



## BETWEEN REALITY AND SYMBOL: “IMAGES-WITHIN-PICTURES” IN THE UPPER CHURCH AT ASSISI

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The question of whether minor and seemingly realistic details of a figurative painting may have a symbolic meaning is one which cannot be completely eliminated from art historical understanding. This essay addresses this question to a peculiar pictorial phenomenon called “image-within-picture.” This term is analogous with the term “picture-within-picture,” which means that one painting is represented in another.<sup>1</sup> However, the term “image-within-picture” designates a wider phenomenon; it alludes to any kind of representation which is depicted in a picture and therefore includes reliefs, sculptures, mosaics, carvings, and paintings.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this widening of the concept is that by

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<sup>1</sup> For the problem of the “picture-within-picture” see André Chastel, “Le tableau dans le tableau,” in *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes. Akten des 21. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn 1964. Band 1: Epochen Europäischer Kunst* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1967), 15–29; Stefan A. Horsthemke, *Das Bild im Bild in der italienischen Malerei: zur Darstellung religiöser Gemälde in der Renaissance* (Glienicke: Galda und Wilch, 1996); Victor I. Stoichita, *L’instauration du tableau: Métapeinture à l’aube des Temps modernes* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> The term “image-within-picture” needs two limitations. The word “image” in the discourse on visual representation would designate only the virtual-mental phenomenon; strictly speaking, the statue is not an image, it is only the medium which contains the image. See W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4, note 5 (hereafter: Mitchell, *Picture Theory*). Nevertheless, the word in a broader sense can be used as a designation of two- and three-dimensional figurative representation, and it will be used in this sense here. On the other hand the word “picture” refers to the thing that hangs on the wall; the picture as a medium in a strict sense names the thing that is composed of a canvas or a panel and a frame, and can be detached from the wall. See Hans Belting, *Bildanthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Fink, 2001), 15, and Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 4, note 5. This formulation excludes the fresco, which is a two-dimensional depicted surface attached to the wall; and it is decisive for the early history of the “image-within-picture.” For terminological reasons here the term “picture” will also designate frescoes. On an ontological level this problem is related to Hans Belting’s argument, where the “panel” as “Kultbild” belongs to an entirely different tradition from the fresco. See Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: Beck, 1990). The discussion of the question of whether from the point of view of



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depicting a statue or a mosaic in a picture the master similarly creates a “representation-within-representation,” of which “picture-within-picture” is only a sub-unit.

The “image-within-picture” is not a necessary component of painting; it was present in Classical painting but disappeared in Early Medieval painting, and significantly reappeared in Italy at the end of the thirteenth century. The exact moment of this reappearance is difficult to determine because of the loss of Roman murals; however, among the works preserved the decoration of the Upper Church at Assisi is considered as the starting point of this tradition.<sup>3</sup> This essay investigates this moment of reappearance, asking how, in Assisi, at the beginning of its “new” history in Western art, the “image-within-picture” was related to the problem of realism and symbolism.

Realism in this context means that the “image” has a simple function; it is part of a building or an interior—a mosaic on a façade, a statue on a building or decoration of an interior. It is merely a realistic ornament. Symbolism, on the other hand, means that the “image” ceases to be a simple meaningless detail and is connected somehow to the main content of the picture. The (non)-existence of a link between the iconographic content of the “image” and the iconographic content of the “picture” decides whether the “image” is an ornament or a symbol. In this sense the ornament can be considered as a “simple” iconographic solution, since what it represents is not connected to the main theme of the picture; parallel to this, the symbol is a “complex” iconographic solution, since what it represents is connected to the main theme.<sup>4</sup>

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“image-within-picture” the panels represent a different tradition is beyond the scope of the present essay.

<sup>3</sup> John White, “Cavallini and the Lost Frescoes in S. Paolo,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 (1956): 84–95, and John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 47–52 (hereafter: White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*). On the watercolor sketches describing Cavallini’s frescoes one cannot find “images-within-pictures.”

<sup>4</sup> This clear division between decorative and symbolic function is deeply transformed in the fifteenth century, when the embedded “image” became an element of the reflection on the different narrative styles in painting. See Wolfgang Kemp, “Praktische Bildbeschreibung. Über Bilder in Bildern, besonders bei Van Eyck und Mantegna,” in *Beschreibungskunst – Kunstbeschreibung: Ekphrasis von der Antiken bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Boehm, Gottfried and Helmut Pfotenhauer (Munich: Fink, 1995), 99–119; idem, *Die Räume der Maler: zur Bilderzählung seit Giotto* (Munich: Beck, 1996), 100–103; idem, “Lukas Mosers Magdalenenaltar in Tiefenbronn. Eine Raumgeschichte,” in *Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus 2*, ed. Wolfgang Kemp, Gert Mattenklott, Monika Wagner and Martin Warnke (Berlin: Akademie, 1998), 39–85.



The question of realism and symbolism in this context cannot be dissociated from Erwin Panofsky's theory on disguised symbolism, which has been the major source of inspiration for this essay but cannot be treated here at length.<sup>5</sup> However, the following points ought to be noted. 1. Panofsky concentrated on fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting and considered the Italian Trecento as a forerunner, but he never treated it systematically.<sup>6</sup> 2. He forged a broad concept of disguised symbolism, where all everyday objects were conceived as containers of symbolic meaning.<sup>7</sup> 3. Disguised symbolism was seen as a solution to harmonize medieval non-realistic symbolic systems with the exigencies of the realistic-imitative picture considered as a window to another world.<sup>8</sup> 4. The "image-within-picture" is a subdivision of disguised symbolism, since these everyday details have specific iconographic contents. In an early essay he reflected this specificity and called it "obvious symbolism;" however, in the final theory he omitted this distinction although he kept some of its methodological implications.<sup>9</sup>

I will have here a double relation to Panofsky's legacy. On the one hand—in accord with his critics—the all-over and broad concept of disguised symbolism is rejected: each and every detail of a realistic painting does not disguise a symbol; details can merely be what they are: simple depictions of reality without deeper implications.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, following his early

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<sup>5</sup> See Peter Bokody, "The 'Image-within-Picture' and the Legend of St. Francis in the Upper Church at Assisi," MA Thesis, Central European University (Budapest, 2006), 6–32. I would like to express my thanks to Anna Eörsi, my mentor in the Art History Department at the Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest, for sharing with me her unpublished paper *Panofsky-Pächt-van Eyck-Campin*, which served as Ariadne's thread in the labyrinth of Panofsky's theory.

<sup>6</sup> Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting. Its Origins and Character 1* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 141 (hereafter: Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*). This was again restated later, see: Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resuscitations in Western Art* (New York: Icon, 1972), 141–142 (hereafter: Panofsky, *Renaissance and Resuscitations*).

<sup>7</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *The Burlington Magazine* 64 (1934): 117–127, especially 126–127; and Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 131–148.

<sup>8</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 140–141.

