

**RHETORIC OF PICTORIAL PLACE**

**FICTIVE ARCHITECTURE AND PERSUASION  
IN ALTICHIERO DA ZEVIO'S ORATORY OF ST GEORGE  
AND FRA ANGELICO'S NICHOLAS V CHAPEL**

**Two Volumes**

**Volume I**

**Livia Lupi**

**Ph.D.**

**UNIVERSITY OF YORK**

**History of Art**

**March 2016**

## ABSTRACT

Historiography has tended to neglect architecture in painting, or to envisage it as a lesser counterpart to built architecture and as a means to create pictorial space. This study seeks to redress the lack of research on architectural settings, arguing for the agency of fictive structures and proposing rhetorical theory and place, rather than space, as heuristic tools for their interpretation. It offers four main contributions to scholarship on Italian medieval and Renaissance painting. Firstly, it illustrates how fictive architecture creates place, constructs the narrative, and engages with the viewer. Secondly, it clarifies the relationship between place and architecture in painting by identifying and qualifying two main approaches to the representation of place: portrait of place and hybrid place. Thirdly, it explores the communicative capacity of fictive buildings, demonstrating the rhetorical power of the structures in Altichiero's Oratory in Padua and Fra Angelico's Chapel in the Vatican, and illustrating the potential of a rhetorical approach for the interpretation of architecture in painting. Fourthly, it contributes to bridging the historiographical gap between fourteenth and fifteenth-century art.

The thesis opens with an analysis of how place was understood in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy, revealing the complexity and metaphorical valence of the word *luogo* and underscoring the rhetorical nature of fictive architectural places. This study posits that rhetoric pervaded late medieval and Renaissance Italian culture, arguing that Trecento Padua and Quattrocento Rome were particularly receptive environments to rhetorical culture and deploying seven rhetorical terms as interpretative instruments. These seven rhetorical terms, selected from primary sources, clarify how artists created fictive architectural places, and help to scrutinise the possible meanings and messages that painted architectural place conveys. By emphasising the central role of architecture in painting, its crucial relationship with place-making, and its powers of persuasion, the thesis demonstrates the relevance of the architectural imagination of artists for a better understanding of painting, built structures and the articulation and perception of architectural identity in this period.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS - VOLUME I

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
List of Illustrations	6
Acknowledgements	21
Author's Declaration	22
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>24</b>
<b><u>CHAPTER ONE</u></b>	
<b>PICTORIAL PLACE: SPATIAL DEFINITION AND ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY</b>	
Introduction	40
Fictive Architecture as Setting	41
Art Historical Literature and Pictorial Space	43
<i>Perspectiva</i> and <i>Prospettiva</i>	46
The Meanings of <i>Spazio</i> in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy	48
The Meanings of <i>Luogo</i> in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy	50
Altichiero da Zevio, Space and Place	55
Fra Angelico, Space and Place	61
Current Scholarship on Place	69
Place and Architecture in Painting	71
1. Portrait of Place	73
2. Architectural Hybridity: Citation and Invention	75
Taking Place Further: the Rhetoric of Place	79
<b><u>CHAPTER TWO</u></b>	
<b>ALTICHIERO DA ZEVIO'S ORATORY OF ST GEORGE</b>	
<b>SIX ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGIES TO CREATE PLACE AND ENGAGE WITH THE VIEWER</b>	
Introduction	80
The Oratory of St George	81
Six Architectural Strategies	86
1. The Fictive Frame	86
2. Projection and Recession	89
3. Splayed Buildings	91
4. Apertures	95
5. Inside or Outside? Ambiguous Settings	99
6. Uninhabitable Places	100
Padua and the Veneto in the Oratory's Frescoes	102
Conclusion	109

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **RHETORIC AND MEMORY IN ALTICHIERO'S ORATORY OF ST GEORGE**

Introduction	111
Petrarch and Place	112
Altichiero and <i>Inventio</i>	116
The Rhetoric of Abundance: <i>Copia</i> and <i>Amplificatio</i>	119
Medieval Rhetoric: Dissemination of the Classics and <i>Poetria Nova</i>	123
Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Padua	132
1. The Biblioteca Antoniana	132
2. Preaching and Secular Public Orations.	133
3. The University	136
4. Private Schools of Grammar and Rhetoric	138
The <i>Ars memoriae</i> and Altichiero's Frescoes	140
1. <i>Memoria</i> as <i>Inventio</i> and Meditation	140
2. Memory, Place and Architecture	142
a. The <i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>	144
b. The <i>ductus</i>	145
c. The Success of the Architectural Model	146
3. Mnemonic <i>Copia</i> in the Oratory of St George	147
4. Memory and Pictorial Space	152
Conclusion	153

### **CHAPTER FOUR**

#### **FRA ANGELICO'S NICHOLAS V CHAPEL**

#### **PLACE, TIME AND ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT**

Introduction	154
The Nicholas V Chapel	155
The Fictive Frame	160
The Doctors of the Church	164
St Stephen's Cycle	171
St Lawrence's Cycle	173
Two Places, Two Times	177
Shared Characteristics	179
1. Repetition of Architectural Detail	179
2. Use of Light	181
3. Polyfocal Perspective	184
4. Defying Typological Definition	185
Conclusion	186

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE *DIGNITAS*, *AUCTORITAS* AND *GRAVITAS* OF ARCHITECTURAL PLACE IN FRA ANGELICO'S NICHOLAS V CHAPEL**

Introduction	188
Nicholas V's Architectural Ambitions, Alberti and the Nicholas V Chapel	189
The Nicholas V Chapel within Angelico's Oeuvre. A Roman Hybrid?	193
1. The Sancta Sanctorum	200
2. San Lorenzo fuori le mura	203
The <i>Dignitas</i> and <i>Auctoritas</i> of Rome and the Church	206
Cicero's <i>Dignitas</i> and <i>Gravitas</i>	209
<i>Gravitas</i> and <i>Vera Gravitas</i> : George of Trebizond	211
Nicholas V, Bibliophilia and Rhetoric	212
<i>Dignitas</i> , <i>Auctoritas</i> and <i>Gravitas</i> in the Nicholas V Chapel	215
1. The <i>Dignitas</i> of Ceremonial	215
2. The <i>Auctoritas</i> of the Figurative Programme	216
3. <i>Dignitas</i> , <i>Auctoritas</i> and Architecture	219
4. The <i>Gravitas</i> of Fra Angelico's Fictive Architecture	221
Conclusion	224
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	226

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS - VOLUME II**

### **ILLUSTRATIONS**

Illustrations for Chapter One	233
Illustrations for Chapter Two	254
Illustrations for Chapter Three	319
Illustrations for Chapter Four	329
Illustrations for Chapter Five	379

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Unpublished Primary Sources	423
Published Primary Sources	423
Published Secondary Sources	428
Electronic Primary Sources	457
Electronic Secondary Sources	457

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Fig.

1. Painter from central Italy (Piero della Francesca?), *Ideal City*, c. 1480/1490, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Mochi Onori and Garibaldi, ed., *La città ideale*, 1.3.
2. Altichiero da Zevio, *Cavalli Votive Fresco*, c. 1375, Cavalli Chapel, Sant'Anastasia, Verona. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
3. Altichiero da Zevio, *Dream and Assembly of Charlemagne (or King Ramiro)*, detail, completed by 1379, St James Chapel, Basilica del Santo, Padua. Author.
4. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Lucy's Funeral*, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXXX.
5. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George Baptises King Sevius*, north wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XXXVIII.
6. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Catherine on the Wheel*, south wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXIII.
7. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George Destroys the Temple*, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
8. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George on the Wheel*, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
9. Fra Angelico, *Annalena Altarpiece*, c.1435, Museo di San Marco, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
10. Fra Angelico, *San Marco Altarpiece*, c.1438-40, Museo di San Marco, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
11. Fra Angelico, *Descent from the Cross*, detail, installed 1432, Museo di San Marco, Florence. Wikipedia, [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deposizione\\_\(Angelico\)#/media/File:Fra\\_Angelico\\_073.jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deposizione_(Angelico)#/media/File:Fra_Angelico_073.jpg).
12. Fra Angelico, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
13. Fra Angelico, *Distribution of the Treasures*, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, E12.

14. Fra Angelico, *Entrustment of the Treasures*, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, E2.
15. Ghirlandaio, *Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule*, detail, 1483-85, Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
16. Gentile Bellini, *Procession in Piazza San Marco*, 1496, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
17. Giotto, *Martyrdom of St Peter*, recto of Stefaneschi Polyptych, c.1330, Musei Vaticani, Vatican City State. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
18. Spinello Aretino, *Apparition of the Angel on Castel Sant'Angelo*, 1402-1403, Guasconi Chapel, San Francesco, Arezzo. Author.
19. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Departure of St Augustine from Rome*, 1464-1465, Choir Chapel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
20. Giotto?, *Homage of a Simple Man*, c.1290-1296, Upper Basilica, San Francesco, Assisi. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
21. Piazza del Comune, Assisi. Wikipedia, [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempio\\_di\\_Minerva\\_\(Assisi\)#/media/File:Assisi\\_2.JPG](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempio_di_Minerva_(Assisi)#/media/File:Assisi_2.JPG).
22. Piazza del Santo, Padua. Author.
23. Andriolo de'Santi? and Altichiero, Sarcophagus of Raimondino Lupi, 1379, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
24. Façade, 1377-1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
25. North wall, exterior, 1377-1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
26. Lupi coat of arms, 1377-1384, façade, left side, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
27. Lupi coat of arms, 1377-1384, façade, right side, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
28. Vaulted ceiling, 1377-1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio. Il restauro degli affreschi*, Tav. IV.
29. Interior view, 1377-1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. E.Padova, <http://www.epadova.com/visitare-padova/piazze/piazza-del-santo.htm>.
30. Altichiero da Zevio, *Infancy of Christ*, west wall, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua (from top to bottom: *Annunciation*, *Nativity*, *Adoration of the Magi*, *Flight to Egypt* and *Presentation at the Temple*). Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed.,

*Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. VII.

31. Altichiero da Zevio, *Crucifixion and Coronation of the Virgin*, east wall, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. VIII.
32. Altichiero da Zevio, *Life of St George*, north wall, west side, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua (from left to right and for top to bottom: *Slaying of the Dragon*, *St George Baptises King Sevius*, *St George Drinks Poison*, *St George on the Wheel*). Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. IX.
33. Altichiero da Zevio, *Presentation of the Lupi Family to the Virgin and Life of St George*, north wall, east side, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua (from left to right: *St George Destroys the Temple*, *Martyrdom of St George*). Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. X.
34. Altichiero da Zevio, *Life of St Catherine* (upper register) and *Life of St Lucy* (lower register), south wall, east side, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua (from left to right: *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol*, *Dispute with the Philosophers and Martyrdom of the Philosophers*; *St Lucy before Paschasius*, *St Lucy Dragged by Oxen*). Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XI.
35. Altichiero da Zevio, *Life of St Catherine* (upper register) and *Life of St Lucy* (lower register), south wall, west side, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua (from left to right: *St Catherine on the Wheel*, *Martyrdom of St Catherine*; *St Lucy's Trials*, *St Lucy's Funeral*). Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XII.
36. Giotto, *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple*, 1305, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
37. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Lucy Dragged by Oxen*, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
38. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Catherine on the Wheel*, south wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXIII.
39. Altichiero da Zevio, *Life of St Catherine* and *Life of St Lucy*, south wall, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
40. Altichiero da Zevio, fictive console brackets, vault, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
41. Guariento?, fictive console brackets, ground floor, completed by 1343, Reggia Carrarese, Padua. Author.



42. Guariento?, fictive arches and human head corbels, ground floor, completed by 1343, Reggia Carrarese, Padua. Author.
43. Guariento, fictive frame, second floor (formerly private chapel of the Carrara), c.1354, Reggia Carrarese, Padua. Author.
44. Altichiero da Zevio, fictive frame, detail, north wall, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
45. Altichiero da Zevio, fictive frame, east wall, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
46. Altichiero da Zevio, *Coronation of the Virgin*, east wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XXXII.
47. Altichiero da Zevio, *Martyrdom of St George*, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LVII.
48. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Catherine's Martyrdom*, south wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXVII.
49. Altichiero da Zevio, *Nativity and Adoration of the Magi*, west wall, middle register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. VII.
50. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Lucy's Trials*, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXXVI.
51. Altichiero da Zevio, *Slaying of the Dragon*, north wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XXXV.
52. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George Drinks Poison*, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XLVII.
53. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol*, south wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXI.
54. Altichiero da Zevio, *Presentation of the Lupi Family to the Virgin*, north wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XLII.

55. Guariento, *Coronation of the Virgin*, Choir Chapel, c.1352-1355, Church of the Eremitani (Sts Philip and James Minor), Padua. Detached fresco from the no-longer extant church of Sant'Agostino, Padua. Author.
56. Guariento, *St Philip Meeting the Bishops*, left wall, middle register, Choir Chapel, c.1352-1355, Church of the Eremitani (Sts Philip and James Minor), Padua. Author.
57. Guariento, *Coronation Polyptych*, 1344, Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
58. Nicoletto Semitecolo, *St Sebastian Comforts Marcus and Marcellinus Presented to the Emperors*, 1367, Museo Diocesano, Padua. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
59. Nicoletto Semitecolo, *St Sebastian's Entombment*, 1367, Museo Diocesano, Padua. Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nicol%C3%B2\\_Semitecolo,\\_Deposizione\\_del\\_corpo\\_di\\_San\\_Sebastiano\\_1367\(65,5x70cm\)Padova,\\_Museo\\_Diocesano.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nicol%C3%B2_Semitecolo,_Deposizione_del_corpo_di_San_Sebastiano_1367(65,5x70cm)Padova,_Museo_Diocesano.jpg)
60. Giusto de' Menabuoi, *Wedding at Cana*, c.1378, Baptistery, Padua. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
61. Veronese Master, *Madonna and Child*, c.1376, Chapel of the Comunità degli Stimmatini, Sezano (Verona). Piccoli, *Altichiero e la pittura a Verona*, Tav. 61.
62. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Lucy before Paschasius*, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXX.
63. Altichiero da Zevio, *Presentation of the Lupi Family to the Virgin*, detail, north wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XLVI.
64. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George Drinks Poison*, detail of crenellation, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XLVII.
65. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George on the Wheel*, detail of crenellation, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
66. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Lucy's Trials*, detail of crenellation, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXXIX.
67. Altichiero da Zevio, *Coronation*, detail, east wall, upper register, completed by 1384,

- Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XXXIV.
68. Altichiero da Zevio, *Nativity*, detail, west wall, middle register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
  69. Altichiero da Zevio, *Adoration of the Magi*, detail, west wall, middle register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
  70. Altichiero da Zevio, *Flight to Egypt*, detail, west wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XXIV.
  71. Altichiero da Zevio, *Slaying of the Dragon*, detail, north wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
  72. Altichiero da Zevio, *Martyrdom of St Catherine*, detail, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXVII.
  73. Altichiero da Zevio, *Baptism of King Sevius*, detail, north wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XXXIX.
  74. Altichiero da Zevio, *Presentation of Jesus at the Temple*, west wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XIX.
  75. Altichiero da Zevio, *Presentation of Jesus at the Temple*, detail, west wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XIX.
  76. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol*, detail, south wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXI.
  77. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Catherine's Dispute with the Philosophers*, detail, south wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
  78. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Lucy before Paschasius*, detail, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
  79. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George Drinks Poison*, detail, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. XLVIII.
  80. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol*, detail, south wall, upper register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.

81. View from the west side, Basilica del Santo, Padua. Author.
82. Altichiero da Zevio, *St George Destroys the Temple*, detail, north wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
83. Entrance portico and loggia, Accademia Galileiana (Reggia Carrarese), Padua. Author.
84. Reconstruction of the original structure of the Reggia Carrarese. Nicolini and Rossi, *La Reggia dei Carraresi a Padova. La Casa della Rampa*.
85. Castelvecchio, construction started 1354, Verona. Author.
86. Funerary monuments of Mastino II della Scala (left), begun 1345, and of Cangrande della Scala (right), post 1329, Santa Maria Antica, Verona. FotoeWeb, <http://www.fotoeweb.it/Verona.htm>.
87. Fretwork window, north side, late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, St Mark's Basilica, Venice. Dellwing, "Il traforo," Fig.2.
88. Fretwork window, south façade, fourteenth century, Palazzo Ducale, Venice. Dellwing, "Il traforo," Fig.6.
89. Altichiero da Zevio, *St Lucy's Trials*, detail, south wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. LXXIX.
90. Crenellation, Palazzo Ducale, Venice. Sette Muse, [http://www.settemuse.it/arte/foto\\_musei/palazzo\\_ducale\\_002\\_esterno.jpg](http://www.settemuse.it/arte/foto_musei/palazzo_ducale_002_esterno.jpg).
91. Fondaco del Megio, detail of crenellation, c.1320s, Venice. Author.
92. View of Padua, tomb of Cangrande della Scala as visible from the interior of Santa Maria Antiqua, post 1329, Verona. Hein, "L'iconografia della Basilica di Sant'Antonio nel Trecento," Tav. 34.
93. Altichiero da Zevio?, *Allegory of the War of Chioggia*, 1380, Ms. Lat. 6069 G, frontispiece verso, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. BNF, <http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065105>.
94. Altichiero da Zevio?, *Portrait of Petrarch*, 1379, Ms. Lat. 6069 F, frontispice, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. BNF, <http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065104>
95. Altichiero da Zevio?, *Allegory of Glory*, 1379, Ms. Lat. 6069 F, fol.1r, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. BNF, <http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065104>.
96. Altichiero da Zevio?, *Allegory of Glory*, early 1380s, Ms. Lat. 6069 I, fol.1r, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. BNF,

<http://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065107>.

97. Altichiero da Zevio, *Crucifixion*, east wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, *Altichiero da Zevio*, Tav. VIII.
98. Altichiero da Zevio?, *Allegory of Glory*, detail, early 1380s, Ms. Lat. 6069 I, fol.1r, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. BNF, <http://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065107>.
99. Altichiero da Zevio, *Crucifixion*, detail, east wall, lower register, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Baggio, Colalucci and Bertoletti, Altichiero da Zevio, Tav. XXV.
100. Altichiero da Zevio, oculus, east wall, completed by 1384, Oratory of St George, Padua. Author.
101. Guariento, *Conversion of St Augustine (Left) and Vestition of St Augustine and Baptism of Adeodato (right)*, c.1352-1355, left wall, lower register, Choir Chapel, Church of the Eremitani (Sts Philip and James Minor), Padua. Author.
102. Giusto de' Menabuoi, *Life of Christ*, west wall, c.1378, Baptistery, Padua (from top to bottom and from left to right: *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple, Annuciation, Visitation, Massacre of the Innocents, Christ and the Doctors, Entry to Jerusalem, Last Supper*; underneath the canopy: votive fresco with patroness Fina Buzzacarini, St John the Baptist). Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
103. Fra Angelico, west and north walls, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, frontispice.
104. Fra Angelico, east and south walls, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, frontispice.
105. Fra Angelico, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State (upper register from left to right: *Ordination of St Stephen, St Stephen Giving Alms*; lower register: *Ordination of St Lawrence*). Author.
106. Fra Angelico, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State (upper register from left to right: *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem, Dispute in the Sanhedrin*; lower register from left to right: *Entrustment of the Treasures to St Lawrence, Distribution of the Treasures*. Arch, upper register: St Augustine and St Ambrosius; lower register: St Thomas Aquinas and St Bonaventure). Author.
107. Fra Angelico, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State (upper register from left to right: *Expulsion of St Stephen from Jerusalem, Martyrdom of St Stephen*; lower register from left to right: *St Lawrence before Decius, St*

- Lawrence Heals and Converts a Prisoner, Martyrdom of St Lawrence*). Author.
108. Fra Angelico, vault with Evangelists and Doctors of the Church (top left: *St Gregory*, bottom left: *St Leo*; top right: *St Augustine*, bottom right: *St Ambrosius*), 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  109. Fra Angelico, *St Athanasius*, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  110. Fra Angelico, *St Chrysostom*, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  111. Floor, 1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  112. Fra Angelico, *Crucified Christ with the Virgin, St John the Evangelist and Cardinal Juan de Torquemada*, 1440-1442, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  113. Fra Angelico?, *St Sixtus appears to Juan de Torquemada (Contemplation 29)*, 1467, *Meditationes*, Vat.Lat. 973, fol.29r, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome*, Fig.25.
  114. Fra Angelico, fictive frame, detail next to right window, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  115. Fra Angelico, fictive frame, detail on the left side of the *Ordination of St Lawrence*, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  116. Fra Angelico, fictive frame, detail of pier, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  117. Fra Angelico, fictive frame, detail of dado with scroll, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  118. Fra Angelico, fictive frame, detail of entablature dividing the two registers, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  119. Fra Angelico, *St Bonaventure*, detail of ciborium and semi-cylindrical columnar mouldings, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  120. Fra Angelico, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, detail, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  121. Filippo Brunelleschi, pilaster, 1419-early 1440s, Old Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence. Author.
  122. Filippo Brunelleschi, column fillet, project begun 1419, nave side chapel, San

- Lorenzo, Florence. Author.
123. Filippo Brunelleschi, pier at the intersection of nave and transept, project begun 1419, San Lorenzo, Florence. Author.
  124. Fra Angelico, *St Bonaventure*, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  125. Fra Angelico, *St Augustine*, detail, upper register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  126. Filippo Brunelleschi, *tribuna morta*, begun 1438, Florence Cathedral. Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duomo\\_di\\_firenze\\_da\\_terrazza\\_in\\_p.\\_duomo,\\_tribune\\_morte.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duomo_di_firenze_da_terrazza_in_p._duomo,_tribune_morte.JPG).
  127. Filippo Brunelleschi, lantern, 1436-1472, Florence Cathedral. Wikipedia, [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cupola\\_del\\_Brunelleschi#/media/File:Santa\\_maria\\_del\\_fiore,\\_lanterna\\_ok.JPG](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cupola_del_Brunelleschi#/media/File:Santa_maria_del_fiore,_lanterna_ok.JPG).
  128. Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Battle between Israelites and Philistines* and *David Decapitating Goliath* (panel IX), detail, east doors (Gates of Paradise), commissioned in 1425, Baptistery, Florence. Paolucci, *The Origins of Renaissance Art*, Pl.240.
  129. Andrea Cavalcanti (il Buggiano), *Presentation at the Temple*, 1443-1448, pulpit, Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, [http://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/b/brunelle/d\\_pulpit.html](http://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/brunelle/d_pulpit.html).
  130. Andrea Pisano, *Tabernacle of the Por Santa Maria Guild*, c.1340, Orsanmichele, Florence. Finiello Zervas, ed., *Orsanmichele*, Fig.120.
  131. Donatello, *Tabernacle of the Tribunale della Mercanzia*, previously of the Parte Guelfa, 1425, Orsanmichele, Florence. Oneonta, <https://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/arth213/orsanmichele.html>.
  132. Jacopo di Piero Guidi?, *Tabernacle of the Medici e Speciali Guild*, 1399, Orsanmichele, Florence. Codex, <http://the-codex.net/Images/06a374a9-4616-46fb-8144-c21dff8c898c.jpg>.
  133. Nardo di Cione, *St Jerome*, 1354-1357, upper register, entrance arch, Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Author.
  134. Fra Angelico, *Ordination of St Stephen*, upper register, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  135. Fra Angelico, *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem* and *Dispute in the Sanhedrin*, upper register, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  136. Fra Angelico, *Expulsion of St Stephen from Jerusalem* and *Martyrdom of St Stephen*, upper

- register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
137. Fra Angelico, Vault and east and west wall lunettes, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
138. Fra Angelico, *Ordination of St Lawrence*, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
139. Fra Angelico, *Entrustment of the Treasures*, lower register, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, E2.
140. Fra Angelico, *Healing of Palladia* (predella panel from San Marco Altarpiece), 1438-1440, National Gallery of Art, Washington. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
141. *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, 1277-1280, Sancta Sanctorum, Rome. Piatrangeli and Romanini, ed., *Sancta Sanctorum*.
142. Pietro Cavallini, *Presentation at the Temple*, 1290s, Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome. Author.
143. Fra Angelico, *Entrustment of the Treasures*, detail, lower register, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, E11.
144. Fra Angelico, *St Thomas Aquinas*, lower register, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, G7.
145. Fra Angelico, *St Lawrence before Decius*, *St Lawrence Heals and Converts a Prisoner*, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
146. Benozzo Gozzoli, *St Augustine Teaching in Rome*, 1464-1465, Choir Chapel, Sant'Agostino, San Gimignano. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
147. Fra Angelico, *St Stephen Preaching and Dispute in the Sanhedrin*, detail, upper register, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
148. Fra Angelico, *Distribution of the Treasures*, detail, lower register, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
149. Fra Angelico, *St Lawrence before Decius*, detail, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
150. Fra Angelico, *Expulsion of St Stephen from Jerusalem*, detail, upper register, east wall,



- 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, C1.
151. Fra Angelico, *Distribution of the Treasures*, detail, lower register, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, E12.
  152. Fra Angelico, *Infancy of St Nicholas*, predella panel from the altarpiece for the church of San Domenico, Perugia, 1447-1449, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  153. Rossellino? and Bramante?, Plans for St Peter's, c. 1450 (Rossellino drawing) and c.1503 (Bramante drawing), 20A, Museo degli Uffizi, Florence. Geymüller, *Die ursprünglichen Entwürfe*, pl.9.
  154. Carlo Alberto Carpiceci, Reconstruction of Nicholas V's project for St Peter's with larger transept and choir, *La fabbrica di San Pietro*, Fig.68.
  155. Christoph L. Frommel and Felice Patacca, Reconstruction of St Peter's apse and transept according to Nicholas V's project, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," in *La Roma di Leon Battista Alberti*, 109.
  156. Fra Angelico, *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Angels*, c.1422-23, Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  157. Fra Angelico, *Annunciation*, 1442-1443, north corridor, San Marco, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  158. Fra Angelico, *Annunciation*, 1430-1432, Madrid, Museo del Prado. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  159. Fra Angelico, *Entrustment of the Treasures*, detail, lower register, north wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
  160. Fra Angelico, *Virgin and Child*, central panel of *Cortona Triptych*, c.1434-1435, Museo Diocesano, Cortona. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  161. Fra Angelico, *San Domenico Altarpiece*, c.1422-1423, (background repainted by Lorenzo di Credi, 1501), San Domenico, Fiesole. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  162. Fra Angelico and Simone di Nanni da Fiesole (following Ghiberti's design), *Linaioli Tabernacle*, c.1433-1436, Museo di San Marco, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  163. Fra Angelico, *Annalena Altarpiece* (without predella), c.1435, Museo di San Marco, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  164. Filippo Brunelleschi, *Ospedale degli Innocenti*, detail of pilaster, 1419-1426, Piazza

- Santissima Annunziata, Florence. Author.
165. Taddeo di Bartolo, *Map of Rome*, c.1410, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. Pinterest, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/510454938991913110/>.
  166. Michelozzo, capital, detail, 1436-1454, Library, San Marco, Florence. Author.
  167. Michelozzo, *San Miniato Tabernacle*, 1448, San Miniato, Florence. Author.
  168. Fra Angelico, *Presentation at the Temple*, predella panel from *Cortona Annunciation*, 1433-1434, Museo Diocesano, Cortona. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  169. Arch of Janus Quadrifrons, detail, fourth century A.D., Rome. Wikipedia, [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arco\\_di\\_Giano#/media/File:Arch\\_of\\_Janus.jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arco_di_Giano#/media/File:Arch_of_Janus.jpg)
  170. Masolino da Panicale, *St Catherine on the Wheel*, c.1428-31, left wall, Castiglione Chapel, San Clemente, Rome. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
  171. Chancel arch intrados, sixth century, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
  172. *Traditio legis*, fifth century, Santa Costanza, Rome. Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa\\_Costanza#/media/File:Santa\\_Costanza.\\_Mosaic\\_del\\_S.\\_VII\\_%E2%80%9CTraditio\\_Legis%E2%80%9D\\_adjusted.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Costanza#/media/File:Santa_Costanza._Mosaic_del_S._VII_%E2%80%9CTraditio_Legis%E2%80%9D_adjusted.JPG)
  173. Illuminator (Bolognese?) after Ciriaco d'Ancona, *Castel Sant'Angelo with Nicholas V's coat of arms*, 1465, Codex XI.G.2/Marcanova MS, cod. a.L. 5, 15, f.39, Biblioteca Palatina, Modena. Huelsen, *La Roma antica di Ciriaco d'Ancona*, Tav. XIV.
  174. Illuminator (Bolognese?) after Ciriaco d'Ancona, *Triumphal arch*, 1465, Codex XI.G.2/Marcanova MS, cod. a.L. 5, 15, f.35, Biblioteca Palatina, Modena. Huelsen, *La Roma antica di Ciriaco d'Ancona*, Tav. X.
  175. Illuminator (Bolognese?) after Ciriaco d'Ancona, *Baths of Diocletian*, 1465, Codex XI.G.2/Marcanova MS, cod. a.L. 5, 15, f.37, Biblioteca Palatina, Modena. Huelsen, *La Roma antica di Ciriaco d'Ancona*, Tav. XII.
  176. Fra Angelico, *St Lawrence before Decius*, detail, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico*, F6.
  177. Arnolfo di Cambio, ciborium capital, 1285, San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
  178. Detail of decorative moulding, cloister, San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
  179. Fra Angelico, *Distribution of the Treasures*, detail, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.

180. Fra Angelico, *St Lawrence before Decius*, detail, lower register, east wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
181. Ancient relief with eagle and wreath, SS. Apostoli, Rome. Author.
182. *Messenger Informing the Emperor of the Arrival of St Stephen's Body in Rome*, end of the thirteenth century, atrium, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
183. *Nicholas III with St Paul and St Peter Presenting the Model of the Sancta Sanctorum to Christ*, 1277-1279, Sancta Sanctorum, Rome. Pietrangeli and Romanini, ed., *Sancta Sanctorum*.
184. Decorative roundel between arches, exterior, 1277-1279, Sancta Sanctorum, Rome. Gardner, "L'architettura del Sancta Sanctorum," Fig.11.
185. Porphyry column and capital, 1279, Sancta Sanctorum, Rome. Author.
186. Fra Angelico, *Circumcision of Christ*, c.1451-1452, *Santissima Annunziata Silver Chest*, Museo di San Marco, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
187. Fra Angelico, *Communion of the Apostles*, c.1451-1452, *Santissima Annunziata Silver Chest*, Museo di San Marco, Florence. Web Gallery of Art, <http://www.wga.hu/index1.html>.
188. *Martyrdom of St Stephen*, 1277-1279, Sancta Sanctorum, Rome. Pietrangeli and Romanini, ed., *Sancta Sanctorum*.
189. *The Procession Carrying St Stephen's Body Stops before San Lorenzo fuori le mura*, end of the thirteenth century, atrium, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
190. Entrance portico, post-1943 reconstruction of the thirteenth-century original, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
191. Nave capital, thirteenth century, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Marble (capital) and granite (column shaft, ancient *spolium*). Author.
192. Nave, thirteenth century, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
193. Comparison of choir capital, ancient *spolium*?, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome (above) and *Ordination of St Stephen*, detail of capital, upper register, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State (below). Author and Buranelli, ed., *Beato Angelico*, A23.
194. Decoration with stylised leaves, thirteenth century?, underside of architrave, choir, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Author.
195. Fra Angelico, *Ordination of St Stephen*, upper register, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Beato Angelico*, A1.
196. Fra Angelico, *Ordination of St Lawrence*, lower register, west wall, 1448-1450,

- Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Buranelli, ed., *Beato Angelico*, D1.
197. Fra Angelico, *Ordination of St Lawrence*, detail of altar, lower register, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
198. Fra Angelico, right window embrasure, west wall, 1448-1450, Nicholas V Chapel, Vatican Palace, Vatican City State. Author.
199. *Martyrdom of St Peter*, 1277-1279, Sancta Sanctorum, Rome. Pietrangeli and Romanini, ed., *Sancta Sanctorum*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a considerable debt to my supervisor, Amanda Lillie, who advised and guided me on all matters with unstinting generosity and patience. This thesis benefitted immensely from her wisdom and teaching expertise, and I am grateful for her enthusiastic support, inspiring suggestions and hospitality on numerous occasions.

Within the History of Art Department at the University of York, Emanuele Lugli offered helpful advice on the thesis and on future career options, whilst Michele Luigi Vescovi provided feedback on teaching during the second year of my PhD, kindly offering me to teach one of the seminars of his specialist module.

Parts of this thesis were presented at various seminars and conferences. I am grateful to all those who listened and raised questions, especially the architectural historians members of RATS and the participants to the Kunsthistorisches Institut's 2013 Summer School, focused on St Francis and Assisi.

The greatest majority of my research was carried out at the Warburg Institute and Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz. Many thanks go to the staff of both libraries. Staff of the Arciconfraternita di Sant'Antonio, the Accademia Galileiana, and the Musei Vaticani kindly answered my questions and allowed me to take pictures.

My gratitude is also recorded to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their generous funding, which enabled me to carry out full-time research.

Other moral and intellectual encouragement has come primarily from four friends and fellow students. Maria Alessia Rossi spent many a day with me at the Warburg, and offered hospitality both in London and in Rome. Katharine Stahlbuhk helpfully scanned documents and provided assistance with the translation of German texts. Alice Delage discussed with me the representation of architecture in other media, particularly metalwork, whilst Chloé Demonet offered hospitality in Paris.

My warmest thanks go to my mother Letizia, who accompanied me on many research trips to Padua, Verona, Venice, Rome and Florence, never complaining of how many miles I had her walk or how long I had her wait for me to finish taking pictures or examining a fresco; to my father Carlo, who offered precious advice and assistance with photographs, purchased many books for me and also accompanied me to research trips around Tuscany; and, finally, to Patrick, who was with me at every stage of this project and to whom I owe more than words can say. Their love and encouragement made the realisation of this thesis possible.

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

In accordance with the requirements for the presentation of theses and dissertations, I hereby record that this thesis contains no material which: (1) has been submitted previously for any other academic award, and (2) has been submitted previously at the University of York or any other academic institution. This thesis is the product of the author's individual and sole research; it is not part of a collaborative project and no other individual has contributed to its content. This thesis does not contain any work which has been published elsewhere, in any format, prior to its submission for examination. All sources are acknowledged as references.

“ ... e llavor[e]rai quelle corniciette con gran piacere e diletto; e per simile, base, colonne, chapitelli, frontispizi, fioroni, civori, et tutta l'arte della mazonaria, che è un bel membro dell'arte nostra e vuolsi fare con gran diletto. ”

Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, LXXXVII

## INTRODUCTION

Architecture in painting is often neglected, treated as a mere background to the supposedly more important narrative or interpreted as a lesser counterpart to built architecture.<sup>1</sup> In particular, it is frequently evaluated on the basis of how successful it is at conveying pictorial space.<sup>2</sup> This thesis argues instead that fictive architecture is a crucial, active agent within the image, constructing the narrative, creating place and rhetorically engaging with the viewer. This study thus proposes a new way of interpreting space, place and architecture in painting, emphasising the invention of place over the rendition of space and underscoring the importance of the architectural imagination of painters. It does so by presenting a sustained analysis of the architectural settings in two fresco cycles, thus advancing scholarship on these case studies as well as highlighting the porosity of the boundaries between painting and architecture. The thesis therefore intends to contribute towards a more integrated consideration of architecture in all its forms, two and three-dimensional, hence enriching our understanding of its communicative powers.

The goal is to highlight the active roles of architecture in Italian painting across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The pairing of architectural setting and narrative

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Ceriana evaluated Mantegna's fictive structures only on the basis of their structural credibility and their reliance on built architectural models. Matteo Ceriana, "La pala di San Zeno: l'architettura reale e quella dipinta," *Annali di architettura. Rivista del Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio di Vicenza*, 18-19 (2006-2007): 83-104. Although Cole Ahl acknowledged Benozzo Gozzoli's architecture as structuring agent within narrative, she failed to notice the importance of this feature for the whole of his oeuvre. Diane Cole Ahl, *Benozzo Gozzoli* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 124, 128. A recent book completely dedicated to fictive architecture is Francesco Benelli, *The Architecture in Giotto's Paintings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Recent exhibitions offered helpful contributions, although they rarely challenged traditional interpretations of fictive structures. Slobodan Ćurčić and Evangelia Hadjistryphonos, ed., *Architecture as Icon. Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art* (New Haven: Princeton University Art Museum, 2010); Delfín Rodríguez and Mar Borobia, ed., *Architecturas pintadas del Renacimiento al siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2011-2012); António Filipe Pimentel, ed., *A arquitetura imaginária. Pintura, escultura, artes decorativas* (Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 2012-2013); Lorenza Mochi Onori and Vittoria Garibaldi, ed., *La città ideale. L'utopia del Rinascimento a Urbino tra Piero della Francesca e Raffaello* (Urbino: Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, 2012); Amanda Lillie, ed., "Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting," The National Gallery, London, 2014, accessed Mar 1, 2016, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/>.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Cristina Acidini Luchinat and Enrica Neri Lusanna treated Maso di Banco's fictive buildings in the Bardi di Vernio or St Sylvester Chapel in Santa Croce, Florence (c.1335) as ways to articulate "virtual space" or the "spatial unity" of the image. Cristina Acidini Luchinat and Enrica Neri Lusanna, *Maso di Banco. La Cappella di San Silvestro* (Milan: Electa, 1998), 76, 122, 210. Similarly, Laura Cavazzini described Vecchietta's *Vision of the Blessed Sorore* in the Pellegrinaio at Santa Maria della Scala in Siena (1441), which presents an extremely complex and ornate architectural structure, as "inserted in a spatial box." Laura Cavazzini, "Lorenzo di Pietro detto il Vecchietta," in *Lorenzo Vecchietta 'pittor de lo spedale'. Le principali opere di committenza del Santa Maria della Scala*, ed. Enrico Toti (Siena: Santa Maria della Scala and Protagon Editori, 2006), 3. Gianfranco Spagnesi, Mario Fondelli and Emma Mandelli, ed., *Raffaello: l'architettura 'picta'. Percezione e realtà* (Rome: Multigrafica editrice, 1984).



forms an inextricable unit within which fictive structures and narrative reciprocally increase each other's agency.<sup>3</sup> The presence of the narrative 'activates' fictive architecture, enabling us to decode its meanings and messages as a setting; similarly, architecture in painting deploys communicative powers that reiterate, clarify and, crucially, intensify the narrative's messages, strengthening its persuasiveness. The thesis argues that the generation of place is at the heart of the agency of architecture in painting, discussing the implications this carries. This study also identifies numerous architectural strategies that engage the attention of viewers, mediating between them and the narrative, and drawing them into the image.

By focusing on fresco cycles, the thesis is able to examine the intertwined relation between place, the paintings and the built architecture within which the frescoes are embedded. Fresco cycles offer more extensive as well as cohesive visual material compared to individual panel paintings, which may be cohesive but are not as large and immersive, or compared to the illuminations of a manuscript, where the impact of the narrative and the immediacy of a comparison between scenes are affected by the work's size and by having to flick back and forth through the pages. Frescoes envelop whole environments, potentially addressing a considerable number of people simultaneously and representing a bold statement on the patron's part. Thus, fresco cycles enable the art historian to examine an ample visual unit at one with built architecture, reaching more comprehensive conclusions on the relationship between built structures, architecture in painting and narrative than other media would yield. The role of the fictive frame is an essential part of this investigation. The frame is an important agent connecting the scenes of the narrative, singling out a specific *locus* for each image to inhabit, and fictively constructing the built environment in which the frescoes are painted. It crucially brings together place, fictive and built architecture. The thesis therefore presents a detailed analysis of this component of the fresco cycles, which has tended to be ignored.

This study's most significant contribution to current scholarship is the rhetorical interpretation it proposes of architecture in painting. This approach sets itself within a significant rhetorical turn in art historical studies, represented by the recent work of

---

<sup>3</sup> On art and agency: Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner, ed., *Art's Agency and Art History* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). For a study applying Gell's theories to fifteenth-century Italian art: Michelle O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency: the Altarpiece of the Society of the Purification and its 'invisible skein of relations,'" *Art History*, 28, no. 4 (2005): 417-441.

Caroline Van Eck, Mary Carruthers, Paul Binski and Jeanne Nuechterlein,<sup>4</sup> and exposes fictive structures as forms of visual rhetoric with persuasive powers, their communicative ability further enhanced by the narrative they host. The thesis posits that the richness of language can be deeply informative, and demonstrates the pervasiveness of rhetoric in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy. *Inventio, copia, amplificatio, memoria, dignitas, auctoritas* and *gravitas* are the seven rhetorical terms this study selects to interpret architecture in painting. These tropes, extracted from contemporary texts, are not deployed as reading keys unlocking the meaning of the fictive architectures analysed. Rather, they function as tools clarifying not solely the rhetorical message of the frescoes as a whole, but also the means artists employed to engage with built architecture and create fictive architectural places. The articulation of new architectural settings is a form of hermeneutics, whereby the artist interprets an existing repertoire and invents new solutions.<sup>5</sup> It is this hermeneutic approach that this study reiterates.

Whilst historiography has examined built architecture in relation to rhetoric, the rhetoric of architecture in painting has mostly gone unnoticed.<sup>6</sup> Amanda Lillie's contribution was crucial in this sense. In the catalogue for her 2014 exhibition *Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting*, Lillie underlined the agency of fictive architecture, suggesting that it can function rhetorically within the image.<sup>7</sup> This thesis

---

<sup>4</sup> Caroline van Eck, "The Retrieval of Classical Architecture in the Quattrocento: The Role of Rhetoric in the Formulation of Alberti's Theory of Architecture," in *Memory and Oblivion*, ed. Wessel Reining and Jeroen Stumpel (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 231-238; "Architecture, Language and Rhetoric in Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*," in *Architecture and Language. Constructing Identity in European Architecture c. 1000-c-1650*, ed. Georgia Clarke and Paul Crossley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72-81; *Classic Rhetoric and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); ed., *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Paul Binski, "Reflections on the 'Wonderful Height and Size' of Gothic Great Churches and the Medieval Sublime," in *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 129-156; "'Working by Words Alone': the Architect, Scholasticism and Rhetoric in Thirteenth-Century France," in *Rhetoric Beyond Words*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14-51; *Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice and the Decorated Style, 1290-1350* (London and New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2014). Jeanne Nuechterlein, *Translating Nature into Art: Holbein, the Reformation and Renaissance Rhetoric* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Copeland remarked that rhetorical invention is a hermeneutical performance. Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 151-178. On hermeneutics and humanism: Robert Klein, ed., *Umanesimo e ermeneutica* (Padua: CEDAM, 1963).

<sup>6</sup> van Eck, *Classic Rhetoric*. Chapter Two in van Eck's book deals with the rhetoric of Italian architectural treatises of the late sixteenth century, whilst Chapter Four analyses the persuasiveness of British architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, the book does not discuss fictive architecture.

<sup>7</sup> Amanda Lillie, "Introduction," in "Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting," The National Gallery, London, accessed Feb 7, 2016, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the->

presents an unprecedented, in-depth analysis of the relationship between rhetoric and architecture in painting that qualifies and substantiates her statement. The pairing of architecture and rhetoric may appear obvious if one considers that classical, late medieval and Renaissance rhetorical treatises recommended the visualisation of architectural structures for memorisation and recollection.<sup>8</sup> Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura* and *De re aedificatoria* represent another link between rhetoric, painting and architecture, although Alberti did not explicitly prescribe a rhetorical approach to painting and building.<sup>9</sup> He did, however, employ rhetorical terms in connection to architecture, insisting in particular on *concinntas*, *dignitas*, *gratia* and *auctoritas*, as well as deriving the structure of his treatises from classical rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, classical rhetorical treatises often suggested the orator use mental images to illustrate his point more vividly, as Caroline van Eck has underlined in her book *Classical Rhetoric and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, there remain problems. Firstly, as van Eck herself admits, a rhetorical attitude towards architecture is rarely made explicit in early modern architectural theory. This is even more so during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the exclusion perhaps of Alberti. The silence of primary sources on architecture in painting is puzzling in light of the level of detail and prominence of architectural settings since antiquity. Most medieval and Renaissance sources did not describe works of art, but

---

[picture/introduction](#). Another key contribution is the April 2010 special issue of *Art History*, whose essays engage with the theatricality of art and architecture in early modern Europe, and consider the relations between the theatre stage and architecture in painting. In particular, Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels, "Introduction," *Art History Special Issue*, 33, no. 2 (2010): 208-223; and Marc Bayard, "In Front of the Work of Art: The Question of Pictorial Theatricality in Italian Art 1400-1700," *Art History Special Issue*, 33, no. 2 (2010): 262-277.

<sup>8</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, ed. Harry Caplan (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann Ltd and Harvard University Press, 1964), 3, XVI. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (c.80 BC) was revived by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas and turned into the dominant mnemonic text of the middle ages. Francesc Eiximenis, "On Two Kinds of Order That Aid Understanding and Memory," in *The Medieval Craft of Memory. An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 200; Lina Bolzoni and Pietro Corsi, ed., *La cultura della memoria* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Luigi Vagnetti, "Concinntas: Riflessioni sul significato di un termine albertiano," *Studi e documenti di architettura*, 2 (1973): 139-161; van Eck, "The Retrieval of Classical Architecture," 231-238; by the same author "Architecture, Language and Rhetoric in Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*," in *Architecture and Language. Constructing Identity in European Architecture c. 1000-c-1650*, ed. Georgia Clarke and Paul Crossley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72-81; and *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts*, 17-28. Piyel Haldar, "The Function of the Ornament in Quintilian, Alberti and Court Architecture," in *Law and the Image. The Authority of Art and the Aesthetics of Law*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Lynda Nead (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 117-136.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books [De re aedificatoria]*, ed. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1988), Prologue and Book 9, V.

<sup>11</sup> In Cicero's *De inventione*, Zeuxis' ideal female beauty, compiled from five different maidens of Croton, suggests the rhetorician should look to several authors for inspiration. Cicero, *De inventione*, ed. H.M. Hubbell (London: Heinemann and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), ii, 1.1-2.5: In Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, the different poses of figures in painting and sculpture, and the ways artists achieve them illustrate the individuality of each oratorical situation. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. Jean Cousin (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1978), ii, 13.8-14. Van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Arts*, 5-6.

merely praised their beauty or the skill of the artist, without justifying their judgement. An emblematic case is Giotto, a painter who achieved great fame and was widely admired while still alive. The four earliest sources praising him, Riccobaldo da Ferrara's *Compilatio cronologica* (1312-1319 for the Giotto passage), Dante's *Purgatory* (c.1314), Francesco da Barberino's *Documenti d'Amore* (before 1313) and Giovanni da Nono's Paduan chronicle (c.1320s), all mention the quality of Giotto's work but not what makes it so admirable.<sup>12</sup> The prosaic, almost a priori admiration for Giotto is even more bizarre if one agrees with Murray that the inclusion of a painter in a historical compilation like Riccobaldo's is extremely rare.<sup>13</sup> One would have thought Riccobaldo might have wanted to explain his unusual choice.

The interplay between word and image has been a bone of contention at least ever since Horace famously wrote *ut pictura poesis* in his *Ars poetica* (c.19 BC).<sup>14</sup> It is also another form of artistic *paragone*, a seemingly apt approach to the *paragone* of painting and architecture offered by fictive structures. In a recent introductory text on the visual/verbal divide, John Bateman argued against too close an assimilation of text and image, identifying the use of the terminology of grammar to describe an image as a mistake.<sup>15</sup> Bateman may therefore disapprove of John Summerson, who entitled his influential book on the classical orders *The Classical Language of Architecture*, comparing the characteristics of classical buildings to grammar.<sup>16</sup> Although Bateman is right in stating that a complete assimilation of word and image would not be productive, it is undeniable that considering architecture as a language underscores architecture's communicative powers.<sup>17</sup> The deployment of rhetorical precepts to interpret fictive

---

<sup>12</sup> Riccobaldo mentioned Giotto's frescoes in Assisi, Rimini and Padua, defining him *eximius pictor*. Dante famously commented on Giotto's growing fame in comparison to Cimabue's waning renown. Giovanni da Nono's and Francesco da Barberino's testimonies are a little more detailed. Giovanni mentioned Giotto in relation to the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua, briefly describing the subject matter of the frescoes *mirifice laborata* by Giotto. Francesco da Barberino remarked *optime pinsit Giottus* in relation to the figure of Envy in the Scrovegni Chapel. For an account of these sources, as well as other later ones, Peter Murray, "Notes on Some Early Giotto Sources," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16, no. 1/2 (1953): 58-80.

<sup>13</sup> Murray, "Notes on Some Early Giotto Sources," 61.

<sup>14</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, ed. Augusto Rostagni (Turin: Chiantore, 1946), 361-365. A well-researched Renaissance comparison between word and image is presented by Rudolph Agricola in his *De inventione dialectica* (Cologne, 1539). Michael Baxandall, "Rudolph Agricola and the Visual Arts," in *Intuition und Kunstwissenschaft: Festschrift für Hanns Swarzenski*, ed. Peter Bloch (Berlin: Mann, 1973), 409-418; by the same author, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); and Peter Mack, "Agricola's Uses of the Comparison Between Writing and the Visual Arts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 55 (1992): 169-179.

<sup>15</sup> John Bateman, *Text and Image: A Critical Introduction to the Visual/Verbal Divide* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 7 and 17.

<sup>16</sup> John Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> A summary on the issue of images as language can be found in William J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), esp. 47-50. William J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Language of Images* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980). Particularly illuminating in this respect is the theoretical interplay between semiotics and art history: Christine Hasenmueller, "Panofsky, Iconography and Semiotics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36, no. 3 (1978): 289-301; Mieke Bal and

architecture clarifies the modalities with which artists designed their structures, and helps us identify how and why architectural settings interact with and affect the viewer.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, this research does not equate language and architecture, but argues that rhetorical precepts reverberated well beyond the textual realm in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy, and especially in Trecento Padua and Quattrocento Rome, where the chosen case studies were realised. The thesis posits that rhetoric pervaded most if not all aspects of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italian culture, and tries to demonstrate that, as visual rhetoric, architecture in narrative painting is a form of communication aiming to persuade the viewer.<sup>19</sup> The elusiveness of the relationship between rhetoric and the visual arts both strengthens and weakens the arguments of this thesis, because it either confirms the subtly ubiquitous influence of rhetoric, or it reveals its irrelevance. Hopefully the evidence presented here will sway readers towards the former proposition.

The thesis analyses two case studies with striking fictive architecture within this rhetorical framework. The first is Altichiero da Zevio's Oratory of St George in Padua (1379-1384). The second is Fra Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel in the Vatican Palace (1448-1450). In both case studies, the frescoes are arranged in a left to right narrative sequence, and are characterised by prominent architectural structures presenting innovative structural solutions and intricate ornament. At times the architecture overwhelms the figures, in others it appears to be distracting, leading the eye within the picture away from the narrative. Fictive buildings do not merely frame the figures but

---

Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin*, 73, no. 2 (1991): 174-208. On architecture and language: Georgia Clarke and Paul Crossley, ed., *Architecture and Language. Constructing Identity in European Architecture c.1000- c.1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), particularly Clarke's and Crossley's "Introduction," 1-20.

<sup>18</sup> A forthcoming publication testifies to a renewed interest in the relationship between architecture and literature, offering a series of reflections on the potential of literary methods in architectural research: Klaske Havik, Susana Oliveira, Mark Proosten *et al.*, ed., *Writingplace: Investigations in Architecture and Literature* (2016).

<sup>19</sup> The work of Peter Mack and Brian Vickers demonstrated the crucial role played by rhetoric in Renaissance and early modern Europe. Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380-1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and, amongst many other publications by the same author: *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1993); "Rhetoric and Liturgy," in *Language and the Worship of the Church*, ed. David Jasper and Ronald Jasper (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990), 82-109; "Aristotle's Rhetoric and Northern Humanist Textbook," in *La rhétorique d'Aristote. Traditions et commentaires*, ed. Gilbert Dahan and Irène Rosier-Catch (Paris, 1998), 299-313. Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry* (London: Macmillan and New York: St Martin's, 1970); "Epidictic Rhetoric in Galileo's *Dialogo*," *Annali dell'Istituto e Museo di storia della scienza di Firenze*, 8 (1983): 69-102; "Valla's Ambivalent Praise of Pleasure: Rhetoric in the Service of Christianity," *Viator*, 17 (1986): 271-319. Wendy Steiner argued that rhetoric was essential even to modern art, and Paolo Valesio placed rhetoric at the centre of all knowledge, presenting it as a contemporary theory. Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relations Between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). Paolo Valesio, *Novantiqua: Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

structure the narrative and draw attention to themselves, mesmerising the viewer with their plethora of decorative detail and their intriguing interaction with light and shade effects. These architectural settings demonstrate that artists dedicated great amounts of thought, work and time to them, and suggest that they are not only an integral part of the decoration, but that they contend with the figures for primacy.

The amount of scholarship on the Oratory of St George and the Nicholas V Chapel differs remarkably. Although he is considered one of the most influential artists for Trecento and Quattrocento painting in the Veneto, Altichiero is a relatively understudied figure. Little is known about him and his paintings are often considered within a broader framework whose focus lies elsewhere. There are, however, four books dedicated to his work. John Richards's is the only monograph dedicated to Altichiero's entire oeuvre, while Gian Lorenzo Mellini's and Francesca Flores D'Arcais's books focus on the collaboration between Altichiero and Jacopo Avanzo. There is also one book on the Oratory of St George, edited by Luca Baggio, Gianluigi Colalucci and Daniela Bertolotti, documenting its most recent restoration.<sup>20</sup> Important contributions about the Oratory have also come in the shape of articles, primarily by Mary D. Edwards and Luca Baggio.<sup>21</sup> Edwards' research on the Oratory of St George has focused on the narrative's iconographical symbolism and Altichiero's possible role as the Oratory's architect, whereas Baggio proposed a link between Altichiero's fictive structures and philosophical developments on space. Significantly though, scholarship has thus far failed to single out and engage with Altichiero's extraordinary architectural settings as a personal signature of the artist, to delve deeper into the significance of their astonishing decorative and structural intricacy and abundance, and to analyse them beyond the restrictive scope of 'pictorial space.' The thesis addresses these issues through the interpretative lens of rhetoric.

---

<sup>20</sup> John Richards, *Altichiero: An Artist and His Patrons in the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Gian Lorenzo Mellini, *Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi* (Milan: Edizioni di comunità, 1965). Francesca Flores D'Arcais, *Altichiero e Avanzo: la Cappella di San Giacomo* (Milan: Electa, 2001). Luca Baggio, Gianluigi Colalucci and Daniela Bertolotti, ed., *Altichiero da Zevio nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio. Il restauro degli affreschi* (Padua and Rome: Centro Studi Antoniani and Edizioni De Luca, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Mary D. Edwards, "The Meaning of the Apertures of the Oratory of St George in Padua," *Il Santo*, 28, no. 23 (1988): 57-69; "Altichiero as Architect," *Il Santo*, 29, no. 3 (1989): 303-331; "The Expression of Time in the Frescoes of the Oratory of St George in Padua," *Il Santo*, 30, no. 1-2 (1990): 87-101; "The Handling of Narrative in the Cycle of St Catherine of Alexandria in the Oratory of St George in Padua (c. 1379-1384)," *Il Santo*, 37 (1997): 147-163; "Parallelism in the Frescoes in the Oratory of St George in Padua (1379-1384)," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 71 (2008): 53-72; "'Straight and without Deviation': the Mission of St Lucy as Told in Fresco by Altichiero, 1379-84," *Il Santo*, 52, no. 1-2 (2012): 259-275. Luca Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche e ricerche scientifiche a Padova nel secondo Trecento," *Il Santo*, 34, no. 2-3 (1994): 173-232; "Sperimentazioni spaziali negli affreschi di Altichiero nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio," in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. Giovanna Valenzano and Federica Toniolo (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2007), 417-435.

The status of scholarship on Fra Angelico is rather different. Numerous monographs, essays, articles and exhibitions have been dedicated to either his oeuvre as a whole or to specific works, like the frescoes for the convent of San Marco in Florence, his most famous endeavour.<sup>22</sup> There exist three books and a PhD devoted to the Nicholas V Chapel, which has received less attention in comparison to other works by Angelico. The publications are Antonella Greco's book in 1980 and two other volumes realised on the occasion of the Chapel's latest restoration, the first in 1999 and the second in 2001.<sup>23</sup> The PhD was written by Kevin Salatino and submitted in 1992.<sup>24</sup> These contributions, along with a plethora of other articles and essays, analyse in detail the context of the Chapel, emphasising the theologically rich iconography of the narrative and its historical significance. Interestingly, Salatino argued that the postures of the figures of St Stephen and St Lawrence and the iconographical programme were informed by the epideictic, or demonstrative, rhetorical genre.<sup>25</sup> This thesis' argument on the Chapel is closely tied to these aspects, but since they have been treated so thoroughly already, it will not repeat them.

The architectural settings in the Nicholas V Chapel have been the object of more careful analysis than the fictive structures in Altichiero's Oratory of St George. However, all considerations related to the Chapel's frescoed structures are either limited to their perspectival and spatial credibility, or to the extent to which they represent Nicholas V's architectural projects for the city of Rome and the basilica of St Peter's.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Some of them are: Robert Langton Douglas, *Fra Angelico* (London: Bell, 1900); Innocenz M. Strunk, *Fra Angelico aus dem Dominikanerorden* (Gladbach: Kühlen, 1927); John Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico* (London: Phaidon Press, 1952); Giulio Carlo Argan, *Fra Angelico* (Geneva: Skira, 1955); Diane Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008). Hood and Didi-Huberman, among others, have concentrated on Angelico's most renowned work, the frescoes for the convent of San Marco in Florence: William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (London: BCA and Yale University Press, 1993); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance et figuration*. (Paris: Flammarion, 1995). Numerous exhibitions have been completely dedicated to Fra Angelico. The most recent are the 2005 one at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, *Fra Angelico*, curated by Laurence Kanter and Pia Palladino, the 2009 one at the Musei Capitolini in Rome, *Beato Angelico. L'alba del Rinascimento*, curated by Gerardo de Simone, Alessandro Zuccari and Giovanni Morello, and the 2011 one at the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris, *Fra Angelico et les maîtres de la lumière*, curated by Giovanna Damiani and Nicolas Sainte Fare Garnot.

<sup>23</sup> Antonella Greco, *La Cappella di Niccolò V del Beato Angelico* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1980). Innocenzo Venchi, Renate L. Colella, Arnold Nesselrath, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari, ed., *Fra Angelico and the Chapel of Nicholas V* (Vatican City State: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1999). Francesco Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro* (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Kevin Salatino, "The Frescoes of Fra Angelico for the Chapel of Nicholas V: Art and Ideology in Renaissance Rome" (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 3 and Ch. 4.

<sup>26</sup> For example: Richard Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and – perhaps – Alberti," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), I, 290-296; Alessandro Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme nella Cappella

More specifically, these observations have been primarily focused on the settings in three of the eleven episodes narrated in the Chapel, completely disregarding the imposing ciboria of the Fathers of the Church painted on the arch intrados, the fictive frame, and the architectural parallels and differences between the two saints' *vitae* represented. This study offers a more integrated analysis of the entirety of the Chapel's fictive architecture, proposing a rhetorical interpretation of it based on tropes different from those of epideictic rhetoric.

The Paduan and the Roman Curial environments are crucial components of the thesis' argument. The University, with its lay and religious professors drawing students from all over Europe, the holdings of the Biblioteca Antoniana for the education of the Franciscan friars, and the presence of key intellectuals like Petrarch, made Trecento Padua a major centre for the study of rhetoric. Furthermore, the growing power of northern Italian states like Padua encouraged the development of bureaucracy, leading to an increase in the production of administrative documentation and in the delivery of public orations by different kinds of people. Rhetorical precepts were thus disseminated across different strata of society. Similarly, a profoundly rhetorical education shaped the numerous lay and religious scholars gravitating around the Roman Curia in the early fifteenth century, such as Poggio Bracciolini, Lorenzo Valla, George of Trebizond and Juan de Torquemada, informing all exchanges they had and assessments they made of other people and situations. The persuasive articulation and reiteration of the authority of the pope and of Rome as papal See were crucial in light of the recent Avignon exile, the Conciliarist threat and persisting hostility on the part of Roman aristocracy. As strongholds of erudition, where oral and textual compositions circulated continuously in great quantity, Padua and Rome are particularly fertile environments for the propagation of rhetorical precepts at various levels, thus providing an excellent context for a rhetorical interpretation of architecture in painting.

Both the Oratory of St George and the Nicholas V Chapel are private commissions. The Oratory bears an inscription on the façade that defines it as the burial place of the patron, the condottiere Raimondino Lupi di Soragna, who had it built and decorated for his memory and that of his family.<sup>27</sup> The Chapel decorated for pope Nicholas V was

---

Niccolina," in *'Angelicus pictor': ricerche e interpretazioni sul Beato Angelico*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari (Milan: Skira, 2008), 145.

<sup>27</sup> The inscription is now illegible. Valerio Polidoro transcribed it in the late sixteenth century: "Oratorium hoc sub auspiciis beati Georgii, ubi condentis est sepulcrum, pro eius, parentum ac fratrum,



adjacent to the pope's apartments and is described in the documents as *secreta*.<sup>28</sup> The main function of both Oratory and Chapel was the celebration of mass.<sup>29</sup> In spite of the professed intimacy of these environments, the thesis argues that they were accessed by an audience more numerous than the Lupi family in the first case, and the pope and the cleric celebrating mass in the other case. The officially private nature of both Oratory and Chapel would have increased the prestige of these spaces, enhancing the preciousness of their frescoes. This research illustrates that the architectural settings in these case studies played a key part in articulating the sumptuousness of the decoration, as well as acting as fundamental conveyors of meaning.

Another link between the two case studies is the subject matter of their frescoes. Both represent the lives of saints who lived in different places and in different historical moments. The Oratory of St George illustrates the lives of St George, St Catherine of Alexandria, and St Lucy of Syracuse, as well as episodes from the life of Christ. The Nicholas V Chapel portrays the lives of the deacon saints Stephen and Lawrence. Although in different proportions, both decoration schemes include Doctors of the Church and prophets. The similar subject matter, that inscribes the lives of saints within the history of Christianity represented by the authoritative figures of the prophets and the Doctors of the Church, makes it possible to present a comparison between the ways in which Altichiero's and Angelico's architectural settings created different locations, and how they brought them together in the built environment of the Oratory or Chapel.

Significantly, both artists relied heavily on the built architecture of their immediate surroundings and their city of origin to design their fictive structures, but also reinvented built architecture in ingenious ways, so that the viewer is not confronted with an

---

ac nepotum indelenda memoria. Miles egregius Raimundinus de Lupis Parmensis Soranea Marchio edificat, Anno Domini MCCCLXXVII. De Mense Novembris." Valerio Polidoro, *Delle religiose memorie, scritte dal R. Padre Valerio Polidoro padovano conventuale di San Francesco, Dottore della Sacra Teologia, nelle quali si tratta della chiesa del glorioso S. Antonio Confessore in Padova* (Venice: Paolo Meietto, 1590), 36.

<sup>28</sup> The archival documents are published in Eugène Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes pendant le XV et XVI siècle. Recueil de documents inédits tiré des archives et des bibliothèques* (Paris, 1878), II, 316.

<sup>29</sup> A document of 3 May 1378 states that the Franciscan friars of the Basilica del Santo must celebrate mass twice a day in the Oratory of St George: "ut fratres conventus [...] debeant missas duas celebrari," Antonio Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," *Il Santo*, 3, no. 3 (1963): doc. V. No document contemporary to Nicholas V specifies that his Chapel was used for the celebration of Mass. However, as a consecrated environment next to the papal bedchamber, it is extremely likely that this was the Chapel's primary purpose. The papal master of ceremonies Paris de Grassis, in office between 1504 and 1521, refers to the Nicholas V Chapel as Julius II's small chapel "of private mass" ("Dominus noster venit ad parvam Cappellam suam quotidianam privatae missae"). Cod. Chig. L. I. 19, 93v ff. quoted in Renate L. Colella, "The Cappella Niccolina, or Chapel of Nicholas V in the Vatican: the History and Significance of its Frescoes," in *Fra Angelico and the Chapel of Nicholas V*, ed. Innocenzo Venchi, Renate L. Colella, Arnold Nesselrath, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari (Vatican City State: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1999), note 166, 63.

unmistakeable portrait of a recognisable site. Scholars suggested that Altichiero's settings are inspired by the architecture of the Veneto, particularly the Basilica of Sant'Antonio in Padua, known as the Santo; whilst Fra Angelico's structures in the *Ordinations* and *Distribution of the Treasures* have been associated with early Christian basilicas of Rome like St Peter's and the Lateran.<sup>30</sup> In spite of their insightfulness, these interpretations do not critically examine the modalities Altichiero and Angelico adopted to engage with real places, nor do they probe the possible reasons behind the hybrid identity of the architectural places they created, or the effect they may have had on contemporary viewers and worshippers. The thesis addresses this gap in our knowledge.

There are also important discrepancies between the two case studies. One is a ground floor structure located in Padua next to the Basilica del Santo, the most venerated building of the city. The other is a small room on an upper storey, incorporated into the papal apartments in the Vatican Palace in Rome. The patron of the Oratory was a layman, a mercenary captain, whereas the patron of the Chapel was a pope. The most striking formal difference is that Altichiero adopted the gothic style, whereas Angelico employed the classical architectural language. However, closer examination reveals that Altichiero did not reject classical architectural forms.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Angelico employed pointed arches, corbels and pinnacles for the ciboria of the Doctors of the Church. The case studies also diverge in their chronology, separated by almost seventy years.

The differences and similarities between these two case studies offer a template to explore the extent to which approaches to the representation of fictive structures changed from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, examining the agency and rhetorical valence of architecture in painting in relation to two separate contexts. In particular, by focusing on case studies realised in major centres for the study and assiduous deployment of rhetorical precepts, the thesis aims to showcase the wider

---

<sup>30</sup> For example Gian Lorenzo Mellini, "Le architetture delle cappelle padovane dei marchesi di Soragna, e quelle dipinte all'interno degli affreschi di Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi," *Archivio storico per le province parmensi*, 46 (1994): 406. Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche e ricerche scientifiche," 230 and by the same author "Storia e arte nell'oratorio di San Giorgio," in *Altichiero da Zevio nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio. Il restauro degli affreschi*, ed. Luca Baggio, Gianluigi Colalucci and Daniela Bartoletti (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani and Edizioni De Luca, 1999), 30. Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and – perhaps – Alberti," I, 290-296; Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme nella Cappella Niccolina," 145.

<sup>31</sup> Most significantly, he included two profiles of Roman emperors in the frame around the *Crucifixion*, and round arches are used extensively along with pointed ones. The classical echoes in Altichiero's frescoes are discussed in Louise Bourdua, "Exports to Padua Trecento Style: Altichiero's Roman Legacy," in *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas c.500-1400*, ed. Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond McKitterick and John Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 291-302; and Barbara Hein, "Altichiero e l'antico nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio: alcune riflessioni," in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. Giovanna Valenzano and Federica Toniolo (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2007), 437-461.

potential of rhetoric for the interpretation of architecture in painting. In addition, this study contributes to bridging the historiographical gap between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which envisages the Quattrocento as harbinger of artistic novelty, especially in terms of perspective, by addressing the relationship between space, place and architecture in painting.<sup>32</sup>

This study considers a historical period where architecture in painting has always been deemed a means to create perspective.<sup>33</sup> This has engendered interpretations that evaluate fictive architecture almost exclusively in terms of how successfully it represents pictorial space, losing sight of the different roles it plays within the image. Current interpretations of Altichiero's and Angelico's fictive structures are emblematic of this tendency, for they largely envisage these artists' architectures as more or less successfully representing space or imitating the structural credibility of built architecture.<sup>34</sup> The thesis proposes to shift emphasis from space to place as a more appropriate definition for the specific locations created by architecture in painting. It suggests that fictive buildings create place, rather than articulating the abstract, generic expanse of space, and that place plays an active role within the image instead of simply hosting the representation. Two key approaches to the representation of architectural place are identified: portrait of place and hybrid place, where the term 'hybrid' is borrowed from postcolonial theory and identifies fluctuation and polyvalence, but is devoid of the social and political

---

<sup>32</sup> A recent example of the scholarly propensity to identify a new beginning with the Quattrocento is the 2013 exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, *La primavera del Rinascimento, la scultura e le arti a Firenze 1400-1460*, although Dominique Raynaud's essay in the catalogue demonstrates the medieval roots of the application of perspective to the figurative arts. Dominique Raynaud, "Ottica e prospettiva prima di Leon Battista Alberti," in *La primavera del Rinascimento, la scultura e le arti a Firenze 1400-1460*, ed. Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Marc Bormand (Florence: Mandragora, 2013), 165-172. A very recent example, instead, of an effort to bridge the gap between Trecento and Quattrocento is offered by the articles in *Predella*, 35 (2015), "The Survival of the Trecento in the Fifteenth Century," examining the reception and reinterpretation of fourteenth-century art in fifteenth-century artistic production. Louise Bourdua, "Introduction," *Predella*, 35 (2015): 7-10. Another article in this issue of *Predella* engages with Trecento Padua and mentions Altichiero: Zuleika Murat, "Trecento Receptions in Early Renaissance Paduan Art. The Ovetari Chapel and Its Models. Revival or Persistence?" *Predella*, 35 (2015): 11-39.

<sup>33</sup> A fundamental study at the heart of this interpretative tendency is John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), esp. 189.

<sup>34</sup> Baggio examined Altichiero's fictive structures as a means to convey pictorial space, and suggested a connection with the development of spatial issues at the University of Padua. Luca Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche," 173-232. By the same author, "Sperimentazioni spaziali negli affreschi di Altichiero nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio," in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. Giovanna Valenzano and Federica Toniolo (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2007), 417-435. On the spatial approach to Fra Angelico's paintings: Maurizio Lorber, "La rappresentazione dello spazio nel Beato Angelico fra Gotico e Rinascimento," *Commentari d'arte*, 12 (1999): 15; Silvio Prota, *Realtà e realismi nell'opera di Duccio di Buoninsegna, Beato Angelico, Caravaggio e Giorgio Morandi* (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 2005), 18. In particular, Bruschi dismissed the "disorganicità" of Angelico's structures in the Nicholas V Chapel as "inevitabili aggiustamenti connessi con i problemi della rappresentazione pittorica," Arnaldo Bruschi, "Alberti e non Alberti. La cultura 'albertiana' nelle architetture rappresentate in pitture e rilievi nel Quattrocento," in *Leon Battista Alberti e l'architettura*, ed. Massimo Bulgarelli, Arturo Calzona, Matteo Ceriana and Francesco Paolo Fiore (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1996), 52.

tensions that qualify the postcolonial cultural hybrid. Both portraiture of place and hybrid place hinge on issues of identity and belonging encapsulated within the architectural characteristics of a place, but hybrid place evokes several sites at once and eludes certain identification. This is the most common kind of fictive architectural place, and it has never been the object of a sustained critical analysis. The aim is to fill this lacuna.

The thesis' rhetorical reading of architecture in painting develops from the metaphorical valence of place in thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy. In addition to a geographical location, place could also indicate an excerpt or passage of a text, or a metaphorical position within society reflecting one's moral, spiritual and social status.<sup>35</sup> It could even indicate a rhetorical topic, a commonplace. *Inventio* defines the creative process during which the orator picks and chooses from his commonplaces, and can be compared to *disegno*, the design and draughtsmanship involved in the making of a picture. It is through *disegno* that the artist employs his inventive powers to give tangible form to ideas. Fictive architecture was a key element in the process of *disegno*, and it is therefore integral to an image since its earliest planning stages.<sup>36</sup> Painted buildings were the principal means through which artists showcased their *inventio*, as also demonstrated by architectural drawings in artists' model books, revealing a rife architectural imagination that competed with built structures in an *ante litteram* artistic *paragone*.<sup>37</sup> In

---

<sup>35</sup> A recent article reflecting on place as productive agent rather than passive container is Helen Hills, "Through a Glass Darkly: Material Holiness and the Treasury Chapel of San Gennaro in Naples," in *New Approaches to Naples c.1500-c.1800. The Power of Place*, ed. Melissa Calaresu and Helen Hills (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 31-62.

<sup>36</sup> Amanda Lillie, "Constructing the Picture - 1.Introduction," *Building the Picture: Architecture in Renaissance Italian Painting*, National Gallery, London, 2014, accessed Feb 18, 2016, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/constructing-the-picture/introduction>. Howard Burns, "Painter-Architects in Italy during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento," in *The Notion of the Painter-Architect in Italy and the Southern Low Countries*, ed. Piet Lombaerde (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 1-8; and by the same author, "Painted Architecture," *Domus*, 983 (2014): 31-33 (this is a review of the 2014 National Gallery exhibition *Building the Picture*). Jacopo Bellini's drawings, among other artists' drawings and model books (such as the so-called Rothschild model book at the Louvre), testify to the central role of architecture in the imagination of artists. Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Jacopo Bellini, The Louvre Album of Drawings* (New York: G. Braziller, 1984). On the importance of drawing: Gianni Carlo Sciolla, "Primato del disegno: un dibattito accademico nel Rinascimento," in *Il disegno: forme, tecniche, significati*, ed. Annamaria Petroli Tofani, Simonetta Prosperi Valenti Rodinò and Gianni Carlo Sciolla (Turin: Gruppo San Paolo and Amilcare Pizzi editore, 1991), 11-37; Carmen Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop. Theory and Practice, 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 1-32.

<sup>37</sup> The theorisation of artistic *paragone* postdates the period treated in this thesis, but artists' awareness of it is demonstrated at least since Giotto's imitation of sculpture in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (1305). Leonardo da Vinci, *Il paragone delle arti*, ed. Claudio Scarpati (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1993). Sefy Hendler, *La guerre des arts: le paragone peinture-sculpture en Italie XVe-XVIIe siècle* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2013). On model books: Robert W. Scheller, *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (c.900-c.1470)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995); and Albert J. Elen, "Italian

addition, seeing architecture in painting as the result of an inventive process stemming from commonplaces underscores the suitability of place as heuristic tool for the interpretation of fictive structures, for one can invent the specificity and tangibility of place, but not the generic abstraction of space. Therefore, both case studies are analysed in terms of *inventio*. *Copia*, *amplificatio* and *memoria* are instead discussed specifically in relation to Altichiero's work, whilst *dignitas*, *auctoritas* and *gravitas* in relation to Fra Angelico's.

Chapter One engages with the relationship between fictive architecture, space and place. It examines architecture in painting as a setting, and offers a critique of the historiographical tendency to interpret it as perspectival means to represent pictorial space. An investigation into the meanings of *spazio* and *luogo* in late medieval and Renaissance Italy informs a discussion of scholarship on the fictive structures of Altichiero da Zevio and Fra Angelico, highlighting place as heuristic tool for the interpretation of architecture in painting. The possibilities of place as methodological approach are then explored further, underscoring two fundamental ways architecture in painting represents place: portraiture of place, where an existing site is reiterated in an immediately recognisable way, and hybrid place, where citation of built models and ingenious innovation coexist to suggest and at the same time resist identification. Although artists like Altichiero and Angelico may not have deliberately set out to create architectural ambiguity, these definitions attempt to clarify the relationship between architecture in painting and built models. Whilst portraiture of place is generally deemed to be more meaningful and has received more scholarly attention, producing convincing interpretations,<sup>38</sup> scholars have often failed to recognise hybrid architectural place and have never critically examined it.<sup>39</sup> The following chapters address this lacuna

---

Late-Medieval and Renaissance Drawing Books from Giovannino de' Grassi to Palma il Giovane. A Codicological Approach" (PhD Dissertation, Leiden University, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> For example the literature on Ghirlandaio's *Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule* in the Cappella Sassetti (1483-85) and the *Homage of a Simple Man* in the Upper Church at San Francesco, Assisi: Eve Borsook and Johannes Offerhaus, *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Santa Trinita, Florence. History and Legend in a Renaissance Chapel* (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1981), 52-54; Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi. The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 161-164. Portraits of place, such as Gentile Bellini's *Procession in Piazza San Marco* (1496), also attract the attention of architectural historians, who tend to use them as visual evidence for the dating and building stages of real structures: Deborah Howard, *The Architectural History of Venice*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 27-28, 30.

