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IMAGES OF PREACHERS IN ITALIAN ART AND SERMONS*

This paper presents several examples illustrating the preaching of major Observant preachers and their images in Tuscany, particularly in Florence. The images discussed are from the Early Modern period, since there are only a very few images of preachers shown in action before the fifteenth century.¹ The intention of the paper is to demonstrate the power of art in depicting preaching, in particular to show how these images were used as a part of the commemoration of preaching events and the cult of mendicant saints in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence. A challenging issue in the field of sermon studies is the relationship between preaching and art, particularly the manner in which preachers used works of art in their preaching and described specific pictures in their sermons, and the way in which they were themselves represented in images, delivering their sermons. My decision to concentrate on Tuscany is due to its importance as a center of preaching and of artistic production during the Renaissance. I chose to discuss Observant preachers in particular since they were the most prominent and most often depicted preachers in the visual tradition, a sign of their popularity and impact.²

* This research was supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, Grant AZ 38/V/15.

¹ On the images of preachers see AUGUSTINE THOMPSON, "From Texts to Preaching Retrieving the Medieval Sermon as an Event," in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig, Leiden: Brill Academic Publication, 2001, pp. 33–35; CHIARA FRUGONI, "L'immagine del predicatore nell'iconografia medioevale (secc. XIII–XV)," *Dal pulpito alla navata: La predicazione medievale nella sua recezione da parte degli ascoltatori (secc. XIII–XV)*, Convegno internazionale di storia religiosa, medioevo e rinascimento 3, Florence: Olschki, 1989, pp. 287–99; ROBERTO RUSCONI, "La pouvoir de la parole: representation des prédicateurs dans l'art de la Renaissance en Italie," *La parole du prédicateur: V–XV siècle*, Nice: Centre d'Études Médiévales de Nice, 1997, pp. 445–46.

² See ROBERTO RUSCONI, "The Preacher Saint in Late Medieval Italian Art", in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 181–202;

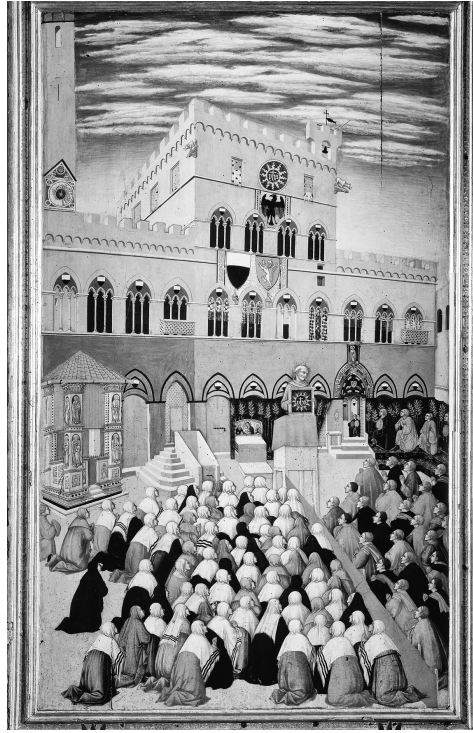


Fig. 1

Preaching was an important part of life in the city. Observant preachers began to dominate urban preaching in Italy from the beginning of the fifteenth century;³ Italian communal governments competed with one another for their services and invited them to deliver sermons for Advent and Lent.⁴ Observant communities appeared in Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and their number grew rapidly between 1420 and 1450. These institutions of

ROBERTO RUSCONI, *Immagini dei Predicatori e della Predicazione in Italia alla Fine del Medioevo*, CISAM: Spoleto, 2016.

³The Osservanza were reform movements that appeared in many religious orders, monastic and mendicant, in the last decades of the fourteenth century. The Osservanza movements arose in reaction to the general relaxation of discipline, defined as Conventualism, characteristic of the decline of the Church after the Black Death. In general, these movements were encouraged by the papacy, which recognized the need for a religious renewal. See MARIO SENSI, *L'osservanza francescana nell'Italia centrale*, Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1985; DUNCAN NIMMO, *Reform and Division in the Medieval Franciscan Order 1226–1528*, Rome: Istituto storico dei Cappuccini, 1987.

⁴PETER HOWARD, *Beyond the Written Word: Preaching and Theology in the Florence of Archbishop Antoninus 1427–1459*, Florence: Olschki, 1995, pp. 87–89.

reform became dominant in the city and enjoyed strong support from both secular and ecclesiastical authorities. The thirteenth, fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were dominated by the activities of such famous Dominican preachers as Giordano da Pisa (1260–1311), Domenico Cavalca (1270–1342), Iacopo Passavanti (1300–1357), and Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419). There was also a large group of itinerant Franciscan preachers led by Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444), who preached in the church of Santa Croce in the years 1424–1425 and whose school of followers continued preaching there throughout the fifteenth century.⁵



Fig. 2

There are many instances of verbal descriptions and pictorial images supplying information on the preaching of the Observants in Tuscany. In Sano di Pietro's and Neroccio de' Landi's depictions of San Bernardino preaching in Siena, the preacher is shown delivering his sermons from a portable wooden stand bearing a plaque of the Holy Name; the audience is also represented (Fig. 1 + Fig. 2). A lively account of Bernardino's preaching appears at the end of one of his sermons in Florence in 1424, where an anonymous reporter described the following scene:

⁵ Bernardino was a leader of the Franciscan Osservanza in its second phase, when it became a pastoral movement with significant influence on the life of the urban population in Italy. There is a vast literature on Bernardino da Siena and his legacy. Three books are: FRANCO MORMANDO, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999; CYNTHIA L. POLECRITTI, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy: San Bernardino and His Audience*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2000; NIRIT BEN-ARYEH DEBBY, *Renaissance Florence in the Rhetoric of Two Popular Preachers: Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419) and Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444)*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2001.

