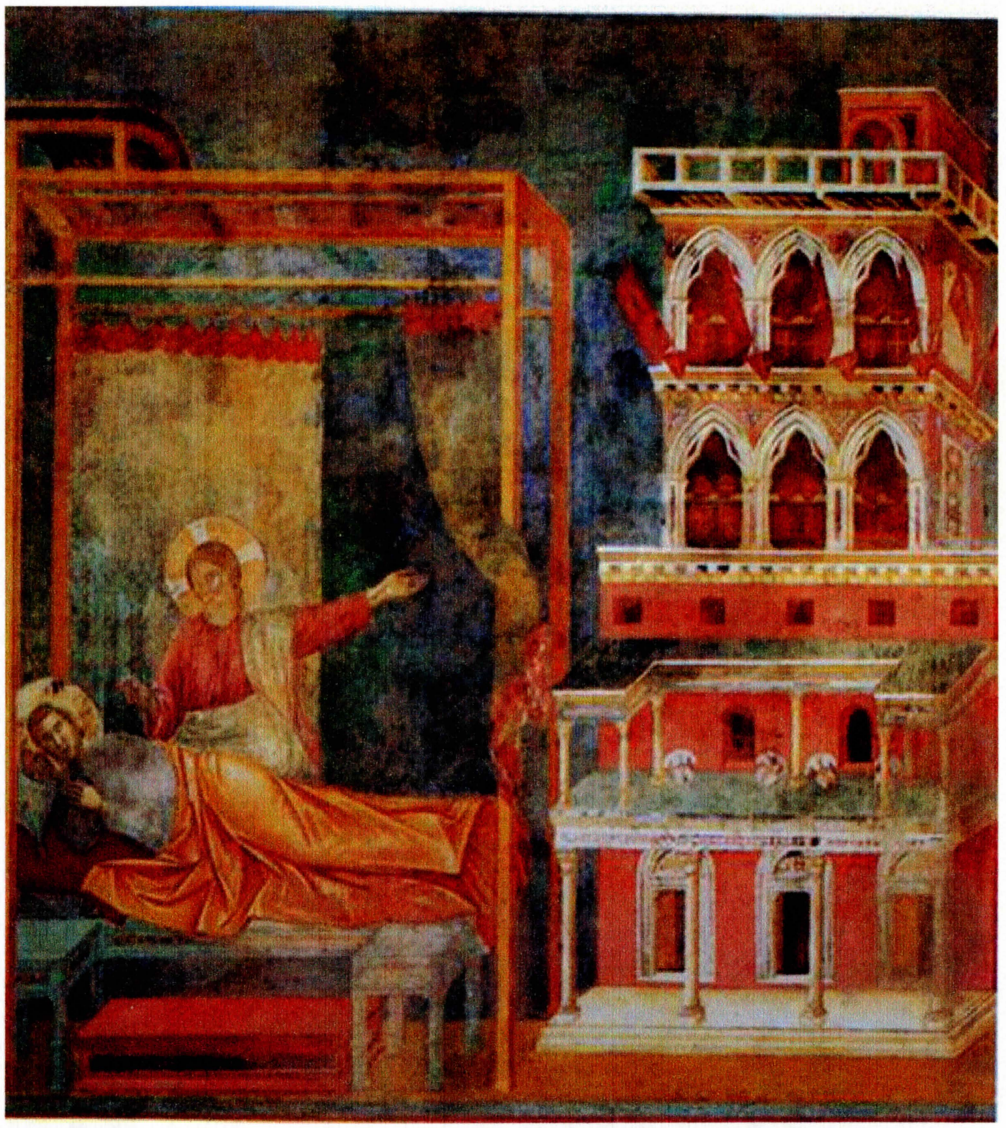


Plate 67

St. Francis Master
Dream of Innocent III
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1297-1310

Plate 68

St. Francis Master
Dream of Gregory IX
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1297-1310

Plate 69

St. Francis Master
Confirmation of the Rule
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Francesco, Assisi
1297-1310

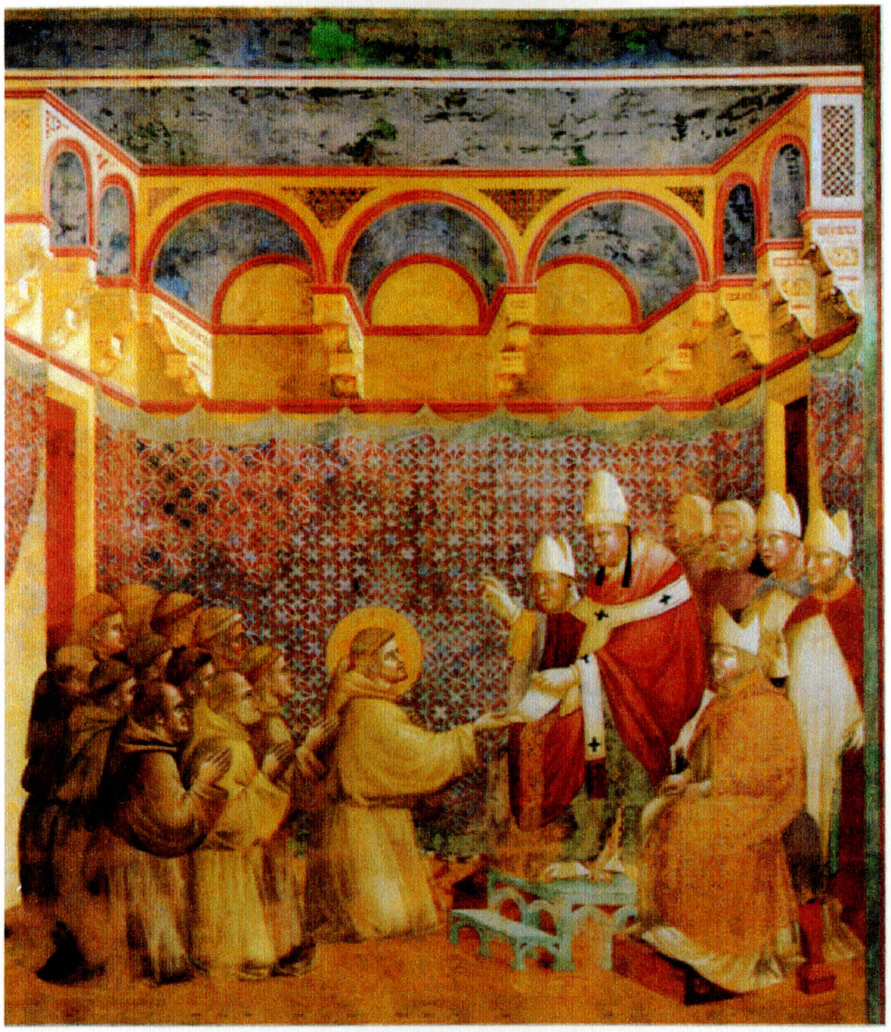


Plate 70

St. Francis Master
Renunciation of his Inheritance
Fresco
Upper Basilica Nave
San Franneso, Assisi
1297-1310