



English Martyrs Reading Apse Cross

Influences and Inspiration.

The cross now hanging in the apse is a culmination of many years research, drawing and prayer. The shape of the cross is taken from a number of sources. In pre Renaissance Italy and particularly in Tuscany and Umbria, it was common to place a large painted and gilded cross in the apse of a church, hanging in the space above the altar. This was particularly prevalent in the large, long naved churches built by the Franciscan order all over Italy.

Some original examples can still be found hanging in the churches for which they were painted, most notably the large Fransiscan foundation of Santa Croce (Holy Cross), in Florence. This church boasts the famous, enormous cross, painted by Duccio, horribly damaged in the devastating flood of 1966, now restored, conserved and hanging back in its original location.

Elsewhere in Italy because of the changing tastes in church architecture and decoration during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, many of these crosses were removed and relocated to museums. The National Gallery in London, The Louvre and The Museo San Matteo in Pisa each have examples which particularly influenced the shape and composition of the English Martyrs Cross.



Master of the St Francis Crucifix c 1280 National Gallery London

Plate 38 Master of St Francis Crucifix. 92.1 cm x 71 cm

Master of the St Francis Crucifix c 1275 Louvre Paris

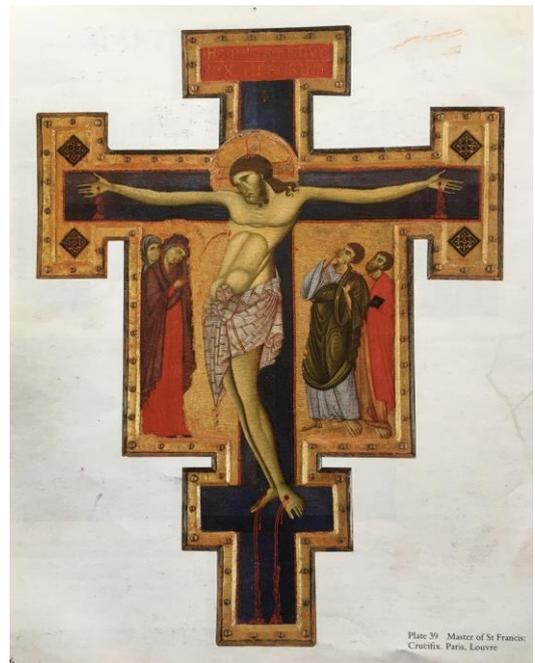


Plate 39 Master of St Francis Crucifix. Paris, Louvre

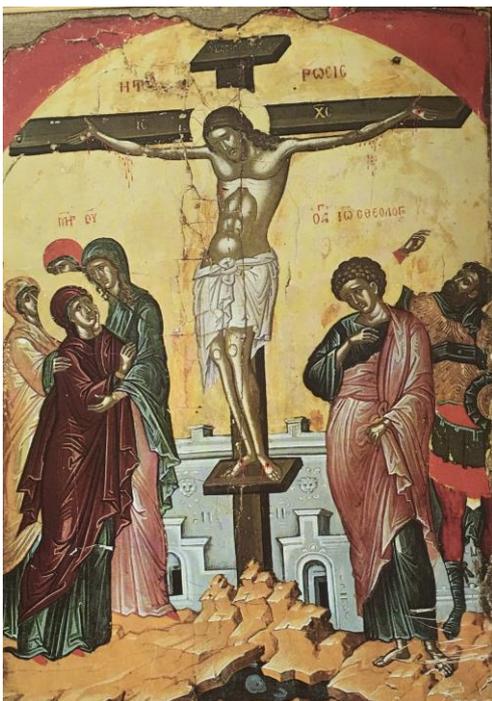


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GIUNTA PISANO fl. 1236-54
Processional cross
with Crucifixion on both
sides
Thirteenth century
Tempera and gold on poplar wood,
83 x 83 cm
Museo San Matteo di San Matteo, Pisa, inv. no.
1079

Giunta Pisano c 1240 Museo San Matteo Pisa

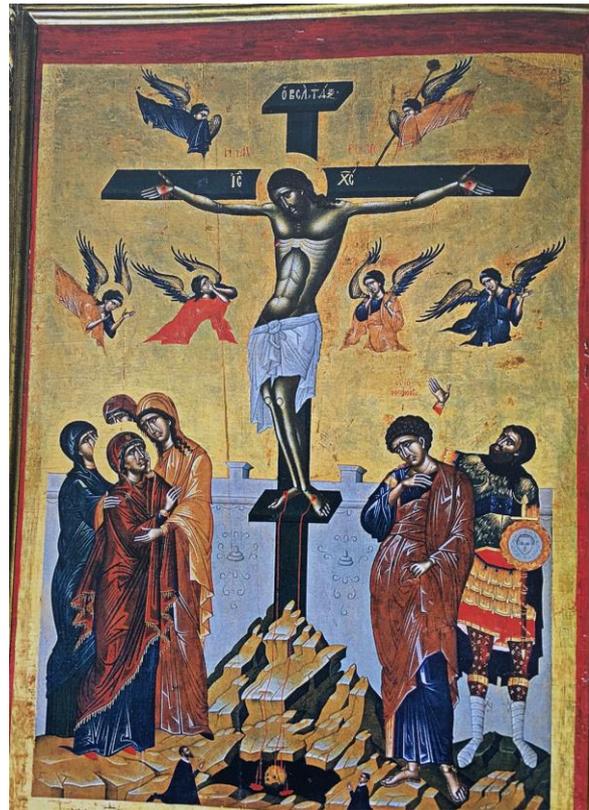
The figures on the English Martyrs Cross are from a slightly different source. They are painted using the Classically inspired style of late Byzantine, Cretan icons. The two masters of this style whose icons were the main prototypes for the cross are, Angelos Akantos and Theophanes Strelitzas. There is also a magnificent slightly later Crucifixion icon from The Church of St George of The Greeks in Venice by Emmanuel Lambardos, also a Cretan, which provided some added inspiration.

Angelos Akantos Crucifixion c 1450 Byzantine and Christian Museum Athens



Theophanes Strelitzas Crucifixion 1546 Stavronikita Monastery Mt Athos Greece

Emmanu Lambardos Crucifixion 1615 Church of St George of the Greeks Venice



As it can be seen, I utilised and adapted the figures of St John and The Blessed Virgin Mary from these icons but also isolated them, editing out the extraneous figures to preserve a sense of monumentality and the poignant dynamic of the relationship highlighted in the Fourth Gospel, when Christ hands care of his mother to the beloved disciple.

Another iconographic detail that comes from the Byzantine, Orthodox version of the image in these icons, is the Cross standing on the rocky outcrop of Golgotha, The Place of The Skull, in popular piety related to the burial place of the body of Adam. The blood dripping from Christ's wounds graphically drip onto the skull, baptising Adam with the blood of Christ, the New Adam, thus completing the cycle of redemption. This idea is also symbolised by the closing in a circle of the finger and thumb of Christ's right hand.

The Sun and Moon visible at the same time symbolically illustrates the narrative of darkness descending in the middle of the day as recounted in the Gospels. The Greek letters Alpha and Omega below them convey the idea that this is the end but also the beginning, everything has come full circle and the Resurrection will soon follow.