

Painted crucifixes Villa Guinigi National Museum

Lucca



Crucifix della Zecca

Date: last quarter of the 12 th century

Inscription: not visible

Location: Lucca, Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi, inv. 1157

Provenance: from the Convent of the Benedictines “della Zecca” in Lucca

Dimensions (max.): height 1706 mm; width 1483 mm; thickness 40 mm

Medium: ‘Medieval Tempera Painting’

Description

Crucifix; Christ alive; lateral fields: Mary, John fulllength.

Art History

The reading of the painting is very compromised with the exception of the extraordinary passage of the loincloth, bound to the hips with a golden, hanging, knotted band made with lapis lazuli and virtuosic tonal juxtapositions which create volumes through thick and angular folds. As for the cross, rare fragments of paint show that it was blue, and that Christ was portrayed as Christus Triumphans: clear highlights define the delicate lines and small closely-spaced strokes define the beard and hair tones tending toward light chestnut. The expression of the face is saturated with a subtle pathos not found in other Lucchese crosses. The lateral figures are of the full-length mourners: the Virgin, quite fragmentary, and John, barely visible. The cross was acquired in 1964 by the Italian government from the Benedictines of the Convento della Zecca (convent of the mint) for the Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi where it had already been in storage for about thirty years; the original location of the painting is not known. The convent of Santa Giustina, where there lived a female community of Benedictines, was suppressed after the Decree of June 6, 1806 enacted by Elisa Baciocchi, Princess of Lucca, and converted in the broad reorganization plan for civic hospitals and hospices. During the successive Duchy of Princess Maria Luisa of Bourbon, it was composed of a small community of sisters who assimilated nuns coming from other suppressed convents; to this Maria Luisa donated an oratory and adjacent building that at one time housed the mint of Lucca. In August of 1812, the nuns went to occupy that which a record of the convent described as “il locale detto della Croce perché prima era della giurisdizione della Compagnia della Croce.” It is possible to imagine, therefore, that the painting was already in that location before the arrival of the community – which was subject to a second suppression in the post-Unification era – and which may have been referred to as the “Testa del SS. Crocifisso del Coro” judged by the governing commission charged in 1866 with verifying the ecclesiastical property up to that moment „di pennello buono e di valore“. Dated by Garrison to the last quarter of the 12 th century, the crucifix, as subsequently reiterated by Caleca, is part of a group of Lucchese crosses (those known as di San Michele, dei Servi, di Santa Giulia, and della Zecca). It is thought the most recent for its awareness on the part of the painter of the „phenomena close to the Bible of Calci, dated 1168“

(Caleca 1982, p. 77) from which it takes some Neo-Hellenistic features; to this we add the references to the contemporaneous Lazian painting, especially in the color tones of the flesh. The same date of the last decade of the twelfth century is upheld by Boskovits (Boskovits 1993, p. 48) who underlines the interest on the part of the anonymous master for „Byzantine luminism.“ It can be considered that the Crucifix della Zecca in some way foretells the interest for capturing the features of the Byzantine court which the bottega of Berlinghiero will develop and rework arriving at results similar to the craftsmen to whom we owe the creation of the great mosaic of the facade of San Frediano, the church which has kept alive the relationship with Rome since the eleventh century.

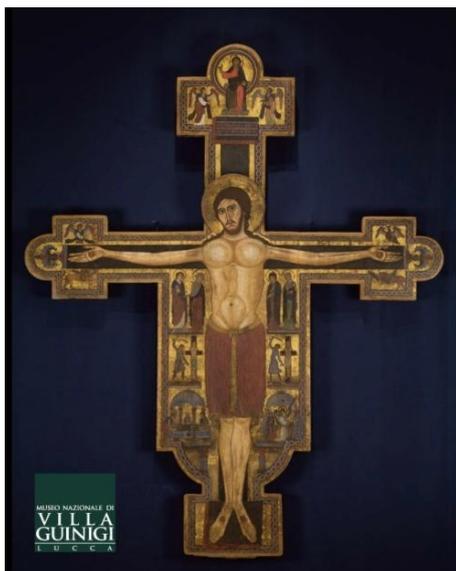
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Garrison n. 502;

