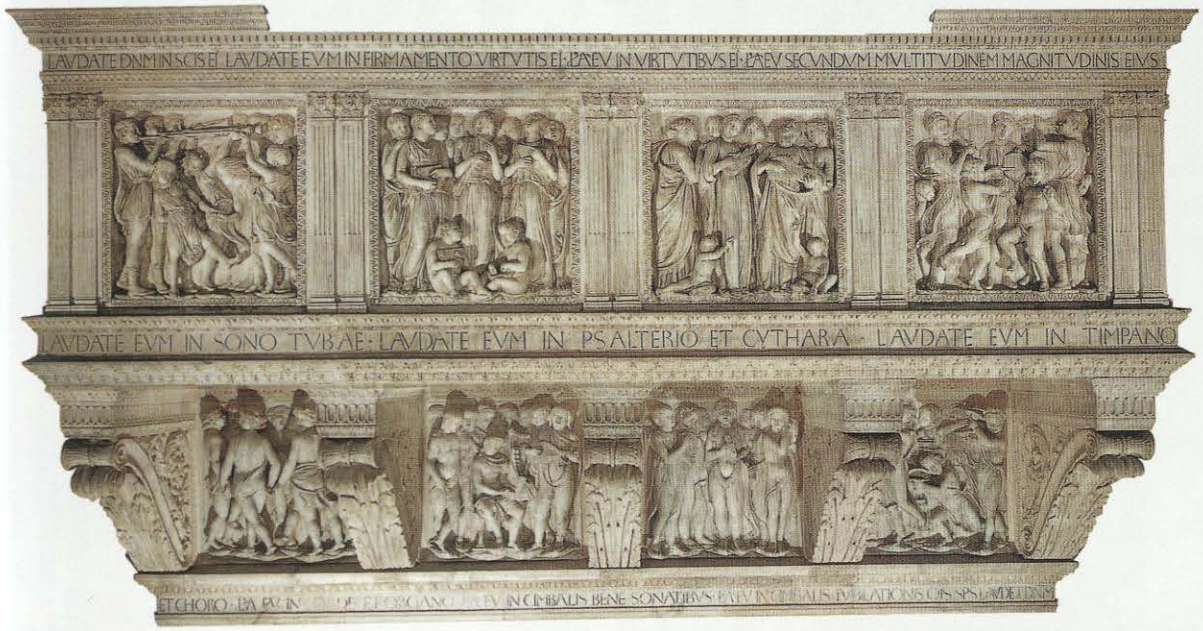


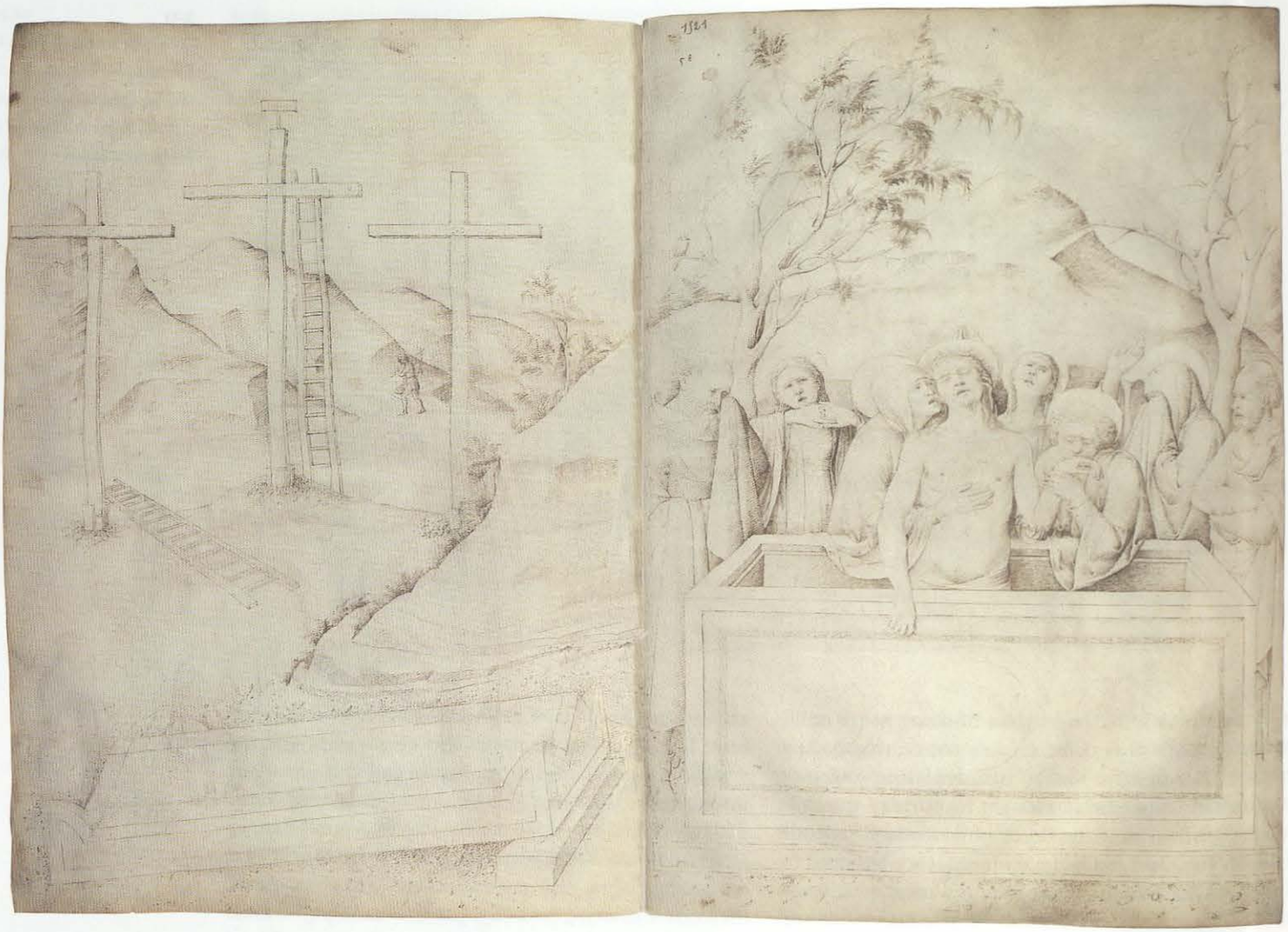
5.21
Luca della Robbia, *Cantoria*, 1431/32–38. Marble, length 18'4" (5.6 m). Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence

riotous and uncouth, the laughter of some more reminiscent of snarls and grimaces, defy containment. And who are these figures? Rather than depicting angels, it appears that Donatello has sought to portray the little spirits (*spiritelli*) that the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and his later commentators believed to inhabit the air, demons whose motions are stirred up by music. They literally embody the disturbances of the air brought about through sound, movement that excites a response from listeners.

Jacopo Bellini and the Transformation of the Modelbook

The drawings of Uccello and Pisanello may have been treasured by their heirs, even admired in themselves, but they always served the ends of painting. It is by no means certain, however, that we can say this about those painters' great Venetian contemporary Jacopo Bellini (*c.* 1400–*c.* 1470), who between about 1430 and his death produced a body of remarkable drawings preserved in two books. He executed the earlier of the two, now in the Louvre, Paris, in **leadpoint** on parchment, with the outlines reworked in pen; for the second book, now in the British Museum, London, he worked in leadpoint on paper. Bellini probably began the volumes as modelbooks, a store of stock designs for flowers, drapery, and architectural ornament, as well as versions of such common **iconographic** themes as the Virgin and Child. In addition, he recorded inscriptions and epitaphs from Roman tombs in the Veneto, sometimes framing them with an entirely invented classical architecture. Then, at a certain point, Bellini began to embellish his pattern-like renderings of familiar sacred subjects. On one page of the Louvre drawing book (fig. 5.22), for example, he took up the theme of the Man of Sorrows, a common devotional subject at the time. Conventional renderings of the theme centered on a dead Christ in an upright position, sometimes in a tomb and supported by lamenting angels, but Jacopo framed the iconic group with a gathering of the mourners, including the Virgin, Mary Magdalene (a penitent prostitute who became one of Christ's most devoted followers), and Joseph of Arimathea (a disciple who gave Christ his own tomb); these three conventionally appear only in treatments of Christ's Entombment, a more narrative scene involving the carrying of Christ to his place of burial. Bellini further elaborated the subject by extending it onto the facing page and adding a rocky landscape with the three crosses. The drawing thus spread into something that exceeded its function as a pattern or source for a painting, since no painter would have treated this or any Biblical subject in such a radically asymmetrical manner.

Bellini went on to invent dozens more original compositions, their format determined entirely by the



expanses of the drawing surface rather than by the convention of painting. On many occasions a landscape or architectural setting dwarfs the narrative subject; elsewhere the imaginary architecture itself becomes the subject. Only when we explore the courtyards and porticos of these complex architectural spaces do we recognize that something more is happening than we first expected – we stumble upon the flagellation of Christ, or the Feast of Herod (fig. 5.23), hidden in the grandiose buildings.

As an apprentice to Gentile da Fabriano, Jacopo Bellini had been to Florence in the 1420s (there is a record of his arrest in that city following a street fight), and he could have become acquainted with the principles of Brunelleschi's perspective at first hand. Yet in the drawing books, he uses perspective as no Florentine artist would, generating entirely original kinds of composition characterized by spatial complexity and the priority of the architectural environment over the events taking place within it. Perspective here creates a new mode of relation between the

5.22
Jacopo Bellini, ***Lamentation/Entombment.*** Metalpoint with pen and ink on parchment, 15⅜ x 11½" (39 x 29 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris: Département des Arts graphiques, RF 1521 67–8

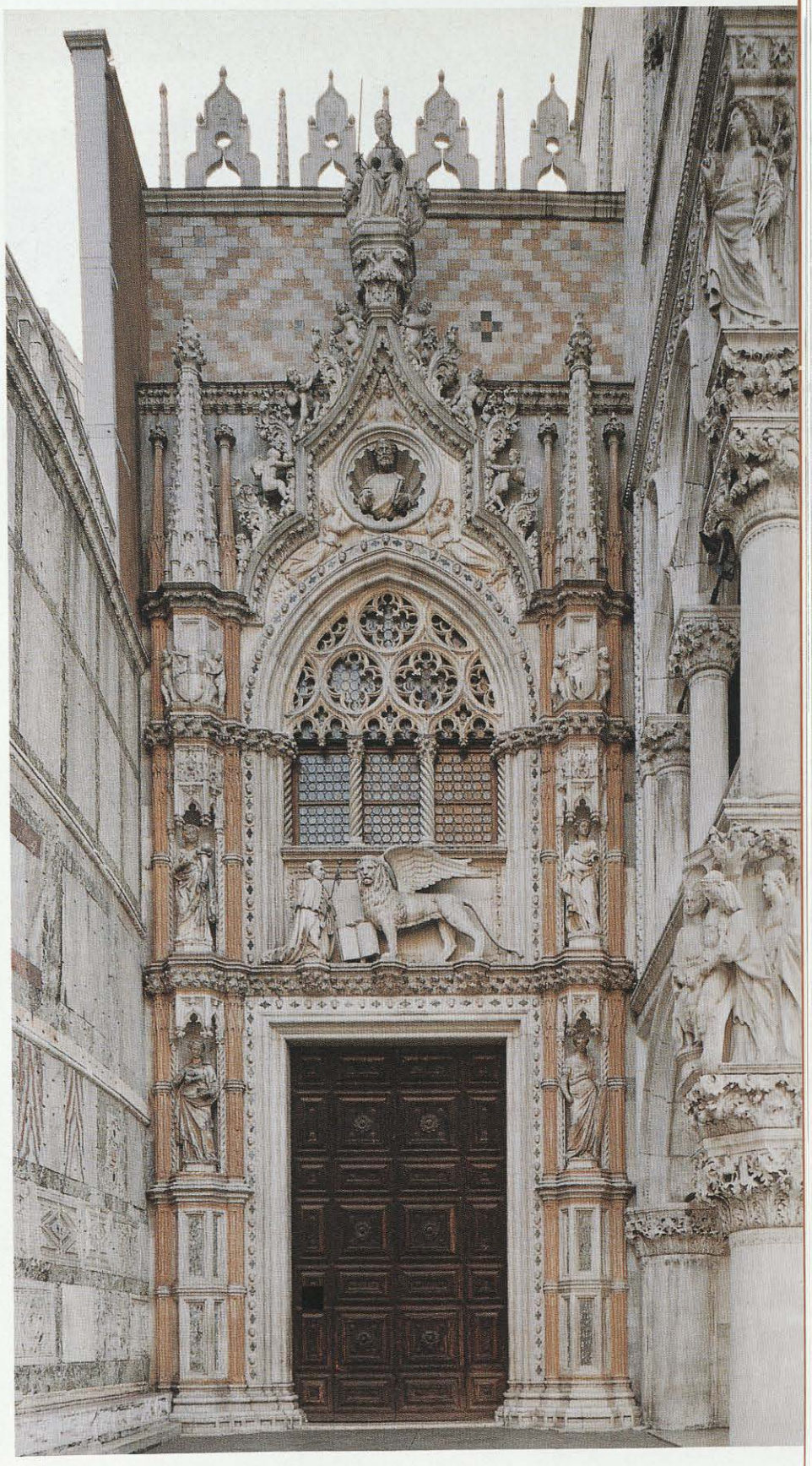
OPPOSITE
5.23
Jacopo Bellini, ***Feast of Herod.*** Metalpoint with pen and ink on parchment, 15⅜ x 11½" (39 x 29 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris: Département des Arts graphiques, RF 1484 13, drawing book 16v. 17

5.24
The Doge's Palace, Venice, from the Grand Canal

beholder and the subject: the religious subject no longer engages primarily with the viewer through its familiarity or emotional drama, but by its objective presentation as one visual fact among others in a complete virtual world. In this respect Bellini bears out Cennini's claim that artists do not simply copy reality, but remake it through an imaginative process aptly compared to poetry.

Jacopo Bellini's two books also suggest the centrality of drawing in the practice of architecture, which is especially significant in the absence of surviving examples of working architectural drawings from before the late fifteenth century. Bellini seems never to have built anything himself, but he demonstrates a thorough command of the principles of architectural design. Buildings of all kinds, and the elaborate urban environments they create, are as important as narrative compositions in demonstrating his powers of *fantasia*. Mostly, Bellini invents a kind of avant-garde architecture of the imagination; he incorporates in his drawings colossal reworkings of antique ruins from the Veneto, and embellishes the facades of his buildings with carvings of nude gods and heroes adapted from classical reliefs and from coins. Some of the buildings in his drawings, however, do evoke the city of Venice, with ornate **Gothic** pinnacles, tracery, and pointed arches, Byzantine domes and arcades, and touches of the new Florentine architecture of Brunelleschi.

More significantly, Bellini's interests in many ways align with the actual practice of architecture in the Venice of his day. Brunelleschi in Florence had worked largely within a local idiom – his knowledge of the architecture of antiquity derived mainly from medieval Tuscan buildings like the baptistery, which itself drew on classical forms. Venice, however, was a cosmopolitan artistic culture; just as its basilica of San Marco displayed precious colored stones and architectural spoils imported or looted from throughout the Mediterranean world, so too did the architectural language of public buildings like the adjacent Doge's Palace combine elements of north



5.25
Giovanni and Bartolomeo Bon, Porta della Carta, Doge's Palace, Venice, 1438–42. Red and white marble and Istrian stone

Italian Gothic (the loggia and tabernacles) with Arabic architecture (the pointed **crenellations** at roof level and the patterns of colored tile; fig. 5.24). Venice was thus symbolically situated as a "center" between the Mediterranean sea and the European mainland.