<sup>39</sup> As the thesis will show, the literature on the fictive architecture in Altichiero's Oratory of St George and Fra Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel is emblematic in this sense. Francesco Benelli's book on the architecture in Giotto's paintings offers instead an example of scholars' propensity to trace built models for architecture in painting and evaluate fictive structures in terms of their structural credibility. The author provided an impressive and largely convincing array of possible built sources for Giotto's fictive

by identifying Altichiero's and Angelico's structures as examples of architectural hybridity and by proposing a new reading of them.

Chapter Two is a formal analysis of Altichiero's extremely complex fictive architecture in the Oratory of St George. It presents a novel, rigorous examination of its frescoed frame and architecture, and proposes six strategies to interpret the ways in which the fictive structures create place, engage with the narrative and the viewer. Comparisons with other near-contemporary artists active in the Veneto highlight that the crucial role architecture plays in Altichiero's Oratory of St George represents the most elaborate example of an understudied group of architectural paintings and drawings in fourteenth-century Padua and Venice. Understanding the architectural character of Altichiero's frescoes is crucial for scholarship on other later painters active in this area, such as Jacopo Bellini, Giambono, and Pisanello. The chapter also shows how Altichiero's structures create hybrid architectural places inspired by the built identity of the Veneto, and discusses the implications of this. The examination of Altichiero's settings is deepened in Chapter Three, which deals with the ways in which artists created hybrid architectural places by deploying rhetorical *inventio* as an interpretative tool. Chapter Three also explains Altichiero's accreted structures through rhetorical *copia* and *amplificatio*, and analyses the relationship between architectural place and *memoria*, presenting the art of memory as informing principle as well as purpose of the Oratory's frescoes. These claims are supported by a consideration of the ubiquity of rhetoric in late-medieval European culture and more specifically in Padua.

Chapter Four offers an original, detailed formal interpretative analysis of Fra Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel. It illustrates how the fictive frame mediates between frescoed and built architecture, and how the fictive architecture creates place, constructs the narrative, articulates time, and engages with the viewer. Most significantly, the chapter argues that the similarities and differences between the architectural settings of the two narratives locate the saints' *vitae* in two distinct, but kindred places. This engenders a chronological as well as geographical discrepancy between the two narratives, which conveys the long and prestigious history of the Church, outlining its dignity and authority. This issue is expanded upon in Chapter Five, which illustrates the traceable, yet ephemeral, Roman character of the Chapel's settings and discusses the implications

---

structures, but did not thoroughly discuss the implications of Giotto's borrowing, nor the reasons behind his intentional alteration of the model. Benelli, *The Architecture in Giotto's Paintings*.

of this in relation to contemporary concerns regarding the status of the Church, the papacy and Rome as Apostolic See. The chapter examines rhetorical *dignitas*, *auctoritas* and *gravitas* as encapsulating key ideas informing Angelico's frescoes, the expression of which was the ultimate purpose of his decoration. The role the fictive architecture in the Chapel plays in this respect is crucial.

All five chapters seek to redress the lack of research on architecture in painting. Its active role within images has tended to be overlooked, dismissed as a minor element or reduced to a perspectival means to represent pictorial space. These interpretations created a dichotomy between figures and narrative on the one hand, and architecture in painting on the other - a dichotomy that downplays and misrepresents both the rich architectural imagination of painters and the agency of fictive architecture. In particular, fixation on pictorial space has prevented deeper, more critical analyses of the relationship between fictive architecture and the representation of place. The contribution of this thesis therefore lies in its rigorous investigation of architecture as a fundamental component of Italian late-medieval and Renaissance painting whose implications are little understood. The main goal of this study is to assert the importance of the rhetorical roles played by architecture in painting and to qualify its crucial relationship with place-making. The thesis therefore opens by exploring space, place and the definition of architectural identity.

# CHAPTER ONE

## PICTORIAL PLACE

### SPATIAL DEFINITION AND ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY

“εἰ δ’ ἔστι τοιοῦτο,  
θαυμαστὴ τις ἂν εἴη ἡ τοῦ τόπου δύναμις  
καὶ προτέρα πάντων”<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle, *Physics*

#### **Introduction**

This chapter surveys primary and secondary sources on fictive architecture, focusing on architecture in painting as a means to create a location for the narrative. Fictive architecture is often interpreted as a way to articulate pictorial space, a major concern in the history of Western art, particularly with reference to fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italian art. The chapter argues instead for the concept of place rather than space, problematising pictorial space as a *tópos* of art historical literature. A brief overview of art-historical scholarship on this topic will be followed by an investigation of Latin and vernacular texts referring to space and place in late medieval and Renaissance Italy. This analysis will reveal that, whilst space in this period was conceived as an unqualified interval, place was understood as a specific location not only containing things, but also actively defining their status. Furthermore, the words *locus*, *loco* and *luogo* in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy did not solely describe geographical positioning, but had a metaphorical valence that could indicate a topic for reflection, an excerpt or quotation from a text, and one’s office or social standing. Since fictive architecture locates and emphasises the narrative, structuring and defining the pictorial surface, this chapter argues that its specificity makes place a more suitable tool for the interpretation of architecture in painting than the generic expanse of space. In addition, the agency of place opens up new pathways of research for the interpretation of architecture in painting, revealing its deeply rhetorical nature.

The chapter discusses space and place in relation to the case studies of the thesis: Altichiero da Zevio’s Oratory of St George in Padua (c.1379-1384), and Fra Angelico’s Nicholas V Chapel in the Vatican (1448-1450). Both artists have been considered skilled painters of pictorial space and as harbingers of the application of mathematical perspective, but fixation on pictorial space has precluded exploration of other possible

---

<sup>1</sup> “If this is the way things are, marvellous would be the power of place, and preceding anything else,” Aristotle, *Physics*, Book IV, 208b, 34-35.



readings of the prominent fictive architecture of these two fresco cycles.<sup>2</sup> The chapter analyses existing interpretations of Altichiero's and Angelico's fictive structures, proposing we consider their architectural settings as places rather than spaces. It then identifies two main approaches to the representation of place: portraiture of place, where an existing site is recognised and unmistakably identified; and architectural hybridity, where citation and inventive refashioning of existing models coexist, creating new imaginary places. Considering place as heuristic tool for the interpretation of architecture in painting enables us to glean a better understanding of the relation between settings and narrative, highlighting at the same time the modalities in which fictive buildings function as visual rhetoric.

### **Fictive Architecture as Setting**

The provision of a location for a narrative is the primary function of fictive architecture. In the conception and realisation of built architectural structures, the interaction with site and location and the ways in which built structures alter and articulate these spaces are always at stake. Architectural structures help to create a new space, or, more accurately, they shape and specify it, creating a place to enable habitation.<sup>3</sup> This is also the case with fictive architecture, where the canvas, panel, page or wall surface constitute the space with which the artist's structures interact. Again, as with built architecture, fictive architecture specifies the surface, thus articulating a setting, a place.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> On Altichiero and space: Gian Lorenzo Mellini, *Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1965), 61; Luca Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche e ricerche scientifiche a Padova nel secondo Trecento," *Il Santo*, 34, no. 2-3 (1994): 173-232; and by the same author, "Sperimentazioni spaziali negli affreschi di Altichiero nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio," in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. Giovanna Valenzano and Federica Toniolo (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2007), 417-435; Peter Scholz, "Constructing Space and Shaping Identity. The Painted Architectures of Giusto de' Menabuoi and Altichiero in Padua," in *L'artista girovago. Forestieri, avventurieri, emigranti e missionari nell'arte del Trecento in Italia del Nord*, ed. Serena Romano and Damien Cerutti (Rome: Vielle editrice, 2012), 269-306. On Angelico and space: Maurizio Lorber, "La rappresentazione dello spazio nel Beato Angelico fra Gotico e Rinascimento," *Commentari d'arte*, 12 (1999): 15-19; Silvio Prota, *Realtà e realismi nell'opera di Duccio di Buoninsegna, Beato Angelico, Caravaggio e Giorgio Morandi* (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 2005); Vitaliano Tiberia, "Spazio reale e astrazione nella pittura dell'Angelico," in *'Angelicus pictor': Ricerche e interpretazioni sul Beato Angelico*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari (Milan: Skira editore, 2008), 83-90.

<sup>3</sup> Countless thinkers have reflected on the relationship between space and architecture. Amongst the most notable are Bruno Zevi, who considered space the essence of architecture, and Henri Lefebvre, who thought of architecture as "the use of space," identifying in monumental architecture a collective mirror for society's social space. Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura: saggio sull'interpretazione spaziale dell'architettura*, 5th ed. (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2009), 22-23, 31. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, ed. Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), 220 and esp. Ch. 4. Heidegger and Casey offered a more place-focused interpretation of architecture: Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Rethinking Architecture: a Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 100-109; Edward Casey, *Getting Back Into Place. Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 109-112. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Presence, Language and Place* (Milan: Skira editore, 2000), 221.

<sup>4</sup> For Eitlinger "the making of a painting is the creation of virtual place. By applying paint on canvas such that we interpret it in terms of the physical world, the painter creates a new place for us to experience," Or Eitlinger, *The Architecture of Virtual Space* (Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, 2008), 26.

It is for this reason that architecture in painting has often been interpreted as the principal conveyor of a picture's pictorial space, in particular because it defines recession and three-dimensionality perhaps better than any other element in an image. The link between perspective and fictive architecture was famously mentioned by Leon Battista Alberti in his *De re aedificatoria*, a first manuscript of which appeared between 1452 and 1454, where he discussed approvingly the use of perspective for the representation of architecture in painting, whilst at the same time rejecting it in architectural plans.<sup>5</sup> Although Alberti's words demonstrate a keen interest in the difference between two and three-dimensionality, they reveal no interest in the representation of space. No mention of architecture is made in Book I of the *De pictura*, which deals with the mathematics of pictorial representation, and where Alberti seems more interested in rays and surfaces than he is in depth and space.<sup>6</sup>

Ghiberti made a similar connection between the representation of architecture and perspective in his *Commentari*, compiled in the 1450s, where he described how his relief sculptures for the Porta del Paradiso of the Baptistery of Florence are “in *casamenti*, so the eye may measure them, and in a way that if one looks at them from afar, they appear in relief. They have very little relief, and on the planes one can see how the closer figures appear larger, and the distant ones smaller; as demonstrated by reality. And I executed all this work with the said measures.”<sup>7</sup> Ghiberti's use of the word *casamenti*, generally meaning buildings,<sup>8</sup> reiterates Cennino Cennini in the *Craftsman's*

---

<sup>5</sup> “The presentation of models that have been coloured and lewdly dressed with the allurements of painting is the mark of no architect intent on conveying the facts [...]: the former [the painter] takes pains to emphasise the relief of objects in painting with shading and diminishing lines and angles; the architect [...] takes his projection from the ground plan and, without altering the lines and by maintaining the true angles, reveals the extent and shape of each elevation and side,” Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books* [*De re aedificatoria*], ed. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), Book II, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Alberti began the *De pictura* with a discussion of surfaces and how they interact with the eye's visual rays. He pointed out that surfaces are recognised not by depth but by width and length. Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura*, ed. Cecil Grayson (Rome: Laterza, 1975), Book I, 2 and 5-8. Interestingly, in Book II he specified that the purpose of painting is to represent seen things, and the first thing our eyes notice when they see a thing is that it occupies a place (“locum occupet”). The painter then “circumscribes the space of that place” (“huius loci spatium circumscribet”), Alberti, *De pictura*, Book II, 30. Anna Little downplayed Alberti's use of the word *locus* as simple literary common place and citation of Aristotle. However, she also showed how the notion of place is still important in *De pictura*, and how Alberti remodelled Aristotelian place for his painterly purposes. Anna Little, “Du lieu à l'espace. Transformation de l'environnement pictural en Italie (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)” (PhD Dissertation, Université François Rabelais, Tours, 2010), 289-294.

<sup>7</sup> “Furono istorie dieci tutti in casamenti colla ragione che l'occhio gli misura e veri in modo tale, stando remoti, da essi appariscono rilevati. Anno pochissimo rilievo et in su e piani si veggono le figure che sono propinque apparire maggiori e le remote minori; come adimosta il vero. E ò seguito tutta questa opera con dette misure,” Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Commentari*, ed. Lorenzo Bartoli (Florence: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1998), II, VI.1. My translation.

<sup>8</sup> A *casamento* was a large building identifying a dignified, although not luxurious, dwelling. Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1961), II, 826-827. Lillie identified a *casamento* as “a large and dignified dwelling,” but she pointed out that in the fifteenth century different terms were often used to describe the same property, and that words like *casa*,

*Handbook*, but whilst Cennino showed no interest in the visual effects that *casamenti* might have on the work,<sup>9</sup> Ghiberti used *casamenti* as if they were the “measures” which allowed larger figures to appear closer to the viewer and smaller figures to appear further away. However, Ghiberti’s ambiguous, almost symbiotic association of *misure* and *casamenti* does not entail the creation of a unified architectural space, for the effects of distance and proximity of the figures are also created by multiple “planes,” *piani*, highlighting the multiplicity rather than unity of the pictorial surface; and his interest in *casamenti* lies in their ability to relate the sculpted figures to each other and increase the relief effect of his work, rather than to create ‘space.’<sup>10</sup> Whilst the close ties established by artists between perspective and architecture testify to the importance of fictive buildings as structuring agents within an image, the notion of a unified infinite space is absent from artists’ textual evidence.<sup>11</sup>

### **Art Historical Literature and Pictorial Space**

The first work to champion the phrase ‘pictorial space’ was John White’s influential 1957 book *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*. In it, the author studied perspectival and compositional arrangements “to clarify the story of the introduction of pictorial space into Italian art during the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.”<sup>12</sup> Pictorial

---

*casa da signore* and *casamento* are not necessarily architecturally informative. Amanda Lillie, *Florentine Villas in the Fifteenth Century. An Architectural and Social History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 58-59.

<sup>9</sup> Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell’arte*, ed. Fabio Frezzato, 7th ed. (Vicenza: Pozza editore, 2012), ch. 87, 127.

<sup>10</sup> It is unclear what Ghiberti meant exactly by *casamenti*, for only three out of the ten panels for the Baptistery east doors display prominent architectural settings. Krautheimer suggested that Ghiberti generalised when he said that he had applied “these measures” to all the panels, but Kathryn Bloom proposed instead that *casamenti* refer to a non-scientific perspectival composition rather than to buildings. Richard Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 233-234. Kathryn Bloom, “Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Space in Relief: Method and Theory,” *Art Bulletin*, 51, no.2 (1969): 168, note 27. Whilst Cennino Cennini used *casamenti* only to refer to architectural settings, Vasari reiterated Ghiberti’s ambiguity in his *Life of Ghirlandaio*, where he said “nel casamento o prospettiva.” On the other hand, in his *Life of Masaccio*, where he described “casamenti bellissimi in prospettiva,” it is clearer that the buildings are represented in perspective rather than being themselves a rule or set of rules around which to compose the painting. Giorgio Vasari, “Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori,” in *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998), II, 290.

<sup>11</sup> Although Judith Field argued that the concept of infinite space did not exist at this date (cf. note 17), artistic practice explored the depiction of distance before a theory of the representation of space was formulated. In this respect, it would be particularly useful to consider the representation of distance through water and atmospheric effects rather than ‘space’ per se, and to examine images that portray landscapes dissolving towards the horizon instead of finite fictive structures. In his *Visitation* for the predella of the *Cortona Annunciation* (c.1432), Fra Angelico created a strong contraposition between the dissolving hilly landscape with its winding river and minute city in the distance on the left, and the sturdy house in the foreground on the right. This arrangement emphasises the seeming infinity of landscape and the finiteness of architectural structures. On the representation of water: Amanda Lillie, “Artists Interpreting Water,” in *La civiltà delle acque tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Arturo Calzona and Daniela Lamberini (Florence: Olschki, 2010), esp. 315 and 327-328; by the same author, “Constructing the Picture - 3.Putting Perspective into Perspective.” *Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting*, The National Gallery, London, 2014, accessed Feb 16, 2016, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/constructing-the-picture/putting-perspective-into-perspective>.

<sup>12</sup> John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 19.

space per se is never problematised within the book, and is discussed in terms of the varying degrees of ‘realism’ attempted or achieved in the picture.<sup>13</sup>

Although the book does not offer a definition of pictorial space, White’s understanding of it can be inferred from his analysis of a well-known ideal view, probably dating from the late fifteenth century and traditionally attributed to the school of Piero della Francesca, today in the Gemäldegalerie in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin (**Fig.1**), about which he observes:

The results obtainable by these means [change of scale, diagonals, colour] are rendered still more striking if the orthogonals are not only clearly differentiated from any lines running parallel to the surface, but are as far as possible uninterrupted, so that the eye may shoot unhindered into the imaginary space. If, in addition, the composition is such that a *spatial box* is formed, the impression of depth may become almost irresistible [...] No matter in what direction it travels over the surface, [the eye] is forced back towards the centre lying *deep in pictorial space*. Such a box is largely created by the architectural view, and is a major contribution to its spatial forcefulness.<sup>14</sup>

The painting White analysed is an urban cityscape observed through a tripartite loggia painted in the foreground, where the representation appears to be receding due to, as White stated, uninterrupted orthogonals perpendicular to the horizontal picture plane. Such orthogonals are the prerogatives of the ‘spatial box’. The spatial box is largely the product of the architectural view, whose buildings, the loggia most of all, frame and direct the gaze “deep in pictorial space.”

The illusion of depth is paramount to White’s understanding of pictorial space. In his review of *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, B.A.R. Carter defined White’s approach as a “surface-depth dichotomy,”<sup>15</sup> which exemplifies the conflict between the painter’s desire to portray depth and his awareness of the flatness of the surface on which he has to work. As Carter acutely pointed out, White failed to ask himself whether the medieval and Renaissance artist was at all aware of the struggle between pictorial surface and pictorial space. White had indirectly addressed this issue by identifying in Alberti’s *De pictura* the description of a novel idea of space, whereby this is understood to be autonomous and to precede the rest of the figuration as the first element to be

---

<sup>13</sup> White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, esp. 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 189. My italics.

<sup>15</sup> B.A.R. Carter, “Pictorial Space,” *The Burlington Magazine*, 100 (1958): 444.

designed.<sup>16</sup> Although Alberti explained how to create a foreshortened pavement before he illustrated how any other object or figure could be later added to it, this is not necessarily proof that Alberti perceived his foreshortened floor as a continuous and three-dimensional expanse completely independent from the figures. At most, Alberti's foreshortened pavement may be semi-autonomous - a finite, indispensable setting for the *istoria*. Furthermore, research on the relationship between fifteenth-century artistic practice and mathematics has concluded that artists of the time did not conceive of space, as we might do, as an independent entity, and that the geometrisation of space and its understanding as autonomous are elaborations of the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> As Carter noted, the anachronistic application of a set of axioms pertaining to a period to interpret an artwork pertaining to another is the major flaw of White's work.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of Carter's insightful criticism of White's book, pictorial space is still largely unproblematised and has become an art historical *a priori*.<sup>19</sup> In his essay for the 1987 catalogue for the exhibition *Space in European Art* at Tokyo's National Museum of Western Art, Gombrich remarked on the popularity of the term 'space' among art historians, observing that in Western art the rendition of space is a "special problem," also bolstered by textual descriptions, more or less precise, of the collocation of sacred places as expressed in many primary sources.<sup>20</sup> Mostly, this special problem is articulated by the absence or presence of 'space' according to art historical analysis, as the title of White's book implies. The 'birth' and 'rebirth' of pictorial space are opposed

---

<sup>16</sup> White, *Birth and Rebirth*, 123.

<sup>17</sup> Judith V. Field, "A Mathematician's Art," in *Piero della Francesca and His Legacy*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (Washington: National Gallery, 1995), 177-178.

<sup>18</sup> Carter, "Pictorial Space," 444.

<sup>19</sup> More recent considerations of pictorial space fall within White's pattern. Lise Bek argued that Alberti's "interseguazione" (the intersection of the pyramid of vision and the picture plane) radically transformed the picture plane in pictorial space, most often identified by the perspectival representation of architecture and testifying to the interest in "realism" developed by humanist ideology. Bek did not question her terminology and did not offer a contextualisation of pictorial space in her analysis. For Paul Crowther, pictorial space "allows the creator to symbolically re-organise and re-make visual reality itself" through recessional planes unified by relational foreshortening and linear perspective. Although Crowther engaged with the meaning and interpretative character of representation, he did not critically examine pictorial space *per se*. Lise Bek, *Towards Paradise on Earth. Modern Space Conception in Architecture: a Creation of Renaissance Humanism* (Copenhagen: Odense University Press, 1980), 57-63. Paul Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 40-49. William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: a History of Spatial Illusion in Painting* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991). Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde: représentations de l'espace au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Gombrich, "Western Art and the Perception of Space," in *Space in European Art*, ed. Ernst Gombrich (Tokyo: National Museum of Western Art and Nippon Television Network Corporation, 1987), 24. Tullio Gregory, "Lo spazio come geografia del sacro nell'Occidente altomedievale," *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 81 (82), no. 2 (2002): 189-213.

to an interim period in which pictorial space was absent, and where a non-space, an *Unraum*, was represented instead.<sup>21</sup>

As Sauerländer outlined in *Space in European Art*, the absence of space perceived by art historians in medieval images engendered two interpretations: the theory of decline, whereby artists did not have access to or possess the technical skills formerly employed in Greco-Roman art; and the theory of spiritualisation, whereby the issue is not knowledge of technical skill but the will to convey a more symbolic, spiritually charged representation.<sup>22</sup> Late medieval and early Renaissance Italy is traditionally recognised as the cradle of the principal technical skill that enabled artists to engage more deeply with three-dimensionality: perspective. The rediscovery or invention of perspective has attracted great scholarly attention, revealing the complexities behind a seemingly straightforward term.

### ***Perspectiva and Prospettiva***

The term perspective has at least two different, although at times overlapping, meanings. The Latin *perspectiva* was used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to refer to the science of optics, and only later was it applied to the field of art and turned, in Italian, into *prospettiva*.<sup>23</sup> Ghiberti's extensive quotations in his *Commentari* from various medieval treatises on optics, such as Alhacen, Bacon and Peckham, testify to the lively interest artists took in this field.<sup>24</sup> Artists may have used these treatises as theoretical sources for practical use in the figurative arts, although the application of perspective is a multifaceted phenomenon which took a different form depending on the context of a work of art.<sup>25</sup> The codification of perspective as an artistic technique was a relatively late

---

<sup>21</sup> Willibald Sauerländer, "Space in the Figurative Arts During the Middle Ages," in *Space in European Art*, ed. Ernst Gombrich (Tokyo: National Museum of Western Art and Nippon Television Network Corporation, 1987), 100.

<sup>22</sup> Sauerländer, "Space in the Figurative Arts," 100. According to Zumthor, space in medieval art is the representation of the interior space of the mind in prayer and meditation: "le langage qui y résonne est celui de la prière ou de l'éloge du Sens caché," Zumthor, *La mesure du monde*, 345.

<sup>23</sup> Dominique Raynaud offers a pithy but deeply informative summary of the matter in "Ottica e prospettiva prima di Leon Battista Alberti," in *La primavera del Rinascimento: la scultura e le arti a Firenze 1400-1460*, ed. Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Marc Bormand (Florence: Mandragora and Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, 2013), 165-171. Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ghiberti, *Commentari*, III; Raynaud, "Ottica e prospettiva," 166; Belting, *Florence and Baghdad*, 2. Graziella Federici Vescovini, "La prospettiva del Brunelleschi, Alhazen e Biagio Pelacani a Firenze," in *Filippo Brunelleschi: la sua opera e il suo tempo* (Florence: Centro Di, 1980), I, 333-348; by the same author, "Contributo per la storia della fortuna di Alhazen in Italia: il volgarizzamento del Ms.Vat. 4595 e il 'Commentario terzo' del Ghiberti," *Rinascimento*, 5 (1965): 17-49; A. Mark Smith, "Introduction," in *Alhacen's Theory of Visual Perception. A Critical Edition, with English Translation and Commentary, of the First Three Books of Alhacen's 'De aspectibus,' the Medieval Latin Version of Ibn al-Haytham's 'Kitāb al-Manāẓir,'* ed. A. Mark Smith (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2001), lxxxiii, civ-cxi.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Little, "Du lieu à l'espace," 7. Pascal Dubourg-Glatigny, Marianne Cojannot-Le Blanc, and Marisa Dalai Emiliani, ed., *L'artiste et l'œuvre à l'épreuve de la perspective* (Rome: Collection de l'École Française de Rome, 2006). Maynard argued that Panofsky's trio "fenestration, mensuration and viewer's

achievement, as only around 1480 Piero della Francesca mathematically demonstrated the illusory decrease in size of far objects on the basis of similar triangles.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, as late as the 1480s Piero spoke of profiles and outlines to be located in their places (*luoghi*), linking measurements (*commensuratio*) to specific, individual positions within the picture.<sup>27</sup> Earlier investigations on perspective in painting were more empirical, such as Alberti's *interseguazione* as described in the *De pictura*, or very difficult to delineate because primary evidence was lost, such as Brunelleschi's famous demonstrations on the Baptistery in Florence and Piazza della Signoria.<sup>28</sup>

In his biography of Brunelleschi (after 1475-c.1485),<sup>29</sup> Antonio di Tuccio Manetti demonstrated his understanding of the difference, and at the same time close relationship between *perspectiva* and *prospettiva* by defining *prospettiva* as a means to “properly arrange the decreasing and increasing dimensions of far and near things appearing to the human eye,” and as “part of that science,” meaning *perspectiva*, the science of optics.<sup>30</sup> Brunelleschi's studies on perspective centred around the representation of buildings and piazzas, as Manetti's accounts of his experiments on the representation of the Florentine Baptistery and the Piazza della Signoria testify.

station” characterising linear perspective is not a necessary condition for perspectival representations. Patrick Maynard, “Perspective's Places,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 54, no. 1, (1996): 23-40. Birgitte Boggild-Johannsen and Marianne Marcussen, “A Critical Survey of the Theoretical and Practical Origins of Renaissance Linear Perspective,” *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, 8, no. 1 (1981): 191-227. Chastel examined the role of fictive architecture as principal means to achieve a perspectival construction, warning against an uncritical approach to space and emphasising how perspective is based on a “mathematical definition of place” (“définition mathématique du lieu”). André Chastel, “Les apories de la perspective au Quattrocento,” in *La prospettiva rinascimentale: codificazioni e trasgressioni*, ed. Marisa Dalai Emiliani (Florence: Centro Di, 1980), I, 45-62. Studies on the *mazzocchio* are an interesting instance of the application of perspective outside the realm of fictive buildings: Margaret Daly Davis, “Carpaccio and the Perspective of Regular Bodies,” in *La prospettiva rinascimentale: codificazioni e trasgressioni*, ed. Marisa Dalai Emiliani (Florence: Centro Di, 1980), I, 183-200.

<sup>26</sup> Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi*, ed. Giustina Nicco Fasola, 2nd ed. (Florence: Sansoni editore, 1984), XIII; Judith V. Field, *Piero della Francesca. A Mathematician's Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), esp. 134-174. Raynaud, “Ottica e prospettiva,” 165.

<sup>27</sup> “La pictura contiene in sé tre parti principali [...] Disegno intendiamo essere profili et contorni che nella cosa se contene. Commensuratio diciamo essere essi profili et contorni proporzionalmente posti nei luoghi loro. Colorare intendiamo dare i colori commo nelle cose se dimostrano, chiari et oscuri [...]” Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Raynaud, “Ottica e prospettiva,” 165-167. Alberti began Book I of *De pictura* by explaining that he was grounding his argument in mathematics, but he also admitted that he would treat the topic as a painter and not as a mathematician, since “we [...] who wish to talk of things that are visible, will express ourselves in cruder terms,” Alberti, *On Painting*, ed. Cecil Grayson and Martin Kemp, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), Book I, 1. For the role played by Brunelleschi and Alberti, but also Filarete, Antonio Manetti and Vasari see Hubert Damisch, *L'origine de la perspective* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), esp. 67-89. Pietro Roccasceca, “La piramide e le intenzioni: Alhacen, Alberti e la composizione della storia in pittura,” in *L'alba del Rinascimento. La scultura e le arti a Firenze 1400-1460*, ed. Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Marc Bormand (Florence: Mandragora and Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, 2013), 173-179.

<sup>29</sup> According to Giuliano Tanturli, Manetti started writing Brunelleschi's biography after 1475 and probably completed it around 1485. Giuliano Tanturli, “Introduzione,” in Antonio Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi. Preceduta da 'La Novella del Grasso'*, ed. Domenico De Robertis (Milan: Edizioni il Polifilo, 1976), xxxv.

<sup>30</sup> “e' mise innanzi ed in atto, lui propio, quello ch'e dipintori oggi dicono prospettiva, perché ella è una parte di quella scienza, che è in effetto porre bene e con ragione le diminuzione ed acrescimenti che appaiono agli occhi degli uomini delle cose di lungi e da presso,” Antonio Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi. Preceduta da 'La Novella del Grasso'*, ed. Domenico De Robertis (Milan: Edizioni il Polifilo, 1976), 55.

Manetti defined Brunelleschi's perspectival representations as places rather than spaces. He described Brunelleschi's representation of the Baptistery as a portrait, explaining how Brunelleschi may have portrayed the building standing just inside the middle portal of the Duomo, including in his drawing the Misericordia, the canto de' Pecori and canto all Paglia, "and what of that place [*luogo*] one can see that is farther away." The specific point of view adopted by Brunelleschi is also described as a *luogo*, "for in every place that is not that one, what appears to the eye changes," as is Palazzo della Signoria "with all the things visible in that place."<sup>31</sup> This is not because Manetti did not contemplate the use of the word space: he used *spazio* to describe the area above and at either side of the portico of the Spedale degli Innocenti.<sup>32</sup> Manetti's choice of different words indicates a discrepancy in meaning between space and place. What was a space and what a place in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy?

### **The Meanings of *Spazio* in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy**

In his *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, Salvatore Battaglia lists as many as thirty-one meanings for the word '*spazio*,' which in old Italian can also feature as '*spaccio*,' '*spacio*,' '*spazio*,' and '*spaziu*,' and have a feminine plural '*le spazia*' instead of the current masculine one. The first definition, which also reflects the most encompassing meaning of space, reads: "infinite and unlimited place of which material things occupy a part with their definite dimension, and where motion occurs as it appears to human experience."<sup>33</sup> This partially abstract ("infinite and unlimited") and concrete ("where motion occurs") aspect of *spazio* is reflected in its use to identify the skies where the planets and stars move, although the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmos is not an infinite one. Thus, as Italians today may use the term *spazio* to refer to outer space, the thirteenth-century monk Ristoro d'Arezzo called *spazio* a part of the sky so full of stars that it appeared as a "luminous road."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi*, 58-60. Amanda Lillie suggested that the main purpose of Brunelleschi's experiments was to demonstrate a new way of depicting the *luogo*, where perspective would be the means rather than an end in itself. Amanda Lillie, "Space and Air: Terms, Concepts and Mentalities in Fifteenth-Century Italy," talk given at the Architectural History and Theory Research School Study Day, University of York, February 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi*, 100.

<sup>33</sup> "Luogo infinito e illimitato di cui le cose materiali occupano una parte con la loro dimensione definita e in cui avviene il moto quale appare all'esperienza umana," Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, (Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1961), XIX, 750. All translations from Battaglia and following primary sources are the author's.

<sup>34</sup> "[...] questa parte del cielo la quale è piena e sofolta de grandissima moltitudine de stelle [...] pare uno spazio d'una strada luminosa, quasi da l'uno polo all'altro," Ristoro d'Arezzo, *La composizione del mondo colle sue cascioni*, ed. Alberto Morino (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1976), 90.



*Spazio* can also be found on earth to identify a geographical region or a territory, as Dante illustrated in the *Convivio* (1304-1308, unfinished):

It is also appropriate that the two spaces, which are in the middle of the two imagined towns and the middle circle [the equator], see the sun in different ways depending on whether they are distant or near to these places.<sup>35</sup>

Or a surface contained by specific boundaries: “the space between the four of them [winged animals] contained /a chariot.”<sup>36</sup> In Giovanni Villani’s *Nuova Cronica* (first edition before 1333), *ispazio* is the distance between two architectural elements:

Ignus Pompeus had the city walls made of bricks, and above the walls of the city he built round and very thick towers with a space between one tower and another of twenty cubits, so that the towers were of great beauty and fortitude.<sup>37</sup>

Villani’s use of *ispazio* is the same as Antonio Manetti’s more than a century later to define the area above and at either side of the portico of the Spedale degli Innocenti. But *spazio* can also represent the extension between one place and another, as again Dante described: “I believe that from Rome to this place [...] there is a space of nearly two-thousand-seven-hundred miles.”<sup>38</sup> These examples from Dante, Villani and Manetti highlight *spazio* as an interval between other elements, places in the case of Dante – a definition reiterated by the first edition of the *Lessicografia* of the Accademia della Crusca in 1612, where space is defined as a “time and place in between two terms,” and accompanied by the Latin term *intervallum*.<sup>39</sup> The differentiation between space and place seen in these quotations from Dante is also exemplified in the early sixteenth century by the vitriolic Pietro Aretino, who had Nanna say that the Florentines will not urinate in their own town “out of respect for that place,” but when outside of it “they flood a long long space with urine.”<sup>40</sup> The difference between *spazio* as a generic

---

<sup>35</sup> “Convieni anche che li due spazii che sono in mezzo delle due cittadi imaginate e [del]lo cerchio del mezzo, veggiano lo sole disvariamente, secondo che sono remoti e propinqui [a] questi luoghi,” Dante, *Convivio*, ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1995), III, v, 19-21, 119-121.

<sup>36</sup> “Lo spazio dentro a lor quattro contenne/un carro [...],” Dante, *Comedia*, ed. Federico Sanguineti (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001), *Purgatorio*, 29, 106-107.

<sup>37</sup> “Igneo Pompeo fece fare le mura della cittade di mattoni cotti, e sopra i muri dela città edificò torri ritonde molto spesse per ispazio da l’una torre a l’altra di XX cubiti, sicché le torri erano di grande bellezza e fortezza,” Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta, 2nd ed. (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo and Ugo Guanda Editore, 2007), Book 2, I, 44-48.

<sup>38</sup> “E credo che da Roma a questo luogo[...] sia spazio quasi di dumila se[tte]cento miglia, o poco dal più al meno,” Dante, *Convivio*, III, v, 10-11, 55-57.

<sup>39</sup> “Quel tempo, e luogo, che è di mezzo tra due termini.” “Spazio,” Accademia della Crusca, *Lessicografia*, 1st ed., 1612, accessed Aug 10, 2016, <http://www.lessicografia.it>.

<sup>40</sup> “I fiorentini fuor di Fiorenza son simili a persone che hanno piena la vescica e non ardiscono di andare a pisciare per rispetto del luogo dove si trovano: che usciti di quivi, allagano uno spazio lungo lungo con l’urina che versa il lor pincone,” Pietro Aretino, *Sei giornate. Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia* (1534).

extension and *luogo* as not only a specific and limited geographical site but also as charged with a stratification of meaning that identify it as such (as the city of Florence), is crucial.

### **The Meanings of *Luogo* in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy**

Battaglia's entry for *luogo* is four pages longer than that for *spazio*, testifying to the richness and multiplicity of the uses of *luogo* in the Italian language. The meanings of *luogo* can be divided in two major strands: firstly, those meanings that have a clear spatial connotation, indicating a part of a territory or area occupied by someone or something; secondly, more diverse meanings not directly related to geographical locations but still identifying a position of sorts, such as the location of an excerpt within a text.

A *luogo* is a place where things or people reside as opposed to roaming in space. It is a suitable position, the proper abode. Thus, the writer, poet and notary Brunetto Latini (1220-1294) spoke of a *luogo* as the place where things were tidily stored, and the vernacular translation (c.1340) of Palladius' agricultural treatise (fourth century AD) states that there must be a place in the *villa* for manure.<sup>41</sup> The definition of place as a suitable position is a long standing one that goes back to Plato and Aristotle. In his *Timaeus*, where he discussed the origin of the cosmos, Plato described how all bodies "must be in some *tópos* (place) and occupy some *chōra* (space), and what is not in the ground or in the sky is nothing," hence implying that *tópos* is a specific place occupied by bodies within *chōra*, space.<sup>42</sup> Although in the *Timaeus* the words *tópos* and *chōra* are at times interchangeable, and their translation is therefore difficult, *chōra* identifies a timeless physical expanse, whereas *tópos* and *hédra* ('dwelling' or 'seat') identify a quantifiable, circumscribed location.<sup>43</sup>

---

*Dialogo nel quale la Nanna insegna a la Pippa (1536)*, ed. Giovanni Acquilecchia (Bari: Laterza e figli, 1969), *Dialogo, Prima giornata*, 180.

<sup>41</sup> "Nell'albergo del re suo oste [...] un luogo v'era, nel quale erano riposte e assettate le cose," Brunetto Latini, *Le tre orazioni di Marco Tullio Cicerone dette dinanzi a Cesare, per M. Marcello, Q. Logorio e il re Dejotaro volgarizzate*, ed. Luigi Maria Rezzi (Milan: Fanfani, 1831), 71 in Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, IX, 303. "Luogo dee essere nella villa per lo letame," Palladius, "Volgarizzamento di Palladio," Ch. 33, Archive.org, 1810, accessed Jan 3, 2016, <https://archive.org/details/volgarizzamentod00pall>.

<sup>42</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Platone: tutte le opere*, ed. Enrico Maltese, Umberto Bultrighini, Giovanni Caccia and Enrico Pegone (Rome: Newton and Compton, 1997), IV, 52b.

<sup>43</sup> For a brief summary of the controversy around the translation of *chōra* in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century scholarship: Alfred Edward Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), 312-313. The *Timaeus* was the only dialogue of Plato that the Latin West possessed until the twelfth century. The only excerpts of the *Timaeus* available until then were Cicero's translation from 27d to 47b (called *De mundo*), and Calcidius's more exhaustive one from 17a to 53c. Calcidius's translation and commentary represented Plato's thought to the medieval Latin West. Knowledge of other texts of Plato's in the middle ages depended on summaries, citations and testimonies in intermediary texts. Commentaries written in Chartres were particularly influential. Bernard of Chartres, *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Paul Edward Dutton (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991). Plato's works, and particularly the *Timaeus*, were studied even after Aristotle had established his primacy in the universities,

Aristotle further developed the understanding of place as the only suitable location for a given body by defining *tópos* as an ontologically necessary container which does not simply receive bodies, but has the “marvellous power” (*thaumastē dúnamis*) to actively surround them and locate them in their proper place (*tópos ídios*).<sup>44</sup> Curiously though, Aristotle thought that the cosmos as a whole did not have a place of its own. In *Physics* he stated: “the sky [...] as a whole has no ‘where’ nor is it in any place, if there is no body that surrounds it.”<sup>45</sup> Aristotle partly resolved this issue by saying, rather enigmatically, that the universe is in place not in the sense that it is contained, but because of its parts: “since it moves, it is also a place for its parts (*tópos ésti toís moríois*); in fact each of its parts is contiguous to the other.”<sup>46</sup>

Aristotle’s enigmatic stance towards the location of the cosmos was central to the late-medieval understanding of place, and fuelled the debates of commentators on Aristotle’s texts such as Averroes, or Ibn Rushd, who established that the cosmos is in place because of its fixed centre, the earth.<sup>47</sup> Whilst this position was accepted by Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas rejected it by shifting the locational reference point from the earth to the heavens. Aquinas explained how the circular motion of the outer sphere means that the sphere in itself is not in place, but its intrinsic parts are.<sup>48</sup> The ability of

---

but in the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the study of Plato was restricted to few scholars. Petrarch famously said that more men praise Aristotle, better ones praise Plato (“A maioribus Plato, Aristotiles laudatur a pluribus”), Petrarch, “De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia.” *Classici Italiani*, 2015, accessed Nov 5, <http://www.classicitaliani.it/petrarca/prosa/ignorantia.htm>. Alexandre Étienne, “La réception du *Timée* à travers les siècles: un survol,” in *Le ‘Timée’ de Platon. Contributions à l’histoire de sa réception/Platos Timaios. Beiträge zu seiner Rezeptionsgeschichte*, ed. Ada Neschke-Hentschke (Leuven and Paris: Éditions de l’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie Louvain-la-Neuve and Éditions Peeters, 2000), xxxiv; and in the same volume Zénon Kaluza, “L’organisation politique de la cité dans un commentaire anonyme du *Timée* de 1363,” 141-172. Andreas Speer, “*Lectio physica*. Anmerkungen zur Timaios-Rezeption im Mittelalter,” in *Platons Timaios als Grundtext der Kosmologie in Spätantike, Mittelalter und Renaissance/ Plato’s Timaeus and the Foundations of Cosmology in late antiquity, the middle ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Thomas Leinkauf and Carlos Steel (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 214. James Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004), 17-19. Paul Edward Dutton, “Medieval Approaches to Calcidius,” in *Plato’s ‘Timaeus’ as Cultural Icon*, ed. Gretchen J. Reydams-Schils (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 183-205. A revival of Platonic studies in the West began in the fifteenth century when Italian scholars were instructed in Greek. Some of the most notable translators of Plato were Brunetto Latini, Manuel Chrysoloras, George of Trebizond and Marsilio Ficino. For a thorough account of the Platonic revival in Renaissance Italy: James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, (Leiden, New York, Copenhagen and Kiln: E.J. Brill, 1990).

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. Roberto Radice (Milan: Bompiani, 2011), 208b34-35. Radice’s notes to Book IV, are very helpful, especially note 6.

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 212b 8-9 in Radice 341.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 212b 10-11 in Radice, *Fisica*, 341. Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), 56 and 59. For the position of the prime mover: Charles H. Kahn, “The Place of the Prime Mover in Aristotle’s Teleology,” in *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things: Philosophical and Historical Studies Presented to David M. Balme on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. A. Gotthelf (Pittsburgh and Bristol: Mathesis Publications and Bristol Classical Press, 1985), 183-206. Helen Lang, *The Order of Nature in Aristotle’s Physics: Place and the Elements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 113-119.

<sup>47</sup> Averroes, *Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle: Problems of Aristotle’s Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Harry Austyn Wolfson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 434. Roger Arnaldez, *Averroès: un rationaliste en Islam* (Paris: Éditions Balland, 1998), 71- 73.

<sup>48</sup> Leo J.S.V.D. Elders, “St Thomas Aquinas’ Commentary on the Physics of Aristotle,” in *La philosophie de la nature de Saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 107-133.

the sphere to be located because its parts are in place implies that for Aquinas the heavens become *the* place, the locational matrix of all the cosmos.<sup>49</sup> These observations informed, and at the same time were perhaps prompted by, vernacular uses of the word place to identify the otherworldly realm, be it hell or heaven. In his *Comedia*, Dante used the word *loco* to refer to both hell (“painful place”) and heaven (“sweet place”), and also identified the mind as a place in the *Convivio*.<sup>50</sup>

Abstract connotations of the word place did not preclude its use to describe precise, physical locations identified by recognisable ethnic, climatic, social or cultural characteristics. Brunetto Latini called *luogora* the motherlands of various barbarian peoples, the poet Chiaro Davanzati (second half of the thirteenth century-1303) stated that the right place and season are necessary for each fruit to ripen, and the Florentine traveller Simone Sigoli referred to the holy sites of Jerusalem and Mount Sinai he visited between 1384 and 1385 as *sante luogora*.<sup>51</sup>

But place can indicate an even more specific location, such as a city, a building or even a part of a building. In his *Rettorica*, Brunetto Latini deduced that those who roam through the fields “did not have houses nor *luogo* [city or abode],” and in the *Decameron* Boccaccio described how “mortals hide their dearest things in the most vile places of their houses,” and how “houses and public places of Rome are replete with ancient memories of [Tito’s] ancestors.”<sup>52</sup> At least from the fourteenth century, *spazio* identified the area covered or that could be covered by a building, or even a section of a building, such as a room. In this instance, *spazio* often refers to the width of the room and the use one could make of it, as in the vernacular translation of Palladius’ agricultural treaty:

---

<sup>49</sup> Casey, *Fate of Place*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> “Dimmi chi tu se’ che ’n sì dolente/ luoco se’ messo,” Dante, *Inferno*, 6, 47. “O santo padre, che per me comporta/l’esser qua giù lasciando il dolce loco/nel qual tu sedi per eterna sorte,” Dante, *Paradiso*, 32, 101. Interestingly, *luoco* and *loco* are emphasised by their position at the beginning and at the end of the verse. “Lo loco nel quale dico esso [amore] ragionare si è la mente,” Dante, *Convivio*, III, ii, 10, 51-52.

<sup>51</sup> “Tu hai domato per battaglia genti crudeli e barbare, le quali, a recare in conto, sono senza novero, a nominare le luogora, sono senza fine,” Latini, *Le tre orazioni di Marco Tullio Cicerone*, 7 quoted in Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, IX, 303. “Ogni frutto pervene/veracemente a sua stagione e loco,” Chiaro Davanzati, *Rime*, ed. Aldo Menichetti (Bologna, 1965), 6-51 quoted in Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, IX, 303. “Quando andai a Santa Caterina al Monte Sinai e al S. Sepolcro e nelle altre sante luogora,” Simone Sigoli, “Viaggio al Monte Sinai,” in *Viaggi in Terra Santa di Lionardo Frescobaldi e Simone Sigoli*, ed. Cesare Angelini (Florence: Le Monnier, 1999), 171. “Simone Sigoli,” *Enciclopedia Treccani*, 2015, accessed Nov 3, 2015, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/simone-sigoli/>.

<sup>52</sup> “Dove dice il testo che gli uomini isvagavano per i campi, intendo che non avevano case né luogo,” Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*, ed. Francesco Maggini (Florence: LeMonnier, 1968), 14-28. “I mortali [...] le loro più care cose ne’ più vili luoghi delle lor case [...] seppelliscono,” Giovanni Boccaccio *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Sadea/Sansoni Editore, 1966), II, Giornata Sesta, Novella Seconda. “Le mie case e i luoghi pubblici di Roma son pieni d’antiche immagini de’ miei maggiori,” Boccaccio, *Decameron*, III, Giornata Decima, Novella Ottava. In fourteenth-century Siena, documents of the Commune used *luogo* to identify public areas. Anna Little has argued that the notion of place was crucial in outlining the Commune’s political agenda for its territory. Anna Little, “Du lieu à l’espace,” 151-158.

“Then in this space of the baths you will make long and narrow cells for the hot water,” and in Filarete’s *Trattato di architettura* (c.1460-1464): “on this floor, we have a space as big as the one below.”<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, these *spazi* are as yet devoid of connotations that will render them places. Even Palladius’s “space of the baths” is not a bath yet, but rather an area singled out to become a bath, as the future tense of the verb (*farai*) demonstrates. *Luogo* was the word they used to refer to a site charged with cultural, social, personal and religious meaning. Boccaccio defined as *luogo* a country villa, and, significantly, *luogo* was a synonym for churches and convents, as demonstrated by Velluti’s definition of the convent of Santa Maria Novella as *convento e luogo*, and by Franco Sacchetti (c.1335-c.1400)’s outraged critique of the clergy, who were not ashamed to have filled *li luoghi sacri* (churches and convents) with concubines.<sup>54</sup>

However, place in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italy had more nuanced uses that related to the identification of a geographical location, but were more metaphorically employed. Place could indicate a topic or argument, and a passage of a text, a citation. Brunetto Latini identified a passage from Cicero as *luogo*, and more than two hundred years later Matteo Bandinelli (1485-1561) lamented how Machiavelli wrote of sad and evil things in several *luoghi*.<sup>55</sup> This understanding of place is related to the expression

---

<sup>53</sup> “Poi in questo spazio del bagno farai le celle lunghe e strette là ove stea l’acqua calda,” Palladius, “Volgarizzamento di Palladio,” ch. 39. Archive.org, 1810, accessed Dec 10, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/volgarizzamentod00pall>. “A questo piano, noi abbiamo uno spazio quanto quello di sotto,” Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, ed. Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi (Milan: il Polifilo, 1972), I, VII, 194. As a surface to be covered or occupied, *spazio* indicated an area to be painted or decorated. The earliest examples found in Battaglia are Ariosto (1474-1533): “They make red, white, green, blue and yellow/below the balconies a sparkling frieze/divided amongst proportioned spaces/rubies, emeralds, sapphires and topaz;” Giovanni Battista Armenini (1533-1609): “By painting I do not mean a space of plank or wall [spazio d’asse o di muro] covered by vibrant and various colours [...]”; and Gabriello Chiabrera (1552-1638): “Regarding the picture of Ati, if the space is large [se lo spazio è grande], nothing [...] can be added [...]” For Ariosto, Armenini and Chiabrera, *spazio* is the surface hosting the representation rather than the fictively three-dimensional environment articulated by the artist. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario*, XIX, 752.

<sup>54</sup> “Avea messer Amerigo, fuor di Trapani forse un miglio, un suo molto bel luogo,” Boccaccio, *Decameron*, I, Giornata Quinta, Novella Settima. “La detta monna Biatrice [...] mise a uno tratto tre de’ detti fanciulli nel convento e luogo de’ frati di Santa Maria Novella,” Donato Velluti, *La cronica domestica di messer Donato Velluti*, ed. Isidoro del Lungo and Guglielmo Volpi (Florence: Sansoni, 1914), 50. “Non vergognandosi di avere ripieni li luoghi sacri di concubine,” Franco Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, ed. Davide Puccini (Turin: UTET, 2004), 25, 11.

<sup>55</sup> “Tullio medesimo, luogo innanzi, isforza i suoi insegnamenti in parlare e in dittare,” Latini, *Rettorica*, 102-15. “Vorrei che [Machiavelli] fosse stato alquanto più parco e ritenuto [...] ad insegnar molte cose triste e malvagie, da le quali [...] se ne poteva e doveva passare, tacendole e non mostrandole altrui, come fa in diversi luoghi,” Matteo Bandello, “Novella LV,” in *Tutte le opere di Matteo Bandello*, ed. Francesco Flora, 3rd ed. (Milan: Mondadori, 1952), II, 529. The use of place in the sense of topic or subject is exemplified by Dante, who had Virgil tell him not to keep the mind in one place, meaning he should not linger on a thought, and by Petrarch, who implored the Lord to bring his roaming thoughts back to better places. “Non tener pur ad un loco la mente/disse ’l dolce maestro,” Dante, *Purgatorio*, 10, 46. “Reduci i pensieri vaghi a miglior luogo,” Petrarch, “Canzoniere,” in *Rime*, ed. Giovanni Mestica (Florence: Barbera, 1896), sonnet XLVIII (62), 13.

“common place,” and to the current use of *tópos* as a rhetorical convention. This issue will be treated more extensively in Chapter Three.

Another striking use of the word place in Italy identifies social standing, or one’s office, implying a sense of duty, dignity and authority. Bartolomeo da San Concordio (1262-1347) referred to those people who “by necessity of their place” must perform great deeds, and in the *Decameron* Boccaccio has a character say to a knight that it is everyone’s duty to endeavour to uncover truth, but above all it is the duty of those who hold the place the knight holds.<sup>56</sup> The enduring use of place as office, assignment or worthy occupation, is also testified by Ercole d’Este (1431-1505) and Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1579), who referred to a military post as a *luogo*.<sup>57</sup> This understanding of *luogo* is reflected in the visual arts, where, as Anna Little demonstrated in her analysis of Italian thirteenth-century art, the place occupied by a figure within a scene frequently indicates their social or spiritual status, or their importance within the narrative.<sup>58</sup> *Luogo* as office, indicating one’s dignity and authority, is a crucial theme of Chapter Five, although here place is treated more metaphorically than in Little’s discussion.

This analysis of the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’ in late medieval and Renaissance Italy reveals that whilst space was perceived as an expanse undefined by nature, often indicating an interval between two elements, place was a specific location, frequently identifying a dwelling or inhabited site, that actively contributed to define the essence of what it contained. Reflecting its use in classical sources, the understanding of place as a precise location was extended to identify a passage within a text and, more generally, a topic. In addition, the power place exerts in further defining what it contains engenders a correspondence between the post one holds, or the place one occupies, and one’s character, thus translating into a use of the word to indicate one’s moral and social standing, and even office.

---

<sup>56</sup> “Chi per la necessità del suo luogo è richiesto di molte cose dire, per questa medesima necessità è costretto di somme opere mostrare,” Bartolomeo da San Concordio, *Ammaestramenti degli antichi latini e toscani. Raccolti e volgarizzati per F. Bartolommeo da S. Concordio Pisano dell’ordine de’ frati Predicatori* (Florence: Manni, 1734), 40-1-3. “Ad un cavaliere [...] disse così: ‘[...] ciascun dee volentieri faticarsi in far che la verità delle cose si conosca, e massimamente coloro che tengono il luogo che voi tenete,” Boccaccio, *Decameron*, I, Giornata Terza, Novella Settima.

<sup>57</sup> “Per l’ultima di Vostra Signoria intendo el desiderio suo circa a dare un luogo di capo di squadra al fratello del capitano Piero,” Ercole d’Este in a 1518 letter, Francesco Guicciardini, *Carteggi*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1939), II, 329. “Fu liberato e da Pavolo menato in Firenze e datoli luogo ne la guardia,” Alessandro Piccolomini, “L’amor costante,” in *Commedie del Cinquecento*, ed. Ireneo Sanesi (Bari: Laterza, 1975), II, 2,5.

<sup>58</sup> Little, “Du lieu à l’espace,” 51-53.

The specificity and inhabitability of place make it a more suitable instrument for the interpretation of architecture in late medieval and Renaissance painting than generic, abstract space. As a detailed and prominent setting locating and emphasising the narrative, engaging with time and responding to the narrative's mood,<sup>59</sup> fictive architecture may well have been conceived as a way of articulating the specificity of place, thus creating 'pictorial place' rather than pictorial space. Besides, even though it can be interpreted in different ways, architecture in painting is generally at one with the narrative it hosts. It is a *locus*,<sup>60</sup> an active agent complementing the narrative and adding meaning - exerting "marvellous power," in Aristotle's words. However, fictive structures can sometimes overshadow or even overwhelm the figures with their large scale or their structural and ornamental complexity. This is the case in Altichiero da Zevio's Oratory of St George, where innovative structures and a plethora of decorative detail compete at times with the figures. Even so, the architectural settings in the Oratory's frescoes never fail to engage with the narrative, and are stretched, altered and opened up to guarantee that the main figures are always visible, as Chapter Two will demonstrate.

### **Altichiero da Zevio, Space and Place**

The Veronese fourteenth-century painter Altichiero da Zevio represented prominent and strikingly detailed architectural structures in his paintings. The votive fresco in the Cavalli Chapel (c.1375) in Sant'Anastasia, Verona (**Fig.2**), displays an elaborate portico with pointed arches and ribbed vaults surmounted by a loggia, gables, turrets and baldachins. His painted structures in the lower register of the Chapel of St James in the Santo at Padua (**Fig.3**) are also particularly elaborate and engage with three-dimensionality, but it is in the more extensive cycle of the Oratory of St George that Altichiero's fictive architecture is deployed in all its magnificent detail, showcasing a more varied approach to the representation of depth (**Fig.4**).

Altichiero's representation of depth has been explained as an attempt at the portrayal of space reflecting ideas being developed at the University of Padua during the second half

---

<sup>59</sup> Amanda Lillie *et al.*, "Architectural Time," *Building the Picture: Architecture in Renaissance Italian Painting*. National Gallery, London, 2014, accessed Mar 12, 2016, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/architectural-time>. Marc Bayard, "In Front of the Work of Art: The Question of Pictorial Theatricality in Italian Art 1400-1700," *Art History Special Issue*, 33, no. 2 (2010): 262-277.

<sup>60</sup> In this thesis, the multifaceted valence of place is expressed through synonyms like 'site' and 'location,' and through the use of the Latin *locus* and the Greek *tópos*. Whilst 'place' is employed as a key word encapsulating all literal and metaphorical meanings discussed above, the thesis adopts 'site,' 'position' and 'location' to indicate a literal, physical placement. *Locus* defines instead an active site, that is a physical location charged with Aristotelian *dúnamis*. Finally, the use of *tópos* denotes a rhetorical convention, or topic.

of the Trecento. Luca Baggio's work is the major contribution on this subject, identifying two key thinkers in particular, the doctor and clock-maker Giovanni Dondi (c.1330-1388), and the philosopher and mathematician Biagio Pelacani (c.1355-1416), who explored the quantification of the visible and admitted the existence of the void.<sup>61</sup> Baggio singled out as a revealing piece of evidence Giovanni Dondi's account of his journey to Rome in 1375, the *Iter romanum*, where the scientist accurately recorded the dimensions of a few key monuments, including the obelisk near St Peter's, St Peter's itself, the Pantheon and the basilicas of San Lorenzo and San Paolo. According to Baggio, Dondi's numerical approach testifies to his interest in mathematics and the measurability of space.<sup>62</sup>

However, Dondi himself did not once mention the word 'space' in his account. Interestingly, the only spatial term Dondi used is *locis*, listing measurements that quantify the distance between places.<sup>63</sup> Rather than being concerned with spatial issues, he appears particularly impressed by greatness in size and abundance. He noted the number of the steps leading towards St Peter's and the number of columns in this basilica, measuring its *latitudo* and *longitudo* in *passus* (steps).<sup>64</sup> He noted the *ambitus* (circumference) of the columns in Santa Maria Rotonda (the Pantheon) in *pedes* (feet), and the diameter of the church within the circle of columns.<sup>65</sup> He compared the size and number of columns of St Peter's, St Paul's and Santa Maria Rotonda, stating that those in St Paul's were larger and more beautiful than those in St Peter's.<sup>66</sup> Dondi's interest in measurements is not particularly unusual if one considers the economic and cultural importance attached to measuring and units of measurement in late medieval Italy.<sup>67</sup> In addition, Dondi interpreted the considerable size of Roman monuments as a reflection of their greatness in status as witnesses to "the history of great deeds," and emphasising

---

<sup>61</sup> Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche," 173-232. Giovanni Dondi taught at Padua between 1354 and 1361, then between 1366 and 1379 with an interval of about a year in Florence between 1367-68. Tiziana Pesenti, "Dondi dall'Orologio, Giovanni." *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Enciclopedia Treccani, 2015, accessed Jun 05, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-dondi-dall-orologio\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-dondi-dall-orologio_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/). Giovanni's father, Iacopo, was also a doctor and clock maker. He realised the 'camera dell'orologio' installed on the gate of the Reggia Carrarese in 1343. Cesira Gasparotto, "La Reggia dei Da Carrara. Il Palazzo di Ubertino e le nuove stanze dell'Accademia Patavina," *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Patavina di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 79, no. 1 (1966-67): 82.

<sup>62</sup> Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche," 190-193.

<sup>63</sup> "et extra columnas in aliquibus loci sunt circa passus quatuor," Giovanni Dondi, "*Iter romanum* (1375)," in *Inscriptiones christianae Urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores*, ed. Giovanni Battista de Rossi (Rome: Ex Officina Libraria Philippi Cuggiani, 1888), II, 332.

<sup>64</sup> Dondi, *Iter romanum*, 331.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>66</sup> "in ecclesia sancti Pauli sunt quatuor ordines columnarum sicut in ecclesia sancti Petri, sed sunt maiores atque pulchriores illarum sancti Petri," Dondi, *Iter romanum*, 332.

<sup>67</sup> Emanuele Lugli, "Hidden in Plain Sight: the 'Pietre di Paragone' and the Preeminence of Medieval Measurements in Communal Italy," *Gesta*, 49, no. 2 (2010): 77-95; and by the same author, *Unità di misura. Breve storia del metro in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014).



their size through measurement was for him a way of gauging the distance and superiority of the Ancients compared to his contemporaries.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Dondi's measurements are not a clear proof of his interest in space as a mathematically conceivable, abstract entity.

In relation to the other figure he singled out, the philosopher and mathematician Biagio Pelacani, Baggio stated that the "strict adherence to reality" of Altichiero's architectural settings reflects Biagio Pelacani's empirical and quantitative approach to philosophical enquiry.<sup>69</sup> Baggio believes the link between Altichiero and Biagio is even clearer when one considers Biagio's theorisation of the existence of the void, for Altichiero's painted structures can be likened to "ample and complex containers to be filled with figures [...] as is the case in an empty, measurable space."<sup>70</sup> Altichiero's frescoes for the Oratory of St George do demonstrate the artist's interest and ability in the representation of depth, but this is not necessarily proof of his awareness of space as a separate, abstract concept. Many other painters, long before the time of Biagio Pelacani, had shown similar concerns with depth, such as Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel and Guariento at the Eremitani, both in Padua. Fixation on space has precluded other possible interpretations of these fictive structures, conflating three-dimensionality, distance and an interest in measurements with a self-referential space that is at the same time a representational means and an end in itself.<sup>71</sup> Biagio Pelacani himself preferred using the term *res quanta* or *continuum quantitatis*, indicating a quantifiable entity, instead of the more generic *spatium* in his writings.<sup>72</sup> In Biagio's *Questiones super perspectiva communi*, a question focuses on the *locus apparitionis* of the seen thing, while another discusses the *vera loca astrorum*.<sup>73</sup> The abstract and generic nature of *spatium* is not considered.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> "[...] grandium gestorum ystorias indicantes." Dondi used these words in a letter to the Franciscan Friar Guglielmo Centeuri, where he discussed at length his great admiration for ancient buildings and monuments in spite of their ruinous state. For the Latin text of the letter with an English translation: Neil Gilbert, "A Letter of Giovanni Dondi dall'Orologio to Fra' Guglielmo Centeuri: A Fourteenth-Century Episode in the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns," *Viator*, 8 (1977): 299-346.

<sup>69</sup> Baggio, "Sperimentazione prospettiche," 199.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Chapter Two, section 6 of this thesis proposes an alternative reading of Altichiero's empty buildings.

<sup>72</sup> For example, in *Quaestiones dialecticae* Biagio talked about *quantitas* and *continuum*. Graziella Federici Vescovini, "La prospettiva del Brunelleschi, Alhazen and Biagio Pelacani a Firenze," 335 note 22. In *Questiones super perspectiva communi* Biagio explained how cognition of the *res quanta* affects us three times. Biagio Pelacani da Parma, *Questiones super perspectiva communi*, ed. Graziella Federici Vescovini and Joël Biard (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2009), 224.

<sup>73</sup> The full title of *Questio* 4, *Secunda pars* is "Utrum locus apparitionis rei vise visione reflexa semper videatur esse in concursu radii visualis cum catheto." The full title of *Questio* 2, *Tertia pars* is "Utrum per visu quis possit vera loca astrorum comprehendere." Biagio Pelacani, *Questiones super perspectiva communi*, 272 and 316.

<sup>74</sup> In *Quaestiones physicorum* Biagio mentioned *vacuum*, but he considered it as a hypothetical milieu for experiments on movement rather than something bodies inhabit and that can be crossed by the rays of vision: "Quia ubi tu esses in vacuo et haberes lapidem in manu, non est dubium quod tu posses ita bene applicare vires tuas lapidi melius quam in pleno," Biagio Pelacani, *Quaestiones physicorum*, quoted in Graziella Federici Vescovini, "La prospettiva del Brunelleschi," 345 note 30.

The use of terminology is revealing, for it reflects Biagio's understanding and clarifies what the concerns of his work were. In light of the understanding of space as an abstract concept and of place as a more tangible one, Biagio's use of words might be due precisely to his empirical approach, centred around the belief that knowledge is to be found in sensible rather than rational evidence.<sup>75</sup> Although he used mathematics as a means to study and explain optics, the idea of an abstract, independent, generic 'space' does not seem to make an appearance in the *Questiones*. Besides, it is important to remember that although Biagio taught in Pavia from 1377 and Bologna from 1380, his Paduan teaching took place between 1384 and 1388, therefore after Altichiero's work at the Oratory had been completed.<sup>76</sup> Biagio's work may well have played a key role in the codification of mathematical perspective in painting around a hundred years after he taught at Padua, and it is likely that his ideas eventually fed into what we now know as 'space.' Nonetheless, Biagio's work reveals an interest in vision, objects and movement rather than a specific concern with space. It is precisely because an interest in vision, objects and movement might have been shared by Altichiero, even independently from Biagio, that we ought to be aware of our tendency to conflate measurements, distance and depth with a unified spatial expansion.

Another primary source that, according to Baggio, exemplifies the extent to which Biagio Pelacani and Giovanni Dondi's quantitative and empirical approach penetrated the Paduan mind is the *Libellus de magnificis ornamentis regie civitatis Padue*, a text describing all the noteworthy sites of the city of Padua written between 1447 and 1448 by the Paduan physician Michele Savonarola.<sup>77</sup> In the *Libellus*, Savonarola expressed his admiration for holy relics and for the buildings that contained them, often lingering over their dimensions and noting the measured distances between objects inside them. Baggio recognised in the attention Savonarola paid to measurements a reflection of Giovanni Dondi's behaviour during his trip in Rome, as exemplified in the *Iter romanum*.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Graziella Federici Vescovini and Joël Biard, "Introduction," in Biagio Pelacani da Parma, *Questiones super perspectiva communi*, ed. Graziella Federici Vescovini and Joël Biard (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2009), 23.

<sup>76</sup> "Pelacani, Biagio, detto Biagio da Parma," Enciclopedia Treccani, 2015, accessed Jun 4, 2015, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pelacani-biagio-detto-biagio-da-parma/>. Biagio's *Questiones* were probably taught in Pavia and Bologna before 1382. Federici Vescovini and Biard, "Introduction," 8.

<sup>77</sup> Segarizzi dated the *Libellus* between 1446 and 1447. Arnaldo Segarizzi, "Prefazione," in Michele Savonarola, *Libellus de magnificis ornamentis regie civitatis Padue Michaelis Savonarole*, ed. Arnaldo Segarizzi (Città di Castello: Tipi dell'editore S. Lapi, 1902), VIII.

<sup>78</sup> Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche," 179.

Savonarola's ideas acquire particular relevance because he mentioned painters in his *Libellus*, stating that they know philosophy and mathematics and apply the science of perspective.<sup>79</sup> The first Paduan examples mentioned by Savonarola are Guariento and Giusto de' Menabuoi. Altichiero only gets a third place after Jacopo Avanzo, with whom he decorated the Chapel of St James in the Santo, although Savonarola attributes this only to Jacopo.<sup>80</sup> Savonarola did not describe what exactly in these paintings he particularly admired or what exemplifies the use of perspective, but he did say that perspective is thought to be the mother of painting and that it is a more worthy aspect of painting since it draws on the "wonderful projection of rays."<sup>81</sup> Savonarola is here expressing his admiration for the science of optics, mentioning with awe the projection of rays theorised and studied by many, from Alhazen to Bradwardine and including Biagio Pelacani. Savonarola's statement implies that the status of painting is enhanced by its association with the science of optics, but, as discussed in relation to Manetti's life of Brunelleschi, *perspectiva* and *prospettiva* do not automatically imply that artist's interest in optics lay in the representation of space. Michele Savonarola did not mention anything to do with the representation of space or 'realism', with the exception of Giotto, by then a literary common place, whose Scrovegni Chapel images "almost appear to be alive."<sup>82</sup>

Interestingly, Savonarola frequently uses the word *locus*, demonstrating his preoccupation with sites. This is mainly due to the focus of the whole *Libellus* on the site of Padua, but the word *locus*, often in association with *amplissimus*, is particularly deployed in connection to buildings. Hence, the crenellated corridor linking the Reggia Carrarese to the city walls, known as 'il traghetto', is a *locus amoenus* because it offers a good view of the city; the Baptistery decorated by Giusto de' Menabuoi is a *locum amplissimum* and a *loco sacro*; and the *locus* hosting Guariento's fresco in the Venetian

---

<sup>79</sup> "Postremo ad mechanicos gloriosus et sua arte illustres viros me converto, quorum scire a philosophia non est longinquum, et mathematicarum artium practica est. Hi sunt pictores, quibus lineamenta figurarum et radiorum projectiones nosse datum est, ut quibus prospectiva scientia gloriatur per eos practicos demonstratur," Michele Savonarola, *Libellus de magnificis ornamentis regie civitatis Padue Michaelis Savonarole*, ed. Arnaldo Segarizzi (Città di Castello: Tipi dell'editore S. Lapi, 1902), 44 and 55.

<sup>80</sup> "Secundam sedem Iacobo Avanti bononiensi dabimus [...] Tertiam vero Altichero Veronensi, qui templum Georgii sancti nobilium de Lupis, templo Antonii propinquum, maximo cum artificio decoravit," Savonarola, *Libellus*, 44. Savonarola also attributed to Altichiero and Ottaviano Prandino da Brescia the lost decoration of the Sala Tebana and Sala degli Imperatori in the Reggia Carrarese. Savonarola, *Libellus*, 49. On Altichiero and Avanzo: Hanno-Walter Kruft, *Altichiero und Avanzo: Untersuchungen zur Oberitalienischen Malerei des ausgehenden Trecento* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1966). For a more recent study on the Chapel of St James: Francesca Flores D'Arcais, *Altichiero e Avanzo: la Cappella di San Giacomo* (Milan: Electa, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> "cum perspectiva picture mater habeatur, et pars in ea dignor, cum de stupenda radiorum projectione pertractet," Savonarola, *Libellus*, 44.

<sup>82</sup> "[...] Zotum Florentinum [...] Hic magnificam amplamque nobilium de Scrovineis Cappellam [...] pinxit, ubi [...] imagines velut viventes apparent," Savonarola, *Libellus*, 44.

Palazzo Ducale is large enough to be constantly replete with “an innumerable abundance of men from different countries” who want to see Guariento’s marvellous frescoes on the day of the Ascension, when everyone is allowed to enter the Palazzo.<sup>83</sup>

Although the *Libellus* dates from about sixty years after Altichiero’s frescoes in the Oratory of St George, in Baggio’s view Savonarola’s statements on perspective support his interpretation of Altichiero’s work, among others such as Guariento and Giusto de’Menabuoi, as experimenting with complex spatial and perspectival renditions of reality.<sup>84</sup> It is tempting to posit a link between artists and *magistri* of the University, and it cannot be excluded. There are instances of interaction, however rare, between intellectuals and artists, such as the friendship between Petrarch and Simone Martini, or that tentatively suggested by Mellini between Petrarch and Altichiero himself.<sup>85</sup> Although Baggio admitted that painters in the Trecento were socially distant from the *magistri*, he believes that the more empirical approach adopted at the University of Padua, as opposed to the more metaphysical and theological one adopted in Paris and Oxford, was a stimulus for the “search for realism in artworks.”<sup>86</sup>

It is certainly true that Altichiero’s fictive architecture explores depth and three-dimensionality with dexterity, and that, whether he was aware or not of any specific treatises on *perspectiva*, vision and how objects appear to us must have been amongst his primary preoccupations. Nevertheless, the word ‘realism’ in conjunction with his work is perhaps exaggerated. Firstly, Altichiero’s structures do not portray ‘realistic’ buildings: their scale is too small when compared to the figures (especially in the case of upper storeys, as we shall see), they are open structures without walls, as for example in the church in *St George Baptises King Sevius* (**Fig.5**), and their structural arrangement is often implausible, as in *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.6**) or in *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Fig.7**). These discrepancies with real buildings, however ‘higgeldy-piggeldy’ one might envisage medieval architecture and urbanism, are not mistakes due to misapplication of

---

<sup>83</sup> “[...] nulla supersit diei hora, qua locus innumerabili diversarum patriarum hominum copia non repleatur,” *ibid.*; “locum habet, quem ‘tragetum’ nominant [...] Is autem locus ita amenus [sic], quo civitas ea in parte tota videtur,” *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>84</sup> Baggio, “Sperimentazioni prospettiche,” 184.

<sup>85</sup> Gian Lorenzo Mellini, “Considerazioni su probabili rapporti tra Altichiero e Petrarca,” in *Da Giotto a Mantegna*, ed. Lucio Grossato (Milan: Electa, 1974), 51-54. Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 51-65.

<sup>86</sup> Baggio, “Sperimentazioni prospettiche,” 174. Baggio remarked that in a letter to the Franciscan friar Guglielmo da Cremona, Dondi mentioned a sculptor and said he spoke to him many times (“hunc plures audivi”). This could indicate that Dondi took an interest in the sculptor’s work. Baggio, *ibid.*, 190-191 and 188. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 52.

perspective or a lack of knowledge or ability on the part of Altichiero, as we will see in Chapters Two and Three.

Secondly, Altichiero's use of fictive depth appears more aimed at increasing the number of beautifully decorated surfaces and displaying further architectural detail rather than at three-dimensionality per se.<sup>87</sup> As well as in splayed buildings like the structure in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**), this is visible in *St Lucy's Funerals* (**Fig.4**), where the interior of the church receding in the background displays a rood screen with balustrade and arched opening, ribbed vaults and two two-lancet windows with delicate tracery. Altichiero may have used measurements to fully engage with his skilful representation of depth, but he did so to portray specific, memorable architectural places for his sacred narratives, not realistic pictorial space.

### **Fra Angelico, Space and Place**

As a fifteenth-century artist, Fra Angelico has been interpreted by art historians as somewhat anomalous, at the same time an innovator and a traditionalist. Many scholars have identified a connection between the Dominican friar's work and Alberti's perspectival and 'istoria' precepts, understood to be cutting-edge at the time, while they also defined Angelico's use of perspective as lax, and his whole body of work as "a rare phenomenon of equilibrium between giottesque tradition, late-gothic style and masacesque realism."<sup>88</sup> Angelico's hovering between tradition and innovation appears to lie particularly in his treatment of fictive depth, 'space', as it is always called in the literature. Angelico's Annalena (c.1435) (**Fig.9**) and San Marco altarpieces (c.1438-40) (**Fig.10**) were among the first to adopt a unified pala instead of a polyptych structure, a choice that may be interpreted as closely linked to Angelico's appreciation of the new perspectival precepts because it favours the use of a single viewpoint, the hallmark of Renaissance perspective.

Lorber has observed that Angelico's work in the "spatial field" can be considered amongst the most innovative of the time, and that his efforts towards the "unification of

---

<sup>87</sup> Gian Lorenzo Mellini noted this too in his *Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1965), 68. For a brief consideration of the aesthetic value of surfaces in the middle ages: Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 176, 181-187.

<sup>88</sup> "...un raro fenomeno di equilibrio fra la tradizione giottesca, lo stile tardo gotico ed il realismo masacesco," Lorber, "La rappresentazione dello spazio," 15. Liana Castelfranchi, "L'Angelico e il *De pictura* dell'Alberti," *Paragone*, 36, no. 419-423 (1985): 97-106. Gerardo de Simone, "Velut alter Apelles. Il decennio romano del Beato Angelico," in *Beato Angelico: l'alba del Rinascimento*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari, Giovanni Morello and Gerardo de Simone (Milan: Skira editore, 2009), 138; Prota, *Realtà e realismi*, 18.

space,” as seen in his *sacre conversazioni* and *predellas*, were reiterated by later artists.<sup>89</sup> On the other hand though, it is generally recognised that Fra Angelico’s perspectival construction is informed more by observation than it is by geometrical application of Brunelleschi’s and/or Alberti’s instructions, and that he often used several disjointed viewpoints in one scene.<sup>90</sup> The lack of full credibility thus expressed in many of Angelico’s settings has often been explained as a result of his belonging to the Dominican Order: Angelico’s representation of ‘space’ is a symbolical one informed by the precepts of St Thomas Aquinas, a pinnacle of Dominican theology.<sup>91</sup> As Didi-Huberman has suggested, Angelico’s work was greatly influenced by Dominican theology and attempted to reproduce what the scholar termed “dissemblance” in order to distance his earthly representation from the atemporal value of the sacred images he portrayed.<sup>92</sup>

And yet, art historians still recognise in Fra Angelico’s paintings characteristics that are deemed emblematic of fifteenth-century art, and the painter’s architectural structures in particular have been identified as evidence for Angelico’s endorsement of novel ideas. According to Lorber, the harmonious relation between natural and architectural setting in Angelico’s *Descent from the Cross* (installed 1432) (**Fig.11**) reveals the artist’s “perspectival precision;” the architectural structures in many of his *predellas* serve the narrative and again showcase Angelico’s perspectival interests; and the adoption of the continuous square frame is closely connected to “the novel architectural demands.”<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, de Simone believes that the frescoes in the Nicholas V Chapel in the Vatican (**Fig.12**), when compared to previous work by Angelico, display more prominent architectural structures where one can identify an “Albertian pictorial representation.”<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> “[L’]intervento dell’Angelico] in ambito spaziale può considerarsi fra i più innovativi tanto che i suoi tentativi di unificazione dello spazio (‘sacra conversazione’ e storie nelle predelle) vennero ripresi dagli artisti successivi,” Lorber, “La rappresentazione dello spazio,” 17.

