

Narrating Charity at the Ospedale del Ceppo

RACHEL E. BOYD
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Fig. 8.1
The façade of
the Ospedale del
Ceppo in Gustavo
Strafforello's *La
Patria, Geografia
dell'Italia:
Provincia di Firenze*
(Turin: Unione
Tipografico-
Editrice,
1894). Photo:
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Commons.



When John Ruskin visited the Italian city of Pistoia in 1845, he found himself simultaneously distressed by and in awe of the colourful glazed terracotta frieze adorning the façade of the Ceppo Hospital (figs 8.1–8.3). In a letter to his father, Ruskin wrote:

There is a singular thing on the Hospital front, a series of bas-reliefs in coloured porcelain ... which have of course the most vulgar effect conceivable, looking like the commonest signpost barbarisms. And yet, if you struggle with yourself, and look into them, forgetting the colour, you find them magnificent works of the very highest merit, full of the p[u]rest sculptural <merit> feeling, and abundant in expression, grace of con[cepti]on and anatomical knowledge.¹

Ruskin's letter conveys a strong sense of his own desire, one seemingly prompted by the frieze, to look past his immediate impressions, beyond the colour, and instead 'into' the sculptural form. While sixteenth-century viewers likely appreciated the polychromy far more than Ruskin, the young critic's extended mode of viewing is a response that appears to be encouraged by the design of the sculptural program itself. The massive frieze, measuring more than forty meters in length, wraps around two sides of the loggia and is populated with dozens of life-size figures: contemporary, sacred, and allegorical. The bright colours of the glazes call attention to the hospital from far away, but it is only by walking around the loggia in relatively close proximity to the façade that a spectator can take in the entirety of the imagery. It is impossible to comprehend the complete picture from a single fixed location. Just as a reader unrolling a scroll would gradually progress through a text from beginning to end, so a viewer here must physically move from one segment to another.

Ruskin's distaste for polychromy was shared by many nineteenth-century historians of Renaissance sculpture, and it is a bias that persists—even if in a much less obvious way—to this day. No monograph has been written on Santi Buglioni (1494–1576), the sculptor responsible for this monumental frieze, since Allan Marquand's pioneering work in 1921.² Ruskin misidentified the creator, assigning it to the more famous Luca della Robbia (1400–1482), who invented the colourful glazed terracotta medium for which his family workshop became renowned. A century later, Santi di Michele (called Buglioni after his master, Benedetto Buglioni), was the last Florentine sculptor to specialise in this medium.³ The Ceppo frieze (1526–1529) is his masterpiece.⁴ Although he used a medium that was by the sixteenth century virtually synonymous

with the Della Robbia family, Buglioni's techniques and materials were highly experimental: he deployed a wide palette, with shades ranging from amber and chestnut to aubergine and pistachio, and in some areas layered colours to achieve a variety of tones and textures. Furthermore, Buglioni's decision to leave areas of exposed flesh unglazed facilitated his naturalistic depiction of contemporary Tuscans.

Just as innovative as Buglioni's technique was the sculptor's approach to the theme. The principal subject of the frieze consists of seven corporal works of mercy. The Gospel of Matthew describes six of these deeds as Christ's basis for the salvation of the blessed during the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31–46): feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. The seventh work, burying the dead, has its origins in the Book of Tobit (1:16–19) and was incorporated into the canonical list of works by the end of the twelfth century.⁵

I. Colour and Contemporaneity

The works of mercy were a natural choice for the decoration of charitable institutions in Renaissance Italy, yet Buglioni's medium and exterior setting allowed him to communicate the subject matter in a newly prominent, visually striking way. Surviving Tuscan precedents that Santi likely knew and referred to include the *Allegory of Divine Mercy* (1341–1342) in the Confraternity of Santa Maria della Misericordia (now the Bigallo) in Florence, the fresco cycle of the Pellegrinaio of Santa Maria della Scala (1440–1445) in Siena, and the lunettes (c.1478–1479) in the Oratory of San Martino dei Buonomini in Florence.⁶ Notably, these are painted and decorate enclosed spaces, making them less immediately visible in their urban contexts.⁷ The saturated colours of Buglioni's glazed terracotta surfaces instead contrast strongly against the matte stone and painted plaster of the Ceppo's loggia, attracting a viewer's eye as he or she approaches from the south or west. Thanks to the inherent durability of Buglioni's technique, the Ceppo frieze has endured largely intact for nearly five centuries; even rain simply washes away accumulated grime, revealing the brilliant surfaces of the sculpture. Buglioni's programme thus addresses not only the members and guests of a specific institution—in this case, a hospital—but also the entire city. The size and prominence of the frieze, furthermore, signal the centrality of this institution



Fig. 8.2
The façade of the
Ospedale del Ceppo
(2018). Photo: ©
The Author.