<sup>9</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "The Friedsam Annunciation and the Problem of the Ghent Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 17 (1935): 433–473, especially 446–453; and Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 141–142.

<sup>10</sup> These critics cover mostly the painting of the Low Countries between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries. See Otto Pächt, "Panofsky's 'Early Netherlandish Painting' 1–2," *The Burlington Magazine* 98 (1956): 110–116, 267–279; Edwin Hall, *The Arnolfini Betrothal: Medieval Marriage and the Enigma of van Eyck's Double Portrait* (Berkeley:



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insight, the “image-within-picture” as a specific subdivision of disguised symbolism is seen as a fruitful and secure ground for investigating *possible* symbolic significance; in these cases, on the basis of the iconographic content of the detail, one can grasp the symbolic connection between the detail and the picture without taking the risk of building iconological castles in Spain. Therefore, the analysis of the “images-within-pictures” in the Upper Church at Assisi situates itself within the broader context of disguised symbolism. It asks to what extent, in that given historical moment when the “image-within-picture” reappeared in Western art, the possible symbolic implications of the phenomenon were explored, that is, how the interplay developed between the decorative and the symbolic use of the “image-within-picture.”

Altogether there are seventeen frescoes in the Upper Church at Assisi that are relevant for the problem of the “image-within-picture.” Two of them can be connected to the Cimabue workshop, three of them are situated around the Isaac scenes and the other twelve belong to the *Legend of St. Francis*. All of the “images” are connected to the exterior or interior decoration of a building; however, their symbolic or decorative functions present a heterogeneous assemblage.

### Decoration and Prototype

In some cases the “images-within-pictures” are used to make the building to which they belong recognizable. In these cases the “image-within-picture” is clearly motivated by the prototype, it functions as documentation. In the background of *Peter Healing the Disabled*, a central (octagonal?) temple is depicted; its façade has a tympanum showing an eagle. The building has been interpreted as the Pantheon.<sup>11</sup> It has to be noted that the event takes place in Jerusalem (Acts 3: 1–9), before the temple, therefore the octagonal building might resemble the Pantheon of Rome, but is more likely that it alludes to the Temple of Jerusalem. The presence of the eagle on the tympanum can be interpreted as a

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University of California, 1994); Lloyd Benjamin, “Disguised Symbolism Exposed and the History of Early Netherlandish Painting,” *Studies in Iconography* 2 (1976): 11–24; Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1983); Jan Baptist Bedaux, *The Reality of Symbols: Studies in the Iconology of Netherlandish Art 1400–1800* (Hague: Gary Schwartz – SDU, 1990). For the symbolic use see E. de Jongh, *Questions of Meaning: Theme and Motif in Dutch Seventeenth Century Painting*, tr. and ed. Michael Hoyle (Leiden: Primavera Press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Joachim Poeschke, *Die Kirche San Francesco in Assisi und ihre Wandmalereien* (Munich: Hirmer, 1985), 74.



faithful reproduction of the golden eagle placed there by the Romans.<sup>12</sup> In this sense the “image” is documenting the decoration of the building.

A similar observation can be made on the other product of the Cimabue workshop. The façade of the church with a view of Rome (*Ytalia*) represents Christ in the middle with the Virgin on his right and a saint on his left. Andaloro argued that because of a clear iconographical divergence, the saint cannot be St. John the Baptist, therefore, the façade does not represent a traditional *Deesis*. If the figure is conceived as St. Peter it becomes a *Deesis* where the titular saint of the church replaces John the Baptist. On this basis the church has been identified with the Basilica Vaticana, where the façade was decorated under Gregory IX with exactly this deviant *Deesis*.<sup>13</sup> In this respect the *Ytalia* can be paralleled with *The Dream of Innocent III* (6—the number refers to the narrative place of the fresco in the *Legend*), where the mosaic medallion near Francis’ head derives from the decoration of the renewed portico of the Lateran basilica done under Nicholas IV.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the façade is lost, therefore it is unknown whether it was decorated or not, like the corresponding parallel of the *Louvre Stigmatization*, which follows its real prototype.

There are three examples which deviate slightly from their presumed prototypes; nevertheless, a chain of derivation can be detected. In the *St. Francis Honored by a Simple Man of Assisi* (1), the building in the center is decorated with a huge tympanum relief which represents two angels (or antique Victories) carrying a garland and bracketing the rosette in the middle. They bear the trace of more an arnolfian than an antique influence, like the ciborium in *The Miracle at Greccio* (13).<sup>15</sup> The building is the Temple of Minerva, still visible in the main square of Assisi. The fresco, however, does not follow the prototype faithfully; the number of columns was reduced and their proportions were altered and, more importantly, the relief depicted on the fresco was never part of the building. In this sense the “image” differs fundamentally from the “images” of the Cimabue workshop.

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<sup>12</sup> As Peter Seiler argued convincingly; see Peter Seiler, “Duccios Tempelgötzen. Anti-jüdische Kritik oder mittelalterliches Wissen über römische Götter- und Kaiserstatuen im biblischen Jerusalem?” *Pegasus* 3 (2001): 97–98 (hereafter Seiler, “Duccios Tempelgötzen”).

<sup>13</sup> Maria Andaloro, “Ancora una volta sull’Ytalia di Cimabue,” *Arte Medievale* 2 (1984): 154–156.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Murray, “Notes on Some Early Giotto Sources,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 72–73.

<sup>15</sup> Alastair Smart, *The Assisi Problem and the Art of Giotto. A Study of the Legend of St. Francis in the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 97 (hereafter: Smart, *Assisi*).



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The discrepancies between reality and its pictorial representation can be seen in different ways. Frugoni, following the results of Scarpellini, argued that the antique temple was transformed into a church during the Middle Ages and a part of it was used as a prison. The decoration of the building alludes to both functions: the two barred windows in the front without a door are signs of a prison, and the relief with the rosette on the tympanum is a sign of the church; thus the “image-within-picture” serves as an indication of the role, without further symbolic implications.<sup>16</sup> Wolff variously interpreted the relief as an allegory of the victory of Christianity over antiquity (Gothic elements introduced to a Classical building) and as a veneration of Francis by the Victories for his future martyrdom.<sup>17</sup> However, without further arguments both propositions remain hypothetical.

The decoration of the ciborium in *The Miracle at Greccio* (13) can be paralleled to the tympanum of the Temple of Minerva; in a symmetrical composition mirrored *putti* or angels can be seen carrying a laurel wreath and a bird, probably an eagle. The ciborium with its ornamentation is part of the decoration of the interior of the sanctuary and, as scholars have variously noted, its changes follow the ciboria made for the churches Santa Cecilia and San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome by Arnolfo di Cambio.<sup>18</sup> The changes influence the all-over design of the ciborium; quite significantly, the Gothic arches are omitted, thus increasing the Classical effect of the columns.

