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**Images of the desert, religious renewal and
the eremitic life in late-medieval Italy:
a thirteenth-century tabernacle in the
National Gallery of Scotland
Vol. I**

Amelia Hope-Jones

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Amelia Hope-Jones
September 2019

Abstract

The image of the desert at the heart of this thesis is contained within a late thirteenth-century Italian tabernacle, on long-term loan to the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh. It is a striking and intricate narrative painting, showing numerous scenes of eremitic life and death in a mountainous desert landscape. The central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle represents the earliest surviving example of 'eremitic landscape' painting in Italy (dated to some fifty years earlier than the well-known *Lives of the Anchorites* fresco in the Camposanto of Pisa). It contains a unique combination of iconography that draws from both East and West. Yet it has been largely overlooked in the extensive literature on Italian panel painting of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and its patronage, origins and intended function are not well understood. This thesis examines the Edinburgh Tabernacle in some depth, drawing on recent technical analysis prompted by my research. Seen as part of a wider cultural and religious context, it emerges as an object of considerable artistic and historical significance. The tabernacle provides persuasive visual evidence for a profound interest in the desert among the increasingly urban landscape of late thirteenth-century Italy. In addition, it raises important questions concerning the legacy of the Desert Fathers in late-medieval Italy, the spirituality of the recently-formed Mendicant Orders, and the relationship between Italian religious life and the monastic culture of Byzantium. This study pursues the impulse that lies behind the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. It explores connections between the tabernacle, the religious context from which it emerged, and a number of eremitic landscape paintings made in central Italy for different patrons between c.1330-1500. In doing so, it aims to shed new light on the function of the object, and the significance of the eremitic life, in late-medieval Italy.

Lay Summary

At the centre of this thesis is a highly unusual painted tabernacle, showing saints and hermits in a desert landscape. My research seeks to understand why this painting, which I refer to as the Edinburgh Tabernacle, was made in late thirteenth-century Italy. It considers the object's potential sources and origins in Byzantium, and what it might have meant to its unknown audience. It considers how the desert was understood: as a symbolic place of religious retreat; a historical setting in which Christian monastic life began; and an antithesis to the urban environment in which many of these images were made and experienced. It asks what this, and other comparable late-medieval images, can tell us about contemporary ideas of the desert.

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Introduction

The image of the desert at the heart of this thesis is contained within an extraordinary painted tabernacle from central Italy (figure 1). The tabernacle is currently dated to c.1280-90, and is on long-term loan to the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh.¹ Its central panel represents a complex narrative scene, with dozens of hermit monks and saints, wild animals and birds occupying a steep and verdant mountain landscape. There is a funeral at its lower edge, to which many hermits travel, and numerous additional scenes of eremitic life in the ascending slopes above. Over the summit of the mountain, the soul of the deceased is carried by angels. Several details of this image, such as the stylite saint at its centre, strongly suggest a connection with the artistic and religious traditions of Byzantium. The folding wings of the tabernacle contain six scenes from the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, and a surmounting central pediment shows Christ Redeemer flanked by six angels. Both the minutely-detailed image of the desert in the central panel, and its juxtaposition with a Christological narrative in the wings, appear to be unique and without precedent in Byzantine or Italian art. Yet despite its exceptional quality and originality, this remarkable panel painting has been relatively little studied to date. Its origins, patronage and function remain obscure, and the motivation behind its making is still unclear. This thesis seeks to redress this oversight, asserting the importance of the tabernacle in art-historical and more broadly historical terms. In doing so, it aims to shed light on the relationship between images of the desert, and the persuasive power of the eremitic ideal, in the late-medieval imagination.

The thirteenth-century tabernacle - which I will refer to as the Edinburgh Tabernacle - marks the beginning of a two hundred-year period in which the eremitic life constituted a prominent theme in the art of central Italy. Images of the desert can be connected to each of the major Mendicant Orders, lay patrons, and the reformed Benedictines between c.1290-1500, revealing the nature and extent of

¹ Boskovits 1988, 122-123; Tartuferi 2002, 398; Malquori 2012, 53-54. I argue for a slightly later date, c. 1295. See below, p. 19-20, and chapter two.

contemporary interest in the eremitic life across a wide spectrum of late-medieval society. The historical scope of this thesis extends from the emergence of the Mendicant Orders in the early thirteenth century, to the late fifteenth century, when images of the desert declined in popularity.² In addition, it explores the origins of the eremitic life in early Christian Egypt, Syria and Palestine, known through literature such as the *Vitae patrum*, and the transmission and adaptation of this exemplary tradition in the monastic life of the West. The ideals of ascetic renunciation, penitential practice and isolation from the secular world ultimately derive from the ancient example of the Desert Fathers.³ Images of the desert testify to the perceived significance of these ideals, and their early Christian origins, among an increasingly urbanised society.

The historical and religious circumstances from which the Edinburgh Tabernacle emerged constitutes a central focus of this thesis. The thirteenth century was a time of rapid growth among the Mendicant Orders, which dramatically altered the religious landscape of western Europe. They were founded on a principle of apostolic poverty, closely linked to the ideal of ascetic renunciation descended from the Desert Fathers.⁴ However their reliance on alms, and their preaching ministry among the laity, meant that they were primarily present in the towns and cities. The Mendicants sought to combine absolute material renunciation with engagement with the secular world, but the inherent contradiction between these two vocations led to disputes regarding the character of the religious life. This was especially true among the Franciscan Order, which had been founded on uncompromising principles of poverty and minority, and whose early existence was characterised by an ascetic and semi-eremitic way of life. Controversy within the Order reached a crisis point in the 1290s, coincident with the making of the tabernacle, when a hermit from the Abruzzi was briefly elevated to the papacy as Celestine V. In the course of my research, a previously-unacknowledged connection came to light, suggesting a potential relationship between the dissident Franciscan friars who became known as the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, the monastic traditions of Byzantium, and the origins of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. My thesis explores this hypothesis, as part of a

² This is discussed in Malquori 2012, 215.

³ See, for example, the *Life of Antony*, 7-70; *Lausiac History*, 23-29.

⁴ Lawrence 1994, 15-19; Brooke 1975, 58-9 and 71-4.

wider discussion on the association between images of the desert, the eremitic ideal, and the origins of the religious life.

The Edinburgh Tabernacle is unique in format and structure, in addition to the unusual iconography contained within its central panel. It is a large, though not monumental object, 118.5cm high by 124.5cm wide when its wings are open.⁵ There is a gabled pediment above an inscribed trilobed arch at the top of its central section, beneath which the folding wings are shaped to fit. When closed, only the half-length image of Christ Redeemer with angels in the pediment is visible. Underneath the central panel, a projecting base-block contains a damaged and partially-legible inscription. It was one of several parts of the tabernacle to be reconstructed or restored in the nineteenth century, prior to its sale to the English collector Lord Lindsay in 1872.⁶ The outer faces of the wings were also painted with gold stars on a dark blue ground at this time, and a projecting wooden headpiece added to the upper edge of the pediment.⁷ There is no surviving documentary evidence of its provenance before Lindsay bought it from the Lombardi-Baldi collection in Florence.⁸ On the inner faces of the wings, six scenes framed with bold vermilion borders depict the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. Reading first from the top of the left wing down, they represent: a scene of grieving angels (which relates to the scene below); the *Crucifixion*; and the *Holy Women at the Sepulchre*. Continuing from the top of the right wing are: the *Flagellation*; the *Mocking and Trial of Christ*; and the *Descent into Limbo (or Harrowing of Hell)*. This episodic narrative frames the central image of the desert, which is painted on a significantly smaller scale. While the lateral Passion cycle is similar in content, size and format to others dating from the late thirteenth century, found for example in painted crosses or dossals, its combination with the eremitic landscape at the centre of the tabernacle appears to be completely unique. The tabernacle has, as far as I

⁵ The full dimensions of the tabernacle, from the most recent conservation report, are as follows: Panel, with wings open: 118.50 x 124.50 x 7.60 cm; central panel: 112.00 x 62.00; left wing: 87.40 x 30.90 cm; right wing: 87.80 x 31.00 cm; closed: 118.80 x 65.70 x 7.60 cm. Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

⁶ Brigstocke 2000, 30-31.

⁷ Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

⁸ Brigstocke 2000, 30-31.

am aware, a 'double' novelty; it represents a narrative image in its central panel, juxtaposed with a Christological narrative in its wings.

The eremitic landscape at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle contains multiple concurrent narrative scenes, dominated by the monastic funeral which takes place at its lower edge (figure 2). The movement in this complex image is dominated by the precipitous descent of the hermits towards the obsequies below, but many additional scenes of eremitic life take place among the contours of the mountain. There is no clear compositional focus, and a profusion of detail characterises the entire mountainous landscape. The hermits emerge from small, red-roofed buildings and chapels, or peer out of tiny caves. The verdant wilderness they inhabit is teeming with birds and beasts, and there is a spring among the rocks. Many of the figures are stooped and elderly, with long grey hair and beards, and all wear grey or cream-coloured habits with contrasting mantles. The funeral of the saint takes place beside an elaborate building, and his bier is surrounded by a crowd of priests - distinguished by their red vestments - and mourners. One of the priests holds a book open towards the viewer, with the first of three tiny inscriptions present in the image written on its pages: REQ[UI]ESCAT IN PACE (figure 3). Two more appear on the pages of books elsewhere in the image. One is at the far right of the panel, next to a hermit who is fishing in a pool: BEATUS VIR QUI NO[N ABIIT], from the first line of Psalm 1 (figure 4).⁹ The other is carried by a sainted hermit, sitting in a wheelchair drawn by lions: DEUS IN ADIU[TORIUM MEUM INTENDE] (figure 5).¹⁰ Each of these inscriptions are only just legible to the naked eye, and the detail of the entire scene is revealed only when a viewer stands at a distance of around two feet from the painting. Both the miniature scale and the narrative content of the tabernacle's central panel are highly unusual in a painting of this size and type.

The Edinburgh Tabernacle's central panel appears to derive from Byzantine sources, although no clear exemplar exists to which it can be traced. Several scenes of eremitic life present in the tabernacle seem to be related to manuscript

⁹ 'Blessed is the man [who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners]', Psalm 1:1.

¹⁰ 'O God, come to my assistance; [O Lord, make haste to help me]', Psalm 69:2.

illuminations, especially those found in eleventh-century illuminations of a monastic treatise known as the *Heavenly Ladder*. Stylite saints, while absent from western iconography, appear in Byzantine illuminated manuscripts and icons from the eleventh century onwards.¹¹ It is notable that the complex composition of the tabernacle's eremitic landscape, with a monastic funeral surrounded by scenes of eremitic life, is repeated in Byzantine images which postdate the tabernacle by over a century.¹² The origin of these later paintings, and their relationship to the image at the centre of the tabernacle, continues to be something of an art-historical riddle, but their existence suggests - even if it cannot prove - a pre-existing artistic tradition from which the tabernacle itself could have emerged.¹³ The subject-matter of the tabernacle's central panel is also associated with ascetic literature known only in the East. In addition to the *Heavenly Ladder*, the Syriac *Religious History* (c.440) and *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* (555-558) appear to be significant literary sources. Italian Duecento painting frequently adapted and incorporated images from Byzantium, but here, scenes particular to the monastic and spiritual traditions of Orthodox Christianity have been fully assimilated into the visual language of central Italy. The result is a uniquely 'hybrid' painting, which synthesises eastern and western sources into something entirely new.

The term 'hybrid' recognises the tabernacle's dual heritage, and acknowledges the problems that arise from its composite origins. The term is often used to describe an image or object which does not sit comfortably within the recognised parameters of a given style, or which lacks a coherent character.¹⁴ It is complex and charged, implying an unnatural combination of two artistic entities that do not belong together. Artworks described as hybrids are implicitly distinct from the pre-existing and intrinsically consistent sources from which they are descended.¹⁵ They have traditionally been regarded as artistically inferior to objects that may be

¹¹ See, for example, Ms. Lavra 46, fol.4v (mid-eleventh century).

¹² The panel in the collection of Y. Petsopoulos at the AXIA Gallery in London contains a very similar composition to that of the tabernacle, with a vertical orientation and the funeral at its base. It includes a monk striking a semandron and a stylite saint, both on its central axis, and an angel carrying the soul of the deceased above a mountainous desert landscape. It is dated to the fifteenth century. See fig. 92.

¹³ cf. Martin 1951, 220.

¹⁴ Bacci 2014, 73-74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73-106.

more readily defined in terms of a national style, even when the boundaries of such a style are recognised to be fluid and permeable.¹⁶ Artistic hybridity can also be viewed in a positive light, as evidence of innovation, productive instability and artistic exchange.¹⁷ The Edinburgh Tabernacle is a Tuscan painting, with many characteristics typical of the late Duecento. But it also contains an iconography which is particular to Byzantium, and apparently alien to the religious and artistic traditions of the West. Its disparate sources are fused together with remarkable skill and the resulting hybrid is, I would argue, visually coherent. I have retained the term 'hybrid' here because it goes some way to explaining the tabernacle's relative lack of scholarly attention and marginal position in the literature; to date it has proved difficult to categorise in terms of style, artist or function. The term recognises the painting's innovative qualities, which arise directly from its peculiar combination of sources, and the way in which assimilation determines its final appearance. The concept of hybridity additionally raises important questions about the relative significance of the Byzantine sources that were incorporated into the framework of this remarkable Italian tabernacle.

I refer to the painting at the heart of this thesis as a 'tabernacle', rather than a 'triptych', despite the fact that the latter is given on its current gallery label and has been used in recent scholarship.¹⁸ 'Triptych' is a modern term used to describe a painting with three parts, which are physically or thematically joined together.¹⁹ It does not indicate the presence of moveable wings or shutters, such as those in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. In medieval documents, multipart panel paintings are described in terms such as '*tabula...ad tres pecios*'.²⁰ The term *tabernacolo*, which derives from the Latin *tabernaculum*, or tent, is a closer match for the object in question. It appears in late-medieval inventories to describe a shrine-like structure

¹⁶ The Edinburgh Tabernacle was described by Garrison (in the 1940s) as 'provincial'. However, the marginal position he assigned to it is, arguably, reflected in the more recent efforts of Boskovits and Tartuferi to assign this painting firmly to a documented Italian artist of the late thirteenth century, and thus to 'pin it down'. Garrison 1949/1998 no.351 [hereafter cited as 'Garrison']; Boskovits 1988, 123; Tartuferi 2002, 397-399. See chapter two, p.93-109.

¹⁷ Stallybrass and White 1986, 58.

¹⁸ Boskovits 1988 122-124; Brigstocke 2000 30-33; Malquori 2012, 52-65; 2013, 217-224.

¹⁹ Its first use is dated to 1731, in reference to a set of writing tablets joined together. Schmidt 2005, 60.

²⁰ For example, in a Palermo inventory from 1438, which mentions a '*cona de cammara ad tres pecios*' ('*cona*' or '*colmo*' refers to a panel with a pointed or arched upper part). Bresc-Bautier 1979, 34.

which contained a precious object or image. In the fifteenth century, documents record a *'tabernacholuzo a sportegli'* (tabernacle with folding wings, or *sportelli*), made for a Florentine nun.²¹ The word 'tabernacle' also alludes to the concepts of dwelling and containment.²² The biblical Tabernacle of the Covenant contained God's Law and represented his promise to the Israelites.²³ The historical currency of the term 'tabernacle', and its religious implications, are important reasons for choosing it in this study. Ultimately, it is a more accurate description of the object in question, which has a shrine-like structure and folding wings that close to contain its precious central image.

In this study, my definition and understanding of an eremitic way of life are derived from the image at the centre of the tabernacle. The hermits inhabit a wild and remote mountainous landscape which is separate from, and antithetical to, the secular world of the city. The words 'desert', 'mountain' and 'wilderness' are used interchangeably, both here and in the literature, to indicate an isolated, but not necessarily specific, geographical place.²⁴ The eremitic way of life pursued in the desert is characterised by physical penitence, visible for example in the self-imposed privations of the stylite saint, and by the renunciation of material possessions and corporeal pleasures. Many of the hermits travel on foot to the funeral despite their advanced age, while others rely on the miraculous provision of sustenance from angels or wild beasts. A hermit is not necessarily defined as a solitary.²⁵ There is a strong sense of community in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, among the grieving monks at the funeral and among those who compassionately assist one another on their journey. Many of the individual hermits in the image pursue various kinds of *ascesis*, or spiritual exercises, intended to purify their

²¹ From the *Ricordanze* of Neri di Bicci, dated to 1453-1475. The term *tabernacholuzo* is a diminutive form of the word *tabernacolo*. *Ricordanze*, ed. Santi 1976, 180, 219-220, cited in Schmidt 2005, 36 and n.19.

²² The verb 'to dwell' comes from the Greek meaning 'to tabernacle' or 'tent', a place to stay in the wilderness. Jasper 2009, xiii. It appears at the opening of the Gospel of John; 'And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.' John 1:14. Late thirteenth-century tabernacles frequently contained an image of the Virgin, within whom Christ 'became flesh'.

²³ 'And carried the ark of the Lord, and the tabernacle of the covenant, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, that were in the tabernacle: and the priests and the Levites carried them.' 3 Kings (1 Kings) 8:4.

²⁴ Vivian 1993, 19; 22-23.

²⁵ A solitary hermit is known as an anchorite (Greek *anakhōrētēs*, from *anakhōrein* 'retire').

physical natures and elevate their minds to God.²⁶ Some devote themselves to prayer, while others are occupied with manual labour, or reading the Scriptures. Interactions between the hermits and the wild beasts of the desert demonstrate the miraculous transformation of animal nature by the grace of God, and the presence of demons and angels indicate the liminality of the desert, where hermits might engage in combat with the devil, or be given succour by the angels.

The content of this eremitic landscape has, in addition, determined the parameters of my research. Death and resurrection are important themes in this image of the desert, visible in the monastic funeral and the transport of the dead saint's soul. The concepts of mortality, penitence and salvation are prominent in the literature, and in many of the other images included in this study. The complete absence of female saints and hermits in the tabernacle, which includes a woman only as a symbol of demonic temptation, means that I have restricted my research to focus on male hermits and masculine forms of the religious life. The important issues of specifically female embodied ascetic experience, cross-dressing hermits and exemplary penitential saints, which are dealt with at length elsewhere, lie outside the scope of this thesis.²⁷ So, too, does the phenomenon of 'urban eremitism'. In the late-medieval period those who enclosed themselves within houses, or in cells in walls, did so as a specific form of *ascēsis* and contemplative retreat.²⁸ However, their physical location within the confines of the city means that they cannot strictly be considered hermits. My inclusion of urban flagellant confraternities, which originate in the thirteenth century, makes an exception to this general rule. They remained within the city, but their ritual practice of self-flagellation is strongly suggestive of the *ascēsis* of the Desert Fathers. In addition, the discovery of frescoes showing hermits and saints in a desert landscape, within an urban space used by the flagellants, determines their relevance in the context of my research. Generally, however, the *locus* of the desert is fundamentally opposed to that of the city, and this separation is central to my understanding of the eremitic life. Whilst images of the desert, including the Edinburgh Tabernacle, may have been seen and

²⁶ From the Greek *askēsis* 'training'; *askein* 'to exercise'. In early ascetic literature, the hermits are frequently referred to as 'athletes': 'How fine it is to behold the contests of excellent men, the athletes of virtue, and to draw benefit with the eyes...' *Historia Religiosa*, 3.

²⁷ See, for example, Walker-Bynum 1984; 1991; 1992; Hamburger 1998.

²⁸ On this topic, see McAvoy (ed.) 2008; Clark Thurber 2012, 47-72; Rava and Thurber 2015, 425-452.

understood within an urban context, they represent something other. The landscape of the desert, which is presented here in minute and elaborate detail, is integral to the eremitic life.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the subject-matter of the Edinburgh Tabernacle in relation to the literary and monastic traditions of the West, from the early Christian desert to the dawn of the thirteenth century. It gives an overview of ascetic literature from the fourth and fifth centuries, such as the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius (357) and the *Lausiac History* of Palladius (c.420), which constitute crucial sources for the development of monastic life in medieval Europe. The early Christian inhabitants of the Egyptian deserts, and their rigorous ascetic way of life, were frequently invoked in monastic contexts as an authoritative and exemplary ideal.²⁹ This chapter looks at the origins of western monasticism, the *Rule* of St Benedict and the creation of a sophisticated, institutionalised form of the religious life which sought to formalise and codify the *ascesis* of the Desert Fathers. It considers the three tiny inscriptions contained within the tabernacle and their meaning in the context of western monastic traditions. And it surveys the periodic re-invocation of the eremitic tradition throughout the medieval period, particularly at times of religious renewal and reform. This historical groundwork permits a fuller understanding of the Edinburgh Tabernacle itself, the meaning it might have held for its late-medieval audience, and the way of life that it represents in such intricate detail.

The ideological ‘pull of the desert’, evident throughout the medieval period, has long been recognised in historical scholarship.³⁰ The ecclesiastical historians Jean Leclerq and Charles Dereine, among others, did much to bring this

²⁹ See, for example, the *Life of Gerard of Salles* (c.1120), cited in Constable 1991, 57, and the *Life of Bernard of Tiron* (c.1140), cited in Thompson 2014, 25.

³⁰ Academic interest in this phenomenon began in the postwar period, most notably in: Chitty 1966; Rousseau 1978; Leclerq 1982; Constable 1986. See also: Sheils (ed.) 1985.

phenomenon to light in the post-war period.³¹ They identified a rising tide of dissatisfaction with the perceived decadence of traditional Benedictine monastic life during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.³² In consequence, new reformed congregations such as the Camaldolese and Vallombrosans (who were particularly prominent in central Italy) formed to reinstate a way of life which more closely resembled that of the Desert Fathers, and there were increasing numbers of independent solitaries who chose to pursue their religious vocation away from monastic foundations.³³ It is important to clarify here that the terms 'eremitic' and 'coenobitic' should not be seen as antithetical.³⁴ An eremitic existence could encompass both solitary and communal (or coenobitic) ways of life. What distinguished the hermit from the 'coenobite' of the monastery was his perceived ascetic rigour and material separation from the secular world.³⁵ The richly-endowed monasteries of the high medieval period were primarily occupied with perpetual prayer as an instrument of social good.³⁶ The hermit, by contrast, sought to re-establish the relationship between the religious life and the traditions of the desert, which included strict material renunciation, individual penitence, and complete isolation from the secular world. This was frequently pursued within eremitic communities, established in remote locations in the wooded hills and mountains.³⁷

The relationship between the reformed or 'eremitic' Orders such as the Cistercians, the tradition of the Desert Fathers, and changes in the societal structures of twelfth-century Europe, have been extensively discussed by scholars

³¹ Their assertion that monastic reform, and the increased number of solitary hermits recorded during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, had been precipitated by a 'crisis in coenobitism', was later disputed by John van Engen. On the 'crisis', see: Dereine 1948, 137-54; Leclercq 1958, 19-41; Cantor 1960, 47-67. Van Engen 1986, 269-304; Baker 1993 207-223.

³² Recorded, for example, in the first half of the twelfth century, in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis. *Ecclesiastical History*, 312.

³³ On the Camaldolese, see: Vedovato 1994, and on the Vallombrosans: Megli and Salvestrini 2013. Notable solitaries include figures such as Gerard of Salles (d.1120), or Romuald of Ravenna (d.1027), both of whom attracted many followers. Penco 1961, 180-197.

³⁴ The word coenobitic means 'common life'. It does not preclude a life lived in common in a hermitage.

³⁵ Reflected, for example, in Peter Damian's biography of Romuald of Ravenna. *Life of Romuald*, 299.

³⁶ Lawrence 1984, 94-98.

³⁷ Penco 1961, 196-7

including Lester Little and Giles Constable.³⁸ The ascetic lives of the Desert Fathers, known through literature and hagiography, contrasted sharply with the perceived corruption and decadence of contemporary society as economies became more sophisticated and urban centres grew. Henrietta Leyser's study of twelfth-century hermits discusses the corruption of the contemporary Church as a motivation for monastic reform, and the consequent ambivalence of the ecclesiastical hierarchy towards an eremitic way of life.³⁹ The reformed monastic houses, in addition to heretical movements such as the Waldensians and Cathars, emphasised material poverty, and the rejection of secular values, as crucial aspects of a true religious life.⁴⁰ More recently, proceedings of a conference held at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, entitled 'The Encroaching Desert' traced the legacy of the eremitic tradition throughout the Middle Ages, from the origins of western monasticism in Late Antiquity, to the Observant reforms of the fifteenth century.⁴¹ Notable papers by Bert Roest and Erik Saak explored the ideal of the desert in relation to individual Mendicant Orders in the thirteenth century, but remain purely historical in scope.⁴² From the outset, this thesis aims to connect historical interest in the eremitic life with the visual evidence, beginning with the Edinburgh Tabernacle.

Chapter Two turns to an in-depth examination of the tabernacle itself. It considers the entire object within the context of late-Duecento visual culture, exploring the more conventional and the radically innovative aspects of its content. Existing scholarship on the tabernacle has tended to focus either on the iconography of its central panel, or on its attribution, emphasising the Passion cycle in its wings.⁴³ My aim is to synthesise both of these approaches, and to address the

³⁸ Little 1978, especially 59-96; Benson and Constable (eds.) 1982, 1-112; Constable 1993, 207-224. There is a useful overview of monastic Orders in the Middle Ages in Lawrence 1984. On the Cistercians, see Houben and Vetere (eds.) 1994; Jamroziak 2013, especially 13-42.

³⁹ Leyser 1984, 24-26; 78.

⁴⁰ See, for example: Lerner 1972; Brooke 1975, 71-74; Russell (ed.) 1976, 55-76; Bolton 1977, 95-102; Constable 1991, 63-74; Lansing 1998.

⁴¹ Dijkstra and van Dijk (eds.) 2006.

⁴² Roest 2006, 163-189; Saak 2006, 191-228.

⁴³ The Passion cycle is closer both in style and iconography to extant panel paintings of the late Duecento. Boskovits 1988, 122-124; Tartuferi 2002, 397-399; Chiodo 2004, 129-131.

neglected issues of its potential function and location, to give a more complete analysis than has been attempted so far.⁴⁴ I raise fundamental questions over the current attribution of the tabernacle, and argue for its importance as an extraordinary, early example of narrative panel painting. Among the large volume of scholarship on the art of the Mendicant Orders, and developments in Italian painting during the late thirteenth century, the tabernacle has been almost entirely overlooked.⁴⁵ This chapter seeks to redress this relative inattention, building on several pieces of art-historical research published since the 1940s.

The earliest academic study of the tabernacle was made in 1944, in an article for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* written by Gertrude Coor-Achenbach.⁴⁶ This was the first to highlight the unique interest of the tabernacle as a whole, particularly its narrative quality, and to establish the relationship between the central panel and Byzantine art. It is, however, largely confined to an iconographic and stylistic analysis typical of its time. An unpublished Masters thesis was written on the tabernacle in 1986, by J. Collis-Harvey at the Courtauld Institute.⁴⁷ It analyses the object as a whole, considering its dating and attribution, and makes several pertinent observations about the combination of iconography in its central panel and wings. Collis-Harvey rightly points out the uniqueness of the tabernacle among contemporary Italian painting and notes its relatively large size. However, her thesis neither explores the origins of its iconography, nor speculates on the reasons for its appearance in late thirteenth-century Italian art. Recently, however, the Edinburgh Tabernacle has received more in-depth attention in Italian scholarship. It is included in Alessandra Malquori's 2012 monograph *Il giardino dell'anima; asceti e propaganda nelle Tebaidi fiorentine del Quattrocento*, as an important precedent for several fifteenth-century paintings of the desert made in Florence.⁴⁸ Malquori's work

⁴⁴ On the location of panel paintings, see for instance: De Marchi 2009, 603-621; Cooper 2002, 1-54; 2013, 686-713.

⁴⁵ See, for example: Zanardi 2002; Bourdua 2002, 473-488; 2004; Cannon 2004b, 217-262; Cook (ed.) 2005; Brooke 2009.

⁴⁶ Coor-Achenbach 1944, 129-152.

⁴⁷ Collis-Harvey 1986, unpublished MA Thesis.

⁴⁸ These paintings are known as 'tebaidi', after the Theban desert in Egypt where several of the Desert Fathers lived. Malquori 2012, 52-65, 192-197, 201-213. I discuss the use of this term on p. 22-25 below.

highlights the significance and quality of the painting, and its relative lack of scholarship. She discusses its iconography and, to a lesser extent, its artistic and historical context, putting forward a hypothesis for the tabernacle's patronage whilst acknowledging that several important questions remain unanswered.⁴⁹ The central subject of this thesis was, in part, motivated by the attention recently given to this painting, in *Il giardino dell'anima* and in the subsequent *Atlante delle Tebaidi*, which was edited by Malquori and published in 2013. The latter publication, which is a survey of paintings depicting the eremitic life, includes the tabernacle with several Byzantine paintings under the heading 'The dormition of the hermit'.⁵⁰ In both of these books, the tabernacle occupies a somewhat marginal position. It appears a century and a half before the Quattrocento 'tebaidi', and bears a close relation to byzantine paintings made between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite its early Italian provenance. In addition, it now hangs in a Scottish gallery, geographically remote from its origins.

The current dating and attribution of the tabernacle has emerged from primarily Italian art-historical scholarship dating back to the 1940s, which focuses on the categorisation of Duecento painting in the major urban centres of Italy. In 1948, Roberto Longhi recognised similarities between the tabernacle, particularly the Passion cycle in the wings, and works attributed to a Florentine artist known as the Master of San Gaggio, named after the so-called *San Gaggio Madonna* now in the Accademia of Florence.⁵¹ In 1949, the tabernacle was included in an index of Italian Romanesque panel paintings compiled by Edward Garrison, in the section titled 'Gabled Tabernacles with Inscribed Arch'.⁵² The index has since been updated, but not yet repeated, and it remains extremely valuable as an overview (if lacunary) of

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 62, 104.

⁵⁰ Malquori, De Giorgi, M. and Fenelli, L. (eds.) 2013 [hereafter: Malquori (ed.) 2013], 217-224. The use of the term 'dormition' in this context is questionable, because it is usually reserved for the death of the Virgin, which occupies a special place both theologically and iconographically. The Virgin's soul is gathered by Christ himself, rather than by an angel, and she is subsequently assumed bodily into Heaven. I have avoided its use in my thesis, except when referring to the Virgin, preferring 'funeral' where the death of a saint is pictured or described. See Shoemaker 2003, 10-77.

⁵¹ See figure 64. Longhi 1948, 19.

⁵² Garrison nos. 347-351.

painted panels of the period.⁵³ Garrison follows Coor-Achenbach in situating the tabernacle somewhere between Siena and Florence, and describes it as ‘Provincial Sienizing Cimabuesque’.⁵⁴ This unhelpful and implicitly qualified judgement reveals the difficulty of categorising the tabernacle by style, and undoubtedly biased subsequent scholarship.⁵⁵ The similarities between certain details of the tabernacle, most notably the *Crucifixion* scene in the left-hand wing, and the work of Cimabue, has led to its dating between 1280 and 1290. However, this approach fails to take into account either those aspects of the wings that are innovative and unique, or the highly sophisticated central panel - which, I suggest, make its more likely that the tabernacle was made slightly later, in the mid-1290s.⁵⁶ Luciano Bellosi repeated Longhi’s attribution of the tabernacle to the Master of San Gaggio in 1974, adding several other paintings to the *oeuvre* of the artist.⁵⁷ The attribution has since been followed by almost all scholars who have considered either the tabernacle or the artist, including Miklós Boskovits and, most recently, Angelo Tartuferi.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that this art-historical literature focuses primarily, if not exclusively, on the wings and pediment of the tabernacle, overlooking the skilled craftsmanship and unique content of its central panel.

At present, Grifo di Tancredi is generally accepted as the artist of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The attribution was made by Boskovits in 1988, when he identified the so-called Master of San Gaggio with this documented, but otherwise unknown Florentine artist recorded between 1271 and 1303.⁵⁹ The connection relies on a problematic reading of the badly damaged inscription in the baseblock of the tabernacle, which - if correct - constitutes the only signed painting by the artist.

⁵³ Garrison 1949/1998. Miklós Boskovits began an inventory of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Tuscan paintings but it remained unfinished at his death in 2011.

⁵⁴ Garrison no. 351.

⁵⁵ The tabernacle is also mentioned in a journal article of 1946 by Edward Garrison, which groups together several ‘romanising’ Florentine panel paintings later attributed to the Master of San Gaggio. Garrison 1946, 321-246.

⁵⁶ See chapter two below, p.92-93.

⁵⁷ Bellosi 1974, 20 n.15.

⁵⁸ Boskovits 1988; Tartuferi 1990; 1994; 2002. Rolf Bagemihl casts some doubt on the attribution. Bagemihl 1999, 413-426.

⁵⁹ Colnaghi 1986, 141; Boskovits 1988, 122.

Significant questions remain over Boskovits' reading of the inscription and the subsequent attribution of the painting, despite its widespread acceptance. Grifo di Tancredi's *oeuvre*, which has been refined and added to by Angelo Tartuferi, is highly inconsistent, and appears to be characterised by collaboration and adaptation.⁶⁰ On close observation, the same holds true for the tabernacle. The impulse towards attribution and definition remains strong in certain art-historical scholarship, and the identification of a documented name is valuable, particularly for a painting of the late thirteenth century. However, I argue that in the case of the tabernacle, it has recognised neither the artistic skill evident in its central panel, nor the workshop conditions in which it was most likely made. In the course of my studies I was fortunate to participate in new technical analysis of the tabernacle undertaken in April 2018 at the National Galleries of Scotland, which was prompted by my research.⁶¹ Close first-hand observation of the painting, including under magnification, revealed a far more complex and interesting picture than has previously been acknowledged. This analysis resulted in my fundamental reassessment of recent art-historical scholarship, and the *oeuvre* to which the tabernacle has been assigned.

The conservation report produced as a result of this analysis outlines what is currently known about the object, and what remains to be ascertained.⁶² The tabernacle was examined at the painting conservation studio of the National Galleries of Scotland with a new digital infrared reflectograph, and its condition assessed by the chief curator of paintings, Aidan Weston-Lewis, and Lesley Stevenson, one of the conservators. The report noted significant alterations to the structure, most specifically the addition of the top square pediment on the central panel and the lower base-block. It recognises the need for further analysis to verify the status of the painted inscription within the base-block, which may or may not be original to the work. These alterations, the hinges at either side, and the painting on the outside of the wings (gold stars on a dark blue ground) were most likely carried out in the nineteenth century. The paint itself is tempera, applied in two thin layers

⁶⁰ Tartuferi gives the most comprehensive synopsis of current attributions, in the DBI, vol. 59, 397-399.

⁶¹ I am grateful to the National Galleries of Scotland, and particularly to Aidan Weston-Lewis, for facilitating this analysis and permitting me access to the ensuing unpublished conservation report. I would also like to thank Lesley Stevenson, conservator.

⁶² The following section is taken from the conservation report. Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

throughout, with the *verdaccio* (green ground) underpainting visible in the faces of the hermits. The gilding was applied over a traditional red bole underpainting. When seen under magnification, the minute detail of the central panel and the use of extremely small brushes became clear.

The infrared reflectography undertaken during this technical examination did not reveal any significant carbon underdrawing, but it did expose an interesting overpainting on the right hand side of the central panel.⁶³ A seated hermit in a hut is clearly visible beneath a tree, and it seems that the figure was more or less complete prior to the filling-in of the tree. This infrared image (figure 82) supports the findings of an earlier technical analysis, done in 1981, in which four x-rays were taken of parts of the central panel. These x-rays also reveal the original hinge marks in both the wings and the central panel, confirming that they always belonged together despite their disparate iconographic sources. Both the earlier analysis and the conservation report of 2018 note the largely intact paint surface of the central panel, which has been re-varnished, and restorations carried out to the inner edge of the left-hand wing, which was presumably lost to worm damage. The support has been carefully reconstructed and repainted in a way that is not immediately apparent to the naked eye. Examination with an ultraviolet light clarified the extent of later restorations to the paint surface in the wings and pediment, as the areas of retouching are darker than the original paint. However the appearance of the original composition does not seem to have been significantly altered. It is hoped that in the future, an x-ray of the entire object could be made, to clarify its original structure and appearance. Dendochronology may be necessary to ascertain whether the painted inscription did always belong to the tabernacle, or was added later, during restorations.

The complex iconography of the tabernacle's central panel has been the subject of intermittent scholarly interest since the 1950s. An important article by John Martin, published in the *Art Bulletin* in 1951, first established the close iconographic relationship between the tabernacle and late-Byzantine paintings of a

⁶³ I discuss this detail and its ramifications in chapter two, p.104-105.

monastic funeral.⁶⁴ It also examines the potential origins of the image at the centre of the tabernacle, both visual and literary, in eleventh-century Byzantine manuscript illuminations and in eastern ascetic literature. Martin regarded the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle as a 'free copy' of an earlier, now lost, Byzantine exemplar which had, in turn, been synthesised from miniature illuminations. This thesis has had considerable longevity, since repeated by Hugh Brigstocke in 1976 and 2000, and by Angelo Tartuferi.⁶⁵ In 1975, the central panel of the tabernacle was included in a survey of Italian narrative paintings of the desert, written by Ellen Callman and entitled 'Thebaid Studies'.⁶⁶ Already in this study, the Edinburgh Tabernacle occupies a peripheral position, distinct from fifteenth-century Tuscan eremitic landscape paintings, and from later, though similar, Byzantine images showing the death of a monastic saint. Callman regards the tabernacle as evidence that this subject-matter was well established in Byzantium by the thirteenth century, and that it had already been introduced from there into the visual culture of Tuscany. She recognises the inventiveness of the tabernacle's central panel and suggests that its artist must, therefore, have had a choice of models from which to work.⁶⁷

The term 'thebaid', used to describe a category of paintings, was first given art-historical currency by Callman, and has been taken up by subsequent scholars. It is derived from the Theban desert in Egypt, where several of the Desert Fathers - frequently represented in these paintings - spent their lives.⁶⁸ Callman identified 'roughly a dozen' paintings dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in fresco and on panel, which represent this theme.⁶⁹ The Edinburgh Tabernacle was not originally included in this group, as its subject matter is more difficult to ascertain,

⁶⁴ Such as a painting by Emanuele Tzanfournari now in the Vatican Pinacoteca, discussed on p. 120-121 below. This panel was believed in the nineteenth century to date from the tenth century, following Bottari's *Roma Sotteranea*. Bottari 1754 III, 219-236; Martin 1951, 217-225.

⁶⁵ Brigstocke 1976, 586; 2000, 33; DBI vol. 59, 397-399;

⁶⁶ Callman 1975, 3-22.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁸ It was the home of St Paul of Thebes, who was visited by Antony and became known as 'the first hermit'. *Vita Pauli*, 302. The desert of Thebaïs is mentioned as a particularly remote location in the literature: 'And we saw in Thebaïs a certain high mountain which lay by the river, and it was an exceedingly terrible mountain with high barren peaks, and in the caves thereof there dwelt many monks.' 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise*, 572.

⁶⁹ Callman 1975, 3.

and it lacks several identifying features of the later Italian paintings. Following Callman's analysis, 'thebaid' paintings characteristically include numerous narrative scenes relating to anonymous monks, or to identifiable ascetic saints, situated in an expansive desert landscape with a river.⁷⁰ Within this framework, the same narratives frequently appear, including the funeral of a hermit (similar to the scene in the Edinburgh Tabernacle), and scenes of monks travelling to mourn his death. There is no indication that the designation was commonly used before the publication of Callman's article. Two panels owned by the Medici family of Florence are described in an inventory of 1492 simply as 'stories of the holy fathers of the desert'.⁷¹ There is an isolated mention of the term in an eighteenth-century Italian source, which refers to a painting of '*una Tebaide di antichi monaci*'.⁷² In the *Atlante delle Tebaidi*, the most recent art-historical scholarship on this subject, the 'thebaid' are defined as idealised paintings of a literary character, constructed according to a fixed compositional scheme.⁷³ The term is applied to ten paintings from Tuscany dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although seven further paintings on panel and in fresco are categorised as 'so-called thebaid' to recognise their compositional or characteristic similarities to the 'thebaid'.⁷⁴

There are, however, several significant problems with the term 'thebaid' as an art-historical designation, and in consequence I have generally chosen to avoid it. Callman recognised that the Theban desert is only one among several distinct locations represented in these images.⁷⁵ Some of the paintings known as 'thebaid' do not refer to saints of the Egyptian desert at all.⁷⁶ Many include ascetic saints of different historical periods, such as John the Baptist or Bernard of Clairvaux

⁷⁰ Malquori 2012, 15; (ed.) 2013, 16.

⁷¹ Cited in Malquori 2012, 140.

⁷² A letter of Giuseppe Bencivenni, dated February 1980, regarding a painting by Gherardo Starnina. Cited in Malquori 2012, 15.

⁷³ Malquori (ed.) 2013, 15-16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 91-128.

⁷⁵ Callman 1975, 3.

⁷⁶ A good example of this is the panel attributed to Uccello and now in the Accademia in Florence, which shows a desert landscape inhabited entirely by western saints. Callman 1975, 15-16; Malquori (ed.) 2013, 76-80.

alongside the Desert Fathers, in an idealised but nonspecific desert landscape.⁷⁷ Its continued use as a categorising label suggests the existence of a definable class of images, a group into which some paintings may be admitted and others not. However, the reality is much less clear-cut, as is reflected in the category of ‘so-called thebaid’ in the recent *Atlante*, and the perpetual difficulty of numbering those paintings which should definitively be classified as ‘thebaid’.⁷⁸ Whilst some of the Quattrocento panel paintings are undoubtedly closely related or even copied, others contain important differences, such as the inclusion (or omission) of certain saints. The use of a single term to refer to paintings with demonstrably different audiences and intentions fails to recognise the specific use to which images of the desert were put in the late-medieval period. It makes too much of the similarities between images currently defined as ‘thebaid’, and too little of the relationship with other representations of the desert, including the Edinburgh Tabernacle, which are not defined as such.

In this thesis, I avoid the use of the term ‘thebaid’ except when referring to other scholars’ work, and where a general label is needed, I refer instead to ‘eremitic landscapes’. This is a less specific designation, which indicates the presence of the desert and the hermits who inhabit it, but does not identify either as belonging to a particular time or place. I use it to encompass all images which represent eremitic or ascetic figures in the wilderness, including those traditionally labelled as ‘thebaid’. But I also include in this broader terminology narrative images of saints such as John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene or Francis. It can be used to describe episodes of a narrative cycle, or subsidiary scenes in a predella panel, for example, which take place within a desert landscape. And it may be applied equally to Italian and Byzantine narratives located in the wilderness, where these have traditionally been seen as distinct. The term is intended to highlight the importance of the landscape, which is often treated with great care. Most importantly, it seeks to recognise the interrelationships between paintings rather than identify that which divides them. It

⁷⁷ Such as the eremitic landscape known as the ‘smaller Lindsay panel’, discussed on pages 180-186 below. Callman 1975, 16-17; Brigstocke 2000, 60-62; Malquori (ed.) 2013, 80-86.

⁷⁸ Callman 1975, 3. The term ‘so-called thebaid’ used in the *Atlante* suggests that the paintings meet certain criteria for belonging to the category, but not others, or else that they have been designated ‘thebaid’ in the past, perhaps wrongly.

recognises the need for an indicative designation but resists the tendency to categorise.

Recent scholarship on ‘thebaid’ paintings has been led by Alessandra Malquori, with important contributions by Manuela de Giorgi, Laura Fenelli and Maria Corsi, focusing on specific images of the desert.⁷⁹ Malquori’s extensive research has shed important light on the origins, content and subsequent fortunes of the Italian Quattrocento landscape paintings.⁸⁰ Her work has brought deserved attention to a subject which achieved remarkable popularity in the art of late-medieval Italy, but which has been relatively little studied since it fell out of favour at the end of the fifteenth century.⁸¹ The *Atlante* expands the remit of Malquori’s earlier work, to include thirty-three Italian and Byzantine narrative images of hermits, covering a period of around six hundred years. The inclusion of related ‘figurative themes’ alongside the ‘thebaid’ and ‘so-called thebaid’ recognises the common ground between these, and other, images of the desert. However, it is not intended as an exhaustive *corpus* of paintings, so it remains a selective and partial survey. The images are categorised according to their most salient features, but while this approach identifies common themes, such as the funeral of a hermit, it ultimately overstates the distinctions between each category. It is also subjective, designating some images, for example, as ‘narrative or exemplary’ in character and implying that others are not. Ultimately, the categories begin to appear arbitrary, or difficult to circumscribe, and clarity is lost.⁸² My aim has been to resist this tendency towards definition and distinction. This thesis focuses on the Edinburgh Tabernacle, whilst seeking to situate it within a wider art-historical context. It explores the connections between this painting and other images, both contemporary and of later date, identifying common features and connections. It aims to give due prominence to the

⁷⁹ De Giorgi 2013, 189-216. Fenelli 2011; 2013, 150-151, 156-161; 2013a, 147-181; Corsi 2016, 297-324. See also: Leader 2011, 221-234.

⁸⁰ Malquori 1996, 79-93; 2001, 119-137; 2012a, 97-104; 2012.

⁸¹ Malquori 2012, 215.

⁸² For instance, there is a section dedicated to ‘The Hermit in the Tree’, but this is a motif found in several paintings belonging to different chapters of the *Atlante*. ‘The Hairy Hermits’ and ‘The Famous Hermits’ appear to be equally arbitrary distinctions.

Edinburgh Tabernacle as one of the earliest surviving panel paintings of an eremitic landscape, in Italian or Byzantine art.⁸³

The third chapter of this thesis addresses the potential origins of the tabernacle's central panel, in the visual and monastic culture of Byzantium. It considers those later paintings of monastic funerals, mentioned above, which bear a striking resemblance to the tabernacle in content and composition, and earlier images dating from the eleventh to the early fourteenth century, to which the tabernacle may be related. In addition, it considers certain eleventh-century manuscript illuminations as a possible source of the tabernacle's iconography, alongside the monastic literature they accompany. Despite the Italian origins of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, it appears to be indebted to the religious traditions of Orthodox monastic life. This chapter explores the religious and cultural relationship between Byzantium and the West, and the specific conditions of the late thirteenth century that might have precipitated the making of this extraordinary hybrid object. In particular, it puts forward a hypothesis connecting the tabernacle to the activities of a dissident Franciscan friar, Angelo Clareno, who was profoundly influenced by the monastic traditions of the East.

The Edinburgh Tabernacle's primary subject is currently identified as *The Death of St Ephraim and Scenes from the Lives of the Hermits*, based on its close similarity to late-Byzantine images showing the funeral of St Ephraim the Syrian.⁸⁴ Ephraim (c.306-73) was a Father of the Syriac Church and author of a substantial number of hymns and biblical commentaries, who was venerated in Byzantium as an ascetic and a monastic founder.⁸⁵ However, identifying the subject of a thirteenth-century painting on the basis of images made several hundred years later is clearly problematic. The saint in the tabernacle is not identified by a *titulus* or inscription, and there is no evidence to suggest that Ephraim was venerated in the West at the time the tabernacle was made. Furthermore, other late-Byzantine images, which follow a very similar format to those of the death of St Ephraim, depict other monastic saints such as Saba, Arsenius and Onophrius, all of whom were revered

⁸³ I discuss precedents for the iconography of the tabernacle in chapter three, below.

⁸⁴ Martin 1951, 217-225; Brigstocke 1976, 584-586+589.

⁸⁵ DEC, 180-181; Brock 1990; Hansbury 2006.

as Desert Fathers and monastic founders in Byzantium.⁸⁶ For the purpose of this study, I will follow recent scholarship in leaving the identity of the dead saint open.⁸⁷ There is no reason to suppose that this must represent St Ephraim, or, indeed, if it was intended to represent an identifiable saint at all. My use of the title 'Edinburgh Tabernacle' for the painting at the heart of this study helps to resist defining its content either too rigidly or by presupposition.

The apparent Byzantine origins of the tabernacle necessitate a consideration of the cultural and religious links between Byzantium and the West. In the last century, scholars such as Pietro Toesca and Ernst Kitzinger challenged the negative Vasarian assessment of Duecento art 'in the Greek manner', uncovering the rich artistic exchange that took place between East and West during the thirteenth century, and the innovations in image-making that resulted.⁸⁸ More recently, this cross-cultural exchange has been extensively studied by Michele Bacci and Amy Neff, among others, and the so-called 'Crusader art', which emerged from the presence of northern European, Italian and Byzantine artists in the Crusader States, by Jaroslav Folda.⁸⁹ However, in this extensive scholarship, the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle - an innovative hybrid painting with a clear debt to Byzantium - has received only passing mention.⁹⁰ The Mendicant Orders formed an important cultural and religious bridge between the Orthodox and Latin Churches. They established houses in the East from early in the thirteenth century, with the aim of converting both 'schismatics' and 'infidels' to the Roman faith.⁹¹ At the same time many friars acquired a deep knowledge of Greek language and religious culture, and artworks made for the mendicants were frequently indebted to images from the East.⁹² The historical connection between Orthodox and Latin forms of the religious

⁸⁶ De Giorgi 2013, 196-197.

⁸⁷ Malquori 2012, 66.

⁸⁸ *Lives of the Artists*, 16. Toesca 1927; Kitzinger 1966.

⁸⁹ Kitzinger 1966, 25-47; Stubblebine 1966, 85-101; Belting 1994, especially 330-376; Bacci 1998, 255-58, 263; 2008 275-279; 2009 164-168; Neff 1999, 81-102; Derbes and Neff 2004, 449-461; Folda 2005.

⁹⁰ Bellosi 1985, 106.

⁹¹ Derbes and Neff 2004, 450-451.

⁹² See, for example: Belting 1990; 1994; Bacci 1998, 255-58, 263; Derbes and Neff 2004, 458; Cannon 2014, 71-72.

life have been studied by Andre Guillou, Deno Genakoplos, and, more recently, by Andrew Jotischky.⁹³ Jotischky has focused particularly on the eremitic aspect of monastic culture and the significance of the historic desert, as authority and exemplar in both East and West.⁹⁴ The Edinburgh Tabernacle appears to represent the shared eremitic origins of religious life between Italy and Byzantium, for a specific audience, towards the end of the thirteenth century.

In considering the potential audience of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, I explore the relationship between the Byzantine origins of its iconography and the Spiritual controversy in the Franciscan Order. The dissident Italian friars who became known as the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine were forced to flee in the late thirteenth century, to Armenia and then to Greece, to escape the persecution of the wider Order. As a result of their exile, Angelo Clareno (who was a prominent member of the group) made several Latin translations of Greek ascetic and spiritual literature, including a seventh-century monastic treatise known as the *Heavenly Ladder*. Illuminated copies of this text, in addition to its content, appear to be intricately linked to the subject-matter of the tabernacle. This chapter considers the relevance of this text, and its subsequent translation by Clareno, for our understanding of the tabernacle, its Byzantine sources, and the Italian context in which it was made.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis considers the tabernacle as a product of the historical conditions in which it was made. It is both an historical study of the thirteenth century, and a selective survey of images of the desert, made during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This chapter seeks to uncover the extent to which the eremitic ideal permeated the religious landscape, considering all four of the main Mendicant Orders, the reformed Benedictines, and the laity. Images of the desert were made for each of these groups during the two hundred years following the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Their respective patronage, function and content sheds significant light on the meaning which the eremitic landscape held as a theme in art. This chapter builds on the hypothesis first put forward in the previous chapter, drawing a connection between the Franciscan Spirituals, the papacy of the hermit-pope Celestine V, and the image at the centre of

⁹³ Guillou 1965, 355-379; Geanakoplos 1959; 1976; Jotischky 1995; 2004, 88-106.

⁹⁴ Jotischky 1991; 1995; 2012, 57-74.

the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Neither the early date of the tabernacle, nor the reason for its appearance in Tuscany at the end of the thirteenth century, have ever been satisfactorily explained. Yet it must have carried a specific meaning for its audience, and was, I argue, made in response to the particular religious conditions that prevailed at the end of the thirteenth century. Even if it is possible to specify its most likely patronage, the tabernacle should still be seen as a product of its wider historical context, as a response to the tension that existed between eremitic and urban-based forms of the religious life.

The first part of this chapter considers the Edinburgh Tabernacle, and the eremitic ideal, in relation to the Franciscan Spirituals, the Poor Hermits, and Pope Celestine V.⁹⁵ It draws on the research of scholars such as David Burr and David Flood, who have focused on rising controversy within the Franciscan Order and the dissident friars who were permitted by Pope Celestine to break from the Order, during his brief papacy in 1294.⁹⁶ It considers the significance of the eremitic life among those Franciscans, known as Spirituals, who objected to the primarily urban, active character of the Order as it increased in size, and who sought a return to the kind of ascetic and contemplative existence which had been important to St Francis.⁹⁷ The eremitic experience of Francis and his early followers has been studied by scholars such as Pellegrini and Roest, and is recognised in their work as a major contributing factor to the controversy that developed within the Order during the thirteenth century.⁹⁸ Spiritual Franciscans frequently drew on the apocalyptic prophecies of Joachim of Fiore, which predicted the imminent dawn of the final age of man, or age of the Spirit. Marjorie Reeves and E. Randolph Daniel have made important contributions to our understanding of Joachite theology, which I have considered in relation to the image of eremitic life, death and resurrection contained within the Edinburgh Tabernacle.⁹⁹ Joachite prophecies were also of significance to the Benedictine hermit Peter of Morrone, who, as Pope Celestine V, played an important role in the fate of the Franciscan Spirituals. The papacy of this ‘angelic

⁹⁵ On the Poor Hermits, see: Manselli 1979 271-191; Potestà 1990.

⁹⁶ Flood 1972; Burr 1992; 2001; Lambert 1998.

⁹⁷ Burr 2001, 40-45.

⁹⁸ Pellegrini 1984, 57-80; Roest 2006, 163-189.

⁹⁹ Reeves 1976; McGinn and Reeves 1980, 163-169; Daniel 1997, 237-253; Burr 2009, 119-138

pope' has recently been reassessed by scholars including Peter Herde and Alfonso Marini.¹⁰⁰ My research seeks to connect these interrelated threads with Angelo Clareno and his Latin translation of the *Heavenly Ladder*.¹⁰¹

The Mendicant Orders of the thirteenth century are an important component of this chapter. The ideal of evangelical poverty constituted their primary form of renunciation, yet it was fundamentally compromised by their reliance on the benefaction of a laity eager to share in the spiritual benefits of such material asceticism. The Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Augustinian Hermits all became deeply embedded within the fabric of the cities as they grew in size and influence, because their role was, in part, to preach and minister to the populace. Consequently, most of the copious scholarship on the Orders, including the work of Moorman (on the Franciscans), Hinnebusch (on the Dominicans), Lesnick and, more recently, Bruzelius (on Mendicant preaching) emphasise their primarily urban context.¹⁰² Research has also tended to focus on the two largest Mendicant Orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans, an imbalance which has only recently been redressed by Frances Andrews, in her work of 2006 entitled *The Other Friars*. The influence of the Desert Fathers and the eremitic tradition can be detected among all four of the Orders, but it held a different significance for each, evident in their respective historical understanding, foundational myths, and in their preaching to the laity. This relationship has been explored in the work of Jotischky, Saak, and Kaspar Elm.¹⁰³ Scholarship on the *Lives of the Anchorites* fresco at the Camposanto of Pisa (c.1336-42), particularly that of Lina Bolzoni, draws a connection between the teaching of the Dominicans, the example of the Desert Fathers, and this specific image of the desert.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Frugoni 1954; Marini 2000, 1001-1022; Herde 2004.

¹⁰¹ Musto 1977; 1983.

¹⁰² Moorman 1968; Hinnebusch 1965; Lesnick 1989; Bruzelius 2014. See also: Röhrkasten 2012, 178-192 and bibliography.

¹⁰³ Jotischky 1995; Elm 1990, 83-107; 1990a, 136-182; and most recently a collection of essays edited by Mixson 2016; Saak 2006, 191-228.

¹⁰⁴ Bolzoni 2003, 11-40.

My research builds on the considerable body of literature devoted to the art of the Mendicants. However, it focuses on images of the desert, which have never been systematically studied in terms of their patronage. It draws on studies of narrative painting, particularly that of Anne Derbes, which focuses on the ideologies of the Franciscans in relation to the development of Passion iconography.¹⁰⁵ Franciscan art has been extensively studied by Henk Van Os, Louise Bourdua and Andrew Ladis among many others, and has received the lion's share of scholarly attention, reflecting the large number of paintings associated with the Order.¹⁰⁶ This chapter connects an overlooked fifteenth-century eremitic landscape now in Scotland to the Franciscans, and speculates on the relationship between this image and the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Joanna Cannon's extensive research on the art of the Dominicans, and the interrelationship of images, friars, and public, has done much to increase our understanding of the purpose and function of images within the context of the Mendicant church.¹⁰⁷ The artistic patronage of the Carmelites and Augustinian hermits reflects their smaller size, and has received more limited scholarly attention. Joanna Cannon and Christa Gardner von Teuffel have written on paintings made for the Carmelite Order (particularly the Carmelite altarpiece which is now in the Siena Pinacoteca), and Bourdua and Dunlop on the Augustinian Hermits.¹⁰⁸ More general studies of the instrumental value of late-medieval art, and the intricate relationship between images and contemporary spirituality, have also been important for my research. The work of Hans Belting, Jeffrey Hamburger and Michele Bacci, in addition to studies by Donal Cooper and Julian Gardner, have all informed my understanding.¹⁰⁹ This thesis considers the tabernacle alongside other eremitic landscapes, connected to each of the Mendicant Orders, which possess their own specific character and purpose.

Looking beyond the Mendicant Orders, images of the desert can also be connected to lay confraternities, in particular those which practiced self-flagellation,

¹⁰⁵ Gardner 1982, 217-247; Derbes 1996.

¹⁰⁶ Van Os 1974; Ladis (ed.) 1998; Bourdua 2004; Cook 2005; Kennedy (ed.) 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Cannon 1980; 1982, 69-93; 1994, 41-79; 2002, 290-313; 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Cannon 1987 18-28; Gardner von Teuffel 2015, 3-41; Bourdua and Dunlop (eds.) 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Gardner 1982, 217-247; 1995, 27-57; 2002; Belting 1990; 1994; Hamburger and Bouché (eds.) 2006; Bacci 2000; 2014; Cooper 2006, 47-69; 2013, 686-713.

and the reformed Benedictines, in addition to secular patrons. This thesis connects the visual evidence for the appeal of the eremitic life to widespread religious practices and beliefs in the thirteenth century, when the Edinburgh Tabernacle was made. The activities of flagellant confraternities have been studied by scholars such as John Henderson and Benvenuti-Papi, and their artistic patronage by Adriano Prandi.¹¹⁰ The self-mortifying physical penitence of these companies echoes the ascetic tradition of the desert, and a fourteenth-century fresco of the eremitic life, connected to a flagellant confraternity in Siena, confirms this perceived relationship. David Tinsley and G.G. Meersseman have studied the complex interrelationship of urban life, the secular economy, and severe forms of ascetic practice undertaken within the cities.¹¹¹ While some of this material lies outside the scope of this thesis, the eremitic life and the figure of the hermit-saint, studied by Andre Vauchez and Michael Goodich, appears to hold a particular appeal within the context of the late-medieval city.¹¹²

The broad view I have sought to encompass, positioning the tabernacle both within its thirteenth-century context and alongside other, later images of the desert, permits a new perspective on the significance of the desert as a theme in art. It sheds light on the impulse behind the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, asking how the religious landscape of late-medieval Italy continued to be shaped by the distant lives of the Desert Fathers, and how images functioned in this dialogue between past and present. My research draws together three strands of scholarship which have, to date, remained entirely separate: art-historical studies of the iconography of the desert; historical analyses of the eremitic tradition, from its origins in Egypt and the Holy Land to its continued influence in Byzantium and the West; and research on the wider historical context and artistic production of the late thirteenth century in Italy. At this time, the newly-established and increasingly powerful Mendicant Orders were significant voices, both within the Church and among the public. The prominence of the Mendicants, as patrons of the arts and as drivers of religious change, has determined their central importance for my research.

¹¹⁰ Prandi 1962, 496-508; Benvenuti-Papi 1977, 191-220; Henderson 1978; 1994. More recently, see: Bullen Presciutti (ed.) 2017 and bibliography.

¹¹¹ Meersseman 1977; Tinsley 2010.

¹¹² Goodich 1982; Vauchez 1997, 329-336.

This thesis is centred around a single painting, to redress its relative marginalisation to date. It is an early example of Italian images of the desert, linked to the artistic and monastic traditions of Byzantium. I have sought to reposition this compelling object as an early example of narrative painting, arguing for its high quality and its radically innovative format at a time of artistic transformation. By restricting the scope of this study to a limited number of additional images, it has been possible to pursue a deeper understanding of the tabernacle itself, its potential origins, and its relationship with later paintings of the desert in both East and West. The ideal of the desert played an important role in the formation and renewal of the religious life in the West throughout the medieval period, and continued to permeate the monastic culture of Byzantium. The tabernacle is a vivid testament to its continued significance, in visual form, late in the thirteenth century. Yet despite the continued popularity of the eremitic life as a theme in Italian art, the content and format of the Edinburgh Tabernacle remain apparently unrepeated. The religious and historical circumstances of its making are key to understanding its unique appearance.

Chapter One

Ascetic literature and the legacy of the Desert Fathers in the West

The central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle represents a religious tradition descended from the third and fourth centuries, when early Christians in Egypt and Syria fled persecution and sought contemplative solace in the desert.¹¹³ They imitated the solitary retreat of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist and Christ, all of whom had encountered the word of God in the wilderness.¹¹⁴ The ascetic practices and spiritual wisdom of these eremitic figures, who became known as the Desert Fathers, were recorded in ascetic literature such as the *Life of Antony* (357) and the *Lausiac History* (420).¹¹⁵ The hermits were admired for their renunciation of material goods and secular relationships, their intensely physical penitence, heroic battles with demons and proximity to angelic realms. The remote and sometimes harsh environment of the desert was central to descriptions of their lives.¹¹⁶ In the West, the ascetic literature and the example of the Desert Fathers became the basis of monastic life, in the writings of John Cassian and Benedict of Nursia. Monks were so called after their isolation from the secular world, but they generally lived together in communities, under the guidance of an abbot.¹¹⁷ The relative significance of the eremitic tradition - that is, the example set by the Desert Fathers - altered over time as western monastic customs and traditions developed. The literature and ideal of the desert was periodically reinterpreted and re-invoked, as an authoritative source for the religious way of life, by those who sought renewal or reform.¹¹⁸ The presence of ascetic literature in the mendicant libraries of the

¹¹³ The persecution of Christians reached its peak during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian (284-305). It came to an end in this early period under Constantine, who became Emperor in 312. The increasing size of Christian congregations during the fourth century necessitated withdrawal to the desert to allow for a more rigorous and ascetic form of life. Such withdrawal was not necessarily permanent or absolute, and its practice varied by region. Chadwick 1958, 16; Harvey 1990, 37; Armstrong 2012, ix.

¹¹⁴ E.g. the prophet Elijah, in I and II Kings; Matthew 3:1-17; Luke 4:1-13.

¹¹⁵ On early female ascetics, not covered here, see Swan 2001.

¹¹⁶ Anson 1964, 8-30.

¹¹⁷ The term 'monk' comes from the Greek word '*monachos*', from '*monos*' meaning alone. White 1998, xv. The aramaic word *ābba*, which is prevalent as a title in the literature, translates roughly as 'elder', 'teacher', or 'father'. The English word abbot is descended from this root, used to refer to the superior of a monastery. De Dreuille 2000, 110.

¹¹⁸ Penco 1961, 180.

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries attests to its continuing importance as a source of moral and religious authority. This chapter considers the literary tradition in conjunction with the image at the centre of the tabernacle, including an analysis of its three miniature inscriptions. In addition, it examines the legacy of this literature in the religious life of the West, until the coming of the Mendicants in the thirteenth century. Both the monastic way of life, and the ascetic literature from which it descends, are central to our understanding of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. They would have been equally relevant to its audience at the end of the thirteenth century.

The *Life of Antony*, written by Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, is a foundational text of central importance to the tradition of ascetic literature. It describes the conversion and exemplary life of St Antony, later known as Antony Abbot or Antony the Great, in addition to long tracts of advice to monks on the principles of monastic life.¹¹⁹ The virtues ascribed to this intensely ascetic figure, including withdrawal from the world, chastity and rigorous self-discipline, became central tenets of an ideal Christian religious life, and were reiterated in hagiography throughout the medieval period.¹²⁰ Athanasius was followed by Jerome, who wrote the Lives of the Egyptian hermits Paul and Hilarion in c.374-379 and 391-392.¹²¹ The meeting between Paul and Antony, described by St Jerome, came to represent the first moment of shared religious life in the desert:

...the door being opened, they threw themselves into each other's arms, greeted one another by name, and joined in thanksgiving to God. [...] While they were talking they noticed a raven land on the branch of a tree: it then flew down gently and placed a whole loaf of bread in front of them as they watched in amazement.¹²²

¹¹⁹ On the *Life* and history of this saint, see: Rubenson 1995; Harmless 2004, 57-114; Fenelli 2011, especially 21-33.

¹²⁰ The extreme ascetic endeavours described in the *Life of Antony*, the *Life of Paul* and in the *Sayings of the Fathers*, were frequently used as a paradigmatic example of spiritual virtue in subsequent hagiography, such as the *Lives* of Martin of Tours (d.397), Benedict of Nursia (d. 543) and Bernard of Clairveaux (d. 1153). Chadwick 1958, 25.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²² *Life of Paul of Thebes*, 80.

It thus became a paradigmatic example, symbolising the origins of monastic life in subsequent literary and visual sources.¹²³ The provision of bread by a raven represents the miraculous intervention of God to provide for his 'soldiers' in the wilderness.¹²⁴ This early hagiography was followed by travellers' accounts which recorded the lives and wisdom of the Desert Fathers, including the *Lausiac History* by Palladius, then Bishop of Helenopolis, and the anonymous *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto (History of the Monks of Egypt)*, written in the late fourth century.¹²⁵ Both of these texts were written with the express purpose of edifying or instructing their reader, and both drew on the pre-existing *Apophthegmata Patrum (Sayings of the Fathers)* in addition to the hagiographic sources discussed above. The *Sayings* originated as an oral tradition of aphorisms and anecdotes, attributed to various Desert Fathers. They were collated and written down some time in the late fourth century, and the pithy, often sharply observant voices of eremitic wisdom contained within them permeate subsequent literature.¹²⁶

The example of the Desert Fathers was of primary importance to the formation of monastic life in the West. Latin translations of the texts discussed above were compiled in various editions under the collective title *Vitae Patrum*, or *Lives of the Fathers*.¹²⁷ The *Vitae Patrum* generally included the *Life of Antony*, Jerome's *Lives of Paul and Hilarion*, the *Lausiac History*, the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, and a collection of *Apophthegmata*, or parts thereof. The *Lausiac*

¹²³ This tradition was particularly strong in Celtic lands. Representations of saints Paul and Antony, dating from the eighth and ninth centuries, can be found on monumental sculpted crosses in western Scotland and across Ireland. Ó Carragáin, 1987, 119. In the late-medieval period, the scene of Paul and Antony breaking bread in the desert is found in Italian 'thebaid' paintings such as the smaller Lindsay panel, discussed in chapter four, p. 183-189 below.

¹²⁴ Paul remarks: 'For the last sixty years I have always received half a loaf: but at your coming Christ has doubled his soldier's rations.' *Vita Pauli*, 301.

¹²⁵ This anonymous text was translated into Latin by Rufinus of Aquileia c.420. Ward 2003, 7.

¹²⁶ Ward 1981, xvii-xviii.

¹²⁷ The most comprehensive edition of the *Vitae patrum* was published by Wallis-Budge in 1904 as *Paradise of the Fathers*. I have mainly referred to this source, adjusting the archaic English to more modern usage, cited as *Paradise*, with the section title (e.g. 'Apophthegmata') given first, in inverted commas. I have supplemented this edition with the following more up-to-date translations of the sources: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers; the alphabetical collection*, transl. Ward 1981 (cited as *Sayings*); *Lives of the Fathers; the Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, transl. Russell and Ward 1981 (cited as *Historia Monachorum*); *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*, transl. Ward 1986 (cited as *Wisdom of the Fathers*); and the *Paradise of the Fathers*, ed. Armstrong 2012 (cited as *Paradise of the Fathers*)

History, for example, was repeatedly re-written and redacted, interspersed and juxtaposed with other material until it became very difficult to determine its original content.¹²⁸ There is no definitive edition of the *Vitae Patrum* that may be taken as authoritative even now, but the widespread transmission and repeated revision of this text testifies to its continued significance in a western context.¹²⁹

John Cassian (c.365-435) was an influential monk and writer who had spent time in a monastery at Bethlehem and in the deserts of Egypt before settling in Gaul.¹³⁰ His *Conferences of the Fathers* (c.430) and *Monastic Institutes* (c.420) were intended to translate the wisdom of the Desert Fathers into a language, and a way of life, that could be followed by monastic communities in the West.¹³¹ The *Conferences* advocates the absolute renunciation of worldly goods and earthly passions, and the gradual purification of the mind and heart through prayer.¹³² Cassian endeavoured to bring order to this process by identifying the practical, moral and spiritual necessities of the monk's work, avoiding the lengthy narratives and miraculous events that characterise other ascetic literature.¹³³ He greatly admired the solitary way of life exemplified by certain Desert Fathers, but acknowledged the monk's need for community and the spiritual guidance of a monastery. Cassian was writing for a context that was primarily coenobitic, and he warned against the dangers of unguided anchoritic practice.¹³⁴ He remained sensitive to the difficulties of the monastic vocation and sought to provide practical instruction to aid the monk's journey towards the 'high mountain of solitude', even if this solitude was symbolised by the quietness of one's cell, rather than a cave in a distant desert.¹³⁵ The *Conferences* were, in turn, influential in the formation of a structured monastic Rule, particularly that of St. Benedict, written in the mid-sixth

¹²⁸ Meyer 1965, 9.

