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SANCTA SANCTORUM

STYLE AND PREJUDICE

This article is based on my contribution for the Studientag *La pittura murale del Duecento a Roma e nell'Italia centrale – nuove scoperte e nuovi materiali* at the Bibliotheca Hertziana–Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte in collaboration with the Historisches Institut at the Österreichi-

ches Kulturforum in Rom, Rome, 5 October 2004. My thanks for the invitation to participate in this *giornata di studio* go to its organizer Michael Schmitz, and to the directors of the Bibliotheca Hertziana Professors Elisabeth Kieven and Sybille Ebert-Schifferer.

The latest publication of the frescoes and mosaics in Sancta Sanctorum undoubtedly launched a bright, but isolated spotlight on Roman pictures and their setting around 1280. The merit of the glossy publication lies in the unprecedented presentation of the restored decoration which constitutes a datable pictorial *factum*, a landmark of sorts in an otherwise rather obscure art historical period.¹ This is not just fragmented evidence, but the unique rediscovery of a whole, integral decoration in its original frame, including mosaics, frescoes, and architectural sculpture. However, after having perused these latest results, it becomes clear that there is not much new or glossy concerning their art historical evaluation, apart from valuable observations regarding the technique of the frescoes by Gabrielli, Moresi, and Zanardi.² The rediscovery was new, but the questions definitely were not. As is customary with newly acquired knowledge, this new evidence, too, raised more questions and problems. These were not so much evaluated in the book itself, if at all, but rather in its reviews, written as far as I know by Cadei, Gardner, Minasi, Tomei, White, and above all by Herklotz.³

Within the small frame of this article, I shall briefly raise issues regarding the style, its possible historical sources, and the authorship of the frescoes.

The face that the frescoes show after their restoration is surprising. Their fresh and glossy appearance is so detached from anything we are familiar with before and after. This poses a problem, because nearly everything else we know of pictorial decorations of that time is utterly fragmented evidence, or is recorded in copy drawings.

I should like to emphasize that it is, at first sight, the impressive pseudo-antique decorative setting of the Sancta Sanctorum frescoes panels that makes them so intriguing.

Whereas some stress the Gothic elements of the decoration, others emphasize its antique or late antique components. The latter are for good and indisputable reasons among the prime and most prominent features. However, neither party acknowledges that *both elements* were char-

acteristic of the time and then equally *modern* in and outside Rome. They were not ends in themselves, but *means* to achieve distinct goals. This is not a perspective limited to Rome, but has to be seen in a larger context. The knowledge of Roman spoils significantly contributed to the formation of the mature Gothic sculptural style in France, such as for example testified by the so-called Visitation Master's sculpture in Reims and elsewhere.⁴ It is the fusion of *both* the knowledge of antique sculpture and the rendering of contemporary *verisimilitude* that resulted in an unprecedented "authentic" *picture* of a new reality – somehow analogous to the new eloquence of vernacular literature. Already earlier in the twentieth century this phenomenon was aptly noticed by Vöge and Dvořák, and called "Naturstudium." But it was not used for its own sake. This new approach to "reality" was instrumentalized to enhance the plausible, realistic, or authentic appearance of worldly and saintly figures. This amalgamation resulted in a new paradigm of figural representation in France with repercussions in Italy.⁵

Some but not many architectural features in Sancta Sanctorum point to the adaptation of French Gothic models which were fashionable at the time. However, the main tenor of the sculptural decoration reflects contemporary Cosmati repertory and antique models, as is clearly reflected in the columns and most capitals of the triforia. This would significantly change in the transept of the upper church in Assisi where Gothic references are dominant.

Again others point to Byzantine sources of style, such as to the frescoes of Sopočani in Macedonia of the 1260s (fig.1). It is hard to imagine that the Sancta Sanctorum workshop had hands-on knowledge of these frescoes or their lost Constantinopolitan counterparts. Except for a general new sense of plasticity and colour, there is not much of a resemblance. However, we may assume that Byzantine or Byzantine trained painters were in Rome at the time. The surviving papal portraits of St. Paul's outside the wall seem to witness their presence. One of them shows obvious

⁴ CLAUSSEN 1973, pp.83–108

⁵ VÖGE 1894, *passim*; DVOŘÁK 1918. The repercussions in Italy are found, for example, in the sculpture of Arnolfo di Cambio, Nicola and Giovanni Pisano in Perugia. Above and beyond Vöge and Dvořák, this is a most complex issue which has not yet found a satisfactory art historical evaluation. One also has to consider the influence of French sculpture of the time, then death masks, effigies, etc. See BRÜCKNER 1966, *passim*.

¹ Hence, the decoration of Sancta Sanctorum is characterized with words such as "mistero" and "unicum," see in SANCTA SANCTORUM, *passim*.

² See also ZERI/ZANARDI 1996; ZANARDI 2002.

³ CADEI 1996. WHITE 1996; HERKLOTZ 1997a; HERKLOTZ 1997b; BELLOSI 1990. BERNARDINETTI 1997; CEMPANARI 1998. POESCHKE 2003.



1. *The Death of the Virgin, detail. Sopočani (after Myrtil Acheimastu-Potamianu, Greek Art. Byzantine Wall Paintings, Athens 1994, fig.90)*

Byzantine traits of character, also defined by ostentatiously shaded eyes (fig.2). I juxtapose it with an Eastern saint's portrait from about 1280 (fig.3).⁶ In my view, the Sopočani reference just points toward a very generic knowledge of Byzantine painting in Italy since the 1260s.⁷

⁶ I chose the late thirteenth-century figure of St. Barnabas in the church of St. Nicholas of the Roof, Kakopetria, Cyprus.

⁷ Therefore I do not dwell on causes and effects concerning the crusades, the convoluted issue of Koehler's and Demus's *Byzantine Art and the West*, the new vernacular language in France and Italy, a new perspective of history even before Petrarch, or the new clients regarding communal pictures. For the surviving papal portraits in St. Paul see the references in ROMANO 1995, p.74, fig.41, and n. 86. A good colour reproduction in KESSLER/ZACHARIAS 2000, fig.165. Not much but the preparatory layer of painting is left of the portrait.



