

The gap between text, image and ritual as an iconological problem Two examples from the Adriatic coast

Through the discussion of two practical “case studies”, the authors deal with a classical theme of the iconological studies, that is the complex relationship between text and image. The two examples explain in particular how the “intention” of the artist or patron, and so the deeper meaning of the pictures, are not revealed by the exact correspondences between text and image, but emerge mainly from the recognition of the differences. Often this gap between text and image can be originated from the liturgy or can be explained by the links with ritual practices, in which the pictures are involved. The first example will focus on the analysis of *Dormitio Virginis*, painted in the first half of the 15th century by Olivuccio di Ceccarello for the Osservanti’s church of Sirolo (near Ancona, in the Marche region). The painter selected episodes from the *Legenda aurea* in a noteworthy manner: he decided to portray the humiliated Jew at the time of their punishment (and not their salvation, which concludes the story) and insert the theme of the award offered to Thomas (which is almost never found in Byzantine icons). The emblematic attack of the Jewish image is the mirror of the ritual practice of the purported “holy hail of stone”, performed in Italy and Spain during the Holy Week: at that time Christians used to attack the homes and properties of Jews by casting stones, to purify the city area where the Passion was ritually staged from the presence of the infidels. The semiliturgical rituality of the assault to the properties of the Jews, accepted by the Church, justifies the scars on the image of Jews and clarifies the reason of the selection of episodes made by the painter on the basis of the *Legenda aurea*, with the intention to highlighted the negative role of the Jews, as opposed to the positive one played by the incredulous apostle Thomas. The second example can be found on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, in the Montenegrin coastal town of Kotor. At issue are deviations from the Byzantine iconographic solutions due to a demand made by the Catholic service during Holy Week. The frescoes in the apse of the Santa Maria Collegiata Church in Kotor were painted probably in the first decades of the 14th century and reveal the Byzantino-Gothic art form (*pictura graeca*). The cycles of the Passion and Resurrection Appearances are arranged in three registers around the central Crucifixion scene. In the lower register, the scenes choices are redeployed from the narrative context. This register is closest to the eye of the beholder and seems in fact to recapitulate the meaning of the entire programme – summing up the dogma of transubstantiation. The scenes selection has a distinctive symbolic meaning and forms an entirety with the Eucharistic rites of *depositio*, *elevatio* and *visitatio* performed in the apse. The focus of this paper is to recognize the interrelationships between the text, image and the ritual. Attention is devoted to the interaction of these different structures traditionally studied separately within the history of art, the history of religion and the history of society. The sermon, the Church’s concept of art, the daily religious practices and piety of the faithful are viewed as being interdependent rather than unrelated. The coinciding or inconsistencies (as in our two examples) between the words (both written and spoken), the visual arts and sermons, represent a clear expression of religious preoccupations and the prevailing religious themes in the microclimate under research.