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Invisible, in Full View

The Byzantine Relics of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena

Stefania GEREVINI

Ever since the publication of Peter Brown's seminal study of the cult of saints in late antiquity, the nexus between presence (*praesentia*), visibility, and potency (*potentia*) has been central to scholarly debates about relics and their significance in medieval societies. As is now widely held, the power of relics to act within and to intercede for a given community rested on their localised presence and availability. However, relics were neither permanently nor directly visible to the faithful. Instead, the charisma of holy bodies and sacred matter relied on what Brown termed an "art of closed surfaces": a carefully maintained balance between distance and proximity, between exposure and concealment of sacred matter.¹ Medieval experiences of the holy were mediated by sophisticated practices of enshrinement, which have been the object of careful scholarly scrutiny in the past decades.² Reliquaries enclosed sacred matter within sumptuously decorated containers, simultaneously enhancing and hiding it. Architectural framings, monumental imaging and ceremonials further framed the holy, confirming and heightening its power, but also removing it from sight and conveying new, topical meanings through its presence. In addition, *passio* legends, miracle accounts, and local historical and hagiographic traditions both expanded and further localised the authority of saints and relics.³ Both recurrent and ubiquitous, such sophisticated *mise-en-scènes* were one of the distinguishing features of medieval public religion. However, the modes in which both relics and relic collections were staged – how they were received, displayed, stored, and venerated by a given individual or social group – were also highly specific. As such, these practices are revealing of the multiple ways in which medieval communities imagined, constructed, and mobilised the sacred to manifest their inclinations and concerns. This article examines the solemn reception, ceremonial display and storage of a newly imported set of Byzantine relics in fourteenth-century Siena.

1. P. BROWN, *The Cult of the Saints: its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago 1981 (The Kaskell Lectures on History of Religions. New Series 2), p. 86-105.
2. Literature on these issues is ever growing. For recent appraisals and a range of different perspectives, see *Saints and Sacred Matter: the Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. C. HAHN and H. A. KLEIN, Washington DC 2015 and *Matter of Faith: an Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, ed. J. ROBINSON and L. DE BEER, London 2014.
3. *Saints and Sacred Matter* (cited in n. 2), p. 6-8.

Investigating how the potency of this foreign group of relics was both amplified and specified through visual and ritual framing in Siena, this article ultimately illuminates the ways in which *praesentia* – the presence and charisma of the holy – was constructed and experienced in late medieval Europe.

The hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, which functioned throughout the middle ages as a medical hospital, as a hostel for pilgrims and as an orphanage, was the most prominent charitable institution of medieval Siena. It occupied the site directly opposite the city cathedral, and was likely founded in the 11th century as an appendage to the cathedral chapter. However, it soon became emancipated from the control of the ecclesiastical authorities, developing into an affluent civic institution whose control was equally covered by both bishopric and government.⁴ In 1359, at the height of its wealth and civic prestige, Santa Maria della Scala acquired a set of precious relics of Byzantine provenance and impeccable pedigree.⁵ The relics were purchased in Venice, but had travelled to Italy from Constantinople, where they had been sold at auction in 1357. The sacred treasury, which has survived for the most part, comprised tokens of the Passion of Christ, of the Virgin Mary, and of several saints. It came with a certificate of authenticity, also preserved, which was penned by the papal legate in Constantinople, the eminent Carmelite and diplomat Peter Thomas, who also identified the relics as a former possession of the Byzantine imperial family. Predictably, Santa Maria della Scala paid a hefty sum for the purchase of the prominent collection, which became the focus of a long-lasting cult in Siena and a source of religious and civic prestige for the hospital.⁶ However, as will be discussed below, the whole city welcomed the arrival of the relics, with ceremonials that suited their status both in solemnity and expense. The government also deliberated upon the modes of their storage and display: the acquisition of the holy tokens prompted the construction of a new lavish chapel,

4. On Santa Maria della Scala, see D. GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale di Santa Maria della Scala in Siena: vicenda di una committenza artistica*, Siena 1985; ID. and A. BROGI, *Lo spedale grande di Siena. Fatti urbanistici e architettonici del Santa Maria della Scala: ricerche, riflessioni, interrogativi*, Florence 1987; E. BOLDRINI and R. PARENTI, *Santa Maria della Scala: archeologia e edilizia sulla piazza dello spedale*, Florence 1991 (Biblioteca di Archeologia medievale 7). On the struggle for control over the hospital in the later Middle Ages, see M. PELLEGRINI, *L'ospedale e il Comune, immagini di una relazione privilegiata, in Arte e assistenza a Siena. Le copertine dipinte dell'ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala*, ed. G. PICCINI and C. ZARRILLI, Pisa 2003, p. 29-45; M. PELLEGRINI, *La comunità ospedaliera di Santa Maria della Scala e il suo più antico statuto: Siena, 1305*, Ospedaletto 2005 (Ospedali medievali tra carità e servizio 3).
5. The standard reference on the treasury of Santa Maria della Scala is *Loro di Siena. Il tesoro di Santa Maria della Scala*, ed. L. BELLOSI, Milan 2001. See also P. HETHERINGTON, *A Purchase of Byzantine Relics and Reliquaries in Fourteenth-Century Venice*, *Arte Veneta* 37, 1983, p. 9-30; ID., *Byzantine Enamels on a Venetian Book-Cover*, *CArch.* 27, 1978, p. 117-145.
6. The information in this paragraph is provided by the certificate of authentication signed by Peter Thomas in 1357, when the relics were sold in Constantinople; and by the contract that stipulated the transaction between Santa Maria della Scala and the Venetian merchant Pietro di Giunta Torrigiani, drafted in 1359 in Venice. Both have been edited by Giovanna Derenzini in *Loro di Siena* (cited in n. 5), p. 72-78.

built on the premises of the hospital for everyday storage and veneration. And, following the city's well-established tradition of devotion to the Virgin Mary, the Sienese authorities ordered that the holy treasury should be solemnly displayed every year on the feast day of the Annunciation, celebrated on 25th March.

Questions of enshrinement and visibility are essential for our understanding of the reception of the Byzantine relics in Siena. Concealing the holy tokens, and enframing them with religious images of local Sienese relevance, the relics' chapel simultaneously amplified the potency of the Byzantine relics and transformed their meaning. This was also the case for the annual ceremonies of the Annunciation. On this occasion, the Byzantine relics were presented to the Sienese community as the focus of an elaborate visual and ritual spectacle that heightened the status and power of the holy treasury, while also increasing its local significance through association with the hospital, and with other, well-established foci of the civic religion of Siena. In three separate sections, this essay examines the initial reception of the Byzantine treasury, the provisions made for its preservation and ordinary veneration in the 14th and 15th centuries, and the annual celebrations of the Annunciation. Exploring how the Byzantine relics and reliquaries operated in Siena, visually and liturgically; the extent to which the faithful could actually see the holy tokens and engage with them, on a day-to-day basis and on festive occasions; and the ways in which their sacred power was activated and endorsed, the present chapter ultimately aims to illuminate the complex practices of visual and ritual enframement that ensured the recognition of the power of relics in the later middle ages, and that enabled their integration in the highly specific religious and visual landscapes of communal Italy at this time.

THE CEREMONIAL RECEPTION OF THE BYZANTINE RELICS IN SIENA IN 1359

The contemporary Sienese chronicler Donato di Neri, who may have been an eyewitness to the event, described the arrival of the Byzantine relics in Siena in 1359 as follows:

The holy relics came to the seaport of Talamone, and the Sienese bought them and had them taken to Siena with great devotion and feasting. They entered Siena, and were placed in the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala. And the Commune of Siena spent, just for their transport and for the celebrations, libr. 1625.⁷

7. "Li santi reliqui venero al porto di Talamone, e li Sanesi li comproro e fecelli recare a Siena con grande divozione e festa. Entroro in Siena, e messersi nello Spedale di Santa Maria de la Scala. E spese el comuno di Siena, solo a farli venire e onorarli, libr.1625." *Cronaca senese di Donato di Neri e di suo figlio Neri*, in *Cronache senesi*, ed. A. LISINI and F. IACOMETTI, Bologna 1936 (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* XV, 6), p. 590. Donato di Neri lived in Siena in the mid-14th century, as is attested in two archival documents dated 1337 and 1347. See *ibid.*, p. xxiii; P. VITI, s.v. Donato di Neri, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, ed. A. GHISALBERTI, Treccani 1992, ([http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/donato-di-neri_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/donato-di-neri_(Dizionario-Biografico))), accessed 9 December 2016). The earliest surviving manuscript of Donato di Neri's historical work dates to the 15th century. However, compared with other Sienese chronicles, the reliability of his account has raised fewer doubts amongst scholars. For a historiographic summary of debates about Sienese chronicles, see J. IMMLER SATKOWSKI,

The financial cost for the purchase of the Byzantine relics was incurred by the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, as we know from the original contract of sale.⁸ However, the arrival of the treasury in Siena in 1359 was perceived by contemporaries as an important civic affair: the ceremonies of reception were sponsored by the government, and the council also regulated their storage and annual display, as will be discussed in more detail below.⁹ Although Donato di Neri's concise indication that the relics were received "with great devotion and feasting" is hardly sufficient to reconstruct the rituals held in 1359, the reception of the Byzantine treasury in Siena is likely to have resembled other, well-known ceremonies of relic translation. Highly inventive and idiosyncratic, these rituals nevertheless followed a common pattern, which generally included a civic procession, the public elevation of the holy tokens by the religious or political authorities, and their ritual enshrinement in their new abode.¹⁰ In addition, by the mid-fourteenth century Siena had an established and well-documented tradition of civic religion, which further assists us in conjuring the event.

