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HEFT I

1 Lorenzo Monaco, *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ*, before 1402. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

NATURAL CALAMITIES, LITANY, AND BANNERS
THE *INTERCESSION OF THE VIRGIN AND CHRIST* IN FOURTEENTH- AND FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLORENCE

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The performativity of images has attracted increasing interest in art history and related fields, across diverse periods and cultures, and has proven particularly ripe for transdisciplinary research exploring how artworks participated in complex ritual activities, offering multisensorial experiences.[1] Within the study of Italian Renaissance art, the performative roles ascribed to mobile images – although long outside the traditional concerns of the discipline – have had a particular fortune in relation to monumental processional banners painted on cloth supports (*gonfaloni*), with a relatively high survival rate for those made in Umbria, the so-called plague pictures (or *Pestbilder*) carried through cities in times of need.[2] Yet the great variety of images recorded to have been processed through the streets in times of plague or natural disaster attests

[1] Among the vast literature on this topic see, for example, *La performance des images*, ed. by Alain Dierkens/Gil Bartholeyns/Thomas Golsenne, Brussels 2010. On performativity, see Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, London/New York [2]2006 ([1]2002). On the performative turn, see Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, Berlin/Boston 2016, pp. 73–101. On moving images, see in particular Johannes Tripps, *Das handelnde Bildwerk in der Gotik: Forschungen zu den Bedeutungsschichten und der Funktion des Kirchengebäudes und seiner Ausstattung in der Hoch- und Spätgotik*, Berlin [2]2000 ([1]1998); Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon", in: *The Art Bulletin*, LXXXVIII (2006), pp. 631–655; and, more recently, *eadem*, "Performative Images and Cosmic Sound in the Exultet Liturgy of Southern Italy", in: *Speculum*, XCV (2020), pp. 396–466. See also the essays in *Meaning in Motion: The Semantics of Movement in Medieval Art*, conference proceedings Kalamazoo 2007, ed. by Nino M. Zchomelidse, Princeton 2011.

[2] Important works include: Raymond Crawfurd, *Plague and Pestilence in Literature and Art*, Oxford 1914, pp. 136–150; Francesco Santi, *Gonfaloni umbri del Rinascimento*, Perugia 1976; Louise Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, XLVII (1994), pp. 485–532; *eadem*, "Confraternity and Community: Mobilizing the Sacred in Times of Plague", in: *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Barbara Wisch/Diane Cole Ahl, Cambridge 2000, pp. 20–45; Michael Bury, "The Fifteenth- and Early Sixteenth-Century *Gonfaloni* of Perugia", in: *Renaissance Studies*, XII (1998), pp. 67–86; Pascale Rihouet, *Art Moves: The Material Culture of Procession in Renaissance Perugia*, Turnhout 2017, esp. pp. 167–226. The study of processional banners in

to the deep-rooted and widespread practice of collectively soliciting the divine in times of crisis.[3] Within the Western Christian tradition, the Marian icons of Rome are often viewed as the quintessential model, with special emphasis given to Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century account in the *Golden Legend* (*Legenda aurea*) of the procession made by Pope Gregory the Great during the plague of 590 in Rome, accompanied by an image of the Virgin.[4] According to the Dominican friar, this event directly linked to the Major or Greater Litany on 25 April – a liturgical feast believed to have roots in the ancient Roman *Robigalia*, a procession aimed at placating the god Robigus to protect the harvest during springtime.[5] Such rituals implicating and imploring images continue in our own times. A poignant reminder, broadcast throughout the world in March 2020 at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, is Pope Francis praying before the fourteenth-century crucifix of San Marcello al Corso, Rome – brought especially to the Vatican for the occasion –, a wooden image that had been used to invoke God's protection against the plague in the same city in 1522 (Fig. 2).

The crucifix of San Marcello's use during a sixteenth-century plague and its devotional relevance still five hundred years later raises important issues about the efficacy, activation, and temporality of such images. It provides a starting point for the analysis of the work at the core of this article, the so-called *Double Intercession* or *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ*, a cloth painting from Florence, attributed to Lorenzo Monaco (fl. 1390s–1423/24) and dating from the last decade of the fourteenth century, today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fig. 1).[6] While the *Intercession* has never been explicitly iden-

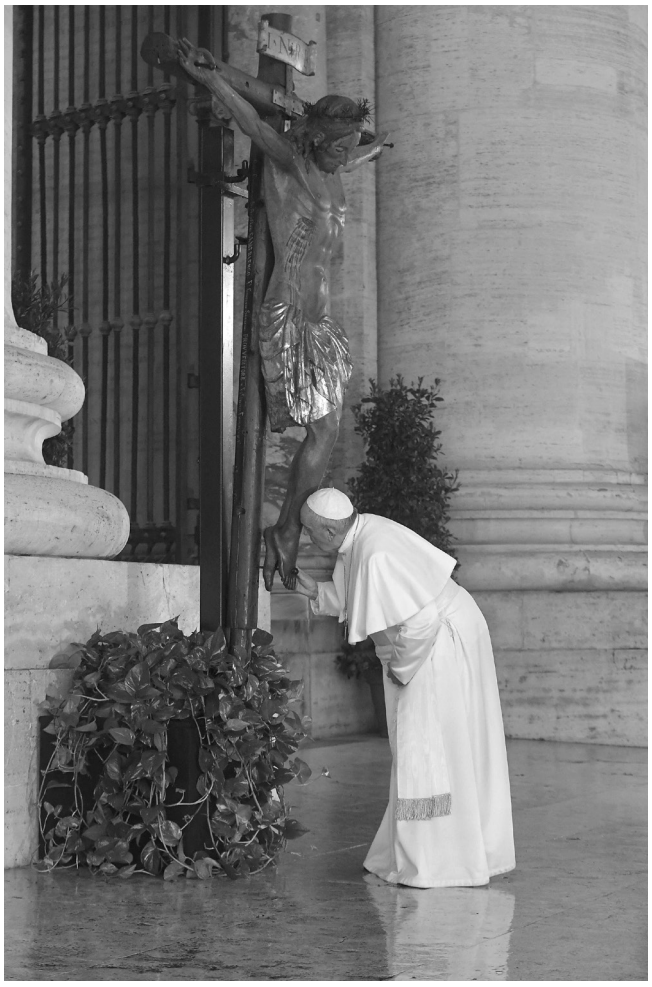
other parts of Italy continues to grow; see Victor Schmidt, *Stendardi e gonfaloni processionali dalle Marche: tardo Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Fermignano 2020. For consideration of banners in relation to plague and music, see Remi Chiu, *Plague and Music in the Renaissance*, Cambridge 2017, esp. pp. 139–181. On the use of the term *Pestbild*, see Avraham Ronen, "Gozzoli's St. Sebastian Altarpiece in San Gimignano", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, XXXII (1988), pp. 77–126: 77.

[3] Louise Marshall, "Epidemics and Religion: From Angry Gods and Offended Ancestors to Hungry Ghosts and Hostile Demons", in: *SHERM Journal*, III (2021), pp. 97–117. Two seminal studies on procession and images in Renaissance Italy are Richard C. Trexler, "The Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image", in: *Studies in the Renaissance*, XIX (1972), pp. 7–41, and Edward Muir, "The Eye of the Procession: Ritual Ways of Seeing in the Renaissance", in: *Ceremonial Culture in Pre-Modern Europe*, ed. by Nicholas Howe, Notre Dame 2007, pp. 132–153. On the topic, more generally, see *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley/Wim Hüsken, Amsterdam 2001. For an example of a silk banner as a site of transcultural exchange, see Michelle C. Wang/Xin Wen/Susan Whitfield, "Buddhism and Silk: Reassessing a Painted Banner from Medieval Central Asia in The Met", in: *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, LV (2022), pp. 8–25.

[4] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by Granger Ryan, Princeton 1995, I, pp. 174 and 286. Jacobus explicitly identifies the image of the Virgin as the one from Santa Maria Maggiore. On the Roman Madonnas, see esp. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago 1994, esp. pp. 311–329; Gerhard Wolf, "Icons and Sites: Cult Images of the Virgin in Mediaeval Rome", in: *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, conference proceedings Athens 2001, ed. by Maria Vasilaki, Aldershot 2005, pp. 23–49; and Rihouet (note 2), p. 171. On the origins of the Greater or Major Litany: Joseph Dyer, "Roman Processions of the Major Litany (*litaniae maiores*) from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century", in: *Roma Felix – Formation and Reflections of Medieval Rome*, ed. by Éamonn Ó Carragáin/Carol Neuman de Vegvar, Aldershot 2007, pp. 113–137; Jacob A. Latham, "The Making of a Papal Rome: Gregory I and the *letania septiformis*", in: *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Andrew Cain/Noel Lenski, Farnham 2009, pp. 293–304. See also John Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*, Rome 1987, pp. 158f.

[5] Jacobus de Voragine (note 4), I, pp. 174 and 286. On the ancient Roman roots of the feast, see Michel Huglo *et al.*, *s.v.* Litany, in: *Grove Music Online*, Oxford 2001, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.16769 (accessed on 8 September 2023).

[6] The attribution to Lorenzo Monaco is accepted in the scholarship. For the attribution history, see Simona Pasquinucci/Barbara Deimling, *Tradition and Innovation in Florentine Trecento Painting: Giovanni Bonsi – Tommaso del Mazza*, ed. by Miklós Boskovits, Florence 2000 (A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting, IV.8), pp. 360–363, and Luciano Bellosi, in: *Lorenzo Monaco: dalla tradizione giottesca al Rinascimento*, exh. cat., ed. by Angelo Tartuferi/Daniela Parenti, Florence 2006, pp. 161–166, no. 22. Charlotte Hale dated it to the early to mid-1390s, and the later part of this range of years is probable ("The Technique and Materials of the *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* Attributed to Lorenzo Monaco", in: *The Fabric of Images: European Paintings on Textile Supports in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, conference proceedings London 1998, ed. by Caroline Villers, London 2000, pp. 31–41: 32). In his monograph on the artist, Marvin Eisenberg places the painting in the last decades of the fourteenth century in the "Milieu of the San Gaggio Altarpiece": *Lorenzo Monaco*, Princeton 1989, pp. 174, 177, 185f., 194, 198, fig. 234.



2 Pope Francis praying before the miraculous crucifix from San Marcello al Corso, Rome, Saint Peter's, 27 March 2020

tified as a plague picture, it is often illustrated as an early forerunner of these monumental processional banners, with their imagery invoking saints and especially the Virgin for protection on behalf of a suffering community.[7] In 1922, Tancred Borenius, in the first art historical publication on the *Intercession*, already referred to it as a processional banner.[8] This status, however, has been the subject of debate up to the present. Thus, one century after Borenius's proposal, the moment seems to have come to revisit the question and to offer new evidence in its favor.

