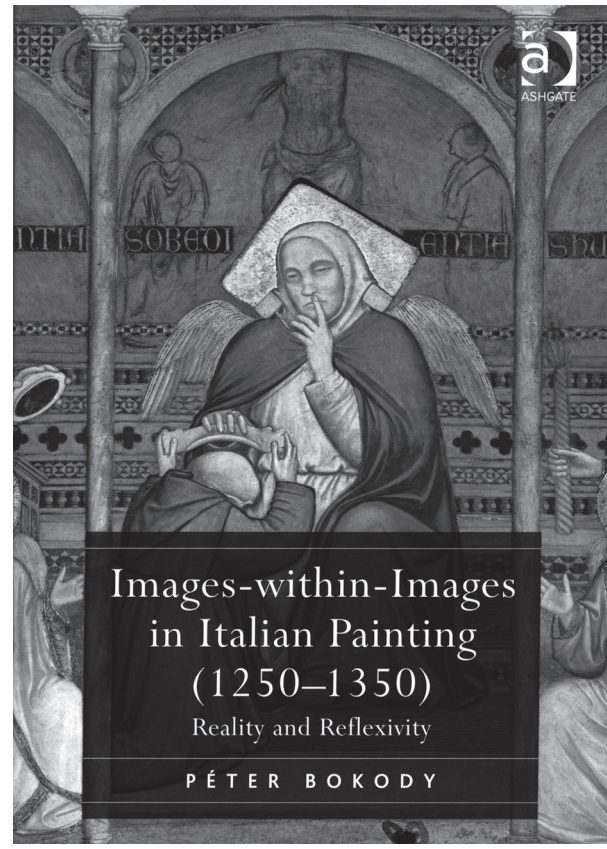
BOOK REVIEWS

BOKODY, Péter: *Images-within-Images in Italian Painting (1250–1350). Reality and Reflexivity*; Ashgate, Farnham – Burlington, 2015. xiv+229 pages, 20 pages of plates

A picture within another picture begins appearing from the second half of the thirteenth century, when a powerful turn can be discerned in Italian painting. Earlier, painters tried to persuade viewers of the "real presence" of sacred things; from this moment up to about the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they tried to represent these things, to render them visible. Representations became truer to reality towards the end of the duecento, with an aim of mirroring small details, too. The spatial correlation of persons and objects was pondered about, the goal being to grasp real space, to make the third dimension visible. The growing interest in representing reality, in rendering the plasticity and spatial placement of figures gave rise to the possibility of depicting separate pictures within a picture: images-within-images.

Though connoisseurs and researchers of painting have been aware of this phenomenon for ages, it was a lecture by André Chastel in 1964 that first analyzed it thoroughly after some occasional mentions,[1] after which research began to inquire into it as a self-contained phenomenon. Chastel retraced the device to the Eyckian turn in the early fifteenth century and pointed out some major milestones from then up to the mid-



Cover illustration: Crucifixion. Giotto di Bondone: Allegory of Obedience, 1310s, fresco. Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi. (© Stefan Diller)

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twentieth century, but with two or three exceptions, he was only concerned with panel and canvas paintings. His collection is not exhaustive; if it were – he states – it would be unbearably boring. That also applies to Péter Bokody,[2] both scholars having made a good selection. The author of the reviewed book set himself a more theoretical goal than Chastel and his followers. (His book is the further elaborated version of his PhD dissertation defended at the Central European University of Budapest in 2010, as footnote 21 of chapter 4 reveals.) He realized that at the time when the phenomenon emerged nobody would have thought of painting an image within an image for its own sake, just to suggest reality or show off personal skills like painters of the later *trompe l'oeil* works. In each case he meticulously scrutinized what was implied by the contents that justified this solution. He monitors the birth and strengthening of the phenomenon in Italian painting from the late duecento to the middle of the trecento, starting out from the assumption that the frequent use of this device was made possible by a turn in painting that took place in that period. The bulk of his examples are from a period beginning with Cimabue's frescoes painted in the upper church of Assisi around 1278 and ending with the death of Ambrogio Lorenzetti around 1348. The beginning is marked by Cimabue's work and the cycle of Saint Francis' legend in the upper church of Assisi. The next phase is the consummation of the type in the lower church of Assisi and the Arena chapel of Padua. The third phase coincides with the work of Giotto's pupils Bernardo Daddi and Taddeo Gaddi, as well as the Sienese painters working parallel with them, Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti. In their creations the phenomenon was already a generally accepted device.

