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**ITALIAN
ART
IN THE
1300s**

Smarthistory Guide to Italian Art in the 1300s

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Matt Collins, Corey D'Augustine, Dr. David Drogin, Dr. Holly Flora,
Dr. Beth Harris, Dr. Donna L. Sadler, Dr. Joanna Milk Mac Farland,
Louisa Woodville, and Dr. Steven Zucker

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Smarthistory Guide to Italian Art in the 1300s by Matt Collins, Corey D'Augustine, Dr. David Drogin, Dr. Holly Flora, Dr. Beth Harris, Dr. Donna L. Sadler, Dr. Joanna Milk Mac Farland, Louisa Woodville, and Dr. Steven Zucker is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

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Map



I

A Beginner's Guide

1.

Introduction to Late Gothic Art

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Polykleitos, Doryphoros (Spear-Bearer) or The Canon, c. 450-40 B.C.E., ancient Roman marble copy of a lost Greek bronze, 211 cm, found in Pompeii (Archaeological Museum, Naples) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The human body

We have bodies that exist in space, and this has been a fundamental challenge for artists through history.

The figure

In ancient Greece and Rome, artists embraced the realities of the human body and the way that our bodies move in space (naturalism). For the next thousand years though, after Europe transitioned from a pagan culture to a Christian one in the middle ages, the physical was largely ignored in favor of the heavenly, spiritual realm. Medieval human figures were still rendered, but they were elongated, flattened and static—in other words, they were made to function symbolically.



Master of the Bardi Saint Francis, Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi (Bardi Dossal), c. mid 13th century, tempera on panel, Bardi Chapel, Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iUE5jm>>

Space

Instead of earthly settings, we often see flat, gold backgrounds. There were some exceptions along the way, but it's not until the end of the 13th century in Italy that artists began to (re)explore the physical realities of the human figure in space. Here, they begin the long process of figuring out how space can become a rational, measurable environment in which their newly naturalistic figures can sit, stand and move.



Giotto, *Lamentation*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Florence & Siena

In Italy, there were two city-states where we can see this renewed interest in the human figure and space: Florence and Siena. The primary artists in Siena were Duccio, the Lorenzetti Brothers, and Simone Martini. And in Florence, we look to the art of Cimabue and Giotto.

Whereas medieval artists often preferred a flat, gold background, these artists began to construct earthly environments for their figures to inhabit. We see landscapes and architecture in their paintings, though these are often represented schematically. These Florentine and Siennese artists

employed diagonal lines that appear to recede and in this way convey a simple illusion of space, though that space is far from rational to our eyes. When we look closely, we can see that the space would be impossible to move through, and that the scale of the architecture often doesn't match the size of the figures.

A word of caution

Be careful here! While it is tempting to think of this movement toward naturalism as "progress" it is important to remember that this art is not less good, nor even less "advanced" than what comes later in the Renaissance (you might think of Leonardo or Michelangelo). Art is always a response to the needs of the moment and for the late 13th and early 14th century, symbols of the spiritual remained potent systems for understanding.



Giotto, *The Ognissanti Madonna and Child Enthroned*, 1306-10, tempera on panel, 128 x 80 1/4" (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC-BY-SA 2.0)

2.

The Medieval and Renaissance Altarpiece

Dr. Donna L. Sadler



Michael Pacher, *Sankt Wolfgang Altarpiece*, 1471-81, polychrome pine, linden, gilding, oil, 40 x 20' (Parish Church, Sankt Wolfgang, Austria) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/dFAWQ>>

The altar and the sacrament of the Eucharist

Every architectural space has a gravitational center, one that may be spatial or symbolic or both; for the medieval church, the altar fulfilled that role. This essay will explore what transpired at the altar during this period as well as its decoration,

which which was intended to edify and illuminate the worshippers gathered in the church.

The Christian religion centers upon Jesus Christ, who is believed to be the incarnation of the son of God born to the Virgin Mary.

During his ministry, Christ performed miracles and attracted a large following, which ultimately led to his persecution and crucifixion by the Romans. Upon his death, he was resurrected, promising redemption for humankind at the end of time.

The mystery of Christ's death and resurrection are symbolically recreated during the Mass (the central act of worship) with the celebration of the Eucharist — a reminder of Christ's sacrifice where bread and wine wielded by the priest miraculously embodies the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the Christian Savior.

The altar came to symbolize the tomb of Christ. It became the stage for the sacrament of the Eucharist, and gradually over the course of the Early Christian period began to be ornamented by a cross, candles, a cloth (representing the shroud that covered the body of Christ), and eventually, an altarpiece (a work of art set above and behind an altar).



Detail of the Eucharist, Rogier van der Weyden, Seven Sacraments Altarpiece, 1445-50 (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp)



Rogier van der Weyden, Seven Sacraments Altarpiece, 1445-50, oil on panel, 200 cm × 223 cm (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp)

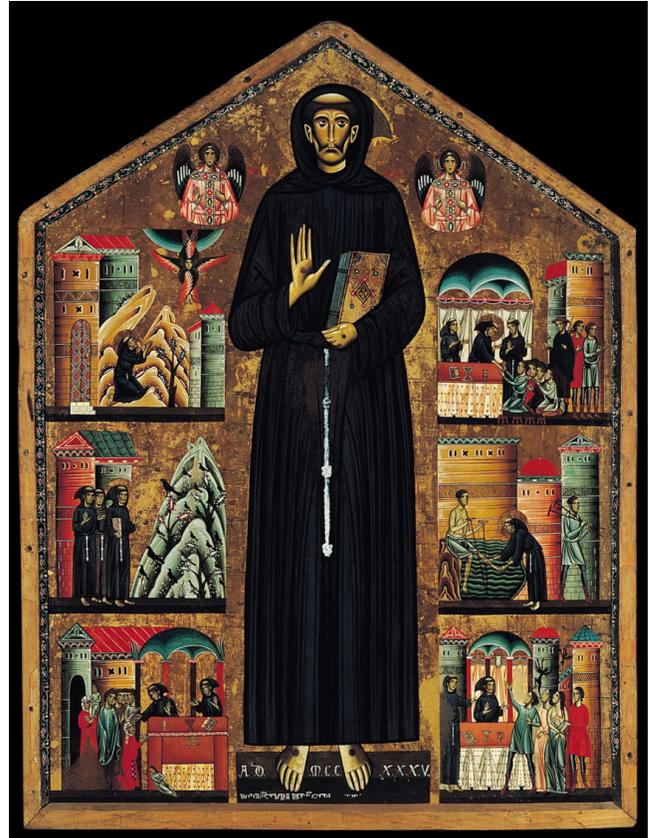
In Rogier van der Weyden's *Altarpiece of the Seven Sacraments*, one sees Christ's sacrifice and the contemporary celebration of the Mass joined. The Crucifixion of Christ is in the foreground of the central panel of the triptych (three-panel altarpiece) with St. John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross, while directly behind, a priest celebrates the Eucharist before a decorated altarpiece upon an altar.

Though altarpieces were not necessary for the Mass, they became a standard feature of altars throughout Europe from the thirteenth century, if not earlier. One of the factors that may have influenced the creation of altarpieces at that time was the shift from a more cube-shaped altar to a wider format, a change that invited the display of works of art upon the rectangular altar table.

Though the shape and medium of the altarpiece varied from country to country, the sensual experience of viewing it during the medieval period did not: chanting, the ringing of bells, burning candles, wafting incense, the mesmerizing sound of the incantation of the liturgy, and the sight of the colorful, carved story of Christ's last days on earth and his resurrection would have stimulated all the senses of the worshipers. In a way, to see an altarpiece was to touch it—faith was experiential in that the boundaries between the five senses were not so rigorously drawn in the Middle Ages. For example, worshipers were expected to visually consume the Host (the bread symbolizing Christ's body) during Mass, as full communion (Christian practice centers on the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is sometimes referred to as Communion) was reserved for Easter only.

Saints and relics

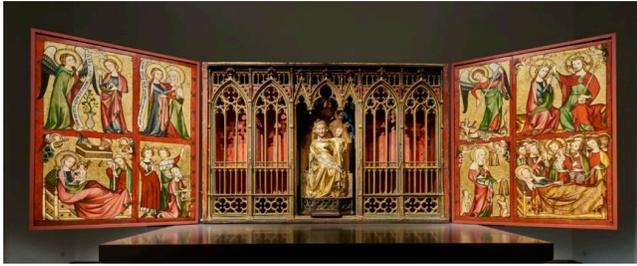
Since the fifth century, saints' relics (fragments of venerated holy persons) were embedded in the altar, so it is not surprising that altarpieces were often dedicated to saints and the miracles they performed. Italy in particular favored portraits of saints flanked by scenes from their lives, as seen, for example, in the image of St. Francis of Assisi by Bonaventura Berlinghieri in the Church of San Francesco in Pescia.



Bonaventura Berlinghieri, *St. Francis of Assisi*, c. 1235, tempera on wood (Church of San Francesco, Pescia)

The Virgin Mary and the Incarnation of Christ were also frequently portrayed, though the Passion of Christ (and his resurrection) most frequently provided the backdrop for the mystery of Transubstantiation celebrated on the altar. (The Passion, from the Latin verb: *patior*, *passus sum* — to suffer, bear, endure, refers to the short final period in the life of Jesus.) The image could be painted or sculpted out of wood, metal, stone, or marble; relief sculpture was typically painted in bright colors and often gilded.

Germany, the Low Countries (modern-day Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg), and Scandinavia were most often associated with polyptychs (many-paneled works) that have several stages of closing and opening, in which a hierarchy of different media from painting to sculpture engaged the worshiper in a dance of concealment and revelation that culminated in a vision of the divine.



Rhenish Master, *Altenberger Altar*, c. 1330 (wings are in the collection of the Städel Museum, Frankfurt)

For example, the altarpiece from Altenberg contained a statue of the Virgin and Christ Child which was flanked by double-hinged wings that were opened in stages so that the first opening revealed painted panels of the Annunciation, Nativity, Death and Coronation of the Virgin (image above). The second opening disclosed the Visitation, Adoration of the Magi, and the patron saints of the Altenberg cloister, Michael and Elizabeth of Hungary. When the wings were fully closed, the Madonna and Child were hidden and painted scenes from the Passion were visible.

Variations



Rood screen of *St. Andrew Church*, Cherry Hinton, England (photo: Oxfordian Kissuth, CC BY-SA 3.0) <<https://tinyurl.com/y73xcbj>>

English parish churches had a predilection for rood screens, which were a type of carved barrier separating the nave (the main, central space of

the church) from the chancel (the area in which the altar was found). Altarpieces carved out of alabaster became common in fourteenth-century England, featuring scenes from the life of Christ; these were often imported by other European countries.

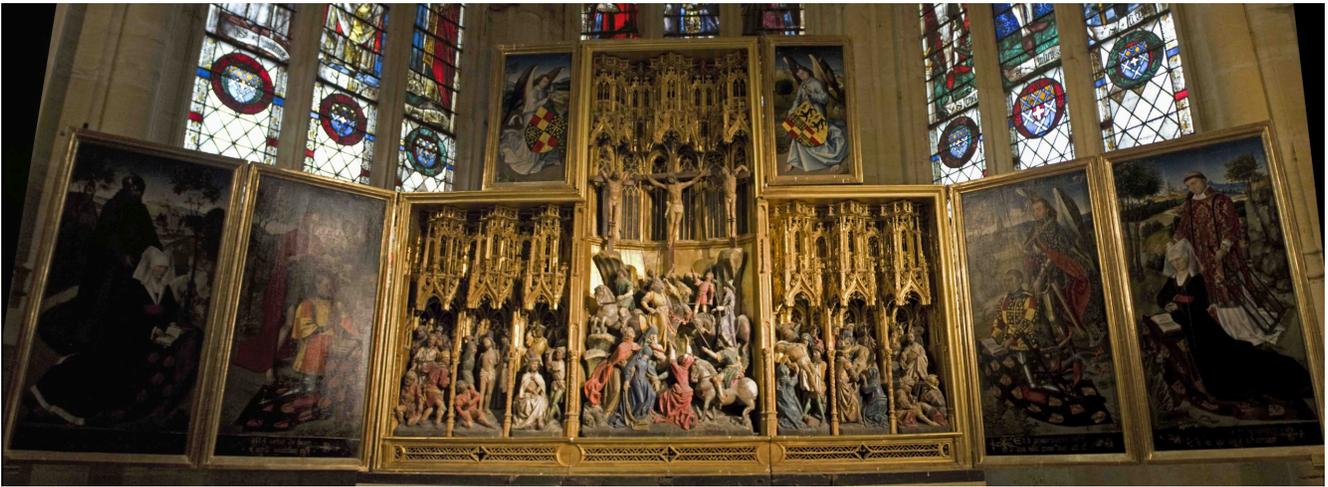


Altarpiece of Saint Eustache, Saint-Denis, Paris, 1250-1260 (Musée de Cluny, Paris)

The abbey of St.-Denis in France boasted a series of rectangular stone altarpieces that featured the lives of saints interwoven with the most important episodes of Christ's life and death. For example, the life of St. Eustache unfolds to either side of the Crucifixion on one of the altarpieces, the latter of which participated in the liturgical activities of the church and often reflected the stained-glass subject matter of the individual chapels in which they were found.

Gothic beauty

In the later medieval period in France (15th–16th centuries), elaborate polyptychs with spiky pinnacles and late Gothic tracery formed the backdrop for densely populated narratives of the Passion and resurrection of Christ. In the seven-paneled altarpiece from the church of St.-Martin in Ambierle, the painted outer wings represent the patrons with their respective patron saints and above, the Annunciation to the Virgin by the archangel Gabriel of the birth of Christ. On the outer sides of these wings, painted in *grisaille* (a gray tonality that simulates sculpture) are the donors' coats of arms.

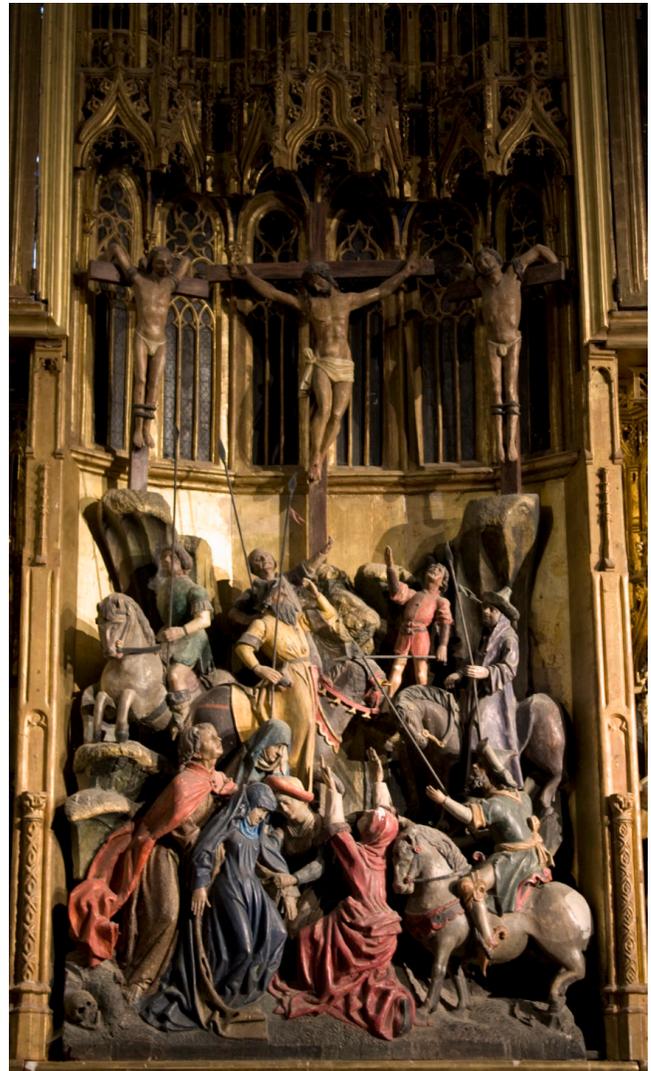


The altarpiece of the Church of St. Martin, Ambierle, 1466 (photo: D Villafruela, CC BY-SA 3.0) <<https://tinyurl.com/yam5lqdv>>

Turrets (towers) crowned by triangular gables and divided by vertical pinnacles with spiky crockets (small ornaments typically projecting from the sloping angles of pinnacles, spires, etc., and commonly depicting stylized foliage) create the framework of the polychromed and gilded wood carving of the inner three panels that house the story of Christ's torture and triumph over death against tracery patterns that mimic stained glass windows found in Gothic churches.

To the left, one finds the Betrayal of Christ, the Flagellation, and the Crowning with the Crown of Thorns — scenes that led up to the death of Christ. The Crucifixion occupies the elevated central portion of the altarpiece, and the Descent from the Cross, the Entombment, and Resurrection are represented on the right side of the altarpiece.

There is an immediacy to the treatment of the narrative that invites the worshiper's immersion in the story: anecdotal detail abounds, the small scale and large number of the figures encourage the eye to consume and possess what it sees in a fashion similar to a child's absorption before a dollhouse. The scenes on the altarpiece are made imminently accessible by the use of contemporary garb, highly detailed architectural settings, and exaggerated gestures and facial expressions.



The altarpiece of the Church of St. Martin, detail of the Passion (photo: D Villafruela, CC BY-SA 3.0) <<https://tinyurl.com/y9gpcgghy>>

One feels compelled to enter into the drama of the story in a visceral way—feeling the sorrow of the Virgin as she swoons at her son’s death. This palpable quality of empathy that propels the viewer into the Passion of Christ makes the historical past fall away: we experience the pathos of Christ’s death in the present moment.

According to medieval theories of vision, memory was a physical process based on embodied visions. According to one twelfth-century thinker, they imprinted themselves upon the eyes of the heart. The altarpiece guided the faithful to a state of mind conducive to prayer, promoted communication with the saints, and served as a mnemonic device (a technique a person can use to help them improve their ability to remember something) for meditation, and could even assist in achieving communion with the divine.



Chalice, mid-15th century, possibly from Hungary (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Paten, c. 1230-50, German (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The altar had evolved into a table that was alive with color, often with precious stones, with relics, the chalice (which held the wine) and paten (which held the Host) consecrated to the blood and body of Christ, and finally, a carved and/or painted retable: this was the spectacle of the holy.

As Jean-Claude Schmitt put it:

this was an ensemble of sacred objects, engaged in a dialectic movement of revealing and concealing that encouraged individual piety and collective adherence to the mystery of the ritual. *J.-C. Schmitt*, “*Les reliques et les images*,” in *Les reliques: Objets, cultes, symbols* (Turnhout: 1999)

The story embodied on the altarpiece offered an object lesson in the human suffering experienced by Christ. The worshiper’s immersion in the death and resurrection of Christ was also an engagement with the tenets of Christianity, poignantly transcribed upon the sculpted, polychromed altarpieces.

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3.

The Black Death

Louisa Woodville



*Fresco in the former Abbey of Saint-André-de-Lavaudieu, France, 14th century, depicting the plague personified as a woman, she “carries arrows that strike those around her, often in the neck and armpits—in other words, places where the buboes commonly appeared” (Franco Mormando, *Piety and Plague: from Byzantium to the Baroque*, Truman State University Press, 2007).*

1348

The Black Death arrived on European shores in 1348. By 1350, the year it retreated, it had felled a quarter to half of the region’s population. In 1362, 1368, and 1381, it struck again—as it would periodically well into the 18th century.

The contemporary Sieneese chronicler, Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, described its terror. A victim first experiences flu-like symptoms, and then sees a “swell beneath their armpits and in their groins.” Agnolo himself buried his five children with his own hands. He also lost his wife.

The plague hit hard and fast. People lay ill little more than two or three days and died suddenly....He who was well one day was dead

the next and being carried to his grave,” writes the Carmelite friar Jean de Venette in his 14th century French chronicle. From his native Picardy, Jean witnessed the disease’s impact in northern France; Normandy, for example, lost 70 to 80 percent of its population. Italy was equally devastated. The Florentine author Boccaccio recounts how that city’s citizens “dug for each graveyard a huge trench, in which they laid the corpses as they arrived by hundreds at a time, piling them up tier upon tier as merchandise is stowed on a ship.

Trade was to blame

Growing stability in Europe in the late middle ages made possible extensive trade between East and West and within Europe itself. Italian city-states such as Venice and Genoa had trading ports in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black sea—trade that made these cities among the wealthiest cities in Europe. Most historians today generally agree that the plague was likely spread through Eurasia via these trade routes by parasites carried on the backs of rodents. The bacterium *Yersinia pestis* (and not all historians agree this was the culprit) likely traveled from China to the northwestern shores of the Caspian Sea, then part of the Mongol Empire and by the spring of 1346, Italian merchants in the Crimea, specifically the Genoese-dominated city of Kaffa (today Feodosiya in the Ukraine) brought the disease west. Rats carrying infected fleas boarded ships bound for Constantinople (today Istanbul in Turkey), capital of the Byzantine Empire. Inhabitants there were sickened by the plague by early July.

From these Greek-speaking lands, the plague spread to North Africa and the Middle East with

terrible consequences; by autumn 1347, it had reached the French port of Marseilles and progressed both north and west. By early November, the Italian city-states of Genoa, Pisa, and Venice—commercial hubs for European trade—had been struck.

Most of the rest of Europe followed in short order. The disease spread along the active trade routes that northern Italian and Flemish merchants had developed. London and Bruges then communicated the disease via busy shipping lanes to the Nordic countries and the Baltic region (aided by a trading partnership known as the Hanseatic League). Western crusaders seeking to attack the Holy Land prompted innovations in shipbuilding and these larger and faster ships carried large quantities of goods over extensive trade networks—but they also carried the deadly pathogen.

“God is deaf nowadays and will not hear us”

The pandemic ended up killing approximately half of Europe’s population, indiscriminate of people’s wealth, social standing, or religious piety. Survivors “were like persons distraught and almost without feeling,” writes Agnolo, a despair echoed throughout Europe. “God is deaf nowadays and will not hear us. And for our guilt he grinds good men to dust,” wrote the late 14th century English cleric, William Langland, in his epic poem “Piers Plowman.”

With so many dead and dying, patterns that had kept medieval society stable were replaced by hostility, confusion, greed, remorse, abuse—and, at times, genuine caring. Contemporary chronicles tell of eruptions of violence, “Christians massacred Jews in Germany and other parts of the world where Jews lived, and many thousands were burned everywhere, indiscriminately,” wrote Jean de Venette, describing a ritualized attacks against Jews who became scapegoats.

Some Christians became more pious, believing that their piety might endear them to a God who

they believed had sent the plague to punish them for their sins. Texts from this time describe Penitent pilgrims, at times flagellating themselves with whips, crowding the roads. Others reacted by assuming a no-holds-barred attitude toward life, giving “themselves over to pleasures: monks, priests, nuns and lay men and women all enjoyed themselves....Everyone thought themselves rich because he had escaped and regained the world,” according to Agnolo.

Economic impact

The Black Death turned the economy upside-down. It disrupted trade and put manufacturing on hold as skilled artisans and merchants died by the thousands—not to mention the customers who bought their wares. Workers’ wages skyrocketed as arable land lay fallow; landlords, desperate for people to work their land, were forced to renegotiate farmers’ wages. Famine followed. Widespread death eroded the strict hereditary class divisions that had, for centuries, bound peasants to land owned by local lords.

People struggled to understand what was happening. In Western Europe a terrified populace often turned to their Christian faith. As a result, the Church became wealthier as many of those stricken, in an effort to assure a place in heaven, willed their property to the Church. But the authority of the Church also suffered. As some pointed to the “astrological skies that revealed Saturn in the house of Jupiter” as the cause of the tragedy.

Did the Black Death contribute to the Renaissance?

The Black Death radically disrupted society, but did the social, political and religious upheaval created by the plague contribute to the Renaissance? Some historians say yes. With so much land readily available to survivors, the rigid hierarchical structure that marked pre-plague society became more fluid. The Medici family, important patrons of Italian Renaissance culture, originated in the rural area of Mugello in Tuscany

and moved to Florence soon after the plague. They initially established their fortune in the wool trade and then branched out into banking. As the family achieved wealth and power, they promoted such artists as Filippo Lippi, Sandro Botticelli, and Michelangelo—not to mention producing four

popes and two regent queens of France. Would such mobility have been possible without the social and economic upheaval caused by the Black Death? Historians will likely debate this question for many years.



Giacomo Borlone de Burchis, *The Triumph of Death with The Dance of Death*, detail, 15th century, Oratorio dei Disciplini in Clusone, Italy (photo: Marco Frattola, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/3RLDru>>

4.

The conservator's eye: Taddeo Gaddi, 'Saint Julian'

A conversation

Corey D'Augustine and Dr. Steven Zucker



Taddeo Gaddi, Saint Julian, 1340, tempera on wood, gold ground, 54 x 36.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Steven: We're up on the second floor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, looking at a small panel painting by an Italian artist who's name is Gaddi, one of the most prolific students of Giotto.

Corey: This is an egg tempera painting.

Steven: We generally think of Old Master paintings as being oil paint on canvas.

Corey: In southern Europe, we have a tradition dating back all the way to the middle ages of painting in egg, whereas oil painting is really a northern tradition.

Steven: So why egg yolk?

Corey: These artists are very concerned with binding pigment—all of these colored powders, etc, many of them mineral—to the wood panel—the support that these works are often painted on—in a way that's going to be durable.

Steven: And they were durable. These are over 500 years old.

Corey: These paintings are coming out of a very highly refined tradition of painting guilds (associations of craftsmen or other professionals). The way this would work is that as an apprentice, you would train for often seven years under a master, understanding not only how to paint beautifully, but how to make sure that your painting lasts for as long as possible with no visible change.

Steven: And that makes sense given the subject. We're looking at an image of Saint Julian.

Corey: It's painted on poplar wood, a rather soft wood, it's one that warps a lot over time.

Steven: And we can see that the surface does bulge toward the center.



Detail with blue line indicating bulge, Taddeo Gaddi, Saint Julian, 1340, tempera on wood, gold ground, (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Corey: In fact, it probably would have done so even more before it was restored in the 19th century. A lot of these paintings have been planed down from the reverse and mounted onto a cradle, a rigid wooden structure in the back that doesn't allow it to flex naturally. We tend to think that deforestation is a very contemporary problem, but the hardwoods of Italy were already deforested by the early and middle Renaissance, so this is why they're painting on poplar. They knew it wasn't the best wood, they knew it would change but they didn't have a choice.



Cradled panel painting (reverse) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And that's not the only change. It's pretty clear that the lovely gothic arch that the saint is

surrounded by would have ended with its point, but here it's been cut off.

Corey: Almost all of the Renaissance paintings that you'll find in museums around the world are only small fragments of what would've been very large altarpieces.

Steven: It would have been part of a polyptych, or multipaneled altarpiece. And we need to, of course, think back to a period before air conditioning.

Corey: Where are you supposed to encounter this painting? Certainly not here at the Metropolitan Museum, but in a church in northern Italy. A non-heated, non-cooled environment, super humid and then super dry, depending on times of the year. And this is a very harsh environment for any work of art...



Example of an intact polyptych in its original location, Andrea Mantegna, San Zeno Altarpiece, 1456-59, oil on panel (Basilica of San Zeno, Verona) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Because the wood itself is expanding and contracting and presumably there's the potential that the paint itself could loosen.

Corey: Wood has this ability to expand and contract again, no problem. Paint does not have that ability however. And that's the reason why paint very often cracks so extensively on these panel paintings.

Steven: Wood is absorbent, so you wouldn't want to paint directly on the wood.

Corey: What these artists and artisans would do is use rabbit skin glue—glue made from the skin of rabbits, that's a size material. In other words, it's a sealant of that wood and it limits the ability of that wood to absorb moisture.

Steven: On top of the rabbit skin glue an additional layer of seal is added. This is known as gesso.

