

The Iconography of the Gothic Ciborium in Rome, c. 1285-1370

Ragnhild Marthine Bø

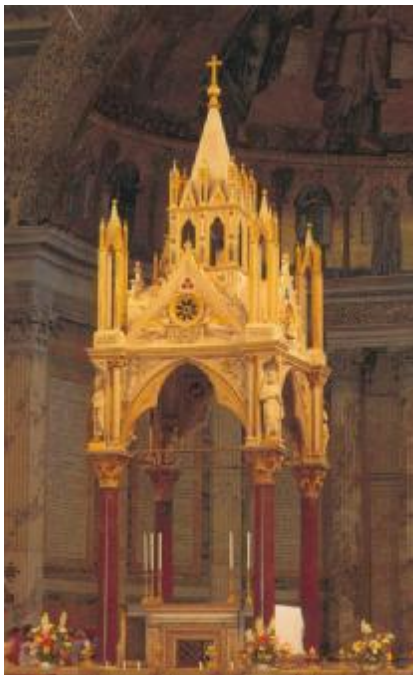
Master of Arts

There are four Gothic ciboria in Rome today: one in S. Paolo, executed by Arnolfo di Cambio (c.1240-1302) in 1285, one in S. Cecilia, also by Arnolfo di Cambio, made in 1293, one in S. Maria in Cosmedin, made by Deodato di Cosma (active c.1290-1305) in 1296, and, finally, one in S. Giovanni in Laterano, attributed to Giovanni di Stefano (active c.1365-1395) and assistants, which was carried out between 1367-1369. The ones made by Arnolfo and Deodato are altar ciboria, while the one in Lateran is a reliquary ciborium.¹

¹ Apart from these four ciboria, there were at least one further Gothic ciborium in Rome in the 14th century, namely the so called Madonnaciborium in S. Giovanni in Laterano, made in 1297, cf. Peter Cornelius Clausen, *Magistri Doctissimi Romani: die römische Marmorkünstler des Mittelalters (Corpus cosmatorum I)*, Stuttgart, 1987, p. 216. Today, only a few fragments survive, placed in the lapidarium of the basilica. I will not only refer to it here since it can not be stated whether a mosaic it is thought to have possessed was an authentic or later added decoration, cf. the drawing by Greuter (Bibl.Naz.Centr.18.4.G.23), published in Giovanni Maggi, *Le sette chiese di Roma*, 1651 and in Claussen 1987, p. 217. For an historical outline of ciboria in general, see Anna Maria D'Achille, "Ciborio", *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, 4, Roma, 1993, pp. 718-735, Giuseppe Zander, "Considerazioni su un tipo di ciborio in uso a Roma nel Rinascimento", *Bollettino d'Arte*, No. 26, 1984, pp. 99-106 and Federico Guibaldi, "I ciboria d'altare a Roma fino al IX secolo", *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome*, Vol. 59, 2001, pp. 55-70. For the style and typology of the Gothic ciboria, see Ragnhild M. Bø, "Det gotiske ciboriet i Roma 1285-1370. Romersk tradisjon og fransk innflytelse", *Konsthistorisk Tidsskrift*, Vol. 74, No.1, 2005, pp. 25-48. For a complete list of reliquary cibories in Rome and questions about their genesis and function, see Peter Cornelius Claussen, "Il tipo romano del ciborio con reliquie: questioni aperte sulla genesi e la funzione", *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome*, Vol. 59, 2001, pp. 229-249.

These Gothic ciboria differs from the ciboria constructed in the 12th and the first half of the 13th century, i.e. the ciboria executed by the so-called *cosmati*, in two ways: In architectural terms by being centred around a pitched roof, having trefoil arches, gables and pinnacles; in iconographical terms by being enriched with narrative decoration, i.e. statues, reliefs and frescoes. The ciboria have all been given scholarly attention in various studies concentrated on style, typology and attribution. The aim of this short article, however, is to take a closer look at a hitherto ignored aspect of the Gothic ciboria in Rome, i.e. their iconography. An interpretation of the iconography will, I believe, throw some light upon the ciboria's pedagogical and political *raison d'être*.