¹²⁹ Malquori 2012, 47-49.

¹³⁰ Chadwick 1985, 1-2.

¹³¹ Cassian founded a house for monks in Marseilles and had influence over the communities of hermits who lived in the woods of Provence. Chadwick 1958, 190-191; 1985, 1-2.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³³ Especially hagiographic texts such as the *Life of Antony*. *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³⁴ *Institutes*, 21.

¹³⁵ *Conferences*, 129.

century. We return to the *Rule* of St Benedict, and the western monastic tradition, in due course.

The image at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle depicts tropes of eremitic life that are recurrent in the western literature. First among these is the theme of physical *ascesis*, or the transformation of the body through severe forms of self-mortification and penitential practice. Disciplines such as restrictive diets, fasting and manual labour allowed the hermit to dissociate from the appetites of the body, devote his attention to God, and thus become a conduit for divinity:

[Elpidius] reached such a high degree of mortification and so wasted away his body that the sun shone through his bones.¹³⁶

Some of the hermits on the periphery of the image appear to be occupied with manual labour; one above the monastery building, with axes lying on the ground beside him, another higher up who seems to be carving spoons, and a third who sits fishing by a pool (figure 6).¹³⁷ The great age of the Desert Fathers is frequently mentioned in the literature, illustrating their accumulated wisdom, and their physical and spiritual resilience from a life of ascetic practice.¹³⁸ Similarly in the tabernacle, the hermits are almost all elderly, with long, grey hair and beards. Many are visibly bent with age, and lean on staffs or rely on the help of their brethren as they travel to the funeral at the base of the mountain (figure 7). All have expressions of solemn determination and quiet concern. The character of the hermits, and of the entire image, is determined in part by their ascetic way of life, and in part by the funeral towards which many of them travel.

The eremitic life is intimately linked to the experience of death, and to the subsequent destination of the soul. In addition, death is a prevalent metaphor in the

¹³⁶ *Lausiac History*, 131.

¹³⁷ Manual labour is described by Palladius as a means for the monk to avoid the demon of *accidie*, or despondency; '...and they prayed, and read, and were anxious with divine solicitude, and instead of being idle they worked with their hands.' *Lausiac History*, 95.

¹³⁸ 'His body was dry by reason of his labours, and his beard descended to his belly, but his eyelashes were destroyed by weeping; he was tall in stature, but was somewhat bowed by old age, and he ended his days when he was ninety-five years old.' 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 638.

literature, for the renunciation that characterises a religious life and the demise of the physical passions:

If you wish to live, become dead, so that you may care neither for the reviling of men nor for their praise, for the dead care for nothing; in this way will you be able to live.¹³⁹

The monk 'dies' to worldly attachments and material goods, and is reoriented towards the life everlasting.¹⁴⁰ This state of detachment, which entails victory over the demands of the body, separates the Desert Fathers both physically and spiritually from the secular world. In the literature, the manner of a hermit's death frequently indicates the virtues he held in life. For instance, in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the death of Abba Sisoës is described as a transformation rather than an ending:

...he delivered up his spirit, and he became like lightning, and the whole place was filled with a sweet odour.¹⁴¹

The light and 'sweet odour' that are left behind represent the illumination he transfers to the brethren who attend him. In the tabernacle, the evident outpouring of grief occasioned by the death of the saint testifies to his importance and status in life, despite his humble appearance. He wears monastic garb similar to those of the hermits around him, and is laid out on a simple bier of rushes (figure 2). The funeral scene is, on one hand, a representation of an event and the effect that this has on an eremitic community. On the other, it is a powerful symbol of the monastic discipline of remembering death as a perpetual motivation for penitence. In the *Apophthegmata*, a monk asks an old man how to overcome the sins of the body, and the old man replies: "The remembrance of death and the punishments which are laid up in the world which is to come."¹⁴² Death is the bridge that connects the monk's finite, earthly life with eternal life in heaven, but he must first pass through judgement, and his salvation depends on the integrity of his *ascesis*.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 739.

¹⁴⁰ 'strive for the death of the body, and then shall be added unto you the death which is in the spirit. And death of this kind will make you die to every man, and henceforward you will acquire the faculty of being constantly with God in silence.' *Ibid.*, 867.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 845-6.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 778.

¹⁴³ On the immediate, or particular judgement of the soul, see Brilliant 2005.

The hermit's separation from the secular world is a second central theme of the ascetic literature, and the character of the desert landscape is an integral part of his isolation. The remoteness of a hermit's location frequently corresponds with the severity of his ascetic discipline.¹⁴⁴ The desert is described either as a barren and hostile place, reflecting the hardship of the eremitic life, or as a God-given paradise, symbolising the beauty and abundance of the world to come. In the *Life of St Hilarion*, Jerome describes a mountain in the deserts of Palestine:

with gushing springs amongst its spurs, [...] shaded on either side by countless palms which lend much pleasantness and charm to the place.¹⁴⁵

Similarly, Paul of Thebes lives in a cave watered by a spring and shaded by a date palm, which sustain his physical needs. This is described as a 'gift from God' amongst an otherwise desolate landscape.¹⁴⁶ At times, images of fertility and natural abundance function as an analogy for the spiritual achievements of the hermits:

The whole company of the holy men is like unto a garden which is full of fruit-bearing trees of various kinds, and wherein the trees are planted in [one] earth, and all of them drink from one fountain.¹⁴⁷

The painted mountain landscape of the tabernacle is extremely beautiful, filled with red and white flowers and delicate trees (figure 8). There is a spring and an abundance of birds and other animals. The monks and saints who inhabit this place labour in their different ways; some travel and converse in groups, while others are solitary or confined to their caves. It corresponds closely with accounts in the literature which describe the desert as a kind of earthly paradise. The effect of the image is 'like unto a garden', where life flourishes and water cascades between the rocks.

¹⁴⁴ 'the dwelling in a remote desert place is exceedingly helpful to the performance of deeds of ascetic excellence.'; '...it is wholly impossible to find a word which would adequately describe the sterility and desolation of that desert, and of the mountain in which [Abba Elijah] lived. He never went down to Shaina, but there was a narrow path along which a man could walk with the greatest difficulty and make his way to him'. 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise I*, 503; 519.

¹⁴⁵ *Life of St. Hilarion*, 311.

¹⁴⁶ *Vita Pauli*, 300.

¹⁴⁷ 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 803.

The image of the mountain is frequently used as an analogy for spiritual ascent. In the *Conferences*, Cassian advises the monk to climb up the 'high mountain of virtue' in order to see Christ more clearly.¹⁴⁸ He refers to the prophets of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah, who encountered God in solitude on the mountains of Sinai and Carmel, and to Mount Tabor, where Peter, James and John witnessed the Transfiguration of Christ. Christ himself withdrew to the mountain, not to escape from the sins of men, but in order to set an example to be followed:¹⁴⁹

To gaze with utterly purified eyes on the divinity is possible - but only to those who rise above lowly and earthly works and thoughts and who retreat with Him into the high mountain of solitude.¹⁵⁰

The mountain is a potent symbol of the hermit's moral and spiritual elevation from secular society. It also indicates the liminality of the wilderness, located at the outer extremities of the inhabited world and approaching the realms of the angels. The activity in the tabernacle's central panel is framed by a precipitous mountain landscape. At its base, the funeral represents the death of the earthly body, and above its bifurcated summit, the soul of the saint carried by angels indicates the proximity of Heaven (figure 9). The hermits exist between these two extremes, but the movement in the painting is dominated by their descent towards the funeral below. This prominent downward motion indicates the significance of the funeral, and may additionally symbolise the remembrance of death and the corporeal experience of the eremitic life.

A prominent trope of the literature is the temptation of the hermit by demons, following the temptation of Christ in the wilderness.¹⁵¹ Athanasius describes how Antony endures both physical and mental assault by demons who take the form of wild beasts, or alluring women:

At night the devil would turn himself into the attractive form of a beautiful woman, omitting no detail that might provoke lascivious thoughts, but Antony

¹⁴⁸ *Conferences*, 129.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁵¹ 'For such a one [as this man] reclines upon the Christ who heard the devil say: 'All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me.' *Lausiac History*, 155; Matt 4:9.

called to mind the fiery punishment of Hell and the torment inflicted by worms: in this way he resisted the onslaught of lust.¹⁵²

The hermit's response to this kind of onslaught determines his spiritual success. Victory purifies and transforms his physical nature, and often leads to the blessing of a God-given gift, such as prophecy, vision, or fighting spirits.¹⁵³ Encounters with demons are frequently described in terms of combat, and the hermit as a soldier of Christ (*miles Christi*). The idea of the hermit as an 'athlete of virtue' similarly indicates the contests which mark his ascetic endeavours. Victory, however, is not guaranteed.¹⁵⁴ The demons represent weaknesses of the body, such as lust or fornication, or spiritual sins such as pride or *accidie* (idleness). They are closely associated with human failings, and are ever-present in the desert:

...envious of us Christians, they leave nothing undone to hinder us from entering Heaven: they do not want us to mount to the place from which they have fallen.¹⁵⁵

Similarly, in the tabernacle, demons lurk among the beauty and abundance of the mountain. One attempts to assail the elderly monk in the wheelchair, and another falls headfirst down the mountain (figure 10). A third presents the form or effigy of a woman to a hermit at the window of his hut, the only female figure in the painting (figure 11). The (almost complete) absence of women in the desert is one reason that the monks retreat there, but this scene in the image, and countless narratives in the literature, show how their isolation is no defence from the temptations of the Devil.¹⁵⁶ The *Historia Monachorum* tells the story of 'a certain brother', who followed a strenuous form of the ascetic life. When he had grown proud of himself and his discipline, 'the Tempter... *showed him* the form of a beautiful woman who was

¹⁵² *Life of Antony*, 12.

¹⁵³ *Lausiac History*, 55; *Wisdom of the Fathers*, 62; 'And thus after many labours and contests, his heart is purified with abundant humility, and he shines with the light of grace, and he is held to be worthy to see Christ in a revelation of light.' *Paradise of the Fathers*, 196.

¹⁵⁴ 'In the contest, the athlete fights with his fists; in his thoughts, the monk stands, his arms stretched out in the form of a cross to heaven, calling on God.' *Wisdom of the Fathers*, 3.

¹⁵⁵ Part of the address to the monks. *Life of Antony*, 23.

¹⁵⁶ Certain holy women inhabit the desert, although they are rarely described interacting with the Abbas. Abba Poemen refuses to see his mother when she comes to his cell weeping and begging to see him, telling her to be satisfied that she will see him in the next world. In another *Saying*, a monk asks; "And what place is there without a woman except the desert?" the old man said unto him, "Then let us go to the desert." 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 808; 709.

wandering about in the desert in the evening.¹⁵⁷ She invites herself into his hut and successfully seduces him, and he is so grief-stricken at having fallen so far that he returns to the world. Demons are present in the image not because they illustrate a specific narrative, but because they are an integral feature of the desert landscape, and constant assailants of the hermits who live there.

The presence of angels in the wilderness, and the proximity of heaven, counteract the ever-present temptations of demons. The provision of nourishment by an emissary from heaven exemplifies a hermit's purity, and provides an explanation for his continued survival despite the most meagre of diets or lengthy fasts:¹⁵⁸

I know a certain man in this desert who for three years past has not eaten anything which is of this earth, but an angel comes to him once in three days, and brings him heavenly food and places it in his mouth, and this suffices him instead of meat and drink.¹⁵⁹

In this description from the *Historia Monachorum* the hermit is nameless, but he is renowned for the blessing shown to him. In the *Life of Onuphrius*, written by Paphnutius c. 390-400, there are several accounts of angels bringing the Eucharist to isolated hermits, in order that they may receive the Sacrament without having to leave their solitude.¹⁶⁰ The provision of nourishment, or the consecrated Host, by an angel indicates the incorporeality of the hermit's body, which has been purified by *ascesis*. In addition, it allows the hermit to endure long periods of isolation whilst still receiving the Sacrament, thus ensuring his continued orthodoxy and membership of the Church. In the image at the centre of the tabernacle, an angel can be seen bringing an object to a hermit in his hut near the summit of the mountain (figure 12). It is not clear, even under magnification, whether this object represents bread, eucharistic or otherwise, or a chalice, but it is clear that the hermit is being blessed and sustained by this heavenly provision. Sometimes, the hermits themselves are described in angelic terms:

¹⁵⁷ My emphasis. 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise II*, 499.

¹⁵⁸ It also echoes the experience of Christ in the Temptations. Mark 1:13

¹⁵⁹ 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise II*, 512.

¹⁶⁰ *Life of Onuphrius*, 156; 164.

[Abba Or] had an angelic form and was about ninety years of age; his beard flowed down over his breast, and it was white and beautiful, and his countenance was so glorious that those who saw him were reprov'd by the sight thereof.¹⁶¹

Purified and transformed by their victory over temptations and prolonged *ascesis*, such hermits are almost immaterial. Simply witnessing these holy men is enough to bestow knowledge and illumination.¹⁶²

The angelic transport of a hermit's soul after death is found repeatedly in the ascetic literature, as confirmation of his virtue. It demonstrates his immediate ascension to Heaven and points towards the promise of eternal life. In the *Historia Monachorum*, the hermit Paphnutius witnesses the soul of an anonymous man who lived in the world, carried to heaven:

...he saw angels carrying the soul of that man up to heaven, and praising God, and saying, "Blessed is the man in whom Thou hast pleasure, and whom Thou bringest to dwell in Thy habitation."¹⁶³

Immediate ascension to Heaven after death is a privilege granted to the righteous, not necessarily guaranteed to an ascetic. However, the witness of such an event is distinguished by his virtue. St Antony observes the ascension of both Abba Amoun of Nitria and Paul of Thebes as their souls are carried to heaven, 'in robes of snowy white ascending on high among the bands of angels, and the choirs of prophets and apostles.'¹⁶⁴ The heavenly transport of the soul is a blessing that relies on a comparably saintlike witness still on earth; the story must be handed on by an authoritative voice. In the tabernacle, not just one but ten hermits witness the ascension of the dead saint's soul above the summit of the mountain, indicating the incontrovertible truth of the event (figure 13). The figure of the soul is similarly robed in white and has a youthful demeanour, indicating his purity and perfection in death. Cassian describes the goal of the monastic life as 'the reward of eternity'.¹⁶⁵ This is

¹⁶¹ 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise I*, 510.

¹⁶² '...their saintliness shines in their faces. To those looking at them the very sight of them can bestow knowledge.' *Lausiac History*, 131.

¹⁶³ 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise I*, 552.

¹⁶⁴ *Lausiac History*, 43; *Vita Pauli*, 302.

¹⁶⁵ *Conferences*, 83.

the ultimate end towards which his whole life, the struggles with demons and practice of penitence, is oriented. The gaze of the monk must be turned upwards, away from the things of the earth, to see the promise of salvation. In the tabernacle, the hermits near the top of the mountain look up towards the soul ascending to heaven, and beyond that to the Redeemer and angels, occupying a separate, heavenly realm in the tabernacle's pediment above.

The relationship between hermits and the wild beasts of the desert is a recurrent trope of the literature, echoing once again the experience of Christ during his Temptation.¹⁶⁶ The virtue and purity of the Desert Fathers are understood to directly effect the willing obedience of wild animals:

O my fathers, if you possess purity of heart, every living thing will be subject to you as it was to Adam before he transgressed the commandment of God.¹⁶⁷

In this *Saying*, the hermits inhabit a paradisiacal, prelapsarian state, in anticipation of the heavenly paradise they seek after death. Stories in the *Historia Monachorum*, the *Lives* of Antony and Paul, and in the *Lausiac History* narrate the obedience and service of wild animals to hermits in the desert.¹⁶⁸ In some cases, the kindness of the holy man towards an animal is repaid by the appreciative beast, whose nature is miraculously transformed.¹⁶⁹ The lion, which recurs frequently in the literature, is a ferocious beast of the desert who becomes meek in the presence of the hermit. In addition, lions were credited with a Christ-like power of resurrection.¹⁷⁰ In the image at the centre of the tabernacle, this legend is represented in a cave beneath the column of the stylite saint, where a male lion appears to be breathing life into its cubs (figure 14). Fourteen lions are present in the mountainous landscape, and further up the mountain, a hermit can be seen milking a lioness. Two lions patiently draw a saint's wheelchair, and a hermit reaches out of his cave towards a boar and

¹⁶⁶ 'And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered unto him.' Mark 1:13.

¹⁶⁷ 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 795.

¹⁶⁸ *Historia Monachorum* 110; *Vita Pauli*, 302; *Lausiac History*, 66.

¹⁶⁹ For example, Macarius healed blind hyena pups, and was given the skin of a ram as a thank-offering by their mother. *Historia Monachorum*, 110.

¹⁷⁰ The male lion was believed to breathe life into its inanimate young on the third day after its birth, which was seen to correspond to the Resurrection of Christ. *Physiologus*, 3.

her young (figure 15). Elsewhere, a hermit milks an antelope. These scenes of nourishment and interdependence demonstrate the acquiescence of wild beasts and their harmonious relationship with the holy men of the desert. In the *Lausiac History*, Macarius runs out of water while walking through the desert, but he is saved when he comes across an antelope with a calf. She allows him to drink his fill from her dripping udder and accompanies him back to his cell.¹⁷¹ In the image, we see the hermits milking rather than suckling directly from the animal, but the nurture and nourishment of a wild beast - including a lion - remains a potent symbol.¹⁷² In a world without women, it carries echoes of fertility and lactation. It indicates the miraculous provision of sustenance in the desert and may stand as a symbol for the transmission of purity:

Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.¹⁷³

In the literature, animals sometimes function as symbols of particular virtues, or analogies for the spiritual life. For instance, the hedgehog is mentioned in Cassian's *Conferences* as a timid animal who needs the protection of the rocks for safety, just as the monk who is assailed by temptations must seek shelter in the recitation of a prayer.¹⁷⁴ A tiny hedgehog is present in the tabernacle, visible to the patient viewer just to the right of the stags in the register above the funeral. Two further scenes with animals in the tabernacle may be similarly symbolic. The first is a hunt, which includes three laymen chasing foxes with spears and dogs, immediately above the funeral of the sainted hermit (figure 16).¹⁷⁵ This is an apparently incongruous secular subject among the scenes of eremitic life, and illustrates a very different relationship with the animals to that of the hermits,

¹⁷¹ *Lausiac History*, 60-61.

¹⁷² The trope of nourishment sent to hermits through the intermediary of animals is well-established in the literature. In the *Life of Paul*, for example, bread is brought to the hermit daily by a raven sent from God. In this case, however, the bird is a messenger, rather than a source of nourishment in itself. *Vita Pauli*, 301.

¹⁷³ 1 Peter 2:2-3

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Proverbs 30:26. Specifically, Cassian refers to the words at the start of Psalm 69, which the monk in the wheelchair drawn by lions displays in the book he holds; 'O God make speed to save me, O Lord make haste to help me'. *Conferences*, 137.

¹⁷⁵ It is not entirely clear what these red-maned animals are intended to be.

discussed above. In the *Apophthegmata patrum*, hunting is used as an analogy for spiritual effort. Abba Hilarion is asked how a monk should proceed when a brother leaves the religious life to return to the world, and replies that he should think about a hunting dog chasing a hare. Even when other dogs turn back, he keeps on his course, fearing nothing, and does not rest until he overtakes his prey:

So also for the brother, who wishes to follow after the love of Christ, is it right to fasten his gaze upon the Cross until he overtakes Him that was crucified.¹⁷⁶

It is possible that this scene, which is on a smaller scale than others nearby, is meant to be seen allegorically. Or it may function as a contrasting image of sinful or secular life, in which men chase possessions and kill animals in their efforts to satisfy their bodily needs.¹⁷⁷ The second scene, to the far right of the panel, shows a sainted monk fishing by a pool (figure 6). This is unusual because no accounts of monks fishing for their food can - to my knowledge - be found in the literature. Indeed, many hermits refuse to eat flesh and subsist on small quantities of lentils, bread and herbs. Like the hunting scene, this image may be intended symbolically, as in this *Saying* attributed to Antony:

As fish die when they are drawn out of the water, even so do monks, who have forsaken the world, become sluggish, when they remain with the children of this world or dwell with them; it is then meet for us to hasten to the mountain even as fish haste to the water.¹⁷⁸

The patient monk who sits by the pool of water is a direct contrast to the men who chase their prey in the hunting scene. He sits in solitude, away from 'the children of this world' and awaits the blessings of God's grace in the wilderness.

In much of the ascetic literature, the sense of community among the hermits of the desert is surprisingly strong. Even the most isolated anchorites form close relationships with their spiritual brethren; the meeting of Paul and Antony, for

¹⁷⁶ 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 878.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 944-5.

¹⁷⁸ *Saying* attributed to St Antony. 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 951. A less elaborate version of this anecdote is repeated in the *Historia Monachorum* and the *Golden Legend*.

example, is tender and warm.¹⁷⁹ The interdependence and mutual respect of the hermits on their spiritual journey is frequently emphasised:

Now these monks have much affection both for each other and for the rest of the brethren, for each one of them would be exceedingly anxious to give up his chamber to any man who wished to seek for grace.¹⁸⁰

Stories tell of one monk persuading another to remain in the desert even after succumbing to temptation, and younger monks frequently seek out the wisdom of their elders.¹⁸¹ The eremitic life did not entail total solitude or silence. The literature of the desert was drawn from an oral tradition, compiled from reported conversations with and among the hermits. It is the product of a shared endeavour. Though the funeral of the saint, or, more abstractly, the remembrance of death, motivates the hermits on their journey in the painting, their mutual concern is clearly apparent. They are unified in grief by their shared reverence for the dead saint, regarding each other with serious expressions or even concern (figure 17). Whilst there are solitary monks in the visual narrative, the most prominent figures are part of small communities. Some physically carry or support one another on their journey, and there is an overriding sense of fraternity and mutual endeavour. In the tabernacle, this interdependence is presented as a virtue, as it is in the *Historia Monachorum*:

A man is helped by his brethren, even as a city is helped by its fortress, and he is like a wall which shall never fall.¹⁸²

The individual scenes in the tabernacle are subordinate to its overriding narrative of eremitic life and death. However, it is difficult to identify these subsidiary scenes with specific stories or particular saints described in the literature. It has been suggested that the scene of a hermit tempted by a woman represents St Antony, who was famously assailed by such temptations.¹⁸³ But in an image where so many of the hermits are saints, it seems implausible that this figure without a nimbus should represent the great Desert Father, even if it is an episode from early in his spiritual journey. In addition, the trope of demonic temptation, and the

¹⁷⁹ *Life of Paul of Thebes*, 80.

¹⁸⁰ 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise I*, 577.

¹⁸¹ 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 848.

¹⁸² 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise I*, 507

¹⁸³ Coor-Achenbach 1944, 137; Brigstocke 2000, 33.

apparition of a woman at a hermit's cell, are repeated in multiple narratives in the literary sources.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, a sainted hermit riding an ass, visible at the extreme left-hand edge of the tabernacle's central panel, has been interpreted as St Hilarion.¹⁸⁵ He is one of the only named hermit-saints to travel in this way, owing to a debilitating weakness from fasting; the majority of the Desert Fathers travel on foot, often without shoes, across vast tracts of desert.¹⁸⁶ Yet it is difficult to define this figure as Hilarion when other, similar narratives exist in the literature. In the *Apophthegmata*, an unidentified 'great and holy man', blessed with the gifts of healing and casting out devils, finds that the beasts have been made subject to him. Seeing a herd of wild asses, he summons one to come to him; 'and one of them came, and crouched before him very gently, and the blessed man mounted him, and sat upon him, and the animal carried him whither he wished to go.'¹⁸⁷ This scene in the tabernacle may simply be a further illustration of the sympathetic relationship that existed between hermits and wild animals.¹⁸⁸ Its most important aspect is not the identity of the saint, but the fact that he travels to the funeral despite his evident inability to walk. The hermits in this remarkable image of the desert are, like many of those in the literature, anonymous and unidentified. They represent virtues and endeavours common to the experience of eremitic life, and it is this *way of life* that is of primary importance for our understanding of the image.

The image at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, then, corresponds closely with prevalent tropes of ascetic literature known in the West. However, it should not be understood as a visual representation of a single narrative, or even multiple narratives, that can be found in the literature. This is in part because the

¹⁸⁴ The *Historia Monachorum* tells the story of 'a certain brother', who followed a strenuous form of the ascetic life. When he had grown proud of himself and his discipline, 'the Tempter... *showed him* the form of a beautiful woman who was wandering about in the desert in the evening.' (My emphasis) She invites herself into his hut and successfully seduces him. He is so grief-stricken at having fallen so far that he returns to the world. 'Historia Monachorum', *Paradise I*, 499.

¹⁸⁵ Achenbach 1944, 140.

¹⁸⁶ *Vita Pauli*, 310; Antony's journey to find Paul in the 'desert interior', with only a staff to support his ageing body, is recorded in the *Life of Paul*, 78-82; Palladius journeys on foot for thirty days 'or twice that' through the desert. *Lausiac History*, 24-25.

¹⁸⁷ 'Apophthegmata', *Paradise II*, 935.

¹⁸⁸ In later Byzantine (and Italian) paintings of this theme, such as a *Funeral of Ephraim the Syrian* (fifteenth century) and the smaller Lindsay panel (c.1480) (figure 113), the saint travels on the back of a lion or a stag.

western ascetic tradition is not sufficient for a full understanding of its subject-matter. The monastic funeral scene, with a large group of priests and mourners, and a multitude of hermits travelling towards it, finds no parallel in the western literature, yet this event motivates the activity of the entire visual narrative. Significant details, such as the stylite saint at the centre of the composition, or the monk above the funeral striking a semandron, are also entirely absent from the literature discussed above. Accounts of a comparable funeral, in addition to these details, must be sought in the literature of the East, such as the *Historia Religiosa* and the *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*. We return to these texts, and consider others of the Orthodox monastic tradition, in Chapter Three.

The ascetic literature, and the eremitic way of life it describes, occupied a central place in the formation and development of religious life in the West. This chapter now turns to a consideration of the western monastic tradition and its relationship with the desert, from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries, as a vital historical background to the main focus of this study. It also permits a fuller understanding of the three inscriptions contained within the tabernacle, which pertain directly to the experience of a religious life. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-543) regarded the eremitic tradition of the East as the primary exemplar for the religious life.¹⁸⁹ He relied heavily on Cassian in composing his *Rule*, and towards the end of this text recommends the *Institutes* and *Conferences*, along with the *Vitae Patrum*, as suitable reading material for the monks, second only to the Holy Scriptures.¹⁹⁰ Benedict claimed only to be writing a 'little Rule for beginners', merely pointing towards the loftier heights of virtue exemplified by the Desert Fathers.¹⁹¹

In this and other early monastic writing, particularly that of Caesarius of Arles and an unknown 'Master', the eastern origins of the monastic life were seen to have an unassailable authority.¹⁹² The tradition of the desert was closer to the life of

¹⁸⁹ The *Rule of Benedict* draws heavily from the slightly earlier and anonymous *regula magistri*. Leyser 2000, 103.

¹⁹⁰ 'The *Conferences* of the fathers, their *Institutes* and *Lives* [...] - these are instruments to help the monk, who follows them, to lead a good life; to us, idle and neglectful sinners, they are a reproach and shame.' *Of Silence after Compline*, RB, 337; 319.

¹⁹¹ RB, 337.

¹⁹² Lawrence 1994, 16.

Christ, both geographically and temporally. The *Rule* of Benedict addresses an evident contemporary need for a more standardised and regular form of the religious life. It recognises false or irregular expressions of devotion and warns of the dangers of corruption and delusion for the solitary monk.¹⁹³ The most practical way to avoid such pitfalls was to live in a regulated community. Benedict saw the ultimate goal of the monk being to dwell in the 'heavenly tabernacle' of the Lord, united with Christ in his kingdom. To reach this distant goal, he required the guidance of spiritual authority, the support of a community, and the grace of God.¹⁹⁴ The *Rule* places greater emphasis on the monk's need for community than do the narratives of desert life found in Athanasius or Jerome, echoing Cassian's concessions to the benefits of mutual support.

The continuing influence of the eremitic ideal is evident in the language Benedict uses throughout his *Rule*. He describes the coenobites as the 'most vigorous' kind of monk (*fortissimum genus*), 'doing battle' (*militans*) under the guidance of a rule, which draws from the rich imagery of the hermit's combat with the devil common to ascetic literature.¹⁹⁵ The practices of the desert hermits, their self-sufficiency and their rejection of superfluous material possessions, inform the basis of Benedictine discipline. The monks' lack of personal property and separation from secular society symbolised their renunciation of worldly attachments, echoing the poverty and solitude of the Desert Fathers. And the ascetic principles of self-denial, chastisement of the body, rejection of pleasure and love of fasting, are prioritised as necessary 'Good Works' of the monk, immediately following the Ten Commandments.¹⁹⁶ Benedict wanted his *Rule* to be applicable to all, so he modified the self-mortification of the desert hermits to more achievable levels of austerity, suitable for the varying climates and social conditions of the West. He formalised the

¹⁹³ The first section of the *Rule* describing the types of monk suggests a reason for this effort. The sarabaites, or independent hermits, are 'shepherdless' and follow their own will. As a result they live pleasurable and corruptible lives with only a superficial appearance of holiness. This follows on from Cassian's long attack on the sarabaites in Conference 18. The gyrovagues are wanderers, slaves to their appetites and even less disciplined than the sarabaites. Such uncontrolled forms of religious life must have been a visible feature of the religious landscape at the time. Chadwick 1958, 268-279; RB, 294.

¹⁹⁴ RB, 293.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; De Dreuille 2000, 110.

¹⁹⁶ RB, 297-299. These are listed as numbers 11-13 of the *Chapter on Good Works*, after the Ten Commandments and Golden Rule.

ceaseless inward prayer of the Desert Fathers, as it was described by Cassian, so that it became the perpetual, shared endeavour of the Divine Office.¹⁹⁷ This ensured that important prayers and the psalmody were said by the monks on a weekly basis, for the benefit of their souls, the souls of the departed, and those of people who remained in the world. Benedict advised that silence be kept daily after Compline (evening prayers), so that the monks would experience something of the solitude and silence that characterised the strictest forms of eremitic experience.¹⁹⁸ The walls of the monastery maintained the monks' separation from the secular world, and replaced the open desert as the context in which the individual might ultimately reach salvation.¹⁹⁹ The *Rule* of Benedict, and the monastic tradition which grew from it, subsumed the eremitic into the coenobitic and became the 'institutional expression' of the ascetic ideal.²⁰⁰

The *Rule* of Benedict was influential in the formation of monastic life across Europe from the sixth century onwards, although initially, religious observance varied widely between foundations.²⁰¹ The mission of Pope Gregory I to the Anglo-Saxons brought Christianity and the Benedictine way of life to northern Europe, and by 817, the observance of the *Rule* of Benedict was required of every monastery in the Frankish Empire. It was not until this widespread adoption of the *Rule*, incorporating the reforms of Benedict of Aniane (c.747-821) that monasteries could properly be described as part of a Benedictine Order.²⁰² The principles of communal poverty, prayer, and discipline were given primary importance and efforts were made to standardise monastic practice.²⁰³ The Divine Office was expanded and lengthened, so that elaborate liturgical ritual occupied the monks at the expense of

¹⁹⁷ *Conferences*, 125-140; RB, 129-139.

¹⁹⁸ Chadwick 1958, 42; RB, 318-9.

¹⁹⁹ 'If then we keep close to our school and the doctrine we learn in it, and persevere in the monastery until death, we shall here share by patience in the Passion of Christ...' RB, 293.

²⁰⁰ Chadwick 1985, 1.

²⁰¹ Following the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), in which the whole of the second book was devoted to St Benedict and his miracles, the person of Benedict, and his *Rule*, became more widely known and admired. Chadwick 1958, 30.

²⁰² The *Rule* was accepted as the authoritative form of religious life by Pope Leo VII in the tenth century. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church online*, "Benedictine Order", accessed 03/01/19, oxfordreference.com.

²⁰³ Penco 1961, 179.

manual labour, and the monastic vocation began to play a more formal, symbolic role in society, in which the primary purpose of the monk was to pray for the souls of the laity, rather than to seek salvation for its own sake.²⁰⁴ The largest of these foundations, such as Cluny in Burgundy, followed a strict interpretation of the Benedictine *Rule*, but began to accrue the financial benefits of local patronage and thus became answerable to secular authorities.²⁰⁵ They were increasingly politicised, and the accumulation of wealth led to frequent abuses of the ascetic tenets of the *Rule*.²⁰⁶ Despite the increasing distance between Benedictine monasteries of the Middle Ages, and the primitive religious communities established by the Desert Fathers, important monastic figures were nonetheless credited with invoking the authoritative traditions of the 'holy fathers'.²⁰⁷ The legacy of the desert continued in theory, if not in practice.

It is in the context of the western monastic tradition that the three inscriptions contained within the Edinburgh Tabernacle should be read and understood. To the far right of the central panel, beside the scene of a hermit fishing by a pool, a book is propped open on the rocks. On its pages, the first words of Psalm One can be made out: BEATUS VIR QUI NO[N ABIIT] (figure 4).²⁰⁸ These words marked the beginning of the Psalmody, an integral part of the Divine Office repeated by the monks on a weekly basis.²⁰⁹ Commentaries on the Psalms provide some insight into the

²⁰⁴ Zarnecki 1972, 33.

²⁰⁵ Cluny was founded in 909. Lawrence 1994, 68-9.

²⁰⁶ In the Carolingian era, royal abbeys were drawn into the political hierarchy and abbots became imperial functionaries, appointed by Charlemagne himself. His aim was to standardise and unify monastic practice under his ultimate authority. *Ibid.*, 70; 93-96.

²⁰⁷ Said of Hugh of Farfa, Abbot of Cluny 1049-1109. *Consuetudines Farfenses*, dated to the second quarter of the eleventh century. Cited in Penco 1961, 180.

²⁰⁸ [1] Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence. [2] But his will is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he shall meditate day and night. [3] And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit, in due season. And his leaf shall not fall off: and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper. [4] Not so the wicked, not so: but like the dust, which the wind driveth from the face of the earth. [5] Therefore the wicked shall not rise again in judgment: nor sinners in the council of the just. [6] For the Lord knoweth the way of the just: and the way of the wicked shall perish. Ps. 1.

²⁰⁹ The Psalms formed an integral component of the Daily Office, said or sung together at the canonical hours of the day. 'we offer prayer (the duty of our profession) at the hours of Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline.' In the *Rule* of Benedict, Psalm One was to be recited at Prime on a Monday, but by the late-medieval period this may have changed to Matins on a Sunday. RB, 307; 304-309; Hughes 1982, 50.

medieval understanding of these words. St Augustine regarded the ‘blessed man’ (*beatus vir*) of this psalm to refer to Christ.²¹⁰ Christ was incarnate as man, but he neither ‘walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners’, as did the man of earth, that is, Adam, when he transgressed the commands of God in Eden.²¹¹ He therefore stands as an example for others who seek to escape the allurements of the world. The presence of Adam in the adjacent scene of Limbo, on the right-hand lateral panel of the tabernacle, may help to underline the hermit’s effective reclamation of Adam’s prelapsarian state. In the third verse, ‘And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters’, Augustine interpreted the tree as one who seeks to be close to the Wisdom of Christ.²¹² This image might readily be applied to anyone who had chosen to enter the religious life.²¹³ Embedded as a minute inscription within the landscape of the desert, the first words of Psalm one might represent the cyclical repetition of the Psalms as part of the Divine Office, which marked the hours and days of the religious life. They might also allude to the ways in which the monk, or hermit, emulated the ‘blessed man’ Christ, by avoiding the ‘counsel of the ungodly’, removing himself from the path of sin, and seeking the wisdom of Christ in the fertile landscape of the desert.

The second inscription can be found towards the centre-left of the panel, further up the mountainous landscape. It appears on the pages of a book, in the hands of a hermit who sits in a wheelchair drawn by lions: DEUS IN ADIU[TORIUM MEUM INTENDE] (figure 5). The words are from the second verse of Psalm 69, ‘A prayer in persecution’.²¹⁴ They invoke the help of God in the face of danger, reflecting the apotropaic power of the Scriptures in the ascetic tradition: ‘Whenever a

²¹⁰ *Discourses*, 21.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹³ In addition to the dedication of one’s will to God (verse 2).

²¹⁴ ‘*Deus in adiutorium. A prayer in persecution*: [1] Unto the end, a psalm for David, to bring to remembrance that the Lord saved him. [2] O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me. [3] Let them be confounded and ashamed that seek my soul: [4] Let them be turned backward, and blush for shame that desire evils to me: Let them be presently turned away blushing for shame that say to me: Tis well, tis well. [5] Let all that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee; and let such as love thy salvation say always: The Lord be magnified. [6] But I am needy and poor; O God, help me. Thou art my helper and my deliverer: O Lord, make no delay.’ Ps. 69.

man reads the Divine Books, the devils are afraid.²¹⁵ In the *Conferences of the Fathers*, Cassian writes at length on these exact words.²¹⁶ The brief prayer that is taken from the second verse of Psalm 69: ‘Come to my help, O God; Lord, hurry to my rescue’ (or, as it is usually rendered in modern English: ‘O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me’) was handed down ‘by the oldest of the fathers’, and should be repeated by a monk who is assailed by temptations, as a way of invoking divine protection.²¹⁷ It expresses humility before God in recognition of human frailty, and the knowledge that a cry for help will always be heard. It functions like a breastplate or a shield, as a defence against temptation and despair, or as protection against pride. The recitation of this prayer defends the monk against attacks of the devil, purifies him of earthly sin, and leads him to contemplation of the unseen. It reminds the monk of his need for God’s help in all things, and it should be there with all his words and deeds:

You will place it on the walls of your house and in the inner sanctum of your heart. It will be a continuous prayer, an endless refrain...²¹⁸

This prayer, continues Cassian, is the embodiment of the utmost holy poverty. He who constantly calls for divine aid recognises that his life and being are sustained solely by God:

He will rightly be called God’s mendicant as he cries out to Him in daily supplication, “I am a mendicant and a poor man, but God helps me”(Ps. 39:18)²¹⁹

These words from Psalm 69 may, then, have taken on a particular significance if they were seen by a late thirteenth-century mendicant with a knowledge of Cassian’s teachings.

The importance placed on the prayer from Psalm 69 in the *Conferences* led to its inclusion in the *Rule* of Benedict. The versicle and response *Deus in adiutorium meum intende; Domine ad adiuvandam me festina* was said at the start of the offices of Prime, Terce, Sext, and None, followed by the respective hymn of

²¹⁵ ‘Apophthegmata’, *Paradise II*, 620.

²¹⁶ *Conferences*, 132-138.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 132-3. For example, in the book of *Daily Prayer*, Scottish Episcopal Church 2006.

²¹⁸ *Conferences*, 136.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the hour.²²⁰ At the other hours, Benedict simply lists ‘a versicle’, which could at times have been the same words. In the chapter of the *Rule* titled ‘After what order the psalms are to be said’, he writes: ‘First shall be said the versicle, ‘O God make speed to save me...’.²²¹ Surviving medieval missals and breviaries rarely restate these recommendations, as they were simply known, and taken for granted.²²² In a monastic context, the second verse of Psalm 69 was thus ever present, said prior to the recitation of the Psalms and at the start of the Offices. By formally including it in the Offices, Benedict codified the recommendations of Cassian to keep this prayer in the heart as ‘an endless refrain’.²²³ Cassian, in turn, passed on the value of the words of Psalm 69:2 from the most ancient and authoritative source of wisdom he encountered in the desert: ‘the oldest of the fathers’.²²⁴ In the image at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, it is an elderly and incapacitated brother who holds the book which contains these words. Their presence in the desert indicates the continuity of religious practice, between that of the ancient Desert Fathers, and the late-medieval viewer of the painting. It may have functioned as a reminder of the extraordinary power of these words in the ascetic tradition, and the importance of invoking Divine protection at all times and in all things.

The third inscription is to be found within the funeral scene, at the lower edge of the tabernacle’s central panel. Close to the centre of the group of mourners by the bier, a red-robed figure holds a book up to face the viewer. On its pages are the words: REQ[UI]ESCAT IN PACE (figure 3). The same words are said towards the end of a Mass for the Dead, following a prayer to deliver the soul of the deceased.²²⁵ Unlike the Office of the Dead, which usually preceded it, the Mass contained the idea of rest and ‘falling asleep in Christ’.²²⁶ The Mass for the Dead had a direct

²²⁰ At the night office and at Lauds an alternative versicle was used; ‘O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise’. RB, 305; 308.

²²¹ RB, 308.

²²² Hughes 1982, 53.

²²³ *Conferences*, 136.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

²²⁵ “Ordo Missae Pro Defunctis”, *Sancta Missa: Missale Romanum 1962*, The Canons Regular of John Cantius, 2010. Accessed 10/10/18, <https://sanctamissa.org/en/resources/requiem/requiem-mass-daily-mass-for-the-dead.html> .

²²⁶ I Cor. 15:18; Binski 1996, 54.

benefit for the soul of the departed, and during the late-medieval period it was seen as an essential component of a 'good death', an aid to the soul's transition through Purgatory, or, as in this case, directly to Heaven.²²⁷ The presence of these words in the image of the desert indicates once again the continuity of religious customs, from ancient eremitic tradition to contemporary practice. Several of the attendants at the funeral wear red robes, in contrast to the grey and white of the hermits, and it seems likely that this marks them out as members of the clergy (figure 2). It is notable that their vestments are red, as it was customary in the Latin West for black vestments to be used in Masses for the Dead, whilst the Orthodox Church used white. Red was used for Passion Sunday, Good Friday, and commemorations of the Passion. It was also employed for commemorations of martyrs.²²⁸ This interesting detail may indicate that in this image, the death of the saint is intended to be explicitly linked with the Passion of Christ, present in the lateral panels of the tabernacle. The hermit's death is, in one sense, a martyrdom, a sacrificial offering to the Lord by one who has dedicated his life and ascetic labours to following Christ. In early Christian sources, the word 'martyr' could be applied to anyone who lived a truly self-sacrificing life, and this usage continued in ascetic literature.²²⁹ The eremitic life was seen as a form of martyrdom because it demanded the steadfast pursuit of perfection in the face of suffering and temptation. It was rewarded, as in this image, with the blessings of Heaven.

The two psalms and the words from the Mass of the Dead indicate the continuity of religious observance, from the earliest monastic communities in the desert to the late-medieval context in which the tabernacle was encountered. In this image, they illustrate the orthodoxy of the eremitic community and highlight aspects of religious experience that had remained unchanged over centuries. Periodically during the Middle Ages, the relationship between contemporary monastic experience and the example of the Desert Fathers was reiterated, particularly in association with monastic reforms. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries,

²²⁷ Binski 1996, 54.

²²⁸ Howell 1973, 73.

²²⁹ E.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* and Tertullian, *Scorpiace*. Chadwick 1958, 20-21. In the *Sayings*, Abba Pambo remarks of a man who has lived for twenty-two years in obedience to an elder, '[this man], restraining his own will, does the will of another. Now it is of such men that the martyrs are made, if they persevere to the end.' *Sayings*, 196.

Benedictine foundations closely involved with the political and economic life of secular society were increasingly criticised for their moral laxity, wealth and corruption.²³⁰ Calls for reform centred on the need to distance the monastery from worldly concerns, and to restate the connection between a religious life and solitude. In addition, they frequently entailed criticism of the contemporary Church, using the ancient example of the Desert Fathers to highlight the material wealth or corruption of monasteries and the ecclesiastical hierarchy.²³¹ The invocation of the early Christian monastic tradition in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, and the demonstration of its continuity with contemporary religious life, suggests that this image may have been motivated, in part, by concerns about ecclesiastical reform and renewal. We return to this possibility in Chapters Three and Four, which look more closely at the thirteenth-century context in which the tabernacle was made.

Monastic reformers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries frequently invoked the Desert Fathers as an idealised example for monastic existence. New religious communities were established in remote and mountainous places all over Europe, in an attempt to distance the lives of the monks from the secular world they had left behind and to pursue a more rigorous and ascetic way of life. The founders of these communities, such as Bernard of Clairveaux (d.1153), were compared to the ancient hermits of Egypt.²³² Gerard of Salles (d.1120) established several eremitic foundations in the west of France, and in his anonymous *Vita* was likened to specific Desert Fathers:

In all his deeds he was redolent of Hilarion, resembled Antony; Christ really lived in him. [...] He inflamed many, he summoned many into the desert.²³³

The ideal of 'the desert', a place far removed from the secular world in which a pure and authentic form of the monastic life originated, exerted a powerful influence. Hermitages and solitary hermits proliferated; the remote mountainous regions of northwestern France were described in the *Life* of Bernard of Tiron as 'like another

²³⁰ Both by certain monks, and external observers. Constable 1982, 58.

²³¹ Discussed on p. 58-60.

²³² Citeaux was to become the mother-house of the reformed Cistercian Order, which spread over much of Europe. William of St Thierry, *Vita prima sancti Bernardi*, cited in *ibid.*, 57.

²³³ Cited in *ibid.*, 58.

Egypt' because of the numbers of hermits living there.²³⁴ In contemporary hagiography, the example of the desert was intended to highlight the decadence and lack of rigour that characterised large monasteries of the Benedictine Order by the end of the tenth century. It directly associated the new reformed and eremitic foundations, such as that of Citeaux in Burgundy, with the legacy of the Desert Fathers.²³⁵

In Italy, the same spirit of monastic reform motivated the foundation of new eremitic communities. The itinerant hermit Romuald of Ravenna (d.1027) established several hermitages in Umbria after leaving the monastery of Sant'Apollinare in Classe in protest at its lax moral standards.²³⁶ He was regarded by his biographer, Peter Damian (d.1072), as an exemplary figure of moral righteousness and religious rigour, and gained many followers.²³⁷ The *Life of Romuald* describes the strictness of the saint's ascetic life as 'even more miraculous' than his power as a thaumaturge.²³⁸ Peter Damian saw Romuald's radical renunciation of the world and principled rejection of corrupt monastic practice as exemplary, and drew a direct parallel between his foundations, and those of the early Christian desert:

It was not just the likeness of name that made Sitria seem like Nitria; it was also the life there.²³⁹

Romuald was seen to be reinvigorating the lost ascetic tradition of the Desert Fathers, which had originally been preserved in the *Rule* of St Benedict.²⁴⁰ Peter Damian believed that entrenched immorality and decadence in monastic and

²³⁴ Written c.1140. Cited in Thompson 2014, 25.

²³⁵ Constable 1982, 58.

²³⁶ Romuald set up several eremitical foundations, at Fonte Avellana, Camaldoli and Sitria in Umbria after leaving the regular monastic life. He spent many years travelling around central Italy following strict ascetic discipline and preaching to lay and religious alike. After his death, a cult grew up around his tomb, which was kept at Val di Castro, but his real importance for the resurgence of the eremitic life lies in his use by Peter Damian as an *exemplum virtutis*. *Life of Romuald*, 299.

²³⁷ Written c.1042. *Ibid.*, 304.

²³⁸ Peter Damian states that it is not his purpose to make a collection of miracle stories on the model of traditional *Vitae*. His purpose was more practical: to persuade the reader of the inherent virtue in Romuald's example and way of life, and to encourage him to follow it. *Ibid.*, 297.

²³⁹ Peter Damian was profoundly influenced by the *Vitae Patrum* and the writings of Cassian. *Ibid.*, 313.

²⁴⁰ Baker 1993, 214-215.

ecclesiastical life had corrupted the purity of the *Rule*, and that reform, modelled on the example of the desert, was urgently needed.²⁴¹ He saw the widespread acceptance of an eremitic life as an essential aspect of religious renewal:

Anyone might have thought that [Romuald's] plan was to turn the whole world into a hermitage and for everyone to become monks. As it was, he snatched away many from the world, settling them in a great variety of holy places...²⁴²

The Camaldolese Order which descended from Romuald's foundation at Camaldoli broadly followed the *Rule* of St Benedict, supplemented by Peter Damian's own *De Ordine Eremitarum*.²⁴³ Their way of life was based firmly on the example of the Desert Fathers in rigorous fasting, strict silence, rough clothing, and self-inflicted penance.²⁴⁴

The hermitage of Vallombrosa, near Florence, was also founded in objection to contemporary monastic practice. John Gualbert (d.1073) left his original monastery in the city in protest at its lax observance and the practice of simony, and together with his followers, adopted a rigorous interpretation of the Benedictine *Rule*.²⁴⁵ At Vallombrosa, both coenobitic and solitary ways of life were accommodated and a strict separation from the secular world was enforced.²⁴⁶ The congregation initiated the recruitment of lay *conversi*, who were responsible solely for the administration of the monastery and interaction with society on behalf of the monks.²⁴⁷ The rigorous way of life at Vallombrosa was widely admired, and the physical separation of the monks from the city of Florence allowed them a certain degree of moral authority.²⁴⁸ They became outspoken critics of corruption among the

²⁴¹ Phipps 1985, 65.

²⁴² *Life of Romuald*, 296.

²⁴³ Bannister 2011, 501.

²⁴⁴ *Selected writings*, 52.

²⁴⁵ Simony is the the buying or selling of ecclesiastical privileges, such as pardons or benefices. McCready 2011, 130.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ By 1048 Vallombrosa had dependent foundations in northern Tuscany, Romagna, Liguria and Passignano. It was recognised as a reformed congregation of the Benedictine Order by Victor II in 1055. Penco 1961, 217.

²⁴⁸ Cushing 2005, 132.

secular clergy and advocates for ecclesiastical reform, despite their cloistered vocation.²⁴⁹ This drew the censure of Peter Damian, who was himself a fierce critic of clerical abuses, as he felt that the monastic life was unsuited to polemical activity.²⁵⁰ There was an uneasy tension between the perceived moral and spiritual authority of an eremitic way of life, and the impulse towards clerical reform, which took place largely in the secular realm.²⁵¹ In the eleventh century, religious reform was thus closely associated with the ancient example of the Desert Fathers, and with intense criticism of corruption in the contemporary Church.

There is some evidence to suggest that monastic reformers of the Roman Church looked to the traditions of Byzantium, in addition to the example of the Egyptian desert. Knowledge of Orthodox monastic practice was passed on orally, through pilgrimage or Crusades to the Holy Land, or through contact with the Italo-Greek monasteries of southern Italy.²⁵² In Byzantium during the eleventh and twelfth centuries there was a comparable impulse towards monastic reform, and a perceived need to return to a more rigorous, 'original' form of the religious life.²⁵³ Practices widely followed in Orthodox monasteries, such as the pursuit of manual labour, were adopted in many of the reformed Benedictine houses.²⁵⁴ The Orthodox model of religious life, in which coenobitic and solitary monks frequently coexisted, and individual foundations were largely autonomous, appealed to western reformers seeking a greater flexibility of spiritual practice than was permitted within the

²⁴⁹ In 1067 there was a dramatic confrontation between the simoniacal bishop of the city, Pietro Mezzabarba, and the Vallombrosan monks who had publicly accused him of heresy, which culminated in violence. Penco 1961, 218.

²⁵⁰ In 1067 Peter Damian accused them in a letter of using their sanctity to intrude on matters of reform in the secular church. He believed this to be anathema to the monastic profession and contemptuous towards the authority of the Apostolic See. Cushing 2005, 132.

²⁵¹ Whilst some Vallombrosan foundations, such as Coltibuono to the west of Arezzo, were places of eremitic seclusion, the order became known throughout central Italy for its support of reform more than for its rejection of the secular world. Penco 1961, 220.

²⁵² Leyser 1984, 24-25; Jotischky 2012, 57-74.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁵⁴ Jotischky gives the example of John of Gorze, who introduced manual labour at his new foundation in 933, following the example of Italo-Greek monks at Monte Gargano in southern Italy. Manual labour was similarly practiced at Camaldoli and Citeaux, for example, in accordance with Benedict's original *Rule*. *Ibid.*, 64-65.

restrictive and highly ordered Cluniac foundations.²⁵⁵ Hermitages were established in central Italy by laymen who had recently returned from the Holy Land, where they may have directly experienced Orthodox observance. William of Malavalle (d.1157), for example, was converted to the eremitic life following a Crusade to Jerusalem, and gained a sizeable following on Monte Pisano in northern Tuscany.²⁵⁶ Giovanni Bono (d.1249) was a former troubadour who was similarly converted following a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. His foundation near Cesena followed some unusual customs apparently influenced by Orthodox practice, such as the growing of beards and wearing of short habits.²⁵⁷ The eremitic congregations which descended from each of these founders differed from traditional Benedictine houses because they retained a primarily lay character, at least until the thirteenth century.²⁵⁸ Whilst the Cluniac monasteries continued to exist, new religious foundations established during the eleventh and twelfth centuries were marked by the spirit of reform, and their character was frequently shaped by a desire to return to an authentic, primitive and ascetic way of life exemplified by the Desert Fathers.²⁵⁹

By the late twelfth century, the proliferation of new eremitic congregations, and the emergence of heretical groups similarly motivated by the desire for religious reform, led to a growing suspicion of independent ascetic practice among the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Arnold of Brescia (d.1155) adopted an itinerant and ascetic way of life and was widely admired among the laity, but his public criticism of the secular clergy caused him to be banished from Italy and eventually executed.²⁶⁰ The layman Waldo of Lyon (d. c.1205) also attracted a large following for his radical renunciation of the world, and his pursuit of the *vita apostolica*. However, his belief

²⁵⁵ Jotischky 2012, 64-65.

²⁵⁶ Marcelli 2000, 56.

²⁵⁷ It is notable that Orthodox monks wore long beards, unlike the majority of western orders. Initially a primarily lay movement, the Gianbonini quickly became a regular canonical order, following the adoption of the Augustinian Rule in 1215. Van Lwijk 1968, 69.

²⁵⁸ Eremitic congregations known as the *Brettinesi* and the *Toscani* (Tuscan Hermits) were widely distributed among the Appennines. *Ibid.*, 70-74. These congregations were later amalgamated to create the Order of Augustinian Hermits. On this Mendicant Order, see Andrews 2006, 69-172 and chapter four below, p. 219-229.

²⁵⁹ Baker 1993, 112. The phenomenon of eremitic practice in the context of eleventh- and twelfth-century monastic reform has been widely studied. See, for example: Cantor 1961; Bolton 1983; Leyser 1984; Baker 1993.

²⁶⁰ He also questioned the authority of the Pope. Constable 1991, 69-71.

that every just man might preach the Gospels was regarded by the papacy as dangerously irregular, and his followers were eventually labelled heretics.²⁶¹ The Waldensians were prominent among the regions of southern France and northern Italy, as were members of the Cathars. This latter group adhered to an overtly heretical dualist doctrine which held that the world, and all matter in it, was inherently evil.²⁶² Their dissenting view of humanity's relationship with divinity was ultimately derived from the radical asceticism of the Desert Fathers, but it fundamentally distorted the inherent value of mortal existence maintained by the early hermits. The heritage of the desert fuelled both heterodox and orthodox expressions of religious renewal, and it was, at times, difficult to tell them apart:

...voluntary poverty, contempt for the world, and true religion inspire many of them, but many hypocrites and plausible counterfeiters are mixed with them, as tares with wheat.²⁶³

In response to the multiplicity of new and independent religious congregations, some of which posed a direct threat to the authority of the established Church, Innocent III (1198-1216) issued a Canon forbidding the formation new religious Orders in 1215.²⁶⁴ Anyone wishing to establish a new foundation had to accept an authorised *Rule* and way of life, and the practice of preaching without episcopal permission was prohibited. In this movement towards greater control of religious expression, particularly among the laity, the eremitic ideal was implicated as a potential source of irregularity and dissent.

Ascetic literature, and the example of the Desert Fathers, continued nevertheless to be regarded as an authoritative source for the religious life. The Mendicant Orders, established in the early thirteenth century, based their way of life on the *vita apostolica* and the example of the early Church. Their novelty was offset by their invocation of an authoritative past, and their preaching activities sanctioned

²⁶¹ Constable 1991, 63-74; Russell 1971, 42-43.

²⁶² Brooke 1975, 71-73.

²⁶³ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, c.1135. *Ecclesiastical History*, 313.

²⁶⁴ *Ne nimia religionum diversitas*, canon XIII of the Fourth Lateran Council. Reproduced in Brooke 1975, 79-88; 160-161.

on account of their deference to the ecclesiastical hierarchy.²⁶⁵ The presence of texts such as the *Vitae Patrum* in early mendicant library catalogues testifies to the perceived significance of this literature in a mendicant context, and suggests that an educated viewer of the Edinburgh Tabernacle would have been familiar with the sources discussed above. The convent of San Francesco in Pisa, for example, possessed a copy of the *Vitae Patrum* which was kept *in catensis* (chained), indicating that it was in frequent use by the friars.²⁶⁶ The catalogues of the Franciscan libraries at Ratisbon and La Verna both list copies of Cassian's *Collationes Patrum*.²⁶⁷ Dominican libraries followed a similar pattern to those in Franciscan houses, and were, in the earlier years at least, more extensive.²⁶⁸ A 1307 catalogue of the Dominican library in Dijon, for example, records one hundred and thirty-one codices, including the *Vitae Patrum*, and the Dominican house in Venice possessed a copy of the *Conferences* by Cassian.²⁶⁹ This ascetic literature was kept by the Mendicants alongside essential liturgical texts and the Holy Scriptures, and was evidently considered to be a necessary component of their libraries.

The *Vitae Patrum* and related texts of the ascetic tradition were evidently read by the friars, but they also influenced mendicant hagiography and preaching activities. In the mid-thirteenth century, the format of the *Vitae Patrum* was used as a model for the *Vitae Fratrum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, a collection of Dominican friars' lives written in 1256-59 by Gerard de Frachet.²⁷⁰ It was invoked, in part, to underline the instructive and edifying purpose of the text, and also to draw a link between the recently-formed Order, and an ancient religious tradition. The association between the Dominicans and the Desert Fathers was, however, primarily theoretical; neither the strict ascetic practice of the Fathers, nor their remote location in the desert, were

²⁶⁵ See Canon X of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, reproduced in *Ibid.*, 160; and the Later *Rule* of St Francis in FAED I, 103.

²⁶⁶ Ferrari 1904, 4. This is among the earliest surviving Franciscan library catalogues, dated to 1355. My thanks to Donal Cooper for alerting me to this source and sending me a copy to read.

²⁶⁷ Ratisbon (1347); La Verna (1372). Humphreys 1964, 101; 106.

²⁶⁸ Humphreys 1964, 90.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 96; 92.

²⁷⁰ Van Engen 1998, 14.

emulated by the early friars.²⁷¹ The legendary known as the *Legenda Aurea*, or Golden Legend, written by Jacopo da Voragine c.1260, brought together revised versions of the *Lives* of the Desert Fathers with those of more recent saints.²⁷² The entire collection prioritises the virtues of ascetic life and contempt for the world, following the spirit of the *Vitae Patrum*, and was widely known in the late thirteenth century.²⁷³ The *Lives of the Fathers* and the *Conferences* of Cassian, in addition to the *Legenda Aurea*, were used extensively by the friars in preaching and in collections of *exempla*, which were short stories or aphorisms for illustrative use in sermon-writing.²⁷⁴ In 1340, the Dominican scholar Domenico Cavalca (d.1342) translated the *Vitae Patrum* into the vernacular, testifying to its perceived value for a lay and religious audience alike.²⁷⁵ Through the activities of the friars, awareness of the ascetic tradition increased among a wide section of society. In a Franciscan context, the principles of an eremitic life are prominent in the two *Lives* of St Francis written by Thomas of Celano.²⁷⁶ In the *Legenda Major* (1260-1263) the ascetic nature of Francis is recounted by Bonaventure:

In wintertime he would frequently immerse himself in a ditch filled with icy water in order to perfectly subjugate the enemy within and preserve the white robe of modesty from the flames of voluptuousness.²⁷⁷

The achievements of St Francis were seen by his biographers to be on a par with those of the heroic Fathers of the Desert. His inclination towards physical penitence and contemplative retreat, and his absolute aversion to material wealth, echoed the renunciation of the early Christian hermits, and constituted significant features of his sainthood.²⁷⁸

²⁷¹ Brett 1984, 121-125; Lawrence 1994, 84; Van Engen 1998, 21.

²⁷² *Legenda Aurea I*, xviii.

²⁷³ *Legenda Aurea II*, 352.

²⁷⁴ D'Avray 1985, 230; See for instance, Humbert of Romans, *De dono timoris*, in ED, 373.

²⁷⁵ *The Vite dei Santi Padri*.

²⁷⁶ Celano also describes the comparable austerity of the early brothers: 'Those enrolled in that first school also subjected themselves to every discomfort...they grew weak from constant fasting and frequent vigils.' *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, FAED II, 258-259.

²⁷⁷ FAED II, 562.

²⁷⁸ The eremitic experience of Francis is discussed at length in chapter four below, p. 164-170.

The rich and multivalent image at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle - with its miniature inscriptions - is not an illustration of a literary source, nor a narrative of identifiable saints' lives. It is a representation of the eremitic ideal, a way of life exemplified by the Desert Fathers, handed down in textual sources and integral to the monastic tradition that descended from them. The remote and rigorous character of this way of life permeates ascetic literature, evident in the lives and sayings of numerous unidentified hermits of the desert. The literary tradition, and the way of life it describes, continued to influence monastic life in the West, particularly in the context of religious reform. The ancient and authoritative example of the Desert Fathers was periodically reinvoked, associated with an original and uncorrupted version of the religious life. The image at the centre of the tabernacle may well have been motivated by similar concerns. It represents the privileged existence of the hermit, in direct relation to the sacrificial life of Christ. The context of the Passion, and the theme of salvation, are alluded to in the funeral of the sainted hermit, in which the clergy wear red, and in the ascension of the dead saint's soul to heaven. It is a highly idealised image, full of beauty despite the inevitable presence of demons. The variety of ways of life, and the fraternal character of the hermits' relationships, are striking; it appears as a powerful visual argument for the eremitic way of life.

We have seen how ascetic literature continued to be of importance into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was prominent in early mendicant libraries, used as a template for hagiography, and incorporated into *exempla* collections for the purpose of preaching. Yet the Edinburgh Tabernacle was made almost half a century before the major vernacular translation of the *Vitae patrum*, and despite the fact that a mendicant way of life was primarily based in the cities. In addition, many aspects of the image are not present in ascetic literature known in the West. It appears to be much more than an academic representation of an exemplary, but distant, religious ideal. We return to the nature and extent of each Mendicant Order's interest in the eremitic life, and the idea of religious reform, in a later chapter. The next chapter turns to an in-depth analysis of the tabernacle itself, and the cultural context in which this image of the desert was made and experienced.

Chapter Two

The Edinburgh Tabernacle: a thirteenth-century image of the desert

The image of the desert contained within the Edinburgh Tabernacle appears alongside scenes from the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, in a format that appears to be completely unique. This chapter addresses the novelty of this exceptional painting in relation to the visual culture of the late Duecento. It considers the tabernacle's subject-matter, composition and authorship, in addition to its structure and potential function. The narrative content of the entire panel - an important aspect of its originality - is considered here in some depth. In addition to the unusual combination of iconography, the presence of a small-scale narrative image that is unrelated to the life of Christ or the Virgin, at the centre of a large panel with shutters, appears to be unrepeated. The eremitic landscape is on a smaller scale than the scenes in the lateral wings, and so detailed that it necessitates close scrutiny. It lacks both a clear focal point and an obvious dedicatory saint, yet it is presented alongside a Christological cycle in a manner more commonly found of iconic images of the Virgin and Child. The reasons for this juxtaposition, and its impact, are given due consideration in what follows. Despite its radical novelty, the Edinburgh Tabernacle may be profitably compared to other paintings made in the late thirteenth century, both in certain visual details and in its overall structure. This chapter aims to shed new light on the object and its content. It considers its present appearance, including its restorations and current attribution, drawing on technical analysis undertaken in Spring 2018 - which was prompted by my research - at the National Galleries of Scotland.²⁷⁹ And it seeks to reposition the tabernacle in art-historical discourse, asserting its previously overlooked importance in late-Duecento painting.

²⁷⁹ My thanks to the National Galleries of Scotland, and especially to Aidan Weston-Lewis, curator, for consenting to this analysis and allowing me access to the painting as it was being carried out, and to Lesley Stevenson, conservator, for her time and expertise.

The first part of this chapter focuses on the lateral panels and pediment of the tabernacle, which find close parallels in contemporary Italian panel painting. They are in themselves distinctive, however, with several notable features that help to narrow down the tabernacle's date and place of origin. At the top of the right-hand wing is the *Flagellation of Christ* (figure 18). The slender figure of Christ is at the centre of two assailants, with his hands tied to a delicate, twisted column. His lowered head leans towards the left and his naked body is marked with bloody wounds. The flagellant to the left is shown in an unusual crouching position, in part because this part of the picture field is constrained by the curve of the wing itself, giving an impression of exaggerated brutality. Both of Christ's attackers bear thickly knotted *flagella*. Beneath the broad vermilion border of the scene is an inscription in black pigment, now barely legible: *hic flagellatur dominus*. Traces of lettering beneath each of the framed episodes in the wings indicate that they once possessed similar short titles, but none of the others can be reconstructed.

The Flagellation marks the beginning of Christ's physical suffering in the narrative of the Synoptic Gospels, and images of this event appear frequently in thirteenth-century passion sequences on panel.²⁸⁰ It encouraged an affective response in the viewer and emphasised the physical suffering of Christ prior to his Crucifixion.²⁸¹ Its conventional inclusion in contemporary Passion cycles indicates its potency as an image, and its relevance for contemporary religious experience. For the members of confraternities which practiced self-flagellation, this particular experience of Christ could be directly emulated, allowing a participant to experience the Passion bodily as well as imaginatively.²⁸² It was a powerful symbol of Christ's earthly sacrifice prior to his death. The relatively sparse composition of the scene in the tabernacle, with Christ tied to a slender column against a simple, horizontally-defined background, is close to that of a hinged panel (c.1290) now in Berlin (figure

²⁸⁰ Schiller 1972, 66-67. The Flagellation is the most commonly found passion scene of contemporary cycles on panel, particularly those in tabernacles. It appears in 30 out of 53 panel paintings with passion cycles listed in Garrison, and in 15 of 20 tabernacles or parts thereof.

²⁸¹ Prandi 1962, 499.

²⁸² A processional cross belonging to an Umbrian confraternity shows the *Flagellation of Christ* on the same scale as the *Crucifixion* on the obverse, which demonstrates the perceived concordance between the two events. Santi 1969, cat. 13, 35-37. On flagellant confraternities, see chapter four below, p. 229-235.

19). In both of these images the flagellants bear prominent, thrice-knotted *flagella*.²⁸³ In other contemporary Flagellations, such as a small panel attributed to Cimabue and now in the Frick Collection, New York, artists experimented with the postures of the scourgers, occasionally prompted by an irregularly-shaped picture field, in order to emphasise the violence of the event (figure 20).²⁸⁴ None, however, repeat the specific posture of the left-hand flagellant in the tabernacle, which seems to represent an innovation of the artist.

Beneath the *Flagellation* is a scene which conflates three separate episodes in the Gospels; the Mocking of Christ, Crowning with Thorns and Trial before the High Priests (figure 21).²⁸⁵ In the mocking of the Jews, Christ is buffeted with sticks and blindfold, and in his second mocking by the Romans, he is robed in purple and crowned with thorns.²⁸⁶ The trial before the high priests describes how Caiaphas and Annas condemn Christ to be judged by Pilate and ultimately put to death.²⁸⁷ This episode in the tabernacle's Passion narrative is dense and complex. Christ is at the centre of the image, isolated between a clamorous crowd to the left, bearing torches and lances, and the priests to the right, who sit on a raised dais before a building and point their fingers in condemnation. Several figures among the crowd, in addition to the two priests, are identified by their headscarves and long beards as Jews. Christ is seated, crowned head bowed, on a throne-like chair below the dais, indicating his humility. The chair is reminiscent of the seat of the Heavenly Virgin in images of the *Maestà*, and may represent his future triumph over ignorance and death. One hand hangs limply in his lap and the other gestures towards the priests,

²⁸³ This may indicate a Franciscan origin for the image. The vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which were symbolised by the thrice-knotted rope worn by the Franciscans, are considered in Flora 2014, 159-160.

²⁸⁴ The two scourgers are forced to the left of the column in a painted cross of 1261 by Coppo di Marcovaldo, in which the picture field is constrained by the intrusion of the central crucified Christ. Meiss 1957, 42-63.

²⁸⁵ The Buffeting or Derision of Christ and the Crowning with Thorns, which are two separate episodes in the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels, are quite often conflated in thirteenth-century passion scenes. However the Trial of Christ was usually kept separate. Derbes 1996, 95.

²⁸⁶ Of the 53 panel paintings with passion cycles listed in Garrison, 17 include either the *Mocking* or the *Trial*, or both. See Schiller 1972, 58 and 69-72.

