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Memory without Mementos: Franciscan Missions and Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Frescoes in Siena**

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1. Introduction

In the Church of San Francesco in Siena, which was modified into a flat Neo-Gothic building in the nineteenth century, two frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti adorn the walls of a lateral chapel in the left transept: “Franciscan Martyrdom” (fig. 1) and “St. Louis of Toulouse before Pope Boniface VIII” (fig. 2)¹. These frescoes were originally designed for the chapter house of the same convent, together with other scenes by Ambrogio’s elder brother, Pietro. The frescoes by Pietro include “Crucifixion”, also conserved in the Church of San Francesco, and “The Resurrection of Christ”, now in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Siena². Although the martyrdom scene in these frescoes has often been cited in the context of Europeans’ expanded contacts with other cultures in the time of Marco Polo³, the significance of the pictorial program of

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fig. 1 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, “Franciscan Martyrdom,” Siena, San Francesco

the chapter house has never been comprehensively explicated⁴.

This paper addresses these paintings by Ambrogio with special emphasis on their collocation in the friary, toward demonstrating two points⁵. The first is how missionary work was viewed by contemporaries or at least by members of the Sienese Franciscan circle of that time. In contrast to the official propaganda of “the Triumph of Catholic Doctrine (or St. Thomas Aquinas)” that we see in the contemporary figurative examples by a Pisan follower of Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi or by Andrea di Bonaiuto⁶ and in contrast to renewed advances into non-European and non-Christian territories in the sixteenth century⁷, there seems to prevail in Siena a calmer and more passive attitude, one that St. Francis of Assisi himself exhorted to his brothers in encounters



fig. 2 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, "St. Louis of Toulouse before Pope Boniface VIII," Siena, San Francesco

with non-Christians.

The second point is how the unprecedented increase in contact between the Western world and elsewhere changed the way believers directed their devotion to saintly relics, items that had been a fundamental and consistent aspect of medieval religiosity. In fact in the early years of the Franciscan order, the remains of the martyrs never returned home, as was the case with Peter of Siena, one of our present concerns⁸. People had to content themselves not with concrete objects, that is, relics, but with the intangible, that is, visual images.

2. A strange gesture of St. Louis of Toulouse

Upon reading the record of Marco Polo, one finds it curious that this Venetian merchant makes only a single mention of Christian missionaries. Toward the beginning of his document, he refers to Nicolas of Vicenza and William of Tripoli, who were sent on a mission by the Pope but turned back halfway after making it only as far as Lesser Armenia⁹. Marco Polo himself was entrusted with a Pontifical letter to Kublai Khan, but he seems uninterested in the propagation of the Christian faith. We must turn our attention to the reports of mendicant missionaries and narrative details of the paintings depicting such clerics.

Some twenty-five years ago, the German art historian Max Seidel reconstructed the nearly lost fresco cycle from the Life of Peter of Siena, a Franciscan martyr in Tana, India¹⁰. The fresco was completed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti for the friary of San Francesco in Siena. It occupied the (liturgically) east side of the cloister, and was composed of seven compartments, between the second and the third of which the Petroni portal, dated 1336, is still seen (fig. 3)¹¹. This cloister shows evidence of rebuilding in the Renaissance period¹². Franciscan friars, going out by the side door of the church after the divine offices, used to advance towards the chapter house, following the sequence of Peter's adventurous undertakings. It started with "Peter's entrance to the Franciscan monastery of Siena" and continued with "his request to be sent to China", then "the debate of the Franciscans in Tana in the presence of the Chadi (Muslim judge)", "the flagellation of Peter", "the execution by hanging from which Peter escaped safely", "the execution of three other Franciscans" (we can still see a large fragment of this scene in the main building of the University of Siena¹³), and "the fall from a



fig. 3 View of the cloister, east side, Siena, San Francesco

horse of the Muslim responsible for the martyrdom of Franciscans”. Though there remain only few fragments, the subject of each panel is known to us thanks to Lorenzo Ghiberti’s precise description from the fifteenth century. I would like to note that “the ordeal by fire for three Franciscans” was omitted¹⁴. This scene is a climax of this martyrdom story and was described in further detail by another Franciscan missionary, Odorico da Pordenone, who brought to China the remains of these Franciscan martyrs¹⁵.

