

Religious Life and Visual Authority: Library Decoration among Mendicant Observant Orders

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Introduction

Due to extensive renovation and changes in use, many friaries restored or intentionally built during the fifteenth century in order to house Observant mendicant communities have been heavily altered over the centuries. Despite this, traces of painted and sculpted ornamentation can still be found in many cloisters, chapter houses, and friars' cells, testifying to a well-established use of images among Observant communities that extended far beyond the boundaries of their churches. Compared to the churches, the monasteries were primarily (but not exclusively) intended to be used and lived in by the friars, and their decoration may provide evidence of the religious communities' self-identity in a way plausibly different from that shown by the art produced for their churches.

Well before the growth of the Observant reform movements in the early fifteenth century, cloisters, chapter houses and refectories of mendicant houses had been traditionally decorated with painted and sculpted images. Along the secluded walls of a cloister, it was not unusual to find narratives, often unfolding the life of the order's founder. The authority of such a long tradition inside the Franciscan order, for instance, was carried on among Observant communities of the fifteenth century, as demonstrated by the cloister of Sant'Angelo, Milan, which had mural paintings depicting the life of St Francis as well as that of St Bernardino of Siena, who had

established the Observant community in Milan and had accepted the old church of Sant'Angelo for his fellow friars.¹

The cloister of San Marco, Florence, and that of Santa Maria di Castello, Genoa, both prominent Dominican Observant foundations, were decorated by a few images with a strong didactic meaning. Didactic is also the display of figures in the capitals of the loggia of Santa Oliva, Cori, a house for a community of friars belonging to the Augustinian Observant Congregation of Lombardy.² In a more monumental way, around 1515-1520, the cloister of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Gravedona, also belonging to members of the Augustinian Observant Congregation of Lombardy, received illustrations on the external walls with busts of Augustinian saints, the Redeemer, the Doctors of the Church, and the Evangelists.³

Like cloisters, chapter houses were spaces customarily used for a visual celebration of the order. Good examples are the Cappellone degli Spagnoli at Santa Maria Novella, Florence, and the chapter house at San Nicolò, Treviso, frescoed by Tommaso of Modena. Similarly, the Observant congregations decorated their chapter houses. Well known is Fra Angelico's *Crucifixion and Saints* at San Marco, Florence. The *Crucifix with the Virgin Mary and the saints John, Sebastian, Vincent Ferrer, Peter Martyr and Crispiano* that features in the chapter house of the Dominicans at Taggia, is perhaps a less known example. This painting by Giovanni Canavesio was paid for by a layman, Giovanni Arnaldi, who had a burial place in the cloister in front of the door leading to the chapter house.⁴ Because of their funerary function, cloisters and chapter houses were also sometimes accessible to the laity, but far less so were other communal areas of a friary.

1 The cycle, now lost, was started in 1486 and had to be frescoed 'cum istoria Sancti Francisci cum conformatibus domini nostri Iesu Christi, pure et sine curiositate', see Edoardo Rossetti, 'Una questione di famiglie. Lo sviluppo dell'Osservanza francescana e l'aristocrazia milanese', in: *Fratres de familia. Gli insediamenti dell'Osservanza minoritica nella penisola italiana (sec. XIV-XV)*, ed. Letizia Pellegrini and Gian Maria Varanini, Quaderni di Storia Religiosa, 18 (Caselle di Sommacampagna (Verona): Cierre, 2011), 101-165, at 123-127.

2 Fabrizio Biferali, *Ambrogio Massari, Guillaume d'Estouteville e il chiostro figurato di Sant'Oliva a Cori* (Tolentino: Centro Studi Agostino Trapè, 2002).

3 Alessandro Rovetta, 'S. Maria delle Grazie a Gravedona e la cultura osservante nell'Alto Lario', *Arte Lombarda* 76/77 (1986), 89-100, at 97-98 and footnote 27 at 100.

4 Presumably at the same date Canavesio executed the *Crucifix with St Dominic* in the refectory.

The monastic library

For reasons of feasibility, I have confined my comparative investigation to Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian reformed male communities, limiting the search for traces of visual 'authority' inside their religious houses to one specific space, functional and deeply symbolic at the same time: the monastic library. As we shall see, during the fifteenth century the architectural features of libraries developed much more substantially than those of cloisters, chapter houses and refectories. Consequently, a new imagery might also have been purposely fashioned for them.

For monastic communities to possess and store books was a necessity since the time of St Benedict's *Rule*.⁵ Famous is the monastic proverb 'claustrum sine armario est quasi castrum sine armamentario' ('a cloister without a book-case is as a castle without an arsenal').⁶ In a broader sense, the monastic library coincides with the collection of books housed in the monastery itself. Apart from those used in the liturgy, books were read aloud in the refectory, or individually for personal studying. According to their specific use, books could be stored in different ways and places. Choir books, for instance, were likely to be kept in the sacristy.

More and more medieval libraries of the mendicant orders (thirteenth to fifteenth century) became 'reference libraries' for communal usage.⁷ Yet, the location and actual appearance of these reference libraries is not easy to assess, as *libraria* and *armarium* could either have been a cupboard or a room of variable size.⁸

5 See Diana Gisolfi and Staale Sinding-Larsen, *The Rule, the Bible and the Council, the Library of the Benedictine Abbey at Praglia* (Seattle: Published by College Art Association in association with University of Washington Press, 1998).

6 See Hubert Silvestre, 'A propos du dicton «claustrum sine armario est quasi castrum sine armamentario»', *Medieval Studies* 26 (1964), 351-353.