The ceremonies organised for the installation of Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Maestà* in 1311 are a particularly useful example. The mid-fourteenth century chronicler Agnolo di Tura described the event with words evocative of Donato di Neri's account of the reception of the Byzantine treasury in 1359: "The Sieneese took that painting to the cathedral (...) with great devotions and processions" (*con grandi divotioni e procissioni*).¹¹ The procession, as he further explained, was led by the bishop, with the entire city taking part in the event. The clergy opened the cortege, followed by the government and city magistrates and by the people. The placement of individuals and social groups was carefully organised around the painting,

Duccio di Buoninsegna: the Documents and Early Sources, Athens GA 2000, p. 97-108. For a positive take on Donato di Neri's account, see W.M. BOWSKY, *The Impact of the Black Death upon Sieneese Government and Society*, *Speculum* 39/1, 1964, p. 1-34, at 3-5.

8. The value of the Byzantine relics was established at 3,000 golden florins. The sale of relics being forbidden, the transaction was camouflaged as a donation against compensation. The merchant Pietro di Giunta Torrigiani – and his wife and son – were guaranteed by the hospital a life-long annual income of 200 florins, and a house in usufruct, see *L'oro di Siena* (cited in n. 5), p. 75-76.
9. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Consiglio Generale* 164, fol. 35r; and, for details about the relics' storage and display, Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Consiglio Generale* 165, fol. 9v-10r. These documents have first been studied, and partly published, in I. GAGLIARDI, *Le reliquie dell'ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala (XIV-XV secolo)*, in *L'oro Di Siena* (cited in n. 5), p. 49-66 (n.b. the archival reference provided there for the second document is partly incorrect, and has been amended in the present article).
10. For an introduction to this wide topic, see N. HERRMANN-MASCARD, *Les reliques des saints. Formation coutumière d'un droit*, Paris 1975 (Collection d'histoire institutionnelle et sociale 6), p. 195-197 and p. 206-207; H. A. KLEIN, *Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West*, *DOP* 58, 2004, p. 283-314; E. BOZÓKY, *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint Louis: protection collective et légitimation du pouvoir*, Paris 2007 (Bibliothèque historique et littéraire).
11. *Cronaca Senese* (cited in n. 7), p. 313.

and everyone carried wax candles in their hands. Women and children closed the cortege, which accompanied the panel around town and inside the Cathedral. On the same day, bells rang and alms were distributed to the poor.¹²

Although the historical accuracy of this account has been variously discussed by scholarship, and even if it is not certain that Agnolo di Tura could have personally witnessed the installation of the *Maestà*, he nevertheless likely lived and wrote in the mid-Trecento.¹³ Thus, his description of the ceremonies of the arrival of the *Maestà*, whether or not philologically correct in relation to that event, represents a likely reconstruction of civic feasting in Siena at times not too distant from the importation of the Byzantine relics to Siena. Moreover, his description testifies to the importance attached to religious images and objects in Siena, and to the solemnity of the ceremonies that these artefacts could provoke in the city. The possession of holy images and relics gained for local communities their *virtus*, ensuring, together with holy protection, victory over enemies, peace and political and social stability. Just like the installation of the *Maestà*, then, the arrival of the Byzantine relics in Siena represented the acquisition of a precious civic treasury, and of a powerful agent of well-being for the entire community. It is therefore likely that the two ceremonies may have been staged in a similar way, with the participation of the political and religious authorities, and the organisation of a hierarchized procession that touched significant landmarks across the city. In 1359, such a carefully orchestrated procedure, and the visual and liturgical manoeuvring of the relics that it entailed, ensured the successful preservation and transmission of the value of the Byzantine treasury to its new religious and cultural context, also initiating a process of amplification and reinterpretation that was perfected with the construction of a new chapel for the custody and devotion of the relics, and with the establishment of new rituals of public ostension on the day of the Annunciation.

PROTECTING AND VENERATING THE BYZANTINE TREASURY: THE CHAPEL OF THE RELICS IN THE HOSPITAL OF SANTA MARIA DELLA SCALA

The arrival of the Byzantine relics in Siena instigated the construction of a lavishly decorated chapel, built on the premises of the hospital for their custody, and to provide room for their veneration throughout the year. Enclosed between the hospital church, the residency of the rector, and the *pellegrinaio* (room for pilgrims), the chapel was located at the very heart of Santa Maria della Scala, and could exclusively be accessed from the nave of its church. Designed as a single-aisle and three-bay vaulted space, the chapel testifies to the civic importance attached by contemporaries to the Byzantine treasury. It was commissioned by the Siense government,¹⁴ and

12. *Ibid.*, p. 313-314.

13. Bowsky, *The Impact of the Black Death* (cited in n. 7), p. 4 (with archival references), suggests that the employee of the Siense Biccherna named Agnolo di Tura detto il Grasso, mentioned in public documents between 1348-55, might be identified with the chronicler writing under the same name.

14. Archivio di Stato di Siena, Consiglio Generale 165, fol. 9v-10r.

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 1 - Groundplan, Cappella delle Reliquie, Santa Maria della Scala,
Siena : present state (Courtesy of Comune di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

built by the Opera del Duomo.¹⁵ Its construction began shortly after the purchase of the Byzantine tokens, possibly under the direction of Giovanni di Stefano, who received payments for the stonemasonry of the chapel in 1366-1367.¹⁶ In 1369, Grifo di Lotto di Matteo Stefani donated to the hospital a farm in the Siense countryside, ensuring the funds for the upkeep of the chapel.¹⁷ Its extensive pictorial cycle, which covered the walls, arches and vaults, was probably completed in 1370, when the Siense painters Cristoforo di Bindoccio and Meo di Pero signed and dated their work on a painted *cartiglio*, still visible over the arch that connects the first and second bay of the chapel

Unfortunately, this room – which still awaits systematic study – was repeatedly transformed from the 15th century onwards: its sanctuary was erased, the passages that existed between chapel and church were blocked up, and its original painterly decoration was substantially altered (fig. 1).¹⁸ The first major alteration probably occurred in 1444, when Domenico di Bartolo was commissioned to paint a fresco of the Virgin of Mercy, the so-called *Vergine del Manto*, for the (liturgical) east wall of the chapel. Presumably, this fresco erased the earlier, Trecento decoration.¹⁹ Further modifications entirely obliterated the fourteenth-century programme of the chapel's sanctuary. In 1513, Domenico Beccafumi repainted the east vault, and, in all likelihood, redecorated the lateral lunettes, one of which has survived and represents the *Meeting of Joachim and Anne*.²⁰ In 1610, the east wall was pulled down altogether, and a door was opened into the main corridor of the hospital, improving access to the wards. On this occasion, the *Vergine del Manto* was removed and relocated to the sacristy of the hospital church, where the Byzantine relics had already been transferred in the mid-15th century, as will be discussed

15. The Opera del Duomo was involved with the building of the relics' chapel between 1359 and 1363. A. GIORGI and S. MOSCADELLI, *Costruire una cattedrale. L'Opera di Santa Maria di Siena tra XII e XIV secolo*, in *Die Kirchen von Siena*, vol. 3, Munchen 2005 (Italienische Forschungen des Kunshistorischen Institutes in Florenz), p. 136, n. 138 (with archival references), and p. 351-352.
16. A document from 1366-67 records that Giovanni di Stefano "makes the chapel next to the church of the Virgin Annunciate", and various payments made to him. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 516, fol. 85v, published by GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 418.
17. The donation of the Podere della Querciola dal Bozzone is recorded in Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 119, fol. 520, cited in GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 133, n. 202.
18. The chapel was restored in 2005-2008. To the best of my knowledge, the only publication ensued from this campaign is M. GAVAZZI, N. MONTEVECCHI and A. SBARDELLATI, Indagini sull'architettura e sulle decorazioni della Cappella del Manto. Lo sviluppo costruttivo dalla fase originaria all'assetto documentato da Domenico di Bartolo, in *Il pellegrinaggio dell'ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala. Atti della giornata di studi, Siena, 26 novembre 2001*, ed. F. GABBRIELLI, Arcidosso 2014 (Ricerche e fonti 3), p. 197-207. This study provides a very preliminary chronology of the chapel and of its decorative programme.
19. GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 165-172.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 268-269, with a discussion of the problematic attributions of these frescoes. The documents recording payments to Domenico di Pace (Beccafumi) are published in the same book, p. 436-437.

below.²¹ Finally, the chapel functioned as an Aid and Emergency ward in modern times, until the hospital was converted into a museum.

Nevertheless, surviving documents and paintings assist us in visualising the inner organisation of this room in the Trecento, and its spatial relationship to the church of the hospital. In 1364, choir stalls (*choro*), seats for women (*sedie delle donne*), and wooden railings (*chanciella*) for the chapel were delivered by the woodworker Ciccio del Ciancha.²² The term *chanciella* is likely to refer to a grille separating the chapel from the adjacent church of the hospital, as is confirmed by another document, describing the chapel as “next to the railings” (*allato a le chanciella*).²³ The presence of choir stalls and of seats specifically intended for a female congregation suggests that the chapel functioned as an actual devotional space, and that it was in all likelihood accessible to the faithful on a regular basis. Within the chapel, the Byzantine relics were presumably stored inside or by the altar. Although later modifications make it impossible to reconstruct the original arrangement in detail, coeval sources emphasise the exceptionality of the relics’ annual display on 25 March, suggesting that they were not accessible or directly visible in the chapel on a daily basis. Also, the record of a payment made to Domenico di Bartolo for the *Vergine del Manto* describes the painting as located “above the grille of the church” (*sopra la gratichola di chiexa*), which might refer to a protective grille sealing a niche inside the wall or the altar, where the relics were preserved.²⁴

The fourteenth-century figurati e programme of the chapel does not provide further assistance in locating the relics: it has only partly survived, and what remains raises attributive and interpretative issues that would require separate examination. However, extant frescoes – primarily portraits of saints, painted on the intradoses of the arches of the chapel and on its lateral walls – offer some useful clues in an attempt to reconstruct the visual surroundings of the Byzantine treasury. The programme, which includes representations of the doctors of the western church, bust portraits of prominent saints of the mendicant orders – St Francis and St Dominic –, and the full team of local Siense patron saints – St Galganus, St Ansanus, St Victor, St Savinus and St Crescentius – is markedly western and Siense in character (figs 2-3).²⁵ Although there cannot be traced a specific iconographic emphasis on themes of healing or pilgrimage, as might be expected from the church of a hospital,

21. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 31, fol. 109v. Also G. MACCHI, *Origine dello Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala di Siena*, Archivio di Stato di Siena D113, fol. 11r.

22. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 516, fol. 35r; published in GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 418, n. 71-78.

23. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 516, fol. 118r; published in GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 418, n. 87.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 165-168 and p. 425, n. 250 for a transcription of the original document, Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 520, fol. 99r.

25. On the Siense patron saints and their iconography, see, amongst others, R. ARGENZIANO and F. BISOGNI, L’iconografia dei santi patroni Anzano, Crescenzo, Savino e Vittore, *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria* 97, 1990, p. 84-115; R. ARGENZIANO, Corpi santi e immagini nella Siena medievale: i santi patroni, *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria* 110, 2003, p. 214-239. For an introduction to their cult in the cathedral, see D. NORMAN, *Siena and the Virgin: Art and Politics in a Late Medieval City State*, New Haven/London 1999, p. 67-85.

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 2 - Cristoforo di Bindoccio and Meo di Pero, Doctors of the Church, intrados of northwest arch, Cappella delle Reliquie, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, ca. 1370 (photo by the author, courtesy of Comune di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 3 - Cristoforo di Bindoccio and Meo di Pero, St Anthony the Abbot, St Dominic and St Crescentius, intrados of central arch, Cappella delle Reliquie, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, ca. 1370 (photo by the author, courtesy of Comune di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

the programme includes representations of St Anthony the Abbot – whose relic Santa Maria della Scala acquired in 1359 – and of St Julian the Hospitaller, respectively venerated as patrons of the sick and poor, and of wayfarers and pilgrims.²⁶ Most significantly for the purposes of this essay, the imagery in the chapel bears only tenuous connections with the individual identity of the Byzantine relics, and makes no iconographic or stylistic reference to their eastern origin. It is possible that more explicit associations between painterly decoration and relics were made on the east wall and near the altar of the chapel, now lost. For example, a surviving altarpiece of the *Assumption of the Virgin with St Thomas receiving the Girdle*, painted in ca. 1360 by Bartolomeo Bulgarini, then oblate at the hospital, might have been destined for the chapel of the relics: its emphasis on the relic of the girdle may be understood as a direct reference to the Marian *pignora* possessed by the Scala (figs 4 and 14).²⁷ Whether or not its missing sections included references to the Byzantine treasury, however, the figurative programme of the chapel significantly reinterpreted the relics in the context of local saintly cults. Projecting new, localised meanings onto the relics, such pictorial framing simultaneously transformed their significance and exploited their potency to promote the relevance of the local Siennese pantheon.

A similar visual strategy – reliant on the limited visibility and restricted accessibility of the relics, offset by a rich and topical painterly programme – was also enacted in the mid-15th century, when the Byzantine treasury was translated from the chapel of the relics to the sacristy of the hospital church in 1445.²⁸ There, the relics were stored inside a new reliquary cupboard, painted by Vecchietta and possibly located above the sacristy altar (figs. 5-6).²⁹ The cabinet was not transparent.

26. On the cult of St Anthony the Abbot in Italy, see L. FENELLI, *Il Tau, il fuoco, il maiale: i canonici regolari di sant'Antonio Abate tra assistenza e devozione*, Spoleto 2006 (Uomini e mondi medievali 9); L. FENELLI, *Dall'eremo alla stalla: storia di sant'Antonio abate e del suo culto*, Roma 2011 (Storia e società). On St Julian the Hospitaller, see G. CIVITANO, *Culto e iconografia di San Giuliano l'Ospitaliere in Italia centro-meridionale*, in *I santi venuti dal mare. Atti del V convegno internazionale di studio, Bari-Brindisi, 14-18 dicembre 2005*, ed. M. S. CALÒ MARIANI, Bari 2009 (Rotte mediterranee della cultura 4), p. 393-414.
27. The altarpiece, generally dated to ca.1360, is currently in the Pinacoteca Nazionale of Siena, n. 61. Only the central panel survives. The relationship between altarpiece and chapel has been developed in J. STEINHOFF, *Siennese Painting after the Black Death. Artistic Pluralism, Politics and the New Art Market*, Cambridge 2006, p. 193 and p. 201-204. On the same painting, see also J. STEINHOFF-MORRISON, *Bartolomeo Bulgarini and Siennese Paintings of the mid-fourteenth Century*, PhD thesis, Princeton University, Ann Arbor 1994, p. 24-244 and p. 603-613. The hospital possessed relics of the veil, girdle, and head-cover of the Virgin, all mentioned in the original contract of sale of 1359.
28. The standard reference on the sacristy is H. W. VAN OS, *Vecchietta and the Sacristy of the Siena Hospital Church. A Study in Renaissance Religious Symbolism*, The Hague/New York 1974 (Kunsthistorische studiën van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome 2).
29. For extensive discussions of the cabinet and its iconography, see *ibid.*, p. 16-30; A.J. ELSTON, *Storing Sanctity: Sacristy Reliquary Cupboards in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 2011, p. 113-158; D. NORMAN, "Santi Cittadini": Vecchietta and the Civic Pantheon in mid-fifteenth Century Siena, in *Art as Politics in Late Medieval and Renaissance Siena*, ed. T.B. SMITH and J. B. STEINHOFF, Farnham 2012, p. 115-140,

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 4 - Bartolomeo Bulgarini, *Assumption of the Virgin with St Thomas receiving the Girdle*, Pinacoteca Nazionale, n. 61, Siena, ca. 1360 (photo : © Ministero dei beni e delle Attività culturali e del turismo. Polo museale della Toscana. Photo Archive Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena).

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figures 5-6 - Lorenzo di Pietro, il Vecchietta, *Arliquiera*, exterior/interior, Pinacoteca di Siena, ca. 1445 (photo : © Ministero dei beni e delle Attività culturali e del turismo. Polo museale della Toscana. Photo Archive Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena).

When closed, it entirely concealed the relics and reliquaries from view, offering beholders instead an elaborate pictorial cycle comprising images of local Siennese holy figures in the lower tiers, and representations of the Annunciation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ at the summit. With the exception of the Christological imagery at the top, the figures depicted on the exterior of the cabinet bear no connection with the Byzantine relics inside. Instead, and not unlike the imagery of the chapel where the relics had been stored in the Trecento, the doors of the cabinet represented the local Siennese holy pantheon, performing a dual function.³⁰ On the one hand, these images framed the Byzantine relics within the highly specific civic religion of Siena. On the other hand, they promoted the standing of the group of Siennese patrons – including the so-called *santini novelli*, many of whom had died recently and had not yet been canonized in the 15th century – by means of their association with the relics of Christ's Passion and of the Virgin.³¹ When open, the reliquary cupboard presented an entirely different visual spectacle. The three Christological scenes at its summit would remain visible. However, the local saints would disappear as the two rectangular doors of the cupboard revolved on their hinges, revealing the extensive Passion cycle depicted on their interior, and exposing the Byzantine relics and reliquaries stored in the wall niche behind the cabinet. The layout of the Byzantine relics inside the cabinet is unknown. Also uncertain are the liturgical occasions when the cupboard would be opened, the rituals that were performed, and the size and identity of the audience that was admitted to the sacristy. Nevertheless, the reliquary cupboard was designed with a precise function in mind: its overall iconography merged the cult of the Byzantine relics with the veneration of local saints and the universal history of salvation. When sealed, the cabinet ensured the protection of the relics therein, both physically, by means of sturdy wooden doors and locks, and symbolically, through the guardianship of the team of Siennese saints. When open, the cabinet revealed the holy treasury, advertised its significance by juxtaposition with the Passion cycle, and provided the beholders with an interpretative and contemplative framework that also extended to the walls of the sacristy, where Vecchietta depicted a monumental representation of the articles of the Christian faith in the same years.

for a discussion of the political implications of this and other representations of the Siennese civic pantheon by Vecchietta. For a comparison with the cathedral's reliquary cupboard, see also W. LOSERIES, Presentation of Relics in Late Medieval Siena. The Cappella delle Reliquie in Siena Cathedral, in *Matter of Faith* (cited in n. 2), p. 56-65.

30. The cupboard features representations of established patron saints, as well as those of more recent and, in some cases, disputed, holy Siennese figures. The images are arranged in two rows of six figures each, and include, from left to right: Ansanus, Ambrogio Sansedoni, Bernardino of Siena, Agostino Novello, Andrea Gallerani and Savinus (top row); Victor, Catherine of Siena, Pier Pettinaio, the Blessed Sorore, Galgano and Crescentius (bottom row).
31. On the *santini novelli*, see A. VAUCHEZ, La Commune de Sienne, les ordres mendiants et le culte des saints. Histoire et enseignement d'une crise (novembre 1328 - avril 1329), *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen Âge-Temps Modernes* 89/2, 1977, p. 757-767; D. WEBB, *Patrons and Defenders: the Saints in the Italian City-States*, London / New York 1996 (International Library of Historical Studies 4), p. 276-297.

