The Altar of Corpus Domini in Urbino:
Paolo Uccello, Joos Van Ghent, Piero della Francesca

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By the year 1474, when Federico da Montefeltro became Duke of Urbino, the city’s Confraternity of Corpus Domini had an imposing new painting for the high altar of its church. This was Joos Van Ghent’s monumental Communion of the Apostles (Fig. 1), with its predella depicting a Miracle of the Host by Paolo Uccello (Fig. 2). The commission was one of outstanding importance to the community since the confraternity was the major religious organization of the town at the time and, as we shall see, its functions included activities and events with broad civic implications. The altarpiece remained in the church of Corpus Domini on the Pian di Mercato until 1703, when the late Gothic structure was demolished. It was then transferred to the nearby church of Sant’Agata. At an unknown date the predella went to the Collegio dei R. P. Scolopi, next to Sant’Agata, from which it was moved in 1861 to its present location in the Palazzo Ducale. The Communion panel followed in 1881. The altar was originally set in a single gold frame that has disappeared. Today the two portions are displayed on adjacent walls of the same room in the Galleria Nazionale delle Marche in the Palazzo Ducale of Urbino.

From the point of view of style the two parts of the altar, one by an Italian, one by a Fleming, are poles apart. The little figures by Uccello, perfect organisms animated with vibrant life, move easily in pure crystals of mathematical space. Their brilliant costumes are set off before geometric interiors and luminous nocturnal landscapes. The carnival effect they create strongly belies the grizzliness of the tale they tell. The main scene of the altar, in spite of large areas of red, green, and blue, is by comparison somber. The big figures, inorganic and flat, are profoundly serious in their expression. Their crumpled poses suggest deep reverence and concentration on the central act of Communion. The ambient is stilted and otherworldly, lacking as it does a mathematically precise spatial organization. As a result the total effect is intensely devotional and solemn.

Iconographically, however, the paintings are a pair, as has always been recognized. They both exalt the miracle of transubstantiation, the actual presence of the body of Christ in the consecrated Host. Joos Van Ghent’s painting depicts the first and, in effect, eternal enactment of the miracle as Christ himself administers the Holy Bread to his disciples. The Uccello predella represents the survival of a consecrated Host after a fierce attempt at its destruction and various miracles that occurred as a result. Since it is the sacrament of the Eucharist around which the devotion of the Confraternity of Corpus Domini centered, the choice of both subjects seems appropriate.

Yet various problems hover about the ensemble. While little is known about Corpus Domini iconography in the fifteenth century, one fact is clear: the subject of the Communion of the Apostles was never before (or after, so far as I know) used for an altar dedicated to the Corpus Domini. Moreover, to find the subject in Italy is in itself surprising. Although frequently represented in Byzantine art, the scene is very rare in the West at any period.

The Communion scene contains five contemporary figures, three of whom make emphatic declarative gestures. One is immediately recognizable as Federico da Montefeltro; the others also seem individualized. In spite of the many theories that have been put forward and the fact that technical evidence shows they were included from the very beginning, their identity and the significance of their presence has never been satisfactorily explained.

The predella scenes also raise a question. The story they relate is relatively clear from the pictorial narrative itself. Not long ago the scenes were correctly linked with accounts of a miracle that occurred in Paris at the end of the thirteenth century. But there were many other Host miracles that might have been used; why did the confraternity select this particular one?

The mere existence of these problems suggests that the eucharistic content of the altar is only part of its message. In fact,
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probing within the framework of contemporary historical events brings to light a world of meaning that lies just below the surface.

It will be useful to proceed with our investigation chronologically, recalling that the two parts of the altarpiece represent two separate campaigns. The predella was done first by Uccello in 1467-1468, and the Communion by Joos van Ghent was produced several years later, in 1473-1474.

Paolo Uccello—The Predella

The records of the Confraternity of Corpus Domini in Urbino show that Uccello was in its employ as early as 1465. But it was not until two years later that he began to receive more or less regular payments, probably corresponding to his actual work on the predella. These payments run from August 10, 1467 through February 27, 1468, and from August 10, 1468 through October 31, 1468. It has been frequently asserted that Uccello’s original assignment was for the whole altar, and that besides completing the predella, he probably also began the upper section. The speculation then continues that the confraternity for some reason became displeased and Uccello was dismissed. Indeed, less than a year after he is last heard of in Urbino, his Florentine tax return of August 8, 1469 stated that he was without work or means of support. If he actually started the altar, however, there are no traces of it; documents show that wood for the upper panel was purchased long after Uccello departed from Urbino, and X-ray photographs of the upper panel reveal nothing in the underpainting that would indicate major changes of composition. We must assume therefore that if Paolo made a design for the altar’s main scene it was rejected. His execution of the predella was, in any case, satisfactory since it was retained and ultimately used for the altar.

The long and narrow panel (42 x 351cm) tells a continuous story in six episodes, proceeding from left to right. The first scene takes place in a shop: a woman standing at the counter opposite a shopkeeper holds a Host in her right hand. The second scene is in the shop-keeper’s house; in the back part of the room something is being cooked in a pan and is overflowing. The man, his wife and two children express fear as rivulets of red liquid pour out of the pan across the floor, and run out of a hole in the wall of the house. Outside, soldiers try to force their way through the door. The following scene is a procession; a robed figure in papal tiara carries an ostensorium, with clerics in front of him and citizens behind. They move before a rolling landscape towards the altar of a church, of which only the apse is depicted. In the next compartment, the woman of the first scene is about to be hung by the soldiers. She looks up and sees an angel making a gesture of pardon over her head; the soldiers are also aware of the miraculous apparition. In the fifth scene the shop-keeper and his family are being burned at the stake by the soldiers. The last episode again combines a landscape background with the interior of an apse. A woman in red robes is lying on a litter on a simple catafalque. Two angels are at her head, one holding a pyx in his left hand. Two badly defaced devils are pulling and tugging at the woman’s feet.

It has always been recognized that the painting represents the story of a miraculous Host, one of many such legends that started circulating around 1264 when the Feast of Corpus Domini became an official part of the Church calendar. There was a rash of miracles throughout Europe involving the sur-

9 The archive of the Confraternity of Corpus Domini since the 18th century has been housed in the annex to the church of San Francesco di Paola. An account book known as “Libro B” covering the years 1465 through 1513 contains, in not very orderly fashion, all the known records of expenses incurred for the creation of the new altarpiece. Extracts were first made by L. Pungileoni, Ellegio storico di Giovanni Saii pintore e poeta, padre del gran Raffaello di Urbino, Urbino, 1832, 64ff. J. D. Passavant, Rafael von Urbino und sein Vater Giovanni Santi, i, Leipzig, 1839, 400; idem, “Beiträge zur Kenntnis der alt-niederländischer Malerschulen des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts,” Kunstblatt, ii, 1843, 56; A. Michiels, Histoire de la peinture flamande et holländaise, ii, Brussels, 1845, 205ff., 2nd ed., Paris, 1866, 131f.; J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, Geschichte der altniederländischen Malerei, Leipzig, 1875, 189f., published the same texts following Pungileoni. A. Schmarsow (1880) looked for but did not find Libro B. In his Meloza do Forli, 359-61, he followed a copy of the manuscript made before 1880, noting for the first time Uccello’s brief presence in Urbino in 1464. Scatena, “Chiesa del Corpus Domini,” 48ff., consulted Libro B and cited most of the entries pertaining to Uccello and some others. He also made use of an early inventory to describe the contents of the church. After this, the manuscript disappeared again. In 1899, Lavalleye, with the help of the Archbishop of Urbino and his secretary, brought Libro B to light once more. Lavalleye (Primitifs flamands, 31) describes the manuscript and extracts in their entirety the entries pertinent to the altar beginning with notice of Pietro della Francesca in 1469.


11 On his Portate al Catasto, Paolo declared, “Truvommi vecchio e senza usameto e no mi posso aerscere e la dona inferma.” Cfr. E. Carli, Tutta la pittura di Paolo Uccello, Milan, 1959, 92.

12 Lavalleye, Primitifs flamands, 31f., Docs. 2 and 3, quotes payments for the wood and manufacture of the panel, September 8, 1470, and February 28, 1471.

13 Ibid., technical report, p. 4.

14 The literature on the foundation of this feast is vast. A brief but precise history is found in Dom. P. Guéranger, The Liturgical Year, Dublin, 1879, 1, 153ff. In the Bull of Institution Transitsur, 1264, Urban IV from Orvieto decreed the fifth Feria (Thursday) after the Octave of Pentecost (which later became Trinity Sunday) to be the Feast of Corpus Domini. As opposed to the “Patarini,” a heretical group which negated the validity of the sacrament of the Eucharist, Urban IV had always been sympathetic to the idea of such a feast. He was finally convinced by the miracle of the bleeding Host of Bolsena (between August 11-September 7, 1264). Thereafter the pope received the relic in his own hands and commissioned Thomas Aquinas, then also residing at Orvieto, to compose the Office of the feast according to the Roman rite (Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, Opera omnia, Parme, 1864, xv, Oficiuibus de Testo Corporis Christi . . . , 253-36.


16 Vloberg, L’Eucharistie, ii, 221. Many of the accusations made against Jews were for ritual sacrifices of Christian children to obtain their blood for the Passover meal, for example, that of Simon of Trent in 1475. Similar stories are recorded about Hugh at Lincoln, Marguerite at Geitz, Richard at Pontoise. The majority, however, were for acts of desecration involving crucifixes, images of the Virgin, or the Host. Stories about Host desecrations began to circulate in the early 15th century, after 1225 when the doctrine of Transubstantiation was recognized. The first public accusation of a Jew occurred in 1243 in Belzec, near Berlin (Jewish Encyclopedia, New York, v7, 1904, 441ff.).
vival of a Host after desecration, or manifestations of the real presence of Christ in the Host through bleeding and/or spontaneous movement. These manifestations were said to bring about belief and veneration from people lacking in faith, and also from animals. Among these miracles there was a category of profanations by Jews. Among the stories of Jewish profanations surely the most famous was the one supposed to have occurred in Paris in 1290, and it is within the history of the Paris legend that Uccello's predella takes its place. Because it is important to understand in what form this legend was available in fifteenth century Italy, I shall recapitulate the major phases of its development.

The first notice of the miracle came in an Acte de Paris, a contemporary police report to the "Official de Paris"; a Jew was arrested for having profaned a Host on the Rue des Jardins on Easter day 1290. Soon thereafter comment on the original brief notice was made by Jean de Thilrode, a monk at the monastery of Saint-Bavon in Ghent. In translation the passage in his chronicle, written about 1294, reads:

To all those who are about to hear and see the present report of the Official of the Paris Curia: we desire not to hide that a certain Jew living in Paris had a Christian serving girl from whom he bought for ten pounds a consecrated Host. She herself in truth presented it to her master, which done he placed the host on a table and had other Jews join him, saying, "Are not these Christians fools to believe in this Host?" Taking knives, styles and other instruments, they wished to destroy the Host which they were not able to do. At length a certain one among them took up a large knife, struck at the Host and it divided into three parts, and it bled continuously. At the sight of this miracle, many of the Jews converted. Then the Host was placed in a cauldron full of water that it might be boiled and destroyed. The Host however, through Divine Grace changed itself into flesh and blood. Having seen these miracles, John, the bearer of these facts, with his whole family was converted to the Catholic faith. These things occurred in the year of our Lord 1290, on the day of the Resurrection of the Lord.

The Jew thus is described as seeking the Host on his own initiative in order to desecrate it. When he had procured the Host, he called in other Jews to assist in the profanation. They finally succeeded in cutting it to pieces, but the miraculous bleeding causes them to believe that transubstantiation has taken place. Seeing the Host turn to "flesh and blood," the Jew and his family convert to the Catholic faith.

The fame of the story spread and it soon received papal recognition. On July 17, 1295, Pope Boniface VIII issued a Bull granting the Bishop of Paris permission to build a chapel over the Jew's house. Thereafter the miracle was known officially as the miracle "de la sainte hostie" and was mentioned repeatedly in the Actes de Paris. The story was told in the Chronicles of Saint-Denis (1285–1328) with the important change that the Jew does not convert but is burned to death for his crime. Another new detail is found in a version of the story included in an anonymous poetical description of Paris of around 1325, namely the idea that the Host was preserved and salvaged from destruction.

The preservation of the bleeding Host and the execution of the Jew by fire, entered immediately into the mainstream of the tradition. They are both present in the report of the...
miracle that marks the first appearance of the legend in Italy, in the Chronicles of Giovanni Villani (compiled before 1348). From 1302–1307, Villani was in Flanders (as representative of the Peruzzi bank) and probably got his information about the miracle during that time.25 Villani’s report includes details which establish an independent Italian branch of the tradition.

In the many manuscript versions of the Chronicles that have survived, none dating before the second half of the fourteenth century, notice of the miracles comes under the year 1290, with the heading ”D’un Grande Miracolo ch’Avvenne in Parigi del Corpo di Cristo.” While in general outline it follows the French story it diverges in detail. The Jew is made a professional usurer and his scheme of procuring a Host develops from a Christian having borrowed money from him. In most redactions the Jew takes advantage of the fact that a woman has pawned her cloak and wants it back to wear for Easter. Seizing on her inability to pay, he offers her garment in exchange for a consecrated Host. Once he has received it, the pawnbroker by himself enacts the sacrilege by boiling and stabbing it. The Host bleeds and turns both hot and cold water red with blood. When Christians enter the shop the Host, which has survived in one piece, miraculously springs up on the table and reveals itself. The Jew is taken and burned, and the Host is recovered by a priest. Thereafter a church is built over the Jew’s house.26 In the famous illuminated manuscript of Villani’s Chronicle (Bibl. Vat. Chigiiana l.viii.296),27 the miracle during that time.25 Villani’s report includes details which establish an independent Italian branch of the tradition.

