The Labors of the Months and the Zodiac Signs in the Cathedral of Otranto: An Iconographical Interpretation of the Symbols of Labor and Time

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In 1163, Archbishop Gionata, Abbot of the Monastery of San Nicola of Casole in Puglia (Apulia), commissioned Pantaleone, a learned monk and artist from the monastery, to decorate the pavement of the cathedral of Otranto with mosaics. This Italian Romanesque cathedral was dedicated to Santa Maria Annunziata or Saint Mary of The Annunciation. In the interior, the floor design in the shape of a tree contains an elaborate biblical program. The encyclopedic narrative of the mosaic symbolically unveils the meaning of the Tree of Life. The iconography of the pavement’s program combines biblical and pagan narratives evolving from a natural realm into a heavenly realm.

The natural realm begins at the church’s entrance with the symbolism of the earth-the roots of a tree-expanding through the nave and transept via the tree’s trunk and its branches, culminating in the apse, at the end of the church, with the foliage of the top of the tree. This natural realm meets with the heavenly realm in two ways: at the crossing of the church or at the sacrificial altar, and at the apse of the church. Before reaching the altar or holy area, between the natural realm and the heavenly realm, the zodiac signs with the labors of the months are depicted.

Keywords: Tree of Life, labors of the months, zodiac signs, constellations, symbolism

Introduction

This study provides an interpretation of the significance of the placement of the zodiac sign in front of the sacrificial altar and what is meant by their symbolic astral depictions, which are combined with the earthly labors of the months (Figure 1). Thus, human vices are transformed by astral intervention into virtues. This study consists of three parts: (1) a history of the commission, (2) a description of the cathedral and the complex design of the mosaic pavement, and (3) an iconographical analysis of a selected part of the mosaic, the theme of labors of the months with the zodiac signs.
History of the Commission

The city of Otranto is on the Adriatic Sea, located at the tip of the heel of Italy. Originally, it was a province of Greece, later inherited by the Romans as a significant harbor for commerce and cultural exchanges between the east and the west. In the Middle Ages, because of its strategic setting, Otranto became a stopping place for the crusaders and Norman pilgrims traveling to and from the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. In 1071, after the Norman conquest of southern Italy from the Byzantine Empire, Otranto further enhanced its political position, establishing important intercultural connections with the classical, Hebraic and Byzantine civilizations now amalgamated under the Norman reign. Thus, the inhabitants of Otranto formed a complex ethnic group whose religion was predominantly Christian, but with pagan and Hebraic nuances.

monastery of San Nicola at Casole. This renowned Basilian monastery, overseen by Abbot Nicetas, functioned as a place of prayer as well as a scriptorium and library for the study ancient texts. The monastery followed the rules of San Basilio The Great. During the same years, Duke Roger Bosso commissioned the building of the cathedral of Otranto, which was consecrated in 1088 as Santa Maria Annunziata under the Roman pontificate of Urban II (active 1088-1099). The papal delegate, Archbishop Roffredo, performed the ceremony in the presence of distinguished dignitaries from the region; Guglielmo, Archbishop of Otranto, and Guglielmo, the Duke of Sicily, with an additional four representatives of the neighboring cities: the Archbishop of Benevento, Urso of Bari, Andrea of Taranto, and Godino of Brindisi. During both the Renaissance and in modern times the cathedral went through many architectural additions and restorations, but through the centuries it always remained a place of Christian worship.

The Cathedral and Its Pavement

The cathedral of Otranto is an Italian Romanesque edifice constructed of local stone. The simple exterior façade originally contained only two lateral small windows framing a rose window (Figure 1). In 1481, the façade of the church was expanded and restored with an elaborate Gothic rose window in the pedimental area, and an entrance supported by classical columns with the coat of arms of the archdioceses or of the Aragonese rulers. In the extensive hypostyle crypt, an Ossuary chapel was added in memory of those faithful who died in the massacre of the Ottoman Empire in 1480.3

The interior follows the shape of a basilica plan: a central nave with two lateral aisles, with the nave ending in an apse. The lofty, tripartite elevation of the cathedral contains a nave arcade, with classical columns supporting round arches, a plain triforium, and a clear story with small round arch windows. The classical columns may be retentions from an existing ancient classical temple in situ dedicated to Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom, or transported from a demolished classical temple nearby (Figure 2).

