Medieval Wood Sculpture and its Setting in Architecture: Studies in Some Churches In and Around Pisa

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The last two decades have seen important scholarly research published on medieval wood sculpture. The exhibitions held in Siena (1987), Lucca (1995–96) and Pisa (2000–01) allowed the status of these studies to be examined and permitted investigation into crucial aspects of style and attribution.[1] Furthermore, all these contributions note the liturgical role and function of these works of art. Nevertheless, they only suggest the issue of the relationship between wood sculpture and architecture, which is the topic of the present article. If stone sculpture is often conceived with specific settings inside churches in mind — like lunettes or pillars — being strongly connected with architecture, the same cannot be said for sculpture in wood. In fact, function and practical usage have always been recognized as the main characteristics of wooden statues, and these qualities make it much more difficult to ascertain their original setting.

From the early classical period, monumental wooden *simulacra* representing pagan divinities were set up in urban and rural temples. The Roman historian Livy, among others, indicates that these statues played an important role in sacred ceremonies: 'From the temple of Apollo two white cows were led through the Porta Carmentalis into the city; behind these two statues in cypress wood of Juno Regina were carried.'[2]

The rich corpus of extant medieval wood sculptures, together with some detailed written sources, confirm the substantial affinity between the pagan and Christian worlds. Obviously the actors change; crucifixes, the enthroned Virgin and Child and, later on, saints became the most widespread types. The script changes as well; the Life of Christ, from the Annunciation to the Passion, its dramatic apex, became the prevailing subject for religious representations. The easy mobility of these works, their sharing of the same space with the congregation, and their painted surfaces which made them like human beings, allowed the faithful to identify themselves with the main characters and feel part of the holy drama.

On Palm Sunday, Christ entered Jerusalem astride a donkey. From the Romanesque period onward, several wooden statues of Christ on a donkey (generally known by the German name of *Palmesel*) were carried through streets and alleys of cities and villages all around Europe. Like the above-mentioned wooden images, this was 'a prototype of

Fig. 1. *Palmesel, end of twelfth century, Schweizerisches Landes-museum, Zurich (from Karl Young,* The Drama of the Medieval Church, *Vol. 1, Fig. 2)*

an artistic category designed principally to vivify the liturgy'.[3] The account of the *Palmesel* procession written by the German radical Protestant Sebastian Franck gives us a partisan, but vivid, idea of a possible *mise en scène* of the episode, which was still represented in the sixteenth century:

> Palm Sunday comes ... A wooden ass on a trolley is pulled around the town with the image of their God on it; they sing throw palms before it, and do much idolatry with this wooden God of theirs. The parish priest prostrates himself before this image, and a second priest also creeps up. The children sing and point with their fingers. Two Bacchantes prostrate themselves before it with outlandish ceremony and song, and then everyone throws palms at it: whoever catches the first makes big magic with it.[4]

Many well-preserved examples of *Palmesel* survive. Contemporary with Franck's description is the Christ on a donkey by an unknown Swabian sculptor (1510–20) in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London;[5] dating from much earlier is the Christ of the Entry (*c.* 1250), kept in a side chapel in the church of Santa Maria in Organo, in Verona.[6] More relevant to our argument, however, is the *Palmesel* from Steinen (Switzerland), now in the Schweizereisches Landes-museum in Zurich (Fig. 1). In fact, whereas the sculptures in London and Verona headed public processions, carried by members of religious congregations, in this case the donkey is nailed to a four-wheeled trolley, ready to be pulled. It seems quite clear that this sculpture was not conceived to be static and that its location inside the church was not fixed, canonically or otherwise. Although the wheels make it a borderline case, we can extend this assertion to medieval wood figures in

general: they 'differ from stone ones in not being architectural adjuncts', and they engender a changeable relationship with architecture.[7]

Writing about the Palm Sunday procession, the Benedictine monk William of Volpiano (tenth to eleventh centuries), the founder of the monastery of Fruttuaria (near Torino), exhorted his brethren to transcend the feature of the *simulacrum* to reach divinity:

> Because, where it permitted to us to contemplate with [our] bodily eyes, it would seem that we ourselves have gone to meet the Son of God, which we must without any doubt believe we have done. Although He may not indeed be seen physically, yet the person whose inner eyes He will have opened has the power to see that we have gone forth to meet our Lord Jesus Christ.[8]

Therefore, together with portability, the other main characteristic of these images was their meaning: 'in sculpture in the round ... the three-dimensional manifestation of divinity would have seemed powerfully tangible.'[9] The physical presence of the sculpted object, the gestures and rituality of the *festum*[10] were a necessary intermediary for folk of the Middle Ages, not accustomed to thinking in the abstract; so the powerful emotional involvement of such liturgical *festa* — whose theological content was often quite weak — helped to satisfy their endless thirst for God.[11]

A similar exhortation to that of William of Volpiano was quite literally hidden inside a Tuscan crucifix. This work, preserved in Siena (at the Museo Aurelio Castelli, Basilica dell'Osservanza), was carved in 1338 by the Sienese sculptor Lando di Pietro, who inserted two signed and dated parchments in it; the first was nailed inside the head of Christ, while the second was put in a tiny hole in his knee. Besides Lando's awareness of his social status as an artist, demonstrated by the signature, he wrote a long prayer at the end of which he wanted to remind himself, and to admonish others, that this statue was, as with the previous example, only an intermediary: 'On January 1337 this figure was made in likeness of Jesus Christ crucified, the living and veritable Son of God. And we must venerate Him and not this wood.'[12]

Only after determining the preceding issues, fundamental to any approach to medieval wood sculpture, can we analyse the various changing relationships between these figures and architecture. In particular, the aim of this article is to examine some representative cases in and around Pisa. Each of them had its own history, related to the life of the building in which it was located and also to cultural and liturgical changes. The sculptures selected are well documented examples of the most common types of the Middle Ages, such as the Deposition, Crucifixion, Virgin and Child, Annunciation and Saints. In order to define the settings of this kind of works, statues in terracotta, marble or stone in general, were taken as unavoidable terms of comparison.

L.C., C.G.

