

NOBILES OFFICINAE

Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo

Volume I. Catalogo

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NOBILES OFFICINAE

Perle, filigrane e trame di seta dal Palazzo Reale di Palermo

a cura di
Maria Andaloro

VOLUME I
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Palazzo Reale di Palermo*

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VIII.16

L'ODIGHITRIA DALLA COSIDDETTA CRIPTA DELLA PALATINA

pittura murale staccata
cm 94x180

Palermo

metà del sec. XII ca.

iscrizioni: [MP / ΘΥ]H ODHITTIPIA

Palermo, Cappella Palatina, narcece

provenienza: Palermo, Cappella Palatina, cripta

Il pannello raffigurante la Vergine in trono con in braccio il Bambino è esposto nel narcece della Cappella Palatina, in una rientranza al centro della parete occidentale. L'ubicazione attuale non è quella originaria: fino a mezzo secolo fa la pittura si trovava all'interno dell'ambiente sottostante la vicina Cappella, chiamato impropriamente cripta, sulla parete di risulta fra l'abside centrale e l'absidiola sinistra.

È noto, infatti, che dalla descialbatura delle pareti della chiesa inferiore, nel corso di lavori di consolidamento e ripristino approntati nel secondo dopoguerra, vennero alla luce due figure di santi, *Nicheta* e *Vincentius* e un'immagine della Madonna in trono con Bambino (POTTINO 1965, p. 11; ZORIC 1999, pp. 86-87). Le prime, purtroppo, andarono "distrutte malauguratamente, sia pure inconsapevolmente, nello scortecciare gli intonaci ricoperti di albo per mettere a nudo le cortine murarie", come ammise l'allora soprintendente Mario Guiotto, alla guida dell'incerta campagna di restauro (GUIOTTO 1947, p. 23, TRIZZINO 1983, pp. 28-29, 41-42). Il dipinto raffigurante la Vergine ebbe una sorte meno infelice, in quell'occasione venne asportato, fatto aderire su un supporto di tela, stuccato e reintegrato delle lacune con l'acquerello.

Allo stato attuale la pittura versa in discrete condizioni, nonostante il velo di sali che ne attenua l'intensità cromatica e alcune zone dove la perdita della pellicola pittorica è piuttosto pronunciata, soprattutto intorno all'aureola di Maria e in corrispondenza della zona inferiore. Il deterioramento, almeno in parte, è sopraggiunto in epoca successiva all'operazione di stacco, come si evince dal confronto con le fotografie scattate all'indomani della sua scoperta che documentano un grado di leggibilità nettamente migliore (TRIZZINO 1983, fig. 80). Nonostante i segni del degrado, il tema rappresentato risulta ancora oggi



VIII.16, fig. 1

apprezzabile integralmente. La Vergine, ammantata di un lungo pallio purpureo su una tunica grigio-azzurra, seduta su un trono con alto dossale, doppio cuscino e *suppedaneum*, ha il volto nella posa di tre quarti, leggermente inclinato sulla spalla sinistra, lo sguardo fisso verso lo spettatore. Tiene in braccio il Bambino, benedicente con la destra e reggente il *codex* con la sinistra, vestito di una tunica bianca claviata, *himation* giallo-ocra e un drappo rosso che oltrepassa la spalla sinistra e si annoda alla vita.

La rappresentazione, nel suo nucleo figurativo, è fedele all'iconografia della Vergine Odighitria (da ὀδηγός='guida'), derivante dalla veneratissima icona del monastero costantinopolitano degli 'Odegoi' (BACCI 1998, pp. 115-116). Rispetto alla versione più usuale, con il ritratto di Maria a mezzo busto o a figura stante, l'immagine di Palermo si distingue per la presenza del trono. Quest'ultimo, caratterizzato dall'alto dossale rettilineo rivestito di un tessuto bianco, trova comunque riscontro in ambito greco, ad esempio nelle miniature della *Topografia cristiana* di Cosma Indocopleuste (Smirne, Scuola Evangelica, B 8, ff. 162-163) risalenti alla seconda metà del sec. XI (STRZYGOWSKI 1899, p. 57, tavv. XXVI-XXVII). Un lampante riferimento all'orizzonte bizantino, sul pannello palermitano, è ravvisabile ai lati del nimbo, dove si legge, anche se non più per intero, l'iscrizione *H ODHIT (TP)IA*. Nella fotografia degli anni Quaranta (TRIZZINO 1983, fig. 80) i caratteri greci si vedono tutti e appena al di sopra si legge distintamente l'assai corrente abbreviazione *MP ΘY*, della quale oggi non vi è traccia alcuna.