Probably during the same program of decorating the convent - I believe it was between 1336 and 1340¹⁶ - the Lorenzetti brothers also executed the fresco paintings of the chapter house. It was customary to place the “Crucifixion” at the center of the back wall, and the “Resurrection” nearby, as we can see in the chapter house of San Francesco in Pistoia¹⁷. “Franciscan Martyrdom”, too, though on a very small scale, we can find in the chapter house of Sant’Antonio in Padua¹⁸.

But “St. Louis of Toulouse before Boniface VIII” (fig. 2) is unique among this Franciscan saint’s iconography. Though this scene has been often interpreted as “St. Louis Taking Leave of Boniface”¹⁹, or “Boniface VIII Receiving St. Louis as a Franciscan Novice”²⁰, the gestures here are not the usual exchange between a Pope and his bishop (fig. 4). They seem more like feudal homage, whereby a vassal puts his clasped hands into those of his lord, and they explicitly show the saint’s subordination to the Pope²¹. In a conventional ordination scene, however, the Pope would be placing a miter on the bishop’s head as the bishop knelt with hands together²². It is worth remembering that obedience is a principal virtue of the Franciscan Order together with poverty and chastity, and it is curious that in the Lower Church of Assisi “the Allegory of obedience” is set in the chapter house that faces the cloister. In the case of Siena, we can recognize Christ himself, he who deserves our ultimate obedience, as



fig. 4 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, “St. Louis of Toulouse before Pope Boniface VIII,” detail, Siena, San Francesco



fig. 5 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, “St. Louis of Toulouse before Pope Boniface VIII,” detail, Siena, San Francesco

a figure in attendance at the back²³ (fig. 5). Here I would like to see the surface submission of the spiritual Franciscans to the Papal authority²⁴. In any case, we may consider the chapter house as a place charged with the significance of obedience.

3. Obedience or submission as a leitmotiv of the chapter house

During the Middle Ages, it was in the chapter house that the rules of monastic or canonical orders were read aloud and commented on by abbot or prior²⁵. The Franciscans of Siena must have frequently heard this passage from the first chapter of the rule: “Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to our Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected and to the Roman Church”²⁶. Ambrogio’s painting could only have made this passage more impressive, particularly because



fig. 6 “Odorico da Pordenone Collects the Bone of Franciscan Martyrs,” Udine, Civici Musei (photo: Civici Musei di Udine, Fototeca)

St. Francis had emphasized obedience in the “Testament of Siena”, saying: “Be always faithful subjects of the prelates and the clerics of the Holy Mother Church”²⁷.

The chapter house is also a place closely associated with the dead, where monks or friars would read the martyrology and call the name of deceased brothers and recite prayers for them, and where the abbots had the right to be buried²⁸. It must have been the same at mendicant friaries, in light of the

impressive martyrdom scene chosen for the chapter house of Siena. The number of martyrs depicted by Ambrogio in this scene has made it difficult to identify its historical setting. We can see at least six or possibly seven Franciscans who have been beheaded or are just about to be beheaded. Those martyred at Tana numbered four including Peter of Siena²⁹, five Franciscans were killed by the King of Morocco in 1220, and seven were martyred at Ceuta in 1227. This makes Ceuta a more likely

setting, however the physiognomy of the people present is Asian, not North African. I like to define this scene as an exemplar of martyrdom in general, rather than as a specific incident³⁰. Thus it would contrast to the concrete, detailed narrative of Peter of Siena found in the cloister, and could sum up the Franciscan missionary spirit.



fig. 7 “Odorico da Pordenone Saved by the Relics in the Fire,” Udine, Civici Musei (photo: Civici Musei di Udine, Fototeca)

As I have already pointed out, St. Louis of Toulouse scene epitomizes the Franciscan virtue of obedience. If we could see these two scenes, “St. Louis of Toulouse” and “Franciscan martyrdom”, next to each other, it would be easier to reconstruct the significance that missionary works held for St. Francis of Assisi. For him, the founder of the first missionary order and a cleric eager to become a martyr, being in the midst of the Saracens and other non-believers never meant conquering them (“they [Franciscan missionaries] must make themselves vulnerable to the



fig. 8 Ark of Blessed Odorico da Pordenone, Udine, Madonna del Carmine

enemies”) as he said in the earlier rule of 1221, *Regula non bullata*³¹. In the same chapter, he admonished his followers “not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake”³². In this context, we can understand the omission of “the ordeal by fire for three Franciscans” in the cloister, since this ostentatious subject was often used to demonstrate Christian supremacy over the heathen³³.

