

Preaching on Vision and Memory in Early Renaissance Florence: The Funeral Sermon for Baldassarre Cossa and His Tomb in the Baptistery

Abstract

The tomb of Baldassarre Cossa (ca. 1370–1419), also known as Antipope John XXIII, in the Baptistery of Florence is one of the most remarkable and innovative funerary monuments from early 15th-century Italy. Its construction between 1422–1428 is partially documented, but much still remains to be discovered about the context which enabled this tomb. This article will present and interpret a previously overlooked funeral sermon that was delivered at the funeral of Cossa in the Cathedral of Florence in December 1419 and which, with its own intellectual and rhetorical tactics, anticipated the famous tomb subsequently constructed for the antipope in the Baptistery. As will be explained in this article, the Latin sermon for Cossa's funeral provides an unusually expansive take on how sight, vision, and memory functioned within the funerary culture in the early 15th century by a Dominican friar-preacher. Finally, the sermon provides important new insights into the responses to Cossa's death in Florence and into the dynamics which ultimately led to the construction of the tomb by Donatello and Michelozzo. It reveals that Cossa's commemoration at the Baptistery was an important catalyst for the re-shaping of the cult of Saint John the Baptist at the Cathedral and Baptistery in Florence.