Inconsueto, invece, è l'esplicito riferimento per iscritto al genere dell'Odighitria. Costituisce un precedente la celebre icona del Sinai con le cinque versioni iconografiche della Vergine, attribuita al sec. XI (BALTOYANNI 2000, p. 145, figg. 87-88). Tuttavia, per un confronto più immediato e più stringente, anche dal punto di vista paleografico, occorre osservare l'immagine a mosaico della Vergine a figura stante che campeggia su un fondo dorato nell'attigua Cappella Palatina, al di sopra dell'arco dell'absidiola di sinistra. L'immagine, com'è noto, è frutto di uno dei primi interventi musivi succedutisi all'interno dell'edificio. Opera di mosaicisti greci, certamente attribuibile alla committenza diretta di Ruggero II, è stata assegnata, insieme agli altri soggetti del nucleo musivo del presbiterio, al quinto decennio del sec. XII (KITZINGER 1992, pp. 9-12, figg. 93-

95). In entrambi i contesti l'esibizione della scritta 'dighitria' potrebbe essere interpretata come un segnale della penetrazione del culto dell'icona costantinopolitana alla corte normanna di Palermo. Il fatto non desta sorpresa se si pensa all'influenza esercitata da personaggi di cultura greca gravitanti intorno a Ruggero II, come Filagato da Cerami autore, fra l'altro, di un'omelia dove è descritta un'icona della Vergine ad encausto che sembrerebbe riferirsi proprio alla tavola del monastero degli Odegoi (BACCI 1998, pp. 99, 125), o come l'ammiraglio Cristodulo, committente di una cappella palermitana eretta in onore di Ruggero e fervente devoto nei confronti dell'immagine dell'Odighitria di Rossano, tanto da finanziare cospicuamente l'opera di ricostruzione del monastero calabrese (ZORIĆ 1999, pp. 63-64). Il confronto tra le due immagini mariane racchiuse nel palazzo dei Normanni, comunque sia, supera la soglia della dimensione iconografica e coinvolge la sfera stilistica (ANDALORO 1994b, pp. 190-191). Aldilà del diverso *medium* pittorico, della presenza o meno del trono e di qualche altro dettaglio, stringenti affinità si riscontrano nella resa dei volti, soprattutto nel tratto degli archi sopraccigliari e nel profilo sghembo e asimmetrico degli occhi, come pure nelle pieghe del panneggio. Per queste ragioni una datazione della pittura murale più o meno alla stessa epoca, intorno alla metà del sec. XII, risulta la più probabile (ANDALORO 1994b, p. 191).

A questo periodo, se non addirittura allo stesso intervento pittorico, possono essere attribuite le immagini dei due santi andate perdute nel corso dei restauri del dopoguerra (GUIOTTO 1947, p. 23). Sempre dalla documentazione fotografica dell'epoca si scorge, alla stessa altezza del pannello dell'Odighitria, non ancora asportato, un altro riquadro pittorico con le tracce evidenti di un santo a figura stante, conservato per metà lungo la parete laterale settentrionale dell'edificio (DILLON 1950, figg. 5-6; ZORIĆ 1999, p. 87). Dalla documentazione relativa all'assetto della chiesa inferiore della Cappella Palatina, precedente agli ingenti lavori di ripristino, viene profilandosi, insomma, la ricca compagine di un luogo di culto che studi recenti mirano a liberare dal tradizionale appellativo di 'cripta' a vantaggio di una vera e propria chiesa, autonoma rispetto alla soprastante Cappella, forse precedente rispetto a quest'ultima di circa un quindicennio (ZORIĆ 1999, pp. 68-73, 111). Sulle nude pareti della pic-

cola navata, a testimonianza del rito di consacrazione, resta soltanto la serie quasi al completo delle croci dipinte in rosso con le scritte *IC-XC NI-KA* (ANDALORO 1994b, pp. 190-191; ZORIĆ 1999, pp. 86-88).

SIMONE PIAZZA

Bibliografia: GUIOTTO 1947, pp. 22-24; POTTINO 1965, pp. 11-12; ROCCO 1976, p. 128; TRIZZINO 1983, pp. 28-29, figg. 79-80; ANDALORO 1994b, pp. 190-191; TESTA 1995, pp. 125-128; ZORIĆ 1999, pp. 86-88.

kept in the church of the Archangel Michael in the monastery of St Mary of Naupactos. On this occasion – about 1080 according to several precise references in the text (NESBITT, WIITA 1975, p. 376) – a miniature with the figure of the Virgin was inserted into a rectangular frame (28 x 13 cm) in the upper part of the first sheet (OIKONOMIDES 1992, p. 248).