The Crucifix in *The Prayer in San Damiano* (4) is a more complex case. It is clearly recognizable, although some pictorial material has been lost, that the *croce dipinta* is a triumphant one: Jesus is depicted with open eyes without the signs of suffering.<sup>19</sup> Around the end of the thirteenth century in Italy, especially within the Franciscan order, the preferred type of the *croce dipinta* was the suffering one,

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<sup>16</sup> Pietro Scarpellini, “Commentario critico,” in Fra Ludovico da Pietralunga, *Descrizione della Basilica di S. Francesco e di altri Santuari di Assisi*, ed. Pietro Scarpellini (Treviso: Canova, 1982), 459–460; Bruno Zanardi, Federico Zeri and Chiara Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto: le Storie di San Francesco ad Assisi* (Milan: Skira, 1996), 66 (hereafter: Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*).

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Wolff, *Der Heilige Franziskus in Schriften und Bildern des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1996), 238 (hereafter: Wolff, *Der Heilige Franziskus*).

<sup>18</sup> Decio Gioseffi, *Giotto architetto* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1963), 30 (hereafter: Gioseffi, *Giotto architetto*); Valerio Mariani, “Giotto nel ciclo della ‘Vita di San Francesco,’” in *Giotto e i giotteschi in Assisi*, Il miracolo di Assisi. Collana di studi sull’arte assisana 1, ed. Giuseppe Palumbo (Rome: Canesi, 1969), 88; Smart, *Assisi*, 41.

<sup>19</sup> Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 96.



which replaced the triumphant one around the middle of the century.<sup>20</sup> The reason for opting for the more archaic type is presumably that the original cross of San Damiano depicts a triumphant Christ. This cross is still preserved and guarded as a relic in the monastery of Santa Chiara; and despite the minor difference it may have served as a prototype for the fresco.<sup>21</sup> The simplification can be due to pictorial considerations (the detailed side actors would have been indistinguishable), and it did not affect the basic idea: the cross is a triumphant one, similarly to the relic.<sup>22</sup>

### Decoration without Prototype

Although this strong attachment of the “image-within-picture” to a given prototype is softened on the other frescoes, this does not mean that they necessarily become symbols. Dependence on a given prototype gives a plausible explanation of why the “image” is depicted in the picture. The lack of this plausible explanation can basically mean two things: the “image” is a symbol,

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Thoby, *Le Crucifix des Origines au Concile de Trente* (Nantes: Bellanger, 1959), 139–141.

<sup>21</sup> In the fresco on the side fields only the Virgin and St. John are represented, contrary to the more numerous group of actors: the Virgin, John, the two Maries, Longinus, the centurion, and Stefatus on the cross. Smart, *Assisi*, 162, and Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 98. For the original cross of the San Damiano see Edward B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1949), 183.

<sup>22</sup> Frugoni argued that the use of the triumphant type here also had a symbolic motivation. She paralleled the scene with the *Stigmatization* and regarded the triumphant cross as a pictorial anticipation of the apparition of the seraph-Christ. (Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 96.) I am not debating the general correspondence between the two scenes, but I have doubts whether the use of the triumphant type here has anything to do with the seraph-Christ. It has to be noted that the idea of the parallel between the *San Damiano* scene and the *Stigmatization* has been elaborated for the Louvre *Stigmatization*, where, indeed, a part of a *croce dipinta* (the Virgin) can be seen inside a chapel, and as Gardner has noted, it could suggest the pictorial connection between the two events and emphasize the “Franciscan” Christology of Bonaventura—see Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate. Una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1999), 212 (hereafter: Frugoni, *Francesco e l’invenzione delle stimmate*) and Julian Gardner, “The Louvre Stigmatization and the problem of the narrative Altarpiece,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 45 (1982): 225–226. The cross, since it is not a necessary component of the Stigmatization, can allude back to the San Damiano scene; but the cross on the San Damiano scene is a necessary component of the story, therefore its symbolic potential is limited.



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thus the motivation of its representation is symbolic or the “image” is still a decoration, and the motivation of its representation is connected to the creation of a “realistic” background for the event. The term “realistic” alludes to a constant feature of the space-representation in the early Trecento: the empirical three-dimensional pictorial space is, to a large extent, the result of a building set obliquely to the picture plane.<sup>23</sup> The building, which can be regarded as the generator of space and thus the generator of reality, is not necessarily a faithful imitation of an already existing prototype; on the contrary, in many cases it is imaginary, however, it creates a “realistic” space. The different “images-within-pictures” attached to these buildings can participate as decorations in the creation of this realistic space; since they render the building more detailed and “building-like” they increase its all-over reality effect.<sup>24</sup>

Three frescos which show these decorative features can be ascribed to the milieu of the Isaac workshop.<sup>25</sup> One of them is a relief of a centaur in the Isaac scenes.<sup>26</sup> It could be interpreted as an allusion to Esau being a hunter, thus a sinner, based on its flexed arm, but the pictorial material does not allow any strict conclusions.<sup>27</sup> The other two can be found on the *Vaulting of the Doctors*. The doctors with their scribes are placed in a composite structure. In the section of *St. Jerome* there are two pairs of statues of winged caryatid creatures on the two sides. In *Gregory the Great*, in the same place, a lion can be seen on each side.

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<sup>23</sup> White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 19–56.

<sup>24</sup> Recently Felicity Ratté argued that in the *Legend* there is an intentional play between the faithful imitation of a real prototype and introducing changes to the representation. She saw this play as a vehicle with a double aim: the imitation expresses the historical actuality of St. Francis’ life; the changes assure the universal importance of the event by softening the strict time-space determination. Felicity Ratté, “Re-presenting the Common Place: Architectural Portraits in Trecento Painting,” *Studies in Iconography* 22 (2001): 102–104. This hypothesis assumes that the masters would have been able to create perfect imitations, and that they deliberately opted for changed solutions; however, the historical development shows that realistic space and the faithful imitation of reality was something to be achieved and not immediately given at the beginning of the Trecento.

<sup>25</sup> Zanardi pointed out that they show a similar mode of execution of the incarnated to that of the *Legend* from frescoes 2 to 7. See Bruno Zanardi, *Giotto e Pietro Cavallini. La questione di Assisi e il cantiere medievale della pittura a fresco* (Milan: Skira, 2002), 110–111 (hereafter: Zanardi, *Giotto e Cavallini*).

<sup>26</sup> Bellosi detected it. See Luciano Bellosi, *La pecora di Giotto* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1985), 73.

<sup>27</sup> Amy Neff, “Lesser Brothers: Franciscan Mission and Identity at Assisi,” *Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 686 (hereafter: Neff, “Lesser Brothers”).

Nine heads of lions also decorate his pulpit and there are two statues of winged creatures on the top of the building where his scribe is sitting.<sup>28</sup> It is quite clear that there is no prototype of these structures. It is difficult to see what kind of link would relate St. Jerome to the caryatids or St. Gregory to the lions. Furthermore, the lions would be an appropriate attribute for Jerome; yet, they accompany Gregory the Great. It is worthy of note that every motif is doubled by a mirror effect; this symmetrical composition is an argument for interpreting them as decorative details.