Fig. 8.3 [detail]
Composite
image of Santi
Buglioni's frieze
at the Ospedale
del Ceppo, Pistoia
(1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Photo: © The
Author.



to Renaissance Pistoia: it was the largest hospital in the city and by the fifteenth century boasted seventy beds for the sick.⁸

Within the frieze, Buglioni indicates his interest in depicting the local relevance of the traditional charitable works of mercy. He does so in a variety of ways. In the second scene, for example, the inclusion of the arms of the Ceppo on the bedsheet locates within this specific hospital the universal Christian duty of sheltering the homeless. Buglioni's use of portraiture, furthermore, draws attention to the contemporaneous quality of his images. This is true above all of the hospital's director and Buglioni's patron, Leonardo Buonafede, whose wrinkles, prominent nose, and Carthusian habit make him easily recognisable across the frieze (fig. 8.4). He appears in six of the seven main panels, absent only in the far-right scene, *Giving Drink to the Thirsty*.⁹

Buonafede is not the only figure with portrait-like characteristics. The second benefactor in *Feeding the Hungry*, for example, appears to be another administrator; he wears a long black cloak over a blue robe and, like Buonafede, a black cap (fig. 8.5). This same figure—recognisable by his wavy hair and fleshy face—reappears next to Buonafede in the second scene, *Sheltering the Homeless* (fig. 8.12). It seems likely that these depictions are portraits of a man who was a well-known member of the hospital's staff.¹⁰ Even the close attention paid to hospital uniforms—the differentiation between the brown robes and white aprons worn by simple attendants on the one hand, and the more elaborate hats and cloaks worn by physicians, on the other—indicates an attempt on Buglioni's part to depict his subjects in garments that communicate their distinct roles (fig. 8.6).

Within the individual scenes, furthermore, Buglioni draws attention to a number of the Ceppo's specific activities in the city. Indeed, the works as represented in the frieze do not follow the order in which they appear in the Gospel of Matthew; instead, the hospital's own charitable priorities may have driven the sculptural arrangement.¹¹ Central to the hospital's mission was the care of the sick, and this scene, appropriately, receives prominent placement above one of the two main entrances to the building (figs 8.2 and 8.7). A striking white ground—a rare choice in the medium of glazed terracotta, in which blue grounds are standard—further calls attention to this, the third panel. Buglioni's depiction of the ward corresponds to what we know of early modern hospital practice: patients are dressed in what appears to be a standard uniform, while their beds are individually numbered and adorned with herbs, at once serving a medicinal purpose



Fig. 8.4 (left)
Santi Buglioni,
detail of Leonardo
Buonafede in
Clothing the Naked
(1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del
Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.

Fig. 8.5 (right)
Santi Buglioni,
detail of hospital
administrator in
Feeding the Hungry
(1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del
Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.

and freshening the air.¹² To either side of Buonafede, the patients being looked after communicate the range of care the hospital provided: at left, one physician checks a patient's pulse while another caregiver studies his urine; at right, a surgeon examines a second patient's head wound.¹³ Other employees hold tablets, perhaps for taking notes. This is no generic hospital interior; rather, it appears to be almost a portrait of the Ceppo's male ward.

Renaissance hospitals provided a wide variety of charitable and social services, and the length and complexity of the frieze reflects the breadth of the Ceppo's mission: not only did it employ physicians and medics to look after the infirm, but it also provided clothes, food, and financial assistance to different groups of disadvantaged citizens.¹⁴ Fittingly, the bodies represented on the frieze are engaged in a similar diversity of charitable activities. For example, in the first section



Fig. 8.6
Santi Buglioni,
detail of hospital
patient and
employees in
*Caring for the
Sick* (1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del
Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.

Fig. 8.7
Santi Buglioni,
Caring for the Sick (1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The Author.



of the frieze, on the loggia's short end, Buonafede stands in the centre, simultaneously engaged in two charitable works (fig. 8.8). With his right hand Buonafede offers a blue garment to a man who is naked but for his loincloth, while with his left he holds out a small bag, seemingly a monetary gift for the kneeling girl in white. The Ceppo's role in helping to provide dowries for women from impoverished families in the local community is thereby paired, and perhaps equated, with one of the canonical works of mercy: clothing the naked.¹⁵

Similarly, a detail in the fourth large panel appears to refer to another specific activity of the Ceppo, beyond its general provision of the standard works of mercy (fig. 8.9). At left, the presence of a man in chains and two other faces behind bars allows a viewer to understand the scene as a depiction of the traditional work of visiting the imprisoned. To the right, however, a colourfully dressed attendant calls attention to two figures carrying food and drink. These men wear brown caps, brown robes with blue sleeves, and white aprons; this costume recurs across the frieze and appears to be the uniform of the hospital attendants. This vignette, therefore, may refer to the hospital's practice of providing a meal to prisoners around the feast of the Assumption each year.¹⁶

Feeding the city's poorest inhabitants was an even more regular activity: the hospital offered meals on a number of feast days and gave bread once a week to any needy individuals who came to the hospital.¹⁷ This latter practice is reflected on the right side of the sixth scene, *Feeding the Hungry*, as two attendants (again dressed in the brown robes and caps and white aprons)

Fig. 8.8
Santi Buglioni,
Clothing the Naked (1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The Author.



