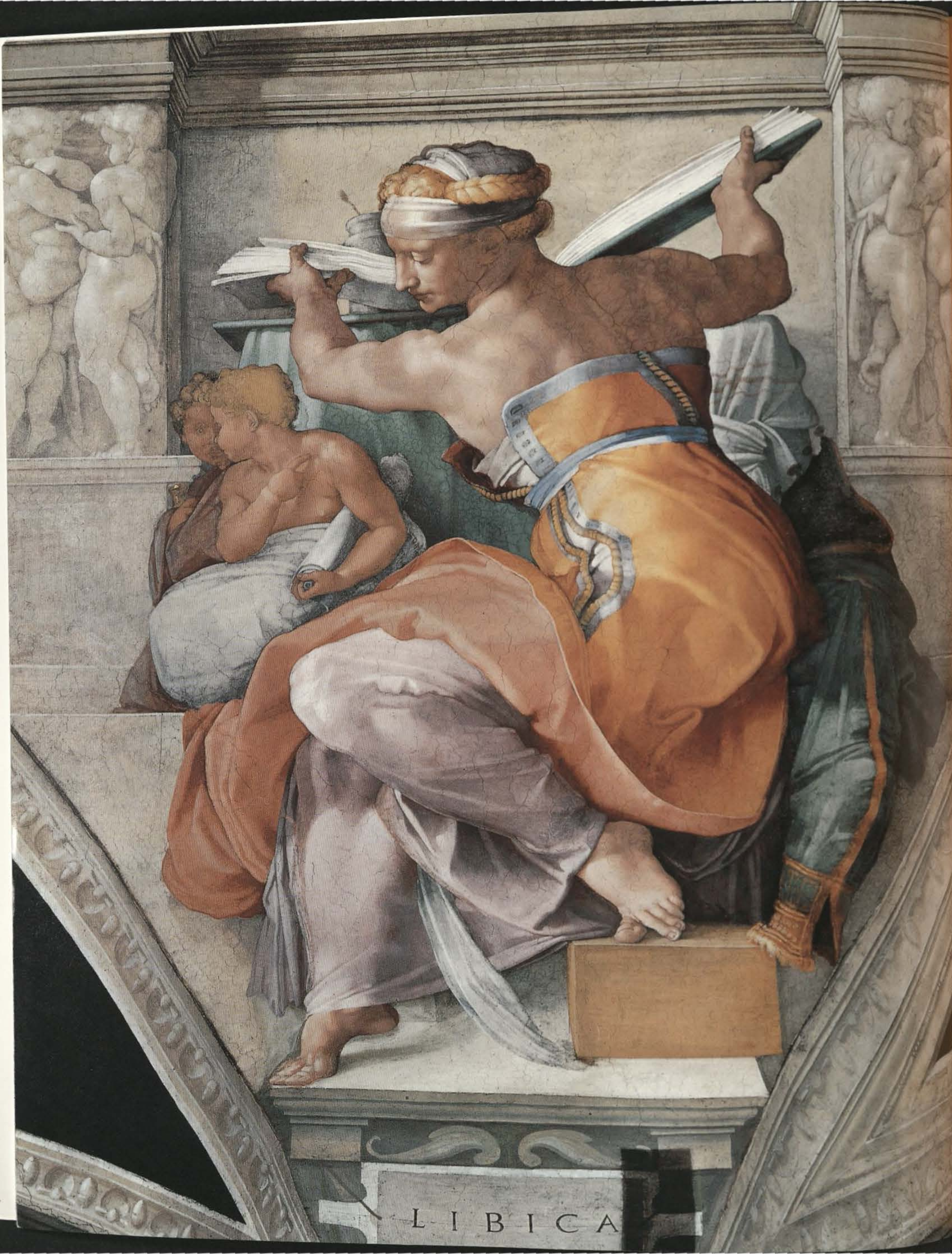
LIBICA

Stephen J. Campbell and Michael W. Cole

Italian Renaissance Art

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To Our Teachers

Half-title and title pages: Michelangelo, Sistine Ceiling, detail: *Libyan Sibyl*

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Contents

Introduction 8
Looking Back, Looking Forward 10
New Technologies and Theories of Art 11
Word and Image 13
The Book and Its Structure 14

1 1300–1400
The Trecento Inheritance 16
Political Geography and the Arts 18
Architectural Legacies 24
Giotto: The Painter and the Legend 26
Rival Traditions: Duccio 36
The Pisano Family and the Rise of Monumental Sculpture 42
Cult Images and Devotional Life 45

2 1400–1410
The Cathedral and the City 48
Campanilism 50
Competition at Florence Cathedral 55
Marble Sculpture for the Cathedral: Nanni di Banco and Donatello 64
Jacopo della Quercia and the Fonte Gaia 67

3 1410–1420
Commissioning Art: Standardization, Customization, Emulation 70
Orsanmichele and Its Tabernacles 72
Customizing the Altarpiece: The *Coronation of the Virgin* 82
Filippo Brunelleschi and the Foundling Hospital 87

4 1420–1430
Perspective and Its Discontents 88
The Centrality of Florence 90
Lorenzo Ghiberti and Brunelleschi at the Baptistery 93
Perspective and Narrative 98
The Brunelleschian Model and Its Alternatives 104
Leon Battista Alberti: A Humanist Theory of Painting 107

5 1430–1440
Pictorial Techniques and the Uses of Drawing 110
Technique: Painting Panels and Frescoes 112
The Centrality of *Disegno* 114
Inventing Antiquity 122
Jacopo Bellini and the Transformation of the Modelbook 125

6 1440–1450
Palace and Church 130
The Sacred and the Profane 132
San Marco 134
The Florentine Altarpiece after 1440 140
Andrea del Castagno and the Convent of Sant'Apollonia 145
The *all'antica* Tomb 146
The Private Palace 148
Civic Patronage and the Church: Venice and Padua 158
Siena: Civic and Sacred Space 165
The Vatican Papacy and the Embellishment of St. Peter's 170

7 1450–1460
Rome and Other Romes 174
The Model City 176
The Courts of Naples and Rimini 183
Padua 191
Pius II: Rome and Pienza 194
Alberti on Architecture 199

8 1460–1470
Courtly Values 202
What Is Court Art? 204
Ferrara and the Court of Borso d'Este 204
The Sforza Court in Milan 212
Mantegna, Alberti, and the Gonzaga Court 219
Urbino: The Palace of Federico da Montefeltro 223
Courtly Values in Cities without Courts 225

9 1470–1480
What Is Naturalism? 232
The Flemish Manner 234
Oil Painting 239
Life Study 244
Leonardo da Vinci's Beginnings 247
Nature and the Classical Past 252
Beauties beyond Nature 254

10 1480–1490
Migration and Mobility 256
Portable Art 258
Artists on the Move 264
Florentine Bronze Sculptors in Venice and Rome 271
Florentine Painters in Rome: The Sistine Chapel Frescoes 275
Leonardo Goes to Milan 280

11 1490–1500
From the Margins to the Center 284
A Fugitive Boundary 286
The *Studiolo* of Isabella d'Este and Mythological Painting 287
Corporate Devotion 291
The World Ends 295
Judgment Day in Orvieto, "Last Things" in Bologna 305
Leonardo in Sforza Milan 312
Michelangelo: Early Works in Marble 320

12 1500–1510
Human Nature 324
The Heroic Body and Its Alternatives 326
Leonardo and Michelangelo in Florence 329
Raphael's Beginnings 338
Rome: A New Architectural Language 342
The Sistine Ceiling 346
The Vatican Palace 354
Venice 361

13 1510–1520
The Workshop and the "School" 370
Raphael and His Team 1512–20 372
Michelangelo's Sculptures for the Julius Tomb 393
The Florentine "Schools" 396
Titian and the Camerino of Alfonso d'Este 402

14 1520–1530
The Loss of the Center 408
The *Sala di Costantino* 411
Rome after Raphael: Making a Reputation 414
Florence 419
Lombardy and Venice 424
The Sack of Rome in 1527 433

15 1530–1540
Dynasty and Myth 436
The Della Rovere in Urbino 439
The Gonzaga in Mantua 441
The Medici in Florence 447
Andrea Doria in Genoa 454
Rome under the Farnese 458

16 1540–1550
Literate Art 464
The Painting of History 466
Michelangelo's Gift Drawings and the *Pietà* 472
The Rise of Vernacular Art Theory 475
Italians Abroad: Fontainebleau 477
The City Square 479
Painting without Poetry 487

17 1550–1560
Disegno/Colore 494
Titian and Rome 496
Design and Production: Florence and Rome 502
Interpreting Michelangelo 509
Out of Italy 513

18 1560–1570
Decorum, Order, and Reform 522
Alessandro Moretto and Giovanni Moroni: Reform Tendencies on the Eve of Trent 524
Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, Twenty Years Later 525
The Jesuits and the Reform of Church Architecture 529
Princes of the Church and Their Villas 531
Villas in the Veneto: Andrea Palladio 538
The "Sacro Bosco" at Bomarzo 541
Bologna, Florence, and Rome in the Time of Pius IV and Pius V 544
The Arts in Transition 552

19 1570–1580
Art, the People, and the Counter-Reformation Church 554
Two Reforming Archbishops 556
Venice in the 1570s 561
Three Confraternities 565
Architecture and Urbanism in Counter-Reformation Rome 575
The Image of the People 579

20 1580–1590
A Sense of Place 584
Gardens and Grottos 586
The Bolognese New Wave 590
The "Holy Mountain" at Varallo 596
Mapping Rome 597
Urbanism in Rome under Sixtus V 601
The Place of Giambologna's *Abduction of the Sabine* 606

21 1590–1600
The Persistence of Art 608
Church Humanism, Church Archeology 610
A New Geography 612
Galleries and Collectable Art 620
Three Paths, *c.* 1600 622
After 1600 635

Chronology of Rule 1400–1600: Key Centers 636
Glossary 640
Bibliographical Notes and Suggestions for Further Reading 647
Sources of Quotations 665
Picture Credits 669
Index 670

Introduction

Looking Back, Looking Forward 10
New Technologies and Theories of Art 11
Word and Image 13
The Book and Its Structure 14

Introduction

Looking Back, Looking Forward

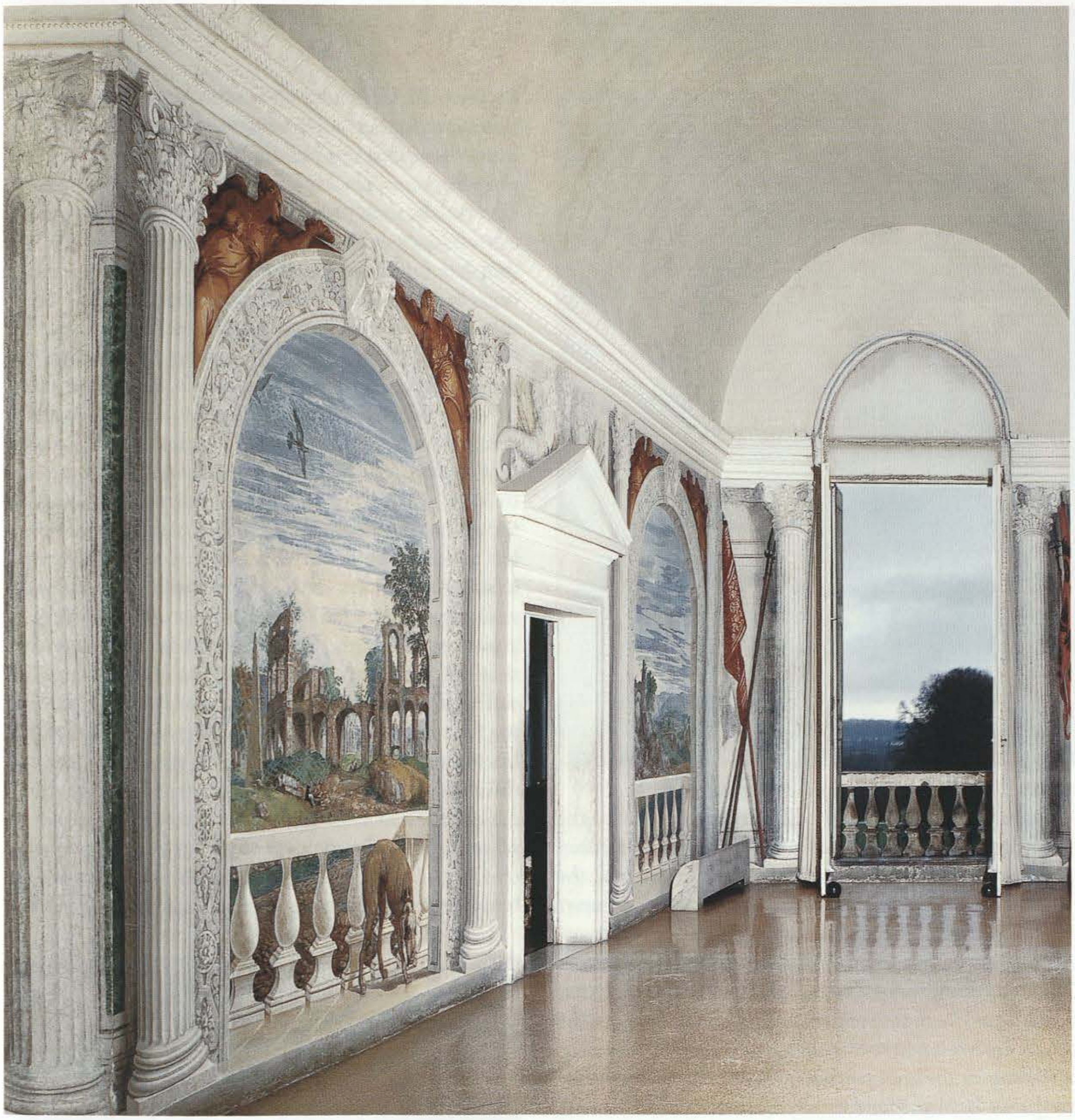
The art we now present in our university courses and display in our galleries and museums is more diverse than ever before. A global, cross-cultural frame of reference, comprising the multiple traditions that represent our various roots, has largely replaced a single coherent tradition centered on Europe. Yet despite this, the art produced in Italy half a millennium ago maintains a surprisingly strong presence in our shared landscape. The painter Leonardo da Vinci, the architect Filippo Brunelleschi, and even the sculptor Bartolomeo Ammanati provide the central focus for popular films and blockbuster novels. A single restored bronze by the sculptor and painter Andrea del Verrocchio, brought to the United States, can draw crowds to museums in any city. The attribution of a new sculpture or painting to Michelangelo, however spurious, makes local newspapers everywhere. Tourists who might not frequent their local galleries will cross an ocean to look at paintings by Botticelli and Raphael. Italy's major art-history research centers today host a strikingly international community of scholars.

Artists in fifteenth-century Italy already recognized that they were doing something remarkable, and when they set out to say what it was, they frequently explained their accomplishments with reference to antiquity. Among the first post-classical art treatises, for example, is Lorenzo Ghiberti's (*c.* 1378–1455) *Commentaries*, written around 1440. Ghiberti, a goldsmith, began by compiling material from ancient authors about the famous artists of the distant past, implying that this was what provided the foundation for knowledge and study in his day. He then went on to place his own art in relation to that of the previous two centuries, when his immediate forerunners had begun to rediscover art's lost "true principles." To Ghiberti, the present could be explained by organizing history into a simple sequence: first, the period of the Greeks and the Romans, when painting and sculpture flourished in nobility and "perfect dignity;" second, a moment in the early stages of Christianity when Christian zealots, led by Pope Sylvester, sought to obliterate the idolatrous cult images of the pagans; third, the "**Middle Ages**" that followed this destruction of paintings and sculptures, along with "the commentaries and books and outlines and rules that gave instructions in so worthy and noble an art;" and finally, Ghiberti's own age. His heroic and mythic narrative provides a basis for what we call the "Renaissance" (the French word for "rebirth").

Stories like this, with their trajectory of artistic loss and cultural recovery, exercised a powerful grip on the imagination of subsequent writers. To others, however, it has seemed that the importance of Italian art after about 1400 lay not in its return to origins but in the emergence of something entirely new and characteristically modern – the idea of art itself.

Related to this was an interest in the makers of the new art. For example, long sections of Ghiberti's *Commentaries* take the form of artists' biographies. No one since antiquity had written a history of art around the lives of those who made it, though a number of later writers followed Ghiberti's lead, including Giorgio Vasari, whose 1550/1568 *Lives of the Artists* remains our single most important source of information on the entire era. In turn, Vasari's approach to history, in which he organized his account of painting, sculpture, and architecture around the experiences and intentions of individual makers, has remained the most powerful model for the writing of art history in the centuries since. Indeed, it has become difficult to imagine how we might think about the objects in our museums if we did not consider them as works created by particular individuals, though such a way of thinking may not have predominated in Europe in the centuries preceding Ghiberti, and it has been rare in many cultures around the world. The very idea of "the artist" was something to which Ghiberti and his contemporaries were giving new emphasis, even reinventing, as they thought about their own world in relation to a vanished past.

The invention of the artist has broad consequences: once we think of a painting as an "authored" work, we are apt, for example, to identify it with the style that for us defines its artist's "look," and to associate the work with specific and timely biographical circumstances. This book will frequently go down such a path, though we should remember that throughout the two centuries it covers, the idea of an art willed into being by artists competed with other possibilities: that a particular work's contents



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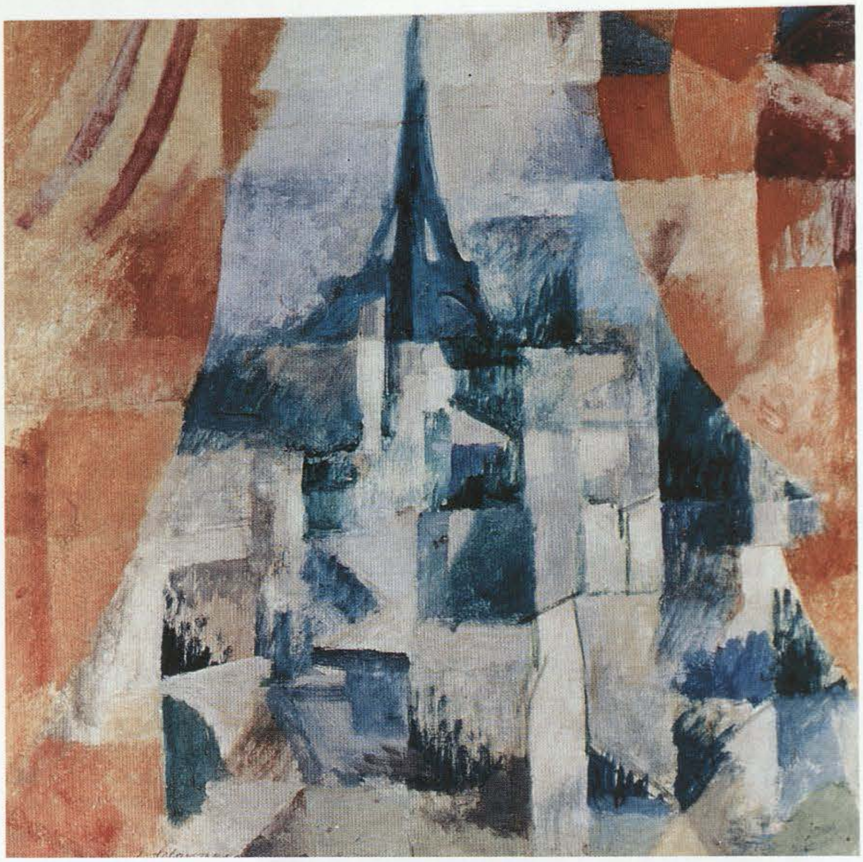
Paolo Veronese, frescoes at Villa Barbaro, 1560–61

and appearance had been dictated by the patron who ordered it, for example; that the work adhered closely to shared and expected formal conventions; or that it was produced by a team or workshop in which no single maker predominated.

The artist's point of view was but one of a number of ways of understanding a painting, sculpture, or building. To many viewers, images served as important vehicles of connection with the supernatural, even as active agents of divine power. To others, they were testaments to the devotion of the people who commissioned them, commemorations of an individual or a family, soliciting prayers on their behalf from a wider public. Much of this book will focus on the ways in which individual objects crystallized these concerns, relating them to or playing them off against one another. How, it will ask, did the artistic knowledge manifest, say, in illusionistic techniques or an awareness of the ancient past matter for the power of images, as historical viewers perceived this? How did works occasioned by devotional circumstances also express or pursue practical, worldly, and even political concerns?

New Technologies and Theories of Art

The legacy of the Renaissance lay not just in this conception of the artist but also in the chief preoccupations of the arts themselves. Fifteenth-century Italy (and fifteenth-century Europe more broadly) witnessed the introduction of a group of technologies and formats that would



ABOVE

0.2

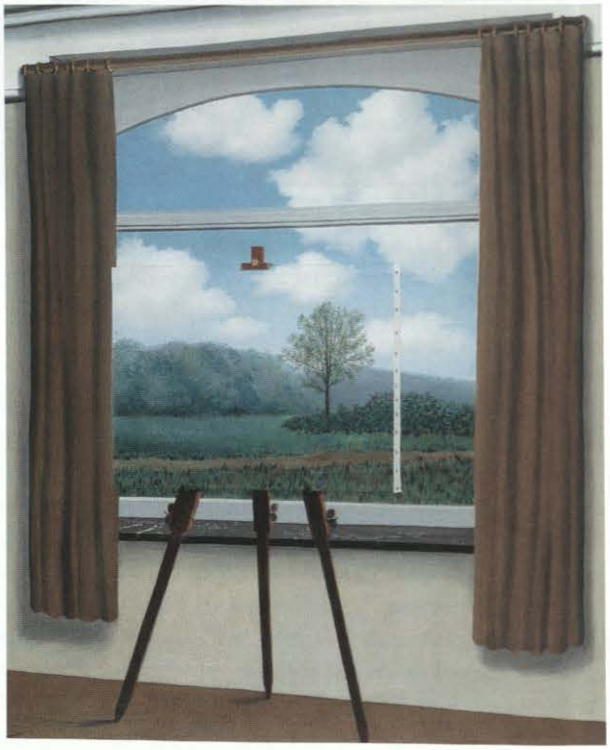
Robert Delaunay,
Simultaneous Windows
(2nd Motif, 1st Part), 1912.
Oil on canvas, 21⅝ x 18¼"
(55.2 x 46.3 cm). Solomon
R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York

quickly attain a newly elevated status. These included the oil painting, executed on canvas at an easel; the drawing in ink, chalk, or pastel on paper; the medal; and the print. In some cases, these media replaced earlier ways of doing things: as we will see, oil supplanted the earlier egg-based **tempera** painting, for example, and canvas gradually took over the role of the wooden panel. Other formats with more continuous histories, such as the small bronze and the marble statue, became a focus of attention in the same years in a way that they had not for centuries before. Into the early twentieth century, being an "artist" usually meant making the sorts of things that fifteenth-century Italians had introduced.

Moreover, it was not just media that mattered to artists after the Renaissance, but what Renaissance artists did with them. For example, modern works as varied as Robert Delaunay's *Simultaneous Windows: Eiffel Tower* of 1912 (fig. 0.2) and René Magritte's *The Human Condition* of 1933 (fig. 0.3), among others, wrestle with an idea invented by the author, artist, and architect Leon Battista Alberti in the 1430s, that a painting was like a window, that one should approach its surface as something one looked through, at what lies beyond (fig. 0.1). Pablo Picasso's early Cubist works (1907–09) depend on a group of other devices – ***chiaroscuro*** (light/dark contrast) and **orthogonal** projection (diagonal lines that appear to recede into space) – that Renaissance painters and sculptors had used to construct illusions of three-dimensionality. Such a painting by Picasso as *Brick Factory at Tortosa* of 1909 (fig. 0.4) does not so much reject a Renaissance way of doing things as quote it, making the building blocks of the Renaissance painting serve a new function.

Perhaps most importantly, the Renaissance developed a twofold sense of what all serious art had to involve, one that has shaped nearly all art since. On the one hand, it regarded art as something that originated in its maker's mind. When Raphael wrote that he started painting with a "certain idea," when Michelangelo described the sculptor pursuing the "concept" contained in the block of stone, or when Vasari reduced painting, sculpture, and architecture to a principle of "design," these artists were asserting that their labor was not merely manual but also intellectual, in some cases even that it was *primarily* a work of thought, such that the physical task of execution could be left to others. On the other hand, and to a certain extent in direct opposition to this, the Renaissance regarded art as an opportunity for manual showmanship. Every Renaissance artist went through a workshop apprenticeship that lasted for years and cultivated a degree of technical skill that his successors today have all but lost. The training focused on the student's capacity to do the same things his master could, so that the youth could disappear into the elder's projects.

By the time Ghiberti was writing his *Commentaries*, young artists had also come to recognize a value not only in advertising their skills but also in individualizing the hand behind the work, even manufacturing the work in



RIGHT

0.3

René Magritte, ***The Human Condition,*** **1933.** Oil on
canvas, 39⅜ x 31⅞ x ⅝"
(100 x 81 cm x 1.6 cm).
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.

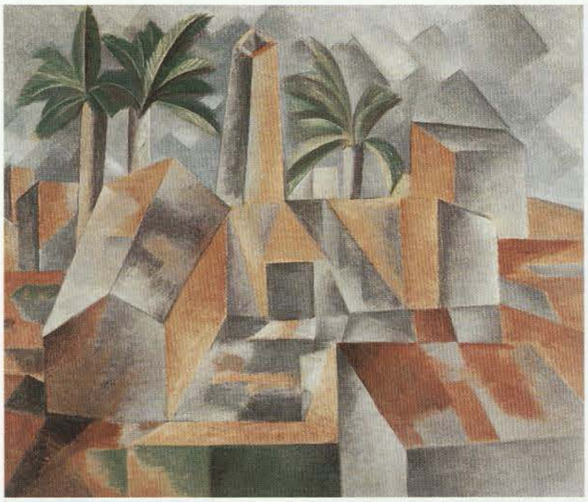
such a way as to draw attention to the process that had produced it. The colossal bronze that demanded ingenuity and finesse to cast, the unfinished marble that reminded viewers of the block from which it had come, the highly worked oil painting that indexed a confident, almost athletic handling of the brush – these, too, were touchstones of Renaissance art, and often the products of the same artists who insisted that art be a display of thought.

We might well begin, then, with both a retrospective and a prospective account of the period this book examines, with an art that claimed to replace or surpass what had been lost centuries before even as it set the stage for Modernist movements in the twentieth century. Indeed, recent scholars have debated whether the centuries this book considers are better regarded as a "Renaissance" (a period distinguished by cultural achievement from the centuries that preceded and followed them) or as the beginning of an "early modern" period that ended only with the social and technological transformations of the late 1700s. With our title we are using a conventional designation for the period rather than taking a position on this question: throughout, our text will attempt to acknowledge both perspectives.

Our main story begins in 1400. This is not a completely arbitrary choice: it is roughly the date of Ghiberti's earliest sculptures, and in part because of this, it is the moment that Vasari, looking back from around the 1550s, regarded as a watershed, when the arts finally left their "childhood." Still, the concerns we have been introducing to this point did not represent cultural novelties so much as new priorities. Some medieval painters and sculptors already looked to the distant past, and some certainly regarded themselves as "artists" of a sort that Ghiberti would have found familiar. By around 1300 some were employing such devices as **perspective**, which would become hallmarks of Renaissance art. As already noted, new technologies, such as oil painting and printing on paper, set the **Quattrocento** (the fifteenth century) apart from earlier periods, and the period covered by this book witnessed a dramatic escalation both in the production of art and in its variety. Beyond this, however, the most we can probably say is that things that were once exceptional came to be the norm – and even that is sometimes difficult to judge. We should not overlook those instances in which continuities with the so-called "Middle Ages" stand out more than any return to antiquity or heralding of the future.

Word and Image

Through the period covered by this book, images were developing as a sophisticated medium for conveying complex ideas in a synthetic and memorable form. And this brings us to a theme that will recur frequently: the fact that artists, with encouragement from patrons and viewers, increasingly sought to explore the relationship between images and words, considering how the capacities of each might differ from, and overlap with, the other.



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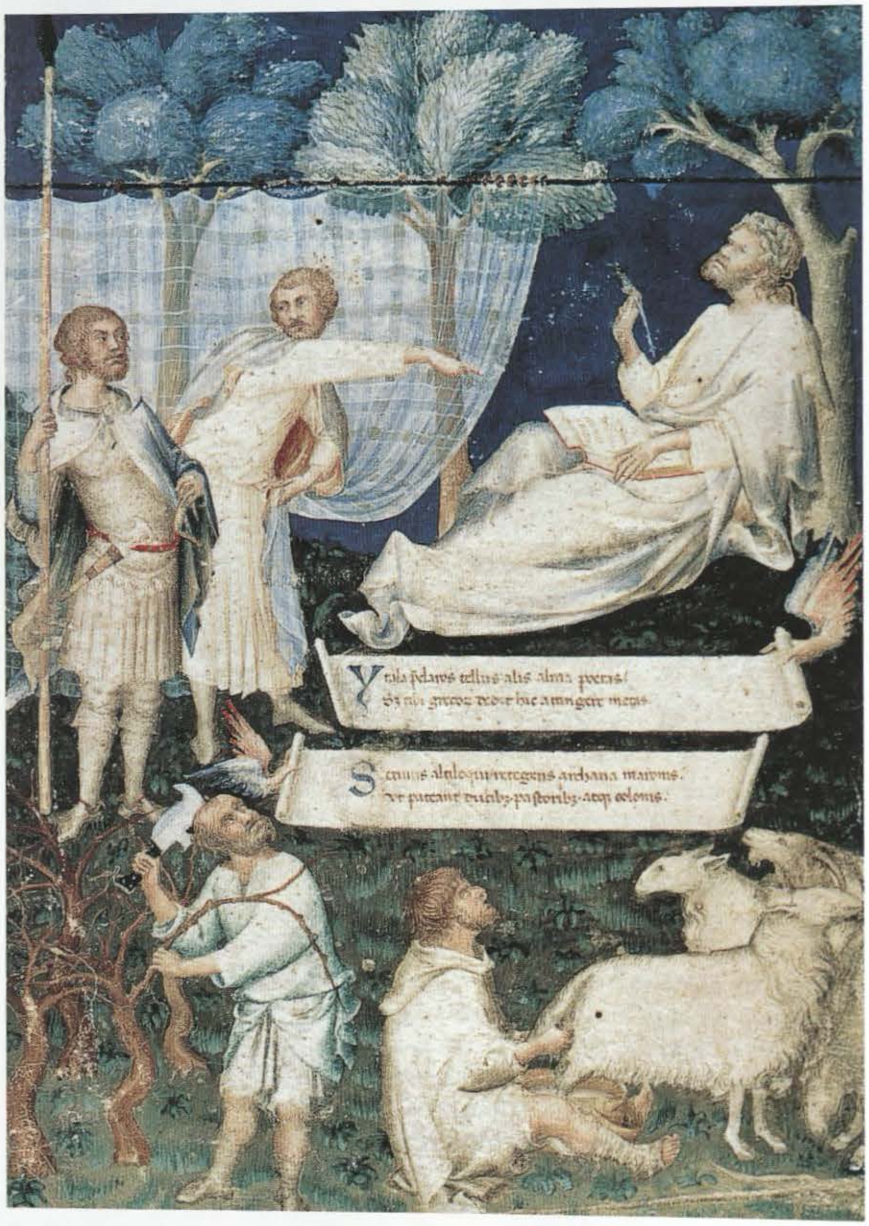
Pablo Picasso. *Brick Factory at Tortosa, 1909.* Oil on canvas, 20 x 23$\frac{3}{4}$" (50.7 x 60.2 cm). The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

The Sienese painter Simone Martini was one of the first artists in Europe to be celebrated not just as a craftsman who rendered what could be seen but also as a poet who created from his imagination. The acclamation came from Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch; 1304–1374), one of the greatest poets in the Italian language, who knew Simone at Avignon in southern France and composed two sonnets on a portrait by Simone of Petrarch's dead beloved, Laura. Simone, according to Petrarch, had painted the picture with a poet's visionary power, apparently without seeing the lady herself. He also decorated the frontispiece for a volume of the major poems by the great Latin poet Virgil (70–19 BC; **fig. 0.5**).

On this folio Virgil looks to the stars for inspiration, reclining beneath a laurel tree that represents at once puns on the name of the dead Laura and also the branches from which the ancients fashioned poets' crowns. To the left, Servius, a late classical commentator on Virgil, figuratively "draws the veil" away to make the poet's text more clear to various readers. An inscription paraphrases the allegory: "Servius, speaking here above, uncovers the secrets of Maro [i.e. Virgil], that they may be revealed to leaders, shepherds and farmers." Ostensibly, this identifies the poems' threefold audience, though a knowledgeable viewer would recognize that the three figures also designated the estates represented in Virgil's three great poems – soldiers in the epic *Aeneid*, shepherds in the pastoral *Eclogues*, and farmers in the didactic *Georgics*. Another inscription, finally, proclaimed an essential affinity and



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Simone Martini, frontispiece to Petrarch's Virgil, *c.* **1336.** $11^{5}/_{8}$ x $7^{5}/_{8}$" (29.5 x 20 cm). Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan

equivalence not only between painting and poetry but also between Virgil and Simone: "Mantua made Virgil, who composed such verses; Siena [made] Simone, whose hand painted them."

In the eyes of cultivated witnesses like Petrarch, the heirs of the great ancient poets were the great artists as well as the writers of his time. Although he sometimes took a more negative view, stressing the limitations of an art that he saw as working through the sense of sight rather than through the intellect, Petrarch suggested that painters could communicate through images just as a poet could through metaphors and other figures of speech.

Such images as Simone's frontispiece demonstrate that the idea of a "Renaissance" was one that artists as well as poets could cultivate – and well before 1400 – by associating themselves with the authority of the ancient past and with the eloquence of poetry. While many of the conventional designations that scholars have used to denote broad periods in the history of art – "Baroque," "Rococo," "Gothic" – originated as pejorative terms, Petrarch's elevation of Simone's painting into something like an emblem of an age appears to get close to the artist's own intentions. Simone's interests, moreover, were by no means eccentric, especially in the centuries that followed: Botticelli's *Primavera* (*c.* 1482; ***see* fig. 9.23**), Andrea Mantegna's *Parnassus* (1497; ***see* fig. 11.4**), Raphael's *School of Athens* (1510–11; ***see* fig. 12.50**), and even the Early Christian revival of the later sixteenth century, as we will see, sustain the myth of a lost origin restored in the present.

This book proposes to take that myth seriously, though not quite at face value: there is too much that it does not account for. The dramatic rise of artistic production in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries followed from a complex set of economic, political, religious, and other causes, many of them remote from any imperative of cultural renewal. Few observers of the arts in the two centuries after 1400 would have agreed that the primary purpose of painting, sculpture, or architecture was to proclaim the progressive skills and ingenuity of artists, a basic aspect of the Renaissance myth. Most truly misleading, perhaps, is the myth's theme of a "return" to the past; more often than not, the appeal to ancient origins was a means of seeking sanction for doing something decidedly new. It is probably more valid to consider the art of the 1400s and 1500s as establishing an agenda, setting in motion a series of concerns about representation and about art that persist into the present. The most fundamental legacy of Renaissance art, more than the principle of "revival," is the idea of a work of art pointing beyond itself to other objects and images, some of them located in an imaginary and largely invented past: the idea of art as a dialogue, where works always show a consciousness of other works, with which they actively compete. This demanded beholders who were capable of making the comparisons, an interested public that could comprehend art as a field of non-professional knowledge.

The Book and Its Structure

This book is a survey, a history of art in Italy and art made by Italians abroad over the two centuries beginning in 1400. We have aimed to be comprehensive though not encyclopedic; we have made choices in, and set limits to, what we cover so as to be able to focus on individual objects and monuments.

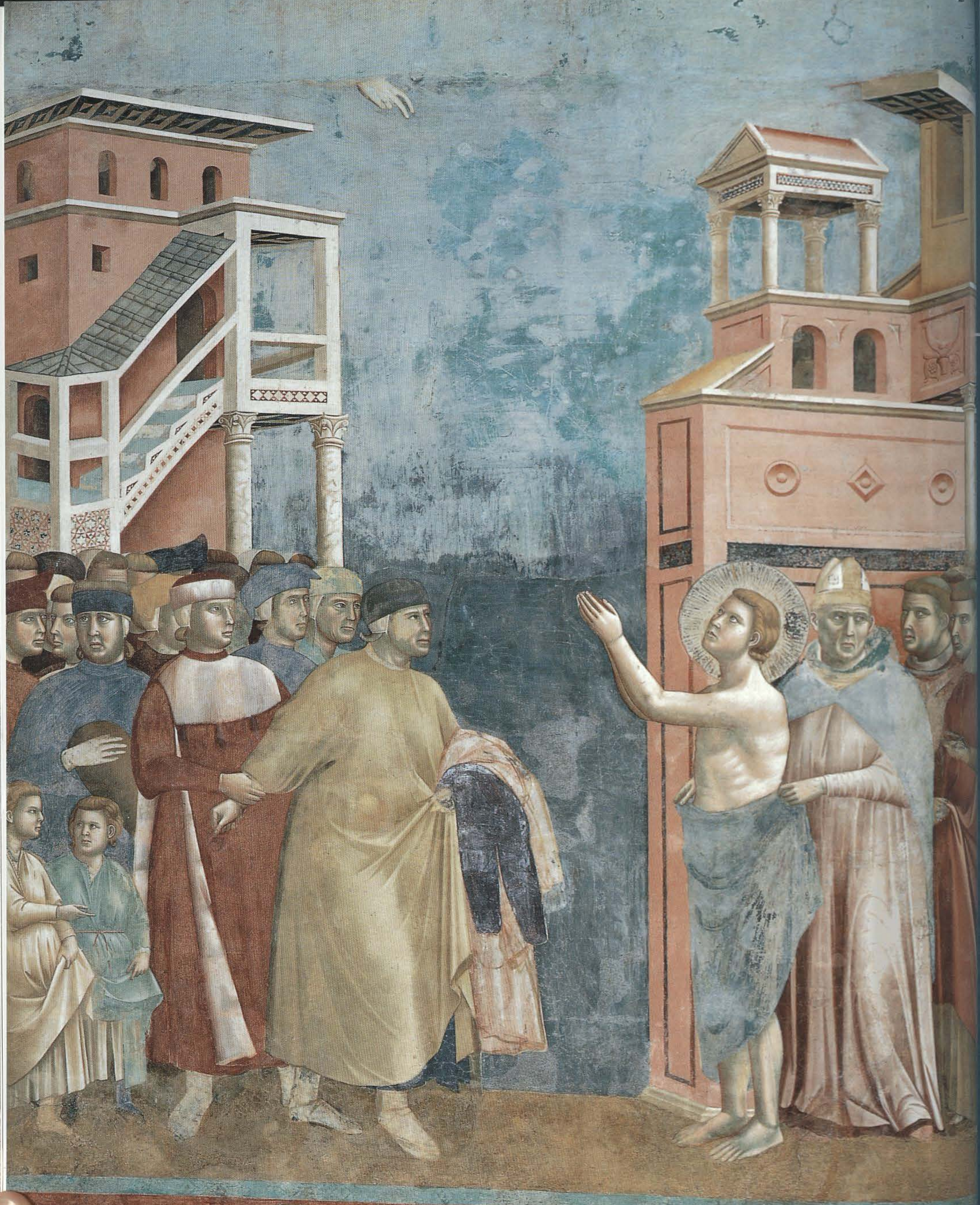
One of the reasons we have organized the book as we have, following a neutral chronological sequence of decades rather than building chapters around the careers of the leading individuals, is to underscore the limits of the biographical approach and to allow attention to the alternatives. We wish to emphasize that the writing of history is the making of a narrative, and that different stories can be told about any of the works we discuss: the life of its author, the interests of its buyer, or patron, the tradition behind its subject matter, the responses of its audience, and so on. Dividing the book into chapters that each cover a single decade has posed challenges – some decades simply seem more important than others, for example, requiring chapters of unequal length – but the approach also offers a number of advantages. For one thing, the arbitrariness of a decade-by-decade story allows us to avoid the impression that retrospectively constructed periods (the "High Renaissance," "Mannerism") had some determining influence on human behavior. For another, it allows us to compare works produced simultaneously in different Italian cities, characterizing what is most distinctive in local traditions and practices while also highlighting essential common ground – for instance, the striking and seldom examined tendency of regional cities in the mid **Quattrocento** (1400s) to emulate Rome, or the building and ornamentation of city squares throughout Italy in the mid **Cinquecento** (1500s). Our approach enables us both to underscore the significance and meaning of particular architectural sites and to track the changing artistic geography in a given period.

Finally, by following a neutral chronological sequence of decades rather than building chapters around leading individuals, we hope to emphasize the limits of the biographical approach and allow attention to the role of patrons, the importance of expected formal conventions, and the teamwork exemplified by the workshops of major artists. Thus, anyone wanting to read about Donatello, who lived from *c.* 1386 to 1466, will need to look at several different chapters of the book. Whereas it might seem more convenient to present his work together, there will be a clear gain in understanding the sculptor's work in relation to artistic and historical transformations over time, and to a shifting series of contexts: public and domestic, sacred and secular, the city of Florence and the Venetian territorial state.

Each chapter aims to bring out the circumstances and expectations that define the historical moments at which works were made, the issues and concerns that even quite different contemporary objects and monuments shared. Thus, every chapter has a theme, one that the works made in a particular decade lend themselves particularly well to exploring. We do not mean to suggest, however, that the issues identified in our titles are the only ones that mattered at that moment, or that such issues have only momentary relevance. Indeed, the topics of our chapters more often than not point to key aspects of art across the period; highlighting a single broad theme in each chapter enables us to observe historical patterns and to introduce complex topics to which later chapters will return. Occasionally we have loosened the chronological boundaries of a chapter for the sake of drawing connections between material, though we have resisted the temptation to do this often.

The thematic structure prohibits the book from giving an entirely neutral account of the art, or from approaching objects with a consistent set of questions from one chapter to the next. We do hew closely throughout, however, to issues that are central to our own scholarly interests and to what we regard as the most vital tendencies in contemporary scholarship on Renaissance art. These include the status of the image: the lingering importance of the icon, the invention of the *historia*, the allure and dangers of the idol. They include the Renaissance concern with place and placelessness, the significance of site to meaning, and the changing geography of the period. We look at ways in which makers and patrons came to regard art as a kind of knowledge, whether they understood it as a place for empirical record-making or as an aspiring science, one related to other emerging modes of visual description. We consider how works of art addressed or enfolded an anticipated beholder.

Most of all, perhaps, we describe objects as examples of *artifice*: we focus on the technical skill and the very art of making them. We suggest that objects and their *madeness*, the nature of their physical workmanship – their media, materials, and handling – became the subject of some of the most notable works of Renaissance art, frequently to a degree that reinforces and enriches other meanings of the work. The production of images in Renaissance culture was driven by the memory of previous images and controlled by often unspoken assumptions about format, genre, and type. Historical transformation played out not only as a sequence of discoveries and innovations, but also as a gradually changing notion of the relation of the Renaissance artist to the work at hand, a changing sense of what authorized or legitimated the act of making (variously, divine truth, truth to nature, emulation of the ancients, and the fashioning of the artist as an author). This self-reflexive dimension to works of art sustains a rich historical narrative of its own, which we seek to bring into view alongside narratives about patrons, institutions, and religious practice.



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1300–1400

The Trecento Inheritance

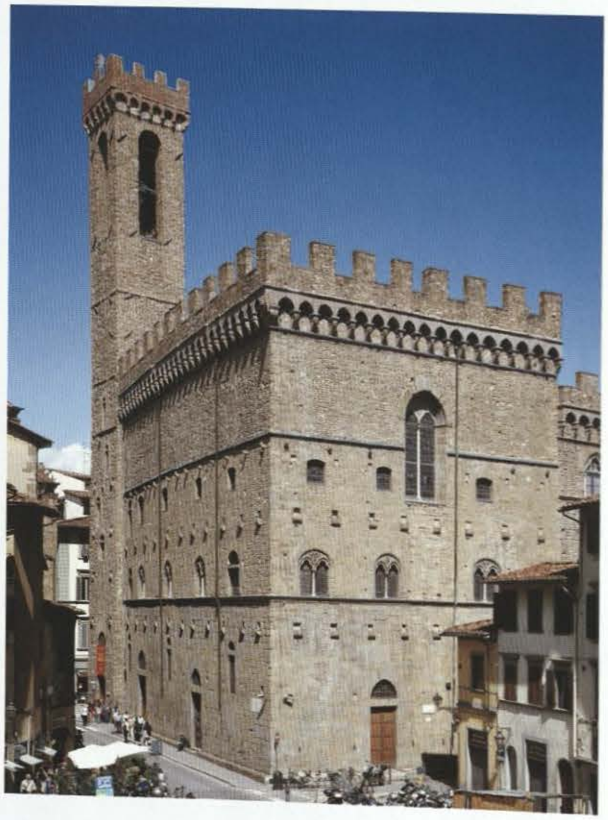
Political Geography and the Arts 18
  Art and the State: Verona and Siena 19
Architectural Legacies 24
Giotto: The Painter and the Legend 26
  Mural Painting: The "Upper Church" at Assisi 28
  Private Patronage: The Arena Chapel 29
  Giotto's Legacy 34
Rival Traditions: Duccio 36
  The *Maestà* 36
  Giotto and Duccio: Competing Legacies 40
The Pisano Family and the Rise of Monumental Sculpture 42
Cult Images and Devotional Life 45

1

1300–1400
The Trecento Inheritance

Political Geography and the Arts

What kind of a world awaited the craftsman who arrived on the scene at the end of the fourteenth century, known as the **Trecento**? An answer to that question probably depends on just where that craftsman arrived. This book's title refers to "Italy," although no such country existed at any point during the centuries this book treats – the idea of nations only took hold in Europe in the eighteenth century, and the country of Italy with its more or less current boundaries dates only to the late nineteenth century. In the years leading up to 1400, most of what we now call Italy was divided between three large interregional powers that vied for power and influence (*see* map, p. 51). To the north was the **Holy Roman Empire**, which claimed the inheritance of the ancient domain of the Caesars and at least nominally controlled all of present-day Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria; its theoretical claims to rule extended as far south as Florence and Siena, although many northern Italian city states asserted their practical independence as early as the twelfth century. Imperial territory stopped further south at the edge of the **Papal States**, over which the Pope in Rome maintained not just spiritual but also temporal rule. Beyond the Papal States was Naples, which in 1400 was both a city and a kingdom, encompassing the whole lower part of the peninsula. South of this, finally, was the large island of Sicily, which in the medieval period was alternately ruled by dynasties originating in what we know today as Germany, France, and Spain. All of this was subject to dramatic change: in the fifteenth century, the Kingdom of Aragon, centered in Spain, would unite the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. Florence and Milan would engage in campaigns of territorial expansion, absorbing their neighbors and forming regional blocs of influence, and Venice in the north-east would become a true empire in its own right, reaching south and east along the Adriatic coast, into what is now Greece. It is worth remembering throughout that when artists moved from one city to another, they were often going to a place with a different government, different customs, and even a different language.



1.1

The Bargello, Florence, 1256–1323. Through most of the Renaissance, the building was called the Palazzo del Podestà. Its current name derives from a police office housed there beginning in 1574.

In 1400, as today, wealth was concentrated in the north, allowing for more lavish patronage and for more expensive decorative projects; the economy there was mercantile, by contrast to the largely agrarian south. The north also held the major population and artistic centers. Painting, sculpture, and architecture often served there as an outlet for regional rivalries, as communities tried to outdo one another in their monuments no less than in their military adventures.

A city's location often had consequences for the look of its buildings and art. When Florence began erecting newly monumental and permanent civic buildings in the thirteenth century, for example, it faced them with a material called *pietra forte* (literally, "strong stone"). On the fortified tower built between 1256 and 1323 to house the captain of the civic militia (**fig. 1.1**), this stone creates an effect of heaviness and impregnability, though an additional appeal must have lain in the fact that it had a local source. This made the stone cheaper to acquire and transport, and it distinguished the look of Florentine buildings from their counterparts in towns without such quarries; the local architecture in Florence, therefore, comes across as a direct extension of the surrounding land.

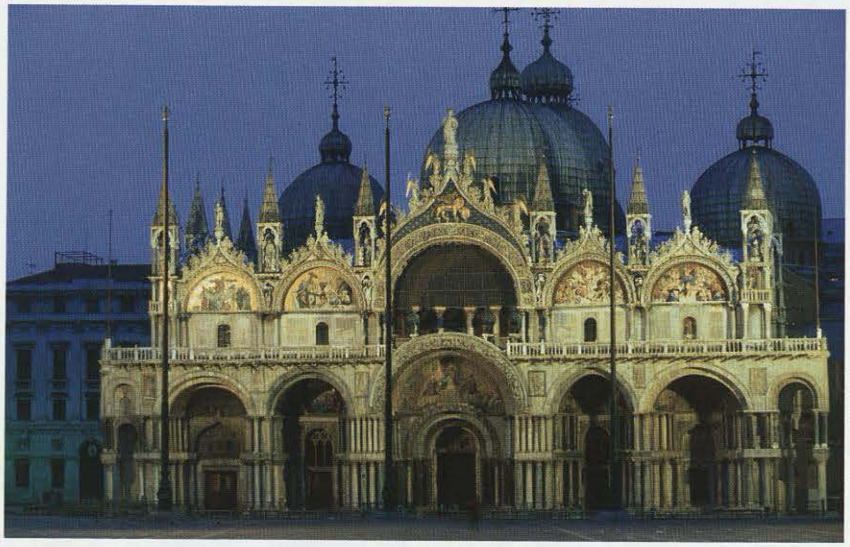
Venice, by contrast, favored a colorful architecture comprising imported stones. The **basilica** of San Marco (figs. 1.2–1.3), its most magnificent religious building and a church that is attached to the city's seat of government, presents an exterior clad with sheets of striated marble, as well as with ***spoglia***, columns, and reliefs stripped from other buildings, many of them in distant lands. Inside, mosaics seem to cover every surface: even after locals had mastered the techniques used to make the small glass and stone ***tesserae*** that form the embedded designs, the exotic-looking materials would have announced Venice's long-standing connection to foreign cities, particularly Byzantium (now called Istanbul). The architecture advertises Venice's ability to exploit eastern trade routes. San Marco, like many Venetian buildings, could only have been made in a city on the water, one that served as a major gateway to the East; the city that had launched Europe's holy crusades in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, and one that would long be a hub for European trade. In Venice, as in Florence, location matters, although in just the opposite way.

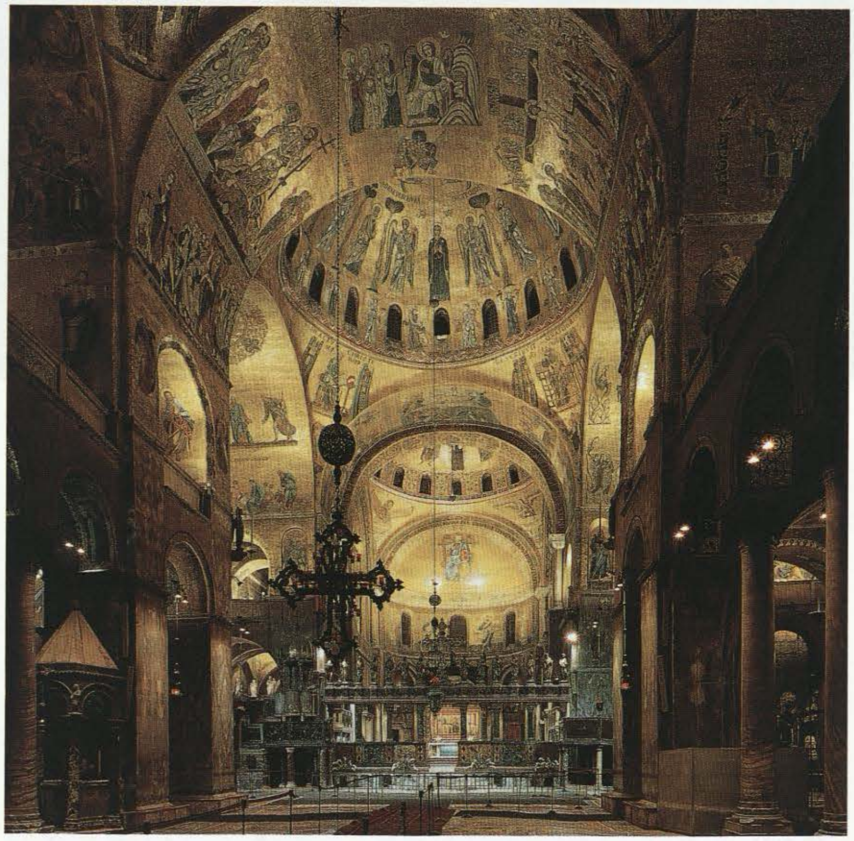
Art and the State: Verona and Siena

Most Italian cities had one of two types of government. Those such as Verona, Milan, Piacenza, Parma, Ferrara, and Rimini, in which a single sovereign and his attendants ran the show, were called ***signorie*** (literally, "lordships"). Those such as Venice, Bologna, Genoa, Florence, Siena, and Pisa, with elected councils, were called ***comuni*** (roughly, "commonwealths"). Most *signorie* were in the north, and many had become autocracies only after an earlier communal government had failed (an unhappy history that survived in local memory and affected commissions of artworks everywhere). Most *comuni* were in central Italy, and they preserved administrative practices that extended back centuries. On the whole, different art forms typified the different modes of government.

In the *signoria* of Verona, for example, Bonino da Campione's (*fl.* 1350–90) looming homage to Cansignorio della Scala (1340–1375; fig. 1.4) counted among the great sculptural monuments of the later fourteenth century. Centering on a bier that featured a recumbent portrait, the work's primary function was to generate an image of the local lord (*signore*) that would last well after his death. The ***baldacchino*** (honorific canopy) that covered it was an architectural feature elsewhere used to mark holy sites and objects, suggesting that in Verona the leader himself was worthy of adoration. Surmounting the *baldacchino* was a second image of the *signore*, as a military champion on horseback: the image of knighthood lent a civilizing gloss to the arbitrary violence that characterized the signorial regime.

This structure attests to its designers' familiarity with ancient Roman triumphal forms, including the Arco dei Gavi (1st century CE; fig. 1.6) outside Verona's city walls. The Veronese *signore* had no qualms about associating himself with the ancient empire and its history of





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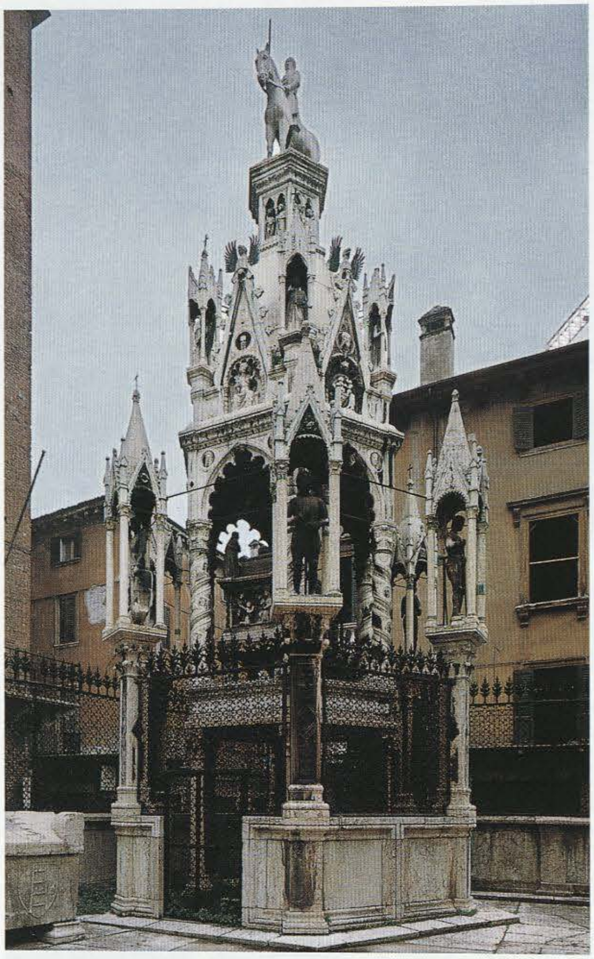
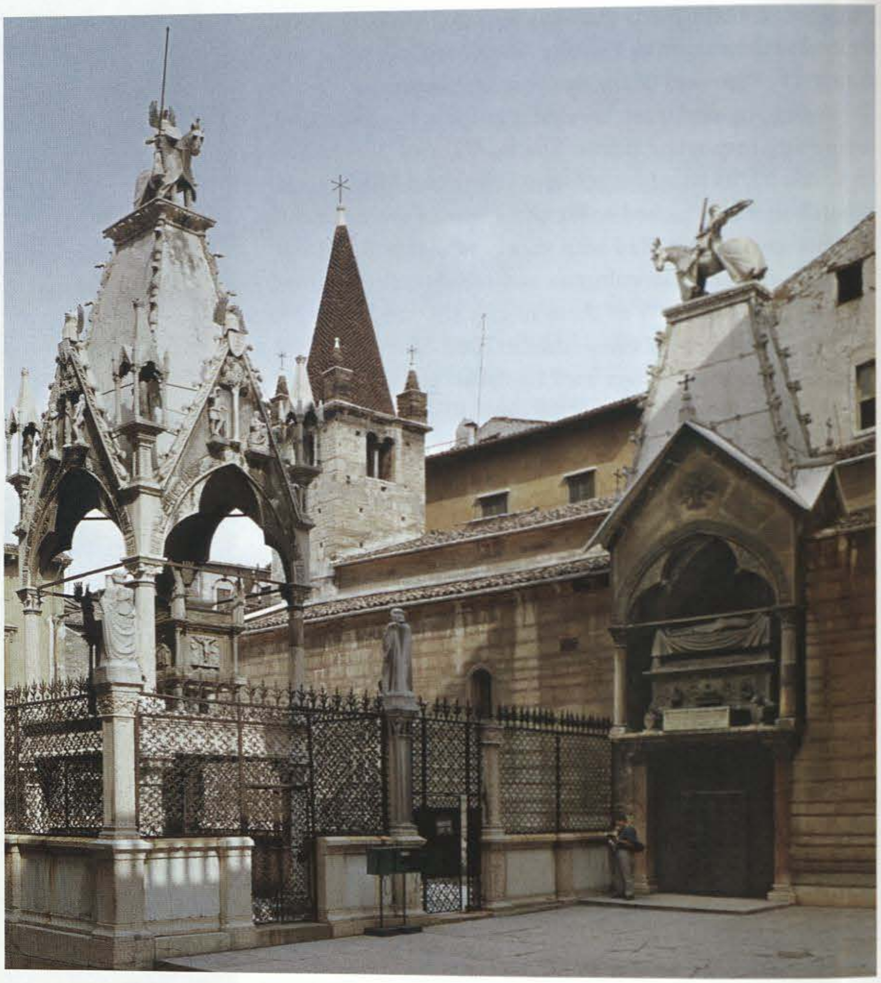
1.2 and 1.3

Basilica of San Marco, Venice, begun 1063. The mosaics in the nave's closest vault are from the sixteenth century; those in the dome beyond from the thirteenth.





ABOVE LEFT

1.4

Bonino da Campione, Funerary Monument of Cansignorio della Scala, 1376. Piazza by Santa Maria Antica, Verona

ABOVE RIGHT

1.5

Funerary monuments of (right) Cangrande della Scala, begun after 1329, and (left) Mastino II, begun 1345. Santa Maria Antica, Verona

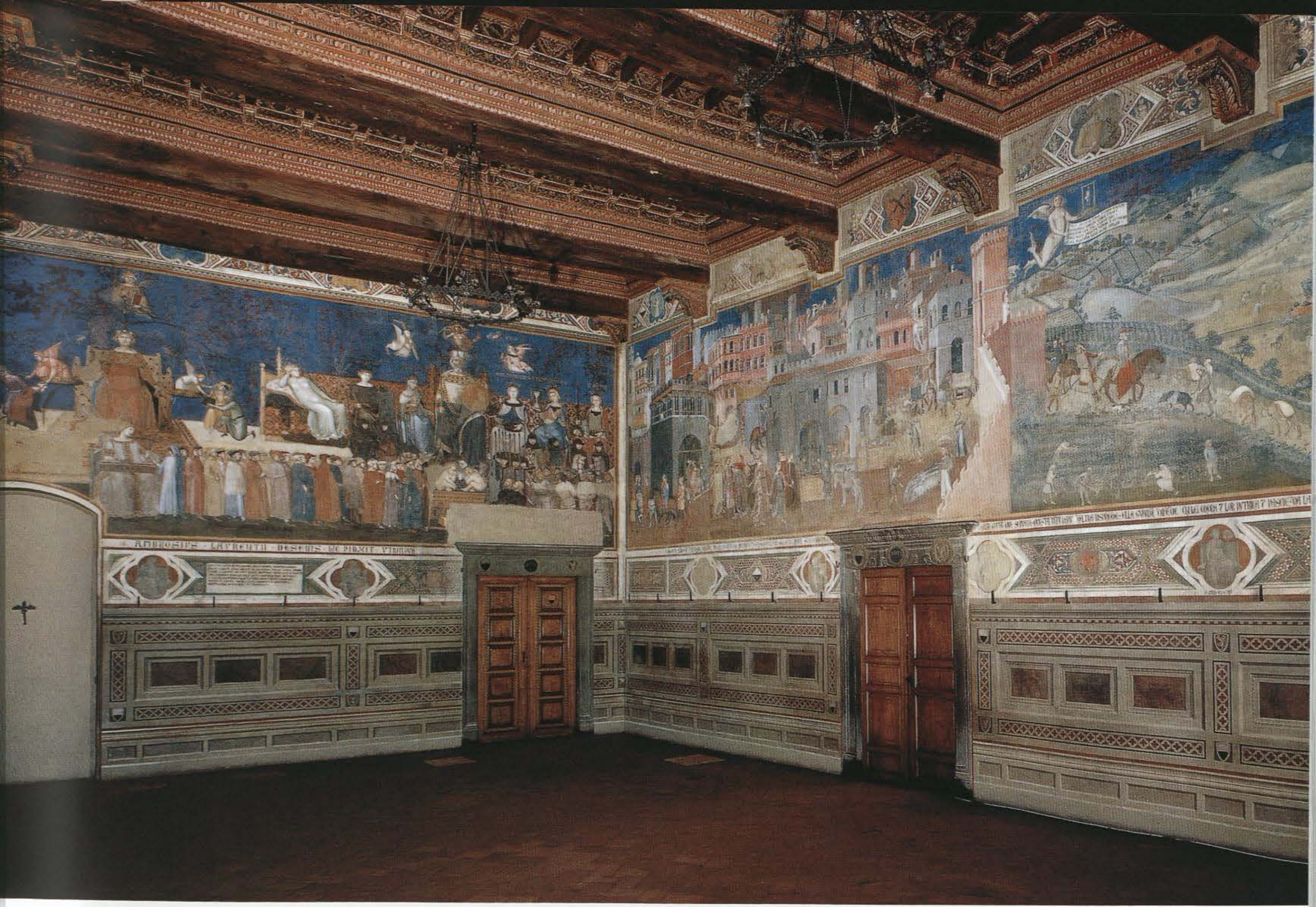
RIGHT

1.6

Arco dei Gavi, Verona. The structure, dating from the first century CE, was rebuilt in 1932.

hereditary rule. What is perhaps most notable about the monument, however, is its re-creation of a more recently established architectural type: Cansignorio's predecessor Cangrande I della Scala (1291–1329) had commissioned the first **cenotaph** of this sort at the beginning of the century, and Mastino II (1308–1351), Cansignorio's father, had created a second (**fig. 1.5**). Attached to the church of Santa Maria Antica, which had been a focus of family patronage, Cansignorio's undertaking would have come across above all as an attempt to legitimate his authority by associating his governance with local tradition. We can speculate on Cansignorio's own motives here: he had taken control of the *signoria* by murdering his own brother Cangrande II, and he may well have faced doubters of his claim to the title of *signore*. We can also consider the function of the Della Scala monuments as a group. Together, they assert the prerogative of a dynasty over and above that of any elected leader. Cumulatively, they form a direct, instantly legible manifesto of coercive rule.

At the other political extreme we might place the murals (wall paintings) that Ambrogio Lorenzetti (*c.* 1290–1348) produced in 1338 for the Room of the Nine Governors and Defenders of the Comune (Sala della Pace) in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena (**fig. 1.7**). The chamber served as the meeting place for a small group of officials who served two-month terms on a kind of executive board for a much larger and more complex government. The "Nine," as they were called for short, lived in the palace during their tenure. The scenes under which they

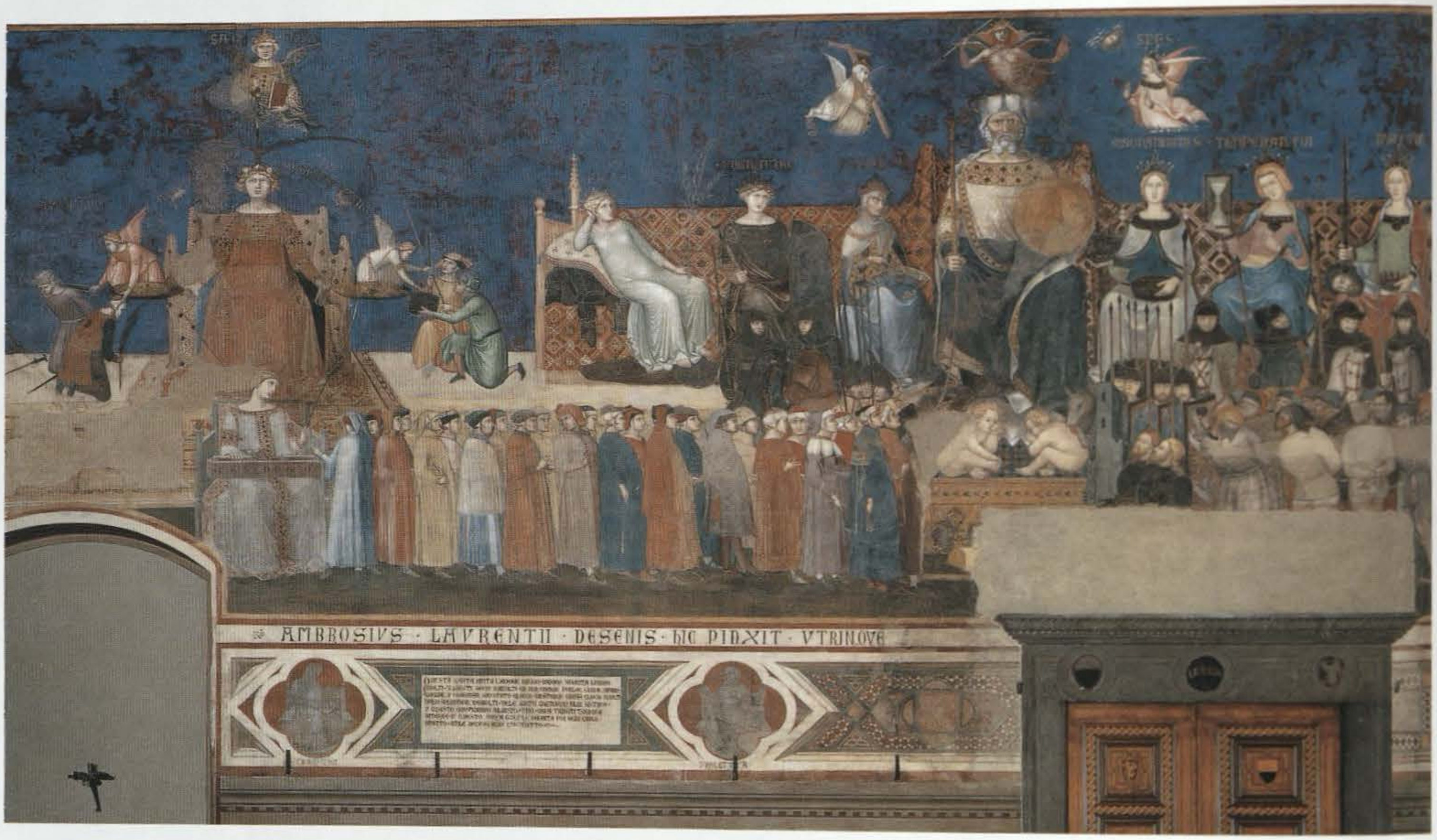


1.7
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, murals in Sala della Pace, 1338. Fresco. Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

convened were not, like Campione's Della Scala sculptures, propagandistic so much as they were exhortative: they showed the city as it would look if the Nine ruled well, and the scenes contrasted this well-run city with its corrupt opposite (fig. 1.10). A third wall of personifications (figures standing symbolically for abstract ideas) rendered the principles of "good government" in vivid and memorable form (fig. 1.8).

This third wall had two focal points, in the form of "*Giustizia*," or "Justice" (as a woman because the Italian word takes the feminine pronoun), and "*Ben Comune*," or "Common Good" (as a bearded man because the Italian noun *bene* is masculine). Inscriptions in Italian at the bottom ensured that the allegory in which these figures participated remained comprehensible to its viewers. Reading from left to right, the Nine would have seen that Justice controls two scales, one on each side, illustrating the notion that there are two kinds of justice: distributive, which rewards and punishes, and commutative, which mediates disputes. Descending from the vignettes that betoken this double function of the courts are two cords, which a figure of "Concord," seated below, weaves together and passes along to Siena's citizens, who proceed with it to the right, arriving at Ben Comune. Flanking him are the Virtues under which the Sienese governors were expected, literally, to unite. Peace, to his far right, reclines on a suit of armor. (The significance is double-edged: political idealists might read it as a triumph of Peace over the weapons of war; hawkish realists might see it as pointing to the bedrock of military strength that literally and figuratively supports Peace.) Fortitude, to his far left, wields a sword, wears a crown, and holds a severed head, signaling the occasional necessity of severity on the part of those who rule cities. The murals, that is, by no means imply that the *comune* was somehow less violent than the *signoria*; the point is rather to deny violence to individuals and to entrust it instead to the collective state, which uses force in necessary self-defense against outlaws and warlords – like the two armed men kneeling in submission before Ben Comune's throne, with a group of bound prisoners under guard behind them.

The associated cityscape (fig. 1.9) elaborates visually on the benefits of proper government: elegant new architecture, flourishing trade, and, not least, the safety of Siena's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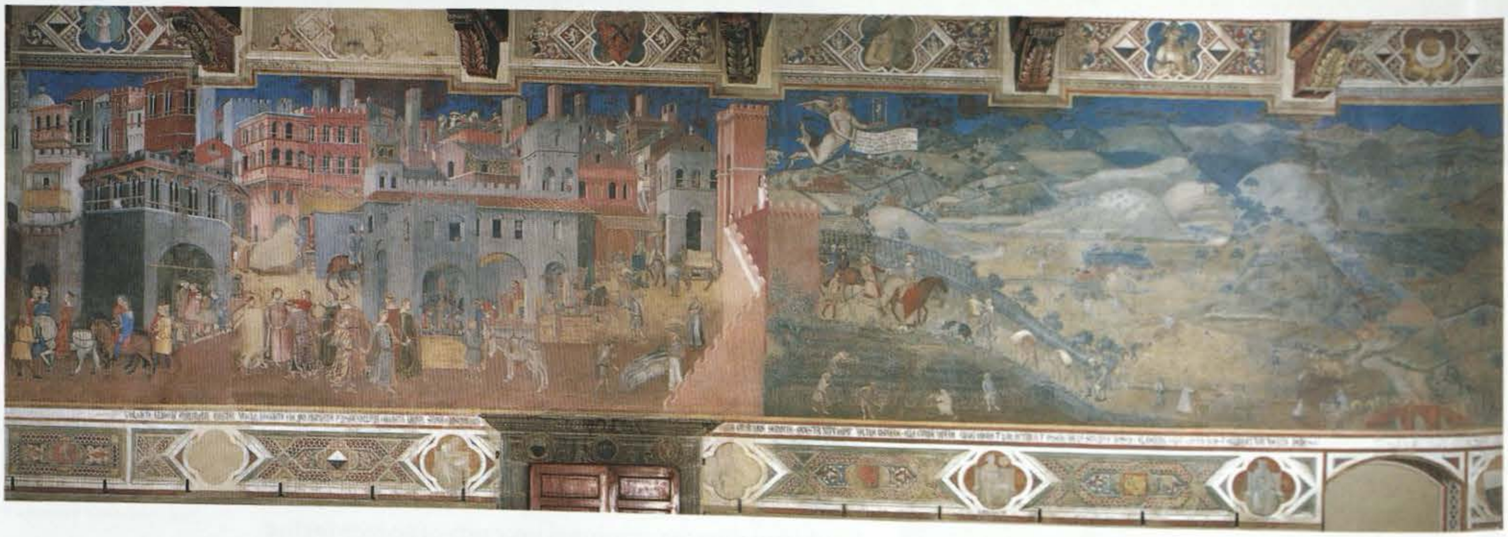


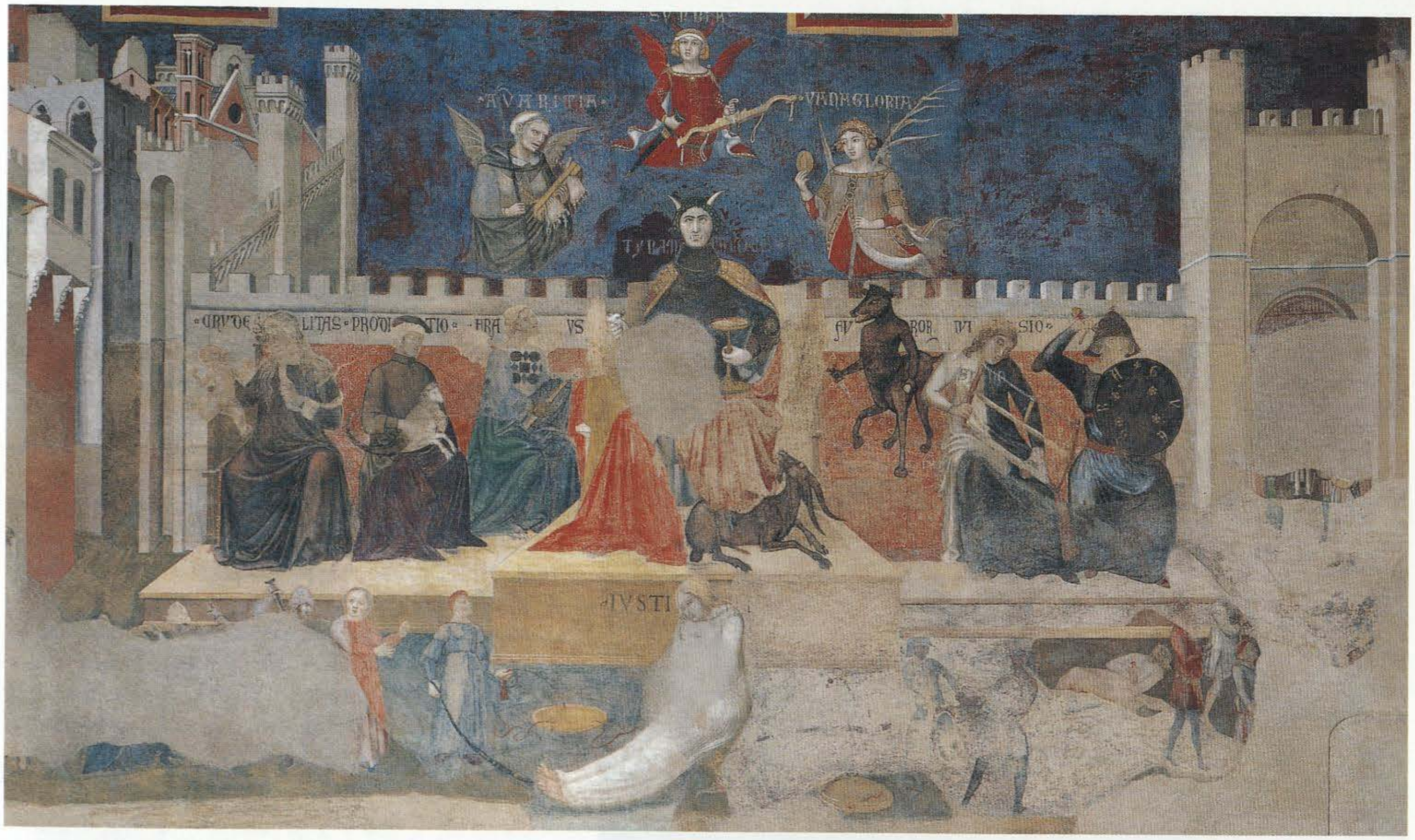
TOP

1.8

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegory of Good Government* (detail), 1338. Fresco. Palazzo Pubblico, Siena

citizens. In the well-governed city, a wedding procession passes through the public square and a group of dancers perform in carnival costume. Such elements convey a sense of joyous festivity, but they also – like all the other activities depicted in the city – represent the areas of daily life over which the governors using the room had jurisdiction. Local laws regulated festivity as much as trade; the city set limits on how much private citizens could spend on family celebrations, and imposed fines for infringements.