This tendency is also clearly present in the Legend of St. Francis. Mirror statues of two recumbent lions appear on the chapel of *The Vision of the Thrones* (9). They presumably result from the transformation of the usual decoration of church entrances; they are definitely not connected to the vision. Similarly, the lion on a console above the gate of the *Expulsion of the Devils from Arezzo* (11) is common in the iconography of a city gate.<sup>29</sup> Heads emerging out of the ornamentation appear on the church, above the roof of the polygonal apse, in the same fresco and in the central vegetal decoration of the top of the building in *The Preaching before Honorius III* (17).

The decoration of the church (reliefs of two nudes and a *putto* with swans) in *The Expulsion of the Devils from Arezzo* (11) bears traces of the influence of antique sculpture. Panofsky explained their presence by Classical remains around Arezzo.<sup>30</sup> Similarly to the mirror-decoration of the ciborium at Greccio and the tympanum of the Temple of Minerva, these Classical elements presumably lack any complex iconographic implications; they are mere decoration of the church. Being antique elements, they might express anti-Christian attitudes, but as they can be found on an ecclesiastical building, which,

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<sup>28</sup> Benton has already noted the antique connections of the winged figures and compared them to the decoration of the Farnesina House and the House of Livia. Janetta Rebold Benton, "Some Ancient Mural Motifs in Italian Painting around 1300," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 48, (1985): 157–158 (hereafter: Benton, "Mural Motifs").

<sup>29</sup> Felicity Ratté tried to interpret the motif as curious coat of arms, but she also admitted that the coat of arms of Arezzo would be a horse, not a lion. (Felicity Ratté "Architectural Invitations: Images of City Gates in Medieval Italian Painting," *Gesta. International Center of Medieval Art* 38 (1999): 147–148 and 153, note 44.) For the city gate see also: Julian Gardner, "An Introduction to the Iconography of the Medieval Italian City Gate," in *Studies on Art and Archeology in Honor of Ernst Kitzinger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. William Tronzo and Irving Lavin Dumbarton Oaks Papers 41. (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1987), 199–213.

<sup>30</sup> Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 148, note 3.

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as Frugoni emphasized, clearly belongs to the pictorial group of St. Francis and Brother Sylvester, anti-Christian implications are highly unlikely.<sup>31</sup>

The five statues on top of the building in *The Ordeal by Fire* (12) also show Classical influence, not of Classical sculpture but Classical murals, and they are shown on a pagan building.<sup>32</sup> The original layer of gilt has been lost; only the yellow drawing is visible now.<sup>33</sup> Tintori and Meiss conceived of the figures as winged *putti*; Smart saw them as pagan statues.<sup>34</sup> Panofsky stated that they are *putti* with pagan implications: they express the evil nature of the place.<sup>35</sup> Three layers of interpretation can be followed here: the statue as a *putto* (derived from Classical murals); the statue as idol (decoration in the Muslim milieu); and the statue as symbol, expressing the evilness of the court of the sultan.<sup>36</sup>

The first two interpretations seem plausible, however, the third contradicts the narrative situation depicted on the fresco. In the *Legenda Maior* (IX, 8.) Bonaventura underlines the exceptional character of the meeting: Francis went to the sultan after having unsuccessfully tried to convince the Christian Crusaders to cease the fight and, unlike the Christian believers, the pagan unbelievers accepted him and listened to him carefully. The ordeal by fire, proposed by Francis and not by the ruler, is not a menace, but the victory of the *Poverello* over the Saracen clergy. The sultan and his court therefore were not an evil and hostile milieu in this case. This means that the statues can hardly express evilness, since the location was not evil.<sup>37</sup> The positive staging of the ruler also appears on the base of the throne, which is decorated by gold reliefs

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<sup>31</sup> Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 160.

<sup>32</sup> Concerning the influence of the Classical murals and the methodological difficulties related to this question the article of Benton remains fundamental. See Benton, "Mural Motifs," 158.

<sup>33</sup> Leonetto Tintori and Millard Meiss, *The Painting of the Life of St. Francis in Assisi* (New York: University Press, 1962), 108, (hereafter: Tintori and Meiss, *Painting*); and Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 176. Only four are mentioned, which cut the huge *giornata* (103). The ornament on the right back pillar, which is hardly visible and belongs to the same *giornata* (103) is not discussed. It is partly covered by the festoon, but it shows a similar form as the other four. It is presumably a statue, which is lost. It may represent an earlier phase of the design.

<sup>34</sup> Tintori and Meiss, *Painting*, 108; Smart, *Assisi*, 180.

<sup>35</sup> Compare: Panofsky, *Netherlandish*, 141, and Panofsky, *Renaissance*, 148, note 3.

<sup>36</sup> On the problems of idols and their representation in the Middle Ages generally see Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> For a similar argument on the "pagan" statues of Duccio see Seiler, "Duccios Tempelgötzen," 78–90.

representing lions.<sup>38</sup> The lions may allude to the throne of Solomon (1 Kings 10:18–20), thus connecting the sultan to the idea of the wise ruler. Therefore, the Classical elements here are found on a pagan building, but their role is restricted to creating a Classical decoration without a specific—complex iconographic—implication of evilness.

### Presumable Complex Iconographic Solutions

The “images-within-pictures” examined so far turned out to be mere decorations. There has been no decisive argument that would testify to a symbolic function and the origin of the motifs can be tracked back to the influence of Classical sculpture, painting or contemporary architecture. In the following examples there are soft pictorial arguments in favor of a symbolic importance. One of them is a meta-pictorial detail; and in another case (*The Testimony of Jerome* [22]) the pictorial insight may be supported by liturgical-hagiographical evidence.

Standing statues decorate the roof of the papal chamber in *The Dream of Innocent III* (6). Only one of them is well preserved. It is next to the collapsing tower of the Lateran, with the left hand pointing to the basilica and the right hand to the chamber of Innocent III.<sup>39</sup> It is tempting to interpret this gesture as explanatory, clarifying the two elements of the event depicted and expressing their interconnectedness: Innocent is dreaming on the right, Francis is acting in this very dream on the left.<sup>40</sup> This statue is not a simple decorative detail; however, it is not a symbol either. It is not connected iconographically to the main content of the picture, but is the link which connects the two elements (the dream and the content of the dream) of the picture. In this respect it is a meta-pictorial detail.<sup>41</sup> Although the other four statues are lost, it could be that

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<sup>38</sup> The gilt has been lost; what can be seen now is the yellow under-drawing which was originally covered. Tintori and Meiss, *Painting*, 108. and Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 176.

<sup>39</sup> Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 120.

<sup>40</sup> As Burkhart proposed. Peter Burkhart, *Franziskus und die Vollendung der Kirche im siebten Zeitalter: Zum Programm der Langhausfresken in der Oberkirche von San Francesco in Assisi* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992), 122 (hereafter: Burkhart, *Franziskus und die Vollendung der Kirche*.)

