

## PIETRO VANNINI'S PROCESSIONAL CROSS

### LA CROCE PROCESSIVA DI PIETRO VANNINI

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**Abstract:** Nowadays Pietro Vannini is considered one of the most skilled 15<sup>th</sup>- century Italian goldsmiths. He was able to harmonize stylistic features of the late Gothic tradition with the new elements typical of the Renaissance art. Indeed, he realised various monstrances, crosses and reliquaries that are still displayed in important museums and churches. Yet, this article focuses on one of his less famous creations, a processional cross displayed at the Diocesan Museum of Osimo. The artefact has not been adequately documented in the past, despite its relevance, and this has caused confusion on its origin and iconography. Various are the hypothesis on the date of its origin, among them the one from scholar Clerici assigns the cross to the late fifteenth century. Moreover, complex is the analysis and identification of the figures that decorate the cross from the iconographical point of view. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to clarify the story of the cross and to underline its relevance. The article starts from the origin of the cross along with a stylistic and iconographic in-depth analysis, where scholars such as Gori, Fanciulli and Montevecchi (one of the best scholars of Vannini) express their views. Then proceeds to a focus on *the several restorations the piece has undergone, from those mandated by bishop Spada and bishop Compagnoni, to the campaigns that have not been documented, yet can be inferred from the changes they brought to the artefact and its various descriptions throughout different periods in history.*

**Keywords:** Pietro Vannini, Processional Cross, Goldsmith's art, Italy, 15th century.

**Astratto:** Al giorno d'oggi Pietro Vannini è considerato uno dei più grandi orafi italiani del XV secolo. Egli è stato in grado di equilibrare caratteristiche tradizionali del gusto tardo-gotico con i nuovi elementi tipici dell'arte Rinascimentale; ha infatti realizzato vari ostensori, croci e reliquiari che sono ancora oggi visibili in musei e chiese di notevole

importanza. Tuttavia, questo articolo si focalizza su una delle sue creazioni meno famose, una croce processionale esposta presso il Museo Diocesano di Osimo. Questo manufatto non è stato documentato in maniera adeguata in passato, nonostante la sua importanza, e ciò ha causato disorientamento su questioni riguardanti la sua origine e iconografia. Molte sono le ipotesi sulla sua data di manifattura, tra queste si distingue lo studioso Clerici che colloca la realizzazione della croce verso la fine del XV secolo. È inoltre complessa sia l'analisi che l'identificazione dal punto di vista iconografico delle figure che adornano la croce. Lo scopo di questo articolo è quello di chiarire le vicende legate alla croce e di evidenziare la sua importanza. L'articolo si propone di analizzare le origini della croce e di delineare una approfondita analisi stilistica e iconografica che muove dagli studiosi Gori, Fanciulli e Montevicchi (una dei più grandi studiosi di Vannini); infine, si analizzano i vari restauri effettuati sull'opera, alcuni commissionati dal cardinale Spada e dal cardinale Compagnoni, e altri che non sono stati documentati, ma che possono essere dedotti dai cambiamenti che hanno portato al manufatto e dalle numerose descrizioni effettuate in vari periodi storici.

**Parole chiave:** Pietro Vannini. Croce Processionale, Oroficeria, Italia, Quindicesimo

## INTRODUCTION

Information has always been vague about this processional cross, which was originally conserved in the cathedral in Osimo (Italy), and is now displayed in the Diocesan Museum. For a long time, the cross was believed to be a product of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, due to the misreading of some contemporary sources; only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did Émile Bertaux attribute the piece to Pietro Vannini, and therefore to the latter half of the 1400s. Even though the period of its creation has been ascertained, there is not much information about the origin of the cross, and the exact date of realization remains unknown. Pietro Vannini is nowadays universally credited as one of the best goldsmiths to ever come from the town of Ascoli; however, his figure has long been neglected. For this reason, there are no ample sources about his minor works, such as Osimo's processional cross. This scarcity of information has prompted the flourishing of many iconographic interpretations, which present different perspectives, but all have the merit

of describing the cross at different points in time<sup>1</sup>. As a result, it is possible to track how the piece changed and how it was restored, even though not all these passages are duly documented.