The exterior of the Doge's Palace was nearing completion by the 1430s, and one of the last sections to be designed was the so-called Porta della Carta (Gate of the Charter), commissioned from Giovanni Bon (1355–1443) and his son Bartolomeo Bon (1421–1464) in 1438 (fig. 5.25). The contract required the sculptor-architects to follow a detailed drawing, now lost, which specified the inclusion of a figure of Justice and another of St. Mark "in the form of a lion," along with nude infants and foliate ornament. As was the case with Jacopo della Quercia's Fonte Gaia in Siena (*see* figs. 2.26–2.27), however, the contract drawing provided only a starting point for greater elaboration, revisions that probably required the preparation of new drawings. As constructed, consequently, the Porta della Carta included significant elements not named in the original contract, among them four additional figures of Virtues in the **jambs** and a lifesize portrait of the reigning Doge, Francesco Foscari (1373–1457), kneeling before the Lion of St. Mark. The florid Gothic of the pinnacles and the gable on which Justice sits enthroned feature Cupid-like infants – intruders from classical art – who bear shields or clamber through the curly **acanthus**. Two angels, meanwhile, bear a *tondo*, with yet another image of Mark, the city's patron saint, this time in the form of a portrait. The impressive ensemble shows little overall concern with "commensuration," although a consistent proportional system guided the design of the tracery and the framing jambs with pinnacles. It was the reliance on drawing – from patterns for individual sections of tracery to more comprehensive designs governing the overall appearance of the Porta – that would have guaranteed the coordination of the overall project, the relation of the parts to the whole.

6

1440–1450
Palace and Church

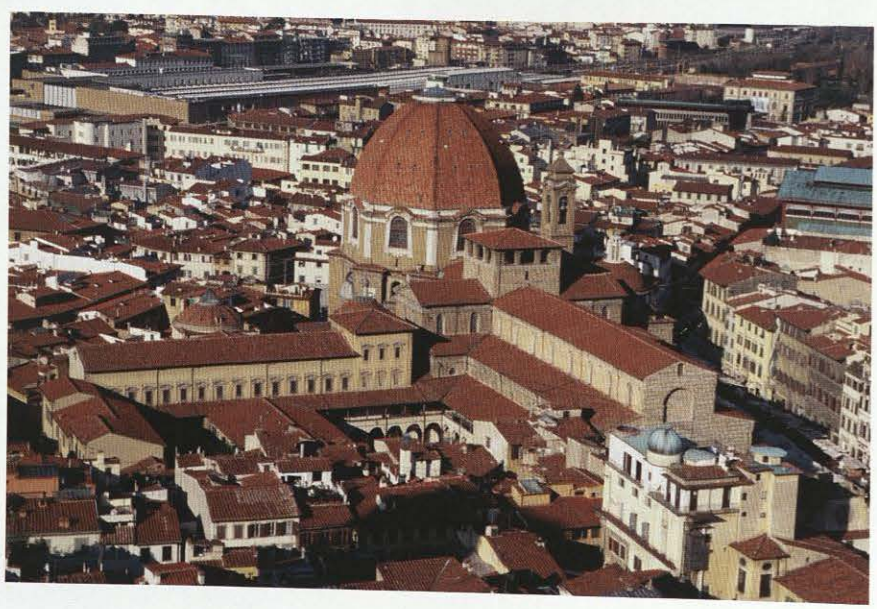
6 1440–1450
Palace and Church

The Sacred and the Profane

"Painters...are to be reprimanded when they paint things contrary to the faith," wrote the Dominican friar Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459) in his theological textbook known as the *Summa theologica*. Fra Antonino, who became archbishop of Florence in 1446, had strong views about the spiritual purpose of art and was highly critical of many tendencies in the art of his time: "[painters] commit an offense," he wrote, "when they create images provoking desire, not through beauty, but through their poses, as of naked women and the like." He further objected to what he called "curiosities," things that incited laughter rather than devotion, giving as examples monkeys, dogs chasing hares, and "vain adornments of clothing." Reading such remarks, it is hard not to think of the opulent works of Pisanello (*c.* 1395–1455), probably the most fashionable artist of the era, or of Gentile da Fabriano (*c.* 1370–1427), who had an avid following in Florence. Such painters, in the eyes of a viewer like the archbishop, had crossed a line when they embellished Christian subjects with "curiosities" – gorgeous ornaments and eye-catching details – or demonstrated their skill in the rendering of figures and animals, and the simulation of costly fabrics. If these artists appeared to be going astray themselves, then they were likely to lead their viewers to think of worldly pleasures rather than enable them to pray or meditate.

Most painters working around mid-century, like the wealthy lay people who paid for their works, would have been surprised by such a reaction from their archbishop. For them, the embellishment of a religious painting with all the trappings of aristocratic display, the evocation of civilized manners and tastes, served the same ends as the use of expensive materials like gold or ultramarine: the purpose was to show honor to the depicted holy figures and to secure honor for the families of the clients who paid for the work. If a lavishly decorated private chapel proclaimed the status of a Cosimo de' Medici or a Palla Strozzi (*see* p. 92), such men were only fulfilling their duties to their family and city. They would hardly have distinguished such a motive from the more recognizably spiritual ones of expiating sins through charitable giving to churches and convents, or of reminding generations who came after them to pray for their souls.

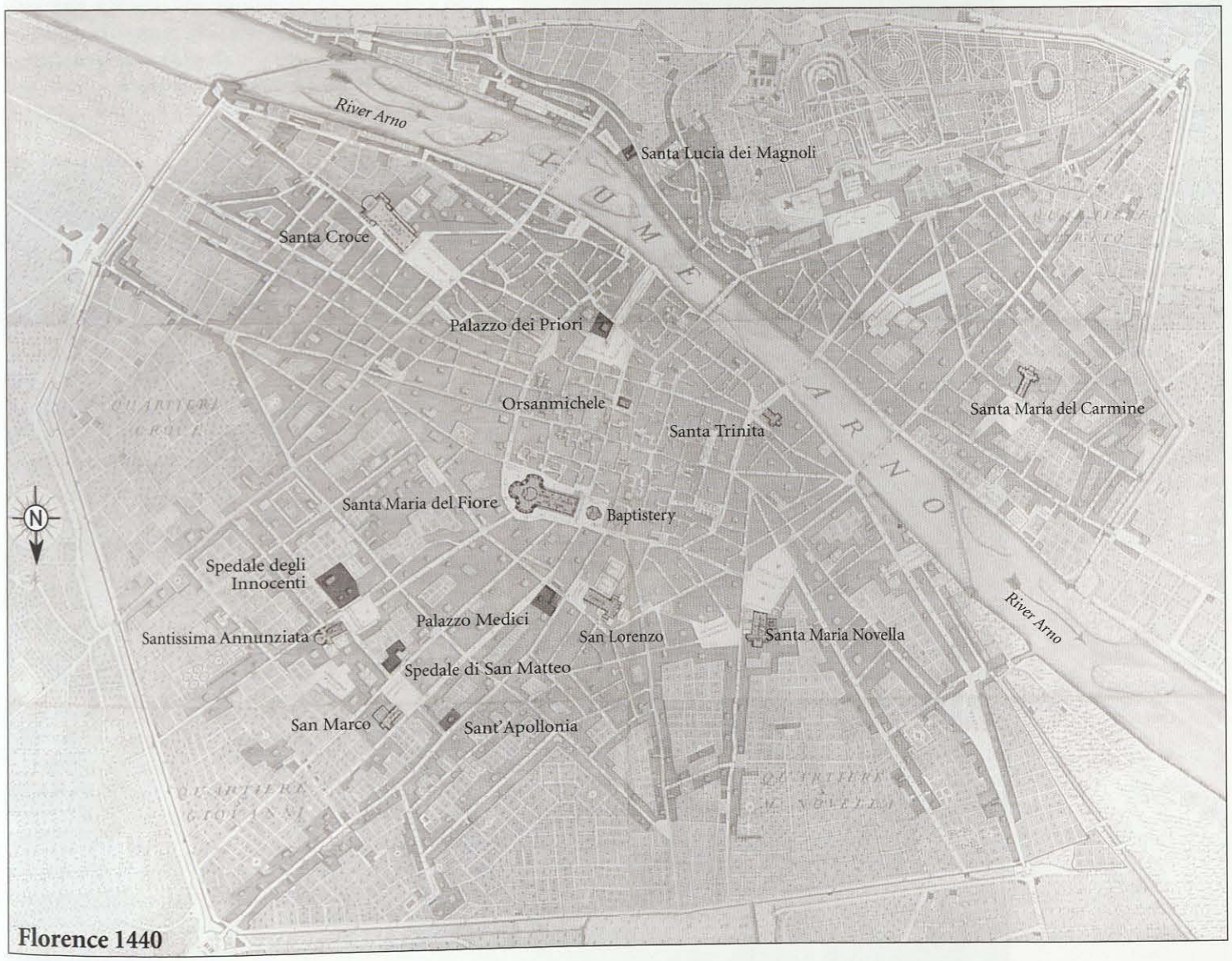
Fifteenth-century Europeans would have accepted that there was, in general, a difference between the domain of the sacred on the one hand and the secular, or "profane," on the other. The distinction was basic to civic as well as to private life: certain times, and certain spaces, were set aside for God, the immortal and the eternal. Yet in lived experience the sacred and the profane overlapped to such an extent as to be indistinguishable. Even lay people measured time through regular moments of daily prayer (the most common form of prayer book is known as a "Book of Hours") and the Church's recurring annual feast days. In Florence, priests and friars participated in the political process, as overseers who ensured the fair casting and counting of votes. The cathedral of Florence was the center of religious life, but as in several other Italian cities, it was administered by a secular bureaucracy appointed by the Florentine government, and it served as a principal space for civic ceremony.



6.1
Aerial view of San Lorenzo, Florence. The Medici Palace is just outside the frame at lower right.

Donatello's Doors for San Lorenzo

When in 1442 Cosimo de' Medici assumed responsibility for the rebuilding of Florence's basilica of San Lorenzo (fig. 6.1), he increased his influence over the religious life of the city. This, too, testifies to the interdependency of



Florence 1440

6.2
Donatello, doors to the right of the altar with figures of Apostles and the Doctors of the Church, 1440–43. Bronze, 7'8½" x 3'7" (2.35 x 1.09 m). Old Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence

the world of the cloister and that of the marketplace. The clergy needed the rich to provide them with material support for their life of prayer and contemplation; the rich needed the clergy in order to obtain salvation. This was especially true of bankers like Cosimo, since the Church regarded the raising of profits through usury (moneylending) as a sin: Pope Eugenius IV (1431–47) personally advised Cosimo about how much of his income he should devote to what the banker called "God's Account." The result was that Cosimo was the single greatest individual Church benefactor not only in Florence but also in all of Italy.

In 1443, the Medici sacristy at San Lorenzo received two pairs of bronze doors (fig. 6.2) designed by Donatello. Only Florence's baptistery could boast an equivalently expensive form of embellishment (*see* figs. 2.13, 2.14, and 4.4). Each of Donatello's doors consists of ten low-relief panels in which pairs of saints communicate in a lively and highly physical manner. The artist represented acts of speech and writing by non-verbal means: he showed figures gripped by an evangelical fervor or intellectual combativeness that registers in their faces and bodily gestures as they brandish books, martyrs' palms, and other attributes. St. Peter jabs his finger at a haggard St. Paul, who starts back in astonishment or defiance; other saints more difficult to identify write urgently in books balanced on their knees or raised on lecterns. By conceiving theological authority as a set of disputes or acts of inspired writing, Donatello avoided monotony and created a constantly varying choreography of moving figures. Yet not everyone, as we shall see, thought that Donatello's conception of the saints and martyrs was appropriate.

San Marco

In addition to San Lorenzo, the most significant institutional beneficiary of Medici largesse was the convent of San Marco. Since 1417 the convent had been the focus of lavish public celebrations of the Feast of the Epiphany, when a **confraternity** based there re-enacted the journey of the Magi with a great procession through the Florentine streets. Several Medici belonged to this confraternity and participated in the festival. In 1436 Cosimo sponsored the transfer from Fiesole, a small town just outside the city, to San Marco of a community of **Observant** Dominican friars. The Observants followed a stricter version of the Dominican rule than the "**Conventual**" Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella, and their piety made them especially attractive intercessors for a rich donor anxious about his salvation. Cosimo used his influence with the Pope to secure the eviction of the religious Order previously occupying the site. He undertook the entire expense of rebuilding and redecorating the convent, as well the costs of books, clothing, food, and other necessities for the community. By the 1440s San Marco housed one of the most important collections of classical and theological texts in existence. The San Marco library (fig. 6.3), designed by Donatello's former collaborator Michelozzo, adopted a simplified version of the architecture of Filippo Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital (*see* fig. 3.13). The library's system of **groin-vaulted** bays rising from Ionic columns made it one of the few parts of the convent not to have a flat wooden ceiling; the choice spoke to the importance of the space but also brought the advantage of reducing the risk of fire.