Corey: The gesso or the ground or the priming of the painting is actually a mixture of rabbit skin glue again and then some gypsum, calcium sulfate, some white powder in other words. This is an absorbent material, which is now going to receive the egg tempera paint and also in areas under the gold, a material called bole, a kind of clay. It's often reddish in color—it is in this painting—and that clay is again mixed with rabbit skin glue. So there's a whole lot of glue all throughout the layer structure of this painting, it's part of the reason why it's so durable.

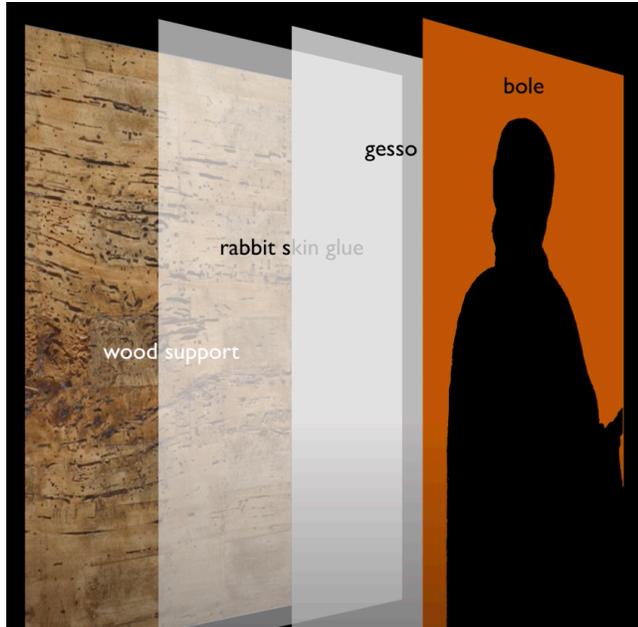


Diagram of painting with layers (graphic: Steven Zucker)

Steven: Let's talk about the paint for just a moment. Tempera is painted with a very small brush, with very fine brush strokes.

Corey: Egg tempera dries quite rapidly and is very difficult to work wet in wet like you can with oil, brushing wet paint into wet paint that's already on your panel. Here this is much more like a drawing technique because you have all these individual, crisp little lines. The face here is incredibly well preserved and we see all of these beautiful lines, they almost look like pencil lines, and really that's the tip of the brush, we can imagine how painstaking this process is to be able to make this degree of modeling and illusionism essentially with pencil lines.



Detail, Taddeo Gaddi, Saint Julian, 1340, tempera on wood, gold ground (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: But while the face is really well preserved, the red garment seems to be kind of flat.

Corey: Remember that these were in churches for hundreds of years and they were cleaned by, not conservators, but monks and nuns, you know the candle soot and the grime that would collect on these paintings had to be removed with very strong materials, urine and lye, believe it or not. These are very corrosive substances. A lot of the upper brush work, the higher layers of the paint, sadly have been scrubbed off. And this probably happened hundreds of years ago.



Detail, Taddeo Gaddi, *Saint Julian*, 1340, tempera on wood, gold ground (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: It's a little misleading to call this a painting because only about fifty percent of the surface is actually paint. The rest of it is gold.

Corey: Gold is one of the only noble metals that we have—it's a metal that doesn't tarnish. The message here is yes, it is expensive, it's luxurious, it's appropriate for a religious painting, but deeply embedded in that meaning is also the fact that this is timeless, it doesn't corrode.

Steven: The gold leaf is actual gold that has been hammered very very thin, then applied and burnished when a smooth object is rubbed over it. What we're seeing here is just a faint trace of the original gleam that the gold would have had.

Corey: This is water gilding technique. The bole is moistened slightly, and that's all the adhesion necessary for this incredibly thin sheet of gold. Now after the gold is applied, there are small metal tools which make all of these beautiful little indentations. Again, we're not supposed to be at the Metropolitan Museum—we're supposed to be on our knees in candlelight, and that light is flickering and refracting off of all those little nooks and crannies. It's part of the magic of these paintings.

Steven: It is too easy to forget about the incense, the music, the lighting.

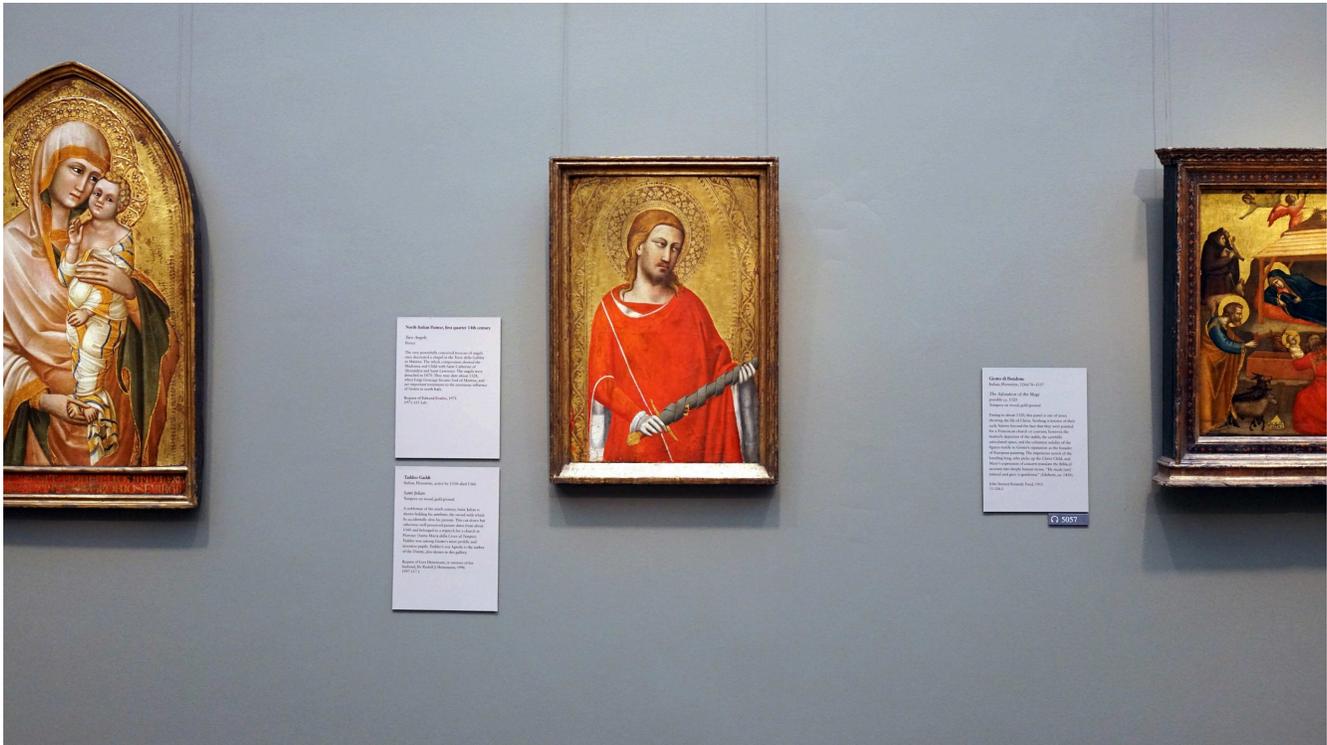


Detail of gilding, Taddeo Gaddi, *Saint Julian*, 1340, tempera on wood, gold ground (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Corey: The entire point of water gilding is to make it look solid. And even though we know there's just a tiny thickness of gold leaf there, these craftsmen were so good that they provided the illusion of solid gold.

Steven: So this is really an art of illusion: trying to produce an object, costly because of its labor, that looked like it was costly because of its material.

Corey: In the early Renaissance we have this great paradox that on the one hand, this scene takes place in a world of gold—perhaps that's heaven—but at the same time, this figure is painted quite illusionistically. I can imagine talking to that saint.



Gallery view of Taddeo Gaddi, *Saint Julian*, 1340, tempera on wood, gold ground, (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: And this artist was the student of Giotto, who is credited with dramatically furthering the idea that he could represent figures that looked as if they were in a world that we recognize, that they had mass and volume, that they cast shadow.

Corey: We have one foot in the Middle Ages, this world of gold, but we have another foot defiantly here on earth. In other words, we have heaven on earth—and this is a very powerful motif for these devotional paintings.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/xPXt8a5tpSE>>

5.

Inventing the image of Saint Francis

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Master of the Bardi Saint Francis, Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi (Bardi Dossal), c. mid 13th century, tempera on panel, Bardi Chapel, Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iUJywV>>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at Santa Croce, Florence.

Steven: We're in Santa Croce, in Florence, the great Franciscan church.

Beth: We're standing close to the main altar. This is an overwhelming space. Much of it covered with fresco painting and the main apse occupied by an enormous altarpiece.

Steven: The space is vast and it speaks to the huge crowds that were flocking to the Franciscans.

Beth: They were an enormously popular order.

Steven: The Franciscans are mendicants—that is, they're one of the begging orders, like the Dominicans. St. Francis gave up his worldly possessions and his followers do the same.

Beth: Both the Franciscans and the Dominicans were relatively new religious orders that specifically located themselves in the cities in Italy and elsewhere in order to preach to an urban population.

Steven: Cities like Florence had become newly wealthy in the 1200s, the 1300s, and especially in the 1400s. And they grew rapidly. Now of course, there were the bankers and merchants, but there were also many poor people. And the Dominicans and Franciscans especially saw it as their mission to preach to the poor. The wealthy elites of Florence saw the Franciscans as a pathway for their own redemption. And so they give the Franciscans large amounts of money, which allowed them to build churches. But it also allowed them to minister to the poor.

Beth: These wealthy merchants and bankers provide for chapels as a place of burial for their families and gave money to the church so that the friars could say prayers on their behalf. The idea that prayers said on your behalf here on Earth could help release you sooner from purgatory so that you could get to heaven.

Steven: We're standing not only beside the high altar but also in front of a large panel painting. Now this painting of St. Francis was produced only a couple of decades after St. Francis's death.

Beth: He died in 1226 and was canonized—was made a saint—in 1228.

Steven: Here is a contemporary man, a man who people might have actually remembered, being represented in the center of this painting almost as if he was a Byzantine icon. The icon tradition tends to focus on the figure, not in a narrative context, not telling stories. But here we have both, we have that central figure that's functioning almost like an icon but surrounded by narratives.



Master of the Bardi Saint Francis, Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Saint Francis of Assisi (Bardi Dossal), c. mid 13th century, tempera on panel, Bardi Chapel, Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So here Francis stands in the center, completely frontal, surrounded by gold—that gold coming from the Byzantine tradition. And in this format, we see the central figure surrounded by apron scenes, or scenes that tell the story of his life, his miracles, and his ministry.

Steven: This is one of eight 13th-century paintings of Francis in this format, although there's a lot of local variation.

Beth: Some show as few as four apron scenes. This one has 20 scenes from Francis's life and miracles.

Steven: The earliest of these paintings is in the town of Pescia, not far from Florence, and that shows six apron scenes. Let's focus on two scenes that are most often represented. The earlier of the two is in the left most column. It's Francis preaching to the birds.

Beth: We see Francis with two friars on the left and on the right, a stylized tree with birds perched on branches and beside that, stylized rows of different kinds of birds.

Steven: Francis's biographers tell us that Francis preached to the birds, as if they were rational beings, and that the birds responded.

Beth: What we're learning is that Franciscans have a mission to preach to everyone.

Steven: Two scenes to the right, we have probably the single most commonly represented image of Francis: this is the moment when he receives the stigmata. According to Francis's biographers, late in his life Francis has a vision. He sees a seraph angel on a crucifix and soon after, the wounds that Christ received on the cross appear on Francis's body. This miracle is seen as an expression of his affinity with Christ, the way in which he had lived his life so closely to Christ that he was given this divine gift. The background is gold and three

rays emanate from the seraph and reach Francis. And this compositional strategy will be influential in the next century. Artists like Giotto will create more naturalistic renderings of this very scene.

Beth: One of my favorite parts are the little roundels that show Franciscan friars that are positioned at the corners of each of the apron scenes. They give us a sense that Franciscan friars were close to Francis himself and that we can be close to Francis and Christ through the ministry of the Franciscans. In the central panel, Francis is elongated. His right hand is in a gesture of blessing. It's very clear that he's showing us the stigmata.

Steven: Francis is shown wearing rough brown cloth, and he's shown barefoot. These are signs of his self-imposed poverty. And if you look closely at his belt, you'll see that it's just plain rope. But it's knotted three times. The three knots represent his vows: poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Beth: So while there were those who criticized the Franciscans for building churches as lavish as this one, the Franciscans held that doing so helped them in their ministry.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/0YMPf-4FWD8>>



Master of the Bardi Saint Francis, Altarpiece with scenes from the life of Saint Francis, detail, c. mid 13th century, tempera on panel, Bardi Chapel, Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence

II

Florence

6.

Florence in the Late Gothic period, an introduction

Dr. Joanna Milk Mac Farland



View of Florence (detail), Unknown Artist, Madonna della Misericordia, 1342 (Museo del Bigallo, Florence)

Boom times in Florence

The city-state of Florence in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was a city on the rise. Urbanization was experienced by all Italian cities at this time and Florence's population doubled in size. But more than almost any other town, Florence saw an explosion in international trade and innovations in finance. A new class of bankers and merchants replaced the old noble families as the center of power, developing a complex, barely democratic social structure that hung in a careful balance.

Art and architecture helped define the relationships between individuals and the bewildering array of civic, professional, and religious institutions that made up the fabric of Florentine society.

Thanks to the city's newfound wealth, impressive communal building projects were undertaken, like the building of a new seat of government, the Palazzo della Signoria.



View of the Palazzo Vecchio, 1299-1310, designed by Arnolfo di Cambio

Church and state

During this building boom, church and state were anything but separate. Public funds were used to erect many of the religious centers, including the cathedral, Santa Maria del Fiore. Subsidies were even given over to the large new churches needed to accommodate growing audiences for the sermons of the mendicant orders (monks that had forsaken worldly possessions and that lived and preached in the cities). The largest of these mendicant behemoths were the Franciscan church of Santa Croce and the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella.



View of the nave of the church of Santa Croce in Florence (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Guilds and private patrons, too

Happily, the decoration of buildings throughout the city fell to a widening range of patrons. Professional guilds (somewhat like our trade unions) were often in charge of decorating public spaces with painting and, increasingly, architectural sculpture. Groups of priests, nuns, and confraternities (organizations of laypeople that gathered to perform acts of charity or sing hymns) hired artists to create devotional images and lavish books of hymns. For the first time, wealthy individuals and families could even purchase the rights to use and decorate chapels within a church.

A more personal spirituality

But art was not all about public displays of wealth or works of communal beautification. Faith and spirituality became more deeply personal even as they became more public. More than in previous centuries, images played an important role in focusing a person's devotion to Christ, Mary and the saints—in imagining their lives or picturing how they might appear in all their heavenly glory. In fact, images didn't just maintain relationships within Florentine society, they built imagined relationships between viewers and the sacred figures they portrayed. This affected more than just the amount of art people needed; it affected what they wanted it to look like. And in the course of the fourteenth century, what they wanted it to look like would change dramatically.

The Italo-Byzantine style



Coppo di Marcovaldo and his son Salerno, Crucifixion, 1274 (Pistoia Cathedral)

Like the art of most Italian cities at the time, thirteenth-century art in Florence was heavily influenced by Byzantine art (the art of the Byzantine Empire). Images from this period are in fact often described as “Italo-Byzantine,” a label that reflects how artists such as Coppo di Marcovaldo (and many more artists whose names we don't know) adapted the foreign style into something altogether Italian.

In painting, this meant emulating the way figures were strongly outlined against glittering gold backgrounds like those seen in Byzantine icons and mosaics. These ornate images seem to directly engage the viewer by pressing whatever is being depicted by the artist to the surface of the painting or mosaic. Figures are formed out of abstract but expressive shapes designed to identify various body parts or items of clothing while creating beautiful patterns. In narrative images, each story plays out across the field of representation instead of within it, eliminating the need for a sense of depth.

A new style emerges



Cimabue, Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned with viewers, 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, BY-NC-SA 2.0)

During the late thirteenth century, artists in a handful of Italian cities began to move away from the Italo-Byzantine style. The Roman artist Pietro Cavallini created frescoes and mosaics featuring solid, monumentalizing figures; the sculptor Nicola Pisano studied ancient Roman sculpture; Sieneese artists seem to have broken new ground in exploring perspective.

Meanwhile, back in Florence, Cimabue's paintings showed more interest in depicting space and

modeling figures with gradations of light and shade. These ideas spread as artists travelled throughout Italy and southern France in search of work, creating a network of artistic centers that all exerted influence on one another.

Giotto

As the new century opened, the painter Giotto di Bondone observed many of these currents and forged them into something distinctively Florentine and enormously influential.



Giotto di Bondone, The Ognissanti Madonna, 1306-10, tempera on panel, 128 x 80 1/4" or 325 x 204 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Whereas earlier works of art engage us with the embellished splendor of the heavenly, Giotto's paintings capture our attention by representing holy figures and stories as if in a majestic but earthly realm. Bold modeling of draperies and the bodies beneath them gives his

figures greater volume and a sense of sculptural relief. Clever kinds of perspective create the illusion that a space is opening up in front of the viewer, as if we might be peering onto a stage.



Giotto, Meeting at the Golden Gate, c. 1305 (Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, Padua)

Perhaps just as importantly, Giotto was a master of visual storytelling—a skill evident in his most important surviving project, the frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua (c. 1305). Here the monumentality of the figures, the quiet dignity of their movements, and the way architectural and landscape settings seem to echo the action all conjure up a solemn aura of the sacred. Like many of the narrative paintings attributed to Giotto, the scenes use closely observed human gestures and careful composition to enhance the drama and emotion of the moment depicted.



Maso di Banco, Pope Sylvester's Miracle, c. 1340 (Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence)

Art after Giotto

Giotto had an enormous workshop full of students and assistants, making it hard to tell which works he painted and which were by his pupils. Even more confusingly, his style was so immediately influential that it is still difficult to say who his formal students were. What we do know is that, in the years immediately after his death, the artists who were the most “Giottesque” received the lion’s share of the important commissions for new projects. The success of artists like Bernardo Daddi, Maso di Banco, and Taddeo Gaddi demonstrates that wealthy patrons were on board with Giotto’s new vision for art.



Andrea Bonaiuti, Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas, c. 1365-67, Guidalotti Chapel (Spanish Chapel) (Santa Maria Novella, Florence)

Sometime around mid-century, though, certain artists began to drift from the clear, spare art of Giotto's school. Many experimented with visually crowded compositions or with complex subjects represented through elaborate symbols and schemes. Some even seem to have purposefully echoed the ornamental, formal art of the Italo-Byzantine period. This has led art historians to wonder whether these changes in style were caused by Florence's collective despair after the outbreak of the bubonic plague—a sickness that wiped out over half the city's population in one year alone (1348).

Most scholars now think the situation was more mixed than this theory might lead us to believe.

In fact, late fourteenth-century art is hard to generalize. This is partly because no single workshop dominated the art of Florence as much as Giotto and his school had in previous decades. But it is also because artists of the time were skilled at adapting their own style to the specific tastes of each patron and to the context and function of each image.

Overall, however, Florentine art from 1348 to 1400 did not experience the same kind of major stylistic shift that characterized Giotto's years on the scene. Rather, the fundamental influence of Giotto continued into the early 1400s. In the end, the long fourteenth century was Giotto's century.



Giotto, Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas), fresco, c. 1305, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

<<https://flic.kr/p/2jsnPbf>>

7.

Dante's 'Divine Comedy' in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance art

Matt Collins



Domenico di Michelino, Dante holding the Divine Comedy, 1465 (Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence)

When you think of Hell, what images fill your imagination? Your mind might first conjure up a monstrous satanic figure, and then you may further fill in the picture with other beastly devils that roam around torturing damned sinners, who in turn cry out with pain and regret.

And how about the better parts of the Christian afterlife; how do you imagine them? Perhaps the saved are singing songs of joy, angels are fluttering about, and throngs of holy men and women converse and worship God. To some degree, such imaginings have their origins in the Bible. However, in the Christian West, conceptions of the afterlife evolved quite a bit over the centuries. One important late medieval figure who played a key role in shaping the cultural concepts of life after death—even to the present day—is Dante Alighieri, the Florentine poet who was born in the 1260s and died in 1321.

In his epic poem known as the *Divine Comedy*, Dante creates a fictional version of himself who travels through the farthest reaches of hell (*Inferno*), purgatory (*Purgatorio*) and paradise (*Paradiso*). Many details that he describes along this journey have left a lasting impression on the Western imagination for more than half a millennium. In fact, the rather stereotypical images of the afterlife I described earlier are all represented in his work. But Dante also found novel ways to portray already well-formed concepts, thus further solidifying them while also reshaping them into new guises that would become familiar to countless generations that followed.



Florence Baptistery (Battistero di San Giovanni), 1059-1128 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jySamt>>

Because of Dante’s image-driven descriptions, many artists have sought to illustrate his text through a wide variety of media. Almost immediately after his work was completed, illuminators created images to accompany manuscripts of his masterpiece. More than forty illuminated manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy* were created before the advent of the printing press (in the late 15th century). When the potential for faster reproductions of books—including illustrated books—became a reality, Dante’s imagination, sometimes intertwined with the imagination of an artist rendering a visual interpretation of his words, reached an even larger audience than before. We will look here at two outstanding examples of how Dante’s words fed the creative imagination of visual artists before and shortly after the invention of the printing press.

The influence of art on Dante’s world

Before looking at Dante’s influence on the visual arts, however, we need take a little step back in time. The relationship between Dante and the arts was a reciprocal one; images he had seen also greatly influenced his literary vision. Were there any sights, sounds or works of art you saw as a child that you can still easily call to mind today? If you were writing a fictional story that relied heavily on your own imagination, could you see yourself drawing from these vivid sensorial experiences and making them a part of that story? This was the case for Dante.

Florence was full of artistic marvels well before the Renaissance. Incredible works of art and architecture filled the city well before Dante’s birth in late medieval times. The Florence Baptistery (illustrated above), which Dante fondly referred to in his *Comedy* as his “bel (beautiful)

San Giovanni,” is one such example, which the poet would have known well, even from the days of his youth. The ceiling inside the baptistery is covered with mosaic images that still dazzle visitors today. There are many indications that Dante too was dazzled by the sight. Quite a few correspondences can be discerned between certain descriptions in the *Comedy* and particular images within this baptistery—indeed, too many to be mere coincidence.



Mosaic (detail) of the Satan in the Last Judgment on the ceiling of the Florence Baptistery, 13th c.

For example, at the end of the *Inferno*, when Dante’s fictional self reaches the deepest part of Hell and encounters “the emperor of the dolorous kingdom” (Satan), Dante’s description is strikingly specific. Satan has three mouths, and “In each of his mouths he was breaking a sinner/ with his teeth in the manner of a scutch, so that he made the three suffer at once” (translation by Durling and Martinez)—just like the image of Satan inside the Florence Baptistery. The link to this mosaic image is just one example of how the visual arts passed from Dante’s memory through his imagination and onto the pages of his epic poem.

After a childhood and adolescence no doubt filled with sights of Florentine artistic wonders, Dante's familiarity with the visual arts matured. In *Purgatorio* XI his understanding of various forms of visual arts and artists is especially evident. Through a conversation between his fictional self and the manuscript illuminator Oderisi da Gubbio, Dante discusses the fading glory of artists, always eclipsed by another's greatness. He writes that just as Franco Bolognese surpassed his master Oderisi in illumination, and Giotto surpassed Cimabue in painting—in poetry, a certain unnamed poet (that is, Dante) just may have outdone Guido Cavalcanti and Guido Guinizelli.

Dante implies that there are similarities between the written word and the painted picture, as he directly associates these mediums and their practitioners with one another. Certainly, poets like Dante learned from and were influenced by artists, and as we will now see, visual artists were also greatly affected by poets such as this great Florentine.

The Yates-Thompson Codex

Among the dozens of illuminated manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy*, one of the most outstanding is known as the Yates-Thompson Codex, which is located in the British Library. It was originally carried out for Alfonso V, the king of Aragon, Naples and Sicily, either as a gift or under his commission. The manuscript was produced in Siena in the 1440s, and two illuminators worked on the 112 framed miniatures.



Detail of a miniature of the lustful being carried about by a wind with Paolo and Francesca on the far right, in illustration of Canto V, Yates Thompson 36, f. 10, 1444-c. 1450 (© The British Library)

In the illumination from the fifth canto (in epic poetry, a canto is a division similar to a chapter) of the *Inferno* pictured here, Dante (in blue) and his guide, the ancient Roman poet Virgil (in red), pass through the circle of the lustful. The artist captures three distinct moments from this canto in one image. The first moment is shown in the upper left corner in the form of the snarling beast. This is Minos, who determines where in Hell a sinner will be sent, and who briefly impedes Dante's journey until Virgil rebukes him and the two move onward.



Priamo della Quercia or Vecchietta (?), illustration of Dante, *Inferno*, Yates Thompson MS 36, f. 10r, 1444-c. 1450 (© The British Library)

Next, just to the right of Minos, Virgil explains the mysterious group of people who are tossed about by a whirlwind, and he identifies individual figures among them. Third, on the far right, a couple facing left converses with the Dante and Virgil. They are there as a visual reference to the extended dialogue between Dante and one pair of lustful sinners, Paolo and Francesca. At the end of the canto Dante faints with pity, and in the center of this image he is shown on his knee—preparing, it seems, to fully lose consciousness.

In a number of illustrated accompaniments to the *Divine Comedy*, there are no images to complement *Paradiso*, and for understandable reasons. While *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* describe physically tangible experiences, the *Paradiso* is elusive and philosophical. The very spaces through which Dante and his paradisiacal guide Beatrice travel defy physical properties. The illuminator for these scenes, Giovanni di Paolo, however, was well up for this task and executed a masterful set of images to accompany this most difficult part of the *Comedy*. Rejecting natural physical laws, Dante and Beatrice are shown throughout these illustrations as if they are hovering above the ground, as they are in this image, which illustrates the second canto.



Priamo della Quercia or Vecchietta (?), illustration of Dante, *Inferno*, Yates Thompson MS 36, f. 132r, 1444-c. 1450 (© The British Library)

In this image, located directly beneath Dante and Beatrice on the far left is the representation of a simile Beatrice uses to explain the workings and shaping of the universe by divine intelligence, which she compares to a coppersmith using his hammer to mold his product. In the center is a reference to a question Dante poses about why there are spots on the moon. Beatrice explains that it is not due to lesser degrees of light among the the planets and stars in the heavens but to the casting of shadows onto the earth, which are reflected back upon the moon. She suggests an experiment with three specifically arranged mirrors and a light to prove the point, which is

likewise illustrated. To the right of light is an illustration of a third simile that Beatrice uses in this same canto; she compares the stripping of Dante's intellect through higher reasoning to the stripping of the color and coldness of snow beneath warm rays. Thus the three similes run along the lower half of the illumination.



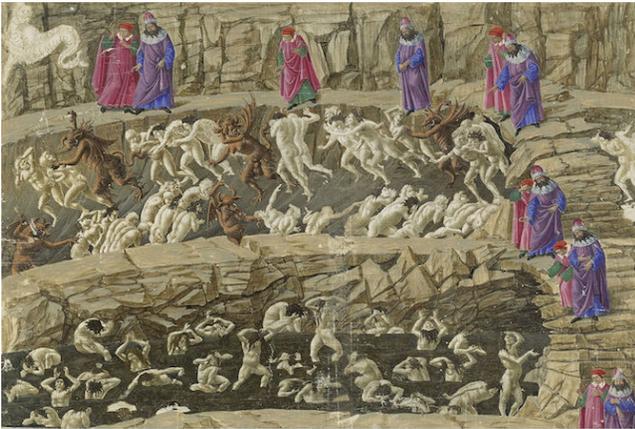
Detail, cosmic symbol, Yates Thompson, MS 36, f. 132r (© The British Library)

On the upper right is a cosmic symbol that represents the circles within the celestial sphere through which Dante will pass during his journey toward God in the ultimate paradise.