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Annamaria Ducci, Pittura, miniatura e mosaico: un quadro variegato, in: Maria T. Filieri (ed.), *Arte a Lucca*, Lucca 2011, pp. 84–99, 88;

D’Aniello 2012, pp. 183–192; Alessio Monciatti, *Le Croci dipinte in area lucchese: modelli e tipi figurati*, in: Frosinini, Monciatti and Wolf 2012, pp. 163–173.



Crucifix dei Servi

Date: first half of the 12 th century

Inscription: Titulus in Roman capitals: IH(esus)

(Na)ZARENU(s)/ REX IUDEORUM.

Location: Lucca, Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi, inv. no. 331

Provenance: from the church of Santa Maria dei Servi, Lucca

Dimensions (max.): height 2205 mm; width 1798 mm; thickness 53 mm

Medium: 'Medieval Tempera Painting'

Description

Crucifix; Christ alive; lateral fields: Three Marias, John, Breaking legs of Two Thieves, Entombment, Marias at Sepulchre; side terminals: Four Evangelist symbols; upper terminal: Ascension

Art History

Christ is depicted alive on the cross, with long, wavy hair that falls to the line of his shoulders; the anatomy of the torso and chest, graphically accentuated, is rendered through insistent brown shadows that underline the nervous thinness of the extended arms. His hips are encircled by a pale red loincloth with tight, closely-spaced folds on which a design is incised with a very thin stylus, highlighted with light tones, bordered in gold, and held up by a band, also in gold, tied and hanging the length of the loincloth. The feet are separated, nailed to the suppedaneum with nails with large gilded heads; a trickle of blood emerges from here, as from the wounds in the hands. It is interesting to note how the suppedaneum is bordered on two contiguous sides by red, suggesting the thickness and a perspectival view. This same solution also appears in the cross of the church of San Michele in Lucca. In the apron, which ends in a semicircle, the symbols of the Evangelists are painted. The actual cross itself, originally painted in blue, ends with a decorative vegetal element that I do not believe is present in other similar paintings but that can be found, as has been noted by Dalli Regoli (2014, p. 134 and 144) both in illuminations and in sculpted and painted Lucchese ornament. At the sides of the figure of Christ, the space is divided into three parts on each side: the top two scenes unusually include John and the Three Marias; the middle register is dedicated to the episode of the two thieves tied to the crosses with the executioners who will strike the blow that breaks their legs; the two scenes in the lower register depict, on the left, the deposition in the tomb, and on the right, the empty tomb and the appearance of the angel to the pious women. Below these last two scenes are two short and sturdy blue columns with red capitals that hold the pavement that closes the physical space in which the two episodes take place. In the upper terminal, the Ascension of Christ with angels is depicted. It should be noted that in the first scene that takes place under a canopy dome, the choice of a sarcophagus with a strigil motif recalls a Byzantine tradition (Monciatti 2012, p. 168–169) and an immediate reference to the frescoes of Sant'Angelo in Formis. The same solution is also adopted in the painted cross of the church of San Michele. Finally, the crucifix narrows at the bottom, which it alludes to the form of a chalice which connects to the cult of the Most Precious Blood in Lucca. A fine band with geometric motifs in blue and white encloses the entire perimeter of the cross, leaving the only scenes that cross over it, breaking the spatial regularity, the two episodes of the Deposition and of the Resurrection, softening the idea of spatial punctuation that also occurs in the two analogous scenes in the cross of San Michele. The Crucifix dei Servi shares with that