The same is true of the countryside depicted outside the city gates, which provides the setting for a range of human activities that Siena protected as sources of income. In one of the first surviving landscape paintings in European art since Roman antiquity, Lorenzetti unfurled a panorama of hills and plains, extending to the sea where Siena had just annexed the port of Talamone, which was vital to its trading interests. In addition to the varieties of rural labor, he depicted a party of elegantly dressed Sienese ladies and gentlemen riding out to hunt with falcons and dogs. The impact of such an inviting world on a Renaissance observer would have been particularly powerful given the contemporary real-



ity of the countryside. Much of the territory between cities was still barely within the rule of law; it was in large part a fearful place associated with wild animals, malarial marshes, bandits, and the marauding armies of warlords whom Siena was actively seeking to bring under control. The principle that has rid the countryside of these terrors is represented by the angelic figure of Security, who appears overhead with a scroll: "Without fear every man may travel freely and each may till and sow, so long as this commune shall maintain this lady [Securitas] sovereign, for she has stripped the wicked of all power." Ominously, Security also bears a gallows with a hanged man: she maintains safety through the threat of punishment, including the death penalty.

Lorenzetti's image of the city might remind us that Campione's Della Scala tomb (*see* fig. 1.4), too, took security as a major theme; the warrior saints topping the columns on the monument's corners work not just as symbols of the lord's virtue but also as guardians, looking out protectively over the community as a whole. What sets the Sienese image of government apart from the Veronese ruler image, both conceptually and rhetorically, is its explicit dependence on a principle of antithesis, on the differences it directly illustrates between good government and bad. Opposite the image of the flourishing city, Lorenzetti painted a fearful picture of what might happen if the governors did not do their jobs (*see* fig. 1.10). Buildings fall into physical ruin. No women dance – or even walk – in the city's streets, where thugs kill those who venture outside. Presiding over all is a horrific double of Ben Comune and his advisors. Here a cross-eyed and devilishly horned figure of Tyranny takes counsel from such vices as Cruelty, who torments a child, and Treachery, who holds a sweet-looking lamb with a scorpion's tail. Division, dressed in black and white (the communal colors of Siena), literally saws herself to pieces, a chilling symbol of how a hard-won political consensus can be torn apart by factional strife. Around the head of Tyranny floats the infernal trio of Avarice, Arrogance, and Vainglory – the vices of city life that preachers most regularly denounced. Justice, Ben Comune's partner on the "good government" wall (*see* fig. 1.8), now lies bound and helpless before the throne.

When the Sienese thought of real Tyranny, they probably imagined cities very much like Verona, where a single lord presided. The communal imagery of the Lorenzetti murals, in other words, does not just differ in kind from the dynastic cenotaphs of the north – such imagery makes the very idea of the *signoria* its target. By contrast to Campione's Della Scala monuments, in which saints surround an individual, the closest thing to a central character in Lorenzetti's *Good Government* is not a person at all but a symbol of anti-individualism ("common good"). The painter might seem to give us an enthroned and stern-looking man, flanked by courtly attendants, but the arrangement also reminds us that

OPPOSITE, BELOW

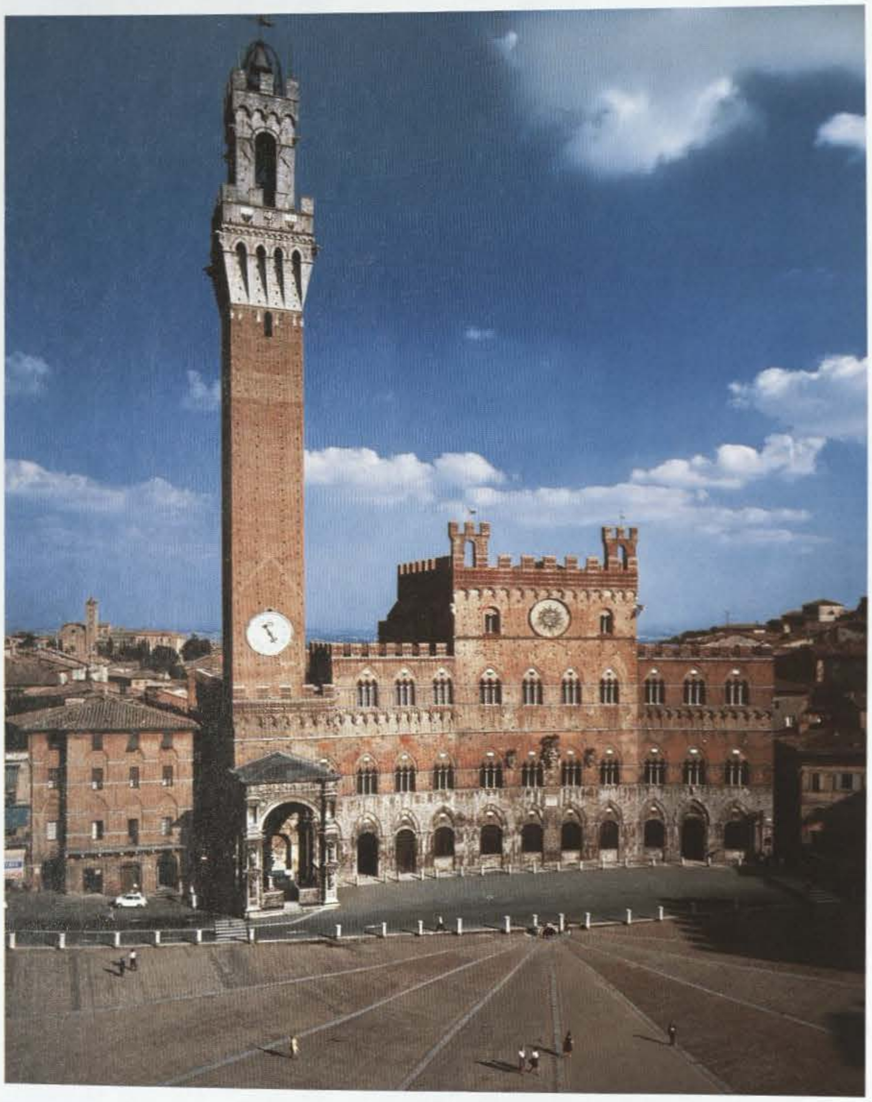
1.9

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Good Government in the City and Countryside*, 1338. Fresco. Palazzo Pubblico, Siena. **The inscription below reads (in part): "Look how many goods derive from [Justice] and how sweet and peaceful is that life of the city where is preserved this virtue who outshines any other. She guards and defends those who honor her, and nourishes and feeds them. From her light is born, both rewarding those who do good and giving appropriate punishment to the wicked."**

ABOVE

1.10

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegory of Bad Government* (detail), 1338. Fresco. Palazzo Pubblico, Siena



1.11
Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, begun 1297. The city hall itself was begun in 1297; the tower (the "Torre della Mangia") was added after 1325.

in a republic no real person can occupy such a position, even briefly. To submit the city to the rule of an individual rather than a group, this program announced, was inherently to give the city over to conflict and destruction.

We have been focusing on figural works, but architecture, too, signaled the kind of government that operated in a city. In the very years Lorenzetti was painting, the Sienese were adding a soaring bell tower to the Palazzo Pubblico, the building in which he worked (fig. 1.11). This structure, completed in 1348, made the Sienese town hall look more like its Florentine counterpart, the Palazzo dei Priori (fig. 1.12), where that city's Council of Nine met. Florentines referred to their governors as the *signoria*, a designation that, like Lorenzetti's depiction of Ben Comune, drew attention to what the city avoided: the council, serving as the city's "lord," prevented such a role from falling to any individual alone.

Lorenzetti's cityscape gives us a sense of the buildings that must have stood out on Siena's fourteenth-century skyline: narrow, stone, largely windowless towers that individual clans kept for their own defense. Florence itself had by this point banned the private use of such towers, and had even required citizens who owned existing structures of the sort to level or lower them. Only one building had the right to stand above others, and that was the building representing the subordination of private interests to the collective, the Palazzo dei Priori.

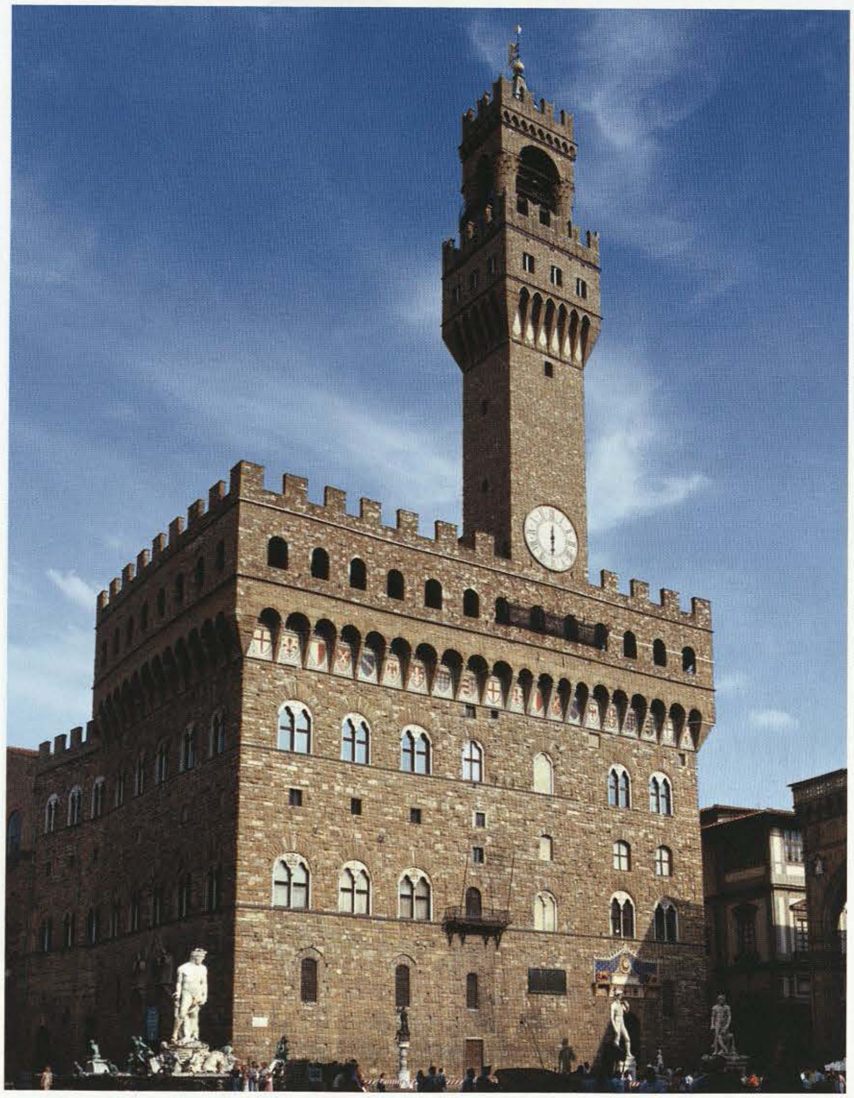
Architectural Legacies

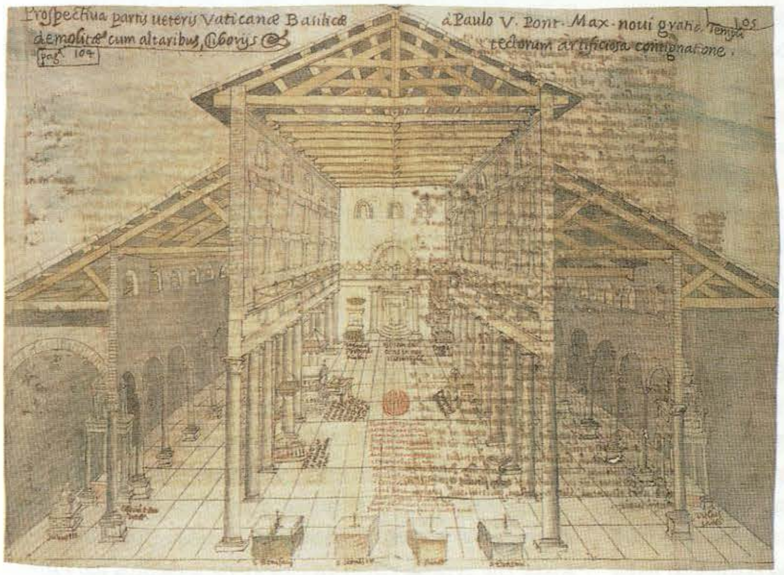
Florence's Palazzo dei Priori (now Palazzo Vecchio), begun in 1299, wears a *pietra forte* rustication echoing that of the earlier Bargello. The Sienese built their rejoinder to this in brick. In both cases city officials opted for a humble material, one that discouraged any pretense to magnificence on the part of those who temporarily quartered in the buildings as government officers. The buildings would set the standard for what communal order looked like: when, two centuries later, a series of architects including Michelangelo imagined a new government complex for the center of Rome, all in one way or another modified the surviving medieval structures on the site, keeping the familiar combination of elements, with a single tall tower rising over a **piazza**.

In the period this book covers, architecture took on few new functions. Although we have already seen that the place of a city, its mode of government, and its economic relationship to the wider world all helped determine what kind of buildings that city needed, most new structures conformed in one way or another to much older types. With the qualified exception of palaces, grand urban residences that came into their own only in this period, the most impressive structures in the period were not new at all, but were rather renovations or expansions of standing works. To give just one dramatic example: Venice established the basilica of San Marco by combining and replacing elements from two earlier churches, beginning in 1063. In the early thirteenth century the city then modified the whole western side of the structure, accommodating a **narthex** (a wide vestibule). The church's domes were enclosed by taller, broader ones a few decades later. Mosaics were added in phases over a period of three centuries, and new *spoglia* were joined regularly to the exterior walls. It is senseless, in short, to assign the building to a single architect or workshop, or even to give "San Marco" as such a date.

What we can talk about are the conventional forms that buildings took. The largest churches of the period, for example, were all basilicas: structures rectangular in plan and divided by aisles, following conventions that had originated in ancient Rome. Under the Caesars, basilicas had served a variety of purposes; early Christians adopted them for more specific religious ends. An iconic example was St. Peter's in Rome (begun *c.* 330–360; fig. 1.13), which focused on a **tabernacle** that covered the remains of the apostle credited with introducing Christianity to the city in the first century CE. In its original form this basilica consisted of a high, wide **nave** that led from the main eastern entrance to the altar zone at the west end. Looking up, visitors could have seen open wooden trusses supporting a peaked roof. Below these a **clerestory** contained the windows providing the main source of illumination. A second level of pitched roofs began their descent just below these windows, widening the space at the lower levels so as to include aisles at both sides. Columns plundered from other buildings supported these side roofs and separated the aisles. The nave terminated in an **apse**, a vaulted semicircular projection that marked the most holy part of the space. Dividing the apse from the nave was a hall-like **transept** that ran on a north–south axis. Later churches involved one or more variations on this model: they might have two side aisles rather than four; they might eliminate the transept, or move it forward so as to create a more cross-like plan. Anyone who wished to reject the basic template, however, worked against the weight of a tradition that had endured for a millennium.

In most towns and cities the main church was the cathedral – the topic of chapter 2. Accompanying the cathedral, either as an extension of the church or as a free-standing building, was often a **baptistery**, a congregational space where infants received their first sacrament (fig. 1.14). Whereas medieval churches, following the




Prospectiua partis ueteris Vaticanæ Basilicæ demolitæ cum altaribus, Ciborijs &c
pag. 104
à Paulo V. Pont. Max. noui gratia Templos tectorum artificiosa contignatione.

LEFT

1.13

Giacomo Grimaldi, Reconstruction of the interior of Old St. Peter's, Rome. Drawing, from "Descrizione della Basilica Antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano," 1619. Vatican Library, Rome. A seventeenth-century view of the by then demolished basilica that was originally constructed around the mid fourth century CE.

ABOVE

1.12

Arnolfo da Cambio, Palazzo dei Priori (now Palazzo Vecchio), Florence, begun 1299

1.14
Baptistery, Pisa, 1059–1128

model of the basilica, were longitudinal and **cruciform**, baptisteries were centrally planned, that is, uniform on all sides; they accommodated a gathering around the font that was at least ostensibly the main attraction of the space. All Italian towns had basilican churches, but *comuni* tended to lend more importance to baptisteries than *signorie*, since the buildings there served as a place for the town to come together and welcome a new citizen into its midst. As architectural types, baptisteries would have a far more limited future than the town hall or the basilica, although, as we shall see, towns continued to decorate their baptisteries, often employing major artists to do so.

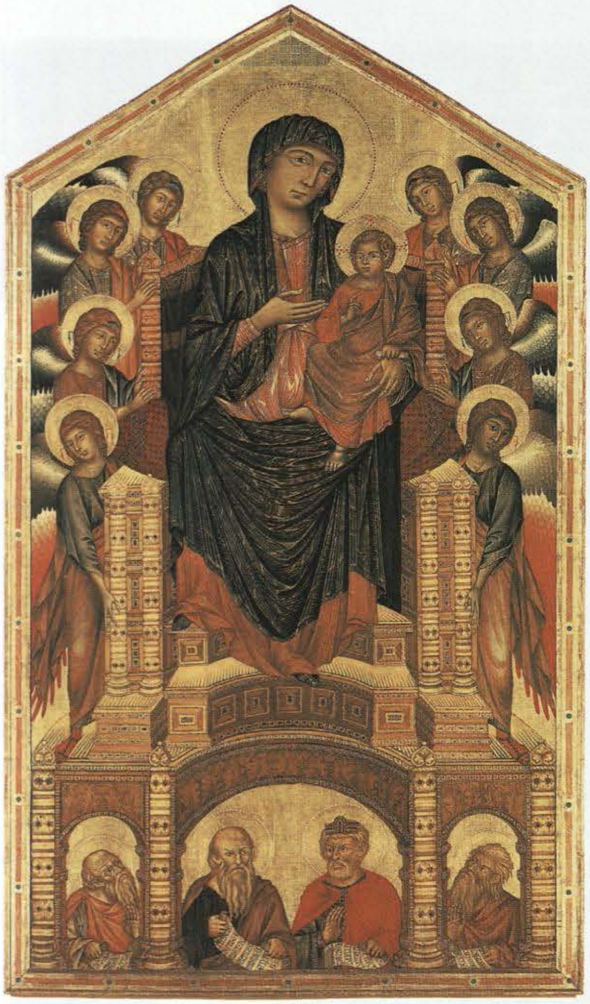
Giotto: The Painter and the Legend

Thus far, we have been emphasizing the governmental forms that shaped the conventions of patronage in the cultural centers of Italy. Artists accepting commissions, however, would have approached their assignments not only with instructions from their employers but also with an eye to what they understood their best predecessors to have done. What, to an artist looking back at the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, would have stood out most forcefully?

Ghiberti's *Commentaries* suggest that one painter in particular – Giotto di Bondone (*c.* 1267–1337) – was of special significance. Giotto "brought in natural art, and grace with it," Ghiberti wrote. "He was thoroughly expert in the whole art, he was the inventor and discoverer of much learning that had been buried some six hundred years." Such comments no doubt betray a regional perspective. The writer who had made Giotto's very name a byword for renewal and innovation was the poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), a literary colossus in the Florence of Ghiberti's day. Elevating Giotto promoted these qualities as defining features of significant art, but it also linked renewal to a local origin. Ghiberti referred to Giotto as a native of "Etruria," the ancient region now known as Tuscany, to which Florentines traced their own cultural beginnings: "In that time," Ghiberti wrote of the 1300s, "the art of painting flourished in Etruria more than in any other age, much more than it ever did even in Greece."

The comparison was doubly significant. When Ghiberti referred to the art of "Greece," he was presumably thinking in part about the ancient Greeks, who flourished in the time of his own alleged ancestors, the Etrurians. Beyond this, though, he had in mind the sacred art of the eastern Mediterranean, a more recent tradition centered on the imperial capital of Byzantium. Ghiberti and his contemporaries regarded the "Greek style" – what we would call the **Byzantine** tradition – as decisive for the painting in Italy that had developed in the century before Giotto. For several centuries travelers had imported Byzantine paintings of Christ and the Virgin, known as **icons**, from the eastern Mediterranean; several of these were regarded as especially holy because they were considered to have been painted in the first century CE by the Evangelist St. Luke from the living Virgin herself. Late medieval Italians had learned to work in this style and painted their own icons. Giotto's teacher was the Florentine artist Cimabue (*c.* 1240–*c.* 1302), and in Ghiberti's eyes Cimabue was a master of the Greek style.

Ghiberti's view had a certain empirical basis. Cimabue's image of the enthroned *Virgin and Child with Angels* from 1285–86 (fig. 1.15), for example, possesses many features that are characteristic of the Greek style (***see, for example,*** fig. 6.50): the impressive, superhuman figures seem to inhabit a timeless and largely spaceless realm. The gold striations defining the folds of the Virgin's gown represent highlights, implying a degree of three-dimensionality, but they primarily reinforce the general effect of linear pattern on a flat surface.



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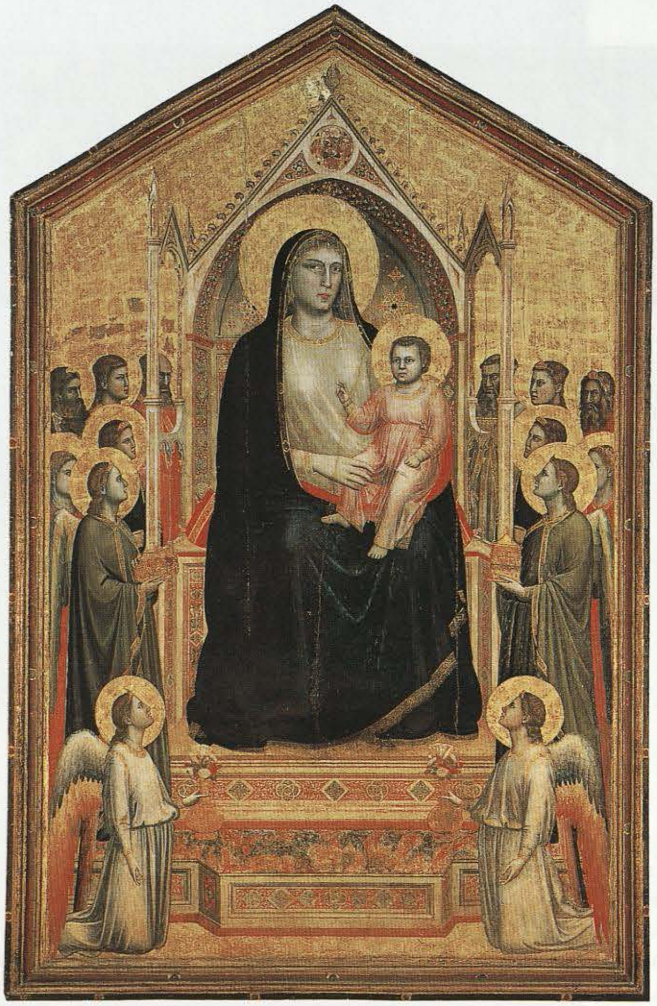
1.15

Cimabue, *Virgin and Child with Angels*, 1280–85. Tempera on panel, 11'7" x 7'4" (3.85 x 2.23 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence



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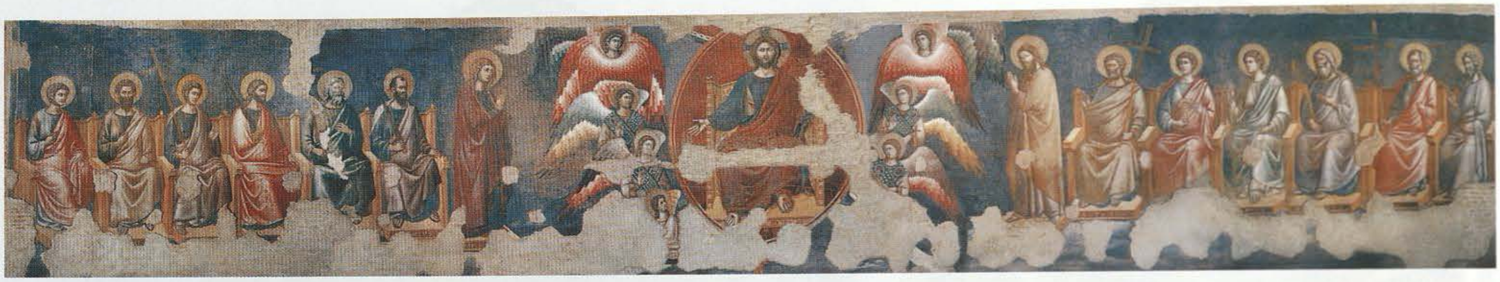
1.16

Giotto, *Virgin and Child with Angels ("Ognissanti Madonna")*, *c.* 1310. Tempera on panel, 10'8" x 6'25" (3.25 x 2.04 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

The painting's characters are symmetrical and repetitive: the Virgin's gesture and facial rendering, in particular, borrow formulas established by earlier pictures.

Ghiberti's characterization of Cimabue as a Byzantine ("Greek") works only so far: unlike many of his predecessors, Cimabue constructed his Virgin's throne so as to suggest recession in space. This does not compromise the overall effect of flatness, but the throne appears more solid and substantial than the figures. Still, Giotto's treatment of the same subject in his *Ognissanti Madonna* (fig. 1.16), painted nearly thirty years later than Cimabue's image, in *c.* 1310, bears out Ghiberti's general perception of the difference between the two artists. Compared to Cimabue's, Giotto's Virgin and Child are solid and weighty. Rather than relying on golden highlights, Giotto painted shadows of diminishing intensity on the faces and bodies, and he used a lighter tone of blue to suggest the shifting appearance of light on a robe that falls in thick, sculptural folds over the Virgin's projecting knees. In Giotto's painting the angels appear to stand one behind the other rather than filling the picture surface from top to bottom.

The long list of works that Ghiberti ascribed to Giotto, only some of which survive, are now mostly thought to be the work of multiple artists or teams of artists, some of them probably associated with, or trained by, the historical Giotto, some not. The idea of one brilliant individual transforming the history of art makes for a compelling story; it is a key myth of the Renaissance. At best, however, Giotto was one of the more accomplished members of a wave of artists working in a range of new styles around 1300, not all of whom were Tuscan. Ghiberti mentions the Roman painter and mosaicist Pietro Cavallini (*c.* 1250–*c.* 1330), whose wall paintings at St. Peter's in Rome were "most excellently done and with great relief," yet the staunchly patriotic Ghiberti makes the Roman Cavallini something less than a peer of the Florentine Giotto: "[Cavallini] retains a bit of the old Greek style." Very little of Cavallini's painting now survives, but some fragments of wall paintings (fig. 1.17), executed around 1290 on the inner facade of the Roman church of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, pre-date anything that can be ascribed to Giotto, and they belie Ghiberti's implication that Giotto was the earliest artist to model his figures in light and shade.



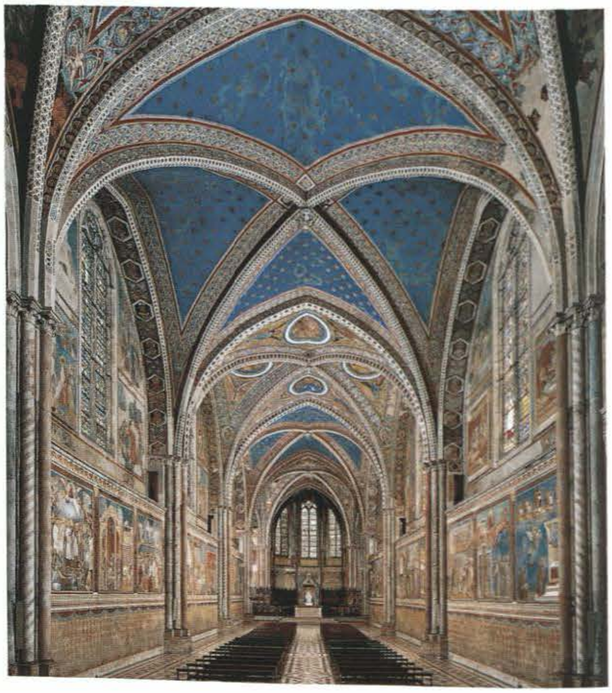
1.17
Pietro Cavallini, *The Last Judgment*, c. 1290. Fresco. Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome

Mural Painting: The "Upper Church" at Assisi

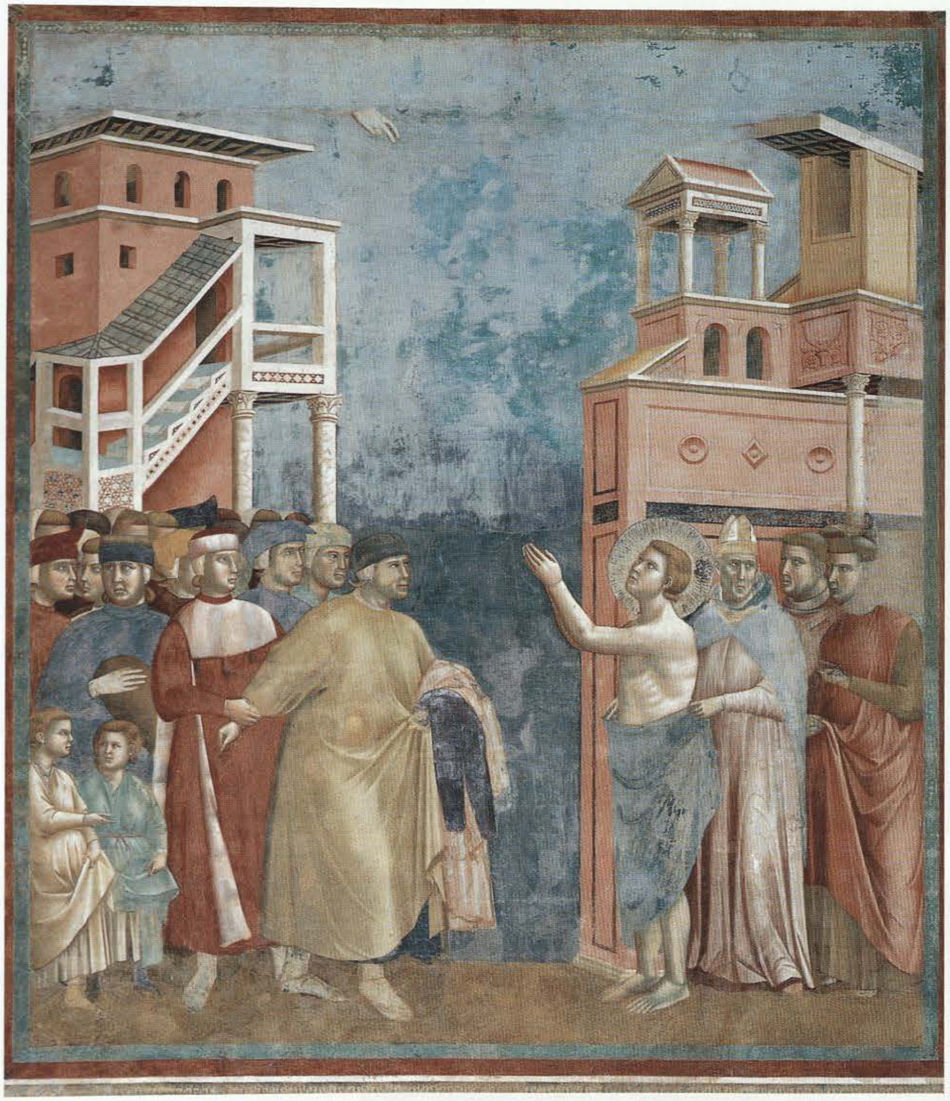
Cavallini's *Last Judgment* belonged to a larger project of redecoration that would originally have included the entire nave of Santa Cecilia. Though working more directly under the auspices of the cardinal who had title to the church, Cavallini painted during the reign of Pope Nicholas IV, the century's greatest sponsor of large-scale murals. Nicholas was the first Pope to have come from the ranks of the Franciscans, one of the new **Mendicant Orders** that had arisen during the 1200s, after the charismatic visionary preacher Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226) and the zealous crusader against heresy Dominic de Guzmán (1170–1221) each founded priestly brotherhoods that embraced the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The mendicants – primarily the **Dominicans** and the **Franciscans**, but also the Carmelites, Servites, and Augustinians – sought to make the teachings of the Church intelligible and relevant to the ordinary people of Europe. Unlike monks who dwelt apart from the urban world in monasteries, the mendicant friars lived and worked in the cities, drawing vast crowds to new large churches designed for preaching. In their sermons, the friars particularly dwelt on the virtue of charity, confronting the mercantile principle of self-interest with an insistence on the common good and regard for the poor.

Pope Nicholas himself took a particular interest in the pioneer basilica of the Franciscan Order, San Francesco in Assisi (begun 1228), encouraging pilgrims from all around Europe to travel to the complex and venerate the relics of the saint. A recently discovered document suggests that Nicholas provided the impetus for the decoration of the building now called the "upper church"; though debate continues to surround the authorship of the murals there, they may be among the earliest surviving works by Giotto and his shop. Extending throughout the entire nave and transept, the paintings narrate a kind of authorized or official version of the life of St. Francis, stressing his social mission, his miracles, his Christ-like nature, and his close relations with the papacy (fig. 1.18). Proclaiming institutional approval was necessary because Francis, with his demands for radical social reform and his criticism of the wealth of the Church, had been a controversial figure during his lifetime, and some of his more extreme followers were persecuted. He was a mystic who was believed to have had the wounds of Christ, known as the stigmata, miraculously imprinted on his own body in the course of an ecstatic vision, and the cycle of paintings depicts not only the miracle itself but also its legal verification by clerics and noblemen at the time of the saint's death in 1226. Appealing to a popular audience rather than to a bookish community of monks, the murals show Francis's life unfolding in a contemporary Italian city. The scenes are populated by an array of recognizable human types – individualized clerics, merchants, and nobles – all of them performing their role in the story with dramatic gestures and vivid expressions. Such devices attested to the veracity of the biographical events depicted, encouraging visitors to identify with the feelings of astonishment and wonder that the original witnesses to the extraordinary events had experienced.

A key episode is the moment where the young Francis renounces his family and worldly possessions, to the



1.18
Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi, view of the murals in the upper church, before 1310.



1.19
St. Francis Master, *St. Francis Renouncing his Worldly Possessions,* before 1310. San Francesco, Assisi, upper church

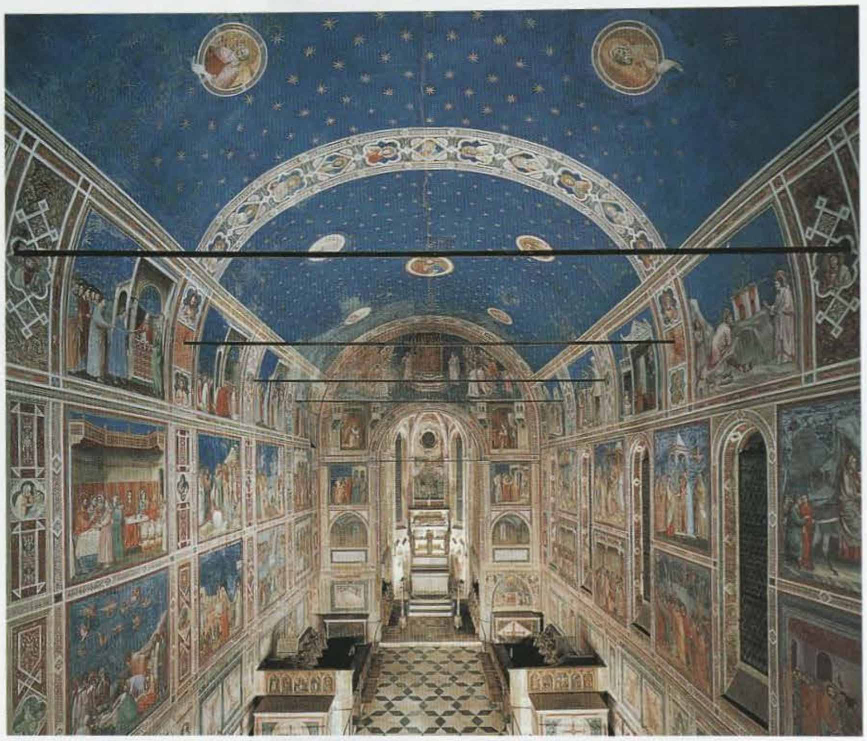
manifest anger of his father and consternation of the people of Assisi: looking toward heaven, Francis sees the hand of God signaling approval (**fig. 1.19**). The bishop of Assisi, mortified to see that Francis has discarded even his clothes in order to return them to his father, intervenes to cover the young man. The architecture in the scene amounts to little more than a symbolic backdrop, but it effectively registers the gulf between the secular world abandoned by Francis and the world of the Church, which now offers him protection.

Private Patronage: The Arena Chapel

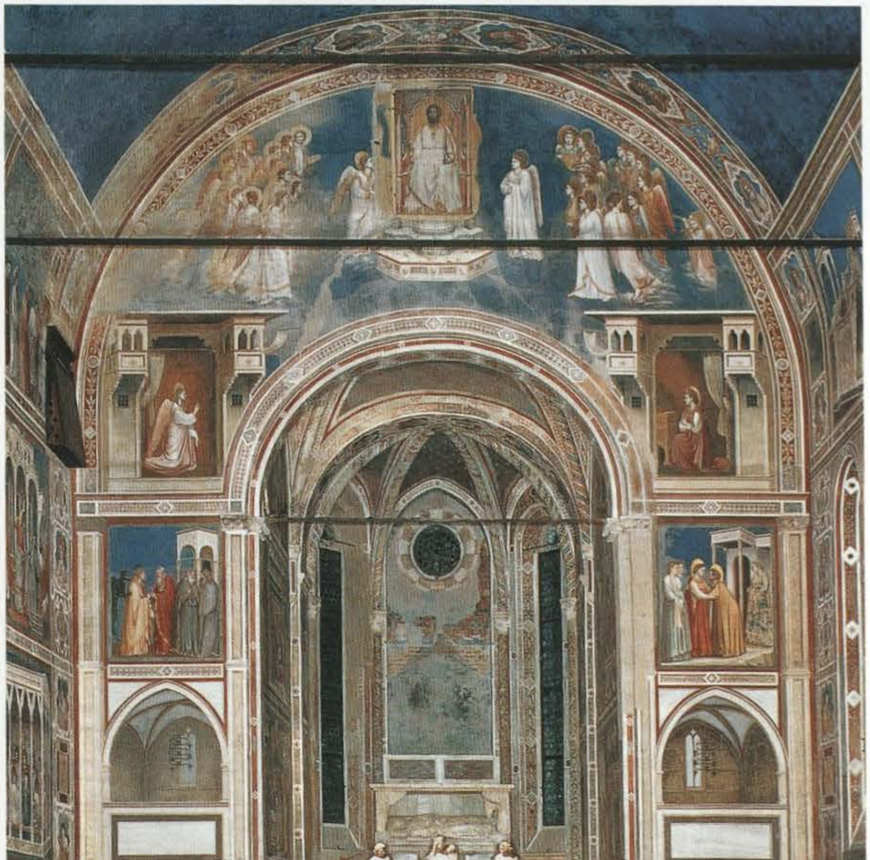
Followers of saints Francis or Dominic could demonstrate their own regard for the poor through pious donations to the friars themselves, who (at least in principle) were not allowed to own property and had to beg for alms. Prominent families could also endow chapels in mendicant churches, paying for vestments, candles, liturgical vessels, and very often decoration in the form of murals, altarpieces, or stained-glass windows. In return, family members obtained the right to be buried in the chapel, thus assuring themselves of the future prayers of the friars and the faithful. (Less wealthy people settled for burial in the crypt before the altar: their carved floor tombs still give churches like Santa Croce in Florence the appearance of a cemetery.)

Giotto's own single most famous cycle of paintings today, in fact, are the murals that he executed in Padua beginning around 1303 for a wealthy banker's son named Enrico Scrovegni (*fl.* early 1300s). The paintings were to decorate a large chapel that Scrovegni had just built near his palace, the latter now destroyed; it is sometimes referred to as the "Arena" Chapel after the Roman amphitheater that once occupied the same location. To build what was essentially a small, private church was to bypass the usual institutions and appeal directly to divine intercessors. At the same time, Scrovegni adopted a decorative scheme that late medieval basilicas had made familiar.

Scrovegni's builders seem to have constructed the boxlike chamber's unbroken expanses of wall, which are



1.20
Arena Chapel (also called "Scrovegni Chapel"), Padua: interior, looking toward the apse. Frescoes by Giotto, 1304–06.



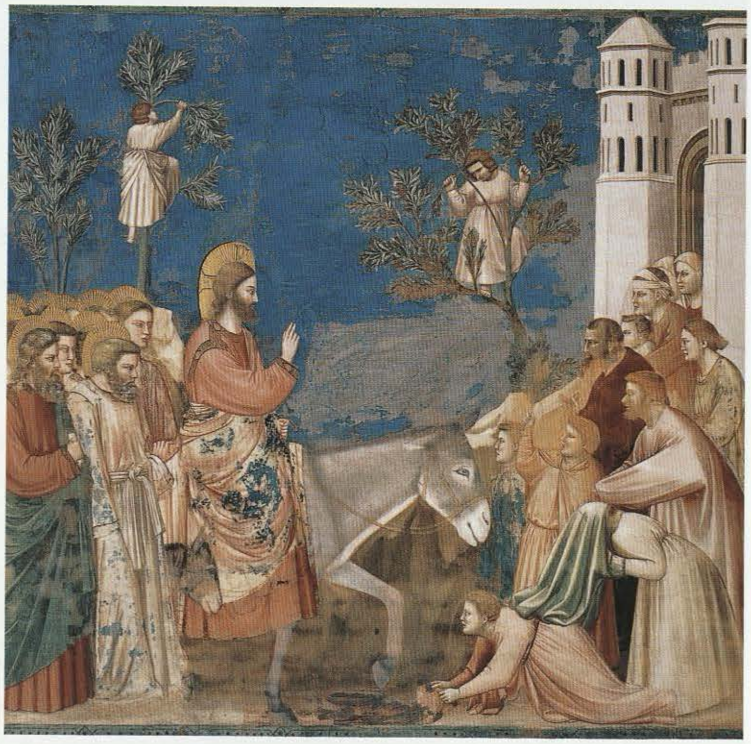
1.21
Giotto, frescoes on the altar wall, c. 1303. Arena Chapel, Padua

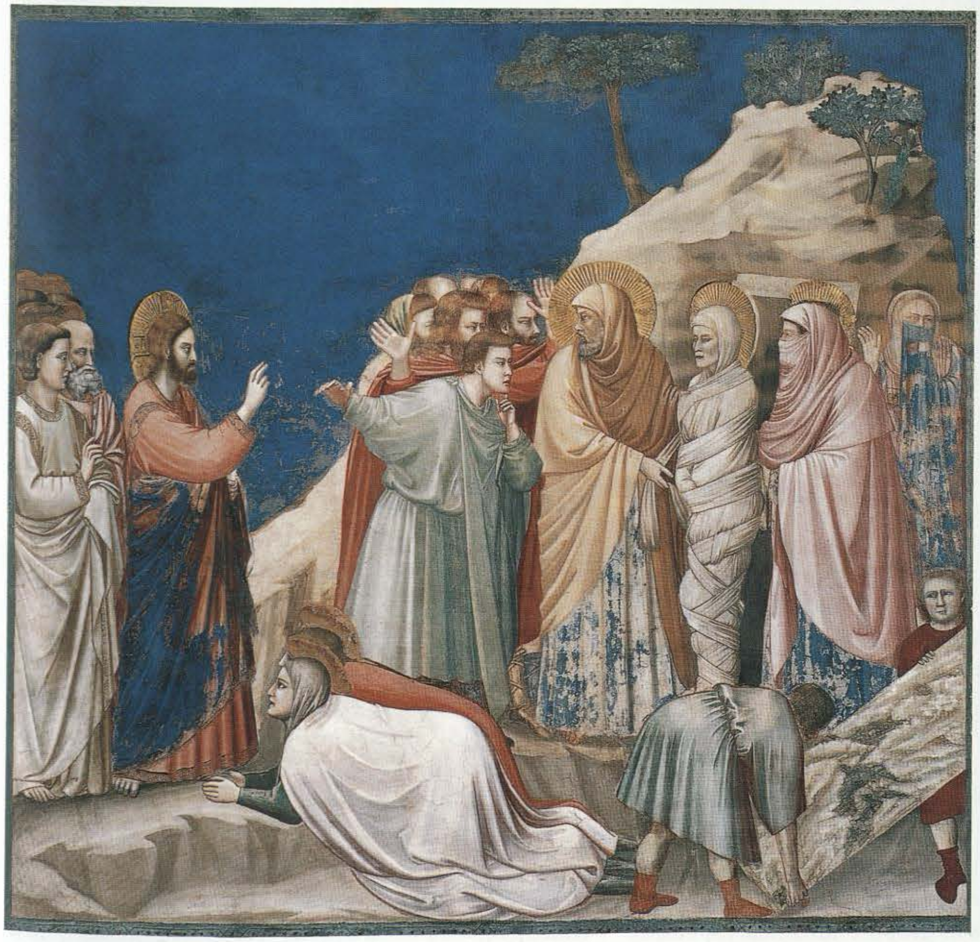
interrupted only minimally by windows, with paintings in mind, and Giotto covered the walls with three rows of narrative scenes unfolding the life of the Virgin and the life of Christ; a lower tier alternates panels of simulated marble and monochrome figures of personified Virtues and Vices (**fig. 1.20**). Portraits of Christ and the Evangelists appear in the vault against a rich field of blue, which recurs in the background of most of the narrative scenes, giving a sense of airy spaciousness to the whole ensemble and unifying the effect. On either side of a great arch framing the altar, Giotto demonstrated his extraordinary command of pictorial illusionism (**fig. 1.21**). The viewer sees what he or she might first take to be little chapels opening to the left and the right, but they are optical illusions. So, too, are the overhanging storeys that house the Annunciation, which appear to project into the real space of the chamber.

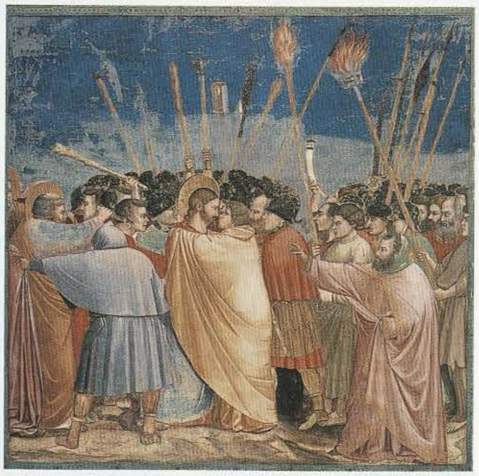
Giotto's approach here gave prominence to one of the most sacred and mysterious episodes in the entire Gospel, the moment of Christ's miraculous conception in the womb of the Virgin, when God took on human form. And that Giotto understood himself to be doing something distinctive with the scene is suggested by what he painted above, in the court of Heaven, where God sends forth Gabriel. To render God's otherworldly divinity, Giotto resorted to the sacred tradition of gold-ground panel painting. God is actually represented by an icon, painted on a wooden panel and set into the wall. To use Ghiberti's language, Giotto shifted from a "modern" to a

"Greek" style when it came time to set God symbolically apart from the conditions of time, space, and matter that prevail throughout the chapel.

Giotto's narrative scenes reduce the action to essentials, concentrating on a single significant gesture or encounter. The painter usually shows Christ advancing in profile from left to right, his right hand raised in blessing, as in *Christ Entering Jerusalem* (fig. 1.22), or bringing about a miracle, as in *The Raising of Lazarus* (fig. 1.23). In the climactic encounter, *The Betrayal of Christ* (fig. 1.24), Judas with a kiss identifies Christ to the Jews seeking to arrest him. Enfolded in Judas's cloak, Jesus remains resolute and unperturbed: through a minimum of means, the painter signals Christ's more-than-human nature. Here and elsewhere, Giotto carefully organizes the figures so that subordinate episodes do not detract from the main event; a characteristic device is the figure viewed from the back, which crops and frames the action taking place beyond. In contrast to Byzantine painters, who generally sought to preserve the integrity of the human body, Giotto sometimes shows us only parts of figures, cropped by the frame or eclipsed by other people as they would be if the scene were unfolding in reality.







TOP

1.22

Giotto, *Christ Entering Jerusalem*, c. 1303. Fresco. Arena Chapel, Padua

ABOVE

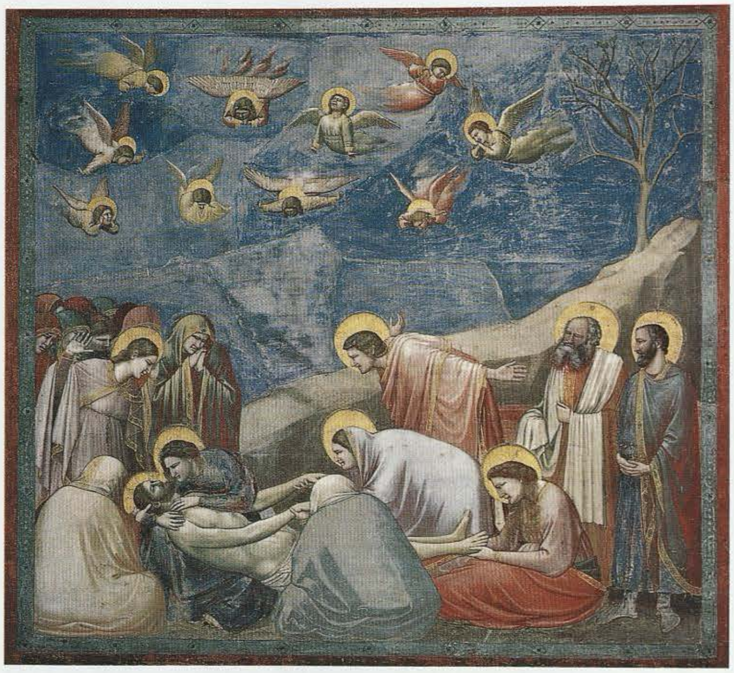
1.24

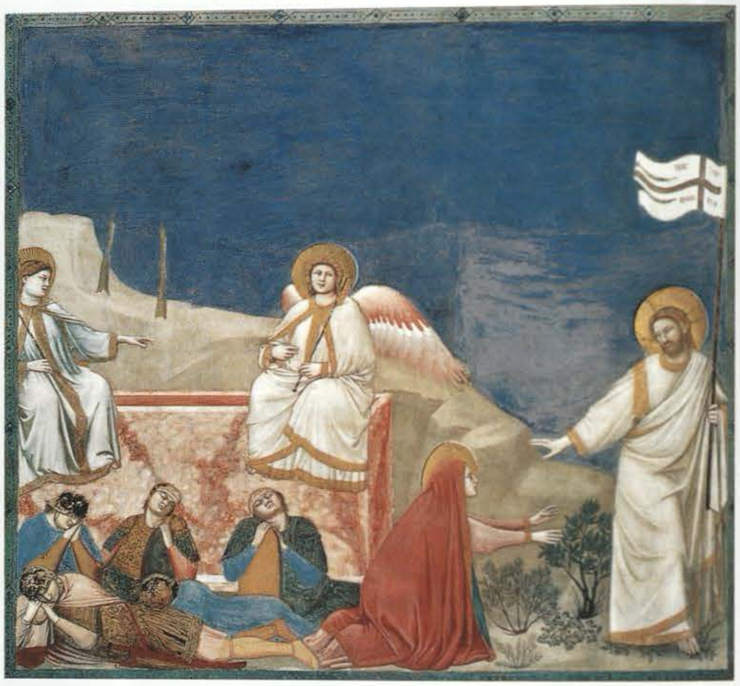
Giotto, *The Betrayal of Christ*, c. 1303. Fresco. Arena Chapel, Padua

LEFT

1.23

Giotto, *The Raising of Lazarus*, c. 1303. Fresco. Arena Chapel, Padua





ABOVE

1.25

Giotto, *The Entombment of Christ*, *c.* 1303. Fresco. Arena Chapel, Padua

ABOVE RIGHT

1.26

Giotto, *Noli me tangere*, *c.* 1303. Fresco. Arena Chapel, Padua

OPPOSITE

1.27

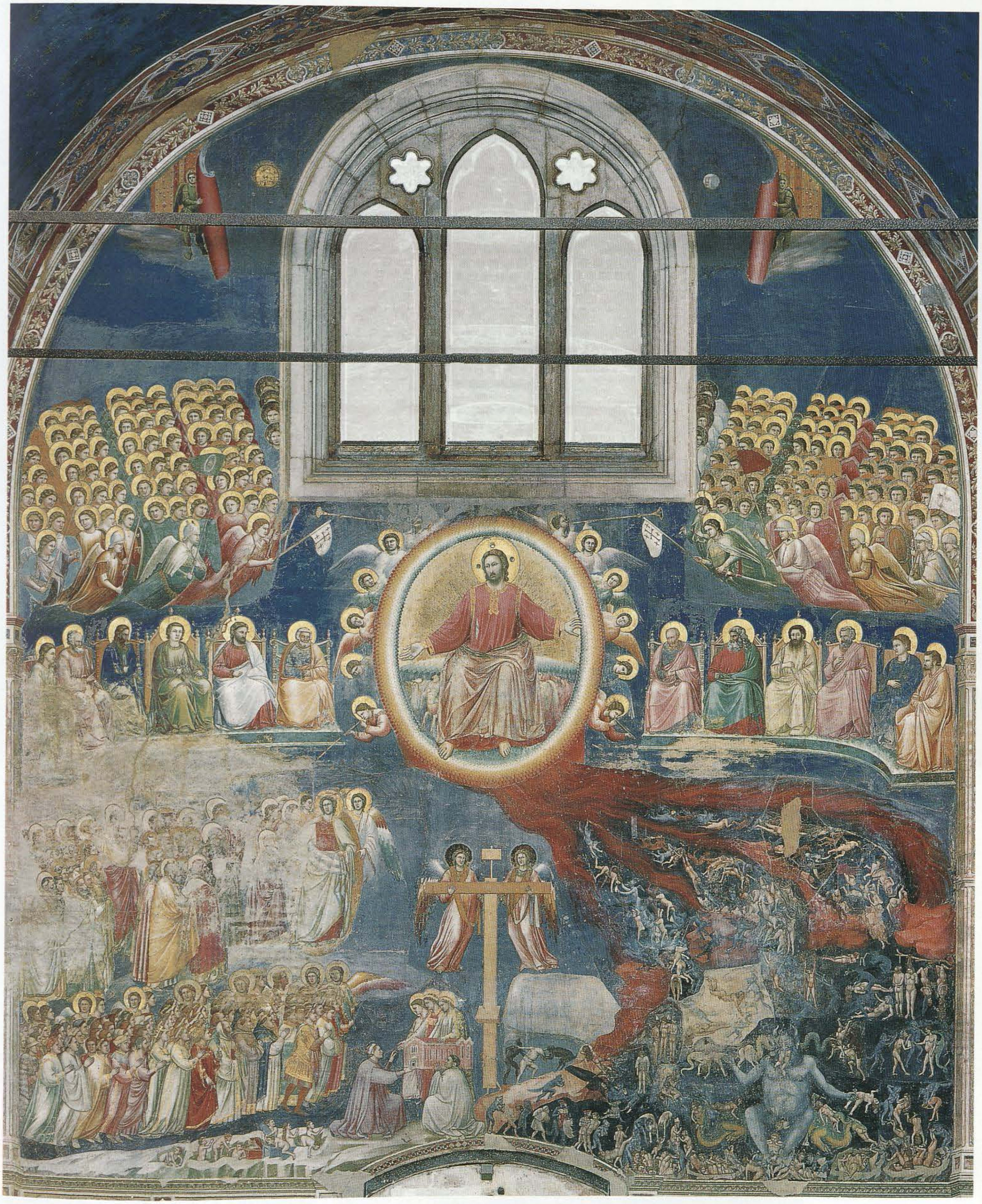
Giotto, *The Last Judgment*, *c.* 1303. Fresco. Arena Chapel, Padua

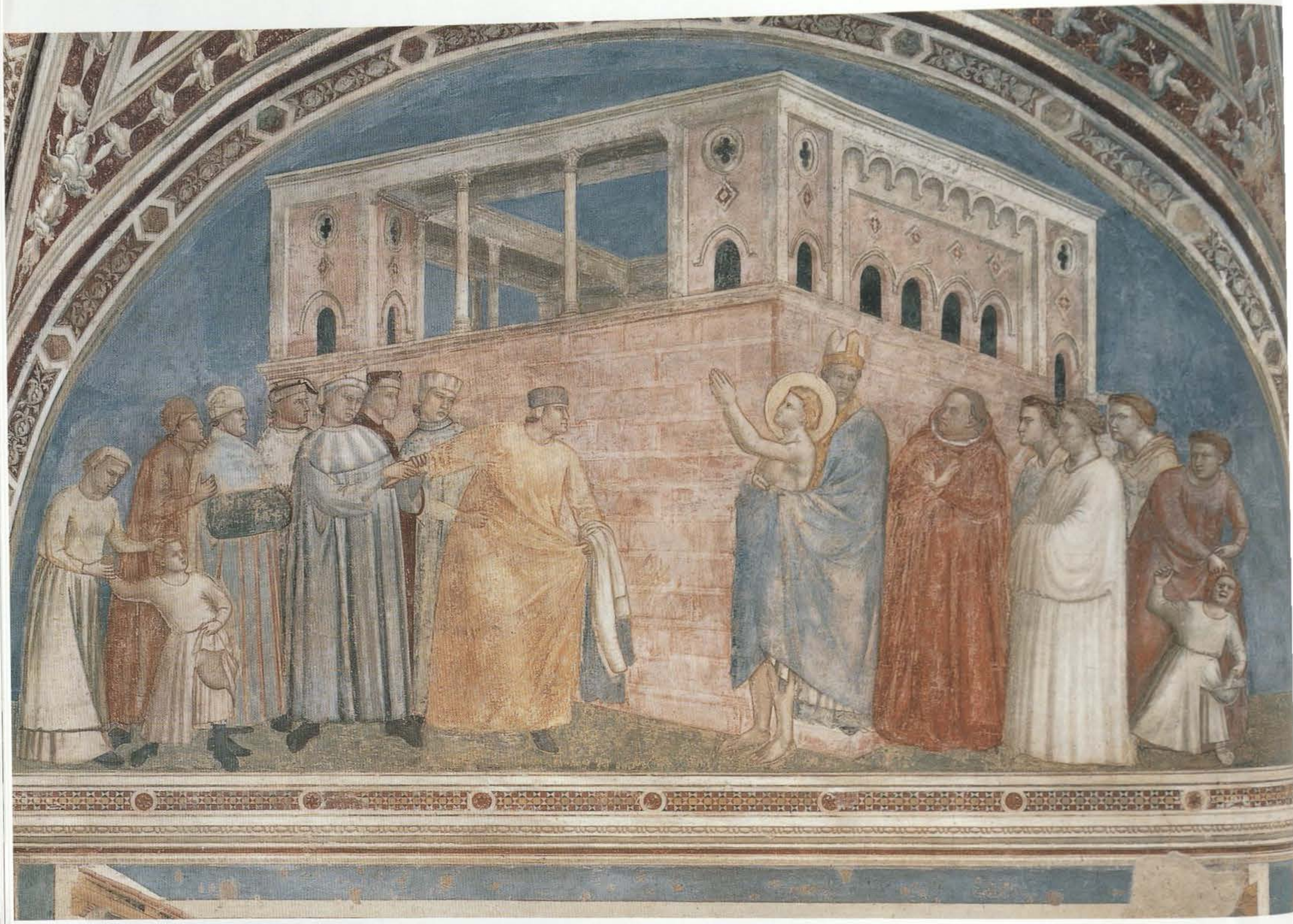
The processional motion of the narrative sequence is suspended in the scenes of the Passion, especially in *The Entombment of Christ* (fig. 1.25): here, a minimal landscape element forms a diagonal that underscores the sequence of descent, as the mourners lower the corpse into the lap of the Virgin and seem drawn by tragic gravity toward the ground. Seated figures, some of whose faces we do not see, communicate grief through the boulder-like inertia of their huddled bodies; above, weeping angels swoop and plunge in the sky. Giotto drew here on a long tradition of tragic Passion scenes, but his treatment set a new standard for rendering affective emotions that could involve the spectator. With scenes of Christ's resurrection (fig. 1.26), Christ's onward motion assumes a triumphal character, and ultimately he ascends to heaven.

The chapel's narratives culminate with a spectacular rendering of the end of human history itself. A great painting of *The Last Judgment* occupies the entire surface of the western inner facade (fig. 1.27) confronting the viewer who leaves the chapel. Two angels now "roll up" the blue that elsewhere had designated historical time and space, revealing a golden eternity beyond. Christ appears as judge in a flaming nimbus, with the Apostles enthroned to his left and right – much as Pietro Cavallini had depicted them at Santa Cecilia in Rome (*see* fig. 1.17). On an axis with Christ, a massive cross serves to separate the damned from the saved. Rivers of fire from Christ's throne engulf the hellish zone to his left, where sinners not devoured (and excreted) by Satan suffer a range of graphic torments. Especially prominent are the usurers (moneylenders), who hang disemboweled from gallows. The depiction recalls the Gospel account of the suicide of Judas, whom Christians regarded as a usurer, since he had sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver.

The particular sin at issue takes us to the heart of a conflict that accompanied the rise of commerce and private enterprise in the preceding centuries. The economic life of Italian towns, as well as the stability of governments, was sustained by banking, which entailed not only systems of credit but also lending money at interest. Preachers decried the sin that enriched so many professed Christians, but the Church was also practical, usually taking a more lenient line with those who devoted the profits of usury to charitable and pious works – such as the building and decoration of churches. This was the reason that Scrovegni, anxious about the source of his family's wealth, invested so much of it in his chapel: to the right of the cross, at the head of the ranks of the blessed, Giotto shows him offering the building to the Virgin Mary.

We might say that Scrovegni re-dedicated an entrepreneurial initiative elsewhere. He had his eye on the rewards of the afterlife, but his investment brought a measure of worldly prominence and advertised his influence with the powerful. The local clergy were scandalized that a private chapel succeeded in drawing away worshipers from their own churches, and no wonder: the very form of Scrovegni's decorations followed the example that "public" churches were just beginning to employ.





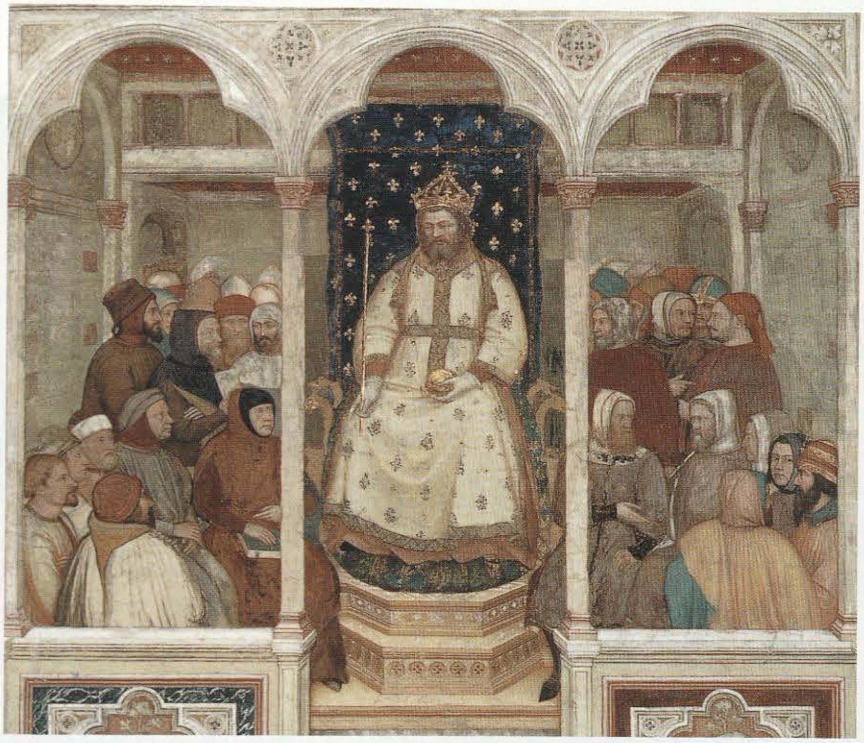
1.28
Giotto, *St. Francis Renouncing his Worldly Possessions*, c. 1320.
Fresco. Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence

Giotto's Legacy

Ghiberti, whose longest and most enthusiastic pictorial descriptions in his *Commentaries* are of narrative works, took the Assisi paintings to be by Giotto. Certainly Giotto knew them: he is documented as having visited Assisi in 1309, several years after painting the Arena Chapel. He had a role, moreover, in bringing images related to the Assisi models to sites with which Ghiberti was intimately familiar.

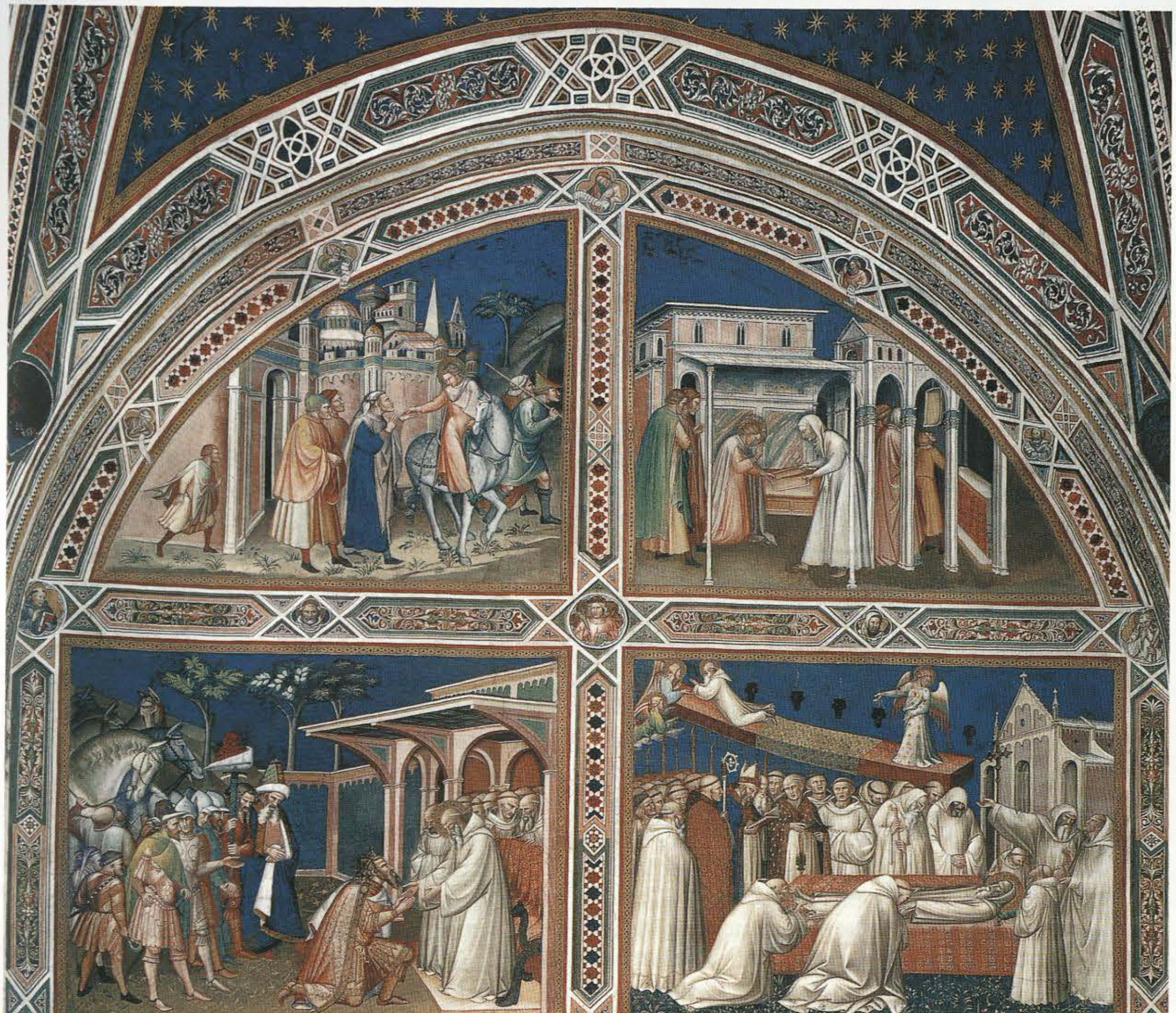
For example, in the chapel that the wealthy Bardi family commissioned in the church of Santa Croce, Florence, Giotto painted an abbreviated Franciscan cycle of seven episodes, including the *Stigmatization* (Francis miraculously receiving the wounds of Christ on his body), the *Funeral and Verification of the Stigmata*, and *St. Francis Renouncing his Worldly Possessions* (**fig. 1.28**). He heightened the drama of the hostile reaction by Francis's father – the other figures seem barely to restrain him – and added such details as the children who throw stones at Francis, the self-appointed outcast. The architecture now creates the space in which the action occurs: the painter aligns Francis with the corner of a massive cubic building that stands as the dividing line between sacred and secular worlds.

Murals like these set the standards for vivid and emotionally convincing pictorial narrative well into the 1400s. The high premium that Ghiberti placed on effective narrative in his *Commentaries* (and, as we shall see, in his own relief sculpture) is itself part of Giotto's long legacy. The painter's influence on subsequent practice resulted not just from the unquestionable force of his art, but also from the system of workshop organization and training. Wherever Giotto worked – Florence, Padua, Naples – he put together a large team of experienced painters and apprentices who enabled the rapid completion of large-scale commissions, sometimes more than one at a time. When he departed for home or for another project,



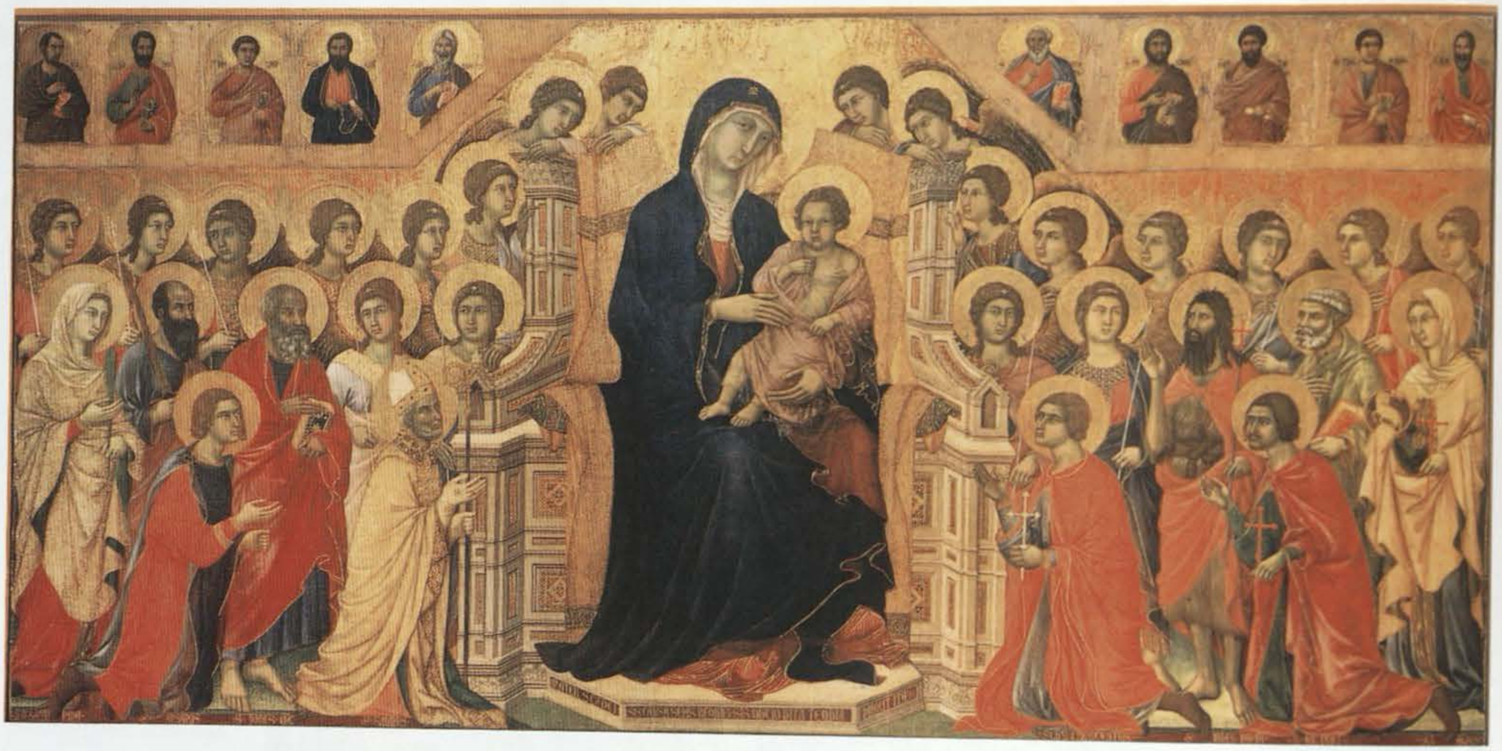
1.29

Altichiero, *Scenes from the Life of St. James*, 1376–79. St. James's Chapel, Basilica del Santo, Padua



1.30

Spinello Aretino, *Life of St. Benedict*, 1387–88: *Benedict leaves his family; Benedict returns a broken tray to a wetnurse; Benedict reproves the warlord Totila; Death of Benedict.* Sacristy, San Miniato al Monte, Florence. The frescoes were heavily restored during the nineteenth century.