²⁸⁷ John 18:28. In this visual context, they also point towards the Crucifixion, on the other side of the tabernacle.

to draw attention to their judgement.²⁸⁸ As far as I am aware, the conflation of these three separate episodes of the Passion into a single image is distinctive and unique.²⁸⁹

The tabernacle *Mocking and Trial of Christ* is comparable to two separate episodes on the apron of a painted crucifix by Coppo di Marcovaldo, dated to 1261 (figures 22 & 23). The gestures and placement of the priests in the tabernacle, in addition to the raised hand of Christ, are very close to those in Coppo's *Trial of Christ*. The *Mocking of Christ* in the same crucifix shows Christ seated on a raised throne, head bowed and blindfold, as a predominantly Jewish crowd wield sticks and blow shofar horns. Both the tenor of this image, which indicates the noise and chaos of the event, and the posture of Christ, are directly comparable to the scene in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The dense crowd to the left of the tabernacle *Mocking and Trial* is similar to a part of the fresco showing the *Betrayal and Capture of Christ* (1288-1290), in the Upper Church of San Francesco at Assisi (figure 24). Both images depict the crowd as a jumble of faces and helmets, creating a sense of claustrophobic violence. In the fresco, a pattern is created by the lances and lanterns silhouetted against the sky above the heads of the figures. This technique is almost replicated at the top left corner of the *Mocking and Trial* scene in the tabernacle. It is notable that both this fresco, and the *croce dipinta* by Coppo di Marcovaldo, were made for Franciscan contexts. The strong narrative element in images of the Mocking and Trial of Christ make clear the culpability of the Jews for the Crucifixion, and the violence he suffered in the lead-up to his death. This corresponds with a Franciscan preference for narrative images, particularly those which encouraged an engagement with the physical and emotional torture endured by Christ. Ideologically, it also reflects the anti-semitic rhetoric, and proselytising

²⁸⁸ Their raised hands suggest a dialogue or disputation, perhaps a reflection of contemporary efforts to convert unbelievers. This theory, put forward most notably by Anne Derbes, has been challenged by Claire Sandford-Couch in a PhD dissertation of 2014, 110-155. The emphasis in the tabernacle scene, like that of Coppo di Marcovaldo, does appear to centre on the Jewish condemnation and mocking of Christ. It is this part of the trial (rather than the trial before Herod) that is chosen for inclusion in the cycle. Derbes 1996, 88.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 74 and n.7.

mission, of the Friars Minor.²⁹⁰ The unique composition of the scene in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, which combines the *Mocking* and *Trial* into a single episode, suggests that each of these incidents in the Gospel narrative were sufficiently important to demand inclusion in the abbreviated Passion cycle.

The next episode in the tabernacle Passion cycle is the *Crucifixion*, at the top of its left-hand wing. The narrative is made up of two scenes occupying separate frames; three grieving angels in the smaller, curved upper field, and the *Crucifixion* proper in the rectilinear frame below (figures 25 & 26). In the principal image, Christ's pale and slender body swings out to the left of a dark blue cross in an exaggerated curve, and three angels hover beside him, catching the blood which falls from his wounds. He is shown dead, but his expression is one of peaceful repose. At the foot of the cross to the left, the Virgin and St John stand together, hands clasped, and to the right the Centurion points to the crucified Christ.²⁹¹ The three grieving angels in the field above display dramatic gestures of mourning, and one covers its face with its hands.²⁹² They are sharply truncated and wear colourful robes. Their presence indicates the participation and proximity of Heaven in the earthly event of the Crucifixion, and intensify the pathos of the scene below.

The tabernacle *Crucifixion* appears to be closely related to Cimabue's monumental fresco in the south transept of the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi. (c.1280) (figure 27). The relationship is evident in the composition of the whole, in the stance and gesture of the red-robed centurion at the right, the exaggerated sway of Christ's body, the presence of multiple grieving angels and the Virgin and St John standing together at the foot of the cross. However, this is not a copy and there is a significant difference. In the tabernacle *Crucifixion*, Christ's feet

²⁹⁰ By 1254, authority for the Inquisition in central Italy was centred in Florence, at the Franciscan convent of Santa Croce. The *Rule* of 1223 contains a chapter on the conversion of the Saracens and other unbelievers, and in his *Commentary on Luke*, Bonaventure wrote about the 'malice' of the Jews who conspired against Christ. *Ibid.*, 89-90. An alternative view is put forward in Daniel 1975, 55-59.

²⁹¹ 'When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he said unto his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then said he to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.' John 19:26-27; Matt 27:54.

²⁹² The mourning angels, with their sharply truncated bodies, are similar to those found in Crusader paintings, and others made for a Franciscan context, including the fresco at Assisi discussed above, and a *Lamentation* scene from the high altarpiece of San Francesco al Prato, Perugia. Derbes and Neff 2004, 460.

are attached to the cross with only one nail, whereas in the fresco at Assisi, his feet are fastened with two, a formulation which was more commonly used in Italy until the end of the thirteenth century.²⁹³ The earliest images of a three-nail Crucifixion are found in twelfth-century Germany. Subsequently it appears in thirteenth-century images from the Crusader States, such as the Perugia Missal (figure 28). In Italy, Crucifixions with three nails appeared earlier and more frequently in sculptural representations, including Nicola Pisano's baptistry pulpit in Pisa (c.1260), as an effective means of accentuating the excruciating twist in Christ's body and legs, and thus the physical suffering he endured.²⁹⁴ It became more widely used in panel painting in Umbria and Tuscany towards the end of the thirteenth century, particularly after the monumental crucifix of Giotto at Santa Maria Novella (1288), which shows Christ crucified with three nails. The three-nail formulation of the tabernacle *Crucifixion*, which does not unduly emphasise Christ's suffering, may allude to the Trinity, to his nakedness on the cross, which caused him to cross his legs, or to an awareness of Greek sources which describe the Crucifixion with three nails.²⁹⁵ In addition, it indicates that the tabernacle was probably made closer to 1295 than to 1285.

Several other late-Duecento paintings bear comparison to the tabernacle *Crucifixion*. The figure of Christ has been called 'cimabuesque', because the subtle modelling of his torso and the bow of his head closely resemble Cimabue's monumental crucifix at San Domenico, Arezzo, and the transparent loincloth of Christ appears very close to the crucifix at Santa Croce in Florence (figure 29).²⁹⁶ The flat blue colour of the cross itself is strongly reminiscent of the latter *Crucifixion*, or those by the so-called 'Master of the Blue Crucifixes'.²⁹⁷ The use of costly lapis

²⁹³ Cames 1966, 185.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 185-202; Binski 1996, 46; Lipton 2005, 1184. The three-nail crucifix has also been found to predominate earlier in works associated with a Franciscan context - though this may reflect the higher number of surviving crucifixes made for the friars minor. Derbes and Neff 2004, 460; Cannon 2002a, 578.

²⁹⁵ The nakedness of Christ, and his crucifixion with three nails, is referenced in Pseudo-Bonaventure and Pseudo-Anselm, both of the thirteenth century. The three nail crucifixion is also mentioned in a celebrated Greek liturgical drama of the twelfth century. Cames 1966, 196; 198-199.

²⁹⁶ Garrison no. 375; Achenbach 1944, 129; Bagemihl 1999, 414; Boskovits 1988, 122-124; Tartuferi 1998, 398; Malquori 2012, 53-65. Dated to the 1260s and c.1280 respectively. Bellosi 1998, 40; 99.

²⁹⁷ Such as the example now kept in the Treasury Museum of San Francesco at Assisi. Cooper and Robson 2013, 67, fig. 65.

lazuli pigment in late thirteenth-century *croci dipinte* helped to make visible the precious materiality of the cross on which Christ died, and provided a rich contrast to the pallid tones of his flesh.²⁹⁸ It may be the case that this image was intended to refer both to the historical event of the Crucifixion, and to a specific painted crucifix, to underline the relationship between the painted image - which was frequently encountered hanging above the high altar in mendicant churches - the event itself, and the liturgical embodiment of Christ's sacrifice in the Eucharist. The linked figures of the Virgin and St John, who typically appear on opposite sides of the cross, are found in a small number of paintings from central Italy dating to the last quarter of the thirteenth century in addition to the fresco at Assisi, including a *sinopia* attributed to Coppo di Marcovaldo from the refectory at San Domenico, Pistoia (c.1280).²⁹⁹ Here, their tender relationship may be intended to echo that of the grieving monks at the funeral in the central panel of the tabernacle.

The *Harrowing of Hell, or Descent into Limbo*, at the lower corner of the right-hand wing, is notable for its inclusion in this short cycle because it is not commonly found in late thirteenth-century panel paintings (figure 30). The narrative is taken from the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which describes how Christ descended into Hell immediately after the Crucifixion, to confront Satan, defeat Death and offer redemption to Adam, Eve and the righteous of the Old Testament.³⁰⁰ In this image, Adam is dragged from Hell by the risen Christ as a powerful representation of the promise of salvation for all humanity.³⁰¹ The scene of redemption takes place beneath a dark and oppressive rocky landscape, inhabited by demons and plagued by fire, which dominates the image. The Saviour, to the left of the scene, is dressed in a bright white robe and holds a slender red cross in his hand, like a sceptre. He treads on the prone figure of Satan, who is crushed beneath the door of Hades. His commanding gaze is a strong contrast to the scenes of

²⁹⁸ Cannon 2002a, 576.

²⁹⁹ Now displayed in the chapter house. Cannon 2014, fig. 169. It is also found in a panel attributed to Guido da Siena, now in the Siena Pinacoteca, and in the left-hand terminal of the *croce dipinta* by Coppo di Marcovaldo, discussed above.

³⁰⁰ 'the King of Glory arrived in the form of a man, Lord of Majesty, who illuminated the eternal darkness'. *Gospel of Nicodemus*, XXI.3; XXI.2.

³⁰¹ Adam represents the father of mankind. In Byzantium the *Anastasis* was an important doctrinal image, representing the Orthodox position on Christ's dual nature and proving the heresy of monophysitism. Kartsonis 1986, 63

submission and suffering in the Passion cycle above, and it seems to extend the promise of salvation to the entire crowd of small figures beneath him.³⁰² Seen alongside the central panel of the tabernacle, which represents the death of a hermit and the ascension of his soul to Heaven, this image represents both a contrasting, chilling glimpse of torture, and a reassuring image of salvation, enacted by Christ himself.³⁰³

The *Descent into Limbo*, or *Anastasis*, features prominently in Byzantine visual culture as a paradigmatic image of the Resurrection.³⁰⁴ In thirteenth-century icons of the *Anastasis*, however, Christ is centrally placed, and Old Testament figures are shown emerging from tombs to either side, beneath a bifurcated rocky landscape.³⁰⁵ Italian images of *Limbo*, dating to the twelfth and early thirteenth century, generally follow this Byzantine format, but the scene is rare in Passion cycles of the last quarter of the thirteenth century (figure 31).³⁰⁶ The composition of *Limbo* in the tabernacle, with Christ to the left and an emphasis on the infernal landscape, differs markedly from these earlier examples in Italian painting.³⁰⁷ It may have been developed from eleventh-century Byzantine *Anastasis* images which show the topography of Hades as an opening beneath a prominent mountain.³⁰⁸ The dark and fiery rocks in this scene bear comparison to images of the *Last Judgement*,

³⁰² Including King David and John the Baptist, denoted with a crown and a halo respectively. In the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Prophet Isaiah is mentioned as he foretold that the dead would rise again; 'Thy dead men shall live, my slain shall rise again: awake, and give praise, ye that dwell in the dust' Isaiah 26:19; *Gospel of Nicodemus*, XXI.2

³⁰³ A very similar formulation of this scene appears in the frescoes of the Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi, by Pietro Lorenzetti c.1315-1319. Frugoni 2002, 48.

³⁰⁴ In Byzantium it was considered a doctrinal image, representing the Orthodox position on Christ's dual nature and proving the heresy of monophysitism. Kartsonis 1996, 63.

³⁰⁵ The broken, rocky landscape of the *Anastasis* refers to the rending of the earth at the moment of Christ's death; 'At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.' Matt 27:51-52; Kartsonis 1996, 207-209.

³⁰⁶ The scene reappears in early fourteenth-century Passion/Resurrection cycles, closely following the format used in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. For example, a Giottesque panel dated to c.1310, now in Munich, and in the same scene on the reverse of Duccio's *Maestà* (1308-1311). See Sciacca 2012, fig. 32.6, and Bellosi 1998, fig. 34, 242-243.

³⁰⁷ Sandberg-Vavalà 1929, 317.

³⁰⁸ Such as the *Anastasis* in the apse of Nea Moni, Chios, dating to the 12th century. Mouriki 1985, fig. 180.

especially a panel painting now in Grosseto attributed to the St Peter Master.³⁰⁹ The nightmarish character of the landscape indicates the proximity of Purgatory to the realms of Hell, and may function as a visual reminder of damnation alongside the promise of redemption. The tabernacle was made at a time when the idea of Purgatory - a physical location to which the soul was confined immediately after death - was being developed and refined.³¹⁰ The sins of the body had to be expiated in Purgatory before the soul was released and could then ascend to Heaven.³¹¹ Certain penitential actions undertaken in life bore a direct relation to the time an individual soul would spend in Purgatory; ascent to Heaven immediately after death was envisioned as the privilege of saints, in images such as the tabernacle's central panel, or those showing the *Death of St Francis*.³¹² The hellish character of Purgatory and the threat of protracted suffering after death functioned as a powerful motivation for good conduct, and individual penance, during life.

The final scene of the tabernacle Passion cycle, at the base of the left-hand wing, shows the *Holy Women at the Tomb* (figure 32).³¹³ This image is found frequently in comparable late thirteenth-century Passion cycles, representing the truth of the Resurrection experienced by the disciples and indicating Christ's triumph over death.³¹⁴ In the tabernacle scene, the three women approach the tomb from the left, carrying vessels of oil. They encounter an angel dressed in white, with vivid red skin, sitting on the edge of the empty tomb and gesturing towards its open door. Beneath the tomb is a group of sleeping guards and above the women's heads is a second angel, carrying a censer. Several idiosyncrasies in this scene are worth noting. The bright red skin of the seated angel is striking, and most likely denotes

³⁰⁹ Subblebine 1964, Cat. no. XVI.

³¹⁰ Le Goff 1984, 44-45.

³¹¹ The first pontifical definition of Purgatory was written by Innocent IV in 1254, and it was made doctrine at the Council of Lyons in 1274. *Ibid.*, 283-286.

³¹² The scene of post-mortem, or particular, judgement in the tabernacle and other images is discussed below, p. 83-84. For a full discussion of this topic see Brilliant 2005.

³¹³ Matt 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-7.

³¹⁴ Such as the Timken Dossal (figure 65). The scene appears in 21 of the 53 panel paintings with Passion cycles listed in Garrison, and is by far the most frequently represented Resurrection scene. In the New Testament cycle of the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi (c.1280-90, now destroyed), it is the final and culminating scene of the Life of Christ. Sandberg-Vavalà 1929, 234.

intense light.³¹⁵ Among contemporary images of the same scene, early fourteenth-century miniatures by Pacino di Bonaguida in the *Laudario of Sant'Agnese*, and an illuminated initial by the 'Master of 1311' contain similarly highly-coloured angels, suggesting that the artist of this scene in the tabernacle was aware of existing manuscript illuminations (figure 33).³¹⁶ This detail may, in addition, allude to the 'mighty angel' of Revelations 10:1; 'clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was on his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.'³¹⁷ Angels with red feet 'as pillars of fire' are found in the same scene in a panel by Coppo di Marcovaldo, and in the mosaics of the Baptistery in Florence (c.1260).³¹⁸ The pile of sleeping guards included in the Baptistery *Holy Women* is uncommon, but it is repeated almost exactly in the Edinburgh Tabernacle; the awkward tangle of sleeping bodies and limbs indicates that the artist of this scene was likely familiar with the Florentine mosaic.

The presence of a second angel, in addition to the messenger who sits on the empty tomb, is an additional notable feature of the *Holy Women at the Tomb*. This detail has very few extant parallels in Duecento painting.³¹⁹ A flying angel with a thurible appears in a late twelfth-century sculptural relief of this scene, from the pulpit which stood, until c.1300, in Pisa Cathedral.³²⁰ In the tabernacle as in the Pisan pulpit, this motif may be a liturgical reference, echoing the presence of the

³¹⁵ The use of red as an indicator of intense light in late-medieval Italian painting is discussed in Seidel and Calamai 2017.

³¹⁶ Sciacca 2012, cat. 45.9, 253. Another manuscript from the same workshop (Morgan Library MS M. 643, f.14) dated to c.1320 also features a bright red angel at the empty sepulchre. See *ibid.*, cat. 36. These images postdate the tabernacle but may indicate a pre-existing tradition in manuscript illuminations, possibly descended from Byzantine examples. In icons such as the thirteenth-century *St. Macarius with a Cherub*, now at Sinai, the angelic being is shown with red skin. Nelson and Collins 2006, cat. 24.

³¹⁷ cf. Matt 28:3, which describes the angel at the empty tomb; 'And his countenance was as lightning, and his raiment as snow.'

³¹⁸ *Corpus I.II*, pl.CXIX and 221-222.

³¹⁹ It corresponds to the account in the Gospel of John, although in this version it is only Mary Magdalene who sees the two angels. John 20:12.

³²⁰ The pulpit was moved to the Cathedral of Cagliari in the late thirteenth century and replaced by a new pulpit, made by Giovanni Pisano, on its completion in 1311. Novello 1995, 225-226.

thurifer at Mass.³²¹ The rising smoke of incense symbolised the ascent of prayer to Heaven, following the words in Revelations; ‘And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel.’³²² In the tabernacle, it augments the liturgical context of the monastic funeral, which takes place in the central panel. And like the scene of *Limbo* at the base of the opposite wing, it may also refer indirectly to the eschatological future and the inevitability of Final Judgement, described in the prophecies of the Apocalypse.

It is striking that there are two Resurrection scenes in the abbreviated Passion cycle of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, giving equal weight to the suffering of Christ prior to his Crucifixion, and his subsequent triumph over death. Comparable late-Duecento Passion cycles on panel prioritise episodes from before and immediately after the death of Christ, focusing on his pain, or on the grief of his disciples.³²³ In painted crosses with Passion cycles, the presence of multiple Resurrection scenes is strongly correlated with a central *Christus triumphans*, the upright and alive image of Christ on the cross which predominates in twelfth- and early thirteenth-century examples. A comparable emphasis in the Passion cycle of the tabernacle indicates the corresponding importance of the triumphant Christ, and the theme of salvation, in the object as a whole. The two Resurrection scenes appear alongside the funeral of the hermit in the central panel. This is a scene of mortality, grief and solemn commemoration, but the proximity of the *Descent into Limbo* and the *Holy Women at the Tomb* strongly indicate the hermit’s imminent salvation, which is pictured above the summit of the mountain. In addition, it aligns this process of ascension to Heaven with the redemption of mankind, suggesting a close correlation between the lives of the sainted hermits, and the sacrifice of Christ. The use of red robes for members of the clergy attendant at the funeral, noted in Chapter One, indicates either the concomitant celebration of the Passion, or the

³²¹ This hypothesis is supported by the presence of a second censuring angel in an illumination of the *Holy Women at the Tomb* in a late thirteenth-century liturgical manuscript known as the Limoges Missal. BNF Ms Lat. 9438, fol.76r. Sandberg-Vavalà 1929, 330.

³²² Rev. 8:4. An angel with a censer is present in the Revelation fresco of the left transept in the Upper Church at S Francesco Assisi, though the censer is now obliterated. Bellosi 1998, 197.

³²³ For example, in a painted dossal with twelve scenes of the Passion now in the Timken Museum (c. 1300-1305), only two episodes represent the Resurrection (figure 65). Similarly in the extended Passion cycle on the reverse of Duccio’s *Maestà* (1308-1311), only four of the nineteen Passion scenes (beginning with the *Trial before Pilate*) deal with the Resurrection. Derbes 1996, 8; Bellosi and Ragionieri 2003, 208-216.

sacrificial 'martyrdom' of the dead saint, and appears to confirm this relationship.³²⁴ The connection between the scene of eremitic life, and the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, does not only look to the past. Specific details in the two Resurrection scenes discussed above encourage the theologically literate viewer to think on the approaching Last Judgement, and to view the lives of the hermits through an eschatological lens. It is worth reiterating that this highly unusual juxtaposition of subject-matter - eremitic life and death, and the Passion and Resurrection of Christ - is unrepeated in contemporary or subsequent panel painting. It must have been carefully planned and considered, and executed with a clear intention. There seems no doubt that the Edinburgh Tabernacle was conceived as a complex and multivalent work.

The image of Christ Redeemer flanked by angels, located in the gabled pediment above the central panel of the tabernacle, functions as a visual and structural bridge between the central and lateral components of the object (figure 34). It is an image of the immutable resurrected Christ as Divine *Logos*, with a book in one hand and the other hand raised in a gesture of blessing.³²⁵ The presence of six adoring angels, three to either side of the Redeemer, creates a strong sense of symmetry and heavenly hierarchy, and defines this component of the tabernacle as a separate, celestial realm. Two of the angels carry censers, a motif commonly found in contemporary images of the *Maestà*.³²⁶ Here, it also echoes the liturgical context of the funeral scene below.³²⁷ Comparable representations of Christ Redeemer appear in the circular *cimase* of painted crosses, such as the *Crucifixion* by Cimabue at Arezzo, as a sign of his Resurrection.³²⁸ A tabernacle attributed to Duccio and now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, includes a similar gabled pediment with the *Redeemer and Angels*, above an arched central panel showing

³²⁴ See p. 58 above.

³²⁵ Cf. John 1:1; 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

³²⁶ Such as the panel of the *Virgin and Child Enthroned* in the National Gallery, London, by Margarito d'Arezzo c.1263-4. Gordon 2011, cat. 564.

³²⁷ cf. Malquori 2012, 53.

³²⁸ Examples of the Redeemer in a crowning pediment include the *Maestà* by Guido da Siena (1270s or early 1280s), now at San Domenico in Siena, and a polyptych made c.1305 for the Dominican church of the same city - now in the Siena Pinacoteca - by Duccio di Buoninsegna. Bartolini 2004, 200-202.

the *Crucifixion* (1311-1318) (figure 35).³²⁹ In these examples, and in the vast majority of contemporary panel paintings, an image of the Redeemer appears above either the *Virgin and Child* or the *Crucifixion*.³³⁰ Once again, the juxtaposition with a narrative image that bears no relation to the life of the Virgin or of Christ, is highly unusual. It serves to reiterate the relationship between the lives of the hermits and the life of Christ noted above, and to augment the Resurrection as a central theme of the entire object.

Against the clear episodic narratives of the Passion cycle, the small scale and wealth of fine detail in the tabernacle's central narrative are striking (figure 36). More than ninety hermits are present in the mountainous landscape, and the absence of a clear compositional focus encourages the viewer to first scan the entire scene. The rich ochre of the landscape is dominant, and the fine gold leaf used for the sky and the haloes of sainted hermits catches the light. Among the steep rocks, which are flat-topped and highlighted with white pigment, there is abundant, decorative foliage, with small red and white flowers and dark green trees. The hermits travel through this fertile landscape in small groups, following the contours of the mountain. They wear grey and white robes, and many are elderly, with stooped postures, long grey beards, and staffs. Some of the monks are incapacitated, and travel with assistance: on the back of their brethren; in a carriage drawn by lions; on the back of an ass; or shuffling along the floor with hand crutches. Some gesture towards each other, and all have solemn expressions as they move down the mountain towards the funeral at its base. Between the groups of travelling hermits, the faces of solitaries can be seen peering from small caves. There are scattered, red-roofed buildings, dozens of birds of different species, and wild animals. At the centre of the mountain is a tall column with pink volutes supporting a fenced superstructure. A stylite saint, framed by this construction, inclines his head towards the funeral below.

³²⁹ Ragionieri 1989, 138.

³³⁰ I know of no other example in which the Redeemer surmounts an image of another saint, or a narrative scene.

Following the journey of the hermits down the slopes of the mountain, the scene at the lower edge of the painting emerges as its primary narrative. The funeral of the sainted hermit is demarcated from the rest of the landscape by a band of rock (figure 2). A dense crowd of figures gathers around the deceased, lying on a bier of rushes at their centre. Several hermits kneel by the bier to touch or kiss the saint's body, and many have expressions of intense grief; one hermit, to the left of the funeral, appears to be overcome. The obsequies are conducted by a number of priests, and a figure by the head of the deceased holds a censer high over his head. To the left is a church and monastic buildings, and to the right, more hermits arrive. On an axis with this scene of death and mourning, at the top of the composition, the soul of the deceased is carried to heaven in a cloth held between four angels (figure 13). The figure is young and clothed in a white habit, and his hands are folded in prayer. The ascent of the dead saint's soul is witnessed by several hermits close to the dual summit of the mountain, who gesture upwards in prayer and exclamation. Close by, another angel flies down towards a hermit's cell bearing food held in a cloth, and he reaches out to receive the offering.

Prolonged and attentive looking reveals layers of additional detail within the desert landscape. There are three winged demons with sharp claws, one falling headfirst down the mountain and another attempting to sabotage the journey of a hermit. The largest presents an effigy of a woman at the door of a hermit's cell (figures 10 & 11). There is a spring, providing water for hermits and wild beasts, and at the right-hand edge of the panel, a monk is fishing. Above the band of rock which separates the funeral from the rest of the image is a miniature scene of hunters with dogs chasing deer, while elsewhere in the mountain the hermits interact tenderly with wild beasts. Above the doorways to some of the huts are painted lunettes showing half-length saints, and above another, near the centre of the image, is an arch of black and white voussoirs. On a similar scale to these minute details are the three inscriptions contained within books, discussed in the previous chapter. The overall effect is of a desert landscape teeming with life, and a captivating abundance of narrative detail.

This image of eremitic life appears to be entirely new in Italian painting. The following visual analysis of the tabernacle's constituent parts identifies aspects that

bear comparison with other narrative paintings made in the late Duecento, exploring its most likely date and place of origin. It considers the funeral of a saint and the ascent of his soul; the visitation of an angel and the presence of demons; the landscape setting, with its apparently incidental detail; the textual inscriptions; and the narrative content of the painting as a whole.

Comparable images of a saint's death can be found in a Franciscan context, such as the *Death of St Francis* in the Upper Church of San Francesco (c.1296), and the *Funeral of St Clare* (c.1280), in a panel now kept at Wellesley, Massachusetts (figures 37 & 38). In both of these images, the number and status of mourners, and their evident grief, serve to indicate the reverence with which the saints were treated during their lifetimes. A liturgical context is indicated in these examples, and in the tabernacle, by the presence of clergy, candles, incense and processional crosses. It was important to indicate the proper conduct of the obsequies, as part of a 'good death' and a prerequisite for immediate admission to Heaven.³³¹ The humility of Francis and Clare, and of the anonymous hermit-saint, is still evident amongst the ceremony, as they are laid out on a simple board, or on a bier of rushes. These peaceful images of death and mourning contrast with violent narratives of a saint's death, such as the *Beheading of John the Baptist*, in the *Vita* panel now in the Siena Pinacoteca, or *St Margaret Beheaded*, from a *Vita* panel by the St Cecilia Master (c.1300) (figure 39). Martyrdom implicitly confirmed the saint's immediate admission into heaven, but where the manner of dying itself was not noteworthy (as in the case of Francis and Clare, for example), the manner of death, that is, the funeral, took on a greater significance in narratives of their lives.

From the mid-thirteenth century, the representation of a saint's death began to be used as an opportunity to show the immediate ascension of their soul to heaven.³³² The motif of the elevation of the soul is prominent in the Upper Church scene of the *Death of St Francis*, in which the half-length figure of the saint, who displays the wounds of Christ in his hands and chest, is carried to heaven in an orb

³³¹ Binski 1996, 32.

³³² The motif of the soul transported to heaven by angels is descended from tomb-sculptures north of the Alps, such as the tomb of Henri de France at Rheims Cathedral (late twelfth century). Markow 1983, 101.

by four angels (figure 37).³³³ In the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the soul of the deceased is carried in a striped cloth, hammock-like, by four angels. A very similar motif appears in the *Vita* panel of St Margaret of Antioch, mentioned above, in which the soul of the martyr saint is shown carried to heaven on a cloth, between two angels (figure 39).³³⁴ Earlier representations of this theme, both from a Franciscan context, appear in the so-called Bardi dossal, c.1245, which similarly represents the soul carried on a cloth by two angels, and the Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi, in which the saint's soul is shown in a *mandorla* (figure 40).³³⁵ The motif of a half-length figure carried in a cloth by angels was also found outside of a funerary context, as a visual shorthand for a distinct heavenly realm, seen in a manuscript illumination of the *Madonna della Cintola*, c.1285.³³⁶

The heavenly transport of the soul appears with relative frequency in Italian art of the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.³³⁷ This coincides with the increasing importance placed on the exemplary manner of a saint's forbearance in suffering, as part of the canonisation Processes.³³⁸ It also reflects an increased doctrinal interest in the particular judgement of the soul; its destination immediately after death and prior to the Final Judgement. The visual image of the soul's transport to Heaven was particularly potent in the case of recently-deceased saints such as Francis, whose transition from physical body to heavenly intercessor was crucial to the success of their cults.³³⁹ In the scene of the desert hermits in the tabernacle, the inclusion of this theme illustrates the unarguable saintliness of the deceased. In death he has returned to his youthful form and occupies an

³³³ Its use at Assisi seems to have ensured its subsequent dispersal through the *provincia romana* in the early fourteenth century. Brilliant 2005, 74-80.

³³⁴ Santa Margherita a Montici, Florence. It is attributed to the St Cecilia Master. *Corpus III.1*, pl.IX; 138-146.

³³⁵ The upper part of the scene is largely obscured, but the *mandorla* with flanking angels can still be discerned. Malafarina 2005, 46 and fig.37.

³³⁶ A psalter and breviary, MS. Harley 2928, British Library, 15v. Conti 1981, fig. 31.

³³⁷ It is found infrequently before this date, for example in the twelfth-century frescoes of St Anthony and St Paul the First Hermit at St Angelo in Formis. Brilliant 2005, 317.

³³⁸ As, for example, in the Processes of canonisation for the Augustinian nun, Clare of Montefalco (c. 1268-1308), in 1318-19. Twenty-three articles of the Processes narrate the manner of her death. Vauchez 1997, 512.

³³⁹ Brilliant 2005, 321.

intermediate heavenly realm above the mountain with the angels. It is a vivid representation of salvation, the reward of a holy life and proper death.³⁴⁰

The visitation of an angel, in the upper reaches of the tabernacle's mountainous landscape, is closely comparable to an episode from the life of Mary Magdalene which appears in a *Vita* panel of c.1280 (figures 12 & 41).³⁴¹ The penitent Magdalene is shown reaching out of her cave in the desert as she receives a circular host from an angel. According to her legend, Mary Magdalene spent thirty years as an ascetic in the wilderness, eating no earthly food, and in the late thirteenth century she was often represented as an emaciated figure, with long hair covering her naked body.³⁴² The theme of angelic exchange found in this image of Mary Magdalene indicates the contiguity of the wilderness with a heavenly realm, and in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, is evidence of the special privilege of the hermit. The wilderness inhabited by the hermits is remote, accessible more easily to the angels than to ordinary mortals, and in the absence of earthly food they are - in some cases - sustained by the direct intervention of the angels.

The demons which inhabit the rocks of the desert landscape have solid black bodies, feathered wings and sharply clawed feet. The closest comparison in Duecento painting is a figure of Satan from the lateral wing of an Umbrian tabernacle (c.1280) (figure 42).³⁴³ It is found in the episode from the life of Christ narrating his Temptation in the wilderness. Christ is seated in a rocky landscape, calmly confronting the large, winged figure of Satan and rebuking his offers.³⁴⁴ As we have seen in Chapter One, demons were often understood as the source of an ascetic's torments, echoing the experience of Christ in the wilderness. In a panel of

³⁴⁰ The same motif was also used in early fourteenth-century representations of local *beati*, such as the marble funerary monument of Beata Margherita of Cortona (d.1297, but canonised only in 1728), at the church of Santa Margherita in Cortona (c.1310-20). Cannon 2002, 291-2. In the case of venerated (but not canonised) individuals, the representation of the soul's transport to heaven effectively indicated their sanctity and anticipated official recognition. Brilliant 2005, 321.

³⁴¹ The Magdalene *Vita* panel is discussed in Cannon 2002, 301-305.

³⁴² This is in stark contrast to her former sinful life as a prostitute, in which she is frequently described, and shown, as a voluptuous woman in elegant clothes. *Legenda Aurea I*, 380; Kaftal 1952, 717-724; Jansen 2001, 124-5.

³⁴³ Santi 1969, cat.14, 37.

³⁴⁴ Luke 4:1-13.

c.1260 by Margherito d'Arezzo, now in the National Gallery, London, a scene from the life of St Benedict vividly illustrates his physical response to the temptations of the flesh which are sent to him by the devil (figure 43).³⁴⁵ No demons are present, but the fiery flames of lust are visible inside the mouth of his cave. The saint is shown naked and face-down, rolling among thorns to purify his body. In the tabernacle, the demons interact directly with the hermits in the desert. They are as large as the hermits themselves, like the image of Satan in confrontation with Christ. These substantial demons are not confined to the realms of Hell, like the demons in *Last Judgement* scenes, or to the ether, as are the small, bat-like demons in contemporary images of exorcism miracles.³⁴⁶ They are solid, physical creatures which exist among the hermits as a manifest threat to their spiritual and earthly journeys.

The desert landscape of the tabernacle's central panel is notable for its complexity and coherence. Representations of the wilderness dating to the second half of the thirteenth century are frequently summary indications of place, far smaller in scale than the figures which inhabit them.³⁴⁷ Here, by contrast, the mountain is conceived as a unified whole and the figures appear to inhabit its contours. The angular rocks, which rise steeply up to a bifurcated summit, invite comparison with the mosaics of the Florence Baptistery, particularly those in the *Life of John the Baptist* cycle. In the scene of John going into the wilderness, there are similar dual summits and steep-sided, flat-topped rocks (figure 44). The decorative, dark-outlined trees in the mosaics are also comparable to those in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The inhabitants of this landscape share an established eremitic

³⁴⁵ NG 564. Gordon 2011, 314-323; 'Soon the devil brought to the holy man's mind the image of a woman whom he had once seen, and he was so aroused by the memory of her that he was almost overcome with desire, and began to think of quitting his solitary way of life. But suddenly, touched by the grace of God, he came to himself, shed his garment, and rolled in the thorns and brambles which abounded thereabouts; and he emerged so scratched and torn over his whole body that the pain in his flesh cured the wound of his spirit.' *Legenda Aurea I*, 187.

³⁴⁶ *The Expulsion of Demons from Arezzo* in the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi (c.1288) shows a cloud of small demons in the sky above the city, and in a scene from the St Peter vita panel (c. 1280), now in the Siena Pinacoteca, the *Fall of Simon Magus*, with demons present, similarly takes place in the sky. Malafarina 2005, 165 fig.167.

³⁴⁷ See, for example, figure 42.

typology; they are largely barefoot, bearded and with long grey hair (figure 7).³⁴⁸ Their staffs, long beards and bare feet correspond with attributes commonly given to John the Baptist, who spent a large proportion of his life in the Jordanian desert. Yet their clothing is not rough, as the Baptist's was normally shown, and their habits are alike, though not identical. They seem to be members of the same congregation, united in their grief for a founding saint who wears a similar habit. In this respect, the hermits correspond to the friars who gather around the bier of St Francis, wearing the same knotted cord around their waists (figure 37). Yet the long hair of the hermits means that they are highly unlikely to represent the members of a contemporary western Order, who were primarily clean-shaven and tonsured.³⁴⁹ Their sombre and aged faces are comparable to those of Old Testament prophets, such as the prophets beneath the Virgin's throne in Cimabue's *Santa Trinita Maestà* (figure 45). This gives them an air of wisdom and authority, and may intentionally indicate the historical nature of the image.

Several of the smallest components in the eremitic landscape find parallels in late thirteenth-century manuscript illuminations. Marginalia, narrative details and historiated initials required great precision on the part of the artist, and arguably permitted greater scope for invention and idiosyncrasy than did the subject-matter of panel painting. The obscure hunting scene in the tabernacle's central panel has a whimsical character which bears comparison to marginalia in a manuscript of c.1270 now in the Vatican Library (figures 16 and 46).³⁵⁰ A hunter with a long spear, similar to those carried by the hunters in the tabernacle, climbs up an initial to attack a perching parrot. Further parallels with miniature animals can be found in other manuscripts; a hunting-dog chases a hare along the top margin of a contemporary French manuscript of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, while a lion and a lamb occupy the decorative scrolls of a bible made in c.1265-70 (figure 47).³⁵¹ In a Bible

³⁴⁸ Earlier images of hermits can be found in a late twelfth-century mural in the narthex of the Benedictine church of Sant'Angelo in Formis. In scenes from the lives of St Antony and St Paul of Thebes, both men are shown as bearded and elderly. The fresco may be the work of a Greek artist, and is certainly influenced by the legacy of Byzantine art and culture at Monte Cassino. Demus 1970, 297-298.

³⁴⁹ Derbes and Neff 2004, 453.

³⁵⁰ *Istituzioni*, Vat. lat.1434. fol.134r. Conti 1981, fig. 26.

³⁵¹ Marginal decoration for Psalm 69 with a lion and a lamb, BN lat.22, 201. *Ibid.*, fig.18.

from central Italy, a historiated initial showing *Daniel between the Lions* contains seven beasts, close in type to the lions found among the rocks in the central panel of the tabernacle (figure 48).³⁵² Despite the broad lack of pictorial depth or illusion of space in the tabernacle landscape, the vastness of the wilderness is indicated by subtle changes in the scale of the figures, and by a pictorial device that is also found in manuscript illuminations. Close to the summit of the mountain, the heads of two travellers can be seen disappearing into an imagined distance, behind its right flank. This technique is very similar to that employed in a *Deposition*, from a late thirteenth-century Psalter now in Bologna, which shows figures partially concealed among the rocks (figures 49 & 50).³⁵³ Detailed landscape scenes on a miniature scale were developed in the manuscripts of the early fourteenth century, particularly in the work of the Master of the St George Codex.³⁵⁴ This type of virtuoso miniature painting, with small narrative scenes rich in natural detail, is prefigured in the central panel of the Edinburgh tabernacle. It seems highly likely that the traditions and techniques of miniature painting were significant to its makers.

The inclusion of tiny, apparently insignificant details within the eremitic landscape suggest that it was intentionally adapted, to increase its immediacy to a thirteenth-century audience. Above the doorways to two of the hermit's huts are painted lunettes with half-length figures (figure 51). They are too small to be identified with certainty, although one appears to be a saint, his hand raised in blessing, and the other, with a blue robe, could conceivably represent the Virgin. Such images-within-images appear in other contemporary paintings, sometimes on a similarly small scale.³⁵⁵ An example can be found in a *Stigmatisation of St Francis* now in the Louvre, by Giotto (c.1300), in which the barely-visible terminal of a painted crucifix at the door of a hut identifies the presence of an altar in the wilderness of La Verna (figure 52). The same hut has a painted lunette over its entrance. These images-within-images are not an essential part of the narrative. They exist, in both the Louvre *Stigmatisation* and the Edinburgh Tabernacle, as an important detail of the visual context, indicating the presence of altars or devotional

³⁵² The so-called 'Miniature di Imola', Vat. lat. 22 326 v. Early fourteenth century. *Ibid.*, fig. 37.

³⁵³ The 'Miniature di Gerona', c.1275. Bologna Biblioteca Universitaria, cod. 346, 308v. *Ibid.*, fig. 76.

³⁵⁴ *Corpus III.IX*, 34-37 and pl. LXVI - LXXXI.

³⁵⁵ For a survey of this phenomenon in late-medieval and early modern painting, see Bokody 2015.

imagery in a remote location, and increasing the 'believability' of the image.³⁵⁶ The black and white voussoirs of an arch over the door of another of the hermit's huts stands out against the predominant red-brown of the simple building (figure 53). This evident addition to the building is strongly reminiscent of late-medieval Tuscan church architecture, but appears incongruous in the desert.³⁵⁷ Another, similar, Tuscan arch can be found in a predella panel attributed to the Master of the Corsi Crucifix, showing the *Last Meeting of Sts Peter and Paul* (1320s) (figure 54).³⁵⁸ In this image, as in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the insertion of a local and contemporary architectural detail functions to 'update' the setting of a remote historical narrative and to increase its impact in the present.

The tiny inscriptions written on the pages of three books among the desert landscape are highly unusual for their inclusion in a painting of this size (figures 3-5).³⁵⁹ Inscriptions within an image are commonly much larger, and function to identify or explicate the role of the associated figure. The inscriptions in the tabernacle, however, conform to the tiny scale of the figures in the landscape, and are difficult to read with the naked eye. There are inscriptions of comparable size and precision in contemporary manuscript illuminations such as the Santa Croce Bible, dated to c.1300. This manuscript belonged to the Franciscan convent of Florence, and it was mostly complete by 1270-80.³⁶⁰ Two miniatures were added to the Bible after it arrived in Florence, presumably by a local artist, and it is these images that bear close comparison to the Edinburgh Tabernacle.³⁶¹ The initial on fol. 162v shows the Old Testament figure Nehemiah instructing a youth, with a book held open to face the viewer (figure 55). It appears to contain the words *Verba*

³⁵⁶ Bokody describes this type of image-within-image as a 'reality effect', an apparently insignificant detail embedded within a visual narrative, which contributes to the perceived 'realism' of the image. Bokody 2015, 59. A miraculous icon of the Virgin appears in a fresco of c.1290 (now detached) from S Agnese fuori le mura in Rome, but here, in contrast, it is integral to the narrative. Righetti 2000, 158; Andaloro 2006, 72, fig.12.

³⁵⁷ The curved shape, misalignment with the structure of the hut, and contrasting tones, cause this tiny detail to stand out prominently from the rest of the scene.

³⁵⁸ *Corpus III*.IX, 152 and pl. XXIII. It is now in the Museo Bardini, Florence.

³⁵⁹ See chapter one above, p.54-59.

³⁶⁰ It is likely to have been made in Bologna. Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Cod Plut. V dex 1. EAM VIII, 435.

³⁶¹ It is a medium-large Bible, 352x240mm. fol. 138r. Marques 1987, 203.

Nehem[iae] fili[i] Helc[hiae] ('The words of Nehemiah the son of Helchias'), which open the Book of Nehemiah.³⁶² The inscription in the manuscript repeats, in miniature, a part of the narrative it illustrates. It is a book-within-a-book, a mirror of the viewer's own attentive reading or instruction to others.³⁶³ The tabernacle inscriptions invite a viewer to step close towards the painting, to 'read' the image attentively, and to become a participant by remembering the words that follow those present in the image; the rest of Psalm one, the response to the versicle from Psalm sixty-nine, or the words from the Mass of the Dead. Furthermore, stylistic parallels can be drawn between the old man Nehemiah, and the aged hermits of the tabernacle (figure 56). Both have expressive eyes and long grey hair that rises from the forehead, painted with fine adjacent strokes of different tones. This visual relationship, in addition to the inscriptions, may indicate a connection between the making of the tabernacle, and artistic production associated with the convent of Santa Croce.³⁶⁴

The image of eremitic life at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle remains unparalleled among contemporary images, primarily in its sheer complexity of narrative detail.³⁶⁵ The principal narrative of the scene - that of the monastic funeral, and the hermits who attend it - is not visually dominant, and does not account for the profusion of detail in the rest of the painting. The image contains multiple simultaneous events, including a hunting scene, the visitation of an angel, and interactions between hermits and beasts. It appears intentionally profuse, and it is unusual in its relative lack of chronological structure or compositional clarity. Contemporary narrative images are typically episodic, with each scene clearly defined from the next by a painted or architectural boundary.³⁶⁶ The Passion cycle in

³⁶² Second book of Esdras (Nehemiah).

³⁶³ The representation of open books in images, particularly in manuscripts, can be associated with the rise of the Mendicant Orders. From around 1250, the open book in use by friars was also represented in images destined for the friars themselves, as a sort of self-portrait or reflection, particularly in manuscript illuminations. Maddalo 1999, 176.

³⁶⁴ I return to this hypothesis in chapters three and four.

³⁶⁵ It is not until the 1330s, in the predella panels of the Carmelite Altarpiece by Pietro Lorenzetti, that we find a comparable image of hermits inhabiting an expansive desert landscape. Compared to the tabernacle, the two scenes from the predella - discussed in full in chapter four - are still much more restricted in scope. See figures 129 & 130, and pages 211-215 below.

³⁶⁶ The latter might apply in the case of monumental narrative cycles in fresco or mosaic.

the wings of the tabernacle follows this conventional format. In the central panel, however, structure is provided only by the mountain, and the two poles of activity - the funeral at its base and the ascension of the soul above its summit - are separated by a wealth of additional events. Whereas other narrative images most often unfold a story already known, to instruct, edify, or remind the viewer of significant events from the past, the eremitic narrative in the tabernacle lacks both a familiar literary source and an identifiable subject.³⁶⁷ It tells the stories of multiple saints and hermits, exemplifying a way of life rather than the virtues of a single saint.

During the thirteenth century, narrative painting developed significantly, particularly in the hands of artists working for the Mendicant Orders. Stories were depicted within a more accurate representation of space and nature, permitting the viewer to imaginatively 'participate' in the narrative and increasing its immediacy.³⁶⁸ More sophisticated settings and the convincing expression of emotion, both within and between the characters of a story, allowed the creation of powerful visual dramas such as the monumental fresco of the *Crucifixion* in the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi (figure 27). In the tabernacle's central panel, the viewer is drawn in not by the believability of the landscape nor the immediate impact of a dramatic event, but by the compelling detail in which multiple stories are told. It represents an innovative approach to visual narrative that has been almost entirely overlooked in discussions of late-medieval painting, because it differs in format, scale and subject-matter from the images that have dominated art-historical scholarship.³⁶⁹

The development of narrative painting in central Italy is well exemplified by scenes of the *Stigmatisation of St Francis*. Images of this event refer to well-known written sources by the first biographer of Francis, Thomas of Celano (d.1256) or, after around 1266, by Minister-General Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (d.1274).³⁷⁰ These sources describe how Francis witnessed a celestial vision of a seraph during

³⁶⁷ Lavin 1990, 2.

³⁶⁸ Belting 1994, 152.

³⁶⁹ Such as the Passion of Christ, and the life of St Francis. See, for example, Derbes 1996, and Brooke, 2009.

³⁷⁰ The *First and Second Life of St Francis*, or *Celano I and II*, and the *Legenda Major* of Bonaventure. FAED II, 500.

his stay at the hermitage of La Verna, and found himself to have been marked with the five wounds (the *stigmata*) of Christ.³⁷¹ In early examples, such as the *Vita* panel at San Francesco in Pescia (c.1235), the saint kneels with his hands raised *orans* before a simple, schematic mountain backdrop, above which the seraph is suspended (figure 57). The scene is one episode among five others that narrate events of his life and posthumous miracles. The *Stigmatisation of St Francis* (c. 1300) attributed to Giotto and now in the Louvre shows how this episode was eventually isolated from the sequential narrative of the life of St Francis, which is present in abbreviated format in three small predella-like scenes below (figure 58).³⁷² The telling of this single event becomes the focal point of the painting, encapsulating his sainthood in the same way that images of the Crucifixion represent both the earthly life and ultimate sacrifice of Christ. The summary landscape backdrop of the Stigmatisation in the Pescia panel is replaced by an expansive and clearly-defined mountainous place, in which the figure of St Francis is dominant. The monumental scale of the *Stigmatisation* affects a viewer by representing the sheer scale of an incontrovertible event. It has been described as ‘profoundly innovatory’ because it is a major panel painting that represents a narrative scene rather than an iconic image, and which is, moreover, unrelated to the Life of Christ or his Mother.³⁷³ The central panel of the tabernacle displays a miniaturising tendency that is entirely opposite to the Louvre painting, yet it too represents a narrative scene unconnected to the Life of Christ or the Virgin. The landscape is decorative, and deliberately otherworldly, but the grief of individual hermits is carefully described. Whereas the Stigmatisation refers ultimately to the iconography of Christ’s Agony in the Garden, the composition of the tabernacle’s central panel finds no parallel in earlier image types, at least any that are known in Italian painting.³⁷⁴ Its innovation is in its complexity and the obscurity of its primary

³⁷¹ For Celano the stigmatisation was connected, albeit indirectly, to a vision of, ‘a man having the image of a crucified seraph’. In Bonaventure’s *Legenda Major*, the instrument of the stigmata was Christ Crucified himself. FAED I, 263; FAED II, 600; Goffen 1988, 15. See chapter four below, p. 169-170.

³⁷² This is also the case in the Bardi chapel, where the fresco of the *Stigmatisation* is isolated over the entrance. Gardner 1982, 217-247; Goffen 1988, 59-63; Gardner 2011, 17-45. The Louvre *Stigmatisation* measures 312 x 162cm.

³⁷³ Gardner 1982, 237; 245. For a more recent discussion of this panel, which does not, however, touch on its narrative content, see Cooper 2013, 686-713.

³⁷⁴ Gardner 1982, 224. Parallels in Byzantine art are discussed in chapter three below.

subject, which is nonetheless presented in tandem with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. Arguably, the Edinburgh Tabernacle should also be classified as a 'major panel', because it is a radically unconventional narrative painting of considerable size and exceptional quality.

The date of the tabernacle is usually given as c.1280-90, but the novelty of this painting, in addition to specific elements of its content, indicate a slightly later dating of c.1295. Earlier analysis has relied on the Passion cycle to date the object, as this component is more readily comparable to other contemporary paintings.³⁷⁵ It is, however, only a partial view, which fails to take account of aspects of the central panel which also bear comparison to late-Duecento painting. In addition, compositional similarities between some of the tabernacle Passion scenes, and others dating to the 1260s-80s, bias the entire object towards an earlier dating. The evident relationship between the Passion cycle of the tabernacle and the work of Cimabue indicates a likely Florentine context, reinforced by similarities between the landscape, or the sleeping guards in the *Holy Women*, and the Baptistery mosaics. It is additionally demonstrated in a potential relationship with the illuminations of the Santa Croce Bible, dated to c.1300, evident in the miniature tendency of the central panel. The eremitic landscape as a whole finds no obvious parallels in Italian painting, but a relationship with late thirteenth and early fourteenth-century manuscript illuminations is evident in details such as the inscriptions, or the animals, and in its overall narrative lyricism. In addition, certain unconventional aspects of the Passion cycle, such as the red-skinned angel in the *Holy Women*, or the entire composition of the *Descent into Limbo*, bear comparison to paintings of the early fourteenth century, suggesting a date in the mid-1290s as the most credible.

Many of the closest comparisons to be drawn between late-Duecento painting and the Edinburgh Tabernacle originate in a Franciscan context. This could provide an explanation, other than chronological proximity, for their reference in the painting. The *Mocking and Trial of Christ*, which relates to the San Gimignano *Crucifix* made for the convent of Santa Chiara by Coppo di Marcovaldo, and the tabernacle *Crucifixion*, which is very close to that of Cimabue at Assisi, are two

³⁷⁵ Achenbach 1944, 129-152; Bagemihl 1999, 414; Boskovits 1988, 122-124; Tartuferi 2002, 398; Malquori 2012, 53-65.

obvious examples. This may simply reflect the fact that a high proportion of Passion cycles dating from the late thirteenth century were made for the Friars Minor. However, it is relevant that the Franciscans demonstrate a marked preference for narrative images, and that the story of their founding saint's life, alongside that of Christ, dominated art made for the Order.³⁷⁶ The tabernacle shares this strong narrative emphasis, and elements of its iconography - including the funeral of the saint and the ascent of his soul to heaven - find parallels in contemporary Franciscan sources. The subject-matter of the tabernacle's central panel is, however, obscure, and not easily attributable to an Order which by the 1290s possessed a clearly-defined visual identity, centred on the life of St Francis. It is too early to draw conclusions, but the possibility of a Franciscan *milieu* for the tabernacle should not either be ruled out.

The Edinburgh Tabernacle is currently attributed to a documented Florentine artist of the late thirteenth century, Grifo di Tancredi. The following analysis reconsiders this attribution, in the light of its nineteenth-century restorations, and in the context of other works attributed to the hand of the same master. Until the 1980s, the tabernacle was generally assigned to the 'San Gaggio Master', but in 1988, Miklos Boskovits interpreted the damaged inscription in the baseblock of this object as the signature of one *Grifus Florentinus*.³⁷⁷ On the basis of this reading, the *oeuvre* previously connected with the San Gaggio Master has subsequently been attributed to Grifo di Tancredi, who is documented at Volterra, Perugia, and Florence between 1271 and 1303.³⁷⁸ No other paintings associated with this artist are signed. The value of a signature and attribution in art-historical discourse, particularly in relation to a work of the thirteenth century, is considerable. However, there remain some fundamental questions over the accuracy of Boskovits' reading of the

³⁷⁶ See, for example: Aronberg Lavin 2005, 95-112; Mulvaney 2005, 169-188.

³⁷⁷ Reading the last letters of the inscription as *GRI[FUS] FL[ORENTINUS]*. See below, p.96. Boskovits 1988, 122.

³⁷⁸ The name appears in documents at Volterra (near Siena) in 1271, Perugia in 1281, and Florence in 1295, when he is recorded as taking an apprentice. The last reference to his name is thought to be in 1303, regarding payment for the execution of some frescoes in Florence. Colnaghi 1986, 141; Bagemihl 1999, 415; Tartuferi 2002, 397-399.

inscription, and consequently the identity of its artist, which have never been addressed. The following discussion considers these issues, and their implications for the *oeuvre* of Grifo di Tancredi, with reference both to the inscription in the base-block of the tabernacle, and to recent technical analysis of the painting itself. A comparison between this object and various other paintings currently attributed to Grifo di Tancredi reveals a more complex, and more interesting, picture of authorship than is presently recognised.

The wooden base-block of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, which contains the remaining fragment of the inscription in question, is a nineteenth-century restoration.³⁷⁹ The block of wood on which the inscription is painted, with white gothic lettering on a red ground, is in a very poor condition compared to the rest of the tabernacle, and has been cut down at its left-hand edge (figure 59). The painted surface that remains is scuffed and patchy, with many letters obliterated. Those that survive may be set out as follows:

[O?][S?][X]U'**ATCF**[E?][C?]**FIHOP.QFEC.M.**[G/C]RIX[XX].F[I][O/C] (figure 60)³⁸⁰

A major initial problem is the difficulty of establishing whether or not this inscription originally belonged to the tabernacle itself. Further analysis, not yet undertaken, will be necessary to ascertain its original connection to the tabernacle.³⁸¹ Comparable panels with shutters dated to the late thirteenth century sometimes include a base-block. These flat, rectangular projections most likely functioned as a prop to permit these objects to stand on a flat surface such as an altar, allowing for the opening and closure of their wings.³⁸² No other extant base-blocks of a similar date and size retain their inscriptions, and many seem to have been undecorated.³⁸³ The extensive restorations undertaken on the tabernacle in the nineteenth century

³⁷⁹ Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

³⁸⁰ Where non-bold characters indicate a probable reading and bold indicates a definite or clear reading. A question mark indicates uncertainty and a slash two possibilities for the same letter. An X indicates a single, unidentifiable letter, and [X] the likely number of letters occupying a damaged portion.

³⁸¹ Such as dendrochronology. Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

³⁸² White 1979, 49.

³⁸³ Fourteen out of the seventy-one tabernacles (or parts thereof) listed in Garrison possess a baseblock and only the one in Edinburgh retains an inscription. Garrison nos. 278-356.

include the addition of a projecting headpiece moulding above the gabled pediment, the retouching of paintwork and infilling of damaged wood, particularly in the wings, and the renewal of the decayed original hinges which attached the wings to the central panel (figures 61 & 62).³⁸⁴ In the context of such major restoration work, it is legitimate to seriously question the authenticity of the inscription on which the attribution of this painting depends.

Restorations undertaken in nineteenth-century Florence were frequently extensive and highly invasive to the original character of a painted object.³⁸⁵ They took place in the context of a burgeoning art market, flooded with artworks displaced by the process of large-scale urban renewal.³⁸⁶ The contents of demolished buildings were frequently bought wholesale by dealers such as Stefano Bardini and Francesco Lombardi, and from the collections they amassed, restored and sold on to wealthy European collectors, frequently through the services of an executor.³⁸⁷ The rediscovery of the so-called *primitivi*, or pre-renaissance artists, among nineteenth-century collectors led to opportunities for the restoration and 'improvement' of Duecento and Trecento artworks.³⁸⁸ Dirty, obscure, or damaged paintings were routinely transformed into marketable products, in which the final aesthetic was prioritised over the preservation of an object's original appearance.³⁸⁹ The collection to which the tabernacle belonged prior to its purchase by Lord Lindsay in 1872 was that of Francesco Lombardi and Ugo Baldi of Florence.³⁹⁰ The Lombardi-Baldi collection was entirely devoted to the 'early Italian school' and its

³⁸⁴ Thompson 1981, unpublished; Stevenson 2018, unpublished. The nineteenth-century origin of the projecting headpiece was noticed by Aidan Weston-Lewis at the National Gallery of Scotland, when the tabernacle was rehung in March 2014.

³⁸⁵ Such as the badly damaged *St Catherine of Alexandria*, by Simone de Martini, 'seamlessly' restored to a pristine appearance by Stefano Bardini c.1870. Hoeniger 1999, 148-149, figs. 1 and 2; Moskovits 2015, 35.

³⁸⁶ The removal of the capital of a newly-unified Italy from Florence to Rome in 1870 had serious economic consequences for the city. *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁸⁷ Fleming 1979, 492-508.

³⁸⁸ Moskovits 2015, 36.

³⁸⁹ Ludovico Metzger, who was the executor for Lord Lindsay, had previously sold a completely reconstructed altarpiece, combining unrelated panels by Bicci di Lorenzo and Ugolino di Nerio, as an 'original'. Brigstocke 2000, 40.

³⁹⁰ Brigstocke 2000, 30-31.

works were described in William Spence's 1847 *Lions of Florence* as being 'in capital preservation'.³⁹¹ Signor Baldi is specifically mentioned by Spence as 'the first restorer in Florence of paintings in distemper'.³⁹² This information corresponds with the largely pristine condition of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Evidence of detailed and very sensitive repainting can be clearly seen in its wings and pediment under magnification, noted during the recent technical examination. The inner edge of the left-hand wing was reconstructed prior to repainting, and the mouldings of the central panel were renewed and regilded. The repaired areas are seamlessly done, and almost impossible to discern to the untrained eye.³⁹³ It seems highly likely that these restorations, in addition to the structural interventions discussed above, were undertaken by Ugo Baldi prior to its sale in 1872. Such extensive and, to our modern sensibilities, unscrupulous alterations may potentially have included the addition of an interesting, but ultimately unrelated, inscription beneath the central panel of the tabernacle.

With this reservation in mind, we turn to an analysis of the inscription itself, and the related question of attribution. The second part of the surviving inscription was interpreted by Boskovits as an abbreviation of the following:

H[OC] OP[US] . Q[UOD](?) FEC[IT] . M[AGISTER] . GRI[FUS]
FL[ORENTINUS] ³⁹⁴

('this work which Master Grifo of Florence made')

In this analysis, Boskovits recognised the uncertainty of the word *quod*, because its position in the word sequence is highly irregular, and finds no parallel in contemporary inscriptions. Dietl's comprehensive survey of artists' signatures in medieval Italian inscriptions (which does not extend to painted examples) includes no single instance of this format.³⁹⁵ *Qui fecit* appears once, in an eleventh-century

³⁹¹ This was an account of the city, its historical culture and architecture, by a resident English aristocrat and connoisseur. Cited in Fleming 1979, 498 n.33.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ The conservator remarked in 1981 that the restoration of this part of the painting is equivalent to 'a brilliant fake'. Thompson 1981, unpublished; Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

³⁹⁴ Expansions are given in square brackets. Boskovits 1988, 121.

³⁹⁵ See table XVII.I 1, in Dietl 2009 vol.1, 283-385.

façade relief, but is preceded by the artist's name: '*ego ... qui fecit haec opera*'.³⁹⁶ The catalogue of panel paintings by Garrison similarly contains no inscriptions with the word *quod*.³⁹⁷ The standard forms for an artist's signature in thirteenth-century paintings were ... *fecit hoc opus*, ... *me fecit* or ... *me pinxit*, with the name always placed before the verb.³⁹⁸ It is difficult to imagine why this signature should be so irregular, given that the remaining legible words elsewhere in the tabernacle, such as *hic flagellatur dominus* (beneath the *Flagellation*), follow convention to the letter.

There are additional difficulties with Boskovits' reading of this cryptically abbreviated inscription. The clearly punctuated letter *M*, which follows *QFEC*, is problematic. Boskovits reads it as an abbreviation for *magister*, but again, this formulation is unrepeated in contemporary artists' signatures. The only other extant example of the word *magister* in painted inscriptions from before this date shows the word in full.³⁹⁹ The letter *M* appears frequently in dates, either as word (*mensis*) or number (1000), but neither are applicable here. It is also used occasionally as an abbreviation for *me*, normally succeeded by either *fecit* or *pinsit*.⁴⁰⁰ The letters towards the end of the inscription, where we might expect to read the date, are given as *GRI[FUS] FL[OR]*, the artist's signature. This reading, too, is not without its problems. The *G* of *Grifus* could be read as a *C*, while close inspection reveals a faint mark above the letter *R* which may suggest a contraction.⁴⁰¹ The proposed *F* of *Grifus* has a curved upper edge and no central horizontal, despite an intact area of paint. It seems more likely that this is a letter *D*, though most of it is obliterated. The

³⁹⁶ Cat. no. A528, listed in Dietl 2009 vol.1, 288.

³⁹⁷ The only other inscription that I have found with the formulation *q... fecit* is now lost. It once belonged to a Guido da Siena *Madonna and Child Enthroned* (1262), now in the Pinacoteca of Siena, and read as follows: *ISTA TABULA EST FRATERNITATIS BEATAE MARIAE SEMPER VIRGINIS QUAM FECIT FIERI IN AD MCCLXII*. Other words beginning with the letter *Q* in painted inscriptions include *quem*, *quondam* and *qui(?)*, none of which are followed by the artist's name. Garrison no.175.

³⁹⁸ Whilst inconsistencies and variants are common in signatures from the late thirteenth century in Italy, some general patterns do emerge and they appear to undermine the validity of Boskovits' interpretation. Donato 2000, 9-13. There is at present no comprehensive catalogue of thirteenth-century panel paintings or their inscriptions; one is sorely needed. Dietl focuses on sculptures, mosaics and architectural features and Donato's work on goldsmiths.

³⁹⁹ A painted cross (1265), with the inscription: *ANNO DNI MCCLXC D. MENSIS APREL(IS) MAGISTER RAINALDO RANUCII PINSIT H.OPUS*. Garrison no.532.

⁴⁰⁰ As in, *me fecit: M(ARGA)RI(T) DE ARETIO M(E) FEC*. *Ibid.*, no.57.

⁴⁰¹ Achenbach reads the *G* as a *C*. Achenbach 1944, 148.

F of *Flor* is clear enough, but both the *L* and *O* are open to interpretation - the horizontal of the *L* is obscured and the final letter, which is mostly obliterated, could equally be a *C*. The most significant issue with Boskovits' reading of this section, however, is the fact that it is highly unlikely to contain the name of the artist given the preceding sequence of letters.

This generally accepted reading does not take into consideration the letters that survive in the first part of the inscription. Those that immediately precede *HOP* are damaged, but may still be deciphered as an elaborate *C*, *F*, *E?* and *C?*, followed by a clearly legible *FI*. It is possible that these letters are the *FEC[IT] FI[ERI]* ('caused to be made') that we would expect to precede the words *HOC OPUS*.⁴⁰² This, in turn, would suggest that the preceding letters (of which we can read *O?S?* *U'AT* and *C*), form part of the name of the artist or patron. The scroll above the letter *C*, and the apostrophe mark between the *U* and *A* suggest that these were both abbreviations. We do not know if the inscription was originally longer at its right-hand edge, and lost through worm damage (which is extensive), or when the wooden support was cut and inserted into the base-block during restorations. It may be the case that this is not a signature at all. The words could instead be part of a prayer or invocation, as in the case of a smaller tabernacle by the Magdalene Master, now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (figure 63). The headpiece of this object, now too damaged to read, is thought to have contained the *incipit* of a prayer.⁴⁰³ Certain other late-Duecento narratives, such as those in the panel by Margherito d'Arezzo in London, carried abbreviated explanatory inscriptions, particularly where the subject-matter was not self-evident.⁴⁰⁴

There is no obvious solution to the problem of this cryptic inscription. The possibility that it contains an artist's signature which, in turn, holds the potential to construct a pattern of attribution, or an entire *oeuvre*, around a documented name, is compelling. However, the compulsion to securely attribute a painting should not permit a problematic or inaccurate interpretation to be accepted without question. This is particularly true in the case of documented artists, such as Grifo di Tancredi,

⁴⁰² This does not solve the problem of what *QFEC* then stands for.

⁴⁰³ Parenti 2004, 100.

⁴⁰⁴ Gordon 2011, 315.

who previously lacked any surviving artworks connected to his name. In certain recent art-historical scholarship, the motivation to attribute a painting, or a group of paintings, to the hand of an individual 'master', has been predominant.⁴⁰⁵ Yet painting of this early period is, in reality, difficult to pin down to the hand of a single artist. Artistic production was frequently characterised by partnerships, collaborative workshop practice, and the adaptation of existing images.⁴⁰⁶ Inconsistencies in an artist's 'style' are sometimes explained as different stages in a career, but they are equally likely to have resulted from the proximity of external influences, or the hand of another artist.⁴⁰⁷ An art-historical discourse which prioritises the association of names with paintings is necessarily highly subjective.⁴⁰⁸ It ultimately aims at a 'canonical' narrative of art history, and the secure attribution of notable paintings to the hand of an identifiable artistic personality. The drive towards categorisation has the potential to obscure complexity and limit our appreciation of the extraordinary and unpredictable. The attribution of the Edinburgh Tabernacle to Grifo di Tancredi is, I would argue, one example of this tendency. It has effectively precluded any further discussion about its production and authorship, and has overshadowed the extremely high quality of its central panel.

The following analysis seeks to redress this situation, considering the Edinburgh Tabernacle in relation to the attributed *oeuvre* of Grifo di Tancredi - which itself requires some reassessment - and by close analysis of its constituent parts. In 1948, Roberto Longhi designated a number of paintings as the work of the 'Maestro di San Gaggio', named after an eponymous gabled panel with the *Maestà and Four*

⁴⁰⁵ It is particularly evident in some Italian scholarship, for example Bellosi 1991; Boskovits 1988, 122-124; Tartuferi 1990, 107; 2002, 397-399. On this issue, see Maginnis 1998, 21-34; 2002, 471-485.

⁴⁰⁶ Such partnerships have been uncovered by technical analysis of late Duecento and early Trecento paintings, as in an infra-red analysis of *Christ opens the eyes of a man born blind*, one of Duccio's panels for the *Maestà* (1308-1311). Bomford, Dunkerton, Gordon and Roy 1992, 86-87. Others are more self-evident, as is the case with the Timken dossal, attributed to Grifo di Tancredi and the Magdalene Master. Marques 1987, 208-212; Tartuferi 2002, 399; *Corpus* III.IX, 15-17 and n.14.

⁴⁰⁷ Boskovits 1993, 163-8; Gordon 2011, 204-219.

⁴⁰⁸ For example, Luciano Bellosi attributed the works collected under the 'Master of the Clarisse' to Rinaldo da Siena, and Miklos Boskovits attributed those of the 'Master of Verucchio', the 'Master of the Cini Madonna', and the 'Master of the Blessed Clare' to different phases of Francesco da Rimini's career. These attributions have been disputed by Alessandro Bagnoli and Dillian Gordon. Gordon 2011, xviii.

Saints, now in the Accademia in Florence (figure 64).⁴⁰⁹ In 1974, the Edinburgh Tabernacle was identified as a work of the same artist by Luciano Bellosi.⁴¹⁰ Since 1988, when Boskovits interpreted the inscription of the tabernacle as discussed above, these paintings (plus some others added more recently) have been given to the name of Grifo di Tancredi. There are thirteen works presently, though not unproblematically, attributed to this hand, which have been the subject of various art-historical scholarship over the last seventy years.⁴¹¹ Those most frequently cited are the lateral scenes of a dossal, made in collaboration with the Magdalene Master c.1300-05 and now in the Timken Museum, San Diego (figure 65); a hinged panel now in Berlin (c.1280-85) (figure 66); and the San Gaggio Madonna, (c.1280-90) (figure 64) besides the Edinburgh Tabernacle.⁴¹² Grifo di Tancredi has been called an ‘early interpreter of Giotto’, and is associated, after c.1300, with the ‘miniaturist tendency’ of the Master of Santa Cecilia and Lippo di Benivieni.⁴¹³ He is thought to have trained under the Magdalene Master. Grifo’s *oeuvre* is described as exhibiting

⁴⁰⁹ The panel is named after the Florentine conventual church of San Gaggio (a corruption of San Caio, papal saint), to which it previously belonged. In the late thirteenth century, the convent housed an order of enclosed nuns. Repetti 1983, 369-370. The paintings Lunghi identified roughly corresponded with the ‘romanising trend’ observed by Garrison in late thirteenth-century Florence. Garrison 1946, 321-346; Lunghi 1948, 14-15 and 44.

⁴¹⁰ It is not clear whether Bellosi saw the painting first-hand prior to his attribution, which is made in a footnote. It was, at that time, in a private collection. Bellosi 1974, 20 n.15.

⁴¹¹ A selected bibliography on the artist is as follows: Achenbach 1944, 121-152; Garrison 1946, 321-346; Lunghi 1948, 19, 47; Previtali 2000, 26, 30, 35; Bellosi 1974, 20 n.15; Marques 1987, 201-212; Boskovits 1988, 122-124; Tartuferi 1990, 61-63, 106-109; 1994, 5-9; Bagemihl 1999, 413-426; Chiodo 2004, 110-115; Malquori 2012, 53-65; Malquori 2013, 217-224.

