Imago Clipeata, the Liturgy, and Giovanni Pisano's Man of Sorrows Lectern: A Classical Reappropriation in the Gothic Era

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Imago Clipeata, the Liturgy, and Giovanni Pisano’s Man of Sorrows Lectern:
A Classical Reappropriation in the Gothic Era

Joslyn Elise Ableman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

*Imago Clipeata*, the Liturgy, and Giovanni Pisano’s Man of Sorrows Lectern:  
A Classical Reappropriation in the Gothic Era

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Master of Arts

The monumental sculpture, especially the pulpits, of the father and son duo, Nicola and Giovanni Pisano, have often been compared to ancient Roman and early Christian sarcophagi. Giovanni produced a pulpit with two accompanying lecterns for the Pisa Cathedral, which is just a few steps away from the Camposanto, a “holy field”, or cemetery, built around sacred soil from Golgotha which serves to house a huge collection of sarcophagi. Iconography, composition, relief style, and even the materiality of Giovanni’s Pisa pulpit is in part governed by, and connected to, these sarcophagi. This influence is especially highlighted by the Epistles lectern, which depicts a half-length Christ as the Man of Sorrows encircled about and raised aloft by two angels. This unusual depiction of the Man of Sorrows seems to be appropriating a long tradition of the *imago clipeata*, or visual apotheosis. Giovanni borrows this classical imagery and updates it to reflect contemporary Christianity. The presence of the classical *clipeata* on the lectern underlines the two natures of Christ, which is a main characteristic of the iconography of the Man of Sorrows. The lectern’s *clipeata* and the reference to sarcophagi establishes a connection to ritual, but in this case Christian ritual, namely the sermon and the Eucharist. The imagery embodies an affective focus on the love and humanity of Christ as the crux of salvation, a characteristic of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century preaching. The drapery and textile, which act as the frame of the *clipeata* on the lectern, allude to the *tramezzo*, or choir screen, and liturgical cloths found at the high altar—both are liturgical accessories that aid the viewer during the consecration of the Eucharist. Giovanni Pisano adopts this antique imagery and recontextualizes it in an early-fourteenth century Christian setting as it becomes a creative commentary on the liturgy, devotion, and significance of place at the cathedral of Pisa.

Keywords: Giovanni Pisano, Man of Sorrows, Pisa Cathedral, Camposanto, pulpit, lectern, epistles lectern, epistles, *clipeus, clipeata, imago clipeata*, apotheosis, liturgy, preaching, eucharist, sarcophagi, sarcophagus, textiles, tramezzo, angels, *genii*, materiality, stone, cornerstone
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Gratitude to Andrea Kristensen for her kindness and helpfulness during the entire process. Finally, I am so grateful to my family, especially my parents, Scott and Debbie Ableman. They have given me life, supported and encouraged my passions and education, and instilled a love and interest in travel, art, and history ever since I was young.
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Introduction

The mid to late period (1000-1400 CE) of the medieval era matured and evolved, especially in the Italian peninsula, as it experienced changes in religious, cultural, and political spheres. Mendicant orders, like the Franciscans and Dominicans, were founded and directly impacted society through their roles as teachers, missionaries, writers, and spiritual reformers.¹

The art from this region also underwent modifications as the altarpiece was introduced as a new format for painting, and styles inspired by Byzantium and the classical past prevailed. One of the great figures from this “Proto-Renaissance” age was Giovanni Pisano (c. 1250-1315). Like his father, Nicola Pisano (c. 1220-84), Giovanni relied upon artifacts from antiquity, and their monumental sculpture—particularly their pulpits—have often been compared to ancient and early Christian sarcophagi.²

Giovanni produced a pulpit and two lecterns for the Pisa cathedral, which is just a few steps away from the Camposanto, an ancient cemetery built around sacred soil from Golgotha, which housed a huge collection of Roman sarcophagi. Giovanni’s interest in the classical past was impacted by his father’s work, and both could have visited the Camposanto with ease in order to study its ancient artifacts, including sarcophagi. The construction of the Camposanto occurred during the late 1270s and early 1280s, so the Pisanos, especially Giovanni, would have seen the building process and the moving of classical objects from outside of the cathedral to the burial ground.³ This classical influence is especially seen in Giovanni’s Epistles lectern (fig.1),

which depicts Christ as the Man of Sorrows encircled about and raised aloft by two angels. This unusual depiction of the Man of Sorrows seems to reappropriate a long tradition of ancient apotheosis imagery that originally featured Roman emperors and eventually included elite folk: the former found on coins and large-scale architecture and the latter on sarcophagi. One of the most common conventions for representing apotheosis is the bust-length, shield motif known as the *imago clipeata*. At times, Giovanni’s use of sarcophagal imagery seems to borrow notions of liminality rather similar to ancient conceptions of the boundary between life and death. Giovanni, like his contemporaries, Giotto di Bondone and Dante Alighieri, did not merely copy classical imagery but carefully adopted parts and pieces and “twisted” them to be relevant for the modern era. Giovanni Pisano’s Epistles lectern appropriates imagery from classical and early Christian sarcophagi—specifically the *imago clipeata*—which he reinvents as a creative commentary on the liturgy, devotion, and significance of place at the cathedral of Pisa.

**Creation and Reconstruction of the Pisa Pulpit**

In 1302, just following his completion of the Pistoia pulpit, Giovanni was commissioned to make a pulpit for the cathedral of Pisa, a Tuscan Romanesque church and one of the largest buildings in Italy at the time. Giovanni’s Pisa pulpit replaced the former pulpit, sculpted by Guglielmo, (c. 1159-62) and surpassed it in a novel conception of octagonal shape, monumental reliefs on curved marble slabs, and narratives from the life of the Baptist (fig. 2). The Man of Sorrows on Giovanni’s lectern, however, is the particular focus of this study. Such an image had

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4 There is persistent confusion in the scholarship surrounding Giovanni Pisano’s two Man of Sorrows lecterns and where they originally belong; one belongs in Pisa and one belongs in Pistoia, but both were dismantled from their original pulpits. They are often referred to interchangeably. This analysis will focus on the less damaged lectern.
never been placed on a pulpit before Giovanni’s invention, and in fact, Peter Dent posits that this is the subject’s first appearance in Tuscan sculpture.\(^7\) In Giovanni’s time, the Man of Sorrows image circulated only among private devotees, but here the sculptor presented it in a very public setting.\(^8\) The Man of Sorrows relief, sculpted out of stark and unpainted Carrara marble, measures 44 cm. x 45 cm. x 36 cm., crowning the 15-foot pulpit.\(^9\) Giovanni’s Man of Sorrows was carved onto the lectern, one of the most visible parts of the pulpit, which directly faced the congregation. Lecterns functioned as book stands for the Gospels or Epistles, and in this case, the Man of Sorrows lectern held the Epistles. It was placed on top of the pulpit, from which the Gospels and Epistles were read, followed by an exegetical homily, in which the celebrant would expound on the texts’ theological themes.

The precise position of the Man of Sorrows lectern is debated among scholars because of a fire that occurred in the sixteenth century. The fire caused much damage to the cathedral but left the cupola and the area beneath it, including the pulpit, unharmed. After the fire, the cathedral chapter deemed Giovanni’s pulpit to be too antiquated and decided to dismantle the monument, store a majority of its parts, and use some of the remaining fragments in a newly commissioned pulpit made by the Florentine sculptor Chiarissimo Fancelli.\(^10\) During the nineteenth century many of the carvings were lost or separated from the Pisa cathedral complex.