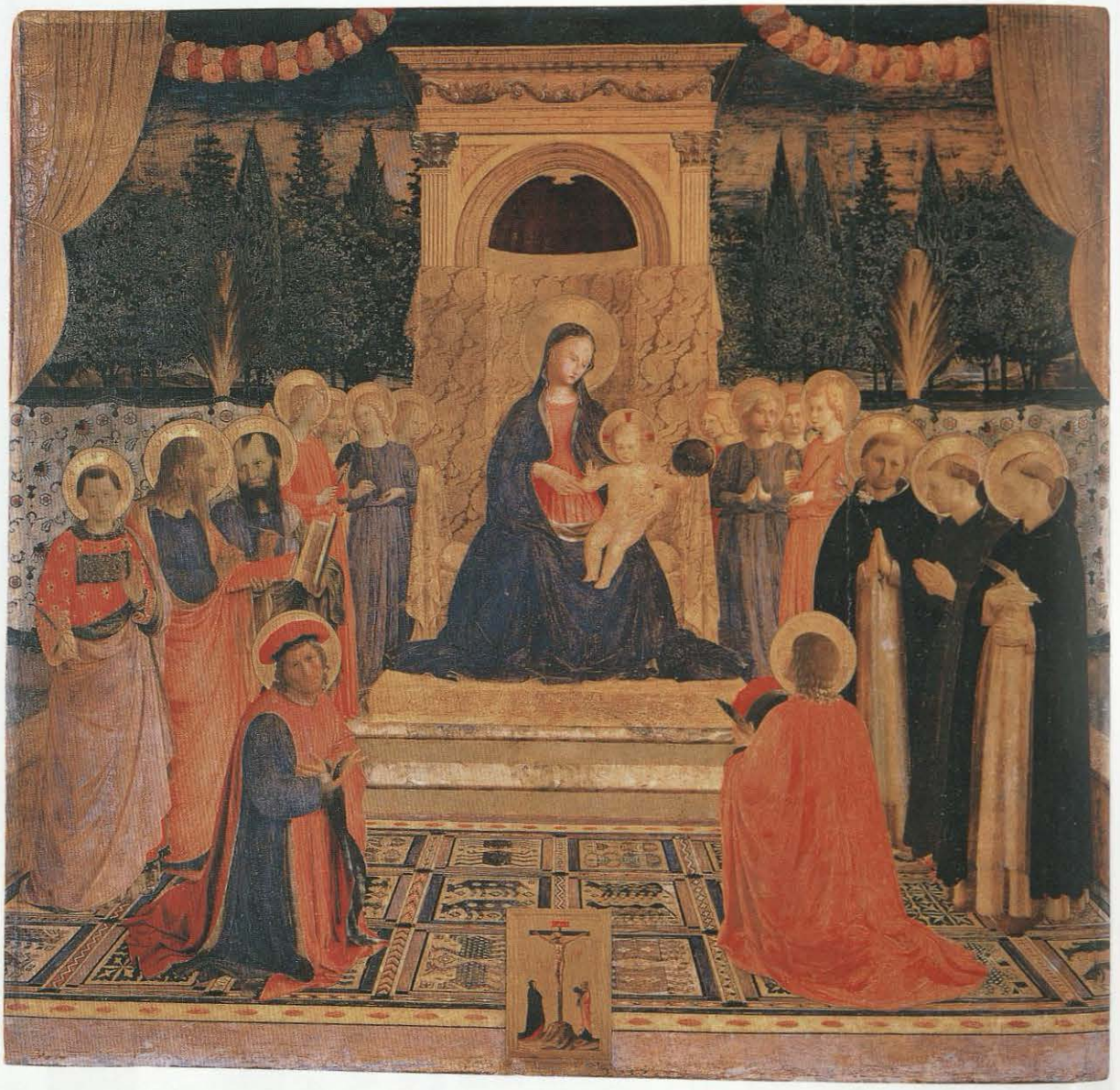
Fra Angelico and the Invention of the Unified Altarpiece

In his dealings with the friars, Cosimo would have consulted closely with the prior, Fra Antonino. Despite the Dominican Order's commitment to poverty, the prior

accepted and justified the benefactions of the richest man in Florence. Perhaps it was Antonino's awareness that he was compromising the Observant commitment to voluntary poverty that prompted his comments on art, his insistence that at least church paintings clarify and preserve a differentiation of sacred from secular interests. Among his colleagues at San Marco was Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, known to posterity as Fra Angelico (*c.* 1395–1455), whose labors as an artist provided an important source of income to his Order. By 1440, the friar was one of the leading painters of Florence, producing altarpieces and devotional pictures for a broad network of lay patrons, including, as we have seen, guilds like the Linaiuoli. In 1441, Fra Angelico took on the decoration of his own convent, forcing him to confront the question of what kind of art was suitable for a religious community professing the highest standards of purity and unworldliness. How could an Order that rejected luxury be represented by a painter who specialized in the making of luxury products?

Fra Angelico's status may have helped him attract a secular clientele, but he was also accustomed to painting according to the expectations of such customers. His stylistic choices in this regard are significant: he learned a great deal from the work of Masaccio and Donatello, yet he showed far greater allegiance to the decorative color, rich detailing, and aristocratically refined figures of

6.3
Michelozzo, Library, begun 1437. San Marco, Florence. The books were removed and the walls, originally green, were painted white after the suppression of the convent in the nineteenth century.



6.4
Fra Angelico, *Virgin and Child with Saints* (San Marco altarpiece), 1438–43. Tempera on panel, 7'2⅝" x 7'5⅜" (2.2 x 2.27 m). Museo di San Marco, Florence

Gentile da Fabriano. Fra Angelico was certainly aware that the vanguard of Florentine art in his generation had created a mode of expression that pursued emotional conviction and rejected ornamental finesse – think of the rugged, vagabond saints and patriarchs of Donatello, Masaccio and Uccello – yet this is not the route that he himself pursued.

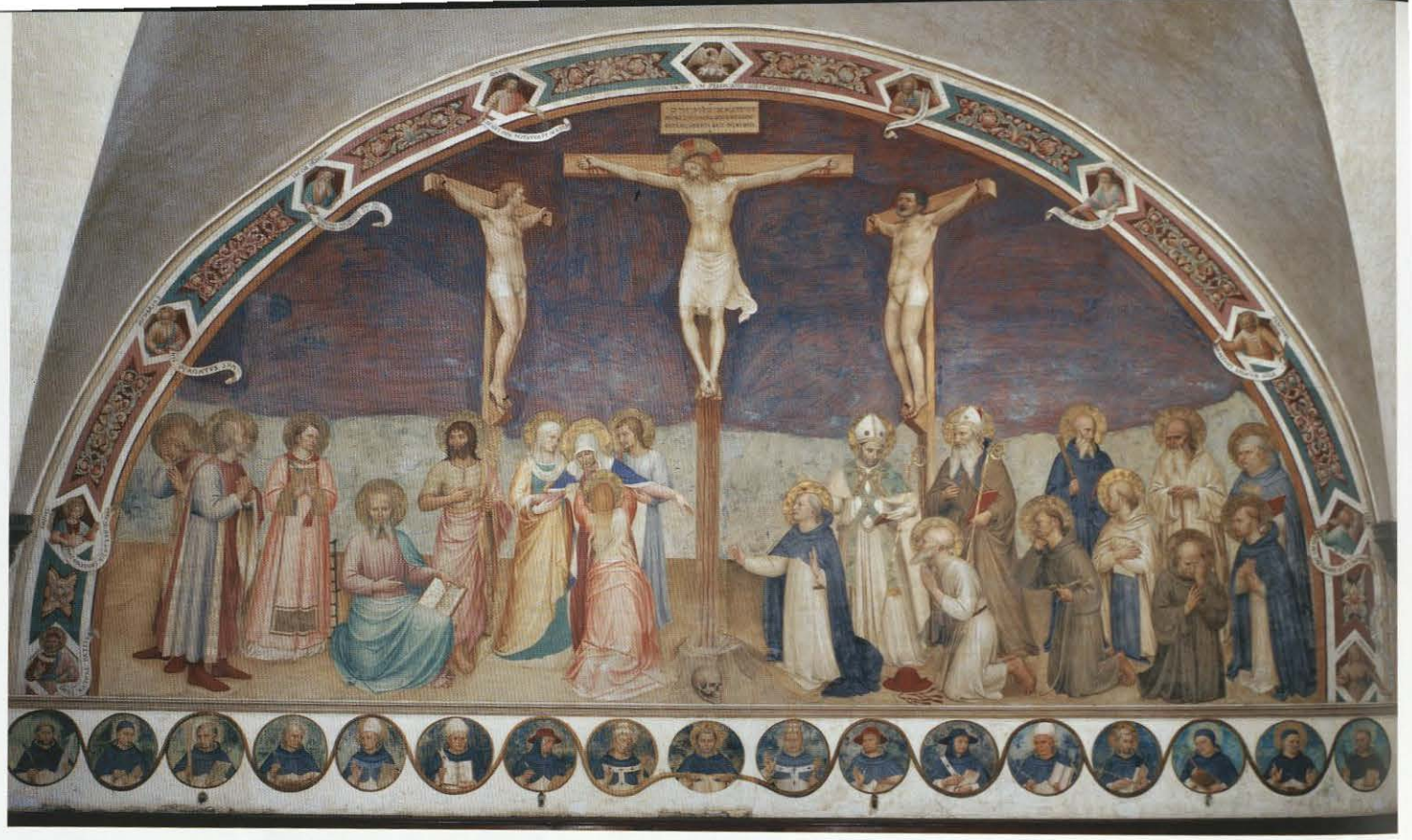
The altarpiece (fig. 6.4) for the rebuilt convent church of San Marco is a spectacular application of the new pictorial science of Brunelleschi and Alberti. It shows Fra Angelico to be a master of perspective; few others working around 1440 could set their figures so convincingly in a luminous and geometrically ordered space. One of the painter's most significant modern gestures was the rejection of the traditional polyptych in favor of a simple rectangular format. This simplification of shape responded to the principle of commensuration that Michelozzo's architecture in the library (*see* fig. 6.3) had already adopted. Fra Angelico conceived his panel simultaneously as a window onto an outdoor world – in this case a garden in which tapestries and a Brunelleschian tabernacle form an enclosure – and as a lavishly decorated surface, one that emulates the crafts of weaving, metalwork, and embroidery. Perspective comes across here as another technique of enrichment. Yet it also focuses and directs our attention to the Virgin, who in turn indicates the blessing Child; he holds the orb of the earth, a sign of universal kingship. The play between decorative surface and proportional recession is especially striking in the Anatolian carpet, with its foreshortening of the animal and abstract designs. Hovering in front of the carpet is a painting-within-a-painting, a *Crucifixion* that evokes the

older tradition of the gold-ground religious icon. This *Crucifixion* further dramatizes the play between flatness and illusionistic depth. It marks the threshold between the tantalizingly close heavenly "other world" of the painting and the actual world of the beholder: the altar table would have extended just below and in front of this, and the Eucharist upon it would have doubled the body of Christ on the cross.

Cosimo de' Medici the patron is discreetly but unmistakably present, not as a donor portrait but through the proxy of his name saint, Cosmas. Cosmas looks out of the painting as if soliciting the attention of beholders and presenting them to the heavenly court. His brother Damian looks inwards toward the Christ Child; they are the primary recipients of the Child's blessing, but they are also heavenly intercessors who obtain the benefits of that blessing for those on our side of the painting. Scholars have traditionally referred to this kind of arrangement as a *sacra conversazione*, literally "holy conversation," as though the picture showed a kind of social gathering. What really structures the picture, though, is a social hierarchy: the humble might seek help from the Medici and their associates just as the devout might petition the advocates at the Virgin's side to put in a good word that she might then pass on to Christ. The saints in the picture have their own rank, one reflected in their relative positions and in their proximity to their betters. Near Cosmas and Damian, and equally responsive to the implied beholder, is the other great Medici patron, St. Lawrence. St. John the Evangelist, in profile, is present as the name saint of Cosimo's father and his brother, both called Giovanni; he is in conversation with his fellow evangelist St. Mark, the patron of the convent. To the Virgin's left (the place of lesser honor) are the principal saints of Dominican and Mendicant observance: St. Dominic, St. Francis, and St. Peter Martyr, the last also the name saint of Cosimo's eldest son.

For all of its distinctive format, Fra Angelico's altarpiece originally included a predella, which set the actionless protagonists from the painting above it into the narratives most closely associated with them. Here, Cosmas and Damian, who were also doctors (*medici* in Italian), appear in a lively series of scenes displaying a variety of landscape and perspective inventions: several illustrate a series of attempts to martyr them through burning, crucifixion, and decapitation. A posthumous

6.5
Fra Angelico, *Cosmas and Damian Healing a Lame Man*, predella panel from the San Marco altarpiece, *c.* 1438–40. Tempera and gold on panel, 15 x 18¾" (38.1 x 47.5 cm). Museo di San Marco, Florence



6.6
Fra Angelico, *Crucifixion with the Virgin, Mary Magdalene and St. Dominic*, c. 1441–42. Fresco. Chapter house, San Marco, Florence

miracle shows the two brothers healing an amputee by substituting the leg of a black man (fig. 6.5). The effect is to produce a sense of wonder that underscores the impact of the altarpiece as a whole.

The altarpiece includes several legible texts. St. Mark shows St. John the sixth chapter of his Gospel, in which Christ sends out the Apostles two by two to preach and to live in poverty. The detail relates the mission of the Apostles with that of the Dominican Order itself, but the reference to saints acting in pairs also points to the brother saints Cosmas and Damian, as well as to the Medici brothers Cosimo and Giovanni.

The text is legible at close range, but we might wonder who, apart from the priest, ever got close enough to the altarpiece to be able to read it. The same goes for another inscription, from the book of Ecclesiasticus, on the mantle of the Virgin: "I am the mother of beautiful love...and of holy hope"; "Like a vine I caused loveliness to bud, and my blossoms became glorious and abundant fruit." Perhaps some of the devout brethren's interaction with the painting did involve poring over its surface, but it should not be ruled out that such inscriptions were placed there by Fra Angelico as memos to himself, making the act of painting into a pious meditation on its imagery and even on its aesthetic effect. The passage from Ecclesiasticus underlies the paradisical splendor of the altarpiece, affirming the artistic idiom of sensory richness and marvel. Fra Angelico might have had cause to wonder whether effects like this had their limits in sacred art, and how those limits were to be determined.

Fra Angelico's Frescoes

Such scruples were clearly operative in the decoration of the convent's communal spaces and the friars' cells. The altarpiece addressed the secular world and presented the Order to outsiders who could enter the convent church (although they probably only saw the painting at a distance, through the doors of the masonry screen that originally separated the choir from the nave of the church). In the chapter house, a space for community assembly and for the reception of visitors, Fra Angelico's great mural of the *Crucifixion* (fig. 6.6) served both to represent the Dominicans and to address the brethren themselves. The nucleus of the composition is the crucified Christ contemplated by St. Dominic, a theme repeated numerous times by Fra Angelico and his assistants throughout the convent (it appears in every one of the novices' cells). Amplifying this is the group with the fainting Virgin, her outstretched arms manifesting her mimetic identification with the suffering Christ (known as the Virgin's *compassio*). Dominic heads a phalanx of kneeling and standing saints, all of them associated with the foundation of religious Orders. By contrast, the group near the Virgin represents the sphere of Florentine civic life, which centered on the cult of the Virgin at the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore. Nearby is a pointing St. John, the city's patron saint, the convent's patron St. Mark, and the three Medici saints Cosmas, Damian, and Lawrence. Fra Angelico frescoed the lunette with the full palette of Florentine Trecento painting, in bright

contrasting primary and secondary colors. There are discreet touches of luxury in the use of ultramarine for the Virgin's regal ermine-lined mantle, and in the *a secco* patterning of the garments of the Medici saints. By contrast, the founder saints to the left of Christ wear sober blue-black, white, and browns, rendered in less expensive pigments. The fresco, in other words, illustrates the harmonious confrontation of city and cloister around the collective act of venerating the Cross.

The fresco also had a prescriptive function for the Dominican brothers. Its model of a prayerful comportment directed the friars to internalize the image of the dead Christ, to maintain a penitential state of mind by meditating upon it. The chapter house also served as the setting for the daily "Chapter of Faults," in which friars would confess to infringements of the Dominican Rule and subject themselves to penitence, including self-flagellation. The mural paintings in the convent's inner spaces maintain a similar disciplinary function. An inscription on the large *Annunciation* (fig. 6.7) at the head of the stairs bids the beholder: "When you come before the image of the Ever-Virgin, take care that you do not neglect to say an 'Ave.'" The painting is pointedly austere: the angel's variegated wing contains the four principal colors to which Fra Angelico has limited his palette: ocher, vermilion, grayish blue, and blue-green. The strong clear light, originally reinforced by a single window in the corridor to the left, gives the figures a powerful sense of presence and sharpens the contours of the architectural setting. This illumination, however, is not consistent; having earlier evoked all the codes of Florentine painting in the wake of Masaccio, Fra Angelico has now resolved deliberately to undermine the principles of spatial coherence. The solid-looking angel casts no shadow; the vaulting above the angel responds to no system of consoles like those visible behind the Virgin, and the capitals of the arcade switch from **Composite** to Ionic in the section of loggia that recedes in space. It is as if Fra Angelico wanted to signify the miraculous and mysterious nature of the Incarnation by conceiving it as something literally "incommensurable" with the optical cues by which we make sense of the world.