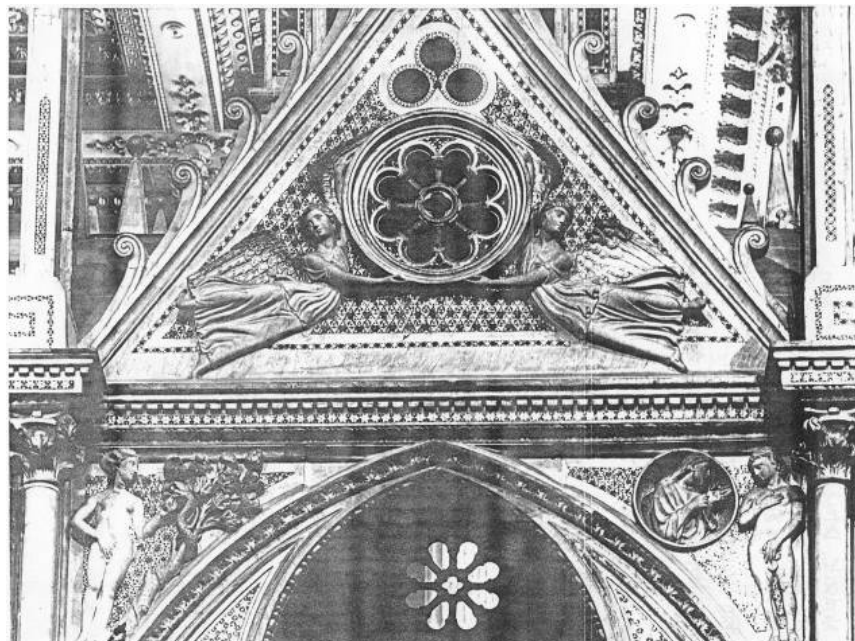
1. The reliefs and statues on the 1285 ciborium in S. Paolo fuori le mura (**Fig.1**), seat of the Benedictine Order in Rome, mirror the historical context of the furniture as the iconography is concentrated on the titulus Saint and his closest connections. Its corners statues represent Saint Paul, Saint Peter, Saint Timotheus and a monk. The first three are shown with their attributes, i.e. with a sword, a key and a letter. The monk, who has a characteristic Benedictine haircut, is carrying a book. He has often been identified as Saint Benedict, but is more likely a representation of the Benedictine monk Abbot Bartholomew, the donor of the ciborium. This observation is iconographically supported by the fact that the figure does not have a beard, a traditional attribute of Saint Benedict.²



FOT.1: Ciborium in S. Paolo fuori le mura, Roma. Arnolfo di Cambio, 1285.

² Valentino Pace, "Committenza benedettina a Roma: Il caso di San Paolo fuori le mura nel XIII secolo", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 4, 1991, pp.181-189.

The spandrels facing the apse are filled with reliefs showing the prophets David and Samuel with two scrolls running from their hands. This scene is a work from the 19th century, and its content does not necessarily correspond to what Arnolfo placed there.³ Facing the nave, in the spandrels between Saint Paul and Saint Peter, we see Abbot Bartholomew about to offer a ciborium to Saint Paul in the presence of two bishops. On the relief on the S, between Peter and Timotheus, Cain and Abel are making their sacrifices to God. The hand of the Lord is shown in the arch above Abel. The facial expression of the two (Abel is looking at God, smiling, Cain stares to the ground, more angry) testifies to a literary interpretation of the scene, as it is told in Gen. 4, 3-5. The relief on the N shows the Fall, in a scene with a more complex narrative structure: Eve is covered by a fig leaf and happily about to serve herself of the apple offered to her by a snake in the tree of knowledge – although her shyness was a result of the consume. Adam has his head turned downward, and his right hand across the chest. Evidently filled with guilt, he is trying to face the Lord, shown in a roundel by his side (**Fig.2**).