7 Donatella Nebbiai, 'Le biblioteche degli ordini mendicanti (secc. XIII-XV)', in: *Studio e studia: le scuole degli ordini mendicanti tra XIII e XIV secolo*, Atti del XXIX Convegno di Assisi (Assisi, 11-13 ottobre 2001) (Spoleto: CISAM, 2002), 221-270. With regard to usage and storage of books, as was established by the legislation of both Dominican and Franciscan orders, see Pietro Maranesi, 'La normativa degli Ordini mendicanti sui libri in convento', in: *Libri, biblioteche e letture dei frati mendicanti (secoli XIII-XIV)*, Atti del XXXII Convegno internazionale (Assisi, 7-9 ottobre 2004) (Spoleto: CISAM, 2005), 171-263.

8 Expressions to be found in documents such as *libraria conventus* (by the Dominicans of Cividale del Friuli), or *armarius esterior* (by the Franciscans of Bologna) as opposed to *armarium interius* (the first term referring to the books that could be given on loan) or again *libraria publica* as opposed to *secreta* in the inventory by Giovanni of Iolo from 1381 of the library of the Sacro

In his 1972 book entitled *The Architecture of the Monastic library in Italy 1300-1600*, James O’Gorman linked the ‘real flowering of monastic libraries and library architecture in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries’ to ‘Observantisme’,⁹ dividing the plan-design of Renaissance libraries into two categories, the ‘basilica type’, with a nave and two aisles separated by columns, and the ‘hall type’. With regard to the first category, O’Gorman did pay special attention to the library in the friary of San Marco, Florence, a center of Dominican Observant reform, rebuilt after 1438. The library, that opens to the corridor of the dormitory on the first floor of the second cloister, was presumably designed by Michelozzo and completed by 1444, but it was rebuilt after an earthquake in the 1450s. As O’Gorman noted, here the library is ‘no longer an insignificant area as it is in the St. Gall exemplar. In plan, internal spatial organization, and external mass, it has become one of the most important parts of the architectural complex. In fact, it is second only to the church itself.’¹⁰ The San Marco library can be considered a prototype for later Renaissance monastic libraries, including the Malatestiana,¹¹ Cesena, and that of San Domenico,¹² Bologna.

The records of the annual provincial chapters of the Franciscan Observants of the province of Bologna, the most complete series of acts of this sort to have come to us, show that between 1467 and 1522 libraries are mentioned on several occasions, as they were in this period under construction in Parma, Forlì, Castellarquato, Modena, Mirandola and Cotignola. In 1467 the friars planned to adapt as a library the ‘old refectory’ in their friary in Parma,¹³ while a few years later, in 1471, they expressed the intention to enlarge the same library, by taking over either two

Convento, Assisi, do refer to the access and the consultation of the books, but not to the actual space where the books were kept. The word *armarium* is used more often than *libraria*.

9 James F. O’Gorman, *The Architecture of the Monastic Library in Italy 1300-1600* (New York: New York University Press for the College Art Association of America, 1972), 10.

10 Ibidem, 4.

11 Lorenzo Baldacchini, *La biblioteca Malatestiana di Cesena* (Rome: Editalia, 1992).

12 Venturino Alce, *La biblioteca di S. Domenico in Bologna* (Florence: Olschki, 1961).

13 *Atti Ufficiali della Provincia osservante francescana di Bologna*, ed. Fr. Diego Guidarini, Fr. Bruno Monfardini, and Fr. Giambattista Montorsi, 4 Vols. (Bologna: Edizioni Francescane, 2003) I, 14: ‘Quod libraria Parme ampliatur, vel fiat in refectorio veteri secundum quod videbitur p. Vicario cum discretis loci’; it was also stated ‘Quod libraria Forliiij fiat in loco convenientiori pro dispositione p. Vicarii cum discretis loci et aliquibus de locis proximioribus’.

or three cells from each side of the dormitory.¹⁴ In 1502, the friars allowed the enlargement of the Parma library towards the small garden.¹⁵ Unfortunately, nothing more is known of this library, and nothing has survived as the friary was demolished in 1546.

As very rarely friars of the same Observant province of Bologna made declarations about images and building decoration, it is remarkable that in 1513 they prohibited excessive and extravagant painted decoration inside their libraries. Nevertheless, they did allow a degree of discretionary freedom to the provincial vicars: 'In the first place it has been determined that the libraries henceforth are not painted, nor should other unnecessary and extravagant things be done, except perhaps at the head or in the middle and with the consent of the father vicar provincial'.¹⁶ I am unaware of statements of this sort by any other Observant congregation or religious order for the fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

During the fifteenth century the Franciscan monastic library was fundamentally a communal reference library (often located on the first floor of the house), used by the community and in some instances by lay scholars or humanists. Where a *studium* existed, the access and the use of the library was intertwined with its activities. As a matter of fact, the word *studium* itself in contemporary fifteenth-century documents may sometimes indicate the library as the physical space where books were stored, read and perhaps copied. If and how such rooms may have been decorated has remained an almost unaddressed question.

The Dominicans

The white plastered walls and vaulted ceiling of the library at San Marco, Florence, were pointed out as unusual by O'Gorman, who noticed that the suitable color for a library was green. The original green color has sur-

14 Ibidem, I, 19: 'Item elongetur libraria Parme versus dormitorium capiendū duas vet tres cellas ex utroque latere ipsius dormitorij elevando solarium totius dormitorij veteris ad equalitatem novi dormitorij, dummo Petrus Maria edificet'.