The turmoil was great and the people trembled. The Church and the *piazza* of Santa Croce were full of citizens and peasants, women and men, several thousands in number. There were loud shouts from little children and young boys as friar Bernardino stopped preaching, went to the *piazza* with many other friars, and set fire to a pile of four gaming tables, several baskets of dice, and more than four thousand pairs of old and new card games. Draped over this pile on every side was much hair and flounces of women's dresses and other things; there was a lot of wood underneath. You have never seen a more beautiful fire, and the flames spread in the air and confused the demon enemy of God, bringing glory, honor and praise to the reverence of our master Jesus Christ, the highest God.⁶

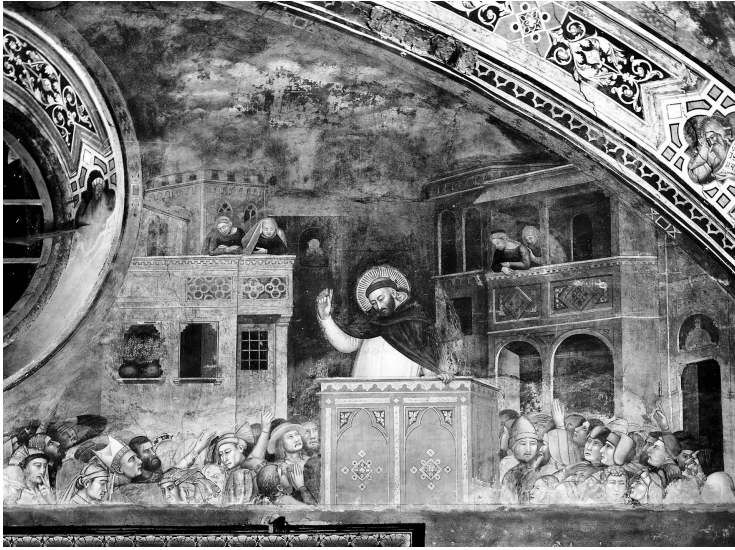


Fig. 3

The passage demonstrates Bernardino's success with the large and diverse audience that had gathered to hear him; it also testifies that the sermon he delivered elicited a loud and excited response from the crowd. The bonfire was a purifying act and a demonstration of the preacher's power, and it brought to a climax

⁶BERNARDINO DA SIENA, *Le prediche volgari — Quaresimale Fiorentino del 1424*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi, Pistoia: Pacinotti, 1934, 2: 87–88: “El tumulto è grande, el popolo fremisce. Era la chiesa e la piazza di Santa Croce tutta piena di cittadini e di contadini, di donne e d'uomini ch'erano parecchie migliaia. El grido de' fanciugli, garzoni era grande che convene che frate Bernardino lasciasse la predica e venne di chiesa in sulla piazza con molti frati, e fece ardere el capannuccio che v'era da quattrocento tavolieri da giuocare, parecchie zane di dadi, più di quattromila paia di naibi vecchi e nuovi di grandissima quantità, e imposti legati spenzoloni intorno intorno con molti capelli e balzi di donne e alter cose, con molta stipa da piè, che mai vedesti el più bel fuoco, che andava infino all'aria la fiamma in confusione del dimonio nimico di Dio, e gloria e onore a lalde e reveranza del nostro Signor Gesù Cristo altissimo Iddio.”

Bernardino's effort to deliver his message in very concrete terms. A symbolic purging of sins, the bonfire also served to remind listeners of the flames awaiting them in the next world if they did not repent.

