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Secularization and realistic turn in Italy: Antonio Fissiraga's Funerary Monument in Lodi

With heavy simplifications it can be stated that during the Middle Ages the political imagery was tied to religious topics, and it meant in the first place the appropriation and transformation of the religious imagery. The present paper focuses on such an appropriation: the funerary monument of Antonio Fissiraga (1253-1327) at the end of the right arm of the transept of San Francesco in Lodi. The fresco on the upper part of the monument represents Antonio Fissiraga, accompanied by St Nicholas and St Francis, while he offers up a model of the church of San Francesco to the Virgin Mary and the Child. The scene takes place within an elaborate architectural setting, consisting also of two monochrome pseudo-reliefs in its tympana. The front image depicts St George in full armor and on horseback slaying the dragon with his lance. St George is represented more as a mighty warrior than a saint, especially in contrast to a similar pseudo-sculptural detail from the St John Baptistery in Varese. It appears that in Lodi the decorative details of the Virgin's throne relate more to the donor, Antonio Fissiraga, *signore de Lode*, than to the Virgin Mary. The appearance of these pseudo-sculptural elements in Italian painting in all probability can be linked to the reemergence of a realistic pictorial paradigm. The first surviving large-scale monument where they can be found is the *Legend of St Francis* in the Upper Church at Assisi. They appear as concomitants to the displayed buildings and interiors. On a general level this may be connected to the wish to portray greater reality in the depicted buildings, that is, to increase their reality-effect and enrich the settings of the Poverello's story. Although in Assisi the pseudo-sculptural elements can be seen on narrative paintings, the phenomenon was quite early associated with votive images, usually as part of the Virgin's throne. The principal statement of my reading is that at the beginning of the 14th century in Italy these monochrome details on votive images displayed figures or themes, which were connected to the Virgin Mary. This claim is substantiated here with the analysis of an example from San Francesco in Rieti, which being also a Franciscan convent offers a fruitful ground of contextual comparison for the San Francesco in Lodi. The crucial feature of the *Virgin and Child with Antonio Fissiraga* is that the pseudo-reliefs appear to be related to the donor, and it is exactly this shift that has to be regarded as a political appropriation of pictorial possibilities

hitherto reserved for religious purposes. In view of the colorful career of Antonio, the analysis of this fresco reveals pictorial mechanism of this appropriation in the context of the Guelf-Ghibellin conflict in early fourteenth century Italy. Furthermore, the funerary monument of Antonio with its pseudo-sculptural details introduces the sculpted monuments of the *signori*, exemplified by the monument of Cangrande della Scala in Verona.