Fra Angelico’s Tempio *Lamentation*: A Consideration of Its Function and Meaning

by

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(Under the Direction of Shelley Zuraw)

ABSTRACT

Painted for the main altar of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio in Florence, Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation* was originally an altar frontal before which condemned prisoners were chained just prior to their execution. Because of this function, the work contains visual elements that would have been relevant to these prisoners and that served as a source of comfort to viewers facing death. This painting was both narrative and devotional. Prisoners could relate their own execution to Christ’s death and contemplate his sacrifice, when they viewed this image.

INDEX WORDS: Fra Angelico, Lamentation, Quattrocento, Renaissance, black brotherhood, confraternity, Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio, oratory, altar decoration, Florence, executions, female piety, Beata Villana, Fra Sebastiano Benintendi, panel painting
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To my parents and Patrick for their love and support…and for always making me smile.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"For the compagnia of the Tempio in Florence he painted a panel of the dead Christ."¹

Although his statement may seem brief, Vasari’s description of Fra Angelico’s Lamentation panel is completely accurate. Set in a peaceful countryside, this painting is a scene of quiet mourning and death in which holy figures kneel around the body of Christ.² Yet in spite of the calm solemnity that characterizes the Lamentation, it is not a simple image. Rather, the panel draws from both the long visual history of the Lamentation as well as from sources that are far outside the boundaries of traditional depictions of this scene. Through a study of these traditions and the innovations that resulted from less obvious influences, one can better understand why and how Fra Angelico created a painting meant to serve as a reminder of Christ’s sacrifice for an audience that ranged from priests to prisoners.

Fra Angelico (b. late 1390s-d. 1455) balanced his own life as a Dominican friar with a successful career as an artist.³ The artist was born Guido di Piero in the Mugello region outside


² It is a tempera and gold on panel and measures 105 x 164 cm.

of Fiesole. By 1417, he and his brother Benedetto were working as artists in Florence; Fra Angelico was trained as a manuscript illuminator while his brother became a scribe. That same year, Fra Angelico entered the religious community as a lay brother for the confraternity of San Niccolò at Santa Maria del Carmine, and in 1418-23, he joined the Dominican Order at San Domenico in Fiesole and became a Dominican friar.

Although he is perhaps best known for his frescoes of Christ’s Passion the cells and common rooms of the Dominican priory of San Marco from 1440-52, Fra Angelico took many projects outside of this Florentine convent. While only a few of his early works from the 1420s are known, by the middle of the 1430s, the artist had received important commissions from both the lay and religious communities of Florence and elsewhere in Tuscany for altarpieces, religious objects, and fresco cycles. At this time, he also had assistants to help him with these major undertakings and was running a large, productive workshop in Florence.

In works such as the San Marco altarpiece of 1436-40, Fra Angelico strayed from the traditional format of multi-paneled altarpieces and painted the entire work on a single panel. This innovation transformed the art of altar decoration from that point onwards, inspiring a trend...
towards continuous-field altarpieces.\textsuperscript{7} It was also at this time that the artist began working under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, who had paid for the restoration of San Marco.\textsuperscript{8} His patrons became only more impressive as his career expanded; Fra Angelico would eventually go to Rome in the 1440s and 1450s to paint fresco cycles for Popes Eugenius IV and Nicholas V.\textsuperscript{9}

It was in the midst of his success in the 1430s that Fra Angelico’s \textit{Lamentation} was painted. This work was commissioned for the small church of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio that once stood just outside of the city walls of Florence.\textsuperscript{10} Dismantled in sixteenth century, the church is perhaps best known today because of the confraternity for which it was built, the \textit{Compagnia dei Neri} or the Tempio brotherhood. The church’s location is marked with an inscription in the c.1480 woodblock print \textit{Map with a Chain} (fig. 2).\textsuperscript{11} Located at the end of Via Malcontenti on the eastern side of the city along the Lungarno, the building was just outside of the Porta della Giustizia, a gate in the city walls of 1333, and next to the still-standing Torre della Zecca Vecchia (fig. 3).\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., see pages 97-121 for a thorough examination of this altarpiece.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 6-7.


\textsuperscript{11} A detail of this section of the print can be found Edgerton, \textit{Pictures and Punishment}, 140, fig. 32. According to Edgerton, 179, the church’s name, Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio, is derived from the Florentine legend that a Roman temple once stood at this spot.

\textsuperscript{12} For a complete discussion on the history and expansion of the city of Florence see Giovanna Balzanetti Steiner, \textit{Firenze disegnata: Le strade da porta a porta nella successione delle mura urbane/ Florence in Drawing:}
The dates that have been related to the construction and the later relocation of the brotherhood provide a rough time-line for this church, forming in turn, a background for Fra Angelico’s painting. Building had begun by 1361, but by 1367, construction of the structure still was not finished. No documents refer to the church until a record of 1447 mentions the building of a sacristy. By 1529, the original Tempio church had been abandoned, and three years later, when Duke Alessandro needed the space for a bulwark to store weapons and to serve as a shelter in case of a revolt, the church was filled with dirt and the Porta della Giustizia was closed. A new Tempio church was founded in 1532 approximately a half a kilometer north near the Porta alla Croce (now the Piazza Beccaria). This second building was closed in 1785, when the brotherhood was once again relocated, this time to the Via XXVIII Ottobre, between the Via de’Macci and the Via delle Conce.

Just as the oratory for which it was built will be fundamental in a discussion of this work, the patron and his family are an integral part of the Lamentation’s history. Fra Sebastiano (b. 1389-d. 1456) was the patron of this painting, although he was not a member of the Tempio

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14 Paatz, 305. See also Capelli, 34. A church record mentions the patronage of Piero di Piero Gianni for the sacristy in this year.

15 Balzanetti Steiner, 272. The bulwark was later called “Mongibello.” Duke Alessandro built it to store weapons taken from Florentines during the siege and for shelter in case of a popular revolt. In 1866, the building was destroyed along with the 1333 city walls to make room for new roads. See also Paatz, 305.

16 Paatz, 307. The second Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio had previously served as a hospital and had been known as St. Nicholas Hospital from 1420-1532.

17 Ibid., 307-08. See also Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 179.
brotherhood. His decision to commission a panel from Fra Angelico may have been a result of Sebastiano’s own life in the monastic community. Long before commissioning the Lamentation for Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio, Fra Sebastiano had been a Dominican friar. However, he left the Order to join the Benedictines in 1422 or 23. Because Fra Angelico entered the Dominican Order between the spring of 1418 and no later than 1423, the two men may have met in this short period of time when they were both Dominican friars. However, it is equally likely that Fra Sebastiano only knew of the artist’s work after he left Santa Maria Novella. In 1425 he was supposed to go to the Abbazia di S. Mama in Arezzo, but he chose instead to remain in Florence, residing at the Badia as a Benedictine monk. It is known that Fra Angelico painted a fresco of St. Benedict enjoining silence over the door of the Badia’s cloister (fig. 4). Perhaps Fra Sebastiano’s decision to hire Fra Angelico was based on a connection made at the Badia rather than in a Dominican context.

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19 Ibid., 2:229. Fra Sebastiano is mentioned in records of Santa Maria Novella in April of 1422 as sottopriore. He is mentioned again in February of 1422 or 23, but without the title of sottopriore. After this date, his name is no longer included in the lists of attendees at capitular meetings of the Dominican Order.

20 For a discussion on Fra Angelico’s entrance into the monastic community, see Creighton Gilbert, “The Conversion of Fra Angelico,” in Scritti di Storia dell’Arte in onore di Roberto Salvini (Florence: G.C. Sanoni Editore Nuova, 1984), 281-87. As a Dominican friar working in Florence, Fra Angelico would have been closely connected to Santa Maria Novella. He painted for reliquary panels for the convent on a commission from the Dominican friar Giovanni di Zanobi Masi (d. 1434). These panels, Madonna della Stella, The Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi, Coronation of the Virgin, and Burial and Assumption of the Virgin, were placed at the altar on specific feast days and date to before 1434 (the death of Fra Giovanni Masi is the terminus ante quem). See Spike, 233-34 for the complete provenance. For a complete discussion on the relationship between Dominican institutions in Florence during Fra Angelico’s life see Hood, 24-26.

21 Orlandi, Necrologio, 2:229-30.

22 The date of this work is unclear due to its damaged condition and has ranged from Fra Angelico’s early period to the late 1430s. See Spike, 260 and Miklós Boskovits, “Appunti sull’Angelico,” Paragone 27, no. 313 (1976): 41.
Fra Sebastiano paid for the *Lamentation* in honor of his grandmother, Beata Villana delle Botti. Beata Villana, who died in 1360 and was known as a *beata* by the fifteenth century, but was only beatified by Pope Leo XII in 1824, was renowned for her dedication to the crucifix.\(^{23}\) She was also known for her compassion for the poor.\(^{24}\) As an example of her assistance to the poor, Villana herself carried a sick man from outside of Santa Maria Novella to a nearby hospital.\(^{25}\) In a work written by Fra Girolamo di Giovanni from Santa Maria Novella around 1420 entitled the *Testo della Vita della Beata Villana* her generosity and compassion are described through stories of her piety and good deeds.\(^{26}\) According to Fra Girolamo, Beata Villana’s conversion to spiritual life occurred after seeing an image of a demon in a mirror and realizing it was her ugly spirit, as if seen through God’s eyes; when she saw her reflection, Villana immediately gave up the richly adorned gown that she was wearing for a rough, plain garment.\(^{27}\) Although she did not belong to a religious order during her life, she requested to be buried in the Dominican habit.\(^{28}\)

Fra Sebastiano’s commission for Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio relates to another relative as well. His father’s first cousin, Donna Villana di Francesco Benintendi, was connected

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\(^{23}\) The crucifix that Beata Villana had worshipped was installed above her tomb designed by Bernardo Rossellino in 1451. Fra Sebastiano was also the patron of this structure in which angels open a canopy to reveal the sculpted marble effigy of Villana. For more information on Rossellino’s tomb, see Anne Markham Schulz, *The Sculpture of Bernardo Rossellino and his Workshop* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 59-63.


\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 53-73. The complete text is reproduced in Orlandi’s book.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 58-59.

to the confraternity. In her will of May 2, 1444, Donna Villana identified Fra Sebastiano as her heir. She also left the Tempio confraternity two hundred florins to celebrate the annual feast of the Beata Villana, Donna Villana’s own aunt, in the chapel of St. Catherine of Alexandria in Santa Maria Novella each year on January 29. Although Donna Villana obviously had personal ties to the Tempio brotherhood, the Lamentation commission appears to be linked directly to Fra Sebastiano himself.

Fra Sebastiano’s responsibility for the Lamentation’s commission is testified to in documents related to a lawsuit brought by Donna Villana’s brother Lodovico Benintendi, in February of 1445, who accused Fra Sebastiano of mismanaging Villana’s funds. As her legal heir, Fra Sebastiano defended the use of the money left to him the year before. In his testimony, he stated that he paid for the decoration of an altar for the Compagnia del Tempio in his grandmother Beata Villana’s honor. He referred both to Fra Angelico’s painting and his commission of a now-lost reliquary or tabernacle by Lorenzo Ghiberti as examples of proper uses of his inheritance. Many high-ranking religious men and laymen spoke in his defense at the trial, illustrating his good reputation in the Florentine community.