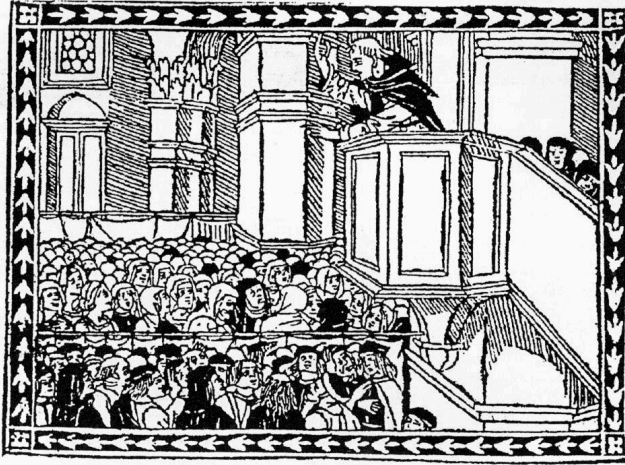


Fig. 4

There are numerous images of preaching events where the preacher is shown preaching outdoors in the central *piazza* of the town. An interesting example is a drawing by Jacopo Bellini showing Bernardino da Siena preaching in Venice from a wooden structure, high above the congregation. Bernardino is shown preaching from wooden structures in the central squares of various other cities as well, as in a cycle of scenes from the life of San Bernardino by Gian Giacomo da Lodi (1477) displayed in San Bernardino chapel in the Church of Saint Francis in Lodi (Milan). Dominican preachers are also often presented preaching outdoors from simple structures of wood or stone, as in Andrea da Firenze's murals in the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella depicting Peter Martyr preaching in Florence (Fig. 3) and the polyptychs from the Erri workshop in Modena showing Peter Martyr and Thomas Aquinas preaching from wooden structures. In some cases, preachers are shown preaching from an external balcony attached to a facade of a church or from a simple internal pulpit projecting from the wall of the church, as in a Ligurian-school painting of Genoa's Palazzo Bianco depicting Bernardino da Feltre preaching from a stone pulpit; or the woodcuts illustrating Girolamo Savonarola's (1452–1498) preaching in Florence Cathedral and in San Marco (from the *Compendio di Revelatione*, Florence 1496) (Fig. 4). A recurrent motif in these pictorial sources is the close proximity of preacher and listeners: the preacher is usually surrounded

by crowds of believers eagerly hanging on his words and in close connection with him.⁷

In a different medium, the preaching of the Observants is revealed in the bronze reliefs in the Salviati Chapel in the church of San Marco in Florence illustrating the preaching of the Dominican Archbishop Antoninus Pierozzi (1389–1459), who was active in Florence in the mid-fifteenth century. The Salviati Chapel, designed by Giambologna, an important Mannerist sculptor, was decorated in bronze by him and his contemporaries. The reliefs, depicting the Story of Saint Antoninus and dated from 1581 to 1587, are attributed to Giambologna, Domenico Francavilla and Domenico Partigiani.⁸ Although executed a century after the actual preaching of Saint Antoninus, which was in the mid-fifteenth century, there is a relief that provides us with some impressions of the preaching environment.

The third relief in the series shows Antoninus preaching from a pulpit inside the Dominican church of San Marco (Fig. 5). Antoninus appears as a young man, wearing not the cassock of an archbishop but the habit of a friar. This scene depicts an earlier stage in Antoninus' career as a preacher and founding prior of San Marco. He is leaning on the rail of the pulpit, using one hand for support and raising the other in an expressive gesture. The audience consists of two groups of listeners, one male and the other female. No physical barrier, such as a curtain or a rope, separates them (as is the case in the famous depictions of Saint Bernardino preaching in Siena) but the two groups are distinct. Another distinction is between the first row, seated on chairs, probably reserved for the more distinguished spectators, and the remaining rows, where people are seated on wooden benches. The reactions of the male listeners are diverse: some evince faith, surprise, awe and pensive meditation; others, notably in the first row, are talking, raising objections, even turning their backs on the preacher, from either shame or boredom. The women, however, are all attentively turning their heads to listen to the preacher, in obedience and faith. There is a differentiation of social classes: some of the women are veiled or elaborately coiffed, and some

⁷ These examples are taken from RUSCONI, "The Preacher Saint in Late Medieval Italian Art", pp. 181–200.

⁸ On the Salviati chapel in San Marco see JAMES HOLDERBAUM, *The Sculptor Giovanni Bologna*, New York: Garland Publishers, 1983, pp. 247–61; MICHAEL E. FLACK, "The Salviati Chapel of Giambologna" (unpublished doctoral dissertation), Columbia University, 1986; CHARLES AVERY, *Giambologna: The Complete Sculpture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 270–71; MARY WEITZEL GIBBONS, *Giambologna: Narrator of the Catholic Reformation*, Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1995, pp. 27–35. An excellent monograph has recently been published on the Salviati Chapel see SALLY CORNELISON, *Art and the Relic Cult of Saint Antoninus in Florence*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. See also MICHAEL W. COLE, *Ambitious Form: Giambologna, Ammanni, and Danti in Florence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, pp. 191–225.



Fig. 5

wear exquisite hats and decorated dresses in accordance with Florentine fashion. One woman, seated prominently in the front, is breastfeeding her baby. She might embody a symbolic message: nurturing her little one in the same way that the preacher, through charity and love, nourishes his listeners.

Other interesting examples are the images showing the preaching of the Franciscan Observant preacher Giovanni da Capistrano (1386–1456). Saint John of Capistrano's iconographic tradition developed in the fifteenth century, when he was generally pictured with a crusader's banner that marked him as a preacher who supported the cause of liberating Christian lands from the Ottomans. The earliest example is a painting by Bartolomeo Vivarini from 1459, in which Saint John of Capistrano holds a book and a crusader's banner. The provenance of this painting is unknown, but it probably was commissioned as part of a campaign to canonize Saint John of Capistrano during the reign of Pope Pius II, only three years after Saint John's death, an initiative that was not successful. In another example, a painting from 1488 that Carlo Crivelli made for the Observant Franciscan Church of San Pietro in Camerino, Saint John of Capistrano, holding

a Crusade banner, stands across from Saint James of the Marches, who holds a pastoral staff.