1.31
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Virgin and Child with Saints ("Maestà")*, 1308–11.
Tempera on panel, main panel 7 x 13' (2.13 x 3.96 m). Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena

members of his team would have remained behind, capitalizing on their ability to execute commissions of their own in the artistic language of the master.

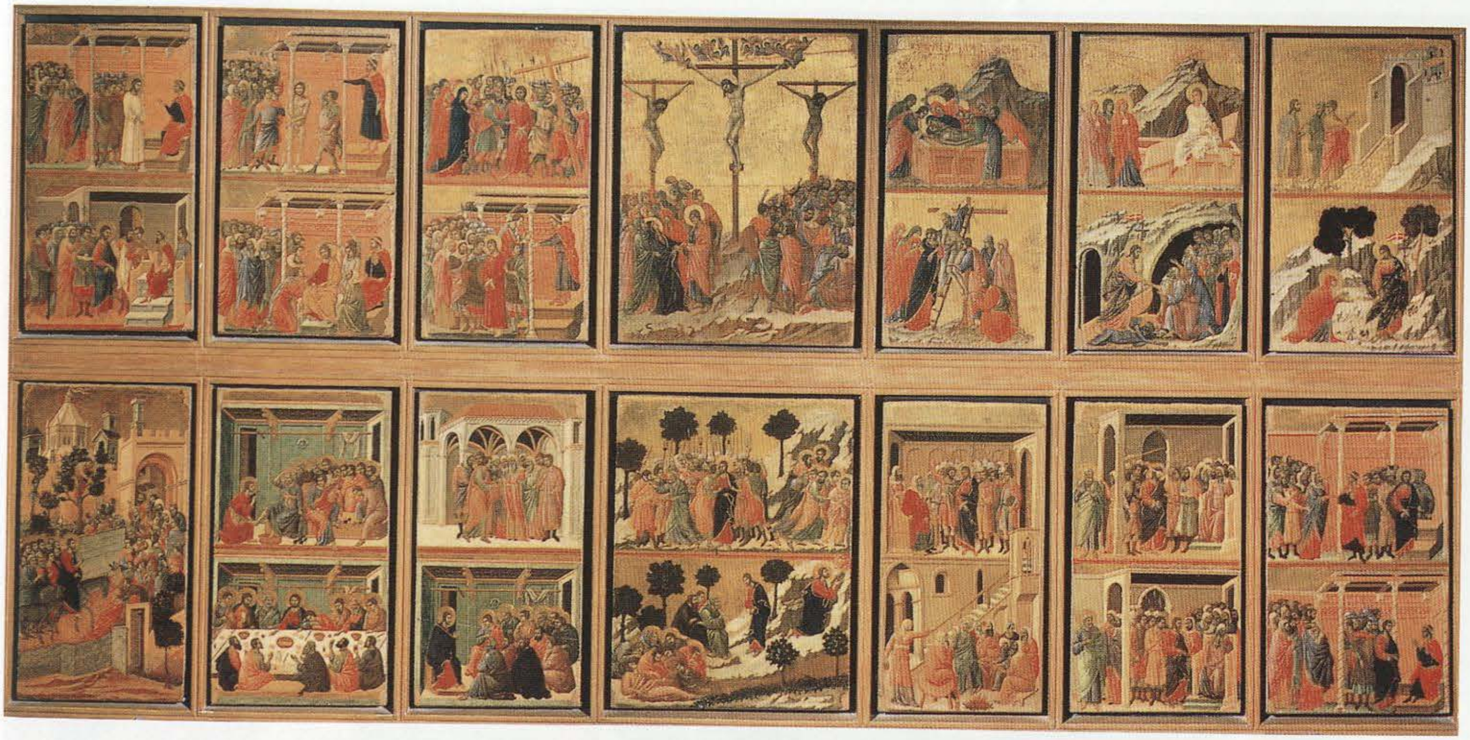
Writing a manual of painting in the 1400s, the Florentine Cennino Cennini (*c.* 1370–*c.* 1440) proudly declared his artistic descent from Giotto, through his master Agnolo Gaddi, the son of Taddeo Gaddi, who was Giotto's godson and most able assistant. Cennini had worked in Padua, where he could have seen remarkable examples of Giotto's ongoing impact on monumental mural projects for the ruling Carrara family. The painters of Padua in the late 1300s – who included Altichiero (*c.* 1330–*c.* 1390) from Verona and the Florentine Giusto de' Menabuoi (*c.* 1320–1391) – produced narratives rich in decorative pageantry in opulent architectural settings (fig. 1.29). The followers of Giotto in Florence tended to adhere more rigidly to Giottesque formulas in a plain and severe style. Indeed, a painter's adoption of Giotto's style in the later 1300s could signal his patron's embrace of politically conservative values. A good example is Spinello's (*c.* 1346–1410) *Life of St. Benedict* (fig. 1.30) in the sacristy of San Miniato al Monte just outside Florence, executed for the Alberti family in 1387–88. Spinello was a pupil of Jacopo del Casentino (*c.* 1297–1358), a follower and probable pupil of Giotto, but his works are seldom so emphatically like Giotto's as in this example. The Alberti were closely tied to the city's key governmental institutions, including the *signoria*, and a revolt in 1378 by the city's unskilled cloth workers, known as the Ciompi, had thrown these into crisis. To hire Spinello was to support tradition, civic heritage, and cultural norms.

Rival Traditions: Duccio

The *Maestà*

If Giotto represented the fountainhead of modern painting as it looked to such a Florentine as Ghiberti, the Sienese Duccio di Buoninsegna (*c.* 1255–1319) offered the most powerful contemporary alternative. Duccio left no documented murals, and he is most important for the innovations he introduced to altarpieces. He painted all of his secure surviving works on panel, taking the Virgin as his primary subject in every one. This, too, has a religious context. Outside of the Mass (the rite celebrating Eucharist, the consecration of bread and wine, in the Roman Catholic Church), the cult of the Virgin as intercessor was the most important and widespread manifestation of Christian devotion. She was invoked both by individuals and by entire communities, often in great collective rituals involving music, incense, and processions, culminating inside a city's most important church.

It was just such solemnity that accompanied the installation in Siena Cathedral of Duccio's *Virgin and Child with Saints ("Maestà")* of 1308–11, the greatest altarpiece from the period (fig. 1.31). Siena had dedicated itself to the protection of the Virgin, effectively designating



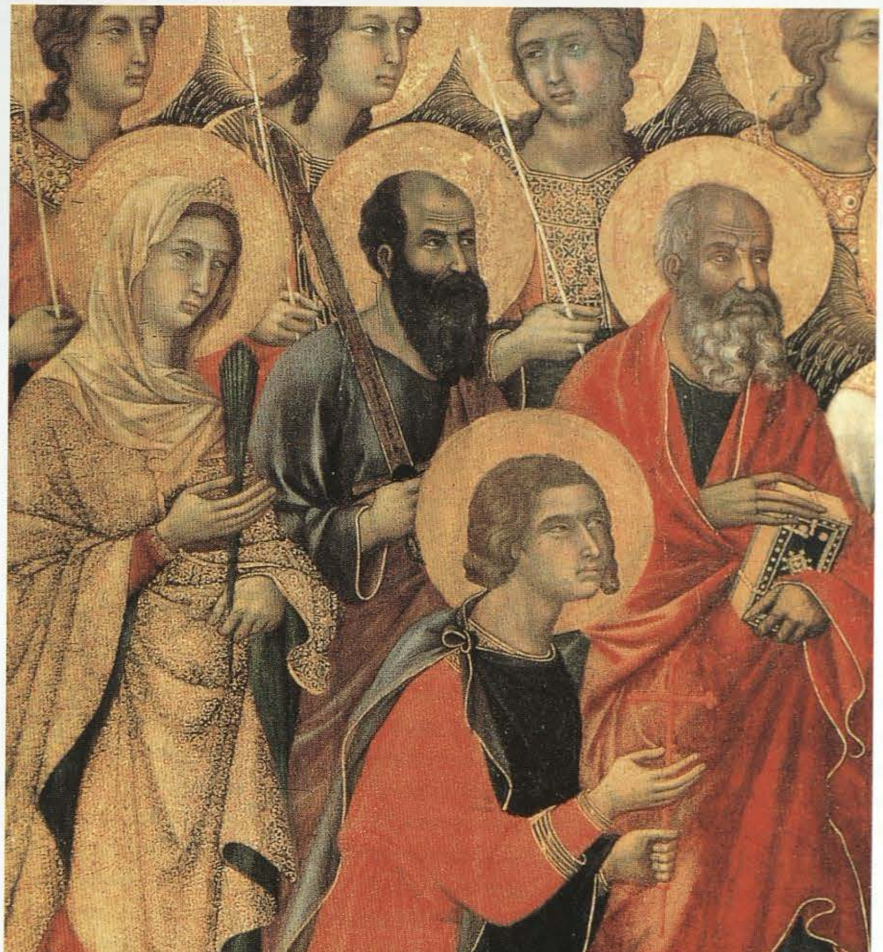
1.32
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Maestà*: Scenes from the back of the main panel, 1308–11. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena

her "Queen," in 1260. (The letters "CSCV" surrounding the head of Ben Comune in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's later painting stand for "Commune of Siena, City of the Virgin"; *see* fig. 1.8.) An older icon of the Virgin in the cathedral was believed to have aided the Sienese in a decisive battle against the Florentines in that year. Duccio undertook the *Maestà* when the city commissioned him in 1308 to replace the icon with a painting "far more beautiful, and more devout, and larger." As we shall see in chapter 3, this was in many ways a typical form of request. The same eyewitness who described the work in this way also recorded a characteristic ceremony: the carrying of the work from the painter's house to the cathedral, with a great procession including the bishop, priests, and friars, the officers of the government, the most worthy citizens and women and children, following which "all that day they stood in prayer with great almsgiving for poor persons, praying God and his Mother, who is our advocate, to defend us by their infinite mercy from every adversity and all that is evil, and keep us from the hand of traitors and of the enemies of Siena."

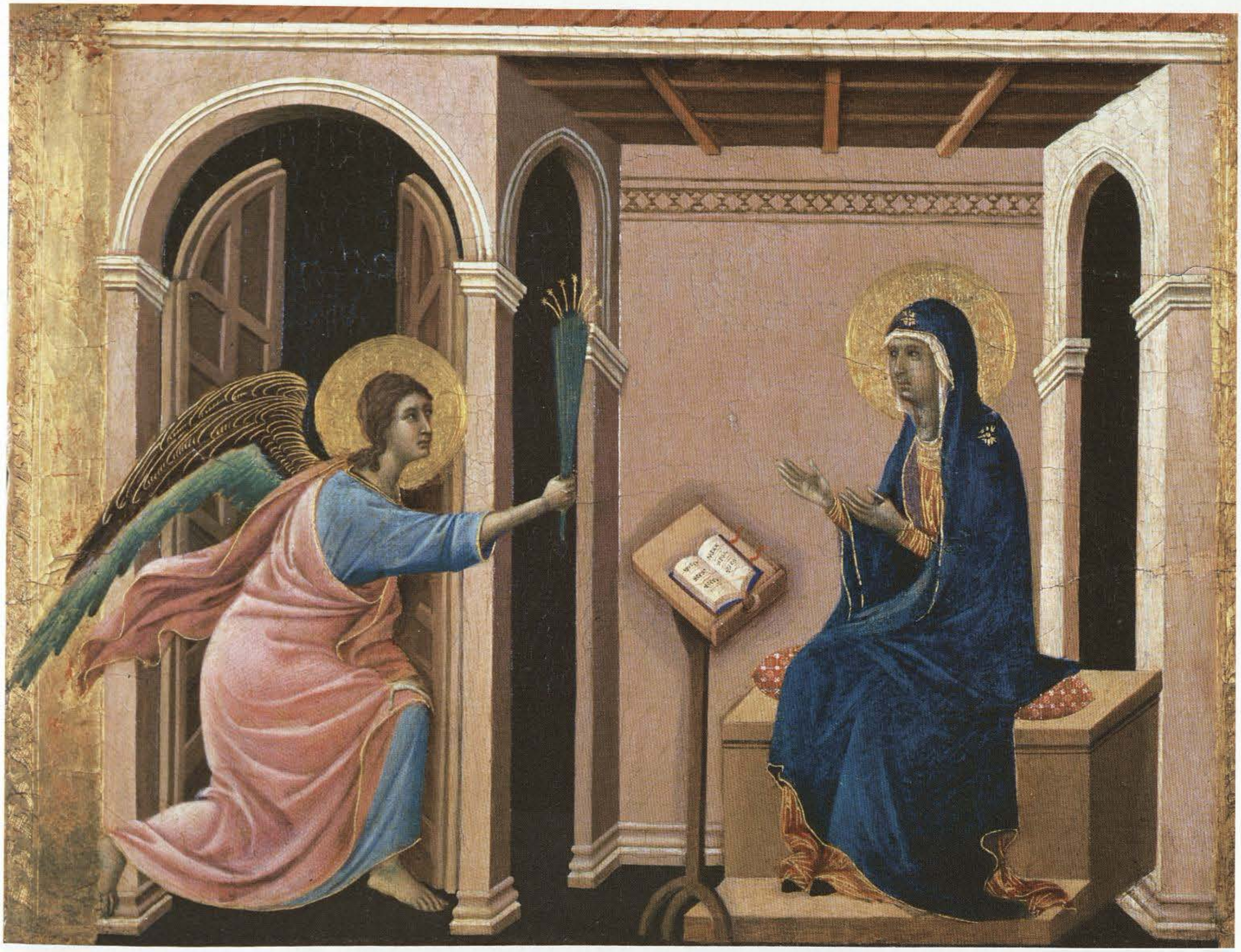
Duccio's *Maestà* altarpiece, painted on both sides, was later dismantled. Many of its parts have long since left Siena, but it still makes an impact through its scale and complexity. The side that originally faced the congregation shows the Virgin and Child with the court of Heaven (in Italian, *maestà* means "majesty"). Angels flank the throne as they do in the recent Florentine panels by Cimabue and Giotto, but now the composition extends to the right and left to include an assembly of saints, the most prominent of whom are the four patrons of Siena – Ansanus, Savinus, Crescentius, and Victor – who kneel at the foot of the Virgin's throne so as to beg her special intercession on behalf of the city. Originally this main panel would have been surrounded by a series of others. A row of panels above and below would have presented episodes from the Virgin's life; the upper row would have been surmounted by ornate pointed pinnacles with half-length images of angels. The other side of the *Maestà* (**fig. 1.32**) originally faced the clergy who assembled for Mass, in a part of the cathedral known as the **choir**. This side's multiple framed panels depicted forty episodes from the life of Christ, the largest and most important of which was the *Crucifixion* on the central axis. Its prominence again reflects its function, that of reminding congregants of the historical event – Christ's sacrificial and redemptive death – that the Mass itself repeatedly re-enacts.

What did the chronicler mean when he called the *Maestà* "more beautiful" and "more devout" than its predecessor? Fourteenth-century viewers would have found beauty in the visual splendor of precious materials (gold and **ultramarine** – the blue **pigment** made from ground **lapis lazuli**) given form by human skill. Duccio in fact showed off his skill by tooling the gilded surfaces to suggest **embossed** or **chased** metal; he also applied paint over gold and then worked it with a sharp point to suggest precious damask or embroidered fabric (fig. 1.33). His handling of the pigments themselves showed his command of the principles of light/dark modeling, though unlike Giotto, who pursued strongly volumetric effects in his figures, Duccio emphasized the picture surface by a constant overall play of elegant pattern – for example, in the swinging folds of the mantles worn by the two female saints at either end of the *Maestà* scene (*see* fig. 1.31), and the sinuous meandering golden borders of the Virgin's blue cloak and the Child's transparent garment. Duccio may have wanted his beholders to see these beautiful flowing lines as something like a personal trademark, an index of his distinctness as an artist – in a word, of his *style*. At the base of the Virgin's throne, near the swirling gold edge of the mantle, he painted in Latin the words "Holy Mother of God, be the cause of peace to Siena and of life to Duccio because he has painted thee thus."

Duccio also undertook extraordinary experiments in rendering pictorial space, especially in his narrative scenes. Occasionally, he worked with the kind of room Giotto might have included: Duccio's *Annunciation* (fig. 1.34), for example, takes place in a convincingly



1.33
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Maestà* (detail): St. Catherine, 1308–11.
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena

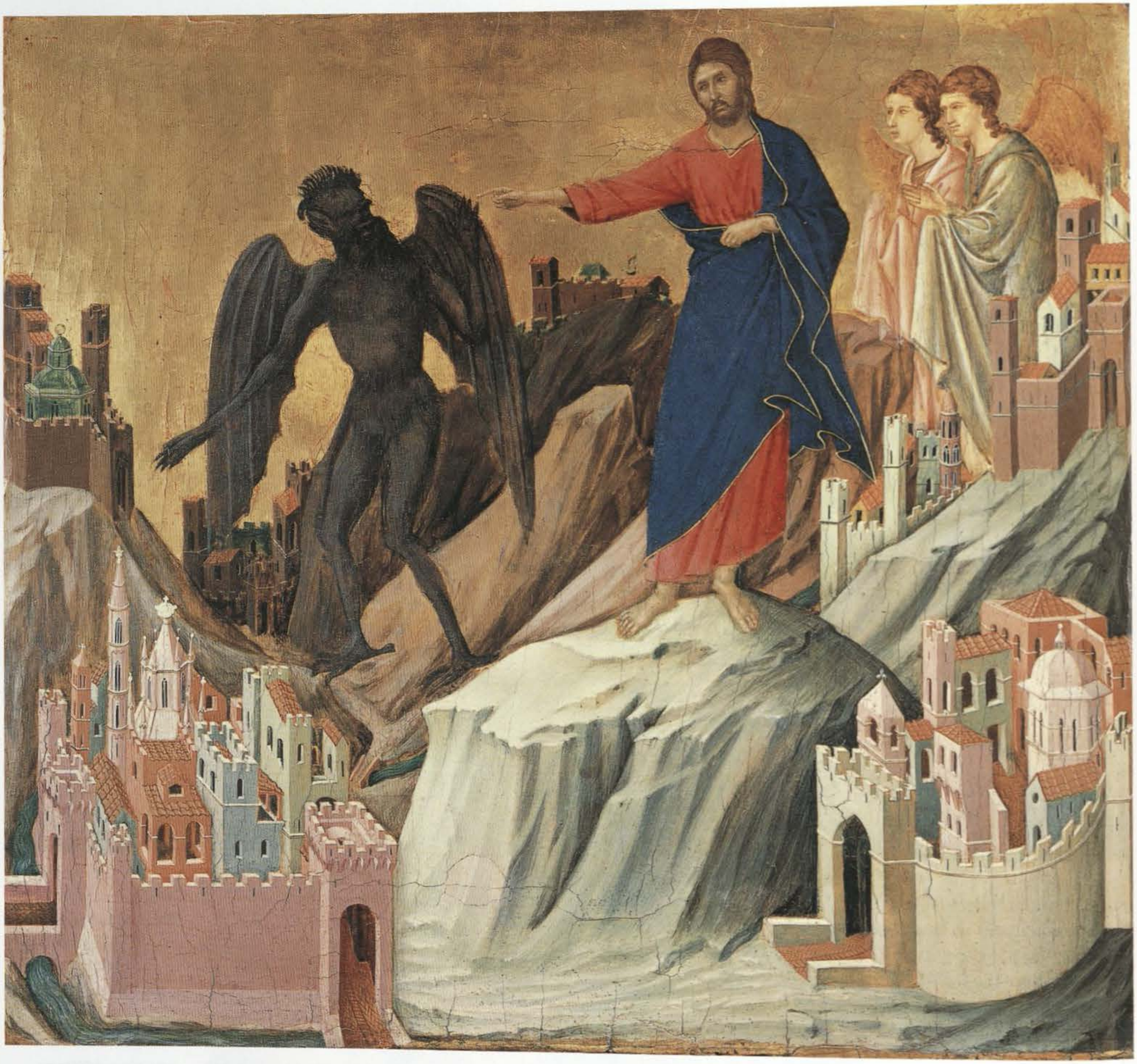


1.34
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Annunciation*, from the back of the *Maestà*, 1308–11. Tempera and gold ground on wood, 16 1/8 x 21 1/4" (41 x 54 cm). Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Siena

realized little architectural cell. Elsewhere, however, the illusions come out in local touches rather than whole scenes. In the panel depicting *The Temptation of Christ* (fig. 1.35), where the Devil tempts Christ by showing him all the kingdoms of the world, Duccio moves in on the action, focusing on Christ and Satan in a kind of "close-up." He also "zooms" out from the mountainside to give us a panorama of the landscape as we would see it if we were standing beside Christ – we look down at remote towns and cities bathed in clear sunshine.

The chronicler's characterization of the work as "devout," for its part, may mean no more than that it covered an encyclopedic array of Christian themes, that the artist and his patrons expended considerable money and effort on turning the Gospels and other sacred histories into pictures – and all in honor of the Virgin. It is possible, however, that this witness also wanted to highlight Duccio's strong links with older Christian art, especially the Byzantine tradition. This aspect of Duccio's work was fully apparent to Ghiberti: even though he considered the altarpiece to be a "marvelous thing," he regarded it as an example of the "Greek style." Less apparent to him writing a century later was the degree to which the Sienese painter showed a cosmopolitan awareness of contemporary art in northern Europe: his flowing line and the tendency of some figures to assume sinuous s-curved poses evoke the dominant aesthetic of French courts and cathedrals around 1300. The so-called Gothic style (a later and highly pejorative designation meaning "barbaric") also flourished at the French-speaking court of Naples, which was ruled by the house of Anjou.

What for Ghiberti defined the painting's retrogressive look would, for the Sienese in 1311, have enhanced its prestige. Like their contemporaries in other cities,

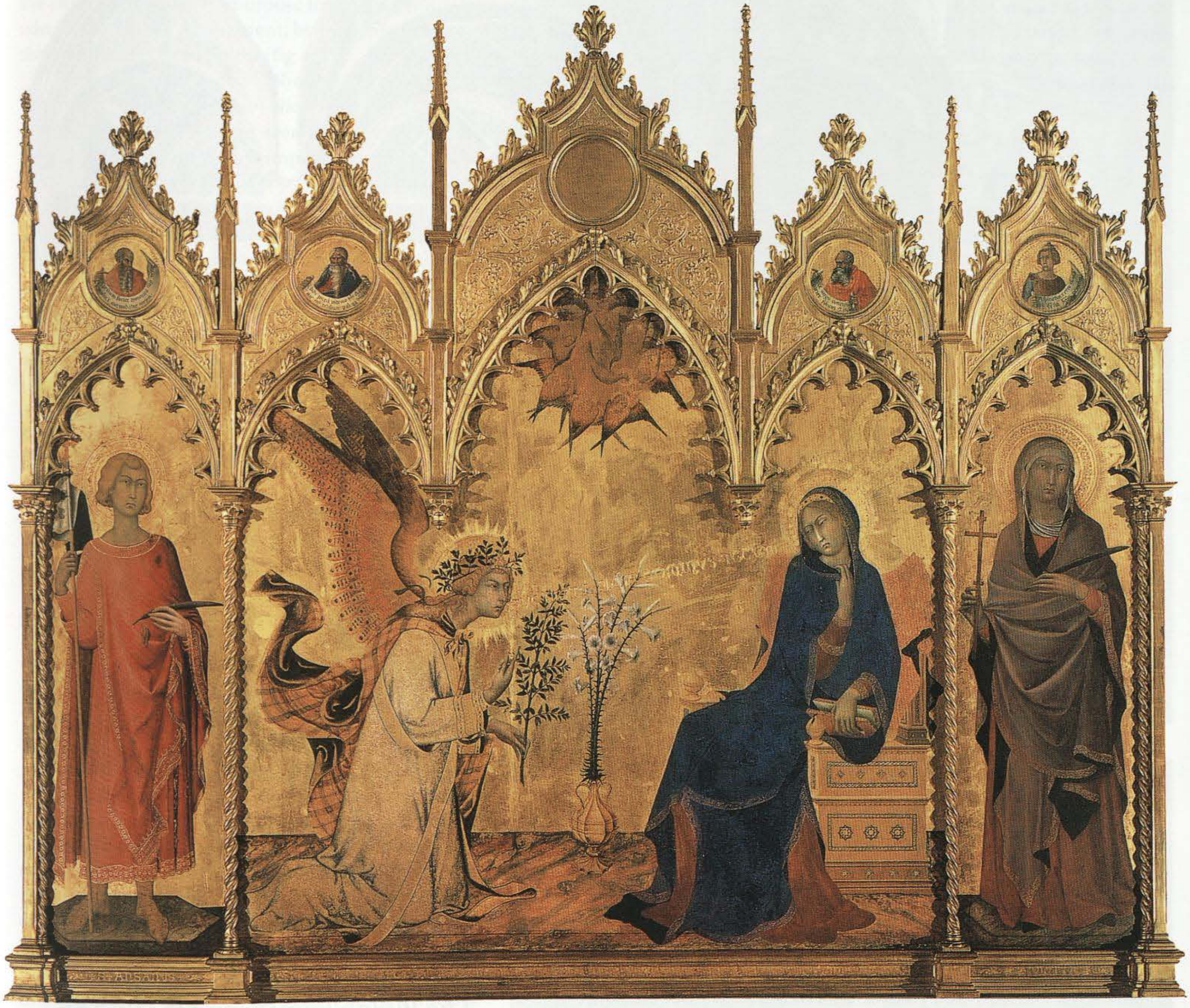


1.35
Duccio di Buoninsegna, *The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain*, from the back of the *Maestà*, 1308–11. Tempera on panel, 17 x 18⅛" (43.2 x 46 cm). Frick Collection, New York

they believed certain older Byzantine paintings to date from the time of Christ and the Virgin themselves. As noted earlier, they even took some icons of the Virgin to be "portraits" made by none other than the Evangelist St. Luke. These they revered as sacred relics, with miraculous properties. Duccio's Virgins, like his half-length saints and angels, refer to the long-standing traditions of the Byzantine icon, and show its ongoing relevance and currency in the religious life of Italian cities.

Giotto and Duccio: Competing Legacies

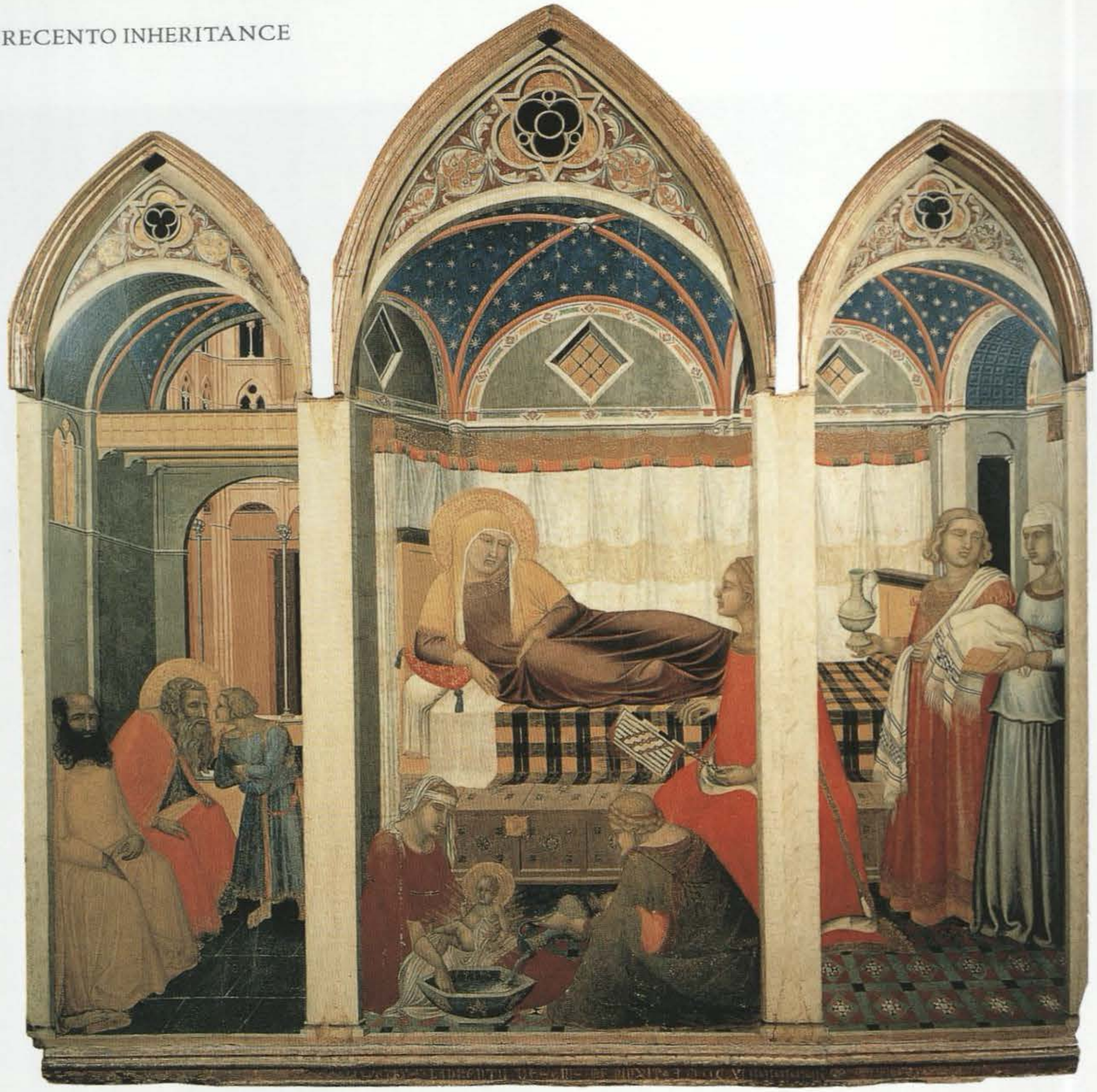
As the series of new altarpieces commissioned to follow the *Maestà* in Siena Cathedral demonstrates, it took only a short time for artists to recognize that Duccio and Giotto represented alternative approaches to painting. Four altarpieces were made for the crossing, each of them dedicated to one of the city's patron saints and depicting an episode from the life of the Virgin. Simone Martini



(*c.* 1284–*c.* 1344), a Sienese artist whom Ghiberti admired as an "elegant painter" and whose paintings were "very delicately finished," produced the St. Ansanus altarpiece, devoted to the *Annunciation*, in about 1330 (fig. 1.36). Simone, like his probable teacher Duccio, conceived his paintings in terms of fluid outlines, giving his figures wiry silhouettes and elongated proportions, with pointed slender features. They bend, twist, and flex their wrists and necks in a way that enhances the calligraphic play of line. Simone's Virgin seems to recoil at the outlandishly beautiful angel in the flowing plaid mantle, who bends his head to clear the molding of the frame. The whole composition reflects the refined behavior and stylish luxury associated with the old feudal nobility and with princely courts. By the time Simone was painting, the mercantile Republic of Siena had largely stripped the old aristocratic families of their power, yet the style associated with the French courts and the Angevin house of Naples carried

1.36
Simone Martini,
***Annunciation with Two Saints*, *c.* 1330.** Tempera on panel, 10' x 8'9" (3 x 2.67 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

1.37
Pietro Lorenzetti, *Birth of the Virgin* (St. Savinus altarpiece), 1342. Tempera on panel, 74 x 72" (187 x 184 cm). Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena



OPPOSITE, TOP

1.38
Nicola Pisano, pulpit, 1260. Marble, height approx. 15' (4.65 m). Baptistery, Pisa

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM

1.39
Nicola Pisano, pulpit: relief of the Annunciation and the Nativity. Marble, $33^1/_2$ x $44^1/_2$" (85 x 113 cm). Baptistery, Pisa

considerable prestige. Simone himself was knighted by King Robert of Naples and ended his career at the court of the popes (then based in Avignon).

By contrast, Pietro Lorenzetti's (*c.* 1280/90–*c.* 1348) contemporary altar of St. Savinus, depicting the *Birth of the Virgin* (fig. 1.37), foregrounds the values of space and volume associated with Giotto. Pietro, the brother of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, treats the tripartite frame of the altarpiece as a three-arched screen through which we see a domestic interior – the bedchamber where St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin, reclines while the midwives bathe the infant Mary. The left panel shows an adjacent anteroom with a view onto a courtyard beyond. Treating the picture surface as an opening onto a highly realized fictional space, Lorenzetti dispensed with the gold ground commonly used in altarpiece decoration. Several of the patterned surfaces that replace it – a tiled floor, a plaid bedspread – reinforce the illusion of deep space by including straight lines that would all converge on a common point if they were extended. (By showing us the cover hanging over the edge of the bed, Lorenzetti indicates that the lines forming its pattern are parallel lines.)

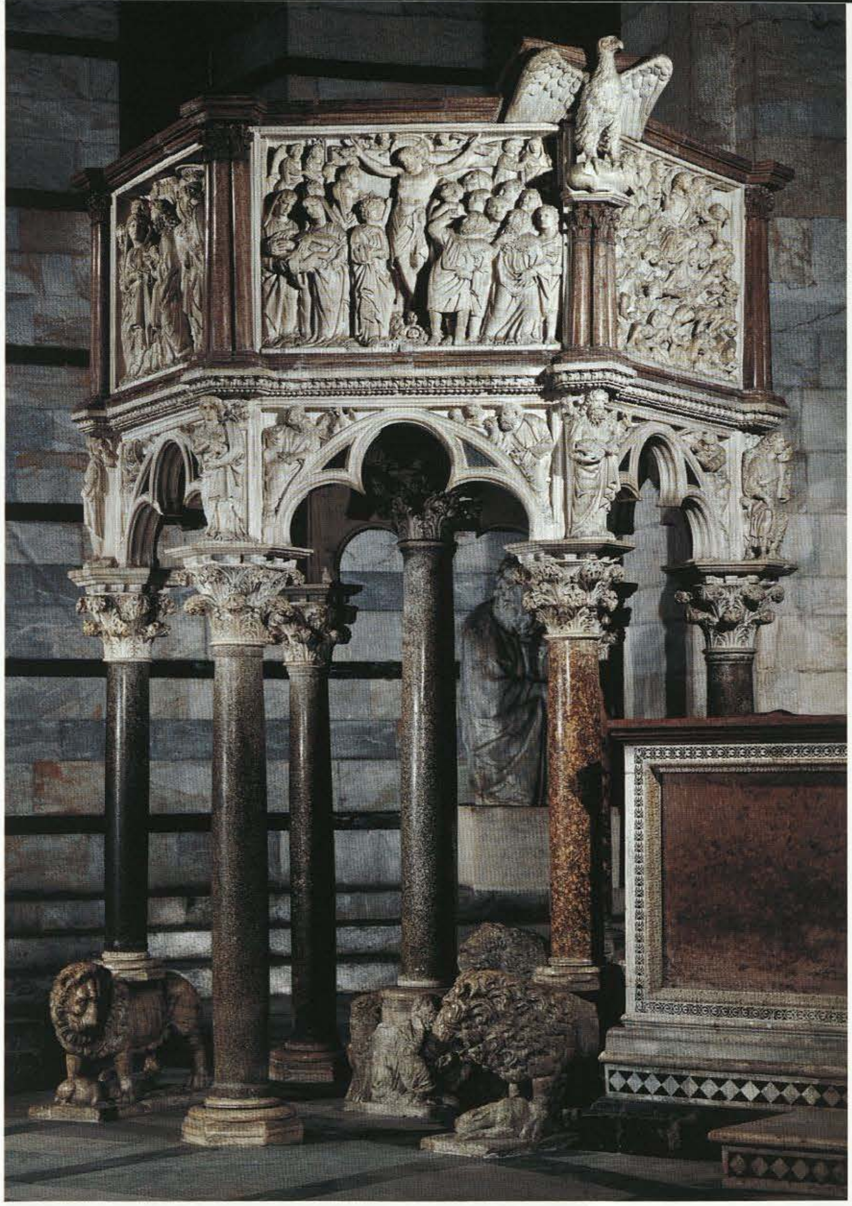
The Pisano Family and the Rise of Monumental Sculpture

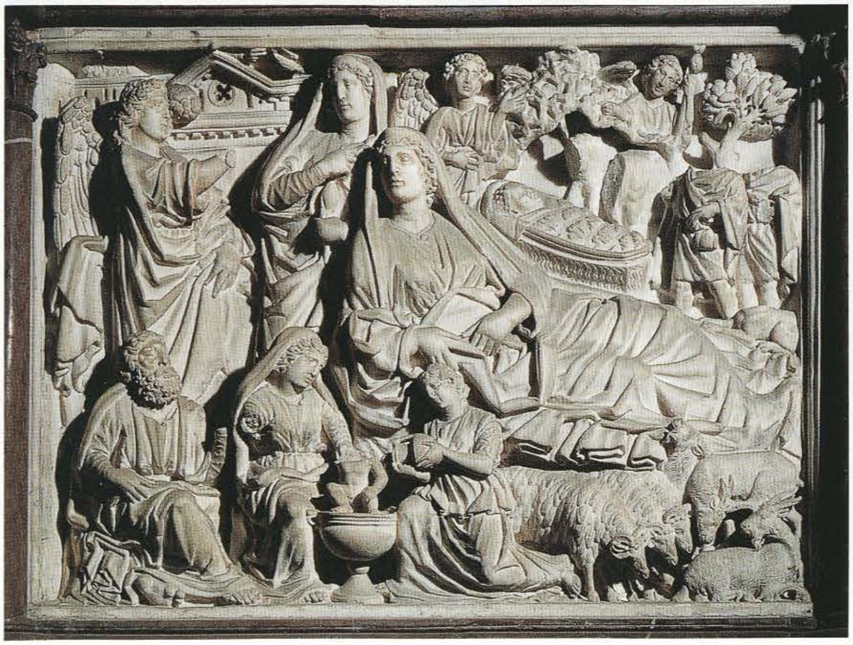
If Florence and Siena hosted the most innovative painting traditions in the decades leading up to 1400, the best sculptors came of age further west in Pisa, where the massive works linked to the city's cathedral complex served as a training ground. Pisa also counted among the cities that witnessed the new phenomenon of preachers giving sermons to an assembled congregation, and it explored ways to adapt its monumental architecture to that new purpose. The city's enormous baptistery had been under way since 1152, but even before the building's completion, the city decided to give it a purpose that went beyond the administration of the sacrament, by furnishing the baptistery with an elevated pulpit (**fig. 1.38**).

This pulpit is signed "Nicola Pisanus" – the Latinized "Nicola Pisano," or Nicolas of Pisa (*c.* 1220–1278/84), though the sculptor seems to have come from Apulia in southeastern Italy. Completed around 1260, the hexagonal structure features five reliefs that narrate in sequence the life of Christ, beginning with the Annunciation and Nativity and ending with the Last Judgment. Dividing the scenes are **colonnettes**, below which appear personified Virtues and the figure of St. John, patron of Baptism; prophets and **sibyls** occupy the **spandrels**. The idea of a polygonal pulpit with a sculptural program appears to be completely unprecedented, testifying at once to the inventiveness of its maker and to the changing function of the baptistery as a space. The pulpit, in fact, constitutes a kind of sermon in itself, since it draws on the very material commonly used by preachers. It visualizes the most important scenes in Scripture (those relating to Christ's incarnation, Passion, and afterlife), demonstrates the foretelling of those events by figures from Jewish and pagan antiquity, and adds a moralizing element.

In the panel that combines the Annunciation and Nativity (**fig. 1.39**), the figures look monumental despite their relatively small scale: broad faces and heavily draped limbs draw on an ancient Roman sarcophagus relief. There were a number of these reliefs close by, reused for burials in the neighboring cathedral cemetery, or Camposanto: one, showing the story of the ancient Greek princess Phaedra, provided the model for the Virgin with her veiled head, while a heroic nude male figure inspired the figure of Fortitude among the Virtues below. Such conspicuous "Romanism" evoked the glories of the ancient empire of the Caesars, and we might wonder whether the idea came from Nicola's patrons or from the artist himself. In the years around 1250, Pisa was cultivating a political alliance with the Holy Roman Empire to the north, but Nicola may also have worked directly for the Emperor Frederick II at his residence in Capua, outside Naples; if that is correct, Nicola would have seen at first hand how a court associated itself with ancient Roman forms.

The Pisa Baptistery pulpit inspired ambitious local imitations. Nicola himself went on to produce a pulpit for Siena Cathedral, in collaboration with his son Giovanni (*c.* 1250–*c.* 1315), who carved two more, for the church of Sant'Andrea at Pistoia and for Pisa Cathedral (**fig. 1.40**). By the turn of the fourteenth century,





these had come to take a somewhat different form: Giovanni moved away from his father's static, monumental effects, multiplying his figures and making them smaller in relation to the pictorial field. His figures are also more slender, elaborately articulated, restlessly dynamic, and more emotive – even from a distance, the surging turmoil of the Massacre of the Innocents is apparent. In combination, Giovanni's figures form flowing linear patterns. The draperies fall in crisp, curving folds, similar to Duccio's nearly contemporary treatment of the saints on the main front panel of his *Maestà* (*see* fig. 1.31).

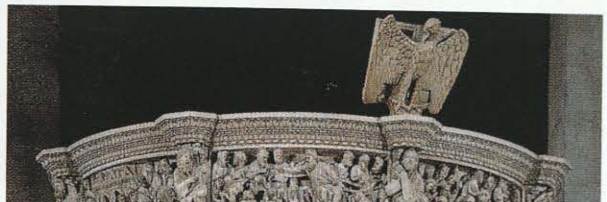
Giovanni and his patrons probably regarded such changes more as an emulation than as a rejection of the previous works we have examined. We cannot be certain how the Pisa Cathedral pulpit originally looked, since the current composition is a reconstruction of the original, which was dismantled after a fire destroyed much of the cathedral in the late sixteenth century. What is not in doubt is that the pulpit was, in its day, the grandest and most complex ever produced. It had no fewer than nine narrative reliefs, incorporating Passion scenes beyond those that Giovanni's father Nicola had included on his Pisa Baptistery pulpit, and episodes from the story of John the Baptist. The relief panels, moreover, were now curved, and they were divided from one another not by simple columns but by fully rendered figures of the Apostles. Virtues "upheld" this pulpit, like Nicola's earlier one in the baptistery, but the supporting figures have grown to about half lifesize. The nude Fortitude is clearly modeled once more on a **classical** sculpture, in this case of Hercules, but Giovanni has also brought in a female pagan type, basing his figure of Prudence on a Roman Venus (fig. 1.41). Giovanni may only have been following his father's example in drawing on pagan sources, but the presence of a female nude in particular is noteworthy, especially in a church setting – below the structure at which the laity would be expected to stare, free of distractions, while listening to long sermons. Nudity and naturalism were two of the qualities that had long seemed to set seductive pagan "idols" apart from their Christian successors: these were the very characteristics, in fact, that the abstractions of Byzantine sacred art sought to displace.

The pulpit now includes not one but two inscriptions, of uncertain origin. (The Latin hexameter makes a very early fourteenth-century date likely, though Giovanni may not have added the inscriptions himself.) One of them reads, in part: "This work was carved single-handedly by Giovanni, son of Nicola.... He was gifted beyond all others in the art of sculpture...nor could he carve anything offensive or disgraceful even if he had wanted to.

RIGHT

1.40

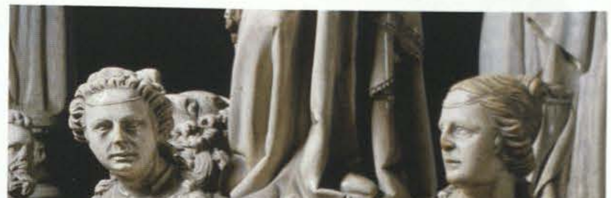
Giovanni Pisano, pulpit, 1302–10. Height approx. 15' (4.61 m). Pisa Cathedral



FAR RIGHT

1.41

Giovanni Pisano, pulpit, (detail): Fortitude and Prudence, 1302–10. Pisa Cathedral



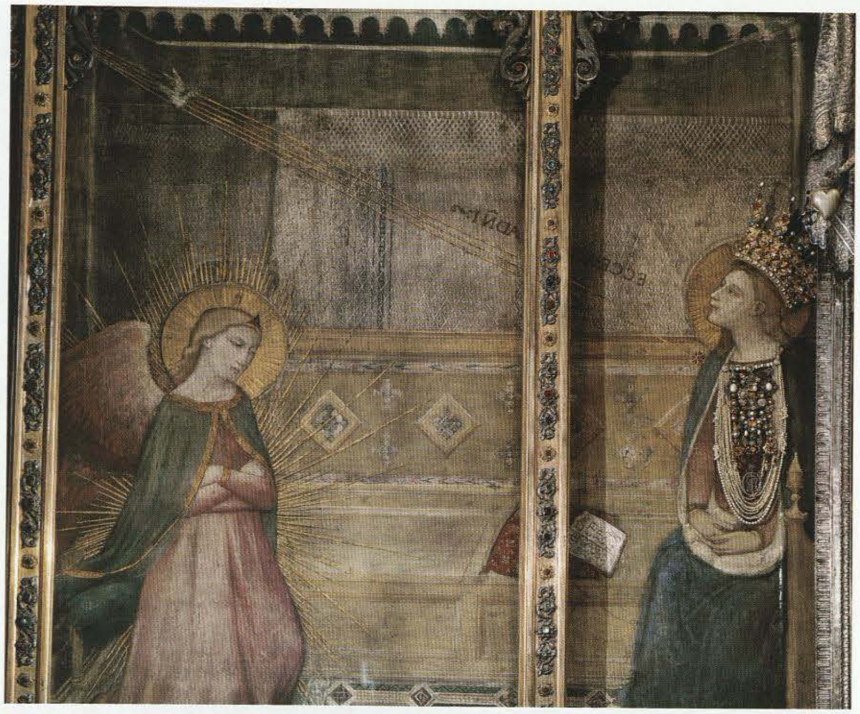
There are many sculptors, but to him alone belongs the praise of fame." This is mighty flattery indeed, though it also sounds like a defensive gesture, especially when read against a second inscription that pretends to be in Giovanni's own voice: "I was not enough on my guard. The more I gave, the more hostility did I experience.... He who defames one worthy of the crown proves himself unworthy, since with his insults he whom he insults is honored and the assailant dishonored." The lines give a taste of the fierce competition that surrounded such commissions.

The inscription also asserts that Giovanni made this final pulpit "when Pisa was ruled in unity and divided by Count Federico da Montefeltro." If the pulpit that his father had made just across the campo might seem characteristic of "communal" monuments, Giovanni allegedly worked for a *signore*. The comparison shows us that a history organized around patronage might look very different from one organized around artists, their workshops and legacies. Giovanni Pisano's most distinguished student was Tino da Camaino (*c.* 1285–*c.* 1337), who in 1315 created a tomb for Emperor Henry VII in Pisa Cathedral before moving south to produce honorific works for the King of Naples. Tino, in turn, seems to have been the teacher of Giovanni di Balduccio (*c.* 1290–*c.* 1349), who completed an apprenticeship in Pisa Cathedral and then moved north to make sepulchral monuments for the lords of Milan.

Cult Images and Devotional Life

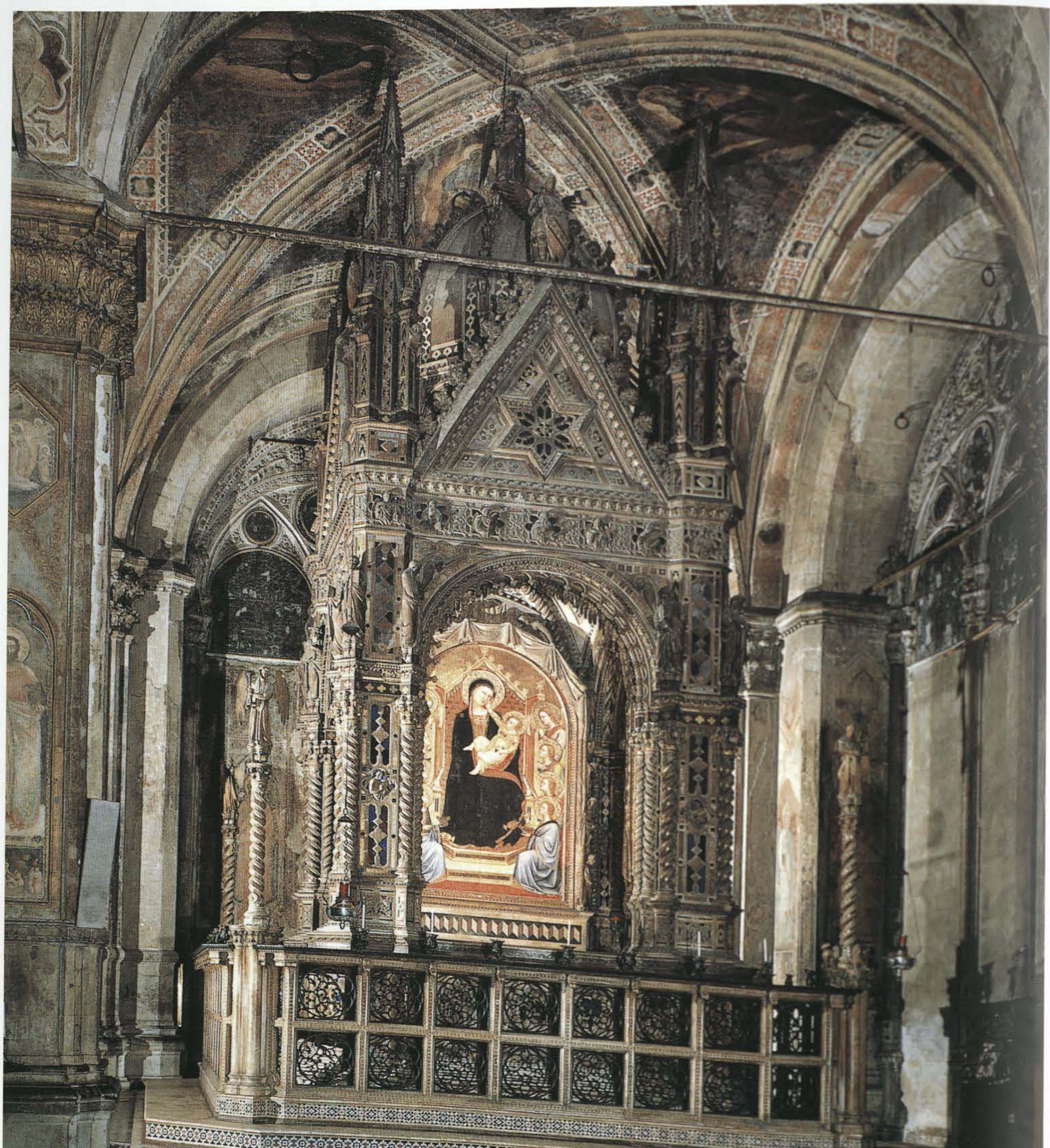
Today we single out the work of Giotto, Duccio, or Nicola Pisano, and even of the artists who continued their workshops. In this, we follow the sensibility of such later writers as Lorenzo Ghiberti and Giorgio Vasari, but we should bear in mind that such a way of looking went against the grain. Most Italians who encountered new images in churches, homes, and public spaces were probably indifferent to the question of who had made them and of the degree to which those works manifested artistic values and ambitions.

Most important Italian artists themselves thought carefully about the uses to which their works would be put, the requirements of those who paid for them and of those who encountered them. Few works had titles – those used in this and other books mostly just describe subject matter. Early viewers would not have thought that paintings and sculptures required titles, since their content was so conventional. Altarpieces normally showed the Virgin and Child with saints; mural narratives related the life of the Virgin, of St. Francis, of local patron saints, and, less commonly, of Christ. Even Ambrogio Lorenzetti's inventive paintings of good and bad government in Siena's Sala della Pace (*see* figs. 1.7–1.10) may have had counterparts in the town halls of Florence, Perugia, and other city republics. The repetition ensured that even the uneducated could recognize the features and attributes (identifying devices) of standard characters: St. Peter, white-haired, bearded, and balding, nearly always wore blue and yellow and carried keys; John the Baptist, younger, emaciated, and often disheveled, typically sported a short vestment made of animal hair; Jerome wore the red hat and robes of a cardinal; and so forth.



1.42
Tuscan painter, *Annunciation*, early fourteenth century.
Mural. Santissima Annunziata, Florence

For the majority of Ghiberti's Florentine contemporaries, the most important image they would have encountered was one he chose not to mention in his *Commentaries*, presumably because he took it to hold little artistic value: this was the *Annunciation* (**fig. 1.42**) on the inner facade of a church in Florence that took its name from that very image (the Santissima Annunziata, or "Most Holy Virgin of the Annunciation"). The painting, believed to respond miraculously to prayers, had become the focus of a cult, and the faithful came from far and wide to revere it and make votive offerings – sometimes in the form of wax portraits of themselves – at the shrine protecting it or in the cloister outside. These visitors would have been told that the work did not stem from human hands: in 1252, according to the official account, a friar-artist who had fallen asleep during his work on the painting awoke to find that it had been completed by an angel. (Despite the alleged date, the present image was probably painted as much as a century later.)



Other images had an equally special status. In 1292 a mural depicting the Virgin and Child at a grain reserve in Florence called Orsanmichele began to work miraculous cures. Thousands flocked to the image with prayers and petitions, and more importantly with financial donations; some of the money paid for bread, which the overseers of the site then distributed to the poor. In 1304 a fire destroyed both the warehouse and the image. The painting was quickly replaced, with no apparent loss of efficacy, and in 1337 the *comune* began work on a new, more secure, mixed-purpose structure that could house it. The arcades on the lower storey of the building we see today (fig. 1.44) originally provided an open loggia facilitating the distribution of food; the new structure's primary occupants, however, belonged to a lay confraternity, or charitable brotherhood, devoted to the painting.

By this point, Florentines associated Orsanmichele with the protection of the commune as such: after uniting in 1343 to expel the French nobleman Walter of Brienne (*c.* 1304–1356) – whom the city had elected as Lord for life exactly one year earlier – it was in Orsanmichele that they erected an altar to mark the occasion. Their sense of the place no doubt owed something to the fact that the warehouse had provided an emergency food supply, though by mid century the image had become more important than the building per se. After the **Black Death** killed half the city's population in 1347–48, Orsanmichele's large grain reserve no longer seemed necessary. The lay confraternity was nearing completion of a grand tabernacle to house an "improved" and more stylistically up-to-date painting executed *c.* 1346 by the artist Bernardo Daddi (*c.* 1280–1348; **fig. 1.43**). It successfully persuaded the *comune* to allow it to fill in the arches of the exterior walls. The closing of the lower floor and the subsequent addition of tracery windows underscored the building's religious purpose.

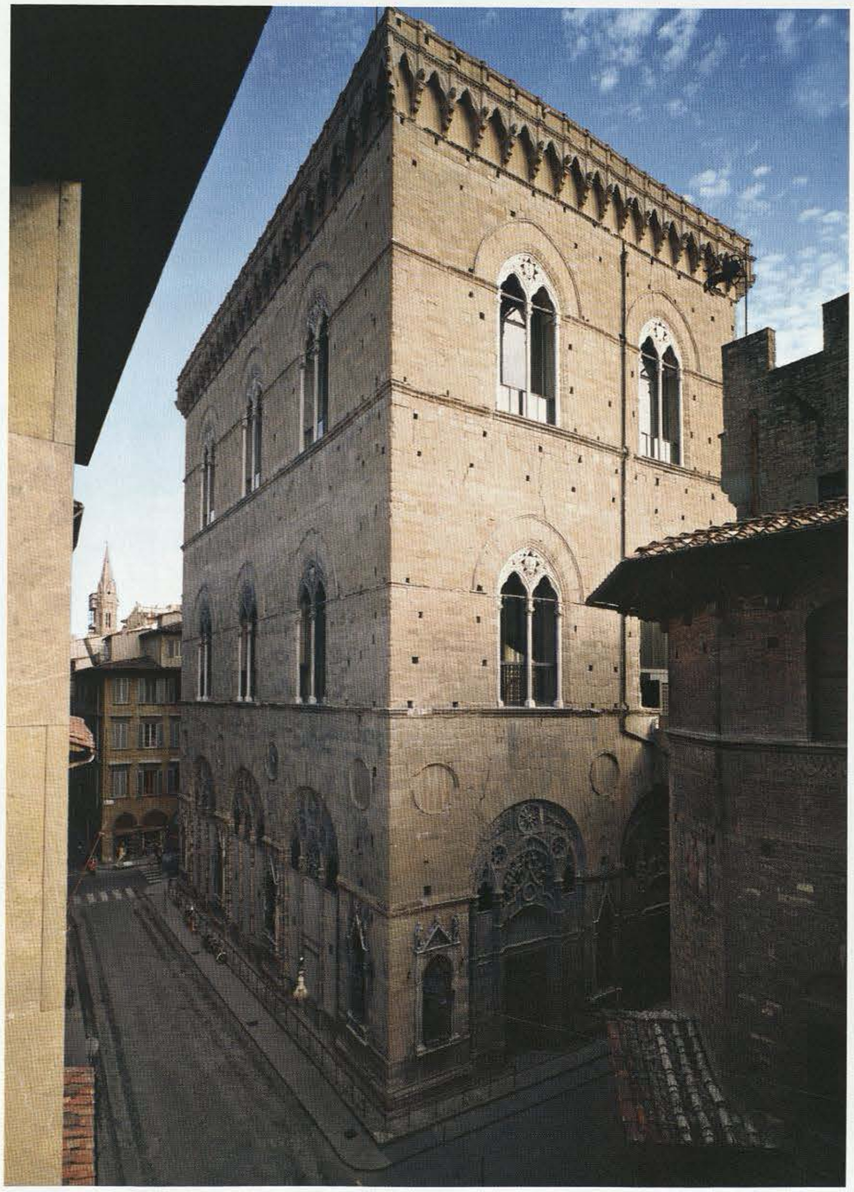
The confraternity in charge of the shrine became enormously wealthy through the numerous legacies that the faithful left to the Virgin of Orsanmichele in their wills. In the years following the first attack of plague, the lay brothers further embellished the cult and site, sponsoring elaborate musical performances and a new marble tabernacle to house Daddi's image (which retained the miraculous powers of the original). All of this helped maintain a steady income by encouraging a constant flow of visitors.

Lorenzo Ghiberti, who once again omits mention of the cult image, lavishes considerable praise on the new grand tabernacle it occasioned and on the painter-sculptor Andrea di Cione, known as Orcagna (*c.* 1308–*c.* 1368), who executed it: "It is a very excellent thing and quite unusual, done with the greatest diligence. He was a great architect, and he did all the scenes of that work with his own hand." The domed, pinnacled shrine would indeed have been a novelty in Florence, its richly carved surface enlivened with gilding, inlaid marble, and colored glass. A series of reliefs depicts the story of the Virgin Mary, culminating on the back of the tabernacle in the scene of her "Assumption," her bodily acceptance into heaven at the end of her earthly life. Ghiberti, interested in the identity of artists, reported that Orcagna carved his own portrait on the shrine, but his authorship is more readily guaranteed by the signature under the Assumption. Whatever the interests of the visitors to the shrine, Orcagna insisted on being remembered as the maker of this work: he was addressing a posterity that included not just the devout but also admirers of art, like Ghiberti himself.

OPPOSITE

1.43

Andrea Orcagna, tabernacle, begun *c.* 1355. Marble, mosaic, gold, and lapis lazuli. Orsanmichele, Florence. **The tabernacle frames a miracle-working panel of the Virgin and Child, repainted by Bernardo Daddi, *c.* 1346.**



1.44

Orsanmichele, Florence, begun 1337

2

1400–1410

The Cathedral and the City

Campanilism 50
- The Cathedrals of Florence and Milan 53

Competition at Florence Cathedral 55
- Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, and the Commission for the Baptistery Doors 58
- Ghiberti's First Doors 60

Marble Sculpture for the Cathedral: Nanni di Banco and Donatello 64

Jacopo della Quercia and the Fonte Gaia 67

2

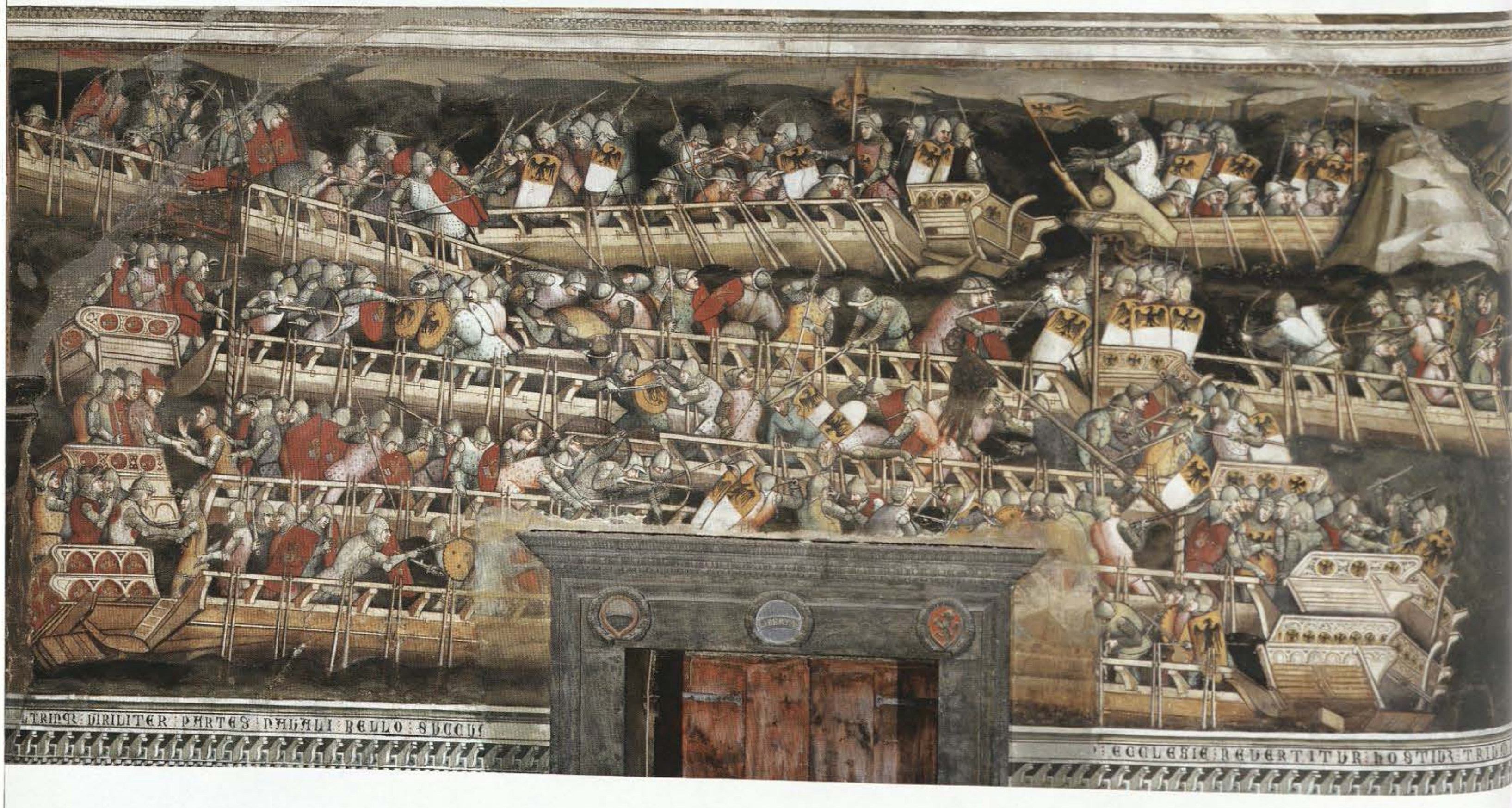
1400–1410

The Cathedral and the City

Campanilism

In 1400, Catholicism was the single Christian religion in Europe, and in principle it operated as a more centralizing organization than any European state. The head of the Church, as today, was the Pope, regarded as the successor of St. Peter, who had been given ruling authority by Christ himself. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, that authority had been damaged by a scandalous division (or "schism"), during which three separate individuals, based in different cities and supported by different European states, claimed to be Pope. The schism required localities to take sides, and provided them with an opportunity for self-assertion.

We see this, for example, in the frescoes that the government of Siena commissioned in 1407 from Spinello Aretino (*c.* 1350–1410; **fig. 2.1**), the respected and prolific painter from Arezzo who had worked in Florence for the Alberti family thirty years before. It is perhaps unexpected to find an elaborate depiction of the life of a Pope in a government building. Yet the new decorations in the Palazzo Pubblico allowed the Sienese to take advantage of the Church's crisis and promoted their city by celebrating the life of a citizen, Rolando Bandinelli Paparoni (1160–1216), who had risen to be one of the most politically effective European leaders of recent centuries. Spinello depicted Paparoni's election as Pope Alexander III, his expulsion from Rome at the hands of Frederick Barbarossa's imperial troops, the Pope's subsequent collaboration with Venice to curtail the advance of imperial power in Italy, his return to Rome, and the emperor's ultimate submission: the climactic image is the spectacular, panoramic battle of Punta San Salvatore, noteworthy as a lone surviving example of the battle paintings that


TRIMR VIRILITER PARTES NAVALI BELLO SVCCV
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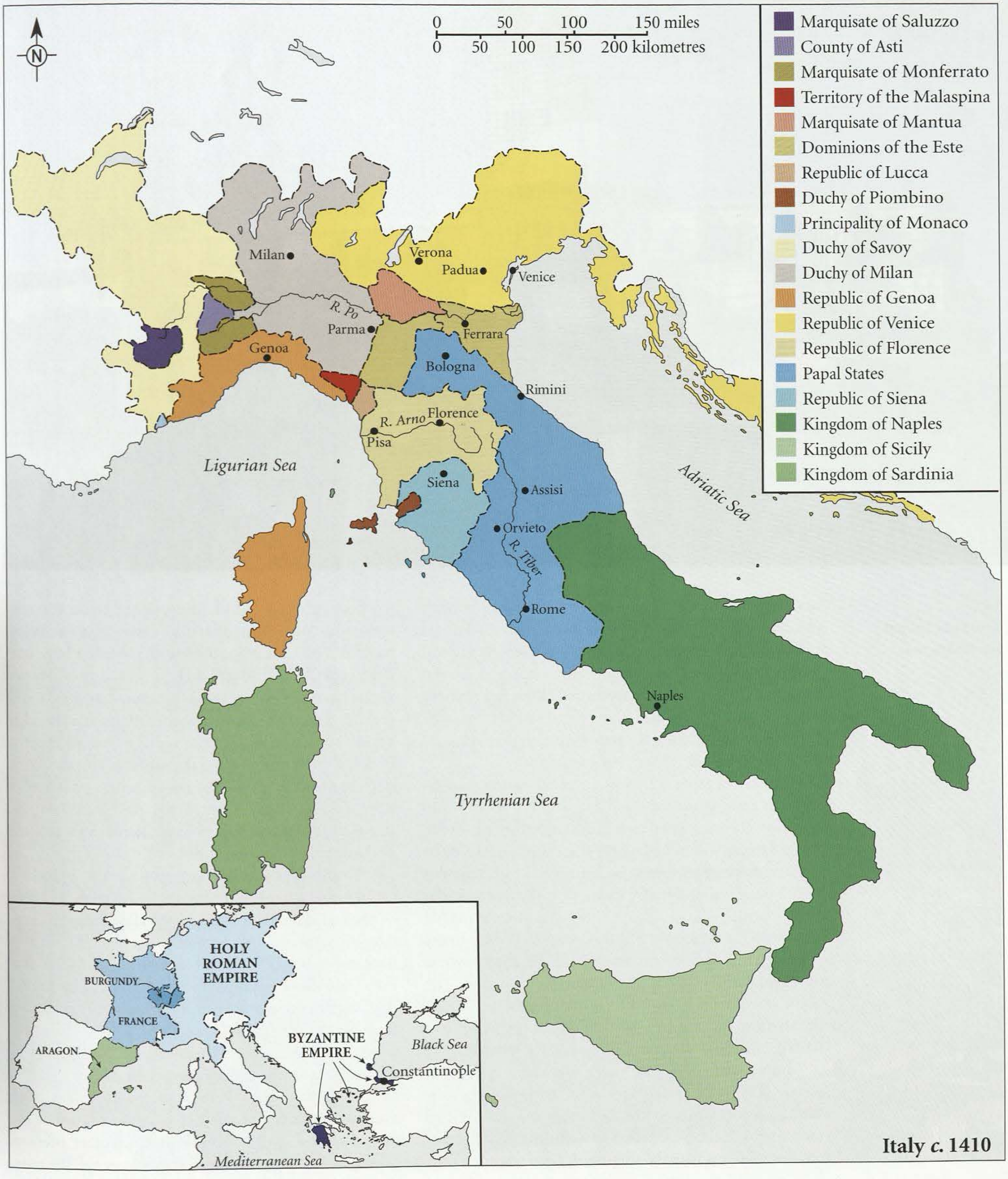
2.1
Spinello Aretino, *Scenes from the Life of Alexander III*, **1407.** Fresco. Hall of the Priors, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena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0 50 100 150 miles
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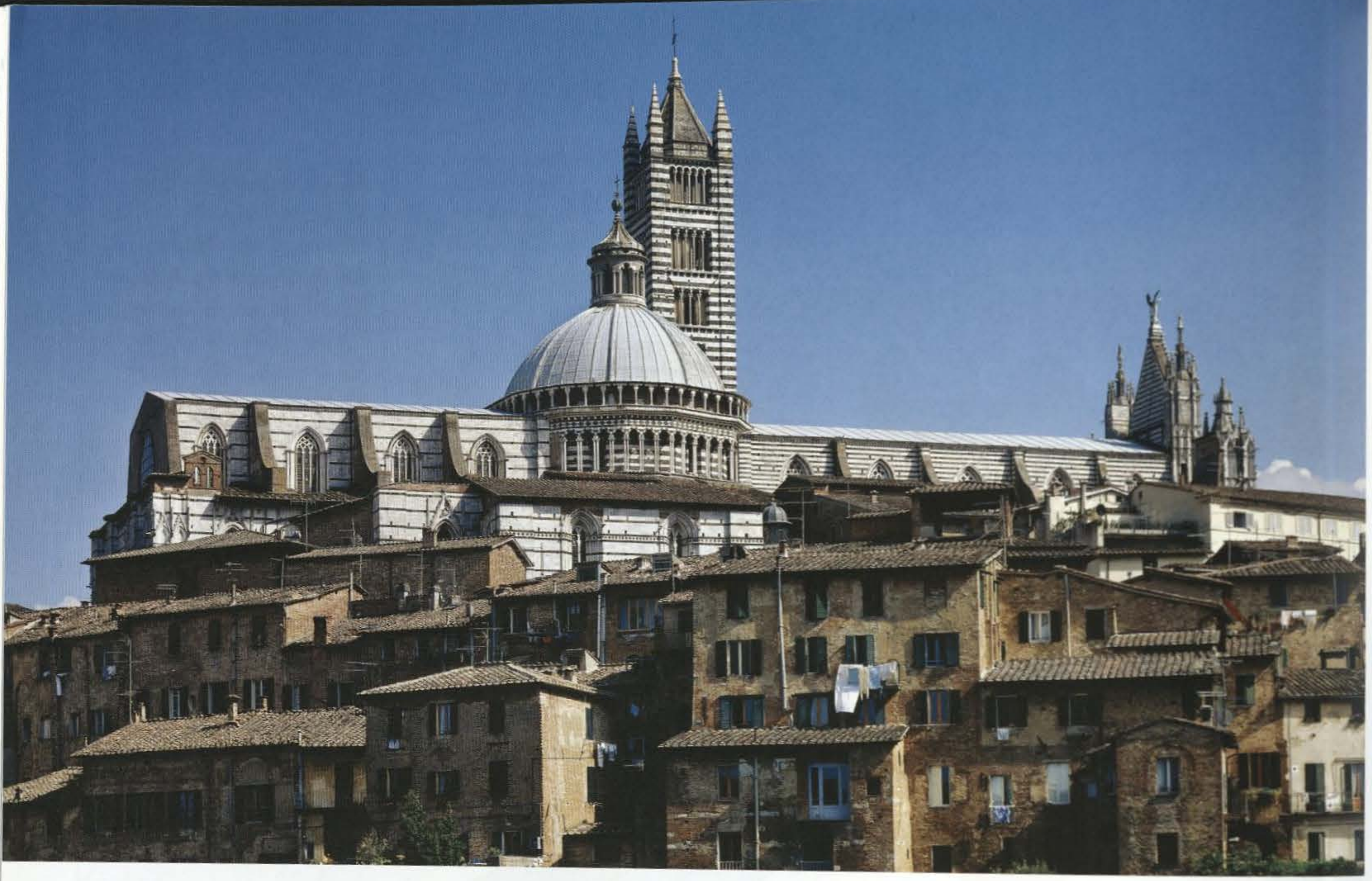
Marquisate of Saluzzo
County of Asti
Marquisate of Monferrato
Territory of the Malaspina
Marquisate of Mantua
Dominions of the Este
Republic of Lucca
Duchy of Piombino
Principality of Monaco
Duchy of Savoy
Duchy of Milan
Republic of Genoa
Republic of Venice
Republic of Florence
Papal States
Republic of Siena
Kingdom of Naples
Kingdom of Sicily
Kingdom of Sardinia
Milan
Verona
Padua
Venice
R. Po
Parma
Ferrara
Genoa
Bologna
Rimini
R. Arno
Florence
Pisa
Ligurian Sea
Siena
Assisi
Orvieto
R. Tiber
Rome
Adriatic Sea
Naples
Tyrrhenian Sea
HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE
BURGUNDY
FRANCE
ARAGON
BYZANTINE EMPIRE
Black Sea
Constantinople
Mediterranean Sea

Italy *c.* 1410



2.2
Siena Cathedral with surrounding town

once adorned many seats of urban government in Italy, including the Doge's palace in Venice and the palace of the Della Scala lords in Verona. The cycle ignores the real fragmentation that characterized the Church in 1407 so as to exalt Siena itself and proclaim it the equal of more powerful states like Venice. Siena clearly wished not to be seen simply as an ally of the papacy, but as the mother of Popes, and a world leader in its own right.