FOT.2: Ciborium in S. Paolo fuori le mura, Roma. Detail from FOT.1, Adam and Eve.

³ Anita Fiderer Moskowitz, "Arnolfo, Non-Arnolfo. New (and some old) observations on the ciborium in S. Paolo fuori le mura", *Gesta*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 88-102.

In the preface of the Italian edition of *The Gothic Cathedral*, written by Otto von Simson in 1962, Chiara Frugoni writes about the façade of the cathedral in Modena and the oldest preserved example of a liturgical drama used as a motive in architectural sculpture – or as she is expressing it “petrified theatre on the façade of a cathedral”.⁴ The text she refers to is *Jeu d’Adam*, a liturgical drama from the first half of the 12th century.⁵ This text is divided in three parts: the story of Adam and Eve, the story of Cain and Abel, and a procession of prophets who are announcing the birth of Christ. This corresponds well with the iconography on the ciborium. *Jeu d’Adam* is often read prophetically, in the way that Adam (in the sense of being the *Adam Primus*) and Eve are understood as pre-figurations of Christ (*Adam Novus*) and Virgin Mary. And there are Cain and Abel and two of the prophets.

According to Pompeo, who wrote about the ciborium in 1588, the audience used the scenes to remind themselves of how this life was imperfect, and filled with *molte angoli e intappi*.⁶ In general terms, the representations of mankind’s first sin and first murder on the ciborium are likely to remind the viewer of his or hers own sins and the consequent need for salvation. Redemption can partly be given by attending the Eucharist given from the altar below.

2. The four corner statues on the ciborium in S. Cecilia in Trastevere (**Fig.3**), the seat of the Benedictine nuns in Rome, can be identified as representations of Saint Cecilia, her husband Saint Valerian, her brother in law Saint Tiburce, and the blessed pope Urban, who was Cecilia’s guide in spiritual questions.⁷ Saint Cecilia is set on the left frontal side. She carries a crown above a nicely dressed hair, holds a bouquet of flowers in her right hand and some of the drapery of her tunic in the left. This recalls a description from *The Golden Legend*, written around 1260, which tells that on the day she married, Cecilia wore a thin under wear under her outer golden garment, and the following day,

⁴ Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, Princeton, 1962, trad.ut. *La cattedrale gotica. Il concetto medievale di ordine*, Bologna, 1988, p. XII. The other materialized version of this text is a capitel from Antelami, now in *Museo nazionale dell’antichità* in Parma.

⁵ Gustave Cohen, *Le jeu d’Adam et Ève*, Paris, 1936, p. 9. Also see Hans Martin von Erffa, *Ikonomie der Genesis: Die christlichen Bildthemen aus dem alten Testament und ihre Quellen*, Munich, 1989, pp. 248-274.

⁶ Ugonio Pompeo, *Historia delle stationi di Roma*, Rome, 1588, p. 132.

⁷ Carli, 1993, p. 124. White has wrongly identified the riding man as Saint Martin, cf. John White, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1250-1400*, London – New Haven, 1993, p.106.



FOT.3: Ciborium in S. Cecilia in Trastevere, Roma. Arnolfo di Cambio, 1293.

an angel appeared with two crowns of roses and lilies in his hand, which he offered to Cecilia and Valerian.⁸ Traditionally it has been argued that Valerian is the man on the opposite side of Saint Cecilia, the one also carrying a crown, and that pope Urban and Saint Tiburce are the ones on the back. If so, Tiburce is the one riding on a horse, and he is represented with an attribute without any hagiographic source.⁹ Valentino Pace, however, has pointed out that the horseman is Valerian, based on the fact that there was an equestrian representation of Cecilia's husband in a now lost 11th century fresco on the façade of the basilica.¹⁰ Further, he believes that the riding Valerian originally was placed on the front together with Cecilia, because they were husband and wife, and because the equestrian statue in such a position, would create a great optical effect for

⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* (translated by W.G. Ryan), London, 1993, pp. 318 - 319.