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via acquisition. In 1926 Peleo Bacci, the Superintendent of Monuments in Pisa, conducted an exhaustive study to reconstruct the pulpit in the place where visitors to the cathedral can see it today. Unfortunately, at the time of Bacci’s Pisan project, the Man of Sorrows image was no longer in Pisa, but in Germany, and was not included in his final reconstruction.

Some scholars argue that the Man of Sorrows was originally the sole lectern atop the pulpit and that it was mistakenly replaced by an eagle lectern in Bacci’s restoration. The common image on medieval lecterns was an eagle, the evangelist symbol for John, since the apostle began his writings with “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Others argue that two lecterns were present in the fourteenth-century construction: the Man of Sorrows for the Epistles and the eagle for the Gospels. The most important agreement between the two theories is that the Man of Sorrows image was conspicuous to the congregation as they listened to and watched the preacher, who consistently interacted with the lectern by physically standing behind it, touching it, or turning the pages of the book that laid upon it.

Gert Kreytenberg, who disagrees with Bacci’s twentieth-century reconstruction and placement of the pulpit, offers a different construction proposal. He argues that Bacci’s final arrangement “presents relationships of [the pulpit’s] parts [that] do not make complete sense from either a theological or visual point of view.” Kreytenberg’s reconstruction argues that the most significant theological parts of the pulpit would have faced the lay congregation (fig. 2). The visual function of the pulpit was to manifest Christian doctrine, which goes hand in hand

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11 Moskowitz, Nicola & Giovanni Pisano: The Pulpits, 95.
12 Ibid.
13 John 1:1, KJV.
14 La Favia, 49.
15 Moskowitz, Nicola & Giovanni Pisano: The Pulpits, 98.
with its liturgical function to direct readings of the Epistles and the Gospels to the assembly. Kreytenberg’s reconstruction of the Pisa pulpit includes both the eagle and the Man of Sorrows lecterns. Their dominant positionings are emphasized through vertical lines of caryatid-like statues and columns that point the eye upwards towards the lecterns and preacher. The centrality and the prominence of the Epistles lectern underlines its emphatic position in relationship to the congregation as they listened to the homily given by the cleric. As they viewed the speaker and his interactions with the lectern, they continually had the figure of Christ as Man of Sorrows placed before them.

Following Kreytenberg’s Pisa pulpit reconstruction, the eagle lectern would have stood on the priest’s right to hold the Gospels, and the Man of Sorrows lectern would have been placed on the priest’s left for the Epistles. At first, it might seem more logical for the Man of Sorrows image to be placed on the Gospels lectern rather than on the Epistles lectern. After all, the Gospels tell the life of Christ, from birth to death to resurrection. It would be sensible to include an image of him on the lectern used for reading his story and message of salvation.

As a subject, however, the Man of Sorrows is not illustrative of a certain event from Christ’s life. It is a non-narrative, devotional image. Rather than referring to a distinct historical moment, it is loosely based on verses found in the book of Isaiah:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

16 There are some aspects of the iconography that reference scripture. For example, the two angels of Giovanni’s lectern could be a reference to: “...and as [Mary] wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.” John 20:11-12, KJV.
17 Isaiah 53:3-5, KJV.
Because of its devotional nature in lieu of a narrative, the Man of Sorrows iconography is dynamic and changeable according to the culture, style, or medium to which it is connected. Even so, the iconography does have certain consistent and distinct characteristics including a half-length figure of Christ, the head resting on one shoulder with closed eyes, and the downward crossing of hands.\textsuperscript{18} A striking new development in Giovanni’s version of the Man of Sorrows is the figure of Christ depicted in a tomb-like setting, with a burial shroud wrapped around him as he seemingly reclines on the stone.\textsuperscript{19} The Man of Sorrows is an exegetical image that interprets Old Testament scriptures to reveal Christ. In that sense, it is appropriately matched with the Epistles, which also serve as exegetical explanations—this time interpreting and commenting on the Gospels and the life of Christ to the early Christian saints. The exegetical nature of the image, thus, supports, reaffirms, and echoes the hermeneutic words of liturgical readings and the words of the scriptural interpretation in the form of a homily.

Giovanni’s Man of Sorrows presents a figural triad with Christ in the middle, with his head tilted onto his right shoulder and his arms crossed and pointed downwards. He is flanked by two angels who create a compelling, almost instantaneous energy to the composition; they look not towards Jesus, nor straight towards the viewer, but turn their heads nearly directly above their shoulders. Rather than being stagnant characters that bookend Christ, the angels generate energy through geometric diagonals created by their appendages. With an articulated precision, they point their legs downwards while also bringing together their arms as one pair meets above the head of Christ and the other pair meets at his side. They grasp onto fabric that seems both behind Christ and covering the lower half of his body like a blanket. The angels’ dynamic, corporeal diagonals create a frame around Christ, while also drawing attention to the fabric that

\textsuperscript{18} La Favia, 45.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 55.
surrounds his post-Crucifixion body. The slightly abstract, gathered fabric which subtly encircles him, as well as the smooth, unwrinkled drapery of the angels, is reminiscent of styles of ancient drapery seen in reliefs and sculpture in the round. The rendering of the angels in a three-quarter profile and presence of contrapposto are references to classical art. Both the fabric and the rendering of the angels further emphasize Giovanni’s influence from classical objects. Especially referential to antiquity, however, is the lectern’s allusion to the *imago clipeata*, an ancient Roman trope used to accentuate the memory of an individual.

**Imago Clipeata and Sarcophagi**

In its most basic form, the *imago clipeata* is a portrait of a god, ancestor, or emperor on a round shield, or *clipeus*. These images were anciently hung in temples, found on monumental sculpture, carried at family funerals, and used on the reliefs of both pagan and Christian sarcophagi.\(^{20}\) One example from pagan material culture is a Roman Imperial coin that depicts, on one side of the coin, Augustus in profile enframed by a slight nimbus. The other side depicts a *victoriae* holding a shield with the letters CL V, standing for “*clipeus virtutis,*” a shield of bravery awarded to Augustus in 27 BC (fig. 3).\(^{21}\) Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) devoted several pages of his writings to the *imago clipeata* as he connected the imagery to military virtue and highlighted its function to “[illustrate] family lineage in the Roman atrium.”\(^{22}\) Hans Peter L’Orange notes that in antiquity the *clipeus* had a diverse iconographic history: it originally held the image of a pagan deity, before being expanded to include apotheosized emperors and

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prominent leaders, and finally depicted apotheosized, deceased mortals of ordinary background.\textsuperscript{23} In fact, throughout Roman antiquity, the \textit{clipeus} was as widely used to depict elite citizens as it was to depict deity or the emperor.\textsuperscript{24} No matter whose portrait was depicted on the \textit{clipeus}, it was employed to elevate the status of the individual, especially when rendered on sarcophagi.\textsuperscript{25}

In early Christian history the iconography of the \textit{clipeus} was embraced by and found in both Byzantium and Western Europe. Unlike the Roman tradition, the military associations of the \textit{clipeus} faded away from the art created in the Byzantine Empire and was used instead in the realm of private citizens.\textsuperscript{26} Most often it was used as a symbol of divinity as it framed Christ, the Virgin, and various saints. Not only are there sculptural examples of the Byzantine \textit{clipeus}, but the imagery is also found in a variety of media, including painting, mosaic, and manuscript illumination.\textsuperscript{27} A Middle Byzantine illuminated psalter, for example, presents Christ Pantocrator enclosed by a clipeus as an iconic preface to the introductory text of the book below (fig. 4). In the Middle Ages, the \textit{clipeus} portrait merged with the Christian nimbus, which further underlined the imagery’s connection to apotheosis. The \textit{imago clipeata} was perpetuated by surviving objects from antiquity, like sarcophagi and coinage. One early extant Romanesque artifact that exemplifies the Christianization of the \textit{clipeus} is the edge of the altar table at Saint-Sernin, sculpted by Bernard Gilduin (fig. 5). This relief shows two winged angels clutching a wreathed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Hans Peter L’Orange, \textit{Studies in the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship}, (New Rochelle: Caratzas Brothers, 1982), 94.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Stine Birk, \textit{Depicting the Dead: Self-representation and Commemoration on Roman Sarcophagi With Portraits}, (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013), 47.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 386.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
clipeus, which encloses a bust portrait of Christ. Artists like Gilduin adopted antiquated iconography and updated it in a Christian “translation.”