It is not easy to define what is exactly meant by "image-within-image." The author is apparently an advocate of as broad an interpretation of the term as possible. He deliberately excludes certain items such as the marginal *drôleries* in illuminated manuscripts also spreading in this period, but he does not balk at discussing border cases or phenomena going beyond the borders. He lays stress on the painted consoles, fictive consoles above or below the painted scenes, which are emphatically not *within* but *outside* of the picture boundaries. He also writes more than once about a sculpture (!) within the picture or a relief in a building or on a sarcophagus (!) without giving reasons for doing so. By contrast, he gives thorough explanation why it is justified to regard the Crucifixion depicted at the background of the protagonists of a very important fresco in the lower church of Assisi not just as part of the picture but as image-within-image, owing to the different rendering of the insert from its immediate environment. Let us side-step now the question to what extent this liberal treatment of the boundaries of the picture type named in the title can be justified or unjustified, for the final outcome does verify the author's method. Bokody can tell us so much useful and essential information thanks to these border crossings that in the final analysis we must be grateful to him.

Let us see an example to illustrate his method of investigation. One of the last scenes of the Saint Francis cycle in the upper church of Assisi is *Verification of the Stigmata*, in which – he points out to us – there is a panel picture of the Crucifixion – an image-within-image – on the beam above the main scene. The fact that the Crucifixion leans somewhat forward might derive from one of the spreading attempts to suggest space in the period at issue. Since by this slant the Redeemer's glance is turned directly at Francis whose stigmata – actually, his most deeply revered side wound – are being examined by another actor of the scene, the author points out that the painter managed to effectively accentuate the intimate and extraordinary connection between the Saviour and the founder of the order. Thus, the picture-within-picture served the iconographic message well. Bokody often discloses observations that are independent of the image-within-image theme but contribute to a more profound understanding of the message. A good example is the *Apparition of Saint Francis at the Chapter of Arles* (Florence, Sta. Croce, Bardi Chapel): we see the saint hovering in the air suggesting his apparition-like presence; here, the form of the figure with his extended arms suggests Francis' "Christiformitas."

The main character of the book is Giotto, his paintings are analyzed most extensively. Since Bokody highlights a phenomenon and not the different painters and their stylistic changes, he feels exempted from taking sides on the moot question whether the Saint Francis cycle in Assisi

was painted by Giotto or not, but from his argumentations the reader infers that he has a leaning toward a positive answer. (At any rate, he makes a point of saying that even if the brush was not in his hand, he must have had a decisive contribution to the conception, perhaps also a sketch. But he notes that in Padua, where the frescoes are surely Giotto's works, there are fewer images-within-images. That might be – he ponders – because the former is the legend of a near-contemporary figure, while the latter is a set of Biblical, almost timeless scenes.) He does not believe that this solution was the brainchild of a single person although Giotto was *pictor doctus*, nor would his clients, the Franciscans of Assisi have entrusted all the work to a single painter. This is the most important church of the order founded right upon the grave of the saint, and within the exquisite church this is the most emphatic cycle – painted in the most up-to-date approach of the age, carefully adapting to the biography approved just a little earlier as the only official life story, *Legenda maior*. The purposefulness of the order is obvious, but it is somewhat startling that in proof of their erudition, the author mentions two members of the order by name, who are not from Assisi, not even from Italy, but from England: John Peckham and Roger Bacon. Anyhow, Bokody takes the idea of the solitary painter genius master minding the whole project for a derivative of the romantic artist concept, presuming that the explosive spread of the new type of representation was the combined outcome of several components. Image-within-image scenes were conspicuously often located in places hardly accessible to the congregation at large, e.g. in closed chapels and sanctuaries, where the clergy, more highly educated than the masses, would notice and appreciate such subtleties.