⁴¹² Tartuferi lists thirteen paintings attributed to Grifo. They are as follows, in the order that he dates them: Two panels, showing the *Deposition* and *Entombment of Christ*, now in the Rijksmuseum (c. 1270-80); A small panel formerly in the collection of Harris in London, showing the *Mocking of Christ* and *Way to Calvary*; A polyptych of *Christ Blessing between Saints Peter and James Major, John the Baptist and Ursula* (?) now divided between the National Gallery of Washington and the Musée de Chambéry (1270-80); A hinged panel, with *Virgin and Child, four saints, the Crucifixion and Flagellation*, now in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; the Edinburgh Tabernacle, Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, on long-term loan to the National Gallery of Scotland; A painted chest now in a private Italian collection (all 1280-1290); A tabernacle with scenes from the *Passion of Christ*, now divided between Christ Church, Oxford, and formerly the Sessa Collection, Milan; A panel of the *Virgin and Child enthroned and four scenes of the Passion of Christ* in the Bodesmuseum, Berlin; The *San Gaggio Madonna*, in the Accademia of Florence (all 1290-1300); A tabernacle now in a private collection in Italy (formerly Agnew, London); A tabernacle now in Memphis showing the *Virgin and Child enthroned between Saints Peter and John the Baptist, a saint and kneeling donor, and the Crucifixion*; and a tabernacle of the *Virgin and Child between St Mary Magdalene and St John the Baptist* now in the Museo Bandini, Fiesole (all 1300-1305). Tartuferi 2002, 397-99.

⁴¹³ Tartuferi 1990, 107. Both the Master of Santa Cecilia and Lippo di Benivieni have been characterised as part of the early Trecento ‘miniaturist tendency’ by Richard Offner, and later by Boskovits, in the *Corpus* III.IX, 12.

a certain adaptability of style and a strong interest in narrative, and the diminutive figures which inhabit these narratives as having slender limbs, expressive faces and glancing, outlined eyes.⁴¹⁴ However, a problematic lack of consistency in this *oeuvre* - in addition to the fundamental questions around the tabernacle inscription - call into question the identity, or even the existence, of a single master artist to which it can be securely assigned.

Discrepancies evident between some of the paintings are well exemplified by a small tabernacle with Scenes of the Passion dated to 1290-1300 (now split between Christ Church, Oxford and formerly, a private collection in Milan), and the panels of a polyptych with the Redeemer and Saints dated to 1270-80 (now in Washington and the Musée de Chambéry) (figures 67 & 68).⁴¹⁵ The polyptych, which is thought to be the earlier of these two works, is more accomplished and painted with greater clarity and assurance than the small tabernacle. The scale of the figures in the latter is much smaller, and the subject is narrative, but even allowing for these typological differences, the discrepancy in handling and ability seems clear. That the *Scenes of the Passion* is meant to be the later of the two works undermines any explanation by artistic development. A panel in Volterra and two now in the Rijksmuseum attributed by some scholars to Grifo di Tancredi have been the subject of disagreement, and the attribution of a tabernacle now in Memphis and another in Fiesole to the same master, have rightly been questioned (figures 69 & 70).⁴¹⁶ The *Deposition* and *Entombment* scenes in the Rijksmuseum, which are dated to the same decade as the polyptych discussed above, show a lack of anatomical understanding and a curious representation of faces in profile, which is different from that found in any of the other paintings. Of the thirteen paintings attributed to Grifo by Tartuferi, it seems to me that only five examples, or parts

⁴¹⁴ Previtali 1967, 36, 45; Bellosi 1998, 238. Both discuss the style of Grifo in the context of their main subjects.

⁴¹⁵ See Byam Shaw 1967, 29; Summerscale 1985, 90.

⁴¹⁶ Bagemihl 1999, 414, 418, 421; Chiodo 2004, 110. For the attribution of the Memphis panel, see Tartuferi and Scalini (eds.) 108. It is currently attributed by the Memphis Brooks Gallery to 'a follower of Duccio'.

thereof, can be reliably associated with the same hand. Others may conceivably be the product of a related workshop, or most likely belong to another artist.⁴¹⁷

The paintings which appear to be most closely related to one another, and to certain parts of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, are as follows: a polyptych with the *Redeemer and Saints* (c.1270-80) (figure 68); a hinged panel with the *Virgin and Child, four saints, the Crucifixion and Flagellation* (c.1280-90) (figure 66); a small painted box with the *Man of Sorrows and Female Saints* (c.1280-90) (figure 71); and the *San Gaggio Madonna* (c.1290-1300)(figure 64). To this list I would add the following manuscript illuminations, which are not currently part of the *oeuvre* of Grifo di Tancredi compiled by Tartuferi: two illuminations from the Santa Croce Bible (c. 1300), and another from a manuscript now at the Worcester Art Museum (c.1290) (figures 55, 72 & 73). A relationship is evident, for example, between the intense gaze and delicate hands of St John the Baptist, who flanks the Virgin and Child in the *San Gaggio Madonna*, and Christ in the tabernacle *Descent into Limbo* (figure 74, a & b). The *Holy Women at the Tomb* in the Edinburgh Tabernacle are close in facial type and gesture to the female saints on the sides of the painted chest, and those in the panel now in Berlin (figure 75, a-c). The latter painting contains a *Crucifixion* and a *Flagellation*, in which the composition, and posture of Christ, are very close to the same two scenes in the tabernacle, and to examples by Cimabue (figure 76, a-d). The figure of David in a Dominican psalter (now at the Museo di San Marco in Florence), especially his sideways glance and the shape of his black-clad feet, is comparable to the high priests in the scene of the *Mocking/Trial of Christ* in the tabernacle (figure 77, a & b).⁴¹⁸ And the Redeemer in the pediment of the tabernacle shares facial characteristics and attitude with the Redeemer of the early polyptych (figure 78, a & b).⁴¹⁹ All of the comparisons above rest on the Passion cycle in the wings of the tabernacle and the Redeemer with angels in the pediment. This is, in part, because these parts of the tabernacle are closer in iconography to the other paintings, and there is no extant parallel in Italian art for the scene in the

⁴¹⁷ Those which I believe to be the product of a related workshop include the small tabernacle with scenes of the Passion (Oxford and Milan) and the Timken dossal, and those which seem to belong to a different hand entirely, the Fiesole *Virgin and Child*, the Memphis panel, and the two small panels in the Rijksmuseum.

⁴¹⁸ Battaglia 2011, 404-7.

⁴¹⁹ Bellosi and Ragionieri (eds.) 2007, 68, fig. 42.

central panel. But it also reveals an important feature of the tabernacle itself; its wings and central panel seem to be predominantly the work of separate hands.

Even at first glance, the image of the desert appears immediately distinct from the Passion cycle in the tabernacle's wings (figure 1). It is on a much smaller scale, with a far greater degree of visual embellishment, and is painted in a more subtle palette, with cream, ochre and a soft blue-grey as its dominant colours. The central panel lacks the bright ultramarine and striking colour contrasts of the Passion cycle, seen for example in the vivid robes worn by figures in the crowd at the *Crucifixion*. The mountainous landscape, and the narrative activity it contains, possesses a lyrical fluidity that is absent from the Passion scenes. The latter have a spare compositional clarity that the central panel lacks, but the episodic scenes in the wings are sometimes disjointed or hard-edged; for example, the angular rocks of *Limbo*, or the awkward configuration of sleeping guards in the *Holy Women*. These major distinctions may be explained, in part, by the difference in scale and subject-matter.⁴²⁰ The unique character of the central panel has been attributed to its derivation from a different visual tradition, and the possibility that it was copied, or adapted, from a putative Byzantine source.⁴²¹ The two parts of the tabernacle follow different compositional formats; the wings contain separate episodes clearly distinguished by their red frames, whereas the central panel is a continuous, multipart narrative scene. In addition, the wings have been restored more substantially than the central panel, which remains largely intact.⁴²² Taking all of these explanations into account, there remain significant points of difference between the two parts of the tabernacle that can, I believe, only be attributed to a division of hands.

Close observations made during recent technical analysis, using magnification, ultraviolet light and infrared reflectography, support this hypothesis. Several apparently minor distinctions become much more pronounced when viewed

⁴²⁰ Bellosi 1985, 106; Brigstocke 2000, 36; Tartuferi 2002, 398.

⁴²¹ The origins of the tabernacle's iconography in Byzantium, and the assumption that it is a copy of a lost work, has been cited as an explanation for the differences, in Tartuferi 1998, 398; Brigstocke 2000, 36.

⁴²² I discuss the restoration of the wings on p. 21-22 above and p.106 below. The central panel was varnished during restoration and some of the gold ground retouched. Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

at close quarters, or with the help of specialist equipment. The most telling difference between wings and central panel is evident in the faces and figures of each part. The hermits of the desert landscape, despite their considerably smaller scale, are nonetheless painted with a delicacy and subtle modelling that is lacking in the figures of the Passion cycle (figure 79, a & b). This is most clearly evident at the hairline, which in the hermits is gradually shaded into the shadows of the face. The heads are convincingly solid in appearance, and each monk has distinctive facial features despite their uniformly serious expressions. The faces of figures in the lateral panels appear flatter and more homogenous, and the hairlines more sharply defined. Their ears, where visible, are described as a tear-shaped lobe protruding beneath the hair. Where the ears of the hermits can be seen, they are complete, placed between the beard and the hair of the head. In the central panel, tight-knit groups of hermits appear to recede in shallow pictorial space, as the heads of figures in the background are partially obscured by those in front. In the Passion cycle, however, the crowd scenes are among the most difficult to read, as juxtaposed heads are placed one above the other, and faces abut in a way that suggests a claustrophobic lack of pictorial depth. This spatial confusion is augmented by flailing limbs and hands, which attach unconvincingly to bodies within the crowd. Among the hermits, by contrast, even complex figural compositions are handled skilfully and harmoniously, despite the considerably smaller scale in which they are painted (figure 80). The 2018 conservation report for the tabernacle notes the extremely fine brushes used for the central panel, and describes this part as 'more sophisticated in design and execution than the painting of the wings.'⁴²³ A similar observation was made following informal technical examinations done in 1981.⁴²⁴ The latter, admittedly subjective judgement was given by the then conservator, after the panel had been viewed under magnification. Nevertheless, both reports firmly support the premise that there were two hands at work on the Edinburgh Tabernacle.

The division of labour evident in the tabernacle is characteristic of workshop production in the late Duecento. A master may have been responsible for the design

⁴²³ Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

⁴²⁴ 'The centre panel was painted by an artist of consummate skill and great powers of invention and observation. The scenes in the wings and on the pediment are by a much less inspired artist.' Thompson 1981, unpublished.

of the entire object and the painting of its central part, whilst the lateral or subsidiary elements were done by an assistant. Such a system is clearly evident, for example, in a dossal attributed to the Magdalene Master and Grifo di Tancredi, now in the Timken Art Gallery (figure 65). It seems most likely that the tabernacle was similarly executed in a workshop, by artists who worked closely together and who aimed to harmonise the two parts of the painting. Both the wings and central panel of the tabernacle exhibit a comparably shallow pictorial space, and use of vermilion pigment, that indicate they were made at around the same time. The separation of hands is largely defined by the separate parts of the object; one is dominant in the central panel and another in the wings and pediment. For the sake of clarity, we shall call them 'Master A' and 'Master B' respectively. The division is not, however, absolute; several details in the central panel appear to be the work of Master B. The angels which carry the soul of the dead saint to Heaven have very similar facial types to those in the *Crucifixion* scene of the left-hand wing, in addition to the sharply-defined drapery which terminates their bodies (figure 81, a & b). Infra-red reflectography clearly reveals an interesting overpainting at the base of the cusped arch, to the right of the central panel (figure 82, a & b).⁴²⁵ A dark green tree, with red flowers terminating its branches, has been painted over a hermit at the window of his hut. The original painting appears in the infrared image as substantially complete. The overpainting is usually described as a *pentimento*, a repainting done by the original artist after a change of heart.⁴²⁶ However it seems to me that this alteration was done not by Master A, but by Master B, for reasons unknown.⁴²⁷ The tree is more bulbous and rather more clumsily painted than the other trees in the desert landscape, and has a heavy black outline which is not evident in the delicate plants lower down the slopes of the mountain. Another, smaller tree at the left-hand side of the central panel is similarly round and heavily painted, and both overlap the moulding at the edge of the frame in a way which is not found elsewhere in the central panel. It seems likely that both trees were introduced by Master B after the central panel was complete.

⁴²⁵ X-rays from 1981, kept on file in the library of the National Galleries of Scotland.

⁴²⁶ Brigstocke 2000, 33.

⁴²⁷ There is no evidence of damage beneath this part of the painting. Viewing the detail under ultraviolet light did not indicate that it was painted much later, by a restorer for instance.

Some final observations can be made about the present appearance of the tabernacle in summary. Its wings and pediment were restored in the nineteenth century, to repair some substantial damage and improve the clarity of the figures. The restorations are most clearly apparent in the figure of Christ in the pediment, and mainly take the form of dark outlining around the eyes and around the edges of figures, to heighten their expressiveness and contrast.⁴²⁸ This repainting was, on the whole, sensitively done, and did not dramatically alter the underlying character of the original painting. The differences discussed above are evident in those parts of the tabernacle which were not restored, or which remained unchanged despite the intervention of a later hand.⁴²⁹ Certain details of the tabernacle wings stand out to the naked eye as anomalous or jarring alongside the harmonious compositions of the Passion cycle as a whole, and do not appear to have been substantially repainted. These include the three grieving angels in the field above the *Crucifixion*, and the sleeping guards in the *Holy Women at the Tomb* (figures 26 & 32). Both of these figure groups are characterised by anatomical confusion and awkwardness, and the exaggerated gestures and facial expressions of the angels lack any of the sensitive depiction of grief apparent in the *Crucifixion*, or in the funeral scene of the central panel. Both the angels, and the sleeping guards, seem likely to be the work of an additional assistant. The Edinburgh Tabernacle, then, appears to have been produced by at least two, and probably three, separate hands in a workshop setting. Its impressive and highly detailed central panel was made by the primary artist, or Master A. Considerable effort was evidently put into creating a unified and coherent whole despite the differences in content, and the effect is, in general, accomplished and harmonious. That there were multiple hands at work on this panel should neither diminish its evident quality nor obscure its uniqueness and importance.

Returning to the question of attribution, and to the name of Grifo di Tancredi, we appear to be no closer to a solution. However, if the similarities between the tabernacle and the *oeuvre* of Grifo di Tancredi rest on the wings and pediment, then the identity of the primary hand at work on the tabernacle, Master A, remains a mystery. The problematic inconsistency of Grifo's *oeuvre* also undermines the

⁴²⁸ Examination under ultraviolet light clarified the extent of restoration, as the areas of retouching are darker than the original paint. Stevenson 2018, unpublished.

⁴²⁹ Such as the composition of figural groupings, discussed above.

present dating of the work to 1280-90, which is based on a stylistic comparison with other paintings attributed to the same master. It seems probable, from the comparative analysis above, that Master B was also responsible for certain works currently attributed to Grifo di Tancredi. Some of the works which have been associated with him, such as the Timken dossal, which was also painted by the Magdalene Master, are characterised by collaborative practice. However, it would be strange if this secondary artist had signed the painting as *'Magister Grifus Florentinus'*, whilst the primary artist of the central panel remained anonymous. It is, of course, entirely possible that the inscription does not reveal the signature of this documented artist at all. If this is true, it problematises the assignation of an entire *oeuvre*, leaving the name of Grifo di Tancredi without any securely attributed artworks. In any case, I would argue that the present attribution to Grifo has done nothing to clarify the extraordinary quality of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, particularly its central panel. This painting far surpasses any others currently attributed to him in virtuosity, imagination and scope. The lack of a documented master or secure attribution should not be allowed to diminish its significance. The possibility that this is a unique work without comparison in thirteenth-century painting is an exciting and challenging prospect.

Another exceptional, but anonymous panel painting, dating from the early fourteenth century, is worth mentioning here by way of analogy. The panel known as the *Tavola di Sant'Agata*, which is in the church of Sant'Agata in Cremona, is similarly unique in its subject-matter (figure 83).⁴³⁰ It is a double-sided panel showing, on one side, small-scale scenes of the life and miracles of Sant'Agata, and on the other, the Virgin and Child beneath a curved cornice, above which is a scene of the Pentecost. It is 112cm high by 69cm wide, and from the sixteenth century, was visible in the chapel of St. James in the Cremonese church.⁴³¹ The highly decorated, golden panel demonstrates a wealth of cultural influences from Byzantium, Venice, Umbria and Tuscany, and its narratives are unmatched in content or invention in contemporary painting of central Italy.⁴³² An attribution has so

⁴³⁰ I am grateful to Luca Palozzi for suggesting this comparison to me. On this panel, see Pasi 1988, 351-365; Goi 1998; Milanese 2012, 330-344.

⁴³¹ Milanese 2012, 341, n.1; 338.

⁴³² It was made in Lombardy. Pasi 1988, 358-9.

far proved elusive, though it seems likely that this panel, like the Edinburgh Tabernacle, was made by two separate hands. A master is thought to be responsible for the small narrative scenes, and an assistant for the Virgin and Child, which adheres more closely to traditional models.⁴³³ It is, like the tabernacle, a heterogeneous object with no clear precedent in Italian painting, created by the collaborative effort of separate artists. The most accomplished parts of the *Tavola di Sant'Agata* reveal similarities to Bolognese miniature painting.⁴³⁴ Similarly in the case of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the fine detail and minute accuracy with which its central panel is painted, reveals an affinity with contemporary manuscript illuminations.

Both the Santa Croce Bible and the Psalter from Santa Maria Novella contain miniatures that are stylistically related to parts of the tabernacle. The figures on folios 138r and 162v of the Santa Croce Bible, which are by a different hand from the rest of the manuscript, exhibit similar features to those in the central panel, with characteristically expressive eyes, and small, delicate hands (figures 55 & 72). The old man Nehemiah is comparable in his bearing and demeanour to the hermits who inhabit the desert landscape. Some scholars have attributed these miniatures to the Master of the San Gaggio Madonna, though Tartuferi, who has been primarily responsible for compiling the *oeuvre* of Grifo di Tancredi, does not believe that the artist worked in manuscript illuminations.⁴³⁵ Additional miniatures from a gradual now in Worcester, Massachusetts, appear stylistically related and exhibit a strong sense of narrative on a small scale (figure 73).⁴³⁶ All of these manuscripts are thought to originate from Florence, where a studio of illuminators, in close contact with both Dominicans and Franciscans, may have existed.⁴³⁷ None of the aforementioned examples are equal to the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle in calibre and virtuosity. Yet the exquisite and minute detail of the

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 351-365; Milanese 2012, 332.

⁴³⁴ Pasi 1988, 356.

⁴³⁵ Tartuferi 1994, 5.

⁴³⁶ Labriola 2004, 187.

⁴³⁷ Labriola 2004, 187; Battaglia 2011, 407. Miniaturists at work in Florence probably originated in Umbria, Rome, and Bologna, as well as the Tuscan city. This demonstrates the difficulty of pinpointing regional 'styles', particularly in manuscript illumination. Ciardi Dupré dal Poggetto 2005, 199-200.

tabernacle's central panel must have been the work of a practiced miniature artist. It is plausible to suggest that Master A, in addition to those who contributed to the production of the tabernacle (and including the Master of the San Gaggio Madonna, or Grifo di Tancredi), were in some way connected to such a studio.

The central panel of the tabernacle has an overarching coherence, in addition to its minute details, that indicates an awareness of larger-scale narrative painting. It was not uncommon for artists who worked predominantly in larger-scale paintings to oversee the production or execution of miniatures. Certain other contemporary manuscript illuminations, for example, have been connected to the workshop of Duccio di Buoninsegna (figure 84).⁴³⁸ The comparison with Duccio is valid (on qualitative rather than stylistic grounds), because the work of both the Master of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, and the Sienese artist, combine a sensitivity to the details of landscape and emotion, with a strong sense of narrative lyricism.⁴³⁹ We may not know the identity of the tabernacle's primary artist, but his stature is arguably equivalent to that of the great masters of his age.

In addition to its unusual content, and the remarkable skill evident in its making, the structure of the Edinburgh Tabernacle is noteworthy. Whilst no surviving painting shares its specific shape or dimensions, comparable panels with shutters from the late Duecento allow us to speculate on the potential function of the tabernacle, and its most likely original context. At 118.5cm high by 124.5cm wide when open, the Edinburgh Tabernacle is a relatively large object, despite the fact that in recent scholarship, it has been misleadingly classified as 'small'.⁴⁴⁰ Of the seventy-one tabernacles catalogued by Garrison (including those for which only the central panel remains), only fifteen are larger than it in height.⁴⁴¹ The largest of these that survives intact contains a central image of the *Virgin and Child eleousia*,

⁴³⁸ Tartuferi 1990, 51; Labriola 2004, 196-8; Cannon 2014, 129-130.

⁴³⁹ cf. Chiodo 2004, 110.

⁴⁴⁰ 'il Trittico, di non grandi dimensioni' [...] 'Il piccolo tabernacolo...' Malquori 2012, 60; following Achenbach 1944, 129.

⁴⁴¹ Garrison nos. 278-351.

surrounded by seventeen scenes from the *Life of Christ* in the wings (figure 85). It is over two metres tall and is now kept in the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria.⁴⁴² Its original location is unknown, but the figures of St Clare and St Francis painted on the outside of the wings suggest that it was made for a Franciscan, and most likely a Clarissan, audience.⁴⁴³ The smallest tabernacles were less than thirty centimetres high, and those under about a metre in height are the most numerous. Smaller panels would have been well-suited to private devotion or use as travelling shrines or altarpieces.⁴⁴⁴ The larger tabernacles, over about one metre in height, are most likely to have been kept in one place. The Edinburgh Tabernacle, for example, is a heavy and unwieldy object that can only be moved with the effort of several people. All of the larger tabernacles have been moved from their original locations and lack documentation, so reconstructing their intended context and function is a challenge. This may be part of the reason why so little scholarship has focused on this particular type of panel painting, which is confined primarily to the regions of Tuscany and Umbria, and to the last four decades of the thirteenth century.

The format of the large tabernacle with folding wings is thought to derive from carved wooden altarpieces, which in turn originated north of the Alps.⁴⁴⁵ An example dating to c.1200 from Santa Maria Maggiore in Alatri, contains a central sculpture of the Virgin and Child enthroned, framed by two lateral wings carved with relief scenes from the New Testament (figure 86).⁴⁴⁶ The wings close to hide the central figure, so that the enthroned Virgin and Child could, on occasion, have been revealed, as if the object were a window opening onto a heavenly realm. Tripartite painted panels on a small scale are found in Byzantium from the late twelfth century, and the two traditions likely merged in the Crusader States during the thirteenth. In the context of Mendicant missionary activity, painted tabernacles with folding wings would have been useful as portable altarpieces and focal points for devotion, for the

⁴⁴² The so-called *Marzolini triptych*, 2.15m. Santi 1969, cat.14, 37. It is now clear that Guido's *Palazzo Pubblico Madonna*, 2.83m (Garrison no. 297), was not, in fact, a tabernacle. John 2002, 280 and fig.1.

⁴⁴³ Belting 1994, 384; Corrie 1990, 37.

⁴⁴⁴ Wilkins 2002, 371-395.

⁴⁴⁵ Belting 1994, 389.

⁴⁴⁶ Van der Ploeg 2002, 108 and fig. 4.

friars and the newly converted.⁴⁴⁷ In Italy, two types of tabernacle descended from these origins; the smaller, portable type, which proliferated in Siena and especially Florence in the Trecento, and the larger objects which appear to have had a short-lived and local popularity, particularly among the Mendicant Orders, in the late Duecento.

The so-called *Madonna dei Crociati* is a good example of this latter type of painted tabernacle (figure 87).⁴⁴⁸ It is close in size, format and, in places, iconography, to the panel in Edinburgh, and it belongs to the convent of Santa Chiara in Assisi. The central panel of this painting contains a large image of the Virgin and Child, and in the wings are eight smaller narratives from the Life and Passion of Christ.⁴⁴⁹ The wings are curved at their upper edge to close beneath the round-headed arch at the top of the central panel, leaving a projecting headpiece visible, and the panel possesses a base-block. In an interesting correspondence with the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the scene at the top of the right-hand wing is a *Flagellation of Christ*. This Marian tabernacle has always belonged to Santa Chiara, but it has been moved from its original position and is now kept in darkness in the crypt beneath the convent building.⁴⁵⁰ It seems likely that the painting, which is dated to c.1265, was originally located on the right-hand side altar of the convent church.⁴⁵¹ This altar, and its altarpiece, would have been visible to the strictly cloistered nuns during Mass, through the grated opening known as the *gratem monialum*.⁴⁵² The nun's choir was located in the right transept of the church, directly opposite the side altar dedicated to the Virgin.⁴⁵³ If the tabernacle of Santa Chiara was an altarpiece, then it is particularly apt that it should enclose an image of the

⁴⁴⁷ Folda 2005, 352.

⁴⁴⁸ Its title is obscure, but it may refer to the eastern origins of the central marian image type, which could have been associated with images brought back to central Italy from the Crusades.

⁴⁴⁹ Its central panel is 137cm high x 51cm wide (compared to the 112 x 62cm of the Edinburgh Tabernacle central panel). It is Umbrian, and evidently influenced by Byzantine images. Garrison no. 325.

⁴⁵⁰ I was fortunate to be permitted access to see this panel by Sorella Chiara Agnese in July 2015, and am grateful for her kind assistance.

⁴⁵¹ Its date coincides with that of the consecration of the basilica itself, in August 1265. Bigaroni, Meier and Lunghi 1994, 28; 195.

⁴⁵² The nuns received the Eucharist through this opening. De Marchi 2009, 607.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 608-611.

Virgin, the *tabernaculum Christi*, addressed to an audience of nuns who were themselves confined.⁴⁵⁴

Other contemporary tabernacles similarly appear to originate within conventual or monastic locations. The monumental Umbrian panel with the *Virgin and Child eleousia* (discussed above), is thought to come from the Clarissan convent of Sant'Agnese in Perugia.⁴⁵⁵ Here, again, the tender image of the Virgin and Child, enclosed within a hinged tabernacle, seems particularly well-suited to a cloistered audience. The small base-block beneath the central panel may suggest that, like the tabernacle from Santa Chiara, it once rested on an altar that was a focus of the nuns' devotions.⁴⁵⁶ A moderately-sized tabernacle, also now kept at the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, has four separate images in its central panel: the *Virgin and Child Enthroned*; *St Anne and the infant Virgin*; the *Crucifixion*; and the *Agony in the Garden* (figure 88).⁴⁵⁷ In the wings are twelve standing saints, among whom is an Umbrian Benedictine, *beato Sperandeo*, who died c.1260 in Gubbio. His presence makes it likely that the tabernacle was made for the monastery of San Pietro in Gubbio, of which Sperandeo was abbot until his death.⁴⁵⁸ The relatively small scale of the four central scenes and the large number of standing saints in the wings, particular to the Benedictine context, suggests that the tabernacle was intended to be seen at close quarters, primarily, if not exclusively, by the monks themselves.

One final example is Duccio's *Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea*, now in the National Gallery, London (figure 89).⁴⁵⁹ The original location of

⁴⁵⁴ Julian Gardner doubts that this was originally an altarpiece, because there were no altars within *clausura*. De Marchi's hypothesis neatly solves this problem. Gardner 1995, 34 n.33.

⁴⁵⁵ Belting 1994, 384; Valsassina and Garibaldi (eds.) 1994, 69; De Marchi 2009, 611.

⁴⁵⁶ Its monumental scale means that it would have been easy to see at a distance. Belting's thesis is that these hinged panel paintings were 'feast day images', opened only on certain days of the year. During the four weeks of Lent (*quadragesima*) - images, particularly of the crucifixion, were covered. Belting 1994, 389; Van der Ploeg 2002, 107.

⁴⁵⁷ It measures 95 x 93cm (entire object) when open. Santi 1969, 25-26.

⁴⁵⁸ Iacobilli 1971, 79.

⁴⁵⁹ c.1312-15. It is only 60cm high, roughly half the size of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. A tabernacle of almost identical proportions, now in Boston, is thought to have been made as a pair to this painting. It contains a central image of the Crucifixion. Gordon 2011, 196-197.

this tabernacle has been the subject of debate, but its mendicant patronage is clear. The presence St Aurea in the right-hand wing, opposite St Dominic, may indicate that it was originally destined for the female convent of Sant'Aurea in Rome.⁴⁶⁰ Alternatively, the tabernacle may have been commissioned by a private patron with a particular fondness for this female saint, whose cult was widespread at the time.⁴⁶¹ The will of the Dominican Cardinal Niccolò Albertino da Prato (d.1321) included '*tres tabulas pictas quae ponuntur super altare*' from his private chapel, revealing that small devotional panel paintings (which are not specified in the will) were commissioned as altarpieces.⁴⁶² The modest scale of Duccio's London tabernacle makes it difficult to ascertain whether it was intended for a conventual context, or for a private chapel.⁴⁶³ Most importantly for our purposes, it seems likely that this painting was commissioned and experienced in a private Dominican context - either within a female convent, or by a Cardinal and his entourage. It appears, like the other tabernacles discussed above, to have been intended for an exclusively religious audience.

All of the tabernacles considered thus far contain primarily non-narrative images in their central panels. They predominantly show the Virgin and Child (the Virgin as *tabernaculum Christi*), which, as we have seen, is an appropriate subject for a winged panel that encloses a precious devotional image. Of all the tabernacles catalogued by Garrison, the vast majority contain central images of the Virgin and Child, while the remainder contain images of Christ.⁴⁶⁴ The central panel of the Umbrian tabernacle from San Pietro, discussed above, is relatively unusual in its inclusion of four central images; two scenes from the Passion of Christ and two iconic images associated with the Virgin. A panel from an unidentified Clarissan

⁴⁶⁰ Gardner 1995, 49.

⁴⁶¹ Cannon 1980, 273.

⁴⁶² Cannon 1980, 269-270; 2014, 207-8. Victor Schmidt has asserted a direct relationship between the *tres tabulas* of Cardinal Niccolò's will, and the two tabernacles by Duccio. Schmidt 1996, 19-30; 2005, 251-2.

⁴⁶³ This tabernacle, like those listed above, possesses a projecting base-block and so may have been intended to rest on a flat surface. Gardner argues that it is too big for a privately-owned painting at the time it was made. Cannon, however, argues that its high quality indicates a private patron. Cannon 1980, 273; Gardner 1995, 49. The private use of images by Dominican friars is discussed in Cannon 2014, 202-3.

⁴⁶⁴ Garrison nos. 278-287; 299-304; 325-332; 345-351; 354-356. Those catalogued as 'centre panel only' are omitted here as not all of these can be shown to be parts of tabernacles.

context, which seems to have originally been the central panel of a tabernacle, is horizontally divided between two narrative scenes: *Christ Mounting the Cross* above, and the *Funeral of St Clare* below (figure 38).⁴⁶⁵ The funeral scene shows friars carefully placing the body of the saint on a bier, while ranks of clergy and mourning nuns look on. The juxtaposition of this specifically Clarissan devotional narrative, with a scene from the Passion of Christ, indicates the Christlike self-sacrifice of Clare and her humble submission to death. The parallel between the two events indicates the likelihood of her salvation and immediate transport to Heaven after death. In the scene of *Christ Mounting the Cross*, the Virgin reaches out in a desperate attempt to cover her son's nakedness as he ascends the cross. This image of the Virgin's protective motherhood and devotion to her son's body (which is present after his death in the Eucharist), echoes the Franciscan portrayal of Clare as a second Mary.⁴⁶⁶ Like several of the tabernacles discussed here, the Wellesley panel was intended for a female religious audience. It is the only example, apart from the Edinburgh Tabernacle, to contain exclusively narrative scenes - reflecting its Franciscan context and ideals. The tabernacle in Edinburgh, however, remains unique, as the only surviving tabernacle of this period to contain a narrative in its central panel that is unrelated to the Life of Christ or his Mother.

The distinctive shape of the tabernacle, in addition to its content, is unrepeated in comparable Italian panel paintings. Its central panel is wide in proportion to its height, and it has a cusped, rather than the more usual round-headed central arch, with a gabled pediment above. In other contemporary contexts, the same cusped arch shape was used to demarcate a niche-like space, often denoting a container for the sacred, such as in shrines, *ciboria* and *piscina*.⁴⁶⁷ In late thirteenth-century painting, such as the *Palazzo Pubblico* Madonna by Guido da Siena (1270s to early 1280s), it functions as a 'canopy', or framing device, above

⁴⁶⁵ Evidence of hinge hooks at both sides remain, indicating that it once possessed folding lateral panels. Its inscribed arch and projecting headpiece is very similar to that of other tabernacles, such as the *Madonna dei Crociati*. Flora 2014, 120.

⁴⁶⁶ Boskovits 1965, 69-94; Mooney 1999, 52-77; Flora 2014, 119-120.

⁴⁶⁷ For example, the reliquary-niches in the tomb of Henry III (c.1280) at Westminster Abbey. The same shape can be found in the ciborium by Arnolfo di Cambio at Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, and in the *piscina* of Santa Maria in Aracoeli, whose shape is repeated across Europe and in the gothic cathedrals of Britain. Binski 1995, 101-102; De Blaauw 2009, 125 and figs. 2, 6; Bolgia 2007, 102 and fig.127.

the central image of the Virgin and Child (figure 90).⁴⁶⁸ Here, it helps to exalt the content of the central panel, and lends a shrine-like quality to the tabernacle as a whole. Structurally, the Edinburgh Tabernacle is close to the tabernacle by Duccio in London (c.1312) and another attributed to the same artist now in Boston (1311-1318) (figures 35 & 89).⁴⁶⁹ All three have gabled pediments and inscribed arches, and the Boston panel, which contains a *Crucifixion* in its central panel, also has a *Redeemer with Angels* in the pediment. The date of the two Sienese panels has been suggested as a *terminus ante quem* for the tabernacle in Edinburgh, because they similarly unite the spandrels and arch of the pediment into a single unit, but utilise a round-headed arch. Following this structural analysis, a *terminus post quem* of the early 1270s might be provided by the Palazzo Pubblico Madonna by Guido da Siena, which has a structurally separate triangular pediment above its central panel.⁴⁷⁰ However this interpretation relies on the presumption that the development of panel painting carpentry was necessarily linear, and gives only a very broad possible dating for the Edinburgh Tabernacle. As I argue here, and in Chapter Three below, a date in the mid-1290s seems the most plausible.

It is evident that tabernacles of a comparable scale to the Edinburgh Tabernacle were made in the late thirteenth century for religious audiences, and that they were frequently found in female convents. Given the strong male emphasis of the subject-matter in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, it seems most likely that it was intended for an audience of male religious, and located on the eastern side of the rood screen, or *tramezzo*, of a monastic or Mendicant church. The function of large tabernacles is difficult to reconstruct because of their present dislocation from an original context.⁴⁷¹ Those possessing base-blocks seem likely to have rested on a flat surface, such as an altar, thus allowing the closure of their wings. Most contemporary tabernacles contained large-scale, devotional images of the Virgin and Child and could easily be seen from a distance, making them well-suited to a

⁴⁶⁸ In fresco, the same device is used to frame the scenes of the *Life of St Francis* (c.1260), in the Lower Church of San Francesco, Assisi. Malafarina 2005, 47, fig. 37.

⁴⁶⁹ Garrison nos. 345 and 350.

⁴⁷⁰ Achenbach 1944, 133.

⁴⁷¹ They were probably moved to accommodate changing fashions in altarpiece design. On the development of the polyptych as an altarpiece from c.1300, and double-sided altarpieces, see Cannon 1982, 69-93; Gardner 1983, 297-332; Cooper 2002, 1-54; Gordon 2002, 229-250.

liturgical context. They were probably located primarily on side altars, like the Santa Chiara tabernacle.⁴⁷² Their wings allowed the precious central image to be covered during Lent, or ceremonially opened on feast days, and the moveable structure may have functioned as a 'stage-set' for the preparation and consecration of the Eucharist when that altar was in use.⁴⁷³ Passion cycles, present in the wings of larger tabernacles including the one in Edinburgh, may have been intended to restate the connection between the sacrifice of Christ and the eucharistic bread and wine. The pediment, or headpiece, that projected above the tabernacle's central panel remained visible even when the central panel was covered, and frequently contained a crowning image of angels or the Redeemer; providing a useful image of blessing or consecration above the altar *mensa*. The small-scale narrative of the Edinburgh Tabernacle's central panel does not automatically preclude it from a comparable liturgical function.⁴⁷⁴ Seen from a distance, the larger-scale Redeemer with Angels, in addition to the clearly-composed Passion cycle, would still have been easily visible. The unusual, and highly specific content of the central panel requires further exploration in terms of its potential patronage, and it was certainly intended to be experienced at close quarters. But for now it may be observed that the only other narrative tabernacle identified thus far, the *Funeral of St Clare and Christ Mounting the Cross*, originates in a Franciscan context, where narrative painting was increasingly used towards the end of the thirteenth century, as a vehicle for expressing the unique parallels between Francis and Christ, or, as in this case, Clare and the Virgin.⁴⁷⁵

The radical innovations of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, highlighted in this chapter, are present both in its individual details and in its peculiar combination of narrative content. The scene of eremitic life in its central panel, directly juxtaposed with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, is on a miniature scale and is unrelated

⁴⁷² With the exception of those kept within *clausura*.

⁴⁷³ Belting 1994, 389.

⁴⁷⁴ '*non poteva trovare la sua collocazione più idonea sulla mensa d'altare di una chiesa...*' Malquori 2012, 60.

⁴⁷⁵ On Franciscan narrative painting and its influence, see Aronberg Lavin 2005, 95-112; Mulvaney 2005, 169-188.

to the Life of Christ or the Virgin. Within the Passion cycle, several unusual aspects, such as the presence of a second angel in the scene of the Three Maries and the Descent into Limbo, point to the significance of resurrection as a theme: in the ascension of the dead hermit's soul; the Resurrection of Christ after the Crucifixion; and the future resurrection of the dead at the Last Judgement. The presence of the lateral Passion cycle, alongside the scene of eremitic life and death, directly aligns the hermits of the desert with the sacrifice of Christ and the redemption of mankind.

The central panel of the tabernacle is both iconographically and stylistically distinct in Duecento painting. It is likely to be Florentine, but lacks any extant parallel in the art of central Italy. Certain of its details bear close relation to contemporary miniature painting, indicating the possibility that manuscript illuminations constitute both a visual source and an artistic *milieu* from which it may have emerged. Taking into consideration both the Passion cycle and the central panel, a date close to 1295 - slightly later than that suggested in recent scholarship - seems the most likely. I have argued that the tabernacle's attribution to Grifo di Tancredi has failed to recognise its distinctiveness and diminished its high calibre. It has prioritised the construction of a documented artist's *oeuvre*, and the assignation of a name to an exceptional painting, overlooking its likely origins in a workshop and the contribution of at least two distinct hands. This division of labour, which is clearly apparent under magnification, reflects contemporary practice and further problematises the attribution to an artist whose other attributed paintings come nowhere close to the tabernacle's central panel in quality, scope, or narrative lyricism. The demonstration that Grifo di Tancredi was not the author of the central panel, and the consequent anonymity of 'Master A', or the Master of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, should neither undermine his evident skill, nor obscure the justified repute of this object among late-Duecento painting.

Comparisons with other similar winged panel paintings indicate that the tabernacle was most likely made for a religious setting. Questions remain over the function of this, and other large tabernacles, which enjoyed short-lived popularity in Tuscany and Umbria at the end of the thirteenth century. Yet it is of a relatively large size, directly comparable with panels that are likely to have been found on subsidiary altar tables of mendicant or monastic churches. In addition, the complex

and multivalent iconography indicate a theologically literate audience, for whom this eremitic narrative was evidently adapted. The small scale of its central narrative indicates that its primary viewers were able to see the painting at close quarters, and contradicts the contemporary tendency towards dramatic monumental narratives seen, for example, in images of the Stigmatisation of St Francis. The anomalous features of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, including the miniature scale of its central panel, have contributed to its relative obscurity. However, despite its apparent novelty, parallels may be found between the image of the desert, and themes present in contemporary narrative painting, particularly in images made for the Franciscans. The following chapter considers the tabernacle alongside images from Byzantium, examining its relationship with, and potential origins in, the religious and visual culture of the East.

Chapter Three

The image of the desert between Byzantium and the West: Orthodox spirituality, literature and monastic practice

The image of a monastic funeral in the desert, which appears at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, finds no surviving precedent in Italian art. Its sources have been traced to the artistic and religious traditions of Byzantium, yet there is no extant visual exemplar, and neither the origins nor the development of this iconography are straightforward. This chapter explores the possible sources of the tabernacle's central panel in Byzantine images, texts and monastic practice. Furthermore, it aims to connect these eastern sources with the specific context in which the tabernacle was made: late thirteenth-century Tuscany. Whilst the Byzantine origins of the eremitic landscape have previously been recognised, its early appearance in the Edinburgh Tabernacle has never been fully explained. Several similar images from Byzantium, showing a monastic funeral in a desert landscape, were made between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. This chapter begins by looking at some of these paintings, alongside a fifteenth-century Greek rhetorical text or *ekphrasis*. The text narrates a funerary scene which is very close to the visual representations of this event found in Byzantine and post-Byzantine panel paintings (and in the tabernacle itself). It provides an important insight into the perception and understanding of this type of image in late-byzantine culture. The second and third parts of the chapter consider the origins of this iconography, in the visual and literary sources that predate its early appearance in the central panel of the tabernacle. The final section situates the painting within the wider historical context of Italo-Byzantine relations, especially in a monastic or religious sphere.

The spiritual traditions of the Orthodox East are of central importance for our understanding of the iconography in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. In particular, the monastic treatise known as the *Heavenly Ladder* (or *Scala Celeste*), written c.600 by John Climacus, abbot of St Catherine's monastery on Sinai, is a crucial literary source for the way of life represented in the desert landscape. It describes the systematic advancement of the individual soul, from the first steps of renunciation,

through the vices and virtues, to the heights of mystical union with Christ, structured as thirty rungs of a ladder.⁴⁷⁶ It is directed to a monastic audience and is primarily didactic in spirit. It was well-known in Byzantium from the time of its writing, but in the eleventh century, during a period of monastic reform, the text received renewed attention. Several illuminated manuscripts dating from this period contain images of monastic and eremitic life that appear to be directly related to details in the central panel of the tabernacle. The *Heavenly Ladder* represents a potential link between the Byzantine monastic tradition and the late thirteenth-century context in which the Edinburgh Tabernacle emerged. An early translation of the treatise by the Spiritual Franciscan Angelo Clareno, dating from before 1300, opens up the possibility of a direct relationship between illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder* from Byzantium, controversy in the Franciscan Order, and the creation of the Edinburgh Tabernacle in late thirteenth-century Tuscany.

Sixteen Byzantine and post-Byzantine panel paintings showing the funeral of a monastic saint survive from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, in addition to nineteen mural paintings.⁴⁷⁷ The majority (twenty-five) date from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Only one is dated to the thirteenth century, but it has been badly damaged and is therefore difficult to analyse in detail. Several of the panel paintings are very close in composition and content to the Edinburgh Tabernacle.⁴⁷⁸ One of these, showing the funeral of St Ephraim, is now kept at the Pinacoteca of the Vatican. It is dated to the first half of the seventeenth century and signed by the Cretan artist, Emmanuele Tzanzournari (c.1570-c.1631) (figure 91).⁴⁷⁹ This painting shares its central features with the tabernacle, and with other post-Byzantine paintings of the same theme: the funeral gathering at the lower edge of the painting;

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. the Ladder of Jacob in Genesis 28:12. The number symbolises the thirty years of Christ's 'secret' life before the Baptism. *Heavenly Ladder*, 289.

⁴⁷⁷ De Giorgi 2013, 196-7. The first on the list, the damaged panel from Sinai discussed above, is mistakenly categorised as a mural.

⁴⁷⁸ Particularly the Funeral of Ephraim the Syrian signed by Emmanuele Tzanzournari, and a panel of the same subject, dated to the fifteenth century, in the collection of Y. Petsopoulos at the AXIA gallery, London.

⁴⁷⁹ It is inscribed 'Funeral of Ephraim Syrus'. Bianco Fiorin 1995, 28-29; 103; Malquori 2012, 185; De Giorgi 2013, 213-217.

the steeply ascending mountains with caves showing scenes of monastic life; a small building on the hillside; a stylite saint on the central axis; and, directly above, an angel carrying the soul of the deceased to heaven.⁴⁸⁰ Both the vertical orientation of the landscape, and small details of the narrative scenes, correspond with the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Several elderly and crippled monks travel to the funeral carried on the backs of beasts or assisted by their brethren, and solitary hermits sit in caves of the mountain practicing their *ascesis*. The later Byzantine and post-Byzantine panel paintings vary only in minor details, such as the number and arrangement of additional scenes of eremitic life, and the inclusion of a river, with birds, plants, and animals (figure 92).⁴⁸¹ In comparison to all of these images, including the panel by Tzanfournari, the narrative at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle is both more detailed and more complex, with a greater number of ancillary scenes. It is remarkable - and problematic - that it appears more than three hundred years before the painting now in the Vatican, and in Italy rather than Byzantium. We return to this issue in due course.

The earliest surviving instance of a monastic funeral scene in Byzantine painting, on panel or mural, is a thirteenth-century panel from the monastery of St Catherine on Sinai (figure 93).⁴⁸² The painting has suffered from heavy losses and is now substantially obscured, but the obsequies of a saint can be partially made out at the lower edge of the vertically-oriented composition.⁴⁸³ The feet of the deceased on his bier can be seen, with a sainted figure kneeling by them, a bishop and three monks in attendance. The figures are arranged before a structure similar to a ciborium. Above this, the remaining fragments of the panel indicate an ascending desert landscape, and hermits can be seen peering from clefts in the rocks. There are several more figures in the desert, including another bishop and two saints, and a small building, on top of which the feet of a monk are visible. Delicate trees and

⁴⁸⁰ See, in addition to the paintings discussed above, the fifteenth-century *Funeral of St Ephraim Syrus* at the Christian and Byzantine Museum in Athens, and the *Funeral of St Saba*, now in Athens at the Benaki Museum and dated to the early seventeenth century. De Giorgi 2013, figs.105 and 106.

⁴⁸¹ De Giorgi 2013, 189-199.

⁴⁸² The panel has not been securely dated, so we do not currently know for certain that it predates the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Chatzidakis 1976, 194; Malquori 2001, 128-129; 2012, 108 n.82; De Giorgi 2013, 201-202.

⁴⁸³ De Giorgi suggests that it once formed part of a hagiographical icon (or *vita* panel). This is not substantiated, however, and the panel's dimensions are not given. De Giorgi 2013, 201.

plants grow along the contours of the landscape. The subject of the painting is usually given tentatively as *The Funeral of Arsenius (?)*, because the remains of an inscription beneath the funeral scene may include the final letters of this name.⁴⁸⁴

Another early painting of this subject is a mural from Thessaloniki, dated to 1303 in an inscription (figure 94).⁴⁸⁵ It is part of a cycle in the church of St Demetrios representing the life of St Euthymius (377-473), who was revered as the founder of Palestinian monasticism.⁴⁸⁶ The funeral scene shows the body of the great desert saint laid out on a woven mat at the centre of a large group of grieving monks. On his chest is an icon of Christ *Pantocrator* (the 'ruler over all'), indicating the union of his soul with Christ in death. The monks gathered around the bier display gestures of despair and mourning, particularly the figure who brings his hand to his mouth, and others whose faces are crumpled with grief. The scene appears intentionally emotive. The upper part of the fresco is lost, so it is not possible to know whether, as in the panel from Sinai, it once included more figures approaching the funeral from far away. The left-hand side of the scene shows a distant rocky landscape, indicating the remote location of Euthymius' life and death. The painting was made in the context of late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century monastic reforms, enacted under Andronicos II (1282-1328) and the ascetically-minded patriarch of Constantinople, Athanasius II (1289-1293 and 1303-1309). The Euthymius cycle at Thessaloniki reflects a renewed interest in the origins of monastic life and the lives of the early desert saints.⁴⁸⁷

Of the nineteen mural paintings showing the death of a monastic saint in a wilderness landscape, the majority (fifteen) are located in monastic settings. It seems likely that panel paintings of the same subject would similarly have been encountered in a monastic environment. The most frequently represented saint among the fifteen extant panel paintings is Ephraim, followed by St. Saba and St.

⁴⁸⁴ However, it has been pointed out that the letters are more likely, given their genitive form, to refer to the name of a putative patron. Chatzidakis 1976, 194 n.87. Arsenius was one of the Egyptian Desert Fathers, but no other comparable images of his funeral survive. De Giorgi 2013, 201; 196-197.

⁴⁸⁵ Gouma-Peterson 1976, 168-183; 1991, 111-159; De Giorgi 2013, 189-190.

⁴⁸⁶ The cycle, including the funeral scene, corresponds closely with textual accounts of his life. *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 4-83. His death is described on pages 56-67; Gouma-Peterson 1991, 112.

⁴⁸⁷ Gouma-Peterson 1976, 173.

Onuphrius.⁴⁸⁸ The deceased saints, who are usually identified by *tituli*, were all venerated as ascetics and early founders of religious communities. The funeral scenes demonstrate the remote environment in which they lived and died, and the devotion they inspired among their followers. Almost all of the paintings show the deceased with an image of Christ on his chest, establishing a close relationship between the dead saint and the Redeemer, or between death and the moment of redemption, through an icon-within-an-icon.⁴⁸⁹ These images are not simply narratives concerning the exemplary life of a specific saint. They represent the continuity of the monastic tradition he established even after his death, and illustrate the origins of the religious life in the wilderness.

An *ekphrasis*, written c.1418-1445 by Marcus Eugenius (d.1445), Bishop of Ephesus, describes a funeral scene very similar to those represented in the paintings discussed above, and sheds some light on the interpretation of this subject-matter in a Byzantine context.⁴⁹⁰ Its author was a prominent figure in the religious life of Byzantium in the early fifteenth century, and is known to have travelled to Italy in 1438 as procurator to the Council of Union, held in Ferrara and Florence in 1439. Marcus remained resolutely opposed to compromising the doctrines of Orthodoxy during the negotiations, and was deeply committed to the monastic traditions of Byzantium. He spent the years between 1418 and 1437 as a monk, latterly at the Mangana monastery in Constantinople, and retired to Mount Athos before his death in 1445.⁴⁹¹ It is not known exactly when the *ekphrasis* was composed, but it seems most likely, given its subject-matter, that it was written in, and intended for, a monastic setting. This type of rhetorical writing functioned primarily to bring before the listener's eyes a vivid rendition of a scene, event, or

⁴⁸⁸ Sixteen panel paintings survive in total. Of these, ten represent St Ephraim and four St Saba. The other saints represented in panel and mural paintings are: Onuphrius, Arsenius, Euthymius and Meletius. De Giorgi 2013, 196-197.

⁴⁸⁹ De Giorgi 2013, 190.

⁴⁹⁰ It first appeared in manuscripts such as Herzog August Bibliothek ms. Guelf. 82. Gud. graec. fol. 158-160v (dated to c.1445-50) alongside other *ekphrases*, including those of the distinguished rhetorician Philostratus (d. c.230 AD). Cited in Malquori 2012, 190. The *Eikones* of Philostratus were based on imagined paintings encountered in a fictive gallery. *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁹¹ Talbot 1991; Malquori 2012, 189.

object.⁴⁹² Paintings and other artworks were only one of many subjects that could be covered, and the text was not intended to be straightforwardly descriptive. *Ekphrases* were frequently embellished for the sake of rhetorical flourish, and might include inferred emotions, illusionistic details, or invoke the participation of multiple senses. Subjects were usually familiar to the intended audience, and their rhetorical description did not depend on the accurate description of a visual source. An *ekphrasis* was a paradigmatic response to a given subject, and thus an indication of the meaning understood to be contained within it.⁴⁹³

The *ekphrasis* in question adheres closely to the rhetorical conventions of the genre, and attempting to ascertain which painting it concerns is neither possible nor, I would argue, particularly profitable.⁴⁹⁴ It corresponds to several images showing the funeral of a monastic saint, describing the obsequies, the crowd of elderly mourners in attendance, the multitude of hermits in the mountain which rises above the monastery, and the birds and animals living in the wilderness.⁴⁹⁵ The *ekphrasis* refers to the artistry of the rhetorician in making an image ‘come to life’, and frequently addresses the listener directly, to direct their response.⁴⁹⁶ The intensity of the description is heightened by the incorporation of other senses, and in the description of emotions inferred by the author:

⁴⁹² The definition of *ekphrasis* in the first centuries CE, when Greek rhetoric was at its most sophisticated, differs from that of modern critical discourse, which frequently understands the phenomenon as a text which engages exclusively with the visual arts. It was originally defined simply as ‘a speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes’. Nikolaos, *Progymnasmata*, cited in Webb 2009, 1; 202; 2-9.

⁴⁹³ James and Webb 1991, 14.

⁴⁹⁴ Attempts have been made to link this text with Italian paintings (including the Edinburgh Tabernacle), which the author could have encountered on his visit to the peninsula in 1438-9. However, given the rhetorical nature of the text, it is extremely difficult to separate embellishment from description and therefore impossible to ascertain for certain whether the words relate to a specific painting. See Pallas 1982, 367; Malquori 2012, 90 n.26.

⁴⁹⁵ The text of this work, in both Greek and Latin, is printed in *Philostratei* ed. Kayser 1840, 142-154. The references that follow are taken from the Italian translation given in Malquori 2012, 192-196. I have given the page numbers of Kayser in brackets in each footnote relating to this text. The English translations are my own.

⁴⁹⁶ For example: ‘But why do you not call me back to reality, enraptured as I am with the art, which seems to me to be closer to reality than to things painted?’; ‘...you have suffered also in seeing it and you are moved’. Malquori 2012, 194 (149); 194 (151).

And those others close to the deceased seem to me to expect tears, and remain, prepared for their cheeks to be drenched with constant weeping.⁴⁹⁷ The features selected for description in the *ekphrasis* indicate the relative importance of certain details in a visual representation of the same scene. The number of mourners and intensity of their shared grief is emphasised. Their age and own approaching death is significant, as is the service rendered to them by the wild beasts of the desert. In the description of the ascent of the dead saint's soul, a privileged few witness the event 'with the eyes of the mind'.⁴⁹⁸ The listener is encouraged to participate in grieving for the dead saint, and then, through the means of rhetoric, to witness the soul's ascent and be freed of their sorrow.⁴⁹⁹ The identity of the dead saint is not mentioned in the text. The purpose of the *ekphrasis*, and any image of the same subject, was to evoke grief and sorrow at the remembrance of death, and point to the corresponding promise of salvation. It is likely that the funeral of a monastic saint was, at the time the text was written, an established and relatively well-known visual tradition in Byzantium. It illustrates the shared reverence of the saint among his followers, and honours the continuation of his example in the context of the wilderness.

With the exception of the aforementioned panel at Sinai, which is difficult to reconstruct in any detail (and which lacks a definitive date), there is no extant exemplar for the entire composition at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. However, there are a number of important visual precedents for its constituent parts, dating from before 1300. The first of these are images of monastic funerals, which appear from the tenth century onwards in illuminated manuscripts such as *Menologia*.⁵⁰⁰ An early example can be found on fol.112r of the *Menologion of Basil*

⁴⁹⁷ Malquori 2012, 194 (152).

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 193 (146).

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 193 (147); 194 (151).

⁵⁰⁰ The earliest surviving deathbed scenes are found in the sixth century Vienna Genesis (vindob.theol.gr.31). This iconography was developed in Byzantium in images of the *Dormition of the Virgin*. Marinis 2017, 50. *Menologia* are liturgical compilations of saints' lives. The text of the *Menologion* was standardised and augmented in the tenth century by Symeon Metaphrastes, a Constantinopolitan court official. At the *orthros* (matins) in monastic communities, there was a reading from the *Menologion* of the life of the saint being celebrated that day. Of the surviving 850 manuscripts of the *Menologion* of Symeon Metaphrastes (known as the 'Metaphrastian *Menologion*'), 43 are illuminated, and all of these date from the eleventh or very early twelfth century. Patterson Ševčenko 1990, 4; 1-6.

II, Vat. gr. 1613 (after 979), illustrating the funeral of St. Ephraim (figure 95).⁵⁰¹ The image shows the body of the dead saint laid out on a bier. Two mourning brethren stand by his side while another figure by his head swings a thurible.⁵⁰² To the upper right of the scene, two angels carry the tiny, swaddled figure of the saint's soul, witnessed by a fourth monk who stands apart from the obsequies. The event takes place in a remote desert landscape, which signals the eremitic context of the saint's life and death. In a *Menologion* dated to c.1040, now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (Cod. W521), similar scenes of death and grieving are found alongside the lives of monastic or eremitic saints, such as St Paul of Thebes (fol. 28r) and Eusebia (or Xenia) of Mylassa (fol. 228r) (figure 96).⁵⁰³ The latter image shows the saint, who was revered as a female ascetic, laid out on a bier, with a bearded monk standing at her head and another kneeling reverently by her feet. Both men appear to show expressions of intense grief. The setting, as in the miniature of St Paul in the same manuscript, is a mountainous landscape, with steep, flat-topped summits and scattered vegetation. Neither of the two images from Cod. W521 include the ascent of the dead saint's soul, but they clearly indicate the development of an iconographic tradition - representing the death and mourning of a hermit-saint - following the *Menologion of Basil II*.

Related funerary scenes, showing the separation of the soul from the body, can be found in manuscript illuminations dating from the eleventh century.⁵⁰⁴ A manuscript of the *Heavenly Ladder*, Princeton Garrett 16 (dated 1081), contains a miniature on fol. 63v depicting the death of an unidentified elderly saint (figure 97). An angel standing by the bier draws a tiny figure from the mouth of the sainted monk, as three brethren (without *nimb*) look on with expressions of mixed grief and horror. A fourth monk standing at the head of the bier prepares a censer. The image

⁵⁰¹ This text is not truly a *Menologion*, but a *Synaxarion*, a calendar of fixed Church feasts with lections. It is an exceptionally lavish decorated manuscript dedicated to the Emperor Basil II. Patterson Ševčenko 1991.

⁵⁰² Patterson Ševčenko 1990, 45.

⁵⁰³ And St Antony of Egypt (fol. 113v). The death of the prophet Micah (fol. 36r) is also represented in a desert landscape, but differs from those of the hermits in that his body is shrouded and he is placed in a stone sarcophagus by attendants. Vikan (ed.) 1973, cat. 11, 78-81.

⁵⁰⁴ Many of the manuscript illuminations to be discussed in this section date from the eleventh century, corresponding with contemporary monastic reforms and a related rise in the numbers of images dealing with monastic life. I deal with this topic further on p. 143-144.

appears in the chapter 'On the Remembrance of Death', an ascetic practice which is central to the monastic spirituality of the treatise. It demonstrates the soul's unwillingness to leave the body, even from a righteous monk, and the potential for intense fear in those who witness the event, and are left behind.⁵⁰⁵ In a psalter dated to 1066, now kept at the British Library, a similar image can be found on fol. 137r, illustrating verse 16 of Psalm 102 (figure 98).⁵⁰⁶ A body is laid out on a raised bier with drapes, as the naked figure of the soul exits through the mouth. One angel stands at the head of the bier and another flies down to receive the soul. As in the Princeton miniature, the identity of the deceased is unimportant.⁵⁰⁷ This image, however, demonstrates the willing departure of the soul from a righteous person who dies without fear.⁵⁰⁸ Both of these manuscripts were made, and seen, within a monastic context.⁵⁰⁹ Their illuminations do not illustrate the deaths of specific saints, as do *Menologia*. They help to communicate a subject with moral and theological implications, concerning the inevitability of death, the soul's departure from the body, and the attendant need for adequate preparation in life.

Certain figural details present in the Edinburgh Tabernacle are closely related to illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder*. A miniature on fol. 41r of Vat. gr. 394 (late eleventh century) shows a group of monks approaching the seated figure of the author, in the chapter on Penitence (figure 99). Among the group are several ageing men who require assistance on the journey, including one who is carried on a litter, another on the shoulders of his brethren, and a third, bent with age, who takes the hand of a monk reaching out to assist him.⁵¹⁰ The interactions, demeanour and gestures of certain figures in this group are replicated almost

⁵⁰⁵ The gesture of bringing a covered hand to the mouth indicates grief, silence and, in this case, fear. Kotzabassi, Patterson Ševčenko and Skemer 2010, 125. The first lines of the chapter 'On the Remembrance of Death' describe cowardice in the face of death as an aspect of human nature after the Fall, and terror of death as an indication of unrepented sins. Cited in Marinis 2017, 51.

⁵⁰⁶ 'For the spirit shall pass in him, and he shall not be: and he shall know his place no more.' Ps. 102:16. Theodore Psalter, British Library Add. Ms 19352.

⁵⁰⁷ He does not appear to be a monk.

⁵⁰⁸ Marinis 2017, 51.

⁵⁰⁹ The Theodore Psalter was written at the monastery of the Studios in Constantinople, by the monk Theodore. Martin 1954, 151.

⁵¹⁰ These ageing monks are not explained by the content of the text. Martin 1954, 59-60.

exactly in the Edinburgh Tabernacle (figures 100 and 101).⁵¹¹ In the painting, to the left of the stylite saint, two monks can be seen carrying a litter, as the figure in front turns his head to look over his shoulder at the others. Further to the left, among a larger group of figures, one monk is carried on the shoulders of another. And at the funeral scene, a standing saint with a red robe holds out his hand to assist a monk, bent double with age, who advances towards the bier. The details of this scene in the manuscript illumination do not derive directly from the adjacent text. They appear to be embellishments, taken either from a now-lost illuminated manuscript relative to the monastic life, or invented anew, to amplify the meaning of the words.⁵¹² In either case, the appearance of these details in the Edinburgh Tabernacle is a strong indication that manuscript illuminations - particularly those of the *Heavenly Ladder* - were of direct relevance to the development of its iconography.

Visual parallels with other illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder* help to confirm this hypothesis. The Princeton Garrett 16 contains a miniature on fol. 113v, showing four hermits enclosed within irregularly-shaped caves (figure 102).⁵¹³ One is intent on reading, while the other three raise their hands towards Heaven in a supplicatory gesture. The image appears in the chapter on Wakefulness. All four figures are contained within an abbreviated landscape setting, with small, decorative plants growing between the caves. The gestures of these monks are very similar to those of the hermits closest to the summit of the mountain in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, who witness the ascent of the dead saint's soul (figure 103). Both the shapes of the caves and the studious intensity of the reading monk find parallels in the tabernacle landscape. On fol.121v of the same manuscript, in the chapter on Pride, a miniature shows a single monk within a cave, raising his hands in prayer towards an icon of Christ (figure 104). A small winged demon (presumably representing the vice of pride) distracts the monk, causing him to turn away from the

⁵¹¹ As observed in Martin 1951, 220.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 222.

⁵¹³ The illuminations appear to be innovations, or to have been compiled from several different sources. Both the apparent newness and the coherence of the cycle of illustrations are notable, and demonstrate the possibilities for invention in monastic art. Martin 1954, 47.

icon.⁵¹⁴ Below, the summary landscape contains a variety of birds and animals, plants and flowers.⁵¹⁵ The animals are not mentioned in the text, but they are an integral part of the wilderness landscape inhabited by the monk, both here and in the Edinburgh Tabernacle.⁵¹⁶ These illustrations of monastic life are characterised by inventive embellishment of a textual source. A similar inventiveness and abundance of detail is present in the tabernacle, which seems to represent a sophisticated synthesis of extant visual sources.

The stylite saint who sits at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle belongs exclusively to the visual and monastic traditions of Byzantium. The *Life of Symeon Stylites* (c.390-459), the first of the pillar-dwelling saints, was written by Theoderet of Cyrrhus c.440, while Symeon was still alive. The *Lives* of Symeon and his followers, which described their extreme self-mortification at the top of tall columns, were neither widely known nor emulated in the West.⁵¹⁷ In the Orthodox tradition, however, they represented a heroic ideal of ascetic practice, and were likened to spiritual 'lampstands', whose prominent visibility was an illuminating example to humanity.⁵¹⁸ Early images of St Symeon Stylites appear in illuminated *Menologia*. The date of Symeon's commemoration (September 1st) coincides with the beginning of the Orthodox liturgical year, and in the mid eleventh-century Ms. Lavra 46, a portrait of the stylite saint occupies the frontispiece (fol. 4v).⁵¹⁹ He is shown half-length, behind a grille at the top of a sturdy column with blue volutes and two steps at its base. Symeon's importance in a monastic context is illustrated by his central placement in a thirteenth-century Crucifixion icon from Sinai, where he appears in a similar format to the Lavra portrait, half-length, and enclosed by the

⁵¹⁴ 'for the enemy may come at you from the unprotected side'; 'the value of prayer can be guessed from the way the demons attack us', *Heavenly Ladder*, 281.

⁵¹⁵ The inscription above the illustration is based on Psalm 69:3-4; 'let them be put to shame and turned back that seek after evil things in me; let them instantly be turned back and put to shame that say unto me, well done'. It relates to the preceding chapter on the closely-related vice of vainglory. *Heavenly Ladder*, 204-5; Martin 1954, 36.

⁵¹⁶ Animals appear again on folio 169 v., in the chapter on Solitude.

⁵¹⁷ Delehay 1923, cxlii-cxliii; Thurston 1923, 592-593. His life is commemorated in the Roman Church on the 5th of January. BLS I, 34-37.

⁵¹⁸ *Religious History*, 166.

⁵¹⁹ Pl. 1B12 in Patterson Ševčenko 1990. The frontispiece of Venice Marciana gr. Z 586 is also an illustration of Symeon Stylites, with an elaborate stepped structure surrounding the column. *Ibid.*, pl. 5B2.

grille atop his column (figure 105). He is situated at the centre of the lower frame, flanked by the Desert Fathers St Paul of Thebes and St Onuphrius, on an axis with the main image of the Crucifixion and Christ Redeemer in the upper frame above. These are portrait images, so they show Symeon in accordance with the archetype of a monastic saint, with long, grey hair and beard, attenuated features, and his hands raised in a gesture of blessing.⁵²⁰ He is shown frontally, in an unmoving posture that makes him appear as an extension of his column, an embodied 'pillar of virtue'. The figure of the stylite in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, however, folds his hands over his chest and bends his head towards the dead saint in a gesture of mourning and respect (figure 106). He is an unidentified participant in the narrative of the monastic funeral below.

In illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder*, images of unidentified stylite saints appear as illustrations of an especially self-mortifying mode of eremitical existence. On fol. 254r of Sinai cod. gr. 418 (mid-eleventh century), a stylite is shown at the top of a decorated column, enclosed by a narrow railing, and below him are two other monks: one seated on a hillock, wearing a garment of woven palms; and another peering out of the door of his cell (figure 107). This miniature accompanies the chapter on Solitude.⁵²¹ The nameless stylite embodies the isolation of ascetic life, physically separated from his brethren by his elevated position and the structure which encloses him. In the succeeding miniature from the same manuscript (also illustrating the chapter on Solitude), a stylite saint is approached by several monks in search of counsel. Even in this limited interaction with other monks, he remains alone at the top of his column. Images of the funeral of St Symeon Stylites follow a similar pattern to those of other ascetic saints, discussed above. In a late eleventh-century psalter, Vat. gr. 752, a scene of his death appears alongside the text of Psalm 118.⁵²² The saint is shown stretched out on a decorated bier, surrounded by eight monastic mourners, and the identifying inscription describes him as 'undefiled', from the first verse of the Psalm.⁵²³ The

⁵²⁰ Maguire 1996, 77.

⁵²¹ Stylite saints are recorded at Mount Athos in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Delehaye 1923, cxli. Martin 1954, 100.

⁵²² Another example of the same scene is in Pierpont Morgan Library, M639 fol. 294v.

⁵²³ 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' Ps. 118:1. De Wald 1942, 35 and pl. xlv.

image of the stylite, then, was strongly associated with an uncompromising ascetic existence, absolute solitude, and a virtue undefiled by the things of the world.

In the image at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the stylite saint, the monastic funeral, and dozens of additional narratives, are interwoven by the mountainous landscape in which they are set. It is possible to conjecture that one of the illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder* once contained a full-page miniature showing scenes of eremitic life alongside the celebration of a saint's funeral, in a comparable landscape setting. This hypothetical composition could, in turn, have informed the creation of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the Sinai *Funeral of Arsenius* and the later Byzantine paintings of the same subject. In some manuscript illuminations, remote and rocky landscapes, comparable to that of the tabernacle, function as a backdrop to episodes from the lives of the saints. In an eleventh-century Metaphrastian *Menologion* now in the British Library (Add. 11870), the miniatures frequently show the narrative action taking place between steep-sided hills, which flank the central figures (figure 108).⁵²⁴ On fol. 197v, John the Evangelist dictates to the scribe Prochoros, who sits on a rock. The mountains beyond have a distinctive, rightward-leaning form, with multiple jagged peaks that look like breaking waves. Above them, the hand of God emerges from the arc of heaven. Details of the landscape, such as tall, slender red-roofed buildings, delicate plants and steep-sided mountains, are close in type to those found in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, further suggesting that manuscript illuminations were an important source of its iconography. The remote landscapes of these miniatures, which are meticulously described, form the backdrop to scenes of revelation, death, and martyrdom.⁵²⁵ They contribute to the drama of the narrative, mark out the site of the action as distant from the secular world, and reflect the remote and often mountainous location of Orthodox monastic experience.

The composition of the tabernacle, in which disparate narrative episodes are unified within a mountain landscape setting, finds a direct parallel in an icon of the

⁵²⁴ Other similarly illuminated manuscripts include Venice 586 and Lavra 51. The narrative images in all these examples are set within elaborate landscape or architectural backgrounds. Patterson Ševčenko 1990, 189-190.