Fig. 6

Around 1480, an unknown master (possibly Giovanni Bartolomeo d'Aquila) painted an altarpiece that shows Saint John of Capistrano at the center, holding a crusader's banner and surrounded with four narrative scenes from his life (Figure 6). Commissioned to support the Observant attempt to spread the saint's cult following the Observant General Assembly held in Pavia in 1478, one year after the saint's hagiography was translated from Latin into Italian, the altarpiece is now in the Museo Nazionale dell'Aquila but it was probably originally located in the local Franciscan Observant house in l'Aquila.⁹

The scenes depicted in the Saint John of Capistrano Altarpiece show the celebration of the Mass in Petrovaradin (Serbia), where the saint had a vision of the coming victory over the Turks; the Battle of Belgrade; the saint preaching in front of the cathedral of l'Aquila; and his tomb and its associated miracles. Two of the narratives show Saint John as a young man holding a banner decorated with the symbol most closely associated with Saint Bernardino: the monogram of Christ's name. In the *Battle of Belgrade* Saint John is on the left, the first among a group of friars, making a sign of benediction and holding a crusader's banner with the Holy Name of Christ. The Turks are shown fighting on the

⁹ On the panel of Saint John of Capistrano see ROBERTO RUSCONI, "Giovanni da Capistrano: Iconografia di un predicatore nell'Europa del '400," in *Le Venezie Francescane: Predicazione francescana e società veneta nel Quattrocento, Atti del II convegno internazionale di studi francescani. Padova 26–28 marzo 1987*, 6 (1989), pp. 31–60.

right-hand side of the painting; there is a war ship in the distance and, in the foreground, a knight steps over a Turkish soldier lying on the ground. There is a marked difference between the fierce battle represented in the panel and the frozen position of the preacher raising his hands and controlling the troops. In the preaching scene, he displays the monogram to his audience.



Fig. 7

A telling example of the manner in which Observant preachers were represented in the Early Modern tradition is the Church of Ognissanti in Florence (Figure 7). The most radical alterations Observants made to the church's interior date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when a pulpit, altars, paintings and sculptures were installed. New chapels were introduced into the church, and older chapels were reconstructed under the patronage of various Florentine families. Many of the newly-constructed chapels were dedicated to Franciscan Observant saints, including Bernardino of Siena and John of Capistrano, and to Franciscan female saints such as Rose of Viterbo and Clare of Assisi, among others. Other themes emphasized in the Baroque renovations of the church were devotions to and miracles associated with the Eucharist.¹⁰ The later decorations associated with the Baroque refurbishment of the church have been neglected

¹⁰ On the church of Ognissanti in Florence see ANNA MARIA AMONACI, *Il chiostro di Ognissanti a Firenze. Gli affreschi del ciclo francescano*, Florence: Fratelli Palombi, 1990; FERDINANDO BATAZZI and ANNA MARIA GIUSTI, *Ognissantii*, Rome: Fratelli Palombi, 1992.

in art-historical research. This is partly due to a general lack of attention paid to the Florentine art of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Together with the attention given to Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi in early modern Franciscan art, an increased interest was focused on other Franciscan saints, including Bernardino of Siena, John of Capistrano and Anthony of Padua. As was customary, the fifteenth-century Saint Bernardino was depicted holding the monogram of Christ's name, which consists of an emblem combining the letters IHS surrounded by rays of light against a blue background, whereas Saint John of Capistrano, who was canonized in 1690, was shown leading troops and holding a cross in the Battle of Belgrade. Many of the works of art in Ognissanti encourage the veneration of these saints. Saint Bernardino of Siena appears in numerous images in the church and has his own special chapel. These multiple visual references to Saint Bernardino of Siena were characteristic of Observant Franciscan houses in Italy. Saint John of Capistrano, on the other hand, was not a central figure in Italian art beyond the city of l'Aquila, where he was active as a reformer and preacher.

At Ognissanti, the chapel dedicated to Saint John of Capistrano is located near the main sanctuary of the church. This chapel was originally dedicated to Saint Benedict, whose monastic rule the Humiliati adopted. According to Ghiberti and Vasari, the chapel was decorated with frescoes probably made by Giotto. In 1661, the patronage of the chapel passed to the Bardi di Vernio family. Seventeenth-century local chronicles describe the chapel as suffering from severe damage; the pictorial decoration is said to have been in a state of serious deterioration. After Pope Alexander VII declared John of Capistrano a saint in 1690, and as a result of the Ottomans' defeat by Christian forces in the battle of Vienna in 1683, the Franciscan Observants at Ognissanti decided to dedicate a chapel to the glory of Saint John of Capistrano. The chapel of Saint Benedict was then completely redecorated through the patronage of the Bardi di Vernio, which included a commission for new frescoes. No traces remain of the original medieval frescoes; an altarpiece that depicted the Virgin and saints that Ridolfo Ghirlandaio had made for the first chapel was removed.