In short, submission or obedience seems to prevail as the principal theme in the pictorial program of Siena and thus it can be said that the original spirituality of the Franciscan order was well preserved. It was for a specific purpose that “Franciscan Martyrdom” was located in the chapter house, a place of the dead, with “St. Louis of Toulouse” scene.

4. Relics depicted

In an account of his travels, Odorico da Pordenone says he brought to China the miraculous bones of Peter of Siena and the other Franciscans³⁴. This interesting episode justifies the absence of Peter's relics in his homeland. In the church of San Francesco in Udine, the tomb of Odorico, who died in the odor of sanctity³⁵, was surrounded by a later fresco cycle from his episodes in Asia³⁶. Beginning with a shocking scene in which the martyrs' remains are gathered up, bones are repeatedly emphasized here (figs. 6, 7). This sharply contrasts with the real presence of as much miraculous remains of the Blessed Odorico (fig. 8). It is as if this repetition is trying to justify the absence of the far and forever lost reliquary of the Franciscan martyrs.

A panel of an altarpiece, executed by an anonymous Bayern or



fig. 9 "The Blood Miracle of Franciscan Martyrs of Morocco," Nurnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum (photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg)

Franconian painter around 1460 and 1470 and now on display in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum of Nurnberg, represents the “Blood Miracle of Franciscan Martyrs of Morocco” (fig. 9)³⁷. Its counterpart is “St. Bernardino of Siena Refuses the Bishopric” which reminds a similar act of St. Louis of Toulouse. In this scene, the blood of the martyrs flows from a chest under the altarpiece, and cures the sick (this altar setting is very common in Nurnberg). The relics, after the martyrdom of 1220, were brought to the convent of St. Cruz in Coimbra, Portugal, which would have relocated to some unknown place by 1247³⁸. Consequently the ambiguous provenance could have thrown doubt on the authenticity of the relics. This painting conceals the real existence of the remains twice. The altar containing (and concealing) the remains is pictured on this altarpiece as a fiction, while the miraculous event guarantees the actual presence of the relics. Here the visual image comes to take the place of real relics in a double sense.

Later in the sixteenth century, the body of St. Francis Xavier was carried back to India from a small island off the Chinese coast, and his right arm was brought from India to Europe. It is still venerated in the church of Gesù in Rome³⁹. Unlike during the Age of Exploration, such an attempt would have been an impossible undertaking in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Ambrogio’s martyrdom series and especially the cruel beheading scene in the chapter house could substitute for the lack of the Sienese martyr’s relics⁴⁰, as the painted blood traces of Nurnberg did. These examples show how a visual image replaced the object and revived a memory that was no longer tied to concrete matter.

¹ These are found on the each side wall of the present Bandini-Piccolomini Chapel. The “Martyrdom” is about 388 centimeters wide and the “St. Louis” is about 410

centimeters: Eve Borsook, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, trans. Piero Bertolucci, Florence, 1966, p.27. The smaller, western wall, approximately 10,5 meters wide, of the chapter house is just good to be covered with these two scenes. See Max Seidel, “Wiedergefundene Fragmente eines Hauptwerkes von Ambrogio Lorenzetti,” *Pantheon*, 36, 1978, pp.119-127, esp. p.126, n.66, but he asserts that these two scenes were on the opposite eastern wall. Considering the right to left composition of the “St. Louis” and the frontality of the “Martyrdom,” it is believed that the former was located on the right and the latter on the left. For a much debated restoration of the church in the nineteenth century, see Jader Bertini, *Notizie intorno ai restauri artistici fatti nel tempio di S. Francesco in Siena dal 1883 al 1894*, Siena, 1894; Vittorio Lusini, *Una questione d’arte e di storia nella facciata di S. Francesco*, Siena 1903. Though Milanese, *Sulla storia dell’arte toscana: scritti vari*, Siena, 1873, p.360, reports the original collocation of the scenes in the chapter house (“parete a destra di chi entra”), we do not know exactly about the loss of the images, especially on the borders, caused by the removal and transportation of the frescoes. Each scene has been given several titles which differ one from another according to the reading of the scenes. See below, notes 19, 20.