THE DEPOSITION OF VICOPISANO

Among the earliest subjects are Deposition groups, which were widespread mainly in Central Italy, as demonstrated by the famous examples in the Duomo of Tivoli (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) and in the Museo Comunale of Montone, Perugia (first half of the thirteenth century). Wooden actors perform the episode of the *schiavellatione*, where

Nicodemus takes the nails out of Christ's bleeding limbs. The other characters animating the scene are Joseph of Arimathea, prostrated to support the Redeemer, the Virgin Mary and St John in sorrow. Staged with dramatic theatricality, these groups were 'created to tell the story of one of the most intense moments of the Passion and make it come to life empathetically, presenting the suffering of a real or almost "living" person'.[13] Exceptionally, three of these groups are preserved in the region of Pisa; their prototype was the monumental Deposition (second half of the twelfth century) carved by a French workshop and originally located in the cathedral.[14]

The first, in Volterra Cathedral, is the only one that can be dated with reasonable certainty (to 1228), and is indeed very well preserved; the five figures are sumptuously dressed and their painted surface is still decorated with gold and silver leaf.[15] The second group is in the Museo della Misericordia di San Miniato, and its identification as a Deposition was confirmed after the restoration begun in 1997; the three surviving statues were partly recarved and heavily repainted in the nineteenth century, according to the concept of the Middle Ages in vogue at that time.[16]

The last is at Vicopisano, in the Romanesque church of San Giovanni Battista (Fig. 2). Whilst the actors in Volterra wear bright costumes, those in Vicopisano are now dressed only in wood; all the characters, with the partial exception of the Christ, have actually lost their original surface as a result of a drastic restoration, carried out in 1868, which removed the medieval paint in order to update the appearance of the statues. In addition to the five canonical figures, two angels are hung above the cross, flying down to hold Christ. His body, held by just one nail, falls against Joseph of Arimathea, and this dramatic collapse instils a lively dynamic rhythm into the composition. The pose of the main actor is not immune from the effects of contemporary painting; we can observe a remarkable resemblance between this representation and the corresponding detail in the Deposition on the lateral panel of the Cross, painted by a Greek artist active in town at the beginning of the thirteenth century (Pisa, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo) (Fig. 3).

Today this group is placed behind the main altar, in the apse of the church. The building is recorded with the double name of Santa Maria e San Giovanni Battista as early as 934, and is a typical example of Pisan Romanesque architecture. Its sloping façade presents characteristic decoration, with blind arches and lozenge motifs, while columns and capitals of the three aisled interior are ancient *spolia*. As to the original position of the wood sculptures, it is only possible to hypothesize, remembering that, at least during the entire thirteenth century, these figures were probably shown to congregations only for the Easter *festa*.[17] A contemporaneous cycle of frescos illustrating the Life of Christ has been recently discovered on the walls of the church; although the sequence is not entirely legible, we can see that the narration was started on the right-hand side of the main altar, with the scene of the Annunciation. After running along the internal walls, it ended on the opposite side, with the Betrayal of Christ painted above the episode of Pentecost. It seems quite clear that the iconographical programme was completed by, and reached its dramatic climax with, the Deposition, which was not painted but sculpted in wood, and was located in the presbytery. As with the aforementioned groups at Volterra and San Miniato, this one has also changed its appearance and location inside the church since the early

Fig. 2. *Deposition (cross: h. 170 cm), second decade of the thirteenth century, church of San Giovanni Battista, Vicopisano (Photo: Authors)*

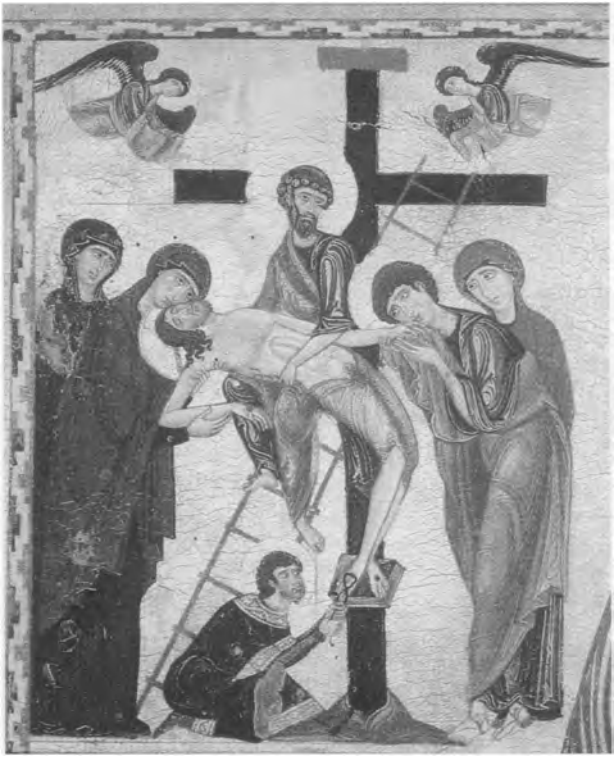

Fig. 3. *Painted Cross, beginning of the thirteenth century, detail of the Deposition, Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa (Dept of Art History, University of Pisa)*

Renaissance. Compared with the other cases, the Vicopisano Deposition is extremely significant because it is thought to have been the central part of the internal decoration of the medieval church from its origins; as well as not being mere architectural adjuncts, these statues were intrinsically linked with architecture.

At the turn of the thirteenth century, wooden Depositions lost their function due to the devotional forms promoted by the new mendicant orders, such as processions, public penitences and dramatic *laudes*.[18] The translation of biblical texts from Latin to the vernacular, and from prose to verse, demanded the representation of the various episodes of the Passion, and not just of its paradigmatic scene. Gradually, static forms of representation developed into exuberant and choral performances, in which the main character was still in wood but the other roles were interpreted by living people.

L.C.

THE CRUCIFIXES OF PALAIA AND OF SAN MINIATO

Among the most detailed information on the *mise en scène* of liturgical drama, the inventory of the Confraternity of San Domenico of Perugia (1339) lists a long series of theatrical objects, including 'a big devotional Crucifix with three nails taken out of from it'.[19] The objects listed allows us reasonably to suppose that the arms of this Crucifix were movable. This new type permitted the presentation of at least three crucial moments in the Passion cycle: Crucifixion, Deposition and Burial.

A rare and refined example of such a sculpture is preserved in the thirteenth-century church of Sant'Andrea of Palaia (Fig. 4). Built in characteristic red brick, the church has a great single nave and its bell tower rests on the two external sides of the building, while on the inside it is supported only by a couple of consoles. This Crucifix is hung in the first chapel on the left side of the church, and was probably carved around the third decade of the fourteenth century, by an unknown artist well aware of Giovanni Pisano's works in Siena.[20] The sculptor seems to revisit Pisano's famous prototypes, through the gracefulness of Sienese Trecento art; this aspect is particularly evident in the composed and linear elegance of the white and golden loincloth. The suffering of Jesus, whose face is framed by a long, curled lock of hair, is emphasized by the blood dripping from his horrific wounds. A print from the second half of the eighteenth century represents this work, and bears an inscription which gives us useful information: 'True likeness of the Miraculous Crucifix which is preserved in the church of Sant'Andrea of Palaia, above the altar served by the venerable Confraternity of San Michele de' Neri of Palaia.'[21] The story behind this work is thus strongly connected with a local confraternity, whose brethren celebrated at the altar of this chapel. The Crucifix still occupies the same position above that altar.

