

**THE ICONOGRAPHY OF *THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN*
IN LATE MEDIEVAL ITALIAN PAINTING. A CASE STUDY**

**LA ICONOGRAFÍA DE *LA CORONACIÓN DE LA VIRGEN*
EN LA PINTURA ITALIANA BAJOMEDIEVAL. ANÁLISIS DE CASOS**

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Abstract: This paper aims to highlight the artistic and conceptual relevance acquired by the iconographic theme of *The Coronation of the Virgin* in Italy during the Late Middle Ages. To achieve this goal we analyzed twenty-seven *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* paintings, with the purpose of discovering in them the more or less innovative compositional formulas proposed by these artists, as well as the possible literary sources that inspired them. From the formal perspective we have discovered three different iconographic types, which complement themselves mutually, as progressively complex variations of a similar basic structure. From the conceptual perspective we could also specify that these three different iconographic types of *The Coronation of the Virgin* in Italy are inspired directly in specific comments by some Church Fathers and medieval theologians.

Keywords: Medieval Art, Marian iconography, Coronation of the Virgin, *Trecento*, *Quattrocento*, theological sources.

Resumen: Este artículo pretende subrayar la relevancia artística y conceptual adquirida por el tema iconográfico de *La Coronación de la Virgen* en Italia durante la Baja Edad Media. Para lograr ese objetivo analizamos veintiséis obras de pintores del *Trecento* y el *Quattrocento*, con el propósito de descubrir en ellas las fórmulas compositivas más o menos innovadoras que dichos artistas proponen, así como las posibles fuentes literarias en las que se inspiran. Desde la perspectiva formal descubrimos tres diferentes tipos iconográficos, que se complementan mutuamente, como variantes progresivamente complejizadas de una similar estructura básica. Desde la perspectiva conceptual hemos podido precisar además que esos tres distintos tipos iconográficos de *La Coronación de la Virgen* en Italia se inspiran de manera directa en comentarios específicos de ciertos Padres de la Iglesia y teólogos medievales.

Palabras clave: Arte medieval, iconografía mariana, Coronación de la Virgen, *Trecento*, *Quattrocento*, fuentes teológicas.

Summary: 1. Preliminaries. Iconographic types of *The Coronation of the Virgin* in the late medieval Italian painting. 2.1. First type: The Coronation of the Virgin with angels. 2.2. Second type: The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints. 2.3. Third type: The Coronation of the Virgin with scenes from the life of Jesus or Mary. 3. Conclusions. Sources and Bibliography.

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1. Preliminaries¹

The image of *The Coronation of the Virgin*² –an event that concludes and culminates the prodigious episodes of her Death or Dormition³ and her bodily Assumption to heaven⁴— constitutes the most significant epiphany of Savior’s Mother as Queen of Heaven, an idea that, incidentally, is also expressed in the iconographic topics of *La Maestà* and the *Sacra Conversazione*. In fact, the act itself of being enthroned and crowned as Queen of the angels, saints, virgins, patriarchs, prophets and all the blessed from Paradise grants to the *Theotokos* the symbolic title that legitimates her to be represented in the various forms of the *Maiestas Mariae*.

¹ We would like to sincerely thank our friend Patricia Grau-Dieckmann for her valuable comments, by giving us notice some small inaccuracies that we had slipped in the previous version of this text.

² We did a first analytical approach to this iconographic theme in Chapter 6 of our book *Ancilla et Regina. Aproximaciones a la iconografía mariana en la Edad Media*, Saarbrücken, Editorial Académica Española, 2012, p. 175-209.

³ We have studied this iconographic topic of the Dormition of Mary in the following works: “La Dormición de la Virgen en el arte bizantino durante los Paleólogos: Estudio de cuatro casos”. In: GARCÍA MAHÍQUES, Rafael and ZURIAGA SENENT, Vicent F. (eds.), *Imagen y cultura: La interpretación de las imágenes como Historia cultural*, Valencia, Generalitat Valenciana / Universitat Internacional de Gandía, Col·lecciò Biblioteca Valenciana, 2008, Vol. II, p. 1425-1436; “La Dormición de la Virgen en la iglesia de la Panagia Peribleptos de Ohrid (Macedonia): Análisis iconográfico a partir de las fuentes apócrifas”. In: PEÑA, Concepción de la, PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ, Manuel, ALBERO, María del Mar, MARÍN TORRES, María Teresa and GONZÁLEZ MARTÍNEZ, Juan Miguel (eds.), *Imagen y Apariencia*. Murcia, Editum, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Murcia, 2009, p. 1-14; “El fresco de La Dormición de María en la iglesia de la Stma. Trinidad de Sopoćani a la luz de tres apócrifos asuncionistas”, *Espéculo*, nº 47, March-June 2011, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid; “The Death of the Virgin Mary (1295) in the Macedonian church of the Panagia Peribleptos in Ohrid. Iconographic interpretation from the perspective of three apocryphal writings”, *Mirabilia. Revista Eletrônica de Antiguidade & Idade Média*. nº 13, Vitória, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Brasil, July-December 2011, p. 237-268; “Iconografía de *La Dormición de la Virgen* en los siglos X-XII. Análisis a partir de sus fuentes legendarias”, *Anales de Historia del Arte*, Vol. 21, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2011, p. 9-52.

⁴ We have addressed this iconographic issue of the Assumption of Mary in these papers: “La iconografía de *La Asunción de la Virgen María* a la luz de sus fuentes. Análisis de ocho obras pictóricas del *Quattrocento* italiano”. In: *Actas del International Colloquium “Contemporary Perspectives on the Medieval World. The Concept of ‘Norm’” (Perspective Contemporane asupra lumii medieval)*, nr. 2/2010, Pitesti, University of Pitesti (Rumania), Editura Tiparg (en prensa); “La iconografía de *La Asunción de la Virgen María* en la pintura del *Quattrocento* italiano a la luz de sus fuentes patrísticas y teológicas”, *Mirabilia. Revista Eletrônica de Antiguidade & Idade Média*. nº 12, Vitória, Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Brasil, January-June 2011, p. 189-220.

As we have already pointed out in other previous studies,⁵ the liturgical feasts of the Virgin's Dormition and Assumption and their respective iconographies are inspired in oral legends and apocryphal writings, as well as in homilies, treatises, comments and liturgical texts from Church Fathers and Doctors, theologians, apologists, mystics and some other spiritual authors. Among the apocryphal assumption writings the *Book of Pseudo St. John the Evangelist*, also known as Pseudo John the Theologian⁶ (fourth century or earlier), the homily of Archbishop John of Thessaloniki⁷ (c. early seventh century), and the Story of Pseudo Joseph of Arimathea⁸ are the most outstanding. However, in contrast to the similar iconographies of Mary's Dormition and Assumption, that of her Coronation is inspired especially in patristic and theological sources, as the apocrypha offer very few, insignificant testimonies in favor of the privilege granted to the Redeemer's Mother as Sovereign of the Paradise. On the other hand, references to Mary as Queen of Heaven –and, hence, to her legitimating Coronation on the throne of her divine Son— by Church Doctors, theologians, hymnographers, homilists, and medieval philosophers are numerous and very significant, as we shall see soon after through some appropriate quotations.

According to experts, the specific iconography of the Coronation of the God's Mother⁹ begins in the middle of the twelfth century in England, in the tympanum of Mary's portico in the Church of Quenington,¹⁰ Gloucestershire (c. 1140):¹¹ this tympanum shows Jesus crowning (or, perhaps, only blessing)¹² the Virgin, both sharing the same double throne, between the four symbols of the Tetramorphs and two escorting angels, while a building in the form of a temple stands on the right flank.¹³ Nearly three decades later, a new representation of

⁵ See the notes 3 and 4 above.

⁶ PSEUDO-JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN, *Tratado de San Juan el Teólogo sobre la dormición de la Santa Madre de Dios*. Bilingual text Greek / Spanish. In: Aurelio de SANTOS OTERO, *Los Evangelios Apócrifos*, Salamanca, La Editorial Católica, Col. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 148, 2006, p. 576-600.

⁷ JOHN OF THESALONIKI, *Dormición de Nuestra Señora, Madre de Dios y siempre Virgen María*. Bilingual text Greek / Spanish. In: SANTOS OTERO 2006: 605-639.

⁸ PSEUDO-JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA, *De transitu Beatae Mariae Virginis (auctore Pseudo-Josepho ab Arimathea)*. Bilingual text Latin / Spanish. In: SANTOS OTERO 2006: 640-653.

⁹ For an excellent analysis of this iconographic theme, see Philippe VERDIER, *Le couronnement de la Vierge. Les origines et les premiers développements d'un thème iconographique*, Paris, Librairie J. Vrin, 1980, 277 p. No less documented, although more oriented toward the iconography of the Assumption of Mary, is the dense case study of Marie-Louise THEREL, *Le triomphe de la Vierge-Église. Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques*, Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 1984, 374 p.

¹⁰ Repr. in VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 1.

¹¹ Cf. VERDIER 1980: 17.

¹² Both possibilities, to crown or to bless, are stated by VERDIER 1980: 17.

¹³ See the analysis by VERDIER (1980: 17-18) on this tympanum of Quenington.

this item fills the tympanum of the portico of the facade of the French Cathedral of Senlis,¹⁴ datable c. 1170¹⁵ according to most experts.¹⁶ In a clearest and most explicit way than that of Quenington, the Senlis tympanum¹⁷ represents the Mary's glorification as Queen of Heaven in a double aspect: two twin compositions describe in the lintel the burial of the Virgin Mary (on the left) and her resurrection (on the right), suggested by the fact that she is being awakened from her Dormition by the angels; on those two symmetrical scenes the event of Mary's glorification expands on the tympanum, in which Christ blesses his already crowned Mother, while both sit separately on two identical thrones.

In the first third of the thirteenth century other outstanding models of this iconographic subject are displayed in some portals of French cathedrals, as, for example, in those of Laon (1195-1205),¹⁸ Chartres (1205-1210),¹⁹ Paris²⁰ (c. 1210-1220),²¹ Strasbourg (c. 1230)²² and Reims (c. 1245-1255).²³ This connoted Marian subject spreads later on throughout Europe in monumental sculptures increasingly more complex, as you can see in Spain in certain tympana of the cathedrals of Ávila²⁴ (Portico of the Apostles, thirteenth century),²⁵ Leon

¹⁴ Marie-Louise THÉREL proposes a thorough analysis of this tympanum of Senlis from its historical, literary and iconographic sources in her already mentioned monograph (1984).

¹⁵ Wilibald SAUERLÄNDER (*La sculpture gothique en France, 1140-1270*, Paris, Flammarion 1972, s.p., fig. 42) and Marie-Louise THÉREL (1984) date c. 1170 this Coronation of Mary in the west portal of the Senlis Cathedral. Paul WILLIAMSON (*Escultura gótica, 1140-1300*, Madrid, Cátedra, Manuales Arte Cátedra, 1997, p. 58, fig. 37) prefers to date it c. 1165-1170.