<sup>90</sup> Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431-1600* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 148; Lorber, “La rappresentazione dello spazio,” 15. More on this in Chapter Four.

<sup>91</sup> Vitaliano Tiberia, “Spazio reale e astrazione nella pittura dell’Angelico,” in *‘Angelicus pictor:’ ricerche e interpretazioni sul Beato Angelico*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari (Milan: Skira editore, 2008), 83; de Simone, “Velut alter Apelles,” 135; Prota, *Realtà e realismi*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico. Dissemblance et figuration* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> Lorber, “La rappresentazione dello spazio nel Beato Angelico,” 15, 17. Anna Luce Sicurezza, “Nuove ipotesi sulla formazione culturale di Beato Angelico. Fra ottica medievale e pratica pittorica,” in *L’artiste et l’œuvre à l’épreuve de la perspective*, ed. Pascal Dubourg-Glatigny, Marianne Cojannot-Le Blanc and Marisa Dalai Emiliani (Rome: Collection de l’École Française de Rome, 2006), 353-363.

<sup>94</sup> de Simone, “Velut alter Apelles,” 138.

Alberti had been a member of the papal Curia for about sixteen years by the time Angelico began his work on the Nicholas V Chapel in 1448. Angelico may well have known him, but it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the two men may have exchanged ideas. Three of Angelico's painted structures in the Nicholas V Chapel were tentatively described by Krautheimer as representations of the plans for the renovation of Old St Peter's, to which Alberti, the scholar proposed, may have participated as advisor.<sup>95</sup> This fascinating hypothesis captivated researchers and has almost become an art historical trope. However, more recent work has questioned Krautheimer's suggestion, highlighting the unreliability of sources and proposing instead that Alberti may have opposed, rather than endorsed, Nicholas V's projects.<sup>96</sup> This issue will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Five.

Nicholas of Cusa, or Cusanus, (1401-1464) is another figure who deserves mention in connection with Fra Angelico, Alberti, and issues of space and place. Nicholas was a German cleric who studied law at Padua and was made cardinal by Nicholas V in 1448, when Angelico's work in the Nicholas V Chapel is likely to have started.<sup>97</sup> Nicholas of Cusa sits between the understanding of infinite space as it developed from the Condemnations (1277) onwards and a more novel approach, as exemplified by his concept of the Absolute Maximum.<sup>98</sup> The Absolute Maximum is the unqualifiedly great, than which nothing is greater. It differs from earlier notions of absolute magnitude because it is *incommensurably* greater than anything else.<sup>99</sup> As such, the Absolute Maximum is infinite, and is therefore not subject to degrees of greatness as finite things

---

<sup>95</sup> Richard Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and - perhaps- Alberti," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), I, 290-296.

<sup>96</sup> Christine Smith and Joseph O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice* (Tempe, Arizona and Turnhout: Arizona State University and Brepols, 2006), 192-198, 193 note 10. Stefano Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti e Roma* (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2003), 111-113.

<sup>97</sup> For the consistory document announcing Cusanus' ordination as cardinal and Nicholas V's letter apropos to Cusanus: *Acta Cusana. Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues*, ed. Erich Meuthen (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1976), Documents 776-778 and 784, 1.2, 568.

<sup>98</sup> Koyré asserted that Nicholas of Cusa is "the last great philosopher of the dying middle ages [...] to whom [...] is ascribed the merit, or the crime, of having asserted the infinity of the universe," Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1957), 6. Similarly, Casey described him as a "liminal figure," Casey, *Fate of Place*, 120 and 387. Tamara Albertini, "Mathematics and Astronomy," in *Introducing Nicholas Of Cusa: a Guide to a Renaissance Man*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto, Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (New York and Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2004), 396-400. The Condemnations are two-hundred-and-nineteen doctrines limiting the power of God issued and condemned in 1277 by the bishop of Paris Etienne Tempier at the request of pope John XXI. Casey identified articles 34 and 49 as key for tracing a significant development of the thought on space and place. Casey, *Fate of Place*, 108. Roland Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 Mars 1277* (Louvain: Publication Universitaires & Paris: Vander-Oyez, 1977), 5-9 and 319.

<sup>99</sup> "I give the name 'Maximum' to that than which there cannot be anything greater;" "since the unqualifiedly and absolutely maximum (than which there cannot be a greater) is greater than we can comprehend (because it is infinite truth), we attain unto it in no other way than incomprehensibly," Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, ed. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1985), Book I, 2, 5 and 4, 11.

are. Unsurprisingly, the Absolute Maximum is identified by Cusanus with God. Since Cusanus considered space infinite, it may appear not only that the Absolute Maximum can be identified with space, but that space can be divine, as Bradwardine and Oresme, among others, had stated in the fourteenth century. However, Cusanus specifies that God is “negatively infinite,” that is, He is not the sum of all finite things; while space is “privatively infinite,” i.e. it is unbounded but not actually infinite, although as a physical thing it could not be greater than it is:

Therefore only the absolutely Maximum is negatively infinite [*negative infinitum*]. Hence, it alone is whatever there can at all possibly be. But since the universe encompasses all the things *which are not God*, it cannot be negatively infinite, although it is unbounded and thus privatively infinite [*privative infinitum*]. And in this respect it is neither finite nor infinite. For it cannot be greater than it is.<sup>100</sup>

Cusanus explained that the universe is a physical contraction of divine infinity, and that it is characterised, oxymoronically, by a finite infinity.<sup>101</sup> This peculiar infinity is in its own turn contained in contracted form in all the things of the universe, with the result that infinity is located in all the places which all things containing the contracted universe occupy. The contraction of divine infinity in the universe ensures the universe’s special infinity as a finite thing containing a contracted infinite one. Yet, its contraction in all things means that the universe is intrinsically connected to places (the locations of all things) and cannot therefore be divine, as God is non-spatial. To summarise, God is fully infinite, incommensurably greater than anything else, and is not bound to space, even though His infinity is contracted within it. On the other hand, the universe is physical and therefore finite, but it is at the same time unbounded and intrinsically linked to the specificity and finiteness of place. The world is boundless yet non-divine, as spatial infinity is secured only by the loss of divinisation.<sup>102</sup> The infinity of space is here painstakingly specified and thus granted a more concrete status than other definitions of it had until now allowed.<sup>103</sup> It is Cusanus’ closer engagement with space that singled him

---

<sup>100</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, Book II, 1, 97. My italics. I have taken the original Latin from the German and Latin edition by Paul Wilpert, *Die belehrte Unwissenheit: übersetzt mit Vorwort und Anmerkungen* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1994), Buch 2, 12.

<sup>101</sup> “[the universe] is, contractedly, that which all things are: in all things it is the contracted beginning of things, the contracted end of things, and the contracted being of things; it is a contracted infinity and thus is contractedly infinite,” Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, Book II, 4, 113. Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), esp. 36; and by the same author *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysics of Contraction* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1983), esp. ch. 4.

<sup>102</sup> Casey, *Fate of Place*, 119-120.

<sup>103</sup> Thomas Bradwardine’s *situs imaginarius* and Nicholas Oresme’s *espace ymaginee* highlight the hypothetical nature of space, proposing a more vague formulation of it than Nicholas of Cusa’s. Thomas Bradwardine, *De causa Dei contra Pelagium et De virtute causarum*, Book I, ch. 5, (London: Henry Savile, 1618), 178. For an English translation: Bradwardine, “*De causa Dei contra Pelagium et De virtute causarum*,” in *A Source Book in Medieval Science*, ed. Edward Grant (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 556-560.



out as a key figure in the development of pictorial space, a hypothesis that is also encouraged by the possibility that he may have known Leon Battista Alberti.

There is no documentary evidence proving their acquaintance, although we know that Nicholas owned a copy of *Elementa picturae*, a shortened version of Alberti's *De pictura* published in 1435, and that they had numerous mutual friends.<sup>104</sup> The *Acta cusana* published in 1976 made available a series of documents confirming Nicholas' friendship with Paolo Toscanelli, Tommaso Parentucelli (the future Nicholas V) and Enea Silvio Piccolomini, figures whom Alberti knew as a member of the Curia from 1432.<sup>105</sup> Besides, both men are documented at the same time in Padua, where Alberti was attending the school of humanist Gasparino Barzizza and Cusanus (three years older) the university; in Ferrara and Florence for the Council; and in Rome, where they both were in 1450 for the Jubilee and in 1459 and 1464.<sup>106</sup>

Karsten Harries has identified Alberti as one of the 'founders' of the modern world, seeing in the *De pictura* a work that contributed to bring about what Heidegger called the "Age of the World Picture," although, as Harries admits, the German philosopher was thinking about Descartes rather than Alberti. Ideas on the relativity of appearance expressed in the *De pictura* would find their mirror image in observations made by Cusa in the *De docta ignorantia*, such as "every enquiry is comparative."<sup>107</sup> Harries sees a parallel between Cusa's use of mathematics as a tool to understand divine truth and Alberti's mathematical perspective, which would be a result of Cusa's meditations on infinity.<sup>108</sup> But for Cusa it is precisely human sight, as a perception altering our understanding, that lacks an absolute centre or measure, for although it can be likened to the sight of God, divine sight is 'omnivoyant' and synoptic, while human sight is divided and multiple, and dependent on a point of view.

---

Nicholas Oresme, "Le livre du ciel et du monde," in *A Source Book in Medieval Science*, ed. Edward Grant (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 553 n. 25.

<sup>104</sup> Kurt Flasch, "Nicolò Cusano e Leon Battista Alberti," in *Leon Battista Alberti e il Quattrocento: Studi in onore di Cecil Grayson e Ernst Gombrich*, ed. Luca Chiavoni, Gianfranco Ferlisi and Maria Vittoria Grassi (Mantua: Leo S. Olschki editore, 2001), 376. Karsten Harries, "On the Power and Poverty of Perspective: Cusanus and Alberti," in *Cusanus: the Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, ed. Peter J. Casarella (Washington D.C.: the Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 106.

<sup>105</sup> *Acta Cusana. Quellen zur Lebensgeschichte des Nikolaus von Kues*, ed. Erich Meuthen (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1976). Flasch, "Nicolò Cusano e Leon Battista Alberti," 373; Harries, "Power and Poverty of Perspective," 107. In 1432 Alberti became head of the papal chancery and then a member of the College of Pontifical Abbreviators. Joseph Rykwert, "Introduction," in *On the Art of Building in Ten Books [De re aedificatoria]*, ed. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), xiii; Christoph Frommel, "L'architettura del Quattrocento romano," in *Il '400 a Roma. La rinascita delle arti da Donatello a Perugino*, ed. Maria Grazia Bernardini and Marco Bussagli, (Milan: Skira editore, 2008), vol.1, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Harries, 'Power and Poverty of Perspective,' 106.

<sup>107</sup> Harries, "Power and Poverty of Perspective," 108; Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, Book I, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Harries, "Power and Poverty of Perspective," 114.

Nonetheless, Nicholas of Cusa did take an interest in pictorial representation. The *De visione Dei* (1453) was delivered to the monks of the Abbey of Tegernsee in Bavaria, who had commissioned it, accompanied by a picture where the eyes of the depicted figure always appeared to look at the beholder no matter what point of view he would adopt in front of it.<sup>109</sup> The experience of the picture's following gaze was meant to facilitate the monks' understanding of our ever-changing point of view and of the impact it has on what we see, thus illustrating the difference between human and divine sight. This is also a reference to the contemplation of God, where the ambivalent 'of' exemplifies that the divinity can both be the object of human contemplation or the subject of vision, visualising everything at once, or as Tamara Albertini put it "the infinite number of perspectives imperceptible [...] to the human eye."<sup>110</sup>

Gianluca Cuozzo reflected on the use of mathematics in both Nicholas of Cusa's and Alberti's work, focussing primarily on Alberti's *Ludi mathematici* (1450-1452). Cuozzo believes that for both Alberti and Cusanus mathematics was an instrument for investigations in all kinds of subjects, but an instrument apt to "symbolical" and "heuristic" investigation. This statement illustrates very well Nicholas of Cusa's use of mathematics for "apprehending divine [truths],"<sup>111</sup> but jars with Alberti's much more practical interest in mathematics as an applied science, as Cuozzo himself is forced to admit.<sup>112</sup> That Cusanus' ideas may have partially informed Alberti's and/or vice versa is not out of the question, but they certainly were not the only thinkers using mathematics for their investigations. As Kurt Flasch observed, Roger Bacon must be considered as a source for both Alberti and Cusanus, but one could extend the range of sources to include the majority of philosophers since at the very least the Pythagoreans.<sup>113</sup> Recently, Charles Carman argued that Alberti's mathematical, seemingly objective approach has been overemphasised to the detriment of the importance he placed on seeing with the mind's eye as well as with physical eyes. Rather than being linked by mathematics, Carman proposed that Alberti and Nicholas of Cusa shared Christian

---

<sup>109</sup> Albertini, "Mathematics and Astronomy," 389.

<sup>110</sup> Albertini, *ibid.*, 389 and 391-392. Graziella Federici Vescovini, "Nicholas of Cusa, Alberti and the Architectonics of the Mind," in *Nexus II: Architecture and Mathematics*, ed. Kim Williams (Florence: Edizioni dell'Erba, 1998), 159-171.

<sup>111</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, Book I, 11.

<sup>112</sup> Gianluca Cuozzo, "La 'grassa Musa' albertiana: Arte e matematica in Nicola Cusano e Leon Battista Alberti," in *A caccia dell'infinito: l'umano e la ricerca del divino nell'opera di Nicola Cusano*, ed. Cesare Catà (Rome: Aracne editrice, 2010), 83-85.

<sup>113</sup> Flasch, "Nicolò Cusano e Leon Battista Alberti," 380.

Neoplatonic ideals and a commitment to stimulating the perception of the divine through visible, finite things.<sup>114</sup>

Any analysis of the Nicholas V Chapel in conjunction with Alberti and Cusanus must consider that Alberti's *Ludi* and Cusanus' *De visione Dei* postdate Angelico's work in the Chapel, even though it is likely that both Alberti and Cusanus already entertained the thoughts expounded in these texts in the late 1440s. They were in Rome at this point, and it is possible, although unsupported by evidence, they knew Fra Angelico. The fictive architecture of the Nicholas V Chapel engages with three-dimensionality by deploying recession and projection, as demonstrated by the receding nave in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.13**) and the projecting section of the L-shaped building in the *Entrustment of the Treasures* (**Fig.14**), but evidence of a strictly mathematical approach to the wall surface is difficult to find.<sup>115</sup> However, Angelico's use of architecture to articulate specific but multiple points of view within the same scene (what Mary Carruthers termed "polyfocal perspective," discussed in Chapter Four) seems to echo a fundamental, if overlooked, issue in Cusanus' writings. For Nicholas of Cusa, place is at the very least as important as space, for it is within individual specific places that the universe can be found in its contracted form.

The relevance of place for Cusa is reflected in his quotation of a statement traditionally attributed to him, but actually deriving from a twelfth-century pseudo-Hermetic text, that the universe has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere.<sup>116</sup> As Casey noted, this means that every single place in the universe is a centre "of *perspectival viewing* from which all other places can (at least in principle) be seen."<sup>117</sup> Perhaps this is what the painting accompanying the *De visione Dei* was meant to convey. Interestingly, the specificity and uniqueness of a perspectival point of view are also expressed by Antonio

---

<sup>114</sup> Charles H. Carman, *Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas Cusanus. Towards an Epistemology of Vision for Italian Renaissance Art and Culture* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>115</sup> Technical analysis of the frescoes reveals the use of tools, but a significant portion of the drawing was done freely by hand, pointing towards a less than mathematical approach. Most of the fictive architecture was realised with the help of a thin rope with a weight attached (*cordino*) and then freely hand-drawn. Compass and ruler were used for the fictive stone perforations between the Doctors of the Church, and the compass was used to help delineate the arches of the loggia in the *Entrustment of the Treasures*, previously drawn much lower, as a still visible incision demonstrates. The transfer of a model drawing through the *spolvero* technique was only carried out for the upper part of the Doctors' ciboria on the two arch intradoses. Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari, "La tecnica pittorica," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 105-106.

<sup>116</sup> The Latin text as found in Nicholas of Cusa's *On Learned Ignorance* reads "sphaera cuius centrum ubique, circumferentia nullibi." The pseudo-Hermetic text is the *Book of the XXIV Philosophers*, an anonymous compilation of the twelfth century. Casey, *Fate of Place*, 116, 385 and Koyré, *From the Closed World*, 18 note 19.

<sup>117</sup> Casey, *Fate of Place*, 117. My italics.

Manetti in his biography of Brunelleschi, where he pointed out that the painter has to work from a single place, “for in every place that is not that one, the view changes.”<sup>118</sup>

Angelico’s fictive architecture in the Niccolina outlines specific places within the Chapel from which to look at each single narrative episode, but it also creates individual places within the painting, as we will see in Chapter Four, addressing the specificity and uniqueness of both real and fictive architectural places. Although Fra Angelico’s multiple points of view may not be a direct application of Nicholas of Cusa’s thoughts, the cardinal’s ideas help to further highlight a striking characteristic of the architectural settings of the Nicholas V Chapel, encouraging us to reflect on its fictive architecture as recreating the singularity and tangibility of place rather than the generic abstraction of space.

The Dominican friar Albert the Great, whose work, along with the *Summa* of the younger Thomas Aquinas, forms the basis of Dominican theology, specified that one must not confuse *spatium* with *locus*, and that *locus* is an active principle of generation, contributing to define the thing it contains.<sup>119</sup> Didi-Hubermann suggested that Albert the Great’s writings on place, readily available in the library at San Marco, Fra Angelico’s convent, contributed to the exegesis of the Annunciation, where the Virgin’s womb is the place where the Holy Spirit is turned into flesh, and informed Angelico’s representation of place in his frescoes at San Marco.<sup>120</sup> Didi-Hubermann explained how the frescoes at San Marco portray a topological and tropological network of places that act as metaphors for key figures and events. Thus, in the north corridor *Annunciation*, the Virgin is both the figure of a young lady on the right of the image and the flowery,

---

<sup>118</sup> “perché ’l dipintore bisogna che presuponga uno luogo solo [...] che in ogni luogo che s’ esce di quello ha mutare l’apparizione dell’occhio,” Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi*, 58.

<sup>119</sup> Albert the Great considered both *spatium* and *locus* in his *Physica*. Although in his *De natura loci* he lingered on the utmost importance of place and the necessity of truly understanding it, he did not agree with Zeno, who stated that all there is, is in a place. For Albert, not all that exists is in a place, and this is the reason place cannot be identified with space: “Sed si locus dicatur esse spatium [...] impossibile est evadere obiectionem Zenoni,” Albert the Great, *Physica*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. Paul Hossfeld (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1980), IV, 1, IV, I, 6, 73-75. “[...] locus est generationis principium activum quemadmodum pater,” Albert the Great, *De natura loci*, in *Opera Omnia*, V, I, 1, 12-13.

<sup>120</sup> Didi-Hubermann, *Fra Angelico*, 268-304. However, according to William Hood it is unlikely that Fra Angelico or the majority of his Observant brothers ever read Albert the Great. William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (London: BCA and Yale University Press, 1993), 24. In spite of this, it is important to remember that Albert the Great features amongst the notable Dominicans depicted by Angelico beneath the *Crucifixion* in the chapter house at San Marco. If the identification with Albert the Great of the fourth figure to the left of St Dominic is correct, Angelico must have known who he was and may have been familiar with his thought through other sources, if not through direct reading of his texts. For a brief overview of the education of Dominican friars: Joanna Cannon, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches. Art in Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 13-15.

enclosed garden on the left.<sup>121</sup> Although Didi-Hubermann did not engage with fictive architectural place, his analysis shows the importance of place within Angelico's work at San Marco.

### **Current Scholarship on Place**

Our notion of place has not dramatically changed since the later middle ages. Although we may not use the word 'place' to refer to a passage of a text or to indicate one's office or assignment, we still use similar words like 'position' to indicate an abstract location within society. The expressions 'social position' and 'to put someone in his/her place' are examples of this.<sup>122</sup> However, precisely because of its ubiquitousness and apparent simplicity, place has been naturalised and made undetectable to analysis. Edward Casey's investigation of the philosophical and theological development of place in Western thought is illuminating in this respect, as it showcases the pivotal role played by place even when the idea of space seemed to have completely overridden it.<sup>123</sup>

Scholars of humanistic geography have been reflecting on place as an alternative to spatial geography for a few decades, and have contributed to underlining the more personal and everyday character of place. Until the 1950s and 60s, geography adopted a prevalently 'chorological,' or regional approach which maintained the individual character of the investigated areas, thus providing no basis for the establishment of rules that could be generally applied. This was interpreted as a fault by some geographers, who adopted a more 'scientifically spatial' approach believed to be more nomothetic and informative.<sup>124</sup> According to Arturo Escobar, Western philosophy since Plato, with the addition of physics and theology, has formed a construct of space as absolute, infinite and universal, while place was relegated to the inferior realm of the bounded particular.<sup>125</sup>

As a reaction to the impersonal character of a space devoid of humans, from the 1970s humanistic geography shifted its focus to place, and a philosophical dimension was added to the old chorological model. Geographers reflected on Heidegger's elaboration of *da sein* (literally "to be there"), a concept coined to identify the essence of existence,

---

<sup>121</sup> Didi-Hubermann, *Fra Angelico*, 303-304.

<sup>122</sup> Hayden highlighted the political overtones of these phrases. Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place. Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995), 16.

<sup>123</sup> Casey, *Fate of Place*. Casey's preface to this book presents a pithy but deeply informative illustration of the reasons that prompted his work on place.

<sup>124</sup> Tim Creswell, *Place: a Short Introduction* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013), 19.

<sup>125</sup> Arturo Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localisation," *Political Geography*, 20, no. 2 (2001): 143.

and Edward Relph queried the seeming obviousness of place by elaborating on intentionality. Developed from nineteenth-century phenomenology, intentionality defines the relation between the self and the world, that is the ways the self is *conscious* of what surrounds it. Phenomenologists argued that one cannot be conscious unless one is conscious of something, and for Relph this indispensable consciousness could be extended to place: we are not simply conscious of something, we are conscious of it in its place.<sup>126</sup>

Yu Fu Tuan differentiated space and place by defining space as an area of action and movement, and place as a 'pause' from motion in space, a pause that allows the individual to develop an emotional bond.<sup>127</sup> Yu Fu Tuan's interpretation reflects Dante's use of *spazio* and *luogo* when he spoke in his *Convivio* of the distance (*spazio*) between Rome and another place (*luogo*). This understanding of space is also found in Roger Bacon's (c. 1220-1292) speculations on a disappearing species moving from one place to the next (*transmutetur de loco in locum*), where *spatium* is where motion occurs between the starting and arrival points or *loci*, and in Nicholas Oresme's (ca. 1325-1382) reflections on the hypothetical movement of the world in an "imaginary space" (*espasce ymaginee*).<sup>128</sup>

In 1987, political geographer John Agnew outlined three major aspects of place understood as meaningful site: locale, location and sense of place. Locale refers to the routine social interactions in a place; location refers to the social interactions derived from the relationship between places; and finally sense of place indicates the subjective and emotional attachment that an individual may develop towards a certain place, that is how place affects the creation of identity and the perception of the self.<sup>129</sup> Location,

---

<sup>126</sup> Cresswell, *ibid.*, 22. "The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence," Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 43.

<sup>127</sup> "[...] if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place," Yu Fu Tuan, *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

<sup>128</sup> Bacon had a keen interest in geography, which was a fundamental means for the all-important location and visualisation of the sacred *loci* enumerated in the Bible. Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*, ed. Robert Belle Burke (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000), ch. 13. David Woodward and Herbert H. Howe, "Roger Bacon on Geography and Cartography," in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), 200-203. Oresme's thoughts are an argument against article 49 of the *Condemnations* (1277), which stated that God could not move the heavens in a rectilinear motion. Oresme, "Le livre du ciel et du monde," 553 n. 25. Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200-1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 624-626. Casey, *Fate of Place*, 108. Orseme treated place in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*. Stefan Kirschner, *Nicolaus Oresmes Kommentar zur Physik des Aristoteles* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), esp. ch. 2, 4.

<sup>129</sup> John A. Agnew, *Place and Politics. The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Boston and London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), Ch.3. John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan, ed., *The Power of Place. Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); in particular: John A. Agnew and

locale and sense of place are helpful categories that not only better define place but also highlight the extent to which it is a construct. They explore what place *does* as active agent rather than as passive receptacle. The agency of place finds its utmost expression in the idea of dwelling, implying inhabitancy. Buildings thus play a crucial role, for they are the medium par excellence that creates dwellings and ensures stable habitation. Heidegger reflected on this point in *Building Dwelling Thinking*, and, more recently, Edwards Casey elaborated on our need to create built places, highlighting how, by so doing, we transform not only the landscape around us, but also ourselves.<sup>130</sup> Norwegian architect Christian Norberg-Schulz even went so far as to call architecture “the art of place,” which interprets, rather than represents the world.<sup>131</sup>

John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel explored the constitutive and constructive force of place in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, a selection of essays on the history of cinema. In the introduction, they explain how place can be used as a heuristic tool for the analysis of the moving image, producing “a new understanding of how the moving image works, how it constitutes itself in and through emplacement, how we may understand it anew and afresh through the particularising lens of place.”<sup>132</sup> The essays in the book grapple with place as active agent in the construction of identity and as metaphor for historical processes or abstractions, for example how the buildings of EUR in Rome served in Italian cinema as a figure for the history of fascism, and later as symbol of the supposed decline of moral sentiment in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>133</sup> Although the essays in *Taking Place* deal with twentieth-century cinema, they examine the power of place as interpretative instrument, underscoring its hermeneutical potential in other fields of study.

### **Place and Architecture in Painting**

The construction of identity and the metaphorical valence of place, which can stand for itself as well as for other ideas, characterise fictive architectural place. Architecture in painting engages with the built architectural identity of one place or set of places, and the representation of place encapsulates the historical and cultural associations

---

James S. Duncan, “Introduction,” 1-7, and Edward Muir and Ronald F.E. Weissman, “Social and Symbolic Places in Renaissance Venice and Florence,” 81-103.

<sup>130</sup> Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking.” Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 109-112.

<sup>131</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Presence, Language and Place*, 221.

<sup>132</sup> John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel, “Introduction,” in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, ed. John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), ix.

<sup>133</sup> John David Rhodes, “The Eclipse of Place: Rome’s EUR from Rossellini to Antonioni,” in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image*, ed. John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 31-54.

connected to that site. No representation of Rome, for instance, is ever devoid of the extremely complex historical and cultural implications that characterise the city. Architecture within frescoes establishes a particularly strong relation with place, for it is at one with the walls of the building hosting it, at one with built architectural place.

Fictive architecture can faithfully portray an existing building or set of buildings, it can evoke known buildings but deliberately change details to thwart identification, or it can completely disregard existing places and propose innovative architectural solutions with no built precedent. The most helpful way to trace these relationships between built and depicted architecture is perhaps to imagine a sliding scale from faithful portrait to entirely invented architectural settings, with varying degrees of recognition of built architectural sources between these two poles. It is particularly difficult to identify entirely invented architecture, for the more we look, the more we find structural and ornamental references to built structures. Or perhaps we tend to construe references to the built environment, for we may feel that tracing a built model is the only way of dealing with architecture in painting.<sup>134</sup> However, a major problem with this approach is that it implies that fictive architecture is subordinate to its built counterpart, which functions as its root. Yet, most architecture in painting is instead highly innovative, proposing daring structural and ornamental solutions. In spite of this, discrepancies with existing built models are often treated as negligible idiosyncrasies rather than as intrinsic to the roles architecture in painting performs. How can traceable references to built architectural places coexist with striking architectural invention? What makes a building recognisable?

The essence or spirit of a place is notoriously difficult to capture. After defining architecture as the art of place, Christian Norberg-Schulz argued that built structures attempt to interpret the local image, which emerges everywhere and conditions the place, but can only be grasped as *genius loci*, “that spirit that eludes any characterisation.”<sup>135</sup> This statement suits architecture in late medieval and Renaissance Italian painting particularly well. Even within one painting or fresco cycle, this relation is fluid and constantly changing, and is likely to include references to numerous locations rather than to a single one. A hybrid type of architectural setting is the most common, where an existing structure or ornamental pattern are ‘cited’ but slightly

---

<sup>134</sup> An example of this is Francesco Benelli’s book on Giotto’s fictive architecture, where Giotto’s structures are examined in comparison to built models. Francesco Benelli, *The Architecture in Giotto’s Paintings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>135</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Presence, Language and Place*, 225.



altered, for example by the omission or addition of details like fenestration or rustication; or where painted buildings are an amalgam of details borrowed from several real ones and are often refashioned to appear more structurally or ornamentally daring. The differences between a portrait of place and an architectural hybrid can be subtle, and the reasons behind the creation of hybrid architectural places deserve to be explored further.

### 1. Portrait of Place

Architecture in painting portrays place when it presents immediately recognisable, largely faithful representations of existing built structures. Ghirlandaio's rendition of Piazza della Signoria in the Sasseti Chapel (1483-85) (**Fig.15**) is an example of portraiture of place, for the well-defined three storeys, fenestration and entrance of the Palazzo della Signoria and the Loggia dei Lanzi are faithfully represented in detail. Another instance is Gentile Bellini's procession in Piazza San Marco (1496) (**Fig.16**). The late fifteenth-century date of these paintings should not lead one to assume that portraiture of place did not exist before then. The *Martyrdom of St Peter* (**Fig.17**) in Giotto's Stefaneschi polyptych (c.1330) represents the *meta Romuli*, a no-longer extant first-century B.C. pyramidal sepulchre on the Vatican hill, where Peter's martyrdom took place according to the *Liber pontificalis*; and it also includes the Pyramid of Cestius, not visible from the Vatican, as an emblematic Roman structure.<sup>136</sup> Whilst the *meta Romuli* identifies the specific site of the martyrdom, the Pyramid, whose shape echoes that of the *meta Romuli*, thus creating an aesthetically pleasing composition, functions as a visual synecdoche standing for the whole of Rome.<sup>137</sup>

Portraits of place may bear little resemblance to the real location they are representing. Although it includes the *meta Romuli* and what may be Old St Peter's, Spinello Aretino's *Apparition of the Angel on Castel Sant'Angelo* in San Francesco, Arezzo (1402-1403) (**Fig.18**), displays a diminutive Castel Sant'Angelo surrounded by four marble panels, compressing the Roman cityscape to include a structure resembling the Colosseum, which is not visible from Castel Sant'Angelo. Benozzo Gozzoli's *Departure of St Augustine from Rome* in the church of Sant'Agostino at San Gimignano (1464-1465) (**Fig.19**)

---

<sup>136</sup> *Liber pontificalis: nella recensione di PietroGuglielmo OSB e del Card. Pandolfo. Glossato da Pietro Bohier*, ed. Ulderico Prerovsky (Rome: Liberia Ateneo Salesiano, 1978), II, I, 5. On the *meta Romuli*: John L. Osborne, "Peter's Grain Heap: a Medieval View of the *Meta Romuli*," *Échos du monde classique*, 30, no.2 (1986): 111-118. The pairing of *meta Romuli* and Pyramid of Cestius (also known as *meta Remi*) in the martyrdom of St Peter was reiterated by Filarete's bronze doors for St Peter's (1433-1445).

<sup>137</sup> For a recent contribution on the Stefaneschi polyptych: Serena Romano, "Giotto e la Basilica di San Pietro: il polittico Stefaneschi," in *Giotto, l'Italia*, ed. Serena Romano and Pietro Petrarola (Milan: Electa, 2015), 96-113.

includes a view of Rome where one can recognise the Pantheon, Trajan's Column and Castel Sant'Angelo among other landmarks, but the proportions are altered, the buildings are squashed together and significant details have been altered, like the façade of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, to which Benozzo added a gable with an oculus. Since these fresco cycles were not painted in Rome, the differences between the built and the painted could be attributed to the painter's inability to directly and frequently compare his work with the real city of Rome. However, images like the *Homage of a Simple Man* in the Upper Basilica of San Francesco at Assisi (**Fig.20**) indicate how little importance was often attached to faithful, systematic portrayals of sites. In it, the artist portrayed the Temple of Minerva, a surviving building close to the Basilica in the centre of Assisi, that the painter could have examined numerous times (**Fig.21**). In spite of this, a comparison between the painted version and the real reveals numerous discrepancies.<sup>138</sup>

The altered portrayals of place in these examples reveal the artists' inventiveness and the malleability of place, as well as the resilience of the audience, called to identify familiar places in an unfamiliar guise. Nonetheless, the *Apparition of the Angel*, the *Departure of St Augustine* and the *Homage of a Simple Man* include other elements that aid place recognition and define their architectural settings as portrayals of specific places. Firstly, textual sources located all three scenes in Rome and Assisi. We learn of the simple man's homage in Assisi in Bonaventure's *Life of St Francis*, and the *Golden Legend* informs us of the apparition of the angel on the Mausoleum of Hadrian and of St Augustine's departure from Rome.<sup>139</sup> These were well-established links to a specific site that artists set out to address. Secondly, all cited examples include other visual clues facilitating identification. The Temple of Minerva is painted alongside Assisi's city hall, thus helping to situate the scene in Assisi. Spinello's Castel Sant'Angelo is painted in front of the emblematic Pyramid of Cestius and next to a simplified version of Old St Peter's;

---

<sup>138</sup> In the fresco, the temple's podium only has three instead of six steps, the bases of the columns are on top of the last step instead of being across three steps as in the real building, and the columns themselves are smaller and only five in number instead of six. In addition, although two barred windows are represented (these are not visible anymore but analysis of the brickwork reveals that they existed and were positioned where the fresco shows them), the frescoed architrave with cosmati work is remarkably different from the plain entablature of the real building, and the gable in the fresco is much larger and adorned with a rose window framed by two angels, absent in the built temple. Cooper and Robson proposed a typological interpretation of the frescoed Temple of Minerva as the Temple of Solomon, which would explain the discrepancies between the built and the painted structures. Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi. The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 161-164.

<sup>139</sup> Bonaventure located the homage of the simple man in Assisi, but did not specify the exact site within the city. Bonaventure, *Vita di S. Francesco*, ed. Francesco Russo (Rome: Angelo Signorelli editore, 1951), 8. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, ed. William Gregory Ryan (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 174 and 504.

and Benozzo's view of Rome, as well as including numerous buildings and monuments representative of the city, is further identified by an inscription below the scene.

Detailed comparisons between the painted and the built can provide informative explorations of the relationship artists established with place, sometimes showing their painstaking attention to detail and willingness to reproduce a building or set of buildings as faithfully as possible, other times revealing their lack of interest in the accurate representation of place. Although these analyses have rarely gone beyond the simple comparison to explain why sometimes inaccurate representations of architectural place were sufficient and why sometimes they were not, the relationship between portrait of place and real place draws the attention of art historians.<sup>140</sup> However, contributions to the literature on the subject tend not to engage with place per se so much as they engage with architecture. An exploration of the multifaceted nature of place would allow us not only to better understand the reasons behind faithful and less accurate portrayals of place, but would also facilitate the investigation of a thoroughly understudied kind of painted architectural place, which engages with built architecture in a more subtle, elusive way: hybrid architectural place.

## 2. Architectural Hybridity: Citation and Invention

A hybrid architectural place is not immediately identifiable with a real location in the same way that a portrait of architectural place is. Rather than keeping things simple by employing one striking structure as a visual synecdoche (as Giotto did in the Stefaneschi polyptych), hybrid architectural place delights in reproducing numerous aspects of existing models; but it is more an amalgam of architectural details and structures than it is a portrait of a single real building or site. Place is here used in its valence of excerpt, passage, citation, and turned from textual into visual reference. However, in hybrid architectural places the citation does not correspond exactly to the source, nor are there other clues that help us identify the represented place with an existing one, as in portraits of architectural place. As a medieval philosopher or theologian would express a classical thinker's idea in his own words or comment upon it without acknowledging the source, taking for granted that the reader would be familiar with it,<sup>141</sup> painted hybrid

---

<sup>140</sup> Fra Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel is an emblematic example. Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and - perhaps- Alberti," and Alessandro Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme nella Cappella Niccolina," in *'Angelicus pictor': ricerche e interpretazioni sul Beato Angelico*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari (Milan: Skira editore, 2008).

<sup>141</sup> This approach persisted well beyond the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as demonstrated by Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, completed in 1452. Manetti only acknowledged a small fraction of his sources, sometimes transcribing them exactly, others paraphrasing them. However, as Elizabeth Leonard noted, he did not merely create an anthology of the work of other writers, but chose

places alter their original model, as if they were providing a commentary on built structures and demonstrating the artist's invention.

Portraits of place like Spinello Aretino's Rome in San Francesco at Arezzo could also be defined as commentary on a built architectural source, but whilst portraits of place at the very least evoke a specific site, architectural hybrids evoke many locations within a city or several cities, and always elude attempts at identification. In hybrid architectural places, the built environment is treated like an architectural receptacle or quarry from which the artist can pick and choose to fashion an architectural identity for his narrative that is simultaneously novel and familiar. This balance between innovation and quotation, which enables the artist to showcase his *ingegno* as well as acknowledging the authority of existing sources, is similar to the way an orator or writer treated rhetorical common places, as Chapter Three will show.<sup>142</sup>

The term 'hybrid' to identify the architectural citation, reinvention and refashioning in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italian painting describes the fluctuating and polyvalent identities of this kind of fictive structure. Like Homi K. Bhabha's notions of 'hybrid' and 'hybridity', hybrid architectural place represents an interstitial passage between fixed identifications,<sup>143</sup> in this case unmistakably recognisable built models. It translates and reinscribes architectural identity,<sup>144</sup> negotiating between built models, the artist's creativity and the patron's ambitions in a quest to bestow authority and prestige upon fictive architecture, narrative, artist and patron.<sup>145</sup> Although Renaissance Italian artists did not purposefully design their structures as cultural hybrids charged with undertones of social and political struggle, like postcolonial cultural hybrids, borrowing the term 'hybrid' from postcolonial theory helps us envisage this type of architecture in painting as an elusive in-between offering structural and decorative alternatives to built models and portraits of place. Crucially, as an alternative, it does not establish real buildings as

---

his materials to create his own argument. Elizabeth R. Leonard, "Introduction," in *Ianotii Manetti, De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, ed. Elizabeth R. Leonard (Padua: Antenore, 1975), xxxiii. More on Giannozzo Manetti in Chapter Five.

<sup>142</sup> Michel Zimmermann, ed., *Actor and Auctoritas. Invention et conformisme dans l'écriture médiévale* (Paris: École des Chartes, 2001), esp. part III.

<sup>143</sup> "[...] interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy." Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 4. On theories of hybridity: Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity, Limits, Prospects* (New York: State University of New York, 2007).

<sup>144</sup> "[marginalised communities] deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate', and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity." Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 6.

<sup>145</sup> "The social articulation of difference [...] is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformations." *Ibid.*, 2.

hierarchically superior, but rather presents itself as a valid, equal counterpart displaying the artist's creativity and versatility. This aspect is particularly important because most literature on fictive architecture has tended to assume the superiority of built architecture.

Because of their ambiguity, the relation of hybrid architectural settings to place may appear looser and not as crucial to the narrative as a portrait of architectural place is. Nevertheless, hybrid architectural places maintain a strong link to the architectural identity of the locations they cite, and are a more intriguing testimony to the artist's inventiveness than portraits of place are. Hybrid architectural places are not 'non-places,' for non-places are devoid of any historical and identity-shaping connotations.<sup>146</sup> On the contrary, hybrid architecture reveals an almost obsessive concern with the identity of place, which it conveys by amplifying, repeating and transforming existing architectural ornaments and structures. The settings thus locate the narrative in an environment familiar to the viewers, which both engages them more directly and makes the narrative more tangible. The relationship with viewers works both ways: they will be reminded of built structures as they observe the fictive ones, but they will also be reminded of fictive architecture as they stroll through the city or cities the artist has hybridised. This is particularly so because architectural references in hybrid fictive places are treated like *spolia*, deprived of their original context and appropriated by the painted setting. These references function as mnemonic tools and as testament to the truth of the narrative, whilst the narrative, in its turn, imparts some of its character (holiness, political significance, mythical resonance) to the architectural identity of the places 'commented upon.' At the same time, architectural innovations enable artists to offer a sample of their ability to adapt and transform the built environment in order to create a unique place for the narrative. Narrative and architectural place thus penetrate each other to form an indissoluble unit hovering between the concreteness of existing place and the transcendence of invented place.

Considering citations in hybrid places as *spolia* highlights the temporal dimension of architectural quotation and invention. In their book *Anachronic Renaissance*, Nagel and Wood explained the idiosyncrasies of Renaissance art through a temporal model of substitutions, arguing that "typological identity thrives on flexibility and

---

<sup>146</sup> Marc Augé defined non-place as impersonal, ahistorical and unconcerned with identity as an effect of modern globalisation. Marc Augé, *Non-place: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 77-78. Rhodes and Gorfinkel argued instead for the specificity and irreplaceableness of place even in the age of globalisation in "Introduction," xii.

approximation.”<sup>147</sup> This is certainly true of hybrid architectural places, which are topically unfixed and hover between citation of existing structures and invention of non-extant buildings, constantly suggesting and at the same time thwarting identification. As Nagel and Wood coined the word ‘anachronic’ (from *ana*, again, and *chronizein*, to be belated) to identify the flexible and approximative iconographical repetitions fitting within their substitutive model,<sup>148</sup> we could propose the neologism ‘anatomic’ to describe what we perceive as the irregularities of hybrid place. However, hybrid places are not simply substitutes, standing in for something else as Nagel and Wood’s substitutive artefacts do. Although they establish strong links to existing locations, hybrid architectures create new imaginary places, highlighting the artist’s powers of invention and the breadth of his repertoire. Perhaps the Renaissance was not ‘anatomic’ as much as it was anachronic.<sup>149</sup>

Pericolo’s term ‘heterotopia’ is more helpful, for it does not identify substitution as much as a purposeful hybridisation of architecture, alluding to but also altering built structures.<sup>150</sup> Nonetheless, Pericolo’s definition of heterotopia includes completely invented architectural settings,<sup>151</sup> and is thus too broad a term to describe the hybrid architectures analysed in this thesis, which establish a perceptible, albeit ephemeral, connection to the architectural identity of a place. In addition, heterotopia describes the implications of hybridity in relation to the perception of antiquity and modernity, thus explaining time more than it does place, which is the focus of architectural hybridity as defined in this thesis and exemplified by Altichiero’s and Angelico’s fictive structures.

Both Altichiero da Zevio in the Oratory of St George and Fra Angelico in the Chapel of Nicholas V locate lives of saints in architectural settings that borrow from the built architecture of the city where the frescoes themselves are located, as well as from the artists’ personal architectural repertoires, thus creating a discernible, yet complex and ambiguous relationship between the narrative, its setting, and the region surrounding them. Altichiero located the life of St George from Cappadocia, St Lucy of Syracuse and St Catherine of Alexandria in a Veneto-like setting, whilst Fra Angelico engaged

---

<sup>147</sup> Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 282.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>149</sup> A recent book on architecture and time is Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time. From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Trachtenberg argued that before Alberti’s contribution to architectural theory, in what he calls “Building-in-Time regime,” architecture was not only time-bound but site-specific. Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time*, 108.

<sup>150</sup> Lorenzo Pericolo, “Heterotopia in the Renaissance: Modern Hybrids as Antiques in Bramante, Cima da Conegliano and the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili,” *Getty Research Journal*, no. 1 (2009): 1-16.

<sup>151</sup> Pericolo cites as an example the “stylistic indistinctness” of the building in Prevedari’s engraving after Bramante (1481), perhaps portraying St Barnabas’ departure from Milan. Pericolo, “Heterotopia,” 4-5.

primarily with the Roman urban fabric to recreate St Stephen's Jerusalem and St Lawrence's Rome, also including references to Florence. Chapters Two to Five will explore how exactly hybrid architectural places work within these frescoes, how they affect the narrative and engage with the viewer, and how we may be able to better understand their means and purposes with the aid of rhetoric as interpretive tool.

### **Taking Place Further: the Rhetoric of Place**

Considering the fictive architecture of the Oratory of St George and the Nicholas V Chapel as a way to articulate pictorial place rather than pictorial space allows for a closer engagement with the architectural identity of place and the roles it plays within the frescoes. In addition to this, place helps us to identify the rhetorical function of the fictive architecture in these two cycles. Going back to the definitions of '*luogo*' proposed earlier in this chapter, those identifying place as a citation or as a topic relate to rhetorical *inventio*, the process through which an orator or writer chose and adapted a theme, or common place, for his speech or text. This method of selection and adaptation is the same adopted by Altichiero and Angelico, as the following chapters will show. Similarly, the almost declamatory richness of the architectural places Altichiero created for the Oratory of St George aims to persuade the viewer through rhetorical *copia* and *amplificatio*, whereas Angelico's luminous, intricately ornate buildings exemplify another meaning of *luogo*, identifying one's social position or office (*dignità*) to enhance the status of the Church, the papacy and Rome as Apostolic See. These research pathways opened up by place further highlight the rich and complex interplay of architectural identity, rhetoric and architecture in painting.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **ALTICHIERO DA ZEVIO'S ORATORY OF ST GEORGE: SIX ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGIES TO CREATE PLACE AND ENGAGE WITH THE VIEWER**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter formally analyses the fourteenth-century Oratory of St George in Padua and its fresco cycle. It presents a rigorous examination of the Oratory's fictive frame and architecture lacking in the existing literature. Rather than presenting Altichiero's fictive buildings as a means to construct abstract and indeterminate pictorial space, as other scholars have done, the chapter considers them as specific, active places integral to the narrative in light of the findings of Chapter One. Chapter Two identifies six architectural strategies that create place and engage with the narrative and the worshippers. Although Altichiero may not have deliberately set out to apply any strategies, the six methods singled out here function as analytical tools to elucidate what roles the artist's fictive buildings perform within the image.

The first strategy is the fictive frame, which substitutes the real architecture of the building, plays with architectural illusion without denying its pictorial nature, and binds the narrative together. The other five strategies are: alternation of projecting and receding structures, splayed buildings, a profusion of apertures, ambiguous settings created by porous boundaries between inside and outside, and uninhabitable places playing with the viewer's desire to inhabit the image and explore its architecture. These strategies overlap with each other, working in synergy to construct the narrative and attract the attention of the spectator. They are also interwoven with numerous, albeit elusive, references to the built architectural identity of Padua and the Veneto, so that the Oratory's fictive structures create architecturally hybrid places that concretise the narrative and at the same time maintain the transcendence of its sacred content. Comparisons with other near-contemporary painters active in Padua and Venice reveal that prominent, intricately decorated architectural structures were an integral component of fourteenth-century Veneto paintings, highlighting Altichiero's frescoes as an extraordinarily inventive example. Understanding the fascination Altichiero and his peers had for architecture is therefore fundamental for scholarship on painters active in



this area at a later date, such as Jacopo Bellini, Giambono and Pisanello, whose drawings and paintings reveal an avid interest in architectural structures and ornament.<sup>1</sup>

### The Oratory of St George

The late fourteenth-century Oratory of St George is located in the Piazza del Santo in Padua. It stands to the right of the onlooker when facing the façade of the Basilica del Santo, the church dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua (**Fig.22**). The Oratory was built under the patronage of Raimondino Lupi di Soragna, member of a powerful family originally from Parma, and probably completed in 1377.<sup>2</sup> The building stands on ground originally used as the basilica's cemetery, and was intended as a funerary chapel hosting Raimondino's sarcophagus, still visible at the foot of the left wall (**Fig.23**), and his funerary monument, a magnificent baldachin-like structure, now lost, whose appearance can be reconstructed thanks to Polidoro's 1506 description.<sup>3</sup> The interior was beautifully frescoed by Altichiero, a painter from Zevio, about nine miles from Verona, who had already worked in the Chapel of St James in the Santo (1374-79) alongside Jacopo Avanzo.<sup>4</sup>

The Oratory is a small brick structure with a pitched roof. It was originally free-standing, but is now abutted by the Loggia della Benedizione leading to the Scoletta del Santo on the right and by an intermediary building that links it to the mid-fifteenth-century Chiostro del Capitolo on the left.<sup>5</sup> The Oratory's façade is divided in three by

---

<sup>1</sup> For a brief overview of Altichiero's influence on painting in the Veneto: John Richards, *Altichiero. An Artist and His Patrons in the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 222-230. For Altichiero and painting in Verona: Fausta Piccoli, *Altichiero e la pittura a Verona della tarda età scaligera* (Verona: Cierre edizioni, 2010). Both Richards and Piccoli recognised the signature-like quality of Altichiero's fictive architecture, but they did not treat it in detail. The appeal of Altichiero's fictive structures is also testified by two early fifteenth-century model-book drawings copying two structures painted in the Oratory. The drawings have been attributed to Pisanello, and today are held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan (F 214 inf., 10r) and in the Louvre (Cabinet Edmond de Rothschild, D.R. 847v). Other drawings in the Rothschild model book may reproduce Altichiero's lost frescoes for the Scaliger Palace in Verona (D.R. 842v, 843r, 848v). Robert W. Scheller, *A Survey of Model Books* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1963), Cat. no. 25, 171-175, and by the same author, *Exemplum: Model-Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (c.900-c.1470)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), Cat. no. 30, 309-316.

<sup>2</sup> The structure measures circa 9,8x19,8m. For the date cf. note 8.

<sup>3</sup> Richards, *Altichiero*, 178. Valerio Polidoro, *Delle religiose memorie, scritte dal R. Padre Valerio Polidoro padovano conventuale di San Francesco, Dottore della Sacra Teologia, nelle quali si tratta della chiesa del glorioso S. Antonio Confessore in Padova* (Venice: Paolo Meietto, 1590), XLIII. Gian Lorenzo Soragna ni and Giuseppe Vicinali proposed a reconstruction of the funerary monument in Luca Baggio, Gianluigi Colalucci and Daniela Bartoletti, *Altichiero da Zevio nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio. Il restauri degli affreschi* (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani and Edizioni De Luca, 1999), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Francesca Flores D'Arcais, *Altichiero e Avanzo: la Cappella di San Giacomo* (Milan: Electa, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> The Scoletta del Santo was built between 1427, by which date the first storey was completed, and 1505. It was meant as an oratory for the brothers of the Arciconfraternita di Sant'Antonio, and was decorated in the early sixteenth century with frescoes by Titian as well as others. The Loggia della Benedizione, filling

brick pilasters rising to meet the cornice, which is plastered a pale ochre and takes the form of play machicolation with five archlets per section supported by a gothic corbel (**Fig.24**).<sup>6</sup> Above the arches is a dentil-like strip under the roof, which is adorned by three pinnacles at its apex and at either end. On top of the middle pinnacle is the small statue of a wolf, symbol of the Lupi family, resting its weight on its hind legs while raising its front ones and lifting its face as if to howl.<sup>7</sup> The central section of the façade is the narrowest and contains the entrance door, a yellow-ochre stone relief sculpture of St George defeating the dragon, and an *oculus*.

Just beneath the sculpture of St George there is a small white stone rectangle that bore a now illegible inscription. Thanks to Polidoro, who transcribed it in his *Delle religiose memorie*, we know that it recorded the dedication of the Oratory to St George and the building's function as a funerary chapel (*sepulcrum*) for its founder Raimondino Lupi and as a mausoleum for the whole Lupi family.<sup>8</sup> The sections on either side of the façade are slightly wider than the central one, and each has a relief sculpture displaying the Lupi

---

the space between the Oratory and the Scoletta, was built in the 1730s by Andrea Gloria, and provides a ceremonial entrance to the Scoletta. "Cenni storici," Arciconfraternita di Sant'Antonio di Padova, 2014, accessed Jul 13, 2014, <http://www.arciconfraternitasantantonio.org/site/pages/show/cenni-storici>. The intermediary building to the left of the Oratory, which now hosts the offices of the Veneranda Arca del Santo, is difficult to date in spite of Rolandino Piazzola's tomb (c.1310), whose canopy projects from the building's northern flank. Edwards concluded that the intermediary structure must have been built after the Oratory and the Chostro del Capitolo. Mary Edwards "Altichiero as Architect," 305-308.

<sup>6</sup> The archlets were frescoed to mimic red and white voussoirs. A ridged cornice was also painted above them. This decoration is no longer visible on the façade, but it can be observed in old photographs of the Oratory. The frescoes on the side wall are instead still visible although weathered. Below the arches, a rampant wolf is painted on a yellow background, and right below the roof line a three-colour band rests on a ridged cornice. Cf. black and white illustration in Mary Edwards, "The Meaning of the Apertures of the Oratory of St George in Padua," *Il Santo*, n.23 (1988): 57-69, and (**Fig.25**).

<sup>7</sup> As Gonzati and Edwards noted, this wolf may be a later alteration, for an engraving of the Oratory published in 1842 shows the wolf on all fours. Bernardo Gonzati, *La Basilica di Sant'Antonio di Padova* (Padua: Bianchi editore, 1852-54), I, 270; Edwards, "Altichiero as Architect," 305. Luigi Ignazio Grotto dell'Ero, *Cenni storici sulle famiglie di Padova e sui monumenti dell'Università*, (Padua: Tipi della Minerva, 1842), plate 9. Also available online: [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_brEZZQrPwewC](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_brEZZQrPwewC), accessed Jan 14, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> "Oratorium hoc sub auspiciis beati Georgii, ubi condentis est sepulcrum, pro eius, parentum ac fratrum, ac nepotum indelenda memoria. Miles egregius Raimundinus de Lupis Parmensis Soranea Marchio edificat, Anno Domini MCCCLXXVII. De Mense Novembris," Polidoro, *Delle religiose memorie*, 36. Sartori proposed that the date mentioned in this inscription commemorates Altichiero's presentation to Raimondino of not only the plan for the frescoed decoration, but also for the building itself. Antonio Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," *Il Santo*, 3, no. 3 (1963): 297 and doc. V. Mary Edwards, "Altichiero as Architect," *Il Santo*, 39, 3 (1989): 303 and 305; Daniela Bobisut and Lidia Gumiero Salomoni, *Altichiero da Zevio: Cappella di San Giacomo, Oratorio di San Giorgio* (Padua: Messaggero di Sant'Antonio editrice, 2002), 44. However, the past tense of the verb *edificat* implies that November 1377 is the date of completion of the building. Sartori's thesis, that envisages Altichiero as the architect of the Oratory as well as its painter, is shared by Mary Edwards, "Altichiero as Architect." Although Altichiero would not have been the first artist to work as an architect (consider Giotto's work for the campanile in Florence for example), the misaligned arrangement of the windows and the fictive framing, as we shall see later, suggests instead that Altichiero may have organised his frescoes around a structure he had not designed. Nonetheless, we cannot exclude that he contributed, at least in part, to the planning of the Oratory, which may have been entrusted to Andriolo de' Santi, the architect who realised Bonifacio Lupi's Chapel of St James in the Santo between 1372 and 1374 or 1376. Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," doc. X.

coats of arms: on the left a shield with a prancing wolf surmounted by a ceremonial helmet with a wolf's head (**Fig.26**), whilst on the right, above the same shield, is another ceremonial helmet with a pair of stylised goat horns (**Fig.27**).<sup>9</sup> The rear exterior wall has the same decoration as the front, including the *oculus*, although instead of a door and relief sculptures it has two narrow, lancet windows either side.

Inside, the longitudinal ground plan of the building is covered by a vaulted ceiling (**Fig.28**). With the exception of the bottom section of the walls, the whole interior is frescoed, including the splayed reveals of the eight lancet windows (**Fig.29**).<sup>10</sup> It seems that Raimondino himself had chosen Altichiero to fresco his oratory, probably after admiring his work in the St James Chapel in the Santo, whose patron was Bonifacio Lupi. Bonifacio was a relative of Raimondino's, and a key figure for the Oratory of St George.<sup>11</sup> Although the structure may have been built between 1376 and 1377, the frescoed decoration was realised under Bonifacio's supervision after Raimondino's death in 1379.<sup>12</sup> Altichiero's work in the Oratory of St George, which included the colouring of Raimondino's tomb as well as the fresco cycle, was completed in 1384, as demonstrated by a document where Altichiero declares he received the agreed sum for the completion of the Oratory.<sup>13</sup>

The subject matter of the frescoes brings together episodes from the lives of Christ on the short west (**Fig.30**) and east walls (**Fig.31**), St George on the north wall (**Figs**

---

<sup>9</sup> The sculptures now on the façade are copies of the originals, which are housed in the museum of the Basilica del Santo. Bobisut and Gumiero Salomoni, *Altichiero da Zevio*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> The dado of the walls, where the masonry is visible, was left bare because seats were originally arranged around the periphery of the Oratory. Edwards, "Altichiero as Architect," 312.

<sup>11</sup> Bonifacio and Raimondino descended from the two most important members of the Lupi family, the brothers Bonifacio (grandfather of the Bonifacio who commissioned the St James Chapel) and Rolandino, (Raimondino's father). Richards, *Altichiero*, 182-183.

<sup>12</sup> For Bonifacio's role, see archival documents published in Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," docs. VII and VIII. Mary Edwards, "Altichiero as Architect," 303 and 305; Bobisut and Gumiero Salomoni, *Altichiero da Zevio*, 44. Sartori considered the decoration of the east wall a bare minimum for the celebration of mass in the Oratory, for which permission was given on 3 May 1378. This would mean that by the time Raimondino was placed inside his sarcophagus on 30 November 1379, the altar wall was already frescoed. Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," 297 and doc. V. However, Colalucci's technical analysis of the Oratory's frescoes concluded that the short walls were the last to be frescoed. Gianluigi Colalucci, "La tecnica dell'affresco di Altichiero e l'organizzazione del cantiere," in *Altichiero da Zevio nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio. Il restauro degli affreschi*, ed. Luca Baggio, Gianluigi Colalucci and Daniela Bartoletti (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani and Roma: Edizioni De Luca, 1999), 40. This would mean that mass was celebrated before the Oratory's decoration was complete, or that Altichiero's 1384 payment was considerably belated.

<sup>13</sup> "[...] Et etiam occasione archæ et ornamentorum, vel causa colorum quam auri, in qua archus corpus q.d. Raymondini preadicti tumulatum est," Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," doc. II. Richards, *Altichiero*, 181; Bobisut and Gumiero Salomoni, *Altichiero da Zevio*, 44; Edwards, "Altichiero as Architect," 304; Gian Lorenzo Mellini, "Le architetture delle cappelle padovane dei marchesi di Soragna, e quelle dipinte all'interno degli affreschi di Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi," *Archivio storico per le province pavesi*, 46 (1994): 403.

32&33), and St Lucy of Syracuse and St Catherine of Alexandria on the south wall (Figs 34&35), with the addition of a votive fresco on the north wall where various saints present the Lupi family to the Virgin. The narrative is arranged in a descending order in the west wall from *Annunciation* to *Presentation at the Temple*, whereas on the east wall it is in ascending order, from *Crucifixion* to *Coronation of the Virgin*. On the long walls, the *vitae* of St George, St Catherine and St Lucy develop from left to right, and from top to bottom in St George's case, since he occupies both registers of the north wall. The narrative is complemented by the four symbols of the Evangelists, four Fathers of the Church (probably the four Great Fathers: Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the Great) and four prophets in the vault, as well as numerous smaller figures of saints and angels in the fictive framing of the vault and in the splays of the eight windows.<sup>14</sup> The inclusion of the warrior St George befits the occupation of both Raimondino and Bonifacio, two condottieri who had fought for various city states. The presence of St Lucy and St Catherine is more personal to Raimondino, for when he was condottiere in Mantua he founded a hospital dedicated to these two saints.<sup>15</sup> The inclusion of St Catherine might also be a nod to the University of Padua, whose patroness was and still is St Catherine.

Literature on the Oratory of St George has often compared it with Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, built less than eighty years before.<sup>16</sup> Because the two buildings share a

---

<sup>14</sup> Other figures were portrayed in the central quatrefoil roundel of each of the three sections in the vault, but they are unfortunately lost. Bronstein hypothesised that the central ellipses, resembling a mandorla, originally contained God the Father, the Virgin and Christ. Léo Bronstein, *Altichiero, l'artiste et son oeuvre* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1932), 35. Baggio, Colalucci, Bartoletti, *Altichiero da Zevio nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio*, diagram I.

<sup>15</sup> Bobisut and Gumiero Salomoni, *Altichiero da Zevio*, 11 and 46. Perhaps significant is that Bonifacio's second wife was a Sienese woman called Caterina. On the other hand, St Catherine may have been the patron of Raimondino's mother, who was called Matilde, for in the votive fresco on the north wall she is presented to the Virgin by St Catherine. Giuseppe Fiocco, "'Storia e storie' della Cappella di S. Giacomo al Santo," *Il Santo*, 6, no. 2-3 (1966): 265; Mellini, "Le architetture delle cappelle padovane dei marchesi di Soragna," 404; Antonio Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," 302; Enrico Angiolini, "Lupi, Bonifacio." *Dizionario Biografico*, Enciclopedia Treccani, 2006, accessed May 26, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bonifacio-lupi\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bonifacio-lupi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/). For Bonifacio's life: Cesare Cenci, "Bonifacio Lupi di Soragna e i frati minori," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 77 (1964): 90-109.

<sup>16</sup> Gian Lorenzo Mellini, *Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1965), 57; by the same author, "Le architetture delle cappelle padovane dei marchesi di Soragna," 401; Luca Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche e ricerche scientifiche a Padova nel secondo Trecento," *Il Santo*, 34, no. 2-3 (1994): 219; by the same author, "Sperimentazioni spaziali negli affreschi di Altichiero nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio," in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. Giovanna Valenzano and Federica Toniolo (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2007), 419; Bobisut and Gumiero Salomoni, *Altichiero da Zevio*, 46; Maria Monica Donato, "'Pictorie studium' appunti sugli usi e sullo statuto della pittura nella Padova dei Carraresi (e una proposta per le 'città liberate' di Altichiero e Giusto al Santo)," *Il Santo*, 39 (1999): 479. However, Richards stated that there is "no direct sign of the Arena chapel in the Oratory, which instead reflects the lower church at Assisi and the Santa Croce chapels," Richards, *Altichiero*, 201. Similarly, Edwards downplayed the formal similarities between the Scrovegni Chapel and the Oratory of St George, although she still recognised their similarities "in spirit," which are particularly relevant to her argument that envisages Altichiero as the architect as well as the painter of the Oratory. Giotto's pictorial example in the Arena, followed by his experience as architect of the campanile for the Duomo in Florence

longitudinal ground plan, the use of brick as the main building material, and a completely frescoed, “aula unica” interior arrangement, as well as a free-standing structure (at least originally),<sup>17</sup> parallels between the Oratory and the Scrovegni Chapel are more striking than similarities between the Oratory and Altichiero’s other important Paduan work, the Chapel of St James in the Santo. Besides, although Altichiero’s work at the Santo displays a fascination with fictive architecture similar to that in the Oratory, he shared the decoration of the Chapel of St James with Jacopo Avanzo, and the frescoed surface is overall less extensive. The characteristics the Oratory shares with the Scrovegni Chapel might have been dictated by Raimondino’s intention to establish a parallel between his Oratory and a chapel that was already famous.<sup>18</sup>

The fame of the Scrovegni Chapel was primarily due to Giotto’s frescoes, which represented an elaborate programme bringing together the Life of Joachim, Christ and the Virgin along with the Last Judgement and representations of virtues and vices. Apart from the theological message it conveys and its relation to the Scrovegni family, scholars have focused on Giotto’s striking fictive architecture, which demonstrates the painter’s great interest in the representation of depth. There is reason to believe that contemporaries also considered Giotto’s Scrovegni cycle as a new benchmark of artistic achievement, although the representation of depth and architecture were not explicitly mentioned in fourteenth and fifteenth-century texts. For example, Cennino Cennini’s statement in his *Craftsman’s Handbook*, probably written in Padua about fifteen years after Altichiero’s work was completed in the Oratory, does acknowledge Giotto’s importance

---

between 1334 and 1337, represented an important precedent to Altichiero’s double role in Edwards’s opinion. Edwards, “Altichiero as Architect,” 327.

<sup>17</sup> Differently from the Oratory, the Scrovegni Chapel has a presbytery and apse flanked by a sacristy on the north side. It is difficult to determine when exactly apse and sacristy were added to the Scrovegni Chapel, but we can assume that the apse was in place by the time the Oratory of St George was built, since it hosted Enrico Scrovegni’s funerary monument, mentioned in his will written the year of his death, 1336. We know that a sacristy was at least planned when Giotto frescoed the Chapel, as testified by the Chapel’s representation frescoed on the counter façade, although here the sacristy appears on the south rather than on the north side of the building where it actually is. Vittorio Dal Piaz, “La storia e l’architettura della Cappella,” in *La Cappella degli Scrovegni a Padova*, ed. Davide Banzato, Giuseppe Basile, Francesca Flores D’Arcais and Anna Maria Spiazzi (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 2005), 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> The earliest sources praising Giotto and/or mentioning his work, at Padua and elsewhere, are Riccobaldo of Ferrara’s *Compilatio chronologica*, Dante’s *Purgatorio*, XI, 94-96; Francesco da Barberino’s *Documenti d’Amore* and Giovanni da Nono’s *Chronicle* of Padua. All of these were written whilst Giotto was still living (d.1337), but numerous commentaries on Dante’s *Divine Comedy* spread and consolidated the artist’s fame for decades and centuries after his death. For a precise account of early sources on Giotto: Peter Murray, “Notes on Some Early Giotto Sources,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16, no. 1/2 (1953): 58-80. Teresa Hankey, “Riccobaldo of Ferrara and Giotto: an update,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 54 (1991): 244. Giotto was also mentioned very briefly by Pietro d’Abano (1247/58-1315/16), who taught at the Studio in Padua. However, Pietro made no reference to any of the painter’s works. Johannes Thomann, “Pietro d’Abano on Giotto,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 54 (1991): 238-244.

but does not refer to fictive architecture: “[...] Giotto changed the profession of painting from Greek back into Latin, and brought it up to date; and he had more finished craftsmanship than anyone has had since.”<sup>19</sup>

The Scrovegni cycle adopts relatively simple fictive structures. In the majority of scenes, Giotto represents only one building or structure, most often comprised of a single unit. Even when more complex structures are represented, as in the *Presentation of the Virgin at the temple* (**Fig.36**), Giotto’s fictive architecture maintains a high degree of legibility and monumental simplicity; though finely decorated, it never overpowers the narrative. Altichiero’s approach is different. His scenes are characterised by a multitude of highly decorated buildings composed of complex units that do not always represent coherent structures. This is particularly evident in *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Fig.7**), in *St Lucy Dragged by Oxen* (**Fig.37**) and in *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.38**), where the buildings extend on both sides of a wall and are articulated by numerous projecting sections. Altichiero’s six architectural strategies complement and enrich the narrative with ornamentally and structurally bold structures, creating painted architectural places that connect to the real space of the Oratory and engage the worshippers.

## **Six Architectural Strategies**

### 1. The Fictive Frame

The fictive geometrical framing of the walls extends continuously to the very top of the building on the short walls, whilst on the long walls it marks the beginning of the vault (**Fig.39**). The walls and the vault are seamlessly joined by frescoed console brackets resting on the thin fictive frame of the walls and supporting the wider fictive frame of the vault (**Fig.40**). Altichiero’s console brackets can be inscribed within a Paduan tradition of fictive architectural decoration, although Altichiero’s frame is less three-dimensional than the frescoed architectural decoration in the Reggia Carrarese, today the Accademia Galileiana. The ground floor of the Reggia, where fictive console brackets and human head corbels can be found, was completed by 1343 (**Figs 41&42**) and probably realised by the Paduan painter Guariento (documented between 1338 and 1367). A dado of fictive marble panels and interlacing arches supported by corbels is

---

<sup>19</sup> Cennino Cennini, *The Craftsman’s Handbook*, ed. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr., 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1960), Ch. I. The original Italian is “[...] il quale Giotto rimutò l’arte del dipignere di greco in latino e ridusse a moderno, e ebe l’arte più compiute ch’avessi mai più nessuno,” Cennino Cennini, *Il Libro dell’arte*, ed. Fabio Frezzato (7th ed; Vicenza: Neri Pozza editore, 2012), 63. For the date of the *Libro* and where it was written, see Frezzato’s introduction, esp. 11-21.

visible in what used to be the private chapel of the Carrara in the Reggia, more certainly painted by Guariento around 1354 (**Fig.43**).<sup>20</sup>

The vault's fictive framing in the Oratory of St George combines with that wrapping around the lower part of the building, not only to cover its real architecture, but to substitute it. The presence of four bands of fictive marble framing dividing the vault in three sections (**Fig.28**) reinforces this impression: it is as if the bands were four transverse arches supporting the barrel-vault. Surprisingly, however, these arches are not in line with the vertical elements of the wall's framing (**Fig.39**), which appear to be the same width as the vault's fictive arches and ought to act as the columns supporting them. The main reason behind this choice is the positioning of the windows. Altichiero made the vertical, 'vault supporting' elements coincide with the windows themselves, thus incorporating them within the framing scheme and virtually turning them into structurally necessary elements. Because it is misaligned but certainly not haphazard, and because it almost completely covers the building's real architecture, the fictive frame is ambiguously situated between architectural illusion and overtly two-dimensional decoration. The frame's level of detail, accurate shading and three-dimensionality, as exemplified primarily by the console brackets fictively supporting the vault, but also by the moulding corbeling in towards the narrative scenes (**Fig.44**), testify to Altichiero's engagement with the illusionistic potential of fictive architecture, whilst its misaligned arrangement, making windows function as column shafts, reveals its pictorial nature.<sup>21</sup>

The frame fictively articulates the architecture of the Oratory, but it also creates a separate site for each of the scenes depicted. By tightly encasing them, it provides an individual *locus* for each of the scenes to inhabit and to be remembered.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the continuous, interlinked fictive frame, as a whole and in its specific elements (intertwined rhombi and other polygonal shapes such as a series of joined hexagrams), contributes to an interconnected theological message that brings together different historical moments and different locations (Bethlehem and Jerusalem in Christ's life, Cappadocia and Lydia in St George's, Alexandria in St Catherine's, Syracuse in St

---

<sup>20</sup> Francesca Flores d'Arcais, "Profilo di Guariento," in *Guariento e la Padova Carrarese*, ed. Davide Banzato, Francesca Flores d'Arcais and Anna Maria Spiazzi (Venice: Marsilio editori, 2011), 22. Cesira Gasparotto, "La reggia dei Da Carrara. Il Palazzo di Ubertino e le nuove stanze dell'Accademia Patavina," *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Patavina di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 79, no. 1 (1966-67): 70-116.

<sup>21</sup> Baggio also noted that the frame creates a link between painted and real architecture, but for him Altichiero's fictive frame is an example of "advanced illusionism." Luca Baggio, "Sperimentazioni spaziali negli affreschi di Altichiero," 423.

<sup>22</sup> Chapter Three of this thesis analyses medieval *ars memoriae* in connection to these frescoes.

Lucy's) and finally transcends them with the Redemption of humankind and the eternal, heavenly triumph of Christ and the Virgin, whose importance is reflected in the different arrangement of the fictive marble frame for that wall section in comparison with the rest of the Oratory. On the altar wall, the fictive twisted columns support three stacked blocks recalling an entablature seen from the side (**Fig.45**), and encase the windows and the *Crucifixion* as if they were the panels of a triptych, acting at the same time as architectural frame and as architectural setting for the scene (**Fig.97**).<sup>23</sup> The frame around the *Coronation* displays a series of white cusped trefoil arches complementing the reddish and slightly different arches framing the vault (**Fig.46**). This scene is integrated to the scene below by the twisted columns framing the *Crucifixion*, which fictively support the *Coronation* as if to underline that the *Crucifixion* below is 'structurally' necessary for the glory of Christ and the Virgin.

The frame also binds the sacred stories to the building and to the specific site where the building stands. The framework is thus a key player in the articulation of place, acting on four levels to 'create' a three-dimensional location (the Oratory's interior), to outline an individual *locus* for the scenes to inhabit, to bind the narrative so as to highlight its continuity in spite of geographical and chronological discrepancies, and finally fasten the scenes to the building itself and to its (fictive) interior architectural structure, underlining their indissoluble, physical link to the walls of the Oratory. The architectural settings in the scenes also reinforce the bond between narrative and place. Altichiero's intricately decorated and elaborately structured buildings create striking and distinctive settings that locate the scenes either in splendid cityscapes or just outside their city walls, as is the case in the *Martyrdom of St George* (**Fig.47**), *Martyrdom of St Catherine* (**Fig.48**), *Nativity* and *Adoration* (**Fig.49**) and *Flight to Egypt* (**Fig.70**). But the fictive architectural settings take the relationship between narrative and place further by engaging with the viewer more directly.

---

<sup>23</sup> The profiles of Roman emperors on what would be the entablature's frieze may reiterate now lost frescoes Altichiero realised in the 1360s in the loggia of Cansignorio della Scala's palace in Verona. The profiles are part of a series of characteristics that, according to Barbara Hein and Louise Bourdua, reveal Altichiero's knowledge of antique art. Barbara Hein, "Altichiero e l'antico nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio: alcune riflessioni," in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. Giovanna Valenzano and Federica Toniolo (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2007), 437-461 and Louise Bourdua, "Exports to Padua Trecento Style: Altichiero's Roman Legacy," in *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas c.500-1400*, ed. Claudia Bolgia, Rosamond McKitterick and John Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 291-302.



## 2. Projection and Recession

Numerous structural units that recede from or project towards the front of the image contribute to the dynamism of each scene and bridge the gap between the narrative and the viewer. There are several instances of structures projecting towards the foreground, such as the short wall in the bottom right corner in the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.5**), which extends towards the viewer and flares even further forward at the bottom. This short double wall surmounted by a small pier juts out towards the ochre line marking the beginning of the frame and disrupts the scene's symmetrical arrangement. The eye is drawn to it and is led from the wall itself to the rest of the architectural structure of which it is part. Similarly, the dais of the throne in the *Coronation* (**Fig.46**) leads the eye from the forefront of the image towards the magnificent arms and back of the throne and to the figures of Christ and the Virgin.

Acting as poles of attention, projecting and receding structures also showcase the architectural complexity of Altichiero's frescoes. This is particularly true in *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.38**), where the slanted structure on the right is characterised by a section jutting out at the back and one at the very front, an uneven staircase that seems to wind around the bottom half of a pier, and an empty balcony at the front. Such intricacy detracts from the figure of St Catherine, who kneels on the wheel away from the centre of the image, and at the same time competes with the projecting portico-like structure on the right. The structural complexity visible in *St Catherine on the Wheel* is extremely difficult to reconcile with any existing structure or building typology, and seems to attain complete implausibility. It is as if the viewer were to marvel more at this astonishing architectural setting than at the miracle of the shattering wheel of torture.

In *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Fig.7**), the building on the left is composed of several units. The lower register of the projecting section on the far left, from where the prefect Dacian observes the temple's destruction, appears to be directly linked to the round arch of the central structure to form an L-shaped building, as shown by the marble-like panels of both sides meeting to form a right angle. However, in the upper register, the trabeated central loggia seems to turn and extend towards Dacian's loggia to articulate a C rather than L-shaped building. These incongruities highlight the implausibility of the fictive architecture and render it more striking for the viewer and more distinctive as a location for its narrative.