The version of the Annunciation that Fra Angelico painted for one of the friar's cells (fig. 6.8) is yet more austere. The event takes place under a loggia strongly reminiscent of the little room in which the painting is located: the whitewashed wall of the cell provides the dominant color of the painted architectural setting. Expensive colors, such as ultramarine, are conspicuously absent, a fact to which Fra Angelico draws attention by leaving the figure of the Virgin unfinished. The underpainting of her robe and its modeling in red wash seem to await a customary final layer of blue pigment that the painter never intended to supply, deliberately "impoverishing" his own image. Fra Angelico had found a way of painting that reflected its primary audience, friars who rejected worldly goods; the image includes the figure of a Dominican, St. Peter Martyr, who provided the cell's inhabitant with a proper example of prayerful contemplation.

Such a manner of painting reinforced the extraordinary posthumous myth of the "angelic" painter, who redeemed the practice of art through a near saintly degree

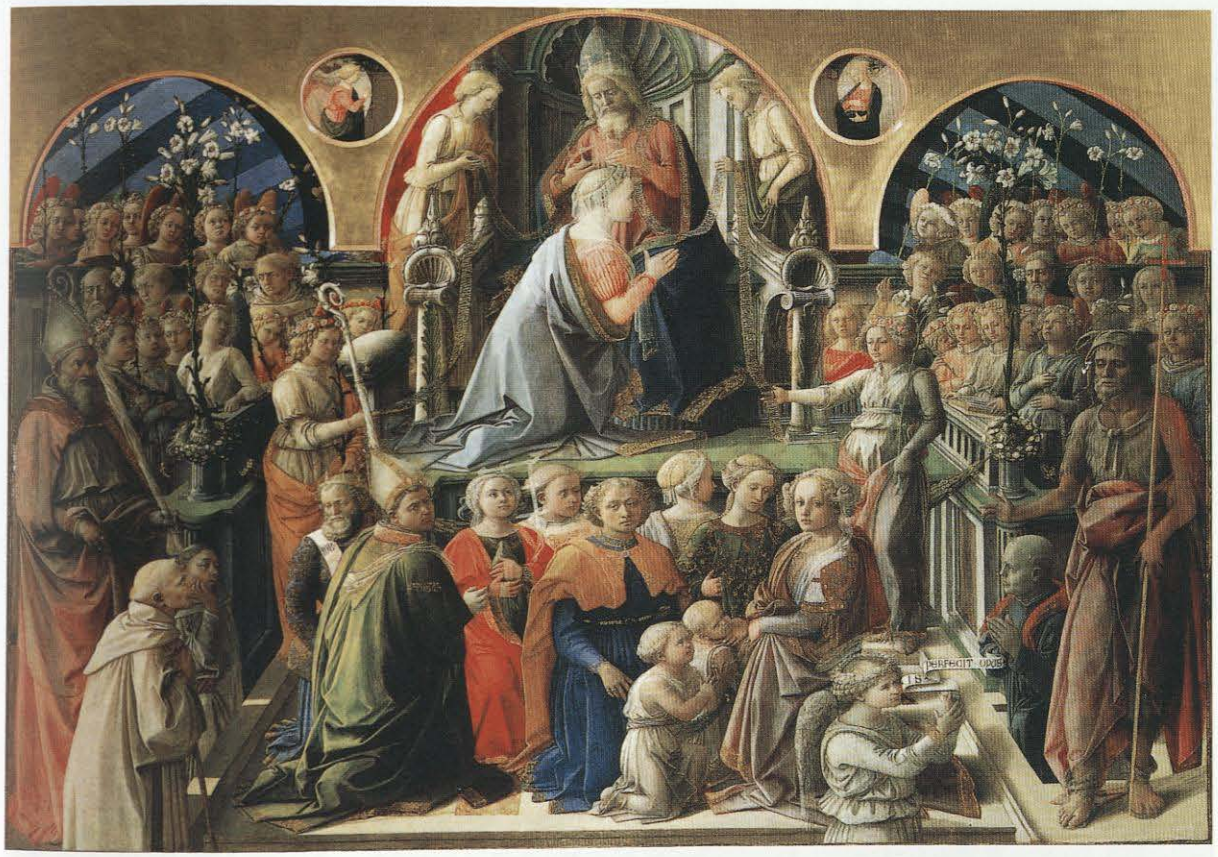
6.7
Fra Angelico, *Annunciation*, 1438–45. Fresco. Upper corridor, San Marco, Florence

of personal piety. As early as 1450 the Dominican poet Fra Domenico da Corella wrote with regard to a set of cabinet doors that Fra Angelico had painted for the church of the Annunziata in Florence, that the artist was "rich in skill and unerring in religion," possessed of the necessary grace to paint the Virgin. The poet associated Fra Angelico with the founding miracle of the **Servite** Order and the celebrated miracle-working icon (*see* **fig. 1.43**) in the church, itself brought to completion not by the tricks of human art, but by the intervention of an angel. Following Corella, writers would regularly refer to "Fra Giovanni" as a *pictor angelicus*, thereby recognizing the unique harmony of an absolute unalloyed orthodox Christian faith combined with the potentially specious splendors of human artifice, illusion, and craft. In his artists' biographies of 1550 and 1568, Giorgio Vasari would immortalize such stories as "Fra Giovanni" weeping when he painted a *Crucifixion*, and the Pope's plan to appoint him archbishop of Florence. Pope John Paul II did in fact beatify the artist in 1984, pronouncing him a step closer to sainthood, and artists are now encouraged to pray to Fra Angelico for his intercession. The myths surrounding Fra Angelico deal with much the same anxieties as those brought on by the remarks of Antonino at the beginning of this chapter (see p. 132), namely, about the surrender of art to secularizing impulses, which were concerns (as we shall see) that came to a climax during Vasari's own lifetime.

The Florentine Altarpiece after 1440

Fra Filippo Lippi

Another friar painter who responded rapidly to the new unified altarpiece format was Fra Filippo Lippi (*c.* 1406–1469) of the Carmelite Order, who was also closely associated with the Medici and their supporters. Lippi would become as famous for his scandalous personal life as Fra Angelico would for his piety, yet like the Dominican friar his painting mediated the concerns of the cloister and the city. Even while living and working in the secular world after 1432 and fathering a child by the nun Lucrezia Buti, Lippi never renounced his vows or broke off contact with the **Carmine**. In 1445 he completed the single-panel altarpiece (*pala* in Italian; **fig. 6.9**) for the chapel of the Franciscan novitiate at Santa Croce in Florence, which had been built and decorated under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici and dedicated to Cosmas and Damian. Like Fra Angelico in the San Marco altarpiece, Lippi places the Virgin and Child in a unified space with a company of saints: Francis and Anthony of Padua represent the Order, Cosmas and Damian its Medici patrons. Damian arrests the attention of the beholder,



OPPOSITE, ABOVE

6.8

Fra Angelico, *Annunciation*, 1440–45. Fresco. Friar's cell, San Marco, Florence

OPPOSITE, BELOW

6.9

Fra Filippo Lippi, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Francis, Cosmas, Damian, and Anthony*, 1445. Tempera on panel, 6'5" x 6'5" (1.96 x 1.96 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

LEFT

6.10

Fra Filippo Lippi, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1441–47. Tempera on panel, 6'7" x 9'5" (2 x 2.87 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

directing him to the Virgin and Child. The shallow architectural setting, decorated in the frieze with the *palle* (balls) that the Medici used as family symbols, would have looked like a more magnificent version of the novitiate chapel itself (built, once again, by Michelozzo). Lippi's saints seem capable of vigorous movement, and the Child, reminiscent of the *spiritelli* on Donatello's *Cantoria* (**see** fig. 5.20), leaps in the Virgin's lap. Clasping his mother's breast, the infant confronts the viewer with his stare, as though to indicate that the Virgin's milk is not for him alone. Clerics often understood the milk of the Virgin to be a symbol of the nourishing power of religious doctrine, but Lippi delivers a more emotional charge: he provided the teenage novices, some of them orphans, some recently removed from the care of their parents and from family, with the compensating assurance of the Virgin's nurturing motherhood.

Lippi's emotive presentation seems more rooted in the physical world than Fra Angelico's painting, yet Lippi, too, undermines the idea of a pictorial space that extends our own. The benches on which the Medici saints sit recede to a two-point perspective that is not consistent with that of the Virgin's throne or the marble tiles in the floor. Once noticed, the effect is jarring, as is the not quite measurable or comprehensible relationship of the four flanking saints to the niches and columns behind them. The hints of incoherence as well as the tripartite division of the architecture read as a throwback to the format of the polyptych, where Virgin and saints seemed to coexist in demarcated worlds, separated by frames.

Lippi and his patrons seem on other occasions to have preferred the older multi-paneled altarpiece: the one he made between 1441 and 1447 for the church of Sant'Ambrogio, Florence, effectively combines the possibilities of the polyptych with the more modern unified format (fig. 6.10). Here the three-arched frame recalls the subdivisions of older altarpieces; dividing and prioritizing visual information, it also serves as a screen behind which figures move in a coherent inner space. The perspective construction of the great throne serves deliberately to misalign its architecture with the divisions of the frame, enhancing the sense of a spatial volume extending beyond the arches and even in front of them: on the "far" side, a court of angels attends on the Virgin's coronation. Lippi places these figures higher in the painting than the foreground group of saints and other figures, who seem rather to be on "our" side of the arcade.

Lippi's altarpiece creates a gradual transition from sacred to secular spheres. Once again, the artist's conception can be related to the dual nature of the congregation

6.11
Domenico Veneziano, St. Lucy altarpiece, 1445–47. Tempera on panel, 6'10" x 7' (2.09 x 2.19 m), Uffizi Gallery, Florence

addressed by the work. On the one hand the Benedictine foundation of Sant'Ambrogio housed a community of nuns who maintained strict vows of seclusion from the secular world; they participated in the Mass and other services from a separate enclosure in the choir. The nuns would have specially identified with, and been represented by, the figure of the Virgin, whose coronation, like the nuns' own profession of vows, constituted a spiritual marriage with Christ. Yet Sant'Ambrogio was also a parish church; it housed confraternities that drew lay membership from across the city, and a diverse community of Florentines venerated its relic of the blood of Christ. The relation of church and city is represented in the altarpiece by the commanding figures of St. John the Baptist and St. Ambrose, who dominate the right and left of the composition respectively. John's gesture designates the Virgin, but it also draws attention to the portrait of the patron, Francesco Maringhi, who seems to rise from his tomb beneath the arm of the Baptist. At the threshold of the painting an angel holds a scroll, which reads "ISTE PERFECIT OPUS" ("He it was who brought the work into being"): the words present the patron as the "author" of the work. Directly opposite are two white-robed figures. The one with the staff is probably St. Benedict; the adjacent figure leaning his head on his hand has no discernible identity, and it is likely that here Lippi took the unusual step of portraying himself, in his Carmelite habit. An image of the friar-painter, in the place of greater honor at God's right, provides a counterpart for the portrait of a donor from the secular world.

At center foreground, the gazes of three saints confront the congregation: the bishop St. Martin and the husband and wife martyrs Eustace and Theopista, shown with their two children. The image of the saintly family presents itself for emulation by Florentine households, although there seems to be very little of the otherworldly or the ascetic in Lippi's view of saintliness. In fact, the lavish attire of the demurely staring Theopista, with her jeweled brocades and elaborately styled hair, touched a point of long-standing tension in the Renaissance city, namely, between the private citizens who sought honor through luxurious adornment, and the government regulators and mendicant preachers who sought to restrain such displays. (Fra Antonino had written a pamphlet against excess in women's fashions in 1440, but his views were generally more moderate than those of Franciscan preachers.)

So what does it mean for a female saint to be dressed in a manner that could invite censure in the case of actual Florentine women? One answer is that there was a different standard for saints: these were superior and non-worldly beings who deserved to be represented with more honor, and thus a greater degree of ornament – especially when the setting was clearly not of this world. Yet perhaps in the eyes of Florentine lay beholders, Theopista would also have quietly affirmed their own worldly pursuit of distinction through expensive adornment.

Domenico Veneziano

Around 1447, across the River Arno, the **Olivetan** Benedictines of Santa Lucia dei Magnoli received an altarpiece (fig. 6.11) by Domenico Veneziano (*c.* 1410–1461), a Venetian who appears to have trained in Florence and Rome with Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello. The rectangular painting shows that Domenico had carefully studied Fra Angelico's San Marco panel (***see*** fig. 6.4), and reconciled the geometry of receding, perspectival, architectural space with simple proportional divisions of the surface. Now the tripartite loggia inside the painting retains the organizing principles of the older multi-panel format. Below the **cornice** of the frame, the painted architecture, flush with the surface, behaves like a traditional triptych, yet the supporting members rise from a point much further back in the pictorial space. While the Virgin and Child are set back in depth and framed by columns, the four saints occupy a common foreground zone closer to the beholder's space. At the same time, the arches and niches of the architectural enclosure echo the containing and compartmentalizing effect of the polyptych frame, emphasizing the status of each saint as an individual focus of devotion. And once again, the panel instructs the viewer who considers it closely not to take the principles of regular spatial recession too literally: the more distant Virgin and Child are apparently exempt from the law of proportional diminution, according to which they would in fact be much larger than the figures in the foreground.