of the church of San Michele and with the cross of the Monastero della Zecca some relevant elements from an iconographical point of view, as well as formal and structural, that are in common with these and the Sarzana Crucifix dated 1138. Scholars who have studied the painted crosses from Lucca have expressed different opinions on the question about whether the Crucifix dei Servi or the Crucifix di San Michele has a single artist or more than one; meanwhile, the dating before the first half of the 12th century is by now accepted unanimously and contemporaneous, therefore, with the cross of Maestro Guglielmo. Some scholars have suggested the group of crosses from Lucca descends from a single archetype; recently Monciatti considered the crosses of San Michele and dei Servi by different artists, the latter based on the former; he suggests, with a few valuable indications, to seek such a model more realistically in the prodigious work of the goldsmiths. In my opinion, it is legitimate to question whether it is really worthwhile investigating in the direction of identifying a well-defined artistic personality or instead, on the production shared by a bottega in which the technical and stylistic contributions of different crafts ended up achieving results by complex cross-pollination (the idea is in R. Van Marle, 1923–1938, 1923 p. 213) and the products of various working methods (Calderoni Masetti, p. 166). Reviving an idea developed by Caleca in 1982 (1982, p. 78), there is great interest in comparing the cross to the output of Lucchese manuscript illumination and especially with the *Passionario P+* of the Biblioteca Capitolare Feliniana di Lucca (Calderoni Masetti pp. 165).

Bibliography

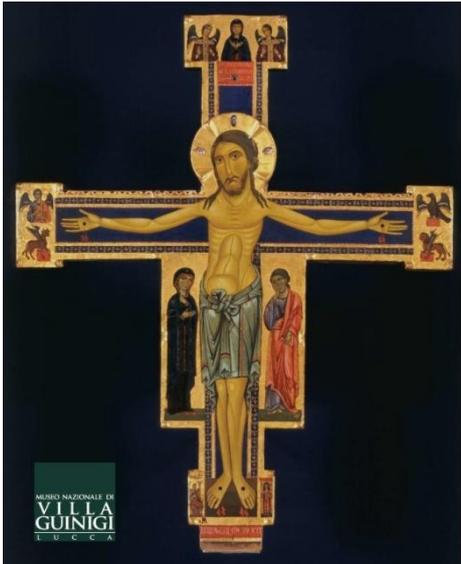
Garrison n. 501;

Raimond Van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting, The Hague 1923–1938, I*, 1923, p. 213; Antonino Caleca, *La Pittura medievale in Toscana*, in: Carlo Bertelli (ed.), *La Pittura in Italia. L'Altomedioevo*, Milan 1994, pp. 163–179;

D'Aniello 2012, pp. 183–192; Alessio Monciatti, *Le Croci dipinte in area lucchese: modelli e tipi figurali*, Frosinini, Monciatti and Wolf 2012, pp. 163–173;

Anna R. Calderoni Masetti, *Miniatura a Lucca fra XII e XIII secolo: prolegomena a un'esposizione*, in: Chiara Bozzoli and Maria T. Filieri, *Scoperta armonia, arte medievale a Lucca*, Lucca 2014, pp. 155–176;

Gigetta Dalli Regoli, *Le intersezioni fra le arti: le tipologie elaborate nella miniatura dei secoli XI e XII*, in: Bozzoli and Filieri 2014, pp. 133–153.



Berlinghiero di Melanese (documented from 1225–1235),

Crucifix with Mourners

Date: first half of the 13th century

Inscription: underneath the suppedaneum: BERLIN-

GERI ME PINXIT; at the top, the titulus: IHS NAZARENUS

REX IUDEORUM; I[ESU]S; NAZARENUS; / REX; IUDEO-

RUM; / Passio; s[an]c[t]i; Laure[ntii] ci l[...]ef anime [...];

passio; s[an]c[t]i; / [A]ndrea[e]; passio; s[an]c[t]i; J[...]ris;

s[an]c[t]a Lucia v[irgo?]; ligni; ve/race; cruce;“

Location: Lucca, Museo Nazionale di Villa Guinigi, inv. 226

Provenance: from the church and convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Lucca

Dimensions (max.): height 1747 mm; width 1405 mm; thickness 35 mm

Medium: 'Medieval Tempera Painting'

Description

Crucifix; Christ alive; lateral fields: Mary, John fulllength; side terminals: four Evangelist symbols; upper terminal: Madonna between two angels; base: Peter's Denial.