This article reconsiders the painting's scene of intercession in relation to the *Golden Legend*, a compilation of saints' lives and feasts arranged according to their celebration within the Christian liturgical year. While scholars have connected the text in the *Golden Legend*, more generally, to its iconography, I argue that its precise location within the feast of the Ascension provides a new understanding of the *Intercession*'s imagery in relation to liturgical processions and crisis. Furthermore, I propose that the highly sophisticated use of text and image in the *Intercession* might be

[7] Ronen (note 2), pp. 99–108; Marshall 1994 (note 2), p. 527, note 92.

[8] Tancred Borenius, "A Florentine Mystical Picture", in: *The Burlington Magazine*, XLI (1922), pp. 156–158: 156.

linked directly to its role in processions orchestrated by the cathedral authorities and leading citizens of Florence. Central to this hypothesis is the painting's theme, as it was understood in relation to liturgical and crisis processions in late fourteenth-century Florence. In particular, the form, placement, and language of the words painted on its surface resonate with the songs and sounds of litany. In the final part, I consider how the visual adaptations of the *Intercession* in the later fifteenth century refer to and expand upon the painting's multisensorial dimensions within the performative environment of the city.

The *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ*

The *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ*, measuring 239.4 × 153 cm, was painted on five pieces of linen stitched together and lined.[9] It presents a "mystical drama":[10] monumental kneeling figures of the Virgin and Christ appear on a platform pleading to God on behalf of eight devotees. Presented by the Virgin through the downward turn of her right hand, these figures gaze to Christ. With her left hand, the Virgin cups her right breast. Directly opposite and at the same level, Christ's extended index and middle fingers point toward the Virgin's breast, his thumb is parallel to an inscription just above it, his lower fingers elegantly curl upward, and the palm of his hand is exposed to reveal the stigmata. Christ's right hand points to his side wound, his longer fingers brushing its inner edge. He gazes upward, where, emerging from lightly dispersed clouds and set against a band of six concentric rings representing heaven, God the Father tilts his head and blesses with his left hand. God's eyes are locked with those of Christ, forming a line with his extended right arm and outstretched palm, from which emanating rays of light unleash the dove of the Holy Spirit. Two distinct texts, at the center of the composition, executed in mordant gold gilding applied directly to the painted surface, present a dialogue in the first-person vernacular that complements and accentuates the flow of gestures and gazes. From left to right, at the level of the neck of Christ (Fig. 3) and extending to that of the Virgin are her words:

> DOLCIXIMO FIGLIUOLO PEL LAC[-]
> TE CHIO TIDIE ABBI MI(SERICORDI)A DI CHOSTORO
> (Sweetest Son, because of the milk that I gave you have mercy on them.)

Moving in the same direction, from Christ's mouth and directed diagonally towards God, we read:

> PADRE MIO SIENO SALVI CHOSTORO PEQUALI TU
> VOLESTI CHIO PATISSI PASSIONE
> (My Father, let those be saved for whom you wished that I suffer the passion.)

The content and formal arrangement of these words echo the exquisitely choreographed scene – one also orchestrated through color: the red robe of Christ recalling the blood of his sacrifice, the white robe of the Virgin the milk that nourished him. Together they create a triangular chain of interactions set in motion by the praying figures, a hierarchy of intercession that reads as a responsorial, a song of prayer and response.

Scholars have long pointed out that this is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, monumental representations of a theme of double intercession first

[9] On the painting, see most recently Bellosi (note 6).

[10] Borenius (note 8).

[11] Ernaldus of Chartres, "Libellus de Laudibus B. Mariae Virginis", in: *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, CLXXXIX, Paris 1890, cols. 1725–1734: 1726; *Speculum humanae salvationis*, ed. by Jules Lutz/Paul Perdrizet, Leipzig 1907, I, pp. 80f. (chap. 39). For the connection with these writings see, for example, Barbara G. Lane, "The 'Symbolic Crucifixion' in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves", in: *Oud-Holland*, LXXXVII (1973), pp. 4–26: 10–18, with further bibliography.

3 Lorenzo Monaco, *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ*, detail of Fig. 1

described in the twelfth century by Ernaldus of Chartres, abbot of Bonneval, that was, by the period of the image's creation, attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) and popularized in texts such as the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* and the fourteenth-century *Speculum humanae salvationis*.[11] In illuminated manuscripts of the latter, the intercession of the Virgin and Christ forms two distinct images. Thus, it has been noted also that the Florence painting is possibly the first image to combine the Virgin and Christ within a single composition.[12] Rather than pursue a list of 'firsts' related to this image (of which there are indeed many), let us consider what we know about its creation and early history.

Despite the still unsettled questions surrounding the painting's origins – that is, its commission and date of execution –, to which we shall return, the *Intercession* has a clear provenience: the cathedral of Florence. In 1757, Giuseppe Richa described the painting on the altar dedicated to the Trinity in the north chapel of the counter-façade of the city's cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore.[13] He identified the kneeling figure with the "toga rossa" (red cloak) as a representation of the "Gonfaloniere di Giustizia"

[12] A possible earlier candidate is the *Epitaph of Dr. Mengot*, dated 1370 (St. Marien und Jakobus, Heilsbronn). On the theme of the double intercession, see Lane (note 11), with discussion of this epitaph on pp. 16f., and Ronen (note 2), with discussion also of the previous literature on the *Intercession*. See further Susan Marti/Daniela Mondini, "'Ich manen dich der brüsten min, Das du dem sünder wellest milte sin!': Marienbrüste und Marienmilch im Heilsgeschehen", in: *Himmel, Hölle, Fegefeuer: Das Jenseits im Mittelalter*, exh. cat. Zurich/Cologne 1994, ed. by Peter Jezler, Zurich 1994, pp. 79–90.

[13] Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine*, Florence 1754–1762, VI, pp. 115f.

or standard bearer of Florence – an elected figure that served as the most prominent member of the Signoria and formal head of the civil administration – and transcribed the painting's inscriptions, which, he wrote, declare the painter's "concetto". Richa also recorded, in the same chapel, a funerary slab dated 1609 at the base of the altar, marking the burial of members of the Pecori family.[14] Indeed, when the chapel was demolished in 1843 the image passed into the hands of the Pecori.[15] What remains unclear is whether the *Intercession* was originally intended for this altar space.

Banner, Non-Banner: A Multifunctional Image and Its Settings

Borenius's 1922 article set the stage for future debates on the early function of the *Intercession*. For while he was aware of Richa's description of the painting on an altar, he proposed that it is "perfectly possible and not at all unlikely it originally was used as a processional banner".[16] Borenius's argument rested on the fact that it was painted on canvas. In addition, he noted, without providing examples, that "the size and shape of the picture and the general character of the composition all support this view".[17] Thus, the painting's material (cloth), its size, and its shape were taken as evidence for its early function as a banner, claims that were repeated by later scholars.[18]

Yet in an article written just after the painting entered the Cloisters Collection of the Met in 1953, Millard Meiss categorically rejected this hypothesis.[19] Meiss acknowledged that the cloth support and rectangular format were in keeping with processional banners, pointing out that cloth was not used as a support for paintings in Florence until the later fifteenth century.[20] However, he argued against its use as a banner because of its unusually large size, which he believed would have made it impossible for it to be carried in procession, and the fact that it was not double-sided, a feature he saw as requisite for processional banners. Meiss also noted that the kneeling figures represent "a family", rather than a religious society, another aspect he believed crucial to banner iconography.[21]

Focusing on the role of the *Intercession* as an altarpiece, Meiss's seminal study of the image and his reconstruction of the chapel and its surrounding works became the definitive study on the painting, and attention understandably shifted to its function

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 116.

[15] Pasquinucci/Deimling (note 6), p. 360. See also Timothy Verdon, "The *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* from Florence Cathedral: Iconographic and Ecclesiological Significance", in: *The Fabric of Images* (note 6), pp. 43–54: 44 (reprinted in: *La cattedrale e la città: saggi sul Duomo di Firenze*, ed. by *idem*/Annalisa Innocenti, Florence 2001, II, pp. 131–149).

[16] Borenius (note 8), p. 157.

[17] *Ibidem*.

[18] See Pasquinucci/Deimling (note 6), p. 352, note 1, for a good summary of this scholarship.

[19] Millard Meiss, "An Early Altarpiece from the Cathedral of Florence", in: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s., XII (1954), pp. 302–317. Before entering the Cloisters, the painting was in the collection of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (from 1865), then auctioned at Christie's in 1946 and sold to Arthur Kauffmann, London.

[20] An example (not discussed by Meiss) is Fra Angelico's mid-fifteenth century standing figure of the *Blessing Saviour* (193 × 78 cm) today in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa, which was likely a processional banner. See Gerardo De Simone, "L'Angelico di Pisa: ricerche e ipotesi intorno al *Redentore benedicente* del Museo Nazionale di San Matteo", in: *Polittico*, V (2008), pp. 5–35, and Pierluigi Nieri, "Il restauro del *Redentore benedicente* del Beato Angelico al Museo Nazionale di San Matteo a Pisa: dati diagnostici e tecnico-materici", in: *Predella*, 39/40 (2016), pp. 277–286.