2. *Papal portrait. Rome, Saint Paul's outside the walls (after Herbert L. Kessler & Johanna Zacharias, Rome 1300. On the Path of the Pilgrim, New Haven and London 2000, fig.165)*

The indiscriminate rediscovery of antique and early Christian paintings, mosaics, and of course sculpture – initiated during the pontificate of Nicholas III in Rome – fulfilled a different purpose. In the first place, they did not intend to develop new painterly standards. Instead, they provided the authoritative pictorial references to re-establish and to propagate Rome as *caput mundi*. By means of *ancient-looking pictures* Nicholas III or his advisors thought to bind Rome back to its apostolic roots. It would be much later and outside Rome, in Assisi, that these new discoveries were amalgamated into a new visual or pictorial fabric, due to innovative Franciscan thought and propaganda.⁸

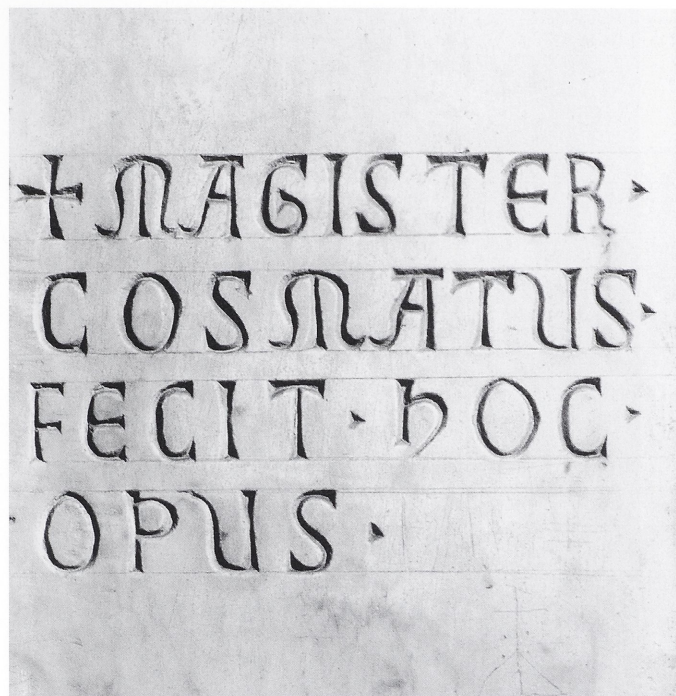
The restorations under Nicholas III not only of Old Saint Peter's and Saint Paul's outside the walls, but also of the Lateran, and the rediscovery of late antique and early Christian imagery – including sculpture – are still a major issue of unknown quantity and quality.⁹ It is firmly established that pope Nicholas III – after the disastrous fall of Constantinople as the centre of the western domination of Byzantium – started an aggressive and remarkable restoration campaign in order to re-establish Rome as the apostolic centre of Christendom. The new decoration of the Sancta Sanctorum

⁸ BLUME 1983; BLUME 1989. See also KESSLER 1990.

⁹ I believe the first attempt to tackle this issue was published by PAESELER 1950. For a twelfth-century perspective see TOUBERT 1970. Further on see WHITE 1956. See also BOSKOVITS 1983.



3. St. Barnabas. Cyprus, Kakopetria, St. Nicholas of the Roof (photo Wollesen)



4. Magister Cosmatus inscription from the entrance to Sancta Sanctorum (photo ICCD)

reflects this endeavour, but now for a restricted audience: the pope and his immediate entourage. Contrary to Assisi, this Roman chapel was a ceremonial showcase for a very few chosen insiders.

Certainly, the rediscovery is disconcerting for the lovers of individual artists' styles, because neither the frescoes nor the mosaics are individually signed and cannot safely be documented for any specific artist. The only signature referring to this *OPUS* is incised in stone right at the entrance to the chapel by a *MAGISTER COSMATUS* (fig. 4).¹⁰ Of course, there is no indication as to a more precise meaning of *OPUS*. Does the signature refer to the chapel design as a whole with the Cosmati Magister as its master mind? Did the Cosmati workshop also paint the frescoes and execute the mosaics? Or was the authorship of the Cosmati limited to architectural sculpture?¹¹ Before tackling these thorny issues, let me look at the fresco decoration in terms of a more conventional view, namely its attribution to a master painter.

In my view, there is no evidence to assign these frescoes to the known heroes of either Tuscan or Roman origin. In other words, there are no valid stylistic criteria to give them

to Cimabue, Torriti, Rusuti, or, if one so wishes – from the ruling, and popular retrospect Renaissance perspective – to young Torriti, young Rusuti, young Cavallini, or even young Giotto. That does not exclude their authorship, but we lack any sound criteria to differentiate between the work of young or old artists at the time, nor do we know anything of what is often described as their *œuvre*. It is, however, the question of attribution that characterizes the research so far.

As far as I can see, the kind of workshop to draw upon was most likely comparable to the one that painted the so-called *Quarta Navata* in San Saba. In this respect, the semi-circular back of emperor Decius's throne in the *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* (fig. 5) with a painted cosmatesque inlay decoration at its front deserves attention. This type of throne and its enormous cushion is quite uncommon for an emperor. It is better suited to seat Mary or Christ. The emperor ought to sit, according to his classical Roman pedigree, for example, on a *sella curulis* – similar to Constantine's seat in the contemporary fresco formerly in the portico of Old St. Peter's. The facsimile of this scene is extant in the fresco in San Piero a Grado near Pisa, painted by Deodato Orlandi around 1300 (fig. 6).¹² By the way, the figures of Decius and Constantine – the latter is here represented by its Pisan replica – are remarkably similar, also including the soldier with the peculiar helmet on the far left.

¹⁰ CLAUSSEN 1987, fig. 271.

¹¹ +MAGISTER • COSMATUS • FECIT • HOC • OPUS. The same questions were already raised by CLAUSSEN 1987, 208; see also GARDNER 1995, p. 20, fig. 4. In general GREENHALGH 1989, pp. 165–67. For the Cosmati see HUTTON 1950; GLASS 1980, pp. 128–29 for the Sancta Sanctorum; and CLAUSSEN 2002.

¹² WOLLESEN 1977, pp. 91–93, fig. 45.