## THE GOLDSMITH PIETRO VANNINI AND THE ARTISTIC CONTEXT OF THE CROSS

Even though Émile Bertaux was the first to conduct researches about Vannini, it is due to Father Vincenzo Paoletti<sup>2</sup> and Father Giuseppe Fabiani the current knowledge of his artistic and private life. Pietro was born between 1413 and 1418 in Ascoli from a family with an artistic background: his grandfather had been a goldsmith and a superintendent of the mint in Macerata and Fermo, while his father Vannino was a renowned artist (Bulgari, 1969, p. 44). A notary deed tells us that Vannini was already qualified as a goldsmith in 1444 (Fabiani, 1968, p. 286), therefore it is not surprising to see his contribution to the micro-sculptures placed on the cross of Montefiore dell’Aso dated 1442<sup>3</sup>. Several factors have affected his creative talent and his stylistic development. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century Ascoli was full of ateliers and goldsmiths, among them Lorenzo d’Ascoli realised the stational cross for the Collegiate of Montecassiano in 1414<sup>4</sup>. For its general structure this work of art became a reference point for all the following crosses and artists, including Vannini. Another artist of the same period is Nicola da

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<sup>1</sup> The various iconographic interpretations that are mentioned above can be found in the following texts: Clerici, Giuseppe (2010). *Pietro Vannini scultore orafa del Quattrocento*, Ascoli Piceno: Istituto Superiore di Studi Medievali Cecco d’Ascoli, pp. 71-74.

Fanciulli, Luca (1769). *Osservazioni critiche sopra le antichità cristiane di Cingoli*, Osimo: Quercetti, pp. 170-174.

Gentili, Gino Vinicio (2001). *Il duomo di Osimo*, Osimo: Fondazione “Don Carlo”, pp. 230-233.

Montevecchi, Benedetta (2002), in *Opere d’arte nella città di Osimo*, Massa, Marina and Carnevali, Ermanno, vol. II, Ancona: Arti Grafiche Annibali, pp. 64-65.

Morello, Giovanni (1999). *Libri di pietra. Mille anni della Cattedrale di Ancona tra Oriente e Occidente*, Mondadori Electa.

Ricci, Amico (1834). *Memorie storiche delle arti e degli artisti della marca di Ancona*, vol. I, Macerata: Tipografia di Alessandro Mancini, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> For an *excursus* and a more in-depth analysis on Vannini’s life the following scholars are mentioned:

Montevecchi, Benedetta (2002), in *Opere d’arte nella città di Osimo*, Massa, Marina and Carnevali, Ermanno, vol. II, Ancona: Arti Grafiche Annibali, pp. 64-65.

Montevecchi, Benedetta (2006). “Pietro Vannini principe degli orafi ascolani” in *Atlante dei beni culturali dei territori di Ascoli Piceno e Fermo*, vol. Beni artistici: Oroficerie, Cinisello Balsamo, pp. 107-126.

Montevecchi, Benedetta (2008). “Dopo Nicola: presenze e suggestioni dall’Abruzzo alle Marche di Pietro Vannini” in *Nicola da Guardiagrele orafa tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*. S. Guido, Roma, pp. 609-627.

Paoletti, Vincenzo (2009). *Pietro Vannini e la scuola di oreficeria ascolana nel Quattrocento*, Ascoli Piceno: Istituto Superiore di studi medievali Cecco d’Ascoli.

<sup>3</sup> There are no official documents about his direct involvement in the cross, yet some scholars underline how such craftsmanship had been reached only by Vannini during those years (Montevecchi, 2006, pp. 107-108).

<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the cross of Montecassiano was made by scholar BARUCCA, Gabriele (2001), in *Ori e Argenti: Capolavori di oreficeria sacranella provincia di Macerata*, GIANNATIEMPO LOPEZ, Maria, Milano: Federico Motta Editore, pp. 104-207.

Moreover an *excursus* on Lorenzo d’Ascoli can be found on a paper written by BARUCCA, Gabriele (2006). “Lorenzo d’Ascoli e Antonio da Sant’Elpidio, maestri orafi del primo Quattrocento” in *Atlante dei beni culturali dei territori di Ascoli Piceno e Fermo*, vol. Beni artistici: Oroficerie, Cinisello Balsamo, pp. 89-105.

Guardiagreles, he manufactured many works of art such as the processional cross for the Cathedral of St. Massimo in L'Aquila in 1434. Vannini was greatly influenced by this figure. Typical of Abruzzese goldsmiths is the development of the arms from the central part of the cross, the insertion of enamels and the decoration of the metallic layers with naturalistic and floral motifs. In Osimo's processional cross and many other Vannini's works, such as the cross at the museum of Cluny and the crosses of Pinaco and Preta<sup>6</sup>, these elements can be found. After 1444 his name is not found in any official document for a long period (Bulgari, 1969, p. 44). During this time Vannini left his city to travel to southern Italy between Puglia and Campania, indeed his presence is confirmed by two monstrances he realised for Bovino and Ariano Irpino dated 1452. Another hypothetical stay could be in Padova where he could have observed works of art by Donatello, Squarcione and Bartolomeo Bellano (Montevecchi 2006, p. 108) from which he obtained a certain realism. And it is through this contacts that Vannini developed a personal and mature style. On the local late Gothic tradition, he introduced new elements typical of the Renaissance, and, it is this exact ability of synthesising various methods and stylistic currents that has made Vannini a distinguished goldsmith. In 1459 he moved to Macerata to work as superintendent of the mint, yet he decided to return to Ascoli in 1461 where he opened an atelier (Bulgari, 1969, p. 43). During these years Vannini was involved in other economic and social activities as well, from trades of wool and cloths to becoming the guide of the mint of Ascoli in 1466<sup>7</sup>. Among his last pieces, the most famous are the arm-reliquary of St. Emidio and its statue, dated 1484-86 and 1487 respectively. They represent the best technical and practical ability reached by Vannini so far, where the late Gothic taste harmonises with the Renaissance innovations. Vannini died on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1496 (Bulgari, 1969, p. 44).