The use of projecting and receding sections also has a chronological function. In *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**), for example, the two projecting wings of the building host two scenes, one preceding and the other following the central torture of the saint on the wheel, as narrated in the *Golden Legend*. The baptism of the magician (who gives St George poison to drink in the previous scene) and the discussion between St George and Dacian acquire visibility thanks to the projection of the loggias that host them, whilst at the same time occupying a distinct, specific area within the scene, or a specific architectural *locus*. Yet, because a single building acts as setting for all episodes narrated, the continuity of the narrative is not disrupted. This is also true of the scene facing *St George on the Wheel* on the south wall, *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.50**), where one building articulates three different episodes in a sequence.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to drawing attention to the structural complexity of the settings, articulating a chronological sequence and engaging the viewer, projection and recession are one of the ways in which Altichiero creates formal links between the architectural settings of different scenes. The short wall in the *Baptism of King Sevius* mentioned above also appears in the adjacent *Slaying of the Dragon* (**Fig.51**) and the lower-register *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.52**).<sup>25</sup> In all three scenes, the wall is represented next to an arched hollow recess, and their positioning articulates not only a link between the images but with the real architecture of the Oratory. In *St George Drinks Poison*, the arch and platform are placed on the bottom left corner of the scene, while in the *Slaying of the Dragon* the arch and wall are placed on the bottom right of the scene. Because these two scenes are superimposed, the arch-wall, arch-platform pairings create a diagonal that visually connects the upper to the lower register (**Fig.32**), seemingly increasing the narrative speed of the events and tying together different moments of St George's life.

This connection extends horizontally as well as vertically. In the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.5**), frescoed right next to the *Slaying of the Dragon* in the upper register, the arch-wall pairing is placed on the bottom right corner in the very foreground. Furthermore, in both scenes the pairing is next to one of the windows, whose left haunch encroaches on

---

<sup>24</sup> Similar observations can be made in relation to *St Catherine's Dispute with the Philosophers*, although more than one building is involved here. The loggia on the left where the dispute takes place contrasts with the receding building on the right, where the emperor orders that the philosophers be burnt at the stake. In this case too, the 'before' and the 'after' are articulated by projecting and receding structures.

<sup>25</sup> Altichiero's short wall can be compared to that painted by Guariento in his *Conversion of St Augustine* in the choir chapel at the Eremitani (early 1360s). Although both walls project forwards, Guariento's has a bizarre shape that acts more as frame for the figure of St Augustine rather than as a connection with the viewer.

the narrative surface of the wall: the painted arch thus reiterates the real arch of the window, building structural links with the actual architecture and increasing the three-dimensionality of the fictive architecture.

Furthermore, projecting and receding units, especially balconies, are often used to mark the position of major characters within the narrative, especially negative figures. Thus, whilst in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* (**Fig.53**) the saint stands close to the foreground of the scene, the emperor Maxentius can be found in the loggia of a structure that juts out from the rest of the building visible on the right. The use of upper storey loggias and balconies allows for a more complete coverage of the pictorial surface, and enables the artist to underline the presence of key figures by allocating them a defined location within the scene. Although projecting structures are also used to emphasise the figure of the Virgin, as in the *Annunciation* and in the *Presentation of the Lupi Family* (**Fig.54**), it is still curious that it is the negative characters that are more often encased in projecting architectural structures. This shows Altichiero's fictive architecture is devoid of specific 'good' or 'bad' connotations, as exemplified by the use of architectural elements of the Basilica of the Santo to represent the pagan temple in *St Catherine and the Pagan Idol*, as we shall see.

### 3. Splayed Buildings

The splaying consists in slightly opening up the sides of a building as if its walls met to form obtuse rather than right angles. This is a type of intuitive perspective that allows the artist to give more visibility to the narrative and to the architectural setting itself. Comparison with other artists active in Padua and Venice at this time reveals that Altichiero was not alone in adopting this form of empirical perspective, demonstrating a keen interest in depth.<sup>26</sup> Scholars have interpreted this approach in mathematical terms, seeing effects that reveal the absence of an overarching perspectival system as "dysfunctions" and mistakes.<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to find proof of whether Altichiero and his

---

<sup>26</sup> Howard and Allison have demonstrated that we all have a tendency to draw with divergent perspective. However, their experiments on the drawing of cubes revealed that it is the receding edges of the drawn solid that diverge rather than converge, whereas in Altichiero's and his peers' paintings it is the foreground edges that open up towards the viewer. Ian P. Howard and Robert S. Allison, "Drawing with Divergent Perspective, Ancient and Modern," *Perception*, 40 (2011): 1017-1033.

<sup>27</sup> In relation to the *Baptism of King Sevius*, Flores D'Arcais spoke of a "precisely measured" church interior, but provided no evidence as to Altichiero's possible use of a mathematical system. She also spoke of the fictive architecture in the Oratory as addressing the need for "spatial definition." Francesca Flores D'Arcais, "La decorazione della cappella di San Giorgio," in *Fonti e studi per la storia del Santo a Padova. Le pitture del Santo di Padova, Studi 5*, ed. Camillo Semenzato (Vicenza: Neri Pozza editore, 1984), 52. Discussing Guariento's frescoes at the Eremitani in Padua, Baggio noted "perspectival dysfunctions" that diminish Guariento's realism more than similar "mistakes" made by Giusto de' Menabuoi ("disfunzioni

peers used mathematics or not, but their interest in depth is undeniable. As Flores D'Arcais noticed, Altichiero's use of slanted structures emphasises diagonals and the depth of interiors.<sup>28</sup> However, as discussed in Chapter One, current interpretations of this quasi-perspectival technique tend to conflate depth with space, envisaging splaying purely as a means to represent pictorial space. Most importantly, they fail to notice that splayed structures were designed to display more architectural detail and to interact with the figures.<sup>29</sup>

In *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**), the projecting wings of the pink building behind the saint are slightly tilted outwards instead of being perpendicular to the horizontal section of the structure, so that the central area hosting St George on the wheel is wider than it would have been. This also increases the visibility of the inner walls of the projecting wings in order to better display architectural elements and ornament, here represented by two arched windows and a row of blind white arches extending from the balustrade at the front, as well as two archways at either side of the loggias. In addition to creating more room for the central figure, the splaying of the projecting wings leads the eye to St George whilst at the same time opening up towards the viewer, as if to embrace him or her within the image.

A similar effect is also achieved in the *Baptism of King Sevius*. Although devoid of projecting wings, the building in this scene, like that in *St George on the Wheel*, seemingly extends beyond the top of the image, meeting the fictive frame, while the focal point of the narrative, the baptism of the king, is placed at the centre. The aisles of the church behind St George and the king are splayed out to grant better visibility of the nave, clerestory and altar. Opened up as it is, this beautiful church interior, perhaps meant to represent the church that Sevius founded in the city of Silena in Lydia to honour the spot where St George baptised him, is not merely a background but an architectural frame for the narrative and an invitation to the viewer to become part of it.<sup>30</sup>

---

prospettiche nei dettagli [...] incidono pesantemente nel contesto programmaticamente realistico di Guariento, ben più che non le analoghe scorrettezze nel 'lirico' Giusto"). Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche," 204.

<sup>28</sup> Francesca Flores D'Arcais, "'Altichiero spazioso': osservazioni sull'affresco votivo della Cappella Cavalli in Sant'Anastasia a Verona," in *Scritti per l'Istituto Germanico di Storia dell'Arte di Firenze*, ed. Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Luciano Belloso, Miklós Boskovits, Pier Paolo Donati, Bruno Santi (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997), 63.

<sup>29</sup> Gian Lorenzo Mellini is the only exception. Already in 1965 he noted that Altichiero employed empirical perspective "not due to lack of scientific knowledge" but to display as much as possible of his fictive buildings. Gian Lorenzo Mellini, *Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1965), 68.

<sup>30</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, ed. William Granger Ryan and Eamon Duffy (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 240.

Painters like Guariento and the Venetian Nicoletto Semitecolo (documented between 1353 and 1370) had already employed splaying in their architectural settings. Particularly striking in this respect is Guariento's now detached *Coronation* at the Eremitani, originally frescoed in the church of Sant'Agostino (c.1352-1355) (**Fig.55**).<sup>31</sup> The throne is a complex structure with apertures on the sides and at the back and delicate decorations. The widest aperture behind the Virgin and Christ decorated with tracery at the top and at the bottom is a slightly simpler version of the elliptical one found on the inside of the throne's arm in Altichiero's Oratory *Coronation* (**Figs 46&67**).

Compared to Altichiero's church in the *Baptism of King Sevius*, Guariento's frescoed church in *St Philip Meets the Bishops* at the Eremitani (**Fig.56**) is spread out even further. Whereas the clerestory in Altichiero's church appears askew, in Guariento's church it is represented more frontally, so much so that two-lancet windows are completely visible behind the balustrade. Because Guariento's church is in the immediate foreground and aligned with the fictive framing, the viewers' sense of proximity to the fictive environment is heightened. However, Guariento's use of obtuse angle structures is not as consistent as Altichiero's in the Oratory. Splaying is absent in the two scenes from St Augustine's life underneath *St Philip Meets the Bishops*, and in what is left of Guariento's frescoed decoration for the Carrara's private chapel in the Reggia Carrarese, although it appears pronounced in the architectural setting for *Christ's Flagellation* in his *Coronation Polyptych* (1344) (**Fig.57**).

The Venetian Nicoletto Semitecolo also had a propensity for splaying, as can be seen in the seven panel paintings depicting episodes from the life of St Sebastian (1367), but his use of slanted buildings is inconsistent like Guariento's. In the panels today at the Museo Civico in Padua, in all likelihood part of a St Sebastian altarpiece for the Paduan Duomo, Nicoletto splayed pronouncedly the building in *St Sebastian Comforts Marcus and Marcellinus Presented to the Emperors* (**Fig.58**), the receding step's V shape emphasising the structure's flaring, but he did not do the same for the two churches in *St Sebastian's Entombment* (**Fig.59**).<sup>32</sup> The viewpoint from which these buildings are seen is the same as the one for the church where St Augustine is baptised in Guariento's Eremitani cycle

---

<sup>31</sup> For the exact location of this fresco: Zuleika Murat, *Guariento: pittore di corte, maestro del naturale* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2016), 67-68 and cat.8.1-8.3.

<sup>32</sup> For Guariento's detached *Coronation* and Nicoletto Semitecolo's St Sebastian panels, see Anna Maria Spiazzi's and Andrea Nante's catalogue entries in Davide Banzato, Francesca Flores d'Arcais and Anna Maria Spiazzi, ed., *Guariento e la Padova Carrarese* (Padua and Rovigo: Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo and Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2011), 123-124 and 199-202.

(**Fig.101**), where one side of the building's interior is completely invisible. Altichiero did something similar for the church in *St Lucy's Funerals* (**Fig.4**), but he increased the structure's visibility by giving it a portico with an arched opening on the side that allows a crowd of onlookers to witness the event.

Another painter who employed splayed structures and was active in Padua at the same time as Altichiero is Giusto de' Menabuoi. A painter of Florentine origin, Giusto decorated the Baptistery of Padua's Duomo (c.1378) for Fina Buzzacarini, wife of Francesco il Vecchio da Carrara, and the Cappella of the Blessed Luca Belludi (completed in 1382) in the Santo for the Conti family. In the *Marriage at Cana* in the Baptistery (**Fig.60**), for example, the walls are splayed, and the obtuse angle they form is echoed by the banquet table. Like Altichiero's, Giusto's frescoes reveal an interest in architectural structures and decoration, but Giusto prefers round arches and simpler structures to the pointed and ogee arches, crocketed gables and complex tracery of Altichiero.<sup>33</sup>

As in Guariento, Altichiero's use of splaying in the Oratory is not limited to buildings proper, since it also features prominently in the throne of the *Coronation of the Virgin*. The arms of this ceremonial seat are splayed, so that the whole structure opens up to display its inner sides, decorated by veined marble panels and an elaborate, elliptical perforation articulated by interlacing, cusped arches and a quatrefoil. The throne in the *Coronation* closely resembles the pink building in *St George on the Wheel* due to its arms projecting from a central body, but its role also reflects that played by the church in the *Baptism of King Sevius*. Precisely as in these two scenes, the splayed sides of the throne focus attention on the central figures of Christ and the Virgin whilst opening up and projecting towards the viewer. In this case, one could say that the arms of the throne function as actual open arms beckoning the viewer to come closer. Here Altichiero is reiterating a practice that was not only common in Padua, as Guariento's work shows, but also in Altichiero's native Verona area. The frescoed *Madonna and Child* (c.1376) in Sezano, Verona (**Fig.61**), presents an architectural throne with splayed arms increasing visibility of two coffered niches. The painter of the *Madonna and Child* incorporated fine architectural detail, but Altichiero's throne in the Oratory's *Coronation* is a remarkably

---

<sup>33</sup> Giusto did include pointed arches, but only in windows, or window-like decorations, as in the throne of the Virgin in the Baptistery or the throne of the *Coronation* in the Cappella Belludi. He also painted perforated crenellations on top of the building in the *Visitation* and *Adoration of the Magi* in the Baptistery. Perforated crenellation can be found in Altichiero as well, and reproduces a typically Venetian motif. More on this from page 97.

more elaborate example, displaying a double plinth, a *compassi* decoration and polychromy suggesting the use of different precious materials.

Splaying is adopted in other scenes, although within different compositional arrangements and with slightly different outcomes. In *St Lucy before Paschasius* (**Fig.62**), the two sides of the courtyard where St Lucy stands flare out. Here too the splaying creates a more ample representational surface, allowing us to see the numerous figures under the arch on the left, but the composition is not as centralised as that in the images previously discussed. Although this architectural setting also opens up towards the viewer, its spread-out sides seem to mainly aim at showcasing architectural detail rather than emphasising the figure of St Lucy. The slanting left wall, in addition to showing the numerous figures entering the palace courtyard, also allows us to see the window with grating, the pink stringcourse under the arch, and the ogee arched bifora and balcony above it. Similarly, the splaying of the right wall gives visibility to a pilaster and archlets decoration and a small round arched bifora.

Emphasis on architecture, sometimes at the expense of narrative, is even more pronounced in *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.38**), where the city gate on the left and the building on the right slant outwards from the crenellated wall behind Catherine. Here the composition is asymmetrical, and the crowd of onlookers and the architectural structure to the right compete with the figure of St Catherine, focal point of the narrative. Particularly interesting in this scene is the use of the background wall, beyond which the architectural structures extend. The wall acts as a boundary bringing our attention back to St Catherine, and the part of the building on the right extending beyond the wall allows Altichiero to represent the small figure of the empress, spouse of Catherine's persecutor, deeply moved by the apparition of the angel. Spread-out buildings extending on both sides of a crenellated wall are also present in *St Lucy Dragged by Oxen* (**Fig.37**). The splaying of the structures still functions to extend the representational surface and open it up to the viewer, but here it does not lead the eye to the figure of St Lucy. Rather, it emphasises the central city gate and the structures above and beyond the wall with their perforated balustrades, loggias and windows.

#### 4. Apertures

Apart from the *Crucifixion*, which is the only image in the whole cycle without an architectural setting, all other scenes include multiple apertures, be they doors, windows,

or loggias, crowned by pointed, round or ogee arches, with or without cusps. Often all of these feature in the same scene. In the *Presentation of the Lupi Family to the Virgin*, for example, there are forty-two visible openings punctuating the setting's bizarre agglomeration of walls and structures, without even counting the perforated balustrades and the canopy of the Virgin's throne (**Fig.63**). These include round arched doorways, square windows with gratings, round, pointed and ogee arched windows, with or without cusps, with or without miniaturised rose windows or trefoils. Even the Virgin's throne is an architectural feat perforated by arches, trefoils and rose windows.<sup>34</sup>

Altichiero's architectural designs go beyond an interest in apertures and do not merely represent open as much as perforated buildings. In addition to the numerous doorways and windows, the perforated balustrades in the *Presentation of the Lupi Family* testify to this, as does the dainty crenellation decorating several buildings in different scenes, for example *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.64**), *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.65**) and *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.66**). It is as if Altichiero's architectural settings were the result of a jeweller's fretwork. Apart from elaborate architectural ornament, this is particularly evident when structures like churches, usually walled on all sides and accessible through one or at most three entries protected by a door, are not only splayed but literally open. In the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.5**), the church is perforated by arches on all sides and is in direct communication with the square and streets around it. Thus devised, its structure grants undisturbed access to and flow across the building in a continuum with the outdoors, therefore offering a simultaneous view of the exterior and interior of the church.<sup>35</sup>

Even the throne in the *Coronation*, with its hollow arms and upper storey loggia, turns into a habitable structure, as demonstrated by the seraphs at the top who are almost entering it (**Fig.67**). That physical engagement with the architectural setting was paramount for Altichiero is demonstrated by the numerous figures who do not merely stand within or sit on the painted architecture, but touch, lean and hold on to it. In the *Baptism of King Sevius*, for example, two children rest their left arm on the balustrade of the bridge, the youngest of the two also wrapping his right arm around the pink pier and leaning against it to gain better visibility of the baptism. In front of him, a man clad in a green cloak rests his hand on one of the composite piers of the church. Again, in *St*

---

<sup>34</sup> Baggio also noted the ubiquitousness of arches in this fresco cycle. Baggio, "Sperimentazioni spaziali," 420.

<sup>35</sup> This can also apply to the temple in the *Presentation of Jesus* and to the church in *St Lucy's Funerals*.



*George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.52**), the three figures on the stairs and under the baldachin rest their hands on the balustrade and the composite pier, while the prefect Dacian holds onto the double colonnettes separating two pointed arched windows.<sup>36</sup> These figures' contact with the architectural setting functions as an example for the worshipper to imitate, encouraging a closer interaction with these structures.

The city views from outside the walls also display apertures and present entrance points. The *Nativity* and the *Adoration of the Magi* (**Fig.49**) are located in the same setting, although the view point shifts slightly from left to right in the second scene. The distant city of Bethlehem visible in the top right corner is dotted with apertures (**Figs 68&69**). One can see the windows of the defensive towers, of buildings within the city walls, balconies with perforated balustrades, loggias, and on the far right in the *Adoration* a buttress supported by a round arch. A noticeable difference between these two views of the same city is the presence of a drawbridge in the *Nativity* and its absence in the *Adoration*, which emphasises the wide round arched aperture in the tower's flank.<sup>37</sup> The cityscapes in the *Flight to Egypt* (**Fig.70**), *Slaying of the Dragon* (**Fig.71**) and the *Martyrdoms* of St George and St Catherine (**Figs 47&72**) are even more elaborate and present an increased number of openings.

Like the drawbridge in the *Nativity*, nearly but not quite completely flush with the tower, the windows of the walls' towers in the *Flight* and in *St Catherine's Martyrdom* present defensive wooden shutters that only partially cover them. Shutters left completely or partially open underline how the windows could be closed, barred, but are instead accessible. With the exception of the small window with open shutters on the elevated ground floor of the loggia in *St Lucy before Paschasius*, apertures with shutters are only present in empty upper storeys. This is the case in the *Baptism of King Sevius*, where a round archway with wooden shutters is visible in each of the two upper storey loggias at the front (**Fig.73**). The shutters of the doorway on the right are open towards the interior of the building, as if someone had just entered it, whilst the shutters of the doorway on the left are ajar, a strip of light defining the fissure between them. The symmetrical placement of the two doors and the different degrees of openness they

---

<sup>36</sup> These are but the most evident examples, for instances of this type can also be found in the cycles of St Catherine and St Lucy. The figures' physical engagement with the architecture was also noted by Baggio, "Sperimentazioni prospettiche," 230.

<sup>37</sup> Baggio interpreted the drawbridge as a device to show the passage of time. The bridge is up during the night in the *Nativity* and down during the day in the *Adoration*. Baggio, "Sperimentazioni spaziali," 420. However, rather than being lowered, the bridge is completely absent in the *Adoration*.

display draw attention to them and to the upper storey. One cannot see what is behind these doorways, one too bright the other too dark, but it can be deduced that they lead to the clerestory, whose arches and balustrades are visible from the nave. This particularly engages with the viewer's desire to explore the architecture, which is also reinforced by the emptiness, and therefore potential habitability, of almost all the ornate upper storeys.

The presence of numerous apertures and refined perforations is ever more striking in comparison to the real, closed, sturdy structure of the Oratory, which presents only eight one-lancet windows with no tracery, two simple *oculi*, and no crenellation. Although on the exterior the space below the archlets was frescoed, the appearance of the Oratory from the outside would have been considerably more severe in comparison with the fictive architecture of the interior, even in spite of the pinnacles and the sculptures with the coats of arms of the Lupi family on the façade. This would have increased the beholder's sense of marvel and surprise on entering, and contributed to creating the impression that the Oratory's frescoes are like a jewel enclosed in a box.<sup>38</sup>

The superabundance of apertures might also relate to the presence of Raimondino's body inside his funerary monument, which stood in the middle of the Oratory before being destroyed. As Roman sarcophagi often present sculpted half open doors, symbolising an open passage to the Beyond, but also to new life, so the arches, windows, doors, and even window tracery and crenellation of Altichiero's frescoes might act as gateways for Raimondino's soul to reach the Beyond, passing through an introduction to the Virgin, mediated by St George, and set against an array of diverse, ethereally

---

<sup>38</sup> Altichiero's architectures do bring to mind aspects of dainty fourteenth-century metalwork. His painted structures can be compared to the microarchitecture visible on some of the Trecento reliquaries at the Santo. The reliquary holding a stone from the Gethsemane and another seven relics (Inv. G. 53; second quarter of the fourteenth century) in the Santo's Treasury, for example, presents a circle of small niches with elongated trefoil arches recalling those on the side of the Virgin's throne in the *Presentation of the Lupi Family*. Besides, the twisted columns of the pinnacles hosting the figures of two saints recall the small twisted piers at the back of the throne in the *Coronation*. Interestingly, Paduan metalwork examples of architectural motifs and density of architectural decoration comparable to Altichiero's work postdate the frescoes. Filippo Baldi's Great Censer (1440-41) presents a plethora of architectural detail ranging from crocketed ogee arches, balconies and twisted columns to a compassi-like decoration. Marco Collareta, Giordana Mariani Canova, Anna Maria Spiazzi, *Basilica del Santo: leoreficerie* (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani and Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1995), 87, 115-118. On micro-architecture and its representation: Christine Kratzke and Uwe Albrecht, "Was ist Mikroarchitektur? Fragestellungen und Bandbreite der Erscheinungsformen," in *Mikroarchitektur im Mittelalter: ein gattungsübergreifendes Phänomen zwischen Realität und Imagination*, ed. Christine Kratzke and Uwe Albrecht (Leipzig, 2008), 13-26; and in the same volume: Bräm, "Architektur im Bild. Gotische Bauformen in der Buchmalerei Frankreichs 1200-1380," 499-517.

pierced buildings, to the beatitude of Heaven, where the Virgin is crowned by Christ on a perforated throne.<sup>39</sup>

### 5. Inside or Outside? Ambiguous Settings

With the exception of the six scenes that represent a city view from outside its defensive walls, the ubiquitous use of apertures locates the narrative somewhere between inside and outside, thus making more porous the boundary between Altichiero's architectural places and the Oratory's interior. In the scene where St Catherine refuses to pray to the idol, for example (**Fig.53**), the lower register of the temple is articulated by a series of tall arches at the front and on the visible side, in a way that reiterates the open access and circulation offered by the church in the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.5**). The accessibility of these buildings, which cannot be shut, situates the narrative indoors and outdoors at the same time.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike the structures in the *Baptism* and in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol*, the temple destroyed by St George's prayer (**Fig.7**) and the church where St Lucy's funerals are celebrated (**Fig.4**) define a boundary around their structure articulated by marble panels and perforated balustrades. Nonetheless, the openness of the rest of the building and the diminutive size of these barriers allow the figures to take part in the narrative and the viewer to see it. Indeed, they reinforce the ambiguity of the settings, which locate the narrative outdoors for everyone to see and take part in, whilst at the same time framing it and sheltering it with architectural structures.

The ambiguity of the settings is also aimed at bridging the gap between the viewer and the painted narratives. The painted buildings, decorated by the most diverse colours and fictive precious materials, purposefully contrast with the simple, monochrome, closed brick structure of the Oratory, but, as demonstrated before, their splaying and perforation open up the frescoed narratives for the viewers, and invite them to

---

<sup>39</sup> The door motif on ancient sarcophagi presents a wide array of iconographies and associated symbols, from garlands to mythological characters. According to Britt Haarløv, the expectation of resurrection pervades all Roman sarcophagi. The door, especially if half open, is a symbol of life beyond death, indicating the path towards the spirit's true resting place beyond the tomb. Britt Haarløv, *The Half-Open Door. A Common Symbolic Motif within Roman Sepulchral Sculpture* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1977), 55, 87. For the role of apertures as passages from this world to the next in a medieval example: Gervase Rosser, "Beyond Naturalism in Art and Poetry: Duccio and Dante on the Road to Emmaus," *Art History*, 35, no. 3 (2012): 475-497.

<sup>40</sup> T.J. Clark made similar remarks about the liminality of architecture in Renaissance painting in a National Gallery video "Strange Space," realised in connection with the exhibition *Building the Picture: Architecture in Renaissance Painting*. T.J. Clark, "Strange Space." The National Gallery, 2014, accessed Jan 12, 2016, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/channel/building-the-picture/>.

imaginatively inhabit the architectural settings. This allows the painted places to merge with the interior of the Oratory where the viewer stands, transferring part of their ambiguity to it.

#### 6. Uninhabitable Places

There are, however, ways in which the artist subtly reminds us of the painterly nature of his work. The devices he uses for this purpose are different facets of the same ones adopted to create permeability between the Oratory's interior and the fictive architecture, and draw the viewer within it: the fictive frame, apertures and empty upper storeys. The beginning of the chapter described how the fictive frame wrapping around the building acts as a substitute for the Oratory's real, invisible architectural structure without denying its two-dimensionality. The same two-facet approach also applies to the frame's relation to the scenes it encases. The fictive frame is the first aspect of the Oratory's painted decoration to create apertures; it virtually structures the building and creates openings in its walls for the scenes to fit into. And it does so accurately by moulding inwards towards the scene to give the impression that each representation is firmly set in, almost bored into the wall (**Fig.44**). In spite of this, its decorative nature, already outlined by the misaligned vertical elements virtually supporting the vault, is again reiterated by the firmly drawn ochre line encasing each scene. The fictive marble frame is interrupted just before it touches the narrative episodes, creating a hiatus between the illusion of three-dimensionality, articulated by the precisely shaded moulding, and the scene within.

It is nonetheless remarkable that the scenes on the short walls illustrating episodes from the life of Christ do not include the line of ochre paint just described (**Figs 30&31**). This choice is to be attributed to the subject of the narrative, which describes the beginning of Christianity with the Annunciation and birth of Christ and its culmination with His sacrifice on the cross and the Coronation of the Virgin. The absence of the ochre line was probably meant to differentiate these scenes from those on the long walls representing the lives of saints, but it also allows the life of Christ to have a more direct relationship with the building and the fictive frame. This particularly applies to the *Crucifixion*, whose architectural setting is supplied by the frame itself, which deploys twisted columns with a partial trabeation encasing the windows and the *Crucifixion* as if they were the panels of a triptych. Perhaps more importantly, the heightened sense of immediacy and physical presence conveyed by the fictive frame of the *Crucifixion*

corresponds to the re-enactment of His sacrifice every time Mass is celebrated from the altar directly below this image.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, even the scenes of the life of Christ have ways of keeping the viewer out.

The temple of the *Presentation of Jesus* (**Fig.74**) is a perforated structure resembling the churches in the *Baptism of King Sevius* and the *Funerals of St Lucy*. Numerous apertures also feature in the upper storey of its façade, where a fine balustrade of cusped ogee arches and colonnettes supports the arches of a loggia with five apertures: two doorways and three windows (**Fig.75**). The porosity of the environment, conveyed by the numerous perforations, and its emptiness, appear to be another instance of Altichiero's attempts to invite the viewers in and inhabit the architecture. However, on closer inspection, one notices that the size of this upper storey loggia is minuscule compared to the lofty ground floor, and the figures standing here could not inhabit the loggia. In spite of its numerous points of access, the temple's upper storey is uninhabitable.

The same could be said of the third and fourth storeys of the pink building in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**), the minuscule balconies in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* (**Fig.76**) and especially in *St Catherine's Dispute with the Philosophers* (**Fig.77**), and the altana above the building in *St George Drinks Poison*. All these empty loggias, balconies and altanas, characterised by evident points of access and manipulated to increase their visibility, represent potentially inhabitable places that, due to their diminutive size, become uninhabitable architectural accretions. They are empty not only in order to play with the viewer's desire of access, but also because figures within them would appear ridiculously small compared to the other larger characters.<sup>42</sup> Their emptiness also underlines their reason to be for their own sake, in spite of habitability. Although some upper storeys are inhabited, as in *St George on the Wheel*, they remain less than those that are unoccupied, and but accentuate their emptiness.

Doorways and windows play an ambiguous role too. Whilst they offer points of access, emphasised in some cases by open or half-open shutters, the darkness they reveal makes the viewer none the wiser about what lies behind them. In *St Lucy before Paschasius*, for

---

<sup>41</sup> The importance of the frescoed decoration of the altar wall to the celebration of Mass has also been noted by Edwards. The scholar proposed to include the windows themselves in this scheme, identifying the *oculus* of the *Coronation* as God and the two oblong windows flanking the *Crucifixion* as the Holy Ghost and Christ. Mary Edwards, "The Meaning of the Apertures of the Oratory of St George in Padua," *Il Santo*, no. 23 (1988): 57-69.

<sup>42</sup> As demonstrated in the *Slaying of the Dragon* and in the *Martyrdom of St Catherine*, Altichiero likes his figures to be large enough to be visible, even if their size belittles that of the walls and annuls their defensive role.

example, the almost virtuoso display of several types of window tracery in the upper storey reveals only blackness (**Fig.78**). The building was splayed to allow us to see the windows on the sides, but no glimpse is offered of its interior. Similarly, in *St George Drinks Poison*, there are two doors in the upper storey whose shutters are wide open (**Fig.64**), but although the splaying of the L-shaped building gives the door on the left more visibility, the area these archways give access to is unfathomable. The almost obsessive depiction of apertures is complemented by the impossibility of seeing where these apertures lead to, the darkness they reveal at the same time drawing the viewers in and keeping them out. This is emblematically enacted in a subtle yet meaningful way in *St George Drinks Poison*. Just past the wide arch behind St George, another arch, this time pointed and smaller, is visible on the left. The eye is drawn to its corbeled haunches, but the possibility of access it could offer is completely negated because this archway is sealed shut (**Fig.79**). On closer inspection, it almost seems walled up. The closure of this seemingly inconspicuous passage contrasts with the openness of the upper loggia doors in the same scene, and acts as a powerful reminder of the impossibility of exploring the painted structure.

There is, however, one exception. Although badly damaged by water infiltrations, one can discern that the apertures of the white building in the *Presentation of the Lupi Family to the Virgin* (**Fig.54**), most noticeably the archway behind St George and next to the Virgin, open onto a blue sky that seems to lead somewhere as opposed to the blackness of the other apertures. This scene is placed right next to the *Coronation of the Virgin* (**Fig.46**) on the altar wall, so that the windows and gateway in the *Presentation* seem to be leading to Heaven. The Virgin, seated under the ornate baldachin of her throne, is after all the *porta coeli*. Whilst all openings in this fresco cycle could be signifiers of a passage from this world to the next, their role as passageways and points of access particularly resonates with the subject matter of the *Presentation to the Virgin*, which brings the patron's family extremely close to the Virgin and to Heaven.

### **Padua and the Veneto in the Oratory's Frescoes**

The fictive architecture in Altichiero's frescoes reproduces decorative themes and structures that can be found in Padua and the rest of the Veneto. Architectural characteristics of Verona, and above all Venice feature prominently in Altichiero's settings, but there is no instance of a faithful portrait of a specific whole building. Instead, the artist collapses architectural features of Padua, Venice, Verona and their

surrounding areas to create a location for his narrative that is generically ‘veneta’ but that cannot be ascribed to any city in particular. Thus, Altichiero articulates hybrid architectural places by borrowing from the built architecture of Padua and the Veneto, and by proposing his own architectural commentary to it through structural and ornamental invention.

There are four architectural structures in Altichiero’s frescoes that have traditionally been interpreted as pertaining to the Paduan urban fabric: the profusion of porticoes, the combination of gables and tall drums supporting grey-blue domes that recalls the Santo, the trabeated loggia in *St George Destroys the Temple* echoing the loggia of the Reggia Carrarese, and the complex of buildings in the votive fresco, which has also been associated with the Reggia.<sup>43</sup> The structure that most effectively recalls the Santo in Altichiero’s frescoes is the pagan temple in *St Catherine and the Pagan Idol*, which displays front and side gables, bluish domes on tall drums and red and white voussoirs like those of the Franciscan church. This is the closest Altichiero gets to portraiture of architectural place. Unlike the Basilica, however, the lower register of the painted building is articulated by a series of tall arches at the front and on the visible side, and the façades also present noticeable differences (**Figs 80&81**). The pagan temple in this scene thus entertains an ambiguous relation with its built cognate completed about seventy years before the Oratory’s frescoes. At first sight, the viewer recognises the Santo in the pagan temple, but this identification is immediately thwarted by a second glance, which identifies the numerous discrepancies. These are all the more enticing since the real model stands but a few metres from the Oratory.

The example of the pagan temple in St Catherine’s cycle is a paradigm for all painted architecture in the Oratory. Thus, the numerous frescoed porticoes recall multiple built porticoes that characterise the streets of Padua, but no specific location is recognisable, and the loggia of the Reggia Carrarese is only subtly evoked by the trabeated loggia in *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Figs 82&83**).<sup>44</sup> As for the association between the Reggia and

---

<sup>43</sup> Richards, *Altichiero*, 189 and 198; Baggio, “Sperimentazioni prospettiche,” 230. Mellini noticed how the city and countryside views of the Oratory recall the Veneto, but described Altichiero’s settings as “gothic urbanist utopia,” Mellini, “Le architetture delle cappelle padovane dei marchesi di Soragna,” 406.

<sup>44</sup> Maretto identified the porticoed street as a specifically Paduan characteristic that presents discrepancies in comparison with the Venetian fondaco and the private porticoes of medieval Genoa, and even with the other famously porticoed Italian city, Bologna. Although it is difficult to date most of Padua’s porticoes, we know that this architectural arrangement was adopted in the city at least from the thirteenth century. Paolo Maretto, *I portici della città di Padova* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1986), 9, 22-25. The loggia of the Reggia had a frescoed decoration on the walls, probably similar to that painted by Altichiero for the loggia in *St George Destroys the Temple*. During a 1964-65 restoration campaign, restorers found traces of an

the bizarre assortment of buildings defying definition in the votive fresco (**Fig.54**) suggested by Richards, it is true that the Reggia was a very complex structure connected to the city's fortress by a crenellated wall similar to that visible on the left hand side of the fresco. However, none of the buildings in this votive image recalls a fortified structure or the Reggia, even as it would have appeared at the time according to reconstructions (**Fig.84**).<sup>45</sup>

There are also architectural characteristics of the city of Verona. The swallow-tail crenellation visible on numerous buildings in the Oratory, in particular on the structure on the left hand side in *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Fig.7**) and the wall, city gate and right hand tower in *St Lucy Dragged by Oxen* (**Fig.37**), is the same that adorns the Castelvecchio in Verona (**Fig.85**) and the Scaliger castle at Soave, but Altichiero emphasised this crenellation by making it a different colour, seemingly a different material, from the main body of the building from which it rises, and embellished it with small archlets, details absent in the Castelvecchio and the Soave castle that reiterate the façade of the Oratory. Other Veronese references are present in tabernacle structures such as that on the left hand side in *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.52**) and the small votive tabernacle placed on the wall in the *Presentation to the Virgin* (**Fig.54**), which bring to mind the Arche Scaligere (**Fig.86**).<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, Altichiero's settings as a whole recall one city more than the others. Whilst the numerous porticoes and above all the various structural combinations where Santo-like domes are represented echo Padua, the intricacy of the architectural decoration and the profusion of perforations (balustrades, windows, arches) display a typically Venetian character.<sup>47</sup>

---

exterior frescoed decoration on a red background. Cesira Gasparotto, "La Reggia dei Da Carrara," 93. Fragments of an exterior decoration are still visible on the walls of the Reggia's portico. They represent arches and *oculi* with tracery. Gasparotto hypothesised that the lost decoration beneath these fragments may have represented fictive marble panels. Cesira Gasparotto, "Gli ultimi affreschi venuti in luce nella Reggia dei da Carrara e una documentazione inedita sulla Camera di Camillo," *Atti e Memorie dell'Accademia Patavina di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 81, no. 3 (1968-69): 237-238, 261.

<sup>45</sup> Richards, *Altichiero*, 198. For the history of the Reggia Carrarese, and in particular the stairs and the passage that connected it to the city walls: Nicoletta Nicolini and Alessia Rossi, *La Reggia dei Carraresi a Padova. La Casa della Rampa* (Milan: Skira editore, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> Richards identified red and white voussoirs as a Veronese characteristic, but they also featured in Padua at least since the very early fourteenth century, as demonstrated by the entrance door of the Scrovegni Chapel. According to Richards, the wall-mounted tabernacle in the votive fresco might have been based on structures like the tabernacle at S. Pietro Incarnario in Verona attributed to Giovanni di Rigino. Richards, *Altichiero*, 188. The swallow-tail crenellation following the triangular shape of the roof can be found, as Mellini noted, in the Castello Colleoni in Thiene, near Vicenza. Mellini, *Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi*, 74. However, the Castello was built in the fifteenth century and cannot be considered a model for Altichiero's paintings. It would be legitimate, instead, to ask whether it was the artist's structures that first articulated this motif in the Veneto.

<sup>47</sup> Francesca Flores D'Arcais also noted the Venetian character of the buildings in *St Lucy before Paschasius* and *St Lucy's Trials*. Francesca Flores D'Arcais, "La decorazione della cappella di San Giorgio," in *Fonti e*



Three elements of Altichiero's painted architecture stand out as Venetian: window fretwork, ogee arches and purely decorative, highly ornate crenellation. Fretwork appears for the first time in Venice in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in the windows of St Mark's Basilica. This form of decoration was highly considered at the French court, and must have been so in Venice too if it was used to adorn the city's main church.<sup>48</sup> The oldest fretwork window in San Marco is that on the basilica's north side facing San Basso (**Fig.87**).<sup>49</sup> In this window three pointed arches support two roundels whose shape slightly alters the supporting haunches of the side arches and turns the middle arch into an ogee. A similar distortion is also visible in Altichiero's paintings in the gothic bifoire on the side of the Virgin's throne in the votive fresco (**Fig.63**). Fretwork was also employed in the Palazzo Ducale during the Trecento, and the windows on the Palazzo's south façade with interlaced arches hosting trefoils in the interstices and supporting roundels can be spotted in several of the Oratory's scenes, including *St George Drinks Poison* and *St Lucy's Trials* (**Figs 88&89**).

Ogee arches have been identified as an originally Egyptian architectural feature which reached Europe in the first quarter of the thirteenth century and appeared in five portals for San Marco dating from 1231.<sup>50</sup> In Altichiero's frescoes, ogee arches feature in almost every scene, from the small upper storey balustrade in the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.73**) to the dainty four-lancet window in the left aisle in the *Funerals of St Lucy* (**Fig.4**).

Finally, fretwork-like crenellation, visible in Venice first and foremost on the Palazzo Ducale (**Fig.90**) but also on the Fondaco del Megio (**Fig.91**), appears in seven of the Oratory's scenes: the *Flight to Egypt*, *St George Drinks Poison*, *St George on the Wheel* and the saint's *Martyrdom*, *St Lucy's Trials* and *Funerals* and *St Catherine's Martyrdom*.<sup>51</sup> In *St Catherine's Martyrdom* (**Fig.48**), a building is visible on the left behind the city walls with a row of white gables and spires not too dissimilar from the arrangement of the

---

*studi per la storia del Santo a Padova. Le pitture del Santo di Padova, Studi 5*, ed. Camillo Semenzato (Vicenza: Neri Pozza editore, 1984), 50.

<sup>48</sup> Herbert Dellwing, "Il traforo," in *L'architettura gotica veneziana*, ed. Francesco Valcanover and Wolfgang Wolters (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere e arti, 2000), 195-196.

<sup>49</sup> Dellwing, "Il traforo," 196.

<sup>50</sup> Juergen Schulz, *The New Palaces of Medieval Venice* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), 49-50. For the relationship of Venetian architecture with the East: Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East. The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100-1500* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000). Ogee arches are also present in Padua, although they here appear after the Venetian conquest of the city in 1405.

<sup>51</sup> The Fondaco del Megio, a storage house for millet, dates from at least 1321. Michela Agazzi, "Edilizia funzionale veneziana del XIV secolo," in *L'architettura gotica veneziana* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2000), 150-152.

crenellation on the Doge's Palace, but the dainty merlons featuring in the St Lucy and especially St George cycles are more varied and intricate than any Venetian ones (**Figs 64-66**).

This brief analysis has shown that whilst built architectural models are an integral part of Altichiero's structures, the artist chose not to portray specific buildings. Their deployment in different settings fulfilling different functions is also revealing. Thus the grey-blue domes of the Santo feature in a pagan temple in *St Catherine and the Idol* (**Figs 53&80**), in a throne baldachin in the votive fresco, and in a fortress in the walled city in the *Flight to Egypt* (**Fig.70**). By doing so, not only does the painter create a new city or series of cities for his narrative, but he also eliminates or at least blurs the boundaries between sacred and profane, 'good' and 'bad'. In St Catherine's and St George's cycles, the architectural identity of the Santo, the most distinctive holy site of Padua, is distorted and applied to a pagan temple, a building embodying all the evil and misguidedness of the wrong faith. Similarly, in the *Flight*, the domes of the Paduan basilica surmount the towers of a fortress, a building representing the civic and defensive power of a city rather than its devotion.

Altichiero's eclectic borrowing from various existing buildings and startling structural and decorative innovations grapple in a complex and multifaceted way with the issue of identity, both of the region and of the patron and his family. By borrowing architectural characteristics from at least three major cities of the Veneto, the artist creates a place for his sacred narratives that can be located within this region, although it cannot be identified with a specific existing site. The physical placement of his figures in an architecturally dense and elaborate environment bearing resemblance to the urban fabric that can be experienced immediately outside the Oratory makes the narrative more palpable, and acts as a guarantee that the events described actually happened, literally took place. At the same time though, the sacred stories, made more tangible by their settings, act in their turn as 'sacralisers' of the fictive architecture, and, indirectly, of the architecture of the Veneto. This is especially so because buildings are instrumental to the narrative: they are not solely arranged with care and altered to increase and complement the figures' visibility (as demonstrated by projection, recession and splaying) but they are also integral to the story. Never more so, for example, than the temple destroyed by St George's prayer or the church where St Lucy's funerals are celebrated. In addition to this, the lavish and intricate decoration, structural innovations

and variety of colours surpass any real model of the time and create a sense of abundance and marvel, enhanced by the impossibility to reconcile Altichiero's buildings with any specific existing models. Because the relationship between fictive and existing built model is vague and defined by wonder at the abundance and complexity of the painted structures and their decoration, the narrative maintains a degree of transcendence that enhances its sacred content.

The relation with the Veneto that Altichiero articulated through his painted architecture also reverberates on his patron and his family. The Lupi da Soragna were originally from Parma, from which they were exiled.<sup>52</sup> Raimondino and his executor Bonifacio were condottieri who had not only fought for Padua, but also for Mantua (in Raimondino's case) and Florence (in Bonifacio's).<sup>53</sup> Appealing to the architectural identity of the Veneto through the Oratory's frescoes reinforced their allegiance to this region, which they had already expressed by choosing it as their resting place. As far as the specific link to Padua is concerned, this thesis is further corroborated by the hypothetical presence of several portraits of the city's ruling family, the da Carrara, and their entourage, both in the Cappella di San Giacomo and in the Oratory of St George. These portraits, according to Mardersteig, include Raimondino and Bonifacio as well as Petrarch and his secretary Lombardo della Seta, demonstrating that the Lupi were part of the humanist circles of the city.<sup>54</sup>

Nonetheless, even though they bring together the architectural identities of several places across the Veneto, it would be reductive and misguided to interpret Altichiero's frescoes as expressing an ambition to unify the region, even though the da Carrara would have welcomed lordship over a unified Veneto. The identities of the individual city-states of the Veneto were strong, and the fourteenth century was characterised by continuous tension and changes of allegiance amongst Padua, Venice and Verona.

---

<sup>52</sup> We know that Bonifacio was an exile in Padua already in 1351. Mellini, "Le architetture delle cappelle padovane dei marchesi di Soragna," 404.

<sup>53</sup> Bonifacio was capitano del popolo for Florence in 1359 and won a battle against Pisa in 1362. In Florence the condottiere founded a hospital dedicated to St James, but when his request to be buried in the Florentine Baptistery was rejected in 1372, he chose Padua as his resting place. Raimondino founded instead a hospital in Mantua dedicated to two of the saints represented in the Oratory of St George: St Catherine and St Lucy. Bobisut and Gumiero Salomoni, *Altichiero da Zevio*, 11 and 46; Giuseppe Fiocco, "Storia e storie' della Cappella di S. Giacomo al Santo," *Il Santo*, 6, no. 2-3 (1966): 265; Mellini, "Le architetture delle cappelle padovane dei marchesi di Soragna," 404; Antonio Sartori, "Nota su Altichiero," *Il Santo*, 3, no. 3 (1963): 302.

<sup>54</sup> Richards, *Altichiero*, 203-204; Giovanni Mardersteig, "I ritratti del Petrarca e dei suoi amici di Padova," in *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 17 (1974): 251-280; Margaret Plant, "Portraits and Politics in Late Trecento Padua. Altichiero's Frescoes in the San Felice Chapel, S. Antonio," *The Art Bulletin*, 63 (1981): 406-425.

Verona and Padua in particular had been intermittently at war for control over Vicenza from 1312 until 1328, when Padua was handed to Cangrande della Scala.<sup>55</sup>

The campaign of expansion carried out by the lord of Verona demonstrates that attempts to unify the region had indeed already been made, but rather than being envisaged as part of a wider area with common geography and culture, conquered territory was still embodied by the individuality of city-states. Thus, on Cangrande's tomb in Verona, the cities he conquered during his lifetime are represented independently, each in one of the four corners of the sarcophagus, and individually labelled. On Cangrande's tomb Padua is epitomised by its two symbols of civic and sacred identity: the Palazzo della Ragione (at the front, with prominent, stylised crenellation) and the Basilica del Santo (the series of domes and slender towers behind the Palazzo) (**Fig.92**).<sup>56</sup> The inclusion of the Santo is significant because it departs from the representation of Padua in the city's thirteenth-century seal, where only the Palazzo della Ragione features. Although its absence from the seal might be due to the fact that it was not completed until the end of the first decade of the fourteenth century, the appearance of the Basilica del Santo on Cangrande's tomb proves that the church had become a crucial part of Paduan identity, not solely for Paduans but also for foreigners.<sup>57</sup> Verona's hegemony did not last long, for in 1336 Venice and its ally Florence waged war against the Scaligers and disbanded their lordship over Verona in 1339.<sup>58</sup> The defeat of the della Scala meant that Padua could recover its independence under the da Carrara, who created an entourage of humanists of the calibre of Petrarch, and re-established Padua as a powerful, independent city-state.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Hein, "L'iconografia della Basilica di Sant'Antonio nel Trecento," *Il Santo (Varia et Immensa mutatio 1310. Percorsi nei cantieri architettonici e pittorici della Basilica di Sant'Antonio in Padova, Basilica del Santo 20 maggio 2010)*, 51, no. 2/3 (2011): 392.

<sup>56</sup> This relief sculpture shows Padua as one of the five cities under the dominion of Cangrande della Scala (Verona, Feltre, Belluno, Vicenza and Padua). Hein, "L'iconografia della Basilica di Sant'Antonio," 391-392.

<sup>57</sup> The Basilica del Santo was begun in 1232, barely a year after the death of the saint to whom it is dedicated. St Anthony, a Franciscan friar of Portuguese origin, was probably sent to Padua to oversee the work carried out at the University and ensure that no heresies were being developed. He became popular and died at the Arcella, close to Padua, in 1231. The Santo was completed about eighty years after his death. Francesco Autizi and Maria Beatrice Rigobello, *Palazzo della Ragione di Padova. Simbologie degli astri e rappresentazioni del governo* (Padua: il Poligrafo, 2008), 102.

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin G. Kohl, *Padua Under the Da Carrara, 1318-1405* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 62-67.

<sup>59</sup> The bitter rivalry between Padua and Verona did not mean that all contacts were severed between the two cities, as demonstrated by Altichiero himself, a Veronese employed in Padua, and by another Veronese, the military engineer Ognibene, who lived in Padua in 1378 and whose son Nicolò was Francesco da Carrara's engineer. Richards, *Altichiero*, 190.

Even though references to the architectural identity of various cities of the Veneto may have political implications, Altichiero's fictive architectural structures do not directly address political issues, neither of Padua in particular, nor of the Veneto in general, nor are they intended to be a reflection of the expansionist hopes of the da Carrara and/or the Lupi. Rather, Altichiero's structural and ornamental commentary on the architecture of the Veneto displays his knowledge of built architecture and his creativity in reinventing it and integrating it with the narrative. Altichiero's architectural repetitions and variations, citations and inventions, are a virtuoso display functioning as the artist's trademark, his means to create striking places that enhance the visual persuasiveness of the narrative and show off his skill.

### **Conclusion**

The six strategies identified in this chapter act in a multifaceted way to intensify the narrative, to enhance the representation of place and to facilitate the viewer's interaction with the frescoes. Firstly, the fictive frame wrapping around the whole interior of the Oratory locates the narrative scenes and blurs the boundaries between the fictive and the real architecture. Then, the alternation of projecting and receding structures, functioning as poles of attention, emphasises figures and narrative episodes, and bridges the gap between narrative and viewer. The opening up of the settings towards the viewer by splaying the structures guarantees the visibility of a plethora of architectural detail and renders the narrative more immersive. The fixation with apertures and perforations ambiguously locates the narrative between indoors and outdoors, heightening the porosity of the boundaries between the Oratory's interior, the painted scenes and the Paduan urban fabric, and taking further the opening up enacted by the splaying.<sup>60</sup> The multiplication of doorways, windows, arches and loggias invites the viewer to virtually inhabit the painted architecture, but at the same time their diminutive size and/or the darkness beyond them frustrate the viewer's desire to do so, and expose their uninhabitability.

This formal analysis revealed how Altichiero's often implausible and porous structures are difficult to reconcile with existing buildings. Although architectural typologies can be recognised (church, palace, city walls), Altichiero's settings are unusual variations of building types resisting conclusive definition. In particular, the chapter highlighted

---

<sup>60</sup> Also remarkable in this sense is the depiction of a blue starry sky on the building's vault that fictively exposes the Oratory to the elements.

Altichiero's inconsistent adoption of illusionism. Whilst the fictive console brackets of the frame mimic three-dimensionality, as do the narrative settings through projection, recession and splaying, idiosyncrasies (such as the C or L-shaped building in *St George Destroys the Temple*, or the conglomerate of structures on the right in *St Catherine on the Wheel*) suggest Altichiero was interested in depth but was not concerned with creating more rigorous illusionism, of the sort Giotto achieved in the fictive sculptures in the Scrovegni Chapel. Current interpretations tend to overemphasise attempts at illusion, dismissing any inconsistencies as shortcomings. Thus, they fail to notice that illusionism and overt two-dimensionality may coexist without being at odds. Rather than jarring with each other, demonstrating the artist's lack of craftsmanship, they combine to articulate a sense of ambiguity mirroring Altichiero's engagement with architectural identity to create new, imaginary places. Altichiero borrowed a great deal from the architecture of the Veneto, but always proposed inventive structural and ornamental solutions that create architecturally hybrid places, at the same time concretising and sacralising the narrative. These imaginative solutions highlight how he relied on structural and ornamental repetition, as well as on striking ornamental intricacy. These characteristics acted as his signature, but they also suggest his engagement with architectural wonder and abundance as means of persuasion.<sup>61</sup> The next chapter therefore analyses Altichiero's fictive architecture as a form of visual rhetoric.

---

<sup>61</sup> For the relationship between architecture and wonder, particularly in northern Europe: Paul Binski, *Gothic Wonder: Art, Artifice and the Decorated Style, 1290-1350* (London and New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2014); by the same author "Reflections on the 'Wonderful Height and Size' of Gothic Great Churches and the Medieval Sublime," in *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 129-156; and "The Heroic Age of Gothic and the Metaphors of Modernism," *Gesta* 52, no. 1 (2013): 3-19.

# CHAPTER THREE

## RHETORIC AND MEMORY

### IN ALTICHIERO'S ORATORY OF ST GEORGE

#### **Introduction**

Altichiero's approach to architectural settings is characterised by a marked interest in structural accretion and decorative abundance that appears at first sight to be gratuitous. His fictive buildings are almost always articulated by at least two or three registers, and present numerous projecting additions, such as the pulpit-like structures attached to the church in the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.73**) or the empty minuscule balcony in the *Dispute with the Philosophers* (**Fig.77**). The settings develop in width as well as in height, and not always in an orderly manner, as demonstrated by the building on the right in *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.38**): a bizarre mass developing sideways with projecting sections at the front and on the side. In addition, fictive structures are manipulated to display more architectural detail, such as the pink structure in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**), or the arms of the throne in the *Coronation* (**Figs 46&67**), and the abundance and intricacy of decorative details such as window tracery and crenellation are nothing short of mesmerising.

This chapter deploys rhetoric as an interpretative tool for Altichiero's plethora of accreted, intricately decorated architectural settings for the Oratory of St George. It begins with a consideration of Petrarch's crucial relationship with place and how he applied the rhetorical principle of *inventio* to his notion of place. As Altichiero's contemporary in Padua, the influential figure of Petrarch functions as a springboard for an analysis of Altichiero's own relationship not only with *inventio*, but also with other rhetorical tropes such as *copia* and *amplificatio* that might plausibly have informed his fictive architectural structures. The importance of rhetoric as an interpretative method for Altichiero's frescoes will then be contextualised through an analysis of the dissemination and understanding of rhetorical principles and the modalities of their teaching in medieval Italy and, more specifically, in Trecento Padua. This will lead to an investigation of *inventio*, *copia* and *amplificatio* as tools within the art of memory, which establishes a pivotal relationship with architectural place and functions both as informing principle and purpose of Altichiero's frescoes.

## Petrarch and Place

The representation of hybrid place as oscillating between invented and existing locations as seen in Altichiero's frescoes is also found in the work of Petrarch, who held the post of canon at the cathedral of Padua from 1349 until his death in 1374. Although his twenty-five years as canon at Padua were marked by numerous absences from the city, the poet was an important figure held in great esteem by the entourage of influential figures around the Carrara, and he had been offered the post of canon through an ad hoc intervention by Bishop Ildebrandino Conti at the request of Iacopo II da Carrara.<sup>1</sup>

Informed by numerous trips around Italy and France, Petrarch's work often includes descriptions of places as sites particularly conducive to writing and meditation. According to Eugenio Battisti, it was Petrarch who reintroduced topographical language into Europe on the basis of Latin models, and he could thus be considered a literary topographer *ante litteram*.<sup>2</sup> Petrarch spoke of real places, amongst which his favourite was probably Mont Ventoux, which he discovered whilst at Avignon. The clear identification that Petrarch proposed for the places he mentioned in his poems is probably a response to the contemporary rhetorical theory that a poet had to refer to real events if he was not to be accused of lying.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the humanist built a relation with his places that went beyond the literal identification of a location.

Petrarch's favourite quiet, uninhabited places are wild and harsh landscapes, but it is precisely their roughness that gives the poet solace and helps him picture the beauty of his beloved Laura.<sup>4</sup> The sense of comfort and the pleasure that Petrarch gets from these *loci* is proper for the classical trope of the *locus amoenus*, but the harshness and wilderness of the landscape describe instead a *locus horridus* or *locus asper*. The fusion of these two classical tropes allows Petrarch to create a hybrid poetic place charged with great

---

<sup>1</sup> Silvana Collodo, "Padova al tempo di Francesco Petrarca," in *Petrarca e il suo tempo*, ed. Gilda P. Mantovani (Milan: Skira editore, 2006), 15. Petrarch had a lasting influence in Padua. Plant argued that he is portrayed in the St James Chapel in the Santo, frescoed about five years after his death. Margaret Plant, "Portraits and Politics in Late Trecento Padua: Altichiero's Frescoes in the San Felice Chapel, S. Antonio," *The Art Bulletin*, 63, no. 3 (1981): 409-410.

<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Battisti, "Non chiare acque," in *Petrarca e i suoi luoghi. Spazi reali e paesaggi poetici alle origini del moderno senso della natura*, ed. Domenico Luciani and Monique Mossier (Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche/Canova, 2009), 4 and 8, note 16.

<sup>3</sup> Battisti, "Non chiare acque," 1.

<sup>4</sup> "Per alti monti et per selve aspre trovo/qualche riposo: ogni abitato loco/è nemico mortal degli occhi miei," Petrarch, "Canzoniere," in *Rime*, ed. Giovanni Mestica (Florence: Barbera, 1896), XVII (XXX), 14-16. "[...] et quanto in più selvaggio/loco mi trovo e 'n più deserto lido,/ tanto più bella il mio pensier l'adombra," Petrarch, "Canzoniere," XVII (XXX), 46-48.



emotional power and offering a suitable environment for introspection and poetic creation: the *locus secretus*.<sup>5</sup>

Although Petrarch's meticulously described secret places may be compared to Altichiero's beautifully detailed architectural places, one cannot deny that the poet's interest is in outdoor landscapes, whilst Altichiero's is in architectural structures. Nonetheless, we know that Petrarch was also fascinated by cityscapes, and in particular by Venice, the city so often evoked by Altichiero's frescoes. The poet described Venice as *miraculosissima civitas*, an otherworldly city that offers refuge from tyranny and war, and whose civic harmony is even stronger than the solidity of its marble foundations.<sup>6</sup> As refuge and guarantor of peace, Venice may relate to the harsh woods where the poet finds rest. The allure of this city to Petrarch's eyes is also demonstrated by a deal he proposed, in which he offered the entirety of his precious library to Venice in exchange for a house in the city.<sup>7</sup> Although this deal was never enacted, it showcases the poet's great admiration for Venice and his willingness to reside in it even at the price of losing possession of his library.<sup>8</sup>

Petrarch's relationship with place is thus as complex as that outlined by Altichiero's fictive architecture for the Oratory of St George, for the places of both the poet and the artist hover between portrait and sublimation of the portrait itself. Although Petrarch is clearer than the painter in the identification of his places with existing sites, his approach to their exaltation is based on rhetorical tropes, so that his places become a repertoire to which the poet applies the rhetorical concept of *inventio*. As Hervé Brunon has demonstrated, Petrarch constantly referenced ancient authors such as Seneca, bringing together the universal, generic tropes offered by them and the specificity of a single place in order to sacralise and increase the status of the sites he described.<sup>9</sup> This is what

---

<sup>5</sup> Hervé Brunon, "Locus secretus: topique et topophilie," in *Petrarca e i suoi luoghi. Spazi reali e paesaggi poetici alle origini del moderno senso della natura*, ed. Domenico Luciani and Monique Mossier (Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche/Canova, 2009), 44-47.

<sup>6</sup> Petrarch, *Familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1933-1942), VIII, 5, vv. 93-94. "Augustissima Venetorum urbs [...] solidis fundamenta marmoribus sed solidiore etiam fundamento civilis concordie stabilita," Petrarch, "Senilia," in *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti, P.G. Ricci, E. Carrara and E. Bianchi (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1955), IV, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Gherardo Ortalli, "La ricerca della solitudine in un paesaggio di pietra. Petrarca a Venezia," in *Petrarca e i suoi luoghi. Spazi reali e paesaggi poetici alle origini del moderno senso della natura*, ed. Domenico Luciani and Monique Mossier (Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche/Canova, 2009), 106.

<sup>8</sup> Other discrepancies between Petrarch's life and his written work can be observed in the longing he expressed for solitude in his poems, in contrast with the politically and diplomatically active life he led, always striving to remain close to the most powerful milieu of the time. Ortalli, "La ricerca della solitudine," 107.

<sup>9</sup> Brunon, "Locus secretus: topique et topophilie," 47-48.

Altichiero did, treating the built identity of the Veneto as a repository of architectural tropes from which to borrow, and thus concretise and sacralise his narrative as well as his fictive structures at the same time.

Even though Petrarch's relationship with contemporary artists is difficult to trace,<sup>10</sup> contacts with Altichiero may be suggested by three manuscript copies of Petrarch's *De viris illustribus*, dedicated by the poet to Francesco il Vecchio da Carrara, which contain illuminations attributed to Altichiero.<sup>11</sup> All three manuscripts are held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris and date from 1379 to the early 1380s, when we know that Altichiero was working in the Oratory of St George.<sup>12</sup> The manuscript Ms. Lat. 6069 G contains an allegory of the war of Chioggia (1378-81) (**Fig.93**), where an ox representing the Carrara is pushing back in the sea a lion representing Venice.<sup>13</sup> Comparison of the illuminated ox with those frescoed in *St Lucy Dragged by Oxen* (**Fig.37**) in the Oratory supports the attribution to Altichiero, although the absence of other scenes in the manuscript makes it difficult to strengthen this hypothesis.

Ms. Lat. 6069 F contains a portrait of Petrarch (**Fig.94**) that can be compared to the figure in dark robes behind St George in *St George Baptises King Sevius* (**Fig.5**), which

---

<sup>10</sup> Gian Lorenzo Mellini, "Considerazioni su probabili rapporti tra Altichiero e Petrarca," in *Da Giotto a Mantegna*, ed. Lucio Grossato (Milan: Electa, 1974), 51-54.

<sup>11</sup> Ms. Lat. 6069 F is the *Epithome* of the *De viris*, with thirty-six lives of illustrious men from Romulus to Trajan. It was begun by Petrarch and completed by Lombardo della Seta after his death. Ms. Lat. 6069 G is the *Compendium* of the *De viris*, meant as a guiding manual for the frescoed decoration of Francesco il Vecchio da Carrara's *Sala virorum illustrium* in the Reggia Carrarese (nothing remains of the original fresco cycle apart from Altichiero's portrait of Petrarch, much restored by Domenico Campagnola in 1540). Ms. Lat. 6069 I is an unfinished version of the *De viris* starting with the life of Adam. For an overview of and bibliography on Altichiero's work as illuminator: Giovanna Baldissin Molli, Giordana Canova Mariani and Federica Toniolo, ed., *La miniatura a Padova dal Medioevo al Settecento* (Modena: F. C. Panini Editore, 1999), 138-141; Cristina Guarnieri, "Altichiero da Zevio," in *Dizionario biografico dei miniatori italiani, secoli IX-XVI*, ed. Milvia Bollati (Milan: Edizione Sylvestre Bonnard, 2004), 6-10. Marta Minazzato, "Scheda di catalogo IV.8," in *Petrarca e il suo tempo*, ed. Gilda P. Mantovani (Milan: Skira editore, 2006), 411-412. Federica Toniolo, "Il libro miniato a Padova nel Trecento," in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. Giovanna Valenzano and Federica Toniolo (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2007), 107-151. For the programme of the *Sala virorum illustrium*: Theodor E. Mommsen, "Petrarch and the Decoration of the *Sala virorum illustrium* in Padua," *The Art Bulletin*, 34, no. 1 (1952): 95-116. For a discussion of the relationship between Altichiero's illuminations and the *Sala virorum*: John Richards, *Altichiero da Zevio. An Artist and His Patrons in the Italian Trecento* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 104-134.

<sup>12</sup> 6069 F is dated 1379 on fol.195v, 6069 G is dated 1380 on fol. 27v. A date is not recorded on 6069 I. According to John Richards, 6069 I was completed after 6069 F, but not by Altichiero himself. Richards, *Altichiero*, 125. The manuscripts are digitised and available through the website of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, accessed Jan 17, 2016,

Ms. Lat. 6069 F: <http://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065104>.

Ms. Lat.6069 G: <http://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065105>.

Ms. Lat 6069 I: <http://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000065107>.

<sup>13</sup> The war of Chioggia saw Genoa and Padua allied against Venice. In spite of the illumination, which seems to confirm the victory of Padua, the war ended to the advantage of Venice. "Chioggia," *Enciclopedia Italiana* Treccani, 1931, accessed Mar 3, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/chioggia\\_%\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/chioggia_%(Enciclopedia-Italiana)).

Mardersteig identified as the poet,<sup>14</sup> and a drawing of Glory distributing laurel crowns to a crowd of men on horses, the *viri illustres* (**Fig.95**). Ms. Lat. 6069 I also contains an allegory of Glory (**Fig.96**). The crowds of *viri illustres* in 6069 F and 6069 I can be compared to the crowd in the Oratory's *Crucifixion* (**Fig.97**). The portraits of Petrarch in *St George Baptises King Sevius* (**Fig.5**) and in Ms. Lat. 6069 F present discrepancies (the eyes are smaller in the frescoed figure, which also seems to portray a slightly older man), but the manuscript profile portrait does resemble other profile figures in the Oratory, such as that of St George behind Raimondino in the *Presentation to the Virgin* (**Fig.54**). The monochrome congregation of the *Glory* allegories presents a horse seen from the rear as visible in the *Crucifixion*, its rider looking sideways and up in all three images, although the attire is different. Another parallel between the *Glory* allegory in 6069 I and the *Crucifixion* is represented by two bearded figures on the right. One figure is represented frontally but looking sideways at his companion, who is represented in profile (**Figs 98&99**).<sup>15</sup> The young man with a helmet represented frontally but looking up and sideways behind him next to the horse in the *Crucifixion* greatly resembles the youth in the same pose, but this time on a horse, in the forefront of the *Glory* illumination in 6069 I. Finally, the headgear of the figures on the right in 6069 F is the same as some of the headgear in the *Crucifixion*. If the illuminations in these three manuscripts were not realised by Altichiero himself, then they were realised by someone who worked closely with him.<sup>16</sup>

Whether Altichiero portrayed Petrarch from the flesh and discussed with him the planning for the frescoes for Francesco il Vecchio's *Sala virorum illustrium* in the Reggia Carrarese or not,<sup>17</sup> the rhetorical trope of *inventio* used by the poet is also a useful tool to understand Altichiero's method for the selection of his architectural structures and decorations. The artist's fictive architecture could thus be envisaged as a type of visual

---

<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Mardersteig, "I ritratti del Petrarca e dei suoi amici di Padova," *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 17 (1974): 251-280, Tav. XXIV.

<sup>15</sup> These two figures in the Oratory's *Crucifixion* have been interpreted as the portraits of Bonifacio di Rolandino Lupi (Raimondino's brother) and Bonifacio di Ugolotto Lupi (the son of Raimondino's cousin and his executor) in Mardersteig, "I ritratti del Petrarca e dei suoi amici di Padova," 251-280, Tav. XXV.

<sup>16</sup> The *Glory* in 6069 I appears of lesser craftsmanship than the frescoes of the Oratory and the *Glory* in 6069 F. The *Glory* in 6069 I might have been executed by an artist close to Altichiero rather than by Altichiero himself. Richards, *Altichiero*, 125. Gianluigi Colalucci's technical analysis of Altichiero's frescoes in the Oratory highlighted discrepancies of execution, suggesting that the artist availed himself of several collaborators. Any of them may have executed the *Glory* in 6069 I. Gianluigi Colalucci, "La tecnica dell'affresco di Altichiero e l'organizzazione del cantiere," in *Altichiero da Zevio nell'Oratorio di San Giorgio. Il restauro degli affreschi*, ed. Luca Baggio, Gianluigi Colalucci and Daniela Bartoletti (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani and Roma: Edizioni De Luca, 1999), esp. 57-64. Richards suggested that Martino and Jacopo da Verona could have been part of Altichiero's workshop, as well as Altichiero's nephew Antonio. Richards, *Altichiero*, 223.

<sup>17</sup> See note 11.

rhetoric connecting in a multifaceted way the lives of Christ, St George, St Catherine and St Lucy to the architectural identity of the Veneto. This acquires particular relevance when considered in relation to the Lupi and the architecture of Padua and its region discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Altichiero and *Inventio***

*Inventio* is the first of the five traditional parts of rhetorical theory, and describes the process through which the orator finds his arguments.<sup>18</sup> It is fundamental to rhetoric, and yet it was regarded disparagingly by some rhetoricians who viewed it as a means to alter and hide the truth. For Aristotle, it is dialectic that deals with a number of limited, valid true arguments, whilst rhetoric can use any means to persuade the hearer or reader.<sup>19</sup> As such, the world of rhetoric can be completely invented, but cannot be so *ex nihilo*, for it has to have some basis that is recognisable by the hearer or reader.<sup>20</sup> Invention (*heuresis*), therefore, consists of finding common notions, or more literally common places (*koinoi topoi*) around which to build an argument. *Inventio* as rational investigation to find concepts and notions is also one of the meanings of the vernacular term *invenzione*. In his *Convivio*, Dante used it to refer to the research carried out on astronomical matters, whereas Boccaccio adopted it to identify creative ingenuity and imagination.<sup>21</sup>

Altichiero's approach can be read through rhetorical *inventio*, for he created a completely invented world for his narrative, both in the sense of creating something novel and in the sense of finding (*invenio* means 'to find') common recognisable notions. In this case, the common notions are the structures and decorative patterns that the artist selected and borrowed from the urban fabric of the Veneto, quite literally, the architectural *topoi* that the frescoes' viewers would have experienced as they entered the Oratory or as they strolled around Padua, Verona or Venice.

---

<sup>18</sup> The remaining four parts of rhetorical speech are *collocatio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *actio* (delivery) and *memoria* (memory). Cicero, *De partitione oratoria*, ed. H. Rackham (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann Ltd and Harvard University Press, 1948), § 5-25.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Watson, "Invention," in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 391.

<sup>20</sup> Watson, *ibid.*, 392.

<sup>21</sup> "Secondo lo cercamento e la invenzione cha ha fatto l'umana ragione con l'altre sue arti, lo diametro del corpo del sole è cinque volte quanto quello della terra, e anche una mezza volta," Dante, *Convivio*, ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1995), III, viii, 7. "D'altissimo ingegno e di sottile invenzione fu similmente, sì come le sue opere troppo più manifestano [...]," Boccaccio, *Commento alla Divina Commedia e altri scritti intorno a Dante*, ed. Domenico Guerri (Bari: Laterza, 1918), I, 35.

Cicero too insists on the link between invention and *locus*, defining *inventio* as the process through which the orator, finding specific *loci*, runs rapidly over them, chooses the most suitable and speaks in a general way about them.<sup>22</sup> This gives rise to the so-called *loci communes*, Aristotle's *koínoi tópoi*, that can be aptly translated as 'topics'. But Cicero's relationship with the rhetorical *locus* is more than nominal, as he directly compares it to a physical place where things are hidden in *Topica*, II.7: "As it is easy to find hidden things when their place has been identified, thus, when we want to investigate any argument, we must know [its] place."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Cicero envisages an argument and its place as intrinsic to each other, in a way that is not dissimilar from the philosophical understanding of a physical place as intrinsic to, and yet distinct from, the thing that occupies it.<sup>24</sup>

As well as referring to a topic or general theme, when applied to texts and speech *tópos* could also signify a familiar place in a text and the passage that occupies it.<sup>25</sup> Again, the physical place on the page, in the book, merges with its discursive content to the extent that one would not be the same without the other. As the orator scours his *topica* (abstract, general and reusable topics) to build a persuasive argument, and Petrarch applies invention to classical rhetorical tropes to sacralise real specific places, Altichiero selects structures and motifs from real architecture to 'invent' the fictitious and specific architectural places of his narratives.

The importance of place within invention is further reiterated by Cicero's understanding of *locus* as the seat of an argument and as repository of proof. In *De oratore*, the Latin rhetorician stated that *loci* reveal all arguments, illustrate them and define them, identifying them as the abode of rhetorical knowledge and truth.<sup>26</sup> As Walter Watson noted, rhetorical place has "a kind of generative potentiality" that can only be

---

<sup>22</sup> "Faciet igitur hic noster [...] ut, quoniam loci certi traduntur, percurrat omnis, utatur aptis, generatim dicat, ex quo emanant etiam qui communes appellantur loci," Cicero, *Orator*, ed. H.M. Hubbell (London: William Heinemann Ltd. and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), xv.47.

<sup>23</sup> "Ut igitur earum rerum, qui abscondita sunt, demonstrato et notato loco, facilis inventio est, sic, cum pervestigare argumentum aliquod volumus, locus nosse debemus," Cicero, *Divisions de l'art oratoire. Topiques*, ed. Henri Bornecque, 2nd ed. (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1960), II.7. My translation.

<sup>24</sup> The interweaving of place and what it contains is best exemplified by Aristotle's notion of *tópos ídios*. See Chapter One, 45.

<sup>25</sup> Martin W. Bloomer, "Topics," in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 779.

<sup>26</sup> "Itaque licet definire locum esse argumenti sedem," Cicero, *Divisions de l'art oratoire. Topiques, Topica* II, 8. "[...] sedis et quasi domicilia omnium argumentorum commonstret et ea breviter illustret verbisque definiat," Cicero, *De Oratore*, ed. Augustus S. Wilkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), II.162. Wilkins notes that in this instance *sedis* is to be interpreted as *loci*.

fully deployed by the “excogitation of the inventor.”<sup>27</sup> This brings to mind the *thaumastē dúnamis* (“marvellous power”) of place described by Aristotle in his *Physics*, as seen in Chapter One, and showcases the polyvalence and power of rhetorical place.<sup>28</sup> For Altichiero, the finding of the *topica* corresponded to the finding of real, physical architectural *tópoi*, bringing forth their active potential and refashioning them in numerous ornate combinations to create a new and yet recognisable world to entice the viewer. Altichiero’s “excogitation,” supported by experience and wisdom, as Cicero wished,<sup>29</sup> engendered a series of architectural places that, as rhetorical *loci*, and through the six strategies described in Chapter Two, reveal, illustrate and define each *argumentum*, each part of the stories told, which is also one and the same with its *locus*.

As Martin Bloomer pointed out in his entry “Topics” in the *Encyclopaedia of Rhetoric*, Greeks and Romans would have employed the term *tópos* or *locus* to indicate a passage of a speech where the virtue or vice of the subject were amplified by comparing them to some well-known event or figure.<sup>30</sup> This is precisely what Altichiero’s architectural places do: the structural and decorative motifs pervading all frescoes amplify the virtue of the three saints depicted in the Oratory by comparing them to Christ and to each other, and by employing parts of the visual vocabulary of the viewers. The familiarity of the viewers with the architectural motifs employed by Altichiero represents a meeting point between onlookers and narrative. As the rhetorical *locus* was a familiar theme that allowed the audience to better assess the orator’s quality as he handled a well-known topic, it is the architectural common place that gains prominence in the Oratory of St George as a key characteristic of Altichiero’s treatment of the architecture itself and of the narrative. Thus, the strategies deployed by the fictive architecture to directly engage the onlooker, as described in the previous chapter, feed into the notion of rhetorical place as bridging the gap between the frescoes and their viewers.

Perhaps *inventio* is the reason behind the Oratory’s striking fictive architecture, and the justification for its prominence even at the expense of narrative. The painted, architectural *koinós tópos* is the key to reach the viewers, at the same time locating and sacralising the narrative, and distinguishing this cycle from others of the same subject

---

<sup>27</sup> Watson, “Invention,” 391.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Física [Physics]*, ed. Roberto Radice (Milan: Bompiani, 2011), 208b34-35.