Already in the introduction Bokody presents as the perfect epitome of image-within-image Cardinal Stefanschi's triptych dating from just after 1300 (Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana), stressing the truthfulness to life of the representation of both the donator and the altarpiece model held in his hand. Of course he does not fail to make mention of the supreme stunt that the few-inch altarpiece held in the hand of the cardinal in the average size triptych also features the cardinal with the model – this time the size of a gold paint drop – in his hand, but the shape of the drop clearly refers to the original form. Hardly had the device of image-within-image been born, Giotto painted an illustrative masterpiece never to be surpassed: the situation may be compared with the Homeric epics, which stand at the fountain-head of innumerable heroic epics to be written but never to come up to the perfection of the epitomes of the genre.

Although we mainly speak of a picture within another picture, Bokody shows sculptures in the same function, usually those on a fairly small scale, e.g. some carved statues on column capitals or adorning upper friezes of buildings, or again, as pagan idols being crushed when the Holy Family arrives in Egypt or when early Christian martyrs are sentenced to death, mostly shown in the background as the ideological foundations of state power defending the old religion with cruel tools. When the statues adorn the façades of Christian churches, they adopt the contemporaneous Gothic models like in *Saint Clare Mourning Saint Francis* in the upper church of Assisi. When they adorn a pagan ruler's – e.g. the sultan's – palace (*Saint Francis before the Sultan*), Bokody tends to discern the impact of ancient Roman frescoes also well known in the Middle Ages. After the painstaking study of the frescoes sometimes he manages to identify a so-far unnamed statue, e.g. in *The Vision of Friar Augustine* in Assisi he discovered a *Saint Anthony hermit*. In Padua, the stone statues on the roofs of edifices with open sides may also carry some additional message. The serpent in the claws of one of the eagles sitting above the scene of the *Last Supper* must refer to the treachery of Judas just being revealed as the scene beneath shows the moment when Judas reaches into the dish at the same time as Christ (the eagle is sitting right above the dish). In the neighbouring scene – *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet* – the eagle depicted on the roof in the same position has nothing in its claws as there was no heinous crime to be reminded of. In Pietro Lorenzetti's *Flagellation* of the Passion cycle in the lower church at Assisi there are lions (one with its prey), a monkey on a chain, putti hunting for hares – these genial, sometimes playful scenes are obvious allusions to the Saviour's captivity and sufferings.

The idols or little statuettes on cornices appear to be carved of stone, sometimes – as at either side in Simone Martini's *Annunciation*

(Florence, Uffizi) – we might see tall wooden statues in the full height of the picture painted polychrome as was customary in the age. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decreed that the altars should be duly decorated; as a result, frescoes also appeared behind the altar, some composed of several scenes or showing markedly plastic figures; there are fine examples in Assisi, e.g. Pietro Lorenzetti's two frescoes above the altars in the lower church, both showing the Virgin between two saints, and Simone Martini's frescoes of half figures of Hungarian saints in Saint Martin's Chapel close to the former.

One may subsume under this group some frescoes that appear like real statues or reliefs – the best known of them are in the lower strip of Capella dell'Arena in Padua; they generally seem to be monochrome statues carved in stone. The author enumerates several opinions to explain the unassertive greyness of the virtues and vices in Padua, to which I should like to add another explanation. The colourful Salvation cycle enclosed in ornamental and architectonic frames makes us onlookers tilt our heads and look upward into a sphere that is beyond our reach. Ours is the sphere of virtues and vices in our world – these images are at eye level; although they have great plasticity almost projecting into space (Bokody cites Dante and other contemporary authors to verify how highly valued plasticity was in the studied period), we – in accord with our pettiness – do not deserve the beauty of the upper region.