¹⁶ VERDIER (1980: 9) dates this relief of Senlis about 1153, and considers it the first sculpture in France that figures the Coronation of Mary.

¹⁷ Repr. in SAUERLÄNDER 1972: s.p. fig. 42; VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 9, 10 and 11; and THÉREL 1984: s.p., pl. I, fig. 1; pl. LIV, fig. 110; and pl. LV, fig. 111.

¹⁸ Repr. in VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 14.

¹⁹ Repr. in SAUERLÄNDER 1972: s.p., fig. 76, 77, 78 and 79; VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 18, 19 and 20. SAUERLÄNDER (*Ibidem*) dates c. 1205-1210 this Coronation of Mary in the central portico of the north transept of the Chartres Cathedral.

²⁰ Repr. in SAUERLÄNDER 1972: s.p., fig. 152 and 153; VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 21.

²¹ With some laxity SAUERLÄNDER (1972: s.p., fig. 152) dates c. 1210-1220 this Coronation of the Virgin of the left portico on the west facade of the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris. Paul Williamson (1997: 91, fig. 77) places it with more precision c. 1220.

²² Repr. in SAUERLÄNDER 1972: s.p., fig. 130 and 131; WILLIAMSON 1997: 94, fig. 80. The latter author (*Ibid.*) dates c. 1225-1230 this Coronation of the portico of the south transept of the Strasbourg Cathedral.

²³ Repr. in SAUERLÄNDER 1972: s.p., fig. 190 and 191. This author (*Ibid.*) dates c. 1245-1255 this Coronation of Mary on the gable of the central portico on the west facade of the Reims Cathedral, while Paul WILLIAMSON (1997: 238, Fig. 232) prefers to date it c. 1255-1275.

²⁴ Repr. in WILLIAMSON 1997: 353, fig. 355.

²⁵ Paul WILLIAMSON (1997: 353) dates c.1280-1290 this Coronation in the northern portal of the Avila Cathedral.

(Portico of Saint Francis, second half of the thirteenth century), the old Cathedral of Vitoria (Saint Mary's Portico, fourteenth century), Pampelune ("Precious Door" of the cathedral cloister, c. 1350-1360),²⁶ as well as in the Collegiate of Toro,²⁷ in the province of Zamora (Portico of the Majesty, c. 1290-1295)²⁸ and other Spanish Gothic churches.²⁹

It is symptomatic in this respect the fact that in France and Spain the image of Mary's crowning assumes almost always the form of an architectural relief, preferably in porticos' tympana of cathedrals and large churches, while its pictorial manifestations in both countries are exceptional. Among such pictorial exceptions highlights, in France, the famous *Coronation of the Virgin* by Enguerrand Quarton,³⁰ or the much more modest Spanish specimens of Coronations in the *Frontal of Lluçà*, today in the Episcopal Museum of Vic,³¹ the *Altarpiece of St. Mary Rubio* (c. fourteenth century), a work of the anonymous Master of Rubio, the *Altarpiece of Sijena*, a work of Francesc Serra and his workshop (second half of the fourteenth century),³² the *Altarpiece of the Holy Spirit* in the Church of St. Mary in Manresa (1390-1394), a Pere Serra's work,³³ and the altarpiece of the main altar of Salamanca Old Cathedral of (1430-1450),³⁴

²⁶ For a hermeneutical study of this portico of the cloister of the cathedral of Pampeluna, see our recent work "La Puerta Preciosa de la catedral de Pamplona. Interpretación iconográfica fundada en fuentes apócrifas", *Eikón Imago*, nº 2, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, July-December 2012, p. 1-48.

²⁷ Repr. in José María de AZCÁRATE RISTORI, *Arte gótico en España*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1990, p. 148; and WILLIAMSON 1997: 351, fig. 352.

²⁸ AZCÁRATE RISTORI (1990: 148) dates this Coronation of the Collegiate Church of Toro at the end of the second third of the thirteenth century, while WILLIAMSON (1997: 351, Fig. 352) pins it down c. 1270-1280.

²⁹ For an overview on the essential Marian Coronations in the portals of medieval Spain, see Matilde AZCÁRATE LUXÁN, "La Coronación de la Virgen en la escultura de los pórticos góticos españoles", *Anales de Historia del Arte*, nº 4, Madrid, Universidad Complutense, 1994, p. 353-363.

³⁰ A thorough study of this work of Enguerrand Quarton is brought by Jean LE PICHON, *Le mystère du Couronnement de la Vierge*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1982, 117 p.

³¹ Repr. in VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 59.

³² Francesc Serra and workshop, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, lower panel of the exterior section of the *Sijena Altarpiece*.

³³ Pere Serra, *The Coronation of the Virgin Mary*, intermediate panel of central section of the *Altarpiece of the Holy Spirit*, church of St. Mary, Manresa.

³⁴ For a case study of this important altarpiece, see Francisco Javier PANERA CUEVAS, *El retablo de la Catedral Vieja de Salamanca*, Salamanca, Caja Duero, 2000, 397 p.

by Dello Delli and his two brothers, Sansone Delli and Nicola Delli (known in Spain as Nicolás Florentino).³⁵

Regarding the iconography of *The Coronation of the Virgin*, Italy –notably Tuscany— occupies a very singular place, for here this iconographic theme, even having been implanted with some delay at the end of the thirteenth century,³⁶ spread very quickly reaching a huge popularity during the following century,³⁷ with a breadth and conceptual complexity unusual by comparison with other countries. Furthermore, the Italian *Coronations* are carried almost always in painting –usually tempera on wood, in numerous panels, triptychs, polyptychs and altarpieces, sometimes not excluding the techniques of stained glass or mosaic—, discarding almost completely its sculptural making in portals or capitals.³⁸

According to Philippe Verdier, the success achieved by the subject of the Mary's Coronation in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries obeys to two significant doctrinal reasons. First of all, it can be explained, because since the end of the eleventh century the previous doubts about the bodily Assumption of Mary, inspired by a letter attributed to the Pseudo-St. Jerome,³⁹ give way now to the increasing strong assertion of the assumption's doctrine, promoted initially by the Pseudo-Augustine,⁴⁰ whose anonymous text *De Assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis*⁴¹ seems to be the work of St. Paschase Radbert (785-865).⁴² The second reason to explain the popular success of this subject derives from the fact that for

³⁵ In this altarpiece in Salamanca the scene of *The Coronation of the Virgin* occupies the last and most conclusive place in the series of panels, in that of the pinnacle located in the outer right edge of the polyptych, just under the fresco of the Last Judgment.

³⁶ With a certain analogy, the monumental anonymous mosaic that dominates the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome, second half of the twelfth century (repr. in VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig 43) could be considered an Italian antecedent of the topic being studied. However, this mosaic represents *The Enthronement of the Virgin next to her Son Jesus*, an idea and image that are similar to –though not all identical to— those of the *Coronation of the Virgin*.

³⁷ The first monumental example of this theme is the mosaic of Jacopo Torriti c. 1295-1296, in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which will be discussed later.

³⁸ We do not recall any Italian example of monumental sculpture of the Coronation of Mary with architectural function. As far as we know, the only monumental representations of this subject in medieval Italy integrated in the architecture are the mosaics of facade in some cathedrals, as that of Siena (1220-1263), whose main (West) facade exhibits in its central triangular pediment a gigantic Coronation in mosaic.

³⁹ PSEUDO-ST. JEROME, *Epistola ad Paulam et Eustochium*. PL 30, 123 ss.

⁴⁰ VERDIER 1980: 14.

⁴¹ PSEUDO-ST. AUGUSTINE, *De Assumptione beatae Mariae Virginis Liber unus Incerti auctoris ac pii*. PL 40, 1141-1148.

⁴² See VV.AA., “Maria Santissima-Madre di Gesù Cristo, Figlio di Dio fattosi uomo”, *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, Città del Vaticano, Ente per l'Enciclopedia Cattolica, 1952, vol. VIII col. 201. See also José María BOVER, *La Asunción de María. Estudio teológico histórico sobre la Asunción corporal de la virgen a los cielos*, Madrid, Editorial Católica, 1947, p. 112, note 49.

the first half of the twelfth century the traditional interpretation of the *Song of Songs* in Ecclesiological sense is replaced now by a specifically Marian interpretation:⁴³ better than with the abstract and impersonal allegoric figure of the Church, the Bride of the *Song of Songs* is now identified with the specific and individual person of the Virgin Mary.

Nonetheless, to better understand the wide spread in Italy of the subject of the Coronation of the Messiah's Mother, in addition to those two reasons rightly exposed by Verdier we must add as an essential stimulation the increasing devotion of the Italians to the *Madonna*, who, under her very different names, is often exalted in the Italian peninsula to the category of patron saint of many cities, communes, corporations, religious orders, confraternities and other associations.⁴⁴

This essay tries to analyze a representative group of Marian *Coronations* produced by Italian *Trecento* painters, with occasional forays into some *Quattrocento*'s similar examples. To support with greater strength our analysis, we will proceed according to a three-pronged methodological strategy: 1) from the structural perspective, we will point out the different kinds of composition and narrative structure, depending on the characters and situations present in the described scene; 2) from the stylistic and formal side, we will try to spotlight (even though without insisting on it) the possible linkages of morphological affinity/influence among some pieces under scrutiny;⁴⁵ 3) lastly –and this will be our main focus of interest– in the hermeneutic scope, we will seek to interpret any ideas and meanings underlying under such pictorial images, inspiring us for this purpose in doctrinal teachings of theologians and medieval Christian writers.

Before developing this triple objective, we will discuss two original Italian exemplars of *Coronation of the Virgin*, that, both for their early date and for their compositional complexity, provide already the essential narrative and conceptual guidelines for subsequent Italian representations of this subject. These two original models are the stained-glass window by Duccio di Buoninsegna in the Siena Cathedral (1287-1288), and Pietro Torriti's monumental mosaic in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (1295-1296).

⁴³ VERDIER 1980: 14.

⁴⁴ For a documented study on the incidence of the cult of the Virgin Mary in the political and social life of the city of Siena, see the excellent monograph of Diana NORMAN, *Siena and the Virgin. Art and politics in a late medieval city state*, New Haven / London, Yale University Press, 1999, viii,251 p.

⁴⁵ It is not in any way our priority objective to try to specify the possible –and highly problematic– influences or derivations between the various artists and paintings present in this essay.



Fig. 1a. Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Entombment, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, 1287-88, stained glass, Siena Cathedral. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 18/08/2012).



Fig. 1b. Duccio di Buoninsegna, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (detail), 1287-88.

Compartimento superior del vitral de la catedral de Siena.