<sup>41</sup> It can be mentioned that Leon Battista Alberti in 2, 42 of his *Della Pittura* advised painters to have some actors in the picture who can explain to the viewer the meaning of the painting with their expressions and gestures. Of course, these figures are supposed to be the “flesh and bone” participants of the painting and not petrified detail;

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the explanatory gestures were meant for them, as if the statues discussed the dream with each other, since the gesticulating figure looks backwards, towards the others. In *The Liberation of the Repentant Heretic* (28) there are two groups of similar angels (?) deep in conversation in the reliefs decorating the balustrade of the prison, but they lack this direct, explanatory connection to the event.

Scant attention has been paid to the three statues on the roof of the church on *The Vision of Friar Augustine and the Bishop of Assisi* (21).<sup>42</sup> The figure on the left may be identified with St. Anthony the Hermit because of the crutch in his hands.<sup>43</sup> The other two do not have such specific attributes, however, they wear the traditional clothes of the apostles. The one in the front right corner represents a beardless youngster and the other behind him is an older man with a long beard. This supports the identification with the apostles St. John and St. James or St. Andrew; however, without the confirmation of the attributes this can only be hypothetical. It has to be emphasized that contrary to the “images-within-pictures” analyzed so far in the cycle, they show a high level of individuality: they are differentiated in their hair-style, their beard and accessories. Furthermore, they cannot in any way be considered as mirror images. The pictorial features of the statues point towards symbolic importance, which on a hypothetical level with the connection to St. Anthony as a founding father of eremitism is not phantasmagoric, but definitely requires the support of written evidence.

In the case of *The Testimony of Jerome* (22) the content of the symbol can be grasped more firmly. On the rood screen three images can be seen: a Madonna, a “suffering” *croce dipinta*, and an icon of St. Michael. The cross was probably part of the interior in Porziuncola, Thomas of Celano mentioned it (*Vita secunda*, XXXV, 65), and recent investigations have revealed the traces of the roodscreen and the attachment of the cross to the apse.<sup>44</sup> For the other two icons there is no evidence which would prove their actual presence in the church. Since the cross belongs to the “suffering” type, it cannot correspond to the décor at the time of Francis; it may correspond to the cross at the time of the execution of the fresco. Thus, there are discrepancies between the pictorial representation and the interior of the church.

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however, the statue at Assisi can be seen as a premature echo of the phrase formulated 140 years later: “o chiami con la mano a vedere.”

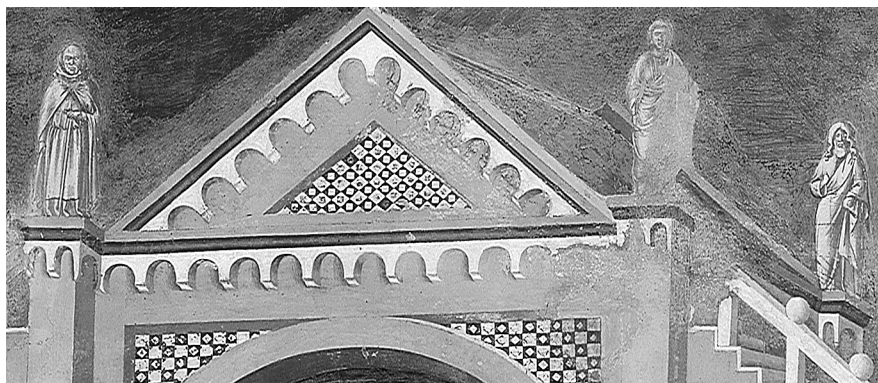
<sup>42</sup> Smart considered them prophets, which they presumably are not. (Smart, *Assisi*, 210–211.) The different descriptions of the frescoes usually neglect them.

<sup>43</sup> George Kaftal, *Saints in Italian Art: Iconography of the Saints in Central and South Italian Schools of Painting* (Florence: Sansoni, 1965), 76. (Hereafter: Kaftal, *Iconography*.)

<sup>44</sup> Chiara Frugoni, “L’ombra della Porziuncola nella Basilica Superiore di Assisi,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 45 (2001): 368–371 (hereafter: Frugoni, “L’ombra della Porziuncola”).



*Fig. 1. The Vision of Friar Augustine and the Bishop of Assisi, Upper Church, Assisi (Courtesy of Pater Gerhard Ruf OFM Conv.).*



*Fig. 2. Detail of Figure 1.*



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The sequence of the three images, as Frugoni showed, can be interpreted symbolically.<sup>45</sup> The order of the images corresponds to the three decisive dates of the Fast of St. Francis at *La Verna*: he started the Fast before the Assumption of the Virgin, he wanted to finish it on the day of St. Michael, and he had the vision of the Seraph on the day of the Exaltation of the Cross.<sup>46</sup> The importance of the Fast of Francis for Bonaventura and for official Franciscan tradition after him can hardly be overemphasized. This is the moment when the conformity of Francis to Christ gained its utmost proof; he received in his life the stigmata of Christ. The *stigmata* on the body of Francis were discovered after his death; this event can be seen on the fresco. Subsequently, Thomas of Celano described the connection between the fast at La Verna, the apparition of the Seraph, and the stigmatization of Francis (*Vita prima*, II, III, 94; *Tractatus de miraculis*, II, 4). This Seraph acquired a more Christ-like feature in the legend written by Bonaventura (*Legenda maior*, XIII, 3).<sup>47</sup> After the decision of the Paris chapter in 1266, which declared the *Legenda Maior* of Bonaventura to be the official and the only *vita* of Francis and ordered the destruction of the other lives, Bonaventura's version became the principal source for pictorial representations.<sup>48</sup> Therefore the three images on the roodscreen reiterate the decisive dates of the hagiographic focus of the life of Francis and they function as a complex iconographic solution that

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<sup>45</sup> Zanardi, Zeri and Frugoni, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, 292. In a later publication, she emphasized more the correspondence between the original decoration and the fresco and considered the three images a symbolic sequence already present in Porziuncola. See Frugoni, "L'ombra della Porziuncola," 392, note 194.

<sup>46</sup> The event is reported in the entry number 118 of the *Compilatio Assisiensis*. "... voluit ibi facere quadragesimam ad honorem sancti Michaelis. Iverat autem illuc ante festum Assumptionis gloriose virginis Marie, et numeravit dies a festo sancte Marie usque ad festum [sancti] Michaelis, quod essent quadraginta dies, et ait: 'Ad honorem Dei et beate Virginis Marie, matris eius, et beati Michaelis, angelorum principis et animarum, volo hic facere quadragesimam.'" ("Compilatio Assisiensis," in *Fontes Franciscani. Testi 2*, ed. Enrico Menestò and Stefano Brufani (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995), 1683.) This dating of the vision is given by Bonaventura (*Legenda Maior*, XIII, 3.)