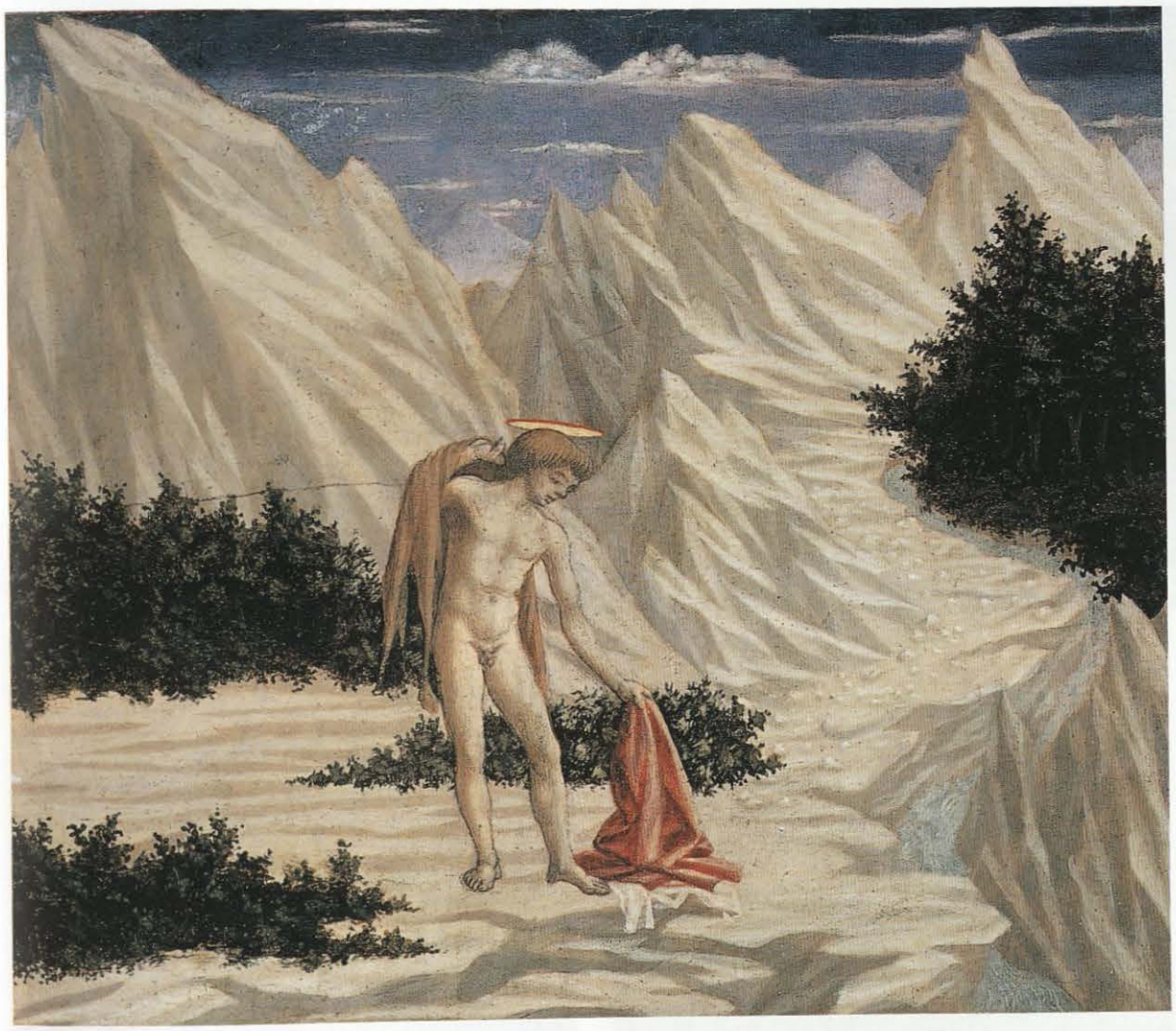
Domenico's major achievement in the panel is the realization of light effects, and it is he who most fully developed that aspect of Masaccio's work. The surface of the painting was damaged by overcleaning in 1862, but it is still possible to see how the reflected light plays across the inner surfaces of the vaults, giving the pink, white, and green of the architecture – a reference to the colors of the marble on Florence Cathedral – a sunlit radiance. Compare the indirect illumination of the Virgin beneath the loggia with the intense light falling on Lucy, the saint in the right foreground holding a plate with the eyes her torturers removed. Domenico has coordinated the rendering of optical phenomena with religious meaning: the very name "Lucy" derives from the Latin word for "light." At the same time, the altarpiece implies that physical light, the medium by which things are seen, constitutes only a limited and partial form of spiritual illumination and insight. The Virgin's throne bears a condensed version of a text from Luke 8:10: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables, that seeing they may not see."

Light assumes an important dramatic role in Domenico's five predella panels below, each devoted to an episode in the lives of the four saints and the Virgin above. The artist scored the rays of miraculous light in *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata* (fig. 6.12) directly into the panel. In the *Annunciation*, diagonal beams fall across the pavement of a closed courtyard, also scored into the surface, and separate the supernatural domain of the angel from that of the mortal Virgin. (As we saw with Pisanello's Brenzoni monument (***see*** fig. 4.20), Catholics regarded the passing of light as a metaphor for the

6.12
Domenico Veneziano, *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, predella panel from the St. Lucy altarpiece, *c.* 1445. 10⅞ x 12" (26.7 x 30.5 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

6.13
Domenico Veneziano, *The Martyrdom of St. Lucy*, predella panel from the St. Lucy Altarpiece, *c.*1445–48. 10⅝ x 11⅞" (27 x 30 cm). Staatliche Museen, Berlin

Incarnation; some, including Antonino, even understood light to be the medium by which the Incarnation took place.) The plunging orthogonals and the vector of a tyrant's scepter, which follow the same path as the light rays that provided the premise for Alberti's explanation of perspective, seem to converge at the point where an executioner's knife enters the neck of the martyred St. Lucy (fig. 6.13). Stark white light striking a pavement dramatically silhouettes the screaming mother of a dead child resurrected by St. Zenobius (fig. 6.14). Finally, as if signaling a drama of conversion, light bathes both the harsh rocks and vulnerable nude body of the young St. John the Baptist (fig. 6.15), who sets aside his worldly clothes for his hermit's animal hide. The gnarled, Donatellesque older saint in the main panel shows the same young man transformed by years of life in the wilderness.



6.15
Domenico Veneziano, *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, predella panel from the St. Lucy altarpiece, *c.* 1445–48. 11¼ x 12¾" (28.4 x 31.8 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Andrea del Castagno and the Convent of Sant'Apollonia

In the same years that Domenico Veneziano was working for the community at Santa Lucia, another Benedictine community across the River Arno, the convent of Sant'Apollonia, hired the Florentine native Andrea del Castagno (*c.* 1419–1457) to decorate its **refectory**. This was the room where the nuns dined, and Castagno responded to that function by painting a monumental *Last Supper* (fig. 6.16) along with other scenes from Christ's Passion. Compared with Fra Angelico in San Marco, Castagno's pictures are more assertive in their virtuoso illusionism and confident in the splendor of their color and ornament. The virtual room that houses the *Last Supper* seems to project from the wall rather than receding into it; the fictional interior is sumptuously adorned with panels of multicolored marble, figured textile hangings, and carved sphinxes. The floor and ceiling tiles, in stark foreshortening, form a shimmering pattern. Castagno had recently worked in Padua and designed mosaics for San Marco in Venice, and so was attuned to the impact of colored stone wall treatments. In the now severely damaged scenes overhead, figures around the crucified Christ gesticulate with an emotionalism that demonstrates that Castagno had studied the work of Donatello, while the resurrected Christ directs his triumphant blessing toward the occupants of the refectory below.

The sumptuousness of the painted architecture and the conspicuous demonstration of illusionistic artifice relate to the privileged status of Sant'Apollonia, the largest and the richest female cloister in Florence. The city's great families were represented among the nuns, who would often bring with them a substantial dowry when they joined the Order. At the same time, the rigorous discipline of the house, especially the maintenance of the community in complete isolation from the outside

OPPOSITE, BELOW
6.14
Domenico Veneziano, *A Miracle of St. Zenobius*, predella panel from the St. Lucy altarpiece, *c.* 1445–48. Tempera on panel, 11¼ x 12⅞" (28.6 x 32.5 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

6.16
Andrea del Castagno, *The Last Supper*, c. 1445–50. Fresco. Sant'Apollonia, Florence

world, earned it the special favor and protection of the Pope, Archbishop Antonino, and the Medici. Castagno, that is, did not produce splendor and magnificence for its own sake. Archbishop Antonino (among the few male Florentines who would have had access to the painting, during pastoral visits) would have been unlikely to fault its effects as arbitrary curiosities. The whole scheme has a cerebral quality, supporting the meditation of the sisters in the room. There is after all something rather funereal about the marble-clad space in which Christ celebrates his last Passover with the Apostles; the precious **porphyry** and **serpentine** recall the adornment of Roman funerary monuments being revived in just these years. The sense of tomb-like enclosure might have resonated with women confined for life behind the high walls of Sant'Apollonia.

At the same time, Castagno's painted marble interior presents a kind of visual enigma, a sign of reality itself being transfigured. As Christ institutes the **Eucharist**, telling his followers to eat of his flesh and drink of his blood, a violent efflorescence of colored marble seems to break forth over the main characters in the story – Christ, Peter, John, and Judas. The six marble panels of the rear wall are matched by six panels on each foreshortened side wall, which tells us that the room is square in form. With sufficient patience, you can determine that the ceiling has fourteen panels to each side. Yet if you count the loops on the circular meander pattern in the frieze, you find that there are exactly twice the number in the section on the rear wall as appear on either of the side walls. Castagno is challenging us to notice the inconsistency, departing from the rules of perspective to create a paradoxical space that signals the mind-boggling mystery that is the subject of the narrative. A literate beholder might recall that sphinxes are symbols of enigma, and that in John's account of the Last Supper, the Apostles expressed perplexity at Christ's mysterious words. At John 16:25, moreover, Christ remarks: "I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the father." The beholder might note that John is placed at dead center, directly on an axis with the Crucifixion above, which would inform her that it is John's account of the Passion that is at stake.

The *all'antica* Tomb

Like Florence's cathedral, the great mendicant churches, such as Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce, received funding from the state, and locals regarded them as civic foundations. In 1444 the *signoria* designated Santa Croce, long established as the burial place of numerous affluent Florentine families, to be the site of a public monument to the late chancellor Leonardo Bruni (1369-1444). Bruni had wanted to be buried there under a plain marble slab, but the state pre-empted family initiative, producing a monument (fig. 6.17) on the scale of the one that Donatello had made in the 1420s for the antipope John XXIII in the baptistery (*see* fig. 4.1). This gesture on behalf of the public interest competed with the territorial strategies of such families as the Alberti, the Bardi, and the Baroncelli, all of whom had ostentatious private burial chapels in the same church. The inscription commemorates the

humanist simply as Leonardus, without using his family name.

Bernardo Rossellino (*c.* 1409–1464) carved the effigy of the deceased Bruni as he had been laid out at his state funeral, crowned with laurel and holding his most prominent work, the Latin *History of the Florentine People*. The eagles that support the bier are a funerary symbol imported from ancient Roman practice, echoing the staging of the funeral itself, which recreated a Roman ritual. Though the Virgin and Child in the ***tondo*** (round image) above refer to the salvation of Bruni's soul, the epitaph on the tomb itself refers not to Bruni's piety but to his intellectual accomplishments, stressing the world's loss at his passing: "history is in mourning and eloquence is dumb, and the Muses, Greek and Latin alike, cannot restrain their tears." This is a tomb that looks back on a lost life more than it looks forward to an eternity in heaven. The ideals of fame and glory were part and parcel of its classical themes, no less than the richly carved Corinthian piers supporting a palmette frieze that surround and contain the effigy. The *tondo* is echoed by the coat of arms outside the arch, originally decorated with blue and gold, and held by angels that resemble the Eros figures in classical funerary monuments. Conveniently, however, the lion on Bruni's coat of arms also corresponded with the lion symbol of Florence, known as the Marzocco: the installation honored the city as much as the individual.

Subsequent patrons and sculptors widely imitated Rossellino's composition. Only a few years later, a follower of Donatello named Desiderio da Settignano (*c.* 1430–1464) completed a similarly conceived monument for Bruni's successor and fellow humanist Carlo Marsuppini, directly opposite Bruni's in the same church. Marsuppini's tomb (**fig. 6.18**) exceeds Bruni's in the lavishness of its classical ornament; its disembodied wings, lion paws, and bristling foliage have an uncanny liveliness, and the virtuoso carving suggests a bid by Desiderio to outdo Rossellino. Whereas the relative severity and gravity of the Bruni tomb might seem to exemplify ideas of the "antique" in the fifteenth century, Desiderio's response

FAR LEFT

6.17

Bernardo Rossellino, tomb of Leonardo Bruni. 1444–50. Marble, height 20' (6.1 m) to top of arch. Santa Croce, Florence

LEFT

6.18

Desiderio da Settignano, tomb of Carlo Marsuppini, begun *c.* 1453–64. Marble, originally with gilding and green and red paint, height 20' to top of arch (6.1 m). Santa Croce, Florence

indicates that *all'antica* works could alternatively embrace a fantastic inventiveness: following the ancients did not always mean "adhering to the rules"; it could also amount to the adoption of a concept of license. Together, the two monuments formulated the principles of what is sometimes called the "humanist tomb," although such tombs would most often be used for the burial of cardinals, popes, and powerful clerics.

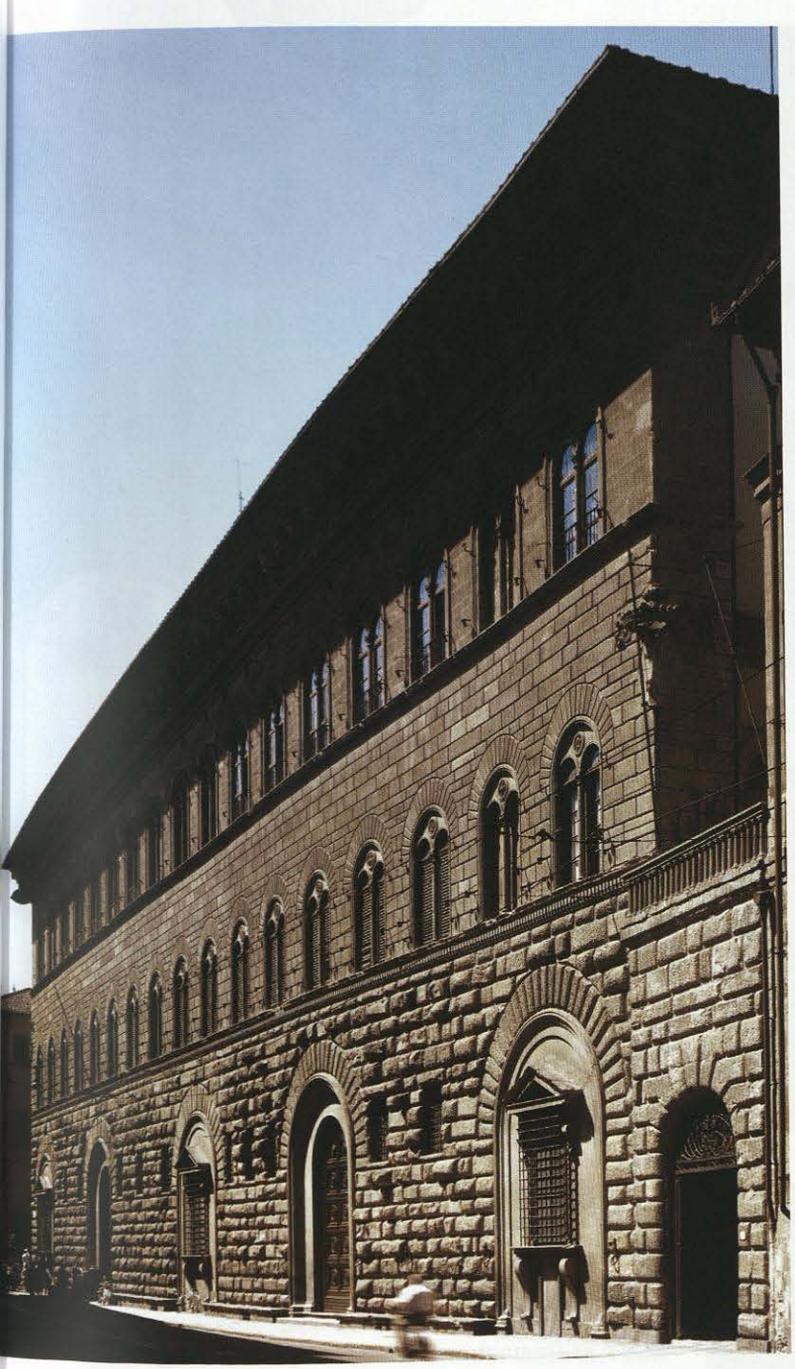
The Private Palace

Ambitious Building in Florence and Venice

During his exile in Padua in 1433–34, Cosimo de' Medici must have traveled to Venice, where he would have seen the way that prominent merchants in another republic lived. In just those years, for example, Marino Contarini was adding new windows to the facade of his home (fig. 6.19) on the Grand Canal. Completed in 1440 after nineteen years of construction, the palace – which is now known as the Ca' d'Oro ("Golden House") – indulged in a splendor normally reserved for religious structures. The arcaded lower storey on the left half of the asymmetrical building provided easy access to boats, while the rows of windows above, outlined with delicate tracery – some of it by Matteo Raverti (*fl.* 1398–1436), who had worked on Milan Cathedral – ensured both bright illumination and an ever-changing play of shadows in the rooms behind. The thin columns separating these were each made of a different imported stone; originally, highlights in gold and even ultramarine ornamented some of the carving. The right-hand side of the palace involved less intricate detailing, though workers applied varnish to the red marble and polychromy to the **Istrian** stone so that even the revetment there sparkled in the sun.