29 Donna Villana was Sebastiano’s first cousin, once removed, that is, Sebastiano’s father’s first cousin. Orlandi, Beata Villana, 41, refers to Donna Villana as Sebastiano’s prozia but in Table I of the same book, he provides a family tree that illustrates her relationship to Sebastiano. In Orlandi, Necrologio, 229, footnote 9, Donna Villana is described as the “sorella cugina del padre di Fr. Sebastiano.” Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico (1974), 17 refers to Fra Sebastiano as the nephew of Beata Villana, perhaps confusing Beata Villana with Donna Villana. Donna Villana’s birth and death dates are not clear from the records provided in the literature on Beata Villana or Fra Sebastiano and his family. This paper is assuming that she died in 1444 when Fra Sebastiano became her heir.

30 Orlandi, Necrologio, 2:232-34. The confraternity also received a house in Chiasso de’Velluti that Donna Villana had sold to Donna Maria di Venezia, but only for Maria’s natural life. The Tempio brotherhood was to receive the house on the condition that they would celebrate Beata Villana’s feast each year at Santa Maria Novella. See also Orlandi, Beata Villana, 50.

31 Orlandi, Necrologio, 2:235.

32 Orlandi, Beata Villana, 40. A reliquary is mentioned in Necrologia, 1:160 in the passage “Nam antequam habitum nostris ordinis, quem legitimis causis dimist, relinqueret, fuit suprior in conventu quo tempore egregie argento ornavit reliquias beate villane eiusque festum in singulos annos faciundum curavit.” In Necrologia,
Yet problems arise with the chronology implied by these documents. The date of Fra Angelico’s commission is generally accepted as 1436, due to a document referring to two payments from that year by Fra Sebastiano, the first on April 23, and the second, believed to be the final payment for a painting, on December 2. But, if the painting was commissioned in 1436, that was eight years before Fra Sebastiano received the money from Donna Villana’s will, thus implying that either his statement at the 1445 trial or the document refers to something else. Because the 1436 payment document is the most concrete link between the patron and the commission of the *Lamentation*, this is the most plausible date. It is likely that Fra Sebastiano

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33 Orlandi, *Necrologio*, 2:234-35. The list of religious figures who testified in this defamatory trial included Fr. Girolamo di Giovanni, Fr. Tommaso di Bernardo Quercetani, Fr. Domenico Bartoli, Fr. Donato di Pietro, Fr. Benedetto Dominici, and other brothers of Santa Maria Novella. Ghiberti and the notary Piero di Giovanni Baldini also spoke on Fra Sebastiano’s behalf. The testimony of this trial still exists today in the records of Santa Maria Novella. This document was originally published in Orlandi, “Il Beato Angelico,” 1954, 190. See Appendix A for the original Latin text. In the same year as the trial, Fra Sebastiano returned to the Dominican Order, perhaps out of loyalty to the friars of Santa Maria Novella who had testified for him. He remained at the convent until his death in 1456.

34 Orlandi, “Il Beato Angelico,” 172 and doc. IX, 190-91, and Stefano Orlandi, *Beato Angelico: monografia storica della vita e delle opere con un’appendice di nuovi documenti inediti* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1964), 53-55 and doc. XVII, 187. See Appendix B for Orlandi’s introduction and the complete text. See also, Ulrich Middeldorf, “L’Angelo e la scultura,” *Rinascimento* VI, no. 2 (December, 1955): 190. Originally, the painting had been thought to be a work from the 1440s or 1450s based on the gilded decoration at the hem of the Virgin’s veil that has been read as the Roman numerals MIIIIXXXXI. However, if these letters do refer to a date, they may be documenting the consecration of the altar by Fra Tommaso Tommasini Paruta who was the apostolic administrator for the Florentine diocese at this time. See Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico* (1974), 199 for a complete summation in English.

used this example of the commission to demonstrate the sound use of his money, under the direction or encouragement of Donna Villana, before her death in 1444.36

Other than the references to payments made to Fra Angelico and Fra Sebastiano’s trial documents, the Lamentation is not mentioned in any other fifteenth-century source. However, four descriptions of the work exist from the sixteenth century, each in descriptions of the Tempio church. In 1510, in his Memoriale di molte statue e pitture…di Florentia, Francesco Albertini mentions “a panel at the Tempio della Guistizia by the hand of Fra Giovanni.”37 In the Libro di Antonio Billi from c. 1516-30 it is noted that: “Fra Angelico painted a panel in the Tempio where one sees the dead Jesus Christ with a chorus of Maries around him.”38 The L’Anonimo Magliabechiano of 1536-46 similarly describes the painting: “And also in the Temple he [Fra Angelico] painted a panel where Christ is dead with the Maries around him.”39 Finally, Vasari includes this work in his 1550 Lives, where he states “Fece medesimamente alla Compagnia del Tempio in Fiorenza una tavola d’una Cristo morto” (Similarly, for the compagnia of the Tempio

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36 Orlandi, Necrologio, 2:234. Villana had given Fra Sebastiano money during her life. According to Orlandi, “La preferenza che donna Villana di Francesco di Piero Stefani Benintendi aveva dimostrata per Fr. Sebastiano, suo pronipote, ed il fatto che questi era divenuto l’esecutore di molte sue volontà in vita, e dopo la morte ne era divenuto l’ereditrice universale, aveva provocato le ire del fratello di lei, Lodovico e della sua famiglia.” It can be speculated that in honor of the Beata Villana, Fra Sebastiano, like Donna Villana, was interested in working with the Tempio brotherhood. He used the commission of Fra Angelico’s Lamentation in 1436 at his trial as an example of his generosity and trustworthiness.


38 Il Libro di Antonio Billi, ed. F. Benedetucci (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1991), 77 and 128. See also Spike, 222. In both the Codice Petrei and the Codice Strozzianno, this passage is identical.

39 L’Anonimo Magliabechiano, ed. A. Ficarra (Naples: Fiorentino, 1968), 102. See also Spike, 222.
in Florence he [Fra Angelico] painted a panel of the dead Christ). The word *medesimamente*, meaning *similarly*, refers to the passage prior to this one in which Vasari discusses Fra Angelico’s frescoes of 1447 in the Chapel of San Brizio in the Duomo of Orvieto that he painted with his workshop. In his 1568 *Lives*, Vasari again mentions the *Lamentation* in the short passage, “Per la Compagnia del Tempio di Firenze fece, in una tavola, un Cristo morto.” (For the *compagnia* of the Tempio of Florence he made, on a panel, a dead Christ.) However in this passage, the word *medesimamente* has been removed. It is plausible that in his 1550 edition of *Lives*, Vasari was referring to Fra Angelico’s use of assistants on the frescoes at Orvieto and believed that Fra Angelico had also worked with assistants on the Tempio *Lamentation*. The omission of the word in his 1568 edition could suggest that he changed his opinion and now believed Fra Angelico worked on his own on this commission.

The *Lamentation* is not mentioned again until 1754-62 when Giuseppe Richa wrote of the painting in the second volume of his *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine divise ne’ suoi quartieri*. This time it is recorded in the second church of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio. Commissioned for the first church of the Tempio brotherhood, Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation* moved with the brotherhood to two other locations before entering the collection of the Galleria


42 Even today, Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico* (1952), 16 and 176 proposes that Fra Angelico worked with assistants on the *Lamentation*.

dell’Accademia in 1786, after the confraternity dispersed. In 1919 the painting came to the Museo di San Marco, where it hangs today.⁴⁴

Although the documents discussed in this chapter have helped to clarify its background, scholarship on the _Lamentation_ has never before explored the visual elements in the work itself. This is unfortunate because it is only through a complete study of this painting that one can completely understand Fra Angelico’s ability to delicately balance narrative and iconic elements into a single panel. By examining this painting, one will appreciate the _Lamentation_ as a complex work that subtly entwines the drama of the Crucifixion with the quiet mourning of holy figures; it is a scene in which the audience can reflect on the sorrow of Christ’s death.

⁴⁴ Spike, 221.
CHAPTER TWO

THE TRADITIONAL AND THE UNCONVENTIONAL IN THE LAMENTATION

The sixteenth-century references to the Lamentation briefly mention aspects of the painting’s content and subject matter. They do not, however, elaborate on either the identity of all of the figures or the landscape in which the scene is set. Under a soft blue sky marked with thin, wispy clouds, the figures in the Lamentation are placed in a simplified Tuscan landscape. On the left, rolling hills dotted with miniscule edifices and trees mark the horizon. A walled city with a single gate dominates the opposite side of the composition, receding from the right edge toward the upper-left of the panel and exiting with the distant hills. The tops of unadorned buildings within the city itself are visible behind the turreted wall.

The figures included in Fra Angelico’s Lamentation do not overlap this backdrop. Rather, they appear to be subterranean, situated on a plane sparsely decorated with individually rendered plants. Surrounding Christ, the four men and ten women almost completely fill the lower half of the panel; they are placed in a strong horizontal band in the foreground, and with the exception of one figure on the far left and the dead Christ, they are all kneeling. This grouping of figures is arranged on three sides around Christ that reflect the containment of the walled city behind them. The positions of these characters echoes those found in a mid-fourteenth-century Lamentation panel by Niccolò di Tommaso (fig. 5) where again the figures kneel, crowded in the constricted space of the foreground.45
The figure of Christ lies horizontal to the picture plane on a semi-transparent shroud that is not resting on the ground, but instead appears to be floating slightly above it. Covered with only a thin loincloth, his body appears lifeless. The figures that surround him further emphasize his lack of movement and expression. Around Christ, four haloed, kneeling figures tend to his body: on the left side of the panel, a woman cradles his head in her lap; in the middle, a man holds his left arm, and a woman with her back to the viewer holds his right hand; another woman leans forward to kiss his feet on the left side of the painting. These figures are among the easiest to identify in the composition because of their traditional appearances in scenes of the Crucifixion and Entombment.

The Virgin is at Christ’s head, looking at his face and wearing a hooded blue cloak over a red tunic. A gold star marks her halo. Her fixed gaze and close physical contact with her son isolates them from the rest of the group, reminiscent of the Pietà where the Virgin and Christ are usually the main characters portrayed in the scene or are even depicted without any additional people. An early example can be found in the Pietà by Giovanni di Pietro da Napoli from c. 1402-04 (fig. 6). In this Pietà, the Virgin holds Christ in her lap in the center of the composition while the three Maries and St. John the Evangelist surround them. Such images focus on the relationship between a mother and her dead son, as she holds his lifeless body, creating an intimate depiction of the two figures.46 In Fra Angelico’s Lamentation, this idea is incorporated into a larger scene, as the other figures on the left side of the composition surround the Virgin and Christ and seem to frame the pair as they watch over them.

45 Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico, (1952), 176 identified this early source of Fra Angelico’s composition. However, there are other similarities between the two panels that will be discussed below. This information is also included in Pope-Hennessy’s revised and reedited 1974 edition, Fra Angelico, 199. The specific dates for this work are unknown.

46 For a complete discussion of the Pietà see Henk van Os, The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe 1300-1500 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 104.
St. John the Evangelist, the only male figure in the central group, holds Christ’s left arm as he leans over his body. The beardless St. John wears a light blue tunic under a soft red mantle and has wavy light brown hair. Holding Christ’s right arm and with her back to the viewer, one of the three Maries wears a green cloak and her long blond hair hangs loosely down her back. Holding Christ’s feet as she leans forward to kiss them, Mary Magdalen, in a blue tunic with a red mantel lined with green also wears her fair hair loose.