Fig. 8.9
Santi Buglioni,
Visiting the Imprisoned (1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta. Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The Author.



together with a more elegantly attired hospital administrator emerge from the hospital's door and distribute bread rolls to the poor (fig. 8.10). On the left, Buonafede leads a man in tattered rags towards a table set out with a more elaborate meal, which three other needy men are already enjoying; this portion of the scene may refer to the more substantial meals the hospital provided on feast days. The threshold depicted in the centre of this scene is neatly positioned directly above the second of the two main entrances to the hospital (fig. 8.2), and the pairing was perhaps meant to stress the direct connection between the image and the institution, as well as the notion that the hospital's work for the community occurred both inside and outside of its walls.

II: Christ Among the Pistoians

The repetition of Buonafede across the façade not only underlines the contemporaneous nature of the imagery, but it also makes possible a reading of the frieze as a continuous narrative. Buonafede in particular acts as a familiar visual anchor, his body serving as a means of both dividing and enlivening the long horizontal fields allocated to each work of mercy. The inclusion of Christ and several saints within these seemingly contemporary represented spaces is, therefore, all the more striking, as is the presence of five female bodies dividing the six large scenes on the main façade, easily identifiable by their familiar attributes as cardinal and theological virtues:



Fig. 8.10
Santi Buglioni,
Feeding the Hungry (1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The Author.

Fig. 8.11
Santi Buglioni,
Hope (1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del
Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.



from left to right, *Prudence*, *Faith*, *Charity*, *Hope*, and *Justice*. Although these figures are distinguished by the presence of haloes—only *Charity*, at the centre of the façade, lacks one—their general similarity in appearance to the sixteenth-century Tuscans among whom they appear must be intentional: all are depicted in high relief and with exposed flesh unglazed.

Somewhat more difficult to identify are the four haloed figures who appear within the main sections of the frieze, as part of the works of mercy: two in *Sheltering the Homeless* and two in *Visiting the Imprisoned*. In the first of these scenes, Buonafede kneels between the two haloed figures, washing the feet of one while the other looks on and blesses his charitable work (figs 8.12 and 8.13). The haloed figure at left is usually identified as St James of Compostela, the patron saint of pilgrims and of the city of Pistoia, a reading supported by the fact that he stands before a group of four men who are identifiable as pilgrims by their staffs and badges, most prominently the scallop shell of St James. The haloed figure at right, in turn, appears to be St John the Baptist, patron saint of Florence, identified from his hair shirt.¹⁸ This pairing has been interpreted as a way of referring to the ties between the major hospitals of Florence and Pistoia, as Buonafede was the director of both.¹⁹

Fig. 8.12
Santi Buglioni,
Sheltering the Homeless (1526–1529). Glazed terracotta. Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia. Photo: © The Author.



Fig. 8.13
Santi Buglioni,
detail of *Sheltering the Homeless* (1526–1529). Glazed terracotta. Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia. Photo: © The Author.



The remarkable physical similarity of these two figures, however, implies a different reading: Instead of St James and St John the Baptist, it is Christ who appears twice, in the guise of two different pilgrims.²⁰ After all, the face, hair and beard of the two haloed figures are identical. Given Buglioni's evident interest in portraiture and his careful attempts to differentiate between the various hospital employees and recipients of charity, it seems unlikely that the sculptor would not wish to identify two saints as different men by portraying them with unique facial features. Indeed, these same physical characteristics reappear in the scene of *Visiting the Imprisoned* (fig. 8.14). Here, the man in shackles at left with his cruciform nimbus is universally identified as Christ.²¹ Surprisingly, however, it has not been noted that this Christ shares the same facial features—shoulder-length curls and a short beard and moustache—as the two haloed figures in *Sheltering the Homeless*. Yet such evident similarities must be intentional.²²

By repeating Christ three times across the frieze, Buglioni fuses contemporary and sacred history, in this way reflecting the liturgical foundations for the works of mercy. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ notes that works of charity will form his criteria for salvation. Addressing the blessed, he says: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I

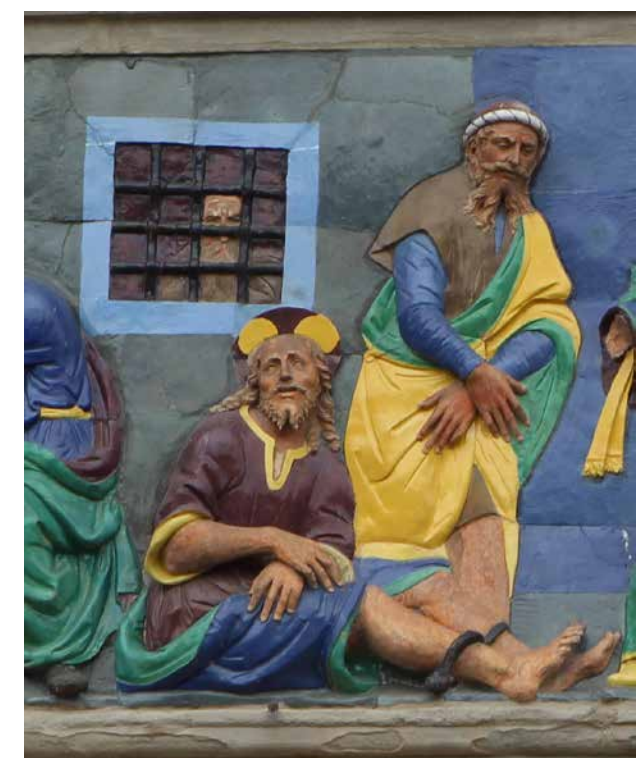


Fig. 8.14
Santi Buglioni,
detail of *Visiting the Imprisoned* (1526–1529). Glazed terracotta. Ospedale del Ceppo, Pistoia. Photo: © The Author.

was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Christ goes on to explain that when his followers perform these works of charity on behalf of their fellow human beings, it is *as if* they are done for Christ himself: ‘as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (RSV, Mt 25:35–40). The words of the Gospel, of course, stress the importance of understanding the recipients of all of these charitable works—‘the least important of these my brethren’—as individual incarnations of Christ. This conflation of Christ with the needy is eloquently expressed by Buglioni by Christ’s recurrence in different guises among the pilgrims and the prisoners.