Botticelli's drawings

In his *Lives of the Artists*, Giorgio Vasari wrote; "since Sandro was also a learned man, he wrote a commentary on part of Dante's poem, and after illustrating the *Inferno*, he printed the work." Either Vasari was a bit misinformed, or he was implying something regarding the profound interrelations between the texts and images when he said that Sandro Botticelli "wrote a commentary." In fact, in the 1480s—the same decade when he painted his most infamous works, *Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus*—Botticelli

undertook the task of drawing not only the *Inferno* but the entire *Divine Comedy*. His delicate handling of line, so well known in his paintings, is also evident in these drawings, which had originally accompanied the text, but have since been broken up and are now located in the Vatican and the Museum of Prints and Drawings in Berlin.



Sandro Botticelli, *Drawing for Dante's Divine Comedy*, 1480-95, gouache, brown ink over metal point on parchment (Staatliche Museen, Berlin)

Many of the earliest printed sets of illustrated editions of Dante's *Divine Comedy* followed Botticelli's drawings, and it is possible that the prints attributed to Baccio Baldini were planned and intended as a mass-produced extension of the master's work.



Detail, Sandro Botticelli, *Inferno*, Canto XXXIV, 1480s, silverpoint on parchment, completed in pen and ink (Staatliche Museen, Berlin)

From the beasts of Hell—such as the now familiar three-headed Satan chewing sinners—to the journey through paradise, Botticelli proves himself a careful reader and a thoughtful illustrator. The horrors of the dark underworld are truly horrifying, and the wonders of the celestial realm, wonderful.



Sandro Botticelli, *Fifth planetary sphere (heaven of Mars); Cacciaguida prophesies Dante's exile, but also his eternal fame*, drawing, c.1480-95

Botticelli's approach in picturing the mysterious spheres of the heavens is especially memorable. He deliberately chose not to illustrate the intangible elements that surround Dante and Beatrice, a choice that in fact furthers one's sense of the journey's ineffability. Principally featuring these two characters within a perfectly rounded circle, we see the unseeable through the gestures and expressions of these two figures. For example in the image pictured here, an illustration of canto seventeen, we see Dante's reaction to a prophecy that he will be exiled from his hometown—as, in fact, he already had been at the time of his writing.

There is no right approach to illustrating Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and in the first two centuries of the book's history alone, there were a good number of excellent reader-illustrators. Of course, in the centuries to follow, and up to the present day, many more artists can be added to this list. No doubt this masterpiece of writing has played an important role in the creation of a great many outstanding works of art.

8.

Cimabue, 'Maestà'

Dr. Holly Flora

The Virgin Mary with the Christ Child seated on a throne



Cimabue, *Maestà* or *Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned*, 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

By the late 1200s, large paintings featuring the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child seated on a throne were a common sight in Italian churches. Larger-than-life panels with this theme, a kind of image that came to be known as a *Maestà* (meaning “majesty”), were adaptations of traditional Byzantine icons for use in devotion in Western Europe. (Icons are sacred images—most often of the saints, Christ, and the Virgin. In Byzantine theology, icons offered access to the sacred figure(s) represented.)



Gallery view with Duccio's *Rucellai Madonna* (left) and Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* (right), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Among the most famous examples are Duccio's *Rucellai Madonna* and Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna*. Such paintings may have adorned altars, but they could also have been placed on a beam or wall in the center of a church, perhaps like the painting shown in a fresco depicting the *Verification of the Stigmata* in the nave of the Upper Church at Assisi.



Left: *The Verification of the Stigmata*, 1288-1297, Assisi, Upper Church, Basilica of San Francesco; right: detail of the painting displayed on a beam.

Displayed in this way, large Marian images (images of the Virgin Mary) would have been seen by the crowds gathered to hear Mass. Monumental Maestà panels could also be commissioned by lay confraternities—organizations of laypeople (members of a religious faith, but not a member of the clergy) who performed acts of piety and service, and gathered to sing hymns of praise to the Virgin. Wherever they might be placed within a church, these imposing, gilded paintings were objects of intense devotion.

Santa Trinita Madonna

At an unknown date, probably around 1280, the Florentine artist Cimabue painted a celebrated Maestà for the church of Santa Trinita in Florence. Now housed in the city's Uffizi Gallery, this massive painting—over twelve feet tall and seven feet wide (12'8" x 7'4")—features Mary gazing out at the viewer. She gestures toward the child with her right hand, while Christ raises his hand in a priestly pose of blessing, an adaptation of the ancient Byzantine icon type (known as the "Hodegetria") in which the Virgin Mary points to Christ as the way to heaven. The Byzantine icons that inspired Cimabue and other artists of his day also often included angels posed on either side of the throne, usually shown in much smaller scale than Mary to emphasize her importance (a good example is the painting of the *Enthroned Madonna and Child* in the National Gallery of Art).



Cimabue's *Maestà* with viewers (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Enthroned Madonna and Child, c. 1250/1275 tempera on panel, 124.8 x 70.8 cm (National Gallery of Art)

In the *Santa Trinita Madonna* and other *Maestà* panels he painted, however, Cimabue makes the angels much larger, and stacks them around the throne so that they seem to be occupying the same space as Mary and Christ. The angels also become interlocutors between the viewer and the holy figures; six of the angels look out toward us directly, while the two in the center gaze at Christ, modeling the pious focus a viewer would imitate.



Cimabue, Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned (detail), 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

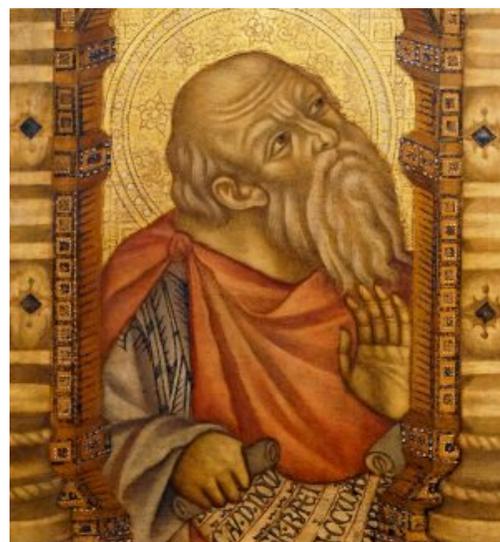
Set against a gleaming gold leaf background, Mary and Christ sit on a monumental throne fashioned of intricately carved wood and studded with gems. This throne has often been celebrated by art historians as an example of how Cimabue experimented with perspectival effects. The curved steps of the throne lead the eye back into the fictional space Cimabue creates, making it seem as though the figures occupy real space. The large throne also allows Cimabue to place the Virgin and the eight angels that surround her at the top of the composition, foreshortening the front parts of the throne and bringing them closer to the viewer, creating the illusion of depth on the painting's flat surface.

The four figures below



Cimabue, Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned (detail), 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

But Cimabue's most striking and novel element is the inclusion of four bust-length, haloed figures beneath Mary and Christ, enclosed within the arches of the throne's base. This arrangement foreshadows a trend seen in later altarpieces called a *predella*—a lateral band of smaller images placed below a larger image. Placed in the foreground, these figures seem to be closer to the viewer than Mary and Christ, further enhancing the sense of three-dimensionality within the painting.

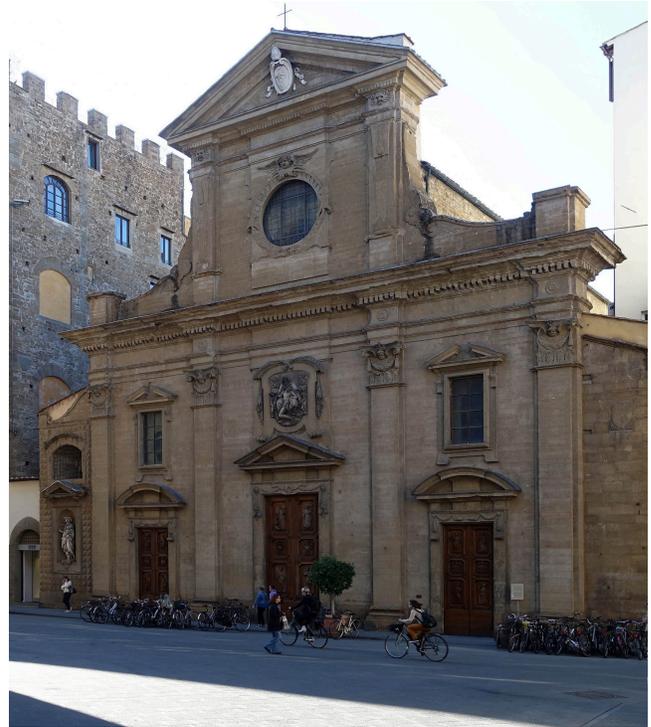


Cimabue, Jeremiah (detail), Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

In the *Santa Trinita Madonna*, the men at the base of Mary's throne are the heroes and prophets Jeremiah, Abraham, David and Isaiah, identified by the scrolls they hold displaying biblical texts associated with each of them (from Jeremiah 31:22; Genesis 22:18; Psalms 131:11; Isaiah 7:14). These figures from the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) are included because they each—according to Christian theology—foretold or made possible the coming of Christ (Jeremiah and Isaiah prophesized the coming of the Messiah via a virgin, and Abraham and David were believed to be direct ancestors of the Virgin and Christ). Isaiah and Jeremiah look upwards towards Mary, and each holds an open palm towards the viewer. David gestures similarly, looking towards Abraham, who holds his scroll with both hands and gazes outward from the picture plane. The inclusion of these four men below Mary's throne glorifies the prophetic heritage and priestly genealogy of Mary and her son.

The Vallombrosans at Santa Trinita

By including these specific figures, Cimabue was perhaps responding to a request from the painting's commissioners. The church of Santa Trinita was built by a religious reform order called the Vallombrosans, men who lived in community and practiced strict acts of fasting and penance. Founded in the eleventh century by the Florentine knight Giovanni Gualberto, the Vallombrosans sought to bring monastic life back in line with the values of Saint Benedict of Nursia, the founder of western Christian monasticism. In celebrating Saint Benedict, members of the order he founded (the Benedictines), emphasized Old Testament prophets in their literary and artistic traditions. A sixth century text, the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, which includes a biography of Saint Benedict, highlights Saint Benedict's own prophetic gifts. In the *Dialogues*, Benedict is compared specifically to King David, legendary author of the Psalms.



Basilica di Santa Trinita (Vallumbrosan), 1258–80; façade, 1593–94 (Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Cimabue, Abraham and David (detail), Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

David is also important in the life of Giovanni Gualberto; his biographers describe how on his deathbed, the saint repeated unceasingly the famous prayer words “of David” from Psalm 23. In Cimabue's painting, David is the most prominent of the figures below Mary; in contrast to the subdued colors worn by Jeremiah, Isaiah and Abraham, David wears a bright red mantle and a crown.

David's clothing echoes the slightly paler scarlet robes worn by Mary and Christ, and his kinship to Christ himself is reinforced by his position directly beneath the Christ Child. Cimabue's placement of David and the other figures at the base of Mary's throne was a completely original visual element, and may have been part of the artist's efforts to create a new spin on the Maestà in celebration of the Vallombrosans, creating their own "signature" Madonna.

Painted at an unknown date in the late thirteenth century, the *Santa Trinita Madonna* was commissioned at a time when many different religious orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans were competing for the loyalty of Florence's wealthy citizens and their offerings. The building of lavish and spacious churches embellished with paintings commissioned by renowned artists were part of these groups' efforts to keep ahead in the rivalries. The spectacular and innovative Maestà that Cimabue created would certainly have brought new attention and prestige to the Vallombrosans at Santa Trinita.



Cimabue, *Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned (detail)*, 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

9.

Cimabue, 'Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Cimabue, *Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, with viewers*, 1280-90, tempera on panel, 385 x 223 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/RC2fJX>>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Uffizi in Florence.

Steven: We're in the first room of the Uffizi. And we're looking at the absolutely monumental painting by Cimabue of the Madonna Enthroned originally for Santa Trinita.

Beth: Right here in Florence. It's about twelve feet high.

Steven: It's huge and it's so big because that's a big church, Santa Trinita. It would have needed to be able to be seen from the back of the church.

Beth: And it's important to remember that it would have been behind an altar raised up from the ground in the space of a church. Very different than the space that we see it in today. So all of that gold would have glistened in a very different way.

Steven: And kind of important because the churches are relatively dark, so that gold would have been really wonderful and luminous. Of course it also has an important symbolic value and that is the light of heaven.

Beth: One of the things that we look at when we think of Cimabue, I think going back to Vasari—who really starts his history with Cimabue—is some hint of the beginnings of the Renaissance. And so when we look at this, we begin to see some of that illusionism that we think about with the Renaissance.



Basilica di Santa Trinita (Vallumbrosan), 1258–80; façade, 1593–94 (Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Right—now of course, this is 20/20 hindsight.

Beth: Exactly.

Steven: Vasari was certainly not a careful art historian, but I think that there is a space that she can sit in. It's not a rational space.

Beth: No.

Steven: You had mentioned that this is the space of heaven. So I think this is a certain degree of license. Now this is a painting that would have been hung fairly high and yet somehow we're looking down at the step on which the virgin's feet rest. We're looking actually down on the seat but we're looking across at the Old Testament prophets down below.

Beth: And up at Mary herself.

Steven: And so there's all kinds of contradictions here.

Beth: Right, and yet we can read that the sides of her throne are closer to us that the parts of the throne by her shoulders are set back into space.



Detail of Cimabue, Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, with viewers, 1280-90, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iK7Vt5>>

Steven: And there's even a kind of velocity that moves our eye back into space. If you look at the lines that are painted on the steps, for instance, where the virgin's feet rest, it does bring us back into space and creates a kind of visual pathway.



Detail of Cimabue, Maestà or Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, with viewers, 1280-90, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iK3wMC>>



Detail of Cimabue, Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, with viewers, 1280-90, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And those figures of the prophets in the foreground are even closer still.

Steven: Let's start down with them because this is curious. They're in a kind of impossible space in the basement under the throne. I mean what is that?

Beth: You know, they did predict the coming of Christ.

Steven: Okay, so this is very much a Christian perspective and the Christians are looking back to the Old Testament, laying literally the foundation upon which Christianity is built.

Beth: So I guess it makes sense that they are below...

Steven: They're holding scrolls as opposed to books, and that's how we can recognize instantly that they are not the Evangelists, that they are actually from the Old Testament. Mary was an enormously important figure at this time. Christ was a little terrifying to the medieval mind, and Mary grew in importance through what is known as the cult of the Madonna—the cult of the

Virgin—as an intercessor to her son. That is, people would pray to the Virgin Mary, and hopefully she would speak maybe to God on your behalf.

Beth: That's right, and that's exactly how Cimabue shows Mary to us here. She's pointing to Christ, in a way addressing the viewer, and then pointing to the Christ child, her son, and saying, "This is the pathway to God. The pathway to salvation is through Christ."

Steven: Now Christ, for his part, is looking back to us. You're absolutely right. His two fingers are raised as if he is blessing us. Now the rendering of Christ is really interesting because of course, compared to Mary, he is quite small and he is the appropriate scale. The problem is—at least to our modern eyes—is that he doesn't look like an infant. His head is small in relationship to his body and he kind of has the features of a grown man, except in a little baby. One of the ways art historians have acknowledged this is that this is a symbolic rendering, that Christ is shown as a man of wisdom and age is sometimes a way of expressing that.



Detail of Cimabue, *Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, with viewers*, 1280-90, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iK7UXv>>

Steven: Symbolically then, here is an all-knowing God. But here is God as a child, although later in the Renaissance, that convention will dissipate and we'll see a chubby baby in its place.

Beth: So I'm noticing the elongated features of Mary, her long nose, the sort of stylization around her eyes is almond shaped, her very elongated hand, and that's coming from Byzantine tradition that Cimabue is painting in.

Steven: What's interesting is Byzantium, which had been a source of power and culture in the East, actually a lot of the artists and intellectuals had come to Italy in part because of invasions. So at this moment—at the end of the 1200s, at the

beginning of the 1300s—there is this infusion of intellectual capital, of artistic tradition, that comes into Italy and really revitalizes the traditions here.

Beth: So sometimes our historians refer to this period as the "Italo-Byzantine." On the other hand, Cimabue is doing things that point toward the Renaissance. He is using gold lines to articulate the folds of drapery, but those lines instead of just sort of being flat and decorative really begin to describe a sense of the three-dimensional folds of drapery and Mary herself begins to sort of fill out and be a little bit less of that thin elongated figure without any mask that we see before this.

Steven: We do have a sense of Mary actually holding the Christ child to some extent.

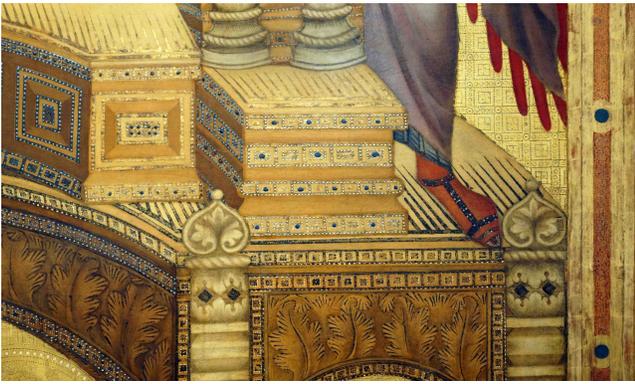
Beth: He's a little weightless.

Steven: Yeah but the figures are weightless. The striations, those gold lines that you were speaking about, help to emphasize that almost two-dimensionality of those figures, but there are trace of chiaroscuro in the neck, in the nose, perhaps in the faces of the angels. You know, these are hints, they are subtle, but of course we can look back now and see this as the beginning of the long development of increasing naturalism, which people like Vasari will look back to Cimabue as the root of.

Beth: Look for example the two foreground angels on either side of the throne. Half of their body is behind the throne, giving us the real illusion of space, and their foot comes forward and on the left the angel's foot comes even a little off the throne.

Steven: But they are still very decorative and one could only imagine what those angels in the background are actually standing on.

Beth: And you know, the throne itself is so decorative. Maybe we should just take one moment and talk about the fact that this is on wood. That this is painted with tempera.



Detail of Cimabue, Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, with viewers, 1280-90, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iK6isP>>

Beth: The artist is using very thin gold leaf. That's real gold there that has been attached to the wood surface.

Steven: And we shouldn't underestimate the effort that it takes to create a panel of wood that can survive for so many hundreds of years without warping, without cracking significantly.

Beth: And so there's a lot of workmanship here that sometimes, I think in the era of the 21st century, when you go to the art store and buy your supplies, we kind of forget about this handmade-

ness that we have here in all aspects of the materials.

Steven: I think that's an important point. There was not so much the separation between the art and the craft as we understand it now. You know he is painter and craftsman.

Beth: Mixing his paints, working on the wood panel, preparing it and painting it...

Watch the video. <https://youtu.be/_alU-o_qDt8>



Detail of Cimabue, Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, with viewers, 1280-90, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iK3x8x>>

10.

Cimabue and Giotto compared

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Cimabue, Santa Trinita Madonna and Child Enthroned, 1280-90, tempera on panel, 151 1/2 x 87 3/4"; Giotto, The Ognissanti Madonna and Child Enthroned, 1306-10, tempera on panel, 128 x 80 1/4" (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC-BY-SA 2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Uffizi in Florence.

Beth: So we are going to do a comparison of two great proto-Renaissance masters, Cimabue and Giotto, by looking at two paintings of the Madonna Enthroned—so exactly the same subject.

Steven: These are both in the Uffizi in Florence, but originally, of course, they were altar paintings, panels which are very large. In fact, the Cimabue is...

Beth: ...more than 12 feet!

Steven: Yeah, it's 12 feet tall, it's huge, and that was so that it could be seen the full distance of the church nave.

Beth: And the Giotto, too, is more than 10 feet high.

Steven: The Cimabue is a little earlier, and Cimabue is the very first artist that Giorgio Vasari talks about in his *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550). He's at the very beginning of this incredible tradition of Italian painting.

Beth: So Cimabue is really seen to make the first step away from a medieval style toward a more human-focused Renaissance style.

Steven: Yeah, and there's a lot of controversy and interest in terms of why the Renaissance has its roots at this particular moment, in this particular place. I mean, why in Florence, and why right here at the end of the 13th century? And one of the theories that's been put forward is pressure that was being felt in the Byzantine Empire to the east by Islam, and some of the artists perhaps fleeing the great traditions of the east and coming to Italy and perhaps prompting it to think beyond the traditions of the medieval.

Beth: The first thing to say is that this is just a really standard subject that we see all the time: Mary, the mother of Christ, holding the Christ child, surrounded by angels, and/or saints and prophets—lots and lots of gold. These are tempera paintings on wooden panels.

Steven: It's egg tempera, and it's using minerals that are suspended in that egg medium. It's good for little lines. It doesn't blend well, it dries quickly, and so there's a really linear aspect to this

painting which may in some respects result from the tempera. This is gold that's been flattened out.

Beth: Pounded very thin.

Steven: It's a very thin gold leaf and, in fact, even tooled, that is to say, patterns have been pounded in to make it even more interesting.

Beth: And it's been glued onto the wooden panel.

Steven: It's been burnished, and there's a kind of clay layer underneath (bole) which you can sometimes see, a little reddish, but the gold itself is really meant as this ornamental reflective material that had a symbolic quality. It was meant to reflect the light of heaven.

Beth: Neither of these is set in any kind of earthly realm. The flat gold background indicates a kind of divine, heavenly space for these figures to occupy.

Steven: And that makes sense when you think of the Cimabue because the Madonna, for instance, she's so...I guess maybe because she's defined by line, if she stood up, she would be so tall.

Beth: She would be very elongated. Her drapery is defined primarily by line and not as much by modeling from light to dark, although it is a little bit.

Steven: There are some distinct medieval or Byzantine elements that are still visible here. Her fingers are very long, her mouth is very small, the nose is very long—a kind of symbolism of the body, not a representation of a real person so much as a representation of a kind of ideal heavenly form.

Beth: The angels are all stacked kind of...

Steven: It's a good thing they have wings, isn't it? Because what are they standing on?

Beth: I don't know, but we do begin to get some sense of the beginnings of an illusion of space in Cimabue.

Steven: A little bit... She's got a little modeling under her chin and you're right, the throne on which she sits does sort of recede, except here's the funny thing: when you look at the throne carefully, it looks as if we're looking *across* at the Virgin Mary, but we're looking down at the seat on which she's seated and in some ways we're also looking *up* at her. There's not a single perspective or point in which the viewer is situated.

Beth: We have sort of multiple viewpoints, and that's something that, of course, will disappear more than a century later when we get to Brunelleschi and the early Renaissance.

Steven: But I'm not comfortable with the idea that Cimabue couldn't do it.

Beth: No.

Steven: So what about the four figures underneath?

Beth: It's interesting that they're behind there to show some illusion of space.

Steven: And it kind of frames them as well.

Beth: It does, and they're adorable down there, those prophets. You can always tell the prophets because they're holding scrolls.

Steven: Okay, so these are Old Testament prophets.

Beth: Right, who would have predicted the coming of a Messiah, of a Christ.

Steven: And here in the Catholic tradition, of course, that would have been understood as Christ, as you said.

Beth: Exactly. Let's look over now at the Giotto because things have really changed. The Madonna just looks so massive and bulky, and look at how her hips and her thighs cover that seat of the throne...

Steven: And her knee projects forward...

Beth: Yep.

Steven: Her breasts and her knees...

Beth: And look at how differently the drapery is indicated. Instead of by these tiny lines, we now have real modeling from light to dark to indicate her knees and her lap, and even how the drapery pulls across her chest and her breasts.

Steven: Looking back at the Cimabue now, the Madonna looks so thin, almost as if she's a paper cutout, and the Giotto looks so substantial, so solid. It's also interesting if you compare the angels because in the Cimabue—in the earlier painting—the angels are stacked up, they don't sort of respond to gravity, and they're also all very similar. They're sort of an idealized face. But if you look at the angels in the Giotto rendering from a few decades later, actually what's really interesting is Giotto was willing to put the angels in back of each other, even obscuring their faces.

Beth: And the way that they sort of seem to go back behind the throne, one's peeking his head through in the back there.

Steven: And yeah, the prophets aren't in some sort of impossible basement now.

Beth: And look at how much more modeling is in her face and in her neck...

Steven: There's one aspect of the painting by Giotto that I think is really significant and really interesting. In the Giotto, there's a very particular single point that the viewer is looking at this from. If you look, for instance, at the steps moving up to the Virgin, you're looking down at the top of the step clearly so you know your eye is above that. But you're also looking up at the ceiling of the throne so you're somewhere in between. In fact, you're looking down at the seat, but you'll notice that just where the prophets' chins are, that's where everything sort of is exactly horizontal, so that's the line at our height—and that makes sense because that would put us just below Christ, a nice humble position. There's a kind of left-right axis, too, which is to say that I think we can see a

little bit more of the right window so I think we're facing Christ.

Beth: This begins to situate the viewer.

Steven: This is not linear perspective.

Beth: It's kind of a more awareness of the human presence in front of the painting.

Steven: I think that's exactly right.

Beth: You know, one of the things that I like to think about is how similar these two images are despite their differences and the ways in which the understanding of originality was so entirely different than in our own culture.

Steven: Right, so this is not so much derivative in a negative sense as we might think.

Beth: In fact, there was a real tradition of the ways

that you represent these figures because these are holy figures.

Steven: That makes sense, and also this is very universal. This is something that then says it transcends time, it transcends space.

Beth: Right, but even within that, Giotto is still creating this new image because obviously things are beginning to change in the early 1300s.

Steven: But he must be responding to cultural changes. That is, putting an emphasis on the here and now.

Beth: And on the human, right.

Steven: In a way that will, of course, blossom into the Renaissance.

Beth: Exactly.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/DKnFvXmUIOI>>



View of the Trecento gallery in the Uffizi, Florence, with Giotto's *The Ognissanti Madonna and Child Enthroned* on the right (photo: Steven Zucker, CC-BY-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2ehsb57>>

11.

Giotto, 'The Ognissanti Madonna and Child Enthroned'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Giotto, *The Ognissanti Madonna and Child Enthroned*, 1306-10, tempera on panel, 128 x 80 1/4" / 325 x 204 cm (Uffizi, Florence), painted for the Church of Ognissanti, Florence (photo: Steven Zucker, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Uffizi in Florence.

Steven: Giotto is not a Renaissance painter, but he's laying that foundation. Twenty, perhaps 30

years after Cimabue painted the large altarpiece for Santa Trinita, Giotto—his student—paints the subject of the Madonna and Child Enthroned as well, in this painting that we think came from the Church of Ognissanti in Florence.

Beth: And this is a Mary like none we've ever seen before. She occupies space. She has a monumentality and presence and physicality.

Steven: It's totally different from anything that we saw at the end of the 1200s. If you think about Cimabue, or even if you think about Duccio in Siena, there's a kind of delicacy, a kind of elegance that those are figures that are almost paper thin. And here, Giotto's Madonna is solid. She weighs a lot. There's no knocking her over.

Beth: No, and it's not just the size of her body. It's also all of that use of modeling that we see...

Steven: Light and shadow—the turn of her body that's created by the transition from highlights to shade.

Beth: Exactly, which we can see in her neck, around her breasts...pulling the drapery across toward the Christ Child.

Steven: We see that in the Christ child as well and even in the angels around her. This is so different from that real sense of flatness or the sense of drawing. This seems much more sculptural.

Beth: With Giotto, we have a real sense of Mary sitting *inside* her throne.



Detail of Giotto, The Ognissanti Madonna and Child Enthroned, 1306-10, tempera on panel (Uffizi, Florence)
(photo: Steven Zucker, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Beth: Her knees are clearly foreshortened. If you look back at the Duccio Madonna, she turns her body so that her thighs are parallel to the picture plane. But the knees in Giotto's Madonna come forward toward us—

Steven: They really are foreshortened.

Beth: —creating an illusion of space.

