

Johannes Tripps

*Giotto and the Year 1304. On the dating of the Franciscan panel in the Louvre in Paris*



Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00009247>

## Giotto and the Year 1304.

### On the dating of the Franciscan panel in the Louvre in Paris

For Helga Kaiser-Minn on her 80th birthday

Translated by Patricia Smith

Around 1300, Giotto painted the *Conferring of the Stigmata on St. Francis* for San Francesco in Pisa. Here, an unusual feature emerges: The scene of the stigmatization is extracted from the usual cycles with the Vita and becomes a single theme. In this panel Giotto creates a variation of his composition developed in Assisi, making it more focused on the conferment of the stigmata from Christ to St. Francis, because it lacks the presence of Brother Leo.<sup>1</sup> The three predella scenes depict *The Dream of Innocent III*, *The Approval of the Franciscan Rule*, and *The Sermon to the Birds*. This scene from Innocent III's dream, in which Peter, instead of Francis, stands behind the pope's bed, is repeated for the first time in one of the panels of the sacristy cabinet in Santa Croce in Florence by Taddeo Gaddi, which was created shortly after 1335.<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1568, Giorgio Vasari saw the close relationship to the frescoes above the tomb of St. Francis in the lower church in Assisi and placed

the Pisan altarpiece at the time of Giotto's return from Assisi to Florence.<sup>3</sup> Like Vasari, Zöschg and Schwarz place the panel between the frescoes in Padua and Giotto's stay in Assisi, i.e., in the second half of 1307 or the first half of 1308, in any case before the Magdalene frescoes in the lower church.<sup>4</sup>

In 2010, Chiara Frugoni examined the historical context: She observed that the breaking column in the subsidiary scene of *The Dream of Innocent III* likely refers to the conflict between Boniface VIII and the powerful Colonna cardinals which erupted in May 1297. Earlier in the 1290s, a column had served as a positive rebus for the Colonna in the Saint Francis Cycle in the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi, alluding to the family's name and their coat of arms. Now the breaking column, cracking violently against the scene's border, signaled the Colonna's downfall. Frugoni's reading also provides a convincing explanation for the second anomaly in the

1 MIKLÓS BOSKOVITS, "Giotto: un artista poco conosciuto?", *Giotto: Bilancio critico di sessant'anni di studi e ricerche*, Firenze: Galleria dell'Accademia, 5 June–30 September 2000, ed. Angelo Tartuferi (Giunti editore, 2000), 82.

2 ANETTE KRANZ, CORNELIA SYRE, AND ULRIKE FISCHER. "Zwei Tafeln eines Sakristeischanks aus Santa Croce in Florenz, c. 1335–40", *Florentiner Malerei: Alte Pinakothek. Die Gemälde des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Andreas Schumacher, Annette Kranz, and Annette Hoyer. (Deutscher Kunstverlag 2017), 4. Taddeo Gaddi, 134–169.

3 GIORGIO VASARI, *Das Leben des Cimabue, des Giotto und des Pietro Cavallini*,

ed. Fabian Jonietz, trans. Victoria Lorini. (Wagenbach Klaus GmbH 2019), 66–68. Vasari no longer saw it as an altarpiece, but as hanging on a pillar next to the main altar of the Franciscan church. The coats of arms on the frame are those of the Cinquini family, who owned the left side choir chapel in San Francesco. Carl Brandon Strehlke, "Francis of Assisi: His culture, his cult and his basilica", *The Treasury of Saint Francis of Assisi*, ed. Giovanni Morello and Lawrence B. Kanter (Mondadori Electa 1999), 29, 42. In 1786, following the secularization of the convent, the painting was given to the Augustinians of San Nicola and finally to the Camposanto Monumentale in 1810; it was removed from there in 1812 and transferred to the Louvre in Paris in 1813 (Élisabeth

Ravaud, "La stigmatisation de saint François d'Assise", *Giotto e compagni*, 3 [exh. cat. Paris, Louvre, 18 April – 15 July 2013], ed. Dominique Thiébaud, [Louvre Éditions 2013], 76). For the idea that the Pisan panel was never an altarpiece despite its predella, see: Donal Cooper, "Redefining the Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy: Giotto's Stigmatization of Saint Francis and its Pisan Context", *Art History*, vol. 36 (Oxford University Press 2013), 686–713.

4 MICHAEL VIKTOR SCHWARZ, IN COLLAB. WITH MICHAELA ZÖSCHG, *Giottus Pictor, Vol. II: Giottos Werke*, (Böhlau Verlag 2008), 404.