6.19
Giovanni and Bartolomeo Bon, Matteo Raverti, and others, Ca d'Oro (Palazzo Contarini), Venice, 1421–40

The Florentine palace, Palazzo Medici (fig. 6.20), that Cosimo began constructing in 1444 seems by comparison both more assertive and more controlled. This occupied a no less significant site along the Via Larga, a street that ran from a point not far north of the baptistery toward San Marco. The family already owned a residence and several other properties there; for several decades they had been acquiring real estate, and when they finally cleared ground, they made room for a palace significantly larger than the Ca' d'Oro. Such conspicuous building by private individuals might have aroused suspicion of the kind that had driven Cosimo into exile in Padua in 1433, yet with his triumphant return in 1434 he was able to banish or thwart the political enemies who feared his growing influence. (Palla Strozzi was among those banished, largely on account of the envy aroused by his conspicuous display of wealth.) By 1444, then, Cosimo had little reason to worry about his political or financial security, and his friend Antonino was ready to justify grandiose acts, conceiving them as a form of public duty that served the common good rather than the self-interest of a patron. The effect of sobriety, a typical Florentine aspiration to ancient Roman gravity, is certainly calculated, yet every contemporary Florentine observer would have understood the extraordinary costs incurred not just by the scale of the undertaking but also by the treatment of the two street facades. The one conspicuously classical element in the design is the colossal overhanging cornice; for the rest, Cosimo favored a design that looked back to the thirteenth-century Palazzo dei Priori (*see* fig. 1.12). The rough rustication characteristic of the earlier building occurs only on the ground floor, however, and gives way to smooth-faced stones arranged in diminishing courses on the second storey (the principal floor, or *piano nobile*) and then to the seamless surface above this. Like the Ca' d'Oro, the palace would originally have been open on the ground floor, with large arches forming a loggia. A Medici device, the diamond ring, appears in the spandrels of the windows, and the corner of the building bears the family coat of arms, with the *palle*.



The palace is generally attributed to Michelozzo but may reflect an earlier design by Brunelleschi. In its references to public architecture, it departs no less strikingly from the conventions of Florentine domestic buildings (compare it with the mid-fourteenth-century Palazzo Davanzati, fig. 6.21) than did the Ca' d'Oro in Venice. Both buildings centered on an open courtyard; entering the courtyard of the Medici palace, however, would have reminded Florentines of Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital (*see* fig. 3.13). It is as if the latter's loggia had been wrapped around four sides of the *cortile* (courtyard), the *tondi* now replaced with the Medici *palle* or with enlarged reproductions of mythological scenes from famous classical carved gems, some already owned by the Medici and others acquired in the decades after the palace was complete.

The house of a wealthy and visible family like the Medici was never truly a "private space" in our modern sense. The palace continued a series of neighborhood interventions that extended from the immediately adjacent church of San Lorenzo to San Marco up the street,

ABOVE LEFT
6.20
Michelozzo, Palazzo Medici, begun 1444. Florence

ABOVE RIGHT
6.21
Palazzo Davanzati, mid fourteenth century. Florence

6.22
Michelozzo, Palazzo Medici, Florence: Courtyard

making no distinction between the secular and religious spheres. The building itself, moreover, was a place of business, sociability, and political deal-making, a place where the concerns of a family merged with those of public life. During public festivals as well as family weddings and christenings, large numbers of Florentine citizens came into both the inner and outer loggias for musical entertainments and lavish meals (fig. 6.22). Still today, passers-by take advantage of the protection the cornice provides from rain and sun, or pause to rest on the benches built into the exterior walls. In both its architecture and its function, the Medici palace inserted itself into the wider world of civic concerns. Perhaps the most audacious aspect of the Medici appropriation and adaptation of public forms and symbols is the statue that once stood on a richly carved marble plinth in the center of the courtyard.

Luxury and Humility: Donatello's Statues for the Medici Palace

Cosimo appears to have commissioned the lifesize bronze *David* (fig. 6.23) from Donatello after the patriarch's return from exile in 1434; it was very probably in the courtyard by the early 1450s. A Florentine visitor might have recognized the image of the Biblical hero as an adopted symbol of the city, since the same artist's earlier marble *David* had stood in the Palazzo dei Priori since 1416; such a visitor, though, could not have failed to be curious about some of the more novel features of the statue. There is slender scriptural support (I Samuel 17) and no visual tradition for representing David naked. Contemporaries could have compared the work to the nude Hercules on the city seal or on the Porta della Mandorla, but they would have been struck immediately by

6.23
Donatello, *David*, *c.* 1440–43. Bronze, height 5'2¼" (1.58 m). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

the figure's non-Herculean physique. To some it would have suggested the medieval convention of representing pagan cults through the motif of the "idol," usually a nude figure on a column. Donatello himself may have designed the work with an eye to the *Spinario* (*see* fig. 2.12), the bronze statue at the Lateran in Rome that had earlier been so important as a model for Brunelleschi and Ghiberti; *David* resembles the *Spinario* not only in its medium but also in its nudity, age, physiognomic type, and long flowing hair. The likeness pushes the statue further from the realm of the sacred into the world of profane and worldly concerns, as does the fact that the boy's cap, boots, and sword make no attempt to evoke the world of Biblical antiquity, following contemporary fashion.

No other family in the city could have afforded so costly and extravagant a work in precious metal, and the Medici may have had reason to worry that the image contradicted the spirit of reserve that the Republican city expected. Perhaps it was these concerns that prompted them eventually to add an epigram to the base of the work: *The victor is whoever defends the fatherland. God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe. Behold! A boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer, O citizens!* The lines speak to the general Florentine preoccupation with patriotism and civic duty, but they also promise viewers that Cosimo de' Medici, for all of his far-reaching powers, would be the very enemy of "tyranny."

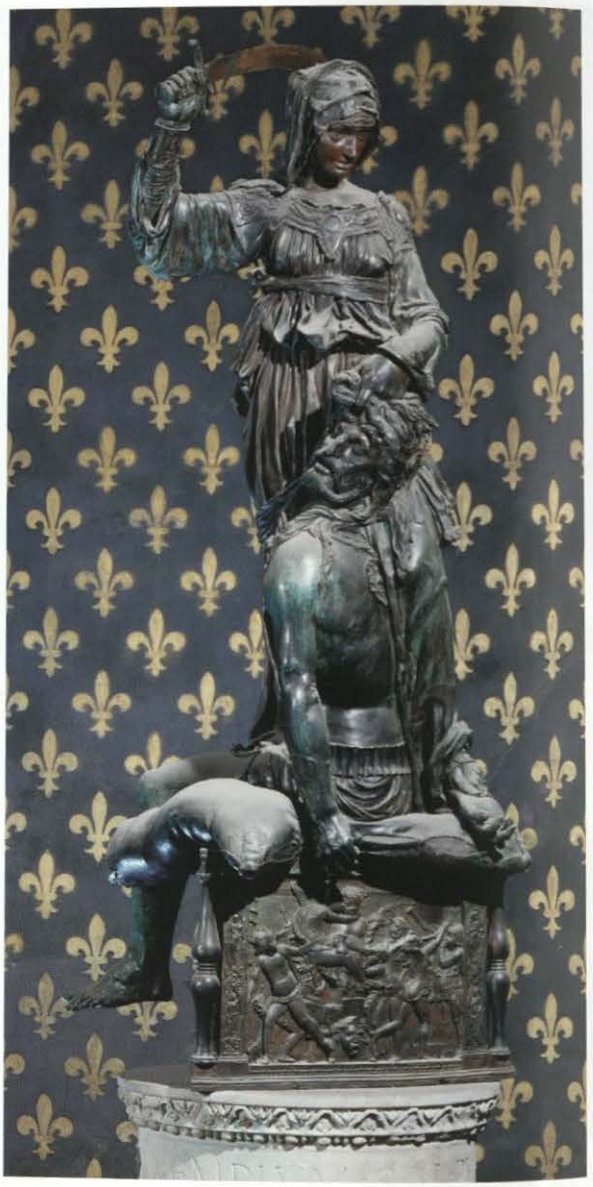
David was useful because the Biblical account also emphasizes his youthful lack of heroism, his humility and utter powerlessness except when aided by God. Donatello and his audience were probably also aware that the Scriptures speak of David's physical beauty. Psalm 44 refers to him as "most beautiful among the sons of men," and the great exegete St. Jerome interpreted the name "David" as meaning both "strong of hand" and "desirable." In the eyes of the Florentine patriarchy, handsomeness and obedience were also desirable qualities in youthful males; Domenico Veneziano's young *St. John* (*see* fig. 6.15) and Ghiberti's *Isaac* (*see* fig. 2.11) are characteristically Florentine in this respect. In fact, the beauty and even the sexual appeal of male adolescents was a deeply rooted obsession of Florentines in general: the preachers decried their fascination with youth as a sinful perversion, and even accused parents of dressing up their sons to make them more attractive to adults. Donatello's *David*, his exposed body set off by contemporary hat and boots, plays upon such preoccupations: the boy's expression suggests erotic enticement, and the feather on Goliath's helmet sensuously caresses his inner thigh. That Donatello thought of his *David* in this way is suggested by the fact that he adorned the helmet of

6.24
Donatello, *David* (detail): Helmet of Goliath. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

Goliath (fig. 6.24) with a replica of a classical cameo showing Eros, or Cupid, riding a chariot. Love, in other words, is in control here – perhaps it is love that has conquered Goliath. Such a detail would not have been visible from the ground, belonging in the sphere of private or restricted meanings known only to the artist and client. On the one hand – in their collaboration with Antonino and patronage of churches and monasteries – the Medici were careful to maintain the role of Christian pillars of society. On the other, they signaled their power through an ability to question the boundaries and limits of what was permissible in Christian art.

Some visitors to the Medici palace would have been allowed to proceed farther from the courtyard into the walled garden beyond, a space one could only glimpse from the street. At some point, probably during the second half of the 1450s, the Medici placed over a fountain in the garden a second bronze statue by Donatello, the two-figure group of *Judith and Holofernes* (fig. 6.25). As a Biblical heroine and exemplar of virtue, Judith formed an apt companion piece to David; she, too, saved her homeland by decapitating an enemy leader (after first getting him drunk). Although she has the same downcast glance as David, however, this now reads as the sign not of allure but of baleful intent. Judith's action contrasts with David's repose, and just as Donatello displayed his masterful depiction of the nude body in the earlier sculpture, so in the later he shows his skill in rendering drapery. The bunched and gathered folds of cloth richly articulate the statue with light and shade. Holofernes, by contrast – struck once already by Judith's sword – drapes over the base in an ungainly and disfigured pose. As with Goliath, Donatello insinuates more about the cause of the figure's undoing. The three sides of the base (fig. 6.26) recapitulate the riotous *spiritelli* (little spirits) of the *Cantoria* (*see* fig. 5.20), except that here they are very explicitly the "vital spirits" of wine who have overpowered the warlord, and who cavort as they make and consume the liquor that intoxicates them. Two of Donatello's fountain spouts takes the form of vomiting faces. One of the more mature spirits, viewed from behind, strikes the pose of the *David*, as if to underscore that figure's scarcely concealed pagan and sensual nature.

The Medici family gave the *Judith*, like the *David*, a self-serving moral meaning in the form of a patriotic inscription: *Kingdoms fall through luxury, cities rise through virtues; behold the neck of pride severed by the hand of humility*. And even more than with the *David*, the lines contain a certain irony: they designate the statue as a triumph of virtue over luxury, yet that statue decorated the most luxurious private residence ever to rise in the city of Florence.



6.25
Donatello, *Judith and Holofernes*, *c.* 1455. Bronze with gilding, 7'9" (2.36 m). Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

6.26
Donatello, *Judith and Holofernes* (detail): Relief from base. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence

LEFT

6.27

Giovanni di ser Giovanni Guidi (called Lo Scheggia), birth salver (*Desco da parto*) of Lorenzo de' Medici. Obverse: *The Triumph of Fame*, *c.* 1449. Tempera, silver, and gold on wood: overall with engaged frame, diameter 36½" (92.7 cm); painted surface, diameter 24⅝" (62.5 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

BELOW

6.28

Lo Scheggia, birth salver of Lorenzo de' Medici, *c.* 1449. Reverse: the Medici device of the *diamante* (diamond ring with feathers). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Inside the Florentine Palace

The large rooms of the Medici palace would have appeared sparsely furnished and decorated to modern eyes. Rooms were flexible in function, sometimes serving at different times for sleeping, for receiving guests, and for conducting business. In Cosimo de' Medici's time, paintings, many of them apparently rather modest images of the Virgin or Christ, decorated a few walls, though the murals that featured frequently in older elite dwellings were largely absent. Some of the more important spaces were decorated to shoulder level with inlaid wooden paneling. Among the most noteworthy works from the 1440s is the decorated salver, or formal tray, called *The Triumph of Fame* (figs. 6.27–6.28), commissioned to mark the birth of Cosimo's grandson Lorenzo on 1 January 1449. The painter, known as Lo Scheggia ("The Splinter"), was the brother of Masaccio, but rather than following his sibling in the making of altarpieces and frescoes, he specialized in painted wooden artifacts associated with the Florentine domestic interior. This childbirth tray he made for the Medici is the largest and most splendid surviving example of one of the most characteristic objects that Florentines had in their home. Most of the salvers in its genre were humble objects purchased as readymades on

the occasion of the birth of a child and probably used for the presentation of gifts after a birth. Some examples were then displayed on walls like small devotional paintings. When decorated, the trays often showed scenes of childbirth and images of one or more male infants wrestling, playing, or urinating – themes associated with fertility and believed to bring good fortune. Wealthier families like the Medici could have the salvers marking their own births made to order with their coat of arms on one side and with imagery drawn from literary classics on the other, as in the present case.

The coats of arms of the Medici and of the Tornabuoni – the family from which Lucrezia, the mother of Lorenzo and the wife of his father Piero, came – appear on the salver's reverse (*see* fig. 6.28), while the inner rim is decorated with green, white, and red feathers, a personal symbol used by Piero that signified the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. The *Triumph of Fame* augurs the future glory of the Medici child, Lorenzo. Its imagery derives from the *Triumphs*, an allegorical dream vision by the great Tuscan poet Petrarch (1304–1374), describing a procession of festive parade floats devoted

6.29
Domenico Veneziano, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1440–43. Diameter 33½" (84 cm). Staatliche Museen, Berlin

6.30
Plate with the arms of the Soderini family of Florence. Produced in Valencia (Spain), *c.* 1400–70. Majolica (tin glazed ceramic). British Museum, London

successively to personifications of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity.