On the main altar of the same church of Sant'Andrea there is another precious Crucifix (Fig. 5), recently identified as an early work of Andrea Pisano (*c.* 1295–1348/49).[22] Although virtually contemporaneous with the others, this sculpture is the visual manifesto of a different figurative culture; the powerful monumentality of the figure reveals how Andrea understood and re-elaborated the classical language of Nicola Pisano. The calm suffering of Jesus is far removed from the more explicit

Fig. 4. *Crucifix (h. 163.5 cm), third decade of the fourteenth century, church of Sant'Andrea, Palaia (from Lorenzo Carletti and Cristiano Giometti,* Scultura lignea pisana, *p. 39)*

Fig. 5. *Andrea Pisano, Crucifix (h. 200 cm), c. 1330, church of Sant'Andrea, Palaia (from* Scultura lignea pisana, *p. 40)*

expressiveness of the Sienese example, conceived to be functional in its role in the public representation of the Holy Drama. Both of them are hung above an altar, but Andrea's Crucifix occupies the most sacred place in the church. In general, as in the above-mentioned case, the wooden Crucifixes found their natural location there or above the *tramezzo*. Their painted counterpart was hung at the iconostasis, as Giotto shows in the scene of the Presepe di Greccio in the Basilica of Assisi. In all cases they had to be seen by the entire congregation.[23]

The practice of exhibiting miraculous and sacred images only during canonical feasts is still kept alive here and there, as is shown by the small venerated Crucifix of San Miniato.[24] Its history is particularly interesting, since we can follow its various wanderings with certainty. Attributed to a master of the central Rhine area and executed around the mid-fourteenth century, it was originally located in the local church of Santi Giusto e Clemente; after a miracle which occurred during the passing of the Compagnia dei Bianchi in 1399, it was moved into the chapel of the Palazzo del Popolo.[25] Since the beginning of the fifteenth century, this little oratory has been embellished to revere this miraculous *simulacrum*; as at Vicopisano, its walls were

Fig. 6. *Church of the Santissimo Crocifisso, 1709–18, San Miniato (Photo: Authors)*

decorated with a cycle depicting episodes of the life of Christ. A century later, a Florentine workshop produced a precious altar in carved and gilt wood, and the Crucifix was placed at its centre. With the spreading of the terrible plague of the seventeenth century, the people of San Miniato asked for help and protection from the wooden image, which answered their prayer as, miraculously, the town was untouched by the epidemic. In order to revere this miracle, the community decided to give the Crucifix a more dignified home and, between 1709 and 1718, the Sanctuary of the Santissimo Crocifisso was built, just in front of the previous chapel on the other side of the street (Fig. 6). Located at the summit of a steep slope, a spectacular stairway leads to the Sanctuary, which was designed by the Grand Duke's architect, Anton Maria Ferri (1651–1716). Reviving a Renaissance tradition, Ferri planned a Greek-cross building, surmounted by a circular drum.[26] The interior is staged with considerable theatricality, thanks to the frescoes painted in a typically late-Baroque taste by Anton Domenico Bamberini (1666–1741). The dramatic fulcrum of this richly decorated setting is the sumptuous main altarpiece, which contains the venerated Crucifix. The paradoxical aspect of this new architectural setting is that the miraculous image, as in the Middle Ages, is still shown just once a year.

C.G.

THE MADRE DEI BIMBI AND THE MADONNA DEI VETTURINI

Devotion to the Virgin Mary, already increasing during the twelfth century, spread considerably a century later, thanks to the apostolate of the mendicant orders. In Tuscany the two most important centres of such worship were the church of Orsanmichele in Florence and that of San Giovanni in Cigoli, a small village on a hill near San Miniato. From the mid-fourteenth century onwards these places became the destinations for thousands of pilgrims, who journeyed to venerate these sacred images. The famous novelist Franco Sacchetti (1332/1334–1400) confirms that 'once upon a time everybody ran to Santa Maria of Cigoli; and then to Our Lady of Orto San Michele'.[27] In both cases the *simulacra* represent a Virgin Enthroned with Child but, whereas in Florence the image was painted, in Cigoli it was carved in the form of a reredos, a panel with figures sculpted in relief (Fig. 7). The reredos embodies an intrinsic connexion between architecture, sculpture and painting. Moreover, while maintaining some

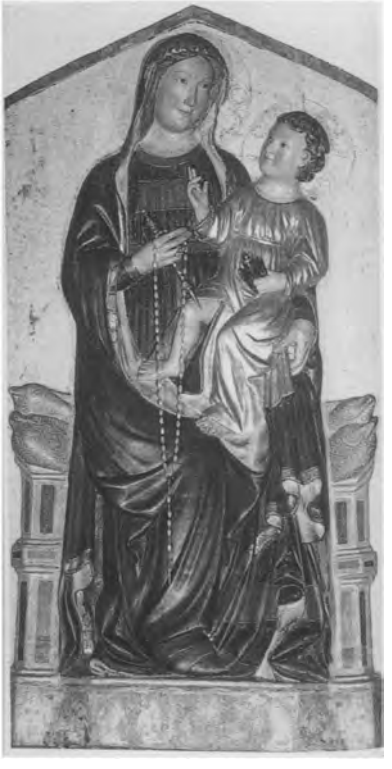

Fig. 7. *Madre dei Bimbi (h. 179 cm), first decade of the Fourteenth-century, church of San Giovanni Battista, Cigoli, San Miniato (from Lorenzo Carletti and Cristiano Giometti,* Scultura lignea pisana, *p. 104)*

Fig. 8. *Madre dei Bimbi in her shrine, church of San Giovanni Battista, Cigoli, San Miniato (Photo: Authors)*

outdated features, such as the gabled form of the frame and the throne divided into two sections, the anonymous sculptor of this work seems to look towards the followers of Giotto.

