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Kneeling on Stone
St. Francis at the Base of Monumental Painted Crucifixes in Arezzo and Assisi

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Kneeling on Stone:
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By Laura IU Collier

This paper identifies the role and function of the dramatic space inhabited by St. Francis at the base of the San Francesco Crucifix, in Arezzo, and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, in Assisi. By considering the San Francesco Crucifix and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix as they may have appeared and functioned in their historical display environments, this paper asks how the depicted space at the bases of the San Francesco and Abbess Benedetta Crucifixes is brought into contact with the real space inhabited by the crucifixes.

Narrative is collapsed in images of Saint Francis engaging with crucifixes. Imbedded in any such image is the allusion to the saint's conversion before the San Damiano crucifix, his stigmatization by a divine image of the crucifix, and Saint Francis's construction as *alter Christus*. The fictive stone base upon which Saint Francis kneels, in the San Francesco and Abbess Benedetta Crucifixes, becomes a liminal space through which the viewer may enter the crucifixion, adopt the pose of Saint Francis, and participate in the veneration of Christ.

In order to address the spatial ambiguities in these two crucifixes, this paper identifies the crucifixes' novel characteristics and places the crucifixes in the context of their broader environments. The supplicant Saint Francis and his location on rocky ground are given special consideration. The San Francesco crucifix is the primary example in this contextualization; however, additional crucifixes are considered as *comperanda*. Finally, this paper develops a case study of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, with special regard for its history and relationship to its church and its city.

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Table of contents

Introduction

The spacious interior of the Basilica Santa Chiara in Assisi and that of the smaller San Francesco in Arezzo[1] are dominated by monumental painted crucifixes suspended in their respective crossings. The San Francesco Crucifix (fig 1-8) was created circa 1270, in Arezzo.[2] It is the product of several hands.[3] The Abbess Benedetta Crucifix (fig 9-12) was painted circa 1260 for the Basilica Santa Croce in Assisi. These crucifixes are unusual in their depictions of Saint Francis kneeling on the rocky ground of Golgotha below the crucified Christ.[4] In both crucifixes, the images are further intensified by the inclusion of a thread of blood that passes from Christ's stigmatized feet, over the cross to which he is fixed, around the body and feet of the supplicant Saint Francis, and into the rocky foundation upon which the drama is enacted (fig 6 and 12).

The inclusion of Saint Francis at the base of the crucifixes suggests a relationship between Christ and Saint Francis within the painting, a relationship of the sort that is emphasized in the thirteenth-century lives of the Umbrian saint. This relationship

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[1] Paola Refice, "Anonimo Artista dell' Italia Centrale Croce Dipinta," in *Restauri Nell'Aretino: Croce dipinte tra Due e Trecento*, ed. Paola Refice (Florence: Edizioni Firenze, 2008), 42; Anna Pincelli, *Monasteri e Conventi del Territorio Aretino* (Arezzo: Alinea Editrice, 2000), 56. This is the crucifix's second location. It probably came from the city's original Franciscan church, located in the Poggio del Sole region. In November of 1290, Arezzo's *Consiglio* invited the friars to relocate to their current location, just inside of the set of walls erected circa 1200. The earliest documented restoration of the Arezzo San Francesco crucifix is from 1951. The crucifix was treated in 1965 and 1984, and the crucifix's final conservation treatments were undertaken from 1998 to 2003.

[2] Refice, "Anonimo Artista dell' Italia Centrale Croce Dipinta," 43. The earliest known references to this crucifix date to the early sixteenth-century.

[3] Isabella Droandi-Ricerca, "La Croce dipinta di San Francesco ad Arezzo: Diario di due interventi," in *Restauri Nell'Aretino: Croce dipinte tra Due e Trecento*, ed. Paola Refice (Florence: Edizioni Firenze, 2008), 61. This determination is based on stylistic analysis.

[4] William R. Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi In Painting, Stone and Glass from the Earliest Images to ca. 1320 in Italy*: *A Catalogue* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1999), 29. These two crucifixes are two of only three known crucifixes that include a supplicant Saint Francis on a stone base at the foot of the cross.

establishes a visual connection, for the beholder, between the fictive space of the painting and the real space of the church within which it hangs. When Saint Francis kneels directly on the rocky ground on which the fictive cross stands, he seems to occupy the same space as Christ on the cross. The crucifix (or the cross as object), meanwhile, hangs suspended in the real space of its viewer. By considering the San Francesco Crucifix and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix as they may have appeared and functioned in their historical display environments, this paper will ask how the depicted space at the base of the San Francesco and Abbess Benedetta Crucifixes is brought into contact with the real space below the crucifix, as an object associated with an altar inside of a church.[5]

In answering this larger question, this paper proceeds in four sections. The first section examines the special characteristics of the two Franciscan crucifixes by considering their relation to the larger tradition of panel crucifixes. The second and third sections interrogate the significance of the novel features of the two crucifixes, especially the supplicant Saint Francis and his location on rocky ground. Using the findings of the first three sections, the fourth section develops a case study of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix (fig 9) as it relates to its history and place within the Basilica of Santa Chiara in Assisi.

Panel Crucifixes

Painted crucifixes on panel that included figures and narratives beyond the crucified Christ emerged in the late twelfth-century. In the twelfth and early thirteenth-

[5] Jill Bennett, "Stigmata and Sense Memory: St. Francis and the Affective Image," *Art History* 24 (2002): 1-16. Bennett argues that by visually engaging with a painted crucifix, especially one with a supplicant at the base, the viewer may permeate the object.

centuries, most crucifixes represented a living *Christus triumphans* style Christ flanked either by small Passion scenes, or by static figures who were witness to the crucifixion.[6] The San Damiano crucifix (fig 14), from the late twelfth-century in Assisi, and the Pieve crucifix (fig 13), made circa 1250-1260 in Arezzo, are examples of the "pre-Giuntesque" *Christus triumphans* crucifixes with crucifixion witnesses in the aprons.[7]

The so-called "Giuntesque" type was introduced by Giunta Pisano for the Upper Church of San Franceso in Assisi in circa 1230, in reaction to Eastern Passion images that the Franciscan Frater Elias witnessed in the Holy Land.[8] "Giuntesque" crucifixes do not contain any figures in the aprons. This crucifix style depicts Christ as *Christus patiens*, a pitiable dead Christ with a pained continence who slumps under his flaccid weight thus departing from the *Christus triumphans* model, which showed a living but static Christ who projects an enduring timeless radiance. This shift is coincident with an increased interest in the humanity of Christ, especially according to the Franciscan interest in the humanity and corporeality of Christ and in the passion.[9] Further, the popularity of "Giuntesque" type corresponds with the restored practice of displaying large painted

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[6] Edward B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: An Illustrated Index* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976), 174-221. For an early twentieth-century comprehensive catalogue of painted crucifixes, see Evelyn Sandberg-Vavala, *La Croce Dipinta Italiana e l'Iconografia della Passione* (Verona, 1929).

