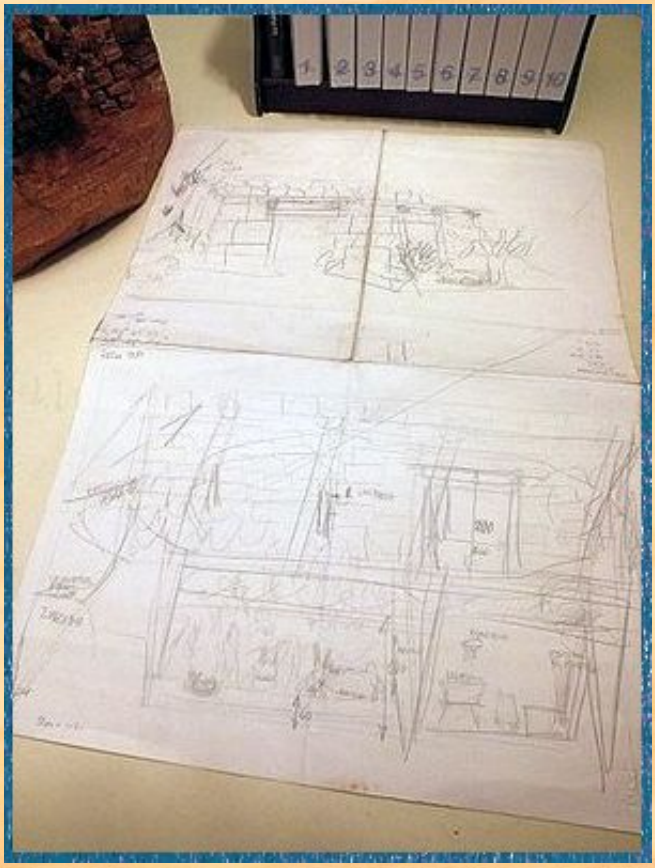
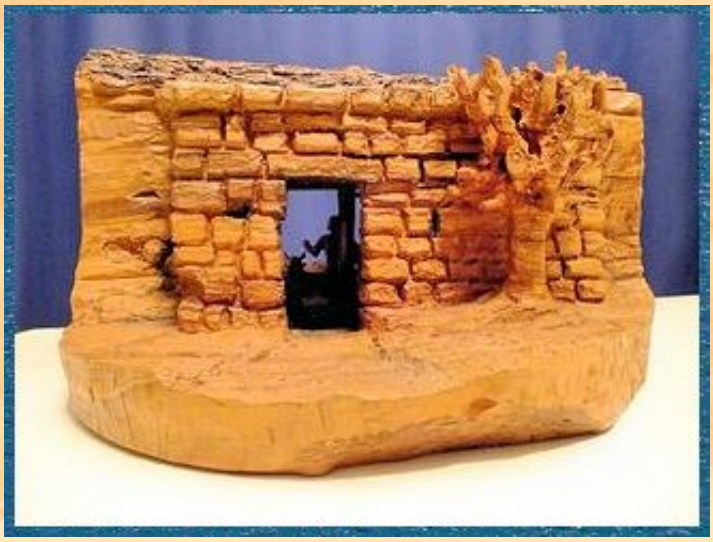
1. Presentation of the CRIB LITTLE JOHN



The entire design of the Crib was made according to the Writes of Little John and the painter and sculptor Lorenzo Ferri who worked on it thanks to the suggestions of Maria Valtorta.



The internal and external parts of the Nativity grotto.



Here are the external parts of the Grotto with an apple tree. Altogether the Crib Little John offers a 360° view on rounding table synchronized with the panorama of Bethlehem. All parts are standing in a showcase.

The following passage tells the witness by Little John over the birth of Jesus.
The highlighted phrases indicate the main features of the Crib.

THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM and THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Written on June, 5th and 6th 1944