In 1163, Pantaleone, who was residing in the monastery of San Nicola of Casole, initiated the *opus
tessellatum*, the decoration in mosaics of the pavement in the religious edifice at Otranto. He completed this in
1166, as noted in the Latin inscription and signature at the entrance of the cathedral, which has suffered great
damage through the vicissitudes of time but still visible are two Latin lines: Exionath donis per dexteram
Pantaleonis/Hoc opus insigne est superans impendia digne (“By the means of Pantaleone’s hand/This
distinguished work worthily overcomes the expense” [see Figures 3a and 3b]). For historian Pietro Marino,
the pavement of the Cathedral of Otranto is a “lavishly decorated carpet of colorful stones”. It is one of the
largest surviving mosaics in Europe, with the mosaic decoration covering approximately 700 square feet. It
extends from the nave to the presbytery, ending at the apse in a horizontal line, and bifurcating in two adjacent
aisles (Figure 3a).

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4 See Willemsen, *L’Enigma di Otranto*, pp. 35-39 and 149, for a careful study of the other inscriptions throughout the floor
mosaic.

Figure 3a. Pantaleone, Tree of Life, 1166, floor mosaic. Saint Mary of The Annunciation, Cathedral of Otranto, Otranto. Photo credit: Eric Lessing/Art Resource, NY ART207271.
There appears to be no chronology or systematic historical development in the presentation of the program. The central nave portrays a spectacular universal encyclopedia. A Tree of Life iconography is depicted in a very long tree trunk and its numerous branches. In the nave, the left side of the tree illustrates the Old Testament or the religious world, while the right side reveals aspects of the cosmos or the pagan world. For example, at the entrance of the church, on the pavement of the nave, two large elephants are depicted sustaining a large tree trunk with many branches. This tree is a symbol of the Tree of Life depicted in the pavement, which runs from the entrance to the apse of the edifice. The tree trunk decoration extends horizontally along the nave up to the altar, while branches from the tree trunk extend out into the nave. There are also two small lateral trees framing the altar. Below the two large elephants, the Latin inscription validates the artist’s name and the mosaic creator, Pantaleone.

Numerous monstrous creatures, animals, angels, and devils are also portrayed on the branches of the tree. On the left side of the tree, the branches contain stories from the Bible, such as the murder of Cain and Abel, the destruction of the Tower of Babel, the universal deluge and Noah, and the Garden of Eden. On the right side are mythological scenes of Diana the Huntress and the wounded deer, and depictions of ancient and contemporary political expansions and triumphs, such as the portrayal of Alexander the Great and King Arthur. Just before the altar, on both sides of the tree, the branches hold circles containing zodiac signs and labors of the months.

In the presbytery or chancel, where the altar is located in the nave, Pantaleone unveils another type of human history: the tempting of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Above the garden are 16 circles of which 12 contain bestiary, with domestic, ferocious, exotic animals and bizarre creatures creating an imaginary zoo. The other four circles depict the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon, a Siren, and a struggling leopard with a ram.

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7 See Gianfreda, “Il Mosaico di Otranto”, pp. 124-132, for the symbolism of these figures.
In the apse are the stories of Jonas and Samson, which prefigured Christ’s ministry and the triumphant church.8

The central tree of the nave branches out into two smaller trees located on the left and right side of the altar. On the left side, these two small side aisles contain depictions of Heaven and Hell, a synthesis of a Last Judgment where Christ is the divine judge. The right aisle depicts a tree with images alluding to human redemption. A series of large figures are seen, such as Samuel holding a large scroll, and numerous animals personifying virtues and vices.9

Iconographical Analysis of the Floor Mosaic

In the Middle Ages, most of the population was illiterate. Thus the visual depictions in stone, glass and mosaics assisted Christian devotees in following their societal activities as well as their spiritual duties. The zodiac signs guided them in the identification of the calendar year, while the labors of the months were associated with a specific agricultural task during the year.10 Thus, it was an encyclopedic almanac. This type of visual information was similar to a book in stone or a visual bible for the people, as depicted in the Cathedral of Otranto.