[7] Sandberg-Vavala, *La Croce Dipinta Italiana e l'Iconografia della Passione*, 623, 641; Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting,* 183.

[8] Elvio Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," in *La Basilica di S. Chiara in Assisi*, ed. Marino Bigaroni, Hans-Rudolf Meier, and Elvio Lunghi (Perugia: Quattroemme, 1994), 160; Joanna Cannon, "Review: The Era of the Great Painted Crucifix: Giotto, Cimabue, Giunta Pisano, and their Anonymous Contemporaries," *Renaissance Studies* 16 (2002): 577. It is thought that the Brother Elias crucifix was the prototype for many monumental crucifixes in Umbria and Tuscany.

[9] Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16-24.

crucifixes above the altar. This type persisted into the fourteenth-century.[10] Both the San Francesco Crucifix in Arezzo and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix in Assisi belong generally to the "Giuntesque" group.

In "Giuntesque" style *Christus patiens* crucifixes, the spaces within the cross and the figures who inhabit it demonstrate a consistent temporal and narrative logic. Christ is painted as dead and inert on the cross. The mourning Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist (fig 3-4), in the terminals on either side of the crucifix, are temporally consistent with the crucified Christ, but their emotional vitality implies action, in contrast to Christ's stasis. The terminal figures are relegated to their own nearly independent rectangles in the fabric of the crucifix. They do not share the same immediate space as Christ; their interaction with him is limited to their mourning. The inclusion of medieval penitent or supplicant figures at the base of "Giuntesque" crucifixes disrupts the otherwise composed and consistent space in the image (fig 6 and 11).

Giunta Pisano's Frater Elias Crucifix, dated 1236 and made for the Upper Church of San Francesco, in Assisi, contained a representation of the penitent Frater Elias in its suppedaneum (or foot support) at the base. It is the first known instance of a non-biblical figure's incorporation into a painted crucifix.[11] The Abbess Benedetta Crucifix may have

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[10] Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting*, 204-217.

[11] Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: the Pope, the Franciscans and the Paintings of the Basilica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 64-65. The Frater Elias Crucifix is now lost, but many seventeenth-century drawings and written accounts survive. The crucifix is dated according its inscription. For more on Giunta di Pisano, see Sandberg-Vavala, *La Croce Dipinta Italiana e l'Iconografia della Passione*, 681-690; Dino Campini, *Giunta Pisano Capitini e Le Croci Dipinte Romaniche* (Milano: Aldo Martello Editore, 1966); Elvio Lunghi, *Il Crocefisso di Giunta Pisano e l'Icona del 'Maestro did San Francesco' alla Porziuncola* (Assisi, Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995), and Angelo Tartufferi, *Giunta Pisano* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1991).

been the first monumental painted crucifix to picture Saint Francis the foot of the cross.[12] Among the so-called "Giuntesque" crucifixes of the second half of the thirteenth-century, neither supplicant figures nor rocky bases were rare.

There are at least thirteen extant thirteenth-century monumental painted crucifixes with a supplicant Saint Francis at the base, and at least eight crucifixes containing a supplicant or supplicants other than Saint Francis.[13] Approximately two thirds of surviving crucifixes with a supplicant at the base include a supplicant Saint Francis. Garrison estimates that a minimum of eighty percent, but probably more than ninety nine percent, of Romanesque panel paintings have been lost.[14] Even by a conservative estimate, thirteenth-century Italy must have produced a large number of monumental painted crucifixes on panel with an image of a supplicant Saint Francis at the base. However, the San Francesco and Santa Chiara crucifixes are two of only three surviving panel crucifixes that place Saint Francis on a fictive stone ground.[15] The new emphasis on supplicants, and especially the inclusion of a stone ground, invites explanation.

Kneeling on Rock

The arrangement of Saint Francis at the foot of the cross in the San Francesco and

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[12] Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi,* 64.
[13] Sandberg-Vavala, *La Croce Dipinta Italiana e l'Iconografia della Passione*; Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting*, 174-221; Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi In Painting*. This determination is based on the assemblages of the three most comprehensive applicable catalogues, which are cited in this note**.**
[14] Edward B. Garrison, "Note on the Survival of Thirteenth-Century Panel Paintings in Italy," *The Art Bulletin* 54 (1972): 140.
[15] Cook, *Images of St. Francis of Assisi In Painting*, 29, 63-64, 111-112. The third example is in the Acton collection, at the Villa la Pietra, Florence. It's surface is somewhat abraded. It was painted decades after the other two crucifixes, but it is stylistically comparable to crucifixes from the early to mid thirteenth-century.

Abbess Benedetta Crucifixes is predicted, iconographically, by the representation of or allusion to the Denial of Saint Peter at the base of earlier crucifixes of the preceding styles. In the thirteenth-century, Franciscan representations of the Passion and of the crucifixion were inexorably tied.[16] Most of the early Franciscan crucifixes depicted figures and scenes from the Passion flanking a *Christus triumphans.*[17]

Until the Frater Elias Crucifix and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, in Assisi, introduced medieval supplicants to the lower portion of the cross, the space below Christ's feet was typically empty. With few exceptions, when "pre-Giuntesque" style crucifixes do contain an image below Christ's body, that image is the Denial of Peter.[18]

There are thirteen known examples of the Denial on painted crucifixes, almost all of which are dated prior to 1260.[19] The best-known example of a crucifix that includes figures from the Passion is the San Damiano Crucifix (fig 14-16), dated to the late twelfth-century, from the church and convent of San Damiano near Assisi. In the San Damiano Crucifix, several badly damaged small figures appear below Christ's feet. These figures are generally thought to represent the patron saints of the major churches in Assisi, including San Damiano and Saint Peter (fig 16). The identification of Saint Peter and the allusion to the Denial of Christ is secured by the painter's insertion of a small rooster in the decorative banding to the right of Christ's legs (fig. 15), referring to the

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[16] Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 23. This is the primary argument of Derbes' text.
[17] Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting,* 174-176; 181-203.
[18] The Denial of Peter is described in Mark 14:66-72; Matthew 26:69-75; Luke 22:54-62; and John 18:15-27.
[19] Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting,* 183-202. The San Damiano crucifix represents a company of saints, each associated with a local church, at its base, and it contains a small image of a rooster on the side, in reference to the Denial. Two additional crucifixes, from Florence and Pisa, contain an image at their base of something other than the Denial; these images are, respectively, the Road to Calvary and the Pentecost. It is of note that a crucifix's "type," more than its precise chronology, correlates with its content.

rooster that crowed, as Christ had predicted, at Peter's third denial.[20]