<sup>47</sup> Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, 3–104, 137–201. See also: Arnold Davidson, "Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or, how St. Francis Received the Stigmata," in *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (New York: Routledge, 1998), 101–124. For the comparison of Celano and Bonaventura see also: Octavian Schmucki, OFM, *The Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. A Critical Investigation n the Light of Thirteenth-Century Sources*, tr. Canisius F. Connors, OFM, Franciscan Institute Publications, History Series 6, ed. Jason M. Miskuly, OFM (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 1991), 182–186.

<sup>48</sup> Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, 203–232.



aims to emphasize and develop the importance of the event taking place in the picture.

The “images-within-pictures” in *The Mourning of St. Francis* (23) are commonly considered as the pseudo-sculptural highlight of the cycle.<sup>49</sup> The church can be identified as San Damiano because of the narrative situation; according to Bonaventura, during the translation of Francis’ body the crowd stopped before the church of San Damiano in order to let St. Clare kiss the body (*Legenda maior*, XV, 5). This decoration, however, does not correspond at all to the real façade of San Damiano.<sup>50</sup> It can be suggested that the renovated façade refers back to the degraded building of *The Prayer in San Damiano*, and emphasizes that Francis indeed repaired the church and on a metaphorical level renewed the entire Holy Roman Church.<sup>51</sup>

In this sense the building is symbolic, and the different “images-within-pictures” contribute to this metaphor. The two prophets with their scrolls in the top tympanum refer to the Old Testament. The four statues in the ciboria on the corners are not very visible; some minor details may suggest that they are the four evangelists, who could stand for the New Testament.<sup>52</sup> The statue of Christ attended by the staggered groups of angels stands in the center of the square formed by the evangelists.<sup>53</sup> The face of the saint on the relief above the door

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<sup>49</sup> Tintori and Meiss, *Painting*, 139–143.

<sup>50</sup> Gioseffi and Smart argued that the façade decoration might follow the plans of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence designed by Arnolfo di Cambio. Gioseffi, *GiOTTO architetto*, 30, and Smart, *Assisi*, 138. This presumption is based on the drawing by Bernardino Poccetti in 1587; and the differences are quite significant. Franklin K. B. Toker, “Florence Cathedral: The Design Stage,” *The Art Bulletin* 60 (1978): 214–215.

<sup>51</sup> Romano argued that the solemn interior of Porziuncola and the grandiose façade of the San Damiano are intended to show due respect towards the two decisive churches of Francis. Serena Romano, “La Morte di Francesco: Fonti francescane e storia dell’Ordine nella basilica di S. Francesco ad Assisi,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 61 (1998): 360–362 (hereafter: Romano, “La Morte di Francesco”). For the general question of the Church as metaphor in the *Legend* see Ivan Gerát, “Kostol v obrazových legendách sv. Františka z Assisi – skutočnosť a metafora” (Church in the Pictorial Legends of Saint Francis of Assisi – Reality and Metaphor). *Studia Archeologica Slovaca Medievalia* 6 (2007), forthcoming.

<sup>52</sup> It seems that the one in the top left corner carries a spear and the other in the top right corner holds a book. It would be tempting to conceive of them as the evangelists St. Matthew and St. John; and in that case the remaining two on the lower corners would be St. Luke and St. Mark. Kaftal, *Iconography*, 617, 712, 744, and 776.

<sup>53</sup> P. Gerhard Ruf, *San Francesco e Bonaventura. Un’interpretazione storico-salvifica degli affreschi della navata nella Chiesa Superiore di San Francesco in Assisi alla luce della teologia di San Bonaventura* (Assisi: Casa Editrice Francescana, 1974), 210; Beda Kleinschmidt, OFM,



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with the two kneeling angels is lost; Smart proposed identifying it with St. Damian.<sup>54</sup> This plausible proposal would mean that the identity of the church is affirmed by the presence of its titular saint above the door.

The *Liberation of the Repentant Heretic* (28) represents the most complex case in the decoration of the Upper Church; its “images-within-pictures” have been the focus of recent studies and the exact meaning of the elements is still debated.<sup>55</sup> On the left, in the niches of the building, nine statues of prophets can be seen.<sup>56</sup> On the right, the lower part has a red balustrade divided into two parts decorated with reliefs of seven angels (three and four). The upper part is a column with a relief that winds around it in a spiral. It resembles the column of Trajan in Rome; however, the two visible parts depict scenes that do not appear on the original. The lower depicts a dressed man standing, perhaps on a stone. He turns to a group of soldiers on the left, and raises his right hand. Behind him there is another group of soldiers with two camels on the far right. The upper part represents an equestrian battle.

The identification of the buildings is insecure; they presumably represent an assemblage of different and altered Roman elements without a definite prototype.<sup>57</sup>

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*Die Basilika San Francesco in Assisi 2 – Die Wandmalereien der Basilika*, ed. Remigius Boving, OFM (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1926), 140. Smart identified it as St. Peter, but there is no attribute that would support this proposition. Smart, *Assisi*, 216.

<sup>54</sup> Smart, *Assisi*, 216

<sup>55</sup> Smart, *Assisi*, 230–231; Gerhard Ruf, “Das Säulenmonument, die Engel- und Prophetendarstellungen im letzten Bild der Franzlegende: ‘Die Befreiung des Häretikers Petrus von Alfile’ in der Oberkirche San Francesco in Assisi,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 59 (1996): 243–259 (hereafter: Ruf, “Das Säulenmonument”); Ruth Wolff, “La liberazione dell’eretico Pietro. Considerazioni su un affresco nella Chiesa Superiore di San Francesco ad Assisi,” *Arte cristiana* 84 (1996): 361–373, (hereafter: Wolff, “La liberazione”); Chiara Frugoni, “Edifici e colonne nella Roma della ‘Liberazione di Pietro di Alfile’ ad Assisi,” in *Domus et splendida palatia. Residenze papali e cardinalizie a Roma fra XII e XV secolo*, ed. Alessio Monciatti (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2004), 107–133 (hereafter: Frugoni, “Edifici”).

<sup>56</sup> Only Os considered them apostles. Henk W. van Os, “Idolatry on the Gate: Antique Sources for an Assisi Fresco,” *Simiolus* 15 (1985): 171–173. Otherwise the literature unanimously regards them as prophets. Smart, *Assisi*, 230, and Irene Hueck, “Frühe Arbeiten des Simone Martini,” *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 19 (1968): 29 (hereafter: Hueck, “Frühe Arbeiten des Simone Martini”). Especially the first figure with the pointed cap, however, is difficult to identify as an apostle.

<sup>57</sup> The building on the left was long identified as the reshaping of the “Septizonium.” Wolff stated that the question cannot be decided (Wolff, “La liberazione,” 365); Frugoni argued for the *domus Aguliae* (Frugoni, “Edifici,” 128). Wolff tried to connect the prison on the right to the Castel Sant’Angelo (Wolff, “La liberazione,” 365–366), but Frugoni strongly rejected this interpretation (Frugoni, “Edifici,” 129, note 67).