15 Ibidem, I, 48: 'Item concessum est quod Parme possit ampliare locus librarie versus orticellum, si modo fratres habent modum...'

16 Ibidem, I, 58: 'Primo determinatum est quod bibliotheca de cetero non pingantur, nec alia superflua et curiosa fiant, nisi forte in capite et medio bibliotheca et de consensu p. Vicarii provincie'.

vived in the Malatestiana library in Cesena, and that of San Domenico in Bologna. Yet, recent restoration has demonstrated that walls and ceiling of the library at San Marco were also painted in green.¹⁷ Green being a color that, according to Marsilio Ficino ‘comforts the sight more than any other and cheers it up in a healthy manner’.¹⁸

The library of another prominent Dominican observant foundation, that of Santa Maria di Castello, Genoa, seems to show a high degree of simplicity, being mainly finished with white plaster, with only the ribs of the vaulted ceiling and the moulding of the triple window emphasized by a striped black and white pattern enriched by a simple gothic leafy decoration. A radiating sun surrounds the central key stone on each bay of the ceiling. Being of the ‘hall’ type, the library was built together with the sacristy between 1445 and 1452, thanks to the financial support of the brothers Emanuele and Lionello Grimaldi Oliva.¹⁹ Such prestigious patronage is repeatedly stated by the coat of arms of the Grimaldi family painted on the carved corbels supporting the vaulting of the ceiling. The rather unassuming painted embellishment of the library was nevertheless part of a larger decoration program that encompasses the entire monastery. The presence of the library seems to have been visually announced on the ground floor of the first cloister where, above the door leading to the second cloister and the main staircase, was depicted *St Dominic inviting to silence*. With the right index finger on his mouth in a gesture of silence, and the discipline (a bunch of thin sticks for scourging) on the left, the saint is shown next to an open book, contextually inviting the friars to study. Further along, to the left side of the door leading from the upper loggia into the library’s vestibule, a monochrome depicts *Job, Solomon and David*, each unfolding an inscribed scroll. If indeed, because of the written words, the three Old Testament figures seem to indicate the caducity of

17 See Magnolia Scudieri, ‘La Biblioteca di San Marco dalle origini ad oggi’, in: *La Biblioteca di Michelozzo a San Marco tra recupero e scoperta*, ed. Magnolia Scudieri & Giovanna Rasario (Florence: Giunti, 2000), 9-43, at 24. Furthermore, on the symbolic meaning of the color green see Magnolia Scudieri & Michele Ciliberto, ‘Un’ipotesi per il verde’, in: *La Biblioteca di Michelozzo a San Marco tra recupero e scoperta*, ed. Magnolia Scudieri & Giovanna Rasario (Florence: Giunti, 2000), 45-48.

18 *Marsilii Ficini De vita libri tres* (Basel: apud Ioannes Bebelius, 1529), 84: ‘... color viridis visum prae caeteris foveat salubriterquae delectet’.

19 Costantino Gilardi O.P. & Sara Badano, *Genova. Santa Maria di Castello* (Genoa: Sagep, 2014), 9-10.

mankind,²⁰ they must be understood also in relationship with the close-by carved image of *St Jerome sitting in cathedra*, displayed on the architrave of the door. Jerome, clothed in his cardinal outfit, does not only stand for his position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but also shows his status as a scholar, engaging the brotherhood to devote itself to study and obtain knowledge in spite of the transience of worldly things. On the internal architrave of the library's door is a relief showing *St George defeating the dragon*, the patron saint of Genoa.

Even though in Genoa the library's walls were probably never painted green, this use is documented in 1572 by the Dominican scholar Serafino Razzi (1531-1613) for the libraries of three other Dominican houses, namely Sant'Andrea (San Domenico), Faenza, San Giovanni in Canale, Piacenza, and San Nicola, Imola. The library at Piacenza was 'con tre navi in volta, e tutta verde' ('with three vaulted naves, and all in green'),²¹ while the other two libraries are also recorded to have had an image of Thomas Aquinas *in cathedra*. Razzi stated that 'The library at Faenza, placed in a convenient place, that is in the middle of the dormitories, with vague paintings adorned, and with walls tinted with green, holds twenty-one benches on each side. And at one end you see a Saint Thomas reading in a chair, with this Latin verse above: 'To which the divine volumes give the name of angelic'.²² It is known that the decoration of this room was executed between 1508 and 1510. The library at Imola also had at the end of one wall a fresco depicting Thomas Aquinas *in cathedra* with a Latin *titulus* stating Thomas' superiority among doctors.²³ The date of this, now lost fresco is unknown. The use of green monochrome may have been a well-established practice to be found in cloisters, and perhaps even more

20 Ennio Poleggi, *Santa Maria di Castello e il romanico a Genova* (Genoa: Sagep 1973). The phylacteries shown by the characters read respectively: 'SIMUL IN PULVERE DORMIENT(UR) ET VERMES APERIENTUR EOS' (Job 21); 'MEMORARE NOVISSIMA TUA ET IN AETERNUM NON PECCABIS' (Ecclesiastes 7); '(ET) RELINQUENT ALIENIS DIVITIAS SUAS/ ET SEPULCHRA EORUM DOMUS ILLORUM (IN AETERNUM)' (Psalm 48: 11-12).

21 O'Gorman, *The Architecture*, 71, cat. 46.

22 Ibidem, 48, cat. 16: '[...] posta in luogo commodo, cioe' nel mezzo de dormitorij, con vaghe pitture adornata, e con pareti tinte di verde, tiene ventun banco per lato. Et intesta di lei si vede dipinto un san Tommaso in cattedra che legge, con questo verso latino sopra 'Cui dant angelicum divina volumina nomen'.'