The San Damiano Crucifix's subtle handling of the Denial is unusual. Most *Christus triumphans* crucifixes that reference the Denial explicitly depict either the biblical characters or the narrative incident. Sometimes, as in a crucifix from the church of Santa Maria della Pieve in Arezzo (fig 13), from circa 1250-1260 and attributed to Margaritone d'Arezzo, Peter and his inquisitor are depicted standing on rocky ground.[21] In the Pieve Crucifix, Saint Peter kneels on a rock to the right of Christ's feet, while a second figure kneels to his left. A rooster, rendered in red paint, separates them.[22]

The appearance of Saint Peter in these crucifixes carries an institutional significance. Within Catholic doctrine Peter is understood metaphorically to be foundation of the Western Church. In Matthew 16:18 Christ associates Peter's name with the rock upon which he would build his church.[23] Elsewhere in the New Testament, especially in the letters of Paul, the "Body of Christ" is a metaphor for the church.[24] The

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[20] On the 1938 cleaning that revealed the rooster, see Miliva Bollati, *Francesco e La Croce di S. Damiano* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 2016), 157-160.
[21] Anna Maria Maetzke, ed. "Dipinti, Sculture E Arte Minori," in *Arte Nell'Aretino: Recuperi e Restauri dal 1968 al 1974*, ed. by Lionello G. Boccacia et al. (Florence: Editrice Edam, 1974), 19-22. The Pieve is located near the church of San Francesco, in which the San Francesco Crucifix now hangs. The Pieve Crucifix was almost certainly made for the Pieve. Maetzke attributed it to Margaritone in 1974, after it was cleaned. Notably, Vasari erroneously attributed both the San Francesco crucifix and the Frater Elisas Crucifix to Margaritone; Vasari, "Margaritone, Painter, Sculptor, and Architect, of Arezzo," in *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters Sculptors and Architects: Volume I,* trans. Gaston Du C. de Vere (New York: Everyman's Library, 1996), 92-96.
[22] Maetzke, ed. "Dipinti, Sculture E Arte Minori," 20. It is of note that prior to the crucifix's cleaning between 1968 and 1974, the Denial was nearly illegible.
[23] "You are Peter, and on this rock I will built My church," Matthew 16:18, NKJV.
[24] Corinthians, Romans, Hebrews, and Ephesians present the body of Christ as the church and the church as the body of the faithful. "Now, therefore, you are not longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into

placement of the Denial at the base of painted crucifixes, including the Piece Crucifix, creates a visual relationship between the rock, the Body of Christ, and the Denial, which serves to reinforce Peter's role as the metaphorical foundation of the Church. In the Pieve crucifix, Saint Peter kneels on the rock out of which springs the crucified Christ, the embodiment of the church. Thus, in the Pieve crucifix, and in other crucifixes that represent the Denial of Peter, the metaphor of Christ's Church built upon Peter, the rock, is represented pictorially.[25]

The blurring of any precise historical location for the image of Christ on the cross allows for a set of typologically associated to come into play. Its function is further evidenced in the San Francesco and Abbess Benedetta Crucifixes. The image of Saint Francis kneeling on fictive stone at the bottom of the San Francesco (fig 6) and Abbess Benedetta (fig 11-12) crucifixes does not point to a fixed event in the past or to a single place. When the rocky hill appears at the base of an iconic crucifix, it serves as an atemporal index. It signifies the geographic site where the Crucifixion occurred. While the hill refers principally to Golgotha as the burial site of Adam and the place of Christ's crucifixion, when a crucifix is in a Franciscan site and contains with a kneeling image of Saint Francis, the hill is also legible as La Verna, the place where Francis knelt before an image of Christ and became *alter christus*.

The imagery of the crucifixes described in this paper is informed by the saint's

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a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit," Ephesians 2:20-22, NKJV.

[25] Thirteenth-century crucifixes, other than crucifixes of the "Giuntesque" type, typically depicted scenes from the passion. This is why the Denial of Peter is an iconographically appropriate way to present the visual metaphor of Saint Peter, the rock, supporting the body of Christ, the church.

hagiography.[26] Among the various legends, Saint Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior* is most relevant to the topic at hand.[27] According to Saint Bonaventure, Christ made the stigmatized Saint Francis as an image:

> Now after that the true love of Christ had transformed His lover into the same image, and after that he had spent forty days in solitude… this angelic man, Francis, descended from the mountain, bearing with him the likeness of the Crucified, engraved not on tables of stone or of wood, by the craftsman's hand, but written on his members of flesh by the finger of the Living God.[28]

While early Franciscans debated whether the stigmata was the result of internally motivated mimesis though imagination or externally imposed by divine intervention, the stigmatized body of Saint Francis was understood by both sides in the debate as a corporeal image of Christ.[29]

In his description of the stigmatization, Saint Bonaventure describes the Seraph who transmitted the stigmata to Saint Francis as cruciform.[30] The angelic vision from which Saint Francis received the stigmata is described as a seraph in the form of a man

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[26] At least a dozen Latin "Lives" of Saint Francis were completed before 1263. The most significant accounts are written by Fra Thomas da Celano and Saint Bonaventure: St. Francis of Assisi, *The Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi,* trans. Father Paschal Robinson (Philadelphia: The Dolphin Press, 1906); Fra Thomas da Celano, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi and The Treatise of Miracles* [the First and Second Life,] trans. Catherine Bolton (Assisi: Editrice Minerva, 2007); Saint Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, trans. E. Gurney (Salter. E-book: Charles River Editors, 2013).

[27] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*. Bonaventure's account was framed as the "official" life of Saint Francis.

[28] Ibid., chapter 13, paragraph 5.

[29] Hans Belting, "St. Francis and the Body as Image: An Anthropological Approach," in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 4. Belting argues that the body of St. Francis is an image of Christ.

[30] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis,* chapter 13, paragraph 3. "…there appeared betwixt the wings the Figure of a Man crucified, having his hands and feet stretched forth in the shape of a Cross, and fastened unto a Cross."

on a cross. The Christ-like figure's body was an image of Christ.[31] The angelic form both resembles a cross and is attached to a cross. Thus, the cross is separable from the appearance of a cross, and Christ is separable from images of Christ. Francis became the model for an act of viewing wherein the image takes on physical and corporeal dimensions that coincide with his those of his body.[32]

It was not until the final years of his life that Saint Francis received the stigmata. The beginning of the Saint's life of ministry was also marked by an encounter with Christ in which an image transgressed its expected boundaries. According to Bonaventure, an image of Christ on the cross incited Saint Francis's conversion (fig 17): "Prostrating himself before an Image of the Crucified, he was filled with no small consolation of spirit as he prayed. And as with eyes full of tears he gazed upon the Lord's Cross, he heard with his bodily ears a Voice proceeding from that Cross…"[33] In this passage, Bonaventure indicates the relationship between the actual Saint Francis and the image of Christ crucified, in the San Damiano crucifix, by emphasizing the saint's bodily experience. The implication is that sensory engagement bridges the space between the devotee and the object of devotion.[34] The reader of the *Legenda Maior* is thus reminded of painted crucifixes' power and their ability to give voice to Christ. The latent potential