Although the sophisticated visual strategy devised in the mid-15th century was modified a few decades later, on the occasion of the enlargement of the hospital church in 1466, issues of protection and concealment of the Byzantine relics remained preponderant.³² In 1478, the holy tokens were removed from Vecchietta's cupboard, and placed inside a locked chest inserted in the architrave of a newly built tabernacle.³³ In 1610, Domenico di Bartolo's *Vergine del Manto*, removed from its original location in the fourteenth-century relics' chapel, was also placed beneath the baldachin.³⁴ In their new arrangement, the Byzantine relics were even more difficult to access: as testified by Francesco Bossio's pastoral visit in 1575, the chest could only be accessed by means of a movable ladder, and was sealed with multiple locks.³⁵

In their medieval and post-medieval arrangements, then, the Byzantine relics of Santa Maria della Scala were carefully protected and concealed from view. Except on special occasions, the faithful gathering in the chapel or sacristy would probably venerate the holy items without seeing them, their devotion being guided, instead, by the sophisticated pictorial programs of the surrounding spaces, which both amplified and localised the meaning of the relics. The visual richness of these spaces, paired with the secrecy and inaccessibility of the holy treasury, is likely to have augmented the worth of the relics in the eyes of the local community and of pilgrims visiting Siena, and to have incited their curiosity and reverence. But when would the faithful have an opportunity to see the Byzantine relics, and to venerate them outside of a locked chest?

INVISIBLE, IN FULL VIEW: THE BYZANTINE RELICS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE ANNUAL CEREMONIES OF THE ANNUNCIATION

On 30 January 1360, only a few months after the solemn arrival of the Byzantine relics and reliquaries in Siena, the city government agreed that the new treasury be solemnly commemorated and displayed every year on the feast-day of the Annunciation, celebrated on 25 March.³⁶ The choice of the Annunciation for the ostension of the new treasury is likely to have reflected a complex set of religious, institutional and political developments. As the commencement of the Incarnation, the

32. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 24, fol. 169v, first published in L. BANCHI and S. BORGHESI, *I Rettori dello Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala di Siena*, Bologna 1877, p. 124-125; more recently in GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 430, n. 375.
33. MACCHI, *Origine dello Spedale* (cited in n. 21) D113, fol. 12v and Archivio Stato Siena, *Ospedale* 120, fol. 68r. The sources are ambivalent about the location of the tabernacle, which may have been erected in the sacristy, where it is now; or in the main space of the church, whence it may have been removed in 1610 to be installed in the sacristy, at the same time as the *Vergine del Manto* was transferred to this room. See GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 180 and p. 261, n. 192; for a different view, VAN OS, *Vecchietta* (cited in n. 28), p. 11-14.
34. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 31, fol. 109v.
35. E. BOSSIO, *Memoriale della Visita Pastorale*, Archivio Arcivescovile Siena, Ms. 21, Sante Visite; partially published in VAN OS, *Vecchietta* (cited in n. 28), p. 81-88. The chest is described at p. 82.
36. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Consiglio Generale* 165, fol. 9v-10r, 30 January 1360.

Annunciation was both a Marian and Christological feast: alternatively referred to in medieval times as *annuntiatio salvatoris* (or *domini*) and *annuntiatio virginis*, it represented a suitable occasion for the display of the Byzantine treasury, which comprised relics of both the Virgin and of the Passion.³⁷ In addition, by the mid-fourteenth-century Siena firmly identified the Virgin as its main patroness, and the Annunciation was an important Marian and Christological festivity: it marked the beginning of the official Siennese calendar, and ideally complemented the greater feast of the Assumption of the Virgin (15 August), which Siena celebrated as its patron day.³⁸ Furthermore, 25 March was the patron day of the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, whose own church, enlarged in 1354, only a few years prior to the acquisition of the Byzantine treasury, was dedicated to the Virgin Annunciate.³⁹ Finally, the feast day of the Annunciation coincided with the dramatic fall of the long-lived Government of the Nine (established in 1287) on 25 March 1355, and it is possible that the new ceremonials may have borne some connections with the recent political turnover.⁴⁰ Associating the Byzantine relics with the day of the Annunciation, then, fulfilled several purposes. It enabled the hospital to promote its civic status and involve the entire civic community in the celebrations of its patron day. It allowed the political and religious authorities of the city to symbolically reclaim the relics – and the hospital itself – as civic assets. And it may have helped to normalise and legitimize the new government, which had recently ascended to power amidst significant social and political strife

Unfortunately, no detailed account has survived of the ceremonials of 25 March in fourteenth-century Siena. However, several aspects of the rituals may be reconstructed thanks to primary and comparative evidence. Siennese liturgical manuals since the 13th-century rank the Annunciation amongst the more solemn religious

37. *DACL* 1, c. 2247-8.

38. On the Siennese calendar, see A. CAPPELLI, *Cronologia, cronografia e calendario perpetuo dal principio dell'era cristiana ai nostri giorni: tavole cronologico-sincrone e quadri sinottici per verifica e le date storiche*, Milan 1930, p. 15. For an early description of the liturgy of the Annunciation in the Siennese cathedral, see the thirteenth-century ODORICUS SENENSIS, *Ordo officio um ecclesiae senensis*, ed. G. C. TROMBELLI, Bologna 1766, p. 308-311. The Assumption was grandly celebrated in Siena under the aegis of the Commune since at least the early 13th century, see *ibid.*, p. 348-355.

39. The date of the dedication of the hospital church to the Virgin Annunciate is unknown. Documents generally refer to it, simply, as “the church” or “the oratory”. A *terminus ante quem* is provided by a record of 1366-7, where the chapel of the relics is described as “next to the [church of the Virgin] Annunciate” (*a lato a la Nunziata*). Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 516, fol. 85v, cited in GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 418, n. 79. Although it is possible that the purchase of the relics in 1359, and the establishment of the new ceremonials, may have prompted the dedication of the church to the Virgin Annunciate, this is more likely to have occurred earlier – either upon the erection of the church in 1257, and as a mark of distinction from the cathedral, or in 1354, on the occasion of the enlargement of the church. The enlargement is mentioned in Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 515, fol. 15, published in *ibid.*, p. 417, n. 44.

40. On the fall of the Government of the Nine, see G. JASPER SCHENK, Enter the Emperor. Charles IV and Siena between Politics, Diplomacy, and Ritual (1355 and 1368), *Renaissance Studies* 20/2, 2006, p. 161-179.

festivals in the city.⁴¹ Liturgical celebrations appear to have been held both inside the cathedral – whose bells were rung at the beginning of Matins, at the beginning of the major Mass of the day, and at the beginning of Vespers – and inside the church of Santa Maria della Scala.⁴² However, the most significant stages of the ceremony, including the display of the Byzantine relics, took place outdoors, in the piazza del Duomo, where people gathered in front of the hospital's façade.

In the years following the arrival of the relics in Siena, a number of artistic and architectural campaigns were undertaken to facilitate and aggrandize the ceremonies of 25 March. The first of these was the construction of:

[...] a beautiful and honourable pulpit, or *pergulum*, whence the aforementioned relics shall be honourably displayed, publicly and before the eyes of all those who will come to see them, on the occasion of the next feast of the annunciation of the glorious Virgin, in the coming month of March.⁴³

Erected on the façade of the hospital, the pulpit has not survived. However, its placement between the two portals that provided access to church and hospital in the middle ages may be reconstructed from a later drawing executed by Girolamo Macchi (1648-1734), archivist of Santa Maria della Scala (identified as n. 7 in fig. 7).⁴⁴ An identical position is suggested by a fresco painted by Domenico di Bartolo in the *pellegrinaio* (room for pilgrims) of the hospital in 1441 (fig. 8).⁴⁵ The fresco, whose representational accuracy has frequently been remarked upon by scholarship, renders the interior of the church of the Virgin Annunciate as it would be seen by a viewer standing in the *pellegrinaio* and looking towards the entrance of the hospital; on the left, one may take a glimpse of the interior of the chapel of the relics.⁴⁶

41. Cathedral canons received double prebend for attending service on the day of the Annunciation. *Constitutiones Sacri Capituli Metropolitanae Ecclesiae Senensis*, ed. L. BONETTI, Siena 1579, p. 82. Also, the liturgy comprised nine lessons, and the antiphon was sung twice, confirming the liturgical relevance of the feast day: ODORICUS SENENSIS, *Ordo officiorum* (cited in n. 38), p. 292 and p. 390-391.
42. See *ibid.* p. 308-311, and also F.A. D'ACCONE, *The Civic Muse: Music and Musicians in Siena during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Chicago 2007, Table 1.2, p. 53, which includes information from the *Pacta et capitula nova* of 1367, and from the cathedral constitutions of 1459.
43. [...] *pulpitum sive pergulum pulcrum et honorabilem super quo publice et palam dicte reliquae omnibus visum ituris easdem honorabiliter hostendantur in proximo festo sancte Annunptiationis Virginis gloriose de mense martii proximo venturo*, Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Consiglio Generale* 165, fol. 9v, 30 January 1360.
44. For the position of the pulpit, see MACCHI, *Origine dello Spedale* (cited in n. 21), D113, fol. 59v-60r.
45. On the date of Domenico di Bartolo's fresco, see GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 160 and p. 259, n. 107, with further references. The most detailed commentary on this fresco is in C. B. STREHLKE, *Domenico Di Bartolo*, PhD thesis, Columbia University 1986, p. 131-147. See also P. PERTICI, *Siena quattrocentesca: gli anni del pellegrinaio nell'ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala*, Siena 2012, p. 282-289.
46. For evidence of the accuracy of Domenico di Bartolo's depiction of the interiors of the hospital, see GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO and BROGI, *Lo spedale grande di Siena* (cited in n. 4), p. 55.