[21] Moreover, Meiss (note 19), p. 302, observed that the painting differs from the (then known) fourteenth-century processional banners, such as the one by Spinello Aretino, also in the Met, which is relatively smaller than the *Intercession*, double-sided, and shows praying confraternity members. On the latter, see Andreas Dehmer, *Italienische Bruderschaftsbanner des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, Munich/Berlin 2004, p. 324, no. 62; Stefan Weppelmann, *Spinello Aretino e la pittura del Trecento in Toscana*, Florence 2011, pp. 19, 257–260, 296, 301, no. 55, with bibliography; and Sarah Kleiner, "A Technical Study of a Late Fourteenth-Century Double-Sided Processional Banner by Spinello Aretino", in: *European Painted Cloths from the Fourteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Nicola Costaras/Christina Young, London 2013, pp. 69–76.

as an altarpiece.[22] Some scholars, however, continued to refer to it as a processional banner.[23] In a 1999 article, overlooked in the debate on the painting, Andreas Dehmer proposed that it was a banner belonging to the Compagnia di San Zanobi, a confraternity based at the cathedral of Florence.[24] This hypothesis, however, seems unlikely, as none of the kneeling devotees are represented in the dress of the confraternity. In the following years, a series of studies focused on the *Intercession* in relation to its display on an altar of the cathedral's counter-façade. Beth Williamson interpreted the scene of intercession within the context of the celebration of the Eucharist, connecting the blood of Christ to the milk of his mother.[25] Timothy Verdon, providing new documentary evidence for the accompanying imagery in the chapel, argued the painting formed part of a wider counter-façade program celebrating different aspects of the Virgin as titular of the site and patron of Florence.[26]

While the display of the *Intercession* within the altar setting is secure, its complete dismissal as a banner based on the evidence provided by Meiss deserves further scrutiny. In particular, the latter's claim that the large size of the *Intercession* mitigated against its use in procession should be questioned. As already noted by Louise Marshall, the size and shape of the *Intercession* relate closely to the cloth plague banners created in Umbria from the second half of the fifteenth century. Some of these works, carried in procession, are even considerably larger than the *Intercession*.[27] Moreover, as Marshall also pointed out, the surviving later Umbrian *gonfaloni* are almost exclusively painted on just one side and were not necessarily made for confraternities.[28] In addition, the devotees represented in these later fifteenth-century cloth images usually presented a motley array of figures, lay and religious, and the commissioning, care, and ownership of these works often involved the cooperation between different groups.[29]

At the time Meiss was writing, most scholars believed that "in the fourteenth century, cloth was employed only for processional banners".[30] Fortunately, our knowledge of paintings on fabric in fourteenth-century Italy has increased significantly in recent decades, providing a more nuanced understanding of the reasons for their use. As Caroline Villers has shown, the cloth medium was not exclusive to processional banners: it was employed as a support for a variety of images, and its selection might have related to its potential to be moved, thus indicating the multifunctional nature of such

On fourteenth-century double-sided banners see also Jessica N. Richardson, "The Brotherhood of Saints Leonard and Francis: Banners, Sacred Topography and Confraternal Identity in Assisi", in: *Art History*, XXXIV (2011), pp. 884–913.

[22] Federico Zeri/Elizabeth E. Gardner, *Italian Paintings: A Catalogue of the Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Florentine School*, New York 1971, pp. 115–117; Pasquinucci/Deimling (note 6), pp. 352–363. For an early counterargument to Meiss, see Louise Marshall, *"Waiting on the Will of the Lord": The Imagery of Plague*, Ann Arbor 1990, pp. 233 and 254f., note 101.

[23] Ferdinando Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina di Napoli, 1266–1414, e un riesame dell'arte nell'età fridericiana*, Rome 1969, pp. 240 and 282, note 10; Miklós Boskovits, *Pittura fiorentina alla vigilia del Rinascimento, 1370–1400*, Florence 1975, pp. 105f., 386, 412; and Everett Fahy, "On Lorenzo di Niccolò", in: *Apollo*, CVIII (1978), pp. 374–381: 379, fig. 11 (caption).

[24] Andreas Dehmer, "Dokumente zu Banner und Tabernakel der Florentiner Compagnia di Santa Maria e San Zanobi im Trecento", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, XLIII (1999), pp. 597–605: 600–602. See also *idem* (note 21), p. 323, no. 61.

[25] Beth Williamson, "The *Cloisters Double Intercession*: The Virgin as Co-Redemptrix", in: *Apollo*, CLII (2000), 465, pp. 48–54.

[26] Verdon (note 15). A similar explanation is found in George R. Bent, *Public Painting and Visual Culture in Early Republican Florence*, Cambridge 2016, pp. 236f. The Virgin became titular of the cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore, in 1296, although reference to the site's earlier dedication to Santa Reparata continued into the fifteenth century.

[27] Marshall (note 22), pp. 233 and 254f., note 1. On these banners, see especially Santi (note 2), Bury (note 2), and Rihouet (note 2). See also Ileana Tozzi, "I gonfaloni perugini, testimonianza d'arte sacra e di devozione popolare", in: *Arte Cristiana*, XC (2002), pp. 30–34.

[28] Marshall (note 22), pp. 233 and 254f., note 1.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 239, note 8. In relation to the New York *Intercession*, Marshall suggested that "Like other even larger Quattrocento canvases, it must have been a *gonfalone*, which was kept as an altarpiece in the Florentine cathedral when not in use" (p. 233).

[30] Meiss (note 19), p. 302 (this somewhat contradicts his own interpretation).

images, especially within different devotional contexts.[31] Moreover, as already noted in relation to the later Umbrian *gonfaloni*, monumental cloth images were not the purview of confraternities alone. Michael Bury highlighted the fluidity of terms used to describe processional works in the surviving documents. He has rightly pointed out also the differences between the *segni* of confraternities (the "insignia or ensigns that would have been carried when a confraternity went out in procession") and monumental 'civic' *gonfaloni*, like those from Umbria, that formed a central element in public penitential devotion involving diverse audiences.[32]

Although the cloth medium alone is not sufficient evidence for a fourteenth-century painting's use in procession, other features of the *Intercession* might point to this function. Returning to the last decades of the fourteenth century, even closer parallels exist. There are surviving examples of paintings on cloth from central Italy that are similar in shape and size to the *Intercession* that also contain imagery only on one side. Three such works are cited by Villers as "possible banners".[33] Notably, two of these are from Bologna, a city with a comparatively high number of surviving fourteenth-century paintings on cloth.[34] One presents a monumental image of *Saint Helena before the Cross* attributed to Simone di Filippo (known as "dei Crocefissi"), with a smaller kneeling Dominican nun (212 × 135.5 cm; Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale), the second contains a colossal image of *Saint Christopher Carrying the Christ Child* signed by Cristoforo, with a devotional prayer (225 × 127 cm; Monte San Pietro, San Cristoforo di Montemaggiore).[35] To this group of "possible banners" we might add a third, also from Bologna, the *Coronation of the Virgin*, signed by the same Simone (228 × 115 cm; Pesaro, Musei Civici, Palazzo Mosca).[36] Like the *Intercession*, these large rectangularly-formatted works have geometric borders, which, as Villers suggested, provide a distinct frame to such portable painted images.[37] Created for different circumstances – a female religious house, a hospital, and possibly a confraternity – they were likely carried in procession, testifying to a rich tradition of single-sided mobile cloth images in late fourteenth-century Italy.[38]

Moreover, the very iconography of the *Intercession*, unprecedented in monumental images from the period, might lend additional support to its processional function. A surviving fifteenth-century painting from Lentini, near Syracuse in Sicily, measuring 191 × 70 cm, also contains a representation of the double intercession (Fig. 4). Within the lower right

[31] Caroline Villers, "Paintings on Canvas in Fourteenth-Century Italy", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LVIII (1995), pp. 338–358: 348.

[32] Bury (note 2), pp. 77–84. On various taxonomy and the complications and overlapping nature of period terminology, see also Schmidt (note 2), pp. 15–34.

[33] Villers (note 31), pp. 344f.

[34] Rosalba D'Amico, "Dipinti su tela a Bologna tra '300 e '400: note su una tipologia artistica", in: *Strenna storica bolognese*, XXXVIII (1988), pp. 137–151. For a broader survey of paintings on cloth in northern Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth century (and their various functions), see Paolo Bensi, "Gli esordi della pittura su tela in Italia attraverso le fonti medievali e rinascimentali", in: *Tela picta: tele dipinte dei secoli XIV e XV in Italia settentrionale. Tipologie, iconografia, tecniche esecutive*, conference proceedings Milan 2006, ed. by Maria Grazia Albertini Ottolenghi = *Arte Lombarda*, n.s, CLIII (2008), 2, pp. 23–28.

[35] For these works, see D'Amico (note 34), pp. 142–144; Jessica N. Richardson, "*Visibile parlare*: Inscribed Prayers, Apotropaic Aphorisms, and Monumental Mobile Images in Fourteenth-Century Bologna", in: *Sacred Scripture/Sacred Space: The Interlacing of Real Places and Conceptual Spaces in Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. by Tobias Frese/Wilfried E. Keil/Kristina Krüger, Berlin 2019, pp. 351–386. The third "possible banner" is a painting on cloth of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Donors* attributed to Taddeo di Bartolo (196 × 86 cm; Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale, inv. 573; cf. Piero Torriti, *La Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena: i dipinti*, Genoa 1990, p. 149; Villers [note 31], p. 345).

[36] Gianluca del Monaco, *Simone di Filippo detto "dei Crocifissi": pittura e devozione nel secondo Trecento bolognese*, Padua 2018, pp. 216–218; Jessica N. Richardson, "A Trecento Artist and Miraculous Images: Simone di Filippo at Bologna", in: *Art and Experience in Trecento Italy*, conference proceedings New Orleans 2016, ed. by Holly Flora/Sarah S. Wilkins, Turnhout 2018, pp. 243–264.

[37] Villers (note 31), p. 348.

[38] *Ibidem*; Richardson (note 36); *eadem* (note 35).

4 *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ*, fifteenth century. Lentini (Syracuse), Santa Maria la Cava e Sant'Alfio

corner of this same work, an organized crowd of lay and religious figures carry images on poles beneath the divine triad, showing a processional performance taking place before this scene of intercession. We will return to this image later; here it is important to note that this combined scene of intercession and procession itself served as a processional image. It was painted on a fabric support that, at an unknown but early date in its history, was attached to an even earlier standing icon of the Virgin that was carried in procession.[39]

In summary, a significant aspect of monumental cloth images is that they had the potential to move between different devotional settings and that they could be stored or displayed when not in use.[40] In his *Libro dell'arte*, written by a Florentine in the very period in which the *Intercession* was made, Cennino Cennini provides further insight. He described the technique of painting on fabric as similar to painting on panel, but he noted that in cloth banners the gilded and punched haloes should be varnished "because sometimes these banners, *which are made for churches*, get carried outdoors in the rain".[41] This suggests that a church setting did not preclude a processional role and that the multifunctional aspects of such works could be intended from their making. Returning to the *Intercession*, it should be recalled that, while Meiss claimed that there is "every good reason to believe that ever since the early fifteenth century this picture stood on the altar", he acknowledged that "it is just possible that it was not originally made for it".[42] This brings us back to the earliest argument made for a dual function of the image, as first proposed by Borenius.

The *Intercession* was positioned on the wall behind the altar of a shallow chapel dedicated to the Trinity on the cathedral's north counter-façade from at least 1409 (the date mentioning the dedication) and possibly by 1404 (when the chapel is referred to as "noviter constructe"). There it formed part of a multi-media ensemble consisting of frescoes, panel paintings, and freestanding marble statues of the Annunciation (in place until 1414).[43] Since the *Intercession* dates to the late 1390s, this would mean that at some point quite soon after its creation, the painting was found within the "newly constructed" altar chapel.[44] The enshrinement of the painting would be in keeping with what we know about the display of later banners, matching the wider practice of placing them within churches in tabernacles and chapels, where they might be stored within these spaces when not in use and offered to the faithful for devotion.[45] A particularly instructive example is the *gonfalone* of San Francesco al Prato, Perugia (Fig. 5). As discussed recently by Pascale Rihouet, just one year after its creation as a plague image carried through the streets, the cloth painting was documented within an altar setting.[46] An even more tantalizing parallel is the fact that the altar, like that of the Florence cathedral *Intercession*, was in a specially built chapel on the counter-façade of the church.[47]

In her technical investigation of the *Intercession*, Charlotte Hale called attention to features that sug-

[39] Francesca Campagna Cicala, in: *Restauri e ricerche: opere d'arte nelle province di Siracusa e Ragusa*, exh. cat, ed. by Gioacchino Barbera, Syracuse 1999, pp. 37–39, no. 4.