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about Nicola da Guardiagrele the following volumes are recommended:

Guido Sante (2010). "Brevi note biografiche su Nicola da Guardiagrele" in *La memoria e la speranza*, Città del Vaticano, pp. 87-91.

Riccioni, Stefano (2016). "Nicola da Guardiagrele: le firme e le opere" in *Arte medievale*, IV serie, Milano: Silvana Editore, pp. 255-266.

<sup>6</sup> About the creation of these crosses they are all thought to be part of the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, the scarcity of information brings to this uncertain dating.

<sup>7</sup> Alongside Vannini another figure leads the mint of Ascoli, it is Giovanni Andrea di Bartolomeo (Bulgari, 1969, p. 44).

## ORIGIN AND STRUCTURE

According to some scholars, the cross was commissioned by the cultured bishop Gaspare Zacchi (Gentili, 2001, pp. 230-233). As mentioned in the *Memoirs* written by the bishop Compagnoni, the diocese of Osimo was held by Zacchi between 1460 and 1474<sup>8</sup>. The bishop was an erudite man and an antiquity enthusiast, and sources prove that in 1469 he decided to authorize substantial renovations in the Cathedral (Compagnoni, 1783, pp. 389-417). He was therefore arguably interested in culture and the arts<sup>9</sup>, and this suggests he was the only one who could have commissioned the cross. This theory is supported by chronological data: Zacchi was the only bishop who presided the diocese for more than a short period. The cross was apparently manufactured during Vannini's mature period, and bears resemblance to other pieces realized in the artist's last years. According to scholar Daniela Ferriani, who observed the archaizing lettering on the reverse of the cross reading "PETRU/S VANI/NI DE E/SCULO F."<sup>10</sup>, the cross may date back to the period between 1460 and 1465. Other experts, such as scholar Giuseppe Clerici, have suggested a later date perhaps around 1470-72. Scholar Clerici sustains his theory taking into consideration the renovations made in the Cathedral in 1469 (Clerici, 2010, p. 77). Indeed, the cross could have been commissioned and made around these years, so that it could be showed once completed the works. Logically the hypothesis of scholar Clerici seems to be the most probable. In fact, it is highly plausible that Zacchi decided to display a new work of art at the renovated place of worship. Furthermore, the micro-sculptures adorning the whole piece show various innovations, such as a new expressiveness and plasticity, that make me think of a more mature work by Vannini. Even though the lettering on the reverse can be considered quite archaic, we cannot base the dating of the cross entirely on it. We should take into consideration how a studio used to operate at that time: more manufacturers were employed under the direction of the artist in order to create complex artworks, and, in many of Vannini's crosses it is clear that the small silver tiles are a

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<sup>8</sup> Compagnoni, Pompeo (1783). *Memorie storico-critiche della Chiesa e de' vescovi di Osimo*, Roma: Zampel.

The period that Zacchi spent at the diocese of Osimo can be also seen on the website of the archdiocese of Ancona-Osimo, <http://www.diocesi.ancona.it/arcivescovo/cronotassi-dei-vescovi/> (Consulted: 09/01/2020).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed Zacchi wrote about the Cathedral of Osimo and its documents (Gentili, 2001, p. 230) and he was usually known to commission many works of art (Quinterio, 2009, p. 123).

<sup>10</sup> From Latin: "Made by Pietro Vannini". Developed by scholar Ferriani, this theory can be found in an article written by scholar Montevocchi (Montevocchi, 2002, p. 65).

product of one of the workers in his atelier<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, these tiles were frequently made yet the innovations were slightly or none, despite the passing of time, as they were considered elements of minor importance. In any case, this processional cross can be regarded as the culmination of all the crosses crafted by Vannini, as it displays his most advanced technical and manual capabilities.