23 Ibidem, 63, cat. 30: 'La libreria e xv banchi per lato, in capo di cui e un san Tommaso, con questo verso nella cattedra 'Inter Doctores gloria prima Thomas'.'

significantly, in secular study rooms. An example being the little 'alcove' created inside the so called 'Golden room' of Torrechiara castle, where are depicted Virgil, Terentius, Hercules and Samson. Yet, the iconography of these mendicant libraries was somehow new, and designed in reference to the specific use of the room.

The primacy granted to Thomas Aquinas in Dominican Observant libraries is confirmed in the friary at Taggia, a newly founded Dominican Observant house established in 1460. Here, between 1485 and 1487, the construction of a library built as a spacious room with an umbrella vaulted ceiling was started on the first floor of the cloister.²⁴ Focal point of the library is the *Vision of St Thomas Aquinas*, signed by the painter Ludovico Brea and dated 1495. The commission probably went to Brea because he had already worked for the same Dominican community, painting on behalf of the prior of Taggia the altarpiece for the high altar of the church, as well as several other altarpieces commissioned by lay patrons. A sense of trust in the painter, as well as an appreciation for his artistic qualities, must have guided the friars in their commission. Even though Thomas Aquinas is not *in cathedra*, but represented at the feet of a crucifix flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist, an inscription praises the theological accomplishments of the *doctor angelicus*. Coming from Christ are the words, written in gothic lettering, 'thoma bene scripsiisti de me' ('Thomas you have written well about me'),²⁵ with reference to the crucifix that in a vision spoke these words to the saint.²⁶

24 Massimo Bartoletti, *Il convento di San Domenico a Taggia*, (Genoa: Sagep, 1993). The phases of construction of this foundation are well documented. By 1479 the refectory and the north wing of the cloister's ground floor had been complete, and by 1482 the chapter house on the south wing had been constructed. The church itself was consecrated in 1490. Work was financed by lay patrons' bequests, as well as by some local municipalities which provided wood from their forests.

25 The Latin verb 'scripsisti' is misspelled with two i's.

26 Thomas' praying hands at the level of his heart correspond to the position of 'respectful conversation', as it is described in *De modo orandi* (*The modes of prayer*), a book written by a Dominican friar from Bologna at the end of the thirteenth century, in which a particular meaning is assigned to nine different bodily modes of prayer. This book was a source, for instance, to many of Fra Angelico's frescoes in San Marco, Florence: Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'Between Text and Image: The Prayer gesture of Saint Dominic', *History and Anthropology* 1 (1984), 127-162; William Hood, 'St. Dominic Manners of Praying: Gestures in Fra Angelico's Frescoes at S. Marco', *Art Bulletin* 68 (1986), 195-206.

Occupying the central lunette and a substantial portion of the wall below, this central image is surrounded by other lunettes around the room portraying beatified Dominicans. Even though these frescoes were not executed by Ludovico Brea, but by an assistant,²⁷ they develop a coherent iconography aimed to celebrate the Dominican order through its illustrious members, but not its saints, following a visual tradition the Friars Preachers had previously established in their chapter house at Treviso.²⁸ Noticeable is the lunette facing the *Vision of Thomas Aquinas*, in which the *Man of Sorrows* is flanked by Blessed Giovanni Dominici and Antonino Pierozzi, two Dominican friars, later cardinal and bishop respectively, who had strongly contributed to the Observant renewal of the order. They represent the contemporary achievement of the Dominican order's scholarly authority within its long and prestigious history.

The culmination of this scheme was reached at about 1480 with the decoration by Antonio of Fabriano of the library at San Domenico, Fabriano.²⁹ This old foundation too had joined the Observant reform in the fifteenth century. The library, a spacious rectangular room with a barn-like wooden ceiling, is located above the refectory. As a matter of fact, it was actually newly created in the fifteenth century, by dividing with a floor the height of the pre-existing refectory into two levels, therefore in size and plan the room was not strictly speaking a new Renaissance library. It was made suitable for the new function by the opening of matching windows on the facing long walls, and, above all, its purpose was made immediately recognizable via a new painted decoration. A large mural, occupying most of the wall at one end of the room, displays an extraordinary eulogy of the Dominican order, hierarchically organized around Christ and exhorting the friars to the mandate of preaching (**fig. 1**); a message clarified by the written words in capital lettering coming from Christ's mouth 'PREDICATE EVA(N)GELIUM OM(N)I CREATURE' ('Preach the Gospel to every creature'; Mark 16:15, **fig. 2**). Christ is seated on a rocky hill set in a landscape with a lake. Beneath the figure of Christ, in the painted

27 See Bartoletti, *Il convento*, 30.

28 Andrea Bellinelli, *Tempio di San Nicolò e Capitolo dei Domenicani Treviso* (Ponzano: Vialinello, 1998).

29 See Fabio Marcelli, 'Note biografiche e committenza', in: *Antonio da Fabriano eccentrico protagonista nel panorama artistico marchigiano*, ed. Bonita Cleri (Cinisello Balsamo (Milan): Pizzi, 1997), 31-47, at 40-44, as well as the catalogue entry at 136-138.