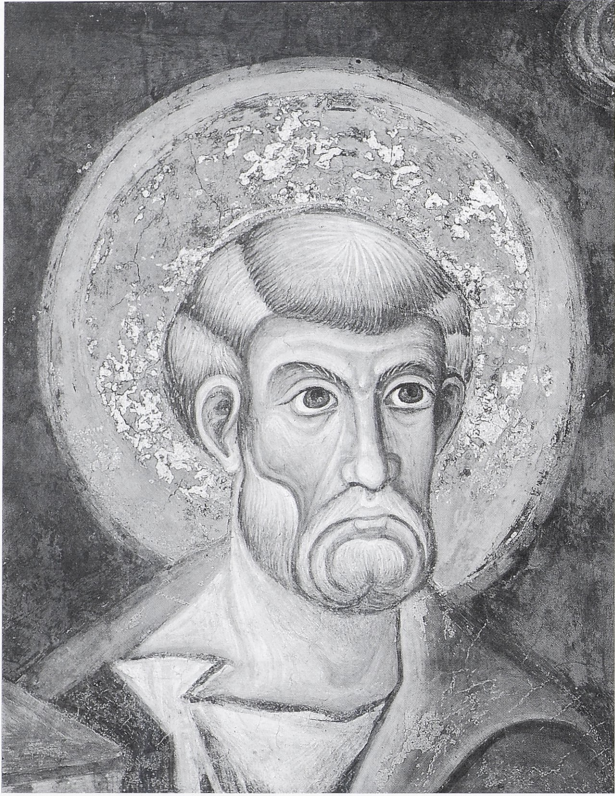
5. The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence, detail: emperor Decius.
Rome, Sancta Sanctorum (photo Vatican Museums)



6. Constantine and Sylvester. Pisa, San Piero a Grado (photo Artini
1067)



7. Mary and Christ Child. Rome, San Saba, Quarta Navata (photo Sopr. Mon. Lazio)



8. *The head of St. Peter. Rome, Sancta Sanctorum (photo Vatican Museums)*



9. *San Saba. Rome, San Saba, Quarta Navata (photo Sopr. Mon. Lazio)*



10. *Head of St. Peter. Rome, Fabbrica di San Pietro, from the portico cycle of Old St. Peter's (photo Wollesen)*



11. Angel. Rome, *Sancta Sanctorum* (photo Vatican Museums)



12. Angel. Assisi, *San Francesco*, upper church (photo Bencini)

It seems that the painters in the Vatican portico and in *Sancta Sanctorum* used a similar model for the layout of the scene. In addition, the pointing figure in front of Decius changes to St. Sylvester in the portico scene. Obviously, scenes were composed in terms of a modular system with figural and architectural elements that could carry diverse meanings in different contexts. Apparently, the *Sancta Sanctorum* atelier did not know (yet) or sought for a more appropriate, antique throne type.¹³ However, again, a good point of reference is the fresco of the *Quarta Navata* in San Saba. It shows Mary sitting on a similar type of throne with a semicircular back (fig. 7). To be sure, the San Saba throne is not identical in all its details, but is truly comparable with Decius's throne and its design, as is also repeated for Christ in *Majesty* on the eastern wall.

One of the most prominent faces depicted in the *Sancta Sanctorum* cycle belongs to Saint Peter (fig. 8) who accepts Nicholas's donation of the chapel and is about to present it to Christ. No doubt, Peter's face resembles the one of San

Saba (fig. 9).¹⁴ The minute comparison between the facial physiognomy of Peter in *Sancta Sanctorum* and San Saba shows that both were structured according to similar prescriptions. The face of San Saba is more crude, but also suffered more damage through time.

However, there are two ways to interpret these Morellian resemblances.¹⁵ The one is to establish an immediate artistic relationship between both ateliers, entailing a judgmental qualitative relationship between masters and pupils, or old and young artists, and so on. This, to be sure, imposes a retrospective Renaissance view on a pre-Renaissance work.

The other possibility is to refrain from the search for artists' personalities and direct artistic relations, and assume instead that these faces were painted while using similar pictorial codes or formal conventions. As to the latter option, it is quite conclusive to compare San Saba with the portrait of St. Peter from the Vatican portico front that I rediscovered some time ago with the help of Fabrizio Mancinelli (fig. 10). It shows very similar facial features. In my view, these analogies do not necessarily suggest the execution by the same painter, but constitute a *prototypical* resemblance

¹³ Strangely enough, the position of the *Sancta Sanctorum* frescoes in regard to the contemporary Vatican portico wall paintings has not been re-evaluated by Serena Romano. I intend to do this in the near future.

¹⁴ As I already pointed out in WOLLESEN 1981, pp. 37–83, 54f.

¹⁵ VAKKARI 2001.

most likely pointing to common late antique or early Christian ancestry mixed with Byzantinizing models.

Let us then compare the face of a Sancta Sanctorum angel (fig.11) with its counterpart attributed to Torriti in Assisi (fig.12). The eyes, noses and ears show identical forms, even though the mouth of Torriti's angel is more narrow and pudgy if compared with his Lateran equivalent. The same formulaic resemblance can also be established between, for example, the faces of Christ from the eastern wall in Sancta Sanctorum (fig.13) and the first nave vault of the Roman workshop in the upper church of San Francesco in Assisi (fig.14). The beard fashion differs,¹⁶ but otherwise the painters used the same *vocabulary* to build up their faces. I would think that this vocabulary borrows from authoritative early Christian Byzantine icons, such as the one from Mount Sinai (fig.15). To avoid any misunderstandings, I hasten to add that I do not believe that this specific icon was actually among the models of our Assisian or Roman painters. However, it is well known for the late thirteenth-century Franciscan and Roman ambience to have attached great value to "old" Byzantine icons. If there were no (miraculous) Byzantine originals available, modern reproductions were endowed with appropriate legends, and painted and presented as old. Byzantium, as we know, had a more immediate, unbroken tradition towards early Christianity. This is manifest in the similarities between, for example, the Christ portraits in the Hagia Sophia (fig.16), in the Karie Djami and the Sinai icon. The Assisian atelier who painted in the Upper church of San Francesco in Assisi harkened back to the same typical features.

In order to make my point, I should like to compare an angel's face from Sancta Sanctorum (fig.11) with a late thirteenth-century non-Roman face of king David from a fresco in Sant'Andrea in Mosciano near Florence (fig.17). One may safely assume that there was no artists' relationship between both figures or any workshop connection between Mosciano and Rome. However, the Mosciano head shares exactly the same features with the Roman head. The same formulaic elements point back, for example, to the Madonna della Clemenza angel in Rome and its ancient ancestry.¹⁷ Basically, they all wear the same make-up.

In essence, these facial features are no artistic inventions *ex nihilo*. They are nurtured by Byzantine, and the more so antique and early Christian sources. The latter component is well shown, for example, in the mosaic heads in the apse

of Santi Cosma e Damiano, a decoration that already constitutes an early Christian classical revival as it most likely was also apparent in the apse of Old St. Peter's. Here, I compare the portraits of St. Peter from Sancta Sanctorum and the Vatican portico fresco with his earlier image in Santi Cosma e Damiano (fig.18).