[-28-]I see a main road which is very crowded. Little donkeys, loaded with goods and chattels or with people, are going one way. Other little donkeys are going the opposite way. The people are spurring their mounts and those on foot are walking fast because it is cold. **The air is clear and dry. The sky is serene, but everywhere there is the sharp atmosphere common to winter days. The barren country seems vaster, the short grass in the pastures has been nipped by the winter winds; on the grazing ground, the sheep are looking for some grass** and they are also looking for some sunshine as the sun is rising very slowly. They are standing very close together one against the other, because they also are cold, and they bleat, lifting their heads and looking at the sun as if they were saying: «Come quick because it is cold!» **The ground is undulating and its undulations are becoming clearer and clearer. It is a real hilly place. There are valleys and slopes covered with grass, and ridges. The road runs through the centre and goes south-east. Mary is on a little grey donkey. She is all enveloped in a heavy mantle. In front of the saddle there is the fitting already seen in Her journey to Hebron, and on it there is the little trunk with the basic essential things. Joseph is walking on the side holding the reins.** «Are you tired?» he asks Her now and again. Mary looks at him smiling and replies: «No, I am not.» The third time She adds: «You must be tired walking.» «Oh! Me! It's nothing for me. I was only thinking that if I had found another donkey You would have been more comfortable, and we could have travelled faster. But I just could not find another one. Everybody needs a mount nowadays. But take heart. We shall soon be in Bethlehem. Ephrathah is beyond that mountain.» They are both silent. The Virgin, when She does not speak, seems to concentrate on internal prayer. She smiles mildly at one of Her thoughts and if She looks at the crowd, She does not seem to see it for what it is: a man, a woman, an old man, a shepherd, a rich or a poor man, but only for what She sees. «Are you cold?» asks Joseph when the wind starts blowing. «No, thank you.» But Joseph is not too happy. He touches Her feet, which are shod in sandals and are hanging down along the side of the donkey and can hardly be seen coming out from under Her long dress, and he must feel them cold, because he shakes his head and takes a blanket which he has across his shoulders and envelops Mary's legs in it and he spreads it also on Her lap, so that Her hands may be kept warm, being covered by the blanket and Her mantle. They meet a shepherd, who cuts across the road with his herd, moving from the grazing ground on the right-hand side of the road to the one of the left-hand side. Joseph bends down to say something to him. The shepherd nods in assent. Joseph takes the donkey and drags it behind the herd into the grazing ground. The shepherd pulls a coarse bowl out of his knapsack, he milks a big sheep with swollen udders and hands the bowl to Joseph who offers it to Mary. «May God bless you both» exclaims Mary. «You for your love, and you for your kindness. I will pray for you.» «Are you coming from far?» «From Nazareth» replies Joseph. «And where are you going?» «To Bethlehem.» «A long journey for a woman in Her state. Is She your wife?» «Yes, She is.» «Have you got a place where to go?» «No, we haven't.» «That's bad! Bethlehem is overcrowded with people who have come from all over to register there, or are on their way to register elsewhere. I don't know whether you will find lodgings. Are you familiar with the place?» «Not very.» «Well… I will explain it to you… for Her… (and he points to Mary). Find the hotel, but it will be full. But I will tell you just the same, to guide you. It's in the square, in the largest one. This main road will take you to it. You can't miss it. There is a fountain in front of it, it is a long and low building with a very big door. It will be full. But if you do not find room in the hotel, or in any of the houses, go round to the back of the hotel, towards the country. **There are some stables in the mountain, which are used sometimes by merchants to keep their animals there, on their way to Jerusalem, when they don't find room in the hotel. They are stables, you know, in the mountain: they are damp and cold and there are no doors. But they are always a shelter,** because your wife She can't be