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[31] Belting, "St. Francis and the Body as Image," 5.
[32] Belting, "St. Francis and the Body as Image," 3-14; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe,* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 112-121; Jacqueline E. Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes on the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination," in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art History*, ed. by Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, 2010), 221-223. Belting argues for Francis as image of Christ, and Bynum and Jung bolster this argument.
[33] St. Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, chapter 2, section 1.
[34] Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary," 224 and 240. The tactility of medieval images enhances their sacred presence.

for crucifix's miraculous animation eroded the boundary between image and viewer.[35]

Beyond what it tells us about the importance of images in Franciscan devotion, Bonaventure's account of Saint Francis's conversion carries institutional weight. Bonaventure legitimizes Saint Francis, which helps to explain why Saint Francis assumed the position on the painted crucifixes that had been occupied by Saint Peter in the earlier crucifixes. Images of Saint Francis kneeling at Christ's feet on the base of a painted cross recall the moment from the life of Francis when he supplicated before the San Damiano Crucifix and, through it, heard the voice of Christ. Christ instructed Francis to "go and repair My House."[36] According to Bonaventure Francis initially took the command literally to mean the Church of San Damiano and then later understood it figuratively in reference to the church at large. Francis was instructed by Christ to rebuild the church, just as Peter had been told by Christ to be the foundation of the church. Via Peter, Francis became associated with the rock upon which the church was built.

The Pieve Crucifix and the San Francesco Crucifix in Arezzo were probably made in the same city only one or two decades apart from one another. They illustrate the transition from the imagery of Peter on stone beneath the cross to Francis on stone beneath the cross. Saint Francis and Saint Peter kneel at the bottom of their respective crucifixes on the rocky ground slightly to Christ's right. In the Pieve Crucifix, the central point below Christ's feet is occupied by the rooster whose winding red lines are almost

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[35] Donal Cooper, "Projecting Presence: The Monumental Cross in the Italian Church Interior," in *Presence: the Inherence of the Prototype Images and Other Objects*, ed. Robert Manuira and Rupert Shepherd, (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), 47-69; Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 214. Cooper argues that monumental crucifixes on panel transcend and eliminate the boundary between the image and the viewer.

[36] St. Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis,* chapter 2, section 1.

indistinguishable from the blood of Christ pooling into the painted earth. In the San Francesco crucifix, the center of the lowest segment of the crucifix is dominated by the head of Francis and the large stigmatized foot of Christ.

Because the lowest portion of a crucifix, at or below the feet of Christ, is closest to the viewer (fig 6),[37]the viewer must look past Saint Francis or past the Denial in order to see Christ. By identifying with the figure at the base of the cross the viewer may imaginatively project him or herself into that fictional space of the actual cross, and thus establish an appropriately mediated relationship with Christ. In the crucifixes of the older style, which contained a Denial, like the Pieve Crucifix, the viewer was forced to confront their own potential denials of Christ and the viewer was reminded that Peter, or Papal authority, was the foundation of the Church. Conversely, in the San Francesco Crucifix, the viewer confronted Saint Francis kneeling on a stone foundation. In the two crucifixes that are the focus of this paper, Francis becomes the new Peter. Owing to Francis's popularity, the church in Rome wasted no time in legitimizing him as a saint, thus assuming Francis and his order under official control. The Franciscan relationship with the painted crucifix co-evolved with the Franciscan interest in the cross and the special Franciscan relationship to Christ.[38] The inclusion of Saint Francis, instead of Saint Peter, at the base of these crucifixes must be understood is part of a larger effort to legitimize Francis within the institution of the Catholic Church. The parallel between Saint Peter and Saint Francis suggested in the imagery of two crucifixes are part of the

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[37] If the crucifix is displayed as an altarpiece, the feet will be near eye level; if the crucifix is displayed in the air, the feet hang or stand nearer the viewer than any other portion of the panel.

[38] Thomas Herbst, OFM, "Franciscan Christology in the Development of the Iconography of the Passion," *The Cord* 59 (2009): 303-311.

pattern of thinking that imagined Francis as a revitalizing force for the institution and a new point of access to the body of Christ as celebrated in the Eucharist.

Francis as Supplicant

In both the San Francesco Crucifix in Arezzo, and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix in Assisi, the painted figure of Saint Francis wraps both of his hands around Christ's right foot and presses his face against the instep (fig 6 and 11). Additionally, in both crucifixes, Christ's left foot is presented frontally, as if to the viewer. In the Arezzo crucifix, Francis's mouth and lower face connect with Christ's wound (fig 7); in the Assisi crucifix, the greater difference in scale between Francis, foot, and wound allows much of the saint's face to press flush against the wound, from chin to eye (fig 12). The close parallels between the gestures in the two crucifixes suggest that the arrangement and orientation of the gesture is significant.

The saint's gesture connects both to actual habits of prayer before sacred images and to depictions of prayer within contemporary representations of Saint Francis. Speaking to the latter point, Joanna Cannon suggests that Franciscan friars would have been generally familiar with the bent posture of supplication because they would have recognized it from the many thirteenth-century representations of Francis bent in prostration at the feet of the crucified Christ.[39] The supplicant gesture in thirteenth-century painting depends on of the iconography of prostration and of its function within a ritual practice involving images.

As Cannon has discussed at length in relation to the use of late medieval Italian

[39] Joanna Cannon, "Kissing the Virgin's Foot: Adoration Before the Madonna and Child Enacted, Depicted, Imagined," *Studies in Iconography* 31 (2010): 40.

images of Madonna and Child, the right feet of painted sacred figures' were kissed or touched in ritual acts of adoration.[40] It is this ritual kissing of the right foot that the painted Saint Francis performs in both the San Francesco and Santa Chiara crucifixes. While the painted Saint Francis models devotion by kissing the right foot, Christ's left foot is apparently presented frontally to the viewer. As Cannon explains, when distance barred physical ritual supplication, the faithful could enact a "symbolic kiss," a form of distanced or mediated supplication at the feet of a sacred image. This is especially suggested in images in which the sacred figures' foot has been made visually accessible.[41]

In both the San Francesco Crucifix and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, Francis's partially exposed foot is positioned as the pictorial medium for a symbolic engagement with Christ's feet, allowing for an imagined graduated interaction between viewer and crucifix (fig 7 and 12).[42] In both crucifixes, the sacramental connection between Christ and Francis is emphasized, and it helps to bridge the spatial distance between object and viewer. For example, in the San Francesco Crucifix Saint Francis's foot is washed in the blood of Christ's exposed and untouched left foot (the same foot that is presented for a devotee's mental kiss or supplicatory gesture). This fictive blood, in turn, stands for the blood that will eventually reemerge, transubstantiated, in the chalice on the altar in the real space of the church.[43] By inwardly mimicking Francis's gesture of ritual

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[40] Cannon, "Kissing the Virgin's Foot," 3, 9-10.
[41] Ibid., 30-31.
[42] Ibid., 30. Cannon argues for the impact of partial covering or uncovering of the virgin's foot to propel mediated veneration.
[43] Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 217-219; Cooper, "Projecting Presence: The Monumental Cross in the Italian Church Interior," 50-54. Camille observes that when the Eucharist is understood as the literal "Body of Christ," images of Christ become more

supplication, the viewer would complete the circuit connecting Francis not only to Christ as sacred personage but also to Christ's body and blood as the substance of mass.