- ² According to Milanese (as note 1), “Crucifixion”, 305 by 393 cm, and “Resurrection”, 195 by 108 cm, were reduced in the lower part of the frescoes. See also Carlo Volpe, *Pietro Lorenzetti*, Milan, 1989, pp.128-134.
- ³ Hidemichi Tanaka, “Fourteenth century Siense painting and Mongolian and Chinese influences: The analysis of Simone Martini’s works and Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s major works,” *Bijutsushigaku (Art History, Sendai)*, 7, 1985, pp.1-55; Maria Grazia Chiappori, “Riflessi figurativi dei contatti Oriente-Occidente e dell’opera poliana nella arte medievale italiana,” in: Alvise Zorzi (ed.), *Marco Polo-Venezia e l’Oriente*, Milan, 1981 (2nd ed. 1989), pp.281-288; Wolfram Prinz, “I Tatars nella pittura italiana del Trecento,” in: *Studi di storia dell’arte sul Medioevo e il Rinascimento nel centenario della nascita di Mario Salmi* (atti del convegno internazionale Arezzo-Firenze, 16-19 novembre 1989), Florence, 1992, pp.415-429; etc.
- ⁴ Recently Suzanne Maureen Burke, “The Martyrdom of the Franciscans by Ambrogio Lorenzetti,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 65, 2002, pp.460-492, argued extensively about Ambrogio’s “Martyrdom,” concluding this scene depicts six Franciscans’ sufferings at Almalıq, Chagatai Khanate, which occurred in 1339, but refers very few to “St. Louis” which was consistently designed with the “Martyrdom” and other scenes of the chapter house.

- ⁵ The author has been interested in the pictorial program which should be interpreted in its architectural context. See Hisashi Yakou, “Contemplating angels and the Madonna of the Apocalypse,” in: Janis Elliott and Cordelia Warr (eds.), *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina - Art, Iconography and Patronage in Fourteenth-Century Naples*, Aldershot, 2004, pp.93-107. Heidrun Stein-Kecks, *Der Kapitelsaal in der mittelalterlichen Klosterbaukunst - Studien zu den Bildprogrammen*, Munich-Berlin, 2004, is a notable study on the decorative program of the chapter house, which takes into consideration the function of the place.
- ⁶ In both the panel painting kept in the church of Santa Caterina in Pisa and the fresco of the Spanish Chapel, ex chapter house of the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, a heathen figure with a non-European appearance, which is Averroes, appears under the feet of St. Thomas Aquinas.
- ⁷ A juridical justification by the Church, to deprive conquered heathen people of the right to life and to own property, seems to have already been debated at the synod of Constance (1414-18) long before the beginning of the Age of Exploration. Susumu Yamauchi, “Thought on International Human Rights in Late Medieval Europe,” *Seijo Hogaku (Seijo Law Review)*, Tokyo, 48, 1995, pp.169-226 (in Japanese).
- ⁸ It is worth mentioning that the relics of Franciscan martyrs in Morocco were transported to Coimbra in Portugal, where St. Anthony of Padua would have left the Augustinian community to join the Franciscan Order.
- ⁹ Henry Yule (trans., ed.), *The Book of ser Marco Polo - the Venetian concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, London, 1921 (3rd ed., revised by Henri Cordier), pp.22-23, Prol. Chap. XII. As for the territory of Lesser Armenia, see Adriano Alpago Novello, “L’Armenia al tempo di Marco Polo (secolo XIII),” in: Alvise Zorzi (ed.), *op. cit.* (as note 3), pp.69-100.
- ¹⁰ Max Seidel, “Gli affreschi di Ambrogio Lorenzetti nel Chiostro di San Francesco a Siena: ricostruzione e datazione,” *Prospettiva*, 18, luglio 1979, pp.10-20.
- ¹¹ Seidel (as note 10), pp.15-16, considers the fresco cycle and this portal were conceived coherently and executed in the same period, in the second half of the 1330s.
- ¹² For the history of the Sienese convent, see Vittorio Lusini, *Storia della basilica di S. Francesco in Siena*, Siena, 1894.
- ¹³ Seidel (as note 1), pp.119-123.
- ¹⁴ Only Jacob of Padua went through the ordeal by fire, and this scene was “auffälligerweise” not depicted. Seidel (as note 1), p.123.