Steven: Yes, it's true. And then of course, there's a little bit more of a rational space for her to exist in. This is not a painting that uses linear perspective. But it is a painting that functions as a precursor in some ways. I mean, look, for example, at the specificity with which the artist places us, the viewer, in relationship to the architecture that he's portraying. Now, if you look at it carefully, clearly we're looking down to the step in the foreground. But we're looking up at the ceiling of the throne. And there's a left-right axis as well. We can see a little bit more of the window on the right side, so we know that we're actually favored on the left a little bit. It makes sense that we're just below Christ, and we're just to his left. So Giotto is placing us in a very particular point in relation to these divine figures. And it is making room for us...

Beth: ...as individuals, as viewers...

Steven: ...giving us a kind of dignity in relationship to the divine, which is an inherently Renaissance idea. What is really remarkable is that

the Old Testament prophets that we saw in the Cimabue are now brought out of the basement, and they flank the Virgin Mary. And we can actually see their faces—at least two of them—framed in the wings of the throne itself. So it's as if Giotto is actually suggesting to us that a painting can be a kind of window that we can look into, that we can look through, and that a painting is a kind of frame in which we can enter with our eyes.

Beth: That's the reason that Giotto's painting has a kind of emotional power. Even within this very traditional composition—all of that use of gold, all of these things that are still medieval—Giotto is literally making room.

Steven: In a sense, making a space for *us* in this room, because this is a world that we can inhabit. This is a place that we know, where there are solids, where there's gravity, where there is, in a sense, all of the physical forces that our bodies contend with. And we're able to inhabit this space in a much more direct way than in the previous paintings.



Detail of Giotto, The Ognissanti Madonna and Child Enthroned, 1306-10, tempera on panel (Uffizi, Florence)
(photo: Steven Zucker, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Beth: She's in Heaven, but she's still here with us.

Steven: That basic conflict will power the Renaissance for the next several hundred years: How do we incorporate, how do we bring together our physical experience and our understanding, our emotional attachment to the divine?

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/P9s3YA-glNk>>

12.

Giotto, 'St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Giotto, *St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata with predella scenes of the Dream of Innocent III, The Pope Approving the Rule of the Order, and St. Francis Preaching to the Birds*, c. 1295-1300, tempera and gold on panel, 3.13 x 1.63 m (Louvre, originally in the Church of San Francesco, Pisa), original frame inscribed: "OPUS IOCTI FIORETINI." (photo: Steven Zucker, CC-BY-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/9HjwwK>>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Louvre.

Steven: We're in the Louvre and we're looking at a large altar panel by Giotto of St. Francis. It's a really spectacular painting.

Beth: It is, it shows St. Francis receiving the stigmata from Christ, who appeared to him in the form of a seraphim (angel). What's striking is that this is not St. Francis in a very iconic, frontal way.

Steven: As we might have expected in a more medieval tradition.

Beth: Exactly. Instead, Francis is kneeling—he's in a naturalistic landscape or at the beginning, we could say, of a naturalistic landscape. As he receives the stigmata he looks up in wonder and awe and confusion, and even some anxiety, I think.

Steven: A little fear there, right?

Beth: Yeah.

Steven: But they are very human emotions. It's really an expression of, you're right, not an eternal iconic image, but rather of a moment of a man responding.

Beth: And his body is rendered naturalistically, too. We have modeling, so we see the folds in the drapery, we see his left knee, his right knee folded under him, the modeling in his hands where we see the stigmata, modeling in his face. So he really seems like this bulky, three-dimensional presence,

really different from the flat, transcendent figures of only a little bit earlier....

Steven: ...and actually, those that other artists are still painting. I want to go back to that point you made a moment ago of the naturalistic landscape because this is certainly not naturalism as we would expect now in the 21st century, but it is, at the very beginning of the 14th or at the very end of the 13th century, quite an extraordinary innovation to place this really physical figure—as you had described him—in an environment with trees, with a mountain.

Beth: Clearly his scale doesn't match the building and the trees, but there's an effort here by Giotto to place him on earth, not just in a heavenly space.



Giotto, St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata, c. 1295-1300 with detail of Francis's face and hands

Steven: We see this extraordinary gold filled background, the light of heaven pours down, and we see that literally in the divine rays that go from the Seraphim from Christ down to Francis, down to his feet, to his hands and to the wound in his side; this gift from heaven for his faithfulness. It's important to remember that Francis was a mendicant, a beggar, that he'd given up his worldly possessions and like the Dominicans, the Franciscans would renounce worldly possessions in honor of Christ. Initially, there are some reports that the church was not sure that it wanted to

accept St. Francis's ideas. The predella below is important because it shows very much the acceptance of Francis.

Beth: So, we have these three scenes below in the predella showing first Pope Innocent III's vision of Francis supporting a church; the next, of blessing that order of the followers of St. Francis, the Franciscans; and then St. Francis preaching to the birds.



Giotto, St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata, c. 1295-1300 with detail of Francis Bracing Church

Steven: Those are all really interesting stories. This dream of the Pope—this great miracle in which he dreamt that Francis was not only supporting a church, but was supporting a church that was falling down—it's a crucial allegory, of course, or metaphor. The acceptance of Francis, this central scene, also very, very important: literally, the embrace of the church to this mendicant order.

Beth: Legitimizing.

Steven: That's right, absolutely legitimizing and if you think about it for a moment, the mendicants did represent a kind of threat. The church was a very wealthy institution, it was a very powerful institution, and here were these followers of Christ saying, "Christ preached poverty, I'm taking that on." For the church to embrace that was a very important step. Then, of course, on the right, there is this relationship between Francis and nature—Francis living in the desert or living in the wilderness, having this direct relationship with all of God's creation, is placed here. This is one of the reasons that Francis is often linked to sort of ecological movements and often seen a patron of nature.



Giotto, *St. Francis of Assisi Receiving the Stigmata*, c. 1295-1300, with detail of Francis and the birds

Beth: I love the way he reaches out toward the animals, the way that the figures are—it's very stark against that gold background. So there's this heavenly realm, but simultaneously, in an earthly realm. It seems to me that Giotto has united both.

Steven: There's a simplicity to Giotto's work that includes a kind of emotional directness that I think has made his work seem incredibly authentic for many, many years. Artists are constantly looking back to the so-called "Italian Primitives," for that sort of direct vision and here, we have it at its most beautiful.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/MQct5EFQ9x8>>

13.

Giotto, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Giotto, Last Judgment, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Late Medieval or Proto-Renaissance?

The Renaissance does not have a start date. Its origins are often located around 1400 but as early as the late 1200s we see changes in painting and sculpture that lay the foundation for what we will come to recognize as the Renaissance. Some scholars call this early period the “Late Gothic”—a term which refers to the late Middle Ages, while other people call it the “Proto-Renaissance”—the beginnings of the Renaissance. In any case, a revolution is beginning to take place in Italy the early 1300s in the way people think about the world, the way they think about the past, and the way they think about themselves and their relationship with God.

Giotto

The artist who takes the biggest step away from the Medieval style of spiritual representation in painting in the early fourteenth century is Giotto.

Giotto is perhaps best known for the frescoes he painted in the Arena (or Scrovegni) Chapel. They were commissioned by a wealthy man named Enrico Scrovegni, the son of a well-known banker (and a banker himself). According to the Church, usury (charging interest for a loan) was a sin, and so perhaps one of Enrico’s motivations for building the chapel and having it decorated by Giotto was to atone for the sin of usury. The chapel is known as the Arena Chapel since it is on the site of an ancient Roman arena (or amphitheater) that later became the property of Scrovegni, whose palace abutted the chapel (the palace was torn down in the nineteenth century, though parts of the arena remain).



Enrico Scrovegni assisted by a priest, presents the chapel to the Virgin Mary and two other figures (detail), Giotto, Last Judgment, 1305-06, fresco, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Commissioning works of art for churches was a common way of doing “good works” which could help you earn your way into Heaven. We can see Enrico himself in the fresco of the *Last Judgment* on the west wall of the Arena Chapel—he is shown on the side of the blessed (or the elect, those whom Christ has chosen to go to Heaven). He is depicted kneeling, presenting the chapel to the Virgin Mary and two other figures (variously identified).¹

The photo at the top of the page gives us a sense of what it feels like to be a tourist visiting the Arena Chapel. Because frescoes are painted directly on the wall, they can’t easily be moved and put in a museum. Most frescoes are therefore still in the spaces that the artists created them in and that the patrons commissioned them for. Having the work of art in its original context helps us to understand its meaning for the people of the 14th century.

Looking at the photo, you can see that there are numerous separate images in the chapel. The frescoes tell the story of the lives of Mary (beginning with her parents, Joachim and Anna) and Christ on the long walls. By the altar,

Giotto painted the *Annunciation*, and at the other end, on the entrance wall, the *Last Judgment*.

Rather like a comic book without words, Giotto tells the story of Christ and his parents through pictures. Most of the population of Europe was illiterate at this time and so couldn’t read the bible for themselves (Bibles were rare and expensive in any case—there was no printing press and so each was copied by hand). People learned the stories of the Bible—stories that would help them get to heaven—by hearing the words of the priest in the church, and by looking at paintings and sculptures.

¹In one interpretation <https://tinyurl.com/y4cl7p3t>, the nearest figure is the Annunciate Virgin, the middle figure Saint Mary of Charity (so the two important roles Mary plays in the chapel), and the last figure is the Angel Gabriel. Another source <https://tinyurl.com/yys47d2e> identifies these additional figures as St. John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene. These figures have also been identified as the Virgin Mary, the Virgin of Charity and the Virgin Annunciate.



Giotto, wall with Nativity and Last Supper, Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/2jsrQ74>

14.

Giotto, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy.



Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel with Wall from ancient Roman Arena (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/e5KQz3>>

Steven: We're in the Arena Chapel, a small private chapel that was connected to a palace that was owned by the Scrovegni family.

Beth: It was the Scrovegni family who commissioned Giotto to decorate this chapel with frescoes.

Steven: It's called the Arena Chapel because it's next to an ancient Roman arena.

Beth: When you're inside it, as we are now, I have to say that it's taller than I expected, and there's that feeling of being enclosed by images that happens when you're in a space entirely covered with fresco.

Steven: There are lots of narrative scenes, but even in between those scenes are trompe l'oeil—faux-marble—panels. We get the sense that there is inlaid stone, but, in fact, this is all painting.

Beth: That extends even onto the ceiling, where we have a star-studded blue sky with images of Christ and Mary and other saints and figures.

Steven: The Arena Chapel is organized in a very strict way. Three registers begin at the top and move downward. I think of it as kind of a spiral—that is, it tells a continuous story. It begins with Christ's grandparents, it goes into the birth of Mary, her marriage, and then when we get down to the second register we get to Christ's life or ministry. Then, the bottom register is the Passion: these are the events at the end of Christ's life and immediately after his death.



Giotto, Cycle with the Wedding of the Virgin, Entry into Jerusalem, Ascension, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: All of this is thanks to—strange as it might seem to us today—a sin, the sin of usury that weighed heavily on the conscience of Enrico Scrovegni, whose palace was next door, and who owned this land and built this chapel and hired Giotto. His father was a usurer; Enrico himself was a usurer.

Steven: What this means is, he charged interest. Just like when you borrow money from a bank, you're charged interest. When you put money on a credit card, you're charged interest. So in a very Catholic environment, being a banker made you a lot of money but it also, within your belief system, would send you to Hell. Dante, the great late-medieval poet, in his most famous poem, "The Divine Comedy," singles out Scrovegni's father for one of the more treacherous parts of Hell.



Detail, Enrico offering model of chapel to the Three Marys, from Giotto, *Last Judgment*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua



Giotto, *Last Judgment*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: So Enrico was really worried, and for this reason, he did—according to the Catholic belief system—a good work: he built this chapel. This was his way of atoning for the sin of usury, hoping that this would help his soul to go to Heaven. We see Enrico himself here in this chapel. On the wall over the entrance, where Giotto painted *The Last Judgment*, we see Enrico kneeling, handing the chapel over to the Virgin Mary.

Steven: He's handing it to the three Marys—the Virgin Mary is in the middle.

Beth: Notice where Enrico has put himself: he's on the side of the Blessed. In the Last Judgment, you see Christ at the very top, and the Damned are on Christ's left and the Blessed are on Christ's right, and that's where we find Enrico.

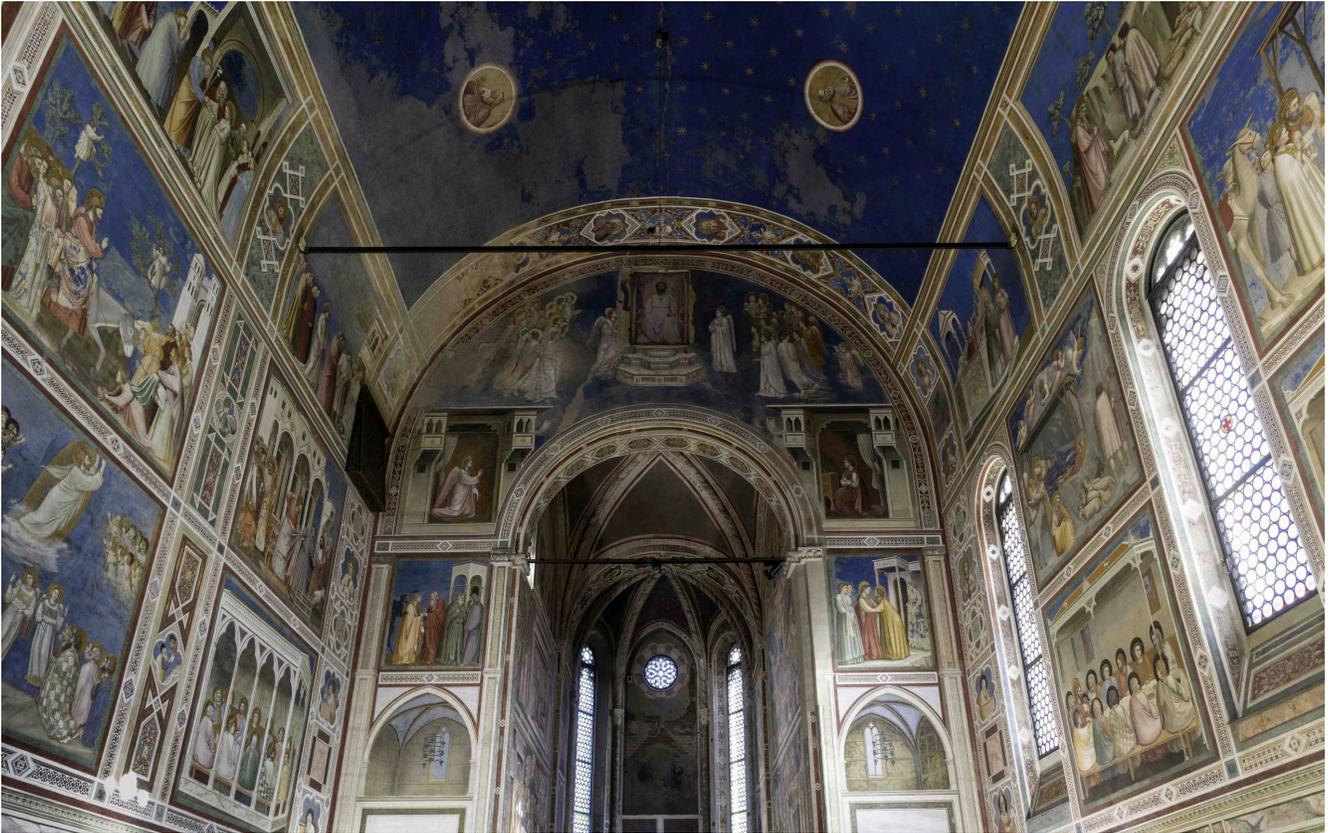
Steven: And the impetus for the entire cycle can be seen at the apex of the triumphal arch on the opposite wall with God, who calls Gabriel to his side telling him to go to the Virgin Mary and announce to her that she will bear humanity's savior, that she will bear Christ.

Beth: Interestingly, when Giotto painted God, he inserted a panel painting, not fresco. It's interesting that he chose to paint the image in a style that was more conservative, or less earthly, within the style that we see in the frescoes. Just to go back to that Annunciation and this wall, we begin to see the illusionism that we see throughout the cycles. If we look to Mary and the angel, Giotto has created an architectural space for each of them. These are not panel paintings with gold backgrounds that suggest a divine space, but earthly settings for Mary and the angel.

Steven: There's another great example of the way that architecture and the sense of space is constructed, even in this era before linear perspective. Two scenes below the Annunciation are these wonderful empty architectural spaces: these rooms that have oil lanterns that hang from their ceilings, and there is such a delicate sense of space of light and shadow. It is a bravura example

of naturalism, and it shows Giotto's interest in the world—in the present, the physical space that humanity occupies.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/47QgqdeSi0U>>.



Giotto, God Sends Gabriel to the Virgin, the Annunciation, Betrayal of Judas, Visitation, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsnJrL>>

15.

Giotto, Arena Chapel frescoes – Narrative Cycle

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Giotto, scenes with Joachim among the Shepherds, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsqzca>>

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy.

Steven: The narrative cycle begins on the right altar-side, in the top register. It introduces Joachim and Anna, the grandparents of Christ.

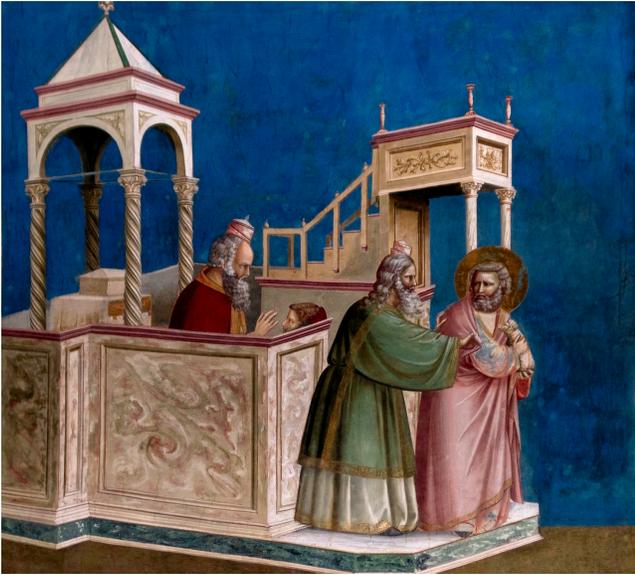
Beth: Mary's parents.

Steven: Joachim begins by being thrown out of the temple.

Beth: For his childlessness.

Steven: That's right. He's grown old without children. Don't take this too literally. It's not in the Bible. These are the extra stories that were added to the Biblical narrative because people wanted to know what happened in between the events that really are mentioned in the Bible.

Beth: Much of this is from a book called "The Golden Legend" that filled in that narrative.



Giotto, *Joachim is Driven from the Temple*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: Let's focus on the last scene on the right side of the upper register, which is the meeting at the Golden Gate.



Giotto, *Meeting at the Golden Gate*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: To get here, what's happened is that Joachim has prayed to God, really wanting a child. Anna, his wife, has done the same, and they've both been visited and been told that there is hope, and they're shown coming together for the first

time in front of Jerusalem, in front of the Golden Gate.

Beth: Each now with the awareness that their desire for a child, this wish, has been fulfilled.

Steven: And we have this wonderful example of the humanism of Giotto. We see their faces together, it is a kiss—it is incredibly intimate, so personal. Their faces come together, they touch and almost become a single face.

Beth: That makes sense. The warmth of their embrace, the warmth of the figures around them who watch, and something that we see throughout the cycle, figures who have mass and volume to their bodies, who exist three-dimensionally in space. Gone are the elongated, swaying, ethereal bodies of the Gothic period, and Giotto gives us figures that are bulky and monumental, where drapery pulls around their bodies. Taken together with the emotion in their faces, it's almost like we have real human beings in art for the first time in more than a thousand years.

Steven: Giotto, we think, was Cimabue's student, and learned from that great master, who had begun to experiment with the *chiaroscuro* that you're speaking of—this light and shadow, this ability to model volume and form and mass, but nothing like what Giotto has achieved here. And you're right, it is the coming together of both the *chiaroscuro* as well as the emotion, as well as the human interaction that creates this sense of the importance of our existence here on earth.

Beth: I would also add the clarity of the gestures and the narrative.

Steven: Look at the way in which the city is not rendered in an accurate way. We have a schematic view, and yet it's everything we need. We have the gate of Jerusalem. Now, of course, Giotto had no idea what the architecture of Jerusalem looked like, yet from legend, he has created this golden arch and this medieval-looking fortified city.

Beth: But the forms are simplified.

Steven: It's a stage set, and he wants those figures to be front and center. They are what's most important. If we move across to the other wall, the upper register continues the narrative. Mary is born, she's presented in the Temple, she's married, and then we get back to the altar-side of the chapel, and there, we reach the triumphal arch and we're back to God the Father now, but below that we have the Annunciation.



Giotto, Annunciation (split), Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: In the register below now, we see scenes from Christ's childhood, including...

Steven: The Circumcision, the Flight into Egypt.



Giotto, fresco with Nativity and Last Supper, Arena Chapel, 1305-06, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: The Massacre of the Innocents....



Giotto, Massacre of the Innocents, from the Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: ...and then moving to the next wall, we begin the story of the ministry of Christ and his miracles.

Steven: As the story unfolds from scene to scene, Christ is often shown in profile, which is derived from the Roman tradition of coinage, which is the noblest way of representing a figure and he's shown moving from left to right, which is the way that we're meant to read the scenes.



Hadrian, 134-138 C.E., gold (University of Virginia Art Museum Numismatic Collection)



Giotto, *Raising of Lazarus*, from the Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: So Giotto is helping us to move through the narrative from one scene to the next, and next we see Christ on a donkey with the apostles behind him.



Giotto, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, from the Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: You'll notice that Giotto does not really care to depict every single one of the 12 apostles. He's really giving us only three or four faces, and the rest are just an accumulation of halos.

Beth: There's that legacy of symbolic representation that we think of as more medieval.

Steven: Look at the way in which the figures in the lower right—there are three of them—begin to pull off their outer garments. One man is pulling his arm out of his sleeve. The next is taking the garment off his head. And the final one is placing that garment at the feet of the donkey in an act of respect, but it is almost cinematographic. There is this idea that is, I think, part of the chapel as a whole that it is about the movement of time. This is one of the most innovative aspects of the entire chapel, I think. One technical issue: if you look at Christ, there is a blue garment that's wrapped around his waist, but the blue is almost entirely missing and that's because the Arena Chapel is painted in bone fresco, true fresco. That is, pigment is applied to wet plaster.



Detail, Giotto, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, from the Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: And when that happens, the pigment binds to the plaster and the paint becomes literally part of the wall.

Steven: That's right, the wall is stained. The problem is that blue was really expensive. Ultramarine blue came from lapis lazuli, which was a very expensive semiprecious stone, and Enrico Scrovegni, when he drew up the contract with Giotto, did not want the blue's brilliance to be diminished by being mixed with the plaster, so he asked that it be applied as *secco fresco*.

Beth: Dry fresco.

Steven: That's right. On top of the wall—and the result is, it didn't last.

Beth: Right, it didn't adhere to the wall as well as the paint that was applied to the wet plaster. So sadly, that's been flaked off, and we really have to use our imagination to fill in a brilliant blue on that drapery.

Steven: Let's move on to the bottom register, to the end of Christ's life. On the lowest register, the register that's devoted to the scenes of the passion, is the Arrest of Christ, also known as the Kiss of Judas.



Giotto, *The Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas)*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: So this is the moment when Judas leads the Romans to Christ, and they arrest him and take him away and torture him, and ultimately, crucify him. And remember, Judas is one of the 12 apostles, one of those considered closest to Christ. He betrays him for 30 pieces of silver.

Steven: It is all the more horrific, it's all the more a terrible betrayal because this is one of the people that Christ trusted most, and Judas has betrayed Christ, not by pointing at him from afar but with a kiss.

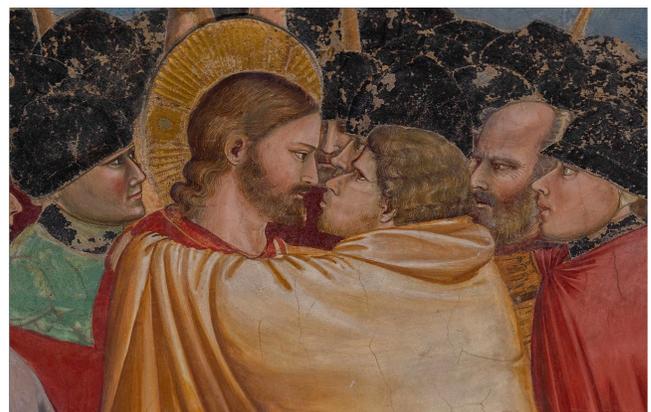
Beth: There's chaos here.

Steven: Well, that's right. That idea of the embrace is really important, I think, because look at the way that Giotto has the figure of Judas' arm and cloak wrapping around him, embracing him, enveloping him—and importantly, stopping him. Remember, that in almost every scene, we have noticed Christ moving from left to right in profile, but here, Judas is an impediment. His progress is stopped. This is literally *arresting* his movement forward.

Beth: If we compare this to Duccio's *Betrayal of Christ*, for example, there, Christ is frontal. Here, he's in profile, you're right, but it makes it so that Judas and Christ look at one another, look at each other in the eye. Judas is a little bit shorter. He looks up at Christ with a sense of, to me, determination but also at the same time maybe a hint of beginning to be sorry for what he's done.

Steven: But still corruption in that face, versus the nobility of Christ's.

Beth: And the sense that Christ *knew* that this would happen, right? At the Last Supper, he said, "One of you will betray me," and there's an acceptance of his destiny here that we often see in images of Christ.



Detail, Giotto, *The Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas)*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

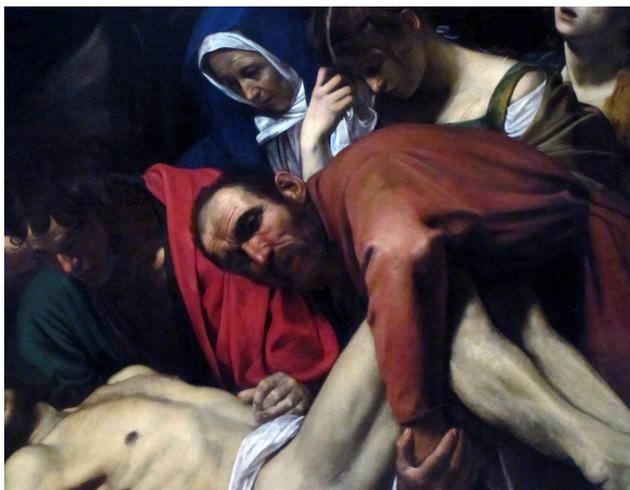
Steven: Let's go back to that idea of chaos that you raised before.



Detail of upper register, Giotto, Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas), Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: Giotto has created this sense of violence, and one of the ways that he's done that is by reserving half the painting, the sky, just for those lances, for those torches, for those clubs, and the way in which they're not held in an orderly way, but they are helter-skelter crossing at angles. They create this almost violent visual rhythm that draws our eye down to Christ, down to Judas, but also feel dangerous.

Beth: But there's this sense of Judas and Christ anchoring the composition down as that chaos takes place around him. The most remarkable figure to me though is the figure who leans his left side of his body and his elbow out of the composition, almost right into our space.



Detail of Caravaggio, Deposition (or Entombment), c. 1600-04, oil on canvas, 300 x 203 cm (Pinacoteca Vaticana)

Steven: It's amazing actually, it almost prefigures the way that Caravaggio centuries later will master this idea of breaking the picture plane.