⁵²⁵ Cormack and Vassilaki (eds.) 2008, cat. 56.

Nativity (c.1100), now at the Monastery of St Catherine on Sinai (figure 109).⁵²⁶ The *Nativity of Christ* takes place within a cave, near the summit of a mountain. Arranged in the contours of the mountain are three scenes showing the *Journey* and *Adoration of the Magi*, and two depicting the shepherds. The *Flight into Egypt* and *Massacre of the Innocents* appear at its base. Within the round-headed upper part of the panel are ranks of angels, and in their midst, a beam of light descends from a star in Heaven directly to the Christ Child in the crib below. The image unfolds the mystery of the Incarnation in episodic form, but is not intended as a straightforward illustration of the Gospel narrative. Each scene is circumscribed by the contours of the landscape and retains its own internal logic, so that it can be read both as a part of the whole and as an autonomous episode. The subject-matter of the Nativity seems opposed to that of the Edinburgh Tabernacle; the former represents the entry of Christ into the world, whereas the latter shows the departure of a monastic saint. However, there are strong compositional and thematic parallels between the two images. The scale of the figures in each painting is small, and their episodic format most likely derives from miniature painting. The activity in both is motivated by a single event, which generates dynamic movement in the journeys of various groups of people. The separate narrative scenes are unified by the ascending mountain landscape, which designates the boundary between Earth and Heaven, and contains the opposing forces of life and death, past and future, ascent and descent. Both the Nativity icon and the Edinburgh Tabernacle are lyrical, cumulative paintings, hierarchically structured and apparently composed of multiple visual sources.

An image which might be described as didactic more than strictly narrative, but which is relevant to the Edinburgh Tabernacle for its subject-matter, is an icon of the Heavenly Ladder, made in the late twelfth century for the Monastery of St Catherine on Sinai (figure 110).⁵²⁷ It illustrates the central premise of the sixth-century text by John Climacus; the symbolic journey of the individual monk up thirty 'rungs', or virtues, on *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. A ladder bisects the image diagonally from left to right, as monks attempt to climb its rungs towards Christ at

⁵²⁶ This is the only example of this type of composition in Byzantine panel painting, that I am aware of, to predate the Edinburgh Tabernacle. It measures approximately 36 x 21cm. Weitzmann (ed.) 1976, XIII; fig.23.

⁵²⁷ Vasilescu 2013, 143; Archbishop Damianos 2004, 335-340.

the apex. Below the ladder, above a crowd of onlookers, small black demons attack the climbing monks with bows and arrows, or drag them from their rungs with ropes. Several monks fall headfirst towards the ground. At the top left of the image are ranks of angels, who appear to offer encouragement to the figures still ascending the ladder. The movement in this image takes place between Heaven and earth, identifying the monks as uniquely poised between the two. Their ordered ascent of the ladder is sabotaged by demons and simultaneously encouraged by angels. This image is derived from illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder* such as Sinai cod. 423, which represents the 'ladder' to be climbed by the monk at the start of each chapter.⁵²⁸ The icon lacks both the landscape setting and the narrative structure of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, but it similarly concerns the effort and ultimate goal of the monastic life. The invention of this iconography, sometime in the eleventh century, provides further evidence that images which had previously functioned only as manuscript illuminations, began to inform the creation of new types of icons, particularly within a monastic context.⁵²⁹ A similar impulse seems to have motivated the creation of compositions like *The funeral of Arsenius* at Sinai, or the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. It is likely, if impossible to prove, that a nascent narrative scene, showing eremitic life in a wilderness landscape, already existed in Byzantium before the late thirteenth century. It may well have been contained within, or derived from, illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder*.⁵³⁰

The textual tradition to which the *Heavenly Ladder* belongs - in addition to the iconography which appeared in its manuscripts in the eleventh century - is an important component of the Edinburgh Tabernacle's central panel. The scene of eremitic life appears to be closely related to Orthodox monastic practice, and to ascetic literature known only in the East, at least until the late thirteenth century. The eastern literary tradition, which originated in Syria and Palestine in the fifth and sixth centuries was derived, in part, from the early ascetic literature of Egypt, discussed in

⁵²⁸ It may originate as a title-page miniature from a now-lost manuscript of the *Heavenly Ladder*. Weitzmann 1976, XIII.

⁵²⁹ Vasilescu 2013, 144-145.

⁵³⁰ cf. Martin 1951, 220.

Chapter One. However, the literary tradition which developed in the East records different kinds of ascetic practice, and forms of monastic life, from those which were widely known in the West. The *Historia Religiosa* by Theoderet, Bishop of Cyrrhus (c.440), recounts the lives of monks and hermits living in northern Syria. These men (and women) followed the ascetic practices of celibacy, fasting and vigils, as a means of imitating the great biblical saints and living an 'angelic' life.⁵³¹ Theoderet records the sometimes extreme self-mortifying activities of men such as Symeon Stylites and James of Cyrrhestica, who both refused shelter and whose bodies suffered greatly from exposure to the elements.⁵³² *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, written c.555-558 by Cyril of Scythopolis, records the history of the Palestinian monasteries and the achievements of celebrated monks such as Euthymius and Sabas.⁵³³ The *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus (sixth century) concerns the lives and virtues of the monks and monastic foundations in Judea, and the *Heavenly Ladder* by John Climacus, which we have already encountered, was a monastic treatise on the systematic spiritual advancement of the soul. With the exception of the *Heavenly Ladder*, none of these texts were translated into Latin before the fifteenth century, but the ways of life they describe remained significant to the Orthodox monastic tradition. It is notable that certain aspects of the Edinburgh Tabernacle appear to reflect the content of eastern literature.⁵³⁴

The *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* describes in some detail the *lavras* established by saints Sabas and Euthymius in the Jordanian desert, which formed the model for many subsequent Orthodox foundations.⁵³⁵ They were composed of a central church and tower, around which a fortified coenobium developed. Beyond these buildings, hermits' cells dotted the hillside. A monk might retreat into solitude for five days of the week, only entering the coenobium to celebrate the Eucharist on Saturdays and Sundays, or he could retreat periodically into the higher desert, as did St Sabas during Lent.⁵³⁶ The example of the monastery's founding saint was

⁵³¹ Price 1985, xxii.

⁵³² *Religious History*, 160-176; 133-147.

⁵³³ Binns 1991, xlii.

⁵³⁴ Greek was little known in the West until the fifteenth century. Jotischky 2012, 69.

⁵³⁵ *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 102-111; 61-62.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

central to the monks' way of life, as the *lavra* owed its very existence to miracles enacted by the founder, even after his death. The Orthodox monastic tradition that developed after the example of the *lavras* of Palestine allowed for the relative autonomy of individual foundations. Each possessed its own *typikon*, or foundational text, concerning liturgical and regulatory matters particular to that community, often composed by its founding saint and maintained by its *hegumenos*, the spiritual father of a foundation.⁵³⁷ Individual monasteries and, to a certain extent, individual monks, had far greater autonomy in the direction of their spiritual practice and character of their religious life than was generally permitted in the West.⁵³⁸

The coexistence of different ways of life was a common feature of the Orthodox monastic tradition. Monasteries frequently supported solitaries who lived apart from the community but remained obedient to the *hegumenos*.⁵³⁹ The *typikon* of the Lavra on Mount Athos (973-975), for instance, makes specific provision for solitary monks (*kelliotai* or *hesychastai*), who could progress from living within the coenobium to a place of their choosing on the mountain.⁵⁴⁰ The different ways of life coexisted, but neither was given priority; those who remained in the community '[did] not take second place to those carrying on the struggle special to solitude'.⁵⁴¹ The number of solitary monks varied from monastery to monastery depending on its *typikon*, but foundations encouraged ascetic practice and were strictly separate from the secular world.⁵⁴² Following the examples of the early *lavras* in Palestine, Orthodox foundations typically occupied remote locations on the sides of a steep

⁵³⁷ These sometimes depended on earlier *typika* such as the *Asketikon* of Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379), but were essentially independent. The term 'Basilian' has been used inaccurately to apply to the Byzantine monastic tradition in general. However, it was not current in the thirteenth century and was only adopted by the Roman Church from 1579, to apply to all Italo-greek monasteries of Southern Italy. MFD I, xii; 22.

⁵³⁸ Talbot 1991a.

⁵³⁹ For example, the Lavra at Athos. MFD I, 245-270.

⁵⁴⁰ MFD I, 261.

⁵⁴¹ MFD I, 262.

⁵⁴² 'Hating the world, do not return to the works of the world. Having been loosed from the bonds of physical attachments, do not be bound again to the affections of the flesh. Having denied all pleasures and perishable things of the present life, do not depart from your struggle with obedience through negligence and become the sport of demons.' Athos Typikon (973-975), derived from the *Testament of Theodore Studites*, an influential *typikon* of the ninth century. MFD I, 79; 265.

mountain, which represented in physical form the idea of the monk's ascent towards God.

The lavraite model of monastic life, widely followed in Byzantium, is clearly reflected in the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The elaborate central coenobium, which contained the church and communal buildings, is present to the left of the funeral scene and can be compared to descriptions in the eastern literature (figure 2):

The old church [Fidus the deacon] made into a refectory, and built the new church above it; within the coenobium he constructed a tower that was ... extremely beautiful, and he also contrived that the burial vault should lie in the middle of the coenobium.⁵⁴³

The death of the saint is the cause of an extraordinary outpouring of grief among the monks and hermits of the desert, which seems to confirm his identity as the founder, or father, of a mixed monastic community.⁵⁴⁴ Higher up the mountain, many different forms of *ascesis* are visible, practiced in solitude - such as the stylite saint - or in small groups. The monks travel together towards the funeral or remain alone, absorbed in their spiritual practice. They are called to the obsequies by two monks striking *semandra*, long wooden or metal bars used in Orthodox monasteries instead of bells (figure 111).⁵⁴⁵ The sound of the *semandron* carried far across the landscape, so it could be used to call the monks who lived in solitude to the coenobium. Its appearance in the image is notable, as the instrument was not - as far as I am aware - found in western monasteries.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ MFD I, 61.

⁵⁴⁴ The presence of a stork with her chicks on the roof of the monastery, a symbol of filial piety, may support this interpretation. Friedmann 1980, 297.

⁵⁴⁵ References to the instrument can be found, for example, in the *Typikon* of Athos, and in the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus. MFD I 221; 223; *Spiritual Meadow*, 10.

⁵⁴⁶ DEC, 439.

The main subject of the tabernacle's central panel is usually given as the Death of St. Ephraim.⁵⁴⁷ St Ephraim of Syrus (d.373) was a deacon of the Church, born in Nisibis, who lived primarily in Edessa. He was known for his ascetic way of life, his activity in famine relief, and the extensive writings he produced in his native Syriac, including hymns, prose works and biblical commentaries.⁵⁴⁸ The life of Ephraim was recorded by Jerome (392) and Palladius (420), and the church historian Sozomen, writing c.440, states that 'he devoted his life to monastic philosophy.'⁵⁴⁹ Contrary to these accounts of his life, earlier Syriac sources reveal that Ephraim did not live as a monk, although he remained celibate (*ihidaya*).⁵⁵⁰ He was, in addition, actively engaged in the community among which he lived. However his disciplined life, contemplative nature and deep engagement with theology, particularly the ideas of repentance and withdrawal from the world, came to be understood as an important model for the monastic tradition of the Orthodox world.⁵⁵¹ Many of the Greek 'translations' of his work include texts of uncertain date and authorship, with no equivalent in Syriac, including several homilies to 'anchorites, mourners and dwellers in the wilderness.'⁵⁵² Ephraim owed his fame in Byzantium primarily to this later *corpus*, rather than to the Syriac sources securely attributed to him.

Interestingly, the Greek sources do not describe the death or funeral of St Ephraim in any detail. A Syriac *Life of Ephraim* contains the following description of the saint's death:

⁵⁴⁷ Martin 1951, 218; Callman 1974, 12; Brigstocke 2000, 34. It is currently described as the funeral of St Ephraim on the gallery label. Closely analogous representations of St Ephraim are found in the majority (twenty-six) of the thirty-five Byzantine and post-Byzantine images of monastic funerals listed in a recent survey, both on panel and in murals. The remaining examples depict other monastic founders such as Onuphrius and Saba. See p. 120-125 above. De Giorgi 2013, 196-197.

⁵⁴⁸ Some of his hymns are translated into English in: Brock 1990; Hansbury, 2006; and his prose works in McVey, (ed.) 1994. A select biography of his writings can be found in *ibid.*, xv-xvii.

⁵⁴⁹ Cited in Brock 1990, 15.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁵¹ Images of St Ephraim, dressed as a monk, are found in the eleventh century Theodore Psalter, and in the Menologion of Basil II. His feast day in the Orthodox Church is the 28th of January. Vööbus 1958, 18-21; Brock 1990, 25-26.

⁵⁵² Vööbus 1958, 69-86 (the origins of these works, which Vööbus attributes to Ephraim, is now disputed); DEC, 180; Brock 1990 34; 36.

With hymns and psalms of the Holy Spirit, his body was borne to the tomb, with angels and watchers, bishops, priests and deacons, and the entire clergy and people in attendance. There also assembled at the funeral the praiseworthy company and blessed band of anchorites, stylites and coenobites, by whom the body of Ephraim was buried with ceremony and honour...⁵⁵³

The mention of 'anchorites, stylites and coenobites' who gather at the funeral gives some account of the numerous figures who travel down the mountain to honour the saint in the Edinburgh Tabernacle.⁵⁵⁴ However, it is not clear how this Syriac source, which is of uncertain date, was known in Byzantium.⁵⁵⁵ In addition, the *topos* is not unique to the account of Ephraim's death; it appears in other, similar accounts of a monastic saint's death, such as that of St Euthymius, founder of the Great Lavra in the Jordanian desert, by Cyril of Scythopolis (558):

The news, circulating through all the surrounding country, brought together an immense crowd of monks and laypeople. Indeed the most holy archbishop also ... arrived at the lavra. *From all parts assembled the anchorites of the desert*, including our great father Gerasimus. [...] Martyrius and Elias wept and lamented the loss of the father.⁵⁵⁶ [My emphasis]

Both of these descriptions show the esteem in which the dead saint is held among the wider population, lay and religious alike. Yet they neither account for the profusion of detail in the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, nor allow us to categorically identify the saint whose funeral is being celebrated. The image seems to be much more than a straightforward hagiographical narrative.

The literature of Syria and Palestine frequently returns to common tropes of the eremitic life, shared with the western literature, which as we have seen, are present in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The ascetic endeavours of myriad saints and

⁵⁵³ Assemani 1743 III, LXII-LXIII, cited in Delehaye 1923, cccix; Martin 1951, 218-219.

⁵⁵⁴ The presence of a stylite is anachronistic, because Ephraim died in 373 but Simeon Stylites, the first stylite saint, lived from c.390-459.

⁵⁵⁵ Martin provides no evidence, stating merely that: 'this narrative must have been known in Greek, either in a translation, or perhaps in an independent account embodying a similar description of the saint's passing.' Martin 1951, 219.

⁵⁵⁶ *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 57. The funeral of Euthymius was represented in a 1303 fresco in Thessaloniki.

hermits permit them to achieve specific physical and spiritual feats, such as the following description of James of Nisibis in the *Religious History*:

While he thereby wore down his body, he provided his soul unceasingly with spiritual nourishment. [... he] received by the grace of the all-holy Spirit the power to work miracles.⁵⁵⁷

The eastern sources dwell more frequently than those of the West on the efficacy of the ascetic as thaumaturge. In the Syriac tradition, a closer relationship existed between certain holy men and the laity, and they were frequently approached for help and counsel.⁵⁵⁸ Whilst this particular aspect is not present in the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the reported responses of visitors (including writers such as Theoderet and Cyril of Scythopolis) to the great monks of the desert guides the response of a reader, or a viewer, who approaches the hermits at one remove:

Many he made lovers of the things of God simply by being seen; for who would not have been overwhelmed with admiration on seeing an old man who was worn away in body [...] and took food sufficient only to prevent death from hunger? In addition to the greatness and number of his labours the bloom of grace induced all to admire and honour him.⁵⁵⁹

The appearance of the hermits may be aged or apparently infirm, but they reflect the glory of God and can edify an onlooker by their appearance alone. Their way of life is frequently compared to that of angels.⁵⁶⁰ The profusion of detail in the tabernacle seems intended to impress on the viewer the sheer numbers of hermits, and the different forms of *ascesis* they pursue. Their endeavours are visible to be admired and honoured, and are all the more impressive for being presented collectively, framed by the mountainous wilderness they inhabit.

In contrast to the primarily hagiographical content of the eastern literature discussed above, the *Heavenly Ladder* of John Climacus narrates the ascent of the individual monk towards God. Sometimes, particularly in the early stages of the treatise, there are narratives which augment the primarily instructive text. In the

⁵⁵⁷ *Religious History*, 13.

⁵⁵⁸ Price 1985, xxix-xxxii.

⁵⁵⁹ Concerning the hermit Romanus. *Religious History*, 95.

⁵⁶⁰ The Prologue of the *Religious History*, for example, states that the monks of Syria 'emulated the bodiless beings'. *Ibid.*, 4.

fourth chapter, 'On Obedience', he describes the monks of an unspecified monastery:

Among them was the awful and yet angelic sight of men grey-haired, venerable, preeminent in holiness, still going about like obedient children and taking the greatest delight in their lowliness. [...] I saw others among these wonderful fathers who had the white hair of angels, yet the deepest innocence, and a wise simplicity that was spontaneous and yet directed by God himself.⁵⁶¹

Alongside the common trope of the monks as earthly angels, Climacus describes the obedience and humility inherent in a successful monastic community. The first two sections of the treatise, 'The break with the world' and 'The fundamental virtues', are concerned with the monk's progress within a coenobitic context. There are three forms of religious life through which a monk might journey on his ascent of the Heavenly Ladder: life in a monastic community; 'the life of stillness shared with one or two others'; and the 'road of withdrawal and solitude'.⁵⁶² The third and final section of the treatise, concerning the contemplative life and final goal of union with God, focuses on solitude. Yet none of the ways of life are given priority; Climacus was only too aware of the dangers of solitude for the unprepared. This vision of monastic existence, based on obedience to the leader of a community, but allowing each monk the freedom to choose the most appropriate form of life according to his spiritual progress, corresponds with the literary and monastic traditions which developed in Syria and Palestine. It is also reflected in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, which pictures a monastic community gathered by the coenobium, small groups of monks travelling towards the funeral, and, close to the summit of the mountain, solitary hermits who direct their gaze towards Heaven.

The remembrance of death is an important component of the *Heavenly Ladder* and a motivating force in the scene at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. It is the sixth step on the *Ladder* and according to Climacus, 'the most essential of all works'.⁵⁶³ Remembrance of death allows a monk to withdraw from

⁵⁶¹ *Heavenly Ladder*, 96-97.

⁵⁶² *Heavenly Ladder*, 79.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 132.

the created world and to renounce their own individual will.⁵⁶⁴ It encourages the monk to 'die each day', that is, to be insensible to the desires of the body, to repent in the knowledge of his inevitable death, and to avoid falling into sin.⁵⁶⁵ Death concerns the ultimate fate of the soul, and is linked to judgement, punishment, and sentence.⁵⁶⁶ The funeral of a monk or a holy father, such as is pictured in the tabernacle, occasions natural grief and mourning among the brethren. But it can also be seen as a representation of the principle of remembrance of death, particularly among elderly monks who approach their own mortality as they descend the mountain towards the funeral.⁵⁶⁷ The sixth chapter of the *Heavenly Ladder*, 'On the Remembrance of Death', motivated the creation of miniatures showing monks grieving at the deathbed of one of their brethren, such as fol. 63v of Princeton Garrett 16 (figure 96). These vivid illustrations do not represent specific monks, but concern the response of the mourner and the destination of the soul after death. Similarly in the tabernacle, the focus is not on the individual (and unidentified) saint who has died, but on the grieving monks who surround him and the angelic transport of his soul.

Climacus regarded the endeavours of the monastic life as an ascent towards God, and a perpetual 'light for all men'.⁵⁶⁸ He saw the mountain, like the ladder, as a powerful symbol of spiritual ascent:

Listen to the voice of the one who says: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of our God" (Isa. 2:3)⁵⁶⁹

Like Cassian in the *Conferences*, he frequently refers to the Scriptures, to illustrate a point, to offer counsel, and to demonstrate the God-given source of the monastic endeavour. In chapter 26, 'On Discernment', the author refers to the invocation at the start of Psalm 69:2, as a way for the monk to pray for rescue from bad thoughts:

⁵⁶⁴ From the very first step, 'On Renunciation of Life'. *Heavenly Ladder*, 74

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 291.

'O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me.'⁵⁷⁰ The words of this same psalm were given prominence by John Cassian in the *Conferences*, and again by St Benedict in his *Rule*, as we have seen. They are present in the central panel of the tabernacle, held by a sainted monk in a wheelchair drawn by lions (figure 5). The Scriptures, particularly the Psalms, were constantly invoked in a monastic context in both East and West, providing a framework around which the monastic life was structured. For Climacus, the religious life was directly informed by the example of Christ. In the thirty steps of the *Heavenly Ladder*, Climacus makes the connection between Christ's earthly life and the endeavours of the monk:

Baptised in the thirtieth year of his earthly age, Christ attained the thirtieth step on the spiritual ladder, for God indeed is love, and to Him be praise, dominion, power.⁵⁷¹

Similarly, the central panel of the tabernacle presents the religious life in the wilderness framed by the sacrificial life of Christ. The efforts of the monks and hermits, living among the ascending slopes of the mountain, are presented in direct relation to the Passion, death and Resurrection of the Saviour and symbolise the continued revelation of the scriptural tradition. The ascent of the dead saint's soul represents the promise of eternal life, made possible by Christ.

A close relationship between the *Heavenly Ladder* and the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle is evident, both in the iconography of illuminated manuscripts, and in the content of the text itself. The illuminations discussed above may have been adapted from existing sources, or equally likely, invented anew, to supplement and embellish the text of the treatise.⁵⁷² Some go beyond the content of the text, such as the details of the landscape, the presence of animals, or the infirm and elderly monks assisted by their brethren (figures 98 and 103), none of which are mentioned by Climacus. It appears that visual embellishment, or images which go beyond the bounds of textual description, were an integral feature of Byzantine images showing monastic and eremitic life. The *Heavenly Ladder* also prompted the

⁵⁷⁰ *Heavenly Ladder*, 240.

⁵⁷¹ Love is the final step on the *Ladder*. *Ibid.*, 291.

⁵⁷² Illuminated copies of the *Apothegmata Patrum* exist from the ninth century onwards, such as Paris. gr. 923. They are not iconographically similar to the illuminations of the *Heavenly Ladder*, but they demonstrate the existence of illuminated ascetic texts well before the eleventh century. Martin 1950, 191-195.

invention of new icons, such as the eleventh-century example discussed above (figure 109). We do not know the source of the tabernacle's central panel as a whole, but it seems probable that a composition including a monastic funeral in a wilderness landscape existed in Byzantium prior to the end of the thirteenth century. Such an image may have originated in a now-lost copy of the *Heavenly Ladder*, or another manuscript, and is likely to have been compiled from many different sources - both literary and visual. This putative composition may then have been extensively adapted and embellished by the highly skilled primary artist of the tabernacle.

The image at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, like the text of the *Heavenly Ladder*, is not a hagiographical narrative. Both are deeply embedded in a monastic context, and both demand the involvement of their audience. The reader of the treatise is exhorted to climb the steps of the *Heavenly Ladder*, following the method Climacus describes, in an ascent towards the perfect love of God. In order to make sense of the image, or to read the text of its inscriptions, the viewer of the tabernacle must physically step close to its painted surface.⁵⁷³ Seen at close quarters, the abundant detail of the eremitic landscape engulfs the viewer, occupying his entire field of vision. Both the image and the text concern the journey of the universal monk, and the close relationship that exists between the monastic life and the life of Christ.

The illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder* originate in the eleventh century, a time when Byzantine visual culture was strongly influenced by a 'prevailing spirit of asceticism'.⁵⁷⁴ The eleventh century saw the foundation of several new monastic foundations, such as at Nea Moni on Chios, and the development of others, including the communities on Mount Athos.⁵⁷⁵ It was also characterised by widespread monastic reform, influenced by the teachings of Symeon the Younger, also known as the New Theologian (c.949-1022). Symeon became *hegumenos* of the monastery of St Mamas between 979 and 991, and his extensive writings emphasise the central importance of the spiritual father and the

⁵⁷³ On the inscriptions, see chapter one above, p.54-59.

⁵⁷⁴ Martin 1954, 151.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

individual's mystical relationship with God.⁵⁷⁶ His ascetic spirit was deeply indebted to the writings of John Climacus, and he frequently quoted from the *Heavenly Ladder* in his writings.⁵⁷⁷ He regarded monks as the 'chosen people of God', in whom the Holy Spirit resides, and he strongly advocated a return to the penitence and ascetic practices of the early Fathers such as Evagrios Ponticos and Macarius of Egypt.⁵⁷⁸ Symeon's teachings were passed on by his disciples and followers, and echoed in the writings of John IV Oxeites, patriarch of Antioch (1089-1100), who protested against the secular control of monasteries and defended the principle of monastic isolation from the world.⁵⁷⁹ Perfect salvation was seen by Symeon, and those who followed him, to lie in the renunciation that characterised the religious life. The renewed interest in ascetic literature, evident in the eleventh century, corresponds directly with the creation of illuminated copies of the *Heavenly Ladder*. The same spirit of asceticism and reform influenced the representation of monastic saints in other manuscripts, such as the so-called Theodore and Chludov Psalters.⁵⁸⁰ The icon, or image, of a monastic saint was seen to embody the sanctity of its prototype, and thus to perpetuate the Christlike virtue of the ascetic.

The image of the desert at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle reflects a corresponding ascetic tendency among its unknown patrons. We return now to the problem of why, and how, it emerged in central Italy, around a century and a half before closely comparable panel paintings were made in Byzantium. Its Italo-byzantine hybridity, which has never been adequately explained, must be seen within the context of a continuing dialogue between Byzantium and the West. The tabernacle seems to indicate a clear admiration of the Orthodox monastic tradition at a time when relations between the Roman and Orthodox Churches were somewhat

⁵⁷⁶ McGuckin 1996, 17.

⁵⁷⁷ Alfeyev 2000, 210-212.

⁵⁷⁸ Martin 1954, 159-160; Alfeyev 2000, 226-241.

⁵⁷⁹ Aspects of Symeon's theology were, nonetheless, controversial. McGuckin 1996, 17.

⁵⁸⁰ British Museum Add. MS 19352; Moscow, Hist. Mus. cod. add. gr. 129. Martin 1954, 151; Patterson Ševčenko 1990, 70-71. On the representation of monastic saints in Byzantine art of the twelfth century, see also Maguire 1996, 75-90.

strained, following the Council of Lyons in 1274 and the collapse of attempted reunification. Yet the image also points towards a religious and historical dialogue that continued to exist between the cultures of East and West, despite the doctrinal and liturgical divisions that had caused the Great Schism of 1054. The following discussion considers instances of this cultural interchange, particularly in relation to the monastic and eremitic traditions represented in the tabernacle. It provides a context in which to view specific events near the end of the thirteenth century, which connect the religious observance and geographies of the divided Churches, and offer a potential explanation for the tabernacle's origins in central Italy.

The monastic reforms of eleventh-century Byzantium, which helped to generate new images of the religious life, also had an effect in the West during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The character of certain Benedictine foundations in Europe was informed by Orthodox religious culture. At the monastery of the Holy Trinity in Rouen, for example, a cult of St Catherine of Alexandria developed following its foundation in 1030, at a time when the virgin martyr was little known in the West. An anonymous account of the monastery's foundation credited an Orthodox monk, Symeon, with bringing the relics of St Catherine from Jerusalem to Rouen.⁵⁸¹ At the reformed Benedictine house of Grandmont, founded in 1073 by Stephen of Muret (d.1124), the monastery's strictly ascetic way of life was associated with that of Orthodox monks living in Calabria. In the first *Life* of the founder, written between 1153-1170 by the monk William of Saint-Savin, Stephen is recorded as spending twelve years among Calabrian hermits before returning to France to establish his own foundation.⁵⁸² The fictitious nature of this account is immaterial; it is however significant that the Greek hermits were regarded by Stephen's biographer as an authoritative example, associated with the lives of the Desert Fathers. In Italy, the important Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino, south of Rome, was profoundly influenced by the culture of Orthodox monastic tradition. In 981, the Calabrian Orthodox monk and ascetic Nilus visited the monastery with his followers, and was welcomed as a saint. He wrote hymns in honour of St Benedict for the monks at their request, engaged in discussions on the liturgical and disciplinary differences between Latins and Greeks, and officiated in

⁵⁸¹ Jotischky 2012, 65.

⁵⁸² Fouquet 1985, 23; Baker 1993, 219-220.

Greek at the monastery church.⁵⁸³ Following his visit, three monks of Monte Cassino travelled to the East, to Mount Athos and Jerusalem, in search of a more rigorous and solitary form of the religious life.⁵⁸⁴ In the second half of the eleventh century, under Abbot Desiderius, Greek artists were invited to Monte Cassino to execute works of art and to teach the monks, reflecting the perceived authority of Byzantine visual culture.⁵⁸⁵ The effects of this practice are still evident in the frescoes of the monastery church of S. Angelo in Formis, a daughter-house of Monte Cassino. Twelfth-century images of the Desert Fathers Paul and Antony, executed in a strongly byzantising style, are evidence of the 'spirit of asceticism' - present in Byzantine images of the eleventh century - in the visual culture of the West.⁵⁸⁶

Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, contact between Orthodox and Latin monks was enabled through increased travel between East and West, and the opening of new trade routes. As early as the tenth century, western monks visited Orthodox communities in the Holy Land at Athos and Sinai as part of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.⁵⁸⁷ Pilgrimage from Europe to Jerusalem was made easier through the establishment of ports such as Acre and Tripoli in the Crusader States.⁵⁸⁸ By the thirteenth century, laypeople also began to visit Mount Sinai, as recorded in the pilgrim account of Thietmar (1217-18).⁵⁸⁹ Sinai had been a holy site since the time of the Old Testament prophets, and pilgrimage to the mountain, as part of an itinerary from Acre to Jerusalem, became increasingly popular in the thirteenth century. It allowed pilgrims from the West an insight into Orthodox

⁵⁸³ Hester 1991, 32.

⁵⁸⁴ Bloch 1946, 172.

⁵⁸⁵ *'Di che perfezione essi siano stati maestri in quelle arti lo si può vedere dalle loro opere'*, *Cronaca Monastero Cassinese*, 387.

⁵⁸⁶ Pace 1982, 462.

⁵⁸⁷ Such a pilgrimage was recorded by the monks at Monte Cassino in 997-998. Jotischky 2012, 63; 65.

⁵⁸⁸ Between 1096-1291.

⁵⁸⁹ Thietmar's is not a typical account; it records two pilgrimages, one to Saydnaya, north of Damascus, and another to visit the tomb of St Catherine on Mount Sinai. A standard itinerary to Jerusalem started and ended in Acre, the primary Levantine port. Pringle 2012, 3-4; 95-133; 165-172.

monastic traditions and became an important place of artistic exchange.⁵⁹⁰ At certain Orthodox monasteries in the Holy Land, provision was made to accommodate the presence of western monks. At St Sabas in the Judean desert, for example, the *typikon* was altered in the early twelfth century, permitting Franks, Iberians, and Syrians to gather in a given location inside the monastery, to sing the canonical hours and Psalms in their own language, and then to go to the Great Church and take part in the sacraments 'together with the whole brotherhood'.⁵⁹¹ The monastery even allowed for Franks and Georgians to become professed members of the community.⁵⁹² At 'Abud, the Orthodox church was extended to provide for Latin congregations, and the shrine church of St John the Baptist at 'Ain Karim near Jerusalem was shared by Latin and Orthodox populations.⁵⁹³ Whilst the Churches of Byzantium and Rome remained divided over issues of doctrine and liturgy, monks and laypeople belonging to both traditions were brought into close proximity through pilgrimage and Crusade.

The increased numbers of travellers between East and West also facilitated significant cultural exchange. Images made in the Latin-occupied territories of the East, often referred to as 'Crusader' art, represent a fusion of styles and iconographic sources, drawing from the visual cultures of transalpine countries, Italy, and Byzantium.⁵⁹⁴ In thirteenth-century Italy, there was an influx of icons and manuscripts from the East, primarily through the ports of Pisa and Venice. Byzantine visual culture permeated Italian painting.⁵⁹⁵ Multiple examples can be found among images adapted for use by the Mendicant Orders, from the iconic type of the *Man of*

⁵⁹⁰ Thietmar noted the monks' ascetic way of life; 'they dress wretchedly and sleep miserably, almost all on the bare ground.' Cited in Pringle 2012, 124-5. The monastery retains an extensive and extremely important collection of Crusader paintings likely taken there by pilgrims travelling from Acre during the thirteenth century. Evans 2004, 12; Pringle 2012, 4.

⁵⁹¹ MFD 4, 1316.

⁵⁹² Jotischky 2001, 93.

⁵⁹³ Jotischky 2012, 67.

⁵⁹⁴ Folda 2005, 352.

⁵⁹⁵ This phenomenon has been extensively studied in the art-historical literature of the period. See, for example: Kitzinger 1966, 25-47; Stubblebine 1966, 85-101; Belting 1994, especially 330-376; Bacci 1998, 255-58, 263; Derbes and Neff 2004, 449-461.

Sorrows, to narrative images showing Christ ascending the Cross.⁵⁹⁶ In certain cases, the appearance of a Byzantine original was carefully preserved, and held an intrinsic value associated with the devotional nature of the icon and the authority of an ancient, unchanged image type.⁵⁹⁷ This perception existed well before the arrival of the Mendicants, but was voiced in a sermon of 1306 by the prominent Dominican preacher Giordano of Pisa (d.1311). He spoke about 'old pictures from Greece'... 'as compelling as scripture', indicating the value attributed to their geographical and historical proximity to the Holy Land and the life of Christ.⁵⁹⁸ The central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, however, is not a straightforward appropriation of a Byzantine image. Firstly, as discussed above, there is no extant exemplar to which it can be directly traced, although one may have existed. Secondly, it represents a way of life that is, ostensibly, extraneous to that of the Mendicants, and, unlike images of the Virgin or of Christ, religious traditions which are distinct from those of the West. It was evidently modified from its putative source to suit a Latin audience, but it was not widely copied in the West.⁵⁹⁹ The tabernacle is evidence that an unusual image, relating primarily to the Orthodox monastic way of life, held sufficient value to be deliberately incorporated into the visual and religious traditions of central Italy.

The opening up of trade routes between the Levant and the Italian peninsula permitted easier travel from East to West, allowing monks and laypeople to undertake pilgrimage to sites in Rome, or Santiago de Compostela.⁶⁰⁰ A pilgrim and hermit called Davinus, who died in Lucca on his way from Rome to Santiago at the end of the eleventh century, was venerated as a miracle-working saint by the locals after his death.⁶⁰¹ His Armenian origins, which are thought to be a legendary invention of the thirteenth century, became an important aspect of his cult, and

⁵⁹⁶ On the *Man of Sorrows*, see for example Van Os 1978, 65-75; Puglisi and Barcham (eds.) 2013; on Christ ascending the Cross, see Derbes 1996, 138-157.

⁵⁹⁷ Bacci 1998, 255-58, 263; Derbes and Neff 2004, 458; Cannon 2014, 71-72.

⁵⁹⁸ Cited in Belting 1990, 22.

⁵⁹⁹ On later Italian paintings of this subject, see chapter four below, p.241-243. The juxtaposition of the eremitic landscape with narrative images showing the Passion and Resurrection of Christ is also likely to be a western adaptation.

⁶⁰⁰ Bacci 2004, 549

⁶⁰¹ His cult continued to be popular until the first half of the twentieth century. *Ibid.*, 553.

testify to the perceived appeal of the eastern ascetic in thirteenth-century Tuscany.⁶⁰² At around the same time, communities of Armenian monks were recorded in the cities of Perugia, Pisa and Lucca, evidence of an eastern religious presence in central Italy.⁶⁰³ The Armenian Church was distinct from that of Byzantium, and had professed allegiance to the papacy and accepted the *filioque* in 1251.⁶⁰⁴ There were, however, notable differences with western foundations. The Armenian monks wore long beards, used the Armenian language in their liturgy and retained some chants of the Eastern rite.⁶⁰⁵ As such, they retained a distinctive 'otherness', and were, at least in appearance and historical heritage, closer to the Orthodox Church than to that of Rome. Yet they coexisted peacefully with their western counterparts and evidence suggests that the monks were highly regarded by the local populations.⁶⁰⁶

In the southern regions of the Italian peninsula, on Sicily and as far north as Rome, there had been an Orthodox monastic presence since the time of the iconoclast controversy. At the monastery of Sts Boniface and Alexis in Rome, for example, Greek and Latin monks co-existed, and Greek-rite monasteries are recorded throughout Apulia and Calabria, along the Amalfi coast and in Naples.⁶⁰⁷ Foundations retained the Greek rite and language, but following the Council of Bari in 1098, existed under the jurisdiction of Rome.⁶⁰⁸ The monastery of Grottaferrata near Rome, founded by St Nilus and consecrated in 1024, became an important centre of Greek learning, manuscript production and culture, and it still supports a community of Orthodox monks. Many of the Italo-Greek foundations, which existed peacefully alongside Latin-rite monasteries, retained a mixed character like that of

⁶⁰² EC vol. IV, 1248-1249.

⁶⁰³ In Perugia, at San Matteo degli Armeni. Bacci 2004, 553; Traina 1996, 97-113.

⁶⁰⁴ Bacci 2004, 551.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 552; For a panel painting of St. Davinus (now in a private collection), see Kaftal 1952, 306 fig. 351.

⁶⁰⁶ Bacci cites the record of a young woman's legacy, left specifically to the Armenian monks in Lucca, during the plague of 1348. Bacci 2004, 552 and n.20.

⁶⁰⁷ Guillou 1965, 359; Alessio 2004, 119-121; Falkenhausen 2014, 306.

⁶⁰⁸ Alessio 2004, 125.

the *lavra*, accommodating both coenobitic and solitary ways of life.⁶⁰⁹ During the period of Norman occupation, Greek monks held prominent positions in Rome and Lombard Latium, as they were often well-educated in the theological and liturgical disputes that divided the Greek and Roman churches.⁶¹⁰ By the thirteenth century, however, during the period of Angevin rule in the Kingdom of Naples, many of the Italo-Greek foundations were declining in size and authority, and others, including Grottaferrata, succumbed to papal pressure in adapting their language and liturgical observance to more closely conform to that of the West.⁶¹¹ Whilst some evidence exists of religious interchange between Orthodox and Latin foundations, particularly in Calabria, the Italo-Greek tradition remained largely distinct from that of the West. Despite the continued presence of Orthodox monks in the south of Italy, their influence north of Rome, by the later thirteenth century, appears to have been minimal.

The instances of religious and cultural exchange between Byzantium and the West outlined above, which were frequently characterised by harmonious coexistence and admiration, existed alongside persistent doctrinal disagreement and mutual suspicion between the two Churches. Following the schism of 1054, Orthodox Christianity was generally viewed by the western Church as aberrant, and efforts were made to return the 'schismatics' to the true faith. During the Latin occupation of Constantinople, from 1204-1261, Greeks were forced to convert to the Roman faith, engendering a deep hostility towards the Latin people and language.⁶¹² Those who were seen to be too closely involved with western customs were known by the disparaging term *latinofroni* ('Latin-minded'), and the Latins were referred to as *azymites*, in reference to their use of unleavened bread in the liturgy.⁶¹³ Western efforts to convert the Greeks, alongside the infidels who were threatening the territories around the Holy Land, continued in the thirteenth century with the arrival of the Mendicant Orders. By the late 1220s, there were Franciscan houses in Constantinople (founded 1220), Antioch (1221) and Jerusalem (c.1229). By mid-

⁶⁰⁹ Such as Pantelleria on Sicily, whose *typikon* survives. Alessio 2004, 126.

⁶¹⁰ Falkenhausen 2014, 308.

⁶¹¹ Parenti 2005, 298; Safran 2014, 4.

⁶¹² Geanakoplos 1976, 10.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

century, the Franciscans were also established in Cyprus, Crete, Cilicia in Greater Armenia and on the Greek mainland.⁶¹⁴ Dominican foundations were set up in Acre (c.1220), Constantinople and Cyprus, and by 1291, there were seven Dominican houses in Latin Greece and at least one each in Georgia and Greater Armenia.⁶¹⁵ The primary purpose of Mendicant activity in the East was evangelical, and both Orders saw it as part of their apostolic duty to correct heretical (if nominally Christian) beliefs such as those of the Orthodox.⁶¹⁶ During the thirteenth century, the Mendicant Orders continued the complex historical relationship between the religious traditions of East and West; at times characterised by mutual admiration, and at others by deep dispute.

Prominent members of both Dominican and Franciscan Orders actively sought the reunification of the Greek and Roman Churches, as a means of resolving the doctrinal differences which divided them. John of Parma, who was Minister General of the Franciscan Order between 1247 and 1257, was sent on a papal mission to the Greek Emperor Vatatzes in 1249, to discuss the possibility of unification. John was sympathetic to the Orthodox religious tradition, and it was during his jurisdiction that the two great Antiochene saints, Margaret and Ignatius, were added to the Franciscan calendar.⁶¹⁷ Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (Minister General 1257-1274) was similarly concerned to address the theological divisions between the Churches, and was deeply sympathetic to aspects of Orthodox spirituality.⁶¹⁸ Under his generalate, several bilingual Franciscans (including Jerome of Ascoli, the future Pope Nicholas IV) were chosen as papal nuncios to the Imperial court of Michael VIII Palaeologus, to conduct negotiations in preparation for reunification at the Council of Lyons in 1274. Dominican friars were also involved in the discussions, including Simon of Constantinople (d.1325) and William of Moerbeke (d. c.1286), both of whom knew the Greek language and understood the

⁶¹⁴ Derbes and Neff 2004, 451.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 450.

⁶¹⁶ Humbert of Romans, *On the Formation of Preachers* in ED, 187-188.

⁶¹⁷ Van Dijk and Walker 1960, 389.

⁶¹⁸ He sees the soul conjoined to God and the soul's rest in God alone, rather than God as an object of the mind's devotions. *Opera Omnia vol. I*, 38-42.

intricacies of Orthodox theology.⁶¹⁹ Humbert of Romans, Minister General of the Dominican Order (1254-1263), believed that union between East and West depended on the mutual understanding of each others' language and religious traditions:

Indeed, it would be precious for union if Latins could read the theologically important Greek works, the acts of the Greek councils, and diverse canonists, and their ecclesiastical history...⁶²⁰

Among the Mendicants, and in the Roman Church more widely, the reunification of the Churches achieved at Lyons was motivated both by a belief in the primacy of papal authority, and by the desire to defend threatened Levantine territories following the collapse of the Latin Empire in 1261.⁶²¹ At the Byzantine court, however, reunification was motivated primarily by political expedience, and was not supported by the clergy or the monasteries. Byzantium desperately needed allies to face the dual threat of Saracen incursions and invasion by the forces of Charles of Anjou.⁶²² Due in part to these divergent interests, the precarious union of the Churches effected at Lyons in 1274 was short-lived. Following the death of Michael VIII Palaeologus in 1282, the union was immediately dissolved under his successor, Andronicos II. The Mendicants, however, maintained a limited presence in Byzantine territories even after the fall of Acre in 1291, and restricted pilgrimage to the Holy Land continued.⁶²³ The knowledge of Greek language and culture among prominent members of both Orders, including the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV (1288-1292), represents the continuing relationship between the religious traditions of East and West towards the end of the thirteenth century.⁶²⁴

⁶¹⁹ Fisher 2010, 393.

⁶²⁰ From the *Opus Tripartitum*, cited in Geanakoplos 1976, 196; Fisher 2010, 392.

⁶²¹ Emery 1953, 257-271.

⁶²² Geanakoplos 1959, 264.

⁶²³ The Congregation of Pilgrim friars, for example, was formed in 1300 to enable Dominican friars to travel to outposts on the shifting frontiers between the Christian East, Islamic lands and pagan-ruled territory. Hinnebusch 1965, 48.

⁶²⁴ Nicholas IV continued to encourage pilgrimage to the island of Cyprus, which remained in Latin hands, through generous Indulgences granted to the Franciscan churches of Nicosia. They are recorded in the *Libro d'Ultramare* (1346-50) by Niccolò da Poggibonsi (ed. della Lega, 1945, xxvii.) Pilgrimage to Cyprus helped to support the surviving Mendicant mission to the East and thus to maintain a western presence among the Greeks. Pringle 2012, 14-15; n.86 and 87.

It was within a Franciscan context that the historical connections between Orthodox monastic practice, and the religious culture of the West, were restated towards the end of the thirteenth century. Between the years 1290 and 1303, a small group of dissident Franciscan friars from the Marche became closely involved with the spirituality of the eastern tradition as they fled persecution in Italy. In 1290, they were sent to Armenia by the Minister General Raymond Geoffroi (1289-1295), to escape condemnation for refusing to obey their superiors.⁶²⁵ The group of friars, who included Thomas of Tolentino, Peter of Macerata (later known as Fra Liberato) and Peter of Fossombrone (who became Angelo Clareno), rejected repeated compromises of the *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis regarding the friars' acceptance of property.⁶²⁶ They advocated a strict interpretation of the *Rule*, and sought a life of absolute poverty and contemplative solitude, away from the urban convents which dominated the Order. This group were among the most vocal, and controversial, members of the Franciscan Order who sought to prioritise matters of the spirit and who subsequently became known as the 'Spirituals'.⁶²⁷ Raymond Geoffroi, who was sympathetic to their position, committed them to the service of King Aiton, who had requested the presence of 'brothers whose lives were holy'.⁶²⁸ It was evidently perceived by the Minister General to be safer, and more conducive for the rigorous observance of the *Rule*, if the brothers were removed to territories in the East. The contemplative and eremitic inclination of Byzantine monastic life, which also permeated the Armenian tradition, was well suited to the spiritual approach of the dissident friars.

In 1294, under the pontificate of Celestine V, the dissidents returned briefly to Italy, seeking recognition for their way of life. Pope Celestine had previously received the friars at his hermitage of Maiella as Peter of Morrone, and his ascetic

⁶²⁵ *Seven Tribulations*, 153.

⁶²⁶ See Burr 2001, 11-66. The men took new names on the creation of the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, in 1294.

⁶²⁷ The term 'spiritual' had currency in the late thirteenth century. It was used to describe 'zealots for poverty' within the Order, who eventually constituted a separate faction. Burr 2001, 39-41; Graham 2013, 360.

⁶²⁸ *Seven Tribulations*, 153.

character meant that he was sympathetic to their predicament.⁶²⁹ He released the friars from their commitment to the Franciscan Order but protected their right to continue to follow the *Rule* of St Francis, as they wished. They were given the name the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, in recognition of their way of life, with Fra Liberato (Peter of Macerata) appointed responsible for the brothers, and Napoleone Orsini as their Cardinal protector.⁶³⁰ The protection of Celestine V did not last long, however. In December 1294, he abdicated the throne of St Peter and was succeeded by Boniface VIII, who had little sympathy for the schismatic and disobedient friars. The Poor Hermits were once again vulnerable to persecution by friars angry that they had been absolved from obedience to their superiors, and their position was seen to jeopardise the integrity of the entire Order. In response to this hostility, Clareno, Liberato and their companions travelled East once again, this time to an island in the Gulf of Corinth.⁶³¹ Clareno later recorded this move in his chronicle, the *Seven Tribulations of the Order of Friars Minor* (c.1325):

...it seemed fitting and useful that the group should withdraw from the brothers' wrath and, for their greater peace and well-being, that they should retreat to remote locations where, without causing tumult or scandal, they could freely serve the Lord.⁶³²

During the following years, the Poor Hermits moved to various isolated places in Greece, including Achaia and Thessalonica, where they lived a primarily eremitic existence.⁶³³ Few details are known about this period besides Clareno's brief account, but it seems likely that the Hermits would have encountered Orthodox monastic foundations, and may have relied on their hospitality.⁶³⁴ The relative freedom permitted to the individual monk in Byzantine *typika* would have appealed directly to the Poor Hermits, who sought to follow the example of St Francis in a manner that was at odds with the majority of the Franciscan Order. Their eremitic

⁶²⁹ EDP, 461.

⁶³⁰ He may have chosen this name after an early ascetic friar known as Angelo Tancredi. *Seven Tribulations*, ii n.5.

⁶³¹ It was probably the island of Trixonia; *Ibid.*, 160 n.85.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 129-178.

⁶³⁴ Gain 2006, 394.

way of life shared more with the remote monastic foundations of Greece than with the urban convents of Italy they had left behind.

The Poor Hermits stayed in Greece for almost ten years, during which time Angelo Clareno developed a profound interest in Byzantine spirituality. He learned the language, and subsequently translated several major works of the Greek monastic fathers, then unknown in the West, into Latin: the *Sententiae* of Pseudo-Macarius; *Epistle 125* of John Chrysostom; the *Ascetikon* and *Ascetic Constitutions* of Basil of Caesarea; and, most importantly for our purposes, the *Heavenly Ladder* of John Climacus.⁶³⁵ To Clareno, the literature of the Orthodox monastic tradition represented a pure source of Christian spirituality, unsullied by centuries of western reinterpretation and commentary.⁶³⁶ He intended his translations to contribute to the reform of the Franciscan Order and the renewal of the western Church. Clareno's letters frequently refer to the Greek Fathers, who informed his attitude towards the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the West. He saw the Church standing in the way of true religious expression and experience, and the control it exerted over the Franciscan Order, in particular, compromising the original ideals of its founder.⁶³⁷ Clareno's opinions opened him to the potentially serious accusation of holding the Greek Church in higher regard than the Latin.⁶³⁸ He denied the charge, but his writings reveal a clear debt to the Greek Church Fathers which came from his deep sympathy with the Orthodox tradition.⁶³⁹ Clareno regarded the monastic spirituality he encountered in the East as an antidote to the worldliness, wealth and lack of rigour he had protested against as a member of the Franciscan Order.⁶⁴⁰ In his later epistles, he asserted the authority of the *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis by comparing their ascetic spirit to that of the long-established Orthodox monastic tradition.⁶⁴¹ He shared his approach to the spiritual life with John Climacus, the

⁶³⁵ Gain 2006, 396.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 402-3.

⁶³⁷ Musto 1977, 40.

⁶³⁸ In 1317-18, by Pope John XXII (1316-1334). This is recorded in his letter '*epistula excusatoria*' in *Epistole*, 236-53; 240; Tsougarakis 2018, 532.

⁶³⁹ Von Auw 1979, 64-66; Musto 1983, 218-220; Gain 2006, 401-407.

⁶⁴⁰ Potestà 1990, 92.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

author of the *Heavenly Ladder*, who emphasised the importance of individual endeavour in the journey towards God. The twenty-fifth step of the *Ladder*, 'On Humility', chimes closely with the teachings of St Francis, who held this virtue particularly dear:

Humility has its signs [...] - poverty, withdrawal from the world...simplicity of speech, the seeking of alms...⁶⁴²

To Clareno, poverty was one among many signs of a truly spiritual life, and he saw little worth in the institutional expression of poverty enacted by the Franciscan Order, if it did not also encompass humility and withdrawal from the world.⁶⁴³ Clareno's translation of this text, which, as we have seen, appears to constitute an important textual and iconographic source for the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, is potentially highly significant to our understanding of the motivation behind the making of this painting in the last decade of the thirteenth century.

The date of Clareno's translation of the *Heavenly Ladder* has, until recently, been given as c.1300.⁶⁴⁴ However, recent scholarship has uncovered evidence that the Latin translation of the *Heavenly Ladder* was known among Spiritual Franciscans as early as 1295. The treatise *De Missa* by Peter John Olivi (d.1298), a controversial and highly influential Franciscan lector and theologian from Provence, is a manual for priests on the proper celebration of the Mass, written in 1295-6.⁶⁴⁵ Olivi shared Clareno's view that the role of the Franciscan Order was, in part, to effect transformation in the western Church, which was fundamentally resistant to change. He objected to the papal interventions in matters of Franciscan poverty and property, and, like Clareno, opened himself to accusations of undermining both the integrity of the Order and the authority of the Pope.⁶⁴⁶ The sixteenth part of Olivi's *De Missa* concerns the division of the Mass into three moments: the action of grace (or thanksgiving); contrition; and prayer. This order, writes Olivi, was revealed by an

⁶⁴² *Heavenly Ladder*, 228. See, for instance, the *Testament of Francis*, in which he states the central importance of simplicity and humility among the early friars. FAED I, 125.

⁶⁴³ Potestà 1990, 79

⁶⁴⁴ Musto 1983, 229-30; Gain 2006, 394.

⁶⁴⁵ Peter John Olivi, *Tractatus de missa*, ed. Piron 2016a.

⁶⁴⁶ Flood 1972, 80.

angel, and recorded by John Climacus.⁶⁴⁷ The reference is to a section of the twenty-eighth step of the *Heavenly Ladder*, ‘On Prayer’:

...heartfelt thanksgiving should have first place [...]. Next should be confession and genuine contrition of soul. After that should come our request to the universal King. This method of prayer is best, as one of the brothers was told by an angel of the Lord.⁶⁴⁸

Olivi did not (as far as we know) read Greek, so his reference to the *Heavenly Ladder* must have come from a translation of Clareno already complete.⁶⁴⁹ His awareness of the text suggests that it was available in Narbonne, where Olivi lived at the time, by 1295 at the latest. This earlier dating opens up the possibility that Clareno had already translated the *Ladder* prior to 1294, when he returned to Italy, and that it was quickly dispersed among those Spiritual Franciscans who sympathised with his position. The evidence in *De Missa* places the dissemination of Clareno’s translation very close in date to the creation of the Edinburgh Tabernacle.⁶⁵⁰

Clareno’s translation of the *Heavenly Ladder* brought a previously unknown Greek spiritual treatise to a western audience. The treatise was of central importance to his understanding of the religious life, but it also appealed to monastic audiences interested in early Christian spirituality and religious reform.⁶⁵¹ The Latin text circulated widely throughout Italy, and was transmitted as far north as the Low Countries by the end of the fourteenth century.⁶⁵² A catalogue of manuscripts and printed editions (many of which contain selections or incomplete text of the *Ladder*, alongside other material) records fifty-one surviving copies in Latin. Most originate in religious houses, including Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and reformed

⁶⁴⁷ ‘*Et concurrat in predictis ordo conveniens, ut prius agantur deo gratie et hoc in introitu, secundo fit contritio in corde ut in Kyrieleyson, tertio fiunt devote petitiones ut in orationibus, quia iste ordo fuit revelatus ab angelo cuidam sancto, sicut refertur Iohannes Climacus.*’ *De Missa*, in Piron 2016a, 25 n. 86.

⁶⁴⁸ *Heavenly Ladder*, 275.

⁶⁴⁹ It may have been translated as early as 1290-93, or else as soon as Clareno arrived in the East in 1295. Tsougarakis 2018, 532, n.16.

⁶⁵⁰ Piron 2016a, 25-27; Tsougarakis 2018, 532 n.16.

⁶⁵¹ Musto 1983, 233-234.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

Benedictine foundations. Two manuscripts from the Benedictine house at Subiaco, where Clareno stayed from 1318-1334, are thought to represent the earliest surviving instances of the Latin text.⁶⁵³ Clareno's Latin version was translated into the Italian vernacular some time before 1348 by his friend and follower, Gentile da Foligno (d.1348), a member of the Order of Hermits of St. Augustine. This translation (which was amended by Cristoforo da Toscanella in 1411) can be found in thirty-nine surviving manuscripts originally dispersed among Franciscan, Augustinian and Camaldolese houses.⁶⁵⁴ One manuscript dated to c.1411, now in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples, is thought to have belonged to the *Fratricelli*, a faction of the Franciscan Order who were the descendants of the Poor Hermits.⁶⁵⁵ The text of the *Heavenly Ladder* was known in the West solely through the translation of Clareno until 1419, when a new Latin edition was produced by the Camaldolese scholar Ambrogio Traversari (d.1439) at the convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence.⁶⁵⁶

The recently-uncovered early date of Clareno's Latin translation of the *Heavenly Ladder*, prior to 1295, provides a previously unrecognised link between the Greek treatise, together with its eleventh-century illuminations, and the appearance of the Edinburgh Tabernacle c.1290-95. The image of eremitic life at the centre of the tabernacle is closely related to the content and iconography of the *Ladder*, but its appearance in central Italy at this time (and its similarity to later Byzantine images) has never been adequately explained. I suggest that its extraordinary composition derives from a now-lost illuminated Byzantine manuscript of the *Heavenly Ladder* comparable to Vat. gr. 394 (see figure 99), and made available in Italy through the contact established by the Poor Hermits. Angelo Clareno may well have encountered a comparable illuminated copy of the *Ladder* while he was in Greece, or used one as a source for his translation. This hypothetical manuscript may have included a full-page miniature showing forms of eremitic life in a mountainous landscape. The visual tradition to which this putative image relates must also have informed the composition and detail of later Byzantine

⁶⁵³ Musto 1983, 220-221.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 613-631.

⁶⁵⁵ MS XIII.G.35. It is dated to 1411. Musto 1983, 622.

⁶⁵⁶ Stinger 1977, 15-16; 110-112.

paintings of the same subject (figures 91 & 92). A manuscript containing such a miniature could have been brought to Italy by Clareno and his companions in 1294, where it informed the creation of the tabernacle. The fine detail of the tabernacle's central panel, discussed in Chapter Two, indicates that its highly skilled primary artist also worked in miniature, and would thus have been able to develop and adapt an existing Byzantine manuscript illumination to suit the requirements of a commission for a panel painting.

This proposal remains, at present, a hypothesis. It leaves unanswered the question of why no closely comparable composition to the tabernacle's central panel survives from Byzantium until the fifteenth century. Nonetheless, the Tuscan origins of the tabernacle may yet provide further evidence of a connection between the *Heavenly Ladder*, Spiritual Franciscans sympathetic to the Poor Hermits, and the painting itself. By the 1290s, the central Italian province had a sizeable contingent of Spiritual friars, who shared the same reservations as the Poor Hermits about the contemporary direction of the Franciscan Order. During the generalate of Raymond Geoffroi (1289-95), groups of zealots in the province had broken with the Order, angry that repeated papal interventions fundamentally violated the observance of poverty, as it had been set out by Francis.⁶⁵⁷ The large Florentine convent of Santa Croce supported a vocal population of Spiritual friars, and between 1287-1289, was home to Peter John Olivi and Ubertino da Casale (d.c.1329), a lector and polemicist from the province of Genoa, both of whom were outspoken supporters of reform within the Order.⁶⁵⁸ The Florentine origins of the tabernacle, its potential links to manuscript production for the convent of Santa Croce c.1300, and the Franciscan nature of its Passion iconography, discussed in Chapter Two, lend support to this proposition.

The image of the desert in the Edinburgh Tabernacle represents an idealised vision of the eremitic life, which was of central importance to Clareno, the Poor Hermits, and the Spiritual Franciscans who remained within the Order. As we have seen, the Latin text of the *Heavenly Ladder* was known among Spiritual Franciscans

⁶⁵⁷ Particularly in the bulls *Quo Elongati* (1230) and *Exiit Qui Seminavit* (1279). The Spiritual controversy in the Franciscan Order is discussed further in chapter four below, p. 167-173. Graham 2013, 360.

⁶⁵⁸ Burr 2001, 94.

soon after it was written in the first half of the 1290s, and Clarenò, Liberato and their companions had supporters in high places, including the Roman Curia, who might have been well-placed to commission such an object. Surrounded by episodes of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, and crowned by an image of the Redeemer, this image of the desert may be seen as a manifesto for withdrawal from the world, in direct opposition to the urban character of the contemporary Order. It exemplifies a particular way of life, rather than a specific model of sainthood, and is closely related to the spirituality of the Orthodox monastic tradition with which Clarenò was so familiar. The Edinburgh Tabernacle may well have found a receptive audience among the Spiritual friars of Tuscany.

This chapter has shown how the monastic and cultural traditions of Byzantium are of central importance for our understanding of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. In Byzantine art, scenes of a monastic saint's death provided an opportunity to illustrate the importance of the spiritual father to a religious community, and exemplify the mourning of the brethren. The departure of the soul pointed to the inevitability of future judgement, and the icon of Christ on the chest of the deceased set up a direct parallel between the saint and the Redeemer. In manuscript illuminations, the identity of the deceased was not always specified, and the funeral scene could function as a prompt to the ascetic practice of remembrance of death. Illuminated copies of the *Heavenly Ladder* are a crucial source for the iconography of eremitic life. Details of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, including the stylite saint, hermits at prayer, and the brethren who assist one another on their way to the funeral, are very close to miniatures found in eleventh-century copies of this text. The entire scene, which finds a compositional parallel in the small Nativity icon from Sinai, seems likely to have been created from the amalgamation of separate sources, and may once have existed as a full-page miniature associated with the *Heavenly Ladder*. The mountain, which forms the compositional basis of the funeral scene in the tabernacle, was an important holy site associated with narratives of divine revelation, and the continuation of monastic life, in Byzantine art and religious tradition.

The eleventh-century manuscript illuminations of the *Heavenly Ladder* originate in the context of monastic renewal and reform. They may have appealed directly to a figure such as Angelo Clareno, who likely encountered them towards the end of the thirteenth century, and who was similarly motivated by a spirit of religious reform. In the 1290s, he and his companions found safety among the remote monasteries of the East. Images of an original and ascetic form of the religious life, the co-operation and humility of the brethren and the ascent of the individual soul towards God, would have held an intrinsic appeal to a Franciscan seeking to return to the ideals of St Francis. It is not difficult to imagine that an image of a dead founding saint surrounded by scenes of eremitic life, encountered in such a setting, would have appealed to the exiled Hermits. They remained devoted to St Francis and mourned the death of his ideals among the Order. The relationship between this group of Spiritual Franciscans and the monastic traditions of Byzantium emerged from a wider context of historical admiration and shared heritage between the two Churches, brought to prominence in the second half of the thirteenth century at the attempted Union of Churches in 1274. For Clareno and his companions, the doctrines and traditions which continued to divide the Orthodox Church from that of Rome represented a safe ideological distance from a hostile papacy, following the abdication of Celestine V. The importance of the Orthodox monastic tradition to Clareno's spirituality is evident in the translations he made whilst he was in Greece, and I argue that it is no coincidence an image intimately linked to the text and illustrations of the *Heavenly Ladder*, appeared in Italy so close in date to Clareno's translation. The next chapter considers the tabernacle in relation to the Franciscan Order, the eremitic ideal, and the Spiritual controversy, within the wider historical and religious context of late-medieval Italy. This extraordinary - and unrepeated - image of the desert, framed by the Passion of Christ, seems to have arisen from a significant, but overlooked, intersection between the religious cultures of East and West near the end of the thirteenth century.

Chapter Four

The religious landscape of Italy and the eremitic ideal, c.

1220-1500

The central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle is permeated by the monastic and artistic traditions of Byzantium, but it emerged, as we have seen, from the visual and religious culture of late thirteenth-century Italy. This chapter positions this painting within the historical context of the thirteenth century, alongside later images of the desert made for a variety of patrons, contexts and settings from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Its first section takes up the evidence discussed in Chapter Three, addressing the possibility of a connection between the tabernacle and the activities of Angelo Clareno and the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine. It considers the spiritual controversy in the Franciscan Order in more depth, examining the significance of the eremitic ideal from the time of St Francis to the end of the thirteenth century, both as a way of life and as exemplar. From the earliest days of its existence, eremitic and ascetic forms of life held a special place in the character of the Franciscan Order, but in time, as the Order grew and expanded, its character was altered and its relationship with the eremitic tradition changed. It was, arguably, this change in character that underpinned the controversies which beset the Order from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. As controversy between different factions of the Franciscan Order continued in the late fifteenth century, a close connection between the Desert Fathers and the figure of St Francis was strongly reasserted in a panel painting known as the 'smaller Lindsay panel'. This later image, showing ascetic saints and hermits in a desert landscape, shares several iconographic details with the central panel of the tabernacle and with other Italian paintings of the Quattrocento. An analysis of this painting, alongside another related image made in Italy, permits a broad perspective on the relationship between St Francis, his Order, and the example of the desert as it was represented in art.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the other Mendicant Orders, beginning with the Order of Friars Preachers. The Dominicans, along with the Franciscans, came to dominate the religious landscape of the West in the course of the thirteenth century. This discussion looks at their engagement with the eremitic

ideal, in hagiography, sermons, and art, from the time of St Dominic to the first half of the fourteenth century, when the magnificent *Lives of the Anchorites* was painted on the walls of the Camposanto in Pisa under the guidance of the local Dominican friars. In addition, it challenges a recent hypothesis, put forward by Alessandra Malquori, which connects the scholarly interests of the Friars Preachers with the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. This part of the chapter continues by looking at the eremitic ideal among the Augustinian Hermits and the Carmelites. Both of these Orders made the transition from remote hermitages to urban convents in the course of the thirteenth century, and their eremitic origins became an important aspect of their foundational myths. The Augustinians traced their ancestry to St Augustine of Hippo, and his supposed creation of eremitic communities in the Tuscan Appenines, in the late fourth century.⁶⁵⁹ The Carmelites, who were named after their original location on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land, looked even further back, to the Old Testament prophet Elijah who had lived for a time on the same sacred mountain.⁶⁶⁰ Narrative images of the desert, commissioned by both Orders in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, illustrate the significance of the eremitic life as a crucial feature of their respective origins.

The third and final part of this chapter addresses the eremitic ideal in the wider religious landscape. It begins with flagellant confraternities, whose physical self-discipline, undertaken in public and primarily within an urban context, was indebted to the ascetic example of the Desert Fathers. It also considers the reformed Benedictine Camaldolese and Vallombrosan congregations, whose presence was particularly strong in Tuscany. Both of these Orders were founded by hermit saints and their character continued to be defined by their eremitic origins.⁶⁶¹ Images of the desert, on panel and in fresco, dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, can be connected to flagellant confraternities and to lay patrons, in addition to the reformed Benedictines. They demonstrate that the appeal of the desert reached far beyond the cloisters of the religious Orders. This chapter takes a wide-ranging approach, in order to properly situate the Edinburgh Tabernacle within its historical and art-historical context. It also aims to address ongoing problems

⁶⁵⁹ Andrews 2006, 158-162.

⁶⁶⁰ Jotischky 2002, 106-7.

⁶⁶¹ See chapter one above, p. 60-62.

around the tabernacle's origins, and to offer an alternative hypothesis for its most likely patronage. In doing so, questions for further research necessarily arise. Ultimately, I seek to shed some much-needed light on the context of the tabernacle's making, and the meaning of the eremitic ideal in late-medieval Italy; in history and in art.

- Part One -

The Franciscans, the Spiritual controversy and Pope Celestine V

In the early sources, Francis of Assisi (c.1181-1226) appears as a man of principled renunciation and intensely ascetic inclinations. His charismatic spirituality, which quickly gained a devoted following, was shaped by his dramatic rejection of worldly goods, a deep feeling for God in nature, and his total dependence on the words of the Gospels. In the first *Life of St Francis* by Thomas of Celano (1228), Francis initially takes up a staff and wears a belted tunic, as external signs of his eremitic life.⁶⁶² But on hearing the words of the Gospel of St Matthew describing how the disciples of Christ possessed neither gold nor silver, shoes nor staff, he set down his own staff, took off his shoes and replaced his leather belt with a knotted cord.⁶⁶³ This narrative echoes a similar story in the *Life of Antony* by Athanasius, indicating the completeness of his renunciation and pointing towards the exemplary tradition of the Desert Fathers.⁶⁶⁴ Celano's accounts of the early friars' way of life similarly emulate those of earlier monastic saints such as Benedict of Nursia and Bernard of Clairvaux.⁶⁶⁵

They strove to restrain the burning of the flesh by such harsh treatment that they did not hesitate to strip themselves on freezing ice, and to cover themselves in blood from gashing their bodies with sharp thorns.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶² *I Celano*, FAED I, 201.

⁶⁶³ Matt. 10:9-10; *I Celano*, FAED I, 201-202.

⁶⁶⁴ '...he came to think of how the apostles had rejected everything to follow the Saviour [...] just at that moment the Gospel passage was being read in which the Lord says to the rich man... When he heard this, Antony applied the Lord's commandment to himself, believing that it was as a result of divine inspiration that he had first remembered the incident and that this passage of Scripture had been read out for his sake.' *Life of Antony*, 9.

⁶⁶⁵ *I Celano*, FAED I, 219 n.b.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

For Celano, as for earlier hagiographers, Francis' exceptional spirituality and conformity to Christ was manifest in his self-imposed physical deprivations, and his ability to subdue the flesh.⁶⁶⁷

Francis took Christ's words in the Gospel of Matthew as the basis of his way of life:

Jesus saith to him: If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me.⁶⁶⁸

In consequence, he tied the renunciation of the religious life to absolute material poverty, and he and his followers relied on the alms of the faithful for their survival. He forbade his companions from handling money or accumulating property, and stated that they should inhabit poor dwellings 'as pilgrims and strangers'.⁶⁶⁹ Francis wanted his followers to be known as *fratres minores* ('lesser brothers'), to indicate the principles of equality, humility and deference, particularly to members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The early friars were primarily laymen, and Francis himself never obtained the priesthood.⁶⁷⁰ The Order of Friars Minor was given papal confirmation in 1223 by Honorius III, according to the *Rule* which Francis had written.⁶⁷¹

The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, *without anything of one's own*, and in chastity.⁶⁷²

From the earliest days of the Order, Francis' uncompromising attitude to poverty created practical difficulties. The friars relied for their material survival on an economic system which was primarily urban, but the requirement to live 'as pilgrims and strangers' prevented them, in principle at least, from settling permanently among those who gave them alms. A parallel tension was also evident among the early friars, between a life of evangelism among the people, and one of

⁶⁶⁷ Blastic 2012, 71. See chapter one above for a discussion of the early ascetic literature.