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Droits numériques non obtenus.

first half of the 18th century (photo by the author, courtesy of Archivio di Stato di Siena.
No further reproduction permitted).

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 8 - Domenico di Bartolo, Distribution of Alms, Pellegrinaio (room for pilgrims), Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, 1441 (photo by the author, courtesy of Comune di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

The open, pointed-arch portal on the left offers a direct view of the cathedral's main entrance across the Piazza del Duomo. Beyond the portal of the cathedral, also open, there can be glimpsed the outlines of Duccio's *oculus* and Maestà, at the east end of the church's nave. Domenico di Bartolo's painted space includes two wooden balconies attached to the counter-façade: the leftmost provided access to a clock placed on the façade of the hospital. Consistently with Macchi's drawing, the relics' pulpit is instead represented between the two portals. Depicted as it would be viewed from the interior of the church, it is a small wooden balcony with a handrail and canopy. The pulpit could be reached from the clock cabin, walking along a wooden gangway above the entrance.⁴⁷ Alternatively, access might have been provided by a movable ladder, such as the one used in Prato for the annual ostension of the relic of the Girdle of the Virgin.⁴⁸ A decade after the construction of the pulpit, in 1371, another important change was made to the surroundings of the hospital: the Siense authorities decided to pull down the Loggia del Vescovado, a building next to the Duomo and in front of the hospital, in order to make more space for the crowds attending the presentation of the relics.⁴⁹ Subsequently, in 1379, low stone benches (*murelli*) were commissioned to run along the exterior of the church of Annunziata, below the pulpit. Spanning the façade of the hospital, these benches would provide the magistrates and noblemen of Siena with suitable seating during the public ceremonies of the Annunciation (figs 7 and 9)⁵⁰

Further glimpses of the celebrations of 25 March may be gathered from Girolamo Macchi's writings, which describe the feast day as one of the "beautiful festivities that were celebrated in Siena", possibly making an implicit reference to the solemn Marian festivity of the Assumption, celebrated each year on 15 August.⁵¹ Celebrations of the Assumption lasted three days in Trecento Siena. On the eve of the feast, every Siense citizen between the ages of 18 and 70 – including those who habitually resided outside of the city – was required to visit the cathedral in the company of the other members of his *contrada* (neighbourhood) and offer a candle. On 15 August, a processional offering also took place that was led by the Commune, which presented a *cerò grosso* (large candle) weighing one hundred pounds. Next came

47. The clock cabin itself would be accessed via a staircase, which has been preserved in the thickness of the wall, between the chapel of the relics and the church: GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 160.
48. G. MARCHINI, *Il tesoro del duomo di Prato*, Milano 1963, p. 63-64.
49. "La loggia del vescovado di Siena [...] si guastò; e questo si fè per avere maggior piazza per mostrare l'arliquia.", *Cronaca Senese* (cited in n. 7), p. 636. The original decree is in Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Consiglio Generale* 181, fol. 11, 3 February 1371, cited in G. PICCINI, *L'Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala e la Città di Siena nel Medioevo*, in *Loro di Siena* (cited in n. 5), p. 39-47, at 43 and 47, n. 52.
50. Archivio di Stato di Siena, Ospedale 20, fol. 17v, which specifies that the benches were used as seating for the Signoria on the occasion of the feast. G. MACCHI, *Memorie*, Archivio di Stato di Siena D107, fol. 93v [modern numbering, pencil]; ID., *Origine dello Spedale* (cited in n. 21), D113, fol. 12v; ID., *Memorie*, Archivio di Stato di Siena D108, fol. 123r [pencil numbering].
51. "E' una delle belle feste che si facci in tra l'anno nella città. ", MACCHI, *Origine dello Spedale* (cited in n. 21), D113, fol. 23v.

the *Signoria* (city magistrates), accompanied by pages who carried twelve-pound, double candles (*doppiari*) set in painted candlesticks. The representatives of the *contado* – the countryside communities subject to Siennese authority – followed the magistrates, carrying candles and a *cerò fogliato* (a large candle painted with vegetal motives), in addition to their city banners. The Siennese *contrade*, escorted by military companies, came immediately behind. The exact itinerary of the procession, which obviously terminated at the cathedral, is likely to have changed over the centuries. However, a document of 1262 indicates that balconies and loggias along the two principal thoroughfares of the city – leading from the Porta di Camollia and Porta Romana to the Porta di Stalloreggi – were demolished, in order to facilitate the transit of the procession with its tall standards and banners. The procession was accompanied by music players, and was followed by a banquet for official representatives and by the distribution of wine to all participants. An annual horse race – the *palio* – also took place on the day, and was officially associated with the festivity of the Assumption of the Virgin in the city statutes of 1310.⁵²

The ceremonies of the Annunciation are likely to have resembled those of the Assumption, albeit on a smaller scale. Donations of wax made to the hospital on 25 March by the Commune and by the confraternities hosted by Santa Maria della Scala are explicitly attested since the 15th century, but the tradition is likely to have begun earlier: according to a decree of 1436, the hospital received annually from the public authorities about forty-eight pounds of wax on 25 March, in the form of twelve *doppiari* (double candles).⁵³ In addition, the *Concistoro* of Siena mentions the Annunciation among the feasts “nei quali la Signoria esce da Palazzo” (for which the governors leave the communal palace) likely indicating that a procession did take place on the day.⁵⁴ This appears to be confirmed by a record from 1375: on the

52. My description of the procession and offerings primarily relies on G. CECCHINI and D. NERI, *Il Palio di Siena*, Milano 1958, p. 14-21. In the same book, see p. 131-132 for the transcription of the official regulations of wax offerings in 1200, and p. 134 for the association of the *palio* to the festivities of the Assunta in 1310. See also NORMAN, *Siena and the Virgin* (cited in n. 25), p. 1-2, with reference to the statutes of Siena of 1337 and 1339 (Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Statuti* 26, dist. I, rubrics 7-18, fol. 9v-11r), quoted at n. 1, p. 215. More recently, see A. CAMPBELL, A spectacular celebration of the Assumption in Siena, *Renaissance Quarterly* 58/2, 2005, p. 435-463, esp. 439-441; J. SOLEO-SCHANKS, From stage to page: Siena's “Caleffo dell'Assunta”, spectacular machines, and the promotion of civic power, in *Thresholds of Medieval Visual Culture: Liminal Spaces*, ed. E. GERTSMAN and J. HEYDT-STEVENSON, Woodbridge 2012 (Boydell Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture), p. 281-301.
53. “1436 il 18 Giugno. Il Gran Consiglio della Campana solennemente determinò che i dodici doppiari, che ogn'anno si portano allo Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala dal Comune di Siena per la festa dell'Annunziatione della Beata Vergine Maria quando si mostrano le reliquie, si intendano, e siano donati, e liberamente offerti dal Comune di Siena al detto Spedale. In oggi il Pubblico in detta festa porta libbre 48 in cera gialla in candele.”, Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 118, fol. 8 [this manuscript is paginated]; Brotherhoods also made annual wax offerings on this occasion: Macchi indicates that the confraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the Vaults donated to the hospital 6 wax candles, weighing 6 pounds each: MACCHI, *Origine dello Spedale* (cited in n. 21), D107, fol. 79v [pencil numbering, modern].
54. F. NEVOLA, Cerimoniali per santi e feste a Siena, in *Siena e il suo territorio nel Rinascimento*, ed. M. ASCHERI, Siena 2000 (Documenti di storia 36), p. 171-184, at 172, n. 12 for sixteenth-century records.

day of the Annunciation, a group of trumpeters performed at the Cappella del Campo, in front of Siena's communal palace.⁵⁵ This performance may have preceded or accompanied the official parade leading to the hospital

An elaborate and carefully staged procession was certainly held on 25 March in early modern times. The cortege, accompanied by trumpeters, was led by the chaplains of the hospital with their attendants. There followed the rector and camerlengo (chamberlain), and then the doctors, surgeons, administrative staff, nurses and other medical staff of the hospital. Students of surgery, pharmacists (*speziali*), and those who took care of the food reserves and basic needs of the hospital (chief butcher, chief baker, chief market-gardener, etc.) closed the first ranks of the procession. A more numerous group joined the procession at the entrance of the church, where the foundlings and girls cared for by the hospital waited together with wet nurses, and with the representatives of the *grance* (countryside convents with farms) and of other hospitals affiliated to Santa Maria della Scala.⁵⁶ Finally, and similarly to the rituals of the Assumption, the celebrations of the Annunciation also included musical performances. These are explicitly attested as early as 1385, and became increasingly more elaborate over the following centuries.⁵⁷ By the 16th century, the cathedral chapel singers performed in the church of Santa Maria della Scala on 25 March, and the First and Second Vespers, and Mass, were celebrated with polyphony on the day.⁵⁸

The solemn display of the Byzantine relics from the tribune on the façade of the hospital represented the climax of the celebrations of 25 March. When the relics were purchased, the hospital façade had already been the object of an important artistic campaign, which had turned it into the ideal setting for a ceremony dedicated to the Virgin. The rector Tese Tolomei (1314-1339) had had the façade levelled and filled, and, probably in 1337, four scenes from the Life of the Virgin were commissioned to be painted on it. These images, which were destroyed in 1720, have been the object of an intense art historical debate that falls beyond the scope of this essay.⁵⁹ What is important in order to assess their role in the ceremonies of the Annunciation, is that the frescoes – which likely represented the Nativity of

55. "A Biagio tronbatore s. vinti, ricevendo per sé e per li chompagni perché feciero onore di trombare alla cappella per Santa Maria di Marzo [1375], L.1.", Archivio Opera Metropolitana Siena, vol. 204, *Entrate e Uscite della Cappella di Campo*, 1374-75, fol. 68r, cited in D'ACCONE, *The Civic Muse* (cited in n. 42), p. 428, n. 52.
56. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 122: three lists survive, in three separate booklets attached to the main file, which describe the order of the procession for the years 1767, 1768 and 1780. See also GIROLAMO GIGLI (1660-1722), *Diario Senese*, ed. V. BUONSIGNORI, 3 vols., Bologna 1974, vol. 1, p. 114-115.
57. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 852, fol. 100r, cited in D'ACCONE, *The Civic Muse* (cited in n. 42), p. 626.
58. Music at the hospital is discussed in *ibid.*, p. 625-629.
59. The date of destruction of the frescoes is provided by MACCHI, *Origine dello Spedale* (cited in n. 21), D108, fol. 281v [pencil numbering]. For a detailed discussion of the frescoes and a summary of previous scholarship, see H. B. J. MAGINNIS, The Lost Façade Frescoes from Siena's Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala, *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 51, 1988, p. 180-194; NORMAN, *Siena and the Virgin* (cited in n. 25), p. 87-103.