frame, a fragmentary inscription reads 'SEDEBAT IN MONTE IESU [...]BAT POPULUS' ('Christ sat on the mountain [and preach]ed to the people'), with reference to the image above. To the left and right, as if they were fulfilling Christ's mandate, St Thomas Aquinas and Blessed Albertus Magnus are portrayed as scholars in their study, deeply concerned with activities that are of primary importance for a successful preacher: Thomas is enumerating his argument with the gesture of the *computatio digitorum*, and Albertus is writing (fig. 3 and 4). Remarkable is the fact that the identity of Albertus Magnus was later altered into that of Blessed Costanzo of Fabriano, who had died in Fabriano in 1481, by deleting Albertus's name originally written in the frame below, and writing Costanzo's name on the border of the desk. A *maniculus* pointing to the new name was also added in the fresco. Costanzo of Fabriano had been a tireless Observant reformer of the Dominican order, who had also been prior of the friary at Fabriano in 1440 and 1467.³⁰ The *maniculus*, a *marginalium* frequently used by medieval scholars in manuscripts to point out a passage within a text, was added, together with the nearby inscription, by a hand far less skilled in painting than that of Antonio of Fabriano, perhaps a member of the Dominican community of Fabriano. Thus, here too, the link with a contemporary member of the order shows how the Dominicans were promoting the memory of Observant reformers.

Furthermore, two medallions, in the spandrel of the painted arches, contain the half figures of St Peter Martyr with the inscription 'PETRUS MARTIR DOCTOR ET VIRGO', and St Vincent Ferrer with the inscription 'DOCTOR VIRGO ET PREDICATOR'. Within two smaller medallions in the horizontal frieze above the arches are also the busts of two Dominican popes: Innocent V and Benedict XI.

Together with the many inscriptions, the large number of books depicted provide a clear indication of the room's function. The library was entered via a door on the wall facing the large mural, so that it was immediately visible to the friars coming in, but on the way out the brothers were also visually reminded of their literary duties by an image of St Dominic reading from a book, painted in a lunette above the door.

30 See Roberto Rusconi, 'Costanzo da Fabriano, beato', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 30 (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1984), 396-398.

The Augustinian Observant Congregation of Lombardy

Learning and studying had been central activities also among the Hermits of St Augustine.³¹ At their chapter meeting of 1324, held in Montpellier, it was recommended to the friars to keep the library/books of each cloister as if they were a treasure.³² In the wake of such recommendations, in the fifteenth century the presence of a reference library became customary as well in the houses of the Augustinian Observant Congregation of Lombardy, which originated in Crema in 1439 and promptly expanded into North and Central Italy.³³ From a collection of rules established by the general chapters of the Congregation held between 1450 and 1515, we are informed about the use and custody of books, including the fact that 'The friars cannot commute, sell or donate the books granted to them for their private use; the offenders are deprived of the granting of books for private use and can consult only those intended for common use in the library of the monastery where the books are chained'.³⁴

The Congregation of Lombardy offers a rather homogenous field of investigation and an exemplary opportunity for comparison with the other mendicant orders, as several of their libraries have survived, starting from

31 With the Constitutions of the General Chapter of Regensburg in 1290, the Hermits had already established rules for the acquisition, use and preservation of books, and each house had to have a library and a brother librarian; the topic is summarised by Federico Gallo, 'La biblioteca di S. Maria Incoronata in Milano', in: *Clastrum et armarium. Studi su alcune biblioteche ecclesiastiche italiane tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, ed. Edoardo Barbieri and Federico Gallo (Rome: Bulzoni, 2010), 61-133, at 66-67.

32 See Balbino Rano, 'Agostiniani', *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, I (Milan: Paoline, 1974), coll. 278-381, at 351-352.

33 Raffaella Seveso has discussed the decoration of the library at Brescia, stating that 'dopo l'insediamento della Congregazione Osservante nei singoli conventi riformati, uno dei primi interventi sia la costruzione proprio della Libreria. Questo avviene a Milano, presso S. Maria Incoronata, a Brescia, a Crema, a Cremona'. Raffaella Seveso, 'La biblioteca del convento bresciano decorata da Giovan Pietro da Cemmo', in: *Società, cultura, luoghi al tempo di Ambrogio da Calepio*, ed. Maria Mancaroni Zoppetti and Erminio Gennaro (Bergamo: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 2005), 311-331, at 325.

34 Gallo, 'La biblioteca di S. Maria Incoronata in Milano', 70-71: 'Non concedatur aliquis liber conventus ad usum privatum alicuius fratris nec cum alio libro commutetur aut vendatur vel donetur. Nec frater aliquis concessos ad usum suum similiter vendere presumere aut donare vel commutare sine licentia prioris Congregationis et prioris et capitulo conventus illius cuius liber ille. Contrafacientes usu illius libri privetur et ad usum comunem bibliotece conventus cuius est liber concatenetur.'

the well-known one of Santa Maria Inconronata at Milan, built in 1487.³⁵ Being of the basilica type, the library retains most of its fresco decoration, consisting of a sequence of lunettes housing medallions with portraits of illustrious members of the order, accompanied by their names, several series of scrolls with inscriptions on the aisles' walls, as well as a radiating sun with the monogram of Christ shining at the center of the vaulted ceiling of each of the nine bays. Entering the library (from the friary) the first pair of lunettes shows, for instance, Andrea Biglia (d. 1435),³⁶ and Paolo Veneto (d. 1428),³⁷ two members of the Augustinian order who had died not long before the foundation of the building. On the last bay we find the portrait of Alessandro Oliva of Sassoferrato (d. 1473),³⁸ the friar and later cardinal, who had codified the modalities of studies to be introduced in the Congregation of Lombardy. Maria Luisa Gatti Perer has suggested that originally an image of St Augustine may have been painted on the end-wall of the central nave, opposite to the library entrance. It is impossible to confirm this, as the wall was almost completely demolished to open a window. Notably, the library's walls were painted green.