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The Florentines were informed of the story again about one hundred years after Villani, by St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence (d. 1459). St. Antoninus’ Chronicles owe much to Villani’s and, in the case of the Paris 1290 miracle, the text is almost a word for word translation into Latin. St. Antoninus says that the woman got her loan for a “pledge of a certain garment” (pignus cuisdam vestimenti sui). He adds a new tone of indignation using for the first time depreciatory words such as perfidissimus and sacrilegus to describe the Jew. He elaborates the passage on the salvaging of the miraculous Host, saying not only that it was taken by a priest but that it was returned to the church cum multa devotione fidélium & honoré . . . and that another church called salvatoris delboglente, was built over the house of the Jew.28

There is ample evidence that sometime during the mid-fifteenth century, the story of the Paris 1290 miracle was given dramatic form as a mystery play, and performed widely throughout Europe. There exist today three separate “scripts” all based on the story, differing slightly in detail, one in French, one in English and another in Italian.

A manuscript copy of the English version at Trinity College, Dublin, called the “Croxtoun Play of the Sacrament,”
3. Paolo Uccello, predella, Corpus Domini Altarpiece, detail, *In the Pawn Shop* (photo: Gabinetto Fotografico, Florence)

5. Paolo Uccello, predella, Corpus Domini Altarpiece, detail, Profanation of the Host (photo: Gabinetto Fotografico, Florence)

PAOLO UCCELLO, FREDELLA, CORPUS DOMINI ALTARPIECE, DETAILS

7. Transportation of the Miraculous Host (photo: Gabinetto Fotografico, Florence)

8. Pardon of the Christian Woman (photo: Gabinetto Fotografico, Florence)

9. Execution of the Jew and His Family (photo: Gabinetto Fotografico, Florence)

records the date 1461. The text turns the Jew into a rich merchant with many servants; the Christian who sells the Host likewise is a well-to-do merchant (rather than a poor woman). Insofar as the whole company of Jews perform the acts of profanation, the play harks back to the thirteenth century chronicle sources cited above. A new element is introduced when the profaned Host at the moment the water of the cauldron turns to blood, takes the form of a crucifix with Christ in agony. There is no recovery scene, nor execution, for in the end the Jews convert en masse at the sight of the miracle.29

The Crucifix apparition is also found in the French play, Le jeu et mystère de la Saint Hostie.30 In this version, upon seeing the Crucifix the Jew flees in terror and his son goes out to the street crying to the passersby, “Where are you going to look for your God? To the Church? But has not my father just killed him, after inflicting all sorts of torments?” Hearing this a neighbor woman enters the house, sees the apparition, and makes the sign of the Cross. The apparition then takes again the form of the Host, and the woman carries it away to the church of Saint-Jean-en-Grève. When the story of the sacrilege circulates, both the Jew and the poor Christian woman who brought the Host to him (who later has murdered her illegitimate child) are arrested and condemned to burning. This is the first time the fate of the female accomplice is mentioned and although she repents in the end, her punishment is as severe as that of the Jew.

The fate of the Christian woman becomes one of the major elements in the Italian version of the sacred drama, called Un miracolo del Corpo di Cristo,31 which records in the introduction its dependence on the Paris legend (saying the play treats “duno bel miracolo chen parigi fue . . .”). As will presently become evident this play and Uccello’s predella are unmistakably related by their mutual emphasis on the salvation of the Christian woman, as well as many other identical details. Because the play has no modern edition, I present here a rather full analysis of its action.

29 Ed. O. Waterhouse, The Non-Cycle Mystery Plays, together with the Croston Play of the Sacrament and the Pride of Life (Early English Text Society, extra series, cvi), London, 1909, liv-lxiv, 54-97. Cf. below, note 32, and Fig. 6.
30 Described, ibid., ivi i.B. (the play was published in the 16th century). Both plays are cited in de Tervarent, “Tapisseries,” 92. Theodoric de Saint-René, Remarques historiques, t. 3, 334ff. cites Alphonso Spina, Fortitudo fidei, a tract against the enemies of Christianity written in Valladolid in 1460, as the first to mention the apparition of the Crucifix over the pot of boiling water. The idea of the apparition might have been inspired by the phrase in cornem et sanaeum se mutavit, in tempio feche per antica fama elsalvator/ bogliente ancor sichiama/” Next comes a scene at the court of Pope Urban IV. An ambassador enters and tells of the miracle that recently “fu in bisena [Bolsena] in su laltare,” repeating the story of the doubting priest for whom a Host bled and stained a corporal with blood. The pope agrees that this “miracolo è maraviglioso . . .” and decides that a special feast should be created to celebrate it (fol. 52v), and “Fra Thommaso daquino” and “Fratre Buonaventura” are called and told to compose the new office. St. Thomas goes before a crucifix and prays for guidance. The crucifix replies “Thomaso ascolta figluol mio dilecto/ rendi ame laude che tho alluminate . . .” Thomas takes his office to the pope who accepts it with great reverence.

The action proper then begins (fol. 53) with a bawdy scene of drinking and gambling at a tavern. The owner, Guglielmo, loses at dice and pawns his coat with Manuel, a Jewish usurer, in order to get money to pay. Guglielmo loses again and this time pawns (fol. 53v) his wife’s “cioppa” (a sort of long gown for “dress” wear). The wife is angered because without the gown she will have nothing to wear at Easter, which is coming soon. She goes (fol. 54) herself to the pawnbroker and begs for her gown for the three day holiday, offering “qualche scambio o danar . . .” Manuel takes her aside to tell her “il pegno tidaro sanza pagarolo/ & oltre a questo danari ancora assai/ selcorpo del suo dio vivo qui recharlo.” The woman is afraid, but the Jew says he needs the Host for his sick son, and besides he promises to have himself and family baptized. The woman is convinced and she leaves, and Manuel, laughing at his subterfuge, tells of his evil intentions. The woman returns with the Host and takes her pledge and money, and leaves. Manuel then (fol. 54v) takes the Host “mattendola
The king awakens and declares the woman must be saved. He calls the bishop and they go to the Jew's house, kneel before the Host and speak to it. The bishop likens the experience to the stab of Longinus which left Christ whole. They ask for a sign that they are pardoned. "Hora lhostia da se sispenda da/ terra & va in mano al vescovo." The king praises God, and tells the Podesta to bring the criminals to justice. "Hora elvescovo porta ilcorpo di xpo alla chiesa / mentre che vanno i preti cantono lymno del corpo di xpo cioe Pange lingua gif[ori]sosi." A judgment scene follows. The Podesta accuses the Jew bitterly saying no punishment is bad enough, and demanding (fol. 57) "giustitia ... sansa misericordia." The Jew is tied up by the Cavalieri. A priest offers him baptism and redemption, but the Jew refuses and he is burnt. The woman is then brought; she calls herself "lanima trista misera/ vanno i preti cantono lymno del corpo di xpo cioe Pange lingua gif[ori]sosi." He calls the bishop and they go to the Jew's house, kneel before the Host and speak to it. The bishop likens the experience to the stab of Longinus which left Christ whole. They ask for a sign that they are pardoned. "Hora lhostia da se sispenda da/ terra & va in mano al vescovo." The king praises God, and tells the Podesta to bring the criminals to justice. "Hora elvescovo porta ilcorpo di xpo alla chiesa / mentre che vanno i preti cantono lymno del corpo di xpo cioe Pange lingua gif[ori]sosi." A judgment scene follows. The Podesta accuses the Jew bitterly saying no punishment is bad enough, and demanding (fol. 57) "giustitia ... sansa misericordia." The Jew is tied up by the Cavalieri. A priest offers him baptism and redemption, but the Jew refuses and he is burnt. The woman is then brought; she calls herself "lanima trista misera e confusa ... che se sperava' inte salvo era Guida."

The scene returns to the king, who falls asleep and has a vision (fol. 57v). He sees St. Thomas Aquinas between two angels. The saint says, "Dal cielo son messo & vengo annuntiare per parte del signore chel cielo honora che quella donna faccia liberare/ che manigoldo e per impiccar hora/ Christo lasciolta peccato fara penitenza & seguira gran ben disuo fallenza." The king awakens and declares the woman must be saved. He sends a message to the Podesta, who rejoices and sets the woman free. She promises to repent and fulfill her devotional duties. The king plans to build a church. The play ends with all the Jews of the town called on stage by name (fol. 58) and beaten by the soldiers, "quanto possono tanto che si fughano tucti." The angel returns to tell everyone to go home, to do reverence to the sacrament and to remember the "ogni peccato alfine ha penitenza."

The Italian play taking the theme of the Paris 1290 miracle develops a wide range of variations: the Jew aggressively seeking to buy the Host and the woman's need for her Easter clothes are combined. The salvaging of the miraculous Host is elaborated into a full-scale procession with the bishop's "corte ben parato." The Jew is bitterly anti-Christian to the end. As I have indicated, the major new element is the lengthy development of the woman's fate. She is brought to trial and condemned, but then is saved from execution by divine intervention. Eternal salvation through penitence is made the main lesson of the play.

From our point of view, the most important innovation of the rappresentazione is that in it the relationship of the story to the cult of Corpus Domini is made overt. The prologue describes the historical and theological circumstances that brought about the foundation of the feast. The hymn sung in the processional sequence, Pange lingua gloriosa, is the opening hymn of the Office of the Feast of Corpus Domini, written by St. Thomas Aquinas. These references, plus the apparition of St. Thomas himself as the agent of salvation, tie the piece unequivocally to the Feast of Corpus Domini, and we may believe that it was on this occasion that the rappresentazione was meant to be performed.

Such a relationship made the story particularly appropriate as a subject for the altarpiece for the Confraternity of Corpus Domini in Urbino. And there can be little doubt that the Uccello predella reflects direct knowledge of the play and its use. The painted panel, however, contains its own share of variations. Far from having drawn solely on the Italian rappresentazione, Uccello culled elements from many sources of the story and, moreover, added some elements of his own. By reviewing the six painted scenes individually we will be able to pinpoint the elements for which we have found sources, and at the same time isolate those that are particular to the painting.

Scene One: In the Pawn Shop (Fig. 3): The house is identified as that of a Jew by the scorpion blazon attached to the mantelpiece. The early Church fathers had likened the treachery of the Jews to that of the scorpion, and the symbolism held throughout the middle ages. In the fourteenth and fif-
teenth centuries most frequently it is found in scenes of the Crucifixion on the flags and shields of Jewish soldiers (as opposed to the S.P.Q.R. on the banners of the Romans). Such a representation exists in Urbino, in the church of San Giovanni (apse wall, fresco by the Salimbeni brothers, ca. 1416), and was therefore known to members of the confraternity. The usurer and the Christian woman are engaged in an exchange transaction. The representation of such a transaction finds its precedence in fourteenth century illustrated manuscript versions of Villani's Chronicle, as we have seen in the Vatican codex (Fig. 4), presumably representative of a tradition. In the manuscript, the couple stand in an outdoor setting, a small building with an open doorway to the left. The woman, on the right, is handing a large cross-marked Host to the usurer, who wears a "Jew Badge" on his shoulder. He holds a folded garment over his right arm, to be returned to the woman once he has the Host.

Uccello moves the scene inside the Jew's shop and places the transaction at a counter. Nevertheless, the disposition of the figures and the moment portrayed are clearly the same. However, in the Uccello no garment is involved. The Jew touches two indecipherable objects (a bowl of coins and coins?). The woman takes a pile of coins (?) in her left hand, and proffers a Host with her right. The scene therefore does not depend on the same version of the story as does the manuscript illumination. We must assume that Uccello's scene is based directly on a redaction of the Villani story in which the pawned item is described simply as "un suo pegno" (see above note 26). In any event, the effect of deleting the garment incident is to strengthen emphasis on the Host itself.

Scene Two: Profanation of the Host (Fig. 5): The similarity of architectural environment indicates that the second episode takes place in another room of the same house. The Jew's wife and children are not mentioned in any of the Italian literary sources. Their appearance here therefore probably depends on knowledge of a Northern version. The Jew has put the Host over a cooking brazier in a frying pan which may be identified with the "padella" of the Italian rappresentazione (rather than the pot of boiling water in other sources). It is blood that pours out of the pan and across the floor. The wife, who wears the yellow veil prescribed for Jewesses in Urbino, and the two children, express surprise and fear at the sight of blood. Uccello neatly condenses the story of discovery and accusation in the literary accounts by providing a hole for the blood to escape into the street. Outside the door, soldiers have already arrived to make the arrest. The role of the soldiers in this and the following scenes, where some are on horseback and specifically cavalieri, depends on the Italian rappresentazione. They wear contemporary costumes, but are given an air of "antiquity" by the S.P.Q.R. on their shields and standards.