III: Continuity and Completion: The Frieze and its Afterlife

The repetition of Christ’s form, like those of Buonafede and the second recognisable hospital administrator noted above, also serves a basic visual strategy: that of encouraging a close and complete reading of the frieze itself. The general subject matter—the seven works of mercy—was familiar to a sixteenth-century viewer, but it is enlivened here not only by the presence and reappearance of these identifiable characters, but also by the elaborate decorative program within which the works appear. The five virtues usefully complement the subject matter, but they also act as convenient pauses for the eye, the female figures and their classicising frames dividing the long frieze into easily comprehensible visual fields.

Taking the place of these virtues at the corners of the loggia are three panels with inscriptions. The first of these is immediately to the right of the first scene, *Clothing the Naked*. Here appear the words ‘*BEATI MUNDO CORDE, Q[UONIA]M*’, or ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for ...’ (fig. 8.15). This beatitude, from the Gospel of Matthew (5:8), is completed at the far-right end of the frieze, immediately after the scene of Giving Drink to the Thirsty. There, another tablet contains the second half of the beatitude, ‘*Q[UONIA]M IPSI DEU[M] VIDEBUNT*’, or ‘for they shall see God’ (fig. 8.16).

On the far left of the main façade is another inscription containing the beginning of a second beatitude, ‘*BEATI MISERICORDE, Q[UONIA]M*’, or ‘Blessed are the merciful, for ...’ (fig. 8.15). Following the above pattern, we would expect to find another inscription containing the remainder of the beatitude (Mt 5:7): ‘for they shall obtain mercy’. However, no such tablet appears elsewhere on the façade. It is possible that the original sculptural program provided for a fourth inscription, one that would complete this beatitude, on the eastern side of the loggia. In this case, an eighth narrative scene might also be expected. Today, this area remains undecorated, aside from a single roundel with the arms of the Ceppo (fig. 8.17).²³ While the seven works of mercy provide a complete cycle on their own, it would not have been surprising to find another scene of charity incorporated, particularly one of special relevance to the institution or the patron.²⁴ Alternatively, it is possible, if unlikely, that there was no plan to decorate the east end, since the two sides of the loggia that are adorned with the frieze are those that look onto the city’s main streets and were therefore the most prominent in the urban environment of the period.²⁵

The division of the beatitudes into incomplete phrases may be a matter of spatial consideration, but it also has the effect of stressing the continuity of the frieze. The fragmentary nature of the inscriptions encourages a viewer to search for their endings, even though in the case of the second beatitude there is none to be found. The inclusion of text within a cycle of images, furthermore, invites a careful reading of the frieze as a whole, and it structures this reading in a Latinate textual direction from left to right, beginning on the western short side of the loggia and ending at the far right of the main façade. Despite this apparent interest in text, however, the seven works of mercy do not follow the order in which they are mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. It seems plausible that the hospital re-ordered the works in order to emphasise the charitable activities of which it was most proud: this would explain the particularly prominent



Fig. 8.15
Santi Buglioni,
glazed terracotta
decorations
(1526–1529) at
the western corner
of the façade of
the Ospedale del
Ceppo. Photo: ©
The Author.

placement and colour scheme of *Caring for the Sick* and *Feeding the Hungry*, as noted above.

A careful viewer will note that the second half of the first beatitude, at the far eastern end of the loggia, is written in a different hand (fig. 8.16). The script is less carefully controlled, the space between the letters is filled with decorative flourishes, and there is a date of 1585 at the base of the tablet. It is evident that this portion of the frieze was completed by another artist, probably the same person responsible for the seventh scene of mercy adjacent to this tablet, *Giving Drink to the Thirsty*. Noticeably different in style, particularly in colour, this scene is usually attributed to the Pistoian painter Filippo di Lorenzo Paladini (c.1559–1608), and it was completed almost six decades after Buglioni’s work.²⁶

It remains uncertain why this last scene is a later work by a different hand, although there is evidence that Buglioni at the very least attempted to complete the cycle himself. In 1934, excavations underneath the Ceppo recovered a large group of fragments of partially-glazed terracotta sculpture: the quality of the glazes and clays, as well as the style of the reliefs, indicates that these were made by Buglioni and his shop.²⁷ One large fragment depicts a poor man holding out a jug, with another vessel in the background, and for this reason it is likely that the subject matter was the seventh work of mercy, *Giving Drink to the Thirsty*. The fragments were pro-



Fig. 8.16
Santi Buglioni and
Filippo di Lorenzo
Paladini (attr.),
glazed terracotta
decorations
(1526–1529 and
1585) at the eastern
corner of the façade
of the Ospedale del
Ceppo. Photo: ©
The Author.

