This dissertation is an examination of the development of the imagery and meaning of the Doubting Thomas, which I argue became a visual paradigm of religious doubt and skepticism, empirical truth seeking, and justice during the Renaissance and Baroque periods (c. 1350-1615). Catalyzed first by Renaissance humanism, and later by the Protestant Reformation, skepticism colored the scientific, intellectual, artistic, and spiritual beliefs of this period and in many ways provided the basis for modern reasoning and the Enlightenment. By assessing the contextual circumstances of commissions like that of Andrea del Verrocchio’s bronze *Doubting Thomas*, and Caravaggio’s luminous painting of the same subject, this dissertation explores the connection between imagery and the issue of doubt in early modern Italy.
DEDICATION

For John Schue,

Whose memory is with me always.
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INTRODUCTION.

Christ’s Resurrection stands as a pivotal event in Christian biblical history, and yet since this climactic event doubt has plagued even the most devoted Christian believers. Within the historical narrative there are many such disbelievers: writing in the 4th and 5th centuries, St. Augustine toiled with his troubling confessions of disbelief and in later years Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Francis of Assisi found confirmation of their religious convictions in holy apparitions of Christ’s bloodied body. The earliest of saintly vacillators was, however, far more infamous than these otherwise successfully assuaged disbelievers. St. Thomas’s incredulity, the colloquial paradigm of faithlessness in the expression “don’t be a Doubting Thomas,” has become a metaphor for our jaded need to ‘see in order to believe.’ His absence during Christ’s first appearance to the apostles (John 20:24) left Thomas at a disadvantage, and thus when Christ finally pays the apostle a special visit, Thomas demands proof that this vision is indeed a reality: Christ has risen from the grave. It is only after Christ has suggested that Thomas touch his wounded body that the apostle believes. Depictions of Thomas’s doubt in art stimulate investigation of a broader question: how did representations of the Incredulity engage with changing beliefs about the senses and knowledge, doubt and faith?

Images depicting Thomas’s incredulity present an intrinsic paradox: the theme describes disbelief but the intent of the object is to instill belief. Indeed Thomas’s momentary mistrust became a lesson for all those who wavered in their convictions. Church theologians from Augustine to Carlo Borromeo evoked Thomas as a model for
the average man, suggesting an alternative to the negative connotations of the modern expression warning *against* being a Doubting Thomas. Did painted and sculpted evocations of Thomas present the same model? This dissertation considers how images of the Doubting Thomas presented the episode and conveyed complex ideas related to the senses, devotion and doubt during the Renaissance and early Baroque periods.

From the first known representation on a 4th-century sarcophagus (fig. 1) to the late 16th century, depictions of the Doubting Thomas conveyed divergent religious and political ideas despite their shared biblical source. In order to explore how diverse ideologies were embedded in iconographic formulations of the Doubting Thomas, I focus on key artistic commissions from three crucial milieus. The first chapter of this dissertation, however, outlines the Early Christian and Medieval iconographic traditions associated with the Doubting Thomas and provides the background for the subsequent chapters. Early representations of the Incredulity were often placed with other scenes in the Resurrection narrative. In the case of the 4th-century tomb of St. Celso (fig. 1), for instance, Christ and Thomas are part of a frieze that includes Christ’s earlier appearance to the apostles. This tradition is maintained well into the Medieval period, during which time ivories and frescos of the Doubting Thomas appeared in Passion or Resurrection cycles (fig. 8). In many of these cases full-length figures of Thomas and Christ stand alone and Thomas extends his hand to probe Christ’s side wound (figs. 2, 7, 10-11 for examples).

Positioned within cycles devoted to the Passion or Resurrection, Early Christian and Medieval images of Thomas’s incredulity highlighted Christ’s dual nature as both Man and God. Additionally, Thomas’s gesture called attention to Christ’s wounds and
carried Eucharistic significance; an association made all the more pertinent by the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the translation of wine and bread into the blood and body of Christ during the Mass, promulgated by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.\footnote{For a recent discussion (with extensive bibliography) of the Fourth Lateran Council, see Miri Rubin \textit{Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The Eucharistic associations of Christ’s side wound are discussed by Vladimir Gurewich, “Observations on the Iconography of the Wound in Christ’s Side, with Special Reference to its Position,” \textit{Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes XX} (1957), 358-362.}

Thomas’s physical verification of Christ’s wounds may be likened to the layperson’s ingestion of the sacrament during Mass. Both acts serve to confirm Christ’s Real Presence and to strengthen faith. Gregorian homilies and sermons by Leo the Great evaluated in this chapter imply that Thomas’s skepticism and need for empirical proof were valued as much, or perhaps more than ‘blind’ faith.\footnote{Later commentaries and hagiographical sources indicate that a more generous understanding of Thomas’s doubt persisted through the centuries. Jacopo Voragine’s \textit{Golden Legend}, compiled around 1260 and then the most widely read book after the Bible, begins by explaining the meaning of Thomas’s name, \textit{didimus} in Greek, or “abyss” or “twofold” in translation. Voragine suggests that Thomas’s “twofold” manner is expressed in his doubt: he is “awake of the Resurrection of Our Lord in a twofold manner, not only with his eyes like the others, but by seeing and touching.” This is the only mention Voragine makes of Thomas’s infamous doubt; the rest of the Saint’s entry is an account of his successful missionary efforts in the East (Jacopo Voragine, \textit{The Golden Legend} (trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger, New York: Arno Press, 1969) 39-46).}

From this important background, the second chapter considers the promotion of the image of Thomas by Franciscans, the earliest to disseminate the theme, by focusing on significant frescos and altarpieces of the subject from c. 1330-1572 by Taddeo Gaddi, Cima da Conegliano, and Giorgio Vasari. In this section I explore how the Franciscans employed the theme in order to solidify the cult of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, by appropriating the biblical story for the purpose of verifying religious faith, and subsequently adopted the Doubting Thomas iconographic tradition.

Franciscan art engaged directly with the Order’s goal to create a more communal, accessible Christian church. Part of my task concerns the use and importance of
contemporary Renaissance sermons—how was the Doubting Thomas invoked in the
Church setting? Sermons provide unique evidence of the social construction of the
church and its congregation. Thomas’s doubt was, and continues to be acknowledged
during the Octave of Easter, specifically, the Sunday following Easter. In a series of
homilies likely commissioned by St. Francis, St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231)
described Thomas’s “confession of faith” as a “confirming of our own.”3 In the
Franciscan interpretation, the retelling of Thomas’s doubt represented an opportunity for
the entire congregation to be absolved from “sins, and [to] take away all doubt.”4
Associating primary textual sources, like St. Anthony’s sermon, with imagery of the
Doubting Thomas, I show, in this section of my dissertation, the way in which an ‘old’
story became colonized with ‘new’ meaning, thereby revitalizing a visual tradition and an
apostolic saint under the umbrella of Franciscan renewal.

My second context for exploration of the Doubting Thomas, 15th-century
Florentine civic art, comprises the pictorial decoration of courthouses, Paolo Uccello’s
lost fresco of the subject in the city’s main market square, and Andrea del Verrocchio’s
bronze group on the city’s grain exchange and guild hall. Images of the Doubting
Thomas were frescoed near the entrances of Tuscan courthouses in order to serve as
emblems of empirical evidence.5 I assert that it was a lost fresco of the Doubting Thomas
in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence and its inscription by poet and politician Franco
Sacchetti (1332-1400) that served as the origin of the judicial interpretation of the

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4 Ibid., 104.
Incredulity. Other frescos of the theme in communal palaces are now mostly deteriorated, but this use of the Gospel story undoubtedly informed another more famous representation of the subject, Verrocchio’s sculpture of the *Doubting Thomas* (1467-83) for Orsanmichele, Florence. Formerly understood to be a continuation of the 14th-century communal palace tradition, I posit that Verrocchio’s sculpture and the other images of Doubting Thomas that it inspired were part of a new, Medici appropriation of the theme.\(^6\) Such an adoption represents an addition to the iconographic repertoire of the Medici family, which already included depictions of their patron saints Cosmas and Damien, and the heroic image of David. Previously used as a Eucharistic devotional aid in late-medieval piety, or as a typological example in Franciscan imagery, the Doubting Thomas came to be associated with judicial attitudes toward truth during the Renaissance.

The concept of what constituted evidence in Renaissance Italy speaks to a broader question related to the senses—was seeing believing? St. Augustine (354-430) had emphasized the importance of touch for Thomas in particular: touching Christ’s human body allowed Thomas to be convinced of Christ’s immortal nature.\(^7\) Ancient philosophers had always given primacy to the sense of sight, but in the Renaissance the concept of touch as a conduit for truth assumed validity.\(^8\) Although attention has been paid to allegorical representations of touch, the significance of touch for religious

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\(^6\) Andrew Butterfield (*The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) considers Verrocchio’s sculpture with regard to the communal palace fresco tradition but he makes no distinction between the interpretation likely initiated by Franco Sacchetti in the Palazzo Vecchio (c.1395) and Verrocchio’s sculpture made nearly 100 years later. In chapter 3 of this dissertation I will advocate for a different reading of Verrocchio’s sculpture and it’s relationship to the earlier Tuscan tradition.


imagery of the time requires further investigation.\(^9\) Evidence for the importance of touch also exists in Renaissance sermons like those of the radical Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498). Delivered several years before his execution in Florence, one such sermon describes the nature of the “Word made Flesh” (John 1:14).\(^10\) Here Savonarola suggests that Thomas’s conversion is bound to Christ’s body and words alike—the experience of touching Christ’s resurrected body confirms his faith in a way that words alone could not.

The fathers of Humanism, such as Pico della Mirandola, valued rationality and intellectual reasoning above all else.\(^11\) In this context doubt could facilitate the revelation of things formerly unknowable. If thought and perception are analogous, as Aristotle argued in *De Anima*, than as he claims, “we know the world around us because the mind is able, through touch, to grasp the form of things.”\(^12\) The quest for knowledge, like Thomas’ quest for truth—as seen in the reaching, but not touching, fingers of Verrocchio’s figure—could be a spiritual as well as scholastic endeavor. Michel de Montaigne (1533-92), the great father of early modern skepticism suggested that one must “pass everything through a sieve, and lodge nothing in his head on mere authority and trust,” noting that skepticism was a healthy, necessary aspect of faith. Unlike Protestant reformers who saw disbelief as inherently heretical, Montaigne and Catholic theologians argued that doubt provided God the opportunity to shape man in a positive

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\(^9\) Lisa Marie Rafanelli, “The Ambiguity of Touch: St. Mary Magdalene and the Noli me Tangere in Early Modern Italy” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2004).
\(^11\) Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (Chicago: Regney, 1971) is among the many influential founders of Humanism.
way. This positive view of uncertainty paved the way for independent inquiry and is the very foundation upon which modern modes of thinking are built. In this way it is possible to see images of the Incredulity as contributing to the evolving relationship between faith and knowledge.

Finally, in the fourth chapter of my dissertation I investigate the burgeoning of images of the Doubting Thomas in Roman art following the Council of Trent, c. 1590-1615. The key works from this phase include the frescoed vault of the Papal Chapel in the Lateran Palace, a fresco of Doubting Thomas by Francesco Salviati (c.1533) in San Giovanni Decollato, the restoration of three churches dedicated to St. Thomas, and Caravaggio’s c.1602 *Doubting Thomas*. No fewer than three Roman churches dedicated to the apostle Thomas received significant structural and decorative renovations at the end of the 16th century: San Tommaso ai Cenci, San Tommaso in Formis, and San Tommaso in Parione. These architectural interventions consisted of the rebuilding of much of the structures and were likely inspired by the coming Jubilee year of 1600. Given their centralized locations, the churches must have been well known and well attended. It seems more than coincidence that one of Caravaggio’s patrons rented the church of San Tommaso in Formis during the 17th-century and another celebrated family marriage and death rites at San Tommaso in Parione.

The later history of Thomas’s cult and the Counter-Reformatory interest in promoting the role of both relics and apostolic saints for encouraging belief would

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suggest Rome as an important center for images of Doubting Thomas. A fresco of the *Doubting Thomas* c.1590 by Sixtus V’s court painter Cesare Nebbia and his team is depicted on the vaulting of the Cappella Papale in the Lateran Palace (fig. 80). This fresco stands as one of very few Roman examples of the subject before Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* of c.1602; neither Nebbia’s fresco nor one by Salviati in San Giovanni Decollato (fig. 78), seem to have inspired a Roman tradition of Thomas imagery.

Prior to Caravaggio’s depiction of the theme there appears to have been no real pictorial tradition associated with the Doubting Thomas in the Roman ambient. I consider how and in what ways Caravaggio’s canvas marked the beginning of such a tradition. Made for one of his illustrious patrons, Vincenzo Giustiniani (1564-1637), Caravaggio’s painting dramatically departs from both the rich iconographical tradition of late-medieval manuscripts, and from Early and High Renaissance frescos and sculptures. The picture’s previously unresolved patronage has in the past prevented its extensive analysis, but the resolution of this question by Silvia Danesi Squarzina in 2001 has opened new avenues for interpretation.¹⁵

Previous literature about Caravaggio’s canvas has primarily addressed questions of provenance or has enlisted its imagery to comment on the painter’s religious beliefs. Maurizio Calvesi and Ferdinando Bologna have argued opposing views of the *Doubting Thomas* as alternatively a testament to “certitude which has been firmly acquired,” or as emblematic of Caravaggio’s own personal incredulity.¹⁶ More recently, John Varriano discussed the painting as an example of Caravaggio’s “secular ways of thinking about the

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But no comprehensive study examines the work in terms of Caravaggio’s artistic and iconographical sources, its relationship to works with related themes in his oeuvre and, more broadly, with regard to contemporary theological beliefs regarding free will, predestination, and Justification by Faith—those subjects hotly debated by Dominican and Jesuit cardinals in Tridentine Rome. I do not accept, as some scholars have suggested, that Caravaggio secularized religious subjects as a result of his own unorthodox inclinations. Instead, through the textual evidence introduced in this chapter I argue that a compelling link exists between Caravaggio’s painting and devotion to the Holy Shroud of Turin, a relic that, like Thomas, had made contact with Christ’s body.

The Council of Trent, permanently adjourned in 1563, crystallized the fundamental gulf between Protestants and Catholics: Protestant belief required Justification based on faith alone, while the official Catholic position favored faith paired with good works. The conduct of Thomas thus became the lynchpin of the Doubting Thomas story: for the Protestant reformers Thomas’s actions were irreverent—a doubtful man is a godless one. The opposing view is exemplified by the famous Catholic-reformer, St. Charles Borromeo. Speaking in a sermon on the Passion of Jesus delivered in Milan Cathedral, 1584 Borromeo qualified Thomas’s doubt by emphasizing Christ’s beneficence: “Christ’s invitation to Thomas is the invitation which the Lord is still addressing to us today, for his desire is that we enter into his wounds and that we read in them what is written inside…put your hand into his side and you will recognize how

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beautiful virtue is.” Borromeo’s sermon embodies the Catholic interpretation of the theme: Thomas’s incredulity is what enables his faith; his actions lead to his Justification and thus his redemption.

Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* was to become his most copied work. In the final pages of this dissertation I consider why the painting continued to resonate long after the artist was dead. Although Bologna and others have implied Caravaggio’s interest in new movements in empirical science, it is more likely that these interests fueled the artist’s followers. The turn toward empirical science, already initiated during the Renaissance by the publication of anatomical textbooks like that of Andreas Vesalius (1543), rapidly accelerated at the turn of the 17th-century. How did this as well as the astronomical discoveries of Galileo, or the botanical dissections practiced by Federico Cesi (1585-1630) at his Lincean academy influence theological beliefs, and thus religious art? The Doubting Thomas, a theme inherently linked to spiritual and intellectual inquiry, may have been a particularly apposite subject for artists impacted by these scientific developments. Perhaps it was for this reason that Caravaggio’s exacting depiction of the *Incredulity* came to be the most called-upon iconographic source for the theme.

It is not my intent to suggest that Caravaggio’s innovative painting represented the apex in depictions of the theme, but his picture had an undeniable impact on future

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21 Andreas Vesalius’ *De humani corporis fabrica* was published in 1543 and was groundbreaking in its anatomical illustrations (see Elizabeth Harvey, 15).
representations of the subject that no previous image of Doubting Thomas had enjoyed.

Caravaggio’s painting is an ideal place to conclude this project because it embodies all of the thematic threads central to this study. Ultimately we are able to see, through Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* and the Thomas imagery of his followers, how issues related to doubt, faith, touch and knowledge converged with stylistic developments in religious narrative painting at the turn of the 17th-century.

This study is intended to enrich our understanding of one of the most compelling iconographies in western art and better situates images of the Doubting Thomas within the history of narrative painting in Renaissance and Baroque Italy. My analysis of Doubting Thomas imagery extends beyond a traditional iconographic history of the theme to consider the complex ways in which these images engaged with changing cultural ideals. In tracing how these images not only reflected but also *impacted* these ideals, two essential strands emerge. The first regards the significance of the depiction of touch for later Renaissance believers. Although much has been done to address the importance of the senses—namely sight and touch—during the medieval period, similar work has not yet been done for the 15th-17th centuries.\(^{23}\)

Despite the diverse contexts and visual discrepancies in portrayals of Thomas, it is always his touch that facilitates faith. Sermons and theological tracts, like those noted above often emphasize the positive nature of Thomas’s contact with Christ’s body. Although vision is typically thought to be at the top of the sense hierarchy, beginning in the medieval period touch and vision were inherently bound to one another. Jeffrey

Hamburger has revealed that believers in the middle ages insist “on the truth as something material, sensible, even tangible.”24 When read in conjunction with Renaissance images of the Incredulity, the primary textual sources discussed herein suggest the persistence of touch as a conduit for spiritual knowledge. This dissertation illuminates how devotional art of the 15th to early 17th-century related to broader dialectics concerning the senses and the verification of belief.

The second strand to emerge from this project concerns how iconography can become a “vehicle of meaning” in art of this period.25 The works discussed in the following pages often follow one of several compositional formulas, demonstrating little variation in images of the Doubting Thomas despite the varied contexts of the commissions. It becomes clear, nevertheless, that these formal similarities do not indicate similar didactic functions. Depictions of the Doubting Thomas in early illuminated manuscripts (figs. 15, 17, 18) for instance, often portray Thomas and Christ alone. Christ stands to the right and lifts his arm to reveal the wound in his side. Sometimes Christ even guides Thomas’s finger to his laceration (fig. 16). These illuminations frequently accompanied devotional prayers read during Easter and emphasized Thomas’s confirmation of Christ’s identity as “Lord and God.” Thomas and Christ are similarly isolated in 14th-15th century Tuscan frescos of the theme (figs. 58, 67) but the meaning of these images is notably different from that evoked in the earlier manuscripts. Painted over judicial benches or in the courtyards of communal palaces, these frescos of Doubting Thomas emphasized another lesson than that associated with the Easter cycle. In this context, fully discussed in chapter 3, Thomas and Christ were

24 Hamburger, 47.
25 Stuart Lingo employs this phrase in The Capuchins and the Art of History. Retrospection and Reform in the Arts in Late Renaissance Italy (Harvard University Doctoral Dissertation, 1998).
exempla of the judicial process upheld by Renaissance jurors. These examples, only briefly outlined here, contribute to our understanding of the flexibility of Renaissance painting: familiar stories depicted with little formal variation could convey a wide spectrum of meanings.

These meanings, not surprisingly, related to shifting social, spiritual, and epistemological beliefs. What it meant to doubt or alternately to have faith was not fixed during this period of time. The place of experiential and intellectual inquiry became increasingly problematic to the Church, who looked to biblical teachings for answers to new questions raised first by humanism and later by movements in skeptical philosophy and empirical science. Artists and patrons recognized in the theme of the Doubting Thomas an opportunity not only to respond to these questions, but to shape and direct perceptions of belief and knowledge.

I am not the first to acknowledge the significance of Thomas’s incredulity or its potential to reveal complex definitions of faith. Several recent publications have treated the episode of the Doubting Thomas paying particular attention to its role in the gospels and in hagiographical and exegetical texts—namely Glenn W. Most’s 2005 book, and Elaine Pagels’ publication on Thomas’s own gospel, rediscovered only in modern times.26 Most’s work, discussed in chapter one, and referred to continuously throughout this dissertation is a key source on the exegetical history of the subject. Most makes a compelling case for the figure of Doubting Thomas as a paragon of questions related to “faith and doubt, skepticism and persuasion,” revealing much about the cultural history of

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this subject. Although Most considers Thomas in sacred images as the subject of one of his chapters, these pictorial “versions” are not his primary subject. The author considers these representations to be “an essential component of any full account of the reception of John’s narrative;” I contend, however, that these images not only indicated how the narrative was received, but contributed to an evolving notion of faith.

Similarly, Elaine Pagels’ acclaimed account of Thomas’s Gospel provides valuable insight into how Thomas’s life and works may have affected his reputation. By assessing the differences between the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Thomas, Pagels demonstrates the variations in textual accounts of Christ’s nature. Her purpose in evaluating these textual differences is to contribute to a widening definition of Western Christianity. Thomas does not discuss his incredulity in his Gospel. Nevertheless, Pagels reveals an author who was interested, more generally, in questions of belief. Thomas’s inquiring disposition may have contributed to his singular reputation as a doubter.

Art historical studies of Thomas’s incredulity are few. A 1995 German Master’s Thesis by Sabine Schunk-Heller stands as the only book-length art-historical exploration of the theme and hers is a purely iconographic consideration of imagery predating 1500. Organized chronologically, her short text lists, illustrates, and highlights various stylistic patterns in depictions of the Incredulity. Schunk-Heller does not consider wider

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27 Most, ix. Most’s text is an important revision and expansion upon Ulrich Pflugk’s 1965 doctoral dissertation (“Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas in der Auslegung der Kirche von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Hamburg, 1965). It should also be noted that Glenn Most is a member of my dissertation committee and has provided invaluable guidance, insight, and inspiration throughout this process. I hope that this dissertation may be considered a complement to his extraordinary book.

28 Most, 159.

historical or contextual factors, nor does she evaluate the importance of contemporary sermons or religious tracts in her account of these images. More recently, essays by Alexander Murray and Joseph Polzer have treated specific concerns in Medieval and early Renaissance imagery of Doubting Thomas. Murray focuses on the relevance of medieval exegesis for a reading of these pictures while Polzer considers Franciscan factors—issues I will treat in the first and second chapters of this dissertation respectively. While other scholars have dealt with some of the works included in this study, mine is the first to consider them contextually as visual episodes in a long-standing iconographic tradition, and as parts in a complex and disparate set of meanings.

These “meanings” are framed by the significant and encompassing theme of doubt. While philosophical and theological scholars have explored the issue of doubt for the 13th-17th centuries and art historians have delved deeply into the nature of religious art none have sought to connect the theme of doubt in this period with the imagery of Thomas. Catalyzed first by humanism and later by the Protestant Reformation, skepticism colored the scientific, intellectual, artistic, and spiritual attitudes of this period and provided the foundation for modern reasoning and the Enlightenment. Without these developments in social thought, the intellectual inquiries of those like Charles Darwin

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would not have been possible: Darwin’s quest, like Thomas’s, was motivated by the search for truth and meaning.\footnote{Charles Darwin’s work, \textit{On the Origin of Species}, Ed. Ernst Mayr (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) is the essential example of this type of inquiry.}
CHAPTER 1.

EARLY CHRISTIAN—MEDIEVAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DOUBTING THOMAS

This chapter will discuss the historical background of the Doubting Thomas in images and texts beginning in the Early Christian period to the late Medieval period. The works of art selected for discussion in this chapter represent but a small sample of representations of the Doubting Thomas over this thousand-year period. Sabine Schunk-Heller’s 1995 Master’s Thesis serves as a valuable guide to the iconography of Thomas from these periods and is largely relied upon here. It is not my intention, therefore, to compile a comprehensive catalogue in the following pages. Rather, this chapter will focus on those objects that reveal the complexity of meaning intrinsic to representations of the Doubting Thomas in art of these periods. These examples, chosen from a vast chronological scope, are an important starting point for two reasons: first, they provide the visual basis for the iconography that will endure well into the Renaissance, and second, they illustrate the origins of devotions associated with the theme that persist in later ages. In this section of my dissertation I will explore the ways in which early images of the Doubting Thomas exemplified a variety of theories regarding Christ’s body, the Resurrection, and the holy sacrament. In these contexts (sometimes funerary, sometimes Eucharistic) Thomas’s incredulity was celebrated as an important confirmation of Christ’s dual nature as both God and Man. Artistic and textual sources often confirmed the same moral message: images of the Incredulity could serve as models for piety and devotion rather than as an admonition against disbelief.
This chapter begins with the biblical account of the Incredulity, the primary textual inspiration for imagery of the same subject, and moves chronologically through select images and exegesis of the subject. I have relied, with few exceptions, on Italian representations of the Doubting Thomas but supplement this discussion with several German and French works where these objects provide important visual evidence. In all of these cases—whether from the Early Christian or early Medieval periods—the Doubting Thomas is depicted within the broader visual context of the Passion or Resurrection. It is not until the Renaissance that Thomas’s incredulity stands alone as its own autonomous subject in art. Thus, the objects discussed in this chapter reveal that the Doubting Thomas in the Early Christian period and Early Middle Ages was less about Thomas than about the nature of Christ.

The story of Thomas’s incredulity is told in the Gospel of John; the following transposition is taken from the authorized Latin Vulgate version:

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.
25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.
26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in their midst, and said Peace be unto you.
27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands: and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.
28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.
29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.¹

   v. 19: Cum ergo sero esset die illo una sabbatorum et fores essent clausae ubi errant discipuli congregati propter metum Judaeorum, venit Jesus et stetit in medio et dixit eis: pax vobis.
   v. 20: Et cum hoc dixisset ostendit eis manus et latus. Gavisi sunt ergo discipuli viso Domino.
In images of Thomas’s incredulity, verses twenty-four and twenty-five are often neglected. Instead, these representations of the biblical event favor verses 27-29. Verse twenty-six, in which it is indicated that Christ appears to Thomas and the apostles behind shut doors, is sometimes depicted in the form of a closed door (fig. 10, for example). The inclusion of these doors is significant and will be treated in the pages to follow.

Schunk-Heller identifies several primary iconographic trends in early imagery of the Incredulity. First, Doubting Thomas always appears as part of a broader cycle of holy images and does not stand alone. Most commonly, these cycles are dedicated to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, as noted above. Saint’s life cycles, an otherwise common format for early fresco cycles, were rarely dedicated to St. Thomas. Indeed prior to the 14th century, when Thomas’s life appears as the subject of a cycle in Santa Croce, Sassoferrato, Thomas’s incredulity rather than the saint’s miracles was made the focus of artistic representations.

v. 22: Hoc cum dixisset, insufflavit: et dixit eis: accipiter Spiritum Sanctum:
v. 23: Quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis: et quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.
v. 24: Thomas autem unus ex duodecim, qui dicitur Didymus, non erat cum eis quando venit Jesus.
v. 25: Dixerunt ergo ei alii discipuli: vidimus Dominum, non erat vero cum eis quando venit Jesus.
v. 28: Respondit Thomas et dixit ei: Dominus meus et Deus meas.
v. 29: Dixit ei Jesus: quia vidisti me <Thoma>, credidisti: beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt.

2 Sabine Schunk-Heller, Die Darstellung des ungläubigen Thomas in der italienischen Kunst bis um 1500 unter Berücksichtigung der lukanischen Ostentatio Vulnerum (Beiträge zur Kunstwissenschaft 59, Munich: Scaneg, 1995); see especially pages 31-34.

3 George Kaftal’s iconographic sources for Italian Renaissance painting include numerous examples of Doubting Thomas imagery but very few may be considered life cycles of the saint. Exceptions are: a cycle by Antonio Alberti in San Domenico, Urbino (Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy, Florence: Sansoni, 1978); a cycle by an anonymous 14th-century artist of the Marchigian school in Santa Croce, Sassoferrato (Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of Central and Southern Italy, Florence: Sansoni, 1978); a predella panel depicting events from the life of St. Thomas in the Earl of Crawford’s collection by an artist from the school of Filippino Lippi (Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting,
iconographic formulations of the Incredulity from the Early Christian to Medieval periods, they often share these formal characteristics: Christ and Thomas are depicted in full-length; Thomas stoops or bends as he reaches toward Christ’s body; Christ raises one hand over his head, perhaps in a sign of benediction. Other variables include the symmetrical or asymmetrical organization of the composition; the inclusion of the other apostles, present in the Gospel account; and the appearance of Christ’s side wound on either his left or right side. The objects highlighted in the pages to follow demonstrate the diverse range of functions, meanings, and visual formulations of Doubting Thomas imagery, thus setting the stage for the later developments treated in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

The earliest known representation of the Doubting Thomas is carved on the front of the sarcophagus of St. Celso, (late 4th-early 5th c. Milan, S. Maria presso S. Celso; fig. 1). The tomb relief depicts a continuous narrative with large leaps between events: Christ appears in several earlier events at the left of the relief, while the Incredulity occurs at the far right. A manger is depicted along the left edge of the composition and the Christ child lies swaddled in his crib the ass and ox look out from the Nativity. From left to right, this scene is followed by the representation of the three Magi, who appear beardless and point to the Star, carved within a medallion. Next, Christ appears with

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Florence: Sansoni, 1952). Significantly, Kaftal has omitted a cycle by Stefano dell’Arzere discussed in chapter two of this dissertation.

4 Schunk-Heller treats these variations in a systematic way in her thesis (31-34). The Byzantine tradition, for example, favors a symmetrical composition with Christ and Thomas at the center and two roughly equal groups of apostles at their sides (34)

5 Schunk-Heller, 26-30; figs. 1 & 2; and Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, Ed., Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage (Wiesbaden : F. Steiner, 1967), cat. 250; p. 87-89.
Peter and Paul. Christ holds a half-opened scroll and stands between Paul, to Christ’s left, and Peter who is on Christ’s right, his hands draped.

A roughening of the ground beneath their feet indicates the next scene in the frieze. Here the two Holy Women find Christ’s empty sepulcher. A wingless angel hovers in the clouds above the sepulcher, pointing to the grave clothes at the portal. This architectural structure helps to divide this event from the Doubting Thomas, represented to the right of the sepulcher. To the far right of the relief is the Doubting Thomas. Christ stands at the furthest edge of the stone, his arm raised far over his head to allow Thomas’s probing finger unimpeded access to his side. With his other hand, Christ pulls back the folds of his mantle to reveal the wound while Thomas stoops and inserts one finger into the cut. St Ambrose, the church father who was said to have discovered the body of St. Celso, asserted that touching “the risen Christ’s body was prerequisite for bearing witness to the Resurrection, something that he felt was man’s prerogative.” In this sense, the tactile proof of the Resurrection comes from Thomas, who concludes the story of Christ’s life prior to the Ascension.

No other example that I am aware of combines into one continuous narrative the scene of Christ’s Nativity with events from the Resurrection, compacting the passage of time between. Thus, the saint’s tomb emphasizes those themes—namely birth, death, and rebirth—that are most appropriate for a sarcophagus. A slightly later sarcophagus preserved in the Museo Nazionale in Ravenna reveals the enduring relevance of the

Doubting Thomas within this funerary context. On this Early Christian sarcophagus fragment (dated to the early 5th century; fig. 2) Christ and Thomas stand between two trees. A nimbed Christ raises his left arm (now largely effaced) and draws Thomas’s arm to his side. Thomas’s right hand is missing, but it would have touched Christ’s side wound, revealed through a slit in his mantle. Both figures face frontally, their arms turned at anatomically challenging angles. Although their feet are now lost, a reconstruction (fig. 2) reveals that they might have worn the sandals typical of late antique dress which are also worn by the figures depicted on the St. Celso tomb. The marble sculpture is largely destroyed, but this fragment is from the end of the tomb, suggesting that it was part of a decorative cycle, and not the primary image of focus. If the scenes on St. Celso’s tomb represented then current pictorial traditions, then the Ravenna sarcophagus decorations may likely have included other scenes from Christ’s Resurrection.

In both the case of the Ravenna sarcophagus and that of St. Celso, the Doubting Thomas is selected for a funerary object that evoked other moments from the life and death of Christ. Although it is difficult to tell in what way the Ravenna fragment might have related to the rest of the sarcophagus, it is less problematic to derive meaning from the St. Celso tomb. Christ’s miraculous birth, as represented by the Nativity and Three Magi, is followed by his teaching and leading of his disciples, represented by Peter and Paul. To them he bequeaths the guidance of the Church after his death. Missing from this cycle are both the Crucifixion and Resurrection, which are implied by the empty sepulcher at the right of the sarcophagus. The first depiction of the Crucifixion in art was not to appear until the second decade of the 5th-century and thus its absence here is not
surprising. Without the Crucifixion and Resurrection, however, the scenes of the Empty Sepulcher and Doubting Thomas must indirectly refer to those events. In this sense, the St. Celso *Doubting Thomas* becomes symbolic of the primary lesson of the Resurrection: Thomas confirms Christ’s godly nature while simultaneously verifying his corporal existence after death.

This was the very same lesson emphasized by the early church fathers who wrote about the Doubting Thomas theme. In the 3rd century Origen (185-c.254 A.D.) had, as Glenn Most explicates, shown himself to be most concerned with the nature of Christ’s body in its Resurrected state. Origen suggests that Christ’s body was, “as it were in a certain intermediate state between the density of his body before the Passion and the manifestation of a soul deprived of this sort of body.”8 In other passages of Origen’s discourse he suggests that “Thomas is an accurate and cautious judge who is not distrustful of the reports of his fellow disciples, but instead is careful to make sure that what is involved is not just some phantasm and to prove that Jesus has really been resurrected in a body that” can be touched.9 The section of Origen’s *Commentary on John* in which he discusses the Doubting Thomas is unfortunately lost, though he explicitly contrasts Thomas’s request with that of the Magdalene, who is denied her urge to touch Christ.10 Origen’s troubled queries about the nature of Christ’s body ultimately led to a quagmire in his thinking: Christ’s resurrected body was solid enough to be touched, but infirm enough to pass through closed doors! When Origen was posthumously condemned for heresy at the Second Council of Constantinople in 533 his

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fate may have helped “ensure that for many centuries Christian orthodoxy would be defined in part by its insistence that Thomas did in fact touch Jesus.” The Church’s ‘insistence’ on this point seems entirely consistent with a primary tenet of Catholic belief: Christ’s Real Presence is evidenced by his Resurrection, and again during the ritual of Transubstantiation.

Visually, this point is emphasized by the depiction of Thomas on the St. Celso sarcophagus. The viewer has an unobstructed view of Thomas’s finger, which clearly enters Christ’s side wound. This moment of tactile contact confirms the dual nature of Christ discussed by Origen: only a God can rise from the dead, but only a man may be touched. Christ is both. His miraculous birth, as represented by the Nativity on the frieze, initiates Christ’s mortal, human time on Earth. This aspect of his nature is mirrored, on the opposing end of the relief, by his appearance to Thomas as his “Lord…and God.” A sermon delivered by Leo the Great on the 6th of January, 444 relates Thomas to the Magi and creates a later, textual analogy to the images on the St. Celso tomb. Leo framed his sermon with discussion of the magi, drawn to Christ’s birth by the vision of the celestial star. He writes that these kings must have possessed a sense of truth that transcended the literal vision of this guiding star, for

…They [the magi] did not search out with physical vision that which they had seen in the fullest sight of mind. Yet their diligence in this service to wisdom persevered until they saw the child, and this diligence thereby benefited the people of a future age and those of our own time. Just as it benefited us for Thomas the apostle to feel with his hand the marks left by the wounds on the

11 Most, 139.
Lord’s body after his Resurrection, so also it profits us that the wise men gave proof of his Infancy in beholding him.\(^\text{12}\)

In this evocation, Leo suggests that the Magi and Thomas alike use their senses to confirm the dual nature of Christ and thus offer believers evidence of this nature. That the St. Celso tomb is framed by the same scriptural stories cannot be accidental and suggests that Leo’s sermon reflects ideas already present in art of the period.

The message of Christ’s dual identity, emphasized by the St. Celso relief and the sermon of Leo the Great, is reiterated in another of Leo’s sermons dated to April, 443. This vigil, dedicated to the observance of the Forty Days, addressed Christ’s Resurrection:

…He [Christ] showed them the wound “in his side,” the “places of the nails,” and all the signs of his recent suffering, so that the property of the divine and of the human natures might be understood as remaining inseparable in him. He wanted us to know that the Word was distinct from the flesh in its essence, but in such a way that we would confess one and the same Son of God to be both the Word and flesh.\(^\text{13}\)

Though Leo does not mention Thomas explicitly in this sermon, his role in our understanding of the “word and flesh” is implied, as it is understood that Thomas’s doubt was the catalyst for Christ’s revelation of his “recent suffering.” As such, the moment described in Leo’s sermon stands at the climax of the Resurrection narrative in that it provides the final proof that Christ is not merely a man. Thus when Leo later preached that “their [the apostles] “seeing” instructed us, “their hearing” informed us, their

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\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, 313, Sermon 71.
“touching” strengthened us…they “doubted” so that we need not doubt,” it is not just Thomas’s doubt, but the apostles who collectively show us, through their example, the way to God. Although only one other apostle joins Thomas in his confirmation of Christ’s wounds on the St. Celso tomb, in later representations of the subject the full cast of disciples accompanies him. In this case Leo’s emphasis on collective doubt or collective belief does not draw from the St. Celso or Ravenna sarcophagi; nevertheless, it is his message of Christ’s dual identity that is relevant to a reading of these images.

This issue of Christ’s nature is also prominent in the exegesis of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), whose influential writings correspond chronologically with the late 4th-century St. Celso tomb. In his *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine discusses the importance of Thomas’s contact with Christ’s body. In *Tractate 121* (on John 20:10-29) Augustine juxtaposes the *Noli me tangere* with the Doubting Thomas as a means of discussing how one must “distinguish the human and the divine.” Mary Magdalene’s vision of Christ near the empty sepulcher and her subsequent desire to touch him make for an obvious counterpoint to Thomas’s similar urge to touch the risen Christ. While the Magdalene is denied her desire when Christ says “touch me not,” he *invites* Thomas to do this very thing. Augustine admits that Jesus says to Thomas “Because you

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14 *Ibid.*, 323, Sermon 73, delivered on June 1, 444, as one of two sermons for the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension.
15 The biblical account of the Incredulity does not, in fact, describe Thomas’s physical contact with Christ. This narrative lacunae is the central occupation of Glenn Most’s book. Most suggests that Thomas, after being invited to touch Christ’s body, realizes his error and confesses his gratitude and belief without literally probing the wound. Indeed this information is missing from the Gospel narrative. Early church fathers (including Augustine) and others (as Most shows) debated this issue. In the end, however, it seems that regardless of what might have occurred in the event, Thomas’s doubt was believed (by Fathers and laity alike) to be assuaged by the literal touching of Christ, as countless representations in art attest (see fig. 1 for example). St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 112-24, translated by John W. Rettig (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998) 58-67.
16 St. Augustine, 56-65.
have seen me, you have believed,” and not “You have touched me,” “because in a certain way sight is the generic sense.” 17 Augustine goes on to suggest that sight is

…commonly named also by the other four senses, as when we say: hear, and see how well it sounds; sniff, and see how well it smells; taste and see how well it savors; touch, and see how well it gives warmth. Everywhere “see” was uttered, although there is no denying that sight properly pertains to the eyes.

Consequently, here too the Lord himself says, “Put in your fingers here and see my hands.” What else does he say then, “touch and see?” And yet he did not have eyes in his fingers! Therefore, whether by looking or also by touching, “Because you have seen me,” he says, “you have believed.” 18

Augustine concludes his quandary with a final statement: “But whether by looking only or also by touching he [Thomas] saw and believed, that which follows foretells and commends more the faith of the Gentiles, “Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed.” 19 As Most has noted, Augustine seems content to leave it at that, never fully answering the question of whether Thomas probed Christ’s wound or was appeased by the mere offer to do so.

Later in Augustine’s own writings the issue seems to have been left behind. In a sermon translated by Schaff, Augustine writes,

And the Lord who could have risen again without any vestige of a wound, kept the scars that they might be touched by the doubting Apostle, and the wounds of his heart be healed... “Behold,” saith the Lord, “put in thy fingers along My Side, and be not unbelieving.” For thy sake have I been slain, at the place which thou

17 Ibid., 61.
18 Ibid., 61.
19 Ibid., 61.
wishest to touch, have I shed My Blood, that I might redeem thee; touch and
believe; find out the place of My wound, heal the wound of thy doubting.\(^{20}\)

Here Augustine’s focus has shifted toward the significance of Christ’s wounds.

Augustine views Thomas’s doubt as being related to the nature of Christ’s
Resurrection—the trouble was not in believing that Christ had somehow risen, but that he
was not a ghost, but was flesh.\(^{21}\) Augustine concludes this sermon by emphasizing
Thomas’s revelation of Christ’s “true flesh;” “…It was the true flesh that the Truth
brought back to life. It was true flesh that the Truth showed to the disciples after the
Resurrection. It was the scars of true flesh that the Truth revealed to the hands of those
who touched Him. Let falsehood then be put to shame, for the Truth has conquered.”\(^{22}\)

Augustine’s words are explicit in their linking of the sacred wounds to Thomas’s
incredulity. The Truth promised by Christ and revealed during the events of the
Resurrection is confirmed by Thomas: Christ is both a man and God.

Augustine’s rhetorical focus on the flesh and blood of Christ may also be
alogous to the Eucharist. Christ’s blood, the source of the sacrament of the Eucharistic
wine, also received increased emphasis at this time and stood for Christ’s true presence in
the Host.\(^{23}\) As John Bossy has argued, re-enacting Christ’s violent sacrifice through the
ritual celebration of the mass aided worshippers in their understanding of Christ’s
transformation from man to God.\(^{24}\) By associating Thomas’s persuasion with the source
of the sacrament—Christ’s blood—Augustine may suggest a link between Thomas’s


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 63-65.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 68.


\(^{24}\) Bossy is cited in Arnold’s text, 140.
doubt and the Eucharistic significance of the episode. With this interpretation in mind, Thomas’s unbelief could be viewed in a positive light as it reminded worshippers of the redemptive power of the Sacraments. In the funerary context of the St. Celso tomb, however, the artist’s intent was not likely to convey a Eucharistic message but rather to remind viewers that Christ’s Resurrection, and its confirmation by the Doubting Thomas, brought with it the promise of the resurrection of faithful souls in Heaven.

The Doubting Thomas maintained these associations with the Passion and Resurrection despite the various functions of the objects upon which it was depicted. The ivory Passion Casket (420-430, British Museum, fig. 3) for example, may have been used as a reliquary and features the **Doubting Thomas** on the fourth plaque.\(^25\) The object is best known for its famous representation of the *Crucifixion*, the earliest known surviving example of the subject along with that depicted on the doors of S. Sabina. On the Passion Casket Christ appears triumphant, even in death (fig. 3). Indeed, his upright, healthy body is juxtaposed with the limp corpse of Judas who hangs from a tree at the left of the composition. Situated in the upper limbs of the tree, a bird feeds her chicks—a familiar analogy to Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of his metaphorical children. The other subjects of the ivories follow chronological order: prior to the Crucifixion is the scene of Christ bearing the Cross, followed by a scene of the empty sepulcher, and finally the Doubting Thomas.

Here the Incredulity follows a different type than that depicted on the St. Celso tomb. Christ stands on a pedestal at the center of the rectangular ivory. Two apostles appear on either side of the Savior, who raises his left arm in order to allow Thomas

\(^{25}\) Schunk-Heller, 21; fig. 6; and Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz : Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 1952) no. 116, pl.61.
access to his side. A bearded Thomas reaches a finger to Christ’s wound as three apostles look on. The other apostles in this scene reveal their emotional responses to the events unfolding before them: to the far left a disciple rests his head on his fingers in wonder. Next to him another disciple cranes forward, grazing Christ’s mantle with his hand. The toes of these figures overhang the edge of the plaque creating a sense of movement toward Christ’s body. The apostle who stands slightly behind Thomas holds a hand to his chest, perhaps in awe of what he is witnessing. Juxtaposed with the triumphant Christ of the Crucifixion, in which the Lord’s bodily sacrifice does not result in the expected painful response, the Doubting Thomas might emphasize Christ’s human nature. Christ is depicted as a God in the Crucifixion and as a wounded man in the Doubting Thomas. The Doubting Thomas is especially meaningful as the final episode represented on the casket; the Incredulity reiterates the primary message of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

In the objects discussed thus far, Thomas and Christ appear either alone (as in the Ravenna fragment) or with a few additional apostolic onlookers (fig. 3). These iconographic variations were to be joined by representations of the Incredulity in which a larger cast of apostles were also present. All three types were to endure in later years but the number of accompanying apostles not only changes the basic compositional elements of the images, but also the ways in which they might be interpreted. When Christ and Thomas are depicted alone, for instance, Thomas’s privileged role as confirmer of the sacred wounds is inevitably accentuated. Conversely, when the other apostles are also present, as they are in the early 6th-century mosaic in San Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna
(fig. 5) the textual details of the biblical story are favored. The episode as it is conveyed in John requires that Christ appear to Thomas and the other disciples; in choosing the more textually accurate variation of the Incredulity, artists underlined the significance of Christ’s message as it was conveyed not only to Thomas, but to all.

The San Apollinare Nuovo mosaic is arranged symmetrically; Christ stands at the center of the composition, his left arm raised to reveal the wound in his side. Thomas kneels at Christ’s left but his hands are concealed and he does not reach forward to touch the wound. Five apostles are arranged at Christ’s right, four on his left. A set of closed doors appears in the left background. Their presence in the background may indicate that Christ has already passed through them to stand “within.” The ground, however, is green, indicating that the scene is unfolding outside. Collectively, the apostles bear witness to what is about to happen, namely, Thomas’s handling of Christ’s wounds. This may recall Leo the Great’s use of the plural form (“he showed them” etc.) in the sermons quoted above. Leo’s sermons may draw not from the account in John Twenty, but rather from the Gospel of Luke 24:39. In this version Thomas’s incredulity is omitted and instead the apostles collectively seek to touch Christ’s wounds, including those on his hands and feet. If the San Apollinare Nuovo mosaic is dependent on the story as it is told

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26 Originally built as a palace church for Theodoric, the mosaic decorations of the lowest tiers of the nave depicted the procession of male and female martyrs against a ground of sparkling gold. For analysis of the mosaics in San Apollinare see the most recent monographs of the subject by Emanuela Iacco Penni, La Basilica S. Apollinare Nuovo di Ravenna attraverso i secoli (Bologna: Ante quem, 2004) and Isotta Roncuzzi Fiorentini, S. Apollinare Nuovo: i mosaici di Teodorico (Faenza: Edit Faenza, 2000).

27 The full text of Luke 24:36-40 reads as follows:

36 And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?

39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have.

40 And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet.
in Luke, than there is no need for the event to unfold behind shut doors, as this is not dictated by the text. Though they no longer bleed, Christ’s wounds provided access to his divinity, as is made clear in a sermon by Leo of June, 444; “He [Christ] pressed on their doubting sight the signs of the cross still showing in his hands and feet and asked them to touch him for proof. He had preserved the wounds of the nails and the lance as signs, to heal the hearts of unbelievers, so that, with a very constant knowledge, not a hesitant faith, they would understand that this nature which had lain in the tomb was to take its place on the throne of God the Father.”

By touching the wounds of Christ, preserved for this purpose, the apostles are able to “heal” their unbelief.

In the San Apollinare mosaic four of the apostles extend their hands toward Christ. One, standing just under Christ’s raised left arm, almost touches Christ’s body with his outstretched hand. Their presence in this mosaic suggests that the lesson of Thomas’s disbelief is applicable to all. Writing around the time the mosaics were made, Gregory the Great (540-604 A.D) discussed the universal applicability of the Thomas story. In *Homilia 26*, based on John 20:19-31, Gregory treats the subject of the Resurrection and concludes:

> What have you observed from these events? Do you believe it to have happened by chance that the chosen disciple was absent then but afterwards when he returned, heard, when he heard, doubted, when he doubted, touched and when he touched, believed? This did not happen by chance but by divine dispensation. The celestial mercy in a marvelous way brought it about that the doubting disciple, when he touched in his master the wounds of the flesh, healed in us the

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28 St. Leo the Great, *Sermons* (see n. 7 above) Sermon 73, delivered on June 1, 444, as one of two sermons for the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension, 324.
wounds of disbelief. For the disbelief of Thomas was of more benefit for our faith than was the faith of the disciples who believed, because when he is brought back to faith by touching, our mind is strengthened in faith and all doubt is put aside.29

Gregory follows this sentiment with another reference to Thomas in *Homilia 29*:

That the disciples were slow to believe in the Resurrection of the Lord was not so much a weakness in them as a source of strength for us in the future, as I shall explain. While they were in doubt the Resurrection itself was made known to them through many signs. When we read and acknowledge these what effect does this have but to strengthen us through their doubt? Mary Magdalene assured me less, who believed more quickly, than Thomas who doubted for a long time. For indeed Thomas in his doubt touched the scars of His wounds and cut away the wound of doubt from our heart.30

As C.W. Marx has emphasized in his analysis of these homilies, both passages refer to the beneficial nature of Thomas’s doubt in that “it gave rise to empirical proof of the Resurrection and thus confirmation for faith, and Thomas is seen as an instrument in a divine plan to reveal the truth of the Resurrection.”31 The Christological cycle to which the *Incredulity* belongs likewise emphasizes the “truth of the Resurrection” with simple depictions of subjects from the Passion and Resurrection narratives.32 Not coincidentally, the “rise of empirical proof” noted by Marx, is a theme that will be more emphatically

30 Ibid., 299.
31 Ibid., 299.
32 The left lateral wall of the nave depicts thirteen scenes of Christ’s miracles and parables. In these he appears young and beardless. The *Incredulity* appears as one of thirteen scenes on the right lateral wall of the nave. In these Passion and Resurrection scenes Christ is older, bearded, and no longer dons the garb of an emperor, thus emphasizing his sacred rather than secular status.
taken up during the Renaissance and will be considered in chapter 3 of this dissertation. Although Marx notes that Gregory is not the first to posit this interpretation of Thomas’s doubt, his writings were certainly among the most influential since the passages noted above appeared as *lectiones* in a number of medieval breviaries and these breviaries thus became a primary means of transmission of this view of Thomas’s incredulity.\(^{33}\)

With its prominent inclusion of the other disciples, symmetrically arranged around Christ and Thomas, the Early Christian *Doubting Thomas* in San Apollinare underscores the significance of this event for all believers. As evidenced by the earlier Ravenna examples (both the St. Celso sarcophagus and the slightly later fragment) and the Passion Casket *Incredulity*, these iconographic variations persisted simultaneously. Another important iconographic variation in images of the Doubting Thomas is the position of Christ’s side wound. Christ’s side laceration or *costato* as it was called, was not consistently represented on same side of his body. The San Apollinare mosaic places the wound under Christ’s left arm, while on the St. Celso sarcophagus the wound is depicted under Christ’s raised right arm. Although attempts have been made to suggest a precise point at which artists became consistent in their representation of the side wound, no such moment has been identified.\(^{34}\) Christ’s right side, traditionally favored as the “side of honor, of good fortune, [and] blessing” was understood by Augustine to be the

\(^{33}\) *Ibid.*, 299-301. Parts of both of Gregory’s homilies are, as noted by Marx, appointed for the Feast of St. Thomas as the *Hereford Breviary* and the *Monistic Breviary of Hyde Abbey, Winchester* attest.

\(^{34}\) Vladimir Gurewich, “Observations on the Iconography of the Wound in Christ’s Side, With Special Reference to its Position,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XX (1957), 358-362. Gurewich explains the iconographical shift of Christ’s side wound from left to right—first observed in the Rabula Gospels executed in 586 A.C.E. Gurewich suggests that the wound is rich in theological significance, noting that the “wound is not yet thought of as being the fountain from which flows the life-giving, world-redeeming blood of Christ, but merely as a blow inflicted in a mortal place on a still living savior,” in early images. The Gospel tradition, as explicated by Gurewich, if followed in artistic representations, would show the wound on Christ’s right, between the lower ribs (361), although in the Northern tradition (Dürer, Rembrandt, Rubens) the wound is often depicted on Christ’s left (362), a subject of controversial significance.
“vita aeterna [and] is the place whence the Sacrament flowed forth and the Church was born.” Nevertheless, a consistent visual tradition does not emerge until the later Medieval period when the wound is most often depicted on Christ’s privileged right side.

More unusual than the position of Christ’s wound in the San Apollinare mosaic is the fact that Thomas does not touch the laceration. In later examples of the subject, such as the 9th-century Cruciform Casket of Paschal I, to which I will return, Thomas’s Incredulity is sometimes divided into two scenes. The first might depict Christ appearing to Thomas, while the second presents the Incredulity (fig. 4). In San Apollinare, however, the two moments are likely merged, as Erik Thunø has suggested. The closed doors in the background of the mosaic are indicative of the first part of the narrative, but Thomas’s bent approach reminds viewers of the moment to follow, in which he will touch Christ’s exposed body. The iconography of Paschal I’s Cruciform Casket may provide posthumous evidence that the 5th-century San Apollinare mosaics were an abbreviated replacement for a more extensive, now-lost cycle.

One of the Sancta Sanctorum objects commissioned by Pope Paschal I (817-824), the silver Cruciform Casket was made to contain a reliquary cross (fig. 4). Five scenes appear on the lid of the casket and emphasize the central scene of The Communion of the Apostles. The sides of the casket are decorated with twelve episodes subsequent to Christ’s Resurrection. Among these are Christ Appearing to Thomas and The

35 Ibid., 359.
36 Ibid., 359.
38 Ibid., 111.
39 Ibid., 18.
40 For detailed analysis’ of these scenes see Thunø, 79-117.
Incredulity of St. Thomas (fig. 4). In the first of these scenes Christ, Thomas, and a small group of apostles appear behind a low wall with closed doors at the center. Christ stands at the far left of the composition and raises his right hand toward the apostles. Thomas’s hands are concealed, as they are in the San Apollinare mosaic, and likely indicate his reverence for the divine presence before him. Thomas has cast off this covering, however, in the following scene of the Incredulity. Gone are the wall and doors of the first episode. Christ stands at the right of the composition, his right arm raised high while Thomas kneels forward and fingers the wound. Nine apostles crowd behind Thomas in the left background.

As Thunø has revealed, the division of the Thomas story into two separate scenes is unprecedented and may have relied on earlier, now-lost visual sources such as a cycle in San Apollinare.41 This separation of the scenes calls attention to the conspicuous removal of the wall and doors in the second image.42 Early medieval commentators “compared Christ’s appearance behind closed doors with Christ’s entering the Virgin’s womb without the violation of her virginity;” “But where divinity was present, shut doors did not obstruct the mass of the body. For indeed he could enter even though they were not opened at whose birth the virginity of his mother remained inviolate.”43 A prophetic reading of Ezekiel 44:2 also foretells of the shutting of a gate that only the Lord may enter.44 Thus, the division of the two episodes emphasizes Christ’s divinity (only the Lord may pass through shut doors) and thereby facilitates the faith of Thomas and the

41 Ibid., 110-111.
42 Ibid., 111.
43 Ibid., 111. Augustine, In Iohannis evangelium tractatus, 121 (Trans. Rettig, The Fathers of the Church 92, p.60)
44 From the Latin Vulgate, (Ezekiel 44:2): “Then the Lord said unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.”
apostles in the Resurrection. Moreover, the faith of the apostles will also “help them in the future by opening for them the doors of Heaven…in anticipation of the Last Judgment.”

Although the separation of the two scenes—Christ’s Appearance to Thomas and The Incredulity—did not become popular in later periods, the wall and closed-door motif reappeared in the virtually destroyed 10th-century frescos of SS. Martiri in Cimitile (fig. 7) and the 11th-century nave frescos in Sant’Angelo in Formis, Rome (fig. 8). Both frescos notably deviated from the earlier tradition that is recognizable in the San Apollinare mosaic and in an 8th-century fresco fragment of the Doubting Thomas in S. Maria Antiqua, Rome (fig. 6). In these cases Thomas and Christ appear in front of closed doors, with a house-like structure behind. To the examples in Cimitile and Sant’Angelo may be added another depiction of Doubting Thomas in which the wall and door motif triumphs over the older pictorial solution: that of the Salerno Ivories (fig. 10). When artists favored the representation of the wall and locked doors in the foreground of the Incredulity, these carved or painted architectural barriers alerted viewers to the nature of the miraculous event unfolding beyond that structural impediment. Christ has passed through a “gate” that only the Lord may enter, but he has also appeared in touchable form: he is God and Man.

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45 Thunø, 112; also significant, as Thunø reveals, is the scene previous to the two Thomas episodes: the Anatasis. The Anatasis thus helps to endow the Incredulity with associations to the Last Judgment and emphasize the “Incarnation as the vehicle of salvation.”

46 The fresco in Cimitile is discussed very briefly by Schunk-Heller (31-32) as an example of the “Western type” of Doubting Thomas imagery. This type also includes the Salerno ivory examples, as both feature the wall and closed doors in the foreground.

47 For the fresco fragment in S. Maria Antiqua see, Schunk-Heller, 28-29; figs. 23-26); Schiller Ikonographie, III (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1969-1990) 110; and Per Jonas Nordhagen, “The frescos of John VII (705-7) in S. Maria Antiqua in Rome,” in Acta ad archaeologiam et atrium historiam pertinentia, vol. 8, Rome (Institutum Romanum Norvegiae 1978) 89-142.

48 Schunk-Heller, 32-33. For the only full account of the fresco program in Cimitile, see Hans Belting, Die Basilica dei SS. Martiri in Cimitile und ihr frühmittelalterlicher Freskenzyklus (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1962).
The monumental group of ivories referred to as the *Salerno Ivories* contains approximately forty plaques depicting Old and New Testament scenes. Among those representing Christ’s Resurrection is the *Doubting Thomas* (fig. 10). Measuring 11.7 x 23.6 centimeters, the rectangular ivory is divided evenly into two scenes. In the top tier Christ appears to the Marys. He stands at the center of the composition and is flanked by the kneeling women. An intricate pattern of foliage indicates that the scene is unfolding outside. The figures appear to stand on the ivory string-course that separates the event from the *Doubting Thomas* below. Again, Christ stands at the center of the composition—his nimbus is aligned almost exactly with that depicted in the upper tier. Christ faces frontally, his right arm raised high to allow Thomas’s finger entry to his wound. With his left hand Christ pulls back the folds of his mantle. A hunched and reverential Thomas approaches from Christ’s right. Four apostles are lined up behind him and another six appear in a similar row on the right side of the composition. Several of the disciples extend their palms toward the viewer, signaling their awe and reverence. The viewer is distanced from the events unfolding, however, by an intricately carved wall that occupies more than half of the composition. A closed and securely bolted door is a reminder of Christ’s appearance to the apostles behind “shut doors.”

Robert Bergman has noted that although the figural composition follows the “usual mid-Byzantine version showing Christ and Thomas in the center…and the Apostles in two roughly equal groups on either side,” the wall and locked-door positioned in the foreground, and thus half-length figures behind, are not found in earlier, Byzantine

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Although Paschal I’s Cruciform Casket, discussed above, includes the locked doors depicted in the Salerno plaque, Bergman argues that other Italian examples were used as artistic sources. The Salerno ivories are more dependent, according to Bergman, on the wall and locked door motif found in the now dilapidated fresco in the nave of SS. Martiri in Cimitile (904-911; fig. 7). Another example, virtually contemporary with the Salerno ivories is the *Doubting Thomas* fresco in Sant’Angelo in Formis (fig. 8; c.1072-1087). Today the scene is partially obscured by damage, but a wall and the edge of a set of doors is still legible in the lower half of the fresco. Like the Salerno ivory, Christ, Thomas, and the apostles appear in half-length behind the imposing architectural structure. Christ similarly lifts his right arm while pulling back his mantle with his left. Thomas folds himself nearly in half as he cranes forward, delicate finger extended to the side wound. Once again, the apostles stand in two rows—one flanking each side of Christ and Thomas. Due to the notable similarities between the Sant’Angelo fresco and the Salerno ivory (among other stylistic factors detailed by Bergman) it would seem that the Salerno *Doubting Thomas* relies on “Italian traditions current at the time the Salerno ivories were made.” If Italian artists favored the prominent depiction of the wall and locked door through the 11th century, this pictorial tradition was not to endure in later periods, as we shall see in the subsequent chapters. Within the broader context of

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50 *Ibid.*, 73. Mid-Byzantine examples are found in the mosaics in Hosios Lukas and Daphni; see Schunk-Heller, figs. 41-42.
53 *Ibid.*, 73. Bergman argues that there are three types of stylistic influence in the Salerno ivories: that of the Syria-Palestinian Grado Chair Ivories (late 7th or early 8th century); that of post-Iconoclasm Byzantine art; and what Bergman labels the “Italian Element” (71). Bergman assigns the *Doubting Thomas* to this latter category.
both the ivories and the frescos—both of which were accompanied by other scenes from Christ’s Infancy, Ministry, Crucifixion, and Resurrection—the structural boundary imposed by the wall and doors emphasizes Christ’s ability to pass through such physical matter. Thus, the Salerno composition, and the Sant’Angelo fresco as well, incorporate the prominent wall and doors as a means of solidifying a primary message related to Christ’s divinity.

A variety of reconstructions for the Salerno ivories exist, all suggesting different arrangement of these plaques. Bergman’s analysis reveals, however, that the scenes were likely part of a set of ornamental doors for the interior of the Duomo in Salerno.54 Despite the obvious inclination to view the Old Testament episodes as direct typological precedents for the corresponding New Testament ivories, evidence has revealed that the ivories were not arranged in order to make such one-to-one comparisons. Instead, as Bergman has suggested, the heroes emphasized in the Old Testament scenes—namely Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses—were all understood to be Christ-types in the medieval exegesis.55 The elaborate juxtaposition of Christological narratives with those from the Old Testament has a cumulative effect; viewers associate Old Testament prophets with the coming of Christ in a collective, general way.56 Nevertheless, Bergman cites a “liturgical undercurrent in the cycle as a result of numerous scenes that allude to the Eucharist,” noting that the ivories “functioned as a veil

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54 Bergman rules out other possible functions including that of an altar frontal, dossal, throne, and reliquary urn (93-103). By the 16th century the ivories had been inserted into a wood framework mounted on the front of the altar in the Treasury of Salerno Cathedral though scholars agreed that this was not their original arrangement.
55 Ibid., 3.
56 Bergman’s diagrammatic illustrates the likely arrangement of the scenes in which the Incredulity plaque is next to one of the Marys and Apostles and Christ at Tiberius but is sandwiched (top and bottom) by scenes of God Commanding Abraham and The Sacrifice of Isaac, neither of which have immediate, direct bearing on the Doubting Thomas but are more generally linked to events in the life of Christ (107).
behind which certain of the mysteries of the liturgy were concealed, [while] at the same time, through the medium of their richly carved decorative program [illustrate] sacred history…” 57 If the ivories adorned a set of doors positioned in front of the choir or main sanctuary, as Bergman proposes, then they functioned as a literal “veil” as well. The proximity of the ivories to the main altar (whether as doors, altar frontal, or throne) indicates that the iconographic program was meant to be read in relation to the ritual enactment of the Mass. The Lenten Synod (1079) had only recently generated further interest in Transubstantiation, implying an increased interest in the Eucharist at the center of liturgical practice. 58 In the broadest terms, both the Old and New Testament scenes depicted on the Salerno ivories may have related to this surge in Eucharistic devotion.

Although it was not likely known by the creator of the Salerno ivories and is a much smaller, less monumental object, a German ivory diptych (now in Berlin) illustrates how Old and New Testament scenes might be linked to create meaningful, Eucharistic analogies. 59 The Ottonian diptych portrays Moses on the left receiving the tablets of the Law from the hand of God, and on the right the Doubting Thomas, and dates to the late 10th or early 11th century (fig. 9). Now separated from one another, the panels of the diptych were probably intended to be used liturgically. 60 Inscribed above the awkward figural arrangement of Christ and Thomas are the words INFER DIGITUM TUUM HUC ET NOLI, “Put in thy finger and be not faithless but believing” (John 20:27). Unlike the Salerno ivory Doubting Thomas, here Christ and Thomas appear isolated, without the

57 Ibid., 86; 108.  
accompaniment of other apostles. Christ stands atop a pedestal that resembles a small building. Thomas has turned entirely away from the viewer and reaches precariously upward to touch Christ’s open wound. The two elongated figures occupy almost the entire space of the panel. In what would have been the adjacent panel, Moses balances on a rock, reaching up to accept the tablet of the Law from God’s enormous hand. This unusual grouping of the Doubting Thomas with Moses receiving the Law must be understood under the “rules of typology” in which the New Testament scene is hierarchically more significant than the Old Testament one.61 Thus, the Old Testament laws as they were given to Moses are incomplete as they do not include the “Christian spirit,” the Word of God, privileged by Moses.62 Moses’s reception of the sacred laws might also be analogous to Thomas’s reception of religious truth as it was transmitted from Christ’s wounds.