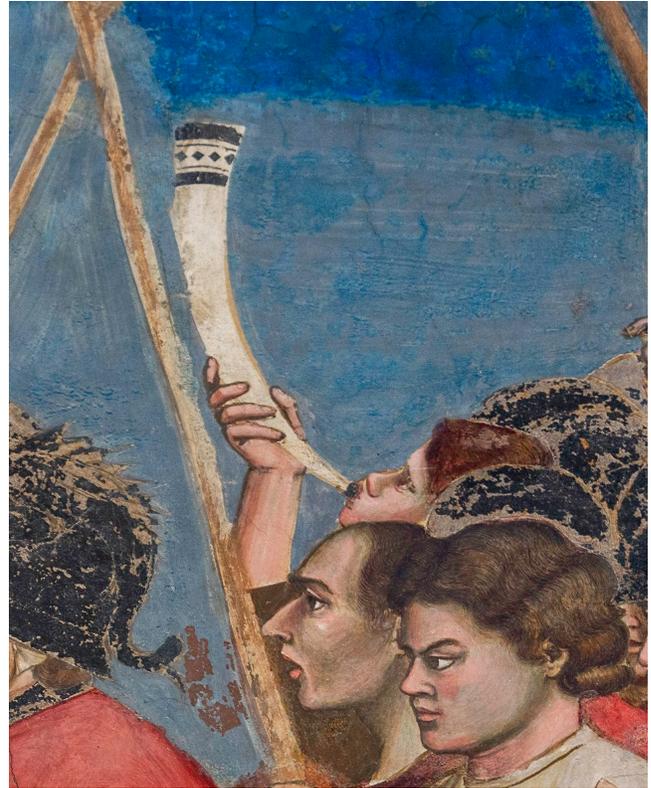


Detail, Giotto, The Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas), from the Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: And then we also see another device that Giotto employs often in the Arena Chapel, and that is a figure with his back to us, and that figure seems to be pulling something that's out of the space of the panel. But look at his feet, perfectly foreshortened, grounded. There's that sense of Giotto-esque weight and monumentality to the figures, all of that modeling, as we can follow the forms of the body underneath.



Detail, Giotto, The Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas), from the Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua



Detail, Giotto, The Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas), from the Arena Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: And Giotto is giving us this full sensory experience. We have this crowd of figures, the sense of violence. The crowd is multiplied because we can see numerous helmets, which by the way would have originally been silver but have oxidized.

Beth: And there's a sense of a crowd pressing in, of all these faces watching what's going to happen.

Steven: And there's one man on a horn who's blowing, creating the sense of energy, this audio that goes with this painting that finishes the whole scene and its chaos and its drama.

Beth: Giotto is a master of the dramatic.

Watch the video <<https://youtu.be/I356lV1v8Bc>>.



Giotto, Arrest of Christ (Kiss of Judas), Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsrPk9>>



Giotto, Wall with the Raising of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem, Noli me tangere, Arena Chapel (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsqv5C>>

16.

Giotto, Arena Chapel frescoes – The Lamentation

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel in Padua, Italy.



Giotto, *Lamentation*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: One of the most powerful scenes in the chapel is *The Lamentation*. Christ has been crucified, has been taken down off the cross. He's now being mourned by his mother, and by his followers.

Beth: And that word that we use for this scene, "lamentation," comes from the verb to lament, to grieve.

Steven: This is one of the saddest images I've ever seen. We have Mary holding her dead son, and it reminds us of a scene that is across the wall, of the Nativity—where there is this tenderness and this relationship between Mary and her infant son—and now we see Mary again, this time holding her adult, now-dead son.

Beth: On her lap, the way she does as a mother when he's a child.

Steven: The idea of representing Christ as dead is a modern idea. Putting emphasis on Christ as physical, as human.



Giotto, *Nativity*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua



Detail, Giotto, *Lamentation*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsqBvy>>

Beth: I think we're struck by the simplicity of the composition. Giotto is placing all of this emphasis on the figures. He's simplified the background, but where we might expect to see, the most important figure, Christ, in the center Giotto has moved him off to the left. The landscape is in service of drawing our eye down toward Christ, that rocky hill that forms a landscape that moves our eye down to Mary and Christ.

Steven: At the top, there's a tree and the tree might look dead, but of course, it might also be winter and that tree might grow leaves again in the spring and it is an analogy to Christ and his eventual resurrection.



Detail, Giotto, *Lamentation*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: It's not just that the dead Christ is on his mother's lap. Look at how she's raised her right knee to prop him up. Look at how she bends forward and....

Steven: ...twists her body.

Beth: And puts her arms around him, one hand on his shoulder, another on his chest. She leans forward as if to plead with him to wake up as if in disbelief that this could have happened.

Steven: At Christ's feet we see Mary Magdalene with her typical red hair, who is attending to his feet and, of course, that's appropriate, given the Biblical tradition as well, because she had anointed Christ's feet. There's a real sense of tenderness there. Giotto is so interested in naturalism that he's willing to show two figures where we only see the backs. There's no representation of their faces at all, and we would never have seen this in the medieval period.

Beth: That's because those figures provide no information to the narrative. All that they do is frame Christ and Mary. They draw our eye to those most important figures.

Steven: We look at Christ and Mary as they're looking at Christ and Mary.

Beth: Exactly. We become like them, surrounding the body of Christ, but they also help to create an illusion of space. It's amazing to me how close they are to us. Their bottoms almost move out into our space. Giotto makes it clear that these figures are looking in and therefore, there's an *in* to look into. There's space here for the human figures to occupy.

Steven: But there are other-than-human figures here as well. There are angels, but these angels are not detached figures. They mourn as we mourn. They rent their clothing. They tear at themselves. They pull their hair. They are in agony.



Detail, Angels, from Giotto, Lamentation, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: They're foreshortened. So, like the figures with their backs to us, they assist in Giotto's creating an illusion of space and like the angels above them, the human figures display their grief in different ways. Some are sad and resigned and kind of keep to themselves, other figures throw their arms out. There's a real interest in individuality, in the different ways that people experience emotion. I always like to look at the feet. Look at the feet of the figure on the far right, that sense of gravity and weight of a figure really standing on the ground just like the figures who are sitting, not the medieval floating figures that we've come to expect.



Detail, Giotto, Lamentation, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: That ground is used for several purposes, to root those figures, but also to draw our eye down to Christ or, in another sense, to allow us to move out of the picture because as we move from the Lamentation, we move to the next image, which is the scene where Christ says, "Do not touch me"—where Mary Magdalene recognizes him as he has been resurrected and you'll notice that Giotto has continued that mountain.



Giotto, *Noli Me Tangere*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Steven: Our eye then moves down and so there is this visual relationship that is drawn between Christ's death, Christ's mourning, and Christ's resurrection, by the landscape that frames them. In the trompe-l'oeil depictions of inset stone, there is another painted scene in the little quatrefoil.



Giotto, *Crucifixion and Lamentation*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Beth: And here we see Jonah being swallowed by the whale and we see water.

Steven: Well, it is a giant fish.



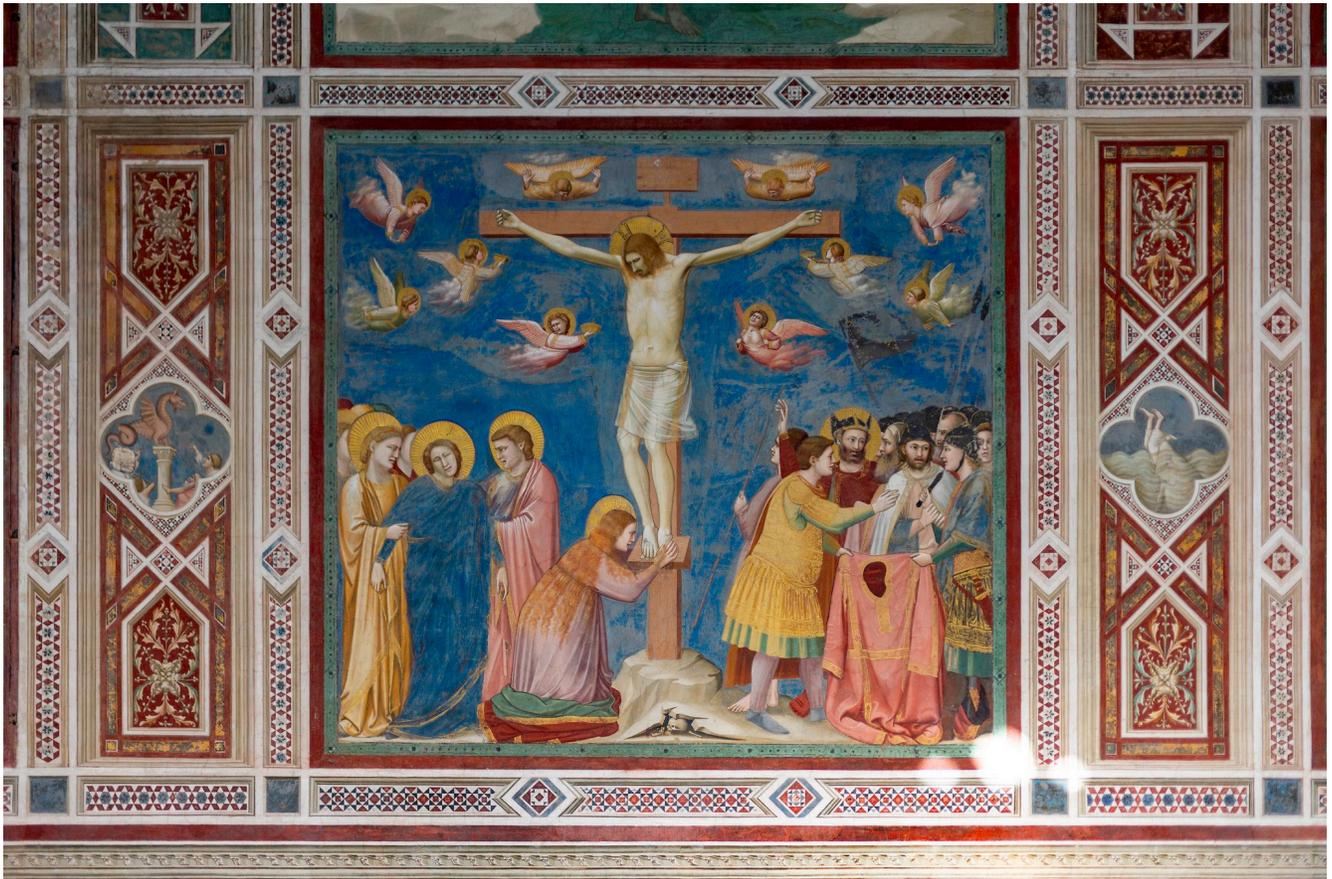
Detail, *Jonah*, from Giotto, *Lamentation*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: Throughout the chapel, we see this. An Old Testament scene being paired with a New Testament one, and specifically, Old Testament scenes that in some way prefigured the life of Christ.

Steven: So Jonah is swallowed by this giant fish, by this whale, prays for forgiveness—having betrayed God—and is delivered from this fish. It is a perfect Old Testament analogy to the New Testament story of Christ's crucifixion and ultimate resurrection. It's a tour de force of emotion. It's such an expression of this late medieval period, that is moving towards what we will eventually call the Renaissance.

Watch the video

<https://youtu.be/RbBQN0Wt_wY>.



Giotto, Crucifixion, with Jonah quatrefoil at right, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsrR9Q>>

17.

Giotto, Arena Chapel frescoes – Virtues, Vices, Last Judgment

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is a transcript of a conversation conducted in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy.

Steven: Below the Passion scene is even more painting. There are these marvelous representations of virtues and vices, that is expressions of good and evil.

Beth: We're looking at the figure of Envy.

Steven: It's one of my favorite figures.

Beth: Here is a figure in profile engulfed in flames, clutching a bag...

Steven: ...but reaching with her other hand for something she does not have, something that she wants.

Beth: She's not content with what she has; she wants more.

Steven: She's got huge ears. It's as if every sense is attuned to what she does not have.

Beth: We see, emerging from her mouth, a snake, who moves toward her eyes.

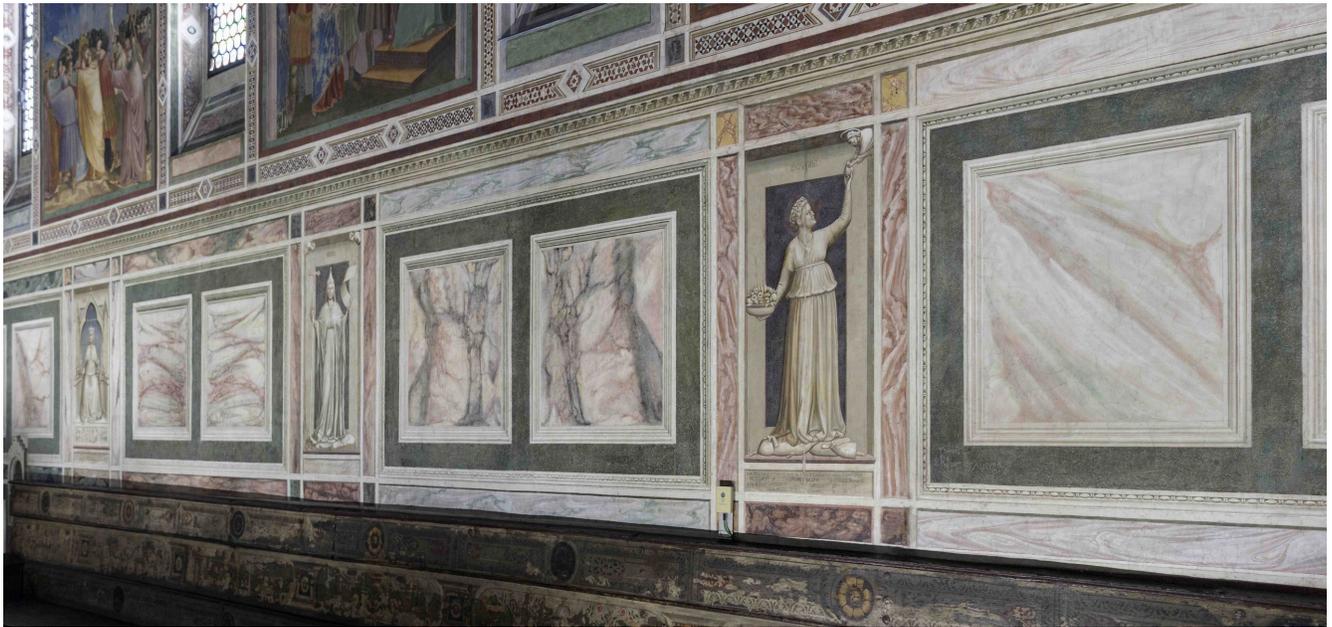
Steven: That's right, it doubles back on itself because it is what she sees that bites her, in a sense.

Beth: We have virtues and vices here because these are the good and evil that we confront, all of us, in our lives and these are the things that decide at the Day of Judgment—we go to heaven or hell.

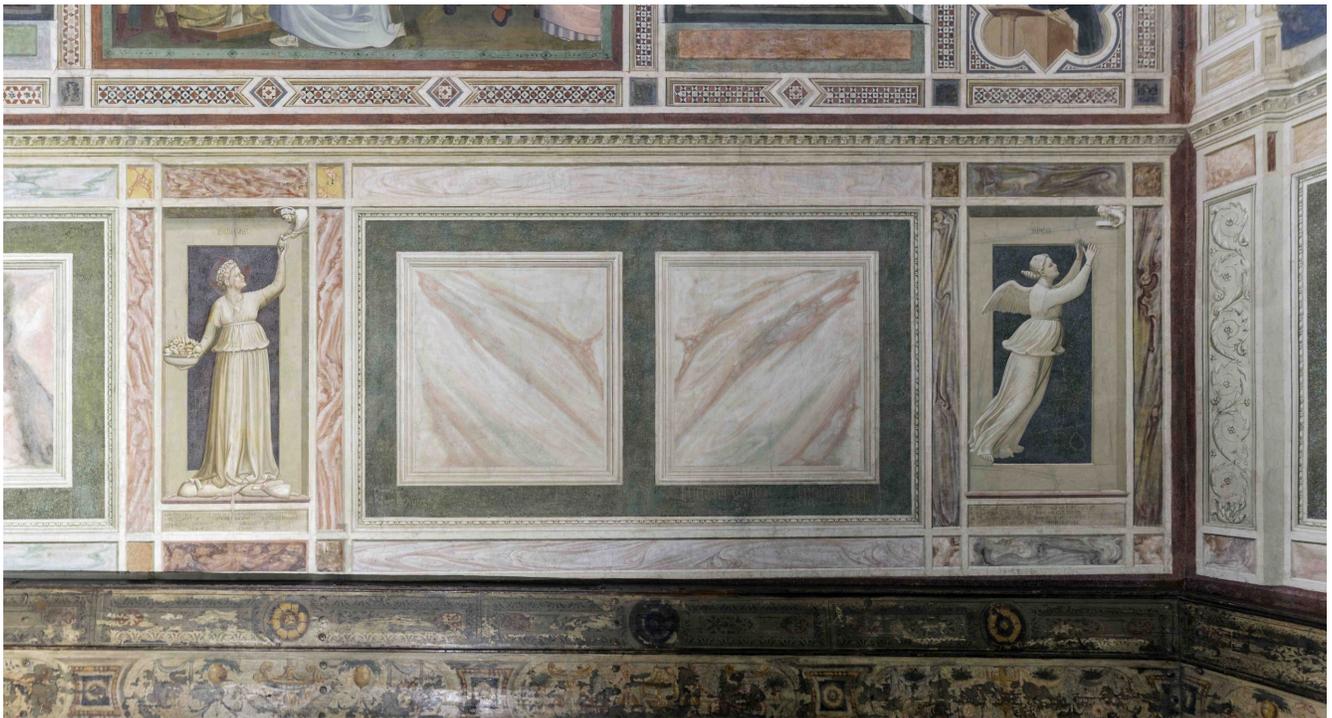
Steven: They are, in a sense, abstractions of the ideas that are told in the stories above. The final virtue, as we move towards the exit of the chapel, is Hope. She is reaching upward, floating, a classicized figure.



Giotto, Envy, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua



Giotto, painted marble revetment and niches with sculptural personifications of virtues, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsrQX2>>



Giotto, painted marble revetment and niches with sculptural personifications of virtues, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsnKKc>>



Giotto, *Hope*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua

Beth: And she's winged like an angel and is lifted up toward a figure on the upper right who's handing her a crown.

Steven: So Hope, because she is in the corner, is looking up towards the Last Judgment and is of the same scale. Her body is in the same diagonal position as the elect in the bottom left corner.

Beth: We see the elect—many of them with their hands in positions of prayer—looking up towards the enormous figure of Christ, the largest figure in this chapel.

Steven: We should say that the elect are the blessed—that is, these are people that are going

to heaven. You'll see that they are actually accompanied by angels that look so caring and gentle—they're shepherding these people into heaven. If you look carefully, you can see that their feet are not on the ground, they're actually levitating slightly, they're rising up.

Beth: There are benevolent, generous expressions on the face of those angels as they look at all of these individuals who've made the choices in their lives that have led them to this moment of being blessed.

Steven: The choices that are laid out for us in the virtues and vices in the bottom panels. Just below the elect, you can see that there are what seem to be children, naked, coming out of coffins, out of tombs. Those nude figures are meant to represent the souls that are to be judged by Christ, who as you said sits in the middle. He sits here as Judge to judge those souls that are being wakened from the dead to determine whether or not they are blessed and get to go to heaven or if they're going to end up on the right side of this painting in hell.

Beth: This follows very standard iconography or standard composition of the Last Judgment with the blessed, those who are going to heaven, on Christ's right and the damned below on Christ's left. Just to either side of Christ, though, that division of left and right doesn't happen.

Steven: That's because this is heaven.

Beth: There we see saints and around that mandorla—that sort of full-body halo around Christ—we see angels blowing trumpets.

Steven: These are images that come right out of the Apocalypse, the Gospel according to John.

Beth: The Book of Revelation.

Steven: We have the angels announcing the end of time. We have angels above them rolling up the sky as if it were a scroll. These are images that we generally see in the Last Judgment because they are in the text of the Bible.

Beth: The scene of hell on the lower right with a large blue figure that is meant to represent Satan, surrounding him are souls being tortured in hell.

Steven: A lot of this imagery is inspired, I think, indirectly by the work of Dante, who had not so long ago written the *Divine Comedy*, which was extremely popular, and he describes the landscape of hell.

Beth: He equates the punishments of hell with the different kinds of sins that people committed. So, in *The Last Judgment* that we're looking at—and because the patron here was concerned with the end of usury—we see usurers featured, and they're being hung with the bags of money on the ropes that they're hanging from.

Steven: Right, usury is requiring interest for when you lend money. It's basically just the act of banking, and that was a mortal sin. In fact, Dante speaks at great length about the usurer's who have their moneybags hanging from their necks and are in one of the lowest of the circles of hell. Below the usurer's you can actually make out a specific individual, also hanged, this is Judas, the disciple who betrays Christ.

Beth: So anyone leaving the chapel from this exit would look up at this scene of the Last Judgment, up at the cross carried by two angels. Perhaps they would notice the figure that I just noticed, a figure behind the cross, sort of grasping it for dear life. And they would have also looked up and seen Enrico Scrovegni himself, the patron offering this chapel to the three Marys.

Steven: As the public would have walked outside after a sermon—after mass perhaps—they would be reminded right before they walk back into the world, the world of desire, the world of sin, of the sacrifice that Christ had made; that story that had unfolded in this chapel comes down to decisions that they need to make in their own life. This is in a sense a kind of “last reminder” before you walk out: take these stories seriously.

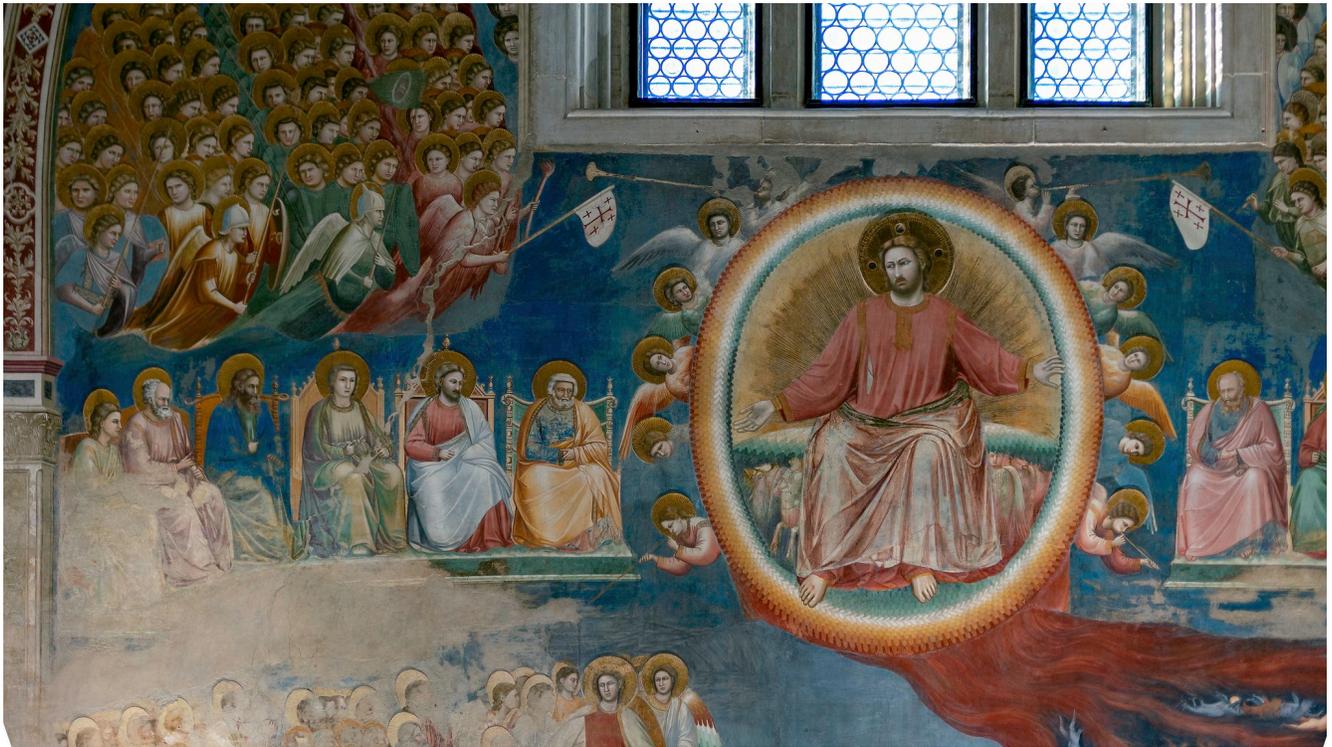
Beth: Giotto makes it very easy for us to do that by painting these figures in their humanity, by making the narrative so easy and clear to read, and by making something so beautiful—recognized for its beauty even when it was first painted.

Steven: That's right, even in its own day.

Watch the video <https://youtu.be/6z_Kjsn8VLI>.



Giotto, Last Judgment, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Giotto, Last Judgment, detail with the Court of Heaven and Christ in Majesty, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsqFcS>>



Giotto, Last Judgment, detail with torments, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jsqAnw>>

18.

Giotto, 'The Entombment of Mary'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Gallery view of Giotto, *The Entombment of Mary*, 1310, tempera on poplar, 75 x 179 cm (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/cdgGFY>>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin.

Steven: We're in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin looking at a really spectacular panel painting by Giotto. This is *The Entombment of Mary*. And it shows the Virgin Mary tenderly being lowered into

her tomb, but it also simultaneously shows her spirit rendered as an infant being cradled by Christ in Heaven.

Beth: It was made for the church of the Ognissanti or All Saints Church in Florence. And it's certainly one of the jewels of their collection.

Steven: It's a wonderful representation of the qualities that made Giotto such an important artist in the early 14th century.

Beth: In the late 1200s, the tradition that Giotto was coming out of is a Byzantine tradition where the figures are elongated, where there's an emphasis on gold and patterning, where the figures seem really distant from us. And there's no real interest in their bodies as existing three-dimensionally in space. But that's exactly what Giotto gives us.

Steven: Figures that have a sense a volume, of mass, of solidity, of gravity. But more than that, you've got a kind of psychological intensity and interaction that makes these figures seem as if they are autonomous in the world.

Beth: So let's take, for example, Saint Peter, who's engrossed in reading. And if we look at the robe that he wears, we can see that Giotto has moved from light to dark to indicate the folds of the drapery and a sense of the figure being round and three-dimensional.



Giotto, *The Entombment of Mary*, detail left, 1310 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: You can see the way in which the figure's elbow is pressing into his waist, gathering that cloth, creating those folds. And there is really a sense, then, of the reality of that moment, something that we recognize as our own elbows have pressed into our sides.

Beth: Look at how gently she's being lowered into the tomb. And the look on the face of the apostle who lowers her body, looking into her eyes so lovingly.



Giotto, *The Entombment of Mary*, detail with central scenes, 1310 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: The intimacy between them can be seen again between the spirit of Mary in the body of the child and Christ. Their faces are close. They look at each other.

Beth: It's also a kind of inversion of the image of Mary and Christ that we usually see where Mary is shown holding Christ as a child.

Steven: And look at the way that the representation of Mary's soul, the infant, has its light drapery swirl around it. It's just a beautiful kind of tender rendering by the artist. Just to the right of Christ, you see a figure bending over slightly. That's Saint Andrew, who is sprinkling holy water on the dead body of Christ's mother.



Giotto, *The Entombment of Mary*, detail right, 1310
(Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: Perhaps my favorite figure is just to the right of that. You can see in back of the angels who are holding tall candles, there's a figure in a kind of yellow white gold. His cheeks are puffed out. And if you look closely, in his right hand, he's holding high a censer—that is he's distributing incense, and it seems as if he's trying to blow it towards Mary.

Beth: Just to the right, another angel has its mouth open, as though she's speaking. And two angels just to the right of that seem to be engaged in conversation. So while this image is very formal and hierarchical—with Christ in the center larger than all the figures—it's at the same time informal and natural.

Steven: That sense of the natural comes across so well in the conversation between those angels. Look at the angel who stands in front—at the way in which the thumbs of that angel are hooked into its belt, into its pockets. There is this sort of wonderful sense of total informality there.

Beth: In fact, that angel also looks like she's about to speak.