Louvre *Dream*: Saint Peter's appearance beside Pope Innocent (like the breaking column, this detail is absent from the version in the Upper Church). On the Louvre panel, Peter's presence underlines the apostolic basis of papal authority, and is consistent with Pope Boniface's own emphasis on Petrine absolutism.

According to this reading, the Louvre *Stigmatization* was painted after the rebellion of the Colonna in 1297, although probably not long afterwards given the topicality of the iconography devised for *The Dream of Innocent III*. The column motif would have made little sense once the crusade against the Colonna was suspended following Boniface's death in 1303 (an effective *terminus ante quem* for the painting).<sup>5</sup> This would mean that the frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua would date back even earlier.

Linda Pisani came to a similar conclusion with her critical analysis based on a comparison with works by Giotto from c. 1300 and their ornamental decoration techniques. Here she draws primarily on the *Badia Polyptych* of the Badia Fiorentina, the *Maestà* of Chiesa di Ognissanti (both of which are now in the Uffizi in Florence), and the *Madonna* of San Giorgio alla Costa.<sup>6</sup> She found the facial features, including the depiction of the seraph's hair, on the crucifix in the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini and on the crucifix in Santa Maria Novella in Florence.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, the question remains as to what triggered the elevation of the bestowal of the stigmata to an independent theme in altarpieces that

follow Giotto's Pisan altarpiece down to the last detail and hardly differ in composition or formal language. Even in the devotional pictures done in *vetro d'orato e graffito*, the theme recurs in small format, as the examples in the Museo del Sacro Convento di Assisi and the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence testify.<sup>8</sup> The Pisan image remains binding for the depiction of the bestowal of the stigmata until the early Renaissance, because Sassetta also faithfully follows Giotto's version, as we shall see. The question is *why*?

The most faithful reproduction is the panel from Borgo San Sepolcro by Giotto's most trusted pupil Taddeo Gaddi (Florence, doc. between 1327 and 1366). It would seem, then, that the friars of Borgo San Sepolcro were so impressed with Giotto's Pisan panel that they requested a faithful copy from Taddeo (Harvard, Fogg Art Museum).<sup>9</sup> For it was Taddeo who, among Giotto's disciples, reproduced that artistic language of the great master most perfectly, dedicated to the realism coined by Giotto in concordance with the Superiors of the Mother Church of the Order in Assisi. "*Il quale Taddeo ..., dopo la morte di Giotto – il quale l'aveva tenuto a battesimo e ... era stato suo maestro ventiquattro anni ... – essendo rimasto nella pittura per giudizio e per ingegno fra i primi dell'arte e maggiore di tutti i suoi condiscipoli*", according to Vasari 1568.<sup>10</sup>

The altarpiece now at the Fogg Art Museum is in such condition that no trace of the predella remains, and the wooden support was replaced in modern times. It certainly followed the Pisan

5 CHIARA FRUGONI, "La colonna spezzata", *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, 102, (Einaudi 2010), 79–82; Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate. Una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto*, (Einaudi 2010), 160, 182, 210–216, 222–224.

6 LINDA PISANI, "La stigmatisation de saint François d'Assise", *Giotto e compagni*, (exh. cat. contrib. Paris, Louvre, 18 April–15 July 2013), ed. Dominique Thiébaud, (Louvre Éditions 2013), 83–84.

8 MAGNOLIA SCUDIERI, "Artista fiorentino giottesco: San Francesco riceve le stimmate, 1370 ca., Vetro graffito e dipinto, 33,2 × 30,5 cm (Firenze, Museo Nazionale del Bargello)", *Giotto: Bilancio critico di sessant'anni di studi e ricerche*, Firenze: Galleria dell'Accademia, 5 June–30 September 2000, ed. Angelo Tartuferi, (Giunti editore, 2000), 221–223; Cristina De Benedictis, *Devozione e Produzione artistica in Umbria: Vetri dorati dipinti e graffiti del XIV e XV secolo* (Edifir 2010), 64–65.

9 JOHANNES TRIPPS, "Taddeo Gaddi e Niccolo di Pietro Gerini nel convento di San Francesco a Pisa: sulle orme di un cenacolo perduto", *Predella: Primitivi pisani fuori contesto*, ed. Linda Pisani, (Felici editore, 2010), 105–113.

10 JOHANNES TRIPPS, commentary on "Die Vita des Taddeo Gaddi", in: Giorgio Vasari, *Das Leben des Taddeo Gaddi, Agnolo Gaddi, Buffalmacco, Orcagna, Spinello Aretino und Lorenzo Monaco*, trans. Vittoria Lorini, (Wagenbach Klaus GmbH 2015), 11–16.

7 Ibid. 84.



model and thus presented three episodes: Innocent III's vision, Innocent III's confirmation of the Franciscan rule, and St. Francis' sermon to the birds.