The idols – which are always statues – symbolizing paganism are set against Christian pictures, sometimes showing a figure absorbed in rapturous prayer. A very important example of the veneration of or devotion to an image is *Saint Francis before the Cross in San Damiano* dated just before the turn of the century. Writing about this fresco, the author suggestively confronts the preservation of supplications before an image with the assertion of a more realistic approach. The early twelfth century original of the crucifix which spoke to Saint Francis in the fresco having survived to this day in the Santa Chiara church in Assisi, the author has the chance to demonstrate that even though the painter adhered in broad outlines to the prototype, in rendering the figures in a more up-to-date manner, with greater plasticity and anatomical correctness and in suggesting space he also widely deviated from it. The crucifix shows the triumphant, not the suffering Redeemer fastened to the cross with four nails (which was already a somewhat outdated depiction); this was contrary to general Franciscan practice but complied with the original relic. The rarity of this triumphant Christ on the Cross within the order is illustrated by the author with an excellent example, a copy of the Assisi fresco painted in Pistoia some 150 km away, in which already the suffering Christ is depicted on the cross. Interestingly, San Damiano's church appears again towards the end of the cycle in *Saint Clare Mourning Saint Francis*, now in full splendor after its renovation, but the two façades do not resemble each other, let alone the appearance of the church today. (Thereby the painter also proved what a magnificent church the earlier dilapidated San Damiano had become, what a good job young Francis had done.) The author took note of a peculiar situation in the San Francesco panel in Orte (near Viterbo) dating from around 1260–1280. One of the lateral scenes – *Healing the Hand of Ruggiero da Potenza* – shows a miracle worked by the saint: the participants are standing under an icon-like image of Francis almost motionless; their lining up without an attempt to suggest space complies with representation in Italian painting before the end of the thirteenth century. (It is worth noting that Bokody joins those who recognize this picture as the only representation of the rarely mentioned miracle.)

There is yet another but rare subtype, fresco-within-fresco, which is infrequent with justification: it is hard to create – on a given wet plaster field with one and the same brush – a different pictorial entity within the larger scheme so as to suggest that in a part of the fresco there is another picture: an image-within-image. The analysis of such a locus – one of the images painted in a vaulting cell of the huge groin vault over the crossing of the nave and transept – is perhaps the most significant exposition in the whole book. By analyzing the ideological background of sight Bokody could explain convincingly and masterfully several oddities of the picture citing relevant Franciscan passages without which the message would be rather perplexing despite the painterly qualities of the execution.

The *Allegory of Obedience* is at issue filling one of the vaulting cells, and together with the

other two Franciscan vows, of chastity and poverty, they are connected to three phases in Christ's life (Infancy, Ministry, Passion). The fourth cell displays the *Glorification of Saint Francis*. The Obedience scene is paired with Christ's suffering and death on the cross ("[Christ] humbled himself and became obedient unto death – even death on a cross." Phil. 2:8). In the focus of the scene is a young monk just taking his vow – putting the yoke of obedience on his shoulders. Above him, under the vault arch a Crucifixion scene is indicated in a startling manner, as if it was unfinished, as if the painting of this part of the fresco had been interrupted and we only saw the *sinopia*, the lateral figures flanking the crucifix being even more sketchy. Since an absentmindedly unfinished *sinopia* in such an important composition is out of the question, Bokody set out to search for and did find an explanation to this peculiar phenomenon overlooked by research so far. In that age the process of fresco painting elicited growing attention, and he managed to link the picture to a contemporary Franciscan text which compares the ever deeper levels of contemplation to the phases of fresco painting each based on the previous one, from the sketch to the final fresco, to the completed picture that appears to protrude out of the wall surface. The incomplete Crucifixion, this strange self-contained image-within-image – according to this argumentation – is an indication how much contemplation awaits the novice just taking his vow. (The term *rilevato* 'protruding' was the term used by the Franciscan author comparing perfect meditation to a perfect wall painting that suggests plasticity; the same appreciation of plasticity can be perceived here as was mentioned in connection with the Padua frescoes.) It cannot be accidental either that the blood gushing forth from the Saviour's side is painted so boldly: it was the side wound of the stigmata of Saint Francis venerated as "alter Christus" that put the deepest imprint on the contemporaries and the immediate posterity of the saint. The emphasis on the spilt blood must be related to this aspect. Above the architectural frame that gives stress to the scene Francis himself appears exposing all his five wounds.