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 9 - Reconstruction of the façade of the hospital in the mid-14th century, after the purchase of the Byzantine relics, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena (adapted from BOLDRINI and PARENTI, *Santa Maria della Scala*, fig. D, . 46).

the Virgin, her Presentation in the Temple, her Betrothal, the Return of the Virgin to her Parents, and, possibly a later addition, the Assumption – were arranged, presumably in chronological sequence, in a continuous band along the façade. They faced the piazza, and were placed under a protective roof – also destroyed in 1720 – and above the relics’ tribune (fig. 9).⁶⁰ These paintings were executed by artists of the calibre of Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti (documented to have worked on the cycle by a painted inscription) and, possibly, by Simone Martini. A commission of 1448 by the city government testifies to the enduring significance of these frescoes in Siena. During that year, the artist Sano di Pietro was ordered to paint five scenes of the Life of the Virgin on the *predella* for an altarpiece in a chapel of the Palazzo Pubblico. The scenes were to be “like those above the portal

60. The date of the destruction of the roof is provided by G. MACCHI, *Diario 1662-1724*, Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Ms A.XI.23, fol. 72r-73v, cited with excerpts in MAGINNIS, *The Lost Façade Frescoes* (cited in n. 59), p. 185-186. The position of the frescoes may be inferred from the same passage, as well as from a fifteenth-century document cited below, n. 61.

of the hospital of Santa Maria”.⁶¹ In addition, in 1478-1484 Battista and Onofrio di Fusino were commissioned to restore the cycle.⁶² This is an additional sign of the undiminished popularity and appeal of these paintings in Siena, which is likely to have derived, at least in part, from their association with the ceremonies of the Annunciation, for which they represented an ideal backdrop.

The elaborate artistic staging of the ceremonies of 25 March also comprised, on the opposite side of the piazza, the western façade of the Sienese cathedral, which had recently regained its legitimate role as the principal façade of the edifice, after the Opera abandoned in 1357 an ambitious and disastrous plan of enlargement and re-orientation of the church begun two decades earlier, in 1339 (fig. 10).⁶³ The cathedral’s western façade had been built between 1284 and 1317.⁶⁴ Its artistic

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 10 - Façade, cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, Siena (photo by the author).

61. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Concistoro* 2462, fol. 73r, quoted in NORMAN, *Siena and the Virgin* (cited in n. 25), p. 87 and p. 224, n. 2, with further references. The record, which bears the date 1448, instructs the artist to paint “fi e stories of our Lady like those that are above the doors of the Scala hospital”.
62. MAGINNIS, *The Lost Façade Frescoes* (cited in n. 59), p. 186-187, with archival references.
63. On the history of the façade, see *La facciata del duomo di Siena: iconografia, stile, indagini storiche e scientifiche*, ed. M. LORENZONI, Milano 2007. For a summary of the chronology of building work in the cathedral in the Trecento, see particularly the essay by M. QUAST, *La facciata occidentale del Duomo vecchio: l’architettura*, *ibid.*, p. 97-129.
64. M. BUTZEK, *La questione dei mosaici antichi*, in *La facciata* (cited in n. 63), p. 147-151, at 147.

programme reflected the dedication of the cathedral to the Virgin, whose infancy and early life were represented in sculpture on the architrave above the central portal. The cycle, probably sculpted by Giovanni Pisano and his workshop, includes the episodes of the Expulsion of Joachim from the temple, the Annunciation to Anne, and to Joachim, their meeting at the Golden Gate, the Nativity of the Virgin, her Presentation in the temple, and her Betrothal, with significant overlaps with the frescoes on the façade of Santa Maria della Scala.⁶⁵ The sculptural decoration of the central tympanum, removed in 1702-1704, has been reconstructed on the basis of visual and written evidence.⁶⁶ As it may be seen in Domenico di Bartolo's *Distribution of Alms*, a sculpted image of the Virgin and Child occupied the centre of the lunette, and was flanked by two kneeling figures, each introduced by an angel (fig. 8).⁶⁷ The two figures have been identified as Bonaguida Lucari, the Siennese officer allegedly responsible for entrusting Siena to the Virgin on the eve of the battle of Montaperti in 1260; and the personification of the city of Siena, presenting a model of the church to the Virgin.⁶⁸ The façade programme, much modified in later centuries, also included other sculptures – primarily Old Testament prophets and ancient philosophers – and mosaics whose date, specific location and iconography are in most cases elusive. The lunette above the north portal may have featured a mosaic of the Lamentation of Christ, and Monika Butzek has suggested that a mosaic of the Assumption of the Virgin may have been commissioned for the summit of the façade as early as 1310.⁶⁹ If this interpretation is correct, the mosaic would have been in place by the time the Byzantine relics reached Siena in 1359, and would have reverberated and reinforced the iconographic message of the façade of the hospital.

On the feast day of the Annunciation, then, the Siennese community gathered in the piazza del Duomo, in the same space where they met in August for the celebrations of the Assumption. Behind them, the complex Christological and Marian iconography of the cathedral façade reaffirmed the long-term bond between the Siennese community and their patroness, the Virgin Mary, also making an implicit statement about the prominence of Siena in the universal history of salvation. However, on 25 March the attention of the Siennese beholders was focused on the opposite side of the piazza, on the façade of the hospital. Here, the elaborate liturgical and artistic *mise-en-scène* reiterated the special relationship between the Virgin and

65. G. TIGLER, *Siena 1284-1297. Giovanni Pisano e le sculture della parte bassa della facciata*, *ibid.*, p. 131-145, at 135.

66. See M. SEIDEL, "Ubera matris". Stratificazioni semantiche di un simbolo, in *Arte Italiana del Medioevo e del Rinascimento. 2. Architettura e scultura*, ed. M. SEIDEL, Venice 2003 (Collana del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz 8), p. 577-626, at 610-612; TIGLER, *Siena 1284-1297* (cited in n. 65), p. 131; V. CAMELLITI, Patroni "celesti" e patroni "terreni": dedica e dedizione della città nel rituale e nell'immagine, *Städtische Kulte im Mittelalter*, in ed. S. EHRICH and J. OBERSTE, Regensburg 2010 (Studien 6), p. 97-121, at 99-100.

67. PERTICI, *Siena Quattrocentesca* (cited in n. 45), p. 264-268.

68. The identification was formulated for the first time by Sigismondo Tizio (1458-1528), *Historiae Senenses*, ed. G. TOMASI STUSSI, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores Recentiores* 10, Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1995, vol. 1, Part I, fol. 42r, p. 61.

69. BUTZEK, *La questione dei mosaici antichi* (cited in n. 64).

Siena, and promoted messages of civic harmony and order, all the while advertising the prestige of Santa Maria della Scala in the religious landscape of the city.

Frustratingly, no early description of the ritual ostension of the Byzantine relics on 25 March has survived. However, better-known relics' displays provide useful comparative evidence. The sixteenth-century ostension in the church of San Lorenzo in Florence is a good case in point. The Florentine relics – preserved inside precious hardstone containers – were donated to San Lorenzo in two instalments, by popes Leo X (Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, pope 1513-1521) and Clement VII (Giulio Zanobi di Giuliano de' Medici, pope 1523-1534). Not unlike Siena, the relics were received in Florence with a solemn public procession in 1532, and subsequently stored inside a *pergamo* (tribune) designed by Michelangelo. The *pergamo* was built against the counter-façade of San Lorenzo, above the central portal, and consisted of a balcony with a storage cabinet. The original project – later modified – also included an opening onto the exterior of the church and a balcony, which would have looked somewhat similar to the pulpit of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena. The Florentine relics were solemnly displayed once a year, on Easter Sunday, and Clement VII meticulously regulated the rituals of ostension with a bull. Men and women would occupy the two sides of the nave, which were separated by a temporary wooden rail. After Vespers, the prior of the basilica or one of the eldest canons would open the relics' tabernacle. Wearing white silk gloves, he would lift each reliquary individually and offer it to public worship, while another canon called out the name of the relic. Once each holy token had been so displayed, the prior would bestow a solemn blessing on the congregation.⁷⁰

The city of Siena, too, had sophisticated traditions of relic display. In 1464, the city acquired a relic of the arm of St John the Baptist. The relic was solemnly presented to the cathedral by pope Pius II Piccolomini, who had recently acquired it from Thomas Palaeologus, despot of Morea. Following its arrival in Siena, St John's arm was re-encased in a new rock crystal and silver casket, made in 1466 by artist Francesco D'Antonio.⁷¹ The relic was offered to public worship yearly, on the first Monday of Pentecost. As we gather from Girolamo Gigli's eighteenth-century account, on that day two acolytes lifted the reliquary from the chapel where it was customarily preserved, and carried it to the pulpit, whence the archbishop presented it to the community, bestowing a solemn blessing.⁷² While the provisions

70. The description above relies on N. DACOS, D. HEIKAMP and A. GROTE, *Il tesoro di Lorenzo il Magnifico*. 2. *I vasi*, Florence 1975, p. 25-29.