In the friary of Sant'Agostino, Crema, the 'mother house' of the Observant Congregation of Lombardy,³⁹ the library was an almost independent building consisting of a rectangular room on the first floor of the cloister, with windows on the north and south walls. Following local fashion mainly to be found in secular palaces,⁴⁰ the room had a plafond with

35 Patron of the library had been the Augustinian Paolo of San Genesio. On the library see Maria Luisa Gatti Perer, 'Umanesimo a Milano. L'Osservanza agostiniana all'Inconronata', *Arte Lombarda* 53/54 (1980), 232-240, and Eadem, 'Novità sulla decorazione della Biblioteca di S. Maria Inconronata a Milano', *Arte Lombarda* 86/87 (1988), 195-234. See also Gallo, 'La biblioteca di S. Maria Inconronata in Milano', 75-80.

36 The image is accompanied by the inscription 'Magister Andreas de Bilis Mediolanensis doctor elegantissimus'.

37 The image is accompanied by the inscription 'Magister Paulus de Venetiis ... doctor profundissimus disputator'.

38 The image is accompanied by the inscription 'Magister Alexander de Saxoferato Sancte Susanne Presbiter cardinalis Doctor Theo (logiae?) Philosophus Academicus (?)'.

39 Chiara Corsetti, 'La libreria del Sant'Agostino di Crema', *Insula Fulcheria* 43 (2013), 261-272; EAdem, 'Biblioteche o no: la conservazione del patrimonio librario tra la Milano del Quattrocento e le case di Osservanza di Lombardia', *Percorsi Agostiniani* 7:14 (2014), 249-258.

40 See Lidia Ceserani Ermentini, *Tavolette rinascimentali. Un fenomeno di costume a Crema*, (Bergamo: Bolis, 1999); Paola Venturelli, 'Tavolette da soffitto a Crema: maestri, personaggi e qualche caso', in: *Rinascimento Cremasco. Arti, maestri e botteghe tra XV e XVI secolo*, ed. Paola Venturelli (Milan: Skira, 2015), 91-109.

painted wooden panels to be dated well into the fifteenth century.⁴¹ As noted by Carlo Piastrella, they do not depict only Augustinian saints, but also biblical scholars (*magistri sacrae pagine*), as well as other friars of the Augustinian order who had reached high ranks in the Church, and those who had obtained a particular distinction due to their intellectual qualities.⁴² Furthermore, in the early sixteenth century, the Venetian humanist Marcantonio Michiel recalls that in the same library 'el compartimento de verde, chiaro e scuro' ('the green, light and dark compartment') had been painted by Gian Pietro of Cemmo, the same painter known to have frescoed, at about 1507, the refectory.⁴³ The partition of different shades of green, presumably a sort of trompe-l'oeil decorative pattern that embellished the library, was therefore executed a few decades after the ceiling had been decorated, indicating that the room was revamped in the up to date fashion of the beginning of the new century.⁴⁴

With regard to its painted decoration, the library of San Barnaba, Brescia, is the most outstanding of all surviving libraries in the Augustinian Congregation of Lombardy.⁴⁵ Built in the 1470-80s, it is entirely frescoed on the walls. An inscription on the entrance wall, above the door, gives the year 1490, taken by scholars as the beginning of the phase of decoration undertaken by the painter Giovanni Pietro of Cemmo, who completed the work started some years earlier in green grisaille by a different painter, perhaps Apollonio of Calvisano.⁴⁶ I cannot analyze here in detail

41 Despite the collapse in 1792 of part of the roof, a substantial number of these panels has survived in situ.

42 Carlo Piastrella, 'Le tavolette da soffitto della biblioteca del convento di Sant'Agostino di Cremona', *Arte Lombarda* 146/147/148 (2006), 227-236, at 231.

43 *Notizia d'opere di disegno*, ed. Iacopo Morelli (Bassano, 1800), 55: 'In la Libreria *el compartimento de verde, chiaro e scuro*, fu dipinto dall'istesso'. Together with the refectory, the same artist plausibly decorated the cloisters and other parts of the friary.

44 Maria Luisa Fiorentini, Laura Radaelli, 'L'ex convento di S. Agostino', *Insula Fulcheria* 20 (1990), 9-49.

45 The house of San Barnaba had been overtaken by the Observant Congregation in 1456. The library consists of a large rectangular room located on the first floor of the building; see Gaetano Panazza, *Il convento agostiniano di San Barnaba a Brescia e gli affreschi della libreria* (Brescia: Ed. La Scuola, 1990), and Valerio Terraroli, 'Un grande cantiere pittorico di fine Quattrocento. La Libreria, le allegorie agostiniane e due pittori', in: *Il salone "da Cemmo" a Brescia. Dalla Libreria agostiniana alla sala concerti del Convento*, ed. Valerio Terraroli (San Zeno Naviglio: Grafos, 2015), 101-124.