The famed Camposanto cemetery at the Pisa cathedral complex at one point contained hundreds of ancient and contemporary sarcophagi belonging to medieval Pisan families. It is well established that Nicola Pisano used some of these classical “relics” as inspiration for his works, and it can be assumed that his son and successor, Giovanni, engaged with the same objects. Under the stewardship of his father, as well as during his Pisa pulpit commission, Giovanni would have been confronted with sarcophagi at the Camposanto that have imago clipeata imagery. A prime example that Giovanni could have easily known is the so-called “Camposanto Sarcophagus” (c. 275 CE) (fig. 6), hailing from a generation of sarcophagi at the end of the pagan, or pre-Constantinian, history of clipeus portraits.²⁸ It is contemporary to some of the first early Christian sarcophagi and carries iconography that was later borrowed for Christian contexts.

The Camposanto Sarcophagus presents the likeness of an unknown man for whom the sarcophagus was made. He has literally become a sculptural bust as a pedestal replaces his lower half, becoming the support for his upper body. With confidence, he holds what looks like a scroll in his left hand and draws particular attention to the object by resting two of his right fingers on top. He is flanked by a pair of winged genii who look away from him and towards the ends of the frieze, and even into the space beyond.²⁹ Together, they foreground the man’s upper body as they hold a cloth with deeply carved drapery folds behind him. These genii, which are the

²⁸ Birk, 384.
²⁹ Genii are similar to victoriae as they are both depicted on sarcophagi, though they are not interchangeable. Victoriae are used to immortalize the memory of the deceased for his or her posterity, whereas genii directly interact with the deceased as they assist in transporting his or her soul to heaven. See Gunnar Berefelt, A Study on the Winged Angel: The Origin of a Motif (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, !968), 59.
predecessors of Christian angels, clutch the fabric, which, although not technically a shield or tondo, is similar enough in shape to still read as a *clipeus*. The *genii*’s firm grasp on the fabric elides the imagery of the *clipeus* with ritual textiles, like a cloth of honor or antependium. The central scene of the man and two *genii* is juxtaposed with allegorical personifications on either ends of the frieze, along with two female figures holding cornucopia beneath the main scene. The *imago clipeata* is a tool used to denote a personage not seen by the other figures in a scene.\(^{30}\) The iconography thus establishes difference between the protagonist enframed by the *clipeus* and other figures included in the scene, like the mythological figures of Apollo and Athena bookending the scene, and even between the sentient viewers who behold the relief. The purpose of the *imago clipeata* and *genii*, then, was to elevate the departed’s memory, apotheosizing them into a realm of distinction.\(^{31}\)

Apotheosis is typically understood as the exaltation of an individual, like an emperor or mythological figure, to the status of a god. In ancient representations of emperors, apotheosis was signified with the head tilted backwards, an open mouth as if he was about to speak, and his eyes gazing heavenwards “reflecting the soul’s limitless emotion”\(^{32}\) (fig. 7). In a similar gesture, early Christian *orant* figures throw up their hands heavenwards as an expression of prayer with the divine. There is even a scriptural account of Christ looking up to the heavens when performing the miracle of the loaves and fishes.\(^{33}\) Apotheosis is synonymous with divinization, a term adopted in Eastern Christianity to characterize the spiritual reshaping of a Christian. This term was established as early as Irenaeus (c. 130-202), a Greek patristic Father who said, “He


\(^{31}\) Birk, 48.

\(^{32}\) Hans Peter L’Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture*, (New Rochelle: Caratzas Brothers, 1982), 16.

\(^{33}\) Matthew 14:19, KJV.
has united humanity to God by his own incarnation and, through communion with God, genuinely and lastingly bestowed immortality on us by his coming.”\textsuperscript{34} The Eastern Orthodox Church teaches three phases in this process of divinization, concluding with the final and most significant stage: \textit{theosis}, or the union of the human with the divine—the ultimate purpose of life. Related notions of transformation by divine grace are found in Western Christianity. This Western divinization is underscored in the words of an ancient prayer maintained in the liturgy at the Offertory of the mass: “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”\textsuperscript{35} The Incarnation and Christ’s own apotheosis allows the pious to be able to become like him and experience salvation.

\textit{Imagines clipeatae} present on sarcophagi signal an apotheosis of the deceased mortal being lifted to or transformed to a divine level. An apotheosis depicted in material culture, whether of an imperial, mythical, or religious nature, designates a heavenly condition.\textsuperscript{36} Christian sarcophagi that present a portrait of the deceased in a \textit{clipeus} imply that the transcendent afterlife is made possible through the works and sacrifice of Christ: “He became human to make humans partakers of the divine nature.”\textsuperscript{37} Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373) wrote that, “[Christ], indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God.”\textsuperscript{38} This notion shows up consistently in homilies of the patristic period and of the late medieval era, and is even part of the modern-day Catechism of the Church.\textsuperscript{39} The portrait of the deceased in a sepulchral \textit{imago clipeata} not only serves as a device of \textit{memoria}—remembering the person’s life on earth

\begin{footnotes}
\item[(36)] Belting, 90.
\item[(37)] Kessler, 137.
\end{footnotes}
and calling to mind their physical remains within—but it also acts as a reminder of their salvific destiny when they are eventually “elevated to the stars.” The sarcophagus itself embodies this liminality between life and death as a stone barrier between the live viewer and the deceased within. Standing as a threshold, it also incorporates various scenes and iconography that call attention to the salvation made possible through the risen Christ.

**Giovanni Pisano’s Classical Reappropriation**

There are rich references to classical sarcophagi imagery, and the *imago clipeata* in particular, on Giovanni Pisano’s Pisa pulpit. However, much more scholarly ink has been spilled over the antique references in his father, Nicola’s pulpits, with their candid quotations from sarcophagi and vases originally placed outside the Pisa cathedral but later moved to the Camposanto. Giorgio Vasari wrote that Nicola engaged with “the marble remains brought home by the Pisan fleet [like] some ancient sarcophagi now in the Campo Santo of that city, including a very fine one on which was an admirable representation of the chase of Meleager, hunting the Calydonian boar.” These extant works served as prototypes for Nicola’s motifs, style, relief technique, and even choices of material. Giovanni is first recorded as an assistant to Nicola in a contract for the Siena pulpit in 1265. Giovanni’s mature style has long been associated with the Gothic tradition, charged, as it is with emotional and psychological tension, but he still followed much of his father’s classicizing and naturalistic *modi operandi*. Anita Moskowitz points out that “for Nicola Pisano and his contemporaries the adaptation of antique models and techniques served multiple ends,” including imparting templates for naturalism, “the incorporation of a

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41 Taylor, 308.
classicizing style [which] may have satisfied and reinforced Pisa’s historical consciousness,” and
his emulation of “biographical reliefs pertaining to the deceased within” classical sarcophagi.43
The most important of these listed functions of adaptation is the last, as Giovanni applied this
all’antica sarcophagal quality to his pulpits and their accessories.