Around this core group, ten additional figures mourn Christ’s death. Besides St. John the Evangelist, only three other men are included in this crowd, and they are all on the far left side of the painting. One man, the only standing figure of this composition, presses his hands together in prayer. He is bearded and wears a Dominican habit. His head is bald on the top with cropped hair on its sides, and he holds lilies in his hands that may represent purity or the city of Florence. This figure can be identified as St. Dominic, founder of the Dominican Order; a red star on his halo indicates his martyrdom. It has been suggested that St. Dominic was painted to resemble Fra Sebastiano, the patron of the work, who had been but was no longer a member of the Dominican Order.

In front of Dominic, two haloed men kneel, tilted towards each other in conversation. One holds a small jar with the balm used to anoint Christ. He wears a red mantle over his blue tunic with gold trim and has a long brown beard. This figure is most likely Joseph of Arimathea, and to his left, his companion is probably Nicodemus who has a shorter beard and a green tunic over which is a red cape with gold lining.

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47 Kaftal, 309-11 discusses the iconography of St. Dominic.

48 Orlandi, *Beato Angelico*, 54. Although no one knows what Fra Sebastiano looked like, the individualized features give the viewer the impression that this is the portrait of a specific person, and therefore, may be the patron of this work.
On the opposite side of the men are two kneeling women who are also identifiable. One woman wears a hooded black garment and has the gold rays of a beata around her head. This woman can be identified as the Beata Villana and is the only figure in the entire composition whose name is inscribed on her halo, indicating the importance of her presence as well as her temporal removal from the event itself. Villana crosses her hands at her chest and an inscription appears to flow from her mouth. It reads “XPO YHU LAMOR MIO CRVCIFISSO” (Christ Jesus my Crucified Love).\(^{50}\)

At Villana’s left, a crowned, haloed woman holds a martyr’s palm in her hands as they rest on her stomach. She wears a red cape over a blue tunic that is decorated with ornate gold trim. Behind this saint is a large wooden wheel, helping to identify her as St. Catherine of Alexandria.\(^{51}\) Beata Villana was known for her devotion to St. Catherine of Alexandria, who appeared regularly in Villana’s visions.\(^{52}\) The letters “MEVS” (“my” in Latin) are found in the gold trim of her red cape.\(^{53}\) This word could refer to Catherine’s importance to Villana.

In front of Villana, another haloed woman leans forward and spreads her hands apart in response to the scene. She wears a black tunic belted with a cord at her chest and a red and blue mantle draped over her left shoulder. Positioned directly behind Mary Magdalen, this figure is most likely the third of the three Maries. Like the other two Maries, this woman also wears her

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\(^{49}\) Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four of the Gospels as the person who removed Christ’s body from the cross (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19: 38-42). Nicodemus is mentioned in John 19:39-42 as assisting Joseph in placing Christ in the tomb as well as bringing the balm.


\(^{51}\) Kaftal, 226. St. Catherine of Alexandria is usually represented as a young Christian princess martyr, wearing a crown. Her spiked wheel is often behind her.

\(^{52}\) Orlandi, *La Beata Villana*, 64. See also Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico* (1952), 16.

\(^{53}\) Orlandi, *Beata Villana*, 43.
long blond hair loose over her shoulders. Although the Maries were mentioned in the Bible as at the Entombment, they may have been included here to foreshadow the events to come.\(^54\)

In the center of the scene are four women who are not as easily identified and have not been named in any of the scholarship of this painting. Next to the group of men on the left, a woman with a halo clutches her blue mantel and presses her hand to her cheek as she looks at the scene before her. Again on her left but closer to the center of the composition, a young woman crosses her hands at her chest while, next to her, an older woman presses her hands together in prayer. Both of these women are beatified figures, indicated by the gold rays around their heads in place of the gold haloes of saints, and wear red mantels and white veils.\(^55\)

In the center and towards the right side of the composition, a woman wearing a nun’s habit looks at Christ’s feet with her hands pressed together. She kneels between St. John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalen. This woman could be one of the Dominican beate who were popular at this time. Although she is depicted with the gold halo of a saint, some beatified females were given haloes in place of gold rays used for beate.\(^56\) St. Catherine of Siena (b. around 1347) was only canonized in 1461, but she was portrayed with a halo soon after her death in 1380.\(^57\) Another possibility is the Beata Joan of Orvieto (b. 1264) who was also painted with a...
halo rather than rays.\textsuperscript{58} A third possibility is the Beata Margaret of Hungary (b. 1242) who was also depicted with a halo and nun’s habit.\textsuperscript{59} Although they were alive at a later time than the Passion, all three of these women were important figures in the Dominican Order. In a commission in honor of the Beata Villana, a Dominican tertiary, any of these beate would have been well suited to a grouping of holy men and women that included such examples of Dominican virtue.

As if to further emphasize the scene of the foreground, there are echoes of Christ’s sacrifice elsewhere in the panel. For instance, a pair of trees flanks each side of the composition, framing the figures in the foreground, especially St. Dominic on the left and Villana and St. Catherine on the right. While those on the left have deep green leaves and appear to be evergreens, the trees on the right hold citrus fruit and are closer to the foreground than the pair on the opposite side. At Christ’s head, the evergreens represent eternal life. On the opposite side of the composition, the trees have fruit that they will eventually lose and regain again, signifying the cycle of life and death. These trees remind viewers that like Christ, they too can triumph over death for everlasting life.

While the trees occupy the sides of the composition, a large cross dominates the center of the painting. The heavy wooden beams of this structure tower over the figures below it. The cross extends all of the way to the top of the panel, even above the walled city. With a thick black nail protruding from each bloodstained arm and a ladder propped behind it, this cross, the

\textsuperscript{58} Kaftal, 536. Joan is typically depicted as a Dominican tertiary with a halo. An example of this type of image is found in the Master of the Dominican Effigies, \textit{Panel of the Dominican Effigies} from c. 1336 that is in Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 671. Like Joan, an example of this type of portrait is found in the Master of the Dominican Effigies, \textit{Panel of the Dominican Effigies} from c. 1336 that is in Santa Maria Novella, Florence.
central instrument in Christ’s death, becomes a principal character in this scene of the Lamentation.

Understandably, the cross is often included in scenes of Christ’s Passion. Likewise, certain holy people present in the visual history of Christ’s Crucifixion and Entombment are also often incorporated into depictions of the Lamentation. The Virgin, usually at Christ’s head, the three Maries with Mary Magdalen kissing Christ’s feet, St. John the Evangelist, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus are all expected characters in these scenes. Other figures included in the Tempio Lamentation are unusual additions to this theme. Thus, it is useful to discuss traditional scenes of the Lamentation and compare the Tempio version to earlier precedents.

The Lamentation has its foundation in Byzantine painting.60 Since the Middle Ages, it was derived from passages found in the Latin version of the Gospel of Nicodemus.61 This text described the reactions of grief from the Virgin, Mary Magdalen, and Joseph of Arimathea at the Crucifixion.62 Beginning in the thirteenth century, the Lamentation was included in scenes of the Passion in fresco cycles and as one of the events portrayed on the small fields to either side of painted crucifixes.63 An example of a Lamentation on a crucifix can be found in the lower right panel of Coppo di Marcovaldo’s Crucifix from the late 1250s, today in the Pinacoteca Civica, San Gimignano (fig. 7). Here the dead Christ, who has been removed from the cross, lies on the ground, with mourners surrounding him. The Virgin holds his body. Although not included in the Gospels, the event was understood to have occurred between the Deposition when Christ is removed from the cross, and the Entombment, when Christ was placed in the tomb. Usually in

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61 Ibid., 2:175.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 2:174-5.
Lamentation scenes, there is evidence of the environment in which the event has taken place, emphasizing its role in the narrative; the cross and even the tomb are sometimes included.\textsuperscript{64}

Because the Lamentation served as a transitional scene in episodes of the Passion, it began to appear regularly in fresco cycles. In this context, its iconography was gradually expanded and refined.\textsuperscript{65}

Fra Angelico’s fresco of the \textit{Lamentation} from c. 1441 in cell two of San Marco (fig. 8) includes the mouth of a cave on the right side of the composition where an empty sarcophagus remains open for Christ’s body.\textsuperscript{66} This cave takes up the majority of the composition, framing the figures; its rocks block off most of the landscape. In this work, the sarcophagus and the cave are emphasized to remind the viewer of the Entombment that follows, even if, as in this case, it will be in another cell of the convent. The characters present at this Lamentation are limited to the Virgin, St. John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalen, and another of the three Maries. Although St. Dominic is included, he is not an active figure in the narrative but witnesses it from the side of the composition. In both the Tempio \textit{Lamentation} and in cell two of San Marco, the body of Christ is divided by the figure kneeling in the foreground and is further emphasized by the gestures and glances of the holy persons surrounding him. The characters at Christ’s feet watch and react to Mary Magdalen, while those at his head concentrate on the Virgin. In both works, the figures create the impression of the Entombment by surrounding Christ on all sides,

\textsuperscript{64} Schiller, 2:174. See van Os, 87-129 for descriptions and examples of each type of scene.

\textsuperscript{65} Schiller, 2:175.

\textsuperscript{66} Hood, 210 dates the frescoes in the east corridor, which includes the Lamentation, to 1441. In Hood, 221 he attributes this work to one of Fra Angelico’s assistants, the Master of Cell 2, but even if this is the case, Fra Angelico would have presumably played a part in its design.
reflecting the enclosed walls of the city in the case of the Tempio panel and the cave in the fresco at San Marco.

Like Fra Angelico’s fresco, Pietro Lorenzetti’s *Lamentation* fresco from 1320-30 in the lower church of St. Francis, Assisi (fig. 9) includes only figures relevant to the biblical narrative of the Crucifixion, in addition to the Virgin, St. John, and two of the Maries, the figures Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the third Mary are also present. They hold the body of Christ in front of the cross against a dark, unadorned background. In this image, the simplification of the figures and composition allows the viewer to easily identify and understand each event in the fresco cycle of the Passion.

Giotto’s *Lamentation* fresco in the Arena Chapel (1305-06) is considered the key predecessor to these scenes from the Passion. In this fresco, again part of a larger cycle, the focus of the image is on the reactions of the figures as they witness the scene before them. The backdrop of the drama is a simplified rocky landscape, again furthering the progression of the narrative fresco cycle by hinting at the Entombment (fig. 10). Although in this fresco there is the addition of a group of witnesses who stand to the left, they lack identifiable attributes and are included to create a crowd of witnesses to the event rather than to portray specific people from the Gospels. Like Fra Angelico and Pietro Lorenzetti’s frescoes, the emphasis is on the main characters of the scene. Unlike the Tempio *Lamentation*, in which a number of saints from different times and places kneel around the main figures, Giotto used only traditional saints in the central depiction of the biblical scene. The other figures included are meant to represent a crowd and stand away from the core group.

Predella panels traditionally employed the same concepts as the fresco cycles. An early example of a predella is Puccio di Simone’s *Lamentation* panel from mid-fourteenth century (fig.
Like most of the previous Lamentations discussed, this scene is set in front of a rocky landscape which points to the Entombment. Also like the frescoes discussed above, this work includes only the traditional figures from the Gospels who react to the dead Christ. Scenes of the Lamentation were less common as single-panel images in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, and these early examples often followed the same format as frescoes and predellas. In Lippo di Benivieni’s independent panel of the Lamentation from 1296-1327 (fig. 12), the figures are again in front of a cross on a rocky landscape. The same figures included in the Lamentation scenes above, the Virgin, St. John the Evangelist, the three Maries, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, surround Christ, holding his body.