The parchment has been published on numerous occasions (DI GIOVANNI 1744; GAROFALO 1835; BUSCEMI 1839; CUSA 1868-1882, I; GARUFI 1899) and analyzed in its various aspects by Nesbitt and Wiita in 1975, whose contribution has not been superseded by later studies (PALIOURAS 1988; KOUTSOGIANNES 1988-1989, pp. 7-24). The charter is a unique document of its kind and extremely important. In fact, it is the only statute of a lay confraternity from the Byzantine world that has survived and it throws light on an aspect of religious organization that played an important role in Byzantium, at the same level as in the West where, however, various statutes from different regions have survived. Among the persons to be mentioned in prayers, besides the emperor, the patriarch, the metropolitan of Thebes and the abbess of St Mary of Naupactos, there are also two abbots from the monastery of Hosios Loukas, both the living abbot and the deceased Theodosios Leobachos. This has made it possible to relate the *typicon* to the important monastery at Stiris. Most likely, Theodosios Leobachos, who was responsible for the reconstruction of Hosios Loukas during the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos (1040-1056) and who was abbot in 1048, also took part in drawing up the document founding the confraternity (OIKONOMIDES 1992, pp. 248-249; CHATZIDAKIS 1997, pp. 11-12).

The list of signatories indicates that the confraternity consisted of 49 members (20 members of the clergy and 29 members of the laity including 3 women) from various social levels and geographic places, among them Dionysos of the monastery at Daphni and people linked to the Theban aristocracy and the imperial court, such as Maria, wife of Theodoros Kamateros, Christophoros Kopsenos and also, as shown by the names themselves (Blatas, Chalkeus, etc.), families linked to commercial activities (NESBITT, WIITA 1975, pp. 373-375; OIKONOMIDES 1992, p. 248). The confraternity did not have a fixed headquarters and its members, who came from

various surrounding districts, were required to meet once a month to carry the icon of the Theotokos in procession from the monastery of Naupactos to another church, where it remained on view for the next four weeks under the care of one of the members.

The miniature with the image of the Virgin, according to Oikonomides (1992, pp. 248) depicts the icon entrusted to the care of the confraternity. Inside a double frame (the outer one red and the inner one blue with small crosses) against a gold ground and resting on a low pedestal standing on a chequered floor, is a full-length figure of the Virgin, turned three-quarters to the right with her hands raised to her breast in supplication. Some traces of colour at the top and to the left led Nesbitt and Wiita (1975, p. 362) to suggest that the miniature once contained a half-length figure of Christ to whom the Virgin's request for intercession is directed, as is the case in the 12th-century illumination in codex 103 A (f. 3) at the monastery of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos (DER NERSESSIAN 1960, fig. 8).

Located here is the image of the Virgin Hagiosoritissa, literally of the 'sacred shrine' (*hagios soros*), which was widespread in Byzantium between the 11th and 12th centuries, even appearing on seals and coins, but whose origins are much older (ANDALORO 1970-1971, pp. 124-125). The Hagiosoritissa reproduces the image of an icon preserved in Constantinople and linked to the cult of the relics of the Virgin; the belt (ζώνη) and the robe (εσθής) were brought from the Holy Land in the 6th or even the 5th century and, enclosed in a casket, venerated in the church of the Chalkoprateia (DER NERSESSIAN 1960, pp. 77-78; ANDALORO 1970-1971, p. 120). According to some, the icon was instead preserved in the Blachernai church where another relic of the Virgin, the *maphorion*, was venerated (CARR 2002, pp. 79-80).

As early as the 6th century the Marian cult in Constantinople was marked by processions organized by the confraternities with the participation of the emperor himself. Every week on Friday after sunset, there was a densely crowded procession held in imitation of one in the Holy Land where people went from Mount Sinai to Gethsemane. Following complex ceremonial procedures, a Marian icon was carried from the Blachernai church to the church of the Chalkoprateia (CARR 2002, pp. 77-79).

Seen in this light, the miniature is testimony to the rites and events of the capital held outside it, but sanctioned by the imperial patronage of Constantine IX Monomachos. With the renovation of the monastery, the abbot of Hosios Loukas committed himself also to reviving religious celebrations similar to those in Constantinople, including the institution of a confraternity to promote the cult of a Marian icon.