Originally located in the circular window (*oculus*) on the apse of the Siena Cathedral, this stained glass designed by Duccio di Buoninsegna⁴⁶ (c. 1255-1319) in 1287-1288 (Figs. 1a and 1b)⁴⁷ is organized in nine compartments around a narrative central axis,⁴⁸ where, in perfect conceptual sequence, three Marian episodes inextricably joined come about one after another, down to above: in the lower compartment, the Mary's Dormition / Funeral / Resurrection; in the center, her bodily Assumption into heaven; in the upper field, her Coronation as Queen of Heaven.⁴⁹ Completing the stained glass, Duccio located in the arms of the structuring Greek cross the four protective Saints of Siena –from left to right, St.

⁴⁶ John WHITE tries to demonstrate that this stained glass window is the work of Cimabue (or his workshop), using the following arguments: “Se acepta por lo general que esta vidriera, a la que hay que considerar como uno de los monumentos más importantes del arte italiano de las postrimerías del siglo XIII, es obra de Duccio. Sin embargo, presenta casi por doquier puntos de contacto relacionados directamente con la obra de Cimabue. La construcción especialmente vigorosa de los diversos tronos marmóreos y la disposición natural de los ángeles en torno al que aparece en la escena de la *Coronación*, encajaría perfectamente dentro de la evolución sufrida por Cimabue pocos años después de la ejecución de la *Madona de Santa Trinidad* y de la finalización de la obra de Asís, en la que tuvo lugar la transición desde los tronos de madera de estilo bizantino a las estructuras de mármol. Además, la costumbre de permitir que los tronos, las alas y los nimbos invadan el espacio reservado a las orlas decorativas es una característica de los frescos de Asís. Es un fenómeno desconocido en la obra de Duccio, el pintor de tablas. La presencia en Asís de nutridas escuelas de vidrieristas septentrionales y el conocimiento, presumiblemente profundo, que Cimabue tuvo de ellas y su obra, de la que la suya fue un complemento, es compatible por completo con el traslado posterior de la visión típica del pintor de frescos al campo del arte vidrierístico, arte relacionado con el anterior, pero que hasta ese momento ocupaba un lugar enteramente diferenciado. Con estos supuestos no resulta más extraño encontrar a Cimabue obteniendo un encargo importante en la Siena de Duccio que encontrar a Duccio ejecutando un retablo en la Florencia de Cimabue. El modelado de muchas de las cabezas de la escena del *Tránsito* se encuentra más cerca del estilo de Asís que del de una cualquiera de las de Duccio, y algunas de aquellas en las que se advierte un tradicionalismo menos patente, como por ejemplo, la de San Lucas, son típicas de Cimabue en la misma medida que resultan incompatibles con el estilo de Duccio. De forma similar, los ropajes de los ángeles, así como su postura y proporciones, encaja en la evolución que se anuncia en Santa Trinidad y en Asís, y otro tanto ocurre con el tratamiento de los pliegues a lo largo de los muslos en escorzo de la Virgen que aparece en la escena de la *Coronación*. En resumen: existen buenas razones para atribuir el diseño de la vidriera, e incluso el modelado efectivo de muchas de las cabezas, a Cimabue en lugar de a Duccio. En cualquier caso, la vidriera, como mínimo, no parece ser, a pesar de su ubicación geográfica, una obra de Duccio y sí en cambio del taller de Cimabue o de su círculo íntimo.” (John WHITE, *Arte y arquitectura en Italia, 1250-1400*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1997 [1966], p. 231-233).

⁴⁷ Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Entombment, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin*, 1287-88, stained glass, 700 cm diameter. Siena Cathedral.

⁴⁸ Repr. in VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 49.

⁴⁹ The indissoluble link between these three Marian episodes had been popularized in Europe, especially in France, since the late twelfth century, with its manifestation in the portico of Senlis, as it has already be seen.

Bartholomew,⁵⁰ St. Ansanus, St. Savinus and St. Crescentius—, while in the remaining circular sectors locates the four evangelists solemnly enthroned with their respective tetramorphic symbols. By highlighting the presence of the four evangelists with such relevance, Duccio wishes to reinforce the idea that the Mary's royalty is entirely legitimated under her status as Messiah's Mother, confirmed again and again in the text of the four Gospels. In terms of the specific scene of the Virgin's Coronation, Duccio provides in this stained glass an emblematic model of composition, that will be successful in many subsequent Italian Coronations: boasting his characteristic cruciferous nimbus, Christ put the royal crown on his mother's head, bowed in a humble and devout attitude, with the hands crossed over the chest, while both sit on a sumptuous common throne,⁵¹ flanked by six angels in solemn guard of honor.



Fig. 2. Jacopo Torriti, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1295-1296, mosaic. Apse of Santa Maria Maggiore, Roma. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 25/08/2012).

Commissioned by Pope Nicholas IV to Jacopo Torriti (active between 1270-1300) to preside over the apse of Santa Maria Maggiore's basilica in Rome, this

⁵⁰ According to other scholars, this character is not St. Bartholomew, but St. Victor.

⁵¹ This compositional structure conceived by Duccio about 1295-96 in this stained glass window recedes in substantial measure of the original composition embodied approximately one hundred and twenty years before (1170) in the tympanum of the western portico of the cathedral of Senlis. In this French relief Christ blesses his mother, who, already wielding the crown on her head and holding a book in her right hand, sits upright on the pose on an autonomous throne, separate from that of her Son.

vast mosaic (Fig. 2),⁵² signed and dated in 1296 by Torriti,⁵³ is the first work in Italy that captures this iconographic motif in a monumental scale.⁵⁴ Its central focus is an enormous *Coronation of the Virgin*, a ceremony which two groups of angels and six saints attend as favorite witnesses,⁵⁵ while in the lower strip of the oven vault, as a *predella*, five Marian scenes complete the main episode: the Annunciation, the Nativity of Jesus, the Dormition of Mary, the Adoration of the Magi and the Presentation of Jesus to the temple. Torriti deliberately locates the event of the Dormition in the center of the lower strip, just under the Coronation, to reinforce the essential nexus of both episodes, namely the Mary's crowning immediately after and as a culmination of her Dormition / Resurrection / Assumption. In the monumentalized center stage, seated on a double throne of gold and gemstones, one can see Mary and Jesus Christ (with his distinctive cruciferous nimbus), who, displaying in his left hand an open book with the inscription *Veni Electa mea et ponam in te Thronum meum*,⁵⁶ places with his right hand the crown on her mother's head,⁵⁷ captured in praying pose, with her arms open upwards, in clear attitude of intercession.⁵⁸ It is useful to point out

⁵² Jacopo Torriti, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1295-1296, mosaic. Apse of Santa Maria Maggiore, Roma.

⁵³ The fact that, despite the clear marking of the year of production that is registered in the quoted epigraphic legend in the mosaic, Philippe VERDIER (1980: 153) dates it in 1292-1295 seems a little strange. On the other hand, Steffi ROETTGEN (*Fresques italiennes de la Renaissance, 1400-1470*, Paris, Citadelles & Mazenod, 1996-a, p. 397) dates these mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore between 1290 and 1295, while Joachim POESCHKE (*Fresques italiennes du temps de Giotto, 1280-1400*, Paris, Citadelles & Mazenod, 2003, p. 23) argues that they were completed in 1296.

⁵⁴ Repr. in David TALBOT RICE (*Byzantine art*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, Coll. Pelican books, 1968 [1935], p. 140, fig.109); Alastair SMART (*The Dawn of Italian Painting 1250-1400*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1978, s.p., fig. 32); VERDIER 1980: s.p., fig. 46 and 47; ROETTGEN 1996-a: 397, fig. 113; and POESCHKE 2003: 23.

⁵⁵ Alastair SMART (1978: 26) describes this mosaic of Torriti with a mere formalistic approach.

⁵⁶ Such epigraphic inscription, taken from a Matins responso of the liturgical service of the feast of the Assumption, is the same which is presented in the book that Christ carries in his left hand on the mosaic which, with a similar iconographic theme (*Mary enthroned as Queen of Heaven*), was installed some years before in the apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome. Cf. VERDIER 1980: 41. Repr. in *Ibid.*: s.p., fig 45.

⁵⁷ The pose and the situation of both protagonists are substantially the same as those of other previous Coronations, as, for example, that of the relief in the tympanum of the main entrance of the cathedral of Ciudad Rodrigo (Salamanca), which, following the opinion of Manuel Gómez-Moreno, AZCÁRATE RISTORI (1990: 145, repr. p. 146) dates *post* 1224. The Coronation of the Virgin in the tympanum of the portico of the Collegiate of Toro exhibits an identical compositional structure, that AZCÁRATE RISTORI (1990: 147, repr. p. 148) dates at the end of the second third of the thirteenth century.

⁵⁸ This attitude of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the stained glass window by Duccio is quite similar to that which, almost nine decades before (1205-1210), was imagined by the sculptor of the Coronation of Mary in the tympanum of the central portal of the North transept of the

that, except the detail of the Christ's gesture of holding an open book (a gesture rarely repeated by other Italian artists), the essential design conceived by Torriti in this mosaic –Jesus placing the crown over Mary's head, while both, covered by rich royal robes, sit on a double throne— will become the basic compositional structure with which the Italian *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* painters will interpret almost always the motive of the *Coronation of the Virgin*.⁵⁹ On the edge of the throne in the Torriti's mosaic, two cohorts of angels escort and pay homage to the enthroned heavenly couple, while at both ends of the conca six saints celebrate the triumph of their Sovereign: on the left, St. Francis, San Paul and St. Peter, before whom the donor Pope Nicholas IV appears kneeling; on the right, St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist and St. Anthony of Padova. The basis of this Roman mosaic set displays two inscriptions in capital letters. The first proclaims: MARIA VIRGO ASSVMPTA EST AD ETHEREVM THALAMVM IN QVO REX REGVM STELLATO SEDET SOLIO.⁶⁰ The second states: EXALTATA EST SANCTA DEI GENITRIX SVPER CHOROS ANGELORVM AD CELESTIA REGNA.⁶¹

It is very eloquent to note that the concept and the image of Mary crowned by Christ as Queen of Heaven, while she shares with him his divine throne, is inspired by medieval theological and patristic texts, which legitimize this Mary's heavenly royalty thanks to the original privilege of her divine motherhood. In view of such sacred writers, indeed, the Virgin Mary, for being the beloved God's Mother, deserves to be crowned by her divine Son on the heavenly throne as Queen of Paradise and as Sovereign of all angels and blessed who inhabit there. This idea is suggested since early date by St. Athanasius of Alexandria (295-373), when, by linking essentially the Mary's divine motherhood and her heavenly sovereign status, says:

For it is written: "The Earth is the plinth of my feet. (Is. 66, 1)". And you truly have on you the feet and head and the whole body of perfect God. If I were to say that the sky is high, this would not equal to you; for it is written: "The heaven is my throne. (Is. 66, 1)". For you are the inn of God.⁶²

Chartres Cathedral (repr. in SAUERLÄNDER 1972: 132, 133, 134 and 135, fig. 77, 78, 79 and 80; and in WILLIAMSON 1997: 73, fig. 56).