In the second chapter of the *Legenda Maior*, Bonaventure groups stories about the selection of appropriate authority and modeling the self after Christ.[44] These stories, which include that of the miraculous speaking crucifix of San Damiano, also feature supplication and the kissing of feet. They shed light on the institutional and sacramental significance of images of Saint Francis kneeling at the base of a crucifix and kissing Christ's feet. According to Bonaventure, prior to the approval of the rule and the formalization of the Franciscan order, Saint Francis spent his time in joyful and humble wanderings. After a period of solitude, Saint Francis lived in humble service among the lepers. Emphasizing the ways in which Francis imitated Christ, Bonaventure explains: "He would bathe their feet, and bind up their sores… he would even kiss their ulcerated wounds…"[45] This bathing, Bonaventure claims, was healing to body and soul. Bonaventure then moves on to illustrate the general point with the specific example of the leper from Spoleto. As the story goes, a leper was returning from a pilgrimage that he had undertaken with the hope of finding a cure when he met Saint Francis. In recounting the meeting, Bonaventure describes a scenario involving a reciprocal act of kissing: "When out of devotion he [the leper] was fain to kiss his [Saint Francis's] footprints, Francis in his humility would not brook it, but kissed on the mouth him that had been fain to kiss his feet."[46] Upon receipt of this kiss, the leper was immediately healed.[47] By the twelfth-

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important. Cooper describes the crucifix as a signifier of the Eucharist, present in bread and in wood.

[44] Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*, chapter two.

[45] St. Bonaventure, *Legenda Major*, chapter 2, section 6.

[46] Ibid.

century, the suffering of lepers was considered Christ-like. Humility towards lepers, often demonstrated with a kiss, was potentially redemptive.[48] Saint Francis's exchange with the leper, which explicitly recalls Christ's washing of his disciples' feet, also alludes to and rewrites the scriptural moment in which Christ allows his feet to be washed by the sinner, Mary Magdalene.[49] Having framed the exchange between Francis and the leper, Bonaventure then models an appropriate response to the scenario by inserting himself as a "witness" to the event. He claims he marveled at "the depth of humility in such a gracious embrace" and the "power in such an astounding miracle."[50]

With the connection of Francis and Christ thus firmly established in an image of profound humility and the healing power of grace, Bonaventure proceeds to tie the example to a particular location and another event in Francis' life, reminding his reader of the miraculous speaking crucifix of San Damiano.[51] At San Damiano, Saint Francis' own act of supplication before an image of Christ on the cross brought the image on the Crucifix to life. Bonaventure links Saint Francis's previously described healing miracle to the miracle of the speaking cross, saying that "Francis, now [established] in the humility of Christ,[52] recalled unto mind the obedience laid upon him by the Crucifix as to the

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[47] On Christ's healing of lepers, see Matthew 8:2-3; Mark 1:40-41; Luke 17:12-15.
[48] Catherine Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," in *Monks & Nums, Saints & Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 182-185. Embracing lepers was potentially akin to embracing Christ.
[49] Matthew 26:6-16; Mark 14:3-11; Luke 7:36-50; and John 12:1-8.
[50] St. Bonaventure, *Legenda Major*, chapter 2, section 6.
[51] André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 192. Vauchez observes that the difference between the repentant Saint Francis in Thomas of Celano's first life and the special Saint Francis in Thomas of Celano's second live is exemplified by the shift from the encounter with the lepers as the saint's inciting incident to his encounter with the San Damiano Crucifix as his inciting incident.
[52] He was established in the "humility of Christ" by his experience with the lepers.

repairing of the church of Saint Damian," and immediately raised the funds for its repair.[53]

Bonaventure's narrative creates a textual proximity between the episode with the lepers and the saint's conversion before an animated crucifix. This proximity suggests humble supplication and the embrace of feet as gestures that may facilitate a relationship with Christ, as modeled by Saint Francis, but what might this mean with regard to the devotional function of the crucifixes here under consideration? In what follows I will consider how the space inhabited by Saint Francis at the base of the cross in the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix might have functioned in its specific devotional setting.

Case Study of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix

The Abbess Benedetta Crucifix (fig. 9-12) was made for the Clarissan order's newly constructed Basilica of Santa Chiara in Assisi sometime just before 1260.[54]

It is a monumental crucifix of the "Giuntesque" *Christus patiens* style, and contains images of Saint Clare (d. 1253) and Abbess Benedetta (d. 1260) in its suppedaneum. Below them, near the bottom of the panel Saint Francis kneels on a painted stone rise.[55] The crucifix currently displayed on the *pergola* that surrounds the main altar, having been re-installed in 1984 following its most recent conservation.[56] It is

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[53] St. Bonaventure, *Legenda Major*, chapter 2, section 7.
[54] Elvio Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," in *La Basilica di S. Chiara in Assisi*, ed. Marino Bigaroni, Hans-Rudolf Meier, and Elvio Lunghi (Perugia: Quattroemme,1994), 151. The inscription on the crucifix indicates that it was commissioned under the authority of Abbess Benedetta,
[55] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 154; Angelo Tartufferi, *Giunta Pisano* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1991), 88. The crucifix was subjected to conservation treatments in 1938 and 1983.
[56] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 154.

not possible to know the crucifix's precise placement at the time of its manufacture, but its location and function within its environment can be reasonably reconstructed.

In the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, the painted figures of Saint Francis, Saint Clare, and Abbess Benedetta are arranged on the cross so that their compositional relationships to Christ correlate with their spiritual access to him (fig 11). Christ is posited as the genesis of this chain, which is mediated through Saint Francis, who stands on solid ground and touches Christ's right foot, and then through the two women in the suppedaneum, Saint Clare, who kneels in an blue field near Christ's exposed left foot, and Abbess Benedetta, whose immediate access to Christ is blocked by Saint Francis.

The presence of Saint Clare within the crucifix is readily explained by its location in her titular church. Saint Clare was an early follower of Saint Francis who attempted to model herself and her order after Saint Francis, so far as her gender allowed.[57] After her decision to dedicate her life and her virginity to Christ, Saint Francis settled Saint Clare in the church and monastery of San Damiano outside Assisi. By 1216, she was the abbess of San Damiano. Saint Clare died on August 11, 1253, and her body was relocated to the hospital and chapel of San Giorgio, just outside Assisi's city walls. San Giorgio had previously been the initial and temporary resting place of Saint Francis's body.[58] Later in the same year the Clarissan order was granted land for a new structure on the site of San Giorgio so that they could follow Saint Clare's body.[59] In 1257 construction began on the

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[57] Fra Thomas da Celano, *The Life of St. Clare Virgin*, trans. Catherine Bolton Magrini (Assisi: Editrice Minerva, 2001).
[58] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 151.
[59] Chiara Frugoni, *Una solitudine abitata: Chiara d' Assisi* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 2006), 144.