In all of these traditional scenes found in fresco cycles, predellas, and independent panels, the main image includes the characters from the Gospels that are sometimes in front of a cross and often in a rocky, bare landscape. This is very different than expansive landscape that occupies the upper-half of the composition in the Tempio Lamentation. However, there are precedents for this image. In another panel by Simone Martini from c. 1333 (fig. 13), a crowd of figures reacts to Christ’s death in front of a dark landscape with dense foliage. Here, the scenes of the Lamentation and Entombment have been conflated into a single image. As in the Tempio Lamentation, the trees symbolize both Christ’s resurrection, this time in the form of a palm tree, and triumph over the cycle of death through a fruit-bearing tree on the far right.

The figures of Simone Martini’s scene are not limited to the standard set of characters, and although they are on the left of the composition, they seem to spill out in to the main scene, adding to its drama. However, unlike the Lamentation of the Tempio brotherhood, these figures are not marked as holy figures, and thus, are closer to Giotto’s fresco in that they are types of people who react to Christ’s death in different manners. Although Fra Angelico’s core group of
figures does include the Virgin, St. John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalen, and the other two Mariates, the additional characters are also involved in the central scene. For instance, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus kneel with other holy figures, as they appear to witness the event before them as a single group and the woman in the Dominican habit kneels directly behind Christ’s legs. There is no barrier separating these figures from the central characters.

This mixture of holy men and women who were present at Christ’s Passion and saints and beate from contemporary times strays from traditional scenes of the Lamentation. The Tempio panel does, however, have predecessors for this innovation. In another independent panel, the San Remigio Pietà altarpiece from c. 1360 by Giottino, identifiable saints who were alive at different periods of time stand in sacra conversazione behind Christ’s dead body and interact with one another, as they witness the event before them (fig. 14).67 They stand behind pious female patrons who kneel and pray before the scene. Unlike other earlier depictions, such as Giotto’s Lamentation and Simone Martini’s panel, these saints are known to have been alive long after the narrative of the Passion had taken place.68 The San Remigio panel does not have to advance the narrative; the painting stands on its own as a single scene of contemplation.69 This work, like the Tempio Lamentation, may have had more freedom to expand upon tradition because it was an independent panel and not an episode in a series of frescoes.

Although the San Remigio panel employs the same concepts found in Fra Angelico’s panel, a closer source appears to have directly influenced the Tempio Lamentation. Niccolò di


69 Birkmeyer, 464-65. In fact, Birkmeyer calls the San Remigio altarpiece a Pietà because of the focus on the Virgin and Christ within the larger composition.
Tommaso’s *Lamentation*, mentioned above, includes the same four unidentifiable women who kneel around the dead Christ with the central figures. In this panel, the Virgin is at Christ’s head, St. John the Evangelist is at his left, one of the three Maries is at his right, Mary Magdalen is at his feet, and the third Mary is kneeling to her right. With the exception of the Virgin, these four figures wear haloes. However, the remaining figures do not have them. Behind the Virgin is a woman who, like the woman in blue in the Tempio *Lamentation*, holds her left hand at her face and clutches her cloak with her right hand. In both images, the woman to her left, on the opposite side of the Virgin, crosses her hands at her chest and wears a thin veil over her head. Also in both works, the women kneeling next to her, on the opposite side of St. John the Evangelist, wears a veil and looks on at the scene from behind the other figures. Finally, on the far left in each work is a woman dressed in a Dominican habit; she is cropped at the right edge of Niccolò di Tommaso’s painting. Thus, not only is the composition the same in both of these images, but Fra Angelico seems to have borrowed the same dress and poses from his predecessor’s *Lamentation*, another Dominican image.70

These same figures also appear in another painting by Fra Angelico. In his *Deposition* for the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Trinita from c. 1438-39, Fra Angelico used the same female representations to form the group of women who surround the Virgin on the left side of the composition.71 In this work, a woman wearing a black and white habit but without a halo stands to the Virgin’s left, while a woman wearing a white veil and a red gown, also without a halo, stands behind the kneeling Virgin. Behind these figures, a haloed woman in blue stands with her hands pressed together, and another haloed woman who also wears a white veil with a red gown

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70 Reasons for this source in Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation* will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4 of this paper.

stands on the Virgin’s right. Although neither Niccolò di Tommaso nor Fra Angelico indicate
the identities of these women, they obviously had either an association with the Virgin at scenes
of the Passion or were used by Fra Angelico as types of women that he could include in
compositions where female groups were needed.\footnote{Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Fra Angelico} (1952), 16 suggests that the same assistant worked on parts of both the
Tempio \textit{Lamentation} and the Strozzi \textit{Deposition}. Unfortunately, he does not specify which parts he believes were by
his workshop in the Strozzi \textit{Deposition}.}

While the Tempio \textit{Lamentation} contains many of the traditional elements associated with
depictions of this scene, it also includes deviations from its precedents. There are no obvious
indications of Christ’s Entombment, and the painting has a more urban setting than the normal
rocky landscape of the Lamentation. The work also combines figures that are included in the
biblical narrative of the Crucifixion and Entombment with other holy persons that were not alive
until hundreds of years later, weaving contemporary people with biblical figures in the same
central scene. Why are these intentional variations on a traditional theme included in this work?
The following chapters will discuss these changes and offer possible reasons for these inclusions
through its commission, function, and audiences.
CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF THE TEMPIO BROTHERHOOD

A consideration of the unusual elements of Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation* should begin with the confraternity of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio. Indeed, deviations from traditional scenes of the Lamentation may be explained by the church for which this painting was originally commissioned, and more importantly, the duties of its confraternity. The group of lay brothers, the Tempio brotherhood, was known mostly for a specific service that they performed. Dressed in hooded black robes, the brothers assisted prisoners in the hours before to their executions.\(^73\)

The confraternity’s philosophy was based on Christ’s Seven Acts of Mercy, described in Matthew 25:34-40.\(^74\) Their charitable deeds were performed to save the souls of the condemned.

In 1343, the Tempio brotherhood was founded in Florence by a group of prominent men that included aristocrats and important citizens, indicating the confraternity’s importance to the community.\(^75\)

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\(^73\) This type of confraternity, known as a comforting confraternity or black brotherhood, began in Bologna in 1336 and quickly spread throughout Italy. The Tempio brotherhood was Florence’s comforting confraternity. For a discussion on the Society of Santa Maria della Morte, the earliest black brotherhood, in Bologna, see Adriano Prosperi, “Il sangue e l’anima, richercché sulle Compagnia di Giustizia in Italia,” *Quaderni storici*, 51 (1982): 960-999.

\(^74\) In Matthew 25:34-40, visiting prisoners is mentioned in the passage, “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food…I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food…And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

\(^75\) Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 178-79 and Capelli, 73-85. The confraternity remained intact until capital punishment became illegal in the late 1700s at which time its duties became obsolete. It was revived as a ceremonial club in the nineteenth century but ended again around World War II.
from a collection of manuscripts known as the *Libro di varie notizie e memorie della venerabile Compagnia di Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio* that describes the code of conduct for the confraternity. Documented in these manuscripts are the Tempio brothers’ instructions for comforting the prisoner or *afflitto* prior to execution.\(^\text{76}\)

This practice is not actually documented before the early 1500s, but it is still useful in identifying the *Lamentation*’s role in the confraternity’s oratory a century earlier. After spending the night praying with and comforting the condemned prisoner in the chapel at the Bargello or the Stinche, the two Florentine prisons at this time, a Tempio brother accompanied the *afflitto* on a legally mandated *cerca*, a specific route through the streets of Florence that eventually led to the confraternity’s oratory and then to the gallows outside of the city gate, aptly at the Porta della Giustizia.\(^\text{77}\) Because this was a part of the spectacle of the execution, crowds watched as the prisoner was led on his journey. By the end of the fifteenth century, the brotherhood had developed a device known as a *tavoletta* (fig. 16) that was meant to aid the condemned.\(^\text{78}\) This object consisted of small panel with a handle; the *tavoletta* typically had a painted scene of the Crucifixion on one side and a scene of martyrdom on its other side.\(^\text{79}\)

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\(^\text{76}\) Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 179 and 231-38. Most of these manuscripts remain unpublished and are housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. The documents include records from the beginning of the confraternity in the fourteenth century to the end of the order in the late eighteenth century. Edgerton believes this collection of various individual records of the confraternity that spans four hundred years was compiled in the middle of the twentieth century. They include specific instructions known as the *Instruzione universale per la Compagnia dei Neri in occasione del esecuzione di condannato al morte*, fols. 167r-220v, that the Tempio brothers were to follow on the day of execution. See also Giuseppe Rondini, “I ‘giustiziati’ a Firenze (del secolo 15 al secolo 18),” *Archivio storico italiano*, series 5, 28 (1901), 209-56 for an additional description of the Tempio’s duties at executions. A precise delineation of the Tempio brothers duties in assisting prisoners can be found in Stefano Sieni, *Firenze Boia* (Florence: Bonechi Editore, 1974), 40-48.


\(^\text{78}\) *Tavolette* were obviously being used by around this time because they are depicted in an unknown artist’s painting *The Agony of Savonarola* from c. 1498, discussed below.
Although no tavolette from the Florentine confraternity survive, later versions from the Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato in Rome may serve as examples of these objects (fig. 17). As in the case of these later Roman examples, the black brotherhoods presumably had many such objects, each illustrating a different type of martyrdom. The brothers chose the tavoletta to be used for a specific execution by relating the martyrdom depicted on the panel to the afflito’s own punishment. The prisoners were to relate their own executions to the martyrdom of the holy figures and Christ, understanding death as a means to salvation.

During the journey from the jail to the gallows, the vision of the prisoner was deliberately blocked by the tavoletta. The afflito, thus, was forced to focus entirely on the image before him instead of the crowds of spectators and eventually the gallows. The Tempio brother holding the tavoletta accompanied the condemned the entire way to the gallows. In fact, in the Libro di varie notizie e memorie, the brothers are instructed to hold the panel before the prisoner until the last possible moment, indicating the important role of the device in the cerca. The brothers even climbed the gallows behind the afflitti, who were dragged up the ladder on their backs. The brothers climbed the ladder behind the prisoners holding the panel in front of them as the afflitti were forced up the ladder and remained with them until they were dropped from the scaffold.

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79 For a complete description of the tavoletta’s role in public executions see Edgerton, Pictures and Punishment, 165-221. See also Samuel Y. Edgerton, “A Little-Known ‘Purpose of Art’ in the Italian Renaissance,” Art History 2, no. 1 (1979): 46-51.


81 Ibid., 234-38 provides a chart of the different types of execution in Florence from 1420 to 1574 that he compiled from the Libro dei giustiziati. In the fifteenth century, beheadings and hangings were by far the most common methods of execution. Other types included being burned alive, dragging, and others that were not specified.

82 Ibid., 180.

A drawing of a hanging by Annibale Carracci from c. 1599 demonstrates this practice (fig. 18). The condemned man on the left is being dragged up the ladder by the executioner while a member of a black brotherhood holds a *tavoletta* in front of his face.  

Also in the middle of the journey from the jail to the gallows was a visit to the confraternity’s oratory at Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio. Like the *tavolette*, the oratory was decorated with images of martyrdom. The façade of the small building was frescoed with images of Christ’s Passion. These frescoes, painted in 1390 by Spinello Aretino, implicitly related the prisoner’s own experience, as he was taken through the Florentine streets, to Christ’s path, as he was led to his death through the streets of Jerusalem. Paintings on the walls of the interior depicted scenes of martyrs’ deaths. One work that may have been especially poignant to the *afflitti* was Bicci di Lorenzo’s now-lost painting of St. James the Lesser rescuing prisoners being hanged. He is portrayed holding them up by their nooses to prevent them from strangling. This imagery, like the presence of the ladder in Fra Angelico’s panel, would have been relevant to the prisoner, who would soon see the scene of his own execution at the gallows.