Antonio Ferri (1651–1716) redesigned the chapel in collaboration with Iacopo Masoni and Giovanni Passardi, who added angels and ornamentation in stone and marble. Three new paintings were placed in the chapel. One, by Pier Dandini, depicts *Saint John at the Battle of Belgrade*. Two other panels by the same painter show *Saint John of Capistrano Conversing with the Virgin* and *Saint John of Capistrano defending the Holy Name of Christ together with Saint Bernardino of Siena*. The three panels depict Saint John of Capistrano in a dramatic manner and as the leading protagonist of the events they record. In the *Battle of Belgrade*, the emphasis is placed on the huge figure of Saint John, who

holds a red crusader's banner as defeated Ottomans escape in the background. The dedication of an entire chapel to Saint John of Capistrano was unusual in the Franciscan Observant tradition. It marks his canonization and, subsequently, his developing cult at the end of the seventeenth century.¹¹

A potential source of information on preaching events, in addition to the pictorial, is the direct references by preachers to their preaching environment in their sermons — when these can be found. Giovanni Dominici, who preached in Florence's Santa Maria Novella, on a few occasions referred to the location of his preaching. Continuing a Dominican tradition, he used to preach either from the high pulpit inside the church or, weather permitting, in the large *piazza*. In an undated sermon for the second Sunday of Advent, which opened with the invitation of Saint Paul to assemble, he proclaimed: "We should gather not inside the walls of Santa Maria Novella, but in the real Santa Maria Novella: in purity, in virginity and chastity."¹² On another occasion, he warned his disobedient listeners that if they would not mend their ways they must not approach his pulpit.¹³ A major site of Franciscan preaching in Florence was the *piazza* and church of Santa Croce. Bernardino da Siena referred explicitly to the site of his preaching when complaining: "The bell of Santa Croce rings for the sermon, rings, rings, it does so for you to come, but you never come."¹⁴

An additional possible source of information on the location of the preaching event might be civic chronicles, hagiographic sources and works of fiction that include stories on preachers and their pulpits. An intriguing tale, taken from one of his *vitae*, is about the preaching of Saint Peter Martyr directed against a group of heretics in the town of Melano. The bishop of the heretics, mocking Peter Martyr, was bothering the congregation, demanding that the preacher create a cloud in order to protect the congregation from the heat of the sun, which was very bothersome. Peter Martyr took on the challenge. He made the sign of the cross from the high pulpit on which he was standing, and immediately a cloud appeared, sent by the Lord, and provided relief for the audience until Peter Martyr had completed his sermon, bringing joy to the believers and much shame to the heretics. Another colorful story, told by Sachetti, is about

¹¹ On the chapel of Saint John of Capistrano see BATAZZI AND GIUSTI, *Ognissanti*, pp. 60–61.

¹² See GIOVANNI DOMINICI, *Ricc. 1301*, Predica 4, lines 10–11: "Richolglianci non è in questa cioè in queste mura di Sancta Maria Novella, ma nella vera Sancta Maria Novella: nella purità, nella virginità, nella chastità."

¹³ See GIOVANNI DOMINICI, *MS Ricc. 1301*, Predica 41, line 183: "se queste vaghegine et vaghegiatori non mutono modi, che disposto sono di non salire in pergamo..."

¹⁴ BERNARDINO DA SIENA, *Le prediche volgari — Quaresimale Fiorentino del 1425*, ed. by Ciro Cannarozzi, Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1940, I: 265: "La campana di Santa Croce suona a predica, suona, suona e fa pro a voi che ci venite ed ella non ci viene mai." (In Tuscan dialect of the fifteenth century 'ella' signifies the polite address 'to you').

a Dominican friar whose major challenge was how to fill the vast interior of the mendicant church where he was preaching. After seeing that no one was coming to hear him, he found a way to attract an audience by proclaiming that usury was not a sin. Everyone thereupon left the other preachers and came to hear him. His success was complete when the crowds gathered, shoulder to shoulder, as had been his dream.¹⁵

In his diary, Luca Landucci, who was an ardent supporter of Savonarola, often mentions the wooden benches that were commonly used in churches during sermons. He recounts that one day the Arno River flooded the town, sending the benches from Santa Croce floating around the city.¹⁶ Landucci, in an entry in his diary on 17 January 1478, relates the story of a hermit, who, “at the age of twenty four, barefoot, with a wallet on his back... declared that Saint John and the Angel Raphael had appeared to him. And one morning he went up to the *ringhiera* of the *Signori* to preach, but the ‘Eight’ sent him away.”¹⁷ This curious tale reveals a case where the preacher chose as his pulpit the *ringhiera*, the political symbol of the city and the platform used by its government officials. One can only surmise that this preacher, a young man from Volterra, where he was working in a hospital, was unaware of the social codes of the city. Another event reported by Landucci took place on 23 July 1497. A certain priest, belonging to Santa Maria Maggiore, was arrested by the ‘Eight’ because he was secretly declaring that the friars at San Marco were sodomites. The ‘Eight’ demanded that he restore the good name of the friars: “He mounted a pulpit placed on the steps of Santa Maria del Fiore, in the Piazza di San Giovanni, against the Campanile, and in the presence of all the people there said that he had told lies and publicly confessed his errors.” In this instance, a temporary structure was erected for the purpose of having the friar publicly repent before the congregation. “Nevertheless, the ‘Eight’ sent him to the Stinche, where he was confined in a cage.”¹⁸ In an entry on 5 May 1497, Landucci mentions a ruling by the Signori that no order of friars could preach without their permission, and they had all the stools and benches and the stands for the boys removed from Santa Maria del Fiore. Later, on 11 February 1498, the stands and benches were returned to their places.¹⁹ In another entry, Landucci mentions that Savonarola

¹⁵ See FRANCESCO SACCHETTI, *Il Trecentonovelle*, ed. by Vincenzo Perticone, Florence: Sansoni, 1946, pp. 73–76.