Told of Christ’s Resurrection verbally, Thomas cannot rely on the word alone, but seeks to be convinced with his other senses. Here the carved ivories also combine the verbal with the tactile—depicting Christ’s words to Thomas as well as the sculptural representation of his tactile inquiry.63 The plasticity and high degree of relief in the ivories also emphasizes, according to William Diebold, the relevance of the tangible, not just the visible message of the Biblical story.64 If the diptych also served a liturgical function, as William Diebold suggests, then the “event through which Christ’s disembodied, verbal message in the gospels becomes tangible and real through the

64 Diebold 2003, 263.
transformation of the Eucharist [might symbolize] the celebration of the word become flesh.”65 Diebold’s interpretation recalls the sensory exegesis of Augustine and Leo the Great and foreshadows later, increasingly Eucharistic interpretations of Doubting Thomas imagery.

A Eucharistic interpretation of the Doubting Thomas is also dependent on prayers devoted to Christ’s wounds. French devotional texts and Books of Hours often identified the Doubting Thomas with devotions to Christ’s side wound.66 Christ’s side wound, where he was pierced by Longinus’ lance pours blood and water—the water of “Baptism washes the Church and the Blood of the Mass illumines all souls as it did Longinus.”67 These textual descriptions of veneration of the Wounds were often illustrated with representations of the Doubting Thomas (fig. 12 and fig. 13). The Doubting Thomas theme, according to Judith Oliver, appears repeatedly in Psalters beginning in the 12th century and Bonaventure urges sisters not only to “see Christ’s wounds but with the Doubting Thomas to place their hands in his side and enter into Jesus’ heart itself.”68

Bonaventure’s spiritual handbook for nuns, the De perfectione vitae ad sorores (1263), suggests that handmaids “draw near with loving steps to Jesus wounded for you, to Jesus crowned with thorns, to Jesus nailed to the Ibbet of the Cross. Gaze with the Blessed Apostle St. Thomas, not merely on the print of the nails in Christ’s hands; be not satisfied with putting your finger into the holes made by the nails in his hands; neither let it be sufficient to put your hand into the wound in his side; but enter entirely by the door

65 Ibid., 80.
67 Ibid., 257
in his side and go straight up to the very Heart of Jesus.”69 The passage from the side wound to the heart is seen, in this case, as a path from the physical to the spiritual. Christ’s wounds were quite literally the door to salvation.

The frequent visual evocation of Christ’s wounds during the 12th and 13th centuries was often associated, as Jeffrey Hamburger and Gurewich demonstrate, with the Eucharist, and the side wound was symbolic of the sacraments.70 Written texts, oral traditions, and artistic illustrations served the same end: to promote the Eucharist as a means toward avoiding a terrible physical and spiritual fate.71 In this sense it was Christ’s body and blood in general (rather than the side wound specifically) which forged the path to salvation. If later Medieval representations of Christ’s wounds were meant to elicit association with the Eucharist, then the Doubting Thomas, with its central focus on Christ’s wounded body, might also have been understood within a Eucharistic framework.

The inclusion of the Doubting Thomas on the Pala d’Oro for San Marco, Venice (fig. 11) places the subject in the closest possible physical proximity to the high altar and the locus of the ritual enactment of the Mass. Christ stands at the center of the cloisonné panel, his back to the door that he has presumably passed through. In keeping with the mid-Byzantine model, the apostles are arranged in approximately equal groups on either side of Christ.72 A beardless Thomas stoops at Christ’s right, extending a finger to Christ’s bared flesh. The scene is surmounted by an inscription: VERA CARO

70 Ibid., 77 and Gurewich, 358-62.
XP(ISTU)S CLAUSIS SE CONTULIT IN TUS (“Christ, true flesh, came into the midst of them where they were enclosed.”). When read in conjunction with the corresponding image, the inscription implies that the Doubting Thomas episode confirms Christ’s “true flesh.” This message may serve two purposes simultaneously: it reminds viewers of Christ’s dual nature as Man and God (and as Word made Flesh, for that matter), but it also emphasizes Thomas’s role as verifier of that sacred flesh. That this flesh was made tangible, indeed edible, in the form of the Eucharistic wafer administered below the altarpiece might have enriched viewers’ engagement with the image of Doubting Thomas.

An early 13th-century Pisan painted cross serves a similar function (fig. 14). Presumably fixed to a rood screen, the monumental crucifix reminded the faithful of Christ’s corporeal sacrifice and manifestation in the Eucharist and was likely more visible to the laity than the Host itself. On the right side of the stem are scenes from the Resurrection: the *Holy Women at the Sepulcher*, *Christ on the Road to Emmaus*, *The Supper at Emmaus* and the *Doubting Thomas*. As with the much earlier depictions of Thomas on the Passion Casket (fig. 3) or the Salerno Ivories (fig. 10) his incredulity emphasizes Christ’s transcendence over death and thus his dual nature as Man and God. As beliefs about Christ’s body changed, however, images such as this one likely accrued additional meaning related to the Eucharist. The establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi in the mid-13th century marked the increasing importance of Eucharistic devotion and the attitude that “relics could work miracles and generate health and prosperity, [and] surely God’s body, the constant and ever-renewed miracle, was even more powerful.”

With his intimate handling of Christ’s body, Thomas may have been understood as a

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73 Rubin, 164; 291.
Eucharistic exemplum, capable of annulling disbelief in the miracle of the Eucharist. This interpretation was to reach its apotheosis, I believe, in the Franciscan appropriation of the Doubting Thomas theme, discussed in chapter 2.

Duccio’s panel of the Doubting Thomas for the Maestà (1311, fig. 15) contextualizes Thomas’s doubt in a similar way. One of twenty-six scenes from the Passion on the back of the altarpiece, Duccio’s Doubting Thomas filled one of the upper crowning pinnacles of the massive structure. Viewed only by the clergy, the image would have been seen (from roughly sixteen feet below) as part of a larger cycle intended to emphasize the Eucharist and Christ’s Resurrection after the crucifixion. Like Duccio’s Maestà, Tino da Camaino’s 1318 funerary monument for Cardinal Petroni (fig. 16) decorated Siena Cathedral and featured a prominent depiction of the Doubting Thomas. Here the Incredulity adorns the front of the monument—one of several scenes in a frieze that decorate the elaborate base of the tomb. Thomas and Christ appear as they do in both Ravenna sarcophagi: Christ stands to the right of the composition, lifting an arm for Thomas to penetrate his wound. In this case the Noli me tangere and the Doubting Thomas flank the central image of the Resurrection. Here it seems, as Lisa Maria Rafanelli has suggested in her dissertation on the Noli me tangere, that Thomas and Mary have been given equal symbolic weight because chronological accuracy has not determined their ordering on the tomb.

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75 Rafanelli, 154.
Thomas, patron saint of builders, was also the patron saint of the Florentine Otto di Guardia e Balia—a group of magistrates who imposed law and were empowered to sentence capital crimes in Florence. Cardinal Petroni was a jurist and as such was likely involved with the Guardia in his earlier career, prior to his move to Siena. Rafanelli posits that the scene of Thomas’s doubt reflects Petroni’s earth-bound concerns and judicial occupation, and is thus placed under the effigy’s feet, while Mary Magdalene is pictured under the Cardinal’s head, the locus of higher thought and faith, thus characterizing Petroni first as a theologian, and second as a jurist. I would argue, however, that the scenes, while interrupted by the Resurrection at the center, still read from left to right, from beginning to end. Thus, the *Noli me tangere* and the *Doubting Thomas* bookend the most important image on the tomb. Together the narratives suggest that the Cardinal, in both his sacred and judicial offices, was firm in his belief of Christ’s holy Resurrection, confirmed as it was by Mary and Thomas.

Not unusual for Tino, the scenes on the Petroni monument are reduced to a few figures that emphasize three dramatic moments in the Resurrection narrative. Tino’s appointment as *Capomaestro* of Siena Cathedral ended by 1320, when he went to Florence to work on the tomb of Gastone della Torre, to be situated in Santa Croce, the Franciscan church of Florence. Though the monument was dismantled by Giorgio Vasari in the 16th century, the individual components of the tomb remain. The *Doubting Thomas* panel for the Torre monument (fig. 17), while not as deeply carved as the Petroni version, maintains the same general composition. Moreover, it also framed the Resurrection along with the *Noli me tangere*, as was done on the Petroni monument.

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Tino’s range of knowledge, coupled with his ability to construct uniquely creative monuments, suggests that the reuse of this motif was not accidental. I propose that the *Doubting Thomas* relief, first carved by Tino on the front of the Petroni sarcophagus, where a more illustrious version stood on the *Maestà* nearby, was re-used in this Franciscan context because its meaning was ideally suited to its new setting. The appropriation of the Doubting Thomas by the Franciscans and their subsequent adoption of Thomas as a means for furthering the cult of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, will be the subject of chapter 2.

The objects discussed in this brief overview suggest the basis for later visual interpretations of Thomas’s disbelief. In verifying Christ’s dual nature, Thomas offers the proof needed to defend the Resurrection to all those heretical factions who denied the events of Easter. It is thus through Thomas that “Truth has conquered.” The sermons of Leo and Gregory reiterate what was already apparent in the earliest depiction of the Doubting Thomas on the tomb of St. Celso: Christ’s wounds, and Thomas’s access to them, served a central role in the quelling of disbelief regarding Christ’s divinity. Pictorial life cycles that might include Thomas’s proselytizing in India are rare, but images of his incredulity are comparatively common, even during the later medieval period when narrative subject matter had yet to take center stage in the creation of religious art. The extant reliefs, paintings, and mosaics discussed in this chapter represent but a sampling of how Thomas was conceived in art. Nevertheless, these works suggest a compelling link between the theme of disbelief and the renewal of faith. The visceral and sometimes even bloody depiction of this confirmation must have reminded
viewers of the importance of Christ’s body for salvation, without whose brutal death and ritual consumption during the Mass they would not be saved.

These interpretations of the Doubting Thomas undoubtedly informed contemporary viewers and patrons in their devotion to such imagery. As the subject became more popular in the 15th century it accrued further meaning equally dependent on contextual factors. The role of touch in the Doubting Thomas—briefly debated by Augustine—became even more crucial during the Renaissance, when new methods of inquiry were replacing the authority of ancient texts. Despite these changing contextual circumstances, however, the Christological significance of Christ’s Resurrection continued to inform images of the Doubting Thomas, as the following chapter will reveal.
CHAPTER II.

THE DOUBTING THOMAS AND FRANCISCAN RENEWAL IN THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

The Doubting Thomas theme was of special significance to the Franciscan Order whose interest in the wounds of Christ made Thomas a particularly important apostle. The renewal of the 13th-century Christian Church was largely facilitated by the decrees of the IV Lateran Council (1217), their reassertion of the primacy of the Eucharist, and papal endorsement of the mendicant orders, who acted as the arbiters of this devotion. The canonization of St. Francis of Assisi in 1228, just two years after his death, cemented his position as founder of a key group in this revitalization, the Franciscan Order. Through his model of poverty, penitence, and compassion, Francis offered a more accessible route to salvation for the laity. Francis’s stigmatization, raised to the rank of a major feast of the Order at the Chapter General celebration at Cahors in 1337, 113 years after the event, also affirmed Francis’s role in devotion to the wounds of Christ, and thus to the Eucharist as it was the physical manifestation of Christ’s body.

Francis’s early biographers made the association between the Doubting Thomas and those who doubted St. Francis’s stigmatization. The official Lives, written first by Thomas of Celano (Tractatus de Miraculis 1250-53) and later replaced by Bonaventure’s biography (Legenda Major, c. 1260), were added to and expanded upon by later non-official hagiographers like Jacobus de Voragine (The Golden Legend, 1260) and John of

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Caulibus (the 14th-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ*).\(^2\) The biographies and imagery which accompanied Francis’s canonization forge parallels between the life of Francis and that of Christ creating, as Hank Van Os has demonstrated, an image of Francis as *Alter Christus*, or another Christ.\(^3\) As records of Francis’s devotional life, however factually unreliable they may be these *vitae*—both hagiographic and artistic—provide a firm association between Christ and the new Christian savior, Francis. Included in both images and texts are episodes that help to illuminate Francis’s role as *Alter Christus* and his Order’s role as Christian reviver. Francis’s supposed reception of the stigmata, foremost amongst these episodes, likens him indisputably with Christ, with whom he shared the sacred wounds. Among these stories about Francis’s wounds are several that imitate the New Testament account of the Incredulity of St. Thomas. These legends are best separated into two types: those that were reported to have occurred while Francis was alive, and those that confirmed his stigmatization after his death. Both types serve the same end: they mitigated doubt regarding the veracity of Francis’s wounds. In this chapter I will argue that the Doubting Thomas held special significance for the Franciscan Order, whose members commissioned this subject for both private and public devotional art. Pairing primary textual sources, namely the *Lives* of St. Francis by Celano and Bonaventure and the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, with imagery of the *Doubting Thomas*, I hope to show the way in which an ‘old’ story became colonized with


‘new’ meaning, thereby resurrecting a visual tradition and an apostolic saint under the umbrella of Franciscan renewal.

I will begin this discussion with an analysis of Francis’s stigmatization and Christ’s Resurrection, as these events link Francis to the Doubting Thomas. Drawing on art historical evidence of Franciscan devotion to Christ’s wounds, as can be seen in 13th and 14th-century monumental Crucifixes and 14th-century images of Francis’s stigmatization, I will show the origins for the Order’s dedication to the Doubting Thomas: namely by way of the wounded body of either Christ or Francis.

From these origins my study then focuses on several works that characterize Franciscan patronage of the Doubting Thomas in art. Among these, I will pay special attention to Taddeo Gaddi’s panels made for an Armadio for the Sacristy of Santa Croce, Florence (c. 1330-35), an altarpiece of the Doubting Thomas by Zanino di Pietro for the sanctuary of a Franciscan beato in the Marches (1394-95), and a fresco by Luca Signorelli (1477-80), all commissioned for Franciscan settings. My discussion of these objects is organized chronologically with two exceptions. In the case of a painting by Giovanni Battista Faenza and the works by Stefano dell’Arzere in the Obizzi chapel in Albignasego I have departed from a strict chronological progression in order to show the enduring relevance of the Doubting Thomas within the Franciscan milieu around Padua. These works are best understood in conjunction with an earlier sermon by the Paduan Franciscan, St. Anthony of Padua—a saint who sometimes appears in imagery of the Doubting Thomas.

Finally, I will conclude this chapter with two important points regarding the development of the Order and images of Thomas into the 16th century. The first concerns
Franciscan images of the Assumption of the Virgin in which Thomas famously catches the ascending Mother’s girdle. This girdle (as it was preserved by Thomas) was later borrowed for the rope tied around the Franciscan habit and thus suggests yet another aspect of the Order’s affinity for Thomas. Second, by concluding with a discussion of works like Cima da Conegliano’s 1501 altarpiece of the *Doubting Thomas*, and those paintings by Giorgio Vasari (Florence) and Santi di Tito (Sansepolcro) dating to the end of the 16th century, I will show how this subject continued to resonate within the Franciscan setting while concurrently accruing added layers of meaning derived from Humanism (the subject of chapter 3 of this dissertation).

Although this chapter appears to span three centuries, highlighting carefully selected objects will shed light on two important roles played by Doubting Thomas imagery in the Renaissance: the first regards the significance of the theme in the promulgation of devotion to Christ’s wounds. Francis’s stigmatization and the subsequent imagery of that event helped to reinforce Christ’s corporeal role in salvation. I contend that Franciscan appropriation of the Doubting Thomas emphasized these bodily links to redemption and modernized medieval Eucharistic devotion to Christ’s wounds. Secondly, I hope to situate these images of the Doubting Thomas within the general evolution of the narrative altarpiece in order to understand how artists interpreted the Doubting Thomas in response to new artistic challenges. In addressing these key points I will demonstrate how the adoption of the Doubting Thomas within the Franciscan milieu was important to that order’s promulgation of Francis as *Alter Christus* and promoted the concept of verification of faith via doubt—a perhaps counterintuitive notion but one which I believe informed subsequent depictions of the Doubting Thomas.
FRANCIS’S STIGMATIZATION AND HIS DOUBTERS

I. SKEPTICS OF ST. FRANCIS

In the climactic episode of his devotional life, Francis received the stigmata in a vision witnessed by only one friar, Brother Leo. This event, recorded in the hagiographical sources to follow, was often doubted as Francis kept a close shroud of secrecy around these wounds while he was alive. Written in 1226, Brother Elias’s letter declaring Francis’s death was the first known document to express wonder at the sight of Francis’s stigmata. Later written testimonies like that of Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure—Francis’s two official biographers—reiterated the sense of general astonishment regarding Francis’s wounds, and their rhetoric reflects what was an ongoing source of debate—the actuality of Francis’s reception of Christ’s wounds. Although

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5 Ibid., 221-223. Elias’ description of the miracle was adopted by Thomas of Celano in his Tractatus de Miraculis (1250-53). That Francis’s stigmatization was a source of “debate” is evidenced by the ongoing issuance of papal injunctions against the actuality of the miracle versus the large body of ‘first-hand’ accounts of the stigmata (222). By the time Jacobus de Voragine wrote the Golden Legend, however, he felt little need to defend the veracity of the stigmata: “That these marks were truly the stigmata of the crucifixion was confirmed by many miracles...that occurred after the saint’s death” (Voragine, 224). Voragine cites a characteristic example of one of these miracles in which a man (Roger) was standing in front of a painting of St. Francis when he was struck by doubt about the stigmata, “had the saint really been honored by such a miracle, or was this a pious illusion or a fraud contrived by his friars?” (224). His doubts are answered when he is miraculously wounded as if by an invisible arrow in his hand. It is only once he has repented his doubt and testified as to his belief in the stigmata that the saint miraculously healed his wounds.

Later texts did not follow suit, and in Ugolino Boniscambi of Montegiorgio’s The Deeds of Blessed Francis and his Companions (1328-1337) an example is given in which Brother Ruffino required three confirmations of Francis’s side wound (for an English translation see volume three of Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, William Short, Eds., New York: New York City Press, 2001, 507-508). First he washes Francis’s “knee-breeches” and finds blood stains on the right side 509). Still doubting, hesticks his finger in Francis’s side wound, for which he is rebuked. Finally, he asks Francis to trade tunics with him so that he might catch a glimpse of Francis’s wound (510). Francis complies and Brother Ruffino’s doubt is finally squelched.

In both Elias’ and Thomas of Celano’s accounts the seraph that appears in so many Renaissance representations of the Stigmatization is omitted; this was a later addition by Bonaventure (retained by Voragine) that thus impacted representations of the event in art, as Gardner and others have shown.
Bonaventure’s sermons emphatically attested to the spiritual accuracy of the miracle ("sicut aliquid certum de mundo potest esse"), Francis’s stigmatization was only raised to the rank of a major feast in 1337, 113 years after the event. The fashioning of Francis’s hagiography to support the notion of Francis as Alter Christus insured that lay believers associated Francis’s stigmatization with Christ’s crucifixion, just as Francis’s general model of piety and poverty could be linked to Christ’s own mission. Explicit links were created between the events in Francis’s life and those in Christ’s, as is evidenced by Bartolomeo da Pisa’s Liber de conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Jesu (Book of the correspondence of the life of St. Francis to the life of Lord Jesus) written around 1390 and largely adopted by the popular Franciscan preacher Bernardino da Siena in his contemporaneous sermons. These texts and sermons facilitated renewed religious

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Bonaventure’s change makes the story appear to be more closely aligned with Christ’s own vision or Agony in the Garden—the iconographic basis for so many Stigmatization images (224).

6 Ibid., 223. For Bonaventure’s sermon see Sermo IV de S. Patre S. Francisco, (in Opera Omnia IX, Ad Claras Aquas 1901), 585-590; 586. Another of Bonaventure’s sermons cites the stigmata as the most important gift granted to Francis: “Among all the gifts that God bestowed on this humble and poor little man, St. Francis, there was one special and if I dare to say, unique, privilege: that he bore on his body the stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ” (590). Armstrong, Hellman and Short cite a story that appeared in a 1343 manuscript of the Avignon Compilation that “assists in understanding the environment of the first half of the fourteenth century in which the Feast of the Stigmata was established” (661). In this story Pope Benedict XII (1334-42), upon witnessing an image of St. Francis near Avignon that had begun to bleed from the stigmata, finally confirmed the feast of the stigmata.

7 H.W. van Os, “St. Francis as a second Christ in early Italian Painting,” Simiolus 7 (1974): 204. Van Os’ article provides a thorough discussion of the notion of Francis alter Christus; in his text he cites Stanislao da Campagnola, (L’angelo del sesto sigillo e l’alter Christus, Rome 1971) as the only other systematic and thorough study of Francis as alter Christus. The idea of Francis as Alter Christus originated in the 13th century. Ubertino da Casale’s Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus (1305) discusses Francis’s life as an imitation of Christ’s (for an English translation see volume three of Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, William Short, Eds., New York: New York City Press, 2001) and the Franciscan preacher Bartolomeo da Pisa wrote his Liber de conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam Domini Jesu (Book of the Correspondence of the Life of St. Francis to the Life of the Lord Jesus) around 1390.

8 Van Os, 126. This text was widely read and owned—Federigo da Montefeltro was even thought to have owned a copy. See Carolly Erickson, Francis Confirmed to Christ; Bartholomew of Pisa’s De Conformitate in Franciscan History (Columbia University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1969) for a discussion in English of the Latin text. A lesser known “conformity” text, written in 1365 by Arnald of Sarrant (The Kinship of St. Francis) may have been the basis of Bartolomeo’s later and more famous edition (Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, 673). Bernardino da Siena routinely preached from Bartolomeo’s texts.
vigor as the laity was encouraged to see Francis as a more accessible and recent model of
Christian virtue.

Because the Stigmatization continued to occupy a central role in Franciscan
hagiography after Brother Elias’ early letter, Celano and Bonaventure’s lives focus on
that event and its later confirmation in their retellings. While Celano’s first and second
Lives of St. Francis describe the privilege granted to those who were permitted to see
Francis’s stigmata after his death, the author focuses on the shroud of secrecy which
concealed Francis’s wounds during his lifetime. Testimonials describing those who did
have occasion to see Francis’s stigmata are included in much of the hagiography. To my
knowledge the first of these accounts, as I have discovered, is in Celano’s lesser known
treatise, Miracles of St. Francis (1250-52). Celano described the human inclination
toward doubt, and told of a Brother’s disbelief in the stigmata: “Imagine the battle going
on in his spirit, with reason defending the side of truth, and fantasy always pushing on the
opposing side!”9 St. Francis then appeared to the Brother while he was sleeping; his feet
covered in mud, Francis said: “Why all these conflicting struggles in you? Why these
filthy doubts? See my hands and my feet! Remove the mud from my feet and examine
the place of the nails.”10 The Brother cleaned the mud from Francis’s feet and he
“touched with his hands the places of the nails”11; when he awoke he found himself, like
the mud he had wiped from Francis’s feet, cleansed. Francis’s precise wording as related
by Celano (see sections in italics) could not have been accidental for it is quoted exactly
from Christ’s response to Thomas (John 20:27).

and elaborated on the idea of Francis alter christus. See the sermon “De stigmatibus sacris gloriosi
10 Ibid., 406.
11 Ibid., 406.
The persuasive power of association—Francis with Christ, disbelievers with Thomas—was a primary component of both written and visual Franciscan rhetoric. It was not until Bonaventure revised Celano’s *Life of St. Francis*, a little over a decade later, however, that the analogy was made explicit between the verification of Francis’s wounds and those of Christ. Written in 1263 and officially approved in 1266, Bonaventure’s text served as the only canonical version of the life of St. Francis. In Chapter XV Bonaventure describes the death of St. Francis and the verification of his stigmata.12 Crowds came to Porziuncola to see Francis’s body and an educated knight called Jerome was “unbelieving like the Apostle St. Thomas and he doubted the reality of the stigmata.” Feeling the saint’s hands, feet, and placing his finger in the side wound, Jerome’s doubt “vanished from his heart and from the hearts of others” (my italics). As a result of Jerome’s careful verification, others bore witness to the truth and swore upon the Gospel.13 Bonaventure’s addition of this episode, as art historian Joseph Polzer has noted, serves to further the image of Francis *Alter Christus* who now, like Christ, had his own Thomas figure.14 Bonaventure’s text also suggests a different interpretation of the story’s meaning: Jerome’s verification of the stigmata not only allays his own doubt, but also erases it from the “hearts of others.” This is not the case in the biblical telling of Thomas’s incredulity. While Christ’s message is universally applicable, in so far as the story is conveyed in the gospel it is Thomas alone whose doubt and belief are in question. This account of Jerome’s doubt was first depicted in art in Assisi, where Jerome’s

14 Polzer, 301-310.
verification of Francis’s wounds is depicted in the Upper Church of San Francesco, a subject to which I will return.

Another text, not previously cited in this context is Bartolomeo da Pisa’s aforementioned *De Conformitate* (1390). An elaborately organized treatise on the conformity of Francis’s life to Christ’s, Bartolomeo’s text ties those who doubt Francis’s stigmata to Thomas, who doubted Christ’s resurrection. The frontispiece of the 1510 edition, reproduced in the version published in *Analecta Franciscana* (fig. 24), illustrates the *Figura Arboris Conformitatum S. Francisci cum Domino Iesu* and places Christ crucified at the center of a many-branched tree. Tied to the limbs are placards containing the inscriptions of Bartolomeo’s chapters, or *fructus*. St. Francis kneels at the tree’s base, his arms wound tightly around its thorny limbs. The third fruit of the third book is dedicated to Christ’s crucifixion and its mirror in Francis’s stigmatization; this is reiterated on the placard one row in from the left, third from the top (fig. 24). Within the text, Bartolomeo makes the explicit analogy between Francis’s doubting Jerome and Thomas’s disbelief:

> Many citizens of Assisi, who came to the place of Santa Maria to see the deceased blessed Francis, saw him, touched him and kissed him. Amongst these were the gentleman Gerolamo [Jerome], being incredulous of the omen (about the stigmata), throwing himself audaciously, he touched the nails in Francis’s hands and feet in front of everyone and, also as the other apostle Thomas had done, Gerolamo put his fingers in the wound (on the side). Having

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15 See note five, and page 410 of the published edition in *Analecta Franciscana* 5 (from 1885).
16 *Ibid.*, 508—the general index lists the title of the Tertius fructus: “Pars Prima: Iesus crucem suscipiens; secunda: Fransiscus consignatur.” The subtitle of the section in question is “Quibus beati Francisci stigmatization veridical approbetur.”
learned the truth, not only did he become devout in front of everyone, but he became a public witness of the holy stigmata. So thanks to the praiseworthy witnesses of faith, the stigmata are attested to having been “imprinted” onto the blessed Francis by Christ. The stigmata and the body of the blessed Francis, according to his own prophecy/will, were seen by the blessed Chiara and her sisters, who were at the time living in San Damiano.¹⁷

Bartolomeo’s text clearly likens Jerome to the apostolic model of Thomas, and more significantly provides explanation as to the importance of both episodes. Jerome’s doubt, and Thomas’s incredulity as well, not only strengthened their individual belief, but ultimately provided evidence of the divine authority of both Francis and Christ. In this sense Jerome is akin to Thomas in a more complicated way than has been previously observed (by Polzer, for instance). For their disbelief is fruitful in two ways: it stimulates further religious fervor, and it provides visible, public evidence of the sanctity of these divine figures via their wounded bodies.

Bartolomeo’s *De Conformitate* is one of the most thorough examples of the sort of Christ-Francis analogy common in much Franciscan literature of the day. Indeed Bernardino da Siena, an extremely popular preacher of the early Renaissance, was influenced by Bartolomeo’s text.¹⁸ Bartolomeo’s *Arboris* frontispiece was also influential, as Lina Bolzoni has shown.¹⁹ These types of trees or charts often made their way into other illustrated Franciscan manuscripts; in one of two extant copies of Arnaud

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 508. Special thanks to Roberto Pesce for his help in translating this passage from Latin.


¹⁹ Lina Bolzoni, *Web of Images: Vernacular Preaching from its Origins to St. Bernardino of Siena* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); her text deals with exactly these sorts of charts and trees and makes clear how common the type used by Bartolomeo actually was at this time.
de Sarrant’s *Kinship of St. Francis* (c. 1365), rubrics instruct illuminators to place images of Francis and his Brothers next to the appropriate figures from the New Testament.\(^{20}\) A story of doubt is recounted: “As Thomas was doubtful about Christ’s Resurrection, so was Brother Rufino [one of Francis’s ‘apostles’] about Francis’s glorification. Just as Christ once appeared to St. Thomas and strengthened him, so He appeared to Brother Rufino and “made his soul melt with divine love.”\(^{21}\) The story of Rufino is confirmed by the earlier writing of Celano in his second life of St. Francis (1245-1247). Sarrant’s text is informative not only in that it creates the explicit written parallel between Brother Rufino and Thomas, but because it also contains a rubric that calls for an image of the Doubting Thomas to be placed next to one of the friar. This manuscript supports my contention that Franciscan appropriation of the Doubting Thomas occurred early in the Order’s history and was not confined to the hagiographic sources but found its most convincing manifestation in images.

In addition to the stories of Brother Rufino and Jerome may be added Bonaventure’s discussion of the doubt of Pope Gregory IX (r. 1227-1241), the Pope under whom Francis was canonized (1228). In Bonaventure’s *Legenda Major* he records Gregory’s vision of Francis: upon doubting Francis’s stigmata, the saint appeared to the pope in a vision. Bleeding profusely, Francis lifts his right arm to reveal the wound in his side, the source of the blood, and fills a glass. “After that,” concludes Bonaventure,


“Gregory was so devoted to the stigmata...that he could never allow anyone to call these wonderful signs into doubt.”22 The episode would have confirmed the association of Francis and his doubters with Christ and Thomas. Bonaventure’s account also creates a parallel between Gregory IX’s vision and the Mass of St. Gregory the Great, a better-known miraculous vision that held special significance for the Dominican Order. In that story Gregory the Great is aware of an incredulous person in his congregation. He thus uses prayer to summon Christ, who appears in order to reveal his wounds along with the instruments of the Passion. This vision convinces all that the sacrament Gregory is administering is indeed endowed with the blood and body of Christ. Both events—the vision of Gregory IX, and the miracle of Gregory the Great’s mass—were depicted in art and reveal the importance of Christ’s wounds and Francis’s subsequent stigmatization for the purpose of assuaging disbelief and bolstering faith.

II. REPRESENTATIONS OF THE STIGMATIZATION AND ITS VERIFICATION

The veracity of Francis’s stigmatization was also legitimized by the dissemination of artistic representations of the event. These Stigmatizations, like Giotto’s famous example in the Louvre (fig. 25), served a complex purpose: they reminded viewers of the still “shockingly novel fact of Francis’s stigmatization,”23 and they created a visual reminder (in the form of the Christ-seraph) that Francis’s body, wounded in the heat of his belief, was a link to the body of Christ, otherwise accessible only through the Eucharist. Like the Stigmatization, the Verification of Francis’s Stigmata was a subject

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22 Bonaventure, *Legenda*, translated in Habig, 748.
in Franciscan art of the Renaissance, as Polzer has shown.\textsuperscript{24} Although Polzer has documented this trend, he has detached these images of the Verification of Francis’s Stigmata from images of Francis’s Stigmatization alone. It is my contention that images of the Verification, relatively few in number compared with the number of panels devoted to the Stigmatization, served the same end as their better known counterparts. That is, both types verified the truth of Francis’s stigmata, thereby legitimizing his sanctity and association with Christ’s body.

The earliest example of the Verification appears in the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi (c. 1290-1305, artists unknown, fig. 26) and is the clear precedent for the Bardi Chapel frescoes, dated to approximately 1310-16 in Santa Croce, Florence (fig. 27).\textsuperscript{25} In the earlier frescos Francis’s death is depicted separately from that of the Verification. One narrative quadrant depicts Francis’s body in its funerary state while a host of friars and lay people gather around Francis. In the sky, angels support a tondo of Francis, his halo connoting his saintly status. The second narrative section of the cycle depicts the Verification. In this scene the artists have maintained many elements of the first composition: Francis remains in his funerary state, surrounded by members of the Order and congregation. In this fresco, however, the figure who must be the doubting nobleman Jerome kneels in front of Francis’s body and inserts two fingers into Francis’s side wound. What appears to be a rood screen surmounted by a monumental Crucifix provides the backdrop.

Unlike the cycle in Assisi, Giotto’s \textit{Verification} in the Bardi Chapel (Santa Croce, Florence, fig. 27) has conflated the death of St. Francis with the verification of his sanctity.

\textsuperscript{24} Polzer, 307-08.
\textsuperscript{25} Polzer, 308. Polzer has acknowledged both the San Francesco cycle images and those in the Bardi chapel, but he does this without any art historical contextualization.
stigmata. The Santa Croce fresco features five men who encircle the funeral bier—a number that mirrors the number of Christ’s wounds.26 Again, Jerome faces away from the chapel space and probes Francis’s side. In this representation, conflated as it is, the tondo of Francis’s immortalization in Heaven appears above the Verification. While the tondo of Francis in Assisi is reserved and iconic—Francis appears restored to an idealized state—the roundel in the Bardi chapel depicts Francis as he is often represented during the Stigmatization. His hands outstretched, golden beams of light surrounding him, Giotto’s ascending Francis mimics the artist’s Louvre image of Francis receiving the stigmata (fig. 27 and fig. 25). It is worth noting that while Giotto probably did not have a direct hand in completing the fresco cycle in Assisi, he was likely a spectator of, if not a participant in their design.27 The artist’s later frescos in Santa Croce may represent a revision of the earlier cycle in San Francesco—a conflation of two moments that, as I have noted, served the same end: to further cement Francis’s stigmatization and sanctification. This conflation indeed became the iconographic norm, as can be noted in a much later rendering by Benozzo Gozzoli in San Francesco, Montefalco (fig. 29) and in the fresco of the subject by Domenico Ghirlandaio for the Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence (fig. 100).28

27 For a recent overview of Franciscan art patronage (with extensive bibliography) see Louise Bourdua, *The Franciscans and Art Patronage in Late Medieval Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
28 This discussion is by no means comprehensive of imagery of the Verification of Francis’s wounds; other known examples of the subject, ascertained from Kaftal’s volumes, shows that the image appeared in San Francesco, Pistoia (Master of the Gondi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, frescos); in a panel by Bicci di Lorenzo (p. 191 of Kaftal’s Tuscan volume); in the panels of a Sassetta altarpiece (National Gallery London 4757-63). Of these Domenico Ghirlandaio’s Santa Trinita fresco is noteworthy because it is the only example that I have seen in which Jerome kneels on the side of Francis’s body furthest from the viewer, thus allowing Jerome to face the audience as he reaches across Francis’s body and probes his side wound (fig. 100).
In her comprehensive study *Spirituality in Conflict: Saint Francis and Giotto’s Bardi Chapel*, Rona Goffen writes, “Giotto’s narrative is related to the ongoing debate about the veracity of the Stigmatization: here, in his most verisimilar manner, Giotto captures and communicates the wonder, doubt, and ultimate conviction of the eyewitnesses…the central inspiring image of Franciscus Alter Christus, the compassionate and irresistible intermediary whose concern for the faithful and intervention on their behalf are guaranteed precisely by his wounds.”

Goffen goes on to suggest that Pope Alexander IV’s own verification of the story of Jerome, issued in a papal bull of 1255, further reiterated the connection between the doubting Jerome and the incredulity of St. Thomas, a correlation that seems irrefutable.

A particularly compelling visual pairing of Francis’s vita with that of Christ’s, exists in Taddeo Gaddi’s sacristy panels formerly in Santa Croce, Florence (c. 1330-35; fig. 28). Like Tino da Camaino’s tomb relief nearby (see chapter 1), Taddeo’s narrative cycle includes doubting Thomas. Taddeo’s panels originally belonged to an Armadio housed in the Church’s sacristy. Although disassembled early in the 19th century, the quatrefoil panels remain intact—twenty-six scenes survive, each approximately 48 x 44 centimeters. Thirteen depict the life and death of Christ, and thirteen portray similar

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30 *Ibid.*, 98. For the full text of the *Magnum Bullarium Romanum* see page 98, note 29. Part of this text reads:

It would take too long to describe each single miracle or even to outline in a brief report the evident prodigies of divine power, which provided both in works of healing and in other remarkable evidence that this confessor holds a place of glory with the saints in heaven. Therefore, we wish at least to set before your eyes those gratifying insignia of the Lord’s Passion which should be frequently recalled and greatly admired, and which the hand of divine operation impressed on the body of this saint while he was still alive. Eyes looking closely saw, and touching fingers became most sure, that in his hands and feet a truly formed likeness of nails grew out of the substance of his own flesh or was added from some newly created material....After he [Francis] died, a wound in his side, which was not inflicted or made by man, was clearly seen in his body. It was something like the side of our Savior, which revealed in our Redeemer the mystery of the redemption and salvation of mankind (English translation taken from Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, vol. I, 780-81).
events from the life of St. Francis. While little is known about the circumstances for the cupboard’s commission and its reconstruction is circumstantial, it seems likely that the panels were, as Andrew Ladis has proposed, organized to display a scene from the life of Christ immediately above or next to the relevant scene from the life of St. Francis.

In Ladis’ convincing reconstruction, the scene of the *Doubting Thomas* is paired with that of the *Verification of Francis’s Stigmata*. The former depicts Christ and Thomas at the center of the composition; Christ lifts his arm toward heaven and allows Thomas to touch the wound in his side while the apostles gather around them. Set against the conventional gold ground of 14th-century religious painting, the action is isolated from its biblical context. In contrast, the *Verification* provides a more theatrical setting, with a church and other buildings rising from behind the wall that separates the figural group of the foreground from the city in the background. Here Francis’s body has been laid out, and Jerome, the incredulous knight, places his fingers inside the saint’s side wound. Gaddi makes an observable correlation between the *Doubting Thomas* narrative and that of Jerome’s verification of the stigmata. With the Bardi chapel close by, Gaddi’s was an obvious allusion to Giotto’s fresco and to the hagiographical sources as well, namely the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*.

As Joanna Cannon highlights in “Giotto and Art for the Friars: Revolutions Spiritual and Artistic,” Franciscan “readers and listeners were urged to visualize the holy

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31 Andrew Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi : Critical Reappraisal and Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 114-125. The Armadio panels—which were formerly attributed to Giotto—were removed from the cupboard in 1810. Ladis’ reconstruction of the arrangement of the panels seems to be the one that is most generally accepted.

32 Ibid.,124-25. Even if Ladis’ reconstruction is incorrect, the cabinet panels were obviously meant to relate events from the life of Francis to those of Christ. The Doubting Thomas episode is a logical pendant to the ‘doubting Jerome’ theme.
story as though he or she were present.”

Emphasis on meditation, often done in front of works of art, yielded, according to Cannon, a more particular attention to three-dimensional space—images embodied what the text dictated people to imagine. The *Doubting Thomas* of 12th- and 13th-century illuminated manuscripts was decidedly symbolic: the illustration accompanied prayers of devotion to the wounds, and those associated with the Eucharist. The Thomas of Tino’s tomb reliefs (see chapter 1), or Gaddi’s sacristy panel, was no longer viewed in a strictly symbolic way: these representations were meant to stimulate recall of the entire narrative context of the story. Once paired with Francis’s ‘Incredulous Jerome,’ the Doubting Thomas evokes not only the biblical circumstances of the event, but its parallels in more contemporary times. This was exactly the sort of connection that the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* intended worshippers to make.

Viewers of the *Verification* in the Bardi chapel and in the Upper Church of Assisi would have linked Jerome’s verification of the stigmata with the longer narrative of Francis’s life. Gaddi’s panels make this inference more explicit and suggest that Franciscan circles were well aware of the relevance of Thomas for their Order. It is important to recognize that Thomas’s significance for the Franciscan Order was further reaching than that of a simple correlation with the figure of Jerome. Most significantly, the Order’s devotion to Christ’s wounds and Thomas’s contact with them reinforced their belief that the blood and body of Christ facilitated religious belief and dedication, as was proven by Francis’s stigmatization.

33 Joanna Cannon, “Giotto and Art for the Friars: Revolutions Spiritual and Artistic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Giotto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121. Canon’s article serves to further the Franciscan attention to images as a means of eliciting emotional devotion and reflective contemplation of the scriptures. Perpetuating the notion that believers should envision themselves in the biblical stories, the images helped worshippers to imagine the narrative in more contemporary times.
Like those images of the Verification discussed above, the vision of Gregory IX also reinforced faith in Francis’s stigmatization and recalled the model of Thomas’s doubt, recounted in the New Testament. Though not a subject often repeated, Francis appearing to Gregory IX was a subject of one of the frescoes in the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi. Because of its location in the most important church of the Franciscan Order, the scene, however infrequent its subsequent depiction, is worthy of some note. Occupying the last section of the third bay of the narrative (on the south wall; scene number twenty-five), Gregory’s dream or vision (fig. 31) portrays the pope between slumber and divine vision. Behind the bed Francis appears to hover as he pulls open his own side wound with thumb and forefinger, allowing Gregory an unimpeded view of the wounds he doubted. Francis’s grim opening of his wound mirrors images in which Christ opens his side wound in a similar fashion. In fact, a later panel by Carlo Crivelli depicts a vision of Christ appearing to Francis in which Christ similarly stands before Francis, opens his wound, and fills a glass with his blood.\(^{34}\) In the Assisi fresco, Gregory takes the filled glass from Francis’s hand even as the Pope’s servants appear undisturbed by the miraculous events unfolding behind them. Turned toward the viewer, Gregory’s mantle is pulled aside to reveal the Franciscan cord cinched around his waist. The same scene, though significantly pared down, appears on a 14\(^{th}\)-century relief carving in San Francesco, Siena (fig. 32), and as part of a fresco cycle devoted to Francis in ex San Francesco da Rimini suggesting that the subject’s depiction in art did not stop in Assisi.

When the vision of Gregory IX, like the earlier vision of Gregory the Great, was depicted in art it reminded viewers of the common experience of disbelief and its

\(^{34}\) Although I was unable to reproduce that panel in the illustrations, a painting in which Crivelli depicts Christ’s bloodied body appears in fig. 33.
assuagement through spiritual communion. These visions and subsequent representations of them suggested a transcendental relationship with the lessons conveyed in the Bible. Gregory the Great’s miraculous mass, for instance, was less concerned with incredulity regarding what was occurring during mass than it was with “finding presence in absence,” which was the eternal clerical mission.35 Essentially the mass of Gregory was about the “lay yearning for an ultimately impossible seeing—for a presence forever beyond.”36 Thomas’s disbelief, Gregory the Great’s insecurity, and Gregory IX’s need for verification are instances in which experience—whether by direct contact, as in Thomas’s case, or by divine vision as in Gregory IX’s—reiterates religious truth. This was the very same experience shared by the laity when they attended mass on Sunday, or contemplated the depictions of these moments in the form of fresco cycles and altarpieces.

EXPERIENCE AND TRUTH-SEEKING: IMAGES OF THE DOUBTING THOMAS AND FRANCISCAN SERMONS

Imagery of the Verification of Francis’s wounds, like imagery of Thomas’s doubt, suggested a more visceral, physical response to disbelief than the offer of prayer alone. As the Church as a whole began devoting more and more attention to the layperson, so too did patrons of the arts. In this sense the frescos of Francis’s death, the mass of

36 Ibid., 233.
Gregory the Great, Gregory IX’s vision, or Thomas’s doubt, related to the viewer in much the same way, despite the fact that the latter was a story from the Bible and the other events from more contemporary times. In both cases a member of the congregation would see a familiar image: disbelief in God’s miracles and Christ’s consistent benevolence in the face of such incredulity. The Franciscan Order, from its earliest inception as a band of lay brothers, was founded on dedication to the laity.37 Even after its later formalization and reform, the Order’s goals were, at their heart, intended to offer the layperson a more accessible version of Christianity.38 Stories that told of doubt—like that of Thomas, or Gregory IX—and their subsequent depiction in art, paralleled the Franciscan attention to the problems and concerns of the laity. The story of Thomas’s disbelief is inherently human: one identifies with his moment of weakness, but Christ makes that weakness into the very source of Thomas’s reinvigorated faith.

37 As can be read in any general source on the Franciscan Order (such as John Moorman, A History of the Franciscan Order, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968). The New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Thompson, Gale, 2002) also provides a thorough entry on the history of the Franciscan Order) the First Order or the Order of Friars Minor was founded by St. Francis of Assisi and was originally an assembly of ‘brothers’ who renounced their worldly goods and followed Francis as he gave impromptu outdoor sermons and lived an eremitical lifestyle.

38 After a formal version of the Rule of St. Francis was approved in 1223, the community became more and more focused on the official pastoral ministry of the Church, as Moorman’s history reveals. A brief summary of his text clarifies important shifts in the Franciscan Order: The strict rule of poverty was relaxed by Papal interventions and the friars settled in urban residences and received more formal clerical education. Nevertheless, the Order, led by Bonaventure from 1257-1274, saw itself as dedicated to emulation of the life of Christ and a more ‘grassroots’ approach to Catholicism.

During the 13th and later part of the 14th century the Order divided into the Observant and Conventual Franciscans; the former remained faithful to the extreme vow of poverty urged by Francis’s original rule, while the latter remained in their urban homes, etc. This conflict reached its climax during the mid-15th century when many Observants (like Bernardino da Siena) were engaging in itinerant popular preaching, thus competing with their Conventual opponents. The Observants were granted autonomy and the Order divided into two separate congregations in 1517 when Pope Leo X split the Order into the Friars Minor of the Regular Observance, and the Friars Minor Conventual. This formal division did not end all conflict within the Order and indeed the formation of the Capuchin Friars was provoked by what these brothers saw as slippage in observance by the Observants. In 1528 they too were granted autonomy and became important zealots of the Counter-Reformation.

The Second Order of Franciscans, better known as the Order of St. Clare, or the Poor Clares, and the Third Order of Franciscans, also known as the Brothers and Sisters of Penance were also established during the 13th century and reinforced the notion of Francis as an exemplar of Christ. Both groups were comprised of laypeople and took their cues from Francis’s vow of poverty and penance and sought lives of quiet devotion and community.
In art the viewer, worshipper, or patron’s identification with the saintly model is best epitomized by the donor portrait. In an unusual panel of the *Doubting Thomas* by Giovanni Battista da Faenza (fig. 33, c. 1500-15, National Gallery, London) Thomas and Christ stand on a wide perspectival stage. The flooring of gray and white stripes punctuated by diamonds is similar to patterns found in communal buildings and suggests that the action is unfolding in a public place (such as a communal palace). This stage-like setting is cast against the backdrop of a landscape in the left of which St. Jerome appears in the wilderness. In the foreground, to the viewer’s right, stand the Franciscan St. Anthony of Padua and the painting’s donor, who kneels in supplication. The donor wears the same red mantle as Christ, forging a visual analogy between the savior and saved. St. Anthony’s gaze is directed toward both the patron and the viewer and his left arm embraces his devotee; both facial expression and gesture create a sense of intimacy between saint and patron, and between the saint and viewer. Indeed Giovanni Battista has created no barriers between the canonical story of Thomas and Christ and the figures of St. Anthony and the donor: Anthony acts as an intercessor, ultimately presenting the donor to Christ who is busy revealing his divinity to Thomas. Christ holds out his arm to provide better access to Thomas while simultaneously revealing the wounds of both his palms and feet. All of the figures in Giovanni Battista’s composition are equal in scale and on the same pictorial plane; they are highlighted by the landscape that seems to unfold around the figural action at the center of the painting.

At this early date, the presence of a donor portrait of this type in the midst of a narrative subject (indeed the figures are depicted on the same plane, not separated by any

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39 I am relying on the London National Gallery of Art’s identification of this tiny figure as Jerome; no particular detail stands out in order to identify him as such (see www.nationalgallery.org).
real or fictive architectural devices) is striking. That fact, coupled with the picture’s horizontal format, suggests that the panel was either a predella for an altarpiece, or was a private easel picture.\(^{40}\) In either case, the presence both of a Franciscan saint and the painting’s donor, suggests that the patron saw Thomas’s doubt as a conduit for belief and eternal salvation. Anthony’s presentation of the patron also suggests that the Franciscan appropriation of the Doubting Thomas continued well beyond the 13\(^{th}\) century, when the Paduan lived and wrote about the Doubting Thomas.

St. Anthony’s sermons, I have found, further developed the meaning of the Doubting Thomas story. Anthony’s significance for the Order is unquestioned, as is demonstrated by the correspondence between himself and St. Francis. In a letter of 1223, Francis commissioned his friend and fellow Franciscan, Anthony of Padua (not yet sainted), to write a series of sermons for the Easter cycle.\(^{41}\) These sermons were likely never delivered by Anthony himself, but were intended for homilists and are thought to have been written and disseminated around 1227-29. The texts dedicated to the First Sunday after Easter (the last day of the Octave, and frequently the day of celebration of the Doubting Thomas), represent a climax in the Easter sermons. In these pages Anthony writes of the significance of Christ’s wounds for the purpose of verifying faith:

> In Isaiah the Lord says: “I have written you in my hands” (49:16). Note that for writing three things are necessary: paper, ink, and pen. The hands of

\(^{40}\) It is more likely that the painting was a private easel picture given its large size: 103.5 x 166.4 cm (or 40.74 x 65.51 inches).

\(^{41}\) George Marcil, ed. *Anthony of Padua, Sermons for the Easter Cycle* (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute, 1994), introduction, 46. Anthony, canonized less than a year after his death in 1231 (canonization proceedings were begun in May, 1232 after Pope Gregory IX announced his intentions to begin the process), is second only to Francis in significance for the Order. For discussion of devotion to Anthony in Padua and subsequent art patronage see Sarah McHam, *The Chapel of St. Anthony at the Santo and the Development of Venetian Renaissance Sculpture* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994) particularly pages 8-28.
Christ were the paper as it were; his blood the ink; the nails the pen. Christ has inscribed us in his hands, therefore, for three distinct reasons: 1) to show the scars of the wounds he bore for us to the Father, thus inviting the Father to show us mercy. 2) In order not to forget us. For this reason he says in Isaiah: “Can a woman forget her infant and not have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have written you in my hands” (49:15-16). He has written in his hands what kind of people we should be and in whom we should believe. “Do not be faithless,” therefore, O Thomas, O Christian, “but be instead a believer.”42

Anthony goes on to conclude:

Let us ask, therefore, dearest brothers, and humbly entreat the mercy of Jesus Christ, so that he might come and stand in our midst. May he grant us peace, absolve us from our sins, and take away all doubt from our hearts. And may he imprint in our minds faith in his passion and resurrection, so that with the apostles and the faithful of the Church we might merit to receive eternal life. May he grant this, he who is blessed, laudable, and glorious through all ages. Let every faithful soul say: Amen. Alleluia.43

In Anthony’s Franciscan interpretation, it is the very “imprint” of the Crucifixion and Resurrection that allows Thomas and us to believe. It is through these wounds, or imprinting, that we might “merit to receive eternal life.” In keeping with the earlier exegesis on the Doubting Thomas discussed in chapter 1, Anthony presents Thomas as a

42 Ibid., 102.
43 Ibid., 104.
figure to be identified with—he, like us, must conquer doubt in order to believe and to reap the rewards of this belief.

The “imprint” of Christ’s crucifixion, made manifest in the wounds themselves, is the physical proof of his Resurrection from that terrible death. That Thomas’s confirmation of this miracle comes in the form of a sensory experience is not inconsequential to this discussion. As historian Alexander Murray has noted in his essay on the medieval image of Doubting Thomas, “After touching a man, Thomas recognized God. This was because the agent of Thomas’s conversion was not a mere empirical verification, but rather a direct experience (represented by physical contact) of the suffering (represented by the wound) through which Jesus had redeemed mankind.”

Thomas’s emotional experience of Christ’s Real Presence would have resonated with Franciscans who, as Murray goes on to suggest, emphasized “affectivity…or the heart, rather than the head as the primary means of contact with Christ…Acceptance of Christ is here no longer now a question of faith, present or absent. It is rather one of total ‘empathy,’ as we say now, with the object of meditation.”

If contemporary worshippers empathized with the object of meditation—namely Thomas—than they might also empathize with Francis, stigmatized in his divine love. Anthony’s sermon represents an iteration of a common Franciscan trope: identification with exemplars. In identifying with Francis, the laity actually identifies with Christ. The Franciscan order was of course not the only mendicant group to employ such tactics. Indeed the goal of lay preaching was, at its heart, all about providing the laity with models by which to live. In this project the Franciscans were not alone and preachers of

the Dominican Order also did a lot to advance this type of paradigm. The popular sermon was strategically used to make such analogies. More and more often delivered in the vernacular, these sermons were aimed at a less-educated lay audience. As Franco Orlando has discussed, modern historians have only recently begun to use the sermons of popular preachers as sources for reconstructing Italian Renaissance history; nevertheless, these documents often reveal epistemological information that is less transparent in other primary sources, whether written or visual. Therefore, Anthony’s sermon, when coupled with the images discussed thus far in this chapter, elucidates something about the way the Doubting Thomas episode was understood, but also about how Renaissance people believed. Anthony uses the nature of human experience to liken Thomas’s incredulity to that of the average listener. Through his own doubt Thomas found belief and through that belief we too believe. In this sense knowledge or truth is discerned from experiential continuity—the New Testament account is made timeless not just by virtue of its applicability in the ‘present’ day, but because the layperson is urged to understand their doubt as a reliving of Thomas’s experience, which ultimately led to the confirmation of Christ’s divine nature.

It would seem, in fact, that the orator’s strategy—namely employing careful rhetoric to evoke a likeness between one’s own belief, and Thomas’s—finds analogy with the Renaissance artist’s use of donor portraits and patron saints. As in the case with Giovanni Battista da Faenza’s painting discussed above, St. Anthony appears in another Paduan image of the Doubting Thomas painted by Stefano dell’Arzere (1543, fig. 35) nearly forty years after the Giovanni Battista panel and three centuries after Anthony’s

own sermon. The little-known altarpiece by Stefano was the final decorative element in the Obizzi Chapel in the parish church of San Tommaso in Albignasego (just outside of Padua) and stands in situ along with one of the only extant fresco cycles depicting the life of St. Thomas. Anthony’s appearance in this altarpiece and a contemporaneous sermon by famous Franciscan friar Cornelio Musso (1511-1574) in the Santo in Padua, warrant this chronological digression. Together these paintings and sermon support not only a Franciscan reading of imagery of the Doubting Thomas, but a specifically local, Paduan concern with this theme. The localization of Renaissance iconography has long been acknowledged. Images of the Doubting Thomas, however, have not been evaluated with the notion of local traditions in mind. In the case of Stefano’s altarpiece, Anthony again bears witness to the Incredulity and intercedes on behalf of one of the donors, depicted at his feet. Here Anthony’s presence indicates the local importance of the saint, and perhaps recalls the Franciscan milieu in which he became associated with the Doubting Thomas. The altarpiece and fresco cycle, both by Stefano dell’Arzere (born c. 1515) are unusual for several key reasons and have not received the art historical attention they deserve.

Stefano’s central panel of Thomas’s disbelief is here ensconced in an elaborate carved frame. Four sculptural herms separate the three panels of the polyptych. The

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48 Giuliana Ericani, “Stefano dell’Arzere nella Cappella Obizi in San Tommaso di Albignasego,” Padova e il suo territorio 12 (1997): 20-24 and “La Scultura Lignea del Seicento nel Veneto,” (Scultura Lignea Barocca nel Veneto. Ed. Anna Maria Spiazzi. Balsamo: Cinisello, 1997), 13 by the same author are the only secondary sources to elaborate on this altarpiece and the frescos in the same chapel. Ericani’s article focuses almost exclusively on issues related to dating, restoration and conservation, and authorship. She concludes that the attribution to Stefano dell’Arzere is sound. Her slightly later entry in Scultura Lignea is in reference to the framing element of the altarpiece.
central panel depicts the Incredulity. Standing atop several stairs, Christ is positioned at the center of the composition and is scantily draped to reveal his classically muscled form, and the reddened wounds of his Passion. Eleven apostles form a tightly arched semicircle around the primary action. Thomas, with notably darker features than the others, steps forward, index finger extended to Christ’s side. Remarkably, in his haste, Thomas has stepped on Christ’s toes! To my knowledge, this element of Stefano’s rendering is unique. Their overlapped feet are directly in line with the point at which Thomas’s finger makes contact with Christ’s body, emphasizing the physical communication between savior and disciple. Thomas’s foot is aligned with the step upon which all of the figures stand. To the far right of the composition, one of the apostles mirrors Thomas’s foot with his own—placed at an anatomically awkward right angle (fig. 35, detail). Never breaching the edge of this step, the Gospel episode unfolds in a claustrophobic space. Stefano’s composition does not appear to breathe because there is no negative space between figures. Rather, the viewer sees a dark and ambiguous interior opening beyond the apostles’ heads.

The same sense of shady depth is not created behind the saints depicted in the side panels. Instead, St. Anthony and St. Catherine of Alexandria stand with the symbols of their martyrdoms in golden niches. At each of their feet is a donor—the identities of whom I will return to. Anthony stands in gentle contrapposto, one hand extended down toward the donor he presents, the other holding his customary lilies. The saint’s head is turned toward the scene of Thomas’s doubt but his facial expression is unmoved. Likewise, Catherine leans easily on her wheel, palm frond in hand. Her gaze is directed out at the viewer and with the donor in St. Anthony’s niche, invites the viewer to engage
with the narrative unfolding in the central panel. The donors are stately noblemen, undoubtedly members of the Obizzi family, for whom the chapel is named. Their beards are graying and they appear to be roughly contemporary in age. Both men clasp their hands in prayer, their bodies turned in toward Christ and salvation. Giuliana Ericani has suggested that the three-quarter length portraits are of the brothers Pio Enea and Ruberto Obizzi, sons of Gasparo degli Obizzi (fig. 35, details). His sons, depicted as donors in the side panels, likely commissioned the altarpiece in honor of their father whose reign as family patriarch ended in 1543.49

Above and below the *Incredulity* polyptych grisaille panels complicate the iconographic program of the altarpiece. Unlike many other Renaissance themes, the Doubting Thomas was very rarely accompanied by such secondary panels that we know of or that are extant. The three uppermost panels depict stories from the Old Testament, while the lower scenes represent key episodes from the lives of the Saints in the main panels. Centered over Christ’s head, the oval monotone is a sketchy depiction of Moses drawing water from the rock. To the left, over St. Anthony, the angel in the Sacrifice of Isaac stays Abraham’s hand. Over St. Catherine, Daniel is rescued from the Lion’s den. The lower three panels depict, from left to right, the *Birth of St. Anthony, Christ Leading Souls from Limbo*, and finally *The Martyrdom of Catherine*. The two scenes from the lives of Anthony and Catherine appear below their larger representations in the panels above. The other scenes—of Old Testament episodes in the upper register and of Christ in Limbo in the lower panel—serve to enrich the central iconography of St. Thomas.

Both the *Sacrifice of Isaac* and *Daniel in the Lion’s Den* recall earlier typological examples of God’s intervention on behalf of the faithful. In the case of Isaac, Abraham is

rewarded for his willingness to make a supreme sacrifice and is thus released from this obligation. It is Abraham’s faith that allows God to do him this favor. God also intercedes on behalf of Daniel. Threatened by the king of Babylonia, who wished Daniel to pray to him and no one else, Daniel was imprisoned in a cave of hungry lions. Continuing to pray to his Hebrew God, Daniel emerged unscathed. The story was commonly appropriated for Christian purposes, and would have reverberated with special significance in this setting. Thomas, not unlike Daniel and Abraham, receives Christ’s beneficent intercession when, in his moment of doubt, he is provided evidence of Christ’s miraculous resurrection. With two important members of the Obizzi family depicted below, surely these Old and New Testament heroes represent models of faith and intercession for the capitani.

The central upper scene of Moses Drawing Water from the Rock may be paired visually with the lower panel of Christ Leading Souls from Limbo. Moses, typologically likened to Christ, led his people from Egypt. Along this treacherous road his followers complained of their thirst and implied Moses’s ineptitude. Their skepticism was quenched literally and figuratively when Moses struck a nearby rock with his staff and water sprung forth. This miracle inevitably renewed confidence in Moses’s authority. The grisaille panel below the scene of Moses is that of Christ assisting souls in Limbo. Moses was often considered a ‘friend of God’ who would, like the other righteous souls in Limbo, await Christ’s arrival when his soul could finally be directed to heaven. Like those in Limbo (or Moses’s incredulous followers), Christ guides Thomas toward faith and the source of redemption.
The iconography of this altarpiece represents an especially sophisticated interpretation of the Doubting Thomas and casts it within a much greater narrative framework related to the Old Testament and to more contemporary saintly models such as Sts. Anthony and Catherine. Famous for their advances in narrative fresco painting of the early Renaissance, the Franciscans continued to ensure narrative developments in altarpieces as well. Although it is unclear whether any members of the Obizzi family were Franciscan, they must have been very familiar with Anthony’s role in the progress of that Order, and of the monumental commissions in nearby Padua (including the much earlier Scrovegni Chapel, for instance) which forever associated the rise of Franciscanism with developments in narrative painting.

This elaborate altarpiece was most likely commissioned after the completion of the fresco cycle in the same chapel. In 1520 the property title of the chapel shifted from Ludovico Obizzi to the brothers Tommaso and Daniele. Perhaps it was these two Obizzi who commissioned the cycle of frescos in the chapel for it is they who are portrayed on the framing pilasters of the central interior archway of the chapel and it is one of these brothers who had a vested interest in his name saint (fig. 37). The chapel is entered from the apse of the modern (20th-century) church of San Tommaso and is the only part of the old building to remain intact. It is difficult to be sure how it was originally accessed but it seems likely to have been positioned as the right side arm of a Latin-cross plan. The chapel is rectangular with a barrel-vaulted ceiling and a semi-circular apse behind the altar. In the vault are painted the four Evangelists, each with their identifying attributes. At the center of the vault the Obizzi stemma denotes the family’s claim to the

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50 Ibid., 21.
51 Ibid., 22.
space. Along the ribs of the vaulting are depictions of the diocese of Padua (fig. 38). The lateral frescos depict events from the missionary life of St. Thomas. This cycle follows the *Golden Legend* account of Thomas’s life, though there are only four scenes to represent the entire story of the apostle’s conversion of India. Beginning on the left lateral wall the viewer must read the scenes chronologically from bottom to top (fig. 36). The large rectangular fresco on the lower left wall depicts the prisoner Thomas as he is summoned before King Gundafor. Thomas had been imprisoned after giving money to the poor when it was intended for a new building project. The King’s brother, Gad, had recently died but told the King about Thomas via a divine vision. This scene marks the moment when the King has decided to give Thomas another chance. Still wearing the crown of his mortal rule, the King appears atop a throne of steps and Thomas stands, hands before him, at his beckoning. The King wears a blue undergarment and yellow mantle while Thomas appears to be dressed in a sort of habit not unlike those worn by Franciscans. Both the King and Thomas may be identified in the subsequent scenes based on their appearance here. A cast of colorfully clad figures stands just slightly behind the King and Thomas. They talk amongst themselves, perhaps deciding how to feel about this foreigner. One of these gentlemen gazes directly out at the viewer. His distinct features could denote a portrait, perhaps of an Obizzi family member.

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52 This does not follow a typical pattern of fresco decoration (as defined by Marilyn Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches 431-1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 9). The cycle in the Obizzi Chapel is closely related to both the “Straight-Line Vertical” pattern, in which the frescos read from top to bottom on both lateral walls, or the “Up-Down, Down-Up” pattern, in which the frescos read from top to bottom on the left lateral wall and from bottom to top on the opposing wall. In the case of Stefano dell’Arzere’s frescos, they appear to follow a reverse up-down pattern: “Down-Up, Up-Down” which is not defined by Lavin. The problematic top scene on the left wall (a Baptism, but of who?) cannot be the starting place for the narrative as this simply does not follow story as it is told in either the *Golden Legend* or *Acts of Thomas*. 
Above this lateral wall fresco is the next scene in the narrative progression, this painted in the shape of a lunette (fig. 36). Upon first glance the subject appears to be the baptism of the King—the next logical event in the story’s progression. Closer examination, however, reveals that it is the King, identifiable via his blue and yellow cloaks, who pours liquid over the head of a mostly destroyed image of Thomas. I can think of no reason for this reversal and am not familiar with a hagiographic text that would support such an interpretation of these events. Interestingly, the King no longer wears his crown and to the right, cast on the ground, is a turban. This turban also appears in the next scene in the cycle on the opposite wall.

