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**“Love not the World”: Saint Francis as an *Alter Christus* in Late Medieval Italian Painting**

This paper reassesses the iconography of Saint Francis as an *alter Christus* in late medieval Italian painting, focusing on a neglected strand of imagery that depicted the saint together with the monastic virtues Poverty, Chastity and Obedience and *either* the monastic vices Avarice, Vainglory and Pride *or* a *mappa mundi* motif. By gathering together surviving examples, some never published before, it is possible to place Sassetta’s famous image of *Saint Francis in Glory* (part of the high altarpiece for the Franciscan church in Sansepolcro, painted 1439-1444, now Villa I Tatti, Settignano) within a broader iconographic tradition that can be traced back into the fourteenth century. I suggest that precise precedents for Sassetta’s iconography can be identified in two paintings commissioned by the Order at the very start of the fifteenth century: a fresco on the facade of San Francesco in Fiesole, illustrated here for the first time, and a now-lost high altarpiece painted for the Franciscan church in Città di Castello, which can be reconstructed thanks to sixteenth-century intarsia copies of its imagery.

Several images of Saint Francis over a *mappa mundi* motif are to be found in Florence: in Orsanmichele, in the convent of Sant’Onofrio, in the novitiate of Santa Croce, and on an altarpiece by Bicci di Lorenzo painted for the church of Santa Trinita. A further panel now in the Accademia probably has a Florentine provenance too. These examples suggest that the *mappa mundi* device was understood as another aspect of the same iconographic tradition that linked Saint Francis in the *alter Christus* pose with the monastic virtues and vices. Furthermore, the facade fresco from San Francesco at Fiesole depicts Saint Francis with the three monastic virtues above with an expansive *mappa mundi* below, cut off by the fresco’s lower border. This partially visible globe provides a precedent for the curved horizon line in Sassetta’s *Saint Francis in Glory*. An even closer analogy can be found in San Francesco in Città di Castello. The original would have showed the saint as an *alter Christus* with the virtues above and the vices below. It also depicted Saint Francis over a remarkable seascape, comparable to that later painted by Sassetta at Sansepolcro. This feature can be explained by a passage in Bonaventure’s *Legenda Maior*, where Francis’s soul is said to have ascended ‘over many waters’ at his death. The image is therefore also a depiction of the ascension of Francis’s soul as a burning star, a vision witnessed by several friars at his death. At both Città di Castello and Sansepolcro, the central *alter Christus* images would have provided the conclusions for the surrounding narrative cycles. The narrative aspect that linked *alter Christus* imagery with Saint Francis’s apotheosis can be traced back to Giotto’s frescoes in the Bardi chapel in Santa Croce. Given the number of related examples that survive, it is safe to assume that the friars at Sansepolcro would have been able to locate Sassetta’s *Saint Francis in Glory* within a broader strand of imagery commissioned inside and outside the Order. This tradition combined different iconographic elements: the *alter Christus* pose for Saint Francis, *mappa mundi* discs of various shapes and sizes, the monastic virtues with a choice of attributes, occasionally the vices with their animal companions, and finally water, standing for the encircling ocean of medieval cosmography, prominent in Sassetta’s painting and its model at Città di Castello. These combinations were intended to express some of the key concerns of Franciscan communities: the uniqueness of the Stigmata, the angelic nature of Saint Francis revealed at his death, and the importance of the rule he instituted, particularly the three vows to poverty, chastity and obedience.