Steven: This is a painting about Mary leaving the physical realm and becoming spiritual. But it's this kind of intimacy, this kind of detail of individual actions through which Giotto creates this fabulous sense of reality.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/MQct5EFQ9x8>>



Giotto, *The Entombment of Mary*, detail with angelic conversation (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

19.

Andrea Pisano, Reliefs for the Florence Campanile

A conversation

Dr. David Drogin and Dr. Beth Harris

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Piazza del Duomo in Florence.



Piazza del Duomo, Florence, with Giotto's Campanile, 1334-37 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/5TMW9s>>

Beth: Here we have a view of Florence where we can see the bell tower—the Campanile—in the center, and then on the left, just a little corner of the Baptistery, and on the back end, the Cathedral of Florence with Brunelleschi's dome at the top.

David: Right. The Baptistery is a medieval building from the 10th century probably. The Cathedral (the Duomo) they began building almost around 1300 and the bell tower starts going up a little bit after that and then the dome is built from the early 1400s and finished in the 1470s.

Beth: So what are we looking at with the bell tower?

David: Right now, we're going to concentrate on the very bottom of the bell tower. Around 1340, even though the tower wasn't complete yet, the town and the guilds of Florence—specifically the wool guild that was in charge of decorating the cathedral—decided that they wanted to decorate the bottom of the tower because even though it wasn't complete, it was embarrassing having just this bare, undecorated surface where everyone's walking around, as you can see, all the time. And so the two very bottom layers are decorated with many reliefs, and these are in stone (marble) rather than the bronze that's on the Baptistery. The reliefs cover a lot of subjects. There are Biblical scenes. There are signs of the Zodiac. There are also scenes of local art and industry. Some of these things may sound unusual. Of course, the Biblical scenes makes sense on the church building.

Beth: Industry?

David: Those are a little bit unusual. We'll see why they might want to include those. We should also say that the Zodiac signs are not unusual because the medieval Christians very comfortably blended

their belief in Christianity and their Christian devotion with interest in the horoscope.

Beth: Yep—we see that a lot on medieval churches.



Andrea Pisano, *Creation of Adam*, 1334-43, from the Campanile, Florence, west side (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jyUV9u>>

David: That's right. Let's look at some of these reliefs. Here's one of the religious scenes. This is the Creation of Adam. The artist is Andrea Pisano, who around the same time is working on the bronze reliefs just across the street on the south doors of the Baptistry. Those scenes were about John the Baptist and here's one of the Biblical scenes on the bell tower. And again, this is typical of his style as we've described it. It's very, very simplified with mostly a blank background, just a few things to give you a sense of the setting—here a few stylized trees—and we have God leaning over and creating Adam.

Beth: Yes, literally out of the dust of the earth he sort of takes form.

David: Right, and this is another good example

of how Andrea Pisano combines a kind of Gothic stylization with a naturalistic classicism.

Beth: Where do you see the Gothic stylization?

David: Well, the figure of God the Father, in some ways the way the robes are rendered without a great sense of the body underneath, the kind of rhythmic folds—all of this is pretty traditional.

Beth: Right, so we have sense of the body, but there's not an entire sense of a real physical anatomically correct body underneath it.

David: That's right.

Beth: Like there will be later with Donatello.

David: And instead, the figure of Adam is a nude athletic male. Even though it's damaged here, it's classicizing and it's naturalistic. He's in a contrapposto stance even though he's lying down. That doesn't make any sense. Contrapposto is usually something for standing up, but the fact that he's done that anyway shows how interested he was in giving it a classic appearance.



Andrea Pisano, *Creation of Adam*, detail, 1334-43, from the Florence Campanile, west side, (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jyYjPs>>

Beth: Yeah, I mean, we can see his ribs and some muscles there too.

David: That's right. So this is very typical for his style.

David: Here now, we're looking at one of the scenes of local industry.

Beth: Wow, this looks a lot like the one of God creating Adam.



Andrea Pisano, Phidias: the art of sculpture, 1348-50, from the Florence Campanile, north side (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

David: Well, it's interesting that you say that because the industry that's represented here is sculpture, and this is an interesting way for an artist, Andrea Pisano, to suggest that the work of the sculptor—the work of the artist—is in some ways like the work of God. Both are creators. In fact, we also see again the creator here, the artist, leaning over a bearded man, in rather stylized robes, leaning over a nude, more naturalistic, more classicizing figure. Now, of course, he's not going to get in trouble. There's a sense of modesty here because look again and compare this to the way God creates Adam. God is in nature, He uses a gesture of his hand, and Adam is clearly supposed to be a real living person. When we look at the sculptor in the studio, he's in the studio, he's using tools. The use of the tools is really conspicuous.

Beth: He can't create simply by his word or by some kind of spiritual action.

David: That's right. And also what he's creating is not going to be mistaken for a real person. It's stiff and it's much smaller in scale.

Beth: But still it seems to be almost a sign of the desire to elevate the status of the artist.

David: It absolutely is a sign of that and it's also definitely a sign of the pride that the Florentines take in their arts. I mean, this is a very important location, the bell tower of the Cathedral, and they're displaying in a way what makes them proud and prosperous as Florentines. In one part, it's the arts.

Beth: And so this could be described as part of that civic pride that I always think is so important in terms of commissioning so much art in the Renaissance.

David: That's right. Here's another scene of local industry. This is weaving, which is one of the main reasons why Florence is so very prosperous around 1340 when these reliefs are being made.



Andrea Pisano, Weaver, 1348-50, from the Florence Campanile, south side (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2jyUV5B>>



Andrea Pisano, *Reliefs for the Campanile in Florence*, c. 1336 (photo: nene9, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)
<<https://flic.kr/p/7z3gNU>>

David: You could talk about it in terms of the style being typical for Andrea Pisano—the boiling down to the essential ingredients—but what really stands out is the way it celebrates industry and manual labor, the things that make this city where it is.

Beth: It's amazing. And so the guilds were really

powerful in enriching the city and decorating the city with beautiful sculptures and reliefs and at the same time, wanting to see their own image in a way.

David: That's right.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/ncgAfzRSJrI>>

III

Siena

20.

Siena in the Late Gothic, an introduction

Dr. Joanna Milk Mac Farland



View of the Piazza del Campo, Siena

Siena: A city overlooked?

For centuries, Siena's role in the history of European art was underappreciated. This is partly because its moment of greatest influence occurred just before the Renaissance, a period commonly associated with the nearby city of Florence (both Florence and Siena were independent city-states in Italy at this time). But history—even art history—is written by the victors. So when Siena's position of power faded while Florence remained one of the financial and artistic centers of Europe, the achievements of Siennese artists slid slowly into the background.

Art historians now know that the development of style in these two city-states was closely intertwined. The artists of one inevitably influenced the other, even in later periods. It is not an exaggeration to say that, at the height of its artistic flourishing, Siena was unsurpassed in its fame for producing celebrated painters.

An international city

By the early fourteenth century, Siena was a wealthy and cosmopolitan city. Several large international banks were run by wealthy Siennese families. Merchants based in Siena traded goods in several foreign countries, particularly France. The city's location on the Via Francigena, the main pilgrimage route to Rome, meant that pilgrims from all over Europe streamed through its streets. These pilgrims would have been greeted by one of the most impressive cityscapes in Italy at the time. Spread out over three hills, the skyline was dominated by the enormous cathedral and by the central seat of government, the Palazzo Pubblico.



Siena Cathedral



Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. The representatives of the Siennese government, “The Nine,” met here.

Communal oversight of the arts

Like many cities today, the Siennese were acutely aware of how art and architecture shaped the city’s identity in the eyes of both natives and visitors. The communal government was controlled by the “Nove,” or the Nine, a rotating group of representatives chosen from the city’s leading families. The Nove dominated art patronage during the period, helping to decide the layout of the city and its largest buildings, selecting committees to oversee large public projects, and subsidizing the decoration of churches.

Siennese art of the period was communally oriented in a few other ways. The central government and various churches hired local Siennese artists, almost exclusively, to produce the most important paintings. Such a preference for native sons hints at a general pride in the city’s painters, known throughout Italy for the quality of their work (this was not the case with sculpture). There were also a few examples of large works of art created for private individuals. Compare this to Florence at the time, where rich citizens often bought the right to decorate family chapels in large churches and where painters from other cities were sometimes awarded prestigious commissions.

Duccio



Duccio, The Rucellai Madonna, with viewer, 1285-86, tempera on panel, 450 x 290 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In fact, the most famous Siennese artist of the fourteenth century may have first made a name for himself in Florence. The earliest recorded work by Duccio, an artist who is often called the father of Siennese painting, was commissioned for the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.



Duccio, Maestà (front, central panel), 1308-11 (Museo dell’Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

This nearly fifteen-foot tall altarpiece depicting the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child introduced Duccio's innovative style to a wider audience. Like previous artists, Duccio was interested in creating beautiful patterns and shapes. We can see the love of surface decoration in the undulating arrangements of fabric or even in the faces of his figures. Yet he also used soft modeling with light and shade to give a sense of mass in the figures' delicate but real bodies. Duccio's ability to combine elegant lines and patterns with a fragile naturalism became a hallmark of Sienese painting.

The *Maestà*



Duccio, *Maestà* (reconstruction of back), 1308-11 (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

The Santa Maria Novella altarpiece must have won Duccio fame in his own city of Siena, for he soon became a favorite painter of the commune. In 1308, he was asked to create a massive painting for the main altar in the middle of the Cathedral. The front of the altarpiece depicted the Madonna and Child sitting on a throne and surrounded by saints and angels, a subject known in Italian as a *Maestà*. Originally, the main scene was at the center of a set of stories and figures, all united in an elaborate wooden structure of frames covered in gold leaf. The back of the altarpiece was painted

with a series of scenes from the life of Christ. Unfortunately, these panels are now dispersed in many museums. In these panels, Duccio demonstrated his unsurpassed skills of visual storytelling, capturing the imagination of contemporary viewers with his vivid depictions of the gospel stories that were so central to the faith of Siena and its visitors.

Cathedral altarpieces

It is hard to overestimate how important Duccio's altarpiece was for the citizens who worshiped in front of it and for the artists who studied it. The city had long ago dedicated itself to the Virgin Mary, believing her to be their special protector. In an age where painted images gave faithful viewers a channel of access to celestial figures, the *Maestà* became the central representation of Siena's powerful patron as the queen of heaven.



Simone Martini (and Lippo Memmi), *The Annunciation*, 1333, tempera on panel, 184 x 210 cm. (Uffizi, Florence) photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The work's role as a devotional and artistic well for the city was most eloquently honored in four altarpieces painted for the chapels surrounding Duccio's painting. Each altarpiece depicted a scene involving Mary, so that the story of her life would have unfolded as your eye travelled along

the chapels. Over the course of two decades, one altarpiece was commissioned from each of the leading Sieneese painters of the day, transforming the heart of the Cathedral into something like a gallery of the great Sieneese artists. This is a perfect illustration of the city's tendency to blend devotional piety and civic pride in large artistic projects.

Simone Martini

Perhaps the best known of these four altarpieces is the *Annunciation* by Simone Martini. Building on the legacy of Duccio, Simone was also influenced by the elongated, swaying figures and elaborate architectural forms of northern European art. On the other hand, his paintings show a bit more of the kind of careful observation of the world around him that we might associate with Giotto, the leading Florentine artist at the time. Thanks to this eclectic but refined mixing of new styles, Simone's reputation and influence spread throughout Europe, a legacy carried on by a large workshop of assistants and students.

The Lorenzetti brothers



Detail, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Allegory of Good Government, Effects of Good Government in the City and the Country, c. 1337-40, fresco, Sala della Pace (Hall of Peace) also known as the Sala dei Nove (the Hall of the Nine), 7.7 x 14.4 meters (room), Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

Two of the other three artists hired to paint altarpieces behind the *Maestà* were actually brothers: Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti. While

the Lorenzetti brothers worked in the Sieneese style, they absorbed the art of Giotto more fully than Simone Martini and his followers did. Weighty, massive figures covered in heavy drapery populate their works, a sure sign of their familiarity with Florentine painting. Even more than Giotto and his school, both Ambrogio and Pietro experimented with using different kinds of perspective to give an illusion of depth in the spaces their figures occupy.

Good and bad government

Ambrogio Lorenzetti's artistic innovation is best captured in one of the most groundbreaking works of the late medieval period: his wall paintings in the Palazzo Pubblico. The elaborate murals were designed to remind the Nove of the consequences of good and bad governance. The scenes are particularly known for their large, sensitively depicted landscapes and cityscapes. No other monumental celebration of everyday urban and rural life survives from the period, making these scenes a turning point in the history of art.

After the Black Death

As in Florence, perhaps half of Siena's population died of the plague in 1348. Scholars think the Lorenzetti brothers were two of the Black Death's victims. Since Simone Martini had died a few years earlier in Avignon, this meant all four of Siena's greatest artists were now dead.

Art continued to lie at the center of the city's image of itself and its religious life. For the remainder of the century, artists such as Bartolomeo Bulgarini worked in the style forged by their forbears, though with less international acclaim. As scholars have emphasized in recent decades, Sieneese art was later reinvigorated during the Renaissance, incorporating an array of new artistic styles into their own strong traditions. Still, to this day the city looks back to the early fourteenth century as a golden age for Sieneese art.

21.

Duccio, 'Maestà'

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Reconstruction of Duccio, Maestà, 1308-11 (© Lew Minter, from Web Gallery of Art)

During this period, and for hundreds of years, Italy was not a unified country, but rather was divided into many small countries we call city-states. Florence, Siena, Milan, Venice—these were essentially independent nations with their own governments—and they were at war with each other. These city-states also had independent cultures with their own distinct styles in painting and sculpture. Siena had a unique style that emphasized decorative surfaces, sinuous lines, elongated figures and the heavy use of gold. Duccio was the founder of the Sienese style and his work was quite different from the Florentine painter Giotto. Giotto emphasized a greater naturalism—creating figures who are more monumental (large, heavy and with a greater sense of accurate proportion) and a greater illusion of three-dimensional space.

Here is a contemporaneous description of the procession that brought this painting to Siena Cathedral (or Duomo):

At this time the altarpiece for the high altar was finished and the picture which was called the “Madonna with the large eyes” or Our Lady of Grace, that now hangs over the altar of St. Boniface, was taken down. Now this Our Lady was she who had hearkened to the people of Siena when the Florentines were routed at Monte Aperto, and her place was changed because the new one was made, which is far more beautiful and devout and larger, and is painted on the back with the stories of the Old and New Testaments. And on the day that it was carried to the Duomo the shops were shut, and the bishop conducted a great and devout company of priests and friars in solemn procession, accompanied by the nine signiors, and all the officers of the commune, and all the people, and one after another the worthiest with lighted candles in their hands took places near the picture, and behind came the women and children with great devotion. And they accompanied the said picture up to the Duomo, making the procession around the Campo, as is the custom, all the bells ringing joyously, out of reverence for so noble a picture as this. And this picture Duccio di Niccolò the painter made, and it was made in the house of the Muciatti outside the gate aStalloreghi. And all that day persons, praying God and His Mother, who is our advocate, to defend us by their infinite mercy from every adversity and all evil, and keep us from the hands of traitors and of the enemies of Siena.

English translation: Charles Eliot Norton, *Historical Studies of Church-Buildings in the Middle Ages: Venice, Siena, Florence* (New York, 1880), 144-45; Italian text: G. Milanesi, *Documenti per la storia dell'arte senese* (Siena: 1854, I), 169.

22.

Duccio, 'Maestà' (front)

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Duccio, *Maestà* (front), 1308-11, tempera on wood (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Opera del Duomo Museum in Siena.

Steven: We're in the museum of the Cathedral of Siena and we're looking at probably the single most famous work of art from Siena—certainly one of the most important works of art from the 14th Century. This is Duccio's *Maestà*.

Beth: The title means "The Virgin Mary in Majesty."

Steven: We see her very large, in the center of the main panel. She is by far the largest figure anywhere in this painting.

Beth: This is a polyptych, it's made out of many, many panels, not all of which are here in the museum unfortunately. The *Maesta* is painted on both the front and the back, so Mary is on the front and stories of Mary's life are on the front, but the story of Christ is on the back.

Steven: In a sense, this is a freestanding painting; it is this large sculptural object that has all of this imagery all over it.

Beth: The figures—the saints and prophets and angels—are almost life-size.

Steven: It's true, there are three rows of them and they're lined up almost as if it were for a class picture. There are four local saints in front and then angels and saints in the second row, and I think an unbroken row of angels in the back. We would have originally seen a predella below. That is a step of small paintings and then above the large panel, there would have been a series of scenes as well. We think that the predella would have held scenes of the early life of the Virgin Mary, then above, those of her death and ascent into Heaven.

Beth: And there would have been a really elaborate frame.



Duccio, Maestà (front), 1308-11 (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena) (reconstruction: Lew Minter, Web Gallery of Art)

Steven: In the previous century, Siena had won a significant battle against its arch rival, Florence. Both Siena and Florence were wealthy city-states, and as they were independent nations, they were often at war with each other. Siena had believed that they won because of the grace of Mary. Many years later, the town of Siena commissioned their most famous painter, Duccio, to create a very large painting dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It would

have stood exactly on the altar of the Cathedral in the crossing, just under the dome. As you approach the high altar you would be able to make out, just at the bottom, an inscription that read, "Holy Mother of God, be the cause of peace to Siena and to the life of Duccio, because he has painted thee, thus." Now, Siena was very much a competitor with Florence, and the great Florentine painter of the day was Giotto. He had painted a major cycle telling the story of the Virgin Mary, of Christ's parents, and of Christ himself, and in some ways, the *Maestà* was a kind of answer to that: "we can do this too, we can be as comprehensive and have a masterpiece."

Beth: I think they proved that! They did something that rivals what Giotto did in the Arena Chapel (in Padua).

Steven: But while Giotto's painting was fresco, fresco didn't make sense for the Cathedral of Siena because the Cathedral of Siena is made of alternating blocks of black and white marble.



Siena Cathedral interior (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/5DHjMo>>

Beth: It has a very decorative interior that wouldn't have worked with fresco. So it made sense to do a panel painting for the altarpiece.

Steven: We have to remember that at the end of the medieval period, Mary had taken on an enormously important role. She was the bridge through which normal people could access Christ. You would speak to the Virgin Mary, and she would perhaps speak to her son on your behalf.

Beth: Right, she had the role of an intercessor or someone who intercedes between God and mankind.

Steven: As is traditional, she is garbed in this intense blue, which must have been fabulously expensive given all the lapis lazuli (blue rock) that would have been required to produce that ultramarine paint. There is also this beautiful embroidered gold in this drape behind her.

Beth: There are a lot of decorative surfaces; that was something that was particular to the Siennese style.

Steven: There is a real sense of delicacy and subtlety. Look, for instance, at the clothing that Christ is swaddled in. There's a kind of transparency around his leg, there's a beautiful modulation of light and shadow, there's real chiaroscuro that's being used here, not only striations of gold. This is not the earlier work of Cimabue. This is an artist, Duccio, who's moving steadily, and carefully, and obviously very conscientiously towards creating a sense of real mask and real volume.

Beth: The drapery around Christ is so softly and beautifully modeled. Look at how Christ with his left hand pulls at the drapery—you see those folds that pull towards him.

Steven: Yes, that's right.



Duccio, Maestà (front), detail, 1308-11 (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

Beth: And the modeling that we see under Christ's chin and neck. He really is three dimensional in the way that we begin to see with artists like Giotto, also in the early 1300s, creating forms that are three dimensional.

Steven: And look at the face of Christ—there is a look of awareness of the kind of wisdom that is piercing. He seems to look directly at us and it is the stare of a fully conscious adult.

Beth: The angels are remarkably animated. Some look at Mary, some look away, some look at us; there's a kind of informality.

Steven: It's true, that informality is so unexpected.

Beth: Yeah, you would expect something a lot more rigid. This is the Court of Heaven after all!

Steven: Which is really quite wonderful and gives it a sense of complexity.



Duccio, *Maestà* (front), detail, 1308-11 (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

Beth: I'm also noticing the lovely curls that make up the wings of the angels—they somehow actually start to almost feel like feathers.

Steven: They create a sense of volume. Those wings are not flat.

Beth: If we look down at the ground we see the throne opening out moving into our space.

Steven: Now remember, in the medieval era, cathedrals and churches in general were not open for people to walk through as they are now. The lay people—that is, everyday people—would have gone to the front of the church only. The area of the altar at the back of the church would have been reserved for those that were associated directly with the church. It's interesting to think about the *Maestà* in relationship to this. It meant that the public would have had access to the side of the painting that focused on the Virgin Mary...

Beth: ...the intercessor between man and the divine.

Steven: But a more privileged view perhaps was available to the monks, to the priest, to those that were associated directly with the church. Let's walk around to the back and take a look at those panels.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/2fijnNzktDI>>

23.

Duccio, 'Maestà' (back)

Duccio, Maesta (back)

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Duccio, *Maestà* (back), 1308-11, tempera on wood (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Opera del Duomo Museum in Siena.

Steven: The back of the Maesta is astonishing. It's every bit as large as the front, but has many, many more panels.

Beth: But Duccio isn't conceiving of each one entirely separately. He's thinking about how to unify all of these scenes together and make them really legible for a viewer.

Steven: A great example of that is if you look at the three central scenes. At the bottom, you have Christ in the Garden. He's asking his apostles to remain awake while he has a private meditation with God. But after the apostles left, we see him a second time—this time fast asleep—not having heeded his request at all. I do want to make note of the three central trees in that image.



Duccio, *Christ in the Garden*, from *Maestà* (back), 1308-11, tempera on wood (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

Steven: Those trees are echoed in the image just above, which is the Arrest of Christ.

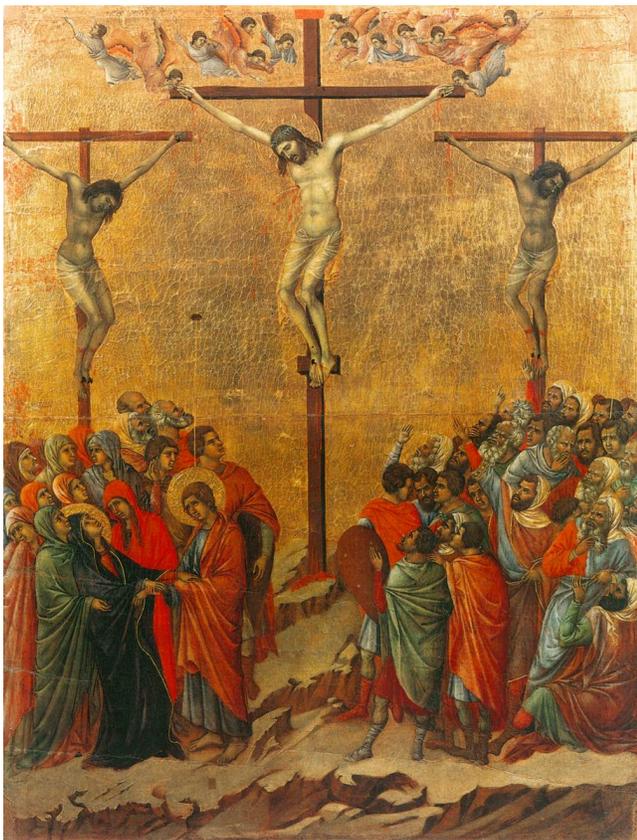


Duccio, *The Arrest of Christ*, from *Maestà* (back), 1308-11, tempera on wood (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

Steven: This is the Betrayal, and you can see Judas, who has already been paid pieces of silver by the Roman authorities to identify Christ with a kiss. You see Christ being abandoned by his followers, or most of them, who flee. But Peter comes to his rescue and on the left side, you can see Peter actually taking out his knife and slicing off the ear of one of the soldiers.

Beth: So we have a continuous narrative in both of those panels.

Steven: We do, especially since we see those trees sort of a second time—they are echoed in both scenes. But what's most interesting, I think, is if you go one more step up, you see a double height scene; this is the Crucifixion. Now, of course, the Crucifixion is incredibly important, and so, is given much more room. But those three trees, now, have become three crosses.



Duccio, Crucifixion, from Maestà (back), 1308-11, tempera on wood (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

Beth: So Duccio is thinking about ways that he can visually bring the scenes together, uniting formal elements between the panels.

Steven: Let's take a look at the first double panel. You might think about it the way that an illuminated manuscript will sometimes have a large opening capital letter.

Beth: It gives us the idea of where to begin.

Steven: That's right.



Duccio, Entry into Jerusalem, from Maestà (back), 1308-11, tempera on wood (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

Beth: This is the entry of Christ into Jerusalem, and we see Christ entering rather humbly into the gates of Jerusalem. And we can identify Christ because he's larger than the other figures and there's a halo.

Steven: He's riding in on a donkey. All the elements that are delineated in the Gospels are here. You have people in the trees, you have people laying down cloth before him and can see his apostles following behind him, and the people of the city literally pouring out of the gates.

Beth: In order to give us a sense of a real crowd coming to see Christ, you'll notice that there's actually a reverse perspective because the figures in the back are larger than the figures in the foreground and also higher, which would not be the case in correct perspective. But Duccio has given this wonderful impression of a real crowd of people present to see Christ and his followers entering Jerusalem.

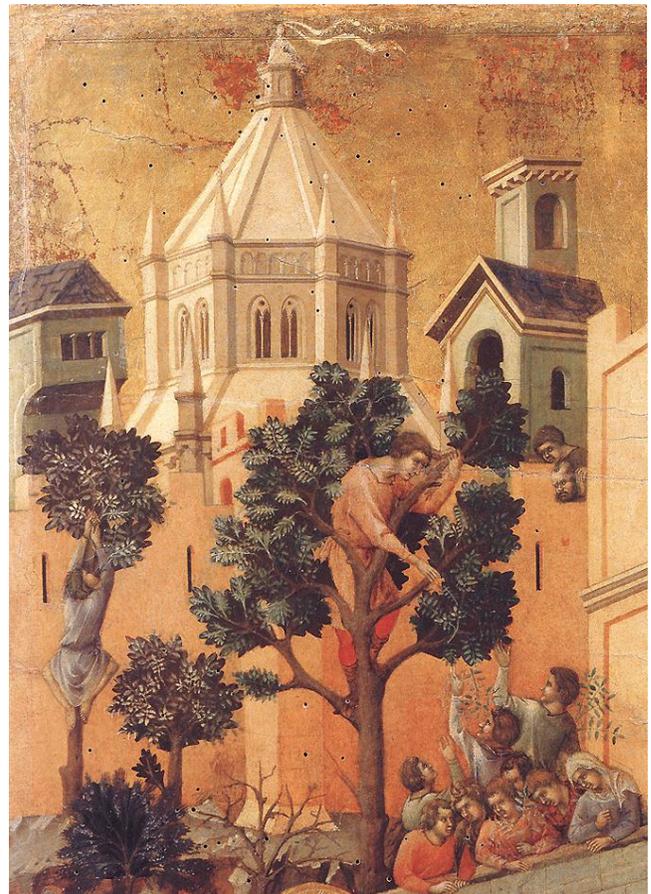
Steven: There does seem to be a love of architecture and the rendering of architecture, almost for its own sake. And look at those beautiful lancet windows.

Beth: And it's this interesting combination of architecture and a space for the figures to occupy, but then also this gold background that indicates the heavenly and the spiritual. So, this mixture of both.

Steven: You mention the gold background, and as you look across not just this panel, but all of the panels on the back of the *Maestà*—not to mention the panels on front of the *Maestà*—there is just an enormous amount of gold. It is literally a treasure, and one can only imagine what it would have looked like in the stark white and black marble space of the Siena Cathedral. Unfortunately, this

painting was taken off of the altar and was ultimately, in the 18th century, cut up for private purchase. This was a moment when the so-called "Italian primitives" became sought after by some collectors. The result is that we don't have all of the paintings in Siena, but many of them are scattered in museums around the world. There is one panel, for example, at the Frick Collection, and it would be lovely to understand these paintings in one place.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/w6Tgu14VSLY>>



Duccio, detail of *Entry into Jerusalem*, from *Maestà* (back), 1308-11, tempera on wood (Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena)

24.