Basilica Santa Chiara; the Basilica was consecrated in 1263.[60] Saint Clare's body was placed in her tomb in the Basilica in October of 1260, [61] which implies that the roof must have been in place and the building must have been sufficiently complete to allow its basic function, although construction was not entirely complete.[62]

Two crucifixes have hung in the Basilica Santa Chiara for more than 750 years: the old San Damiano Crucifix and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, which was made for the new Basilica. The function and perception of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix in the Basilica Santa Chiara were informed by the Clarissans' established relationship to the San Damiano Crucifix.

Before Saint Francis's miraculous encounter with the San Damiano crucifix, it was an unremarkable monumental painted crucifix on panel. By the time it was moved to the new Basilica of Santa Chiara the San Damiano crucifix had accrued the status of relic.[63] Elvio Lunghi describes it appropriately, as the "too familiar" symbol of Saint Francis.[64]

During their time at San Damiano, the Clarissan nuns shared the space of the

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[60] Construction efforts during the thirteenth-century could develop over decades, and churches were often functional before construction was complete. For more on this, see Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 109-114.

[61] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 151. At this time, construction on the edifice was sufficiently complete that the pope granted indulgences to pilgrims on an annual feast day.

[62] Marina Righetti Tosti-Croce, "La chiesa di Santa Chiara ad Assisi: architettura," in *Santa Chiara in Assisi: architettura e decorazione*, ed. Alessandro Tomei (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2002), 30; Bigaroni, "Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa," 24.

[63] Elvio Lunghi, "Francis of Assisi in Prayer before the Crucifix," *Studies in the History of Art* 61 (2002), 340. Lunghi calls it a "relic to be venerated."

[64] Lunghi, "Francis of Assisi in Prayer before the Crucifix," 341. This observation is in reference to the cumulative process of the San Damiano crucifix signifying Francis over more than seven centuries, but the observation is relevant within the boundaries of the duecento.

monastery church with members of the local lay community.[65] It was therefore necessary for the sisters and the laity to be physically separated from one another inside the church. The sisters may have occupied a secluded choir called the *coro di Santa Chiara* from which they were not able to see the mass.[66] Their experience of the mass was auditory, rather than visual.[67] This means that while they were still in San Damiano, Saint Clare and her community could not see the miraculous speaking crucifix during the performance of the Eucharist.

The San Damiano Crucifix remained in the church of San Damiano after the church and its cloisters were dedicated to the use of Saint Clare's new order. With the construction of the new Basilica, however, the San Damiano Crucifix was transferred to the Basilica along with Saint Clare's other relics.[68] Within a few decades of the Poor Clares' relocation to their new Basilica they expanded the space of the church by constructing two new chapels on the south side and transferred the San Damiano Crucifix into one of those chapels.[69]

The new Basilica of Santa Chiara had the same needs as the Church of San Damiano, regarding the division of space. The nuns did not celebrate the mass inside the main body of the church; they were separated from the laity and the male clergy. Initially,

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[65] Caroline A. Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture, ca. 1213-1340," *Gesta* 31 (1992): 84.
[66] Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 84; Tosti-Croce, "La chiesa di Santa Chiara ad Assisi," 37. Tosti-Croce notes that without archaeological exploration, it is not possible to confirm with absolute certainty that the nuns, and not lesser friars, has use of the *coro di Santa Chiara*.
[67] Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 84.
[68] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 154.
[69] Elvio Lunghi, "Francis of Assisi in Prayer before the Crucifix in the Accounts of the First Biographers," *Studies in the History of Art* 61 (2002): 347; Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 84.

the nuns of Santa Chiara used the San Giorgio chapel. There was no door connecting the nuns' chapel to the broader church.[70] They took the Eucharist seven times a year through an opening,[71] and their experience of the mass was aural, rather than visual.[72] When the Basilica was expanded in the late thirteenth-century, the newer Holy Sacrament chapel and Crucifix chapel allowed the nuns a new choir that was closer to the Saint's tomb.[73]

The Basilica Santa Chiara did not have a choir screen. The altar of Santa Chiara stood in the crossing and was partitioned from the church at large by a *pergola*.[74] The *pergola* was composed of twelve octagonal stone columns connected by an iron framework, the entirely of which surrounded the altar.[75] The current *pergola*, which is similar to the first and second *pergolas* from the lower Church of San Francesco in Assisi, probably dates to the thirteenth-century. The popularity of such structures had declined by the fourteenth-century.[76] It is even possible that the *pergola* in Santa Chiara predated those in the Lower Church of San Francesco.[77]

The Abbess Benedetta Crucifix probably did not stand on the stone *pergola* in the Basilica Santa Chiara in the thirteenth-century. Documentation from the fifteenth-century

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[70] Tosti-Croce, "La chiesa di Santa Chiara ad Assisi," 30.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 83-86.
[73] Tosti-Croce, "La chiesa di Santa Chiara ad Assisi," 30; Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 84.
[74] Marino Bigaroni, "Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa," in *La Basilica di S. Chiara in Assisi*, ed. Marino Bigaroni, Hans-Rudolf Meier, and Elvio Lunghi (Perugia: Quattroemme, 1994), 24-28.
[75] Hans-Rudolf Meier, "Protomonastero e chiesa di pellegrinaggio," in *La Basilica di S. Chiara in Assisi*, ed. Marino Bigaroni, Hans-Rudolf Meier, and Elvio Lunghi (Perugia: Quattroemme, 1994), 130; Bigaroni, "Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa," 24. Meier suggests a possible connection between the twelve pillars of the *pergola* and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.
[76] Bigaroni, "Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa," 26.
[77] Ibid.

and significant compositional correlations between the lost crucifix from the Upper Church of Assisi and the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix suggest that the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix may have been mounted on a wooden beam that spanned across the church's apse near the crossing.[78] The composition in the suppedaneum of the Benedetta Crucifix strongly resembles that of the lost Frater Elias Crucifix.[79] In the Frater Elias crucifix, a small supplicant Frater Elias knelt at the base of the Frater Elias Crucifix near a dedication to Frater Elias.[80] Surviving drawings and descriptions indicate that the painted supplicant Frater Elias wore the Franciscan robe and knelt beside Christ's right foot in the *orans* posture. As a supplicant figure in Franciscan habit the painted Frater Elias is recognizable as an ancestor of the kneeling figures of Saint Francis who occupied the base of later crucifixes. He is also a clear direct forbearer of the image of Abbess Benedetta on her eponymous crucifix.