The location of the frescoes in the Sienese republic's city hall reinforced the close working relationship between governing bodies without the town. It was in this palace, as we saw in the previous chapter, that elected representatives met. Siena also, however, served as one of the Church's administrative districts, called dioceses, and thus provided a home to the bishop who presided over it. In Siena as elsewhere the bishop occupied a palace in the city center, though his real seat was in the church where he officially conducted instruction and worship. The Latin word for this seat was "cathedra," and the church that held it was consequently called the "cathedral" (in Italian, "**duomo**," from the Latin word for "house").

Italy's cathedrals, like those elsewhere in Europe, nearly always bore signs of the bishop's presence, including prominent tombs and other commemorative monuments. Still, the function of a cathedral was to serve the flock no less than the shepherd. Even when built on the periphery of an older town, cathedrals became centers in their own right, offering a covered space sufficient to hold most of the populace and typically a large outdoor square as well. Most had long construction histories, replacing other consecrated structures on sites of historic significance; Siena's cathedral (**fig. 2.2**) replaced an earlier building dating to the ninth century CE that was believed to have stood on the site of a Roman temple dedicated to Minerva. Like the cathedrals elsewhere, it reinforced myths about the town's most ancient origins, one factor that motivated its use of Roman-style columns and other classicizing motifs.

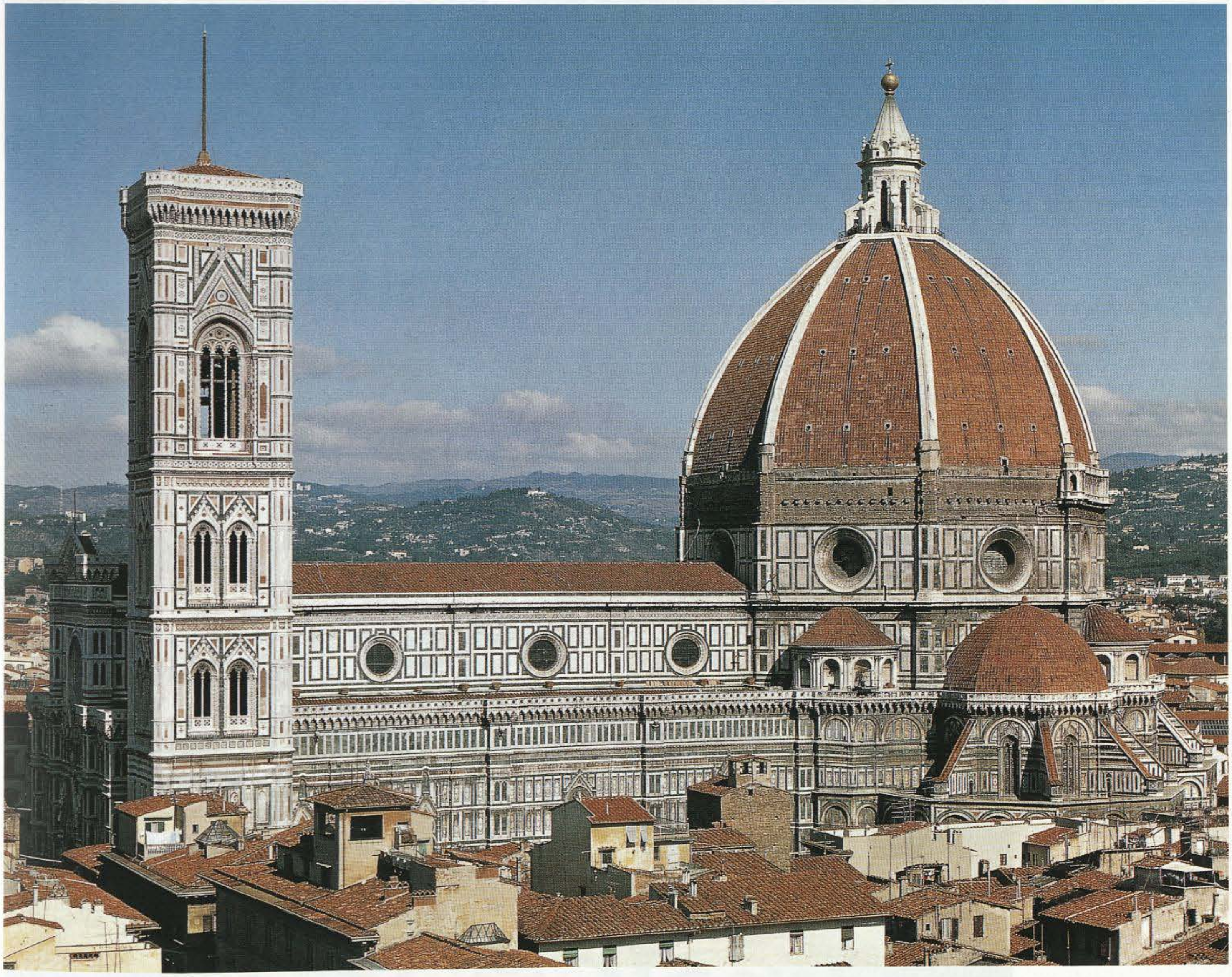
The building's appearance set it apart. At Siena, as at Orvieto and other hill towns, the cathedral stood at one of the region's highest topographical points and loomed over the surrounding neighborhoods. In most Italian cities, cathedrals were the tallest structures around, and they came into view from miles away. The skyscrapers of their day, such buildings were feats of engineering, though their height had symbolic and even practical functions as well, manifesting by virtue of their size the protection of the saints to whom they were dedicated. Whereas the towns' other buildings were largely made of wood, brick, and humble stone, the surfaces of cathedrals, inside and out, displayed expensive marbles and other precious materials. To enter a cathedral was to escape the mundane world for a preview of paradise. **Campanili**, or bell towers, adjacent yet also independent, soared still higher than the cathedrals themselves, ensuring that they could not only be seen but also heard anywhere in the city.

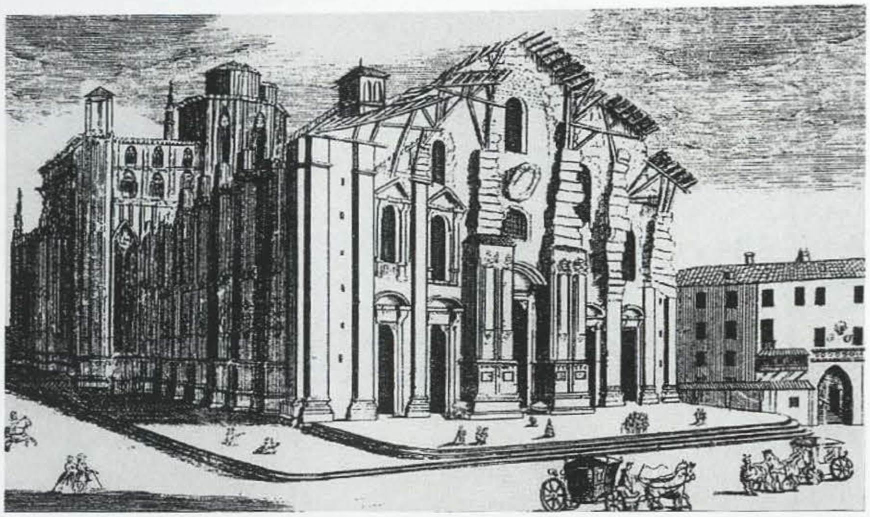
The Cathedrals of Florence and Milan

Chapter 1 referred to some distinguishing hallmarks of seignorial and communal patronage (*see* pp. 18–26). Cathedrals, however, tend to work against such classifications, as the cases of Florence and Milan illustrate. Florence's cathedral, founded in 1296, shows that the town was fully aware of what other nearby communes were up to: Orvieto had begun building its new cathedral over ten years earlier, in 1285, the same year that Siena furnished its duomo with a new lower facade; Grosseto began erecting a new cathedral in 1294, the year that nearby Florence committed to building its own. In that city, **guilds** – corporate monopolies that controlled the practice of various trades and dominated city governments – oversaw construction of what all expected to serve as an image of the city; committees of townspeople made the major design decisions, turning to locals for ideas and technical expertise. The architecture of Florence's cathedral was as "democratic" as any from the period could be, and urbanistically, too, it constituted a new center, with streets radiating outwards from it rather than crossing in a grid. This itself declared the building to be a place for general congregation, and its wide nave allowed it to accommodate large gatherings.

The broad communal involvement also resulted in an indecisiveness that slowed progress: seven decades

2.3
Florence Cathedral, begun 1296 after a design by Arnolfo di Cambio. View from the south, showing to the left the campanile designed by Giotto.





after the architect and sculptor Arnolfo di Cambio (*c.* 1245–1301/10) laid the building's foundation stones, the structure had advanced so little that it was still possible to consider newly proposed models for its most basic design. The crawling pace of construction may help to explain why, in the intervening years, both patrons and builders directed their energies elsewhere: a colossal campanile (**fig. 2.3**), designed by Giotto, was built even before the final plans for the cathedral itself were settled. At least one completed noble structure, the Florentines hoped, would impress visitors from other places.

The origins of Milan's cathedral (figs. 2.4–2.5), by contrast, date to almost a century later, in 1386, when Gian Galeazzo Visconti (1351–1402) consolidated his control of the city (he became the first Duke of Milan in 1395). In 1385 Visconti had deposed, imprisoned, and ulti-

ABOVE

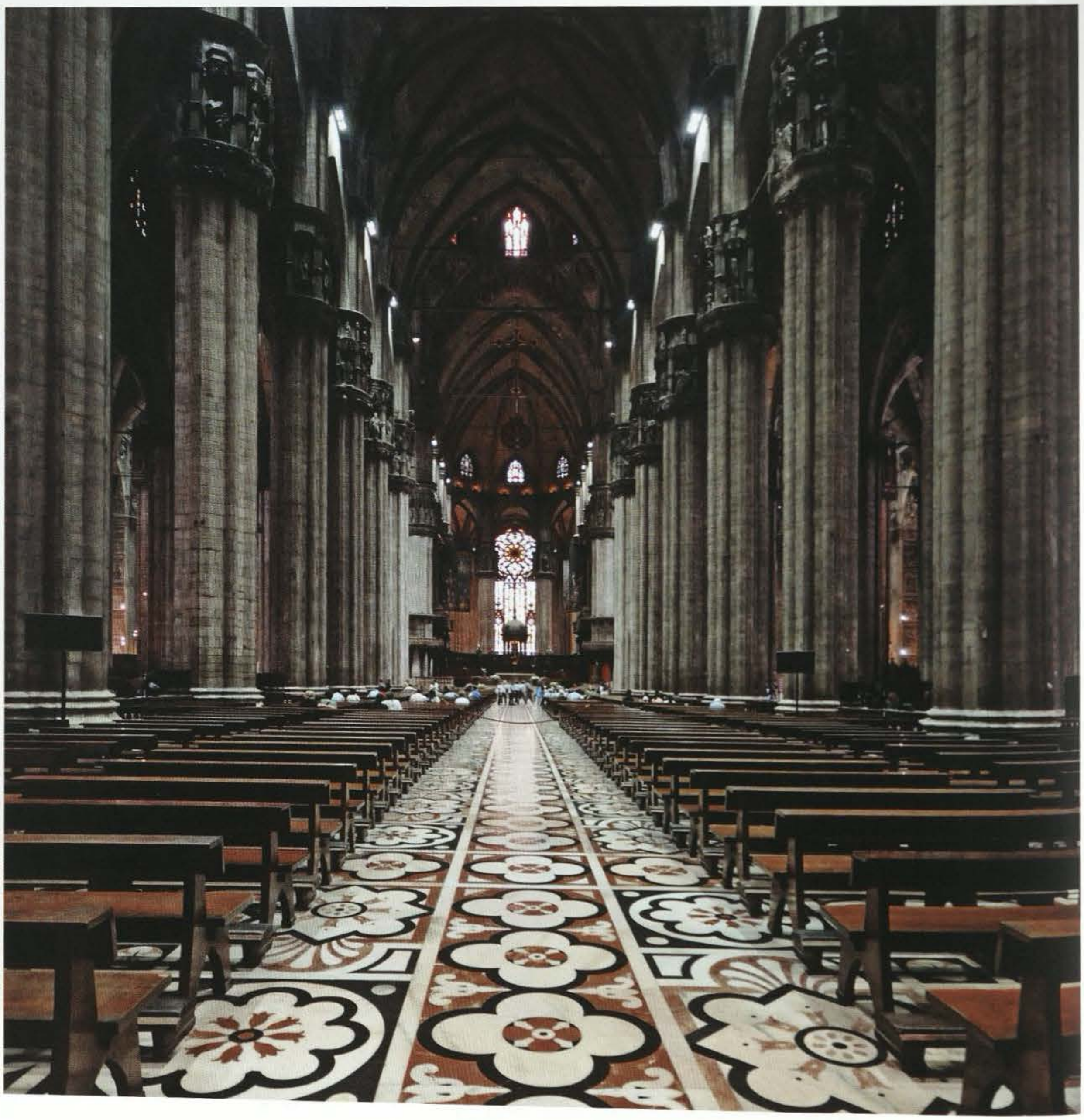
2.4

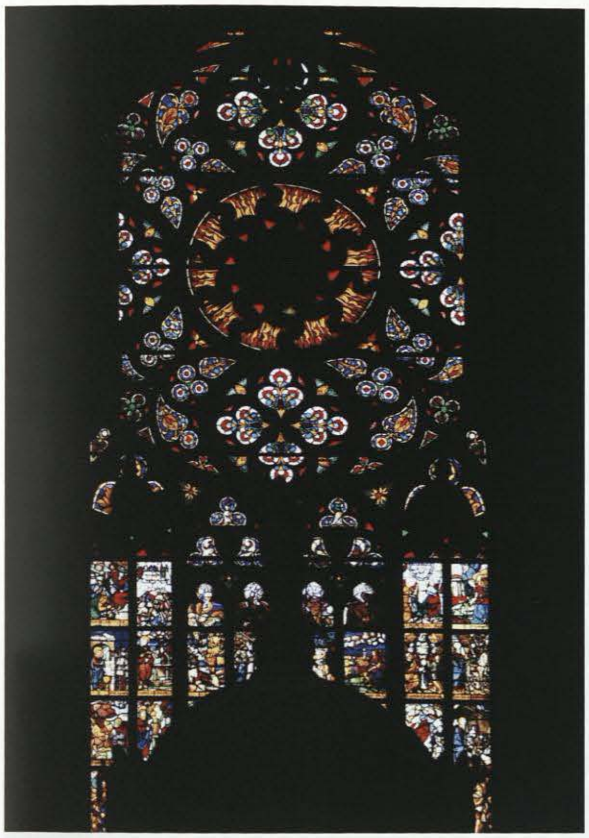
Milan Cathedral, begun 1386. This engraving of *c.* 1745 by Marc' Antonio dal Re gives a sense of the building's appearance before the extensive nineteenth-century additions.

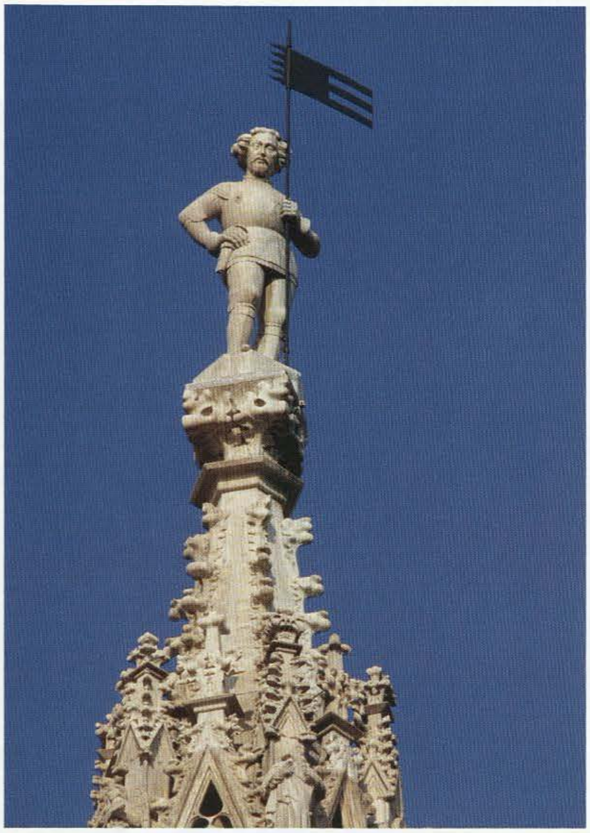
RIGHT

2.5

Interior of Milan Cathedral







FAR LEFT

2.6

Tracery windows in Milan Cathedral

LEFT

2.7

Top of the Carelli *guglia* of Milan Cathedral, with statue of St. George by Giorgio Solari, completed 1404

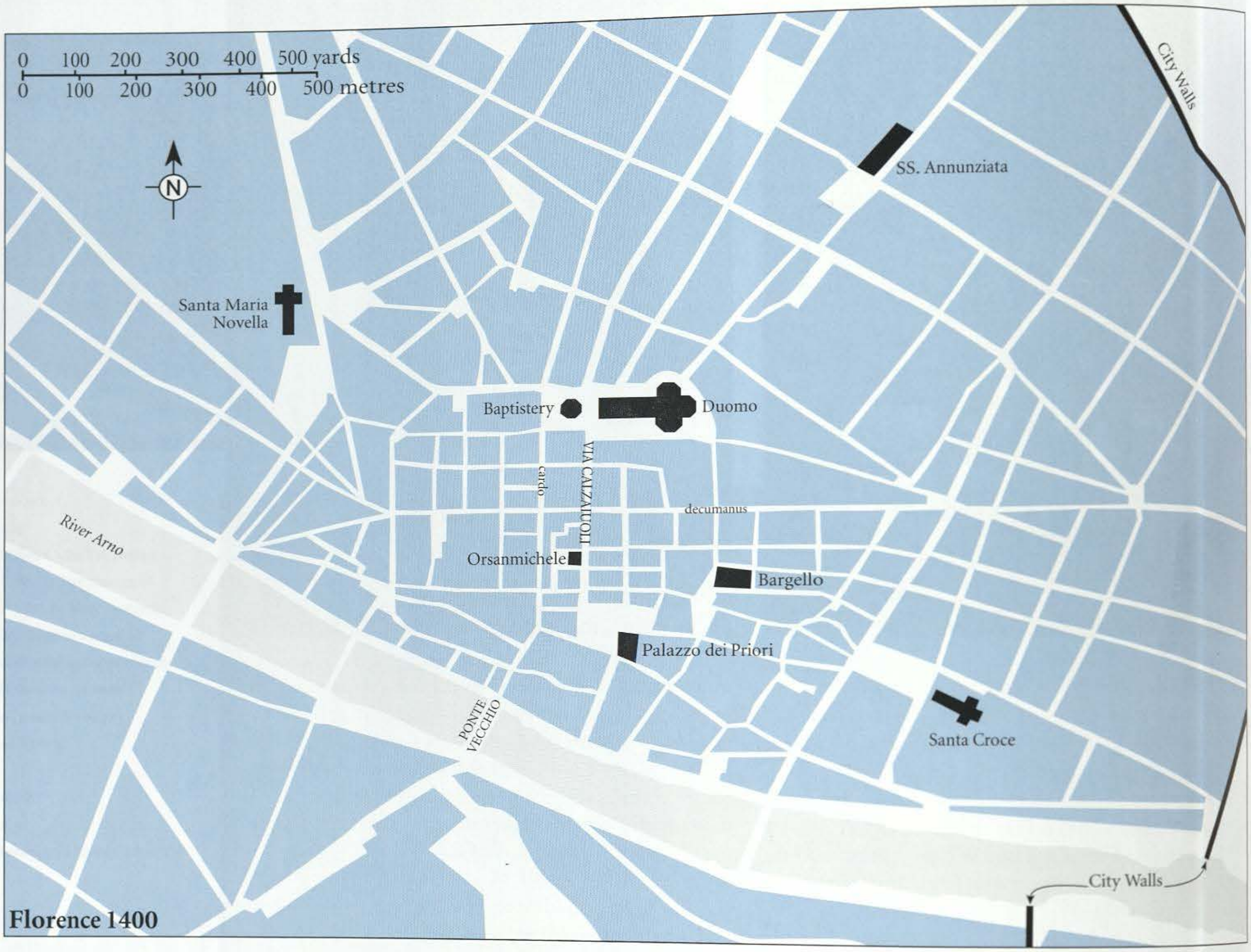
mately poisoned the previous ruler, his uncle Bernabò Visconti; construction on the building began one year later, under the supervision of Gian Galeazzo's cousin, Archbishop Antonio da Saluzzo. The Visconti, who wanted contemporaries to measure them by international standards, called in French and German master builders to provide designs and oversee construction, giving the church a northern European look that later additions would amplify. The relative belatedness of the building meant that all involved had seen what the Florentines were already making – an airy interior interrupted only by the massive supports necessary to hold up the **vaulting** and the great **dome** – yet the Visconti and their masons favored a different kind of building, with a series of narrow bays running from the entrance to the brightly illuminated altar wall and thinner, taller **piers** between (fig. 2.5). The windows themselves featured stained glass, framed by **tracery**, or decorated stonework, one of the most impressive features of northern European cathedrals, but highly unusual in the Italian peninsula (fig. 2.6). By comparison with Florence Cathedral, with its massive internal supports and broad expanses of solid wall, Milan's designers sought an effect common among the cathedrals of northern Europe, replacing large areas of wall with screens of colored glass.

The most distinctive exterior feature of Milan Cathedral in the fifteenth century was not a bell tower, but a "guglia," or spire (fig. 2.7), paid for by a merchant named Marco Carelli who donated funds in 1391. Supporting a statue of the warrior saint George and conceived in part as a commemorative monument, this had more in common with the Della Scala tombs in Verona (*see* p. 20) – a city Gian Galeazzo had conquered a few years before – than with Giotto's campanile in Florence. The individualist origins of the cathedral also helped shape its fate. When the plague killed Gian Galeazzo in 1402, work came largely to a halt. Nearly all the defining exterior features of the building that we see today are eighteenth- and nineteenth-century additions.

Competition at Florence Cathedral

Cathedrals provided a focus for urban artistic activities. In many cities, the cathedral works controlled the importation and distribution of marble and other materials. Sometimes a cathedral even provided workspace for artists. This situation regularly led to competition, and at several levels. Towns, as we have seen, closely watched what their neighbors were up to. Guilds strove to outdo one another in sponsoring conspicuous embellishments to the structure of their cathedral. And artists themselves, recognizing that an assignment at the cathedral was their best opportunity for public exposure, worked against others to secure commissions.

The Florentines had built their duomo, like most others in Italy, over an earlier church, in this case the eleventh-century Santa Reparata. The one ancient


0 100 200 300 400 500 yards
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N
City Walls
SS. Annunziata
Santa Maria Novella
Baptistery
Duomo
VIA CALZAIUOLI
cardo
decumanus
River Arno
Orsanmichele
Bargello
Palazzo dei Priori
PONTE VECCHIO
Santa Croce
City Walls
Florence 1400

RIGHT

2.8

Plan of Florence Cathedral

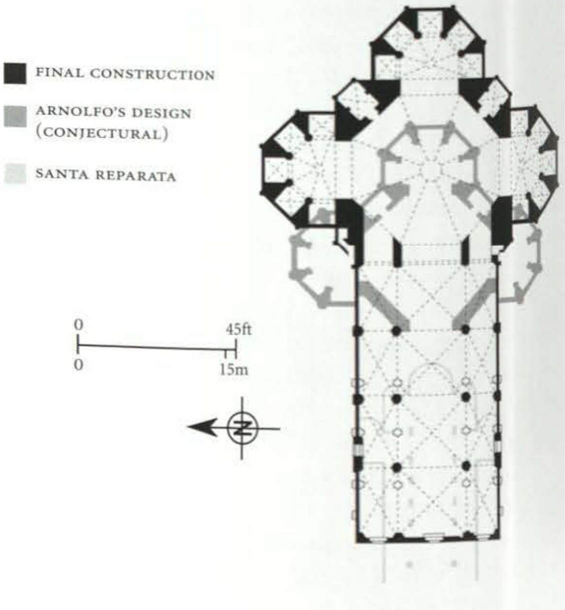
OPPOSITE

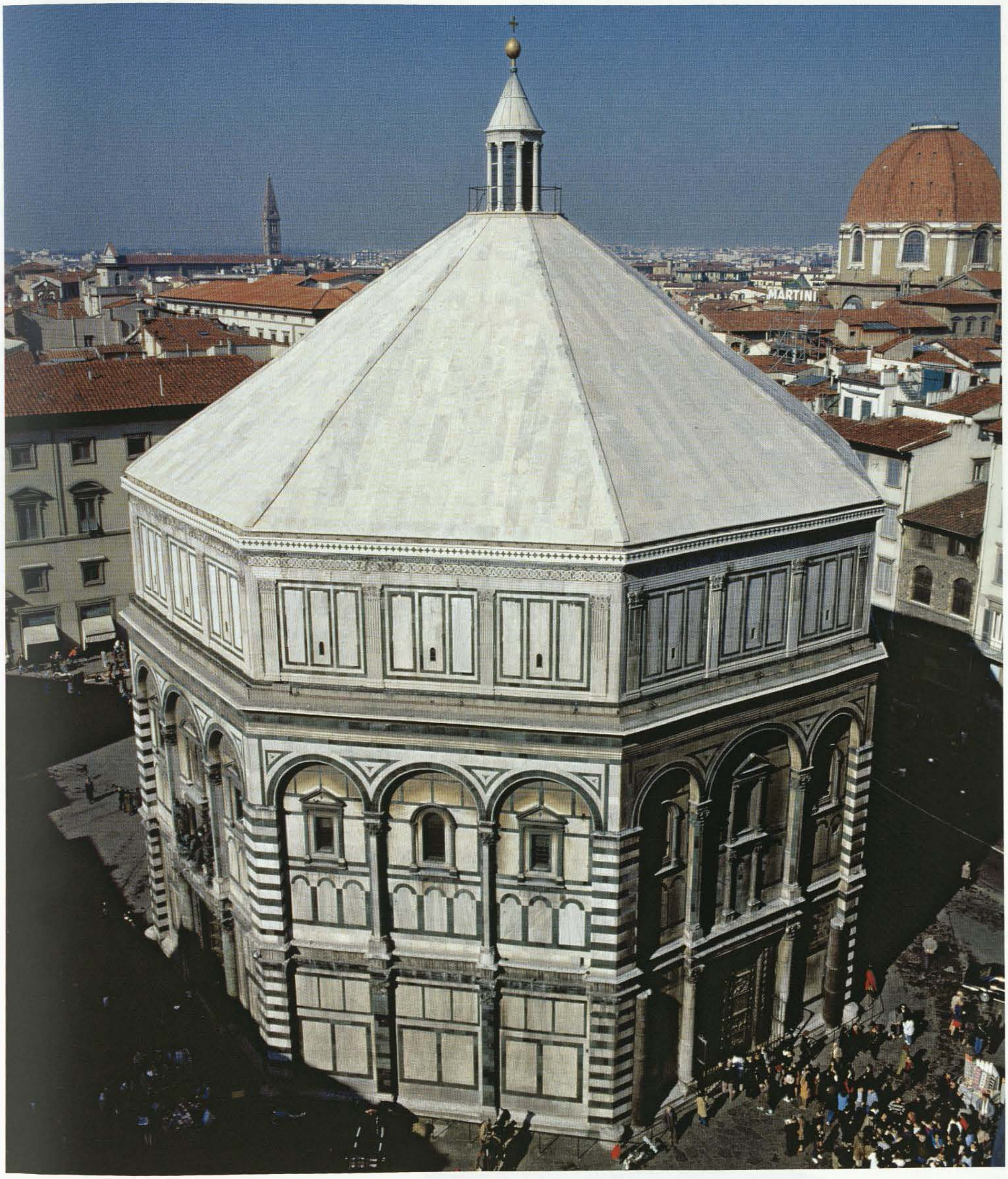
2.9

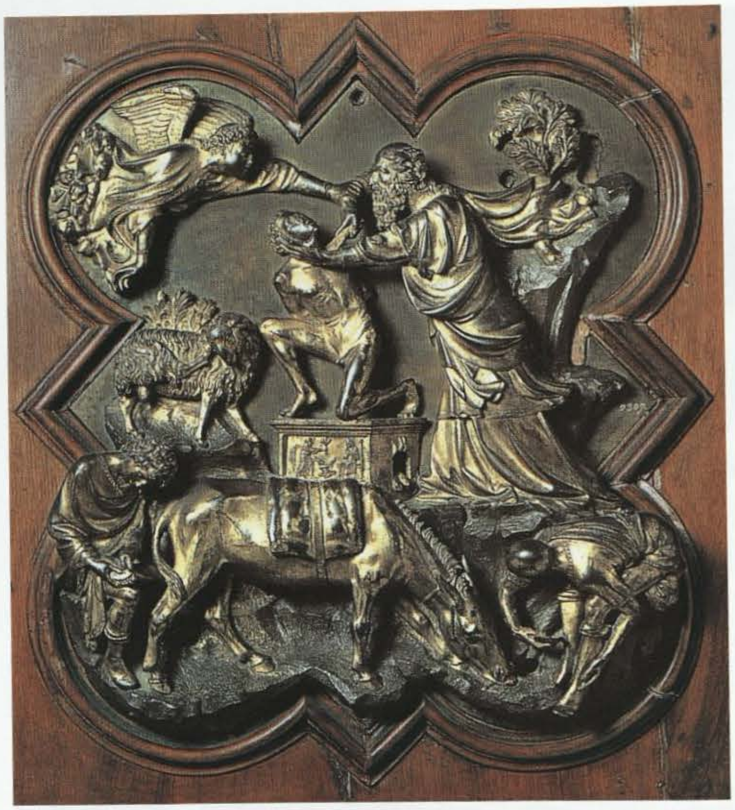
Baptistery (San Giovanni), Florence. The building may have been founded as early as the fourth century but was heavily renovated in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries with the addition of white and green marble revetment and columns salvaged from ancient Roman buildings (*spolia*).

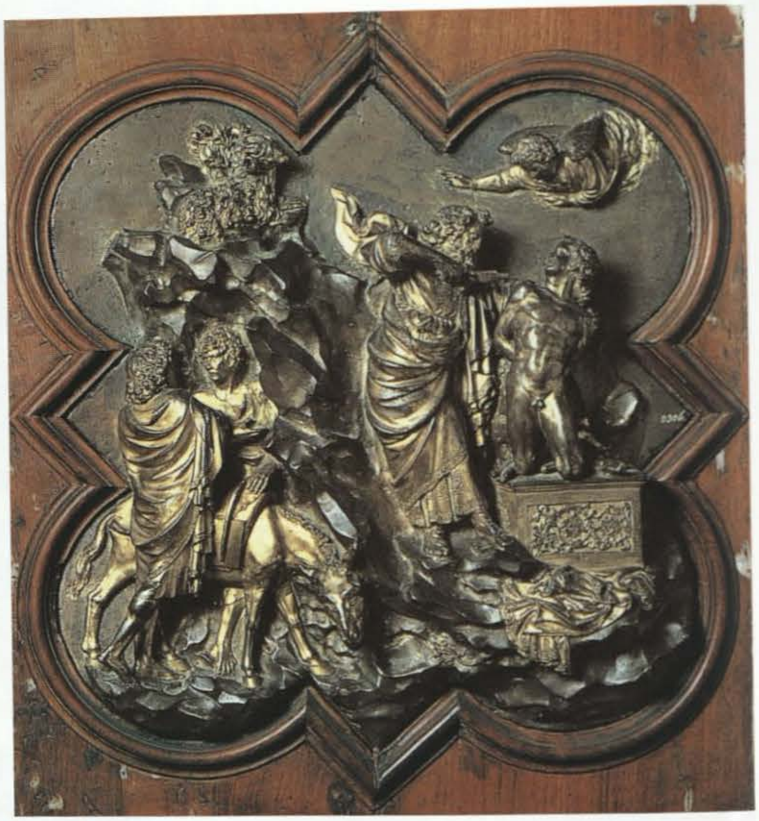
structure the Florentines opted to retain, however, was the baptistery (fig. 2.9). The standing architecture of this building had been consecrated in 1059, though the Florentines believed it to be still older, originating as an ancient pagan temple dedicated to the Roman god of war, Mars. That imagined history lent it an authority to which the site's subsequent buildings nodded. Arnolfo di Cambio had proposed an octagonal crossing for the cathedral, essentially inscribing the baptistery's distinctive form into its plan, and this was one element of his design that survived subsequent reconsiderations. Giotto and his successors saw that both the Campanile and the cathedral itself received a variegated skin of green and white marble **revetment** (marble facing) like that of the baptistery. And those responsible for the cathedral looked for ways to give it, too, more ancient roots.

The Republic's instructions to Giotto in 1334 were to build something "so magnificent in its height and


FINAL CONSTRUCTION
ARNOLFO'S DESIGN (CONJECTURAL)
SANTA REPARATA
0 45ft
0 15m
N


MARTINI





ABOVE LEFT

2.10

Filippo Brunelleschi, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401–03. Bronze with gilding, 21 x 17½" (53 x 44 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

ABOVE RIGHT

2.11

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401–03. Bronze with gilding, 17¾ x 15" (45 x 38 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

workmanship that it shall surpass anything of the kind produced by the Greeks and the Romans in the time of their greatest power." The patrons of the campanile demanded something daunting in scale, and we can assume that Arnolfo's earlier employers had the same expectations. This did not, however, preclude careful attention to ratios, and the church's dimensions, in fact, aligned it with another model. The plan of the cathedral (fig. 2.8) repeated the square that formed the crossing so as to generate a nave six units in length, a transept two units wide; the dome was three units high. This matched the dimensions of Solomon's Temple, as given in the first book of Kings (6:2): "And the house, which King Solomon built to the Lord, was threescore cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and thirty cubits in height" (i.e., 60 x 20 x 30). The reference to antiquity in this instance was not an attempt to recapture the look of ancient forms but rather to follow what contemporaries would have understood as a set of divinely sanctioned proportions, as if the cathedral were a realization of God's own design. So important were the ratios that the Flemish composer Guillaume Dufay (1397–1474) would incorporate them into the motet (a short choral composition) he wrote for the new dedication of the building on 25 March 1436.

For all of the building's novelty, in other words, it also presented itself as the fulfillment of an earlier plan. And this way of thinking about sacred art, as an attempt to carry through something previously foreshadowed or prescribed, bears more broadly on the cathedral precinct. Catholic theologians often construed the characters and events of the Old Testament as "prefigurations" (foreshadowings) of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints who followed them, and the theme of prophecy had exceptional importance at Florence Cathedral, since John the Baptist, the great prophet to whom the baptistery itself was dedicated, was also the city's patron saint.

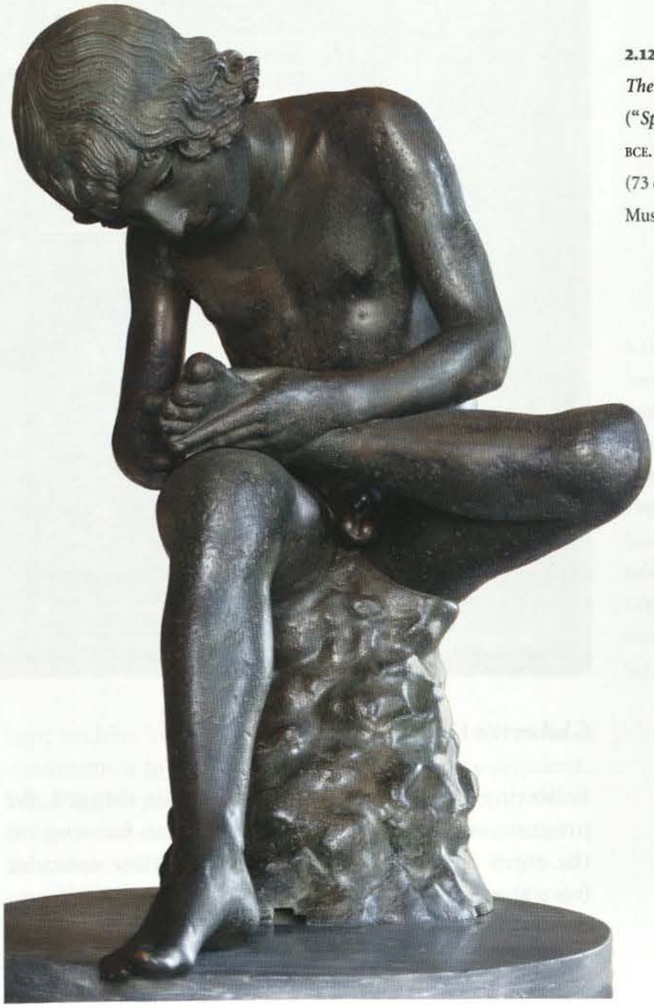
Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, and the Commission for the Baptistery Doors

The city's luxury cloth importers belonged to the "Calimala," Florence's most powerful guild, and the Calimala was charged with overseeing the baptistery's decoration. Its members recognized that the most impressive features of the building's exterior were the bronze doors that the sculptor and architect Andrea Pisano (*c.* 1270/90–*c.* 1348/9) had carried out for the east entrance between 1330 and 1336, showing scenes from the life of John the Baptist. And in 1401 the guild held a competition for the production of a sequel to what Andrea had made. Artists who wished to enter had to produce a single panel that embodied their vision for the new door. It had to show the Sacrifice of Isaac, the episode from Genesis wherein God commands Abraham to kill his own son Isaac, then intervenes at the last moment by allowing him to slaughter a ram instead. (Catholics understood the scene to foretell God's sacrifice of his own son on the Cross.) For the sake of continuity, participants had to work with a frame of the same size and shape (a **quatrefoil**, or diamond with projecting lobes) that Andrea had used for his south-entrance panels, and to sculpt the Abraham and Isaac story within that form. The fact that two surviving competition panels include the same number of figures and very similar background elements, finally, suggests that even these things were stipulated from the outset.

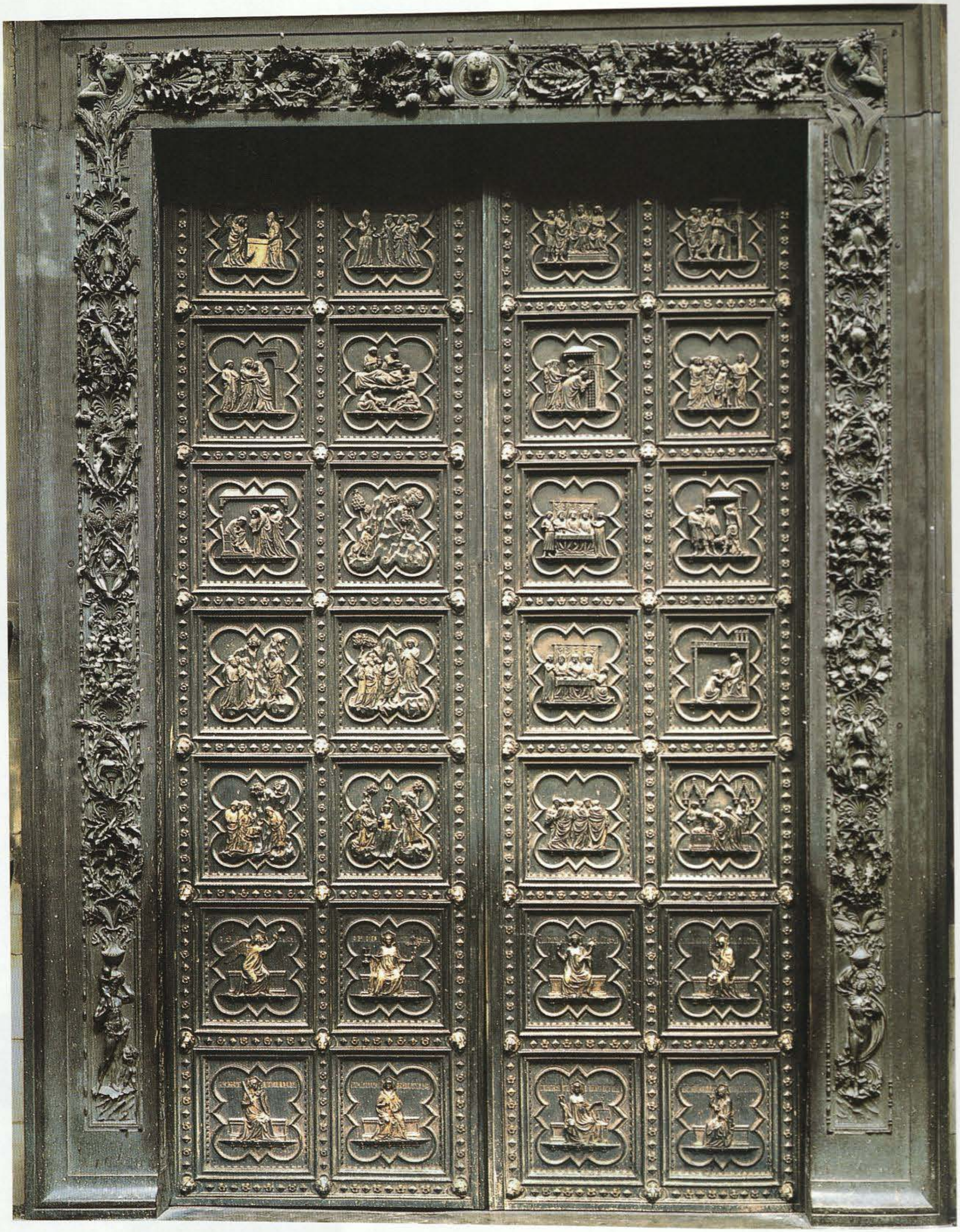
As a prospective commission, the new doors would have been hard to pass up, for they would essentially guarantee the winner a decade's worth of steady work while also promising maximum visibility for his products. Seven artists ultimately submitted panels, of which two survive (figs. 2.10–2.11). Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) approached the problem by designing individual characters in widely varying poses, then placing these in the subfields suggested by the assigned shape: an angel in the upper left arc, a ram in the projecting angle below that, servants at lower left and right. His attention to the challenging medieval frame manifests itself especially in details such as the pose of the horse and the contours of the cliff behind Abraham, though the artist also attempted to incorporate elements that looked to a more distant past. He sets his Isaac, for example, on an altar with a relief carved on the side; Brunelleschi may actually have seen ancient stone altars and imagined their ritual function, though here the device works also as a pedestal, making Isaac himself look like a statue. The figure at the lower left, rather than paying attention to the central event, seems preoccupied with the base of his foot. This has little to do with the central narrative, but it makes an unmistakable reference to the *Spinario* (*The Thorn Puller*) (fig. 2.12) in Rome, from the first century BCE, one of the most famous surviving statues from the ancient world.

Brunelleschi's biographer Antonio Manetti reported that the competition resulted in a draw, but that Brunelleschi refused the option of working in collaboration with his rival. Ghiberti himself, on the other hand, reported in his *Commentaries* that he won the contest outright. If this was indeed the case, it is easy to see why.

Brunelleschi, the son of a local notary, had entered the world of sculpture as an outsider. Ghiberti, by contrast, had trained in a typical late medieval workshop, the son and student of another goldsmith; eventually he would pass the craft on to his own sons, who remained in the same profession. In the previous chapter, we looked at Ghiberti's enterprise as an author, which was unusual for an artist in his time. In addition to writing an important early art-historical and theoretical text, however, he also proved himself to be the most innovative metalworker of his day. Whereas Brunelleschi produced his relief by casting seven small objects, then soldering these together, Ghiberti made his scene as a single piece, attaching only Abraham's hand and a section of the rock. Thin and hollow at the back, his relief weighed less than Brunelleschi's, making it easier for the installers to handle, and it required less bronze, making it less costly. Beyond the economics, the judges of the competition may simply have liked the look of his relief better. Whereas Brunelleschi's secondary figures of animals and servants, with their vigorous and difficult poses, all jostle for our attention, Ghiberti produced a harmonious and easily legible composition organized around flowing curves. If Brunelleschi advertised his knowledge of ancient sculpture by quoting the *Spinario* in the lower margin, Ghiberti adopted the thorn puller's delicate anatomy (though not his distinctive pose) for Isaac himself; the victim here charms the viewer in a way that Brunelleschi's wretched, screaming child does not. The awarding of commissions to those who demonstrated an ability to fuse technical innovation with beauty would recur throughout the early history of the site.



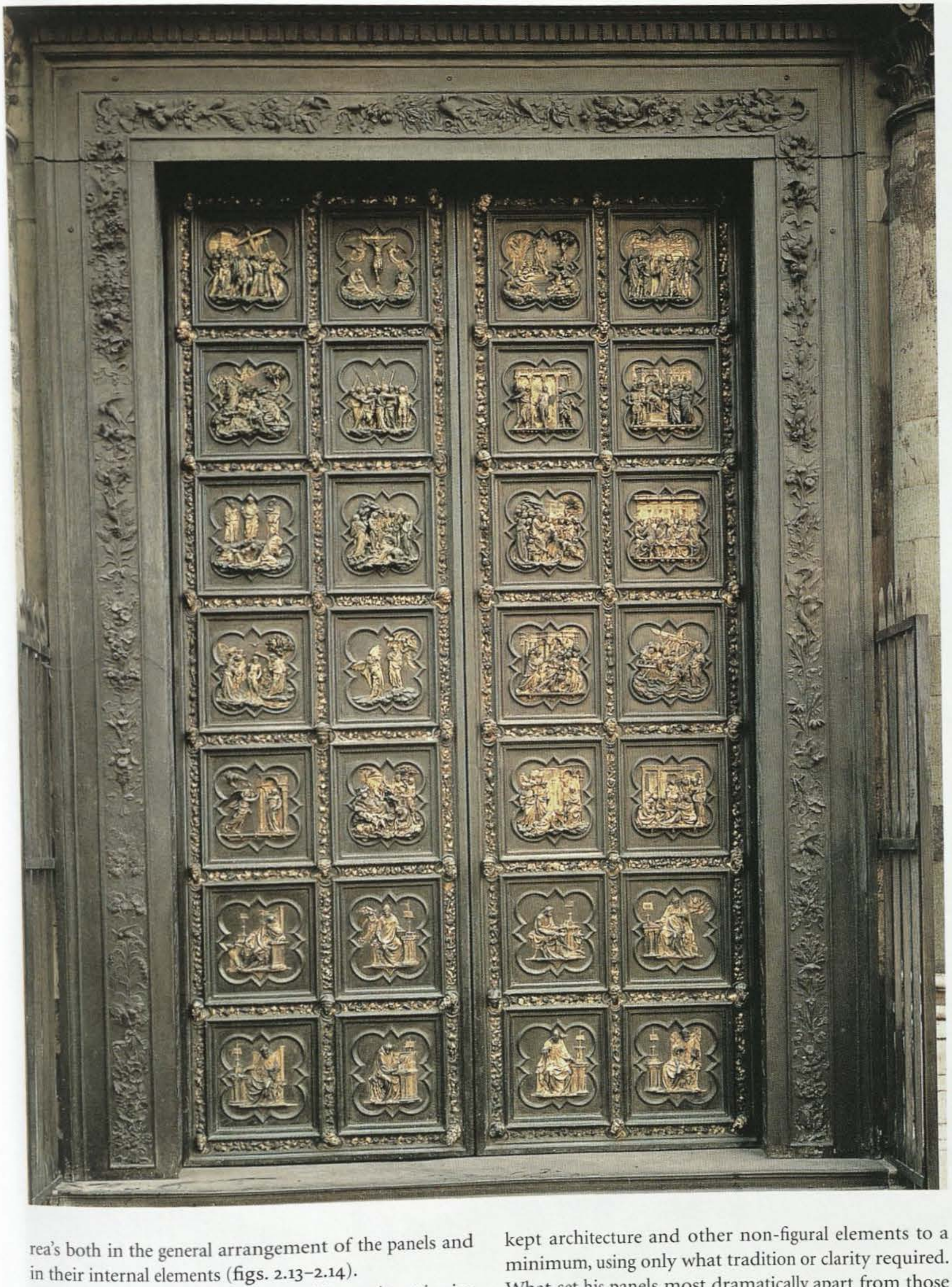
2.12
The Thorn Puller
("*Spinario*"), first century BCE. Bronze, height 28¾" (73 cm). Capitoline Museum, Rome



2.13
Andrea Pisano, south doors of the Florence Baptistery, 1330–36. Bronze with gilding, height 15' (4.6 m). **The doors were originally made for the building's east facade.**

Ghiberti's First Doors

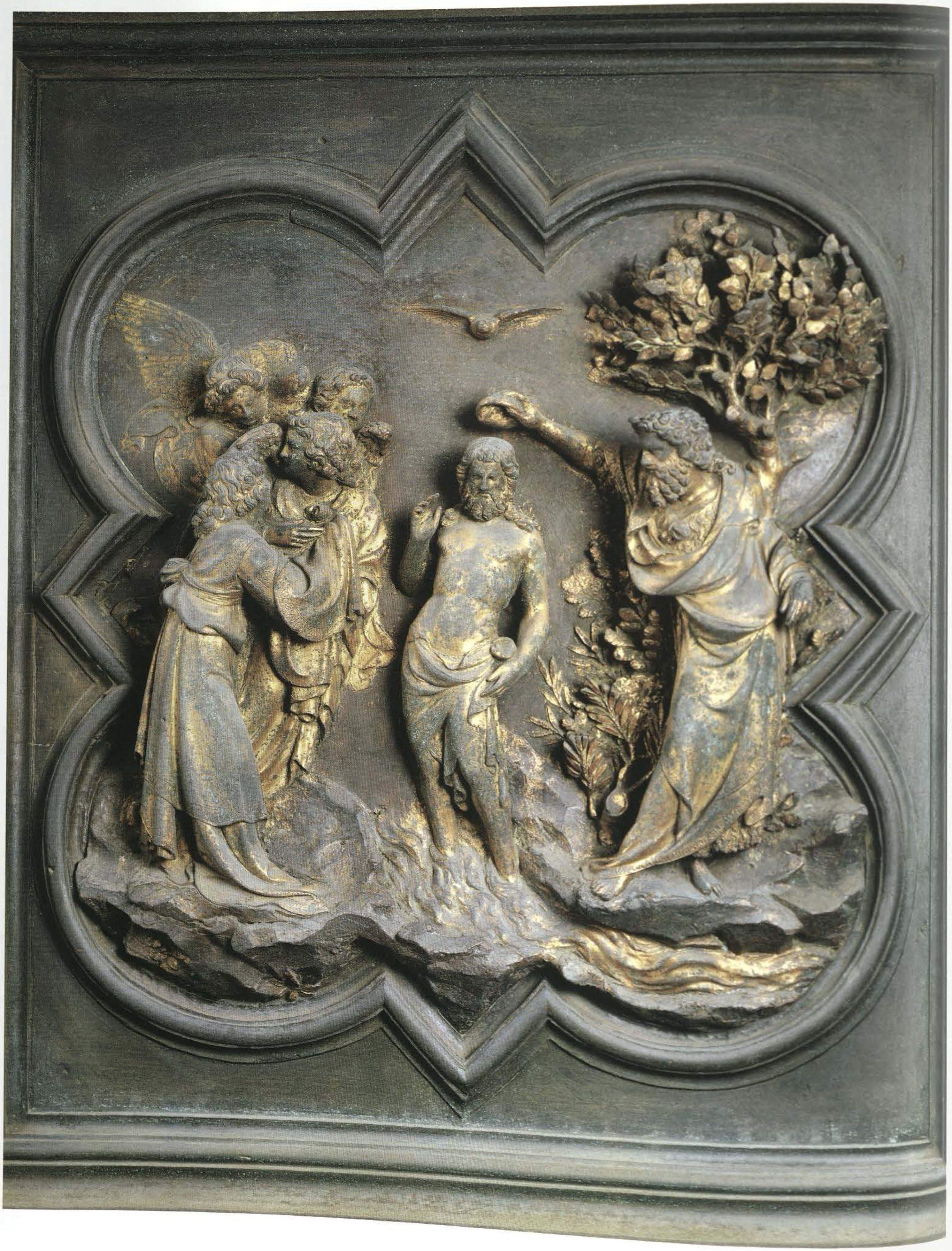
Following the competition, the Calimala changed the program of the commission. Rather than focusing on the story of Abraham and Isaac and other episodes from the Old Testament, it would treat the New Testament, that is, the life of Christ. And rather than simply complementing Andrea Pisano's existing doors, Ghiberti's would replace them on the baptistery's east side, facing the cathedral itself. The protagonists would be the Savior whose coming John the Baptist had foretold, and Ghiberti's composition would closely follow And-

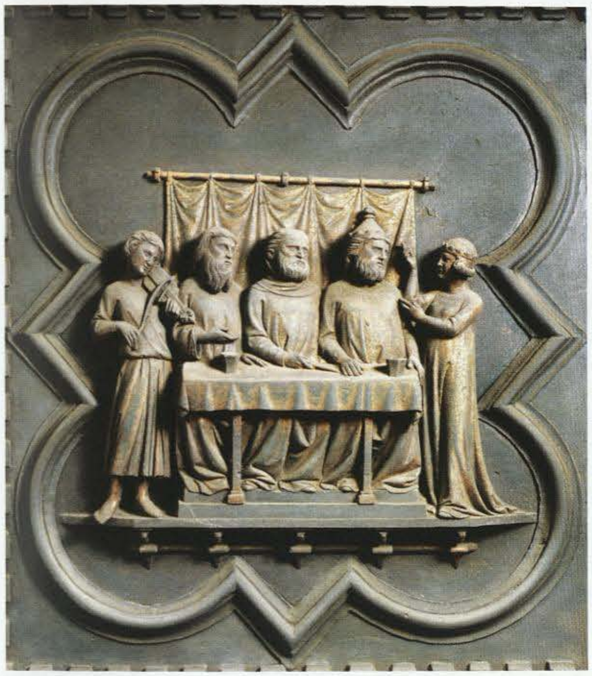


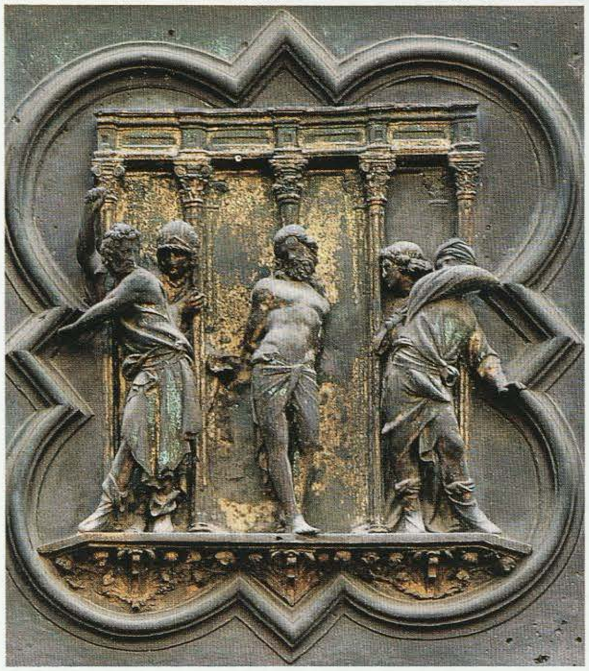
2.14
Lorenzo Ghiberti, north doors of the Florence Baptistery, 1403–24. Bronze with gilding, height approx. 15' (4.6m). The doors, installed as replacements for the Pisano pair in 1424, were moved to the building's north side in 1452.

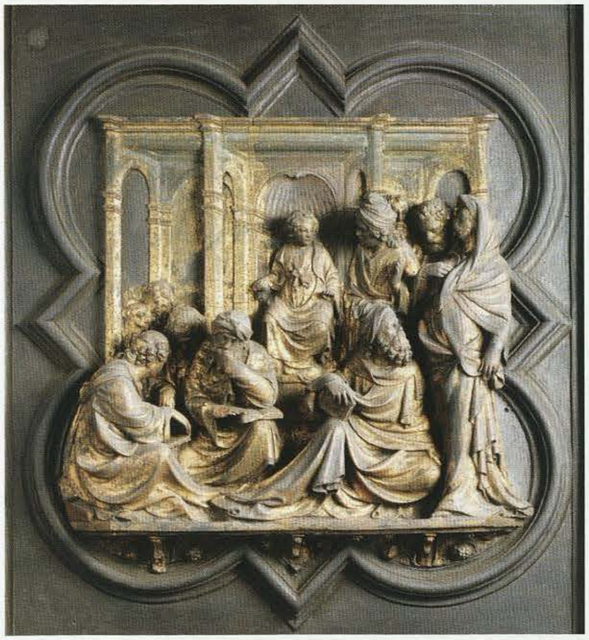
rea's both in the general arrangement of the panels and in their internal elements (figs. 2.13–2.14).

Ghiberti scaled his figures, roughly consistent in size from frame to frame, to match Andrea's. Most occupy a space defined by a ground line that runs between the middle and bottom lobes of the quatrefoil. The goldsmith kept architecture and other non-figural elements to a minimum, using only what tradition or clarity required. What set his panels most dramatically apart from those of his predecessor was his interest in figural movement. To take one telling example, Andrea's Salome (fig. 2.16) was a rigid, almost contourless figure, even though the









OPPOSITE

2.15

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Baptism of Christ*, from the north doors of the Florence Baptistery, *c.* 1416–19. Bronze with gilding

FAR LEFT

2.16

Andrea Pisano, *Feast of Herod*, from the south doors of the Florence Baptistery, 1330–36. Bronze with gilding

LEFT, ABOVE

2.17

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Flagellation of Christ*, from the north doors of the Florence Baptistery, *c.* 1416–19. Bronze with gilding

LEFT, BELOW

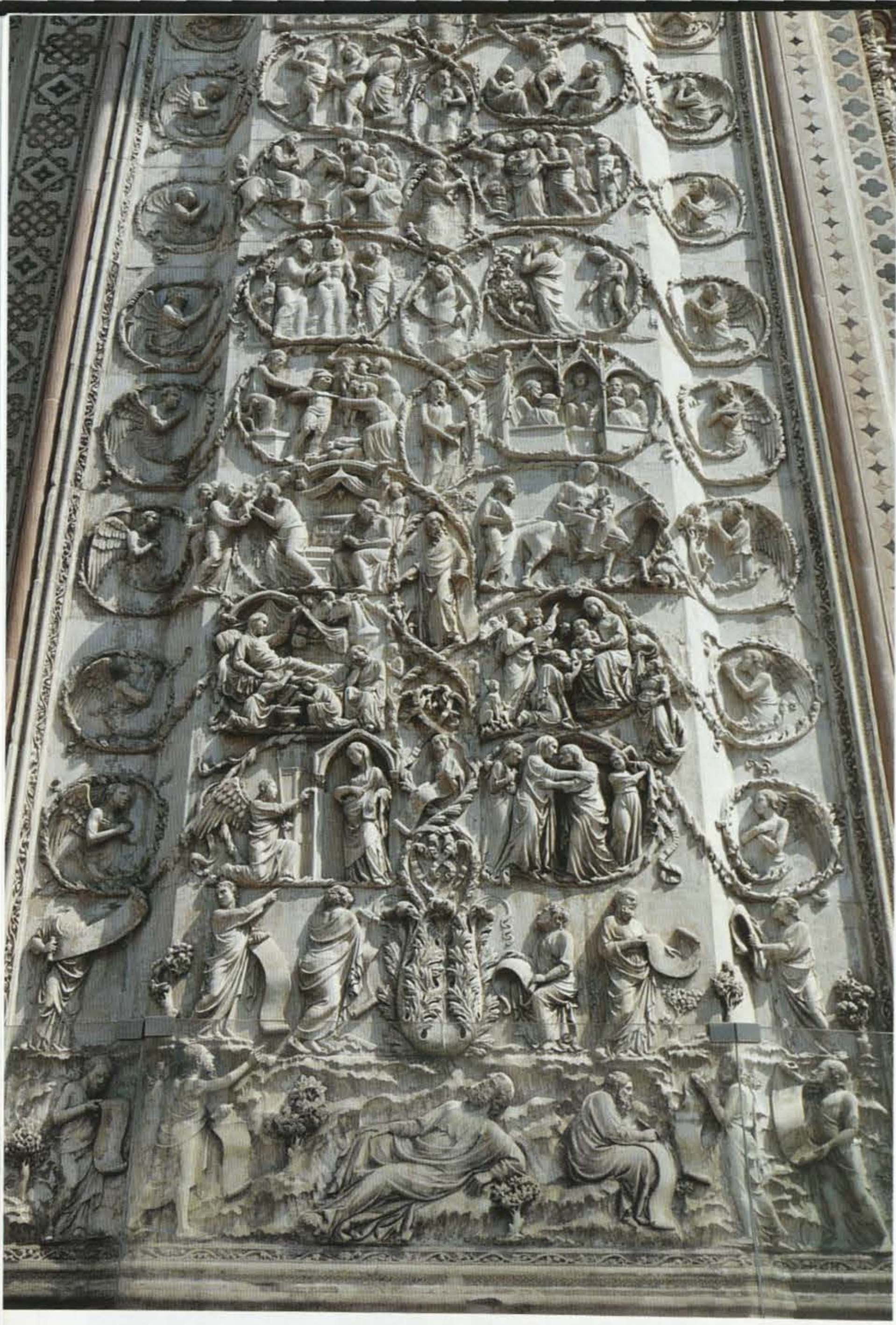
2.18

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Finding of Christ in the Temple*, from the north doors of the Florence Baptistery, *c.* 1416–19. Bronze with gilding

scene in which she starred had her dancing seductively before her stepfather. Ghiberti, by contrast, lent a graceful twist even to the suffering Christ of the *Flagellation* (fig. 2.17). In the *Baptism of Christ* (fig. 2.15), Christ's suavely curving body is symmetrically framed by sweeping arcs, formed to his right by draperies of attending angels, and on our right by John's elastically outstretched right arm and extended right leg. Posture and movement both enrich the narrative and display a modern artfulness, learned in part from the study of what the figures in ancient sculptures did. More willing than Andrea to crowd his panels, Ghiberti also set figures in different states of motion against one another, inviting the viewer to compare them (fig. 2.18). And here, as in the competition relief, Ghiberti exhibits the subtle drama of his storytelling. Mary, standing on the right, discovers the twelve-year-old Christ, who had been missing for three days, disputing with the Jewish elders in the temple. Her commanding presence disrupts the symmetrical arrangement of Christ and his interlocutors; as her gaze locks with Christ, she points to herself in a gesture of maternal reproach. It is impossible to mistake the words she is speaking: "Why have you treated us like this?" (Luke 2:48).

The baptistery doors' story of Christ's life and death runs from left to right and – more surprisingly – from bottom to top. This suggests that the viewer is to move up into the story from the panels below, which show the four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), who had authored the Gospels narrating Christ's life, and four of the chief Church Fathers who had interpreted these. The decision to give each of the quatrefoils in the lower two rows over to a single seated figure followed Andrea's example, though Ghiberti may also have had a more integrated understanding of the overall program.

When the sculptor and architect Lorenzo Maitani (1255–1330), nearly a century before, undertook the energetic marble reliefs he made for the facade of Orvieto Cathedral (fig. 2.19), he adopted a comparable arrangement. The figures at the bottom of Maitani's picture field, which the viewer encountered at eye level, represented



2.19
Lorenzo Maitani, marble reliefs from the pier to the right of the main portal of Orvieto Cathedral, 1310–30

OPPOSITE
2.20
Lorenzo Ghiberti, self-portrait (detail from the north doors of the Florence Baptistery), *c.* 1416–19.
Bronze with gilding

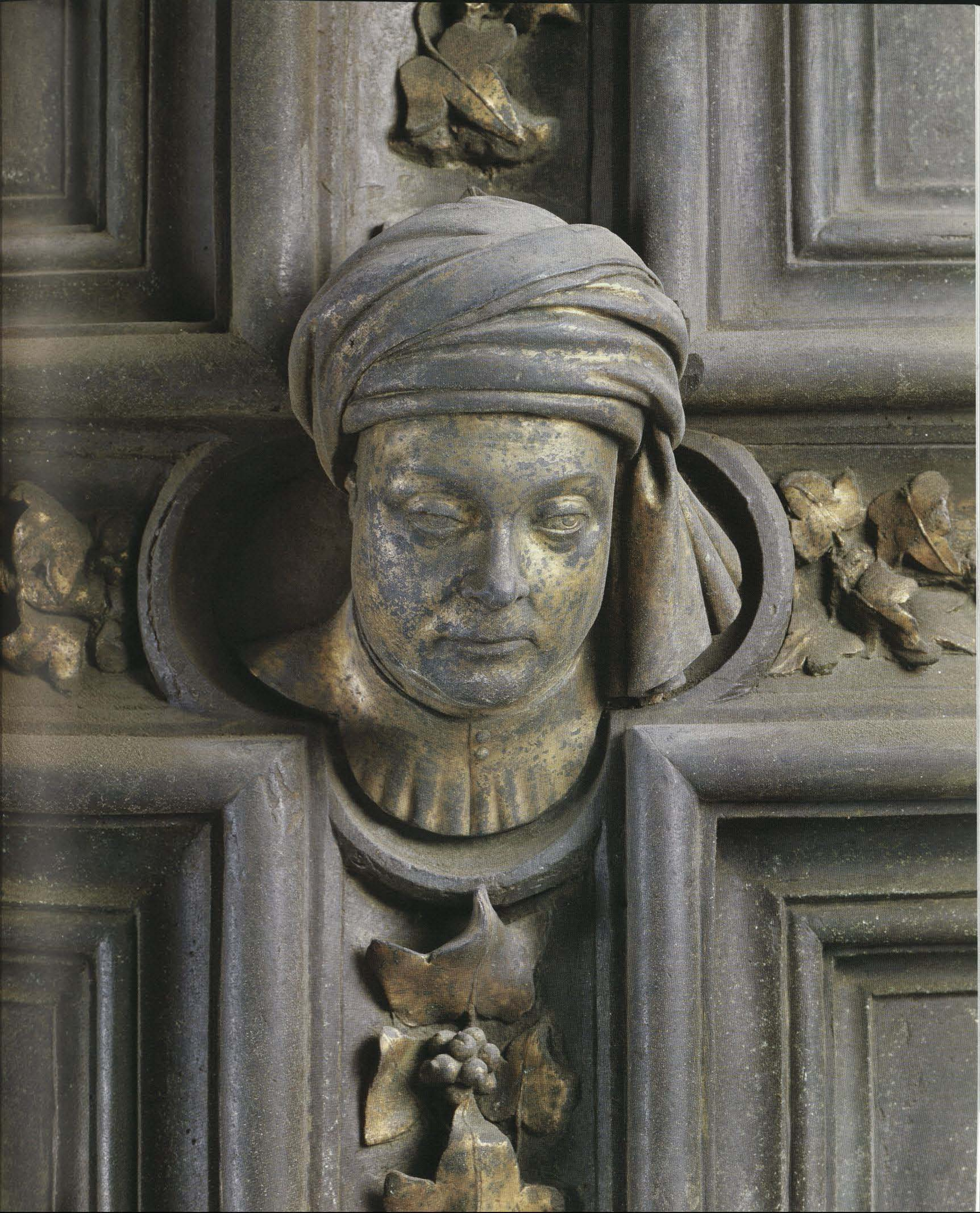
prophets, and the foliate motifs that grew up from them framed the individual stories as fulfillments of what the prophets had written. Ghiberti added vegetation around his panels as well; more surprising, though, is his decision to substitute human heads for the leonine motifs that Andrea Pisano had used in his earlier doors. In making these, the goldsmith seems to have drawn on ancient portraits: one head resembles surviving figures of Socrates, another Julius Caesar. Most, however, resist naming, and seem there in order to enliven the overall composition through their mutual interaction and their engagement with the beholder rather than to depict any specific group of individuals. Do they indeed have identities at all? Some of the bearded faces follow the conventions for representing prophets. Perhaps they, like John the Baptist himself, foretell the narrative that Ghiberti fulfills with his panels. Or perhaps they simply play the part of commentators, looking around and "speaking" about what the goldsmith produced.

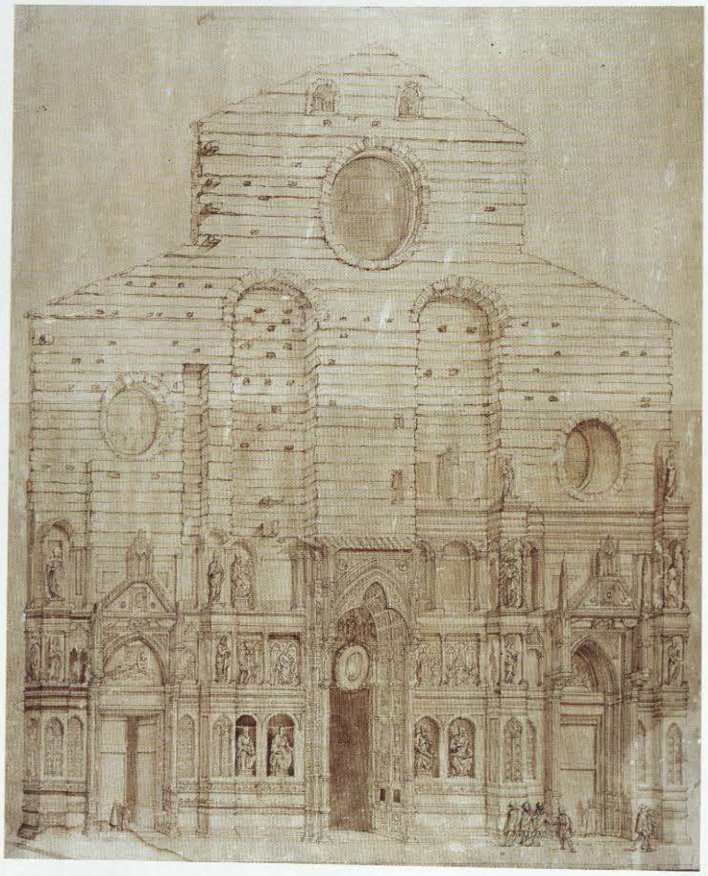
Among the heads Ghiberti included one of the first Italian self-portraits (fig. 2.20). The cloth covering Ghiberti's hair may simply be the normal protective gear that sculptors wore in the studio, but it also gives the artist an exotic look, as though he were from the same distant oriental lands as the characters he depicts.

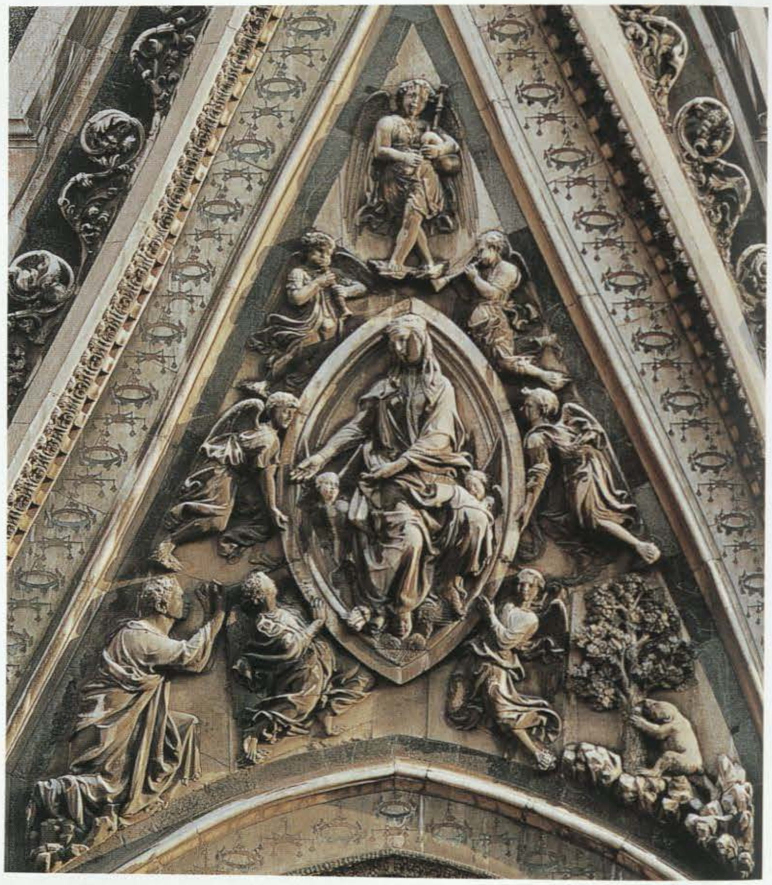
Marble Sculpture for the Cathedral: Nanni di Banco and Donatello

Bronze was among the most expensive materials used for early Renaissance sculpture, and the decision to dedicate it to the production of doors shows how important such thresholds were. The decoration of the facade of Florence's cathedral under Arnolfo di Cambio had stopped soon after it began, but not before the area around the main doors had been completed (fig. 2.21). This was not only a crucial passageway between the secular world of the city and the sacred interior of the cathedral; it was also a ceremonial site in its own right, one where citizens gathered for festivals and holy days, and one that the bishop could use for public dealings with the city.

The long, straight street that terminated at the cathedral from the north, moreover, ran not up to the doors facing the baptistery, but rather up to one around the corner, colloquially called the "Porta della Mandorla" (fig. 2.22) or the "Almond Door" after the almond-shaped aureole that surrounds the Virgin in the relief above. The door itself had been under way since 1391, but in 1406 a sculptor named Nanni di Banco (1384/90–1421) was brought in to complete the ensemble that included vines,







ABOVE LEFT

2.21

Bernardo Poccetti, facade of Florence Cathedral, *c.* 1587. Ink on paper. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence.

The drawing records the appearance of the building before the removal of the original sculptures and the addition of the nineteenth-century facade.