¹⁶ LUCA LANDUCCI, *A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516*, trans. by Alice de Rosen Jervis, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971, pp. 5, 24.

¹⁷ LANDUCCI, *A Florentine Diary*, p. 26

¹⁸ LANDUCCI, *A Florentine Diary*, pp. 125–26.

¹⁹ LANDUCCI, *A Florentine Diary*, pp. 119, 130–31.

went out of the church of San Marco to a pulpit outside the church to display the host before the people.²⁰

A further aspect of the preaching event is the division of ecclesiastical space which is the traditional separation of women from men in the congregation. When discussing the preaching of Savonarola in Santa Maria del Fiore in 1496, Landucci relates that a wooden stand for boys was broken because of the crowd. "You must know that there were four stands: two against the walls facing the chancel; the other two, one above for the men and the other below for the women, in the body of the church."²¹ The division between men and women in the congregation and the position of the pulpit in relation to them is an important aspect of Landucci's accounts. According to Adrian Randolph: "Primarily through the positive roles provided by mendicant promotion of Marian devotion and, secondarily, through the emergence of powerful female spirituals in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, women staked out a territory for themselves within the Church." He especially highlights the participation of women in preaching events.²² In the pictorial evidence, as for example in Sano di Pietro's and Neroccio de'Landi's panels of San Bernardino preaching in Siena, men are often shown as being separated from women. In the *piazza*, the location of men in relation to women is not consistent: sometimes they are on the right, other times on the left. Inside the church, however, women were traditionally confined to the north of the church and men to the south. The north had a negative connotation since, from the point of view of the congregation, it was on the left side of the church, traditionally regarded as evil.²³ In woodcuts from 1496 alluding to Savonarola's preaching in the cathedral of Florence, the interior of the church is shown with a curtain separating the male and female spectators, and the pulpit projects from the wall on the side of the nave. In other pictorial sources, as in Giambologna's reliefs, discussed above, men are again seen as distinct from women, but there is no physical barrier between them.

Women were often singled out for special attention by preachers. When Savonarola was preaching on political matters and issues of state, he banned women from his sermons. But many other preachers directed their sermons

²⁰ LANDUCCI, *A Florentine Diary*, p. 131.

²¹ LANDUCCI, *A Florentine Diary*, p. 111.

²² See ADRIAN RANDOLPH, "Regarding Women in Sacred Space", in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. by Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 17–41.

²³ See GULIELMUS DURANTIS, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments*, trans. by John Neal and Benjamin Webb, Leeds: T.W. Green, 1973, p. 36; MARGARET ASTON, 'Segregation in Church', in *Women in the Church*, ed. by W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, pp. 237–95.

especially to women.²⁴ The early fifteenth century preacher Girolamo da Siena, in a little booklet on religious behavior, wrote a special section on how men, and especially women, should behave in church. “Do not enter the church,” he warned, “like those vain women who greet all merchants, their neighbours, their family and friends in the house of God; but stay alone, and devout, and in perpetual silence.... Be attentive during the preaching. Don’t judge the preacher, but note and write down in the living tablets of your heart those elements of doctrine which it seems to you that you need to remember most.” He further complained against women who ran from church to church to see the consecrated host in more than one ceremony, and against those who in the middle of a sermon would rise up and speak, interrupting the sermon.²⁵

Passages in sermons in which preachers appealed differently to men and women reinforce the impression of a separation of the sexes in the congregation. Many of Giovanni Dominici’s sermons contain direct appeals to the women present in his audience; such phrases such as “You, mother” or “You, woman” abound. At times, too, he emphasized that he is was referring not just to the men in his audience but equally to the women.²⁶ Other preachers, Antoninus and Savonarola among them, protested against women’s abuse of the preaching event as an opportunity to display their charms. “Look at the customs of Florence,” Savonarola exclaimed, “how the Florentine women marry their daughters, they put them on display, and attire them so that they appear to be nymphs; and the first thing they do is take them into Santa Reparate. These are your idols, which you have placed in my temple.” Antoninus compiled a list of female vices and condemned women for adorning themselves prior to appearing in church.²⁷ Bernardino da Siena claimed that “women who have a daughter that they want to marry... dress her up and take her to church to find a husband.”²⁸ When staging a peace ceremony in Siena in 1425, Bernardino gave separate instructions to men and women. He directed his women listeners to be reconciled in the Chiesa di Santo Martino, while the men were to go to the Duomo. Moreover,

²⁴ LANDUCCI, *A Florentine Diary*, pp. 76–77.

²⁵ This passage is taken from ROBERTO RUSCONI, *Predicazione e vita religiosa nella società italiana: da Carlo Magno alla Controriforma*, Torino: Loescher, 1981, pp. 176–77.

²⁶ GIOVANNI DOMINICI, *Ricc. 1301*, Predica 20, 66v: “A te madre”; Predica 23, line 171: “Et tu donne”; lines 165–66: “et così alle donne come agli uomini.”