In the pavement, the horizontal movement, from the entrance to the church to its apse, should also be viewed as vertical movement, an imaginary axial movement from earth to heaven, from the natural realm to the celestial realm. The Tree of Life is a symbol of the natural and spiritual journey of the individual to reach the heavenly sphere (Figure 3a).

The subject of the mosaic derives from the first book of the Genesis.

And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. A river then...went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.11

In the center of the nave, the branches of the Tree of Life intertwine with 12 circles. The circles contain the zodiac signs with the labors of the months. Pantaleone creatively employed the branches and foliage to assist in the design of the seasons depicted with their related working activities according to the season, alluding to the natural world, while the zodiac signs allude to the cosmic world.12

At the entrance of the church, the Latin inscription and signature suggest that Pantaleone wanted not only to identify himself as the creator of the mosaic pavement, but also to offer guidance to the parishioners for understanding human actions in connection with the heavenly creator—God’s orderly cosmos. The theme of the mosaic deals with the Christian origin of the world, the battle between good and evil, the human struggle between virtues and vices. The zodiac and labors of the months assist the individual to overcome evil through labor (Figure 4).13

11 Genesis Book One.
12 See Gianfreda, “Il Mosaico di Otranto”, p. 133, n. 39, cites Willemsen’s comment on the disturbing action of the branches and leaves intertwining with the labors of the months. I disagree with this interpretation. The arboreal decoration assists in connecting the labors of the month in a calendric manner, uniting temporal and spatial aspects of an individual’s duties in life.
13 See Gianfreda, “Il Mosaico di Otranto”, pp. 134-145, for a description of the labors of the months and the zodiac signs, and L. Bartoli, La chiave per a comprensione del simbolismo e dei segni nel sacro (Trieste: Lint, 1982), passim, for an interpretation of zodiac signs in a Christian environment.
In this mosaic, surprisingly unnoticed by scholars, Pantaleone drew from Prudentius’s fifth-century *Psycomachia* (Conflict of the Soul), a medieval treatise on virtues and vices with notions about the individual’s struggle for achieving goodness. Pantaleone a learned monk from the Monastery of San Nicola of Casole incorporated also ideas from *Physiologus* (Metaphysical Morality), a Greek series of moralized animal tales composed during the second century in Alexandria, describing how to employ bestiary narratives to explain the conflict between good and evil. Both treatises were well known during the Middle Ages, especially by the monks residing in such a learned center as the monastery of San Nicola a Casole.

Furthermore, Prudentius was known in Otranto through the writings of Marcus (Hydruntis or Idruntis), Bishop of Otranto, who lived in the eighth century. He first served as a steward of the church of Constantinople, and then as a bishop in Otranto. Marcus owned a Latin version of Prudentius’s writings. Pantaleone, being a member of the learned monks at the Monastery of San Nicola, likely consulted the text in this erudite library.

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14 Prudentius (born in 348 in northern Spain, died after 405) spent most of his life following worldly pursuits, but later turned to writing, in which he aimed to glorify God and atone for his earlier sins. One of his most popular works is a poem called “Psychomachia” (“Conflict of the Soul”), which describes the battles between female personifications of human virtues and vices. See Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, trans. H. J. Thomson, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1949).


Focusing on the zodiac signs, it is possible to see relevant connections between Pantaleone’s mosaic decorations of the zodiac signs and Christian symbolism in Prudentius’ writings. For example, in Apothosis (617-26), when viewing the Star of the Magi, Prudentius described the zodiac signs as follows.