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- ¹⁵ Odorico da Pordenone OMin, *Libro delle nuove e strane e Meravigliose cose*, ed. Alvise Andreose, Padua, 2000, pp.146–151, Cap. XIII.
- ¹⁶ See note 11.
- ¹⁷ Enrica Neri Lusanna, “La pittura in San Francesco dalle origini al Quattrocento,” in: Lucia Gai (ed.), *S. Francesco - La chiesa e il convento in Pistoia*, Ospedaletto (PI), 1993, pp.110–160; Stein-Kecks (as note 5), pp.295–300 et passim.
- ¹⁸ According to Louise Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy*, Cambridge, 2004, pp.50–51, the martyrdom scene including ‘grisly details of decapitation’ was located in such a less accessible place as chapter house. For the chapter house of Sant’Antonio, see Francesca d’Arcais, “La presenza di Giotto al Santo,” in: Camillo Semenzato (ed.), *Le pitture del Santo di Padova*, Vicenza, 1984, pp.3–13; Stein-Kecks (as note 5), pp.279–284 et passim.
- ¹⁹ For example, see Chiara Frugoni, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti,” in: Chiara Frugoni (ed.), *Pietro e Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, Florence, 2002, p.194.
- ²⁰ Nancy M. Thompson, “Cooperation and Conflict: stained glass in the Bardi chapels of Santa Croce,” in: William Robert Cook (ed.), *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, Leiden, 2005, p.272. I would like to follow the argument of Stein-Kecks (as note 5), p.336, who considers this scene does not refer to a specific moment of the saint’s life, but represents a “harmonious” relationship between the Franciscan Order and the Papacy.
- ²¹ Jane Collins Long, *Bardi patronage at Santa Croce in Florence, c. 1320–1343*, Ph. D. thesis, Columbia University, 1988, p.210, points out that “Louis’s humility and obedience to the pope is underlined by his stooping posture and the feudal gesture of service with which he lays his hands in the pope’s”. Most recently, Thompson (as note 20), p.272, merely describing this St. Louis’ gesture as a “posture of supplication”, indicates that by this “Louis’ humility and obedience to the Pope” is emphasized.
- ²² See the relief panel with inscription “FATTO VESCOVO” for the tomb of Guido Tarlati in the cathedral of Arezzo, signed by Agostino di Giovanni and Agnolo di Ventura and dated 1330.
- ²³ Prudently describing this figure as a “long-haired Christ-like figure, watching the proceedings from the extreme right”, Eve Borsook, *Mural Painters of Tuscany - from Cimabue to Andrea del Sarto*, Oxford, 1980 (2nd ed.), p.33, leaves its identity undefined. As for a young man pointing a thumb most probably at this Christ-like figure, she informs us of Irene Hueck’s view that it portrays Louis’ younger brother, Robert of Anjou, who is indicating himself with his thumb as a sign of his

conscious acceptance of the conceded, by turns, status as royal heir.