⁶⁶⁸ Matt. 19:21; *Later Rule*, FAED I, 101.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁷⁰ He was later ordained deacon.

⁶⁷¹ *Later Rule*, FAED I, 103. For the differences between the first and later *Rules* of Francis, see Short, 2012, 59-60; and on the text of the *Testament*, written shortly before his death, *ibid.*, 62-63.

⁶⁷² My italics. *Later Rule*, FAED I, 100.

contemplative solitude.⁶⁷³ Francis decided that a strictly renunciate way of life should not keep the friars from their apostolic mission, and so the early Order lived a semi-eremitic existence, going into the cities by day to preach and retreating to the solitude of the *eremo* by night.⁶⁷⁴ However, the difficulty of reconciling absolute material poverty with life among secular society was evident from the outset, and the practical difficulties only increased as the size of the Order grew.

The importance Francis attached to the eremitic and contemplative life is evident in a short document attributed to him, dated between 1217 and 1221. It is known as the *Regula pro eremitoriis*, or Rule for Hermitages, and it sets out brief guidance for 'those who wish to remain in hermitages'.⁶⁷⁵ At the time it was written, there was evidently a certain flexibility afforded to the friars, allowing some to retreat from preaching altogether, either temporarily or permanently.⁶⁷⁶ The text sets out the parameters of a specifically Franciscan form of the eremitic life, acknowledging the necessity of strictest poverty and absolute simplicity. It integrates prayer, ascetic practice and complete separation from the world with a sense of fraternity and minority central to the character of the Order.⁶⁷⁷ Francis recommends that among a small group of friars living in a hermitage, certain brothers should act as 'mothers', while others took on the role of 'sons'. The mothers assumed all responsibility for the material needs of the sons, who were free to focus all their attention on prayer and contemplation and remained absolutely detached from society. The friars alternated roles between 'mother' and 'son', and the risks of complete solitude were

⁶⁷³ It is recorded in the first *Life* by Celano: 'These true proponents of justice conferred together about whether they should live among people or go off to solitary places. Saint Francis ... chose not to live for himself alone, but for the one who died for all.' *I Celano*, FAED I, 214.

⁶⁷⁴ As recorded by Jacques de Vitry (d.1240), historian and bishop of Acre, in a letter of 1216: 'During the day they go into the cities and villages giving themselves over to the active life in order to gain others; at night, they return to their hermitage or solitary places to devote themselves to contemplation.' FAED I, 579.

⁶⁷⁵ At hermitages such as the Carceri, on the slopes of Monte Subasio above Assisi, and others in the Rieti Valley at Greccio and Poggio Bustone. Moorman 1968, 63; Pellegrini 1984, 67; *Rule for Hermitages*, FAED I, 139.

⁶⁷⁶ The word *stare* can be interpreted as a transient or permanent 'stay'. FAED I, 61 n. b.

⁶⁷⁷ Pellegrini 1984, 69.

thus avoided.⁶⁷⁸ Francis was clearly sensitive to the eremitic tendency of certain friars, and wanted to ensure that contemplative retreat was accommodated within the regular framework of the Order. Celano records how, towards the end of his life, Francis retreated more and more frequently to deserted places or remote hermitages among the Appenine hills, seeking rest and ‘the blessed solitude of contemplation’.⁶⁷⁹

After the death of Francis in 1226 and his canonisation two years later, the tensions inherent within the Order grew ever more apparent. There was an increasing gulf between the uncompromising ideals of the founder, and the continued viability and success of the order as an institution. Accommodation and education for an expanding and progressively more clerical Order directly contradicted the exhortations to poverty, minority and simplicity which were central to the *Rule* and *Testament*.⁶⁸⁰ In 1230, Pope Gregory IX issued the bull *Quo elongati* in response to concerns about the implementation of the *Rule* and the use of property.⁶⁸¹ Essentially, this bull opened the way for succeeding papal interpretations of Francis’ words, and allowed the friars to occupy buildings and accumulate goods without compromising their vow of poverty (a concession known as *usus pauper*).⁶⁸² The active, apostolic aspect of Franciscan life gradually overshadowed the eremitic and ascetic inclinations of the early Order, and as a consequence, the Order became increasingly embedded within the social and economic fabric of the cities.⁶⁸³ The friars existed alongside (and to some extent, in competition with) other Mendicant Orders, most notably the Dominicans, whose

⁶⁷⁸ Representing the active and contemplative aspects of the religious life, sometimes characterised in reference to the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. This typology is comparable to that of the *Regula* of Grandmont, also found in the *Vita II* of Robert of Arbrissel, in which labour is divided between the contemplatives and administrators. However the rigid distinction between the monks and *conversi* at Grandmont created conflict between the superior (contemplative) and subjugated (active) roles. Pellegrini 1984, 70.

⁶⁷⁹ *I Celano*, FAED I, 261.

⁶⁸⁰ Burr 2001, 10. On the increasing significance of education for the Order, see Şenocak 2012, 76-80. The first Franciscan Pope was Nicholas IV (1288-92).

⁶⁸¹ On the implications of this bull, see: Lambert 1998; Burr 1989, 1-29.

⁶⁸² The bull is reproduced in FAED I, 570-575.

⁶⁸³ Lawrence 1994, 46.

primary endeavour was the care of souls.⁶⁸⁴ It became a practical necessity for the Franciscans to be based in the cities, as their pastoral duties grew and they increasingly relied on the alms, or financial patronage, of the laity to whom they ministered.

Celano's second *Life of St Francis*, also known as *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (1247), reflects these growing tensions within the Order. Additional stories not present in the first *Life* emphasise Francis' ascetic existence, his consequent victory over demons, and his vehement rejection of physical comfort and material possessions - including books - among the friars. In one such narrative, Celano recounts how, on hearing that the friars had constructed a new house in Bologna, Francis refused to visit the city and ordered every one of them to abandon the property immediately. No-one was allowed to return until Cardinal Hugolino (the future Pope Gregory IX, 1227-1241) declared that the building formally belonged to him.⁶⁸⁵ In another incident, Francis returns to Assisi to attend the Chapter of the Order, and finding that a stone dwelling has been built to accommodate the friars, climbs onto the roof and begins throwing down tiles and rafters, railing angrily against the construction of such a scandalous thing which contradicts the ideal of poverty.⁶⁸⁶ The strong implication in these stories is that new urban architecture, made especially for the accommodation of the friars, fundamentally contradicted the spirit in which St Francis had lived, in 'poor dwellings' such as the abandoned Porziuncola in the valley outside Assisi.⁶⁸⁷ The second *Life* was written at a time of rapid expansion in the Order, when new houses and churches were being built for the friars all over Europe.⁶⁸⁸ Celano was one of the early companions who saw the changes in the Order as a corruption of Francis' principles.

Repeated papal interventions during the course of the thirteenth century attempted to resolve internal disagreement over the interpretation of the *Rule* and

⁶⁸⁴ Röhrkasten 2012, 179.

⁶⁸⁵ This story - which is absent from Celano's first *Life of St Francis* - illustrates anxieties within the order at the time of its writing even if it does not relate historical fact. *II Celano*, FAED II, 286.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 285; Bolgia 2017, 91.

⁶⁸⁷ *Testament*, FAED I, 126.

⁶⁸⁸ Bolgia 2017, 92.

Testament of Francis, particularly regarding the interrelated issues of property and poverty. The bull *Ordinem vestrum*, promulgated by Innocent IV in 1245, officially ceded ownership of all property used by the Order to the Apostolic See. It effectively permitted the friars to accumulate wealth, and to build convents and churches, without 'owning' anything, allowing their vow of poverty to remain intact.⁶⁸⁹ The concessions granted by this intervention (which followed on from *Quo elongati*) inevitably led to abuses of the *Rule*, and it was necessary for Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, who was Minister General of the Order from 1257-1274, to condemn the grandeur of buildings, acceptance of legacies and extravagance among the order.⁶⁹⁰ The Constitutions of Narbonne, written at the General Chapter of 1260, attempted to reinforce discipline, reiterating the importance of 'austerity, lowliness and poverty' among the brethren.⁶⁹¹ Bonaventure recognised the ideal of absolute poverty, but he was a pragmatist who saw the order's primary role in the spiritual care of souls. He saw no necessity for a return to the strictures of simplicity and destitution associated with the Order in its formative years, yet he attempted to address the concerns of those who protested against the character of the contemporary Order.⁶⁹² Poverty was essential to Francis' vision and to the ascetic character of the early Order. Its gradual erosion followed a drift away from the principle of strict renunciation, on which Francis had founded his way of life.

Bonaventure's *Major Life of St Francis* (or *Legenda Major*) is indicative of changing attitudes towards the religious experience of Francis among the Order. While Bonaventure drew on the two earlier *Lives* of Celano, he refrained from idealising the eremitic lifestyle of Francis and his companions, and modified the extremes of renunciation reported by Celano.⁶⁹³ The *Legenda Major* was written in 1263, and three years later it was declared as the definitive *Life* of the Saint.⁶⁹⁴ Bonaventure's suppression of the earlier biographies indicates that by this time,

⁶⁸⁹ FAED II, 774-9.

⁶⁹⁰ Moorman 1968, 145.

⁶⁹¹ Lawrence 1994, 58.

⁶⁹² Moorman 1968, 153-4. The authenticity of this document has recently been questioned. See Hammond, Hellmann and Goff (eds.) 2013, 78-79.

⁶⁹³ FAED II, 501. For the relationship of the *Legenda Major* to *I* and *II Celano*, see FAED II, 500.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Celano's understanding of Francis, and his characterisation of the Order, were regarded as problematic. In the *Legenda Major*, Francis is presented 'more like an angel than a human being'.⁶⁹⁵ The episode of the Stigmatisation, in which Francis was marked with the wounds of Christ's Passion during a retreat at the hermitage of La Verna, becomes the defining episode of the saint's life.⁶⁹⁶ Whereas in Celano the event is associated with the vision of a seraph, Bonaventure regards it as the direct result of an intervention by Christ, representing the saint's perfect spiritual and physical identification with the Saviour.⁶⁹⁷ He draws a parallel between La Verna and the 'high mountain apart' of Matthew 17, on which Christ was Transfigured.⁶⁹⁸ Bonaventure's transformation of Francis, from the principled wandering ascetic of Celano's writings to stigmatised saint of the highest order, *Franciscus alter Christus*, meant that he was effectively inimitable.⁶⁹⁹ His absolute poverty, simple obedience and ascetic life could not be perfectly emulated by his followers, because he had been marked apart by the *sign of the living God*.⁷⁰⁰ By the time Bonaventure was writing, the lived experience of the Friars Minor was more closely associated with the social and economic world of the towns and cities than the eremitic existence of the primitive Order, and he was only too aware of the need to minimise the conflict represented by this discrepancy.⁷⁰¹

Rising controversy among the Friars Minor centred on the maintenance of Francis' original ideals, and is of central importance to the present discussion because it had a direct bearing on the significance of the eremitic life within the Order. After Bonaventure's death in July 1274, the conflict escalated dramatically. Several friars in the Marche region rose up in defiance of a rumour that the

⁶⁹⁵ *Legenda Major*, FAED II, 544; 632.

⁶⁹⁶ Unlike the account in *I Celano*, in which the agent of the stigmatisation is a seraph, in Bonaventure it is Christ, under the *appearance* of a seraph, who inflicts the wounds on Francis. *I Celano*, FAED I, 263; *Legenda Major*, FAED II, 600.

⁶⁹⁷ Goffen 1988, 15.

⁶⁹⁸ 'And after six days Jesus taketh unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a *high mountain apart*' (my emphasis) Matt. 17:1.

⁶⁹⁹ Frugoni 1998, 137; Burr 2001, 37.

⁷⁰⁰ *Major Legend*, FAED II, 638; cf. Revelations 7:2.

⁷⁰¹ Rohrkasten 2012, 185-6.

Franciscans would soon be obliged to accept ownership of property.⁷⁰² Their loyalty to Francis, and to his *Rule* and *Testament*, ultimately triumphed over their obedience to papal jurisdiction, and this was seen to be dangerously schismatic.⁷⁰³ Peter of Fossombrone, Peter of Macerata, Traimondo and some others, whom we encountered in Chapter Three, refused to recount their views, were quickly suppressed and sent to hermitages in perpetual imprisonment.⁷⁰⁴ The controversy continued to gain momentum despite their condemnation, particularly in the provinces of Tuscany and Provence. Several prominent members of the Order who had been present in the early years spoke out against the growing corruption of Franciscan principles. Among them were former Minister General John of Parma (1247-1257), who lived at the hermitage of Greccio, and Hugh of Digne (d.1285), author of a *Commentary on the Rule* and provincial minister of Provence.⁷⁰⁵ The outspoken Genoan lector Ubertino da Casale (d. 1329) was strongly influenced by John of Parma, and became a central figure in the dispute. So too did Peter John Olivi (d.1298), a lector and theologian from Provence whose writings on Franciscan observance were later condemned as schismatic. Those who dissented from the character and direction of the contemporary Order regarded its founding principles as inextricably linked to the ascetic and semi-eremitic way of life pursued by Francis himself. They rejected changes to the principles of poverty, simplicity and minority which had come about as a direct result of the Order's expansion in the towns and cities.

The term 'spiritual', used in reference to the dissident friars, arose from their interest in matters of the spirit above the practical concerns of a growing Order, and the continuing dispute became known as the 'spiritual controversy'.⁷⁰⁶ The term also

⁷⁰² The rumour was false but the damage was done nonetheless; Burr 2001, 43; *Seven Tribulations*, 150.

⁷⁰³ This contradicted their vows. Burr 2001, 44.

⁷⁰⁴ The group included a young Angelo Clareno, then known as Pietro da Fossombrone, according to his later testament. *Seven Tribulations*, 150-153.

⁷⁰⁵ Hugh of Digne, *Disputatio inter zelatorem paupertatis et inimicum domesticum eius*, cited in Sisto 1971, 341-70. John of Parma, in the *Arbor Vitae* (by Ubertino da Casale), 422-23. Burr 2001, 23-25; 47.

⁷⁰⁶ The term 'spiritual' had currency in the late thirteenth century. It was used to describe the 'zealots for poverty' who eventually constituted a separate faction of the Order. Burr 2001, 39-41; Graham 2013, 360.

relates to the theological writings of Abbot Joachim of Fiore (d.1202), contained in his *Exposition on the Apocalypse* (c.1184). This influential treatise prophesied the coming of two orders of spiritual men (*virii spirituales*), heralding the final 'third age' of mankind. Joachite theology enjoyed widespread popularity during the early part of the thirteenth century, when the new Mendicant Orders were aligned with the apostolic *virii spirituales*.⁷⁰⁷ They stood for the successful conversion of infidels and represented hope for a future age of peace and concord.⁷⁰⁸ However, the *Exposition on the Apocalypse* was also a source of potentially heterodox beliefs.⁷⁰⁹ Joachim divided history into three ages, corresponding with the persons of the Trinity.⁷¹⁰ The transition from one age to the next was characterised by the kind of conflict and persecution that had marked the life of Christ, at the beginning of the second age, and this narrative of tyranny and oppression held a powerful appeal to the dissenting friars. Joachim prophesied that at the cusp of the age of the Spirit, the *virii spirituales* would be agents of change among those corrupted by temporal power and material possessions.⁷¹¹ It was not difficult for the protestors to align themselves with the true, 'spiritual' followers of Christ, and to see their struggle in opposition to a powerful and corrupt Church hierarchy which had effectively undermined the purity of Francis' *Rule*.

Prominent figures in the Spiritual controversy, including Ubertino da Casale, Peter John Olivi and Angelo Clareno, were all significantly influenced by Joachite theology.⁷¹² Their apocalyptic understanding of the dispute justified the disobedience of protesting friars and fundamentally threatened the authority of the Order's leaders and the Church. In the *Arbor Vitae*, written c.1305, Ubertino identified the former Minister General John of Parma with the angel from Revelations who revealed the

⁷⁰⁷ Including in the writings of Bonaventure. McGinn and Reeves 1979, xvii; Daniel 1997, 253.

⁷⁰⁸ Daniel 1997, 240.

⁷⁰⁹ In 1254, Gerard of Borgo di San Donnino had published the *Evangelium Eternum*, an interpretation of Franciscan history according to the Joachite prophecies. It was quickly condemned as highly offensive after a papal commission of 1255 to examine its orthodoxy. One major problem was that it set the Order above the Church. Senoçak 2012, 139-140.

⁷¹⁰ This conception was overlaid onto the more traditional sevenfold division of history found in Revelations, where the final seventh age corresponded with that of the third. Salimbene of Parma, writing in 1282, recorded the importance of Joachite thought in the Order. *Ibid*, 137.

⁷¹¹ Douie 1932, 24.

⁷¹² Burr 2001, 173.

coming judgement of the fallen Church, the 'great whore'.⁷¹³ He questioned the rights of Franciscans to hold positions of ecclesiastical authority, criticised the handling of conventual funds, and saw the leaders of both Church and Order spreading corruption and laxity among the friars.⁷¹⁴ Ubertino condemned the increasing importance of the *studium* as evidence of the friars' worldliness and carnal knowledge, in opposition to the spiritual ideals of Francis.⁷¹⁵ Peter John Olivi recognised the role of academic learning in the Order, but shared Ubertino's anxieties about corruption in the Order and the Church. In his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (1298), he saw the strict apostolic poverty initiated by Francis as a sign that the Franciscans were precursors of the final age of the Spirit.⁷¹⁶ Just as the Apostles had been sent out by Christ to convert the Gentiles, the Franciscans were sent by Francis to accomplish the universal conversion which would characterise the culminating age of mankind.⁷¹⁷ To Olivi, this process necessitated challenging the established Church, which stood in the way of Franciscan poverty and was resistant to change.⁷¹⁸ In the writings of Angelo Clareno, Joachite theology is less prominent. However, his understanding of conflict as a necessary tribulation, justified by the promise of future resolution, was essentially apocalyptic. His *Seven Tribulations of the Order of Friars Minor* (1320s), which describes the suffering of the persecuted faithful, reflects this approach.⁷¹⁹ The spiritual controversy was not only about poverty, or the maintenance of Francis' original ideals. The central difficulty, which caused Olivi's writings to be condemned, and Ubertino and Clareno to be banished and censured, lay in the idea that the ecclesiastical hierarchy stood in the way of true religious experience, the path towards Christian perfection and ultimately, the fulfilment of eschatological truth.⁷²⁰

⁷¹³ And he later encountered in Olivi. Burr 2001, 97.

⁷¹⁴ *Arbor Vitae*, 422-423, cited in *ibid.*, 47.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷¹⁶ Burr 1989, 45.

⁷¹⁷ This process had already begun with the conversion of Greeks, Muslims, Mongols and Jews in Franciscan missions to the East. Burr 2001, 87.

⁷¹⁸ Olivi's ideas effectively undermined the authority of the Church. As a consequence, his teachings were condemned at the general chapter of 1299, and anyone who used his books was to be excommunicated. Burr 1989, 125.

⁷¹⁹ Accrocca 2007, 55.

⁷²⁰ Musto 1983, 40.

It is argued here that the Edinburgh Tabernacle was made in the mid-1290s, when the Spiritual controversy was reaching crisis point. Its central image of the desert, juxtaposed with the sacrifice and suffering of Christ, was potentially highly relevant to the debate around a Franciscan way of life, and the apocalyptic understanding of the Spirituals. It shows an eremitic existence in the wilderness, far from the corrupting influence of the city, as the ideal form of religious experience. In the tabernacle, an eremitic way of life is directly linked to the salvation of the soul after death and presented in parallel with the sacrifice and suffering of Christ. In addition, the red vestments of the priests at the funeral indicates the effective 'martyrdom' of the eremitic saint, and underline his links to the sacrificial life of Christ.⁷²¹ The Spirituals similarly understood their struggle in the context of redemption history. As Christ and the Apostles marked the beginning of the second age of the Son, the *virii spirituales*, who were described as an order of contemplatives, marked the coming of the third age of the Spirit. The followers of Francis, like the Apostles of Christ, had an important role as bearers of truth and heralds of future salvation. Two images of redemption are present in the tabernacle: one in the central panel, showing the ascension of the dead hermit's soul; and another at the bottom of the right-hand wing, showing the *Descent into Limbo*, which represents the opening of the way to salvation for all humanity. The inclusion of this scene, which was not commonly found in comparable Passion cycles of the late Duecento, directly aligns the sacrificial lives of the hermits, and the ascension of the dead saint's soul, with Christ's historical - and future - redemption of mankind. The Spirituals similarly saw their struggle within a framework of historical understanding, in which coming salvation, foreshadowed by past events, provided the primary motive for the endurance of present trials.⁷²² This is not to suggest that the tabernacle can be read as a straightforward allegory of the Spiritual controversy. However, the unique inclusion of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ alongside this image of the desert may have been motivated by the relationship the Spirituals perceived between an eremitic way of life, and the promise of salvation in the approaching third age of the Spirit.

⁷²¹ See chapter one above, p. 58.

⁷²² McGinn and Reeves 1979, 6.

The influence of Joachite theology was also evident among a congregation of observant Benedictines founded by Peter of Morrone, later Pope Celestine V, located in the Abruzzi mountains. A close relationship developed between the persecuted Franciscan Spirituals and the leader of this eremitic congregation which culminated, as we have seen, in the formation of the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine in 1294. Peter of Morrone had moved from the Benedictine house of Santa Maria di Faifula near Montagno, to Monte Porrara in the Abruzzi in 1231, seeking a more solitary and ascetic way of life.⁷²³ Together with a number of followers, he moved again, to the more remote locations of Monte Morrone and Monte Maiella, where he established a hermitage called Santo Spirito. Their way of life was characterised by contemplation, retreat from the secular world, and simplicity and austerity of clothing and food.⁷²⁴ Peter's cell on Monte Morrone was named Sant'Onofrio, after the famously ascetic Desert Father.⁷²⁵ He regarded the congregation as a precursor to reform of the Benedictine Order and the wider Church, part of the *ordo* or *ecclesia contemplantium*, or *quiescentium*, which Joachim of Fiore had predicted would identify the age of the Spirit.⁷²⁶ In 1263, Pope Urban IV formally recognised the congregation as the *Fratelli dello Spirito Santo*, incorporated into the Order of St Benedict, and granted a number of indulgences to those who visited its churches.⁷²⁷ The date of papal approbation coincided with the prophesied emergence of the third age of the Spirit, contained in the *Exposition on the Apocalypse*.⁷²⁸ Peter of Morrone's interest in the spiritual renewal and ecclesiastical reform predicted by Joachim of Fiore meant that he was deeply sympathetic to the protesting Franciscans of the Marche.⁷²⁹

⁷²³ EDP v.1, 460.

⁷²⁴ Goodich 1982, 138.

⁷²⁵ EDP v.1, 464.

⁷²⁶ The *Liber Concordie*, cited in Reeves 1958, 111.

⁷²⁷ By 1294, there were thirty-six dependent foundations, housing around six hundred monks. DIP 2, col. 733; De Simone 2005, 54.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁹ The first encounter between the Franciscan dissidents and Peter of Morrone was at the hermitage of Santo Spirito at Maiella, sometime during the 1270s. EDP, 461.

The elevation of Peter of Morrone to the papacy in July 1294 as Pope Celestine V indicates the significance of the eremitic ideal, even within a powerful and politically-motivated ecclesiastical hierarchy. The election of the Morrone hermit followed a two-year interregnum after the death of Nicholas IV, marked by intractable divisions within the College of Cardinals and rising civil unrest.⁷³⁰ Peter of Morrone was an unlikely candidate for the papacy, as he was neither a cardinal nor a bishop, but a man of contemplative inclinations entirely unfamiliar with the complex political dynamics of the Roman Curia. His election was, in part, a pragmatic decision to break the stalemate in the College.⁷³¹ Peter had allegiance to neither of the opposing factions in the Curia, the Colonna and Orsini, who favoured different candidates for the papacy. He was known to Latino Malabranca, Dean of the papal enclave, as a man of renowned insight and ascetic habits, and his eremitic experience distanced him from the political machinations which had marked papal elections of recent years. Celestine V also answered a perceived need for spiritual renewal in the Church, hoped for by an appreciable part of the laity, members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and supporters of the Franciscan Spirituals.⁷³² It is remarkable that a simple hermit, without political or diplomatic experience, was chosen as pontiff of the Roman Church as it faced profound challenges, both internally and internationally.⁷³³ Celestine V represented to some the possibility of change and transformation, as a prophesied angelic pope of the Joachite third age, who could usher in the *Ecclesia spiritualis*.⁷³⁴ The election of the hermit-pope in 1294 also motivated the exiled Spiritual Franciscans to return to Italy, seeking protection from persecution and recognition for their way of life.

The group of dissident Franciscans, which included Pietro da Macerata (Fra Liberato) and Pietro da Fossombrone (Fra Angelo Clareno), met the new pope in September 1294.⁷³⁵ Clareno recorded in a letter of 1317 how they were released from their obligations to the Order, while retaining their vows to the *Rule* and

⁷³⁰ Gatto 2006, 36-37.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, 41; Marini 2000, 1021.

⁷³⁴ Gatto 2006, 43.

⁷³⁵ Frugoni 1954, 132-133.

Testament of St Francis.⁷³⁶ The title of the new congregation reflected the Spirituals' way of life and effectively separated them from the Franciscan Order. They became the *Poveri Eremiti e Fratelli del Papa Celestino*, or Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, whose poverty and eremitic character was intended as an implicit contrast to the perceived worldliness and wealth of the contemporary Order. Clareno later described the identity of the congregation:

[Pope Celestine V] ordered that we should respond to those who asked us who we were with the answer: "We are poor men and brother hermits keeping the life and poverty we have promised in the desert and serving the Lord in the simplicity of faith."⁷³⁷

He understood the eremitical life as 'the way of life to which we have been called by the inspiration of God and the confirmation of the Supreme Pontiff'.⁷³⁸ Their legitimacy relied on the continued protection of the papacy, but their way of life was understood to be divinely sanctioned. The friars' choice to live as hermits grew out of their desire to observe the *Rule* and *Testament* 'as Saint Francis wished them to be observed'.⁷³⁹ They saw the intractable difficulties facing the Order arising from the impossibility of maintaining the *Rule* and *Testament* in the context of the cities. The interventions of successive popes, which had effectively altered the interpretation of these documents, were contrary to the expressly-stated wishes of Francis in his *Testament*:

And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: "They should be understood in this way."⁷⁴⁰

The Poor Hermits' continued obedience to Francis was only made possible by the concession of Pope Celestine. Until that point the friars were obliged to be obedient to the Order itself, and to the ministers who governed it. They retreated to the hermitage of Santa Maria del Chiarino near Ascoli Piceno to pursue a life of peaceful contemplation, but to the majority of the Franciscan Order, their very existence was

⁷³⁶ Angelo Clareno, 'A Letter to the Pope concerning the False Accusations and Calumnies Made by the Franciscans', transl. in McGinn and Reeves 1979, 164.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ *Seven Tribulations*, 156.

⁷⁴⁰ *Testament*, FAED I, 127.

highly controversial.⁷⁴¹ It was now possible for friars to follow the *Rule* and *Testament* of St Francis without being part of the Order, thereby undermining the authority both of the institution, and of the Church, which had sanctioned its contemporary character.

Celestine was ill-equipped for the dramatic transformation from hermit to pope. His actions as pontiff were severely restricted by the interventions of the Angevin King Charles II, who sought to use the papacy for his own political ends.⁷⁴² In addition, his political inexperience and primary interest in matters of monastic reform were criticised as evidence of ineptitude. He was, however, able to issue a Bull of Absolution, which granted all penitent pilgrims to the Benedictine church of Santa Maria di Collemaggio remission of their sins, linked to the feast of John the Baptist.⁷⁴³ The bull indicates his intentions as pope; to grant privileges to monastic foundations he favoured, and to serve the spiritual needs of the wider populace.⁷⁴⁴ By the start of Advent in 1294, the hermit-pope was overburdened by the pressures of his office and sought a temporary retreat to his cell on Monte Morrone. Prevented from doing so by his cardinals, he began to think of taking the unprecedented step of abdicating the papal throne. Under the legal advice of Cardinal Benedetto Caetani, Celestine was convinced that abdication would be both legitimate under canon law, and expedient, for the sake of his health and for the good of the Church. On the 13th of December 1294, he was officially divested, and on the eve of the Nativity, Benedetto was elected his successor as Boniface VIII. In the face of considerable political and bureaucratic pressure, Peter of Morrone's eremitic virtues - which had been crucial to his election - proved, in the end, to be the downfall of his papacy. The extraordinary event of his abdication, a mere five months after his installation as pope, illustrates the fundamental incompatibility of high ecclesiastical office and an eremitic way of life.

Boniface VIII revoked the majority of the legislation enacted by his predecessor on the 27th of December 1294, which immediately removed the papal

⁷⁴¹ Clareno took his name from the hermitage. De Simone 2005, 58.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁴³ The church in L'Aquila had been founded by Celestine himself. EDP, 467.

⁷⁴⁴ *Inter sanctorum solemnia*, 29 Sept 1294. De Simone, 121-122.

protection of the Poor Hermits.⁷⁴⁵ They were forced to flee, as we have seen, to the relative safety of Greece, where they were largely able to avoid censure.⁷⁴⁶ The *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis continued to form the basis of their ascetic and contemplative way of life. In Italy, Peter of Morrone tried to return to his cell in the Abruzzi, but was placed under surveillance by Boniface VIII, anxious that his supporters (particularly the Colonna) would seek to deny the legitimacy of the new pope whilst the former Celestine V lived.⁷⁴⁷ The Poor Hermits were accused by members of the Franciscan Order of rejecting the authority of Boniface VIII, but Clareno explicitly denied this charge and recognised the necessity of regaining papal support.⁷⁴⁸ The Spiritual Franciscans were, however, bitterly disappointed at the loss of a pope who had represented expectations for a transformed *ecclesia spiritualis*. Joachimite predictions of a *papa angelico*, who would arrive at the dawn of the third age, are found in the writings of Olivi, but were only explicitly aligned with the figure of Celestine V in the following century, following his death in 1296.⁷⁴⁹ In the canonisation Processes of the hermit-pope, dating from 1313, it is his exemplary eremitic life that is emphasised.⁷⁵⁰ His ascetic practice is described in terms analogous to those used of the Desert Fathers, emphasising his self-mortification and sustenance ‘by divine grace’.⁷⁵¹ Despite the short and ignominious nature of his papacy, he was honoured and beatified as a hermit.⁷⁵²

The brief papacy of Celestine V, the formation of the Poor Hermits, and the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, coincide in the highly volatile historical context of the 1290s. It seems likely, given the evidence discussed in Chapter Three, that the treatise known as the *Heavenly Ladder* was also translated by Angelo Clareno at

⁷⁴⁵ Potestà 1990, 29-31.

⁷⁴⁶ See chapter three above, p.153-156.

⁷⁴⁷ Burr 1989, 112.

⁷⁴⁸ *Seven Tribulations*, 162-3; ‘A Letter to the Pope...’, in McGinn and Reeves 1979, 166.

⁷⁴⁹ Marini 2000, 1005.

⁷⁵⁰ ‘vidit dictum fratrem Petrum commoranem in heremis et locis aridis et asperis, scilicet in montibus et in carcere seu cella, de quibus non exibat nisi causa mutandi locum’ CP Celestino V, 83.

⁷⁵¹ ‘quod magis videbatur sibi quod gracia divina speciali sustentaretur quam corporeo nutrimento...’ *Ibid.* (my translation).

⁷⁵² By Clement V in 1313.

around the same time, either prior to 1294, or early in 1295. This text, which may have informed the subject-matter of the tabernacle's central panel, represents an approach to the religious life closely aligned with the eremitic ideals of Peter of Morrone/Pope Celestine V. It focuses on the individual's ascent towards God, the importance of contemplation and the necessity for protection from the secular world. The text provides an alternative narrative to that of the contemporary Franciscan Order, because it gives the founder of a congregation primary importance, and regards the individual's spiritual progress as paramount. There is no emphasis on ministry to the laity or engagement with the secular world; the monk or hermit fixes his gaze on Christ. As we have seen, Clareno's translation was quickly disseminated in Spiritual circles and was evidently utilised by Peter John Olivi, who referenced the *Heavenly Ladder* in *De Missa*, in 1295-96. It may well have held a particular appeal in the turbulent context of the mid-1290s, when the status of the eremitic life, the character and integrity of the Franciscan Order, and the office of the papacy were all at stake. It is possible that the iconography of eremitic life, found in illuminated copies of this treatise, was transmitted to the West at the same time as the translation of Clareno, c.1294.⁷⁵³ Such a hypothetical manuscript source may, in turn, have informed the unusual byzantine iconography which characterises the image of the desert at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle.

The themes contained in the tabernacle bear relation to the concerns of a discernible spiritual 'tendency' within the Franciscan Order towards the end of the thirteenth century. Peter John Olivi and Ubertino da Casale both spent time at the convent Santa Croce in Florence towards the end of the 1280s, where their ideas fell on fertile ground.⁷⁵⁴ A faction of Spiritual Franciscans at the convent sought to observe the strictures of poverty and rejected the *de facto* accumulation of wealth. They strongly resisted plans for a third rebuilding of the church.⁷⁵⁵ The proposed monumental structure, which was to replace a building that was only thirty years old, was intended in part to compete with the large Dominican church on the opposite side of the city, at Santa Maria Novella. It was also a consequence of countless

⁷⁵³ As suggested in chapter three above, p. 158-159.

⁷⁵⁴ Potestà 1990, 43

⁷⁵⁵ The first was built in the 1220s and the second was begun in 1259. Goffen 1988, 4-5; On the factions at Santa Croce and elsewhere, and Spiritual protests against rebuilding, see Brooke 1959, 181-182; 188-189; Daniel 1973, 89-98.

testamentary bequests to the Order by pious Florentines seeking burial in the church of the Friars Minor.⁷⁵⁶ The relentless pursuit of legacies, and the ever-increasing grandeur of the Franciscan church, was seen by the Spirituals, at Santa Croce as elsewhere, to represent a profound negation of the ideals of St Francis. What was at stake was not only the correct interpretation of the *Rule* and the nature of a true Franciscan life. The compromise of Franciscan principles embodied by the plans for Santa Croce were seen to be inextricably linked to the wider corruption of the Church, following the controversial views of Olivi and Ubertino. In this religious context, the image at the centre of the tabernacle may have represented a statement against such corruption. It shows the pious reverence of the hermits for the founding saint of their congregation, the humble fraternity and simple asceticism of their lives, and the consequent blessing of Christ. The eremitic landscape represents an idealised way of life entirely at odds with the predominant character of the contemporary Order.

It may be argued that the Edinburgh Tabernacle is too lavish to have been made for the Spiritual Franciscans, who vehemently opposed the accumulation of material wealth. However, there was a strong visual tradition in the Order which could be traced back to the life of St Francis, and the miracle of the talking *croce dipinta* at the church of San Damiano.⁷⁵⁷ Certain paintings made for Franciscan churches, such as the monumental crucifix by Cimabue at Santa Croce itself, provided visual evidence for the nakedness and poverty of Christ, and thus reflected the ideals of the Spirituals.⁷⁵⁸ The ostracised Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine had the support of wealthy and influential members of society and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Cardinal Napoleone Orsini, who had been named protector of the Poor Hermits in 1294, continued to offer his support to Angelo Clareno and his companions when they returned to Italy in 1305.⁷⁵⁹ The prominent Tuscan spiritual, Ubertino da Casale, became Napoleone's chaplain in the years between

⁷⁵⁶ Bruzelius 2007, 208.

⁷⁵⁷ '...with the lips of the painting, the image of Christ crucified spoke to him. "Francis," it said, calling him by name, "go rebuild my house; as you see, it is all being destroyed."' *Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, FAED II, 249.

⁷⁵⁸ As did the Bardi dossal. See Goffen 1988, 29-30.

⁷⁵⁹ Lambert 1998, 182.

1306-1309.⁷⁶⁰ And Napoleone's cousin, Giacomo Colonna, took Angelo Clareno into his household during the Council of Vienne (1310-12), which attempted to address the problem of Franciscan poverty.⁷⁶¹ Clareno, Ubertino and other spiritual spokesmen obtained a number of powerful supporters at Avignon. Outside of the papal court, they gained patrons and allies in Rome, Naples, Sicily and Aragon.⁷⁶² Prince Philip of Majorca so admired Clareno and his rigorous way of life that he eventually became one of his followers.⁷⁶³ To their allies, including those such as the Colonna and Orsini, who wielded considerable power, they represented admirable principles of renunciation, self-denial and utmost humility.⁷⁶⁴ The painting is unlikely to have been commissioned by the largely itinerant Poor Hermits themselves. However, it is possible that this object, whose iconography is linked to Angelo Clareno, the *Heavenly Ladder*, and the monastic traditions of the East, was made under the patronage of one of their high-profile supporters, for an audience of Spiritual friars.

In Franciscan iconography, the eremitic landscape featured prominently from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. The earliest narrative images of the *Stigmatisation*, found in *Vita* panels such as the example from Pescia (1235), draw on the iconography of the *Agony in the Garden* and represent Francis, kneeling *orans* before a schematic mountainous backdrop, receiving the stigmata from a seraph in the sky above (figure 112). In Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*, this event was described as the defining feature of his sainthood, directly linking Francis to the sacrificial life of Christ.⁷⁶⁵ As a consequence, the Stigmatisation became increasingly significant in Franciscan art, and in the monumental cycle of the Upper Church at San Francesco in Assisi, the episode of his transformation was visually

⁷⁶⁰ The arrangement continued until 1316. Graham 2013, 360.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*

⁷⁶³ Lambert 1998, 181.

⁷⁶⁴ Potestà 1990, 78.

⁷⁶⁵ *Legenda Major*, FAED II, 539; 545.

related to the *Crucifixion* of Christ.⁷⁶⁶ This image shows the landscape of La Verna as an expansive, desolate and clearly-defined place (figure 113).⁷⁶⁷ The development of the Stigmatisation in Franciscan art reflects the Order's interest in narrative painting and in the visual theme of the wilderness. By c.1300, the Stigmatisation was excerpted from episodic narrative cycles of the saint's life and treated as an isolated image, for example in the fresco above the entrance to the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce, and in a monumental panel painting now in the Louvre.⁷⁶⁸ In both cases, the image epitomises the sacrificial life and unique sainthood of Francis, and the other narratives relating to his life are relegated to a position of secondary importance. The isolated wilderness of the *eremo*, at La Verna and elsewhere, had been important to Francis in life. It is perhaps no coincidence that images of the wilderness landscape became a central *topos* in the increasingly sophisticated iconography of the Franciscan Order.

In the fifteenth century, a Stigmatisation of St Francis was included within an extensive eremitic landscape, populated by dozens of ascetic saints and hermits (figure 114). The panel in question is a long, horizontal panel painting, now on loan to the National Gallery of Scotland, and dated to c.1480.⁷⁶⁹ It measures 49.5cm high by 163.5cm wide, and was bought by Lord Lindsay, who later became the owner of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, in 1856 or 1865.⁷⁷⁰ It is referred to in the literature as the 'smaller Lindsay panel' after its nineteenth-century owner, and to distinguish it from another, similar eremitic landscape also purchased by Lord Lindsay.⁷⁷¹ Stylistically, it

⁷⁶⁶ The *Crucifixion* is directly above and to the right of the *Stigmatisation*, in the second register of frescoes in the nave. They are visually linked by a strong diagonal in the *Stigmatisation*, connecting Francis with Christ-as-seraph.

⁷⁶⁷ It is notable that the two episodes of the Life of St Francis which appear on the counter-facade of the Upper Church of San Francesco, Assisi, are distinguished from the majority of the scenes in the nave by their non-urban settings: the *Miracle of the Spring*, which takes place in a rocky wilderness; and the *Preaching to the Birds*, which is set in the grassy landscape outside Bevagna.

⁷⁶⁸ On the Bardi Chapel, see Goffen 1988. On the Louvre *Stigmatisation* panel, attributed to Giotto, see Gardner 1982, 217-247; Cooper 2013, 686-713, and discussion in chapter two above, p. 90-92.

⁷⁶⁹ At time of writing, the painting was not on display due to a major refurbishment taking place at the National Galleries of Scotland. Until 2017, it hung on a wall opposite the Edinburgh Tabernacle, inviting comparison between the two paintings. On the 'smaller Lindsay panel', see: Callmann 1975, 16-17; Brigstocke 2000, 60-62; Malquori 2013, 80-86.

⁷⁷⁰ Brigstocke 2000, 58.

⁷⁷¹ This painting, which remains in a Scottish private collection, is known as the 'Large Lindsay Panel'. *Ibid.*, 58-62; Malquori 2013, 56-63.

may be described as Florentine, but its origins are obscure.⁷⁷² The painting has, historically, been known as a 'thebaid', because it follows a similar composition to several other fifteenth-century Florentine panel paintings representing saints in a desert landscape.⁷⁷³ The term 'thebaid' is in reality a misnomer, because the saints pictured in this image were not all inhabitants of the Egyptian desert.⁷⁷⁴ It is a pan-historical landscape, occupied by early Christian hermits, founders of western monastic Orders, and Mendicants. St Francis appears towards the centre of the panel, close to its upper edge. He kneels *orans* on a rocky spur, looking up towards Christ in the form of a seraph hovering in the sky above (figure 115).

The small narrative scenes contained in this panel are dispersed throughout its panoramic landscape. The topography combines steep, rocky mountains, views of distant hilltop towns and cities, lush vegetation, and a broad river, which runs along the lower edge of the painting. Numerous small chapels and cells dot the hillsides, and a large, elaborate church complex dominates the centre of the image. In front of the church, the funeral of a sainted hermit takes place which is comparable to that of the Edinburgh Tabernacle (figure 116). Mourning hermits, priests and acolytes gather around the bier and at the centre, a sainted hermit raises his hands in a gesture of grief. To the left of this scene, other hermits travel to the funeral, down a steep and rocky mountain path. As in the tabernacle, one rides an animal (here it is a deer), one is carried on the back of his brethren, while other elderly figures are seated in carriages or assisted on their way. Two hermits embrace at the edge of the funeral scene. While the essential elements of the tabernacle's composition are present, they have been adapted to fit the horizontal format of this painting. The stylite saint, who appears on an axis with the funeral in the tabernacle, is replaced here by a hermit in a tree.⁷⁷⁵ There are three types of scenes present in this eremitic landscape: identifiable narratives relating to the lives of well-known eremitic or ascetic saints; generic images of life in the desert, including the monastic funeral at the centre; and scenes which allude to the

⁷⁷² Brigstocke 2000, 58.

⁷⁷³ Callmann 1975, 15-17; Malquori 2012, 29-30; Malquori 2013, 80-86. See discussion below, p. 241-243.

⁷⁷⁴ As discussed in the Introduction, p. 22-25.

⁷⁷⁵ On this theme in eremitic landscape paintings, see Malquori 2013, 230-240.

presence, or absence, of laypeople in the wilderness. Among the first type are images of the penitent St Jerome, St Benedict rolling in thorns to control the passions of the flesh, St Macarius conversing with a skull, and a young St John the Baptist, led by angels into the desert (figure 117). The second type, representing unspecified saints, include a group of flagellants, who are stripped to the waist and gathered around a tall crucifix (figure 118). A scene showing the legend of the Three Living and Three Dead is of the third type, illustrating the conversion of laymen to the religious life following a confrontation with death (figure 119). None of these types of scenes are given compositional prominence in the panel, and the viewer is encouraged to regard each episode individually, as if reading them in a picture-book.

The inclusion of St Francis in this eremitic landscape is notable, because it positions him as a successor of the eremitic tradition represented by the Desert Fathers. Several other saints in the image represent the foundation, or renewal, of monastic life in the West. St Benedict, for example, was regarded as the founder of western monasticism, and St Bernard of Clairvaux, who is shown seated before a vision of the Virgin, was an important figure in the monastic reform movement of the twelfth century. Francis is the most recent saint included in the painting. There are two Carmelite friars, identifiable by their striped habits as early inhabitants of Mount Carmel. All of these figures are part of the same wilderness landscape inhabited by the Desert Fathers and all, to some extent, follow their example. Francis emulated the Desert Fathers in his radical renunciation of the material world, his ascetic conduct, and his frequent retreat to the wilderness. Yet like the other western saints in the image, he did not live exclusively in the desert. Jerome, for example, was depicted in images either as bare-chested penitent or as scholar and cardinal, and Benedict advocated the safety of the coenobium over the dangers of a solitary life in the desert.⁷⁷⁶ Francis, as we have seen, divided his time between solitary contemplation and evangelism among the people. He is distinguished in this busy landscape both by his placement, at the centre of the panel's upper edge, and by his direct alignment with the paradigmatic image of monastic origins; Paul and Antony breaking bread in the desert (figure 115). Francis is honoured as an ascetic and stigmatised saint, as founder of an Order, and as primary renewer of the religious life instantiated in the historical desert.

⁷⁷⁶ *Legenda Aurea* v.II, 212-216; RB, 293.

The provenance of the smaller Lindsay panel is, at present, unknown. No records exist beyond its sale to Lord Lindsay in the 1850s or 60s.⁷⁷⁷ In the limited scholarship on this painting, it has been compared with an eremitic landscape of c. 1460-70, now in the Accademia in Florence and attributed to Paolo Uccello (figure 120).⁷⁷⁸ The Uccello panel, which is known as *The Way of Perfection*, or *Scenes of Monastic Life*, contains only western monks and saints: St Bernard, St. Jerome, a circle of Benedictine monks, a group of flagellants around a crucifix and, at the top of the painting on a high rocky escarpment, St Francis receiving the stigmata.⁷⁷⁹ The presence of both Francis and the flaming IHS monogram associated with the prominent Observant Franciscan St Bernardino of Siena (d. 1444), have led to the suggestion that the Accademia painting was made for a Franciscan context.⁷⁸⁰ The two panels, which are both dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, represent western ascetic and monastic saints in a desert landscape and include a scene of group flagellation. St Francis appears in both paintings at the moment of his stigmatisation, on the summit of a mountain, placed close to the upper edge of the panel. It seems significant that he should appear at the apex of the composition in both cases. If the paintings represent a journey towards perfection, Francis is shown surpassing all of the spiritual achievements of the monks and saints lower down the mountain. The representation of Francis as the paramount ascetic saint, uniquely identified with Christ, strongly indicates a Franciscan context for both paintings.

The smaller Lindsay panel, and the Uccello *Way of Perfection*, demonstrate that by the later fifteenth century, certain eremitic landscapes included the stigmatised saint. The ascetic endeavours of Benedict, Bernard, and Francis, were evidently viewed on the same continuum as those of the heroic Desert Fathers. The

⁷⁷⁷ Brigstocke 2000, 30.

⁷⁷⁸ Callmann 1975, 15-16; Brigstocke 2000, 62; Malquori 2013, 80-86.

⁷⁷⁹ Malquori 2013, 76-80.

⁷⁸⁰ Possibly associated with the convent of St Jerome and St Francis in Florence. Malquori 1990, 128-129; 2012, 27-29. A record of the painting from 1909 states that it, together with some others, had come to the Uffizi (it was later transferred to the Accademia) from the Vallombrosan convent of San Giorgio alla Costa, but there is no further evidence of this from an earlier date and it has been questioned by several scholars. Staderini 2013, 76-79.

inclusion of Francis alongside the Desert Fathers and St. Benedict presents him alongside the most important founders of religious movements in the West. The Stigmatisation remains the paradigmatic moment of his sainthood, but more than that, it represents his union with Christ as the result or culmination of his ascetic *way of life*. Both of these panels explicitly align St Francis with the ascetic and eremitic tradition of earlier western saints and, ultimately, with the origins of Christian religious life. They illustrate the continuing vitality of the eremitic ideal, and strongly assert the position of St. Francis within it.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, when these paintings were made, the Franciscan Order was increasingly divided. The struggle between the Conventuals, who refused to recognise the need for internal reform, and the Observants, who sought to return to the letter of the *Rule* and the austerity of the early Order, grew, in part, out of the Spiritual controversy that had begun in the thirteenth century.⁷⁸¹ The Observants, through their advocates such as Bernadino of Siena and John of Capistrano (d.1456), sought to prove that they were more loyal to the Franciscan ideal than were the Conventuals.⁷⁸² Bernadino's *Exposition of the Rule* (1440) set out the Observant position on poverty and the renunciation of all unnecessary goods.⁷⁸³ An image of Francis in the desert, alongside ascetic and monastic saints, identifies him as the founder of an Order and the inheritor of a tradition. Seen in the context of Observant agitation in the second half of the fifteenth century, paintings such as the smaller Lindsay panel and the Uccello *Way of Perfection*, explicitly align Francis, as stigmatised saint, with the authority and ascetic observance of his predecessors. It was his way of life that represented the summit of spiritual achievement and which he had handed down to his followers in the *Rule*. In following this *Rule* to the letter, the Observant followers of Francis were the rightful inheritors of this uniquely sanctioned form of the religious life.

The smaller Lindsay panel shares several features with the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, which was made around two hundred years earlier. The detail of the figures, landscape and buildings within both are minutely observed, and

⁷⁸¹ Moorman 1968, 441-456; Burr 2001, 303-304.

⁷⁸² Moorman 1968, 450.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*

the paintings reward prolonged examination at close quarters. The myriad scenes are intelligible only to those with some prior knowledge of the stories and traditions they represent, almost certainly an educated religious audience. There is a lack of clear pictorial structure in both cases, but the elaborate funeral scene acts as a focal point. Unlike other 'thebaid' paintings of the Quattrocento, such as the now dismembered panel known as the 'Budapest/Bartolini-Salimbeni' (figure 121), the monastic funeral in the smaller Lindsay panel is placed at the centre of the image, rather than at its left-hand edge.⁷⁸⁴ This placement may, in turn, reflect the relative significance of the scene or recognition of its source in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. It also underlines the importance of the Church in the context of the desert, and confirms the orthodoxy of the obsequies being celebrated. The two paintings detail various forms of the religious life, carried out by figures with haloes and without, and who wear a variety of different habits. There are scenes of solitude and fraternity, angels and demons. Both include scenes of self-mortification: the image of the stylite saint in the tabernacle, and that of the flagellants in the fifteenth-century panel. Among the kneeling penitents in the smaller Lindsay panel, some are tonsured, two have haloes and others, wearing various different habits, appear as *beati* (figure 118).⁷⁸⁵ It seems likely that these men, like the tabernacle's stylite saint, are unspecified ascetics who represent a type of physical penitence associated with the desert. The wilderness landscape in both images is idealised as a powerful antithesis to the secular world of the city. In the Edinburgh tabernacle, the dead hermit's soul is carried to Heaven at the apex of the painting, directly above the funeral. In the Lindsay panel, this image is replaced by St Francis receiving the stigmata. In each case, spiritual union with Christ is indicated as the ultimate aim and achievement of the eremitic life.

The later inclusion of St Francis in eremitic landscape paintings such as the smaller Lindsay panel indicate the possibility of a Franciscan context for the

⁷⁸⁴ On this panel, see Malquori 2012, 119-121; 2013, 38-43; below, p. 183-189.

⁷⁸⁵ Alessandra Malquori has pointed out the compositional similarities between the group of flagellants in the smaller Lindsay panel and an illumination in a manuscript of *Lo specchio de l'ordine Minore*, or the Mirror of the Friars Minor (Perugia Biblioteca Augusta, ms. 1238, fol.29r.), showing Francis and his early companions kneeling around a cross. She suggests that the group in the painting may similarly represent the early friars. However, the variety of habits and tonsure evident in the Lindsay panel, and the presence of two saints, make this implausible. It seems more likely that the scene in the painting is intended to represent the practice of self-flagellation as part of the eremitic tradition, practiced by several different saints and *beati*. Malquori 2012, 28.

Edinburgh Tabernacle itself. The Lindsay panel shows that St Francis, unlike other recent saints, was regarded by reformist, or Observant members of the Order as a prominent inheritor of the eremitic tradition. It is this eremitic aspect of his life, linked to his transformation into *alter christus*, which aligns him most closely with the lives of the Desert Fathers. The stigmatisation was not a martyrdom, but it was a crucifixion of sorts, mirroring the suffering and sacrifice of the Saviour. In the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ is juxtaposed with a scene of eremitic life and death. The Redeemer in the pediment appears to bless and consecrate the ascetic endeavours of the hermits below, and the death of the hermit-saint is acknowledged within the context of the Passion, or as an effective martyrdom, in which the officiating clergy wear red vestments. The scene does not include St Francis, or focus on one specific identifiable saint, but it makes clear the spiritual consequences of a self-sacrificing, ascetic way of life. If this image was, as I suggest above, linked in some way to the interests and inclinations of the Franciscan Spirituals, it represents a powerful argument for the eremitic way of life they associated with the stigmatised saint. For the Franciscans, the eremitic life was highly pertinent to the disputed character of the Order and the conflict that arose around the legacy of St Francis. By the late fifteenth century, as the controversy continued between Conventual and Spiritual factions of the Order, Francis was represented in art as an eremitic saint, who represented the renewal of the ascetic tradition, descended from the Desert Fathers.

- Part Two -

a) The Dominicans, or Order of Friars Preachers

In Italy and across Europe, the social, cultural and religious landscape was profoundly altered by the arrival of the two major Mendicant Orders. Both the Friars Minor and Friars Preachers responded to conditions that had arisen in the preceding centuries: demographic increase; a new, urban-based market economy; and a remote and sometimes corrupt ecclesiastical hierarchy that frequently failed to meet the pastoral needs of the laity.⁷⁸⁶ Reacting against the growing profit economy of the

⁷⁸⁶ In Florence, for instance, the population in 1278 was c.73,000, more than three times the number of a century before. Little 1978, 19-41; 210.

mercantile classes, the Mendicants embraced voluntary poverty, which was visible in the rough simplicity of their habits and the plain architecture of their churches and convents. The Dominicans were explicitly founded to counter heretical beliefs by preaching the gospels to the laity, and their activity was focused in urban centres, where populations were most concentrated. The new Orders were highly successful, and spread quickly through Italy and the rest of Europe.⁷⁸⁷ Over time, they took on an increasingly important pastoral role among the laity, whose alms ensured their continued survival. In the course of the thirteenth century, they were joined by others restructured on a similar model, most notably the Augustinian Hermits and the Carmelites, but the Dominicans and Franciscans remained the largest and most influential of the Mendicant Orders.⁷⁸⁸

The mendicant way of life became closely associated with the life of the cities, where their preaching activities took place and where economic activity was concentrated. During the Duecento, the Orders gained papal privileges, such as the right to hear confessions and conduct burials, that drew increasing lay patronage. They became an important focal point of lay devotion, and frequently acted as protectors of pious and charitable lay confraternities, such as the *laudesi* (whose devotional activity focused on singing *laude*) and *flagellanti* (or *battuti*, who undertook self-flagellation). The Dominican Order in particular placed great importance on the education of the friars, and schools run by Mendicants were established within the universities, initially at Bologna and Paris.⁷⁸⁹ The pastoral activities of the Mendicants led to their increasing importance as patrons of the visual arts, which functioned to facilitate devotion, to communicate Gospel truths to the laity, or to promote the cults of their saints. The arts became a central aspect of Mendicant identity, despite their vows of poverty, and were frequently linked to the

⁷⁸⁷ On the growth of the two orders in Europe and Italy, see Lesnick 1989, 44-45 and 64-65. In the case of the Franciscans, numbers increased dramatically, from 12 friars in 1210 to c.30,000 only forty years later. Pellegrini 1984, 185 n.58.

⁷⁸⁸ Andrews 2006, 9-21; 71-98.

⁷⁸⁹ On the rise of education in the Franciscan Order, see Şenocak 2012; On Mendicants and burials, see Bruzelius 2007, 203-224.

benefaction of the laity.⁷⁹⁰ The profound religious and cultural changes associated with the rise of the Mendicant Orders have primarily been understood in the context of the cities.⁷⁹¹ This is particularly true of the Dominican Order, which quickly established foundations in the largest cities of Europe from 1220 onwards.⁷⁹² Yet the *Lives of the Anchorites* fresco in the Camposanto of Pisa (c.1340), closely linked to the activities of the local Dominicans at the convent of Santa Caterina, reveals a profound interest in the ancient example of the Desert Fathers that has led to speculation around their involvement in the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The following discussion examines this hypothesis, considering the nature and significance of the eremitic ideal among the Order in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Friars Preachers were established in 1216 by Dominic of Caleruega (c. 1172-1221), with the stated aim of preaching, or 'the care of souls'.⁷⁹³ Their lifestyle was motivated in large part by practical considerations, and the success of their evangelical mission was, at least initially, more important to the Order than any cult of its founder.⁷⁹⁴ Their primary purpose was to counter heterodox beliefs, particularly those of the Cathars, who had large followings in northern Italy and southern France in the early thirteenth century.⁷⁹⁵ The heretics created an impression of holiness - and a point of difference to the secular clergy - through itinerant preaching to the laity and the renunciation of worldly goods.⁷⁹⁶ The Dominicans pursued a practical

⁷⁹⁰ For example, Innocent IV issued a bull in 1253 allowing the friars to spend alms and donations they received on commissions to artists for the decoration of the newly-consecrated church of San Francesco in Assisi. The Franciscan cardinal Bentivenga Bentivegni (d.1290) left a library to the convent of San Fortunato in Todi. Kempers 1987 22-23; 26; Bourdua 2004, 19. For a list of indulgences granted by Innocent IV to the faithful who contributed to funds for Franciscan church buildings between 1246 and 1253, see Bolgia 2017, 111.

⁷⁹¹ See, for example, Little 1978; Goffen 1988; Lesnick 1989; Lawrence 1994; Bourdua 2004.

⁷⁹² They were established in Paris, Bologna and Florence by 1221. Lesnick 1989, 64.

⁷⁹³ *Constitutions*, in Brooke 1975, 191.

⁷⁹⁴ Dominic was canonised in 1234, thirteen years after his death. St Francis, by contrast, was canonised only two years after he died, in 1228.

⁷⁹⁵ The Albigensians, or Cathars, were so called because they were based in the city of Albi. They preached a radical dualism and understood the material world as inherently evil. Prior to the arrival of Dominic and Bishop Diego of Osma in 1206, the Cistercians had been charged with the papal mission against the Cathars. Moorman 1968, 21-22.

⁷⁹⁶ Brooke 1975, 71-74.

interpretation of apostolic poverty, as they owned their own priories and monetary income was accepted for the purchase of provisions.⁷⁹⁷ The renunciation of worldly goods, profession of poverty and ascetic practices such as taking the discipline or fasting (observed in common with reformed monastic orders, as the Premonstratensians) were not regarded solely as means to reach the end of individual perfection, but rather as necessary aspects of an exemplary life.⁷⁹⁸ Mortification of the flesh was to be undertaken in moderation, so that the friar should not become sick or weak, or compromise his ability to fulfil his duty as preacher.⁷⁹⁹ The primary goal, reflected in the early sources, was effective, orthodox preaching and capable ministry to the laity.⁸⁰⁰ Accounts of Dominic's life present him as a self-effacing and humble man, one among several brethren whose primary goal was the repudiation of heresy.⁸⁰¹ They emphasise the success of his preaching mission and the legacy of the early Order, rather than the charisma or miracles of the founder.⁸⁰²

Dominican friars pursued a *vita apostolica*, following in the footsteps of Christ's Apostles by renouncing personal possessions, travelling to preach the Gospels, and relying entirely on the alms of the laity.⁸⁰³ In the *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, a narrative of the early Order, Jordan of Saxony (d.1237) describes how Dominic sent his brethren in pairs 'into the world' to preach.⁸⁰⁴ Humbert of Romans (d. 1277), Minister General of the Dominicans from 1254-63, explained the presence of the Mendicants in the cities as a necessity of their apostolic mission. He saw the city as the place in which the battle for souls might be won or lost:⁸⁰⁵

⁷⁹⁷ Hinnebusch 1965, 157.

⁷⁹⁸ In an encyclical of Master General Humbert of Romans to the order, dated 1260. Cited in Van Engen 1998, 21.

⁷⁹⁹ Humbert of Romans, *Opera de vita regulari*, cited in Brett 1984, 125.

⁸⁰⁰ As in Jordan of Saxony's *Libellus de principio ordinis*. Van Engen 1998, 10-12.

⁸⁰¹ See, for example: *Lives of the Brethren*, 43-44; 56; 133-140.

⁸⁰² Lawrence 1994, 84; Brett 1984, 121.

⁸⁰³ Matthew 10:7-10.

⁸⁰⁴ Jordan was the first Minister General of the Order after the death of Dominic in 1221; Matt. 9:1-6; *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, in Brooke 1975, 170.

⁸⁰⁵ Preaching activities were not confined to the cities, but Dominican houses had to have a minimum of twelve friars and so were set up in large urban centres. Lesnick 1989, 64.

In cities there are more people than in other places, and therefore it is better to preach there than elsewhere, just as it is better to give alms to more than to fewer people.⁸⁰⁶

There were also, of course, more human and material resources in the cities, which the Order needed in order to survive and grow. Early sources give no indication that there was an eremitic aspect to the Order's character, even in its formative years. Its Constitutions (1220) drew from those of the Premonstratensian Canons, who similarly followed the Rule of St Augustine, and emphasised the contemplative aspect of a religious life.⁸⁰⁷ The Dominicans, however, were obliged by their mission to engage with the world rather than withdraw, and the contemplative aspect of the friars' lives was restricted to the temporary privacy of their cells.⁸⁰⁸ The statutes of several general chapters held during the thirteenth century condemned excesses in the friars' clothing and repeatedly reiterated the prohibition against the personal possession of money, reflecting the difficulty of maintaining corporate poverty in an outward-facing, and growing, urban Order.⁸⁰⁹ Apostolic poverty was an important aspect of the Dominican character, but unlike the Franciscans, whose poverty was uncompromising and absolute, the principle was pursued pragmatically. In the course of the thirteenth century, the Dominican way of life focused increasingly on education in the service of preaching, and the Order became firmly embedded in the heart of the cities.

Despite the urban context of Dominican activity, their academic activities demonstrate a marked interest in the tradition of ascetic literature. We know that early Dominican foundations possessed copies of the *Vitae patrum* (*Lives of the Fathers*), the collection of ascetic writings which described the lives of the early Desert Fathers in the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine.⁸¹⁰ The *Vitae fratrum*,

⁸⁰⁶ Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione praedicatorum*, cited in d'Avray 1985, 31.

⁸⁰⁷ Cited and translated in Sundt 1987, 396.

⁸⁰⁸ A story in the *Lives of the Brethren* tells how a pious German friar gave up all activity except prayer, but was chastised by his brethren for 'making himself unfit for the duties of the Order'. In response, he prayed that his contemplation might benefit the souls of others and was granted a God-given gift of preaching; 'his scanty store of learning was so increased that he preached fluently in German and Latin...' *Lives of the Brethren*, 142-143.

⁸⁰⁹ Hinnebusch 1965, 159.

⁸¹⁰ Humphreys 1964, 92.

written between 1256-59 by the provincial minister Gerard of Frachet (d.1271), was a collection of stories modelled on the structure of the *Vitae patrum*, whose name it echoes.⁸¹¹ It was intended to edify the friars and educate the novitiate by describing the virtuous deeds of Dominic and the early brethren, illustrating their missionary zeal. But whereas the *Lives of the Fathers* frequently describes the heroic ascetic endeavours of individual hermits, the *Vitae fratrum* focuses on the success of the early friars' missions, and the ways in which they collectively received the blessings of the Church and the protection of the Virgin.⁸¹² Before c.1300, the *Lives of the Fathers* would have been encountered by the friars within the libraries of convents and schools, or read aloud in the chapter-house, primarily to educate and edify.⁸¹³ They did not attempt to emulate the ascetic discipline or contemplative retreat of the desert hermits.⁸¹⁴ Following the monastic tradition of the West, the eremitic life had been replaced for the Dominicans by the 'institutional expression' of the ascetic ideal, in which the solitude of the desert was symbolised by the partial and temporary enclosure of the cloister or cell.⁸¹⁵ Gerard of Frachet, in addition to Minister General Humbert of Romans, emphasised the spiritual and practical rewards due to the preacher as a result of his active, rather than contemplative, life. The effort to save souls and fight against the work of the devil among people endows the preacher with 'greater certainty of salvation' and 'particular brilliance in Heaven'.⁸¹⁶ For the Dominicans, the tradition of the Desert Fathers was important primarily for its usefulness in the service of preaching.

Collections of short, illustrative stories known as *exempla* were created by Dominican and other Mendicant scholars in the thirteenth century for use in their sermons, and many of these drew from ancient and authoritative sources such as

⁸¹¹ *Lives of the Brethren*, 133. See chapter one above, p. 65-66.

⁸¹² Van Engen 1998, 19-20.

⁸¹³ Philippart 1977, cited in Malquori 2012, 48. See chapter one above, p. 64-66.

⁸¹⁴ Brett 1984, 125.

⁸¹⁵ Little 1978, 168. Hinnebusch emphasises the contemplative aspect of the order's 'mixed life'. Hinnebusch 1965, 123-4.

⁸¹⁶ Humbert of Romans, *Treatise on the Formation of Preachers* in ED, 198-9.

the *Vitae patrum*, or the *Apophthegmata*.⁸¹⁷ *Exempla* were used by preachers to enliven their sermons and to emphasise moral themes in a vivid and engaging way.⁸¹⁸ For our purposes, they also reflect contemporary attitudes towards the hermit and perceptions of the eremitic life.⁸¹⁹ In some *exempla*, hermits such as St Antony Abbot or Macarius are named, indicating that their lives were widely known, but in many more, the hermit is anonymous.⁸²⁰ The hermit's separation from the secular world and ascetic way of life were enough to associate him with the authoritative virtues of the great Desert Fathers. His battles with the demons of temptation emulated the Temptation of Christ, and his victory over the weakness of the flesh echoed Christ's triumph over death.⁸²¹ The image of the desert and the ideal of the eremitic life evidently had great imaginative potential. *Exempla* frequently describe the hermit's spiritual trials and bodily mortification, which are rewarded by the receipt of divine gifts or encounters with angels.⁸²² His rejection of the things of the world vividly illustrated the transience of earthly life, and the necessity of repentance. Eremitic *exempla* demonstrate the God-given fruits of a holy life - for the benefit of the laity, who encountered these stories in the course of Mendicant sermons - and for the friars, who delivered them. In the *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, an *exemplum* describes how a hermit called John, whose total solitude and reliance on spiritual, rather than bodily nourishment, bears fruit when he is granted the gift of the knowledge of preaching by an angel.⁸²³ This story indicates the spiritual as well as instrumental value of a preaching vocation,

⁸¹⁷ On the early ascetic literature, see chapter one, p. 36-67. Late-medieval *exempla* collections have recently been digitised as a searchable database by a group of scholars from the Groupe d'Anthropologie Historique de l'Occident Médiéval (GAHOM), under the title 'Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi' (hereafter: *Thema*).

⁸¹⁸ Humbert of Romans states that *exempla* are useful 'to bring help and salvation to all men.' ED, 373.

⁸¹⁹ Jones 2011, 14.

⁸²⁰ For example, one *exemplum* from the *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicandum* (1275-79) refers to St Antony. Seeing the snares of the enemy spread out over the entire world, and wondering how anyone can evade capture, he hears a voice saying "humility". *Ibid.*, 123.

⁸²¹ 'A hermit who was tempted by the beauty of a woman went to open her tomb several days after her death. Her decomposing body worked against his temptation.' *De Dono Timoris*, *Thema*.

⁸²² For example, in the *Liber exemplorum*, an *exemplum* describes how Abba Moses is permitted to witness the hordes of demons and multitudes of angels which occupy the horizons to his left and right. They represent the sources of vice and the succour of salvation, and as a result of this vision, Moses is able to choose to turn towards the angels. *Liber exemplorum*, *Thema*.

⁸²³ From the *Lausiaca History* of Palladius. *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*, *Thema*.

drawing an analogy between the preacher who delivers the *exemplum*, and the ancient, and authoritative, figure of the hermit.

In *exempla* and in sermons, the wilderness often symbolises a *locus sanctus*, in direct contrast to the sinful, secular life of the city. Humbert of Romans describes how the preacher, while present in the city, should lead an austere life in emulation of John the Baptist.⁸²⁴ The preacher's moral authority and exemplary conduct was important. He acted as mediator between the public and the Church, between the sinfulness associated with secular life and the rewards of salvation. The preacher's status could be associated with that of the hermit not because he inhabited the desert, but because he was morally and spiritually separate from the secular world occupied by the laity.⁸²⁵ A sermon delivered in Florence in August 1304 by the Dominican scholar Giordano of Pisa (d.1311), takes up this theme of moral authority in the preacher, using the analogy of the desert:⁸²⁶

lo voglio che voi sappiate, disse frate Giordano, che non si confa a noi di stare tra voi in cittade perocché i monaci, che noi siamo tutti monaci, deono stare fuori della cittadi, ai diserti, ai luoghi solitarii a contemplare Iddio. Non è convenevole a noi lo stallo qui, ma è proveduto per lo meglio che noi stiamo qui tra voi, acciocché noi v'aitiamo.

I want you to know, said brother Giordano, that it does not suit us to stay among all of you in the city because monks, and we are all monks, desire to stay outside the city, in the desert, in solitary places, to contemplate God. It is not convenient to us to stay here, but it is for the best that we stay here among you so that we can help you. ⁸²⁷

In reality, there was no desert, or solitary place outside the city to which a Dominican friar might retreat; only the silence of his cell after Compline allowed for

⁸²⁴ Humbert of Romans, *Treatise on the Formation of Preachers*, ED, 215. As preacher of penance, John the Baptist wore a camel shirt, and ate locusts and wild honey. Matt. 3:4.