<sup>29</sup> “[...] neminem eloquentia, non modo sine dicendi doctrina, sed ne sine omni quidem sapientia florere unquam et praestare potuisse,” Cicero, *De oratore*, II.1, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Bloomer, “Topics,” 781.

matter.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps one of the cycles from which Altichiero and his patrons wanted to specifically differentiate the Oratory is Giotto's famed Scrovegni Chapel, where the architecture is comparatively simple and references to the built architecture of Padua are spare and understated (except for a self-reference in the *Last Judgement*).<sup>32</sup> The individuality of Altichiero's architectural approach will however be better understood by engaging with his remarkable propensity for structural accretion and decorative intricacy. As the rhetorical term *locus* indicated a passage where virtue or vice were amplified, so Altichiero's places amplify the narrative, and can be better interpreted with the aid of the rhetorical tropes of *copia* and *amplificatio*, which for monastic rhetoric were tropes of invention.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Rhetoric of Abundance: *Copia* and *Amplificatio***

The abundance of Altichiero's fictive architecture and the complexity of its structures, as expressed by the six strategies mentioned in the previous chapter, and the intricacy and plethora of decorative detail amplify the narrative's architectural places and magnify their rhetorical power. The structural and decorative abundance of the Oratory's architectural settings evokes the rhetorical precepts of *copia* and *amplificatio*, terms often used by ancient writers to commend stylistic fluency in writing.<sup>34</sup> *Copia* is abundance of expression as a stylistic goal and learning technique, while *amplificatio* is a rhetorical

---

<sup>31</sup> van Eck identified the *koinós tópos*, which she termed "common ground," with composition and linear perspective. Caroline van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 65-73. Nuechterlein discussed rhetorical *loci communes* in relation to the choice of subject matter in Holbein's painting. Jeanne Nuechterlein, *Translating Nature into Art. Holbein, the Reformation and Renaissance Rhetoric* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 68-76.

<sup>32</sup> Benelli emphasised the link between the Palazzo della Ragione and the temple in the *Expulsion of the Merchants*, but the connection between the two is more evident in their architectural detail and function as market place rather than in their overall appearance. The scholar also noted how six architectural details of the Paduan urban fabric might have informed parts of Giotto's fictive buildings. These are: 1) the pediments and lower roof in Giotto's Scrovegni *Annunciation to Anna and Birth of the Virgin*, resembling the roofing solution between the pediments and the domes at the Santo, or the top of the ciborium over the tomb of Antenore (the mythical founder of Padua); 2) the double console brackets supporting the projecting balconies of the structure above the archangel Gabriel and the Virgin in the *Annunciation* resembling the console brackets supporting the sarcophagus of Guido da Lozzo and Constanza d'Este in the cloister of the Capitolo at the Santo; 3) the moulding of the round arch of the city gate in the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* resembling that of the Porta Altinate (I do not see the similarity as much as Benelli does in this instance); 4) the building on the right in the *Massacre of the Innocents* echoing parts of the apse of the Santo; 5) the pilaster and archlets decoration of the temple in the *Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple* recalling the decoration of the Palazzo della Ragione; 6) in the same scene, the almost entirely cut out arches framing a pediment repeating a motif also visible on a sarcophagus in the Santo's cloister of the Capitolo. Francesco Benelli, *The Architecture in Giotto's Paintings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 72-106.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.

<sup>34</sup> Ann Moss, "Copia," in *Encyclopaedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 175.

trope expanding a single idea or statement.<sup>35</sup> Although these descriptions refer to texts, it is not difficult to see parallels with Altichiero's rich and 'expanded' structures, as we shall see.<sup>36</sup>

Amplification had been considered a fundamental trope at least since Aristotle. For him, amplifying the importance of facts was the natural thing to do once these facts have been proven, and amplification (*aúxēsis*) and its counterpart, attenuation (*tapeinōsis*), were regarded as common requirements for any speech over the centuries.<sup>37</sup> Cicero defined it as an "admirable" form of ornament that increases the honour of the speech, even describing it as the highest achievement of eloquence.<sup>38</sup> As such, amplification reveals a great deal of the orator himself. For Quintilian it is ornament that distinguishes the orator, for even those without culture can have *inventio*, and it is for this reason that Cicero identifies amplification as the difference between a merely skilled orator and a truly eloquent one.<sup>39</sup>

The interpretation of *amplificatio* as a reflection of the orator's quality defines Altichiero as a particularly proficient artist rather than a "merely skilled" one. If the aim of the artist and his patrons was to give the Oratory distinction, perhaps in particular by proposing it as a counterpart to the Scrovegni Chapel, Altichiero could not have chosen a better course of action than to apply *inventio* to the real architecture of the Veneto and aggrandise it and particularise it with *amplificatio*. Furthermore, amplification is particularly suited to the subject matter depicted in the frescoes, for this rhetorical trope was traditionally reserved for the praise of already ascertained actions and of people whose character had already been determined.<sup>40</sup> The highly ornate, 'accreted' fictive architecture of the Oratory as a type of visual rhetoric would thus have further

---

<sup>35</sup> Richard Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 42 and 8.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Binski has carried out research on amplification and art in medieval northern Europe. He touched on this rhetorical trope in relation to micro-architecture in his evening lecture for a conference held in Paris in 2014. Paul Binski, "Micro-architecture and Medieval Aesthetics," evening lecture given for the conference *Microarchitecture et figures du bâti: l'échelle à l'épreuve de la matière*, Musée du Moyen Âge-Termes de Cluny, Paris, 8 December 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), *Rhetoric*, 1419b20-21. Lucia Calboli Montefusco, "Stylistic and Argumentative Function of Rhetorical 'Amplificatio,'" *Hermes*, 132, no. 1 (2004): 69.

<sup>38</sup> Cicero, *Orator*, XXXVI, 125. "Summa autem laus eloquentiae est amplificare," Cicero, *De oratore*, II.104.

<sup>39</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. Jean Cousin (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), VIII, 3, 1-5. In Cicero, *De oratore*, I, 94, the truly eloquent (*eloquens*) orator is described as someone who, unlike the merely skilled (*disertus*) orator, "can exalt (*augere*) ever more admirably and more magnificently, and ornament what he wants."

<sup>40</sup> Cf. note 37.



corroborated the indubitability and magnificence of the events portrayed, a corroboration the fictive architecture had already provided in its role of place and prime locator of the narrative.

It is important to point out that architectural *copia* acts as a particulariser of place, inasmuch as it creates memorable locations for the sacred narratives, as we will see shortly. Moreover, since the architectural structures and decorations represent variations of similar patterns in all the frescoes, architectural *copia* also articulates a sense of unity of place that brings together the various geographical locations where all the described events were recorded to have happened. This observation acquires even more relevance if one considers the relationship of the fictive architecture with that of Padua and the Veneto outlined in the previous chapter.

In his *Institutio oratoria*,<sup>41</sup> Quintilian divided *amplificatio* into *incrementum* (growth, increase), *comparatio* (comparison), *ratiocinatio* (reasoning) and *congeries* (accumulation, heap, pile).<sup>42</sup> All these aspects can be observed in the Oratory of St George. *Incrementum*, a most powerful trope that makes even small things seem great,<sup>43</sup> features in almost all the painted scenes, for example in *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.38**), where the bizarre structure on the right presents an alternation of projecting and receding, open and closed units, that are more similar to growths rather than carefully planned, symmetrical additions. The same can be said for the white building in the *Presentation to the Virgin* (**Fig.54**), also characterised by receding and projecting units, balconies jutting out and a

---

<sup>41</sup> Although the complete text of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* was discovered by Poggio Bracciolini in 1416, his work was well-known during the middle ages through partial manuscripts, commentaries and excerpts in other texts, and continued to exert great influence. Between antiquity and the twelfth century, the *Institutio oratoria* was copied, reviewed, excerpted and then incorporated into the important *Ad Herennium* glossing tradition. This chapter uses primarily Book VIII of the *Institutio*, which features in MS51 in Bern, Bürgerbibliothek, from which medieval manuscripts of the *Institutio* derive for the most part. Furthermore, ninth-century manuscript E153 sup. (s.IX) at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan contains all the *Institutio* apart from IX, 4, 135 - XII, 11, 22. John Ward, "Quintilian and the Rhetorical Revolution of the Middle Ages," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 13, no. 3 (1995): 249, 253. Significantly, Ward argued that it was the Renaissance's supposedly more philological approach to Quintilian that "destroyed the homogeneity and unity characteristic of medieval rhetorical theory and practice." Ward, *ibid.*, 250. For a history of manuscripts of Quintilian and the reception of the *Institutio* during the middle ages: Priscilla Boskoff, "Quintilian in the late Middle Ages," *Speculum*, 27 (1952): 71-78; Michael Winterbottom, "The Textual Tradition of Quintilian 10.1.46 f.," *The Classical Quarterly* (1962): 169-175 and Ward, *ibid.*, 250-282. Although she pointed out that Quintilian's work was not available in its entirety before 1416, Mary Carruthers did not engage with the details of what exactly may or may not have been known of the *Institutio*, arguing that this continued to be an influential text throughout the middle ages, even if in the form of digests. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 316, note 35.

<sup>42</sup> "Quattuor tamen maxime generibus video constare amplificationem, incremento, comparatione, ratioconatione, congerie," Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 4, 3.

<sup>43</sup> "Incrementum est potentissimum, cum magna videntur etiam quae inferiora sunt," Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 4, 3.

lateral expansion that turns into a wall pierced by a gabled round arch. It even applies to the building on the left in *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Fig.7**), and the structures filling the upper half of the *Dispute with the Philosophers* (**Fig.77**).

*Comparatio*, which achieves amplification by comparison, is here represented by the use of fictive structures that mirror each other across the walls of the Oratory.<sup>44</sup> Thus, for example, the building in *St George on the Wheel* on the north wall (**Fig.8**), with its projecting wings, is mirrored by the building in the scene it faces on the south wall, *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.50**), where the pale yellow palace presents two receding wings and a projecting central section. Furthermore, the temple in the *Presentation of Jesus* (**Fig.74**) reiterates with a few modifications the same structure of the church in *St Lucy's Funerals* (**Fig.4**). Both structures are in the foreground, the entry demarcated by marble panels, and a wide central round arch gives access to a nave flanked by side aisles. Parallels are also established within the same scene and within the same wall. A bridge supported by a round arch is repeated twice in *St George Slaying the Dragon* (**Fig.51**), and the bridge in the foreground in this same scene in combination with a projecting wall is also repeated in the following scene, the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.5**).<sup>45</sup>

The third subcategory, *ratiocinatio*, indicates a series of arguments or details which when combined together better explain and describe the mental process through which one arrives at a conclusion.<sup>46</sup> Altichiero's settings displays ratiocination in scenes like the *Baptism of King Sevius* or *St Lucy's Funerals*, where the elaborate interior and exterior of the church are represented simultaneously in order to present a more detailed and comprehensive representation of a building as a whole. By displaying interior and exterior at the same time, Altichiero better 'explains' the structure of his buildings, offering us a clearer view of the result as whole. Finally, *congeries*, the multiplication of facts or words,<sup>47</sup> can be seen in the *Presentation of the Lupi Family* (**Fig.63**), where the

---

<sup>44</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 4, 9-15. Edwards has analysed the numerous parallels established by Altichiero in the Oratory, but she has not considered these in relation to the rhetoric of *amplificatio*. Mary Edwards, "Parallelism in the Frescoes in the Oratory of St George in Padua (1379-1384)," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 71 (2008): 53-72.

<sup>45</sup> This short wall coming forward toward the viewer is a favourite device of Altichiero's. As well as appearing in three scenes of the life of St George in the Oratory (Chapter Two, 84-85), it also features in the *Crucifixion* in the Chapel of St James in the Santo, where Altichiero collaborated with Jacopo Avanzi a few years before his project at the Oratory of St George.

<sup>46</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 4, 15-26. Quintilian points out that amplification by *ratiocinatio* can resemble emphasis, but the final effect of emphasis is given by words and that of *ratiocinatio* is given by things. As such, amplification via *ratiocinatio* has more value, for things are steadier than words ("res ipsa verbis est firmior"). *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 4, 26.

<sup>47</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 4, 26-29.

baldachin of the throne of the Virgin displays an accumulation of gables, turrets, pinnacles and arches, or in the *Coronation of the Virgin* (**Fig.46**), where the numerous registers of the throne, marked by different fictive materials, colours, decorative patterns and structures, are piled on top of each other rising towards the *oculus*.

The ideas of *copia* and *amplificatio* as “expanding by means of diversified detail”<sup>48</sup> are exemplified not only in all of the Oratory’s narrative scenes, but also in the frame. The thin bands of fictive marble inlays have patterns on the long walls that differ from those on the short walls, the decoration on the edges of the vault, with its small round cusped arches (**Fig.40**), is as beautiful and intricate as that at the edges of the *Coronation of the Virgin*, but diverges from it nonetheless, and even the window embrasures present varied fictive inlays of different shape and colour hosting diverse figures.

Lanham described with great clarity the working mechanisms of amplification as a technique that invents, expands and particularises an assertion with a multitude of synonyms. This expansion is aimed at convincing the audience, which is thus encouraged to create a new “expanded sense of reality.”<sup>49</sup> If this new reality is convincing, the amplification is naturalised and becomes truthful for the audience. If one substitutes a plethora of synonyms with a plethora of architectural structures and decorative detail, one can see the extent to which *copia* led Altichiero’s imagination towards the creation of disparate realities, different places at different moments in history. This hypothesis seems ever more probable if one agrees with Moss in considering that the lists of synonyms taken from Cicero that circulated in Italy during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were the main means through which students enriched their Latin vocabulary and became familiarised with *copia*.<sup>50</sup>

### **Medieval Rhetoric: Dissemination of the Classics and *Poetria nova***

From the mid-thirteenth century Cicero’s work experienced renewed popularity thanks to various translations into the vernacular, and the consequential redirecting of his principles to a non-learned audience. The first phase of the ‘Ciceronian revival’ began

---

<sup>48</sup> Heinrich F. Plett, “Amplification,” in *Encyclopaedia of Rhetoric*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25.

<sup>49</sup> Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Moss, “Copia,” 175. Moss cites the example of the humanist Gasparino Barzizza (1360-1431), who probably used lists of synonyms he took from Cicero to illustrate the way of speaking Latin like the ancients to his students. Barzizza arrived in Padua in 1408, and we know he taught Cicero there in 1412, too late, therefore, to have any specific bearing on Altichiero’s work. “Barzizza, Gasperino,” *Enciclopedia Italiana* Treccani, 2014, accessed Dec 3, 2014, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gasperino-barzizza\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gasperino-barzizza_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

in Italy with Brunetto Latini's *Rettorica*, a translation into Italian of the *De inventione* (begun in the 1260s and left incomplete) and with Bono Giamboni's *Fiore di rettorica*, an abridged translation of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (also begun in the 1260s), then believed to be Cicero's.<sup>51</sup>

Giles of Rome, instead, focused on Aristotle's work, and wrote a commentary to the Greek philosopher's *Rhetoric* in ca. 1272. Giles was particularly struck by Aristotle's consideration of rhetoric as linked with ethics, and commented that "rhetoric is about those things that are applicable to morals."<sup>52</sup> This meant that rhetoric had a much broader scope than assigned to it by Cicero, who defined it as the art of speaking well on civic affairs. The ethical dimension of rhetoric allowed medieval people to view it as a more encompassing and reliable art in fields other than civic affairs. Brunetto Latini himself, in his Ciceronian translation, had attempted to reconcile the Latin orator's definition of rhetoric with his view that rhetoric could be used for writing and speaking on any topic, and not solely for legal and political matters.

Late-medieval works also existed that did not present themselves as commentaries on the classics and dealt with rhetoric in great detail. The most famous and most widely circulated of these over a long period of time is Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, ca. 1208-1213. The *Poetria* covers all five parts of rhetoric, from invention through to delivery, and its popularity is demonstrated by numerous citations taken from it in the work of a disparate array of writers from many parts of Europe: from rhetoricians to scholars, from writers of treatises on *dictamen* (the art of composing official letters and documents) and prose to poets.<sup>53</sup> Particularly important for the present argument is a small group of commentaries to the *Poetria* written in fourteenth-century Italy, as we shall see later. Geoffrey opened his text with a passage that describes the importance of

---

<sup>51</sup> Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, "Brunetto Latini, *Rettorica*: Introduction," in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric. Language, Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 753. John O. Ward, "The Medieval and Early Renaissance Study of Cicero's *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: Commentaries and Contexts," in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 3-70; and in the same volume Virginia Cox, "Ciceronian Rhetoric in Late Medieval Italy," 109-136.

<sup>52</sup> Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, "Giles of Rome, Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: Introduction," in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 793. Giles of Rome, "Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric. Language, Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1359a22.

<sup>53</sup> Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, "Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, ca. 1208-1213: Introduction," in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 595. Marjorie Curry Woods, "A Medieval Rhetoric Goes to School - and to University: the Commentaries on the *Poetria nova*," *Rhetorica*, 9, no. 1 (1991): 55-65.

planning one's work, of 'inventing' one's subject matter, and he interestingly does so with an architectural metaphor:

If a man has a house to build, his impetuous hand does not rush into action. The measuring line of his mind first lays out the work, and he mentally outlines the successive steps in a definite order. The mind's hand shapes the entire house before the body's hand builds it. Its mode of being is archetypal before it is actual.<sup>54</sup>

Geoffrey's *archetypus* is comparable to the rhetorical *tópos*, and we may therefore interpret it, in Altichiero's frescoes, as the architectural archetype of the Veneto. Although Altichiero might not have been in direct contact with Geoffrey's work, the writer's use of an architectural metaphor demonstrates that the boundaries between literature, architecture and the figurative arts were permeable at the very least on a theoretical level.<sup>55</sup>

The *Poetria* continues with a detailed treatment of amplification, the text itself amplified to demonstrate the rhetorical mode by way of example, followed by an aptly brief treatment of abbreviation as the other key possibilities for the development of a theme, supporting their explanation with a series of examples.<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey lists eight methods for the achievement of amplification: repetition (*interpretatio, expolitio*), periphrasis (*circuitio, circumlocutio*), comparison (*collatio*), apostrophe (*exclamatio*), personification (*prosopopoeia*), digression, description and opposition.<sup>57</sup> These divisions recall those offered by Quintilian, although Geoffrey's are more numerous and detailed and are themselves an example of amplification and repetition.

All of Geoffrey's amplifying methods can be identified in Altichiero's fictive architecture, with the exception of apostrophe, which is represented by the figures rather than the architecture, and opposition.<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey's *interpretatio* and *expolitio* signify repetition by

---

<sup>54</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, ed. Margaret F. Nims (Wetteren: Universa Press, 1967), lines 43-48.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Binski argued that this was the case in medieval France in his article "Working by Words Alone: the Architect, Scholasticism and Rhetoric in Thirteenth-Century France," in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14-51. Mary Carruthers, "The Poet as Master Builder," *New Literary History*, 24, no. 4 (1993): 881-904.

<sup>56</sup> One of these, the Lament for Richard I, was famously cited by Chaucer in his *Nun's Priest's Tale*, VII.3347-54.

<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 219-689.

<sup>58</sup> The apostrophe consists of addressing the reader or hearer with an exclamatory tone. If one excludes the damaged areas where the faces of the figures are now lost (especially in St Catherine's cycle), there are three instances of a figure looking out towards the viewer. The first is an elderly man with white and red headgear standing on the left behind the figure identified as Petrarch in the *Baptism of King Seivus*; the

variation, and can be likened to Quintilian's *incrementum*. This amplifying method is articulated by the presence of numerous accretions jutting out, such as the portico and small balcony of the building on the right in *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Fig.7**), the balcony in the upper left and the projecting section of the building on the right in the *Annunciation*; or the cityscape in the *Presentation at the Temple*, where balconies, porticoes, turrets, domes and pinnacles are almost piled on top of each other (**Fig.74**). Repetition is also evident in the use of decorative patterns like the swallow tail merlons in *St George Destroys the Temple* and in the scene opposite, *St Lucy Dragged by Oxen* (**Fig.37**); or the three-lancet window with interlaced round arches and twisted colonnettes in the top left of *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.52**) and in the top right of *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.50**); or the grey-blue domes in the city view in the *Flight to Egypt* (**Fig.70**), those of the temple in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* (**Figs 53&80**) and those atop the throne of the *Coronation* (**Fig.46**). Interesting variations are also represented in the motif of small arches acting as decorative framing elements for the vault and the *Coronation*. Each of the three sections of the vault is encased by round trefoiled arches with three small corbels (**Fig.40**), whereas the arches framing the *Coronation* are of a different colour and only have trefoils but reiterate the three-sphere corbels.

The second method, *circumlocutio*, consists of hinting at a topic without revealing it immediately, for as Geoffrey advises us one should not “unveil the thing fully but suggest it by hints [...] take a long and winding path around what you were going to say briefly.”<sup>59</sup> The viewer walks along a winding architectural path whichever scene they may gaze upon in the Oratory, for example in the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.5**), where the eye is drawn all around and beyond the central baptismal scene by the pink city gate on the right, the pale yellow portico on the left and the clerestory of the church on top. Geoffrey's advice not to give everything away at once and merely suggest and hint at the crux of the matter is particularly helpful in relation to Altichiero's uninhabitable places, as discussed in the previous chapter. The half open doors, numerous dark apertures and diminutive upper storeys and balconies only hint at the interiors of the painted structures, showing an entry point, a place to inhabit, only to frustrate the viewer's desire for access.

---

second and third are a seraphim and an angel in the *Coronation*. The seraphim looks out and holds his hands joined in prayer, whereas the angel tilts his head and gazes towards us whilst blowing a trumpet.

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 231-233.

Geoffrey's *collatio* is similar to Quintilian's *comparatio*, but the medieval writer points out that one may compare things either explicitly or implicitly, the implicit comparison being "more artistic and more distinguished."<sup>60</sup> An explicit comparison is introduced by one of three key words: 'more,' 'less' or 'equally,' whereas an implicit comparison is introduced "with dissembled mien as if there were no comparison at all" through the adoption of "a new form marvellously engrafted, where the new element fits as securely into the context as if it were born of the theme."<sup>61</sup> It is difficult to say whether the architectural comparisons in the Oratory of St George are explicit or not, for they are not introduced by verbal means, but Geoffrey's description of implicit comparisons as hidden and as new forms fitting securely within the context is in line with Altichiero's reiteration with modifications of the structure acting as temple in the *Presentation of Jesus* (**Fig.74**) and as church in *St Lucy's Funerals* (**Fig.4**), and of the yellow building in *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.50**) complementing the pink structure in front of it in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**). This amplifying means also extends beyond the walls of the Oratory through the numerous references Altichiero makes to the architecture of the Veneto, particularly in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* (**Figs 80&81**), where the comparison of the temple with the Santo articulates an evident *collatio* with the Paduan urban fabric.

The connection with the architectural identity of Padua also ties to Geoffrey's *prosopopoeia*, or personification. This trope consists of personifying an object and giving it a voice as if it were a person, as Geoffrey does, by way of example, by presenting a speech of the personified holy cross.<sup>62</sup> Reading *prosopopoeia* into Altichiero's frescoes for the Oratory of St George is more difficult than reading any of the other amplification methods presented by Geoffrey, but if one agrees in recognising numerous aspects of the built architecture of the Veneto in these fictive structures, as expounded in Chapter Two, then it could be argued that Altichiero's settings embody the architectural landscape of his region, albeit in a hybrid way; the Oratory's fictive buildings personify the architectural identity of the Veneto, amplifying and concretising regional identity by locating within them the lives of Christ, St George, St Lucy and St Catherine.

The *Poetria nova* also lists digression as a means to achieve amplification, advising us to "go outside the bounds of the subject and withdraw from it a little."<sup>63</sup> Forms of

---

<sup>60</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 262-262.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 248-253.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 469-507.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 528-529.

digression can be observed in Altichiero's frescoes in *St George Slaying the Dragon* (**Fig.51**), where the city walls and the buildings visible within them draw the eye away from the foreground where the saint is slaying the dragon in front of the frightened princess. The background bridge echoing the foreground one, also an example of repetition, leads the eye to the wall towers with machicolation and to a rich cityscape painted with great attention to detail, so much so that one of the towers of the background city gate is much shorter and narrower than the other to allow us to see the gable of a church façade with a rose window.

Another example of fictive architecture digressing from the main narrative event is the setting for *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.38**). The structure on the right occupies the majority of the scene, and its numerous accretions projecting sideways (the stairs where Maxentius stands) and forwards (the section on the far right with projecting balcony), its marble panelling and perforations (perforated balustrade and arches) attract the viewer's attention more than the figure of the saint on the wheel. Geoffrey points out that digression is a technique that demands restraint, for one should not digress so much from the main subject that it would then be too difficult to return to it. Altichiero achieves this by splaying the two sets of structures in *St Catherine on the Wheel* and joining them with a wall behind St Catherine. The architectural setting thus creates a v shape leading towards the saint, and the wall acts as a barrier that allows the eye to focus on the figure of Catherine whilst at the same time pointing out the developments of both structures acting as digressions even beyond the wall itself.

The final amplifying method that Geoffrey lists and that can be read in Altichiero's frescoes for the Oratory is description. Description enriches the "long and winding path" of *circumlocutio*, for one should also let the path "be wise, let it be both lengthy and lovely."<sup>64</sup> Lengthy and lovely description can be read in Altichiero's intricate decorations reproducing precious materials, as for example in the *Coronation* (**Figs 46&67**). The arms of the throne lead the eye up through a congeries of marble panels, window-like apertures with tracery, shell shapes, gables with a rose window and floral decorations, pinnacles and blue-domed turrets at the back. The delicacy of the decorative patterns and the alternation of white, pale yellow and pink confer onto the throne a jewel-like quality that reveals Altichiero's fondness for 'descriptive' architectural detail.

---

<sup>64</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 555-556.



Altichiero's architectural ornament is a crucial component of amplification. In Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* ornament and amplification are discussed in the same book, for they are inextricably intertwined. The Latin author recommended the use of ornament to persuade a wide audience by seeking to give them pleasure, particularly in epideictic rhetoric.<sup>65</sup> This is the kind of rhetoric devoted to the praise and glory of the subject, where there is nothing left to prove for all that is described is certainty. If one were to ascribe a genre to Altichiero's frescoes, where the admirable deeds of three saints and the holy life of Christ are described, it would be the epideictic. This reflects one of the uses of the verb 'to amplify' in the vernacular Italian, where it is often adopted to signify an increase in power, fame and prestige.<sup>66</sup> Architectural ornament in the Oratory's frescoes is abundant in all depicted scenes, from capitals to console brackets, from pinnacles to painted external wall surfaces (as in *St George Destroys the Temple* (**Fig.82**), and *St Lucy's Trials*, (**Fig.50**), but it is particularly detailed in the fictive frame patterns, crenellation, tracery and blind or perforated arches of balustrades.

As seen in the previous chapter, the fictive frame presents intricate and varied geometric patterns encasing the scenes, but other, more architectural elements are used in the frame around the vault, where series of cusped round arches with a three-sphere corbel articulate the three sections of the ceiling, the *Coronation* lunette (**Fig.46**), whose arch is decorated by white, cusped trefoil arches with a three-sphere corbel and a sphere on each cusp, and the *oculi*, whose inner circle is painted with interlacing, cusped round arches with a three-leaf motif and also with a three-sphere corbel (**Fig.100**). The crenellation is particularly detailed on the background buildings in the *Presentation at the Temple* (**Fig.74**) and *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.66**), where small piers with a pointed roof with three spheres are alternated to sets of two cusped round arches with a crocketed, slightly concave gable where a lozenge decorated with a quatrefoil is inscribed. This motif is also present in the crenellation on the building in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.65**), although here it is complemented by a second and more elaborate kind of crenellation, where the small piers present a base and two registers, the upper one occupied by a minuscule niche. The round arches now have capitals, and they are surmounted by an ogee arch

---

<sup>65</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 3, 2-5 and 11-12.

<sup>66</sup> The entry 'ampliare' of Salvatore Battaglia's dictionary lists, among others, Boccaccio ("I sommi imperadori ed i grandissimi re non hanno quasi con altra arte che d'uccidere [...] e ardere paesi e abbattere città, li loro regni ampliati, e per conseguente la fama loro;") "per ampliare le nostre ricchezze e il mondano onore;") "ampliasi la loro fama"); Matteo Villani ("[i popoli] per cupidigia d'ampliare signoria"); and Filippo Villani ("e ampliando le laudi di Teodosio"). Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1961), I, 432.

with crockets and four roundels. This elaborate crenellation is also visible, with modifications, on the building in *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.64**).

Window tracery is especially intricate in *St George Drinks Poison* and *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.66**), where a three-lancet window with twisted colonnettes presents a tracery of cusped, interlacing round arches (like those in the *oculi*) supporting two roundels with quatrefoils, each of the interstitial areas decorated by a trefoil; or in *St Lucy before Paschasius* (**Fig.62**), where four kinds of tracery are displayed, the one on the top right reiterating the window above the saint in *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.79**) and recalling the central crenellation in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.65**). Balustrades are particularly ornate in the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Figs 5&73**) and *St Lucy before Paschasius* (**Fig.62**), where they are articulated by a series of cusped ogee arches supported by slender piers, the area between each arch embellished by a little flower. This arrangement is also visible in the upper register of the temple in the *Presentation of Jesus* (**Figs 74&75**) and in the blind arches in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**), although here the piers are substituted by pairs of slender colonnettes. The balustrade in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* (**Fig.53**) also presents pairs of colonnettes, but they support trefoil arches like the blind ones above the machicolation of the main gate in the *Slaying of the Dragon* (**Fig.51**).

The decorative details described are but a fraction of the numerous kinds and different combinations of ornament that characterise the frescoes of the Oratory of St George. The more one looks, the more details and pattern variations one finds. They are so many and so beautiful that searching for and finding them in their various declensions becomes for the viewer a delightful architectural quest around the Oratory, from one scene to the next, from one wall to the other. Such *copia* of delicate, intricate ornament might have been greatly disapproved of by Quintilian, for whom ornament must be *virilis, fortis et sanctus* and always used in moderation, but it might have pleased Geoffrey of Vinsauf, whose discussion of ornament follows that on amplification and abbreviation.<sup>67</sup>

Geoffrey treats ornament in great detail, dividing his discussion into five sections and subdividing it into multiple means accompanied by examples to achieve an ornate composition. The numerous tropes indicated by Geoffrey in this extensive treatment of ornament, amplified even more than the treatment of amplification itself, highlight both

---

<sup>67</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 3, 7.

the inextricable link between amplification and ornament, and the importance of variation. This is made especially clear by Geoffrey when he treats *expolitio*, the seventh figure of thought discussed as part of his second section on “easy ornament” (also a trope of *amplificatio*):

By turning a subject over repeatedly and varying the figure, I seem to be saying a number of things whereas I am actually dwelling on one thing, in order to give it a finer polish and impart a smooth finish by repeated applications of the file, one might say. This is done in two ways: either by saying the same thing with variations, or by elaborating upon the same thing.<sup>68</sup>

This passage, emphasising repetition, elaboration and variation could easily have been part of Geoffrey’s treatment of *amplificatio*. As seen above, Altichiero too “says the same thing” with variations, as demonstrated by the series of cusped arches with three-sphere corbels used as framing devices in the vault and the *Coronation* (**Figs 40&46**), but changing their colour (reddish-brown in the vault, white in the *Coronation*) and the shape of the arch (round in the vault, trefoil in the *Coronation*). His interest in ornamental variety is perhaps especially evident in *St Lucy before Paschasius* (**Fig.62**), where four different kinds of windows and two different types of panelling (coloured marble and carved roundels) adorn the same building.

The late medieval love of *varietas* feeds into what Mary Carruthers termed “polyfocal perspective,” that is the enjoyment of a literary, artistic or architectural work from a variety of points of view.<sup>69</sup> These numerous points of view are given by the diversity and splendour of the ornament that cannot be taken in at a single glance, as is the case with Altichiero’s profusion of beautifully coloured, intricate ornament and architectural *amplificatio*, sending the viewer from one side of the Oratory to the other and back again to compare, for example, the projecting and receding sections of the buildings in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**) and *St Lucy’s Trials* (**Fig.50**), or the upper register of the façade with niche and statue of the pagan temple in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* (**Fig.53**) and in *St Lucy’s Funerals* (**Fig.4**). Polyfocal perspective also applies to the perspectival representation of the architectural settings, as exemplified by the splayed buildings discussed in the previous chapter eluding a ‘correct’, single viewpoint perspective.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 1244-1251.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 151-155.

<sup>70</sup> Polyfocal perspective is also at play in the organisation of the narrative in scenes like *St George on the Wheel*, where two other episodes are illustrated at either side of the central one, requiring the viewers to look more attentively at the scene as a whole and then shift their gaze from one episode to the other.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* was the basic textbook of rhetorical composition for three centuries after it was written, and it was taught at different levels, both in schools and universities.<sup>71</sup> It engendered numerous commentaries all over Europe, two of which were written in Italy at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The first is the commentary of Guizzardo of Bologna, a *trivium* scholar (*trivialium doctor*) who taught at Bologna from 1289 to 1319, and the second is that of Pace da Ferrara, who was a professor of grammar and logic at the University of Padua in the early fourteenth century.<sup>72</sup> Pace's is the longest commentary of the two, dwelling on the *Poetria* phrase by phrase, occasionally word by word, but both Pace's and Guizzardo's texts combine the attention for textual concerns that was typical of school education, with a more sophisticated emphasis on rhetorical theory that was typical of University teaching.<sup>73</sup> This indicates that the *Poetria* circulated at several levels in Italy too, and that rhetoric was a primary educational concern in Padua, both at school and at university.

### **Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Padua**

Rhetorical teaching permeated the Paduan social fabric in four major ways. Firstly through the Biblioteca Antoniana's acquisition of books for the instruction of the friars, secondly through the writing and the performance of sermons (especially after preaching was established as a crucial clerical duty in 1215) and secular public speaking. Thirdly, rhetoric was taught at the University, which provided the highest degree of rhetorical teaching, and finally through private grammar and rhetoric schools, the first stepping stone towards an education that was not necessarily completed at University by all pupils.

#### 1. The Biblioteca Antoniana

The first document that describes the existence of a book collection at the Santo dates from 1237.<sup>74</sup> Since its origins in the early thirteenth century, the library of the Franciscan convent was affiliated to the theological school of St Anthony, the first

---

Already in 1965 Mellini used the words "prospettiva plurifocale" in connection with Altichiero, but did not expand upon this formulation. Gian Lorenzo Mellini, *Altichiero e Jacopo Avanzi* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1965), 61.

<sup>71</sup> Marjorie Curry Woods, "A Medieval Rhetoric Goes to School," 55-56.

<sup>72</sup> Curry Woods, *ibid.*, 61. Pace's commentary is addressed to a certain Simon, who has been tentatively identified with Simone della Tela, another scholar in the liberal arts at Padua, who appears in a 1328 document.

<sup>73</sup> Curry Woods, *ibid.* 63.

<sup>74</sup> Nicoletta Giovè Marchioli, "Circolazione libraria e cultura francescana nella Padova del Due e Trecento," in *Predicazione e società nel Medioevo: riflessione etica, valori e modelli di comportamento*, ed. Laura Gaffuri and Riccardo Quinto (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani, 2002), 138.

Franciscan who taught theology with the authorisation of St Francis himself.<sup>75</sup> From 1291, when a scriptorium was established for the transcription of texts necessary to the friars, the collection expanded, and an inventory of 1396-97 lists theological, patristic, exegetical and philosophical texts as well as works by Franciscan writers such as Bonaventure.<sup>76</sup> Although the collection was not rich in classical texts, we know that it held copies of various works by Cicero and by Aristotle. Knowledge of the Greek philosopher's thought was considered, as elsewhere, paramount.<sup>77</sup>

## 2. Preaching and Secular Public Orations

The inventory of 1396-97 reveals that at least until the end of the fourteenth century the Antoniana library favoured a kind of teaching that promoted pastoral ability and theological knowledge.<sup>78</sup> This appears to be a direct response to the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council, which stated that all priests were to increase the pastoral care they provided for their parishioners. This included delivering regular sermons, which were compiled using formal classical rhetorical techniques.<sup>79</sup> Thus, priests applied Aristotelian and Ciceronian invention to Biblical material, and adapted it to the vernacular. The art of preaching was codified in the form of *reportationes*, the systematic writing of specific sermons and formulae the preacher could turn to, to compose his sermons, and works designed to help the priest carry out his duty, known as *Pastoralia*, developed.<sup>80</sup>

In Padua, and for Franciscans in general, St Anthony represented a fundamental example as the first preacher who organised and applied rhetorical techniques to sermons within the Franciscan framework.<sup>81</sup> It is during St Anthony's time, at the

---

<sup>75</sup> Carlo Delcorno, "La retorica dei *Sermones* di Antonio da Padova," in *Congresso Internacional Pensamento e Testemunho. 8º Centenário do Nascimento de Santo António. Actas* (Braga: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Família Franciscana Portuguesa, 1996), 246.

<sup>76</sup> Giovè Marchioli, "Circolazione libraria e cultura francescana," 139.

<sup>77</sup> Giovè Marchioli, *ibid.*, 141; Antonino Poppi, "Per una storia della cultura nel convento del Santo dal XIII al XIX secolo," *Quaderni per la storia dell'università di Padova*, 3 (1970): 7. Poppi pointed out that the Paduan emphasis on a vast and detailed knowledge of Aristotle's thought derived from the influence that Duns Scotus' work exerted on Paduan scholars. Although critical of the Greek philosopher, Scotus greatly promoted knowledge of his texts. For the circulation of the classics on rhetoric in the middle ages: Michael D. Reeve, "The Circulation of Classical Works on Rhetoric from the 12th to the 14th Century," in *Retorica e poetica tra i secoli XII e XIV*, ed. Carlo Leonardi and Enrico Menestò (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1988), 109-124.

<sup>78</sup> Giovè Marchioli, "Circolazione libraria e cultura francescana," 139.

<sup>79</sup> Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Introduction: Place, Space and the Body within Anchoritic Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>80</sup> Herbert McAvoy, 'Introduction,' 5. Cate Gunn, "Private Meditations and Public Discourse: Ancrene Wisse and Sermon Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 67.

<sup>81</sup> Delcorno, "La retorica dei *Sermones* di Antonio da Padova," 246.

beginning of the thirteenth century, that the first accurate descriptions of contemporary rhetorical techniques appear, prescribing the division and subdivision of a sermon around a single verse of the Scriptures, a *thema*. However, the arrangement of St Anthony's sermons is not particularly indebted to the symmetrical distribution of topic around a *thema*, rather, it is rich in *clausulae*, detailed titles and subtitles, similes, juxtapositions between Old and New Testaments, etymological explanations, and long evangelical pericopes divided into numerous sections.<sup>82</sup> This ornate treatment of the Scriptures articulates a *dilatatio*, or *amplificatio* of the material, rich in comparisons and concordances between Old and New Testament.<sup>83</sup>

St Anthony's frequent use of *clausulae*, detailed titles and subtitles is mirrored in Altichiero's frescoes by the multitude of architectural structures and architectural detail, repeated exactly or slightly varied, surrounding the figures. One could say that the structures as a whole, such as the building in *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.52**), act as titles, whilst the marble panels, intricate merlons and window tracery function as subtitles particularising the narrative's setting. Besides, the *dilatatio* of St Anthony's sermons brings a further layer of meaning to the splaying of buildings seen in the previous chapter. The splayed throne of the *Coronation* (**Fig.46**), for example, is a form of dilation both literally (because it is splayed, dilated) and figuratively, in the sense that the dilation of its arms amplifies the narrative by allowing us to see more architectural detail. Comparisons and concordances are also present in Altichiero's frescoes as they are in St Anthony's sermons. An analysis of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *collatio* has shown how numerous parallels can be drawn across the Oratory, for example between the temple in the *Presentation* (**Fig.74**) and the church in *St Lucy's Funeral* (**Fig.4**), both articulating a similar structure; or the buildings in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**) and in *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.50**), complementing each other's receding and projecting sections. As already seen, architectural detail also plays an important part in the articulation of correspondences across the Oratory's walls. Yet another example is the use of white rustication on the left in the *Annunciation* (**Fig.30**) and in *St Catherine's Martyrdom* (**Fig.48**), or the use of the same merlons in the cityscape of the *Presentation at the Temple* (**Fig.74**), and on the pale yellow building in *St Lucy's Trials* (**Figs 50&66**).

---

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-255.

<sup>83</sup> Folena aptly described the style of St Anthony in the *Sermones* as "fiorito e mellifluo," observing how the saint often included rarely used polysyllabic nouns, like *populositas* and *gelicidium cupiditatis*, and ample *clausulae*. Gianfranco Folena, *Culture e lingue nel Veneto medievale* (Padua: Editoriale Programma, 1990), 168-169.

It might seem a stretch to compare Altichiero's frescoes so closely with sermons written well over a hundred years earlier. Perhaps saying that Altichiero's frescoes are like visual sermons means to grossly conflate the verbal and visual nature of sermons and frescoes, and to disregard their differing audiences.<sup>84</sup> However, as Mary Carruthers pointed out, all arts in the middle ages, from literature to music, from the figurative arts to architecture, were conceived and experienced on the basis of ancient rhetoric.<sup>85</sup> Besides, as observed by Ruth Morse, amplification is one of the most distinctive features of medieval literature as a whole, and, with time, the rhetorical techniques used by St Anthony as well as others breached the clerical boundaries, allowing the more literate laity to eventually appropriate them.<sup>86</sup> Examples of secular public speaking in late medieval Italy are offered by the advice books for the podestà, which furnished rudimentary guidance on public speaking accompanied by model orations, and by treatises on the *ars concionandi* or *arengandi*. These *artes* were less known and less systematically treated than the *ars predicandi*, *dictaminis* or *poetica*, but they evolved over time from practice and from the example of the *ars dictaminis* and *predicandi*.<sup>87</sup>

The *ars concionandi* taught citizens how to respond to and petition officials, and addressed a great variety of speakers and speech situations.<sup>88</sup> The growing power of central and northern Italian city states like Padua encouraged the development of bureaucracy and an increase in the production of administrative documentation, as well as requiring more and more kinds of people to write documents and give speeches, from judicial officials to citizens speaking in their council and from executives of communal chanceries to ambassadors.<sup>89</sup> In his *Parlamenti ed epistole* (c. 1240), Guido Fava has a podestà say that "it is the custom of ambassadors and noble men to speak ornately and say beautiful words so that they may obtain great prestige and reputation."<sup>90</sup> This

---

<sup>84</sup> Sermons were aimed at the whole congregation, whilst it is difficult to establish who had access to the Oratory of St George apart from the Lupi family, the priests celebrating mass and perhaps the Carrara.

<sup>85</sup> Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages. Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63. Herbert McAvoy, "Introduction," 5. For a discussion of the interactions between image-making and preaching: Lina Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini. Predicazione in volgare dalle origini a Bernardino da Siena* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 2002). For a brief but thorough discussion of preaching in Italy: Carlo Delcorno, "Medieval Preaching in Italy (1200-1500)," in *The Sermon*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 449-560.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen J. Milner, "Communication, Consensus and Conflict: Rhetorical Precepts, the *Ars Concionandi*, and Social Ordering in Late Medieval Italy," in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 381.

<sup>88</sup> Milner, "Communication, Consensus and Conflict," 381-383.

<sup>89</sup> Milner, "Communication, Consensus and Conflict," 369, 373.

<sup>90</sup> "Costume scia de ambaxature et de gentili homini favelare ornata mente, e dire belleçe de parole a zò ch' ey possano atrovare grande presio e nomo pretioso," Guido Fava quoted in Milner, "Communication, Consensus and Conflict," 375.

sentence shows both how important good public speaking was to increase one's prestige and how crucial ornament was for this purpose.

In spite of its growing popularity, the *ars concionandi* was held in low esteem by those whose profession was dominated by Latin, such as teachers in ecclesiastical schools and at University. Boncompagno da Signa, teacher of rhetoric at Bologna from the 1190s to perhaps the 1230s, referred to the *ars concionandi* as a *plebeia doctrina*, but in the Trecento the speech structure used in preaching as well as in vernacular *reportationes*, where a theme is identified, split into sections, analysed through *distinctiones* and then amplified, was adopted even by Petrarch when addressing a wider public - although he still used Latin.<sup>91</sup> The poet's oration to Galeazzo Visconti and the Novaresi in 1356 identifies as its *thema* a line from Psalm 72.10, *convertetur populus meus hic* ("here my people are converted"), which the poet divides in two parts: "for the sake of brevity I will divide [this line] in two parts only, of which the first addresses laudable correction [praiseworthy conversion], that is *convertetur*. The second [part] describes the delightful sense of belonging expressed in *populus meus hic*."<sup>92</sup> The second distinction is then itself divided into *populus*, *meus* and *hic*, each treated separately in great detail and amplified through examples. Such a scrupulous word-for-word analysis, in contrast with the *studio brevitatis* professed at the beginning, shows how rhetorical schemes adopted for the *ars predicandi* were also applied to the *ars concionandi*, even when the orator was a humanist of Petrarch's calibre.

### 3. The University

As well as preaching and secular public speaking, a major Paduan institution that contributed to the dissemination of rhetorical principles was the University, or the *Studium*. Although the Paduan University did not receive papal recognition until Urban V's 1363 bull declared the establishment of a faculty of theology in the city, scholarly teaching had taken place there since the early thirteenth century.<sup>93</sup> Especially after the tyrant Ezzelino Romano was defeated in 1256 and the *Studium* was reinstated, the

---

<sup>91</sup> Boncompagno da Signa dedicated a section of his *Rhetorica novissima* to public speaking and ridiculed its practitioners' reliance on custom rather than on Latin learning. Milner, "Communication, Consensus and Conflict," 375, 393.

<sup>92</sup> "[...] studio brevitatis in duas tantum partes divido. Quarum prima continet actum correctionis laudabilis, quia 'convertetur'. Secunda continet pactum possessionis amabilis, quia 'populus meus hic'." Petrarch, *Arenga in civitate Novariae*, ed. Carlo Negrone (Novara: Fratelli Miglio, 1876), 18. My translation.

<sup>93</sup> Antonino Poppi, "Per una storia della cultura nel convento del Santo," 6.



University focused its efforts on the liberal arts, and within these it favoured the *trivium*: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic.<sup>94</sup>

The University was fundamental to the prestige of Padua during the dominion of the Carrara. In the 1318 document where the Maggiore Consiglio transfers its powers to the Carrara, a specific reference to the University is made stating that it should fall under the *paterna providentia* of Giacomo I da Carrara.<sup>95</sup> The signori did not disappoint, and not only continued applying and overseeing all the provisions in favour of the University that it had inherited from the commune, but it also actively participated in the appointment of posts, calling foreign scholars to increase the prestige of the Paduan *Studium*.<sup>96</sup> The Carrara's involvement with the appointment of teaching posts, which Gallo aptly termed "politica delle cattedre," testifies to the signori's will to control the cultural life of their city, as also exemplified by the appointment of Petrarch as canon at the Paduan cathedral at the request of Iacopo II da Carrara.<sup>97</sup> Given the signori's keen interest in the life of the University, it is tempting to identify Altichiero's engagement with rhetoric, and in particular with *amplificatio*, as a reference to the rhetorical teachings of the University and as indirect praise of the Carrara.

It is not unlikely that Raimondino and Bonifacio Lupi might have wanted to include in the frescoes a nod to their powerful Paduan hosts. Although the coats of arms in the fictive frame of the Oratory are only those of the Lupi, two figures dressed in black stand out in the bottom right corner in *St Lucy before Paschasius* (**Fig.62**), and have been identified by Mardersteig as Francesco il Vecchio and Francesco Novello da Carrara.<sup>98</sup> One can read another reference to the Carrara reinforcing Mardersteig's hypothesis in the scene immediately following *St Lucy before Paschasius*, where several pairs of oxen fail to drag the saint to a brothel. The Carrara coat of arms was a red cart on a white background, an agricultural tool often dragged by oxen. The ox as symbol of the Carrara and by extension of Padua was also used in the illumination attributed to Altichiero in Petrarch's *Compendium virorum illustrium* (1380), where a fight between an ox

---

<sup>94</sup> Luciano Gargan, "Scuole di grammatica e Università a Padova tra medioevo e umanesimo," *Quaderni per la storia dell'università di Padova*, 33 (2000): 11. Courses on rhetoric often included moral philosophy in the early stages of the notarial or legal syllabus. Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 212. Paola Benussi, "L'età medievale," in *I collegi per studenti dell'Università di Padova*, ed. Piero Del Negro (Padua: Signo editrice, 2003), 49-96.

<sup>95</sup> Donato Gallo, *Università e signoria a Padova dal XIV al XV secolo* (Trieste: Edizioni Lint, 1998), 23. Collodo, "Ordine politico e civiltà cittadina a Padova nel Trecento," 312.

<sup>96</sup> Gallo, *Università e Signoria a Padova*, 22.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. note 1.

<sup>98</sup> Mardersteig, "I ritratti del Petrarca e dei suoi amici di Padova," tav. XVI.

and a lion represents the war of Chioggia between Padua and Venice (**Fig.93**). The two figures and the oxen frescoed next to them testify to the Lupi's will to associate themselves with the Carrara, strengthening already existing family ties.<sup>99</sup> In spite of this, amplification, however important a feature for medieval rhetoric, does not seem to have any specific connection with the Paduan ruling family.

The elucidation of the link between the Carrara and rhetoric is made harder by the difficulty in ascertaining who actually held the *cathedra* of rhetoric at the University in the fourteenth century. Even though the *Studium* was the highest expression of rhetorical teaching in Padua, there were numerous private schools and numerous teachers of rhetoric, and it is not always clear who occupied what post. Some *professores* or *doctores grammaticae* taught at both the University and at private schools, but not all.<sup>100</sup> However, the figure of Pietro da Moglio might be useful for the present analysis. Pietro was one of the rhetoricians who certainly held the *cathedra* at Padua, where he arrived in 1362 and remained until 1368 under the aegis of Francesco il Vecchio da Carrara.<sup>101</sup> Pietro was the author of a commentary on the *Poetria nova*, today held at the Biblioteca Durazzo in Genoa, and he taught courses on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De inventione*.<sup>102</sup> His commentary on the *Poetria* and his courses on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Cicero demonstrate how crucial these texts were for rhetorical teaching in Padua, and Pietro's presence in the city under the invitation and protection of Francesco il Vecchio testifies to the Carrara's more than active involvement, not only with the University in general, but also with the teaching of rhetoric in particular.

#### 4. Private Schools of Grammar and Rhetoric

Many of the private schools where University *professores* also taught may have been monitored by the *Studium* itself. The first goal of these schools was literacy, then the students were taught Latin grammar and were expected to be familiar with several

---

<sup>99</sup> Bonifacio's maternal grandmother was Donella di Pietro da Carrara. "Bonifacio Lupi," *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, 2006, accessed Mar 4, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bonifacio-lupi\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bonifacio-lupi_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

<sup>100</sup> Gargan, "Scuole di grammatica," 10.

<sup>101</sup> Gargan, "Scuole di grammatica," 14. "Pietro da Moglio," *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, 2015, accessed Jan 16, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-da-moglio\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-da-moglio_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

<sup>102</sup> "Pietro da Moglio," *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, 2015. Although he lived too late to have any bearing on Altichiero's work at the Oratory of St George, Guarino da Verona (1374-1460) is another figure demonstrating the interest in Cicero's rhetorical works (and those thought to be Cicero's) in the Veneto in the late fourteenth century. A student at Padua under the guidance of Giovanni Conversini da Ravenna (chancellor for the Carrara between 1379 and 1382, and again between 1393 and 1404), Guarino wrote a commentary to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and taught Greek in Venice and Verona. "Guarino Veronese," *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, 1933, accessed Mar 11, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/guarino-veronese\\_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/guarino-veronese_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)).

texts.<sup>103</sup> Once a good knowledge of Latin grammar was reached, the education was generally considered complete, but the teachers could hold extra classes where classics such as Cicero were read and where the students were introduced to rhetorical theory.<sup>104</sup> The private grammar and rhetoric school were thus the first milieu where young students would have been introduced to the classics and to works like Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*.

The most interesting aspect of these private Paduan schools was that they taught grammar and rhetoric to anyone who was willing to learn Latin to make use of it in his profession. The schools were mainly targeted by those who meant to gain a degree in law, medicine or the liberal arts, but anyone who had enough money to pay the teacher could have access to them.<sup>105</sup> This is not to say that Bonifacio and Raimondino Lupi, or even Altichiero himself, were necessarily instructed at any of these schools, rather to outline the centrality of rhetorical teaching to late medieval culture and its relative accessibility in Padua through three gateways, the private schools, the University and preaching.

In summary, from the thirteenth century onwards, works on rhetoric from Antiquity were translated into the vernacular and glossed, which made them more accessible for a wider public. Moreover, an effort was made to reconcile the ideas of rhetoric and ethics, and to fashion rhetoric into an encompassing art that could be used in any circumstance. This made possible a more conscious application of rhetorical principles in fields other than law or politics. The use of rhetoric in preaching paved the way for its employment in other forms of art pertaining to the religious sphere, such as Altichiero's cycle for the Oratory of St George. Thanks to medieval treatises on rhetoric like the *Poetria Nova*, the status of amplification was raised even higher than it was in the minds of Cicero and Quintilian, by defining it as one of only two key developments of any topic. Finally, the numerous commentaries of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's work testify to the great

---

<sup>103</sup> Gargan, "Scuole di grammatica," 1-16. Black, *Humanism and Education*, 86. Elementary school pupils were taught how to read and write, they were introduced to the psalter, and then to *Ianua*, a treatise on *ars grammatica* spuriously attributed to Aelius Donatus ("Legere la tavola, il salterio e il donatello"). Black, *Humanism and Education*, 34-63.

<sup>104</sup> We know some of the names of the rhetoricians who taught at private schools in Padua during the late fourteenth century, for example Carletto Galmarelli, Anastasio Ghezzi da Ravenna, Lazzaro Malrotondi da Conegliano, Egidio da Siena. Gargan, "Scuole di grammatica," 15. These names demonstrate the extent to which Padua attracted rhetoricians from various parts of Italy. For a general view on the curriculum of rhetorical school teaching: Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, "Part 4: Pedagogies of Grammar and Rhetoric, ca. 1150-1280. Introduction," in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 544-550.

<sup>105</sup> Gargan, "Scuole di grammatica," 25.

popularity of the *Poetria*, which was widely circulated and taught in the Paduan schools and *Studium*, where the teaching of rhetoric was considered central to any kind of education.

### **The *Ars memoriae* and Altichiero's Frescoes**

It is important at this point to note that *copia* can demean as well as elevate an argument, as Quintilian remarked.<sup>106</sup> At the positive end of the spectrum, *copia* can create a new, expanded reality,<sup>107</sup> and the magnificent buildings Altichiero created for the Oratory are an integral part of the new beautifully detailed, townscape reality that hosts the lives and deaths of Christ and of saintly figures of noble birth like St George, St Catherine and St Lucy. In spite of this, one cannot but wonder whether it really was the narratives that were meant as the focal point of the frescoed decoration of the Oratory. Although his figures are beautifully drawn and his composition is lively without being confused (except perhaps in *St Catherine on the Wheel*), it is Altichiero's architectural settings that captivate the viewer's imagination. This may be related to another issue, closely connected to rhetoric, that acted as a means for and purpose of the Oratory's frescoes: the *ars memoriae*.

#### 1. *Memoria* as *Inventio* and Meditation

The importance of mnemonic teaching, institutionalised since Antiquity, is demonstrated by Quintilian's statement that "every discipline consists of memory."<sup>108</sup> Such an encompassing understanding of memory also applies to the middle ages, for, as Mary Carruthers explained, the art of memory was not solely used for rote repetition or recollection, rather, all forms of learning came under the umbrella of memory.<sup>109</sup> *Memoria* was the basis for all kinds of knowledge, and the various *artes memoriae* that were devised in the late middle ages established as their purpose that of recollecting schemes, words and images aimed at *inventio*.<sup>110</sup> Thus, the nature of *memoria* is heuristic, since it acts as the primary tool to find (*invenire*) material to elaborate upon. But as well as being an aid for 'finding' topics, *memoria* is a *tópos* itself, a "*camera argumentorum*," a repository of

---

<sup>106</sup> Whilst discussing amplification by *ratio*, Quintilian stated how one may deliberately minimise an event to amplify what follows. *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 4, 19. Use of too much ornament (*caozelon*) can also be interpreted as demeaning the quality of the oration. *Institutio oratoria*, VIII, 3,56.

<sup>107</sup> Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Quintilian, *Inst. orat.*, XI, 2, 1.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 153.

<sup>110</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 23.

arguments.<sup>111</sup> It therefore has close ties with rhetoric, and *memoria rerum* in particular, the memory of subjects or topics, was associated with the rhetorical tropes of invention and delivery. The *memoria rerum* consisted of remembering concepts or categories, rather than individual sentences or words, that could then be adapted to specific circumstances, as the fourteenth-century Dominican Thomas Wileys recommends be done for the composition and delivery of sermons.<sup>112</sup>

The ‘*summatim*’ mnemonic storage proposed by *memoria rerum* even applies to citation of the Scriptures: once one has memorised them *verbatim*, one can slightly change them and adapt them to suit one’s own text. This is the case for Hugh of St Victor, who quoted, while readapting, a passage from Proverbs in his *De archa Noe*. Mary Carruthers explained Hugh’s use of the Scriptures in a way that concisely outlines the role of *memoria*, the engagement with the audience, and the author’s showcase of skill:

Such adaptive freedom is enabled by complete familiarity with the text, the shared memory of it on the part of both audience and author, and hence a delight both in recognising the familiar words and in the skill with which they have been adapted to a new context.<sup>113</sup>

Carruthers’ words seem to describe Altichiero’s relationship with the architecture of the Veneto: his fictive structures demonstrate great familiarity with the region’s built identity, and the reinvention of its defining motives displays the artist’s virtuosity as well as engaging with the audience.

Envisaging Altichiero’s architectural invention as a mnemonic as well as a rhetorical trope allows us to hypothesise more clearly not only the means by which the artist designed his architectural settings, but also their purpose. In the previous chapter we saw how Altichiero’s six architectural strategies articulated a multifaceted relationship with place in order to structure the narrative and relate to the viewer. The *ars memoriae* may illustrate the reasons behind the approach, highlighting the Oratory’s fictive structures as tools for memorability and meditation.

---

<sup>111</sup> Thierry of Chartres’ commentary to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* defines memory as *thesaurum inventorum*, whilst another commentary to the same text ascribed to Master Alanus (perhaps Alan of Lille) defines it as *camera argumentorum*. Mary Carruthers, “Rhetorical Memoria in Commentary and Practice,” in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 220.

<sup>112</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 115.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

One of the many understandings and uses of the word *memoria* in the middle ages was that of “mindful attentiveness,” as Carruthers described it, which therefore made it a crucial tool for meditation. During the *lectio divina* (concentrated reading of the Scriptures), the student memorised and appropriated the object of his learning, storing it, after elaboration, “*in memoriae thesauro*.”<sup>114</sup> This idea is also shared by Petrarch, who had St Augustine say in the *Secretum* that one should make a point of impressing in one’s memory interesting textual passages by meditating upon them. Augustine suggested marking such passages so they may serve “as hooks in your memory” for whenever the need arises.<sup>115</sup> This observation expounds one of the meanings of rhetorical place as a passage in a text; but it also draws attention to the function of marks, which can take various forms, from a hook, to a pointing hand, or an architectural structure. Architecture was identified as one of the possible tools for *memoria*, and the mnemonic architectural model expounded in the *Rhetorica ad herennium* enjoyed renewed popularity from the thirteenth century onwards. This model ties together ideas of place with architectural elements and structures. The meditative potential of Altichiero’s works in the Oratory of St George will therefore be better understood once this link has been illustrated.

## 2. Memory, Place and Architecture

Since Antiquity, memory has been thought to work best with images. Visual aids were deemed necessary for memorisation by Aristotle, who established close links between memory, imagination, and sensory perception; by Cicero, who deemed that even auditive perceptions are best retained when attached to images; and by the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, who prescribed that images be recorded on imaginary places comparable to wax tablets.<sup>116</sup> The use of images for the purpose of recollection, invention and meditation was also recommended in the middle ages by figures like Gilbert Crispin, abbot of Westminster between 1085 and 1117, and Hugh of St Victor, but also by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, who revived the teachings of the

---

<sup>114</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 109, 53-54.

<sup>115</sup> Petrarch, *Secretum*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Rome: Archive Guido Izzi, 1993), Dialogue Two. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 204. The link between vision, memory and meditation is expressed in numerous other texts, such as the late fourteenth/early fifteenth-century *Colloquio spirituale* written by Simone da Cascina, dominican prior of the Convent of St Catherine in Pisa. Simone da Cascina, *Colloquio spirituale*, ed. Fausta Dalla Riva (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1982). Lina Bolzoni, “Costruire immagini: l’arte della memoria tra letteratura e arti figurative,” in *La cultura della memoria*, ed. Lina Bolzoni and Pietro Corsi (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1992), 62-67. Lina Bolzoni, “Il *Colloquio spirituale* di Simone da Cascina. Note su allegoria e immagini della memoria,” *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 3, no. 1 (1985): 9-65.

<sup>116</sup> Aristotle, *De memoria et reminiscencia*, ed. David Bloch (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 449b30-31, 450a13-14. Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: the Quest for a Universal Language* (London: the Athlone Press, 2000), 7. Cicero, *De oratore*, II, 87, 357; *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Book III.

*Rhetorica ad Herennium* and turned it into the dominant mnemonic text of the middle ages.<sup>117</sup>

Although it is not the only source for medieval mnemotechnique, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* contains the most detailed description of what Frances Yates called the “Ciceronian mnemonic” and Mary Carruthers the “architectural mnemonic.”<sup>118</sup> For this model of recollection as well as for others, memories are best stored in a place that has been previously created for them in the mind. The creation of place is an indispensable prerequisite for memorisation, as we are told by Aristotle (“one seems to recollect from places”).<sup>119</sup> Aristotle thus conceived mnemonic *loci* as physical places, the sine qua non of existence with which generations of later thinkers grappled.

Mary Carruthers believes that such a physical understanding of mnemonic place is at odds with the idea of rhetorical place, or topic, that she sees as an abstract part of speech.<sup>120</sup> However, as seen earlier in this chapter, the use of the word place in these various meanings appears clearer when one considers that rhetorical place was also considered as a spatial entity. Cicero thought of it as the repository of all subjects, and compared topics to a physical place where things are hidden. Besides, ‘place’ could identify a portion of a text, or a physical location on the page, as seen before. Rhetorical topics and mnemonic *loci* are both characterised by a polyvalent nature that fuses abstract and concrete understandings depending on the context. Such pliable use of the word place, exemplifying the observations made in Chapter One on its literal and metaphorical valence, reflects the centrality that this idea has held for centuries and in numerous fields.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 155, 275-276. Abbot Gilbert stated that “as letters are in a way forms and notes of words, so pictures exist as likenesses and notes of written things.” As Carruthers noted, Gilbert’s statement requires an understanding of pictures as mnemonic aids in the same way that letters are. Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 275.

<sup>118</sup> Carruthers has clarified that classical mnemonic theory reappeared in the late middle ages within the context of well-established monastic practices derived from the meditative techniques of the Judaic tradition. Carruthers, “The Poet as Master Builder,” 881-904; and *The Craft of Thought*, chs 3 and 4.

<sup>119</sup> “διὸ ἀπὸ τόπων δokoῦσιν ἀναμimnēskethai ἐπιότε,” Aristotle, *De memoria et reminiscencia*, 452a13.

<sup>120</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 395 n. 126.

<sup>121</sup> Anna Little offered an interesting overview of the relationship between place, memory and the visual arts in the middle ages in her PhD thesis. She argued that the rules of the architectural method were applied more zealously to Italian painting during the thirteenth century than at any other point. Anna Little, “Du lieu à l’espace. Transformation de l’environnement pictural en Italie (XIIIe-XVe siècles)” (PhD Dissertation, Université François Rabelais, Tours, 2010), 96-119.

a. *The Rhetorica ad Herennium*

The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* begins its account of memory by clearly stating that artificial memory consists of places and images (*ex locis et imaginibus*). Places are complete (*absoluti*) and outstanding (*insignite*) so that we may easily understand and embrace them with our natural memory. These *loci* may be a house (*aedes*), the distance between columns (*intercolumnium*), a corner or recess (*angulum*), an arch (*formicem*) and others similar to these. The images are figures and shapes of the things we wish to memorise that it is necessary to locate in definite places (*locis certis*).<sup>122</sup> The *loci* must be arranged in a series that will allow us to follow the images and retrieve material with ease. For the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, places seem even more important than memory images themselves, for they represent the crux of the mnemonic system he is expounding: like letters on a wax tablet, memory images, when not used, may fade, but the *locus*, like the tablet, must endure.<sup>123</sup>

The *Rhetorica* tells us that it would be more advisable to create places in a deserted rather than populous region, for solitude preserves the shape of the images; places ought to be different enough from each other to be distinguishable, they should have moderate size and medium extent, not too bright nor too dim, and the distance between them and the viewer should be of about thirty feet.<sup>124</sup> The first prescription of creating places in *derelecta regione* introduces the idea that as the images are located in places, so places are located in a region. This is better explained a few lines later, where the author stated that our imagination can embrace any region, and in it fashion and construct (*fabricari et architectari*) a place as it wishes.<sup>125</sup> The region, which we may create for ourselves should we not be happy with the ready-made set of places, is the site of the *locus*, which in its turn is the site of the memory image. This arrangement is not too dissimilar from the Platonic *chōra* and *tópos* seen in the first chapter, where *chōra* is the region hosting *tópos*, and *tópos* (or *hēdra*) the indispensable site for all created things. Memory thus becomes a network of places in a region, each place distinct from but at the same time associated to

---

<sup>122</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, ed. Harry Caplan (London and Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann Ltd and Harvard University Press, 1964), 3, XVI. p. 208.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, XVII

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, XIX. Harry Caplan interpreted the thirty feet as the distance between each *locus*, whereas Mary Carruthers saw it instead as the distance of the viewer from the background. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 90-91.

<sup>125</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 3, XIX.



the other, aiding the mind on a journey of recollection following the images (*imagines sequi*).<sup>126</sup>

b. The *ductus*

The idea of being led on a journey from one place to the next also pertains to another rhetorical concept, that of *ductus*, or course of a work. Ancient and medieval writers like Geoffrey of Vinsauf understood the art of composing a text as comparable to that of drawing a map, informed by the *consilium* of the author, but ultimately becoming an active agent taking the readers through its various *topica*, ambivalently functioning at the same time as physical places and arguments.<sup>127</sup> Hence, for example, the late fourteenth-century Catalan Franciscan Francesc Eiximenis recommended the use of a mental itinerary of the pilgrimage from Rome to Compostela in order to remember the subjects of one's speech. The friar explained how this itinerary should be punctuated in one's mind by as many cities as there are things to remember. So if one wishes to speak of clerics, he will place them in Rome, for this is the seat of their spiritual head; if the following topic is money, he will mentally place it in Florence, for this is a famous financial centre, and so on until arrival in Compostela.<sup>128</sup> This advice is another demonstration of the ease with which rhetorical, mnemonic and physical places could be merged together in the middle ages.

Francesc Eiximenis, a contemporary of Altichiero who had visited France, England and Italy probably between 1357 and 1374, and was of the same order as the friars of the Santo, listed ornate buildings among the 'mental orders' corresponding to the things to be remembered. This method will work with houses, cities or villages that are well known, and where memory images may be positioned, along straight routes, in meaningful places. This procedure can also work with large churches, where each chapel, altarpiece and even distance between one spot and another may host a memory

---

<sup>126</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 3, XVII. For a summary of the transmission of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* from the later fourth century: Ruth Taylor-Briggs, "Reading Between the Lines: The Textual History and Manuscript Transmission of Cicero's Rhetorical Works," in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 77-96. Later commentaries to the *Rhetorica* include the twelfth-century *Etsi cum Tullius*, probably by William of Champeaux, the commentary by Thierry of Chartres (1130s) and the one perhaps by Alan of Lille (1170s). The last of the important medieval commentaries to the *Rhetorica* is that of Guarino da Verona. Carruthers, "Rhetorical *Memoria* in Commentary and Practice," 218-226.

<sup>127</sup> For an account of the concept of *ductus*: Mary Carruthers, "On the concept of *ductus*, or Journeying Through a Work of Art," in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 190-213.

<sup>128</sup> Francesc Eiximenis, "On Two Kinds of Order That Aid Understanding and Memory," in *The Medieval Craft of Memory. An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 200.

image adequate to its location. Therefore, if one wishes to remember the Trinity, one will place it on the high altar, whereas purity will be placed on the altar of the Virgin Mary and contemplation on the altar of St John.<sup>129</sup> Francesc's prescriptions highlight the inextricable link between place and architecture and their importance for memory techniques.

### c. The Success of the Architectural Model

The architectural model of mnemonics expounded in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was very well known in Antiquity, as demonstrated by the remarks of Quintilian and Cicero on the topic.<sup>130</sup> Although it was deemed cumbersome already by Quintilian's time, the visualisation of an object in a place rich in particulars on which one could also ponder was considered conducive to meditation, the most important monastic understanding of mnemonics.<sup>131</sup> The architectural model was therefore revived in the thirteenth century by figures like Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas. Albertus Magnus defended this model from the objections and hostility of some Parisian masters of his time, and paved the way for the hegemony of the *Ad Herennium* mnemotechnique in medieval universities and then humanist teaching.<sup>132</sup> Albertus treated this matter in his *De bono*, written during the 1240s, and discussed it in the context of moral philosophy rather than of rhetoric, thus echoing Brunetto Latini's efforts to include matters previously associated solely with politics and law within the umbrella of ethics.<sup>133</sup>

Although the de facto influence of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* might have been overstated by scholars, the success of locational *artes memorativae* and of the architectural model in

---

<sup>129</sup> Francesc Eiximenis, "On Two Kinds of Order," 201.

<sup>130</sup> Quintilian stated that one should select a particular building and arrange things within its rooms, so that by mentally visiting the building whenever the need should arise, one could retrieve the memory images stored in it. Quintilian, *De institutione oratoria*, XI, 2. Cicero considered the method so "familiar and well known" (*re nota et pervulgata*) that he only discussed it very briefly in *De oratore*, II, 87, 358.

<sup>131</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf scorned the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* method of using unusual images, but he still insisted on the importance of images and places in his section on memory. Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, lines 2008-2020.

<sup>132</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 172-173 and "Rhetorical *Memoria* in Commentary and Practice," 230-231.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Aquinas praised architectural mnemotechnique in the second part of the *Summa*, written two or three decades after Albertus Magnus' *De bono*, and further elevated its status to the best of the mnemonic arts. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 192-193. Albertus slightly adapted the architectural places prescribed in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, turning *aedis* (house) into *templum* (church), *angulus* (corner, recess) into *pratum* (cloister garth) and *forix* (arch) into *hospitalis* (hospice), leaving unchanged, however, *intercolumnium*, the distance between one column and another. Albertus Magnus, *De bono* II.7, quoted in *The Book of Memory*, 349, 174. Although the architectural method was the most prominent technique of memorisation, there were other models that did not include architecture, most famously Bradwardine's. His memorial art, expounded in *De memoria artificiale adquirenda* (c.1335), represented, however, a minority. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 163-172; Jean-Philippe Antoine, "Ancora sulle Virtù: la 'nuova iconografia' e le immagini di memoria," *Prospettiva*, 30 (1982): 18.

particular was considerable, and expanded beyond the academic sphere.<sup>134</sup> The popularity of the *ars memorativa* reached its peak in Italy from the late thirteenth century onwards, where it was used by theology and law professors and students, as well as by clerks, merchants, physicians and notaries.<sup>135</sup> Many ancient treatises on rhetoric that dealt with memory were translated into the vernacular from the thirteenth century, as seen above, and public oratory ceased to be a prerogative of abbots and bishops, thanks to the expansion of the study of law from the twelfth century and to the Fourth Lateran Council, as already seen.<sup>136</sup>

### 3. Mnemonic *Copia* in the Oratory of St George

The precepts of the *ars memoriae* described above could provide a further explanation for Altichiero's use of the fictive frame and 'amplified' architectural settings in the Oratory of St George. The establishment of a link between the *ars memoriae* and the figurative arts is encouraged by the terminology adopted in many medieval glosses to the *Ad Herennium*, where the ancient terms *constituere*, *conformari*, *architectari* and *fabricari* are explained with *pingere*, *depingere*, *fingere*, *confingere* and *describere*.<sup>137</sup> The use of these words might have described a mental process rather than an invitation to create actual works of art, but it testifies nonetheless to the conflation of mental and actual *picturae* for medieval writers.

In the previous chapter we saw how the painted marble frame fictively structures the Oratory and creates an individual *locus* for each scene to inhabit. In light of what was discussed in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, one could say that the fictive frame creates several *regiones* where the architectural places demarcating each episode are then inscribed. So, for example, the fictive frame around the penultimate scene of St Lucy's cycle creates a *regio* that hosts a pale yellow palace which, with its three sections - two receding, one

---

<sup>134</sup> According to Carruthers, the *Ad Herennium* was often cited as an authoritative source in medieval texts, but its specific contents were rarely reiterated. Carruthers, "Rhetorical *Memoria* in Commentary and Practice," 211, 233. However, it was in the mid-fourteenth century that the first surviving complete translation of the *Ad Herennium* was written, the anonymous *Avvegna Dio*. This work, following in the footsteps of Bono Giamboni's *Fiore di rettorica*, testifies to a growing interest in the entirety of the *Ad Herennium*, whose section on memory had nonetheless always been amongst its most popular, as demonstrated by the *Ars arengandi* by Jacques de Dinant, who held the chair of communal rhetoric in Bologna in the late thirteenth century. The *Ars arengandi* is a much abridged commentary to the *Ad Herennium* which focuses more on Book III (where memory is discussed) than on any of the other three Books. For a bibliography on the *Avvegna Dio* see the appendix to Cox, "Ciceronian Rhetoric in Late Medieval Italy," 141. On Jacques de Dinant: Milner, "Communication, Consensus and Conflict," 388-389; and André Wilmart, "L'*ars arengandi* de Jacques de Dinant avec un appendice sur les ouvrages *De dictamine*," in *Analecta Reginensia. Extraits des manuscrits latins de la reine Christine conservés au Vatican*, ed. André Wilmart (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1933), 113-51.

<sup>135</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 192.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>137</sup> Carruthers, "Rhetorical *Memoria* in Commentary and Practice," 225.

projecting - differentiates and at the same time links the three episodes of the saint's life here represented. The architectural settings would therefore act as mnemonic architectural places, providing specific *loci* for the memory images but catalysing attention more than the narrative episodes themselves. This is also in line with the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, according to which memory images may fade, but mnemonic *loci* designed with care endure.

The specific arrangement of most of the figures in relation to the architecture also corresponds to the architectural elements enumerated in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, especially the categories of *fornix* and *intercolumnium*. Thus, in the *Presentation to the Virgin* (**Fig.54**), the figure of St George is framed by two columns supporting an arch, as is also the case in *Dacian Attempts to Convince St George with Flattery*, the episode in the projecting wing on the right in *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**). Again, in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* (**Fig.53**), Maxentius is framed by two columns supporting a polylobed arch, and the three groups of figures in the central section of *St Lucy's Trials* (**Fig.50**) are separated by slender twisted columns.