The Frater Elias Crucifix was displayed on a wooden beam in the Upper Church of San Francesco until 1622, when it was lowered to the ground. It was only when the crucifix was lowered that the image of Frater Elias was clearly visible and the text painted next to him legible or even visible.[81] Chiara Frugoni hypothesized that the

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[78] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 151, 154.
[79] Cooper, *The Making of Assisi: the Pope, the Franciscans and the Paintings of the Basilica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 64-65; Lunghi, "Francis of Assisi in Prayer before the Crucifix in the Accounts of the First Biographers," 344-346.
[80] Lunghi, "Francis of Assisi in Prayer before the Crucifix," 344-346; Cooper and Robson, *The Making of Assisi,* 63-66. It is unclear for how long the identity of the supplicant, Brother Elias, the purported architect of the Basilica San Francesco, was remembered into or beyond the thirteenth-century. His name, written on the crucifix, was not legible to a viewer standing on the ground. Had Brother Elias's name been legible, the artist's name would also have been legible. The artist's name was almost certainly not legible, because Vasari misattributed it.
[81] Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: the Pope, the Franciscans and the Paintings of the Basilica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 63-69.

inscription at the base of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix is actually from the seventeenth-century. The inscription reads: "DNA BENEDICT APOST S. CLARA P. ABB. ME FECIT F."[82] Frugoni's assertion is based on a paleographic investigation. She suggests that Bishop Marcello ordered the inscription and possibly even the two female figures to be added to the suppedaneum of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix in the seventeenth-century, after the Giunta Pisano Frater Elias Crucifix was lowered from its beam and its text was made legible.[83] This assertion has been repeated as a hypothesis, but it has been neither fully accepted nor refuted.[84]

The inscription is either from the thirteenth-century or from the seventeenth-century. If the inscription and the female figures in the suppedaneum of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix were painted in about 1260, they were modeled, in composition and style, after the Frater Elias Crucifix.[85] If the suppedaneum inscription is an early modern addition, then the inscription and supplicant females were intended to indicate a connection between the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix and the Frater Elias Crucifix. Frugoni's hypothesis casts doubts upon the assumption that the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix was actually commissioned either directly by Abbess Benedetta or in connection with her death.[86] Despite the uncertainty of the age of the inscription, the image of Saint

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[82] Frugoni, *Una solitudine abitata: Chiara d' Assisi*, 145. Frugoni transliterates the inscription as: "Domina Benedict post S. Claram prima abbatissa me fecit fieri."
[83] Frugoni, *Una solitudine abitata*, 144-159.
[84] Miliva Bollati, *Francesco e La Croce di S. Damiano* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 2016), 95-96.
[85] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa,"151-161.
[86] Frugoni, *Una solitudine abitata: Chiara d' Assisi*, 144-149; Bollati, *Francesco e La Croce di S. Damiano*, 95-96; Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 151; Angelo Tartufferi, *Giunta Pisano* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 1991), 88. Frugoni postulates that the inscription is early modern, and Bollati repeats the hypothesis, without taking a clear position on it. If the inscription is to be believed, as Lunghi does, then the

Francis, kneeling on the hill at the base of the crucifix, has not been questioned.

The inscription implies that the crucifix was installed in 1260, the year in which Abbess Benedetta died and Saint Clare's body was interred below the altar. Despite the uncertainty of age of the inscription, the scholarship assumes that the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix was in the Basilica in the second half of the thirteenth-century. The earliest explicit reference to the Benedetta Crucifix dates to the middle of the fifteenth-century. In May of 1467, Antonia, the widow of Andrea Ferravecchie of Assisi, donated 3 florins for the replacement of a beam in the Basilica Santa Chiara from which the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix hung.[87] There is no indication of how old the beam was or if the beam had previously been replaced. From this evidence, it is known that in the fifteenth-century the crucifix was not displayed, as it now is, on the stone *pergola* surrounding the altar. It was rather, hung on a wooden beam.[88] This method of hanging a panel crucifix is depicted in one of the frescos in the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi (fig 18). It is entirely possible that the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix was displayed on a wooden beam beginning in the thirteenth-century, much like the Giunta di Pisano Brother Elias crucifix in the Upper Church of San Francesco.[89]

Lunghi and Frugoni infer that the crucifix was displayed on a beam across the

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crucifix was made either slightly before 1260 or it was commissioned in 1260 in association with Abbess Benedetta's death. Tartufferi, in a catalogue of "Giuntesque" crucifixes, repeats the information given in the inscription apparently without question. It is of note, however, that while Frugoni's hypothesis complicates the Crucifix's timeline, she still refers to Abbess Benedetta as the commissioner of the crucifix.

[87] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 154.

[88] Bigaroni, "Origine e sviluppo storico della chiesa," 26-27; Meier, "Protomonastero e chiesa di pellegrinaggio," 130.

[89] Cooper, *The Making of Assisi*, 63-69.

apse that served as an iconostasis.[90] Frugoni suggests that the Abbess Benedetta Chrucifix was displayed on this beam between a pair of panel paintings representing, respectively, Saint Clare and the Virgin and Child Enthroned (fig 20).[91] The cross would have been attached to the wall by ropes or iron rods and hung at an angle.[92] Since wooden beam would have spanned the Basilica's apse and the altar was located in the crossing. The crucifix would not have been displayed directly over the altar. However, the general spatial impression must have been that the crucifix was located above the altar.

A definitive account of the crucifix's placement and the spatial configuration inside the Basilica Santa Chiara in the late thirteenth-century is not possible. However, it is possible to reconstruct an approximate configuration of the church its altar and its crucifixes based on the surviving evidence. By 1260 Santa Chiara's body was underneath the Basilica, implying that the construction was sufficiently complete to appropriately house her body. The San Damiano Crucifix was moved to the new Basilica in the late thirteenth-century. The Abbess Benedetta crucifix was probably produced and installed over the altar of the Basilica Santa Chiara before the San Damiano Crucifix was relocated to the new Basilica. It was stored in a choir of which the sisters had use,[93] and it appears that its veneration as a relic was separated from its function as painted crucifix for a church interior. This separation of function is suggested both by the fact that a new

[90] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 151, 154; Tartufferi, *Giunta Pisano*, 88; Frugoni, *Una solitudine abitata: Chiara d' Assisi*, 144-153.
[91] Frugoni, *Una solitudine abitata: Chiara d' Assisi*, 144, 155-159.
[92] Lunghi, "La decorazione pittorica della chiesa," 151, 154.
[93] Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 84.

crucifix was produced and by the changes made to the church to accommodate visitors' access to the San Damiano Crucifix.[94]

When the sisters commissioned their new crucifix, they could have commissioned an older *Christus triumphans* style crucifix complete with Passion scenes, like the San Damiano Crucifix. This would have reinforced their connection to the San Damiano Crucifix, to Saint Francis, and to Christ. However, the sisters commissioned a crucifix in the relatively new "Giuntesque" style with a *Christus patiens*.[95] Their new crucifix was clearly modeled after the stylistically innovative Frater Elias Crucifix, from the Upper Church of San Francesco.[96]

The Abbess Benedetta crucifix was hung from a beam in the apse as part of an iconostasis. A stone *pergola* surrounded the altar, below the crucifix. The nuns experienced the mass aurally from the physically separate San Giorgio chapel. It is thus more than likely that this new crucifix was made for audience other than the nuns.