Therefore, it cannot be emphasized enough that the notion of style at this time should not yet be readily associated with artists' personalities or identities. What we call "style" at that time definitely needs to be re-assessed. It is not yet an individual artist's style, or the *ductus* of an individual mind and hand, but relates, in my opinion, to certain conventions or norms echoing Byzantine, and especially antique singular forms or entire models. This type of *analogy* escapes the attempt to identify individual artists, youthful or old, at the time when the frescoes in Sancta Sanctorum were executed. This is to say that at this particular phase certain *formulae* dominated or obscured any individual artistic expressions, if they ever existed yet. These *formulae* certainly reflect the knowledge of contemporary Byzantine sources, but the more so of authoritative late antique or early Christian models. They were at the time what I would label as *retroactive* Roman elements – tainted by Byzantine models pointing to the same "ancient" past – which constituted the pictorial language of a *Roma Renovata*.

Regarding these *formulae* Zanardi suggested the possible use of *sagome*, templates, or *patroni*, although there is no written record for any such use for the late thirteenth century.¹⁸ His observation, if true, has to be fine-tuned. Maybe, these *sagome* involved some cartoon-type of template for the heads. However, the facial "interior design" as such must have depended on authoritative convention, on pattern and motif books, on the professional education of artists, workshop tradition, and, most importantly, on *memory*. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that *not one* acanthus or amphora motif is exactly identical to the other.

To be sure, the extent and amount of painterly decorations required highly economic procedures. For larger decorations, the workshop was most likely divided up in specialists for ornaments, decorative patterns, and architectures, and others for figures and faces.¹⁹ It is peculiar, however, that the *giornate* in Sancta Sanctorum do not seem to reflect such a division of work. In any event, the work process in general must have been highly organized and economized. Later Eastern examples however of the mid-

¹⁶ This more rugged beard "fashion" is not the result of the individual artist's taste or painterly style, but again based on certain prototypes. See Christ's beard in, for example, Tre Fontane, the *Anastasis* in the Karye Djami (Constantinople), and many Byzantine icons.

¹⁷ See WOLLESEN 1981, pp.76f. See also HERKLOTZ 1997a, pp.169f.

¹⁸ Martina Bagnoli delivered a contribution, unfortunately unknown to me, entitled "The Use of Patroni in Roman Painting of the Thirteenth Century. Some Considerations on Repetitions and Meaningful Patterns in the Depictions of Sacred History," at the 2004 Medieval Conference in Kalamazoo.

¹⁹ See WHITE/ZANARDI 1983, pp.103f.



13. Head of Christ. Rome, Sancta Sanctorum (photo Vatican Museums)



14. Christ from the Creation of the World, detail. Assisi, San Francesco, upper church (photo GFN)



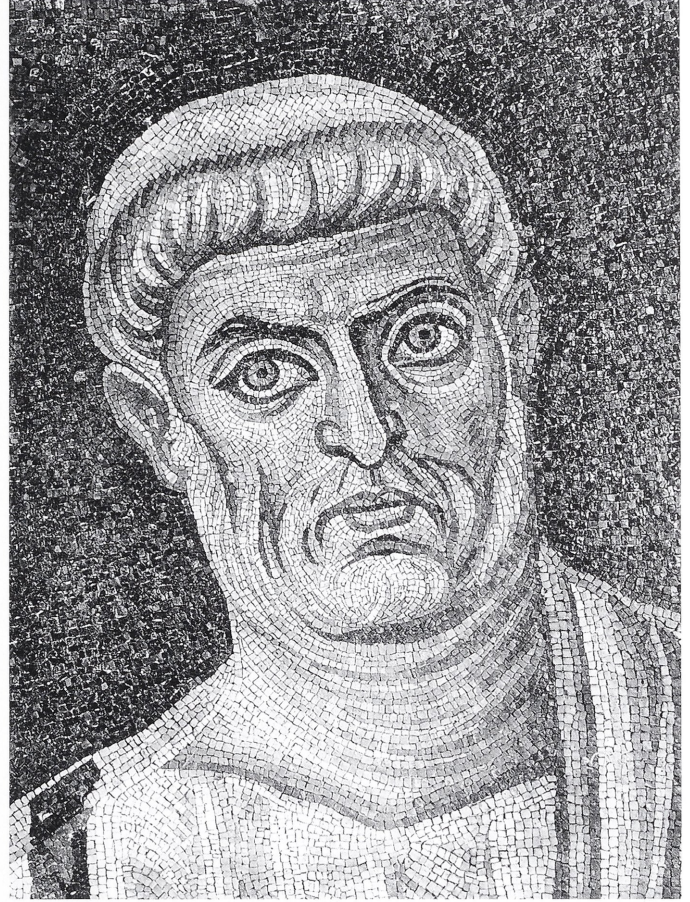
15. Encaustic icon with the head of Christ. Sinai, St. Catherine's monastery (after K. Weitzmann, *The Icon. Holy Images – Sixth to Fourteenth Century*, New York 1978, pl. 1)



16. Mosaic head of Christ. Istanbul, Hagia Sophia (after K. Weitzmann et al., *The Icon*, New York 1987, pl. 68)



17. King David. Mosciano, *Sant'Andrea* (photo Sopr. Firenze 128041)



18. Head of St. Peter. Rome, *Santi Cosma e Damiano*, apse (photo Sopr. Mon. Lazio)

fourteenth century witness these procedures. The figures of Christ in two Passion scenes are nearly identical with certain variations of the gold striations and drapery details which may have been executed by different workshop members but according to the same model (fig.19).²⁰ A certain type of figure, including facial and drapery features was applied twice and slightly varied in order to fit the theme. This phenomenon is also apparent in the repetitive and standardized faces in the *Crucifixion of St. Peter* in *Sancta Sanctorum*. In my view, these figures and faces were composed from stock repertory – unlikely with the help of *sagome* or *patroni* – and finished by means of model books, and memory routines.

It is repeatedly emphasized throughout the latest *Sancta Sanctorum* publication that the chapel's frescoes represent a

²⁰ Since I presently concluded a study on “crusader art”-related issues regarding the early fourteenth-century fresco decoration of a French Lusignan “royal chapel” chapel in Pyrga on Cyprus, I chose from another mid-thirteenth-century Cypriot cycle in the Lampadistis monastery showing two Passion scenes.

new and experimental stage within the history of painting in Rome. But how new was it really? Of course, the degree of novelty is defined by the knowledge of surviving, and the more so *dated* Roman monuments. Whereas, for example, the acanthus-leaf decoration is long established in Rome and rooted in its glorious late antique heritage, its visually spectacular revival during the last two decades of the thirteenth century is new and most remarkable – and, may be, occurred for the first time in *Sanctorum*.