There is, however, one major discrepancy between Altichiero's work at the Oratory and the architectural mnemonic model of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, namely the representation of numerous figures in all scenes with the exception of the *Annunciation* (**Fig.30**), the *Flight to Egypt* (**Fig.30**) and perhaps the *Nativity* (**Fig.49**). For the author of the *Rhetorica*, crowding "confuses and weakens known images," whereas in the Oratory the figures act as crucial witnesses to the events represented, and, according to Richards and Mardersteig, could portray members of the Lupi and Carrara families,<sup>138</sup> thus specifically tying the architectural settings and the narrative to the contemporary Paduan context.<sup>139</sup> Besides, crowding is another form of *copia* that mirrors the abundance of architectural structures and decoration and further differentiates the Oratory's frescoes from the Scrovegni Chapel, where the figures in each scene are as few as possible. The plethora of witnesses, especially in scenes like *St Catherine on the Wheel* (**Fig.6**) and *St Lucy's Funerals* (**Fig.4**), emphasises the emptiness of the upper registers of the architectural settings, as discussed in the previous chapter. This is particularly

---

<sup>138</sup> Cf. note 14. However, the figure with a dark moustache in the *Baptism of King Sevius* that Mardersteig identifies as Raimondino Lupi does not look like the Raimondino painted in the *Presentation to the Virgin* and identified as such by an inscription.

<sup>139</sup> Emanuele Lugli also noted how, from a legal point of view, the presence of a large crowd increased the reliability of contracts. Emanuele Lugli, "Hidden in Plain Sight: the 'Pietre di Paragone' and the Preeminence of Medieval Measurements in Communal Italy," *Gesta*, 49, no. 2 (2010): 83.

evident in the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Fig.5**), *St George Drinks Poison* (**Fig.52**) and the *Coronation* (**Fig.46**), where highly ornate, ‘uninhabited’ loggias are juxtaposed with ‘over-inhabited’ streets, squares or skies.

Within the artistic tradition of the Veneto, Altichiero seems to owe his propensity for crowds to Guariento, as seen for example in the Choir Chapel at the Eremitani. Here, four episodes from the life of St Philip and two from the life of St Augustine are witnessed by numerous people, especially *St Philip Meeting the Bishops* (**Fig.56**) and the *Vestition of St Augustine* and *Baptism of Adeodato* (**Fig.101**).<sup>140</sup> Another crucial instance of crowding in Padua, and more pronounced than Altichiero’s, is offered by Giusto de’ Menabuoi’s work in the Baptistery. The dome of the building is completely covered by saints, patriarchs, prophets and angels so tightly arranged that no background is visible except for a small portion of gold behind Christ and the golden aura emanating from the Virgin. Several other scenes demonstrate Giusto’s interest in crowds, for example the *Massacre of the Innocents*, *Entry to Jerusalem*, *Christ’s Miracles* and *Christ’s Arrest* (**Fig.102**).<sup>141</sup>

Altichiero is certainly not the only artist framing each scene of his cycle by encasing it in an ornamental fictive frame. Giotto had already done that in the Scrovegni Chapel, although Altichiero’s approach is more architectural than Giotto’s at the Scrovegni, and places the Veronese artist more firmly within the local artistic tradition of Guariento or Nicoletto Semitecolo, as mentioned in the previous chapter.<sup>142</sup> It could be argued that all representations at this time, especially architectural ones, were informed by the *ars memoriae* more or less consciously. Besides, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is a treatise proposing solutions to generic problems. Altichiero appears to have heeded the *Rhetorica*’s advice refashioning it to his specific needs. Nor does this mean that Altichiero would necessarily have read the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* or any medieval commentary to it.

---

<sup>140</sup> Another work by Guariento that represented a large assembly is his frescoed *Paradise* for the Palazzo Ducale in Venice (1367). Unfortunately this wall painting was severely damaged by a fire in 1577. Davide Banzato, Francesca Flores d’Arcais and Anna Maria Spiazzi, ed., *Guariento e la Padova Carrarese* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2011), 212-215.

<sup>141</sup> Giusto’s Baptistery frescoes might be a precedent of Altichiero’s also as far as portraits are concerned. According to Claudio Bellinati, the figure coinciding with the foreground white pier in the *Miracles of Christ* is a portrait of Petrarch, flanked on one side by Francesco il Vecchio and on the other by his wife Fina Buzzacarini, the patroness of the Baptistery’s frescoes. Claudio Bellinati, “Iconografia e teologia del Battistero,” in *Giusto de’Menabuoi nel Battistero di Padova*, ed. Anna Maria Spiazzi (Trieste: Edizioni LINT, 1989), 58.

<sup>142</sup> Flores d’Arcais considers Altichiero a direct heir of Guariento, particularly as far as buildings and the arrangement of crowds are concerned. Francesca Flores d’Arcais, *Guariento. Tutta la pittura* (Venice: Alferi Edizioni, 1965), 45-46.

The popularity of the architectural mnemonic model in Italy at this time was probably sufficient for its precepts to trickle down into common knowledge.

What instead characterises Altichiero's work at the Oratory, distinguishing him even from Guariento, is his architectural amplification.<sup>143</sup> *Copia* was also considered a memory aid, and in monastic meditational praxis it was often paired with its antithesis, *brevitas*, as a mnemonic and meditational tool. *Brevitas* was recognised as the first step towards a *summatim* memorisation as opposed to a *verbatim* one, allowing one to memorise more general concepts rather than specific words. Medieval scholars recognised the limits of natural memory, and prescribed that one should not attempt to memorise at once more than what the eye could take in at one glance.<sup>144</sup> This is in contrast to the complex architectural structures Altichiero painted for the Oratory, that cannot be taken in, in all their intricate detail, at a single glance. However, *copia* was seen as the logical development of *brevitas*, as demonstrated by Peter Chrysologus's analysis of the mustard seed parable in Luke's Gospel (13: 18-19), where the kingdom of God is described as a tiny mustard seed that grew and became a great tree. Peter invites us to sow the grain of mustard in our chest (*in pectore*), so that it may grow into a great tree of knowledge (*intelligentiae magnam arborem*), thus invoking our own powers of copious expansion from a *brevis* beginning.<sup>145</sup>

St Augustine echoed this thought when he said that from our *summatim* knowledge we may select certain things that are more worthy of attention and dwell on them, expanding them for inspection and wonder (*inspicienda atque miranda*).<sup>146</sup> The idea of wonder resonates within Altichiero's architectural settings, as they articulate structurally inventive, elaborately ornate and majestic buildings. The sense of wonderment evoked by Altichiero's fictive architecture is also instrumental in signalling to the viewers that the Oratory's narratives are something extraordinary to be admired rather than imitated, admiration and imitation being considered as opposites in the middle ages. As

---

<sup>143</sup> Nonetheless, one has to bear in mind that a thorough comparison with Guariento is hindered by the loss of a great part of his work at the Eremitani due to bombing during the second World War. The most recent work on Guariento is Zuleika Murat, *Guariento. Pittore di corte, maestro del naturale* (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2016).

<sup>144</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 63.

<sup>145</sup> Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 98, lines 28:33 quoted in Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 64 and 295. Geoffrey of Vinsauf also reiterated this idea at the end of his analysis of *amplificatio*: "[...] plentiful harvest springs from a little seed; great rivers draw their source from a tiny spring; from a slender twig a great tree rises and spreads," *Poetria Nova*, lines 687-680.

<sup>146</sup> St Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, III.5(2).3-15 quoted in Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 64-65 and 295.

Caroline Bynum noted, “marvelling responds to the there-ness of the event, to its concreteness and specificity.”<sup>147</sup> In the Oratory of St George, concreteness and specificity are conveyed by the relative correspondence of the fictive structures to the built architecture of the Veneto. Altichiero’s settings are expanded and adapted versions of cityscapes that are ever more awe-inspiring and memorable because the contemporary viewer was familiar with them.<sup>148</sup> The *copia* of the Oratory’s painted architecture is therefore to be interpreted both as copy (or imitation) and as abundance, the two meanings it encapsulated in the middle ages. *Copia* in the sense of copy also referred to the commonplaces that a diligent student *copied*, which did not simply indicate mere emulation, but a memorisation process that included adaptation and elaboration of the commonplaces to one’s own needs and specific occasions.<sup>149</sup>

Altichiero’s architectures also constitute a *fil rouge* in the Oratory, for if each cycle’s continuity is represented by recurring figures, the main element that unifies all three cycles are the fictive structures, as demonstrated in the parallels between scenes analysed earlier. The painted settings represent the places through which the viewer is led, *ductus*, on a meditational journey. This is particularly true of the *Nativity* and the *Adoration of the Magi* on the entrance wall (**Fig.49**), where the stable and especially the city view in the background give the sequence a sense of movement thanks to the slight change in viewpoint that allows for an ‘amplified’ treatment of the city view in the *Adoration*; of the city gate and walls in the *Slaying of the Dragon* and the *Baptism of King Sevius* (**Figs 51, 5&32**); of the *Presentation at the Temple* (**Fig.74**) and the *Funerals of St Lucy* (**Fig.4**), where the temple and church share a very similar structure; and of *St George on the Wheel* (**Fig.8**) and *St Lucy’s Trials* (**Fig.50**), where the two palaces’ receding and projecting wings complement each other. The six architectural strategies discussed in the previous chapter can also be seen as aspects of a meditational journey, for they engage the viewer

---

<sup>147</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 43, 51, 73. Walker Bynum remarked how wonder can be the prelude to appropriation (Bynum, *ibid.*, 69). Altichiero’s painted structures, through the ‘finding’ of *inventio* and the startlingness of *admiratio*, attempt to appropriate the architecture of the Veneto like *spolia*. For an example of how the discourse on wonder and magnificence was employed in Italian architecture in the late middle ages: Areli Marina, “Magnificent Architecture in Late Medieval Italy,” in *Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger (New York: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2010), 193-214.

<sup>148</sup> Interesting in this respect is the link established by Thomas Aquinas between memory and wonder, because we wonder more at what is unusual (“*ea quae sunt inconsueta magis miramur*”), Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, ed. Pietro Caramello (Turin: Pietro Marietti editore, 1922), Pars secunda secundae, Q. 49, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Carruthers explained this in *The Craft of Thought*, 225. This idea of *copia* as model or commonplace to be elaborated and adapted is also proposed by Richard Krautheimer with respect to medieval architectural copying in “La rinascita dell’architettura paleocristiana romana nell’età carolingia,” in *Architettura sacra paleocristiana e medievale e altri saggi su Rinascimento e Barocco*, 2nd ed. (Turin: Bollato Boringhieri editore, 2008), 151-220.

and help the internalisation of the memory places of the narrative. In particular, the possibility or impossibility of inhabiting the fictive buildings encourages the viewer's reflection whilst at the same time acting as a reminder of the two-dimensionality of the Oratory's architectural settings.

#### 4. Memory and Pictorial Space

Jen-Philippe Antoine proposed that the *ars memoriae* could be an explanation of three-dimensional explorations in art at this time. According to Antoine, it is the credibility of the painted memory places, and therefore the impossibility of separating them from the built environment hosting them, that is essential for the creation of a mnemonic *regio*.<sup>150</sup> Although this is an interesting suggestion, Antoine's interpretation of the *ars memoriae* does not engage critically with notions of space and place, and seems to conflate three-dimensionality and illusionistic representation. Antoine did not examine Altichiero's work to illustrate his arguments, but the relationship between the representation of depth and fictive architecture, now as mnemonic structure, brings us back to issues discussed in Chapter One, which highlighted the problematic use of the words 'space' and 'pictorial space' in art historical literature. Antoine's use of 'pictorial space' falls within this pattern. Whilst Altichiero's structures are certainly three-dimensional, architectural illusion was not one of his goals. As seen in Chapter Two, his frame repeatedly reveals its painterly nature even in the most architectonic of its parts (like the altar wall) and his accreted, often structurally implausible settings encourage, as well as frustrate, the viewer's desire for access.

What could instead be relevant to Altichiero of Antoine's analysis is the importance the scholar attributed to the limitation of 'pictorial space.' Antoine rightly argued that the individual place hosting the *imago memoriae* is the most fundamental aspect of the *ars memoriae*, and that an image projecting the viewer's gaze too deep within the picture detracts from the *imago memoriae* in its place, thus becoming counterproductive for memorisation.<sup>151</sup> Altichiero appears to have engaged with this suggestion, adopting diminutive upper storeys, walled archways and background walls (like those seen in the *Baptism of King Sevius*, *Martyrdom of the Philosophers* and *St Catherine on the Wheel*) as limits leading the viewer's attention back to the narrative and its places rather than into the

---

<sup>150</sup> Jean-Philippe Antoine, "L'arte della memoria e la trasformazione dello spazio pittorico in Italia nel Duecento e Trecento," in *La cultura della memoria*, ed. Lina Bolzoni and Pietro Corsi (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1992), 114.

<sup>151</sup> Antoine, "L'arte della memoria," 113.



distance. If we set aside space, we would see that a *locus memoriae* is a better container when it can encase the *imago*, and to do so it must be hollow, three-dimensional, like Altichiero's splayed structures embracing his figures with an alternation of projecting and receding sections. *Memoria* could thus contribute to explaining both Altichiero's engagement with fictive depth and his use of background walls and inaccessible places.

## **Conclusion**

Rhetoric and memory are two interpretative instruments for fictive architecture that give a further insight in the polyvalent understanding of place in the middle ages. They act both as informing principle (*inventio*) and as purpose (*memoria* as meditation, engagement with the viewers). In the case of the Oratory of St George, *inventio* clarifies Altichiero's articulation of hybrid architectural places, whilst the main vehicles for architectural rhetoric and *memoria* are *copia* and *amplificatio*, the first understood as copy as well as plethora. Altichiero's settings lead the viewer along the Oratory, offering several reading pathways: from left to right in a chronological sequence, but also diagonally, as the projecting wall and arch parallels on the north wall suggest, and across the walls, as the structures and decoration are repeated with masterful *varietas*. The fictive structures thus address the viewers in a quest to mesmerise them and be memorised by them, the similarity of architectural structures and ornament with the built environment around them aiding them in this process of internalisation.

This exposition of rhetoric as a heuristic tool, clarifying the means and purposes of Altichiero's hybrid architectural places and accreted structures, does not suggest that Altichiero knew rhetorical principles and necessarily set out to apply them to his work; nor does it claim that rhetoric and memory were the only informing principles of Altichiero's frescoes at the Oratory. Rather, the chapter argues that rhetoric and *memoria* were such pervasive aspects of medieval culture that direct knowledge of specific texts was not required to glean at least partial understanding of them. The merits of amplification in particular were widely appreciated, as was the value of memorability, and they would not have gone unnoticed in Trecento Padua, where rhetorical precepts were disseminated especially well, as shown by the analysis of the numerous ways rhetoric was taught and employed in this town at this time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FRA ANGELICO'S NICHOLAS V CHAPEL PLACE, TIME AND ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a formal analysis of the architecture depicted in Fra Angelico's frescoes for Nicholas V's Chapel in the Vatican (1448-1450), representing the lives of St Stephen and St Lawrence on the walls, eight Doctors of the Church on the intradoses of the Chapel's two semicircular arches, and prophets in the windows embrasures. Numerous scholars have noted the prominence of the Chapel's fictive architecture (and in particular the choice of basilican settings for three episodes), which stands out from the rest of Angelico's artistic production,<sup>1</sup> but to this day there is no thorough investigation entirely devoted to the Chapel's striking architectural settings. Chapter Four aims to fill this gap. It discusses how the frescoed frame, ignored in existing studies, binds together fictive and built architecture; it identifies differences and similarities between the two saints' lives and illustrates how the fictive structures isolate and at the same time reconcile the two *vitae* with the Doctors of the Church on the arch intrados. In addition, the Chapel's architectural settings organise the narrative through separation and unification, articulate time and place and engage with the viewer by reiterating architectural ornament, playing with light and employing polyfocal perspective.

This study shows that Fra Angelico created two different places for the Chapel's two narratives. Unlike Altichiero, whose settings collapse the geography and chronology of his four narratives in the Oratory, Fra Angelico articulated compositional, ornamental and chromatic discrepancies between the two lives in order to locate Stephen and Lawrence in two distinct, albeit kindred places. The chapter argues that the luminous, imposing structures of these locations articulate time and help to legitimise the dignity and authority of the Church. This creates a platform that leads to Chapter Five, which highlights the hybridity of Fra Angelico's architectural places and presents an

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and -perhaps- Alberti," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irvin Lavin and John Plummer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), I, 290-96; Arnold Nesselrath, "Fra Angelico's and Benozzo Gozzoli's Composition in the Murals of the Private Chapel of Pope Nicholas V in the Vatican," in *Fra Angelico and the Chapel of Nicholas V*, ed. Innocenzo Venchi, Renate L. Colella, Arnold Nesselrath, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari (Vatican City State: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1999), 75-92; Diane Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2008), 185; Alessandro Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme nella Cappella Niccolina," in *Angelicus pictor: ricerche e interpretazioni sul Beato Angelico*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari (Milan: Skira, 2008), 144-157.

interpretation of the Chapel's settings based on the rhetorical tropes of *dignitas*, *gravitas* and *auctoritas*.

### The Nicholas V Chapel

The Chapel of Pope Nicholas V (Tommaso Parentucelli, 1447-1455), or the Cappella Niccolina (**Figs 103&104**), is a narrow chamber<sup>2</sup> located in the tower traditionally attributed to Innocent III (1198-1216), a medieval structure adjacent to the papal residence in the Vatican that was altered to create the chapel.<sup>3</sup> The Chapel has two entrances on the north wall. The door on the left led into a small space that connected with the pope's bedroom, or *cubiculum*. The door presently used, on the right of the north wall, leads to the Sala dei Chiaroscuri.<sup>4</sup> Works for the construction of the chapel, whose initial project was probably conceived by Nicholas's predecessor Eugenius IV, began with modification of Innocent III's early thirteenth-century tower. The floor that separated the third and fourth floors of the tower was eliminated, and the walls of the space thus obtained were delimited by semicircular arches, while the ceiling was groin-vaulted. The two round-arched windows with splayed embrasures and the two doorways granting access to the chapel completed the tower's alterations.<sup>5</sup> Between 1449 and 1451, Nicholas V had work done on his *cubiculum* and on his study.<sup>6</sup> Nicholas

---

<sup>2</sup> The Chapel measures circa 4.23 metres in width and 6.80 in length, with a maximum height of 8.12 metres at the crown of the lunettes and of 8.45 metres at the apex of the vault. Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari, "Report on the Chapel's State of Conservation: April 1995 - December 1996," in *Fra Angelico and the Chapel of Nicholas V*, ed. Innocenzo Venchi, Renate L. Colella, Arnold Nesselrath, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari (Vatican City State: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1999), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Giantomassi and Zari, "Report on the Chapel's State of Conservation," 98. For an overview of the history of the tower, which some scholars suggested could date from the time of Innocent IV (1248-1254): Massimo Alfieri and Pier Nicola Pagliara, "La torre di Innocenzo III," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 15-26. For an overview of the tower's decoration and function before Nicholas V: Guido Cornini and Anna Maria De Strobel, "Beato Angelico: la Cappella Niccolina," in *Il '400 a Roma: la rinascita delle arti da Donatello a Perugino*, ed. Maria Grazia Bernardini and Marco Bussagli, (Milan: Skira editore, 2008), 27-40.

<sup>4</sup> Giantomassi and Zari, "Report on the Chapel's State of Conservation," 98. As Liebenwein stated on the basis of a plan of the Vatican Palace, the presence of the left door probably dates to the time the chapel was built. However, Liebenwein described it as walled up in his 1977 *Studiolo*, a second edition of which appeared in 2005. The second edition still describes the door as walled up, but this is not the case at least since the late 1990s, when photographs of the open door were taken during the latest restoration campaign. Wolfgang Liebenwein, *Studiolo. Storia e tipologia di uno spazio culturale*, 2nd ed. (Ferrara: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2005), 94 and note 50. Signs of manipulation are evident in the erasure of part of Angelico's fictive frame above the left door.

<sup>5</sup> Giantomassi and Zari, "Report on the Chapel's State of Conservation," 98.

<sup>6</sup> De Simone believes the chapel, sacristy, *cubiculum* and study were four different rooms located successively according to an arrangement typical of curial residences. Gerardo de Simone, "*Velut alter Apelles*. Il decennio romano del Beato Angelico," in *Beato Angelico: l'alba del Rinascimento*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari. Giovanni Morello and Gerardo de Simone (Milan: Skira editore, 2009), 132. Liebenwein did not mention the sacristy, but he placed the Chapel in connection with the study and the *cubiculum*. Liebenwein *Studiolo*, 93. The Chapel is still connected to a narrow and very short passage leading to a small room. I was not allowed access to these environments, which were under restoration during my last visit at the

V's alterations also made his chapel adjacent to and on the same level as the Sala dei Chiaroscuro, thus making it an integral part of the second floor of the papal residence.<sup>7</sup>

The Nicholas V Chapel is one of four fresco cycles that the Observant Dominican painter Fra Angelico completed in Rome, after he arrived in 1445. All four cycles were papal commissions for St Peter's and the Vatican Palace, and all are lost except for the Nicholas V Chapel.<sup>8</sup> Its frescoes represent the lives of deacon saints Stephen and Lawrence, as well as eight Doctors of the Church on the arch intrados and the four Evangelists on the vault (**Figs.105-110**). The lunette window on the south wall was opened after Angelico's time, and may have caused the loss of a frescoed decoration. Vasari stated that the altar wall of the Chapel hosted a *Deposition*, but it is unclear whether this was a fresco or a panel painting.<sup>9</sup> The precise date of the murals in the Chapel is debated: a document of 11 May 1447 might suggest that works had started by

---

Vatican. I am grateful to the staff of the Musei Vaticani for answering my questions in relation to these rooms.

<sup>7</sup> Alfieri and Pagliara, "La torre di Innocenzo III," 23. The walls of what would eventually become the Nicholas V Chapel may have already been decorated with frescoes dating to Nicholas III. Fragments detached from the *cubiculum* and the Sala dei Chiaroscuro show decorative patterns with birds and griffins. Maurizio Calvesi, "Gli affreschi del Beato Angelico nella Cappella Niccolina," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 45. Alessio Monciatti, *Il Palazzo Vaticano nel Medioevo* (Florence: Leo Olshki editore, 2005), 159-171.

<sup>8</sup> The last document mentioning Angelico at San Marco in Florence dates 1445. In January 1446 he is absent from the Capitolo of his convent in Fiesole. It is therefore likely that he came to Rome in the second half of 1445. Antonella Greco, *La Cappella di Niccolò V del Beato Angelico* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1980), 9. Greco's book includes several archival documents in the appendices. Before Creighton Gilbert's contribution to the subject, scholars believed Angelico only painted two fresco cycles in Rome, a misleading assumption mainly based on Vasari's testimony. It is now widely accepted that he worked for Pope Eugenius IV on the Cappella del Sacramento in the papal residence and on the apse in the Basilica of St Peter's (both cycles were destroyed by later renovations), whilst for Nicholas V he decorated a studio in 1449 (where his work was again destroyed by renovations carried out under Julius II) and the Nicholas V Chapel. Creighton Gilbert, "Fra Angelico's Fresco Cycles in Rome: Their Number and Dates," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 38, no. 3 / 4 (1975): 245-265. For the published archival documents: Eugène Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes pendant le XV et XVI siècle* (Paris, 1878), 112, 127.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, ed. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 173. An 1853 drawing shows the south wall before the eighteenth-century decoration was removed in 1924. In it, below the dedication to Pius VII and behind the altar candles, one can see a dark rectangle where an elongated, seemingly naked figure next to a kneeling one is just discernible. It is difficult to say for certain whether this image is part of a fresco or of a panel painting, but it appears to be the latter. In any case, this iconography recalls more a *Compianto* or an *Entombment* rather than a *Deposition*, especially if one compares it with Angelico's Strozzi *Deposition* (**Fig.11**). Salmi suggested that the undocumented *Compianto* attributed to Angelico, now in the Kress Collection of the National Gallery in Washington, may be the *Deposition* mentioned by Vasari, but this panel is too small to be an altarpiece, and its vertical format does not correspond to the horizontal one of the image in the nineteenth-century drawing. Perhaps the Chapel's altarpiece resembled the *Lamentation over Christ* that Angelico painted for the confraternity of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio between 1436 and 1441, now in the Museo di San Marco. For the nineteenth-century drawing: Anna Maria De Strobel and Maurizio De Luca, "Dopo il Beato Angelico: storia dei restauri," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina. Storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani and Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 93. For the Kress *Entombment*: Mario Salmi, *Il Beato Angelico* (Spoleto: Panetto and Petrelli, 1958), 122.

then, but its terminology is misleading and most probably refers to the now lost frescoes Angelico realised for the *capella ecclesiae Santi Petri*, the apse in Old St Peter's.<sup>10</sup> The earliest document that seems to refer to the Nicholas V Chapel is that of 15 February 1448, where a payment is recorded for the purchase of ultramarine blue for the *capella secreta*.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to *secreta*, the Chapel of Nicholas V is also described as *parva*, *privata*, and *quotidiana*, and officially served as the pope's private chapel.<sup>12</sup> Celebration of mass for the pope was its main function, and its characterisation as secret and private encourages an interpretation of its frescoes as a personal decoration speaking directly to the pope's aims and interests. However, the right-hand door connecting the Chapel to the Sala dei Chiaroscuro demonstrates that the room was meant to be accessed from outside as well as from inside the papal private rooms,<sup>13</sup> and points to a ceremonial as well as a private function for the Chapel. There are no documents referring to ceremonies held in the Niccolina during the time of its patron, but reports by the early sixteenth-century papal masters of ceremonies, Paris de Grassis (in office 1504-1521) and Biagio da Cesena (in

---

<sup>10</sup> The 11 May 1447 document contains the minutes of a meeting of the Operai of the Duomo in Orvieto and mentions work that Angelico was carrying out in a chapel "in palatio apostolico sancti Petri de Urbe." The Niccolina is in the Palazzo Apostolico, but the term *capella* was also used for the apse in St Peter's, and the addition of "sancti Petri" to "palatio apostolico" may suggest that the location of this *capella* was the Basilica of St Peter's. For the published document: Deoclecio Redig de Campos, *I Palazzi Vaticani* (Bologna: Casa Editrice Licinio Cappelli, 1967), 50. Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and – perhaps – Alberti," 290. Greco, *La Cappella di Niccolò V*, 12. Gilbert, "Fra Angelico's Fresco Cycles."

<sup>11</sup> For the document: Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des Papes*, II, 316 and Stefano Orlandi, *Beato Angelico: Monografia storica della vita e delle opere con un'appendice di nuovi documenti inediti* (Florence: Leo Olschki editore, 1964), 189.

<sup>12</sup> Paris de Grassis defined it as *parva capella* in the early sixteenth century, Vat.lat. 12269, fol.162r quoted in Renate Colella, "The Cappella Niccolina, or Chapel of Nicholas V in the Vatican: the History and Significance of Its Frescoes," in *Fra Angelico and the Chapel of Nicholas V*, ed. Innocenzo Venchi Renate L. Colella, Arnold Nesselrath, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari (Vatican City State: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1999), note 21. Calvesi, "Gli affreschi del Beato Angelico," 45.

<sup>13</sup> In 1510 Francesco Albertini stated that the Nicholas V Chapel and other private rooms of Eugenius IV frescoed by Fra Angelico were decorated with paintings, marbles and a beautiful door for Julius II ("capella Nicolai V et alia secreta Eugenii IIII q(ua)s frater Jo. flor. ord. praed. perpulchre depinxit in palatio apostolico, sunt a tua beatitudine picturis et marmoribus ac porta pulcherrima exornata"), Francesco Albertini, "Opusculum de mirabilibus novae et veteris Urbis Romae editum a Fra(n)cisco de Albertinis Clerico Florentino dedicatumq(ue) Iulio secundo Pon. Max. (Rome, 1510)," in *Five Early Guides to Rome and Florence*, ed. Peter Murray (Farnborough: Gregg, 1972), III, x, v. Albertini's *pulcherrima porta* is likely to refer to the ornate marble frame around the door connecting the Chapel with the Sala dei Chiaroscuro, rather than to the opening of the Chapel's wall to create the door. The inscription on the door frame (*Iulius Ligur Papa II*) confirms Julius II's patronage. In addition, examination of the Chapel's frescoes around this door reveals no major alterations: the door must have already been in place when Angelico was painting the Chapel. On the other hand, the paint around the other door, connecting the Chapel to Nicholas V's private apartments, shows interference. This may be due to other renovations carried out by Julius II. Cf. note 4. It is difficult to ascertain the full extent of Julius II's intervention in the Nicholas V Chapel, especially since Albertini's testimony includes the renovation of other commissions carried out by Angelico for Eugenius IV. For a history of the Nicholas V Chapel's renovations: Anna Maria De Strobel and Maurizio De Luca, "Dopo il Beato Angelico: storia dei restauri," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina. Storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani and Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 79-97.

office 1518-1544), refer repeatedly to the Nicholas V Chapel as the site for some curial ceremonials. Julius II presided in the Chapel to bestow a pallium and to ordain and install newly appointed cardinals.<sup>14</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Nicholas V also presided over curial ceremonials in his private chapel, since there are precedents. Guido da Busco, papal master of ceremonies from 1404 to 1431, tells us that Gregory XII (1406-1415) consecrated his nephew Antonio Correr as bishop of Methone in his *capella secreta*.<sup>15</sup>

Due to its vicinity to the papal apartments, its small size and its definition ‘*capella secreta*,’ the Chapel must have exerted great fascination on the privileged few who had access to it for important, albeit small, ceremonies. Rather than being an obstacle to the celebration of functions and investitures, the Chapel’s intimacy would have confirmed the visitor’s prestige and proximity to the pope, enhancing the uniqueness of the beautiful frescoed decoration, which carried personal as well as more public, ceremonial and political messages.<sup>16</sup> The frescoed decoration also points towards a wider audience. The west wall depicts St Stephen’s and St Lawrence’s ordinations as deacon by no less than St Peter and St Sixtus respectively, an apt iconography to accompany the ordination of bishops and cardinals. In addition, it is thought that Angelico’s St Sixtus bears the physiognomy of Nicholas V himself,<sup>17</sup> thus establishing a direct parallel

---

<sup>14</sup> Colella, “The Cappella Niccolina,” 49-50.

<sup>15</sup> Colella, “The Cappella Niccolina,” 49-50. In his biography of Nicholas V, Giannozzo Manetti highlighted Nicholas V’s concern with the ordination of cardinals, emphasising the promotion of eight men to the *dignitas* of the cardinalate between February 1448, less than a year after Nicholas V’s own election as pope in March 1447, and 1452. Giannozzo Manetti, *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V summi pontificis*, ed. Anna Modigliani (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2005), II, 6. Unfortunately Manetti did not speak of ordination ceremonies or where they took place. Another indication of Nicholas V’s concern for the cardinalate is expressed in his eulogy for Eugenius IV where, as reported by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, he addressed the cardinals with strong words in relation to their role as electors of the future pontiff (“comminatus est extremum iudicium cardinalibus, si amore, si odio, si aliquo affectu indigno in electione uterentur”). Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *Aenae Silvii Senensis Frederici Romanorum Regis Secretarii et Oratoris de morte Eugenii IV creationeque et coronatione Nicolai V summorum Pontificum Oratio coram ipso Rege habita Anno MCCCCXLVII*, in R.I.S., 3/2, Mediolani 1734, col. 891, quoted in Anna Modigliani, “Introduzione,” in Giannozzo Manetti, *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V summi pontificis*, ed. Anna Modigliani (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2005), XI, 9.

<sup>16</sup> For the implications of St Lawrence as patron of books, and of St Stephen as patron of building in relation to Nicholas V: Charles Burroughs, *From Signs to Design: Environmental Process and Reform in Early Renaissance Rome* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1990), 55-56. For a more detailed discussion of the role of the diaconate in the Chapel: Kevin Salatino, “The Frescoes of Fra Angelico for the Chapel of Nicholas V: Art and Ideology in Renaissance Rome” (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 93-158. For the theological message of the Chapel: Innocenzo Venchi, “Il messaggio teologico della Cappella Niccolina,” in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 63-78.

<sup>17</sup> Maurizio Calvesi, “Il pontificato di Niccolò V,” in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 5 (fig.1). The identification of St Sixtus with Nicholas V is based on the pope’s profile portrait on papal coins, such as the one held at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (inv. 766) or the one at the British Museum (BMP 410.29) Although the frescoed figure of St Sixtus appears leaner than Nicholas V in both coins and

between the frescoes and the ordination ceremonies that took place in the Chapel, and identifying the figures of Stephen and Lawrence as role models for the bishops and cardinals to be.

A further indication of the frescoes' engagement with the bishopric and cardinalate may be the possible involvement of the Dominican Cardinal Juan de Torquemada.<sup>18</sup> Torquemada was a key supporter of Nicholas V's election, and had played a crucial role during the papacy of Eugenius IV as chief theologian arguing for the pope's primacy over the Council and for the primacy of Rome as Apostolic See.<sup>19</sup> He is most likely to be identified with the cardinal kneeling in front of the cross in a small panel painting by Angelico of circa 1440-42 (**Fig.112**). It has also been argued that Torquemada commissioned Angelico to paint a cycle of terra verde frescoes for the cloister of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, the home of the head of the Dominican order, and a major Dominican centre in the fifteenth century.<sup>20</sup> It is there that Angelico died in 1455 and was buried under the floor of the church, his tomb still identifiable by a sculpted and inscribed slab of stone. The terra verde cycle for Santa Maria sopra Minerva was based on Torquemada's *Meditationes*, a contemplative text that has become famous as one of the very first printed books (1467). The illumination attributed to Fra Angelico of *Contemplation 29* in a manuscript version of the *Meditationes* held at the Vatican (Vat.Lat. 973, fol.29r) portrays Torquemada kneeling in front of his patron saint, St Sixtus (**Fig.113**), the same saint and pontiff consecrating Lawrence as deacon on the west wall of the Nicholas V Chapel. This circumstantial and visual evidence strongly suggests a link between Torquemada and Fra Angelico in the Chapel.

Diagrams of the *giornate* highlight that Angelico and his workshop dedicated great amounts of time to the fictive architecture in the Niccolina. A whole *giornata* was spent on the transept in the *Ordination of St Stephen* (**Fig.134**), on the portal of the basilica in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.151**), on the city gate and walls in the east wall lunette

---

younger than in the Biblioteca Apostolica coin, the profiles and the frescoed figure feature a distinctive, slightly bent long nose.

<sup>18</sup> Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, 173-176, 212-213.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas M. Izbicki, *Protector of the Faith. Cardinal Johannes de Turrecremata and the Defence of the Institutional Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 17, 76-77.

<sup>20</sup> For the terra verde cycle and its attribution to Angelico: Gerardo de Simone, "L'ultimo Angelico. Le *Meditationes* del Cardinal Torquemada e il ciclo perduto nel chiostro di S. Maria sopra Minerva," *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte*, 76 (2002): 41-88 and Angi Elsea Bourgeois, *Reconstructing the Lost Frescoes of Santa Maria sopra Minerva from the Meditationes of Cardinal Juan de Torquemada. A Case Study in the History of Art* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2009). For Torquemada's involvement with Santa Maria sopra Minerva: Carol Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome: Cardinals in the Fifteenth Century* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2009), 168-174.

(**Fig.136**) and on the elaborate canopy of the ciboria in the lower register (**Fig.119**). Entablatures received special treatment: the trabeation in the *Ordination of St Stephen* and in the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* were dedicated a *giornata* each, and so was the beautiful entablature of the fictive frame dividing lower from upper register (**Fig.118**).<sup>21</sup> During the latest restoration campaign, carried out between 1995 and 1996, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari identified six different hands at work in the Chapel in addition to Fra Angelico's.<sup>22</sup> The Niccolina workshop was probably composed of the same painters who collaborated with Angelico on the apse of St Peter: their names, Benozzo Gozzoli, Pietro Giacomo da Forlì, Ser Lazzaro da Narni, Giovanni di Antonio della Checca and Giacomo Antonio da Poli, are not mentioned in documents concerning the Nicholas V Chapel.<sup>23</sup> Fra Angelico's frescoes in the Niccolina are likely to have been completed by 1450, year of the Jubilee, when Nicholas V had the floor of the chapel replaced with inlaid marble patterns bearing his name (**Fig.111**).<sup>24</sup>

### **The Fictive Frame**

Rather than structuring plain walls as in the Oratory of St George, the fictive frame of the Nicholas V Chapel engages with a more complex architectural environment, crucially linking all the projecting and receding edges of the room. Instead of a barrel vault, the Chapel is cross vaulted, the lunettes of St Stephen's cycle receding from the rest of the architectural environment, and the lower register, which juts out compared to the lunettes, receding slightly from the arches at either side of the chapel.<sup>25</sup> The alternating projection and recession of the walls is further enhanced by the two original windows bored deep into the west wall to create wide embrasures.

Although the environment of the Nicholas V Chapel is different from that of the Oratory, as are its architectural and decorative style, the frame still represents the first step towards creating a cohesion between real architecture and frescoed narrative. Angelico and his workshop responded to the challenge of an uneven pictorial surface by creating a fictive frame that wraps around corners and edges at the extremities of the lower register (**Figs 114-116**). The frame emphasises the built structure of the Chapel,

---

<sup>21</sup> Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari, "La tecnica pittorica," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 112-130.

<sup>22</sup> Giantomassi and Zari, "La tecnica pittorica," 101.

<sup>23</sup> Orlandi, *Beato Angelico*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> Calvesi, "Gli affreschi del Beato Angelico," 45.

<sup>25</sup> The jutting out of the lower register is likely to mark the union in the space of the Chapel of two floors of the tower of Innocent III.



defining and characterising its walls, and turning them into narrative receptacles by dividing them into three sections: a dado, a lower and an upper register.

The dado is decorated by fictive brocades of different colours hanging from fictive hooks beneath fictive stone scrolls with foliate decoration (**Fig.117**).<sup>26</sup> The scrolls recall those underneath console brackets supporting the entablature running along the walls at San Lorenzo in Florence, and are attached to a moulded entablature incorporating a frieze with fruit swags against a gold ground with flowers. The swags hang from putti heads and roundels encasing Nicholas V's coat of arms: a mitre over St Peter's crossed keys, also present in six of the nine fictive brocade panels. The frame continues with a stylised foliage motif and a white entablature seemingly acting as a ledge to support the scenes from the life of St Lawrence. Like the scenes from the life of Christ in the Oratory of St George (but unlike the scenes of the three saints' lives), no ochre line separates the narrative from its architectural frame.

The unmediated relation between frame and narrative is further emphasised by the stone coloured fictive piers of the lower register at the extremities of the west and east walls. These piers rest on an illusionistically shaded moulded base (**Fig.114**), their shafts decorated with stylised elongated leaves and fruit. They are wrapped around the corners marking the slight projection of the arches at either end of the chapel, merging with an unfluted pier at the edge of the last scenes of St Lawrence's life on the east wall (**Fig.116**). One is left wondering whether the unfluted pier is part of the fictive framing or of the architectural setting for the scenes. A similar effect is reiterated on the west wall. Although here the piers connect the arch intrados and the window embrasures, the scene between the two windows, the *Ordination of St Lawrence*, still presents at its edges part of a pier with a stylised leaf shaft (**Fig.115**).<sup>27</sup> The fictive frame piers are markedly different in shape and colouring from those within the architectural setting of the *Ordination*. Their position, almost covering the edges of the columns in the scene, draws attention to them and the entablature they support.

---

<sup>26</sup> The fictive brocades of the dado have been extensively repainted, as shown in the diagrams in Francesco Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina*. An eighteenth-century source states that the fictive tapestry "a broccati di fiori d'oro" was added during the time of Gregory XIII (1572-1585). Gregory XIII's fictive draperies were removed during a restoration campaign in 1950-51 to reveal Angelico's. De Strobel and De Luca, "Dopo il Beato Angelico," 79 note 1 and 86.

<sup>27</sup> The paint at either side of the *Ordination of St Lawrence*, where the piers are, was damaged and repainted. For the diagrams of damages and renovations: Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari, "La tecnica pittorica" and "L'intervento di restauro," both in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina: storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani-Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 113, 184-185.

The white slender piers wrapping around the edges of the *Ordination of St Lawrence* appear to support the fictive entablature separating the lower from the upper register, but so do the last columns in the foreground of the architectural setting (even though their capitals are not completely included in the representation), thus blurring the boundaries between fictive frame and architectural setting. The intricately decorated entablature marks the edge of the projecting lower register, at the same time hiding (when one looks at it from the front) and emphasising it with its beautiful cordon of red and blue flowers, fasciae and cymae (**Fig.118**). This entablature's cordon of flowers, along with the fruit swags of the dado below and the flowers of the window embrasures, is an example of the floral and fruit decoration pervading the whole environment. Another instance of this are the festoon-like slender strips of green leaves and scarlet flowers binding the walls to the vault (**Fig.119**), imitating semi-cylindrical columnar mouldings like those in earlier chapels, for example Nardo and Andrea di Cione's Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella (1354-1357) but also the Sancta Sanctorum in Rome, a crucial model for the Niccolina, as Chapter Five will show. Two strips depart from the fictive entablature above the brocades and enhance the real semicircular arches of the Chapel, flanking the Doctors of the Church as well as the frescoes of the north wall, and another four spring from the floral entablature above St Lawrence's cycle, marking St Stephen's lunettes and meeting at the centre of the vault to define its ribs and the spandrels hosting the four Evangelists (**Fig.108**).<sup>28</sup> Stylised leaves of this type appear all over the Chapel: the monochrome ones on the fictive frame's pier shafts, on the engaged columns supporting the ciboria of the four lower Doctors of the Church, the leaves at the bottom of the capitals of the columns in *St Lawrence's Ordination* (**Fig.115**), in the *Distribution of the Treasures*, the decoration of the pilasters at either side of the emperor's seat in *St Lawrence before Decius* (**Fig.149**), and in the unusual frieze of the white building in *St Lawrence's Martyrdom*, punctuated by buckles (**Fig.120**).

There are other correspondences between framing elements and narrative settings, such as the repetition of brocades with a pattern established in the dado and recurring with variations in the brocade over the altar behind the clerics in the *Ordination of St Lawrence*, behind and at either side of Decius in *St Lawrence before Decius*, Sixtus's robe in the

---

<sup>28</sup> The round scarlet flowers have well-defined edges and a slight indent that makes them similar to a small saucer. Their shape could be a reference to the paten handed to Stephen and Lawrence, and their red colour may be a reference to the cardinalate, indicating that Nicholas V ordained cardinals in the chapel like Julius II after him. Cf.15. Burroughs also pointed out that the cardinalate descends from the diaconate created by St Peter, of which Stephen and Lawrence are model examples. Burroughs, *From Signs to Design*, 55. The reference to the cardinalate may also have been dictated by Juan de Torquemada.

*Entrustment of the Treasures of the Church to St Lawrence* (**Fig.139**) and the canopy on the upper floor of the white building in the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*. In addition, the light purple leaves above the fruit swags are similar to those decorating the armour of the soldier in green in the *Entrustment*, those on the capitals of the columns behind Sixtus in the same scene and those on the capitals of the pink pilasters in the flanking scene, the *Distribution of the Treasures*. The round fruits of the swags are repeated on the capitals of the churches in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* and the *Distribution of the Treasures*, and a trace of fruit or vegetable swags, possibly with faces of putti, is left at the top of the wall in the Sanhedrin in St Stephen's *Dispute*. Finally, the white and red square framing around St Stephen's lunettes is evoked by the floor of the basilica in the saint's *Ordination* (**Fig.134**) and of the Sanhedrin in the *Dispute* (**Fig.147**), and the perforations decorating the Sanhedrin's entablature are repeated, albeit in different shapes, in the strips and small spandrels separating the Doctors of the Church in the arch intrados. These ornamental repetitions help to integrate the structure of the Chapel with the frame and the architectural settings, making the transition from one to the other more seamless, without, however, completely merging them together.

This ambivalent relationship hovering between symbiosis and dichotomy between the frame and the narrative scenes is also established between the frame and the built architecture of the Chapel. Whereas in the Oratory of St George the frame seemingly structures the plain smooth walls and vault of the building, in the Nicholas V Chapel it highlights and at the same time masks the real architecture of the room. On the one hand, the mouldings covered with green leaves and red flowers rising to the ceiling define and underline the ribs of the vault and the lunettes hosting St Stephen's cycle, whilst the entablature above the *Ordination of St Lawrence*, wrapping around the wall, emphasises the projection of this section of the wall. On the other hand, by folding over the projecting and receding edges of the wall, the fictive piers punctuating the lower register almost flatten the projection of the side arches and merge them with the narrative, as is particularly evident on the east wall. These folded fictive piers may be Angelico's interpretation of Brunelleschi's corner solutions. At San Lorenzo and in the Pazzi Chapel, pietra serena pilasters do not simply wrap around the outside of corners, but they fold within concave corners in the shape of a V (**Fig.121**), and columns almost disappear except for a little projecting fillet (**Fig.122**). In particular, the composite piers supporting the arches at the intersection of nave and transept at San Lorenzo extend

over the walls of the nave and transept to show a portion of a capital and shaft.<sup>29</sup> This solution is strikingly similar to the Chapel's fictive piers on the east wall, which 'continue' on the wall towards the narrative (**Figs 116&123**).<sup>30</sup>

The fictive frame of the Nicholas V Chapel shares three purposes with the frame in the Oratory of St George. Firstly, it fastens the frescoed decoration to the real architectural structure of the chapel, underlining the indissoluble link to its walls; secondly, it defines the environment of the Chapel and outlines an individual part of the walls, a *locus* for the scenes to inhabit; finally, it binds the narratives to the arches at either side where the Doctors of the Church are represented and to the vault where the Evangelists sit, thus inscribing the narratives within a prestigious ecclesiastical tradition. However, a significant difference in comparison with Altichiero lies within Angelico's insistent employment of the vegetal motif, which works not only to decorate the environment but also to 'naturalise' it, integrating the architectural, man-made chapel with nature. The vegetation theme, which Altichiero did not adopt, constitutes the main point of contact between fictive frame and narratives, as well as between the various scenes themselves, as we will see shortly. The repetition with variations of architectural decorations of vegetal inspiration turns the frame into a further means to display ornament, testifying to Angelico's closer engagement with a more architecturally-oriented fictive frame.

### **The Doctors of the Church**

The arch intradoses are divided in two registers. St Thomas Aquinas, St Bonaventure (lower register), St Ambrose and St Augustine (upper register) occupy the arch intrados around the north wall, whilst St Athanasius, St John Chrysostom (lower register), St Leo and St Gregory (upper register) occupy the arch intrados around the south wall. All eight figures stand on projecting plinths set on a marble floor and underneath a ciborium. The ciboria are centrally planned structures. They appear to have a hexagonal plan and display a three-storey elevation. The first storey of the ciboria flanking the lower register is markedly elongated to fill the side sections of the arch intrados, making the ciboria particularly imposing and drawing attention to them (**Fig.124**).

---

<sup>29</sup> On Brunelleschi: Eugenio Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1976); Howard Saalman, *Filippo Brunelleschi. The Buildings* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Arnaldo Bruschi, *Filippo Brunelleschi* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 2006). For an evaluation of Brunelleschi's indebtedness to medieval architecture and his innovations: Heinrich Klotz, *Die Frühwerke Brunelleschis und die mittelalterliche Tradition* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1970).

<sup>30</sup> Nesselrath also noted echoes of Brunelleschi's San Lorenzo, but his observations are only in relation to the appearance of capitals. Nesselrath, "Fra Angelico's and Benozzo Gozzoli's Composition," 77-80.

The ciboria encapsulate design ideas relating to centrally planned buildings in Florence during the 1430s and 1440s. Brunelleschi's work is particularly relevant in this respect, especially his designs for the rotunda at Santa Maria degli Angeli (1434 onwards) and for the drum and lantern of the Florentine Cathedral. Although the Chapel's fictive ciboria appear to have a hexagonal plan, rather than the octagonal plans of the rotunda at Santa Maria degli Angeli and the drum for the Cathedral dome, they are remarkably three-dimensional and architectonic. The lower and middle storeys of the ciboria's canopy, with trefoiled pointed arches supporting a balustrade 'a compassi' in front of shell niches (**Fig.125**), emulate the *tribune morte* of Florence Cathedral (**Fig.126**), while the buttresses with an arched openings are similar to those supporting the drums of the side cupole or the lantern.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the top storeys of the ciboria recall the lanterns of the Baptistery as well as the Duomo. In particular, the Duomo's lantern presents tall, narrow arches like those in the ciboria's top storey (**Fig.119**), although here they are blind, whereas they function as windows at the Duomo (**Fig.127**).<sup>32</sup> Other details recall the work of Brunelleschi, such as the roundels of the polychrome ciboria, reproducing those of the Barbadori Chapel.<sup>33</sup> All these details testify to Fra Angelico's engagement with contemporary architectural design in Florence.

There are also similarities with contemporary relief sculpture. The three sides of the lower register of the frescoed ciboria project forwards in an arrangement similar to three buildings in the background of panel IX for Ghiberti's east door for the Baptistery in Florence, representing the battle between Israelites and Philistines and David decapitating Goliath (**Fig.128**). The same arrangement with three projecting sides, also including shell niches, is adopted in Andrea Cavalcanti ("il Buggiano")'s *Presentation at the Temple* on the pulpit for Santa Maria Novella (1443-1448) (**Fig.129**). Finally, the free-standing, centrally planned and polygonal structures of the ciboria, as well as echoing the lanterns of Florence Cathedral and Baptistery and the Baptistery itself, are an early

---

<sup>31</sup> Work on the *tribune morte* began in 1438 "secundum designum et modellum Filippi." Arnaldo Bruschi, *Filippo Brunelleschi* (Milan: Electa, 2006), 160. Howard Saalman, *Filippo Brunelleschi: the Buildings* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 411. Eugenio Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi* (Milan: Electa, 1976), 277. The popularity of the shell niche in Florence during the first half of the fifteenth century is testified, amongst other examples, by the niches in Ghiberti's east door for the Baptistery, commissioned in 1425 and in place by 1452. Kenneth Clark and David Finn, *The Florence Baptistery Doors* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 199-200. Antonio Paolucci, *The Origins of Renaissance Art. The Baptistery Doors, Florence* (New York: George Braziller, 1996), 123-126.

<sup>32</sup> The project for the lantern dates 1436, but its execution, like that of the *tribune morte*, postdates Brunelleschi's time. Michelozzo, Manetti and Rossellino realised the details of the lantern, and the sphere at the top, or 'palla', marked the lantern's completion in 1472. Saalman, *Filippo Brunelleschi*, 411. Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi*, 248, 258. Bruschi, *Filippo Brunelleschi*, 165.

<sup>33</sup> Saalman, *Filippo Brunelleschi*, 83. These roundels are also represented in Masaccio's *Trinity* at Santa Maria Novella, although here they appear much deeper.

exploration of the tempietto form, an architectural typology that became particularly successful in Rome after Fra Angelico's time, as exemplified primarily by Bramante's tempietto (1502).<sup>34</sup>

The ciboria in the upper register are monochrome, whilst those in the lower are more elaborate and coloured in white, pink and gold. Scholars have failed to notice that rather than highlighting hierarchical differences between the saints, the colour of the ciboria establishes a mirroring pattern between the two saints of the upper and the two saints of the lower register, whereby two bishop saints (St Ambrose and St Augustine), and two Pope saints (St Leo and St Gregory) in monochrome ciboria face each other in the upper register; and two Eastern Doctors (St Athanasius and St John Chrysostom) and two friar saints (St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas) in polychrome ciboria face each other in the lower register. The architecture of the ciboria thus works in unison with the robes of the Doctors to define their identity and role within the Church.

Furthermore, the alternation of monochrome and polychrome reflects the hues used in the architectural settings of the scenes the ciboria are closest to. Hence, the monochrome upper register ciboria reiterate the pale fictive stone of the basilica, cityscapes and walls in St Stephen's lunettes; whilst the white, pink and gold ciboria of the lower register echo the white, pink and yellow of the architectural settings in St Lawrence's cycle (particularly in the north and east walls), as well as the golden decorative flames on Lawrence's dalmatic and the colours of the west wall window splays framing his *Ordination*.

Apart from chromatic differences, the ciboria are almost identical. The brocades hanging behind all saints, each with its own different pattern, recall those in the dado of the chapel, and the empty niches with shell half domes in the middle register of the ciboria recall the apse of the church in the *Distribution* (**Fig.151**) and the shell behind the sculpted bust of Christ above the door in the *Entrustment* (**Fig.139**). Other architectural links to the rest of the frescoed decoration of the chapel, in addition to the stylised leaves similar to parts of the fictive frame, are the blind arches and conical roof on the

---

<sup>34</sup>Jack Freiberg, *Bramante's Tempietto, the Roman Renaissance, and the Spanish Crown* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Rosenthal traced the antecedents to Bramante's tempietto to peripteral temples in Rome, such as the no longer extant temple dedicated to Hercules Victor. The only pictorial representation of a tempietto Rosenthal mentioned is Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin* (1504), now at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan. Earl Rosenthal, "The Antecedents of Bramante's Tempietto," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 22, no. 2 (1964): 55-74.

uppermost register, which recall the blind arches on the garden walls in *St Stephen Giving Alms* and the roofs of towers in all of St Stephen's lunettes.

All other architectural details are specific to the ciboria. Pinnacles, buttresses and trefoil pointed arches are in stark contrast to the moulded entablatures, round arches and corinthian capitals of the narrative's architectural settings. As well as adding to the chapel's architectural variety, perhaps the use of a different architectural language was meant to distinguish the status of the almost iconic Doctors of the Church from the figures in the narratives, placing the Doctors in a different time and inscribing them more directly within an older artistic tradition of arch intrados saints, whilst at the same time tying them, through shared architectural ornament, to the lives of Stephen and Lawrence.

Saints standing beneath ciboria are a statuary *tópos*. A fundamental example are the tabernacles of Orsanmichele in Florence, with which Angelico must have been familiar. The flat pilasters of the monochrome ciboria recall those of Andrea Pisano's tabernacle for the Por Santa Maria Guild (c. 1340) (**Fig.130**), whilst the Corinthian capitals with double ionic volutes and the shell-domed niche can also be found in Donatello's tabernacle of the Tribunale della Mercanzia, previously of the Parte Guelfa (1425) (**Fig.131**). But the most striking similarity is with the tabernacle of the Medici e Speziali Guild (1399) (**Fig.132**), which has three sides projecting forwards, trefoiled pointed arches and corbels like Angelico's ciboria. The parallels are so arresting that Angelico must have used this sculpted tabernacle as a model for the lower register of the Chapel's ciboria.<sup>35</sup> The interior of Orsanmichele also presents saints frescoed on arch intrados like the Doctors of the Niccolina, as well as numerous figures under ciboria frescoed on the walls. The saints depicted on the arch intrados of the second bay of the south aisle, south side at Orsanmichele (early fifteenth-century) are framed by twisted columns and a trefoiled round arch rather than by a three-dimensional ciborium, but the holy figures on the first bay of the north aisle, west side (early fifteenth-century) are seemingly depicted between a polylobed arch and a simple round one, conveying a sense of depth that recalls the three-dimensionality of ciboria.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Fra Angelico's Frankfurt *Virgin Enthroned with Angels* (c.1422-23) (cf. Chapter Five, 194 (**Fig.156**)) and Louvre *Coronation of the Virgin* (1427-29) also demonstrate the influence of this Orsanmichele tabernacle on the friar's work.

<sup>36</sup> For Orsanmichele: *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, ed. Diane Finiello Zervas (Modena: Panini Editore, 1996). On the exterior tabernacle sculptures: Alessandra Griffo, "The Trecento Sculptures in the Exterior

Florence offers numerous other examples of saints frescoed under tabernacles. The saints at either side of the Choir Chapel in Santa Croce (c.1380), for instance, stand underneath elaborate ciboria supported by slender piers with engaged twisted columns and topped by crocketed pinnacles and a pyramidal roof. Pinnacles and pointed roofs are also visible in the ciboria of the Nicholas V Chapel, but Angelico simplified the pinnacles by depriving them of crockets and smoothed the side of the pyramidal roof by turning it into a cone. Nardo di Cione's ciboria on the piers and arch intrados of the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella (1354-57) (**Fig.133**) are another interesting example, combining pink, white and yellow like the ciboria in the lower register of the Nicholas V Chapel. Decorated by pinnacles and twisted columns like those at Santa Croce, these ciboria present, however, a domed roof, not too dissimilar from the dome over the tabernacle of the Medici e Speciali Guild at Orsanmichele, that becomes rather squat in the haunches of the arch to allow more room for the representation of four figures.

Although he may well have taken inspiration from these Florentine fictive ciboria, Angelico's have four defining characteristics that set them apart. Firstly, their seemingly hexagonal plan and accurate shading enhance their three-dimensionality and give them a considerable architectural presence that is absent in fictive tabernacles at this time, but can be found in sculpted ones like the tabernacle for the Medici e Speciali Guild. Secondly, Fra Angelico's ciboria have three distinct levels rather than one: the first formed by pointed trefoil arches, cornice and balustrade; the second characterised by shell niches; and the third articulated by a lantern with conical roof. The telescoping enhances their separation and their being stacked on top of each other in a way that recalls the *congeries of amplificatio* encountered in Chapter Three. Thirdly, the empty niches and balustrade of the middle register, reiterating the tribunes of the Duomo in Florence, offer a point of access but at the same time deny it because of their diminutive size, thus acting in a similar way to Altichiero's uninhabitable places. This could also be said of the last register, especially in the monochrome ciboria, where window-like fissures are visible in each blind arch of the lantern. Finally, Angelico's ciboria are so tall and elaborate that they draw attention away from the saints they host (**Figs 119, 125, 135**), as was the case in almost all of Altichiero's architectural settings for the Oratory of St George. In the lower register, the ciboria are double the height of the Doctors, who

---

Tabernacles at Orsanmichele," in *Orsanmichele and the History and Preservation of the Civic Monument*, ed. Carl Brandon Strehlke (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 125-139.



are barely larger than the figures in the narratives. St Bonaventure, for example, looks towards *St Lawrence before Decius*, and almost seems ready to step into the narrative and merge into the crowd of onlookers. In the upper register the ciboria are slightly shorter, but in spite of this they loom even larger over the saints because they follow the curve of the arch.

The division of the ciboria in three storeys is crucial. The three registers diminish in width as they ascend like the papal tiara worn by St Sixtus in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* and the *Entrustment of the Treasures*, and by St Leo and St Gregory on the south arch intrados. Angelico highlighted this parallel by surmounting his ciboria with a cone, smooth like the last tier of the tiara, rather than with a pyramidal roof as in the cited examples at Santa Croce, or a squat dome like Nardo di Cione's ciboria at Santa Maria Novella. Besides, the vertex of Angelico's conic roof is decorated by a golden sphere or crocket recalling the little golden sphere on top of all three papal tiaras depicted in the Chapel. The establishment of this parallel may be a reason for the adoption of pinnacles, buttresses and crockets only in the ciboria and not in the narrative settings. Perhaps Fra Angelico felt that pinnacles and buttresses were better suited to convey the height of the papal tiara.

The correspondence between the ciboria and the papal tiara creates a link not only between Nicholas V as St Sixtus and the Doctors of the Church, but also between the office of the pope and the ciboria of the Doctors. Ciboria marked the location of the altar in a church, as demonstrated by the ciborium in the *Ordination of St Stephen* (**Fig.134**), thus defining the holiest of places within the building. Raising the eight saints on a pedestal and sheltering them with an elaborate ciborium, rather than a simple plinth, elevates their status by designing a specific, prestigious architectural place for each of them to inhabit.<sup>37</sup> These structures are aedicules, dwellings embodying the sacredness of *aedes*, houses, but also temples and shrines.<sup>38</sup> As such, they represent the righteous abode, the proper *place*, for the authoritative figures of the holy Doctors.

In relation to architectural niches, Amanda Lillie noted how they work like a built exclamation mark to sanctify what they contain through a variety of means. They

---

<sup>37</sup> For a deeply informative analysis of the rhetorical role of pedestals in Renaissance Italy, especially for statuary: Alison Wright, " '...con uno inbasamento et ornamento alto:' The Rhetoric of the Pedestal c. 1430-1550," *Art History*, 34, no. 1 (2011): 8-53.

<sup>38</sup> *Thesaurus linguae latinae, editus auctoritate et consilio academiarum quinque Germanicarum Berlinensis, Gottigensis, Lipsiensis, Monacensis, Vindobonensis* (Leipzig: in aedibus G.B. Teubneri, 1900-), I, 911.

magnify the framed object, drawing attention to it; they project forwards, thus entering public space and boldly stating their presence; they create a boundary between the framed figure and its surroundings, enhancing its specialness; and they aesthetically enhance, through decoration, what they contain.<sup>39</sup> Lillie's analysis highlights the agency of the niche or aedicule to the advantage of the object they frame, emphasising how the niche works *for* what it contains, or even what it does not contain in the case of empty niches. These observations ring true for Fra Angelico's fictive ciboria: their height and 'stacked' arrangement compress and intensify the figures of the Doctors, they fictively project forwards and separate the saints from the rest of the decoration, proclaiming their presence, and they certainly are splendidly decorated. However, the fictive ciboria for the Nicholas V Chapel also work the other way round. They sanctify the Doctors, but at the same time the Doctors sanctify the niches, so that their holiness, dignity and authority are transmitted to the ciboria's three-tiered structures, and by extension to the papal tiara and the office of the pope. The connection between one's social and moral standing and location, where the site as container is inextricable from the character and essence of the thing contained, reiterates the metaphorical valence of place as office mentioned in Chapter One. This meaning of place is at the heart of the interpretation of all the architectural settings for the Nicholas V Chapel, as we will see in Chapter Five.

This complex pattern of legitimisation and authority-lending, working reciprocally, is applied by the ciboria to the whole Chapel. With their pointing roofs, they lead the eye upward towards the Evangelists in the vault, as well as binding the narrative on the north wall and the fresco or altarpiece, now lost, of the south wall. The ciboria team up with the fictive frame to fasten all the sections of the decoration together, and bind them inextricably to the built architectural environment of the Chapel. In addition, the Doctors function as a term of comparison for the narratives. Their imposing stillness as they stand holding books is in contrast to the varied and active poses of Stephen and Lawrence as they interact with the faithful through the administration of alms and the distribution of the treasures of the Church. Whilst the Doctors are symbols of spiritual contemplation and may act as doctrinal role models for the pope, Lawrence and Stephen act for the material wellbeing of the congregation, acting as practical role models. Action and contemplation thus emerge as two crucial themes, balancing each other within the space of the Chapel.

---

<sup>39</sup> Amanda Lillie, "Boundaries, Tabernacles and Voids: Observations on Renaissance Niches," talk given at the workshop *Niche*, presented by the *Research School for Architectural History and Theory and Sculpture Studies*, University of York, 26 May 2010.

## St Stephen's Cycle

The episodes from the life of St Stephen in the upper register are all demarcated by an almost centrally placed column or pier in the very foreground. This compositional arrangement separates and at the same time connects single episodes, while also creating chronological succession and consequential relationships between the scenes. In the west wall lunette, the pier or wall end rising from the basilica's floor separates the *Ordination of St Stephen* from the *Giving of Alms* (**Fig.134**), whilst at the same time apparently locating both episodes in the same building: the *Ordination* inside the church and the *Giving of Alms* on its entrance step. The same strategy is adopted in the north wall lunette, where a pier separates *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem* on the left from the *Dispute in the Sanhedrin* to the right (**Fig.135**), but Stephen is shown preaching next to the dividing pier and on a step adjacent to the wall of the Sanhedrin. A sturdy, vertical element in the foreground of the scene is also adopted in the east wall, where the end tower of the city gate divides the *Expulsion from Jerusalem* from the *Martyrdom of St Stephen* (**Fig.136**).

The pier, gate tower, and wall end bring the fictive architecture forwards right to the picture plane, a compositional choice that attracts the viewer's attention and was probably prompted by the distance between the upper register and the viewer. Besides, the wall end and the side of the city gate in the west and east lunettes, rising to the top of the arch, almost seem to function as central supports for the arch itself, outlined by moulding and foliate decoration, thus mediating between the architectural setting for the scene, the fictive framing and the built structure of the chapel.<sup>40</sup> The fictive architecture in St Stephen's cycle is crucial both for connecting the representational surface and individualising the single episodes. A place is assigned to each episode (the enclosed area of the Sanhedrin, the interior of the basilica), but all places are at the same time linked by the architectural settings.

The architectural separation creates chronological succession, but the proximity of the episodes within the same lunette also establishes a consequential relationship: the *Giving of Alms* on the right of the west lunette, as one of the duties of the diaconate, was a direct consequence of Stephen's *Ordination*; and the *Dispute in the Sanhedrin* was a direct consequence of the saint's *Preaching*. The architecture separates them, creating specific

---

<sup>40</sup> In the Oratory of St George, the frame plays this double role in the *Coronation*, whose architectural decoration is both fictive framing and architectural setting, at the same time inside and outside the narrative scene. Similarly, the painted columns on the altar wall function as framing for the triptych-like arrangement of the two windows and the *Crucifixion*, as well as fictive support for the lunette of the *Coronation*.

places for different moments in time, but also constructs a tight sequence, enhancing the left to right development of the narrative and almost quickening its pace. This consequential relationship also works across walls. The tower at the end of the gate in the foreground of the *Martyrdom of S Stephen* on the east wall and the wall end of the basilica in his *Ordination* mirror each other (**Fig.137**). Like the episodes in the west and north lunettes, the mirroring use of a vertical white architectural structure in the foreground could also be read as articulating a consequential relationship between *Ordination* and *Martyrdom*, especially since Stephen adopts the same kneeling position looking towards the chapel's altar wall in both episodes.

Another characteristic of St Stephen's cycle is the contrast of interiors and exteriors working together to emphasise each other. In the west and north wall lunettes the fictive architecture alternates between the interiors of the basilica and the Sanhedrin to the streets and squares of the *Giving of Alms* and the *Preaching*. Stephen and his deeds are firmly grounded in the city, which appears to develop continuously behind the framing arch and the Doctors of the Church of the intrados. It seems the two women walking away from Stephen after having received alms in the west lunette are walking towards the adjacent north lunette to hear him preach, and the bearded Jewish elder wearing a pink robe with blue lining in the Sanhedrin is again represented holding a stone and walking menacingly towards Stephen in the adjacent east lunette.

In *St Stephen Preaching* (**Fig.135**), the grey and pale cream-coloured buildings form an obtuse angle that creates a piazza where a crowd of people can comfortably sit or stand to listen to Stephen's words, and the cityscape of the *Preaching* continues to develop behind the Sanhedrin with another two palaces and a round pink tower enclosing a column. The saint's hands, enumerating the points illustrated in his speech, stand out against the facade of the cream palace, bright in the sun.<sup>41</sup> The openness of this setting and the tight enclosure of the Sanhedrin next to it counterpose each other. The

---

<sup>41</sup> This episode marks an emphasis on hands recurring in almost all the scenes of the chapel. In both *Ordinations*, Peter and Sixtus hand out chalice and paten to the receiving hands of Stephen and Lawrence, Stephen distributes alms like Lawrence distributes the treasures of the Church after having received them from the hands of Sixtus, and in the *Preaching* and *Dispute* Stephen's hands are the mark of his eloquence. In particular, Stephen's gesture in the *Preaching* reproduces the *comput digitalis*, a gesture employed by orators at universities. O. Chomentovskaja, "Le *comput digitalis*. Histoire d'un geste dans l'art de la Renaissance italienne," *Gazette des beaux arts*, 20 (1938): 157-172. Stephen's hands in the *Preaching* were restored multiple times, since the plaster detached due to the opening of a small window, now closed, right next to the figure of the saint. The hands were repainted during the papacy of Gregory XIII (1572-1585), but they were visibly different in style and colouring from the rest of the image. They were repainted as they are now during a restoration campaign in 1948. De Strobel and De Luca, "Dopo il Beato Angelico," 82-83.

alternation of inside and outside is also present in the east wall lunette, and is again articulated by the city walls: on the left St Stephen is still within the perimeter of the city as he is being dragged towards the gate, while on the right he is being martyred outside the walls, as emphasised by the rural landscape and hill towns in the distance.

### **St Lawrence's Cycle**

The episodes from the life of St Lawrence present three different compositional solutions. The *Ordination of St Lawrence* is contained between two windows, the *Entrustment* and *Distribution* on the north wall are divided by a painted strip that is not part of the architectural setting, and the three final scenes of Lawrence's life on the east wall are represented continuously. These diverse solutions significantly differentiate St Lawrence's cycle from St Stephen's, each arrangement emphasising the narrative in different ways. The isolation of the *Ordination* collaborates with its architectural setting to give the scene a more iconic character; the barrier between *Entrustment* and *Distribution* emphasises the simultaneity of the actions in the *Entrustment* as articulated by the setting, encouraging parallels with other parts of the frescoed decoration, and possibly implying a chronological hiatus between the two episodes; and the continuous last three scenes of the east wall increase the pace of the narrative and make it more immersive.

The *Ordination of St Lawrence* (**Fig.138**) is unique in the chapel because it is framed by the windows and is not accompanied by another episode. The narrative takes place in a church interior, although it is unclear where exactly in the church. At first glance it looks like a view down the nave of a basilica, but since the altar is placed to the left in the foreground, the colonnade behind the figures could be that of a transept, although a golden apse is visible at the end of the main axis, and we can infer a transept developing at either side of it. This would place the altar on the left side of the nave, an unusual location. In spite of its ambiguous setting, the *Ordination of St Lawrence* is the most striking fresco in the chapel. This is partly due to its frontal composition isolated by the windows, which act as wings to the scene as if the whole register were a triptych. The *Ordination of St Lawrence* also stands out thanks to the colonnade, whose sides are splayed out towards the viewer, and thanks to the eye-catching gold apse. The architectural setting is even more intriguing when one notices three striking characteristics: the unusual capitals, decorated with leaves, fruits and a calla (**Fig.115**); the full arch supporting a rib vault; and the two barely glimpsed areas, perhaps the arms of a transept, developing at either side of the apse, as enticing as they are elusive. Compared

to the *Ordination of St Stephen*, the *Ordination of St Lawrence* introduces variety of architectural decoration whilst maintaining a correspondence with the kneeling figures of the two saints.

The following episode of Lawrence's life, the *Entrustment of the Treasures of the Church* (**Fig.139**), takes place in an even more ambiguous and more complex setting reiterating the L-shaped building with a diminutive upper storey of the *Healing of Palladia*, a predella panel of Angelico's San Marco altarpiece (**Fig.140**). The right side of the building in the *Healing* opens onto a garden as the building in the *Entrustment* opens onto what appears to be a cloister, but the upper storey in the *Entrustment* is far more anomalous and built up with a combination of different structures. This arrangement loosely recalls the structures above the arches in the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* in the Sancta Sanctorum (1277-1280) in Rome (**Fig.141**), as well as evoking the diminutive upper storeys Pietro Cavallini designed for the *Life of the Virgin* mosaics in the apse in Santa Maria in Trastevere in the 1290s (**Fig.142**). Most importantly, The L-shaped structure in the *Entrustment* reproduces, inverting it, the structure on fol.29r of Torquemada's *Meditationes* (Vat.Lat. 973) (**Fig.113**). As mentioned before, *Contemplation 29* portrays the cardinal kneeling in front of St Sixtus, the same figure offering the treasures to Lawrence. The poses and gestures of the figures are also similar. Lawrence and Torquemada kneel on the right, the folds of their robes extending towards the edge of the scene, whilst Sixtus stands with a hand raised in a gesture of benediction, although in the illumination he holds a cross rather the treasures of the Church and he stands frontally rather than sideways. This could be cited as further evidence for Torquemada's involvement with the programme for the Nicholas V Chapel.

The L-shaped building with a portico behind Sixtus and Lawrence in the *Entrustment* could be understood as a section, as if the painter had taken down the wall standing in front of the two saints for the benefit of the viewer, but preserved it to the left to show the entrance in front of which two soldiers are standing. This interpretation would explain why the soldiers, who were sent to arrest Sixtus, do not seem to see him standing right next to them. However, the hem of the robes of both Sixtus and especially Lawrence are not in line with the portion of the building on the left, and invade the pictorial field of the soldiers. Rather than establishing a consequential relationship as in St Stephen's cycle, here the architectural setting creates simultaneity. The shape of the building enables the key figures of St Sixtus and St Lawrence to be placed in line with,

yet separately from the soldiers, thus synchronising the arrival of the soldiers with the handing over of the treasures and articulating a sense of urgency also emphasised by the worried gesture of the cleric behind St Sixtus.

The portico behind Sixtus and Lawrence draws the viewer in through an arched opening leading to a cloister (**Figs 139&143**). The representation of the architecture is precise: one can see a slender column to the left supporting the roof, whose underside is outlined, the trunks of trees whose green tops rise above the building (as in the walled garden in *St Stephen Giving Alms*), and the two-register cloister with columns, windows and roof tiles. This portico recalls that at San Marco, Angelico's convent, although here the roof rests on round arches rather than on an entablature as in the fresco.<sup>42</sup> The arch opening onto an architectural structure grants further visibility to the settings' decorative detail, achieving similar results as Altichiero's splaying, although in this instance the architectural detail is made visible by the tunnelling in of the arch rather than by the opening out of the structure. The white building in the distance illuminates the episode, and although it does not match in structure and building materials the L-shaped structure in the foreground, the round arches and perfectly straight tree trunks reiterate the arch and columns of the church behind St Lawrence in the flanking scene, the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.151**). Furthermore, the Corinthian order with acanthus leaves and double volutes decorating the columns on the left in the *Entrustment* is the same as the capital of the pink pilaster in the *Distribution* (**Figs 139&148**).

These parallels are the only links between *Entrustment* and *Distribution*. They are the only two episodes on the same wall that are not separated by a shared architectural element, but by a simple white and gold strip rising from the lower to the upper moulding of the fictive frame, and cutting through St Lawrence's robe in the *Entrustment* and part of the woman holding a baby in the *Distribution*. Perhaps this marked, non-architectural separation was meant to convey a chronological hiatus between the two episodes rather than suggesting sequence and consequentiality, as in St Stephen's cycle. Or perhaps a sharp separation between *Entrustment* and *Distribution* was meant to encourage parallels between the two basilican scenes on the north and west walls of St Lawrence's cycle, *Ordination* and *Distribution*, rather than between *Entrustment* and *Distribution*. Both *Ordination*

---

<sup>42</sup> This frescoed portico is more similar to the entrance portico of San Lorenzo fuori le mura, cf. Chapter Five.

and *Distribution* present basilican nave structures leading to a semicircular apse, and the rows of columns are slightly splayed to offer a better view of the interior of the church.

The sharp, more overtly pictorial rather than architectural separation between *Entrustment* and *Distribution* draws attention to the figure of St Lawrence in the *Distribution*, highlighting a parallel between it and the saints in the arch intrados, particularly those of the lower register. St Lawrence's standing, haloed figure is framed by the basilican architectural setting as the standing, haloed Doctors of the Church are framed by the ciboria, Lawrence gazing downwards like St Ambrose and slightly sideways like St Thomas Aquinas (**Fig.144**). Furthermore, the pink, shell dome of the basilica's apse in the *Distribution* reiterates the one visible on the second register of the ciboria, and the *oculus* above the apse in the *Distribution* echoes the indented roundels at either side of the ciboria's pointed, trefoil arches. These parallels assimilate St Lawrence to the Doctors, but at the same time further underscore the contraposition of active and contemplative life represented by the deacon saints and the Doctors respectively.

The treatment of the last three episodes of St Lawrence's life is yet again different from the previous ones. Although all the figures are on the same level, the episodes of *St Lawrence before Decius* and that of his *Martyrdom* are demarcated by two adjacent but different buildings (**Fig.145**). The separation between these episodes is articulated by the projecting prison tower of the white building, where the saint can be seen baptising and healing a blind man. The recession within the pictorial field of this episode, in contrast with the foreground architectural divide in St Stephen's cycle and the simple white and gold strip between *Entrustment* and *Distribution*, creates a continuous narrative, as also highlighted by the youth to the left of emperor Decius casting a worried glance towards the saint's martyrdom.