Serpens [Serpent] withdraws; Leo flees; Cancer contracts its claws at the side as if maimed; the bull having been tamed groans with its horns broken; Capricorn withers, its coat torn to pieces; here the banished water boy, Aquarius, glides down; there too Sagittarius; Gemini wander, separate as they flee; shameless Virgo gives up her silent lovers in the vault of heaven; the other fiery orbs that hand in the terrible clouds are afraid before the new star.18

The zodiac signs or circle of animals allude to the ring of constellations that the Sun seems to pass through each year as the Earth orbits around it: Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius, according to Aratus’ *Phenomena* of 240 BCE.19 The zodiac signs’ associations with labors of the months are part of the natural cycle of the life or the cycle of the seasons and seen in the jambs of the cathedral of Notre Dame at Amiens in 1260. The traditional depiction of the personification of the month, with the zodiac sign and corresponding attribute, for example, shows the month of January with a Janus-head or a feasting party. January’s corresponding zodiac sign is Aquarius with the attribute of the Water Carrier. February is shown warming by a fire with Pisces and the Fishes. March is represented pruning vines and digging the earth with Aries and the Ram. April is depicted as the joy of Spring, planting and picking flowers with Taurus, the Bull. May is shown by courting and hunting with Gemini and the Twins. June is represented reaping and stacking hay with Cancer and the Crab. July is depicted harvesting, scything wheat with Leo and the Lion. August is shown by threshing grain with Virgo and the Virgin. September is represented picking and pressing grapes with Libra and the Scales. October is depicted plowing and sowing with Scorpio and the Scorpion. November is shown gathering acorns and collecting wood faggots with Sagittarius and the Archer; and December is represented as killing pigs, backed by Capricorn and the Sea Goat.20

In the case of the Otranto mosaic, however, Pantaleone followed an older tradition, starting the calendar year with the sign of Capricorn and not Aquarius. The sign of Capricorn with its attribute of the Sea Goat usually corresponds with the month of December, not January. And in his image for the month of January, the Sea Goat is depicted above the tondo (circle), in addition, the individual warms the hands on the fire, a typical representation that traditionally occurs in February; hence Pantaleone depicted January with the attributions of December and February in this mosaic (Figure 5) to be consistent with the other figures.

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In this mosaic, the labor of the months shifts to coincide with the zodiac sign that month begins with a previous or after zodiac signs as seen in the month of January, where the individual warms the hands on the fire, a typical representation that traditionally occurs in February. The sign of Capricorn with its attribute of the Sea Goat usually corresponds with the month of December. The same is noted in all the other months. February is depicted spit roasting with Aquarius and the Water Carrier.
Figure 6. Pantaleone, February, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
March is shown foot cleaning with Pisces and the Fishes.

Figure 7. Pantalcone, March, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
April is represented taking sheep to pasture with Aries and the Ram.

*Figure 8.* Pantaleone, April, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
May is depicted with the joy of Spring with Taurus and the Bull.

Figure 9. Pantaleone, May, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
June is shown reaping and stacking with Gemini and the Twins.

*Figure 10. Pantaleone, June, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.*
July is depicted threshing grains from plants with Cancer and the Crab.

*Figure 11.* Pantaleone, July, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
August is shown grape harvesting with Leo and the Lion.

*Figure 12.* Pantaleone, August, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
September is shown pressing grapes with Virgo and the Virgin.

*Figure 13. Pantaleone, September, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.*
October is represented plowing with Libra and the Scales.

*Figure 14.* Pantaleone, October, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
November is depicted cutting wood with Scorpio and the Scorpion.

*Figure 15.* Pantaleone, November, 1166, floor mosaic. Cathedral of Otranto. Photo credit: Liana De Girolami Cheney.
And December is shown killing pigs with Sagittarius and the Archer.

In the pavement, the labors of the months depict two types of cycles in the terrestrial world or natural realm. First, the labors allude to the tasks of humankind on Earth. Second, the construction of the months is connected and is part of the time cycle during the seasons, similar to the zodiac signs, which personify the world created by time. In the labors of the months, the cycle is temporal as well as terrestrial, hence contrasting with the zodiac signs, whose cycle partakes of the heavenly world or celestial realm that is eternal.

The Medieval calendar, focused on the labors of the months, zodiac signs and personification of good and evil, was developed from an ancient Roman calendar of 354, known as the Calendar of Filocalus (Vat. Bib. Apostolica, MS Barb. lat. 2154). A copy of the Roman calendar was made during the Carolingian era. Hence, in the Norman period, it was incorporated in their cultural activities as revealed in the Otranto mosaic pavement.