This image is still thought to be miraculous and is usually called the 'Madre dei Bimbi'.[28] Its history is linked with the religious Order of the Humiliati, which was established at Cigoli in 1335; here they built their monastery and renovated the previous church dedicated to San Michele. Soon after their arrival, the Confraternity of the Madonna of Cigoli presented the Humiliati with the reredos. In 1381, in order to give the image an appropriate, sumptuous setting, they commissioned the Florentine Neri di Fioravante to carve a precious tabernacle in wood (Fig. 8). This elegant Gothic structure, not coincidentally, reminds one of its renowned, monumental precedent in marble and mosaic of Orsanmichele, designed by Andrea Orcagna between 1355 and 1359. The decorative programme of Cigoli's tabernacle was completed with a cycle of frescoes by the Florentine painter Stefano di Antonio di Vanni (1405–83): a chorus of

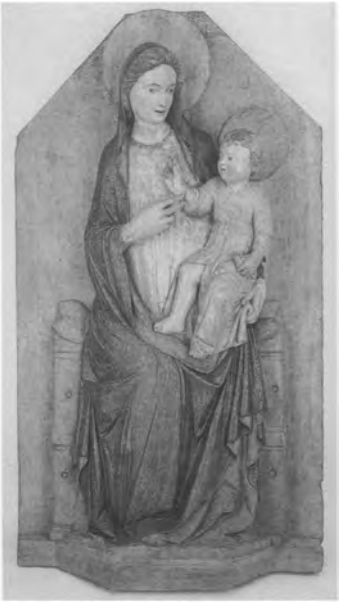

Fig. 9. *Nino Pisano, Madonna dei Vetturini (h. 157 cm), Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa (from Lorenzo Carletti and Cristiano Giometti,* Scultura lignea pisana, *p. 58)*

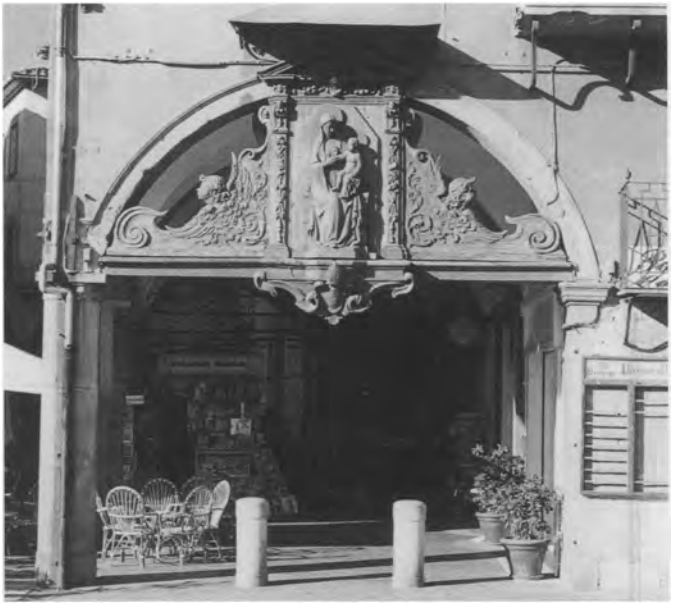

Fig. 10. *Copy of the Madonna dei Vetturini under the arch of Borgo, Pisa (Photo: Authors)*

angels surrounds and frames the niche with the reredos, while above it, on either side of the tympanum, the scene of the Annunciation is enacted.

The 'Madre dei Bimbi' was so highly venerated that it was taken as a model by such an innovative and sophisticated artist as Nino Pisano (*c.* 1315–1368), the son of Andrea. In the seventh decade of the fourteenth century he carved the so-called 'Madonna dei Vetturini', which has been housed in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo of Pisa since the early, 'seventies of the twentieth century (Fig. 9). Nino maintains all the features of Cigoli's prototype, both in the form of the panel and in the position of the figures. Indeed, his Gothic language, permeated with French stylistic reminiscences, softens the entire composition and intensifies the bond of affection between the mother and her son.[29] Just as for the small Crucifix of San Miniato, so too for the 'Madonna dei Vetturini' we are able to reconstruct its wonderings around Pisa. This work was originally placed in the Gothic church of Santa Maria della Spina, where it was particularly venerated by members of the Medici family. Built in 1230 close to the Ponte Novo, an ancient bridge (now destroyed), the church of Santa Maria was enlarged in 1325 by the Pisan architect and sculptor Lupo di Francesco. Subsequently his project was continued by Andrea Pisano and his son Nino, who worked there from the late 'forties until the 'seventies of the fourteenth century.[30] In 1586 the Pisan Archbishop Dal Pozzo decided that the

population should pray at the noontide tolling of the bell. For this reason, Canon Giovan Battista Totti suggested moving the sculpture from the church to the very centre of the town, so that the community could pray in front of the sacred image. The selected location was at the start of the commercial street, called Borgo, above its first arcade. The frame supporting the reredos at the top of the arch was commissioned from the woodcarver Cosimo d'Arrigo, while Agostino Ghirlanda painted the local saints San Torpé and San Ranieri on either side of the Virgin. This newly designed work was taken apart some years later, since the building above the arcade was apparently collapsing. After the restoration, the 'Madonna dei Vetturini' returned to overlook the street, but now framed by a new wooden structure, updated to suit Baroque taste. Due to another restoration of the building, in 1890, the Commune of Pisa moved Nino's sculpture inside the nearby church of San Michele di Borgo, and intended to leave it there. The carriage drivers, who had elected the image as their patron, then protested to the Commune, and the Virgin returned beneath her arch (Fig. 10).[31]

C.G.

THE ANNUNCIATION GROUPS BY NINO AND TOMMASO PISANO

After the death of his father, Nino Pisano became the most important artist in town and his studio produced several sculptures in marble and wood for local churches and suburban oratories. Among other types, he was commissioned to carve a great number of Annunciation groups; his most famous is that in marble, partially polychrome, in the Dominican church of Santa Caterina of Pisa (dating from the seventh decade of the fourteenth century), which is still very well preserved. Transferred here from the church of San Zeno at the beginning of the Quattrocento, the two statues were placed on the pilasters of the arch at the sides of the main altar.[32]

Nino's workshop produced many copies in wood of this successful type; one of these is the Annunciation of the Collegiata dei Santi Pietro e Paolo in Castelfranco di Sotto (Fig. 11). The modulated rhythm of the drapery and the delicate expressiveness of the faces recall the analogous group in marble. The Castelfranco statues now stand in an elegant niche above the second altar on the left-hand side of the nave. This arrangement is the result of a restoration carried out between 1719 and 1737, under the direction of the Florentine architect Giuseppe Broccetti, which radically transformed the interior of the church. The two side aisles were demolished and replaced by a single large nave, terminating in an imposing arch which led to the presbytery area; the rich decorative programme in stucco was realized by a team of plasterers from Lugano, in Switzerland.