Scene Three: Transportation of the Miraculous Host (Fig. 7): The processional scene is related to the similar scene in the Italian play, with its clerics "ben apparati," and their open mouths indicating that they are singing hymns. It comes in the same sequence as in the play, after the arrest and before the execution. The figure carrying the ostensorium, however, is not a bishop as described in the play, but a pope wearing a triple-crowned tiara. One is immediately struck by the exaggerated height of this tiara that gives to the figure, along with his beardlessness, a very youthful appearance. Historically, there was one pope who wore a tiara of extreme length, was beardless, and who also had important connections with the Paris 1290 miracle. This was Pope Boniface VIII whose 1295 bull gave the miracle official recognition (see above, p. 3, and note 20). The confraternity probably requested a reference to Boniface in the predella to confirm the authenticity of the miracle. For the image, Uccello certainly drew on the Arnolfo di Cambio seated statue of Boniface formerly in a niche on the façade of the Florentine cathedral, where the high-arching tiara is the most characteristic feature. Although he simplified the forms of the three superimposed crowns, Uccello used the length of the tiara to identify the figure as referring to Boniface VIII.

The setting of the scene with its curious combination of landscape background and church interior, indicated only by a truncated apse is, I believe, the same kind of "shorthand" device as the unnaturalistic hole in the wall in the previous scene. The combination of two kinds of backgrounds represent simultaneously the route and the objective of the procession. It should be borne in mind that contemporary spectators would have recognized in this scene a reference to the annual procession of Corpus Domini, one of the major functions of the Urbino Confraternity (see below, p. 10).

36 Cf. Statuta civitatis Urbini, Pesaro, 1559, Liber Quintus, fol. 108r ff., "De Iudaeis," Rub. xxxvi. These laws were written under the rule of Duke Francesco Maria I in the early 16th century, but clearly had been in force earlier.
37 It has been suggested that this insignia gives them a more "Italian," than a "French" identity (Francastel, "Mystère illustré par Uccello," 128).
38 Professor Gerhart Ladner helped me to solve this problem by guiding me to his article "Die Statue Bonifacii VIII. in der Lateranbasilika und die Entstehung der dreifach gekrönten Tiara," Römische Quartalschrift, 42, 1934, 35-69. The Arnolfo statue, which was mounted on the façade of Santa Reparata between 1296-1301, today in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, is his pl. ix (1). The tiara itself, originally surmounted by a huge ruby, was still in existence as late as 1485 (cf.). Ladner's proposition that Boniface's tiara was the first to be composed of three crowns (of differing shapes) was contested by Percy E. Schramm, "Zur Geschichte der päpstlichen Tiara," HZ, 352, 1935, 307-12. This point notwithstanding, the length of the tiara remains the mark of identification. Francastel, "Mystère illustré par Uccello," 190, argued that the figure was a portrait of Pope Pius II.
39 See ibid., 128, for an interpretation of the apse represented here and in scene six, as a piece of stage apparatus.
Scene Four: The Pardon of the Christian Woman (Fig. 8): As we have noted, the only literary source containing the salvation of the Christian woman is the Italian rappresentazione. Uccello’s version illustrates the motif but differs from the play in two respects: there is no king, and the apparition bringing the pardon is not St. Thomas Aquinas between two angels, but a single flying angel. The event, however, is the same. Implied in the painted scene are the facts that the woman has been apprehended for her role in the crime and condemned to hanging. As in the play, she is in the hands of the executioner when the heavenly pardon arrives.

Scene Five: The Execution of the Jew and his Family (Fig. 9): Frequently we have met in both the Northern and Italian literary history, the burning of the Jew is punishment for his acts of profanation. But nowhere in the written legacy is there an episode in which his wife and family are executed. A general attitude of anti-Semitism is shown in the Italian play in the finale when all the Jews of the town are dragged in and shamed. But only in the predella are the wife and children made to share the punishment with the unrepentant Jew.

Scene Six: The Death of the Christian Woman (Fig. 10): I have been unable to find precedents in the tradition of the Paris 1290 miracle for a scene of the Christian woman lying in state with angels and devils fighting over her. The source, in fact, lies elsewhere. Formally, the scene relates to illustrations of the famous tract on Christian death, the Ars moriendi, showing the dying person’s last struggle with the devil. Wood-block editions of this widely circulated work (Fig. 11, for example) provide the visual source for Uccello’s arrangement of the famous tract on Christian death, the Ars moriendi, giving Uccello’s predella its own place in the tradition as an original mixture that expresses a strong brand of anti-Semitism, and adapting elements from the Ars moriendi iconography, it illustrates a civic function of its patrons. The result is an original mixture that gives Uccello’s predella its own place in the tradition as another major variation on the basic narrative theme.

As a subject for painting, however, it remains extraordinary. One is justified in wondering what may have brought about. The site of the church of Corpus Domini, on the Pian di Mercato, was in the heart of town, placed so that the sick and dying from any direction could arrive with the greatest ease. In practical terms, the assistance the confraternity gave was to make sure the moribund received the Last Rites and in particular the sacrament to which the confraternity was dedicated, the Holy Eucharist. Uccello shows the woman having been transported to the church, the outdoor-indoor background, as in Scene Three, suggesting the route and the objective of the transportation. The woman is not dead, as is usually assumed; she is moribund. One of the angels at her head holds a pyx, a container for consecrated hosts used when Communion is not administered as part of the regular Mass. He drops a Host into her open mouth. With the altar set for Last Rites (a white cloth, a crucifix, and a blessed candle burning), the dying woman is receiving last Communion, called the viaticum, from a “special endowment of heaven-sent strength . . . necessary for the soul’s final victory . . . over the struggle with the devil (at this moment) more formidable than ever.” Using the figure of the repentant Christian woman of the Paris 1290 miracle and the form of an Ars moriendi illustration, the scene is thus a visualization of the particular service offered by the Confraternity of Corpus Domini to the community of Urbino.

The predella, while dependent on the literary sources of the Paris 1290 miracle and incorporating many specific details of the Italian rappresentazione, has several unique elements. It expresses a strong brand of anti-Semitism, and adapting elements from the Ars moriendi iconography, it illustrates a civic function of its patrons. The result is an original mixture that gives Uccello’s predella its own place in the tradition as another major variation on the basic narrative theme.

40 The most famous version is by Jean Charlier de Gerson, Oeuvres, Antwerp, 1706, 1, Opuscule tripartitum, 42ff., pt. 3, “De arte moriendi.” The dying Christian is subjected to five demonic temptations (to his Faith, Despair, Impatience with suffering, Vainglory, and the last Avarice). Gerson’s text was translated and adapted in Italian by Domenico Capranica, Cardinal of Fermo, in 1450, under the title “L’arte del ben morire” (published, Rome, 1596). Our illustration (Fig. 11) is made after the Ars bene moriendi, Reproduction photographique de l’édition xlyographique du XV* siècle, B. Pittau, ed., Paris [n.d.], first cut. This edition is thought to be German, ca. 1450-70. For basic bibliography, cf. R. Rainer, “Ars moriendi;” von der Kunst des heilsamen Lebens und Sterbens, Cologne, 1907. See also, A. Tenenti, Il senso della morte e l’amore della vita nel rinasciment o (Francia e Italia), Turin, 1957. Chap. III, 79-138. idem. La vie et la mort à travers l’art du XV* siècle, Paris, 1952, Chap. II, 2, 48-60, and App. C, 97-120.


43 Catholic Encyclopedia, 1913, iv, 60ff., s.v. “Death, Preparation for.”

44 Ibid. My thanks are due to Prof. and Mrs. H. Hibbard for checking details of this scene for me.

45 See above, notes 30 and 32 for examples of the subject that post-date Uccello.

46 Chinato, Monte di Pietà di Amelia, 191.

47 Luzzatto, Banchieri ebrei in Urbino, 37ff.

48 Fabiani, Ebree e il Monte di Pietà in Ascoli, 22 ff., containing a brief but good historical essay and useful bibliography.

49 Unfortunately in the case of the Urbino Monte, the discussions on the proposed structure and the statements of denial of Jewish rights cannot be cited, as they can from other communities (e.g. Ascoli Piceno, Fabiani, loc. cit., Amelia (Prov. di Todi), Chinato, loc. cit., because the Libri di Ricordanze are missing from before 1506 (cf. Luzzatto, Banchieri ebrei in Urbino, 39).

50 Statuta civistia Urbini, Liber Sextus, “Capitoli del Monte della Pietà d’Urbino,” fols. 152v ff.; signatures, fol. 155r. It is possible that the countess signed the docu-
about its choice. The explanation is to be found in a remarkable set of circumstances that occurred in Urbino in the second half of the 1460’s.

There appeared at this time in many towns of Umbria, Tuscany and the Marches, a wave of Franciscan monks preaching the strongest anti-Jewish propaganda Italy had known. In the early fifteenth century the Jewish population in Italy began to multiply as a result of an influx of immigrants from Spain and Portugal. Jewish communities in various cities grew from a handful of families to groups numbering in the hundreds. As long as they had remained a negligible minority, they had been allowed to live in relative peace. But after a few generations of successful moneylending, they began to present a real economic threat to the local merchants. This situation and its implications were soon recognized by the Franciscans, and the destruction of Jewish power was taken up as a battle cry of the religious renewal that the order was then seeking. Circulating first through central Italy, they preached against the usury of the Jews; their mission was to show how it ruined the economy and in particular that of the poorest people. They declared usury the gravest of sins and they fought for ecclesiastical legislation to excommunicate cities where it continued to be practiced. In sermon after sermon, the monks harangued the populace with this message. Giovanni da Capistrano, one of the most fanatic of the friars, preached immediate massacre of the Jews. Others, like the Beato Bernardino da Feltre and his followers, pointed out a more rational way for cities to free themselves from the hold of the Jewish bankers.

The plan was to create Christian banks established on a non-profit basis, administered by Christian organizations, and serving only Christians. The banks were to be called Mons Pietatis or Monte di Pietà (monte meaning “a gathering together of capital”), to be set up in each town to provide funds for lending to the poor in small amounts with no interest. One of the earliest foundations was that in Ascoli Piceno in 1458, soon after, in the early 1460’s, Monti were created in Perugia, Gubbio, and Orvieto. And in 1468, under the strong persuasion of Fra Domenico Leonessa (or Gonessa), a Monte di Pietà was founded in Urbino. As in every case in central Italy, the charter of the foundation at Urbino was specifically pitted against the Jews, “... in susidio del le persone bisognose in le cose licite, massime per levarle dalla voragine dell’usura, e delli gravi danni & incommodi che da questa seguitano ...”

The original charter of the Urbino Monte was signed in the name of Pope Paul II, on April 6, 1468, by Contessa Baptista Sforza, wife of Federico da Montefeltro. It was certainly this foundation and the blow it tried to strike against the usurers of Urbino that lay behind the selection of the subject of the Paris 1290 miracle for Uccello’s predella. The story demonstrated in visible terms the kind of mortal sin one was apt to become embroiled in when dealing with Jews. It showed their insidious, lying ways, and the hideous end suffered by the blasphemers. It also showed that it was never too late for a contrite Christian to stop sinning. If one had sinned by making use of the services of a Jewish moneylender, he could, through proper reverence for the sacrament, find forgiveness and salvation, as he saw it depicted in the predella. The preaching of Leonessa had already begun when Uccello got his commission. The actual foundation of the Monte di Pietà and the completion of the predella were only months apart.

We may now understand how eminently suitable the anti-Semitic theme was as propaganda for the new Monte di Pietà. But we may still wonder what the Monte di Pietà had to do with the Confraternity of Corpus Domini. An official connection between the two organizations is not recorded in the 1468 Charter of the Monte. But the original document is rather brief and sketchy, and additions were apparently made immediately after the signing. In 1514, when further formal provisions were added to the Capitoli under Duke Francesco Maria I, the relationship between the two societies was made explicit and we may assume that the rules written then reflect...
long-standing practice. Every year the solemn Procession of Corpus Domini was accompanied by a great illumination of the town. This illumination represented a large investment of money by the confraternity because of the vast quantities of wax involved. When it was over, the used wax was returned to the Sindici of the confraternity. They were to sell it and present, within three days of the feast, a balanced account. In this transaction they were assisted by the Consoli of the Monte di Pietà who audited the account to ensure that no fraud was perpetrated. The entire profit was then turned over to the Monte, not just for safekeeping, but for the Monte’s use. First it was to be spent by the Monte for its contribution to the Corpus Domini procession: the purchase of canvas to cover the houses lining the path of the procession. But, more importantly, the money was to be added to the Monte’s capital for its loans to the poor. (The capital, it will be remembered, had constantly to be renewed since the loans were made without interest.)

The Procession of Corpus Domini, as may be judged from the Capitoli of the Monte di Pietà, and the even fuller description given in the first book of the Statutes of Urbino dealing with religious holidays, was the major religious event of the year in Urbino. No other festival was so carefully prepared and solemnly carried out, nor did so much of the population take an active part. From these facts we can judge the great importance of the Confraternity of Corpus Domini within the religious orders, in proper dress, proper order, and proper decorum. The participants in the march included the rulers of the town, the officials, the aristocracy, the citizens and all members of the religious orders, in proper dress, proper order, and proper decorum.

One can suppose that the Confraternity of Corpus Domini promoted the new Christian bank with its promise of bookkeeping and administrative assistance, and that already at the beginning, the decision to found a Monte di Pietà came with the expectation of revenue from the resale of wax to be used as capital. The interdependence of the two organizations was even reflected in the arrangement of the annual Corpus Domini procession: the early sixteenth century description tells that, after the duke, the magistrates, and the Sindico of the illumination, came walking together the Prior fraternitatis corporis Christi & Consules Montis Pietatis, cum tubis praecedentibus.