⁹ Carli, 1993, p. 125.

¹⁰ Valentino Pace, "Il ciborio di Arnolfo a S. Cecilia. Una nota sul suo stato originario e sulla sua comittenza" in *idem.*, *Arte a Roma nel Medioevo. Comittenza, ideologia e cultura figurativa in monumenti e libri*, Naples, 2000, pp. 141-142. The fresco on the frontal side of the basilica was entitled, something which is still visible in a water color copy from the 17th century, cf. Stephan Waetzold, *Die Kopien des 17. Jahrhunderts nach Mosaiken und Wandmalereien in Rom*, Vienna - Munich, 1964, Fig. 26.

the audience as they approached the ciborium from the nave.¹¹ The links with the crowns of roses from *The Golden Legend*, often seen as an important iconographical element in representations of Saint Cecilia and her husband, seem then to be lost.¹²

Or maybe not? In an Office of Saint Cecilia from Salisbury, a manuscript based on the anonymous *Passio S. Ceciliae*, liturgically composed as Hours and performed on her feast day the 22nd of November, it is told that *Cecilia virgo Tyurcium et Valerianum ad coronas vocabat*, i.e. that Cecilia was offering crowns of roses to Tiburtius and Valerian. Ruth Steiner has described the general effect of such offices as:

*In being chosen to set to music, these passages [from Passio S. Ceciliae] have been singled out as themes for meditation... Transformed into the texts of Gregorian chants, they have become part of a cycle; they will be committed to memory, and performed in public year after year.*¹³

The content of the manuscript, then, indicates which parts form the Life of Saint Cecilia is worth commemorating and contemplating year after year. The fact that Cecilia offered a crown of roses to her husband and brother in law is one of these mediation themes. Pace has already proved that Valerian is the *eques*, and it should hereby be confirmed, with the help of the Salisbury Office, that it makes sense to identify Tiburce as the man with a crown of roses. In sum then, the corner statues are arranged so that Cecilia and Tiburce are put on the front, and Valerian and Urban on the back of the ciborium. It is all reason to believe that the chosen iconography played a decisive role in

¹¹ Pace, 2000, pp. 142-143. Arnolfo's fascination for antique sculptures is another possible explanation for this iconographical choice; the inspiration might have been the horsemen placed on corners of antique sarcophaguses or the statue *Marcus Aurelius*. The subject is brilliantly discussed by Valentino Pace in "Questioni arnolfiani: l'Antico e la Francia", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, Vol. 54, 1991, pp. 335-359.

¹² Cf. the entrance "Cecilia von Rom" in W. Braunfels (ed.), *Lexicon der christliche Ikonographie*, Roma-Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1973, columns 455-463. The painting *Saint Cecilia between Saint Valerian and Saint Tiburtius with a female donor* by the Florentine painter Francesco Botticini (c.1446- 1498), Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, shows an angel dressed in red, coming down from heaven with one crown of roses in each hand, clearly about to place them on the heads of Saint Cecilia and Saint Valerian, cf. Caroline de Watteville, *Collezione de Thyssen-Bornemisza. Guida alle opere esposte*, Milan, 1989, p. 47.

¹³ Ruth Steiner, "Matins Responsories and cycles of illustrations of Saints' Lives" in Thomas P. Halton og Joseph P. Williman (Eds.), *Diaconia: Studies in honour of Robert T. Meyer*, Washington D.C., 1986, p. 327.

the liturgical practise in the basilica on the 22nd of November, but just *how* the statues were interacting in this practise remains uncertain.¹⁴