However, this statement has to be significantly qualified. What is new in *Sancta Sanctorum* is *not* the re-use of the motif itself, but its eye-catching appearance. The amphora-type of vase with acanthus leaves (fig.20) features much earlier in numerous instances, such as for example in Magister Solsternus' mosaic at the façade of the cathedral of Spoleto. The lunette frescoes in Tre Fontane, and in the choir of Santa Maria Maggiore in Tivoli are other most eloquent echoes of this revival, but now in terms of what I called a *pictorial mimesis*.

What is most remarkable in *Sancta Sanctorum* is not only the fact *that* antique models were used for papal propaganda, but the more so *how* they were copied and mises-en-



19. Two Passion scenes (14th c.). Cyprus, St. Heracleidius, monastery of St. John Lampadistis, Kalopanayiotis (photo Wollesen)

scène. To be sure, the representation of these acanthus scrolls and *amphorae* is still somewhat schematic, but the overall impression is truly infused with a new interpretation of an antique spirit.

The arduous question remains: where were the actual references for this antique spirit? There is no convincing answer to this question that sought for wholesale solutions. As far as I know, there is no antique model extant, or was accessible at the time, that precedes the Sancta Sanctorum decorative scheme *as a whole*. In this respect, Serena Romano recapitulated past and present theories, adding not very convincingly, that the most possible reference of the Sancta Sanctorum decoration can be found in catacomb paintings, such as ones in the Via Latina.²¹

There is none the less another, rather neglected venue to recruit antique models. I should like to refer to antique *spoliae*, i. e. sculpture with plenty of griffons, acanthus scrolls, and amphorae, as for instance in a fragment from the Campo Marzio (fig. 21). It seems that the painters of the Vatican palace under Nicholas III made use of similar spoils (fig. 22).²² A comparable repertory is offered by the Pan-

theon frieze with its dolphins, candelabra, egg-and-dart and dental frieze (fig. 23). The acanthus scrolls in the Tre Fontane frescoes are based on a type we know from the Ara Pacis – which of course was not visible at the time, but certainly must have had many off-springs.

This is, I believe – for very un-artistic, which is to say extra-pictorial, political reasons – the beginning of an artistic *pictorial mimesis* in Rome that indeed had a paramount impact on the development of painting in the outgoing Duecento and the beginning of the Trecento. *It is the beginning of the role of pictures as a mirror of reality*. The analog mirror of reality, or specular vision, was indeed a problem, also on a scientific basis. It is reflected in the optical treatises of Robert Grosseteste († 1253), John Peckham († 1292), and Roger Bacon († 1292), and also manifest in the revolutionary perspectival design of Cimabue's Trinity Madonna.

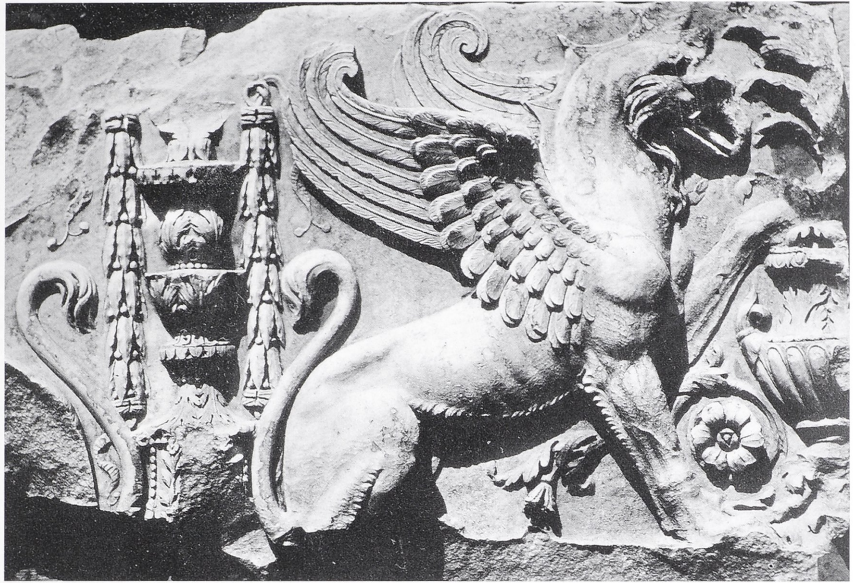
The attempt to plausibly plagiarize reality in pictures and its stunning solution is little later revealed in those columns which separate the scenes in the nave of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere. They faithfully portray contemporary Cosmati twisted columns, such as those from the tomb of Hadrian V († 1276) in San Francesco in Viterbo (fig. 24). The fictitious Santa Cecilia columns are decorated with patterns meticulously imitating contemporary Cosmatesque marble inlays. The painter(s) in Santa Cecilia in Trastevere succeeded in literally and convincingly translating the visual aspects of a *sculptural ensemble* into the medium of painting. Another fine example of this new approach is shown in the frescoes

²¹ ROMANO 1995, p. 49: “E certamente, nella cappella del *Sancta Sanctorum* uno dei modelli di più intenso possibile riferimento è quello catacombale...” It is hard to imagine our Sancta Sanctorum painters stumbling around in the catacombs with torches. ... See also HERKLOTZ 1997a, pp. 170f.

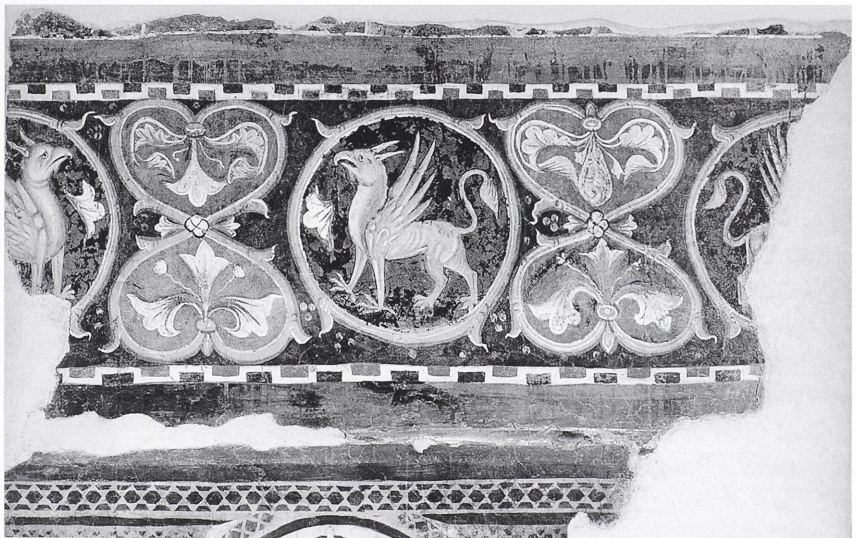
²² ROMANO 1995, fig. 3, and notes 23, 25. HERKLOTZ 1997a, pp. 172f., points into a similar direction.