Thus the members of the Confraternity of Corpus Domini alluded in their altarpiece to the need for an alternative to Jewish usury not only in response to the anti-Semitic preaching of the Franciscans but also because the newly founded Monte di Pietà was to contribute integrally to their own program. The subject of the 1290 Paris miracle, modified with local variations, was ideal for the purpose.

Joos Van Ghent—The Main Panel

Almost five years elapsed between the completion of the predella and the start of the main panel of the Corpus Domini altarpiece. After October 31, 1468 Uccello is mentioned in the documents of the confraternity no more. The next sign of artistic life is the tantalizing entry in “Libro B,” the one and only document that attests the presence of Piero della Francesca in Urbino. On April 8, 1469 Giovanni Santi (the father of Raphael) is reimbursed ten bolognini to cover expenses for “maestro Piero dal Borgo chera venuto a vedere la taula per farla a conto dela fraternita...” (“Libro B, fol. 51”). The conclusion has been drawn that Piero was considering (or being considered for) the job of completing the altarpiece. That he did not take (get) the commission, is assumed from the fact that his name never again appears in the account book of the confraternity. The document says he came to look at “la taula”; but there is no basis for speculation as to what he saw. Whatever it was, it was not in the form ultimately used since, as has been noted, new wood was purchased in 1470 and the panel was worked on by a carpenter in 1471.

The name of Joos Van Ghent first appears in the confraternity’s documents on February 12, 1473. A year and a half later, on October 25, 1474, he received final payment for “sua fatigha per depignare la tavola de la fraternita...” These dates may be taken as the termes for the painting of the altarpiece.
Joos’s one documented work, the Altarpiece of the Communion of the Apostles.

The painting is very large (283.3 x 303.5cm), the figures just under life size. The scene of the Communion is set in a Romanesque church, in the crossing of the transept, with the apse in the rear. Windows open on a rural landscape at the extreme left and a view of a town at the right. Grouped around a table covered with a simple white cloth are to the left, nine apostles, one holding a lighted candle and another, the young St. John the Evangelist, holding a flask of white wine on the table. The apostle kneeling in the foreground, presumably St. Peter, is receiving Holy Communion from the hand of the Saviour. Christ stands in the center of the scene bending toward him, holding a paten in his left hand and a wafer in his right. On the floor below his feet are a basin and ewer. To the right in the foreground, kneeling in reverence, are the other three apostles. Somewhat behind the table to the right in a position of prominence is a bearded man in a turban and cut-velvet robes, his right hand on his breast, a walking stick in his left. Gesturing to him is Federico da Montefeltro, Count of Urbino at the time the painting was commissioned, duke by the time it was finished; he also wears cut-velvet garments, a red bonnet and shawl. Behind Federico is a courtier who gestures with his hands. The head of a younger man is seen between the two previously mentioned figures, and a fourth male head is partially discernible at the right margin of the painting. Between the turbaned gentleman and the count in the fore-choir of the church is seen the half-figure of a woman holding a crowned child. In a niche in the corresponding point of the left fore-choir are a large metal flagon on a cannister, a round object probably an apple, and what might be identified as a knife-case leaning or hanging against the side of the niche wall. Two heraldically placed angels hover above the main figures of the scene. A metal lantern with the sacrament light glowing hangs in the apse at the rear, and a bottle wrapped in straw is depicted on the picture plane as though leaning against the edge of the frame at the bottom left. The table holds to the left, a flask of white wine (in St. John’s hand), a jeweled chalice on a small stand under the cloth, in front of it about fifteen holy wafers in a heap; at the right end of the table are two pieces of risen bread, a saltcellar, and a bottle of water. The great size of the panel, unprecedented in the history of early Netherlandish painting, was established, as we have seen, before Joos’s arrival in Urbino. Otherwise, the basic structure of the scene, a religious event taking place in an ecclesiastical setting, fits into the mainstream of contemporary Flemish art both formally and symbolically. The traditionalism of style and setting, however, in no way prepares the observer for the strong “Byzantine” character of the iconography. As we have observed, the Communion of the Apostles is so unorthodox a subject in Western art, both Netherlandish and Italian, that we must investigate how the Urbino confraternity came to choose it for its high altar.

The Communion of the Apostles is described in three of the Evangelical narratives of the Last Supper: “And as they were eating Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26: 26–28; with variations, Mark 14: 22–24; Luke 22: 19–20). The scene as it was developed in art is not based directly on the Gospels, but on the theological concept of the Eternal Priesthood of Christ as stated in the Pauline Epistle to the Hebrews. The letter teaches that, as Christ gave his own body and blood, he is the sacrifice, but as this is constantly renewed at the altar in the form of bread and wine, he is a Priest after the order of Melchisedek (as described in Psalm 109). Based on this text, plus the commentaries of St. John Chrysostomus (d. 407) and Cyril of Alexandria (d. 431), Byzantine art created the subject called the Koinonia, the word of St. Paul meaning the “perfect participation in the indivisible,” which by the sixth century had achieved a well-defined form. Changes in liturgy led to many variations in details of the iconography, but the basic formula remained the same. As we see in the silver paten from Riha on the Orontes dated 565–578 A.D. (Fig. 12), the scene is placed before an abbreviated architectural background, ecclesiastical

of Corpus Domini began with a general council of the Priori on St. Stephen’s Day, December 26; the procession of Corpus Domini is held in late May or early June.

56 Ibid., fol. 2v. There is no mention of members of the Monte di Pietà in the description of any other feast held in Urbino.

57 Lavalleye, Primitives flamandes, 21, Dec. 1.

58 At this precise moment (April 8, 1469) Piero was still working on the altarpiece for the monastery of Sant’Agostino in Borgo Sansepolcro. He received partial payment for the painting (contracted for in 1454), which must have been only partly finished when he received payment, on November 14, 1469. Cf. M. Meiss, “A Documented Altarpiece by Piero della Francesca,” AB, 23, 1941, App. 2, 67f., documents in original and English. For this reason he may have been unable to sign a contract with the Confraternity of Corpus Domini at the time.

59 See above, note 12.

60 Lavalleye, Primitives flamandes, 46f., Doc. 11.

61 See Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 1, 137–40, 320. The Romanesque style of architecture symbolizes the “real” Jerusalem where the religious event took place in the topographical sense, and the “heavenly” Jerusalem where the divine prototype exists in the eschatological sense (see below, p. 20).

One of the largest Netherlandish paintings dating earlier than the Communion of the Apostles, Roger Van der Weyden’s late Crucifixion in the Escorial (ibid., 1, 288, 416f., fig. 357), is somewhat smaller than Joos’s painting: 320 x 190 (7) cm, as opposed to 283.3 x 303.5cm.


63 See above, note 12.

in nature. Before this stands an altar-table covered with a cloth and furnished with liturgical vessels. Christ, acting as High Priest, is represented twice, behind the altar-table at either end. He serves bread to a group of six apostles at one side and wine to another group of six at the other. On the ground in front of the table, are a ewer and basin, referring to the washing of the feet of the apostles by Christ (described in John 13: 4–15).65

All these elements have their basis in Greek orthodox liturgy. The dual representation of Christ expresses the practice of offering Communion under two species, the bread and the wine. The apostles are divided into two groups of six, but are meant to express reception by all twelve of both species. Those who receive the Holy Bread advance while bending over very far but not kneeling. The recipient receives the Host in his hands, making a throne in the palm of the right hand by holding it up with the left. The recipient of wine holds a cloth to catch spilled drops. In the post-Iconoclastic periods, when the Koinonia was often represented in monumental frescoes and mosaics, the central portion of the scene became more specifically a church setting. Elaborate architectural ciboria rise above the altar and after a certain time two angels are added, one at each end of the altar, standing behind the figure of Christ.66

Thus enacted by Christ and the apostles, the Koinonia has mystical meaning, elevated beyond narrative: it is the Divine Liturgy, the archetype of the sacrament of Communion.

There are very few representations of the Communion of the Apostles from mediaeval times in Italy and those that exist generally reflect the presence of Greek communities and liturgical practices on Italian soil.67 One fourteenth century example is found in Santa Maria in Porto Fuori in Ravenna, the ancient Byzantine exarchate. The fresco (Fig. 13) is directly dependent on the Byzantine type. Although the number of apostles is reduced to two on each side, the sacrament is offered under two species in the Eastern fashion, bread on the left and wine on the right.68 It does, however, introduce some Western elements: Christ is shown only once and the sacrament is clearly a wafer of unleavened bread. Christ places the bread directly into the mouth of one communicant as is done in the Latin rite.

In view of this purely Eastern background, it is surprising to find toward the middle of the fifteenth century two Florentine paintings, both from the workshop of Fra Angelico, that represent the Communion of the Apostles. One (Fig. 14) is a fresco in Cell 35 in the monastery of San Marco, and the other (Fig. 15) is a compartment on the doors of a silver-chest in the Museo San Marco.69 Here the liturgy is performed entirely in the Western manner: Christ stands before the table holding a paten full of unleavened Hosts. Communion is offered under one species, the bread alone. The communicant takes Communion of the Apostles. One (Fig. 14) is a recess in the wall of the church, set in a niche above the altar; the fresco is directly attributed to Fra Angelico, and the other (Fig. 15) is a compartment on the doors of a silver-chest in the Museo San Marco.69

For an explanation of the appearance of the Communion scenes in Florence at this time, I would suggest a reflection of discussions held during the Council of Florence, 1437–1439,70 concerning the sacrament of the Eucharist. One question dealt with the moment during the mass when transubstantiation occurred, whether at the speaking of the Gospel words, as believed in the West, or after the Prayer of St. Basil in the orthodox rite. No agreement was reached on this point. The second question was the kind of bread used in administering the sacrament. The Greeks used leavened bread, while the Latins preferred unleavened. The decision was that baking of Holy Bread could follow local custom provided wheaten flour was preferred...


17. Dirk Bouts, Martyrdom of St. Erasmus. Louvain, Saint-Pierre (photo: Copyright A.C.L. Brussels)


23. Francesco Laurana, Bust of Battista Sforza. Florence, Bargello (photo: Alinari)
24. Gianfrancesco Enzola, medal, Costanzo Sforza (after Hill)


26. Attributed to Joos Van Ghent, Lecture of Federico da Montefeltro, Windsor, Royal Collection (photo: Copyright H.M. the Queen)

28. Detail of Fig. 27 (photo: Anderson)

30. Albert Van Ouwater, *Raising of Lazarus* (122 x 92cm). Berlin-Dahlem, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie (after Panofsky)

used. The Fra Angelico shop-pieces demonstrate Western ritual preference. Nevertheless, the idea of representing the subject itself could have been inspired by the visitors from the East.

Some two decades after the San Marco examples, Joos Van Ghent produced his monumental Communion of the Apostles (Fig. 1). There is an allusion to a narrative dining scene, the straw-covered flask on the floor in the left foreground; but it is a mere remnant. There is a sense of transition from event to ritual in the momentary gestures of two of the apostles: St. John setting down the wine flask, and another apostle bringing a taper, the first of two candles regularly lighted during the Christian sacrifice.

The rest of the scene is purely ritualistic, and all the ritual depicted is thoroughly Latin. A single figure of Christ, standing in front of the altar-table administers Holy Communion under one species to a kneeling apostle by placing the unleavened wafer directly in his mouth. There is a striking approximation to the Byzantine Koinonia formula in other respects. The setting is ecclesiastic. The table is an altar bearing liturgical furnishings. The ewer and basin, a reference to the Washing of the Feet, similarly appear on the floor. Even the presence of two angels points to a direct and objective emulation of the traditional Eastern form. The figure of Christ is given emphatic ceremonial qualities. He is not portrayed as the cherished master of the disciples but is isolated and framed in the center of the space, calling attention to his role as Eternal Priest. As in the Epistle to the Hebrews, he is defined as the Priest. He is for this one time and always his human and his liturgical self.

So strong is the impression of Christ as the Priest that in spite of the general Eucharistic implications of the iconography, we are led to suspect some special relevance of the Eternal Priesthood for the veneration of Corpus Domini. The fact is that the reference to the Eternal Priesthood of Christ is based on the liturgy of the Feast of Corpus Domini as it was written by St. Thomas Aquinas. The antiphon that opens the first service (Primas Vesperas) of the Office is as follows: Antiph. Sacerdos in aeternum Christus Dominus secundum ordinem Melchisedech panem et vinum obtulit. The scene is thus not simply a random borrowing from Byzantine art but a pointed combination of Eastern iconography and Western liturgy. The concept of the Eternal Priesthood had no vehicle of expression other than the Eastern scene, and hence the confraternity's rigid adherence to the Koinonia scheme. Its enactment however, with Western ritual procedure explains that it here serves the purely Western Thomist liturgy.

But again, as was the case with the predella, the use of this subject for this purpose remains unique to Urbino, and again there were specific reasons for its choice.