The term “processional cross” comes from the Latin *crux processionalis* (acc. *crucem processionalis*), and it defines a cross which is mounted on a pole or held by the extension of its vertical arm to be carried in procession. A 16<sup>th</sup> century register from the Cathedral of Osimo shows that Vannini’s cross was stored in the sacristy at the time, and describes it as “una croce grande antica con il Crocifisso con figure di rilievo d’argento, cioè quattro da una parte, e quattro dall’altra, di peso di 9 , compresavi l’anima di legno”<sup>12</sup> (Unknown author, 1657, p. 24). The cross, which is 75 cm high and 45 cm wide, is composed of a wooden core that was originally covered by an embossed silver layer with a bead motif, which “consunta dall’età, l’è stata con insano consiglio sostituita un’altra sottil lastra di ottone”<sup>13</sup> (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 170). The silver layer, partially gold-plated, is still visible in some areas of the cross, whereas in others it has been replaced by brass or copper: these metallic layers are finely embossed, chiselled and engraved. The cross is slender and both sides are decorated: the obverse bears the crucified Christ and four micro-sculptures at the extremities, whereas the reverse presents five small sculptures, four on the extremities and one in the centre. Engraved plates, originally covered in translucent enamel, and a big circular tile located centrally behind the head of the Christ complete the decoration of the arms. At the foot of the vertical arm, six additional silver plates decorate the polyhedral knob adorned with embossed floral motifs, where the modern pole is inserted. [1]

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<sup>11</sup> During the Renaissance it was a common custom for a major artist to have many workers. These workers followed the stylistic guidelines of the master and each of them was employed in order to create a specific part of the whole piece. As a result of this whole process, the work of art was nothing more than the product of a complex process of assembly. Therefore, it is usually identifiable the part created by the hand of the master or the ones created by other manufacturers. This exact method was used in Vannini’s atelier, and, in most of his works it is seen the stylistic difference between the polished micro-sculptures and the small silver tiles of inferior formal quality.

<sup>12</sup> “A great, ancient cross with the body of crucified Christ and figures of silver in relief, that is, four on one side and four on the other, weighing 9, including the wooden core”.

<sup>13</sup> “Consumed by age, was recklessly replaced by another thin layer of brass”.



1. Vannini, Processional Cross. Obverse. Osimo Diocesan Museum.

### STYLISTIC AND ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The cross has several elements worth analysing in detail, especially from an iconographic point of view.

There are various iconographic elements to observe: the extremities of the arms present square plates surrounded by four lobes decorated with floral motifs and coils. The plates act as a base for the micro-sculptures adorning the whole piece. Moreover, the arms bear the same diamond-shaped plates found in the knob at the base of the cross. While the obverse presents a silver Christ with a carved silver tondo under his head, the reverse carries another in-the-round statuette in the centre.

The silver Christ on the obverse [1] stands in the centre and has been described as “in atto assai doloroso, ed eccitante a pietà”<sup>14</sup> (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 171): his palms and soles are pierced by nails, his head is reclined to the right, his mouth agape to show so deep a suffering that even his legs are slightly bent. The iconographic intention of this piece is evidently to glorify the Holy Cross, as proved by the 18<sup>th</sup> century cartouche above

<sup>14</sup> “Very painful in his demeanour, and eliciting compassion”.

Christ's head, which reads "IN HOC SIGNO/VINCES"<sup>15</sup>, referencing the figure of Constantine. The hypothesis of a link to Constantine is strengthened by the figures of St. Helena and Constantine reproduced at the extremities of the cross. These two figures are historically related to the veneration of the Holy Cross, as Gori points out: "Statuae Constantini & Helenae ex industria locatae fuerunt ad latera huius S. Crucis, quia non solum hisce debemus felicem SS. Ligni adinventionem; sed quia Constantinus ipse, cum CPoli insignes Cruces erexisset, ad earundem crucum latera flatuas S. Helenae matris suae, atque sui ipsius itidem poni mandavit."<sup>16</sup> (Gori, 1749, p. 46). Portraying these two figures was an innovation for its time: it is possible that bishop Zacchi, a humanist, suggested to include them. The two in-the-round statuettes are made of silver with gold-plated draperies, as all the other sculptures on the cross; currently, one of them is situated on the obverse of the cross and the other one on the reverse.

St. Helena is portrayed at the foot of the cross. Between 325 and 326 AD, she posed the relics of the Holy Cross she had retrieved on Mount Golgota in the Holy Cross Church of Jerusalem. The Holy Empress is portrayed as a half-bust figure standing on a ledge shaped in the form of a cherubic head. She wears a robe tied at the waist and a cape over her shoulders; a crown rests on her head. She used to hold a sceptre in her right hand, of which only the end survives today, whereas "doveva posare dappincipio un globo"<sup>17</sup> (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 170) to rest in her open left hand.