On the right lateral wall the scenes read from top to bottom, rather than from bottom to top as they do on the left wall of the chapel (fig. 35). In the top lunette a fictive architectural wall frames the scene of the King’s recognition of Thomas’s sanctity. Thomas kneels before the King who raises his hand to bless the apostle. A similarly diverse group of figures forms a semi-circle around the central action. At the center of the composition, cast on the ground, is the familiar turban. In this case, however, the turban is topped with the King’s crown and the King in turn is now haloed. One might read this strange headdress as a sort of progression from the barbarism of the King’s cultural origins in the East (as represented by the turban), to his civilized status as King (the crown), and finally to his justification as a Christian leader (the halo). The fresco of Thomas is badly abraded in this scene but it is clear that he wears the simple robe represented in the episodes on the opposing wall.

53 Marilyn Lavin
54 As far as I know the King was never recognized as a saint but appears with a halo in these frescos and in the stained-glass windows by Bernardo di Francesco in the Florentine Duomo where Bicci di Lorenzo’s Incredulity is depicted below (see chapter three, fig. 64).
In the next scene of the cycle Thomas is martyred by the lance of a local pagan priest. Thomas has toppled a statue of a false idol with his prayer and thus incurs the wrath of the unconverted. A classical niche at the far left contains the fallen sculptural fragments. The priest’s lance pierces Thomas’s chest just where Longinus similarly stabbed Christ, though Thomas’s wound is on his left and Christ’s was thought to be on his right. The crowd behind the priest reveals mixed emotions and one figure, arms cast up in what looks like dismay, adds energetic drama to the narrative. The Martyrdom of St. Thomas marks the apostle’s tragic end and is the final episode depicted in the unusual cycle.

Visitors who proceed from the end of the mural cycle toward the altar will pass by the frescoed images of Tommaso and Daniele Obizzi on the pilasters framing the archway leading into the apse. Above these representations the Annunciation punctuates the architecture. Once through the arch, Stefano dell’Arzere’s altarpiece stands tall against the curved back of the apsidal end of the chapel. A much later, perhaps 19th-century fresco of the Nativity has been painted on the ceiling of the apse. Taken together, the cycle and altarpiece create a compelling link between the Obizzi—an important family of the Padua area—the life and imagery of Thomas, local saints Anthony and Catherine, and the diocese of Padua. The Church has never, to my knowledge, owned a relic of St. Thomas, nor did the Obizzi endow it with such a gift. Inserting themselves into the pictorial events through the use of donor portraits, two generations of Obizzi capitani reveal that their claim to St. Thomas as a patron saint was further reaching than the simple namesake of one member (Tommaso Obizzi, represented on one of the pilasters of the chapel). While the family employed other artists and more aggrandizing
imagery in their nearby Palazzo Catajo, their commissions for this chapel spoke to the family’s religious rather than civic identity.

The pictorial recounting of the life and martyrdom of Thomas in San Tommaso at Albignasego ultimately emphasizes his saintly works rather than the moment of his incredulity alone. Although the altarpiece was likely commissioned after the narrative cycle, the two decorative components work together to express both aspects of Thomas’s religious significance. The visual message of the altarpiece and fresco cycle conveys the importance of Thomas’s disbelief, the generosity of Christ’s response, and the success of Thomas’s later missionary life. Less than a decade after Stefano’s work in San Tommaso was complete this way of thinking was reiterated in verbal form. I have identified a sermon by the Franciscan humanist Cornelio Musso (1511-1574) that emphasizes the same point as that conveyed in these decorations. Delivered on the Octave of Easter in the Santo in Padua, 1553, Musso’s sermon elaborates on the role of missionary life for belief. The title, “Predica della Giustificazione, et della Remissione de’peccati,” indicates that Musso’s general topic is Justification and the Remission of Sins. Musso frames this discussion with a reminder of the apostolic missionaries, sent all over the world (including India) to spread the word of God. He implores the congregation to “be

55 Irma Jaffe, Zelotti’s Epic Frescoes at Cataio: the Obizzi Saga (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Jaffe’s new book deals with the elaborate iconographic program of the decorations in the Palazzo Catajo. Determined by family friend and poet Giuseppe Bertussi, these frescos trace the genealogy and historic legacy of the Obizi family. An earlier Tommaso Obizi (not of the same generation as the Tommaso depicted in Albignasego) was a very important soldier and politician during the 1260’s and is depicted in no fewer than five monumental frescos. Although it is not possible to prove a connection between this Tommaso and the chapel in San Tommaso, he could not have been far from the minds of later Obizi family members given that Bertussi remembered him as “not only the greatest hero of the Obizi family but also the greatest warrior of his time” (107). It was the grandson of this Tommaso (Antonio) that established the Obizi family presence in Padua.

56 Cornelio Musso, Prediche del Reverendissimo Mons. Cornelio Musso da Piacenza, Vescovo di Bitonto. (Fatte in Diversi tempi, et in diversi luoghi, nelle quali si contengono molli Santi, & Evangelici precetti, non meno utili, che necessari alla interior Fabrica dell’huomo Christiano. Con la Tavola delle Prediche nel principio & quella delle cose piu notabili nel fine), printed in Ferrara, 1554.
not disbelieving but faithful” in the identical way that Christ asks this of Thomas. This rhetorical phrasing essentially casts the laity in the role of Thomas, beseeched to believe and not to doubt. Also like Thomas, the congregation must live by the model of charity and virtue provided by the apostolic missions. Musso’s emphasis on the importance of Justification via good works made him a popular Counter-Reformatory preacher, a topic I will return to in chapter 4.

Just as the frescoes and altarpiece in Albignasego may be understood to represent facets of Thomas’s belief, so too Musso’s sermon employs Thomas as a model for the faithful. His sermon reiterates the potency of Thomas’s sensory knowledge of Christ’s wounds and reminds worshippers that Christ’s response is intended to allay the incredulity of all humans. Thomas is not, in Musso’s estimation, a sinner but rather an example of someone whose actions governs their faith. It is not despite Thomas’s incredulity that he converts India, but precisely because of it that he succeeds in his missionary life. Crucial to the Franciscan order was the goal of creating accessible models for the laity. Both Musso’s sermon and Stefano dell’Arzere’s pictorial interpretation of Thomas’s doubt and the events of his life suggest just such a model.

The Franciscan order was certainly not alone in their crafting of sermons around the idea of Thomas as a model for normal lay behavior. Although I do not think the Dominican order laid particular claim to the Doubting Thomas, my discovery of a sermon by Giordano da Pisa, a 14th-century Dominican priest—adds another facet to the evocation of Thomas discussed in St. Anthony of Padua’s sermon, mentioned earlier, and Musso’s much later sermon. As is clear from the brief discussion to follow, the two preachers—Anthony, Franciscan and Giordano, Dominican—emphasize different aspects

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57 Ibid., 161.
of the same subject. Both nevertheless seek to annul fear and doubt in the congregation by discussion of a story about just those emotions.

Likely delivered during Giordano’s extended stay at Santa Maria Novella, Florence (1302-07), the subject of his sermon was the theme of *Beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt* (or the Blessed those who do not see but still believe) and was given on December 21st, 1304, Thomas’s feast day. After recounting the Incredulity from John 20:24-29, this sermon becomes more abstract in its content. Giordano highlights the distinction between the clergy and the laity—the former dedicate at least thirty years to understanding the truths of Scripture, while the latter must rely on the clergy for their knowledge of the same material:

You must believe us, since we see these things clearly and because you do not, or perhaps you do not want to believe? Now, if you say, “I want to understand as you do,” brothers, you would need to study for thirty years and be in school, so that then you would see well. This cannot be—you must give yourselves to believe the wise. And I, being at the altar of the Sacrament, I see many things through reason and through negative proof, of which I am as certain

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58 Carlo Delcorno, *Giordano da Pisa e l’antica predicazione volgare* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1975), 184-185. The relevant passage of Giordano’s sermon is transcribed in Delcorno’s text:

I savi molte cose vegiono per ragioni vive et naturali, le quali eciandio se Scrittura Sancta non fosse le si crederebbono elgino per sé, imperò che le veden per ragione, non ne dubitano niente. Ma queste cose non le vegiono i semplici et che ànno pocho lume, et però ogni cosa conviene che vi porgiamo a fare credere per fede, ché per ragione non le vedestri. Dovete credere anoi, che queste cose vedemo chiaramente, et perché voi non le vegiate, o non volete però credere?

Or se tu di’:--Io le voglio intendere come tu--; frate, e’ ti conerverrebbe studiare trenta anni et più stare in iscuola, anci che tu bene le vedessi. Non può essere questo: conviene che vi diate a credere ai savi. Et mei eciandio nel Sacramento de l’Altare, disse frate Giordano, vegho io molte cose per ragione et per prova in negativa, de le quali io ne [ms. Non] sono certo come se con gli occhi io le vedesse, le quali tucte vi conviene credere voi; imperò che voi non siete stati in scuola come sono io venti et trent’anni continuo. (December 21, 1304, in Quaracchi 1901).

As per Delcorno’s careful reconstruction of Giordano’s sermons, the Dominican priest also spoke of the Doubting Thomas on the Sundays following Easter 1304-1306 (see chart, page 382-383).
as if I had seen them with my own eyes, which all of you should believe, because you did not got to school as I did.\textsuperscript{59}

Thus, Giordano suggests that the laity will have to rely on faith, rather than reason, unlike the clergy who will utilize both in their pursuits. But Giordano admits that this gives priests an unfair advantage—while they may utilize the tools of rational inquiry to explain the things that they would be more certain of if they could see them “with [their] own eyes,” the “simple people” must rely solely on faith. Giordano notes that

The wise see many things for natural and living reasons, those which even if they didn’t believe were from the Holy Scripture they would think that they saw them because of reason, and they doubt nothing. But the simple do not see these things because they have less light [\textit{lume}] and so we should put everything to them to believe because of faith, that if just by reason you would not see.\textsuperscript{60}

In his discussion of this sermon Carlo Delcorno notes another instance in which Giordano referred to the notion of sight as pertaining to faith; “Il predicare un è se no gli occhi serrati de la mente aprire,” or, “if your eyes are not closed, your mind cannot open.”\textsuperscript{61} That one’s eyes should be \textit{closed} in order for one’s mind to \textit{open}, seems to imply that Thomas, in seeking with his eyes or hands, fell into a common intellectual trap. Rather than using his reasoning and faith, which would have allowed him to arrive at the truth of Christ’s resurrection, Thomas relied on his senses. It is significant, however, that the tone of Giordano’s sermon is obviously one of compassion—the laity, perhaps like Thomas, cannot help but to sometimes fall into such a trap. How the senses

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, 185. Special thanks to Kathleen LaPenta, who assisted with this translation.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}, 185.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, 184.
informed modes of thought and inquiry is a subject to which I will return in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Images and sermons served the same end in many cases: both promoted first-hand experience as a valid means of seeking truth. Thomas’s doubt, more than anything, served as a positive example for the increasingly prominent laity—one could doubt, and this doubt would ultimately strengthen faith. The sense of collective doubt and collective alleviation in the episode of Jerome and Francis parallels that of Thomas and Christ and finds an observable correlation in two unusual examples of the Doubting Thomas in art, both with Franciscan links. Polzer calls attention to a depiction of the *Witnessing of Christ’s Stigmata by the Apostles* (fig. 39) that he views as a sort of hybrid deriving from iconography of the *Doubting Thomas*, but combined with a distinctly Franciscan emphasis on the stigmatization.62 The fresco, attributed to Buonamico Buffalmacco (Campo Santo, Pisa) represents Christ at the center, while Thomas and the other apostles examine his wounds. Polzer postulates that the revised interpretation of the *Doubting Thomas* story (and iconography) to include the disbelief of all the apostles reflects a Franciscan agenda. This seems unlikely, however, since the Pisan Campo Santo has no explicitly Franciscan heritage and there is no evidence of a Franciscan agenda in the rest of that Passion cycle. The Pisan fresco does not, as Polzer writes “comprehensively underline Thomas’s lesser faith by having the other apostles actually join him in the testing of Christ’s wounds instead of standing apart.”63 Rather, I believe that Thomas’s lesser faith is most certainly not underlined by incorporating the other Apostles who test and probe the wounds as well; their presence only serves to normalize and humanize

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62 Polzer, 301.
63 Ibid., 303.
Thomas’s reaction of disbelief when confronted by the resurrected Savior. Textual proof of my interpretation exists in the Franciscan treatise *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, as I will show.

The second example of this artistic “hybrid” as Polzer has called it, exists in the anonymous monumental tomb relief of Cardinal Luca Fieschi in the Duomo of Genoa. The Cardinal’s tomb monument, erected in May of 1344, features the same sort of *Witnessing of Christ’s Stigmata* at its center as does the Campo Santo fresco. In the relief Christ stands at the center with his arms outstretched (fig. 40). The twelve apostles are positioned on either side of Christ, and six extend their hands to touch his wounds. If we assume that Thomas is the figure prodding Christ’s side, than he is relegated to a strange compositional location, in the left background, extending his arm under Christ’s in order to gain access to the laceration. Indeed Thomas, though on Christ’s privileged right side, is not singled out as a point of focus here. Instead, Christ’s bodily incarnation is made the center of the composition and thereby of the narrative. Thomas’s doubt has been grouped, in this instance, with that of the apostles’ collective need for affirmation of their risen savior. The Fieschi family’s Franciscan devotion was likely the source for this interpretation of the monument, as Polzer has shown.

Polzer goes on to suggest that the *Witnessing of Christ’s Stigmata* in the Campo Santo and on the Fieschi tomb are the precedents for iconography of the Doubting

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64 Julius Gardner, *The tomb and the tiara: curial tomb sculpture in Rome and Avignon in the later Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 118-121, figs. 136 and 137; the relief—the first of its kind to span the entire front of a sarcophagus, may have been by a close follower of Giovanni Pesaro (120). Documents concerning the erection of the tomb, May 24, 1344 are published by F. Alizeri, *Notizie dei professori del disegno in Liguria dalle origini al secolo XVI* (Genoa, 1864-73); the formal relationship to the Campo Santo fresco has been recognized by Polzer, n. 79; he notes the Fieschi family devotion to the Franciscan order; Adrian V (Luca Fieschi was his nephew) was the first pope buried in a Franciscan church.

65 Polzer, n. 11, p. 309.
Thomas. The validity of that particular aspect of Polzer’s argument is weak. Early
Christian representations of Thomas, as has been demonstrated, long depicted a very
different iconographical representation of the *Doubting Thomas* than is represented in the
Pisan fresco, and other Tuscan civic examples that predate the fresco also suggest no
derivation from the image of the *Witness of Christ’s Stigmata* (see chapter 3). In these
earlier images Christ and Thomas either appear alone, excised from their narrative
context, or surrounded by the other apostles who do not engage in the action as they do in
the Campo Santo fresco, but rather stand on as passive witnesses.

Hagiographic sources do, however, create a textual parallel to the type of imagery
seen in the Campo Santo and on the Fieschi tomb. The Franciscan treatise *Meditations
on the Life of Christ* relates the story of the *Doubting Thomas* in a different fashion than
it is told in the Gospel of John; in his first appearance to the apostles Christ stayed
“familiarly” with them, allowed all of them to see his hands and side, and they in turn
sorrowfully told of how they had abandoned him. Later, when Christ returned to
convince Thomas of his Presence Thomas said “My Lord and my God” for he saw the
Man and believed in the God.”66 The *Meditations* continues “…therefore observe Him
diligently and consider His customary goodness, humility, and fervent love as He shows
Thomas and the other disciples His wounds in order to remove all doubt from *their*
hearts, for *their* profit and ours” (my italics). The meaning of the story in this context is
one of collective doubt—of all apostles, of all people. The visual iconography of the
*Doubting Thomas*, writes Polzer, is “transformed” to promote the Franciscan zeal for the
Real Presence of Christ as it was manifested in St. Francis’s stigmatization. While that
may be so, Franciscan images of the Doubting Thomas, as will be shown, do not

necessarily emulate the *Witnessing* type, but rather draw on late Medieval images of the Doubting Thomas for formal inspiration.

While Taddeo Gaddi’s armadio panels in Santa Croce, Florence, made the parallel between Jerome & Francis and Thomas & Christ visually explicit, the Fieschi tomb in Genoa establishes the correlation between Franciscan patronage and the possible affinity for the Doubting Thomas as a subject in art. Compelling evidence of this exists in a 1395 polyptych attributed to the French painter Zanino di Pietro who worked in the Marches (1389-1448; fig. 41). The painting, likely commissioned in honor of the local Beato Sante (Giansante Brancorsini 1343-1394) of Mombaroccio in the Marches, at one time occupied the high altar of the sanctuary there. The central panel of the altarpiece depicts the Doubting Thomas and is flanked in the side panels by (from left to right) representations of the Archangel Michael, the Beato Sante, St. Peter, and St. Anthony Abbott. At the center, Thomas kneels and reaches a delicate finger to touch the still bleeding wound in Christ’s side. Michael, Peter, and Anthony appear with their attributes, their eyes downcast. Only the Beato Sante actually witnesses the miracle of Thomas’s conversion as his eyes are tilted up toward the dramatic action. In his left hand he holds a tiny gold cross and in his right a blazing sun. This golden orb has been identified as the Beato’s attribute—a sparkling sun that appears close to his breast in other representations of the Sante. The presence of the tonsured, Franciscan Beato in

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the privileged position to Christ’s right and the central panel’s narrative subject matter (predating the general Italian move toward the narrative altarpiece) justify the more detailed examination of this painting that follows.

While no longer ranking among the likes of Gentile da Fabriano, Zanino di Pietro or Giovanni di Francia (or Giovanni di Pietro Charlier) as he was also called, was a relatively successful painter in the Veneto and Marches during the late 14th and early 15th centuries. As has been documented by Giancarlo Mandolini and Guido Ugolini, contributors to a collection of essays in honor of the anniversary of the Beato’s death, Zanino’s work on the altarpiece likely began before the Sante’s death in 1395. Still in its original, highly ornate frame, the panels that comprise this polyptych are an unusual combination. St. Peter and the Beato Sante stand in panels capped with carved pinnacles. The carved bust on the right (over St. Peter) appears to be St. Jerome—dressed as a cardinal and holding a model of the church. Mandolini has suggested that the opposing bust on the left side of the altarpiece, over the Beato, is St. Paul. A figure of Jerome, similarly clad, appears in a polyptych in nearby Pesaro (now in the Pinacoteca Comunale) and was commissioned to commemorate another local Beato: Michelina. Many other altarpieces painted in and around Pesaro include Jerome and it is likely that he was an unofficial patron saint of the city. The presence of St. Anthony Abbott in the far right panel and the Archangel Michael in the far left speak more to the role of the Beato and the Franciscan friars than to any particular Thomason devotion. Michael was a known protector of soldiers and thus he stands appropriately close to the ex-warrior Beato. As a

69 See especially Christiansen, 146-147.
70 The official saint of Pesaro is St. Terence. In a conversation with Giancarlo Mandolini (July 19, 2008) the priest told me that he thought the tiny carved bust was likely the patron saint of either Pesaro or Mombaroceo but that he had been unable to positively identify the figure. Mandolini felt strongly, however, that the carving on the left was St. Paul.
model for penitential saints, Anthony Abbott was equally appropriate to the religious life adopted by the Beato and his brothers. Peter’s presence legitimizes the role of the Franciscans in church life. These saints, like those depicted in the side panels of Stefano dell’Arzere’s altarpiece in Albignasego, speak to the local traditions associated with the subject of the altarpiece. But unlike Stefano’s work, the saints included in the Zanino polyptych do not specifically enrich the Doubting Thomas iconography. Instead, these saints augment the iconography of the Beato Sante, whose communion with Christ resulted in many miracles.

According to biographies of the Beato, published posthumously after his beatification in 1769, Brancorsini was educated in Urbino before becoming a soldier.71 Fleeing this life of violence, he became a devout member of the friars minor in 1362. Upon his death, January 22, 1395, legend records that a lily grew miraculously from his heart, up through his sepulcher. His body was transferred to a more dignified tomb in the sanctuary where it remained until a new monument was constructed in 1774.72 Documents gathered for the beatification process describe the commission for the polyptych: the bishops of Pesaro and Fano jointly requested a painting for the high altar ("super Aram Maximam") to celebrate the life of the Beato Sante after the miracle of the lily.73

Two problems arise from the history reconstructed above: the first regards the identification and prominent position of the Beato Sante to Christ’s right in the painted polyptych, and the second concerns the dating of both the commission and the finished

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71 Biographies by Antonio Maria Bonucci (1709), Pietro Giunti (1720), and Giuseppe Maria Pagliaccini (1774) are documented by Mandolini, 131.
72 Ugolini, 284.
73 Ibid., 288-290; the original Latin documents were published in Positio super cultu immemorabili ven. Servi Dei Fratris Sanctes de Monte Fabrorum, Rome 1770.
altarpiece. In Mauro Lucco’s authoritative volumes dedicated to painting in the Veneto, Zanino’s polyptych is described as the *Doubting Thomas* not with the local Beato, but with St. Francis in the left side panel.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, if it were not for the clearly painted inscriptions appearing over the heads of the figures, the Beato would be easily confused with St. Francis. Lucco has assumed that these inscriptions are a later addition made during the beatification process of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Ugolini has argued convincingly, however, for the identification of the figure with the Beato, and in doing so has simultaneously addressed the problem of dating. The documentary evidence suggests that the polyptych was first commissioned in 1394 and that by the time of the Beato’s death in January, 1395, Zanino was nearly finished.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, the bishops of Pesaro and Fano could not have intended the polyptych to honor the Beato as the miracle for which he was known had not yet occurred.

At the time of the commission, Ugolini posits, the altarpiece would likely have been ordered to include St. Francis in the privileged panel. Still present in the Marches at the time of the Beato’s death, Zanino could have easily modified his own composition—with inscriptions and the attribute of the golden sun—in order to reflect the new needs of his patrons.\textsuperscript{76} A later artist, perhaps one employed by the friars in Mombaroccio, following the beatification of their local hero, could also have been responsible for these additions, as is assumed by Lucco, but Ugolini proposes a more convincing alternative. The patronage documents compiled during the beatification process describe the vacillation on the part of the commissioning bishops concerning whether they could legitimately place the altarpiece, with its representation of the Sante, over the high altar.

\textsuperscript{74} Lucco, 21-23; pl. 34.
\textsuperscript{75} Ugolini, 290-91.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 291.
Ultimately they decided that its placement there was necessary and may have, as Ugolini suggests, altered the original contract to reflect their change of heart: the altarpiece was no longer to represent St. Francis and the Doubting Thomas, but the Beato Sante and the Doubting Thomas. It was only in the 18th century that the altarpiece was moved to its position over the door to the presbytery on the right side of the nave, later to be moved to the museum adjacent to the sanctuary.

For the purposes of this discussion, it is not entirely relevant whether the figure in the left panel was intended to be the Beato Sante or St. Francis. In either case, the central subject of the Doubting Thomas was paired with a preeminent Franciscan figure over the main altar of a church. An 18th-century fresco cycle devoted to the Beato does not reiterate the theme of the Doubting Thomas and suggests that the Sante did not reserve special devotion for Thomas. Instead, it seems that the choice of subject, particularly for its position in a highly visible location over the altar, was meant to emphasize the celebration of the mass and the sacrament of the Eucharist enacted just below the polyptych. Indeed Mandolini has found no other reason for the bishops’ choice of subject other than that of reinforcing pilgrims’ faith in the Resurrected Christ as represented in the Eucharist. When a contemporary of the Beato, Franciscan preacher Bartolomeo da Pisa saw Zanino’s polyptych (c. 1399) he said “Nunc infinitis coruscate miraculis, etsi etiam in vita claruerit” (Now he shines with infinite miracles, even though

77 Ibid., 291.
78 Mandolini, 136-37. Mandolini has also carefully documented the friendship between Bartolomeo and the Beato Sante. Mandolini has suggested that the Eucharistic and penitential themes of the altarpiece explain its commissioning (conversation, July 19, 2008).
in life too he was famous). Bartolomeo must refer to his friend, the ‘famous’ Beato, as the subject of his praise.

The triumph of faith demonstrated by the Thomas episode is linked not only to illustrious believers like Francis, but to local heroes like the Beato, whose faith enabled the miracle of the lily. That the lily sprung from the Beato’s heart, the very place to which Christ’s side wound provides access in Bonaventure’s handbooks, suggests that the Beato and Francis were both linked to Thomas—the apostle who so directly entered that wound. Indeed local Mombaroccian devotees wore silver flaming hearts in memory of the Franciscan beato (fig. 42); these pendants were kept close to their own hearts and represented a physical reminder of the wounds of the Beato, St. Francis, and Christ. Franciscan devotion to the wounds of Christ, and thus to the Eucharist, made the connection to the Doubting Thomas all the more potent, as Zanino’s panels attest. As discussed earlier in this chapter, monumental crucifixes of the late Medieval period often incorporated the diminutive image of Francis at Christ’s feet in order to suggest an immediate model of piety in the form of Francis’s devotion (fig. 43). At the sanctuary in Mombaroccio, a similar monumental crucifix hangs in the apse and is attributed to Ferrer Bassa (fig. 44). In this example, however, the figure of Francis has been replaced with the Beato, who clings to the cross lovingly, under a falling arc of blood pouring from Christ’s side. At one time this crucifix would have been viewed in conjunction with Zanino’s painting for the high altar. Together, these images make explicit the analogy between the Beato and St. Francis, and thus incorporate imagery of the Beato Sante into

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79 Ibid., 136. Special thanks to Ryan Fowler for his help with the English translation.  
80 I am unclear as to the connection between these devotional objects, which must have referred to lily that sprung from the Beato Sante’s heart, and his attribute of the blazing sun that appears in representations of the Beato.
the greater context of Franciscan art. Zanino’s altarpiece also situates the Doubting Thomas and the Franciscan order within a more general Renaissance development: that of the narrative altarpiece, a subject to which I will return in the final section of this chapter.

The Doubting Thomas remained an important theme in the Franciscan artistic repertoire into the next century, as is the case in Luca Signorelli’s famous fresco decoration of the Sacrestia della Cura (or the Sacristy of St. John) in the Basilica della Santa Casa, Loreto (c. 1477-80). Signorelli’s frescos, originally commissioned and paid for by Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV, were completed under the jurisdiction of his nephew, Cardinal Girolamo Basso della Rovere, hence it his stemma that appears on the ceiling of the sacristy. In the octagonal vault of the Sacristy of St. John (one of four sacristies in the basilica) are depicted the four Evangelists, the four Doctors of the Church, and eight music-making angels. On the walls of the drum Signorelli has arranged the apostles in pairs with Thomas depicted as the Doubting Thomas on the eastern wall, and Paul represented in his scene of Conversion on the northern wall (fig. 45). These two scenes are distinct from the five others (the southeast wall is occupied by a window) in that they are clearly narrative, rather than iconic in form.

Signorelli’s fresco of the *Doubting Thomas* relies on the viewer’s interaction with the depicted subject in order to impart meaning beyond the actual painted surface. The sacristy, planned in an octagon with a rib-vaulted cupola is, as Gloria Kury has shown, dedicated to presenting the history of human redemption according to the Gospel.81 The

81 Gloria Kury, *The Early Work of Luca Signorelli: 1465-1490* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), 127-145. The Sacristy is one of four in the Church at Loreto; Kury has carefully reconstructed the importance of Loreto as a pilgrimage location and notes the enlargement of the church (beginning in 1468) as an important aspect in fostering continued pilgrimage to the site. Of course Signorelli’s frescos predate
sacristy imagery specifically relates to John’s gospel and depicts the *Doubting Thomas* without reference to any of the events from the Resurrection, as did Zanino’s altarpiece. Instead, pairs of apostles flank the Incredulity, all of whom hold books and appear to be conversing. The figures of John and Peter are in the compartment adjacent (to the left; see graphic illustration) to the Doubting Thomas; John holds his gospel in his right hand and points toward his open book (and in the direction of Thomas), supporting Kury’s claim that Signorelli’s cycle uses John’s Gospel as its point of departure. To the right (though not immediately next to the *Doubting Thomas*), the *Conversion of St. Paul*, suggests, as Kury noted, that “although Thomas’s kind of knowledge was no longer possible, knowledge of god could take place through a comparably direct experience of spiritual confrontation or grace.” Below the frescoed pairs of apostles are elaborate *intarsia* cabinets used to hold liturgical objects and vestments.

The mission of the apostles—to provide spiritual education and to aid in the confession of sins, as well as to act as the administers of the sacraments, is the same mission as that of the church. The ecclesiastical symbolism of Christ’s side wound, so

the most significant reassertion of this building’s devotional primacy: Bramante’s lavish marble covering of the Santa Casa.

Steffi Roettgen (*Italian Frescoes, The Flowering of the Renaissance 1470-1510* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997) also includes Signorelli’s cycle as well as that in the Sacristy of St. Mark, also in Loreto (56-81). Her graphic illustrations (reproduced in the figures of this dissertation) are essential for understanding the frescos in relationship to one another within each sacristy.

Kury, 135. Signorelli’s depictions in the sacristy are unusual and problematic and Kury’s seems to be the most thorough art historical handling of them to date, though a more recent article by Stefano Papetti (“Signorelli at Loeto: Frescoes in the Sacristy of San Giovanni,” *FMR* 125 (2004): 39-60) has added to this literature. Incidentally, although the other scenes of the Passion narrative are not depicted in this Sacristy, they are the subjects of Melozzo da Forlì’s frescos for the neighboring sacristy in the opposing corner of the same transept of the basilica (see plan, fig.). This makes sense, as Roettgen mentions, because it is St. Mark who describes the Passion in the most detail and it is to him that that sacristy is dedicated (60). The other two sacristies, as Kury discusses, were never completed but likely would reflected the interests of saints Luke and Matthew.

Roettgen also notes, significantly, that Donatello’s Apostle doors (c 1435) for the Old Sacristy in Florence were likely a source for Signorelli since Donatello’s bronze reliefs feature the apostles conversing in a similarly dynamic way (62). Notably, however, Donatello’s doors do not pair Thomas with Christ, as has been done in Loreto.

Ibid., 138.
described by Bonaventure, suggests that the “blood and water [that] flowed from his side are the sacraments through which the church is renewed.” Kury’s discussion of these frescos, still the only lengthy study on Signorelli’s early work, focuses on this interpretation: she suggests that the cycle is ultimately about the dissemination of the Apostolic mission as it was given by Christ to the apostles only after Thomas’s affirmation of Christ’s Real Presence. Signorelli’s sacristy frescoes, influenced largely by a Franciscan Pope, place the Doubting Thomas at the center of a group of missionary apostolic saints who are defined by their roles as teachers and advocates of faith in much the way St. Francis was defined. Moreover (and as Kury has oddly omitted), the function of the sacristy, as a home to those sacred vessels, vestments, and objects of the liturgy used by contemporary priests, suggests a sense of historical continuity between the Apostles as the first priests of the Church, and those of the 15th century.

Nevertheless, despite Thomas’s later success as an apostolic missionary in India, the Doubting Thomas had never, as far as I know, been used to represent those successes, and viewers would have had to make that connection from subtle allusion alone. The theme of Paul’s Conversion, depicted nearby, seems to be equally about his success as a preacher and the power of belief. Thus, in my estimation, Signorelli’s unusual singling out of the Doubting Thomas and the Conversion of Paul sets these subjects as pendants.

84 As quoted in Kury, 140. Kury deals extensively with allusion to the apostolic mission and Christ’s wounds, pages 140-146. She notes that Thomas posthumously became “closely associated with missionary preaching” as is evidenced in Voragine’s biography of Thomas which is almost exclusively comprised of an account of the Apostle’s success in India. This would stand as convincing evidence of her argument if Voragine’s Golden Legend was not so biased a text; that is, the author almost always favors missionary accounts over other types of stories. To my knowledge, and certainly as he was depicted in art, Thomas’s historic reputation remained most significantly linked to his infamous doubt, and not to his role as an architect and preacher, as Kury would have us believe.

85 Papetti’s 2004 article on the sacristy decorations (cited in note 64 above), although beautifully illustrated with glossy full-color photographs, does not supplement Kury’s earlier work with additional information or different interpretations.

86 Indeed as Papetti notes, it seems that the sacristy decorations were seen only by priests for some time as since their creation and through the 16th century, they were virtually unknown to contemporaries (42).
Both episodes enact the possibility of disbelief and eventual persuasion, inherently facilitating renewed religious vigor in both cases. That these events likely inspired the two Apostles’ success as missionaries appears only secondary to the narratives that are actually represented in the paintings. Again, the function of the sacristy might be significant here: increasingly aware of the laity, the priest would see familiar images of incredulity just prior to giving his sermon and administering the Eucharist—those aspects of the Mass which offered encouragement to the congregation. The unusual iconographic pairings in the sacristy must have been shaped by Franciscan beliefs and thus suggest the role of Sixtus IV in the commission.

Christ’s wounds, emphasized in images of the Doubting Thomas like Signorelli’s, suggest an obvious correlation to Christ’s Presence in the sacrament, but they also may have reflected interest in Francis’s reception of Christ’s wounds during the Stigmatization. The notion that Christ’s side wound could facilitate devotion is mirrored in devotion to Francis’s wounds. Christ’s Real Presence in his Resurrected form was emphasized by the early Franciscans, I would argue, in two important ways: first in the image of Francis at the foot of the Crucifixion in 13th and 14th-century monumental Crucifixes, and second in narrative cycles and panels featuring the Stigmatization of St. Francis. As scholars like Joanna Cannon have demonstrated, the Franciscan church repeatedly employed these images—of Francis at the foot of Christ’s cross, or receiving his sacred wounds—to reiterate their founder’s imitation of Christ.87 These works of art (see fig. 43 for example) also stressed the importance of narrative in art commissioned by

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the Order\textsuperscript{88} and may have provided the art theoretical foundation for the Order’s appropriation of the image of the Doubting Thomas.

The diminutive figures of Francis kneeling at the base of so many early Renaissance crucifixions served to activate and contemporarize the biblical event. Because a tall rood screen often created a barrier between the laity and the high altar (and thus the high altarpiece), the monumental Crucifixes that perched atop the screens could be considered to have had the strongest visual impact on the congregation.\textsuperscript{89} One such example, a Crucifix from Santa Chiara, Assisi by a 13th-century anonymous painter (fig. 43) highlights Christ’s feet by setting them against a rectangular plane of gold leaf. At Christ’s right, on bended knee, a tiny depiction of Francis is also cast against the golden panel. Even though this figure of Francis “bears no visually realistic relation to the body of Christ, [his] emotional suffering is made as real as possible through his [Francis’s] features and gestures.”\textsuperscript{90} Francis’s presence at the foot of the cross, when he certainly was not present at the Crucifixion, is exactly the sort of visualization the laity was being urged to make. As van Os has explicated, the Order was interested in mysticism as an essential tool in promoting Francis as Alter Christus: “the personalistic form of mysticism, whereby the mystic finds his own identity by identifying with another, is a

\textsuperscript{88} The role of the Franciscan order in the development of narrative painting in Italy is well traversed territory; however no scholar, to my knowledge, has discussed the place of the Doubting Thomas in this development. For discussion of this subject see for example: Hans Belting, “The New Role of Narrative in Public Painting of the Trecento: Historia and Allegory,” in Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (National Gallery of Art, Studies in the History of Art 16, ed. H. Kessler and M.S. Simpson, Hanover and London, 1985), 151-68; Marilyn Lavin, The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches 431-1600 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); H. Thode, Franz von Assisi und die Anfange der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien (Berlin, 1885). And for narrative in the illuminations of Franciscan manuscripts, see D. Lesnick, Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality (Athens, GA and London, 1989), 144-5
\textsuperscript{89} Cannon, 108.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 108.
fundamental element in the stories about St. Francis of Assisi.” Bonaventure uses the words *similitudo*, *transformatio*, and *conformitas* to describe Francis in the *Legenda Maior* and the implication is that if worshippers also follow this code they might reach higher levels of religious faith. Indeed the *Meditations*, as I have shown, were used toward that very end. Moreover, Francis’s depiction on these painted Crucifixes allows the viewer to imagine that they, like Francis, may have contact with the Resurrected Christ, albeit in the form of the Eucharist.

The associations between the *Doubting Thomas* and St. Francis are made most explicit where they are depicted side by side with the *Verification of the Stigmata* as in Taddeo’s 13th-century panels, or with a Franciscan saint or beato, as in the Stefano dell’Arzere altarpiece or the Zanino polyptych, but the proliferation of Francis as *Alter-Christus* ensured that these connections could be made by viewers without their explicit representation. In fact, as has been shown by Rab Hatfield, imagery that did not necessarily include Francis came to be understood as Franciscan nevertheless. It is my contention that the Doubting Thomas was an example of such a subject and that its increased visibility in later centuries was due largely to its 13th and 14th-century renewal within the Franciscan milieu.

15TH & 16TH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS IN NARRATIVE ART, THE FRANCISCAN ORDER, AND THE DOUBTING THOMAS

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91 Van Os, 115.
If sermons like those by Anthony of Padua or Giordano da Pisa encouraged an experience-based notion of truth seeking, images confirmed the importance of this mode of thought. Italian Renaissance art has long been acknowledged as a formal turning point in the history of visual representation—the use of mathematical perspectival systems initiated by Masaccio and Brunelleschi facilitated the illusion of space and depth in two-dimensional works of art and allowed viewers, especially those in a church setting, to become participants in the action represented. Although this type of viewer participation may have reached its climax in the Baroque, the importance of experience as a means by which to reach viewers or listeners (as in the case of Anthony and Giordano’s sermons) was obviously well known during the Renaissance.

The ultimate identification of oneself with Thomas, or of Francis with Christ could be made all the more compelling through the contemplation of visual aides in the form of narrative art. In this sense altarpieces and fresco cycles, along with sermons, became part of the clergy’s arsenal of rhetorical tools. Often noted for their important role in the development of narrative painting, the Franciscan order’s attention to the meditative quality of religious life facilitated their promotion of this imagery. The evolution of narrative art may have been fostered early on by the importance of the Elevation of the Host (at which time the Host is consecrated during Mass), codified two years after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1217. Anne Derbes suggests that the “doctrinal focus [during the Elevation] on Christ’s corporeal presence encouraged meditation on the

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93 Mary Carruthers (“Moving Images in the Mind’s Eye,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) has noted that “how an artist “communicated” to various audiences is fundamentally a rhetorical concern, even when the artistic medium is not words” (287).

body of Christ and on the physical reality of the Passion, and it privileged the role of
sight in Eucharistic devotion,95 (though touch and even taste seem to be equally
important) as the experience of taking communion is inextricably linked to the Elevation.
The new rite of elevating the host has been associated with the rise of narrative altarpiece
painting; in order to visually frame the act of Elevation, new altarpieces were
commissioned.96 The Franciscan order was in fact responsible for the introduction of the
Elevation of the Host to the Roman missal and this is evidence of the Order’s growing
devotion to the Corpus Christi (though this was not a devotion reserved for their Order
alone).97 Sensory evocations created by the newly emphasized sight of the Host could
only have gained momentum in the years that followed. If Derbes and others are
correct—that the elevation fostered artistic enterprise—then the sight of the Host,
coupled with both the altarpiece (more and more visible to the laity after the removal of
rood screens in the late 15th and 16th centuries) and the ritualized consumption of the
Eucharist created a multi-sensory experience of the Mass. That Franciscans were
champions of both the Elevation and the narrative altarpiece, could not have been
coincidental.

Derbes has convincingly traced Franciscan interest in the potential of narrative to
their commissioning of Passion cycles beginning in the 13th century.98 These cycles, like
the Crucifixes cited previously, provide the earliest examples of the Order’s interest in

98 Derbes, 19.
the power of narrative as a means of stirring belief. These Passion cycles were often expanded to include scenes conventionally reserved for Resurrection cycles—the Marys at the Tomb, the Road to Emmaus, the Supper at Emmaus, the Apparition at the Closed Gate and the Noli me Tangere were all sometimes included in Franciscan Passion cycles. While these cycles did not, to my knowledge, include the Doubting Thomas, the combination of Francis’s own life with that of Christ, as evidenced in Taddeo’s Armadio panels, suggests an expansionist attitude toward the traditional parameters of Biblical narrative. What began with the diminutive image of Francis inserted at the base of late medieval Crucifixions, and blossomed with Passion and Francis life cycles in the 14th century, later reached its full aesthetic potential in narrative altarpiece painting of the 15th and 16th centuries. The Franciscan Order’s special devotion to Christ’s corporeality coupled with their cultivation of narrative art may have contributed to the popularity of the Doubting Thomas within Franciscan circles, as Cima da Conegliano’s vibrant altarpieces demonstrate.

Cima da Conegliano painted two versions of the theme of the Incredulity of St. Thomas for altars in Venice and the terrafirma during the climactic years of his career.

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99 Ibid., 268. See San Sebastiano, Latium; San Pietro in Vineis at Anagni; Santa Maria degli Angeli near Spoleto; Sant’Antonio in Polesine, Ferrara; and the lower church in San Francesco, Assisi for examples of these early cycles.

100 Ibid., 268

101 See my forthcoming article in Arte Veneta (“From Vocation to Veneration: Form and Function in Cima’s Two Doubting Thomas Altarpieces”). For the fundamental monograph on Cima (Giovanni Battista, c. 1459-1517/18) see Peter Humfrey, Cima da Conegliano (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 43. Humfrey notes the years 1499-1506 to be the climax of the painter’s artistic career, but simultaneously to be the point at which he began to be “old fashioned.” Of the forty-one documented works that Cima made for devotional purposes, only ten of these are narrative altarpieces. That two of the ten are images of the Doubting Thomas is statistically remarkable. The London painting originally hung in San Francesco, Portogruaro (a small town in the Veneto between Trieste and Pordenone) until the building was destroyed in 1828. The second Doubting Thomas is now in the Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice. The Accademia catalogue incorrectly notes that the Doubting Thomas was painted for an altar in San Samuele but the picture was in fact made for and displayed in the Scuola (Edited by Lucia Impelluso, Gallerie dell’Accademia, Milan: Monadori, 2004).
The first panel (fig. 46) was painted for the Scuola di San Tommaso dei Battuti ca. 1502-04 for its altar in San Francesco, Portogruaro; it is now in London, National Gallery. Cima’s second *Doubting Thomas* (fig. 47) from c. 1504-05 originally decorated the altar of the Scuola dei Mureri adjacent to San Samuele in Venice. The two altarpieces are representative of the artist’s most important patronage: one for a Franciscan devotional confraternity in the Veneto, the other for tradesmen in Venice. Despite their shared subject and many formal characteristics in common, significant differences distinguish the two works. Stylistic factors partly explain these differences, but even more influential were the circumstances underlying their genesis and reception. A close comparison of the two paintings reveals Cima’s response to the distinctive concerns of each of his clients and, moreover, deepens our understanding of the Franciscan appropriation of the Doubting Thomas, as it is contrasted with the theme’s relevance for Venetian viewers around 1500.

Born to a family of *cimatori di panni* who specialized in the trimming and finishing of woven wool cloth, Cima took his name from his father’s profession. Peter Humfrey has shown that little can be deduced about Cima’s formal training, save for the visible influence of Giovanni Bellini (c. 1431-1516) and Antonello da Messina (c. 1430-1479) whose Venetian visit of 1475-6 was invaluable to many artists working in the city. Once established, Cima drew his patronage most notably from lay confraternities and Franciscans. In several instances these two kinds of clientele overlap, as is the case in Cima’s first *Doubting Thomas* altarpiece. The London work exemplifies the Franciscan appropriation of the Doubting Thomas. The Order’s adoption of the Doubting Thomas theme reasserted the redemptive power of Christ’s wounds, an association that

would have been of particular interest to the confraternity of the Battuti, whose purpose was to aid sick pilgrims returning from the Holy Land.  

In the London painting, Cima set the gospel narrative within “shut doors” as dictated by the text (John 20:26): Christ stands in a room defined by the orthogonals of the ceiling and red and white checked floor, which suggest a closed space. Thomas, to the proper right of Christ, extends a tentative finger to Christ’s wound. Two arched windows opening onto a landscape pierce the gray wall in the background. Both of Cima’s *Incredulity* altarpieces integrate landscape into their composition and are among a small number in the iconographic history of the subject to do so. His Venetian training undoubtedly inspired Cima to introduce landscape to the imagery of the Doubting Thomas.

Cima’s handling of the narrative in his first altarpiece was surely informed by earlier depictions of the Incredulity, which, as I have shown, placed the Incredulity within the context of the Resurrection narrative, devotions to the wounds of Christ, or with regard to the life of Francis.  

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104 I know of only five Italian paintings of the Doubting Thomas that include landscape—Mariano del Buono’s illumination for the statutes of the Otto di Guardia (1479); an altarpiece by Giuliano Presutti (now in Fano); Giovanni Battista da Faenza’s panel of c. 1500 (in the National Gallery, London); Mazzolino’s painting of 1521; and Santi di Tito’s altarpiece for the Duomo in Sansepolcro (1577) which includes a window and distant landscape.

105 Cima’s painting may also have influenced Dürer’s *Small Passion* (1510-11) woodcut of the subject (Humfrey 1983, 13) or vice versa. For Dürer’s visits to Venice, see Katherine Crawford Luber, ed., *Albrecht Dürer and the Venetian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Fritz Koreny, “Venice and Dürer,” in *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer, and Titian* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), 240-331. It is also possible that Cima was aware of Verrocchio’s *Doubting Thomas* in Florence, given the sculptor’s influence in Venice and the Veneto. Cima, however, is not known to have visited Florence.
painted the London *Incredulity* for a confraternity whose charitable contributions aided the sick, and whose members were flagellants (*battuti*). Given the concerns of its viewers with the body—whether with invalids or the self-mortified flesh of the confraternal members—Cima’s painting must have recalled the late-medieval devotion to Christ’s body and wounds. Peter Humfrey has suggested that Cima’s first *Doubting Thomas* was meant to comfort those ailing patients who could pray to Christ in his “perfect resurrected state,” despite his wounds. Indeed, in Cima’s London painting Christ appears to be unharmed by the Crucifixion: his skin is a milky white and his body is perfectly muscled. Cima’s Thomas probes the wound of an otherwise unscathed Christ, reminding viewers that the savior’s sacrifice led to his Resurrection and to human redemption. Although many flagellant confraternities had by this date given up their physical mortification, the Scuola’s dedication to the reminder of Christ’s bodily sacrifice meant that his triumphant return was especially important to the group’s piety. The vivid language employed by Bonaventure to evoke Christ’s wound as a passage to salvation might have been recalled in this spiritual ambience.

These contextual circumstances are surely significant to a reading of Cima’s London painting. Ailing devotees, returning from pilgrimages to the East, were attended by the Scuola di San Tommaso dei Battuti, whose vigilant care and prayers might earn the sick literal or spiritual healing. Unlike Cima’s other two altarpieces made for flagellant confraternities in the Veneto, which are both *sacre conversazioni* in the spirit of Giovanni Bellini, the painting for the Scuola di San Tommaso is decidedly narrative.

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107 The other two altarpieces commissioned for Battuti were for Oderzo (the Scuola di S. Giovanni Battista, catalogue no. 81 in Humfrey’s monograph) and Conegliano (the Scuola dei Battuti, altar of S. Maria dei
Although the dedication of the commissioning confraternity to St. Thomas made the Incredulity a likely choice for their altarpiece in San Francesco, the Scuola’s particular mission and the altarpiece’s display in a Franciscan church converge to make the narrative message of faith all the more potent. Cima himself can be associated with the Franciscans: he painted no fewer than fourteen major altarpieces for Franciscan settings and was later buried in San Francesco in his birthplace of Conegliano.108

In close succession to the London altarpiece, Cima repeated the subject in his second Incredulity of St. Thomas, now in the Gallerie dell’Accademia. This second painting was not for Franciscan patrons. It is important, nevertheless, to discuss this work in contrast with Cima’s earlier depiction of the Incredulity because it highlights and differentiates the first work from the second on contextual rather than stylistic grounds. It is my contention that the second painting, made for builders in Venice, has little to do with the first picture, situated in San Francesco in Portogruaro. These differences only emphasize the importance of a specifically Franciscan appropriation of Thomas imagery.

The contract for the Accademia altarpiece is no longer extant, but Cima was a significant Venetian painter and it seems reasonable to presume that his new patrons, the Scuola dei Mureri knew, either directly or indirectly, of Cima’s first painting.109 Cima’s second altarpiece, which was painted soon after the apostolic legate mandated that

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108 Ibid., see the table of Cima’s employers on p. 9-10.
109 Peter Humfrey and Richard Mackenney, “The Venetian Trade Guilds and Patrons of Art in the Renaissance,” Burlington Magazine 128 (1986), 322; Humfrey and Mackenney note that Cima is ranked among the most famous of artists employed by the Venetian arti during the late 15th and 16th centuries. The mariegola of the Mureri is in the Archivio di Stato, Venice, Arti, Mureri, Busta 406-407. In the miscellaneous documents of the Scuola there is mention of celebration of St. Thomas’s feast day in front of this altar as late as 1525 (Busta 406). For additional secondary sources on the Scuola di San Tommaso dei Mureri see Gastone Vio, Le Scuole Piccole nella Venezia dei Dogi (Angelo Colla Editore: Venice, 2004), 329; Cesare Augusto Levi, Notizie Storiche di Alcune Antiche Scuole d’Arte e Mestieri, Scomparse o Esistenti Ancora in Venezia (Venice, 1895), 17; Alvise Zorzi, Venezia Scomparsa (Vicenza-Milan, 1972), 555.
members of the Scuola be present on the day of Thomas’s feast (at risk of a twenty soldi penalty), would have been an important focus for the Scuola’s devotions.\(^{110}\) The choice of subject seems particularly apposite because the members of the confraternity were builders like Thomas, and because a relic of Thomas’s jawbone was owned by the adjacent church of San Samuele.

Nonetheless, the artist’s second version of the *Doubting Thomas* notably differs in several key ways from his first painting of the subject. Cima sharply pared down the composition for the Scuola: the other apostles have vanished and instead Christ and Thomas are accompanied by St. Magnus, Bishop of Oderzo, a fellow builder and patron saint of the guild. The Scuola was founded in 1200 with a dual dedication to Thomas and Magnus and thus the bishop appears in Cima’s painting.\(^{111}\) A triumphal arch, common to Venetian buildings and depicted in many *sacre conversazioni*, frames the three figures.\(^{112}\) In this altarpiece, however, the architectural structure especially complements the trade of the Mureri—Venetian dialect for *muratori*—and of course, of Thomas and Magnus. As Humfrey noted, this setting may reflect Cima’s “absorption” of the characteristics of Mauro Codussi’s architectural plans for San Giovanni Crisostomo and his Santa Maria Formosa.\(^{113}\) The generic similarity of the painted architecture to Codussi’s work suggests a parallel between the Mureri and an eminent Venetian architect. Perhaps Cima and the

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\(^{110}\) Vio, 329; notes that the “Magistrati alla Giustizia Vecchia e I Provveditori di Comun confermano la bolla del Legato Apostolico, che concede di celebrare la messa solenne nel giorno di san Tommaso nei locali della scuola.”


\(^{112}\) Given the influence of Giovanni Bellini in Cima’s artistic development, this architectural trope likely derived from Bellini (see the *San Giobbe Altarpiece* for example, c. 1478-80, Venice Gallerie dell’Accademia).

\(^{113}\) Humfrey 1983, 42. Cima’s *S. Michele* altarpiece (c. 1495-97), writes Humfrey, also appears to have been inspired by the recent works of Codussi (1440-1504), particularly by motifs in S. Giovanni Crisostomo. For Codussi’s buildings, see Loredana Olivato Puppi and Lionello Puppi, *Mauro Codussi* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1977).
Mureri wished to evoke a further link between the altarpiece and Codussi’s buildings. Codussi rebuilt the church of Santa Maria Formosa in 1492, but it takes its name from the original seventh-century building. *Formosa* refers to St. Magnus’ vision, in which the *formosa* (voluptuous) Virgin appeared before Magnus and asked him to build her a church under a white cloud. The resulting seventh-century construction is believed to be Venice’s first church with a Marian dedication. If Cima’s archway thus deliberately resembles Codussi’s architectural language, this would be especially appropriate, in that St. Magnus, one of the three figures framed by the fictive architecture, was believed to be the founder of Codussi’s recently restored Santa Maria Formosa.

Christ does not appear to Thomas (and Magnus for that matter) behind “shut doors” in this picture, but rather seems to stand on an architectural stage in front of the sweeping landscape that fills the background behind the figures. In the distance a fortified castle, similar to that visible through the right window in Cima’s London *Incredulity*, is built into the foothills. The expansive landscape recalls the setting in Giorgione’s contemporaneous *Castelfranco Altarpiece* (c. 1504). Cima’s landscape, however, occupies almost the entire background of the painting and is separated from the viewer not by an imposing parapet as in Giorgione’s painting or even by an intruding throne, as in the case of Cima’s earlier *Conegliano* (1492-3) and *Boldù* (c. 1495-7) altarpieces but only by the figures of Thomas, Christ, and Magnus. Occupying the space framed by the bodies of Thomas and Christ, a diminutive, turbaned figure rides a horse down a meandering path. Despite his place in the distance, this horseman is directly and

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prominently in the viewer’s sightline, calling attention to his presence. The turban surely identified the rider as Turkish and his inclusion can be interpreted against Venice’s recent and disastrous losses to the Ottoman Empire. It cannot be coincidental that according to popular legend, Thomas’s relics were brought to their final resting place in the Italian town of Ortona from Edessa (today Urfa, Turkey) via Chios—a Venetian territory during the early 13th century. If Venetians had a role in returning Thomas’s body from Turkish to Roman Catholic hands, then Cima’s rider might have recalled this exchange. The figure rides away as if turning his back on the religious clarity promised by Doubting Thomas (as well as by Venice and the Church), thereby confirming his exclusion from Salvation.

Standing to Christ’s left, St. Magnus is dressed in the full regalia of his office, his face revealing an aged reserve at odds with Thomas’s eager approach. The bishop’s elaborate brocaded orphrey depicts tiny saints under canopies, a motif common to such vestments. Cima’s affinity for this type of textile may be seen in at least a half dozen of his other altarpieces in which saints wear equally luxurious fabrics; in each case, the tiny saints or apostles stand witness to the central action of the altarpiece. Magnus cradles an enormous book, perhaps the Bible or John’s Gospel, with a gloved hand emblazoned

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116 See chapter I for the history of Thomas’s relics.

117 For a discussion of these orphrey brocade patterns see Ruth Grönwoldt, “Studies in Italian Textiles: Some Groups of Renaissance Orphreys of Venetian Origin,” *Burlington Magazine* 108 (1965), 231-40. Magnus wears, according to Grönwoldt, an embroidery of Flemish origin (239). Grönwoldt documents many other examples of Cima’s ‘painted’ fabrics, all with *opus anglicanum* motifs (saints or apostles under canopies); see p. 239-40.
with a cross. This marking mirrors Christ’s own hand, where his perfect flesh is scarred with the evidence of his Crucifixion. Magnus acts as a witness and intercessor and thus makes the gospel episode more accessible to the members of the Scuola who were also builders like Magnus. Additionally, Magnus’ unique presence in a scene of the Incredulity helps to localize this theme, endowing it with an easily recognized and revered saint of the Veneto.

The brilliance of Cima’s composition may lie in its simultaneously narrative and iconic formulation of the theme. The Accademia composition assumes iconic simplicity, making Christ Thomas’s defining attribute instead of the builder’s square. Yet the painting does narrate a story—the architectural stage and naturalistic setting distinguish Cima’s altarpiece from the gilded backdrops in early Renaissance depictions of the theme. One explanation for the contraction might have been informed by practical concerns: the first Doubting Thomas, with its thirteen figures, fetched the highest price (132 ducats) ever paid to Cima, and it is conceivable that the Mureri could not afford a similarly composed altarpiece. Furthermore, the painter’s stylistic development undoubtedly played a part in the shift away from the strictly narrative content of the London altarpiece. Humfrey suggested that the “unimaginative London version” had

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118 Thank you to Dr. Benjamin Paul for calling my attention to the possible significance of Magnus’ liturgical gloves.

119 Seeking to explain Cima’s reduced cast of characters, Humfrey posed an apt question: “Should…Cima’s Incredulity of St. Thomas of c. 1504-5, like his painting of the same subject of a year or two earlier, be interpreted as a narrative scene, with the figure of St. Magnus simply replacing the cast of disciples mentioned in the biblical story? Or should the image be interpreted rather as an iconic representation of Sts. Thomas and Magnus, with the Resurrected Christ included chiefly as an attribute for the incredulous Thomas?” (Humfrey 1993, 13)

120 Humfrey 1983, 110.
been supplanted by the more “vividly actual” encounter depicted in the second painting.  

Patronage and function, however, account as much for the suppression of narrative as Cima’s artistic evolution and financial constraints. Although Thomas was one of the official patron saints of builders, the subject of the Doubting Thomas was surprisingly not previously commissioned by any builders. To my knowledge, Cima’s altarpiece is unique in this regard. Only in retrospect does the choice of theme seem obvious for the Accademia altarpiece because Thomas was the patron of builders; Cima and the Mureri were actually more innovative in the theme of the altarpiece than has generally been assumed.

Thomas’s reputation as a builder depends on the Acts of Thomas (and subsequently, the Golden Legend) that record his mission in India as is discussed in the introduction. Although several extant pictorial cycles of his missionary life exist, Thomas was rarely depicted holding the squaring device that is his attribute. Instead, he most often holds a book in one hand and the lance or dagger of his martyrdom in the other. In many late Gothic and Renaissance polyptychs and sacre conversazioni, Thomas bears these attributes and not the square that would identify him as a builder or architect. Two Italian exceptions, both from the Veneto, can be cited: a frescoed

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121 Ibid., 41.
122 Ibid., catalogue entry 143 (pp. 151-152).
123 When depicted alone, or as one in a series of apostles, Thomas often holds one of two attributes: the lance by which he was martyred or the squadra, a right-angle square used for building (Bibliotheca Sanctorum XXIII, 1969).
124 The most significant of these cycles is by an anonymous 14th-century artist of the Marchigian school, for Santa Croce in Sassoferrato, and the later cycle in Albignasego.
125 Well known examples exist in Duccio’s Maestà (Siena, c. 1308-10), Pietro Lorenzetti’s Carmelite polyptych (Siena Pinacoteca, 1329), or Hugo van der Goes’ Portinari Altarpiece (Uffizzi, c. 1473-78) in which the patron Tommaso Portinari kneels in front of his namesake, and Thomas holds a book and lance, not the square in hand.
Doubting Thomas of ca. 1300 in San Fermo, Verona, that shows the apostle with square in hand, and a much later relief of the same subject on the arca of St. Matthias in Santa Giustina, Padua (1562). Despite the absence of a visual tradition linking the Doubting Thomas and building, the historical legend of Thomas as architect surely motivated the choice of subject for the Mureri, making the painting even more striking in its originality.

The trade of the members of the Scuola largely influenced this choice of subject. The term mureri is not precise, and may be translated as “wallers,” “masons,” or “bricklayers,” despite being most commonly understood in the broader sense of “builders.” St. Thomas, it seems, was only associated with wallers and even more specifically, with those in Venice. Wallers’ guilds elsewhere in Italy varied in their individual devotion—St. Marino was the patron of the wallers in Parma, and St. Gregory of the wallers in Rome. St. Thomas appears to have acted as the patron saint only of the

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126 This example is mentioned and illustrated in Alexander Murray, *Doubting Thomas in Medieval Exegesis and Art* (Rome: Unione Internazionale degli Istituti di Archeologia Storia e Storia dell’Arte in Roma, 2006) 41; pl.7. Paolo Uccello’s lost fresco of the Doubting Thomas on the façade of San Tommaso, Florence (illustrated in the Codex Rustici) was inscribed INDI A TIBI CESSIT (India Yielded to You); see chapter 4 for a complete discussion of this and other Florentine images of the Doubting Thomas. A rare, and much later Flemish example of Thomas as builder exists in Peter Paul Rubens’ portrayal of the aged saint, hooded, holding the right-angle square to his breast (c. 1618, Prado no. 1651; this painting is variably noted as either Thomas, Matthew, or James). See Hans Vlieghe, *Corpus Rubenianum* Part VIII (London: Phaidon, 1972), catalogue entries 13, 26, and 40 for Ruben’s other representations of St. Thomas.

127 Tim Benton, “The Building Trade and Design Methods,” in *Siena, Florence, and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 124. See also Richard Goldthwaite’s chapter on “The Guild” in *The Building of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 242-286. There is no book comparable to Goldthwaite’s for Renaissance Venice, though Deborah Howard’s *The Architectural History of Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) deals with many of the same practical and economical issues. The distinctive identity of the Venetian Scuola dei Mureri emerges when contrasted with its counterpart in Florence. In Florence, the muratori belonged to the collective guild of the *Maestri di Pietra e Legname* and so shared artistic commissions with their fellow tradesmen. The Florentine guild was responsible for major, public artistic commissions, as was the case most famously at Orsanmichele. There Nanni di Banco’s important group sculpture of the *Quattro Coronati* (c. 1405-1414) fills the niche owned by the *Maestri di Pietra e Legname* and significantly does not present St. Thomas. Nanni’s sculptural group and the relief below, which depicts members of the guild at work, would have been an ideal setting for an image of St. Thomas the builder. A detail of the relief that illustrates the labors of the wallers does include, however, the squaring device that is an attribute of the apostolic saint; this same device is duplicated by Luca dell Robbia in the coat of arms of the *Maestri di Pietra e Legname* inside Orsanmichele. The fact that Thomas himself is nowhere in attendance supports the conclusion that he was only associated with wallers and thus was not a patron saint of the collective guild of Florence.
Mureri or Venetian wallers, a factor that has been overlooked in regard to this commission. Venetian guilds, moreover, maintained their devotional rites more rigorously than did their corporate counterparts in other Italian cities, so their patronage consisted almost exclusively of altarpieces like that made for the Scuola dei Mureri.

Cima’s Accademia painting for the Mureri is an example of such patronage. The painting neatly straddles the line between the more stylistically progressive, narrative altarpieces of the 16th century and the earlier *sacra conversazione* model. In isolating Thomas and Christ as the central focus of the altarpiece, Cima and the Mureri exploited the theme of the Incredulity of St. Thomas for its iconic clarity much the way more conventional imagery of the Madonna and Child with saints had been used by the artist in so many other commissions. In this case Thomas is the means through which Christ’s divinity is proven, and thus the apostle is the arbiter of the faith the Mureri uphold in work and in worship.

Ultimately the differences between Cima’s two altarpieces of the *Doubting Thomas* do not indicate that the second painting is a “version” or “variant” of the first, successful commission. Instead, the two paintings represent independent formulations of the subject and respond to the specific circumstances of their patronage. It cannot be coincidental that Cima’s London painting for San Francesco in Portogruaro is significantly more narrative in structure than the Accademia version for a non-Franciscan setting. The Franciscan Order was among the most important patrons of narrative art during the Renaissance; by illustrating John’s gospel account with attention to textual

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128 Goldthwaite, 254 notes the individualized patron saints of chapters of mureri.
129 Humfrey and Mackenney’s appendix of altarpieces commissioned by the Venetian trade guilds c. 1360-1610 (325-26, 29-30) confirms that the patronage of the guilds, while significant as the authors argue, was specific to their dual roles as religious confraternities and trade associations.
details in the London work, Cima and his patrons evoked the whole narrative of Christ’s resurrection, rather than the single moment of Thomas’s disbelief. The subject thus resonated on multiple levels—both as it reminded viewers of their dedication to St. Thomas and as it recalled the parallels between Christ and Francis.

In the Mureri work, however, Cima avoided the more textually accurate conception of the first altarpiece. He deliberately redesigned his Accademia Incredulity of St. Thomas to recall more iconic versions of the subject, while simultaneously suggesting a sort of hybrid sacra conversazione. The resulting imagery extends the thematic meaning of the Doubting Thomas beyond the saint’s disbelief to include his architectural feats in India, relevant to the identity of Cima’s mureri patrons. As Venetians, moreover, they would have been particularly primed to recall this aspect of Thomas’s legend because Marco Polo recorded his visit to the saint’s tomb in India in his widely read Descrizione del mondo (c. 1298). Subsequent explorers (incidentally most of them Franciscan) sent to solidify Venetian relations with India, confirmed Polo’s observations and reminded those at home of Thomas’s successful conversion of natives in distant lands. The Doubting Thomas appeared in monumental mosaic form on the vault of San Marco (c. 1190), and would later be repeated in two other important Venetian

130 Peter Humfrey, The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 250. Humfrey is the first to mention the sacra conversazione element here, which is due to the presence of St. Magnus, who stands so closely to Christ in this second version.