Art History

Almost completely covered with gold leaf, the crucifix has small protrusions of gesso along its perimeter covered by gold. Whether this is meant to simulate an object made of gold, for they seem like bosses or studs staggered along the border and recall the theme of the jeweled cross (Roma, Croce gemmata sul Golgota con busto del Salvatore fra i santi Primo e Feliciano, 7th century, Rome, Santo Stefano Rotondo; Croce gemmata e due santi, Rome, cemetery of San Ponziano, 6th–7th century; fresco of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, 6th century), it is indicative of a precise formal and ideological choice that intends on restating and making visible a direct connection to the figurative court production of the first centuries of Christianity in which the jeweled cross was sufficient to recall the mission of salvation of Christ through death and resurrection. The crucifix then emerges as a precious object from Antiquity, and for this, it is authoritative in its continuity with the past. The halo of Christ is decorated with three rock crystals between rays in relief; below the titulus IHS REX IUDEORUM, on a red background, there is a second inscription probably from the same time but with cursive characters, hard to read, which flanks a small rectangular hole that probably held a fragment of wood of the Cross. Christ, nailed to a blue cross, has a white loincloth with red and blue stripes held with a complex knot to his hips; his feet are nailed separately. Abundant trickles of blood emerge from the wounds of feet and hands; the face is impassive and calm. The symbols of the Evangelists are depicted in the side terminals; in the upper terminal, a half-length Virgin of the Assumption between two angels. On the sides of the suppedaneum is the Denial of Peter: the two main characters of the Gospel story are separated, on the left Peter, sitting, warms himself by a flame that is placed outside the well-defined space of the scene; to the right is the servant who recognizes Peter as a disciple of Jesus. In the apron are full-length figures of the two mourners: the Virgin on the left, St. John on the right. A very elegant decorative motif on a blue background defines the perimeter of the painted cross, recalling the other

paintings given to Berlinghiero or to his family bottega such as the Crucifix of Tereglio or that example unfortunately modified from its original dimensions from the church of Santa Maria Assunta a Villa Basilica. The cross was long thought to be the only signed painting by the Master until, in the course of restoration in 1981, on the cross from San Salvatore di Fucecchio and today in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo in Pisa, traces were found under two 17th and 18th inscriptions. This was a much older painted inscription that Caleca (Caleca 1981, pp. 17–19) deciphered as BERLINGHERIUS VULTERRANUS ME PINXIT A.D. M. . . . The presence of the master in Volterra has implied that this center was the place where Berlinghiero trained, a center of artistic production that could support the high quality of the painting of Berlinghiero and the possible link to the miniature production of which the so-called Bible of Calci (today in Calci, Museo Nazionale di Certosa) dated 1168 and made for the Benedictines of San Vito in Borgo in Pisa and the bible of the Biblioteca Comunale Guarnacci of Volterra from the 12th century. The reference to antiquity and its particular association with a precious and sophisticated neo-Hellenism that is seen among other things in the range of primary colors that reflect the splendor of enamels, so present in Lucchese crosses, I believe should be read as a formal choice that probably was not unrecognized by a highly refined and qualified patron. There seems to be a reduced narrative vividness – though not entirely eliminated, for one still sees the most evocative details such as Peter who approaches the fire with his foot and gives the artist the impetus for defining the perspective of the extended foot toward the flame that is outside of the enclosing narrative frame, or the gesture of the Virgin who, despite holding the mantle that covers her head, leaves a glimpse of the striped fabric that wraps her hair. This can be attributed to the chronological precociousness of the painting and a reflection of its prestige which the artist had well understood when he was asked by the patron to create a precious and timeless reliquary crucifix.

Antonia d’Aniello

Inkarnat und Signifikanz. das menschliche Abbild in der Tafelmalerei von 200 bis 1250 im Mittelmeerraum, München 2017, pp. 610-619.