The spandrels facing the nave are filled with reliefs of two unidentified prophets, while the Four Evangelists are covering the S side (Marc and Matthew) and the N side (Luke and John). The spandrels on the rear side are filled with two women carrying lighted oil lamps, two of the wise virgins who appear in Mat 25, 1-13, i.e. in the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins. This parable was understood and interpreted by the Fathers of the Church as the coming of the Apocalypse, and the destinies of the prepared (blessed) and unprepared (deemed) in the Last Judgement. Pace believes that also the Virgins have been moved from their original frontal position.¹⁵ I support his idea, since the frontally placed Virgins would certainly serve as trustful *exempla* for the congregation below.¹⁶

3. The ciborium in S. Maria in Cosmedin (**Fig.4**) suggests a change in the *oeuvre* of the Cosmati artists with its touch of an iconographical programme. The absence of reliefs and statues of larger size is probably due to the artistic background of Deodato; he was not trained as a sculptor and therefore he only decorated the ciborium with geometrical patterns in *opus sectile*. The ‘change’ is the *Annunciation* scene in the spandrels facing the nave, where the archangel Gabriel is set inside the one to the left and Virgin Mary in the one to the right.¹⁷ The other spandrels are decorated with the coat of arms of the Caetani family. The *Annunciation* echoes the 11th century frescoes in the apse, showing the *Annunciation*, the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, the *Adoration of the Three Magi*, the

¹⁴ For the liturgical use of sculptures, cf. the part entitled *Image sculptée et liturgie* in Roland Recht, *Le croire et le voir. L'art des cathedrales (XIIe – XVe siècle)*, Paris, 1999, pp. 251-289.

¹⁵ Pace, 2000, p. 145.

¹⁶ The same scene can be seen on the façade of S. Maria in Trastevere. The narrative here is more complex. The seven wise virgins with lighted lamps are placed to the left of an enthroned *Madonna lactans*, and the seven unprepared to the right. The enthroned Madonna and two of the female figures date from the 13th century, the others date from the 14th century. There is some doubt about the original iconography and a probable misunderstanding during a restoration in 1466, when half of the women were given lamps without fire. They might all have had burning lamps in the original version, thus symbolizing burning faith, cf. Roberto Luciani, *Santa Maria in Trastevere*, Rome, 1987, p. 18.

¹⁷ To the best of my knowledge there were no narrative decoration on the Cosmati ciboria in Rome, although there is a painted *Annunciation* of uncertain date on the ciborium in S. Maria Maggiore in Tuscania. See photo in Enrico Parlato, *Italia romanica*, Milan, 1992, p. 235.



FOT.4: Ciborium i S. Maria in Cosmedin, Roma. Deodato di Cosma, 1296.

Presentation in the Temple and the *Coronation of the Virgin*, and underlines, like the ciborium in S. Paolo and S. Cecilia, the addressee of the basilica.¹⁸

The Deodato ciborium was replacing an earlier ciborium, erected in the time of Pope Hadrian I (772-795), and restored by Alfanus in the 12th century. The descriptions of these two in the *Liber Pontificalis* do not mention any decorative programme.¹⁹ The explanation of the coat of arms is found in a chronological presentation of the architectural history of the basilica, where it is told that in the time of Cardinal Francesco Caetani, who was nephew to pope Boniface VIII, the basilica was enriched with a Gothic ciborium signed by Deodato.²⁰

¹⁸ The frescoes were unfortunately heavily overpainted in 1899. There is, however, no reason to doubt their content, since it echoes other representations of the Life of the Virgin like the mosaic cycles in S. Maria in Trastevere (Pietro Cavallini 1291) and S. Maria Maggiore (Jacopo Rusuti 1291-1296).

¹⁹ Giuseppe Massimi, *La chiesa di S. Maria in Cosmedin*, Rome, 1989, p. 27 og p. 42.

²⁰ Giovanni Battista Giovenale, *La Basilica di S. Maria in Cosmedin*, Roma, 1927, s. 157 and Giuseppe Patroni, *Serie cronologica dei cardinali diaconi dei prelati vicari degli arcipreti e canonici e altri componenti il capitolo della perinsigne basilica S. Maria in Cosmedin*, Naples, 1899, p. 18.