ABOVE RIGHT

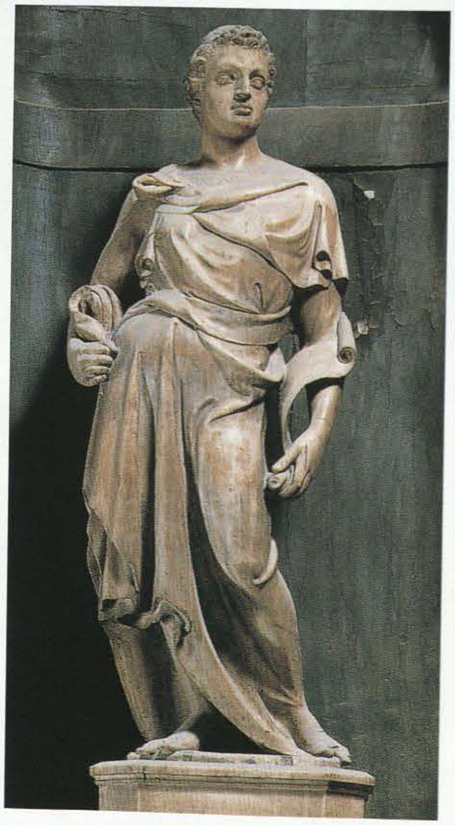
2.22

Nanni di Banco, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1414–22. Gable above the Porta della Mandorla, Florence Cathedral

half-length angels, and a nude figure of the hero Hercules, leaning on a club. Florentine legend made Hercules out to be the founder of the city, and from the late Middle Ages he had featured on the city's seal; his presence on the door announced the building's importance as a civic no less than a religious site and returned to the idea of its own ancient foundations.

Working with Nanni was a twenty-year-old sculptor named Donatello (*c.* 1386–1466). Nanni, like Ghiberti, had come from a family workshop; Donatello, like Brunelleschi, had entered the trade from outside. His father, a laborer in the city's wool industry, no doubt had connections to the guild that commissioned the baptistery doors and may have helped get him into Ghiberti's studio. There the boy had probably been performing menial tasks and studying his art when he received commissions in 1406 to carve two small prophets for Nanni's doorframe. Clearly he made an impression, for two years later he secured a more significant assignment: to work with Nanni on a series of prophets for the buttresses over the cathedral choir.

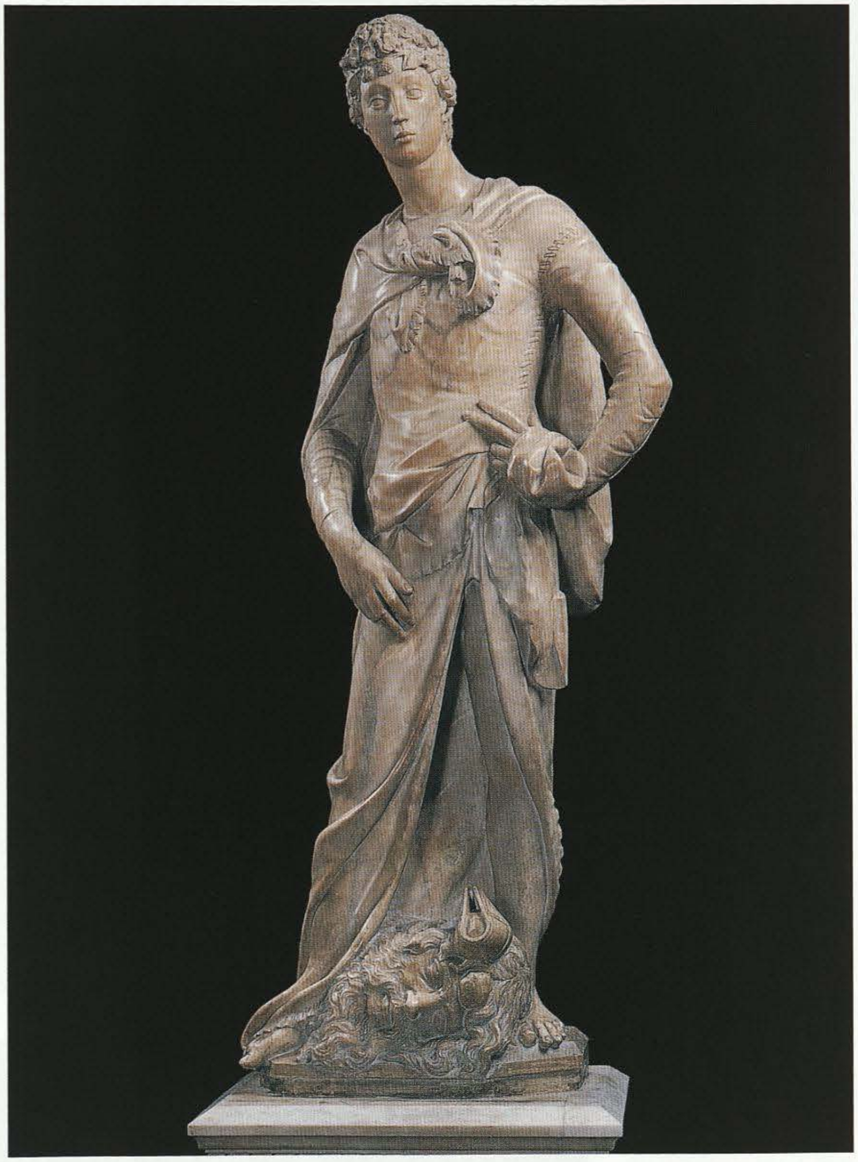
Nanni's first contribution to that cycle was a figure that usually goes by the name *Isaiah* (fig. 2.23), the Hebrew author of the eponymous Old Testament book. Artists conventionally showed Isaiah holding a scroll



with the words "Behold the virgin will conceive and bear a child," a phrase that would have linked him to the Virgin Mary and to the cathedral's dedication. Nanni's own version of the figure, nevertheless, shows a surprisingly physical writer. His swung hip nods to the graceful poses that the goldsmith Ghiberti was beginning to incorporate into his doors, but the stockier proportions immediately differentiate Nanni's invention from the goldsmith's designs. Another surprise is the relative youthfulness of the prophet: wanting nothing to do with the wrinkles and hair that marked the wisdom of age, Nanni carved a smooth, beardless face; *Isaiah*'s clenched right hand – perhaps now missing the attribute it once held – adds to the figure's air of toughness.

Nanni must have been making his statue in coordination with Donatello, who in 1408 was assigned to produce a *David* (fig. 2.24). David's status as a prophet depended on the traditional belief that he had authored the Psalms, a group of Old Testament songs. Donatello's statue, however, holds neither the scroll that identifies the other figures in the group nor the harp a psalmist would play. The only hint, in fact, that the depicted figure produced words of any kind is his ivy crown, an ornament sometimes worn by poets, though in context this looks more like a reward for his victory over Goliath, the giant whom David slew and whose head appears at his feet. The statue, with its body-hugging leather, long neck, and apparent awareness of being seen, presages the sculptures of beautiful young men for which Donatello would become famous. Yet the figure is also swaggeringly militaristic and tough, even more explicitly so than Nanni's.

Neither Nanni's nor Donatello's statue ever reached its intended destination. The patrons eventually brought Nanni's *Isaiah* inside Florence Cathedral, where it remained until the twentieth century. Donatello's *David*, by contrast, was turned over in 1416 to the government of the city, which erected it in Florence's Palazzo dei Priori, on a pedestal bearing a dedication "to the fatherland, still struggling mightily against terrible enemies," and an invocation to "let God lend his help." The inscription seems to refer to the city's war with Milan, a context that helps explain the curious circumstances of the original commission: the patrons, in asking Nanni and Donatello to carve their figures, were moving forward with the ornamental elements surrounding the dome of Florence's cathedral even before they were quite sure how the dome itself would be constructed. Donatello's *David*, in particular, seems to have been intended for a position that faced north – in other words, toward Milan – the same direction in which the *Hercules* on the Porta della Mandorla looked. The patrons may well have hoped that the statues would have talismanic effects, channeling divine protection to the city over which they stood, though those patrons were certainly also aware that Milan had its own cathedral under way in the same years, with its own warrior saint, George, rising high above.



2.24
Donatello, *David*, 1408–09. Marble, height 6'3" (1.91 m) including base. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

Jacopo della Quercia and the Fonte Gaia

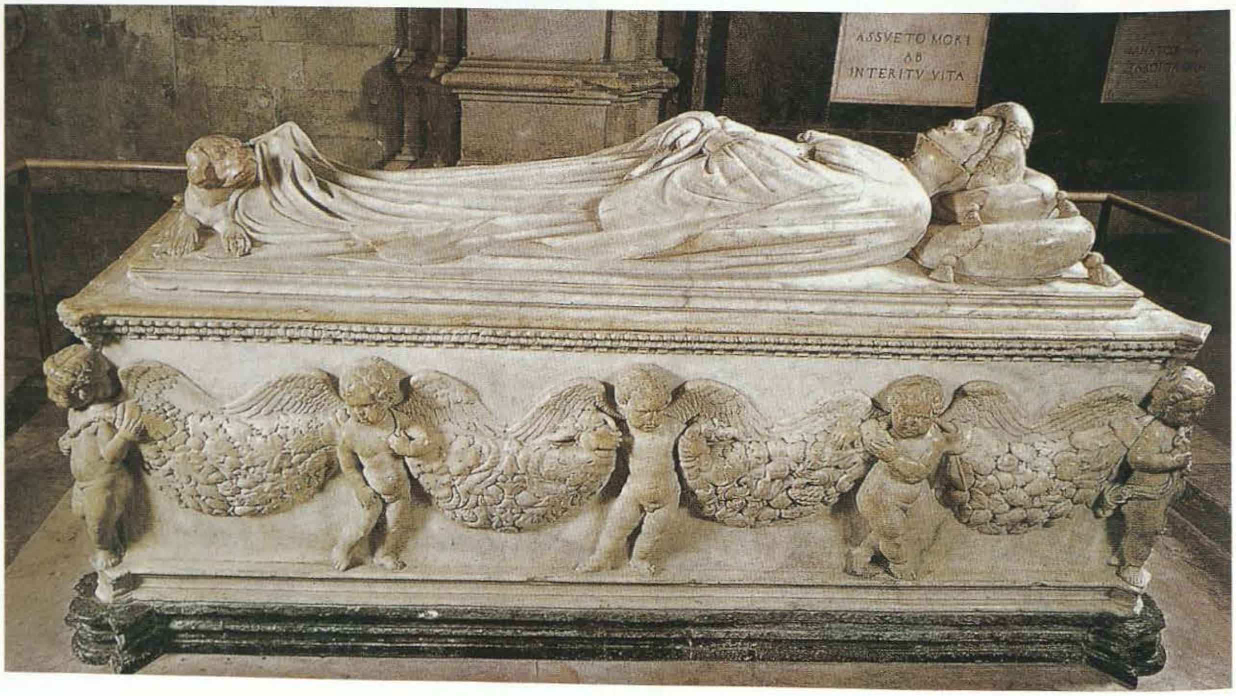
The sculptures at Florence Cathedral, conceived in competition with Milan, encouraged their own rivals elsewhere. Lorenzo Ghiberti, in the third book of his *Commentaries*, wrote that the Sienese discovered a sculpture of Venus inscribed with the name of the ancient Greek sculptor Lysippus (fourth century BCE) and placed it on top of their fountain. One citizen of the town, however, complained that the statue was encouraging idolatry

OPPOSITE BELOW
2.23
Nanni di Banco, *Isaiah*, 1408. Marble, height 6'4" (1.93 m). Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence

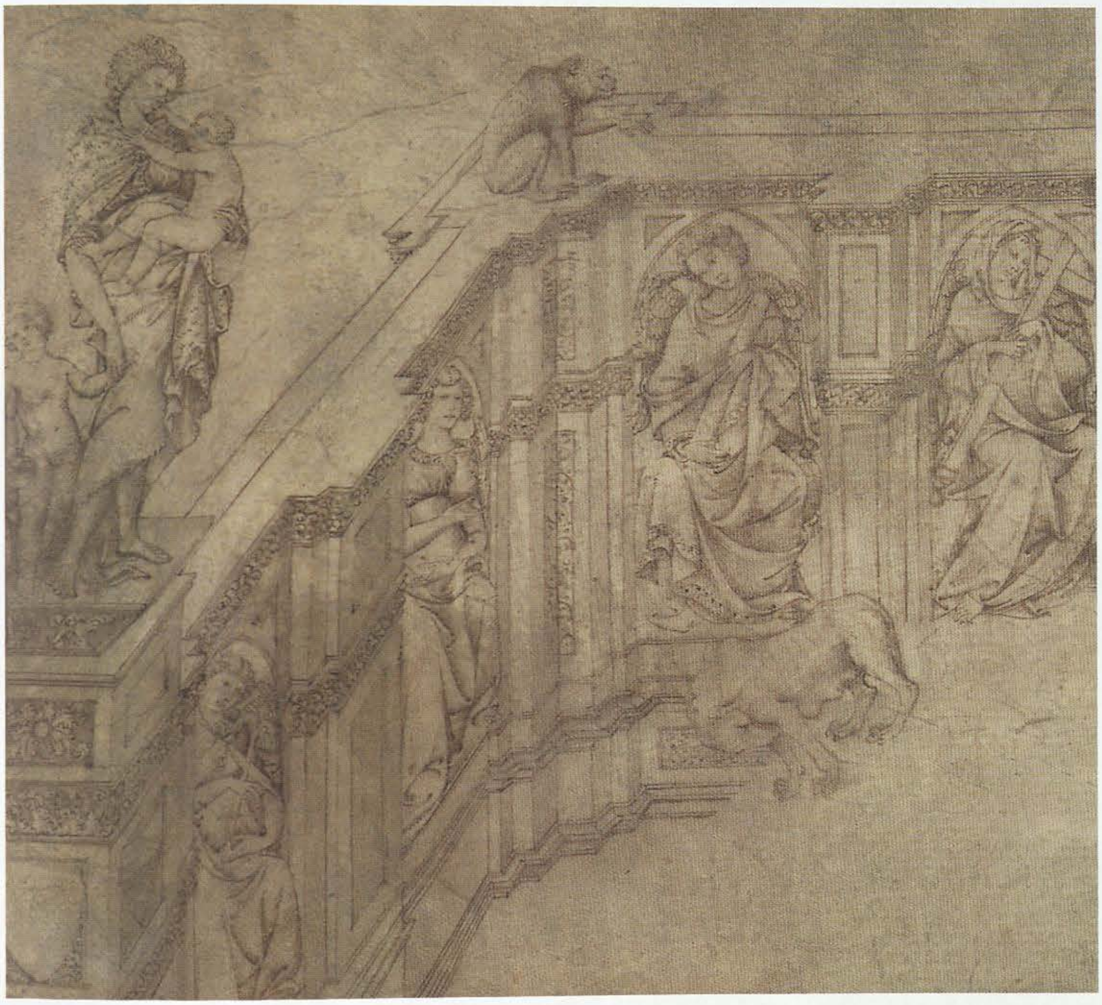
and cursing the Sienese army; he convinced the city council not just to take down the statue but to bury it across the border in Florentine territory, where it could bring misfortune to Siena's enemies instead. The comment reinforces the impression that Renaissance artists and patrons attributed much more power to sculpture than we do today; the idea that you could do things with sculptures that would literally advance your military prospects helps explain why the Florentines thought to position Nanni's and Donatello's prophet figures as they did. At the same time, there is perhaps a whiff of superiority in Ghiberti's story (just as there is in his account of Duccio's painting the *Maestà*; see chapter 1, p. 37), as though the ignorant Sienese could not appreciate antiquity in the way that Florentines did. He reports that he knew the statue from a drawing made of it by the "great painter" Ambrogio Lorenzetti, as though to distinguish the interests of artists from those of the superstitious. As we saw in chapter 1 (see p. 10), moreover, Ghiberti's *Commentaries* blamed a similar fear of idols for the destruction of ancient art in the first place.

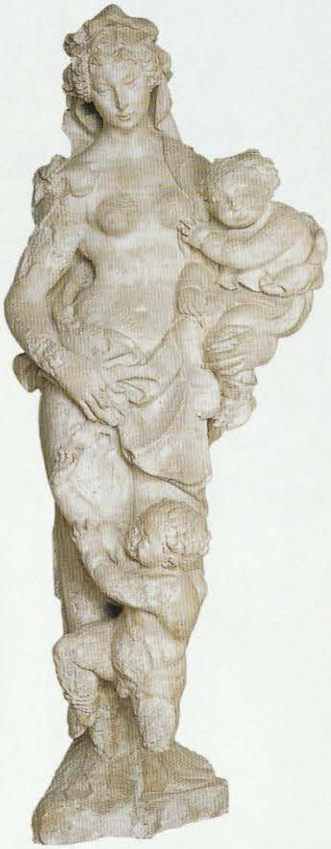
In fact, Ghiberti's actual contemporaries in Siena were nothing like those of his story. While he was at work on the north doors of Florence's baptistery, they were commissioning new sculptures for the very fountain on which, to follow Ghiberti, they had erected the fearful image of Venus. The best Sienese sculptor of the moment was Jacopo della Quercia (*c.* 1374–1438), a goldsmith who had entered the competition for Florence's baptistery doors in 1401, along with Ghiberti and Brunelleschi. After losing the competition to Ghiberti, Jacopo spent several years working in Ferrara, to the north, though the Sienese probably knew him best from the tomb sculpture that Paolo Guinigi, the Lord of Lucca, had asked him to make of his wife, Ilaria del Carretto, after her death in 1405 (fig. 2.25). Originally produced for a monastery, the exquisite portrait presents Ilaria in courtly finery, her head cushioned on pillows, a dog at her feet. Jacopo's treatment combines a sense of volume comparable to the work of Donatello and Ghiberti with a delicacy of line that responded to Italian aristocratic taste for ornamental flourish and refined detail. The rest of the monument that we see today is a late nineteenth-century reconstruction, and the children bearing garlands that adorn the sarcophagus below – a self-conscious revival of the mythical figure of Eros (or Cupid, the god of love) in Roman funerary art – probably date to a later period than the effigy itself. Still, nothing suggests that the tomb ever included any explicit Christian symbolism, and the Guinigi coat of arms, added to one end of the sarcophagus, reminds viewers that houses of religion such as monasteries (or cathedrals) could be sites for dynastic patronage. Long after the statue was made, the Lucchese moved it into their own cathedral, where it remains today; by then it was possible to ignore the monument's political function and to celebrate it as evidence of the city's historic artistic achievement.

The Sienese, in hiring Jacopo, probably did so in the recognition that no other native of the city – and few elsewhere – had established comparable skills in marble carving. In 1408, the same city council that Ghiberti had accused of expelling the earlier idolatrous sculp-



2.25
Jacopo della Quercia, tomb of Ilaria del Carretto, 1406. Marble, length of figure 6'10" (2.1 m). Lucca Cathedral





ture commissioned Jacopo to replace the original Fonte Gaia fountain in the **campo**, or square, before the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, with a new group of reliefs and free-standing figures. Exposed for centuries to the elements, these have not survived well, but a drawing (fig. 2.26) of 1409 by Jacopo gives a sense of the way the fountain would originally have appeared, with Virtues flanking the Virgin and Child in fictive niches, mythical Roman figures standing on parapets (fig. 2.27), a wolf, a dog, and a monkey. Civic fountains in this period were rare, and the technological achievement of bringing fresh water into the middle of the town surpassed anything the Florentines had achieved. Few public sculptures of any kind, moreover, featured such non-Christian subjects as the two largely nude female figures.

These represented Rhea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus, and Acca Laurentia, the woman who raised them after Rhea's execution. (The wolf must be the animal that, to follow the myths, nursed the twins.) The ancient Roman historian Livy (59 BCE–CE 17) had represented Rhea as a descendant of the mythical Aeneas, who, like Romulus and Remus, was also best known for his role in the founding of Rome. To place these statues before Siena's city hall was to assert Siena's connections with antiquity to the same degree that the Florentines, in tracing the origins of their baptistery, had asserted their own. The Sienese may even have aimed to bring Mars, god of war, into the dispute, since the Florentines claimed that their baptistery had been his temple and the Sienese saw Rhea as his daughter.

The Fonte Gaia, made for one of the city's great gathering places, addressed not just the local population but the larger community of Italian states. It shows us that just as the builders of Florence Cathedral looked north to Milan, so did the Florentine products have their own centrifugal effect, shaping the sensibilities of artists who subsequently went elsewhere, as well as the goals of rival towns. Jacopo may have lost the competition for the Florence baptistery doors, but in gaining employ from Florence's enemies, he could engage a similar set of concerns, even participate in Siena's contestation of Florence's proudest claims.

ABOVE LEFT

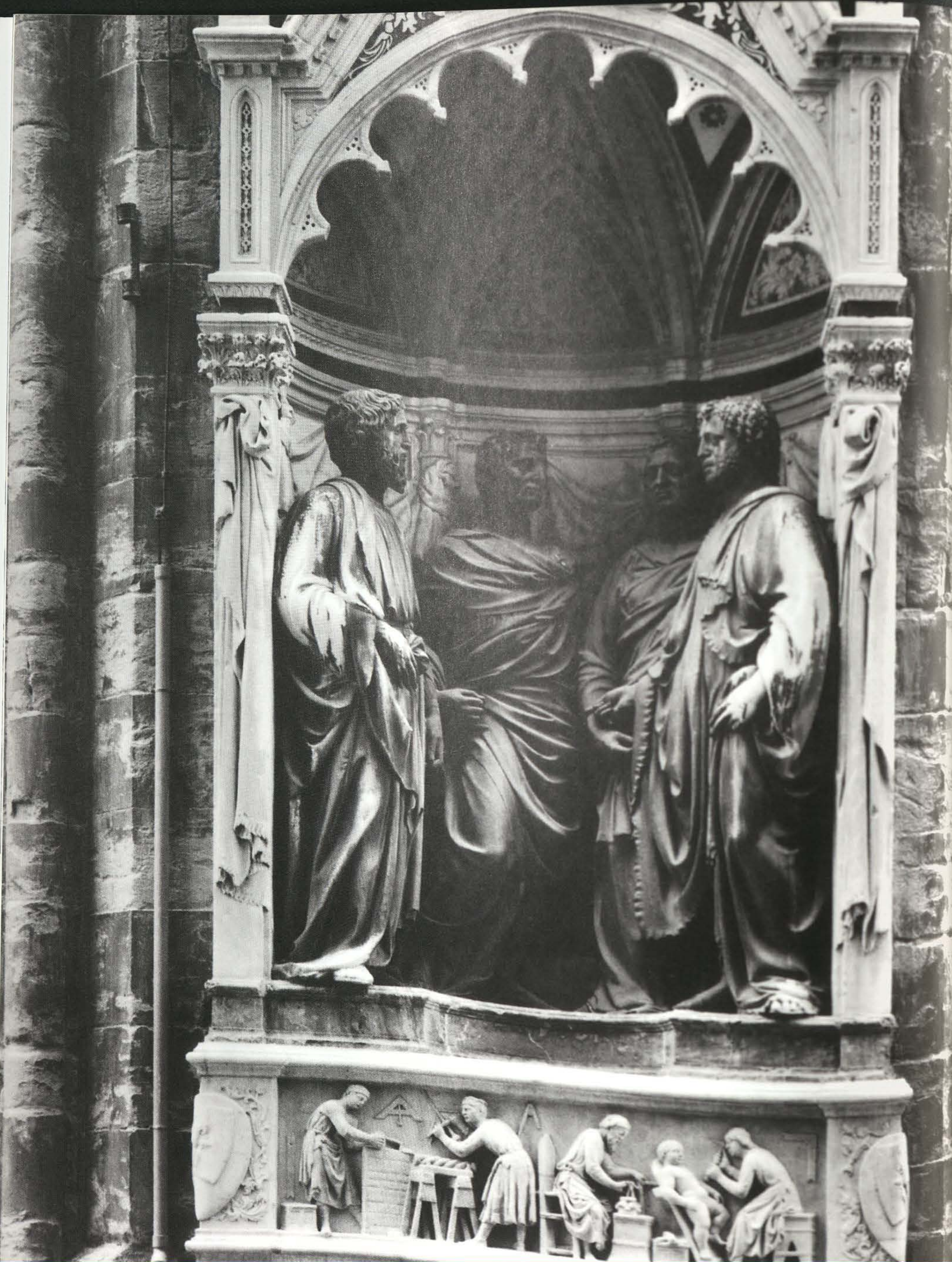
2.26

Jacopo della Quercia, drawing for the Fonte Gaia, 1409. Pen and ink on parchment, $7^{7}/_{8}$ x $8^{1}/_{2}$" (19.9 x 21.4 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

ABOVE RIGHT

2.27

Jacopo della Quercia, *Rhea Silvia*, from the Fonte Gaia, *c.* 1410. Marble, height 5'4" (1.63 m.) Santa Maria Della Scala, Siena



3

1410–1420

Commissioning Art: Standardization, Customization, Emulation

Orsanmichele and Its Tabernacles 72
  Nanni di Banco's *St. Philip* 76
  Donatello's *St. Mark* 76
  Figure and Niche 78
Customizing the Altarpiece: The *Coronation of the Virgin* 82
Filippo Brunelleschi and the Foundling Hospital 87

3

1410–1420

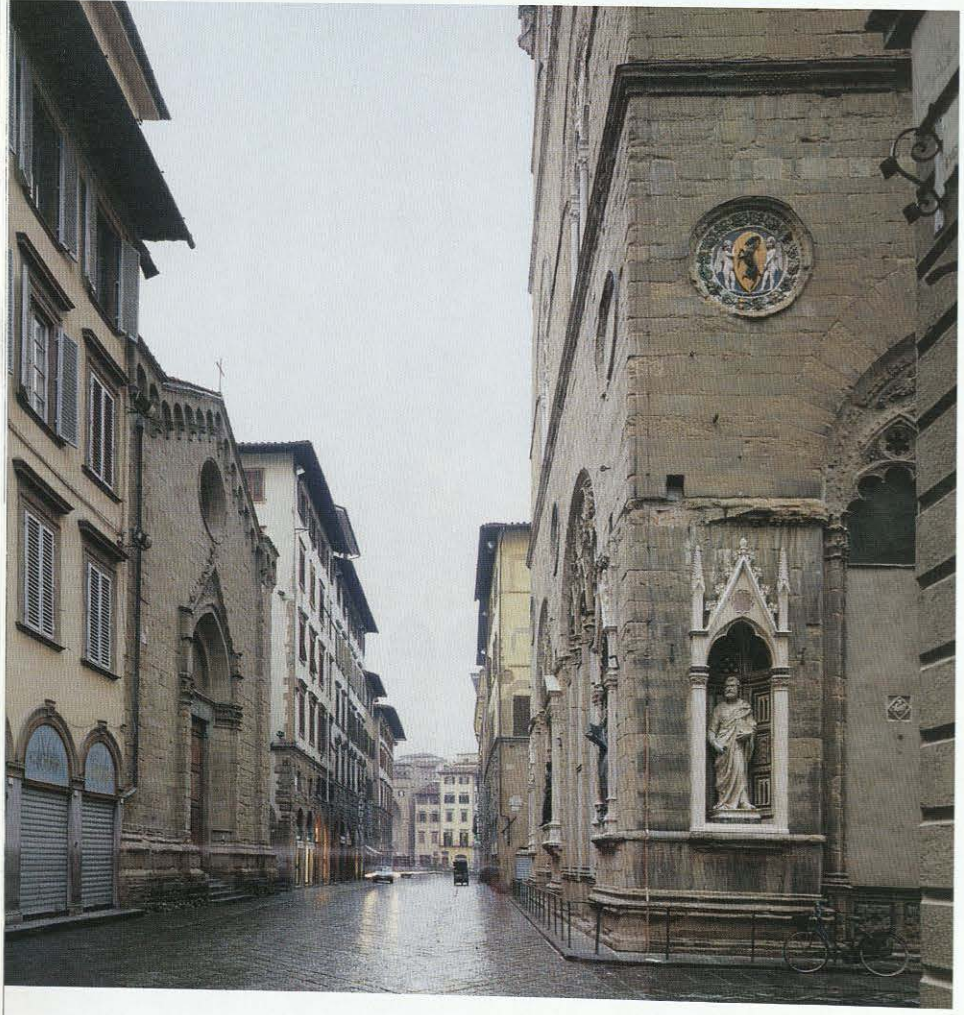
Commissioning Art: Standardization, Customization, Emulation

Orsanmichele and Its Tabernacles

Look at our map of central Florence (p. 56), and you will still see clear evidence of its ancient origins. It was laid out, beginning in the first two centuries CE, following a "castrum plan," the gridded form in which the Romans arranged their garrison towns. The streets today called the Via Calimala and Via Roma were, in the city's earliest years, its "*cardo*," or central north–south route. What are now the Via Strozzi and Via del Corso together constituted the *decumanus*, the main street running east–west. Stand on the Via del Corso today and look in either direction and you will still have views as nowhere else in the old city, a consequence of the fact that the nearly 2,000-year-old road has never been significantly impeded by later development.

In antiquity, the *cardo* and *decumanus* met in the main forum, a space that later evolved into the city's primary marketplace. It served this function until the late nineteenth century, when Florence briefly became the capital of Italy, and, in an attempt to return to the city some of its ancient grandeur, the government demolished the market and many surrounding buildings, expelling the area's Jewish occupants and carving out the square now called the Piazza Repubblica. The rest of the old city, the part inside the original Roman walls, was "centuriated," that is, divided into regular rectilinear blocks through which streets parallel to the *cardo* and *decumanus* ran. Even today, it is easy to see roughly where the medieval city grew from the Roman one, since the streets in the older sector follow the original grid, and on the whole run north–south and east–west.

Especially if we imagine away the late nineteenth-century Piazza Repubblica, every map of Florence shows the prominence of two key areas in the city: those of the cathedral and of the city hall, or Palazzo dei Priori (sometimes called the Palazzo della Signoria or Palazzo Vecchio). By the beginning of the fourteenth century, these were the centers of civic and religious life in the city. Chapter 2 showed the way that the cathedral zone emerged in competition with those in rival towns. The same was true of the area around the Palazzo dei Priori, where, as in Siena, a large public square monumentalized the building in which the city council lived and worked. This space, called the Piazza della Signoria, had been constructed through the course of the fourteenth century in an area previously occupied by family houses. There could be no clearer declaration of the city's ostensible subordination of private to public (or at least communal) interests, dispossessing families of their properties and replacing these with a large clearing that could be used for ceremonial gatherings. The structures surrounding the piazza included a tribunal (called the "Mercanzia") for the Florentine guilds, quarters for troops, and a kind of open gallery (now called the "Loggia dei Lanzi") that functioned as a sort of reviewing stand, a place for



3.1
Via Calzaiuoli, looking south from the cathedral square. On the right, the east facade of Orsanmichele; at the end of the street, the Piazza della Signoria.

privileged viewers to watch what happened in front of the government's main building.

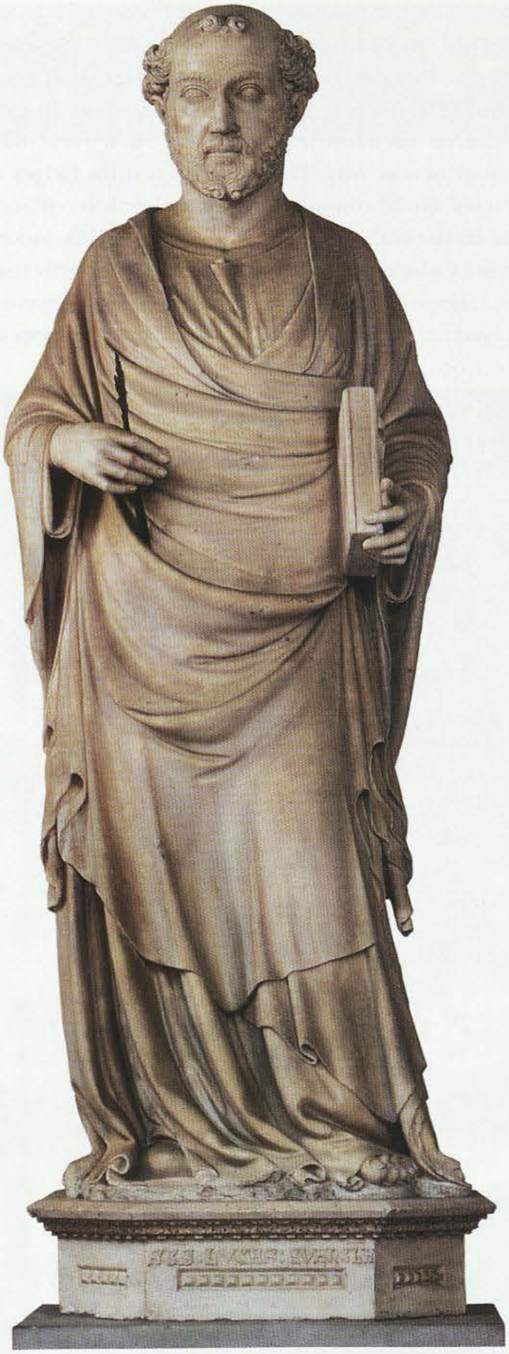
The emergence of this complex, along with the contemporaneous building of the new cathedral, essentially shifted the main north–south route through Florence east by one large city block, from the old Roman *cardo* to the Via Calzaiuoli ("Cobblers' Street"), which ran from the piazza between the baptistery and the duomo to the corner of the Piazza della Signoria, where it offered the most dramatic available view of the city hall. Connecting the focal points of the city's civic and religious life, the Via Calzaiuoli brought new attention to the buildings that lined it, and none more so than Orsanmichele, the former grain warehouse that housed Orcagna's tabernacle (*see* chapter 1, p. 47).

As early as 1339, the Arte della Seta, or Silk Merchants' Guild, conceived a collaborative ornamentation to the exterior of Orsanmichele (**fig. 3.1**). The group's idea was that the twelve major guilds in the city, along with the Parte Guelfa, the political party that represented the city's merchants and in those years controlled its government, would add a series of tabernacles or niches with statues to the building's piers. The collective participation in the building's decoration would itself be symbolic, and the sight of statues in niches would link Orsanmichele to the "campanile," Giotto's bell tower, the one other building in Florence to be decorated in this way.

The association between Orsanmichele and the cathedral zone was underscored not just by the format of the decorations at the two sites, but also by the artists involved. The first two tabernacles to be added to the structure, those of the Wool Merchants' Guild and Silk Weavers' Guild, had both been designed by Andrea Pisano (*c.* 1270/90–*c.* 1348/9), the artist responsible for the south baptistery doors and the sculptural decorations on the campanile (*see* figs. 2.13 and 2.16). The sculptor and architect Niccolò di Piero Lamberti (*c.* 1370–1451), who made the tabernacle for the Judges and Notaries' Guild in 1405 and the statue of St. Luke in 1406 to go inside it (**fig. 3.2**), had likewise spent much of the previous decade engaged with cathedral projects. And around 1410, the Arte della Calimala asked Lorenzo Ghiberti (*c.* 1378–1455) to stop working on the doors that the guild had commissioned from him so that he, too, could design a niche for Orsanmichele and fill it with a statue of their own protector, St. John the Baptist (**fig. 3.3**).

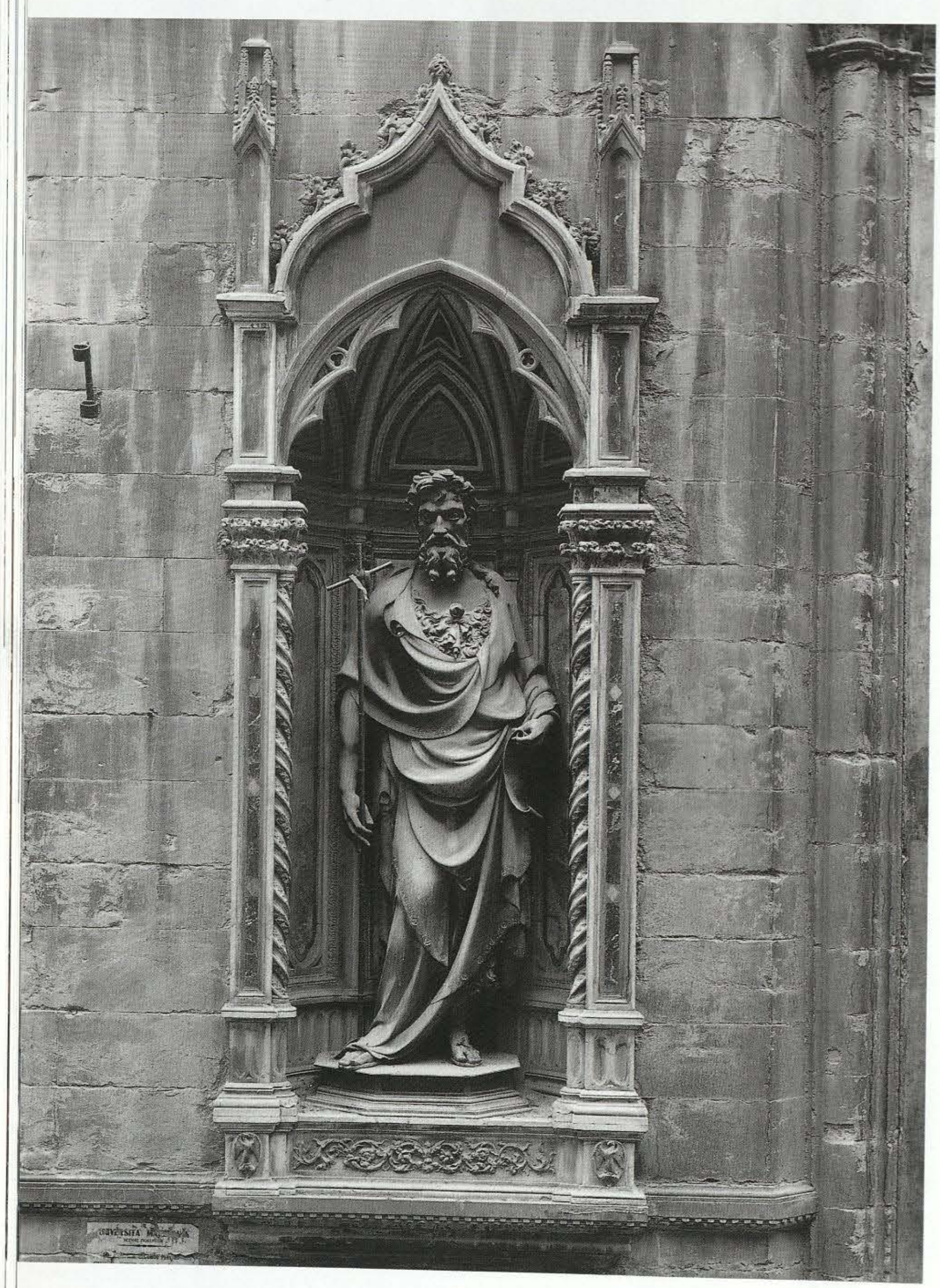
The fact that the same artists and patrons were active at both Orsanmichele and the cathedral also meant that their attention was divided, and in the nearly seven decades that had passed between 1339, when the Guelph Party and the major Florentine guilds had agreed to take responsibility for decorating the piers of Orsanmichele with statuary, and 1407, when the Calimala officially initiated their own project by appointing a group of supervisors, only four ensembles had been completed – those for the Wool Merchants' Guild, the Silk Weavers' Guild, the Doctors and Apothecaries' Guild, and the Judges and Notaries' Guild.

In the first decade of the fifteenth century, it was increasingly evident that competition with the cathedral works threatened to hinder the already slow progress of the decorations at Orsanmichele, and in 1406 the Florentine city government, many of whose members also



3.2
Niccolò di Piero Lamberti, *St. Luke*, 1406. Height 6'10" (2.08 m). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. The statue was made for a tabernacle on the exterior of Orsanmichele but replaced in the late sixteenth century.

belonged to the Orsanmichele confraternity, legislated that guilds must either complete the tabernacles meant for the spaces assigned to them within ten years or give up the rights to decorate the building at all. In the event, this decree was not strictly enforced, but it did initiate a flurry of new activity. That was the year the Judges and Notaries' Guild commissioned Lamberti to replace an older statue with an image of their patron, St. Luke; in 1407 the Calimala initiated its own project. Shortly thereafter, Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) seems to have got involved in the decorations; it is to his workshop that most scholars attribute the *St. Peter* made for the Butchers' Guild, which he began around 1409. Suddenly, the situation at Orsanmichele looked very different than it had only a few years before. By 1410, three of the best sculptors to have competed for the baptistery door commission one decade earlier – Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, and Lamberti – had all made, or were in the process of making, what would count among the most visible large-scale figure sculptures in Florence, in a highly trafficked area and close to the ground, where they could be inspected and compared. This, as much as any law, brought the stalled project at Orsanmichele back to life. A decade later, some ten new monumental projects were either on display or nearly completed, and the building had become home to a group of the most ambitious works in the history of sculpture.



3.3
Lorenzo Ghiberti, *St. John the Baptist*, *c.* 1410. Bronze, height 8'4" (2.55 m). Orsanmichele, Florence. **The photo shows the statue before removal from its original tabernacle.**

The Calimala Guild must have turned to Ghiberti in part because it wanted a work in bronze, and he had established himself as the city's best master of that material. This choice immediately set Ghiberti's statue of St. John the Baptist apart from its predecessors, since such a work would cost exponentially more than a statue in stone on the same scale. At the time the statue went up, it would have been the only over-lifesize bronze statue in all of Florence – and one of the few in Italy – and this itself announced both the wealth and power of the Calimala as a guild and the new prestige of Orsanmichele as a site. To minimize the amount of metal used, Ghiberti needed to make a hollow rather than a solid cast, employing a method called the "lost wax technique." After completing a full-scale design in clay, he would have covered this with a thin coat of wax, reworking details. To the wax surface he would have attached a series of wax rods, or "sprues," then enclosed the whole structure in a reinforced earthen mold, with a large opening at the top and metal pins running at various points into the clay form inside. Submitting this to heat would cause the wax to run out, leaving a thin empty space between the original model and its external "negative," as well as empty channels where the sprues had been. Through these, the casting team could run molten bronze into the mold. Once the mold had cooled, they could chip away the clay shell and saw off the (now) metal sprues, then file and polish the whole work. Ghiberti and his assistant would have completed such details as the hair, beard, and animal-hide tunic of John the Baptist with small chisels, a process called "chasing."

The laborious methods by which the bronze was made ensured that the figure appeared stylish and refined, rather than coarse. Despite the fact that Ghiberti is portraying a hermit saint who lived in the desert and wore animal skins, the overall effect of his sculpture is extraordinarily sumptuous. We are not shown much

GOLDSMITHS

For much of the period this book concerns, no profession held more importance and prestige than that of the goldsmith. Goldsmiths made jewelry and tableware for wealthy households and produced the liturgical objects that the Church used for every Mass. Their workshops generated ornamental weaponry, dies for seals, and, later, medals.

To be a goldsmith required not only a set of distinctive manual skills, but also a specific knowledge and even an ethic. The goldsmith's experience with alloys and familiarity with precious gems allowed him to be called upon for appraisals. Goldsmiths commonly served as money changers and even small-scale bankers, which required them to develop bookkeeping skills. Since patrons entrusted them with precious materials, they had to maintain their reputations. Many aspired to social advancement, and they tended to have a strong sense of honor.

In Italy, goldsmithery also provided the most common path to artistic fame in other fields. Artists trained as goldsmiths – Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, Jacopo della Quercia, Pisanello, Masolino, and Luca della Robbia, to name just a few of the figures we shall encounter in the early chapters of this book – created some of the most innovative works of the period, none of them in precious metals. Is this mere coincidence?

Permissive guilds allowed Italian goldsmiths to experiment across fields, and skills essential to the goldsmith's trade provided foundations for other practices. All goldsmiths could draw: the patterns that masters would apply across surfaces required the mastery of designs preserved in books, and patrons expected to see a proposal for what an object would look like before committing resources. The techniques involved with the casting of gold and silver translated readily to baser metals like bronze, allowing goldsmiths to take on assignments for statuary. Casting, moreover, required goldsmiths to make models in various materials, including wood, the same thing that architects did when designing buildings.

The two centuries between 1400 and 1600 saw the reorganization of the professional landscape in Italy, at the goldsmith's expense. Artists seeking fame increasingly turned to monumental painting and sculpture. And for those who cared about enduring reputation and the longevity of their works, goldsmithery was a bad bet: too often, it was tempting for the owners of gold and silver objects to melt them down, whether to liberate gems from their settings or simply to make more up-to-date ornaments. An increasing tendency to regard the "art" or skill behind a work as more valuable than or even at odds with its materials too easily took goldsmithery as its foil.

Domenico Ghirlandaio and Andrea del Verrocchio, the teachers of Michelangelo and Leonardo respectively, were both goldsmiths by training, but their famous students showed little regard for the craft. Though Michelangelo made some designs for precious objects, he largely avoided working in metals himself. When Leonardo wrote a series of texts comparing the virtues of painting to other arts, he selected poetry, sculpture, and music, and when academies later supplanted guilds as the organizational systems for the arts, they privileged painting, sculpture, and architecture at the expense of goldsmithery. Benvenuto Cellini, largely on account of his writings, would become the most famous goldsmith in history, but already in his lifetime his specialization had been displaced as the premier artistic profession. Henceforth, goldsmiths would supply lavish and sometimes eccentric trifles to the courts, but they would not be paving the way for those in other fields.

of John's emaciated body and humble attire: he is enveloped in what appears to be a fine cloth mantle, arranged in a rhythmic pattern of folds and gathers that has little to do with the actual behavior of any fabric. The Calimala Guild represented the city's fine cloth dealers, and Ghiberti's figure deliberately recalls the taste and style of art produced for the elite clientele of the great Florentine cloth merchants throughout Europe: in France, in Bohemia, and in England, as well as in centers closer to home, such as the court of Milan. The goldsmith's ornamental handling of detail was the kind of thing expected in works on a far more intimate scale; one of his surprising achievements with this statue is his successful pursuit of such effects in a monumental figure.

The other guilds were not in a position to commission a work of such luxury, and they consequently

OPPOSITE

3.4

Nanni di Banco, *St. Philip*, *c.* 1410–12. Marble, height 6'3"(1.91 m). Orsanmichele, Florence

welcomed statues that could be judged according to a different measure of quality, one matching Ghiberti in inventiveness rather than in material value. The mostly young artists who carried out the works added to Orsanmichele between 1410 and 1420, similarly, must have seen the commissions as an unprecedented opportunity to make works that were guaranteed prominence and attention, and they spurred one another on.

Nanni di Banco's *St. Philip*

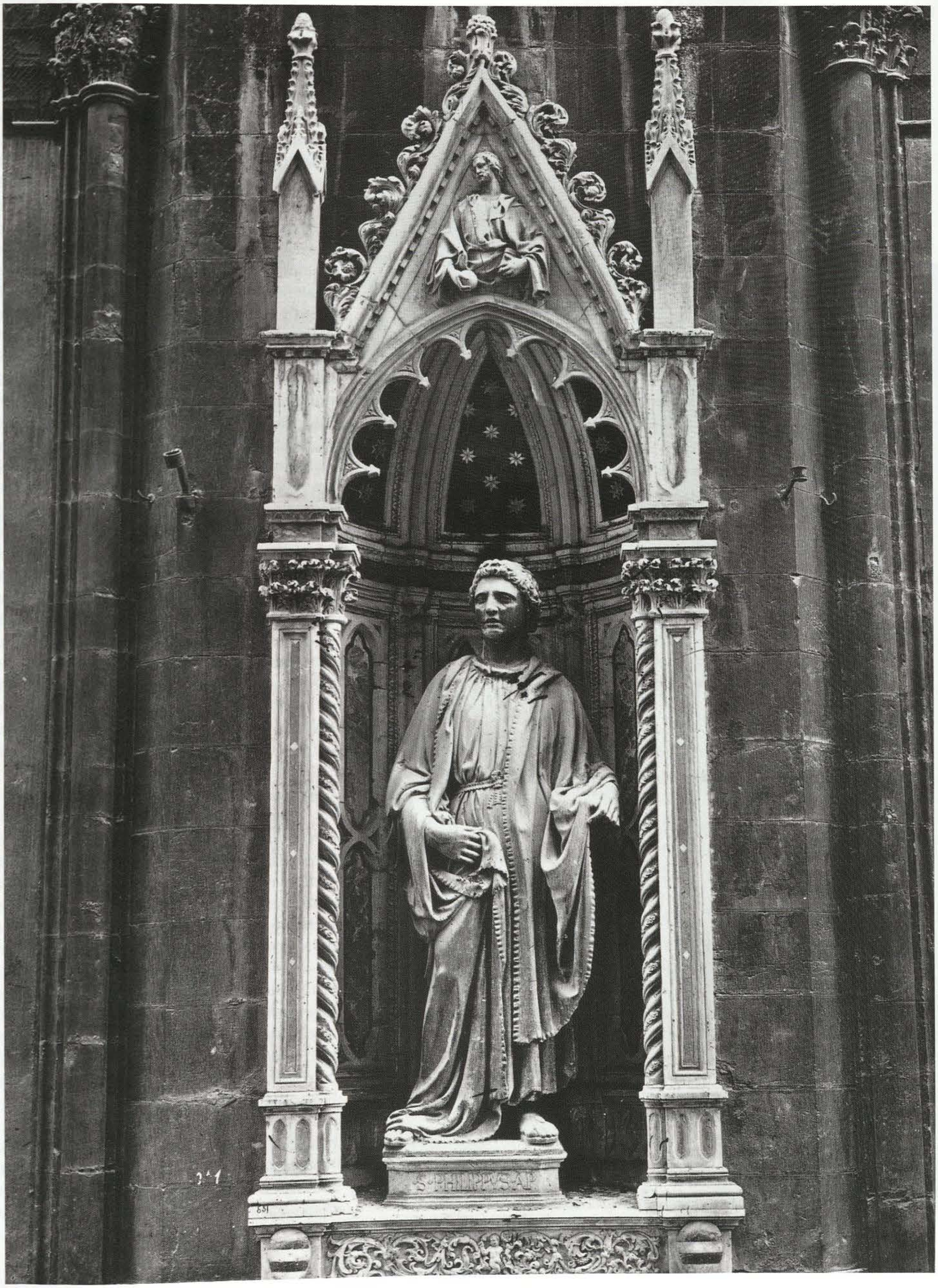
Among the first artists to respond to the challenge the site presented was Nanni di Banco (1384/90–1421), who had been making sculptures for Florence Cathedral since 1408 (*see* figs. 2.22–2.23). Both his statue of St. Philip (fig. 3.4) for the Shoemakers' Guild and the niche it occupies are undocumented, though they have been dated on stylistic grounds to the years between 1410 and 1413. The figure, that is, was made no more than seven years after Lamberti's *St. Luke*, yet it is entirely different in conception. Lamberti's combination of statue and niche had presented redundant reminders of just who it is we are seeing. Luke holds the gospel he authored in his left hand and the pen he used to write it in his right; the winged bull, the conventional companion that allows Luke to be distinguished from the other Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, and John), appeared as a relief at the bottom of the niche, looking up at the figure, while the saint's name ran across the plinth below. The lower corners of the niche were occupied by shields with the six-pointed star that was the heraldic symbol of the Judges and Notaries' Guild; the field of inlaid six-pointed stars behind and above the figure seemed to repeat this, even as they also suggested that the space of the niche is a heavenly one, presided over by the figure of Christ in the gable above.

The niche for *St. Philip*, with its combinations of pilaster and spiral column at the sides, its inlaid red marble and gold stars behind, and its crowning pediment with flanking spires, closely follows that of *St. Luke*. Its dependence on Lamberti's earlier architecture only makes the difference between the two artists' figures all the more remarkable. To begin with, Nanni gives his statue of St. Philip exaggeratedly elongated upper arms, such that its proportions only seem correct when it is viewed from below. The artist, in other words, took into account the imagined presence of a visitor to Orsanmichele, gazing at the sculpture from the street, and he engaged his figure in just the same action: the saint's turned head and sharply incised eyes, rolled up slightly in their sockets, suggest his own act of focused attention, and lend the figure a psychological existence that its predecessor, *St. Luke*, lacked. Nanni's figure overall is less columnar than Lamberti's, and the contrast gives the impression that the earlier sculptor was working with a block that was too small and worried about wasting stone: Nanni himself does not hesitate to cut away large sections of material below both of Philip's arms and especially around the shoulders and head, freeing the figure's movements. On the body itself, additional deep cutting creates substantial folds in the garment; paradoxically, Philip's drapery seems thicker than Luke's, even as it also appears to reveal more of the body beneath it. This is because Nanni has thought about the behavior of cloth as Lamberti has not. The drapery on Luke's hip and breast, among other places, looks as if it has been folded over on itself and then ironed flat. Philip's, by contrast, seems to fall the way it does because of the positioning of the figure's arms. That Philip's clothes seem to do what they do might finally prompt us to ask just why they are as they are. Why *does* Philip seem to lift his drapery up in the air?

In answer, we might note that Philip is displaying his feet, which are clad, unlike those of Lamberti's shoeless Apostle Luke, in beautifully decorated sandals. It was for the city's cobblers, after all, that Nanni was working; just as Lamberti gave his saint a pen, the same instrument wielded by the notaries from the guild that Luke protected, and just as Ghiberti drew special attention to the cloth worn by the cloth merchants' saint, John the Baptist, Nanni found a way to associate his statue with the kind of labor for which his patrons wanted to be known. Normally, we think of the items that a sculptural figure displays as "attributes," clues primarily to the identification of the figure. These are recognizable precisely because they are the same every time that same figure appears. One of the things Nanni's first work for Orsanmichele suggested was that the identity of Philip himself could be adjusted in response to a commission, to make the sculpture of him a clearer representative and advocate of the patrons responsible for it.

Donatello's *St. Mark*

Closely related to Nanni's *St. Philip* was Donatello's *St. Mark* (fig. 3.5), produced for the "Linaiuoli," the Linen Merchants' Guild. The contract for the *St. Mark* was signed in 1411, but the statue could well have taken several years to complete. Donatello, who had until 1407 been Ghiberti's apprentice, was in 1411 still at work on a group of stone figures that he had started three years earlier, including the lifesize *David* (*see* fig. 2.24), an over-lifesize *St. John the Evangelist*, and other statues for Florence Cathedral. The absence of evidence indicating just when Donatello delivered the *St. Mark*, combined with the uncertainty surrounding the dating of the *St. Philip*, makes it impossible to say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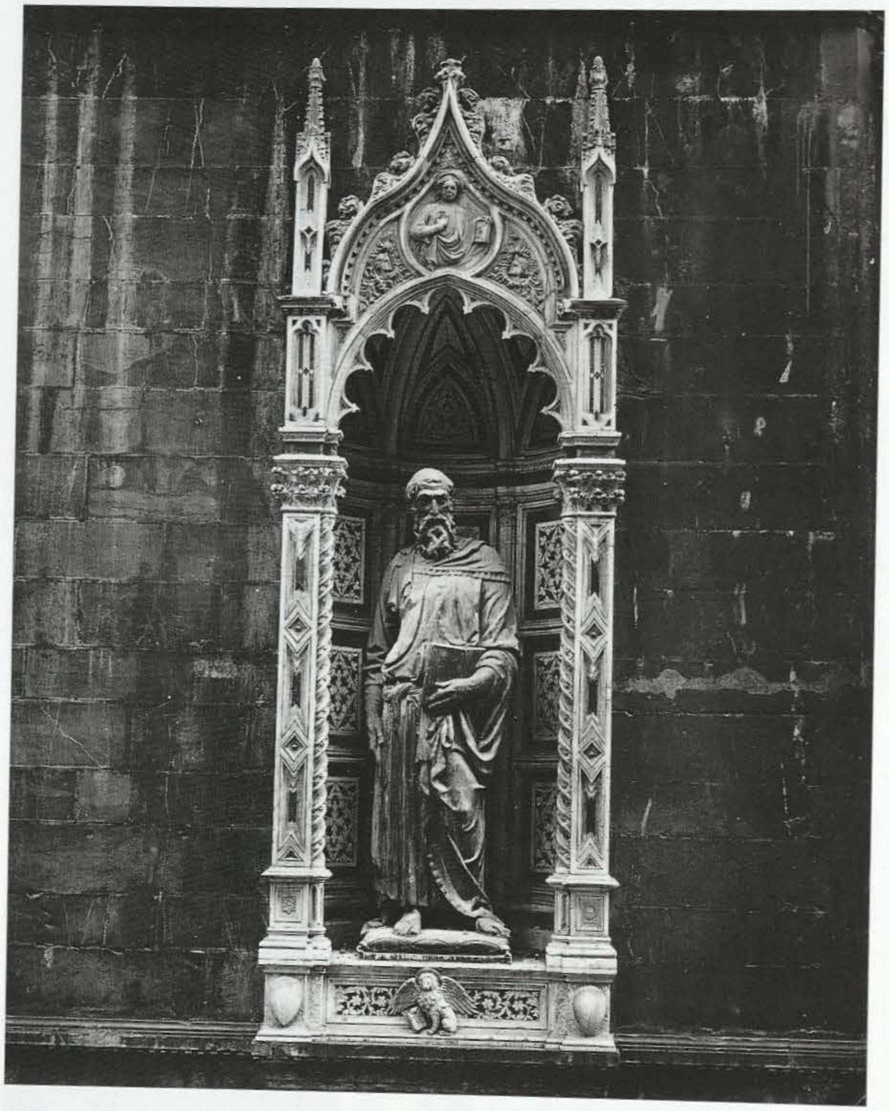


3-5
Donatello, *St. Mark*, 1411–13. Marble, height 7'9" (2.4 m). Orsanmichele, Florence. **The photo shows the statue before removal from its tabernacle.**

with certainty which came first, but there can be no doubt that one sculptor had seen the work of the other, since the poses of the figures are nearly mirror images of each other. One key difference between the two figures resulted from the fact that Donatello found himself working with a considerably shallower piece of marble than Nanni had. Seen from the side, in fact, the stone really appears to be more a slab than a block, and the completely unfinished back makes it clear that Donatello essentially conceived his figure as a relief rather than as a sculpture in the round. Remarkably, however, it is nearly impossible to perceive this when the statue is in its niche, not just because that environment controls the point of view from which the work can be seen, but also because of the counter-clockwise rotation of the depicted figure's torso, which gives the impression both that it has an axis on which to twist and that, were it to turn still further, there would be still more to see.

The shallow block did not allow Donatello to make the deep excavations that Nanni did in order to bring folds of drapery into prominent relief. Compensating for this, Donatello relied on an array of techniques that seem more pictorial than sculptural in effect. He incises forms such as Mark's beard and the fringe of his garment in the manner almost of a drawing, and he cuts more deeply only into a few carefully chosen areas of stone – between the left sleeve and the left knee, for instance, or inside the right arm – so that the shadows created there establish the base for a tonal range that is of necessity more restricted through the rest of the work. Like Nanni, Donatello elongates his figure so that it only appears correctly proportioned when seen from below. And like Nanni, Donatello finds a clever way to allude to the group that paid for his statue, by standing his figure on a pillow. The pillow is the kind of product with which linen sellers would have been specifically associated, and it thus says more about the group that sponsored the work than it does about St. Mark himself.

At the same time, the motif must have appealed to Donatello for its contribution to his illusion, since the depression on the pillow suggests the weight of a man rather than that of a massive rock. The rendering of weight stands in contrast with the work of such older sculptors as Ghiberti, whose *St. John the Baptist* privileges grace over mass; Ghiberti had used his commission to translate an aesthetic from the decorative arts onto a greater scale. Donatello, by contrast – like Nanni – seems to have drawn especially on Roman portrait sculpture, which combined a sense of gravity (in both senses of the word) with a concern for individualized likeness.

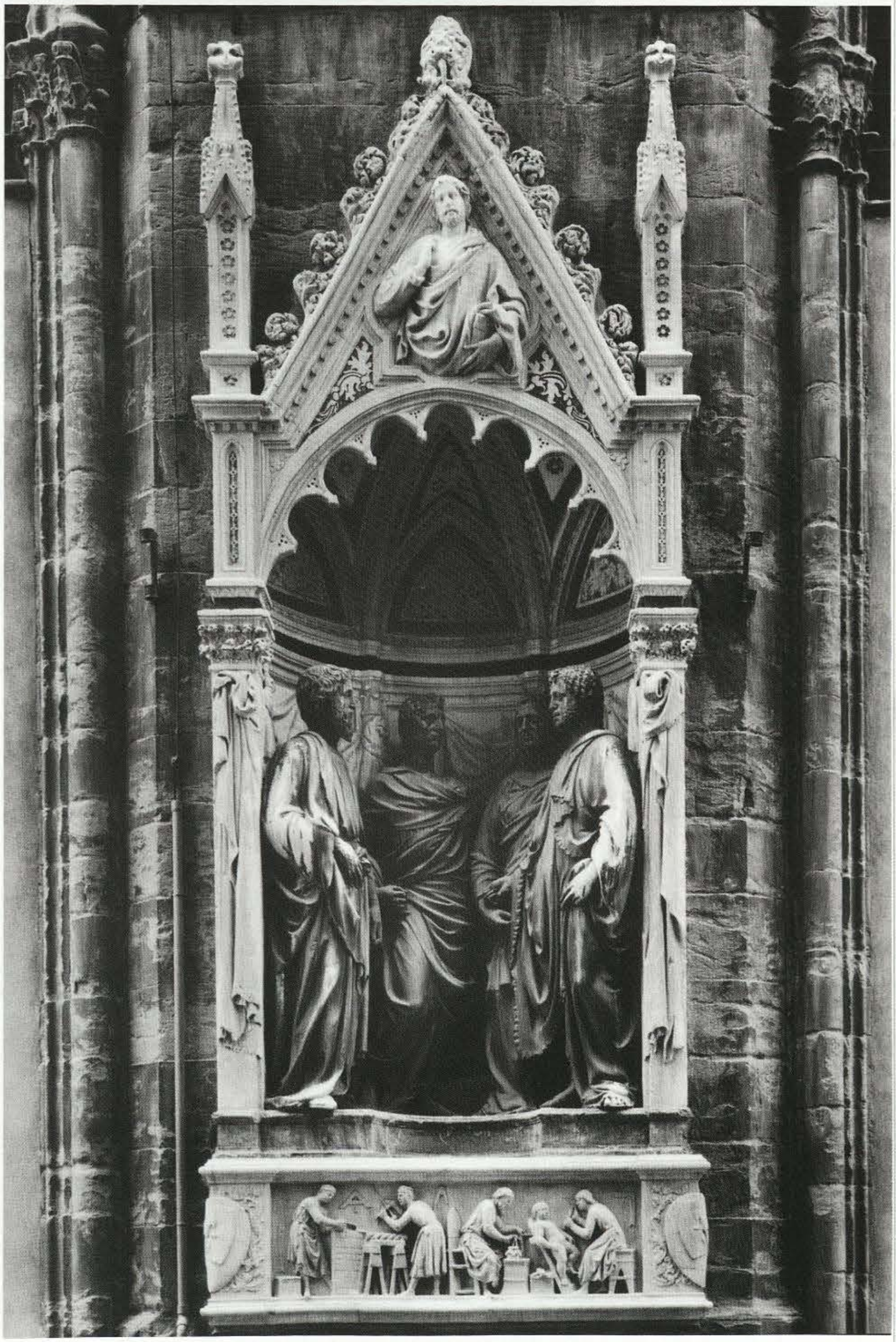
Figure and Niche

The sculptors working at Orsanmichele in the 1410s increasingly realized that their assignments invited not only inventive references to the sponsoring guild, but also experimental connections between the figure and the niche. Nanni's *St. Philip* seems only an accidental part of its architectural environment; the niche, following the model of Lamberti's earlier design, could have housed virtually any statue made on the right scale. Later artists, however, began to use the niche to expand on the characterization of the depicted saint. Donatello's *St. Mark*, for example, follows the model of Lamberti's *St. Luke*, placing the lion that identifies the Evangelist on a panel below the figure. This single clear indication that the statue shows Mark, rather than the writer of another Gospel, frees Donatello to take more liberties with the figure's other attributes. In this respect, it is his thoughtful use of the niche that permits Donatello to place a pillow, rather than a name-tag, below his statue. Knowing where the statue was going, and how it would be housed, affected the way he designed it.

Nanni, whose ideas for Orsanmichele so closely tracked Donatello's, clearly paid attention to this new integration of sculpture and niche, and nowhere more so than in his second work for the site, completed sometime after 1415 (fig. 3.6). This was the niche for the professional organization to which Nanni himself belonged, the Stone and Timber Masters' Guild, and he must have been particularly interested in making a strong impression. An added challenge was that the guild had a group of patron saints rather than a single protector: four early Christian sculptors who had been drowned for refusing to produce an idol for a pagan temple. The guild required Nanni to accommodate multiple figures in a confined space, and it may also have asked him to reuse an existing sculpture in the process: the conception of the second figure from the left, with its toga-like costume and the weight-shift in its pose, is decidedly similar to the designs of the prophets that had been under way since the previous decade for the exterior of the cathedral. This statue, uniquely among the four that make up the group, is finished on the back as well as the front, and it particularly stands out in light of the way Nanni otherwise approached his assignment. Like Donatello, he counted on the fact that views of the sculpture would be partially hidden. The hand that appears on the shoulder of the rightmost figure, for example, does not continue in an arm, though the viewer standing before the niche cannot see that this is the case.

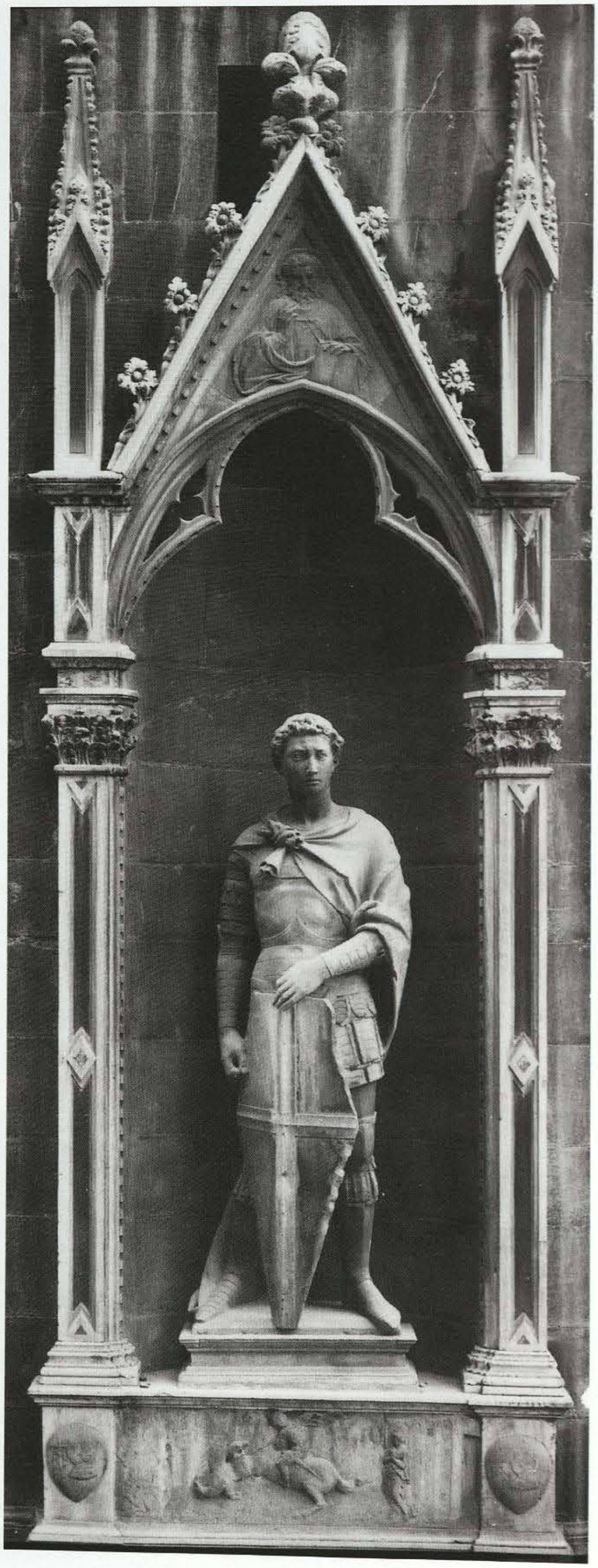
The figures are made from three separate blocks of stone, the two on the right having been carved from a single piece. The approach allowed Nanni to rotate the slabs, fitting the four figures into the single niche. Pushing the blocks up against the side and back walls in this way might have had the strange effect of leaving the front, central area – precisely the space occupied by the statues in the other niches – empty. To avoid this, Nanni simply cut away that part of the niche's floor. His tabernacle is thus the first that seems actually to have been conceived with an eye to the figures it would contain, rather than the other way around. The fictive cloth that drapes the back walls further reinforces the compositional integrity of figure and niche, gathering the psychologically unconnected statues into a unified group. And if earlier sculptors had found ways to advertise the work of their guild sponsors within their sculpture, Nanni takes advantage of the newly cohesive statue and niche to do this too, displacing his own advertisement for the guild's products from the statues themselves to the relief below. Whereas Donatello and Lamberti had used this space to show attributes identifying their characters, Nanni illustrates the labors in which the guild members engaged: building a wall, carving a column, measuring a capital, and chiseling a statue. The nature of the assignment gave Nanni the unusual opportunity to draw attention to the activities at which both he and the people who paid him were most skilled: turning stone into art.

The new use that Nanni made of the vertical surface below his figures set an influential example not just for the artists who came after him at Orsanmichele, but



3.6

Nanni di Banco, *Four Crowned Saints*, c. 1413–14. Marble, height approx. 6' (1.83 m). Orsanmichele, Florence. The photo shows the figures before removal from their tabernacle.



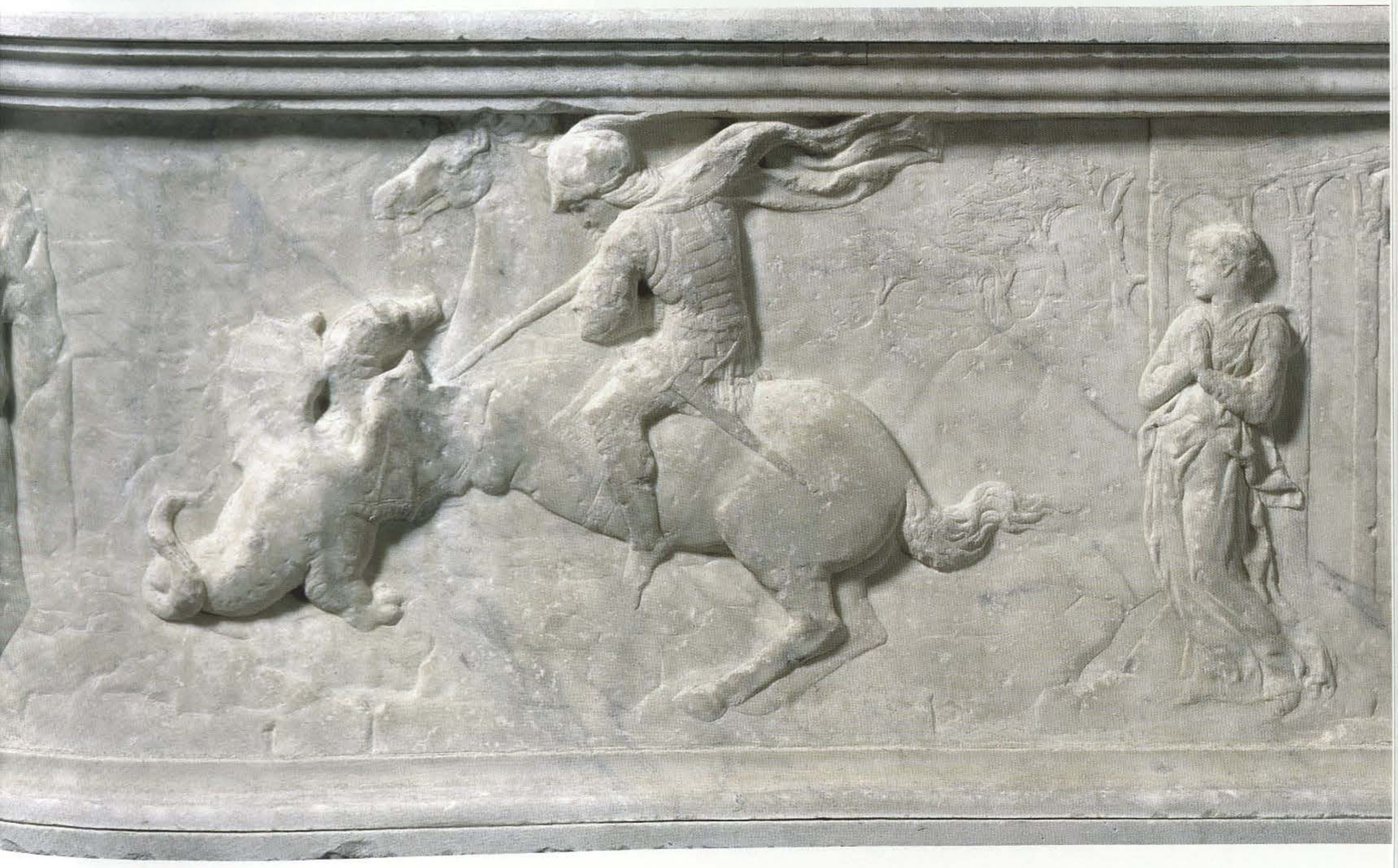
3.7
Donatello, *St. George* from Orsanmichele, Florence, *c.* 1415–18. Marble, height 6'10" (2.1 m). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. **The photo shows the statue and the relief below it before their removal to the Bargello.**

also for Renaissance sculptors more broadly. The first artist to respond to it, not surprisingly, was Donatello. Presumably in part on account of the impression he had made with his *St. Mark*, Donatello was commissioned around 1415 to produce a niche with a statue of St. George for the Armorers and Swordsmiths' Guild (fig. 3.7); he completed the work roughly three years later. Picking up on Nanni's idea, Donatello now used the space at the bottom of his niche for a narrative scene, one that showed the act for which George was most famous, slaying a dragon and rescuing a princess (fig. 3.8). If his *St. Mark* from around 1411 already took a pictorial approach to three-dimensional imagery, the *St. George* relief pushed that approach to its limits: a loggia at the right and a cave at the left both diminish in perspective, creating the effect of a deep, receding space. The regular bays of the loggia position the princess herself within an illusionistic world, such that she appears to stand slightly back from the picture plane, even though the stone from which she is made actually projects further forward in real space than the stone that represents the building beside her. What Donatello showed was that the impression of three-dimensionality could be achieved independently of the actual three-dimensionality of the stone, by employing the same devices available to painters. As if to underscore this, Donatello cut his relief as shallowly as possible, in a style that has come to be called *relievo stiacciato* (literally, "mashed" or "squashed" relief). It is hard to imagine an approach more different from that of Nanni, or indeed from that of Ghiberti, who had been Donatello's teacher just a decade earlier.