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85 Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 194 and Balzanetti Steiner, 270. However, there is no information about these lost frescoes in the literature on Spinello Aretino. For information on his work see Stefan Weppelman, *Spinello Aretino und die toskanische Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Florence: Edifir, 2003), passim. Another example of decoration in which the scenes directly relate to the function of the building can be found in the Pellegrinaio in the Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala, Siena. Between 1439 and 1444 Domenico di Bartolo painted the following charitable activities of the hospital: care of the sick, the reception of pilgrims and the distribution of bread, the nursing and education of orphans and the marriage of a poor girl whose dowry was provided by the hospital, and the feeding of the poor. These frescoes were meant to show the patients of the hospital that they were in good care. For a complete discussion of these frescoes see Carl Brandon Strehlke, “Art and Culture in Renaissance Siena,” in *Painting in Renaissance Siena, 1420-1500*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989), 47-50.

In the confraternity’s oratory, the prisoner was chained to a post and forced to kneel before the altar where Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation* was located before being let to the gallows. Just as Christ’s Passion and other scenes of martyrdom were painted on the sixteenth-century *tavolette* to comfort the prisoners, it has been suggested that Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation* served the same function a century earlier. The *afflittio* could contemplate Christ’s sacrifice and relate it to his own inescapable death as he knelt before the painting. In the Tempio chapel the condemned was immersed in imagery of sacrifice and death. By the sixteenth century, he could reflect upon these same themes on the portable panels from the moment he left the jail.

Unlike the *tavolette*, it was impossible to transport the large panel of the *Lamentation* with the prisoners to the gallows. Perhaps in order to keep the image mentally with the prisoner on the remainder of his *cerca*, the painting includes visual elements that would have been familiar to the *afflittio* after he left the oratory. For instance, the location of the death of the prisoner in fifteenth-century Florence was similar to that implied in Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation*. The cross is set halfway between the walls of the city and the surrounding hill, just as Florentine executions too were held just beyond its walls. In both cases, the condemned was led outside the safety of the city to be executed. This parallel, like the *cerca* that took the condemned to his execution, created a relationship between the prisoner and Christ; both the *afflittio* and Christ were paraded through the streets to their executions outside the city walls.

In Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation*, the location of the Crucifixion beyond Jerusalem is indicated by the large walled city that dominates the painting’s right side and the rolling

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87 Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 194. Although the evidence provided by Edgerton is inadequate, my reading of this painting’s function presumes the validity of this argument.


89 Balzanetti Steiner, 270-71.
landscape on the left. Within the wall is a centralized, columned tower to the immediate left of the gate that may represent the Holy Sepulcher. Evidence in the painting’s setting points to a place other than Jerusalem. The contemporary architectural style of the buildings suggests that this city is also a representation of Florence. Fra Angelico often included a Florentine cityscape to represent the Gates of Heaven or the New Jerusalem, a symbolic depiction that would have been readily accessible to the Florentine viewer. Although the technique of using a wall on the right of the composition to define recession into space is found in Donatello’s 1417-18 predella St. George at Or San Michele (fig. 19), the similar device in Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Miracle of the Strozzi Boy from the San Zenobius sarcophagus completed by 1443 is far more elaborate and clearly suggestive of a fortified city wall. Here, as in Fra Angelico’s painting, a turreted, walled city also occupies the right portion of the scene (fig. 20). The gate and the structures it encloses recede into space towards the center of the composition. Because, in the case of Ghiberti’s relief, the miracle itself took place in Florence, there is no doubt as to the identity of the city depicted. In the Tempio Lamentation, this fact is further supported by the inscription, which flows from Villana’s mouth and ends at the gate of the walled city. These

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90 For a discussion of such allusions to Jerusalem in depictions of Florence, see Robert D. Russell, “‘A Similitude of Paradise’: The City as Image of the City,” in The Iconography of Heaven, Clifford Davidson, ed. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 146-161. For more information on historical precedents for this concept see Bianca Kühnel, From the Earthly to the Heavenly Jerusalem: Representations of the Holy City in Christian Art of the First Millennium (Rom, Freiburg, and Wien: Herder, 1987), passim.

91 An example of using Florence in place of Jerusalem can be seen in the predella of the 1434-35 Annalena altarpiece, now in the Museo di San Marco in Florence. See Hood, 102-04.


93 Richard Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 6. The San Zenobius sarcophagus was first commissioned in 1432, but then cancelled in 1437. In 1439, Ghiberti received a new contract for this work. Because Ghiberti and Fra Angelico had already collaborated on an earlier project, the Linaiuoli Tabernacle, in 1432, it is plausible that they shared ideas for other projects.

94 Middledorf, 189-90. For a complete discussion of the San Zenobius sarcophagus see Krautheimer, 154, 205-10.
words link Villana with the city of Florence, her home as a Dominican tertiary at Santa Maria Novella. The parallel of Ghiberti’s relief with Fra Angelico’s depiction reinforces the dual nature of the painted walled city in the *Lamentation* as both Jerusalem and Florence.

The gate in the *Lamentation* also has a Florentine precedent. In *Il Giuoco del Civettino* by Giovanni di Ser Giovanni (known as lo Scheggia) from c. 1430, today in the Museo di Palazzo Davanzati, Florence (fig. 21), a gate with a turreted tower resembles the gate in Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation*. Because, according to the biblical narrative, Christ was crucified outside of Jerusalem’s walls, the gated city in the *Lamentation* must surely represent the holy city. However, the idea of the gate as an entrance to paradise and, at the same time, the gate as the doorway to a specific Tuscan town, were meant to be interchangeable in the viewer’s mind, instilling a sense that the city had been blessed by God.95

Because the perfection of forms reflects God’s perfect creation of the universe, artists often portrayed their cities with geometric order to emphasize the high standards that citizens must reach.96 Like Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s urban scene in his 1337-39 *Allegory of Good Government* in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena (fig. 22), the controlled order of the geometric, unadorned edifices of the *Lamentation* stresses the city’s goodness and sanctity.97 In two examples painted later than the *Lamentation*, the city of Florence is portrayed in a similar manner. In Ghirlandaio’s *Pietà* fresco in the church of Ognassanti, Florence from c. 1472 (fig. 23) the walled city of Florence is again visible behind the cross set in the Tuscan landscape.98

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96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., 198.

Sandro Botticelli’s *Crucifixion with the Penitent Magdalen and an Angel* from c. 1498-1500 in the Fogg Art Museum (Cambridge, MA) also depicts Florence in the distance (fig. 24). In Botticelli’s work, one can actually identify landmarks of the city, such as the Duomo, Giotto’s campanile, and the Palazzo della Signoria.\(^99\) Yet, unlike Botticelli’s *Crucifixion* and the well-known representation of Siena as Jerusalem in the Entrance panel of Duccio’s 1308-11 *Maestà* (fig. 25), it is difficult to identify the exact buildings represented in the *Lamentation*.\(^100\) Rather, Fra Angelico was more interested in creating an impression of Florence meant to represent Jerusalem through a walled city that echoes a specific portrait of the city.

There are other indications that Fra Angelico was creating a visual relationship between the reality of Florentine executions and Christ’s Crucifixion in Jerusalem. Although no mention of ladders at Christ’s Crucifixion is made in the Gospels, they are often included in depictions of the Crucifixion.\(^101\) The ladder that stands behind the cross also has a contemporary context. In an effort to create a scene with which contemporary viewers could identify, painters sometimes included imagery from executions of their own time in scenes of Crucifixions, including ladders.\(^102\)

Giacomo Jaquerio’s c. 1440 *Crucifixion*, now in the Museo Civico in Turin, includes a crowded scene of spectators in fifteenth-century costume (fig. 26).\(^103\) The condemned thief on

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\(^101\) Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 188-89. Another example that includes multiple ladders can be found in cell 36 in San Marco, Florence in the fresco *Christ Being Nailed to the Cross* from 1438-52.

\(^102\) Ibid., 190.

the left side is being dragged up the ladder on his back by an executioner in the same manner that a prisoner would have been taken to the scaffold in contemporary hangings. The scene of Jaquerio’s *Crucifixion* in its entirety closely resembles an execution of the fifteenth century.\(^{104}\)

Even Fra Angelico’s *Deposition* includes ladders behind the cross and men in contemporary dress who stand on the right side of the composition. These men have individual characteristics but cannot be identifiable as specific people drawn from the biblical narrative. Instead, Fra Angelico appears to have used people from his own time to represent different types of onlookers at Christ’s Passion.\(^{105}\) Here too, the viewer would have related this scene to contemporary executions, through this group of people witnessing the event.

With the ladders propped against the strong wooden beams in the *Deposition* as well as in the Tempio *Lamentation*, the crosses themselves recall the scaffolding in a contemporary execution. An unknown artist’s *The Agony of Savonarola* from c. 1498 that is today in Museo di San Marco, Florence (fig. 27) illustrates how closely these scaffolds resembled the crosses in Fra Angelico’s paintings. Although this event takes place in the Piazza della Signoria and fire is at the base of the cross-like structure, many of the elements included in typical contemporary Florentine executions are present. Three figures hang by nooses from a cross on which a ladder is leaning. Other prisoners are accompanied to the scaffold by the Tempio brothers. The members of the confraternity wear hooded black robes and hold *tavolette*. Groups of people stand around the site as the executions are taking place.

The structural frame in the *Lamentation*, combined with a view of Florence behind it, must have looked very similar to the scene at the Porta della Giustizia, near the Tempio chapel,

\(^{104}\) Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, 190.

\(^{105}\) Feuillet, 60-73.
fusing contemporary elements into a traditional scene. The condemned prisoner would have
carried this mental image with him to the gallows, the similar setting triggering his memory of
the work and reinforcing the idea that he was following in Christ’s sacrifice.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE LAMENTATION AS BEATA VILLANA’S VISION

Just as the tavoletta was held directly in front of the prisoner, the Lamentation may have been in front of the prisoner in the Tempio oratory. Rather than an altarpiece, the Lamentation could have been originally used as an altar frontal.106 An altar frontal was either a painted panel or a tapestry that was placed in front of the altar table. The argument of this function for the Tempio Lamentation is made on the basis of the extremely horizontal format of the panel as well as the damage on the bottom of the work.107 Furthermore, none of the early writings that mention the Tempio Lamentation use the term “altarpiece,” only “panel.”108 Because the afflitto was chained on his knees in front of the altar, the altar frontal would have been directly in front of his face.

107 Strehlke, Angelico, 30. Strehlke uses the damage of the painting as evidence that the bottom portion of the panel touched the floor. However, according to Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico (1974), 199 and Cole (1977), 244, the damage is attributed to the flood in Florence. See also Giorgio Bonsanti, “Theory, Methodology, and Practical Applications- Painting Conservation in Italy in the Twentieth Century,” in Early Italian Paintings: Approaches to Conservation (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 91-2. Bonsanti also mentions flood damage to the painting but provides a date of 1955 for the restoration of the work at the Istituto Centrale del Restauro in Rome. According to Pope-Hennessy, the work was also cropped at the top during the cleaning and removal of overpaint at the Istituto Centrale del Restauro, but he does not provide a date for this restoration. In Pope-Hennessy’s 1952 edition, he does not mention the restoration.
108 The 1510 Memoriale di molte statue e pitture della Citta di Florentia, the Codice Petrei and the Codice Stroziano of the Libro di Antonio Billi from c. 1516-30, the L’Anonimo Magliabechiano of 1536-46, and Giorgio Vasari in his 1550 edition of Lives all refer to this painting as a panel, not an altarpiece. However, as discussed in Paul Hills, “The Renaissance Altarpiece: A Valid Category?” in The Altarpiece in the Renaissance, Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 42-43 works were not categorized by their function in the Renaissance.
The visual elements of the painting support the theory of the altar frontal. Christ’s body and the arrangement of the figures emphasize the horizontality of the composition. This is a common characteristic of altar frontals. For instance, Niccolò di Tommaso’s *Lamentation* has been identified as the source for Fra Angelico’s composition of the *Lamentation*.\(^{109}\) It, too, may have served as an altar frontal.\(^{110}\) In both of these paintings, the holy people are crowded next to each other in the foreground, surrounding the dead Christ. In Niccolò di Tommaso’s *Lamentation*, the lack of depth in the composition is exaggerated by the gold ground.