The stylistic traits of the figure of the Virgin – the harmonious proportions, the soft modelling of the cloak and the contained, calm expression of the face – make it possible to link the miniature with the mosaics of Hosios Loukas, especially the figure of the Virgin in the scene of the Crucifixion in the lunette on the east wall of the narthex or in the scene of the Presentation in the Temple on the north-west squinch.

The parchment, which was mentioned in the inventory of the Cappella Palatina in 1309, most probably reached Palermo following the Norman incursion into Greece that resulted in Roger II conquering Thebes in 1147. The city was sacked and, together with ecclesiastical treasures and sacred books, the *typicon* was also stolen, for, although it was not a religious text, it contained a precious miniature of a sacred subject (NESBITT, WIITA 1975, p. 380).

MARIA RAFFAELLA MENNA

Bibliography: DI GIOVANNI 1744, pp. 347ff., no. CCXCVIII; GAROFALO 1835, I, pp. 1-6; BUSCEMI 1839, pp. 5-10; DI MARZO 1858-1864, p. 37; CUSA 1868, pp. 53-57; GARUFI 1899, pp. 87-97; NESBITT-WIITA 1975, pp. 360-384; PALIOURAS 1988, pp. 613-623; KOUTSOGIANNES 1988-1989, pp. 7-24; OIKONOMIDES 1992, pp. 248-249; ROCCO in Palermo 1994, p. 28; CHATZIDAKIS 1997, pp. 11-12.

MURAL PAINTING

VIII. 16

THE HODEGETRIA IN THE SO-CALLED 'CRYPT' OF THE CAPPELLA PALATINA

Detached wall painting

94 x 180 cm

Mid-12th century

Inscription: [MP/ΘΥ] H ODH/TTPIA

Palermo, Cappella Palatina, narthex

Provenance: Palermo, Cappella Palatina, crypt

The painting portraying the Virgin Mary enthroned, with the Child in her arms, is displayed in the narthex of the Cappella Palatina, in a recess at the centre of the western wall. The present location is not the original one: until half a century ago the painting was in the space beneath the nearby chapel, wrongly termed the crypt, on the rubble wall between the central apse and the small apse on the left.

We know that in the stripping of the plaster from the walls of the lower church during consolidation and restoration work that took place after the Second World War, there came to light two figures of saints, *Nicheta* and *Vincentius*, and an image of the Virgin enthroned with Child (POTTINO 1965, p.11; ZORIĆ 1999, pp. 86-87). The former, unfortunately, were "destroyed unhappily, though not deliberately, in scraping off the plaster covered with whitewash in order to strip bare the walls", as the then superintendent Mario Guiotto admitted in his guide to this careless restoration (GUIOTTO 1947, p. 23; TRIZZINO 1983, pp. 28-29, 41-42). The painting portraying the Virgin met a less unhappy fate; it was taken down, attached to a canvas support, filled and the losses were reintegrated with water colour.

In its present state, the painting is in fair condition, despite the thin layer of salts which dims the intensity of the colour and the fairly pronounced loss of the paint layer in some areas, especially around Mary's halo and in the lower parts of the work. The deterioration, at least in part, took place after the detachment, as can be seen by comparison with the photographs taken immediately after its discovery, which show the painting is distinctly more legible (TRIZZINO 1983, fig. 80). Despite the signs of decay, the subject represented can even today be appreciated in its entirety. The Virgin, clothed in a long crimson robe over a grey-blue tunic, is seated on a throne with a high back, a double cushion and a *suppedaneum*. Her face is in three-quarter profile, slightly inclined towards the left shoulder, and her gaze is fixed on the observer. She is holding the Child in her arm,

as he blesses with his right hand and holds the *codex* in his left, clad in a white tunic decorated with a *clavus*, a yellow ochre *bimation* and a red drape which passes over the left shoulder and is tied at the waist.

The representation, in its figurative nucleus, is faithful to the iconography of the Virgin Hodegetria (from ὁδηγός = guide), deriving from the deeply venerated icon of the monastery in Constantinople known as that of the 'Hodegoi' (BACCI 1998, pp. 115-116). In comparison with the more usual version, with the portrait of Mary in half-bust or as a standing figure, the Palermo image differs in the presence of the throne. This is distinguished by a square high back covered with white cloth; it does however have parallels in the Greek sphere, for instance in the miniatures of the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes (Smyrna, Evangelical School, B 8, ff. 162-3) which date from the second half of the 11th century (STRZYGOWSKY 1899, p. 57, pl. XXVI-XXVII).