Duccio, The Rucellai Madonna

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Duccio, *The Rucellai Madonna*, 1285-86, tempera on panel, 450 x 290 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iKoTst>>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in the Uffizi, Florence.

Steven: You know the Florentines get all the credit. And it's important to remember that there was another major city in the 1300s that was also in Tuscany, there was another independent republic—and this is the Republic of Siena, with

the capital city of Siena. And there was an enormously important and influential painter there whose name was Duccio. So let's look at one of his most important paintings, the Rucellai Madonna.

Beth: We're looking at a painting of the Madonna holding the Christ Child surrounded by three angels on either side. It's 12 feet high, so a very large painting of the Madonna.

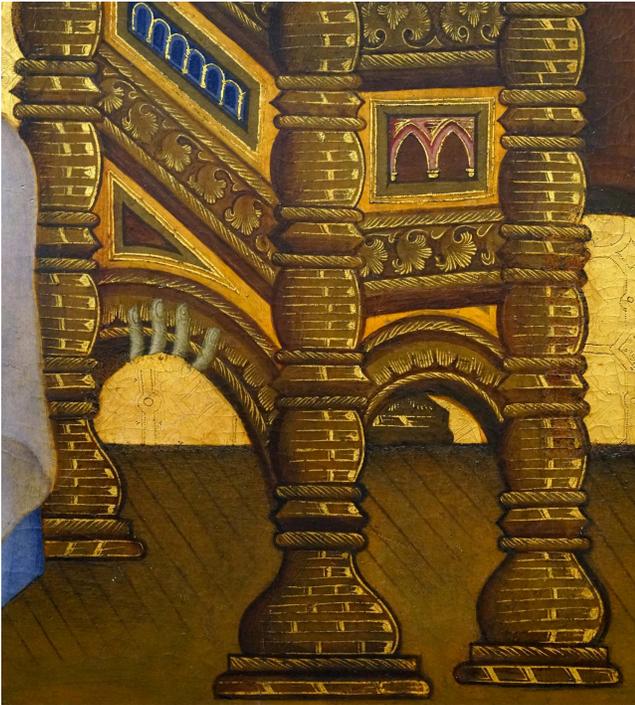
Steven: Yeah, it's a huge painting. In fact, the Virgin Mary herself is twice the height, if not larger, than a human being. It's an altarpiece that was meant to be seen at a great distance within a huge church.

Beth: And there's so many decorative patterns here: on the throne, in the spaces in between the posts that make up the throne...we see reds and blues. Then we've got more patterning in the drapery behind the throne.



Duccio, *The Rucellai Madonna*, detail, 1285-86, tempera on panel (Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: The characteristics that you're referencing are seen by our historians to be the definition of Sienese art of this time: highly decorative, highly patterned, and with a subtlety of color that we don't often see in the Florentine.



Duccio, *The Rucellai Madonna*, detail, 1285-86, tempera on panel (Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iKoTiF>>

Beth: First of all, Mary's whole body is in this lovely ultramarine blue, which was a very expensive paint. But the angels, you see purples, and greens, and pinks, and blues.

Steven: And they're subtle and prismatic in a way that we don't so much see in the flatter colors of the Florentine style.

Beth: It's hard to see that Mary's sitting in her throne. The throne itself is so flat.



Duccio, *The Rucellai Madonna*, detail, 1285-86, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iKoTxD>>

Steven: It's almost a background against which she's seen. There's so much detail and so much decorative patterning in the throne, especially in the cloth that drapes the throne, that its structure gets lost; pattern, of course, does emphasize the two dimensional. You know, when I look at Sienese art, and especially the Rucellai Madonna, I tend to think of an artist who is so in love with the ability to create beauty that pattern and form tend to trump the overall representation and the emphasis on any kind of naturalism or any physicality. For instance, look at the Byzantine-influenced hands of Mary. Look how long those fingers are. It's almost as if the artist has gotten lost in the length of those fingers as they wrap around Christ's waist.



Duccio, *The Rucellai Madonna*, detail, 1285-86, tempera on panel (Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iKoTLu>>



Duccio, *The Rucellai Madonna*, detail, 1285-86, tempera on panel (Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iKoT2t>>

Beth: They're very beautiful, those hands. I'm thinking also about the amount of gold here. We see the disappearance of all of that gold through the 1300s into the 1400s. Here, the painting's value is largely in that ultramarine paint—that was expensive—and in the use of gold. And what happens during the Renaissance is that the artist himself is valued, the artist's *skill* becomes more valued. Not that Duccio's skill wasn't valued, but the value was also heavily in the materials that were used that were often dictated by the patron.

Steven: Now, the ultramarine blue that you're referencing was actually made of the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli. And during the Renaissance, the only mines that were available for lapis were in Afghanistan, still a remote place for us in the 21st century. One can only imagine how exotic and rare and difficult importing from Afghanistan would have been in the 1200s.

Beth: And here we have an enormous quantity of that color being used.

Steven: So this is, in some ways, ostentatious. In some ways, this is a painting that is broadcasting its value, its wealth, its importance. What's so interesting is this was a commission for the main altar in Santa Maria Novella in Florence, although it's by a Sienese artist. And Santa Maria Novella is the main Dominican Church, that is, one of the mendicant orders, this order of begging monks, that had renounced worldly possessions. So there's this interesting kind of tension. We mentioned that this is called the Rucellai Madonna, and that's a later title. This painting was later moved away from the main altar in Santa Maria Novella and into the Rucellai Chapel—that is, the private chapel that was controlled by the Florentine family, the Rucellai.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/1JL5ZR-ocOs>>



Leon Battista Alberti, *Santa Maria Novella façade*, 1458-70, Florence (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/M9LEap>>

25.

Duccio, 'Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the National Gallery, London.



Duccio, Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea, c. 1315, tempera on wood, 61.4 x 39.3 cm (London, National Gallery) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Steven: We're in the National Gallery in London, and we're looking at a really rare painting, a painting by Duccio. There are very few in the world. This is the *Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea*. It's got at the top of it a little teeny image of King David.

Beth: From the Old Testament.

Steven: He is surrounded by Old Testament prophets, who are identified with their scrolls.

Beth: It's sort of standard iconography. And so you have the prophets who foretell the coming of Christ, and then below, we have a triptych so that when the wings are open, Mary and Christ are

revealed. So it's kind of wonderful in that you have the prophets at the top who are always there with King David, and then when the triptych is open, the revealing of the truth of their prophecy...

Steven: ...comes to be.

Beth: Right. And King David was thought to be, or understood to be, an ancestor of Christ.



Duccio, Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea, detail of David, c. 1315, tempera on wood (National Gallery, London).

Steven: He is wearing a blue that relates directly to the blue that Mary wears. There is a kind of intimacy here that is absolutely revolutionary and is the foundation of the Renaissance, later. Look at the way that the Christ Child looks up really adoringly at his mother.

Beth: He sort of grabs hold of her veil to make sure he sees her face.

Steven: And look at the delicacy of that veil. I think that's one of the most beautiful areas of this painting. The way in which he gathers her veil in one hand...

Beth: Yeah, it's very sweet.

Steven: He also pulls on it with the other. And it creates this very soft, kind of arc between them—this bridge. Duccio is a Siennese artist, and certainly Duccio's work is characterized by the sensitivity to the decorative, both in the subtlety of color but also in form. There's a kind of interest in the decorative for its own sake. And I think you really see that in the way that Christ pulls at the inner garment around Mary's neck and creates a series of really beautiful and rhythmic folds.

Beth: Yeah, and playful lines and curves that carry down around the golden hem of Christ's garment and Mary's garment.

Steven: You see it, also, in the rendering of Saint Aurea, who's a rare saint to be shown in paintings of this time—of *any* time. And also with Saint Dominic on the left as well. Both of those saints are so direct. They seem to be almost stepping out of the picture plane. There's a sense of truthfulness, of veracity almost, that seems so precocious for this moment.

Beth: I think when we look, overall, at the painting, at this little altarpiece that would have been a private altarpiece for private devotion that someone could carry around if they moved and wanted to have the ability to worship and pray—it's important to remember that this is an aid in prayer. But when we look at it, there's a real sense of the physical presence of the saints on either side, and of that emotional connection with Mary and her physical presence. So we're seeing the beginnings of this change to the Renaissance.



Duccio, *Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea*, detail, c. 1315, tempera on wood, 61.4 x 39.3 cm (London, National Gallery) (photo: Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/FJQiy0>>

Steven: It's so interesting that Duccio is creating these connections which will lay the foundation for the Renaissance, which will come a century later. But at the same time, this is so firmly rooted, also, in the medieval tradition. And we're never very far from that. Not only do we have these broad gold fields, which are really representation of the divine light of heaven, there's no rational relationship between the figures, in terms of scale. And then, of course, there's that strong Byzantine influence still in the elongation of the nose—look at Mary—and of her fingers, even as Duccio begins to explore the possibility of creating a more intimate—and, I think, emotionally charged—rendering.

Watch the video. <youtu.be/Pu1WCHsYfKQ>



Duccio, Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea, detail, c. 1315, tempera on wood, 61.4 x 39.3 cm (London, National Gallery) (photo: Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/FJQiy0>>

26.

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Allegory and Effects of Good and Bad Government

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.



View of the Palazzo Pubblico from across the Campo, Siena (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/dG82zX>>

Steven: We're in the Palazzo Pubblico, or town hall, in Siena.

Beth: Remember that Siena was a city state—it was its own country. It had its own government. We think about Italy as a unified country, but back in the 14th century, Italy was divided into city

states, and Siena was one. It was a very proud republic.

Steven: It was very wealthy through manufacturing and banking primarily. In fact, well into the 14th century, the city was known as the “Bankers to the Papacy.” And in addition, the city gained a tremendous amount of wealth because it was on the road between France and Rome, and so anybody who was going on a pilgrimage, would stop here and, of course, the city would enjoy the benefits of that tourist trade. There were two main centers of power in the commune that was Siena. That was the church and that's exemplified by the Duomo (Cathedral) at the top of the hill, and then down here, just at the bottom of the field or what is known as the “campo”, sits the Palazzo Pubblico. In one of the main meeting rooms, where the rulers of the city, “the Nine,” met we have an extraordinary series of frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

Beth: And those are meant to remind the rulers of the city their responsibilities to be good and just.

Steven: And the dangers of not doing. So let's describe for a moment the room itself. On one wall, there is a set of windows, but on the other three, major frescoes by Lorenzetti. Opposite the windows is the *Allegory of Good Government*. To the right of that is the *Effects of Good Government in the City and the Country* and then opposite that is what happens when tyrants take over.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, frescoes, c. 1337 or 1338-40, Sala della Pace (Hall of Peace) also known as the Sala dei Nove (the Hall of the Nine), 7.7 x 14.4 m, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/dGdrjw>>

Beth: Oh—and it’s ugly.

Steven: Very bad. So let’s start with the *Allegory of Good Government*.

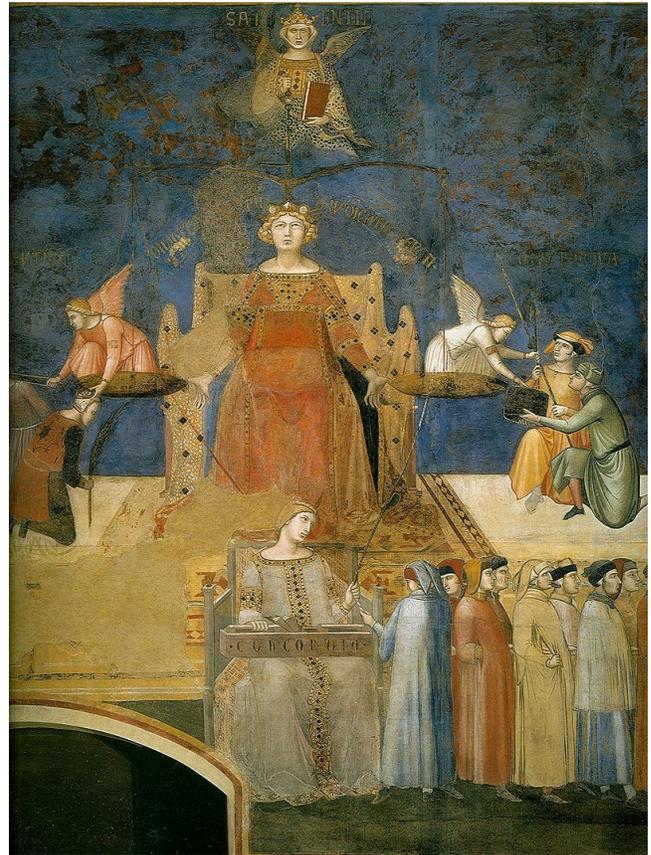
Beth: And allegory means “figures that stand in for ideas.” We might want to note first that the door where the Nine would enter is right beneath the personification of Justice, who sits looking up to another figure who personifies Wisdom. Justice is doing just that; she’s meting out Justice. In her hands, she’s got scales with an angel on either side. On her left, she metes out justice in the form of a reward, and on the right, as punishment.

Steven: And that is quite the punishment; an angel in the right scale is actually cutting the head off somebody who clearly was guilty.

Beth: But it’s important that she looks up to Wisdom.

Steven: Now you’ll notice that there is a small cord that goes from each of those scales down to a seated figure who has, in her lap, a plane...that is, the kind of tool that a carpenter would use to smooth rough spots, or in this case, to create a certain degree of equality among the different levels of society. That plane has the words “Concordia” written on it, and it’s just at about that point that those two cords from the angels in the scales come together and are handed to the figure in a blue robe. That cord then winds its way through all of the figures who are standing

at the bottom; figures that are meant to represent the people of Siena. They are all held in line, held in check by these cords that come from Justice herself. If we move to the head of that line, we can see the cord rises, and it’s held by the largest figure. That is the personification of the Good Commune.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Justice*, from the *Allegory of Good Government*, detail, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

Beth: This figure is surrounded by various Virtues.

Steven: On the left you can see Peace. In fact the hall in which we stand is called “The Hall of Peace,” named after her.

Beth: She’s reclining. She’s relaxed. It’s almost as if everything else was working, if all of these other figures—Justice, Concord, Fortitude, Prudence—if they’re all working, there’s Peace, and there’s nothing much for her to do.

Steven: She relaxes, by the way, on a cushion, but if you look under the cushion, you can see black forms. That is meant to be armor. Originally it would have been silver, but it's oxidized over time. So she's taken off her armor and she can now relax. As you said, if all of these allegorical figures are doing their job, then the city is at peace. Prosperity can reign, and there is a very clear image of that in the fresco on the right. This is the *Effects of Good Government in the City and in the Country*.

Beth: And we see the walls of the city of Siena.

Steven: We should caution that probably the first few feet on the left are a restoration and are not by Ambrogio. This is one of the most ambitious, perhaps the largest landscape and cityscape certainly, that existed in the medieval era...I can't even think of a Renaissance painting that is more ambitious than this.

Beth: And its subject is secular; it's not a biblical scene. That's important at this time when the vast majority of art made would have been biblical.

Steven: So let's take a look at the cityscape. What we have is a place where commerce can flourish, where there is plenty, where there is no privation, where there is justice and art and culture. We have a kind of utopia, and it's remarkable because if you think about the history of Paradise and the way that it's represented, Paradise is always seen in nature. Yet here we have the earliest example that I can think of where Paradise exists in an urban context. That is, where man is in control of his society and can actually produce through careful governing an environment where humanity can flourish. I love architecture, and it's pretty clear that Ambrogio loved architecture, too.

Beth: He did, and it's really packed with people. It feels bustling, like a city where the citizens are engaged in commerce and are well-to-do. We see something that looks like a hosiery shop with people selling boots and socks.

Steven: In the foreground, probably the largest group of figures, are a group of women dancing in wonderfully elaborate costume. This is clearly symbolic.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of Good Government in the City, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena*

Beth: So this is likely some allegory about the peace and prosperity that comes from good government.

Steven: What I love is the fact that the city is open to our gaze. You can look into all these shop windows. You can see a lecture, perhaps a school with somebody at a lectern and students listening actively.

Beth: And a place where you can buy ham and meat next door, too.

Steven: There are people going about their daily activities. If we look up, we can see faces in some of the windows. In my favorite passage, you can actually see construction workers who are actively building the city.

Beth: I love this idea that the leaders of Siena would be able to look at this and see, “If I do my job right, this is what my city will be.”



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of Good Government in the City and in the Country*, detail of construction, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

Steven: That was taken so seriously, you know, the Nine were only allowed to be in office for two months because there was such a fear of corruption. So every two months, each of the members of the city council would be exchanged for another member of the aristocracy.

Beth: So let's look at the *Effect of Good Government in the Country*. This looks like the landscape around Siena. There's a real sense of the observation of the natural world which is so unusual and new for this time.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of Good Government in the Country*, detail, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

Steven: And if you look carefully, you can see some figures on horseback that are just leaving the city. These are obviously wealthy aristocracy. In fact, one holds a falcon. They're going out hunting. As you go a little further, you can see a peasant who is walking into the city with a pig, clearly bringing that pig to market. There are donkeys that are bringing grain from the fields. In the distance, there is a kind of combination of both the season of spring and the season of summer. We see both the sowing of the fields and harvesting going on.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of Good Government in the Country*, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

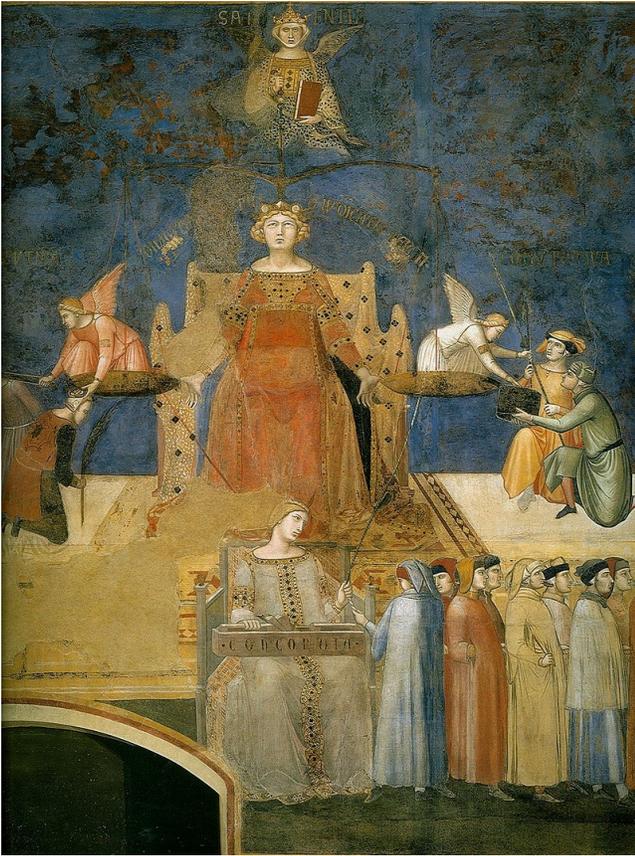
Steven: So when you're looking at the allegory of good government, to your right is the *Effects of Good Government in the City and in the Country*. But opposite that is *Bad Government*. That's on the left wall, so you have this notion of right—of justice, of the good—and the left—of evil, of having gone astray. The main figure that is in opposition to Justice, if you look carefully, looks just like a devil with horns, fangs, but in back of that male figure, is the word "Tyranny," and so we have Justice and Tyranny who are in opposition. Tyranny is surrounded not by Virtues, but by Vices, and you can see for instance Avarice, Vainglory...

Beth: Down below is a bound figure, and here we see sadly Justice, who is no longer ruling the city. This fresco is in very poor condition, but we can just make out a series of criminal acts. All of this is enclosed within an architecture that is the architecture of war. We can see a crenellated wall that speaks of defense and attack.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of Bad Government in the City*, detail, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/dG83hV>>

Steven: Beyond the allegorical figures, we can see a city, but this is not a city that is still being built. This is a city that's being destroyed. The walls have holes. The windows have been broken and there's a sense of fear among the citizenry.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Justice*, from the *Allegory of Good Government*, detail, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

Beth: In fact, I see below a woman being carried off by two men in a very menacing scene, and below them, a fallen wounded figure.

Steven: To the left of the city, we see fields, but these fields have been burned. We can see the flames of houses on fire, and it is a place of want, of neglect and of fear. In fact, the word “terror” rides over the landscape. So this room becomes a very clear message, both a promise and a threat, to the government of Siena. It is an extraordinary expression of the way in which morality can be portrayed in the most direct sense in the place that it’s needed most.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Effects of Bad Government in the Country*, detail, c. 1337-40, fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

Beth: What’s really interesting to me is that when we walk to the center of this room and look through a doorway, we see Simone Martini’s *Maestà of the Virgin* based on Duccio’s *Maesta*, which is in the cathedral.

Steven: So the Virgin Mary, reigning queen of Siena, taking her place beside the allegorical symbol of Justice—both seated, both enthroned.

Beth: And this idea that the Virgin favors Siena, and in favoring Siena, has given it a Republic that the government of Siena must now protect.

Watch the video.

<<https://youtu.be/jk3wNadYA7kA>>



Simone Martini, *Maesta*, c. 1315-16, fresco, in the Sala del Mappamondo of the Palazzo Public, Siena (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/dGdrYq>>

27.

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 'Presentation of Jesus in the Temple'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker



Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Presentation at the Temple*, 1342, tempera and gold on panel, 257 x 168 cm (Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iMi85e>>

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Uffizi, Florence.

Steven: We're in the Uffizi in Florence, and we're looking at Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Presentation in the Temple*. Now, Ambrogio Lorenzetti was one

of two brothers, the other was Pietro Lorenzetti, and they were both students of the great early Sienese master Duccio. This is one of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's most important paintings. It tells the story early in the New Testament narrative of Christ's being brought to the temple to be circumcised. This is the moment when Simeon is presenting Christ to the temple and Anna, the seer, is recognizing Christ as the Redeemer, and points him out.

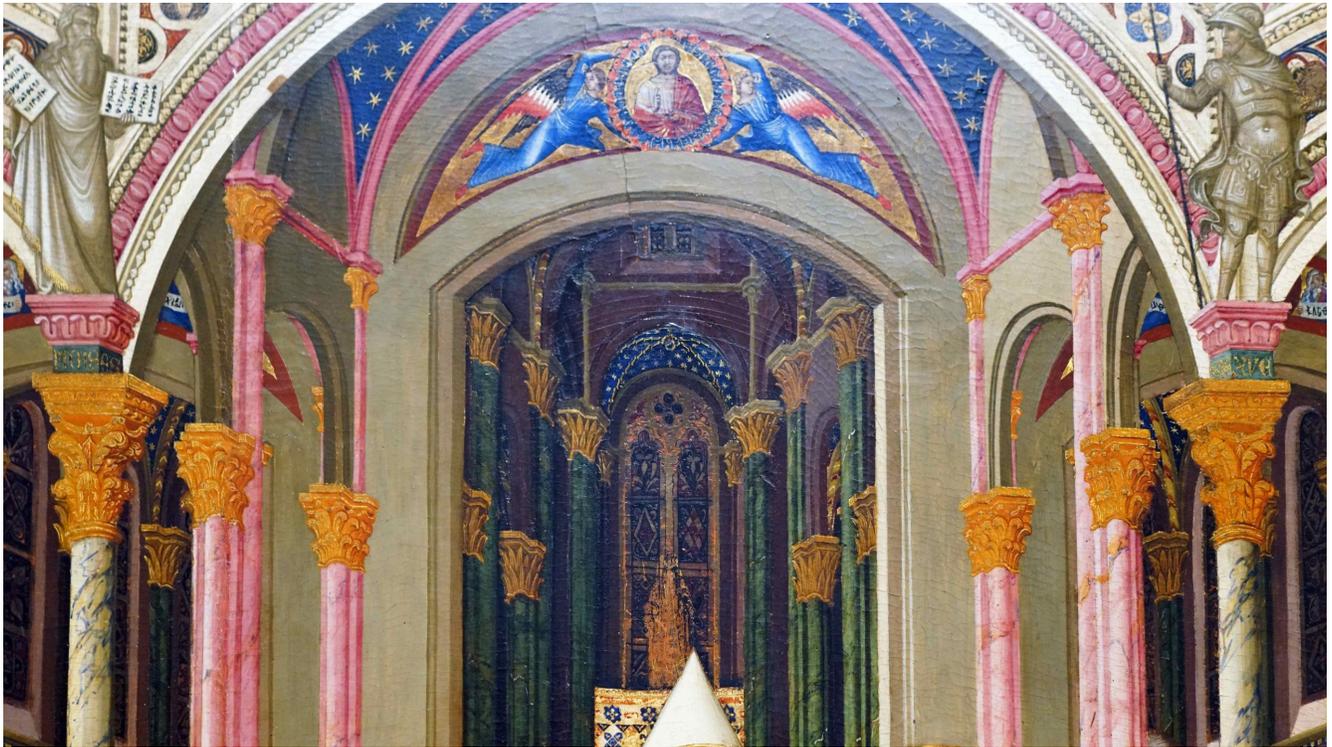


Detail, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Presentation at the Temple*, 1342, tempera and gold on panel (Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: What I find so interesting is that whereas Christ is so often represented as all-knowing, even as an infant, here he really looks like an infant.

Beth: He's putting his fingers in his mouth.

Steven: It's hard to miss the beautiful emphasis on architecture. This is something that Ambrogio Lorenzetti often emphasizes. Look at the Gothic characteristics of this church.



Detail of architecture, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Presentation at the Temple, 1342, tempera and gold on panel (Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: This panel was originally intended for the Duomo in Siena, and so it would itself have been in this great Gothic environment. Look at the way in which we look back towards the apse through this nave. There's all this fabulous emphasis on these vaguely Corinthian columns and lots of paint on the ceiling. For instance, we can see a Christ in a mandorla with angels; we can see ribbed vaults, which actually have painted gold stars against a blue ground, very much like we would expect to see in a 14th-century church.

Beth: And we have an illusion of space. If we look down at the floor, we see diagonal lines that appear to recede into space, although this is not correct use of linear perspective.

Steven: It's not, but it is an attempt to create a

sense of recession. Just look at the capitals and the way they allow our eye to move back slowly but deliberately into space, as one space opens up into another. There is mystery and drama, and what's so interesting is that we see this wonderful trans-historical representation of Christ—this ancient figure—in a modern, Gothic environment, wonderfully eliding the past the present.

Beth: So in some way it would have made a Sienese person in the 1300s really be able to relate to what was going on here.

Steven: I think that that's right—making this ancient scene immediate.

Watch the video. <https://youtu.be/_lzdHHLwcQ>

28.

Pietro Lorenzetti, 'Birth of the Virgin'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.



Pietro Lorenzetti, Birth of the Virgin, c. 1342, tempera on panel, 6' 1" x 5' 11", for the altar of St. Savinus, Siena Cathedral (now in Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena)

Steven: We're in the museum of the Cathedral of Siena, and we're looking at one of the great Sienese's artist Pietro Lorenzetti's *Birth of the Virgin*. This is painted by a man who was the student of Duccio, the great Sienese master. Some scholars think that Pietro helped Duccio paint the *Maestà*.

Beth: There's a lot of paintings in the *Maestà*, I hoped someone helped him.

Steven: That's true. This is a painting that would have functioned as a secondary altarpiece in the Siena Cathedral. It is a three-part painting, it actually shows one continuous space.

Beth: Well then, let's remember that the Virgin Mary was the protector of the city of Siena.

Steven: This is about the birth of the Virgin, not the birth of Christ, but the birth of Mary herself. In the central scene, we have this beautiful medieval interior. I have to say that the Sienese pay attention in the 14th century to architecture in a way that nobody else does. There is a love of the rendering of space and furnishings.

Beth: We have the vaulting in the ceiling, the windows, the painted moldings, the tiles on the floor, the chest next to Anne's bed. We almost get a sense of what it was like in a household in 14th-century Siena.

Steven: It's true, even the fact that a bedroom was kind of public space; you can see Anne reclining on the bed, she's got a real sense of mass and volume. The bed doesn't look all that comfortable, it doesn't seem to be yielding to her.