In the order's late thirteenth century period fundamentally influenced by Saint Bonaventure there was a frequent admonition that the self-sacrifice of Christ must be an example for the obedience of every Franciscan; this idea was included in several manuals on taking the vows based on Bonaventure's *Rule of the Novices*. Since the location is the lower church, the idea must have spread way beyond the order through the masses of pilgrims crowding to the grave of Francis. The intricate composition abounding in allusions may as well be conceived as a very early manifestation of disguised symbolism. Bokody reminds us that the system of disguised symbolism flourishing in early Netherlandish painting roots – in the opinion of Erwin Panofsky – in the Italian trecento. He speaks in appreciative terms of the scholar who has been in the volley of criticism since the 1980s and 1990s, trying to temper somewhat the charges at his imbalanced views: "while Panofsky advocated an exclusively iconographic, and Pächt an exclusively pictorial, reading of these details, the material shows that they could actually oscillate between the two and fulfill both functions on their context."

There is another peculiarity of the Crucifixion appearing behind the figure of Obedience: the head of the Crucified is not seen as the arch covers it. It is a typical feature of Italian painting reviving around 1300 that the real sight was to be reproduced at any cost: when a head is not visible for some reason, e.g. concealed by an arcade in front of it, then the figure – be it even the son of God – must be painted maimed. Without particular scruples the author regards the frescoes on the vaulting cells as the work of Giotto (p. 97: "the attribution of the frescoes to Giotto is generally accepted") – and this issue has no special significance in a book whose theme is not the style. When, however, one consults the most recent, less than ten-year-old, dictionary of art, one finds that most scholars disagree with this attribution.[3]

Bokody devoted another very thorough analysis to Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Presentation in the Temple* (Florence, Uffizi); he declares that image-within-image is rare in Siena, hardly any examples being found before the Lorenzetti brothers. He concentrates on the figures in the upper part of the building, especially Moses and Joshua standing on the columns rising in front of the protagonists. He easily connects the former to Giovanni Pisano's Moses on the façade of Siena cathedral, but he considers the latter the outcome of painterly imagination. He dwells