131 Marco Polo dictated his Descrizione del mondo to the poet and novelist Rustichello da Pisa (see Leonardo Olschki, Marco Polo’s Asia: An introduction to his “Description of the World.” Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960). That the text later came to be known as the Milione (or Tall Tale) is an indication of its factual inaccuracy but given the traveler’s enormous fame, and his real or fictitious opening of trade routes between Venice and areas east of the Levant, perhaps Venetians were better prepared to recall Thomas’s life in India than were Florentines, for example. A 1483 frescoed map depicting Turkey, Egypt, and the Asia of Marco Polo was incorporated in the decoration of the Shield Room in Palazzo Ducale and included India. That this knowledge endured well beyond the 13th century is evidenced by the eighteenth-century decoration of San Tomá, Venice, which features a depiction of Thomas’s martyrdom on the ceiling (in a fresco by Jacopo Guarana, 1755) and his Incredulity on the high altarpiece (by Antonio Zucchi, c. 1766).

132 See the introduction of this dissertation.
Cima thus employs a common strategy of Renaissance painters: his inclusion of St. Magnus and the Turkish rider, and his very choice of the Doubting Thomas, together create an altarpiece that resonates with Venetian associations.

Cima’s Accademia version of the *Incredulity*, which notably introduces a saint not present at the time of the actual Biblical event, was perhaps influential on the altarpiece of the same subject attributed to Girolamo da Treviso (1475-97) for the church of San Nicolo, Treviso (1505-06; fig. 50). Indeed it would seem that Cima’s earlier Franciscan altarpiece spawned the dissemination of the Doubting Thomas beyond the Franciscan milieu as his own, later altarpiece and the Treviso painting attest.

**THE CULT OF THOMAS AND THE VIRGIN’S GIRLDE**

This dissemination depended not only on images of the Doubting Thomas but on other aspects of the saint’s iconography as well. Another facet of the Order’s devotion to the cult of St. Thomas was Franciscan devotion to the Virgin’s girdle. A brief discussion of imagery of the Assumption of the Virgin will elucidate this devotion and will further support my claim that the Franciscan order was instrumental in the revival of the cult of St. Thomas. Here I have disrupted the chronological discussion of Doubting Thomas images in the Renaissance in order to further confirm the notion that images of Thomas

133 In addition to the prominent mosaic in San Marco, the Doubting Thomas is also the subject of an altarpiece in Santi Giovanni e Paolo (Leandro da Bassano, c.1590) and of the high altarpiece in San Tomà.

134 *Ibid.*, 152. The painting in Treviso was published by Luigi Coletti, *Catalogo delle cose d’arte e di antichità d’Italia Treviso* (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1935), 403-405. The painting was at one point attributed to Sebastiano del Piombo and the present attribution to Girolamo da Treviso is still tenuous. The painting creates an interesting separation between Christ and the donors below via an ambiguous staircase. In this predella-like area are painted (from left to right) portraits of the Bishop of Rossi, Pietro Querini, the podestà, Giovanni Francesco da Treviso, prior of the Dominican convent for which this painting was intended, Fioravante Biadene, the mayor of Monigo, and two unidentified women.
accrued added meaning with time. The theme of Thomas and the Virgin’s girdle deserves discussion here for the Franciscan Order also appropriated this part of Thomas’s legend for the purpose of verifying faith.

The cord synched at the waist of the Franciscan habit is modeled upon that dropped by the Virgin as she ascended into heaven. In another moment of incredulity, this time recounted only in apocryphal sources, Thomas declared his doubt as the Virgin rose toward the celestial sphere; satisfying his skepticism, the Madonna dropped her girdle, or *cintola*, to the waiting apostle, who preserved the relic for generations to come. Retold in the thirteenth-century text by Joseph of Arimathaea, and popularized by the *Golden Legend*, Thomas plays an important role in the Virgin’s assumption. Having fallen into the hands of Michele Dacomari in the 12th century, the *cintola* was passed to the parish priest of Santo Stefano, Prato, where the relic has remained. Thomas’s association with the Virgin’s belt, as depicted in numerous Renaissance representations of the *Assumption* (figs. 49, 51-53), would have served to further the revival of his cult. Both stories also emphasized the same moral message: doubt ultimately affirms and strengthens faith.

As both Elaine Tulanowski and Maria Ferretti have shown, images of the Assumption that so prominently featured her consignment of the girdle, are an iconographical sub-category of sorts, and are often titled *Madonna della Cintola*, rather

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than the *Assumption of the Virgin*. Tulanowski suggests that the basis of this distinction resides in the pictorial emphasis placed on Thomas’s role in the former images, while the “exodus of the Virgin from earth” appears to be the locus in the latter imagery. In varying apocryphal accounts, Thomas’s receipt of the sacred belt is predicated either upon his doubt (having missed the Virgin’s death and subsequent events) or, alternately, to his supreme faith. In the latter type, Thomas asks that the lid of the Virgin’s sepulcher be removed so that he might see her one last time. The tomb, much like Christ’s, did not contain her body but was instead filled with flowers (fig. 49). Because of his faith, Thomas is then witness to a vision of the Virgin being carried by angels into Heaven; when he asks the Virgin for proof to verify this sight to the other apostles, she throws down her girdle.

One of the earliest monumental images of the *Madonna della Cintola* was that for a panel in SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Spoleto (c. 1290; fig. 118). In this representation the Virgin stands in a mandorla and passes the cintola down to Thomas, who appears to her right. In the left flanking panel St. Francis bears witness to the miracle. Given the early dating of this iconographic variation on the Assumption, van Os has argued that it was the Franciscans who thus “figuratively put the girdle into the hands of the doubter to indicate to the faithful the reality of the mystery.” The Franciscan order’s

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136 Tulanowski, 272-310, and Ferretti, 411 both refer to these works as images of the *Madonna della Cintola*, although this is not always the art historical convention.
137 Tulanowski, 274.
139 Tulanowski, 275.
140 H. Van Os, *Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der Sienesischen Malerei 1300-1450*, (The Netherlands: Kunsthistorisches Studien van het Nederlands Historisch Instituut te Rome, 1969), 155. I have not conducted a systematic study in order to determine how many images of the Madonna della Cintola made in the 14th-15th centuries were commissioned by Franciscans, but images like that by Benvenuto di Giovanni (1498) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, attest to the lasting
championing of the Virgin’s glorification would also have fostered this iconographic
development in their circles. Thus, the Franciscan order may have actually played a role
in the development of imagery of the Assumption rather than simply incorporating the
cintola into their habits. If Franciscan patrons were largely responsible for the early
pictorial incorporation of Thomas in images of the Assunta, than this would represent
another facet of the order’s devotion to Thomas.

The flourishing of imagery of the Madonna della Cintola in and around Florence
during the 14\textsuperscript{th}-century was due in part to the importance of the relic of the belt in Prato.
The early image in SS. Giovanni e Paolo was likely the source for Bernardo Daddi’s now
lost composition for the chapel in the Duomo of Prato\textsuperscript{141} and was a precursor to Agnolo
Gaddi’s more elaborate cycle to follow. Agnolo’s decoration of the Cappella della Sacra
Cintola in the Duomo of Prato (1393-95) features Thomas in two prominent scenes.\textsuperscript{142}
In the frescoes of the Life of Mary and the Legend of the Holy Cintola, Thomas is seen
first catching the belt from the Virgin, a scene in which St. Francis is depicted as a
spectator, and later consigning the cintola to a priest who will pass it to Michele
Dagomari (fig. 48).\textsuperscript{143} The mural’s “curious blend of verification by vision (St. Francis)
and by tangible evidence (St. Thomas) would later become the guiding principles that led
to the development of disparate traditions in imagery of the Assumption in Florentine and
Sienese painting.”\textsuperscript{144} By adopting the Franciscan “belt design as the relic of the Virgin,
the *propositura* [Order] took advantage of its popularity. It was furthermore creating another level of association for these belts outside the various confraternities, linking each brother or sister with the new cult of the Virgin, and thereby with the *propositura*. The Order would thus have seen St. Thomas as a conduit for Franciscan devotion to the Virgin—the apostle’s receiving and protecting of the girdle facilitated its incorporation of the relic into its everyday dress.

Because Florence was especially devoted to the Virgin and was positioned in geographic and political proximity to Prato, the city likely fostered Florentine artists’ representations of the Madonna della Cintola. Orcagna’s marble tabernacle in Orsanmichele (1352-66) features the prominent *Madonna della Cintola* scene (fig. 52) as well as heraldic imagery specifically associated with Florence. Brendan Cassidy has suggested that the subject is inextricably linked to the military events of the 1350’s. Fighting off the Milanese troops led by Oleggio Visconti, the Florentines were victorious during the days before August 15th, the feast day of the Assumption. Although war continued sporadically until 1353, the construction of the tabernacle was part of the rededication of Orsanmichele as a civic shrine.

Prato, acquired by Florence in 1350, stored much of Florence’s bulk commodities (like grain surplus) and wartime provisions and, had the Milanese been successful in their attack of Pistoia, would have been lost to their northern enemies. The Virgin’s cintola enshrined in Prato, was seen to have protected the Medici-led city and was processed

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145 Eliason, 13.
146 Brendan Cassidy, “The Assumption of the Virgin on the Tabernacle of Orsanmichele,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 51 (1988): 174-188. Commissioned by the confraternity of the Madonna of Orsanmichele, the tabernacle was constructed to house their cult image—a painting by Bernardo Daddi. Begun in 1352 and finished in 1366, the structure was over life-size and would have been gilded and brightly painted and visible from the street (178).
fifty years later after another Visconti threatened to overrun Tuscany. Orcagna’s tabernacle, though not a Medici commission, would certainly have evoked the Medici’s victory over the Visconti, and the image of the *Madonna della Cintola*, repeated on the high altar in the Medici owned church of San Tommaso, was reproduced over a dozen times within Tuscany during these years.

Civic and humanist identifications with the Doubting Thomas, the subject of chapter 3 of this dissertation, added yet another complexity to the image of the Doubting Thomas in the Renaissance. Doubting Thomas imagery, revived as a part of Franciscan devotion first to the wounded body of Christ, and second to the Virgin as provider of an essential part of their daily dress, later came to stand for empiricism and justice. Florentine connections with the Doubting Thomas seem to have begun first with their interest in that saint’s role in the consignment of the Virgin’s cintola. The apostle’s need to see or obtain proof of the miracle of her Assumption, just as he required similar evidence of Christ’s Resurrection, resonated within a city dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and truth associated with Humanism.

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147 Cassidy, 179. Cassidy suggests that while there is no proof that the relic was processed after the 1350 victory, it is likely that the Virgin had been viewed as Florence’s protector against the Milanese army. In 1402 when Giangaleazzo threatened Florence, the relic was processed around Prato so that the Virgin could ward off the encroaching threat (179).

148 Nanni di Banco’s very visible Porta della Mandorla (c. 1414-21) is a good example of the prominence of the image of Thomas receiving the Virgin’s girdle in Florence at this time. Both Tulanowski and Ferretti describe a similar arc of repetition of imagery of the Madonna della Cintola during these years. Tulanowski refers to an “almost instantaneous halt” in the production of these images after the 3rd decade of the Cinquecento and she attributes this to the Counter-Reformation (294-5). The Archbishop of Florence, Antonius wrote (1450) about the dangers of apocryphal subjects: “But neither are they to be praised when they paint apocrypha, such as midwives at the Virgin’s delivery, or her girdle being sent down by the Virgin Mary in her Assumption to the Apostle Thomas on account of his doubt...” (295). The general Reformation contempt for the role of relics was also likely a contributing factor, as Calvin wrote in his *Inventory of Relics*, “every person not absolutely sunk in ignorance is aware that the pious had no such custom as that of collecting [objects] in order to make relics of them...” (Tulanowski 296). While imagery of the Madonna della Cintola never ceased entirely (see Santi di Tito’s 1585 painting for the church of Santo Stefano al Ponte, Florence, for example), it was certainly no longer popular.
The fact that Humanism largely dominated the philosophical and cultural ambient of 16th-century Italy does not mean that the Franciscan connotations of the Doubting Thomas ended at that time. Rather, layers of meaning were added to a subject already rich in exegetical and aesthetic tradition. For this reason, Vasari’s composition of the *Doubting Thomas* for Santa Croce, Florence (1572; fig 54), provides a good example of how the subject became replete with Franciscan and humanist meaning. Although Vasari’s dismantling of Tino’s tomb monument of Gastone della Torre (see chapter 1) had more to do with the Counter-Reformatory restructuring of church interiors than it did with Franciscan piety, it could not have been by chance that the Florentine artist maintained the theme of the Doubting Thomas when painting the altarpiece for the Guidacci Chapel in 1572.

Vasari’s hope for his massive renovation of the two great Franciscan and Dominican churches of Florence, Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella, was to make a “public demonstration of his devotion to the Tridentine spirit, but also to lead the way in instituting reform.” Thus the altarpieces of the nave chapels were readily accessible to the laity, in keeping with the decrees of the Council of Trent that asserted that sacred images maintain didactic value.149 Vasari’s altarpiece for the Guidacci chapel was meant to facilitate meditation and contemplation as viewers experienced it within the context of the altarpieces of the nave chapels, all of which depicted scenes from the events of the Passion through the descent of the Holy Spirit.

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149 Marcia Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation: Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Sta. Maria Novella and Sta. Croce 1565-1577* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Vasari’s church renovations, overseen and sanctioned by the Medici, preceded the codification of Carlo Borromeo’s treatise that suggested the adjustments necessary to improve post-Tridentine churches (2, 3; 13).
Set against the backdrop of a perspectival, triumphal arch, Vasari’s composition of the Doubting Thomas reflects the Mannerist tendencies for which he is known. Bulbous, elongated figures fill the foreground and St. Peter, clutching his keys, balances improbably on his tiptoes in the lower right corner. A particularly young-looking Thomas extends a single finger toward Christ’s equally youthful, muscular body. The cast of onlookers, of which only ten apostles are identifiable by their haloes, creates an air of spectacle and the figure at the middle left (behind the bald apostle and wearing a black and white contemporary dress) appears to be a portrait. A letter from Vincenzo Borghini to Vasari describes the purpose of the two figures hovering over the scene of Thomas’s *Incredulity*. In his letter Borghini suggests that Vasari depict the two qualities of Faith described in St. Paul’s’ definition (Hebrew 11:1) which states that “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The figure on the right who holds an apple and flowers, thus represents the substance of Things Hoped For, while the figure on the left, who wears a thin veil over her head, alludes to the Evidence of Things Not Seen.\(^{150}\) While Borghini recommended that Vasari add inscriptions to identify these figures, Vasari did not heed Borghini’s advice, thus making these allegories virtually unrecognizable to viewers. Vasari was likely more concerned, as has been suggested by Marcia Hall, with the completion of his altar by All Saint’s Day, than with viewers’ understanding of these subtle additions.\(^{151}\)

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\(^{150}\) Marcia Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation: Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce 1565-1577* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 144-147, discusses the commission and provides the letter from Vincenzo Borghini to Vasari which describes his iconographic suggestions for the painting. The chapel formerly belonged to the Barbigia family and would have displayed Donatello’s *Crucifixion*, later moved to the Ludovico Bardi chapel, (according to the 1596 inventory) though they probably did not commission this work. On the left side of the composition by Vasari the man without a halo is likely a donor portrait of Tommaso Guidacci (145).

\(^{151}\) *Ibid.*, 147.
Vasari’s painting, highly visible as it was in the Franciscan church of Florence, was an important source for later versions of the subject, as has been recognized of Santi di Tito’s altarpiece for the Duomo in Sansepolcro (1577; fig. 55).\textsuperscript{152} Although Santi simplified Vasari’s composition, many components of the Santa Croce version remain: an arch frames the central action while a receding staircase and putti fill the upper section of the narrative. Unlike Vasari, however, Santi replaces the two obscure allegorical figures recommended by Borghini with three putti holding lilies and a palm branch. Jack Spaulding tells us that the palm undoubtedly refers to a passage in the \textit{Golden Legend} which refers to a moment when Christ tells Thomas “when thou has converted India, though shalt come to me with the palm of martyrdom;” the lilies, “symbols of purity, reflect Thomas’s praise of celibacy and virginity while in India.”\textsuperscript{153} Santi’s altarpiece, destined for a provincial church though it was, may have been known to Caravaggio, whose later rendering of the subject, and the subject of chapter 4 of this dissertation, may have been inspired by the central grouping of figures.\textsuperscript{154}

Relegated to the periphery of Vasari’s career and cited as an example of his over-zealous artistic impatience, the Santa Croce \textit{Incredulity} was, nevertheless, a highly visible rendering of the subject in one of Italy’s most frequented cities. As such, its influence should not be underestimated. The Florentine painter Girolamo Macchietti left Florence for Naples in 1578, thus allowing for the possibility that Macchietti saw the Santa Croce painting before making his own version of the \textit{Doubting Thomas} for the Florentine

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid.}, 339.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} This observation and has not, to my knowledge, been noted in the Caravaggio literature.
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chapel in the Franciscan church of Santa Chiara, Naples (1580, fig. 56). Possibly commissioned by the chapel’s owner, the Florentine Tommaso Risaliti, for the altar over his sepulchral monument, Macchietti’s painting is in a barely legible state of conservation. A preparatory drawing in the Gabinetto Nazionale Disegni e Stampa (Rome) makes Macchietti’s design more readily discernable and shows the possible influence of Vasari on this displaced Florentine (fig. 56). In this composition Christ stands to the right, drapery cascading to reveal a muscled chest and modest side wound. Thomas reaches an elongated, mannerist finger to touch the wound with one hand, holding a book and his own mantle with the other. The remaining eleven apostles fill the space behind Christ and Thomas and dirt and damage on the painting does not allow the viewer to see what must have originally (according to the drawing) been an architectural interior. None of Vasari’s allegorical content is present here. Although Macchietti must have seen and perhaps been influenced by the Vasari Incredulity, Macchietti’s composition bears little formal resemblance to Vasari’s despite similarly animated spectators.

Additionally, and more significant than any observable stylistic parallel, is the fact that Macchietti’s altarpiece, like Vasari’s painting, was made for a chapel in another prominent Franciscan church. Carrying with it the associations of a Florentine artist and possible patron, the Santa Chiara Incredulity also may have helped to transport the Franciscan connotations of the subject—which likely originated closer to Assisi—to the

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155 Marta Privitera (Girolamo Macchietti, Un pittore dello Studiolo di Francesco I (Firenze 1535-1592). Milan: Jandi Sapi Editori, 1996), 72 and 167, is the source for Macchietti, but possibility of Vasari’s influence is my observation. There are no extant patronage documents for this commission but Tommaso Risaliti’s involvement was noted in the 17th century by Scipione Ammirato in his Delle Famiglie Nobili Fiorentine of 1615.
156 Ibid., 72-74; 167.
Southern region of Campania. The likely donor, Tommaso Risaliti, undoubtedly would have commissioned this subject with the desire to be likened to his saintly namesake, while simultaneously evoking his goal for salvation in the after life usually associated with funerary chapels. What better subject than the Doubting Thomas to encapsulate both agendas—Thomas, absolved by Christ who is proven resurrected, just as Christian devotees will one day be, shares the same name as the patron buried there. The Doubting Thomas, as we know (see chapter 1), was intrinsically linked to this funerary context, but here a layer of meaning is added. The altarpiece resides in a Franciscan church, where viewers were better prepared to anticipate the implicit messages conveyed by the subject. These worshippers are reminded that they, like Francis’s doubters and Thomas, are in a position to affirm Christ’s presence everyday.

Ultimately Macchietti’s altarpiece confirms the lasting relevance of the Doubting Thomas within the Franciscan ambient. Through its evocation in textual sources like the biography of St. Francis by Bonaventure and Bartolomeo da Pisa’s later Liber de Conformitate, the theme of the Doubting Thomas became associated with Francis Alter Christus. Imagery of Francis’s stigmatization and the verification of these divine wounds related directly to depictions of Thomas’s testing of Christ’s side wound. Both Thomas and those who doubted Francis’s sacred identity required direct, experiential contact with the wounds of their savior. It was through that primary, tactile experience that both Thomas, and followers of Francis renewed their religious fervor and it was this fervor that inspired commissions like the Macchietti painting.
As I have demonstrated in this chapter, sermons and images often facilitated an interpretation of Thomas’s disbelief that offered a model for the laity and those afflicted with doubt. The later incorporation of other Franciscan saints and beati as in Giovanni Battista Faenza and Zanino di Pietro’s altarpieces supports my contention that images of the Doubting Thomas became colonized with new, distinctly Franciscan meaning during the trecento and subsequent centuries. Narrative innovations such as those observed in Cima’s two altarpieces of the Incredulity may, therefore, have been influenced by the broader impact of the Franciscans on narrative painting in the early Renaissance. Vasari’s incorporation of the prominent Doubting Thomas altarpiece in his program for Santa Croce offers a final and compelling example of the enduring relevance of the Incredulity in Franciscan churches and their lay congregations. Christ’s wounds, viewed as the essence of his humanity, were the source of redemptive power both implicitly as they indicated his death for our sins, and explicitly as they symbolized the blood of the sacrament—they specifically “created a link between the present and the moment in the past when power, and the access to it, was defined.”¹⁵⁷ The Franciscan claim to the sacred past via Francis’s stigmata was validated by Jerome and others’ doubt and conversion—emphasizing the same humanizing and redemptive powers that the Doubting Thomas accentuates in Christ. Vasari’s vivid painting foreshadows the time when, only a few decades later, the Church would struggle once again to maintain its hold on the Eucharist, Transubstantiation, and the burden of proof, as it did in the age of St. Francis.

¹⁵⁷ Rubin, 334.
CHAPTER III.

“TOCCATE IL VERO”: EVIDENCE, JUSTICE, AND THE DOUBTING THOMAS

As indicated in the introduction of this dissertation, during the late 14th and 15th centuries, the Doubting Thomas came to be explicitly linked to the theme of justice and the acquisition of evidence. Indeed, Thomas’s indelicate inquiry and his particular mode of truth seeking via empirical evidence could be analogous to the modern system of criminal law. Christ’s generous acquittal of Thomas may also be likened to the medieval juror—at once a member of the civic law system and servant of God’s law. This interpretation of Thomas’s incredulity did not, however, derive from the exegesis traced in the first chapter of this thesis, nor was it related to the Franciscan appropriation of the theme. How then, was Thomas’s story expanded in art during this time, and particularly in Tuscany? The purpose of this chapter is to attempt a more conclusive answer to this question than has been previously posited and to suggest why this local tradition endured beyond its 14th-century sources. In tracing the origins and development of this interpretation this chapter will explore how images of the Doubting Thomas embodied and engaged with contemporary attitudes toward truth and sensory knowledge.

As recognized by Edna Carter Southard in her 1979 dissertation, the “Doubting Thomas was placed near entrances of communal palaces in Tuscany…[and] is a logical image for a communal palace, especially in courtyards and tribunals where judicial decisions were handed down, because he asked for further evidence before believing and because he [Thomas] serves as an admonition to trust and believe in a higher authority.”¹

Although Southard identifies four examples of the Doubting Thomas that may be “logical images” of justice, none of these is likely the original source for this meaning. Instead, the *Doubting Thomas* fresco, no longer extant but dated to c. 1385, in the Sala dell’Udienza, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence was most probably the basis for a judicial reading of the theme. In the following pages I will discuss the problematic chronology of these early examples with the intention of demonstrating that the civic Thomas tradition originated with the inscriptions for the Palazzo Vecchio fresco, authored by poet and politician Franco Sacchetti (1332-1400).² Sacchetti aligns Thomas with one who “touches the truth” and “believes in Justice” and it is this rhetorical variant that I propose informs the Tuscan tradition as a whole.³ Because several of these frescos are no longer extant, it will be necessary to focus on those examples in the Palazzo Pretorio, Scarperia, Palazzo del Podesta, Pistoia, and a panel by Giovanni Toscani, now in the Accademia, Florence but formerly for the Mercanzia tribunal, which remain to varying degrees intact. Readjusting this chronology is more than a matter of accurate dating. If Sacchetti was significant for the later dissemination of this Doubting Thomas tradition, then this implies a likely reason for the theme’s importance in Tuscany. Moreover, this would suggest an explanation for Southard’s deduction that this was a “logical image” of justice for communal palaces since the Doubting Thomas was never before associated with law, justice, or good government.

² See note 7. There is no known earlier fresco of the Doubting Thomas in a Tuscan courthouse (either extant or lost).
³ For an English translation of Sacchetti’s verses, see Andrew Butterfield, *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 62. In Italian the sonnet reads: Toccate il vero com’io, e crederete/ nella somma Iustizia in tre persone,/ che sempre essalta ognun che fa ragione./ La mano al vero e gli occhi al sommo cielo,/ la lingua intera ed ogni vostro effetto/raguardi al ben commune sanza diffetto./Cercate il vero iustizia conseguendo;/ al ben commune la mente intera e franca,/perch’ogni regno sanza questo manca. The fresco in the Palazzo Vecchio stood over the doorway to the Sala dell’Udienza until c. 1475.
Southard’s impact on the scholarly literature has been significant. In his 1997 discussion of Verrocchio’s *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, Andrew Butterfield wrote that “the Doubting Thomas was commonly associated with justice in fifteenth-century Tuscany.”\textsuperscript{4} The “common association” of Thomas and justice must be traced to the four or five examples noted above, at least three of which date to the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, not the fifteenth. Indeed most judicial images, several of which are discussed in the first section of this chapter, significantly did not include Thomas. Prior to Verrocchio’s 1467 commission there existed only two other prominent Florentine examples of the Doubting Thomas made during the 15\textsuperscript{th} century, neither of which bear any direct relationship to the tradition to which Butterfield must refer (figs. 23 and 28). Butterfield further suggests that “one key factor in the appeal of the subject was that Christ and St. Thomas were thought to personify two essential aspects of a just magistrate, clemency and the desire for truth” but the author’s source dates to 1638.\textsuperscript{5} Although these civic connotations are likely relevant to a reading of Verrocchio’s sculpture, as Butterfield argues and as I will further extrapolate below, Butterfield does not take into consideration the significant chronology of these objects. Toscani’s panel, dated to 1419-20 and inscribed with a copy of Sacchetti’s verses is the last such image to appear before the Medici family resumed control of Florence in 1435. Their return to power and subsequent patronage of several images of Thomas should not be elided with the much earlier Palazzo Vecchio fresco (c. 1385) and subsequent communal imagery (up until around 1407). Rather, I will argue that the later interest in imagery of Thomas, including Verrocchio’s sculpture, Paolo Uccello’s lost fresco on the façade of San Tommaso, Florence, Bicci di Lorenzo’s fresco

\textsuperscript{4} *Ibid.*, 61.

\textsuperscript{5} *Ibid.*, 62.
inside the Duomo, and several other examples were fostered by the Medicean interest in Thomas and should thus be considered not as a continuation of imagery inspired by Sacchetti’s creation for the Florentine Signoria, but as an appropriation of this theme.

My methodological approach employs both the textual evidence found in published sermons and religious tracts, and other civic monuments, such as Donatello’s destroyed *Dovizia*, to establish firmly the originality of Sacchetti’s verses and the lost fresco. Doing so reveals a much more complex relationship among these images of the Doubting Thomas, justice, knowledge, and faith. Like representations of David or Hercules made during the early Renaissance, the religious episode of the Incredulity was invested with civic meaning. But unlike these other themes the Doubting Thomas did not formerly belong to the cache of religious-political subjects. Tracing how the Doubting Thomas became a Tuscan “metaphor of rule,” to adopt the phrase from Sarah Blake McHam, demonstrates the facility of artists to engage with new modes of thought and representation.⁶ One such mode, for example, involves the “efficacy of the senses for acquiring knowledge.”⁷ Through touch, Thomas knows Christ. The relationship between religious images and sensory experience in the medieval period has received much attention but is yet to be as thoroughly discussed for the later Renaissance. Images of the Doubting Thomas made for the civic, communal arena afford insight into how sensory

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experience was understood outside of a strictly religious setting. The depictions of Thomas discussed in this chapter demonstrate the complex dichotomy between faith and knowledge in the 14th and 15th centuries and ultimately reveal how artists used familiar iconography to shape ideology.

**FRANCO SACCHETTI AND A NEW THOMAS TRADITION**

As I have suggested in the introduction to this chapter, Franco Sacchetti can be given responsibility for initiating what could be called a “new” Thomas tradition at the end of the 14th century. His verses, inscribed under the *Doubting Thomas* in Palazzo Vecchio, were at least extremely influential, as is evidenced by their later repetition on works by Giovanni Toscani (c. 1420) and Pier Francesco Fiorentino (1490). The problem with establishing Sacchetti as the sole origin of this interpretation of Thomas’s disbelief lies in the unproven dating of two other 14th-century frescos of the subject also depicted in communal palaces. These frescos, noted by Edna Carter Southard, are in Scarperia and Pistoia. Both towns, perhaps significantly, were governed by Florence beginning in 1306 and 1295 respectively. That both locations were under Florentine control indicates their relative importance to the much larger, more powerful center and may be a clue to the question of the chronological relationship of the frescos. Both of these frescos may

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8 Both Maria Monica Donato and Lucia Battaglia Ricci have very tentatively suggested that Sacchetti might have been the source for the civic interpretation of the Doubting Thomas (M.M. Donato, “Immagini e Iscrizioni nell’Arte ‘Politica’ fra Tre e Quattrocento,” in “Visibile Parlare” Le Scritture Esposte nei Volgari Italiani dal Medioevo al Rinascimento (Ed. Claudio Ciociola, Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1997) and Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Palazzo Vecchio e Dintorni: Studio su Franco Sacchetti e le Fabbriche di Firenze* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1990)). I propose that their speculations are too tentative and introduce textual evidence to further explain the originality of Sacchetti’s poem and interpretation.

9 For a discussion of these ‘Florentine’ towns, see David Friedman, *Florentine New Towns: Urban Design in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988).
or may not predate Sacchetti’s Palazzo Vecchio inscription as they have only been very generally dated to the 14th century. Unfortunately, the fresco in Pistoia is but a fragment; situated above the judicial bench in the Tribunal of the Palazzo del Podesta, two faint halos and several incisions mark the place of the *Doubting Thomas* (fig. 59).

Although Southard noted this fresco fragment, she does not indicate that there is another image of the Incredulity directly across the piazza in the cathedral church of San Zeno (fig. 60). Painted by Giovanni di Bartolomeo Cristiani in 1388 this version of the Incredulity follows the *Witnessing of Christ’s Wounds* format discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation. The fresco fills the lunette at the top of a side chapel along the right lateral wall of the nave. Christ stands at the center of the composition, his right arm raised to allow Thomas, dressed in his customary green and red, to poke at the side wound. The other apostles form an oval around Christ; six disciples stand on Christ’s right (including Thomas) and five huddle around their savior’s left. Thomas is not the only saint to make contact with Christ’s wounds: five other apostles touch Christ’s feet, hands, and shoulders. A disciple clad in blue and yellow crouches in the right foreground and touches Christ’s punctured foot while simultaneously turning in astonishment to respond to one of his fellows. There is a flurry of activity and revelatory emotional response amongst the group. Clearly, as in the example by Buonamico discussed in chapter 2, Thomas’s incredulity is downplayed in this iconographic variant. He appears as one of many who join in a shared disbelief at the resurrection of their “Lord and God.”

This fresco in San Zeno was commissioned by Bartolomeo Gaddi, the son of a notary, but little else is known about its genesis or reception.\(^\text{10}\) It seems significant, nevertheless, that this prominent image of the Incredulity is located in such close

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proximity to the dilapidated fresco in the Palazzo Pretorio. The 1388 dating of the San Zeno fresco suggests that it was most likely completed after Sacchetti’s verses and the fresco were completed in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (c. 1385). This does not clarify, however, whether or not it was this Pistoian image or the one in the Palazzo del Podesta of Pistoia which was made first. In either case, Thomas was depicted in two highly visible locations, both within buildings at the city center, within a few years of one another. Another Doubting Thomas fresco was then commissioned from Niccolo di Mariano for Pistoia’s second communal palace, the Palazzo del Comune, in c.1478, a subject to which I will return. Together these images imply that Thomas and the central moment of his Incredulity were of some special significance for the community.

Unlike the first fresco in the Palazzo del Podesta (Pistoia), the Doubting Thomas preserved in the Palazzo Pretorio, Scarperia (fig. 57) is in remarkably good condition especially considering its location in a semi-exposed portico. Christ and Thomas stand alone, framed by a Gothic crenulated arch. Because Christ stands on a crude stone block, he appears taller than Thomas; he has lifted his arm above his head in order to facilitate Thomas’s outstretched hand. Their fingers painted with extreme delicacy, Christ peals back his robe to allow Thomas’s forefinger entry into his wound. Both Christ and Thomas’s drapery is painted with a refinement and modulation unusual for the end of the 14th-century. In fact, such an early dating seems suspect in light of the sophisticated shading and figural handling of the fresco which is more likely contemporary to than a predecessor of Masaccio’s work. If this is the case, than the fresco in Scarperia could not have been painted before that in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, dated to approximately 1385. Painted along the left frame of the fresco is a
stemma (fig. 58) that appears to be repeated on a larger scale just to the right of the
Doubting Thomas fresco.\textsuperscript{11} In both cases a yellow ground is punctuated by five
descending rows of black and white birds. I have not yet been able to identify this coat of
arms, though it surely indicates the familial patronage of the fresco and therefore might
provide evidence of a more specific date. More broadly, the stemma implies that the
Doubting Thomas theme was selected by a specific family for its place in the Palace
courtyard. Perhaps the patron was a member of the judicial court and wished to recall the
earlier model in Florence.

Standing on a pedestal at the right of the simple composition, Christ assumes the
position of an orator in the Palazzo Pretorio. Unlike other images of the Incredulity, in
which Thomas kneels (fig. 40), or stoops (figs. 1,16, 22, 45 etc.) in order to signify his
supplication, here Christ is elevated by a physical object.\textsuperscript{12} Unfortunately, it is
impossible to determine whether or not the artist of the Scarperia fresco was imitating a
compositional form found in the likely earlier fresco in Florence (no longer extant). The
plinth calls attention to Christ’s authority as arbiter of religious justice—if Thomas
sought evidence with his inquiry, Christ’s allowance and subsequent rebuke of this
request surely indicate his divine sentence. This was the very role Renaissance jurors
were expected to uphold in their own decisions. By isolating Christ and Thomas from the
narrative context of the story, much the way Cima was to do in his later altarpiece for the
murari in Venice, the artist emphasized an abstract moral message.

\textsuperscript{11} This stemma was not noted by Southard or Glenn Most and although Carla Giuseppina Romby has very
carefully documented and identified most of the stemme in the Palace courtyard, she has not included this
distinctive emblem (Nel Vicariato di Scarperia: Prima e Dopo Lorenzo il Magnifico. Brescia: Il Cordusio,
2000). I am still exploring the possible provenance of the coat of arms.

\textsuperscript{12} The mosaic in San Marco, Venice, alternately, uses both the stoop of Thomas and the placement of Christ
on at the landing of a set of steps to signify the height difference between the two figures. Later, Signorelli
and Cima cast Thomas in a sort of stoop—not kneeling and not standing erect.
Abstract moral messages were not new to art made for the civic or judicial context. Famous Renaissance monuments, such as the Lorenzetti frescos in the Sala di Nove in Palazzo Pubblico in Siena or the lost Donatello Dovizia in Florence demonstrate that religious and civic ideals were often fused to promote a more just notion of government. A brief discussion of these two examples—the Lorenzetti in a communal palace, much like the Doubting Thomas frescos included in this chapter, and the Donatello a public statue not dissimilar from those erected on the façade of Orsanmichele—will clarify the key ways in which images of Thomas differed from the existing tradition of communal imagery. It is not my intention to create a lengthy detour into the history of civic art but rather to employ two carefully selected examples to bolster my thesis that Thomas did not, prior to Sacchetti’s poem, belong to the repertoire of governmental imagery. Both the Lorenzetti frescos and the Donatello statue were executed by major artists of the period, both were famous in their own day, and both occupied central locations in their respective cities. These two monuments are thus especially well suited for comparison with the Doubting Thomas frescos, the earliest of which date to the late 14th-century.

The frescos commissioned from Ambrogio Lorenzetti between 1338-40 to adorn the walls of the Sala di Nove in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena cannot be characterized as either secular or sacred. Instead the decorations are an amalgam of civic and religious virtues meant to provide a model for the Nove, leaders of Sienese government from 1287-1355 who used this room as a meeting hall. Legislation passed in 1318 made the Nove responsible for the ordering and reformation of the city and environs, and
Lorenzetti’s frescos reflect their priorities. Perhaps the best-known example of civic art made during the early Renaissance, the *Allegory of Good Government* occupies the central wall of the cycle. Here allegorical figures personify virtues associated with a just rule and the male, enthroned figure of the Commune is surrounded by angels labeled with the cardinal virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. An inscription at the bottom of the wall reiterates the message of the decoration:

This holy virtue [of Justice] where she rules, induces to unity the many souls [of the citizens], and they, gathered together for such a purpose, make the Common Good their Lord; and he, in order to govern his state, chooses never to turn his eyes from the resplendent faces of the Virtues who sit around him. Therefore to him in triumph are offered taxes, tributes, and lordship of towns; therefore, without war, every civic result duly follows—useful, necessary, and pleasurable.  

It is apparent from both the images and inscription that the governmental body and the citizens must work together to ensure a happy, peaceful life.

Lorenzetti’s frescos were innovative at the time just as the Doubting Thomas was to be an innovative subject for communal palace decoration just forty years later. The Sienese frescoes, no matter how complex or controversial their iconographic program, do however overtly depict the Virtues. Allegorical subjects are employed to elicit moral, civic messages in keeping with dogmatic religious teachings about virtue. Indeed this seems a logical image for a communal palace.

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Almost one hundred years later another civic commission also called on the allegorizing of virtue as both an artistic and a rhetorical device. Donatello’s limestone *Dovizia* was erected in the Mercato Vecchio between c. 1428-30 and was later replaced and eventually lost when the area was leveled in the 19th century. During the 15th century, however, it shared the same piazza as the church of San Tommaso—a Medici family church and the site of a fresco of the *Incredulity* by Paolo Uccello, a painting that will be discussed in the subsequent pages of this chapter. When the column-statue was erected it was the first since ancient times to personify a pagan subject: the virtue of Abundance was carved as a large, female figure with a basket of fruit on her head and cornucopia in her arms.\(^{15}\) The sculpture was a remarkable invention because it “had no overt Christian content, although implicitly its symbolism connoted the Christian virtue of Charity,” and was the first to “promulgate the Republican government’s virtues, in this case wealth and charity to its citizens.”\(^{16}\)

Other civic images commissioned during the Renaissance often included allegories of virtue, successful military exploits, or patron saints of the city.\(^{17}\) St. Thomas represented none of these earlier types. He was neither an official patron saint of Florence, or any other Tuscan city, nor was the episode of his incredulity customarily interpreted as an allegory of Christian virtue, per se. Southard’s contention is that these

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\(^{17}\) Siena and Florence alone provide examples to support these types of civic imagery. In Siena the frescos in the Sala del Consiglio of Palazzo Pubblico, depict Sienese military victories (Lippo Vanni, c.1364), the Lorenzetti frescos in the nearby Sala di Nove embody moral virtues, and images of the Virgin (like that by Simone Martini also in the Sala del Consiglio, c.1315-20) remind visitors of the Virgin’s protection of the city. In Florence the Donatello *Dovizia* embodied allegorized virtue while the frescos inside the Palazzo Vecchio and the new silver altar for the Baptistry (Leonardo di ser Giovanni, Betto di Geri, and others, 1366-77, now in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence) served both its obvious religious function while simultaneously heralding the importance of St. John the Baptist for the city.
frescoed images of Thomas and Christ could serve as a model for members of the judicial system who like Thomas, must seek evidence and who like Christ, must demonstrate clemency. But this message would have been very difficult to understand without some prior artistic or textual tradition to inform viewers. If the Lorenzetti frescos and the Donatello Dovizia represent ideas more commonly associated with judicial imagery, than the Doubting Thomas as a civic image was surely too innovative to be intuitively understood as such. The message of justice and truth seeking embodied by frescos of the Doubting Thomas in communal palaces was only made explicit in Sacchetti’s inscription below the Palazzo Vecchio fresco and it is to his verses that we must credit this innovation.18

The posthumous reputation of Florentine poet Franco Sacchetti (c. 1332-1400) has been partially eclipsed by his more famous contemporaries, namely Boccaccio (1313-1375). Nevertheless, Sacchetti was a well-known and respected member of both the Otto di Guardia (1383) and the Florentine Signoria (1384).19 Throughout the 1380’s and 1390’s, Sacchetti was employed either by his writing or by commissions on behalf of the city of Florence. These projects, such as that for the program of the vault of Orsanmichele, often included images common to communal buildings in Medieval

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18 Evidence for this statement may be found in the dearth of textual sources regarding such a tradition. I have found many early modern textual sources which refer to Thomas and his incredulity. None but the Sacchetti likens his pursuit to that of a good juror. Although Maria Monica Donato has implied that Sacchetti was likely the source of such an interpretation, I feel that this must be more emphatically stated (see M.M. Donato, “Immagini e iscrizioni nell’arte ‘politica’ fra Tre e Quattrocento” (in “Visibile Parlare” Le Scritture Esposte nei Volgari Italiani dal Medioevo al Rinascimento, Claudio Ciociola, Ed (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1997): 389). It is also important to restate the fact that Southard significantly does not include the Palazzo Vecchio fresco (or Sacchetti’s original verses; she only includes their duplication on a much later image) in her dissertation and it is her dissertation to which almost all subsequent scholars have referred.

Italy. The program in Orsanmichele, covered by intonaco by the end of the 18th century, depicted famous men and women, and Sacchetti was likely responsible for the inscriptions and iconographic decisions involved with the commission. The Signoria commissioned later projects, including tituli and iconographic programs, for the Palazzo Vecchio, and by the Operai del Duomo for Santa Reparata (still distinguished from Santa Maria del Fiore in 1397). Sacchetti’s verses and instructions for illustrative accompaniments in all of these cases focused on moral and patriotic themes linked to Florentine civic identity. Even in his most famous literary work, the *Trecentonovelle* (1392), his focus is on moral truths despite its more playful structure as a compilation of anecdotes concerning minor Florentine characters. Sacchetti’s deep commitment to the Guelph party and to Florentine politics in general has been noted. However, his significance to the Doubting Thomas tradition has not received the recognition it deserves.

**THE SALA DELL’UDIENZA, PALAZZO VECCHIO, FLORENCE**

An anonymous late 14th-century image of the Doubting Thomas formerly adorned the wall above the entrance to the Sala dell’Udienza in Palazzo Vecchio. Sacchetti’s

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22 Ibid., 447.
inscription below the fresco embodies the civic appropriation of the *Doubting Thomas* iconography. Translated by Andrew Butterfield, the poem reads:

> Touch the Truth as I do, and you will believe in the absolute Justice of the Trinity which always exalts each person who sits in judgment.

> Direct your hand to the Truth and your eyes to heaven; and all your speech and your every deed to the common good without exception.

> Search for the Truth, Justice will result; Direct your whole and free mind to the Common good, Because without this, a government is deficient.  

The first verse engages the viewer in a sensory experience of the fresco. As one read the sonnet, their eyes would be directed to the fresco as they, like Thomas, sought to “touch the truth.” Presumably such a viewer would also be in a position to “sit in judgment.” Sacchetti goes on to suggest that in directing “your” hand, which has now taken the place of Thomas’s, toward the truth, revealed by Christ, a sense of common good motivates these actions. Finally, the author exalts the search for truth as inherently linked to justice and the good of the Comune. Upon reading this final stanza, the viewer-reader now directs their attention to the good of a just government—a conclusion which appears far removed from the depiction of John 20:24 above the poem. Indeed it seems that Sacchetti’s verses are a unique interpretation of the biblical story. Nowhere else does such a judicial reading of Thomas’s disbelief come into play.  

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26 Butterfield, 62.  
27 Although I cannot claim to know of every sermon or exegetical tract to mention John 20:24, those that I have found do not call upon such an interpretation. Those scholars who have cited this ‘civic’ tradition of the Doubting Thomas (among them Butterfield, Donato, Most, Paleotti, Ricci, Rubinstein, and Southard) have provided no additional primary evidence for a ‘tradition’ of this judicial interpretation. That none has
If Sacchetti was influenced by other written analyses of Thomas’s incredulity, they were not those of his contemporaries. Instead, Sacchetti may have used Origen and Augustine as a point of departure. In the former, Origen suggests that “Thomas is an accurate and cautious judge who is not distrustful of the reports of his fellow disciples, but instead is careful to make sure that what is involved is not just some phantasm and to prove that Jesus has really been resurrected in a body” that can be touched.28 Here, Thomas’s inquiry proves the nature of Christ’s Resurrection. This understanding of John 20:24 was to find resonance through much of the Renaissance and particularly in the later 16th-century, when Christ’s body became the subject of dogmatic debate during the Council of Trent. As discussed in chapter 1, Augustine similarly concludes a sermon by emphasizing Thomas’s revelation of Christ’s “true flesh;” “It was the true flesh that the Truth brought back to life. It was true flesh that the Truth showed to the disciples after the Resurrection. It was the scars of true flesh that the Truth revealed to the hands of those who touched Him. Let falsehood then be put to shame, for the Truth has conquered.”29 It seems that Sacchetti has employed a similar rhetorical structure to Augustine: he uses Truth as a proper noun, in substitution for God or Christ. Nevertheless, Sacchetti concludes his poem in a very different way than either of these early Christian sources. In both of these earlier instances the authors’ final words regard the divinity proven by Thomas’s trial. Sacchetti’s verses conclude, however, by recalling the communal benefit of truth and justice. The Florentine’s reference to good


29Ibid., 63-65.
government and to the interests of the community must therefore reflect his own political position in the Florentine Republic.

Sacchetti’s sonnet, according to both Butterfield and Rubinstein, emphasizes the secular rather than religious truth of the story—“Sacchetti invests the biblical theme of the *Incredulity of St. Thomas* with a civic meaning which is entirely at variance with patristic and scholastic interpretations of [the Gospel] of John…it is a far-fetched application of the story meant to serve as a politically instructive tool for the Signoria.”

Rubinstein shows that Sacchetti’s verses, like other inscriptions in the Palace rooms, were meant to provide the Signoria with a model for civic values. Moreover, Rubinstein situates his discussion of the lost *Doubting Thomas* and Sacchetti’s poem as a preamble to what he views as a “shift from religious to secular themes in the iconography of the Palazzo Vecchio in the second half of the fourteenth century.” Indeed when read in comparison with contemporary exegesis discussing Thomas’s disbelief, Sacchetti’s poem seems disconnected from centuries of interpretation. The discourse of Thomas Aquinas, fundamental to prominent clergymen such as Savonarola and Nicholas of Cusa, whose work I will return to, may have shaped Sacchetti’s interpretation. The essential importance of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* (1265-74) is evidenced by its frequent citation in the works of churchmen from the 13th-17th centuries. In this context, Aquinas’s discourse on faith is an especially helpful lens through which to understand the originality of Sacchetti’s verses and their impact on future discussion and representation of the Doubting Thomas.

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30 Rubinstein, 50-52
31 Ibid., 51. An image of a wheel of fortune over the door of the Sala dei Priori was also accompanied by a sonnet, this one a reminder of the pitfalls of power (51).
32 Ibid., 52.
Divided into a series of articles framed by seminal questions, Aquinas’s *Summa* offers a lengthy analysis of faith and its verification. In the second part, “Of the Act of Faith,” Aquinas clearly distinguishes faith from reason and knowledge. Aquinas concludes his introduction to the topic “it is proper to the believer to think with assent: so that the act of believing is distinguished from all the other acts of the intellect, which are about the true or the false.” The remaining questions in this section are all aimed at discovering how faith and reason may or may not relate. Ultimately Aquinas decides that knowing via reason and knowing via faith are two fundamentally different epistemological modes: “Human reason is very deficient in things concerning God…Hence it is not human knowledge, but the Divine truth that is the rule of faith…Therefore it seems that any kind of human reasoning in support of matters of faith, diminishes the merit of believing.” Southard’s reading of the Doubting Thomas in public palazzi as “a logical image for a communal palace… because he [Thomas] asked for further evidence before believing and because he [Thomas] serves as an admonition to trust and believe in a higher authority” merges the concepts of reason and faith in too facile a way for the period in question.

Because Southard’s comments have become the accepted interpretation of this Doubting Thomas tradition, scholars have not adequately explored how this notion of Thomas as judicial icon compared with contemporary theological doctrine. Nor have previous studies appreciated to what extent Sacchetti’s verses shaped such an interpretation. Although Aquinas was not a contemporary of Sacchetti he was, until that

35 *Ibid.*, Ila Ilae q.2 a.7, and Ila Ilae q2. a.10.
36 Southard, 100-102.
The relevance of his *Summa* cannot be overemphasized. In the passages cited above, Aquinas’ distinction between knowledge and faith are clear. Such a separation—between knowledge and faith—ultimately fostered dependence on the church by keeping God unknowable. When Sacchetti’s sonnet is paired with the Doubting Thomas, however, intellectual “Truth” becomes synonymous with faith. Sacchetti’s lines suggest that if one touches “the Truth…” it is possible to “believe in the Justice of the Trinity.” Truth leads to belief and when one “search[es] for the Truth, Justice will result.” A viewer would read these lines in conjunction with the fresco of Thomas and derive an analogy between the quest for Truth and that for Faith.

This analogy was not necessarily an intuitive one in 14th-century Florence. Certainly the incredulity of Thomas had never, to my knowledge, been previously linked to the pursuit of judicial prudence. How did Sacchetti make the leap from the post-Resurrection story of Thomas’s disbelief to a model of righteous government? The *Summa* may once again shed light on Sacchetti’s rhetorical devices. In the third part of his *Summa* Aquinas considers the “Quality of Christ Rising Again.” Here he begins by grappling with the nature of Christ’s risen body—not an apparition and not a living being, the resurrected Christ was capable of passing through closed doors but was

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38 Robert Rosin, *Reformers, the Preacher, and Skepticism: Luther, Brenz, Melanchthon and Ecclesiastes* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1997) 49. Usually called Nominalism, this philosophy maintained that man was incapable in matters concerning God.
simultaneously touchable. Regarding this question Aquinas asks “Whether Christ’s body ought to have risen with its scars?” Aquinas worries that

It would seem that Christ’s body ought not to have risen with its scars. For it is written (1 Cor. 15:52): “The dead shall rise incorrupt.” But scars and wounds imply corruption and defect….It does not therefore seem fitting for the open wounds to remain in Christ’s body; although the traces of the wounds might remain, which would satisfy the beholder; thus it was that Thomas believed, to whom it was said: “Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, though hast believed” (Jn. 20:29).

But Aquinas resolves this conflict by noting that

Our Lord said to Thomas (Jn. 20:27): “Put in thy finger hither, and see My hands; and bring hither thy hand, and put it into My side, and be not faithless but believing.” I answer that, it was fitting for Christ’s soul at His Resurrection to resume the body with its scars…The scars that remained in Christ’s body belong neither to corruption nor defect, but to the greater increase of glory inasmuch as they are the trophies of His power…Thomas not only saw, but handled the wounds, because as Pope Leo says: “it sufficed for his personal faith for him to have seen what he saw; but it was on our behalf that he touched what he beheld.”

In keeping with earlier exegesis on Thomas’s handling of Christ’s wounds (see Chapter I), Aquinas notes the importance of this touch for confirming the faith of all.

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39 Aquinas, IIIa q.54 a.4.
40 Ibid., IIIa q.54 a.4.
41 Ibid., IIIa q.54 a.4.
This is not, however, the end of Aquinas’s inquiry. The subsequent part of the *Summa* considers the “Manifestation of the Resurrection.” Here Aquinas addresses the theme of proof so crucial to our reading of Thomas apostle as a judicial model:

The word “proof” is susceptible of a twofold meaning: sometimes it is employed to designate any sort “of reason in confirmation of what is a matter of doubt”: and sometimes it means a sensible sign employed to manifest the truth…If the term “proof” be taken in the second sense, then Christ is said to have demonstrated His Resurrection by proofs, inasmuch as by most evident signs He showed that He was truly risen.”42

Christ showed “these signs” to the disciples for two reasons. Because it was difficult to believe in the Resurrection, and because they would then be more effective missionaries: “that which we have seen, and have heard, and our hands have handled…we declare.”43

Finally, Aquinas notes

For a man to believe from visible signs the things he does not see, does not entirely deprive him of faith nor of the merit of faith: just as Thomas, to whom it was said (Jn. 20:29): “Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou has believed, saw one thing and believed another”: the wounds were what he saw, God was the object of His belief. But his is the more perfect faith who does not require such helps for belief. Hence, to put to shame the faith of some men, our Lord said (Jn. 4:48): “unless you see signs and wonders, you believe me not.” From this one can learn how they who are so ready to believe God, even without beholding

42 *Ibid.,* IIIa q. 55 a.5.
43 *Ibid.,* IIIa q.55 a.5.
signs, are blessed in comparison with them who do not believe except they see the
like.\textsuperscript{44}

In his final analysis Aquinas, while sympathetic to the need for proof, suggests that those
who believe without such “signs” have a “more perfect faith.”

A juror who believes without “signs” or evidence, however, is guilty of
negligence. Less than ten years prior to the date when Sacchetti penned his inscription
for the Palazzo Vecchio the Ciompi government established the Otto di Guardia to
prevent such corruption.\textsuperscript{45} Sacchetti’s verses suggest that the juror \textit{should} seek such
tangible evidence, as Thomas did, and that such proof solidifies justice. Thus Sacchetti
has redefined what Thomas is capable of proving. In Aquinas’s estimation Thomas’s
dubiousness benefited others because it provided conclusive evidence of Christ’s
divinity. This proof is flawed, nevertheless. Christ himself seems to admonish Thomas
by his declaration “blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed” (John 20:29).

Sacchetti does away with this conclusion of the story. By combining his verses with the
fresco of Doubting Thomas, Sacchetti suggests that Thomas’s inquiry is as pure as the
Truth that results from his touch.

Further indication of Sacchetti’s unique interpretation exists in the nearly
contemporary sermons of Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464). Cusa’s sermons, collected,
published and distributed internationally during his lifetime were, like those of Aquinas,
extremely influential. In a sermon first preached in Koblenz in 1431 Cusa treated the
“Nature and Disposition of Faith.” Like Aquinas and Augustine before him, Cusa also

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.} IIIa q.55 a.5.

\textsuperscript{45} Laura Stern, \textit{The Criminal Law System of Medieval and Renaissance Florence} (Johns Baltimore and
grapples with the fundamental difference between reason and faith. Cusa’s tone is
decidedly firmer than Aquinas:

God is believed in and through faith, without persuasion and proof…Therefore
the Catholic faith teaches that God is believed-in without proof and without
evidence…The error against faith arises first of all from the fact that someone
does not believe anything unless he understands, for he thinks that his intellect is
capable of understanding all possible things.46

Whereas Aquinas allowed for skeptical inquiry, Cusa’s sermon is decidedly anti-
intellectual when it comes to matters of faith. Although Cusa later notes that Christ
allowed himself to be known by “being seen…through being touched…and through
taste” he also unequivocally denies Thomas “magnificent devotion”: “Faith ought to have
magnificent devotion; for when natural reason fails, faith trusts in God alone…Thomas
did not have such faith, because he wanted to touch.”47

Here, unlike in Sacchetti’s poem, Thomas’s touch does not prove a higher truth or reveal important evidence.

It was not until the later part of the 15th and well into the 16th century that
skeptical inquiry was truly embraced as a tool for Christianity.48 Despite the renewed
interest in ancient philosophy and skepticism (like that of Socrates), Humanists generally
subscribed to Fideism—“the position that faith alone provides the way to truth and that

46 Nicholas of Cusa, Early Sermons: 1430-41 (translated by Jasper Hopkins, Loveland CO: Arthur Banning

47 Ibid., 69. Cusa clearly denied scholastic theology. Unlike the writings of the key skeptical philosophers
of the later 15th and 16th centuries (such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, and Pietro
Pomponazzi), Cusa’s sermons do not reflect a “knowable” truth (Rosin, 16-38). Contemporary literature
(such as that by Maffeo Vegio, Poggio Bracciolini, and Giovanni Conversino) all discussed the idea of
pursuing truth when truth cannot be known (Rosin, 38).

48 C. B. Schmitt, “The Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism in Modern Times,” (In Reappraisals in
philosophical activity is to no avail. As a poet, novelist, and politician, Sacchetti was ahead of his time. He suggests that Thomas’s act, represented in the fresco above his sonnet, is one that facilitates a knowable truth. It is through doubt that Thomas comes to believe and it is through doubt that jurors will arrive at the Truth. Such an interpretation of John 20 did not exist, to my knowledge, prior to Sacchetti’s work at the Palazzo Vecchio. Thus it seems probable that the Palazzo Vecchio fresco was made appropriate for its setting in a communal palace by Sacchetti’s verses. The novelty of his poem and its coupling with the image of Thomas suggest that it is the origin for later representations in other civic buildings. In this example the fresco and its accompanying inscription forged a new understanding not only of the specific episode of the Incredulity, but of the process of truth seeking. The representation of Thomas and Christ, isolated from the rest of the Resurrection narrative, stood for the attainment of Truth. Moreover, both Sacchetti’s verses and the image of Thomas’s probing finger suggest that it is specifically through touch that truth and justice are achieved, thus thrusting Thomas into the discourse on the senses.

THOMAS AND TOUCH

Judicial truth is linked to religious faith—as characterized in Sacchetti’s verses and in the frescoed images of Thomas—by the sense of touch. It is not possible to make a similar statement about earlier governmental images like the Allegory of Good Government in Siena or the Dovizia in Florence. Sacchetti’s first line, which invites viewers to “touch the truth,” implies a direct correlation between the senses and

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49 Ibid., 229.
knowledge. When read in conjunction with an image of Thomas and Christ, perhaps not unlike that in Scarperia (fig. 57), Thomas’s touch becomes the conduit for spiritual knowledge and metaphorically for judicial truth. Although vision is typically thought to be at the top of the sense hierarchy, beginning in the medieval period touch and vision were inherently bound to one another. Jeffrey Hamburger has revealed that believers in the middle ages “insist, often not without embarrassment, on the truth as something material, sensible, even tangible…Common worshippers demanded visible proof in matters of faith. If knowledge depended on senses…then seeing and believing, sight and certitude, were closely linked with one another.”

Physical contact—particularly with the Eucharist—was essential for religious experience in the 14th century but Sacchetti’s suggestion that it was essential for seeking the Truth was innovative. In De Sensu Aristotle named touch the “indispensable sense, synonymous with life itself,” going so far as to make touch the “paradigm and structure of the intellect.” If “thought and perception are analogous, as Aristotle claims, then we know the world around us because the mind is able through touch to grasp the form of things.”

Images of the Doubting Thomas afforded patrons and artists an unusual opportunity to engage directly with dialectics regarding the senses because touch is fundamental to the story itself. Unlike the contemplative, religious context in which viewers would regard the altarpieces discussed in chapter 2, frescos like that in Florence or Scarperia are detached from that mystical ambience. Although Sacchetti suggests that

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51 For the best and most recent discussion of Aristotle in relationship to the sense of touch see Elizabeth Harvey, Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 2003)5.
52 Ibid., 15.
touch will facilitate Truth and belief in the Trinity, the remaining verses of his poem are about government and the common good. These are hardly words meant to elicit “visionary [or] mystical union.” Nevertheless, the author demands a sensory investigation in order to arrive at Truth. In many ways this experiential mode was to find its apotheosis in the 16th century as the natural sciences became increasingly empirical.

In the 14th century, however, Aristotle’s notion of touch as essential for the “sake of being” and the other senses for “well-being” casts a shadow over the role of tactility.

The work of Cynthia Hahn and Michael Camille has shown that medieval and early Renaissance concepts of vision were highly integrated with notions of experience. Medieval beliefs about the science of sight reflect an understanding of vision that is not passive but rather involves exchange with the object seen. Espoused by Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253), William of Conches (1090-c.1154) and Adelard of Bath (1080-c.1152), “extramission theory” proposed that the eye emits a ray; this ray exits the eye,

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53 Jeffrey Hamburger, “The Visual and the Visionary. The Changing Role of the Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions,” *Viator* 20 (1989): 161-182. Although Jeffrey Hamburger’s work on theme of vision in medieval art is useful for this discussion, it is important to note the ways in which such a model does not work for these civic images. Hamburger, Caroline Walker Bynum (“Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the 15th Century,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Eds., Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), and Mary Carruthers (“Moving Images in the Mind’s Eye” in *The Mind’s Eye*) all discuss the importance of representation as part of a “rhetorical objective” not just as illustration (Carruthers, 287). The images considered by these authors, however, are all viewed in devotional contexts in which meditation and “immersion” is essential to religious practice (Hamburger 2000, 47). It seems unlikely that such a mode of viewing was intended for jurors and convicts passing through the communal palazzi in Tuscany. Nevertheless, touch is a key element of Sacchetti’s verses and of the theme of the Doubting Thomas and thus demands reevaluation here.


encounters an object, is shaped by that object, and returns to the eye.\textsuperscript{57} Seeing thus involved rays that actually touched and were “impressed” by the form of objects. The images of vision discussed by Hahn add “spatial and bodily means to the perception of the visual” and suggest a fluidity between seeing and feeling.\textsuperscript{58} Corporeal vision and touch were both understood to be linked to cognition and knowledge acquisition: Avicenna’s 11\textsuperscript{th}-century \textit{Al Shifa} (a commentary on Aristotle’s \textit{De Anima}) defines five classifications of sense faculties, all of which were accepted by later philosophers interested in vision, including Roger Bacon (c.1225-94), John Pecham (1225-92) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-74).\textsuperscript{59} These “writers took for granted that sensation was the foundation of cognition, a truth that was summarized in the formula “there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses” and went even further than Avicenna in linking the intellect with the body.”\textsuperscript{60} If sensation was the “foundation of cognition” than surely it was touch that directly facilitated Thomas’s own cognition of Christ as “Lord and God.”

An exegetical tradition linking touch, cognition, and Thomas’s doubt did not exist to inform Sacchetti’s verses. But his verses and the subsequent images of the Incredulity frescoed in communal palazzi may have inspired a change in the clerical discussion of Thomas and touch. A particularly convincing example is found in a sermon by the church radical Savonarola (1425-98). Prior to his execution, the Dominican was an extremely popular reformer whose words found resonance among many of the most important 15\textsuperscript{th}-century patrons and artists, including Lorenzo de’Medici and Sandro

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Hahn, 174.
\item[58] Ibid., 179. For a more comprehensive history of vision theory see David Lindberg, \textit{Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
\item[59] Camille, 200.
\item[60] Ibid., 200.
\end{footnotes}
Botticelli. Dated to c.1497 the sermon titled *Della celsitudine del Verbo di Dio per il senso del toccare* discusses the importance of touch for finding religious clarity.\(^{61}\) Savonarola suggests that those who “have a more noble sense of touch also have a more noble intellect, because those who are ‘hard’ are inept.”\(^{62}\) “Just as St. Thomas…we do not believe lightheartedly…but touching and handling him [Christ] several times, seeing and investigating his life and his works…we know that we were not made by chance, but with great consideration from God, from He who touches strongly and arranges gently everything from end to end.”\(^{63}\) Like Sacchetti, Savonarola seems to have cast off the more negative interpretation of Thomas’s sensory inquiry. Savonarola urges worshippers to identify with Thomas and, to quote Sacchetti, “touch the truth as I do.” Savonarola’s sermon may have contributed to the particular meaning of Doubting Thomas imagery in the communal palace setting, facilitating a connection between the “handling” of Christ and the “handling” of evidence.

If Thomas did not *actually* touch Christ, as has been suggested by Glenn W. Most, that was not the version of events recorded by artists. In the overwhelming majority of these images—painted or carved—Thomas does make physical contact with Christ’s wounds. Late medieval and early Renaissance tactile experience so fundamentally linked the acts of seeing and touching that sight was almost a form of touch. The problem for artists, however, was in representing this sensory elision without abandoning the new visual vocabulary of naturalism. The anonymous frescoes of the

\(^{61}\) Savonarola, *Prediche di Fra Girolamo Savonarola de’predicatori* (Florence: A. Parenti, 1845) 27-32. This sermon was included in a collection of sermons published first in Latin in 1536 and later in Italian (1547). For the most recent discussion of Savonarola and Florence see Lauro Martines, *Fire in the City: Savonarola and the Struggle for Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) with earlier bibliography; special thanks to Kathleen La Penta for her helpful notes on the translation of this sermon.