The two figures at the ends of the horizontal arm are the *Mater Dolorosa* and St. John the Evangelist, respectively. Since they are traditionally believed to have been present on the Golgota, their iconographic identification is hardly surprising<sup>18</sup>. The two whole-figure micro-sculptures, sat on a seashell-shaped base, face the centre of the cross. The Virgin Mary, her head veiled, is draped in an ample cape through which her bent leg is visible. The Apostle sits with his legs crossed and his hands joined on his right knee; he wears a long tunic and turns his sorrowful face towards Christ.

<sup>15</sup> With (under) this sign you shall triumph, from ancient Greek ἐν τούτῳ νικά.

<sup>16</sup> "The statues of Constantine and St. Helena were deliberately posed on the sides of this Holy Cross, not only because we owe them the felicitous invention of the Holy Wood, but also because Constantine himself, after raising the renowned crosses in Constantinople, ordered a statue of himself and of his mother St. Helena to be placed on the sides of the cross in the same way".

<sup>17</sup> "A globe was originally intended".

<sup>18</sup> The presence of St. Mary and St. John on the Golgota is amply recognised by the Christian community and it is confirmed in the Gospel of John (19,25).



The remaining figures on the cross's extremities, both on the obverse and on the reverse, have lost their defining attributes (such as globes, books, spears, arrow, sceptres). Some of these were still present when the scholar Fanciulli sketched the cross in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; however, even at that time their iconography was ambiguous and did not allow conclusive identification.

On the obverse and at the top of the cross, a figure is represented directly facing the viewer. He is dressed with pontifical vestments, over which he wears a cope clasped with a buckle. He wears a low mitre on its head. His right hand holds the drapes of the cope, whereas his left arm is extended. His left hand probably used to hold an attribute which has been lost, perhaps a cross or a pastoral staff. The lack of defining iconographic attributes makes it difficult to identify this figure. Two suggestions have been made: it could be St. Leopard or St. Vitalianus<sup>19</sup>, both bishops whose devotion is deeply felt in the city of Osimo.



2. Vannini, Processional Cross. Reverse. Osimo Diocesan Museum.

<sup>19</sup> Both scholar Fanciulli (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 172) and Montevecchi (Montevecchi, 2002, p. 64) agree on the figure of St. Vitalianus, while scholar Carnevali advances the hypothesis of St. Leopard (Carnevali, 2014).

On the reverse and in the centre [2], there is the Blessing Holy Father, described as “un uomo assai vecchio, ricoperto il capo di candida chioma: gli pende dal mento lunga e veneranda barba; colla destra sta in atto di benedire; elevate tenendo le due prime dita, raccolte le altre: si vede un codice situato sopra del sinistro ginocchio, su cui spiegata tiene la sinistra mano.”<sup>20</sup> (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 172).

It has been speculated that the statuette beneath the Holy Father is a prophet or a doctor of the Church, most likely St. Jerome (Morello, 1999). He is sitting with his right hand resting on his knee, “a traverso”<sup>21</sup> (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 174) a pen laid at the time of Fanciulli’s observations; he holds open a codex with his left hand.

At the top of the cross on the reverse side there is another statuette of a bishop dressed in pontifical vestments. He wears a low mitre on his head and gloves on his hands; his right hand is raised in a blessing gesture, while his left hand clasps an object which has been lost, but was possibly a pastoral staff<sup>22</sup>. This figure has been variously identified as St. Leopard or St. Benvenutus<sup>23</sup>.

The extremities of the horizontal arm of the cross bear two unidentified micro-sculptures.

The left extremity carries a figure in military garb. His chiselled helmet ends at his shoulders; his chest down to his knees is covered by a cuirass, and a cape draped behind his back is clasped at his right shoulder. At the time of Fanciulli’s sketch, the figure held a spear in his right hand; this, together with the two animal figures nearby, led the scholar to conclude that it was a depiction of the martyr St. George. Currently, two other theories are believed to be more plausible: according to the first, the figure

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<sup>20</sup> “A very old man, with his head covered in a snow-white mane; a long, venerable beard descends from his chin; with his right hand he dispenses blessings, raising the first two fingers and closing the others; one sees a codex over his left knee, and his left hand rests upon it”.

<sup>21</sup> “Across which”.

<sup>22</sup> The object was still present at the time of Fanciulli’s description (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 172).

<sup>23</sup> There are various theories about this figure: Fanciulli identifies a bishop yet he does not clarify his name (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 172), Morello hypothesises it to be St. Benvenutus (Morello, 1999) to which Montevicchi adds the chance of the figure to be St. Leopard (Montevicchi, 2002, p. 64).

represents St. Victor, who was then patron saint of Osimo; the second claims that it represents emperor Constantine<sup>24</sup>.