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21 For example, the month of February in the Chronography of 354 by the fourth century calligrapher Filocalus. The copies of the original illustrations are pen drawings in a seventeenth-century manuscript from the Barberini collection.
The placement of the zodiac signs in circles, as turning the world, is similar to the movement of the cosmos, alluding to a heavenly and perfect cyclical movement, the metaphysical realm of the individual. The tree trunk and its branches intertwined with labors of the individual are allusions to the vicissitudes of the material and terrestrial world, hence the natural realm of the individual.

With the *Psychomachia* and *Physiologus*, there are two parallel symbolic traditions that employ animal forms as well as astral signs to explain human conduct and moralized behavior in order to conform with the divine laws of Christianity. Both treatises combined the ancient allusions of pagan rites with the Christian cult. The Christian Eucharistic rites derived from ancient pagan myths or cults, e.g., the sacramental meal or baptism through blood alludes to the mystic rites of Dionysus. The symbolic number of twelve alluding to Christ’s twelve apostles is also related to the twelve zodiac signs.

Medieval poetical literature contains moralistic allusions that can be traced to the *Physiologus* tradition. This text was influential on the symbolism of medieval ecclesiastical art, e.g., the phoenix rising from its ashes as a symbol of Resurrection and the pelican feeding her young with her own blood as a symbol of charity are well known in the 12th century. The placement of the zodiac signs and the labors of the months so close to the altar allude to pagan and Christian rituals associated with traditional sacrificial cults, e.g., the sacrifice of the ram (Aries). Both the ram is a symbol of Spring, a generative power, and agricultural activities such as cultivating the land. This sacrifice is a prototype for Biblical sacrifices, e.g., the Sacrifice of Isaac and Christ’s Crucifixion.

The word zodiac is an astronomical term from the Greek zoon meaning animal and kyklos referring to circle. The composition of the word zodiac alludes as well from the Greek, zoe meaning life and dia referring to a pathway, an allusion to a planisphere or star map. Thus, the zodiac is the path of life, a throughway to terrestrial and celestial realms. Historically, although contested, the zodiac existed before the Bible, foretelling

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the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, among many prophecies, thus paralleling the Tree of Life. Scripture confirms the existence of divine messages in the stars, as Psalm 19:1-6 states:

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\begin{align*}
\text{The heavens declare the glory of God,} \\
\text{the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork;} \\
\text{day discourses of it to day,} \\
\text{night to night hands on the knowledge.}
\end{align*}
\]

No utterance at all, no speech, no sound that anyone can hear; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their message to the ends of the world.

High above, he pitched a tent for the sun, who comes out of his pavilion like a bridegroom, exulting like a hero to run his race.

Photo has his rising on the edge of heaven, the ends of his course is its furthest edge, and nothing can escape his heat.

Some biblical references assist in connecting the meaning of zodiac signs in the Cathedral of Otranto with its placement so close to the holy altar. The parallelism between the sacred and the profane symbolism is traditional in Christian iconography, in particular during the Middle Ages. The zodiac signs are located below the biblical stories of Adam and Eve and the murder of Abel by Cain, which are allusions to sins against the laws of nature and God. Above the events of Noah building the ark and the deluge, the Great Flood, are indications of God’s actions toward humankind and the purification of the individual.

In viewing the pavement, one observes Pantaleone’s familiarity with the biblical text as well as with astronomical manuals as he composed three groupings of the zodiac signs, arranged in a cluster of four adjacent signs, in relation to Christian predictions. The first group is composed of the signs of Virgo, Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius respectively seeing in the months of September, October, November and December (see Figures

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28 See Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, Vol. 1, p. 18, noting that the Tree of Life or *arbor vitae* was associated with the Tree of Jesse and in mid-12th century onwards the tendency to associate this meaning with Isaiah 2:1-3.