Donatello's *St. George* relief, like Nanni's image of the stoneworkers' practices in the *Four Crowned Saints* (*see* fig. 3.6), can also be seen as an illustration of the guild's tools put into action, in this case showing the sword and armor brought to a fight. At the same time, the composition, with George at the center and the princess, hands folded at her chest, in the wings, evokes that of devotional images, reminding us that this is not just any warrior we are seeing. In the relief, the inherently heroic and romantic aspect of the story runs up against the idea of George as an icon, and the same is true of the marble statue above. Nanni's *St. Philip* had already experimented with characterization, imagining the Apostle as a fresh-faced young man rather than as the wizened prophet Donatello seemed to embody with his *St. Mark*. With *St. George*, Donatello embraced the opportunity to show a beautiful young champion, placing skin-tight leather across his chest and giving him a long, sinuous neck and an expressively furrowed brow. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the work would be considered the most lovely of all Florentine marbles, the model that later painters and sculptors should follow if they wanted to idealize the men they portrayed.

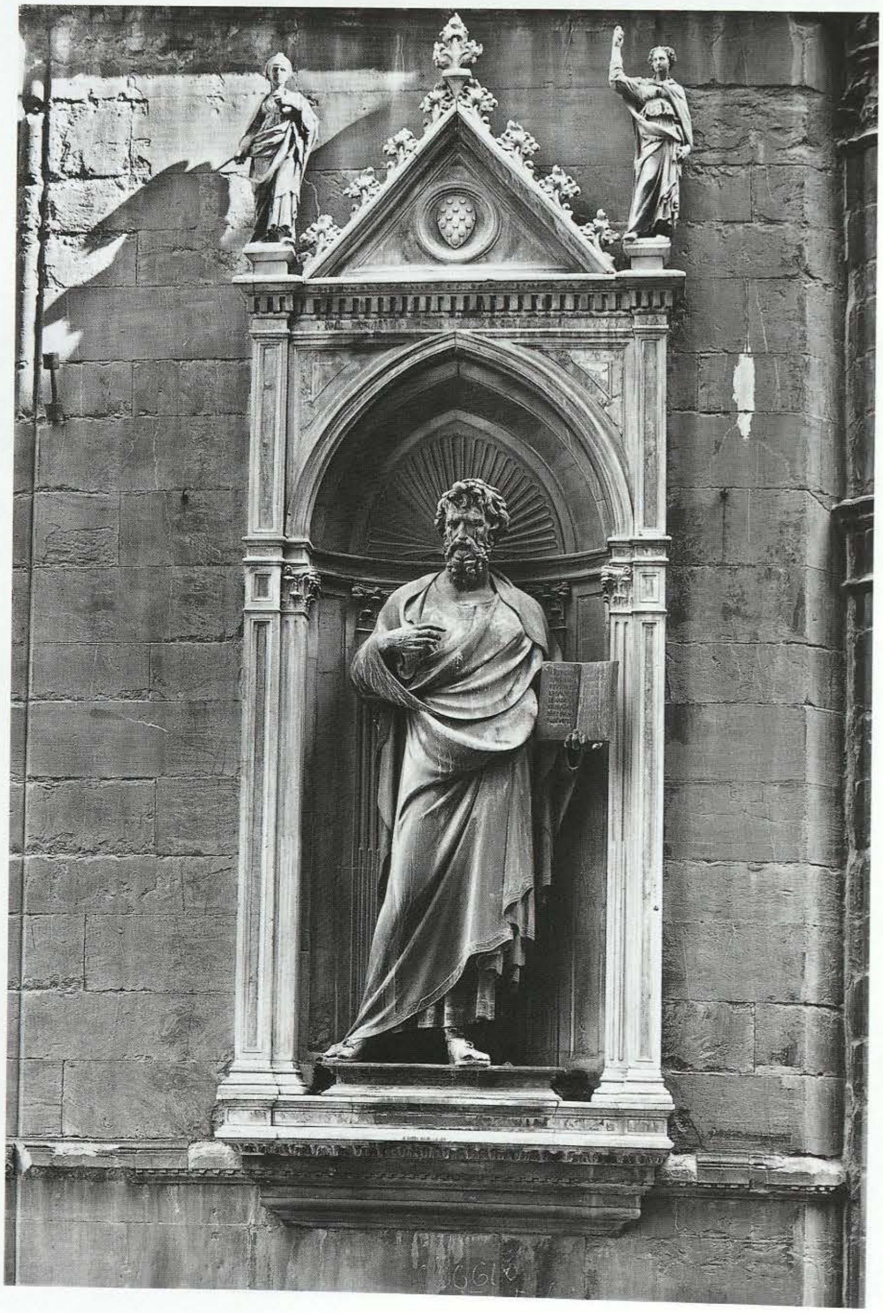
Drill marks in George's head indicate that he was at one point crowned with some form of victor's wreath; the position and arrangement of George's left hand suggest that he originally held an additional attribute there, too, presumably a bladed weapon. If this was, as is likely, a removable iron instrument, *St George* would, like Nanni's *Four Crowned Saints*, have counted among the statues on Orsanmichele that advertised the products of their guild in the materials of which those products were actually made.

The same could be said of Ghiberti's second sculpture for the building, the *St. Matthew* he began in 1419 and completed in 1423 (**fig. 3.9**). The space had originally been assigned to the Bakers' Guild, but as this group did not have money to spend on art, they ceded their space to the Bankers' Guild. The bankers, by contrast to the bakers, belonged to one of the wealthiest organizations in the city, and they meant to show this with their commission. Hiring Ghiberti was already an indication of their power, and the decision to order a work in bronze rather than marble delivered much the same message. The Evangelist Matthew, like Mark and Luke, was the author of one of the gospels, and he, like them, is portrayed with the text he wrote in his hand. Still, the ensemble departs from these earlier works (*see* **figs. 3.5** and **3.2**), and for that matter from all the recent compositions created for the site, in foregoing any pictorial relief below the figure. This could have been because the patrons wished to avoid ornamentation that would distract from Ghiberti's marvelous statue, limiting themselves to a pair of female figures, possibly representing sibyls, which originally stood in place of spires on the tabernacle. Given the overlaid meanings of the attributes that the earlier sculptors gave their figures, however, the reduction of forms in the case of *St. Matthew* raises the question of whether there is anything in that work, too, that refers specifically to the corporation that commissioned it. The answer may again lie in the bronze material itself, since bankers, more than any other professionals in Florence, would have been associated with precious metals.



3.8
Donatello, *St. George and the Dragon*, relief from the St. George tabernacle, *c.* 1420. Marble, 15$^{3}/_{8}$ x 47$^{1}/_{4}$" (39 x 120 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

Certainly the bankers themselves realized that their commission would stand out among the recent additions to Orsanmichele, the only work that could really compare to *St. Matthew* being Ghiberti's own earlier *St. John the Baptist* of *c.* 1410. The contract required Ghiberti to make his *St. Matthew* as large as or larger than the Calimala's *St. John* and to cast it in no more than two pieces. One way to read this is as an indication of just how competitive the atmosphere at Orsanmichele had become by 1419. At the same time, contracts with this sort of stipulation were not uncommon in the Quattrocento. One of the easiest ways for patrons to convey to artists what they wanted was to refer to another work; contracts themselves, that is, challenged artists to outdo their predecessors, even while imitating them. The repeated success of artists like Donatello and Ghiberti suggests that patrons prized clever responses to assignments. Still, the prime expectation was that the artist would rise to a particular standard rather than that he would do something entirely original. The question, for example, of whether Nanni's *St. Philip* preceded Donatello's *St. Mark* or vice versa is less important than the sense, evident in the proximity between the two works, that one was supposed to match the other in quality and perhaps in design. The artist was to direct his intelligence to adaptation as much as to creation, finding ways to make a highly conventionalized set of components fit together in a distinctive way.

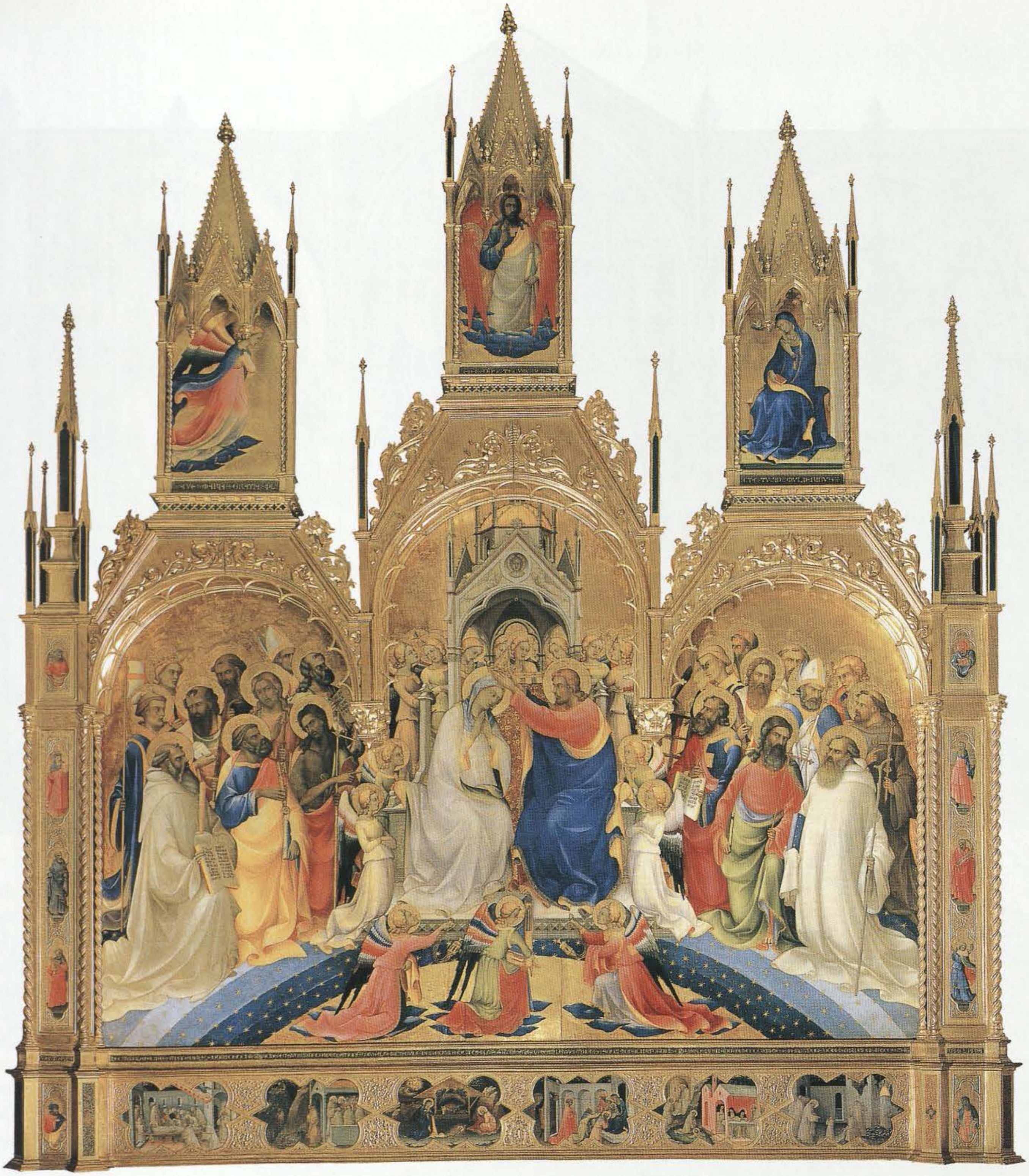


3.9
Lorenzo Ghiberti,
St. Matthew, 1419–23.
Bronze figure, originally with gilded decoration, height *c.* 8'10" (2.7 m).
Orsanmichele, Florence.
The photo shows the statue before removal from its tabernacle.

Customizing the Altarpiece: The *Coronation of the Virgin*

In the case of Orsanmichele, it was the site itself that established the conventions in relation to which variations on the niche and statue would be conceived. Once the first niches were in place, the scale, position, and general format for future ornaments were essentially set, and the materials that could be employed were limited to a narrow range of choices: marble, bronze, and glass or mosaic elements might be inlaid within the wall of the niche. In other places, and in other media, the controls on invention were somewhat different.

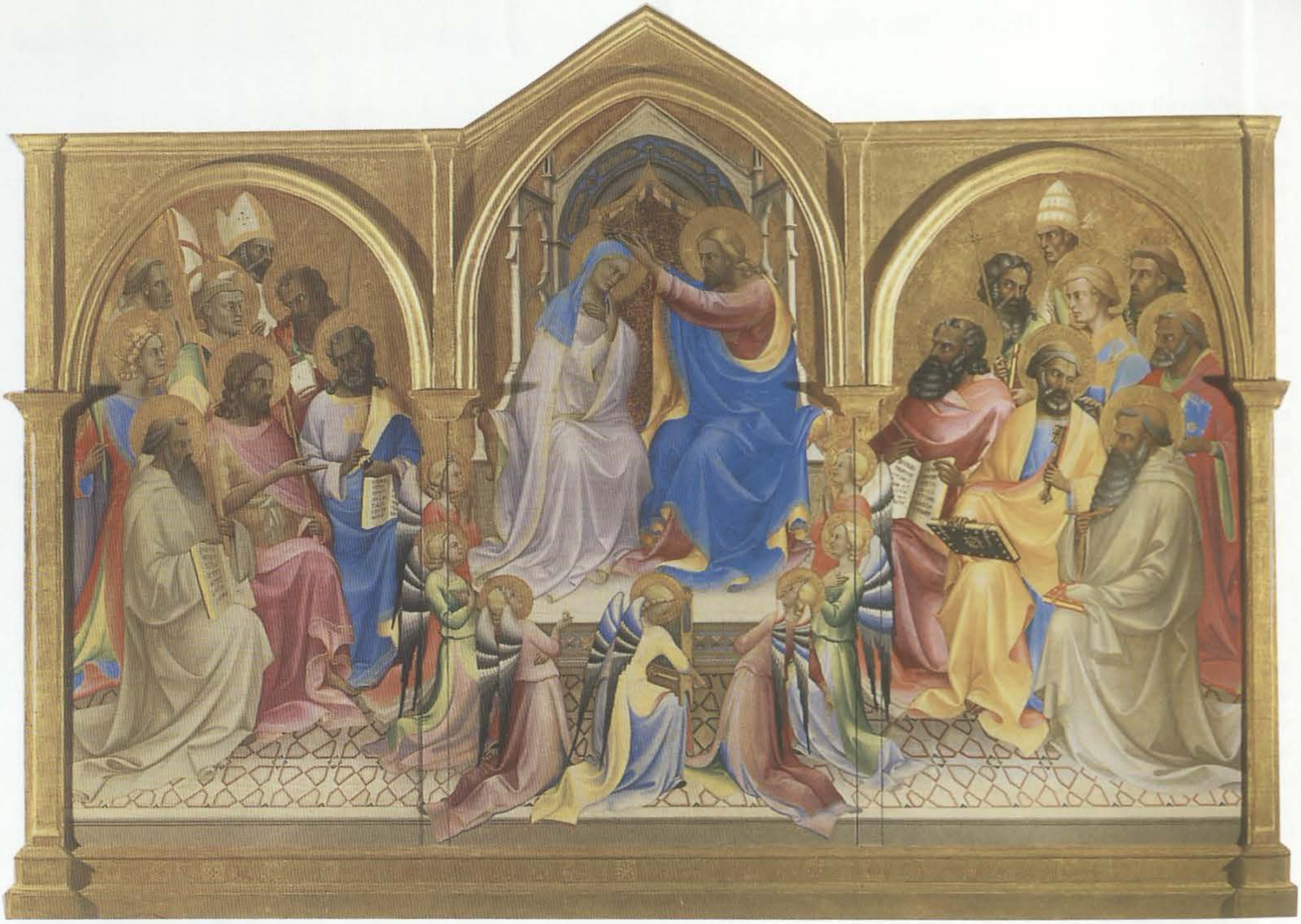
A painting today in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, showing the Coronation of the Virgin (**fig. 3.10**), bears the following inscription: "This panel was made for the soul of Zanobi di Ceccho della Frascha and for the souls of his family, in recompense for another panel that had been placed in this church for him." It goes on to identify the artist responsible for the painting as "Lorenzo di Giovanni, a monk of this order," and to specify that the work was completed in February 1413 (1414 by modern calendars). The painting comes from Santa Maria degli Angeli, a no longer extant Florentine church that in the early fifteenth century was occupied by the Camaldolese, a branch of the **Benedictine Order** and one of Italy's oldest religious communities. The apparent history behind the inscription is that Zanobi di Ceccho, a banker who had died in 1375, had donated a painting that the monks at the church later wished to replace; the nature of the banker's donation required that the original painting be remembered, even after its removal. What the inscription does not tell us is that the new painting from 1414 not only took the place of the vanished panel to which it makes specific reference, but also followed the model of a second picture, a *Coronation of the Virgin* from 1407,



now in the National Gallery in London (fig. 3.11), that the same artist, Lorenzo Monaco, had made a few years earlier for another, newer Benedictine monastery, one that a group from Santa Maria degli Angeli had founded. The Camaldolese, that is, commissioned a picture in direct imitation of the one that decorated the most sacred space in a daughter church.

The Uffizi version of the *Coronation* is in every way more impressive than the one now in the National Gallery, London: the artist managed to accommodate more than a dozen extra attendants to the central scene, even as he made the space itself seem ampler. The figures are at once more gracefully elongated and more subtly modeled; the distribution of color across the picture is more complex; and the surface is worked with special diligence, every halo being individualized with a pattern of punched gold not repeated anywhere else in the picture. For these reasons, scholars long believed that the Uffizi

3.10
Pietro di Giovanni dalle Tovaglie, called Lorenzo Monaco, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1414. Tempera on panel, 12'3" x 8' (4.5 x 3.5 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence



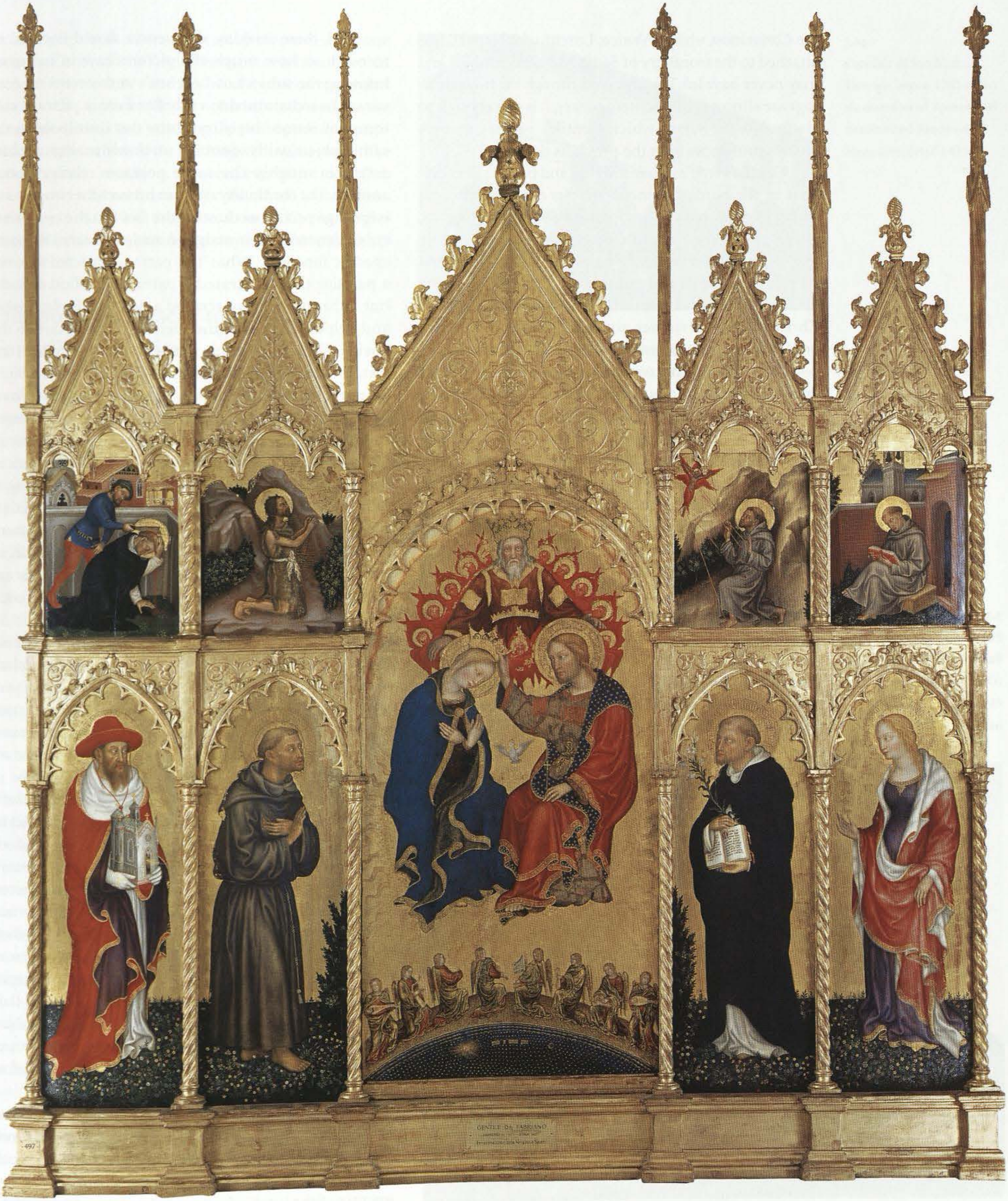
3.11
Lorenzo Monaco,
Coronation of the Virgin,
1407. Tempera on panel, 6'5" x 5'1" (1.95 x 1.05 m) (left); 7'3 x 5'3" (2.21 x 1.15m) (center); 6'5" x 5' (1.97 x 1.02 m) (right). National Gallery, London

OPPOSITE
3.12
Gentile da Fabriano,
Coronation of the Virgin,
1408–10. Tempera on panel, 19¼ x 14¾" (48.9 x 37.8 cm) (upper); 61¾ x 31⅜" (157.2 x 79.6 cm) (center); 46 x 15¾" (117.5 x 40 cm) (lower). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

picture must have been painted first, the London version looking like a lesser copy of this. That the opposite turns out to be true suggests something about the way that commissions themselves worked in the period: though no contract has yet been discovered, we can presume that the monks at Santa Maria degli Angeli asked Lorenzo to make something that exceeded his previous production (as the Florentine bankers had specifically asked Ghiberti regarding his *St. Matthew*). Lorenzo's second *Coronation* closely resembles his first – indeed, it includes a number of figures so similar that they could have been based on drawings the artist preserved from the earlier project. Even where improvement was welcomed, remembrance, including remembrance of things that patrons were willing to destroy, mattered more than novelty. The Camaldolese altar drew the viewer's thoughts first to the holy characters it showed: the central scene of the Virgin surrounded by celestial devotees would have reminded visitors that the church itself was dedicated to "Maria of the Angels." The painting, however, also recalled both an earlier work of its maker and the altarpiece that had been there before it.

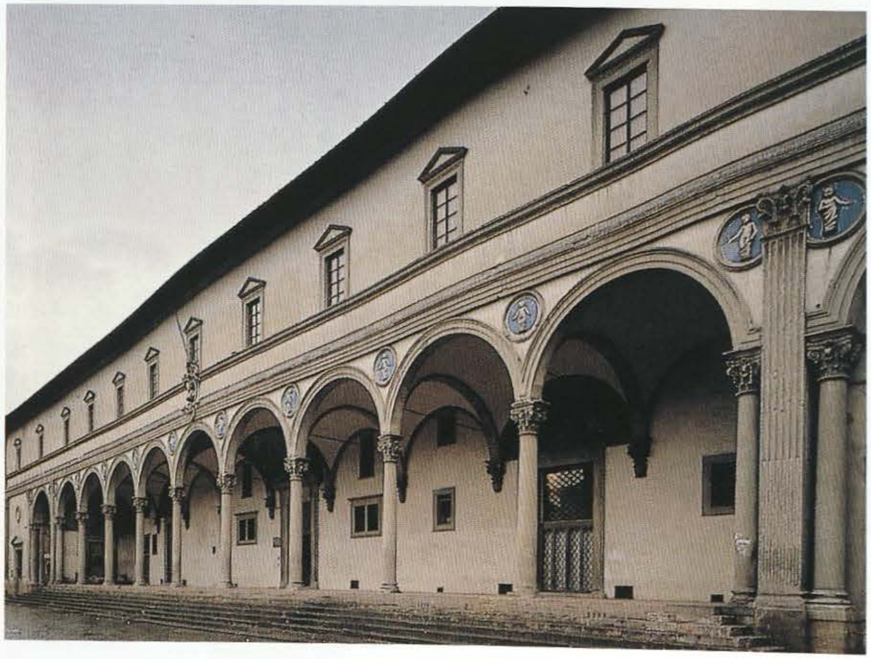
Like the niches and statues at Orsanmichele, the two altarpieces show how art could, in the early Quattrocento, be generated by customizing a set of basic forms. And we bring this mode of production into still sharper relief if we compare the Lorenzo Monaco painting of 1414 with one that another painter made in roughly the same years, showing the same subject. In 1405, Chiavello Chiavelli, the Lord of the town of Fabriano in north-central Italy, ordered the rebuilding of a Benedictine church by the name of Santa Maria di Valdisasso in the hamlet of Valle Romita for a group of Franciscan friars. Although no documents survive relating to the *Coronation* altarpiece (fig. 3.12) that the painter Gentile da Fabriano (*c.* 1370–1427) made for this new church, it seems likely that Chiavelli, who wished to be buried there, commissioned the surviving picture as well, and that Gentile finished the work sometime between 1410 and 1414.

Lorenzo Monaco and Gentile da Fabriano seem to have had no contact with one another before making their paintings: Gentile had grown up in Fabriano and had spent a brief period in Perugia to the south-west, but he made most of his important earlier works, including


GENTILE DA FABRIANO

the *Coronation*, while in Venice; Lorenzo, for his part, was attached to the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli and may never have left Tuscany. And though the two paintings are almost exactly contemporary, it is easy enough to enumerate the ways in which Gentile's painting ignores Tuscan prototypes from the previous decade.

Gentile's style emphasized line and pattern, as is evident in the borders of the draperies of the Virgin and Christ; he favored rich and varied surface treatments, evoking the appearance and texture of luxurious fabric and flowering meadows. Lorenzo, by contrast, tended to more simplified and volumetric figures. Following Venetian rather than central Italian tradition, Gentile's Christ crowns his mother not with two hands but with one, holding a cruciform scepter in the other, and he is accompanied by the two other members of the Holy Trinity, with God the Father behind Christ and the Virgin, and the dove representing the Holy Spirit between. Both Gentile and Lorenzo set their scenes in a celestial realm, indicated by the starry arches below them, but Lorenzo's space is more architectonic, honoring the couple with the baldachin that canopies them, rather than floating them, as Gentile does, in spaceless gold. Whereas Lorenzo implies that the space of the central panel and of those at the sides constitute one continuous room, Gentile insists on the sacred separateness of the area occupied by Christ and the Virgin, placing his peripheral figures on the floor of a garden resembling paradise and dividing them with the columns of the frame. More than Lorenzo, Gentile makes it clear that his saints are permitted to see what Christ and the Virgin are doing but not to join them.



3.13
Filippo Brunelleschi, Foundling Hospital (Ospedale degli Innocenti), Florence, designed 1419, built 1421–44.

Still, these striking differences should not lead us to overlook how much the pictures have in common: knowing the subject of Lorenzo's work, even a modern viewer unaccustomed to early Renaissance pictorial customs will immediately recognize that Gentile shows the same subject, with identical or closely analogous characters, in roughly the same positions relative to one another. The continuity of form between the two pictures is in large part a product of the fact that the two painters understood their assigned subject to serve the same specific function. What the patrons expected was not a painting that illustrated a particular Biblical episode, but rather one that portrayed a devotional relationship and helped them imagine their own connection to the Divine. The central scene, to the extent that it follows any text, responds to a line from the Song of Songs, a Biblical poem traditionally ascribed to King Solomon: "Come from Lebanon, my spouse, come and receive your crown." It does not, that is, represent a narrative so much as an expression of love and commitment. This gives particular importance to the characters who watch the central exchange, partaking in the same sentiment. The saints mediate between the viewer and the central characters, but they also represent a community on the model of which the monks could understand their own. It is not accidental that in the case of the two Lorenzo Monaco altars, all the depicted onlookers are male.

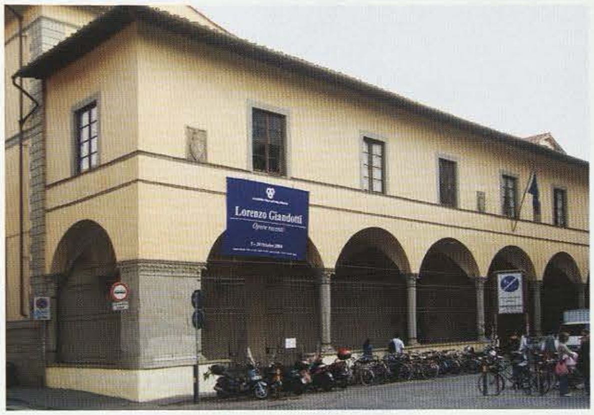
The Camaldolese Order was known for its strictness, and the lavish gold ornament at the center of the church must have looked especially glorious to the ascetics who lived with it. One might even understand the coronation scene as an illustration of the heavenly reward promised to those who lived like the saints in the picture. The art in an altarpiece like Gentile's or Lorenzo's consisted in making the characters in the scene as celestially beautiful as could be imagined without straying from a set of basic, almost diagrammatic expectations – expectations controlled, to a certain extent, by the physical framework to which artists continually returned. One of the reasons why early Renaissance altarpieces showing the coronation of the Virgin all look so similar is that their makers were expected to adopt the same component elements. The altars of Gentile, Lorenzo, and their contemporaries are mostly **polyptychs**, or multi-paneled pictures: they comprise a central arched image with the primary characters; flanking arched wings, slightly lower, with pictures of important saints; gables above; and a **predella** below with smaller, narrative scenes.

The overall structure of these polyptychs echoed that of the church in which such altars were placed, with what look like sections of the central nave and side aisles or chapels replicated in the pictures. In all three paintings of the Coronation of the Virgin discussed above, the position of the secondary figures illustrates a hierarchy of spaces – the zone featuring Christ and the Virgin being more sacred than that occupied by onlookers – and this would have corresponded closely to the spaces inside the actual churches where the panels stood. Attendants watching the priest perform liturgical ceremonies in front of the painting at the altar would, like the saints at the Coronation, have seen events that took place in an area they did not themselves enter. If, at Orsanmichele, every project started with the niche, so in the *Coronation* pictures it is architecture, as much as anything, that establishes the constant.

Filippo Brunelleschi and the Foundling Hospital

As chapter 1 suggested, most architecture in this period organized itself around nameable building types. What the comparative cases of sculpture and painting allow us to see more clearly, however, is the mechanism by which "types" developed, one driven by conventions of patronage. The most famous building in Florence made by the most famous architect in this period was the Ospedale degli Innocenti, or Foundling Hospital, that Brunelleschi started in 1419 (fig. 3.13). Following convention, it centered on a cloister, with a ward on one side and a church on the other. Brunelleschi himself was not responsible for the way in which the whole structure was eventually built, but he does appear to have overseen the laying of the foundations and the construction of the basement storey. Most striking today, as in Brunelleschi's own time, is the hospital's loggia, or **portico**, which faces the Piazza Annunziata.

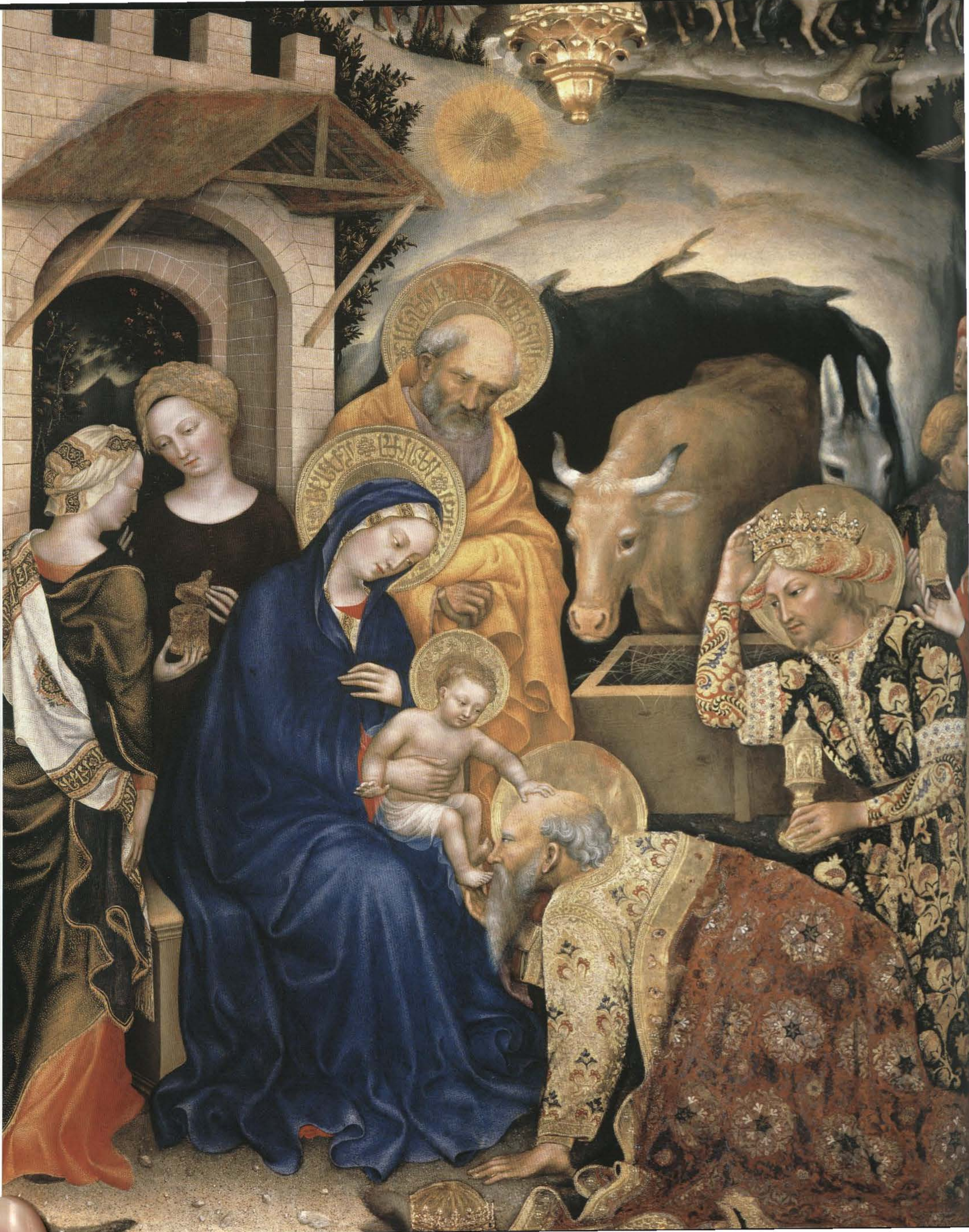
This portico served a practical purpose, offering a kind of waiting room for those who could not yet be admitted to the wards. As much as it contributed to the hospital's operations, however, it also ennobled the piazza where the building stood. These two roles were not unrelated: building a hospital was an act of charity, and beautifying the city was as well; the civic function of the loggia, in this sense, was a double one. Originally, the facade above the columns included as its most prominent single ornament the coat of arms of the Silk Weavers' Guild, its patron. If building the hospital was to be a charitable act, there could be no doubt about whose act that was. Only in 1487 did Andrea della Robbia (1435–1525) fill in the concave roundels that Brunelleschi had envisioned with glazed terracotta reliefs depicting the swaddled infants for whom the hospital cared; this transformed the decoration in a way that placed more emphasis on the hospital's operations than on its sponsorship.



3.14
Ospedale di San Matteo, Florence, begun 1385 under the direction of Romolo del Bandino and Sandro del Vinta, completed 1410.

Today, the loggia of the Ospedale degli Innocenti is, justly, considered to be one of Brunelleschi's most defining works. Its **Corinthian** order, studied from ancient examples, and its elegant semicircular arches in crisp *pietra serena* (a local gray limestone) together give a sense of spatial order and geometrical tidiness unlike that seen anywhere else in an early Quattrocento city. It is immediately apparent that the loggia is based on elementary geometry and simple ratios: the height of each column is the same as the interval between the columns and the distance between each column and the wall behind, resulting in a series of cubic spaces with hemispherical domes. Brunelleschi's exquisite and highly cultivated sense of design, nevertheless, should not distract us from the fact that the loggia was itself a fairly standard feature of Florentine hospitals: the hospital of San Matteo (1385–1410, fig. 3.14), among others, had a similar loggia, likewise facing a piazza, and this had been completed only nine years before for a building just one block to the west of the site of the Ospedale degli Innocenti. What is more, the contract for the San Matteo hospital survives, and it works much like the contract for Ghiberti's *St. Matthew*, requiring the hospital's builders to make their portico "in the form and manner" (*forma e modo*) of a hospital across town, in the Via San Gallo. The loggia, even one as majestic as Brunelleschi's, was not meant to be a novelty. It was added to the hospital precisely on account of its familiarity as a structural type, and because it seemed especially well suited to its circumstances.

Nowadays, in an art world shaped by assumptions of the **avant-garde**, we tend to place less emphasis on these conventional, repetitive aspects of the works we love. Renaissance art, though, depends on repetition for its legibility; the art is only comprehensible when we understand how conventional it is. What made a work "good" was not necessarily, or not only, its originality. Artists focused their intelligence as much on adaptation as on creation. The masterpieces of the period are not those that break radically from the past, but rather those that fit standard parts together in a way that is at once appropriate and distinctive.



4

1420–1430

Perspective and Its Discontents

The Centrality of Florence 90

Lorenzo Ghiberti and Brunelleschi at the Baptistery 93

- New Technologies 93
- Linear Perspective, Regular Space 94

Perspective and Narrative 98

- Donatello and Ghiberti 98
- Masaccio, Masolino, and the Brancacci Chapel 101
- Masaccio's *Trinity* 103

The Brunelleschian Model and Its Alternatives 104

Leon Battista Alberti: A Humanist Theory of Painting 107

4

1420–1430
Perspective and Its Discontents

The Centrality of Florence

Histories of early Renaissance art have long presented Florence as its center, and our opening chapters have done the same. Accounts of this kind run the risk of perpetuating the prejudices of Giorgio Vasari (*see* p. 547), whose influential *Lives of the Artists* left to posterity the idea that all progressive art looked Florentine. Even a more comparative perspective, however, suggests that Florence really was, in the early 1400s, a focus of unparalleled attention. Three works from the decade 1420–1430 give some measure of this.

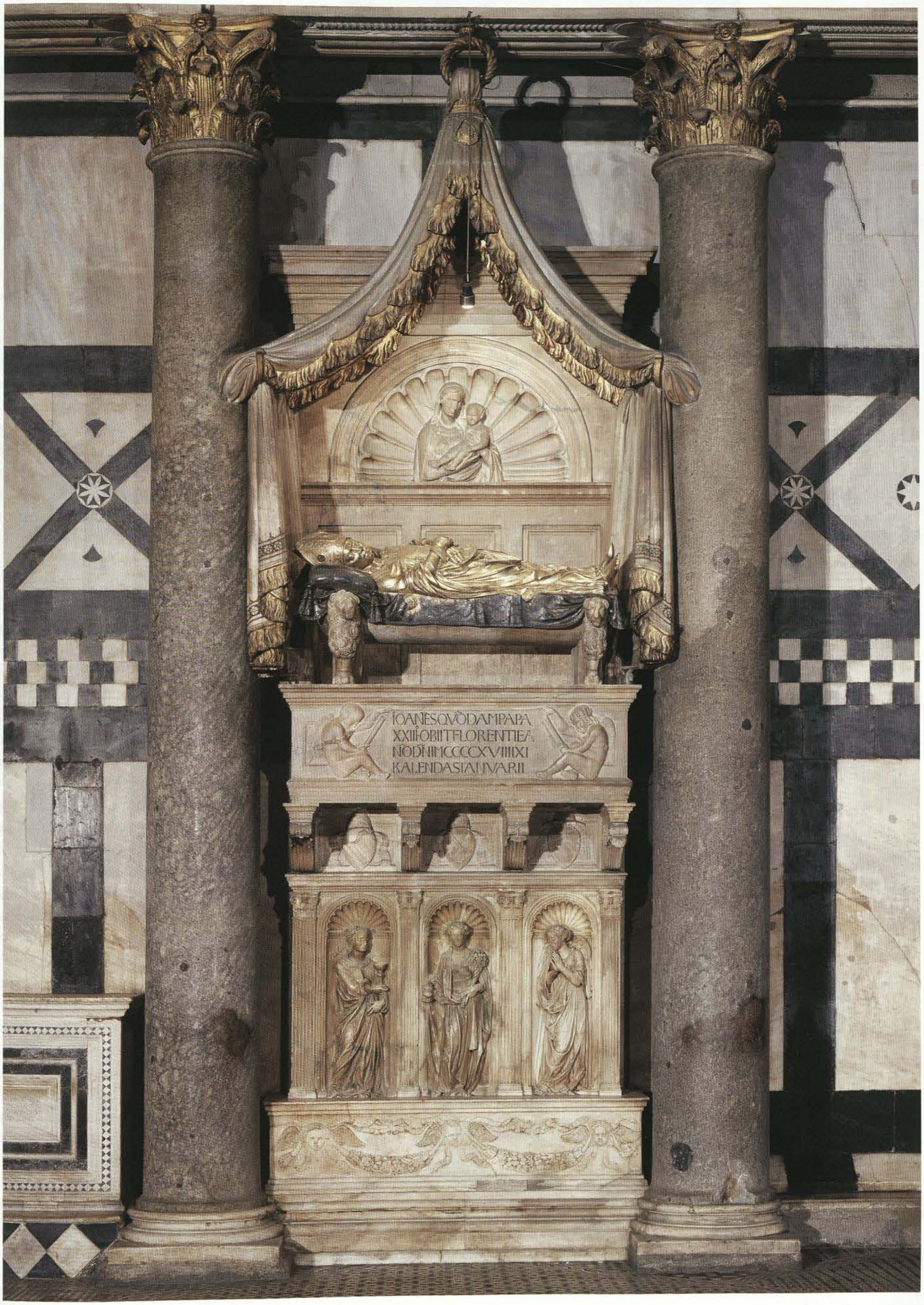
Cardinal Baldassare Cossa (*c.* 1370–1419) was Neapolitan by birth, and he had served as papal deputy in Bologna; in 1410 a faction of powerful clergy had assembled in Pisa and elected him as Pope in opposition to rival claimants in Avignon and in Rome itself. In many ways, however, his most important ties were to Florence. He fled there in 1410 when an invasion by King Ladislao of Naples (*r.* 1386–1414) prevented Cossa, who as Pope had taken the name John XXIII, from establishing his papacy in Rome. When the 1414 Council of Constance resolved the Schism in favor of Pope Martin V (*r.* 1417–31), Martin himself reigned initially from Florence. And when the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (*r.* 1433–37) imprisoned the deposed Cossa in 1418, the city of Florence paid the ransom required to free him. Cossa secured for Florence a particularly prized relic, the finger of John the Baptist, the city's patron saint. And in the 1420s, the Calimala guild (*see* p. 58) approved the burial of Cossa, as a former Pope and major ally of the city, in Florence's most prestigious setting, the baptistery. The tomb (**fig. 4.1**), designed by Donatello (*c.* 1386–1466), executed with help from the bell-caster Michelozzo di Bartolomeo (1396–1472), and completed in 1431, occupied the space between two of the baptistery's existing columns, without actually modifying the venerated building's architecture. Braces hold apart an enormous fictive baldachin that drapes down from a ring above, lending the whole ensemble a ceremonial aspect while also blurring the distinction between where the building ends and the tomb begins. Low-relief figures of Virtues occupy three niches in the lower storey. Above this, three coats of arms – one of them including a papal miter – recall Cossa's worldly titles. The Latin inscription, which uses the papal name Johannes rather than Baldassare, refers to the deceased as "*quondam papa*" ("one-time pope"). A pair of lions, traditional symbols of Florence, support a bier with a full-scale portrait of Cossa. The Virgin and Child appear to look down protectively over a parapet.

The Cossa tomb illustrates the close ties that Florentines cultivated to the papacy and the appeal that the city held for cultivated clerics. Such a monument, however, required not only a wealthy patron and an available site, but also a capable artistic team, and the art of the 1420s can give the sense that the city of Florence had both unmatched financial resources and a near monopoly on the major talent. When the heirs of Cossa's former nemesis, King Ladislao, determined to build him a grand tomb as well (**fig. 4.2**), it was to a Florentine that they turned. The still-obscure artist behind the work goes by the name Andrea da Firenze (Andrew of Florence), though the Neapolitans seem to have called him Andrea Ciccione (Fat Andrew). He began the monument when Donatello and Michelozzo were well advanced on theirs, and Andrea adapted what he knew to his new commission. Like Donatello, the sculptor here responds thoughtfully to the architectural setting, virtually presenting the tomb as architecture itself, without really modifying the existing structure. The monument appears to unfold behind the high altar, extending its wings to the side walls of the space to create a closed environment. Like its predecessor, Ladislao's tomb includes personifications of virtues, but the king's virtues apparently outnumbered Cossa's: four support the superstructure on their shoulders while others sit in **trilobed** arches above. Ladislao himself appears not once but three times: enthroned at the side of his sister and successor Giovanna, laid out on a sarcophagus, and on horseback with drawn sword at the top. The scale of the whole monument says much about the prerogatives of a deposed Pope relative to a conquering king, but there is also something perhaps a little too assertive about it. Pope Martin V had excommunicated Ladislao, condemning him to Hell on his death. The emphasis on virtue, like the presence of the bishop and two deacons who stand over the recumbent effigy, giving it their blessing, seems calculated to undo in death what had befallen Ladislao in life.

OPPOSITE

4.1

Donatello and Michelozzo, tomb of Pope John XXIII, completed 1431. Baptistery, Florence


IOANESQVÕDAMPAPA
XXIII OBIITFLORENTIEA
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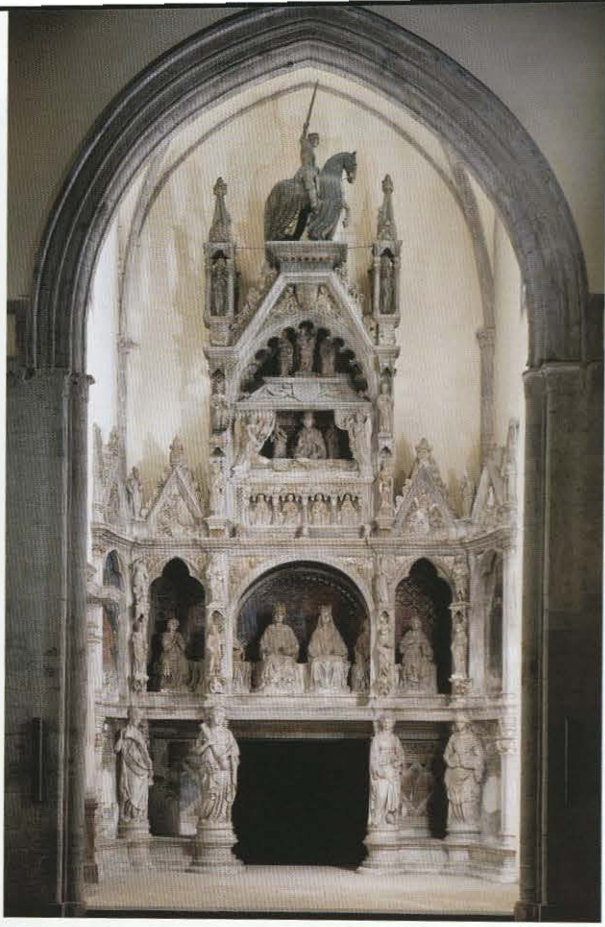
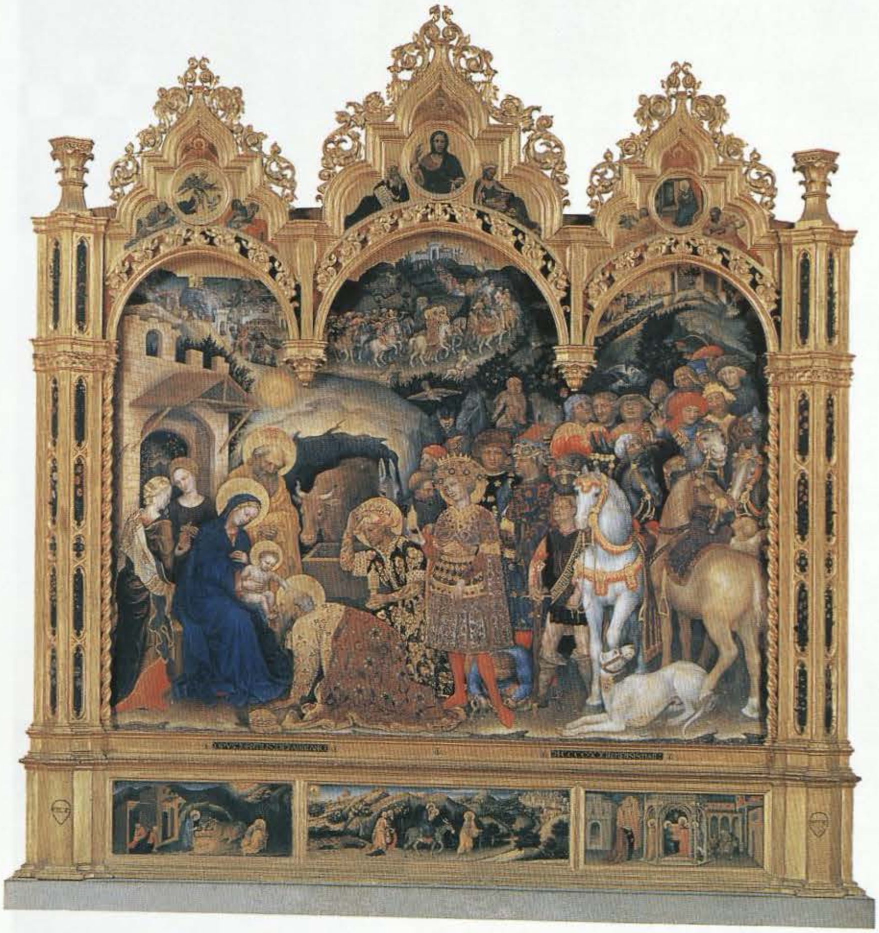
KALENDASIANVARII



4.2
Andrea da Firenze, tomb of King Ladislao of Naples, 1420s. San Giovanni in Carbonara, Naples



4.3
Gentile da Fabriano, *The Adoration of the Magi* (Strozzi altarpiece), 1423. Tempera on panel, 9'10½" x 9'3½" (3 x 2.8 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Andrea da Firenze was a sculptor of middling abilities, and his move to Naples in the 1420s suggests not only what patrons outside Florence had to settle for, but also what limited opportunities a Florentine less gifted than Donatello or Ghiberti might find at home. For the best artists, conversely, the city held real allure. In 1420, Gentile da Fabriano, the most talented painter in northern Italy, chose to move his shop from Brescia to Florence. Three years later, he completed an *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 4.3) in the sacristy of the church of Santa Trinita. The painting, like the artist's earlier *Coronation* altarpiece (fig. 3.12), bears his proud signature. Its patron, Palla Strozzi (1372–1462), had been the Calimala guild's agent in the Cossa tomb commission (***see*** **fig.** 4.1); a learned banker whose fortune helped make Florence one of the richest cities in Europe, Strozzi embodied the republican, capitalist culture that produced the city's demand for art, sustained its intellectual life, and encouraged its eye for innovation. The highly ornate manner for which Gentile was known must have appealed to Palla; the artist, for his part, could have asked for no better subject to show off his lavish approach.

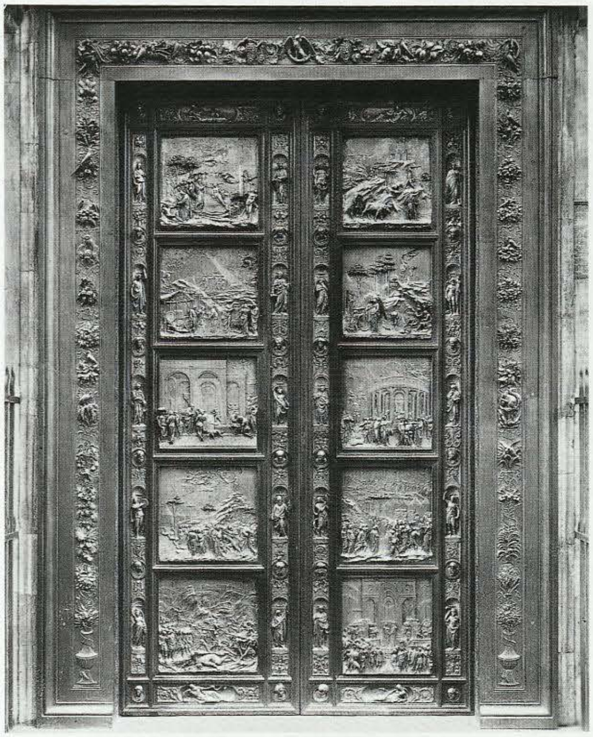
The panel shows the story from the Book of Matthew in which the three wise men (Magi), having followed a star, arrive in Bethlehem and kneel down before the newborn Christ. Following convention, Gentile rendered the Magi as crowned rulers, representatives from the East who bow to the "King of Kings." Composing a scene that involved travel, he abandoned the gold background he had employed in his earlier *Coronation* (***see*** **fig.** 3.12) and instead adopted the panoramic landscape convention introduced in the previous century by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. The smaller relative size of the background figures indicates their distance in space, although in general here, as in his earlier picture, Gentile emphasized surface rather than depth: the sloping ground allowed him to stack rather than overlap his characters, putting a collection of individualized heads on display even as he flattened the space. Nor did the painter see any contradiction between the idea that the picture's main characters might inhabit an illusionistic world that flowed continuously across the three lobes of the **triptych** and the conviction that paintings for important sites should be physically bejewelled. Applied gold leaf did not so much depict the material of the kings' crowns and offerings as *present* it literally, along with the threads of their brocaded robes, and their animals wear gold harnesses. When it came to the rendering of such motifs as the spurs that a retainer removes from the central figure's feet, Gentile employed a technique called ***pastiglia***, physically building up the surface of the painting with molded plaster before applying the gold leaf, to create the effect of a three-dimensional gold object. This is not to say that gold always stands for gold in his painting; Gentile also experimented with the metal's luster, using it to depict the highlights in the landscape and, in the predella, to produce a moonlit Nativity scene.

All of this gilded splendor would have lent the *Adoration* altarpiece an exotic quality, as would the turbans and fine cloths that Gentile takes such delight in detailing. Yet not everything about the retinue he depicts would have seemed distantly foreign. All three of his Magi, for example, look distinctly European, different only in their ages. They are accompanied by squires, and travel on horses with dogs at their sides, as if they represented a great hunting party rather than a group of weary wanderers. The whole image is strikingly courtly, an effect that could seem out of place in a public commission by a private citizen. The subject matter, in this case, allowed artist and patron to conceive a work that would play to the former's strengths, even if it went against expectations of what Florentine art should look like. Only an artist with a north Italian background, trained to serve a clientele who expected luxuriant display, copious detail, and calligraphy-like linear pattern, could have painted this.

Lorenzo Ghiberti and Brunelleschi at the Baptistery

New Technologies

The sacristy that housed Gentile's altarpiece in the church of Santa Trinita, Florence, may have been designed by Ghiberti, who is documented as having been involved with the new woodwork being added there in the year Gentile arrived in the city. And few Florentines would have appreciated more acutely than Ghiberti the effects that Gentile was after. When the goldsmith completed his Florence baptistery doors with the *Life of Christ* in 1424, his patrons at the Calimala guild were so pleased with the result that they commissioned him to design a second set. The shift in program more than two decades earlier had left the baptistery without the scenes that Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, and their competitors had originally proposed to make (*see* p. 58), and the Calimala at first considered simply returning to the earlier plan of having Ghiberti make twenty panels showing episodes from the Old Testament and eight prophets. By 1429, though, the new doors had been completely reconceived: now they would comprise only ten panels, each significantly larger in scale than what Ghiberti had previously made, and they would combine narrative moments and even separate stories within a single frame. The format of the panels would now resemble that of panel paintings, and Ghiberti organized most of his scenes in a way comparable to what Gentile had done, with figures disposed against a hilly landscape that allowed him to show multiple characters while also covering or decorating the entire surface of the work (fig. 4.4). When Ghiberti later boasted about his accomplishment, he wrote:

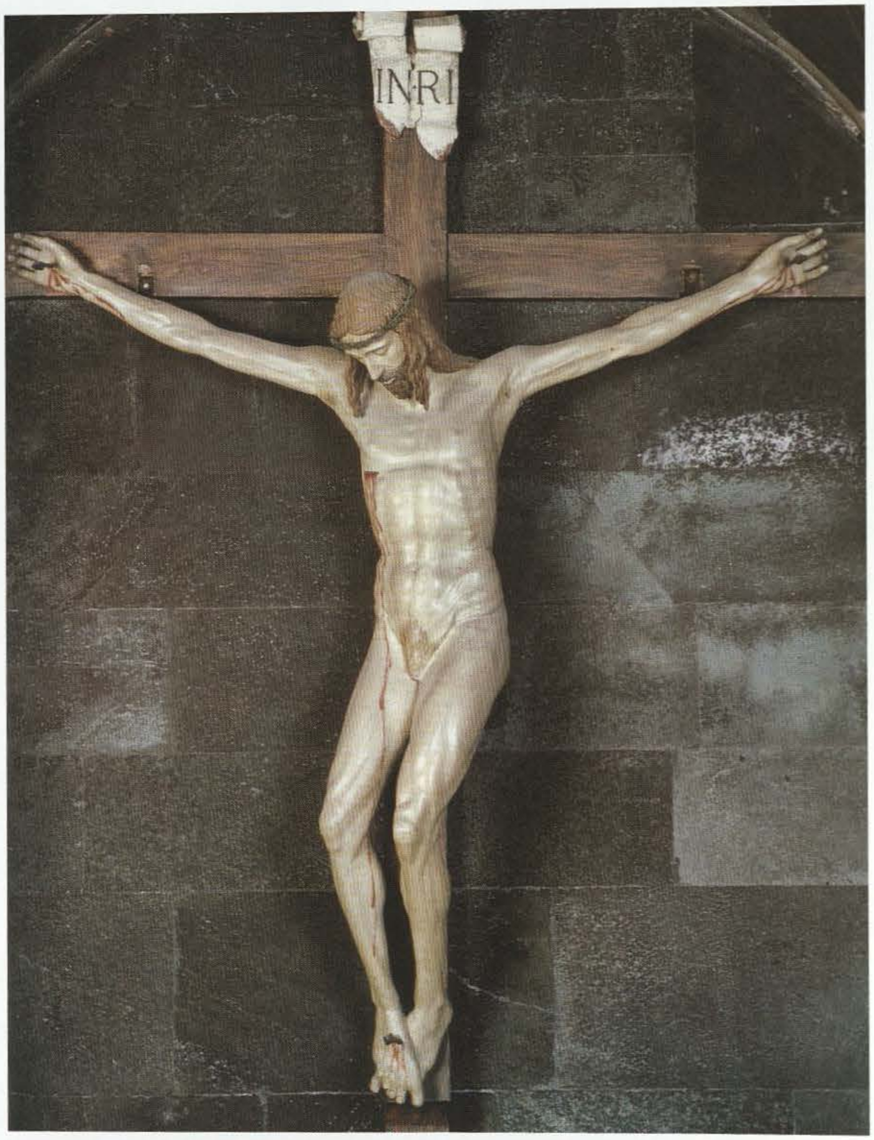


4.4
Lorenzo Ghiberti, east doors of the Florence Baptistery ("Gates of Paradise"), 1425–52. Height 15' (4.6 m)

> I was permitted to execute the commission in whatever way I believed would result in the greatest perfection, the most ornamentation, and the greatest richness.... In the stories [*historie*] that called for numerous figures, I strove to imitate nature as closely as I could, and with all the perspective I could produce to have excellent compositions rich with many figures. In some scenes I placed about a hundred figures, in some less, and in some more.

The first qualities Ghiberti wanted his viewers to appreciate were "ornamentation" and "richness." As he saw it, packing a panel with as many and as great a variety of figures as possible demonstrated his virtuosity. Gentile, with his *Adoration*, could have boasted of much the same achievement.

If there is an element in Ghiberti's description of his aims that sets him apart from Gentile, and more generally from the court art of northern Italy, it is the remark that he rendered the panels for the second set of doors "with all the perspective [he] could produce." These lines appear in the artist's *Commentaries*, which – along with the autobiographical, historical, and theoretical material



4.5
Filippo Brunelleschi, Crucifix, *c.* **1410–15.**
Polychromed wood, 5'7" x 5'7" (1.7 x 1.7 m). Santa Maria Novella, Florence

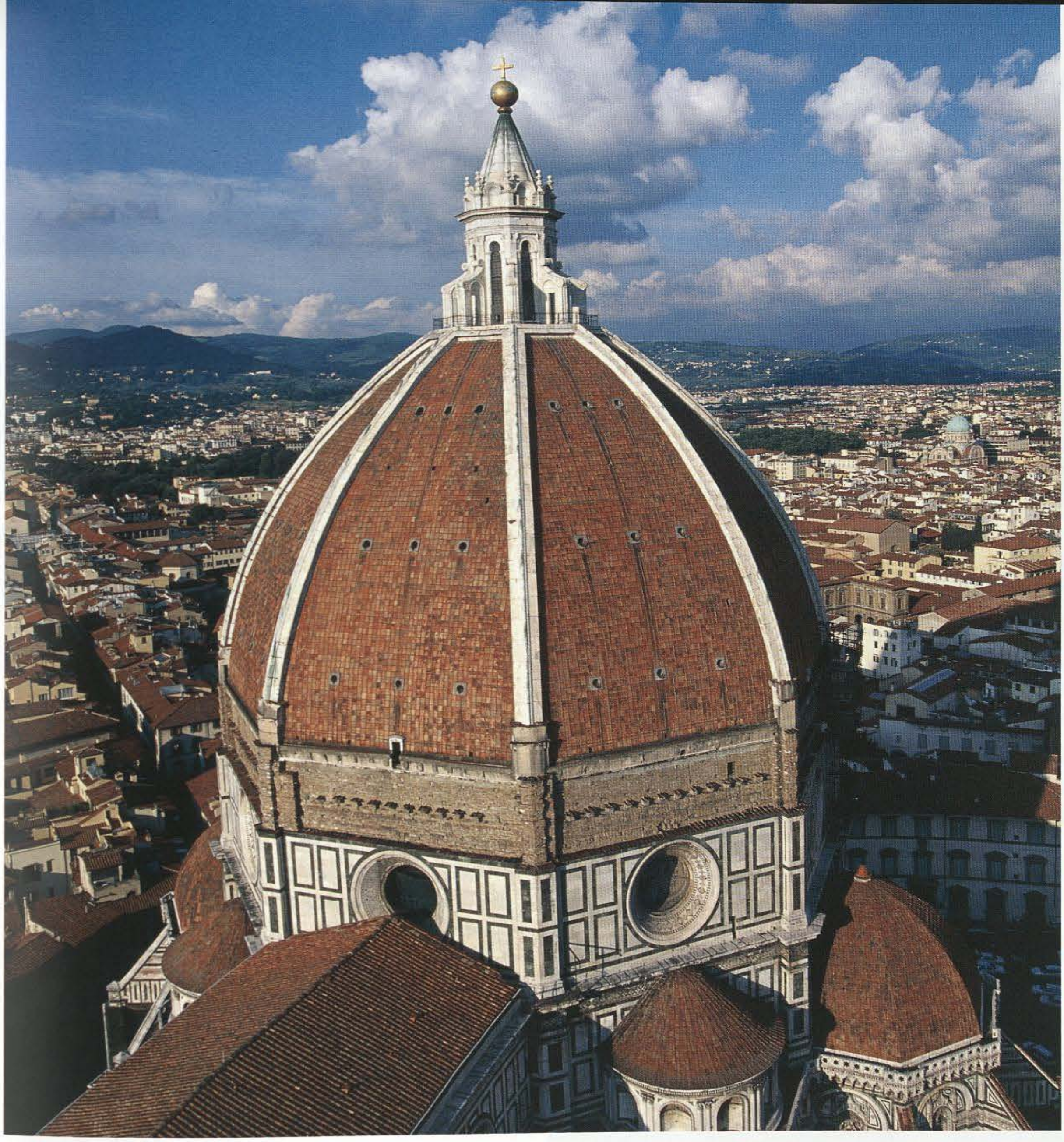
we discussed in chapter 1 – also dealt with the science of optics. In the context of these volumes, it may not seem surprising that the artist would have been interested in perspective, though we should recognize the extent to which that interest represented a move away from Ghiberti's earlier values. The origins of his new concerns in the 1420s also reflect Ghiberti's close and continuing relationship with his rival Brunelleschi.

Brunelleschi's only Quattrocento biographer, Antonio Manetti, writes that following the competition for the baptistery doors in 1401–03, the artist went to Rome to study architecture. This may well be true, but initially, at least, Brunelleschi continued to work in Ghiberti's own primary medium of sculpture. For the Gondi Chapel in the church of Santa Maria Novella, most notably, he produced a lifesize Crucifix in wood (fig. 4.5), a material in which Italian sculptors of the period rarely worked. The choice of medium in this case was certainly encouraged by the subject, for it allowed the artist to make an actual cross, rather than a representation of one, and facilitated the application of **polychromy** (painted-on colors) that would give the impression of Christ's presence, in the flesh. Manetti claims that Brunelleschi made the work in competition with Donatello, who produced his own lifesize wooden Crucifix for the church of Santa Croce in Florence at roughly the same time.

Brunelleschi also made the most immediately recognizable contribution to the Florence cathedral complex where Ghiberti was working: he designed the duomo's astonishing dome (**fig. 4.6**). Though the builders must have known for decades that the crossing of the new cathedral would have to be covered by a structure of extraordinary size, it was not until 1418 that a competition was held to determine the best way to do this. Ghiberti and Brunelleschi this time collaborated, jointly submitting a model, but after it was selected, Ghiberti withdrew from the project, leaving the supervision of the construction to Brunelleschi. Throughout the 1420s, while Ghiberti was completing his first set of doors and beginning his second, the dome was rising over the cathedral site. Structurally, it depended on a system of **ribs** – large ones springing from the corners of the octagonal **drum**, smaller ones between these – that distribute the load of the **lantern** evenly to the stone building below. None of this is visible from outside, since Brunelleschi built a second shell, covered with terracotta tiles, over the structure that carries the real weight. The only hint, in fact, that the dome we see contains another dome within are the marble ribs that articulate its exterior, announcing and doubling the ribs that do the work below (**fig. 4.7**). These features, providing the white vertical stripes that stand out so dramatically against the red brick between them, recall the **buttresses** and ribs that were the most dramatic features on Gothic churches across Europe; the dome, in fact, consists of four "medieval" pointed arches, joined at the top, where the white marble lantern disguises their peaks. Brunelleschi advertised his application of old elements to a new purpose.

Linear Perspective, Regular Space

The dome remains to this day the defining feature of the Florentine skyline, and the technological marvel it represented was not just a matter of its structure. Building the dome required other innovations, from the rigging of pulleys and the construction of a towering scaffolding system to the way in which Brunelleschi designed the laying of bricks. It is not surprising, then, that the cathedral also provided a site for Brunelleschi's other major inven-



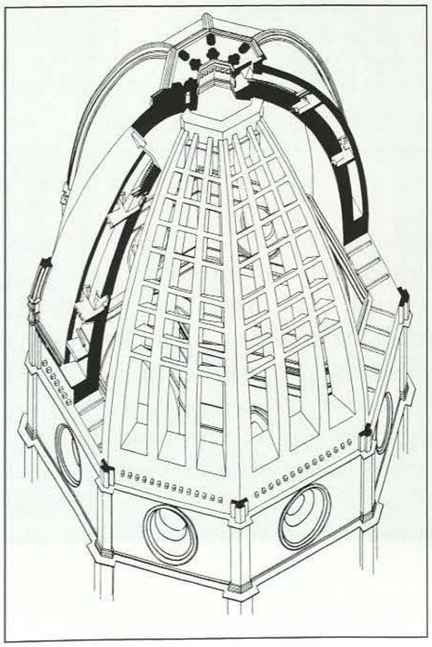
4.6
Filippo Brunelleschi, dome of Florence Cathedral, 1423–38

tion of the period, a device that would transform the way that paintings and sculptures were made.

Around 1413, Brunelleschi had prepared two painted panels, one showing the Piazza della Signoria, viewed from the north-west, and the other depicting the baptistery, seen from the portal of the cathedral looking toward the entrance Ghiberti was then fitting with doors. Into each image Brunelleschi had cut a hole, so that a person could look through the back of the panel and into a mirror, seeing the painting in reflection (fig. 4.8). This simple operation had two significant effects: it eliminated the user's bifocal vision, forcing him to see with one eye only, and it established that what the viewer saw was not the thing itself but the appearance that thing had shed onto another surface. At every point, the image in the mirror intersected the lines of sight between the viewpoint and the actual thing being seen.

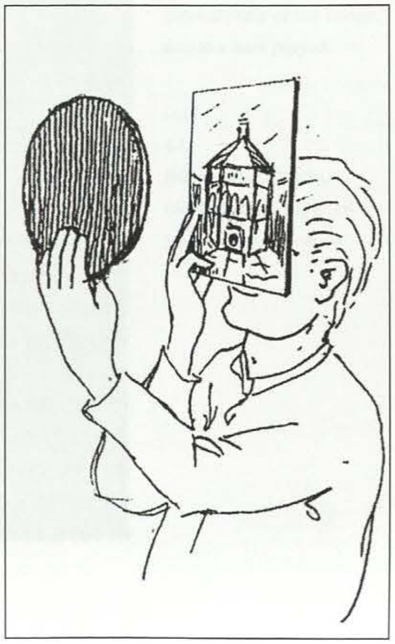
BELOW LEFT

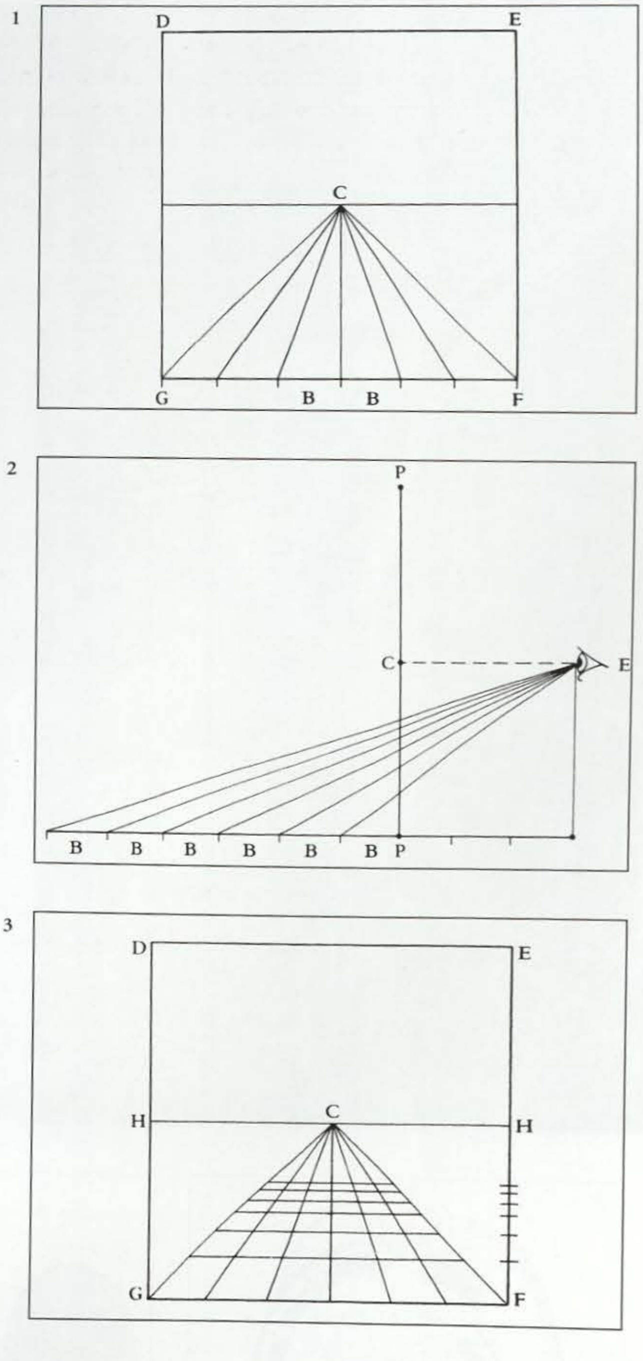
4.7
Cut-away view of the dome of Florence Cathedral, showing the double shell and the internal rib structure. Diagram after Piero Sanpaolesi



BELOW RIGHT

4.8
Brunelleschi's perspective panel





RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM

4.9 (1–3)

Diagrams of perspective

To follow Leon Battista Alberti's instructions of *c.* 1435 for creating a painting in perspective, the artist starts with a rectangular surface (DEFG) and draws a line parallel to the base to represent the horizon of vision. The area below the horizon will be imagined as a floor or ground and will ultimately be divided into foreshortened squares. The artist begins by designating a point (C) as a "centric point" or vanishing point, then divides the bottom edge of the plane (FG) into equal segments (B).

Next, the artist establishes the distance between the viewer's eye (E) and the picture plane (PP). It may be easiest to understand diagram 2 as though diagram 1 had been rotated ninety degrees, so that the frame DEFG is now a picture plane seen from the side (PP). The lines connecting the viewing point E to the divisions along the baseline represent optical rays that run to the viewer's eye from a series of points set ever further back in space from the picture plane. The segments (B) along the bottom of diagram 2 will be equivalent to the segments (B) along the bottom of diagram 1.

