

Maquette in Iconography

Symbol, Emotion and Realistic Depiction

Small-Scale Things of Great Importance

The role of the Christian Iconography, in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, was underlined by Gregory the Great's words: "What Scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant, who see through them what they must accept; they read in them what they cannot read in books". Consequently, images had useful functions, particularly among the illiterates. In holy places pictorial representations contributed to instruct the illiterates, enabling them able to understand the stories that were represented, to recognize the Saints and to perceive the meaning of their attributes (Figs. 1-2). As the tradition allowed the deeds of the Saints to be depicted in holy places, narrative pictures were able to stimulate religious emotions, because "from the view of the event portrayed, [people] should catch the ardor of compunction", as Gregory the Great wrote.

Concreteness and recognizability of the images are also related to a significant aspect of the Medieval iconography, i.e. the representation of either a Church (Figs. 2-3, 5-6, 9-10) or a Medieval town (Figs. 7-8) in a maquette held by a Saint or a Patron.

A maquette of a church held by a Saint often denotes that he had erected holy places as symbols of the "building up" of the Church through the Doctrine and his own theological writings, as in the case of Saint Jerome or Saint Thomas Aquinas, who were Doctors of the Church.

A further significant aspect of this iconography is related to the fact that a maquette can also refer to the Church which housed the painting. A maquette not only contributes to contextualize the painting, chronologically and geographically, but it is also very useful in giving us some clues regarding the original style of the Church where it was located, or the originary style of a Mother Church, showing an accurate architecture, as noted in Antonio and Bartolomeo Vivarini's works, where the artists used to represent a maquette showing the style of Santa Maria dei Frari (i.e. the Mother Church of the Franciscans in Venice) regardless of where the paintings were located (Figs. 3-4).

This study shows some eloquent and suggestive examples of paintings, focusing on those from the Umbria-Marche School, the Florentine School and the Veneto School. The usefulness of a maquette in remodeling both the aspect and the style of a structure is underlined by impressively precise architectural details.



Fig. 1 - Antonio Vivarini, *Triptych of San Bernardino*, 1451-1456, San Francesco della Vigna, Venice. The figure of Saint Jerome holds a model of a church recalling the style of the 14th century Franciscan churches in Venice



Fig. 2 - The bell tower of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice (left) showing similarities with that represented in the maquette (right) held by Saint Jerome in the *Triptych of San Bernardino*



Fig. 3 - *Polyptych of the Certosa of Bologna (det.)* Fig. 4 - Santa Maria dei Frari in Venice



Fig. 5 - Giotto, *Enrico Scrovegni offering a model of the chapel to the Virgin*, detail of the *Last Judgement*, 1303-1305, Padova, Scrovegni Chapel



Fig. 6 - Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Jerome*, detail of the *Polyptych of the Camerino Cathedral*, 1490 ca, Milano, Pinacoteca di Brera



Fig. 7 - The maquette of the town of San Severino held by Saint Severino, detail of the *Polyptych of San Severino* by Vittore Crivelli, 1482, San Severino Marche, Pinacoteca Comunale



Fig. 8 - The maquette of the town of Camerino held by Saint Venanzio, detail of the *Triptych of Camerino* by Carlo Crivelli, 1482, Milano, Pinacoteca di Brera



Fig. 9 - Jacopo di Cione and Workshop, *Saint Peter*, detail of the *Incoronazione della Vergine e Santi*, 1370-1371, London, National Gallery. The painting was realized for the 14th century Florentine church of San Pier Maggiore, that was reconstructed in the 15th century. The shape of the maquette represents the original building before reconstruction.



Fig. 10 - Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, detail of the *Polyptych of Saint Dominic*, 1476, London, National Gallery. The painting was done for the church of Saint Dominic in Ascoli Piceno (right) which recalls the shape of the model held by the Saint.



An Iconographic Attribute in remodeling Lost Architecture

Examples of maquette represented as an iconographic attribute of a Saint are shown in numerous Medieval paintings. The model of the church associated to Saint Jerome in the Triptych of Saint Bernardino by the Venetian Antonio Vivarini, enables us to understand the shape of San Francesco della Vigna in Venice, which preserves the painting, before reconstruction (Figs. 1-2). The typical architectural details of the churches erected by the Franciscans in Venice, that are clearly represented in the maquette, are to be found in Franciscan churches, such as Santa Maria dei Frari (Fig. 3), which shows a strong similarity with the maquette. In both the model and the church, the facade is divided into three parts by simple pilasters in late Gothic style. The central part of the facade is adorned with a portal and three windows. At the top is an ogival arch.

The model of the Church, that Enrico Scrovegni offers to the three Marys - as represented by Giotto in the Scrovegni chapel - is slightly different from the chapel which has a rectangular plan. The maquette, showing a T-shaped layout (Fig. 5), refers - in fact - to the initial project of the chapel, that was modified during the construction.

The multi-paneled altarpiece by Jacopo di Cione and his Workshop, painted for the early fourteenth century benedictine Church of San Pier Maggiore in Florence, shows Saint Peter holding a model of San Pier Maggiore, as it appeared before its reconstruction a few decades later (Fig. 9). The original building, that symbolises the Universal Church, had the typical austere style of the Benedictine Order, with Gothic features, but with an absence of decoration. The Church had a T-shaped-cross plan and three naves, following the typical layout of the benedictine abbeys, an octagonal dome in the intersection between the transept and the main nave, three arch-shaped entrances corresponding to the three naves, and a simple rose-window above each portal inserted in a façade that - as usual at the time - was divided into three parts by half pilasters.

The Dominican Saint Thomas Aquinas with a maquette of the medieval Dominican Church of Saint Peter Martyr in Ascoli Piceno before reconstruction (Fig. 10), is represented in the Polyptych of Saint Dominic. The model shows a rose-window façade, a sloping roof, and - more visible - a row of arch-shaped windows corresponding to the clarestory on the main nave.

These small-scale models, as a particular type of iconographic attribute, are forceful in their different connotations, supplying a fundamental contribution to the knowledge of Medieval Architecture.