This leaves a question as to the original location of these wooden statues. The Annunciation of Santa Caterina, and many other contemporary figurative examples in marble, still placed in their original location, can provide good comparisons. They let us reasonably suppose that, in the medieval period, the position of the Virgin and the Angel was fixed inside the church. The dialogue between them was staged in two distinct spaces. More often than not they were placed at the sides of the main altar, as shown in Giotto's fresco cycle in the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua (1303–05), where the kneeling figures crown the triumphal arch. If placed in other areas, they remained apart from each other, as we can also see in the Annunciation in stone (*c.* 1253) over the

Fig. 11. *Nino Pisano, Annunciation (h. 160 cm), church of Santi Pietro e Paolo, Castelfranco di Sotto (Photo: Authors)*

Fig. 12. *Tommaso Pisano, Annunciation (h. 160 cm), Oratorio Pesciolini, Ghizzano, Peccioli (Photo: Authors)*

Fig. 13. *Scene of the Flagellation, 1500–30, Chapel of the house of Pilato, Sacro Monte di San Vivaldo, Montaione (Photo: Authors)*

doorway of the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey.[33] In all these cases, however, the faithful occupied a position between the two figures, and could participate and feel involved in their sacred conversation.[34]

As related above, the two statues of the Castelfranco Annunciation now share the same niche. The group in the remote village of Ghizzano, executed by Nino's brother, Tommaso (in the second half of the fourteenth century), underwent a similar fate. Its current location is in a small nineteenth-century oratory, built to more suitably accommodate this much venerated work; above the main altar a neo-Gothic tabernacle frames these elegant statues, creating a sort of 'devotional picture' (Fig. 12).[35] This new kind of setting marks a separation between the sacred space of the representation and that of the faithful spectator; the sacred space becomes a framed stage, and the spectator does not live in it, but can only contemplate it from the outside. The turning point which determined this new overall arrangement for most religious buildings, and therefore of the wooden sculptures inside them, came with the Tridentine Council (1545–63) and its edicts;[36] but a profound cultural change had already begun a century earlier.

To explain this pivotal change we can look at the experience of the Sacri Monti. Besides being executed in terracotta, they can be considered as the examples closest — in terms of theatricality and mimesis — to the wooden groups. The oldest one is the Sacro Monte of San Vivaldo, in the countryside between Pisa and Florence. Built between 1500 and 1530, it consisted of thirty-four chapels scattered across the hills with the aim of recreating the topography of the Holy Land. In each one of these was performed an episode of the Life of Christ, from the Annunciation to the Assumption; the characters were statues in polychrome terracotta with, as backdrops, scenes painted in fresco (Fig. 13). The pilgrim was separated from the stage and witnessed the event from his own area inside the chapel, and sometimes even from outside it. In this way the chapel became a sort of small theatre. The choral dimension of the medieval *festa* gave way to individual contemplation; since the fifteenth century, in fact, the Sacred Representation had been progressively performed inside an architectural wooden niche, which delimited the space of the action.[37] This new way of staging the sacred scene, which is strongly linked with the birth of Renaissance perspective,[38] underlies the modern setting of the above mentioned Annunciation groups and, more generally, of many other wooden sculptures.

L.C.

THE SANTA LUCIA OF MONTECASTELLO

From the early fourteenth century onwards, wooden figures of saints began to invade churches. In spite of the sculptures that have a more certain architectural setting, such as those of the Annunciation and Crucifixes, the relationship between statues of saints and architecture is much more flexible.

Throughout central Italy, the most popular and most frequently represented figure was St Antony Abbot;[39] in the countryside around Pisa, however, St Lucy also enjoyed great popularity. In the church of Montecastello, a village not far from Pontedera, a statue of St Lucy is still much venerated (Fig. 14).[40] This free-standing figure is in a

Fig. 14. *St Lucy before the restoration (h. 134 cm), first decade of the fourteenth century, church of Santa Lucia, Montecastello, Pontedera (from Lorenzo Carletti and Cristiano Giometti,* Scultura lignea pisana, *p. 87)*

frontal pose and wears a green dress with a red mantle; the garment clings to her body at the top and falls in loose and ample folds below, a red belt girding it under her breasts. The saint seems to lean into the viewer's space, bending her neck slightly forward, and her face shows a human sense of contentment, which closely resembles works by the young Giotto. For this reason, we can attribute it to the sculptor of the 'Madre dei Bimbi' of Cigoli, or his workshop, and date it to the first decade of the Trecento.[41]

The vicissitudes of this work exemplify the history of the updating suffered by many medieval wood statues over the centuries; these transformations were mainly due to changes of taste or to variations in the hagiographical tradition. According to legend, St Lucy was a rich Syracusan virgin at the time of Diocletian. During a pilgrimage she gave all her possessions to the poor, inciting her fiancé's anger. Her determination led to her martyrdom, with a sword thurst into her throat.[42] Before the recent restoration, this sculpture bore the attributes associated with this medieval legend: the wounds of the dagger, the crown and the palm of the martyrdom in her left hand. The other hand, however, was extended to support a plate with her eyes. This last feature is due to a later tradition, which inaccurately derives the name 'Lucy' from the Latin word *lux* (light). To fit this new story, the saint's arm was cut at the level of its elbow and rotated to hold the plate.[43]

Located within a wooden aedicule above the main altar, St Lucy is now surrounded by a vast array of relics and reliquaries. Whereas in Early Christian times statues in

wood were conceived as human containers of relics, they gradually began to be venerated for themselves, independently of their contents. For this reason, from the Renaissance onwards, these *simulacra* needed to be suitably reappraised, and were therefore reframed in different architectural settings. The church itself became a monumental and well-ordered reliquary.

L.C.

THE STORY OF A CRUCIFIX IN THE CATHEDRAL OF PISA

If the Santa Lucia of Montecastello was re-framed inside a neo-Gothic tabernacle so as to be more suitably seen and venerated, we should like to conclude with another significant example, that of the so called 'Crocifisso d'Elci', which can be considered a border-line case. It was, in fact, preserved as a precious relic but concealed in a funerary monument in the left transept of Pisa Cathedral.