Fig. 8.17
View of the loggia
of the Ospedale del
Ceppo from the
east (2018). Photo:
© The Author.



bably discarded because of problems that developed during the firing: glaze defects and cracking are visible throughout.

Since Buglioni remained active as a sculptor for another four decades, it is difficult to determine why the frieze does not appear to have been finished by this artist or his collaborators. Paladini's work is a testament to the hospital's desire to bring the frieze to completion. His more muted tones and less reflective glazes, however, are in strong contrast to those used in the rest of the frieze. This artist, working less than a decade after Buglioni's death, could not or did not wish to replicate the technique used by his predecessor: the glazes barely cover the clay body and the colours seem to have deteriorated significantly over the centuries. Paladini's attempt to imitate Buglioni's style is nevertheless apparent, particularly in the cartouche that provides the text for the end of the first beatitude.

Paladini's contribution to the Ceppo also serves as a reminder that individual authorship may not have been particularly important to the sixteenth-century patrons and viewers of this frieze, chiefly Buonafede himself. The hospital's façade in fact includes reliefs by four separate artists working in glazed terracotta: in addition to Santi Buglioni and Paladini, Giovanni della Robbia created the elaborate roundels (1525–1529) immediately underneath the frieze (figs 8.19–8.21), while Santi's master, Benedetto Buglioni, was responsible for the *Coronation* lunette (1510–1512) above the entrance to the men's ward (immediately to the left of the loggia) (fig. 8.22), and the roundel with the hospital's coats of arms (1515) on the eastern side of the loggia (fig. 8.17).²⁸ Buonafede's patronage both at the Ceppo and elsewhere is marked by a strong interest in the medium of glazed terracotta more than in a specific artist,²⁹ so it is not terribly surprising that he would commission three separate sculptors to contribute to the hospital's façade.

Fig. 8.18
Attributed to
Filippo di Lorenzo
Paladini, *Giving
Drink to the
Thirsty* (c.1585).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del
Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.



Fig. 8.19 (left)
Giovanni della
Robbia, *The
Annunciation*
(1525–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del
Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.

Fig. 8.20 (centre)
Giovanni della
Robbia, *The
Assumption of
the Virgin* (1525–
1529). Glazed
terracotta. Ospedale
del Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.

Fig. 8.21 (right)
Giovanni della
Robbia, *The
Visitation* (1525–
1529). Glazed
terracotta. Ospedale
del Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.



Fig. 8.22 (bottom)
Benedetto Buglioni,
*The Coronation of
the Virgin* (1510–
1512). Glazed
terracotta. Ospedale
del Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.

It is the medium itself that provides a sense of unity and cohesion to the hospital's exterior decoration. The roundels underneath the works of mercy, for example, invite a viewer to complement a horizontal, narrative reading of the frieze with vertical readings that stress local and institutional identity: the images of the Virgin refer to her role as patron saint of the hospital, while the coats of arms of the city and the hospital indicate the centrality of these charitable works to the life of Pistoians. The wide diversity of bodies represented in the frieze and the civic identity reflected in the roundels, furthermore, underline the importance of community, both with Christ and with one's neighbours, to Christian life.

The physical movement of the viewer, finally, is critical to the comprehension of the full array of images represented, and this may be a subtle means of recalling the fact that action is an essential component of the façade's main subject, the works of mercy. For Catholics, after all, salvation is obtained through the willful, ongoing performance of good works in one's society. The complexity of the sculptural program at the Ceppo, fittingly, encourages both physical and spiritual activity. It is this same profusion of imagery and colour that has made the Ceppo façade simultaneously one of the most compelling contributions to the entire genre of glazed terracotta sculpture and an unmistakable feature of the urban landscape of Pistoia for almost five centuries. Even Ruskin, after all, with his strong distaste for 'vulgar' sculptural polychromy, could not keep himself from judging the frieze 'magnificent'.

8.23
Santi Buglioni,
Burying the Dead
(1526–1529).
Glazed terracotta.
Ospedale del
Ceppo, Pistoia.
Photo: © The
Author.



Appendix: The Ceppo Frieze

1: The subject of the first section of the frieze, facing west towards modern via delle Pappi, is traditionally identified as *Clothing the Naked*, one of seven corporal works of mercy that are the main subject of the façade's sculptural program. Hospital director Leonardo Buonafede (c.1450–1544) stands in the centre, dividing groups of men and women. The exposed skin of the needy men at left, rendered in unglazed terracotta, contrasts strongly with the colourful, glazed surfaces of the garments Buonafede has given them. The self-assured posture of the newly clothed man who is second from the left communicates the ennobling power of Buonafede's charitable work. Simultaneously, Buonafede offers a different form of charity to a group of women gathered at right: the bag he holds out represents a gift of a dowry.