Of the five people to the right of the composition (Fig. 16), only one is immediately recognizable: Federico da Montefeltro with his familiar hawk-nosed profile. It is not he, however, who is given outstanding prominence in the group, but the bearded gentleman to his right, on whose arm Federico places his hand. In the early seventeenth century this figure was identified by Bernardo Baldi, historian of Urbino under Duke Francesco Maria II, as an ambassador from the Shah of Persia. Baldi wrote a life of Federico da Montefeltro (publ. 1604) working with much archival material that has since disappeared. He refers to our painting when describing the world-eminence of Federico:

_Uzun Hasan, mighty King of Persia, who sent a mission of ambassadors to the Christian rulers, ordered them especially on his behalf to visit [Federico] and present to him very rich gifts, which they did with diligence. To keep alive the memory of that fact [Federico] had full-scale portraits of himself and the ambassadors painted in the panel of the main altar of the Confraternity of Corpus Domini in Urbino by Joos Tedesco, famous painter of those times and of whom it is said_

71 Regional preference was used frequently as a device for compromise in the Decree of Union signed at the council; A. Mercati, "Il decreto d'unione del 6 luglio 1439, nell'Archivio Segreto Vaticano," Orientalia Christiana Periodica, 15, 1945, 3-44.
72 A. Schmarsow, Joos van Gent und Melozzo da Forli in Rom und Urbino, Leipzig, 1912, 212ff., connected the Angelico shop-pieces with Joos’s painting. He cogently suggested that Fra Angelico had himself depicted a Communion of the Apostles in the Cappella del Sacramento (also called the Cappella di San Niccolò) in the Vatican done between 1452 and Fra Angelico’s death in 1455, and perhaps continued by assistants after that date (cf. Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico, 29, 206f.). The chapel was destroyed at the time of Paul III, but it is known that there were painted scenes from the life of Christ that included many portraits from life (Vasari-Milanese, 65, 51ff.). Considering the dedication of the chapel to the Holy Sacrament, it is a good chance that, stimulated by the Council of Florence as I have suggested, a Communion scene was included; if so, it might have been known in the Florentine workshop through drawings, etc. This possibility would assist in explaining the appearance of so uncommon an iconography in the work of relatively minor followers, as in the two extant examples (Figs. 14, 15). Schmarsow went on to speculate that Joos was probably in Rome before going to Urbino and might have seen such a fresco. Although purely hypothetical, it must be admitted that a reference in Joos’s painting to a distinguished work in the Vatican, which included portraits from life, would not have been out of place.

73 See below, note 107.
74 Opera omnia, xv, Opusculum V, 233.
75 Of the handful of Communiones of the Apostles ever produced in Europe none besides Joos’s can be shown to have been placed on an altar dedicated to the Corpus Domini: Signorelli’s Communion of the Apostles, Cortona, Museo Diocesano, signed and dated 1512 (P. Scarpellini, Luca Signorelli, Milan, 1964, 125, pl. 89), was formerly on the high altar of the Chiesa dei Gesù, Cortona; Federico Barocci’s Communion of the Apostles, Aldebrandini Tomb Chapel, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, 1604-07 (H. Olsen, Federico Barocci, Copenhagen, 1962, 209, #65, pl. 109). Cf. also J. Montagu, "The 'Institution of the Eucharist,' by Charles LeBrun," JWarb, 24, 1961, 309-12.
76 F. Ugolini, Storia dei conti e duchi d’Urbino, Florence, 1859, Bk. v, 362ff.; Federico lost his right eye and the bridge of his nose in a joust with a member of the Ranieri family in Urbino on February 25, 1450. Because of this deformity he almost always had himself portrayed in left profile. This may have been one factor in determining the placement here of the civilian group on the right of the composition. However, see below, note 128.
77 Among these gifts is usually thought to have been the conical bonnet encrusted with pearls, displayed prominently in the portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his son Guidobaldo (Fig. 29); cf. Lavallelye, Primitiva flamanda, 109-27. See below, p. 22.
he was the first to bring to Italy the modern use of painting in oils.\textsuperscript{78}

On the basis of Baldi’s remarks Passavant in 1839\textsuperscript{79} proposed a name for the bearded figure in the painting: Catinero Zeno, a Venetian nobleman, ambassador to the court of Persia and brother-in-law of the shah’s Venetian wife. Passavant’s suggestion was universally followed for the next 125 years.\textsuperscript{80} until Paolo Alatri in 1949 demonstrated that the identification, was untenable. Alatri made two simple observations, firstly that Catinero Zeno was ambassador to, not from the Shah of Persia, and secondly his mission to Persia lasted from September 10, 1471 (he was already in Tabriz in April) to May, 1474 when he returned to Venice.\textsuperscript{81} He was thus out of Italy at precisely the time the visit of the Persian ambassador to the court of Urbino would have had to take place to be recorded in the painting by Joos Van Ghent (February 12, 1473–October 25, 1474).

Alatri’s observations were made on the occasion of his publication of the one fifteenth century document that attests to the actual presence of a Persian ambassador in Urbino, the copy of a Latin letter from Federico “al Sultano” Uzun Hasan, contained in a manuscript copia lettere in the Vatican Library.\textsuperscript{82} In the letter, written at the behest of the ambassador, Federico congratulates the shah on matters of diplomacy, and recounts with what pleasure he had received his distinguished ambassador Isaac known to have been in Italy at this period. From these sources, Alatri made the counter-proposal that the figure in the painting was one “Ambassador Isaac” known to have been in Italy in 1472–1473.\textsuperscript{83}

Based purely on circumstantial evidence and containing some problems (see below, note 95), the suggestion was tacitly rejected by Lavalleye in his 1964 publication.\textsuperscript{84} However, I believe Alatri is correct and that, unknown to him, his suggestion contained important implications for the meaning of the altar as a whole. There is still no absolute proof; but we shall see that acceptance of his idea makes the elements of the ensemble fall into a harmony that is otherwise missing. To understand Ambassador Isaac’s role in the painting, a brief word on the historical events that brought him to Italy will be useful.

The war between the Greeks and the Turks, which had brought the fall of Constantinople in 1453, was in the early 1470’s still in progress. Early in the 1460’s a second front had been opened on the Turks by a rival Muslim potentate, Uzun Hasan.\textsuperscript{85} The pope, Pius II, was much dedicated to the cause of turning back the Turks, and although his Council of Mantua in 1459 had failed to move the Italian princes to unified action, he continued his efforts personally. He was in contact with Uzun Hasan with the mutual hope that an alliance could be formed. Pius conferred with a Persian ambassador named Mamenatazab five months before he died in Ancona on his way to peace talks with Mohammed II.\textsuperscript{86} Negotiations continued and Pope Paul II received one Kasam-Hasan, a Persian ambassador, in 1465.\textsuperscript{87}

Within a short time the Turkish threat became more of a reality to the Italian mainland; Mohammed’s forces in 1466 were threatening Negroponte (taken July 7, 1470), and he was inviting Sforza of Milan (an old enemy of Venice) to join forces in attacking Venice itself. Only the exhortations of Pope Paul kept the Venetians from arranging an unfavorable peace.\textsuperscript{88} Meanwhile, Uzun Hasan had been improving his position; he had allied himself with the Caramanians and

78 B. Baldi, Della vita e de’ fatti di Federigo di Montefeltro, duca di Urbino, 1604, F. Zuccardi, ed., Rome, 1824, iii, Lib. 10, p. 241f.: “... Usanassasseno potensissimo Re di Persia nel mandar, che fece Ambasciatori a’ Potentati Cristiani, ordino loro particolarmente che da sua parte lo visitassero, e gli presentassero ricchissimi doni: il che fecero essi diligentemente, onde egli per lasciar viva la memoria di quel fatto, fece ritrarre se, e gli Ambasciatori dal naturale nella tavola dell’ Altar maggiore della Confraternita del Corpo di Cristo in Urbino da Giusto Tedesco famoso pittore di que’ tempi, e che per quanto si dice fu il primo che portasse in Italia l’uso moderno del dipingere a Olio ...”

79 Passavant, Rafael von Urbino, i, 420, and further Lavalleye, Primitifs flamands, 7.

80 Some elaborate iconographic interpretations were founded on this suggestion, see ibid., 8; one of the most developed was the notion that the Latin Rite (Federico) and the Byzantine rite (Zeno) are united by the Host, and the world of the Jews and the Christians and Neapolitans, adding sixty-three more galleys to the fleet. They proceeded to Caramania, attacking first Satalia after which Naples retired, and then took Smyrna. Carafa’s desire to continue the siege northward was overruled by

81 Paolo Alatri in 1949 demonstrated that the identification, was untenable. Alatri made two simple observations, firstly that Catinero Zeno was ambassador to, not from the Shah of Persia, and secondly his mission to Persia lasted from September 10, 1471 (he was already in Tabriz in April) to May, 1474 when he returned to Venice. He was thus out of Italy at precisely the time the visit of the Persian ambassador to the court of Urbino would have had to take place to be recorded in the painting by Joos Van Ghent (February 12, 1473–October 25, 1474).

82 Ms Urb. lat. 1198, Alatri, Lettere di stato e di arte, 79f. J. Dennistoun, Dukes of Urbino, i, 394, noted this letter and related it to the painting, but followed Passavant (Rafael von Urbino, i, 620) in identifying the ambassador as Caterino Zeno. See below, note 98, for my proposed correction of Alatri’s dating.


84 Primitifs flamands, 8. While admitting the inaccuracies of his earlier publication on this point (Juste de Gand, 59f.), Lavalleye concludes here that the figure represents some Persian ambassador whose name we do not know.

85 Minorsky, “Uzun Hasan,” 112f. The shah’s name is transliterated in many ways including Usnassassan or Cessani; he is called Assemeh Han in Federico’s letter.


88 Pastor, Popes, iv, 85.

89 Malipiero, Annali veneti, s.v. “Guerre co’ Turchi.” Malipiero (1428-1515) was a naval captain who became a Venetian senator, Podesta of Rovigo, Rimini, and Treviso. His original manuscript is no longer traceable. The chronicle quoted (pp. 87f.) Mirat’s letter of introduction and then continues “... Arrivato el mese de Fever dell’anno passado 1470 [i.e. 1471; the Venetian New Year was March 1], e fo interetturato 4 mese continui senza farghe risposta.” Later in the same year (1471) Mirat was designated traveling companion to Persia with Caterino Zeno (Berchet, Venezia et la Persia, 7).

90 Pastor, Popes, iv, 217ff., 220, first note, quoting payments to tribus oratoribus Usnassassani principis ... August 16, 1471, Sirti iv, Lib. Bullet. 1471-73, Archivio di Stato, Rome. I have checked these documents and found no other payments of this kind from the pope.

91 Pastor, Popes, iv, 226f. Carafa sailed to Rhodes where he was joined by the Venetians and Neapolitans, adding sixty-three more galleys to the fleet. They proceeded to Caramania, attacking first Satalia after which Naples retired, and then took Smyrna. Carafa’s desire to continue the siege northward was overruled by
achieved important victories in southeast Asia Minor against the rear lines of the Turks. In February, 1471 his ambassador, Mirat (an Armenian) went to Venice to renew their alliance, now from a position of strength.90

This was the situation when Giovanni della Rovere ascended the papal throne in 1471. As Sixtus IV, the Franciscan pope was much interested in the crusade and immediately moved to consolidate an alliance between the papacy, the king of Naples, and Venice, with Uzun Hasan. In August, 1471, three ambassadors, unnamed, from Persia, came to confer with Sixtus and were graciously received.91 The pope failed when he tried again to enlist general European support, but he nevertheless proceeded on his own. By the spring of 1472 a papal fleet, headed by Admiral Cardinal Carafa was ready to set sail. On the Feast of Corpus Domini, May 28, 1472, following a solemn high mass at Saint Peter’s sung by Carafa, Pope Sixtus IV and his entire court marched in procession to the Tiber port at San Paolo fuori le Mura and blessed the fleet and flags of twenty-four galleys and 4,700 men who set sail first for the Adriatic to join forces with Naples and Venice, and then on to attack the foe.91 But even before the Italian fleet’s arrival on the Ionian Sea, Uzun Hasan’s position had worsened, and again he dispatched emissaries to the Christian princes to ensure their continued support and help.

Two of these men, arriving in Venice in August, 1472, are known by name. One was Azimoamet, who brought gifts that are still in the treasury of San Marco. After delivering communications from Caterino Zeno in Persia, Azimoamet was commissioned to confer with Giosafatto Barbaro, Venice’s newest ambassador to Persia. The following January (1473) he accompanied Barbaro back to the Persian theater of war.92

The other ambassador, denoted as “primo” was, remarkably enough, a Jewish doctor from Spain. His name was Isaac and he is identified by his credentials including a letter dated July 1472, as: . . . hic medicine Doctor noster ad te in sermo prudens mittimus, magnus medicus Isaac fidelis in quem num fidem habemus oratemus tibi omnia de mandato nostro sufficienter narrabit . . . 93 Isaac arrived in Venice by way of Caffa (a Genoese possession in the Crimea) and Hungary where he went to assure the rulers of his master’s continuing efforts. From Venice he went to Rome and was greeted by the Venetian orator to the Holy See, Federico Cornaro who had received a letter of introduction, recorded on September 12, 1472, which reads in part: Fuit ad presentiam nostram unus orator illustissimi domini Ussoni Cassani natione hispanus fide autem hebreus, et de bona dispositione prefati domini offrendendi turchum multis exposuit, ad quem respondimus sicut per introclusion exemplum videbitis; et quem orator predictus Roman ad pedes apostolicos venturus est, beatitudini summum pontificis hoc declarate . . . 94 Isaac’s mission in Rome, as it had been in Venice and would be shortly in Naples, was to bring news of Uzun Hasan’s latest strategy and to bolster Italian support in money and manpower, as well as in goodwill.