Doubting Thomas in Scarperia and Florence, and that by Antonio Vite in Pistoia revealed or perhaps shaped contemporary attitudes toward the epistemology of touch. For Thomas touch facilitated truth and in the civic arena this truth governed the goals of the Commune. Nowhere is the merging of touch, truth, justice and faith more evident than in Sacchetti’s poem and the destroyed image of the Doubting Thomas in the Palazzo Vecchio.

The enduring relevance of the Palazzo Vecchio fresco is clear in subsequent representations of the Doubting Thomas made to serve civic functions. Taddeo di Bartolo was commissioned to fresco the Doubting Thomas in the Sala del Concistero of the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena in 1407. Although no longer extant, this image surely recalled the model in Florence. Giovanni Toscani painted a later panel of the Doubting Thomas for the tribunal of the palace of the Mercanzia, the highest court of commercial law in Florence (fig. 61, c.1419-20 now in the Galleria dell’Accademia). The painting overtly references the Palazzo Vecchio image. Framed by an elaborate gothic arch, Christ and Thomas stand against a gold backdrop in Toscani’s panel. Christ faces frontally while Thomas is arranged in an awkward contrapposto pose. Unlike in the Scarperia fresco, Christ raises both hands and directs his gaze toward the viewer, not toward Thomas, whose hand explores the side wound. Separated from the textual cues that typically illustrate the context of this story—namely the other apostles, or an enclosed room—the image is more iconic than narrative. Inscribed on the panel is the

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64 Southard, 100-102 and 394-99, with earlier bibliography.
first terza of Sacchetti’s poem (“Touch the Truth as I do, and you will believe in the absolute Justice of the Trinity which always exalts each person who sits in judgment”).

Above the framing arch are depicted the Hebrew prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah, both of whom look down on the narrative action below. The selection of these two Old Testament figures may serve to enrich the central subject of the panel. Both the books of Jeremiah and Isaiah relate to central judicial themes: in the case of the former to issues of judgment and compassion, in the latter to notions of punishment and righteousness. Similarly, in both books parallels are drawn between devotional life and ethical behavior. All of these themes were crucial to the role of the Mercanzia as arbiter of commercial law. The addition of the prophets in Toscani’s panel thus might have further illustrated the significance of the central Doubting Thomas while simultaneously specializing a familiar Tuscan exemplum of judicial virtue.

The Mercanzia’s use of Sacchetti’s verse and its employment of Doubting Thomas imagery perpetuated the thematic associations first established by Sacchetti thirty-five years earlier. In subsequent years the Mercanzia would sponsor yet another, more prominent image of Thomas: The Incredulity of St. Thomas by Andrea del Verrocchio (1467-83). During the intervening years between the two Mercanzia commissions the Medici were to return to power in Florence. The Medici’s de facto rule had huge, and well-studied implications for both the arts and government organizations in Florence. These two agendas may have converged in the form of Doubting Thomas imagery.

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“HE WHO BELIEVES QUICKLY IS LIGHT OF HEART”: THE MEDICI RETURN TO FLORENCE

The fresco in Palazzo Vecchio was one of a small handful that constituted the tradition of Doubting Thomas imagery in courthouses and civic buildings prior to the Medici return to power in 1434. Other art historians have shown that this return resulted in the commissioning of new artistic renderings of subjects made for the previous government.67 One example shows the way in which the Medici imagined new “incarnations” of old iconography: Donatello’s marble David (1408-9) was likely made for the Duomo’s north tribune but was installed in 1416 in the Sala dei Gigli, Palazzo Vecchio, against a background of heraldic lilies. At the time this backdrop—surely a reference to Florence’s alignment with the house of Anjou—cast the David in unprecedented and unequivocally political terms.68 In order to reinforce the analogy between Florence, the unlikely hero David and their own familial legacy, the Medici commissioned new versions of the subject. Donatello’s second, bronze David (1460’s) stood in the courtyard of the Medici Palace and Verrocchio was paid to sculpt another bronze David for the entrance to the Sala dei Gigli in the 1470’s. Verrocchio’s statue repeated the subject of Donatello’s marble David but it was cast in the richer, more permanent material of bronze, and David appears to have gained in confidence. When Michelangelo’s much later colossal David (1504) took its place outside the palace on the

67 McHam 2006, 104-137; and McHam, 1998). Maria Monica Donato builds a similar case in “Hercules and David in the Early Decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio: Manuscript Evidence,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 54 (1991): 83-98. These examples demonstrate “how successive regimes of diverse Florentine governments returned again and again to themes intended to recall to officials and to visitors key aspects of Florence’s civic identity” but unlike images of John the Baptist, Zenobius, or Anne, Thomas was not considered a patron-saint of Florence (McHam 2006, 104).

68 McHam 2006, 108.
ringhiera the Signoria, once again free of the Medici, reclaimed David as a Florentine icon. This sculptural battle for the rightful governmental use of David imagery is only one example of such iconographic turf wars.

Given their successful appropriation of other types of imagery, it seems likely that the Medici extended this strategy to include the Doubting Thomas. The Florentine banking family had, in fact, an additional motive in this case. John Paoletti has shown that the Medici were especially dedicated to St. Thomas, as is demonstrated by their patronage of the destroyed church of San Tommaso, Florence.69 The Medici commissions there, their involvement with Verrocchio’s **Doubting Thomas** for Orsanmichele and with several other important images of Thomas suggest a continued interest in the connotations of the Doubting Thomas established by Sacchetti.

The small church of San Tommaso was formerly situated in the northwest corner of the Mercato Vecchio but was destroyed, along with Donatello’s **Dovizia**, during the modernization of the city center in 1892.70 First mentioned in the family chronicle of c. 1373 by Foligno di Conte de’Medici, it is recorded that the full deeds and patronage rights to the building were transferred from the Sizi family to the Medici in 1348. Paoletti’s thorough documentation of Medici ownership of the church from that early date reveals that the building was central to their devotional practices, especially prior to Cosimo’s commissions at nearby San Lorenzo.71 Cosimo “took possession” of the main altar at San Tommaso as he had done in other Medicean churches in Florence; “such claiming of altars, divorced from family burial chapels, is unique to the Medici in

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70 Paoletti, 54.
71 Ibid., 54.
Florence and reads as part of their gathering control over the ritual life of the city.\textsuperscript{72} A contract of 1427 cites Thomas among those saints most important to the Medici family and thus it is not surprising that canons of the cathedral were required to give wax to the church and sing mass there on Thomas’s December 21\textsuperscript{st} feast day.\textsuperscript{73} Foligno’s 14\textsuperscript{th}-century chronicle is important not simply because it explains the church’s history, but because Foligno’s devotion to describing it reflects the building’s importance for Florentine residents who, as Paoletti convincingly argues, would have seen San Tommaso as a Medici family church.\textsuperscript{74}

The decoration of San Tommaso, though difficult to reconstruct in any precise terms, included at least two prominent images of St. Thomas. A lost \textit{Doubting Thomas} fresco by Paolo Uccello is documented by a drawing in the Codex Rustici (fig. 62) and is mentioned in the 1550 edition of Vasari’s \textit{Vite}.\textsuperscript{75} Although Paolo Uccello’s fresco for the church is no longer extant, the drawing provides evidence of its existence and suggests a break from the iconic Thomas-Christ images discussed in the previous pages of this chapter. At the top of the page a perspectival rendering of the small church offers an view of its exterior. Below is a detail of the façade decoration: it is an enlargement of the fresco over the main entrance that would have been protected by a roof, described by

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 58. Cosimo took over the main altars of San Marco (1440), San Lorenzo (1442), and the Badia Fiesolana and Piero de’Medici did the same with the reliquary altars at SS. Annunziata and San Miniato (58).

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 55 and 71 n. 11.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 55 and 59.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 54, with earlier bibliography, 71 n. 4 & 5. Incidentally Vasari includes Uccello’s work at San Tommaso in order to illustrate the unfortunate end of the artist’s career. Although Uccello “took the greatest possible pains with this work,” Donatello was particularly critical when he finally saw it unveiled: “Ah, Paolo, now that it ought to be covered up, you’re uncovering it instead!” Donatello’s comment was apparently so upsetting to Uccello that he retired, never to paint again (Giorgio Vasari, \textit{The Lives of Artists}, Oxford World’s Classics edition, 1998).
Ferdinando del Migliore in 1684. Standing on a platform are Christ and Thomas. Christ faces outward while Thomas, probing his side wound, turns in profile toward Christ. The arrangement of two figures resembles that of the Scarperia fresco or the Toscani grouping. Unlike those earlier representations, however, here Thomas and Christ are surrounded by the other apostles who form a nearly complete circle around the central action. Six disciples kneel, allowing an uninterrupted view of Thomas and Christ. Two of these apostles reach out and touch Christ’s feet and a third appears to grasp at Thomas’s drapery. As such, this iconographic formulation recalls the type denoted by Polzer as the *Witnessing of Christ’s Wounds*. This church, like San Zeno in Pistoia where a similar iconography is employed, is not Franciscan, as are the few examples cited by Polzer. It seems that this more narrative typology suited the religious context of these decorations rather than a specifically Franciscan interpretation of the theme.

Below Uccello’s original *Incredulity* (not recorded in the Codex drawing) was the inscription INDIA TIBI CESSIT (India Yielded to You), an allusion to Thomas’s evangelizing in India—a narrative which is described in the Codex Rustici, but which was also emphasized in the *Golden Legend* and other texts, as I have shown. The high altarpiece for the church, also no longer extant, is recorded to have been an *Assumption of the Virgin Dropping her Girdle to St. Thomas*, perhaps not unlike Filippo Lippi’s version (fig. 49). Together these images speak to the flourishing of the cult of Thomas in Tuscany at this time and suggest that while that rejuvenation was likely initiated by the Franciscans as discussed in chapter 2, it was maintained by mendicants and non mendicants alike. Furthermore, the accompanying words inscribed below Uccello’s

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77 For the inscription see Dale Kent, *Cosimo de Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patrons Oeuvre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 199; the inscription was recorded by Del Migliore.
image did not reference Sacchetti’s judicial interpretation of the Doubting Thomas but rather the saint’s successful missionary career after his incredulity, signaling a change in the civic Thomas tradition. The Assumption inside the building also referred to events after Christ’s final ascent to heaven and recalled Florence’s historical dominion over Prato, where the Virgin’s cintola is preserved (see chapter 2).

Thomas’s incredulity—both of Christ’s Resurrection and perhaps of the Virgin’s Assumption—could not have been understood negatively because the Medici clearly heralded St. Thomas in general. As Paoletti has demonstrated, the Medici stemma appeared on many liturgical objects housed in San Tommaso. One such example—a choral book used for the feast of St. Thomas—was embroidered with gold thread and illustrated the story of St. Thomas decorated with Medici palle. The Medici made every effort to publicize their affiliation with the church of San Tommaso and the cult of St. Thomas. Their presence in and control of public ceremonies there is also testament to their involvement with the church and its name saint.

Although Paoletti notes that the Doubting Thomas over the door of San Tommaso “repeats an iconographical form already present in the Palazzo Vecchio…[and] used repeatedly in town halls in Tuscany as a symbol of Justice” he does not mention Sacchetti or the significance of a new Medici appropriation of this imagery. Instead, he suggests that the inscription recalls Thomas’s role as a ruler in India—bringing kings there under his control (“CESSIT”) until they killed him, “a fate that Cosimo had escaped in 1433.” Indeed the “doubting Thomas over the main door of the humble church…appropriates a

78 Paoletti, 57.
79 Paoletti, 59.
80 Ibid., 59.
civic image representing justice but in doing so the Medici have crucially redirected its interpretation. The inscription on the exterior of San Tommaso suggests that India yielded to Thomas because he doubted and thus believed, thereby making him a better missionary—just as Aquinas prescribed. Uccello’s favoring of a more communal testing of Christ’s wounds in the fresco indicates a subtle but important adjustment to the Tuscan town hall tradition. A group or community of believers is in doubt here and it is through their collective pursuit of proof and knowledge that they all, collectively, touch and believe. By reminding viewers of the other disciples and their role in the New Testament story of Thomas, Uccello has returned some of the biblical primacy to the subject excluded by Sacchettì’s verses. As in their adoption of David imagery, the Medici have not replaced the previous iconological understanding of Doubting Thomas but rather have restored a layer of meaning fundamental to the subject itself.

The ‘civic’ imagery of Thomas and Christ discussed in the earlier part of this chapter seems to detach the story visually, as did many illuminated manuscript illustrations, from its greater narrative context. As such, these images do not necessarily evoke the rich narrative tradition of the Franciscan milieu traced in chapter 2 of this dissertation. Perhaps the Medici viewed these communal images as becoming too divorced from their religious context. Even though it was understood that magistrates sought justice under the guidance of Christ, Sacchettì’s sonnet does not focus on religious guidance but on judicial righteousness. The dissemination of the Thomas story, as it was

81 Ibid., 59.
retold in the popular *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, renewed interest in a gospel episode that was otherwise reserved for religious texts and tombs, and popularized its employment in a variety of settings. Thus, the *Doubting Thomas* as it was evoked in Sacchetti’s poem, or depicted by Andrea del Verrocchio for the façade of Orsanmichele (fig. 65) cannot be considered independently from its earlier religious content. In fact, in the case of the latter, I suggest that Verrocchio’s sculpture deliberately co-opted the tradition inspired by Sacchetti in order to return sacred primacy to the subject of the Doubting Thomas.

**VERROCCHIO AND THE MEDICI ADOPTION OF THE DOUBTING THOMAS**

The sculpture of the *Doubting Thomas* by Verrocchio fills the place where Donatello’s *St. Louis of Toulouse* once resided (in the former niche of the Parte Guelfa). It is the only statue adorning Orsanmichele’s façade that features two figures in a niche designed to contain one. The figure of Christ stands to the viewer’s right; his left hand pulls back the folds of his mantle to reveal the wound in his side while his right hand is raised in explication. Thomas stands in contrapposto, turning slightly out of the niche (the toes of his right foot overhang the ledge) and in toward Christ. The apostle reaches his hand toward Christ’s side, his fingers not yet contacting the sacred laceration despite his fixed gaze. Often critical of Verrocchio for being too belabored, Vasari praises the *Incredulity*:

“…for the figure of St. Thomas expresses the saint’s incredulity and impatience in learning the truth and, at the same time, the love which moves him, in a most
beautiful gesture, to place his hand upon Christ’s side; and the figure of Christ Himself, who raises one arm in a gesture of great generosity and opens His garments, dispelling the doubt of His incredulous disciple, expresses all the grace and divinity, so to speak, that art can bestow upon a statue.”

Noteworthy for its artful “grace,” as Vasari writes, Verrocchio’s sculpture is also important as an example of Renaissance group sculpture and conveys unprecedented emotional engagement between two statues in the round.

Both Thomas and Christ wear inscribed cloaks; Christ’s mantle translates as “Put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing,” while Thomas’s reads, “My Lord and my God!” This is answered on the opposite side of Christ’s mantle which is inscribed, “Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed; blessed are those who did not see and believed.” Framed, rather than contained by the niche they stand in, Thomas and Christ appear to be standing in an open room, not unlike that described in John’s Gospel. That Christ’s left foot and both of Thomas’s feet extend beyond the aperture of the tabernacle-like niche suggests that the viewer occupies the space of the other apostles, anticipating the experiential innovations of Baroque sculpture. The presence of the inscriptions, the narrative nature of the subject, and the dynamic energy of the sculptural group set Verrocchio’s sculpture apart from the single figure statues of Orsanmichele’s other niches.

Verrocchio’s *Doubting Thomas* thus seems to embody elements from both the judicial and religious Thomas traditions. The sculpture, commissioned by the Università della Mercanzia, is the work that resulted from their procrastinated execution of

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83 Vasari, 235.
84 Ibid., 64; see also Dario Covi, “Verrocchio and Venice, 1469,” *Art Bulletin* LXV (1983): 259-60.
legislation in 1339 requiring guilds to furnish statues of patron-saints for their niches on the exterior of Orsanmichele. The Mercanzia regulated trade guilds, and served as the highest court of commercial law in the city; as such, the unusual choice of subject for their niche—the *Incredulity of St. Thomas*—represented, according to Andrew Butterfield, a perfect adaptation of the civic tradition—evoking the Medici’s reform of government, and the Mercanzia’s dedication to its implementation. Despite the Mercanzia’s official control of the commission, the *Operai*, or their governing board, was essentially Medici dominated. When Cosimo returned from exile in 1434 he established a processional ritual on the December 21st feast day of St. Thomas that included the Sei di Mercanzia, captains of the twenty-one guilds, and the Council of Eight and concluded at the familial church of San Tommaso. As Gonfaloniere di Giustizia, Cosimo had the Feast of St. Thomas declared a communal holiday in January of 1435, and the captains of the guilds were required to give donations at San Tommaso. Verrocchio’s *Incredulity* must therefore be read as an example of the Medici appropriation of Thomas imagery.

In his fundamental monograph on the artist, Butterfield has suggested two important reasons for the *Operai’s* choice of the Doubting Thomas for their sculpture. First, Thomas was a favored saint of the Medici, as is clear from their sponsorship of the church of San Tommaso, and their commission from Uccello for the *Doubting Thomas* on that building’s façade. Secondly, the Doubting Thomas “was commonly associated with justice in fifteenth-century Tuscany” and appealed to “two essential aspects of a just

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85 Butterfield, 69. Orsanmichele, erected in 1336 as a market and warehouse for grain reserves, became home to an important miracle-working Madonna and Child, the veneration of which eventually led to the construction of Orcagna’s elaborate tabernacle. An altar dedicated to St. Anne was installed in 1344.

86 *Ibid.*, 70. Butterfield seems to disagree with van Ausdall in her analysis of the sculpture, favoring a more secular interpretation over her Eucharistic one.

87 Paoletti, 59.

88 Butterfield, 61.

magistrate, clemency and the desire for truth.” Sacchetti’s earlier poem, writes Butterfield, supports the definition of justice outlined by Cicero and St. Thomas Aquinas that suggests that justice is “action directed at the common good” and may be seen in Verrocchio’s sculpture. This definition of justice is the same embodied in the work of one of the operai, Matteo Palmieri, and is synonymous with the reputation that Lorenzo de Medici was cultivating for himself and his rule. Butterfield concludes that “given these manifold associations, it would not be surprising that Lorenzo and his allies saw the Christ and St. Thomas as an emblem of the justice of the Medicean rule.” While this might have been so, Verrocchio’s use of inscriptions derived from the gospel, rather than from Sacchetti’s poem, indicates that the sculpture was not simply another example in the Tuscan courthouse tradition. Instead, it was a new ‘incarnation’ of this tradition intended to reflect not only the justification of Medici sovereignty but its holy sanctification as well.

Orcagna’s earlier tabernacle inside Orsanmichele also prominently represented Thomas, reaching up to catch the Virgin’s falling belt (fig. 52). Seen in conjunction with the building’s religious function—as host to an important miracle-working image, and home to a Eucharistic tabernacle that featured another scene from Thomas’s life—Verrocchio’s Doubting Thomas must have stimulated connections with other prominent Florentine depictions, such as the panel by Gaddi in Santa Croce, or the fresco by Uccello

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90 Ibid., 61. Butterfield is not the first to note such a corollary: Charles Seymour’s 1971 monograph (Sculpture of Verrocchio, Connecticut, 1971) also noted the significance of the Mercanzia’s function and the subject of the Doubting Thomas (58).

91 Ibid., 62; Butterfield draws this conclusion from Cicero’s De Officiis and Thomas Aquinas’ Summa Theologica, both of whose writings on justice were well known during the Renaissance, as is demonstrated by the work of the humanist and chancellor Coluccio Salutati (62).

92 As explained by Butterfield, 62.

93 Ibid., 62.
on the exterior of San Tommaso. Like those representations, Verrocchio’s sculpture would have reminded viewers of the biblical context from which the scene derived.

The *Doubting Thomas* occupies a niche that scholars have suggested resembles that of a Eucharistic tabernacle, not unlike that housed inside Orsanmichele. Kristen Van Ausdall proposes that it was these Eucharistic associations that made the choice of the Incredulity most appropriate for the niche. As traced in the first and second chapters of this dissertation, images of the Doubting Thomas were sometimes considered Eucharistic because it is precisely through Thomas’s probing of Christ’s open wound that his blood and body are confirmed—much as they are confirmed by the ritual consumption of the sacraments during mass. The final words inscribed on Thomas’s mantle on the Verrocchio sculpture are ET SALVATOR GENTIVM marking a departure, as Van Ausdall has shown, from John’s text, which reads “Christus Filius Dei” (20:31). From a fifteenth-century “theological point of view, the inscriptions,” argues Van Ausdall, “emphasize the value of faith in Christ’s resurrected state, the belief in the fulfillment of his promise without the benefit of physical evidence, and so provided an ironic counterpoint to the Mercanzia’s mundane function.”

Because the Doubting Thomas could be related to the Eucharist and Transubstantiation, these associations would not have been forgotten in this particular case. Van Ausdall emphasizes that the formal characteristics of Eucharistic tabernacles embodied by the architectural niche made the Thomas-Eucharist connotation all the more

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94 Kristen van Ausdall, “The Corpus Verum: Orsanmichele, Tabernacles, and Verrocchio’s Incredulity of St. Thomas,” in *Verrocchio and Late Quattrocento Italian Sculpture*, eds. Steven Bule, Alan Phipps Darr, Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1992), 33-49 argues for a Eucharistic architectural program of the already-existing niche, and likens the structure to Donatello’s enlarged Host receptacles from which other sculptors based their *ciboria* designs.
95 Van Ausdall, 34-35.
apparent. Although I agree that there could be “no more appropriate sculpture for this setting,”98 one cannot dismiss the judicial Doubting Thomas tradition inspired by Sacchetti. The fresco in Palazzo Vecchio, subsequent frescos in nearby towns under Florence’s dominion, and the direct borrowing of Sacchetti’s verses in the case of the Toscani panel indicate that the civic meaning of Thomas’s doubt was very much in vogue, if not becoming a part of the exegetical tradition itself. The earlier fresco of the Doubting Thomas on the façade of San Tommaso represented a subtle shift away from this burgeoning tradition. Medici involvement in that commission and with the cult of St. Thomas offer a precedent for their engagement with the Verrocchio Thomas. In both the case of Uccello’s fresco and Verrocchio’s sculpture the selected inscriptions refer significantly not to Sacchetti or to justice, but to Thomas’s religious and apostolic life. The careful merging of civic and religious implications of this iconography is a benchmark of Medici patronage in general. If the Medici appropriated imagery of the Doubting Thomas, as I have proposed, than this layering of meaning was a deliberate and strategic way of reusing the Tuscan iconography for new purposes.

In order to strengthen this point a third example may be added to the Doubting Thomas images by Uccello and Verrocchio: Mariano del Buono’s illumination of 1478. Lorenzo de’Medici’s 1471-77 reorganization of the judicial system advanced reforms in judgment from trained judiciary to laymen, from statutory law to executive, from “ragione to arbitrium”.99 The 1478 reorganization and reform of Florence’s governing body, the Otto di Guardia, resulted in a new draft of the statutes, the frontispiece of which

98 Ibid., 48.
99 Butterfield, 61. Lorenzo’s reforms more specifically defined the scope of the Mercanzia’s power and added to this power by redesignating their jurisdiction to include those formerly held by the Podestà. Additionally, Lorenzo made the Mercanzia the court of appeals for the lower guild courts (61).
was illuminated with an image of the Doubting Thomas by Mariano del Buono (fig. 66). In this composition Christ is depicted with both hands raised—his right directed toward heaven, his left revealing his nail-pierced flesh. Christ’s eyes are cast down and gaze neither at Thomas nor the viewer. Unlike the Thomas of Verrocchio’s sculpture, Mariano has allowed Thomas’s fingers to make contact with the wound, revealed as it is through a slit in Christ’s mantle. The illumination is exceptionally naturalistic, especially given its small size and does not confine the two figures to the fictive tabernacle framing the scene. Instead Thomas’s incredulity is set against a Tuscan landscape with the towers of communal palazzi rising in the far distance. Additional naturalism comes from the energy of Thomas’s figural arrangement: his right foot appears to be mid-stride, his whole body directed toward the source of his renewed belief.

This central composition is framed by an illusionistic architectural tabernacle not unlike that which contains the *Doubting Thomas* on Orsanmichele. The roundel of the Trinity that caps the triangular pediment of Donatello’s niche has, however, been replaced by God the father in the illumination. Several of the more classicizing elements of the Orsanmichele niche have also been replaced: the frieze of swags and cherub-heads is not found in the statute image and the wreath-carrying putti at the base of Donatello’s structure has also been supplanted in Mariano’s illumination. Instead of the latter, Mariano has depicted two angels who bear the Medici stemma and palle. Inserted between the image of Thomas and Christ and the Medici emblem below is an inscription from Sirach 19:4: “He who believes quickly is light of heart.” The book of Sirach, like

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those of Tobit and Judith, is included only in the Roman Catholic Old Testament.\textsuperscript{101} Combining the Old Testament quotation with the New Testament image of Doubting Thomas represented a novel pairing.

Butterfield concludes that “this illumination compares the clemency and wisdom of the Medici with that of the supreme exemplar, Christ, and identifies their opponents’ skepticism with the misguided doubt of Thomas.”\textsuperscript{102} But the meaning of the Sirach inscription is ambiguous and does not necessarily suggest that Thomas is “misguided.” As the phrase is transcribed it should be translated: “He who believes quickly \textit{is} lightness of heart,” a form that is not derived from any version of the biblical text.\textsuperscript{103} It is unclear whether the inscription or Butterfield’s transcription of it is faulty. In either case the verse is abridged at a crucial point: the complete Vatican Vulgate verse translates, “He who believes quickly is light of heart, and will be lessened,” though Butterfield makes no mention of this complete version.\textsuperscript{104} Thus, image and text could easily be read in exactly the opposite way as Butterfield has done. Butterfield assumes that ‘lightness of heart’ is a positive virtue that Thomas does not have and which the viewer is urged to possess. But clearly one might also understand the meaning to be that one who believes too easily, too blithely, is simplistic and foolish.\textsuperscript{105} If the Medici were to identify with the image of Thomas and Christ as a civic model than they would, logically, need to recognize virtue in both the part played by Christ as Judge, and of Thomas, as the inquisitor. Given contemporary interpretations of Thomas’s doubt, like that proffered by Savonarola,

\textsuperscript{101} Sirach is not included in Jewish or most Protestant versions of the Old Testament.
\textsuperscript{102} Butterfield, 62.
\textsuperscript{103} Ryan Fowler is to thank for these translations of the Latin.
\textsuperscript{104} “Qui credit cito, levis corde est et minorabitur”
\textsuperscript{105} The phrase “lightness of heart” is difficult to define; it may refer to a lightness of mind, or even of the soul.
which salutes Thomas as a model of good faith, Butterfield’s analysis seems unlikely. Instead, it is more probable that Mariano’s illumination, with its inscription, urged the Medici sponsored government to turn away from the carefree belief brought by rapid decisions and rather to embrace a more just, humane policy.

This distinction is essential because Butterfield’s discussion casts Thomas in negative terms that are at variance with the exegetical tradition. Why would the Medici align themselves through their patronage at San Tommaso with a saint whose skepticism they understood to be “misguided”? The illumination of the statutes does compare the “clemency and wisdom of the Medici with that of the supreme exemplar, Christ,” but it also suggests their dedication to a just and righteous government in which jurors seek evidence before judging. Butterfield’s assertion that “Thomas’s doubt was not a morally neutral act but the product of hardness of heart, and it was deeply sinful” is not a fair assessment of exegesis. Moreover, if the Medici were interested in the Tuscan judicial tradition of Doubting Thomas imagery established by Sacchetti, than they would not have understood Thomas’s doubt to be sinful, but rather to be the model for sound skeptical inquiry. The innovative combination of the verse from Sirach and the illuminated depiction of the Doubting Thomas is proof of the Medici’s seamless revision of the Tuscan tradition—at once nodding to Sacchetti’s earlier example while simultaneously returning to it some of the subject’s religious meaning.

Even when the Medici cannot be shown to be directly involved with the commission of a representation of the Doubting Thomas, it seems that their revitalization of the theme resonated in these images. Another significant Florentine example of the Incredulity may demonstrate how the Medici return in 1434 and their devotion to Thomas

106 Ibid., 63.
inspired renewed interest in the theme. In 1439, just five years after the Medici returned
from exile, the Opera of the Duomo commissioned Bicci di Lorenzo (fig. 63, 1373-1452)
to decorate the tribunes of the cathedral with frescos of saints. In the fifth chapel of the
southern tribune Bicci frescoed the Doubting Thomas.  
Standing in a fictive
architectural stage-set, Thomas and Christ are isolated against a nearly black background.
Christ is unusually intimate with Thomas in this representation: his right arm is
positioned around Thomas’s shoulder rather than raised in a sign of benediction. This
gesture seems to be one of love or at least of affection—as Glenn Most has described, “he
[Christ] lays his arm protectively around Thomas’s shoulders, not only authorizing him to
test the wound, but going further, encouraging and emboldening him to do so.”
No other image of Christ and Thomas casts the two figures in so close a physical
relationship. Painted prior to the completion of Verrocchio’s sculpture, it seems likely
that Bicci’s activation of the figures of Christ and Thomas in his fresco inspired the later
sculptural group. The placement of both figures’ feet is mimicked in the energetic stance
of Verrocchio’s Thomas and Christ. Unlike the later sculpture, however, Bicci does not
allow Thomas to turn inward to face Christ. Instead the apostle’s eyes are cast down
toward the object of his inquiry. Christ pulls back a slit in his robe with a nail-pierced
hand, revealing a particularly long side wound. Thomas clearly inserts two fingers well
inside the wound. Both Christ and Thomas are dressed in delicately adorned robes and

107 For Bicci’s commission see Barbara Walsh Buhler, The Fresco Paintings of Bicci di Lorenzo
(Bloomington, Indiana University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1979); Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Le Cattedrale di
Santa Maria del Fiore a Firenze (Florence: Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, 1995) 299. Most of these saints
were represented in pairs—in the chapels of the southern tribune are frescos of Vittorio and Barnaba;
Simone and Taddeo; Anthony and Martino, and the Parte Guelfa and Matthew. In the opposite tribune are
Andrea; Bartolommeo; Stefano on the Cross; Jacopo Maggiore; Mattia
108 Most, 187. Most indicates that this example is similar to Verrocchio’s in this sense but the gesture of
Christ in the Verrocchio sculpture belongs to the more traditional iconographic tradition and is not as
intimate.
embody the classical contrapposto poses embraced by 15th-century painters and sculptors alike.

Painted against the wall behind the altar of the chapel, this fresco, like the others in the tribune, was surmounted by elaborate stained glass windows. These windows, commissioned from Bernardo di Francesco in 1439, depict the titular saint of each chapel in the uppermost section with two other saints or colleagues below. In the fifth chapel a large window of the titular St. Thomas accompanies the fresco of the Doubting Thomas. Below the enthroned apostle are a king and queen, undoubtedly representative of those he converted in India. Together the fresco and window decorations of the chapel wall evoke the entire narrative context of Thomas’s life. It is important to acknowledge, as has not been previously noted, that this combination—that of the Doubting Thomas with recollection of his missionary activity in India—existed already in Florence on the façade of the Medici church of San Tommaso. Given the processions to San Tommaso during the celebration of Thomas’s December 21st feast day, the Opera of the Duomo must have been familiar, if not influenced by Uccello’s fresco and inscription on San Tommaso.

This period marks the most prolific in both decoration of the cathedral interior and production of sumptuous illustrated books commissioned by the Opera. A new calendar of the Florence ecclesia maior marked especially important feast days in red ink—‘red letter’ days. In versions of the calendar published from c.1438 the feast of St. Thomas appears as a red-letter day thus reinforcing the importance of Thomas in

109 Luchinat, 299.
110 Marica S. Tacconi, Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: The Service Books of Santa Maria del Fiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 55. Prior to this point the service books were under the jurisdiction of the cathedral canons and provost, not the Opera.
111 Ibid., 55.
Florence. New liturgical texts were particularly lavish and were meant to reestablish the prestige of the Opera del Duomo. One example, an antiphonary spanning the entire church year, contains illuminated graduals for the Easter cycle. Like many medieval manuscripts, the Thursday after Easter is denoted as a liturgical occasion and is illuminated with the Incredulity. An inscription is dedicated to specific members of the Opera—Bartolomeo Ubertini and Bartolomeo Corbinelli, who held office in 1470. This illumination shows the endurance of the medieval manuscript tradition but the addition of these inscriptions of ownership also demonstrates how important these liturgical functions were to members of the Florentine community. Together with the interior decoration of the Duomo, including Bicci’s fresco and Bernardo di Francesco’s stained glass windows of Thomas, the antiphonary helps to illustrate the significance of Thomas for Florentine religious devotion.

Once again, Thomas’s life after the Incredulity is recollected in these decorations. An additional decorative element at Sta. Maria del Fiore should also be included: Nanni di Banco’s Porta della Mandorla (c. 1420, fig. 51) depicts the Assumption of the Virgin. In the sculptural relief the Virgin turns to her right to pass the kneeling figure of Thomas her sacred cintola. Like Orcagna’s relief on the massive tabernacle in Orsanmichele, angels herald the miraculous event. Whereas Orcagna’s interior image of Thomas was then complemented with the later exterior sculpture of Thomas and Christ, Nanni’s relief was a prelude to the frescoed Doubting Thomas inside. The church of San Tommaso, with its no longer extant Assumption altarpiece and Uccello’s exterior fresco of the Doubting Thomas may have established a pattern. Nanni di Banco’s Porta della

\[\text{112 Ibid., 149.}\]
\[\text{113 Antiphonary Edili 148, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. This illumination is referenced in Tacconi, 149.}\]
Mandorla recalled Thomas’s presence at the Assumption while the later addition of the fresco and stained glass windows inside the church filled in the other episodes from the apostle’s life. In the case of Orsanmichele, the interior-exterior relationship is restored to that of San Tommaso—the Assumption is inside, and the later Verrocchio Doubting Thomas adorns the façade. The decoration of San Tommaso is the only set of these three that could have been planned as a program. In the two later examples the Doubting Thomas images (Bicci’s fresco in one case and Verrocchio’s sculpture in the other) were added after the images of the Assumption were already in place. It seems clear that the Medici were at least partially responsible for the commissions at San Tommaso—choosing the Assumption as an altarpiece and thereby reminding viewers of their involvement in Florence’s successful overthrow of Prato, where the relic is kept. The selection of the Doubting Thomas for the exterior of the church had to have engaged with the Palazzo Vecchio fresco and those in nearby Pistoia, Scarperia, and Siena. Bicci di Lorenzo’s Doubting Thomas must have recalled the example in San Tommaso and was perhaps even more directly influenced by the Medici church decorations there.

The Medici patronage of images of Thomas may therefore have inspired the diffusion of this iconography in Tuscan towns near Florence. For example, a second Pistoian fresco of the Doubting Thomas was commissioned from Niccolò di Mariano for the Sala d’Udienza in the Palazzo del Comune around 1478. The fresco, no longer extant, was the third to be painted in the buildings of the Piazza del Duomo in a century. At the time of its selection Niccolò’s fresco would have joined Antonio Vite’s version in the Palazzo del Podesta and Giovanni di Bartolomeo Cristiani’s painting in the cathedral of San Zeno across the piazza. Long a stronghold of Florence, the Medici became
involved in Pistoian life beginning around 1440. It was at this time that Donato de’ Medici was made bishop of Pistoia (1440-1475) bringing a wave of artistic patronage in his wake. Maso di Bartolomeo, Luca della Robbia, Filippo Lippi and Andrea del Verrocchio were among those Florentine artists to begin working in Pistoia during the Medici bishopric. Other artistic families, like the Gozzoli and the Del Mazziere, transferred their workshops almost entirely from Florence to Pistoia at this time. An altarpiece commissioned for Donato’s chapel in San Zeno depicts a sacra conversazione with St. John the Baptist and Donato (fig. 68) and is variably attributed to Verrocchio, Lorenzo di Credi, and Leonardo da Vinci. Painted between 1475-80 the altarpiece commemorates the town’s important bishop, since deceased, and depicts him in front of an open landscape not unlike the flat valley occupied by Pistoia. Medici presence in Pistoia catalyzed unprecedented artistic productivity in the small town. Niccolo’s new Doubting Thomas was among the works to come of this productivity despite its completion after Donato had died. Although it is not possible to associate the Medici directly with the commission, their presence in the cultural and political ambient was undeniable and ensured that Niccolo’s fresco was read in relationship not only to the older generation of Pistoian Doubting Thomas imagery but with regard to the Medici appropriation of this theme in Florence.

A final example demonstrates the remarkable endurance of Sacchetti’s original verses with the fresco in Palazzo Vecchio, and the successful Medici adoption and dissemination of Doubting Thomas imagery to serve a subtly revised function. In 1490

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115 Ibid., 47.
116 Ibid., 63.
Pier Francesco Fiorentino (1447-1497) was commissioned to fresco the Doubting Thomas, still visible on the left wall upon entering the courtyard of the Palazzo Pretorio (fig. 67). Among the few to have survived centuries of deterioration, Pier Francesco’s fresco is today in remarkably good condition thanks to its restoration and removal to an interior room of the palazzo. No longer exposed to the elements, the fresco is placed closer to eye-level than it would have in its original position, faint traces of which may still be seen today. Christ is depicted between two figures: on his right is Thomas who stands in three-quarter view and extends two fingers to test Christ’s wound. Christ wears an unusually ornate mantle on which appears a pattern of stars. The same pattern can be identified on Christ’s drapery in the Scarperia fresco. Without more extant examples it is difficult to determine if this was a motif common to these Tuscan representations or if it held particular significance in this context. On Christ’s left is the kneeling figure of St. Jerome accompanied by his usual feline companion, the lion. In his left hand Jerome holds a strand of rosary beads and in his right hand a stone with which he beats his breast in penitence. At the base of the stone he kneels on are other symbols of his hermetic life: his books, and a scourge. As usual, Thomas does not hold either of his attributes, the builder’s square nor lance. Instead he is depicted holding a scroll in his left hand. Printed on the scroll are familiar words: “Touch the Truth as I do, and you will believe in the absolute Justice of the Trinity which always exalts each person who sits in judgment.” The words are from the first stanza of Sacchetti’s poem, written one hundred years earlier.

At the base of the lunette a final inscription announces the name of the patron, Tommaso Morelli, and the date, 1490. Tommaso’s motivation for commissioning this
fresco may have been based on his name alone but this seems unlikely given its setting in yet another Tuscan courthouse. Additionally, Tommaso may have been particularly prepared to understand the broader tradition of this imagery and its possible Medicean connotations. Tommaso was first cousin to Girolamo Morelli, one of Lorenzo il Magnifico’s most trusted advisors, a member of the Operai, and a board member of the Mercanzia beginning in 1466 (the time when Verrocchio’s sculpture was commissioned). As such, Tommaso must have been familiar with Verrocchio’s *Incredulity* for Orsanmichele and with the earlier communal palace tradition as well. One might infer, therefore, that Tommaso carried the Medicean revival back to the Tuscan hill town of Certaldo and once again asserted the relevance of Sacchetti’s original verses.

Like Florence and Pistoia, Certaldo is home to a church of San Tommaso, a factor that has not been noted in the literature on this subject. In this case the church is adjacent to the Palazzo Pretorio and connected by a loggia. At the time of my research in Certaldo the church and its records had been closed and inaccessible for at least a year with no known date for reopening. This has made it nearly impossible to reconstruct the relationship between the church, its art, and the palace. A chapel within the palazzo was, however, also dedicated to St. Thomas. It appears that the town, birthplace of Boccaccio, may have had special devotion to the apostle. Alternatively, perhaps it was Tuscany in general that harbored these devotions, given Thomas’s role in the protection of the Virgin’s *cintola* and the Medicean interest in the saint. In either case it seems apparent that the civic or judicial interpretation of the Incredulity and its depiction in communal

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117 Butterfield, 247. Tommaso Morelli’s relationship to the Medici is acknowledged in footnote n. 40.
118 The church is so close in physical proximity to the palace that it is difficult to miss. Thus, it seems that this fact has been overlooked simply because subsequent scholars have relied on Southard rather than viewing the fresco firsthand. My photographs are, I believe, the first clear, color images of the fresco.
palaces persisted at least through the end of the 15th century. After that point, however, it seems to have disappeared entirely, never to resurface in any other region or public palace to my knowledge.

**SOME IMPLICATIONS OF TUSCAN DOUBTING THOMAS IMAGERY**

The assertions of this chapter are threefold: first, I suggest that Franco Sacchetti’s verses and the accompanying (lost) fresco were the origin for a burgeoning Tuscan ‘tradition’ of Incredulity imagery. Secondly, I propose that the Medici appropriated the image of Doubting Thomas in order to promote their own devotion to Thomas and to revise the former, Republican use of the theme in the Palazzo Vecchio. Finally, it is my contention that the Medici adoption of Thomas imagery in Florence helped to promulgate that same imagery in other Florentine strongholds in Tuscany. In the conclusion of this chapter I explore the possible significance of this tradition for the subsequent century—did this geographically isolated, judicial notion of Thomas endure in any future incarnation of the subject or was it a fleeting phenomenon? The cities of Florence, Certaldo, and Pistoia were all home to Tommasan churches, suggesting the saint’s broader importance in the region. Thomas’s protection of the Virgin’s girdle and that relic’s significance for Prato and thereby for Florence should not be underestimated—indeed this may have inspired the renewed interest in Doubting Thomas imagery to begin with. The perpetuation of this interest, however, may have less to do with Florence’s political interests in Prato and more to do with the implications of Sacchetti’s interpretation of the Doubting Thomas theme. Long acknowledged as one of
the most important centers for Humanism, Renaissance Florence was also a hotbed of skeptical philosophers. The rediscovery of ancient skepticism during the Renaissance fueled the attempt by 15th-16th-century skeptics to seek a new truth that found “common ground between philosophy and Christian theology.” During this early revival of skeptical philosophy the goal was not to discredit religion but to determine whether or not man could attain “reliable knowledge” through natural inquiry. Indeed it is Sacchetti who suggests that Thomas, and by extension the viewer/reader, will find “reliable knowledge” through inquiry. This inquiry, as I discussed in the earlier pages of this chapter, is manifested in Thomas’s probing of Christ’s wound. His tactile confirmation is at the core of his experience of the truth of Christ’s divinity—a sort of ‘common ground’ is struck between the desire for “reliable knowledge” and Christian theology.

Sacchetti’s poem and the accompanying fresco were, however, written and painted during the late 14th-century and thus cannot be considered part of the general movement of skeptical philosophy in Renaissance Italy. Instead, the combination of the fresco with Sacchetti’s verses likely inspired a tradition in which Thomas’s doubt was construed as the source of judicial and civic righteousness. And in fact, this tradition seems to have endured and then burned out within the 15th century. Later Florentine images of the Doubting Thomas do not appear to build upon the civic interpretation of the subject. It is difficult to imagine, for instance, that Vasari was not familiar with the Palazzo Vecchio fresco when he painted his Doubting Thomas for Santa Croce almost two hundred years later. His painting contains no explicit reference to the civic tradition.

119 Robert Rosin, Reformers, the Preacher, and Skepticism: Luther, Brenz, Melanchthon and Ecclesiastes (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1997) 16.
and Vasari’s choice of inscription, from St. Paul’s’ definition (Hebrew 11:1) of faith, states that “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Although the word “evidence” might remind us of Sacchetti’s verses and the subsequent visual expressions of his interpretation, the meaning of the verse is entirely different. If faith is the “evidence of things” which cannot be seen, does Thomas have faith? And if the apostle is faithful, how is this in keeping with Paul’s definition? The verse and painting appear to poke proverbial holes in the notion that Thomas can provide sound evidence of anything.

But, perhaps it is unfair to compare Vasari’s painting with the tradition initiated by Sacchetti. His altarpiece for Santa Croce was part of a much larger agenda intended to function as an artistic response of the edicts of the Council of Trent. Didactic clarity and religious experience were central to both Vasari’s program for the side chapels in the church and to the larger institutional Church at the time as well. Which is to say that it seems that the judicial or civic tradition of Doubting Thomas imagery was relevant only for a short time, in a limited geographic location. Indeed the flourishing of the Tuscan judicial images of Thomas also corresponds to the time prior to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation when the church came to feel an urgent need to clarify the purpose of religious images. For Sacchetti and his followers, however, the subjects chosen to decorate the Palazzo Vecchio and other sites in Florence provoked more than “an imagined journey through important monuments in Florence’s urban geography; it conjoined the city’s town hall with its key spiritual sites, thus allowing the sacred to permeate the secular in order to construct a religious aura around the government.”

Such a “conjoining” may not have been relevant after the Signoria reclaimed Florence in

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121 McHam, 105.
1494—just four years after the last known Doubting Thomas was commissioned for a public palace. When the new Medici regime returned to Florence in 1512, they were faced with Michelangelo’s imposing *David*, and thus began a new phase of artistic propaganda in Florence that did not include Thomas.

Even though there were to be no other representations of Doubting Thomas in Tuscan or other Italian courthouses during the Renaissance, it is possible that the connotations of those images resonated beyond the immediate context in which they were made. The notion that it was through touch that Thomas believed and ultimately found “truth”, as declared by Sacchetti, is especially significant. Depictions of the Doubting Thomas employed the sense of touch as a way of describing exactly how Thomas believed. This is important because scholars like Butterfield indicate that Thomas’s touching of Christ is in some way sinful, but it clearly was not perceived to be so at the time. Furthermore, the Doubting Thomas was not the only subject in 15th-century art to convey the spiritual power of touch. The *Virgin and Child* by Andrea Pisano (fig. 69, 1336-1343) on the campanile of the Duomo, in physical proximity to both Nanni di Banco’s Porta della Mandorla and Bicci di Lorenzo’s fresco of the Doubting Thomas inside, mirrors the type of touch usually reserved for the image of Thomas and Christ. This relief depicts the Virgin holding the Christ child on her lap in a variation on the Byzantine icon of Madonna Hodegetria. Christ looks out at the viewer while he uses both hands to guide Mary’s pointing finger to his chest. Her head is bent sorrowfully, perhaps heavy with the knowledge of what is to come, but the infant Christ is comparatively lighthearted. He smiles and squirms in his mother’s lap while simultaneously using her finger to indicate the source of human redemption: his own
body. This relief was contemporary to those images made of Thomas in and around Florence during the late 14th and 15th centuries and implies Christ’s selective and perhaps instructive desire to be touched.

The senses were an important part of both intellectual and religious discussion during this time period. Giovanni Dominici (1356-1420), the prominent Dominican friar, urged the faithful to decorate their homes with religious images in order to influence directly the behavior of their children. Images were thus extremely powerful precisely because they were seen, and vision was a sort of penetration of the mind and soul, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Although the primacy of vision was most often asserted over the more base sense of touch, images like those of Thomas and that by Pisano cited above suggest a more complicated relationship between Renaissance believers and touch.

During the 16th-century the efficacy of the senses was to gain increasing popularity. Leonardo da Vinci famously speculated that the “eye, which is said to be the window of the soul, is the primary means by which the sensus communis of the brain may most fully and magnificently contemplate the infinite works of nature, and the ear is second, acquiring nobility through the recounting of things which the eye has seen.” Although Leonardo and the philosopher-historian Vincenzo Borghini both assert vision to be the “lord of the senses,” vision was also explicitly considered a reflexive sense—the object seen received rays from the eye and subsequently sent its own rays back to the eye. Touch is also a reflexive sense: the individual who touches an object is also touched by the object itself, becoming both ‘toucher’ and touched. Both Aristotle, and much later Leonardo (in his Physiology of the Senses) confirmed that the sense of touch derives from

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123 Rafanelli, 317.
the *senso commune*—there is no organ of touch but rather the entire surface area of the body conveys touch to some deeper organ within the body and soul. Leonardo described touch as a full-body experience: “For as soon as the finger-tips have touched the object, the *senso commune* is immediately made aware of whether it is hot, cold, hard, or soft, pointed or smooth…the sense of touch clothes all the skin of man.”\(^{124}\) As discussed earlier in this chapter, both vision and touch were linked to knowledge since it was through these impressions that matter was proven real or unreal. The words of the theoreticians cited here make apparent how broadly the sense of touch was defined during the Renaissance. There is a sort of slippage between concepts of sight and touch and the types of knowledge these senses could provide.

If seeing was understood to be a reciprocal sense in the same way touch was, an object that was seen could imprint the soul in much the way that an object that was touched could. Perhaps it is this sentiment that informs the strain between Thomas’s reaching hand and Christ’s untouched body in Verrocchio’s *Incredulity*. As Rafanelli has emphasized, “in Verrocchio’s *Christ and St. Thomas*, the tension between touch and vision as the basis of belief seems to define the artist’s own power to create, and to instill belief by rendering God visible, and giving him physical presence.”\(^{125}\) Sensory contact is therefore established as an important component of religious experience—touching is a route to religious healing and a “dialectic between materiality and resurrection, between physical and spiritual.”\(^{126}\)

Sacchetti’s verses and the accompanying fresco, as well as the subsequent visual tradition they inspired make a viable case for the importance of Thomas’s tactile inquiry


\(^{125}\) *Ibid.*, 320.

\(^{126}\) Harvey, 2.
as a source of truth. In the Tuscan ambient Thomas’s sensory exploration is particularly relevant given the saint’s local significance as safe-keeper of the Virgin’s *cintola* in Prato and the Medici interest in the cult of St. Thomas. Here the episode of Thomas’s doubt reveals truths linked to civic and judicial practice. For later images of the Incredulity, however, Thomas’s tactile inquiry may be related more to the movements of skeptical philosophy and the developing notion of touch as a conduit for spiritual truth, as will be seen in the final chapter of this dissertation.
TOUCHING IS BELIEVING: IMAGES OF DOUBT IN COUNTER-REFORMATORY ROME

The sculptures, paintings, and illuminations discussed in the previous chapter all relate in various to what was at the time a new way of thinking about the incredulity of St. Thomas. No longer understood in a strictly devotional way, these civic images employed a familiar religious iconography to evoke messages of judicial responsibility. This Tuscan tradition was likely perpetuated by contextual circumstances—namely Prato’s ownership of the relic of the Virgin’s girdle and Medici family devotions to St. Thomas—that coalesced to create a particularly sympathetic ambient for that iconological interpretation of the Doubting Thomas. Similarly, the social and political climate of the later part of the 16th-century may have encouraged yet another way of viewing Thomas and his incredulity.

In this chapter I will focus on how depictions of the Doubting Thomas were reinterpreted in the context of Catholic Reform. The decrees issued by the Council of Trent, adjourned in 1563, bore tremendous consequences for the iconological significance of sacred images. I contend that images of the Doubting Thomas made in the period following the close of the Council must have engaged with those dogmatic concerns most crucial to the Reform: Justification and Transubstantiation. Caravaggio’s c.1602 depiction of the Incredulity of St. Thomas, for instance, was in several significant ways the first radical iconographic rearticulation of the theme. Its subsequent popularity—it is the most copied of all the artist’s works—raises important questions
about its creation and reception. Why, given the infrequent depiction of this subject in Rome prior to this point, was Caravaggio commissioned to paint the theme? What contextual circumstances or ideas may have inspired Caravaggio’s compositional and formal choices? Most significantly, it seems that this painting, as a case study, engages with broader issues concerning disbelief during the Counter Reformation. Previous scholarship on Caravaggio’s Roman years has succeeded in contextualizing his work with an aim toward a better understanding of how his innovative style interacted with various political and social factors. Still unexamined, however, are how St. Thomas and his cult were perceived in Counter-Reformatory Rome. Doing so will facilitate a better understanding of the revolutionary nature of this painting, and by extension, of Caravaggio’s work in general.

I have begun this discussion by outlining those aspects of the Counter-Reformation that are most essential for understanding not only Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* but the cult of St. Thomas more generally. Preparation for the Holy Year of 1600 undoubtedly converged with these post-Tridentine initiatives and resulted in the restoration and revitalization of many of Rome’s churches. Among these are three dedicated to St. Thomas. Two papal bulls granting indulgences to Ortona, the site of Thomas’s relics, an avviso, or news bulletin regarding Thomas’s protection of foreign lands, and a 16th-century vita of the saint all help to reconstruct the apostle’s importance in Counter-Reformatory Rome. Despite Rome’s obvious claim to Thomas as an apostle sent out from the Christian capital, a pictorial tradition did not accompany the church revitalizations or papal edicts cited above. Only three monumental depictions of the Incredulity were to be found in Rome prior to Caravaggio’s c.1602 painting: a tondo
designed by Raphael for a chapel in Santa Maria della Pace (c.1511-27), a fresco by Francesco Salviati in San Giovanni Decollato (c.1553), and another fresco of the *Doubting Thomas* by Cesare Nebbia in the papal chapel of the Lateran Palace (c.1595). These examples, few and far between, might suggest that it was Caravaggio who first employed the Doubting Thomas theme to evoke explicitly post-Tridentine concerns about faith.

Although the Caravaggio literature is vast, little has been done to interpret the *Doubting Thomas* against earlier iconographic traditions or with regard to the Roman cult of the saint. Additionally, questions of patronage have sometimes confused what broader contextual factors may have influenced the artist. Vincenzo Giustiniani, his brother Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani, Ciriaco Mattei and his brother Cardinal Girolamo Mattei have all been credited with the commission of Caravaggio’s *Incredulity* though today scholars finally agree that Vincenzo Giustiniani was the patron. Although I am not proposing an alternative to that consensus here, new documentary discoveries discussed in this chapter suggest that Vincenzo’s brother, Benedetto, surely played a part in the commission. Regardless of which brother was responsible for the painting, the devotional concerns of both provide a new lens through which to understand the *Doubting Thomas* and its relationship to previous depictions of the theme.

Finally, the immediate popularity of Caravaggio’s painting should, I contend, be understood with regard to contemporary devotional trends. The Roman culture of conversion, publicized by Pope Clement VIII with the successful conversion of Henry IV to Catholicism, meant that Thomas’s return to the fold was especially apposite. Thomas’s momentary disbelief served as an ideal model for the average believer and
reinforced the Catholic doctrine of Justification, in which one’s actions, in addition to faith, are essential for salvation. In the concluding pages of this chapter I will explore the ways in which the broader, post-Tridentine climate contributed to the posthumous success of Caravaggio’s novel depiction of the *Doubting Thomas*. As a result, I hope to demonstrate that it was not only Caravaggio’s stylistic choices that made his the most influential *Incredulity* to date, but his innovative way of relating these formal decisions to relevant contemporary devotions.

**THE CHANGING CLIMATE OF REFORM**

In order to better understand how Roman images of the Incredulity related to the ideals of Catholic Reformers, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the events and doctrinal issues pertinent to this Reform. Although the Council of Trent had concluded its final session in 1563, its impact continued to resonate well into the 17th century. Two dogmatic principles debated by the Council—namely Justification and Transubstantiation—were particularly energizing for the Catholic Renewal in a post-Luther Christian world. The rise of new religious orders coupled with the leadership of important bishops like Carlo Borromeo (1538-84) signaled the evolving nature of the Church. Many of the ideological tenets discussed by reformers find corollaries in the theme of the Doubting Thomas. Problems associated with the definition of faith, salvation, and the sacraments all present obvious parallels to the spiritual notions embodied in both the Incredulity episode and its depiction in art.
To summarize the events leading to and resulting in Martin Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses* (1517) and the Protestant Reformation is beyond the scope of this project. However, it was the *Theses* and Luther’s camp that initiated a chain of events that would result in the fracturing of the Church. When the Council of Trent first convened in 1545 they set out largely with the goal of uniting, rather than dividing, the international Christian factions.¹ Nevertheless, representatives at the Council were largely from Spain, France, and Italy, *not* Germany, where the schism had originated. Emperor Charles V and Pope Paul III played large roles in the decisions made by the Council and indicate that this was a reform dictated from the highest authorities down.

The most important issue discussed during the first session at Trent was the doctrine of Justification.² Generally, the agreed upon definition of Justification had been as follows: “Justification means *iustifactio*, ‘a making righteous’ and that ‘to justify’ means ‘to become righteous before God.’ Justification is therefore the remission of sin by God through grace.”³ How people were “made righteous” was a point of contention. Luther had called for Justification *sola fide*, based on faith alone. This declaration undermined “both Catholic sacraments and clerical authority” because it did not include the important actions of believers as a necessary component of salvation.⁴ In June of

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¹ Martin Luther (1483-1546) is widely regarded as the initiator of the Reformation. Frustrated with the corruption of the church, namely over the issue of indulgences, Luther wrote and circulated his *Ninety-five Theses* as a call for reform. The Council of Trent convened for the first time just one year before Luther’s death, and no Germans were included. It was not Luther, therefore, who would be responsible for sealing the fate of the Church as forever divided. For the most comprehensive, recent source on the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, see the essays included in volume six of the Cambridge History of Christianity, edited by R. Po-Chia Hsia (*Reform and Expansion 1500-1660*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) all with extensive bibliography. R. Po-Chia Hsia’s earlier *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) is a good source for the Catholic Counter-Reformation and was recently revised and released in a second-edition (2005).

² Hsia 2005, 13.


⁴ Hsia 2005, 13.
1546 the Council laid out six questions for tackling the issue—all intended to provide a clearer doctrinal definition of Justification. Eventually, on January 13th, 1547, a consensus was reached and a final decree published. Here the ‘solafideism’ promoted by Luther was officially reproved: “If anyone says that people are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and inherent to them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God: let him be condemned.” The Church had decided in no uncertain terms that faith is not enough and must be paired with good works in order to find salvation. If this principle is applied to the story of Thomas, his actions become an essential model for reformed believers, a point to which I will return.

Second to the problem of Justification were questions concerning the seven sacraments. During the 1520’s Luther had begun to make subtle, gradual but ultimately monumental changes to the celebration of mass. He translated the mass into German so that the laity could understand it and wrote his own baptismal rite in the vernacular. Prior to this point Latin had obscured the full meaning of Transubstantiation from the laity. Luther’s reforms eliminated the ‘hocus pocus’ (*hoc est corpus meum*) that transformed the bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ and taught that “Jesus’s instruction to his disciples that ‘this is my body’ meant ‘this signifies my body,’

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5McGrath, 325. The six questions were: “1. What is justification, nominally and actually, and what is to be understood when it is said that ‘humanity is justified’? 2. What are the causes of justification? What part is played by God? And what is required of humans? 3. What is to be understood when it is said that ‘humanity is justified by faith’? 4. What role do human works and the sacraments play in justification, whether before, during, or after it? 5. What precedes, accompanies and follows justification? 6. By what proofs is the Catholic doctrine supported?”

6This particular wording is taken from Canon Eleven, though the same essential definition is also issued in Canon 9 from the proceedings of the Council of Trent (McGrath, 343).

and that, therefore, the supper was strictly a commemorative event.\textsuperscript{8} What followed was an essential disruption of the Catholic mass: appointed ministers would carry bread around to congregants while each member took with their own hands a morsel of bread; plain wine in ordinary wooden cups was also handed out.\textsuperscript{9} The elimination of a ritualized ingestion of the Host was deemed heretical by Catholics because it too facilely mixed the secular with the sacred. Although the Church maintained that Luther’s reforms were incongruous with Church teaching, they did agree on one essential point. Both felt that the “reality of the signified” is so strong that it “vivifies” believers. That is why the sacrament involves the ingestion of the sacrament, rather than the viewing of it. God is really ‘ingrafted’ in us by the ‘mystery’ of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{10} Nevertheless, the Council wanted to reaffirm the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and did so officially in the sixth session, January, 1547.

The Doubting Thomas likely evoked Eucharistic analogies, as I argued in the first and second chapters of this dissertation. Christ’s blood and wounds were a route to salvation, both as they were depicted in representations of Thomas’s incredulity and as they were ingested during mass. Bishops responsible for carrying out the decrees of the Council would have reiterated the fundamental importance of Christ’s Real Presence in the sacraments, reminding worshippers that Christ’s body was a crucial aspect of belief. Images of the Doubting Thomas made in this climate of reform must, therefore, have

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Ibid.}, 375.
\textsuperscript{9} Mark Greengrass, “The Theology and Liturgy of Reformed Christianity,” (in \textit{Reform and Expansion}, ed. Po-Chia Hsia, 2007) 109-110. For Protestants the “sign is not the reality, but it stands in a corresponding relationship with reality as an ‘analogy’ between the visible, material sign and the invisible, spiritual reality of the sacrament” (118).
\textsuperscript{10} Greengrass, 119.
called to mind this most recent renewal of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, first approved by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1217.

Though these and numerous other points framed the subsequent meetings of the Council, the Catholic Renewal following the closing session was also dedicated to less dogmatic issues that concerned the dissemination of Christian teachings to the laity. Top among these problems were the use of relics, cults of saints, and images for stirring the faithful. Once again, to summarize Catholic customs regarding each of these would be a digression from the central purpose of this chapter. However, a cursory overview sets the contextual backdrop for the discussion to follow. Despite the Jewish prohibition of images and the iconoclastic controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries, “if God could take on the flesh, then material representations of Christ [were] in some way essential [and] belonged to a continuum in which matter could serve to make divinity present to the eyes of the faithful.”11 The rise of the cults of saints and their relics during the Middle Ages extended the ‘continuum’ to include images of saints and sumptuous reliquaries. It is well known that Luther found these images and devotional aids contemptuous and called for their complete removal from arenas secular and sacred alike. The Council again defended the practices of the established Church and, in the twenty-fifth session (1562-63) reiterated the importance of relics, saints, and sacred images.

In these canons the Council maintained that the invocation of saints through the judicious use of relics and images could help believers to offer their prayers to God. The decrees clarify that these relics, images of Christ, the Virgin, and other saints are to be honored and venerated not because they themselves contain any divinity or virtue but

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because they *represent* the divine messages conveyed in Church teachings. Bishops were thus held responsible for carrying out these policies: they were to ensure that images and relics in their churches followed certain guidelines and that worshippers were using these objects in the appropriate way, as outlined by the Council. The didactic task of painting was explicated by those like the Bishop of Bologna, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti whose treatise on the subject (1582) became a widely disseminated source on the appropriateness of images.

Those members of the reforming commission present at the twenty-fifth session sought not to “innovate but to ‘strip the office back to its antique simplicity.’”12 This interest resulted in what may be deemed a return to many of the fundamental tenets of the Early Christian Church. Attempts were made to prune the calendar of saints and to encourage the worship of so-called ‘major’ saints rather than those of more local attention.13 In many ways, this paved the way for the rise of new, Counter-Reformation saints who would be canonized after 1588 (ending the hiatus of papal canonization which had lasted for sixty-five years).14 But the revival of “saint-making” was also accompanied by stricter regulations of the cults of saints, demonstrating an “increase in central control of the sacred, or the right to define the sacred.”15 Papal confidante and Church reformer Cesare Baronio (1538-1607) published multiple revisions of the *Martyrologium* during these years, all with the goal of definitively clarifying the feast dates and lives of the saints. The post-Tridentine Church sought simultaneously to encourage popular belief while maintaining firmer regulations on just how this belief was

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13 Ibid., 204.
14 Ibid., 205.
15 Ibid., 206-07.
attained. Toward that end, the cults of saints, their relics, and images depicting their lives, could serve as useful *propaganda fide*.

Ultimately the period of Catholic Renewal that followed the Protestant Reformation resulted in a burgeoning of artistic and architectural patronage all geared toward rebuilding the reputation of a glorious Catholic Church with Rome at its apex. Churches with ancient or early Christian foundations were restored or embellished in preparation for the Holy Year of 1600—the first since the war waged by the Protestants. New altarpieces were commissioned under the oversight of vigilant bishops. Apostolic saints like Thomas, who were responsible for the initial spread of Christianity, were recalled in both art and religious rhetoric and reminded the laity of the timeless origins of the Church. New and unprecedented missionary efforts asserted the unwavering role of Rome and the papacy as *caput mundi*. Thomas was in many ways the perfect saint for the Counter-Reformatory agenda: he was the apostle with the most direct evidence of Christ’s Real Presence, was a successful missionary saint, and a model for believers whose actions, they were told, were essential to their Justification. The potential analogies between the episode of Thomas’s incredulity and his life after this infamous moment, were not lost, it seems, on those in Rome c.1590.