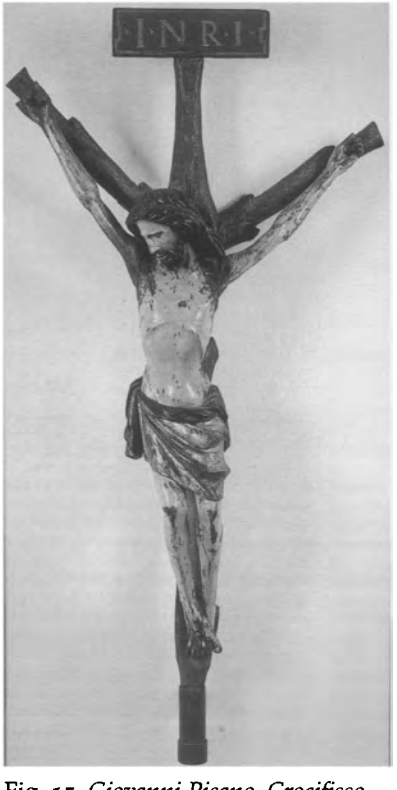

Fig. 15. *Giovanni Pisano, Crocifisso d'Elci (cross h. 87 cm), 1270–80, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Pisa (from Lorenzo Carletti and Cristiano Giometti,* Scultura lignea pisana, *p. 48)*

Fig. 16. *Ferdinando Vaccà, Funerary monument to the Archbishop Francesco Pannocchieschi d'Elci, 1742, Duomo, Pisa (Dept of Art History, University of Pisa)*

This small sculpture was made by Giovanni Pisano between 1270 and 1280 (Fig. 15). He created a type of human and anguished crucifix, which became the prototype of a great number of works with the same iconography, produced in Tuscany throughout the entire fourteenth century. The dramatically extended arms, reclining head, and suffering face of Christ show how Giovanni interpreted the human being in a personal, and extremely modern, way.[44] Although always kept in Pisa Cathedral, this masterpiece was, incredibly, forgotten by faithful and scholars alike for almost two centuries. In fact, it was hidden behind a gilt and inlaid grating in the centre of the grand, late Baroque monument of the Archbishop of Pisa, Francesco Pannocchieschi d'Elci (Fig. 16). Forty years after his death, his nephew Cardinal Ranieri commissioned the tomb from the sculptor Ferdinando Vaccà; the inscription at the base of the sarcophagus informs us that the Archbishop himself asked to be buried under the sacred image: 'Ranieri, the Cardinal of S. Sabina, wanted this image of the Crucifix to be surrounded by ornaments and, with grateful heart, took care of erecting this funerary monument to Francesco of the Counts of Elci'.[45] The profusion of polychrome marble was not conceived just to glorify the prestigious deceased, but rather to create a magnificent setting which, nevertheless, hides the Crucifix from the faithful spectator's gaze. In this case, the will of the Archbishop, and therefore a private dimension of worship, deprived the community of such a masterpiece; it was only critically reappraised in 1986, on the occasion of monument's restoration. Since then it has been preserved in the nearby Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.[46]

C.G.

CONCLUSIONS

Unlike stone sculptures, wooden ones have always had a specific role within the liturgy and particularly in Sacred Representations. For being frequently moved during the *festa* of the Middle Ages, it is difficult to determine a fixed space for each type within the church, apart from the more documented case of the Crucifix which, as we saw, found its natural and more usual location hanging in the *tramezzo*. For the other types, as we have tried to demonstrate, we can only study and trace the various wanderings of each single statue. Their history tells us that they only found a more definitive location after the early modern period. The main causes for this change are the need for an unified gaze, imposed by the birth of the Renaissance perspective; and the requirements of the Counter-Reformation liturgy, which favoured individual, rather than a corporate dimension of worship. Therefore the human space of the faithful becomes separate from that of the sacred images, and the statues are placed in an architectural context by creating niches, shrines and tabernacles. Carved in wood to be easily carried, those sculptures are now framed and crystallized into small devotional sets.

L.C., C.G.

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NOTES

1 Alessandro Bagnoli (ed.), *Scultura Dipinta. Maestri di legname e pittori a Siena (1250–1450)* (Firenze, 1987), catalogue of an exhibition at the Pinacoteca Nazionale of Siena (1987); Clara Baracchini (ed.), *Scultura lignea. Lucca 1200–1425* (Florence, 1995), catalogue of an exhibition at the Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Mansi and Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi of Lucca (Lucca, 1995–96); Mariagiulia Burresi (ed.), *Sacre Passioni, Scultura lignea a Pisa dal XII al XV secolo* (Milan, 2000), catalogue of an exhibition at the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo of Pisa (2000–01). See also Enrico Castelnuovo (ed.), *Imago lignea: scultura lignea nel Trentino dal XIII al XVI secolo* (Trent, 1989); Giovanna Sapori (ed.), *L'immagine, il culto, la forma: antichi gruppi lignei di deposizione* (Montone, 1999); Giuseppina Perusini (ed.), *La scultura lignea dell'arco alpino (1450–1550): storia, stili e tecniche* (Udine, 1999); Elvio Lunghi, *La passione degli Umbri* (Foligno, 2000).

2 Jerry Jordan Pollitt, *The Art of Rome. Sources and Documents* (London, 1966), p. 49. In the same volume see also pp. 33–34, 58, 108. For the sources on Greek Art see Jerry Jordan Pollitt, *The Art of Greece. Sources and Documents* (London, 1965), pp. 5, 7, 14–15, 17, 26, 29, 60, 74, 90–91.

3 Elizabeth Lipsmeyer, 'Devotion and Decorum: Intention and Quality in Medieval German Sculpture', in *Gesta*, 34/1 (1995), pp. 20–27 (p. 20). For a study of the *Palmeselprozessionen* see Johannes Tripps, *Das handelnde Bildwerk in der Gotik. Forschungen zu den Bedeutungsschichten und der Funktion des Kirchengebäudes und seiner Ausstattung in der Hoch- und Spätgotik* (Berlin, 2000).

4 Sebastian Franck, *Weltbuch* (1534), p. 131b, quoted by Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London, 1980), p. 58: 'Auff diß kumpt der Palmtag [...] Vnd füret [man] ein hültzin Esel auff einem wägelin, mit einm darauff gemachten bild yhres Gots, in der statt herumb, singen, werffen palmen für yhn, vnd treiben wil abgötterei mit disem yhrem hültzinen Gott. Der Pfaffer legt sich vor diesem bild nider, den schlecht ein ander pfaff. Die schüler singen vnd deütten mit fingern darauff. Zwen Bachanten legen sich auch mit seltzamer Ceremoni vnd gesang vor vor dem bild nider, da wirfft jedermann mit palmen zu, der den ersten erwischt, treibt vil zauberei damit.'

5 Paul Williamson (ed.), *European Sculpture at the Victoria & Albert Museum* (London, 1996), pp. 104–05.

6 On this sculpture, known in Verona by the name of *Muleta*, Enzo Carli wrote (Enzo Carli, *La scultura lignea italiana* [Milan, 1960], pp. 37–38, Fig. 11): 'Rappresenta Gesù che cavalca un asinello, o meglio una giumenta, e soleva essere recata in processione per la festività della Domenica delle Palme, a ricordo dell'entrata di Cristo in Gerusalemme. Questa devozione, particolarmente diffusa nella Germania meridionale e nell'Austria e nota infatti col nome tedesco di "Palmesel", pare che in Italia venisse assai presto soppressa: il che spiega la estrema rarità da noi di simulacri del genere. La scultura veronese è — a quanto risulta — la sola che ci sia rimasta".