4. The most important functions of a reliquary ciborium are to exhibit and to protect its valuable content. This was most easily obtained by adding a ‘cube’ above the ciborium, which put the focus to the relics in the same time as their need of conservation were secured.²¹ The ‘cube’ could be decorated on the outside, and the interaction between the decoration (narrative programme) and the relics rapidly achieved some new effects. How this was expressed in other reliquary ciboria in Rome is difficult to state.²² The only surviving – although heavily restored – example are the twelve frescoes on the reliquary ciborium in S. Giovanni in Laterano (**Fig.5**).

Its eight corner statues are representing Saint Peter, Saint Paul, John the Baptist, Virgin Mary, Gabriel, John the Evangelist, and two Fathers of the Church, probably Saint Ambrosias and Saint Augustin.²³ The frescoes, which were painted in the 16th century, are displaying a *Crucifixion* between Paul and Jacob, and Peter and Andrew (on the front) (**Fig.6**); a *The Good Shepherd* between four fathers of the church, Saint Gregory the Great, Saint Augustin, Saint Ambrosias and Saint Jerome (left) (**Fig.7**); a *Coronation of the Virgin* between the *Annunciation* and Saint Catherine and the Abbot Antonius (to the apse) (**Fig.8**) and a *Madonna Enthroned adored by a kneeling man* between saint Lawrence and John the Baptist and John the Evangelist and Saint Stephen (right) (**Fig.9**). The kneeling man is identified as cardinal Pierre Roger de Beaufort del Malmonte (who was priest in Lateran in the time of pope Urban V and who later became pope Gregory XI).

²¹ Giuseppe Zander, “Considerazioni su un tipo di ciborio in uso a Roma nel Rinascimento”, *Bolletino d’Arte*, Vol. 69, 1984, p. 100.

²² Peter Cornelius Claussen has presented many relevant questions about reliquary ciboria. Some are answered, some remain open, Claussen, 2001.

²³ Augusta Monferini, “Il ciborio lateranense e Giovanni di Stefano”, *Commentari*, No. 13, 1962, pp. 191ff.



FOT.5 (6,7,8,9): Relikvieciborium in S. Giovanni in Laterano, Roma. Giovanni di Stefano, 1367-69.

Pope Urban V saw this ciborium as a continuation of the ciborium that emperor Constantine the Great got erected above the tomb of Saint Peter in the Old Saint Peter around 340 AD, which again was a continuation of the Biblical tabernacle erected by Moses. The persons in the roundels, of which one carries a book and the three others scrolls, are generally believed to represent four prophets, probably including Moses himself.²⁴ Moses is also recognised to be among the relics that the ciborium is protecting, together with parts of the Old Testament, relics of the Passion, Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Saint Pancratius, Saint Lawrence and ‘many others’.²⁵ According to this ‘inventory list’ the frescoes quite strongly echo the actual content of the ciborium.

²⁴ Monferini, 1962, p. 194.

²⁵ Monferini, 1962, p. 196.

The ciborium is decorated with different coat of arms; in the lower part cardinal Antonelli (who was responsible for the reconstruction) and cardinal Pierre Roger de Beaufort del Malmonte on the left sides, the central part is reserved for pope Urban V, and the part on the right for cardinal Angelico de Grimoard (a nephew of pope Urban V). On the upper part are the same coat of arms placed twice on either side: Charles V of France on the front, Angelico di Grimoard on the left, pope Gregory XI towards the apse, and pope Urban V on the right. The presence of the coat of arms of the French king Charles V stresses the connection between the French royal house and the Catholic Church, between the emperor and the pope, in a time when the papacy was on its way back to Rome from its French exile. Thus, the ciborium serves as a political piece as well. To underline the position of the involved, there is a crown above the coat of arms of Charles V, a papal tiara above Urban V and Gregory XI, and a cardinal hat above Angelico de Grimoard.