In both versions of the *Lamentation*, Christ’s body tilts towards the picture plane, allowing the viewer to look down on his body. This viewpoint is very appropriate for an altar frontal because the panel would be placed below eye level. The vantage point also recalls the true function of the altar; the altar itself is symbolic of Christ and his tomb.\(^{111}\) In these depictions, Christ would appear to be entombed in the altar.\(^{112}\) When the Eucharist was displayed at mass, Christ’s sacrifice would be illustrated in the ritual performed by the priest as he held up the host. When the priest was not standing in front of the altar, the painting would serve as the representation of this sacrifice.\(^{113}\) With the altar and the Eucharist each present, the viewer would have an altar frontal in front of him which would symbolize the sacrifice of Christ.

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\(^{110}\) Strehlke, *Angelico*, 70.

\(^{111}\) Julian Gardner, “Some Aspects of the History of the Italian Altar, ca. 1250-ca. 1350: Placement and Decoration,” in *Objects, Images, and the Word: Art in the Service of the Liturgy*, Colum Hourihane, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 142. An example where a manger in a scene of the Nativity is represented both as an altar and a sarcophagus is found in Ghirlandaio’s *Nativity* altarpiece (1483-85) in the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita, Florence. In this scene, the Virgin prays over the Christ Child who lies in front of the manger, making it appear as if the Virgin is kneeling at an altar.

\(^{112}\) The fragment of a Roman sarcophagus from 180 AD in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, known as the *Death of Meleager*, is an example of this concept on a sarcophagus. Although the figures on this marble relief carry the lifeless body, he appears to be at the same time lying in the structure; like Christ in the *Lamentation*, his body is tilted towards the viewer as if he or she is looking down on him.

\(^{113}\) For a discussion of the history of altar frontals see Miklós Boskovits, “Appunti per una storia della tavola d’altare: le origini,” *Arte Cristiana* LXXX, no. 753 (1992): 422-438. See also Jacob Burckhardt, *The*
Christ’s death and resurrection could be celebrated together at mass. Using the altar as the tomb of Christ, Fra Angelico’s *Lamentation* conflates the scene of the Lamentation with the Entombment, already hinted at through the position of the figures and the walled city; the tomb is not actually present in the painting because it is the altar itself.

This same practice of tilting Christ’s dead body towards the viewer in altar frontals continued into the late sixteenth century. In Guasparri di Bartolomeo Papini’s tapestry, the *Altar Antependium of Clement VII* from 1593-97, taken from a cartoon by Alessandro Allori, Christ is portrayed in a similar manner (fig. 28). In the center of this work, the crucified body of Christ lies in a luxurious golden space. He is again tilted toward the viewer, this time by two angels who hold his shroud, creating the same point of view found in the panels of Fra Angelico and Niccolò di Tommaso. However, the small door at Christ’s feet further emphasizes Christ’s Entombment in the altar by representing the space surrounding Christ and the angels as the actual tomb.

Interestingly, neither Niccolò di Tommaso’s *Lamentation* nor Ghiberti’s *San Zenobius* sarcophagus, both of which are traditionally associated with the Tempio *Lamentation*, was placed above the altar; they too seem to have been set lower, at or beneath the altar table and take the implicit viewpoint into consideration in their compositions. The *San Zenobius* sarcophagus

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114 This work is catalogued in *Vatican Treasures: 2000 Years of Art and Culture in the Vatican and Italy*, Giovanni Morello, ed. (Milan: Electa and New York: Abbeville Press, 1993), 104-05, 168.
was itself used as an altar table,\textsuperscript{115} and as just mentioned, Niccolò di Tommaso’s \textit{Lamentation} was most likely an altar frontal.\textsuperscript{116}

The Entombment is further emphasized by the figures in the \textit{Lamentation}. These holy men and women are all depicted below the horizon line almost as though they, too, are underground. The composition of this painting appears to be pushed to the bottom, emphasized by the kneeling figures. There is no free space at the bottom of the composition. Rather, it is constricted as if these figures are entombed. Because the altar frontal was so close to the viewer, who was also kneeling, it shared his or her space, blurring the line between the painted image of the \textit{Lamentation} and the real world of the person in prayer.

The Tempio \textit{Lamentation} was not the first time Fra Angelico integrated the fictitious world and the reality of the viewer. His \textit{Last Judgment} panel, now in the Museo di San Marco, which dates to the early 1430s, may have been the upper part of a bench back or hung over the seat of the priest, deacon, or sub deacon when he celebrated high mass at Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence (fig. 29).\textsuperscript{117} In this work, the saved are divided from the damned, but in the central area, the boundaries are not completely clear. The viewer’s space appears to continue into the painting through the strip of emptied tombs in the center of the composition that separates heaven and hell. This space recedes from the foreground of the painting to the horizon,


\textsuperscript{116} Alberto di Betto’s 1421 \textit{Pietà with the Virgin, St. John, and Mary Magdalen} is another example of the dead Christ situated below the altar. In this case, the figures are sculpted from polychromed wood and arranged under the altar of St. John the Evangelist in the Siena Cathedral. Thus, the structure of the altar actually entombs the three-dimensional figures, conflating Christ’s death with the Eucharist that would have been held above the table. Another example is Donatello’s relief in \textit{pietra di Nanto} (a type of limestone) of the Entombment (c. 1449), assumed to have been located on the back of the altar, at ground level in the Basilica del Santo, Padua. See Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Donatello}, 219-20 for a discussion of this work.

\textsuperscript{117} See Cole-Ahl (1981), 140 for a discussion of the date of this panel. For information on the function of this work see Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Fra Angelico} (1952), 191. See also Creighton Gilbert, \textit{How Fra Angelico and Signorelli Saw the End of the World} (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 33-34, 45-46.
drawing the audience into the scene. Unlike the Tempio Lamentation where the composition of
the panel is pushed down, here the entire composition rises upwards through its orthogonal lines
that intersect at a single point at the top of the painting where Christ is seated. Because the
Lamentation focused on death, it is understandable that the audience would look down at the
image of the dead Christ who lies on the ground. In the case of the Last Judgment, the audience
would have looked up at the image and at Christ. The role of the Last Judgment panel is to give
viewers the hope of salvation and remind them that they are still in limbo between heaven and
hell; the tombs that invade the viewer’s space reinforce this fact.

In the Tempio Lamentation, Fra Angelico again relies on perspective, but does so here for
different reasons. The viewer is incorporated into the scene as the composition appears to recede
from his or her space to the soft hills in the background, with the diagonal of the wall as it leads
out of the painting, serving as a transition between the two spaces. This type of construction is
most prominent in the work of Masaccio, whose solid forms and geometric structures emulate
reality. For example, in his c. 1425 fresco of the Tribute Money for the Brancacci Chapel, the
figures are placed in a landscape that recedes to the horizon, using linear and atmospheric
perspective to emphasize this distance (fig. 30). The setting appears to be a continuation of the
viewer’s reality as the objects and figures are modeled as solid forms and placed within the
constructed space. The tax collector’s back is to the picture plane; this man serves as an
intermediary between the painting and reality. The viewer feels as if he is standing with this
figure, watching the action that is taking place in the image in front of the tax collector.118

for a discussion of this work.
In Fra Angelico’s work, the environment in which the figures are integrated stresses the inclusion of the viewer. Just as the gold ground had implied a sacred space in earlier works such as Niccolò di Tommaso’s *Lamentation*, the landscapes also represented heaven. Hood proposes that beginning with the *San Marco* altarpiece, Fra Angelico used landscapes rather than flat gold backgrounds to blur the lines between the created space of the painting and the concrete world of the viewer, bringing “fixed eternal time” into our reality.¹¹⁹ But even in the *Lamentation*, an earlier work, Fra Angelico created a visual link between the earthly events at the altar during mass, the *afflitto*’s last rites, and a sacred space of the landscape, one that included even the pious viewer. The placement of the figures as well as the familiar Tuscan landscape linked the sacred space of Christ’s death with the world of the viewer. Indeed, even the individual saints and beate include the viewer into the scene. Their poses, mourning before the dead Christ, mirror the person kneeling before the altar. A kneeling prisoner would have been included with these figures, meditating on Christ’s sacrifice moments before his own death. The circle of witnessing characters opens in the front, and thus, the *afflitto* completes the circle as he or she joins this holy group, sharing in the mourning of Christ’s body.

The meditative aspect in the *Lamentation* is also emphasized by the absence of any actual activity. In fact, the figures do not appear to be in motion; they seem frozen in their positions and gestures. For instance, Mary Magdalen leans over Christ, holding his feet to kiss them. At the same time, her hair hangs down to either side; she does not appear to be moving forward. Rather, she seems to be still in her pose with action only in her hands. When compared to Giotto’s *Lamentation* fresco in the Arena chapel where St. John the Evangelist leans forward, this immobility is especially noticeable; St. John’s arms straighten behind him as he moves

¹¹⁹ Hood, 45.
towards Christ’s body, his mouth is open in reaction to the scene before him. The figures are divided into three sets that progressively move the viewer’s eye downwards, unlike Fra Angelico’s panel in which all of the figures are already down at the bottom of the composition. The sense of stillness in Fra Angelico’s painting is further emphasized by the absence of shadows around the figures and by the fact that, with the exception of St. Dominic, no one is standing in the scene. Also unlike the Giotto’s fresco, there are no added figures in the background or in the distance. Even the city is empty. Instead of a realistic rendering of this event, the figures appear to be posed in the setting, frozen in their responses to the scene before them.

Just as the figures are immobile in the Lamentation, the flat foreground in which individual plants dot a plain green base also emphasizes this stillness. Indeed, there appears to be a conscious effort to create an unmoving scene. This motionless setting is ideal for the role of the altar frontal as a painting upon which the viewer could meditate. Rather than depicting outbursts of grief to create an intense drama, this work focuses on the Lamentation itself, allowing the viewer to contemplate the subject through imagery rather than interpret the activity of a narrative. Thus, Fra Angelico’s scene stresses the devotional nature of the image rather than furthering the story of the Passion.