71. The most complete study on the Sienese relic of the arm of St John, which was formerly in the possession of the monastery of Ziča, in Serbia, is D. POPOVIĆ, 'The Siena relic of St John the Baptist's right arm', *Zograf* 41, 2017, p. 77-94. On the Sienese reliquary, see also *Francesco di Giorgio e il Rinascimento a Siena 1450-1500*, ed. L. BELLOSI, Milan 1993, p. 154-155. On the history of the relic in Siena and on the chapel built in the cathedral to provide room for its veneration in the 15th century, see T. B. SMITH, *Alberto Aringhieri and the Chapel of Saint John the Baptist. Patronage, Politics, and the Cult of Relics in Renaissance Siena*, PhD thesis, Florida State University 2002.

72. GIGLI, *Diario Senese* (cited in n. 56), vol. 1, p. 555-556.

made for the veneration of the arm relic of St John offer insights into renaissance and early modern practices of relic display and storage, the ritual ostension of the much-venerated head relic of St Galganus is revealing of earlier, medieval Siense practices. In the late 13th century, the Cistercian abbey of San Galgano near Siena commissioned a new reliquary for the preservation and display of the head relic of their patron saint, St Galganus.⁷³ The reliquary, which has survived, is a tour de force of medieval metalworking. Devised as an octagonal, tower-shaped container, the reliquary is decorated with precious gemstones and enamels, and illustrates the vita of the saint in a series of embossed, silver-gilt panels. The head relic would habitually be concealed inside the dazzling micro-architectural structure, and would therefore be invisible to the faithful. However, upon activation of a mechanism hidden inside the base of the reliquary, the decorative plaques of the central register would slide down inside the object, temporarily revealing the relic therein, which would be visible through a row of window-shaped openings. The involvement of the head relic of St Galganus in public ostensions is attested since the late 13th century, when it was displayed on the main altar of the abbey church on the feast day of the saint.⁷⁴ In addition, Agnolo di Tura reports a solemn procession held in Siena in 1330 with the same relic.⁷⁵ At an unspecified date, the abbey also commissioned a movable wooden pulpit for the annual display of the relic. The wooden structure was positioned on the esplanade in front of the abbey church. Having carried the head reliquary of St Galganus up on the pulpit, which was octagonal in shape and had eight windows, the monks would perambulate it, presenting it to the view of the faithful through each of the windows.⁷⁶

The display of relics in Siena on 25 March presumably resembled these examples – with one significant difference. Unlike the Medici relics, the head of St Galganus, and the arm of St John the Baptist, which were stored inside sizeable reliquaries that would be visible to the congregation, the relics and reliquaries of Santa Maria della Scala are unlikely to have been individually visible from the piazza. With few exceptions, the Byzantine holy tokens of the hospital are very small: the largest among the passion relics can be held in a hand, or in a pocket, and several of these reliquaries were originally intended to be suspended from neck chains (figs 11-13). It is improbable that they functioned in Byzantium as objects of public veneration.

73. The date and authorship of the reliquary have generated a lively debate. See E. CIONI, *Il reliquiario di San Galgano: contributo alla storia dell'oreficeria e dell'iconografia*, Florence 2005, p. 103-104 and p. 169.

74. Anonymous, "Vita Sancti Galgani", ed. E. SUSI, *L'eremita cortese: san Galgano fra mito e storia nell'agiografia toscana del XII secolo*, Spoleto 1993 (Biblioteca del Centro per il collegamento degli studi medievali e umanistici in Umbria 9), p. 206, cited in CIONI, *Il reliquiario di San Galgano* (cited in n. 73), p. 34. The *vita sancti Galgani* has been repeatedly studied by Eugenio Susi, who most recently dated it to the 1270s. E. SUSI, *Il dossier agiografico di San Galgano: uno status quaestionis*, in A. CONTI (ed.), *Speciosa Imago. L'iconografia di san Galgano dal XIII al XVIII secolo*, Siena 2014, p. 17-44, at 30.

75. *Cronaca Senese* (cited in n. 7), p. 498-499.

76. A. LIBANORI, *Vita del glorioso San Galgano*, Siena 1645, p. 120-121, discussed in CIONI, *Il reliquiario di San Galgano* (cited in n. 73), p. 48-49.

Droits numériques non obtenus.

11	12
13	

Figure 11 - Reliquary of the True Cross, Byzantine, gold, enamel and precious stones, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, 12th century (photo by the author, courtesy of Comune di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

Figure 12 - Reliquary of the Passion, Byzantine, gilded silver, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, 14th century (photo by the author, courtesy of Comune di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

Figure 13 - Pendant icon, Byzantine, painting on wood and golden filigree, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, 14th century? (photo by the author, courtesy of Comune di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

They were, instead, presumably created as devotional jewels, and meant for the private usage of an individual.⁷⁷

Upon their arrival in Siena, the Byzantine relics of Santa Maria della Scala do not appear to have been immediately re-encased in western containers. The earliest surviving reliquaries of local manufacture that can unambiguously be associated with the Byzantine holy tokens date from the 15th century: the bust reliquaries of St Cristina, St Antony the Abbot, and St Stephen were most likely made in Siena in the early decades of the quattrocento.⁷⁸ The arm reliquary of St Blaise, which is dated and signed by the artist Goro di Ser Neroccio, was commissioned by the hospital rector Giovanni di Francesco Buzzichelli in 1437.⁷⁹ Finally, the relic of the holy nail, which attracted particularly intense devotion in medieval and renaissance Siena, was enshrined in a new silver and enamelled tabernacle in 1453.⁸⁰

Although it is conceivable that other reliquaries might have been manufactured in Siena at an earlier date for the preservation of individual relics of the hospital, none have survived, and no explicit documentary evidence exists to support this hypothesis. It is therefore also possible that the relics were displayed inside their Byzantine containers on the day of the Annunciation. The more sizeable tokens may have been elevated individually, as Macchi speculates about the *pignora* of the Virgin. In his account of the re-invention of the Marian relics in the 18th century, he submits that, in the past, the veil and girdle used to be elevated one by one by the bishop, who held them up with the aid of wooden, metal studded sticks (*mazzette*), which have since been lost (fig. 14).⁸¹ The smaller relics within the hospital collection, particularly the passion relics, are instead likely to have been presented to the congregation as a group, inside a casket. A record from 1361,

77. This has also been remarked by J. SHEPARD, *Imperial Constantinople: Relics, Palaiologan Emperors, and the Resilience of the Exemplary Centre*, in *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean World after 1150*, ed. J. HARRIS, C. HOLMES and E. RUSSELL, Oxford 2012, p. 61-92, at 78-79.

78. *Loro di Siena* (cited in n. 5), p. 148-150 and GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 241-243, date the reliquaries to the early 15th century and to 1430s respectively. Van Os previously attributed the bust-reliquaries to Vecchietta: VAN OS, *Vecchietta* (cited in n. 28), p. 10-11.

79. The reliquary has survived, as has the original document recording its payment: *Loro di Siena* (cited in n. 5), cat. 13, p. 132-33; GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 147 and p. 420, n. 132, for the transcription of the payment record.

80. Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 521, carta 461, published in GALLAVOTTI CAVALLERO, *Lo spedale* (cited in n. 4), p. 428, n. 334; and previously in BANCHI and BORGHESI, *Nuovi Documenti per la storia dell'arte senese*, Siena 1898, p. 181. Scholarship has long debated whether the reliquary within which the holy nail is presently preserved coincides with Antonio di Francesco's creation. For a summary of previous literature, see *Loro di Siena* (cited in n. 5), cat. 12, p. 130-131. Special provisions were made early on for the veneration and display of the holy nail: in 1379, the hospital commissioned a *pallium* to cover the relic when it was taken in procession; and, in 1384, it was decided that the holy nail should be placed before the cathedral relics when they were both taken in procession: Archivio di Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 120, fol. 77r-v.

81. Archivio Stato di Siena, *Ospedale* 120, fol. 397r-v, and fol. 411v-412r for drawings of the relics and their supports. See also MACCHI, *Origine dello Spedale* (cited in n. 21), D107, fol. 17v [modern numbering, pencil].

Droits numériques non obtenus.

Figure 14 - *Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala*, ASSi, 120, fol. 411v-412r (photo by the author, courtesy of Archivio di Stato di Siena. No further reproduction permitted).

for example, registers a payment made by the hospital to the artisan Bertino di Piero from Rouen for “a work for the relics”, which Giuseppe Cantelli has connected to a small, gilded iron casket that might have contained a selection of the Byzantine tokens.⁸² Whether exhibited individually or inside a casket, however, the holy relics would have been hardly visible from the piazza below the pulpit – at best, the faithful would have caught sight of the glittering jewels in the winter sun, or seen the glint of their gemstones. Nevertheless, the relics commanded the attention of the entire civic community and their pious devotion, provoking us to reflect on the key questions of this volume: the correlation between visibility, sacred presence and authority in the later middle ages, and the interactions between images, relics, and ecclesiastical spaces.