- ²⁴ It may be reminded that in his *Expositio* on the Franciscan Rule, Angelo Clareno insists that “Dependent enim et fontaliter emanant et auctoritas prelatorum et subiectio et obedientia subditorum a Christo, qui est caput Ecclesie et principium et finis bonorum gratie et glorie” (10, 38) and repeats loudly a verse from the Acts 5, 29: “Obedire oportet Deo magis quam hominibus.”(10, 48) Thus this spiritual dissident reserves the right to disobedience, which seems, though, not to be turned to the Pope himself as much as to prelates and ministers. Frate Angelo Clareno, *Expositio super regulam fratrum minorum*, P. Giovanni Boccali OFM (ed.), Assisi, 1994, pp.654, 658.
- ²⁵ Stein-Kecks (as note 5), pp.34-35.
- ²⁶ *Regula bullata*, I, 2. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Volume I: The Saint, Regis J. Armstrong OFM Cap, J.A. Wayne Hellmann OFM Conv, William J. Short OFM (eds.), New York-London-Manila, 1999, p.100. Thompson (as note 20), pp.262-263, suggests that the Franciscan obedience to the Pontiff is emphasized by the stained glass program also in a Spirituals’ haven of Santa Croce in Florence.
- ²⁷ *Testamentum senis factum*, 5. Kajetan Esser OFM, *Gli scritti di S. Francesco d’Assisi*, trans. Alfredo Bizzotto, Sergio Cattazzo, Padua, 1982, p.600.
- ²⁸ Stein-Kecks (as note 5), pp.100-102, 184-185.
- ²⁹ According to Hidemichi Tanaka (as note 3), pp.31-32, three Franciscan martyrs in Tana are represented twice, before and after beheading, since Peter of Siena was tortured elsewhere and not beheaded.
- ³⁰ Cf. note 4. Bourdua (as note 18), p.50, deliberately states that “the Sienese version could allude to various reports of Franciscan martyrdoms”.
- ³¹ Chap. XVI. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (as note 26), p.74.
- ³² *ibid.*
- ³³ Bourdua (as note 18), pp.50-51, observes that, when the atrocities should be exposed to the public, “the martyrdom of Franciscan friars was symbolized by a depiction of Francis of Assisi’s own trial by fire, from which he emerged unscathed, as in the former church [Santa Croce, Florence] and the upper church of San Francesco at Assisi.” In other words, we may say that as a means of *Ordenspropaganda*, a more triumphant and conquering scene, i.e. “the ordeal by fire” was depicted and for a less public devotion the “martyr” was preferred. Naturally *Ordenspropaganda* is quoted from Dieter Blume, *Wandmalerei als Ordenspropaganda - Bildprogramme im Chorbereich franziskanischer Konvent Italiens bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Worms, 1983.

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- ³⁴ Odorico da Pordenone (as note n.15), pp.151-152, 162, Capp. XV-XVI, XXX.
- ³⁵ Giordano Brunettin, “L’invenzione del santo patrono,” in: *Odorico da Pordenone: dalle rive del Noncello al trono del Drago*, exh. cat. Museo Civico d’Arte di Pordenone a Palazzo Ricchieri, Pordenone, 2003, pp.26-47. This tomb, dated 1331-1332, is now transferred in the Church of Madonna del Carmine in Udine. Maria Walcher, *Scultura in Friuli - Il gotico*, Pordenone, 1980, pp.68-71.
- ³⁶ Decio Gioseffi, *Udine: Le arti*, Udine, 1982, p.46, dates this fresco around the beginning or the first half of the fifteenth century.
- ³⁷ This panel is recently referred to in Henk van Os, *The Way to Heaven - Relic Veneration in the Middle Ages*, Baarn, 2000, p.28, fig. 18.
- ³⁸ John R. H. Moorman, *Medieval Franciscan Houses*, New York, 1983, p.140.
- ³⁹ St. Francis Xavier Chapel of this Jesuit church is the last project of Pietro da Cortona (1672-1678). Annarosa Cerutti Fusco, Marcello Villani, *Pietro da Cortona Architetto*, Rome, 2002, pp.323-326.
- ⁴⁰ It should be noted that three heads are aligned on the edge of the picture plane, just in front of spectators’ eyes, as if they were on display in a cupboard for relics.

[図版出典] **figs. 1, 2**: キアーラ・フルゴーニ 『ロレンツェッティ兄弟』 (谷古宇尚訳) 東京書籍, 1994年, pp.60, 62 (figs. 69, 72)。