Accompanying Lo Scheggia's *Triumph of Fame* are great men of the classical and chivalric past, although the artist does not make their identities clear. Rather than depicting Fame in a chariot, he places her on top of an elaborate fountain-like structure, manifesting once again the powerful significance of the figure raised on a pedestal in Florentine culture, and at the Medici palace in particular. The style is a simplification of the manner of Gentile da Fabriano and Uccello, prioritizing decorative effects with its symmetry and repetition of forms.

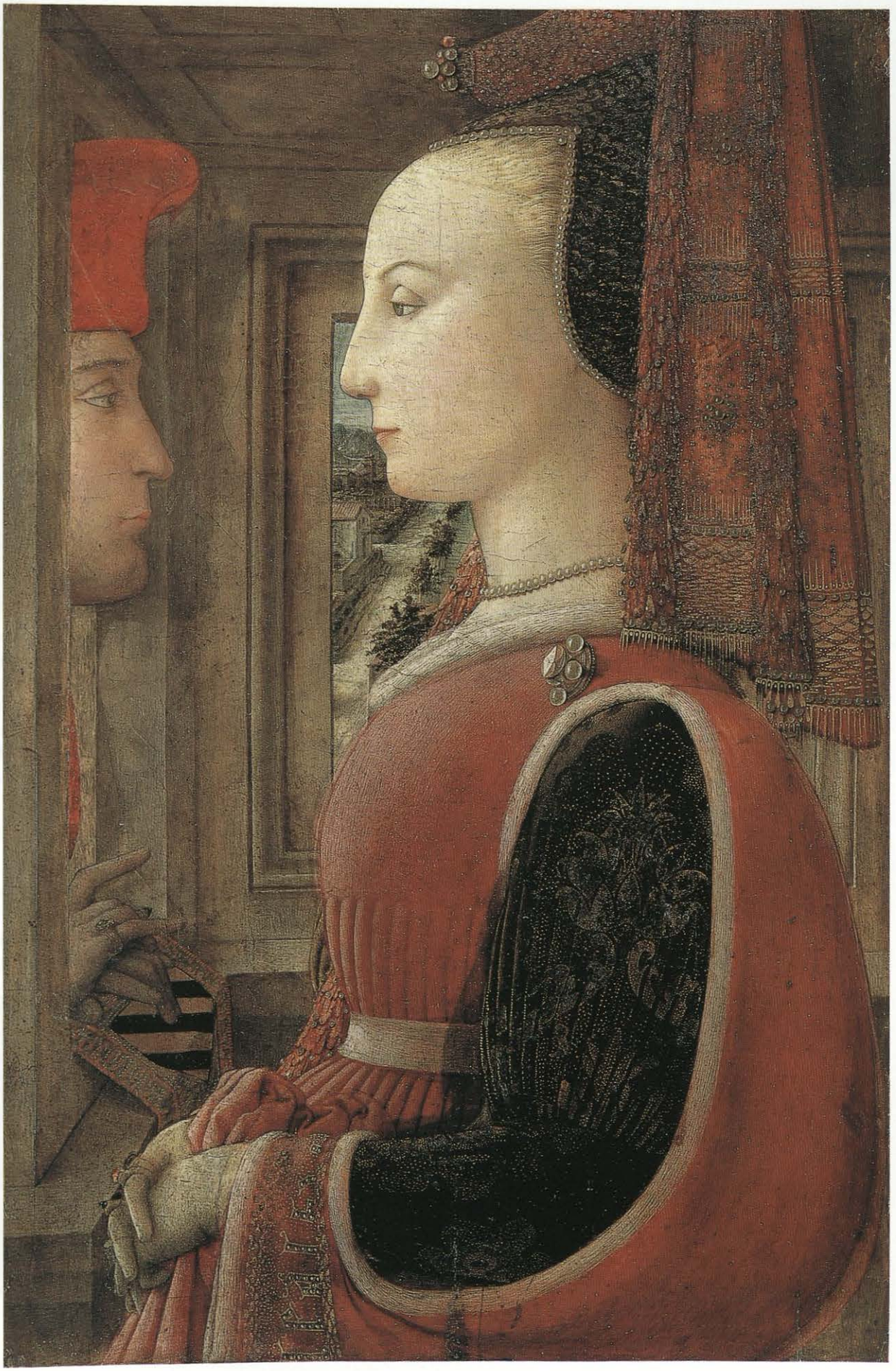
Related in format to the childbirth tray, although more varied in function and location, is the round religious painting known as the *tondo*, which became fashionable in the 1440s. We have already seen one example, the relief of the Virgin and Child on Rossellino's tomb of Leonardo Bruni (*see* fig. 6.17), but paintings of related subjects were more common. Domenico Veneziano produced a splendid example, possibly for the Medici, around 1440–43, depicting the *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 6.29). The pageantry of gorgeous costumes and the depiction of animals make this painting the closest that any local artist ever came to the work of Pisanello, with whom Domenico shows evident familiarity, although he locates these features in the kind of spacious landscape more characteristic of his own generation of Florentines.

What other kinds of artifacts could be found in a Florentine private palace? Painted majolica (fig. 6.30), imported or produced in the Central Italian towns of Deruta or Faenza, was a highly prized commodity. Panel paintings portraying individuals were becoming more common: those that survive from before 1450 are almost always of male sitters depicted in profile, in response to the convention familiar from ancient coins and the more recent portrait medals of Pisanello (*see* fig. 5.16): the portrait of Matteo Olivieri, probably painted by Domenico Veneziano around 1440 (fig. 6.31), is a characteristic example. More unusual is the female profile painted by Lippi around 1444 (fig. 6.32). The painting does more in this case than record a likeness: the unknown woman wears sumptuous velvet brocade with a saddle-shaped headdress and jewels, apparel frequently censured or even banned in public. She is placed in an interior and engaged in a mysterious transaction with a male figure whose profile appears at a window casement. The motto

6.31
Domenico Veneziano (or copy after?), *Matteo Olivieri, c.* 1440. Tempera on fabric transferred from wood, 18⅞ x 13¼" (47.95 x 34.14 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

LEALTA ('loyalty') appears on her red sleeve. To whom is such loyalty being professed? To the man who engages her by the window – or to another, whose wife she has become? In fact, it is now uncertain (and probably always was) whether the woman is a portrait or a creation of poetic fantasy. Lippi's image constructs the domestic interior as not only a private but also a female space, one where luxury could not easily be regulated by law and where secret thoughts and fantasies could be entertained. The "portrait," however, also imagines the permeability of this confined female world: women did display themselves at windows, where they could attract the gazes of passers-by, and they paid more than slight attention to the world outside the palace walls.

The wooden furnishings of important rooms often incorporated painted panels as an integral part of the decoration. Horizontal panel paintings adorned the splendidly decorated ***cassoni***, chests that accompanied a wealthy bride to her new home. The chests contained the precious textiles that formed the bride's provision from her own family. (Titian shows such a chest in the background of his later *Venus of Urbino*; ***see*** fig. 15.3.) The main surface was often painted all over with narrative scenes, including a dozen or more episodes of a story



6.32
Fra Filippo Lippi, *Portrait of a Woman and a Man at a Casement*, *c.* 1444. Tempera on panel, 25¼ x 16½" (64.1 x 41.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

from ancient history or mythology, with hundreds of figures. Sometimes the inner lids of the *cassoni* were painted with sensuous reclining nude male or female figures (fig. 6.33), in the belief that the very sight of beautiful bodies could enable pregnant women to conceive and deliver healthy and handsome children. The so-called "Adimari cassone" (fig. 6.34) by Lo Scheggia from the 1440s is not a *cassone* (nor was it made for the Adimari family) but is rather likely to be a ***spalliera*** panel, set into a wooden surround at shoulder level (spalla is Italian for "shoulder"). The panel is especially remarkable in that it depicts a contemporary Florentine celebration, possibly of a marriage or of the Feast of St. John on 24 June: the latter possibility would explain why the Florence baptistery appears so prominently. Splendidly dressed couples dance in formation under awnings outside a palace; a group of wind players, depicting the ensign of the *signoria* who normally employed them, provide the accompaniment. Festivities like this provided an occasion for the display of private wealth, and the painting shows that the display could occur in the city streets, and with conspicuous civic symbols. The Florentine elite justified their lavish expenditure on weddings, christenings, and funerals with the rationale that these added to the glory of the city.

Such conspicuous luxury, whether in the form of ephemeral celebrations or of monumental building, was not without an element of competition or rivalry. Although the authority of the Medici was well established in Florence by the 1440s, a number of other wealthy families quietly resented their prominence, and challenged it in their own equally visible commissions. Among these were the Pazzi, who like the Medici ran an important international bank. Seeing the Medici use the sacristy of San Lorenzo as a burial chapel, the Pazzi in 1442 commissioned Filippo Brunelleschi to design theirs (fig. 6.35) as the chapter house of Santa Croce, where it opens off one of the main cloisters. Its wall treatments, with Corinthian pilasters and evocations of Roman triumphal arches, represent both a variation on and an enrichment of the Old Sacristy (*see* fig. 4.11); the bays are adorned with *tondi* of the twelve Apostles by Luca della Robbia (1400–1482), and the pendentives of the dome present richly colored figures of the Evangelists, a deliberate contrast with the sober white, gray, and blue of the lower parts of the chapel. In the 1460s the Pazzi would also commission their own palace (fig. 6.36), from Giuliano da Maiano (1432–1490). It had a **rusticated** lower storey, though the smaller scale of the stones and the plain stuccowork of the upper facade make the whole building less overbearing than the Medici building that had spurred them to commission it.

BELOW

6.33

Paolo Schiavo, *cassone*, opened to show nude from interior, 1440s. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

BOTTOM

6.34

Lo Scheggia, *spalliera* with scene of a public festival ("Adimari Cassone"), 1440s. Accademia, Florence

Civic Patronage and the Church: Venice and Padua

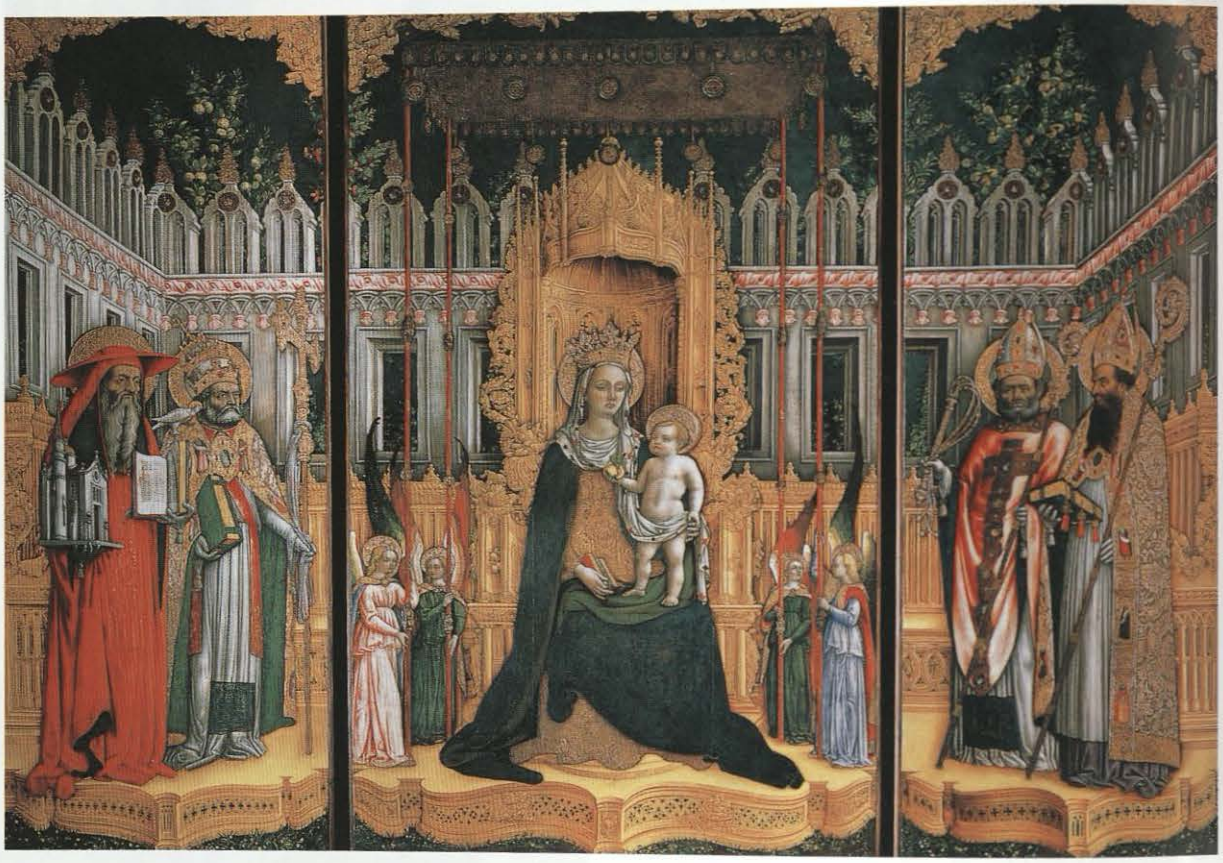
The use of art to mediate between the sacred and the profane, as well as between the public and the private, was not unique to Florence. We have already seen one example

6.35
Filippo Brunelleschi,
interior of the Pazzi Chapel,
Santa Croce, Florence,
c. 1430

of a private Venetian palace, the Ca' d'Oro (*see* fig. 6.19), employing imported revetment, gold, and tracery decorations, all ornaments we might sooner associate with churches. Its combination of white Istrian stone and red marble, meanwhile, made the same kind of reference to public architecture that the Medici palace in Florence did, in this case to Venice's Palazzo Ducale, or Doge's Palace (*see* fig. 5.24), the large complex adjacent to San Marco where the Doge resided and the city's Great Council met. Giovanni Bon (*c.* 1355–1443), one of the stonemasons who oversaw work on the Ca' d'Oro, moved on to work at the Doge's Palace, for which he and his son Bartolomeo provided the Porta della Carta (*see* fig. 5.25), completed in 1442. Part of the function of the Porta was to unify the adjacent worlds of church and palace, of sacred space – the basilica of San Marco – with the building that housed the Venetian government and elected ruler.

As in Florence, moreover, patronage by private individuals and families in Venice was less conspicuous than initiatives by the state and by corporations. The most important Venetian corporations were not the guilds, as in Florence, but confraternities known as ***scuole***. Most *scuole* were groups of lay people who gathered for prayer before specially designated altars in parish churches, but the great *scuole*, or "Scuole Grandi," were elite organizations, their membership drawn from the highest class of *cittadini*, or non-nobles, who constructed palatial buildings to house their meetings, charitable

6.36
Giuliano da Maiano,
Palazzo Pazzi, Florence,
1462–72



6.37
Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Allemagna, *Virgin and Child with Saints*, 1446. Oil on canvas, 11'3½" x 15'7¾" (3.44 x 4.77 m). Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

activities, and communal devotions. The boardroom of the Scuola della Carità was decorated with a great triptych on canvas, *Virgin and Child with Saints* (fig. 6.37), painted in 1446 by the workshop of Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Allemagna. Depicting the Virgin and Child with a group of saints in a splendid Gothic architectural setting, it served as an image for communal devotion while also representing the confraternity and its members. The *scuola* was devoted to acts of charity, and in this picture, St. Jerome holds a book open to a passage exhorting beholders to despise riches and give to the poor. The staggering splendor of the golden throne and stalls, the gilded fruit and foliate ornament that echo the real vegetation in the garden beyond, the simulated brocades and crowns in raised patterns, the expensive colors, including **indigo** and ultramarine – all of this might today seem contrary to the work's basic point, but to a contemporary audience it would have asserted that the only true wealth was to be found in heaven.