1A: At the corner between the western side of the loggia and its main façade is a curious female creature with colourful wings, whose body is partially covered by acanthus leaves. This figure, possibly a sphinx, has between her legs a shield with the arms of the hospital: a blooming tree stump ('ceppo' in Italian). To the left of this creature is an inscription with the beginning of a beatitude from the Gospel of Matthew (5:8): 'BEATI MUNDO CORDE, Q[UO-NIA]M, or 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for ...'. To the creature's right is a second inscription with the beginning of another beatitude: 'BEATI MISERICORDE, Q[UONIA]M, or 'Blessed are the merciful, for ...' (Mt 5:7).

2: Buonafede, easily recognisable in his black and white garments, reappears at the centre of this scene, the first on the main side of the hospital façade, facing south. Here, he kneels to wash the feet of a pilgrim. The bed nearby, made up with sumptuous purple linens and white tasseled pillows, is another sign of the hospitality Buonafede's institution offers to those in need. The subject of this panel, therefore, is a second work of mercy, *Sheltering the Homeless*. The homeless are here depicted as pilgrims, as the group of men at left carry staffs and pilgrim badges, most prominently the scallop shells of St James of Compostela. A well-dressed man at far right gestures to the emblem of the hospital—a flowering tree trunk atop a crutch—painted onto the linens, thereby underlining the identity of the institution providing this charity.

2A: *Prudence*, one of the four cardinal virtues, holds her traditional attributes: a mirror and a snake (now missing its head). The mirror is made of wood and may replace a similar, lost

object in glazed terracotta.

3: A contemporary hospital ward provides the setting for the next work of mercy, *Caring for the Sick*. Buonafede, now wearing a black mantle over his white robes, consults with a male figure, possibly a physician overseeing the ward. To either side, medical practitioners attend to the infirm. The patients are dressed in what appears to be a standard uniform, while their hospital beds are neatly made up and individually numbered.

3A: The theological virtue *Faith* holds her attributes: a chalice and a cross. The cross is made of wood and may replace an earlier version in glazed terracotta.

4: The subject of the fourth main section of the frieze is *Visiting the Imprisoned*. Buonafede is guided by his name saint, Leonard, while looking down at Christ in his shackles. To the right, a young man points to two other male figures, seemingly hospital employees, who carry a bundle and buckets, perhaps filled with refreshments, to the prisoners.

4A: The theological virtue *Charity* is accompanied by two infants. Fittingly for a frieze depicting a variety of charitable works, this virtue appears at the very centre of the loggia.

5: Buonafede oversees the *Burial of the Dead*, as he watches over the performance of a funeral mass. The strong visual presence of the cross in this area of the frieze—it appears on the cloak worn by the priest, on the cloth underneath the corpse, and on the processional cross held by an attendant—reinforces the association between Christ's body (visible in three-dimensional form on the processional cross itself) and that of the deceased. To the left, we observe the process of burial itself, as a second corpse is lowered into the ground.

5A: The third theological virtue, *Hope*, clasps her hands in prayer.

6: Together with hospital employees, Buonafede performs a sixth work of mercy: *Feeding the Hungry*. Here, for the first time, Buonafede is moved off-centre, his usual space occupied instead by a doorway. This sculptural doorway aligns with a real entrance to the hospital, directly below. Beggars, identifiable as such from the torn garments and shoes they wear, populate the rest of the scene. At right, a second hospital administrator distributes the bread carried out by his assistants. The variety of bodies shown—from young children to the elderly, both male and female—emphasises the diversity of the needy, and by extension, the breadth of the hospital's charity. At left, Buonafede guides a poor elderly man—his rags particularly scanty—towards a table laid out with bread and meat, where three other men are already being served by another hospital employee.

6A: A second cardinal virtue, *Justice*, carries a sword in her right hand. Her left hand must have held her other traditional attribute, the scales, which are now lost.

7: The seventh work of mercy, *Giving Drink to the Thirsty*, is the subject of the final section of the frieze, at the far right of the hospital's main façade. This portion of the frieze is the creation of a different artist working later in the century, probably the Pistoian painter Filippo di Lorenzo Paladini (c.1559–c.1608). The stark difference in technique and style is a testament to a loss in technical skill with the end of the Buglioni and Della Robbia workshops and their specialisation in glazed terracotta sculpture. Buonafede here is replaced by a later hospital administrator, in white robes, who offers liquid refreshment to the impoverished people surrounding him. An elderly man to the left and a boy to the right drink from simple glazed

cups, while others hold a variety of jugs, urns, and mugs ready to be filled.

7A: The first Beatitude in praise of the pure in heart, begun at the edge of the left façade, is here completed with the words ‘Q[UONIA]M IPSI DEU[M] VIDEBUNT’: ‘for they shall see God’. The inscription is evidently written in a different hand from the two at left, and the panel includes numerous decorative flourishes as well as a date of 1585. These factors, together with the matte surface finish (a contrast particularly apparent beside the bright glazed blue and white pilaster, a remnant of Buglioni’s sculptural project), make it evident that this portion of the inscription was completed by Paladini. The winged female creature at the right corner of the façade, however, is similar to that at the left edge of the façade, and therefore is likely Buglioni’s work.

