

Workshop 7

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The Sagittation of the Father: A Representation of Justice from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, between Manuscripts and Painted Façades

The doctoral dissertation explores urban painted façades from the Renaissance, within the broader European project “La Ville Ornée”. The research particularly focuses on the evolution and dissemination of specific motifs, and among them, the “sagittation of the father”, found on Swiss and German façades. The investigation into this theme has led to the exploration of a small corpus of illuminated manuscripts, spanning the 13th to 15th centuries and consistently depicting a group of sons about to or shooting at their father’s dead body. This motif originates from a story in the Babylonian Talmud (400 CE), emphasizing filial loyalty and the legitimacy of offspring, tested through a judge’s trial involving the deceased father. Over time, the narrative evolves: the number of sons is reduced, and instead of disturbing the tomb, the sons must shoot arrows at their father’s corpse, with the legitimate son refusing. This legend, losing its Oriental roots and incorporating Christian elements, eventually finds a place in the “Gesta Romanorum”, a 14th-century collection of fables which influenced iconographic programs. The widespread dissemination of this work led to the depiction of the sagittation across various media, including engravings, stained glass, and cassoni, and ultimately on monumental painted façades in urban spaces, emphasizing its significance in legal and moral contexts.