Beth: No.

Steven: But the body does seem to be under that drapery in a most emphatic way.

Beth: I think Pietro has Giotto, because his figures are really bulky and three dimensional.

Steven: Of course Duccio, his master, was already moving towards a sense of mass and volume using chiaroscuro, but perhaps not as emphatically as Giotto had.

Beth: She's just big and chubby the way that Giotto's figures are.

Steven: Right, almost like the Ognissanti Madonna.

Beth: Exactly.

Steven: Yeah, but if you look at the attendants who are washing Mary in the basin, they're pretty substantial. The figure in green on the right looks like she could have come right out of the Lamentation from the Arena Chapel. There are more attendants coming in with fresh cloths, it looks like, on the right and fresh water.



Pietro Lorenzetti, Birth of the Virgin, detail, c. 1342, tempera on panel (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena)

Beth: The two scenes on the right are unified in their architecture, although, Anne is separated out with the mother of Mary.

Steven: In the left panel we see a room outside, where it seems as if Joachim, Anne's husband, is being told that the birth is taking place.

Beth: I love his face. He's like an expectant father who's been worried about what's going on and is

now anxious to hear. The view outside must be Siena. As we walked around the streets of the city I can recognize buildings that looked like this.

Steven: Of course, it's important to remember that the architecture that we're seeing is 12th and 13th century, and of course that's 1200 and 1300 years after this event would have taken place, so it's completely out of chronology. I think the point was to create something that was familiar, something that the Sienese audience would recognize. I'm also taken with the attempt by Pietro Lorenzetti to create a sense of recession. Not only do you have an interior space that is architecturally detailed, but if you look at the vaulting, for example, you can see where the ribs in the vaulting come together in the central panel and the panels on the right and the left they're obscured, as they would be if we were looking at those ceilings. This is not linear perspective, but there is a real attention to the basic tenets of seeing space and rendering it on a two-dimensional surface. That's also really evident in the bedspread.

Beth: So there are diagonal lines that appear to be receding into space in the bedspread.

Steven: Right, but I bet if we lined them up with a pencil we would not reach a single vanishing point.

Beth: No.

Steven: Right, so it's not linear perspective. There is a real sensitivity and a real attempt to create a sense of space. I think the Sienese were doing just amazing things in the 14th Century.

Beth: So often we pay attention to Florence and maybe we don't give Siena quite as much attention as we should.

Watch the video.

<https://youtu.be/Z29bpAW1AUM?>>

29.

Simone Martini, 'Annunciation'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at the Uffizi, Florence.



Simone Martini (and Lippo Memmi), Annunciation, 1333, tempera on panel, 184 x 210 cm, for the altar of St. Ansanus in the transept of Siena Cathedral (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iTotb5>>

Steven: One of the great masters of the 14th century was Simone Martini, and the *Annunciation* is his most famous painting.

Beth: This is the moment when the angel, Gabriel, has come to announce to Mary that she will conceive the Christ Child.

Steven: That announcement is literally taking place.

Beth: We can see the angel's announcement to

Mary quite literally coming out of his mouth, left to right.

Steven: As if it were a speech bubble.

Beth: In Latin, it reads "Hail, Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women."

Steven: It is the most elegant and beautiful painting. It makes so much sense that this was a student of Duccio in the Sienese style. We see that kind of attention to decorative pattern and detail and subtle color and a kind of elegance. Look, for example, at Gabriel's wings and the fluidity and delicacy there, or especially, of the drape that whips around as if he's just landed.



Simone Martini (and Lippo Memmi), Annunciation, detail, 1333, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iTotGF>>



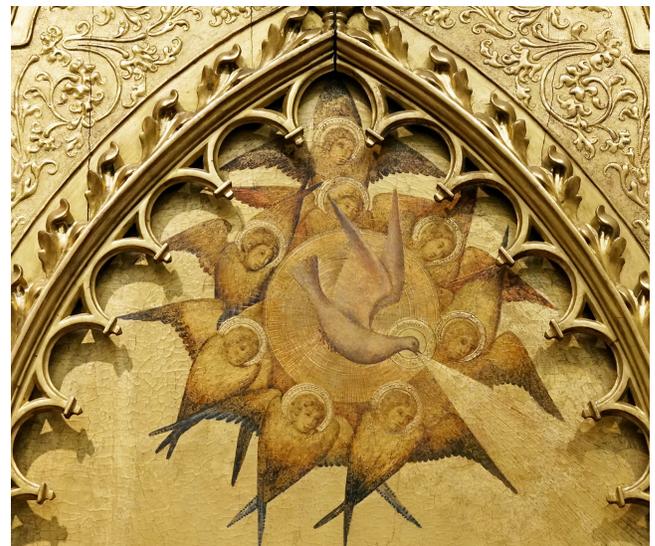
Simone Martini (and Lippo Memmi), *Annunciation*, detail, 1333, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iTou3A>>

Beth: It's really like the artist is just enjoying those beautiful sinuous lines, which I think of as also very characteristic of the Sienese style. In the middle of this very shallow space that Simone Martini has created, we see a vase with lilies, which are symbols of Mary's virginity. We do have a bit of a space here, but we still have that large gold expanse behind the figures and Mary, who's very thin and elongated.

Steven: In addition to the vase of lilies—which is a standard symbol in the Annunciation—we see Gabriel holding a branch of olive leaves, which is a symbol of Christ, of the coming of the Prince of Peace. And of course, an olive branch is a traditional symbol that refers back to the story of Noah and the dove returning with an olive branch, speaking of the kind of covenant of peace with God.

Beth: We also see in the triangular space above and between Mary and the angel Gabriel, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove surrounded by

seraphim—by angels—and rays of golden light that emerge from that haloed dove and move toward Mary.



Simone Martini (and Lippo Memmi), *Annunciation*, detail, 1333, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Steven: They actually emerge from the open beak of the dove as if the Holy Spirit is speaking this grace, speaking this divinity. It echoes, of course, the fact that Gabriel the archangel is also speaking to Mary.

Beth: Mary is turning away. If you look at it, the line from the dove to Mary and from the angel's words to Mary form two sides of a triangle that meet at Mary, and that she—with her body and her face—kind of pulls away from being the center of this attention.

Steven: So this is modesty that is represented: that Mary is a slightly unwilling vessel for God. She's been interrupted. You can see her fingers still holding a place in the Bible which she has been piously reading just as Gabriel has arrived.

Beth: We have a kind of sense of time unfolding here, that Mary is about to—but has not yet said—"Behold the handmaiden of the Lord." She hasn't yet accepted her destiny as the mother of God.

Steven: This is a really interesting issue then because on the one hand, there is the momentary, but at the same time, the artist is creating a perfect

moment that is absolute and eternal. How do you imbue a painting both with the full dignity and grace of the spiritual moment and at the same moment, speak to that human experience?

Beth: I think it was very important to be able to imagine what this moment was like. The sense that it has of the momentary and of Mary's emotional reaction helps us to imagine what this moment must have felt like for her.

Steven: A couple of cautions about this painting. The frame, which is wildly elaborate, is not original. In fact, it's a 19th-century frame—that is, it's a much more modern representation of the kind of frame that might have originally been around it, but I don't think we know what that was. In addition, the two saints that flank the main panel would probably not have been immediately adjacent to it. So: just a couple of cautions in terms of how this painting has changed over time.

Beth: Always a good thing to remember when you're in a museum looking at works of art that are 800 years old!

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/7PsgPJoGWig>>



Simone Martini (and Lippo Memmi), *Annunciation*, gallery view, 1333, tempera on panel (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/2iTmUyH>>

IV

Pisa, Pistoia, and Rome

30.

Nicola Pisano, Pulpit, Pisa Baptistery, and Giovanni Pisano, Pulpit, Sant'Andrea church, Pistoia

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. David Drogin

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted in Pisa.



Baptistry, Cathedral and Leaning Tower of Pisa (L to R)
(photo: Tracey Hind, CC BY-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/22LAQGQ>>

David: We're looking at the Baptistery in Pisa, a building that was begun in the mid 12th century. It's in a very famous location that perhaps people have seen...

Beth: It's where the Leaning Tower of Pisa is.

David: That's right. The "Leaning Tower of Pisa," as it's known, is actually the Bell Tower of the Cathedral. This building, the Baptistery, is in front of the Cathedral. Usually, this is how the buildings were arranged in these late medieval Italian cities: the Cathedral with the Baptistery in front of it as a kind of religious and civic center of the city.

Beth: We see that in cities like Florence, too.

David: That's right. You see the same kind of arrangement there. Baptistries were especially important buildings. Of course, it was where baptisms would be performed. That had a great, great importance in these cities which were dominated by their Christian faith and practices because it was a place where essentially the individual, through baptism, was welcomed into the Christian community of that city.



Baptistry, Pisa (photo: arsheffield, CC BY-NC 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/88XHVM>>

Beth: So it makes sense that this is a place that the city government would want to decorate.

David: They were usually very richly decorated places and the focus of a lot of patronage and attention because of their importance in cities of this type.

Beth: Cool, so let's go inside. We're in the Middle Ages when we're thinking about the architecture, right?



Nicola Pisano, Pulpit, Pisa Baptistery, 1260 (photo: exfordyswife, CC BY 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/5bnfgC>>

David: Well, inside we're seeing something that's leading to a great transition—that's relatively revolutionary, in fact. That's when we look at this structure here, which is inside the Baptistery. This is the Pulpit by Nicola Pisano in the Pisa Baptistery, which was finished by about 1260.

Beth: A pulpit would be a place where the priest would stand to deliver sermons.

David: That's right. They would climb up and these reliefs here are essentially a low wall. Then this eagle supports a little stand where a book or other writings could be placed and the preacher would speak from it.

Beth: So everyone could see him and everyone could hear him.

David: We see these multicolored columns with capitals. Above the capitals are these figures of virtues. Then above those are historiated reliefs, showing narratives from the life of Christ. Those reliefs are separated by small columnettes. What I'd like to draw our attention to is this very interesting figure of Fortitude.

Beth: This is one of the virtues...



Nicola Pisano, Pulpit, detail, Pisa Baptistery, 1260 (photo: Miguel Hermoso Cuesta, CC BY-SA 4.0)

David: One of the virtues on top of the capital, below the reliefs. Fortitude means strength. Here, we see a figure, an allegorical figure, representing the virtue of strength, of fortitude; this figure is interesting and brings about a change, points in a new direction.

Beth: It really doesn't look like a medieval sculpture anymore.

David: No. It's not very Romanesque looking. As we'll see, it's definitely not very Gothic looking either. What it is, though, is extremely influenced by Classical antiquity both in terms of how it looks, but also in terms of what it means. Of course a muscular athletic figure makes sense as a representation of fortitude. We can go even further in terms of who this figure is because as you can see, there's a lion's skin wrapped around his left arm and a lion cub that he holds on top of his right shoulder. That helps us identify this nude, athletic, muscular figure as, in fact, Hercules, or Heracles, the Greek and Roman mythological half deity who is famous for his strength.

Beth: He's both Classical looking and a Classical figure and a Christian virtue, all at the same time.

David: That's right. It's a Christian virtue of fortitude as personified by the Classical figure of Hercules, therefore it has this Classical meaning. As you said, it also looks very, very Classicizing.

Beth: Incredibly so.

David: Perhaps we can best see that by comparing it to an actual Classical sculpture. Here we're looking at the figure of Fortitude by Nicola Pisano, compared to Diadumenos, a Classical figure probably by Polykleitos, a marble version of it. What you can see are the ways that obviously Nicola Pisano was emulating, copying, influenced by, the Classical sculpture from centuries before.

Beth: It's remarkable. They both stand in contrapposto.



Fragments of a marble statue of the Diadumenos (youth tying a fillet around his head), c. A.D. 69–96, copy of work attributed to Polykleitos (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Beth: It's remarkable. They both stand in contrapposto.

David: That's right.

Beth: So they both look very relaxed and very natural in their pose. There's a lot of attention to human anatomy, to the muscles of the body, to a kind of naturalism of the body.

David: That's right. The body kind of twists. It looks in different directions. The hips shift. The shoulders shift. It's relatively naturalistic in attention to the musculature and the way a body stands. Also, think about how Nicola Pisano's figure, though attached to the pulpit, exists really freely of it.

Beth: He looks like he could walk away from it.



Nicola Pisano, Pulpit, Pisa Baptistery, 1260 (photo: Richard Mortel, CC BY 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/deArTw>>

David: Exactly. What we're seeing here is this very, very Classical looking figure and it's also a Classical figure in terms of its subject matter—it does represent Hercules. This is pretty important because throughout the Middle Ages up until this point, occasionally you would see figures that looked sometimes Classically influenced. But usually their meaning was very far removed from any kind of Classical meaning. Here, for one of the first times in this period, we're seeing a kind of reconnection of Classical form and Classical content—even though, as we said, ultimately, it's representing a Christian virtue on a very Christian structure inside an extremely Christian building. What we're seeing is an increasing interest in a kind of influence and a kind of rediscovery of Classical antiquity in various ways.

Beth: Yeah, that's so obvious. Let's compare it to a medieval sculpture to make that point—an example of Gothic sculpture.

David: Here's some Gothic sculpture. This is from the west portal at Chartres Cathedral, which is begun in the mid 12th century—around the same time that the Pisa Baptistery was being built, these figures were being carved, so a little bit earlier than Nicola Pisano's Pulpit.

Beth: And far away, in Paris!



Central portal jamb figures (right), Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres, France, c.1145 and 1194-c.1220 (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/TGAGJe>>

David: Far away, too, but what we're showing here is very different schools of sculpture around the same general time. You can see that the Gothic style, as you may know, is really characterized by very stiff, elongated, stylized figures, purposefully distant from any kind of naturalism, with the repeating folds of the drapery, the unindividualized faces, the repeating gestures. Here are figures that do not really exist autonomously from their background. Their proportions and their appearance are really dictated by the Gothic structure that they decorate.

Beth: Look at their feet. There's no way that they could stand.

David: They don't seem to really be standing. They don't seem to interact with any kind of psychological verity with the world around them.

Beth: No contrapposto.

David: No contrapposto. So again, compared to Nicola Pisano's figure, they're really a world away. You can see how he's moving very strongly away from that kind of Gothic tradition and other medieval Romanesque traditions as well.



Nicola Pisano, Pulpit, Pisa Baptistery, 1260 (photo: Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 3.0)

David: Here's a view of the upper part of the Pulpit, the same one, so we can see our friend, Fortitude, down below. Then above, as we said, are these reliefs that represent stories or moments from the life and death of Christ. In this particular scene that we see above and to the right of Fortitude is the Adoration of the Magi, which shows the three kings coming to visit the newly born Christ and the Virgin Mary, who sits in a chair. What you can see is that this Classicizing aesthetic that's moving away from more Romanesque and Gothic styles is evident in these reliefs as well.

Beth: Absolutely.

David: Monumental, heavy figures with...

Beth:big folds of drapery.

David: Very heavy, somewhat naturalistic folds of drapery.

Beth: Very different than those lines of the drapery in the Gothic.

David: There's a little bit of repetition. There's some stylization, certainly, to be found. What we can see is that it's definitely moving away from that and heavily influenced by Classical antiquity. This is relevant to the Pisans, the people who would be using and seeing this object when it was originally built.



Nicola Pisano, Pulpit, detail, Pisa Baptistery, 1260 (photo: José Luiz, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Beth: How so?

David: Because their city actually has a very strong Classical heritage. Pisa was founded by ancient Romans; the medieval Pisans, they knew that. The heritage of that Classical antiquity surrounded them everywhere they looked. There were lots of remnants of Classical sculpture around them, like this sarcophagus, or carved tomb, which was—and still is—in Pisa.



Sarcophagus with scenes of Hippolytus and Phaedra, c. 180 AD, marble, Camposanto, Pisa

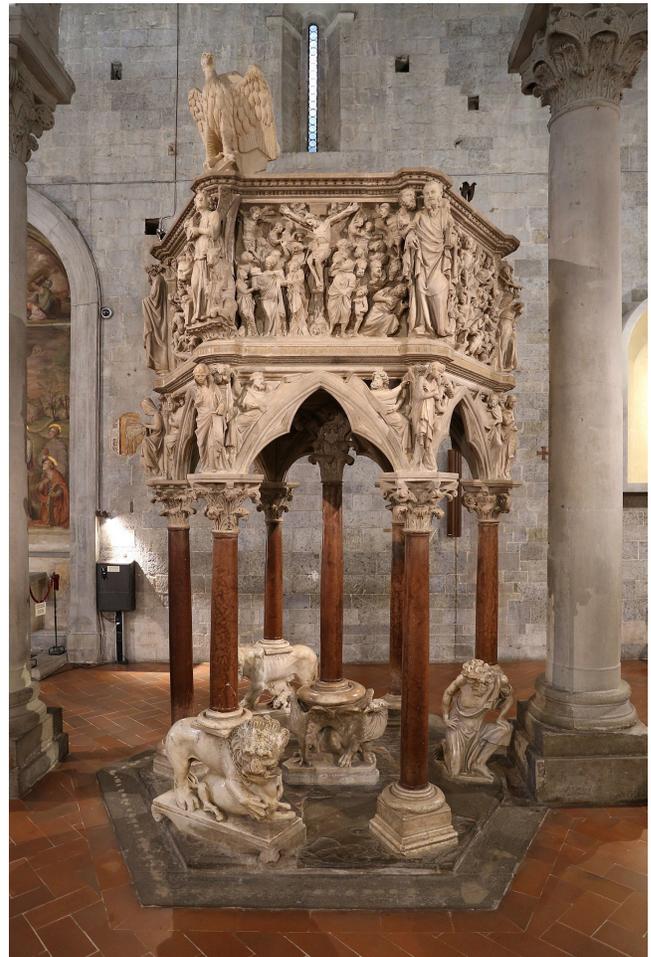
David: There were many, many fragments and pieces like this, some of which were actually incorporated into the medieval walls and buildings of the city, so there really was this sense that Classical antiquity made up the fabric and the identity of Pisa itself.

Beth: Still, it had been sort of neglected for a long time and is being, now, rediscovered.

David: But now they're feeling like they can reconnect with that Classical heritage and identity. This particular sarcophagus is important because it shows, especially related to the reliefs that we just looked at, how the figures are quite large. They fill up the height of the relief completely, just like in Nicola Pisano's reliefs later on. The standing male nude figure looks very, very much like the figure of Fortitude, so might have been the influence for that figure. To the left, we see a seated female figure who, although she's seated, takes up the whole height of the relief in exactly the same way that the Virgin Mary does in the Adoration of the Magi we looked at a second ago. This might be the very example that Nicola Pisano might have looked at and it is very nearby, in a cemetery called the Camposanto, which is just a few yards away from the Baptistry. We can really see that Classical influence in action. Nicola Pisano—his last name means “the Pisan,” but he's not actually from Pisa. He's probably from southern Italy, maybe connected to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, who in his patronage and interests was revitalizing a Classical revival. Perhaps the artist influenced by that in his origins comes to Pisa, finds a city that's rich in Classical heritage—a people that are open to these new kinds of connections—and from there, these changes start blossoming.

Beth: Makes sense.

David: Now, Nicola has a son named Giovanni. They worked together on several projects. Then around 1300, Giovanni Pisano starts his own workshop and his own independent projects.



Giovanni Pisano, Pulpit, 1301, Sant'Andrea church, Pistoia (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

David: This is one of them. This is the Pulpit from the Church of Sant'Andrea in Pistoia, which is dated to 1301. This is by Giovanni Pisano. You can see the structure is essentially the same. There's colored marble columns with capitals and allegorical figures on top of the capitals below reliefs that make up the low walls of the pulpit itself. One difference you can see right away is that the corners that separate the reliefs are no longer small columns, but rather figures. What this does is give a greater sense of continuity and connection between the individual reliefs as opposed to them being very distinctly separated by the frames that we saw in his father's example from 40 years before.

Beth: Where there were attached columns.



Giovanni Pisano, Pulpit, detail of Massacre of Innocents, 1301, Sant'Andrea church, Pistoia (photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0)

David: I want to look at one specific thing in this Pulpit, which is the relief that we see here on top, of the Massacre of the Innocents. This tells a story from the New Testament where Herod orders that all the newly born male children in Bethlehem be executed because he's heard that Christ has been born and is this new leader who's going to bring great changes that he doesn't want, so, according to the text, he orders the execution. What we are looking at here is this really emotional, disturbing scene of Roman soldiers slaughtering children.

Beth: And mothers.

David: Their mothers trying to—as we see here—protect them, or else mourning over their dead bodies.

Beth: Or averting their glances.

David: Averting their eyes, running away. Soldiers with knives in their hands actually executing infants. Women covering their faces. There's Herod giving the order. Now, in some ways

Giovanni Pisano's sculpture is connected to that of his father. There's this naturalism that we saw developing earlier on. There's Classicism, especially in some of the other areas of the Pulpit. But what makes Giovanni Pisano's sculpture of the early 1300s more distinct is obviously his great interest in communicating emotions—a kind of vibrant, expressionistic representation of the feelings that communicates the horrifying scene that we're looking at. It really connects with the viewer.

Beth: Through their gestures, their facial expressions.

David: Exactly. Those are the keys for him and other artists throughout this period, using gestures and facial expressions to tell a story as powerfully as possible.

Beth: Of course, this is another sign of moving away from the Middle Ages, from those Gothic, expressionless faces.

David: Especially in terms of marrying those kinds of expressions, that kind of emotion, with naturalism, because sometimes in Gothic art, you do see things that are very graphic or violent looking, but also very stylized. At Pistoia, we have a kind of naturalistic representation that's naturalistic in terms of the physical appearance and also naturalistic in terms of the psychological expressiveness. What's interesting is to think that this is happening in the first years of the 1300s, exactly at the same time that Giotto is doing the very same thing in painting.

Watch the video. <<https://youtu.be/DXEG8l1FRRk>>

31.

Pietro Cavallini, 'The Last Judgment'

A conversation

Dr. Beth Harris and Dr. Steven Zucker

This is the transcript of a conversation conducted at Santa Cecilia, Rome.



Santa Cecilia, view from altar to entrance, Benedictine monastery and church in Trastevere, Rome (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <<https://flic.kr/p/eqczRH>>

Steven: We're in Santa Cecilia in Rome looking at the ruins of an extraordinary fresco by Cavallini from the late 13th century.

Beth: We're above the entrance to the church, and we're looking directly at a fresco that in the late 13th century, people would have looked up at. It's a scene of the Last Judgment.

Steven: Right, so this would have been on the wall opposite the altar, and this would have been the last thing you saw as you were leaving the church. It's a monumental fresco. You see Christ in the center in a mandorla—that is, a kind of divine emanation or halo that surrounds his entire body. He sits here as judge over the souls that have lived.



Pietro Cavallini, The Last Judgment, detail of Christ, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome

Beth: And he exhibits for us very clearly the wounds of the Crucifixion. We can see holes from the nails in his feet and his hands, and the wound in his side that is bleeding—reminder of Christ's suffering. He returns now as judge of mankind.

Steven: He is framed by angels on either side, and beyond that, we can see the apostles, six on each side. Between the apostles and Christ there were two other figures. You have Mary on Christ's right and John the Baptist on his left.



Pietro Cavallini, The Last Judgment, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome (photo: Luistxo Fernandez, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Beth: And we're so clearly at just before the time of Giotto in the way these prefigure what Giotto will do in the very early years of the 14th century.

Steven: Right. This is known as "Roman realism." Cavallini is clearly borrowing from Byzantine models, but there is a kind of unprecedented interest in creating a sense of naturalism, of figures that are of *our* world.

Beth: Look at how heavily the figures are all modeled. These are not thin elongated forms created by line, but really monumental forms created by the use of light and dark.

Steven: You can see that use of light and dark very consistently in the furniture as well; the light makes it very believable.



Pietro Cavallini, The Last Judgment, detail of Mary, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome



Pietro Cavallini, The Last Judgment, detail of apostles, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome

Steven: The line is drawn so that there is a precocious attempt at a kind of perspective—not true linear perspective of course, but something that is very much trying to explain how these angles function in space as one looks up from below.

Beth: That's right, especially evident in the seats that the apostles sit in. They angle inward toward the center. So it's as though they really are thinking about us as the viewer in the center, looking up at Christ.

Steven: There is a kind of sensitivity in terms of rhythm and especially color in this painting that is so beautiful. Look at the apostles. You have alternations of violet blues, red blues, grey blues, green against a warmer kind of grey moving across so that there is never a repeat of the color, just beautiful.

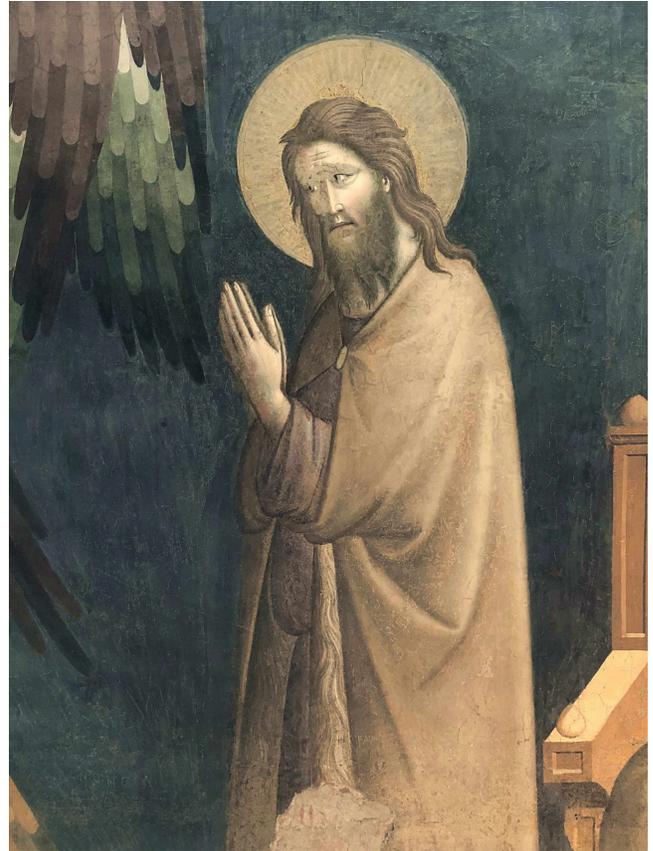
Beth: And we get a sense of a three-dimensional body underneath that drapery. If you look at the apostles, we can see the drapery pulling around their bellies, around their shoulders, in the folds around their arms—giving us a sense of monumental figures that really haven't been seen since ancient Rome.



Pietro Cavallini, *The Last Judgment*, detail of apostles, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome

Steven: It's interesting to think about this move from the spiritual rendering—that is, a kind of symbolized body—to one that is more three-dimensional, one that takes up space. There's this idea that there is a proximity between the way in which these figures are rendered and the bodies that we inhabit...

Beth: ...and the kind of human emotions that we feel. Look at the figure of Saint John the Baptist, with his hands clasped in prayer—the way that he moves his eyebrows together. There are wrinkles in his forehead, and he looks toward Christ. There is a real sense of individuality to these figures and a sense of human emotion as they look toward Christ.



Pietro Cavallini, *The Last Judgment*, detail of John the Baptist, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome

Steven: But they are still clearly coming out of the Byzantine tradition. If you look at the face of Christ, we might be looking at a mosaic from Ravenna, from Constantinople.



Pietro Cavallini, *The Last Judgment*, detail of Christ, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome

Beth: That's right. This moment at the end of the 1200s, the beginnings of the 1300s—we have this imminent naturalism.

Steven: Of course, Cavallini does not know that is coming. That's our hindsight. Nevertheless, we can see this kind of painting along with the

sculptures of Pisano or perhaps the work of Cimabue, as we're beginning to move into what will eventually become the Renaissance.

Watch the video.

<<https://youtu.be/pwHzN9aV1WY>>



Pietro Cavallini, The Last Judgment, c.1293, fresco, Santa Cecilia, Rome

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