7 Ilene Haering Forsyth, 'Magi and Majesty: A Study of Romanesque Sculpture and Liturgical Drama', in *The Art Bulletin*, 50 (1968), pp. 215–28 (p. 216). In the case of the Romanesque type of the Enthroned Virgin and Child, Forsyth writes (Ilene Haering Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom. Wood sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* [Princeton, 1972], p. 40): 'It is clear that this type of statue was not confined to a single location. Were such peripatetics not desirable, the Madonna would more likely have been made of durable material such as stone.' See also Marco Collareta, 'Le immagini e l'arte. Riflessioni sulla scultura dipinta nelle fonti letterarie', in *Scultura lignea*, pp. 1–7 (p. 1).

8 Lipsmeyer, 'Devotion and Decorum', p. 22: 'Nam si nobis permitteretur corporeis oculis intueri, videremur ipsi dei filio obviam isse, quid sine dubio credi oportet nos fecisse. Licet enim corporaliter non videatur, tamen cuius ipse oculos interiores aperuerit, contueri valet domino nostro Ihesu Cristo nos obviasse.'

9 Forsyth, 'Magi and Majesty', p. 217.

10 Ludovico Zorzi, 'Figurazione pittorica e figurazione teatrale', in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, 1 (Turin, 1979), pp. 421–63 (p. 427): '*festa* or *festum* has remained for a long time the word for indicating the sacred performance, inspired by the legend of a Saint or of the Holy Virgin, or by the crucial moments in the Passion of Christ'

('*festa* o *festum* rimane per lungo tempo il termine sinonimico con il quale viene indicato lo spettacolo sacro, dedicato al leggendario di un santo, della Vergine o ai momenti cruciali della passione di Gesù').

11 André Vauchez, *La spiritualité du Moyen Age occidental* (Paris, 1975).

12 Alessandro Bagnoli, 'Lando di Pietro', in *Scultura Dipinta*, pp. 65–68 (p. 68): 'Anno Domini/ MCCCXXXVII/ di gennaio/ fu compiuta/ questa fi/ gura a si/ militudine/ di yhu xpo/ crocifisso/ figliuolo di / dio vivo et/ vero. Et/ lui dovend/ o adorare/ et non que/ sto legno'. The disparity between the two dates arises from the different calendar adopted by the Commune of Siena.

13 Lorenzo Carletti and Cristiano Giometti, *Scultura lignea pisana. Percorsi nel territorio tra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Milan, 2001), p. 113.

14 Antonino Caleca, 'Il Cristo ligneo del Duomo', in *Il Museo dell'Opera del Duomo a Pisa* (Cinisello Balsamo, 1986), pp. 77–78; Mariagiulia Burresi and Antonino Caleca, 'Sacre Passioni: il Cristo deposto del duomo di Pisa e le Deposizioni di Volterra, Vicopisano e San Miniato', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 24–43. The only remaining figure of this lost group is the Christ, today housed in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo of Pisa.

15 The Volterra Deposition is set on a stone base in the second chapel to the right of the main altar of the cathedral.

16 Before the restoration, the group was thought to be an *Imago pietatis* (Hans Belting, *L'arte e il suo pubblico. Funzione e forme delle antiche immagini della Passione* (Bologna, 1986), pp. 173–76). The recent restoration brought to light surprising similarities in style and composition with the groups of Tivoli and Montone.

17 See Giovanni Carlo Crocchiante, *L'istoria delle chiese della città di Tivoli* (Rome, 1726), p. 42. In the case of the Tivoli *Deposition*, the statues were taken in procession 'every Friday of March by the members of the Confraternity of the town [...] singing verses on the Passion of Christ and the *Miserere*' ('ogni venerdì del mese di marzo da membri della confraternita della città [...] accompagnandolo con il canto di versi sulla passione di Cristo e con il *Miserere*').

18 Solange Corbin, *La déposition liturgié du Christ au Vendredi Saint. Sa place dans l'histoire des rites et du théatre religeux* (Paris-Lisbon, 1960), pp. 114, 120.

19 Alessandro d'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano*, I (Turin, 1891), p. 164: 'Tre chiuove torte dai crocefixo, uno crocefixo grande acto a fare la Devotione.' Nevertheless, in some scenes the presence of a person acting the part of Jesus was necessary: a document of 1257 indicates that, for the representations staged in Siena during Holy Week, a young man ('al giovinotto che fa la parte del Signore') was paid to play that part (d'Ancona, *Origini teatro*, p. 90). See also Claudio Bernardi, *La drammaturgia della settimana santa in Italia* (Milan, 1991).

20 Giovanni Pisano (*c.* 1248–after 1314), the son of Nicola, worked in Siena between 1285 and 1296.

21 'Vera effigie del Miracoloso Crocifisso che si conserva nella chiesa di Sant'Andrea a Palaia all'altare aggregato alla Venerabile Confraternita di San Michele de' Neri di detta terra', quoted in Marco Collareta, 'Aria di Siena', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 129–34 (p. 129).

22 Enrico Castelnuovo, 'Andrea Pisano scultore in legno', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 152–63.

23 Michele Bacci, 'Sculture lignee nel folklore religioso: alcune considerazioni', in *Scultura lignea*, pp. 31–41.

24 The image of this *Crucifix* is published in Michele Tomasi, 'Il Crocifisso di San Giorgio ai Tedeschi e la diffusione del "Crocifisso doloroso"', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 57–76 (p. 74).

25 The chapel is now dedicated to Santa Maria di Loreto.

26 On Renaissance central plan churches see Wolfgang Lotz, *L'architettura del Rinascimento* (Milan, 1997), pp. 121–25. On the church of the Santissimo Crocifisso of San Miniato see Maria Adriana Giusti and Dario Matteoni (eds), *La chiesa del SS. Crocifisso a San Miniato. Restauro e storia* (Turin, 1991).

27 Franco Sacchetti, *Lettere* (Florence, 1857), pp. 218–19: 'E' fu un tempo che a Santa Maria da Cigoli ciascun correa [...]; e poi a Nostra Donna d'Orto San Michele.'

28 Protector of children, the 'Madre dei Bimbi' is especially venerated by pregnant women. Among its famous miracles is the resurrection of a child, an event which is still evoked on 21 July, when people from nearby towns and villages process to the Sanctuary. Also its theft can be considered a kind of miracle; the sculpture was stolen in 1980 and reappeared one winter night, six years later, when the priest heard the doorbell ring and found the sacred image on his doorstep (Lucia Cardone and Lorenzo Carletti, 'La devozione continua', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 236, 240). For the veneration of this sacred image in the fourteenth century see Daniel Borstein, 'The shrine of Santa Maria a Cigoli; female visionaries and clerical promoters', in *Melanges de l'Ecole Français de Rome — Moyen Age-Temps Modernes*, 98 (1986), pp. 219–28; Michele Bacci, '*Pro remedio animae*'. *Immagini sacre e pratiche devozionali in Italia (secoli XIII e XIV)* (Pisa, 2000), pp. 38–42.