This final factor—the reappropriation of the all’antica sarcophagus style to other
objects—transforms the Pisano pulpits into “sepulchral symbols,” metamorphosing their
liturgical significance into sacramental reminders of baptism, death, and resurrection.44 In this
vein, Giovanni’s Pisa pulpit acts as a locus of ritual. Its main Christological cycle reliefs and
Epistles lectern have visual crossovers with ancient sarcophagi which Giovanni must have drawn
from the Camposanto or elsewhere. These overlappings include the pulpit’s pure brazen
materiality as stone, with little to no paint or gilding; its crowded figures that still maintain the
overall narrative sequence; and figures with an “architectonic” presence whose functions are to
break up the different panels and scenes. The shape and main program of the pulpit resemble a
sarcophagus; in fact, the pulpit itself acts like a physical sepulcher for Christ, a continuation of
his tomb, as depicted on the Epistles lectern.

Like ancient sarcophagi that reference the deceased within, the Pisa pulpit references the
ritual of the liturgy, especially preaching and the Eucharist, which always points back to Christ
and the salvation he brought through his sacrifice of death. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul
said, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up
from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”45
Though typical sarcophagi are used to shelter the dead, the sepulchral function of the pulpit

43 Moskowitz, Nicola & Giovanni Pisano: The Pulpits, 336.
44 Ibid., 58.
45 Romans 6:4, KJV.
serves as a testament that Christ died, was laid in the tomb, but was eventually raised up and
resurrected. The pulpit itself, carries a message of hope that the pious can follow in order to
experience their own Christ-like apotheosis.

This exact scriptural passage from the Epistles would have been read from Giovanni’s
Man of Sorrows lectern. Nirit Ben-Areyeh Debby points out that, “the role of the preacher
matches that of the artist; both the ars of preaching and the visual ars try to organize abstract
ideals and present them in the clearest possible manner. In a sense, both pulpit and sermon are
rhetorical modes working together to convey certain religious and cultural messages.”46 These
tomb-themed passages of scripture would have carried extra significance when read from a place
that acted as a sepulchral symbol, but they would have made an even more substantial impact
when coupled with the imago clipeata found on the Epistles lectern. The relief makes a clear
allusion to sarcophagi, like the Camposanto Sarcophagus. Moskowitz has characterized this
inspiration from the Camposanto as follows: “The Pisa Cathedral pulpit [and its parts] appear to
be a recapitulation, a synthesis and an amplification not only of the earlier pulpets but of the
major innovations and solutions of almost all the previous monuments of Giovanni and his
father.”47 Giovanni emulates his father and other predecessors by looking to ancient monuments
and sarcophagi as inspiration, but he distinguishes himself in that he specifically borrows the
composition of the imago clipeata. Christ is depicted like a sculptural bust, though lacking a
pedestal, with angels on either side holding onto a cloth while looking away from his dead body.
Giovanni does not restrict the bust of Christ by enclosing him within the frame of a clipeus, but
instead, like the Camposanto Sarcophagus, he uses the bodies of the angels and the textile to

47 Moskowitz, Nicola & Giovanni Pisano: The Pulpits, 99.
create a quasi-*clipeus*, which allows the figure of Christ to protrude from the stone without any restriction that a frame might create. Giovanni borrows the high relief technique from Roman precedents, employing it so dramatically that the figures almost seem to be carved in the round. The edges of the cloth surrounding Christ are in low relief, while he is rendered in high relief. This fluctuation of relief from flatness to three dimensionality gives the sense of a dynamic—even Eucharistic “Real Presence.”

The reappropriation of the sarcophagal *imago clipeata* onto the Epistles relief has several implications that emphasize Christ’s dual nature and the lectern’s function. On the ceiling of the Sancta Sanctorum at the Lateran Palace in Rome, there is a mosaic of four angels carrying an *imago clipeata* of Christ, in his imperial and divine, rather than human, aspect (fig. 8). At the end of the thirteenth century, the image of the Lateran Christ, the Sancta Sanctorum’s legendary *acheiropoieta*, or miraculously created icon, would have been displayed directly under this mosaic. In this position, the mosaic would certainly have referenced Christ’s Ascension to heaven and, thus, “the legend that Christ was living in heaven but had left the icon behind to console those on earth.”

Kessler points out that images of an imperial Christ in an *imago clipeata*, like the ones in the Sancta Sanctorum and the Zeno Chapel at Santa Prassede in Rome (fig. 9), distance Him from the viewer, clearly overshadowing his mortal nature with his godliness. In these terms, the aforementioned examples are more reminiscent of Christ Pantocrator and ancient *clipeus* portraits of emperors. These mosaic depictions of Christ represent the invisible, apotheosized God, who, because of his divinity, appears inaccessible and otherworldly.

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48 Kessler, 137.
49 Ibid., 93.
Similar to these imperial portraits of Christ, the Christ on Giovanni’s Epistles lectern utilizes *clipeus* imagery and shows the bust of Christ being held up by angels. On the other hand, the *imago clipeata* of Christ on the lectern is depicted in a tender, emotive, and distinctly human manner. His head is slumped to the side, his eyes are closed; this is a Christ whose mortal nature abates his divinity. In this vein, this version of Christ is similar to portraits on sarcophagi, whose “perpetuation of presence by means of veristic features echoes the ancestral tradition of wax *imagines,*” or funerary masks. Sarcophagi portraits, especially ones framed within a *clipeus,* were meant to stand as a reminder of the memory of the person and actual body housed within. Verity Platt points out that “the portrait acts as an externalization of the sarcophagus’s internal content, binding together its inner and outer functions.” This double representation is referred to as a ‘*mise-en-abyme,*’ or, “a representation on the exterior of the person that is in the interior,” and in this case is inside the sarcophagus. The image on the outside points the viewer to an invisible body that no longer endures. In a similar manner, the lectern relief creates a never-ending loop between the image of Christ as the human Man of Sorrows and Christ who has left the tomb to reign in heaven. The *imago clipeata* not only acts as a frame to accentuate the Man of Sorrows in a deeply devotional way, but it also acts as an externalization of Christ as the God who overcomes death. This externalization of an invisible power is especially highlighted by the liturgical cloths on and behind Christ, which will be discussed in more detail later. His human body at first appears weak in the image, but upon closer inspection the way Christ firmly grasps the shroud—even in death—speaks to the power and divinity that will animate his resurrected body.

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 224.
Christ’s two natures are both present in the lectern. Most obviously, his human nature and physical body succumbing to death are emphasized, but so, too, is his godly nature present, though through less apparent ways. The ‘tondo of cloth’ surrounding Christ like a shield not only draws from classical apotheosis heritage, but also references a biblical tradition of Christ as a shield. There are dozens of passages interspersed throughout the scriptures that establish this idea: “After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward”; “O Israel, trust thou in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.”53 In the Bible and material culture, the body of Christ shields the faithful from death and the devil. In the fresco at San Pietro al Monte at Civate (late eleventh century) (fig. 10), Christ appears enclosed in a shield-like shape as he, along with other saints and angels, battles the demons described in Revelation 12. Stine Birk points out that, “The portrait enclosed by a clipeus served to reinforce the heroic image of the person.”54 The clipeus on the lectern reinforces the salvific and heroic powers of Christ.