The great esteem the Franciscans had for Giotto's godson and his interpretations in the artistic language of his godfather, is evidenced again by Vasari (1568): "*In Casentino nella chiesa del Sasso della Vernia dipinse la cappella dove S. Francesco ricevette le stimmate...*"<sup>11</sup>

Among Taddeo's works is one that gives us a possible *terminus post quem* for the dating of the Pisa panel (Paris, Louvre): the monumental decoration of the west wall of the refectory of Santa Croce in Florence (c. 1345, 11.20 × 11.70 m). A giant *lignum vitae* inspired by the eponymous pamphlet by Bonaventure of Bagnoreggio serves as the main theme. On the upper left we see the scene of the conferring of the stigmata, based on the model created by Giotto in Pisa. At the foot of the *lignum* are Saint John and the Virgin supported by the three Marys lamenting on the left. This is followed by St. Francis kneeling embracing the cross. St. Bonaventure sits to the right writing his vision on a scroll. Behind St. Francis the commissioner, wearing a tunic of the Franciscan Third Order, stands in the act of prayer: Mona Vaggia Manfredi, the wife of Filippo Manfredi, who died on November 10, 1345. Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Dominic and Saint Louis of Toulouse appear on the right.<sup>12</sup>

At first the presence of the Dominican saint is surprising, but it should be kept in mind, that it

was Pope Benedict XI of the Order of Preachers who instituted the feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis in 1304<sup>13</sup>, as reported by Luke Wadding in his *Annales*. This suggests that Giotto's Pisan altarpiece was executed shortly after 1304. In 1337, at the time of Benedict XII, the General Chapter, celebrated in Cahors, imposed the celebration of the feast throughout the order and asked the Minister General, Gerald of Oddone, to write the liturgical texts.<sup>14</sup> Here we also have the fact that the theme of Francis receiving the stigmata has been elevated to the central image of an altarpiece. The stylistic features, which date the altarpiece to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, would therefore have the year 1304 as its basis. It may further be noted how Giotto, in concordance with the Franciscan order, reached some sort of ideal formulation there for the depiction of the conferment of the stigmata on St. Francis, and it almost assumed the status of an icon for the Franciscan order becoming so inescapable that it was still copied at the time of Sassetta's Borgo San Sepolcro polyptych (1437–1444), in which Giotto's composition reappears almost unchanged.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the Pisan panel forms the prototype on which all further depictions of the theme were based is certainly due to the fact that San Francesco in Pisa had been the seat of the Inquisition for the whole of Tuscany since 1254 and thus Giotto provided the prototype for the depiction of the new feast.<sup>16</sup>

11 Ibid. 11–16.

12 ALESSANDRO SIMBENI, "Gli affreschi di Taddeo Gaddi nel refettorio: programma, committenza e datazione, con una postilla sulla diffusione del modello iconografico del *Lignum vitae* in Catalogna", *Santa Croce, Oltre le apparenze*, ed. Andrea De Marchi and Giacomo Piraz, (Gli Ori 2011), 113–142.

13 LUKE WADDING, *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum a s. Francisco Institutorum, Tomus VI*, (1648), 1301–1322, third ed., Joseph Maria Fonseca, (Ad claras aquas, 1931) 44. I would like to thank my colleague Bernd Schmies,

Münster, most sincerely for researching and checking the source, which was known to me only from hearsay. Filippo Sedda, on the other hand, claims it is a misleading legend that it was Pope Benedict XI, of the Order of Preachers, who instituted the feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis in 1304. In truth, the feast was instituted by the 1337 chapter of the Minorites at the time of Pope Benedict XII; see: "Introduction", *Franciscus liturgicus. Editio fontium saeculi XIII*, ed. Filippo Sedda, (Editrici francescane, 2015), 9–34.

14 Sedda 2015, 28, no. 53.

15 KLAUS KRÜGER, *Der frühe Bildkult des Franziskus in Italien: Gestalt- und Funktionswandel des Tafelbildes im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*, (Gebr. Mann Verlag 1992), 178–185; Donal Cooper, "The Franciscan genesis of Sassetta's altarpiece", *Sassetta, The Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece*, ed. Machtelt Israëls, vol. 1 (Villa I Tatti, 2009), 285–303; Rachel Billinge, "The Stigmatization of Saint Francis", *ibidem*, vol. 2, 505–510.

16 MARIANO D'ALATRI, *L'inquisizione francescana nell'Italia centrale nel sec. XIII*. *Collectana Franciscana*, (Roma 1952 vol. 22), 225–250; (vol. 23, 1953), 51–165.