46 See Mario Marubbi, 'Note in margine a un restauro: gli affreschi del refettorio di Sant'Agostino a Crema', *Insula Fulcheria* 11 (1989), 51-68.

the extremely complex iconography, but together with the authority of St Augustine, the celebration of the order through its illustrious members is a central theme. On one wall are depicted those friars who had made the Augustinian Hermits prominent because of their knowledge, on the opposite wall those who had done it due to their saintly life. The enterprise was interrupted presumably because of lack of funding, but the iconography must have been fully developed at the time work started in the 1480s.⁴⁷

The Franciscan Observants

The necessity of books among Franciscan Observant communities is documented since a very early stage of the reform movement.⁴⁸ Representative is the *scriptorium* established by Bernardino of Siena in the late 1420s in the friary at La Capriola, that Bernardino himself directed and supervised. There Bernardino wrote his texts and his own writing was copied by his collaborators. After Bernardino's death in 1444, his personal books, consisting mainly of his own work, remained in the Siena house, safely housed in a room especially constructed for this purpose called *libraria parvula*. It was built next to the cell Bernardino had used in his life time, even though in the friary already existed a library room.⁴⁹

47 Seveso, 'La biblioteca del convento bresciano', 325 and 330-331.

48 On the complexity of the production of Franciscan books see Nicoletta Giovè Marchioli, 'Scrivere (e leggere) il libro francescano', in: *Scriptoria e biblioteche nel basso medioevo (secoli XII-XV)* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2015), 179-211; the author has pointed out that 'Sarà il Quattrocento, sarà in particolare l'Osservanza a cambiare in qualche modo le cose e a creare, almeno in alcuni casi, un vincolo innegabile e forte, anzi una sovrapposizione evidente fra insediamenti francescani e luoghi di copia...', 188-189.

49 See Rossella De Pierro, 'Lo scriptorium di san Bernardino nel Convento dell'Osservanza a Siena', in: *In margine al progetto Codex. Aspetti di produzione e conservazione del patrimonio manoscritto in Toscana*, ed. Gabriella Pomaro (Pisa: Pacini, 2014), 29-105, at 30-31. The existence of a library is proven by the fact that in 1446, in order to make Bernardino's books available, the friars were given permission by the *Signoria* to move them into the library room, making sure they would be chained to the *plutei*. Subsequent to the enlargement of the friary, we know that in the 1490s the library room was on the first floor of the west side, above the refectory, but whether it had any sort of decoration is unknown. A room to store books, together with a scriptorium is also documented in the Observant cloister of Monteripido, Perugia, where Bernardino had established a *studium generale* between 1431 and 1436, but again we do not know where it was located. Furthermore, at Santa Maria delle Grazie at Monteprandone (Ascoli Piceno), Giacomo della Marca founded a conspicuous library of which we know the books' content, but nothing about where and how the manuscripts were housed. One page of the inventory of the late fifteenth-century library of the friary of San Bernardino, L'Aquila, has

In the 1480s the architect Francesco of Giorgio included a library among the requirements for a well-planned Franciscan Observant friary, together with cloisters, dormitories, guest houses, refectories, infirmaries, and other sorts of rooms needed for storage.⁵⁰ A frieze from the late 1470s with medallions depicting Franciscan saints and blessed interspersed with acanthus leaves, used to run around a room located on the first floor of the Franciscan Observant house of Santa Croce in Fossabanda at Pisa.⁵¹ Only the figures of St Francis, Anthony of Padua, Louis of Toulouse, Bonaventura of Bagnoregio and Bernardino of Siena are easily recognizable. The function of the room is not documented, but due to its location, size, shape, and kind of decoration one can speculate it to be the library. The frescoes have been attributed to Zanobi Machiavelli, a pupil of Benozzo Gozzoli who settled in Pisa circa 1472, and worked there until his death in 1479. It is no coincidence that Zanobi Machiavelli painted also two altarpieces for the church of Santa Croce in Fossabanda.⁵²

The foundation and decoration of the library of the Franciscan Observant house of San Bernardino, Verona, seems to be in open contrast with any requirements for simplicity. Patron of the library was Leonello Sagramoso, and construction was already on-going in 1496, while the fresco decoration, attributed hypothetically to Domenico Morone, is dated 1503.⁵³ The spacious rectangular room is entirely frescoed. A sort of *Sacra conversazione* features on the short wall opposite to the entrance door;

also survived (Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS I. H. 38, f. 1), but nothing is known about how and where books were stored.

50 Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Trattati di architettura ingegneria e arte militare*, ed. C. Maltese, 2 Vols. (Milan: Il polifilo, 1967) I, 236-239.

51 Licia Bertolini Campetti, 'Resti di affreschi nell'ex convento di S. Croce in Fossabanda', *Antichità pisane* 3 (1974), 25-28. On the church and friary see Angelo Eugenio Mecca, *Il convento di S. Croce in Fossabanda e l'Osservanza francescana a Pisa* (Pontedera (Pisa): C. L. D. Libri, 2011). The frescoes were detached and are now on display at the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa.

52 *Madonna and Child with Saint Francis, Anthony, a pope and Ranieri* (Pisa, Museo di San Matteo) and the *Coronation of the Virgin* (Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts).

53 For the history and decoration of this sumptuous room, see Alessandra Zamperini, 'Committenza aristocratica e iconografia francescana nella biblioteca di San Bernardino a Verona (parte prima)', *Annuario storico zenoniano* 19 (2002), 51-66; Eadem, 'Committenza aristocratica e iconografia francescana nella biblioteca di San Bernardino a Verona (parte seconda)', *Annuario storico zenoniano* 20 (2003), 79-103; Eadem, 'La Libreria Sagramoso di San Bernardino di Verona e qualche ipotesi per Domenico Morone', in: *Storia, conservazione e tecniche nella Libreria Sagramoso in San Bernardino a Verona*, ed. Monica Molteni (Treviso: Zel Edizioni, 2010), 11-33.