Another way in which Christ’s divinity manifests itself on the lectern is through the presence of the flanking angels. In pagan and even some Christian sarcophagi, these angels are anticipated by Roman genii, victoriae, and psychai, who hold the clipeus.55 These winged figures represent the Roman notion of victory over death.56 At the pivotal ecumenical assembly of the Council of Nicaea in 325 the belief in angels was included in the dogma of the Church. Augustine considered angels as “the guardians of mankind and the executors of the divine

53 Genesis 15:1; Psalm 115:9, KJV.
54 Birk, 47.
56 Berefelt, 7.
will.”

John Chrysostym (d. 407) and other theologians asked Christians to imagine angels as they watched Christian ritual in order for holy and hidden things to be manifested. In general, angels were regarded as having the capacity to act as a link between man and God, and it was the presence of wings which allowed this connection to occur. Wings were viewed as signs of spirituality by ancient figures like Plato who wrote, “The natural property of a wing is to raise that which is heavy and carry it aloft to the region where the gods dwell; and more than any other bodily part it shares in the divine nature.”

The genii present on the Camposanto Sarcophagus lift the deceased towards the gods. In a similar manner, the angels that bookend Christ on the lectern raise him towards the heavens, while at the same time appear to apostrophize the duality of Christ’s natures: they are the link between earth and heaven, the mortal and divine, as they raise up the being who literally embodies them both. Externally, Christ appears frail and weak in his human nature, but the clipeus points to Christ’s intrinsic, godly role as a shield. The angels help to highlight his divine ability to be victoriously reborn in resurrection.

Like imagery of the imago clipeata on sarcophagi, the composition of the lectern frames the veristic similitudes of Christ’s mortal and divine natures. Where the lectern departs somewhat from sarcophagi is through its functions, though it should be noted that there remain some similarities between the two, especially in their common connection to ritual and sepulchral symbols. The liturgies of both the Word and the Eucharist are alluded to through the iconography of Giovanni’s Man of Sorrows. Indeed, the imagery of the lectern straddles and adapts with ease to various facets of the liturgy because of the nature of the Man of Sorrows subject as a non-narrative devotional image. As mentioned earlier, the Man of Sorrows does not

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57 Berefelt, 14.
depict a distinct or historical moment of Christ’s life but is rather loosely based on verses from Isaiah. Because the iconography is strictly devotional, rather than part of a narrative, it has the liberty of adapting to diverse contexts, media, and devotional purposes with fluid modifications. It has been established that the Man of Sorrows lectern is a recapitulation and reappropriation of classical imagery. Giovanni adopts the *imago clipeata* trope from antiquity but in a way that supports its particular place and presence on the Pisa pulpit. Just as ancient sarcophagi were part of a ritualistic program, so, too, is the lectern connected to Christian ritual, namely the lessons and sermon, as well as the Eucharist.60

**The Lectern’s Place in Liturgy and Ritual**

Both the *imago clipeata* from antiquity and Giovanni’s repurposed, early fourteenth-century *clipeus* were connected to ritual and ceremony. Romans formed their everyday spaces around ritual; this tradition predated them as ancient Jews sought to do the same thing with their temples, a practice that was later carried over into Christianity and applied to the construction of their basilicas and cathedrals. The Roman home, for example, had a funerary function, with rituals of death and grieving transpiring in the atrium.61 After a period of time called the *collocatio*, when the body would lay in the home, there would be a progression from the domestic sphere to the public sphere, and the deceased would be relocated to the tomb, where more intimate ritual feasts and farewells would occur.62 Following the funeral, there were a number of opportunities to visit the grave, and most of these occasions involved a ritual meal. There are several surviving tomb sites around Rome that were anciently furnished with an oven

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60 Taylor, 327, 332.  
62 Platt, 216.
because of the regular occurrence of feasting on site. Although many of these funerary rituals remain mysterious, we understand that the practices included religious rites dedicated to the deceased and their afterlife, as well as social customs devoted to maintaining their memory. Both pagan and Christian sarcophagi and their associated ceremonies revolved around remembrance.

Although Giovanni was most likely not well-versed in pagan or early Christian death rituals, he would have been cognizant of the new depth that antique sepulchral imagery brought to his monumental sculptures in Christian ceremonial context. Dent argues for precisely this kind of careful consciousness on Giovanni’s part by asserting that he “was unusually sensitive to the relationship of his work to both beholder and context.” Giovanni connected the pulpit and lecterns to the surrounding ritual, namely the two principal components of the mass: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. Thus, rather than depicting funerary rites and memorials of the deceased in the Roman fashion, the reliefs on Giovanni’s Pisa pulpit reflect the message of Christian salvation through the preaching of the scriptures and the transubstantiated body and blood of Jesus.

The pulpit stages an interplay between word and image as the reader proclaims the Epistles from the Pisa lectern and the homilist preaches on the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice for humankind. An affective focus on the love and humanity of Christ as the crux of salvation is characteristic of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century preaching, trumping the eleventh-century goal

64 Michael Koortbojian, Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 13.
of “public instruction on customs and faith.” This coincided with a blossoming trend in the
general teaching of the Church concerning the fragile mortality of Christ. Beginning in the
eleventh century, figures like Anselm of Canterbury humanized Christ, deemphasizing the
foreboding and judge-like persona of the Pantokrator. This focus on redemption through the
flesh and blood aspect of Christ’s hypostatic union continued to be adopted and studied by
thirteenth-century figures, like Thomas Aquinas. Alongside these theological developments
were experiences of mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi, and the founding of
mendicant orders like the Dominican and Franciscans, all of which focused on the emotional
redemption and salvation made possible through Christ. The formation of these experiences and
orders influenced and permeated the realm of preaching and the realm of art, humanizing Christ
through both word and image.

The Man of Sorrows image perfectly embodies this growing trend as it depicts a Savior
of the utmost humility, alluding to his tragic death, as well as foreshadowing his resurrection and
ultimate redemption of mankind. Giovanni’s adaption of the antique clipeus was neither
anachronistic or arcane inaccessible, but instead supported and embodied contemporary
movements and messages of salvation. Through time the imago clipeata evolved into an emblem
of the triumph of Christianity. The angels on the lectern connect God to man, but as Christian
substitutes for the classical genii, they also point to the great victory of Christianity over
paganism, death, and sin. Instead of a deceased individual, Giovanni’s early-fourteenth-century
imago clipeata depicts Christ like an apotropaic symbol, a shield, which “protect[s] the soul[s] of

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67 La Favia, 7.
68 Berefelt, 31-32.
the deceased” and provides hope for triumph over death, or salvation. On the Camposanto Sarcophagus, the *clipeus* references the deceased’s anticipation of a possible triumph over death, while the lectern depicting Christ as hero assures that hope and protects the soul from everlasting death and destruction.