The right extremity depicts a statuette with the head wrapped in a bandage, whose end he holds in his left hand. He is dressed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century fashion, with heavily embellished garments tied at the waist. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century description provided by Fanciulli, this figure held a spear in his right hand. According to Gori, this was a depiction of emperor Constantine, whereas Fanciulli believed it to be the martyr St. Longinus or the martyr St. Victor. The depiction of St. Helena on the obverse of the cross and the oval cartouche reading “IN HOC SIGNO/VINCES” seem to support Gori’s hypothesis identifying the figure as Constantine. According to tradition, before facing Maxentius in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on 25 October 312, Constantine had a vision of a luminous cross on which the abovementioned words were engraved. However, historiographic sources prove that the cartouche was added to the cross at a later stage, following one of the restorations to which it was subject; this is why the hypothesis of St. Victor was advanced. Contemporary scholars tend to agree with Fanciulli in identifying the figure as St. Victor, but some have also suggested it could be St. Corona<sup>25</sup>.

The micro-sculptures, four on the obverse and five on the reverse, all present an element of striking innovation: the small *suppedanea* which serve as a base for the figures. The *suppedanea* are rounded and decorated with scales, shaped as seashells or as cherubs with spread wings. The in-the-round figures seem to expand into the surrounding space and to interact with each other. Vannini achieved outstanding results in sculpting human anatomy: the mourners’ figures express sorrow and anguish through their expressive facial features, whereas the reclined face and sombre figure of the Christ remind of Donatello’s realism. Faces are lit by a new expressiveness: there are no more absent-minded or inattentive figures, but rather a strong pathos. Characters have lost the rigidity that characterizes manufactures from previous centuries, and have acquired considerable plasticity (clearly inspired to classical art) which is evident in the body of the Christ and in the draping of the other characters’ garments. It is worth noting how the

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<sup>24</sup> The possibility of it to be St. Victor is shared by scholar Gentili (Gentili, 2001, p. 232) and Morello (Morello, 1999) while scholar Montevicchi (Montevicchi, 2002, p. 64) believes it to be emperor Costantine.

<sup>25</sup> Among the contemporary scholars, Montevicchi identifies this figure as St. Victor (Montevicchi, 2002, p. 64) whereas Gentili claims that it represents St. Corona (Gentili, 2001, p. 232).

artist achieved a certain “pictorial” quality in the figures by balancing the silver and gold-plated parts: faces and bodies are of silver, whereas hair, clothes and accessories are gold-plated.

Another decorative element lies behind the Christ’s head, on the obverse of the cross. It is a circular tile chiselled to depict an old man: he sits outdoors, wearing a robe and a cape, and writing on a scroll with his head reclined intently. The lettering on the scroll is too minute to be deciphered, and cannot provide any clue about the figure in question, but it is believed to portray a prophet, such as David or Isaiah (Montevecchi, 2002, p. 64).

Small silver tiles halfway down the arms complete the decoration of the cross: two on the obverse and four on the reverse, chiselled with ornaments which were probably originally covered in translucent enamel. One of these tiles bears writing that authenticates the cross as a product of Vannini. The tiles have also lent themselves to controversy, when Costantino Costantini argued that two of them on the arms and all the tiles on the knob were the product of later restoration. Partially corroborating this claim, Fanciulli wrote (Fanciulli, 1769, p. 174):

“Rimane ora per ultimo a dire di quattro altre figurette, delineate a bollino full’argento, e locate qua e là nella nostra Croce, le quali tutte, [...], rappresentano sacre Vergini decorate del martirio. [...] Parimente, resterebbe a dire dell’ altre immagini impresse in tanti quadrelli attorno alla palla; ma, per esser queste lavoro degli ultimi passati anni, sostituite all’ antiche che più non v’ erano, perciò stimiam bene di non farne parola.”<sup>26</sup>

From these sources we learn that in 1769 there were only four tiles on the whole cross, all depicting virgins. Currently, the tiles bearing a portrait of figures are five, three with virgins and two with figures of saints. This means that the two tiles depicting saints are

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<sup>26</sup> “Lastly, it remains to be said about four other small figures, made of pure silver and disseminated on the Cross, all of which [...] represent holy Virgins decorated with martyrdom. [...] Equally, it should be said about other images impressed on many small squares around the knob; but since these are a product of these last years and have replaced others more ancient and lost, we do not think it suitable to write of them”.

most likely the work of some restorer: one of the tiles depicting the virgins must have been lost and replaced with a new tile, while another tile has been added *ex novo*.