**THOMAS APOSTLE IN ROME**

Given the Church’s renewed interest in the cults of saints perhaps it is not surprising that Thomas appears to have been the subject of just such renewal during the later years of the 16th century. Until now it has been difficult to contextualize images like
Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* because art historians knew little about the post-Medieval perceptions of the Incredulity. The apparent dearth of primary textual sources obscured what role, if any, Thomas or the central moment of his disbelief may have had in Counter-Reformatory Rome. My identification of new primary sources pertaining to St. Thomas and the commissions associated with three Tommasan churches in Rome clarify the way Thomas was perceived, discussed, and most significantly, how his incredulity was depicted in art.

Although briefly discussed in the Introduction, it is worth reviewing the late 16th-century events pertaining to the relics of St. Thomas believed to be in the coastal town of Ortona, just to the east of Rome. Both Gregory XIII and Clement VIII passed bulls granting indulgences to pilgrims destined for Ortona but they recognized different feast dates associated with Thomas. In September of 1575 Gregory XIII confirmed the bulls of several previous popes (see the Introduction) and granted indulgences for visitors of the May celebration of St. Thomas—a date of celebration local to Ortona and recognized previously by Sixtus IV in 1479. Despite Gregory’s affirmation of the May feast date, his trusted advisor and friend, the Oratorian Cesare Baronio (1538-1607) confirmed the official feast date of St. Thomas as December 21st in his *Martyrologium* published in 1586. St. Beda’s much earlier 7th-century *Martyrologium* recognized Thomas’s martyrdom in India on December 21st and the translation of his relics to Edessa on July 3rd, making no mention of Ortona in his account. Baronio confirmed both of these dates but to the July 3rd entry added a further description of the apostle’s translation to Ortona. Baronio returned legitimacy to the official, Church-recognized December feast date while
simultaneously recognizing Ortona as the final resting place of the Apostle. In light of contemporary attacks on the validity of saints’ cults, Baronio’s corrections were not inconsequential. His additions deliberately reiterated the authority of the Catholic Church in matters of saintly celebration.

Clement VIII Aldobrandini heeded Baronio’s advice. On March 4th, 1596 Clement reversed Gregory XIII’s decision to endorse the Ortonian feast of St. Thomas in May. Instead, the pope granted indulgences to pilgrims visiting the relics in Ortona only on the official feast day of December 21st. In his bull, Clement cited the upcoming Holy Year (1600) as impetus for this important restoration of dates. Indeed the jubilee year served as motivation for the Church to reform many such local corruptions of doctrinal accuracy and was also the excuse for many church restorations and new artistic commissions, as we shall see. The comments of Gregory XIII, Baronio, and Clement VIII demonstrate the relevance of St. Thomas for pilgrims and popes of the late 16th century.

To the two papal bulls and Martyrologium entry must be added two additional primary texts of note. The first is the vita of St. Thomas written by De Lectis, also discussed in the Introduction, and the second is a 16th-century news item (or avviso) regarding Thomas. Both sources help to establish Thomas’ significance in Rome at this time and suggest that dedication to his cult was alive and well. The late publication date of 1577 sets De Lectis’ text apart from the earlier lives of the saints (such as the Golden

16 Cesare Baronio, Martyrologium (Rome, 1586).
17 Polidoro, 56.
18 Clement VIII also restored other important feast dates to their original liturgical dates; the Feast of the Assumption (celebrated by the people of Ortona on the same day as that of St. Thomas) was reverted to its August 15th feast date (Polidoro, 56). Clement VIII’s revisions indicate the importance of authority for the Counter-Reformatory movement: local traditions were usurped by papal policy.
Legend) written during the late Medieval and early Renaissance periods. Titled *Vita del Glorioso Apostolo di Christo S. Tomaso con la Traslatione, e Miracoli*, De Lectis' text does not add much narrative detail to the already lengthy *Acts of St. Thomas*. Instead, the author focuses on the translation of the relics and miracles performed by the relics once they arrived in Ortona. This rhetorical focus shifts the emphasis from the life of St. Thomas as a living apostle and directs the reader to focus on Ortona as an important pilgrimage site. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the readership of this text in 16th-century Rome, it was likely the first publication to include any lengthy note on the saint's relics and their importance for Ortona.

Along with these references to Thomas may be added a final textual source: an *avviso* published in 1596 recorded the events of the previous year on the "Isola di S. Tomaso" in the 'Ethiopian sea.' The news bulletin describes the founding of a Portuguese missionary island dedicated to St. Thomas apostle and the subsequent rebellion of the native, black inhabitants of that island. The largest of these indigenous people, a formidable "negro" named Amadore, led the revolt that nearly drove the Portuguese from the island. Thanks to the intercession of St. Thomas on behalf of the faithful, however, the "negri" were subdued and order was restored. This description of events corresponds to the historical record of the Portuguese island of Sao Tomé, in the West African Gulf of Guinea. In 1485 Portuguese settlers arrived in Sao Tomé, supposedly on Thomas's feast day of December 21, and began cultivating sugar with the

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19 *Avviso della Sollevazione dei Negri nell'Isola di S. Tomaso contro la corona di Portogallo, con la rota data dai Portoghesi ad essi Negri, & la morte del loro falso Rè Amadore, del mese d'Agosto 1595* (Published by Bernardino Beccari al Minerva, Rome, press of Nicolo Mutij, 1596; Biblioteca Angelica SS 11 54(5), Rome).
20 *Ibid.*, "...per l'intercessione (come è da credere) del glorioso Apostolo S. Tomaso, protetore dell'Isola, ribatterono di nuovo i Negri..."
help of slave labor. The uprising that was sensationalized in the Roman *avviso* likely occurred much as it was recounted—save for Thomas’s saintly intervention—and concluded with the execution of the false king Amadore.

Because *avvisi* were widely disseminated, inexpensive, and readily available in and around Rome, it is likely that word spread of a Tommasan island in Africa. Thomas’s intercession on behalf of the western, Christian inhabitants of that island was fodder for his reputation as an apostolic missionary saint. Africa, like India (where Thomas was sent to do his own missionary work), represented a land ripe for conversion. In the *avviso* the Portuguese triumph there is ultimately linked to the island’s foundation as a Christian stronghold, protected by Thomas and implicitly by Christ. The news conveyed in the bulletin and the reference to St. Thomas as the protector of the island would have been construed as evidence of the Church’s successful missionary endeavors in a post-Reformation world. Thomas’s name need only be mentioned once in order to convey the most important point of the announcement: the infidels were defeated with the help of a glorious Christian saint.

None of the texts cited above (papal bulls, Martyrologium entries, *vitae*, or *avvisi*) mention Thomas’s incredulity. These references to Thomas instead allude to his missionary successes and the triumphant return of his relics to Italian soil. It cannot be coincidental that both the role of missionaries and relics were crucial to the Counter-Reformatory effort, as outlined above. When the Incredulity was finally evoked in textual form it was by the important church reformer Bishop Alfonso Paleotti who
recalled Thomas as essential to devotion to the wounds of Christ, a subject I will return to in the subsequent section of this chapter.22

Preparation for the jubilee year of 1600 also inspired the restoration and rebuilding of many Roman churches. Those with ancient, early Christian, or medieval origins were favored over newer buildings in an effort to reinforce the timeless stability of the Church and her churches. No fewer than three churches were dedicated to St. Thomas Apostle in Rome and all of these received some form of architectural restoration during the last decades of the 16th century. These projects are recorded in contemporary guidebooks, and the documents of two of the three churches have been published. The buildings have not, however, been introduced to the historical literature regarding St. Thomas, or the art historical discourse regarding the Doubting Thomas.

Their number alone requires the discussion of the three San Tommaso churches; I have not found any other Italian city with more than one church dedicated to St. Thomas apostle. That all three were restored within the last three decades of the 16th-century indicates that they were included in the broader city plans for Holy Year. Although I will not attempt a comprehensive building history of each church, it is necessary to outline key moments in the architectural records in order to demonstrate the role of these churches for the cult of Thomas in Rome. Because the history of each building is more or less contemporary to the next I have discussed them alphabetically here: San Tommaso ai Cenci, followed by San Tommaso in Formis, and finally San Tommaso in Parione.

First consecrated in 1114 (and again in 1240), San Tommaso ai Cenci is located at the center of the Monte Cenci, abutting the Jewish Ghetto. The tiny church is

22 See note 117 of this chapter.
rectangular, with its primary entrance on the left lateral side (fig. 70). An inscription over the portal dedicates the building to Thomas and announces the patron as the family of Cristoforo Cenci. The church is built over the ancient temple of the Dioscuri, and basement access provides a view of these ancient remains. Pope Julius III passed the patronage rights of the church to Rocco Cenci in 1554 with the condition that he restore the building. Rocco’s death meant the delay of that restorative project; the building was not completed until 1575 under Francesco Cenci. Although a 1601 inventory refers to a painting of the *Doubting Thomas* made for the high altar, that altarpiece has since been lost and was replaced by Giuseppe Vermiglio’s 1612 version of the same subject (still *in situ*, fig. 71). Along with the inventory of the church in the archives of the Vicariato in Rome is a later, 18th-century copy of an earlier *vita* of St. Thomas. There is no date or author mentioned but the *vita* does note Baronio’s confirmation of the 13th-century translation of Thomas’s relics to Ortona. The inclusion of the *vita* and this detail about Thomas’s relics are the only evidence of either the church’s or the Cenci family’s dedication to their patron saint.

The small 12th-century church of San Tommaso in Formis, is located in the Celio and is best known for a mosaic roundel over the portal to the adjacent hospital. Made around 1210 (fig. 73) it depicts Christ at its center, shaking hands with a white Christian man on his right and a black Christian on his left (fig. 74). The message conveyed by this decoration is one of unity between the Eastern and Western churches and notably has

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26 *Ibid.*, the copy is dated to 1724.
little to do with Thomas, the saint to whom the building is dedicated. In fact, the
documents pertaining to the building (now published) report little about Thomas and the
relationship between church and saint. Instead these records underline the ancient
origins of the building, founded as it was over the Aqueduct of Claudio. Beginning with
these illustrious origins the parish church enjoyed the attention of high-profile guests.
Pope Innocent III recognized the congregation as Trinitarian (an order founded in 1198
by Giovanni de Matha) and in 1209 St. Francis is thought to have stayed in the tiny
church. From these early dates the church and its hospital shared complicated
dedications to the Trinitarians and Giovanni de Matha, thereby eclipsing the significance
of Thomas’s role in the church’s history. In fact, I have not been able to discern why the
church was dedicated to Thomas in the first place. My discussions with the priests now
working in San Tommaso in Formis yielded little information to supplement the
published documentary records of the building: their primary devotional concern is with
Giovanni de Matha.

Nevertheless, the church has always maintained its original dedication to the
apostolic saint. Starting in 1435 and continuing through the 1527 sack of Rome, the
church was subject to restorative efforts. Finally, in 1532 the Vatican appointed the
architect Antonio da Caravaggio to rebuild parts of the hospital and the church. This
remodeling effort was formally recognized in a celebratory reopening on Thomas’s feast
day, December 21st, 1538. From 1538 through the early decades of the 17th-century, San
Tommaso fell under the protection of numerous fathers—some Franciscan, others

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27 The documents for this church appear to be the most complete of the three and are published in Antonio
Dell’Assunta, San Tommaso in Formis sul Celio: notizie e documenti (Isola del Liri: Macioce & Pisani,
1927). A much abridged version of the church’s history appears in Pietrangeli’s Guide Rionali di Roma:
28 Ibid., 65-66.
During this time the church entered yet another phase of rebuilding and restoration, likely initiated around 1560 by Pirro Ligorio. After February, 1590 the Capitolo Vaticano repossessed the church and reiterated the importance of celebrating the founding saint’s feast date of December 21st. The last date associated with the building and of significance for this discussion is the 1634 lease of the church and hospital by the Marchese Girolamo Mattei. The Mattei had already begun acquiring properties around this area, including the Villa Celimontana, beginning around 1570. Their subsequent takeover of San Tommaso was, therefore, quite logical. Girolamo Mattei and his brother Ciriaco were, as stated earlier, important patrons of Caravaggio. It was Ciriaco Mattei, in fact, that 17th-century artist and biographer Giovanni Baglione cited as the patron of the *Doubting Thomas*. Although it is unlikely that the original painting was made for Girolamo or another member of the Mattei family, their interest in the environs around San Tommaso and later possession of that church suggest that the building’s small stature did not relegate it to obscurity. If the Marchese was in some way occupied with the Tommasan building while Caravaggio was in the family’s employ, surely the artist would have been aware of this and the annual celebrations held on the December feast day.

Whether Caravaggio was or was not made privy to the Mattei interests in and around San Tommaso in Formis cannot be determined. This brief overview of the building history, however, reveals a broader Roman recognition of St. Thomas, which could not have been lost on the painter or his clients. The third Tommasan church in Rome, San Tommaso in Parione, was perhaps the most publicly recognized and offers the

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31 The Mattei lease of the church lasted until 1663 when Alexander VII repossessed the building and ordered the completion of restorative projects after the Mattei had fallen delinquent in their payments (Stefania Severi, “La Chiesa di S. Tommaso in Formis al Celio,” *Lazio Ieri e Oggi* 40 (2004): 132-33).
strongest evidence of this more general attention to Thomas in the last years of the 16th century.

Consecrated by Innocent II on December 21st, 1139, San Tommaso in Parione is the only one of the three Tommasan churches that does not claim to have ancient or early Christian foundations. Little is known about the early history of the building. During the 16th-century, however, the church grew in fame due to several key events. Beginning in 1517 with the appointment of Lorenzo Campeggi by Pope Leone X, San Tommaso in Parione enjoyed the protection of notable cardinals. And Andrea Palladio described San Tommaso in Parione in his guidebook to Rome, noting that in 1546 the Reverend Messer Ambrosio Maggio made several exciting discoveries. Later placed on the high altar by Innocent II, Ambrosio Maggio found buried

An arm of Saints Damasus, Calixtus, Cornelius, Urban, Stephen, Sylvester, and Gregory; some of the clothes of the Virgin Mary, some of the barley loaves, some of the rocks with which Saint Stephen was stoned, some of Saint Lucy’s blood, and some relics of Saints Nicholas, Velentine, Sebastian, Tranquilino, Phocas, of the Four Crowned Martyrs, Saints John and Paul, Crisante and Daria, Cosmas and Damian, Ninfa, Sofia, Balbina, Martha and Petronilla. These relics were hidden until the year 1546, the twelfth year of Paul III’s reign.

This veritable treasure trove is confirmed by Pietro Martire Felini in his 1610 guidebook to Rome.

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33 Andrea Palladio, as edited and translated by Vaugh Hart and Peter Hicks, Palladio’s Rome: A Translation of Andrea Palladio’s Two Guidebooks to Rome (Yale University Press, 2006) 132.
34 F. Pietro Martire Felini, Trattato nuovo delle cose maravigliose dell’alma città di Roma diviso in due parti (Rome: press of Giacomo Fei, 1610, 1650):
But perhaps the most significant event to occur in San Tommaso in Parione took place in 1551. It was in that year that Filippo Neri, founder of the Oratorian order, was ordained inside San Tommaso.\footnote{This event is noted by Papi and Cecilia Pericoli, \textit{Guide Rionali di Roma, Parione Parte I} (Rome: Ridolfini, 1969) and is, more significantly, also acknowledged in Gallonio’s 1601 life of Filippo Neri in which it is noted that he was ordained on May 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1551, in San Tommaso in Parione (\textit{Vita del Beato Filippo Neri, Fiorentino, fondatore della Congregazione dell’Oratorio, scritta e ordinata per anni} (Rome, 1601; see the critical edition edited by Bonadonna, 1995).} Although it remains unclear why Neri was ordained in this small church, from that date until the present day San Tommaso has maintained Oratorian affiliations. Perhaps it is not coincidental then, that in 1561 the confraternity of public scribes (“Scrittori e Copisti”), protected by Neri’s close friend Carlo Borromeo, were granted privileges in San Tommaso.\footnote{Pericoli, 92; Giuseppe Scarfone, “San Tommaso in Parione, la chiesa ove Filippo Neri ricevette gli ordini sacri,” \textit{Lazio Ieri e Oggi} 32 (1996): 11-13.} The coalescence of the rediscovery of relics, ordination of Neri, and presence of Borromeo in this church within a matter of decades may have facilitated the renovation process that was begun around 1582. It was at that time that the two noble brothers Mario and Camillo Cerrini financed Francesco da Volterra’s design of a new façade for San Tommaso.\footnote{Papi, 10. The attribution to Francesco da Volterra is confirmed in the monograph by Laura Marucci (\textit{Francesco da Volterra}. Rome: Multigrafica Editrice, 1991).} Their names are now inscribed on the architrave of that façade but little else is known about the Cerrini. Francesco’s exterior incorporates lions and the emblems of Sixtus V (fig. 75) who owned a residence in the Parione and later inscriptions inside the church confirm the architect’s involvement in the façade design.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 10-11.}

Little of the interior of San Tommaso in Parione remains intact today. From the late 16\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} centuries, however, frescoes of Filippo Neri and Cardinal Barbarigo framed
the high altar over which once hung a 16th-century altarpiece of the *Doubting Thomas*, by Cosimo Piazza (1537-1621), no longer extant.39 Seventeenth-century guidebooks note that the vault of the church once depicted the *Glory of St. Thomas* painted by Domenico Palombi, a collaborator of Pietro da Cortona.40 These guidebooks also expose some preference for San Tommaso in Parione over the other two Tommaso churches in Rome. Ottavio Panciroli (1600), Camillo Fanucci (1601), Giovanni Battista Cherubini (1609), Pietro Martire Felini (1610), and Mauritio Bona (1636) all list San Tommaso Apostolo in Parione under the December 21st listing in the Stations of Advent.41 Felini’s description of the discovery of relics inside San Tommaso in Parione is the lengthiest entry of those just cited. None of these authors, including Andrea Palladio in his earlier guide to Rome, discuss the specific Tommasan dedication of the church. Its inclusion in these guides, often without the company of the other two Thomas churches in Rome, suggests that San Tommaso in Parione was well known.

The marriage, death, and birth records of the small congregation also support this contention. Many significant noble families living in Rome celebrated marriages,

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39 Ibid., 10-11; Pericoli 92, today these decorations are almost completely obscured by dirt and soot. Paolo Piazza, called Fra Cosimo Piazza, was born either in 1537 or 57 in Castelfranco and died in Venice in 1621 (Karl Ludwig Gallwitz, *The Handbook of Italian Renaissance Painters* (New York: Prestel, 1990). The altarpiece to which Papi and Pericoli refer might, therefore, have been painted around the end of the 16th or beginning of the 17th century. Some semblance of the ceiling frescoes are visible through this grime but it is impossible to see with any degree of clarity what the subjects of these paintings might be. Dark, poorly aerated, and used only by the small Ethiopian Christian population of Rome, San Tommaso in Parione has fallen into a ruinous state.

40 Papi, 11.

baptisms, and funerals in San Tommaso in Parione. Most prominent among these was the wedding of the Baroque sculptor, Gian Lorenzo Bernini to Caterina Tetio in May of 1639.42 Later in the 17th-century Antonio Bernini was also married in San Tommaso, demonstrating the family’s longstanding commitment to the church.43 Other family names frequently repeated in the marriage and death records are the Bevilaqua, Boncampagni, and most essential for this discussion, the Giustiniani. From the early years of the 17th century (c.1609) until the 18th century, four Giustiniani marriages and two funerals took place in San Tommaso.44 Given that the Giustiniani were supporters of the Oratorian order from its inception, one might speculate that their affiliation with the church was inspired by Neri’s ordination there and the subsequent followers that event initiated.45 Even if the Giustiniani were not members of the San Tommaso congregation before 1609 (the date of the first Giustiniani funeral held there) they must certainly have been aware of the building’s import as the place of ordination for one of the family’s heroes. What part, if any, the Giustiniani interest in San Tommaso played in their likely commission for Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*, will be discussed in the later pages of this chapter.

42 Archivio Storico del Vicariato di Roma, San Tommaso in Parione, I Matrimoni 1576-1687, tomo I. This event is also noted by Scarfone, 13.
43 Archivio Storico del Vicariato di Roma, San Tommaso in Parione, I Matrimoni 1576-1687, tomo II; there is not precise date recorded for this event but it appears in a list of marriages dating from 1654-1708.
44 *Ibid.*, tomo I-IV; the funeral of Emilia Giustiniani took place on August 26th, 1609; that of Giuseppe Giustiniani sometime between 1708-22. The following Giustiniani marriages occurred in San Tommaso from 1576-1607: Sestimia Giustiniani; Vincenzo Giustiniani but no specific date is recorded for either, making it difficult to tell if these ceremonies took place before or after Neri’s ordination. In the records labeled “From 1748-1793” D. Michele Giustiniani and Lito Octavia Giustiniani celebrated marriages in San Tommaso. These records are extracted from the index of matrimonies; the volume containing the more detailed records and marriage licenses for volumes I-IV was being restored at the time of this research. It was thus impossible to verify to whom each individual was married, nor was it possible to check for explanations as to the selection of this church.
45 The Giustiniani have been linked closely to the Oratorian order (Silvia Danesi Squarzina, “I Giustiniani e l’Oratorio dei Filippini.” *Storia dell’Arte* 85 (1995): 369-94), but they have never before been mentioned in regard to the understudied church of San Tommaso in Parione.
The papal bulls of Gregory XIII and Clement VIII and the revisions to the *Martyrologium* demonstrate the concern of the Church with the relics of St. Thomas. De Lectis’ new *vita* of St. Thomas, the 1596 *avviso* describing the events of Sao Tomé, and the refurbishment of three Roman churches dedicated to San Tommaso indicate that Thomas’s incredulity had in no way tarnished his reputation. Moreover, what emerges from these events and records is a surprising lack of pictorial representations of the Doubting Thomas, despite the city’s superior claim to the apostle and the proximity of his relics in Ortona. To my knowledge, and as mentioned above, there were only three prominent representations of the theme commissioned in Rome prior to the Caravaggio painting of c.1602: a bronze tondo designed by Raphael for a chapel in Santa Maria della Pace, a fresco by Francesco Salviati in San Giovanni Decollato, and another fresco of the same subject by Cesare Nebbia (1536-1614) in the papal chapel of the Lateran palace. As the only monumental Roman representations of the *Doubting Thomas* executed prior to Caravaggio’s own version of the subject, these three works warrant discussion here.

The first of these projects was a bronze tondo of the *Doubting Thomas* designed by Raphael and carried out by Lorenzetto (fig. 76; c.1511-27). Originally intended for the side chapel of Agostino Chigi in Santa Maria della Pace, the relief was never put in place and today remains in Chiaravalle Abbey in Milan.\(^{46}\) Set in a Bramantesque architectural setting, Christ and Thomas stand at the center of a perfectly balanced, classicizing composition. To their right and left the other apostles crowd to glimpse with wonder Christ’s risen body. Thomas is youthful and un-bearded, slightly tentative and stooped as he reaches out a finger and touches Christ’s side. Raphael’s composition may

have been inspired by Albrecht Dürer’s widely circulated woodcut of the same subject (1510, fig. 77) created as part of his Small Passion series. Both the print and tondo share a strict classicizing formalism but Raphael has used linear perspective to create spatial breadth around his figures. The orthogonal lines of the floor and the barrel vault of the illusionistic interior facilitate the viewer’s focus on Raphael’s primary subject: Christ and St. Thomas. This tondo, had it been placed in situ, would have been viewed (like Dürer’s woodcut) as part of a Passion cycle. The altarpiece of the chapel was to have been the Resurrection with this tondo and another of Christ in Limbo flanking the central image. Together the reliefs and central altarpiece would have conveyed a message of faith and redemption appropriate for a private chapel.

Because Raphael’s program was never completed or placed in situ, it is nearly impossible to reconstruct how widely known these plans were, or if his drawings of the Incredulity were circulated outside his workshop. A fresco of the Doubting Thomas by Francesco Salviati for San Giovanni Decollato was a much more public, visible representation of the theme (fig. 78). Painted around 1553 the fresco decorated the second side altar on the right lateral wall of the church nave. The Florentine mannerist artist had painted an altarpiece of the same subject c. 1547 (now in the Louvre) and it is likely that he reused his own preparatory drawing for the composition in San Giovanni Decollato. Unfortunately the San Giovanni fresco is now impossible to visit due to an ongoing restoration of the church and closure of the archives housed there. Much more is known, therefore, about the Louvre painting than about the prominent Roman fresco. In her monograph on the artist, for instance, Luisa Mortari includes a catalogue entry for the

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47 Ibid., 136.
earlier canvas but not for the fresco, which she mentions briefly as a “variant” of the first successful picture.\(^{49}\) According to the documents associated with the Louvre altarpiece, the patron of the Louvre painting was Tommaso Guadagni, adviser to Francesco I, and it was likely made for the chapel of the Conti Guadagni in a convent of the Jacobins in Lyon (destroyed 1817).\(^{50}\) The Florentine chapel was founded by the uncle of Tommaso Guadagni, who was also named Tommaso and who had died in 1533.\(^{51}\) An inscription on the bottom of Salviati’s preparatory drawing explains that family friend Albizo del Bene was administrator to the heirs of the deceased Tommaso Guadagni and oversaw the execution of the painting.\(^{52}\) This same Albizo may have been involved in the Roman *Doubting Thomas* commission since he saw the earlier painting and later returned to Rome.

The Louvre composition, like the fresco in San Giovanni, depicts the Incredulity in a close, confined room. A colonnade is visible in the background but it is otherwise difficult to locate the narrative more precisely. Salviati has brought the figures closer to the picture plane than did Raphael in his tondo composition. Christ stands to the viewer’s right while Thomas kneels and extends a dainty finger toward Christ’s heroically muscled

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\(^{51}\) Nova, n.5, p.101.

\(^{52}\) Miller, 123. The inscription reads “di michelagnolo pitore Fiorentino alias Salviati diciaro questo esere il disegnio della tavola daltare che io promeso fara a albizio delben…/chome apare pe[r]uno[?] contratto rogato per M[esser] piero franc[es]co machalli notaio Fiorentino oggi questo di dinovembre.” This names Piero Francesco Maccalli as the notary and cites a contract between the merchant Albizo del Bene and Salviati (122). A *locatio tabule* found by Miller has clarified the meaning of the inscription. In this document dated to 1544, Albizo del Bene is named as the executor of the will of the deceased Tommaso Guadani, thus enabling his oversight of the Salviati commission. The Louvre painting was completed between 1544-45. Prior to Miller’s documentary discovery, Alessandro Nova had suggested that the inscription might refer to the San Giovanni fresco, rather than the Louvre painting. Vasari wrote that Tommaso Guadagni (the second) brought the altarpiece to Lyon himself, thereby confusing the matter of Albizo’s involvement (Miller 122-23). But, given the new evidence noted by Miller, it seems unlikely that the inscription refers to the San Giovanni fresco.
body. His staff oddly balanced against his leg, Christ juts out his right hip, striking an exaggerated contrapposto. This exaggeration is mirrored in the figure of Thomas, whose right leg appears painfully crushed beneath his own body. Thomas dons an expression of naïveté—his brow is raised and beardless he seems young and vulnerable. The other apostles line the middle ground, creating a slight parting where the two protagonists stand. Salviati’s use of strong light in the foreground with ever deepening pockets of dark in the background creates a theatrical stage-like effect. One apostle—at the far right the composition—looks directly out at the viewer in a provocative way, soliciting the viewer’s attention.

There are few compositional differences between Salviati’s oil painting and his fresco of the *Doubting Thomas* in San Giovanni. To the latter the artist added a draped pedestal upon which Christ stands, thus making the kneeling Thomas appear even more diminutive in nature. Salviati has also changed the architecture of the foreground in his later version of the subject: the figures now stand atop steps and, most significantly, there is a bust-length donor portrait at the far bottom left of the fresco. Without access to the elusive archives of San Giovanni it is impossible to determine who this donor is. Those scholars who have examined the *fondi* of the Confraternity have not found documents pertaining to this chapel.53 Thus, little is known about the *Incredulity* in San Giovanni, save that Salviati and his workshop reused the Louvre drawing as the basis for the

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53 Nova, 101 n.12, Nova cites the research of Michael Hirst, “Francesco Salviati’s *Visitation*” *Burlington Magazine* CIII (1961): 240; Rolf E. Keller, *Das Oratorium von San Giovanni Decollato in Rom* (Neuchâtel, 1976) 118-119; Jean S. Weisz, *Pittura e Misericordia: The Oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato in Rome* (Ann Arbor, 1984) 19. This fresco, it should be reiterated, is in the church of San Giovanni Decollato, not the adjacent oratory. Indeed my own attempts to access the collective archives of the church and oratory were every time thwarted by the officers of the Confraternity who insisted on its closure due to ongoing restoration.
composition and that Albizo del Bene, the wealthy Florentine merchant, may have been involved.

The Confraternity of San Giovanni (established in 1490) seems to have had no particular claim to Thomas or the subject of his *Incredulity*. They were founded with the purpose of comforting condemned prisoners prior to their executions but it was to the more famous Oratory (attached to the church of San Giovanni) that prisoners were taken before their deaths. From 1540 on, the feast of the Decollation was celebrated by the release of a selected prisoner who was then processed from the prison to the Oratory, where they were released. At no time was the church of San Giovanni part of these processional rites. The decorations in the church were therefore not as integral to the workings of the Confraternity as were those in the Oratory. In fact, the completion of the Oratory took precedence over that of the Church, though by the 1530’s construction on the Church was nearing completion. In 1518 the brothers of the Confraternity assembled in Santa Maria della Pace where Pope Leo X reconfirmed the privileges of a bull instated by Innocent VIII which granted indulgences to visitors of the Church of San Giovanni Decollato on the Feast of the Decollation of St. John the Baptist, and also on Sundays. By the time Salviati and his workshop finished work on the *Incredulity* in the Church (c.1553) the celebration of this Feast would have been well known.

Contemporary guidebooks do not, however, describe the interior decoration of the church and without access to the archives of the Confraternity it is simply impossible to

54 Weisz, 5.
55 Ibid., 5.
56 Ibid., 11.
57 Ibid., 10.
reconstruct the reception of these decorations or to know with any degree of certainty who commissioned this image of Thomas or why.

Nevertheless, this fresco, along with the rest of the Church decorations (all executed by Salviati or his workshop) represented a monumental undertaking and the building was, during the 1550’s, the destination for Florentine artists working in Rome. It is therefore possible to refer to this image of the Doubting Thomas as one of the few highly visible representations of the subject in Rome prior to 1602. To this short catalogue another notable example may be added: a fresco of the Incredulity (figs. 79 and 80) made by Cesare Nebbia (1536-1614) c.1595 in the Papal Chapel of the Lateran Palace. Commissioned by the Franciscan Pope Sixtus V (r.1585-90) the decorations of the papal chapel were considered part of Domenico Fontana’s larger architectural projects pertaining to the Lateran complex. Here the Doubting Thomas occupies the entire western lateral coving of the vaulted chapel. The fresco is one of five narrative scenes depicting the Resurrection, Noli Me Tangere, First Appearance to the Apostles, Doubting Thomas, and finally the Ascension. In the pendentives are the Four Evangelists framed by papal saint Gregory the Great (a favorite of Sixtus V), the Latin and Greek doctors of the Church, and other unidentified saints. Enclosed by elaborate stucco frames replete with the papal regalia of Sixtus V, these scenes are the visual focus of the small rectangular space.

Upon entering the chapel the viewer faces the scene of Christ’s Resurrection on the southern coving. This episode initiates the chain of events depicted in the other

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58 Vasari himself may have also been involved in the execution of these decorations (Mortari, 115).
60 Mandel, 53.
frescos and thus is a logical starting place for a visual analysis of the chapel. The square composition of the *Resurrection* is framed by the stemma of Sixtus V, made obvious by the ubiquitous *monte* and Lion. Christ appears to bound from his tomb, his right leg suspended above the ground, his right arm thrust outward. His guards are hardly able to sleep through this divine awakening—to the left of the composition one stares in surprise at the apparition before him, while simultaneously scrambling to raise himself. The other guard, to Christ’s left, also appears caught mid-action as he flings an arm over his forehead and struts forcefully forward, disturbing another guard at his feet. All of this upset has not affected Christ, who, despite his highly active pose, appears calm and in control, his perfect, muscled body restored to its pre- Crucifixion state.

Opposite this scene, on the northern coving of the chapel, is the depiction of the *Noli me Tangere* (fig. 79). The tension and drama of the first episode has dissipated and here Christ stands in a more gentle contrapposto, the shovel of his gardener disguise still in hand. Mary Magdalene kneels at his feet, having recognized her savior, who is now illuminated by a glowing halo. Christ reaches out his left hand, quieting Mary’s desire to touch him, thus revealing the dark, bloodied mark of the nail. To the left of this scene is the depiction of *Christ’s First Appearance to the Apostles* on the eastern lateral coving of the chapel. The inclusion of this episode by Cesare Nebbia is unusual and in fact highlights the importance of the subsequent scene, in which Thomas does appear. Like the Early Christian example on the cruciform casket of Paschal I (fig. 4) this Resurrection cycle includes a separate scene of Christ’s first miraculous appearance to a larger group of disciples. In this fresco Christ stands with open arms, still wearing the loose drapery
of his entombment; airy lightness surrounds him as his fully-clothed apostles kneel, gawk, and pray at the sight of their once lost Savior.

Things have changed considerably in the opposing scene (fig. 80). Occupying the western coving of the chapel, the *Incredulity* takes place between two large columns, implying the closed space of the Gospel narrative. Christ once again stands at the center of the long, rectangular composition and is flanked by the apostles. In this composition, however, the apostles no longer give Christ their undivided attention: instead they talk amongst themselves and a few, huddled around a table at the far right seem positively distracted by their own conversation. At the center of this crowd, Thomas kneels, reaching his finger to Christ’s side, touching the red gash inflicted by Longinus’ spear. Thomas is older than in many other depictions of this theme; his head is bald, his beard full, his eyes sunken with age. Once again, Christ wears only loose drapery while Thomas and his peers are fully clothed, many of their shirtsleeves rolled up to reveal their forearms and their robes cut short to expose Greek-style sandals. This contrast in attire only accentuates the otherness of Christ: he is a God, risen miraculously from a closed tomb; they are still men, not yet martyred or sainted.

The cycle concludes with the *Ascension* at the center of the vault (fig. 79). Christ ascends alight a glorious cloudbank, heralded by two angels on the left and right of the mandorla-shaped embankment of clouds. The angels rest lightly on the mountains beneath them, easily recognized as the three *monti* of Sixtus V’s *stemma*. Kneeling before the *monte* are the apostles who look up in wonder at their rising Lord and God. By casting this final scene in front of the *monti*, Nebbia has relocated the final event of
Christ’s time on earth to the Montalto of Sixtus V. 61 This pictorial strategy was employed by many artists in the service of Sixtus and situates the decorations of this Chapel within the context of the Pope’s other artistic exploits. 62 It is tempting to see Sixtus V’s inclusion of the *Doubting Thomas* as indicative of his Franciscan devotions and thus of his awareness of the subject’s connotations within his Order (as recounted in chapter 2). 63 It is similarly enticing to see the inclusion of the *Doubting Thomas* as evidence of the Pope’s special interest in the theme. The Incredulity is not, however, included in any of the Pope’s other prolific decorative projects. Indeed it seems that this episode is simply a logical part of the Resurrection narrative, just as it was often inserted as such in Medieval art (see chapter 1). Although this was his private chapel Sixtus V must have invited visiting dignitaries and guests of the Lateran Palace to view his newly finished apartments, including the Cappella Papale. 64 Thus, this example of the *Incredulity* was likely more visible than its location in a domestic residence implies.

The fresco in the Cappella Papale, the *Doubting Thomas* in San Giovanni, and Raphale’s designs for the tondo to be placed in Santa Maria della Pace, hardly constitute a pictorial tradition. Unlike Florence, with its claim to Thomas as a civic emblem of justice, Rome did not similarly employ imagery of Thomas despite being home to no fewer than three churches dedicated to the apostle. The city also harbored the most

61 Pope Felice Peretti di Montalto (Sixtus V) was known by Cardinal Montalto. He dedicated numerous buildings and monasteries “di Montalto” and went on to establish the “monti” (or hills) of Rome. The three monti depicted in the fresco are also part of the Pope’s *stemma*.
64 It is impossible to know this with absolute certainty but Patricia Waddy (among others) has demonstrated that palace interiors were hardly as private as their domestic function might imply (Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and Art of the Plan* (New York: The Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1990)).
important Tommasan relic: Santa Croce in Gerusalemme claims to have acquired
Thomas’ finger (fig. 94), the very one used to probe Christ’s wound, from St. Helena’s
voyage to the Holy Land in the time of Constantine. Today displayed in a modern
monstrance, the digit occupies a central place in the largest collection of Passion relics in
the world. One of the Holy nails, two Holy Thorns, three fragments of the True Cross,
the whole crossbeam of the Good Thief’s cross, Christ’s name placard (which was nailed
to his cross), fragments of the Holy sepulcher and of the Column of the Flagellation
accompany Thomas’s finger in Santa Croce. It cannot be coincidental that Thomas’s
finger is included in a collection of relics that explicitly confirm Christ’s Passion and
subsequent Resurrection, affirmed through Thomas’s touch. An altarpiece of the
Doubting Thomas by the Baroque artist Giuseppe Passeri (1654-1714) occupies the first
altar on the left side of the nave of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. This painting may have
replaced an older version of the subject, but there are no documents to confirm this
speculation.

Thomas’s finger relic would have been processed with or even separately from
the other Passion relics in the Church’s possession and thus should have been widely
known to Roman devotees. Nevertheless, no known pictorial depictions of Thomas were
commissioned to accompany the prestigious relic. The apparent dearth of imagery of
Thomas is remarkable. It indicates that despite the city’s superior claim to Thomas as a
missionary sent out from Rome to convert the peoples of distant lands, they did not
develop a contemporary artistic tradition like that embraced by Florentines. Indeed with

65 Most, 220.
66 The documents of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme are housed in their own archive, adjacent to the church
itself. My research did not yield any documentary finds pertaining to the painting or relic. The helpful
secretarial staff there also did not have any additional information about the mysterious provenance of the
relic.
three Tommasan churches and an important relic of the saint, Rome would have been an ideal place for the emergence of such a tradition. The restoration of Tommasan churches in preparation for Holy Year, the bulls acknowledging Ortona as the rightful resting place of Thomas’s bones, Baronio’s reiteration of the December 21st feast date, the report of the apostle’s intervention on behalf of Catholics in Sao Tomé, and renewed interest in the Holy Shroud provided ample inspiration for the emergence of a new, Roman *Doubting Thomas* tradition.

**DEPICTING DOUBT, INVOKING BELIEF: CARAVAGGIO’S *DOUBTING THOMAS***

Given the Roman milieu outlined in the preceding section, it is now possible to understand Caravaggio’s c.1602 depiction of the *Incredulity* (fig. 81) as the first in what was to become a distinctly Roman Thomas tradition. The most copied of all his works, Caravaggio’s interpretation of the *Doubting Thomas* became the inspiration for renewed interest in a subject well-suited to Catholic-Reformatory goals. Why, given the lack of pictorial precedents in Rome, was the painting commissioned in the first place?

I will begin with a thorough formal analysis with an aim toward clarifying the ways in which Caravaggio’s painting diverged from the pictorial traditions sketched in the earlier pages of this dissertation. Second, a review of the literature about this painting, beginning with the accounts of 17th-century biographers, reveals pertinent questions about the commission, yet unanswered. Previous Caravaggio scholarship approached the *Doubting Thomas* tentatively because the documentary evidence regarding this commission was scant and therefore patronage could not be firmly
determined. In 2001 Silvia Danesi Squarzina’s exhibition catalogue *Caravaggio e i Giustiniani: toccar con mano una collezione del seicento* resolved the question of patronage, establishing Vincenzo Giustiniani as the patron. Little attempt has been made, however, to situate the painting within the Roman ambience or to explain the specific devotional interests at play in this commission. In this section I will propose possible reasons for the unusual choice of the *Incredulity* as a subject for an easel painting. These explanations complicate our understanding of how Caravaggio’s painting was received and contribute to how we might interpret it today.

**CARAVAGGIO’S INCREDULITY**

Painted around 1602 while the artist was living in the Mattei family palace, Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* was one of several private religious canvases completed during his years in Rome. As such, it offers an important example of Caravaggio’s religious work for a private patron. Preceded by a rich visual tradition and followed by an abundance of copies, Caravaggio’s c.1602 *Incredulity* represented a unique handling of the biblical episode—not simply because it was painted with his startling naturalism, but because Caravaggio used this stylistic device to convey his inimitable interpretation of the religious subject.

The rectangular canvas is 107 x 146 cm, and is the first to depict the episode with three-quarter length figures.\(^7\) Christ stands at the left of the composition while Thomas

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\(^7\) Silvia Danesi Squarzina, “Incredulità di S. Tommaso,” in *Caravaggio e i Giustiniani: toccar con mano una collezione del seicento* (Milan: Electa, 2001), 280 describes the condition of the picture as “excellent.” The painting has been relined once and as per the Stiflung Schlösser und Gärten, Sanssouci (Potsdam) conservation policy, the original varnish has not been removed. The result, according to Squarzina, is a
and two other apostles form a cluster in the center of the picture. His head bent in quiet concentration, Christ manually guides Thomas’s hand to his side. Thomas touches dirty middle finger to thumb as he extends his pointer forward; it is a subtle figural detail but is one that allows the viewer to identify with Thomas as an ordinary man. Caravaggio employed a similarly colloquial gesture in his depiction of the angel with *St. Matthew* in his altarpiece for the Contarelli Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi (1602-03; fig 117). Here the angel, descended directly from Heaven to inspire Matthew as he writes his Gospel, is “ticking off on his fingers the generations of Christ’s genealogy.”68 The viewer’s identification with Thomas may be important to an interpretation of Caravaggio’s painting, as we shall see.

Their heads craned forward, the two apostles standing behind Christ and Thomas are unidentified. Although the upper, balding figure bears resemblance to a mourning disciple in the contemporaneous *Death of the Virgin* (c.1601-03; fig. 116), he is not readily identifiable in either painting.69 Similarly, the apostle with darker features immediately behind Thomas shares the same brown, full hair as the incredulous apostle on the left side of the table of the *Supper at Emmaus* (1601; fig. 83) usually identified as Peter.70 Whether Caravaggio used the same models for these pictures or not, he has adopted a visual type for his representations of apostles: they are usually bearded, middle


69 Pamela Askew has tentatively suggested that this balding figure is St. Paul whose surprise at the Virgin’s mortal death is expressed by his outreached hand and parted lips. Through Paul’s surprise, Caravaggio “isolates the experience of revelation as one of sudden illumination, of ‘seeing’ in the sense of knowing, understanding, and feeling” (*Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990) 43). Askew’s identifications are, however, speculative and cannot be confirmed by any obvious attributes. If it is Paul who also appears with Thomas in the *Incredulity* than his “experience of revelation” has surely redoubled since his first revelatory experience as a young man (see the *Conversion of St. Paul*, fig. 93).

70 Puglisi, 212. The shocked apostle on the left in the *Supper* is usually identified as Cleophas.
to older in age, and appear humble and poor in dress. The *Doubting Thomas* is no exception: all three apostles, including Thomas, are bearded, their faces ruddy and wrinkled. Thomas is identifiable only because of his unique actions—only he is invited to touch Christ’s side wound. Thomas is dressed in what appears to be contemporary, working-class clothing. His shirtsleeve is torn or is pulled away at the shoulder to reveal the white of his undergarment. This whiteness, which mirrors the color of Christ’s mantle, guides the viewer’s eyes along Thomas’s shoulder, down his arm, toward Christ’s wounded side. Punctuating the primary action of the composition, the shoulder seam accentuates the path toward aesthetic lightness, Christ’s white mantle and glowing flesh, and toward spiritual illumination, Christ’s gaping wound.

Like the *Supper at Emmaus* or the *Death of the Virgin*, the spectator is brought within the folds of an intimate circle of characters in Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*. Thomas’s wonder is apparent as he inserts his finger into Christ’s open wound—his brow raised in surprise. Christ’s side laceration (and the scars of the nails on his hands) do not bleed but instead appear soft and clean as Thomas’s finger moves easily into the cut, gently pushing up a fold of flesh. An ambiguous light illuminates the group from the left side of the picture, bathing the apostles in warmth. The two unidentified apostles who stand behind the doubting Thomas appear equally curious, but their faces do not register the magnitude of emotion that is apparent in Thomas. Clearly Caravaggio has made us witness to the moment of Thomas’ conversion which, “by good painting and

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71 I believe that Thomas’s shirtsleeve is torn at the shoulder seam, but it is also possible that this is a type of commonly worn sleeve that detaches at the shoulder. Caravaggio depicted this type of sleeve on the cheating youth at the far left of his *Cardsharps* of c. 1594-95 (oil on canvas, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth) and on the figure of a tax collector (at the far end of the table) in the *Calling of St. Matthew* (1599-1600; oil on canvas, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome). In both of these paintings, however, the sleeve is attached to the bodice by a series of short seams. Unlike the cardsharp’s sleeve, Thomas’s shirt only appears to ‘detach’ in one place.
modeling...shows on the faces of all those present such an expression of astonishment and naturalness of skin and flesh that in comparison all other pictures seemed to be of colored paper.”

In addition to the innovative three-quarter-length format, Thomas has been shifted from his customary position on the left of the composition to the right side of the canvas—an artistic decision that immediately sets Caravaggio’s painting apart from others of the same subject. As a result, Caravaggio’s Thomas must extend his arm in front of Christ in order to reach the laceration. The viewer’s gaze is drawn from Christ’s side to the apostles, to Thomas’s gesture—completing a visual circle around the composition. Despite the naturalism observed by 17th-century critic Joachim von Sandrart when he suggested that other pictures “seemed to be of colored paper” when compared with Caravaggio’s Doubting Thomas, elements of the composition betray careful artifice. Howard Hibbard suggests that the canvas is so meticulously plotted as to make it unnatural: Caravaggio “placed four heads in a concentrated diamond in the center of a canvas that is artfully planned and plotted...thus the shockingly realistic Doubting Thomas could even be called classicizing in its composition.”

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73 Howard Hibbard, Caravaggio (Oxford: Westview Press, 1983), 168. Other scholars, including Keith Christiansen, “Caravaggio and “L’esempio davanti del naturale,” Art Bulletin 128 (1986): 421-445 also suggest that Caravaggio “apparently did not view art as a simple demonstration of naturalism,” and that his “repeated recourse to poses and compositional devices of such High Renaissance masters as Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian are evidence of a more complex approach to painting than was allowed by unsympathetic contemporaries” (422). Much of the criticism from “unsympathetic contemporaries” was in reaction to what they deemed to be Caravaggio’s lack of artifice—a necessary element of good design as passed down from Alberti. The early biographers were, however, inevitably conditioned by their artistic ideals and so could not (or would not) appreciate Caravaggio’s conceit—which, though naturalistic in style, was hardly without artifice. Calvesi also posits, less persuasively, that Caravaggio’s composition of the Incredulity forms a cross with the left to right gesture of Thomas’s arm intersecting with the vertical positioning of the figures. This does not seem like the sort of stylistic device Caravaggio would employ, nor is it visually convincing, for if that had been Caravaggio’s intent, he would likely have favored the full-
However, the placement of the apostles to Christ’s proper left extracts the figures from their usual narrative roles and disrupts a strictly classical balance. As illustrations of a Biblical scene, previous representations of this subject depict a narrative that is meant to be read from left to right, beginning with the apostles and St. Thomas, and ending with Christ’s gesture of generosity. Instead, Caravaggio requires his viewers to become interlocutors, rather than readers of this picture. The viewer stands in the place where another apostle might reside had this been a sculptural group or a theatrical set, rather than a two-dimensional painting.\textsuperscript{74} Juxtaposed with Cima’s more conventional composition in the London altarpiece (fig. 46), for instance, Caravaggio’s picture seems sparse. Caravaggio has pared down the number of figures and magnified the composition so dramatically that the need for an architectural setting has been eliminated. These trademarks of Caravaggio’s style—magnification, three-quarter length figures, dramatic \textit{chiaroscuro}—are also characteristics of his private easel pictures. Indeed, had this been

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Alternately, Ellen Spolsky (“Is Touching Believing? What did Doubting Thomas Want to Know” in \textit{Satisfying Skepticism: Embodied Knowledge in the Early Modern World}, Aldershot, 2001) has proposed unconvincingly that viewers are in the position of Thomas, while the painter is in the position of Christ (39). She also emphasizes that the exchange between Thomas and Christ is sexual (a thesis taken up by Glenn Most in his chapter on images, 164). She suggests that Jesus has “feminine curls and is in a feminine contrapposto stance” and that the phallic extension of [Thomas’s] finger “pushed into the wound” makes the “wound bleed by his aggression” (40). But Christ’s wound, at least as it is depicted in Caravaggio’s painting, is not bleeding and thus cannot represent what Spolsky has termed a “virginal entrance.” Spolsky proposes that Thomas’s torn shoulder seam is vaginal in shape and Most writes that the “tension of his stance has burst open a seam in [Thomas’s] jacket” (Spolsky, 40; Most, 143). The torn seam is a stylistic device employed by Caravaggio in other paintings and refers to the humble nature of his subjects, not their actions. In his first \textit{Supper at Emmaus} (1601, National Gallery, London) for instance, an apostle wears a shirt with a torn elbow seam; the peasants praying before the \textit{Madonna of Loreto} (c.1603-6, S. Agostino, Rome) wear equally tattered clothes.

  Both Spolsky and Most indicate that “Thomas’s inquisitive gesture takes on a drastic, energetic, almost brutal quality” and Most goes so far as to describe this action as a rape (164). This interpretation of Thomas’s actions is not supported by the exegesis about the Doubting Thomas episode, nor do I believe is it reflected in Caravaggio’s painting. Christ’s left hand, as depicted in the painting, is not so much “gripping” and powerful as gently guiding. For the type of forceful gestures described by Most, one might look instead to Caravaggio’s \textit{Sacrifice of Isaac} (1603, Uffizi, Florence) in which the tension of both Abraham and the Angel’s hands are made visible by their strained knuckles, and impressed flesh.
\end{itemize}
a public religious commission, the artist might have provided a more delineated setting or a greater number of figures (as in the nearly contemporary Entombment; fig. 82). Caravaggio’s intent must have been to bring the viewer and/or the patron within the figural group—creating an intimacy that perhaps would not have been desirable in an ecclesiastical setting.

In his seminal Caravaggio Studies (1955), Walter Friedlaender called attention to the visceral exactitude of Caravaggio’s composition, noting the artist’s emphasis “on the finger thrust into the wound.” Friedlaender went on to cite Dürer’s 16th-century woodcut of the same subject (fig. 77) as a potential artistic source for Caravaggio’s graphic handling of the wound in Christ’s side. Mina Heimburger’s work has confirmed Friedlaender’s early contention that the Italian artist was influenced by Dürer. While the Doubting Thomas is not one of her primary examples, Heimbürger’s arguments are applicable in the case of Caravaggio’s painting and the Dürer print. Like his use of Dürer’s figural groupings for the Taking of Christ (fig. 84), Caravaggio looks to Dürer for his example of Thomas’s bent body, his arm grasped by Christ, and Thomas’s finger inserted into the abrasion. As Friedlaender originally suggested, Caravaggio must have derived inspiration from Northern sources in his graphic representation of Thomas’s finger inside the wound. Glenn W. Most has also reiterated the importance of the Northern iconographic tradition for Caravaggio’s painting. While the “unflinching details” of Christ’s injury, as Catherine Puglisi has described them, have been represented

Friedlaender, 162.
I do not agree, however, that Caravaggio’s painting “makes strategic use of a specifically German Renaissance iconographic tradition” (Most, 205) because Caravaggio’s Thomas, most significantly, does not probe Christ’s wound with two fingers, but rather with one, as it was most commonly depicted in Italian Renaissance art.
in other Italian pictures, it is the position of Thomas’ finger—knuckle deep within the wound—that finds its roots in the Northern tradition.  

The intentionally bloody depiction of the wound in representations of the Pietà, Lamentation, or the Man of Sorrows serve a similar purpose—the viewer is made painfully aware of Christ’s suffering, and therefore of his corporal existence (fig. 97). In his 1602-04 Entombment (fig. 82) Caravaggio depicts John’s bare hand grasping the body of Christ, inadvertently pulling open the wound in Christ’s side. The dramatic effect of this motif is carried to its extreme in the Incredulity of St. Thomas where, despite its graphic depiction, the wound no longer bleeds. Advocates of the Protestant Reformation had urged the faithful to remember anew Christ’s violent torture and demise. The Christ imagined by the pious Protestants must have been grim. Caravaggio has not favored this interpretation of Christ’s wounded body. Instead, his wounds cleaned, Christ returns triumphant, much as the Catholic Church envisioned its own triumph.

Although representations of the Doubting Thomas, like Dürer’s, and the altarpiece by the Master of the St. Bartholomew altar (fig. 95), support the hypothesis that Caravaggio found Northern precedents for his surgically detailed representation of Thomas’s finger in Christ’s side, the other aspects of these compositions do not account for Caravaggio’s particular imagery. Dürer’s print may have served as a model for Caravaggio’s portrayal of the wound, but the humble Christ of Caravaggio, as Squarzina has written, has nothing to do with Dürer’s classicizing figure. Creighton Gilbert describes Dürer’s Christ as standing “coolly in the center between deferential disciples,

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78 Puglisi, 216.
79 Squarzina, 278; email correspondence with Keith Christiansen 3/11/04.
like the chief icon of most altarpieces,” while Caravaggio boldly moves Christ off to the left, giving the mobile Thomas the center.  

Despite Caravaggio’s unprecedented compositional and stylistic choices, he must have relied on artistic sources for his *Doubting Thomas*, as in his other work. Dürer’s print likely influenced Caravaggio’s formulation of the *Doubting Thomas*; it is far less clear what his other Italian sources may have been. It is not known if, for instance, Caravaggio studied Verrocchio’s Florentine sculpture (fig. 65) on his way down from Lombardy to Rome; or if he was aware of Santi di Tito’s tenebrist altarpiece for the cathedral in San Sepolcro (fig. 55). Although it would be difficult to imagine a scenario in which Caravaggio saw Santi di Tito’s 1577 composition first hand, it is interesting to note that it is the only known example of the subject predating Caravaggio’s *Incredulity* that depicts Thomas on the right side of the composition. When one isolates Christ, Thomas, and the two apostles behind Thomas in Santi’s painting it bears some resemblance to the pared down focus in Caravaggio’s version. I am not, however, aware of any prints made of Santi di Tito’s painting, nor do we know if Caravaggio ever sketched from other artists’ work. 

Similarly, it is unlikely that we will ever know with any degree of certainty if Caravaggio saw either Salviati’s fresco of the *Incredulity* in San Giovanni in Decollato (fig. 78), or Cesare Nebbia’s fresco of the same theme in the Lateran Palace (fig. 80). Although it is easier to imagine the young artist visiting the open, publicly accessible church of San Giovanni, it cannot be ruled out that he might have been granted entrance

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to the Cappella Papale. Cesare Nebbia’s frescos were commissioned by the Franciscan Pope Sixtus V who was friendly with Cardinal Girolamo Mattei, Caravaggio’s host during the years around 1601. Notably, Caravaggio’s painting bears absolutely no resemblance to either Salviati or Nebbia’s compositions. Both of those paintings were, however, chapel decorations: the one on the vault of a cycle depicting the Resurrection, the other an altarpiece for a side chapel. Neither were private commissions and both were in keeping with the stylistic tenets of Florentine Mannerism. If Caravaggio saw either of the two Roman *Doubting Thomas* paintings, he surely did not follow the example set by their authors. This does not mean that Caravaggio was not influenced by other Tommasan factors. Two of his potential patrons had ties to the small San Tommaso churches, and with Thomas making news in Africa, the artist must have been aware of the devotional significance an image of Thomas would have in the Counter-Reformatory climate.

The vertical, rectangular composition was, in Salviati’s version and others noted in previous chapters, necessitated by the placement of these works over altars. As a private devotional image, a vertical orientation was not necessary for Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* because it would not be viewed in this way. Of Caravaggio’s nine easel paintings made during the Roman period, only three had vertical formats and these all represented single figures.⁸² Although I have made no systematic study of formats used for private easel paintings more generally, Caravaggio’s choice to employ a

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⁸² Here I am excluding those paintings that are not unanimously attributed to Caravaggio. Those works that are surely Caravaggio’s are: *Cupid* (c.1601-02, Staatliche Museen, Berlin); *St. John the Baptist* (c.1602, Pinacoteca Capitolina, Rome); *Supper at Emmaus* (1601, National Gallery, London); *Still Life with a Basket of Fruit* (c.1601, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan); *Doubting Thomas* (c.1602, Stiftung Schlösser und Gärten, Sanssouci, Potsdam); *Taking of Christ* (1602-03, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin); *Sacrifice of Isaac* (1603, Uffizi, Florence); *St. John the Baptist* (c.1603-05, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City); *St. Jerome* (c.1605, Galleria Borghese, Rome); *Supper at Emmaus* (1606, Brera, Milan).
horizontal canvas for the *Doubting Thomas* may have been influenced by customs pertaining not to Doubting Thomas imagery, but to private easel painting—namely that the horizontal format best suited narrative content.

The first *Supper at Emmaus* and the *Taking of Christ* (now in the National Gallery, Dublin) are both horizontally formatted, depict deeply tenebrist backgrounds that offset the figural action, represent Christological subjects, and were made for the Mattei family. The *Supper at Emmaus* moreover, is the prelude to the Doubting Thomas episode so it is tempting to see the *Incredulity* as part of this series. The two paintings do not share the same dimensions or patrons, however, and thus cannot be viewed as pendants, despite the chronological relationship of the subjects depicted. Although the paintings share some stylistic factors—the figures are magnified, there is dramatic use of chiaroscuro, and there are no obvious signs of the supernatural (like halos)—at least one key difference separates them. The *Supper at Emmaus* is more textually accurate than is the *Doubting Thomas*. A small group of diners is necessitated, in the case of the *Supper*, by the biblical story. Christ is at first unrecognizable to those at the table, including his own disciples. This factor legitimizes Caravaggio’s choice to depict Christ in a more naturalistic type of clothing—the Savior wears a tunic under his mantle and there is no golden halo to denote his status. The humble table, visible surprise of his friends, and naïve servant at the left of the composition are all logical visual extensions of the textual episode. In the *Doubting Thomas*, however, Caravaggio has pared down the composition so drastically that he has, in effect, cropped elements of the gospel related by John.

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The ambiguity of setting in Caravaggio’s painting, for instance, means that the narrative is not unfolding “behind closed doors” as the text dictates. Christ and Thomas are not alone, as in Verrocchio’s sculpture, but the whole cast of apostles has been narrowed down to two. Cima’s second altarpiece of the *Doubting Thomas* (fig. 47) also favored an unusual pairing of Christ and Thomas with St. Magnus. Thus, Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* was not the first to introduce anomalies to the iconographic tradition. The three-quarter length figural format and dramatic close-up favored by the artist in so many of his other private commissions create an intimacy not present in Cima’s altarpiece or Verrocchio’s sculpture. Interestingly, the manuscript illuminations of Christ and Thomas, made during the Middle Ages for wealthy religious patrons, also often employed a pared down version of the event.\(^{84}\) It seems likely that these formal choices—shared by illuminators and Caravaggio alike—were motivated by the private nature of the commissions. As such the *Incredulity* may represent a rearticulation of the private devotional painting for the early seventeenth-century devotee.

Aside from the most obvious difference between previous examples of the subject and Caravaggio’s depiction—namely the change from full-length to three-quarter-length figures and the shift of Thomas’s position from left to right—is the drastic reduction in the number of figures present at the event. Earlier representations of the subject usually belong to two compositional categories: depictions in which Christ appears to Thomas alone (figs. 57 or 65) or those where he appears to Thomas among a crowd of disciples (figs. 47 or 54). The result is to “magnify the object of scrutiny not only for participants

within the painted scene but for the viewer too. Caravaggio’s reduction of figures, from the crowded scene in Dürer’s print to the three apostles in his rendering of the Doubting Thomas, marks a significant iconographical shift in the visual representation of this subject. Although he did not work in isolation, Caravaggio’s work shares little with the artistic sources that may have influenced him. It has been suggested that such differences may be attributed to Caravaggio’s unique stylistic tendencies, making the Doubting Thomas an example of the painter’s unprecedented aesthetic inclinations. While this is undoubtedly true, the Doubting Thomas must also have engaged with contemporary devotional concerns and these might have, in turn, shaped the artist’s formal decisions.

As previously noted, the literature regarding this particular Caravaggio painting is surprisingly limited despite the expansive nature of Caravaggio scholarship in general. Nevertheless, early and modern sources alike are pertinent to establishing the authenticity, dating, and patronage of Caravaggio’s Doubting Thomas. The following review of these studies clarifies the provenance of the painting, the current consensus regarding its commission, and the arguments of those authors who have included this painting in their books or articles and have contributed to the interpretation of this picture.

INTERPRETATIONS OF CARAVAGGIO’S DOUBTING THOMAS

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85 Puglisi, 216.
No longer in question are the authenticity of the Potsdam painting or its dating to around 1602.\(^{86}\) Also recently resolved are issues related to the patronage of the painting. Because the patronage of Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* cannot be traced to a contractual agreement it has been difficult to assess the potential role of his patron in this commission. It was these men—whether of the Giustiniani or Mattei families—that must have had a hand in Caravaggio’s innovative interpretation of the subject. Caravaggio lived in the Mattei residence when the *Incredulity* was commissioned. Within walking distance from the Mattei palatial compound was the third of the San Tommaso churches, in Parione. It was there that Filippo Neri was ordained and where the Giustiniani, the patron of the *Doubting Thomas* by Caravaggio, held significant family rites during the 17\(^{th}\)-century. Caravaggio’s early biographers reported conflicting information about the painting.

These biographers were not impressed by the *Doubting Thomas* they described. In his 1672 *vita* of Caravaggio, Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1615-96) wrote that the *Doubting Thomas* is a picture of “Saint Thomas thrusting his finger into the wound in the side of the Savior, who guides his hand, removing the shroud to reveal his chest;” indeed Christ does seem to be *removing* his shroud since, as Keith Christiansen hypothesized, it appears that Christ’s rear must be completely exposed from behind!\(^{87}\) There may have

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\(^{86}\) Squarzina outlines the details of the controversy regarding this originality of this work (2001, 278). During the 1940’s and 50’s debate swirled around the firm attribution of this painting to Caravaggio. Concern that it was a copy, made for Orazio del Negro dominated much of the conversation about this picture. Further complication was added when in 1943 Roberto Longhi attributed a copy of the *Incredulity* now in Messina to Caravaggio (in the Museo Nazionale, Messina) (279). Eventually Longhi’s attribution was corrected (1951) and the much earlier attribution of the Potsdam picture to Caravaggio was restored (Voss, 1923). These issues were further complicated, writes Squarzina, by political strife with the Soviet Union and the former inaccessibility of the painting (280; Denis Mahon, for instance, based his analysis of the Potsdam *Doubting Thomas* on a photographic reproduction, 1951).

\(^{87}\) Friedlaender, 237 for this translation of Bellori’s *Le vite de’pittori, scultori e architetti moderni* (Rome, 1672). Keith Christiansen noted the ironic naturalism of Christ’s shroud in a conversation via email dated
been some significance to Bellori’s choice of words, as we shall see later in this chapter. Malvasia recorded an incident in his 1678 *Vite de’ pittori bolognesi* when the painter Ludovico Carracci went to see the *Incredulity*, or more likely a copy of the original, in the home of the Lambertini family in Bologna. Ludovico apparently found nothing in the painting but “a great contrast of light and shadow; it was too obedient to nature, lacked decorum, was of little grace and intelligence, and was clearly ruinous to good design.” Bellori catalogued this picture among those of Caravaggio’s that “often degenerated into low and vulgar forms,” and Baglione implied that Caravaggio swindled the commission from Ciriaco Mattei, “relieving this gentleman of many hundreds of scudi.” Sandrart, as noted earlier, was the only early biographer to find some value in the naturalism of Caravaggio’s conceit: suggesting that it made other paintings look like imposters. Despite some of the early critics’ apparent disdain for Caravaggio’s version of the *Doubting Thomas*, it was his most frequently copied work during the 17th-century, surely revealing a different reception by the more general public. Nonetheless, Caravaggio’s naturalism, particularly in this painful image, must have startled his contemporaries who were more accustomed to the type represented in Salviati’s San Giovanni fresco (fig. 78).