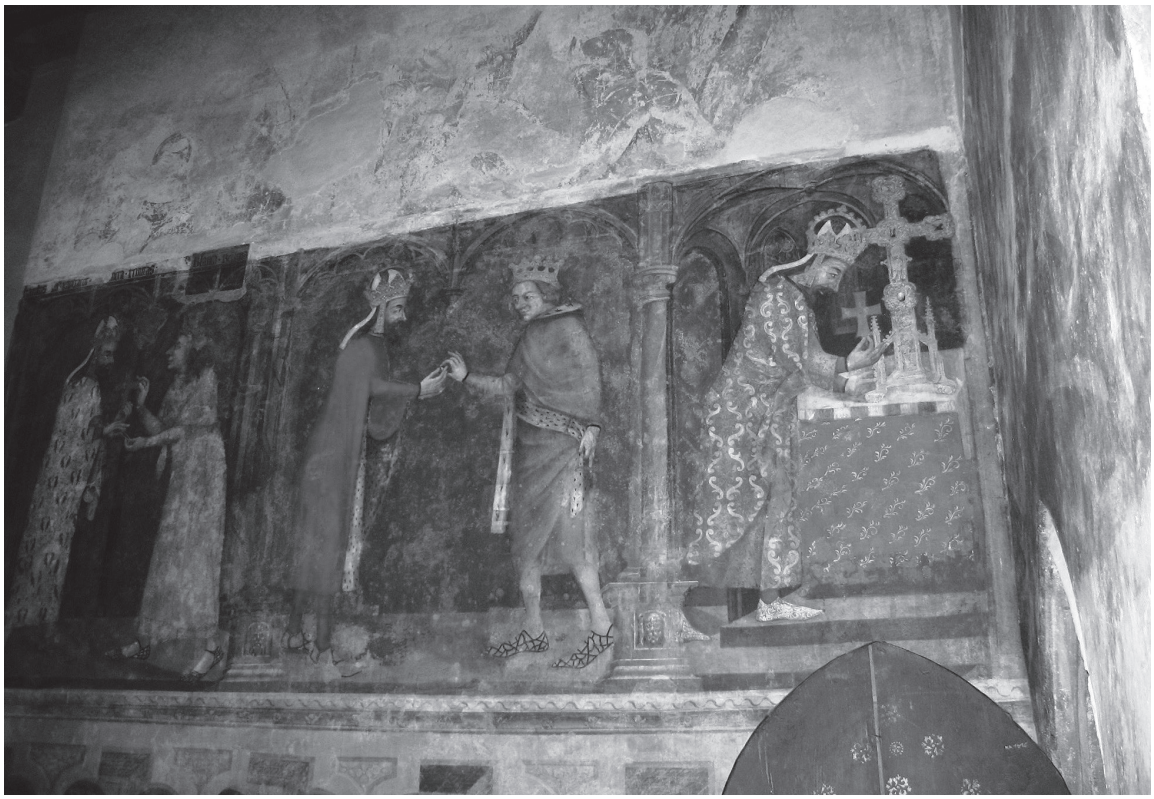

Fig. 1. Nikolaus Wurmser of Strasbourg: Emperor Charles IV, accepting the relics of Christ's Passion and placing them into a reliquary cross, c. 1356; mural painting in the Chapel of Mary, Castle Karlštejn (photo: Pál Lővei)

Fig. 2. Architectural motif with dwarf columns; mural painting in the Chapel of Mary, Castle Karlštejn (photo: Pál Lővei)

long on the emphatic presentation of the two prominent Old Testament figures, for he cannot find their relation to the iconographic system of the cathedral. He gives a detailed discussion of the importance of the feast of the Presentation in Siena, but it is hard to believe that the joint presentation of Moses and Joshua is indeed to be derived from a thought of the Venerable Bede. It is true that Bede gave a witty explanation for the connection of the two leaders of Israel with the ritual of the circumcision, but he was hardly a widely read author in fourteenth century Italy. Outside Great Britain Bede is not thought of as the "last of the Church Fathers," and although – as Bokody points out as evidence – a fellow member of Bede's order Heiric of Auxerre often cited from his works a hundred years later, but in the later Middle Ages Heiric was famous mainly for his knowledge of Latin poets rather than as a Bede commentator, and this fame had also grown dim by the fourteenth century.

Bokody complements the all-Italian images-within-images with a highly intriguing representation: a tempera on wood panel – *Morning of the Resurrection* – of the altar of the Augustinian Abbey in Klosterneuburg painted in 1331. It has not occurred to anyone before that it might belong here. It shows *The Three Mary at the Tomb* and the *Noli me tangere* scenes, as well as a *Daniel in the Lion's Den* – the Old Testament archetype of the Resurrection – reduced to a few figures on the side of the sarcophagus on a very small scale. Taking note of this scene, the author could register the first appearance of image-within-image north of the Alps at a remarkably early date, contemporaneously with the spread of the device in Italy. Befitting the Italian origin of the startling phenomenon is the emphatic solid presence of the sarcophagus and the ostentatious depiction of its structure of corbels and arcades at a time when it was wholly unknown in German painting.

This thought may be supported by an only few decades later fresco in Castle Karlštejn built by Emperor Charles IV near Prague. There are three scenes on the wall of the Chapel of Mary to which the ruler assigned extraordinary significance: the reception of the splinter of the Holy Cross from two royal dignitaries and placing it with his hand in a reliquary. Whether it was the idea of the artist NikolausWurmser of Strassbourg or of the designer of the program, it underscores the importance of the event that under it a forest of dwarf columns painted masterfully for the 1350s in foreshortening – a powerful version of the arcades under the Saint Francis legend in Assisi – can be seen.[4] The Emperor with a penchant for Italy must have been delighted that this solution so markedly emphasizing the importance of the events also appeared in his castle under pictures perpetuating his relic collecting zeal.