the Virgin Mary with the infant Christ on her lap is surrounded by the Franciscan saints canonized up to that time, including the five Franciscan Martyrs of Morocco, sanctified in 1481. The patrons, Leonello Sagramoso and his wife Anna are presented to the Virgin and Child by St Francis and St Clare respectively. The celebration of the Franciscan order is amplified on the remaining walls via the full-length portraits of its members, illustrious either because of their sanctity or their knowledge (fig. 5 and 6). The concepts expressed by the imagery, certainly devised and approved by members of the Observant family, are presented via an extraordinary decorative richness that seems to personify the ideal target at which the 1513 injunction mentioned before was aimed.⁵⁴ Proofs of a direct connection between this statement and the Veronese decoration that had just been completed do not exist, but so much *superfluitas* was certainly to be quickly known within the Franciscan Observant family. Even though the remark forbidding excessive decoration in libraries may still have reflected the concern of some friars, by the early sixteenth century the insistence shown by Franciscan Observant documents against excesses seems to have become a rather formal action, behind which lies a very different reality accepted by a good part of the Observant family.

Conclusion

With respect to the authority of images, my considerations are based on a still limited number of cases, and therefore I can only attempt a provisional interpretation. As a space of communal life libraries are, within a religious house, a particularly suited place to express self-identity. More than cloisters, chapter houses, and refectories, in early Renaissance mendicant houses libraries became a 'new' space for 'new images'. The decorative schemes adopted are only partially based upon earlier traditions, like the fourteenth-century chapter house frescoed by Giovanni of Modena for the Dominicans at Treviso, yet they are innovative in the sense that the celebration of the canonized saints of the order is accompanied, sometimes overshadowed, by a celebration of the scholarly achievements of its members.

⁵⁴ See above, footnote 16.

Even though similarities can be noted, for instance, with the decoration of the Greek and Latin libraries in the Vatican Palace, realized between 1474 and 1477, and opened to the public by the Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV in the early 1480s,⁵⁵ where images of ancient philosophers and of Christian theologians are displayed within lunettes around the rooms, classical philosophy or classical themes are never referred to in the imagery devised for the libraries under investigation. The focus being the intellectual achievements expressed by every single order, rather than a humanistic approach to texts and scholarship.

The decoration of libraries to be found in Dominican, Augustinian and Franciscan foundations seems to have progressed in a similar way from the mid fifteenth to the early sixteenth century, moving from a rather restrained use of images to reach an extremely lavish and ostentatious decoration. Despite the role and expectations of private patrons, which need to be assessed more in-depth, the creation of a new iconography, centered around a growing number of portraits of illustrious and learned members of the orders in question, was a choice of the religious communities. It is not a coincidence, that in the same period of time the Observant religious houses discussed here were re-thinking their identity and writing numerous texts about the illustrious members of their own orders.⁵⁶ The presence, among the portraits, of friars who had been instrumental to the reform movements of the fifteenth century is a direct response to the recent history of the orders, which prompted an iconographic innovation that found in the library its ideal space for visualization. In the future the iconographic choices used for other religious spaces, such as, for instance, the refectory of the Franciscan Observant house at Gandino, or the sacristy of the Dominicans of Santa Maria della Rosa at Calvisano, should also be examined in consideration of the iconography developed for libraries.

55 *Le origini della Biblioteca vaticana tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento*, ed. Antonio Manfredi (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2010).

56 This has been researched for the Dominicans by Anne Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls. Dominican Narratives of Self-Understanding During Observant Reforms, c. 1388–1517* (Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2018). For the Franciscans see Clare Lappin, *The Mirror of the Observance: Image, Ideal and Identity in Observant Franciscan Literature, c. 1415–1528*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 2000). For the Augustinians see Mario Sensi, 'L'osservanza agostiniana: origini e sviluppi', in: *Angeliche visioni. Veronica da Binasco nella Milano del Rinascimento*, ed. Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, Emore Paoli, and Pierantonio Piatti (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2016), 71–140.

With regard to the artists involved, it emerges that the same painters working in the churches were also employed for the internal decoration of the friaries. Within the Augustinian Congregation of Lombardy, for instance, the same artist, Giovanni Pietro of Cemmo, worked for several houses belonging to the Congregation,⁵⁷ suggesting a high degree of centralized control exerted by the Congregation over the decoration of its houses, a pattern not uncommon also among the Dominicans and the Franciscans.

Illustrations



Fig. 1: Antonio da Fabriano, Library decoration, Fabriano, San Domenico (photo Roberto Stelluti, made available by the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna, under a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license [<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>]).

57 At Brescia and Cremona, and perhaps at Santa Maria delle Grazie at Gravedona.



Fig. 2: Antonio da Fabriano, Library decoration, Christ seated on the mountain, Fabriano, San Domenico (photo Roberto Stelluti, made available by the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna, under a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license).



Fig. 3: Antonio da Fabriano, Library decoration, St Thomas Aquinas, Fabriano, San Domenico (photo Roberto Stelluti, made available by the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna, under a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license).



Fig. 4: Antonio of Fabriano, Library decoration, Blessed Albertus Magnus later modified to Blessed Costanzo of Fabriano, Fabriano, San Domenico (photo Roberto Stelluti, made available by the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna, under a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license).



Fig. 5: Master of the Sagramoso Library, Sagramoso Library, Nicholas of Lyra and Marco of Viterbo, Verona, San Bernardino (photo Lotze, made available by the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna, under a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license).



Fig. 6: Master of the Sagramoso Library, Sagramoso Library, Tommaso of Frignano and Pietro Aureoli, Verona, San Bernardino, Biblioteca Sagramoso (photo Lotze, made available by the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna, under a Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license).