29 The stylistic connection between the 'Madre dei Bimbi' and the 'Madonna dei Vetturini' was underlined by Anna Padoa Rizzo, 'Stefano d'Antonio di Vanni a Cigoli', in *Bollettino dell'Accademia degli Euteleuti*, 1990, 57, pp. 75–83. Marco Collareta studied this relationship, independently, but drew different and more convincing conclusions: Collareta, 'Immagini di devozione tra scultura e pittura', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 51–54.

30 In 1333 the church received the gift of a thorn, supposedly part of the crown of Christ; it then changed its name to Santa Maria della Spina. Because it was erected on the bank of the river and exposed to frequent floods, in the second half of the nineteenth century the building was taken down piece by piece and rebuilt on the present site, which is one metre higher than the previous one.

31 Dino Frosini, 'La collocazione della immagine della Madonna "in pié di ponte" nel Cinque e nel Seicento', in *La* 'Madonna dei Vetturini' (Pisa, 1982), pp. 4–8.

32 The statues of Santa Caterina can be considered the prototype of the wooden *Annunciation* (sixth to seventh decades of the fourteenth century) preserved in the National Gallery of Washington.

33 Paul Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture 1140–1300* (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 204–06.

34 Since the later Middle Ages, these wooden statues were also used for performing the Annunciation. See Karl Young, *The Drama of the medieval Church*, II (Oxford, 1962), p. 245, n. 6, pp. 479–80. We know that in Parma, for example, 'artificial figures of the Angel Gabriel and Mary were used at the pulpit where the Gospel was read. The figure of Gabriel was lowered from an opening in the roof'.

35 A local legend tells how the two statues were recovered from the ruins of an old church which was situated not very far away from the hills, along the road which runs beside the oratory. They were transported on a oxcart, and it was decided to construct the new building to accommodate the statues at the place where the cart stopped. For devotional reasons, these figures had movable arms, so as to be easily dressed in real clothes (Cardone and Carletti, 'La devozione continua', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 234–44).

36 See Marco Collareta, 'La chiesa cattolica e l'arte in età moderna. Un itinerario', in *Storia dell'arte religiosa* (Bari, 1994), pp. 167–88.

37 Cesare Molinari, *Spettacoli fiorentini del Quattrocento. Contributi allo studio delle Sacre Rappresentazioni* (Venezia, 1961), p. 67. By the term 'Sacred Representation' (*Sacra Rappresentazione*) we mean the 'dramatic representations in *ottava* rhyme, performed in a certain way, and frequently by some confraternities in Florence, during the Quattrocento'. In 'Sacred Representations' we see a progressive definition of the *loci deputati* of the different episodes performed; besides the aforementioned isolation of the stage, the theatrical machinery became more complex and sophisticated, as is shown by Brunelleschi's *mise en scène* of the Annunciation (25 March 1439) in the Florentine church of Santissima Annunziata (Ludovico Zorzi, 'La scenotecnica brunelleschiana. Problemi filologici e interpretativi', in *Filippo Brunelleschi. La sua opera e il suo tempo* (Florence, 1977), pp. 161–71).

38 Paola Ventrone, 'I Sacri Monti: un esempio di teatro pietrificato?', in *La Gerusalemme di San Vivaldo e i Sacri Monti in Europa* (Florence, 1986), pp. 145–162 (p. 155): 'The clear separation between the drama and the audience reproduces a situation very similar to that one imposed by Renaissance perspective' ('La netta opposizione tra lo spettacolo e il pubblico riproduce una condizione di fruizione molto simile a quella imposta dalla scena prospettica rinascimentale'). For the Sacri Monti see also Rudolf Wittkower, 'I Sacri Monti delle Alpi italiane', in *Idea e immagine. Studi sul Rinascimento italiano* (Turin, 1992), pp. 322–38; Santino Langé and Alberto Pensa, *Il Sacro Monte. Esperienza del reale e spazio virtuale nell'iconografia della passione a Varallo* (Milan, 1991).

39 St Antony Abbot lived in the third and the fourth centuries, but the religious order which bears his name was founded only in the eleventh century. The monks of this order were devoted to curing various diseases, especially ergotism, using pork-fat. For this reason, they were allowed to pasture pigs and annually, on 23 December and on 17 January, they slaughtered the animals and gave the meat to the poor. Since medieval times, St Antony himself has been represented with a little pig at his feet.

40 A local tradition tells that the statue, found in a nearby woods, was fought over by the neighbouring villages. Placed on a cart drawn by oxen, the sculpture itself decided to go to Montecastello to take care of the community there.

41 Collareta, 'Immagini di devozione', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 51–54.

42 Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda aurea*, thirteenth century (Turin, 1995), pp. 34–37.

43 Figure 14 shows St Lucy before the recent restoration, which deprived the statue of all the attributes added throughout the centuries.

44 A local legend tells how this small sculpture was usually located on the top of the pulpit by Giovanni Pisano himself in Pisa Cathedral, at the time of Thomas Aquinas' preaching. For the *Crocifisso d'Elci* see Enzo Carli, 'Giovanni Pisano e Tino di Camaino', in *Il Museo dell'Opera*, pp. 83–101 (p. 90); Max Seidel, 'Sculpens in ligno splendida. Sculture lignee di Giovanni Pisano', in *Sacre Passioni*, pp. 79–94.

45 '[...]/ ICONEM HANC J. CRUCIFIXI CIRCUMORNARI/ ET/ FRANCISCO EX COMITIBUS ILCII/ CARD. SCIPIONIS/ QUI SEDEM HANC PRIMATIAL TENUIT ANNOS XXVII. MEN. V./ EX FRATRE NEPOTI/ PROXIMOQUE ILLIUS PER AN. XXXVIII: MEN. IX IN EA SUCCESSORI/ HEIC CONCITO/ GRATI ANIMI MONUMENTUM PONI CURAVIT/ RAYNERIUS TIT. S. SABINAE CARD./ PATRUO AMATISSIMO/ A. S. MDCCXLII.' For the Elci monument see Adriano Peroni (ed.), *Il Duomo di Pisa*, III (Modena, 1995), pp. 456–57.

46 The Crucifix has already been mentioned by Margrit Lisner in *Holzkruzifixe in Florenz und in der Toskana von der Zeit um 1300 bis zum frühen Cinquecento* (Munich, 1970), p. 19.