A row of consoles rendered with great plasticity is rare in Italian trecento painting, too. It is certainly not accidental that its first (or one of the first) significant examples can be found in a location of fundamental importance for the modern development of painting, in the upper church of Assisi above Cimabue's scenes from the Gospels and under the Saint Francis legend scenes. Though immediate precedents to rendering rows of corbels with plasticity appeared in Rome's Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura, but this powerful motif came to be firmly established in the Saint Francis Church. The similar solutions here, then in Giotto's and his followers' works – notably the painted ornamental frames composed of architectonic elements around pictures, the twisted columns are effective improvements of the device. Marked examples of fictive architectural elements can be found in Padua: fictive chambers with ribbed groin-vaults without narrative scenes on the chancel arch, in the most exposed spots. The author gives several explanations, but one can surely be ignored: namely, that it is a bravura stunt to suggest spatial depth. Pietro Lorenzetti's bench covered with a carpet in the left transept of the lower church in Assisi can only be taken for a virtuosic solution of perspective merely by a superficial observer, whereas it just indicates the place of the clergy.

Finally let us mention an interesting type represented by a single – now lost – Bernardo Daddi painting, the memory of which is preserved by three copies. It is seemingly a panel painted upon the influence of triptychs, but the central figure is not simply *a Madonna* as perceived by most viewers but *an image of a Madonna*, for under its frame the shallow but clearly perceptible space of the panel continues, which strangely isolates the protagonist. This impression is further enhanced by the wholly different scale of the icon-like bust of the Virgin and by her hand reaching beyond

the frame toward the kneeling donators in the foreground, thus a peculiar image-within-image evolves.

The death of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, the great Plague of 1348 only temporarily interrupted the development, but tracking it further is beyond the goal of the book. Bokody points out that several examples of this kind of representation can be cited from the quattrocento: he mentions Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles* (Florence, Uffizi) with the many antique statues, reliefs rendered like stone carvings in the background. By contrast, the early Netherlandish and, in general, the northern Renaissance images-within-images almost exclusively remain within the themes of Christianity: a specific version of this, the elegant monochromes on the outer wings of altarpieces Bokody retraces to Giotto's cycle of virtues and vices in Capella dell'Arena, although both the temporal and stylistic distance is undeniably great. Then skipping centuries, he discovers the continuation in modern painting: "Modern art in the twentieth century emphasized the pictorial aspects of visual artifacts over their subject-matter as the place of aesthetic value and the true essence of art. The self-reflexive characteristics of certain examples presented in this study show that works around 1300 also bear comparison with later periods in this respect."

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NOTES

[1] CHASTEL, André: Le tableau dans le tableau, in *Stil und* Überlieferung *in der Kunst des Abendlandes. Akten des 21. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte in Bonn 1964*, Bd. I. Berlin: Verlag Gebr. Mann, 1967. 15–29. Republished in Chastel's selected studies: *Fables, Formes, Figures*, Paris: Flammarion, 1978. 75–98.

[2] Péter Bokody is Lecturer in Art History, Plymouth University, UK. He curated the exhibition *Image and Christianity* in 2014 at the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma (Hungary): *Kép és kereszténység. Vizuális médiumok a középkorban / Image and Christianity. Visual Media in the Middle Ages*, ed. BOKODY, Péter (exhibition catalogue). Pannonhalmi Főapátság, 2014.

[3] *Saur Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon. Die bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, Vol. 54, München–Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2007. 471–477, authors: SCHWARZ, Michael Viktor, THEIS, Pia.

[4] HOMOLKA, Jaromír: The Pictorial Decoration of the Palace and Lesser Tower of Karlštejn Castle, in *Magister Theodoricus, Court Painter to Emperor Charles IV: The Pictorial Decoration of the Shrines at Karlštejn Castle*, ed. FAJT, Jiři. Prague: National Gallery Prague, 1998. 65–66, fig. 38.