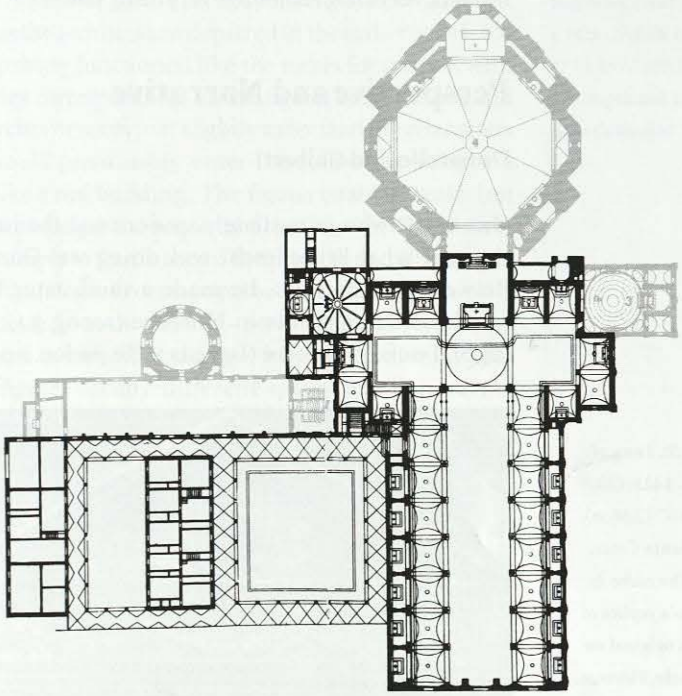
On the vertical axis, the artist marks the points where the sightlines connecting the eye to the edges of the ground modules intersect the picture plane. The intervals between these points of intersection appear to diminish the closer they get to the centric point (C).

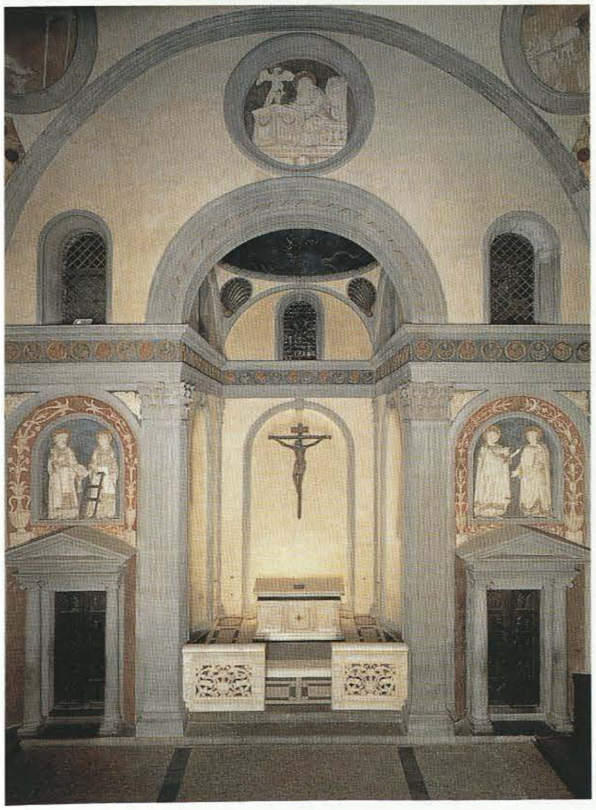
Diagram 3 transfers these points of intersection to the side of the picture plane (HF), then uses them to establish the diminishing horizontal intervals (transversals) of the imaginary floor grid. The lines between the divisions of the baseline and the centric point (orthogonals) represent the apparent convergence of parallel lines as they run away from the viewer. Each of the boxes in the floor represents a square with sides of length B.

These were the basic principles of **linear perspective.** Writers on optics understood vision to result from straight linear rays that came from an object and converged in the eye of the observer. The meeting of the rays at a single point made it possible to render vision in a diagram as a cone or pyramid, with the eye at the apex. The crucial step from this theory to the construction of a painting in perspective was the reconception of the surface of the picture as a slice through the pyramid of rays. If things in a picture that followed this scheme were higher or lower than one another, to one another's left or right, that was because they looked to be so positioned from a particular point of view. And if one painted thing was larger or smaller than another, that was at least in some cases registering the impression that that thing was closer to or more distant from the observer. "Perspective" literally means "seeing through"; the very word evokes the idea that the painting is a metaphorical window *through which* we see a scene. But the mechanism that Brunelleschi introduced, with its fixed point of view, its controlled separation of observer and image, and its implication that the size of an object on the surface provides information about that object's distance beyond the surface, was really a system of **commensuration**, a way of representing things such that the dimensions of any one thing were coordinated with the dimensions of every other (fig. 4.9).

This way of thinking about a painting could only have occurred to someone with an interest in optics, that is, with a predisposition to imagine lines that extended between a point or surface inside the eye and the things seen before it. It also depended on a certain competence in geometry. In these respects, Brunelleschi's idea of painting translated his architectural interests. We have already seen how, at the Foundling Hospital, Brunelleschi allowed everything in his design to be measured against everything else (*see* fig. 3.13): the heights of the columns, their distance from the wall, their distance from one another. He followed the same principles at the building on which he worked through the 1420s, the church of San Lorenzo in Florence.

In this case, Brunelleschi was sponsored not by a guild but rather by a private patron, Giovanni de' Medici (1360–1429). A church dedicated to St. Lawrence had stood on that site since the fourth century CE, but Giovanni envisioned an entirely new building (fig. 4.10); he had Brunelleschi begin with the **sacristy** (fig. 4.11), the room near the altar where priests donned their vestments before conducting Mass. The lofty uncluttered grandeur of the main space results from the superimposition of the hemispherical dome upon a perfectly cubic structure; effecting the transition from the cubic to the spherical form are curved triangles known as **pendentives**. (The dome in this way differs from that of the cathedral, which rises from a polygonal drum.) As at the Innocenti, the architect built the space from simple geometrical forms that all responded proportionally to one another. The altar stands in a square cubicle, each side of which is exactly half the length and half the width of the main room; the attic zone is the same height as the lower story, and this height is also the radius of the hemispherical dome of the ceiling. Here again, Brunelleschi implied that his use of measurement was something he had recovered from antiquity: he framed the bays to either side of the altar with Corinthian **pilasters**, and gave the doorways **Ionic aedicules**. Here too, finally, he made the commensurability of elements perceptible through his choice of materials, articulating the arches, frames, and ribs in ***pietra serena*** and setting these against white plaster such that the geometry of the design emerged in crisp outline. (As at the Foundling Hospital, the colorful reliefs in the roundels are later additions, in this case by Donatello.) The visitor has the sense that he or she has walked into a





ABOVE

4.10

Plan of San Lorenzo, Florence, showing the church's fifteenth-century form. The sacristy (see fig. 4.11) is off the south transept (to the left). The ghosted parts of the image date to a later period.

LEFT

4.11

Filippo Brunelleschi, Old Sacristy, *c.* 1418–28.

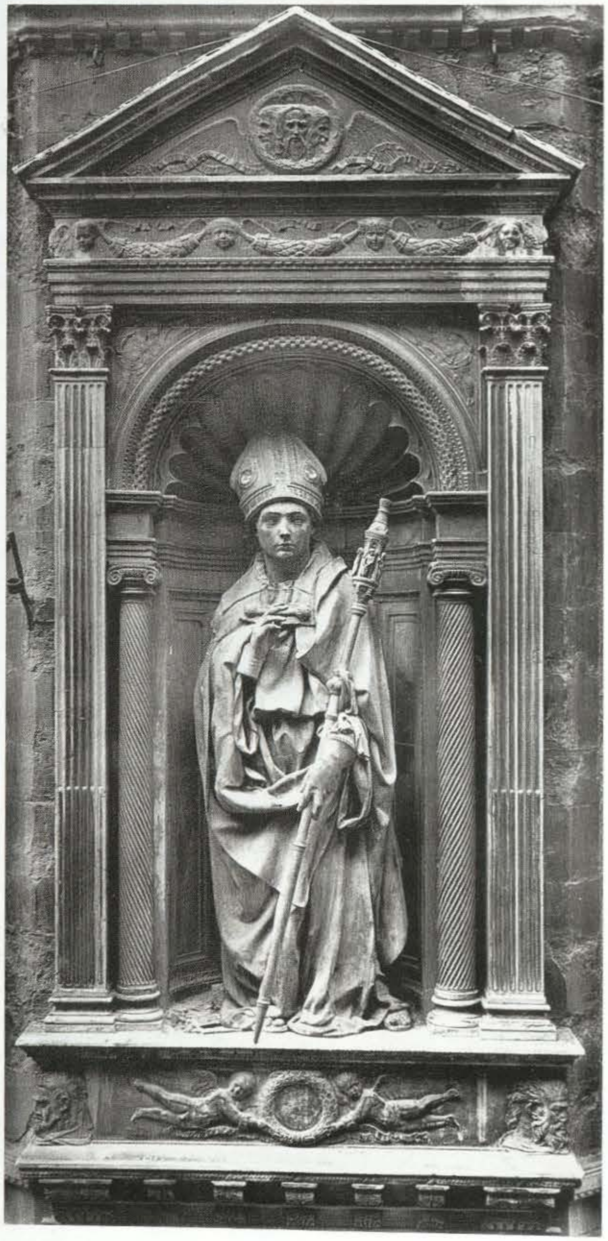
San Lorenzo, Florence

closed system. Brunelleschi conceived the room, like his perspective paintings, as an autonomous space; within its frame, everything relates to everything else.

Perspective and Narrative

Donatello and Ghiberti

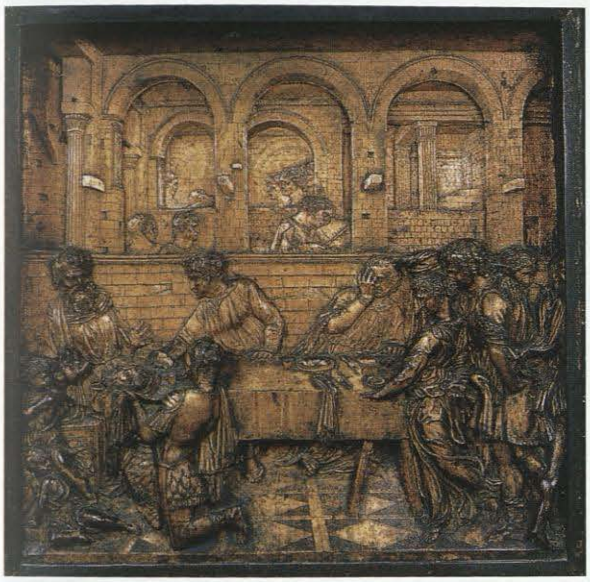
One artist who immediately understood the implications of what Brunelleschi was doing was Donatello. Between 1418 and 1422, he made a third statue for the facade of Orsanmichele in Florence (*see* fig. 3.1), showing St. Louis of Toulouse (fig. 4.12). His patron, a political organization called the Parte Guelfa, had instructed him to make the figure in gilded bronze; lacking experience in metal, Donatello once again called in Michelozzo to help him with the cast. The conception of the work, nevertheless, reflects the approach Donatello had taken in his earlier contributions to the facade. Like the *St. Mark* (*see* fig. 3.5), the work depends on the assumption that the viewer would only see it from controlled angles: in fact, the "statue" consists of nothing more than a robe, a mask, and a glove held together by a hidden armature behind, even if no one studying the statue from the street would realize this. What sets the *St. Louis* apart from the *St. Mark* and from every other figure made for the building, however, are its niche and the figure's relationship to it. Whereas earlier niches look like frames from a Gothic church, with tall pointed arches, thin columns, and spires at the side, Donatello's comes off as a collection of the classical architectural motifs the artist knew: a Corinthian aedicule with two smaller Ionic columns set inside it, a conch above the niche itself, a ***clypeus*** (ornamental shield) in the lower frieze, and swags of garlands in the upper ones. Unlike the most recent additions to the building, the ornaments of the niche seem only loosely connected to the saint, yet in other ways the figure and his container are inextricably bound. For the first time, the niche is scaled precisely to the figure: the Ionic columns rise precisely to his shoulders, the **architrave** behind is at the height of his face, and the **flutes** of the conch radiate behind his head like a halo.



4.12
Donatello, *St. Louis of Toulouse*, c. 1423. Gilt bronze, 8'8¾" (2.66 m). Museo di Santa Croce, Florence. The niche in the photo is a replica of Donatello's original on Orsanmichele, Florence.

It was Donatello who also first demonstrated the pictorial possibilities that Brunelleschi's new perspective system might allow. The marble slab below his *St. George* on Orsanmichele (*see* fig. 3.8) had already explored the way that illusionistic devices could amplify the effect of three-dimensionality. When, in the years around 1425–27, Donatello completed a bronze relief, the *Feast of Herod* (fig. 4.13), to decorate the font at the center of Siena's baptistery, he pursued similar aims. But whereas the *St. George* had used the crystalline qualities of marble to suggest an atmospheric outdoor environment, now the artist created an interior layered with hard edges. Even as he followed the goldsmiths' convention of covering the surface with detail, he worked the wax design for the bronze as he earlier worked marble, in unusually low relief. By describing the individual bricks that make up the arcades and walls, and by diminishing those bricks in size to indicate a position further back in space, he was able to define a deep recession without having much of anything physically project forward from the picture surface.

Donatello dramatized the principle that the image represented a slice through a cone of rays by abruptly cutting off the roof beams extending toward the picture plane. He did not conceive his depicted architecture just as an



LEFT

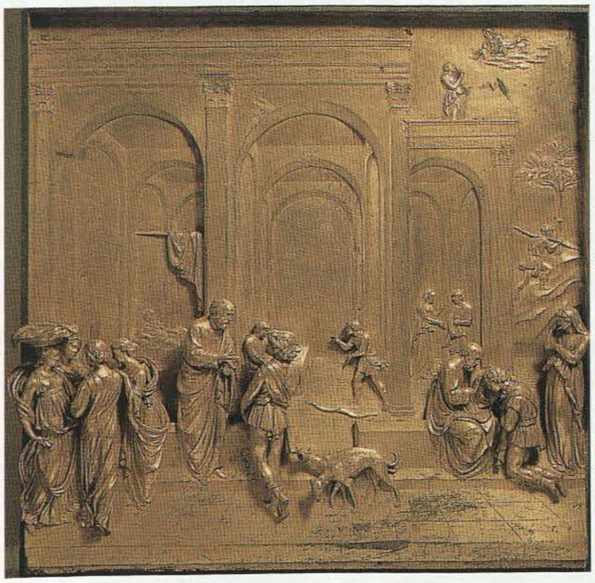
4.13

Donatello, *Feast of Herod*, *c.* 1425–27. Gilt bronze, 23⅕ x 23⅕" (59.7 x 59.7 cm). Baptismal font, Siena Cathedral

exercise in optics, however, but rather used the distinctions that perspectival constructions allowed to organize his story. The viewer must explore the complex space to find the various episodes. Like earlier narrative art, Donatello's relief subordinates some events and characters to the background, arranging these in layers separated by architectural screens. In the right foreground, Salome leaps and twists, performing the dance that induced her stepfather, Herod, to give her anything she wanted; Donatello has placed the musician who accompanies her in the middle distance, in a space that resembles a singers' gallery. In the most distant scene, visible through the leftmost arch, the executioner presents the head of John the Baptist to Salome. The horrible consequence of her seductive dance is shown to the left: the entire court convulses in shock as the head is presented to the king.

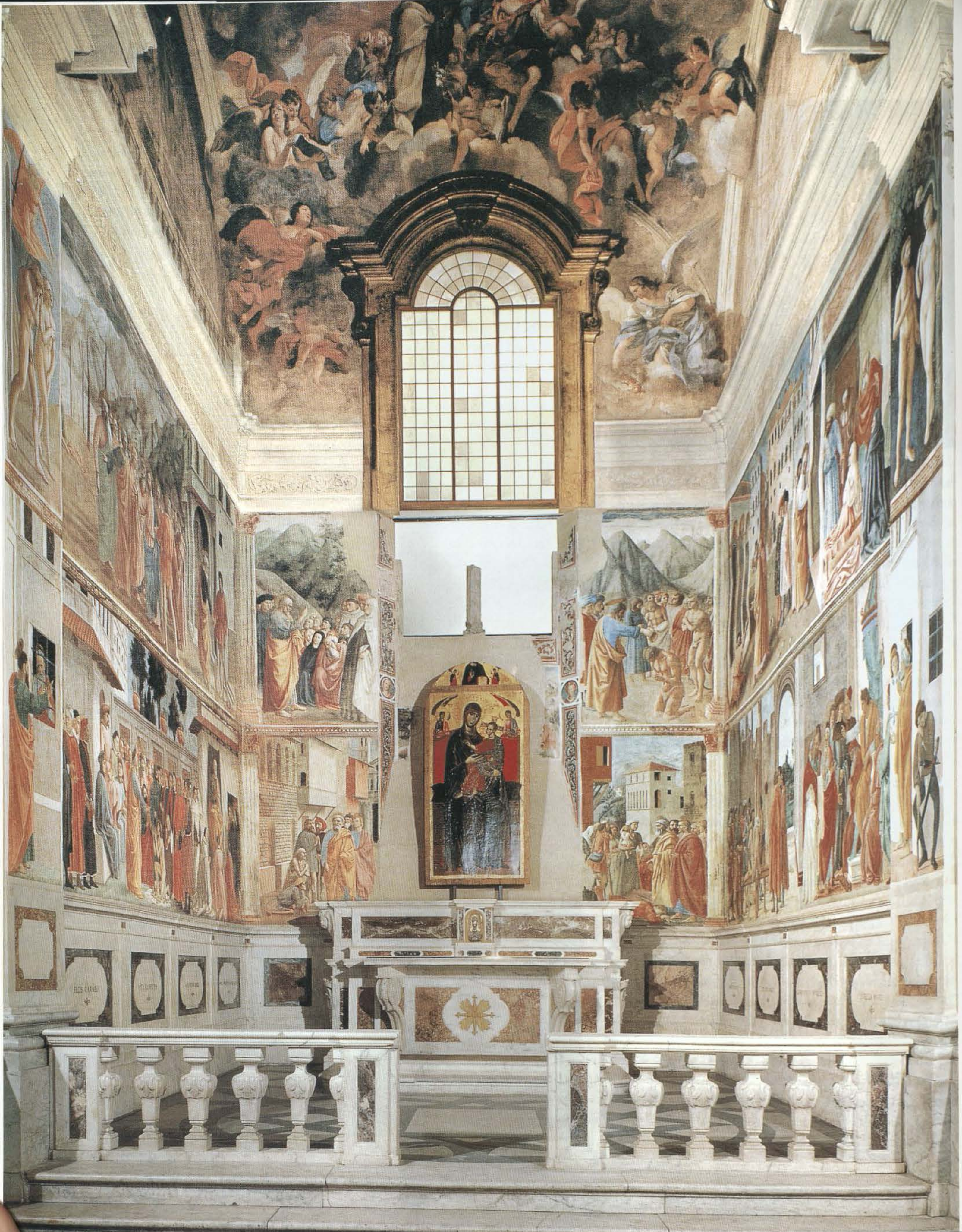
Donatello's impact on Ghiberti, who had produced less inventive reliefs for the same Sienese baptistery, is most evident in the latter's second set of doors for the Florence baptistery. To begin with, the change from a quatrefoil to a square format for each of the reliefs represents a move toward geometric simplicity, but it also introduces a shape that more readily allowed for the conception of the picture as a mirror or window. What Ghiberti set within each of those frames, moreover, is far denser than anything he had made previously. Consider his version of the story of Jacob and Esau (fig. 4.14) from 1425–52. In his reliefs for the north doors, characters typically stood on a kind of shelf that projected forward from the relief ground; Ghiberti simply created real three-dimensional figures that occupied real three-dimensional space. The ground in this later work, by contrast, appears to slope inwards, and the tiles in the background, which diminish in size as they get more distant, tell us that Ghiberti has established a point of view and transformed the space according to optical principles. A kind of measure, absent before, now governs: whereas the architecture depicted in the earlier reliefs for the baptistery functioned like the niches for statues, with openings corresponding to the figures before them and with arches or roofs just slightly taller than the characters who would presumably enter them, now the structure looks like a real building. The figures establish scale, but there is no longer the sense that the function of architecture is simply to frame them. By implying that differences in the figures' sizes correspond to their relative proximity or distance from the viewer – something Ghiberti never suggested in his earlier doors – he could also imply that those figures occupy different spaces, one behind the next. Painters had used a variety of proportional diminution from the first half of the fourteenth century, and any sculptor acquainted with Gentile would have seen how this worked; only now, however, did Ghiberti and Donatello begin to move their colleagues away from a more literal-minded conception of sculptural space and toward the virtual realities of painting.

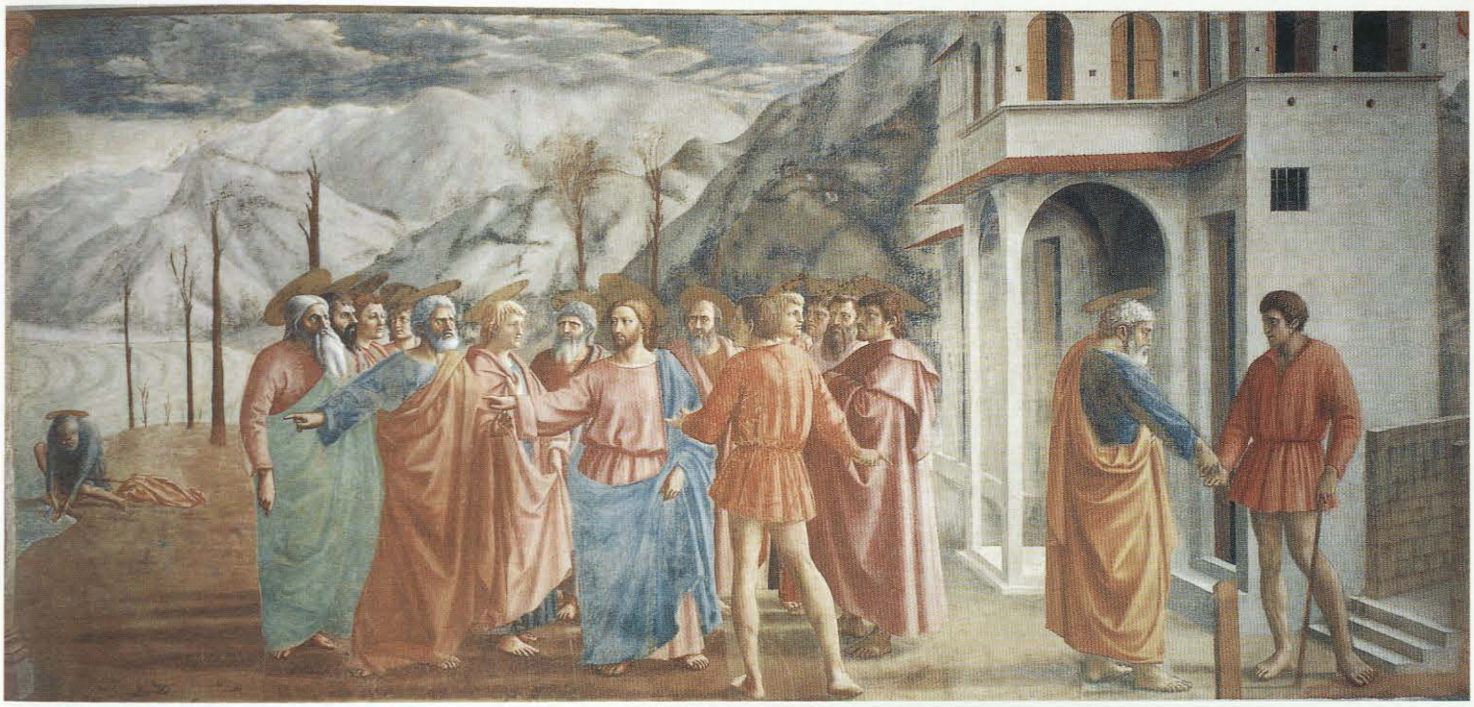
Perspective allowed Ghiberti, as it had Donatello, to employ "continuous narrative," whereby the same characters recur repeatedly in what looks like a single space. On the rooftop at the right of the *Jacob and Esau* panel, God tells the pregnant Rebecca that "Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be divided out of thy womb, and one people shall overcome the other, and the elder shall serve the younger." In the background left, Rebecca lies in bed, an allusion to the birth of her twin sons, Jacob and Esau. The two boys, now adolescents, confront each other in the central arch. In front of the building, Rebecca's husband Isaac instructs Esau to go hunting,



4.14

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Jacob and Esau*, panel from the Gates of Paradise, 1425–52. Gilt bronze, 31¼ x 31¼" (79 x 79 cm). Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence





4.16

Masaccio, *The Tribute Money*, *c.* 1426–28. Fresco. Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence

so that he might serve meat to his father and receive a blessing. In the middle ground to the right of this, Esau's mother Rebecca conspires with Jacob to steal the blessing; he holds the meat that she will prepare for him. The theft itself happens in the same bay of the architecture, but in the foreground, where the blind Isaac blesses Jacob under Rebecca's eyes, essentially making Esau and his descendants the servants of Isaac and his. The use of architecture, scaled figures, and a gridded pavement to position the characters in the scene allows Ghiberti to show events from different chapters of Genesis in a single frame.

Masaccio, Masolino, and the Brancacci Chapel

The examples considered so far might well give the impression that it was the sculptors of Florence who made the most significant pictorial innovations in the first decades of the fifteenth century, and there is some truth to this. Painters, though, responded to what Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Ghiberti were doing as well, and none more impressively than two known as Masaccio (1401–1428) and Masolino (1383–*c.* 1447) – roughly, "Big Tom" and "Little Tom." The pair worked together in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, across the river from the center of Florence, in a chapel that had been founded by Piero di Piuvichese Brancacci in 1367 (fig. 4.15). Dedicated to its founder's name saint, Peter, the paintings in the Brancacci Chapel, mostly carried out between 1424 and 1428, show scenes from that saint's life.

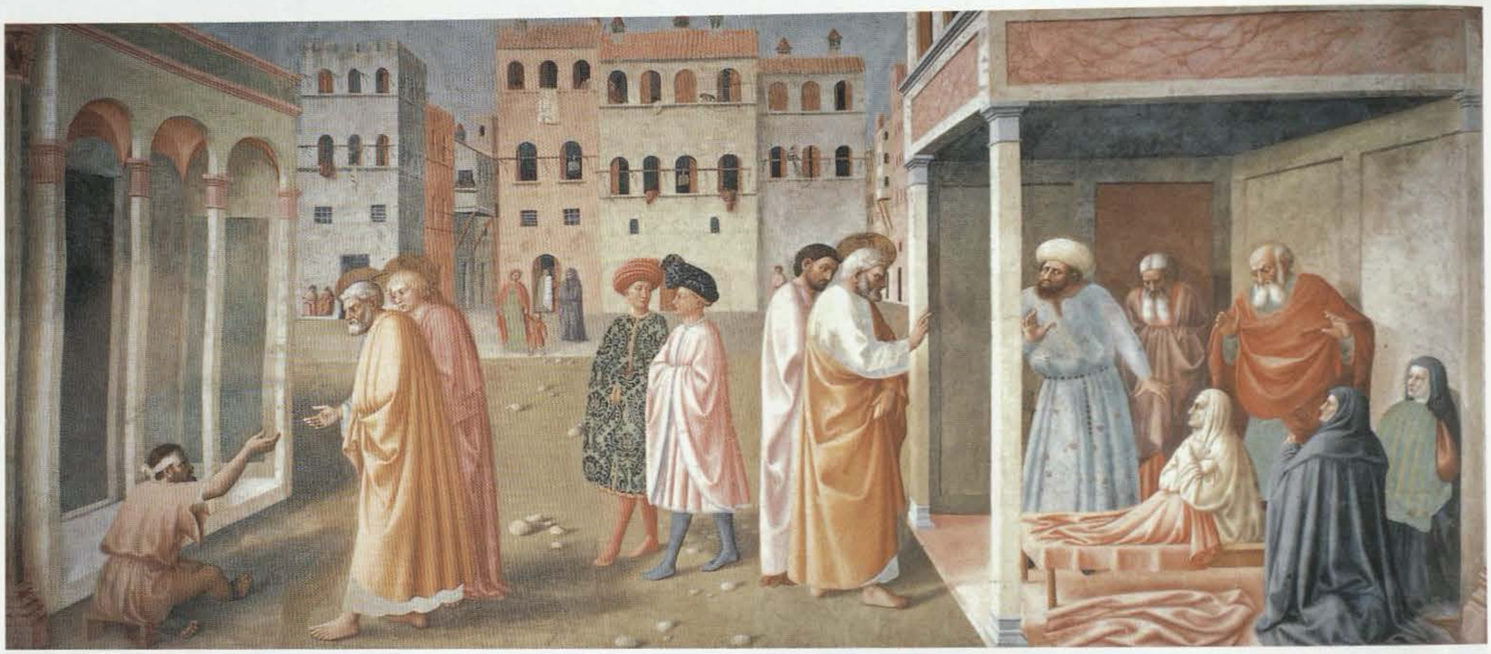
The romantic idea of the Renaissance artist as a heroic and solitary individual has led to a centuries-long debate about which of the chapel's scenes, even which of its figures, each of the two artists painted. The close collaboration between Masaccio and Masolino, however, should remind us that works on this scale rarely originated from a single hand. The Brancacci patrons appear first to have hired Masolino, who began painting the vault and made his way downward from there before Masaccio's arrival. The patrons may have brought Masaccio into the huge project when it was clear that Masolino's other obligations would prevent him from finishing the chapel on his own; the two worked together on the upper zone of friezes, and Masaccio painted the lower parts (some of which were modified later by Filippino Lippi) on his own. The arrangement, in any case, seems to have been a happy one all around: the two had worked together elsewhere before coming to Santa Maria del Carmine, and they would collaborate again in Rome a few years later. While they were both on the Carmine scaffolding, they did not simply divide assignments, but contributed to one another's scenes: Masaccio, for example, appears to have painted the hills in the background of Masolino's *St. Peter Preaching*, whereas Masolino painted the hills in the background of Masaccio's *St. Peter Baptizing the Neophytes*, as well as the head of Christ in Masaccio's *Tribute Money* (fig. 4.16).

The framing of the images divides them into twelve sections, including four long friezes on the side walls. These lent themselves to a lateral disposition of figures, and the painters might simply have lined up their characters as the ancients did on their sarcophagi – Giorgio Vasari later admired what he described as the paintings' effects of "relief," and other elements, too, including various nudes, suggest a close study of sculpture. Masaccio and Masolino's primary reference points, though, were not ancient so much as contemporary, a fact that becomes

OPPOSITE

4.15

Masaccio and Masolino, Brancacci Chapel, 1426–28. Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence. On the altar is a mid 13th century icon called the Madonna del Popolo that was placed in the chapel in 1436. Filippino Lippi completed the Masaccio and Masolino cycle in 1481–82. The vault was reconstructed and redecorated following a fire in 1771.



4.17
Masolino (with Masaccio), *The Raising of Tabitha*, c. 1426–28. Fresco. Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence

evident as they transpose a number of the events they depict from ancient settings to modern Florentine streets. In the main episode Masolino painted in the upper register of the west wall, for example, St. Peter appears twice, once on the left, where he heals a cripple, and again on the right, where he raises a disciple of Christ's named Tabitha from the dead (fig. 4.17). The episode took place in the city now called Jaffa, outside Tel Aviv, yet the buildings that serve as Masolino's backdrop have the tile roofs and chimneys characteristic of Italian domestic architecture in the period. The central characters wear the sort of fashionable robes and headdresses that wealthy merchants would have worn in Masolino's day; in the background, two men sit and chat beside a palace entrance, and a woman takes her child out for a walk. The paintings so capture local life, in fact, that social historians have been tempted to look at them for references to recent events, taking Masaccio's depiction of Peter Paying the Tribute Money, opposite Masolino's *Raising of Tabitha*, as a reference to a controversial Florentine tax instituted in these years. Interpretations along such lines have not held water; the most we can say about the timeliness of the subject matter is that the Carmelites and the Brancacci alike wished to cultivate ties with the papacy in Rome, and that such a desire provided an additional reason to promote the image of St. Peter.

Masaccio's *Tribute Money* (*see* fig. 4.16) shows a scene from the Book of Matthew in the Gospels, when Jesus tells Peter (a former fisherman) to cast a hook in the sea and open what he caught; there he would find a coin with which to pay the taxes asked of Jesus. Like Masolino on the opposite side of the chapel, Masaccio employs continuous narrative: Masaccio's story in this case proceeds from the center, where Christ gives instructions, to the left, where Peter retrieves the money from the fish, to the right, where he delivers the tribute to a tax collector. Masaccio refrained from adding much of the incidental detail that Masolino could not resist; in his relative spareness, and in the solidity of his figures, Masaccio may have been consciously modeling his work on the fourteenth-century frescoes by Giotto in Santa Croce across town. Masaccio's mural demonstrates that what these artists sought from their contemporaries, and from tradition, was a sense for how to create a three-dimensional world with a two-dimensional medium. The use of the building and the water in the paintings both to structure the composition and to separate moments in a narrative sequence follows the recent example of Donatello. What impressed early viewers even more, though, was the way Masaccio's figures seemed to *take up* space. All the characters here block the ambient light and cast strong shadows – a fact that becomes unmistakable in the nearby scene of the multitude bringing the sick into the streets in the belief that Peter's shadow will heal them (Acts 5:15).

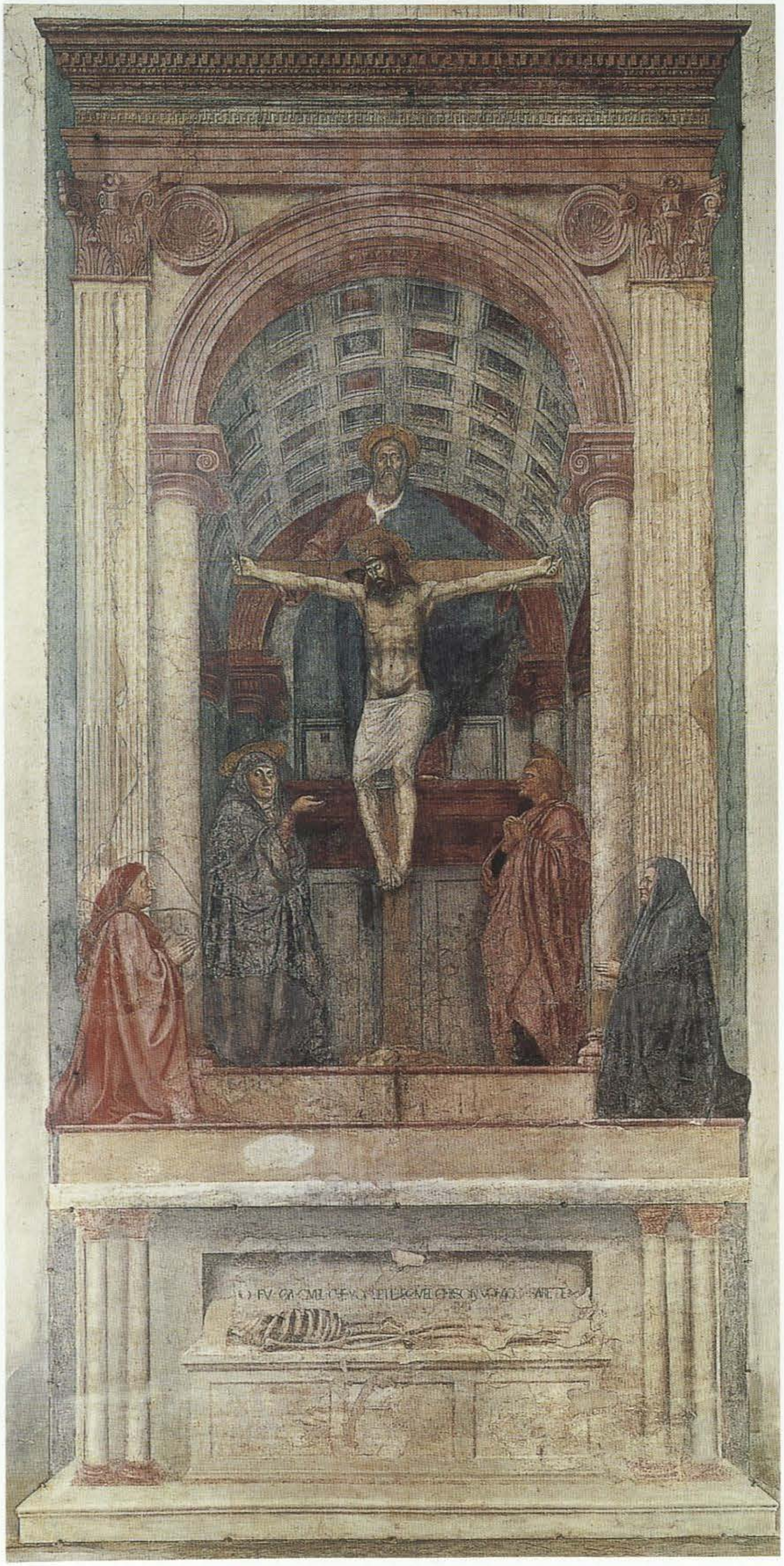
Vasari, for his part, singled out not the shadows but the draperies, the simple folds of which give surprising volume to the bodies they wrap. Masaccio had realized "that figures who stood on tip-toe, rather than standing firmly with foreshortened feet, lacked all goodness of manner." In casting Masaccio's achievement as one of foreshortening – a kind of local perspective, whereby the painter reduced the dimensions of a line or surface to give the impression that they projected toward the viewer – Vasari treats it both as a technical accomplishment and as an advance in understanding. But the fact that Masaccio's depiction of his characters' feet makes it possible to infer how they are positioned relative to one another in space also points to a reconception of the picture more generally, as a kind of container in which figures and objects occupy clearly defined places.

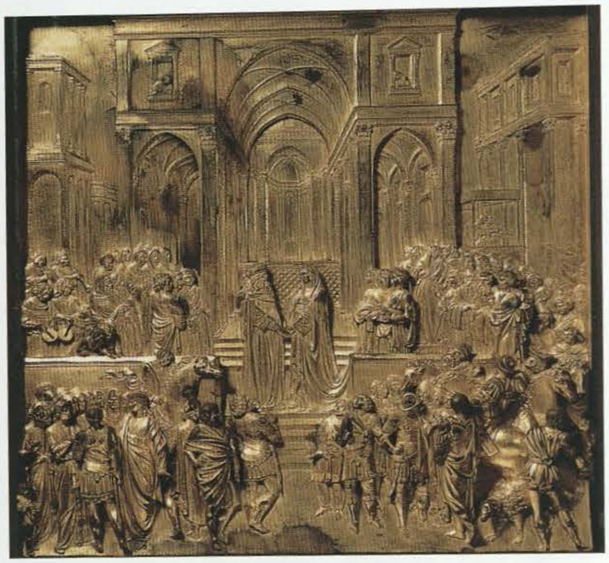
OPPOSITE
4.18
Masaccio, *Trinity*, 1425–28. Fresco. Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Masaccio's *Trinity*

Before he completed work on the Brancacci Chapel in 1428, Masaccio began painting another burial monument (fig. 4.18), this time in the church of Santa Maria Novella, across the river. The exact circumstances of its patronage, like that behind the murals in the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine, remain uncertain, though a family named Berti may have been involved. What Masaccio created this time, though smaller in scale than his Brancacci paintings, was still monumental, a painting ten feet wide and twenty-two feet high. If, at the Carmine, Masaccio had used architectural settings to structure his scenes, here he turned the painting itself into a kind of architecture, using perspective to create the impression of a fictive chapel set back into the wall, with an altar table before it and a tomb below. On a ledge above and behind the table kneel two donors, representatives of the family that commissioned the painting, and just above and behind them is a Crucifixion, flanked by Mary and St. John the Evangelist. The uppermost zone centers on a medieval arrangement called the "Throne of Grace," which conventionally included a seated God the Father holding between his knees the cross bearing his son, while the Holy Spirit descended from one to the other.

Masaccio departed from the usual formula: he combined the Throne of Grace with a full-scale Crucifixion and had his God the Father stand rather than sit, but the accumulation of subsidiary figures only augments the standard meaning of the motif – God's offer of mercy in times of need. In this case, that mercy manifestly derives from Christ's sacrifice, since blood runs down the cross and out of its space onto the ledge with the donors, approaching the altar table where that same blood would have been made available to the modern celebrant in the form of the Eucharistic wine. In this case, in other words, Masaccio uses perspective not so much to structure a historical scene as to describe a series of relationships. The division of spaces maps a hierarchy of intercessions: close at hand, the donors pray for salvation (and also solicit the prayers of the living); the Virgin, in turn, conveys their prayers to the Trinity; most distantly from us, Christ's sacrifice guarantees humanity's salvation. Unlike the murals in the Brancacci Chapel (and more like Nanni di Banco's and Donatello's marble figures for Orsanmichele; *see* figs. 3.4–3.5), the perspectival construction turns on a point of view that a visitor to the church could actually occupy. Perspective now addresses a viewer. The skeleton at the bottom is not that of a specific body, buried in this tomb, but an instance of the death that all will face, and thus a reminder of the need to follow the patrons' example and live a life of devotion. The inscription above it reads: "I was once what you are and what I am you will also be."





4.19
Lorenzo Ghiberti, *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, panel from the Gates of Paradise, 1425–52. Gilt bronze, 31½ x 31½"(80 x 80 cm). Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence

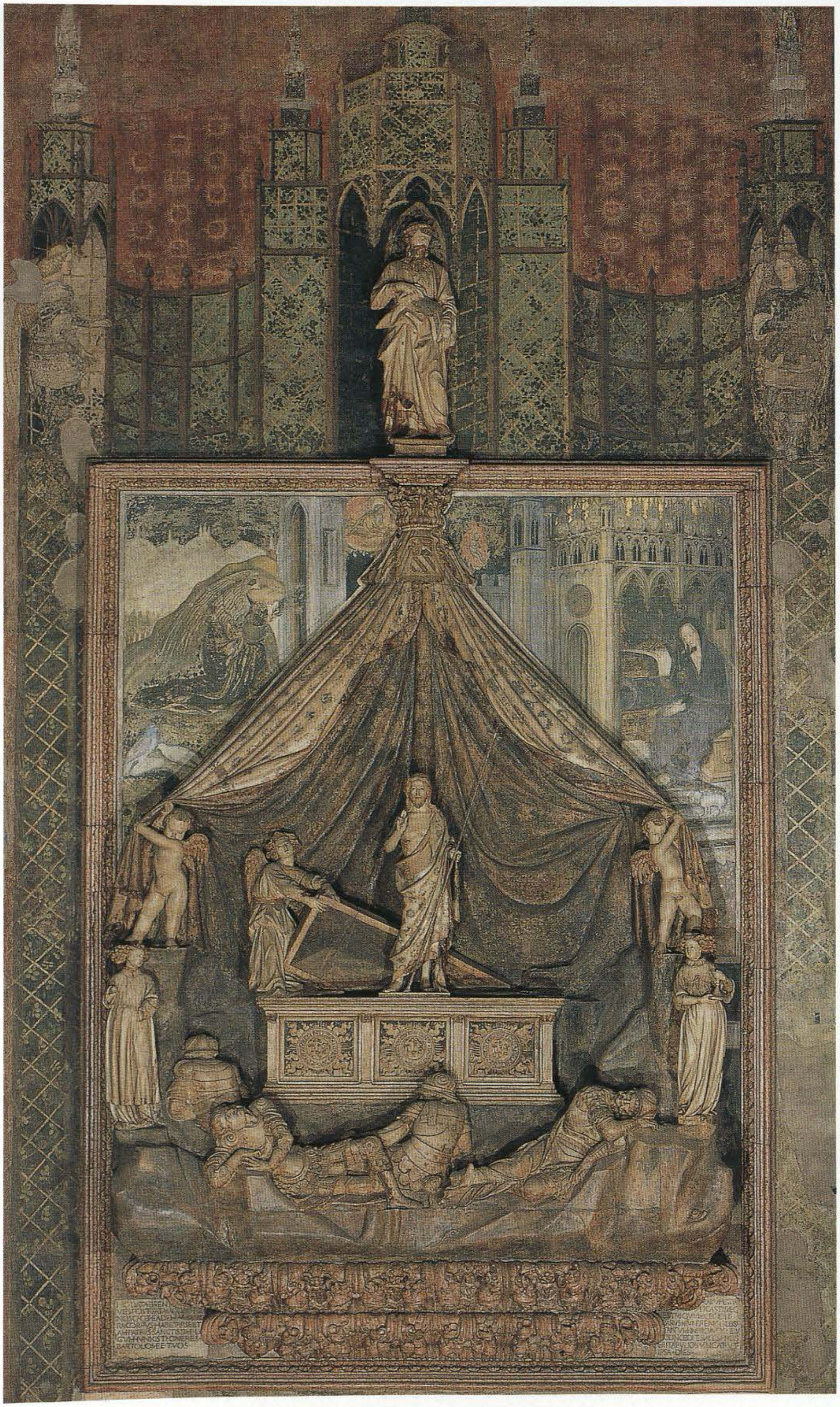
The Brunelleschian Model and Its Alternatives

To this point, we have been emphasizing the close connection between architecture, sculpture, and painting in the 1420s, looking especially at how the system of perspective united the means and ends of different arts. The constructions inspired by Brunelleschi, though, were a new and in many ways radical approach to picture-making, and it was hardly the case that every artist and patron embraced them without reservation. There were numerous reasons to be skeptical. Although linear perspective was based on optics, it did not capture the actual experience of seeing: it was built on the false premise that we look at the world through a single, unmoving eye, a premise that not only contradicted nature itself but also the very point of public works: simultaneously to address multiple viewers standing in various positions relative to the monument. It could be impractical to work out a rigorous perspective scheme that only looked "correct" from one position. And mural paintings, especially those such as Masaccio's, which had to cover wide surfaces, would result in ugly, distorted forms if they rigorously followed a single perspective scheme.

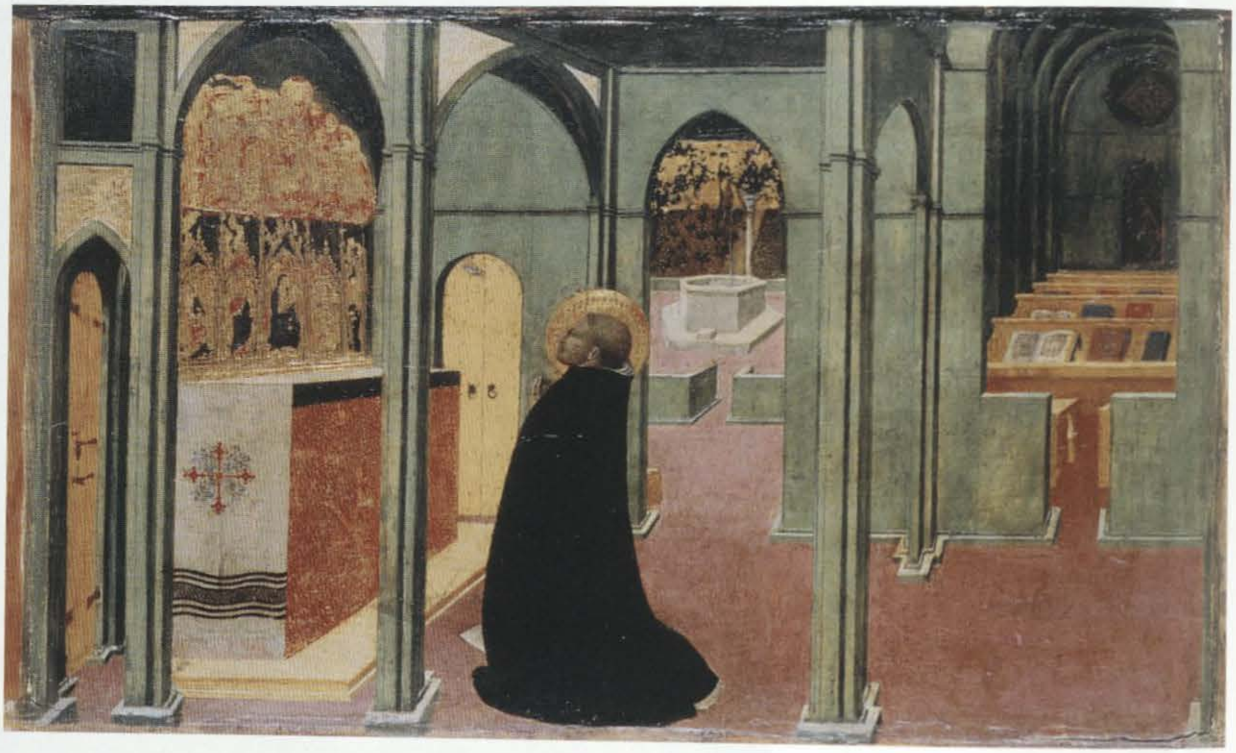
Nor was it always obvious that the scale of the figures should solely be a factor of their position in space, relative to other figures. In Masaccio's *Trinity* (*see* **fig. 4.18**), a unifying perspective scheme governs most of the composition, but the painter shifted to a higher point of view when it came time to show Christ on the Cross. In Ghiberti's *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* (**fig. 4.19**), a panel that seems to postdate his *Jacob and Esau*, the two figures at the center of the scene are larger than all the others, larger even than the soldiers in the foreground, who are closer to the viewer. The account of the queen's visit to Solomon in Kings 3:10 centers on the marvel she experienced in the presence of Solomon and his palace; rendering these two characters on a different scale from any of the others, and framing them before the main portal of a structure that resembles Florence Cathedral, conveys their nearly divine status. Comprehending how the attendants to each are positioned in space is important to understanding the scene, but violating the rules of perspective conveys more subtleties about the status of the panel's occupants.

Not all artists in Florence may fully have grasped or embraced the optical principles according to which perspective worked. Masolino, for example, seems to have had a shaky understanding of the system, or limited conviction in it, despite having Masaccio to consult. The close connection between the artists who did take up perspective made that seem a feature of one particular regional manner, the values of which could be questioned by those working in other places. Consider the case of the young painter Antonio Pisano, called "Pisanello" (*c.* 1394–1455), a sometime collaborator of Gentile da Fabriano who worked primarily in Mantua and Verona and also undertook commissions in Rome in the late 1420s. His most important surviving painting of the decade is the mural he added around a tomb commissioned by Francesco Brenzoni for the Veronese church of San Fermo Maggiore (**fig. 4.20**). Pisanello signed the work in 1425, which suggests his pride in what he had accomplished, and there can be little question that he was aware of the innovations happening to the south: he may have spent time in Florence while Gentile da Fabriano, his sometime artistic partner, was in the city, and on the tomb itself he worked alongside Nanni di Bartolo (*fl.* 1419–51), a Florentine sculptor who had completed commissions for the Florentine duomo and collaborated with Donatello. Pisanello's subject, showing characters interacting within and across an architectural setting, could certainly have taken up Florentine compositional devices, yet the painter evidently had little interest in this.

The central sculptural composition shows **putti** pulling back curtains to reveal the Resurrection of Christ. Pisanello framed this with a painting of the Annunciation, with the angel Gabriel in the upper left and the Virgin in the upper right. Outside this whole ensemble are additional painted angels and a sculpted prophet, set against a kind of pergola. Gabriel kneels and the Virgin sits; both would be too tall for their buildings were they to stand. In this case, there were practical reasons for making the figures so large relative to the buildings: placed high up on the wall, it was important that they be visible, and the constraints of the frame did not leave much flexibility. In addition, the architecture here had to



4.20
Pisanello, Brenzoni Monument, 1425. Fresco. San Fermo Maggiore, Verona. **The sculptures are by Nanni di Bartolo.**



4.21
Sassetta, *St. Thomas Aquinas in Prayer*, panel from the Arte della Lana altarpiece, 1423–26.
Tempera and gold on panel, 9¼ x 15⅜" (24 x 39 cm). Szépmüsvészeti Museum, Budapest

play a more symbolic than organizational role: it needed to designate the Virgin's bedchamber, and it needed to include the window through which the Holy Spirit passed like light – a way of conveying the idea that this woman would become a mother yet remain a virgin – but it did not have to provide different areas in which a complex story could take place. Eschewing the new Florentine manner of picture-making, Pisanello favored a flattening, decorative effect. His patrons obviously appreciated textiles – most of the sculpted monument, too, is given over to a massive polychromed canopy – and it may be that Pisanello aimed to equal a richly woven cloth. As we shall see in the next chapter, Pisanello would take much the same approach to all of his paintings, even those in formats that might lend themselves especially well to perspectival constructions. His difference from Masaccio, a near contemporary, shows the extent to which the experiments Brunelleschi inspired initially remained local ones.

Similarly, in Florence's neighboring city of Siena, artists drew not on the recent Florentine experiments in perspective but on the tradition of rendering space established by Duccio (*c.* 1255–1319) and the Lorenzetti brothers in the previous century. The painter Stefano di Giovanni, now commonly known as Sassetta (1392–1450/51), set narrative scenes in spatial interiors of considerable complexity in the predella of his altarpiece for the chapel of Siena's Wool Guild, a work dismantled and largely lost in the late eighteenth century. In the scenes of *St. Thomas Aquinas in Prayer* (fig. 4.21) and *The Vision of St. Thomas Aquinas* (fig. 4.22), Sassetta gives us glimpses into the inner spaces of a monastery. From the chapel, with its gilded polyptych, we can imagine ourselves passing into the **scriptorium** to our right or the cloister garden to the left, or slipping through the foreshortened door in the left foreground. Sassetta achieved this spatial enrichment, however, without resorting to the strict new principles he would have seen demonstrated in Donatello's relief for the Siena baptistery (*see* fig. 4.13); in fact, Sassetta would probably have found the idea of the single vanishing point, with its dominance of the pictorial organization, to be a limitation.

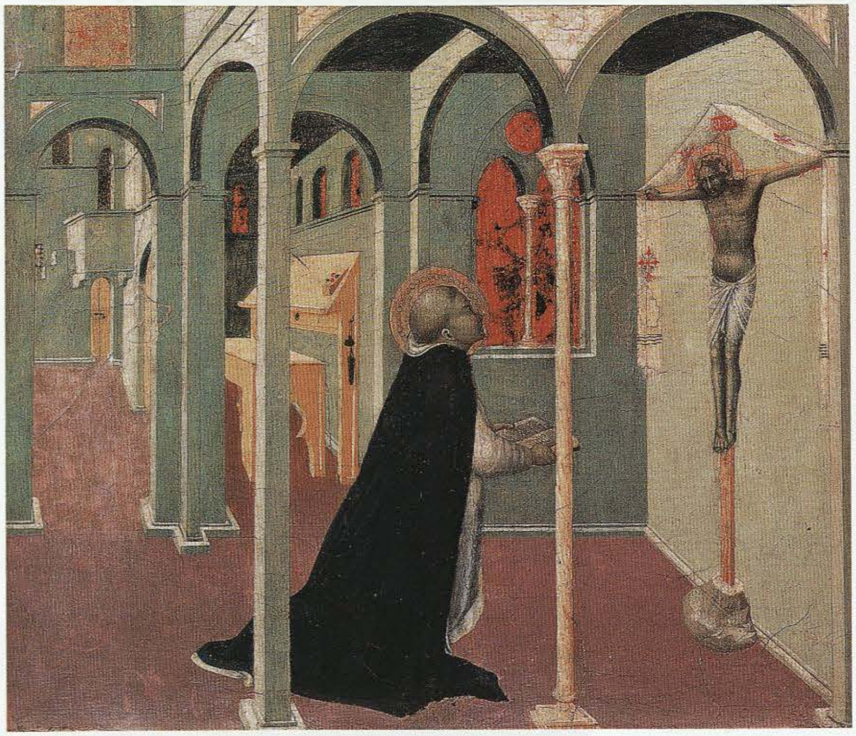
Sassetta's compatriot Giovanni di Paolo (*c.* 1403–1482) went further, and seems even deliberately to have flouted the principles of perspective. His *Entombment* (fig. 4.23), again a predella scene from a now dismembered altarpiece for the Malavolti family in the church of San Domenico, Siena, not only drew on compositional formulas current since the time of Duccio – the bearing of Christ's body and the gesturing women – but also looked beyond even these to the older tradition of Byzantine painting, from which he adapted the strange, jagged rock formations. Giovanni was an admirer of Gentile da Fabriano, and in particular the way Gentile employed gold to create light effects. Here, against a blaze of striated golden rays, Giovanni hauntingly rendered the shadow of the male figure who bends to lift Christ's body into the tomb. The effect is more to inspire wonder than to describe a natural phenomenon for illusionistic purposes, the way Masaccio did in his *Tribute Money* (*see* fig. 4.16). In the ensuing years, as Sienese painters increasingly registered the impact of Florentine perspective and modeling in light and dark, Giovanni became more willfully individualist, as if trying to mount a Sienese "alternative" to the Florentines. His version of Gentile's *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 4.24) cancels every gesture toward spatial illusion on the part of the older artist, turning his composition into a decorative linear calligraphy that stresses pictorial surface over the illusion of depth.

Leon Battista Alberti: A Humanist Theory of Painting

Today, we use the word "**humanists**" to refer to Renaissance scholars of the liberal arts, or *studia humanitatis* (literally, "humane studies," although corresponding roughly with the modern term "humanities"). The liberal arts – that is, arts of the free-born, undertaken for their own sake and not for money – initially comprised a group of studies based in mathematics (geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy) and in language (grammar, rhetoric, and logic). They might extend to written practices like poetry, history, and moral philosophy, but they did not include the visual arts of painting and sculpture, which traditionally fell into the category of the "mechanical" arts, worthy only of the low-born, and ranked with carpentry, butchering, and so on. The humanists followed a number of professional callings, serving as secretaries, diplomats, notaries, historians, and educators, but all were concerned with the effectiveness of language in public life. These men modeled their writing on such ancient authors as the Roman philosopher Cicero (106–43 BCE). Many also worried about the accuracy of the texts of ancient authors then available to them, since centuries of transmission in manuscript had led to a proliferation of errors, interpolations, and even outright forgeries. It is through the efforts of humanists who scoured the old monastic libraries of Europe in order to find the oldest and most reliable manuscript versions of ancient poets, orators, and historians that we have those texts today.

By the late Middle Ages, scholars of antiquity had become aware that classical authors, such as the encyclopedist Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE), held the achievement of ancient painters, sculptors, and architects in high esteem. Petrarch, the pioneering poet and humanist whom we saw comparing Simone Martini to Virgil (*see* p. 13), also celebrated the Sienese painter in his annotations to Pliny, comparing Simone to the ancient painter Apelles who had been honored by Alexander the Great. Petrarch here laid the groundwork for a reconception of painting as a "liberal" rather than a "manual" art; humanists in Ferrara and Mantua bestowed similar praise on Pisanello.

Inspired by the artistic achievements of his own day, Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) would take the defense of painting's liberal status a good deal further. Alberti came from a Florentine family that had been associated with the arts before being sent into exile at the end of the fourteenth century. This provided Alberti himself, who studied at the universities of Bologna and Padua, an opportunity to see first hand what was happening in northern Italy, and to bridge the gap between artistic events in Florence and the world of such painters as Pisanello in such towns as Verona and Mantua. In 1434, following a period of working as a secretary for the Pope in Rome, Alberti returned to Florence, where he was appointed as one of the canons (salaried resident clergy) of Florence Cathedral. One year after his arrival, he wrote a short treatise with the title *On Painting* (1435). The printing press had not yet been invented, so Alberti could not have hoped that his thoughts would find the broad audience at which later writers aimed. After completing the vernacular version of the treatise and dedicating it to Brunelleschi, however, he sent a Latin edition to Pisanello's chief patron in Mantua, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga. Alberti was a scholar, and he would later take up architecture, but when he wrote this treatise he was an amateur artist at best. Nevertheless, *On Painting* reads as a kind of interpretation and codification of what had been

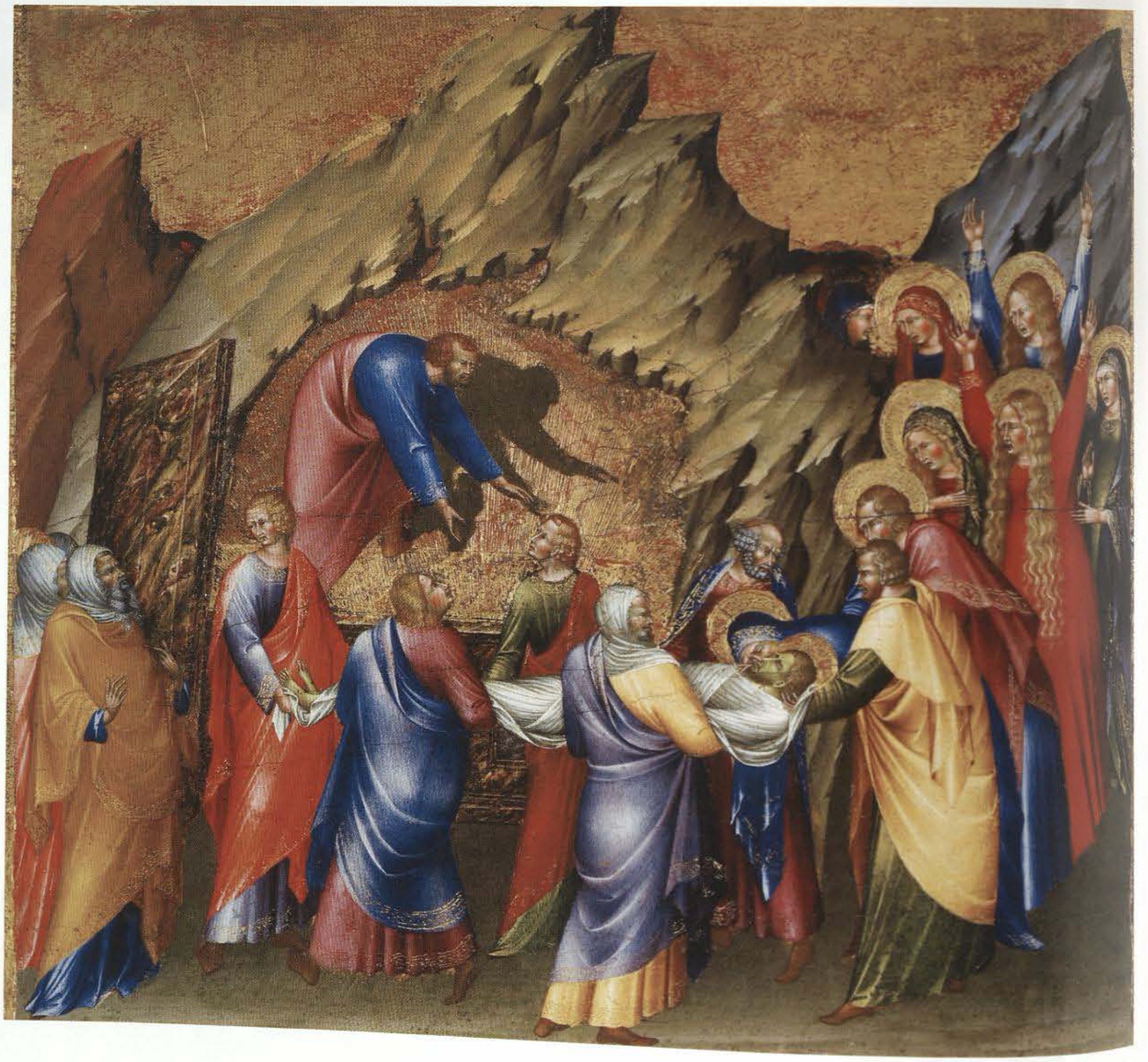


4.22
Sassetta, *The Vision of St. Thomas Aquinas*, panel from the Arte della Lana altarpiece, 1423–26.
Tempera and gold on panel, 9⅞ x 11⅜" (25 x 28.8 cm). Pinacoteca, Vatican

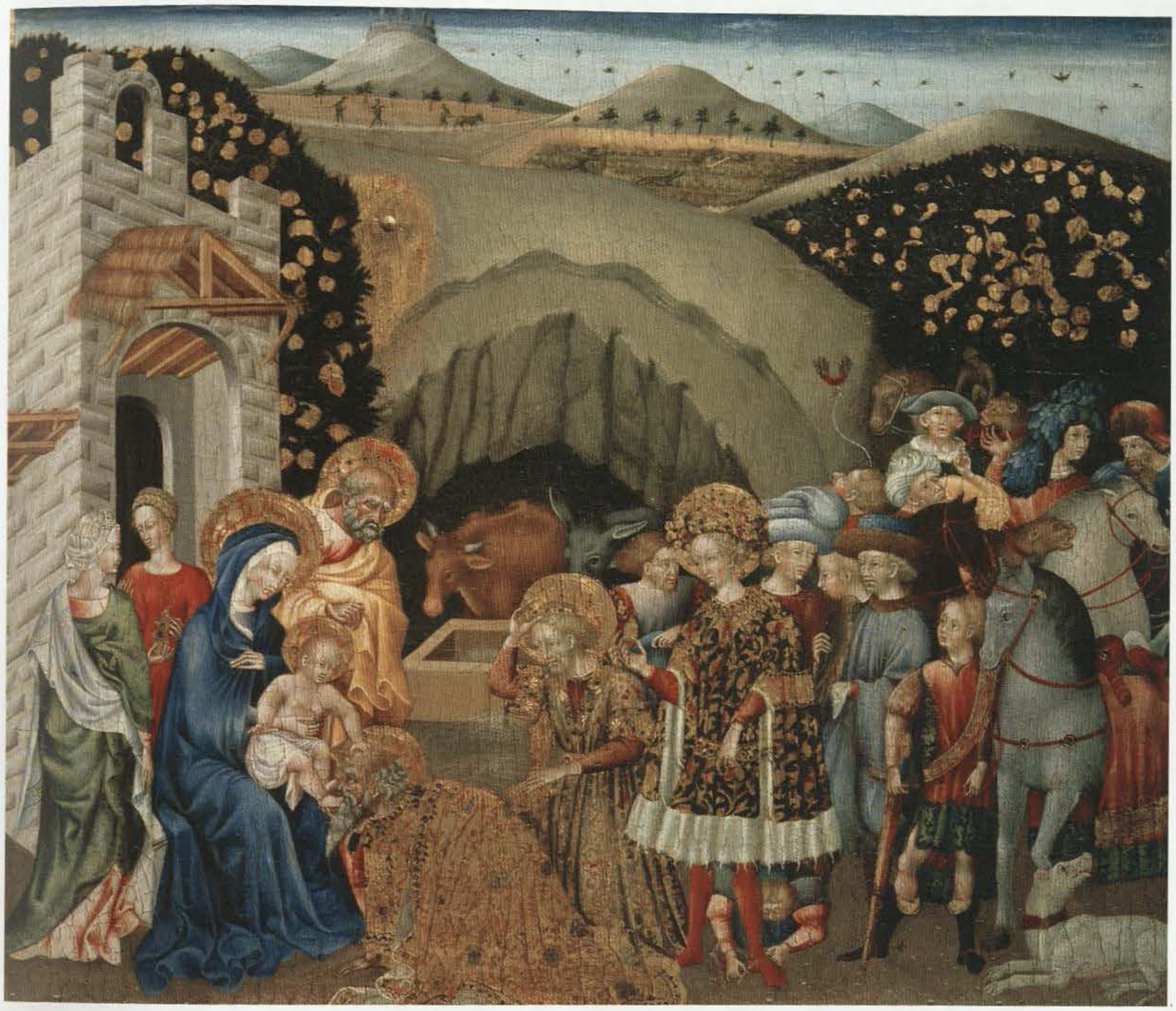
happening in Florence in the 1420s, and it offers a valuable account of the innovations we have been looking at.

The first of the treatise's three books lays out the geometry involved in putting together a painting in linear perspective, while the remainder of the text has to do with the conception of the painting more generally, and with the nature and education of the artist. In many respects, Alberti conceived painting as an almost literary enterprise. He referred to the work that the artist would make as an *historia*, the Italian for "story" or "history," though Alberti applied it to any image (painting, mosaic, or relief) showing figures in action: as examples, he gave a narrative mosaic, Giotto's *Navicella (Christ Walking on the Waves)* and the non-narrative mythological subject of the Three Graces. The concept, at least as Alberti employs it, has broad application, but it also allows a useful contrast between static devotional icons and paintings with human action and expression. The categories did not need to be mutually exclusive: Sassetta's narrative predella panels, *St. Thomas Aquinas in Prayer* (*see* fig. 4.21) and *The Vision of St. Thomas Aquinas* (*see* fig. 4.22), render space in which action unfolds, yet both of them include a centralized figure before an image that bore a different status – a Crucifix, a devotional polyptych. Donatello's *St. George* relief (***see* fig. 3.8**) is narrative in content but "iconic" in organization. The kind of painting Alberti envisioned would manifest variety, especially in the types of figures it included, and it would focus on a range of gestures. Alberti's inference was that the creation of the perspectival space, a space that allowed the interaction of multiple characters, impelled the painter to "stage" certain kinds of scenes.

The task of the painter, as Alberti saw it, was not to manufacture an object or to reproduce conventionalized images, but to "compose." This cast the artist's work in distinctly literary terms, and at various points Alberti insists



4.23
Giovanni di Paolo, *Entombment*, from the Malavolti altarpiece, 1426.
Tempera with gold leaf on panel. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore



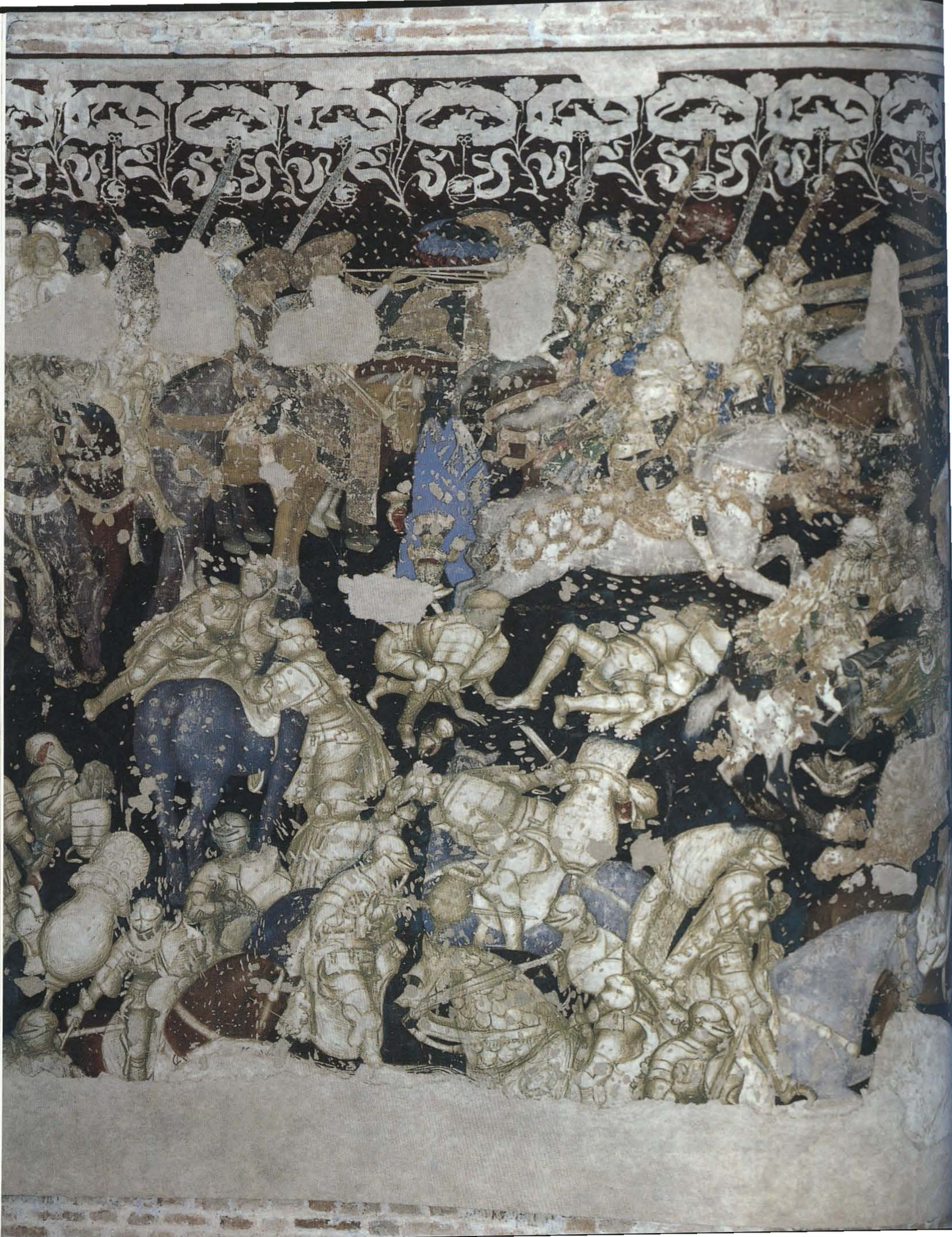
4.24
Giovanni di Paolo, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1440–45. Tempera and oil on panel, $10^{5}/_{8}$ x $9^{1}/_{8}$" (27 x 23.2 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland

that what painters and writers do is closely analogous: Perhaps, he writes, "the artist who seeks dignity above all in his *historia* ought to represent very few figures, for as paucity of words imparts majesty to a prince...so the presence of only the strictly necessary number of bodies confers dignity on a picture." Elsewhere, the comparison guides his pedagogic views:

> I would have those who begin to learn the art of painting do what I see practiced by teachers of writing. They first teach all the signs of the alphabet separately, and then how to put syllables together, and then whole words. Our students should follow this method with painting.

Alberti's implication was that painting could aspire to be a liberal art, a practice worthy of an educated gentleman. The use of perspective already gave painting a mathematical basis that allowed comparison to arithmetic, geometry, and music, and Alberti treated painting not as a job one did for money, but as a leisure activity, for pleasure. The very art itself, he suggested, originated when Narcissus, a youth known from Greek and Roman myth, fell in love with his own image reflected in the surface of a pool: a painting, like a poem, represented its creator; its beauty was one that originated from the artist's self, one for which the painter might well feel a strong sense of possession.

Painters throughout the Renaissance were still, on the whole, artisans who relied on their craft to provide an income. In Italy, the subject of nearly every substantial work they would undertake was dictated by a client who expected them to execute agreed-upon content in a more or less pre-established style, sometimes following the requirements of a written contract. The idea of painting promoted in Alberti's book was to a certain degree a fantasy, but it characterized the ambitions that many in Italy would cultivate from this point forward.