But something happened to Isaac while he was in Rome. For reasons unstated, under circumstances undescribed, Abassador Isaac was converted to the Catholic faith and baptized by the hand of Pope Sixtus IV. The event is recorded in a unique source, the contemporary Chronicle of Domenico Malipiero, Venetian nobleman and diplomat: “L’Ambassador de Persia è stà battezzato a Roma da Papa Sisto, insieme con due famegli, e ghe è stà messo nome Sisto, dal nome del Papa, el qual con tutti i Cardinali e tutta la corte, l’ha presentà de gran doni e molto richi . . .”95

We know from the sources that after Rome, Isaac went to Naples to confer with King Ferdinand of Aragon and was stating his disbelief that any of these four went to Urbino. He says, instead, that the man in Jooe’s painting is another ambassador whose name we cannot know because Federico’s letter of commendation does not state the name or “région d’origine” of the person it was written for. The documents published by Cornet, Guerre dei Veneti, and Berchet, Venezia et le Persia, and the Annali veneti, show clearly that there were more ambassadors whose names are recorded than Bizaro notes (see above, notes 83-85). Moreover, I believe that Bizaro was mistaken in the names of two of the four ambassadors he did mention. The one ambassador named “Nicolò” I find in the documents covering the years 1460-74 is Messer Nicolò Coco, who was commissioned as ambassador to (not from) the Turks on November 27, 1470 (Berchet, op.cit., 5), and I believe it is he to whom Bizaro refers. I have not been able to locate the name “Chefarsa” or anything like it in the documents. I strongly suspect, however, that this spelling is a garbling of “Ghaffar-chah” for “Kafir Ishaq,” the “infidel Isaac” as his name would be in Turkish.

Therefore since Mirat (or Murd, or Mozat) was in Italy only from February, 1471 to September, 1471, since Nicolò was probably an Italian, and since Chefarsa is most likely Isaac himself, Azimoamet becomes the one possible alternative for the baptized ambassador. He as well as Isaac was in Italy from August, 1472 to January, 1473, in time to have been in Urbino before the painting was started. But the documents refer to Azimoamet only as in Venice; in contrast to Isaac, I find no record that he ever went to Rome, a prerequisite for having been baptized by the pope.

As we shall see shortly, the identification in the diplomatic correspondence of Isaac as a Jew is the clue upon which the whole sequence of events and deductions hangs.
well received.96 He thereafter returned to Venice before leaving Italy. The last notice of Isaac is found in the Commission of Giosafatto Barbaro as ambassador from Venice to Uzun Hasan, dated January 28, 1473: "Isach medicho, primo ambassador suo, retornato da Roma e andato per sua deliberatione et per nostro conforto item al serenissimo re di Hungary per iterum suaderlo et confortarlo a far animexa et potentemente contra al comun inimicho . . . .97

No document names Isaac as the ambassador who went to Urbino. There is every possibility however, that it was he. From the existing information we may reconstruct the following chronology (realizing that all the dates concerned probably designate the time of recording the information rather than of the actual occurrence): Isaac arrived in Venice sometime in August, 1472. By September 12 he had reached Rome. From there he went to Naples, and by January 28, 1473, he had returned to Venice and departed for the court of Hungary. It is possible therefore both geographically and from the point of view of time that roughly after September 12, 1472 and before January 28, 1473, Isaac and his train passed through Urbino on their way back to Venice. Federico da Montefeltro's letter of commendation states specifically that the ambassador who visited him had also visited Venice, Rome, and Naples.98 Isaac is the only ambassador from Persia who is documented as having been in all these places and who also would have visited Urbino immediately before the composition of the Corpus Domini altarpiece was begun (i.e., before February 12, 1473).

It can not be claimed that the bearded figure in the painting is an actual portrait of Isaac. It is probable, in fact, that Joos Van Ghent never saw Ambassador Isaac in person. We do not know precisely when the painter arrived in Urbino, but presumably not long before he received his first payment from the confraternity on the above date. For Isaac to be reported gone from Venice and out of Italy by January 28, 1473, he would have had to leave Urbino before this. Their paths therefore presumably did not cross. This fact explains what has frequently been observed, namely that the bearded figure in Joos's painting is a stock character. In stance and costume he repeats almost exactly those of the commanding magistrate in the Martyrdom of St. Erasmus (Fig. 17) painted by Dirk Bouts before 1462.99 Joos doubtless saw this painting and made sketches of it before he left Flanders and drew upon it as a source when he was commissioned to paint a high ranking official in oriental garb.100 The major change he effected was to shift the position of the right arm and hand which in the Bouts was placed on the hip. For the figure of Ambassador Isaac the arm is raised and the hand is placed over the breast. By his simple adjustment, the meaning of the figure is totally changed. It now expresses a heartfelt avowal. If the chronological hypothesis offered above is correct, Isaac would have been converted to the Christian faith very shortly before he arrived in Urbino. I believe this was the case, and that for this reason a figure representing him was included in the Corpus Domini altarpiece. Hence, we may understand his bodily gesture in the painting as a profession of faith in the liturgical drama he sees enacted before him.

The bearded figure, therefore, is a converted Jew. The theological substructure of the Communion of the Apostles is, we recall, the Pauline Epistle to the Hebrews.101 The exegesis of the Eternal Priesthood of Christ in this letter was made for the benefit of, as the letter itself reveals, a community of recently converted Jewish Christians living in Palestine. The addressees, because of persecutions and a sense of isolation from the splendors of the Temple, were wavering in their new faith. To forestall any such backsliding, the epistle mingles warning, exhortation, teaching and encouragement. Methodically and with reasoned argument, it demonstrates the inferior quality of the Levitical priesthood, where the old Covenant had to be ratified repeatedly by the shedding of animal blood. Infinitely superior, says the letter, is the Priesthood of Christ, who offered his own body and shed his own blood one time and forever. He entered then the Kingdom of Heaven and became mediator of the New Covenant between God and man, obtaining eternal cleansing and redemption for all those who partake of Him in His sacramental form.


We might further suggest a reference here to a treatise on the Venerabili Sacramentum alari formerly attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas (Opere omnie, xvi, Opusculum 1, 135-76; but see xvii, 377-44). An edition of this treatise with the commentary of Nicolas de Lyre was published while the painting was in progress (Incipit tracte Sanctil Thomae . . . de Corporre Christi, Cologne, April, 1473).
These are the very lessons Ambassador Isaac had just embraced; he was the modern Hebrew to whom the epistle could be addressed. His gesture physically confirms his devotion to his faith in the manner of the sacrament of the altar almost as if in response to the ex-taking the thumb of his left hand between the thumb and forefinger of his right, he counts on his fingers in the age-old gesture of teaching with arguments and proofs, precisely as is done in the letter.

Recognizing Isaac as a Jew helps to explain various other details of the composition. The objects on the altar-table are divided into two groups. To Christ’s right are Christian objects, the wafers and the wine of the sacramental meal. To his left, and directly before Isaac are risen bread and salt, both invariably parts of the food offering placed in the Temple, and therefore references to the Jewish sacrificial meal. The carafe of water at the “Jewish” end of the table is the ritual cleansing agent used in both faiths.

It now also becomes evident that Joos arranged many elements of his composition to correspond to Uccello’s preexistent panel. Directly above the scene in the pawnbroker’s shop, at the left end of the predella, appears the Apostle Judas clutching his bag of money. (Fig. 18). The one New Testament done in the processional compartment of the panel below. And immediately over the auto-da-fé of the Jew and his family, is the figure of Isaac himself. Between them on the floor are the ewer and basin, a reference to the sacrament of Baptism, rejected by the pawnbroker and accepted by Ambassador Isaac.

These juxtapositions reveal that whatever the original plans may have been, by the time the altar was finished, it had achieved an overall “program.” The predella shows the fate of unrepentant Jews who being vile and evil by nature (“Così maladecto elmie natale,” says Manuele in the Italian rappresentazione), are destroyed and damned forever. The upper section shows the rewards of the Jew who embraces the Faith: he is taken to the bosom of great men, allowed to feast on the “bread of angels,” and to live in the sight of Christ forever. The predella demonstrates the attitude of the Franciscans of the 1460’s, who preached the inborn state of evil native to all Jews. The upper panel modifies this view, proclaiming in effect that the flaw is not inevitable. Given the correctives of Christian sacraments, as in the case of Isaac, even a Jew can be saved.

The confraternity’s decision to include a visual document of Isaac’s conversion was thus crucial for the internal harmony of the altar. The choice of the subject of the Communion of the Apostles in its ritualistic form was probably motivated at the outset by the opening lines of the Office written by St. Thomas Aquinas for the Feast of Corpus Domini, where the Eternal Priesthood of Christ is cited. The scene itself with its emphasis on the transubstantiated Host, fully expresses the confraternity’s dedication. But because of its dependence on the Epistle to the Hebrews, it was a visual demonstration of the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, and could gain specific contemporary meaning from the witness of a recently converted Jew. His presence moreover, united the upper panel and the predella in a way that went beyond their Eucharistic relation. The foundation of the Monte di Pietà had established a Jewish theme for the predella. Isaac’s arrival in Urbino gave the Confraternity of Corpus Domini the means to broaden, universalize, and make positive the overall message of its new high altar.

104 The two pieces of bread are possibly a reference to the Hebrew “shewbread” which is placed on a “pure” table near the altar for a week at a time as a constant part of the sacrificial meal (Leviticus 24: 5-9, Jewish Encyclopaedia, xi, 312). One panel, now lost, of the Dirk Bouts triptych referred to in note 3 above, was supposed to have depicted shewbread (cf. Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, i, 490). See below, p. 18, for other relationships between Joos’s painting and the Bouts altar.

Salt by law, was a part of every Jewish sacrifice (Lev. 2: 13). It was also used in making the shewbread. Very early, salt became the Jewish symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, giving rise to the expression “the salt of the covenant” (Lev., ibid.); Jewish Encyclopaedia, x, 660. It is not without significance that in the painting, Christ has turned his back upon these ritual objects.

106 The knife (“le Canif”) was a famous relic preserved in the church of Saint-Jean-en-Givre in Paris. A new goldwork reliquary was made for it in 1469 (cf. Vloberg, L’Eucharistie, ii, 223), perhaps on the occasion of an authenticated miracle of healing performed by “la sainte Hostie des Billettes” (cf. Theodoric de Saint-René, Remarques historiques, ii, 435, citing a miracle in the French province, verified by a Parisisian Act of 1669). It is possible, furthermore, that the knife here is also more generically the “eucharistic Knife,” anciently kept in most sacristies for preparing the sacramental Bread and for dividing the Eulogiae. See Lee, Glossary of Liturgical Terms, 173.

107 The basin and ewer on the floor, a reference to the Baptism of the Apostles and a common element in Byzantine Koinonia scenes (cf. above note 65) are especially prominent here, perhaps because of one of the functions of the confraternity. We know that in the 12th century the Washing of the Feet was reenacted by members of the confraternity on the night of Holy Thursday: “il Sindico della Confraternità . . . dovrà nel Giovedì Santo dare scudi doi al Priore per la collazione della sera, secondo l’uso antico. Sia cura del Priore provvedere chi facci in tal funzione il ragionamento Spirituale e d’avvertire, che detta collazione segua modestamente senza alcun scandalo, e più tosto con edificazione de’ Fratelli, & altri, che si trovano presenti à quella santa funzione della lavanda de’ piedi, che deve sempre farsi con effetto, & non con fictione, ordinando, che i dodici Fratelli, che rappresentano gli Apostoli, si scalzi da un piede . . .” Capitoli della Confraternità, cap. iv, p. 13. The phrase “l’uso antico,” in the text may well indicate that this had also been the case in the 12th century.
The inclusion of the Jewish emissary has perhaps one further, final implication. Isaac was after all not just any Jew. First and foremost he came to Urbino as the honored delegate from a Musulman king, a tangible bridge with the infidel threat from the East. It is possible that in Isaac’s conversion Federico da Montefeltro envisioned the real solution to the “Turkish question.” The fundamental purpose of the crusade was not only to defeat the enemies of Christendom; it was to convert them. The 1472 campaign of the crusade was launched, as we remember, from the Vatican on the day of the Feast of Corpus Domini, with special reference to the power of the “Santissimo.”108 Federico da Montefeltro would have known of this event and understood its significance. The visit of the ambassador from the Shah of Persia, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, provided him with the opportunity to give a new and deeper moral to the Corpus Domini altarpiece, and with it make his and Urbino’s contribution to the crusade against the Turks on a solemn liturgical level.

Between the head of Isaac and Federico there appears a young woman holding a crowned child (Fig. 19). This group has frequently been interpreted as the infant Prince Guidobaldo held in the arms of a nursemaid. The woman is so identified for two reasons, one because of the simplicity of her dress, and two because by the time the painting was started the child’s mother, Battista Sforza, was dead.109 One of the most poignant incidents in the brilliant career of Federico da Montefeltro was that of the death of his young wife,110 which sadly followed an occasion of great jubilation. For years, Federico had waited for a male heir. His first wife, Gentile Brancalone, had been barren. His legitimized natural son Buoncote died as a child of the plague in 1458. The first eleven years of his marriage with Battista Sforza, fourteen years old when he took her, had produced eight daughters. Battista at one point offered her life in return for divine assistance in producing a son.111 Finally, on January 24, 1472, as it was generally believed through the intercession of St. Ubald, Prince Guidobaldo was born. In his joy, Federico made a gift of 350 fiorini to the Monte di Pietà.112 But Battista, then aged twenty-six, did not survive for long; she died of pneumonia on July 6, 1472.