In the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, the painted figure of Saint Clare helps to bridge the gap from supplication as exemplary action to supplication as participatory. Saint Clare is shown bent in prayer and approaching Christ's left foot without making final contact with it, allowing the viewer to engage with the image and participate in the gesture. Thus, the viewer is invited to perform the act of devotion that Cannon described as the "symbolic kiss."[97] That is, in looking at the image of Saint Clare engaged in

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[94] Tosti-Croce, "La chiesa di Santa Chiara ad Assisi," 30; Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing," 84.
[95] Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 214. Camille writes that after the San Damiano miracle, crucifix makers and painters tried to make images the appeared capable of animating.
[96] While the date of the crucifix's inscription is not secure, it is certain that the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix was modeled after the Frater Elias Crucifix.
[97] Cannon, "Kissing the Virgin's Foot," 30-31.

supplication, the viewer is invited to mentally complete the gesture or engage in their own mental supplication of the exposed foot.[98] Through the act of mental or imaginary supplication, the viewer bridges the barrier between the fictive world inside the crucifix and the actual space of the church.

The viewers' experience of the Abbess Benedetta crucifix involved viewing the image on panel and experiencing the crucifix as an object inside the space of the church. To the thirteenth-century layperson or clergyman standing in the Basilica, the crucifix was not a passive image. The image and the object on which it was painted engaged with the space in which the object was displayed and stood in discussion with the fabric of the city, its churches, and its other monumental painted crucifixes.

Within the Basilica it was encountered suspended in the air above the main altar. Viewed from such a perspective the painted Body of Christ would have towered over the supplicants depicted below him: Saint Francis, Saint Clare, and Abbess Benedetta. Fulfilling his role within the complex Saint Francis kneels on stone ground that is at once Golgotha and La Verna. The altar, below the iconostasis and crucifix, is surrounded by the mediating barrier of a stone *pergola*, which serves to frame and control sacred space within the church. While the miracle of the Eucharist, offering the transubstantiated Body of Christ, is performed on the altar, a painted trickle of red blood streams from the foot wounds of the crucified Christ on the Crucifix above. It runs down the fictive stone at the base of the crucifix, disappears, and re-emerges, transubstantiated, as the Eucharist on the altar below, where it is surrounded by the literal stone of the *pergola*.

Stone characterizes liminal space in both the painted crucifix and the crossing of

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[98] Cannon, "Kissing the Virgin's Foot," 30-31.

the Basilica. The fictive stone in the painted crucifix signifies Golgotha, where Christ was crucified, and Mount Verna, where Saint Francis knelt before an angelic image of a crucified figure. Furthermore, and especially given the connection of the Basilica of Saint Clare to the old monastery of San Damiano, the image of Saint Francis kneeling beneath a painted crucifix would have evoked Saint Francis's miraculous encounter with the speaking Crucifix. The stone on which Saint Francis kneels, within the painting, is an open signifier pointing to multiple locations and multiple sacred events. In the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix, the stone occupies space between the viewer and the body of Christ. It thus serves a conceptual function similar to real function of the stone *pergola* over the altar, inside the church below the crucifix. Both indicate the liminal space at between the devotee and body of Christ.

The Abbess Benedetta crucifix was probably produced and installed over the altar of the Basilica Santa Chiara before the San Damiano Crucifix was relocated to the new Basilica. By the time of the San Damiano crucifix's relocation, it acquired the status of a Franciscan relic. It was stored in a choir of which the sisters had use,[99] and it appears that its veneration as a relic was separated from its function as painted crucifix for a church interior. This separation of function is suggested both by the fact that a new crucifix was produced and by the changes made to the church to accommodate visitors' access to the San Damiano Crucifix.[100]

Of course, the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix is explicitly associated with Saint Clare by its depiction of that saint on the suppedaneum and by its placement over her tomb in

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[99] Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 84.
[100] Tosti-Croce, "La chiesa di Santa Chiara ad Assisi," 30; Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing," 84.

her order's Basilica. In one of Saint Clare's most celebrated miracles, Saint Clare engaged in an aural and visual dislocation. As Saint Clare lay sick in her bed in San Damiano, she reflected on the Christ child and wished to God that she could be present in the Basilica of San Francesco "to sing his praise. Suddenly those marvelous harmonies that were being sung in the Church of Saint Francis began to resound in her ears… what even surpasses this auditory miracle is the fact that she was permitted to see Jesus' creche."[101] Saint Clare was able to mentally bridge the distance between the convent at San Damiano and the Basilica of San Francesco.

The Abbess Benedetta Crucifix was painted for the Basilica Santa Chiara, almost exactly equidistant between the church in which the living Saint Clare had her vision and the church in which the drama of the vision occurred.[102] The nuns associated with the Basilica Santa Chiara had to similarly dislocate themselves in order to experience the mass aurally.[103] They were unable to see the proceedings, so they had to rely on their hearing and their imagination. Perhaps the supplicants Abbess Benedetta and Saint Clare on the suppedaneum of the Abbess Benedetta Crucifix were modeling this mental dislocation.[104]

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[101] Celano, *The Life of St. Clare Virgin*, chapter 29. The living crèche was famously introduced by Saint Francis: St. Bonaventure, *Legenda Major*, chapter 10, section 7.
[102] They are equidistant for a pedestrian.
[103] Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture," 84.
[104] If Frugoni's most extreme suggestion, that the depictions of Saint Clare and Abbess Benedetta are early modern, is correct, dislocation as a way of viewing or entering the crucifix is still plausible because of the crucifix's Clarissan origin and its location in its church and its city, as described in this paper. Saint Clare as a model is not strictly necessary.

Conclusion

Saint Francis, kneeling on stone at the base of the San Francesco and Abbess Benedetta Crucifixes, replaces Saint Peter as the occasional occupant of the space below Christ's feet and as the builder, the stone foundation, of Christ's church. In the fabric of the painted crucifix, the viewer may pass visually through Saint Francis to access Christ, taking the official events of the saint's life as a guide.

Historical time is collapsed in images of Saint Francis engaging with the crucifix. Imbedded in any such image is the allusion to the saint's conversion before the San Damiano crucifix (fig 14), his stigmatization by a divine image of the crucifix, and Saint Francis's construction as *alter Christus*. The fictive stone base upon which Saint Francis kneels, in the San Francesco and Abbess Benedetta Crucifixes, becomes a liminal space, both of our world and not of our world, through which the viewer may enter the crucifixion, adopt the pose of Saint Francis, and participate in the veneration of Christ.

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