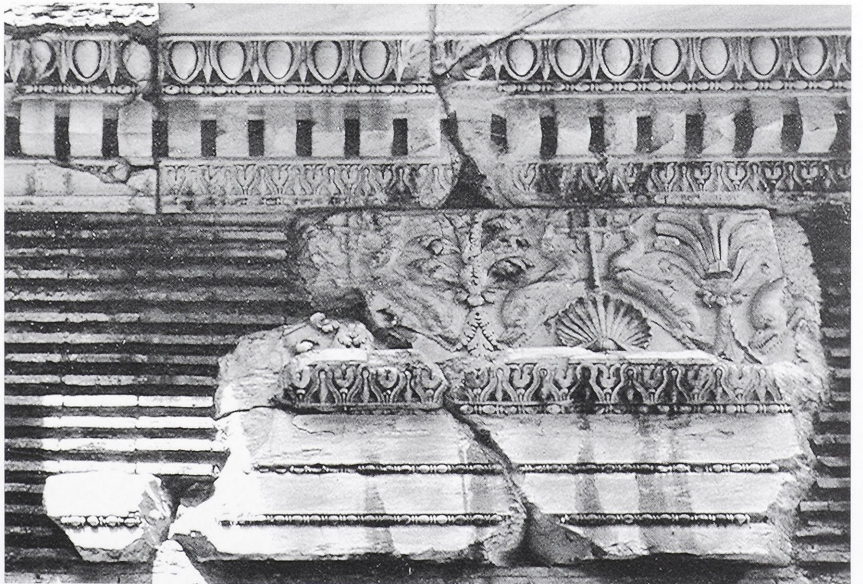
20. Painted vase. Rome, Sancta Sanctorum (photo Vatican Museums)



21. Antique sculpture, fragment from the Campo Marzio, Rome (photo Wollesen)



22. Frieze, detail. Vatican palace (photo Vatican Museums)



23. Frieze. Rome, Pantheon (photo Wollesen)



24. Tomb of Hadrian V., detail. Viterbo, *San Francesco* and detail of decorative framing system. Rome, *Santa Cecilia* in Trastevere (photos Wollesen)

of San Flaviano in Montefiascone. The Roman soldier in the martyrdom scene exactly reproduces models we know from sculptures and relief (fig. 25).²³

I would definitely think that this translation of sculpture into painting deserves much more attention than it has had so far. Undoubtedly there was a closer interrelation between what we define as distinct media since the Renaissance. And painters, mosaicists and sculptors collaborated in Italy and in Rome, closely. This is manifest within the realm of numerous papal tombs signed by the Cosmati. In the second half of the thirteenth century, the tomb designs for popes, cardinals, and the higher echelon of the curia ranged among the most challenging tasks of the time. It called for “integrated” media structures, involving antiquity (reused antique sarcophagi) and modernity, as is visible in numerous examples on papal territory, such as in Viterbo, Orvieto and Rome. It seems that the most progressive structures, namely the tombs of Clement IV (Viterbo), and of cardinal de Bray (Orvieto) were strongly imbued by French Gothic models.²⁴ The tomb of Cardinal Matteo d’Acquasparta († 1302) is another great but much later manifestation of this collaboration of painters, mosaicists, sculptors and architects. Lesser known, earlier such examples (substituting mosaics with frescoes), are the tombs for the cardinal Vicedomini in San Francesco in Viterbo (after 1276), and in Santo Spirito d’Ocre.²⁵ Regarding the Viterbo monument

²³ The frescoes were painted probably toward the end of the thirteenth century by a Roman workshop.

²⁴ The same can be said for Arnolfo’s ciboria in St. Paul’s outside the walls and in Santa Cecilia.

²⁵ HERKLOTZ 1985, pp.185f., figs. 76, 78.



25. Martyrdom scene, detail. Montefiascone, *San Flaviano* and detail from the Arch of Constantine (photos Wollesen)

Herklotz pointed to French models, also taking into account the French pedigree of the Vicedomini cardinal who was archbishop of Aix-en-Provence.²⁶ The planning and execution of such works certainly required a workshop versatile in diverse media.²⁷

²⁶ HERKLOTZ 1985, p.186, and notes 137, 138.

²⁷ Referring to sculptors as architects see Vasari’s mentioning of Arnolfo as “architectus,” or Giotto as architect. See also ROMANINI 1983, esp. pp.45–47. See also ROMANINI 1987, pp.1–40. For Cavallini as a sculptor see MANCINELLI 1959–74, referring to Vasari’s statement “affermano similmente alcuni che Pietro fece alcune sculture ... e che è di sua mano il crocifisso, che è nella gran chiesa di S. Paolo fuor di Roma ...”. See also LAVAGNINO 1940–41. For the Cosmati as painters of the *Sancta Sanctorum* see CLAUSSEN 1987, pp.208, n. 1184, with reference to HERMANIN 1945, p.298. On the other hand, as indicated

In the past, the search for related model repertory has been somewhat linear; associating paintings with paintings and sculptures with sculptures. The inclusion of antique and early Christian sculpture and relief regarding the model repertory of painters would significantly expand the possible range of models. There were numerous friezes and reliefs in Rome that could have provided the Sancta Sanctorum workshop with appropriate *exempla*, such as the one from the Campo Marzio, the Pantheon – or other friezes which in all likelihood were also *painted*. After all, whole scenic compositions of the contemporary portico cycle of Old St. Peter's were drawn from reliefs of the arch of Titus.²⁸