Rachel E. Boyd is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. Her dissertation examines the glazed terracotta sculpture of the Della Robbia family (c.1430–1566), focusing on the workshop’s proprietary glazing technologies and the transmission and development of this artisanal knowledge over more than a century. Rachel currently holds the David E. Finley Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, and she was previously a Kress Institutional Fellow at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut. She earned a B.A. in Italian and History of Art from Yale University and an M.Phil. in History of Art and Architecture from the University of Cambridge.

1. John Ruskin, *Ruskin in Italy: Letters to His Parents, 1845* (ed. Harold I. Shapiro) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 87. For further discussion of Ruskin’s commentary, see Charlotte Drew, ‘Luca della Robbia: South Kensington and the Victorian revival of a Florentine sculptor’, *Sculpture Journal* 23:2 (2014): pp. 171–183.
2. Allan Marquand, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921).
3. Giorgio Vasari includes a brief discussion of Santi and Benedetto Buglioni at the end of his Life of Andrea del Verrocchio, in the Giuntina edition of 1568. The Della Robbia workshop’s ‘secret’ methods, Vasari says, were stolen from Andrea della Robbia by Benedetto Buglioni (via a woman who worked in Andrea’s house), and by 1568, Benedetto’s successor Santi was the only living artist who still knew how to make this type of glazed terracotta sculpture. See Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568* (eds Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi) (Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1966–1987), 3: p. 545. Santi was also a distant relative of Benedetto Buglioni: Santi’s mother was a cousin of Benedetto’s wife. See Marquand, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni*, pp. xxxii–xxxiii.
4. The frieze was commissioned by Leonardo Buonafede, director of the Ceppo and the major Florentine hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. Documents published by Marquand indicate that Buglioni was paid 413 lire, 9 soldi, by the Ceppo Hospital between 1526 and 1529. See Marquand, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni*, pp. 165–182.
5. For broad studies of the iconography of the works of mercy in Italian art, see Federico Botana, *The Works of Mercy in Italian Medieval Art* (c.1050–c.1400) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); Ulrike Ritzerfeld, *Pietas – Caritas – Societas: Bildprogramme karitativer Einrichtungen des Spätmittelalters in Italien* (Bonn: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, 2007); William Levin, ‘Studies in the Imagery of Mercy in Late Medieval Italian Art’ (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1983).
6. As Botana has noted, given the widespread imagery of the works in medieval churches throughout Europe, it is very possible that similar cycles were used to decorate many other early hospitals, but most of these structures have since been rebuilt or redecorated, and as a result little evidence for the original decoration survives. See Botana, *Works of Mercy*, pp. 2 and 7–9. On the Tuscan precedents mentioned here, see William Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy at the Misericordia in Florence: Historiography, Context, Iconography and the Documentation of Fraternal Charity in the Trecento* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2004); Phillip Earenfight, ‘The Residence and Loggia della Misericordia: Il Bigallo: Art and Architecture of Confraternal Piety, Charity, and Virtue in Late Medieval Florence’ (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, 1999), pp. 138–191; Earenfight,

- “‘Civitas Florenti[a]e’: The New Jerusalem and the Allegory of Divine Misericordia”, in Arnold Victor Coonin (ed.), *A Scarlet Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Sarah Blake McHam* (New York: Italica, 2013), 131–160; Beatrice Sordini, *Dentro l’antico Ospedale: Santa Maria della Scala, uomini, cose e spazi di vita nella Siena medievale* (Siena: Protagon, 2010); Maggie Bell, ‘On Display: Poverty as Infirmary and its Visual Representation at the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena’, in Peter Howard, Jonathan Nelson, and Fredrika Jacobs (eds.), *Body and the City: Representing Illness* (forthcoming, Routledge, 2020); Ludovica Sebgondi (ed.), *La Congregazione dei Buonomini di San Martino* (Florence: Polistampa, 2018); Giovanni Santambrogio, *I volti della misericordia nell’arte* (Milan: Ancora, 2016), pp. 121–150.
7. Botana, *Works of Mercy*, p. 2. The Misericordia fresco, however, was partially visible from the Piazza San Giovanni, as it decorated an entrance hall that opened onto the square. See Phillip Earenfight, ‘Catechism and Confraternitas on the Piazza San Giovanni: How the Misericordia Used Image and Text to Instruct its Members in Christian Theology’, *Journal of Religious History* 28:1 (2004): pp. 67–69.
8. David Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200–1430* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 248.
9. This portion of the frieze is a later work by a different hand, a topic to which I will return at the end of this essay. Dated 1585, the scene of *Giving Drink to the Thirsty* is usually attributed to the Pistoian painter Filippo di Lorenzo Paladini (c.1559–c.1608). There are indications that other artisans from nearby Montelupo Fiorentino, an historic centre of ceramics production, worked together with Paladini, presumably on account of their technical expertise. Consistent with the later date of production, Buonafede here is replaced by a later administrator, who has been variously identified as Bartolomeo Montechiari or Filippo Guilliccioni. See Maria Cristina Masdea and Valerio Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure di terra cotta, espressioni l’opere della misericordia,’ in Giovanni Capecci et al., *Avvicinatevi alla bellezza: Il fregio dello Spedale del Ceppo* (Pistoia: Giorgio Tesi, 2015), pp. 31 and 105.
10. Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, pp. 45 and 93.
11. In the Gospel of Matthew, the works are mentioned in the following order: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned (Mt 25:35–36).
12. The prominent representation of these herbs may lend support to John Henderson’s proposal that the man holding a green hat, standing next to Buonafede, is one of the hospital’s gardeners. See Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital: Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 207.