⁵⁹ As it is logical to assume, this basic compositional "norm" will be susceptible in many cases of some slight accessory variants, as noticeable in the pictorial works which we will discuss later. These accidental variations do not invalidate in any way the evident essential fidelity of the later artists to the Torriti's prototype.

⁶⁰ "The Virgin Mary was assumed to the heavenly thalamus where the King of kings is sitting on a throne of stars."

⁶¹ "The holy Mother of God is exalted on the choirs of angels until the heavenly kingdoms."

⁶² "Scriptum enim est: 'Terra scabellum pedum meorum (Is. 66, 1)'. Etenim in te et pedes et caput et totum Dei perfecti corpus vehis. Caelum si dixerim altum, hoc non te exaequabit; quia scriptum est: 'Caelum est thronus meus (Is. 66, 1)'. Nam tu es Dei diversorium." (ST. ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Sermo de Maria Dei Matre et de Elisabeth Ioannis matre*. In:

Three and a half centuries later St. John of Damascus (c. 676-749) speaks in even more explicit and forceful terms. In his *Homily on the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*,⁶³ for example, this famous Father of the Eastern Church associates necessarily the Mary's heavenly royalty with her divine motherhood, when proclaiming:

Hail, the only Queen between queens, you who are indeed a daughter of Kings, but also Mother of the King of all, and strength of religious kings and emperors! Hail, the only Queen among queens, covered with a gold dress, and with variety, such as David, the singer of the Psalms, exclaimed!⁶⁴

And in his *First homily on the feast of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary*,⁶⁵ the same St. John Damascene insists on the thesis of the Virgin's bodily assumption and of her enthronement as Queen of Heaven, as a consequence of her status as Mother of the God the Son, by stating bluntly:

For you have not risen to heaven like Elijah. You were not transported, like Paul, "up to the third heaven"; but you did arrive to the royal throne of your Son, looking at him directly and with joy.⁶⁶

2. Iconographic types of *The Coronation of the Virgin* in the late medieval Italian painting

Considering thoughtfully the two prototypical models of Duccio and Torriti newly analyzed, we can discern in medieval Italian painting three iconographic types of Marian crowning, different from each other, even though complementary, thanks to their progressive mutual enrichment: 1) the Coronation with angels (in general, musician angels); 2) the Coronation with angels and saints; 3) the Coronation with angels, saints and scenes of Jesus or Mary. Each of these three complementary iconographic types corresponds to specific patristic and theological statements, as we will point out straight away.

Sergio ÁLVAREZ CAMPOS (ed.), *Corpus Marianum Patristicum*, Burgos, Ediciones Aldecoa, 1970, vol. II, p. 63).

⁶³ ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homilia in Annuntiationem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 643-662.

⁶⁴ "Salvesis, sola inter reginas regina, quae regum quidem filia es, universorum autem Regis Mater, ac religiosorum regum et imperatorum robur. Salvesis, sola inter reginas regina, vestitu deaurato circumdata, ac varietate, veluti psalmodum cantor David exclamavit." (*Ibid.*, 654-655).

⁶⁵ ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homilia I in Dormitionem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 699-722.

⁶⁶ "Non enim ad modum Eliae velut in caelum ascendisti. Non uti Paulus ad tertium usque caelum subvecta es; verum usque ad regium Filii tui thronum pervenisti, perspicue eum ac laete contuens (...)" (*Ibid.*, 11. PG 96, 718).

2.1. First type: The Coronation of the Virgin with angels

We can illustrate this first iconographic category with some works of Paolo Veneziano, the Maestro dell'Arte della Lana, Niccolò di Buonaccorso, Mariotto di Nardo and Nardo di Cione.



Fig. 3. Paolo Veneziano, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1324. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 18/08/2012).

In his panel of the National Gallery of Art, Washington (Fig. 3),⁶⁷ Paolo Veneziano (c. 1300-c. 1365) combines some elements of the already analyzed works by Duccio and Torriti. From the Torriti's prototype, Veneziano takes the prayer and advocating stance of Mary, raising her open arms, and the gesture of Jesus placing with his right hand the crown on the head of his Mother, sitting both on the same double throne, in a situation of almost perfect hierarchical equality. From the Duccio's model, on the other hand, Veneziano takes especially the alignment of the angels (eight, instead of the six on the Sienese stained glass), located in rigid order at the borders of the painting, in their role of

⁶⁷ Paolo Veneziano, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1324, tempera on wood, 99 x 78 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

servers of the heavenly rulers as members of their escort and guard of honor. In shaping with so tiny and marginal aspect the caring angels at the edge of so imposing *Madonna*, Paolo Veneziano, and with him the numerous pleyad of Italian artists who address this issue with similar antitheses Mary / angels, they do but illustrate the unanimous proposal of certain Church Fathers and medieval theologians, in the sense of proclaiming the unattainable superiority of the God the Son's Mother over the angels and any creature on Heaven and Earth. St. Athanasius of Alexandria (295-373), for example, do not otherwise state, when enunciating:

If I were to say that the angels and archangels are great, you are superior to all of them; for angels and archangels serve in fear of him who dwells in your womb, and they do not dare to talk in the presence of him, while you dialogue with him freely.⁶⁸



Fig. 4. Maestro dell'Arte della Lana, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1375. Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana, Florence. Image from FREMANTLE 1975, p. 325, fig. 665.

In his altarpiece of the Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana, c. 1375 (Fig. 4),⁶⁹ the so-called for that reason Maestro dell'Arte della Lana (active c. 1375) multiplies the number of members of the angelic cohort. Featuring them in two separate wings on both flanks of the lunette, the painter places in semi-circle twenty-two musicians angels, twelve on the left, ten on the right, with the gesture of

⁶⁸ “Angelos et archangelos si dixerim magnos, tu illis maior omnibus; angeli enim archangelique cum tremore ei qui in visceribus tuis habitat serviunt, neque in conspectu eius loqui audent, cum tu illum libere alloquaris.” (ST. ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Sermo de Maria Dei Matre et de Elisabeth Ioannis matre*. In: ALVAREZ CAMPOS 1970, vol. II: 63).

⁶⁹ Maestro dell'Arte della Lana, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1375, tempera on wood, 274 x 153 cm. Palazzo dell'Arte della Lana, Florence.

celebrating all of them with their heavenly melodies the Marian event in process. The artist puts also at the foot of the throne two pairs of kneeling angels, paying tribute in guard of honor to Jesus and Mary, while both of them are seated on a double throne, covered with magnificent brocades. As it was performed by Duccio in his Sienese stained glass window (1287-1288) and by Giotto in his *Baroncelli Polyptych*, 1328 (to be discussed later), the Maestro dell'Arte della Lana figures the Messiah in the act of placing the crown on the head of his Mother, secluded with devotion in humble pose, crestfallen, with both hands crossed on her chest. As in many other Italian images of Marian crowning, in this Florentine lunette the *Madonna* exhibits with elegance a white mantle covered with golden stars. With such a badge in clothing the artists seek to illustrate the significant verse of the *Psalms* referred to the Virgin Mary: *Astitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu deaurato*.⁷⁰



Fig. 5. Niccolò di Buonaccorso, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1380. Metropolitan Museum, New York. Image from the web of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Last access: 21/12/2012)

⁷⁰ “The queen remained standing to your right, dressed in robes of gold.” (Psal. XLIV, 14).

In his *Coronation*, c. 1380, of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 5),⁷¹ also Niccolò di Buonaccorso (active in 1356-1388) adopts the aforementioned compositional pattern of Duccio perfected by Giotto, i.e., a demure Virgin, hands crossed over her chest, invested as Queen of Heaven by her Son, who gird up her the crown with both hands, seated both on a common throne. However, Buonaccorso introduces three personal variants on Duccio/Giotto's prototype: first and foremost, he replaces the physical throne for a virtual, weightless "throne", formed by pure angelic spirits; in addition he configures the two mandorlas, the internal and external, by means of two semicircular "crowns" of Seraphim and Cherubim; finally, he multiplies the angels in a circular procession of honor in order to fill up the compositional space, serving many of them as jubilant musicians.



Fig. 6. Mariotto di Nardo, *The Coronation of the Virgin with five musician angels*, 1408. Minneapolis Institute of Art. Image by Steve Central, taken from internet (Last access: 06/01/21013).

Fig. 7. Mariotto di Nardo, *The Coronation of the Virgin with six musician angels*. Convento della Certosa, Galluzzo. Photo Scala, courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e Att. Culturali, Italia.

⁷¹ Niccolò di Buonaccorso, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1380, tempera and gold on wood, 50,8 x 32,7 cm (with frame); 44,8 x 26,7 cm (panel). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In his two Coronations of the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Fig. 6)⁷² and the Certosa di Galluzzo (Fig. 7),⁷³ Mariotto di Nardo (c. 1373-1424) poses a relatively similar structure: in the presence of a small choir of angelic musicians (five in the first painting, six in the second), Jesus places the crown on the her Mother's head with both hands. Besides the exceptional situation that the painter brings to the two protagonists in both panels –Christ to the left, the Virgin to the right, a composition diametrically opposite to that brought almost always by the others Italian painters in the treatment of this iconographic topic⁷⁴—, Mariotto di Nardo introduces in the panel of Galluzzo the additional novelty of placing the Virgin kneeling at the time of her Coronation, instead of sitting her on the throne with her Son. In both paintings the artist places the musician angels alongside the platform of the throne, in the attitude of paying lyrical tribute with their instruments and their songs to their newly crowned *Madonna*.



Fig. 8. Nardo di Cione, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1340s-1360s. Victoria & Albert Museum, Londres. Image of the museum's web. (Last access: 06/01/2013).

⁷² Mariotto di Nardo, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1408, tempera on wood, 131,7 x 68,6 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis.

⁷³ Mariotto di Nardo, *The Coronation of the Virgin with six musician angels*, tempera on wood, 190 x 93 cm. Museum of the Certosa's convent, Galluzzo.

⁷⁴ This unusual formula of reversing the positions of Christ and Mary used by Mariotto di Nardo in his two panels of c. 1408 had already been used in other previous Coronations, as, for example, in the tympanum of the right door of the portico of the South transept in the Strasbourg Cathedral, in which even Christ crowns his mother with his left hand. (repr. in SAUERLÄNDER 1972: s.p., fig. 130-131).