The meditative nature of the Lamentation may also be explained by the disproportionate number of women in the scene. Indeed, these ten female characters in Fra Angelico’s painting is especially unusual considering the audience of this work. The confraternity of the Tempio brotherhood was made up of only men, and the majority of the executed prisoners were also men. However, there are a few possible explanations for this uneven grouping. The commission of this work is one possible reason. Although he was the patron of the work, Fra Sebastiano paid
for this painting in honor of his grandmother Beata Villana with the encouragement of Donna Villana. He was acting on their behalf. It is plausible, therefore, that these holy women were portrayed to stress their importance in religious life and their significance as predecessors to Villana. Second, by the fourteenth century, the number of female saints increased disproportionately to the number of male saints in Italy, and to a lesser degree, throughout Europe. They practiced new forms of piety and wrote religious texts that were based on the ideology of their orders. One of these books, a bestseller in its time, is the *Meditationes vitae Christi*. Written for Franciscan nuns, the *Meditationes vitae Christi* was popular during Fra Angelico’s life; its passages concerning meditation were known throughout Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. The idea that a person in the act of meditation is at a sacred event, transported there through prayer, has its roots in these instructions for meditation. The viewer was to become an active participant in the narrative.

It is enough to meditate only on what the Lord did or on what happened concerning Him or on what is told according to the Gospel stories, feeling yourself present at those places.

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121 Stephan S. Wolohojian, *Closed Encounters: Female Piety, Art, and the Visual Experience in the Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina in Naples*, Ph.D. dissertation (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1994), 187. See also Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 224. This trend may have been due to the fact that the religious orders to which these women belonged had a relationship with the towns in which they lived. The women in these orders had a civic power that they could not enjoy in the secular spheres.

122 Wolohojian, 213.


124 Wolohojian, 213.
as if the things were done in your presence, as it comes directly to your soul in thinking of them.\textsuperscript{125}

One of the key points of this text is the idea that the worshipper meditates as though physically present at a specific biblical event, and thereby brings an otherwise distant narrative to life. The person meditating mentally transports himself or herself to the holy event. Thus, Christ becomes emotionally closer and more human to the viewer.\textsuperscript{126}

This concept coincides with Pope-Hennessy’s conclusion that Fra Angelico’s \textit{Lamentation} is a painted visualization of Beata Villana’s meditation.\textsuperscript{127} Through her visions, Beata Villana shared in Christ’s persecution and tried to emulate his suffering. Standing off to the right of the painting with St. Catherine of Alexandria who appeared in Beata Villana’s visions, the two women appear to be sharing in this experience; Villana’s speech, “Christ Jesus my Crucified Love,” indicates her involvement in the scene.\textsuperscript{128} By the middle of the fifteenth century, such inscriptions were far from common, and they were even more rare in Fra Angelico’s own work.\textsuperscript{129} Here, Villana serves as the link between the person praying before the altar frontal and the painting. The written text is important for this painting because Villana is speaking to the viewer, including him or her in her vision. Because Christ is the “Word made

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Meditationes vitae Christi}, 387-91.

\textsuperscript{126} Wolohojian, 214.

\textsuperscript{127} Pope-Hennessy, \textit{Fra Angelico} (1952), 16.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{129} The Cortona \textit{Annunciation} is the only other time that an inscription is used to imply speech in Fra Angelico’s work.
Flesh,” the inscription underscores the authenticity of her vision and emphasizes the link between the Word of God and Christ’s corporeality.

The idea of creating a painting based on an apparition has its roots in the depictions of St. Bridget of Sweden’s visions of the Nativity, which she described in detail in her writings, known as her Meditations. These included very specific objects that she saw at the event. Niccolò di Tommaso’s Nativity (c. 1380-1400) is one of the earliest works to include Bridget in a painting of her vision (fig. 31). In this work, she kneels in the right foreground and watches the event. Around this same time, a mural of the Nativity with Bridget again as a witness was painted in Santa Maria Novella (fig. 32).

Although there are obvious similarities between the depictions of St. Bridget and Beata Villana as they both kneel and watch the apparitions, the paintings of the visions of St. Bridget are distinctly different to Villana’s vision in the Tempio Lamentation. In Villana’s vision, the entire scene is still. The viewer is meant to join her in her meditation, hoping thereby to be shown her vision. The depictions of the Nativity with St. Bridget are illustrations of her writings and are visual records of her visions. Because her writings include specific iconographic details that she saw at the Nativity, the paintings of this subject changed to incorporate elements from her vision. These paintings of St. Bridget are meant to depict the actual event as she witnessed it, creating a real drama, and thus making the Nativity come alive for the viewer. For instance, in

130 John 1:14.

131 In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, female devotions emphasized the body of Christ and his humanity. See Wolohojian, 215.


134 Giovanni Leoncini, “La Pittura del Trecento a Santa Maria Novella,” in Alla riscoperta delle chiese di Firenze: 2. Santa Maria Novella (Florence: Centro Di, 2003), 95. The Nativity is in a frescoed predella under a scene of the Annunciation. Bridget kneels on the far right side, watching the Holy Family.
Robert Campin’s *Nativity* from c. 1425 in Dijon’s Musée des Beaux Arts (fig. 33), inclusions such as Joseph holding a candle and Christ radiating with light are drawn directly from Bridget’s writings. These elements make the scene of the Nativity active and tangible to the viewer through their details and visual specificity.

In the case of the *Lamentation*, there is no action. The painting is meant to represent a still vision occurring in present time; the viewer participates with the holy figures in meditation and prayer. The words flowing from Villana’s mouth appear to represent either what she said during her visions, or she could be talking to the viewer through this inscription. Because the viewer can join her in prayer, he or she is incorporated into the meditation as well. He or she becomes both a witness and a participant to the event taking place, a timeless event that appears before our eyes. Thus, not only was the artist able to facilitate a form of meditation for the *afflitto* praying before the altar by fusing reality with a sacred space through contemporary details and human response, he also simulated a heavenly vision, delicately creating an intimate relationship between the viewer and Christ.

There is a connection between this type of art and Dominican ideology. In an illumination from *De modo orandi*, a prayer manual illustrating the practices of St. Dominic, the crucifix comes to life, leaning over the praying saint (fig. 34). Art “could thus stimulate as well as simulate a living vision.” Another example can be found in the frescoes in the upper church of Assisi from 1295-1300, in the scene *Prayer in Front of the Cross in San Damiano* where

135 Felix Thürmann, *Robert Campin: A monographic study with critical catalogue* (Munich: Prestel, 2002), 40. Thürmann reproduces the text from St. Bridget’s revelations, “Mary bore a son, from whom such a splendid light radiated that not even the sun could stand comparison; now could the candle placed [in the cave] by the old man radiate its light against him, for the splendor of the divine glow had completely annihilated the earthly glow of the candle.”

136 Hood, 17.
Christ comes alive on a painted crucifix and speaks to St. Francis (fig. 35). Here, too, the painted depiction of Christ is transformed into Christ’s dying body by prayer. In these works, a painting could establish the actual presence of the holy figures or, as in the case of the Lamentation, the holy scene on earth. The Tempio Lamentation attempts to bridge the gap between the painted, two-dimensional world and reality. The work creates a more personal, immediate experience between the audience in prayer and Christ’s Passion.

Fra Angelico includes devices more common to devotional scenes of the Passion in order to facilitate meditation. The most apparent deviation from traditional scenes of the Lamentation is the nails that are still in the arms of the crucifix. This inclusion is more typically found in Man of Sorrows imagery. In such paintings, the focus is on iconography relating to Christ’s Crucifixion, based on the vision of St. Gregory the Great commonly known as the “Mass of St. Gregory.” Depictions of the Man of Sorrows are devotional images that one could use to meditate on Christ’s death. In Masolino’s Man of Sorrows with Arma Christi, a fresco in the Holy Cross Chapel in Santo Stefano, Empoli from c. 1424 (fig. 36), the whips used in the flagellation of Christ hang from the thick, black nails still embedded in the cross. Another example can be found in Giambono’s Man of Sorrows with St. Francis from 1420 where two

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138 For a discussion on the tradition of Man of Sorrows images, see van Os, 106. See also Louis M. La Favia, The Man of Sorrows: Its Origin and Development in Trecento Florentine Painting: A New Iconographic Theme on the Eve of the Renaissance (Rome: Edizioni Sanguis, 1980), 3-45. Traditional Man of Sorrows images show a half-length Christ in front of a cross with his arms usually folded at his chest. Objects pertaining the Passion are also included.

139 La Favia, 19.

nails are embedded in the arm of the crucifix at Christ’s right (fig. 37).\textsuperscript{141} If the logical progression of the Passion is taken into account, the nails had to be removed in order for Christ to be taken down from the cross. They remain in the paintings of the Man of Sorrows paintings as reminders of Christ’s suffering and instruments of his death. In the Tempio \textit{Lamentation}, they are likely included for the same reason. The person praying before this altar frontal could meditate on Christ’s sacrifice. This act would have been especially pertinent to the \textit{afflitti} who would soon experience their own executions. Thus, the integration of the Man of Sorrows tradition into the \textit{Lamentation} gave an iconic facet to a typically narrative scene, one that would facilitate the contemplation of Christ’s Passion through its imagery.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

With additional figures and iconography, the Tempio Lamentation is, perhaps, not the most standard example of Christ’s Crucifixion. Although the Tempio Lamentation is indeed a depiction of the Lamentation, it also includes elements drawn from other scenes of Christ’s Passion. The Pietà, Christ’s Entombment, and representations of the Man of Sorrows are woven into its imagery. This fusion of conventional iconography and elements from other parts of the Passion points to the multiple roles of the painting. The combination of these elements into one painting reflects the concerns of the patron and probably the confraternity’s desire to satisfy the multiple audiences and functions of this altar frontal. In order to create a work intended for such diverse groups of people, Fra Angelico essentially entwined four scenes into a single painting.

To best exemplify this conflation of events into a single scene, one can look to an earlier example where this same concept was employed. The c. 1300 Serbian tapestry known as the Epitaphios of King Stefan Uroš II Milutin illustrates the integration of all aspects of Christ’s death into one work (fig. 38). The epitaphios is an embroidered cloth that was traditionally used to cover the chalice and paten when the gifts were prepared for the Eucharist during mass. Later, the function of the epitaphios changed and was used to cover the symbolic coffin of Christ in Good Friday processions. In this horizontal composition, Christ lies on a shroud supported by small angels. The frontal position of the body of Christ reiterates the function of a sarcophagus;

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142 For a description of this epitaphios and others like it, see Helen C. Evans, Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557), exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004): 312-18. Schiller, 2:174 points out that the epitaphios eventually transformed into the Lamentation in Italian art.
his body faces the viewer as if we are standing over him in the coffin. One has a similar viewpoint in the Tempio Lamentation. As an altar frontal, Christ’s body is painted as if entombed in the altar itself; the altar table serves as Christ’s sarcophagus. Christ’s dead body is tilted towards the viewer so that one has the sense that he or she is looking down at Christ’s body, entombed in the structure.

In the embroidery, Christ is also lying on a shroud that is suggestive of the Lamentation, but his frontal position and visible nail marks in his hands are evocative of the Man of Sorrows. In the Tempio panel, the traditional theme of the Lamentation is illustrated by the dead Christ’s placement in front of the cross with figures surrounding him. The Man of Sorrows imagery is woven into the setting by the emphasis on the large, centralized cross with the nails and blood still present on its arms. The Virgin cradling Christ’s head implies the Pietà, a scene that typically emphasizes the intimate relationship between these two figures, as the Virgin, mourning her dead son, holds his body. In the Serbian tapestry, the Virgin is absent. Instead, the angels that mourn Christ remind the viewer of images of the Pietà. Just as the Virgin traditionally holds Christ’s body, the angels tenderly hold his shroud. A later work by Carlo Crivelli, The Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels from c. 1470-75 is another example of a painting of angels and Christ in an image of the Pietà (fig. 39). In both of these works, the angels support the body of Christ; they are the only other figures with Christ, creating an intimacy usually found in the depictions of the Virgin with her son.