The style of the figures in the scenes is ruled by different, but equally complex criteria. The drapery style does not seem to fit well with anything we know of the time in Rome; but then there is barely anything we know of it. The east wall lunette with pope Nicholas framed by Sts. Paul and Peter is without doubt one of the crucial paintings of the chapel. In all likelihood it was trusted to the most competent members of the workshop. It is here that we find some of the finest drapery examples (fig. 26). These are not at all impressed by ornamental, traditional Roman features of around the middle of the thirteenth century – such as for example in Santi Quattro Coronati. There seems to be a dichotomy between the highly ornamental organization of the drapery folds and the attempt to introduce volume and plasticity. The dominant impression is of a certain calmness and stiff regular parallel patterns. The V-shaped belly folds of Paul are varied by the circular folds of Peter's belly. The clothes and draperies of the citizens who raise the stones to kill St. Stephen demonstrate basically the same qualities. A certain Byzantinism is indicated by the exaggerated highlights of the draperies (fig. 27). They are not yet characterized by the smooth shading or highlighting of the color tone of the textile, but dark shades and white highlights are applied next to the monochrome colour of the garments. The appearance of these draperies is quite similar to those in the figures of saints Peter and John in the scene of the *Resurrection of Lazarus* in the first lunette of the southern nave of the upper church in San Francesco in Assisi (fig. 28).²⁹ Unfortunately, the latter figures are in a rather ruinous state, therefore my comparison can only be most tentative, if not reluctant. Alas, the Baroque Tasselli drawings of the con-

temporary portico cycle offer no further clues in that direction, and its Pisan copy is too much rooted in an indigenous stylistic idiom characterized by a local Byzantinism (Maestro di San Martino). As to the faces in Sanctorum: the strands of the hair, the eyes, are all marked by a strong, if not clumsy linearism.

To make the issue even more complex, I believe that contemporary Roman sculpture seemed to have had an impact on the Sancta Sanctorum drapery style.

There are surprising analogies regarding the Sancta Sanctorum draperies or this type of "plastischer Figurenstil"³⁰ with Roman sculpture of the 1280s and later. Here I am referring to the Praesepe figures in Santa Maria Maggiore (fig. 29), the figures of Sts. Peter and Paul in the Lateran (fig. 30), to Hadrian V's tomb in Viterbo (after 1276), and the funerary monument of the sub deacon Riccardo Annibaldi in the Lateran with its frieze of clerics (fig. 31).³¹ Arnolfo di Cambio's figures reveal the intimate knowledge of antique spoils and, at the same time, are deeply infused with a modern, French Gothic spirit. Unfortunately, as far as we know, they could not have served as models for the painters in Sancta Sanctorum. However, St. Paul's tunic seems to be a transliteration of Joseph's draperies from the Presepe group; and the long elastic folds that characterize St. Peter's mantle bear similarities with those of his Lateran counterpart. The long folds of St. Agnes' dress are related to the latter ones.

In all likelihood, we are missing many sculptural models in Rome dating from around 1270s and around 1280. There is, of course, no place here to further pursue this issue which, however, points toward a more comprehensive research perspective.³²

³⁰ HERKLOTZ 1985, p. 163

³¹ The Presepe figures, mostly dated to the late 1280s, and attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio, are still an unsolved mystery when it comes to explain their *raison-d'être*. See VENTURI 1905, esp. p. 257; KELLER 1934; STEFANUCCI 1944; BERLINER 1951; NILGEN 1967; ROMANINI 1969, *passim*; POESCHKE 1972, pp. 209–11; MESSERER 1975; ROMANINI 1988. For the papal tombs see MONTINI 1961, *passim*. For a significant update regarding attribution and time of execution of the Annibaldi monument, and literature to that date see HERKLOTZ 1985, pp. 170f. Regarding the clerics' frieze Herklotz (p. 180) remarks: "L'appartenenza al quale del fregio dei clerici non è dimostrabile." Contrary to that, without any justification, GARDNER 1992, pp. 104f., maintains that the portrait of the defunct sub deacon and the series of clerics are of the same hand, and vaguely refers to French Gothic (Reims) models. See also WEINBERGER 1963.

³² In this respect note also the observation of HERKLOTZ 1997a, p. 163: "daß Cavallini und vor allem Giotto, wie so häufig vermutet, auch Werke der Skulptur studierten, um ihre mimetischen Qualitäten zu verfeinern, mag zutreffen, doch dürfte die Sancta Sanctorum keinen Zweifel lassen, daß die Begegnung mit der Skulptur nur Mittel zum Zweck, nicht Urheber einer stilistischen Entwicklung gewesen sein kann." For possible earlier tombs in Rome see GARDNER 1972, p. 141 and n. 34 with reference to the tomb of Amice de Courtenay, countess of Artois, who died 1275 in Rome.

by Herklotz (see my previous note), the interplay and coordination of painting and sculpture seems to point to French Gothic influences; see GARDNER 1972, esp. 139f.

²⁸ HUECK 1969.

²⁹ WOLLESEN 1977, fig. 51, 111.



26. Sts Paul and Peter. Rome, Sancta Sanctorum (photo Vatican Museums)



27. Detail from the Martyrdom of St. Stephen. Rome, Sancta Sanctorum (photo Vatican Museums)

I am quite aware of the intricate problems posed by such comparisons between painting and sculpture. However, I believe – apart from the rediscovery of ancient Roman material – that it was the latest, fashionable production in sculpture, and especially of French imports, that posed a great challenge to Italian painters.

There are many unknowns that determined how sculptural elements found their way into painting. To be sure, many draperies and facial types depended entirely on the looks of the model material, as well as on the origin and tra-

dition of the painters and mosaicists, and their own model books. The balance between innovation and tradition in this respect, was also conditioned by the quality and mentality of the workshop and its members, diverse as they were, and of course, to a great extent, by their patrons.

In any event, this *pictorial mimesis* is an outstanding achievement of the painters of the 1290s in Rome, and an



28. *Sts. Peter and Paul, detail from the Resurrection of Lazarus. Assisi, San Francesco, upper church, southern nave wall (photo GFN D 8374)*

important prerequisite for a *pictorial vernacular* in late Duecento and early Trecento monumental painting.³³ It seems that the atelier in Sancta Sanctorum laid the foundation for this development. However, this new mimetic antiquarianism is clearly and peculiarly limited to the decorative frame of the Sancta Sanctorum frescoes – it was

significantly expanded by the workshop that executed the lost portico frescoes of Old St. Peter's. It does neither comprise the drapery style of the figures, nor the scenes or their architecture settings which were composed according to different criteria. Therefore, I would suggest to sharply distinguish the style of these antiquarian decorative elements from the composition of the narrative scenes and the figural style, however assuming that the same atelier was responsible for the one and the other – with an extraordinary expertise regarding a new mimetic interpretation of