Even devoid of angelic figures, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1340s-1360s, work of Nardo di Cione (active c. 1343-1365), now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Fig. 8),⁷⁵ may be included within this first iconographic type being studied.⁷⁶ The artist prefers here to compose the Mary's glorification with the mere presence of its two protagonists (in the now conventional pose of Christ crowning his mother with both hands), leaving entirely out the angels in guard of honor. These –despite their physical absence from the painting, for not overlapping the growing figures of Jesus and Mary, who absorb the entire pictorial space— manage you to feel their virtual “presence” as necessary witnesses and escorts of the celestial couple in the Epiphany of the *Madonna* as the Sovereign of Heaven. This same absence / virtual “presence” of the angels in the Marian crowning is also observed in the approach of the Master of Terenzano (documented between 1336-1345) in his *Polyptych of the Coronation of Mary with four saints*, in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence.⁷⁷

However, when the Maestro dell'Arte della Lana, Niccolò di Buonaccorso, Mariotto di Nardo and other many of the Italian painters who interpret *The Coronation of the Virgin* (some of which we will see in subsequent panels) paint with such abundance angels in the role of musicians, strumming a colorful panoply of wind and string instruments around the throne of the Sovereigns of heavenly Eden, they do not do but translate into visual language the testimony of numerous medieval ecclesiastical writers that underline the enormous joy with which the angelic hierarchies accompany the Virgin in her Transit / Resurrection / Assumption, and pay her tribute as a crowned Queen of Heaven in explicit terms. For example, we can pick up some of those theological and patristic testimonies. Thus, in the eighth century St. John of Damascus (675-749), in his aforementioned first homily on the Dormition of Mary,⁷⁸ when reaffirming his thesis on the celestial royalty of the Mother of God, says:

The King introduced you on his chamber, where the Powers escort you, the Principalities bless you, the Thrones sing you, the stunned

⁷⁵ Nardo di Cione, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, tempera on wood, 118 x 77,5 cm. Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

⁷⁶ For a study of the physical and iconographical characteristics of this painting, see Katharine HUGH (Curatorial Assistant de la Apsley House en The Wellington Museum), “The Coronation of the Virgin - a Technical Study”, *V&A. Conservation Journal*, July 1997, n° 24, publicado en la red en el link <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-24/the-coronation-of-the-virgin-a-technical-study/>. Based on rigorous testing techniques and stylistic approach, this curator woman concludes that, in its current state, this panel of Andrea di Cione, in addition to having been very altered in shape and size, is clearly incomplete, because it is the central panel of a large altarpiece, whose wings would undoubtedly some saints. We are grateful to Patricia Grau-Dieckmann the letting us know the existence of this interesting article.

⁷⁷ Repr. in FREMANTLE 1975: 99, fig. 194 and 186.

⁷⁸ ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homilia I in Dormitionem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 699-722.

Cherubim are happy, the Seraphim praise you, recognizing that, by nature and by a true dispensation, you exist as Lord's mother.⁷⁹

Four centuries later St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), in his first sermon for the feast of the Assumption,⁸⁰ stresses the immense joy of the angels and the others blessed in welcoming Mary as their heavenly Queen. The Cistercian mystic records it that way:

and who will be enough to even think how glorious would go the Queen of the world and with how much affection of devotion all the multitude of the heavenly hosts would emerge to meet her? With what songs she would be accompanied up to the throne of glory, with which so placid countenance, with such serene face, with what joyful hugs would be received by the Son and would be praised over every creature with that honor which a mother so great deserved, with that glory which was worthy of such a great Son?⁸¹

2.2. *Second type: The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints*

The second iconographic type –by far the most widespread in Italy— is the Marian Coronation complemented with angels and saints. We will now analyze a dozen of such paintings produced by Giotto, Bernardo Daddi, Puccio di Simone, Jacopo di Cione, Giovanni del Biondo, Gentile da Fabriano, Lorenzo di Niccolò, Niccolò di Tommaso, Lorenzo Monaco, Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi.

This second iconographic type is represented, as an indisputable paradigm, by the altarpiece of Giotto di Bondone *The Coronation of Mary with angels and saints*, in the Baroncelli Chapel,⁸² better known as the *Baroncelli Polyptych* (Fig. 9),⁸³ whose authorship⁸⁴ is undoubtedly recorded in the inscription inserted in its

⁷⁹ “Introduxit te rex in cubiculum suum, ubi te stipant Potestates. Principatus benedicunt, Throni concelebrant, Cherubim gaudentes obstupescunt, laudant Seraphim, ut quae Domini natura veraque dispensatione mater exsisteris.” (*Ibid.*, 718).

⁸⁰ ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, “En la Asunción de la bienaventurada Virgen María (15 de agosto). De los dos recibimientos, de Cristo y de María”. In: *Obras completas de San Bernardo* (Edic. española preparada por el R. P. Gregorio Díez Ramos), Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. BAC, 1953, vol. I, p. 702-705.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 704.

⁸² Giotto di Bondone, *Baroncelli Polyptych*, c. 1328-1334 (or *post* 1334), tempera and gold on wood, 185 x 323 cm. Baroncelli Chapel, church of Santa Croce, Florence. Repr. in Anne MUELLER VON DER HAEGEN, *Giotto di Bondone, hacia 1267-1337*, Köln, Könemann, 2000, p. 125 (central panel), p. 126-127, fig. 147 (the total), p. 128 and 129, figs. 148 and 149 (details of the side panels).

⁸³ For a thorough study of this Florentine altarpiece by Giotto, see Massimiliano G. ROSITO, “Il Polittico Baroncelli. Giotto, Dante e I Maestri spirituali di Santa Croce”. In: Corrado GIZZI, *Giotto e Dante*, Milano, Skira, 2001, p. 109-115.

central panel (*Opus Magistri Jocti*),⁸⁵ although his execution date still arouses some controversy.⁸⁶



Fig. 9. Giotto di Bondone, *The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints (Baroncelli Polyptych)*, c. 1328-1334. Baroncelli Chapel, church of Santa Croce, Florence. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 25/08/2012).

In this splendid altarpiece Giotto alters and completes the compositional prototype of Jacopo Torriti, proposing, on the other hand, a new model, which the late medieval Italian painters will adopt very often when interpreting this iconographic subject. Giotto, in fact, not content with changing the pose of Christ, whom he represents crowning his mother with both hands (such as Duccio expressed it in his stained glass window), omitting the open book in his left hand,⁸⁷ changes also the Virgin's gesture and attitude, by shaping her with her hands intertwined, rather than opened up, as Torriti did in his mosaic. These

⁸⁴ Although some rare historian, as Moshe BARASCH (*Giotto and the language of gesture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Coll. Cambridge Studies in the History of Art, 1987, p. 125) denies the authorship of Giotto on the *Baroncelli Polyptych*, attributing it only to his workshop, the vast majority of the experts agree on this altar as an original Giotto's work.

⁸⁵ "*The work of the master Giotto*". Among other scholars, MUELLER VON DER HAEGEN (2000: 124) confirms that underneath the central panel appears in the inscription: *Opus Magistri Jocti*.

⁸⁶ Some researchers, such as Corrado GIZZI (2001: 206), dates this polyptych of Giotto between 1326 and 1328. Klaus KRÜGER ("Medium and imagination: Aesthetic aspects of Trecento painting panel". In: SCHMIDT 2002: 58) puts its implementation in 1330, while MUELLER VON DER HAEGEN (2000: 125) dates it in 1334.

⁸⁷ As it was said earlier, this open book with its allusive inscription appears in the apsidal mosaic of Santa Maria in Trastevere (by an anonymous author) and in the one of Santa Maria Maggiore (work of Torriti).

two postures of Jesus and Mary conceived by Giotto in the *Baroncelli Polyptych* shall constitute the model preferred by the later Italian artists when figuring this iconographic motif. Giotto organizes the composition in a perfect symmetry, completely filling the four side panels with a huge cohort of standing saints and several choirs of kneeling angels, many of them playing string and wind instruments. In the central panel –wider and higher than the other four— the artist represents the Mary's Coronation, by placing Christ and the Virgin, covered both with clear robes embroidered in gold, seated on a large common throne, while four kneeling angels honor their newly vested Queen, offering vases and flasks to her.

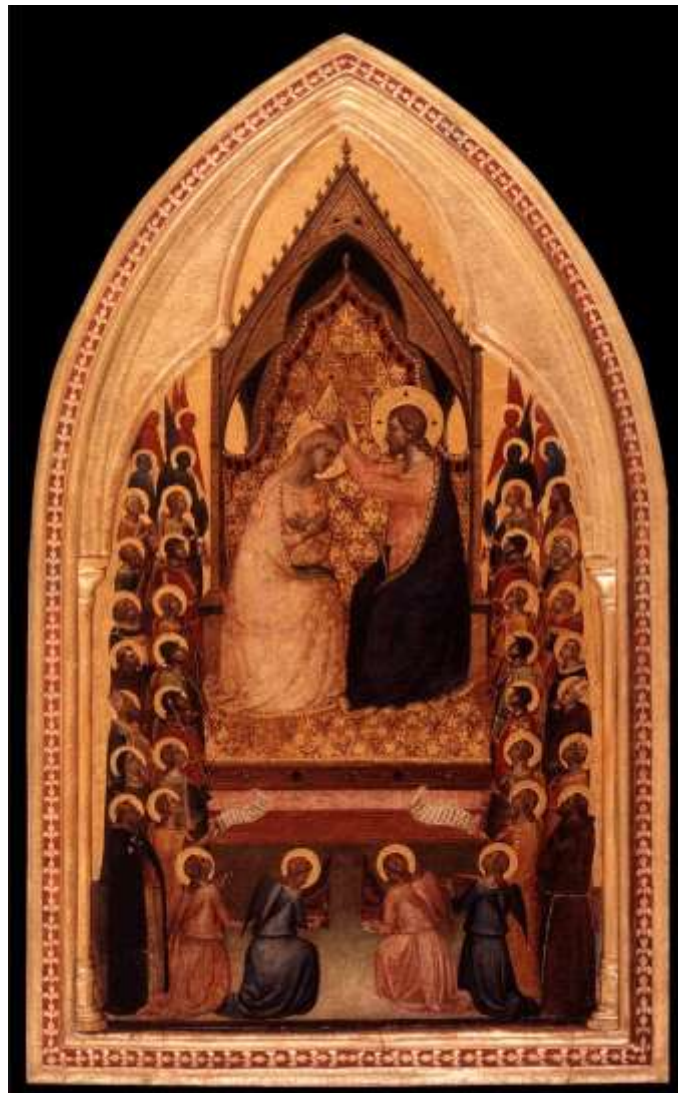


Fig. 10. Bernardo Daddi, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1340. Lindenau Museum, Altenburg. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 15/08/2012).

The giottesque painter Bernardo Daddi (c. 1290-1348) adopts in his *Coronation in the Lindenau Museum in Altenburg* (Fig. 10)⁸⁸ the essential of the pose and the attitude that Giotto brought to both protagonists in the *Baroncelli Polyptych*, including the four angels which on knees pay tribute to the heavenly couple at the foot of their throne, with the variant that Daddi converts them into musician angels. Further distancing of the schema of the Giotto's altarpiece, Bernardo Daddi, constrained by the limited space that this narrow panel offers to him, also modifies the layout of the angelic cohorts and saints attending the ceremony of the Mary's enhancement. Therefore he places in a rigid symmetry, on both sides of the Gothic double throne, two rows of tiny angels and warriors archangels, behind which he sets in identical symmetrical order other two long rows of miniaturized saints, thus forming a robust warp with which he frames the two flexible figures of Jesus and the Virgin in a sharp geometrical linker.