[40] On the display and storage of processional banners, see Villers (note 31), pp. 347f.

[41] Cennino Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook*, ed. by Daniel V. Thompson, New York 1954, p. 232 (chap. 140); emphasis mine.

[42] See Meiss (note 19), p. 304.

[43] See *ibidem* and Verdon (note 15). For the 1404 and 1409 documents, see Giovanni Poggi, *Il Duomo di Firenze: documenti sulla decorazione della chiesa e del campanile, tratti dall'archivio dell'Opera*, ed. by Margaret Haines, Florence 1988, I, p. 68, doc. 371 (1409), and p. 205, doc. 1020 (1404); for further documents related to the chapel see also I, pp. CVI–CXII and 206f. C. J. Cavallucci, *S. Maria del Fiore e la sua facciata: narrazione storica*, Florence 1887, p. 151, transcribed a 1402 reference to the chapel (included in Meiss [note 19], p. 316). Yet this would seem to be a transcription error of the 1404 document in the cathedral archives: see Pasquinucci/Deimling (note 6), p. 358, note 9.

[44] On the attribution and dating, see note 6 above.

[45] Bury (note 2) and *idem*, "Tabernacoli e gonfaloni", in: *Benedetto Bonfigli e il suo tempo*, ed. by Maria Luisa Cianini Pierotti, Perugia 1998, pp. 52–57 and 183–189.

[46] Rihouet (note 2), pp. 191f.

[47] *Ibidem*, p. 212.

gest its use as a temporary altarpiece or a banner.[48] For example, she notes that the cosmatesque cloth borders are separate but coeval to the main support, suggesting that they might have been "added to the painting to provide an integral frame during its earlier use" as a banner.[49] Alternatively, she proposes that they could have been attached to the central image in its new altar setting, in order that the cloth painting "would remain portable".[50] The latter could indicate its occasional use in procession, as in the case of the later Umbrian examples.

Furthermore, the proposal that the *Intercession* was likely made for a different setting and then incorporated into an altar setting complements the situation of an image that had been moved to the slightly earlier south chapel of the cathedral's counter-façade. In 1397/98, this chapel was built ex novo and a highly venerated *Madonna and Child* frescoed earlier in the fourteenth century on the southern nave wall was embedded within a newly painted panel above its altar.[51] The re-location of this fresco stemmed from the desire to grant greater access to the image. It also formed part of a broader trend within Florence, whereby the counter-façade served as a space for specially revered or miracle-working images, the most celebrated case being the fourteenth-century fresco of the Annunciation on the counter-façade of the church of Santissima Annunziata.[52]

If, like the fresco of the *Madonna* opposite, the *Intercession* was re-purposed to form part of the altar space of the north counter-façade chapel, this could have related to the patronage of the family that had burial rights there, the Pecori, which some have suggested are the devotees depicted before the Virgin.[53] Verdon

5 Benedetto Bonfigli, *gonfalone* of San Francesco al Prato, 1464. Perugia, Oratorio di San Bernardino

[48] Hale (note 6), p. 33. In favor of the latter hypothesis, she noted also that the "narrative clarity and broad manner of painting [are] features characteristic of banners" (*ibidem*).

[49] *Ibidem*, p. 35.

[50] *Ibidem*.

[51] On this fresco and its re-instalment to the counter-façade chapel: Poggi (note 43), I, pp. CVI–CXII, and pp. 201–205 for the late fourteenth-century documents. See also Verdon (note 15), p. 44; Hale (note 6), pp. 31, 35; Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, New Haven 2013, pp. 77f.

[52] On this fresco see, among others, *ibidem*, pp. 80–81.

[53] Meiss (note 19), p. 310; Pasquinucci/Deimling (note 6), p. 352.

proposed that Bartolomeo de' Pecori, who died in 1400, might have been the first family member to be buried in this space and that the *Intercession* could have functioned as tomb marker, a "private banner" that was transformed "into an altarpiece for public worship".[54] Indeed, the practice of displaying banners in the cathedral that honor important Florentine families is documented in the fourteenth century.[55] Significantly, this same Bartolomeo de' Pecori formed part of the 1397 deliberating committee that elected to move the fresco of the *Madonna* to the south counter-façade chapel, just opposite the eventual location of the *Intercession* in the Chapel of the Trinity.[56]

However, the Pecori had burial rights in the cathedral prior to the construction of the counter-façade chapel, as Bartolomeo's brother Guido, who died in 1367, stipulated in his testament of the same year the desire to be buried in the family's tomb within the cathedral.[57] Moreover, never noted before in relation to the history of the painting, several members of the Pecori family held the supreme civic office of *gonfaloniere di giustizia* in the second half of the fourteenth century, beginning with Guido in 1363. In this same period, various Pecori also served as members of the governing body of priors who, similar to the *gonfaloniere*, were elected every two months, including Bartolomeo himself in 1399, thus within the very range of dates possible for the commissioning of the image.[58] It will be recalled that Richa identified the foremost kneeling figure as dressed in the crimson robe of *gonfaloniere di giustizia*.[59] While this could provide a tempting range of identifications with the members of the Pecori family, it should be pointed out that this dress was not exclusive to this office. It is also worth noting that the Cappella dei Priori in the Palazzo della Signoria (now Palazzo Vecchio) was dedicated to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the very monk who was credited with the description of the scene of intercession represented in our image.[60] Thus, the imagery might sustain a link to Saint Bernard's writings that resonated within devotional practices of the ruling elite, which in these very decades included various members of the Pecori, as well as of the city more generally.

The issue of patronage remains uncertain, even though the links to the Pecori seem probable. Yet visual evidence and comparative analysis offer further clues to the *Intercession*'s early use. I would like to pro-

[54] Verdon (note 15), p. 52. Villers (note 31), p. 349, also suggested that the painting could have had a funerary function.

[55] John Paoletti, "Medici Funerary Monuments in the Duomo of Florence during the Fourteenth Century: A Prologue to 'The Early Medici'", in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, LIX (2006), pp. 1117–1163, with discussion of two, now lost, fourteenth-century banners in the cathedral commemorating members of the Medici family, pp. 1150 and 1159. On elite burial practices in fourteenth-century Florence, with discussion of cloth banners, see Sharon T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence*, Baltimore 1992, pp. 55–104. As Paoletti has demonstrated, in the fourteenth century, while family burials in the cathedral were prohibited by official laws, exceptions were made for important Florentine families such as the Medici.

[56] Poggi (note 43), I, pp. 201f., doc. 1004.

[57] Francesca Carrara, "Il Canto dei Pecori al Boldrone: storia di una famiglia e del suo casale", in: *eadem*/Enrica Neri Lusanna/Mirella Branca, *Percorrendo giardini di virtù: affreschi del Trecento a Firenze nel Canto dei Pecori al Boldrone*, Todi 2005, pp. 81–103: 89. A marble tomb marker with the Pecori coat of arms of the second half of the fifteenth century from the cathedral of Florence is on display in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence (no. 2005/237).

[58] For a list of the Pecori *gonfalonieri*, beginning with Guido "de Dino di Giovanni" in 1363, see Pietro Farulli, *Annali overo notizie istoriche dell'antica, nobile, e valorosa città di Arezzo in Toscana dal suo principio fino al presente anno 1717*, Foligno 1717, p. 323. On the Pecori *gonfalonieri* and priors, see also Luigi Passerini, *Memorie genealogico-storiche della famiglia Pecori di Firenze*, Florence 1868, pp. 11–13, and Carrara (note 57), p. 89. Guido's son Domenico was *gonfaloniere di giustizia* in 1384. Guido's brother Jacopo di Dino Pecori (d. 1380) was prior on three occasions beginning in 1351 and was *gonfaloniere* twice, in 1372 and in 1375. Jacopo's son Gilio was prior on two occasions; his son Francesco was part of the Balìa (a special ruling committee) of 1393 and prior in the following year. Bartolomeo, also one of Jacopo's sons, died of the plague in 1400 and stipulated by public decree that his son, Piero, should succeed him. Indeed, Piero served as prior in 1428 and as *gonfaloniere* in 1432. This is not to overstate the family's importance in the Signoria, but to show their involvement in the government of Florence in the years surrounding the date of the *Intercession*.

[59] Richa (note 13), VI, p. 115.

[60] This chapel was used for morning prayer of the officers. For the reasons for the dedication of the chapel to Saint Bernard, see Melinda

pose that the enshrinement of the cloth painting in the cathedral of Florence testifies to the effectiveness of its imagery and that this could have related not only to its possible role as a banner that marked a family tomb within the site, but as a banner used in procession, where it could have moved from one 'public' space, the streets, to another, the counter-façade, and that in this 'new' space both the image and its text carried a memory of its early function.[61] As already noted, in support of this there are examples of banners (in particular *Pestbilder*) dating from the fifteenth century, especially in Umbria, that were transformed into altarpieces, such as the aforementioned *gonfalone* of San Francesco al Prato (Fig. 5).[62] Just as in these later works, the altar setting of the *Intercession* would explain its survival, and the decision to place the cloth painting in this prominent 'fixed' space within the cathedral would testify to the devotional importance ascribed to the image itself. Yet what might have accounted for the special status of the image at the turn of the fifteenth century?

The *Intercession* and the Lesser Litany: A New Reading

It has long been noted that the scene represented in the New York *Intercession* was described by Jacobus de Voragine in the *Golden Legend* – a manuscript of saints' lives organized according to the celebration of their feasts within the liturgical year. What has never been discussed in relation to the painting is precisely where this occurs within the text: the passage on the Ascension, a feast that had a specific relevance for the liturgy and processions of fourteenth-century Florence.[63]

In chapter 72, dedicated to the Ascension of the Lord, Jacobus considers seven questions related to Christ's Ascension, including "why he ascended". Christ's "ascension was beneficial in nine ways". About one of these the author writes:

> The Fourth fruit is our security. Christ ascended in order to be our advocate with the Father. We can be secure indeed when we realize that we have such an advocate to plead our cause; I John 2:1: "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just, and he is the propitiation for our sins." About this security Bernard [of Clairvaux] says: "O man, you have sure access to God, when the mother stands before the Son and the Son stands before the Father, the mother shows her Son her bosom and her breasts, the Son shows his Father his side and his wounds. Surely then, where there are so many marks of love, there can be no refusal."[64]

Crucially, the theme of the *Intercession*, the dialogue of gestures between Mary, Christ, and God, is intimately connected to the Ascension, a moveable feast that occurred forty days after Easter and was preceded by two other important feasts, the Greater and Lesser Litanies, described also by Jacobus (in chapter 70). The first occurred on the 25 April, the feast of Saint Mark, while the second marked the three days preceding the Ascension. Both litanies, as their names indicate, were specifically linked to processions. Jacobus, culling from and embellishing earlier liturgical

K. Lesher, "St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the Republic of Florence in the Late Middle Ages", in: *Cîteaux – Commentarii cistercienses*, XXXV (1984), pp. 258–267.