CONCLUSIONS: VISIBILITY AND PRESENCE

Late medieval audiences were accustomed to ritual viewing. The practice of the Elevation of the Host was introduced in the early 13th century, and ocular communion became a common substitute for the actual consumption of the Eucharist by the laity, at the same time as visionary experiences and mystical apparitions became more widespread throughout western Europe.⁸³ Relic devotion underwent significant changes, too: ritual ostension and visual contemplation replaced direct touching or kissing of relics; and transparent rock crystal reliquaries, which enabled the faithful to see – but not touch – the holy fragments therein, gained unprecedented popularity.⁸⁴

82. The casket measures, 40 × 12 × 19 cm, are discussed in *Loro di Siena* (cited in n. 5), cat. 16, p. 138-139.
83. For a useful summary of the theological and devotional reasons behind the introduction of the Elevation, see V. LORNE KENNEDY, *The Moment of Consecration and the Elevation of the Host*, *Mediaeval Studies* 6, 1944, p. 121-150. On the practice of the Elevation in response to a desire of seeing in the Middle Ages, see E. DUMOUTET, *Le désir de voir l'hostie et les origines de la dévotion au Saint Sacrement*, Paris 1926. On ocular communion, see also A. ELJENHOLM NICHOLS, *The Bread of Heaven: Foretaste or Foresight?*, in *The Iconography of Heaven*, ed. C. DAVIDSON, Kalamazoo 1994 (Early Drama, Art, and Music Reference Series 21), p. 40-68; C. WALKER BYNUM, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, Philadelphia 2007 (The Middle Ages Series), p. 86-90; G. WALTERS ADAMS, *Visions in Late Medieval England: Lay Spirituality and Sacred Glimpses of the Hidden Worlds of Faith*, Leiden/Boston 2007 (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 130), p. 151-152. Literature on the visionary cultures of late medieval Italy is vast. On Siena, see most recently L. DONKIN, *Following the Footsteps of Christ in Late Medieval Italy: Pietro Pettinaio's Vision of St Francis*, *Word & Image* 32/2, 2016, p. 163-180; and, with reference to imagery at Santa Maria della Scala, C. WARR, *Clothing, Charity, Salvation and Visionary Experience in Fifteenth-Century Siena*, *Art History* 27/2, 2004, p. 187-211.
84. The visibility of relics in the late middle ages has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years. For succinct but insightful introductions to the topic, see C. HAHN, *Strange beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204*, University Park 2012, p. 223-244; and M. BAGNOLI, *The Stuff of Heaven: Materials and Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries*, in *Treasures of Heaven. Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. M. BAGNOLI, H. A. KLEIN, and G. MANN, London 2010, p. 137-147.

In the majority of cases, however, these “rituals of seeing” did not imply direct, close-up observation, but distant and partial viewing. The laity witnessed the Elevation of the Host from the nave, at a substantial distance from the altar, while choir screens further obstructed their view. Transparent reliquaries often offered the beholder visual access to a relic’s silk wrapping, rather than to the actual holy token.⁸⁵ Similarly, when the consecrated host was taken in procession on the feast day of the Corpus Christi, the wafer itself would be scarcely visible to the faithful, who would more likely catch sight of its glittering monstrance in the distance, and relics’ ostensions were similarly removed from the space of the laity.⁸⁶

Such pervasiveness of partial and temporary visibility, ritual veiling, and highly regulated access to the holy in the late middle ages has alternatively been explained as a means of social control, instrumental to the increased role of the Church as intermediary between the faithful and the divine; or in connection with Christian notions of revelation, which admits an ambivalent understanding of the visual world as both the trigger to inner vision (and thus the point of access to the divine), and a veil that hampers the faithful’s vision of God.⁸⁷ The modes of storage and display of the Byzantine relics in Siena might perhaps be understood in this perspective. After all, the active engagement of the political authorities and of the bishop of Siena in the liturgy of the Annunciation ensured a mediated access to the holy, while the reduced visibility of the relics by the beholders during the ceremonies, and their inaccessibility in the chapel where they were preserved and venerated throughout the year, may have communicated the intrinsic inability of physical sight to comprehend divine reality, and thus the need for the faithful to employ inner vision to access God.

85. M. BAGNOLI, Dressing the Relics: some Thoughts on the Custom of Relic Wrapping in Medieval Christianity, in *Matter of Faith* (cited in n. 2), p. 100-109, with insightful observations on the broader topic of seeing and believing in the Middle Ages.
86. The standard reference work on the feast of the Corpus Christi is M. RUBIN, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge MA/New York 1991. On the celebrations held on this occasion in Siena in the 14th century, with extensive bibliographic references, see M. ISRAËLS, Altars on the Street: the Wool Guild, the Carmelites and the Feast of Corpus Domini in Siena (1356-1456), *Renaissance Studies* 20/2, 2006, p. 180-200. On monstrances and issues of visibility, see G. J. SNOEK, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: a Process of Mutual Interaction*, Leiden / New York 1995 (Studies in the History of Christian Thought 63), p. 283-290.
87. On the relationship between ritual veiling and medieval notions of revelation see, amongst others, N. ZCHOMELIDSE, The Aura of the Numinous and Its Reproduction: Medieval Paintings of the Savior in Rome and Latium, *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 55, 2010, p. 221-263; V. M. SCHMIDT, Curtains, “Revelatio”, and Pictorial Reality in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy, in *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing. Textiles and Their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. K. RUDY and B. BAERT, Turnhout 2007, p. 191-213. A proficient discussion of the relationship between sight and inner vision in medieval times is S. CONKLIN AKBARI, *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory*, Toronto 2004. See also P. HILLS, Titian’s Veils, *Art History* 29/5, 2006, p. 771-795; P. HILLS, Lorenzo Lotto’s Shrouds and Veils, *Artibus et Historiae* 68/34, 2013, p. 9-28.

However, as Beth Williamson has compellingly observed, to engage with an image or object that is partially, or temporarily, or conditionally visible, does not necessarily, or exclusively, stimulate the beholder to see through that object to enter the realm of inner contemplation. Rather, partial visibility pertinaciously holds the attention of viewers and directs their gaze precisely to the boundary between what is *in* and what is *out* of sight – between what is visible and what is invisible – and thus incites them to apprehend the mysterious enmeshment between sensory and sacred reality.⁸⁸

In addition, as John Mack noted, small things possess a particular radiance. Barely or only partly visible, minute artefacts become inscrutable, arcane – and therefore, charged with the particular power that comes from secrecy.⁸⁹ The enshrinement and ritual ostension of relics in the Middle Ages often capitalised on the potency of smallness, enframing diminutive artefacts in large-scale and visually opulent reliquaries and architectural settings that did not compensate, but rather emphasise the invisibility of the relics therein.⁹⁰ This was also the case in Siena. On the day of the Annunciation, the Byzantine relics of Santa Maria della Scala represented the almost invisible core of an otherwise exuberant visual spectacle that entailed processions, musical performances, and sculptural, architectural and painterly decorations. The rest of the year, the treasury was concealed from view inside a sumptuously decorated chapel that existed for the purpose of their cult, and yet hid them away, making them inaccessible. In both cases, the sophisticated liturgical and artistic choreography did not obviate the problem of the visual irrelevance and limited visibility of the relics. Rather, it emphasised and conferred meaning on it. The rituals entailed a suspension of ordinary time, and activated the cathedral and hospital façades as mechanisms of presentation: devices that conveyed the sacredness of the relics on display and alerted the beholders to the extra-ordinary nature of the spectacle they witnessed. Such elaborate ceremonies and artistic trappings, as Megan Holmes has argued in relation to miraculous images in renaissance Florence, sensorially and conceptually mediated the interaction between viewers and relics, making the latter accessible, but also communicating their extraordinary status by means of distancing mechanisms.⁹¹ Furthermore, they presented the Sienese beholders with a set of visual and ritual cues that connected their current viewing experience with other familiar civic spectacles and religious sites in Siena – most prominently, the imagery in the cathedral, the rituals of the Assumption, and possibly, the ceremonies of the installation of other prominent artefacts in Siena, such as Duccio's *Maestà* a few decades earlier – thus providing them with specific guidelines on how to engage with and unravel what they saw.

88. B. WILLIAMSON, *Sensory Experience in Medieval Devotion: Sound and Vision, Invisibility and Silence*, *Speculum* 88/1, 2013, p. 1-43.

89. J. MACK, *The Art of Small Things*, London 2007, p. 31 and p. 119.

90. For an overall appraisal of the relationship between relics and reliquaries, a very lively topic in medieval studies, see C. HAHN, *What do Reliquaries do for Relics?*, *Numen* 57, 2010, p. 284-316.

91. M. HOLMES, *Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence*, *Art History* 34/3, 2011, p. 433-465, at 456-457; and her longer study EAD., *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, New Haven 2013.

At the heart of this elaborate cultic and visual enshrinement, the Byzantine relics simultaneously attracted and eluded the gaze of beholders. Physically present and yet too far and too small to be fully gauged, they ceased to be mere material objects that had to be seen, and became embodied manifestations of the divine – suspended at the threshold between materiality and immateriality, desire to see and visual opacity, human fabrication and divine presence. Liturgy, its elaborate artistic staging, and the expectant gaze of the beholders gave the relics agency, transforming them from passive objects of observation into active sites of divine intervention. Thus activated, the relics could in turn validate the triumphant vision of social harmony and heavenly protection represented on the façade of the hospital, and the orderly vision of heavenly intercession presented in the chapel of the relics, and in Vecchietta's sacristy and painted cupboard. Hardly visible although in plain sight, they reminded the Siense community of the mysterious contiguity between ordinary life and divine workings, and they reassured them that the saving power of God was indeed at work in their city, hidden – yet in full view.

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