Fig. 11. Puccio di Simone, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints*, c. 1350, private collection, Lucca, and Galleria Nazionale, Parma.

Image from FREMANTLE 1975: 91, fig. 178.

In his *Triptych of the Coronation of the Virgin*, whose panels are today spread in a private Italian collection⁸⁹ and in the Galleria Nazionale of Parma (Fig. 11), Puccio di Simone (documented in 1343/6-c. 1362, and also known as the Master

⁸⁸ Bernardo Daddi, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1340, tempera and gold on wood, 53 x 30 cm. Lindenau Museum, Altenburg.

⁸⁹ Puccio di Simone, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints*, c. 1350, tempera on wood. Central panel, 126 x 76 cm, private collection, Lucca; side panels, in the Galleria Nazionale, Parma.

of the Altarpiece of Fabriano) repeats almost literally – with the inevitable slight changes— the Giotto’s compositional model in the *Baroncelli Polyptych*: in addition to the almost identical stance and attitude of the two protagonists at the culminating moment of the crowning, to the sound of lyrical melodies produced by several angelic musicians, Puccio di Simone fills the two side panels with two separate groups of saints, who overstock the space in progressive alignments to the height. However, distancing himself from the Giotto’s prototype, Puccio puts the holy men in the right panel, in accordance with the Christ’s location, while placing the holy women in the left panel, in correspondence with the place occupied by Mary on the throne.



Fig. 12. Jacopo di Cione (atributed), *Altarpiece of The Coronation of the Virgin with saints*, 1370-1371. National Gallery, London.

Attributed to the giottesque painter Jacopo di Cione (c. 1320/30-c. 1398 / 1400)⁹⁰ or his workshop, this altarpiece,⁹¹ originally painted for the Florentine church of San Pietro Maggiore, and today in the National Gallery of London (Fig. 12), is inspired evidently by the compositional model designed by Giotto in the *Baroncelli Polyptych*. The ceremony of the royal investiture on the central panel is attended in court of honor by two groups of saints, arranged in oblique

⁹⁰ Brother of Andrea di Cione (Orcagna) and Bernardo (Nardo) di Cione –the latter, apparently the eldest of the three—, Jacopo di Cione shared workshop with his brother Andrea Orcagna. The three are part of the second generation of the Giotto’s followers.

⁹¹ Jacopo di Cione (atributed), *Altarpiece of The Coronation of the Virgin with saints*, 1370-1371, tempera and gold on wood. National Gallery, London.

rows on the two side panels next to the lush Gothic throne. Christ and the Virgin exhibit poses and robes similar to those who Giotto imagines in his altarpiece. The more remarkable variants introduced by Jacopo di Cione to the prototype of his master Giotto come especially from the greater complexity of the throne, and from the multiplication and the greater dynamism of the musician angels at the base of the central panel, engrossed all of them in the task of playing their instruments to celebrate with joy the glorification of the *Madonna*, while other angels remain firmly in escort of honor on both sides of the throne.



Fig. 13. Giovanni del Biondo, *The Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels*, 1373. Fiesole Cathedral. Photo of Sailko, taken from Wikipedia. (Last access: 06/01/2013).

While in his *Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels*, 1373, in the Fiesole Cathedral (Fig. 13),⁹² Giovanni del Biondo (documented between 1356-

⁹² *The Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels*, 1373. tempera on wood, 210 x 201 cm. Fiesole Cathedral. Image from FREMANTLE 1975: 246, fig. 490.

1398) reiterates essentially the same compositional scheme proposed by Giotto and his just analyzed followers –massive grouping of saints on both sides of the throne, on which the two protagonists sit, with Jesus crowning his mother in the presence of several musician angels—, Gentile da Fabriano offers in his *Valle Romita Polyptych* a quite different structure, despite its evident analogies with the giottesque model.



Fig. 14. Gentile da Fabriano, *The Coronation of the Virgin. Polyptych of Valle Romita*, c. 1400. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 24/08/2012).

Painted for a convent of Fabriano, this altarpiece of Gentile da Fabriano (c. 1370-1427)⁹³ for Valle Romita (Fig. 14) clearly illustrates the direct influence of the Franciscan spirituality on the iconographic subject being studied.⁹⁴ In the role of privileged witnesses of the Mary's investiture as Queen of Paradise, Gentile places in the side panels the Saints Jerome, Francis of Assisi, Dominic de Guzmán and Mary Magdalene, while in the top panels narrates some scenes of St. John the Baptist in the desert, the martyrdom of St. Peter Martyr, St. Francis meditating and the stigmata of the latter. Despite adopting in this polyptych the poses, attitudes and the basic compositional guidelines of the conventional model of the subject, Gentile da Fabriano introduces certain novelties of significant relevance. The first is to achieve almost dematerialize the coronation scene, making Jesus and Mary levitate on the abstract Gothic background of gold leaf, just suggesting the virtual "throne" on which both "sit" weightlessly. Secondly, the heavenly court is expressed in two groupings of angelic beings, figured in a very different way: on the one hand, the eight tiny musician angels, that, in arc of circle in the edge bottom of the panel, sing celestial melodies in honor to their Queen; on the other hand, the eleven red Seraphim which, skirting the lunette, set a diadem or semicircular mandorla over the heads of the royal couple. The third – and by far, the largest and most significant— novelty introduced here by Gentile da Fabriano is the presence of the divine Trinity. Girt with rich crown and covered in priestly robes, God the Father manifests himself on top, extending his protective arms over Jesus and Mary; with naked head, wearing only the nimbus of holiness, God the Son crowns his mother with his right hand; the Holy Spirit, in the form of a white dove, spreads its wings between the bellies of Christ and the Virgin, to emphasize his reproductive work, by making possible that –for his work and grace— the Mary's womb conceive the Word of God made man, according to the message from the archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation: "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Highest will overshadow you."⁹⁵ Inspired by this well-known and fundamental Gospel passage, which allows him to emphasize the acting presence of the divine Trinity in this glorification of the *Madonna*, Gentile da Fabriano could, perhaps, have taken into account a liturgical hymn of the twelfth century, one of whose stanzas reads:

*Gloria tibi, Domine,
Qui natus es de virgine,
Quam suscitavit in gloria
Trinitatis potentia.*⁹⁶

⁹³ Gentile da Fabriano, *The Coronation of the Virgin. Polyptych of Valle Romita*, c. 1400, tempera and gold on wood, 157 x 180 cm. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

⁹⁴ St. Bonaventure, who ruled the Franciscan order as General Superior (*Ministro Generale*), was one of the most esteemed promoters of the idea and the image of the Coronation of Mary as Queen of Heaven.

⁹⁵ "Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi." (Lc 1, 35).

⁹⁶ "Glory to you, Lord, / You were born of a virgin, / Whom the power of the Trinity / elevates to glory." (*Himno litúrgico del siglo XII*. Cited in BOVER 1947: 342).



Fig. 15. Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with two angels and saints*. Private collection. Image from FREMANTLE 1975: 393, fig. 800.



Fig. 16. Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, *The Coronation of the Virgin with four saints*, 1410. Museum of Santa Croce, Florence. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 28/11/2012)

In his two similar versions, the *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with two angels and saints*, in a private collection (Fig. 15),⁹⁷ and *The Coronation of the Virgin with four saints*, 1410, at the Museum of Santa Croce in Florence (Fig.

⁹⁷ Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with two angels and saints*, tempera and gold on wood, 174 x 179 cm. Private collection.

16),⁹⁸ Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino (documented in 1392-1411) assumes the basic structure and the essential guidelines of the giottesque model of the *Baroncelli Polyptych*: before a cohort of obsequious angels, Christ crowns with both hands his demure Mother, seated on a throne that is common to both, while on the side panels some saints gather together as guests to the ceremony. Lorenzo di Niccolò introduces a slight difference between the two versions, for in the triptych in the private collection includes twelve saints, while in the polyptych of Santa Croce places just four well-known saints: on the left wing, St. Lucy (with her eyes on a tray) and St. John the Evangelist (elder, with a book and pen), and at the right wing St. Peter (with keys) and St. Lawrence (with the palm of martyrdom). The artist adds a detail in this altarpiece of Santa Croce, representing these four saints carrying a book: even though such attribute is relevant in St. John the Evangelist and St. Peter, as authors of biblical texts, it is not appropriate, on the other hand, in the case of St. Lucy and St. Lawrence.



Fig. 17. Niccolò di Tommaso, *The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints*, c. 1370. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Image from Wikimedia Commons (Last access: 06/01/2013).

In his portable triptych of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (Fig. 17),⁹⁹ Niccolò di Tommaso (c. 1320-c. 1405) reinterprets with certain freedom the basic scheme conceived by Giotto to the Mary's crowning. Still retaining the

⁹⁸ Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, *The Coronation of the Virgin with four saints*, 1410, tempera and gold on wood. Museum of Santa Croce, Florence.

⁹⁹ Niccolò di Tommaso, *The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints* (portable triptych), c. 1370, tempera and gold on wood, 65,5 x 73,5 cm. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

essence of the giottesque pose in the protagonists of the Mary's investiture as Queen of Heaven, an event in which he includes four saints as assistants in the side panels (an unidentified holy bishop, St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Catherine of Alexandria), Niccolò di Tommaso figures two pairs of angels flying over these saints, and locates at the foot of the virtual (only suggested) throne, along with two musician angels, a couple of donors, introduced before the heavenly rulers by two protector saints.



Fig. 18. Lorenzo Monaco, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints*, 1407-09. National Gallery, London. Image from Shafe website (Last access: 06/01/2013).

In his *Triptych of the Coronation of the Virgin*, in the National Gallery of London (Fig. 18),¹⁰⁰ the camaldolese monk Lorenzo Monaco¹⁰¹ (c. 1370-1425) places, as favorite witnesses of the *Madonna's* apotheosis, sixteen great saints.¹⁰² Among them stand out, in the first row of the left pane, St. Benedict, opening the

¹⁰⁰ Lorenzo Monaco, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and saints*, 1407-09. tempera on wood, 195 x 105 (left panel); 221 x 115 cm (central panel); 197 x 102 cm (right panel). National Gallery, London.

¹⁰¹ The name of Lorenzo Monaco was Piero di Giovanni.

¹⁰² Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 19/08/2012).

book of the Benedictine rule,¹⁰³ at his side St. John the Baptist and St. Mathew, with his open Gospel; and, in the first row of the right pane, St. John the Evangelist (opening his Gospel), St. Peter (with the keys of heaven) and St. Romuald, the founder of the camaldolese order.



Fig. 19. Fra Angelico, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1434-35. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 24/08/2012).