It seems to me evident that Federico had an image of a woman and child included in the Corpus Domini altarpiece to commemorate these events.113 The nature of the image itself however, is highly problematic. The deterioration of the surface in this area hampers secure conclusions, but there are various indications that the figures are not simply anecdotal. The woman is depicted only to the waist and the child is held in her arms above a narrowly projecting ledge. The space behind them is closed. Cut off and placed in a niche arrangement, dark at the back, they are reminiscent of the donor figures in Dirk Bouts’s masterpiece, the Last Supper, 1464–1468,114 surely seen by Joos in the church of Saint-Pierre, Louvain, where he also saw the Martyrdom of St. Erasmus (see above, pp. 16f.). But unlike the cubicile in the Bouts painting (a kind of rectangular trap-door into the wall, with the front open to form a shelf) the niche here is a harmonious part of the architectural setting. It is exactly symmetrical and parallel in construction with the niche on the left side of the fore-choir. In fact, this reciprocal placement gives the key to the meaning of the woman and child; they are to be read as complementary to the contents of the niche opposite. In the left hand niche (Fig. 20), besides the presumed knife case, is found a metal flagon resting on a flat-topped circular box. The vessel, I believe is meant to be a container for the wine used in celebrating Holy Communion before the period of solemn obligation.115 Likewise, the cannister is probably an Altar-Bread box, that is, the box to hold the wafers before they are transferred to the altar and consecrated in the Mass.116 Both implements are thus containers for materials from the everyday world.
which, through the intervention of Divine Grace, are transubstantiated into the Corpus Domini.

The woman and child in the right-hand niche may be interpreted on the same two levels. As figures from the everyday world, I suggest the woman is not a nurse, but Battista Sforza herself. A reference to the countess in the Confraternity’s altarpiece would seem to have been almost mandatory, considering her sponsorship of the Urbino Monte di Pietà and its connections with the confraternity. The placement of the figure in the niche, separated from the other contemporaries, indicates that it is not a portrait but a memorial, painted after Battista’s death. This idea would explain the simplicity of her dress since the countess is recorded as having been buried at her own request in the rough robes of the Franciscan lay order to which she belonged. The living prince, be-decked with jewels, gazes mournfully at his worldly father, whose figure stands in front of the niche.

But there is also a divine level. It must be recalled that all Urbino believed Prince Guidobaldo had been conceived with supernatural aid. As worldly bread is transformed into Christ’s body through the intervention of Divine Grace, so these figures of mother and child in their transubstantiated form are elevated into an image of Divine Incarnation.

The upper panel of the Corpus Domini altarpiece thus expresses the grief that enshrouded the court of Urbino at the time of the commission. Through the presence of the members of Federico’s family the basic Eucharistic message of the altar is overlaid with allusions to mystic conception, supernatural birth and mourning.

Joos Van Ghent and Piero della Francesca

A major part of Federico da Montefeltro’s art patronage immediately after the death of his wife was apparently directed toward having visible records made of his son’s divinely inspired birth and his own devoted mourning. These same overtones are also present in the altarpiece he commissioned from Piero della Francesca, the Madonna and Child with Saints (Fig. 27), today in the Brera Gallery, Milan. The painting refers to the birth of Guidobaldo through the suspended ostrich egg and to the dead countess through the presence of the Baptist, her patron saint, to the Madonna’s right. It is now generally agreed that the altarpiece was painted sometime after Battista’s death (July 6, 1472) and before Federico became duke (August 21, 1474). It was created, in other words, at almost exactly the same time, for the same patron, for some of the same reasons, as Joos Van Ghent’s Communion of the Apostles. This conjunction of commissions is particularly significant because the two paintings also have much in common not only in terms of mood and spirituality, but also in terms of specific motifs.

It has been observed that the Brera Madonna holds a unique place in the history of Italian art. It is the first instance in which the Madonna and Child, saints and donor, are brought together in a true ecclesiastical setting. They are grouped in a church which the spectator views from a point within the imaginary nave. As a source for this innovation, along with the peculiar placement of the kneeling donor to the Madonna’s left, Millard Meiss suggested Jan Van Eyck’s Madonna of the Canon George Van der Paele (Fig. 31), dated 1436. Meiss set his proposal within the framework of the brilliant efflorescence of Flemish elements, pictorial, compositional, and iconographic, that characterizes Piero’s last works. Of critical importance, moreover, was the realization that underlying the formal relationship is a basic unity of subject matter; not simply alignments of cult images and a donor, they embody through their settings the traditional Mary-Ecclesia iconography.

In the later Middle Ages a formula was created to visualize the theological identification of the Virgin with the Church as a corporate institution, which showed the figure of Mary (with of a memorial. When looked at in a reclining position the stilted angle of the chin seems quite natural. W. Rolfs, Franz Laurana, Berlin, n.d. (Intro. dated 1967), 1, 356-69, n. pl. 50, was also of this opinion. More recently a terracotta cast of Battista’s actual death mask has been identified and suggested as the model for the bust; C. and R. W. Kennedy, Four Portrait Busts by Francesco Laurana, Northampton, Mass., 1962, n.p.; C. Seymour Jr., Sculpture in Italy 1400-1500, London, 1966, mask reproduced pl. 120(h), proposes a date of 1474 because the paths of Laurana and Federico da Montefeltro could have crossed in this year either in Naples or Urbino. C. Gilbert, “New Evidence for the Date of Piero della Francesca’s ‘Count and Countess of Urbino,’” Marquês, 1, 1941, 41-43, found reasons to believe the Piero della Francesca portrait of Battista is similarly a memorial painted after her death in 1472. His reasoning, based on what he believed to be the use of the past tense in the laudatory poem on the reverse of the painting, has been challenged on grammatical grounds; cf. Meiss, “Ovum Struthionis,” n. 20. It seems to me that no more convincing evidence for the late date of the Ullist portrait is needed than a comparison of it with the Louvre death-mask. Cf. the Canonize by De la Pergola, Cingiini, “De vita et morte illustris D. Bap- tistae Sforiae,” 51, note to Cap. vi, v. 12.

See the Appendix for the identification, based on a contemporary account of Bat-tista’s death, of the other courtiers here represented. Meiss, “Ovum Struthionis,” 92-101. Kenneth Clark, Piero della Francesca, 48, 215, came independently to some of the same conclusions about the painting’s symbolism. Meiss has slightly modified his views about the relationship of the painting to Battista’s death, in a new article (with T. G. Jones), “Once again Piero della Francesca’s Montefeltro Altarpiece,” 203-06. See his n. 5 for recent bibliography on the painting’s iconography. He emphasizes that Battista was buried in the church of Santa Chiara, Urbino, and not in San Bernardino as is frequently stated in art historical literature (see his n. 19). He further suggests that the Montefeltro Altar originally hung in the small church of San Donato where Federico himself was buried before his remains were removed along with the painting to the church of San Bernardino (not built at the time of his death). I am grateful to Professor Meiss for sending me a copy of this article before it was in print; as will become apparent, the observations in this section of my paper are heavily in debt to his findings. Meiss, “Ovum Struthionis,” loc. cit.; Clark, loc. cit.; Longhi, Piero della Francesca, 167, who favors a slightly later date (1477), see below, note 142; Tolnay, “Con- ceptions religieuses de Piero,” 32ff. (ca. 1470-75).

Meiss, “A Documented Altarpiece,” 62. Meiss also points out that this is the first time in his career that Piero abandoned the polyptych format and used the single large (248 x 376cm) rectangular panel. Now Meiss has further defined the historical significance of this innovation for later, particularly Venetian painting. “Once again” p. 204, with bibliography.

“A Documented Altarpiece,” 631.

Ibid. Besides the Brera Madonna, relations to Northern art have been observed in the Perugia altarpiece, the Nativity, National Gallery, London, and the Sini-gallia Madonna, Palazzo Ducale, Urbino; cf. Longhi, Piero della Francesca, 104f., 117f.; Clark, Piero della Francesca, 46f., 208f., and Tolnay, “Conceptions religieuses de Piero,” esp. p. 237.
The problem that confronted Piero in taking up the Eyckian theme can be stated quite simply: to achieve the effect of divine grandeur for his figures in the context of a strictly rational, mathematically defined spatial construction. His first departure was to enlarge the architectural interior. The Van der Paele Madonna shows only the sanctuary, and the upper frame of the painting cuts the view at the height of the canopy over Mary’s head. Piero, on the other hand, depicts a lofty basilica with the entire fore-choir and apse and portions of the nave and transept visible. Thus while the ultimate derivation of the ecclesiastical setting may well be from the Van der Paele Madonna, the more complete form of Piero’s church cannot be explained on this basis.

I propose that Piero found the source for the full view of the church toward the east in Joos Van Ghent’s Corpus Domini altarpiece where the same architectural unit is represented. Netherlands painting after Van Eyck moved further ahead in naturalism by enlarging the environment and eliminating “mystic” leaps of scale. The temple setting of Albert Van Ouwater’s Raising of Lazarus (Fig. 30, ca. 1455), for example, already provides a mighty interior space to which the figures are related in normal, quasi-rational terms. Joos’s large basilica finds its place in this more modern development of the Netherlands tradition. Yet, he mixed with the new naturalism many archaic elements that make the metaphysical nature of the building clear. He employed the symbolic Romanesque style. He set up an elaborate system of orthogonals in the floor pavement and altar-table which however, meet at many different vanishing points. He cut off the arched opening of the apse at an arbitrary level, and the spectator views the expanse of the church from a point high in the space of the nave, slightly to the right of center. By enlarging the view of the building Joos did away with unnatural scale discrepancies. At the same time he retained and exploited the ambiguities of false perspective for his own symbolic needs.

The spatial construction of the Montefeltro altarpiece has been made clear by a new analysis with reconstructed ground plan published by Meiss and T. G. Jones. Three flutes of the left nave pilaster, earlier postulated and then discovered by Meiss under the frame, connect the base partially visible next to the right hip of the Baptist and the fractional entablature above. Meiss assumes that the flutes of the corresponding pilaster on the right have been lost through trimming. With the crossing piers behind them, the figures are revealed as being not in the apse, nor in the crossing, but well forward in the nave. Thus, a long-standing problem has been resolved. Yet, although the pilasters serve to locate the figures in space, a subtle but insistent effect of ambiguity remains. As Meiss himself observes, the figures still look as if they were quite near the apse. This apparent discrepancy must be reckoned with because it is crucial to the meaning of the picture.

To begin with, it is evident that Piero did everything possible to emphasize the figures. He placed them as close to the picture plane as possible and set them in a kind of spatial man’s-land. Except for the floor, no part of the architecture reaches the surface. Laterally, the panel is cut off at the edges of the figure group and the nave walls become visible only at a considerable distance behind. The vertical cut-off point includes the full height of the building but permits no forward perception of the roofing. As a result, the setting functions almost entirely as a backdrop, and the figures’ prominence is unmitigated by enveloping architectural forms.

Behind the figures, Piero created an extremely deep space, some forty-five feet according to Meiss’s calculations. Toward the back, in the choir, the impression of recession is intensified by the design of the architecture itself: its emphatic horizontal mouldings and regular coffers measure the depth. The effect of this recession is to diminish drastically the size of the architecture. The apse appears to frame the Madonna on a scale hardly bigger than the church tabernacles in which she sits in mediaeval renderings of the Madonna-Ecclesia theme.

126 Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 1, 145–47, 415f., text figs. 52, 54.
127 Meiss, “A Documented Altarpiece,” 64, suggested the real possibility of Piero’s knowing at least one painting by Jan Van Eyck: a women’s bathhouse scene which, according to Vasari, Jan sent to Federico (Vasari-Milanese, 1, 184; cf. W. H. J. Weale, Hubert and John Van Eyck, London, 1908, 370).
128 Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, 1, 320–23, 31, figs. 435–36. An actual dependence on Ouwater’s temple (where, incidentally there is also precedence for placing figures of Jews on the right side of the composition) seems possible considering the many elements the paintings have in common: Romanesque architecture with variegated marble columns, foliate and historiated capitals (of which in Joos’s painting only traces can still be discerned), bull’s-eye glass windows. All these details, however, are also present in the setting of works by Van Eyck, including the Van der Paele Madonna and the Madonna triptych (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden). The latter panel (Panofsky, op. cit., fig. 240) provides a source, in the windows that open on landscape vistas in the wings, for the similar vistas at the right and left of Joos’s composition.
129 See above, note 61.
130 “Once again.”
131 These flutes were already partially visible in the photograph published by Longhi, Piero della Francesca (1953), pl. 202.
132 Here, however, there have been many different interpretations of the relationship between the figures and the architecture, all incorrect; cf. Meiss, “Once again,” n. 3, 4 and 5, for a review of these positions.
An important further observation in this context, is that the transept and fore-choir coffers are abnormally large and heavy in proportion, so that the wall-pilasters seem slim and delicate by comparison.