It is also significant that the baptism and healing of the blind man should be placed inside the projecting section of the building behind the *Martyrdom*. This allows the *Baptism* to be discreetly differentiated from the two episodes flanking it, whilst at the same time illustrating its increased chronological proximity to the martyrdom in comparison with the preceding episode of *St Lawrence before Decius*. The rusticated round arch of the prison reiterates the eye-catching, arched opening in the background of the *Entrustment of the Treasures*, but it also allows the inclusion of another episode in St



Lawrence's life to compensate for the single *Ordination* on the west wall. The lives of both Stephen and Lawrence are thus expounded in six episodes each.

### **Two Places, Two Times**

The discrepancies between the two cycles in the arrangement of the settings, their chromatic pattern and the quantity and type of ornament emphasise the distinction between the life of St Stephen and that of St Lawrence, a differentiation already enacted by the elaborate fictive moulding dividing the two registers and emphasising the slight projection of the lower register. These incongruences could suggest the intervention of Benozzo Gozzoli, who was Fra Angelico's main collaborator. Benozzo's role within the Nicholas V Chapel is debated. Although he did not remark upon the subtle differences between the cycles, Arnold Nesselrath proposed that all architectural settings of the Nicholas V Chapel were designed by Gozzoli.<sup>43</sup> Diane Cole Ahl disagreed, stating that Fra Angelico conceived the architecture, but conceding that Benozzo may well have executed its ornament.<sup>44</sup> It could be argued that the discrepancies between the cycles reconcile these diverging opinions: perhaps Benozzo did intervene in the designing process for the settings, but only in one case, maybe St Lawrence's, whose more abundant architectural ornament is more in line with, for example, Benozzo's St Augustine cycle in the church of Sant'Agostino at San Gimignano (**Fig.146**).

However, the variations do not merely touch the architectural settings, and are so pervasive as to suggest an intentional distinction rather than highlighting a different hand. This is particularly evident in the twin *Ordinations*. Whilst the altar in the *Ordination of St Stephen* (**Figs 134&195**) is covered by a humble *tovaglia perugina*, an affordable and widely used textile in fifteenth-century Italy, in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* (**Fig.138**) the altar is adorned by a velvet panel similar to the extremely expensive ones created for the first time in the 1420s and still exclusive and à la mode in the 1440s (**Fig.197**).<sup>45</sup> Although the altar in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* is not as prominent as that in the *Ordination of St Stephen*, the simplicity of the *tovaglia* reflects the chromatically plainer settings of St Stephen's cycle, whereas the gold-rimmed velvet-like panel echoes the elegant robes of the figures, the polychromy of the settings and the complexity of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Nesselrath, "Fra Angelico's and Benozzo Gozzoli's Composition," 72-97.

<sup>44</sup> Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, 187.

<sup>45</sup> Lisa Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets* (London: V&A Publications, 2012), 8-11, 19 and for the perception of velvet and its representation in painting 29, 37-47. I am grateful to Vera-Simone Schulz for discussing with me the fictive brocades, robes and altar cloths of the Nicholas V Chapel and sharing her knowledge of textiles.

architectural ornament in St Lawrence's cycle. Cole Ahl's opinion is therefore more likely to be correct: the settings are the result of a unified plan on which Angelico, as head of workshop, must have had significant input. One cannot exclude, nonetheless, that Benozzo may have contributed to designing the architectural ornament.

The slightly varied settings articulate a distinct place for each narrative. Each thus becomes intrinsic to its assigned narrative, as the ciboria of the arch intrados are at one with the Doctors. Again like the ciboria, the settings define and are defined by the character of what they host. On the one hand, the chromatically and ornamentally sparer, though still beautiful and dignified, settings for the life of St Stephen reflect the early days of the Church, when the Apostles were still living and St Peter had just begun to shape the papal office and the duties of the Church with the appointment of deacons, as shown in Stephen's own *Ordination*. On the other hand, the polychromy and the profusion of innovative, striking architectural ornament in the settings of the life of St Lawrence represent the Church at a stage when it was more established. Thus, by engaging with two different moments of the history of the Church, these two places also articulate time. The spatial distance between St Stephen's cycle in the upper register and the viewers contributes to conveying chronological separation, as well as emphasising the proximity of St Lawrence's cycle. The spatial vicinity of this cycle to the viewer is also meant to be perceived as chronological contiguity. The features of St Sixtus recall those of Nicholas V, the beautifully dressed clerics holding liturgical paramenta reiterate ceremonials of the time, as we will see in more detail in Chapter Five, and the robes of the figures are shorter and more elaborate than the tunics of the lay figures in the cycle of St Stephen, recalling fifteenth-century fashion.<sup>46</sup> Considered together, the two places mark a temporal evolution that lends the Church authority by grounding it in history, as well as stressing its long existence and influence on the life not only of the faithful, but also the unfaithful, as demonstrated by the martyrdom scenes.

A further layer of meaning is added by the location of the two saints' lives as described in their textual *vitae* and, in Stephen's case, in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>47</sup> Stephen lived

---

<sup>46</sup> Giulia Mafai, *Storia del costume dall'età romana al Settecento* (Milan: Skira, 2011), 197-230.

<sup>47</sup> Acts of the Apostles 6:5-7:59, accessed Jan 23, 2016, <http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=5&c=6>. Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*, ed. William Granger Ryan (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 45-50 and 449-460. *Liber Pontificalis: nella recensione di Pietro Guglielmo OSB e del Card. Pandolfo. Glossato da Pietro Bohier*, ed. Ulderico Prerovsky (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978), XXV, 2. For the relationship between the hagiographies of Sts Stephen and Lawrence on the one hand and the building and decoration of churches in Rome: Renate Colella, "Hagiographie und Kirchenpolitik. Stephanus und Laurentius in Rome," in *Pratum Romanum: Richard Krautheimer zum 100.*

and died in Jerusalem, whilst Lawrence carried out the duties of the diaconate and was martyred in Rome. The frescoed settings thus bring together, without collapsing them, the crucial hubs of Christendom, where the Rome of St Lawrence, who lived about two-hundred years after St Stephen, becomes an heir to St Stephen's Jerusalem. The differences between these two fictive places, which do not allow for a complete assimilation between the cities, enhance instead the time span between the life of one saint and the other, contributing to the establishment of the Church's authority through history. The articulation of the Church's authority through the architectural settings of the Chapel is also informed by parallels with the built identity of Rome, as discussed in Chapter Five. Nonetheless, the discrepancies between the two settings are not so stark as to create a rupture between the narratives, and are mediated by four shared characteristics that, in addition to unifying the whole decoration of the Chapel, also contribute to the temporal continuity between the cycles enacted primarily by the mirroring episodes of the lives of the two saints.

### **Shared Characteristics**

In spite of their different episodes, the cycles of Stephen and Lawrence share an architectural language and numerous architectural decorative details between them and with the fictive frame and ciboria of the Doctors, as well as a striking use of light and the employment of depth and multiple points of view. In addition, the architectural settings of both cycles are characterised by structural fragmentation and ambiguity, thus defying typological definition, as observed in Altichiero's Oratory of St George.

#### **1. Repetition of Architectural Detail**

The two narrative cycles share an architectural language, characterised by pilasters and columns with highly decorative and innovative capital solutions, and imposing entablatures. A common architectural vocabulary reduces the chronological and geographical distance between the two narratives, bringing together St Stephen's

---

*Geburstag*, ed. Relate Colella, Meredith J. Gill, Lawrence A. Jenkers and Petra Lamers (Wiesbaden: Dr. L. Reichert, 1997), 75-96. The lives of Sts Stephen and Lawrence also feature in Antonio Agli's *Libri X de vitis et gestis sanctorum* (ms. BAV, Vat.lat. 3742) commissioned by Nicholas V himself. Agli, a Florentine cleric and humanist, never completed his hagiographical work for Nicholas V. Arnaldo D'Addario, "Agli, Antonio." *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Enciclopedia Treccani, 1960, accessed Jan 23, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-agli\\_%28Dizionario\\_Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-agli_%28Dizionario_Biografico%29/). On Agli's account of the lives of St Stephen and St Lawrence: Salatino, "The Frescoes of Fra Angelico for the Chapel of Nicholas V," 201-203. Salatino remarked upon the absence of St Sixtus from Agli's hagiography of St Lawrence, a striking discrepancy with Angelico's frescoes. Although Salatino argued that Nicholas of Cusa was the figure behind the frescoed programme for the Nicholas V Chapel, the prominent presence of St Sixtus seems instead to suggest the influence of Juan de Torquemada, whose patron was St Sixtus. Cf. note 20.

Jerusalem and St Lawrence's Rome. Altichiero had achieved a similar effect through the reiteration of architectural structures and decorative details in the Oratory of St George, but whilst the strikingly repetitive arrangements and details of Altichiero's settings collapsed the places of the four narrative cycles, in the Nicholas V Chapel, Rome and Jerusalem are not completely assimilated. The chromatic differences between the cycle of St Stephen and that of St Lawrence, the prominence of cityscapes in St Stephen's cycle and their absence in St Lawrence's, compensated by more abundant architectural decoration, maintain two distinct places, whilst at the same time the architectural characteristics they share allow them to be compared as equals.

There are numerous decorative details present in both the St Stephen and St Lawrence cycles, as well as in the ciboria for the Doctors of the Church and the fictive frame. The capitals of the fluted pier in the *Ordination of St Stephen* (**Fig.134**), of the pilasters flanking St Lawrence in the *Distribution* (**Fig.148**), and of the pilasters of the white building in the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (**Fig.120**) all present an abacus blossom. A series of these blossoms also climbs on the shaft of the pilaster of the Sanhedrin in the *Dispute* (**Fig.147**). The acanthus leaves decorating the capitals of the pink pilasters in the *Distribution* are also present in the capitals of the pier and columns in the *Ordination of St Stephen*, and the double volutes visible in the capitals of the columns of the left portico in the *Entrustment* (**Fig.139**) are also employed in the columns of the *Ordination of St Stephen*, as well as in the capitals of the pilasters in the *Distribution* and in the *Dispute in the Sanhedrin*. Decorative details are also echoed in scenes of the same cycle. The lotus leaves decorating the pink pilasters in the *Distribution* also decorate the capitals of the pilasters in *St Lawrence before Decius* (**Fig.149**), which are also embellished by a minuscule calla recalling the larger ones on the capitals in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* (**Fig.115**). White towers with squat, conic roofs can be seen in all cityscapes in St Stephen's cycle, acting as harbingers of the saint's *Martyrdom* scene, where a white tower with a conic roof decorates the gate separating the *Expulsion from the City* from the *Martyrdom* (**Fig.136**).

Added to the decorative elements the narrative architectural settings share with the fictive frame and with the ciboria of the Doctors of the Church, the architectural correspondences between the cycles of the two deacon saints contribute to the coherence and cohesion of the whole frescoed decoration of the chapel, also echoing the principle of *varietas* encountered in Chapter Three in connection with Altichiero (p.126). Although they do not wholly compensate for the differences in episode arrangement and

use of colour between the two cycles, by reiterating ornaments found in the frame these decorative repetitions participate in the harmonisation of fictive architecture and real space of the Chapel enacted primarily by the frame.

## 2. Use of Light

The architectural settings of the Nicholas V Chapel are characterised by a striking use of light effects that is also visible in previous works by Angelico.<sup>48</sup> As the chromatic and decorative treatment of the settings differs slightly between the two cycles, so does the use of light, which is more diffused in St Lawrence's cycle and more contrast-based in St Stephen's. Hence, in the north wall lunette, the facade of the pale yellow building in *St Stephen Preaching* (**Fig.147**) is in sharp contrast to its sombre side and the shady interior of the Sanhedrin, whilst the setting for *St Lawrence before Decius* and the saint's *Martyrdom* in the east wall lower register (**Fig.107**) is more evenly illuminated. Angelico's rendition of light in the Niccolina serves three main purposes: it shapes and moulds the buildings to highlight architectural detail and convey a sense of movement; it focuses the viewers' attention and draws them into the picture by illuminating receding parts of the setting; and it emphasises façades to create a contrast with other parts of the architectural setting and directly engage with the figures.

The use of highlights defining the fictive architecture conveys rhythm and movement particularly well in the *Martyrdom of St Stephen*, where the turrets, merlons and arches of the gate are well-lit only on one side, producing a repetitive rhythmic pattern of light and shade moving leftwards and curving in the distance that accompanies the swift movements of the figures in the *Expulsion* (**Fig.150**). In the *Ordination of St Lawrence* the contrast of light and shade is more subdued, but touches of white paint on the left side of the columns define the roundness of their shafts, and light and shade delicately intertwine to shape the leaves, volutes, fruits and callas of the ornate capitals (**Figs 115&138**). A similar effect is achieved in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.151**), where

---

<sup>48</sup> An exhibition at the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris was dedicated to the importance of light in the work of Fra Angelico and his entourage. However, the exhibition catalogue does not fully explain how Angelico's light effects were achieved and how exactly they engage with the narrative. Giovanna Damiani and Nicolas Sainte Fare Garnot, ed., *Fra Angelico et les maîtres de la lumière* (Bruxelles: Fonds Mercator, 2011). Strehlke noted the use of light in the Niccolina, arguing it gives the figures "a statuesque appearance and the scenes an intentionally timeless quality," Carl Brandon Strehlke, "Fra Angelico: A Florentine Painter in Roma Felix," in *Fra Angelico*, ed. Laurence Kanter and Pia Palladino (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 211. For a brief overview of Angelico's possible sources on colour and light: Anna Luce Sicurezza, "Nuove ipotesi sulla formazione culturale del Beato Angelico. Fra ottica medievale e pratica pittorica," in *L'artiste et l'œuvre à l'épreuve de la perspective*, ed. Pascal Dubourg-Glatigny, Marianne Cojannot-Le Blanc and Marisa Dalai Emiliani (Rome: Collection de l'École Française de Rome, 2006), 353-363.

light and shade alternate to outline the lotus leaves of the pink pilasters and the fruits and leaves of the capitals within the building, although in this colonnade the contrast of light and shade is more pronounced than in the *Ordination of St Lawrence*.

The episode where the play of light and architecture is perhaps most enticing is the *Ordination of St Stephen* (**Fig.195**). The well-lit nave where the ceremony is taking place is in sharp contrast with the dark aisle behind it, punctuated by the softly lit splays of the lancet windows. What the eye is drawn to, however, is the transept, illuminated by two side chapels and their *oculi*. The brightness originating from these not only contributes to illuminating the bent figure of St Peter in the foreground, but also allows us to glimpse the blue ribbed ceiling of the transept, the fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals, and the delicate festoon relief on the chapels' arch intrados, as well as the pilaster at the end of the aisle echoing the pier visible in the foreground at the intersection between nave and transept.

The ciboria of the Doctors of the Church, the fictive framing and even the vegetal decoration of the window splays are not exempt from the interplay of light and shade that shapes and highlights the architectural settings of the narratives. In the ciboria, the shading helps convey the curving of the niches of the middle register and their shell domes (**Fig.119**); the single elements of the fictive architectural framing of the lower register of the walls are rendered more three-dimensional by light, as the red flowers and green leaves of the upper register and arches appear more turgid. Even the six-petal roundels in the window splays are moulded by light patterns corresponding to the real light from the windows.

Whether it achieves a diffused effect or a bolder one, Angelico's use of light functions as a catalyst of attention everywhere in the Chapel. There are, however, three episodes in particular where the play of light, associated with the rendition of depth, is particularly successful at drawing the viewer within the picture: the *Ordination of St Stephen*, *Entrustment* and *Distribution of the Treasures*. In the *Ordination of St Stephen*, the bright side chapels and *oculi* illuminate the transept, highlighting how this recedes further within the picture eluding the viewer's gaze. The environment, articulated by delicate decorative detail defined by light, acts as a point of access for the viewer, the two bright light dots of the *oculi* engaging like a pair of eyes with the viewer's own. Similarly, in the *Entrustment of the Treasures*, the white building visible in the distance through the arch of the portico

illuminates the scene, providing a more ample, complex location for the narrative. At the same time, the well-lit grass and white building catalyse attention, and are but emphasised by the slender tree trunks and the dark under roof visible through the portico arch. The well-lit environment in the distance invites the viewer to enter and explore the receding architectural setting.<sup>49</sup> In the *Distribution of the Treasures* the densely packed columns are articulated by light and shade and lead the eye towards the apse, where five lancet windows and an *oculus* focus the attention of the viewer. As the receding transept in the *Ordination of St Stephen*, the delicately lit, deep nave in the *Distribution* acts like a point of access (**Fig.151**).

Façades are another means to illuminate the narrative. Brightly lit building fronts are particularly evident in the north wall. In *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem*, a two-storey cream-coloured building with a tower stands sideways, creating a slanted piazza-like environment where the people of Jerusalem gather to hear the saint's words (**Figs 135&147**). The building's luminous front contrasts with the other grey building defining the piazza, and in addition to a few small windows, is characterised by four, extremely narrow fissure-like openings reiterating the slender tree trunks of the *Entrustment* directly beneath it.

The building's side, which corresponds to the standing figure of St Stephen, is much darker than its front, against which the saint's hands are drawn. The brightness of the structure thus emphasises the saint's hands as he enumerates the key points of his eloquent sermon, but it also appears to emanate light itself, illuminating the crowd of listeners as St Stephen's speech is illuminating their minds. The odd structure of this building, with small turrets, a tower, a receding upper storey and fissure-like openings singles it out from the square grey palace on the left, and the striking lighting renders it a narrative agent rather than a passive complement.<sup>50</sup> Similarly to the pale yellow structure in *St Stephen Preaching*, light seems to emanate from the brightly lit façade of the

---

<sup>49</sup> Angelico had already adopted this arrangement, where a door on the right gives a glimpse of carefully lit interiors or exteriors. It is particularly evident in his Prado *Annunciation* (c.1425-27) (**Fig.158**), and in the *Apparition of St Francis at Arles*, a predella panel for the *Compagnia di San Francesco Altarpiece* (documented 1429).

<sup>50</sup> Angelico also paired a slanted well-lit building façade and a preaching figure in one of the predella scenes for the San Nicola altarpiece for the church of San Domenico in Perugia (**Fig.152**). The panel, representing the birth and early life of St Nicholas, is held in the Pinacoteca Vaticana. The buildings on either side of the image display iron rods and wooden batons like those visible on the cream building in *St Stephen Preaching*. The Perugia panel painting was carried out between 1447 and 1449 over a period of absence from Rome, where the Nicholas V Chapel was underway. Marilena Tamassia, "Naissance et vocation de St Nicolas, aumône aux trois jeunes filles pauvres," in *Fra Angelico et les maîtres de la lumière*, ed. Giovanna Damiani and Nicolas Sainte Fare Garnot (Bruxelles: Fonds Mercator, 2011), 164-165.

building in the *Distribution of the Treasures*, emphasising the contrast with the darker interior and diffusing its glow over the figures receiving St Lawrence's gift. Another episode where one side of a building is considerably brighter than the others is *St Stephen Giving Alms* in the west wall. Here, the luminous sides of the pink wall and white buildings lead the eye within the cityscape, mirroring the bright chapels of the transept represented in the neighbouring scene of *St Stephen's Ordination*.

### 3. Polyfocal Perspective

Another striking feature of the Chapel is the adoption of more than one viewpoint for the narrative, so that the viewer is guided in multiple directions by the perspectival arrangement articulated by the architectural setting. Hence, the viewers' gaze in the *Expulsion of St Stephen* is directed leftwards by the curve of the walls, whereas in the *Martyrdom* it is directed rightwards by the hilly landscape (**Fig.136**). Similarly, the pale yellow palace in *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem* directs the gaze leftwards, whilst in the abutting *Dispute in the Sanhedrin*, the Sanhedrin is articulated as if the viewer were standing in front of the building's fluted pilaster and glancing towards the right (**Fig.135**).

In the north and east wall lunettes hosting St Stephen's cycle, the nearly central, vertical architectural divisor functions as a guideline for the position of the viewer. It is the centre from which the perspectival arrangement of the lunette develops into a V: expanding away from the viewer leftwards in the *Preaching* and *Expulsion*, and rightwards in the *Dispute* and *Martyrdom*. The *Ordination of St Lawrence*, as a single episode, is unique within the Chapel, but even here the architectural setting first draws the viewers in through the colonnade, and then directs them at either side of the image by hinting at what appears to be the arms of a transept.

Different viewpoints are again adopted in the east and north wall lower register, although the dividing line between *Entrustment* and *Distribution* reiterates for each episode the sense of enveloping iconicity of the *Ordination of St Lawrence* as opposed to the architecturally intertwined narrative from the life of St Stephen. The proximity to the viewer of the St Lawrence cycle increases the monumentality of the painted architecture and the vividness of the narrative, further enhanced, for the contemporary viewer, by the portrait of Nicholas V himself as Sixtus II in the *Ordination* and *Entrustment*. The use of multiple viewpoints allows Angelico to represent immersive architectural settings



articulated in well-defined, separate units. Even in the St Stephen cycle, where episodes are always linked in pairs, the use of different viewpoints creates specific locations for each narrative moment to inhabit. Nowhere more so than in the box-like Sanhedrin in the *Dispute*.<sup>51</sup>

As well as echoing Nicholas of Cusa's reflections on the centre of the universe discussed in Chapter One (albeit perhaps not deliberately), the adoption of shifting viewpoints recalls what Mary Carruthers called "polyfocal perspective," a term already encountered in Chapter Three. Polyfocal perspective feeds into the trope of *varietas*, where the multiple shifts of view function as a variation of ornament. The delicately ornate and innovative capitals, friezes, columns and pilasters of the Nicholas V Chapel also exemplify *varietas*, reiterating with slight alterations leaf and floral decorations, as Altichiero had repeated and transformed arch types, crenellation and fenestration. However, whilst in the Oratory of St George *varietas* was paired with dazzling architectural *amplificatio*, in the Nicholas V Chapel the overall effect is more poised and balanced.

#### 4. Defying Typological Identification

As observed in relation to Altichiero's architecture for the Oratory of St George, Angelico's settings are fragmentary structures difficult to reconcile with any specific building typology. The settings for both *Ordinations* and the *Distribution* can be referred to as 'basilican' structures, but closer inspection reveals their idiosyncrasy and ambiguity. The building in the *Ordination of St Stephen* has no roof, and the wall section or pier dividing the *Ordination* from the *Giving of Alms* means the basilica's nave is extremely short, demeaning the majestic effect of the ornate capitals of pier and columns and of the strikingly lit transept arm. The *Ordination of St Lawrence* is more problematic: the altar appears to be placed on one side of the nave rather than in front of the gold apse visible in the background, and the diminutive distance between the two colonnades makes one wonder whether the ceremony is at all taking place in the nave of what the elaborate capitals, rib vaults and hinted transept would suggest is a major ecclesiastical building.

---

<sup>51</sup> Aronberg Lavin also noted how in the Niccolina Angelico created "many rationally constructed ambients within a single pictorial field, each providing an autonomous spatial unit," Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431-1600* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 148.

In *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem*, the brightly-lit building on the right is a bizarre structure composed of three storeys, of which the middle one is a medley of misaligned parts of different heights and the top one is a slender tower. Is this a private palace? Does the obtuse angle it creates with the Florentine-looking grey palace articulate a town piazza? What sort of building is the pink circular structure with aedicules surrounding a column visible above the Sanhedrin in the *Dispute*? Similar questions can be asked of the L-shaped structure in the *Entrustment of the Treasures*, seemingly part of a church or monastery complex opening onto its cloister, but surmounted by a diminutive upper storey that does not extend the whole length of the lower storey. Even the continuous setting of the east wall lower register displaying the last episodes of the life of St Lawrence is puzzling: is St Lawrence meeting the emperor in a courtyard surprisingly attached to a prison, or are we to interpret the adjacent wall and white building as two completely different places? The implausibility of these structures does not simply highlight the discrepancies between the painterly and the built medium for the making of architecture.<sup>52</sup> The ambiguity of Angelico's fictive buildings is another means to entice the viewer, and, added to the repetition of architectural ornament, a striking use of light and polyfocal perspective, it emphasises the agency of the settings and their inextricable relationship with their narrative.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter's formal analysis of the Nicholas V Chapel highlighted the importance of the architectural settings for the overall decoration. They establish parallels and create distinctions across the whole frescoed programme, and they also play a crucial role in engaging the viewer through repetition of architectural ornament, polyfocal perspective, ambiguous structures and striking use of light, which also contributes to displaying more architectural detail. In particular, the repetition of architectural ornament through formal and chromatic *varietas* not only differentiates and at the same time unifies the two narrative cycles, but also connects these to the Doctors of the Church and the fictive frame, which binds the built to the fictive architecture of the Chapel.

---

<sup>52</sup> This is Arnaldo Bruschi's interpretation, dismissing the idiosyncrasies of Angelico's structures as "inevitabili aggiustamenti connessi con i problemi della rappresentazione pittorica," Arnaldo Bruschi, "Alberti e non Alberti. La cultura 'albertiana' nelle architetture rappresentate in pitture e rilievi nel Quattrocento," in *Leon Battista Alberti e l'architettura*, ed. Massimo Bulgarelli, Arturo Calzona, Matteo Ceriana and Francesco Paolo Fiore (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1996), 52. Arnold Nesselrath presented a more attentive analysis of the structural deficiencies of the Chapel's fictive architecture, but did not offer any explanation for them. Nesselrath, "Fra Angelico's and Benozzo Gozzoli's Composition," 75-77.

The discrepancies between the two saints' lives, mainly articulated by the settings, create two distinct places that reflect the character of the narratives they host and emphasise the chronological hiatus between them. This helps to endow the narratives with a chronological dimension that expresses the long history of the Church, which is legitimised by the Doctors of the Church, whose ciboria bind the whole decoration and convey a poignant link to the papal tiara and therefore to the office of the pope. Furthermore, the architectural similarities between the two places are the *fil rouge* establishing Rome as heir, rather than interchangeable substitute, to Jerusalem. They thus subtly enhance, instead of annulling, the sense of continuity through time, also conveyed by the mirroring subject matter of the narrative episodes, crucial for the expression of the authority of the Church through history.

Finally, the balanced, luminous appearance of the architectural settings reflects the elegant, calm gestures and radiant presence of the two deacon saints and the Doctors of the Church, conveying a sense of dignity that is not only intrinsic to the frescoes themselves, but also to the narrative they expound. The dignity and authority of the Church, and of the papacy in particular, and how they are inextricably intertwined with Rome, are a central issue for the frescoes of the Nicholas V Chapel, and are expanded upon in the following chapter.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
***DIGNITAS, AUCTORITAS AND GRAVITAS***  
**OF ARCHITECTURAL PLACE**  
**IN FRA ANGELICO'S NICHOLAS V CHAPEL**

**Introduction**

The prominence of the architectural settings and the abundance of inventive ornamental detail distinguish the Nicholas V Chapel from the rest of Fra Angelico's surviving artistic production, making it a *unicum*. This chapter presents the first detailed comparison between the frescoes for the Chapel and other works by Fra Angelico. It not only highlights the distinguishing features of the Chapel's decoration, but also illustrates the extent to which the built identity of Rome fed into its fictive architecture to create hybrid architectural places. The hybridity of Angelico's fictive structures for the Niccolina has often been neglected or dismissed, either as a structural adjustment to meet the needs of the painterly medium or as embodying Dominican spirituality,<sup>1</sup> but the settings' references to Roman architecture have informed their traditional interpretation as an expression of Nicholas V's ambitious architectural projects for Rome. In addition, the presence of Leon Battista Alberti in the papal Curia at the time when Angelico was at work in the Chapel prompted comparisons between the frescoes and Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, a first, mostly completed version of which was dedicated to Nicholas V between 1452 and 1454.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter Five engages with the Chapel's traditional interpretation, but, although it does not negate the relationship between Nicholas V's building enterprises and the Chapel's fictive architecture, it proposes a novel approach. Rather than comparing Angelico's structures with no-longer-extant buildings and with Alberti's precepts for built architecture, this chapter re-examines the connection between Rome and the Chapel's

---

<sup>1</sup> Arnaldo Bruschi, "Alberti e non Alberti. La cultura 'albertiana' nelle architetture rappresentate in pitture e rilievi nel Quattrocento," in *Leon Battista Alberti e l'architettura*, ed. Massimo Bulgarelli, Arturo Calzona, Matteo Ceriana and Francesco Paolo Fiore (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1996), 52. Alessandro Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme nella Cappella Niccolina," in *Angelicus pictor: ricerche e interpretazioni sul Beato Angelico*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari (Milan: Skira editore, 2008), 156.

<sup>2</sup> Rykwert dated the dedication of the *De re aedificatoria* to Nicholas V to about 1450. Joseph Rykwert, "Introduction," in *Leon Battista Alberti, On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, ed. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (London and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), xvi. However, more recent studies postdated it to between 1452 and 1454. For a summary of the research on this: Christine Smith and Joseph F. O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice* (Tempe, Arizona and Turnhout: Arizona State University and Brepols, 2006), 192-198.

decoration in light of contemporary discussions regarding the *auctoritas* of the papacy and the *dignitas* of the city of Rome as Apostolic See. It argues that Angelico's frescoes played a key role in expressing these ideas, and that his architectural settings were crucial for the achievement of this purpose. Whilst Chapter Four highlighted that the authority of the Church was articulated and legitimised by two different places and moments in time created by the settings, Chapter Five tackles this issue in more depth, examining how the dignity and authority of the pope and of the Church are conveyed by the hybridity of Angelico's frescoed places. This requires the deployment of a third rhetorical term, *gravitas*, a cognate of *auctoritas* expressing the versatility of an orator. The skill to adapt one's oration to suit any audience in any location at any time explains the variety and malleability of Angelico's architectural inventions, and sheds light on the elusiveness of his references to the urban fabric of the city of Rome.

### **Nicholas V's Architectural Ambitions, Alberti and the Nicholas V Chapel**

In his *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V*, completed a few months after the death of Nicholas V in 1455,<sup>3</sup> Giannozzo Manetti discussed at length what he defined as the secular works of Nicholas V's reign: the Jubilee announced for the year 1450 and the pope's ambitious building enterprise that aimed to renovate various parts of the Roman urban fabric to render the city a *digna sedis* for the secular ascendancy of the Church.<sup>4</sup> Nicholas's architectural projects were mostly left unfinished due to his short papacy and later interventions, and little or no physical evidence remains. The pope's building plans have attracted attention from numerous scholars.<sup>5</sup> Richard Krautheimer was the first to hypothesise a relation between the architectural settings of the *Ordination* and *Distribution*

---

<sup>3</sup> According to Anna Modigliani, the biography was commissioned by Nicholas V himself towards the end of his pontificate. 1455 is the date inscribed in codex Plut. 66, 22 (Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence), a copy of the *Vita* dedicated to Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici with annotations by Giannozzo himself and his son Agnolo. The end of 1455 is therefore deemed to be the *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the *Vita*. Modigliani argued that Manetti's testimony is mostly reliable, since, excluding a few voluntary omissions, he used numerous first hand sources for his *Vita*. Anna Modigliani, "Introduzione," in Giannozzo Manetti, *De vita ac gestis Nicolai V summi pontificis*, ed. Anna Modigliani (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2005), XXXVII-XLIX.

<sup>4</sup> The Jubilee and the collapse of the Hadrian bridge (now Ponte Sant'Angelo) in front of Castel Sant'Angelo are discussed in Giannozzo Manetti, *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V summi pontificis*, ed. Anna Modigliani (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2005), II, 11-15; Nicholas V's building enterprise, which included partial restoration of two important churches dedicated to St Stephen and St Lawrence (Santo Stefano Rotondo and San Lorenzo fuori le mura), is in II, 30-64.

<sup>5</sup> Carroll William Westfall, *In This Most Perfect Paradise. Alberti, Nicholas V and the Invention of Conscious Urban Planning in Rome, 1447-1455* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974). Stefano Borsi, *Nicolò V e Roma. Alberti, Angelico, Manetti e un grande piano urbano* (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2009). Franco Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti. L'opera completa* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1980), 29-58. Christoph L. Frommel, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," in *L'architettura della basilica di San Pietro. Storia e costruzione*, ed. Gianfranco Spagnesi (Roma: Bonsignori editore, 1997), 103-118. Smith and O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom*, 199-291.

scenes, and Nicholas V's projects for the renovation of St Peter's. He proposed that Leon Battista Alberti, possibly the pope's advisor for his architectural enterprise, could have influenced Angelico's structures for the Chapel, and his suggestion has been reiterated countless times.<sup>6</sup>

Krautheimer began by exploring possible links between the settings for the *Ordinations* and *Distribution* and Old St Peter's. Crucial for his argument is the simultaneous presence of nave, colonnade supporting an entablature, transept and apse. It is true that in Stephen's *Ordination* a good part of the transept is clearly visible to the left of St Peter (**Figs 134&195**), and that in Lawrence's *Ordination* a transept is suggested by the cross vaults at the sides of the apse (**Fig.138**). On the other hand, in the *Distribution* (**Fig.151**) the transept is completely invisible, as is the apse in Stephen's *Ordination*. Another problem, as Krautheimer himself noticed, is that the church in Stephen's *Ordination* does not have double aisles as Old St Peter's did. The scholar attributed all inconsistencies and uncertainties between real and fictive architecture to the renovation programme that Nicholas V had in mind for the Petrine basilica, begun in 1452.<sup>7</sup> Angelico had completed his frescoes by then, but Krautheimer hypothesised that a project for St Peter's already existed by the time Angelico was at work in the Chapel, and that the artist may have included aspects of it in his architectural structures.<sup>8</sup>

The history of the renovation plans for St Peter's is extremely complex, but on the basis of drawing 20A, today held in the Uffizi (**Fig.153**), we can infer a version of a plan

---

<sup>6</sup> Richard Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and – perhaps – Alberti," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin and John Plummer (New York: New York University Press, 1977), I, 290-296. Krautheimer's suggestion is based on the assumption that Alberti was the main advisor for Nicholas V's building enterprise. This idea was first expounded in Georg Dehio, "Die Bauprojekte Nicolaus des Fünften und Leon Battista Alberti," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 3 (1880): 241-257. Although it is often mentioned, Krautheimer's hypothesis is rarely challenged or critically examined. Diane Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico* (New York: Phaidon, 2008), 185; Gerardo de Simone, "Velut alter Apelles. Il decennio romano del Beato Angelico," in *Beato Angelico. L'alba del Rinascimento*, ed. Alessandro Zuccari, Giovanni Morello and Gerardo de Simone (Milan: Skira editore, 2009), 136-137; Alessandro Diana, "Niccolò V e Salomone: gli affreschi del Beato Angelico nella Cappella Niccolina," *Roma nel Rinascimento*, (2009): 269. Borsi linked Alberti to Angelico's structures for the Chapel, but did not discuss his suggestions systematically or engage directly with Krautheimer's essay, Borsi, *Niccolò V e Roma*, 165-168. Bruschi presented a brief but informative analysis of possible 'Albertian' elements in Fra Angelico's fictive structures. However, his evidence is not conclusive. Bruschi, "Alberti e non Alberti," 51-52. On Angelico and Alberti's precepts on painting: Liana Castelfranchi Vegas, "L'Angelico e il *De pictura* dell'Alberti," *Paragone*, 36, no. 419-423 (1985): 97-106.

<sup>7</sup> 1452 is the date of the first payments for the reconstruction of the "tribuna," perhaps to be identified with the choir. Eugène Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes pendant le XV et XVI siècles. Recueil de documents inédits tirés des archives et de bibliothèques romaines* (Paris: Ernest Thorin Éditeur, 1878-1882), I, 122. Christoph L. Frommel, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," in *La Roma di Leon Battista Alberti. Umanisti, architetti e artisti alla scoperta dell'antico nella città del Quattrocento*, ed. Francesco Paolo Fiore (Rome and Milan: Skira editore, 2005), 104.

<sup>8</sup> Krautheimer, "Fra Angelico and – perhaps – Alberti," 294.

roughly dated to the 1450s.<sup>9</sup> Key aspects were the expansion of both transept and apse and the reinforcement of the walls, as highlighted in the reconstruction drawing proposed by Carpiceci (**Fig.154**).<sup>10</sup> Some of the architectural elements identifiable in the Uffizi drawing, as well as others hypothesised by Christoph Frommel and reproduced in a digital model (**Fig.155**),<sup>11</sup> are present in Angelico's frescoes, namely the cross vaults (as visible at the end of the nave in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* and perhaps in the *Distribution*, and in the transept in the *Ordination of St Stephen*), and the *oculi* (in all three scenes). Whilst the beautiful detail and rendition of light in the transept in the *Ordination of St Stephen* might demonstrate a fascination for this part of the church, the main focus of Nicholas V's restoration, the argument is complicated by the presence or absence in Angelico's structures of incongruous elements. According to Frommel's reconstruction, the cross vaults of the transept arms would have been supported by colossal columns from the Baths of Agrippa,<sup>12</sup> but these do not feature in any of Angelico's frescoes. The *oculus* above the apse, which features in the frescoes, is absent in the digital reconstruction; and two bright, clearly visible openings in the transept of the *Ordination of St Stephen* seem to suggest the presence of chapels or deep window recesses or niches, which again are absent in the digital reconstruction.

The thread linking the settings of both *Ordinations* and *Distribution* to the pope's ambitious projects to aggrandise St Peter's is extremely elusive, first and foremost because whatever was carried out of this project was destroyed in the early sixteenth century under Julius II. The matter is complicated further by contrasting testimonies as to the roles the "ingegnere di palazzo" Bernardo Rossellino and Alberti played.<sup>13</sup> Giannozzo

---

<sup>9</sup> Uffizi 20A shows two plans over the early Christian ground plan of St Peter's. The first, smaller plan was originally identified as Nicholas V's in Heinrich Geymüller, *Die ursprünglichen Entwürfe für Sanct Peter in Rom von Bramante, Raphael Santi, Fra Giocondo, Den Sangallos* (Vienna and Paris: Lehmann und Wentzel and Baudry, 1875-80), I, 130-131. Volume II of Geymüller's *Die ursprünglichen Entwürfe* contains a large size, detailed reproduction of Uffizi 20A (pl. 9). The second, clearer drawing is a sketch attributed to Bramante. Frommel found the measurements given by Manetti in Book II of his *Vita* to correspond roughly to the walls in Uffizi 20A. Frommel, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," ed. Fiore, 106, 108.

<sup>10</sup> Alberto Carlo Carpiceci, *La fabbrica di San Pietro: venti secoli di storia e progetti* (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983). Christoph L. Frommel, "L'architettura del Quattrocento romano," in *Il '400 a Roma. La rinascita delle arti da Donatello a Perugino*, ed. Maria Grazia Bernardini and Marco Bussagli (Milan: Skira and Arthemisia, 2008), I, 20; and by the same author, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," esp. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Frommel based his reconstruction on Giannozzo Manetti's testimony in his biography of Nicholas V, as well as on archival documents and Uffizi 20A. Frommel, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," 106-110.

<sup>12</sup> Between December 1451 and June 1452 the engineer Aristotele di Fioravanti was paid for the transportation of a colossal column from the Baths of Agrippa to St Peter's ("per condurre la colonna da la Minerva a palazzo"). Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes*, I, 108-109. The Baths were located on the Campus Martius close to the temple of Minerva, where now stands the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

<sup>13</sup> A document of the books of the Tesoreria Segreta (ASR, Cameral I, vol.1285-1287, 1469) dating December 1451 mentions the first payment to Rossellino. For a chronology of Rossellino's presence in Rome and work carried out in the transept at St Peter's: Frommel, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," 103-104 and note 15-28.

Manetti did not once mention Alberti in his biography of Nicholas V, ascribing all the merits of the design to the pope and all the merits of execution to Rossellino.<sup>14</sup> However, the chronicler Mattia Palmieri stated that work already underway at St Peter's was interrupted under Alberti's advice.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, the search for evidence prompted scholars to focus on comparing Angelico's fictive architecture with Alberti's precepts as expounded in the *De re aedificatoria*; on the other, it led them to propose built structures within the Roman and Florentine urban fabrics as models for the Chapel's settings.<sup>16</sup>

Although these are valid and informative paths of investigation, they have led to inconclusive findings due to the numerous discrepancies between the Chapel's fictive architecture, Alberti's *De re* and built structures.<sup>17</sup> This is especially the case since all architectural interventions in St Peter's postdate the frescoes, and it is difficult to evaluate which aspects of the renovation would have already been under consideration whilst Angelico was at work in the Chapel. These interpretations have two grave faults. Firstly, they forget that Alberti's *De re* was written as a theoretical text to underpin the planning and realisation of built structures, and they only refer to fictive architecture as

---

<sup>14</sup> Manetti, *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V*, II, 59. Modigliani presented an ample bibliography on Rossellino, Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas V in her edition of the *Vita*. Manetti, *Vita*, II, 59, note 134.

<sup>15</sup> "Pontifex ornatiorem Beato Petro Basilicam condere volens, altissima jecit fundamenta murumque unarum tredicim erexit, sed magnum opus, ac cuius veterum aequandum primo Leonis Baptistae consilio intermittit [...]," Mattia Palmieri, *De temporibus*, col. 241, 1452. Mattia's words on Alberti can be found in the appendix to Massimo Miglio, "Un repertorio di uomini illustri. Il *Liber de temporibus suis* di Mattia Palmieri," in *Scritti per Isa. Raccolta di studi offerti a Isa Lori di Sanfilippo*, ed. Antonella Mazzon (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, 2008), 656. The Pisan Mattia Palmieri wrote his *De temporibus suis* as a continuation of the chronicle begun by the Florentine Matteo Palmieri, *Liber de temporibus*, which ended in 1449. The definitive edition of Mattia's *De temporibus* dates 1475-1483. Smith and O'Connor offered a clear and thorough summary of the circumstances around Alberti's *De re*, Manetti and Nicholas V's projects, highlighting the unreliability of Mattia Palmieri's testimony. Smith and O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom*, 192-198, 193 note 10.

<sup>16</sup> Frommel proposed that Alberti's solution to save the walls of the central nave of Old St Peter's, found in his *De re aedificatoria*, X, 17, could be the advice he gave to Nicholas V according to Palmieri. Frommel, "Il San Pietro di Niccolò V," ed. Fiore, 105. Zuccari identified Florentine, as well as Roman architectural elements in Fra Angelico's settings for the Nicholas V Chapel. Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme," 144-157. Other Roman and Florentine elements were identified by Arnold Nesselrath, "Fra Angelico's and Benozzo Gozzoli's Composition in the Murals of the Private Chapel of Pope Nicholas V in the Vatican," in *Fra Angelico and the Chapel of Nicholas V*, ed. Innocenzo Venchi, Renate L. Colella, Arnold Nesselrath, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari (Vatican City State: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1999), 75-80.

<sup>17</sup> Notable incongruities between the *De re aedificatoria* and Angelico's paintings could be the prominence in the frescoes of the *oculi*, which Alberti disapproved ("the ancients would never make their windows and doors other than quadrangular," VII, 12); the polychromy of the Chapel, from the dado to the vault, whereas Alberti advised "purity and simplicity" in the choice of colour (VII, 10); and the trabeation of the basilican structures, only acceptable to Alberti, who favoured the arch (VII, 14). Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, ed. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (London and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988). Although there are also numerous similarities (Bruschi, "Alberti e non Alberti," 51-52), it is difficult to gauge the novelty of Alberti's architectural advice. As Bruschi noted, some architectural solutions in Angelico's frescoes had been adopted in Florence by Michelozzo, Brunelleschi and Ghiberti before Alberti.



a lesser counterpart of real buildings, disregarding its active role in locating and structuring the narrative. This approach becomes even more problematic when we consider that scholarship on Nicholas V's building projects and Alberti demonstrated that Alberti was more likely to have opposed, rather than informed, the pope's architectural plans.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the readings of Krautheimer, Bruschi and Zuccari, among others, do not consider the fictive frame and the role played by architectural ornament, thus failing to examine the Chapel's settings as a whole.<sup>19</sup> Nor do they investigate the extent to which the Chapel differs from the rest of Angelico's oeuvre, failing to explore in more depth the relationship between the Chapel's fictive architecture and the built identity of Rome.

### **The Nicholas V Chapel within Angelico's Oeuvre. A Roman Hybrid?**

Although some ornamental and structural solutions that Angelico adopted for the Chapel's settings can be found in the rest of his oeuvre, the fictive architecture of the Nicholas V Chapel distinguishes itself for its plethora of inventive architectural ornament, hinging on the vegetal theme. The striking discrepancies between the Chapel and the rest of Angelico's artistic production emphasise the markedly architectural character of the Chapel's decoration, and highlight citations of the architecture of Rome that go beyond the links already proposed in the literature. These citations, which reinvent as much as they quote, create hybrid places that not only engage with

---

<sup>18</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, "'Cives non esse licere'. Niccolò V e Leon Battista Alberti," in *Ricerca del Rinascimento. Principi, città, architetti* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1992), 33-88. Robert Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 19-23. For a comparison of Manetti's and Alberti's writings within the context of Nicholas V's building projects: Smith and O'Connors, *Building the Kingdom*, 191-223. Similar conclusions, downplaying Alberti's role, were drawn in Stefano Borsi, "L'Alberti a Roma," in *Maestri fiorentini nei cantieri romani del Quattrocento*, ed. Silvia Danesi Squarzina (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1989), 43-75 and by the same author, *Leon Battista Alberti e Roma* (Florence: Polistampa, 2003), 111-113. Although this research was published between 1989 and 2003, more recent contributions on the Nicholas V Chapel have tended to avoid the thorny problem of possible Angelico-Alberti relations, preferring not to engage with the Chapel's fictive architecture. Most notably, the large monograph on the Niccolina, realised after the latest restoration of the Chapel between 1995 and 1996, mentions Alberti in relation the Chapel's fictive structures only very briefly (cf. note 51). The volume focuses instead on the architectural history of the part of the Vatican Palace occupied by the Niccolina, the papacy of Nicholas V and the theological message of the frescoes, as well as providing a detailed account of the Chapel's restorations with graphs, diagrams and numerous good-quality pictures. Unfortunately the fictive frame was almost completely excluded from this thorough photographic survey. Francesco Buranelli, ed., *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina. Storia e restauro* (Novara: Musei Vaticani and Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Burroughs was the first to point out that interpretations of the Chapel's fictive architecture solely based on comparisons with built architecture lose sight of the settings' role within the narrative. Charles Burroughs, *From Signs to Designs: Environmental Process and Reform in Early Renaissance Rome* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 51. He was echoed in Richard Cocke, "Filarete at St Peter's, Fra Angelico in the Vatican: Art and a Sense of 'Decorum' in the Service of the Church," in *Decorum in Renaissance Narrative Art*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis and Anka Bednarek (London: Birkbeck College, 1992), 49.

contemporary concerns regarding the dignity and authority of the pope in relation to Rome as Apostolic See, but also showcase the ability and versatility of the artist.

For the Chapel, Angelico reproduced architectural ornament found in his previous panel paintings and in two of his San Marco frescoes: the *Madonna of the Shadows* and the *Annunciation* on the north corridor. The canopy in a *Virgin and Child with Angels* (c.1422-23) (**Fig.156**) presents the same tripartite structure with pointed trefoil arches, roundels and corbels visible in the ciboria of the Doctors of the Church, and that Angelico had borrowed from the Orsanmichele tabernacle for the Medici e Speciali Guild, as seen in Chapter Four. Both painted ciboria also share a middle storey or drum with supporting arched buttresses, but whilst in the *Madonna and Child* the canopy has two registers, the ciboria of the Doctors have three like the papal tiara, and are surmounted by a lantern with a conical roof rather than a dome.<sup>20</sup>

Roundels like those at either side of the ciboria's pointed arches are also prominent in Angelico's Annunciations, such as the roundel in the spandrel between two round arches in San Marco's north corridor Annunciation (1442-1443) (**Fig.157**). This roundel, monochrome like four of the Niccolina's ciboria, presents however an embossing that is absent in the Chapel's ciboria roundels. More elaborate tondi are to be found in the Annunciation at the Museo del Prado (c.1425-27) (**Fig.158**), where the central, larger one hosting Christ's face recalls the half shell with Christ's bust above the door in the Chapel's *Entrustment* (**Fig.159**). In this same scene, two roundels with putti faces echo those in the spandrels of the Virgin's canopy in the Cortona Triptych (c. 1434-35) (**Fig.160**).

The prominent vegetal theme adorning fictive frame and painted structures in the Nicholas V Chapel also features in Angelico's previous work. Interlaced rose branches can be found in the frieze of the loggia in the Prado Annunciation; in the base of the Virgin's throne in the San Domenico Altarpiece (c.1422-23) (**Fig.161**); and in the marble frame of the Linaioli Tabernacle (1433-36) (**Fig.162**), although this was carved

---

<sup>20</sup> A tripartite canopy with pointed trefoil arches, corbels and roundels is also visible in Angelico's *Coronation of the Virgin* (c.1427-29), now at the Louvre. Here the roundels at either side of the arches present petal-like indents identical to those on the polychrome ciboria for the Niccolina's Doctors, but the engaged columns of the *Coronation's* ciborium are more pronounced, the corbels are more elaborate, and it only has one storey rather than three.

by Simone di Nanni da Fiesole following Ghiberti's design.<sup>21</sup> Swags of fruit and leaves similar to those at the top of the dado and dividing the two narrative cycles in the Chapel can be seen in the frieze above the wall in the *Annalena Altarpiece* (c.1435) (**Fig.163**), whose fictive gold brocade reproduces patterns found in the fictive brocades of the dado in the Chapel; and in the frieze of the elaborate throne of the Virgin in the San Marco Altarpiece (c.1438-40) (**Fig.10**), where the brocade behind the Virgin and the tied curtains at either side of the image are again similar to the brocades of the Nicholas V Chapel.<sup>22</sup> In spite of these similarities, there are no rose branches in the Nicholas V Chapel, and, with the exception of the swags and cordon of fruit and flowers at the top of the dado and above the moulding separating the two registers, the leaves and flowers of the Chapel are more stylised, seemingly reproducing sculpted architectural decoration even in the bands of green leaves and red flowers binding the walls and vault of the Chapel (**Fig.119**).

Quotations of Florence in the Nicholas V Chapel, identified in Chapter Four, may be considered an existing part of Angelico's repertoire, on which the artist's *inventio*, informed by *varietas*, was based.<sup>23</sup> The presence of St Lawrence in the Niccolina may remind one of Angelico's work at San Marco, where the Roman saint is represented in the *San Marco Altarpiece*, the *Madonna of the Shadows* and the *Crucifixion* in the Chapter House. Besides, the Corinthian capitals of the pilasters in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.148**) are identical to those adopted by Brunelleschi for the Ospedale degli Innocenti (1419-1426) (**Fig.164**) and San Lorenzo (begun 1419), as shown in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, unlike these pietra serena, fluted pilasters, Angelico's pink ones in the *Distribution* are embellished by lotus leaves all down the shaft, and the entablature above them, adorned by downwards facing stylised leaves, does not have as many fasciae.

---

<sup>21</sup> Magnolia Scudieri, "Il Tabernacolo dei Linaioli nel percorso dell'Angelico," in *Il Tabernacolo dei Linaioli del Beato Angelico restaurato. Restituzioni 2011 a A.R.P.A.I. per un capolavoro*, ed. Marco Ciatti and Magnolia Scudieri (Florence: Edifir and Opificio delle pietre dure, 2011), 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> The *Annalena Altarpiece* also presents monochrome curling rose branches on the sides of the Virgin's throne.

<sup>23</sup> Alessandro Zuccari identified six characteristics in the Chapel's architectural settings that could be defined as Florentine. He suggested that the cylindrical structures on the background of *Stephen Distributing Alms* may recall Florentine *rotundae* such as Brunelleschi's Santa Maria degli Angeli or Alberti's SS. Annunziata; the palace on the left in *St Stephen Preaching* is a cognate of Palazzo Rucellai; the buildings on the right behind the Sanhedrin in the *Dispute* have an affinity with Palazzo Davanzati; the windows with entablature of the round building in the *Dispute* reproduce the windows of the Florentine Baptistry; the landscape in the *Martyrdom of St Stephen* is similar to the Tuscan countryside; and, finally, the tower of the city walls in the foreground dividing the *Expulsion* from the *Stoning* is reminiscent of the Florentine Porta San Niccolò. Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme," 152, 156. Kurt Forster, "The Palazzo Rucellai and Questions of Typology in the Development of Renaissance Buildings," *The Art Bulletin*, 58, no. 1 (1976): 110-111.

The inclusion of architectural details and loose quotation of structures found in Florence could be a reference to the years Nicholas V spent there as tutor for the Albizi and Strozzi families between 1415 and 1419, and then as part of the Curia during the Council (1439-1443).<sup>24</sup> Florence had been a welcoming refuge for Eugenius IV and his Curia from 1434, thus becoming a temporary seat for the pontifex and his entourage. However, even though the palace on the left in *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem* recalls the tripartite façade of Michelozzo's Palazzo Medici, in the Niccolina there are no instances of architectural portraits of any recognisable Florentine building.<sup>25</sup>

Even considering the presence of architectural details found in Angelico's previous works and the inclusion of Florentine architectural features, the fictive architecture of the Nicholas V Chapel distinguishes itself for the amount and complexity of ornament it displays and the peculiarity of its structures. Nowhere else in Angelico's oeuvre do we find capitals adorned by callas, long stylised leaves and round fruits like those in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* (**Fig.118**) and the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.148**), or by a central small scroll framed by minuscule callas as in *St Lawrence before Decius* (**Figs 149&176**). Nowhere else are there accreted structures like those in the cityscapes in *St Stephen Giving Alms, Preaching in Jerusalem* and behind the Sanhedrin in the *Dispute* (**Fig.147**). Nowhere does Angelico use the combination of nave, column and architrave instead of the arch.

Angelico's innovative capital solutions, experimenting with the Ionic and Corinthian orders, set the Niccolina apart from earlier works by Fra Angelico and from Altichiero's interpretation of capitals, apparently demonstrating Angelico's awareness of the

---

<sup>24</sup> Massimo Miglio, "Niccolò V." *Enciclopedia dei Papi Treccani*, 2000, accessed Mar 9, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/). Pio Paschini, "Concilio di Ferrara-Firenze." *Enciclopedia Treccani*, 1932, accessed Mar 9, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/concilio-di-ferrara-firenze\\_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/concilio-di-ferrara-firenze_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/).

Burroughs recognised in the Niccolina's settings formal echoes of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence and argued for a strong link between Nicholas V and the Medici. According to the scholar, the inclusion of St Lawrence in the Nicholas V Chapel may be a tribute to Cosimo de' Medici's involvement with the building of San Lorenzo, whereas the inclusion of St Stephen may be a reference to the Duomo in Prato, dedicated to St Stephen, whose archpriest was Cosimo's illegitimate son Carlo. Burroughs, *From Signs to Design*, 54. However, Carlo became archpriest at Prato in 1451, by which date the Chapel had been completed. It is also important to point out that while Angelico was painting the Nicholas V Chapel, Michelozzo was at work on Cosimo de' Medici's palace. These are the same architect and patron of the library at San Marco, for which Nicholas V wrote a bibliographical canon, as we will see later on in the chapter.

<sup>25</sup> As Zuccari himself admitted, the same structures he singled out as Florentine may also recall aspects of the Roman cityscape. Zuccari, "Roma, Firenze, Gerusalemme," 146, 149.

architectural orders as used by architects such as Brunelleschi and Michelozzo.<sup>26</sup> Angelico's exploration of the orders is more prominent in St Lawrence's cycle, where we can count as many as fifty-four full and abbreviated capitals displaying eight different kinds of decoration. The more pronounced presence of the orders gives Lawrence's cycle a more architectural and Roman character in comparison with St Stephen's cycle, where only ten capitals of four types can be counted, thus accentuating the discrepancy highlighted in Chapter Four between Lawrence's settings and Stephen's. Although Angelico's capitals and pier and pilaster solutions, in the frame and in the scenes, are partly inspired by Brunelleschi, Angelico's fictive architecture in the Chapel diverges from the canonical orders, revealing less interest in their correct representation. Angelico's capitals include the volutes and acanthus leaves of the Ionic and Corinthian orders (especially in the *Entrustment* and *Distribution* scenes), but propose other, more elaborate decorative solutions. Rather than conforming to an architectural system, Angelico's more ornamental approach falls between a consistent exploration of Vitruvian orders and a totally heterodox, pictorial imaginative approach. In this respect, Fra Angelico is similar to Michelozzo, who engaged with Brunelleschi's heritage but proposed highly innovative and ornate capitals, such as those in the cloister and library at San Marco (1436-1454) (**Fig.166**), and those in the San Miniato (1448) (**Fig.167**) and Santissima Annunziata tabernacles (1448).<sup>27</sup>

A comparison with the predella scene of the *Cortona Annunciation* (1433-1434) representing the *Presentation at the Temple* (**Fig.168**) is particularly illuminating in relation

---

<sup>26</sup> Fra Angelico may have had some second-hand knowledge of Vitruvius' treatment of the architectural orders, since numerous manuscripts of *De architectura* circulated in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Figures like Boccaccio, Petrarch, Filippo Villani and Giovanni Dondi knew Vitruvius either through direct knowledge of *De architectura* or through excerpts, and Francesco Sassetti and the Medici owned copies of it. Carol H. Krinsky, "Seventy-Eight Vitruvius Manuscripts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 30 (1967): 37-38. For an account of Renaissance interpretations of Vitruvius' Ionic capital: Maria Losito, "La ricostruzione della voluta del capitello ionico vitruviano nel Rinascimento italiano (1450-1570)," in Vitruvius, *De architectura*, ed. Pierre Gros, Antonio Corso and Elisa Romano (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1997), 1409-1428. Pier Nicola Pagliara, "Vitruvio da testo a canone," in *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana: dalla tradizione all'archeologia*, ed. Salvatore Settis (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1986), III, 7-88.

<sup>27</sup> On Michelozzo's understanding of the Classical orders: Arnaldo Bruschi, "Qualche considerazione sul contributo di Michelozzo alla formazione del linguaggio architettonico rinascimentale," in *Michelozzo. Scultore e Architetto (1396-1472)*, ed. Gabriele Morolli (Florence: CentroDi, 1998), 21-28; and in the same volume Antonio Natali, "L'umanesimo di Michelozzo nel Pergamo di Prato," 29-34. On the adoption of the classical architectural language in the fifteenth century: Arnaldo Bruschi, "Brunelleschi e la nuova architettura fiorentina," in *Storia dell'architettura italiana. Il Quattrocento*, ed. Francesco Paolo Fiore (Milan: Electa, 1998), 38-113; John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 130-146. Angelico's original capitals could be interpreted as a departure from Alberti, who defined the orders with precision, and although he admitted that there exist numerous variations on the kind and size of decorations he described, he specified that these are not approved by the learned. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, Book VII, 8.

to Angelico's entablatures in the Niccolina. The *Presentation* takes place in a receding nave presenting a perspectival arrangement similar to that of the building behind Lawrence in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.151**). In both scenes, the columns lead to a tall arch connecting the nave with the apse, illuminated by an oculus. However, in the Cortona *Presentation* the capitals are typically Corinthian, whereas those on the *Distribution* are adorned by stylised elongated leaves and round fruits. Even more noticeably, the arches in the nave of the *Presentation*, giving the structure a lighter appearance, have been substituted in the *Distribution* by a heavy, tall entablature, and the distance between the columns has been reduced, so they appear more numerous and the whole environment larger and more imposing.

There are many ornamental and structural references to Rome's architecture and artistic past in the fictive architecture of the Nicholas V Chapel. Particularly striking in this respect is the circular building around a column visible behind the Sanhedrin, recalling near-contemporary representations of Castel Sant'Angelo like Taddeo di Bartolo's in his map of Rome in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena (c.1410) (**Fig.165**). The shell niche in *St Lawrence before Decius*, where the shell's marked segments depart from a pronounced apex or protoconch and separate as they descend (**Fig.149**), resembles the niches of the Arch of Janus Quadrifrons (fourth century A.D.) close to the Forum Boarium and the Velabrum (**Fig.169**).<sup>28</sup> The extremely tall blind arches on the pink wall in *St Stephen Giving Alms* and on the lanterns of the ciboria recall those that Masolino painted underneath the *Annunciation*, in *St Catherine before the Pagan Idol* and in *St Catherine on the Wheel* in the Castiglione Chapel at San Clemente (c.1428-31) (**Fig.170**), as well as the windows of the lantern of the Duomo in Florence, as highlighted in Chapter Four. More noticeably though, the abundance, repetition and variation of vegetal ornament in the Chapel are as prominent as they are in Roman basilicas such as San Clemente, Santa Maria in Trastevere, San Lorenzo fuori le mura (**Fig.171**) and the mausoleum of Santa Constanza (**Fig.172**). Although Angelico's vegetal theme maintains its individual, more architectural character, defined especially by the long, stylised leaves and by a propensity for the monochrome in the narrative scenes, the plethora of fruit, flowers and

---

<sup>28</sup> A pronounced shell apex is also visible above the Virgin in the *San Marco Altarpiece* (c.1438-40) (**Fig.10**) and in the *Madonna of the Shadows* at San Marco (c.1443), but in both cases the dome is smooth with no streaks. Within Fra Angelico's production, descending segments appear in paintings postdating the Nicholas V Chapel, such as the *Bosco ai Frati Altarpiece* (c.1450-51). Here shell domes with descending segments and pronounced apices are alternated to domes with ascending segments, an interesting example of *varietas*.

leaves of various kinds is particularly evocative of early Christian, basilican mosaic decorations.

The use of vegetal ornament also reflects near-contemporary images of Rome like those found in Codex XI.G.2, also known as Marcanova MS, cod. a.L. 5,15, in the Biblioteca Palatina in Modena. This manuscript, begun in Padua and completed in Bologna in 1465 for the physician Giovanni Marcanova, is a version of Ciriaco d'Ancona's *Quaedam antiquitatum fragmenta*, a collection of inscriptions found on antique buildings accompanied by drawings. Ciriaco probably compiled the section dedicated to Rome of the *Quaedam antiquitatum* during his first trips to the city in 1424-25 and in the 1440s, and although the date of Marcanova's Modena codex is 1465, Nicholas V's coat of arms on an illumination of Castel Sant'Angelo (**Fig.173**) suggests that the drawings of the codex probably copied earlier ones realised during Nicholas' papacy.<sup>29</sup> The manuscript's illuminations represent some of the most famous Roman monuments, all adorned by a profusion of garlands and festoons. The triumphal arch on folio 35 (**Fig.174**) has festoons spiralling all around the column shafts and hanging below the entablature, and the same can be said for the columns of the Baths of Diocletian on folio 37 (**Fig.175**), which support an entablature where foliate swags hang from putti faces, as in the dado of the Nicholas V Chapel.

Remarkable links to the art and architecture of Rome can be found in the strong similarities between the leaves of the unusual pilaster capitals either side of the emperor in *St Lawrence before Decius* (**Fig.176**) and those on one of the capitals of Arnolfo di Cambio's ciborium for San Paolo fuori le mura (**Fig.177**), as well as between the carved stylised leaves facing upwards in San Paolo's cloister (**Fig.178**) and those, facing downwards, on the pink entablature above the pilasters in the *Distribution* (**Fig.179**).<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Christian Huelsen, *La Roma antica di Ciriaco d'Ancona* (Rome: Ermanno Loescher, 1907), 2, 4, 7. Edward Bodnar, *Cyriacus of Ancona and Athens* (Bruxelles-Berchem: Latomus, 1960), 98-101. On Ciriaco and antiquity: Arnold Nesselrath, "I libri di disegni di antichità. Tentativo di una tipologia," in *Memoria dell'antico: dalla tradizione all'archeologia*, ed. Salvatore Settis (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1986), III, 100-101. Gianfranco Paci and Sergio Sconocchia, ed., *Ciriaco d'Ancona e la cultura antiquaria dell'Umanesimo* (Reggio Emilia: Edizioni Diabasis, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> However, similar leaves can also be seen on some of the Orsanmichele tabernacles, for example Nanni di Banco's for the Fabbri Guild (c.1419-21). Nineteenth-century sources describe how Arnolfo's ciborium was miraculously left intact by the fire that devastated the basilica in 1823. Although more recently scholars have suggested that the ciborium withstood more damage than previously thought, providing slightly discordant accounts of which parts are original and which ones are heavily restored, it seems the capitals were not as damaged as the tympana, retaining their original appearance. Anita F. Moskowitz, "Arnolfo, Non-Arnolfo: New and Some Old Observations on the Ciborium in San Paolo fuori le mura," *Gesta*, 37, no. 1 (1998): 88-102. Anna Maria D'Achille, "Il ciborio di San Paolo fuori le mura tra

The carved eagle surrounded by a garland above emperor Decius (**Fig.180**) also directly engages with Rome's past, for it is an almost exact reproduction of an antique relief sculpture now in the atrium of the church of SS. Apostoli (**Fig.181**).<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the plethora of towers and turrets, and especially the accretion-like character, so unusual in Angelico's work, of the upper register of the cream-coloured slanted building in *St Stephen Preaching in Jerusalem* (**Fig.147**), or the white building in the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (**Figs 120&145**), and the bizarre pink turrets and column behind the Sanhedrin in the *Dispute*, loosely evoke late thirteenth-century representations of architecture like those in Pietro Cavallini's mosaics for the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere, particularly the *Presentation at the Temple* (**Fig.142**), or in some of the frescoed scenes in the atrium of San Lorenzo fuori le mura (**Fig.182**). The buildings and frescoed decoration of San Lorenzo fuori le mura and the Sancta Sanctorum are fundamental for a better understanding of Angelico's frescoes for the Niccolina. The link has been highlighted by Burroughs, Cole Ahl and Colella among others, but scholars have not fully recognised the crucial interplay between the Nicholas V Chapel and these two buildings, especially with regards to the Chapel's ornament and architectural settings.<sup>32</sup>

### 1. The Sancta Sanctorum

The Sancta Sanctorum was erected on the site of a chapel dedicated to St Lawrence first mentioned in the third quarter of the eighth century during the papacy of Stephen III. In the *Liber Pontificalis*, it was described as the pope's personal chapel in a ninth-century entry relative to the papacy of Gregory IV.<sup>33</sup> Thirteenth-century liturgical documents already call the chapel Sancta Sanctorum, the same term used in the Old Testament to refer to the innermost part of the Temple where the Ark of the Covenant resided.<sup>34</sup> This

---

autografia e restauro mimetico," in *Arnolfo di Cambio e la sua opera. Costruire, scolpire, dipingere, decorare*, ed. Vittorio Franchetti Pardo (Rome: Viella, 2006), 157-166.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, an eagle with spread wings resting on a circle can be found on the entablature of the frame for the east door of the Florence Baptistery (1449-1452). However, Fra Angelico's frescoed eagle bears closer resemblance to the sculpted one at SS. Apostoli. Both are framed by a wreath rather than by a simple circle, and their wings, extending up and outwards rather than downwards, are behind the wreath rather than in front of a circle as in the Baptistery eagle.

<sup>32</sup> Burroughs, *From Signs to Design*, 53; Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, 169-173; Renate L. Colella, "The Cappella Niccolina, or Chapel of Nicholas V in the Vatican: the History and Significance of Its Frescoes," in *Fra Angelico and the Chapel of Nicholas V*, ed. Innocenzo Venchi Renate L. Colella, Arnold Nesselrath, Carlo Giantomassi and Donatella Zari (Vatican City State: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 1999), 28-35.

<sup>33</sup> "In patriarchio Lateranensi, pro utilitate sive usu pontificis, prope oratorium sancti Christi martyris Laurentii, habitaculum satis idoneum, ubi quies est optima [...]," *Liber Pontificalis: nella recensione di Pietro Guglielmo OSB e del Card. Pandolfo. Glossato da Pietro Bohier*, ed. Ulderico Prerovsky (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978), CIII, II, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Julian Gardner, "L'architettura del Sancta Sanctorum," in *Sancta Sanctorum*, ed. Carlo Pietrangeli and Angiola Maria Romanini (Milan: Electa, 1995), 19.



evidence points to the holiness of the site and its special link to the figure of the pope. The original chapel was completely renovated by Nicholas III, who probably consecrated it in 1279. Nicholas commissioned a frescoed decoration for it that included the four Evangelists in the rib vaulted ceiling, and on the walls martyrdom scenes from the lives of St Peter, St Paul, St Stephen, St Lawrence and St Agnes and St Nicholas, whose relics are housed within the chapel.<sup>35</sup> The private space of the chapel, with frescoes depicting St Stephen and St Lawrence, and the papal name of its patron already establish a connection with the Niccolina, the *capella parva* or *capella secreta* of Nicholas V, but the relation between the two chapels is much closer.

The years preceding Nicholas III's election to the papal throne had been characterised by the Church's reaffirmation of its political and spiritual supremacy over the city of Rome in response to the controversy with Frederic II during the 1240s and 1250s.<sup>36</sup> Nicholas III stated his views on the matter in July 1278, less than a year after his election in December 1277, in the bull *Fundamenta militanti Ecclesiae*, where Rome is defined as the secular and spiritual capital of the world consecrated by the martyrdoms of St Peter and St Paul, and the inhabitants of Rome as the chosen people.<sup>37</sup> Nicholas III corroborated his statements in the bull by engaging in an acquisition and building campaign that expanded the papacy's possessions in the Vatican and renovated San Paolo fuori le mura and the Campidoglio.<sup>38</sup> Nicholas III's *Fundamenta* and building campaign would have certainly resonated with Nicholas V, who on his deathbed defended his own architectural enterprise as a means to defend the *auctoritas* of the Church and the *dignitas* of the Apostolic See from those who did not recognise them, as we will see shortly.<sup>39</sup>

Although St Agnes and St Nicholas are not present in the Nicholas V Chapel, all other saints represented in the Sancta Sanctorum are, including St Paul. He is the bold figure with a brown beard (the same physical characteristics he displays in the Sancta Sanctorum) holding the garments of one of the stone throwers in the *Martyrdom of St*

---

<sup>35</sup> Gardner, "L'architettura del Sancta Sanctorum," 20.

<sup>36</sup> Alessandro Tomei, "Un modello di committenza papale: Niccolò III e Roma," in *Sancta Sanctorum*, ed. Carlo Pietrangeli and Angiola Maria Romanini (Milan: Electa, 1995), 192.

<sup>37</sup> Tomei, "Un modello di committenza papale," 194. Franca Allegrezza, "Niccolò III." *Enciclopedia dei Papi Treccani*, 2000, accessed 21 Aug 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolò-iii\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolò-iii_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/)

<sup>38</sup> For Nicholas III's acquisition of territories and renovation of early Christian basilicas: Julian Gardner, "Nicholas III's Oratory of the Sancta Sanctorum and its Decoration," *The Burlington Magazine*, 115, no. 842 (1973): 283-294; by the same author, "San Paolo fuori le mura, Nicholas III and Pietro Cavallini," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 34, no. 3 (1971): 240-248; Tomei, "Un modello di committenza papale," 192-201.

<sup>39</sup> Manetti, *Vita Nicolai V*, III.

*Stephen*, which occurred before his conversion on the road to Damascus, as described in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>40</sup> Thus, in the Nicholas V Chapel, St Paul in the east wall lunette stands parallel to the figure of St Peter consecrating St Stephen in the west wall lunette.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the figure of the pope is present in both chapels. Nicholas III kneels between St Paul and St Peter as he presents the model of the chapel to Christ enthroned (**Fig.183**), whilst Nicholas V enters the narrative of Angelico's chapel as Sixtus II.

The exterior of the Sancta Sanctorum is almost completely covered by other structures later added to the oratory, but a few decorative, indented disks that were part of the original decoration are still visible (**Fig.184**). Gardner hypothesised that they may have been decorated by mosaic tesserae or with ceramics,<sup>42</sup> but in their present state they are strikingly similar to the slightly projecting roundels part of the pink entablature in *St Lawrence before Decius* (**Fig.149**), as well as recalling the tondi of the Barbadori Chapel and Masaccio's *Trinity*, reproduced by Angelico in the Chapel's fictive ciboria, as discussed in Chapter Four.

The smooth porphyry columns with gold capitals in front of the altar in the Sancta Sanctorum (**Fig.185**) are similar to the columns and capitals of the ciborium in the *Ordination of St Stephen* (**Fig.134**), although here the capitals are simpler, their volutes recalling more the fictive stone scrolls from which the chapel's brocades hang rather than the separate volutes and egg and dart moulding of the Sancta Sanctorum capitals.<sup>43</sup> However, the Sancta Sanctorum gold capitals have an abacus blossom positioned just above the volutes like those visible on the capitals of the pilasters in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.148**) and in the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (**Fig.120**). Similar blossoms, although with a bigger pistil, are also present on the capital of the pier at the intersection between nave and transept in the *Ordination of St Stephen* and on the shaft of

---

<sup>40</sup> Acts of the Apostles, 7: 57-59, Latin Vulgate, 2015, accessed Aug 21, 2015, <http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=5&c=7>

<sup>41</sup> A frescoed renovation partially covering the *Martyrdom of St Stephen* in the Sancta Sanctorum makes it impossible to ascertain whether St Paul was represented in this scene. However, the *Martyrdom of St Paul* and the *Martyrdom of St Stephen* are next to each other, the first on the south wall and the second on the west wall of the Sancta Sanctorum.

<sup>42</sup> Gardner, "L'architettura del Sancta Sanctorum," 21.

<sup>43</sup> Porphyry columns supporting a gold roof are recorded over the altar in St Peter's by Maffeo Vegio, a humanist from Lodi who was a canon of St Peter's and an apostolic breviary in 1452. "Supra alter autem, cui subiacet corpus, statuit nobile tegimen auratum, quatuor porphyreticis columnis erectum," Maffeo Vegio, *De rebus antiquis memorabilibus basilicae S. Petri Romae*, quoted in Fabio Della Schiava, "Sicuti traditum est a maioribus: Maffeo Vegio antiquario fra fonti classiche e medievali," *Aevum*, 34, no. 3 (2010): 634.

the pilaster of the Sanhedrin in the *Dispute* (**Fig.147**).<sup>44</sup> Although the abacus blossom is a standard feature of capitals,<sup>45</sup> it does not feature regularly in Angelico's work. It is present in the San Marco *Annunciation* in the north corridor and the *San Marco Altarpiece*, but absent in the *Cortona Annunciation* (c.1432), the *Cortona Triptych* (c.1434-35), the *Bosco ai Frati Altarpiece* (c.1450-51) and in the panels of the *Santissima Annunziata Silver Chest* (begun c.1451-52). In the *Chest*, the blossom is most notably absent in the *Circumcision of Christ* (**Fig.186**), which displays prominent pietra serena-like pilasters. A blossom does feature, however, in the scene where Christ administers the host to the Apostles, but it is placed beneath the abacus (**Fig.187**). Whether Angelico derived them from Brunelleschi or from the Sancta Sanctorum, the blossoms of the Niccolina are a further indication of Angelico's closer engagement with the Classical orders and with vegetal ornamental themes for his Roman commission.

The *Martyrdom of St Stephen* in the Sancta Sanctorum (**Fig.188**) takes place just outside the city gate, as in the Nicholas V Chapel, although what is still visible of the original Sancta Sanctorum image does not include the city walls.<sup>46</sup> The Sancta Sanctorum *Martyrdom of S Lawrence* (**Fig.141**) bears instead a closer resemblance to *St Lawrence before Decius* and the saint's *Martyrdom* in the Niccolina (**Fig.145**). In both chapels, the throne of Decius has a semidome divided in segments, and the building behind St Lawrence on the grill is a long horizontal structure. In the Sancta Sanctorum it is a set of tall arches framing Lawrence's tormentors and recalling an aqueduct or loggia, although clusters of buildings rise from its entablature; whilst in the Nicholas V Chapel the arches are substituted by niches hosting statues and an upper storey has replaced the clusters of buildings (**Fig.120**).

## 2. San Lorenzo fuori le mura

The basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le mura hosts a series of frescoes describing the lives of St Stephen and St Lawrence in numerous episodes. The frescoes date from the middle and the end of the thirteenth century, and although many were destroyed by the

---

<sup>44</sup> A dainty abacus blossom decorates the free standing column in *St Sylvester Tames the Dragon* in Maso di Banco's St Sylvester or Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce (post 1336-ante 1341). The setting for this scene is the city of Rome. For the date of the chapel: Enrica Neri Lusanna, "Maso di Banco e la Cappella Bardi di San Silvestro," in *Maso di Banco. La Cappella di San Silvestro*, ed. Cristina Acidini Luchinat and Enrica Neri Lusanna (Milan: Electa, 1998), 23-28.