In this lush altarpiece of the Louvre,¹⁰⁴ originally painted for the convent church of St. Dominic in Fiesole (Fig. 19), Fra Angelico features an original model that for its compositional complexity and its conceptual depth exceeds the conventional interpretations of this iconographic theme, surpassing even the Giotto's prototype. First of all, you are impressed in this altarpiece by the

¹⁰³ By their status as reformed benedictines, the Camaldolese monks were governed by the Rule of St. Benedict.

¹⁰⁴ Fra Angelico, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1434-35. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

physical (earthly) aspect of the heavenly “palace”, both by its imposing throne of exquisite embroidered fabrics and golden intarsia, covered with a slender Gothic baldachin, its wide marble staircase and its solid pavement of slabs, on which the standing saints claim vigorously. The various poses, attitudes and clothing of the musician angels and, above all, those of the saints also exhibit great originality. Among them are Mary Magdalene (with her phial of ointment), St. Catherine of Alexandria (with her spiked breaking wheel), St. Agnes (with his lamb in her arms), St. Nicholas of Bari (with his episcopal tiara and his sumptuous cope), St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padova and St. Dominic de Guzmán. However, the difference of stances with which Fra Angelico depicts Christ and the Virgin is the most innovative element in this altarpiece: instead of putting them here sitting both on the same throne, as it was customary in the traditional model, he places Mary kneeling on the last step, in polite reverence to her Son, who, sitting on his royal throne gird her the crown over her temples with both hands. With such a difference in situation and attitude by both protagonists, the Angelico seeks to highlight the idea that the original King of Heaven since eternity is the Son of God, who, in the course of time, decided to glorify Mary as Queen of Heaven, by becoming his virginal Mother.



Fig. 20. Fra Filippo Lippi, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1441-1445. Pinacoteca Vaticana. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 24/08/2012).

This altarpiece of Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469), now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana (Fig. 20),¹⁰⁵ was made on behalf of the monastery of the Olivetan monks in Arezzo. That of the Olivetan monks is a religious order founded in 1313 by the Sienese theologian St. Bernard Tolomei,¹⁰⁶ who, after adopting early the eremitical life mode, adopted later the monastic system under the rule of St. Benedict, having as one of his essential pillars the devotion to the Virgin Mary.¹⁰⁷ In the altarpiece being analyzed, Fra Filippo Lippi reduces to a minimum the descriptive core that he will express more or less for the same years in his famous *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1441-1447, at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence,¹⁰⁸ a splendid altarpiece which, in turn, reinterprets with unquestionable originality the compositional and conceptual model designed by Fra Angelico in his newly analyzed work of the Louvre. In this triptych of the Vatican Pinacoteca, in fact, while respecting the stance imposed by Beato Angelico to the heavenly couple –Christ, seated on the throne, crowning with both hands his devoutly kneeling Mother—, Fra Filippo Lippi restricted to the maximum the presence of the blessed assistants to Mary’s apotheosis. Thus, besides six musician angels Fra Filippo includes only four protective saints, one of which (the second from the left) might be St. Jerome, hermits’ model, while the first of the right panel is probably St. Benedict, whose rule the Olivetan monks obeyed. These two identifiable saints perform before the Sovereigns of Heaven the usual intercessory presentation on behalf of the two kneeling donor. The donor dressed in red in the left pane might be, in all likelihood, the Bishop of Arezzo, Guido Tarlati, who almost five decades earlier had approved the first Olivetan monastery. On the other hand, we could not identify the donor dressed in black in the right pane, because the primary hypothesis of seeing in him the founder of the order, St. Bernard Tolomei,¹⁰⁹ should be ruled out, inasmuch as the Olivetan monks adopted the white habit in honor of Mary. In any case, Fra Filippo Lippi offers here a new formula –correct and elegant, despite some coldness— of representing the Virgin’s royalty, this time for meeting the request of the Olivetan monks, whose proclaimed austerity does not prevent them to finance so pompous altarpiece in order to manifest their consistent devotion to the Mother of God.

¹⁰⁵ Fra Filippo Lippi, *Triptych of The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1441-1445, tempera on wood, 167 x 69 cm (left panel), 172 x 94 cm (central panel) and 167 x 82 cm (right panel). Pinacoteca Vaticana.

¹⁰⁶ The name “*olivetano*” (Olivetan) was chosen by the founder of the order in honor of Our Lady of Mount Olivet (Mount of Olives): *Congregatio Sanctae Mariae Montis Oliveti*.

¹⁰⁷ Information brought by the web page of the Olivetan Benedictine Association: http://home.galileo.edu/~20063163/Colegio_Benedictino/ora.html (Last access: 08/01/ 2013).

¹⁰⁸ We have analyzed this monumental altarpiece of Fra Filippo Lippi in our aforementioned book SALVADOR GONZÁLEZ 2012: 159-160.

¹⁰⁹ Bernardo Tolomei was canonized in 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI.

At last, the fact that almost unanimously the late medieval Italian painters complement their images of *The Coronation of Mary* with a variable multitude of saints and angels –the latter almost always in the role of jubilant musicians— is not but the direct visual translation of the reiterated doctrine of many Church Fathers and medieval theologians. Many of the ecclesiastical writers of the Middle Ages, indeed, insisted with more or less emphasis on the insuperable supremacy of the Virgin over the angels and the saints, as well as in the immense joy with which the blessed inhabitants of Heavenly Paradise welcome and pay tribute of honor to their *Madonna*. For example, St. John Damascene, in his already mentioned *First homily on the feast of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary*,¹¹⁰ says that she came to the royal throne his Son Jesus,

staying next to him with a great and inexplicable freedom, you [Mary], who are the happiness higher than any word for the Angels and all the Powers that dominate the world, the everlasting delectation for the Patriarchs, the ineffable joy to the righteous and the perennial gaiety to the prophets.¹¹¹

Almost three centuries and a half later, St. Anselm of Aosta (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury and Church Doctor, reaffirms the doctrine that the Mother of God the Son was praised as Queen of Heaven, linking also the Mary's heavenly royalty with her role as intercessor before God for believers. He states thus in a prayer to the Virgin, written to commemorate the feast of the Assumption:

You have been exalted about the choirs of angels, eternally happy and glorious Queen of Heaven, where you aid all those who glorify you as Lady and often invoke your holy name with humble prayer.¹¹²

And in another paragraph of the same writing, St. Anselm addresses Mary in these terms:

on the merits of your most salutary Nativity, Annunciation and virginal Birth, and on your most chaste purification and your most glorious Assumption, may I be presented with a clean heart and pure body in the sublime palace of heaven, where you exults and reigns as

¹¹⁰ ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homilia I in Dormitionem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 699-722.

¹¹¹ “et cum magna et inexplicabili libertate astans, angelis, et mundo sublimioribus Virtutibus universis, omni sermone major laetitia es, patriarchis sempiterna oblectatio, justis gaudium ineffabile, perennis prophetis exultatio.” (*Ibid.*, 718).

¹¹² “Exaltata super choros angelorum gaudens et gloriosa in perpetuum regina cœlorum, ubi adjuvas omnes qui te dominam glorificant, et sanctum nomen tuum humili prece frequentant.” (ST. ANSELM, *Oratio XL, Ad sanctam Virginem Mariam in Assumptione eius*. PL 158, 965).

the glorious Queen of angels and men, Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹¹³

Almost a century and a half later, the Franciscan mystic St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1218-1274) points out in his second homily on the Assumption:¹¹⁴

[Mary] was, finally, enriched over all saints in terms of excellence of dignity or condition; because, being Mother of the Supreme Emperor, it is by her dignity and condition the worthiest of all creatures; and for this cause not without reason she was elevated above them and placed to the right of her Son in a very magnificent chair.¹¹⁵

2.3. Third type: The Coronation of the Virgin with scenes from the life of Jesus or Mary

The third iconographic type is one which complements the Coronation with some scenes from the life of Jesus or Mary, type that we can illustrate with some works of Paolo Veneziano, Giovanni del Biondo, Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, Giovanni dal Ponte and Lorenzo Monaco.

On a medieval abstract background of gold leaf, Paolo Veneziano (c. 1300-c. 1365) structures his complex altarpiece (c. 1350-1358)¹¹⁶—now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia of Venice—around the Coronation of the Virgin in the central panel (Fig. 21).¹¹⁷ Eight great scenes of the life of Jesus in the side panels serve as narrative and doctrinal complement to this Marian apotheosis: on the left wing, the Nativity/Adoration of the Magi, the Baptism of Christ, the Last Supper and the Prayer of Jesus in the Garden with the subsequent Arrest; in the right wing, the Ascent of Jesus to Calvary with the cross, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, expanded with the episode of the *Noli me tangere*, and the Ascension. There are also other six scenes under the pinnacles of the altarpiece,

¹¹³ “Nulla de caetero macula peccati anima mea inquinetur; sed mundo corde et casto corpora per merita tuae saluberrimae nativitatis, annuntiationis, et sanctissimi virginei partus tui, et castissimae purificationis, et gloriosissimae assumptionis in excelso caelorum palatio possim praesentari, in quo gloriosa exsultas et regnas regina angelorum et hominum, Mater Domini nostri Jesu Christi.” (*Ibid.*, 966).

¹¹⁴ ST. BONAVENTURE, *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo II.* In: *Obras de San Buenaventura, Edición bilingüe*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, 1947, vol. IV, p. 860-868.

¹¹⁵ “Super omnes Sanctos nihilominus facta est nobilis quantum ad dignitatis sive generis excellentiam; ipsa enim genere et dignitate, cum sit Mater Imperatoris altissimi, est omnium creaturarum nobilissima; et idcirco super omnem creaturam et ad dexteram Filii sui fuit non immerito exaltata et in solio sublimissimo collocata.” (*Ibid.*, p. 864).

¹¹⁶ Paolo Veneziano, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1350/58, tempera and gold on wood, 167 x 285 cm. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

¹¹⁷ WHITE (1989 [1966]: 520, fig. 266) dates this polyptych of Paolo Veneziano c. 1360.

representing, in the left top, Pentecost, St. Chiara taking the veil and St. Francis giving up the earthly goods, with two evangelists in the middle of these three panels, and at the top, the Prophet Isaiah; in the right top, the stigmata of St. Francis, the death of St. Francis and the Pantocrator, scenes which include the other two evangelists, and the Prophet Daniel at the top.



Fig. 21. Paolo Veneziano, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, c. 1350/58. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 25/08/2012).

To make even more spectacular the royal investiture's ritual, Paolo Veneziano puts Jesus and Mary, covered in luxurious robes embroidered in gold, on a twin throne, haloed in its support by a blazing, circular mandorla, having under their feet the Sun and the Moon, respectively.¹¹⁸ With his right hand Christ places the heavenly crown on his mother's head, leaning modestly by interlocking her hands on her chest, while a large group of musician angels celebrates the *Madonna's* exaltation.