left on the road. Perhaps you will find room there and some hay to sleep on and for the donkey. And may God guide you.» «And may God give you joy» answers Mary. Joseph instead replies: «Peace be with you.» They take to the road again. **A wider valley can be seen from the crest they have climbed over. In the valley, up and down the soft slopes surrounding it, there are many houses. It is Bethlehem.** «Here we are in David's land, Mary. Now You will be able to rest. You look so tired» «No. I was thinking I think…» Mary gets hold of Joseph's hand and says to him with a blissful smile: «I really think that the time has come.» «O Lord of mercy! What shall we do?» «Don't be afraid, Joseph. Be steady. See how calm I am?» «But You must be suffering a lot.» «Oh! No. I am full of joy. Such a joy, so great, so beautiful, so uncontainable, that My heart is thumping and thumping and it is whispering to Me: «He is coming! He is coming!» It says so at each beat. It is My Child knocking at My heart and saying: «Mother, I am here and I am coming to give You the kiss of God.» «Oh! What a joy, My dear Joseph!» But Joseph is not joyful. He is thinking of the urgent need to find a shelter and he quickens his pace. He goes from door to door asking for a room. Nothing. They are all full. They reach the hotel. Even the rustic porches surrounding the large inner yard are full of campers. Joseph leaves Mary on the donkey inside the yard and he goes out looking in other houses. He comes back thoroughly disheartened. He has not found anything. **The fast winter twilight is beginning to spread its shadows.** Joseph implores the hotel-keeper. He implores also some of the travellers. He points out that they are all healthy men, that there is a woman about to give birth to a child. He begs them to have mercy. Nothing. There is a rich Pharisee who looks at them with obvious contempt and when Mary goes near him, he steps aside as if he had been approached by a leper. Joseph looks at him and his face blushes with disdain. Mary lays Her hand on his wrist to calm him and says: «Don't insist. Let us go. God will provide.» They go out and they follow the wall of the hotel. They turn into a little street which runs between the hotel and some poor houses. They then turn behind the hotel. They look for the stables. **At last, here are some grottos, a kind of cellars, I would say, rather than stables, because they are so low and damp. The best have already been taken.** Joseph is utterly disheartened. «Ehi! Galilean!» an old man shouts. «Down there, at the end, under those ruins, there is a den. Perhaps there is nobody in it yet.» They hurry to the «den.» It is really a den. Among the ruins of an old building there is a hole, beyond which there is a grotto, an excavation in the mountain, rather than a grotto. It seems to consist of the foundations of the old building, with the roof formed by rubble supported by coarse tree trunks. There is hardly any light, and to see better Joseph pulls out .tinder and flint and he lights a little lamp that he takes out of the knapsack he is carrying across his shoulders. He goes in and is greeted by a bellow. «Come in, Mary. It is empty. There is only an ox.» Joseph smiles. «It's better than nothing!…» Mary dismounts from Her donkey and goes in. Joseph has hung the little lamp on a nail of one of the supporting trunks. They see the vault covered with cobwebs, the soil stamped ramshackle earth, with holes, rubbish, excrement - the soil is strewn With straw. In the rear, an ox turns its head round and looks with his large quiet eyes while some hay is hanging from its lips. There is a rough seat and two big stones in a comer near a loop-hole. The blackness in that comer is a clear sign that a fire is generally lit there. Mary, goes near the ox. She is cold. She puts Her hands on its neck to feel its warmth. The ox bellows but does not stir. It seems to understand. Also when Joseph pushes it aside to take **a large quantity of hay from the manger and make a bed for Mary, the ox remains calm and quiet. The manger is a double one: that is, there is one out of which the ox eats, and above it there is a kind of a shelf, with some spare hay,** which Joseph pulls down. The ox makes room also for the little donkey that, tired and hungry as it is, starts eating at once. Joseph discovers also **a battered bucket, turned upside down. He goes out, because he saw a little stream outside,** and he comes back with some water for the little donkey. He then takes possession of a bunch of twigs in a comer and he tries to sweep the floor with it**. He next spreads the hay and makes a bed with it near the ox, in the most sheltered and dry comer.** But he realizes that the poor hay is damp, and he sighs. He then lights a fire, and with the patience of Job, he dries the hay, a handful at the time, holding it near the fire. Mary is sitting on **the stool,** She is tired, She watches and smiles. The hay is now ready. Mary sits down more comfortably on the soft hay, with Her back leaning against one of the tree trunks. **Joseph completes… the furnishings hanging his mantle as a curtain on the hole that serves as a door. It is a makeshift protection.** He then offers some bread and cheese to the Virgin, and he gives Her some water out of a flask. «Sleep now» he says. «I will, sit up and watch that the fire does not go out.**There is some wood**