The lectern’s practical function of holding a book of scripture is important to consider. As discussed earlier, the Man of Sorrows would have supported the Epistles, the didactic letters from the early apostles to Christian converts. They not only show that the origins of the Christian sermon can be traced back to Peter and Paul, but they also function as a witness of Christ, proving to believers and non-believers alike that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. In this way, the message of the Epistles fittingly coincides with the purpose and authority of fourteenth-century homilies, which mimicked the apostolic duty to “feed my sheep” and testify of salvation through the Redeemer. As the preacher read the apostolic words—“projecting” them, as it were, onto the minds of the congregation—so, also, were the stone angels, the divine messengers on the lectern, literally presenting and “projecting” the image of Christ. It is as if the liturgical word has enlivened the stone depiction of the Man of Sorrows, which becomes suggestive of life and animation under the straining arms of the angels. Giovanni’s Man of Sorrows becomes the *lapis angularis*, or “cornerstone” of the lectern. The Man of Sorrows becomes “the head of the corner...the stone which the builders rejected” whereby salvation comes, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men,

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69 Kiilerich, 139.
70 Ibid.
72 John 21:16-17, KJV.
73 St. Germanus emphasizes that “The ambo, [or pulpit] manifests the shape of the stone at the Holy Sepulchre [on which the angel sat after he rolled it away from the doors of the tomb,] proclaiming the resurrection of the Lord to the myrrhbearing women. This is according to the words of the prophet, [‘On a bare hill raise a signal’ (Is. 13:2)]. For the ambo is a mountain situated in a flat and level place. Germanus, *On the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 63.
whereby [they might] be saved.”74 Literally made out of stone, the Man of Sorrows embodies “the source of all life, especially of that which salvation gives.”75 The image, infused with movement and life reiterates the very purpose of preaching: ‘giving life’ to the narratives and teachings of Jesus. The Man of Sorrows acts as an exegesis of the word and the Word. In other words, the lectern’s figural triad and clipeus elucidate and support the word of the preacher, who speaks of the Word, or Christ. As the homilist gives life and color to the Word and his salvation through preaching, so, too, do the angels suggest movement and life to the image of Christ, “triumph[ant] over death.”76

Giovanni Pisano encountered artifacts from antiquity and studied their media, details of craftsmanship, and iconographies. As a sculptor, the medium of sarcophagi would have been particularly inspiring in planning his pulpit, however, there was already a strong tradition of pulpit and lectern making in stone, especially revitalized during the Romanesque period, which again experienced a revival of monumental sculpture.77 Stone was primarily reserved for the most consequential public monuments, whether ecclesiastic or secular. Giovanni was close to this material throughout the whole process. A document from 1284, for example, attests to his presence as a worker in a Pisan marble yard.78 Later, while working on the Pisa pulpit, he would journey north to the Carrara marble quarries to personally pick the best materials for his projects. Not only did stone have a historical and artistic significance to Giovanni, it likely held a religious and liturgical meaning as well, connected directly to the Epistles.

74 Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:12, KJV.
76 Kiilerich, 128.
Throughout the scriptures, and especially in the Epistles, stone and rock refer predominately to Christ, the “chief cornerstone.” On one occasion, while Jesus was “preach[ing] the gospel” in the temple, some chief priests and scribes came to ask him from where he received his authority.79 He replied with a number of questions and a parable, concluding his response with, “What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”80 As a stone, Christ becomes either a stumbling block that falls upon those who fail to recognize him or the cornerstone, the building block for believing Christians. The Man of Sorrows on the lectern, sculpted into the rock, reiterates Christ’s role as a cornerstone: the first stone that is placed in a structure and to which all other stones are set in reference. The surrounding images—themselves “stones” carved in relief—include the Annunciation and Presentation in the temple. Placed on the curved panels of the pulpit below, they are all forerunners and types for what Christ achieves through the semblance of the Man of Sorrows, taking on the mortal griefs and wounds of the world in order to heal the stripes and iniquities of humanity. It is Christ as Redeemer who “sets the first stone” for mankind’s sake.

This juxtaposition of Christ as stumbling block to some and building block to others is mentioned in the Gospels and is then further embedded throughout the Epistles: “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.”81 Paul here reiterates the relationship of Jesus with believers versus his relationship with nonbelievers, specifically the Jews who fail to

79 Luke 20:1, KJV.
80 Luke 20:17-18, KJV.
81 1 Corinthians 1:22-23, KJV.
recognize him. Interestingly, Paul compares this spiritual blindness to a veil placed over their minds and their hearts: “But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.”82 The Man of Sorrows relief mirrors this notion of veiling. The angels take the cloth that was once covering all of the body of Christ and pull it back to reveal the true Messiah. It is as if the unveiling has just occurred due to the way the angels’ hands still cling to the material and turn their heads toward the viewer, inviting all to see and experience the intimate moment of the freshly unveiled body of Christ. The words of the Epistles, relayed through the preacher, have acted as the catalyst to the event depicted on the lectern.

Christ as a chief cornerstone is an important theme in William Durandus’ (c. 1230-96) Rationale divinorum officiorum, in which he discusses the symbolism of the church, including its structure, decorations, and liturgical practices. He establishes that the church is built upon “the chief cornerstone [who] is Christ,” which is physically represented by a rock that the celebrant sprinkles with holy water and engraves with a cross before construction begins.83 The remaining stones building the church consist of apostles and prophets. These “stones” multiply, “when masters in the Church teach and confirm and strengthen those who are put under them.”84 Durandus suggests that even after the construction of the church is accomplished, stones are progressively added through preaching and conversion. The Man of Sorrows lectern acts as a physical manifestation of the Pisa cathedral and the institutional Church’s cornerstone. Those who viewed the carving and listened to the liturgy of the word would have been reminded that

82 2 Corinthians 3:14-15, KJV.
84 Ibid, 22.
they, too, can add to construction of the church through their diligence, obedience, and faithfulness, being “[built] together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

The apostle Paul declared that the Epistles, read from the Man of Sorrows lectern, are, “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” The medium of the lectern is stone, but the event taking place—the corporeal, lively unveiling of Christ’s body—takes the “table of stone” and turns it into a fleshy testament of Christ. The material of the lectern comes to the forefront of the scenario that Paul is explaining: stone becoming flesh. This metamorphosis is underscored by the imago clipeata, which already points to an effervescent apotheosis, in which change occurs. The words of the preacher, teaching and testifying of Christ, activate the reliefs on the curved pulpit below, many of which foreground the metamorphosis of Incarnation, as the Word becomes flesh in the Annunciation to Mary, the Nativity, and the Presentation in the Temple. And for the very first time on a pulpit, scenes from the Passion are represented in Giovanni’s construction, including the Kiss of Judas, the Mocking of Christ, and the Flagellation. The Christ in the Flagellation scene (fig. 11) looks strikingly similar to the Man of Sorrows on the lectern, especially in the angle of his tilted head and the two figures flanking him. The Flagellation leads the viewer’s eyes towards the adjacent panel depicting the Crucifixion where, again, Christ looks extremely similar to the Man of Sorrows, with the bent head and emaciated torso (fig. 12). These events encapsulate Christ’s humility, death, and resurrection. Combined with the words of the Epistles, they activate the unveiling of the Man of Sorrows on the lectern, a dramatic moment of stone becoming flesh, the mundane becoming sacred, right before the eyes of the congregation. The

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85 Ephesians 2:22, KJV.
86 2 Corinthians 3:3, KJV.
lectern, though a concrete object, reflects the “rise of devotionalism” during the late Middle Ages, in which liturgical materials were used to elevate the viewer’s communication with deity, rather than primarily fulfilling the demands of the clergy.88

This spiritual transposition of the Pisa Cathedral’s lectern from one medium to another is reminiscent of the transubstantiation of the body of Christ that takes place during the celebration of the Eucharist. Almost a century before Giovanni’s completion of the Pisa pulpit was the pivotal meeting of the Fourth Lateran Council (c. 1215), wherein the dogma of transubstantiation was established: “Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed (transsubstantiatio) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us.”89 This coincided with the late medieval concentration on the humanity of Christ through contemplation, imitation, and liturgical practices. Following the readings of the sacred texts and the homily the Eucharist was celebrated at the high altar.