Having established the prominence of the figures in front of a diminished setting, Piero took great pains to obscure the relationship between them. There are surprisingly few orthogonals. Those that occur are either broken, as with the nave entablatures, which are almost immediately interrupted by the transept arches, or partially masked, as at the right side of the Virgin’s dais. In striking contrast to both the Van der Paele Madonna and the Communion of the Apostles, the floor is a homogeneous surface without paving stones that would indicate a progression into depth. Even the arches of the transept, along which the eye might trace a path from front to rear, are interrupted. Except for the openings at the Baptist’s left, the figures completely block the line of juncture between the horizontal and vertical. Finally it is astonishing to realize that the only means to reconstruct completely the space of the picture are the tiny point about midway up the base of the left nave pilaster, where the lower limit of the transept wall is visible, and the three slim flutes of the pilaster which connect the base to its capital.

By all these devices Piero encourages the eye to associate the figures directly with the setting behind them. And the net result of reading natural sized figures in relation to dwarfed architectural forms is the illusion of an irrational leap of scale. Without their actually being so, the figures seem “too big” for the building, and hence embody the Mary-Ecclesia symbolism. Ironically, the effect of this apparent discrepancy has a culmination and focal point in the one real discrepancy that Piero included: the Madonna is larger in scale than the other figures.

Concern with such expressive values must have been a bond that drew Piero and Joos together. This basic kinship between the two artists sheds light on the many specific motifs their paintings have in common. The architectural analogies were discussed above. In both, profile portraits of Federico appear on the right of the composition, and the right foreground of each displays large quantities of reflective metal. In both, the figures are grouped in arc-shaped arrangements that fill the lateral dimensions. The central figures of each group are projected against empty space; they both pivot slightly to the left.

Most striking, perhaps, is the fact that above both central figures, objects are suspended from fine chains. Above Christ’s sloping neck, but far in the background, hangs the sacramental lantern. The lantern’s chain, because the architecture is viewed slightly from the right, appears off-center. Since the vault of the apse is not shown, we cannot see where the chain is attached; the lantern’s actual location in space therefore remains unknown. It can be read not only as hanging in the apse but, in terms of design, although held within the oval window, as weighing down upon Christ and emphasizing the imperative bending of his body. In the case of Piero’s ostrich egg, the point of suspension is carefully indicated: the projecting tip of the inverted scallop-shell that fills the half-dome of the apse. But here Piero creates his own ambiguity. There is no way to measure the amount of projection and we cannot judge precisely where the egg is in space. Hence again, although we know it is in the apse, we tend to relate it visually to the space above the Madonna’s head where it functions with the same sense of mysterious weight as the lantern above Christ.

Our analysis of the links between the Communion of the Apostles and the Montefeltro Madonna helps to clarify the circumstances of both commissions. The death of Battista Sforza having reinforced, perhaps even motivated his taste for grave, spiritually intense art, Federico chose Piero to paint his votive altarpiece. At the same time, also with Federico’s intervention, the Confraternity of Corpus Domini finally resolved to complete the altarpiece for its church. Piero himself had previously been considered for the task by the confraternity. Now Federico’s own commission made him unavailable and it was necessary to turn elsewhere for a suitable substitute. Thus the painter from Ghent was called.

I submit that Piero and Joos worked side by side at the court of Urbino and that their contact resulted in a fruitful interchange of ideas and materials. Besides the precedent for his full-scale ecclesiastical setting, Piero was probably also indebted to Joos for many of his other borrowings from
Northern art. We may assume that the sketches after Dirk Bouts's *Martyrdom of St. Erasmus* Joos used in creating his figure of Isaac,140 were not the only drawings after works by Flemish masters that he brought with him from his homeland. He no doubt had many such sketches, and it would have been through this medium that the Van der Paele composition became available to Piero.141 It should also be emphasized that Joos was a purveyor of Northern oil technique and may well have inspired some of Piero's own pictorial effects. Joos, for his part, was equally effected by Piero's presence. Considering their close relationship, in fact, it seems reasonable to assume that the so-called realistic artist, universally recognized as a non-Italian, who either painted or repainted Montefeltro's praying hands in the Brera Madonna (Fig. 28), was not the elusive and mediocre Pedro Berruguete, documented in Urbino for the first time only in 1477, but Joos Van Ghent himself.142 The style of the hands would bear this out. They indicate a stage in Joos's personal development beyond the *Communion of the Apostles*. Realistic details are applied to more organically structured form, though not yet having the flexibility and resiliency of the slightly later portrait of Federico and Guidobaldo (Fig. 29). The hands thus become an early document of the progressive "Italization" of the Flemish artist, under Piero's influence, during his brief stay in Urbino.143

Rome, Italy

APPENDIX: THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE COURTIERS IN THE COMMUNION OF THE APOSTLES

Immediately behind the figure of Federico da Montefeltro in the *Communion of the Apostles* there appear three other men also wearing red bonnets. From their physical proximity, it seems evident that they represent courtiers closely associated with the Lord of Urbino and the historical events alluded to in the painting. As an aid in identifying these courtiers, I bring to bear a passage in the poem by Ser Gaugello de la Pergola, *De vita et morte illustris D. Baptistae Sfortiae*, that describes Battista’s death chamber in the palace at Gubbio.144 Four men are named as present: besides 1) Federico da Montefeltro, there were 2) Ottoviano Ubaldini, 3) Costanzo Sforza, and 4) Antonio Ubaldini.145 Ottaviano Ubaldini (2) was a coeval nephew, friend, and close associate of Federico da Montefeltro throughout his life. As boys they were brought together, educated together, and they fought together under the Visconti of Milan. When Federico became count in 1444, Ottaviano who had become increasingly intellectual and less military, remained at his side as counselor and treasurer. Frequently when Federico was on military campaigns, Ottaviano took over the reigns of government or assisted the young Battista to do so. After Federico’s death in 1482, Ottaviano became regent of the duchy and ruled until the majority of Guidobaldo. Ottaviano died in 1498.146 No more reasonable choice than Ubaldini could have been made to appear next to Federico to share in his mourning and his dedication to the Corpus Domini. There is in fact some evidence for believing the Ubaldini family had special veneration for this cult. In the little town of Urbana (a few miles from Urbino, called Castle Durante before the time of Urban VIII), the building of the church of Corpus Domini (second half of the fifteenth century) seems to have been sponsored by the Ubaldini. The family *stemma* still hangs there over the altar of St. Anne.147

There exists one inscribed portrait of Ottaviano (Fig. 22), the mate to another of Federico, both in the church of San Francesco in Mercatello sul Metauro, carved after 1474. These rather fine reliefs are probably the sources for the more generalized *en face* double portrait of two noblemen in the Palazzo Ducale, Urbino.148 Taking into account differences in style and physiognomic interpretation, age and angle of vision, there are still enough similarities between the rondel of Ottaviano and the head of the courtier who counts on his fingers in Joos’s painting (Fig. 21) to bear out the identification.149 Costanzo Sforza (3) was Battista’s brother; I propose that his is the sad face visible between Federico and Ottaviano. Costanzo was born in 1447 and therefore would have been around twenty-seven when the painting was done. He appears so in the painting. The representation of the head and actual features of this face are very loosely rendered and provide scant evidence for identification. Still, I believe that comparison

140 See above, p. 16.

141 This may have been precisely the fashion in which Piero gained his knowledge of Hugo Van der Goe’s Portinari Altar which did not arrive in Italy before ca. 1481, but which is reflected so strongly in his own London Nativity. Joos, who was the teacher and close friend of Hugo, could have sketched the altar, which was commissioned before he left Flanders, in its early stages (cf. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 333-36, 343, fig. 461).

142 The suggestion resurrects the old attribution, changed by Longhi in 1927 (reprinted in Piero della Francesca, 1963 ed., 71, 102, etc.), who now believes the armor still life on the ground was also painted by the foreign hand (p. 204). Cf. Lalavalle, *Primitiva fiamenga*, pls. ccxiv and ccxxv, for a comparison of details of Federico’s hands in the Brera Madonna and the Urbino portrait. Lalavalle, *ibid.*, esp. p. 123, and *Juste de Gand*, 179ff., for discussions of Joos’s later development.


144 Ibid., (2) fol. 137v, 1. 1ff.; (3) fol. 137v, 1. 23ff.; and (4) fol. 137v, 1. 13ff.

145 Cf. L. Michelini Tocci, “Ottoviano Ubaldini della Carda e una inedita testimonianza sulla battaglia di Varna (1444),” Mélanges Eugène Tisserant (Studi e testi, 237), vii, pt. 11, 1964, 97ff.; and also Franceschini, *Figure urbinate*, 7ff., “La giovenezza da Federico da Montefeltro.”


147 Cf. A. Venturi, “Francesco di Giorgio Martini, scultore,” L’arte, 33, 1923, 204, fig. 7; Michelini Tocci, *op.cit.*, pl. iii.

148 See my forthcoming article on Piero della Francesca’s *Flagellation* for a fuller account of Ottaviano’s personality and interests, and other presumed portraits of him.
with a coin of Costanzo (Fig. 24) struck after April 3, 1473 (when he became Lord of Pesaro) does not negate the association.\(^\text{150}\) Costanzo came to Urbino with Battista at the time of her wedding. After her death he remained very dear to Federico, as witnessed by his frequent appearance in other paintings from the Urbino court. One such appearance is as the kneeling male figure in the Allegory of Music, attributed to Joos Van Ghent with the probable assistance of Pedro Berruguete (Fig. 25) ca. 1476, now believed to come from Federico’s palace at Gubbio.\(^\text{181}\) The figure was first identified as Costanzo by M. J. Friedländer,\(^\text{182}\) who compared it to the Enzola medal mentioned above. The identification was followed by Schmarsow, and others.\(^\text{183}\)

Another painting in which I find a likeness of Costanzo Sforza is the Lecture of Federico da Montefeltro, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle (Fig. 26).\(^\text{144}\) Costanzo would be the young man seated with two older men, behind Federico and little Guidobaldo, here four or five years old (1476–77). Although the three figures behind Federico have been identified as (from back to front) Odasio, Federico’s secretary, Ottaviano and his son,\(^\text{155}\) a more likely combination would be Federico’s bastard son Antonio (see below), Ottaviano Ubaldini (although physiognomic similarity is almost completely lacking), and Costanzo Sforza. The younger man cannot be Ottaviano’s son, since his one son, Bernardino, died of the plague as a youth in 1458.\(^\text{184}\)

This curious painting, in ruined condition, depicts members of the court listening to a lecture delivered by a bearded scholar. The name of Paolo di Middleburg has been suggested as the lecturer.\(^\text{157}\) Paolo was a famous mathematician-astrologer from Holland who was court astrologer for Federico, later doctor to Guidobaldo, and ultimately Archbishop of Fossombrone.\(^\text{158}\) However, Paolo did not enter the services of Federico until 1481; at this time, furthermore, he was only thirty-five years old (b. 1446), much too young for the bearded sage in the painting. I would like to suggest instead another humanist, Antonio Bonfini (1427–1502), humanist-historian of Urbino, who wrote a history of Hungary in which he described the activities of Uzun Hasan.\(^\text{159}\) Bonfini is known to have written and presented a Latin oration describing the exploits and virtues of Federico around 1477. The oration is preserved in the Vatican Library, ms Urb. lat. 526, and was published by G. Amadio, Un discorso inedito di Antonio Bonfini tenuta alla presenza di Federico da Montefeltro, Montalto (Marche), 1942.\(^\text{160}\)

Antonio (4), called Ubaldini, was a natural son of Federico, who was never legitimized but who always lived at his father’s side. The fourth head, barely visible at the extreme right, is too fragmentary to permit physiognomical analysis. It may be Antonio, and if so, would complete the roster of male members of Federico’s immediate family at his side at the moment of his wife’s death.

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\(^{153}\) Melozzo da Forli, 88. For a review of positions, see Davies, loc.cit., who himself doubts the identification.

\(^{154}\) Juste de Gand, Berruguete, et la cour d’Urbino, Exhibition Catalogue, Ghent, 1957, 60f., No. 20.

\(^{155}\) Ceuleeuer, “Juste de Gand,” 98.

\(^{156}\) Cronaca di Ser Guerriero da Gubbio, 67f.

\(^{157}\) Ceuleneer, loc.cit.


\(^{159}\) Rerum Ungaricum decades, I. Fögel, B. Íványi, and L. Juhász, eds. (Bibliotheca scriptorum medii recentisque aevorum, saeculum X V) iv, Leipzig, 1941, Dec. IV, Lib. II.

\(^{160}\) C. H. Clough and W. L. Grant are at this moment preparing a new edition of the Bonfini Discorso, to appear in a forthcoming issue of Manuscripta. Mr. Clough informs me that by a quite different route, they also reached the conclusion that the orator in the painting is Bonfini.

\(^{161}\) I may add a note on the provenance of this painting. It is listed in Cardinal Antonio Barberini’s Inventario della Guardaroba, 1671, cart. 440 (2) where it is valued at sixty scudi (Bibl. Vat., Archivio Barberini, Armadio 38; the portrait of Federico and Guidobaldo, Fig. 29, is also listed in this inventory, cart. 528 (2), valued at four hundred scudi). The Windsor painting apparently went from Urbino to Rome, becoming part of the personal collection of Cardinal Antonio. Later it went to Florence before it was sold in the Woodburn sale of 1853 to Queen Victoria.


Malipiero, D., *Annali veneti dell’anno 1457–1500*, transcribed and abbre-
viated by Sen. Francesco Longo (d. 1584), A. Sagredo, ed. (Archivio storico italiano, 1st ser. vii, 1) Florence, 1843.


*Statuta civitatis Urbini*, Pesaro, 1559.

Tervarent, G. de, “Les tapisseries du Ronceray et leurs sources d’inspira-