A striking reference to Byzantine workmanship can be seen on the Palermo painting flanking the nimbus, where part of the inscription H ODHFI(TP)IA can be read. In the photograph from the 1940s (TRIZZINO 1983, fig. 80), all the Greek characters can be seen, and immediately above them can be read distinctly the quite frequent abbreviation MP ΘΥ of which today there is no trace at all.

By contrast, the explicit reference in writing to the Hodegetria genre is unusual. A precedent is provided by the famous icon of Sinai with the five iconographic versions of the Virgin, attributed to the 11th century (BALTOYANNI 2000, p.145, fig. 87-88). However, for a more immediate and compelling comparison, and also from a paleographic viewpoint, we should look at the mosaic image of the Virgin standing, which is placed against a gold background in the nearby Cappella Palatina, above the arch of the left apse. As is well known, the image is one of the first mosaics inside the building. The work of Greek mosaic artists, certainly attributable to a direct commission by Roger II, it has been assigned, together with the other mosaics making up the nucleus of the presbytery, to the 1140s (KITZINGER 1992, pp. 9-12, fig. 93-95). In both cases, the insertion of the inscription 'Hodegetria' could be interpreted as a sign of the penetration of the cult of the Constantinople icon into the Norman court of Palermo. This is not surprising when we con-

sider the influence exercised by figures of Greek cultural background around Roger II, such as Philagathos of Cerami, the author among other things of a sermon in which an encaustic icon of the Virgin is described which seems to refer exactly to the painting in the monastery of the Hodegoi (BACCI 1998, pp. 99, 125); or as Admiral Christodoulos, who commissioned a chapel in Palermo in honour of Roger II, and who was such a fervent devotee of the image of the Hodegetria of Rossano that he gave considerable sums towards the rebuilding of the Calabrian monastery (ZORIĆ 1999, pp. 63-64).

The comparison between the two images of Mary contained in Palazzo dei Normanni, in any case, goes beyond the iconographical dimension and involves questions of style (ANDALORO 1994b, pp. 190-191). Over and beyond the different medium, the presence or absence of the throne and of a few other details, close affinities can be seen in the way the faces are rendered, above all in the treatment of the arcs of the eyebrows and in the slanted and asymmetrical outline of the eyes, as well as in the folds of the drapes. For this reason, the dating of this wall painting to more or less the same period, around the middle of the 12th century, seems the most probable (ANDALORO 1994b, p. 191).

The images of the two saints which were lost in the course of the post-war restorations may be attributed to the same period and possibly even to the same painter(s) (GUIOTTO 1947, p. 23). Once again, from the photographs taken at that time, at the same height as the Hodegetria – which had not yet been detached – we can see another painting with evident traces of a standing saint, half of which is preserved along the north lateral wall of the building (DILLON 1950, fig. 5-6; ZORIĆ 1999, p. 87).

From the documentation relating to the arrangement of the lower church of the Cappella Palatina prior to the extensive renovation, there emerges a rich jigsaw of a place of worship that recent studies have sought to free from the traditional title of 'crypt' in favour of an actual church, which was autonomous in relation to the chapel above it, and perhaps prior in date to the latter by around fifteen years (ZORIĆ 1999, pp 68-73, 111). On the bare walls of the small nave, as witnesses to the rite of consecration, there remains only the almost complete series of crosses painted in red, with the inscriptions

IC-XC NI-KA (ANDALORO 1994b, pp. 190-191; ZORIĆ 199, pp. 80-86).

SIMONE PIAZZA

Bibliography: GIOTTO 1947, pp. 22-24; POTTINO 1965, pp. 11-12; ROCCO 1976, p. 128; TRIZZINO 1983, pp. 28-29, fig. 79-80; ANDALORO 1994, pp. 190-191; TESTA 1995, pp. 125-128; ZORIĆ 1999, pp. 86-88.

PANEL PAINTING

VIII. 17

AN UNPUBLISHED *DORMITIO VIRGINIS*

Tempera on panel

138,5 x 93 cm

End of 12th century

Inscriptions: [MP/ΘY] H ODH/TITPIA

Palermo or Cyprus

Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, inv. no. 590

This panel was stored in *Magazzino IV* of the Galleria Regionale of Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo, compartment 12, no. 590, when we were allowed to see it in 1989 thanks to the director, Vincenzo Abbate, who also gave permission for the painting to be displayed in this exhibition "*Nobiles Officinae*". Thus the first account of the work is in this catalogue, and we shall be foreshadowing some lines of research and some results, which will be more fully developed in a publication dedicated to this panel and its restoration.