## RESTORATIONS

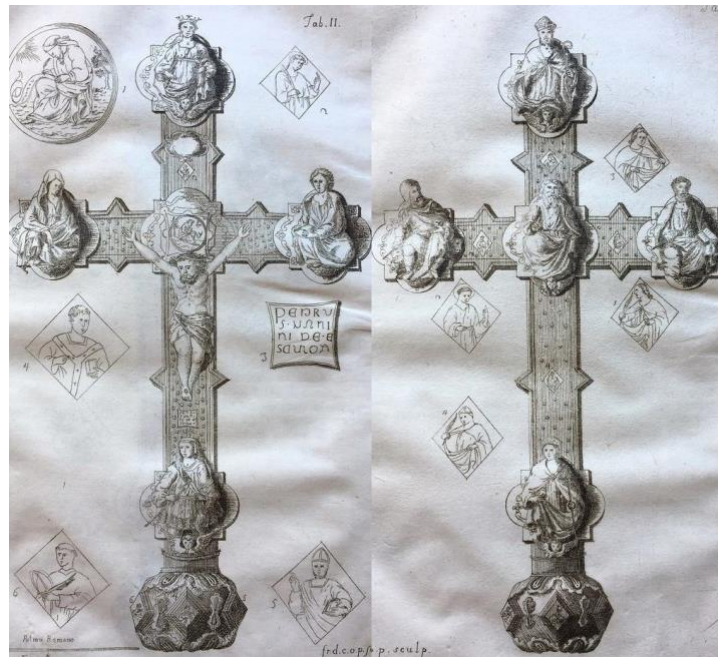
In time, the cross has undergone several campaigns of restoration: some, such as those mandated by bishop Spada and bishop Compagnoni, are known; others have not been documented, but can be inferred from the changes they brought to the piece and its varying description through different historical periods.

One of the first known restorations has been recorded in the Cathedral's register in 1719: the description of the cross is accompanied by an indication that “è stata fatta ristaurare dall' Emo. Spada”<sup>27</sup> (Unknown author, 1719). The document mentions archbishop and cardinal Orazio Filippo Spada, who held Osimo's bishopric from 17 January 1714 to 28 June 1724. Numerous sources depict Spada as an art collector and a patron of artists. It is known that he commissioned exquisite wooden furniture for the choir of the St. Leopard Cathedral, thus it is hardly surprising that he ordered restorations. These were probably carried out between 1714, when Spada first arrived in Osimo, and 1719, when the intervention was recorded in the Cathedral's register. The same entry describes the knob at the base of the cross as “pomo dorato con tre specchietti d'argento, e figurine di basso rilievo”<sup>28</sup> (Unknown author, 1719). Originally, the knob must have been decorated with precious gemstones, and possibly with the six chiselled and enamelled silver tiles mentioned in the document, similar to those embellishing the arms of the cross. However, the gemstones and some of the silver tiles must have gotten lost in time and then replaced, approximately between 1720 and 1764. Another restoration must have been conducted roughly at the same time, for the 1769 Fanciulli document notes: “resterebbe a dire dell'altre immagini impresse in tanti quadrelli attorno alla palla; [...], per esser queste lavoro degli ultimi passati anni, sostituite all'antiche che non più v' erano, perciò stimiam bene di non farne parola.”<sup>29</sup> (Fanciulli, 1769, pp. 174-175). [3]

<sup>27</sup> “His Excellence Spada has ordered its restoration”.

<sup>28</sup> “A golden knob with three silver tiles, and low-relief figurines”.

<sup>29</sup> “It should be said about other images impressed on many small squares around the knob; but since these are a product of these last years and have replaced others more ancient and lost, we do not think it suitable to write of them”.



3. Fanciulli, Drawing of the Processional Cross, 1769. Diocesan Archive of Osimo.

In the restoration allegedly performed between 1720 and 1764, the silver tiles on the cross's knob were replaced. Even Costantini believes that the half figures were not realized by Vannini: this is supposedly proved by their design, which is different from that of the figures on the cross, but also by the colour of the silver itself. Moreover, during the same period the silver layer covering the cross may have been replaced with a brass layer, crudely stippled and embossed in some areas. The corners of the cross were covered with fillets of brass. The “disgraziatissima rattoppatura”<sup>30</sup> (Costantini, 1906, p. 190), as it was labelled by Costantini, is mentioned by Fanciulli but not by the 1719 register.

Another known restoration was ordered by bishop Pompeo Compagnoni, active in Osimo from 16 September 1740 to 25 July 1774. This intervention is documented by a small plaque on the reverse of the cross, reading “restaurandam curavit pompeius compagnonius episcopus MDCCLXV”<sup>31</sup>. The 1765 restoration added another baroque-inspired cartouche on the obverse, reading “in hoc signo vinces” and emphasizing the

<sup>30</sup> “Disgraceful patch-up”.

<sup>31</sup> “Bishop Pompeo Compagnoni had (this cross) restored 1765”.

glorification of the Holy Cross as part of the iconographic program of the piece. Equally baroque quadrilobed decorations were also added.