²⁷ See RANDOLPH, “Regarding Women,” p. 35.

²⁸ BERNARDINO DA SIENA, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, ed. by Carlo Delcorno, 2 vols, Milan: Rusconi, 1989, pp. 777–78: “Simile dico di queste donne, che hanno la loro figliuola e voglionla mandare a marito... ma quelle ornamenta a le quali ella dura tanta fatica, come so’ di fare le tende con tanti bottini e tante frasche...”

the women had to enter the church from one side and exit from the other as a sign of concord.²⁹

Richard Trexler, taking verbal and visual evidence into account, summarises that when a sermon was delivered, the arrangement of sexes was as follows:

Properly coming through separate doors into the church, men and women proceeded to their distinct places. For Mass men went to the front of the church near the image and altar, and women remained in back, separated by a wall from their men. The socially prominent of either sex preceded those of lesser estate, and sometimes had chairs to sit on. During sermons, the seating was different; separated by a screen, men were on the right-hand side of the church (the honorable side), and women were on the left. Within each sex, groups might be discerned: confraternities, business associates, guild members, pupils with teachers among the men, neighbors and friends among the women. In all ceremonial settings the family was sundered, for sex specific groups were the contracting elements in society. The social order has arranged itself before its images. And behind the priest or preacher, the government sat in a semicircular frame.³⁰

Apart from certain religious rituals, such as receiving the host beyond the rood screen at the high altar, to which women were denied access, it appears that women were central participants in preaching events although restricted to their particular space. They were confined to one side of the *piazza* or one side of the church but did take part in the preaching event.

From pictorial sources, it is evident that the preacher's pulpit was located in front of the divided congregation and he was able to approach men and women equally; sometimes the women were even closer to the preacher than the male listeners. The position of the pulpit in close proximity to female listeners and its being accessible to them is much in line with the sermon literature tradition. Indeed, sermons were often directed at a female audience and specifically served their religious needs. The relationship between male preachers and female listeners has attracted increasing attention in recent years.³¹ Innovative

²⁹ BERNARDINO DA SIENA, *Prediche volgari (Predicazione, Siena 1425)*, ed. by Ciro Cannarozzi, Florence: Rinaldi, 1958, II, 262–63: “Quando voi vi partite di qui, io vi prego e vi comando, se io vi posso comandare, che tutti, per l'amore di Dio e per santa carità, voi perdoniate a tutti e vostri nemici, e che voi vi riconciliate insieme, e non rimanga nè donna, nè uomo, nè piccolo, nè grande, che non perdoni liberamente, magnanimamente a tutti coloro che t'anno offeso. E se fusse niuno che non potesse trovare colui col quale à l'odio, vada in segno di volere perdonare, al Duomo, a l'altare, e poi, quando troverà el suo avversario, facci pace co' lui e perdoni l'uno a l'altro. E a voi, donne, tutte andate costì a la chiesa di santo Martino, e intrate dall'una parte e uscite da l'altra, in segno che voi perdoniate a ogni persona.”

³⁰ See RICHARD C. TREXLER, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

³¹ Another field of research combining gender and medieval sermons is that on women preach-

studies are being written on perceptions of marriage and on women saints as portrayed in medieval sermons.³² Some scholars have concentrated on translating and commenting upon collections of sermons addressed to women,³³ others on sermons directed to communities of nuns.³⁴ Yet others have focused on the domestic guidance offered in the sermons of mendicant preachers.³⁵ In the context of fifteenth-century Italy, scholars have analyzed the attitudes towards women of the famous mendicant preachers Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444) and Savonarola (1452–98).³⁶ I have written elsewhere on the views of the influential Dominican preacher Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419), who acted as a guide and mentor to women — to individual females, to a community of nuns; to a congregation of laywomen attending his sermons.³⁷ In his preaching, Dominici addressed himself directly to women and devoted time to their guid-

ers. See CATHERINE M. MOONEY, “Authority and Inspiration in the Vitae and Sermons of Humility of Faenza”, in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig, Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp. 93–119; BEVERLY M. KIENZLE, “Defending the Lord’s Vineyard: Hildegard of Bingen’s Preaching against the Cathars”, in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, pp. 163–81; *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverly M. Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 1999.

³² See *Modern Questions about Medieval Sermons: Essays on Marriage, Death, History and Sanctity*, ed. by Nicole Bériou and David L. D’Avray, Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1994; ANNE T. THAYER, “Judith and Mary: Hélinand’s Sermon for the Assumption,” in *Medieval Sermons and Society: Cloister, City, University*, ed. by Jacqueline Hamesse and others, Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d’Études Médiévales, 1998, pp. 63–76.

³³ See *Prediche alle donne del secolo XIII: Testi di Umberto da Romans, Gilberto da Tournai, Stefano di Borbone*, ed. by Carla Casagrande, Milan: Bompiani, 1978; CAROLYN MUESSIG, *The Faces of Women in the Sermons of Jacques de Vitry*, Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1999.

³⁴ See NICOLE BÉRIOU, “La prédication au béguinage de Paris pendant l’année liturgique 1272–1273,” *Récherches augustinienes*, 13 (1978), 105–229; VERONICA M. O’MARA, “Preaching to Nuns in Late Medieval England”, in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, pp. 93–119; REGINA D. SCHIEWER, “Sermons for Nuns of the Dominican Observance Movement”, in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, pp. 75–92.