⁸²⁵ This is to ensure that he cannot be found reprobate while he preaches the word of God. Bolzoni 2003, 20-21.

⁸²⁶ The full collection of these sermons is entitled *Quaresmale Fiorentino*.

⁸²⁷ Giordano da Pisa, cited in Delcorno 1975, 43. My translation.

contemplation.⁸²⁸ Giordano associates the Dominicans with the ancient and authoritative tradition of religious life in the desert in order to emphasise their moral integrity, despite their conspicuous presence in the cities.⁸²⁹

Two further references to the desert in Fra Giordano's sermons indicate how this image could illustrate quite different ideas. In a sermon concerning the Temptation of Christ, delivered on the first Sunday of Lent 1305, Giordano describes how Christ's flight from the world should be seen as an example to all, to flee from men and go to the desert.⁸³⁰ This symbolic desert refuge is located in the contemplative silence of one's room, or in the corner of a house. It is a place of prayer and contemplation, an antithesis to 'the world'. In this sermon, it is not only the friar who is associated with the eremitic ideal. Christ's stay in the desert sets an example to all Christians to 'flee the world' in spirit, even as they live within it.⁸³¹ In another sermon, delivered in March 1305, Giordano refers to the desert not as a place of safety and retreat, but as a dangerous location associated with self-determining solitude.⁸³² Those who choose to roam in 'the desert', outside the cities and beyond the ministry of the friars and the clergy, are described as 'crazy'. Giordano reminds his audience of their inescapable need for spiritual direction and

⁸²⁸ Hinnebusch 1965, 46.

⁸²⁹ Giordano repeats a theme that is already present in *de eruditione praedicatorum*, in which Humbert of Romans warns of the moral danger to the friars of prolonged contact with the laity in the cities. Despite this danger, he argues that without the preaching ministry of the friars, 'all these vices would have increased until the whole world would have suffocated'. *De eruditione praedicatorum*, cited in Delcorno 1975, 44; *Opera de Vita Regulari*, cited in Brett 1984, 154.

⁸³⁰ 'Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil.' Matt. 4:1; *Quaresimale Fiorentino*, 38-43. '*Stette Cristo tra bestie e con angeli, fuggie gli uomini, fuggi il mondo, a darete exemple che ttu dei fuggire la gente e andare al deserto. Questo deserto puo essere la cella tua, la casa tua, la camera tua; quando lasci il mondo, raccogliti con Dio nella casa tua, questo deserto puo essere il cantone de la casa tua: fa' tu che tu fuggi il mondo e la gente.*' (Christ was there between the beasts and the angels, having fled far from men, far from the world, to give you an example to flee from people and go to the desert. This desert can be your cell, your house, your room; when you leave the world, you meet with Christ in your home, and this desert can be the corner of your house: do this to flee from the world and from people.) Giordano da Pisa, cited in Delcorno 1975, 40. My translation.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*

⁸³² The sermon was on the theme of Luke 10:1, in which Christ sends out the Apostles. '*... sono matti et matte, che se vano a recludere o vano in desertto. Matti e stolti sono. Or se chazeno in stultizia hove sono i predicatori che li retraga se chazono in pechatto hove sono i confessori et pretti che ne assolvano?*' (...they are crazy men and crazy women, those who go into seclusion or go into the desert. They are crazy and foolish. If they fall into foolishness where are the preachers to bring them back, if they fall into sin where are the confessors and priests who can absolve them?) Giordano da Pisa, cited in Delcorno 1975, 51. My translation.

absolution, and the friars' role in providing it. In this instance, the desert represents a place outside the bounds of orthodox religious teachings while the city, by implication, is associated with the safety of the Church. The concept of the desert, as it appears in Giordano's sermons, could represent a place of moral and spiritual authority, Christlike contemplation and retreat, or religious irregularity. In all three of the sermons cited above, the desert performs an illustrative function, defending the role of the preacher and reinforcing the Dominican vocation.

In around 1340, a monumental image of the desert was painted on the wall of the south corridor in the Camposanto of Pisa, intimately linked with the preaching activities of Dominicans in the city.⁸³³ It forms part of a cycle of three large frescoes; the *Triumph of Death*, the *Last Judgement and Hell*, and the *Lives of the Anchorites*, all of which are attributed to Bonamico Buffalmacco (figures 122-124).⁸³⁴ The Camposanto was a public space, built as a cemetery and used for processions and liturgical commemorations. The impressive marble funerary complex contained earth from the Holy Land (hence its name, the Campo Santo, or 'sacred ground'), which, according to the inscription on its facade, provided a burial place which would miraculously consume the flesh of the deceased and ensure the penitent access to eternal life.⁸³⁵ The *Triumph of Death* cycle would have been encountered by a viewer immediately to his right on entering the complex through the east door. This was the main entrance used during processions, which led directly from the adjacent Piazza dei Miracoli, the Cathedral and the Baptistery.⁸³⁶ The cycle has often been described as a 'visual sermon' owing to its moralising and exemplary content and its

⁸³³ It is dated to 1338-40 by Caleca 1996, 26.

⁸³⁴ The attribution was first made by Luciano Bellosi in 1974. The monumental complex of the Camposanto, which is adjacent to the Cathedral and the Baptistery in the Piazza dei Miracoli, was constructed as a cemetery for use by the citizens of Pisa. It was begun in 1278, and measures c.130 x 44m. Cole Ahl 2003, 95.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁶ Caleca 1996, 23.

extensive inscriptions in Latin and the vernacular, many of which are now lost.⁸³⁷ The *Lives of the Anchorites* shows various episodes from the lives of the Desert Fathers, echoing contemporary *exempla* and drawn largely from a contemporary translation of the *Lives of the Fathers*, the *Vite dei Santi Padri*, by the local Dominican scholar, Domenico Cavalca (d.1342).⁸³⁸ The convent of Santa Caterina in Pisa, to which Cavalca belonged, was an influential centre of culture and theology by the end of the thirteenth century, and it played an active role in the religious life of the city.⁸³⁹ The *Lives of the Anchorites* is didactic, exhortatory and strongly narrative in character, intrinsically linked to the local conditions in which it was made.

The fresco itself is a *tableau* of separate episodes showing the lives, and deaths, of hermits and eremitic saints, unified by a mountainous desert landscape (figure 124).⁸⁴⁰ Cells and chapels are set among caves and rock-cut steps, which zig-zag between the scenes, and the landscape, though remote, is interspersed with trees and plants. The narrative episodes are arranged in three registers, one above the other, which are read from left to right as if in the pages of a book. The scenes dwell on three primary themes: combat with demons, or the forces of temptation; the power and efficacy of prayer and penitence; and mortality. The topmost register shows the meeting of St Paul the First Hermit and St Antony, the death and burial of Paul, the temptation of Antony and the vision of Christ. At the end of this sequence, Hilarion banishes a dragon by speaking the words of scripture. In the central band of the fresco, Mary of Egypt is brought the sacrament by the Abbot Zosimus (figure 125), and both Macarius the Roman and Macarius the Egyptian are represented, the latter conversing with a skull. A hermit is tempted by a claw-footed demon in disguise at the entrance to his cave (figure 126). At the far right is the burial of Onuphrius, with two lions excavating the grave and Paphnutius kneeling by his body (figure 127). On the lowest register, several monks are engaged in everyday activity

⁸³⁷ Caleca, Nencini, and Piancastelli 1979, 55. The inscriptions, from the frescoes and their (now-lost) borders, were transcribed from a Quattrocento manuscript by Salomone Morpurgo in 1899. This manuscript names Cavalca's work as the source of the scenes in the *Lives of the Anchorites*. Morpurgo 1899, 51-87; Bolzoni 2003, 15.

⁸³⁸ Caleca, Nencini, and Piancastelli 1979, 55; Caleca 1996, 23. It has recently undergone restoration and was reinstalled in its original location in 2015.

⁸³⁹ Between the years 1299-1342, Pisa had a Dominican bishop. Bolzoni 2003, 15.

⁸⁴⁰ On this fresco, see also: Polzer 1964, 457-469; Bellosi 1974; Callman 1975, 4-6; Bolzoni 2003, 3-46; Malquori 2012, 77-91; Malquori 2013, 28-32.

on the shores of a river, Marina the virgin sits before the door of a monastery, and at the far right is Nathaniel, a monk tempted into lust. The remains of inscriptions in the vernacular can still be read alongside the images, describing the virtues of the hermits and elaborating the narrative content to a reader.⁸⁴¹

In its original state, the *Lives of the Anchorites* would have been experienced both as image and as text. The extensive explanatory and moralising inscriptions, which might have been read directly, or heard through the voice of a preaching friar depending on a viewer's education, were meant to mediate his or her understanding of the image.⁸⁴² Their presence in this fresco (which has more inscriptions than either of the other two images in the cycle) indicates that the stories of the Desert Fathers were not yet widely-known among its primarily lay audience.⁸⁴³ Cavalca's vernacular translation of the *Lives of the Fathers* was only completed in 1340, roughly contemporary with the creation of the fresco. Seen and experienced in the context of Dominican learning and preaching, the *Lives of the Anchorites* may have functioned as a reminder that the friars bore comparable virtues and possessed an equivalent moral authority to the hermits, despite their urban way of life.⁸⁴⁴ From a Dominican standpoint, the friars were an important means by which the layperson gained access to examples of a holy life; through their conduct, through the *exempla* used in sermons, and through the mediation of images such as this.⁸⁴⁵ Furthermore, in a concrete sense, the friars, alongside other members of the clergy, mediated a layman's access to Heaven by administering the sacraments of the Church. The *Lives of the Anchorites* represents an important symbolic example of virtuous life and death alongside the other frescoes in the *Triumph of Death*. Its textual content

⁸⁴¹ For example, the explanatory text alongside the first episode showing St Paul and St Antony: 'Here is the first hermit St Paul; Who lived for a hundred years in a hermitage; Fighting against the flesh and against the devil'. Morpurgo 1899, 71.

⁸⁴² The written components have suffered extensive damage and losses over the years, especially the Latin inscriptions which once occupied its decorated borders. Many are conserved in the manuscript Marciano Italiano 204 (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciano, Venezia) and were published by Morpurgo in 1899.

⁸⁴³ Polzer 2008, unpublished. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Polzer for allowing me access to this unpublished work.

⁸⁴⁴ Bolzoni 2003, 20-21. Giordano da Pisa's sermon of August 1304, discussed above, reminds his listeners that the friars preachers would prefer to remain in the wilderness, but remain among the people to help them. Giordano da Pisa, cited in Delcorno 1975, 43.

⁸⁴⁵ Humbert of Romans, *Treatise on the Formation of Preachers* in ED, 184-194.

and narrative layout indicates that it was meant to be read and understood intellectually, as a series of visual *exempla*.

The other two frescoes in the *Triumph of Death* cycle directly affect the way in which the *Lives of the Anchorites* was seen and understood. Immediately to the left of the eremitic landscape, at the centre of the cycle, is the *Last Judgement and Hell* (figure 123). Its right-hand side is occupied by a monstrous vision of perdition, where Satan sits at the centre of a rocky, cave-like underworld and the damned are punished according to their sins. The scene is powerful visual evidence for the consequences of a sinful life, and its accompanying text reminds the viewer to think on their sins and repent.⁸⁴⁶ The 'worldliness' of the sinner - the reader addressed in the inscription, or the souls who are being tortured in the image - stands in stark contrast to the peaceful eremitic existence of the hermits in the adjacent fresco. Both images contain steep and rocky landscapes, one showing Hell and the other the earthly paradise of the desert. The scene of Judgement and damnation functions in dialogue with, and opposition to, the holy lives of the hermits. The *Triumph of Death*, on the other side of the *Last Judgement*, contains another scene of eremitic life at its left-hand edge (figure 122). The hermits are separated from the rest of the narrative by the contours of a steeply ascending mountainous landscape. At the edge of the mountain, a hermit confronts the horrified riders of an elegant hunting-party, stopped in their tracks by three cadavers in open caskets. The inscription on his scroll urges them to keep their minds on what they have seen, reminding them (and the reader of the scroll, who 'sees' the cadavers too) that they too 'will come to this'.⁸⁴⁷ The hermits of the mountain are predominantly elderly, in contrast to the members of the hunt, and occupy a separate earthly realm, where they pursue a life of virtue and penitence in preparation for death. The entire fresco cycle, with Hell as its central pivot, sets up a powerful dynamic between the opposing forces of pleasure and suffering, virtue and sin, life and death, in which the Desert Fathers represent the principles of penitence, virtue and salvation.

⁸⁴⁶ 'O sinner who in this life dwell; Enveloped in worldly cares; Fix your mind on these harsh figures; Which live amidst the torments of dark Hell ; As they are, so will you be; If you do not repent of the evil you have done.' Morpurgo 1899, 69; translation Bolzoni 2003, 31.

⁸⁴⁷ Morpurgo 1899, 57.

The narratives in the *Lives of the Anchorites*, like the exemplary stories contained in Dominican sermons, illustrate ways in which the viewer might avoid the condemnation of Hell. The scene of Mary of Egypt kneeling before the Abbot Zosimus shows the moment of her last communion (figure 126). The inscription describes how her retreat to the desert saves her from the consequences of her former, sinful life, and through her penitence and the Sacrament, she passes after death into Paradise.⁸⁴⁸ Her exemplary later life demonstrates the importance of contrition, and the administration of the Eucharist by the Church, in the eventual salvation of an individual's soul. The story from the *Vitae patrum* of St Macarius and the demon in disguise, pictured at the centre of the lower register, indicates the importance of mental vigilance. The demon tries to tempt several hermits by offering them various potions of vice, according to their tastes. But following the advice of Macarius, the hermits lift their minds to God, and against this defence, the devil is powerless. The narrative shows how temptation can be avoided if the thoughts are 'directed always to Christ'.⁸⁴⁹ The hermits' experience of, and preparation for death in the *Lives of the Anchorites* is explicitly described as exemplary.⁸⁵⁰ In the *Triumph of Death* (on the opposite side of the *Last Judgement*), worldly men and women confront death with horror and revulsion, desperately clamour for it as a relief from suffering, or amuse themselves in order to deny its inevitability.⁸⁵¹ In the *Lives of the Anchorites*, by contrast, death is frequently encountered by the hermits with quiet grief or calm resolve (figure 127). Scenes of burial, or the encounter between Macarius and the skull, remind the viewer of their own mortality and encourage them to prepare for a 'good departure'.⁸⁵² The narratives illustrate how the Eucharist, prayer, and preparation for death can function as an antidote to the dangerous sins

⁸⁴⁸ 'Zozima sancto abate a llei recò; Il corpo di Christo, et lei comunicò; Et poi così in Paradiso se ne andò.' Morpurgo 1899, 75.

⁸⁴⁹ 'Per la virtù della sua sancta mente; La quale ha diricta sempre ad Christo; Non fu il demonio allor tentar possente.' *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁵⁰ 'La carne e 'l mondo con molta astentia; Per campar poir della infernal sententia; Seguite adunque la lor sancta vita; Per far del campo una bella partita.' *Ibid.*

⁸⁵¹ In addition to the meeting between the huntsmen and the cadavers, the *Triumph of Death* includes a large scene showing pleasure-seekers, making music and gossiping, in a beautiful garden. To their left is a pile of corpses and above them, angels and demons fight over the souls of the departed. They are oblivious to the winged figure of Death who looms over them with a scythe. Towards the centre of this fresco, a number of elderly, sick and maimed figures plead in vain with Death to release them from their suffering. *Ibid.*, 54-57.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 78.

of the secular world. As part of a strongly moralising, exhortatory fresco cycle, the *Lives of the Anchorites* presents the desert as a symbolic place of virtue, where the deeds of the eremitic saints demonstrate how an attentive viewer can ‘escape from the infernal sentence’.⁸⁵³

The civic context in which the *Lives of the Anchorites* was made had a direct bearing on its content, beyond the preaching agenda and academic interests of the local Dominican friars. In the first half of the fourteenth century, when the fresco cycle was made, the Holy Land was increasingly inaccessible, as the Pisans had lost control of Acre in the Battle of Meloria in 1284. In 1291, the city fell to the Saracens.⁸⁵⁴ The building of the Camposanto, which contained earth transported from the Holy Land, represented a symbolic link to the place hallowed by the life of Christ and constituted an important *locus sanctus* for the people of the city. The image of the Desert Fathers contained within its walls, representing the origins of Christianity in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine, further underlined this connection. The *Lives of the Anchorites* fresco carried an additional civic resonance, associated with the memorial of a locally-venerated hermit known as Giovanni Cini.⁸⁵⁵ Cini was a member of the Pisan *frati della penitenza* and one of a group of hermits living just outside the city walls. He founded the *Compagnia dei disciplinati di San Giovanni Evangelista di Porta della Pace*, a flagellant confraternity, and he was already venerated as a *beatus* during his life.⁸⁵⁶ He died some time in the 1330s, and his tomb was the first permanent funerary monument to be installed in the Camposanto.⁸⁵⁷ The memorial included flanking images of two kneeling flagellants and a surmounting tabernacle structure, which was incorporated into the scene of

⁸⁵³ See n. 845 above.

⁸⁵⁴ Cole Ahl 2003, 96.

⁸⁵⁵ On this *beatus*, see Ronzani 2005, 111-140.

⁸⁵⁶ Caleca, Nencini, and Piancastelli 1979, 55.

⁸⁵⁷ Opinion differs as to the date of his death, which is not documented securely. Caleca dates it between 1331-40. It seems most likely that the sarcophagus was in place before the fresco was completed in 1342, and that the images augmented the memorial of the local *beatus*. Caleca 1996, 23.

eremitic life when the fresco was executed c.1342.⁸⁵⁸ The installation of Cini's tomb indicates his significance - as ascetic and hermit - for the devotional life of the city, and reflects the importance of this site for the flagellant confraternity he founded.⁸⁵⁹ The *Lives of the Anchorites* fresco painted around the monument augmented the memory of the local *beatus*. It linked him closely with the eremitic tradition and the exemplary lives of the Desert Fathers, and effectively elevated his status in death to one among their number.

The relative historical proximity of the Pisan fresco to the Edinburgh Tabernacle, and their comparable subject-matter, has recently led to the suggestion that the tabernacle emerged from a Dominican *milieu*.⁸⁶⁰ The following discussion considers the likelihood of this hypothesis and reflects on our present understanding of the tabernacle's provenance. The *Lives of the Anchorites* reflects the scholarly interests and preaching activities of the local Dominican friars, but it is also, as we have seen, highly specific to its Pisan context. An eremitic landscape is not found again in a securely Dominican context until the last quarter of the fourteenth century, when a monochrome fresco showing the *Burial of Onuphrius* was painted in the cloister of the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Novella in Florence (figure 128).⁸⁶¹ This simple, linear fresco, showing the meeting between Onuphrius and Paphnutius, the death of Onuphrius, and his burial, decorates the vaults of a single bay in the Chostro dei Morti.⁸⁶² While this fresco, and the Pisan *Lives of the Anchorites*, both share an eremitic theme with the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, they are iconographically and stylistically remote. Neither betray even a trace of familiarity with the elaborate, miniaturist image at the centre of the tabernacle. If it is

⁸⁵⁸ Degradation and repeated restorations of the fresco have made it difficult to ascertain the original appearance of this arrangement. When the tabernacle was removed later in the fourteenth century, the triangular space behind it was frescoed by Antonio Veneziano in 1386. This area, at the lower right of the main body of the fresco, encompasses a scene of a monastic complex with three monks seated and another standing, and a hermit sitting in a tree above. Malquori 2012, 85.

⁸⁵⁹ A document of 1334 records the ritual activities of the *battuti* of San Giovanni Evangelista within the Camposanto's walls. Caleca 1996, 23.

⁸⁶⁰ Malquori 2012, 98.

⁸⁶¹ Malquori 2012, 92-104

⁸⁶² It occupies a space thought to have once constituted the entrance to the Chapels of St Thomas and St Joseph, which were accessible from the cloister and from the interior of the convent. A painted crest in the adjoining vault indicates that the space most likely belonged to the local Nardi family. It is therefore probable that the fresco of Onuphrius was commissioned by a layperson, rather than by the Dominicans themselves. *Ibid.*, 92-94.

true, as Malquori suggests, that the tabernacle was kept in a prominent Dominican convent such as Santa Maria Novella during the Trecento, it is difficult to explain why it was not then utilised as a visual source, either by the makers of the Camposanto fresco or by the artist of the later *Burial of Onophrius*. The academic interest of the Pisan friars in ascetic literature such as the *Lives of the Fathers*, and the existence of the Camposanto fresco, are not, I suggest, sufficient evidence for an existing Dominican predisposition towards this theme as a subject for art in the late Duecento.

Significant differences between the Edinburgh Tabernacle and the Pisan *Lives of the Anchorites* reflect their disparate audiences. The Pisan fresco is a monumental image, easily seen from a distance and intended to be 'read' in three registers, from left to right, like a book. The extensive exhortatory and didactic inscriptions expound the narratives and direct a viewer's understanding and response. Both its content and its public location indicate that it was directed primarily towards a lay audience, which may have been unfamiliar with the literary source of the narratives.⁸⁶³ The central panel of the tabernacle, by contrast, is on a miniature scale. Its dense and elaborate narrative would have been legible only to a privileged, educated audience with direct access to the object itself. There is no explanatory text, and its three tiny inscriptions are neither didactic nor exhortatory, but are deeply embedded in the religious tradition represented in the image itself. The purpose of the *Lives of the Anchorites*, alongside the others of the *Triumph of Death* cycle, is clear; to incite the viewer to virtue, through a series of visual *exempla*, in preparation for their death and inevitable judgement. It reflects the primarily academic nature of Dominican interest in the desert as a place of moral and spiritual authority, used in the service of preaching to the laity.⁸⁶⁴ The Edinburgh Tabernacle, however, is evidence of a profound spiritual interest in the eremitic way of life, especially, as we have seen, in the traditions particular to Byzantium. This image of the desert does not appear to be addressed to the laity, nor to explicitly teach or exhort a particular set of virtues. It is on too small a scale, lacking clear visual or literary references, and the inscriptions it does possess pertain primarily to the religious life. It glorifies the experience of an eremitic existence through the

⁸⁶³ Polzer 2008, unpublished.

⁸⁶⁴ See the discussion on Giordano da Pisa's use of the idea of the desert, p.196-198 above.

sacrificial death of a hermit-saint, understood within the framework of Christological sacrifice and Redemption. The fundamental dissimilarities between the tabernacle and the Pisan fresco, in terms of iconography, scale, and meaning, make it highly unlikely that both images can be traced to the same *milieu*.

The conspicuous Byzantine elements of the Edinburgh Tabernacle have also been interpreted as evidence for its potential patronage, linked to the academic and theological interests of the Dominicans.⁸⁶⁵ Malquori suggests that the panel could have been made for an individual patron with a personal connection to the monastic traditions of the East. She gives as a potential, or 'paradigmatic' example, the name of Nicola di Durazzo (d.1276), a Roman cleric of Greek origin who became bishop of Cotrone, Calabria, in 1254.⁸⁶⁶ Nicola was an important figure in the negotiations between the Roman curia and the Byzantine imperial court regarding the Union of the Churches between 1262 and 1265, alongside several members of the two major Mendicant Orders.⁸⁶⁷ He was bilingual, and his learning was highly regarded.⁸⁶⁸ Michael VIII Palaeologus gave him the privilege of wearing Greek vestments, despite the fact that he belonged to the Roman Church, before he mysteriously fell out of favour c.1267.⁸⁶⁹ After this date he appears to have been absent from the negotiations. Malquori asserts that Nicola di Durazzo, and others like him, shared their intellectual culture and bilingualism with scholars of Greek origin who joined the Dominican Order in Italy during the thirteenth century. Nicola is presented as a potential patron of the tabernacle because he had a personal knowledge of Byzantine culture and a vested interest in the union of the two Churches. She suggests that the painting could subsequently have passed into the hands of the Dominicans after his death.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁵ There remain significant questions over the patronage of the Edinburgh tabernacle, and Malquori recognises that there is a problematic lack of evidence around its origins. Malquori 2012, 104.

⁸⁶⁶ Malquori 2012, 62.

⁸⁶⁷ As discussed in chapter three above, p.150-152. Sambin 1954, 13-14.

⁸⁶⁸ Inventories of his belongings list several bilingual manuscripts in Greek and Latin, and at his death his library was divided between the Benedictine monastery of San Giorgio in Venice and the Augustinian Hermits of Sant'Agostino in Padua. *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁶⁹ He is referred to letters until 1267, after which date his name is absent from correspondence between Constantinople and Rome. One contains a vague allusion to an anti-byzantine scheme, but beyond this we know little about the reasons for his fall from grace. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁸⁷⁰ Malquori 2012, 64.

There are, however, several major problems with this admittedly tentative hypothesis. Malquori gives the impression that Nicola was in some way connected to the Dominican Order, when no evidence exists to suggest that this was the case.⁸⁷¹ Nicola died in 1276, prior to the most likely date of the tabernacle. The painting is large to have been made for a single individual, despite the small scale of its central panel, and its narratives emphasise the fraternity of an eremitic community. Furthermore, there is no indication that Nicola had any particular interest in or experience of the eremitic life, which makes the commission of such a large and elaborate painting of this subject difficult to explain. The Italo-Byzantine culture evident in the tabernacle, and embodied by figures such as Nicola, was not exclusive to the Dominican Order. As we have seen, Byzantine visual traditions permeated the artistic production of Duecento Italy, and bilingual friars from the Franciscan Order were also closely involved in the negotiations between Rome and Constantinople prior to the Council of Lyons in 1274.⁸⁷² Ultimately, the argument that the tabernacle ended up in Dominican hands rests on the assertion that they were the primary disseminators of the eremitic landscape in Italian art from the thirteenth century onwards.⁸⁷³ As the rest of this chapter makes clear, such a claim does not accurately reflect the evidence.

⁸⁷¹ See Sambin 1954, 7-22.

⁸⁷² Geanakoplos 1976, 186-187.

⁸⁷³ Malquori recognises that we cannot know whether the origins of the Edinburgh tabernacle had anything to do with the Dominicans. Nonetheless, she goes on to make the fallacious claim that the robes worn by the hermits in the painting 'have the colours of the Dominican habit'. The alternating creamy-white and grey mantles of the hermits bear no relation to the black mantles and white habits of the Dominicans. Malquori 2012, 104.

b) The Carmelites, or the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the Augustinian Hermits, or Order of Hermits of St Augustine

Both the Carmelites and the Augustinian Hermits were transformed in the course of the thirteenth century, from relatively small and primarily eremitic congregations, to centrally-organised Orders, following the model of the pre-existing Dominicans and Franciscans. This fundamental change in character necessitated their removal from remote locations into the heart of the cities. There, they pursued the *vita apostolica*, preaching to the laity and living on alms. As a consequence of their altered way of life, both Orders expanded rapidly alongside the other Mendicants. Unlike the Dominicans and the Franciscans, however, whose character was determined by the ideals of their respective founding saints, mendicancy was effectively imposed on the Carmelites and Augustinian Hermits, in papal bulls of 1247 and 1256 respectively.⁸⁷⁴ The imposition of a mendicant way of life, under an existing and recognised *Rule*, permitted the two Orders the right to establish foundations in the towns, to preach, and to receive alms.⁸⁷⁵ It also entailed a more formal, centralised structure, and the protection - and oversight - of the papacy. The official formation of the Carmelite and Augustinian Orders after 1215, when the foundation of new religious Orders had been prohibited at the Fourth Lateran Council, meant that their existence was, at least until the early fourteenth century, considerably more precarious than that of the Dominicans and Franciscans.⁸⁷⁶ When their legitimacy and heritage were later called into question, both Orders sought to defend themselves by recourse to an ancient and authoritative eremitic past.

In the final quarter of the thirteenth century, the Carmelites and the Augustinian Hermits developed comprehensive historical narratives, seeking both to prove their existence prior to 1215, and to create a compelling cult of origins. Each Order used their eremitic heritage as a means of defining their unique character, which helped to differentiate them from the larger and more successful Franciscans

⁸⁷⁴ *Quae honorum conditoris* (1247), Innocent IV; *Licet ecclesie catholice* (1256), Alexander IV. Andrews 2006, 15; 83-90.

⁸⁷⁵ MCH, 34.

⁸⁷⁶ *Ne nimia religionum diversitas*, constitution 13 of the Fourth Lateran Council. Andrews 2006, 13.

and Dominicans. Members of the Carmelite and Augustinian Orders engaged directly with the eremitic tradition, as a defining aspect of their history and, in certain cases, as a continuing way of life. The Carmelites, who were named after their origins on the slopes of Mount Carmel in the Holy Land, looked to the contemplative lives of the Old Testament Prophets, claiming Elijah, who was closely associated with the mountain, as their founder. The Augustinian Hermits had originated as several disparate eremitic congregations scattered throughout Tuscany, Umbria and the Marche. They looked to St Augustine, who had spent time in Italy following his conversion to Christianity in 386, as eremitic exemplar, and directly linked the origins of the Order to the life of the saint.⁸⁷⁷ This enabled the Hermits to claim antecedence over the foundation of other Orders (such as the Dominicans), who also followed the *Rule* of St Augustine. In the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, both the Carmelite and Augustinian Hermits commissioned paintings of the desert, related directly to their respective foundational myths. Unlike the *Lives of the Anchorites* fresco, which was made under the *aegis* of the Dominicans for a primarily lay audience, these images were directed towards the friars themselves.

In 1238, as the Holy Land was increasingly threatened by Muslim incursions, the Carmelites moved from Mount Carmel to the island of Cyprus, and from there to the relative safety of the West.⁸⁷⁸ The congregation followed a *Rule* given to them between 1205 and 1214 by the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, Albert of Vercelli, describing the importance of solitude - both of the community from the secular world and of the individual hermits from one another - and the goal of union with God through contemplation.⁸⁷⁹ The hermits kept silence between the hours of Vespers to Terce on the following day, and lived in individual cells. They met for worship in a central oratory dedicated to the Virgin, the Lady of Mount Carmel after whom the

⁸⁷⁷ Jotischky 2002, 265.

⁸⁷⁸ Jotischky 1995, 101.

⁸⁷⁹ DIP 2, col. 477. The *Rule* itself is brief, more like an Orthodox monastic *typikon* (written for an individual foundation) than a *Rule* for an entire Order with multiple foundations. By the twelfth century, there were both Latin and Orthodox hermits on Carmel - those who requested the *Rule* from Albert were probably only one of the groups of monks. Jotischky 1995, 102; 128; 134.

Order was eventually named.⁸⁸⁰ This minimal *Rule* effectively synthesised the Orthodox and western eremitic traditions practiced at the time in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.⁸⁸¹ The Carmelites were given papal confirmation in 1226, and in 1229, Gregory IX protected their requirement for solitude and committed them to a life of communal poverty.⁸⁸² As the Carmelites travelled West, to Sicily, England and Provence, they again sought papal recognition in response to their altered conditions. In 1247, Innocent IV issued *Quae honorum conditoris*, establishing a more coenobitic way of life for the friars, and, crucially, permitting the establishment of Carmelite foundations in the cities.⁸⁸³ The strict requirements on fasting, silence and solitude followed on Carmel were modified, and the active, apostolic role of the friars among the laity was recognised alongside their contemplative way of life.⁸⁸⁴ Whereas the initial settlements of the Carmelite friars in the West were in remote locations, such as Aylesford in Kent and Hulne in Northumberland (both 1242), following the traditions of Mount Carmel, after 1247 foundations were established primarily in towns and cities.⁸⁸⁵

The move away from Mount Carmel profoundly affected the character of the Order and the role of the eremitic life among its members. Initially, the Order maintained a symbolic and historical link to the Holy Land in its liturgy, as it followed the rite of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. By 1260, however, changes were made so that it became almost identical to the Dominican rite, and the link to Jerusalem remained only in minor details.⁸⁸⁶ The new generation of Carmelite friars who joined the Order as it expanded in the West sought to maintain a balance between active

⁸⁸⁰ The 1252 bull of Innocent IV was the first to state the Order's marian title. DIP 2, col. 477.

⁸⁸¹ Jotischky 2002, 138.

⁸⁸² Honorius III confirmed the 'brother hermits of Mount Carmel'. The 1229 bull *Ex officio nostro*, meant that in their expansion and settlement in the west, they began to follow a mendicant, rather than monastic, form of life. DIP 2, col. 478.

⁸⁸³ And in an attempt to protect themselves against the prohibition of new religious Orders issued at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Jotischky 2002, 12.

⁸⁸⁴ Including, for example, the provision of a communal refectory. *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁸⁵ In central Italy, for example, Carmelite houses were established in Pisa (c.1249), Siena (before 1261) and Florence (1268) under the auspices of generous lay support. Copsey 2004, 18; Andrews 2006, 24-26.

⁸⁸⁶ King 1955, 252-3.

and contemplative ways of life, ostensibly preserving the memory of the holy mountain in the context of the cities.⁸⁸⁷ However, theological knowledge, used in the service of preaching, became increasingly important for the Order as it existed in competition with the other Mendicants. In consequence, knowledge of its original character diminished among the western friars. This dramatic change in the Carmelite way of life provoked an impassioned response from Nicholas Gallicus, prior general of the Order from 1266 - c.1269. In around 1271, he addressed the Order in a tract known as *Ignea sagitta* ('Flaming Arrow'), bitterly lamenting the loss of its original, eremitic way of life.⁸⁸⁸

Nicholas Gallicus saw the city as a spiritual danger to the religious man, and the pursuit of active ministry within its walls as a fundamental betrayal of the Carmelite *Rule*. In the *Ignea sagitta*, he describes an emerging divide between the 'true sons' of the original Order, associated with the *locus sanctus* of Mount Carmel, and the recently arrived 'stepsons'.⁸⁸⁹ The latter he saw as defiling its contemplative character, by preaching among the laity without the necessary preparation in an *eremo*. Nicholas regarded the remote location of a friar's cell, a sanctuary halfway between Heaven and earth, as the true place of his spiritual work.⁸⁹⁰ He describes the wilderness as a place of nourishing beauty, in direct contrast to the chaotic dissonance of the city. The Order, for Nicholas, was characterised by the example of 'our fathers the holy hermits', and of Christ.⁸⁹¹ As far as he was concerned, it was impossible for the Carmelites to identify themselves as hermits and live within the cities, and the only solution to the present crisis was for the friars to leave the secular world and return to the wilderness.

The *Ignea sagitta* had little impact on the trajectory and subsequent character of the Carmelite Order, despite the prominence of its author. However, it reveals profound dissent within the Order directly related to its transition from holy

⁸⁸⁷ DIP 2, col. 478.

⁸⁸⁸ The letter is reproduced in *Carmelus IX* 1962, 237-307.

⁸⁸⁹ Jotischky 2002, 101.

⁸⁹⁰ '*Certe inter cellam et caelum nullum scio medium, et ideo de hac ad illud facillime pervenitur.*' Cited in *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸⁹¹ Cited in *ibid.*, 104.

mountain to city convent. The text of *Ignea sagitta* survives in a very few manuscripts from the fifteenth century and later, and neither the letter nor its author are mentioned at all in Carmelite writings of the late thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.⁸⁹² This may have been because it was written at a hermitage in Cyprus, referred to in a cryptic postscript as 'Mount Enatrof', which restricted its subsequent dispersal.⁸⁹³ If it was widely disseminated after 1271, it may have found few sympathisers among a growing, urban-based Order, and simply been disregarded. Yet is hard to imagine that Nicholas was a lone voice in his lament; he had been elected prior-general in 1266, presumably as a known defender of the eremitic life. It seems highly likely that the marked silence around the text and its author indicates a deliberate suppression of his controversial views, and those who sympathised with them.⁸⁹⁴ The continued survival and expansion of the Order depended heavily on the economy of the cities, and the appearance of unity among its members was important, as they competed with the other Mendicants for patronage and status. This became especially pronounced after 1274, when the succeeding prior-general, Ralph de Frayston, was tasked with defending the legitimacy of the Order following the Council of Lyons.⁸⁹⁵

The bull *Religionum diversitatem*, issued in 1274 by Pope Gregory X, threatened the continued existence of both the Carmelites and the Augustinian Hermits. It effectively reiterated the decree *Ne nimia religionum diversitas* of 1215, which had prevented the formation of new religious Orders, and ordered the dispersal of the Pied and Sack friars, which had been formed after this date.⁸⁹⁶ Both the Carmelites and the Augustinian Hermits were allowed to remain 'in their present state' pending the final decision of the papacy, but their expansion was temporarily

⁸⁹² Copsey 2004, 25-27.

⁸⁹³ Most likely a reference to Fortanie in Cyprus. It is very likely that he retired there after relinquishing his post as prior-general in around 1269. Jotischky 2002, 81. Copsey argues that Nicholas remained prior-general but died shortly after completing the work at the Cypriot hermitage, which explains why it remained unknown; Copsey 2004, 19-20; MCH, 262-6.

⁸⁹⁴ cf. Jotischky 2002, 81 n.4.

⁸⁹⁵ Ralph de Frayston was named as the first prior-general of the Order in a list compiled by Jean Trisse (prior-general 1362-3). This likely indicates that his predecessor Nicholas Gallicus had, at this time, fallen from grace. MCH, 318-322.

⁸⁹⁶ On these Orders, see Andrews 2006, 173-230.

suspended and their continued existence uncertain.⁸⁹⁷ In their defence, the Carmelites sought the support of bishops in the Crusader states who testified to the Order's existence 'at a time before our records began'.⁸⁹⁸ They also began to assert a direct relationship between the present Order, and the life of the Old Testament prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel. The *rubrica prima* of the Constitutions, written at the General Chapter of London in 1281, provided a historical account of the Order addressed both to its younger members, and to outsiders who questioned its legitimacy:⁸⁹⁹

We say that, on the evidence of trustworthy witnesses, that from the time of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, the holy fathers of both the Old and New Testaments, have lived devotedly on Mount Carmel, true lovers of the solitude of that mountain for the contemplation of Heavenly things.⁹⁰⁰

Elijah was regarded in patristic and medieval literature as an Old Testament 'type' of the hermit, who had combined prophetic insight with solitary contemplation of God.⁹⁰¹ The invocation of Elijah as founder of the Carmelites provided an extended historical narrative that was difficult to dispute. It answered the threat posed by *Religionum diversitatem* in asserting the ancient, scriptural origins of the Carmelites, uniquely associated with the eremitic life and the holy mountain of Carmel.

The habit of the Carmelite Order was altered in 1287, in part to reflect their mendicant status, and as an additional reference to their ancient heritage. The distinctive grey and white striped habit (*pallium baratium*) was changed to plain white, allowing uniformity throughout the Order and countering accusations of decadence.⁹⁰² Justification for the change referred to the Orthodox monastic *Rule* of

⁸⁹⁷ Cited in Copsey 2004, 6.

⁸⁹⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, 29; 40.

⁸⁹⁹ It is the first known document to explicitly state the significance of the prophet Elijah for the Order. MCH, 40-41.

⁹⁰⁰ *Constitutions*, in MCH, 40-41. Staring believes that they were written before 1274, whereas Jotischky argues for c.1238. *Ibid.*; Jotischky 2002, 106-7. Translation in Copsey 2004, 37.

⁹⁰¹ For example, in Jerome's *Life of St Paul* and Peter Damian's *De suae congregationis institutis*, as well as in the writings of Athanasius, Cassian and Gregory of Nyssa. Jotischky 1995, 106; Ackerman 1995, 139.

⁹⁰² As stated in *Invocantes*, the notarial act of the general chapter, 1287. MCH, 67. It was actually just the cappa, not the entire habit, that was changed. The tunic remained an unspecified but contrasting colour to the cappa. Jotischky 2002, 47.

St Basil (c.366), which specifically forbade the wearing of bright or multicoloured garments.⁹⁰³ In following the precepts of this *Rule*, the Carmelites associated themselves with a religious tradition that predated those of the other Mendicants, and was even older than the foundational *Rule of St Benedict*.⁹⁰⁴ The change of Carmelite habit marked the culmination of a period of crisis and change in the Order.⁹⁰⁵ From 1281, laymen had been excluded from the Order as it was increasingly clericalised, and the first *studium generale* was established near Paris.⁹⁰⁶ The friars were no longer identical with the hermits who had travelled West from Mount Carmel. They lived as Mendicants and their simple habit, like that of the Dominicans and Franciscans, was an outward sign of their poverty and austerity. The white habit also represented a symbolic, if superficial return to the Order's historical origins in the primitive monastic context of the Holy Land, perhaps a concession to the criticisms of men such as Nicholas Gallicus, who had lamented the loss of the original, eremitic Carmelite life.⁹⁰⁷

In the early fourteenth century, an impressive painted polyptych was made for the Carmelites, narrating the foundational myth of the Order in its predella (figure 129). It was completed and signed by Pietro Lorenzetti in 1329, and was originally intended for the high altar of the Carmine church of San Nicola in Siena. The altarpiece was later dismembered, and is now displayed as a partial reconstruction in the Siena Pinacoteca.⁹⁰⁸ The broad central panel of the polyptych contains the

⁹⁰³ The *Invocantes* claimed that Basil's Rule had been developed from one originally written for the monks on Mount Carmel. Jotischky 2002, 114. The same argument is made in the treatise *Universis christifidelibus*, written in the late thirteenth century and attributed by Staring to a young Sibert de Beka (prior-provincial of Germany, 1317-1333). MCH, 84.

⁹⁰⁴ St Basil, cited in Morison 1912, 116.

⁹⁰⁵ Jotischky 2002, 51.

⁹⁰⁶ Andrews 2006, 41-42.

⁹⁰⁷ Jotischky 2002, 51. The legend continued that the striped habit was adopted at the insistence of the Muslims, whose leaders wore white, when they first conquered the Holy Land. Other, contradictory, sources cited by Baconthorpe, a Carmelite historian writing before 1330, describe Elijah's own mantle as striped. Copsy 2004, 10; Ackerman 1995, 137.

⁹⁰⁸ It was dismembered and is now partially reconstructed in the Siena Pinacoteca. Torriti 1977, 97-99; On the present (corrected) reconstruction, see Gardner von Teuffel 2015, 16, n.76.

Virgin and Child enthroned, flanked by the prophet Elijah and St. Nicholas, with four angels. Elijah, with long grey hair and a beard, holds a scroll reading: '*verum tamen nunc mictē et congrega ad me universum Israel notatīe[que?] in montem Carmeli et prophetas Baal quadringentos quinqu[aginta?]*'⁹⁰⁹ The lateral panels of the central storey contained the standing figures of St. Agnes, Elisha, John the Baptist and St Catherine of Alexandria. In the storey below, five predella scenes narrate, from left to right: the *Dream of Sobach* (Elijah's apocryphal father, who had a vision of an angel before his son was born); the *Fountain of Elijah* (figure 130); the *Carmelites Receiving the Rule of Albert of Vercelli* (figure 131); the *Approval of the Carmelite Habit by Honorius IV*; and the *Reconfirmation of the Carmelite Order by John XXII*.⁹¹⁰ The third storey at the top of the polyptych contained half-length apostles in moulded niches, with prophets in the spandrels. At the time of its making, the Carmelite altarpiece was a comprehensive and sophisticated visual representation of the Order's origins and identity.

The two scenes with which we are primarily concerned here are the second and third panels of the predella: the *Fountain of Elijah* and the *Carmelites Receiving the Rule of Albert*. In the first, a hermit identifiable by his striped mantle as an early Carmelite, bends over the legendary fountain to draw water (figure 130). To the right of him, a hermit sits reading at the door of a cell, and in the background, another emerges from a small cave. The setting is Mount Carmel, which is pictured as a steep and rocky landscape with scattered trees. In the distance, further up the mountain, two more hermits can be seen as they disappear over the horizon. In the second scene (figure 131), the patriarch Albert is shown at the head of a large retinue travelling from the city of Jerusalem. The walled city dominates the far left-hand side of the panel. Albert hands a long scroll to a group of kneeling hermits, who are gathered by the fountain of Elijah we saw in the previous scene. To the right is the church the hermits dedicated to the Virgin, built close to the fountain.⁹¹¹ It is guarded by a lion. In the rocky landscape beyond this scene, two more lions are prominent. Hermits sit reading in caves, or travel on foot between the contours of

⁹⁰⁹ 'Nevertheless send now, and gather unto me all Israel, unto Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty.' 3 Kings, 18:19.

⁹¹⁰ Cannon 1987, 22-23.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

the mountains. In both of these scenes, the eremitic landscape of Mount Carmel is given due prominence. This specific location, hallowed by its association with the prophet Elijah and his followers, is the birthplace of the fourteenth-century Order. The narratives reflect contemporary concerns to establish an authoritative historical lineage for the Order and to confirm Elijah as its founding father, *in lieu* of a founding saint.

The entire programme of this altarpiece was designed to portray the unique character of the Carmelite Order, and to illustrate its ancestry as laid out in the Constitutions of 1281. The Apostles in the niches of the upper register represent the *vita apostolica* pursued by the Order as Mendicants in the West. Elijah, standing at the side of the Virgin, holds a scroll describing the location of Carmel from the Old Testament. It implies that the 'four hundred and fifty' are to be identified with the first, or precursory, members of the Order. Elisha, one of Elijah's disciples and his anointed successor, is also present. Both men are miracle-working prophets of the Old Testament, precursors of John the Baptist (who was originally present in the altarpiece too, in the corresponding panel opposite Elisha), and ultimately of Christ. The Virgin, 'Our Lady of Mount Carmel', is at the centre of the altarpiece, reflecting the longstanding Marian devotion of the Order. The small-scale predella scenes beneath the Virgin's feet address the friars who would have been closest to the altarpiece, seated in the choir, officiating or serving at the altar.⁹¹² They represent the Order to itself, preserving the memory of the *mons sanctus* of Carmel, and the eremitic life of the early Carmelites, for future generations. The scenes of the predella generate a sequential narrative, visually joining five events or episodes which were historically and scripturally quite separate. Ultimately, they tie the contemporary Order, recently reconfirmed by Pope John XXII and pictured in the final predella scene, to an apocryphal vision that illustrates the sanctity of their Old Testament founder.⁹¹³ The intervening episodes show the eremitic origins of the original Order, which continued through Old and New Testamentary history.

⁹¹² Gardner von Teuffel 2015, 23.

⁹¹³ It was a problem for the Order that Elijah was not, of course, a saint, however exemplary his life. This fact did not prevent them from representing him as such in the Carmelite Altarpiece and elsewhere. Cannon 1987, 21. For a discussion of the sources for the *Dream of Sobach*, see *ibid.*, 25.

The programme of the Carmelite altarpiece, and the narratives in its predella, were never repeated in images made for the Order that have survived. The ambitious polyptych is of its moment, reflecting the contemporary concerns to illustrate and disseminate the foundational myth written into the 1281 Constitutions. It was made at a time when the birthplace of the Order was no longer inhabited by hermits and the Holy Land had been lost to the Mamluks following the fall of Acre in 1291. It represents an original, eremitic way of life to an Order that was, by this time, primarily urban and mendicant in character, preserving the memory of the desert in a carefully-planned and detailed visual programme. Despite the fact that these predella panels have not been included in the recent *Atlante* of 'thebaid' and related themes, they clearly represent the origins of Christian religious life, even if a specifically Carmelite way of life, in the desert. Similarities between the *Fountain of Elijah* and the *Carmelites Receiving the Rule of Albert of Vercelli*, and other eremitic landscapes, have previously been noted, but never properly discussed.⁹¹⁴

The Carmelite altarpiece predates the Camposanto *Lives of the Anchorites* by around a decade, and its predella panels bear comparison to the Edinburgh Tabernacle because both images function in the same eremitic idiom. In the scene of the *Carmelites Receiving the Rule*, the remote location of Mount Carmel is indicated by the presence of lions, who live among a dry, rocky landscape and scattered trees (figure 131). In the ascetic literature and in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, tame lions are frequently associated with the hermits of the desert, who have achieved mastery over nature.⁹¹⁵ The hermits who inhabit Mount Carmel are primarily stooped and elderly, with long grey hair and beards. Again, this echoes the figures in the tabernacle, whose advanced age indicates their wisdom, authority and resilience to the hardships of an eremitic life.⁹¹⁶ Both images contain a church, which serves as the devotional focus of the monks in the desert, and both represent the daily tasks of eremitic life such as reading, travelling and drawing water.⁹¹⁷ There is, in addition, a direct parallel between a single detail present in the *Fountain of*

⁹¹⁴ Torriti 1977, 99; Gilbert 1990, 173, n.21.

⁹¹⁵ See chapter one above, p. 46-48.

⁹¹⁶ It also echoes the typology of the Old Testament Prophets, who are similarly represented in the central register of the Carmelite Altarpiece.

⁹¹⁷ Unlike the Camposanto fresco, which focuses primarily on identifiable narratives.

Elijah and in the central panel of the tabernacle. Two partially-obscured figures are shown in both paintings, walking away from the viewer into the distance beyond the mountain (figure 132, a & b). They are half enveloped by the landscape, indicating the vastness of the wilderness and the hermits' ability to survive in its depths. It was noted in Chapter Two that the same motif can be found in manuscript illuminations, potentially indicating the miniature origins of the Edinburgh Tabernacle (figure 50). This parallel detail, in addition to the typological similarities outlined above, suggests that Pietro Lorenzetti may have been aware of existing representations of the desert, even, perhaps, the tabernacle itself, or the sources to which it refers. In this unique representation of Carmelite origins in the Holy Land, he very likely combined existing visual sources with novel images to create something entirely new.⁹¹⁸ Like the Edinburgh Tabernacle, this painting looks to the East, and it is, I would argue, closer in spirit to the tabernacle's central panel than is the monumental fresco of the anchorites in the Camposanto of Pisa. Both paintings appear to be directed towards a primarily religious audience.

The eremitic origins of the Carmelites in the Holy Land became a central feature of the Order's historical narrative as it developed in the thirteenth century.⁹¹⁹ The solitary and eremitic way of life on Mount Carmel came to be understood as an aspect of this narrative, tied to the location of the holy mountain, rather than a specific way of life to be emulated in the West. In the 1281 *Rubrica prima*, the holy fathers seek the solitude '*of that mountain*', rather than solitude *per se*, and later texts repeat this specificity.⁹²⁰ Despite the passionate views of Nicholas Gallicus, who saw the Carmelite purpose in a life of solitude and contemplation, the Order's removal from Carmel effectively distanced them from an eremitic way of life. Pietro Lorenzetti's predella scenes for the Carmelite Altarpiece preserve the lost foundation on Mount Carmel in idealised and historical images of the desert. By the early fourteenth century, the Carmelites looked back to the heritage of eremitic life in the

⁹¹⁸ Pietro Lorenzetti painted the first known representation of St. Leonard as a hermit in 1315, in a panel for the Augustinian church of SS. Leonardo e Cristoforo, Montichiello. Prior to this date, he was represented as nobleman or deacon. This was not a narrative image, but it demonstrates Lorenzetti's awareness of eremitic iconography, and his ability to adapt it to the needs of his patrons. Seidel 2005, 233.

⁹¹⁹ Jotischky 2002, 111.

⁹²⁰ The *Universis christifidelibus*, a treatise of the late thirteenth century. The Rubrica states: '*eiusdem montis solitudinem pro contemplatione caelestium...*' MCH, 40; 81.

Holy Land purely as an authenticating narrative, increasingly distant in time, that was subsumed into the realities of mendicant life in the West.⁹²¹

The Order of Hermits of St Augustine was created in 1256, when several existing eremitic congregations, mainly from central Italy, were unified by Pope Alexander IV.⁹²² The *Magna Unio* ('Great Union') brought together the Tuscan Hermits, the Gianbonini and the Brettinesi, in addition to other smaller groups, as a single new Mendicant Order under the Rule of St Augustine.⁹²³ The eremitical character of the original congregations was preserved in the Order's title, but the Augustinian constitution was modelled on that of the Dominicans, and the friars were encouraged to engage in an active life of academic study and preaching.⁹²⁴ A chronicle written c.1357 by Jordan of Quedlinburg (d.1380), a historian and theologian of the Order, records the difficulty of transition from *eremo* to urban convent:

The Supreme Pontiff, Pope Alexander IV, decreed that they ought to move into the cities and acquire houses there. [...] Some of these brothers found this difficult, and preferred to remain on their own in the wilderness and be with God in their accustomed way, than to expose themselves to the bad influence of the world among worldly people.⁹²⁵

Several of the original foundations rejected this move outright, and were exempted from the Union by Alexander IV.⁹²⁶ The Order's expansion was focused on the cities, like the Dominicans and Franciscans who came before them, and they were quickly

⁹²¹ Andrews 2006, 23; Jotischky 2002, 108.

⁹²² The groups of hermits unified by Alexander IV proliferated in the wooded hills near Florence and in the central Appenines. For details on these earlier groups, see Andrews 2006, 72-83; Van Luijk 1968. The mandate was *Cum quedam salubria*, 15 July 1255. Van Luijk 1964, 142. Rano puts the Order's inception at 1244, with the union of the Tuscan hermits by Innocent IV. DIP 1, cols. 278-279.

⁹²³ It also included the Tuscan hermits and Montefavale. *Licet ecclesiae catholicae*, April 1256. Saak 2002, 5. For the early development of the Order, see Van Luijk 1968, 15-27.

⁹²⁴ Andrews 2006, 87.

⁹²⁵ *Liber vitasfratrum*, 100.

⁹²⁶ Jotischky 2002, 269.

established in Perugia (1257), Siena (1258) and Pisa (1266).⁹²⁷ Alongside this primarily urban focus, the Augustinian Hermits also retained several hermitages, such as Lecceto and San Leonardo al Lago, both in the hills outside Siena, and Rupecava in the diocese of Lucca.⁹²⁸ In central Italy, where most of the congregations originated, the eremitic life remained a significant feature of the Order.⁹²⁹

The *Magna Unio* of 1256 was an important factor in the Order's development and self-understanding. At the outset, it demonstrated ecclesiastic anxiety around the unregulated practice of independent eremitic congregations.⁹³⁰ The creation of a new Mendicant Order brought the hermits out of the wooded hills and into the plain sight of the cities, permitting papal oversight and unifying observance under an existing Rule. The Augustinian Hermits were clearly distinguished from the Franciscans and Dominicans by their uniform black, belted habits, given by Alexander IV.⁹³¹ They were, to a certain extent, an invention of the papacy, and it was therefore necessary for the Order to develop a strong founding narrative and unique character of its own, to distinguish it from the existing Mendicants.⁹³² Hermitages such as Lecceto and San Leonardo represented an important link to the eremitic origins of the Order, and the Augustinians saw themselves as uniquely able to synthesise active and contemplative ways of life. The hermitage at Chifenti north of Lucca, for example, was dedicated to St Mary Magdalene and St Francis, who

⁹²⁷ They also expanded north of the Alps, to Germany and England, in part because groups such as the Guglielmiti already possessed dependencies in these countries. DIP 1, col. 323. See also Van Lwijk's map of the Order's geographical dispersal, DIP 1 cols. 327-339.

⁹²⁸ Van Lwijk 1968, 42.

⁹²⁹ Records of tithes, or *decime*, for the region of Tuscia from the year 1275-76 denote hermitages separately from monasteries, hospitals and other religious foundations, unlike the *decime* of other regions from the same period. Jansen 2000, 137 n.65; RDI 279-320.

⁹³⁰ Including wandering preachers. The sentiments of Alexander IV were not dissimilar to those of Innocent III in 1215, who had imposed unity and uniformity on Orders such as the Humiliati. Andrews 2006, 84.

⁹³¹ Alexander IV had prescribed a black habit for the Tuscan hermits, but it was sometimes worn over a white tunic, so allowing the Augustinians to be confused with the Dominicans. Other groups included in the *Magna Unio* wore an undyed habit and so were confused with Franciscans. Disputes around the habit resurface periodically in the thirteenth century, demonstrating the importance of the friars' visible identity. Warr 2007, 19-20.

⁹³² Saak 2002, 5.

were regarded both as preachers and recluses.⁹³³ Jordan of Quedlinburg described the combination of preaching and solitude as a 'greater state of perfection' among the friars:⁹³⁴

...we are taught that the most perfect life combines these two activities, sometimes to be with God in contemplation and solitude, and sometimes to go out from there to pour forth to others what has been acquired by contemplation, for the good of their souls.⁹³⁵

The eremitic foundations did not alter the fundamentally outward-facing character of the Augustinian Order, but their existence underpinned the Order's self-understanding. The institution may have been formed by papal decree, but it maintained a privileged claim to the spiritual heritage of the eremitic tradition.

In 1274, the continued survival of the Augustinian Hermits was threatened, as it was for the Carmelites, by the issue of *Religionum diversitatem* at the Council of Lyons. The Augustinians were in a particularly vulnerable situation because they relied on the continued support of the Holy See to authorise their existence. In response to Lyons, the Augustinians sought to formulate a legitimising historical narrative for their Order, extending far beyond the *Magna Unio* of 1256. They turned to Augustine of Hippo (d.430), the source of the *Rule* which they (and other Orders) followed, claiming him as the original founder of their Order. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, prominent Augustinian scholars and theologians developed this narrative, providing the Order with a founder of great stature and arguing for its continued existence from the time of the Church Fathers to the present day.⁹³⁶ Augustine was already claimed as the founder of the Augustinian Canons in his capacity as bishop, but the Hermits reclaimed Augustine as an eremitic saint, from accounts of his conversion and life in Italy after his baptism.⁹³⁷ The black cowl and leather belt worn by the Order were traced back to descriptions

⁹³³ Jansen 2000, 137; RDI, 304; Van Luijk 1968, 48.

⁹³⁴ *Liber vitasfratrum*, 100.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹³⁶ A full discussion of the Augustinian development of historical narrative can be found in Jotischky 2002, 263-273 and Saak 2006, 191-228.

⁹³⁷ The sources (both of uncertain date and authorship) were believed at the time to be by Ambrose, *Sermo de baptismo et conversione sancti Augustini* and Augustine, *Sermo de passione*. Jotischky 2002, 265.

of the garments worn by Augustine himself, providing an external sign of continuity between the saint - in his early appearance as hermit - and his 'true' followers.⁹³⁸

In addition to this historical appeal to St Augustine as founder, the Order issued a call to unity, condemning deviations in habit and imposing a single theology following the teachings of Giles of Rome, prior-general of the Order from 1292-95 and its first master of theology at Paris.⁹³⁹ The importance of theological argument for the success of the mendicant endeavour had already been demonstrated by the Franciscans and Dominicans in their responses to the attacks of the seculars and again at the Council of Lyons.⁹⁴⁰ Following the General Chapter of Regensburg in 1290, the Augustinian Hermits placed the study of theology at the centre of their mission.⁹⁴¹ Fourteenth-century Augustinians looked directly to the Desert Fathers, in addition to St Augustine, as forerunners and exemplars for the Order. Jordan of Quedlinburg drew heavily on the *Vitae patrum* and other ascetic literature, regarding Paul of Thebes as the model for all later hermits, including the Augustinians. He saw Christ's stay the desert as a consecration of the eremitic life for those who would imitate him.⁹⁴² Paul, as his perfect follower, did the same, becoming 'the exemplar and mirror of the eremitic life' for all later generations.⁹⁴³ Jordan believed that one could follow Paul's example inwardly, or spiritually, by receiving divine direction, putting away worldly concerns, and turning one's mind towards God. The pursuit of a symbolic or 'inner' eremitic life, pursued alongside a life of apostolic mission, was identified as the *vita perfectissima*, instituted by Christ and taken up by St Augustine, by whom it was subsequently handed down to the Augustinian Hermits. Jordan saw the active, pastoral aspects of Augustinian mendicancy flowing naturally from the friars' contemplative endeavour, and their unique role in bringing the spirituality of the desert into the secular world of the cities.⁹⁴⁴

⁹³⁸ Again the source was the *Sermo de baptismo et conversione sancti Augustini*. Warr 2007, 20.

⁹³⁹ Dunlop 2007, 10.

⁹⁴⁰ Moorman 1968, 121-122.

⁹⁴¹ Dunlop 2007, 10; Saak 2002, 20.

⁹⁴² The following is based on Jordan of Quedlinburg, *Opus Dan* or *Sermones de sanctis* (after 1365), discussed in Saak 2006, 219-225.

⁹⁴³ *Opus Dan*, fol. 56r, cited in *Ibid.*, 221.

⁹⁴⁴ Saak 2006, 213.

The eremitic aspect of the Augustinian ideal was represented in visual form at the hermitage of Lecceto near Siena, in a fresco painted between 1439-1442 (figure 133).⁹⁴⁵ It is part of a cycle on the east wall of the cloister known as the *Chiostro de' Beati*.⁹⁴⁶ The two sides of the cloister adjacent to the church and the chapter house contain frescoes, which are badly damaged and in places completely lost.⁹⁴⁷ The Life of St Augustine appears in two registers on the southern wall. The cycle includes the legend adopted by the Augustinian hermits regarding the saint's foundation of hermitages in Tuscany, during his stay in Italy in 387.⁹⁴⁸ On the east wall, in the upper register, five partially-legible scenes show the life of a hermit-saint.⁹⁴⁹ In the register below, several scenes represent stories of the blessed residents of Lecceto, drawn from the *Assempri (Exempla)* of a prior of the *eremo*, Filippo degli Agazzari (written 1397-1416).⁹⁵⁰ The first shows the miracle of a penitent thief, from the story of the *beato* Bandino de' Balzetti.⁹⁵¹ Between this narrative, and another illustrating the story of *beato* Giovanni di Guccio Molli, is a scene of eremitic life in the desert.⁹⁵² This image shows several hermits engaged in practices of prayer and penitence, including a funeral scene. They inhabit the caves

⁹⁴⁵ The foundation date of Lecceto is unknown, but it is referred to as an 'eremo' in a document of 1224. It was known as 'Foltignano' until sometime before 1392, when it is first referred to as 'Lecceto'. Hackett 1999, 57. On the frescoes of the Chiostro de'Beati, see Callmann 1975, 15; Alessi 1990, 211-212, 241; Hackett and Radan 1990, 97-105; Radan 1994, 74-76; Catoni 2002, 66-69, 89-90; Corsi 2013, 115-119.

⁹⁴⁶ The inner, or older of the two cloisters at Lecceto was so named after the *beati* of its frescoes. Hackett 1999, 339.

⁹⁴⁷ Damage was already evident in the seventeenth century, according to the annals of Marcellino Altési (1626). Hackett and Radan 1990, 101.

⁹⁴⁸ Hackett 1999, 57.

⁹⁴⁹ There is some disagreement about the identity of the protagonist in this cycle. Alessi has it as Antony, while Hackett and Radan argue that the scenes represent St Jerome, Giulielmo di Malavalle and St Benedict. Hackett and Radan 1990, 103. Catoni suggests that it could represent a conflation between the Life of Antony and that of San Frontonio, a little-known eremitic saint in Italy. Catoni 2002, 85.

⁹⁵⁰ Filippo degli Agazzari (also known as Fra Filippo da Siena) was prior of Lecceto from 1398 until his death in 1422. His *Assempri* were published as *Gli Assempri* in 1973 by Siena Cantagalli. Hackett 1990, 60.

⁹⁵¹ He was one of first priors of Lecceto, in the first half of the thirteenth century. Catoni 2002, 88; n. 225.

⁹⁵² Giovanni di Guccio Molli was prior of the eremo from 1332-1339. *Ibid.*, 90.

and recesses of an undulating, barren landscape that is quite different from the densely wooded hills surrounding Lecceto itself. Like the other narratives in the cycle, this scene is framed by a decorative border and separated from the adjacent scenes by painted columns. It does not, however, illustrate an episode from the *Assempri*, and its individual protagonists are unidentified.

At the far left of the scene, two standing figures approach the hermits with a mixture of admiration, astonishment and devotion. They gaze towards the image of a hermit's soul being carried to Heaven by two angels, which appears above a funeral scene at the centre-right of the fresco. Between the two travellers and the funeral, nine hermits of roughly equal size sit or kneel as they undertake various forms of *ascesis*. One hermit is asleep, with a pile of stones for a pillow. Another reads, one strikes his chest with a rock, and another administers the discipline to himself. One hermit embraces a cross, one wears an animal skin as he kneels in prayer and another sits with his head in his hands. At the far right of the fresco, a naked hermit rolls in thorns and two elderly men converse before a small chapel. Above, a figure eats roots with one hand while he throws away bread with the other. The funeral scene shows a deceased hermit laid out between three brothers, who are conducting the obsequies. The bier is at a steep diagonal to allow the full figure of the dead man to be seen, while a fourth attendant kneels by the hermit's side and clasps his hand. The deceased is unidentified, and is not distinguished as a saint. Above this is the scene which seems to engage the travellers' attention. A small naked figure, his hands folded in prayer, kneels in a hammock of cloth carried by two angels. This clearly illustrates the particular judgement of the dead hermit's soul and its immediate ascension to Heaven.⁹⁵³

The fresco is composed of separate scenes of ascetic endeavour, rather than a unified narrative. It was interpreted by the seventeenth-century chronicler and prior of Lecceto, Marcellino Altesi (1626-1635), as a representation of the '*primi habitatori di queste selve*'; nameless 'first inhabitants of these forests'.⁹⁵⁴ Most, though not all, of the figures are clean-shaven and tonsured, as were the

⁹⁵³ For contemporary theology relative to particular judgement, see chapter two above, p. 83-84.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ilicetana Galleria ovvero Memorie istoriche, specialmente della città di siena e del Convento di Lecceto fino all'anno 1633*. Unpublished, cited in Catoni 2002, 89.

contemporary Augustinian Hermits, while others follow the traditional typology of the hermit, with long, unkempt hair and beards. With the exception of the figure wearing a hair shirt, they all wear similar scapulars which identify them as members of the Order. It seems likely that they were intended to represent nonspecific Augustinian hermits. The desert they inhabit is unlike the environs of Lecceto, but as in many other eremitic landscapes, it describes the wilderness in general, rather than a specific place.⁹⁵⁵ The hermit beating his chest with a rock alludes to representations of St. Jerome, and the naked hermit lying in thorns repeats the self-mortification of St. Benedict, described in his *Life* by Gregory the Great.⁹⁵⁶ The two elderly monks sitting by a palm tree, before a small brick chapel, recall the meeting of Sts. Paul and Antony in the desert. None of these figures possess haloes, so it is highly unlikely they are intended to represent the saints themselves. But they make reference to widely known ascetic literature and to the tradition of eremitic landscape painting, which was, by the time the fresco was made in the 1440s, already well established. The funeral scene, and the image of the soul carried to Heaven by angels is, of course, found in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, though here it is pared-down and much simpler. In its composition and content, the funeral of the hermit at Lecceto lies somewhere between the spare eremitic burials of Paul and Onuphrius, visible in the *Lives of the Anchorites* in Pisa, and the elaborate byzantine funerals represented, for example, in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The eremitic landscape at Lecceto is unique both in content and composition, but it seems likely that its artist was aware of existing traditions in literature and in art.

A low brick wall which runs parallel to the bottom edge of the fresco, and continues in the background of the image, visually separates the hermits and penitents from the viewer. It distinguishes their location as a defined place outside the monastery, in the seclusion of the wilderness. The viewer, like the two travellers at the extreme left of the fresco, encounters this scene of penitential practice as an observer, at one remove from the hermits' endeavours. The painted onlookers stand on the same side of the wall as the hermits, and direct the viewer - who 'reads' the fresco from left to right, following the narrative sequence of the cycle - to the most

⁹⁵⁵ A notable exception to this general rule is the predella of the Carmelite altarpiece, which specifically shows the wilderness of Mount Carmel. See above, p. 214-218.

⁹⁵⁶ Both of these scenes are found in the later Lindsay panel, discussed above (fig. x). *Life of Benedict*, 168; *Legenda Aurea* v.II, 213.

significant aspect of the scene; the hermit's soul carried to Heaven by angels. The two men, one young and one old, are exemplary observers, demonstrating an ideal response for one who encounters the penitential hermits in the image. They recall the narrators of ascetic literature, found in texts such as the *Historia Monachorum* or the *Lausiaca History*.⁹⁵⁷ The entire scene is clearly indebted to the eremitic tradition of the Desert Fathers, and indicates the timeless continuity of this tradition in the context of Lecceto's history.⁹⁵⁸ Through rigorous austerity and eremitic penitence the Leccetan hermits, and those who adopt a similar way of life, are ultimately blessed.

Augustinian literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries describes the ascetic practices of specific friars, following the example of the Desert Fathers. Agazzari, for example, describes how the lay friar Giovanni, who lived at the hermitage of Lecceto, used to go into the woods to pray and to escape from the temptations of the flesh. He carried a bundle of nettles with him, and laying them out on the earth, stripped naked and rolled over them.⁹⁵⁹ In the second part of the *Liber Vitasfratrum* (c.1357), Jordan of Quedlinburg argues that benefit might be found in the battle between the spirit and the flesh.⁹⁶⁰ He details the chastisement of the body, through fasting, vigils and flagellation, and offences against the self, especially rough clothing and a hard bed. Jordan goes on to give examples of saints, including Jerome, Benedict, and the Desert Fathers, who used corporeal penitence to successfully guard their chastity.⁹⁶¹ Most of the forms of self-mortification listed by Jordan are represented in the fresco at Lecceto. The hermits in this scene are all occupied with rigorous penitence, and the everyday details of their existence, such as scenes of water-carrying, or encounters with animals, are not included. They practice their *ascesis* in the wilderness and are rewarded, ultimately, with the beatification of the soul.

⁹⁵⁷ See, for example, *Lausiaca History*, 7.

⁹⁵⁸ Frescoes at the female Augustinian convent of Santa Marta in Siena, dated to 1390-1410, also represent the lives of hermits in the desert. See Corsi 2013, 101-104 and bibliography.

⁹⁵⁹ *Gli Assempri*, cited in Catoni 2002, 90.