[61] On the theme in relation to death and burial, see esp. Lane (note 11), with a summary of the earlier literature.

[62] Rihouet (note 2), pp. 10–12 and 211–216. See also Bury (note 2) and *idem* (note 45).

[63] Jacobus de Voragine (note 4), I, pp. 297f.

[64] *Ibidem*. The Latin text reads: "Quarta est nostra securitas. Ideo enim ascendit ut noster aduocatus sit apud patrem. Valde autem securi esse possumus, quando talem aduocatum apud patrem nos habere consideramus. Ioh. Prima, II: 'Aduocatum habemus apud patrem Ihesum Christum iustum et ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris'. De hac securitate dicit Bernardus: 'Securum accessum habes, o homo, apud deum, ubi mater ante filium et filius ante patrem, mater ostendit filio pectus et ubera, filius ostendit patri latus et uulnera. Nulla ergo poterit esse repulsa, ubi tot sunt caritatis insignia'" (Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda aurea: edizione critica*, ed. by Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, Florence ²1998, I, p. 491).

sources, recounted Gregory the Great's procession to ward off the plague in Rome, accompanied by an image of the Virgin, as the origins of the Greater Litany. The processions instituted by Saint Mamertus, bishop of Vienne, on account of natural calamities that occurred in the year 458, initiated the Lesser Litany.[65] His vivid descriptions of both events betray new details that reflect the ritual framework for such processions in his own day. Concerning the Lesser Litany or rogation days (from the Latin *rogare*, to ask or beseech), Jacobus observes:

> The Lesser Litany is called the Procession, because on this occasion the Church holds a great procession at which the cross is borne aloft, the bells are rung, the standard is carried [...]. In this procession we carry the cross and ring the bells to make the devils flee in terror; for just as the king in the midst of his army has the royal insignias, namely, trumpets and standards or banners, so Christ the eternal King in the midst of his Church militant has bells for trumpets and crosses for standards [...]. Of course, there was another reason, which was that the bells would warn the faithful and incite them to pray hard in view of impending danger [...]. Another reason for carrying the *standard in procession* is to represent the victory of Christ's resurrection and the *victory of his ascension*. He ascended to heaven with much booty: thus the banner advancing through the air is Christ ascending to heaven as a multitude of the faithful follows the standard carried in procession, so a great assemblage of saints accompanies Christ ascending.[66]

Jacobus further notes that "the chants sung in the procession stand for the chants and praises of the angels who met the *ascending* Christ and led him with his company into the heavens with choruses of praise". Significantly, he cites the very "angelic canticle" sung in these litanies "Sancte deus, sancte fortis, sancte et immortalis, miserere nobis" ("O holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal, have mercy on us") noting that "when it was sung publicly the said tribulation ceased".[67] He then offers additional reasons for "observing the Rogations":

> The first is that as Christ, ascending, says: "Ask and you shall receive", the Church may petition him more confidently. The second is that the Church fasts and prays in order to have less flesh by mortification, and by prayer to acquire wings, because *prayer is the soul's wing by which it flies to heaven. So the soul will be able freely to follow Christ in his ascent*.[68]

As recounted by Jacobus, the Greater and Lesser Litanies derive from communal processions in times of crisis, celebrated in a period of the year that typi-

[65] Jacobus de Voragine (note 4), I, pp. 285–287 and, for the role of image of the Virgin, p. 174 ("St. Gregory").

[66] *Ibidem*, p. 287 (emphasis mine). "Dicitur etiam processio, quia tunc ecclesia generalem facit processionem. In hac autem processione crux defertur, campane pulsantur, uexillum portatur [...]. Ideo autem ibidem crucem deferimus et campanas pulsamus, ut demones territi fugiant. Nam sicut rex in suo exercitu habet insignia regalia, scilicet tubas et uexilla, sic Christus rex eternus in sua ecclesia militanti habet campanas pro tubis et cruces pro uexillis [...] licet alia ratio sit quia campane tunc fideles admonent et prouocant, ut pro instanti periculo orationi insistant. [...] Vexillum autem ibidem defertur propter representandam uictoriam resurrectionis et uictoriam ascensionis Christi. Qui cum magna preda celos ascendit, unde uexillum per aera incedens est Christus in celum ascendens et sicut uexillum quod in processione defertur multitudo fidelium sequitur, sic Christum ascendentem magna sanctorum collectio comitatur" (Iacopo da Varazze [note 64], I, pp. 475–477).

[67] Jacobus de Voragine (note 4), I, pp. 288f. "Cantus autem qui ibi fiunt significant cantus et laudes angelorum qui Christo ascendenti obuiauerunt et ipsum cum sua societate usque in celum cum multis laudibus perduxerunt. [...] *In huiusmodi autem letaniis esset illud angelicum canticum frequentandum: 'Sancte deus, sancte fortis, sancte et immortalis, miserere nobis.'* [...] *quod ad eius prolationem illa tribulatio conquieuit*" (Iacopo da Varazze [note 64], I, pp. 477f.; emphasis mine).

[68] Jacobus de Voragine (note 4), I, p. 287 (emphasis mine). "Prima ut scilicet Christo ascendente et dicente 'Petite et accipietis' confidentius petat ecclesia. Secondo quia ecclesia ieiunat et orat ut parum habeat de carne per ipsius carnis macerationem et acquirat sibi alas per orationem, quia oratio est ala anime, qua uolat in celum, ut sic Christum ascendentem libe-

cally brought plague and disease. Thus, in this text we find a clear articulation of the power of publicly sung prayers, petitions that could be answered on account of Christ's Ascension. Just as the litany celebrations prepared the way for the Ascension, these prayers, the "soul's wings", could "follow freely Christ in his ascent".[69] In his analysis of liturgy and folklore in the *Golden Legend*, André Vauchez discusses how in his account of the Lesser Litany, Jacobus emphasizes the "urban origins" of the festival (in contrast to its rural roots found in earlier sources) and the liturgical sanctification of the time of the year and "inscribed the procession in an ascensional symbolism".[70]

Following Roman rite, the Greater and Lesser Litanies were observed in Florence, as evidenced in surviving cathedral calendars and other manuscripts.[71] As Richard Trexler has pointed out, in fourteenth-century Florence, processions of the Greater Litany, the rogation days of the Lesser Litany, and the Ascension were the main penitential feasts, days of contrition that were expiatory in nature, and highly retributive periods for the church.[72] Indications concerning how these feasts were celebrated in Florence are found in surviving fourteenth-century chronicles. These sources emphasize the public nature of crisis processions, which, again, followed the ritual framework of the litanies. Like Jacobus's descriptions of rogation days beseeching God's protection from calamities, the Florentine sources focus on the power of numbers, the different groups involved (men, women, children, religious), the use of images (the cross, images of the Virgin, banners), and the sound of songs and prayers, thus highlighting the visual, oral, and aural nature of these events. During a papal interdict placed on the city in 1375, for example, the Florentine chronicler Marchionne di Coppo Stefani described how the whole population, including children, participated in the processions:

> Every day there was a procession with relics and hymns followed by the whole population. Every company beat themselves, including children down to ten years of age. There were certainly more than 5000 flagellants at processions and more than 20,000 people followed the procession.[73]

Likewise, an anonymous chronicler recounts the processions performed during the interdict of 1377, emphasizing the presence of children, men, and women who sung *laude* and chants to petition God, his mother, and all the saints and carried "insegnie di Tavole di Nostra Donna" and "molti Crocifissi e Tavole e gonfaloni di Compagnie".[74] Describing another crisis procession in Florence in 1389, Naddo da Montecatini again highlights the presence of different groups and explicitly mentions that the prayers di-

re possit sequi, qui ascendit pandens iter ante nos et uolauit super pennas uentorum" (Iacopo da Varazze [note 64], I, p. 475).

[69] Jacobus de Voragine (note 4), I, p. 287

[70] André Vauchez, "Liturgy and Folk Culture in the Golden Legend", in: *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, ed. by Daniel E. Bornstein, Notre Dame 1993, pp. 129–139: 135–137. On the origins of these feasts, see also Anna Benvenuti, "Draghi e confini: rogazioni e litanie nelle consuetudini liturgiche", in: *Simboli e rituali nelle città toscane fra Medioevo e prima età moderna*, atti del convegno Arezzo 2004 = *Annali aretini*, XIII (2005), pp. 49–63.

[71] Marica S. Tacconi, *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria del Fiore*, Cambridge 2005; Franklin Toker, *On Holy Ground: Liturgy, Architecture, and Urbanism in the Cathedral and the Streets of Medieval Florence*, Turnhout 2009, pp. 121–123.

[72] Richard C. Trexler, *The Spiritual Power: Republican Florence under Interdict*, Leiden 1974, p. 133, who transcribes a 1377 entry from the account books of the Compagnia di San Zanobi that notes the group's participation in these processions.

[73] Cit. *ibidem*, pp. 130f. *Cronica fiorentina di Marchionne di Coppo Stefani*, ed. by Niccolò Rodolico, Città di Castello 1903 (Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, XXX.I), p. 295, rubrica 757: "ed ancora s'andava ogni dì a processione colle reliquie e canti musichi con tutto lo popolo dietro; ed ogni compagnia facea battuti in tanto numero, che v'erano infino a fanciulli di dieci anni, e certo più di cinquemila battuti, quando si facea processione generale, v'erano, e ventimila persone o più seguiano la processione."