5. The introduction of a narrative programme in the Gothic ciboria underlines what Kristin Faupel-Dreves in very simple terms has called the esthetical maxim of the Middle Ages: the invisible became visible by means of reproduction. The expression is originally related to Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141), who saw works of art as representing *visibilis pulchritudo invisibilis pulchritudinis imago est* – the beauty of the visible is an image of the beauty of the invisible.²⁶ Herbert Kessler is using the same metaphor when he states that

*Specifically, they elaborate my view that various aspects of sophisticated work of medieval art –subject matter, form, and material – were devised to engage the viewer in an anagogic process, offering spiritual readings of texts, elevating established categories of objects and iconographies, and deploying materials in such a way that physical presence is simultaneously asserted and subverted. Art fully was a means to realize the central claim of medieval theory: to show the invisible by means of the visible.*²⁷

²⁶ Kirstin Faupel-Dreves, *Vom rechten Gebrauch der Bilder im liturgischen Raum: mittelalterliche Funktionsbestimmungen bildender Kunst in Rationale Divinorum Officiarum des Durandus von Mende*, Leiden, 2000, p. 132.

²⁷ Herbert Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Philadelphia, 2000, preface. Recht discusses the same issue in chapter 3, *Le visible et l'invisible*, cf. Recht, 1999, pp.97-145.

The invisible is surely made visible in the decoration of the ciboria. In his *Rationale* from 1296 Durandus defended both the use of such visible representations and the famous *dictum* of Saint Gregory the Great, by saying “but we are not worshipping pictures, neither do we see them as Gods, neither do put any hope for salvation in them. That would be idolatry. On the contrary, we see them as a memory and a reminder of things that happened a long time ago”.²⁸ The iconography of the ciborium has a quite specific pedagogical function. In fact, it is, following a definition given by Jacques Le Goff, acting as an *exemplum*.²⁹

The iconography gives further depth to this point. The placements of the different saints (statues) and scenes (reliefs and frescoes) shows that in the three ciboria with a complete narrative programme, S. Paolo, S. Cecilia and S. Giovanni, the most important *exempla* are placed towards the nave and the congregation. And when there is a second entrance to the south, as in S. Paolo and S. Giovanni, the second most important scene is placed there. It is probably by chance, but the iconography is following a chronological order of motives; the 1285 ciborium in S. Paolo is decorated with scenes from the Old Testament, the one in S. Cecilia and the one in S. Maria in Cosmedin with scenes from the New Testament, and the one in S. Giovanni with scenes from the NT and representations of four Fathers of the Church.

In S. Paolo, S. Cecilia and S. Giovanni, there is an arch nearby the ciboria. They have an almost identical iconographical content, based on the 4th and 5th chapter of the Apocalypse. This decoration is not only to be found in these three basilicas, but all over Rome. Ursula Nilgen sees this as an evidence for the arches being decorated according to liturgical needs; they are a visual constant in the church interior, independent from whatever there might be of other decorative programmes, and from which order the

²⁸ “Sed nos illas non adoramus, nec deos appellamus, nec spem salutis in eis ponimus quia hoc esset ydolatrare, sed ad memoriam et recordationem rerum olim gestarum eas ueneramus” (Guilhelmus Durandus, *Rationalde Divinorum Officiarum*, Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis (CCCM), 140. A. Davril og T.M. Thibodeau (Eds.), Turnholt, 1995, IV, i, 15).

²⁹ *Exemplum*: A brief narration given as thrustful and intended to be inserted into a discourse (generally a sermon) to convince an audience by a salutary lesson. *Exemplum* is a term from religious and didactical Medieval literature. In a wide sense it labels an example, a model or a virtue, cf. Jacques Berlioz, “Exempla” i André Vauchez (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, I, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 517-518.

church belongs.³⁰ An equally common iconography is not possible to detect in the Gothic ciboria. The order to which the church belonged to and the importance of it, seem to have been the most decisive factor, since the basilicas of S. Paolo and S. Cecilia give more importance to their respective saints than to Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. On the same time, the iconography of the ciborium in S. Cecilia is exclusively tied to its *locus* as a regular tituli church, while the ciborium in S. Paolo, which is one of the seven pilgrim churches in Rome, addresses an iconography more commonly accessible. This underlines the autonomy of the ciborium inside the church; they seem to have been constructed as mediums for context-related pedagogical guidelines from the clergy to the congregation.