⁹⁶⁰ *Liber Vitasfratrum*, 262-267.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 268-290.

During the years in which the frescoes of the Chiostro de' Beati were made, Lecceto itself was an important centre of Augustinian Observance.⁹⁶² It is thought that the frescoes, and other building and restoration works at the hermitage, were completed in time for the papal visitation of Eugenius IV (1431-1447), in September 1442.⁹⁶³ During his turbulent papacy, Eugenius IV remained preoccupied with the reform of the Church, and he sought to promote regular observance among Franciscan and Augustinian convents.⁹⁶⁴ The friars of Lecceto, under the priorate of Bartolomeo Tolomei (1339-42), sought to present to the Pope an ascetic image of the Order which stood in direct contrast to the presumed moral decadence of other Sienese houses.⁹⁶⁵ The cycle of St. Augustine, standing next to episodes illustrating the exemplary observance of the Rule, and the blessed history of Lecceto itself, demonstrated the fidelity of the eremo's inhabitants to the ideals of the saint they regarded as their founder. The insertion of an eremitic landscape into this programme alludes to the preservation of an original form of Christian monastic life at Lecceto, as it had been practiced by the Desert Fathers. It makes a claim for the eremitic aspect of Augustinian mendicancy, away from the corrupting influence of the city, as a defining feature of the Order's true character. In September 1443, one year after his visit to Lecceto, Eugenius IV granted the hermitage a notable privilege in the bull *Regimini universalis ecclesiae*.⁹⁶⁶ The foundation was permitted complete independence from the rest of the order in recognition of its primary status among Augustinian Observants.⁹⁶⁷

The initial motivation for the creation of these frescoes may have been the impending visit of Eugenius IV, and a desire to present Lecceto as a place of consistent, rigorous observance, but they are also addressed to the friars who would have encountered them daily as they moved between the church, the chapter

⁹⁶² Lecceto was recognised as an Observant congregation in 1387. DIP 1, col. 325.

⁹⁶³ Catoni 2002, 86; Corsi 2013, 118.

⁹⁶⁴ Stinger 1977, 171; *Vespasiano*, 20-22.

⁹⁶⁵ This is also true of his successor Girolamo Buonsignori. Both were from noble Sienese stock and were enthusiastic proponents of Observant reforms. Catoni 2002, 87 and n.204; Hackett 1999, 61.

⁹⁶⁶ This was followed by four more bulls in favour of the *eremo*. Hackett 1999, 61; DIP 1, col. 325. The first papal privilege granted to Lecceto was a protection obtained from Gregory IX in February 1228. Hackett 1999, 58.

⁹⁶⁷ Known as the *Congregatio Ilicetana*. Walsh 1980, 107; 119.

house, and the dormitory. These men lived together in the hermitage, isolated from the city but sharing their religious life together. Lecceto served as a place of spiritual retreat for Augustinian friars who ordinarily lived in the city, and, at times, also functioned as a refuge from epidemics.⁹⁶⁸ The individual solitude of the hermits in the fresco was not necessarily directly emulated by the inhabitants and visitors of Lecceto, but they would have been able to undertake penitential practice individually, whether outwardly, or internally.⁹⁶⁹ The image presents an idealised view of ascetic practice, and clearly indicates the immediate salvation of the soul as the ultimate consequence of rigorous discipline. Like the predella of the Carmelite altarpiece discussed above, it serves to illustrate the connection between the history of the Order, and the origins of Christian monastic life in the desert. This fresco is a unique and specific adaptation of existing iconographical traditions for the time and place in which it was made.⁹⁷⁰ Its presence on the wall of the cloister at Lecceto represents the continuity of ascetic practice, historically and into the unseen future of the Order.

The Augustinian Hermits and the Carmelite friars, who had been threatened with dissolution at the Council of Lyons, defended their legitimacy by developing strong historical narratives tied to the eremitic life. In 1298, the Augustinian Hermits and Carmelites were given the papal exemption they had been waiting for after the Council of Lyons, and by 1303, they had achieved a comparable legal basis to the Franciscans and Dominicans.⁹⁷¹ The eremitic origins of both Orders were of central importance to their respective foundational myths; the Augustinians claimed St Augustine as hermit for their founder, and the Carmelites looked to the prophet Elijah and the holy site of Mount Carmel. Unlike the Dominicans, who developed an academic interest in the Desert Fathers in the service of their preaching, the 'other

⁹⁶⁸ Walsh 1980, 113; Catoni 2002, 87.

⁹⁶⁹ DIP 1, col. 305-306.

⁹⁷⁰ Further examples of eremitic landscapes from an Augustinian context include frescoes at Santa Marta in Siena (1390-1410) and San Giovanni a Carbonara, Naples (1430-1445). See Corsi 2013, 101-104; Delle Foglie 2013, 112-115.

⁹⁷¹ Saak 2002, 27.

friars' were defined by a far more intimate relationship with the eremitic tradition. Both the Carmelites and the Augustinian Hermits originated as eremitical congregations, which directly informed their respective identities and historical understanding. Their own distinctive characters are reflected in the images of the desert discussed above. The predella of the Carmelite altarpiece represents the early Order in the tradition of the Desert Fathers, and was made at a time when its historical narrative was relatively newly established. The fresco at Lecceto describes the ascetic endeavours of the Augustinian Hermits, in direct relation to the practices of eremitic saints. It was made at a time of renewed observance, representing the continuation of a long-established ascetic tradition at the heart of the Order. Neither of these narratives are restricted to the representation of identifiable Desert Fathers. They represent the friars themselves as hermits, despite the mendicant status and urban focus of each Order. Both examples show how images of the desert were adapted during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to suit the highly specific needs of an Order and to represent its historical understanding, addressed primarily to the friars themselves.

- Part Three -

Flagellant confraternities and the eremitic ideal in the wider religious landscape

The appeal of the desert extended far beyond the bounds of the Mendicant Orders in thirteenth-century Italy. This final section of the chapter looks at the significance of the eremitic life among lay populations, particularly in the context of the flagellant confraternities that were formed in the thirteenth century. It also considers images of the desert made in Quattrocento Florence, considering their patronage among laypeople and the reformed Benedictine Orders of Vallombrosa and Camaldoli, whose origins were discussed in Chapter One. The eremitic way of life was closely connected to contemporary ideas around penitence and morality, which permeated the religious lives of the cities. It was also, as we have already seen, linked to the pursuit of religious reform and renewal, representing the authoritative and exemplary origins of the monastic tradition. Yet the desert also represented potentially problematic religious independence, and locally popular

hermit-saints were frequently treated with suspicion by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The presence of the eremitic life as a theme in art until c.1500 testifies to its ideological resonance, among laypeople and religious communities, within the urban context of central Italy.

Lay confraternities provided members of the urban populace with a ritual and devotional framework for pious or penitential activity, and their number increased dramatically during the period from c.1260 to c.1500. They were similar in structure to trade guilds or *arti*, governed by their own officials and statutes, and providing both spiritual and social benefits to their members.⁹⁷² Mutual support was offered in case of sickness or material need, the deceased were ensured proper funerals, and prayers were said for the souls of all members, whether living or dead.⁹⁷³ Some of the confraternities, known as *disciplinati*, or *battuti*, engaged in the ceremonial practice of self-flagellation, either in the public spaces of the city or in private chapels and oratories. Knotted cords or strips of leather were used to inflict physical injury on the bare skin of the penitent's back, as prayers, *laude* or short invocations were uttered.⁹⁷⁴ This particular expression of lay piety, which periodically took place on a mass scale, represents a direct engagement with the type of physical *ascesis* traditionally associated with monks and hermits.

Self-flagellation was a form of corporeal penitence that only became widely practiced among the laity in the second half of the thirteenth century. The formation of many flagellant confraternities can be traced to 1260, when an extraordinary wave of public devotion originated in the city of Perugia.⁹⁷⁵ The event is recorded in the *Chronicle* of Salimbene de Adam (c.1280) as a universal civic movement,

⁹⁷² Henderson 1994, 2. On lay piety and confraternal life, see Scaramuccia (ed.) 1962; Meersseman 1977; Henderson 1994; Terpstra 1995; Bullen Presciutti (ed.), 2017 and bibliography.

⁹⁷³ Papi 1980, 94-97.

⁹⁷⁴ Terpstra 1996, 5-6. These were the main types of lay-directed confraternities, but other charitable confraternities (*confraternite ospedaliere*) also existed in the thirteenth century under clerical direction. See: Meersseman 1977, 136-149; Papi 1980, 92.

⁹⁷⁵ The public nature of this event echoes the widespread 'Allelulia' processions of 1233. Henderson 1978, 155.

involving men of all rank and status.⁹⁷⁶ For several days the participants, who were stripped to the waist, processed through the city streets, scourging themselves and crying '*miser cordia e pace!*'⁹⁷⁷ The movement became known as the *devozione generale*, and spread north to Bologna, Modena, and Piacenza, and south to Rome.⁹⁷⁸ It was instigated by Fra Raniero Fasano, a member of the Perugian *fratelli della penitenza* who believed that certain serious offences, including the corruption of the Christian faith, necessitated an urgent expression of collective penitence.⁹⁷⁹ It was intended to generate civic peace on earth, and to assuage the expected wrath of God in Heaven.⁹⁸⁰ Flagellant confraternities founded in the wake of the *devozione* sought to perpetuate these good effects, by creating a ritual space in which all participants were equal, disputes were put aside, and members could enact a powerful form of physical contrition, for themselves and for the life of the city.

Historically, the act of self-flagellation functioned as a means to chastise the flesh and control the passions, and was primarily used by members of the religious Orders. It was recommended to monks by St Benedict and later by Peter Damian, as an effective form of penitential self-mortification, descended from the practices of the Desert Fathers.⁹⁸¹ In addition, flagellation was seen as a powerful means of physical and spiritual identification with Christ, who had willingly undergone the pain and humiliation of scourging prior to his Crucifixion. By inflicting the same wounds on themselves, penitents imitated this significant episode in the suffering of the

⁹⁷⁶ '...the flagellants arose throughout the whole world, and all men, both small and great, noble and common, went in procession, naked, whipping themselves through the cities, led by the bishops and men in religious Orders.' *Chronica*, 474. Further contemporary sources are listed in Henderson 1978, 150.

⁹⁷⁷ This is recorded in a contemporary Bolognese chronicle, where the *devozione* continued after it left Perugia. *Corpus chronicorum Bono niensium*, cited in Meersseman 1977, 459.

⁹⁷⁸ Henderson 1978, 151.

⁹⁷⁹ The *fratelli* were an association of laypeople who dedicated their lives to penitence. DIP 4, cols. 61-62. '*Quia propter peccata innumerabilia et turpia, scilicet sodomitarum, functorum, et propter corruptionem fidei christiane... volebat dominus mundum istum subvertere.*' *Legend of fra Raniero Fasano*, cited in Meersseman 1977, 451-4.

⁹⁸⁰ '*Tanta igitur opera sanctitatis et misericordie tam viri quam femine ostendebant, ac si timerent quod divina potentia ipsos vellet igne celesti consumere vel haitu terre subito absorbere aut concutere vehementissimo terre motu seu aliis plagis, quibus divina iustitia pentina...*' *ibid.*

⁹⁸¹ Leclercq 1961, 73-83; Weissman 1982, 50. Self-mortification is also mentioned by St Paul in the Epistles: 'I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection' I Cor., 9:27.

Saviour.⁹⁸² The extant statutes of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *disciplinati* all instruct their members to think of the Passion of Christ during regular flagellation rituals: '*per memoria della passione di Cristo*'.⁹⁸³ This direct link to penitence, and to the sacrifice of Christ, meant that self-flagellation was closely related to the themes of death and salvation. An individual's proper preparation for death was a prominent theme of the ascetic literature in both eastern and western traditions, as we have seen.⁹⁸⁴ In *exempla* and in images of the desert such as the *Lives of the Anchorites* in Pisa, hermits frequently embodied perfect penitence, achieved through their bodily *ascesis*. Self-flagellation permitted a layperson, who could not emulate the sustained physical mortification of the hermit, to identify with the suffering of Christ, and to prepare for their own death by undertaking an effective form of ascetic repentance. In addition, the shared practice of self-flagellation allowed members of the *battuti* to temporarily 'retreat' from societal norms, periodically emulating the seclusion of the eremitic life without leaving the confines of the city.

The rise in penitential activity among the laity during the thirteenth century reflects prominent themes in contemporary preaching. In one of his sermons *ad status*, Jacques de Vitry describes how contrition, or sorrow for one's sins, allowed an individual's temporal punishment to be experienced for a time in Purgatory rather than suffered for eternity in Hell.⁹⁸⁵ This initial step had to be followed by confession and satisfaction, which consisted of the penitential exercises imposed by a priest, before absolution could be granted.⁹⁸⁶ Satisfaction might include prayer, almsgiving and mortification of the flesh, including taking the discipline.⁹⁸⁷ The doctrine of Purgatory was formulated during the thirteenth century, providing a theological framework for the temporary punishment of an individual's soul after death, but prior

⁹⁸² Vauchez 1993, 411-12. 'And they shall mock him, and spit on him, and scourge him, and kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.' Matt. 10:34.

⁹⁸³ See, for example, the statutes of the *Raccomandati* of Pavia, 1334. Chen 2014, 69.

⁹⁸⁴ See chapter one, p. 39-40 and chapter three, p. 140-141.

⁹⁸⁵ Intended for married couples. *Sermones vulgares*, cited in Jansen 2000, 203.

⁹⁸⁶ At the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, annual confession was made compulsory for all Christians, and the sacrament of the Eucharist, itself essential to salvation, was available only to those who had fulfilled this requirement. The canon *omnis utriusque sexus* served to codify and formalise existing practice. *Ibid.*, 202.

⁹⁸⁷ This was recorded by Hugh of Ripelin (d.1270), Dominican prior at Strasbourg, in his *Compendium theologicae veritatis*. Cited in *Ibid.*, 224.

to the Final Judgement.⁹⁸⁸ Appropriate penitence for the sins committed in life was a means of shortening the time spent in Purgatory before the soul could be delivered.⁹⁸⁹ Mendicant preachers emphasised the importance of individual devotional experience, and the corresponding necessity of personal contrition for the salvation of the soul, in the context of this doctrine. In sermons and *exempla*, the laity were encouraged to look to the lives of the Desert Fathers, or saints such as Mary Magdalene, as exemplars of perfect penitence.⁹⁹⁰ Contemporary preaching and flagellant practice helped to bring the ideals of an eremitic life, which had previously been entirely separate from the experience of the laity, into the context of the city.

The titular saints of flagellant confraternities established in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reflect an ideological relationship between the urban *disciplinati* and the eremitic life. In Florence between the years 1250 and 1499, two flagellant confraternities had been dedicated to St Antony Abbot, one to the hermit-pope St Peter of Morrone (d.1296), two to John of Gualberto, local hermit and founder of the reformed Vallombrosan Order, and three to St Jerome.⁹⁹¹ A banner made c.1384-86 for a flagellant confraternity of Pisa, and now on display at the city's Museo di San Matteo, shows the local hermit Guglielmo da Malavalle (d. 1157) surrounded by kneeling flagellants.⁹⁹² The saint stands at the centre of the banner and is the focal point of the flagellants' devotion, providing an exemplar of ascetic practice and, by implication, a means of reflecting on the suffering and sacrifice of Christ.⁹⁹³ St Mary Magdalene, who was regarded as both penitent and eremite, was taken as the titular saint of flagellant congregations in Lucca, Viterbo, Rome, Bergamo and Borgo Sansepolcro during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁹⁹⁴ The penitent Mary Magdalene reputedly attacked her sinful body until it

⁹⁸⁸ The work on this topic of mendicant theologians such as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas is discussed by Le Goff 1984, 237-288.

⁹⁸⁹ Additional means of shortening the time spent in Purgatory included papally-sanctioned indulgences and suffrages (fasts, prayers and masses) performed by the living. Lay confraternities undertook these suffrages for the benefit of deceased members. *Ibid.*, 291-294; 327-238.

⁹⁹⁰ D'Avray 1985, 362.

⁹⁹¹ Out of a total of fifty-four flagellant companies. Henderson 1994, 120; 444-474.

⁹⁹² Parenti 2008, 97-109.

⁹⁹³ Corsi 2016, 322-323.

⁹⁹⁴ Jansen 2000, 226.

bled.⁹⁹⁵ The perceived incorporeality of her purified body allowed her to be carried aloft by angels every day at the seven canonical hours.⁹⁹⁶ Flagellants emulated the physical penitence of Mary Magdalene, and other ascetic saints, for the sake of their own salvation and, ostensibly, for the transformation of society as a whole.

The Italian *battuti* followed in the eremitic tradition because they understood the individual body as an important *locus* of devotional ritual. Thirteenth-century theologians developed the idea that the body was capable of accruing merit alongside the soul, and that it received eternal rewards accordingly.⁹⁹⁷ Engaging the body in discipline or deprivation allowed it to be purified in preparation for salvation. The radiant appearance of emaciated hermits, which we have already encountered in ascetic literature, illustrates this point:

And they used to say that the face of the old man Sylvanus shone so brightly, even as did the face of Moses, with the glorious splendour which he had received from God, that no man was able to look upon it with his eyes wide open.⁹⁹⁸

The ascetic's body becomes a conduit, or a window through which the grace of God might be glimpsed. The embodied sanctity of the hermit was emulated by the flagellants in their course of their devotional rituals. Salimbene remarked that participants of the 1260 *devozione* physically 'walked in salvation' as they processed, singing and whipping themselves, through the streets of the city.⁹⁹⁹ The corporeal nature of the flagellant's ascetic practice was not simply self-punishment or atonement for sin. It was a potentially transformative act, with tangible benefits in

⁹⁹⁵ Her self-inflicted penance is described in the fourteenth-century *Life of St Mary Magdalene* by Domenico Cavalca. Jansen 2000, 225.

⁹⁹⁶ *Legenda Aurea* v.I, 380.

⁹⁹⁷ Contemporary theological writing, including the *Summa Contra Gentiles* by the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, frequently cited II Corinthians 5:10 in blurring the distinction between soul and body; 'For we must all be manifested before the judgement seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done, whether it be good or evil'. Walker Bynum 1991, 224. Bonaventure, in defending the bodily assumption of the Virgin, asserted that soul and body are part of a union; 'the person is not in the soul; it is a composite.' Bonaventure, *De assumptione B. Virginis Mariae*, cited in *ibid.*, 229. The bull *Benedictus Deus* issued by Benedict XII at the Council of Lyons in 1274 included the profession of faith of Michael VIII Paleologus, stating that *omnes homines* will appear before Christ in Judgement *cum suis corporibus*. *Ibid.*, 386 n.122.

⁹⁹⁸ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, 955.

⁹⁹⁹ *Chronica*, 474.

this life - both civic and personal - and expected advantage in the next. The chastisement of the body, practiced by hermit and flagellant alike, perfected and purified it, in readiness for its resurrection and eventual salvation.¹⁰⁰⁰

In the early 1340s, a Sienese flagellant confraternity commissioned an extensive cycle of frescoes representing the lives of the Desert Fathers, for their rooms in the vaults beneath the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala (figure 134).¹⁰⁰¹ The paintings only came to light in the last twenty years, following extensive restoration works undertaken at the hospital complex in 1999. They occupy an irregularly-shaped space which currently belongs to the *Società di Esecutori di Pie Disposizioni*, a confraternity which in the early fourteenth century was known as the *Disciplinati di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo*.¹⁰⁰² The area in question opens onto the underground street known as the chiassa di Sant'Ansano, and it is probable that it originally functioned as an anteroom, providing access for the confraternity from the street into its private internal spaces.¹⁰⁰³ The space has been much altered over the centuries and some of the frescoes are now in a ruinous condition, while others have recently been restored, revealing scenes of eremitic life painted by a highly accomplished hand. The best-preserved of the frescoes are found high on the wall now bisected by a staircase, and have been attributed to an artist in the circle of the Lorenzetti, most recently to a young Lippo di Vanni.¹⁰⁰⁴ The paintings provide important evidence that in the first half of the fourteenth century, images of hermits held a specific appeal to members of the *disciplinati*.

The narratives of eremitic life once extended over the entire walls and vaulting of this windowless space. They are painted in a simple, muted palette, of a

¹⁰⁰⁰ Walker Bynum 1991, 222.

¹⁰⁰¹ Bagnoli 2001, 155-162; Corsi 2016, 297-324.

¹⁰⁰² It is likely that it was already in use by the *Disciplinati* in the first half of the fourteenth century. Corsi 2016, 314-315. On the history of this confraternity, see: Manetti and Savino 1991, 122-130; Gagliardi 2004, 40-48. The company's name was changed in the late fourteenth century, after it was amalgamated with the *Societas Beate Virginis Marie*. Gagliardi 2004, 53-54.

¹⁰⁰³ Corsi 2016, 313.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Bagnoli 2001, 156, 158; Corsi 2016, 318.

type often used for the decoration of external spaces, with the figures depicted in brick red and the vegetation in green. Several registers of images are still partially visible on the wall above the staircase, divided from each other by a mountainous landscape with trees.¹⁰⁰⁵ Most of the scenes are obscure, and several are unrepeated in other eremitic landscapes. In one striking image, there is an encounter, full of evident mutual suspicion, between two elderly hermits and two richly-dressed but disrespectful young huntsmen (figure 135). The story most likely alludes to an *exemplum* found in the *Sermones tempore* of Jacobus de Voragine (1267-1286). When St Antony advises his brethren to rest after a long journey, they are seen and mocked by a nearby archer. Defending the monks, Antony draws an analogy between the eremitic life and the archer's bow, explaining that if maximum pressure is maintained on the bow for too long, it will break.¹⁰⁰⁶ Next to this is a scene of three hermits before a chapel, in which a priest prepares to celebrate the Eucharist (figure 136). This probably refers to a story in the *Vite dei Santi Padri* in which an elderly hermit, disbelieving the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic bread and wine, is convinced by two other hermits of the truth.¹⁰⁰⁷ As the three approach the church for Mass on Sunday, they are greeted with a vision (not visible to the viewer of this fresco) that clarifies the mystery of eucharistic presence. In the image, they respond with expressions of fear, hesitation, and wonder. The audience of these exemplary narratives are likely to have been familiar with the stories, which counsel moderation in all things, including ascetic practice, and belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.¹⁰⁰⁸

The rest of the surviving frescoes show a combination of well-known narratives from ascetic literature and generic scenes of eremitic life. They include the meeting of St Antony and St Paul, the burial of Paul, and an encounter between St Mary of Egypt and Zosimus, all painted on the barrel-vaulted ceiling. Lower down the wall, St Jerome is shown removing a thorn from a lion's paw. On the wall which separates the internal space from the street of Sant'Ansano, several episodes depict

¹⁰⁰⁵ A complete description of all the scenes can be found in Corsi 2016, 306-308.

¹⁰⁰⁶ *Thema*. Corsi 2016, 307 n.26.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 307. *Vite dei Santi Padri*, v.II, 905-7.

¹⁰⁰⁸ The cult of the Eucharist - the belief in the real presence of Christ in the sacramental bread and wine - culminated in the creation of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 by Urban IV. See Rubin 1991, esp. 181-182.

the everyday activities of eremitic life. One hermit carries an elderly companion on his shoulders, while another feeds a wolf and a third leads a docile bear.¹⁰⁰⁹ Others are shown in prayer or working the land. Opposite the entrance, above an archway which now pierces the wall, are more scenes of monks engaged in agricultural work (figure 137). A tall monastery building dominates the image, while figures tend the land alongside according to the labours of the seasons. Great care is taken over the accurate depiction of tools and crops.¹⁰¹⁰ Agricultural work may have held both practical and symbolic resonance for the audience of the frescoes. Cultivation of the land in the Sieneese *contado* was vital to the life and health of the city, just as the penitential activity of the flagellants contributed to the spiritual health of its inhabitants. In the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the abbot Silvanus explains to a visiting monk who wonders why the brethren of Sinai work the land, “So Martha is necessary for Mary, for because of Martha is Mary praised.”¹⁰¹¹ The active life, represented by agricultural work, was thus necessary to allow for the temporary retreat of the flagellants, whose discipline emulated the ascetic lives of the hermits.¹⁰¹²

Seen by an audience of *disciplinati*, the frescoes of eremitic life under the vaults of the Ospedale must have held both exemplary and symbolic value. The more unusual scenes may well reflect the wider concerns of the confraternity, such as the *exemplum* that counsels moderation in all things, including spiritual exercises, and the story of a miracle that reveals the mystery of Christ’s presence in the consecrated Host. Several images of eremitic death and burial may refer indirectly to confraternal works of mercy, which often involved the burial of the poor. There are three separate narratives of female ascetics in this relatively small space, two of which show women who are only able to pursue an eremitic life by dressing as

¹⁰⁰⁹ The tropes of fraternal assistance and interaction with wild animals are frequently encountered in the literature, and are present in the Edinburgh Tabernacle.

¹⁰¹⁰ Whilst it has been observed that this agricultural landscape is indebted to Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s recently-completed *Buon Governo* fresco in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena (1338-39), the reasons for its inclusion alongside scenes of eremitic life remains unexplained. Corsi 2016, 302-303.

¹⁰¹¹ *Sayings of the Fathers*, 143.

¹⁰¹² Luke 10:38-42.

men.¹⁰¹³ We know that flagellant rituals were undertaken only by men, but women were often allowed to be members of a flagellant confraternity and could undertake the discipline in private.¹⁰¹⁴ The Sienese *disciplinati* are likely to have included women, who were probably admitted into this anterior space. Images of female hermits may have functioned to remind a woman of her equal potential to undertake penitence, both physical and spiritual, and of the concurrent necessity for modesty and discretion in her efforts. In their original state, the frescoes would have turned this enclosed, subterranean space into an expansive landscape, with exemplary narratives intended to be specifically instructive for the *disciplinati* who saw them.

The manuscripts owned by the *disciplinati* of Santa Maria della Scala confirm an interest in the lives of the desert saints. A surviving inventory of 1325 lists three books of ascetic literature out of a total seven, including the *Collationes* of Cassian and a vaguely-defined '*libro de la vita de' santi Padri*'. There is also a collection of *exempla*.¹⁰¹⁵ A second inventory compiled in 1492 lists a total of twenty-eight manuscripts, of which thirteen are liturgical or for communal prayer. Of the remaining fifteen, seven are directly related to ascetic literature and the lives of the Desert Fathers, including a copy of the *Scala Celeste*, or *Heavenly Ladder*, of John Climacus.¹⁰¹⁶ This particular flagellant confraternity played an important part in the devotional life of the city of Siena. The *disciplinati* obtained indulgences from popes and bishops usually reserved for the religious Orders; in 1304, members were granted an indulgence of one hundred days for every time they undertook the discipline.¹⁰¹⁷ They were ministered to by the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians and Carmelites on various dates of the fourteenth century, and their

¹⁰¹³ In one of these, the Abbot Bessarion and one of his disciples come across the body of an anchorite and begin to prepare his burial. In doing so, they discover that the deceased is, in fact, a woman dressed as a monk. *Vite dei Santi Padri* v. II, 946-7. The other is the story of St. Marina, in the *Legenda Aurea* v.1, 324-325.

¹⁰¹⁴ Vauchez 1993, 411.

¹⁰¹⁵ Manetti and Savino 1991, 147.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-159. Some of these have not yet been identified with surviving manuscripts. It is possible that a single manuscript remains to be found that can account for all the scenes included in the frescoes. Corsi 2016, 317.

¹⁰¹⁷ 16 June 1304. Published by Bughetti and cited in Gagliardi 2004, 55, n.126.

close relationship with all of the Mendicant Orders is attested in their statutes.¹⁰¹⁸ Giovanni Colombini and Francesco di Mino Vincenti were members of the *disciplinati sotto le volte* who, in the mid-fourteenth century, went on to found the *brigata de' povari*, later known as the *gesuati*.¹⁰¹⁹ The devotional practices of this lay organisation drew heavily on the christocentric piety of the *disciplinati*, and their way of life was modelled on that of the early Franciscans.¹⁰²⁰ They undertook rigorous self-mortification, begged for their food, and carried out charitable works such as the burial of the dead, all in the public spaces of the city.¹⁰²¹ The frescoes in Santa Maria della Scala reflect the perceived concordance between the ascetic piety of the Sienese flagellants and the lives of the Desert Fathers. They allowed the religion of the remote desert to be witnessed and experienced, deep within the built environment of the Trecento city.

Contemporary eremitic saints and *beati* were the subject of ardent popular devotion in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy, not only among the *battuti*. The Processes of locally-venerated hermits such as Giovanni Bono (d.1249) and Lorenzo Loricato (d.1243) describe how people flooded to see them in search of counsel or cures, and left greatly edified.¹⁰²² Monks who left their monasteries to pursue a solitary life, such as Ugo di Sassoferrato (d.1250), a Silvestrin, or Franco d'Assergi, a Benedictine who lived in the Abruzzi, gained widespread popularity among the local laity.¹⁰²³ Guglielmo di Malavalle entered the eremitic life near Pisa, on his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1145. He inspired a sizeable following at Rupecava and other hermitages between Pisa and Grosseto, and he

¹⁰¹⁸ Gagliardi 2004, 54; '*pregaremo per li nostri padri spirituali frati minori, predicatori, agustini, servi et carmellini...*' Cited in *ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰²² Lorenzo was a monk of Subiaco who left the monastery to pursue an independent eremitic existence. Giovanni Bono was a hermit and founder of the Gianbonini, who were later incorporated into the Augustinian Hermits. Van Luijk 1968, 69; Vauchez 1997, 333.

¹⁰²³ *Ibid.*, 193 n.111.

was venerated by members of the laity in the cities.¹⁰²⁴ Following the partial incorporation of the Guglielmiti into the Hermits of St. Augustine in 1256, Guglielmo was adopted by the Order as one of the true sons of St. Augustine and inheritor of the Augustinian eremitic tradition in Tuscany.¹⁰²⁵ He appears in a mid-fourteenth century fresco at Montalcino as a saint, alongside the Tuscan hermit Giovanni Bono, kneeling at the feet of St Augustine to receive the Rule.¹⁰²⁶ Contemporary hagiography repeated tropes of the ascetic literature; both Giovanni Bono and the Augustinian Hermit Nicholas of Tolentino (d.1305) were reportedly attacked by demons on several occasions.¹⁰²⁷ The saintly hermits were credited with mastery over nature, and a heroic ability to survive both sustained self-mortification and repeated conflict with demons, that could only be explained by the intervening hand of God. The hermit's relationship with the created world is illustrated in stories of miraculous natural abundance; Lorenzo Loricato and Nicholas of Tolentino made springs appear beside their cells, and Giovanni Bono caused a stick of dead wood to flower.¹⁰²⁸ This same command over natural forces made hermits prolific healers and performers of miracles. Witnesses to the canonisation process of Nicholas of Tolentino, for example, described his many healing miracles and his humility in effecting them.¹⁰²⁹

Despite the widespread appeal of hermits among the laity, canonisation Processes sometimes reveal papal misgivings about the value and orthodoxy of the eremitic life. This arose in part from an anxiety about unregulated forms of lay religion, expressed at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and reiterated in 1274.¹⁰³⁰ Solitary laymen and small groups of itinerant hermits were seen as potential sources of heterodoxy and a danger to the established Church. The Processes of Giovanni Bono (1251), who remained an illiterate layman until his death, repeatedly

¹⁰²⁴ Marcelli 2000, 56-57.

¹⁰²⁵ Ducci 1999, 284-302.

¹⁰²⁶ Marcelli 2000, 66, fig. 7.

¹⁰²⁷ Vauchez 1997, 333.

¹⁰²⁸ Cited in Vauchez 1997, 331 n.238, 239.

¹⁰²⁹ BLS vol. III, 526.

¹⁰³⁰ Canon XIII of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215. Reproduced in Brooke 1975, 161. This was reiterated in the canon *Religionum diversitatem* at the Council of Lyons in 1274.

emphasise his catholic faith and close relationship with the bishop of Cesena, to counter such suspicions. However, despite a second enquiry into his faith and posthumous miracles two years after the first, he was never canonised.¹⁰³¹ Even the mendicant hermit Nicholas of Tolentino was not canonised until 1446, despite two separate inquiries into his life and miracles during the fourteenth century. Witnesses repeatedly assert that he was not a *fantasticus*, or visionary, and defend his wisdom, good sense and distinction.¹⁰³² He exemplified the Augustinian ideal of the *vita perfectissima*, the balance between active and contemplative forms of religious life, and is described as ‘a scrupulous observer of the Rule’.¹⁰³³ The excessive austerity practiced by some hermits was seen to be potentially self-destructive or unorthodox. The Processes of Lorenzo of Subiaco record that Cardinal Hugolino had tried to persuade him to modify the severity of his penitential practices, which included the wearing of metal plates, or *lorica*, next to his skin.¹⁰³⁴ It is telling that the only hermit to be canonised between 1198 and 1431 was Peter of Morrone in 1313. His orthodoxy had been confirmed beyond question by his elevation to the highest office of the Church.¹⁰³⁵

Alongside this popular devotion to hermit-saints, images of the desert enjoyed remarkable popularity in fifteenth-century Tuscany. Seven separate but closely-related panel paintings, showing a broad, pan-historical desert landscape inhabited by ascetic saints, were made in and around Florence between c. 1400-1480.¹⁰³⁶ One of these is attributed to Fra Angelico (d. 1455) and his workshop, and is now split between a museum in Budapest and a private collection

¹⁰³¹ The Processes of Giovanni Bono state: ‘*luit homo boni sensus et non fantasticus*’; ‘*non erat fantasticus, immo sapiens et discretus*’ cited in Vauchez 1997, 333, n.250. They were held in 1251 and 1253. Gutierrez 1984, 32.

¹⁰³² *Il processo per la canonizzazione di S. Nicola da Tolentino (CP Nicola da Tolentino)*, 1 and 173, cited in Vauchez 1997, 333 n. 250.

¹⁰³³ *CP Nicola da Tolentino* 48, cited in Vauchez 1997, 336.

¹⁰³⁴ *Processes of Lorenzo Loricato*, cited in Vauchez 1997, 334 n. 251.

¹⁰³⁵ Vauchez 1997, 333.

¹⁰³⁶ These are: The ‘Thebaid’ in the Uffizi; the Budapest/Bartolini-Salimbeni ‘Thebaid’; the Esztergom/Christie’s ‘Thebaid’; the ‘larger Lindsay panel’; the ‘smaller Lindsay panel’; the ‘Quattrocento jigsaw puzzle’ reconstructed by Ellen Callmann, and the *Way of Perfection*. See Malquori (ed.) 2013, 27-86, and discussion of the problematic term ‘thebaid’ in my introduction, p. 22-25. On the smaller Lindsay panel and the *Way of Perfection*, see section one of this chapter, p. 183-189.

(formerly Bartolini Salimbeni) (figure 121).¹⁰³⁷ These Quattrocento ‘thebaid’ paintings have recently received detailed scholarly attention, which does not need to be repeated here.¹⁰³⁸ It is, however, relevant to note the prevalence of an eremitic theme in art, especially in Florence, during the fifteenth century. The content and format of these paintings follow a similar composition to the example above: a horizontally-oriented, panoramic desert landscape with a river along its lower edge; multiple scenes of eremitic life; and a monastic funeral, similar in type to that of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, at the far left-hand side of the painting.

The original location of these panels is difficult to determine, as all have been moved and several, including the panel attributed to Fra Angelico, were dismembered in the nineteenth century when they entered the art market.¹⁰³⁹ The discussion in section one of this chapter indicates that two of these seven panel paintings emerged from a Franciscan *milieu*. The others are, as mentioned above, difficult to locate with any certainty. However, there is evidence that the panel by Fra Angelico, or one very like it, may have been made for wealthy lay patrons. A 1492 inventory of property belonging to the Florentine Medici family records two panels painted with *storie di santi padri*, one of which, ‘in the hand of friar John’ (*‘di mano di fra Giovanni’*, otherwise known as Fra Angelico), was located in the corridor leading to the room of Piero.¹⁰⁴⁰ The listed dimensions of the painting correspond closely with those of the Budapest/Bartolini Salimbeni panel prior to its division.¹⁰⁴¹ The ascetic lives of the Desert Fathers seem at first glance a strange choice of subject-matter for powerful and wealthy inhabitants of the Tuscan city.

The inclusion of a monastic funeral in six of the seven ‘thebaid’ panel paintings is notable, because it suggests that the iconography of the Edinburgh Tabernacle was known to Florentine artists in the fifteenth century. Whether this

¹⁰³⁷ Several of the panels are extremely closely related in composition and iconography, while the well-known example now in the Uffizi has been identified as a copy. Malquori 2012, 115-169.

¹⁰³⁸ See *Ibid.*, and Malquori (ed.) 2013, 27-86.

¹⁰³⁹ Such as the ‘Quattrocento jigsaw puzzle’, reconstructed in Callman 1957. Its components are now dispersed between Oxford, Edinburgh, Zurich and Yale.

¹⁰⁴⁰ In Palazzo Medici on via Larga. The other panel was located in the chapel of the Careggi Villa. Malquori 2012, 140.

¹⁰⁴¹ c. 74 x 232cm (approx. 4 *braccia* wide, in the inventory). Malquori 2012, 86-87; 140; 182-183.

scene was familiar from the painting itself, its putative manuscript source, or copies, is difficult to ascertain. None of the later images repeat it exactly; neither the tabernacle's vertical composition, profusion of narrative detail, nor its juxtaposition of eremitic landscape with scenes from the Passion and Resurrection of Christ were emulated in the Quattrocento paintings. In addition, the peculiarly Byzantine details of the tabernacle's central panel - the stylite saint and the monk striking the *semandron* - are omitted in the Italian 'thebaid'. The monastic funeral and the travelling hermits, who descend a steep mountain towards the obsequies, become only one aspect of a wider eremitic landscape. In only one of these panels the ascent of the dead saint's soul is pictured.¹⁰⁴² Most of the others depict an angel descending to bring bread to a hermit near the top edge of the painting above the funeral, as if *in lieu* of the angelic transport of the soul. As in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, the identity of the deceased in all of these images appears unimportant. He is one among several anonymous eremitic saints, alongside well-known figures such as St Jerome, St Macarius of Egypt, and St Benedict. While some scenes in the desert landscapes illustrate recognisable narratives, others appear to be more generic, showing hermits in conversation, or working the land. The monastic funeral and its attendant scenes evidently carried a recognised visual authority, even if they lacked a literary source. They describe the inevitability of death and the exemplary mourning of the ageing hermits. In addition, the inclusion of this image in an eremitic landscape is a means of indicating the orthodoxy of the hermits' communal life, which takes place before a monastery and church.

The seven panel paintings from the fifteenth century often referred to as 'thebaid' were created alongside other eremitic landscapes, made for a variety of patrons in fresco and on panel, as we have seen. One final example is worth mentioning here, because its patronage can be linked both to another powerful Florentine family, and to the reformed Benedictine Orders of Vallombrosa and Camaldoli. It is a predella panel from a now-dismembered altarpiece, originally made for the sacristy of the Vallombrosan church of Santa Trinità in Florence.¹⁰⁴³ The altarpiece was begun in 1422-23 by Lorenzo Monaco (d.1424) and completed before 1434 by Fra Angelico. Its three predella panels, attributed to Lorenzo, are

¹⁰⁴² The 'larger Lindsay panel', which remains in a private Scottish collection. Brigstocke 2000, cat. 11.

¹⁰⁴³ Tartuferi and Parenti 2006, 232 cat.43.

now displayed in the Florentine museum of San Marco.¹⁰⁴⁴ A barren, moonlit desert landscape shows three scenes from the *Life of Onuphrius*, which was well-known in fifteenth-century Italy in both Latin and vernacular translations (figure 138).¹⁰⁴⁵ The central scene of the predella panel shows the initial encounter of Paphnutius and Onuphrius in the desert. Paphnutius is terrified, on account of the ageing hermit's nakedness and wild appearance. The scene to the left shows their meeting, as Onuphrius, who is nearing death, recognises Paphnutius as a holy man and calls out to him. The third scene, to the right of the panel, shows the two hermits deep in conversation before a small hut. The altarpiece itself was commissioned by Palla Strozzi, a prominent member of the wealthy Florentine banking family, to honour the testamentary bequest of his father Onofrio (Nofri) Strozzi (d.1418). Onofrio had provided funds for a new family burial chapel attached to the sacristy of the Vallombrosan church, and in 1421, its altar was dedicated to his patron saints, Nicholas and Onuphrius.¹⁰⁴⁶ The predella panel showing scenes from the *Life of Onuphrius* reflects the virtues of piety and humility associated with Nofri Strozzi himself.¹⁰⁴⁷ This image of extreme asceticism, as part of a large and expensive altarpiece, provides an effective spiritual antidote to the family's vast economic riches. As in the case of the Medici panels discussed above, this example suggests that images of eremitic life held a specific appeal to members of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Quattrocento Florence.

Despite the Strozzi patronage of this altarpiece, the exact content of the predella panel showing Paphnutius and Onuphrius, in addition to the programme of the entire object, would also have been influenced by the Vallombrosan monks in

¹⁰⁴⁴ The centre of the altarpiece, attributed to Fra Angelico, represents a Deposition from the Cross. It is thought that this differs from the original intention of Lorenzo Monaco prior to his death. The other two predella panels represent *Scenes from the life of St Nicholas*, and a *Nativity*. Padoa Rizzo 1987, 132.

¹⁰⁴⁵ The text is attributed to Paphnutius 'Cephalus' of Upper Egypt, and dated to the end of the Fourth Century. *The Life of Onuphrius*, in Vivian 1992, 145-166. More than seventy manuscripts survive from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thirty-one vernacular translations from the fifteenth century survive in Italian, and it was frequently included in fifteenth-century copies of Cavalca's *Vite dei Santi Padri*, but is not thought to be part of the original work. Fenelli 2013, 151.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Vasaturo 1973, 14.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Onofrio's heraldic motto, inlaid in the marble entrance-hall plaque, was *PARVUS* ('the lesser'). Davisson 1975, 322-323.

whose sacristy it stood.¹⁰⁴⁸ The small scale of the predella panel (as in the case of the Carmelite altarpiece, discussed above), and the location of the altarpiece in the sacristy of the church meant that its primary audience was monastic, and in this context, the eremitic narrative had an additional resonance.¹⁰⁴⁹ The story of Onuphrius and Paphnutius reflected the eremitic nature of Vallombrosan origins, echoing the miracles and worldly renunciation of their founding saint Giovanni Gualberto. The life of Giovanni, who was both hermit and advocate of Church reform, had been recently retold in a new biography of the saint, completed in 1419.¹⁰⁵⁰ Vallombrosan hagiography historically reflected the Order's interest in the solitary life. Venerated hermits of uncertain affiliation, such as Torello da Poppi (d. 1282), who was also claimed by the Franciscans, were inserted into the Vallombrosan tradition to assert the continuity of the founder's eremitic way of life.¹⁰⁵¹ The cults of the *beati* Migliore (d.1282) and Giovanni delle Celle (d.1396) were promoted by the Order in association with the *Eremo delle Celle*, not far from Vallombrosa itself.¹⁰⁵² This exaltation of the solitary life functioned as a statement of the Order's identity and origins, reaffirming the importance of its eremitic tradition. The Vallombrosan monks did not live in solitude, but they had originally maintained a strict separation from the secular world through their use of *conversi*.¹⁰⁵³ Over time, and with the patronage of families such as the Strozzi, this detachment from society was necessarily compromised, particularly in urban centres such as Florence. The economic, political and social activity of Santa Trinità reached its peak in the fourteenth century.¹⁰⁵⁴ Images of the eremitic life, such as the predella panel by Lorenzo Monaco, may have helped to maintain a connection with the original, isolated existence of the monks, for whom the enclosure of the cloister represented the wilderness of the desert.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Davisson 1975, 330, regarding Gentile da Fabriano's altarpiece for the same church, commissioned in 1420 by Palla Strozzi.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Megli and Salvestrini 2013, 19.

¹⁰⁵¹ Salvestrini 2008, 236.

¹⁰⁵² DIP 9, col. 1700.

¹⁰⁵³ The Order was officially recognised by Victor II in 1055. Penco 1961, 217.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Vasaturo 1973, 8.

In Quattrocento Florence, the reformed Benedictine congregations of Vallombrosa and Camaldoli, which both originated in rural Tuscany, remained significant to the religious and cultural life of the city.¹⁰⁵⁵ The Camaldolese monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence was an observant foundation, which followed the customs of Camaldoli in accommodating both solitary and communal forms of life, and sought to maintain the rigorous ideals of Peter Damian's *Liber eremiticae regulae*.¹⁰⁵⁶ It also housed an important scriptorium, or *studium*, which became known as a place of significant intellectual and cultural activity among humanists and Greek scholars then living in Florence.¹⁰⁵⁷ In the early fifteenth century, several works of Orthodox monastic spirituality were translated into Latin at the *studium* by the monk and noted scholar, Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439).¹⁰⁵⁸ These included the anonymous *Paradisus animae* (a short allegory on the virtues of the soul), the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus, and the *Spiritual Ladder* by John Climacus, which had already been translated by Angelo Clareno towards the end of the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁵⁹ Ambrogio was a passionate advocate of union between the Latin and Orthodox Churches, and was deeply interested in the monastic traditions of Byzantium.¹⁰⁶⁰ He was also reformist in spirit, and as Prior General between 1431 and 1439, he endeavoured to recreate the spiritual fervour of the early Church within the Order.¹⁰⁶¹ Lorenzo Monaco, the artist of the *Life of Onophrius* predella panel, was a Camaldolese monk whose *oeuvre* strongly reflects the religious climate of Santa Maria degli Angeli. His striking conception of the desert in this painting reveals a fascination with the eremitic landscape that is echoed in many of his other works, including those with no obvious relation to the

¹⁰⁵⁵ See chapter one, p. 60-62, for a discussion of the eremitic origins of these congregations. Both were prominent in Arno valley.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Caby 1999, 159.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Melis 2006, 34.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Vespasiano*, 208-209.

¹⁰⁵⁹ He also translated Greek versions of the *Vitae patrum*, adding new material to the Latin versions already in circulation. Stinger 1977, 127.

¹⁰⁶⁰ In 1439, Ambrogio played an important part in the dogmatic disputations at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, at which a Decree of Union was eventually signed by the Latin and Orthodox Churches. *Ibid.*, 205-6.

¹⁰⁶¹ As Prior General, Ambrogio spent his time exhorting the monks, abbots and priors of the Order to reform. *Ibid.*, 172-202.

wilderness, such as a *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ* (1408) (figure 139).¹⁰⁶² Lorenzo was granted an exclaustation in order to run a workshop close to the monastery, where the young Dominican friar known as Fra Angelico was apprenticed c.1417.¹⁰⁶³ It is perhaps no coincidence that several of the Quattrocento 'thebaid' paintings discussed above are attributed to Fra Angelico, given the spiritual context of his early training.¹⁰⁶⁴ The popularity of eremitic landscape painting in Florence should be seen in relation to the culture of monastic reform, and the interest in Greek monastic spirituality associated with Ambrogio Traversari, at the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli.

The eremitic life held powerful religious and exemplary moral value in the wider context of late-medieval Italy. Penitential confraternities such as the *disciplinati* emulated the physical mortification of the hermit and the suffering of Christ in their rituals. Their members responded to a theological climate in which the penitence of the individual was emphasised, and mendicant preaching exhorted lay audiences to prepare for death and repent of sin. The eremitic life, which was vividly pictured in frescoes for the *disciplinati* of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, provided ideal examples of individual penance and spiritual transformation within the built environment of the city. The historical desert, and the primitive religious culture it represented, was also significant among the reformed Benedictines, particularly at the Camaldolese foundation of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Ambrogio Traversari's translations led to the reappraisal and dissemination of Greek religious literature, and his passionate interest in Orthodox spirituality as a source for religious reform echoed that of Angelo Clareno. In fifteenth-century Florence, images of the desert evidently enjoyed popularity among wealthy members of the laity, as a direct contrast to their economic riches in the context of the city. The desert landscape was a place apart, an idealised location of eremitic and ascetic sainthood. Images of the Desert Fathers may have functioned as a source of moral erudition and virtue to a lay audience. Cassian describes in the *Conferences* how an onlooker could be edified simply by looking at the hermits:

¹⁰⁶² Tartuferi and Parenti eds. 2006, cat. 24a.

¹⁰⁶³ Melis 2006, 33.

¹⁰⁶⁴ The original after which the Uffizi 'Thebaid' was copied, in addition to the Budapest/Bartolini-Salimbeni and Esztergom/Christie's 'Thebaid'. On these paintings, see Malquori 2012, 115-169.

Their old age is clear in their bent bodies and their saintliness shines in their faces. To those looking at them the very sight of them can bestow knowledge. Not from their words, but from the example of their holy way of living you may learn.¹⁰⁶⁵

The late thirteenth-century context in which the Edinburgh Tabernacle appeared was characterised by an upsurge in lay piety, and controversy among and within the Mendicant Orders regarding the nature of the religious life. This chapter has explored the significance of the eremitic ideal within various contemporary contexts, from the ritual activities of the *battuti*, to Dominican sermons and the formulation of historical narratives among the Augustinian Hermits and the Carmelites. Whilst the tabernacle seems to represent an isolated and anomalous instance of the desert as a theme in art, it should be seen against a historical background in which the eremitic ideal was highly pertinent. The dating of the Edinburgh Tabernacle to c.1295 coincides with the short-lived papacy of the hermit-pope Celestine V, the formation of the Poor Hermits, and rising controversy within the Franciscan Order regarding the character of the religious life and the legacy of its founding saint. In addition, it coincides with the translation into Latin of the *Heavenly Ladder*, and I suggest that its iconography may derive in part from an illuminated manuscript of this text, brought to Italy by Angelo Clareno and his companions in 1294. Whether or not this was the case - and the substantiation of this hypothesis requires further research - the eremitic life was of particularly charged relevance for the Franciscan Order, especially among those friars known as the Spirituals. We have seen how the life of Francis was characterised by eremitic tendencies and ascetic practice, particularly in the early biographies, that were essential aspects of his devotion to poverty and renunciation of material goods. In seeking to return to the legacy of Francis, and adhere more closely to his rigorous ideals, the Spirituals rejected the increasingly worldly and urban character of the conventual Order. The seclusion of the *eremo*, which was so important to Francis, stood in stark opposition to the large and well-endowed convents being built in the cities of central Italy.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Conferences*, 142.

The eremitic ideal may have held an important and controversial place within the Franciscan Order, but it was also relevant to the other Mendicant Orders and to the laity in the thirteenth century. The Dominicans used ascetic literature extensively in their *exempla* and sermons, and it was referenced in written works about the Order itself. However the nature of their interest in the eremitic life was primarily academic, used in the service of preaching to the laity. The suggestion that the Edinburgh Tabernacle was found within a Dominican context is unconvincing, given its iconographic irrelevance for the Camposanto *Lives of the Anchorites*. The intended audience of the tabernacle seems most likely to have been both religious and profoundly interested in the *experience* of life in the desert as a means of approaching the sacrificial life of Christ. Its message appears to be profoundly at odds with the outward-facing, evangelical mission of the Dominican friars. For both the Augustinian Hermits and the Carmelites, the eremitic ideal was directly relevant to their respective histories, which they were forced to defend following the Council of Lyons in 1274. Both Orders looked to an eremitic past to legitimise their existence prior to 1215, and the Augustinians in particular laid claim to the *vita perfectissima* exemplified by St Augustine, combining active and contemplative forms of life. For the Carmelites, the *locus sanctus* of Mount Carmel, and the ancient example of the Old Testament prophets, constituted a central aspect of their identity even as the Order became embedded within the cities. However the relatively precarious position of the two 'other' Mendicant Orders in the late thirteenth century, which meant that they were not in a position to commission major artworks, makes it highly unlikely that they were patrons of the tabernacle themselves.

Among lay populations in the thirteenth century, the eremitic ideal was familiar through the *exempla* used in sermons, the ascetic character of popular local saints, and the self-mortifying penitence of the flagellants. The growth of lay piety, and the intensely physical character of flagellant devotions, form an important aspect of the historical backdrop against which the Edinburgh Tabernacle was made. It demonstrates how contemporary interest in ascetic practice, descended from the Desert Fathers, permeated urban society. Even if the flagellant confraternities were unlikely patrons of the tabernacle itself, whose format and content indicates a religious audience, their growing popularity shows how the

eremitic ideal was adapted and incorporated into the context of the city, beyond the confines of the religious Orders.

The Edinburgh Tabernacle predates subsequent images of the desert, made in Tuscany during the two hundred years to 1500, by at least forty years. The content of these later paintings was directly related to the context and audience for which they were made, and all of those discussed in this chapter appear to be unique. They were made for different Orders, and for the laity, representing an ancient and authoritative way of life that held exemplary, historical, or legitimising value. Those made for a religious audience, such as the Carmelite predella panels, the fresco at Lecceto, and the panel painting known as the smaller Lindsay panel, are associated with the restatement of an Order's historical identity, or with its renewal and reform. Whilst certain details of the tabernacle's central panel - most notably the monastic funeral - were repeated in later images of the desert, it remains unique in its content, complexity and juxtaposition with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. It is significant that the funeral of the hermit-saint was given prominence in a fifteenth-century eremitic landscape likely to have been made for the Franciscans, and which includes an image of St Francis at its apex. The smaller Lindsay panel reiterates the possibility of a Franciscan provenance for the tabernacle itself, because it explicitly aligns the stigmatised saint with the authoritative origins of monastic life and the legacy of the Desert Fathers. I have argued that the tabernacle reflects the specific historical conditions from which it emerged. Alongside the appeal of the desert among the laity and the significance of the eremitic tradition for the other religious Orders, the late thirteenth century was marked by controversy within the Franciscan Order regarding the true character of its way of life, and calls for the reform of the Order according to the *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis. The Edinburgh Tabernacle may be understood in the context of this controversy, as a radical statement for the priority of the eremitic life, and the alignment of this way of life with the sacrifice of Christ.

Conclusion

The Edinburgh Tabernacle and the eremitic life in late-medieval Italy: a new proposal

This thesis has focused on the eremitic life as the focal image of a striking tabernacle in the National Gallery of Scotland. It has shown how the desert functioned within late-medieval society as an exemplary ideal, representing the authoritative origins of the religious life, and as a contemporary *locus sanctus*, far away from the secular life of the cities. Through a synthesis of art-historical and historical analysis, I have explored the motivation behind the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, its potential sources and patronage, and its relationship with other images of the desert made in Italy during the two hundred years to c.1500. The new proposal which has emerged from my research points to a potential and previously unrecognised connection between the content of the tabernacle, the monastic and cultural traditions of Byzantium, and the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, in the years around 1295.

A direct connection between the Edinburgh Tabernacle, and Angelo Clareno's translation of the *Heavenly Ladder*, was only suggested towards the end of my period of study, when the likelihood of an earlier date for the translation (previously estimated at c.1300) came to light. It remains, for the time being, a hypothesis, which cannot be proven with certainty. The relationship I propose opens up avenues for further research that remain beyond the scope of this thesis. The development of the tabernacle's sophisticated iconography from eleventh-century Byzantine manuscript illuminations requires more in-depth research. The early transmission and dissemination of Clareno's translation of the *Heavenly Ladder*, and the extent of Olivi's involvement in this process, is still unclear. Questions remain around the use of images by Franciscan Spirituals, and the extent to which apocalyptic expectations were expressed in visual form. And more needs to be done on the powerful patronage behind the Poor Hermits, particularly within the Curia, and the possibility of art objects linked to this relationship. Despite these limitations, however, the unique combination of iconography in the Edinburgh Tabernacle, which aligns the eremitic life with the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, appears to

confirm its most likely function as a form of visual polemic, particularly when it is seen against the historical backdrop of the Spiritual controversy in the Franciscan Order.

The first chapter considered the image of the desert alongside the eremitic tradition to which it relates. The primary subject of the tabernacle is closely linked to the earliest forms of Christian monastic life in the desert, and to recurring tropes of ascetic literature. The lives and wisdom of the Desert Fathers contained within this literature were invoked in association with monastic or religious reform and renewal throughout the Middle Ages. Its continuing significance into the late-medieval period is attested by the content of mendicant libraries. However, the academic study of ascetic literature tells only part of the story. The Desert Fathers represented an authoritative and original form of monastic life, characterised by distance from the secular world, self-mortifying ascetic discipline, and renunciation of material goods in the name of identification with Christ. The eremitic life came to represent an antithesis to western forms of the religious life which neglected these principles. Its increased practice during the eleventh and twelfth centuries was regarded both as a return to the true origins of the monastic tradition, and as a potential threat to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and to the institutions it supported.

The image at the centre of the Edinburgh Tabernacle similarly represents a potentially controversial assertion of the privileges which were uniquely associated with life in the desert. It is highly idealised, despite the presence of demons, and gives prominence to the fraternal character of eremitic existence. The identities of the individual hermits, including the deceased saint, appear to be less important than the way of life they represent. The presence of three small textual inscriptions indicate the likelihood of a religious audience, and suggest that the idea of continuity - between the ancient eremitic tradition, and contemporary religious life - was significant to its makers. Psalm 1 invokes the 'blessed man' Christ as the source of the religious life, and symbolises the entire psalmody that lay at the heart of the canonical hours. The invocation from Psalm 69:2 was repeated as 'an endless refrain' in the Benedictine tradition, descended from the wisdom of the Desert Fathers.¹⁰⁶⁶ It is mentioned in the ascetic literature of both East and West,

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Conferences*, 136.

representing the idea of spiritual mendicancy, or reliance on the grace of God. The words from the Mass for the Dead indicate the orthodoxy of the unidentified saint and the obsequies that are being celebrated, demonstrating the continuity of ritual practice between past and present.

The in-depth analysis of the Edinburgh Tabernacle contained in Chapter Two demonstrated its unique conjunction of iconography and singular narrative content. Details of the Passion cycle in its wings are highly innovative, and the emphasis on the Resurrection is notable. References to existing images of the Passion open up the possibility of a Franciscan context, and the subject-matter of its central panel indicates a communal, educated, and most likely religious male audience. Certain iconographic and stylistic elements of the tabernacle indicate a likely Florentine *milieu* and a date c.1295. Structurally, the tabernacle finds parallels with winged panels made in Tuscany and Umbria between c.1265 and 1320. It is relatively large, directly comparable with objects likely to have been made for the altar tables of mendicant or monastic churches; though the function and placement of these large paintings with shutters still requires more focused research. The small scale of the image in its central panel should not preclude its use as an altarpiece. This detailed study of the object itself, including through recent technical examination, has revealed a painting of extraordinary quality, and problematised its present attribution to Grifo di Tancredi. The quality of its central panel, its complexity and coherence as a landscape, finds no direct parallel in contemporary painting and deserves to be recognised as the work of an as yet unidentified master artist, to whom no other paintings can currently be attributed. Further research into manuscript illuminations made in Tuscany c.1300 may shed more light on the artist I have referred to as the Master of the Edinburgh Tabernacle.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the iconographic similarities between the central panel of the Edinburgh Tabernacle, and images of a monastic funeral made in Byzantium. The spatial and temporal gap between the tabernacle's origins in Italy, and parallel compositions from the East, is a riddle that has still not been completely resolved. However the existence of an eremitic theme in Byzantine monastic art prior to the late thirteenth century seems highly likely, despite the lack of a surviving exemplar. It is indicated by the damaged thirteenth-century panel from Sinai

representing the *Funeral of Arsenius (?)*, an *ekphrasis* of a monastic funeral, which points to a pre-existing visual tradition, and manuscript illuminations showing scenes of eremitic life, dating from the eleventh century. It is in miniature painting that the closest parallels between Byzantine art, and the central panel of the tabernacle can be found. There is a close correspondence between isolated details of the tabernacle, and images contained in illuminated manuscripts of the *Heavenly Ladder*. These eleventh-century illustrations reflected renewed interest in the eremitic origins of the monastic life; an ascetic inclination that is repeated in the central panel of the tabernacle. It seems highly likely that the composition at the centre of the tabernacle was ultimately derived from manuscript illuminations, embellished and synthesised into a complex whole.

This chapter also showed how the eastern monastic tradition, unlike that of the West, retained an eremitic character close to that of early ascetic literature. Monasteries maintained a strict separation from the secular world, a reverence for the founders and *typika* particular to each congregation, and a flexibility of religious practice. This tradition was reflected in monastic treatises such as the *Heavenly Ladder*, and is echoed in the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The tabernacle, like the *Scala Celeste*, is non-hagiographical, and it invites the individual viewer to approach and ascend the 'mountain of the Lord'.¹⁰⁶⁷ The painting is visual evidence that Orthodox monastic culture was known and understood among a specific audience in the West. It mirrors the religious and cultural interpenetration of, for example, the Italo-Greek monasteries in southern Italy, and the presence of Armenian monks in Lucca and Perugia. Historically, the meeting of Orthodox and Roman religious cultures had been characterised by admiration, or by suspicion and 'otherness'. In the late thirteenth century, the differences between the two Churches had been highlighted by the failed attempt at union following the Council of Lyons. Yet the tabernacle goes against this prevailing trend, and appears to be deeply sympathetic to the monastic traditions of Byzantium.

The tabernacle's evident debt to Orthodox monastic literature and customs led me to suggest that it was in some way linked to Angelo Clareno, and the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine, who found refuge from persecution in the monasteries of

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Heavenly Ladder*, 291.

Armenia and Greece. Their approach to the religious life was similar to that of Orthodox foundations, which maintained independence in their *typika*, and prioritised the spiritual journey of the individual monk. The Poor Hermits sought to renew the legacy of St Francis, as 'poor men and brother hermits keeping the life and poverty we have promised *in the desert*'.¹⁰⁶⁸ Clarenó's translation of the *Heavenly Ladder* is, potentially, especially relevant to the making of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Its early date, and its relevance among Spiritual Franciscans, seems to be confirmed by a reference in the writings of Peter John Olivi from 1295-6. The Edinburgh Tabernacle is a visual manifesto for the eremitic life, closely aligned with the monastic traditions of Byzantium. Its content would surely have appealed to members of the Franciscan Order who sought the freedom to follow the *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis in accordance with his original ascetic ideals.

The significance of the eremitic tradition for St Francis, and for the Franciscan Order as a whole, was explored in the first part of Chapter Four. The *Regula pro eremitorio* indicates that life in hermitages formed an important aspect of the Order's early life, allied to concepts of Franciscan minority and fraternity. The uncompromising renunciation and ascetic inclinations of Francis himself were essentially eremitic in character, though he combined this tendency with itinerant evangelism and reliance on the alms of the faithful. The controversy that grew up in the Order after his death centred on its way of life; how to combine the active and contemplative aspects of Francis' vision, and accommodate the requirements of utmost poverty as the Order grew and settled in the towns and cities. For the Spirituals, who wanted to adhere to the letter of the *Rule* and *Testament* of Francis, the Order's urban growth was inextricably linked to the corruption of the original Franciscan ideal. It had been overseen by an ecclesiastical hierarchy that prioritised the institutional integrity of the Order over the preservation of its founding principles.

I suggested in this chapter that the Edinburgh Tabernacle should be seen in relation to debates about poverty, property and the nature of a religious life, which characterised the Spiritual controversy in the late thirteenth century. In addition, I proposed that it reflects the apocalyptic theology which pervaded Spiritual thought, because it represents the lives of hermits - the *virii spirituales* of Joachite prophecies

¹⁰⁶⁸ My emphasis. Angelo Clarenó, transl. McGinn and Reeves 1979, 165.

- as directly aligned with the sacrifice of Christ and the redemption of mankind. It looks both to the historical past, to the ancient traditions of monastic life instantiated in the desert, and to the future, to the resurrection of the dead at the time of Judgement. It echoes the apocalyptic tendency to view history as a cyclical process, in which the renewal of certain historical traditions functioned as harbingers of future transformation. In this image, an ancient eremitic tradition is shown, through minute visual and textual details, to be directly related to the religious life of the late-medieval viewer. It may be read as an implicit critique of the contemporary Franciscan Order, which, according to the Spirituals, had drifted away from its strictly renunciate origins and had been compromised by the interventions of a corrupt Church. Apocalyptic theology saw the path to salvation blocked by an *ecclesia carnalis*, necessitating a difficult process of transformation and reform that would arise from the 'spiritual men'. The juxtaposition of eremitic and Christological narratives found in the tabernacle presents the hermits of the desert as uniquely related to the story of salvation history.

The remainder of this final chapter explored the significance of the eremitic life among the other Mendicant Orders, and the wider populace, in thirteenth-century Italy. It challenged a recent theory linking the Edinburgh Tabernacle to the teachings of the Dominican Order, and demonstrated the central importance of the eremitic tradition among the Carmelite Friars, the Augustinian Hermits, and flagellant confraternities. The relevance of ascetic and contemplative forms of religious practice, closely associated with the legacy of the Desert Fathers, among a significant proportion of urban society, testifies to their appeal beyond the academic activities of the Dominicans. For the Carmelites, the eremitic tradition was closely associated with the life of the early Order and the *locus sanctus* of Mount Carmel. Its invocation in their late thirteenth-century Constitutions asserted the Order's identity, its longevity and authenticity, connecting their history to that of the Old Testament prophets: the prototypical Desert Fathers. Among the Augustinians, the eremitic tradition constituted a direct link to the life of the saint they claimed as founder. It was also an integral part of their pre-mendicant character, invoked when the Order was threatened at the Council of Lyons and again in the context of Observant reforms. The intensely physical form of penitential practice enacted by the flagellants emulated the physical *ascesis* of the Desert Fathers and sought to purify

the body in anticipation of future Judgement. It allowed them to separate themselves from the normal boundaries of secular life in spirit, while remaining within the context of the city.

Images made for each of these various groups illustrate the versatility of the eremitic ideal as a subject for art. The Camposanto *Lives of the Anchorites*, and the frescoes made for the flagellants beneath Santa Maria della Scala, were both addressed to the laity, and predominantly represent the exemplary value of the eremitic life. The hermits counter temptation with mental vigilance and penitential discipline, and prepare their bodies and souls for death and the life of the world to come. A viewer did not have to emulate the hermit's retreat to the desert in order to imitate his (or her) virtues. Images directed primarily at a specific religious audience, including the Carmelite predella panels, the Lecceto fresco, and, most likely, the 'smaller Lindsay panel', represent the value of the eremitic tradition for the identity of the Order in question. Each of these examples are closely associated with the assertion of an Order's historical character, or the invocation of its origins in the context of reform. The eremitic tradition constituted a potential source of religious inspiration for a late-medieval audience, but it also carried associations of religious irregularity or dissent that was evident, for example, in the canonisation Processes of venerated hermits. Seen in the context of a predominantly urban society, the figure of the hermit could represent an 'other', who existed outside of the secular world and stood in opposition to its principles. The values associated with the eremitic tradition did, at times, represent a direct challenge to those who remained closely associated with society, or else functioned as an antidote to the excesses of urban life. The latter is apparent in images made for lay patrons, such as the predella of the Santa Trinità altarpiece. In those made for a religious context, such as the fresco at Lecceto, the invocation of an eremitic past constituted an implicit criticism of the worldly character of the contemporary Order.

As the earliest known example of an eremitic landscape in Italian painting, the Edinburgh Tabernacle occupies an important place in our understanding of this theme in art. By placing it within its thirteenth-century context, and alongside other images of the desert made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this thesis has shed significant light on its potential meaning and purpose. The existence of the

smaller Lindsay panel, which places Francis alongside the paradigmatic image of monastic origins, indicates the significance of the eremitic tradition in the context of Franciscan reform. This painting, along with the *Way of Perfection* by Uccello, were made at a time when the Observant faction of the Order sought to renew the legacy of St Francis and reassert the significance of the eremitic tradition within its convents. The Edinburgh Tabernacle similarly emerges at a time when the nature of the religious life was the subject of controversy within the Franciscan Order. It may represent an implicit challenge to the urban character of the contemporary Order, representing the eremitic life as expressly blessed by Christ. This painting was made at a time when the eremitic ideal was highly pertinent, as we have seen. It represented the penitence and purification of the body, the continuity of an authoritative past, and a moral authority that potentially challenged existing convention. Whilst it seems most likely that the making of the tabernacle was linked to the Spirituals within the Franciscan Order, it should be seen as a reflection of this broader context, in which the eremitic tradition took on a renewed significance in society and in art.

The creation of the Edinburgh Tabernacle in the mid-1290s is important. It coincides with the papacy of the hermit-pope Celestine V, whose elevation to the throne of St Peter confirms the perceived moral and spiritual value of the eremitic ideal. That his papacy was so short-lived echoes the historical disconnect between the eremitic life and established ecclesiastical authority, and reiterates the problematic nature of a way of life that existed, at times, outside the institutional framework of religious Orders. Celestine was instrumental in the Spiritual controversy, and his creation of the Poor Hermits in 1294 effectively recognised the absence of true poverty and renunciation within the Franciscan Order, and opened the way to its eventual division. The connection forged by the persecuted Poor Hermits, between a mendicant Order of the West, and the monastic traditions of the East, is embodied in the hybridity of the Edinburgh Tabernacle. Angelo Clareno's translation of the *Heavenly Ladder* of John Climacus, close to 1294, seems unlikely to be coincidental given the relevance of this text, and its illuminations in eleventh-century manuscripts, for the subject-matter of the tabernacle's central panel. The outlook of the Spiritual Franciscans, particularly those close to Angelo Clareno and the Poor Hermits, provides a persuasive explanation for the unusual conjunction of

iconography found within the Edinburgh Tabernacle. The tabernacle represents a potential link between a group of Spiritual Franciscans, who were estranged from an Order with its own sophisticated iconography, and an extraordinary image of the desert which has its origins in Byzantium. It is a complex, multivalent image, which makes a powerful case for the eremitic life as the one most closely aligned with the salvation of mankind.