[74] "Diario d'anonimo fiorentino dall'anno 1358 al 1389", in: *Cronache dei secoli XIII e XIV*, Florence 1876 (Documenti di Storia Italiana, VI), p. 331: "Oggi, a' dì 19 d'aprile anno 1377, la mattina, andò per Firenze tutti e

rected to the Virgin implored her to beseech her son on behalf of the populace, that she might "gracefully pray to her son Jesus Christ that he mercifully in his piety guard this city from every danger".[75]

By the fourteenth century, in Florence and indeed elsewhere, it was hardly unusual to find prayers to the Virgin linked to communal crisis and plague. The anonymous Panciatichi chronicler described, during a 1390 procession against the plague, a temporary altar with the *Madonna dell'Impruneta* and relics in the "Piazza dei Signori", where mass was celebrated in the presence of the image.[76] Thanks to the important work of Trexler, who analyzed the chronicles just cited, we know a great deal about such crisis processions, often including the movement of images, such as the *Madonna dell'Impruneta*, the panel painting attributed to Saint Luke described in the 1390 text, brought into the city especially in times of draught.[77]

Throughout the liturgical year, there were certainly many occasions for processions involving the cathedral of Florence, whether specifically related to crises or not. However, the last decade of the fourteenth century, the very years in which the *Intercession* was created, was a particularly turbulent period in Florentine history. The city not only faced the threat of a Milanese invasion by Gian Galeazzo Visconti, it also suffered continuous outbreaks of plague, the worst of which hit the city in 1399–1400 – for example, three Pecori, including Bartolomeo, died of the plague in 1400.[78] The response to this epidemic was mass penitential pilgrimage aimed at appeasing the wrath of God and manifested in the well-studied Bianchi movement, which swept through the cities of central Italy, including Florence.[79] All of these events potentially resonate with the patronage of the *Intercession*. However, in the absence of direct documentary evidence, it is not my intent to link the creation of this cloth image to a specific crisis, but to point, more generally, to how it could have effectively taken part in its rituals and processions, which were intimately linked to the Greater and Lesser Litany processions, feasts associated, in turn, with the theme of the double intercession. Significantly, it is here that the words inscribed on the painting's surface take on special meaning.

Devotion to the Virgin as mediatrix was ubiquitous in texts and vernacular songs (*laude*) of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Florence.[80] The city's surviving *laudari*, belonging to its various religious companies, present prayers in the first-person vernac-

tutte Compagnie di battuti e co'molte insegnie di Tavole di Nostra Donna, di San Gilio, e molti Crocifissi e Tavole e gonfaloni di Compagnie, per tutta la città di Firenze, co'molta bella e grande processione di battuti e di giovani, cantando molte e belle laude e canti, e omini e giovani e donne e fanciugli, battendosi a onore d'Iddio e della sua Madre Madonna Santa Maria e di tutti Santi e Sante di Paradiso." For an English translation, see Trexler (note 72), p. 132.

[75] Cit. in Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York 1980, pp. 356f. *Croniche fiorentine di Ser Naddo da Montecatini e del Cavaliere Iacopo Salviati [...]*, ed. by Ildefonso di San Luigi, Florence 1784, p. 107: "l'ufficio fu bello, grande, ed onorevole. Veramente in sulla piazza, e per le case furono a udire il detto uffizio circa venticinque migliaia di cristiani, o più, tra piccoli, e grandi, maschi, e femmine, pregando con divozione la nostra Donna, che per sua grazia pregasse il suo figliuolo Giesù Cristo, che per sua pietà, e misericordia guardi questa città da ogni pericolo."

[76] *Alle bocche della piazza: diario di anonimo fiorentino (1382–1401) (BNF, Panciatichiano 158)*, ed. by Anthony Molho/Franek Sznura, Florence 1986, p. 99: "E venne i·questo dì i·Firenze la tavola di Santa Maria in Pianeta, e posesi i·su la piaça de' Signiori, e quivi i·sulla ringhiera, fatto un grandismo palcho dove stetono e' cherici, e' Signiori Priori e' loro Cholegi, e uno palcho più alto dove stette messer lo veschovo a cantare la messa, e più palchi più alti, molti adorni, dove stette la moltitudine delle relique, che ogniuno di sulla piaçça le potea vedere." For an English translation, see Trexler (note 75), p. 356.

[77] Trexler (note 3); *idem* (note 75), esp. pp. 353–358.

[78] The two others are Bartolomeo's brother Francesco and his nephew Jacopo, son of Gilio (Passerini [note 58], pp. 12f.). In the last weeks of April 1400, the death count in Florence reached over eight per day; by late May, nearly fifty deaths a day were being reported by gravediggers. See Anne G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge 1986, p. 66, for graphs of registered deaths per day in 1399–1400.

[79] On the Bianchi movement, see Daniel E. Bornstein, *The Bianchi of 1399: Popular Devotion in Late Medieval Italy*, Ithaca 1993, and Alexandra R. A. Lee, *The Bianchi of 1399 in Central Italy: Making Devotion Local*, Leiden 2021.

[80] See among others, Elise Murray Cambon, *The Italian and Latin Lauda of the Fifteenth Century*, Ann Arbor 1975; Cyrilla Barr, *The Monophonic Lauda*

ular that were often sung before specific images of the Virgin, sometimes even including her response.[81] Furthermore, the *laude* – including those the Bianchi used in procession – often gave voice to the Virgin herself, as she intercedes for her people and pleads to Christ on account of the milk through which she nourished him.[82]

In his presentation of Marian litanies, Gilles Meersseman discusses "emergency litanies" ("Notlitanien") that were performed in times of crisis, noting their close relationship to the rogation days of the Lesser Litany.[83] One of these, the *Letania de sancta Maria* compiled by Meersseman from manuscripts dating from the eleventh to the fifteenth century and including one from fourteenth-century Italy, has a particular relevance to my argument.[84] After its long list of invocations to the Virgin – "Sancta Maria excellentissima et gloriosissima regina, intercede per me […] S. M., dei genitrix, per misericordiam filii tui […] miserere michi" ("Holy Mary excellent and glorious queen, intercede for me […] Holy Mary, mother of God, for the mercy of your son, have mercy on me") – it closes with a supplication to the Virgin's breast that nourished Christ: "Laudo et adoro beata ubera tua, que lactaverunt salvatorem mundi" ("I praise and adore your holy breast that gave milk to the Saviour of the world").[85] These words, in sung prayer, could have accompanied the *Intercession*, expressing the types of petitions and supplications voiced within the liturgical year and during extra-liturgical crisis processions. Furthermore, this first-person litanic verse is at the core of the scene visualized in both image and words of the *Intercession* (Fig. 3). The Virgin responds to these very words in the first person: cupping her breast with her left hand, she recommends with her right hand a group of praying figures to Christ, beseeching him, on behalf of her role as nourishing mother, to "have mercy on them": "abbi mi(sericordi)a di chostoro".

While the painting's inscription has been acknowledged as crucial to the visualization of the dialogue between the Virgin and Christ, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the material and artistic connotations of its script and to how its words resonated within the devotional milieu of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Florence. The *Intercession*'s formal composition, its highly sophisticated display of script, and the very nature of these painted words provide strong evidence for how the image itself might have participated in processions. There are five

and the Lay Religious Confraternities of Tuscany and Umbria in the Middle Ages, Kalamazoo 1988; Vincenzo Traversa, *The Laude in the Middle Ages*, New York 1994; Ursula Betka, *Marian Images and Laudesi Devotion in Late Medieval Italy ca. 1260–1350*, PhD diss., Melbourne 2001.

[81] Among the many publications on this topic, see Concetto Del Popolo, *Laude fiorentine*, I: *Il laudario della Compagnia di San Gilio*, Florence 1990; Blake Wilson, *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence*, Oxford 1992. A case in point is the prayer inscribed on the Virgin's book in the *Virgin of Bagnolo*, a work that contains two kneeling female devotees. The text reads: "Dolcissima Vergine Maria da Bangnuolo, priegoui che preghiate lui per sua charita e per la sua potenzia me faccia grazie di cio che me fammestiere" ("Sweetest Virgin Mary of Bagnolo, I pray to you that through your charity and through your power you beg him [Christ] to grant me the grace I need"). See Lars Jones, "*Visio Divina*? Donor Figures and Representations of Imagistic Devotion: The Copy of the 'Virgin of Bagnolo' in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence", in: *Studies in the History of Art*, LXI (2002), pp. 30–55: 37 and 49, note 3.

[82] For a specific *lauda* in which Mary pleads to Christ: "O dolce Figliuol benedetto, per lo latte che del mio petto poppasti, ogni rio difetto perdona lor con dolce amore" ("O sweet holy Son, for the milk that thou hast sucked from my breast, forgive them for every fault, forgive them with sweet love"), see *Le laude dei Bianchi contenute nel codice Vaticano Chigiano L. VII 266: edizione critica*, ed. by Bernard Toscani, Florence 1979, p. 167 (and further examples on pp. 81, 129–131). More generally, see Mary Channen Caldwell, "Litanic Songs for the Virgin: Rhetoric, Repetition, and Marian Refrains in Medieval Latin Song", in: *The Litany in Arts and Cultures*, ed. by Witold Sadowski/Francesco Marsciani, Turnhout 2020, pp. 143–174. On the relationship between litany and *laude*, see esp. Magdalena Maria Kubas, *Litanic Verse*, IV: *Italia*, Berlin 2018, and *eadem*, "Maria e i fiori, lauda e litania nel Duecento", in: *Fiori dell'anima; la simbologia dei fiori nell'immaginario religioso*, ed. by Marco Papasidero/Francesco Galofaro = *Ocula*, XXI (2020), pp. 167–177. On the Bianchi *laude*, see Bornstein (note 79), pp. 117–161.

[83] Gilles G. Meersseman, *Der Hymnos Akathistos im Abendland*, Fribourg 1958–1960, II, pp. 229–231.

[84] *Ibidem*, pp. 230f., no. 40.

[85] *Ibidem*, p. 231.

'actors' within the painting: the praying figures, the Virgin, Christ, God the Father, and, lastly, the Holy Spirit. Only part of their 'dialogue' is presented in the painted words, those of the Virgin and Christ. Equally significant is what has been left out. The Virgin's words are dependent on the petitions and prayers of the people. In the image, she presents these figures to Christ, who is shown, in turn, accepting the Virgin's plea through gesture and speech. What is missing are the voices outside the picture, the processing public, the prayers and litanic verse sung by the populace. Thus, in this image we are confronted with an ongoing, active dialogue, one that was not necessarily linked to a specific moment in time, whether as part of a crisis or rogation procession.

The *Intercession* presents a flow of words, the received petitions of the praying supplicants before the image, allowing for overlapping temporalities within and outside the image, but also in time and space more generally: terrestrial prayers are met by celestial grace. In fourteenth-century Florence (as indeed elsewhere), processions had the anticipated goal of God's grace and/or deliverance in the face of crisis. This was linked to the populace and to its words, the song and prayer, and to the multitude of voices heard, the oral and the aural. The sounds and words that took place before the image, the petitions and litanic verse in the active first person are here answered by the Virgin and Christ also in the first person, and in the vernacular. The latter, the language of the *laude* and song in medieval Florence, placed the image in the present.