When the ciborium turned into storage for relics, it partly changed form. The arches and the timpani were split by a 'locker', intended to protect its important content. When this 'locker' was added to the architectural structure, the ciborium achieved a larger surface, and it was possible to enlarge the narrative programme as well. The only surviving example in Rome are the twelve frescoes on the reliquary ciborium in S. Giovanni in Laterano, with their representations of scenes from the Bible, Saints and Fathers of the Church in upright position. The chosen iconography indicates the need for these painted scenes, as especially the Crucifixion hardly could have entered in a spandrel or a perforated tympanum. Once this scene was introduced, however, it became the focal point of the ciborium. The popularity of the Crucifixion is due to the scene's recognisable iconography, unambiguous message and its close affinity to the Eucharist, received right next to it.³¹ The ambitious narrative programme in the reliquary ciborium made it an even more competent guide for the congregation, than the other Gothic

³⁰ Ursula Nilgen, "Die Bilder über dem Altar. Triumph- und Apsisbogenprogramme in Rom und Mittelitalien und ihr Bezug zur Liturgie" in Nicolas Bock, Sible de Blaauw, Christoph Luitpold Frommel og Herbert Kessler (eds.), *Kunst und Liturgie im Mittelalter*, Munich, 2000, pp.75-89.

³¹ Michele Bacci explain the representation of the Crucifixion in following terms: "...in un punto centrale dello spazio sacro come la transenna poteva assolvere, già di per sé, una definita funzione liturgica, indirizzando l'attenzione dei fedeli che assistevano alla messa nella navata sul tema del sacrificio di Cristo, ripetuto nella celebrazione eucaristica, come condizione primaria del riscatto dell'umanità. Il ruolo fondamentale del crocifisso come punto focale nel rito deriva in primo luogo dalla sua percezione primaria come 'segno' visivo (...), il ricorso alla rappresentazione di Cristo morto insiste sul momento sacrificale e rende esplicita la sua associazione col mistero eucaristico". Michele Bacci, "*Pro remedio animae*": *Imagini sacre e pratiche devozionali in Italia centrale sec XIII- XVI*, Pisa, 2000, p. 107.

ciboria. It also had a more important political interest, being so heavily applied with coat of arms.³²

This paper has intended to demonstrate that the Gothic style and its extended use of narrative decoration, i.e. statues and reliefs, created a ciborium which, unlike the ciboria made some decades earlier, served both as a pedagogical and a political piece in the church interior: pedagogically by transmitting occurrences from the past, through *exempla* that reminded the spectator of his or hers need for salvation; politically by focusing on the piety of the donors, that being Abbot Bartholomew or king Charles V of France. In an article about smaller liturgical equipment, Parker McLachlan makes following remark:

*In sum then, liturgical vessels and other accessories not only were essential to the service of the Eucharist: they also, by virtue of their intrinsic material value and brilliant colours, rendered it suitably magnificent; and by the symbolism of their imagery and inscriptions, added depth to the meaning of its ceremonies. Their association with specific donors and owners adds to our knowledge of the patterns of piety and patronage among medieval ecclesiastics and laymen alike, and on occasion adds the poignant illusion of personal contact with these long-dead benefactors, making us vividly aware of their hopes of earning eternal blessedness.*³³

The same could have been said about the four Gothic ciboria in Rome.

³² – although this practise also appear on the rather modest ciborium in S. Maria in Cosmedin.

³³ Elizabeth Parker McLachlan, "Liturgical vessels and implements" in T.J Heffernan & E.A. Matter (eds.), *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church* (Medieval Institute Publications), Kalamazoo, 2001, p. 429.