Besides the insecure identifications of the buildings, the “images” themselves are deeply ambiguous; that of the preacher especially has been the basis of different interpretations. He has been seen as an allusion to the peaceful mission of St. Francis to the East.<sup>58</sup> He has been identified with the Antichrist.<sup>59</sup> With the angels and the prophets he has been connected to Moses and the service of the Lord.<sup>60</sup> What is common to all these interpretations is that they somehow try to give a meaning to these “images,” which means that they are considered as symbols. This consideration on the level of the pictorial execution can be confirmed: the different details of the last fresco may definitely have a complex iconographic content. Despite considerable efforts to formulate it, this content has remained on a hypothetical level, combining different allusions from the life of Francis; therefore the symbolic function of the “images-within-pictures,” similarly to fresco 21, is presumed, but its final interpretation is still to come.

### **The Sequence of the Pictures and the Possibility of an “Iconographic History”**

So far I have argued that the “images-within-pictures” in the Upper Church represent a heterogeneous assemblage from the point of view of symbolism. The “image” can be the part of a building which follows a given prototype, including the decoration of the prototype or altering it slightly; it can be part of an imagined building and contribute to its reality effect, sometimes following Classical examples with no symbolic implications; it can be also a symbol creating a complex net of significations. In the following pages I propose a hypothesis which sees these examples not only as elements of static groups, but conceives of them in their dynamic historic development.<sup>61</sup>

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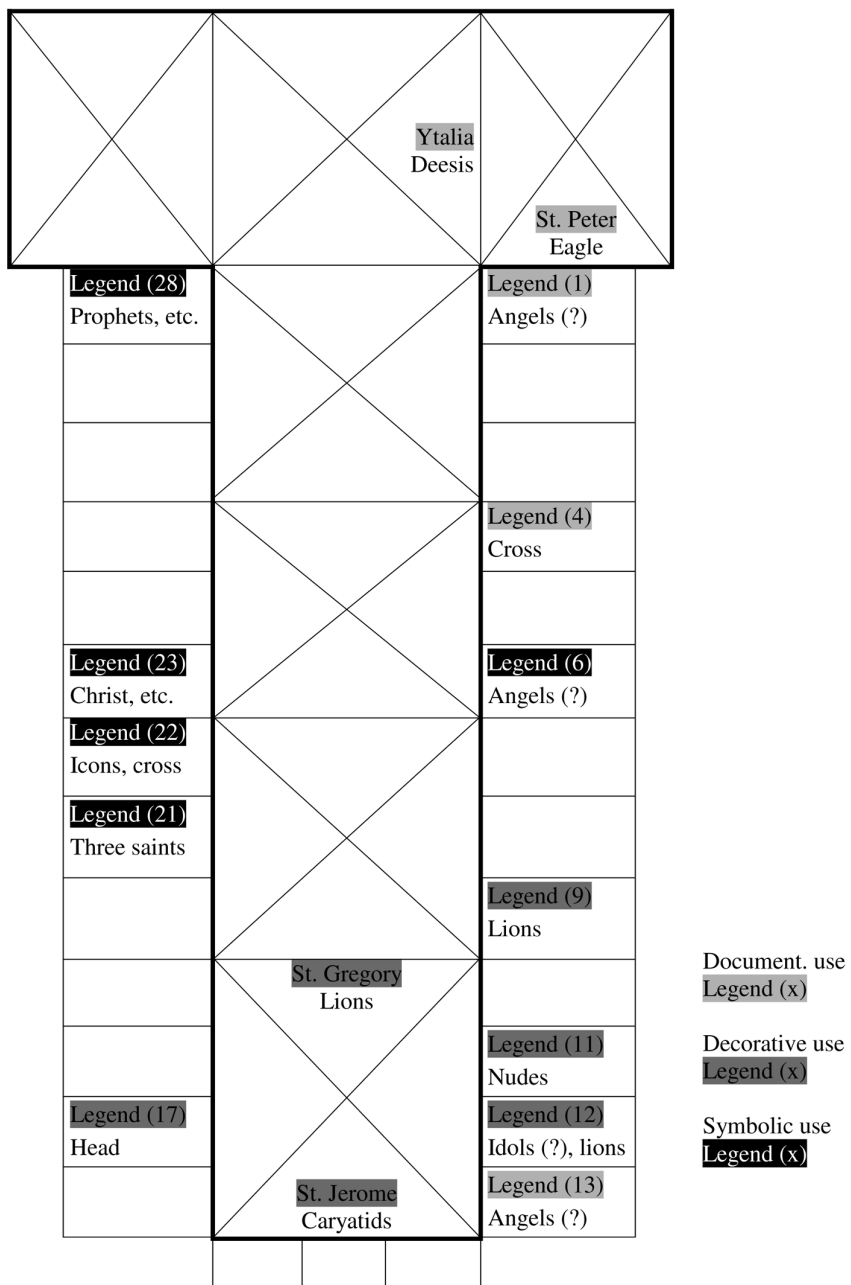
<sup>58</sup> Smart, *Assisi*, 230–231.

<sup>59</sup> Burkhart, *Franziskus und die Vollendung der Kirche*, 167–173; Wolff, “La liberazione,” 366–368.

<sup>60</sup> Ruf, “Das Säulenmonument,” 253–254.

<sup>61</sup> Although the decoration of the Upper Church is one of the most debated objects of art history, the relative chronology of the frescoes is sufficiently clarified, thus the different “images-within-pictures” can be sorted into a sequence. For the relative chronology see Hans Belting, *Die Oberkirche von San Francesco in Assisi: ihre Dekoration als Aufgabe und die Genese einer neuen Wandmalerei* (Berlin: Mann, 1977), 101–104 (hereafter: Belting, *Oberkirche*) For the *Legend* see Zanardi, *Giotto e Cavallini*; and “Giotto and the St. Francis Cycle at Assisi,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Giotto*, eds. Derbes, Anne and Mark Sandona (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32–62.

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1. Scheme: Images-within-Pictures in the Upper Church at Assisi.



The first two “images-within-pictures” were executed by the Cimabue workshop. Both of them follow a given prototype: the function of the “image” is to allude to a given building in a given context (the Temple of Jerusalem, and the Rome of Nicholas III). After the Cimabue workshop the “image-within-picture” appears again on the frescoes of the Isaac workshop, in the Isaac scene and on the vaulting of the doctors. The strong indicating or documenting use of the decoration changes here; the buildings do not correspond to given prototypes, the “images” are mere decorations.

This decorative function, with some exceptions, also dominates the *Legend of St. Francis* to the *Preaching before Honorius III* (17). Some of the examples are closer to a prototype, like the cross San Damiano or the ciborium at Greccio, but the documenting intention which characterized the Cimabue workshop is lacking even in these cases; since the cross is altered, only the type (triumphant) corresponds and the ciborium is rendered as more Classical compared to the prototypes. The only detail which clearly bears some complex implications is the statue on the roof of the papal chamber, but since it is explaining the event it can be considered more as a meta-pictorial detail.