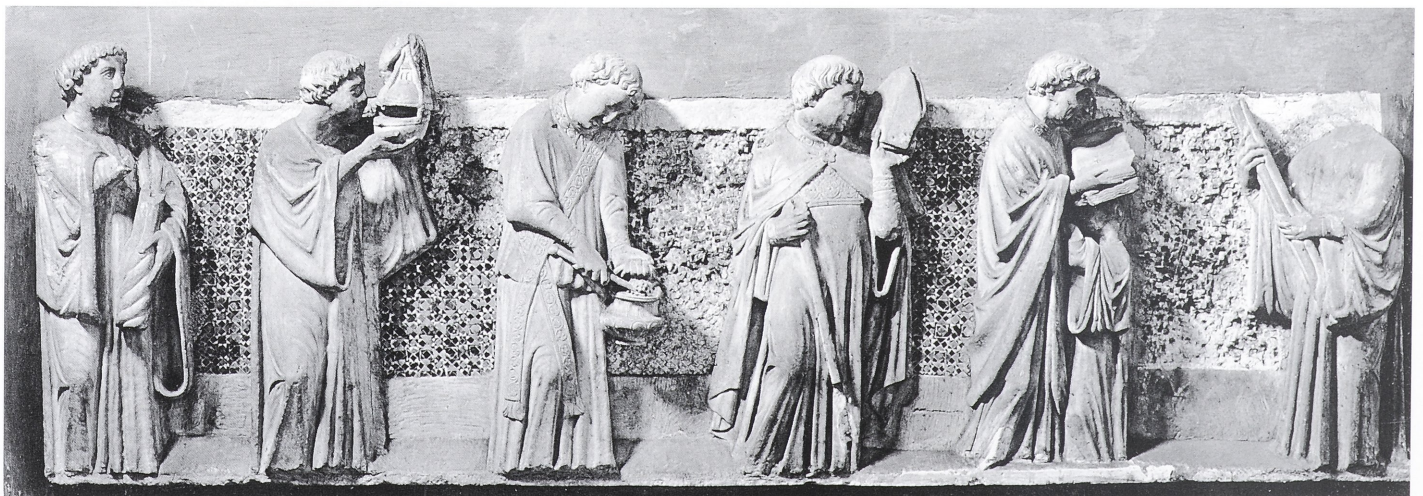
³³ For these issues see also STUBBLEBINE 1985, *passim*, and WOLLESEN 1998, pp. 58–71, and *passim*.



29. St. Joseph, detail from the Praesepe group.
Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore (photo Wollesen)



30. St. Peter. Rome, San Giovanni in Laterano
(photo Alinari)



31. Frieze of clerics from the tomb of sub deacon Riccardo Annibaldi. Rome, San Giovanni in Laterano (photo Alinari)

ancient Roman decorative motifs drawn from mosaic and sculpture repertory.

What could have been the unifying formative frame of this amalgamation of media? It must have been a workshop intimately familiar with antique elements belonging to both sculpture, frescoes or mosaics.

I propose here – backed by a similar assumption made by Claussen – that these antiquarian innovations may have been orchestrated by those *Magistri Doctissimi Romani*, also known as the Cosmati, and in particular by the *Magister* who so prominently recorded his authorship in stone at the entrance of the chapel.³⁴

As we know, the Cosmati were specialists in antique design. Indeed, they consciously competed with antique decorative models, as exemplified in Claussen's latest publication on this matter, and Gardner, too, claimed earlier that the *Sancta Sanctorum Magister* was "the papal architect" and planner.³⁵ This proposition would also fit to my referral to antique sculpture. Formerly, I was skeptical as to this possibility, but I am now leaning towards a Cosmati supervision or solution. Unfortunately, there is no room to further explore this hypothesis here and now, but I should like to stress again that there is a great discrepancy between the mimetic ancient Roman quality of the decorative system and its parts, and the composition of the narrative scenes. The latter are much more bound to traditional formulae as is obvious with the scene depicting the *Miracle of St. Nicho-*

las (fig. 32). The architectural settings, although revealing a better sense of "realism",³⁶ are still very much attached to backdrop formulae such as the ones in the crypt frescoes of Anagni; here I chose the *Miracles of St. Magnus* (fig. 33),³⁷ and do not at all indulge in any remarkable antiquarianism. Interesting enough, this changed significantly with the contemporary, but "public" frescoes at the portico of Old St. Peter's.

In sum: it seems that an extra-pictorial Roman propaganda triggered one of the most consequential developments in Duecento pictorial history: the rediscovery and revival not only of late antique and early Christian paintings of Saint Paul's outside the walls, Saint Peter's, and the Lateran, but also of antique sculpture and reliefs. The innovative echo in terms of a *pictorial mimesis* – at least regarding the decorative system – in a late Duecento idiom is now apparent in *Sancta Sanctorum*.

After all, at its time, the decoration of the *Sancta Sanctorum* was among the most prestigious tasks, and was certainly given to the most profiled workshops. It seems that these frescoes – together with the unknown quality of the lost portico decoration of Old St. Peter's – vitally contributed to the *Roma Renovata* picture of the time, on both "private" and public levels. This is a great and novel achievement for Rome at the time. The same workshops would then, due to combined curial and Franciscan policy and propaganda, contribute their achievements to the Assisi project.

³⁴ I definitely support Claussen's statement (CLAUSSEN 1987, p.209): "So kann man doch mit einiger Berechtigung behaupten, daß Cosmatius der künstlerische Organisator war, dessen sich der Orsini-Papst Nikolaus III (1277–80) bei seinem ehrgeizigen, mit Vehemenz und großen finanziellen Mitteln angepackten Bauvorhaben bevorzugt bediente." In this respect Claussen's observation (p.208) is important that: „Architektur und Dekoration gehen so ineinander über, daß zumindest ihre Planung als Einheit betrachtet werden muß.“

³⁵ See CLAUSSEN 1987, p.208, with reference to HERMANIN 1945, pp.298, who attributed the *Sancta Sanctorum* paintings to the Cosmati

atelier. Also CLAUSSEN 2000. CLAUSSEN 1987, p.209: "Vielleicht war er wirklich 'the papal architect', wie Julian Gardner behauptet. Immerhin hatte er nachweislich Zutritt zum Palast des päpstlichen Kämmerers in dem Jahr 1279, in dem an der Kapelle mit Hochdruck gearbeitet wurde". See also GARDNER 1973, pp.283f.

³⁶ See HERKLOTZ 1985, pp.162f.

³⁷ For Anagni see TOESCA 1902; MATTHIAE 1966, pp.131–45; BAGNOLI 2004.



32. The Miracle of St. Nicholas. Rome, Sancta Sanctorum (photo Vatican Museums)



33. *Miracles of St. Magnus. Anagni, cathedral crypt (photo ICCD)*

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