Similar to sarcophagi, the celebration of the Eucharist and the preaching of the word were locales for liminality. Early Christian sarcophagi were loci to access the resurrected Christ, whose depiction on sarcophagi “specifically cite[d] his body as the sacrifice and g[ave] way to his subsequent victory in ways that recall[ed] the holy Eucharist altar located formally in churches and chapels.”90 As a rite of passage, notions of death in Christian antiquity followed a tripartite structure: 1) “preliminal rite,” or separation from the world, 2) “liminal” or “threshold

90 Taylor, 320.
rite,” which transitions to 3) “postliminal rite,” or reintegration into new status. The sarcophagus was connected to the middle stage, the liminal rite, because it housed the dead body, while the soul was elsewhere. Catherine Taylor underscores this idea of the sarcophagus acting as a transitional space: “Sarcophagi provided a site-specific liminal space where early Christians could also envision themselves after death, joining again with the faithful and Christ in triumph over death.” Death was continually affixed to movement across a limen; in antiquity families would move the deceased from the private sphere to the public one and then to the dead’s final resting place, and medieval burial practices would often mark “the stages in the passage through purgatory, by means of physical movement across boundaries.”

The liturgy is marked by similarly liminal movement as the preacher progresses from pulpit to the tramezzo and finally to the apse as the mass transitioned from the celebration of the Word to the celebration of the Eucharist. At the Pisa cathedral, archaeological evidence points to a tramezzo, or choir screen. Giovanni’s pulpit would have been attached to this choir screen via a small bridge. This transition between pulpit and choir screen would have been organic, as these different parts were “designed to mesh with the surrounding architecture and merge those [liturgical] functions.” Giovanni understood that “during the liturgy, the pulpit [and its parts were] explicitly tied to the other cardinal point in the church, the altar as celebration of the Word moved to celebration of the Eucharist.” The tramezzo functioned as a boundary separating two worlds but “at the same time [acted] as the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate:

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92 Taylor, 308.
where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.” It, like a sarcophagus, formed a threshold, or limen, transitioning between two areas, and in the case of the tramezzo it separates the laity from the clergy. The tramezzo is often considered a barrier, and for this reason many choir screens were dismantled during the Tridentine Reform to allow the laity to be closer to the altar. However, the tramezzo is as much a boundary marker and concealment of the “holy of holies” of the apse as it is a frame that highlights the mysteries of the area of the altar. Augustine highlights this mystification through concealment when he wrote, “Although the sacred mysteries (sacramenta) of the faithful are not displayed to them, this is not because [the faithful] are unable to bear them; rather, this is done so that [these mysteries] will be all the more ardently desired by them to the extent that they are honorably concealed from their view.”

The Pisa cathedral’s tramezzo, although unknown in what it would have looked like, probably had doors or windows that allowed and even encouraged lay people to look through the partition, their eyes plunging through its many openings. The tramezzo channeled the gazes of the laity towards the Host and chalice of the Eucharist at the point of consecration. The choir screen pointed the congregation’s contemplation towards the altar, “a major focus of textile adornment” in the medieval cathedral as it was encircled and blanketed with liturgical fabrics. Like other late medieval churches, the Pisa cathedral probably had a curtain surrounding the altar, the sides of which would be pulled apart at the moment of consecration, coupled with the priest raising the Host into the air, mimicking the elevation of Christ’s body on the cross. It is equally likely that Pisa would have had something like a purple cloth hung behind

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99 Jung, 72.
the high altar so that the laity could behold the elevated Host with more ease from the nave.\textsuperscript{101} These hanging textiles were later replaced by ornate wood or metal altarpieces. Another cloth fixture for the altar is an antependium, or veil, which was hung on the front of the altar. Similar hangings are carved on third-century pagan and Christian sarcophagi, located behind the busts of the deceased, as seen on the Camposanto Sarcophagus.\textsuperscript{102} Later, in the fourth century, these hanging were used in Rome when “the tombs of martyrs were removed from catacombs to basilicas.”\textsuperscript{103} The use of the antependium stems from the tradition of putting altars over the tombs of saints to protect them. Antepedia in the thirteenth century were composed of fabrics that matched other altar vestments and furnishings, like the altar curtain.\textsuperscript{104}

The textiles involved in the celebration of the Eucharist at the high altar served as a cloth of honor, which Rebecca Martin, in her study of medieval fabric defines as, “a curtain of precious fabric suspended behind a saint as a sign of veneration,” a motif that “reflect[ed] the way luxurious fabrics were used in courtly settings.”\textsuperscript{105} Not only were textiles viewed as precious via secular connections, but also via their association with the divine in apocryphal and biblical accounts, including the Veronica \textit{sudarium}, the veil of the Temple woven by the Virgin Mary, and the miracle-performing clothing of saints. Donna Cottrell points out that “the cumulative result of these religious associations was that the sumptuous fabrics came to possess an innate aspect of sacredness about them. Therefore, the awe-inspiring textiles provided a direct link to the heavenly domain.”\textsuperscript{106} The veiling provided by both \textit{tramezzo} and liturgical textiles

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Martin, 73. Chartres cathedral had just this kind of arrangement.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Murray, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 25.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Martin, 33.
\end{itemize}
created a mystification through concealment as they separated sacred space, while also framing the sacred for the laity, encouraging them to gaze at the miracle transpiring at the altar.

The paradoxical function that the liturgical cloths and tramezzo play, as both revealers and concealers, highlights the mystery of transubstantiation. The consecration of the Host emphasizes the duality of Christ, as there are two kinds of imagery transpiring: “the moment of ascent into the heavenly realm [and] the moment of descent into the earthly world,” which intersect at the moment of elevation.\(^{107}\) No wonder this dramatic, all-encompassing moment has added drama through the opening of curtains to reveal the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. This crucial high point of the mass that intermingles the imagery of Christ’s descent and his apotheosis is echoed in Giovanni’s Man of Sorrows lectern and imago clipeata iconography. The clipeus, acting as a mise-en-abyme, binds together the inner and outer functions of Christ as the Man of Sorrows. The exterior—the visible—is Giovanni’s fragile, stooped Christ who, in his human nature, was “wounded for our transgressions.”\(^{108}\) The exterior represents something as physical as a body in a tomb or the corporeal accidentals of bread and wine in the Eucharist. The interior—the invisible—refers to the divine nature of Christ. That inner reality elevates the bloody sacrifice of his mortal body to a salvific sacrament. The angels seem to push Christ forward so that his person emerges out of the scores of stone analogies in the scriptures and becomes the living, foundational rock and corner stone with a real presence, that parallels his “Real Presence” in the Eucharist.

Likewise, friezes of sarcophagi act as boundaries between the visitor and the deceased’s remains within, a border between life and death. The deeply carved fabric behind the deceased’s head on the Camposanto Sarcophagus, like the linen that the angels hold on the lectern, acts as a

\(^{107}\) Florensky, 44.

\(^{108}\) Isaiah 53:5, KJV.
frame for viewers to behold the deceased. The *clipeus* cloth alludes to the afterlife and also enlivens the character whose portrait is framed. On the lectern the angels appear to be at the sepulcher in which Jesus was laid, theatrically pulling off the fine linen to reveal his body, as if mimicking the lifting of the liturgical curtain that reveals the Host at the apex of the celebration. This quasi-*clipeus* cloth, like the ones depicted on sarcophagi, gives energetic life to the scene, as if anticipating Christ’s resurrection. The stone on which his body lies doubles as both the altar and the medium for the lectern. This is appropriate, for, in a sense, Christ is not only elevated over the altar in the Host and chalice but also over the pulpit as the Word is made manifest through the proclamation of the Epistles.