The directionality of the words is also significant: while Christ's words issue from his mouth, Mary's do not: hers are at the center of the composition between the divine pair and above the kneeling figures and read from left to right.[86] The placement of the words and the diagonal, progressively elevated position of those coming from Christ's mouth express the hierarchy of prayer and intercession mimicked in the gestures of the figures. The Virgin's words connect Son and Mother, while the diagonally placed words of Christ ascend to heaven. The pronouns "te" and "tu" (you), moreover, appear at the beginning and end of the two inscriptions closest to those they address: The Virgin's invocation to her son, "dolciximo figliuolo" and "te" are placed closest to Christ's face, while Christ's invocation to the Father, "tu", finishes the first line of his speech and is the most elevated word, closest to God. Moreover, the poetic flow of both voices is matched in their dual use of "chostoro" (them/those). Both inscriptions end with a four- or five-point interpunct. In the words of the Virgin, such interpuncts appear again twice, at crucial points in her speech. Significantly, interpuncts frame the expression "abbi misericordia di chostoro" – emphasized also by the hands of both figures below –, a direct response to the litanic invocation: have mercy on us or me, the Latin "miserere nobis" or "miserere michi" found, respectively, in Jacobus's account of prayer in the Lesser Litany and in the emergency litany to the Virgin cited above.

In his analysis of the "word in religious art", Roger Ellis proposed two main purposes, "the interpretation as well as the animation of the subject", and that script could address the viewer, both indirectly and directly.[87] The latter could be linked to speech, painted on the surface, an "overt symbol", and "part of a historical drama [that] may now appeal directly to us", the

[86] On the study of written speech and the directionality of words in fourteenth-century Italian art, see Roger Tarr, "'Visibile parlare': The Spoken Word in Fourteenth-Century Central Italian Painting", in: *Word & Image*, XIII (1997), pp. 223–244. For a discussion of the written speech in the two above-mentioned banners from Bologna, see Richardson (note 35), with further bibliography on the topic. See further Roger Ellis, "The Word in Religious Art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance", in: *Word, Picture, and Spectacle*, ed. by Davidson Clifford, Kalamazoo, 1984, pp. 21–38; Lasse Hodne, "Reading and Viewing Words in Fra Angelico's Typological Paintings", in: *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, XXIV (2011), pp. 243–263.

[87] Ellis (note 86), pp. 26f.

viewer.[88] Lasse Hodne, moreover, in his discussion of words issuing from the Virgin's mouth in fifteenth-century paintings of the Annunciation, argued (like others before him) that the importance of such speech when "inscribed on the picture's surface" are not "a description of an event, but the event itself".[89] Indeed, the rich literature on written speech in fourteenth-century Italian art has placed emphasis on the ways it might serve to activate an image.[90] Yet in the *Intercession* we might take this one step further. The words and the drama that unfolds do not only invite the spectators' participation: the painted scene and its speech is predicated on and set in motion through the viewers' prayers.

The importance of the words is indicated also in material terms: they are painted in gold using mordant gilding, a technique reserved for the haloes of the holy figures. The use of gold was significant both in terms of its value as a substance and the shimmering visual effects it could induce (especially through movement) and as an added dimension of visibility and tactility to the words through its raised surface. There is a performative aspect to these words: they do not present a strict dialogue between the holy figures represented, but they exist as part of a larger conversation, or better, as a perpetual set of prayers between those before the image and those within the image, the Virgin, Christ, God the Father, and, ultimately, the Holy Spirit. The drama that unfolds in the painting was precipitated by a series of actions that could have taken place before the image at different points within the city as it processed through the streets.[91]

Again, my aim is not to argue that this text linked necessarily to a specific *lauda* or litanic verse, but rather to show how it would have resonated in such rituals. If we read the monumental cloth image in relation to the Ascension, which allowed Christ to intercede for humankind on behalf of his nourishing mother, its festal and performative aspects become more pronounced. Through the theme of intercession, its imagery and words are directly implicated in this celebration. Accordingly, the devotees represented in the painting would reflect the Florentine community writ large, with its diverse population of men, women, children, and religious, as 'ciphers' standing in for the multitudes that might have accompanied the image in song and prayer, as described in the documents of the very period of its creation.

The fifteenth-century painting on linen from Lentini, mentioned earlier, shows the very events played out in the streets, the space of the processing public, who are represented at lower right as they make their appeal to the holy triad (Fig. 4). In this asymmetrical setting, the small donors are not presented by the Virgin to Christ; rather, they are in movement, a group of men, women, and confraternity members, led by the cross and followed by standards – small gold-ground panels on poles, not the large cloth *gonfalone* we have been discussing. The Lentini *Intercession* contains images within an image. A sort of metapainting, it is a *gonfalone* that contains a representation of how, as the pictured mobile images, it would have been used.[92] This cloth *Intercession* was likely carried in procession

[88] *Ibidem*.

[89] Hodne (note 86), p. 261.

[90] For bibliography and further discussion see above, note 86, and Richardson (note 35), esp. pp. 378–386.

[91] For discussion of the performative aspects of inscribed speech in fourteenth-century monumental cloth banners from Bologna, see Richardson (note 35). On the performative aspects of written speech in monumental Christian art, see, among others, Robert Nelson, "Image and Inscription: Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of Devotion", in: *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. by Liz James, Cambridge 2007, pp. 100–119, and Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "Written Voices: The Spoken Word in Middle Byzantine Monumental Painting", in: *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound*, ed. by Susan Boynton/Diane J. Reilly, Turnhout 2015, pp. 153–165. Ševčenko, in particular (p. 160), argues that the performative aspects were "conveyed by inscribing the words directly on the background, rather than displaying them on a book or scrolls in conjunction with the speaking gesture", indicating "that it was a spoken word that precipitated the action in question".

[92] On metapainting in pre-modern Italian painting: Lorenzo Pericolo, "What is Metapainting? *The Self-Aware Image* Twenty Years Later", in: Vic-

as part of a double-sided image. The painting was discovered at the beginning of the last century on the back of an earlier icon of the Virgin attributed to Saint Luke that had served as a processional panel.[93] The unfolding scene in the lower corner is nearly identical to that described in the *Golden Legend* as well as in the crisis processions of late fourteenth-century Florence: cross at front, *stendardi*, and the mixed populace. The Virgin, to whom their prayers are directed, is at the center of the composition petitioning Christ and God the Father on their behalf. The image once contained an inscription on the stairs of the throne. Fragmentary and illegible, it was removed during an early twentieth-century restoration. It probably provided further testimony to a heavenly dialogue, one that was likely made more explicit in the now-missing text of the scrolls.[94]

To return to Jacobus's description of the Lesser Litany, there is one further point worth mentioning in relation to the New York *Intercession*. Jacobus cited another reason for this feast's name: "because in these three days", he wrote "we implore the help of the saints". Furthermore, "we ask God to end the wars that so often erupt in springtime", "we ask him to preserve and multiply the still tender young fruits of the earth", and "we pray for help in praying *to receive the Holy Spirit*: fasting is an excellent preparation and our supplications increase with worthiness".[95] Might this passage explain also the prominence given to the dove of the Holy Spirit – whose feast directly follows that of the Ascension – in the *Intercession* and, later, in the image's devotional environment within the cathedral, as evidenced in the chapel's recorded dedication to the Trinity in the fifteenth century?

The Memory of an Image and Its Script in the Later Fifteenth Century

The setting of the *Intercession* within the space of the cathedral's counter-façade chapel is attested to in the second half of the fifteenth century by the adaption of its imagery in several panels and frescoes in and around Florence.[96] As has been pointed out, a panel attributed to Filippino Lippi (Figs. 6a, b) today in Munich and formerly located in the church of San Francesco al Palco outside Prato reflects the overall 'program' of the image in its altar setting, which was recorded to have had statues of the Annunciation as well as an *imago pietatis* below the painting.[97] Such quo-

tor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Metapainting*, London 2015, pp. 10–31 (where a nuanced and inclusive definition on the term includes "involving the beholder as an active or even indispensable component of the image", p. 12); Péter Bokody, *Images-within-Images in Italian Paintings (1250–1350): Reality and Reflexivity*, London/New York 2015; and, most recently, the essays in *Renaissance Metapainting*, ed. by *idem*/Alexander Nagel, Turnhout 2020.

[93] On the history of the painting (discovered under a later image of Saint Luke), see Campagna Cicala (note 39), pp. 37–39, with bibliography; Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, New York 1970 (reprint of the ed. The Hague 1923–1938), VIII, p. 484, where the painting is linked to the school of Gentile da Fabriano and is said to provide the only example of "evidence of the penetration of the Marchigian influence" in Sicily. On the earlier panel of the Virgin Hodegetria (dating from the thirteenth century), see Gioacchino Barbera, "La Vergine Odigitria di Lentini", in: *Federico e la Sicilia dalla terra alla corona: archeologia, architettura e arti della Sicilia in età sveva*, exh. cat. Palermo 1995, ed. by Carmela Angela Di Stefano/Antonio Cadei, Palermo 1994, pp. 94f., and, most recently, Simone Piazza, "La Madonna del Castello a Lentini: un'icona-palladio dalla Sicilia federiciana, fra storia, memoria e leggenda", in: *Arte Cristiana*, CX (2022), pp. 360–369; Carmela Maria Di Blasi, "L'Hodighitria di Lentini: la testimonianza dei restauri nei documenti del Novecento", in: *Sofonisba Anguissola e la Madonna dell'Itria*, exh. cat. Cremona/Catania 2022, ed. by Mario Marubbi, Busto Arsizio 2022, pp. 79–84, and Mariagrazia Patti, *ibidem*, pp. 88f.

[94] For a transcription of the now lost letters of the fragmentary inscription, see Antonio Salinas, "Monumenti inediti di Lentini e di Noto", in: *L'Arte*, VI (1903), pp. 159–164: 162.

[95] Jacobus de Voragine (note 4), I, p. 287 (emphasis mine).

[96] See Bellosi (note 6), p. 162, for a summary and an updated list of the eleven fifteenth-century Florentine double intercession images deriving from the New York *Intercession*, including the recently associated panel in San Niccolò Oltrarno by Gentile da Fabriano. On the latter, with specific reference to the New York *Intercession*, see Cecilia Frosinini, "L'Intercessione: il 'nuovo' polittico di Gentile da Fabriano ritrovato", in: *Il Gentile risorto: il "Polittico dell'Intercessione" di Gentile da Fabriano. Studi e restauro*, ed. by *eadem*/Marco Ciatti, Florence 2006, pp. 17–38: 23f., and Annamaria Bernacchioni, "Sul soggiorno di Gentile da Fabriano a Firenze", *ibidem*, pp. 55–64: 61f.