Inventories and other documents have revealed that Baglione must have mistaken the *Doubting Thomas* he saw in the Mattei collection for an autograph Caravaggio. The Mattei inventories of 1624 record only the possession of “a painting of St. Thomas with

March 11, 2004. About the *Doubting Thomas* Bellori writes, “Seguitava egli nel favore del Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani che l impiegò in alcuni quadri l Incoronazione di spine e San Tommaso che pone il dito nella piaga del costato del Signore il quale gli accosta la mano e si svela il petto da un lenzuolo discostandolo dalla poppa” (249).

88 Malvasia, *Vite de’ pittori bolognesi* (Bologna, 1678), as translated by Friedlaender, 161.
89 *Ibid.*, see Friedlaender’s entry on the *Doubting Thomas* for English translations of these biographies.
90 Sandrart wrote about the *Doubting Thomas* during his residence in the Giustiniani palace around ca. 1630 (as translated by Friedlander, 261).
Gaspare Celio’s early reports about the Mattei collection noted three Caravaggio paintings, none of which were the *Doubting Thomas*. Unlike the other Caravaggio works owned by the Mattei, this picture is never given an artistic attribution. In 1642 Baglione had, however, credited Ciriaco Mattei with the *Doubting Thomas* commission. Evidence has clarified that Caravaggio’s rival was mistaken; the Mattei owned what was likely a very good copy of Caravaggio’s original. The 1638 inventory of Vincenzo Giustiniani documents his ownership of Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*. Bellori (1672) and Joachim von Sandrart (1606-88) both confirm the *Incredulity* to be a Giustiniani painting.

Although Vincenzo was undoubtedly the patron of Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*, the Marchese’s brother, Benedetto, may also have been involved in the commission, as Squarzina has shown. Squarzina’s 1997-98 publication of Benedetto Giustiniani’s inventories distinguish Benedetto’s patronage from that of Vincenzo thus viewing the brothers as representatives of the two sides of Seicento culture: the religious and the secular. Squarzina details how these inventories are documents of Benedetto’s

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91 Squarzina, “The Collection of Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani,” *Burlington Magazine* 139 (1997): 766-91, and 140 (1998): 102-14. The un-attributed Mattei picture described as a St. Thomas in a black frame, appears repeatedly in the family’s archives from the *Inventario ereditario di Giovanni Battista Mattei* of 1624, to the 1824 *Stima del 1824*—these documents are published in full in Francesca Cappelletti, *Il trattenimento di virtuosi: le collezioni secentesche di quadri nei palazzo Mattei di Roma* (Rome: Argos Edizioni, 1994). The picture, however, is never given Caravaggio’s authorship, despite the Mattei owning, and documenting other Caravaggio and Caravagggesque pictures. The absence of Caravaggio’s name in reference to this painting is noteworthy. Caravaggio is recorded as having lived in the Mattei residence for about a year beginning in the spring of 1601. Baglione’s account in Friedlaender (137) suggests that Caravaggio painted the *Doubting Thomas* for Ciriaco Mattei, while Bellori and Sandrart write that the picture was executed for the Giustiniani (189, 207).

92 Celio’s was published in 1638 but may date to as early as 1607 (Squarzina 2001, 280). Mina Gregori (1991) and Cappelletti-Testa (1994) also discuss the importance of Celio’s account of the three autograph paintings.

93 *Ibid.*, 280. Squarzina 2003, 398 also reiterates that the Mattei owned a high quality copy of Caravaggio’s original *Incredulity*. More specifically, such a copy was found in a private Roman collection with a frame inscribed “GM” (Giuseppe Mattei). The copy was reframed when at the end of the Settecento new frames were made for numerous paintings in the Mattei collection (398).
artistic taste. Included are countless examples of the Virgin and Child, saints in prayer, and other religious subjects, many of which are painted in the ‘candlelit’ style so popular in Caravaggio’s Rome. Benedetto clearly favored the North-Italian art of the Carracci, Francesco Albani, and Caravaggio—evidence that suggests patrons like Benedetto viewed Caravaggio’s work within the context of other Lombard-trained artists.

The *Incredulity of St. Thomas* by Caravaggio is not listed in either the Guardarobba or the 1621 inventory of Benedetto’s picture collection. Instead, the painting appears in Vincenzo’s 1638 inventory. Squarzina maintained that the *Incredulity* should nevertheless be considered an example of Benedetto’s patronage, not his brother Vincenzo’s. Benedetto, born in Genoa in 1554, rose in the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the papacy of Clement VIII and was named Cardinal Legate to Bologna from 1606 to 1611. According to Squarzina Benedetto was “in sympathy with the two main lines of the reform in painting—the adherence to reality via an imitation of the ‘natural’, and the revival of the religious fervor of the early Christian era”.94 This combination of artistic values would have facilitated Benedetto’s appreciation and patronage of Caravaggio—a little studied connection in the past, rectified by Squarzina’s scholarship. Squarzina relies on the primary sources of the Giustiniani archive: namely Benedetto’s ‘Entrata della Guardarobba’ drawn up between 1600 and c.1610, a post mortem inventory of 1621, and Vincenzo Giustiniani’s inventory of 1638.95

94 Squarzina 1997, 768.
Squarzina’s proposed addition of the *Doubting Thomas* to Benedetto’s collection is noteworthy as the picture is only catalogued in Vincenzo’s 1638 inventory. In the catalogue for the 2001 Giustinian exhibition, Squarzina introduced new evidence that countered her previous argument in favor of Benedetto’s patronage of the *Doubting Thomas*. In 1606 Orazio del Negro reported having seen “una copia del S. Tomaso del signor Vincenzo, di Caravaggio” (a copy of the *St. Thomas* of signor Vincenzo, by Caravaggio) in Genoa. This statement indicates that that the original painting was possessed by Vincenzo, and that any copies of Caravaggio’s *Incredulity* were made after Vincenzo’s authentic version. Squarzina’s previous hypothesis, that the subject of the work, “the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the necessity of belief through faith” was particularly well-suited to Benedetto’s religious ideals is now complicated by references to Vincenzo as the rightful owner. Benedetto’s fondness for the picture is, however, evidenced by Bolognese copies of the subject, confirming that Benedetto brought the canvas to Bologna when he served as Legate to the city. These copies may have signaled Benedetto’s indifference to the uniqueness of the work, a characteristic that Squarzina more easily associates with Benedetto than with Vincenzo, whose paintings were rarely allowed to be copied. Like Giulio Mancini, Vincenzo Giustiniani believed that to copy a work was to violate its originality.

Benedetto’s patronage and use of artistic works was governed by his theological values. Benedetto had, writes Squarzina, “no evident sensitivity to the autograph

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96 The *Incredulity of St. Thomas* was considered part of Vincenzo Giustinian’s collection by Luigi Salerno, “The Picture Gallery of Vincenzo Giustiniani,” *Burlington Magazine* 102 (1960): 21-7, 93-104, 135-48. To the best of my knowledge Caravaggio literature after the date of Salerno’s publication tends to refer to Vincenzo as the Giustiniani owner of the *Doubting Thomas*.


98 Squarzina 1997, 773.
character of a masterpiece” and was more concerned with the picture’s decorum and dignity. Interestingly, Squarzina does not suggest that these religious convictions affected Benedetto’s patronage of Caravaggio—an artist who was often criticized for his indecorous religious depictions, at least for public commissions. The Bolognese copies of Caravaggio’s original composition serve as a record of Benedetto’s attachment to the painting—having carried it with him to Bologna despite his brother’s ownership of the painting.

Squarzina’s revisions to the patronage record of this painting strongly indicate that it was Vincenzo who ordered the *Doubting Thomas* from Caravaggio. But her earlier analysis of Benedetto’s artistic tastes may still be relevant to the commission. Benedetto favored devotional subjects that related directly to spiritual experience while Vincenzo’s collection was markedly less focused on pious themes. Even though Benedetto was probably not responsible for commissioning the *Doubting Thomas*, Caravaggio may have been responding to the more general religious convictions and artistic tastes of both Giustiniani brothers, a subject to which I will return.

Past interpretations of the *Incredulity* have largely focused on the naturalism of the subject—a stylistic tendency favored by both Giustiniani patrons. John Varriano has, for example, called attention to Caravaggio’s employment of realistic clothing and props in his paintings. Like Cesare Nebbia’s Christ and St. Thomas (fig. 80), Caravaggio’s Thomas and apostles are distinguished from Christ in part by their manner of dress.

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100 This criticism came primarily from Caravaggio’s early biographers—Baglione and Bellori—but the *Death of the Virgin*, the first *Inspiration of St. Matthew*, and the *Madonna dei Palafrenieri* are said to have been rejected on the basis of a breach of decorum.
101 It is also possible, as Alfred Moir hypothesizes *(Caravaggio and his Copyists* (New York: New York University Press, 1976) 13) that Benedetto brought a copy, rather than the original painting, with him to Bologna. We do know that Benedetto brought a version of the *Doubting Thomas* with him to Bologna but we do not know with certainty that it was the original.
Christ’s shroud, as Squarzina and Christiansen have indicated, appears to be a vaguely antique toga, while the apostles wear anachronistically contemporary clothing, “accentuating the sacred nature of the event, even outside the time of the apparition.”

As Varriano suggests, by contrasting costumes and gestures, Caravaggio uses material differences to suggest opposing states of spiritual enlightenment—the contemporary clothing of the apostles is tattered and dirty, while Christ’s draped mantle is timelessly appropriate for his religious position. The “classical order,” as Gilbert calls it, is favored in Caravaggio’s three-quarter-length close-up that is “in tune with the artist’s most conspicuous skills, using physical naturalism for arguments of faith.”

Caravaggio “seizes the occasion to show the concept of accepting Christ through imagery of training in a skill, precisely what we would call “hands-on” teaching. This harmonizes with the artist’s specification that all three disciples…are poor or lower-class, articulated in the torn shoulder seam highlighted in the foreground.” While this detail is generally regarded as a statement of Caravaggio’s realism or as an aesthetic device, Gilbert posits that it is “a part of the formulation that is also teaching us, the viewers, through good pedagogical invocation of our prior experience, the lesson of the text.”

The originality of Caravaggio’s painting does not depend entirely on the artist’s renowned naturalism despite scholarly arguments both for and against the importance of Caravaggio’s realism. Hibbard, as mentioned earlier, found Caravaggio’s composition to be so contrived as to be “classicizing”. Hibbard’s statement can be juxtaposed with John Varriano’s sentiment: “In the Incredulity of St. Thomas, the artist takes the secular...

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102 Squarzina, 278.
104 Gilbert, 152.
105 Gilbert, 153.
theme a step further. Although the posthumous appearance of Christ occurs in an unspecified setting, the entire gestural and compositional thrust of the picture centers on intellectual comprehension rather than emotional or spiritual reaction.” Varriano’s analysis is problematic in that it suggests, as do Caravaggio’s early biographers, that the painter’s naturalism was intended to emphasize “secular ways of thinking about the spiritual.” More accurate, I would suggest, is the notion that Thomas’ comprehension is not intellectual rather than spiritual, but is instead a combination of both. His knowledge is one of confirmation—as Thomas touches the wound of Christ, his disbelief is vanquished and his faith reaffirmed.

Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* has also been viewed as an example of the emerging principles of empiricist Natural Philosophy. Ferdinando Bologna, John Spike, and John Varriano have all briefly suggested that in his quest for evidence and desire to have the Truth verified, Thomas is a model for empirical inquiry. Bologna explores

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106 Varriano, 196.
107 Varriano agrees with John Gash, who writes that Caravaggio’s patrons and collectors together were “generally more fascinated with Caravaggio’s artistic experiments than with his distillation of Counter-Reformation sentiment” (196). This hypothesis supposes that those Cardinals who commissioned religious subjects from Caravaggio were interested more in style than content. But this does not seem in keeping with what we know about these patrons or their Reform interests. Squarzina has, for instance, demonstrated that Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani’s collection was dominated by devotional paintings—some of which were by Caravaggio, but many others were not. His brother Vincenzo may have been more “fascinated with Caravaggio’s artistic experiments” than with “doctrinal issues,” but the Cardinal surely could not have shared this focus. In his essay on “Caravaggio and Religion” (1999) Varriano explains that Caravaggio was not likely an intellectually trained artist. In the same essay, however, Varriano argues that Caravaggio embraced new philosophical attitudes that supported a shift from faith to reason, and thus the artist promoted a “secular” way of thinking about the spiritual (196). There is no evidence linking Caravaggio directly to the skeptical movement of philosophy heralded by Montaigne. The artist had already left Rome when this movement was gaining momentum. It seems more likely that modern ideas about reason influenced Caravaggio’s copyists and followers more than it did the artist himself. Perhaps this is one reason why the *Doubting Thomas* was so influential for later Baroque proponents of naturalism. Recently John Varriano has posited that Caravaggio’s picture engaged with contemporary notions of empiricism (*Caravaggio: The Art of Realism*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). While I agree with this suggestion, and will take it up in the conclusion of this dissertation, it still remains difficult to promote an empirical reading of the picture over a spiritual one.

the relationship between Galileo’s investigative methods—science based on observation first, and conclusions second—with Caravaggio’s realism. Varriano corroborates this analysis in his recent *Caravaggio: The Art of Naturalism*. Here he suggests that Caravaggio favors skepticism over surprise as “the central features of the apostles’ cognitive process.” It is uncertain, however, how this skepticism (rather than surprise) is represented pictorially. Thomas’s raised brow in Caravaggio’s painting seems to register surprise and awe, not jaded skepticism. That the other two apostles look on with concentration, not knowing disapproval, suggests that they share Thomas’s proverbial wonder. Varriano notes Caravaggio’s “epistemological peers” to be a generation of thinkers devoted to empirical observation and reasoning. The emphasis on scientific knowledge advanced by those like Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), Galileo (1564-1642), Giambattista della Porta (1535-1615), and Francis Bacon (1561-1626) accords well, writes Varriano, with “Caravaggio’s own methods of ideation and representation.” It is perhaps not coincidental that two of the four men listed by Varriano were also accused and condemned of heresy during the 17th-century. Varriano argues that Caravaggio’s naturalism, and thus his potential alignment with empiricism, secularizes the content of his religious pictures. But Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake in 1600, and Galileo, condemned in 1633, both defended their own faith. Historians of science are quick to point out that science and religion were not separated from one another until the 18th-century. If Caravaggio’s painting engaged with empirical trends, as I agree it likely

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109 Bologna, 167-68.
did, this does not mean that the picture was necessarily “secularized.” The parallels between Caravaggio’s naturalism, Thomas’s inquiry, and early modern empiricism may have, however, contributed to the painting’s enduring influence, a subject to which I will return in my conclusion. That it was loved by a Cardinal (Benedetto Giustiniani), suggests that the *Doubting Thomas* could not be void of spiritual content. Just how devotional this painting was meant to be will be addressed in the subsequent pages of this chapter.

**The Culture of Conversion and Doubting Thomas**

The notion of spiritual verification that informs the Doubting Thomas theme was, as Maurizio Calvesi has highlighted, of some importance to Caravaggio more generally.113 Noting the *Doubting Thomas* and the slightly later *Entombment* in which the apostle John inadvertently pulls open Christ’s wound as he carries him to the grave, Calvesi alludes to the tactile contact made by apostles in both pictures. In both cases Christ’s body is touched, thereby making it more real and perhaps more present. This connection should, it seems, be asserted more emphatically. Also yet to be considered are the ways in which Thomas was perceived in Counter-Reformation Rome and how these perceptions engaged with the religious convictions of Caravaggio’s patrons—particularly the Giustiniani. Connected closely with devotion to the Wounds of Christ during the Medieval period, Thomas remained a key figure in these devotions even in the

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late 16th and early 17th centuries. More specifically, there is now reason to believe that the Incredulity was, from 1598, linked with what is arguably the most important relic in all of Christandom: the Holy Shroud of Turin. These associations may have, in turn, inspired the unusual commission from Caravaggio and may better explain Cardinal Benedetto’s desire to have the painting with him when he traveled to Bologna.

The restoration of three Roman churches dedicated to St. Thomas apostle and the subsequent encouragement of pilgrimage to the site of his relics (endorsed in the papal bulls of Gregory XIII and Clement VIII) suggest that Thomas was a particularly relevant saint for the Catholic Renewal. Caravaggio’s depiction of the Incredulity was, as I have shown, a groundbreaking image in the iconographic history of the theme and began what was to become a Roman pictorial tradition of the Doubting Thomas. It cannot be coincidental that the popularity of the Doubting Thomas theme in art increased just as the Church was regaining its footing after the crisis of faith underlying the Reformation.

It has been suggested that Caravaggio’s Doubting Thomas was so widely copied and imitated because his version of the subject was the best, most stylistically relevant painting of the subject to date. I believe, however, that the enduring influence of Caravaggio’s picture had as much to do with its contextual relevance as with its innovations in style. The Catholic-Reformatory climate, which promoted new zeal for apostolic, missionary saints would have, for instance, fostered renewed interest in Thomas’s saintly model. Similarly, the issue of Justification, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, polarized the differences between the established Church and

114 For the early history of this devotion see chapter 1 of this dissertation.
Luther’s camp. Thomas’s actions were central to the affirmation of his faith, and by extension to the faith of all Christians. In the later years of the 16th-century these very actions were the subject of Protestant ridicule. John Calvin went so far as to declare that the “stupidity of Thomas was astonishing and monstrous.”116 But this is not how Catholic Reformers understood Thomas’s incredulity. Carlo Borromeo, perhaps the most important bishop of the Counter-Reformation, urged the faithful to use their senses, just as Thomas did, to imagine Christ’s suffering. Indeed, as Most has suggested, “Caravaggio’s painting is organized in terms of an action and reaction”117 and this may point to the relevance of doctrinal issues for Caravaggio’s painting.

If Caravaggio’s vernacular style helped to provide accessible exempla for ‘real’ people, then these stylistic choices facilitated the view, in the case of the Doubting Thomas, that average Christians could waver, if temporarily, in their convictions. The quelling of Thomas’s incredulity may be understood as a sort of conversion—not from sin to purity, but from disbelief to faith.118 The conversion of King Henry IV of France from Calvinism to Catholicism in 1595 provided the exemplary model for such vacillators.119 The Oratorian adviser to Clement, Cesare Baronio, in many ways facilitated the reconciliation with Henry IV. Clement’s conversion of Henry absolved the French king of his errors of faith and forged a stronger relationship between Rome and

116 Spolsky, 111.
117 Most, 201.
118 It is important to note that nowhere in my reading of exegetical literature is Thomas ever labeled a “sinner.” He is elicited as an example of disbelief, or alternately of faith, but never of sin.
France (and consequentially with Spain as well).\textsuperscript{120} Clement VIII’s own patronage often highlighted scenes of conversion, as in the case of the altars on the piers in St. Peter’s, where the \textit{Conversion of Paul} and the \textit{Healing of a Cripple} (by St. Peter) both relate to themes of incredulity and faith.\textsuperscript{121}

The \textit{Doubting Thomas} by Caravaggio reflects the more general “culture of conversion” in early 17\textsuperscript{th}-century Rome.\textsuperscript{122} Indeed to the \textit{Doubting Thomas} may be added other works in Caravaggio’s Roman oeuvre that reflect this theme. For instance, the \textit{Calling of St. Matthew} (fig. 85) depicts Matthew as he undergoes his conversion.\textsuperscript{123} A shaft of light illuminates the tax collector, interrupted from his work by Christ and Peter who have come to retrieve Matthew from the spiritual darkness of his life. Matthew’s companions are unmoved by the “light of the world” (John 8:12) and thus are not converted from sin.\textsuperscript{124} A similar theme was taken up by the artist roughly a year later when he painted the \textit{Conversion of St. Paul} in the Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo (1600-01, fig. 93). Here the Roman official Saul is struck down by divine light, stopping him from accomplishing his mission to persecute Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:3-9). Blinded by this light for three days, Saul was converted and became Paul. In Caravaggio’s painting light once again signifies the moment of conversion: Saul lays prostrate on the ground, his hands held high toward the rays that blind him.

\textsuperscript{120} Cyriac Pullapilly, \textit{Caesar Baronius: Counter-Reformation Historian} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) 62.

\textsuperscript{121} Erin Benay, “A Clementine Conceit: Papal Intention and Sacred Decoration in St. Peter’s” (delivered at the Graduate Student Symposium on the History of Art, the Frick Collection and the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, New York 2007).

\textsuperscript{122} This phrase is coined by Silvia de Renzi, “Courts and Conversions: Intellectual Battles and Natural Knowledge in Counter-Reformation Rome,” \textit{Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science} 27/4 (1996): 429-449.

\textsuperscript{123} Puglisi, 162.

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Ibid.}, 162.
companion remains oblivious, attending to the horse rather than to the miracle taking place before him.

In both the case of the *Calling of St. Matthew* and the *Conversion of St. Paul* Caravaggio employs light to signify the arrival of new found faith to an otherwise disbelieving person. Indeed Caravaggio uses the same technique in the *Doubting Thomas*: a shaft of light emanates from the upper left of the composition, across Christ’s body and wound, and settles on the foreheads of Thomas and the apostles. The juxtaposition of such light to such darkness seems to be a rather transparent metaphor for the notion of conversion from incredulity to belief. Recently it has been suggested that Caravaggio’s tenebrism was even analogous to contemporary movements in skeptical philosophy. While it is unlikely that Caravaggio was familiar with the work of philosophers like Montaigne, his followers may have been. Either way, Matthew, Paul, and Thomas all served as models for the pious: disbelief and sin may tempt, but ultimately Christ’s light will return believers to the fold.

By the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th-century, Thomas’s incredulity had thus become a universal model of the humanity of lay believers. Ultimately Caravaggio’s message was not inherently different from those who illustrated the Books of Hours and manuscripts discussed in chapter 1. An altarpiece by Quirizio da Murano from c. 1461-78 depicts *Christ Showing his Wounds and the Host to a Clarissan Nun* (fig. 99). An enthroned Christ pulls open his wound with one hand, while he hands the nun a Eucharistic wafer with the other. The implication is clear: the Host has come from the

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125 Itay Sapir spoke on this topic in a session of the College Art Association conference, February 16th, 2007 (Session: “Skepticism and the Arts”; Talk: “Caravaggio, the Skeptical Painter; Montaigne, the Tenebrist Philosopher: Knowledge, Visibility, and Darkness around 1600”). Sapir’s talk was derived from his doctoral research for *Early Baroque Tenebrist Painting: an epistemological interpretation*, (University of Amsterdam doctoral dissertation, 2008).
wound in his side. The painting is as overt a depiction of the Real Presence as is possible. Caravaggio’s painting of Christ and Thomas is not so overt in its message. Both the conventions of naturalism and the artist’s style prevent the *Doubting Thomas* from carrying so obvious a symbolic message. Nevertheless, through his verification of Christ’s wounds, Thomas reassures the faithful of Christ’s divinity and of their access to it through the sacraments, just as Christ does in the Quirizio altarpiece.

Catholic reformers like Borromeo, and his contemporary, Gabriele Paleotti, bishop of Bologna, were eager to promote new ways of invigorating Eucharistic devotion after the Protestant Reformation. Luther’s followers had emphatically denied the miracle of Transubstantiation, leaving the Church to renew its insistence on the Mass as an essential aspect of religious practice. As elucidated in chapter 1, the Doubting Thomas theme was often linked to such Eucharistic devotion. Thomas’s access to the wounds through tactile penetration could be analogous to the ingestion of the sacrament during Mass. During the late 16th century Borromeo, Gabriele Paleotti, and his brother Alfonso Paleotti (successor to Gabriele as bishop of Bologna) all wrote about the wounds of Christ and their potential to inspire the laity to believe in the miracles endorsed by the church.

In a homily on the Passion of Jesus delivered in Milan Cathedral, March 23rd, 1584, Borromeo instructed the faithful to use their senses to imagine the horror of Christ’s wounds:

…This swollen and distended body of Christ, these holy wounds, the lacerations of his flesh!...Do you know how it should be read? This reading must move us to the point that we feel in our own flesh all the tortures which the Lord felt in his;
that these nails pierce our hands and feet, that these wounds and these injuries be renewed within us; that we too be struck by scourges and disfigured by spittle. Listen to the Apostle who teaches us how what is written on the outside of this book must be read: ‘Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Jesus Christ’ [Phil. 2:5]; feel it, Oh Children, I say, not with only one or two senses, but with all of them, apply your eyes and contemplate with care this livid flesh and these wounds; lend your ears to this mockery, these insults, finally to these blasphemies, supreme outrages to the divine glory and majesty, which inflicted deeper wounds upon Christ than the lance; smell this cadaverous stench which emanated from Calvary where our Lord was crucified, a seasoning of torture added to the numberless pains which he endured: taste this very bitter gall, this sour beverage in which wine and vinegar were mixed with myrrh; arouse the sense of feeling of which every one of your limbs is susceptible so that you think you feel all the torments of which the body of the Son of God was tortured. Oh happy he who knows how to read this book in this way!126

Borromeo suggests, as Most has discussed, that touching Christ’s body is redemptive:

All these wounds are in effect just as many openings: it is by means of them that the Lord wants us to enter, if we wish to read. Do you not recall that after his Resurrection, still bearing upon his body the traces of his wounds, the Lord appeared to the apostles and that he said to Thomas in particular, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side” [John 20:27]. This is the invitation which the Lord is still addressing to us today, for his

126 I cannot claim credit for finding this sermon; the translation is found in Most, 153 and is from Borromeo’s Homélies et discours (350-51).
desire is that we enter into his wounds and that we read in them what is written inside them. Oh, what teachings you would discover in them, Christian, if you would put out your hand!

*Put your hand* into these wounds and you will understand all the value of your soul…*Put, Christian, your hand into this side*, and you will understand how much God is horrified by the excesses of the flesh, by cupidity, vanity, pride, impurities…*Put your hand into this side* and you will recognize how beautiful virtue is.127

In his vivid meditation on Christ’s wounds Borromeo insists that the faithful reenact Thomas’s actions as a means to finding faith. Touching is believing.

Along with dogma related to Transubstantiation, another contentious issue at the meetings of the Council of Trent was the veneration of relics, a practice opposed by the Protestant faction. Catholic reformers like Borromeo and both Paleotti bishops were eager to demonstrate the usefulness of relics for the laity. The arrival of the Holy Shroud in Turin in 1578 signaled a new opportunity to extol the virtues of relics for invoking belief. Calvin had publicly ridiculed the Shroud in a printed sermon of 1543 but this may have only added to the relic’s fame in Catholic lands—the Shroud was to become the paradigmatic relic of the Catholic Reformation.128 Although devotion to the Shroud is well-documented, less known is the role St. Thomas played in these devotions. Sketching the later, Italian history of the relic reveals the significance of Thomas’s part in devotions to the Shroud in Counter-Reformatory Italy and suggests new grounds for the

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popularity of Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* in Bologna, where Benedetto Giustiniani served as legate.

**ST. THOMAS AND THE HOLY SHROUD**

The early Italian history of the Shroud began when the city of Milan was struck by the plague in 1576, and the influential bishop Carlo Borromeo made heroic efforts to save his people. The Bishop vowed to make a pilgrimage to pray before the Shroud, housed in Chambéry, France.\(^\text{129}\) The Duke of Savoy, Emmanuel Philibert, could not permit the weak Borromeo to make such a dangerous voyage and instead sent the Shroud to Turin. In 1578 Cardinals Gabriele and Alfonso Paleotti of Bologna accompanied Borromeo as he set out on foot to Turin. Milan was supposedly saved from the plague due to their prayers and the Shroud today remains on Italian soil.

Borromeo was to make three subsequent trips to Turin (1581; 1582; 1584); each time his visit and the Ostension of the Shroud were commemorated in either an engraving or more monumental artistic commissions (fig. 90).\(^\text{130}\) These Ostensions were especially important because the relic “constituted a direct witness to the Passion and the mystery of the Incarnation” (not unlike Thomas himself) and because pilgrims who saw this relic

\(^{129}\) Information about the Shroud’s transfer to Italian soil may be found in a number of sources. The best, most recent of these is Scott *Architecture for the Shroud: Relic and Ritual in Turin*, with extensive bibliography. Regarding Borromeo’s visit to Turin, see Luigi Fossati and Lidia de Blasi Giaccaria, “Carlo Borromeo a Torino: L’ostensione della Sindone del 1582 in un scritto inedito” *Studi Piemontesi* 16 (1987): 429-37.

\(^{130}\) Sheldon Grossman, “The Sovereignty of the Painted Image: Poetry and the Shroud of Turin” (in *From Rome to Eternity*, ed. Pamela Jones, 2002) 179-222. The first of Borromeo’s trips was depicted by Camillo Landriani and Il Morazzone in the *Pilgrimage of Carlo Borromeo to Turin* (Milan Cathedral). Cesare Nebbia also painted the *Pilgrimage of Carlo Borromeo to Turin* on the vault of the salone of the Collegio Borromeo in Pavia, and a famous engraving by Antonio Tempesta depicting the *Ostension of the Shroud on May 4th, 1614* commemorates Borromeo posthumously in its inscription.
became, in a sense, witnesses as well. The physics of sight, discussed in chapter 3, embraced by contemporaries who viewed the relics, meant that the Shroud was impressed on the retina of the beholder. In an early 17th-century commentary on the Shroud, Daniele Mallonio (theologian at the University of Bologna) wrote that “the celestial splendor which flashes from the most holy effigy of Christ imprinted on the Shroud…[wounds] the heart of the beholder with the dagger of remorse…[who is] compelled to acknowledge and confess that a certain radiance in the Shroud is a thing divine.” As Scott reminds us, Mallonio’s words were meant to be taken literally: what is transferred to the beholder in the case of the Shroud is Christ’s blood—‘seeing’ the Shroud would have been a “transformative experience” of soul and body. Perhaps not coincidentally, this was the same sort of transformation undergone by Thomas in his post-Resurrection encounter with Christ.

As the power and legitimacy of the Shroud grew, so too did the significance of that relic in the three principal north-Italian centers of the Counter-Reformation: Turin, Milan, and Bologna. It was in the latter of these cities, Bologna, that Archbishop Alfonso Paleotti published the most important text regarding the Shroud since its transfer to Turin. Perhaps inspired by the religious fervor leading up to the Holy Year of 1600, Alfonso Paleotti wrote the *Esplicatione del Sacro lenzuolo ove fu involto il Signore et delle piaghe in esso impress ecol suo pretioso Sangue* (1598, 1599) with a dedication to Pope Clement VIII. Indeed it is the stemma of Clement VIII that is supported by angels on

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131 Scott, 115.
132 As in “extramission theory” discussed in chapter 3.
133 As quoted in Scott, 116.
134 Ibid., 117.
135 Paleotti’s text was published first in 1598 and reprinted in 1599, both with dedications to Clement VIII (Bologna, 1599, press of Gio Orossi with Licenza de Superiori; Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Rome 10.4.c.17). Alfonso Paleotti was archbishop of Bologna from 1597 to 1610.
the frontispiece of the volume (figs. 86 and 87). These angels carry the tools of the Passion and denote the importance of those events for worship of the *Sacro lenzuolo*, or Shroud. In the dedicatory pages of the text, Paleotti explains his purpose: he wishes to share his experience of the Shroud (when he viewed it with his cousin Gabriele Paleotti and Carlo Borromeo) and to explicate the relic’s role for devotion to the Wounds of Christ. The Archbishop further notes the importance of these wounds for the purpose of verifying faith in the divinity of Christ. A table of contents clarifies the structure of the text—each chapter corresponds to one of Christ’s wounds.

In both the 1598 and 1599 editions of the text the table of contents is followed by an illumination. An engraving depicts the Archbishop in front of the city of Bologna (fig. 88). Kneeling before an urban landscape, Paleotti gestures toward the background, readily identifiable as Bologna because of the prominent towers, and gazes up toward the heavens. There in the sky three angels hold up the Shroud. The impression of Christ’s bloodied body is marked by a dotted outline on the unfurled fabric. A banner below the Shroud is inscribed “For which reason your shroud [covering] is red.”\(^{136}\) The banner must signal protection of the city over which it is held. The pages to follow are directed toward the faithful and explain the role of the Shroud for devotion to Christ’s wounds and in fact map these devotions precisely to markings on the relic. The engraving of Paleotti before the city, however, suggests that his manual is more specifically for the faithful citizens of Bologna and the unfurled Shroud above the city indicates its protection of that place. Although the Shroud is of course most strictly connected to Turin, its final resting place, it clearly was of protective import to other Italian cities during the Counter-

\(^{136}\)“QVARE RVBRVM EST INDVME NTV TVV.” Thanks to Ryan Fowler for his translation of this ambiguous phrase.
Reformation. In 1598, the same year Paleotti’s treatise was published, a confraternity dedicated to the Shroud was established in Turin; by 1606 the Brotherhood of the Shroud was publishing its own texts in Rome.  

Another illustration is placed at the back of Paleotti’s thin *Esplicatione*. Here a tri-part, pullout sheet depicts the Shroud in red ink (fig. 89). The Shroud is hand drawn but the title and letters surrounding the images of Christ are printed. On the left side of the sheet is the impression of the back of Christ’s body; on the right side of the paper is the corresponding image of Christ’s front. Christ’s halo separates the two head-to-head impressions. The letters A-O coordinate with directives given within the main text. Within the text Paleotti delineates the way Christ received each wound, noting the corresponding letter on the illustration, and suggests that wound’s relevance for devotions to Christ. Paleotti refers to the apostle Thomas in no fewer than three of these chapters, each time referring readers to the lettered diagram of the Shroud at the back of the book.

The first chapter of the *Esplicatione* to refer to the Incredulity of St. Thomas is Chapter Sixteen, dedicated to the wounds in Christ’s hands and the quality of the nails used to secure them to the cross. Paleotti briefly recounts Thomas’s disbelief and his words as written in John 20—“unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails…I will not believe.” Like St. Thomas, writes Paleotti,

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137 Scott, 61. For information pertaining to the confraternity of the Shroud in Rome, see Umberto Vichi, “Osservazioni sulla chiesa del SS. Sudario in Roma” Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria 1959, 209-213; Mouchet Croset, *La chiesa ed arciconfraternita del SS Sudario dei Piemontesi a Roma* (Pinerolo 1870). I am unaware of a similar confraternity in Bologna, though it is possible that one existed.

the holy Sindone confirms these wounds and their miraculous quality. The same sort of confirmation is espoused in Chapter Twenty of Paleotti’s treatise. Dedicated to discussion of the wound in Christ’s side, the Costato, the chapter once again refers readers to Thomas’s example. The “grand aperture” in Christ’s side is impressed on the Sindone, explains Paleotti, and is confirmed in the Gospel when Christ urges Thomas to “bring hither thy hand and put it into my side.” Thomas verifies the wound by “entering his hand into Christ’s side” and thus, according to Paleotti, both the Shroud and the biblical story confirm the sanctity of Christ’s risen body.\footnote{Paleotti, page 125-36 of the 1599 edition; the chapter is titled Della piaga del costato di Christo nella parte destra. De gl’effetti, & virtù, che di essa seguirono; “Fù quest’apertura grande, che tale ne la mostra la sacra Sindone, & tale si può comprendere dal ferro della lancia, che ben largo si mostra in Roma nella Chiesa di S. Pietro, & tale la denota il Salvatore stesso, quando nell Evangelio in vita S. Thomaso à ponervi entro la mano, dicendo. \textit{Affer manum tuae, & mitte in latus meum} [John 20]. cioè, Appresenta la tua mano, & ponila nel mio lato.”} Finally, in Chapter Twenty-One Paleotti explains why Christ returned from the grave with the brutal markings of his Crucifixion. After noting the importance of these wounds for demonstrating Christ’s death for our sins, Paleotti suggests that these wounds (and their impression on the Sacred Shroud) attest to the sorrows of Christ’s martyrdom and its confirmation by St. Thomas.\footnote{Paleotti, pages 137-43 in the 1599 edition, Dell’integrità dell ossa del Signore; & causa perche dopo morte egli fu percosso nel costato. \textit{Con una breve consideratione al Lettore sopra le piaghe de Scritte.} “…Tramonterà il Sole nel mezzo di, & in giorno di lume farò oscurarsi la terra, Così noi; ma molto maggiormente, compatendo al Signore, dobbiamo mostrar mestitia di così penoso spettacolo, nel cósiderar massime, che la passion di Christo Salvatore ha passato tutti i dolori de’Martiri, come afferma S. Tomaso.”} Although Paleotti’s was the most popular tract to treat the subject of the Shroud, the Wounds of Christ, and Thomas’s important role in devotion to both, authors of other similar 17\textsuperscript{th}-century texts reiterated Paleotti’s thesis: Thomas played a crucial part in confirming the Resurrection, and thereby the lay-person’s faith.\footnote{I have not made a systematic study of these texts (of which there are many) but the following examples duplicate the same rhetorical choices made in Paleotti’s treatise: Bartolomeo Amico, \textit{Meditationi delle Sagre piaghe di Gesu} (Naples, 1635); Tommaso Auriemma, \textit{Stanza dell’anima nelle piaghe di Giesu overo pratiche vsate, & insegnate da Santi per fabricarsi la Stanza in Christo Crocifisso in vita & in morte} (Bologna, 1651); Michele Berod, \textit{Le prerogative della Santissima Sindone in Compendio}. (Rome, 1648);}
Not unlike the Franciscan *Meditations on the Life of Christ* or Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* (1524) Paleotti’s exposition on the sacred Shroud and the Wounds of Christ urges the faithful to experience the events of Christ’s life firsthand. Alfonso Paleotti’s text was therefore written in Italian, not Latin, because he sought to address a wider reading audience. By seeing and perhaps even touching the Shroud, worshippers could come as close as is possible to reenacting Thomas’s own experience of seeing and touching Christ’s body. Plenary indulgences were granted to those attending the Ostension of 1582, officiated by Carlo Borromeo. The Shroud was subsequently shown in seven Ostensions until 1600 and close to fifty times during the next century.\(^{142}\)

For many of these occasions posters were made to provide pilgrims with an affordable keepsake (fig. 90). Visitors would thus experience the sight of the Shroud and hear the liturgy of the Holy Shroud which evoked the bloody image of Christ’s wounded body, engaging directly with Christ’s death on the cross.

The phenomenon of the Shroud’s popularity and burgeoning cult was “part of the general increase in the emphasis on the veneration of relics and use of sacred imagery sanctioned by Tridentine decrees and advocated in post-council treatises authored by

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Luca Pinelli, *Meditationi delle Cinque Piaghe Et Del Sangue sparso da Christ o gli altri misterij della sua passione* (Rocca (?), 1603). Additional texts on the same subjects (the Wounds of Christ or the Sacred Shroud, or both, often mention the importance of the Shroud having touched Christ’s body, and cite John 20 but do not mention Thomas explicitly (for examples, see: Francesco Adorno, *Lettera della Peregrinatione, di Monsignore illustri ssimo Cardinale di S. Prassede, Arcivescovo di Milano: per visitare la sacra Sindone di Nostro Signore Giesu Christo, à Torino* (Milan, 1578); Camillo Balbiani, *Ragionamenti sopra la sacra sindone di N.S. Giesu Christo, Ne’ quai si trattano molti Misteri della Sua Passione, Morte, Sepolitura, e Resurrettione* (Turin, 1608); Innocenzio Baldi, *Discorso Intorno a’ Misteri della Santa Croce, nel giorno di sua Inventione. Dove anche si ragiona a lungo della sacra sindone, et della Sereniss. Casa di Savoia, per Divinia providenza sua legitima custode* (Turin, mid-17th century); Prospero Bonfamiglia, *La Sacra Historia della Santissima Sindone di Christo Signor Nostro* (Rome, 1606).

\(^{142}\) *Ibid.*, Appendix E, 342. Many more images of the Ostension are lost than remain—because they were of poor quality and immediately circulated as mementos, these prints were never intended to be permanent works of art. There are comparatively few monumental commissions, according to Scott, that depict the Ostension or Shroud.
Gabriele Paleotti wrote about the Shroud in his *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582) in his chapter on “What May be Called Sacred Images”:

…[An image] will be called sacred because it touched the body or face or another part of Our Lord or of one of his saints and from that contact alone there remained impressed the figure of the body or that part that I would have touched, as one calls the Holy Face left to us by Saint Veronica, which is preserved in Rome, or the sacred Shroud in which the most blessed body of our Savior was wrapped after death, which to this day maintains the image of that body, and which is kept much revered in the domain of his Excellency the Duke of Savoy.  

The goal of Gabriele Paleotti, writing after the Shroud’s important Ostension in 1582, was shared by Carlo Borromeo (and later by Alfonso Paleotti as well): these bishops sought to clarify and present anew the practice of Christianity. All were careful to explain how, under the proper circumstances, images could play a beneficial role in this reform.

During the early 17th-century Carlo Borromeo’s influence continued to be strong. Those church reformers who followed in his wake, like Alfonso Paleotti, shared a similarly experiential interpretation of the writings of the Bible. Images were perceived, as is widely recognized, to be an important part of the worshipper’s experience of religious devotion. Both Paleotti and Borromeo encouraged Christians to place themselves in Thomas’s position and to enter Christ’s wound as a conduit to faith, just as

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144 As translated in Grossman, 189.
the much earlier Franciscans had done (see chapter 2). By the time Caravaggio was
commissioned to paint the *Doubting Thomas* Paleotti’s treatise about the Shroud had
been in circulation for at least three years.

Caravaggio’s awareness of devotion to the Shroud in the early 17th century is
evident in his depiction of the *Entombment* of 1602 (fig. 82). This painting, heralded by
his early biographers as the best of his Roman years, was commissioned for the chapel of
Pietro Vittrice in the Oratorian church of the Chiesa Nuova (Santa Maria in Vallicella).145
Both the *Entombment* and the *Doubting Thomas* depict Christ with what looks to be the
drapery of his burial, and both may have been commissioned by patrons familiar with
current devotions to the Shroud. In his essay on the *Entombment*, Sheldon Grossman
convincingly connects the painting to contemporary spiritual interest in the Shroud. Such
a link constitutes a precedent for Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*, as we shall see.

Originally from Parma, Pietro Vittrice became an active follower of Filippo Neri
in Rome during the last quarter of the 16th century.146 Vittrice was likely responsible for
gaining Neri an audience with Pope Gregory XIII, whose bull of 1575 finally established
the congregation of secular priests and clerics known as the Oratory.147 The original
altarpiece for the Vittrice chapel was a *Pietà*, a logical subject given the Marian theme of
the chapels in Chiesa Nuova. This painting included a portrait of Gregory XIII who had
granted papal privileges to the altar.148 The chapel was re-founded in 1596, one year
after Neri’s death, and is the only chapel in the church that does not retain the subject of

of Art, 1984) 11.
146 For the patronage of the *Entombment* see Lothar Sickel, “Remarks on the Patronage of Caravaggio’s
147 Ibid., 17. See also Alessandro Zuccari, “La politica culturale dell’Oratorio romano della seconda metà
del Cinquecento” *Storia dell’Arte* 41 (77-121).
its old altarpiece. Caravaggio’s *Entombment* is not an overtly Marian subject either (she appears veiled, and with head downcast in Caravaggio’s composition), and thus may be understood to disrupt the program of altarpieces in the side chapels of Chiesa Nuova. Grossman argues that Caravaggio’s composition, in which Christ’s body is carried toward an ambiguous point of burial, is meant to relate directly to the other decorations of the chapel. Frescoed in the vault directly over the *Entombment* is a representation of the *Pietà*. Figures in compartments stand to the left and right of the central image, though only that on the right is legible. This figure, by Angelo Caroselli, depicts an Old Testament King who holds a tablet inscribed, “Among the Dead I am Free.” The verse is from Psalm 88, used during the Easter vigil to describe Christ’s state in the tomb before his Resurrection. The prayer begins “O God, through your Son, the cornerstone” and it is to this cornerstone that the slab painted in Caravaggio’s painting may refer.

Much of the original decoration of the vaulting is now effaced but clearly legible in the coving over the entrance to the chapel is a depiction of the Shroud of Turin (fig. 91). Like the prayer inscribed over the *Pietà* on the ceiling of the chapel, the Shroud was celebrated during the Easter cycle because of its significance in the burial and resurrection of Christ. The liturgy of the Holy Shroud, recited during the Easter vigil, refers to this sacrifice:

> We honor in your name, Christ, your standard the
> Victorious cross, your thorny crown, your Holy
> Shroud, your bloody red nails, and the lance thrust

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Into your sacred side. As Grossman has suggested, with its “very graphic depiction of Christ’s wounds the representation of the Shroud must have become in the period a striking testimony to the actual physical evidence of Christ, but more importantly a reminder of his death and, therefore, of his Resurrection.” An obvious connection is forged between the new depiction of Christ’s burial in the altarpiece by Caravaggio, and the fresco of the Shroud in the vault of the chapel. If the Oratorian order was devoted to the Shroud, as Grossman so convincingly shows, than the fresco and altarpiece would have been particularly apposite choices for the Vittrice Chapel.

The Doubting Thomas was also evoked during Easter and shared many of the same Resurrection themes as the relic of the Shroud. Caravaggio’s painting of the Incredulity shares some formal elements with the Entombment, a work that was likely completed in 1602, around the same time Caravaggio painted the Doubting Thomas. Caravaggio’s Entombment, like the Incredulity, depicts Christ after his Crucifixion. In the Entombment Christ’s body appears limp, the shroud falling from his limbs. John and Nicodemus struggle to carry his weight and John accidentally pulls open the laceration in Christ’s side (fig. 82), in his effort to balance the body. In his careful handling of Christ’s limp body Caravaggio must have been influenced by Michelangelo’s Roman Pietà (fig. 98), as Puglisi has noted.  

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152 Scott, 173.
154 Puglisi, 175.
Michelangelo’s depiction of Christ’s drapery in his Pietà may have related specifically to devotional ideas about the Shroud, as Brandt has shown. Brandt posits that the distinctions Michelangelo creates between Christ’s loincloth, or perizoma, and the cloth beneath his body intentionally signal their symbolic properties. Essentially both loin cloth and shroud symbolize the “flesh of the savior” and are at once “his incarnation, humanity, and mortality.” In the case of the Pietà the probable reference to the Shroud (still in France at this time) was especially significant, given that the French Cardinal Ambassador to Rome commissioned the sculpture. Brandt argues that Michelangelo was specific about his drapery types, distinguishing between the fabric of Christ’s perizoma and the altar cloth that formed his Shroud. If Michelangelo was careful about this distinction, as were many other artists cited by Brandt, it is probable that Caravaggio was also deliberate in his choices for Christ’s drapery in both the Entombment and the Incredulity. In the case of the Entombment, where the actual Holy Shroud was depicted nearby, it seems that Grossman is correct: Christ is not draped with a shroud, but rather the Shroud.

Like the Doubting Thomas, the Entombment also resonated with Counter-Reformatory meaning. The stone slab protruding from Caravaggio’s painting refers to a passage from Matthew (21:42) “alluding symbolically to Jesus as the cornerstone of the Church. Thus Caravaggio’s Entombment both affirms the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, reiterated at the Council of Trent after its denial by the Protestants,

156 Ibid., 91.
157 Ibid., 91.
and the role of the Church as intermediary between God and the devout.”158 In the case of the *Doubting Thomas*, the “intermediary” role of the Church may also be indicated, however subtly, by Christ’s Shroud, thus alluding to the Church’s encouragement of devotion to the relic. Both Paleotti’s treatise on the Shroud and Borromeo’s sermon direct the faithful to put themselves in Thomas’s place to experience firsthand the Resurrection of Christ. It is possible to read Caravaggio’s painting as a pictorial translation of the very same idea. Indeed, it seems that Caravaggio was aware of the Shroud’s significance and likely of Thomas’s associations with it as well. A photomontage recently produced by the town of Ortona in celebration of Thomas’s annual feast day superimposes Caravaggio’s painting over a photograph of the Holy Shroud (fig. 92). Christ is replaced by the Shroud and it is the fabric that Thomas probes with his outreached finger. This modern frontispiece is unfortunately not explained or attributed, nor is there any reference to the Shroud within the text of the prayer pamphlet.159 Although this photomontage cannot stand as historical evidence of a connection between the painting and the relic, it reveals the extent to which long-standing popular beliefs about the Shroud have enlisted St. Thomas as a verifier of the Sacred Wounds.

Those in Caravaggio’s circle were enthusiastic about the potent and “most beautiful image of [the] Church” embossed on the Shroud. Caravaggio’s friend, the famous poet Cavalier Giambattista Marino, served as court poet to Carlo Emanuele I, Duke of Savoy. Twice Marino wrote eloquently about the Shroud; first, in 1608, he

158 Puglisi, 176.
159 Frontispiece, *Solenne Novena in onore di San Tommaso Apostolo* (Parrocchia di San Tommaso Apostolo Concatedrale Basilica, Ortona, 2007). The prayer pamphlet was published in conjunction with the Jubilee of San Tommaso, celebrating the 750th anniversary of the arrival of the saint’s relics to Ortona.
suggested that the image on the Shroud is “a figure whose painter was the dying Christ, the brushes nails, and the pigment blood.”\textsuperscript{160} In 1614 Marino wrote more extensively about the Shroud as a “beautiful image”:

For that reason glory upon glory accrues to this great artist [Christ] for having painted such a beautiful image with faulty instruments. And with which instruments did he fashion the most beautiful image of his Church? Vile instruments, scourges and gallows; whereby drawing glory from baseness, honor from shame, life from death, the marvels of his art increase. Do you want the brushes? Here are the nails. The panel? Here is the cross. The mahlstick? Here is the lance. The lights? Here are the lanterns. The shadows? Here are the \textit{tenebre}. The canvas? Here is the Shroud. The vermilion? Here is the blood.\textsuperscript{161}

Marino makes Christ the ultimate artist, the painter of his own Shroud. Still in Rome during Caravaggio’s years there, Marino must have been aware, like the painter, of the growing importance of the Shroud. While composed a few years after Caravaggio’s \textit{Doubting Thomas}, Marino’s poetry attests to the cult of the Holy Shroud and the poet may be entered as yet another member of Caravaggio’s circle who embraced devotions to the Shroud.

Devotion to the Shroud may also have played a role in the posthumous influence of Caravaggio’s \textit{Doubting Thomas}. Benedetto Giustiniani left Rome to serve as legate in Bologna in 1606, the very year the Roman confraternity of the Shroud published the semiofficial history of the relic. He took with him what was likely the original Caravaggio \textit{Doubting Thomas}. Copies of the \textit{Doubting Thomas}, now lost, were quickly

\textsuperscript{160} As cited by Grossman 2002, 197-199, from \textit{Il retratto del serenissimo Don Carlo Emanuele, Duca di Savoia, panegirico} (Turin, 1608).
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Ibid.}, 199, from \textit{La pittura, diceria prima, sopra la Santa Sindone} (1614).
commissioned by Bolognese families. The Lamberti and Legnani owned versions of the
*Doubting Thomas* and the Bolognese artists Lorenzo Garbieri, Lionello Spada, and
Alessandro Tiarini painted copies noted by Malvasia (1678).162 These collectors were
likely motivated by artistic factors: Caravaggio’s canvas is, as I have shown, an
innovation in style and iconography. But, if Alfonso Paleotti, archbishop of Bologna,
was responsible at least in part for linking Thomas to the Shroud, then this may explain
Benedetto’s decision to bring the painting with him and its immediate popularity in
Bologna. It is impossible to know with certainty if this is true: little is known about the
families who commissioned the lost copies. Had they attended Ostentions of the Shroud?
Did they own copies of Paleotti’s treatise?163 Nevertheless, it is clear that Bologna was a
major center of the Catholic Reformation. Furthermore, Paleotti had made great efforts
to establish Bologna as a sympathetic site for the Oratorians and as a potential stop in the
route to the pilgrimage point in Turin. If Caravaggio’s painting reflected renewed
devotions to the Shroud as I believe it does, than its imagery would have resonated in
Bologna.

dell’arte in onore di Ferdinando Bologna*, Eds. F. Abbate; F. Stricchia Santoro, Catanzaro: Meridiana,
1995) 199-203 and Moir, 90.
163 The reception of Caravaggio’s work in Bologna is analyzed by Perini. Perini maintains that it is most
likely that Benedetto had the original *Doubting Thomas* with him in Bologna and that it was this painting
(not a copy) that inspired the Lamberti and Legnani to order copies and artists like Garbieri and
Alessandro Tiarini to study and paint from the original. In this short article Perini asserts that the *Ecce
Homo* and the *Incredulity*, those paintings in Benedetto’s possession while in Bologna, were of
fundamental importance for the influence of Caravaggio on the entire school of Bolognese painting.
Malvasia’s *Felsina Pittrice-Vite de’pittori bolognesi* (Bologna, 1678) and Alfred Moir’s study of
Caravaggio’s copies are Perini’s two most important sources. Neither provides any details as to the
specific devotional interests of the Bolognese patrons of the *Doubting Thomas*. Unfortunately neither the
*Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana) nor Pompeo Scipione
Dolfi’s *Cronologia delle Famiglie Nobili di Bologna* (Bologna, 1670) includes any relevant information
about these families despite the inclusion of both the Lamberti and Legnani. Further work in the state
archives of Bologna would be necessary to determine if these patrons shared any specific ideological
interests with Benedetto Giustiniani and what role, if any, these concerns played in their commission of
copies of the *Incredulity*. 
Caravaggio, like other artists of his day, was surely guided by the spiritual and devotional interests of his patrons. The *Doubting Thomas* was not likely an exception. Even so, there have been few attempts to determine what part, if any, Caravaggio or his patrons’ religious interests played in the *Doubting Thomas* commission. What pious impetus led the Giustiniani to order this subject for an easel painting when it does not, as in other examples discussed in this dissertation, commemorate a family member named Thomas? It has often been suggested that Caravaggio was personally affected by particular religious affiliations. For example, Walter Friedlaender argued that Filippo Neri was Caravaggio’s primary spiritual influence, Calvesi has suggested Cardinal Federico Borromeo, and Pamela Askew has posited that the guidance of St. Francis de Sales informed Caravaggio’s Hartford *St. Francis*. These speculations ignore, as Stuart Lingo has asserted, “the potential for an artist to respond imaginatively to the situation of a particular commission or a particular relation, or to work in nuanced stylistic modes.”164 Thus, one need not see Caravaggio as being particularly devoted to the Shroud himself. Instead, it is necessary to understand how the Shroud, and devotional tracts extolling Thomas’s virtues, may have been relevant to his patrons: the Giustiniani.

According to Squarzina, Vincenzo and Benedetto Giustiniani were sympathetic to the Oratorian ideals.165 If this was the case, then it is possible that the Order was influential to their artistic commissions, including the *Doubting Thomas*. In 1567 Carlo Borromeo saved Filippo Neri and his followers, later to be named the Oratorians, from

165 Silvia Danesi Squarzina, “I Giustiniani e l’Oratorio dei Filippini.” *Storia dell’Arte* 75 (1995): 369-94. The Dominican Vincenzo Giustiniani the elder (Vincenzo and Benedetto’s uncle) lived in the convent of S. Maria sopra Minerva when Filippo Neri was also in residence. During the first half of the seicento, four members of the Giustiniani were documented to be part of the Oratory, though Vincenzo and Benedetto were not included (390). Nevertheless, Squarzina maintains their affiliation with the Oratorians.
the wrath of Pius V. Neri’s Oratorian Order was to become one of the most important new religious orders of the 17th-century. It is worth recalling that in Rome Borromeo was protector of the confraternity of Scribes at San Tommaso in Parione, the very church where Neri was ordained in 1551. Borromeo’s deep-founded devotion to the Shroud was well known and was perhaps equally important to Neri and his followers. Alfonso Paleotti also befriended Neri: he had promoted Bologna as a good home base for the Oratorians and had advocated their cause to Cardinal Pierdonato Cesi when he served as papal legate in Bologna (prior to Benedetto Giustiniani’s arrival there). Alfonso Paleotti and Carlo Borromeo were especially devoted both to the Shroud and to Oratorian principles.

Benedetto and Vincenzo Giustiniani had been involved, if only peripherally, in the commissioning of Peter Paul Rubens for the high altarpiece of Chiesa Nuova. Citing this and the family’s hiring of Francesco Borromini (1599-1667), the architect responsible for the Oratory, as evidence of their shared aesthetic interests, Squarzina postulates that the brothers were likely affiliated with the Oratory. If this was indeed the case, then there is all the more reason to suppose that Caravaggio was familiar through them with connections between the popular Shroud of Turin and the doubting Thomas. A portrait of the Beato Amadeo, duke of Savoy was recorded in Benedetto’s 1621 inventory and later inventories of the Giustiniani libraries included several volumes on the history of Savoy. Unfortunately, no solid evidence proves whether the

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168 Squarzina 1995; Squarzina suggests that the Giustiniani brothers (Benedetto and Vincenzo) shared the artistic tastes of the Oratory and were impacted by Oratorian spirituality.
169 These are listed in the inventories published in Squarzina’s La Collezione Giustiniani (2003) 1621 inventory #62; and the post-mortem inventory of 1638 I, entries under “libreria”. Although I scoured the
Giustiniani, in addition to being Oratorian sympathizers, were also devotees of the Shroud.

Despite the absence of any documented links between the Giustiniani, the Oratorians, and the Shroud, it seems likely that Cardinal Benedetto would have been well-aware of devotions to the relic regardless of any Oratorian affiliation. Members of the Giustiniani family celebrated important rites in what was to become (shortly after the founding of the Order in 1575) the Oratorian church of San Tommaso in Parione. This building was but a matter of blocks not only from another Tommasan church, but also from Caravaggio’s temporary residence in the Mattei palace compound. It seems inevitable that the artist, employed by the Giustiniani at the time, would have been made aware of the importance of the Shroud and of the connection between the wounds imprinted on that holy cloth and those probed by Thomas himself. Can it be coincidental that the Christ of Caravaggio’s Doubting Thomas looks as if he is indeed wearing a shroud, just as Bellori indicated? More broadly, the Oratorians were also interested in increasing lay participation in matters of faith. The participatory emphasis in Caravaggio’s painting, which focuses on Thomas’s dramatic action, reverberates with the experiential spirit so important to the new Catholic orders, including the Oratorians.

This would not have been the first time Caravaggio adjusted his compositional choices to reflect the nuanced spiritual beliefs of his patrons. In 1995 Creighton Gilbert conjectured that Cardinal Girolamo Mattei (1545-1603), with whom Caravaggio lived from approximately 1601-1603, served as his only plausible and perhaps “inescapable

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Inventories of all Giustiniani family members, I found no record of Paleotti’s Esplicatione or any other text about the Shroud or the Holy Wounds.
conduit” to the latest Franciscan pieties.170 These Franciscan pieties did at times affect Caravaggio’s iconographic choices, just as the Giustiniani’s piety may have impacted the Incredulity. Thus, it is worth recalling briefly in what ways Caravaggio had made such adjustments in the past.

Girolamo Mattei began his career in the civil sector—serving as court cleric, head of the Department of Streets (1575), and the Department of Prisons (1578)—but he was named Cardinal by the Franciscan pope Sixtus V in 1586.171 The Cardinal (and Caravaggio during those two years) occupied the Palazzo Mattei-Caetani—one of four Mattei palaces on the Circus Flaminius facing the Fountain of the Tortoises by Tommaso Landini. Gilbert, Bert Treffers, and Lingo have all argued for the important influence of the Franciscan Cardinal on Caravaggio’s religious paintings completed both for the Cardinal and other patrons.172 These scholars have suggested the ways in which Caravaggio regulated his iconographic choices to reflect specific devotional ideas, just as I believe the artist did with the Doubting Thomas. One example, the Hartford St. Francis (1596; fig. 96), clarifies the ways in which Caravaggio had responded to private religious commissions in the past.

The subject of the St. Francis has been debated: is it a representation of the Stigmatization or of the Ecstasy of St. Francis? Lingo argues his case most convincingly: Caravaggio’s Francis wears a clearly Capuchin habit, with its typical pointed-hood, and

170Gilbert, 154.
171 Gilbert, 100-101.
172 Gilbert, 103; Bert Treffers, “Dogma, esegesi e pittura: Caravaggio nella cappella Contarelli in San Luigi dei Francesi,” Storia dell’Arte 67 (1989): 241-55; this article traces Caravaggio’s iconographic choices in the Contarelli chapel to Franciscan texts by Nicola da Lira (Venice, 1588) and Johann Wild. Francesca Capelleti and Laura Testa also discuss the Franciscan influences of the Mattei on Caravaggio (Il trattenimento di virtuosi: Le collezioni secentesche di quadri nei Palazzi Mattei di Roma (Roma: Argos Edizioni, 1994), 13-17).
the subject of the painting, while still contentious, is likely a *Stigmatization*. Lingo proposes both textual and visual evidence to refute earlier arguments favoring identification of the subject as the Ecstasy of St. Francis. The author lists the Caravaggio painting as an example of the ‘Stigmatization from Above’ type which emerged during the High Renaissance as a particularly Capuchin development. This type allowed for the seraph to be outside of the picture plane, just out of view. Caravaggio’s depiction of light, which pours down on St. Francis from above suggests, according to Lingo, the idea that the seraph was recently there, but had now retreated to heaven. The recumbent St. Francis, knocked down by the impact of his vision, is held up by an Angel as the Dead Christ was upheld by Angels, or as Christ was supported in depictions of the *Agony in the Garden*. Lingo reminds readers of the importance of the revived cult of the Guardian Angel during the late 16th and early 17th century, thus indicating a reason for the Angel’s presence here. Important Franciscan devotional texts described Francis as a cohabitant with the angels of Mount La Verna, thus suggesting that Caravaggio was “visualizing the truth” that angels were in their midst. Finally, Lingo posits that Caravaggio’s depiction

173 Lingo, 186. Lingo dissects Treffers’ article on the *St. Francis*, which sought to dispute Pamela Askew’s earlier discourse in favor of the *Stigmatization* attribution. Treffers objects to the *Stigmatization* title because there is no seraph present in Caravaggio’s painting—a necessary element for a Stigmatization. He also notes that Francis’s reclining position is highly uncharacteristic in the Stigmatization tradition. The Hartford *St. Francis* was painted while Caravaggio resided in the Cardinal Del Monte’s palace but was commissioned by a wealthy banker, Ottavio Costa (Puglisi, 120).

174 Ibid., 212. Orazio Gentileschi, Caravaggio’s longtime friend, had in fact employed this strategy in his rendering of the *Stigmatization*.

175 Ibid., 204. Also discussed in this chapter of Lingo’s dissertation is Caravaggio’s *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1608-09) painted for the high altar of Messina’s Capuchin monastery. Contemporary critical reception of this painting described it as one that degraded the Virgin’s holy sanction by presenting her as an ordinary woman seated on the floor of a barn. Lingo reminds readers, however, of the important *Madonna del Parto*, preserved and venerated until its disappearance, by the San Francesco Conventuals in Messina. The Capuchins, then under the jurisdiction of the Conventuals, did not enjoy an easy relationship with their governing Franciscans. In “re-seeing” the lost antica image of the *Madonna del Parto* in his *Adoration of the Shepherds*, Caravaggio was, according to Lingo, bridging a source of tension between the Capuchins and Conventuals in Messina. By appropriating “a venerated local Virgin from its less reformed Franciscan owners, virtually, if not in fact,” Caravaggio addressed the specific needs of his Capuchin patrons; only the loss of this context ever allowed Caravaggio’s Virgin to be seen simply as ‘ignoble’ (Lingo, 232).
of Francis’s side wound reflected Franciscan descriptions of the event in which Francis received the stigmata one wound at a time.\textsuperscript{176} If Caravaggio was aware of Franciscan debates about the wounds, or adjusted his pictorial conception of Francis’s Sigmatization to reflect contemporary cults, then this suggests that he, like other artists of his day, made iconographic and stylistic choices that reflected his engagement with changing devotional ideals.

Rather than asserting that Caravaggio sympathized personally with Capuchin or Franciscan beliefs Gilbert, Treffers, and Lingo all support the notion that Caravaggio responded to specific commissions with an informed perspective of current religious doctrine. Gilbert’s analysis of Caravaggio’s relationship with Cardinal Mattei is especially convincing. Caravaggio was not a particularly religious or learned man and the likelihood of his conferring with his Cardinal host on matters of religious doctrine and iconography seems entirely plausible. In his discussion of the Hartford \textit{St. Francis}, Lingo agrees that Caravaggio was likely informed on important Franciscan beliefs, and that as Gilbert suggested, the artist probably consulted with Cardinal Mattei. Caravaggio would have similarly conferred with his patrons regarding the \textit{Doubting Thomas} commission.\textsuperscript{177} I resist, just as Lingo has done, the temptation to claim Caravaggio as a

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\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid.}, 204. Treffers notes the bizarre appearance of St. Francis’ side wound without the presence of the hand and feet wounds as well. To explain this anomaly, Lingo proposes that the side wound was the most important wound of Christ as it emphasized the foundation of the church. In addition, Lingo cites the compelling evidence given in Bonaventura’s \textit{Legenda Maior}, which says “there and then the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet, just as he had seen them in his vision; his right side seemed as if it had been pierced with a lance and was marked with a livid scar” (204). The text does not determine which wound occurred first, but rather that they began to occur simultaneously. Caravaggio may have interpreted the text in this way, thus depicting Francis in the process of receiving the stigmata, but before they had all appeared.
\textsuperscript{177} In this case there is no reason to suggest that Caravaggio’s \textit{Doubting Thomas} was conceived as a Franciscan version of the subject. Girolamo Mattei may have alerted the artist to the Franciscan connotations of the theme, given that Caravaggio was living in Girolamo’s home at the time the \textit{Doubting Thomas} was commissioned, but these were probably not the ideals that inspired Caravaggio’s iconographic choices.
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Franciscan, or Capuchin, Oratorian or Jesuit artist, as it invalidates the possibility that Caravaggio, like other great painters, sought to address the needs of his patrons in the best possible ways.