13. For the identification of the central figure examining the head wound (the man wearing a grey tunic and hat), see Henderson, *Renaissance Hospital*, pp. 235–236. Henderson notes that the man’s clothes are simpler than those of the physician attending to the other patient, reflecting the relatively lower status of this hospital employee.
14. For a comprehensive study of the Renaissance hospital, see Henderson, *Renaissance Hospital*.
15. On the hospital’s charitable activities, see Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: for dowry contributions*, p. 249.
16. Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, p. 248.
17. Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, pp. 248–249.
18. Philine Helas, ‘Opere benevole—opera bellissima. Il fregio dell’ospedale del Ceppo a Pistoia’, in Elena Testaferata and Giacomo Guazzini (eds.), *Il museo e la città: Vicende artistiche pistoiesi del Cinquecento* (Pistoia: Gli Ori, 2017), p. 71; Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 45; Fiamma Domestici, *I Della Robbia a Pistoia* (Florence: Octavo, 1995), p. 212; Marquand, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni*, p. 169, who reads the figure at left as ‘Christ disguised as a pilgrim’.
19. Helas, ‘Opere benevole’, p. 71; Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 45; Domestici, *I Della Robbia*, p. 212; Alberto Cipriani and Lorenzo Cipriani, *Lo Spedale del Ceppo: Storia, arte, cultura* (Pistoia: Gli Ori, 2013), pp. 182–183; Henderson, *Renaissance Hospital*, p. 79. The Ceppo had come under the control of the Florentine hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in 1501.
20. Francesco Gurrieri and Aurelio Amendola, *Il fregio robbiano dell’Ospedale del Ceppo a Pistoia* (Pistoia: Cassa di Risparmio di Pistoia e Pescia, 1982), p. 25, also noted the similarity between the two figures and raised the possibility that both might be Christ.
21. Helas, ‘Opere benevole’, p. 75; Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 69; Marquand, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni*, p. 170.
22. The cruciform nimbus Christ wears in *Visiting the Imprisoned* serves to differentiate him from St Leonard, who appears to the right and with distinct physical characteristics. Leonard’s presence in this scene is explained by the fact that he is the patron saint of the imprisoned, as well as the name saint of Buonafede, whom he appears to guide. See Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 69.
23. This roundel has been identified as the coat of arms for which Benedetto Buglioni received payment in 1515. Given the incomplete nature of the façade decoration at this date, it seems unlikely that the eastern side of the loggia was its original intended location. See Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 29.
24. *The Allegory of Divine Mercy* painted for the Misericordia in 1341–1342, for example, included eight roundels depicting the seven works of mercy: *Burying the Dead*, a work of particular importance to the society, was divided across two roundels. Ghirlandaio’s frescoes for the Oratorio dei Buonomini (c.1478–1479), furthermore, consisted of a cycle of ten lunettes: in addition to the seven traditional works (*Feeding the Hungry and Giving Drink to the Thirsty* are combined into one scene), there are two lunettes depicting the confraternity’s patron saint, Martin, as well as two depicting other charitable activities of the Buonomini: providing dowries and drawing up inventories. Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 29, suggest that the initial plan for the decoration of the loggia must have included all three sides.
25. For the opinion that it was intentionally left undecorated, see Marquand, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni*, p. 166.
26. Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 31.
27. Masdea and Tesi, ‘Vaghe figure’, p. 30. For a catalogue of the fragments, see Rachel E. Boyd, ‘Catalogo dei frammenti di terracotta rinvenuti nel 1934. Riconoscimento prima del restauro’, in Maria Cristina Masdea and Valerio Tesi (eds.), *Il restauro del fregio dello Spedale del Ceppo di Pistoia* (forthcoming).
28. For documents, see Marquand, *Benedetto and Santi Buglioni*, pp. 91–94; Allan Marquand, *Robbia Heraldry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1919), pp. 215–216, 267–269; Allan Marquand, *Giovanni della Robbia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1920), pp. 195–201 and 223–224.
29. For Buonafede’s patronage of other glazed terracotta projects, see Cipriani and Cipriani, *Spedale del Ceppo*, pp. 170–174; Giancarlo Gentilini, *I Della Robbia: La scultura invetriata nel Rinascimento* (Florence: Cantini, 1992), 2: pp. 281–284, 324, 326, 395–396, 437–441, 454; David Franklin, ‘Ridolfo Ghirlandaio’s altar-pieces for Leonardo Buonafé and the Hospital of S. Maria Nuova in Florence’, *The Burlington Magazine* 135:1078 (1993): pp. 4–16; Fiamma Domestici, ‘Il mecenatismo di Leonardo Buonafede per l’arredo del Santuario delle Grazie in Casentino’, *Antichità viva* 27:3–4 (1988): pp. 35–40; Doris Carl, ‘L’oratorio della SS. Concezione dei Preti: Documenti e suggerimenti per la storia della chiesa e la sua decorazione artistica’, *Rivista d’arte* 38 (1986): pp. 120–123.