These four episodes from the Passion create an image that relates to the diversity of viewers who would have seen this work on a regular basis. Indeed, Fra Angelico’s Lamentation combined iconic and narrative elements for three different audiences: the condemned prisoner,

143 van Os, 104 mentions the substitution of angels in place of the Virgin in some depictions of the Pietà.
the brothers of the confraternity, and the congregation at mass. It also had to satisfy the interests of its patron, Fra Sebastiano Benintendi who commissioned the work in honor of his grandmother, Beata Villana. Through the conflation of scenes from Christ’s death, Fra Angelico created a work that was intended for all of these viewers, resulting in this fabricated scene that is an illustration of Beata Villana’s vision in which the various audiences are invited to participate.

While the scene of the Lamentation points to the narrative of the Passion, the events leading up to Christ’s death related well to the condemned’s own cerca through the streets of Florence, from his prison cell to his execution. This idea of connecting Christ’s death to the fate of the condemned would have been reiterated by the decoration of Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio that included images of Christian deaths on its façade and interior. Later, this same connection was reinforced by the tavoletta that included a depiction of Christ’s Passion on one side and the death of a martyr on the other and was held in front of the prisoner during his cerca and execution.

Although it may have been a precursor to the tavoletta, the Lamentation could not have been transported with the prisoner on the cerca to his death. It is for this reason that Fra Angelico added certain elements to the composition that would remain in the condemned prisoner’s mind after he left the altar and was taken to the gallows. For instance, the scene depicted in the painting looks like the setting where the gallows were located. This area would have looked familiar to him when he was taken to his execution.

As an altar frontal, the work would have been especially close to the afflitto who knelt before the altar prior to his execution. Thus, Fra Angelico created a scene that was more tangible to the condemned; the afflitto was involved in the experience of witnessing Christ’s death. This painted representation of Villana’s vision incorporated the prisoner into its composition as the
kneeling group of figures opens at the front where the condemned was kneeling. He was included in the holy group mourning Christ and could be comforted by the fact that he was present at this holy event. Just as Villana experienced Christ’s Passion through prayer, so too could the prisoner.

Indeed, it is because of Villana’s presence that we are able to witness Christ’s death. Through its stillness and the inclusion of iconic elements, the viewer is able to meditate with her on Christ’s sacrifice. Its multiple roles are woven into a single panel to create a work that is both an icon and a narrative painting. Unusual for the fifteenth century, Fra Angelico painted a Lamentation that balances these elements in a single image. The many facets of this painting allow viewers to take part in mourning Christ’s Passion through the vision of the Beata Villana.

Although Fra Angelico’s Lamentation may not be as well known as some of his other works that are, perhaps, considered to be more beautifully painted, this panel is equally important in his oeuvre. The Tempio Lamentation proves that Fra Angelico was interested in creating art that conveyed very specific ideas to diverse audiences and that he had the ability to weave these complex concepts seamlessly into his compositions. Indeed, it is only through a complete study of the Lamentation’s historical background and the visual elements in the work itself that one can gain a clearer understanding of Fra Angelico as an artist of the Quattrocento and his capabilities to create paintings could be relevant to any type of audience.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Notum sit omnibus et singulis presentes [licteras] inspecturis qualiter de anno Domini 1444, de mense februarij, quidam libelus infamatorius oblatus fuit. Sanctissimo Domino Pape Eugenio, in quo plurima mala et nephanda scelera contra fratrem Sebastianum Iacobi de Florentia contenta erant, et spetialiter quod dictus frater Sebastianus dissipavit et dissipat bona que olim fuerunt domine Villane, que Lodovicus quidam, germanus dicte domine Villane ad se asserit pertinere, et cum aliis obiectionibus pro nune obmissis ad dictum articulum per dictum fratrem Sebastianum taliter respondetur, quod ipse dicta bona domine Villane numquam dissipavit neque dissipat, quin ymo de illis semper fecit voluntatem dicte domine Villane de dictis bonis, ac etiam suis propriis fere infinitas elemosinas fecit et in locis piis plurima exposuit sicut infra notabiture cum subscriptionibus et testificationibus plurimorum virorum tam clericorum et religiosorum quam etiam secularium personarum. Nam in primis fecit in Sacristia Sancta Marie Novelle de Florentia unam notabilem pixidem argenteam deauratam pro tenendis reliquis pretii florenorum. centum octuaginta duobus cuius auctor fuit laurentius bartolucci aurifex florentinus. Item fecit hedificari unum altare apud Societatem in Templi Florentie, cum notabili tabula seu ancona depicta per manus fratris Johannis de Fesulis, ordinis predicatorum de observantia, et dictum altare consecrari fecit per manus. R. P. episcopi modo Feltrensi (sic), singulis annis faciens in dicto altari per frateres predicatorum celebrari festum Sancte Katherine, ubi exposuit ultra florenos centum et Singulis annis sex vel circa pro celebratione festi, quod festum modo facit in Sancta Maria Novella de Florentia. Item fecit dimicti dicte sotietati templi annuatuim florenos quindecim in perpetuum. ex quibus tenetur dicta sotietas annis singulis sollemmem festum beate Marie celebrari facere apud sanctam mariam Novellam ordinis predicatorum. Item ordinavit quod dicta domina Villana reliquid [=relinquere] unam domum valoris ducentorum quinquaugintam ducatorum pro dote cuiusdam altaris construendi in ecclesia sancte Marie Novelle. Item in dicta ecclesia Sancte Marie Novelle multas picturas et ornamenta fecit, et nunc actualiter fieri facit septem albas valde pulchras pro sancta sanctaria dicte ecclesia. Item de suis propriis bonis sicut appareat in libris montis comunitatis florentine pro dotibus filiorum dicti lodovici tantum deposuit quod ipse habent nongentos florenos. Item in pane vino et oleo pecunii supellectili et alis multis quam diu. S. D. N. fuit florentie dedit dicto lodovico et familie eius in pluribus vicibus ad valorem florenorum trecentorum et ultra. Item pro subsidio plurimorum attinentium suorum pauperum inter quos est unus. Nam [filii?] philippi boni qui modo est (?) Rome plurima subsidia receperunt. Item apud rus seu villam marignolle ubi olim suorum predecessort estant (sic) possesiones et bona. Infinitas elemosinas fecit maxime pro maritandis virginibus facit. quatour sex vel octo florenos pro qualibet pro dotibus consignando adeo ut fere nulla ibidem maritata fuerit quin manus adiutrices in aliquo porrexerit. taliter quod modicum pro suis necessitatis dicto fratri Sebastiano remansit.

APPENDIX B

PAYMENT DOCUMENT OF THE LAMENTATION


Sia manifesto a chiunque legerà la presente scritta. Come io frate Cipriano di ser Antonio priore di Fiesole e di sancto marcho òne comperato da don Bastiano di iacopo monaco dello ordine [di] sancto benedetto uno messale secondo l’ordine di frati predicatori per preço et pregio di ducati quindici d’oro stimato da frate bartolomeo da monte rapoli priore di sancta maria novella di firenze. Detta quantità di ducati quindici de’quali òne recevuto ducati otto e quali ebbe per noi dallo vescovo di racanati di limosina per llo papa et irresto che sono ducati sette ci lascia per parte di pagamento d’una tabola la quale debba dipignere frate Giovanni dipintore et per chiareça di ciò io frate Cipriano sopradetto òne fatta la sopra detta scritta di mia propria mano a di XIII d’aprile MCCCCXXXVI.

Item io frate giovanni dipintore ò. Riceuto staia sexsanta di grano per soldi diciassepte la (sic) staio ad di. 2 di dicembre 1436. monta L.XXXXXI.

Item die decto ò ricevuto fiorini quattro d’oro o per lire quatro l’una e soldi dodici montono L. 18. et s. 8.


Figure 1. Fra Angelico, *Lamentation*, c. 1436. Museo di San Marco, Florence.
Figure 2. *Map with a Chain*, detail of woodblock print, c. 1480. Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.
Figure 3. Map of Florence to 1333 city walls, in Giovanna Balzanetti Steiner, *Florence in Drawings: The Streets from Gate to Gate Following the Order of the City Walls* (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 2001), 270. The Via Malcontenti is located in the box in bold.
Figure 4. Fra Angelico, *St. Benedict Enjoining Silence*, fresco in the pediment of the doorway of the cloister, c. 1420s-30s. Cloister of the Monastery of the Badia, Florence.
Figure 5. Niccolò di Tommaso, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, mid-14th century. Congregazione della Carità, Parma.
Figure 6. Giovanni di Pietro da Napoli, Pietà, c. 1402-04. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.
Figure 7. Coppo di Marcovaldo, *Crucifix*, late 1250s. Pinacoteca Civica, San Gimignano.
Figure 8. Fra Angelico, *Lamentation*, 1438-52. Florence, San Marco, Cell Two.
Figure 9. Pietro Lorenzetti, *Lamentation* fresco, 1320-30. Lower Church of St. Francis, Assisi.
Figure 10. Giotto di Bondone, *Lamentation*, 1305-06. Fresco in Arena Chapel, Padua.
Figure 11. Puccio di Simone, *Lamentation* predella panel, mid-14th century. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
Figure 12. Lippo di Benivieni, *Lamentation*, 1296-1327. Museo Civico Amedeo Lia, La Spezia.
Figure 14. Giottino, San Remigio Pietà, c. 1360. Uffizi, Florence.
Figure 16. 19th-century photograph of San Giovanni Decollato brother holding a tavoletta, Milan, 1923.
Figure 17. Unknown artist, *tavoletta* of the *Beheading of St. John the Baptist*, 16th century. Arch-confraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, Rome.
Figure 20. Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Miracle of the Strozzi Boy* from the *St. Zenobius* sarcophagus, completed by 1443. Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence.
Figure 23. Domenico del Ghirlandaio, Pietà, c. 1472. Fresco in the Vespucci chapel, church of Ognassanti, Florence.
Figure 24. Sandro Botticelli, *Crucifixion with the Penitent Magdalen and an Angel*, c. 1498-1500. Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Figure 25. Duccio, *Entry into Jerusalem*, detail of the *Maestà*, 1308-11. Siena, Museo dell’Opera del Duomo.
Figure 26. Giacomo Jaquerio, *Crucifixion*, c. 1400. Museo Civico, Turin.
Figure 27. Unknown artist, *The Agony of Savonarola*, c. 1498. Museo di San Marco, Florence.
Figure 29. Fra Angelico, *Last Judgment*, early 1430s. Museo di San Marco, Florence.
Figure 30. Masaccio, *Tribute Money*, c. 1425. Fresco for the Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.
Figure 31. Niccolò di Tommaso, *Nativity*, c. 1380-1400. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome.
Figure 32. Unknown, *Nativity*, late 14th to early 15th century. Fresco in Santa Maria Novella, Florence.
Figure 33. Robert Campin, *Nativity*, c. 1425. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon.
Figure 34. *St. Dominic in Prayer*, c. 1260-88. De modo orandi, no. VII.
Figure 35. Giotto di Bondone?, *The Prayer in front of the Cross in San Damiano*, 1295-1300. Fresco in the upper church of St. Francis, Assisi.
Figure 36. Masolino, *Man of Sorrows with Arma Christi*, c. 1424. Fresco from the Holy Cross Chapel in Santo Stefano, Empoli.
Figure 38. *Epitaphios of King Stefan Uroš II Milutin*, c. 1300 (embroidery); 16\textsuperscript{th} century (velvet border). Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Belgrade.
Figure 39. Carlo Crivelli, *The Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels*, c. 1470-75. National Gallery, London.