But let us take things in order.

As soon as we saw this painting on a gold ground it looked like it would be highly interesting. The subject is a *Dormitio Virginis*, depicted according to the usual iconography of the Byzantine world – however one that was widely accepted in the West – and an extremely fine version at that, given the quality of the painting and the remarkable size of the panel. Although it is true that the panel seems to have been cut back along the edges and that the surface appeared to be darkened due to repainting, especially the heads of the angels – or so it seemed – and that there was

a deep crack running the length of the panel, disfiguring both the composition and the painting, none of the elements extraneous to the original painting – whether due to the condition of the piece, clumsy repairs and additions, or any other cause – could hide or disguise the medieval nature of the work. Therefore the dating of the 15th century given on the accompanying label immediately appeared untenable and totally misleading. A brief examination revealed large sections of original work that were still clearly visible, as well as delimiting the areas disfigured by repainting; but above all it made it possible to grasp the overall layout of the forms on the panel, the compositional and iconographical features, and such morphological details as to allow for rather promising chronological links, the most suitable of which coincided with the late 12th century. A rare medieval painted panel had come to light, one of remarkable quality, with a subject that was quite intriguing. Nothing less than a conservation treatment would have been able to guarantee both the best conservation of the piece and the most accurate way of studying it. This work was carried out in 1994-1995 by Carlo and Donatella Giantomassi with the consultation of Giuseppe Basile of the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro.

It was already possible after cleaning to appreciate the overall harmony and details of the painting which had been previously so defaced.

First of all, the colours used were quite festive: bright reds, intense blues, warm yellows; and, indeed, as the analyses of the pigments would reveal, a range of high quality materials was used, from cinnabar for the reds to probably Egyptian frit for the blues. Furthermore, it was ascertained that only the head of the angel near the deep vertical crack of the panel had been repainted, while the abundant retouching of the other angels' heads and other areas had not seriously affected the original parts. Consequently, the recovery of the original surface layer was neither slight nor insignificant, in particular for the group of apostles depicted on the right and the figures in the procession above them. Thus we can conclude that this recovery was of the utmost value above all in terms of the entire right side of the painting, which was clearly in a much more fragile state of conservation than the left half. Likewise, it was evident that the entire lower border of the

painting had suffered substantial damage, perhaps as the result of a fire.

As for the technical aspects, a more in-depth analysis will undoubtedly provide extensive data. However, for the time being, it should be mentioned that there is canvas on the wooden support, but this is discontinuous, corresponding almost always to the joints of the boards making up the panel.

Following the restoration, an interpretation of the iconographic theme became clearer within the scheme of the composition which had recovered an overall equilibrium.

In this *Dormitio Virginis*, so rich in figures and scenes, the fulcrum of the work is in the centre of the panel. Three scenes are placed along the vertical axis: the reclining figure of the Theotokos depicted as she is falling asleep surrounded by St Paul, the Apostles and some eminent Church Fathers; Christ in a *mandorla* surrounded by eight angels, carrying in his right arm the tiny effigy of the Virgin's soul, which, as usual, is portrayed as an infant dressed in a white tunic; and lastly, the *animula* of the Theotokos is welcomed by a choir of angels as it ascends to heaven in their arms. The other surrounding scenes enrich this fulcrum and endow the panel with a highly pathetic choral quality, giving the painting its particular character. These scenes stand out clearly on the upper part of the work, but like the figures of the apostles on the lower part they have been damaged along the edges that have been cut. Two interesting architectural structures with columns and domes stand on the sides. Inside them, four mourning women express their sorrow by drying their tears with the edge of their cloaks or tearing at their hair. With these ancient, eloquent gestures they witness and participate in the scene of the Virgin's death from their windows (or verandas or terraces).

Above the terraces, at the same height as the *animula* of the Theotokos carried by the angels, two processions move. The one on the left, preceded by a haloed female figure, is composed principally of women, but is led by a young man in a rose-coloured tunic who holds a small cross in his right hand. The other procession on the right has a group of male figures at the end, and is followed a few steps behind by a man who turns his head towards the group of angels holding the *animula*.

It is not clear who exactly the people are or what the two groups represent. At the same time, it is obvious that because of their differ-