5

1430–1440

Pictorial Techniques and the Uses of Drawing

Technique: Painting Panels and Frescoes 112

The Centrality of *Disegno* 114
  Pisanello's *St. Eustace* 116
  Paolo Uccello 117

Inventing Antiquity 122
  An Emperor in Italy 122
  The *cantorie* of Donatello and Luca della Robbia 123

Jacopo Bellini and the Transformation of the Modelbook 125

5

1430–1440

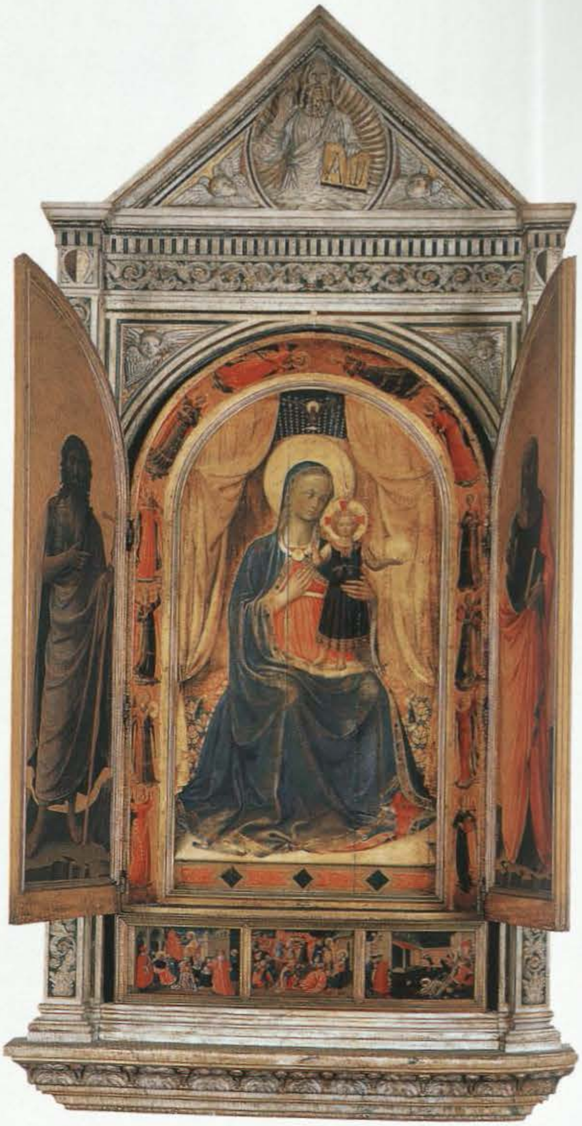
Pictorial Techniques and the Uses of Drawing

Technique: Painting Panels and Frescoes

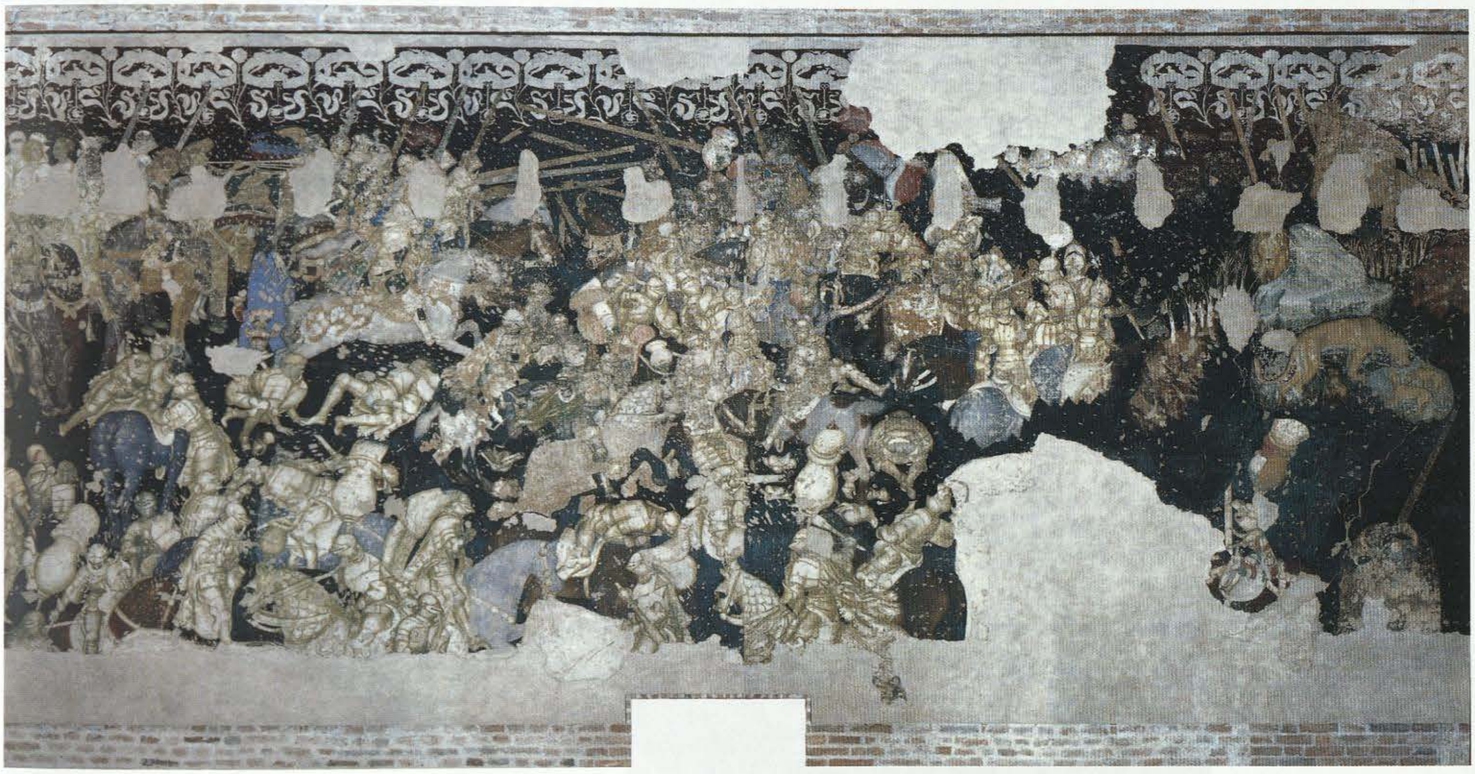
The making of such a painting as the *Virgin and Child* by the artist-friar known as Fra Angelico (*c.* 1395–1455) was a laborious and intensively collaborative process (fig. 5.1). The work forms part of a small architectural structure known as a tabernacle, produced for the offices of the Linaiuoli in Florence (whom we have already seen as patrons of Donatello's *St. Mark*; *see* fig. 3.5). In fact, the guild's desire for an object that included a large wooden panel with convex frame and shutters decorated "inside and out with the finest colors," along with a carved marble casing, required separate contracts with the painter Fra Angelico, the sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti – who assigned the carving to two assistants – and a woodworker known as Il Papero. Such teamwork had creative consequences: the lifesize saints that Fra Angelico painted on the tabernacle doors, with their slender proportions and their crisp, calligraphic draperies, consciously imitate Ghiberti's saints for Orsanmichele (*see* figs. 3.3 and 3.9). Though the sumptuous main panel recalls the work of Gentile da Fabriano in its glowing gold and its simulated silks and brocades, it also aims at the three-dimensionality of sculpture. The solidly modeled Virgin occupies an intelligible volume of space, beneath a starry vault that recedes over her head.

The wooden support for such a painting required many hours of labor even before the painter could lay his hand to the work. Designed to last, the panel had to undergo a series of procedures to make it stable and durable. Wood, unless it is properly treated, tends to crack or to split as it becomes drier over time: it can also warp, causing the painted surface to flake and detach. Larger wooden panels like this one, composed of several vertical planks of poplar glued together, usually required additional bracing in the form of horizontal strips fixed to the reverse, although this was not a possibility for the shutters, which are painted on both sides. Since wood is too absorbent to be painted on directly, the first task faced by Fra Angelico's assistants when the panel arrived from the woodworker was to apply a smooth ground in several layers. They would have coated the panels with animal glue, covered it with linen to mask the joins in the wood, then applied at least two layers of liquid ground on top of this, in the form of a white powder known as *gesso* (sometimes called "gypsum" in English) combined with animal glue. Each coating required several days to dry, and the painter's assistants would have worked the final layer with **pumice** to render it as smooth as possible.

At this point, Fra Angelico would have applied his design. Most painters preferred charcoal for underdraw-



5.1
Fra Angelico, *Virgin and Child (Linaiuoli Madonna)*, 1433–36. Marble tabernacle, tempera on panel, 9'7" x 9' (2.92 x 2.76 m) (closed). Museo di San Marco, Florence



5.2
Pisanello, ***Tournament Scene, c.*** **1439–42.** Fresco. Sala del Pisanello, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua

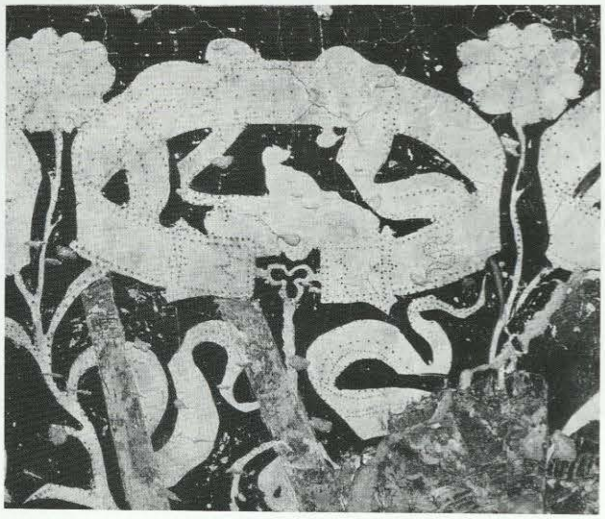
ing, but this artist's particularly meticulous approach led him to employ pen and ink as well, and he often scored his figures into the *gesso* using a sharp point. With the underdrawing in place, his team would have then treated the areas of the panel that were to be gilded with a red, water-based glue known as **bole**, and then applied very thin squares of gold leaf. Haloes and other details required additional treatment with metal punches; the resulting effect was that of elaborately chased goldsmith work (like that we saw in Lorenzo Monaco's *Coronation* pictures, which were produced in much the same way; *see* fig. 3.11). The brocades and silks that give this panel its particular splendor were produced by applying paint over areas of gold. The paint medium is tempera: mineral or organic pigments, ground by assistants to a fine powder, mixed with egg yolk. The painter would lay in colors with small, precise strokes, proceeding slowly across the surface. Within a dimly lit church interior the intense tones of the tempera would have glowed like jewels.

Paintings on walls called for a different range of techniques. All the examples we have seen so far, from Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Sala della Pace in Siena (*see* fig. 1.7), to Masaccio and Masolino's Brancacci Chapel in Florence (*see* figs. 4.15–4.17), are examples of ***fresco*** (literally, "fresh," or "wet"). In *fresco* painting, the artist's assistants prepared the wall with an ***arriccio***, a layer of rough plaster on which the painter applied his design in a red pigment known as ***sinopia***. Over this drawing, the painter would spread the ***intonaco***, a second, smoother layer of plaster, on which he would apply color in the form of pigments combined with a solution of water and lime. As the plaster dried, the pigments physically bonded with it, resulting in a solid and durable surface. For this to happen, however, the painter had to finish his work while the *intonaco* was still wet ("fresco"), requiring him to decide in advance how much he could get done in a given period and to proceed segment by segment: the joins between the segments typically separate the equivalent area to a day's work, and the sections themselves have thus come to be called ***giornate*** (singular *giornata*, after the Italian word for day, *giorno*).

To render details of ornament or costume, the artist had to turn to the more time-consuming process of working on top of the parts of the dried (***secco***) mural. Painting *a secco*, the artist was no longer working against the clock; what he made using this technique, however, was susceptible to fading or flaking. A damaged but still spectacular series of frescoes (fig. 5.2) painted between 1439 and 1441 by Pisanello (*c.* 1394–1455) in the palace of the Gonzaga rulers of Mantua, showing a scene of jousting with numerous knights in armor, illustrates the uneven durability of the different methods, *fresco* and *secco*. The parts of the painting that survive (discovered under layers of whitewash in the 1970s) were those painted in true *fresco*, though their incomplete appearance also makes it clear that they originally depended on *a secco* touches for their impact, and the armor of the knights would additionally have been completed in silver and gold leaf applied over the *sinopia*.

The exposed *sinopia* tells us a great deal about the role of drawing in Italian workshops in the early fifteenth century. Pisanello, an accomplished and vigorous draftsman, appears to have planned the composition on the wall itself, generating a battle from a montage of figures; he made them solidly three-dimensional, but arranged them across rather than within the expansive pictorial field. The artist studied some of the more difficult figures independently on paper in advance, including those with limbs or entire bodies extended perpendicular to the picture plane. The convincing rendering of such **foreshortened** forms was a mark of particular skill that Pisanello proudly displayed throughout his work.

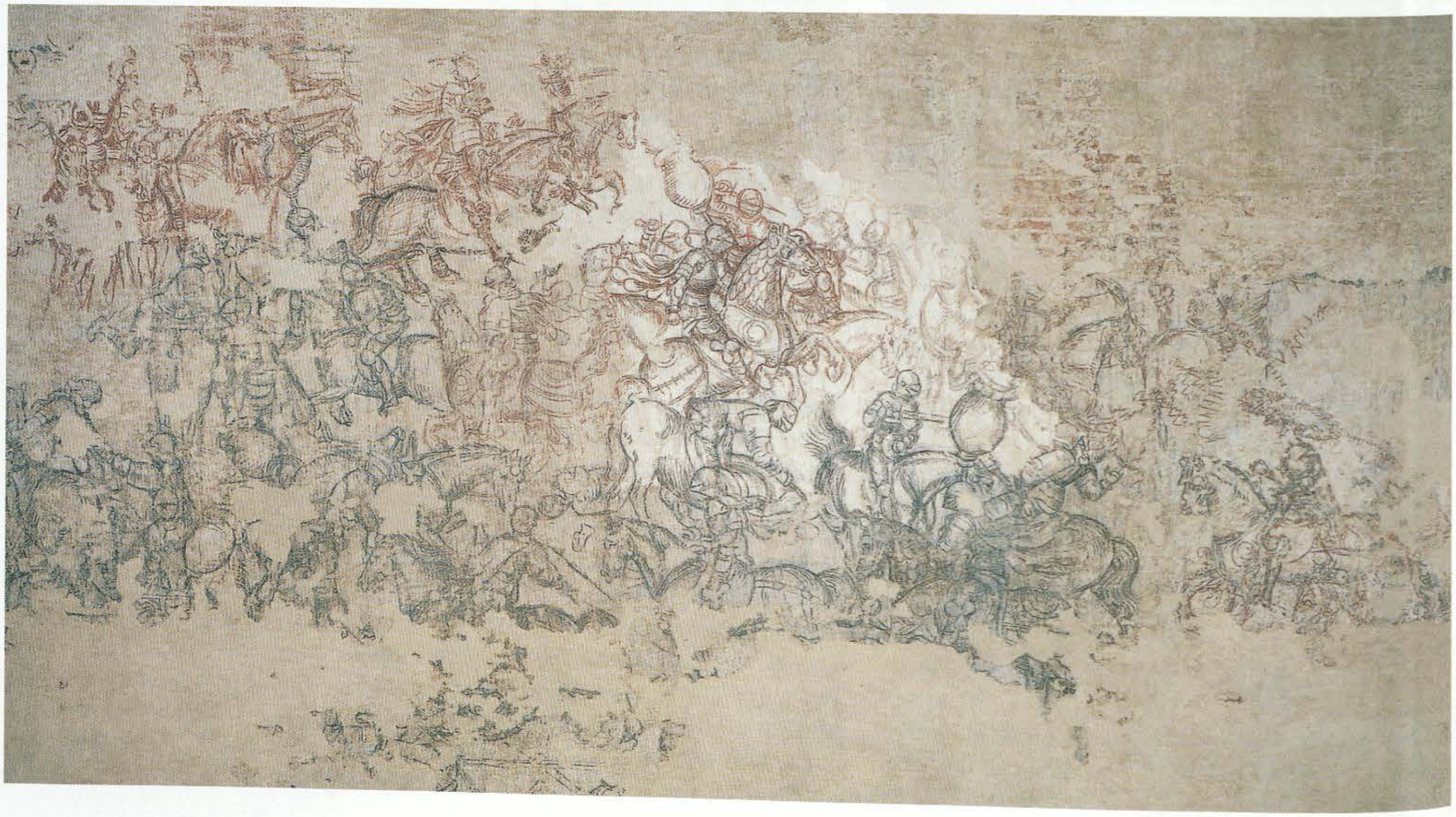
The fresco provides evidence of other uses of drawing. The outlines of the fluttering banners that form a decorative border in the upper zone, for example, are composed of minuscule dots called ***spolveri*** (figs. 5.3–5.4). Here Pisanello has used a paper pattern known as a **cartoon** (from the Italian word *cartone*, meaning a large sheet of paper or parchment), perforating the lines of the drawing with a stylus, then tapping or rubbing charcoal dust (called "**pounce**," or *spolvero* in Italian) through the holes to leave a dotted outline on the wall. Cartoons had allowed earlier artists to repeat decorative patterns, but painters were beginning to see new potential in them, using cartoons for entire figures and even reversing them to create figures in symmetrical pairs.



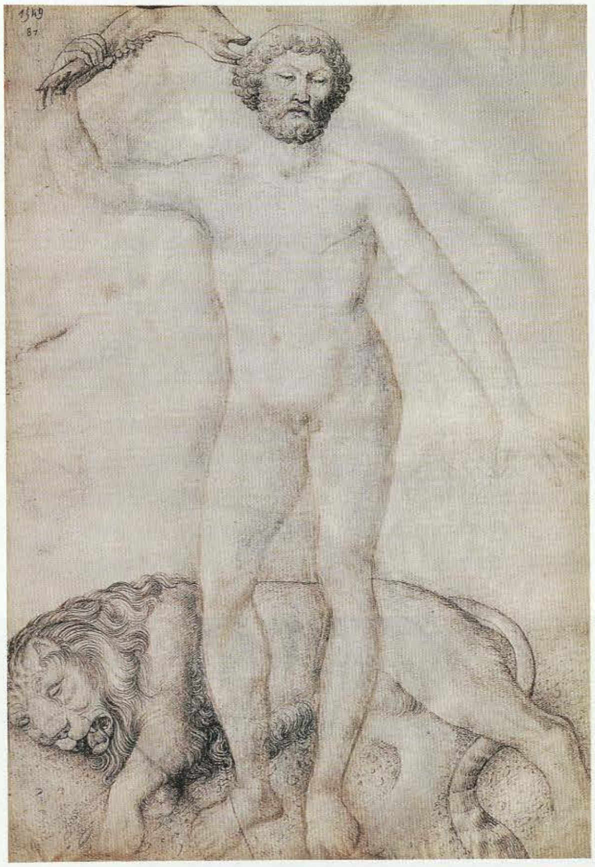
5.3
Pisanello, *Tournament Scene.* Detail showing *spolveri.* Fresco. Sala del Pisanello, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua

The Centrality of *Disegno*

In his early fifteenth-century handbook on the art of painting, the Florentine Cennino Cennini encouraged aspiring artists to work under a good master, and thereby



5.4
Pisanello, *sinopia* beneath the removed *Tournament Scene* fresco. Sala del Pisanello, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua



5.5
Jacopo Bellini, ***Samson and the Lion.*** Silverpoint, pen and brown ink on parchment, 15 x 10¼" (38 x 26 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (RF 1515.57, fol 89r)

learn the fundamentals of the profession: grinding pigments, preparing wood panels, making pens and brushes. Above all, though, he wanted them to draw. It was drawing, or *disegno,* that gave painting its special distinction as something more than a mechanical activity. The apprentice, Cennini wrote, should spend a year copying simple subjects on a panel coated with an erasable surface of ground bone and saliva. From here he could progress to drawing with the pen on parchment or on paper, which would "make you expert, skillful, and capable of much drawing out of your own head." Cennini recommended going out to copy figures from paintings in churches and chapels, stressing the importance of choosing a small number of good artists and learning from them alone. The last stage in one's training as a draftsman was the "triumphal gateway" of copying from nature.

Drawing transmitted the principles of art across generations: Cennini saw himself as passing on what he had learned from a century of predecessors, going back to Giotto. Continuity required extensive copying; at the same time, Cennini believed that it was through the very reproduction of models that artists began to manifest individual qualities or recognizable styles of their own. Copying involved what Cennini referred to as the *fantasia* (roughly, the "imagination"), the part of the mind in which images formed. His belief that even the most repetitive paintings depended on imagination encouraged him to make elevated claims for the dignity and intellectual prestige of the art. Just like poets, he asserted, painters could produce figures that resembled nature or they could deviate from nature entirely, creating fantastic inventions that had no reality outside of the artist's mind. Painting by definition combined imagination and skill of hand, "in order to discover things not seen, hiding themselves under the shadow of natural objects, and to fix them with the hand, presenting to plain sight what does not actually exist." Painters, in his view, created an entirely new reality based on observation of the physical world: from the form of a man and the form of a horse, the painter could produce a synthetic fiction – the form of a centaur. The role Cennini assigned to the imagination distinguishes his treatise from Leon Battista Alberti's later *On Painting* (*see* chapter 4, p. 107), which, in emphasizing observed reality, says nothing about the topic.

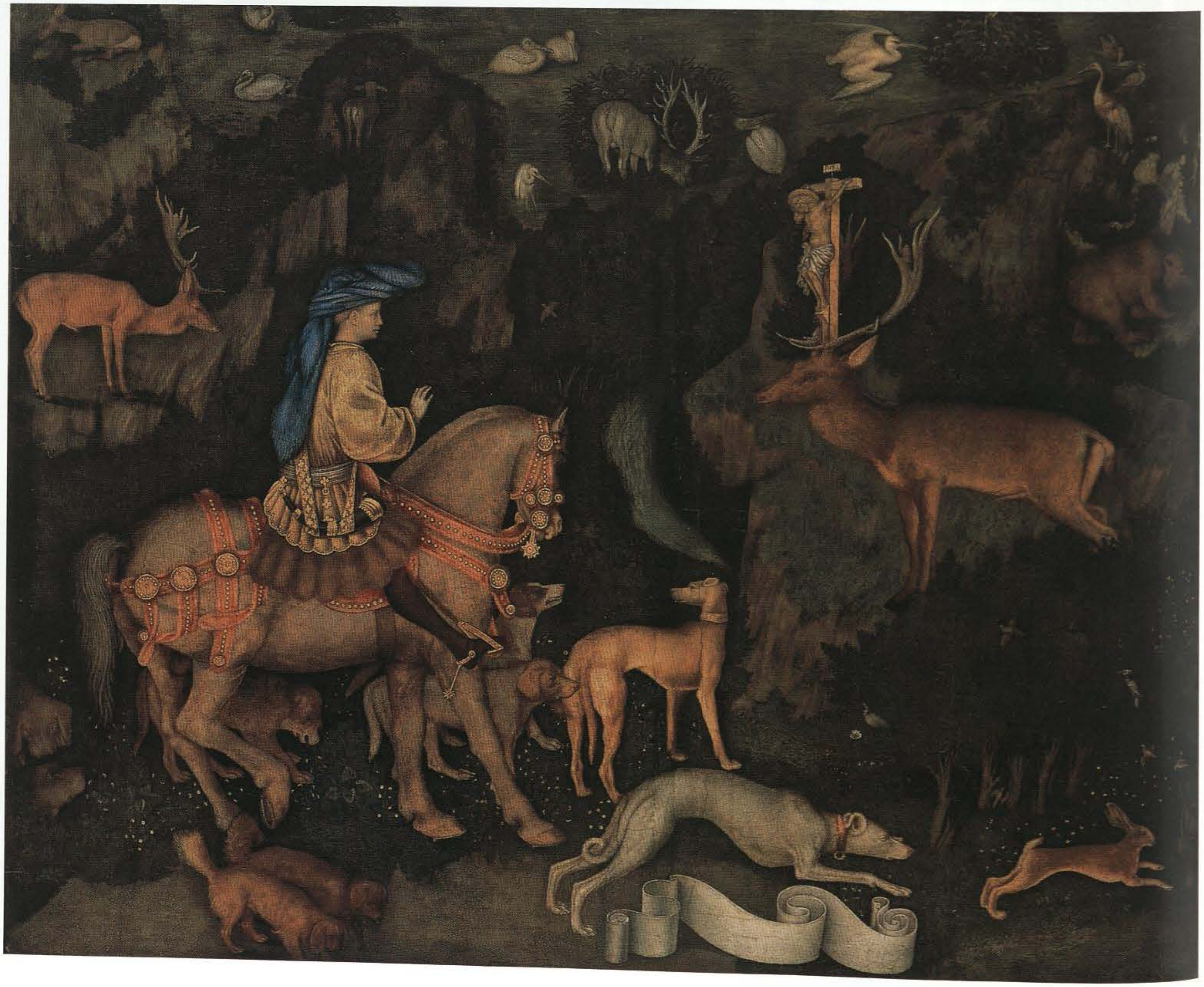
Cennini accepted, although did not feel called upon to explain, the principle that painting involved both a process of reproduction and the projection of an internal image, one that bore characteristics of the artist who had formed it in his mind. Cennini might well have agreed with Alberti's idea of painting as both poetic invention and as simulation of visual experience (the "perspective as window" effect), but his more practical treatise differs in its detailed descriptions of how painters manufactured things, subjects on which Alberti is silent.

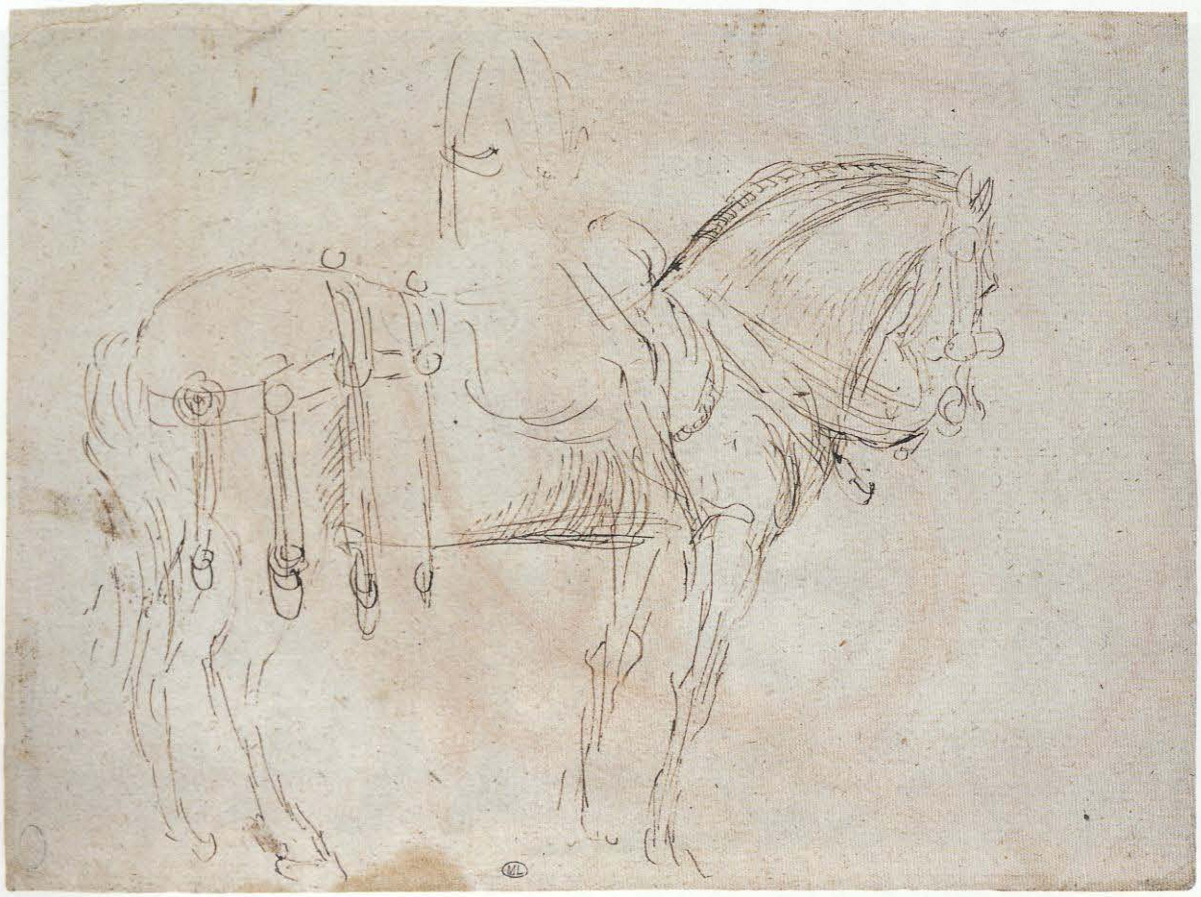
Cennini's pages on drawing cover a wide range of techniques and of media, and they touch on an array of purposes that drawing had acquired in the Italian workshop by the middle decades of the fifteenth century. When learning to draw, the student used a sharpened silver stylus, known as **silverpoint**, which left a fine trace of black silver oxide when dragged over a prepared surface (fig. 5.5). Silverpoint demanded precision and deliberation. The medium did not lend itself to soft or broken lines, nor to very deep tones; when an artist needed to create areas of shading, he had to resort to **hatching** (short close parallel strokes) or to the addition of watercolor washes. Preparing a surface to accept silverpoint was itself time-consuming, and the raw materials were costly; once drawn on such a surface, moreover, silverpoint lines could not be erased. Apprentices learning the practice drew on wooden panels that could be recoated to avoid wasting time and money. Only when a master made drawings he intended to keep as a kind of studio stock – templates that could be copied by trainee draftsmen or that could serve as a source of motifs for paintings – did he use more permanent supports. Until mid century, the most common of these was parchment, a durable but expensive support made from sheep or goat skins otherwise used for important documents and for books. When draftsmen made model drawings on parchment, they tended to produce highly finished works, combining a range of media that might include silverpoint, pen and ink, black chalk, and watercolor. Only in the 1430s did paper begin to become both more generally available and more affordable than parchment, a factor that would have significant implications for how artists would approach the practice of drawing. Fabriano, the hometown of the painter Gentile, was the major center of paper production.

Pisanello's *St. Eustace*

Pisanello's *Vision of St. Eustace* (fig. 5.6) assembles motifs from his own studio models that the artist carefully worked up from life studies, or in some cases – such as the hound and the hare – derived from older modelbooks by north Italian artists. Yet Pisanello also made new drawings that appear to have been intended specially for this painting, such as studies of horses, stags, and birds. Several of these, executed in pen and watercolor, sometimes on tinted paper, display a much greater freedom of handling than would be characteristic of a model drawing, and show the artist working out his first thoughts (fig. 5.7). Others show the artist's skill in massing pen strokes to produce what amounts to a relief map of the head of a horse (fig. 5.8). The refined technique and sumptuous effect of the painting – for example, in the gold ornaments of the saint's costume and the *pastiglia* harnesses – indicate that the small panel was a prestige commission, probably made for a nobleman. Its subject, the miraculous apparition of the crucified Christ to the pagan knight Eustace, involved a scene of hunting, the princely sport *par excellence*, and would have appealed to courtly patrons. The variety of animals and the glamor-

5.6
Pisanello, *The Vision of St. Eustace*, c. 1438–41.
Tempera on panel, 21½ x 25¾" (54.8 x 65.5 cm).
National Gallery, London





5.7

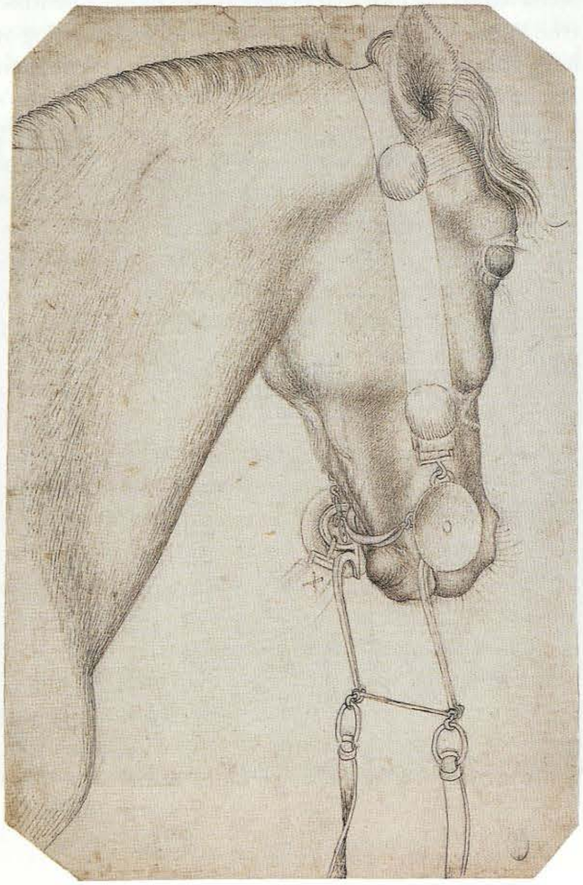
Pisanello, Horse and Rider, study for *Vision of St. Eustace*, *c.* 1434–38. Pen and ink on red prepared paper, 7³/₄ x 10¹/₄" (19.5 x 26 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris

ous figure of the rider represent an artistic performance, a display of the repertory at which Pisanello excelled.

In his Latin history *Of Famous Men* (*c.* 1450), the humanist Bartolomeo Facio praised the artist for his "poet's genius." Pisanello, in fact, received more literary tributes of this kind than any other Italian artist of the early fifteenth century; writers praised his ability to "equal nature's works," both in his copiousness of detail and in his images' astonishing lifelikeness. As with his frescoes in Mantua (*see* figs. 5.2–5.4), this naturalism emerged primarily in the individual motif: the landscape space is largely symbolic, a flat ground on which the figures have been superimposed. As we saw in the last chapter (*see* p. 104), Pisanello certainly knew the principles of perspective; his paintings of the 1430s, however, tended to favor a more all-inclusive point of view. *St. Eustace*, for example, shows us something that no human being would ever see at one go, the encyclopedic variety of creatures that a woody landscape might contain.

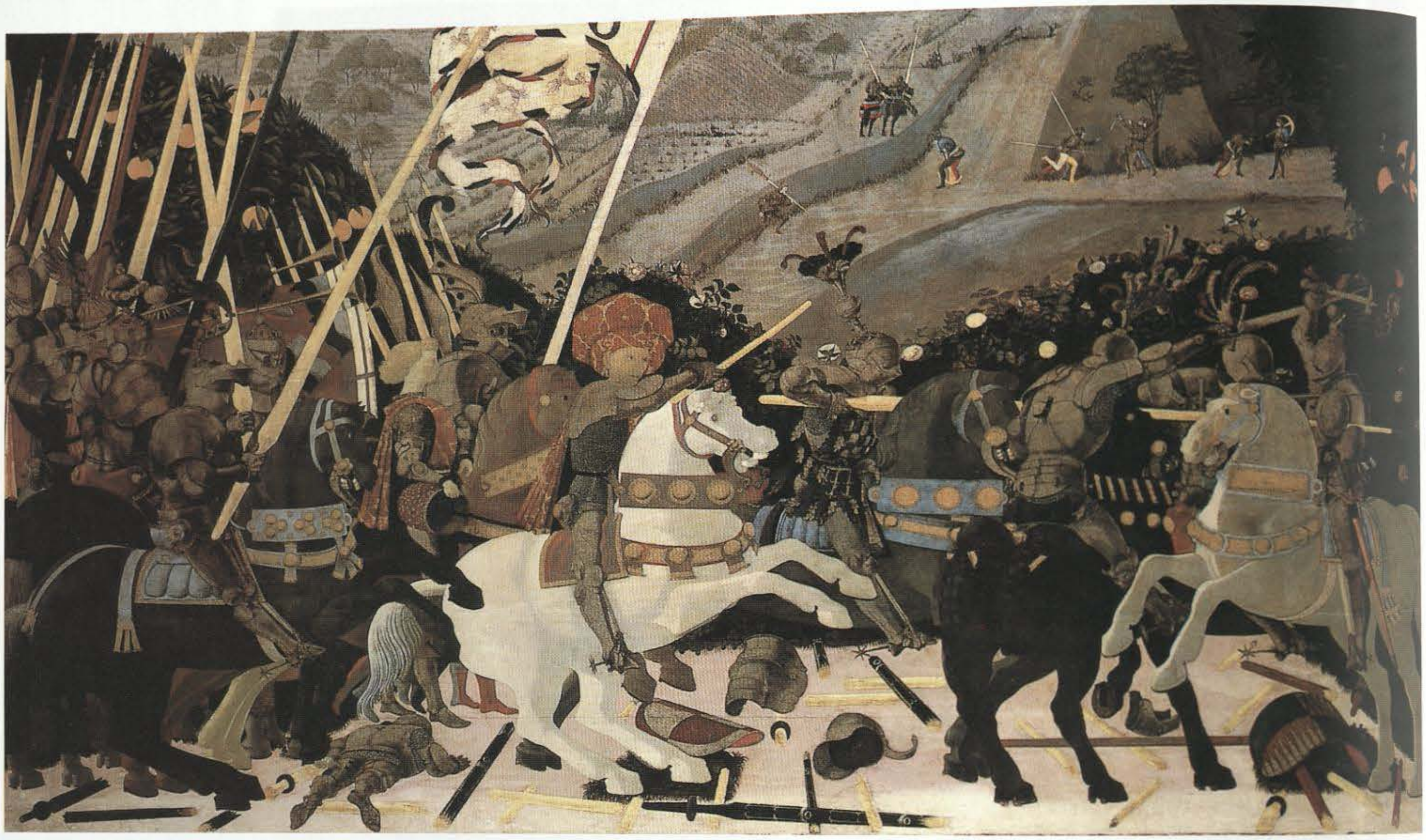
Paolo Uccello

The world that Pisanello's Florentine contemporary Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) visualized in his *Battle of San Romano* (fig. 5.9) provides a striking contrast. Uccello



5.8

Pisanello, Head of a Horse, study for *Vision of St. Eustace*, *c.* 1434–42. Pen and ink with black chalk on paper, 10¹/₂ x 6³/₄" (26.6 x 17.1 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris



5.9
Paolo Uccello, *The Battle of San Romano*, 1436?
Tempera and silver foil on poplar, 6' x 10'5¾" (1.82 x 3.2 m). National Gallery, London

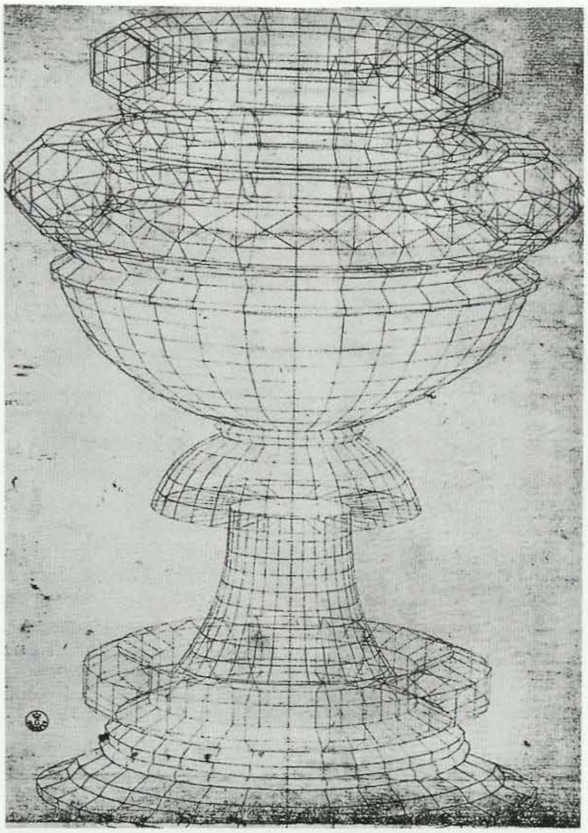
depicts a historical battle, a recent Florentine victory over Siena led by the mercenary captain Niccolò da Tolentino (the figure with the prominent red headdress charging at left), although he makes this look no more violent than Pisanello's Arthurian tournament (*see* fig. 5.2). Uccello's Florentine patrons, like the courtiers who would have admired Pisanello's murals, were enthusiastic readers of chivalric romances, with their ritualized, even bloodless vision of war. They expected Uccello, just as Pisanello's supporters had expected him, to be attentive to the pageantry and decorative potential of his subject matter: the *Battle of San Romano* belonged to a series of three paintings that adorned a private palace. Yet whereas Pisanello organized his battle like a tapestry, spreading it across a large area of wall, Uccello composed his work with regard to the rectangular form of the panel support, emphasizing horizontals and diagonals and attempting to organize everything within a uniform pictorial space.

The engagement takes place in a stage-like space in which scattered weapons and the foreshortened bodies of fallen warriors insist on the underlying rigor of a perspectival grid. Uccello departs from the system only at the center, where he masks the recession of orthogonal lines toward a vanishing point with a flowering hedgerow and screen of orange trees, beyond which rolling hills, fields, and warriors observe the much older spatial convention found in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's landscapes (*see* figs. 1.7–1.10) or Gentile's *Adoration of the Magi* (*see* fig. 4.3). Uccello's figures, already subjected to a kind of bodily abstraction through their armor, have a faceted quality, as if he has attempted to construct them by a process of geometric projection, regularizing the curved forms of nature into a schematic system of planes. Perspective here has little to do with the optical and illusionistic interests of Brunelleschi and Masaccio. Numerical order and geometric commensuration, in this case, transform visible reality more than they simulate it.

Such effects are even more apparent in the extraordinary mural (fig. 5.11) that Uccello painted in the Chiostro Verde ("Green Cloister") of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, part of a series of Old Testament scenes he began in 1431. *The Flood*, probably not completed until 1447, shows the story from Genesis of divine wrath and the salvation of Noah and his family. To the left, figures cling to the side of the ark or battle each other as they try to save themselves from the flood waters. To the right, the ark comes to rest as the waters recede, while crows pluck out the eyes of the drowned victims. Uccello here seems to have conceived of perspective as a visual puzzle or enigma for the observer, even as a vexation for the eyes. Working largely monochromatically in a greenish medium called *terra verde* (whence derives the name of the cloister), Uccello amplified the hard-edged quality of his forms. The diagonal that plunges from just left of top center suggests an orthogonal extending into depth, as though parallel with the ark's enormous base, which runs toward the same point from the lower left; only by inference, comparing the pyramidal form of the ark to the right, can the viewer see that the line is rather one of its sloping sides. Lines seem to converge relentlessly on the vanishing point, which Uccello marks with a bolt of lightning, as if it were a destructive vortex drawing the entire composition into itself. Conspicuously present throughout the picture are objects associated with perspective exercises or problems: curved barrels, and complex polygonal *mazzocchi* (wooden frames for headdresses), all of which Uccello must have studied in individual preparatory drawings.

Only a single surviving drawing (fig. 5.10) records Uccello's experiments with complex perspectives. This study of a chalice nevertheless represents another instance of the rapid transformation in the function of drawing in the 1430s and 1440s, as artists increasingly came to think of the medium as a place for experimentation. Uccello was among the first artists to use cartoons not only for intricate and repetitive patterns but also for entire figures. Traces of *spolveri* remain in the earliest of his frescoes for the Green Cloister, indicating that Uccello preferred to finalize particularly challenging poses or foreshortened anatomies on paper rather than sketching their outlines on the plaster.

The main drawback of the cartoon method was that the drawing had to be to the same scale as the figure in the painting, which was cumbersome in the case of large murals. When he came to his next large fresco assignment, consequently, Uccello devised a process of transferring his designs from drawing to painting by means of a squared



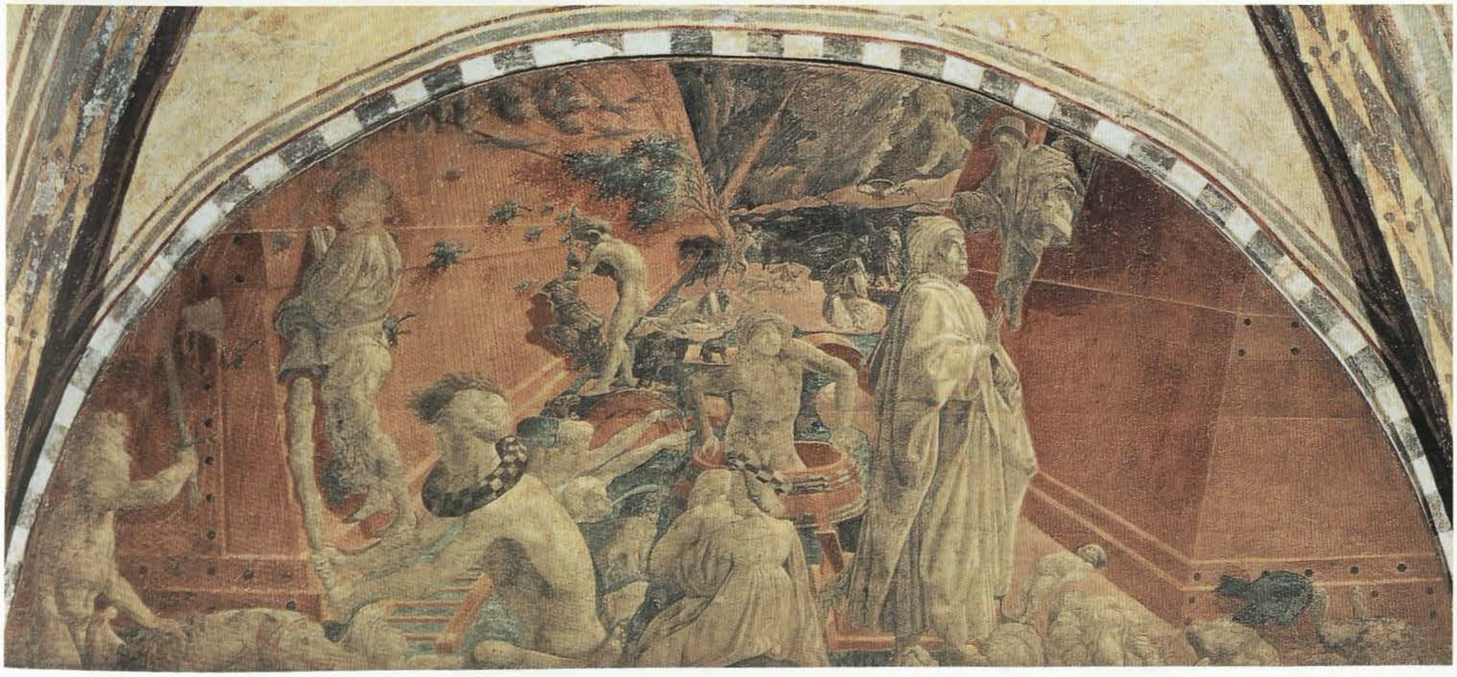
5.10

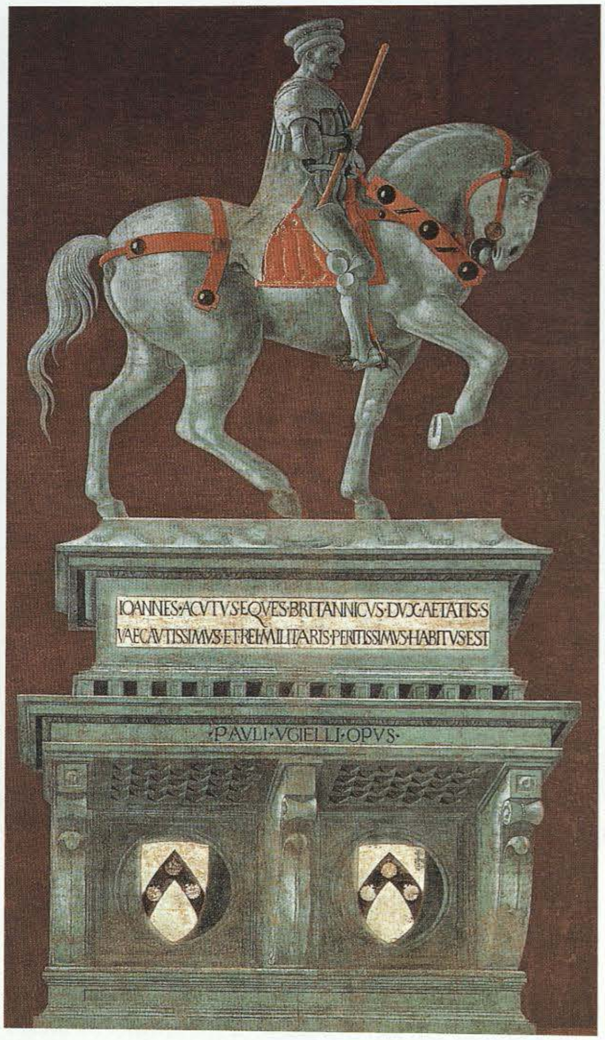
Paolo Uccello, perspective study of a chalice, 1430–40. Pen and ink on paper, 11½ x 9½" (29 x 24.1 cm). Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

BELOW

5.11

Paolo Uccello, *The Flood*, c. 1447. Mural, painted in tempera, later transferred to canvas, 7'¾" x 16'8¾" (2.15 x 5.1 m). Chiostro Verde, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

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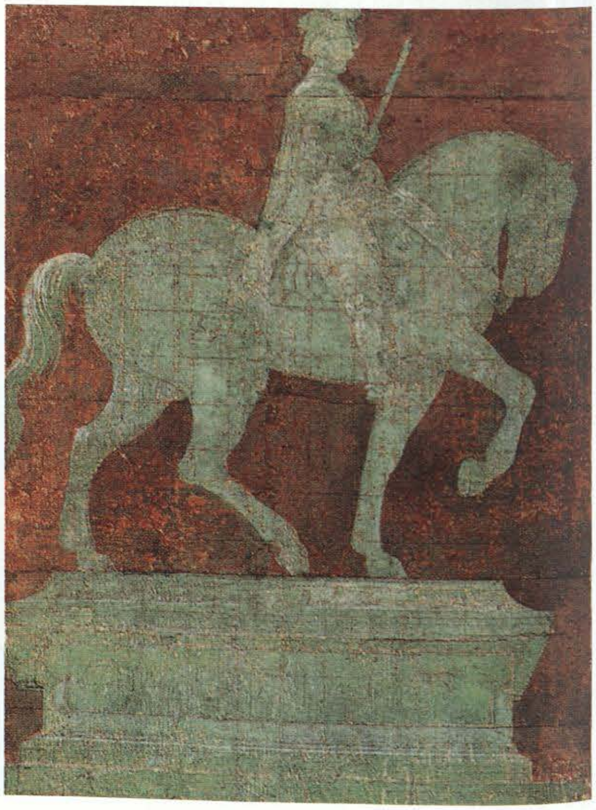
5.12
Paolo Uccello, *Sir John Hawkwood*, 1436. Fresco transferred to canvas, 26'10" x 16'10" (8.5 x 5.15 m). Florence Cathedral

grid (again using the principle of commensuration). In 1436, the *signoria* of Florence had commissioned him to paint a monumental fresco (fig. 5.12) for the newly completed cathedral, in time for its consecration by Pope Eugenius IV the same year. The commission revived a project, abandoned several decades before, to turn the cathedral into a kind of Pantheon of heroes who had served the Florentine Republic. The man Uccello honored was the fourteenth-century English mercenary captain Sir John Hawkwood (1320–1394), whom the state had promised long before to commemorate in the duomo, initially with a marble equestrian statue, "as much for the magnificence of the commune of Florence as for the honor and perpetual fame of the said lord John." Within a year of his death, the Republic decided to order a painted memorial instead and selected painters, though it did not immediately move forward even with this. Uccello's reputation as a perspectivist may have secured him the revived commission, though he also painted a clockface and designed stained-glass windows for the building.

Before beginning to paint this work, the artist made a detailed silverpoint drawing (fig. 5.13), which he divided into squares; he then copied the drawing square by square into a much larger grid ruled onto the cathedral wall. The logic of the square pervades the whole design – the base and the horse can each be circumscribed by a square of equal dimensions, and the horse's rear right hoof touches the mid-point of one of its sides. The drawing enabled the artist to resolve in advance the demanding perspective of the base, which he projected as if seen by a beholder standing below (the fresco, detached in 1842, would originally have been much higher on the wall). The vanishing point thus falls below the lower edge of the border, creating a "worm's eye", or *sotto in su* (literally, "from below, looking up"), perspective. Much as Masaccio had done with the figure of Christ in his *Trinity* (*see* fig. 4.18), however, Uccello shifted the perspective for the horse and rider, depicting them as if seen by an observer standing on the same level. He more than likely realized that if he used the same point of view as for the base, he would show a heavily foreshortened figure of Hawkwood and a great deal of the horse's underside. For reasons unknown, a first version of the fresco, completed in 1436, failed to satisfy the *signoria* and had to be entirely repainted. Could this be because a too rigorous application of perspective resulted in a less than flattering image of the commander?



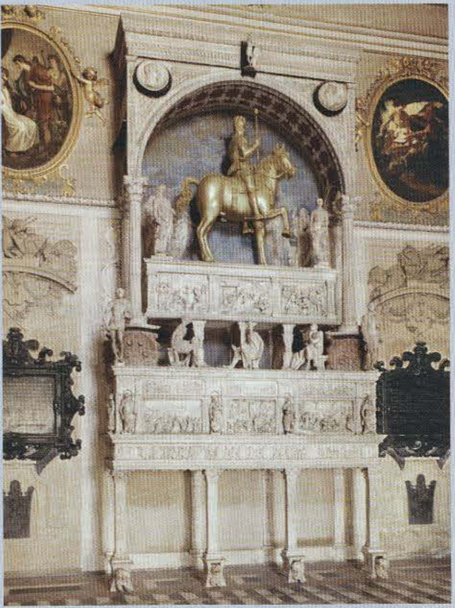
5.13
Paolo Uccello, study for the equestrian monument to Sir John Hawkwood, *c.* 1436. Greenish wash with white highlights on prepared paper, 17¾ x 12⅝" (45 x 32 cm). Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

CONDOTTIERI

The most powerful Italian states – Milan, Florence, Venice, Naples, and the Holy See – did not allow their citizens to bear arms. From the late 1200s, governments waged war by hiring mercenary companies led by captains known as *condottieri* (from the word *condotta*, the term for an assignment given to one of these warlords). Most were soldiers of non-noble origin, some were landless sons of nobles, and one or two were renegade friars; in the 1400s the princely rulers of smaller territories – Urbino, Rimini, Ferrara, and Mantua – all signed *condotte* with the more powerful states. *Condottieri* were regarded with fear and suspicion. Some, like Cangrande della Scala in 1311 and Francesco Sforza in 1450, staged coups against their employers and established dynastic rule over former republics. Others, like Sigismondo Malatesta of Rimini, became notorious for breaking faith with successive employers. The armies of Niccolò Piccinino (1386–1444) and John Hawkwood were known for lawlessness and rapacity during periods when they were not employed.

Equestrian monuments in the tradition of those made for the Della Scala in Verona (*see* figs. 1.4 and 1.5) became the most characteristic form associated with the warlords. Although some princely *condottieri* commissioned equestrian statues of themselves or their fathers – the Este of Ferrara in 1450 and 1499, the Sforza of Milan (employing Leonardo da Vinci for the purpose) – the most prominent of these memorials were erected (or painted) in the Republican territory of Venice and Florence, the cities that had engaged their services. Given the association of the form with despotic rulers and usurpers, this might seem surprising. Yet placed on the walls of the cathedral, Uccello's painted monument to John Hawkwood (*see* fig. 5.12) and Andrea del Castagno's pendant for Niccolò da Tolentino look less like glorifications of the individual than heroic masculine symbols of the Republic itself, the forces of violence contained and put to productive use.

Several fifteenth-century *condottieri* are noted for their patronage of art and learning. Some of them may have responded to the widely shared belief, articulated by the new humanist philosophers no less than the older poets of chivalry, that military achievement represented only one kind of virtue, and needed to be balanced with cultivation. Others, recognizing that the commercial interests that drove their profession also undermined its respectability, saw art as a way of restoring their honor. Some, especially with age, may simply have found the life associated with the palace more comfortable than that of the field. All, having achieved fame in their time, wished to leave some lasting memorial to themselves.



5.14
Giovan Antonio Amadeo, Colleoni Chapel, Bergamo, 1472–75. Interior, showing the tomb of Bartolomeo Colleoni

Bartolomeo Colleoni (*see* fig. 10.23) is an example of how innovative *condottiere* patronage strategies could be, especially in the case of warriors aspiring to princely authority. Colleoni ruled only a small fiefdom, but assembled a refined court at his castle of Malpaga in Lombardy and commissioned works on a princely scale. His spectacular funerary chapel in nearby Bergamo, richly polychromed and built to a centralized design by Giovanni Antonio Amadeo in 1472–75, stood on property seized from a local confraternity. The exterior, with its imperial busts and despoiled marbles, suggests the cultivation of an antiquarian sensibility, even as it strikes a belligerent tone. The interior is dominated by the general's highly distinctive tomb (fig. 5.14): an equestrian statue of Colleoni in gilded wood surmounts a marble sarcophagus with reliefs of the life of Christ, the whole enclosed in a triumphal arch with roundels based on Roman imperial coins.

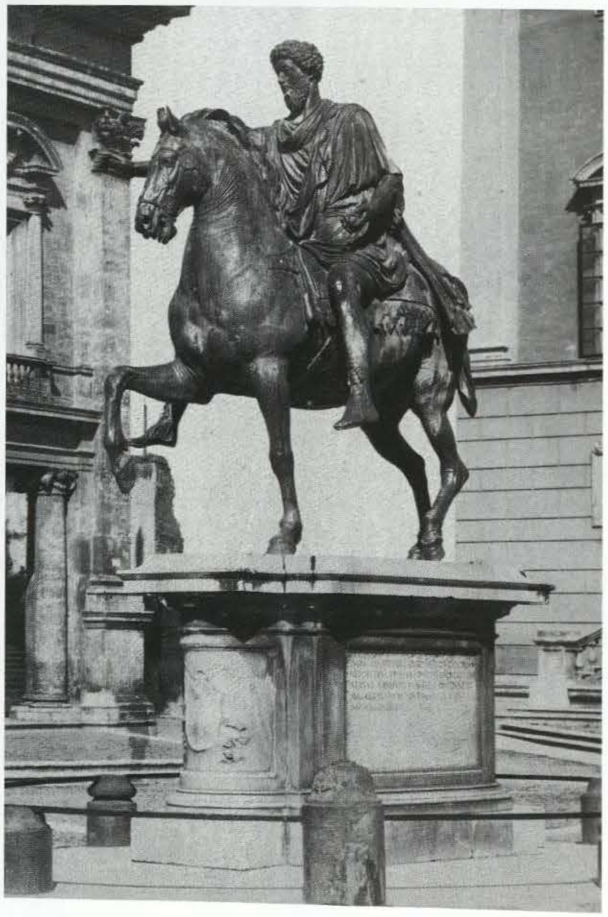
Inventing Antiquity

An Emperor in Italy

Uccello's work is important not only because it applied strict geometry to the making of a painted surrogate for sculpture. It also explicitly revived a classical sculptural type associated with empire and domination, the equestrian monument best typified by the sculpture of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (fig. 5.15), then at the Lateran Palace in Rome and widely regarded as a portrait of Constantine, the first Christian emperor. The classical character of Uccello's fresco is underscored by the inscription in elegant humanist Latin, praising the commander for his military skill and for his great caution. The mural was just one of the influential adaptations of ancient forms to modern artistic and political ends to occur in the 1430s.

In 1438, a great council of the Western and Eastern Christian Churches convened at Ferrara, then transferred after several months to Florence. The aim of the council was to reconcile the theological and administrative rifts that had long split Christianity into two observances, one centered on the papacy in Rome, the other on the Orthodox Church in Constantinople. The council's sponsors included not only Pope Eugenius IV and the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund but also the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos, who attended the council in person with seven hundred members of his entourage. The presence of the Byzantine emperor, a near-legendary figure who belonged to an imperial succession that went back to the ancient Caesars, caused a sensation. Among the retinues of the Italian princes who went to pay court to Palaiologos was Pisanello, who made rapid on-site pen studies of the Byzantines, their exotic weapons and their costumes. He also made a detailed portrait drawing of John himself, which became the basis for the first Renaissance portrait medal (figs. 5.16–5.17).

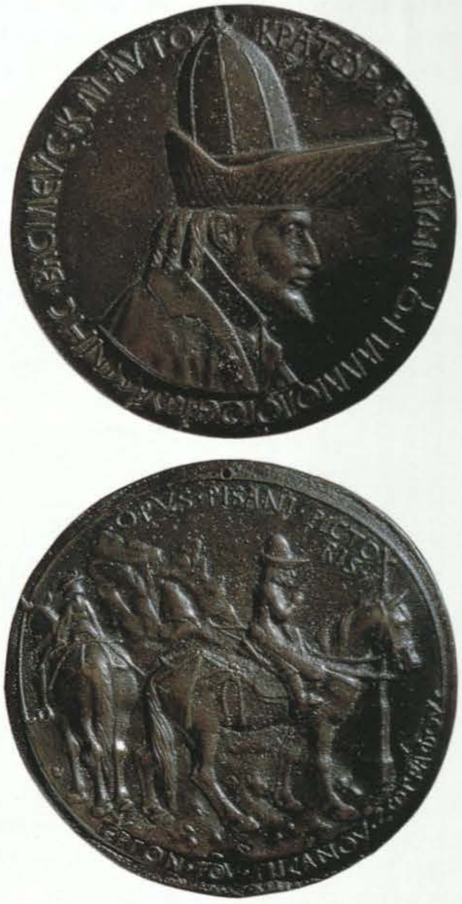
Here Pisanello adapted the numismatic images of Roman and Hellenistic rulers to create a cast bronze likeness, which survives in multiple versions and which circulated widely in the form of diplomatic gifts or as collectable objects. (Italian princes rapidly followed suit in commissioning medals of their own.) On one side (*see* fig. 5.16), the medal bears the profile of the emperor with an inscription in Latin and Greek, "John Palaiologos, King and Emperor of the Romans." The reverse (*see* fig. 5.17) presents a composition very similar to the art-



RIGHT

5.15

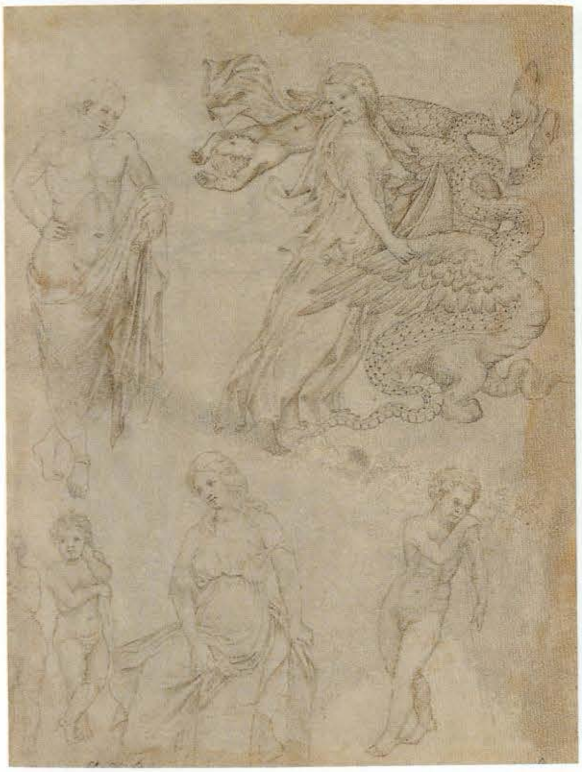
Equestrian monument of Marcus Aurelius, 161–180 CE. Campidoglio, Rome



FAR RIGHT

5.16 and 5.17

Pisanello, *John VIII Palaiologus, Emperor of Constantinople*, obverse (top) and reverse (bottom), 1438–39. Cast bronze, diameter 4" (10.3 cm). British Museum, London



5.18
Pisanello, studies from a sarcophagus of Jason and Medea, *c.* 1431–32. Pen and ink and brown wash over metalpoint on parchment, 8³/₈ x 6¹/₈" (21.2 x 15.6 cm). Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

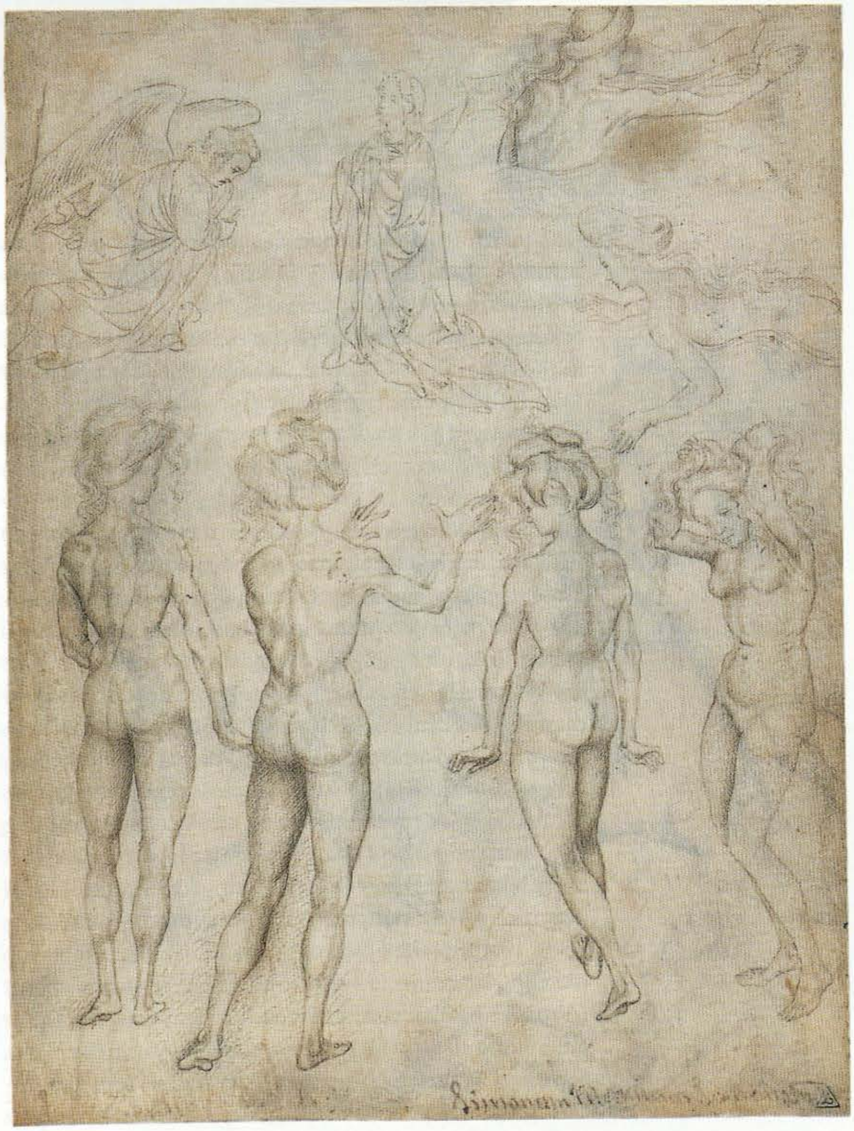
ist's *St. Eustace* panel (*see* fig. 5.6): the emperor, shown hunting or possibly as a pilgrim, pauses to make a sign of reverence before a cross. The image presents John as the pious defender of Church unity, all the more so since the equestrian portrait made reference to the statue believed to be of Constantine (*see* fig. 5.15), who had presided over a consolidated Christian realm.

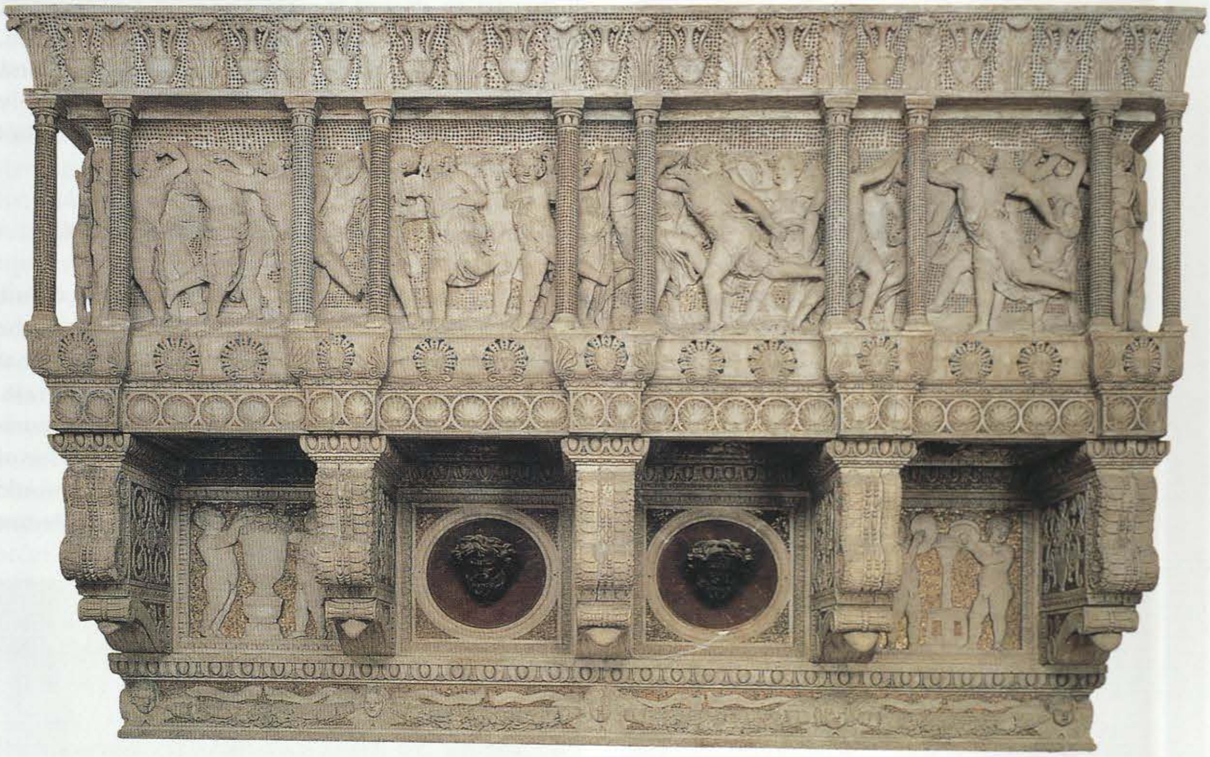
Drawing was the means by which ancient art entered the repertoire of the fifteenth-century artist, who used it to transpose and adapt older forms. Pisanello's surviving drawings show numerous motifs copied or freely adapted from ancient relief sculpture. An aspect of ancient art that particularly appealed to him was its depiction of the human figure in motion. If in the Trecento Nicola Pisano and his followers (see chapter 1, p. 43) paid particular attention to the posed nude, Pisanello and his contemporaries looked more at the dynamic figures on a mythological sarcophagus (fig. 5.18). By 1440, correspondingly, the representation of the moving body, nude or with clinging drapery, had become the quintessential sign of an artistic allegiance to antiquity. A group of remarkable drawings by Pisanello of a dancing woman (fig. 5.19), *c.* 1430, rendered on the same parchment sheet as a modelbook Annunciation, shows that he was looking at an actual nude model rather than a sculpture: nothing from antiquity showed such a depiction of sequential acts. Her fluid, graceful gestures, and the tumbling hair she unbinds, however, all suggest an attempt to evoke the most distinguishing characteristics of the body in ancient art – its dynamism. When Pisanello turned to the art of his own time, and drew from reliefs of putti by Donatello, he probably regarded them as works that possessed the very virtues that he admired in ancient art.

The *cantorie* of Donatello and Luca della Robbia

Donatello himself (*c.* 1386–1466) explored the theme of the dancing figure in a major commission from the 1430s: the *Cantoria* (fig. 5.20), or singing gallery, that he produced for Florence Cathedral from 1433 to 1438. The gallery was one of a pair that supported the musicians and singers indispensable to the ceremonial life of the cathedral, where the Mass and other liturgies would have been sung (we have already referred to Guillaume

5.19
Pisanello, *Nude Woman, the Annunciation, c.* 1430? Pen and ink on parchment, 8³/₈ x 6¹/₂" (21.1 x 16.5 cm). Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam





5.20
Donatello, *Cantoria*, 1433–38. Marble and mosaic, length 18'8" (5.7 m). Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence

Dufay's motet performed at the consecration in 1436, an instance of the duomo's flourishing musical life). Donatello's singing gallery seems to have housed a small organ in addition to singers: the main organ was located in the other *cantoria* already commissioned in 1431 from Luca della Robbia (1400–1482; fig. 5.21). Both commissions sought to enhance the fame and prestige of their chief religious center by promoting the best of Florentine art and music.

Thus Donatello's *Cantoria* participates in a dialogue with ancient relief sculpture as well as with the work of a Florentine contemporary. Luca's gallery had drawn heavily on the principles of Brunelleschi's architectural design. Paired Corinthian pilasters provide a supporting frame for six square reliefs, while four more appear between the consoles beneath. Each panel depicts a throng of boy musicians and others who sing and dance, illustrating the verses from Psalm 150 that appear inscribed in the frieze: "... Praise [God] with the sound of the trumpet; praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals; praise him upon the high-sounding cymbals." Luca has composed his figure groups in harmony with the architectural forms. The tallest children in each relief wear gowns that fall in long straight folds, echoing the fluting in the pilasters even as they sway gently to the music. Yet while the architecture determines the orderly form of the composition, the words of the psalm – which call for God to be worshiped with movement and sound – enabled Luca to introduce several smaller infants, some naked and some grinning, who leap and kick their legs with an abandon that is entirely uncharacteristic of earlier Christian art. Luca probably looked at the same kind of sarcophagus that Pisanello drew (*see* fig. 5.18), transposing the figures from a pagan to a Christian context. Ancient relief has become the vehicle through which Luca explores the bodily motion and emotion produced by music.

Donatello echoes the format and the content of Luca's relief, but produces something different in every respect. Conspicuously avoiding the architectural vocabulary both of Brunelleschi and Luca here, he instead employs a bold ornamentation with shells and bizarre faces as well as vase and acanthus patterns, covering most of the surfaces with an inlay of tiny colored stone roundels. It is almost as if Donatello were trying to produce a sculptural equivalent for the musical **polyphony** newly in vogue at the cathedral, in which voices simultaneously sang material with overlaid texts and rhythms, sometimes even incorporating profane song. Unlike Luca's reliefs, moreover, Donatello's do not read as a series of square "pictures" framed by columns. The architectural order now forms a screen behind which a tumultuous crowd of dancers move freely along the length of the structure – in fact, they dance in a circle, the figures in lower relief set back further in space. The infant dancers, more