Although the Mattei were later to rent the small Franciscan church of San Tommaso in Formis, it appears that they did not have a formal association with that building while Caravaggio was living in the palatial compound in the city center. Their palaces were very close, however, to the monte Cenci and the parish church of San Tommaso in Cenci, where annual celebrations marked the feast day of St. Thomas. Furthermore, it was the third of these churches, the Oratorian San Tommaso in Parione, where members of the Giustiniani family celebrated numerous rites during the 17th-century. Caravaggio could not have been oblivious to these churches in monte Cenci and Parione and their dedications, situated as they are in the heart of Rome.

Contemporary devotions to Thomas and the Shroud, rather than specifically Franciscan or Oratorian ideals, must have informed Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* and almost certainly were important to Benedetto Giustiniani and his brother Vincenzo, the owner of the painting.

Previously understood as epitomizing the artist’s astounding naturalism or secularism, Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* should now also be interpreted in light of contemporary devotions to St. Thomas. Like the Hartford *St. Francis*, the *Incredulity* reflects then current beliefs: Caravaggio’s focus on Thomas’s tactile contact at the center of his composition recalls the importance of seeing and touching relics like the Holy

178 The precise dates of which are not known (see note 44 above).
Shroud. The magnification of the figures makes the biblical story particularly intimate and is akin to the advice given by reformers encouraging the laity to envision themselves as present in the unfolding of Gospel events. More specifically, Caravaggio’s Christ is cloaked in a mantle that likely refers to the Shroud and reminded viewers of Thomas’s verification of the Sacred Wounds. Treatises like the one by Alfonso Paleotti emphasized Thomas’s key role in securing knowledge of Christ’s Resurrection and hence of his divinity. Thus, for the first time, pictorial attention shifts so that Christ and Thomas are treated as equal halves of the story, both with important lessons to teach.

The refurbishment of three churches dedicated to the apostle in Rome and the updated bulls and *Martyrologium* entries discussed in the first sections of this chapter, indicate that the city was primed for a new Roman tradition representing the Doubting Thomas. Caravaggio’s painting can be viewed as a powerful expression of and inspiration for that tradition. The central tenets of the Counter-Reformation, namely Justification and Transubstantiation, contributed to the tremendous potency of Caravaggio’s picture. Thomas’s actions, as noted above, are essential to his belief, making him a fitting example of Catholic Justification via works and faith. Similarly, Thomas reveals the Real Presence of Christ by probing the Savior’s wounded body. This is the ritual enacted at the altar when the wine and wafer are ‘transubstantiated’ into Christ’s blood and body. It was reaffirmation of these doctrines that informed contemporary devotions to the Wounds and the Shroud, and infused rich spiritual meaning into Caravaggio’s painting as well.

Caravaggio modernized the lessons inherent in the Doubting Thomas story by rearticulating the theme in the new artistic vocabulary of the Baroque. The immediacy of
Caravaggio’s composition reflects both his concerns as an artist, and a more humanizing, post-Tridentine approach to religion and religious pictures alike. Arguably the most influential painting of the subject, the *Doubting Thomas* was to have inestimable impact on Caravaggio’s followers. The posthumous popularity of the painting is astonishing and warrants further reflection. Its enduring relevance must signal the ways in which Caravaggio’s painting related to the changing cultural milieu. The emergence of skeptical philosophy and empirical science during the 17th-century ensured that Thomas’s disbelief, as it was so exactingly visualized by Caravaggio, continued to resonate with viewers as they sought to verify their own beliefs just as Thomas had done.
CONCLUSION.

THE DOUBTING THOMAS AFTER CARAVAGGIO

In many ways the Reformation unsettled Christian believers in a way they had never been before. When the sessions of the Council of Trent finally came to a conclusion in 1563 the Church was formally divided. The spiritual anxiety and political upheaval of these years left an indelible mark on the arts, as has been well documented. Artists were left to respond to the vigorous demands of the Church and its bishops. Religious iconography was subject to censor as in the famous case of Paolo Veronese and his painting of the Last Supper turned *Feast in the House of Levi* (1573). Despite what might be considered an increasing climate of fundamentalism, skepticism thrived in Italy during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Doubt about the omnipotence of God or the validity of miracles signaled a reticence to believe easily in Church teachings. It seems inevitable that these leanings would have impacted the 17th-century viewer’s relationship to imagery of Doubting Thomas—a theme that is inherently linked to spiritual incredulity.

In the following pages I will address how the changing culture of conversion, discussed in the preceding chapter, engaged with an equally changing culture of knowledge. The overlap between spiritual knowing and intellectual knowing may have inspired the flourishing of images of the Doubting Thomas in the late 16th-early 17th-centuries. To the aspects of Doubting Thomas imagery discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation—such as the Eucharistic understanding of Thomas, the Franciscan appropriation of the theme, or the civic interpretation of the Incredulity—may
be added another layer of meaning. This layer, perhaps pictorially initiated by Caravaggio’s innovative depiction of Christ and Thomas, suggested Thomas as a model of intellectual inquiry in a way that he could not be for Renaissance jurors who viewed the Tuscan communal palace frescos. Those illustrious men were encouraged to view Thomas and his tactile contact with Christ as evidence of the divine justice they extolled in their own decisions. But for the followers of Caravaggio, the skepticism of Thomas may have evoked broad movements in both philosophical and scientific thought.

Alfred Moir’s invaluable text *Caravaggio and his Copyists*, traces over thirty copies of Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*, done both in print and painted media. Among these are copies made by J. Robillart (fig.103), and many other unknown copyists (figs. 102 and 104). These copies, whatever their artistic merit, or lack there of, substantiate Giovanna Perini’s suggestion that the *Doubting Thomas* was particularly well received in Bologna.¹ Malvasia’s *Vite de’pittori bolognesi* of 1678 details the exchange of several copies of the picture among important Bolognese citizens, including the Legnani and Lambertini.² While Moir admits that there is “no certain correlation between the number of known copies after a painting and its popularity or its authenticity,”³ the frequency with which artists wished to copy the *Doubting Thomas* strongly implies that the picture was favorably received by these artists and their patrons, if not by the general public as well.

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¹ Giovanna Perini, “Caravaggio a Bologna,” in *Napoli L’Europa: Richerche di storia dell’arte in onore di Ferdinando Bologna*, eds. F. Abbate, and F. Stricchia Santoro (Catanzaro: Meridiana, 1995), 199. The number of copies and their vicinity (at the time of their execution) to Bologna serves as evidence, I would suggest, for Squarzina’s notion that Caravaggio’s picture was in Bologna because it was owned by Benedetto Giustiniani.
² Malvasia (Bologna, 1678) 9-10. For the English translation see Friedlaender, 161.
Extant copies of Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* (figs. 102-104) reveal that these artists followed as strictly as they were able the original pictorial composition. Moir documents thirteen other painted copies of the *Incredulity* now lost, which dated to the 17th-18th centuries. Most notably, two of these lost paintings date to around 1606, just four years after Caravaggio painted the original canvas and contemporaneous to Benedetto Giustiniani’s service as legate in Bologna. The impact of Caravaggio’s painting was immediate. As I have proposed in the preceding chapter, those who viewed Caravaggio’s painting in Bologna (and commissioned subsequent copies) may have been particularly disposed to its devotional subject. As an important Counter-Reformatory center, Bologna had played a crucial role in church reforms and in devotion to the Shroud in Turin. The Bolognese bishop, Alfonso Paleotti, had written about the wounds of Christ and the Shroud while highlighting Thomas’s central role in the affirmation of Christ’s divine body less than a decade before Caravaggio’s painting was brought to the city. A lost copy of the *Doubting Thomas* was recorded in the collection of the Duke of Savoy as early as 1635. This commission may have reflected the Duke’s interest in the relic his duchy was responsible for donating to Turin in the preceding century. Moreover, these copies, which originate largely from the area around Bologna, speak to the painting’s visibility and Benedetto’s desire to share one of his prized artistic possessions.

The body of extant copies represents only the most immediate manifestation of Caravaggio’s legacy. Subsequent depictions of the *Doubting Thomas*, both Italian and

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4 Alfred Moir, 89-90.
5 These copies, unlike the records of the early biographers (Baglione and Bellori, for example), reflect the picture’s immediate and positive reception. By the time Bellori wrote his seething review of Caravaggio in 1672, it is conceivable that aesthetic taste had affected critics’ reception of Caravaggio’s work.
Northern alike, substantiate the importance of the painting and suggest that Caravaggio’s iconographic interpretation endured, despite the indecorous naturalism Baglione so abhorred. These canvases cannot be called copies because they do not follow Caravaggio’s compositional model as strictly as the works noted above. Instead, artists like Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, il Guercino (1591-1666), who painted the Incredulity in 1621 (fig. 105) clearly derived inspiration from Caravaggio’s picture of c.1602 without strictly adhering to its type. In Guercino’s version the figures of Christ and Thomas are alone, as they were often depicted in earlier representations of the subject (figs. 46, 57, and 65 for example). Thomas probes Christ’s wound with two fingers instead of one, thereby evoking Northern predecessors like Dürer (fig. 77). Unlike in Caravaggio’s painting, Christ does not guide Thomas’s hand to his side. Instead, his right arm is cast aside, and in Christ’s left hand he holds his standard. Coupled with dramatic backlighting which creates a halo-like effect around the figures, Guercino’s inclusion of Christ’s standard reinserts symbolic elements excluded in Caravaggio’s veristic composition.

Between c. 1620 and 1626 Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644) painted the Doubting Thomas three times (figs. 107-109). In each of these paintings Strozzi borrowed formal elements from the Caravaggio painting: the figures are depicted in three-quarter length and Christ and Thomas appear among a significantly pared down group of apostles. Tenebrist backgrounds situate Strozzi’s narratives in indistinguishable spaces, just as

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6 Luisa Mortari, *Bernardo Strozzi* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1995) 129; 134. It was not uncommon for Strozzi to repeat his subjects. In fact, he painted seventeen versions of *The Tribute Money* during his career (145-148). Each of Strozzi’s *Doubting Thomas* canvases was likely painted for a private patron, though the details of the commissions are not known (134). Strozzi was a devout man, taking the Capuchin habit in 1597 when he entered the convent of S. Barnaba in Genoa. Many of his other paintings reflect these religious devotions: depictions of St. Francis in ecstasy or praying before a crucifix are common in his oeuvre (see Mortari’s catalogue of paintings 83-221). Perhaps the artist and his patrons counted the Incredulity among those subjects that resonated with special Franciscan piety.
Caravaggio did in his earlier painting. Nevertheless, Strozzi’s versions of the subject are notably different from the model provided in Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*. In all three paintings Christ appears, for instance, with a deliberate halo of light that highlights his divine nature. Thomas too appears haloed in at least one of the compositions (fig. 109). In these representations of the theme Thomas stands at the left side of the composition and his face is barely visible—we focus instead on the point at which his finger makes contact with Christ’s ivory flesh. Caravaggio’s depiction of the physical exchange between Christ and Thomas is imbued with tremendous emotional tenor. Their heads almost touching, both Christ and Thomas are equally invested in the awesome event. Strozzi has defused some of this dynamism by directing our attention mostly to Christ’s body.

Dutch Caravaggisti working in Rome such as Matthias Stomer (1600-1649) and Hendrik Terbrugghen (1588-1629) also painted the *Doubting Thomas* (figs. 110; 111). Neither of these paintings may be viewed as copies of Caravaggio’s earlier work though they were obviously inspired by it. In Stomer’s picture Thomas is at the left side of the canvas, his back turned toward the viewer. He extends two fingers to Christ’s side while one apostle looks on. In Terbrugghen’s composition Christ is at the center of the canvas while Thomas is once again depicted on the left. Christ guides Thomas’s hand as he does in Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* but the frontal position of the figures means that the viewer focuses less on this physical exchange and more on Christ’s body. Three apostles form a circle around Christ and one wears spectacles, craning for a better examination.

Guercino, Stomer, and Terbrugghen’s versions of the *Doubting Thomas* (figs. 105, 110, and 111), are just three of twelve catalogued in Benedict Nicolson’s
Caravaggesque Painters.⁷ Both the Italian and Netherlandish artists adapt Caravaggio’s close framing, and while both adjust the number and location of the apostles, they obviously take Caravaggio’s picture as their point of departure. In a familiar example of the subject, Peter Paul Rubens (1613-15) notably omits the wound in Christ’s side (fig. 112), choosing instead to emphasize the hand wounds. His version of St. Thomas is young, beardless, serene—hardly the anxious and stunned Thomas type that we see in Caravaggio’s rendition. The figural grouping is, however, distinctly Caravaggesque; the central panel of the triptych places the three apostles in a similar arch around the three-quarter length Christ. The other apostles have been eliminated from the composition in favor of Caravaggio’s particular choice of Thomas and two additional disciples. Rubens’s incorporation of donor portraits in the side panels indicates Thomas’s intercession on their behalf.⁸

Despite the many differences that distinguish the Caravaggesque paintings from Caravaggio’s original composition, they rely on the earlier picture. Caravaggio’s dramatic chiaroscuro and tenebrism informs all of these depictions of the theme. Each represents the subject with three-quarter length figures, and in each case the cast of

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⁷ Benedict Nicholson’s, The International Caravaggesque Movement (London: Phaidon, 1979) is the most complete list of Caravaggesque pictures. Terbruggen (fig. 111) and Stomer’s (fig. 110) versions of the Doubting Thomas were both private easel pictures. Howard Hibbard also makes mention of the Terbruggen version noting the artist’s “belated assimilation of these [Caravaggio’s] powerful effects,” 168. Terbruggen painted the Doubting Thomas upon his arrival back in the Netherlands after having been in Italy (1604-1614) and sold this picture to Samuel Jackson, a British watchmaker, in whose family it remained until 1956.

⁸ While as the court painter for Archduke Albert and Infanta Isabella of Antwerp, Rubens painted his Incredulity of St. Thomas for Nicolaas Rockox. The triptych, with the left side panel portrait of Rockox and right panel of his wife, was intended for the patron’s funerary chapel in the Franciscan church in Antwerp. Rockox was the mayor and a patrician patron of the arts. I am unsure as to where this triptych was situated within the chapel as it now resides in the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp. It is interesting to note, however, that unlike many other public religious depictions of this subject, Rubens adapts Caravaggio’s three-figure composition (rather than the usually crowded altar versions, like Cima’s) for a funerary commission. The intimacy and immediacy which this compositional device allows is applied to a semi-public work, implying Caravaggio’s widespread and enduring influence.
apostles is significantly reduced. A sense of intimacy is created by the close pictorial framing and lack of a visible interior setting. Although “clearly not painted by a devout artist, like Guido Reni or Bernini, Caravaggio’s religious works none the less convey intense religious experience. The tenor of this experience is not visionary; divinity or sanctitude do not transform earthly matter,” and it is this earthly element which is also largely adopted by the artist’s followers in their depictions of the *Incredulity*.9 Finally, and perhaps most significantly, in each of these examples our eyes are drawn to the point of tactile contact. Thomas’s fingers penetrate Christ’s warmly hued flesh and confirm what he was skeptical to believe: Christ *is* his “Lord and God.”

Thomas’s incredulity and the visual focus on his sensory allayment of disbelief may have been particularly apposite at a time when movements in skeptical philosophy were gaining momentum. Thomas Aquinas had emphasized the importance of reason for matters of faith (as discussed in chapter 3) but competing philosophies had also flourished. Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471) for instance, advocated for the denial of reason citing it as a complicating impediment to faith. Following the Council of Trent, however, doubt seems to have fueled intellectual and artistic currents. Although it is widely acknowledged that seventeenth-century skepticism “emerged as an important philosophical movement, which had significant impact not only on philosophical thought, but on theology, science, and literature as well,”10 it is less often recognized what impact this movement had on art. The overwhelming popularity of Caravaggio’s *Doubting*.

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9 Puglisi, 253.
Thomas may have been spawned by the growing interest in Socratic skepticism: the notion that one must critically probe an issue to decide if it is believable.\textsuperscript{11}

For Caravaggio’s contemporaries the danger in following ancient models like those of Socrates and Pyrro of Elis, generally regarded as the first skeptics, is that it “frees the individual from making a commitment” which can, in turn, free them from believing in Church doctrine.\textsuperscript{12} In late 16\textsuperscript{th}-century Europe, it was commonplace, as Nicholas Davidson has revealed, for people to think of Italy as a breeding ground for atheism.\textsuperscript{13} Foreign visitors compiled lists of these atheists—Johannes Micraelius named Aretino, Ochino, Poggio, Clement VII, Alexander VI and Galileo in his list and Thomas Philipps added Ermolao Barbaro, Ficino, and Girolamo Cardano. But the men (and popes!) inventoried here believed in God; they were not atheists according to our modern definition of the word. Lucien Febvre has explained, in fact, that modern atheism was not possible prior to 1700 and that anything referring to it is more of an insult than an accurate description of beliefs.\textsuperscript{14} Instead, the Renaissance revival of ancient skeptical philosophy meant that poets like Aretino and scientists like Galileo posed questions regarding the Christian notion of the soul, creation, and salvation.\textsuperscript{15} Posing these questions was deemed heretical—not because it meant the person did not believe in God, but because the person did not believe in traditional Church definitions of God. The

\textsuperscript{11} Robert Rosin emphasizes the significance of the Socratic approach to skepticism for 17\textsuperscript{th}-century reformers in \textit{Reformers, the Preacher, and Skepticism: Luther, Brenz, Melanchthon and Ecclesiastes} (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1997) 8.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 8-12.
\textsuperscript{13} Nicholas Davidson, “Unbelief and Atheism in Italy, 1500-1700,” in \textit{Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment} (Michael Hunter and David Wootton, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 56.
\textsuperscript{14} Lucien Febvre, \textit{The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais} (Trans. Beatrice Gottlieb, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947). Despite the early date of this text, Febvre’s deduction, that modern atheism did not really exist prior to 1700, has gone unchallenged by Davidson and others. The “atheism” to which Davidson refers in his title (see note 17 above), is not “disbelief in the existence of God” but rather incredulity or skepticism in the dogma of the Church.
\textsuperscript{15} Davidson, 67.
cynicism of Machiavelli and Girolamo Cardano suggested that people were virtuous because of fear not because of genuine belief.

Following the Council of Trent, a “climate of cynicism” prevailed but so did one of intolerance: little is known about what “unbelievers” truly thought because they were necessarily secretive. Nevertheless, alternative theories about the spirit, immortality, Christ’s divinity, and Christian morality were in wide circulation during the late 16th and early 17th-centuries. Michel de Montaigne (1533-92), the great father of early modern skepticism suggested that one must “pass everything through a sieve, and lodge nothing in his head on mere authority and trust,” noting that skepticism was a healthy, necessary aspect of faith. Unlike Protestant reformers who saw disbelief as inherently heretical, Montaigne and Catholic theologians argued that doubt provided God the opportunity to shape man in a positive way. In this context doubt such as Thomas’s could facilitate the revelation of things formerly unknowable.

Giordano Bruno’s refusal to accept the crucifix handed to him as he burned on the pyre in 1600 was symptomatic of philosophical trends at the turn of the century. Cases like that of the miller Domenico Scandella ‘Menocchio’ (1532-1599), famously relayed by Carlo Ginzburg, who was executed after prolonged trials regarding his denial of Christian doctrine, suggest that the Church had not been totally successful in its squelching of religious insubordination. The new wave of philosophers were skeptics; heirs to Montaigne, they were often deemed atheists, or specifically, Libertines—a

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16 Ibid., 68.
17 Ibid., 70.
19 Davidson, 85; Bruno lived from 1548-1600.
largely French faction of unbelievers. Arriving in Rome around 1592, not long before the burning of Bruno for his transgressions of faith, Caravaggio would become famous for his richly colored religious pictures produced in a climate of unresolved reform. That the *Doubting Thomas* became the most frequently copied of these works indicates that Thomas’s own transgression of faith was particularly relevant to 17th-century viewers.

Equally relevant, I would argue, was how Caravaggio translated this lapse into pictorial terms, for it was not only the Doubting Thomas theme which flourished after c.1602, but specifically Caravaggio’s iconographic variation of the subject. Even a more classicizing altarpiece like that by Leandro Bassano (1557-1622, fig. 106) for an altar in Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice reflects Caravaggio’s impact. Here the narrative unfolds in a grand architectural space and the full cast of apostles surround the central figures of Thomas and Christ. St. Dominic and St. Peter Martyr kneel in the foreground, offering intercession on behalf of devout viewers. The composition does not follow Caravaggio’s three-quarter length format, nor is the same intimacy evoked. Nevertheless, Bassano’s Christ is similarly proactive: he guides Thomas’s hand to the wound, where the apostle inserts two fingers into a bloody laceration. Gone, it would seem, are more tentative renderings of this moment like the one by Verrocchio in Florence (fig. 65) in which Thomas’s finger does not yet reach Christ’s body. Despite the many formal differences in depictions of the *Incredulity* following Caravaggio’s painting, all appear to share a similar emphasis on the point of physical contact between the protagonists.

This exacting detail in Caravaggio’s painting likely reflects broad historical currents. Ferdinando Bologna and John Varriano have both briefly suggested that Caravaggio’s Thomas is representative of new movements in empirical science. Neither
scholar has, however, shown how these scientific theories might be more explicitly linked
either to Caravaggio’s painting or to the role of Thomas in general. Indeed Thomas
carried what might be called ‘empiricist’ associations from the Tuscan tradition in which
the quest for evidence was deemed a necessary element of faith and justice alike. In this
later context, however, these images might have resonated with a more general reluctance
to believe in things unseen, or, more specifically, untested. “What nature displayed to the
outer eye of man was no longer a sufficient guide. Indeed, it was often downright
misleading. Judgment could no longer rest on any confident assertion of the correlation
between appearance and reality (whatever those terms might mean). Skepticism about
appearance had to become the order of the day, because the world had become
interpretable—with all the perils and profits interpretation entailed.”21 The only truth at
this time, writes David Freedberg, “is that appearance does indeed mask that which is
essentially defining about things.”22

Until the middle of the 17th-century, there were two dominant trends in the
theories of science.23 The first was the Conceptualist model: from the 12th-century
translation of Aristotle until the beginning of the 15th-century, the natural world was
understood through insight. This means that human “insight allows us to grasp essence
via a single observation…seeing the universal in the singular…makes the premises of
natural science into necessary truths that are seen to be such without the need for further

21 David Freedberg, The Eye of the Lynx: Galileo, his Friends, and the Beginnings of Modern Natural
22 Ibid., 408.
23 Ernan McMullan, “Empiricism and the Scientific Revolution” in Charles Singleton, Art, Science, and
History in the Renaissance (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967) 335; McMullan (and others)
are quick to qualify this type of statement, reminding readers that science and philosophy were, until at
least the mid-18th century, inseparable terms. Both concerned the “stablest and best-warranted knowledge
man could obtain about nature.”
testing.” If this is to be applied to the biblical account of the Incredulity, it might be summarized as ‘Thomas sees and then believes,’ without further need of verification. It was not until the end of the 14th-century and then later with Copernicus (1473-1543) that analytical observation began to play a part in scientific inquiry. The empiricist mode of scientific analysis did not truly emerge until the 17th-century. According to scientific historian Ernan McMullan, the empiricist “claims that the world of sense is too opaque to be directly penetrated by human insight in the way the conceptualist assumes…the attainment of any sort of generalized knowledge about it is only possible on the basis of careful and persistent observation.” When this model is applied to the episode of the Incredulity, one might deduce that ‘Thomas sees, then touches, and then believes.’ Thomas requires “persistent observation” before Christ’s Resurrection is proven. But, even Galileo, whom Bologna cites as a model (somewhat anachronistically) for Caravaggio’s Thomas, was not truly empirical in approach. Rather, Galileo straddled the line, according to scientific historians, between the older conceptualist model and the empirical one.

The recent work of Freedberg (among others) has revealed a dynamic exchange between artists and scientists, and the emergence of natural history. Federico Cesi (1585-1630), the great founder of the Lincean Academy, routinely engaged Galileo and the artist Vincenzo Leonardi (active c. 1621-46) in his studies (fig. 115). Caravaggio was not a part of these projects. The Academy was founded in 1603 (a year after Caravaggio painted the Doubting Thomas) and did not gain momentum until after the artist’s death in

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24 Ibid., 335.
25 Ibid., 335.
26 Ibid., 345.
27 Ibid., 345, with bibliography.
28 Freedberg, introduction.
1610. I maintain, therefore, that it is unlikely that these trends influenced Caravaggio’s depiction of the *Incredulity*.

Rather, it seems that Caravaggio’s painting engaged posthumously with emerging empiricism and that in subsequent years the *Doubting Thomas* accrued added meaning not originally intrinsic to its creation.

Varriano and Bologna assume that Caravaggio’s naturalism in the *Doubting Thomas* is at least partially a result of the artist’s interest in this analytical mode of scientific analysis. Freedberg, however, explains that despite the most exacting nature and the highest levels of accurate reproduction in illustrations of fruits, vegetables, and dissections made for the Lincean Academy, they did not necessarily serve an explicative function: they did not tell us what the species were. On the other hand, after many revisions of these observations and drawings, the illustrations could “carry you beyond doubt, and [could] sometimes even resolve fundamental questions of ambiguity.” What sort of ambiguity did Caravaggio’s exacting depiction of the *Doubting Thomas* resolve for viewers? The artist’s vivid naturalism was perfectly cued to the subject of the painting itself; together style and meaning converged to depict a “natural inclination to want to believe….that our eyes can indeed provide us with evidence we can trust as the basis for further judgment of the world beyond ourselves.” In Thomas’s case, verification with his eyes was not enough and he thus required the physical evidence so many modern scientists depend on.

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29 Despite the notion that Caravaggio was likely exposed to scientific experimentation in Cardinal Del Monte’s household (John Varriano, *Caravaggio: The Art of Realism* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2006) 12) it seems that broader trends in empirical inquiry did not fully permeate cultural ideals until later in the century.


It is easy to see in Caravaggio’s Thomas a model for the increasingly secular scientific investigation of the later part of the century. The risk of “seeming gullible” or of being deluded by our initial insights (as in the Conceptualist approach) means that Thomas’s incredulity seems more and more appropriate—at least in retrospect. Numerous copies and the far-reaching influence of Caravaggio’s painting may support just such an analysis. The posthumous popularity of the subject could be credited to both the engagement of the theme and Caravaggio’s naturalism with the emergence of empirical science and skeptical philosophy. Nevertheless, Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas*, unlike Rembrandt’s *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632, fig. 114) for example, did not become iconic with regard to the rise of modern empirical science. The reason is simple: the subject of the painting could never be void of its spiritual content. Ultimately, no matter how visceral the artist’s rendering, or how humanizing his conceptualization of the theme, Caravaggio’s *Thomas* is about “the world beyond ourselves.” While today we see this ‘world’ as nondenominational, perhaps even secular, during the early years of the 17th-century such a place did not yet exist.

A sort of rhetorical slippage already existed between the sacred and more secular, empirical modes of the day. 16th and 17th-century intellectuals often employed the language of the Church to convince skeptics. The culture of conversion established during the age of Clement VIII (and his personal success with regard to the conversion of Henry IV) inspired philosophers and scientists to adopt the rhetoric of conversion for their own purposes. Models of religious conversion were used to “describe complete changes in ways of seeing and thinking…” and were “powerful and persistent

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among…followers of Galileo and others.” As historian of science William Ashworth has shown, contrary to many oversimplified versions of this history, many Catholic scientists believed in the “ascendancy of the senses” and promoted an empiricist approach over a conceptu alist one. This melding of religious and scientific conversion may have resonated with artists who depicted subjects related to such conversion. The Calling of St. Matthew and Conversion of St. Paul were common themes for Counter-Reformatory artists, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, the Doubting Thomas differed from these other stories: Saul and Matthew are not yet converted to Christianity while Thomas is already Christ’s apostle. Thomas’s need for evidence underscores the central issues of belief.

In their depictions of this subject Caravaggio and his followers gave visual form to the problems inherent to both the intellectual and spiritual pursuit of truth. Unlike the conversions of Matthew and Paul just noted, Thomas’s ‘conversion’ is dependent on his affirmation of Christ’s divinity via physical evidence. He is granted an opportunity denied Mary Magdalene: he is invited to touch Christ’s risen body. Thomas touches the source of the knowledge he seeks, something future Christians will enact figuratively when they ingest the sacrament. The artists discussed in this dissertation encapsulated the potency of the Doubting Thomas episode. Depictions of the theme came to signify discrepant meanings: Thomas’s gesture called attention to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and at times it was also an exemplum of Franciscan spirituality. Thomas’s incredulity could stand for the investigatory methods of Renaissance jurors, or it could

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34 Ibid., 439.
signal doctrinal concerns at the heart of the Counter-Reformation. Despite their ability to convey a variety of meanings, images of the Doubting Thomas shared common paradigmatic ground—no other theme better summarized the problem of spiritual inquiry. Whatever anachronistic secularization might be read in Caravaggio’s *Doubting Thomas* is thwarted by the Gospel story itself. By reaching for proof, Thomas resolves his crisis of faith and provides a model for those who would doubt, just as he had, the mysteries of faith. The varying interpretations of the Incredulity discussed in this dissertation were generated, expressed, and conveyed by devotional texts and by images. But it was the persistence and revitalization of Doubting Thomas imagery that attests to its fundamental importance for individuals. These images—from the earliest *Incredulity* on a 4th-century tomb, to Caravaggio’s painting of c.1602—profoundly impacted early modern attitudes toward doubt and faith.
APPENDIX.

THOMAS IN INDIA

As Glenn W. Most’s recent publication establishes, the Gnostic texts dedicated to St. Thomas say little of his incredulity but rather focus on his missionary sojourn in India. Despite the omission of the incident of Thomas’s incredulity, *The Gospel of Thomas* reveals that while John’s gospel seems to have the authoritative last word, for a time Thomas’s own interpretation colored Christian understanding of Christ’s Resurrection. Pagels suggests that Thomas’s gospel largely opposes the rhetoric of John’s; Thomas encourages that the “hearer not so much believe in Jesus, as John requires, [but] seek to know God through one’s own, divinely given capacity since all are created in the image of God.” There may be good reason for this opposition as Pagels documents; written after Thomas’s gospel, John’s gospel might be largely retaliatory against the teachings of Thomas’s own work. Regardless, the disparities between John and Thomas’s gospels are somewhat moot: Pagels devotes most of her text to discussing how Thomas’s gospel fell into obscurity while John’s was accepted into the canon. Later

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3 *Ibid.*, 57-58. While John firmly believes that the light of the world comes from Jesus, for example, Thomas suggests that this light can come from within, and may be found in everything. Thomas thus projects the idea that the capacity to discover truth is within each of us. Repeated numerous times in Thomas’s gospel, the sayings of Christ often refer to the process of seeking and finding. According to Thomas, Christ said, “One who seeks will find, and for [one who knocks] it will be opened; Let one who seeks not stop seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will be troubled. When he is troubled he will be astonished and will rule over all.” But given Thomas’s proclivity to see spirituality as a divine quest, the Doubting Thomas story recounted in John may have in fact occurred. As such, the incident would not, as Pagels asserts, represent a heretical crisis of faith, but rather be a demonstration of Thomas and Christ’s own convictions: that one must seek in order to find.
commentaries on the gospels prove that Thomas’s words were indeed largely forgotten by theologians, not to be resurrected until the 20th century.

The history of Thomas’s relics, neglected in previous art historical discussions of this subject, demonstrates the importance of Thomas’s life after his incredulity. Thomas’s conversion of the people of southern India, who today still call themselves Thomas Christians, must have informed depictions of the Doubting Thomas—that moment for which the saint was most famous. By filling in the details of Thomas’s mission and the translation of his relics, one may reconnect images of the Incredulity to the development of the saint’s cult. Doing so contributes to our understanding of the relationship between the depiction of hallowed biblical narratives, and popular devotional cults.

The story of the translation and veneration of Thomas’s relics reveals a complex and international relationship to the apostle’s death that has not been brought to bear on the iconographic traditions associated with Thomas. A brief reconstruction of this history provides valuable background for the chapters to follow. Ultimately the history of Thomas’s relics was, I believe, to have lasting impact on the western cult of St. Thomas and on images of his incredulity. The relationship between Thomas’s relics and his depiction in the art of early modern Italy has, until this point, been obscured by the textual scarcity and competing descriptions of Thomas’s translation. An attempt must be made, nevertheless, to recount these events and to reconstruct early devotions to Thomas beyond his moment of disbelief.

Thomas’s life after the Incredulity was fruitful—his accomplishments led to his conversion of the king of India and his building of a new palace for the baptized ruler.
This act, which later made Thomas the patron saint of builders and architects, also led to his martyrdom and supposed burial in the Indian town of Mylapore (also called Chennai, ex Madras), where he is still celebrated (and was recently featured on a postage stamp, fig. 6). According to the Latin version of the *Acts of Thomas*, however, Thomas was never buried in India, but rather in Edessa, or modern day Urfa, Turkey. The later translation of Thomas’s relics from Edessa to Ortona in 1258, in the Abruzzi region of Italy, has inspired centuries of celebration and dozens of artistic commissions in honor of the town’s patron saint.

After his martyrdom in Mylapore around 72 A.D., Thomas’s tomb and the cathedral of San Thomé became the sites of devotion for both local ‘Thomas Christians’ and Christian pilgrims from the West. Accounts beginning with that from Theophilus to Constantine in 354 A.D. reported that Thomas’s conversion of locals in Southern India had resulted in a thriving Christian community. St. Efram of Spain (381 A.D.), John of Chrysostom (c. 380), and Gregory of Tours (c. 550) all confirmed the presence of Thomas’s tomb in India. These accounts become complicated, however, by the

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4 Thomas’s relics were later transported to the Isle of Chios in the Aegean Sea. Although the details of this transfer are mysterious, it is clear that in 1258 the prince of Taranto raided Chios and had the relics brought to the small port of Ortona, Italy. Thereafter most of St. Thomas’s body has remained in the Ortona Cathedral, although there are notable exceptions: Thomas’s jawbone is preserved in the Scuola dei Mureri at San Samuele, Venice, where the guild of builders commissioned Cima’s *Incredulity of St. Thomas* to adorn their chapel altar. In addition, Cardinal Tisserant arranged for Thomas’s thighbone to be sent to Crangamore in 1952; for what purpose I am not sure. Although Ortona was a major port until its destruction by the Venetians in the 15th century, the interior of the 12th-century cathedral is largely ruined today due to bombings during World War II. Thomas’s missionary work in India is still largely celebrated by Christians in that country, and a postage stamp featuring a Byzantine-style image of St. Thomas was issued as recently as 1964. This information is widely available online on the websites of the Indian and Italian governments.

5 Christians in this area refer to themselves as ‘Thomas Christians’ and trace their lineage directly to the apostle.

6 For the best, most academic account of the Indian history of St. Thomas see Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956, 1982); for a detailed, though slightly biased detailing of the translation of Thomas relics, including earlier history and bibliography, see Marco Cozza, Rodolfo Giungi, Paola Pasquini, Emilia Polidoro. *L’apostolo Tommaso è ad Ortona.* (Ortona: Comune di Ortona, 2006).
conflicting report that Thomas’s body was in Edessa by around 232 A.D.\(^7\) St. Efram (also known as Egeria or Aetheria) described praying at the tomb of St. Thomas in India, but he also recounted his prayers at the tomb of Thomas in Edessa!\(^8\) It seems that both places claim to have kept Thomas’s body and to this day both Christians in Edessa and in Cochin maintain supposed tomb sites.\(^9\) Thomas’s presence in India was known in Italy beginning with the early sources cited above and knowledge of the saint’s Indian tomb was perpetuated as late as the 16th century.

In 1292 John de Montecorvino, a Franciscan missionary, was ordered to explore routes to China via India by Nicholas IV. Although his most significant accomplishment was to bring Christianity to China (becoming the first archbishop of Peking, now Beijing), he was in Mylapore for a year, where he recognized the tomb of St. Thomas.\(^10\) This late date indicates that Thomas’s supposed translation to Edessa was not embraced by locals in Southern India. Later the same year Marco Polo returned from his voyage East and recorded his visit to Thomas’s tomb in India in his widely read *Descrizione del*

\(^7\) The Latin version of the *Acts of Thomas* recount this version of the story.
\(^8\) As cited by Cozza et al, St. Efram’s first account describes his experience of Thomas’s tomb in Edessa: “Poi, in nome del Signore, passato un po’ di tempo, essendo già tre anni interi da quando ero arrivata a Gerusalemme, dopo aver visto tutti I luoghi santi nei quali mi ero recata per pregare e avendo già in animo di ritornare in patria, volli, per volere di Dio, recarmi ancora in Mesopotamia di Siria, per vedere I santi monaci che si diceva essere li molto numerosi e capaci di vita ammirevole oltre ogni dire. Mi volli anche recare per pregare alla tomba di san Tommaso apostolo, dove è deposto il suo corpo tutto intero, ossia presso Edessa” (77). St. Efram’s second account describes what the authors’ call “almeno di parte del corpo del Santo in India”: “…giungemmo, in nome di Cristo Dio nostro, ad Edessa. Al nostro arrivo, subito andammo alla chiesa ed alla tomba di san Tommaso. Dopo aver pregato, secondo la consuetudine, e dopo aver fatto tutte le altre cerimone che eravamo abituati a fare nei luoghi santi, vi leggemmo anche alcuni testi sullo stesso san Tommaso. La chiesa che è là è grande, bellissima, ricostruita da poco, veramente degna di essere la casa di Dio; poiché molte erano le cose che desideravo vedere, mi sono dovuta fermare per tre giorni” (77).  
\(^10\) Brown, 324-25.
Subsequent explorers, sent to solidify Venetian relations with India, confirmed Polo’s observations and reminded those at home of Thomas’s successful conversion of natives in distant lands. Forty years prior to Polo’s visit Pope Innocent III founded the Societas Peregrinantium pro Christo—a missionary society of Franciscan and Dominican friars dedicated to evangelizing in the East. Many of the society’s most important members, Franciscans from the Veneto, confirmed Polo’s account of Thomas’s tomb. Among these reports were those of Odoric de Pordenone (c. 1325), and John Marignoli (1350), both of whom traveled through the Madras area in search of safe passage to China. By as late as 1431 the Venetian Pope Eugenius IV had sent an envoy to the Indian Christians with a letter in hand, “To my most beloved Son in Christ, Thomas, the illustrious Emperor of the Indians, health and the apostolic benediction. There often has reached us a constant rumor that your Serenity and also all who are subject of your kingdom are true Christians…” The letter never reached its destination. In 1499 Nicolo de Conti reported that Thomas’s body was worshipped in San Thomè. These descriptions establish a counter-tradition to that which places Thomas’s relics in the Italian town of Ortona beginning in 1259.

Beginning in the early part of the 16th century the Portuguese and Venetians struggled for control of the spice trade through India. Portuguese missionary activity in

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11 Marco Polo dictated his *Descrizione del mondo* to the poet and novelist Rustichello da Pisa (see Leonardo Olschki, *Marco Polo’s Asia: An introduction to his ‘Description of the World.’* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960). That the text later came to be known as the *Milione* (or Tall Tale) is an indication of its factual inaccuracy. In this record, however, Marco Polo notes that the tomb of St. Thomas is in coastal South India.

12 Brown, 82.

13 For John de Montecorvino see A. van den Wyngaert, *Jean de Mont Corvin* (Lille, 1924); Odoric de Pordenone wrote about his travels in his *Relatio*, reprinted in *Sinica Franciscana* I (Quaracchi, 1929) 414-95. For more detailed information about John Marignoli see Girolamo Gulubovich, *Le prime relazioni della S. Sede con la Cina per opera de’ Frati Minori e l’itinerario orientale di Fr. Giovanni de’ Marignolli di Firenze* (Florence, 1923).

14 Brown, 84.
India resulted in a new wave of reports about Thomas’s tomb site. Ludovico de Varthema wrote extensively about his travels in this area and about the mass celebrated by the Thomas Christians; he described this as a Greek Mass said with four names: John, James, Matthew, and Thomas. His *Itinerario de Ludovico de Varthema Bolognese ne lo Egypt une la Suria ne la Arabia deserta & Felice ne la Persia ne la India: & ne la Ethiopia* provides a lengthy discussion of the devotion to Thomas in India. Despite their celebration of a Christian mass, Thomas Christians cultivated a specifically local version of the religion. A small repoussé casket (fig. 7) is now used for collecting alms in the Cathedral of St. Thomas in San Thome, ex Madras but its imagery reflects an amalgam of Christian and Hindu iconography.

Decorated with a geometrical pattern of foliage and Hindu motifs as well as with an image of the Doubting Thomas, the lock and side hinges indicate that it was once a reliquary box. Although Indian historian B.A. Figredo has dated it to the 16th century based on contemporary descriptions, it could be dated earlier on stylistic grounds. At its center is a medallion of the Doubting Thomas. The figures are cast under a constellation of seven stars, or what is called the Great Bear or Septa Rishi in Hindu

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15 This book was first published in Rome in 1510; I consulted a later edition (1523) in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Roma. The Portuguese involvement with the Malabar church extended into the 17th century. Archbishop Menezes went to Goa in 1600 to secure the submission of the church to Rome (Brown, 92). The Jesuit Francis Roz was sent as bishop—the first to control the Thomas Christians in Madras. In 1656 Alexander VII was to send a mission of Discalced Carmelites to bring the Thomas Christians under Roman obedience (101). They were mostly successful until the Portuguese (and thus the Roman church) were driven out of the area by the Dutch in the 1660’s. This was not before Pietro della Valle published his extensive account of his travels in India (1623, Rome) in which he described the tomb of Thomas in India.

16 This casket is published in B. A. Figredo, *Bones of St. Thomas and the Antique Casket at Mylapore, Madras* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1972). Figredo speculates that the object is a reliquary, an observation confirmed in conversation with reliquary specialist Cynthia Hahn (8/30/07).

17 Cynthia Hahn, email conversation, 8/30/07. It is difficult to be sure of the dating without better photographs or without examining the casket first hand.
According to legend, the Septa Rishi (or seven great teachers) were turned into stars—Christ and Thomas are thus included in that galaxy. Peacocks flank the medallion. In Christian symbology the peacock represents immortality or the incorruptibility of flesh, but the provenance of the casket, as Figredo has suggested, may also be important for interpreting the presence of these birds. The traditional burial place of Thomas in Mylapore is translated as “Peacock town.” Portuguese explorers Diego Fernandez and Bastiao Fernandez (who arrived around 1517) reported that the ancient chapel of St. Thomas was decorated with crosses and peacocks. Additionally, a lintel preserved in the museum of St. Thomas in Cochin depicts a peacock and cross. This type of bird, as Figredo has shown, was a Hindu motif depicted on the lintels of temple doors as far back as 900 A.D. Another Hindu symbol appears on the casket: the feet of the chest appear to be the paws of dogs. The dog is thought to represent the four Vedas or sacred books of Hinduism. Finally, the lizard, which adorns the lock of the reliquary, is also significant. According to Hindu belief, by touching the lizard devotees are absolved of their sins. This cannot be insignificant given that the relics contained within the box, and perhaps touched by pilgrims, were of a saint who famously touched Christ in order to be absolved of his doubt. The intricate merging of Hindu and Christian belief is highlighted by the decoration of this object and speaks to the local and deep-rooted traditions associated with Thomas in India.

For Italians, however, the supposed translation of Thomas’s relics from India to Edessa in the 3rd century is an essential part of this saint’s history. Although it is unclear

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18 Figredo, 2.
19 Ibid., 7. The explorers’ accounts were published by Gaspar Correa, who was in India from 1512-1561.
20 Ibid., 14.
21 Ibid., 13.
under what circumstances Thomas’s body would have been transported to Edessa, it
seems clear that if it had not been, then it could not have been subsequently moved to the
Greek island of Chios (or Scio in Italian) and subsequently to Ortona. Chios, first under
Venetian rule and later Genoese, was unlikely Thomas’s home for very long. The 750th
anniversary of the supposed translation of Thomas’s relics from Chios to Ortona has
inspired the publication of several new texts dedicated to establishing the history of
Thomas’s arrival in Ortona. The most scholarly of these, L’apostolo Tommaso è ad
Ortona, recounts the early history of the town and cites evidence of Thomas’s relics in
the cathedral as early as 1259. Emilia Polidoro and Paula Pasquini, contributors to the
volume cited above, both suggest that Marco Polo and his contemporaries’ accounts of
Thomas’s tomb in India are fictitious and instead favor the Latin version of the Acts of
Thomas which describes the transfer to Edessa.22 Pasquini notes the account of
Guglielmo di Tiro who reports that Thomas’s relics were in Edessa as late as 1142, but it
is unclear why this traveler’s observations would have any more validity than Polo and
his fellow explorers.23 Giovanni Battista De Lectis, a native of Ortona born in 1522,
penned a life and history of St. Thomas that was largely derived from an earlier version
written in 1262. Both accounts are essentially copied from the Acts but include the later
story of Thomas’s translation.24

Beginning c.1204 Ortona experienced its greatest economic growth because of the
advantageous location of its port. It was around this time that a colleganza or society of
navigation was founded by Domenico de Albiola and Pietro Barbani including Venice,

22 Pasquini, 74.
23 Ibid., 79.
24 Ibid., 81. The early documents pertaining to Thomas in Ortona, including De Lectis’ vita are found in
the Archivio Storico Capitolare di San Tommaso in the Biblioteca Diocesana “San Domenico” of Ortona.
A version of De Lectis’ text (published in 1577) is also available in Rome, Biblioteca Angelica (X.9.64).
Ancona, Ortona and Slavonia. By the end of June 1258, King Manfredi of Sicily, son of the emperor Federico II, arrived in Ortona to meet with ambassadors from Trau and Spalato; these meetings certified Ortona as a port in the Adriatic system of friendly harbors, helping to fortify the Adriatic defenses. Allied with the Venetians against the Genoese, Manfredi sent a fleet of one hundred galleys to Chios under the command of Filippo Cinardo. According to De Lectis an Ortonese man named Leone accompanied the fleet. He was to play a pivotal role in the legend of Thomas’s translation. Once on Chios, Leone escaped into the cathedral during a break in the ongoing battle. There he saw a luminous hand beckoning him toward the altar. As he approached, he saw a marble slab on which a relief of St. Thomas had appeared to have come alive. The image pointed Leone toward a hole in the stone, through which he reached his hand and touched the bones of the apostle. Later that evening, Leone returned with his friend, Ruggero. Together, they wrapped the bones in linen, excavated the stone slab, and stole away to their ship. Upon their return to Ortona, the ship encountered a terrible storm. Their boat was miraculously bathed in light and the seas made calm. Once they landed, Leone felt confident (after a divine vision) that Thomas’s relics should be left with the priest in Ortona’s cathedral. According to De Lectis, a marble tomb slab depicts Thomas as Leone described him in his vision: with one hand raised in benediction and the other

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25 Polidoro, 45.
26 Ibid., 46. For essential bibliography and history of the Abruzzi see Emilia Polidoro’s essay in L’apostolo Tommaso è ad Ortona (14-61).
27 Ibid., 80.
28 For the clearest version of this story see that transcribed in Pasquini, 82.
29 The story of Thomas’s rightful return to Ortona may be modeled on the tale of the return of St. Mark’s relics to Venetian soil. This follows a pattern that has been discussed by Thomas Dale in Relics, Prayer, and Politics in Medieval Venetia: Romanesque Painting in the Crypt of Aquileia Cathedral (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
holding a small cross.\textsuperscript{30} Today, this marble slab covers the place of Thomas’s tomb in Ortona (fig. 10). Above Thomas’s head is an inscription in Greek, and below is a small hole, supposedly the very one through which Leone felt Thomas’s bones.

Further evidence of this account was confirmed by the discovery of a \textit{pergamena} of 1259, containing a description of these events. The description recorded in the parchment, transcribed and published in \textit{L’apostolo Tommaso è ad Ortona}, was penned by Giovanni Nicola of Bari and was witnessed by several residents of Ortona, as well as by prisoners taken from Chios.\textsuperscript{31} The story of Thomas’s translation is retold here with a critical omission: in this retelling, the relics are brought from India to Chios (circumventing Edessa) on order of Emperor Alessandro Severo. Because this account is given by the Chios prisoners, Pasquini speculates that their oral tradition had neglected to maintain the part of the legend that included Edessa.\textsuperscript{32} The prisoners mention October 6\textsuperscript{th} as the day of translation and thus of celebration; the \textit{pergamena} dates to September 22\textsuperscript{nd}, and Thomas’s body is believed to have arrived on September 6\textsuperscript{th}. Thus Pasquini and others have speculated that Thomas’s body was only on Chios for a year before finding its permanent home in Ortona. This seems unlikely, however, since several of the prisoners who dictated portions of the \textit{pergamena} were clerics and donors of the cathedral of San Tommaso in Chios. Perhaps the church was rededicated once his bones

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, 82.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{L’apostolo Tommaso è ad Ortona}, 119-122. The prisoners cited are: Sabaro Sabasto di Mitielene di Romania, Angi Falconario di Chios (formerly the abate of the church of San Tommaso, Chios), Michele Cursentil (also of Chio, patron of the Church of San Tommaso), Stefano (chierico of the Church of San Tommaso in Chios), Constantino (chierico of the church of San Tommaso in Chios). The others listed as present are: Tommaso di Chios, Giovanni Pavone (justice of Bari), Pietro (son of Marilio), Giovanni Nicola (public notary of Bari), Bisanzio (son of Goveroni), Giacomo (son of Stefano Bulisani), and justice of Ortona, Guglielmo di Ortona.

\textsuperscript{32} Pasquini, 89.
arrived there, but if the cathedral was built in honor of Thomas, surely his relics were there for longer than one year.

From the date of Thomas’s arrival in Ortona the larger Christian Church has acknowledged Ortona, above India or Edessa, as the final resting place of the apostle’s relics. Prior to 1300 Ortona and the Abruzzi were not destinations on most pilgrimage maps. In 1352, however, St. Brigida changed this when she mentioned praying at the tomb of St. Thomas in Ortona. She repeated her description again in 1369, thereby putting Ortona and Thomas’s tomb on contemporary pilgrimage routes. Following St. Brigida’s recognition of the tomb of St. Thomas in Ortona, Innocent VI (1359-1362) issued the first of many papal bulls granting plenary indulgences to the faithful who visited the apostle’s tomb in Ortona on the 6th of September. Pope Bonifacio IX confirmed this in 1399, as did Sixtus IV in 1479, changing the celebration of Thomas’s feast day from September 6th to the first Sunday in May in order to admit the local tradition eliding the saint’s feast with the celebration of Perdono. Five years after the institution of the bishopric in Ortona, Gregory XIII (1575) confirmed the indulgences and May celebration date outlined by Sixtus IV. In March of 1596, however, Clement VIII overturned Gregory XIII’s bull, and directed the town to observe the proper Western liturgical feast day of St. Thomas on December 21st, citing the importance of this correction with reference to celebration of the holy year of 1600. This decision was supported by the Oratorian Cardinal Cesare Baronio’s earlier publication of the "Martyrologium Romanum" in 1586, which emphasized the importance of the December 21st celebration.

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33 Polidoro, 53.
34 Ibid., 54-56. A feast which marks the forgiveness of sins.
35 Ibid., 56. In 1742 Benedetto XIV reversed Clement’s decision in order to revert to Gregory XIII’s ruling. This overturning of bulls continued until John Paul II made a final ruling in October of 2004, writing to archbishop Carlo Ghidelli of Ortona, allowing the community to celebrate on the first Sunday in May.
21st feast date and corresponded to the day of Thomas’s martyrdom, and mentioned the date of July 3rd in regard to the translation to Edessa and then later to Ortona. Baronio’s account does not include Chios, but the author’s mention of Ortona surely helped to solidify the town’s claim to the apostolic saint.

Cesare Baronio’s entry in the *Martyrologium* and Clement VIII’s bull would have appeared in marked contrast with the travel literature of Ludovico Varthema and Diego Fernandez published earlier in the century that convincingly describe Thomas’s bones in India. The contributions of Baronio and Clement VIII to the discourse surrounding Thomas’s relics were undoubtedly tied to Counter-Reformatory goals regarding the cult of martyrs and preparation for the holy year of 1600. Both of these themes will be taken up in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Unfortunately, little remains of the original cathedral of San Tommaso in Ortona. Bombed and largely destroyed during World War II, the building today is a modern conceit, complete with a brightly painted twentieth-century vault. The small museum adjacent to the church contains many fragments of the Early Christian building and one sculptural fragment depicting Leone’s return voyage on the ship with Thomas’s relics (fig. 9). The bust reliquary, taken out and processed through the town twice a year—once on the day of the saint’s historic arrival on September 6th and the other on the first Sunday in May—is a late nineteenth-century replacement for a much older, medieval bust since destroyed. Although it is probably safe to assume that the high altar of the church once displayed an earlier image of Thomas, the altarpiece there now is a twentieth-century rendering of the Doubting Thomas.
For residents of Ortona, however, it seems that the moment of Thomas’s incredulity as recounted in John is just one of many episodes in the saint’s life. De Lectis’ sixteenth-century *vita* is the only one to my knowledge that deals rather extensively with the episode from John while also including an apocryphal account of the apostle’s missionary life. After narrating the events of Thomas’s life and death, De Lectis devotes a section to the “virtue and glory of the apostle…and his incredulity.”

Here his rhetoric becomes extremely repetitive as he emphasizes the importance of Thomas’s incredulity, who, “without timidity, touches for all...Because only Thomas was incredulous, he touched for all, confirming everyone’s faith.” De Lectis later delineates Thomas’s two declarations about Christ, first as his “Lord” the second as his “God.” These declarations, writes De Lectis, clarify both the sacred humanity and divinity of Christ. It is only by touching the resurrected Christ that Thomas, and therefore all who doubt, believe. This message resonates with the language employed by Augustine, Leo the Great, and Gregory the Great, discussed in chapter 1. It is


37 De Lectis, in the section titled “Delle rare virtù che in questo glorioso apostolo....”: ...solo Thomaso fu quello che senza timore toccò per tutti: Et il toccar suo fu quello, quale perfettamente rimosse quelli d’ogni dubio, & confirmogli in piena, & perfetta fede: O certamente oportuna, & a gl’increduli molto necessaria incredulità, alla quale ne seguito la piena, & perfetta fede de tutti i discepoli: Tomaso però solo fu incredulo, toccò per tutti, a tutti la fede confermando; tutti videro il trionfante Christo, nessuno piu di Thomaso la resurrettione certificò, non lasciando nulla adietro d’infideltà di Thomaso; che la dubbia fede de tutti i discepoli Percioche con il suo reverete toccare, fu fatto a noi indubbio testimonio della gloria resurrettione del Signore, permese Di il discepolo dubitare, man non lo lascio in quello persistere; anzi rimovendo esso da quello, tutti gli altri discepoli in fede confirmò: havendo dunque riverentemente toccato le sante piaghe del signore, & per questo perfettamete credendo, esclamo, Signor mio alla sacra humanità alludendo: e Dio mio nella sua divinità credendo e mentre dalla sua infideltà cercò uscire, la fede vacillante in tutti gli altri co firmò. Questo solo fu quello, il quale per le sue virtù fu fatto degno toccare il risuscitato maestro. La devota discepola Maddalena piangendo, & lagrimando al sepolcro volendolo toccare, hebbe ripulsa, dicendo ancora non essere asceso al padre eterno: & non so lo voleva Thomaso essere toccato, ma gli premise porre le dita nel fesso costato, & nelle fissure de gli acutichiodi: dell’altre sue infiniti virtù, della carità, della fortanza, & magnanimità dell’animo suo niuno a bastaza ne può dire, per esser d’ogni parte ripieno di virtù, & molto accetto al Signore nostro (De Lectis).

38 I am paraphrasing mostly from the section of text cited in note 87.
interesting to note that De Lectis calls upon this earlier language rather than on more contemporary Renaissance sources. His work, and its place with regard to images made during the late 16th-century, will be returned to in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

The function of De Lectis’ text, like that of the much earlier, more famous Voragine, was notably different from other exegetical literature, such as the later 14th-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. Rather than offering an interpretation of Biblical events, De Lectis’ *vita* and Voragine’s pages about Thomas focused on the life of the saint *after* Christ’s ascension. Thus the authors’ attention to Thomas’s later life may reflect a more thorough knowledge of the saint’s life than was recognized during the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance. As evidenced by the dearth of images of Thomas’s missionary endeavors in India, and the comparatively large body of works depicting his incredulity, it seems that was the event for which he would remain known.
Fig. 1 Sarcophagus of St. Celso, late 4th-early 5th c.
Milan, S. Maria presso S. Celso; right, detail

Fig. 2 Anonymous, Incredulity of St. Thomas, early 5th c., marble sarcophagus, Museo Nazionale, Ravenna

Fig. 3 Anonymous, Crucifixion and Incredulity of St. Thomas, Passion Casket, 420-430, ivory, British Museum, London
Fig. 4 Anonymous, *Christ Appearing to Thomas and Incredulity of St. Thomas*, Cruciform Casket, 817-824, silver-gilt, Musei Vaticani, Rome
Fig. 5 Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, mosaic, early 6th-century, San Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna

Fig. 6 Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, fresco, 705-707, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome

Fig. 7 Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, fresco, 904-911, SS. Martiri, Cimitile
Fig. 8  Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1072-1087, fresco, Sant’Angelo in Formis, Rome

Fig. 9  Anonymous, *Moses Receiving the Law and Incredulity of St. Thomas* diptych, late 10th century, ivory, Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Skulpturensammlung, inv. no. 8505, 8606

Fig. 10  Anonymous, *Christ and the Holy Women and Incredulity of St. Thomas*, Salerno Ivories, late 11th-century, ivory, Museo Diocesano, Salerno
Fig. 11 Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, Pala D’oro, cloisonné, San Marco, Venice

Fig. 12 Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, Du Boisrouvray Psalter, Geneva Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, MS. Comites Latentes 239, fol. 123; First Canticle: Confitebor

Fig. 13 Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, Psalter, British Library MS. Harley 2930, fol. 115; First Canticle: Confitebor
Fig. 14 Anonymous, *Crucifix*, Museo Nazionale di S. Matteo, Pisa

Fig. 15 Duccio, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1311, crowning section of the *Maestá*, Siena Cathedral
Fig. 16  Tino da Camaino, *Petroni Monument*, 1318, Siena Cathedral, detail of *Incredulity*

Fig. 17  Tino da Camaino, *Gastone della Torre Monument*, c.1323, Santa Croce, Florence. Detail of *Incredulity*
Fig. 18 Pacino di Bonaguida, *Beato Chiarito Tabernacle*, c.1340, tempera on panel, Getty Museum

Fig. 19 *St. Thomas*, postage stamp of India, c.1960
Fig. 20  *Tomb of St. Thomas*, c. 13th century, Cathedral of San Tommaso, Ortona

Fig. 21  18th-century bust reliquary of St. Thomas, Cathedral of San Tommaso, Ortona
Fig. 22 Anonymous, *St. Thomas’s Relics Arrive in Ortona*, sculptural fragment, c. 13th-century, Cathedral of San Tommaso, Ortona

Fig. 23 *Mylapore Casket*, c. 15th century (?), repousse, Cathedral of St. Thomas, San Thome, ex Madras, India; right, detail of *Incredulity*
Fig. 24 Frontispiece, *Analecta Franciscana, Figura Arboris Conformitatum S. Francisci cum Domino Iesu*, 1510

Fig. 25 Giotto, *Louvre Stigmatization*, 1312, tempera and gold leaf on panel, Louvre, Paris

Fig. 26 *Verification and Death of St. Francis*, 1290-1305, fresco, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi
Fig. 27 Giotto, *Death of St. Francis*, 1310-16, fresco, Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence

Fig. 28 Taddeo Gaddi, *Incredulity of St. Thomas* and *Death of St. Francis*, 1330-35, tempera and gold leaf on panel, Armadio panels, Santa Croce, Florence

Fig. 29 Benozzo Gozzoli, *Death of St. Francis*, 1452, fresco, San Francesco, Montefalco
Fig. 31 *Vision of Gregory IX*, 1290-1305, Fresco, Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi

Fig. 32 *Vision of Gregory IX*, 14th-century, relief, ex San Francesco, Rimini

Fig. 33 Carlo Crivelli, *Lamentation*, 1485, tempera on panel, Museum of Fine Art, Boston

Fig. 34 Giovanni Battista Faenza, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1500-1515, oil on panel, National Gallery, London
Fig. 35 Stefano dell’Arzere, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1543, oil on panel, Obizzi Chapel, San Tommaso, Albignasego; details of donor portraits and Christ’s foot

Fig. 36 Stefano dell’Arzere, *Scenes from the Life of St. Thomas*, c.1543, fresco, Obizzi Chapel, San Tommaso, Albignasego
Fig. 37 Stefano dell’Arzere, Obizzi Chapel decorations, c. 1543, fresco, San Tommaso, Albignasego; two members of the Obizzi family

Fig. 38 Stefano dell’Arzere, Obizzi Chapel decorations, c. 1543, fresco, San Tommaso, Albignasego; spandrel frescos and exterior view
Fig. 39 Buonamico Buffalmacco, *Witnessing of Christ’s Wounds*, 14th-century, fresco, Camposanto, Pisa

Fig. 40 Anonymous, *Fieschi Monument*, c.1344, Duomo, Genoa; detail of *Witnessing of Christ’s Wounds* below
Fig. 41 Zanino di Pietro, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1415-20, tempera on panel, Sanctuary of the Beato Sante, Mombaroccio; left, detail of Beato

Fig. 42 Examples of silver, flaming-heart pendants, c.15th-century, Sanctuary of the Beato, Mombaroccio
Fig. 43 Master of Santa Chiara, Santa Chiara Crucifix, 13th-century, tempera on panel, Santa Chiara, Assisi

Fig. 44 Ferrer Basso, Crucifix, 14th-century, tempera on panel, Sanctuary of the Beato Sante, Mombaroccio
Fig. 45 Luca Signorelli, *Incredulity of St. Thomas, Conversion of St. Paul*, ceiling decorations, 1477-80, fresco, Sacristy of St. John, Santa Casa, Loreto; with graphic illustration
Fig. 46  Cima da Conegliano, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1502-04, oil on panel, National Gallery, London

Fig. 47  Cima da Conegliano, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1504-05, oil on panel, Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice
Fig. 48 Agnolo Gaddi, *St. Thomas Consigning the Cintola to a Priest and the Marriage of Michele Dagomari*, 1393-95, Cappella della Sacra Cintola, Prato, Duomo

Fig. 49 Filippo Lippi, *Madonna della Cintola*, 1455-65, tempera on panel, Prato Galleria Comunale di Palazzo Pretorio

Fig. 50 Girolamo Treviso, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1505-06, oil on panel, San Niccolo, Treviso
Fig. 51 Nanni di Banco, *Porta della Mandorla*, 1414-21, Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence

Fig. 52 Orcagna, *Madonna della Cintola*, 1352-66, Tabernacle in Orsanmichele, Florence

Fig. 53 Giovanni Speranza, *Madonna della Cintola*, 1st half of the 16th century, oil on panel, Vincenza, Museo Civico
Fig. 54 Giorgio Vasari, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1572, oil on canvas, Guidacci Chapel, Florence, Santa Croce

Fig. 55 Santi di Tito, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1577, oil on canvas, Duomo, Sansepolcro

Fig. 56 Girolamo Macchietti, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, 1577-86, left: oil on canvas, Santa Chiara, Naples; right: preparatory drawing, Gabinetto Nazionale Disegni e Stampe, Rome (FC124157)
Fig. 57 Anonymous, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, c. late 14th-century, fresco, Palazzo Pretorio, Scarperia

Fig. 58 Anonymous, stemme, late 14th-century, Palazzo Pretorio, Scarperia

Fig. 59 Antonio Vite, *Incredulity of St. Thomas*, late 14th-century, fresco fragment, Palazzo del Podestà, Pistoia
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