The cloth that lies over the body of Christ and which he grasps is reminiscent of the antependium. This reference to a liturgical linen further engrains the Man of Sorrows with Eucharistic connotations as he literally embodies the sacrament: his lower half is the altar covered with the antependium, while his upper half is being revealed via the opening of curtains as the elevated Host. The linen that the angels pull away from the body of Christ functions like the *tramezzo* and liturgical cloths in that it allows the laity to behold Christ, plunging their gazes through his wounds, like the “portals” and “windows” of the stone choir screen. Looking upon Giovanni’s lectern, then, becomes an act of devotion and an attempt to access and understand the humanity of the Savior. Sicardus of Cremona (c. 1155-1215) stressed, “that through visible textile ornaments,” like the liturgical curtain and antependium, “the faithful are inspired to seek after the invisible treasures of heaven.”109 The presence of these liturgical textiles at the high altar is mirrored in the imagery of the Man of Sorrows, allowing the pious to draw near understand that, in the words of the Augustinian canon Gerhoh of Reichersberg (d. 1169), “what

109 Martin, 11.
[they] discern in the image is neither God nor a hanging man; rather, what the image displays is both God and man … that what [they] perceive as death is really the life of the dead; that he whom [they] see wounded is really the Savior.\footnote{110}

The elevation of the Host in the mass, as well as the imagery of the Man of Sorrows being lifted on the lectern and the raising up of the deceased on the friezes of ancient sarcophagi, all point to an apotheosis. The Eucharistic elevation and visual raising on the lectern recall the apotheosis of God, whose resurrection and sacrifice made it possible for men, like those depicted on sarcophagi, to also experience apotheosis. This apotheosis is underscored by the \textit{clipeus} iconography, which emphasizes the ability to transcend death, through the heroic and divine powers of Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.”\footnote{111} The elevation of the Eucharist and the elevation of Christ on the Epistles lectern remind each viewer that like Christ, they can escape death and experience resurrection. Miri Rubin writes that the “Eucharist placed Christians within a symbolic system operating within a history of salvation, and it was lived as a drama re-enacted at every altar during every mass.”\footnote{112} And so, too, Giovanni’s Man of Sorrows mimics this moment of salvation, which creates a link between the present and the past. Christ’s salvific power “belong[s] in every area of life [as it] mediate[s] between sacred and profane, supernatural and natural.”\footnote{113}

\section*{Pilgrimage to the Pulpit}

\footnote{110}{Jung, 52.}
\footnote{111}{Romans 6:8-9, KJV.}
\footnote{112}{Miri Rubin, \textit{Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture} (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), 14.}
\footnote{113}{Ibid., 334.}
Pious pilgrims and Pisan locals would have experienced the Pisa cathedral complex’s message of salvation created by the conglomeration of word, iconography, and liturgy. Diane Ahl points out that before visiting the Camposanto, pilgrims would have likely visited the cathedral to venerate the relics housed there, including the body of Nicodemus, to participate in the mass, and to view the images, including the apse mosaic of Christ Pantocrator and Giovanni’s pulpit and lecterns in situ.114 This spiritual experience in the cathedral served as a prelude to similar themes they would encounter in the Camposanto. Their participation in the Eucharist and their viewing of the Man of Sorrows lectern, which emphasizes the liminality between life and death, would have been echoed in their visit to the Camposanto. In particular, they may have noted the clipeus iconography on the lectern echoed on sarcophagi reliefs at the cemetery.

One of the primary reasons for pilgrims to visit the Pisa cathedral was the holy relics of Nicodemus, “a man of the Pharisees,” who appears several times in the New Testament account of John.115 The scriptures say little about Nicodemus, but he is famously remembered for his night visit to Jesus and his generous offering of spices for the burial of Christ. During the Middle Ages, Nicodemus became the object of several apocryphal legends including his reputation of an artisan who carved, with angelic assistance, the Volto Santo, or “Holy Face” of Lucca. Copies of this semi-acheiropoietic crucifixion spread throughout Europe during the late medieval era. It is significant that the relics of Nicodemus are under the same roof that houses Giovanni Pisano’s sepulchral Man of Sorrows lectern. Nicodemus, after all, not only buried Christ but also asked him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s

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114 Ahl, 101.
115 John 3:1, KJV.
womb, and be born?”116 This idea of being “born again” is echoed in the sarcophagi and *imago clipeata* themes of the pulpit, especially since Christian death is essentially a rebirth into eternal life. During his night-time conversation with Nicodemus, Christ responded to the pharisee’s question by saying, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” Significantly, this verbal imagery of being “lifted up” is visually replicated on the Epistles lectern, as the angels lift Christ towards the heavens. For a pilgrim who prayed at the relics of Nicodemus, saw the pulpit and Man of Sorrows lectern, took part in the liturgy, and then visited the Camposanto, the theme of being “born again” made possible through Christ would appear as a cohesive theme connecting these various stations.

**Conclusion**

The message of Giovanni Pisano’s Epistles lectern is salvation. It stands as a conglomeration of classical iconography, liturgical ritual, and contemporary thought. Giovanni, like so many of his contemporaries, looks to the classical past to adopt and reappropriate imagery to create a Christian message relevant to his time. The lectern reflects the growing interest in the humanity of Christ. It brings together and mirrors the program of the liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and the homily, the goal of which was to communicate salvation made possible through Christ. Like ancient sarcophagi, the Eucharist, and even the preaching of the word, the lectern acts as a boundary between life and death as it puts forth a visual message that salvation is made possible through Christ who appears as the Man of Sorrows. A passage of scripture, which would have been read from this lectern reads:

> For I [preached] unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the

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116 John 3:4, KJV.
third day according to the scriptures . . . But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.¹¹⁷

The Epistles lectern, through its imagery and its liturgical connections, embodies this biblical passage as it underlines the possibility of an apotheosis for every person. It reflects the expression and goal of the liturgy as an image that communicates this salvation made possible through the devotional semblance of the Man of Sorrows: that even though, “he was wounded for our transgressions [and] bruised for our iniquities, with his stripes we are healed.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15: 3-4, 13-14, 20-22, KJV.
¹¹⁸ Isaiah 53:5, KJV.
Fig. 1. Giovanni Pisano, Man of Sorrows Epistles Lectern, 1310, Bode Museum, Berlin.
Fig. 2. Reconstruction of Pisa Cathedral pulpit (after Kreytenberg).

Fig. 3. Coin, Caesaraugusta, denarius, 19-18 BC, The British Museum, London.
Fig. 4. Illuminated Psalter, fols. 4v-5r, Byzantine, late 12th century, The Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Fig. 5. Bernard Gilduin, Christ and Angels, Altar Frontal, c. 1095, St. Sernin, Toulouse.
Fig. 6. Sarcophagus, c. 275 CE, Camposanto, Pisa.

Fig. 7. Medallion with Alexander the Great, ca. 215-43, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.
Fig. 8. Vault mosaic, as redecorated in c. 1278, Sancta Sanctorum, Rome.

Fig. 9. Ceiling mosaic, IX Century, Chapel of Saint Zeno, Santa Prassede.
Fig. 10. Mosaic, Late Eleventh Century, San Pietro a Monte, Civate.

Fig. 11. Detail from Passion of Christ Panel, Pulpit, 1302-10, Cathedral, Pisa.
Fig. 12. Crucifixion Panel, Pulpit, 1302-10, Cathedral, Pisa.
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