[97] Meiss (note 19), p. 314.

6a, b Filippino Lippi, *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* (main panel) and *Man of Sorrows with Saints Anthony of Padua, Louis of Toulouse, Francis, Dominic, Clare, and Catherine of Siena* (predella), ca. 1495. Munich, Alte Pinakothek

tations testify to its continued efficacy as an image type and offer insight into the earlier work itself, to how it was remembered and perhaps even, as we shall see, to its former function in the streets of the city.[98]

The reception of the image and script of the *Intercession* is even more pronounced in two little-studied images from the last decades of the fifteenth century, a panel attributed to the Florentine painter Monte di Giovanni of unknown provenience, today in Montreal (Fig. 7), and a fresco attributed to the school of Domenico Ghirlandaio from the former monastery of San Giorgio alla Costa, Florence

[98] It has been proposed that the panel, created for the Franciscan Observant church, was commissioned by the civic authorities of Prato as a votive offering for the friars' prayers, either in response to the then threatening armies of Charles VIII or in thanksgiving for his having spared the city: Patrizia Zambrano/Jonathan K. Nelson, *Filippino Lippi*, Milan 2004, p. 493. On the painting, see Andreas Schumacher/Daniela Karl, in: *Florentiner Malerei: Alte Pinakothek. Die Gemälde des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Andreas Schumacher/Annette Kranz/Annette Hojer, Berlin 2017, pp. 435–447, no. 28, who argue

7 Monte di Giovanni, *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ with Saint Bernard*, ca. 1490. Montreal, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

(Fig. 8).[99] Both retain the essential actors, including the mixed population of devout men, women, and children (and religious in the San Giorgio fresco), but present a dramatically altered setting. The divine pair and praying figures are situated on a parapet, a sort of stage, with the distant view of a river (Arno?) and a city. Most notably, below both scenes and physically separate, a kneeling Saint Bernard holds an unfurled scroll. While in the San Giorgio fresco this area is fragmentary and damaged, the scroll in the Montreal panel describes the scene of intercession:

> O HOMO SECURUM HABES ACCESSUM [...] ANTE PATREM MATREM HABES ANTE [...] OSTENDIT VULNERA. MATREM OSTENDIT FILIO PECTI UBERA. IBI VIDEO UBI TOT CARITATIS SUNT INSIGNIA.
>
> (O Man you have secure access [to God when the son is] before the father and the mother before [her Son. The son] showed [the father] his wounds. The mother showed her son her breast. There I see so many proofs of love.)[100]

These written words no longer express an active dialogue between the Virgin and Christ in the first-person vernacular, as in the New York *Intercession*, but are in Latin and presented by Saint Bernard, as part of his writings. In one of the few studies on the Montreal panel, Myra Nan Rosenfeld argued that, with the addition of the figure of Saint Bernard and the "greater pictorial realism", the artist "increased the participation of the spectator in the supernatural

8 Circle of Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ with Saint Bernard*, late fifteenth century. Florence, former monastery of San Giorgio alla Costa

that this hypothesis is further evidenced in the predella imagery through the inclusion of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, remarkable in view of the rivalry of the orders, and paired in the devotional literature in relation to their struggle for the intercession of Mary and Christ (pp. 439f.).

[99] These paintings were first linked to the *Intercession* by Meiss (note 19), p. 312, and Zeri/Gardner (note 22), p. 58, note 2, respectively.

[100] For the Latin transcription, see Cecilia Filippini, in: *Bernardo di Chiaravalle nell'arte italiana dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, exh. cat. Florence 1990, ed. by Laura Dal Prà, Milan 1990, pp. 148f., no. 25. This is an adaptation of the passage found in Ernaldus of Chartres (note 11), col. 1726.

9 Circle of Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Baptism of Christ*, detail of Fig. 8

event".[101] Yet the very engagement with the viewer presupposed by greater pictorial illusionism actually discouraged the sort of participation evoked, primarily through script, in the New York *Intercession*. The Latin scroll transforms the divine conversation – instigated in the New York *Intercession* by depicted speech combined with the prayers and song performed before the image – into a written text, a gloss for a scene of intercession removed from the space of the devotees by the raised stage upon which the scene unfolds. Moreover, we might ask whether the walled city that features so prominently in both images could be a reference to Florence itself, thus alluding to the Virgin's protection of the city and its inhabitants. The depiction of the city was a common feature in the later Umbrian plague pictures together with the representation of the Madonna of Mercy.[102]

With these comparisons, I do not intend to argue for a more participatory nature of the New York *Intercession* in relation to the fifteenth-century works, but to consider instead what these later quotations

[101] Myra Nan Rosenfeld, "A Florentine Quattrocento Altarpiece: Witness to Artistic, Religious Trends", in: *M: A Quarterly Review of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts*, VII (1975), 2, pp. 4–19: 16. On the image, see also Filippini (note 100), with the attribution to Monte di Giovanni.

[102] It should be noted, moreover, that the earliest representation of the city of Florence appears in the monumental mid-fourteenth-century fresco of the *Madonna of Mercy* in the Loggia del Bigallo of the Confraternita di Santa Maria, a building located just across the piazza from the cathedral

might reveal about the earlier image and to what extent they could lend insight into its use within processions related to crisis or the Lesser Litany and the litanic prayers recited before it. A strong case might be made for its relationship to the Lesser Litany in the fresco from San Giorgio alla Costa, which contained, as we have seen, a representation of the city and various kneeling figures. It has been described as a votive fresco on account of the precise date below the image (Fig. 9). Yet it has never been noted that in 1487, the year inscribed at right (MCCCCLXXXVII), Easter fell on 15 April, and the Feast of the Ascension on 24 May: the date 21 May, which appears at left (A DI XXI DI MAGIO), would have been the start of the rogation days of that year.[103] Thus, this date could provide a temporal link to the *Intercession* and to its role as a processional image within the Lesser Litany celebrations.

The use of the intercession imagery in another fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli in the church of Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano (Fig. 10), leaves little doubt about the theme's later interpretation in connection to procession and plague.[104] This is a votive fresco, a *Pestbild*, painted in just four months after a plague in 1464, as the date inscribed in its predella (28 July 1464) indicates. Here, Saint Sebastian, by this time well-established as protector against plague, shelters the people of San Gimignano, and the scene of Mary and Christ's intercession takes place in the upper register. Here is not the place for a detailed reading of the painting, suffice it to note that the inscriptions within this image recall the song of litany, likely recited before the image, as well as in the streets of the city: on Sebastian's pedestal are the words SANCTE SEBASTIANE INTERCEDE PRO DEVOTO POPVLO TVO ("Saint Sebastian intercede on behalf of your devout people"), and on the Virgin's halo is the invocation SANCTA MARIA HORA

10 Benozzo Gozzoli, *Saint Sebastian protecting devotees from the plague*, 1464. San Gimignano, Sant'Agostino

of Florence. For an analysis of the iconographic similarities between the New York *Intercession* and the Bigallo fresco (and other frescoes at that site), see Bent (note 26), pp. 101–103, 236f.

[103] Mario Salmi, "Bartolomeo Caporali a Firenze", in: *Rivista d'Arte*, XV (1933), pp. 253–272: 261, (incorrectly) attributed this work to an Umbrian painter of banners (Bartolomeo Caporali) and linked the iconography to fifteenth-century plague banners.

[104] Ronen (note 2); Diane Cole Ahl, "Due San Sebastiano di Benozzo

PRO NO(BIS) ("Holy Mary pray for us"). Thus, both this fresco and that from San Giorgio are ex-votos related to specific events and crisis. Although they are emphatically non-mobile, through their visual quotations of the Florence cathedral *Intercession*, I would argue, they carry the memory of the earlier work as a processional banner, its performativity, and its use in either rogation or crisis processions.

Fifteenth-century processional banners are well-studied and even a cursory summary cannot be presented here. It should be noted, however, that many of these images do indeed contain texts, which certainly deserves further attention in relation to the oral and aural dimension of processions. The prestige and perceived efficacy of these monumental cloth images in relation to crises such as disease, plague, and earthquakes is evidenced by their later enshrinement as altarpieces, again such as in the plague banner of 1464 from Perugia (Fig. 5), often cited as the earliest surviving image of this type.[105] Yet, should the above hypothesis be correct, the Florence cathedral *Intercession* would predate it as the first known monumental cloth image implicated in such processions and enshrined to form part of an altar ensemble.

To conclude, while the theme of the intercession presented in the New York painting was widespread and found in a variety of religious contexts – songs, prayers, litany, *laude* – attesting to its adaptability in various devotional settings, also in the vernacular, its treatment in this image added a new dimension, one emphasized already in the *Golden Legend* and evidenced in the motley group of praying contemporaries. The scene here showed, in Jacobus's words, a "fruit" of Christ's Ascension, and, more specifically, the power of communal petitions to the Virgin for the city in crisis. Certainly, the image took on multiple meanings over time. Yet processed through the streets, its efficacy could have been set in motion by the song and prayer of those surrounding it.

The *Intercession* might be understood, in both its imagery and its painted words, as the visualization of prayers received and those in the process of being transmitted to heaven. The internal first-person dialogue within the image was a response to the sung prayers of the populace, the voices without the image that still resonate in the Virgin's response "abbi misericordia di chostoro". Moreover, even in its 'new' setting of the counter-façade chapel of Florence cathedral, the image carried the memory of its former function in the streets, its efficacy as a civic palladium during rogations and civic crises, retaining, to borrow Vauchez's words, its "ascensional symbolism".[106]

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Gozzoli a San Gimignano: un contributo al problema della pittura per la peste nel Quattrocento", in: *Rivista d'Arte*, LX (1988), pp. 31–61; Marshall 1994 (note 2).

[105] Rihouet (note 2), p. 191.

[106] Vauchez (note 70), p. 135.

Abstract

This article explores the performativity of images and script in late medieval Florence. It offers a new interpretation of the *Intercession of the Virgin and Christ*, a late-fourteenth century cloth painting from Florence attributed to Lorenzo Monaco, today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It considers new evidence in favor of its long-debated early function as a banner, arguing that the painting's highly sophisticated use of text and image might be linked directly to its role in processions. Central to this hypothesis is the painting's theme, as it was understood in relation to liturgical feasts and crisis processions in fourteenth-century Florence and, in particular, the form, placement, and language of the words painted on its surface. These inscriptions recall the songs and sounds of litany. This proposition is further supported by the later fifteenth-century visual quotations in paintings in and around Florence, attesting to the multisensorial dimensions of its imagery within the ritual environment of the city. Focusing on the dialectics between image and script in the *Intercession*, it shows how the performative aspects of this work broaden our understanding of traditional iconographies and contribute to wider discussions on the role of image and script in the definition of 'public' ritual practices.

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