The decisive entry of the complex iconographic use of the “image-within-picture” happens on the subsequent three frescoes of *The Vision of Friar Augustine and the Bishop of Assisi* (21), *The Testimony of Jerome* (22) and *The Mourning of St. Francis* (23). Although written evidence only supports the symbolic interpretations of *The Testimony of Jerome*, the pictorial organization of the other two (a high level of individuality and a lack of mirror imaging) suggests the transgression of simple decorative status in these cases as well. This symbolic use presumably appears again on the last fresco, but its exact content is difficult to determine. It has to be emphasized that the first fresco of the narrative order (*St. Francis Honored by a Simple Man of Assisi* [1]) was the last to be executed. Its strong emphasis on the actual building of Assisi with its altered design can be connected to the design of *The Liberation of the Repentant Heretic* (28) in the sense that these two frescoes represent the executive and spatial closure of the cycle. Smart interpreted this as a comparison between Rome and Assisi, where the latter is proclaimed here as the new *città santa*.<sup>62</sup>

What is emerging here is a “history” of the “image-within-picture” which is the development of its iconographic-symbolic structure.<sup>63</sup> This iconographic-

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<sup>62</sup> Smart, *Assisi*, 23 and 231–232.

<sup>63</sup> Besides this “iconographic” reading there is also a stylistic reading of the Legend. Tintori and Meiss mention that the three different masters of the cycle can also be distinguished by the handling of the pseudo-sculptural decoration of the buildings. See Tintori and Meiss, *Painting*, 82 and 140. Hueck introduced different distinctions based



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symbolic history cannot be strictly ascribed to different masters, but its correspondence to the other transformation within the cycle should be noted. The Cimabue workshop is responsible for a documenting use of the “images;” the later Roman masters (Torriti?) did not create “images-within-pictures.” After the entry of the Isaac master, whether it was Giotto or someone else, a new tendency started, which handled the decorative potentials of the phenomenon more freely. Material evidence emphasizes the continuity between the master of the Isaac scenes, the *Vaulting of the Doctors* and the first workshop of the cycle (frescoes 2–7).<sup>64</sup> However, the same material evidence shows a break at fresco 7, which does not correlate with the unchanged (decorative) use of the “image-within-picture.”<sup>65</sup> It may be that the change affected only the execution of the incarnated, and the execution of the buildings remained in the same hands. At a given moment (frescoes 21, 22, 23) decorative dominance turned into symbolic use. This turning point corresponds to the changes testified to by the material evidence.<sup>66</sup> The execution concludes with the comparison between Assisi and Rome (frescoes 28, 1). This part used to be ascribed to the Santa Cecilia Master on a stylistic basis, but the material evidence does not show any change here.<sup>67</sup>

The decisive moment of this story is the turning point between decorative and symbolic use, between simple and complex iconographical solutions in frescoes 21–23. Strikingly, besides the changes in the material evidence, this part of the cycle, more precisely the third bay (frescoes 20–22), show high levels of pictorial organization (the two side scenes are divided horizontally on both, which creates a strict symmetrical composition) and show thoughtfulness in terms of the main iconographic content; the *Death of St. Francis* and the *Testimony of Jerome* are paralleled with the two Isaac scenes on the opposite side of the bay, emphasizing the important theme of St. Francis’ legacy and the real heirs of his order.<sup>68</sup> The change from decoration to symbol in respect of the “images-within-

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on the idea that the “images-within-pictures” at Assisi were assigned to young wandering painters to test their capacities without risking the overall outcome of the fresco. See Hueck, “Frühe Arbeiten des Simone Martini,” 29–30 and 57, note 5–6.

<sup>64</sup> Zanardi, *Giotto e Cavallini*, 106–108, 110–112

<sup>65</sup> Zanardi, *Giotto e Cavallini*, 106–108, 110–112

<sup>66</sup> Zanardi, *Giotto e Cavallini*, 106–108, 110–112

<sup>67</sup> Zanardi, *Giotto e Cavallini*, 106–108, 110–112. For the Santa Cecilia Master see Richard Offner, “Giotto, non-Giotto,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 74 (1939): 267, note 10; Alastair Smart, “The St. Cecilia Master and His School at Assisi,” *The Burlington Magazine* 102 (1960): 406; Smart, *Assisi*, 43–44.

<sup>68</sup> White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 45; Romano, “La Morte di Francesco,” 353–362. Recently Neff stated on the basis of John of Wales’ *Meditatio pauperis in solitudine* that it is not Isaac but Jacob who should be considered as the fundamental



pictures” is part of the material-pictorial-iconographic intensification of the third bay.

This material-pictorial-iconographic intensification is connected to one of the most enigmatic questions of the cycle and medieval art in general: At the end, who is responsible for the symbolic use of the “image-within-pictures?” Was it the master who at a given moment decided to express hidden meanings by means of details formerly used as decorations? Or was it a theoretician-theologian who realized the symbolic potential of the pictorial phenomenon and proposed complex iconographic contents? Assisi seems to demonstrate that the masters were exploring the decorative potentials at the beginning of the phenomenon; the decisive change from simple to complex iconography bears the definite mark of a Franciscan milieu and seems connected to the core of the Franciscan identity. This supports the importance of external (hagiographic, ecclesiastical and political) factors for the genesis of the “image-within-picture” as a symbol.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusions

The general conclusion that can be harvested from these investigations of “images-within-pictures” shows that the “image” is not necessarily a symbol; it can easily function as decoration. Furthermore, the fact that first the “images” are decorations and, later, they take on symbolic importance directly contradicts Panofsky’s proposal. “Image-within-picture,” the subdivision of disguised symbolism, did not appear in order to harmonize medieval non-realistic symbolic systems with the exigencies of representing realistic-imitative space; it was not immediately a symbol which helped the realistic depiction of complicated typological-theological ideas. At its very beginning it was a simple decoration, and later, over a very short period, it developed from a decorative state to a symbolic state. This had decisive consequences for the entire problem of “image-within-picture” in the fourteenth century. Since everything started with the simple, with decorative details, the symbolic-complex implication of the embedded “image” is not a necessary fact, but a permanent possibility. A history

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prototype of St. Francis, which weakens the parallel between the scenes. See Neff, “Lesser Brothers,” 678–680 and 700–701.

<sup>69</sup> Serena Romano, “La redazione del programma e lo svolgimento del cantiere della navata,” *La basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi: pittori, botteghe, strategie narrative* (Roma: Viella, 2001), 179–207; Charles Mitchell, “The Imagery of the Upper Church at Assisi,” in *Giotto e il suo tempo. Atti del congresso internazionale per la celebrazione del VII centenario della nascita di Giotto* (Rome: De Luca, 1971), 113–134.



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of the “image-within-picture” in the fourteenth century, yet to be written, must focus exactly on this *possibility* of the symbolic and on the turning point from simple to complex, detecting the internal (“pictorial”) and the external (“social-historic”) factors which may have determined this process.