4. Photo of the Processional Cross in 1906. Obverse. From “Rivista Marchigiana Illustrata” n°6.

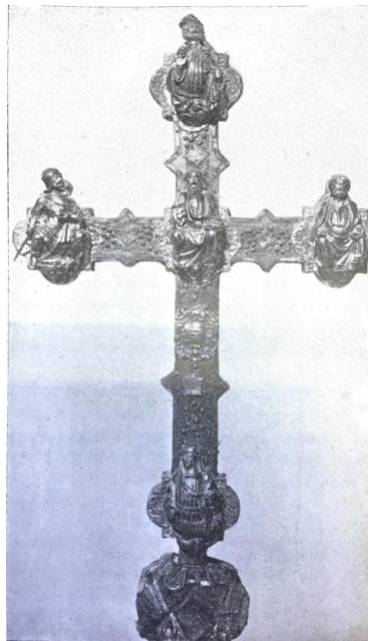
Further news about the cross surfaced only in 1906, thanks to an article penned by Costantino Costantini. Comparing the appearance of the cross with the description made by Fanciulli [3], the scholar realized that some of the statuettes on the extremities of the cross had been moved. In 1769, the gentleman dressed in 15<sup>th</sup> century garb (presumed to be either St. Victor or St. Corona) was on the reverse beneath the Christ, whereas in 1906 it is situated on the obverse, in the lower part of the cross, having switched positions with the figure of a bishop (perhaps St. Vitalianus or St. Leopard) [4]. Clearly, between 1765 and 1906 further restorations must have been carried out, according to Costantini “da un volgarissimo stagnino”<sup>32</sup> (Costantini, 1906, p. 190). The scholar explains how some figures present clots of solidified tin where they were welded back onto the plates that fix them to the cross, or how the Christ’s head is flawed in the neck because of having been reattached, or how one of the nails piercing the body of the Christ is “un pezzettaccio di ferro qualunque inzeppato da una bulletta comune”<sup>33</sup> (Costantini, 1906, p. 190) and no longer made of silver. It is plausible that the two silver

<sup>32</sup> “By a most vulgar tinsmith”.

<sup>33</sup> “A vulgar piece of common iron fixed with an ordinary tack”.

tiles depicting saints and decorating the arms of the cross were also added at this time. In 1769, Fanciulli only mentions tiles depicting virgins. Some scholars claim that one of these two tiles replaced one which originally bore the date of realization of the cross. This is possible, since the cross presents a small tile identifying Vannini as its author; therefore, the hypothesis of a second tile bearing the date of realization is credible. However, there are no sources in support of this theory; furthermore, the first cathedral register mentioning the cross, dating back to 1657, does not mention any such tile.

A third restoration must have been performed after 1906. Comparing contemporary pictures of the cross with those available today, it is possible to see how the position of some in-the-round statuettes has changed. On the obverse [4], the figure of St. Helena is located today in the lower part of the cross, whereas in 1906 (and in 1769) it was in the upper half. It has therefore been switched with the figure of the bishop (presumed to be St. Vitalianus or St. Leopard), which was originally situated beneath Christ. Two more statuettes have been displaced on the reverse [5]. In 1906 (and in 1769) the doctor of the church (probably St. Jerome) was on the right end of the cross, whereas today it is in the lower part; this was originally the position of the 15<sup>th</sup> century gentleman (probably St. Victor or St. Corona), who stands now in the right arm.



5. Photo of the Processional Cross in 1906. Reverse. From “Rivista Marchigiana Illustrata” n°6.



## CONCLUSIONS

When investigating the cross's origin and analysing its complex iconography, it can be seen that this artefact has not been adequately documented in the past, despite its relevance. This has caused a paucity of sources and documents from previous periods. However, *the cross seems to have reoccupied its rightful place in the international art scene* as Vannini's figure acquired new importance thanks to Bertaux, who describes him as one of «*les plus grands orfèvres de la Renaissance*»<sup>34</sup> (Bertaux, 1897, p. 7). *The studies of scholar Paoletti and Fabiani helped as well. Nowadays Vannini is considered an excellent goldsmith who was able to balance stylistic features of the late Gothic tradition with innovative Renaissance factors. And the cross of Osimo is nothing but the representation of this matured style. The several restorations the piece has undergone are a testimony to its importance for the city of Osimo. A processional cross itself it is usually taken into great consideration by a community as it is seen as a guidance during a procession. As a result, Vannini's processional cross was highly significant for this role itself. Besides the iconography that is present all over the piece was not only innovative for that time, given the representation of St. Helena and Costantine, but also dear to the citizens for the portrayal of the most revered saints of that time. All things considered, the processional cross is clearly a piece of great cultural and artistic significance thanks to its rich iconographic interpretation and conservation history. Most of its conservation campaigns remain unknown, but can be deduced from the changes of the cross and its different descriptions we have over time, while others are known, such as those approved by bishop Spada and Bishop Compagnoni.*

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<sup>34</sup> "The greatest goldsmiths of Renaissance".

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