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“The Iconographic Study of the Last Days of the Virgin along the Northern Wall of the Church of Santa Maria ad Cryptas in Fossa (L’Aquila)”

This paper focuses on 14th century frescos extant on the north wall of the Church of Santa Maria ad Cryptas in Fossa, a small village on the outskirts of L’Aquila, in the Abruzzo region of Italy. The author presents a stylistic analysis of the frescoes, posits an identification of the painter, and analyzes the iconography. The author further suggests the existence of now lost works that could be considered the model for several extant works, including the Fossa murals. The observations presented in this article can be seen as linking to a more comprehensive examination of the formation and development in Italy of traditional iconography regarding the later years of the Virgin.

This article consists of five sections. Section 1 notes the decorative scheme overall of the north wall of the Church of Santa Maria ad Cryptas, and then surmises that the commissioner of these murals was connected to the family of the House of Anjou who ruled the area up until 1435.

Section 2 suggests a painter for the mural. The author refutes earlier studies that assign the painting to a Tuscan painter, noting that the style of this mural differs from that of the "Fossa Painter" and “the Master of Campo di Giove.” Given the Fossa mural’s similarities to the work of Ugolino di Prete Ilario, painter of the chancel murals in Orvieto Cathedral in Umbria, suggests that a painter influenced by Ugolino was responsible for the Fossa mural.

Sections 3 and 4 present the author’s iconographic analysis of the murals. While the Golden Legend is the general source for iconography related to the later years of the Virgin, this work differs from that iconography. The author indicates that the Fossa mural’s unusual iconography partially quotes from examples of the subject in Spoleto ca. 1290, Padua ca. 1320, and the Orvieto Cathedral chancel murals ca. 1384. From those comparisons the author posits a post 1384 date for the Fossa mural.

The author indicates examples that use the same later years of the Virgin iconography as seen at Fossa, namely two works by Ottaviano Nelli and an altarpiece today in the Museo e Tesoro del Duomo di Monza. The fact that these works separated by production site and production period are mutually extremely close suggests the existence of a shared model. The author presents the hypothesis that this model was the Vatican Palace murals, now lost, by Matteo Giovannetti. Matteo worked in the Vatican in the 1360s, and the author surmises that he painted images of the later years of the Virgin at the Vatican, a subject he is posited to have previously painted in the 1340s at the Palais des Papes, Avignon.

In Section 5, the author used a survey of tombstones to link the later years of the Virgin imagery to the Last Judgement, and thus indicate it is a connection for life after death and peace. The figure lying on its side in the lower part of the Fossa mural corresponds to the deceased on a tombstone, emphasizing that this figure lying on its side is the deceased commissioner of the work being reborn.

This article takes up a little-known work by an unidentified painter in a regional area far from artistic centers of the day.

The author suggests a production period and artist for the mural based on a detailed stylistic analysis and survey of related works, concluding that these works relied on a now lost model. Through her connection between the later years of the Virgin and the Last Judgement, the author indicated a linked desire for rebirth after death. Her narrative is vivid, her hypotheses bold and stimulating, all marking a step forward in the study of 14th century Italian art.

For these reasons we have awarded the *Bijutsushi* Article Prize to Kuwabara Natsuko.