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13-16), which prefigure the person, work and triumph of the Redeemer who came to us in flesh on earth, e.g., Virgo (The Virgin): “Behold the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel”, which is translated, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Libra (The Scales) reveals a symbol of perfection and justice: “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). Scorpio (The Scorpion) is a sign of struggle and conflict between good and evil as experienced in the temptation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:2-5). Sagittarius is a sign of death because of his action with the bow and arrow, as Jesus who died in the cross and was pierced by a lance: “Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit” (Matthew 27:50).32

The second group consists of the signs of Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces and Aries respectively seeing in the months of January, February, March and April (see figures 5-8), which refer to the Redeemer’s future endeavor and ministry. This group foretells about the formation of Christianity. Capricorn (The Horned Goat or Sea Goat) alludes to atonement, a scapegoat for the sins of others: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life and he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). Aquarius (The Water-Bearer) is a symbol of water essential for life, like Jesus is the spiritual well for the Christian human soul: “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give [him] will become in [him] a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). Pisces (The Fishes) is a symbol of Jesus’ constellation when He was born as well as an allusion to His ministry: “Then, He said to them [Peter, Andrew and Simon], Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Aries (The Ram) is an allusion to the Old Testament law, e.g., if an individual broke the law and was convicted a lamb was sacrificed. When John the Baptist saw Jesus he proclaimed: “Behold The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).33

The third group is formed with the signs of Taurus, Gemini, Cancer and Leo respectively seeing in the months of May, June, July and August (see Figures 9-12), which allude to the final consummation of all things. They foretell the coming judgments on earth and the glorious outcome of Christ’s reign. Taurus (The Bull) is a symbol of payment for sin, a payment that Jesus made for humankind: “But I say to you that every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36) and “But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year” (Hebrews 10:3). Gemini (The Twins) is a symbol of unity and the end of time: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his wife has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7), hence, alluding to the union of Christ with His true believers who form His Christian church. Cancer (The Crab) is a symbol of holding on as the word crab indicates. As Christ’s true believers, He clutches on to his devotees and never lets them go, just like the action of the crab: “He answered and said to them: He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man” (Matthew 13:37). Leo (The Lion) is a symbol of power and proclamation. The Lion alludes to the tribe of Judah: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Revelation 22:13).34

Pantaleone visualization of calendar’s design is in relation to two realms: the physical world composed of the Tree of Life, the seasons and the labor of the months, and metaphysically world composed of biblical stories, in which the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament. Conceptually, he expanded the traditional

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
biblical prefiguration to include ancient divination as prediction for Christian outcomes. Hence, in the floor mosaic, pagan divinities and construction of the cosmos through zodiac signs, constellations and planets become transformed into Christian signs and codes. Pantaleone’s Christianizes the pagan cosmos into a Medieval universe. He suggests to the viewer a specific cyclical rotation with the first part of the calendar ranging from Virgo to Aquarius, which deals with the divine message in the stars, the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (see Figures 13-16, 5 and 6). In the third century, Tertullian in *De Carne Christi*, 21:5, connected the ancestorship of Christ with the house of David, whose son, Jesse, symbolized the tree’s stem (radix) while Mary alluded to a rod or a branch from this tree (virga), and Christ was the flower (flos) of the branch. In Hebrew, the word *Virgo* (*מַזַל בְּתוּלָה nikud*) means a virgin, and in Latin it means virga or branch, thus the allusion of the Virgin as a tree branch being part of the Tree of Jesse or Tree of Life: “In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious” (Isaiah 4:2), as well as an allusion to the beginning of the divine message: “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Isaiah 7:14). Libra with the attributes of the scales, alludes to: “Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting” (Daniel 5:27), and the price paid for sin through the sacrifice on the cross: “Ye are bought with a price” (Paul, I Corinthians 7:23). Scorpio (Scorpion) is a sign of the conflict in the individual and among humankind: “And I (God) will put enmity between thee and the woman (Eve) and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Sagittarius (The Archer) has the opposite meaning to Scorpio. The attribute of the arrow symbolizes the human conquest over evil: “Behold a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2). Capricorn (Sea Goat) is a reference to a scapegoat for the sins of others, a sacrificial animal alluding to the Goat as a personification of the Redeemer (Jesus Christ) being sacrificed as a sin offering for humankind: “And he brought the people’s offering, and took the goat, which was the sin offering for the people, and slew it, and offered it for sin, as the first” (Leviticus 9:15). The last one of this group, Aquarius (The Water Carrier), is a symbol of divine good fortune, a positive omen of pouring forth with blessings: “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon thy seed (Israel) and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isaiah 44:3).