<sup>45</sup> Howard Saalman, "Filippo Brunelleschi: Capital Studies," *The Art Bulletin*, 40, no. 2 (1958): 113-137.

<sup>46</sup> Gardner remarked how the iconography for the *Martyrdom of St Stephen* in the Sancta Sanctorum differs from near-contemporary images of Stephen's stoning, such as those in San Lorenzo fuori le mura and San Paolo fuori le mura, and argued that it is derived from manuscript illumination. Gardner, "Nicholas III's Oratory," 291-292.

bombings of 19 July 1943, those in the atrium survived for the most part. The narrative for both deacon saints in San Lorenzo covered a more extensive surface than in the Niccolina, therefore presenting a more detailed narrative. Particular emphasis is given to the transportation of St Stephen's body from Jerusalem to Constantinople and then to Rome, where he was buried next to St Lawrence.<sup>47</sup> The tale was confirmed to be true when two well-preserved corpses were discovered in the church in 1447 shortly after the election of Nicholas V.<sup>48</sup> The event is likely to have been greatly celebrated, and was perhaps at the origin of Nicholas V's idea to commission a chapel dedicated to these deacon saints.

Fictive architecture is prominent and detailed in most of the scenes of the medieval cycles (**Fig.182**), which includes the portrait of San Lorenzo itself in the scene where the procession carrying St Stephen's body stops in front of the basilica (**Fig.189**). Although there are no striking similarities with Angelico's settings for the Nicholas V Chapel, the courtyard or cloister portico visible through the archway in the *Entrustment*, emphasised by Angelico's use of light (**Fig.143**), recalls San Lorenzo's portico with smooth ionic columns supporting a red-tiled roof (**Fig.190**).<sup>49</sup> The capitals in the nave of the church present Ionic volutes (**Fig.191**) similar to those in those on the right side of the portico in the *Entrustment* (**Fig.139**) and in the nave in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.148**), although here the egg and dart moulding visible at San Lorenzo is substituted by rows of fruits. The high trabeation of the basilica (**Fig.192**) resembles that in the *Distribution of the Treasures* (**Fig.151**), and the Corinthian capitals of San Lorenzo's choir present acanthus leaves, slightly irregular double volutes and curved abaci like the capitals in the nave in the *Ordination of St Stephen*, although these do not have an abacus blossom like the San

---

<sup>47</sup> The body of St Stephen was transported from Palestine to Constantinople by mistake and then sent to Rome. When the procession carrying St Stephen's body reached San Lorenzo fuori le mura, the mules dragging the chariot containing the saint refused to move any further. Stephen was then buried there. "*De translatione Sancti Stephani de Jerusalem in urbem Byzantium*," *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: 1861), 51, 818.

<sup>48</sup> Burroughs, *From Signs to Design*, 53. The search for the bodies was prompted by the Observant Franciscans of Santa Maria in Aracoeli shortly after Nicholas V's election. The friars claimed the remains of the two saints were in their mother church rather than at San Lorenzo fuori le mura. The inquest ordered by Nicholas V ascertained that the bodies in San Lorenzo were Stephen's and Lawrence's. Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, 173. Their joint burial is commemorated in a fresco on the left wall of the Cappella dell'Assunta in the Duomo in Prato, realised by Andrea di Giusto, who completed Paolo Uccello's work in the chapel, probably around 1437. Anna Padoa Rizzo, *La Cappella dell'Assunta del Duomo di Prato* (Prato: Claudio Martini Editore, 1997), 35-41, 145. Coincidentally, Angelico was chosen to fresco the high altar chapel in Prato Cathedral in 1452, but when he declined the job was offered to Filippo Lippi, who painted the life of St Stephen, the Duomo's titular saint. Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, 197 and 210.

<sup>49</sup> Angelico's fictive portico also recalls that of San Clemente's atrium, with smooth columns and tiled roof (twelfth century). Louis Nolan, *The Basilica of San Clemente in Rome* (Grottaferrata: Nilo, 1925), 9. Joan E. Barclay Lloyd, "The Building History of the Medieval Church of San Clemente in Rome," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 45 (1986): 213-214.

Lorenzo capital (**Fig.193**).<sup>50</sup> Finally, the foliate fascia under the architrave in the choir presents a strip of stylised leaves (**Fig.194**) that closely resembles the frieze of the white building in the *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (**Fig.120**) and the fictive mouldings with green leaves and red flowers of the fictive frame.

There are, however, three remarkable differences. The transept in the *Ordination of St Stephen*, so masterfully articulated by the interplay of light and shade, is absent in San Lorenzo fuori le mura, as is the vaulted ceiling in the *Ordination of St Lawrence*. In addition, the striking cosmatesque floors in San Lorenzo fuori le mura and the Sancta Sanctorum are replaced in the Niccolina by a dark green floor in the *Ordination of St Lawrence* reiterating the colour of the upholstery on the altar front, and by simple white stone or marble with pastel pink squares in the *Ordination of St Stephen* and in the *Dispute*.

Angelico's fictive architecture for the Nicholas V Chapel establishes structural and ornamental parallels with some of the most prestigious and venerable buildings in Rome. The subject matter of the frescoes' narratives aligns the Chapel with the decoration of San Lorenzo fuori le mura and the Sancta Sanctorum, thus firmly inscribing the Chapel within the art and architecture of Rome and creating a continuity between Nicholas III and Nicholas V. Yet, Angelico's architectural places do not include a recognisable, faithful portrait of a whole building or site in Rome. They are an amalgam of architectural details and structural solutions that Angelico selected extrapolating them from their context, and then cited, providing for them a unique environment and combining them in innovative and varied ways. Like Altichiero's fictive architecture for the Oratory of St George, Angelico's settings for the Nicholas V Chapel are architectural hybrids. They cite but at the same time reinvent their numerous sources, illustrating the scope of the artist's architectural thesaurus and his 'inventive' skill, understood both as finding and selecting (*inventio*), and as varying and commenting on a source (*varietas*).

As was the case in the Oratory of St George, Angelico's architectural hybrids create familiar and at the same time novel settings that engage the viewers not only within the Chapel, but also outside, where they will be reminded of the fictive architecture by its built counterpart. However, whereas the political implications of hybrid places

---

<sup>50</sup> Capitals with acanthus leaves and double volutes, but without the abacus blossom, can also be observed in the capital above the Sanhedrin's fluted pilaster in the *Dispute*, and in the left side of the portico in the *Entrustment*.

refashioning the Veneto in the Oratory of St George are more latent, and the fictive structures deploy *amplificatio* to persuade and be memorised, Angelico's relationship with the built identity of Rome, so striking in comparison to the rest of his work and hinging almost obsessively on architectural ornament, testifies to the crucial role played by this city in the Nicholas V Chapel. It may appear obvious that Angelico included references to Rome in order to strengthen the connection between the sacred narratives, the pope and the Apostolic See, especially in relation to the persisting threat of Conciliarism and in light of the continued difficulties encountered by popes in Rome even after they returned from Avignon. These links, although never fully extrapolated, have been suggested before.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, present scholarship does not consider the decorative programme as a whole, thus missing the role of architectural ornament; nor does it account for the discrepancies between the frescoes and the Roman built environment, that encourage and at the same time resist identification with existing models. If the link to Rome was so important, why was it not more manifest? An exploration of the rhetorical terms *dignitas*, *auctoritas* and *gravitas* as hermeneutic tools allows to delve more deeply into the relationship between the Chapel's fictive architecture and the dignity and authority of Rome and the papacy, and it also provides an explanation for Fra Angelico's hybrid architectural places.

### **The *Dignitas* and *Auctoritas* of Rome and the Church**

The second book of Giannozzo Manetti's *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V* opens with Parentucelli's election and with an illustration of the perilous state of the papacy, threatened by numerous wars and revolts, and by Conciliarism.<sup>52</sup> Nicholas V considered it paramount

---

<sup>51</sup> Scholarship has tended to focus on the subject matter of the narratives, rather than on their settings, to highlight the relationship between the authority of the papacy and of Rome. Salatino focused on the role of the diaconate, and proposed that the message of papal primacy embodied in the frescoes is expressed through epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric. This is particularly evident in the preaching figure of St Stephen in the north lunette (cf. O. Chomentovskaja, "Le *comput digitalis*. Histoire d'un geste dans l'art de la Renaissance italienne," *Gazette des beaux arts*, 20 (1938): 157-172). Kevin Salatino, "The Frescoes of Fra Angelico for the Chapel of Nicholas V: Art and Ideology in Renaissance Rome" (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1992), Ch. 3 and Ch. 4. However, Calvesi briefly pointed out that the Chapel's fictive architecture shows a "linea romana" that was later reiterated by Piero della Francesca and Raphael, and that represents the ecumenical values of the Church. Calvesi, "Gli affreschi del Beato Angelico nella Cappella Niccolina," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina. Storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani and Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 54-55. Cocke argued that Fra Angelico's frescoes reflect the decorum of the papacy. According to him, Angelico's sense of decorum is evident in his treatment of the orders, which would have embodied a threat to Christianity. Unfortunately his argument is not expounded fully and it is unclear why the orders would have presented a threat. Cocke, "Filarete at St Peter's, Fra Angelico in the Vatican," 50.

<sup>52</sup> Manetti, *Vita*, II, 2-6. Nicholas V had to contend with the antipope Felix V, elected by the Basel Council in 1439, and with tensions within the Roman aristocracy persisting since the revolt that forced Eugenius IV to flee to Florence. Nicholas V managed to end the schism and obtain the abdication of Felix V in 1449, but a revolt led by Stefano Porcari threatened him in 1453. Porcari was captured and hung in

that the beginning of his rule should define him as an authoritative and admirable figure, and he endeavoured to appear as the embodiment of authority in the eyes of princes, kings, all the Christian people and the *res publica*.<sup>53</sup> He was so successful in doing this that, according to Manetti, it was solely with the tranquil and benign authority granted him by the Holy Spirit that he was able to subdue the lingering tensions of previous conflicts surrounding the papacy.<sup>54</sup>

It was not only Nicholas V's personal success that depended on *auctoritas*, but that of the whole Church. The constant thought on Nicholas V's mind was to "increase the authority of the Roman Church and amplify the dignity of the Apostolic See" by whatever means.<sup>55</sup> This formula is repeated twice in Book II, and emphasised by specifying each time that Nicholas V dedicated his mind and his soul to magnify the *auctoritas* of the institution of the Roman Ecclesia and aggrandise the *dignitas* of the newly reacquired See within the city of Rome, where St Peter is buried and where the apostolic link to the beginning of the papacy is stronger than anywhere else.<sup>56</sup>

These are the years of a renewed interest in the urban fabric of Rome, as exemplified by Ciriaco d'Ancona's drawings of Roman monuments realised in 1424-25 and in the 1440s, and other textual sources testify to the fascination that Rome exerted on many writers. The first instance is offered by Alberti's brief description of the city in his *Descriptio urbis Romae* (ca.1433), where he discusses a mathematical method for drawing a map of Rome. Another important example is Flavio Biondo's *Roma instaurata*, written between 1443 and 1446 and dedicated to Nicholas V's predecessor Eugenius IV. The *Roma instaurata* opens with a preface to Eugenius IV, where Biondo laments the general ignorance of the monuments of Rome even amongst the more cultured. His treatise, briefly discussing the history and state of all the most important areas and buildings of

---

January 1453. His revolt is discussed by Leon Battista Alberti in his *De Porcaria coniuratione*. "Niccolò V," Enciclopedia dei Papi Treccani, 2000, accessed Aug 17, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/).

<sup>53</sup> "[...] nihil utilius existimavit, quam si initio pontificatus sui [...] *auctoritatem* admirationemque nancisceretur [...] apud cunctos principes, reges christianoque populos ac res publicas *auctoritatem* consecutus est," Manetti, *Vita*, II, 3.

<sup>54</sup> "[...] veteris belli reliquias non armis, non tumultibus, non militibus, sed sola tranquilla ac benigna Sancti Spiritus *auctoritate* penitus omninoque sedaret," Manetti, *Vita*, II, 4.

<sup>55</sup> "Semper enim cogitabat atque animo et menteolvebat, que ad exaugendam Romane Ecclesie *auctoritatem* atque ad amplificandam Sedis Apostolice *dignitatem* ullatenus pertinere arbitrabatur," *Ibid.*, II, 8. "Dum igitur pontifex ipse his et huiusmodi *dignis* ac memorabilibus operibus mirum in modum primum ad honorem omnipotentis Dei, ad augendam deinde Romane Ecclesie *auctoritatem*, ad amplificandam insuper Apostolice Sedis *dignitatem*, tota mente animoque contenderet," *Ibid.*, II, 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Dignitas* is a keyword within Manetti's oeuvre, for it constitutes the crux of his *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, written between 1450 and 1452 and dedicated to Alfonso of Aragon. Giannozzo Manetti, *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, ed. Eizabeth R. Leonard (Padua: Antenore, 1975).

the city, is meant as a complement to the pope's efforts to renovate and embellish the buildings of Rome, an endeavour *dignissimus* of a magnanimous head of state.<sup>57</sup>

In 1448 Poggio Bracciolini completed his *De varietate fortunae*, where a reflection on the ever-changing nature of things and life is prompted by a melancholic consideration of the ruins of Rome. This work is dedicated to Nicholas V, praised as an unusually knowledgeable and wise man, and defines the ruins of the city as the only evidence of the previous dignity, *praeteritam dignitate*, of Rome, now devoid of all *decorum*.<sup>58</sup> The choice of the word *decorum* is interesting, for it not only implies splendour, but also appropriateness and might. Perhaps these words, written barely a year after his election, resonated with Nicholas V, and strengthened his interest in and resolution to renovate the architecture of his Apostolic See.

In addition to this, and in relation to the Chapel's function, the word *dignitas* also meant appointment, office. In his 1446 *De ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani*, Enea Silvio Piccolomini referred to the papacy as "the glory of such great dignity," and Giannozzo Manetti described the cardinalate as *dignitas* in his biography of Nicholas V.<sup>59</sup> Manetti's use of *dignitas* reflects Eugenius IV's 1441 bull *Non mediocri dolore*, which centred around the word *dignitas* to define the status of cardinals. The bull responded to the mounting lack of clarity with regard to the difference between bishops and cardinals, and identified cardinals as superior to bishops in office and dignity. However, the source of a cardinal's dignity is the pope, for just as there could be no Apostles without Christ, there could be no cardinals without the pope.<sup>60</sup>

The use of the word *dignitas* to identify one's status and office, or duty, relates specifically to Angelico's frescoes for the Niccolina, where Stephen and Lawrence are appointed to the office of the diaconate, but it also reiterates uses of *luogo* to define social standing encountered in Chapter One. The inextricability of place, dignity and appointment is made explicit by Michele Canensi in his *De laudibus* (1451), a brief, encomiastic

---

<sup>57</sup> Flavio Biondo, *Roma instaurata*, ed. Anne Raffarin-Dupuis (Paris: Éditions les Belles Lettres, 2005), Book I, 11.

<sup>58</sup> "[...] omni decore nudata," Poggio Bracciolini, *De varietate fortunae*, ed. Jean-Yves Boriaud and Philippe Coarelli (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999), Book I, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Enea Silvio Piccolomini, "On the Origin and Authority of the Roman Empire (*De ortu et auctoritate imperii Romani*)," in *Three Tracts on Empire*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki and Cary J. Nederman (Bristol and Sterling, Virginia: Thoemmes Press, 2000), 101. Manetti, *Vita*, II, 6. The word *dignità* is still used in modern Italian to mean appointment, particularly of the ecclesiastical type. This meaning was also carried through to the English "dignitary."

<sup>60</sup> Carol Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome: Cardinals in the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 106-108; 114-120. Richardson remarked on the interchangeability of *auctoritas* and *dignitas*.



biography of Nicholas V addressing him directly. In an attempt to show his modesty, Michele asked how elegant, ornate and lively an oration can be in order to correspond in a dignified way to the place, the thing, the dignity which Nicholas V represented by the will of God as the pope. Canensi further added that there is no place more dignified or admirable.<sup>61</sup> The intertwining of *dignitas* with position suggests that the locations for the lives of these two saints must reflect the *dignitas* of their sainthood and of their office as deacons. This is particularly true of the Doctors of the Church on the Chapel's arch intrados, whose place within the ciboria is so dignified as to articulate a direct link with the papal tiara.<sup>62</sup>

### **Cicero's *Dignitas* and *Gravitas***

The rhetoric of *dignitas* and *auctoritas* was not a prerogative of the Curia and its entourage in the fifteenth century. Ecclesiastics and humanist writers all drew from a number of sources, the most eminent of which was Cicero.<sup>63</sup> His writings never ceased being translated or commented upon, as Chapter Three demonstrated, and Nicholas V himself reiterated the by then commonplace indispensability of Cicero's works for any library, as we will see shortly. In the *De Oratore*, Cicero repeatedly used the adjective *dignus* and the noun *dignitas*, often in conjunction with the adjective *gravis* and its noun *gravitas*. These are polyvalent terms that in classical Latin can mean worth, suitability, honour, authority, effectiveness and meaningfulness.<sup>64</sup> But they also convey a sense of

---

<sup>61</sup> "Quippe cum oratoris sit pro loci proque rei ac persone *dignitate* suam contexere orationem, que tam elegans, tam ornata, tamque exuberans esse potest oratio, ut loco, ut rei, ut *dignitati*, in qua divine constitutus es numine, *digne* responderet queat. Locus enim *dignior* prestantiorque habetur nullus," Michele Canensi, *Ad beatum somnum D.N. Nicolaum V pontificem maximum Michael Canensis de Viterbio humillimus servulus de ipsius laudibus et divina electione*, f.1v. A transcription of Canensi's *De laudibus* is available as an appendix in Massimo Miglio, *Storiografia pontificia del Quattrocento* (Bologna: Patron, 1975), 205-243. Canensi's relatively brief text (thirty-four folii; the transcription is thirty-eight pages with the notes) contains the words *dignus* and *dignitas* as many as thirty times, at times in conjunction with *auctoritas* and most often with reference to the Apostolic See, the papacy or other ecclesiastic office. The quoted passage uses adjectives, adverbs and nouns to convey dignity through *amplificatio* and *varietas*. Canensi also wrote an *oratio* for Nicholas V, found in Vat.Lat. 3697, ff. 2r-14r. Miglio, *Storiografia pontificia*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> Giannozzo Manetti remarked on the importance of the tiara, that Nicholas V had embellished with great amounts of gems and precious stones, so that those who took part in "tam spetiosa et tam digna" papal ceremonials were full of admiration and wonder. Manetti, *Vita*, II, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Lorenzo Valla held Quintilian in higher esteem than Cicero, a nonconformist opinion that generated heated invectives Valla and Poggio Bracciolini exchanged between 1452 and 1453. Whilst Bracciolini envisaged the Graeco-Roman heritage as valid in the absolute sense because it had been venerated for centuries, Valla viewed it as relative, adopting a more philological approach. Salvatore Camporeale, "Il problema della *imitatio* nel primo Quattrocento. Differenze e controversia tra Bracciolini e Valla," *Annali di architettura*, 9 (1997): 149-154. Smith and O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom*, 14. Another example of the pervasiveness of Ciceronian writings within the Curia is Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, which drew heavily on the Ciceronian corpus. Elizabeth R. Leonard, "Introduction," in *Ianotii Manetti, De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, ed. Elizabeth R. Leonard (Padua: Antenore, 1975), xxxiii.

<sup>64</sup> *Thesaurus linguae latinae, editus auctoritate et consilio academiarum quinque Germanicarum Berlinensis, Gottigensis, Lipsiensis, Monacensis, Vindobonensis* (Leipzig: in aedibus G.B. Teubneri, 1900-), V.1, 1134-1153; VI.2, 2272-2309.

seriousness and weighty solemnity, especially in the case of *gravis* and *gravitas*. Thus, in Book I, 64, Cicero defined an orator “worthy of the important title” (*gravi dignus nomine*) as someone who speaks wisely, skilfully, ornately and from memory with a certain “dignity of action” (*cum quadam actionis dignitate*). Here *gravi* means important as much as burdensome, and the orator must be *dignus* and act with *dignitas* to carry the weight of his title.<sup>65</sup> Cicero spoke of *versibus gravibus* to indicate verses full of meaning, and of a *gravis modus* to define an effective approach.<sup>66</sup> Orators must also be *graves* to vary the style of the speech in accordance with what is pleasing to the ears and the mood. In this context *graves* means being able to convey a sense of importance of both the speech and the orator, but it also implies the great skill involved in constantly adapting the style of the oration.<sup>67</sup>

*Dignitas* and *gravitas* are again bound together in Book II, 334, where Cicero stated that sermons require *gravitas* and variety, and that, therefore, nothing is more desirable than *dignitas* when one’s purpose is persuasion. Cicero implied that the *gravitas* and variety of the speech are instrumental in articulating a sense of dignity, the most persuasive characteristic a speech could possess.<sup>68</sup> Since they encapsulate the skill of the orator and the meaningfulness of the speech, as well as its worth and suitability, *gravitas* and *dignitas* illustrate both the authority of the orator and of the oration. The authoritative reverberations of *gravitas* in particular are exemplified in Book I, 214, where the expression *auctoritatem gravitatis* is used to refer to the authority of someone’s weighty character.<sup>69</sup>

Whilst Cicero gives us an insight into the relationship between *varietas* and *dignitas*, enabling us to interpret the variety of ornament of the Nicholas V Chapel as an expression of dignity, it is important to acknowledge that the meaning of words is not stable and changes constantly. The most evident discrepancy between Ciceronian and

---

<sup>65</sup> “orator erit [...] gravi dignus nomine, qui [...] prudenter et composite et ornate et memoriter dicet cum quadam actionis etiam dignitate,” Cicero, *De oratore*, ed. Augustus S. Wilkins, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), I, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Cicero, *De oratore*, I, 154 and III, 167. Wilkins’ edition of the *De oratore* only presents an English commentary rather than a translation, but he suggested the translation of *gravibus* as ‘full of meaning’ and *gravis* as ‘effective’ under ‘*gravis*’ and ‘*gravitas*’ in the index of the book.

<sup>67</sup> “Itaque tum graves sumus, tum subtiles, tum medium quiddam tenemus: sic institutam nostram sententiam sequitur orationis genus idque ad omnem aurium voluptatem et animorum motum mutatur et vertitur,” Cicero, *De oratore*, III, 177. Wilkins aptly suggested the word ‘impressive’ to translate *graves* in this instance.

<sup>68</sup> “contio [...] gravitatem, varietatemque desiderat. Ergo in suadendo nihil est optabilius quam dignitas,” Cicero, *De oratore*, II, 334.

<sup>69</sup> “M. Scaurus [...] si audierit hanc auctoritatem gravitatis,” Cicero, *De oratore*, I, 214.

Curial rhetoric in relation to the terms analysed so far is the shift from *gravitas* to *auctoritas*. Although Cicero did use *auctoritas*, it seems he felt that the complexities of *gravitas* were better suited to address with one word both the importance and authority of a speech, and the skill of the orator in deploying his own *gravitas* to adapt the oration to the situation. The preference for *auctoritas* in early and mid-fifteenth-century texts discussing the Church and the papacy might be dictated by the intention to convey not just skill and character, but also power. *Auctoritas* emphasises the agency of the *auctor*, or author, and encapsulates one's right to authorise and sanction.<sup>70</sup> It is a response to Conciliarism, which threatened to severely restrict papal ascendancy. The *auctoritas* of the pope thus reflects his overarching legal and secular power as well as his moral stature. In spite of this, *gravitas* did not disappear entirely in the fifteenth-century Curia. Canensi noted how Nicholas V distinguished himself because of his *gravitas* already as a youth, and how the pope's actions are *gravissimis*.<sup>71</sup> Besides, *gravitas* is a crucial issue in the work of Greek humanist George of Trebizond.

### ***Gravitas and Vera Gravitas: George of Trebizond***

George of Trebizond, or Trapezuntius, moved to Venice in his twenties and spent the rest of his life in Italy. He became part of the Curia and later apostolic secretary of Eugenius IV, following the pope to Ferrara and Florence for the Council like Tommaso Parentucelli, the future Nicholas V. George's illustrious reputation allowed him to lecture in the *studia humanitatis* at the Studio Romano, and his post as apostolic secretary was confirmed by Nicholas V, who commissioned from him numerous translations of ancient and patristic authors from Greek into Latin, and also a translation of Plato's *Laws* and *Parmenides*.<sup>72</sup> *Gravitas* is a central theme in George of Trebizond's *Rhetoricorum*

---

<sup>70</sup> *Thesaurus linguae latinae*, II, 1213-1234. The *Thesaurus linguae latinae* reflects the inextricable relation between dignity, authority and *gravitas* by using *dignitas* and *gravitas* as synonyms to describe *auctoritas* and vice versa.

<sup>71</sup> "et quanquam etate eras atque annis tum iuvenis, moribus tamen honestate, modestia, gravitate[...] insurgebas;" "poterimus facile deerrare si tuis gravissimis dictis factis egregiis tuis divinis exemplis [...]," Canensi, *De laudibus*, f.7v and f.22r.

<sup>72</sup> John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond. A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 69-73. In his *Antidotum in Pogium*, a 1452-53 invective against Poggio Bracciolini dedicated to Nicholas V, Lorenzo Valla praised Trapezuntius as the most learned rhetorician of the age: "[...] ad concorrendum cum Trapezuntio omnium Rhetorum, ut ferebatur, hac tempestate doctissimo adductus sim, etsi Rhetorice lectio, ut nunc quoque non habebat concurrentem," Lorenzo Valla, *Opera omnia*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Turin: Bottega D'Erasmus, 1962), 348. However, Valla's enthusiastic judgement of Trapezuntius might be a result of his antipathy for Poggio Bracciolini, a rival of Trapezuntius'. Trapezuntius helped Bracciolini in his translations from Greek, but it was Bracciolini who later exposed the errors and manipulations of Trapezuntius' translations, thus tarnishing his reputation in the same year as Valla's *Antidotum*. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 80. For the Valla-Bracciolini controversy: Salvatore Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla. Umanesimo e teologia* (Florence: Palazzo Strozzi, 1972), 93-98 and 311-374. For an analysis with examples of Trapezuntius' translations of Plato: James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden, New York, Copenhagen and Köln: Brill, 1990), II, 429-435. The appendix to

*Libri V*, written between 1433 and 1434.<sup>73</sup> The *Rhetoricorum Libri V* was written as a Latin version of and commentary on Hermogenes of Tarsus's *On Types of Style* (*Peri ideōn*). Whilst Hermogenes presented passages from Demosthenes to illustrate his points, George of Trebizond chose Cicero's work as exemplar, demonstrating his knowledge of and great admiration for the Latin orator.

*Gravitas* is the term George chose to translate Hermogenes's *deinotēs*, generally meaning severity or shrewdness, but defining the forcefulness or intensity of a speech in a rhetorical context.<sup>74</sup> However, George expanded upon Hermogenes's *deinotēs* by adding an extra section of his own to clarify the difference between two types of *gravitas*. On the one hand, *gravitas verbo* dwells on grand themes and uses grand language, and is perceived by the *vulgus* to be true *gravitas*.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, *vera gravitas* is the ability to suit the oration to the situation, and is the chief ability of the orator.<sup>76</sup> The erudite's, and not the *vulgus*'s, true *gravitas* reiterates Cicero's statement in *De oratore*, Book III, 177, where the adjective *graves* identifies the oratorical ability to change and adapt a speech to the situation. It is not by chance that George of Trebizond indicated Cicero as the only Latin orator who achieved true *gravitas* as a follower of Demosthenes.<sup>77</sup>

### **Nicholas V, Bibliophilia and Rhetoric**

Tommaso Parentucelli was a bibliophile with scholarly interests and impressive oratorical abilities.<sup>78</sup> He had studied dialectic, natural philosophy and theology in Bologna, and had worked as tutor in Florence for the children of Rinaldo degli Albizi and Palla Strozzi between 1415 and 1419,<sup>79</sup> the years when Palla commissioned from Ghiberti a funerary chapel in Santa Trinita for his father Onofrio, whose altar was later to be

---

Monfasani's *George of Trebizond* includes the preface to George's translation of Plato's *De legibus*, addressing Nicholas V, as well as George's epistles to the pope.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380-1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39.

<sup>74</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940). Other modern translators of Hermogenes have chosen the term *decorum* to translate *deinotēs*. Lucia Calboli Montefusco, "Ciceronian and Hermogenean Influences on George of Trebizond's *Rhetoricorum Libri V*." *A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 26, no. 2 (2008): note 26, 146-147.

<sup>75</sup> "ut vulgo graves videamur," George of Trebizond, *Rhetoricorum Libri V*, ed. Luc Deitz (Hildesheim, Zurich and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2006), V, 603.

<sup>76</sup> Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 287. The crucial role of *gravitas* for George of Trebizond is schematically exemplified in Calboli Montefusco's diagram, where *gravitas* sits at the top as the origin of all the other characteristics of speech. Calboli Montefusco, "Ciceronian and Hermogenean Influences," 147.

<sup>77</sup> George of Trebizond, *Rhetoricorum Libri V*, V, 605. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 294.

<sup>78</sup> Massimo Miglio, "Niccolò V." *Enciclopedia Treccani*, 2000, accessed Aug 30, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/).

<sup>79</sup> Manetti, *Vita*, I, 16-21. According to Manetti, Parentucelli also cultivated interests in poetry, oratory, cosmography, geography and history. *Ibid.*, I, 23.

adorned by Gentile da Fabriano's *Adoration of the Magi* (1423).<sup>80</sup> Tommaso then went back to Bologna, where he lived and worked under the aegis of bishop, and later cardinal, Niccolò Albergati. But he was again in Florence for the Council, where, before he was ordained bishop of Bologna on 27 November 1444, he was asked by Cosimo de' Medici to compile a list of books he thought every library should have.<sup>81</sup> As Vespasiano da Bisticci recorded, Tommaso's bibliographical canon was used for the library of Fra Angelico's convent, San Marco, built by Michelozzo Michelozzi between 1441 and 1444 under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici himself.<sup>82</sup>

Although Tommaso's bibliographical canon is anything but exhaustive, and almost completely disregards classical literature and works in Greek to the benefit of patristic literature, it includes a section on the *studia humanitatis*.<sup>83</sup> Tommaso introduced the arts of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and ethics as *auctoritate digna*, interconnecting *dignitas* and *auctoritas* as Giannozzo Manetti later would in his *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V*.<sup>84</sup> The canon includes Donatus, identified with Aelius Donatus, to whom the *ars grammatica Ianua* used in schools was attributed, and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*. Donatus is defined as "*priscum dignum*," venerable and authoritative because ancient; but it is Cicero who enjoys the place of honour. As brief and essential as Tommaso was required to make his

---

<sup>80</sup> Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, 81.

<sup>81</sup> Blasio, Lej and Roselli believe the canon was written before Tommaso's ordination as bishop because already in 1445 Cosimo de' Medici sent book agents to other Tuscan states, and it is likely that they based their researches on Tommaso's canon. Maria Grazia Blasio, Cinzia Lej, Giuseppina Roselli, "Un contributo alla lettura del canone bibliografico di Tommaso Parentucelli," in *Le chiavi della memoria. Miscellanea in occasione del I centenario della Scuola Vaticana di Paleografia, Diplomatica e Archivistica*, ed. Associazione degli ex-allievi (Vatican City State: Scuola Vaticana di Paleografia Diplomatica e Archivistica, 1984), note 7, 127.

<sup>82</sup> The core collection of the library at San Marco was donated by the Florentine bibliophile and humanist Niccolò Niccoli after his death in 1437. Cosimo de' Medici was one of his executors. Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote that Tommaso Parentucelli's bibliographical canon was also used for the library of the Badia in Fiesole, and that a similar list was followed for the library of the Duke of Urbino and that of Alessandro Sforza, "and whoever will want to establish a library will not be able to do it without this inventory" ("Et chi arà pe' tempi a fare libraria non potrà fare senza questo inventario"), Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Aulo Greco (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1970-1976), 46-47. On the San Marco library: Berthold Louis Ullman, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence: Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de' Medici and the Library of San Marco* (Padua: Antenore, 1972).

<sup>83</sup> Parentucelli's canon survives in a late fifteenth-century copy at the Biblioteca Centrale in Florence (Conv. Soppr. J VII 30 (411)). It is included in a miscellaneous codex that on the spine bears the title *Vitae Sanctorum*. We cannot be sure that this copy, made by Leonardo di Ser Uberto, librarian at San Marco between 1471 and 1473, is completely faithful to Parentucelli's original. For a critical edition of the canon with introduction and comparative tables: Blasio, Lej and Roselli, "Un contributo alla lettura del canone bibliografico," 125-165. On Leonardo di Ser Uberto: Thomas Kaeppli, *Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevi* (Rome: Istituto Storico Domenicano, 1970-1993), III, 87.

<sup>84</sup> "De studiis autem humanitatis, quantum ad grammaticam, rhetoricam, hystoricam et poeticam spectat ac moralem, que auctoritate digna sunt, vobis credo esse notissima," Tommaso Parentucelli (and Leonardo di Ser Uberto), *Inventarium Nicolai pape V, quod ipse composuit ad instantiam Cosme de Medicis*, ed. Maria Grazia Blasio, Cinzia Lej, Giuseppina Roselli, in "Un contributo alla lettura del canone bibliografico," in *Le chiavi della memoria*, 154.

canon, he included Cicero's opera omnia, of which the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was still part, "for everything of his is fundamental."<sup>85</sup>

Since Parentucelli's canon was concerned with essential, well-established works in Latin, and Latin commentaries and translations of very few key Greek authors, such as Aristotle, George of Trebizond's relatively recent *Rhetoricorum Libri V* does not feature. However, one can assume Tommaso and George knew each other already by the time George was writing his work on Hermogenes, for they were both part of the papal Curia of Eugenius IV, and both in Florence. We cannot be sure if Parentucelli read George's *Rhetoricorum Libri*.<sup>86</sup> However, as soon as he became pope, Parentucelli commissioned several translations from George and confirmed his role as apostolic secretary, demonstrating that, at least, he knew of George's work and was happy to endorse it, even though their relationship deteriorated in the later years of Nicholas V's papacy.<sup>87</sup>

George of Trebizond's *vera gravitas* encapsulates the impressive ability of the orator to adapt, to use varied oratory styles to suit varied situations, places, people, causes.<sup>88</sup> As seen in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, *varietas* is a key word defining both the quality of the oration and that of the orator, informed by his judgement, *iudicium*. A wise, knowledgeable and skilled orator is an authoritative figure conveying the *dignitas* of his speech and commanding respect. As such, he is the perfect statesman.<sup>89</sup> These reflections of George's may have been particularly appealing to Parentucelli in the wake

---

<sup>85</sup> "quia omnia eius precipue sunt," Parentucelli (and Leonardo di Ser Uberto), *Inventarium*, 154.

<sup>86</sup> The extent of Nicholas V's erudition is debated. He founded the Vatican library and commissioned numerous translations from Hebrew and Greek (Manetti, *Vita*, II, 16-24), but according to Pastor Parentucelli was more of a bibliophile than a true scholar. Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, ed. Frederick Ignatius Antrobus, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD, 1899-1908), II, 22. Pastor's argument is supported by Nicholas V's failure to read texts produced for him, such as Filelfo's biography of him in 1453, as well as correspondence addressed to him, such as George of Trebizond's warnings about the Porcari conspiracy in 1452-1453. Smith and O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom*, 194. Nonetheless, Massimo Miglio emphasised Nicholas V's cultural preparation, and the trust Cosimo de' Medici placed in him for the preparation of the canon suggests that Parentucelli was considered a knowledgeable man, if not a scholar, even before he became a bishop. Massimo Miglio, "Niccolò V umanista di Cristo," in *Umanesimo e Padri della Chiesa*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile (Rome: Rose and Ministero per i Beni Culturali, 1996), 77-83. An appendix to the *Liber pontificalis* defines Nicholas V as "deditus litteris" and "doctissimus," *Liber pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, (Paris: De Boccard Editeur, 1955), II, App. II, 557.

<sup>87</sup> Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 73-75, 360-364. See George's dedications and prefaces to his translations in John Monfasani, ed., *Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond* (Binghampton: Medieval Texts and Studies in Conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, 1984); and Modigliani's deeply informative notes in Manetti, *Vita*, II, 16-24. Cf. note 72.

<sup>88</sup> "Haec summa etiam gravitas oratoris est; qui ad hoc pervenit, ist mihi orator. Neque quoniam est omnium difficillimum tam multas, tam varias, tam instabiles rerum, personarum, causarum, locorum, et temporum condiciones percipere [...]," George of Trebizond, *Rhetoricorum Libri V*, V, 611.

<sup>89</sup> Monfasani remarked on George's interest in what should be considered the best education for a statesman. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 294.

of his election as pope, a *gravis* and *dignus* appointment that prompted him to strengthen the *auctoritas* and *dignitas* of the Church.

### ***Dignitas, Auctoritas and Gravitatis in the Nicholas V Chapel***

The *dignitas*, *auctoritas* and *gravitas* of the Nicholas V Chapel are expressed in three ways. Firstly, the emphasis on ceremonial articulated by the fictive frame and the robes and paraphernalia in the two *Ordinations*; secondly, the significance of the decorative programme as a whole, perhaps informed by the influential cardinal Juan de Torquemada; thirdly, the role played by the Chapel's fictive architecture in articulating two places and two different moments in time, as highlighted in Chapter Four, and in creating hybrid architectural settings.

#### 1. The *Dignitas* of Ceremonial

In his *Vita ac gestis Nicolai V*, Manetti stated that the glory of God, the authority of the Church and the dignity of the Apostolic See are exalted through “worthy and memorable deeds,” *dignis ac memorabilibus operibus*. Purchasing and using worthy ceremonial fixtures was essential to aggrandise the spiritual authority of the Church, for splendid and worthy services - *digna officia* - elicit admiration, wonder and devotion.<sup>90</sup> Manetti here reiterated Cicero's statements on the crucial importance of *dignitas* for persuasion, and Manetti's description of the varied materials, colours and gems used for papal *paramenta* echoes the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, where the author stated that dignity is what makes an oration ornate, singling it out with variety.

The *Ordination* scenes in the Nicholas V Chapel offer examples of *digna officia*. In the *Ordination of St Stephen* (**Fig.195**), the elegantly dressed deacons hold beautiful manuscripts and watch as St Peter hands chalice and paten to the kneeling St Stephen in front of an altar covered by an embroidered white cloth, or *tovaglia perugina*, on which golden candelabra and an open book are placed. In the *Ordination of St Lawrence*, three clerics, two deacons and three bishops witness the ceremony. One holds an ethereal transparent veil in his hands, another a half open book, yet another an elaborate

---

<sup>90</sup> “Proinde cum status Ecclesie duobus, spiritualibus scilicet et secularibus rebus [...] Unde ubicunque illa tam spetiosa et tam digna officia intuebantur, homines tanta admiratione tantoque stupore simul atque devotione capiebantur [...]” Manetti, *Vita*, II, 8 and 9. Miglio noted a tendency in papal biographies to define popes as masters of liturgy. He also remarked on the renewed interest in medieval liturgical books as a source of *auctoritas* when popes returned to Rome, for failure to correctly apply liturgical ceremonial was considered a serious criticism. Massimo Miglio, “Liturgia e cerimoniale di corte,” in *Liturgia in figura. Codici liturgici rinascimentali della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, ed. Giovanni Morello and Silvia Maddalo (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana and Edizioni De Luca 1995), 44-45.

thurible and an incense boat (**Fig.196**).<sup>91</sup> The altar is decorated by seemingly velvet upholstery with a black and green pattern, with a golden candelabrum resting on it (**Fig.197**).<sup>92</sup>

The *Ordination* episodes are not the only instance of *paramenta*. Ceremonial decorations constellate the whole chapel, and are particularly evident in the fictive frame. Brocades of various colours, floral friezes, mazzocchi, terracotta-like faces of putti, and the floral decoration of the window embrasures (**Fig.198**) are all ways to render the frescoes *digni* and capable of eliciting admiration. The varied, vegetal ornament of the fictive architecture of the narratives is another fundamental demonstration of the Chapel's *digna paramenta*, embellishing the architectural settings and giving them distinction through *varietas*.

## 2. The *Auctoritas* of the Figurative Programme

The combination of two deacon martyrs, the four Evangelists, and eight Doctors of the Church as figures of authority articulates the *auctoritas* of the Chapel's decoration. As deacons, Stephen and Lawrence represent papal authority and illustrate the deeds of the Church for the well-being of the faithful, particularly material well-being, as exemplified by the *Giving of Alms*, *Entrustment* and *Distribution*.<sup>93</sup> Significantly, the *Ordination* scenes, where St Stephen is ordained deacon by St Peter himself and Lawrence by Sixtus II, who bears the features of Nicholas V, are set within magnificent interiors reminiscent of basilicas. As Stephen and Lawrence receive chalice and paten, they are bestowed with the papal sanctification that had its origins in the Holy City of Jerusalem with the Apostle and first pope Peter, and continued centuries later in Rome as new Jerusalem with Lawrence and Sixtus II, a canonised pope.

Although the rich and complex juxtaposition of Rome and Jerusalem has generated a great amount of literature,<sup>94</sup> scholars have not emphasised enough that the interweaving

---

<sup>91</sup> On the ceremonial of ordinations: *Ordines romani*, ed. Michel Andrieu (Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense, 1974), Ordo XXXIV.

<sup>92</sup> For a study of the status, uses and meaning of brocade and its representation in painting: Rembrandt Duits, *Gold Brocade and Renaissance Painting. A Study in Material Culture* (London: The Pindar Press, 2008); Lisa Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets* (London: V&A Publications, 2012).

<sup>93</sup> For the theological message of the Chapel's narratives: Innocenzo Venchi, "Il messaggio teologico della Cappella Niccolina," in *Il Beato Angelico e la Cappella Niccolina. Storia e restauro*, ed. Francesco Buranelli (Novara: Musei Vaticani and Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 2001), 63-79. Salatino treated in detail the significance of *diakonia* for the Chapel's programme. Salatino, "The Frescoes of Fra Angelico for the Chapel of Nicholas V," Ch.2.

<sup>94</sup> Manetti compared Nicholas V to Solomon in *Vita*, II, 61-64. Marie Tanner, *Jerusalem on the Hill: Rome and the Vision of St Peter's in the Renaissance* (London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2010); Smith



of Jerusalem and Rome, Nicholas V, and Sts Stephen, Lawrence, Peter and Sixtus addressed the status of the papal office inherited by Nicholas V. Even though the Avignon papal See was abandoned definitively in 1377 to return to Rome, the situation of the papacy within the city had been unstable for decades. Closer to Parentucelli's time of involvement within the Curia, a revolt led by the Roman aristocracy in 1434 forced his predecessor Eugenius IV to flee the city and find refuge in Florence, to return in 1443. Furthermore, the threat of the Council, which claimed supremacy over the pontifex, was still alive in the figure of Felix V, the antipope elected by the Council in Basel in 1439, who was convinced to abdicate only in 1449.<sup>95</sup>

The inclusion of St Peter, the assimilation of Nicholas V and Sixtus II, who bears the same plump face and bent nose of Nicholas V (cf. Ch.4, note 17), and the *Ordination* scenes where Stephen and Lawrence receive chalice and paten from these authoritative figures all confirm the legitimacy and *auctoritas* of the papacy. Besides, St Stephen and St Lawrence, as protomartyrs, highlight the ancient roots of the diaconate, and their paired lives in the Niccolina reiterate Jacobus da Voragine's words in the *Golden Legend*, where "blessed Lawrence is said to stand with St Stephen in first place among the martyrs."<sup>96</sup> Stephen and Lawrence are two saints demonstrating the *auctoritas* of the Church, but they also embody the dignity of the Apostolic See, to use Manetti's expression, by linking Rome to Jerusalem.<sup>97</sup> The *auctoritas* and *dignitas* of the two cities are crucial, since, as Jacobus da Varagine informs us, the first reason Lawrence enjoys his high status as martyr alongside Stephen is the place of his sufferings, Rome, "the capital of the world and the Apostolic See."<sup>98</sup> The link between Rome and the Church was also emphasised

---

and O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom*, 91-119; Westfall, *In This Most Perfect Paradise*, 121 and 124. Diana, "Niccolò V e Salomone," identified Solomonite elements in the fictive architecture of Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel. Giuseppe Morolli, "Federico da Montefeltro e Salomone. Alberti, Piero e l'ordine architettonico dei principi-costruttori ritrovato," in *Città e corte nell'Italia di Piero della Francesca. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Urbino, 4-7 Ottobre 1992*, ed. Claudia Cieri Via (Venice: Marsilio editori, 1996), 319-345.

<sup>95</sup> Miglio, "Niccolò V," *Enciclopedia Treccani*, 2000, accessed Aug 19, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/); "Eugenio IV" *Enciclopedia Treccani*, 2000, accessed Aug 19, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v\\_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v_%28Enciclopedia-dei-Papi%29/). On Conciliarism: Gerald Christianson, Thomas Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto, ed., *The Church, the Councils, and Reform: the Legacy of the Fifteenth Century* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Jacobus da Varagine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, ed. William Granger Ryan and Eamon Duffy, 2nd ed. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 456.

<sup>97</sup> The figure of St Lawrence in particular aligns the Chapel's programme with the mosaic decoration of the apse in several basilicas of Rome, for example Santa Maria in Trastevere (c.1140) and San Clemente (12th century), as well as with the frescoes in San Lorenzo fuori le mura and the Sancta Sanctorum, discussed earlier on.

<sup>98</sup> Jacobus da Varagine, *The Golden Legend*, 456.

by Giuseppe Brivio, a member of the Curia, who, in his *Conformatio Curiae Romanae*, elaborated on the Christian Rome of Sts Peter and Paul.<sup>99</sup>

The Doctors of the Church in the two arch intrados span all four walls, bringing together the deacon saints' lives and complementing the *dignitas* and *auctoritas* of the Church as expounded in the narrative cycles with their own *dignitas* and *auctoritas*. The Councils of Basel and Constance, Ferrara and Florence had brought about a resurgence of the authority of the Doctors of the Church, who were the basis on which to build the *pax* and *unitas* of the Church to strengthen the *potestas pontificia*, the *fundamentum dignitatis* of the Church.<sup>100</sup>

The importance of the Doctors of the Church is expressed in several documents addressed to Nicholas V, hinging on the *auctoritas* of the Church and the Apostolic See. Probably around 1450, the bishop of Brescia Pietro del Monte dedicated to Nicholas V a treaty concerned with defending the authority of the Apostolic See entitled *Contra impugnantes Sedis Apostolice auctoritatem* (Vat.lat.4145), where he defined the Doctors of the Church as models to follow, whose authoritative doctrines defended the authority of the Church itself.<sup>101</sup> In 1453 Leonard of Chios, bishop of Mytilene, observed in his *De urbis Constantinopoleos iactura captivitateque historia* how the “*prisci*,” ancient and venerable Greek Fathers of the Church Basil, Athanasius and Cyril had always supported the *Romana Ecclesia*, thus encountering the harsh criticism of the Eastern Church.<sup>102</sup>

Although Pietro del Monte's and Leonard of Chios's words postdate Angelico's frescoes in the Nicholas V Chapel, Athanasius and another Greek Father, John Chrysostomos, feature in the lower register of the south arch intrados in the Chapel, probably painted

---

<sup>99</sup> Concetta Bianca, “Il pontificato di Niccolò V e i Padri della Chiesa,” in *Umanesimo e Padri della Chiesa. Manoscritti e incunaboli di testi patristici da Francesco Petrarca al primo Cinquecento*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile (Rome: Rose and Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1996), 85. The *Conformatio* is an invective against the 1453 revolt led by Stefano Porcari. Pietro Messina, “Giuseppe Brivio,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* Treccani, 1972, accessed Aug 19, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giuseppe-brivio\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giuseppe-brivio_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/).

<sup>100</sup> Juan de Torquemada argued in his *De potestate ecclesiastica* that the *pax* and *unitas* of the Church were the only weapon against the supporters of the schism. A brief 1447 letter of the Florentine Franciscan Francesco Micheli to the newly elected Nicholas V ended mentioning the importance of *pax* and encouraging the pope to strengthen the throne of the Apostolic See. Ms Landau 152, c. 62r, Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, quoted in Bianca, “Il pontificato di Niccolò V,” 87-88.

<sup>101</sup> Vat.lat.4145, c.2v. Bianca, “Il pontificato di Niccolò V,” 85. Pietro Messina, “Pietro del Monte.” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* Treccani, 1990, accessed Aug 19, 2015, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-del-monte\\_res-3f32aed2-87ec-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pietro-del-monte_res-3f32aed2-87ec-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/).

<sup>102</sup> Ms. 660, c.44v. Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence. The manuscript is dated Chios, 16th August 1453. Bianca, “Il pontificato di Niccolò V,” 86.

whilst George of Trebizond was translating Chrysostomos' work.<sup>103</sup> Nicholas V had also demonstrated his veneration for Thomas Aquinas, represented in the lower register of the north arch intrados of his Chapel, by promoting his feast day with a special ceremonial attended by Cardinals in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the chief Dominican church of the city.<sup>104</sup>

The Doctors of the Church thus act as a further demonstration of the *prisca auctoritas* of the Romana Ecclesia. They are the link between its origins in Jerusalem, represented by Stephen, its prestigious continuation in Rome, represented by Lawrence, and the time of Nicholas V. The architecture of the ciboria they inhabit reflects this by reiterating ornament also present in the settings of the narrative and by including different architectural solutions, primarily the pointed trefoil arches, that reproduce the architecture of more ancient and contemporary sacred buildings Nicholas V may have seen when he was in Florence during the Council, in Venice in 1427, or during his diplomatic missions in France and England with Cardinal Niccolò Albergati.<sup>105</sup> The ciboria thus contribute to the *varietas* of the Chapel's decoration, but their elaborate and ornate structure also creates a *digna sedis* for the *auctoritas* of the Doctors, mirroring, with its *dignitas*, the moral stature of the Doctors. Crucially, the ciboria's three storeys establish a link to the papal tiara and therefore to the papal office, thus functioning rhetorically as the embodiment of *auctoritas*.

### 3. *Dignitas, Auctoritas* and Architecture

Although the *dignitas* of the Chapel's variety of architectural ornament and the *auctoritas* of the three-storey ciboria are recognisable, the application of these terms to architectural structures might appear dubious. Yet, *dignitas* and *auctoritas* were used as architectural terms not only in Manetti's *Vita et gestis Nicolai V*, but also in Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*. The noun *dignitas* and the adjectives *dignus* or *digna* are frequently employed

---

<sup>103</sup> Monfasani argued that Trebizond's translation of Chrysostomos was carried out in 1448. George also translated Gregory Nazanzenus's two orations in praise of St Athanasius between 1451 and 1452. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 72-73.

<sup>104</sup> O'Malley argued that Nicholas V considered Thomas Aquinas the first non-patristic Doctor of the Church: John O'Malley, "The Feast of Thomas Aquinas in Renaissance Rome," *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 35 (1981): 1-27. For the rising importance of Thomas Aquinas in the fifteenth century: Smith and O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom*, 17-20. For the other Doctors of the Church in the Nicholas V Chapel: Venchi, "Il messaggio teologico della Cappella Niccolina," 75. Furthermore, as Cole Ahl observed, Thomas Aquinas was Nicholas V's patron, for he was born as Tommaso, and the inclusion of this Dominican saint may also have been dictated by cardinal Juan de Torquemada, a Dominican like Fra Angelico. Cole Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, 173-176.

<sup>105</sup> Parentucelli accompanied Albergati to England in 1422, to France and to England again between 1434 and 1435, and then to Germany in 1438. Miglio, "Niccolò V." *Encyclopaedia dei Papi Treccani*, 2000, accessed Feb 01, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v\\_\(Enciclopedia-dei-Papi\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-v_(Enciclopedia-dei-Papi)/).

by Alberti to describe the importance and value of a building as a criterion to calculate costs, the difficulty that arises from attempting to build a structure that joins practicality with *dignitas* and beauty, and the magnificence and *dignitas* of the theatre of Pompey, a work worthy, *dignum opus*, of Pompey himself and of victorious Rome.<sup>106</sup>

Alberti identified *dignitas* and *auctoritas*, along with *gratia*, as the sources of *concinntas*, the ultimate purpose of architecture and Alberti's most complex and most discussed rhetorical term.<sup>107</sup> As the harmony of different parts coming together to endow a building with grace, *dignitas* and *auctoritas*, *concinntas* can be likened to rhetorical *varietas*, ornamenting a speech with dignity and investing it with *auctoritas*. The inextricability of ornament and dignity, and of dignity and authority, is again expressed by Alberti's statement that age will give a temple as much authority as ornament will give it dignity.<sup>108</sup> The equation where age as to authority equals dignity as to ornament has a particular resonance in the Nicholas V Chapel, whose ornate architectural settings subtly articulate a chronological hiatus between the lives of Stephen and Lawrence in order to convey the dignity and authority of the Church through history. Whether Alberti's specific formal and structural advice in the *De re* informed Angelico's frescoes or not, it is significant that he applied to buildings the same concerns around the *dignitas* and *auctoritas* of the Church and the Apostolic See that were expressed in the writings of Giannozzo Manetti, Pietro del Monte and Giuseppe Brivio.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> "Adde quod futurae impensae modus et summa [...] certior habebitur [...] pro earum [of the parts of a building] dignitate et fabrorum manu pensatis;" "Ego vero usu istarum rerum perdoctos memini, quam sit difficile perducere opus, ut in eo sint partium commoditates dignitati venustatique coniunctae," Leon Battista Alberti, *L'architettura [De re aedificatoria]*, ed. Giovanni Orlandi and Paolo Portoghesi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1966), Book II, 1. "Pompeii theatrum ob egregiam operis magnitudinem et dignitatem laudibus et admiratione prosequimur, dignum opus et Pompeio et victrice Roma," Alberti, *ibid.*, Book II, 2.

<sup>107</sup> Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, Book IX, 5. For Alberti's *concinntas* and use of rhetoric: Luigi Vagnetti, "Concinntas: Riflessioni sul significato di un termine albertiano," *Studi e documenti di architettura*, 2 (1973): 139-161; Robert Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 43-48. More recently, van Eck has contributed greatly to the subject: Caroline van Eck, "The Retrieval of Classical Architecture in the Quattrocento: The Role of Rhetoric in the Formulation of Alberti's Theory of Architecture," in *Memory and Oblivion* ed. Wessel Reining and Jeroen Stumpel (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 231-238; "Architecture, Language and Rhetoric in Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*," in *Architecture and Language. Constructing Identity in European Architecture c. 1000-c-1650*, ed. Georgia Clarke and Paul Crossley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72-81; and *Classical Rhetoric and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17-29.

<sup>108</sup> Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, Book VII, 3.

<sup>109</sup> For the authority of architecture in Alberti: Jan Bialostocki, "The Power of Beauty. A Utopian Idea of Leon Battista Alberti," in *Studien zur toskanischen Kunst. Festschrift für Ludwig Heinrich Heydenreich*, ed. Wolfgang Lutz and Lise Lotte Möller (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1964), 13-19. Miguel Soromenho, "A Arquitetura enquanto autoridade," in *Arquitetura Imaginária. Pintura, escultura, artes decorativas*, ed. António Filipe Pimentel (Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 2012), 149-153.

Similar reflections on the *auctoritas* and *dignitas* of buildings can be found in Book III of Manetti's *Vita*, where the biographer reports Nicholas V's own *apologia* for his architectural enterprise. For Nicholas V, great buildings are necessary to express the *summa auctoritas* of the Church to those who have not understood it by assiduous studying. His projects focused on Rome since this is held to be the most *digna* of all cities, made by God residence of the popes and See of the eternal sanctity of the papacy.<sup>110</sup> In paragraph 13, Manetti has Nicholas clarify that the aim of his building enterprise was not to aggrandise his name but to increase the authority of the Roman Church and the dignity of the Apostolic See in the eyes of all the Christian people and in response to the persecutions endured by the papacy during the previous six-hundred years.<sup>111</sup> Thus, Alberti and Manetti demonstrate that architecture was perceived to have a rhetorical power that allowed it to communicate ideas and persuade viewers.

#### 4. The *Gravitas* of Fra Angelico's Fictive Architecture

The fictive architecture of the Nicholas V Chapel achieves *dignitas* through its beautifully varied ornament. In particular, the ciboria are the Doctors' rightful place, a *locus* combining their physical position with their spiritual stature and that of the papacy, thus embodying not only *dignitas* but also *auctoritas*. The Chapel's architectural settings also articulate *dignitas* and *auctoritas* by creating two different, but kindred places as well as two moments in time, as shown in Chapter Four. In addition, the numerous references to the artistic and architectural identity of Rome highlighted at the beginning of this chapter contribute to concretising and legitimising not only the narratives but also Rome as Apostolic See. Nevertheless, Fra Angelico's settings are hybrid architectural places, citing Roman architecture as much as they refashion it, including Florentine quotations and resisting identification with existing built models as much as they defy typological definition.

Angelico's hybrid approach to fictive architecture is particularly puzzling in the life of St Lawrence, who lived and was martyred in Rome, especially since illustrious precedents

---

<sup>110</sup> "Romane nanque Ecclesie auctoritatem maximam ac summam esse ii soli intelligunt, qui originem et incrementa sua ex litterarum cognitione perceperunt [...] At vero cum illa vulgaris opinio [...] magnis edificis perpetuis quodammodo monumentis ac testimoniis pene sempiternis, quasi a Deo fabricatis, in dies usque adeo corroboratur et confirmatur," Manetti, *Vita*, III, 11. "Quanto enim hec alma Urbs ceteris omnibus maior et dignior habetur [...] perpetuam summorum pontificum sedem atque eternum pontificie sanctitatis habitaculum ab omnipotenti Deo constitutum fuisse," *ibid.*, III, 12. In addition, the renovation of the Vatican Palace and of areas adjacent to St Peter's is justified with the intent to provide a "digna quadam segura [...] habitatione" for the whole Curia, *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> "[...] non ambitione, non pompa, non inani gloria [...] sed maiori quadam Romane Ecclesie auctoritate et ampliori Sedis Apostolice apud cunctos christianos populos dignitate," Manetti, *Vita*, III, 13.

such as the frescoes in the Sancta Sanctorum and San Lorenzo fuori le mura present portraits of place. In the Sancta Sanctorum's *Martyrdom of St Peter*, the saint is represented in front of the no-longer extant *meta Romuli* and what appears to be Castel Sant'Angelo, indicating a specific Roman site (**Fig.199**). Similarly, in San Lorenzo, the fresco on the façade showing the chariot that transported the body of St Stephen to Rome presents a portrait of the basilica of San Lorenzo itself (**Fig.189**). Interestingly, however, both in the Sancta Sanctorum and San Lorenzo fuori le mura the setting for the martyrdom of St Lawrence is not a recognisable location in Rome. Although this may be due to the silence of textual sources as to the location of the saint's martyrdom, whereas they comment on the site of his burial, the coexistence of portraits and hybrid architectural places in these thirteenth-century examples demonstrates the same ambiguous, inconstant interest in portraiture of place that can also be observed in fourteenth and fifteenth-century painting.<sup>112</sup>

In comparison with the scenes dedicated to St Lawrence in the Sancta Sanctorum and San Lorenzo, the St Lawrence cycle in the Nicholas V Chapel establishes strong connections to Rome through the sculpted eagle enclosed in a wreath above Decius's seat (**Figs 180&181**), and through the abundant architectural ornament of the settings and the fictive frame, with columns and moulded cornices demonstrating an engagement with the Classical orders. Fra Angelico's effort to create a Roman identity for Lawrence's settings makes it even more remarkable that no episode of the saint's cycle was located in a recognisable, unmistakable Roman site. The elusiveness of Angelico's fictive architectural places could be read as an attempt at maintaining the transcendence of the sacred narratives, as discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Altichiero's fictive buildings, but it may also be due to the Chapel's function. The argument revolving around the *dignitas* and *auctoritas* of Rome and the Church expounded here strengthens the suggestion, proposed in the previous chapter, that Nicholas V held important investiture ceremonies in his Chapel, but perhaps an unmistakable portrait of a Roman site may not have been expected, and could have been interpreted as blatantly self-aggrandising for a small, officially private consecrated

---

<sup>112</sup> Whilst the *Liber pontificalis* tells us where St Peter was martyred ("Sepultus est autem in via Aurelia, in templum Apollinis, iuxta locum ubi crucifixus est, secus palatium Neronianum, in Vaticano,"), it only mentions where St Lawrence was buried ("beatus Laurentius in cimiterio Cyriaces, in agrum Veranum [sepultus est]"), *Liber pontificalis: nella recensione di Pietro Guglielmo OSB e del Card. Pandolfo. Glossato da Pietro Bohier*, ed. Ulderico Prerovsky (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978), II, I, 5 and XXV, I, 155. The location of St Peter's martyrdom became a bone of contention in the fifteenth century, when an alternative tradition placing it on the Janiculum developed. J.M. Huskinson, "The Crucifixion of St Peter: a Fifteenth-Century Topographical Problem," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 32 (1969): 135-161.

environment that, unlike the Sancta Sanctorum, contained no relics. Especially because of the intimate nature of the Chapel, the message of its decoration was designed to be perceptible but subtly articulated.

However, George of Trebizond's *vera gravitas* might help us clarify the malleability of the Niccolina's hybrid architectural places. *Vera gravitas* reflects the ability of the orator to adapt to any situation, to any place and to any audience. It represents the skill of bringing together all rhetorical styles as needed, and thus encapsulates *varietas* of ornament, giving *dignitas* to the speech and displaying the *auctoritas* of the orator. Angelico's settings and fictive frame for the Nicholas V Chapel display *varietas* of ornament and engage with the *dignitas* and *auctoritas* of the Apostolic See, but unlike a speech, they cannot vary according to the place, the audience or the situation. They are inextricably bound to the vaulted environment of the chapel, forever fixed as they are without the possibility to respond impromptu to changes in circumstances. It is true that the chapel's fictive architecture, along with its narrative, originated from a specific historical context and with a specific audience in mind, but the changeability of ornament, architectural structures and narrative arrangements, and the elusiveness of his hybrid architectural places, can be read as Angelico's attempt to invest his decoration with the adaptability of *vera gravitas*. This extends the relevance of the narratives and their settings to any time, any place and any viewer, whilst at the same time bearing subtle but recognisable references to Rome that encapsulate the long and prestigious history of the city, forever tied to the fate of Christendom.<sup>113</sup>

The *gravitas* of Angelico's fictive architecture contributed to continuously renovating the Chapel's expression of the dignity and authority of the pope and of Rome as Apostolic See, perhaps even playing a major role in guaranteeing the survival of the Chapel's frescoes in an environment particularly susceptible to repeated destructions and reconstructions carried out by popes anxious to leave their mark. Furthermore, the fictive structures' *vera gravitas* also illustrate the artist's skill, exalting the richness of his

---

<sup>113</sup> George of Trebizond was not the only one concerned with adaptability. The famous Paduan humanist and teacher Gasparino Barzizza (d.1431), who taught Alberti, Francesco Barbaro and Francesco Filelfo, stated that all aspects of a speech need to be accommodated to the dignity of things, places, times and people ("ut omnia [...] ad rerum, de quibus loquimur, dignitatem, temporum, locorum et personarum accomodata sint"), Gasparino Barzizza, *De compositione*, quoted in Nancy S. Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance: Rhetoric and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 68. Even Poggio Bracciolini in his *Oratio ad Nicolaum V* stated that all things need a way, a time and a place ("sed omnia modum, tempus, locum, requirunt"), Poggio Bracciolini, "Oratio ad Summum Pontificem Nicolaum V," in *Opera omnia*, ed. Riccardo Fubini (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1964), I, 289.

architectural repertoire and his inventiveness in repeatedly varying it. Of all of Fra Angelico's oeuvre, his prestigious Vatican commissions were the best suited to showcase the breadth of his inventive imagination, perhaps even allowing his main collaborator Benozzo Gozzoli to propose a few solutions for the Chapel's detailed ornament. Whilst at San Marco Angelico's frescoes are an invitation and an aid to meditation, the frescoes of the Nicholas V Chapel aim to impress the viewers with their glowing fictive textiles and elaborate, unusual architectural structures and decorations. Added to the narratives' subject matter, they need to convincingly convey the *dignitas* of Nicholas V as pope and the righteousness of Rome as Apostolic See to cardinals and bishops to be, the very élite that will be called to elect a new pope, or even become one.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter put aside the traditional interpretation of the fictive structures of the Nicholas V Chapel, based on comparisons between Nicholas V's architectural projects, extremely complex to reconstruct, and the controversial role played by Leon Battista Alberti. It illustrated instead the extent to which the Chapel's frescoes differ from the rest of Angelico's production and are related to the artistic and architectural identity of Rome, proposing a reading that envisages the fictive structures as agents expressing the dignity and authority of the papacy and of the Church. The analysis of texts written by ecclesiastics and humanist members of the Curia during the 1440s and 1450s highlighted the almost obsessive reiteration of the words *dignitas* and *auctoritas*, both with reference to the pope and the Church, and to indicate clerical offices such as the cardinalate. Consideration of Cicero, whose writings were deemed essential, as demonstrated by Nicholas V's own bibliographical canon, clarified the link between *dignitas* and ornament, whilst at the same time introducing the term *gravitas* and highlighting the shift from it to *auctoritas* in Curial rhetoric.

An examination of the Chapel's decorative programme added to a consideration of *dignitas* and *auctoritas* as architectural terms qualifying the settings' articulation of two places and two moments in time observed in Chapter Four, and demonstrating the extent to which the Chapel's architectural ornament and structures are intertwined with the narratives' subject matter to convey the dignity and authority of Nicholas V as pope, of the Church and of Rome as Apostolic See. The architectural places Angelico created for the Chapel function as embodiments of ecclesiastical investiture, as deacon, bishop, cardinal and pope, as well as saint. Enacting the correspondence between place as



container and thing contained, as shown in Chapter One, the Chapel's architectural places reflect the social, moral and spiritual 'position' of the represented figures, acting as a *locus dignitatis* (a place of dignity), to coin a new expression. Angelico's numerous, yet ambiguous references to Roman architecture play a key role in giving dignity and authority to the frescoes as a whole. As well as highlighting the versatility of the artist, the deployment of George of Trebizond's *vera gravitas*, which elaborates on Cicero's as well as Hermogenes' *gravitas*, enables us to see that the architectural hybridity of Angelico's settings might have functioned as an advantage rather than a hurdle for the articulation of adaptable and perceptible, yet subtle links between the Chapel and Rome.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis argued for the agency of architecture in painting. It demonstrated that fictive architecture structures the narrative, engages with viewers and, crucially, creates place. More specifically, it argued that architecture in painting is not simply a perspectival means to represent pictorial space, and that thinking about fictive structures as articulating place rather than space is a less anachronistic approach, highlighting the rhetorical valence of fictive architecture. Considering place makes it possible to identify two major categories of architectural settings: portrait of place, where the architecture presents immediately recognisable, largely faithful representations of existing built structures; and hybrid architectural place, where fictive architecture cites, but also refashions structures and ornament found in built models in order to evoke many places at once and elude identification. The thesis thus sought to qualify more precisely the roles architectural settings play within Italian fourteenth and fifteenth-century frescoes through close examination of two case studies.

The first significant finding, shedding light on the relationship between pictorial space and fictive architecture, is that the underlying motives or strategies identified to interpret Altichiero's fourteenth-century frescoes do not differ dramatically from those Fra Angelico employed in the fifteenth century. This is in spite of the discovery, or re-discovery and theorisation of perspective in the early Quattrocento. Both Altichiero and Fra Angelico used projection, recession and splaying. Both manipulated their fictive buildings to show more architectural detail and engage with the viewer, although Angelico used light more often than splaying in order to do so. Both presented uninhabitable accretions, even though in Altichiero these are not a minor feature but a defining characteristic. For both, the frame is a crucial binding agent, but Angelico put more emphasis on it, using it as a further means to showcase ornament. The structures in both fresco cycles resist precise identification with existing building types and are characterised by intricate ornamental variety, although Altichiero privileged tracery, ogee arches and elaborate corbels, while Fra Angelico applied his creativity to the vegetal theme and classical architectural forms. These are significant parallels. The methodological affinities and shared intentions between the fictive architectures of the Oratory of St George and the Nicholas V Chapel bridge the traditional

historiographical gap between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, further shifting the focus away from spatial interpretations and towards the agency of architecture in painting. Nonetheless, the thesis has also uncovered a major discrepancy between the cycles. Whilst Altichiero collapsed the various geographical locations and historical periods in which the lives of Jesus, Sts George, Catherine and Lucy took place, Angelico's settings created two slightly different sites, thus also articulating a sense of time that is vital to the expression of the authority of the Church conveyed by the whole decoration of the Chapel.

Analysis of the word *luogo* in Italy from the late middle ages to the early Renaissance highlighted the pliability of place, which functioned both as a specific, physical site, and as a more abstract, metaphorical location. In particular, this analysis revealed the inextricability of the container, place, and the object contained, suggesting a degree of correspondence between the two that allows place to exert its "marvellous power".<sup>1</sup> The understanding of *locus* as excerpt or passage, and as repository of rhetorical *tópoi*, or common places, clarified how artists may have created their hybrid architectural places through *inventio*, the finding and refashioning of tropes for the specific needs of the speech/commission. Examination of hybrid architectural places, which have a fickle but traceable relationship with existing places, through *inventio* allowed us to interpret artists' treatment of the built identity of a location as a repository from which they could extract a 'passage,' commenting upon it by altering it for their artwork. By citing existing architectural models and creating new fictive buildings, hybrid places use built models as *spolia*, appropriating them and adapting them to the decorative programme as a whole.

In relation to *spolia*, Nagel and Wood's definition of temporally unfixed artefacts "thriving on flexibility and approximation" is certainly pertinent, highlighting hybrid architectural place as topically unstable. Whilst not espousing Nagel and Wood's theory of substitution, as discussed in Chapter One, this thesis offered a spatial counterpart to Nagel and Wood's exploration of time in their *Anachronic Renaissance*, arguing that hybrid architectural places are topically unfixed, fluctuating between citation and innovation, identification and elusiveness, tangibility and transcendence. Hybrid places act to situate the narrative in a believable physical location, placing the figures in a seemingly

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, ed. Roberto Radice (Milan: Bompiani, 2011), 208b34-35.

plausible environment. At the same time, however, hybrid places sacralise the narrative because they prevent certain identification with an existing site, conferring a degree of transcendence on the holy events portrayed. As settings for a sacred narrative, hybrid places transfer part of the narrative's character to the sites that the fictive architecture refashions, enhancing the status of the locations cited and refashioned.

Following recent work by Mary Carruthers, Paul Binski, Caroline van Eck and Jeanne Nuechterlein, the deployment of rhetoric as heuristic tool elucidated the means as well as the purposes of fictive buildings, enabling us to interpret the striking, overwhelming abundance of accreted structures and intricate architectural ornament in Altichiero's Oratory of St George through *copia*, *amplificatio* and *memoria*; and the polychrome, innovative and elaborately decorated settings for Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel through *dignitas*, *auctoritas* and *gravitas*. *Copia* and *amplificatio* showed that Altichiero's buildings attempt to entice and persuade the viewer of the veracity of the narrative by endlessly reiterating and varying structural and ornamental solutions, whilst *memoria* clarified the relationship between place and fictive architecture, acting as an informing principle and goal of Altichiero's painted buildings. Similarly, in Fra Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel, the *dignitas* of architectural ornament signals the high status of the Chapel and Rome as Apostolic See; whilst the *auctoritas* of the ciboria, three-tiered like the papal mitre, and of the basilican-like interiors (as well as of the narrative's subject matter), persuades the viewers of the authority of the pope. Finally, the *gravitas* of hybrid place, encapsulating *varietas* and *dignitas* of ornament and displaying the *auctoritas* of the Apostolic See, identifies the adaptability of the settings, ensuring their message is constantly renovated.

These interpretations of the architectural settings in Altichiero's Oratory of St George and Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel rest on the pervasiveness of rhetoric within Italian culture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and particularly within Trecento Padua and the Roman Curia in the Quattrocento, as discussed in Chapters Three and Five. The thesis' rhetorical reading not only exposed the integral role that architectural settings played within these fresco cycles, but also demonstrated that fictive structures were a crucial means for the artists to create a signature style and showcase their skill. The endless variations of ornament, chromatic arrangements and structural solutions linking and dividing the narrative episodes, and exemplifying ingenious transformations of the artists' architectural repertoire, enabled them to display their own mastery of

*inventio*, their own *dignitas* and *gravitas* much more than the figures. The architectural inventiveness of artists also demonstrated that fictive architecture is intrinsically similar to and at the same time intrinsically different from built structures. Both Altichiero and Angelico borrowed extensively, and with great attention to detail, from the architectural identity of their hometowns and of Padua and Rome, striving to give their structures considerable three-dimensionality. However, their architectural settings are not meant to achieve a completely illusionistic effect, and built models are plied and refashioned to suit not only the two-dimensional medium of painting, but especially the narrative and the artists' own needs to display their *ingegno*.

A significant, if unexpected, finding of this thesis was the fundamental role architectural ornament plays in articulating hybrid places, conveying the rhetorical message of the frescoes, and showcasing the artists' skill. *Amplificatio* and *dignitas* of ornament, elegantly modified by *varietas*, connect all the scenes of both fresco cycles, collapsing time and place or subtly differentiating them. Even when it helps to articulate two distinct places and moments in time as in the Niccolina, ornament still functions as a paramount unifying element. It is thus deployed as chief persuader.

Ornament could be another topic to pursue in relation to architecture in Trecento and Quattrocento painting, adding to existing studies on ornament in Renaissance architectural theory, drawings and prints.<sup>2</sup> Altichiero and Angelico would be illuminating case studies to trace the formal changes and uses of architectural decorations across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, especially the shift from gothic to classical ornamental forms. Still in relation to ornament, reflecting on decorated surfaces and on the play with materiality would also be fascinating research pathways. Both Altichiero and Angelico make ample use of polychromy, suggesting the interplay of several materials; from Altichiero's marble-like surfaces and jewel-like crenellation, to Angelico's fictive brocades and terracotta-like putti.

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, Alina Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance. Architectural Invention, Ornament and Literary Culture* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113-236; Cammy Brothers and Michael J. Waters, *Variety, Archaeology and Ornament: Renaissance Architectural Prints from Column to Cornice* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Art Museum, 2011); Christopher Heuer, *The City Rehearsed: Object, Architecture and Print in the World of Hans Vredeman de Vries* (London: Routledge, 2009), 99-135.

However, what this thesis has made clear is that fictive architecture is fundamental to Altichiero's Oratory of St George and Fra Angelico's Nicholas V Chapel. The comparative examination of these case studies contributed to bridging the gap between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the historiography of Italian art, demonstrating that envisaging architecture in painting solely in terms of pictorial space, or as a lesser version of built architecture, is misleading and reductive. Most importantly, the rhetorical interpretation of the Oratory's and the Chapel's settings showed that architecture in painting is a form of visual rhetoric, highlighting the possibilities this approach could offer in relation to other examples of prominent fictive architecture, even in areas and periods that may appear less receptive or exposed to rhetorical theory than Trecento Padua and Quattrocento Rome.

The investigative path adopted here showed that architecture in painting works on different levels. Firstly, this thesis' interpretation highlighted the importance of fictive architecture as structuring agent for the narrative. Secondly, it stressed the profoundly rhetorical nature of architecture in painting, exploring the ways in which it acts as a key means to draw the viewers' attention and to communicate with them. Thirdly, fictive structures emerged as a crucial vehicle for the artist to display his architectural and artistic repertoire, his skill and inventiveness. Finally, the thesis qualified the essential relationship between fictive architecture and place-making. These conclusions underscore the power of the artist's architectural imagination, and need to be taken into account when evaluating not only Italian painting, but also the fashioning and perception of the built identity of places.