fortunately, let us hope that it will bum and last. Thus I will be able to save **the oil of the lamp.**» Mary lies down obediently. Joseph covers Her with Her own mantle and with **the blanket that She had round Her feet earlier.** «But you… you will be cold. «No, Mary. I'll be near the fire. Try and rest now. Things will be better tomorrow.» Mary closes Her eyes without insisting. Joseph creeps into his little comer, sits on the stool, with **some dry shoot** near him. They are very few. I do not think they will last long. They are placed as follows: Mary is on the right hand side, with Her back to the… door, half hidden by the tree trunk and the ox which has lain down on the litter. Joseph is on the left side, towards the door, and since he is facing the fire, his back is turned towards Mary. But he turns round now and again to look at Her, and he sees She is lying quietly, as if She were sleeping. He breaks the little sticks as noiselessly as possible and throws them one at a time on to the little fire, so that it may not go out and may give some light and yet make the wood last longer. There is only the dim light of the fire: at times bright at times very faint. The lamp in fact has been put out and in the half light only the whiteness of the ox and of Joseph's hands and face can be seen. All the rest is a confused mass in the dull dim light. [-29-] I still see **the inside of the poor stony shelter,** where Mary and Joseph have found refuge, sharing the lot of some animals. The little fire is dozing together with its guardian. Mary lifts Her head slowly from Her bed and looks round. She sees that Joseph's head is bowed over his chest, as if he were meditating, and She thinks that his good intention to remain awake has been overcome by tiredness. She smiles lovingly and making less noise than a butterfly alighting on a rose, She sits up and then goes on Her knees. She prays with a blissful smile on Her face. She prays with Her arms stretched out, almost in the shape of a cross, with the palms of Her hands facing up and forward, and She never seems to tire in that position. She then prostrates Herself with Her face on the hay, in an even more ardent prayer. A long prayer. Joseph rouses. He notices that the fire is almost out and the stable almost -dark. **He throws a handful of very slender heath on to the fire and the flames are revived,** he then adds some thicker twigs and finally some sticks, because the cold is really biting: the cold of a serene winter night that comes into the ruins from everywhere. Poor Joseph must be frozen sitting as he is near the door, if we can call a door the hole where Joseph's mantle serves as a curtain. He warms his hands near the fire, then **takes his sandals off** and warms his feet. When the fire is gaily blazing and its light is steady, he turns round. But he does not see anything, not even Mary's white **veil** that formed a clear line on the dark hay. He gets up and slowly moves towards Her pallet. «Are You not sleeping, Mary?» he asks. He asks Her three times until She turns round and replies: «I am praying.» «Is there anything you need?» «No, Joseph.» «Try and sleep a little. At least try and rest.» «I will try. But I don't get tired praying.» «God be with You, Mary.» «And with you, Joseph.» Mary resumes Her position. Joseph to avoid falling asleep, goes on his knees near the fire and prays. He prays with his hands pressed against his face. He removes them now and again to feed the fire and then he resumes his ardent prayer. Apart from the noise of the crackling sticks and the noise made now and again by the donkey stamping its hooves on the ground, no other sound is heard. **A thin ray of moonlight creeps in through a crack in the vault** and it seems a blade of unearthly silver looking for Mary. It stretches in length as **the moon climbs higher in the sky** and at last reaches Her. It is now on Her head, where it forms a halo of pure light. Mary lifts Her head, as if She had a celestial call, and She gets up and goes on to Her knees again. Oh! How beautiful it is here now! She raises Her head, and Her face shines in the white moonlight and becomes transfigured by a supernatural smile. What does She see? What does She hear? What does She feel? She is the only one who can tell what She saw, heard and felt in the refulgent hour of Her Maternity. I can only see that the light around Her is increasing more and more. It seems to come down from Heaven, to arise from the poor things around Her, above all it seems to originate from Herself. **Her deep blue dress now seems of a pale myosotis blue, and Her hands and face are becoming clear blue as if they were placed under the glare of a huge pale sapphire.** This hue is spreading more and more on the things around Her, it covers them, purifies them and brightens everything. It reminds me, although it is somewhat softer, of the hue I see in the vision of holy Paradise, and also of the colour I saw in the visit of the Wise Men.The light is given off more and more intensely from Mary's body, it absorbs the moonlight. She seems to be drawing to Herself all the light that can descend from Heaven. She is now the Depository of the Light. She is to give this Light to the world. And this blissful, uncontainable, immeasurable, eternal, divine Light which is about to be given, is heralded by a dawn, a morning star, a chorus of atoms of