The remaining six zodiac signs, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer and Leo, visualized in the floor mosaic with the months of March, April, May, June, July and August (see Figures 7-12), reveal divine evidence that evil is conquered through God’s intervention, and redemption for humankind is achieved through His Son, Jesus Christ, God’s gift to the universe. Pisces, with the attribute of the fishes, has always been associated with Israel: “let them, Ephraim Manasseh and Joseph’s son, grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Genesis 48:16), and to the redemption seed of the houses of Judah and Israel united under one king, the Messiah. Aries, with the attribute of the ram or lamb, is an allusion to how John the Baptist referred to Christ: “Behold the lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Taurus, with the attribute of the bull, is associated with the coming of Jesus, as noted in Revelation 19:10: “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”. Gemini, with the attribute of the twins, is an allusion to Jesus; dual nature, Jesus as the man and Jesus as the God: “In this days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon

37 Jones, ed., *The Jerusalem Bible*. 
endureth" (Psalm 72, Verse 7). Cancer has the attribute of the crab, whose meaning in Greek and Latin refers to holding or encircling. Lastly, Leo, with the attribute of the Lion, is the twelfth sign of the zodiac, recalls the writing in Revelation 5:5: “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed, hence an allusion to the Messiah, Jesus Christ”. Thus, the zodiac signs area provides guidance for Christians’ souls, while the labors of the months help Christians in conquering vices through work and discipline. This interaction between the zodiac signs and the labors of the months assisted Christians in receiving the virtues of love and peace and, ultimately, achieving God’s grace and fulfillment.38

Conclusion

The discussion of the constellations around the circles of the zodiac signs and labors of the months is beyond the scope of this study, but it is here noted for the first time. Briefly, the pavement was damaged through the centuries and recently has been remarkably restored; some of the constellations are still visible and can be identified, namely, Leo (Lion) and Lepus (Hare) above and between the months of September and October, while below them is Draco (Dragon) (see Figures 12-14). The constellations of Canis Major (The Greater Dog) and Ara (Sacred Altar) are located above and between the months of November and December, while below them are Ursa Major (Great Bear) and Cetus (Sea Monster) (see Figures 15 and 16). Below the months of May and June are the constellations of Aquila (The Eagle) and Canis Minor (Small Dog) (see Figures 9 and 10).39 Hence, the integration of the constellations with the zodiac signs and labors of the months reveal another level of classical erudition in Pantaleone’s opus tessellatum (Figure 4).

In art, during classical times, floor mosaics in secular and sacred places contained depictions of the calendar year in four different types of representations: (1) solely the zodiac signs, e.g., Roman mosaic of the Zodiac of 300 CE, Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Bonn; (2) solely the seasonal cycles, e.g., Roman mosaic of the Four Seasons of 300 CE at the Bardo Museum in Tunisia; (3) the zodiac signs within the season cycles, e.g., Roman mosaic with zodiac signs and the seasons of 300 CE at the Bardo Museum in Tunisia; and (4) the seasons and the labors of the months, e.g., Roman mosaic of third century CE at National Archaeology Museum in Saint-Gemain-en-Laye, near Paris.40 Later in Medieval sacred art, the labors of the months were integrated into the representations of the calendar year. These representations, however, commonly found in the thirteenth century and fourteen centuries (early Renaissance), were portrayed in sculptural carvings on church portals, stained glass windows, misericords, and illuminated manuscripts. Although there is no literary documentation on the Pantaleone’s program, the imagery and the conventions of ancient, classical and Medieval cultures provide insights on the iconography of the opus tessellatum. The depiction of the combination of labors of the months with the zodiac signs on the mosaic pavement of a sacred space is rare, thus the uniqueness of the Cathedral of Otranto’s floor mosaic in terms of placement, decoration and symbolic program. Pantaleone, a learned monk, ardent poet and talented artist, unveiled a pre-Dantesque cosmos in the mosaic pavement of a Christian basilica.


39 See Sesti, The Glorious Constellations: History and Mythology, for a careful study about the constellations, passim.

40 See Zuffi and Novellone, Arte & Zodiac: storia, misteri e interpretazioni dei segni zodiacali nei secoli, pp. 53-164.
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