Giovanni del Biondo (active c. 1356-c. 1399), to structure his altarpiece of the Coronation of Mary for San Giovanni Valdarno (Fig. 22),¹¹⁹ enriches a lot the already conventional compositional scheme of the Marian crowning before some musician angels and multiple saints as exceptional witnesses: the three central panels that end the altarpiece as pinnacles, adds the scene of the Crucifixion in the center, framed by the Annunciation, whose protagonists, Gabriel and Mary,

¹¹⁸ We are grateful to Patricia Grau-Dieckmann the having noted the presence of both luminaries under the feet of the heavenly couple.

¹¹⁹ Giovanni del Biondo, *Polyptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels*, tempera and gold on wood, 182 x 297 cm. Santa Maria delle Grazie, San Giovanni Valdarno.

are placed in independent symmetrical panels. Both “peripheral” scenes, the Annunciation and the Crucifixion, underscore and confirm the privilege granted to the Virgin being crowned as Queen of Heaven, because of her humble acceptance of being Mother of God (Annunciation) and wanting to participate with her Son in the Redemption as Co-Redeemer of Mankind (Crucifixion).



Fig. 22. Giovanni del Biondo, *The Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels*, c. 1370.
Santa Maria delle Grazie, San Giovanni Valdarno.
Image by Sailko, taken from Wikipedia (Last access: 06/01/2013)



Fig. 23. Rossello di Jacopo Franchi, *The Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels*, 1420. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence. Photo Scala, Florence. By courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e Att. Culturali, Italia.

A similar situation to the one conceived by Giovanni del Biondo in the *Polyptych of San Giovanni Valdarno* depicts Rossello di Jacopo Franchi (c. 1377-1458) in *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1420, now in the Galleria dell'Accademia of Florence (Fig. 23):¹²⁰ in this last altarpiece Rossello di Jacopo Franchi complements with the characters of the Annunciation (in two top tondos) the massive presence of saints and angels attending the glorification of Mary.

¹²⁰ Rossello di Jacopo Franchi, *The Coronation of the Virgin with angels and twenty-four saints*, 1420, tempera on wood, 334 x 390 cm. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.



Fig. 24. Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, *Polyptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with saints*, 1402. Church of San Domenico, Cortona. Image from Web Gallery of Art (Last access: 06/01/2013).

In the altarpiece of *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1402 (Fig. 24),¹²¹ originally painted for the church of the Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence, Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino (documented in 1391-1412) represents the classical structure of Christ crowning his mother with both hands, in the presence of six musician angels and ten saints: in the left pane, and top down St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thomas of Aquinas, St. Lawrence (with the palm of martyrdom), St. Dominic de Guzmán (with his characteristic attributes, the chastity lily and the Gospel book), St. Marc (wearing his Gospel); in the right wing, from top to

¹²¹ Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino, *Polyptych of The Coronation of the Virgin with saints*, 1402, tempera and gold on wood. Church of San Domenico, Cortona.

bottom, St. Benedict, St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. John the Baptist (with his cruciferous staff and under tunic camel leather dress), St. Peter and St. Julian (with the sword and the palm of martyrdom). To this conventional iconographic scheme Lorenzo di Niccolò adds three significant scenes, in direct connection with the subject in study.

In the central panel of the *predella* he depicts the Adoration of the Magi, a primordial episode in which the Royal nature of the redemptive infant, King of Kings, was manifested (Epiphany), to whom the Kings (Magi) of Orient pay homage and offer tributes: this Christological Epiphany affects rebound –as a virtual Marian “Epiphany”— in the recognition of the royal status of the Mother of the King of Kings herself, whose crowning as Sovereign of Heaven is shown in the central panel of this altarpiece. In addition, Lorenzo di Niccolò includes in the two lateral pinnacles the scene of the Annunciation, which, as it has already been said, is the founding episode of Mary’s heavenly royalty, having agreed to be the Savior’s mother, in accordance with the archangel Gabriel’s announcement. Thirdly, in the central pinnacle the artist embodies the divine Trinity with the crucified Son of God, to mean the intervention of the three divine persons not only in the Messiah’s Annunciation / virginal Conception,¹²² but also in the Crucifixion / Redemption.¹²³ With such resources the painter wants to express, as already said, the inescapable role of the Queen of Heaven in making possible the bodily presence of the Savior in the world and in facilitating the redemption of Mankind as co-redeemer.

Very similar to that of the preceding polyptych by Lorenzo di Niccolò di Martino is the approach that Giovanni dal Ponte (1385-1437) offers at the *Coronation of the Virgin with saints*, 1410, in the Musée Condé in Chantilly (Fig. 25),¹²⁴ when complementing the Marian exaltation with the Annunciation (in the tondos of the lateral pinnacles) and the Trinity. Giovanni dal Ponte here represents the divine Trinity in a very significant situation, while God the Son crowns his Mother, God the Father, crowned as King, blesses her from the top of the middle pane and the Holy Spirit as a dove flies over the Mary’s crowned head. With similar positions, one could say that the artist intends to illustrate literally the archangel Gabriel’s announcement: “the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the highest will overshadow you.”¹²⁵ In the side panels

¹²² God the Son became man when incarnating in Virgin Mary’s womb, in a supernatural way, in conformity with the message of the archangel Gabriel, who told her that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High (God the Father) will overshadow you.” (Lk. 1.35).

¹²³ God the Father sent his Son to earth to redeem mankind, in virtue of the infinite love (Holy Spirit) that both profess mutually, and that reverts to the love that they have toward their favorite creatures, men, made in his image and likeness. According to the Christian doctrine, in effect, the Holy Spirit is the hypostasis of mutual love between God the Father and God the Son.

¹²⁴ Giovanni dal Ponte, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1410, tempera on wood, 178 x 215 cm. Musée Condé, Chantilly.

¹²⁵ Lk. 1.35.

eight saints, among them in the foreground –identified by inscriptions on the base of the altarpiece— St. Anthony Abbot and St. Peter, on the left side, and on the right, St. John the Baptist and the apostle St. Thomas, are grouped.



Fig. 25. Giovanni dal Ponte, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1410. Musée Condé, Chantilly. Image from Flickr (Last access: 06/01/21013).

Not very different from the previous conceptual and compositional perspective is the triptych that Giovanni dal Ponte figures in another representation of this iconographic motif, now in the Galleria dell'Accademia of Florence (Fig. 26).¹²⁶ Along with the inevitable couple of protagonists in the now conventional poses and attitudes in the presence of some kneeling musician angels, the artist locates four saints as witnesses of the royal investiture: St. Francis and St. John the Baptist in the left pane, and St. Ivo and St. Dominic de Guzmán in the right one. In the pinnacles, among the fragmented scene of the Annunciation, the artist includes a unique representation of the Anastasis in the central pinnacle.

¹²⁶ Giovanni dal Ponte, *The Coronation of the Virgin with musician angels and saints*, c. 1410, tempera on wood, 182 x 207,5 cm. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

Although rare in Western art, the Byzantine Anastasis (descent of Jesus to Limbo or “Hell”) is, from the conceptual perspective, a theme similar to the Crucifixion, because the redemption and salvation of Mankind are expressed in both through the power of the incarnate Son of God.



Fig. 26. Giovanni dal Ponte, *The Coronation of the Virgin with musician angels and saints*, c. 1400-1410. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence. Image from Web Gallery of Art. (Last access: 06/01/2013).

Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1370-c. 1425) signs and dates the altarpiece of *The Coronation of the Virgin* (Fig. 27), painted for the main altar of the church of the camaldolese monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence,¹²⁷ where the painter himself lived as a monk. As it was to be expected, Lorenzo Monaco adopts here the classical composition of Jesus crowning Mary, seated both on the same opulent Gothic throne. The artist then completes the main scene with

¹²⁷ Lorenzo Monaco, *The Coronation of the Virgin with saints*, 1414, tempera on wood, 450 x 350 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

twenty witnesses saints –among whom one can distinguish in the first row in the left sector St. Benedict, St. Peter and St. John the Baptist, and in the right two apostles (the first of them, maybe St. Marc?) and St. Anthony Abbot—, in the middle of a huge crowd of angels, who all over surround the heavenly throne as an honorable escort, while other three censer-bearer angels pay reverent tribute with their incense to the celestial rulers.¹²⁸



Fig. 27. Lorenzo Monaco, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1414. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
Photo by Terminartors, taken from internet (Last access: 06/01/2013).

¹²⁸ It is not unthinkable that, with this unusual proliferation of angels, Lorenzo Monaco would have wanted to make an explicit reference to the advocacy to which his monastery is entitled: Santa Maria degli Angeli.

In the two central panels of the *predella* –in whose ends four scenes from the life of San Benito are narrated— Lorenzo Monaco adds the Nativity of Jesus and the Adoration of the Magi, while in the lateral pinnacles depicts the Annunciation. All these episodes –Annunciation, Nativity and Epiphany— are, as it has already been said, essentially related to the concept and the image of Mary as Queen of Heaven. Furthermore, Lorenzo Monaco locates in the central pinnacle of the altarpiece an unusual image of Jesus blessing above clouds between two cherubs, which could perhaps be interpreted as the Ascension. If such hypothesis would be true, a semantic slip would occur between the two similar events of Jesus' Ascension and Mary's Assumption, the latter event culminating, as it is known, the Coronation of the Virgin as Queen of Heaven.

3. Conclusions

As a result of our inquiry it seems legitimate to register some basic conclusions in a brief summary:

The iconographic theme of *The Coronation of the Virgin* arises and consolidates its position in Europe from the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, as the logical culmination of the doctrine and the iconography of the Mary's Dormition / Resurrection and Assumption

The idea and the image of the Virgin Mary crowned as Queen of Heaven is based on a considerable plexus of teachings of some Church Fathers and medieval theologians, who legitimized the Mary's heavenly royalty as the a privilege necessarily derived from her exclusive status of the virginal Mother of God the Son, King of Kings and Lord of Heaven.

In Italy the iconography of the Marian crowning, even if adopted with some delay in the late thirteenth century, spread very quickly since the *Trecento*, until reaching a great popularity in essentially pictorial expressions, being the monumental sculptural forms almost totally inexistent.

To interpret this iconographic motif, the late medieval Italian painters successfully introduced a series of very relevant conceptual and compositional innovations, to the extent that their Marian Coronations stand out considerably by comparison with similar works of other European artists.

After establishing a structural design for the pose and the attitude of the two protagonists of the event (Jesus and Mary), the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* Italian painters enriched and complicated the basic compositional structure, thus forging three iconographic types or variants: the Coronation with angels, the Coronation with angels and saints, and the Coronation with angels, saints and scenes of Jesus or Mary.

The analysis of the twenty-seven Italian paintings chosen for the current essay allows us to conclude that each of these three generic iconographic types is inspired by some specific patristic and theological sources that were sometimes interpreted with special wisdom by the more conspicuous artists.

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