³⁵ See BERNADETTE PATON, *Preaching Friars and the Civic Ethos: Siena 1380–1480*, London: Westfield Publications, 1992, pp. 210–63.

³⁶ On Bernardino da Siena and women see David Herlihy, “Santa Caterina and San Bernardino: Their Teachings on the Family”, in *Atti del Simposio Internazionale Cateriniano-Bernardiniano*, ed. by Domenico Maffei and Paolo Nardi, Siena: Accademia Senese degli Intronati, 1982, pp. 917–33; IDA MAGLI, “L’etica familiare e la donna in S. Bernardino”, in *Atti del Convegno Storico Bernardiniano, Aquila: Comitato aquilano, 1982*, pp. 111–26; FRANCO MORMANDO, “Bernardino of Siena, «Great Defender» or «Merciless Betrayer» of Women?”, *Italica*, 75 (1998), 22–40; on Savonarola and women see LORENZO POLIZZOTTO, “When Saints Fall Out: Women and the Savonarolan Reform in Early Sixteenth Century Florence”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 46 (1993), 486–525; NATALIE THOMAS, *A Positive Novelty: Women and Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Victoria: Monash Publications, 1992, pp. 38–57.

³⁷ See NIRIT BEN-ARYEH DEBBY, “The Preacher as Women’s Mentor,” in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, pp. 229–254.

ance and instruction, occasionally using images and stories derived from their daily experience.³⁸ Studies of sermons to women emphasize the affinity between preachers and their female listeners. On the one hand, most held misogynist views and condemned the vanity and corrupt nature of women; on the other, in contrast to the usual custom of the time, many preachers addressed women directly and were concerned with their daily problems.

In conclusion, the pictorial examples depicting the sermonizing of preachers show the close affinity between preachers and their listeners; the location of the preaching was determined on the basis of its best utility for the preacher and in line with the sermon tradition. Thus, in churches, the preachers were located in the lower nave in the midst of the congregation and in close proximity to male and especially female listeners. The positioning of preacher and pulpit within the church, then, reflects the reality that the preacher acted as a mentor and guide to women in their daily life, and the close bonds between the preacher and his female audience appear to be an integral part of the preaching tradition. The pictorial evidence highlights the use of simple, portable wooden pulpits or plain marble structures as aids to the preacher. Preachers were represented either in the city squares or within the churches while preaching to their attentive audience. One could raise doubts regarding the reliability of visual images as a reflection of a real preaching event due to their stereotypic and symbolic character and argue that the depiction of a preaching event is to be viewed in the context of the cult of the specific preacher-saint depicted. Nevertheless, these images are valuable because they present the physical conditions of the preaching event and contain some lively details about the preacher and his listeners.

Illustrations

Figure 1. Sano di Pietro, *Sermon of San Bernardino in the Campo*, Siena Museo Capitolare. (Photo: Courtesy of Alinari)

Figure 2. Neroccio di Bartolomeo, *Sermon of San Bernardino in the Campo*, Siena Museo Capitolare. (Photo: Courtesy of Alinari)

Figure 3. Andrea da Firenze, *Sermon of Peter Martyr*, Florence, Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella. (Photo: Courtesy of Alinari)

Figure 4. Woodcut illustrating Savonarola preaching in S. Maria del Fiore. Girolamo Savonarola, *Compendio di Revelazione*, Florence, 1496, Florence, P. Pacini, 23, IV, 1496 (Reproduced with courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale)

³⁸ An interesting study on the manner in which an audience of female readers and listeners has influenced vernacular literature is KATHERINE GILL, "Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular, 1300–1500," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, ed. by Ann E. Matter and John Coakley, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994, pp. 64–104.

Figure 5. Giambologna, *The Preaching of Antoninus in San Marco, Florence, San Marco*, Chapel of Saint Antoninus (Photo: Courtesy of Alinari)

Figure 6. Master of Saint John of Capistrano Altarpiece, Museo Nazionale dell'Aquila, Aquila. Photo: Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby

Figure 7. Interior, Ognissanti, Florence. Photo: Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby

IMAGES OF PREACHERS IN ITALIAN ART AND SERMONS

S U M M A R Y

This paper presents several examples of the preaching of major Observant preachers and the images they employed in Tuscany, and particularly in Florence. The intention of the paper is to demonstrate the power of art in depicting preaching and to show how these images were used as a part of the commemoration of preaching events and the cult of mendicant saints in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Florence. A difficult question in the field of sermon studies is the relationship between preaching and art, particularly the manner in which preachers used works of art in their preaching and described specific pictures in their sermons, and the way in which preachers themselves were depicted delivering their sermons by artists. My decision to concentrate on Tuscany is due to its importance as a center of preaching and of artistic production during the Renaissance. My choice to discuss Observant preachers in particular is based on the fact that they were the most prominent and most often depicted preachers in the visual tradition — a sign of their popularity and impact.

KEYWORDS: Sermons, Preachers, Florence, Tuscany, Word & Image

SŁOWA KLUCZE: kazania, kaznodzieje, Florencja, Toskania, słowo i obraz