Light that increase continuously like a tide, and rise more and more like incense, and descend like a large stream and stretch out like veils… **The vault, full of crevices, of cobwebs, of protruding rubble balanced by a miracle of physics, the dark, smoky repellent vault, now seems the ceiling of a royal hall. Each boulder is a block of silver, each crack an opal flash, each cobweb a most precious canopy interwoven with silver and diamonds. A huge green lizard, hibernating between two stones, seems an emerald jewel forgotten there by a queen: and a bunch of hibernating bats is like a precious onyx chandelier. The hay from the upper manger is no longer grass blades: it is pure silver wires quivering in the air with the grace of loose hair. The dark wood of the lower manger is a block of burnished silver. The walls are covered with a brocade in which the white silk disappears under the pearly embroidery of the relief, and the soil… what is the soil now? It is a crystal lit tip by a white light. Its protrusions are like roses thrown in homage of the soil; the holes are precious cups from which perfumes and scents are to arise.** And the light increases more and more. It is now unbearable to the eye. And the Virgin disappears in so much light, as if She had been absorbed by an incandescent curtain… and the Mother emerges. Yes. When the light becomes endurable once again to my eyes, I see Mary with the new-born Son in Her arms. A little Baby, rosy and plump, bustling with His little hands as big as rose buds and kicking with His tiny feet that could be contained in the hollow of the heart of a rose: and is crying with a thin trembling voice, just like a new-born little lamb, opening His pretty little mouth that resembles a wild strawberry, and showing a tiny tongue that trembles against the rosy roof of His mouth. And He moves **His little head that is so blond that it seems without any hair,** a little round head that His Mummy holds in the hollow of Her hand, while She looks at Her Baby and adores Him weeping and smiling at the same time, and She bends down to kiss Him not on His innocent head, but on the centre of His chest, where underneath there is His little heart beating for us… where one day there will be the Wound. And His Mother is doctoring that wound in advance, with Her immaculate kiss. The ox, woken up by the dazzling light, gets up with a great noise of hooves and bellows, the donkey turns its head round and brays. It is the light that rouses them but I love to think that they wanted to greet their Creator, both for themselves and on behalf of all the animals. Also Joseph, who almost enraptured, was praying so ardently as to be isolated from what was around him, now rouses and he sees a strange light filter through the fingers of his hands pressed against his face. He removes his hands, lifts his head and turns round. The ox, standing as it is, hides Mary. But She calls him: «Joseph, come.» Joseph rushes. And when he sees, he stops, struck by reverence, and he is about to fall on his knees where he is. But Mary insists: «Come, Joseph» and She leans on the hay with Her left hand and, holding the Child close to Her heart with Her right one, She gets up and moves towards Joseph, who is walking embarrassed, because of a conflict in him between his desire to go and his fear of being irreverent.» They meet at the foot of the straw bed and they look at each other, weeping blissfully. «Come, let us offer Jesus to the Father» says Mary. And while Joseph kneels down, She stands up between two trunks supporting the vault, She lifts up Her Creature in Her arms and says: «Here I am. On His behalf, O God, I speak these words to You: here I am to do Your will. And I, Mary, and My spouse, Joseph, with Him. Here are Your servants, O Lord. May Your will always be done by us, in every hour, in every event, for Your glory and Your love. Then Mary bends down and says: «Here, Joseph, take Him», and offers him the Child. «What! I?… Me?… Oh, no! I am not worthy!» Joseph is utterly dumbfounded at the idea of having to touch God. But Mary insists smiling: «You are well worthy. No one is more worthy than you are, and that is why the Most High chose you. Take Him, Joseph, and hold Him while I look for the linens.» Joseph, blushing almost purple, stretches his arms out and takes the Baby, Who is screaming because of the cold and when he has Him in his arms, he no longer persists in the intention of holding Him far from himself, out of respect, but he presses Him to his heart and bursts into tears exclaiming: «Oh! Lord! My God!» And he bends down to kiss His tiny feet and feels them cold. He then sits on the ground, and holds Him close to his chest and with his **brown tunic** and his hands he tries to cover Him, and warm Him, defending Him from the bitterly cold wind of the night. He would like to go near the fire, but there is a cold draft there coming in from the door. It is better to stay where he is. No, it is better to go between the two animals which serve as a protection against the air and give out warmth. Thus, he goes between the ox and the donkey, with his back to the door, bending over the New-Born to form with his body a shelter, the two sides of which are a grey head with long ears, and a huge white muzzle

with a steaming nose and two gentle soft eyes. Mary has opened the trunk and has pulled out the linens and swaddling clothes. She has been near the fire warming them. She now moves towards Joseph and envelops the Baby with lukewarm linen and then with Her veil to protect His little head. **«Where shall we put Him now?» She asks. Joseph looks round, thinking… «Wait» he says. «Let us move the animals and their hay over here, we will then pull down that hay up there and arrange it in here. The wood on the side will protect Him from the air, the hay will serve as a pillow and the ox will warm Him a little with its breath. The ox is better than the donkey. It is more patient and quiet.» And he bustles about, while Mary is lulling the Baby, holding Him close to Her heart, and laying Her cheek on His tiny head to warm it.** Joseph makes up the fire, without economy this time, to have a good blaze, and he warms the hay and as it dries up, he keeps it near his chest, so that it will not get cold. Then, when he has gathered enough to make a little mattress for the Child, he goes to the manger and sorts it out as if it were a cradle. «It is ready» he says. «Now we would need a blanket, because the hay stings, and also to cover Him.»**«Take My mantle» says Mary.**«You will be cold.» «Oh! It does not matter!**The blanket is too coarse. The mantle is soft and warm.** I am not cold at all. Don't let Him suffer any longer!» Joseph takes **the wide mantle of soft dark blue wool, he double folds it and lays it on the hay, leaving a strip hanging out of the manger. The first bed for the Saviour is ready.** And the Mother, with Her sweet, graceful gait, moves to the manger, lays Him in it, **and covers Him with the strip of Her mantle. She arranges it also around His bare head, almost completely covered by the hay, from which it is protected only by Mary's thin veil. Only His little face,** the size of a man's fist, is left uncovered. Mary and Joseph, bending over the manger, are blissfully happy watching Him sleep His first sleep, because the warmth of the clothes and of the hay has appeased His crying, and made Him sleepy.