Venetians had long regarded the Virgin Mary (as the Florentines regarded John the Baptist and the Romans saints Peter and Paul) as a symbol and protector of their state. Beyond its inclusion of the image of the Virgin, the style in which the work was painted also signaled the patriotic identity of the *scuola*: the elaborate Gothic ornament of the setting would have evoked the rich architectural ornament of the Doge's Palace, the residence of the Republic's elected prince and the city's other governors. By casting the triptych format as a continuous space, Vivarini and his partner showed their consciousness of recent Florentine innovations – the Florentine Filippo Lippi had painted such a unified triptych in Venice's subject city of Padua in the previous decade – though as in Jacopo Bellini's drawings (*see* figs. 5.5, 5.22–5.23), the relation to Florentine art is anything but complacent. In an adaptive fashion characteristic of Venetian artistic culture, the artists transform and translate the imported format.

A number of Florentine artists were active in Venice and the Veneto during this decade, their presence sometimes the result of Medici diplomacy: Cosimo had temporarily moved the Medici bank from Florence to Padua while exiled there in 1433–34, and his authority was still strong in the region. For the Observant Benedictine nuns of San Zaccaria in Venice, Castagno in 1442 painted a series of his characteristically sinewy and vigorous saints (fig. 6.38), in the Gothic vaults of the sacristy. Around the same time he designed a mosaic of the *Death of the Virgin* (fig. 6.39) for a chapel in the basilica of San Marco in Venice, though his designs were probably only executed later in the decade and even modified by other artists. Castagno's contribution consists of the group of Apostles, the Virgin on her bier, and Christ

ABOVE

6.38

Andrea del Castagno, *Benedictine Fathers and Apostles*, from the vault of the apse in the chapel of San Tarasio, 1442. Fresco. San Zaccaria, Venice

RIGHT

6.39

Andrea del Castagno (designer), *The Death of the Virgin*, *c.* 1430–50. Mosaic. Mascoli Chapel, San Marco, Venice

OPPOSITE

6.40

Jacopo Bellini (designer), *Visitation, c.* 1450. Mosaic. Mascoli Chapel, San Marco, Venice

LEFT

6.41

Donatello, Santo altar, 1447–50. General view of present installation. Basilica del Santo, Padua

appearing overhead in a **mandorla**. The architectural elements behind appear to have been added subsequently to the figure composition: Castagno, as we have seen, was generally more adept at locating his figures within painted architecture. Moreover, the style of the architecture is closer to the monumental and richly adorned buildings that appear in the drawing books of Jacopo Bellini (*see* figs. 5.5, 5.22–5.23). In the same chapel Bellini designed the flanking scene of the *Visitation* (fig. 6.40), where the figures are, again by contrast, located within the pictorial space, and it was probably he who supplied the background for Castagno's composition.

Donatello in Padua

In the period he was working on the *David* and the *Judith*, Donatello found himself drawn between palace and church commissions. He spent roughly a decade (1443–53) working in Padua, notably at the great Franciscan pilgrimage church of St. Anthony – known as the Santo – where he carried out a massive altarpiece with seven near-lifesize figures in bronze and more than a dozen bronze reliefs depicting angels and episodes from the life of St. Anthony, together with a marble relief of the Entombment of Christ (fig. 6.41). The ensemble

6.42
Donatello, *The Miracle of the Newborn Child,* 1447–50. Bronze with gilding, 22½ x 48½" (57 x 123 cm). Basilica del Santo, Padua

was dismantled in 1579 and the present reconstruction dating from 1895 bears little relation to Donatello's own installation in 1450. It is necessary to imagine a temple-like structure housing the Virgin in the company of three saints representing the Franciscan Order (Francis, Anthony, and Louis of Toulouse), and three others from the city of Padua (Prosdocimus, in bishop's vestments; Giustina, crowned; and Daniel, holding a model of the city). The great Crucifix pertains to an independent commission by Donatello and was not originally part of the altarpiece.

The exact original disposition of the other parts, moreover, remains uncertain, and possible reconstructions produce strikingly different effects. Did the gestures of Giustina and Daniel originally designate and acknowledge the congregation, beckoning pilgrims to approach the altar, as they do now? Or were their positions switched, such that their gestures rather directed the beholder toward the Virgin and Child – much like the attitudes of St. John in Domenico Veneziano's St. Lucy altarpiece (*see* fig. 6.11) or Cosmas in Fra Angelico's San Marco panel (*see* fig. 6.5)? Slightly rearranged, the altarpiece becomes more introspective and self-enclosed in character, like Vivarini and Giovanni d'Allemagna's *Virgin and Child with Saints* (*see* fig. 6.37): the saints become contemplatives in a state of otherworldly beatitude. The viewer would in that case relate to the altar primarily through the confrontational pose and penetrating stare of the Virgin, austerely frontal and symmetric as she holds the child directly before her (fig. 6.42). Donatello surrounds his Christ with a mandorla of drapery that makes the Child appear to emerge from her body. The composition derives from an older icon of the Virgin and Child, yet with his frown and urgent gesture of blessing, Christ seems more human than the otherworldly Virgin, a disquieting composite of ancient statuary and pagan motifs: her head is reminiscent of a Roman or Hellenistic goddess, but crowned by "living" cherubim; the throne is composed of lion claws with human heads, probably designating sphinxes that (as we saw with Castagno, *see* fig. 6.16) served as a symbol of enigma.

The four rectangular bronze reliefs recount miracles attesting to the sainthood of Anthony. Like the narrative paintings of Fra Angelico and Domenico Veneziano (*see* figs. 6.5–6.8, and 6.11–6.15), these aimed to produce marvel and wonder. With an eye on Ghiberti's second set of baptistery doors, Donatello crowded his compositions with a throng of figures who react to what they see with passionate astonishment: through the saint's agency, a newborn infant speaks in defense of his mother's chastity; a self-mutilating penitent has his severed leg reattached; a donkey converts a skeptic by kneeling in reverence before the Eucharist; and an autopsy on a miser reveals his heart not to be in his chest but in his money box.

Donatello uses perspective to enrich and complicate the space in which the action unfolds, superimposing screens of architectural elements as he did in his earlier *Feast of Herod* for Siena (*see* fig. 4.13), though the illusionistic architecture now has a vastness and monumentality with little precedent in Florentine art. This has to do in part with the scope afforded by the extended horizontal relief format, but it also suggests that Donatello was in touch with Jacopo Bellini and knew that artist's drawing books with their panoramic landscapes and architecture (*see* figs. 5.22–5.23). *The Miracle of the Irascible Son* (fig. 6.43) uses the architecture of a stadium to magnify the diminution between the main figures in the foreground plane and the smaller figures that appear

6.43
Donatello, *The Miracle of the Irascible Son*, relief from the Santo altar, 1447–50.
Bronze with gilding, 22½ x 48½" (57 x 123 cm).
Basilica del Santo, Padua

6.44
Donatello, *The Miracle of the Ass*, relief from the Santo altar, 1447–50.
Bronze with gilding, 22½ x 48½" (57 x 123 cm).
Basilica del Santo, Padua

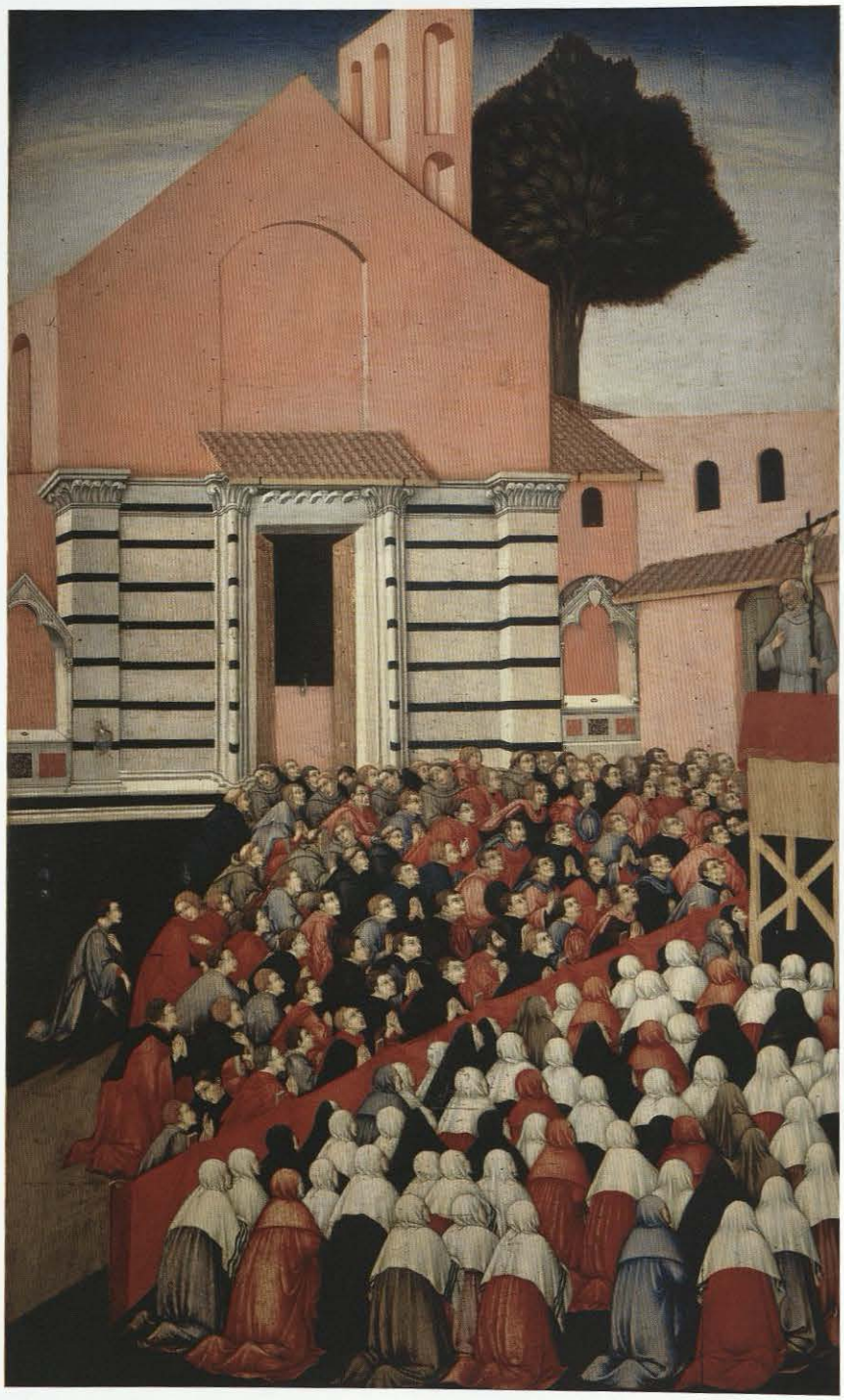
to watch from the far distance. The monumental three-naved basilica in *The Miracle of the Ass* (fig. 6.44) uses architectural motifs also found in Bellini's drawings. The gold highlights in *The Irascible Son* suggest the effects of the blazing sun (which appears overhead), but as with all the architectural settings in the Santo series, they also evoke the shimmering, mosaic-clad interiors of the basilica of San Marco.

Siena: Civic and Sacred Space

In Siena as in Florence and elsewhere, the public space adjacent to major public buildings like the Palazzo Pubblico was always potentially sacred space. Just as the city palace contained chapels and altars, so too did the great piazza outside. Close to the outdoor altar of the palace, preachers mounted temporary pulpits to address the assembled populace in lengthy yet colorful sermons.

In 1444 the great Franciscan preacher Bernardino of Siena died and instantly became the focus of a popular cult, especially in his native city. In 1445, even before he was officially canonized, a Sienese confraternity known as the Company of the Virgin commissioned an altarpiece from Sano di Pietro (1406–1481) with Bernardino as its protagonist (figs. 6.45–6.46). Sano and his fellow artists effectively had to invent the iconography of a new saint. The central panel most likely showed a single figure of Bernardino, possibly in carved wood.

The most remarkable features of the altarpiece, however, are the two panels that originally flanked this. These depict the saint's most characteristic activity: his



6.45
Sano di Pietro,
St. Bernardino Preaching at the Siena Duomo, 1445–47.
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena

delivery of sensational, witty, and badgering sermons before huge outdoor crowds at the city's town hall and at its most important churches. On one wing of the original altarpiece, Bernardino preaches about the Crucifix in the square before the cathedral of Siena, while on the other he displays the IHS monogram (an abbreviation for the name "Jesus" in Latin) to a crowd – segregated by gender – in the Piazza del Campo. Bernardino promoted the IHS monogram as a kind of verbal icon and as the focus of a devotional cult. Along with the saint's toothless, sunken-cheeked visage (probably based on a death mask), the monogram would become an indispensable aspect of future Bernardine iconography. The panel, unprecedented in its rendering of contemporary urban topography, shows that the city of Siena had already taken up the IHS as a civic motif – it is emblazoned on the walls of the Palazzo Pubblico.

The altarpiece was eventually installed in a public building: the renowned Sienese hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, a major focus of civic patronage located

6.46
Sano di Pietro,
St. Bernardino Preaching in the Campo, 1445–47.
Tempera on panel,
63¾ x 40" (162 x 101.5 cm).
Chapter house,
Siena Cathedral

directly in front of the city's cathedral. In the 1440s the city commissioned a monumental program of frescoes for the male dormitory there, depicting the foundation's history and its range of charitable and medical services. Domenico di Bartolo's (*c.* 1400–*c.* 1447) *Care of the Sick* (fig. 6.48) is a rare surviving example of a public commission made to record an activity of contemporary urban life, and it gives a remarkable degree of attention to documentary and anecdotal detail: the artist does not use perspective to construct an abstract, geometrically perfect space but to depict a contemporary institutional interior. To the left a physician examines a flask of urine while an orderly cradles an emaciated patient; a surgeon examines a shivering nude youth with a wounded thigh who bathes his legs in a copper basin; a corpulent friar hears the last confession of a dying man while a dog and cat (maintained as a form of pest control) square off in a noisy confrontation. Domenico lavishes attention on the still life of bottles and jars over the bed of the confessing patient, the boy's submerged foot, and the shadow of a candelabrum on the terracotta tiles. Above all, the fresco proudly displays what would at the time have been considered exemplary standards for the care of the sick. Such self-celebration by a public institution in such an innovative idiom of matter-of-fact description has no obvious parallel elsewhere in Italy at this time.

Sienese artists were in demand in the smaller towns of southern and eastern Tuscany, although in such locations they were expected to work in a more abstract

LEFT

6.47

Sassetta, *Virgin and Child with Angels* (main tier front of San Sepolcro altarpiece). 6'9" x 3'10" (2.05 x 1.19 m) (original panel 2.02 x 1.19 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris

ABOVE

6.48

Domenico di Bartolo, *Care of the Sick*, 1440–47. Fresco. Pellegrinaio, Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, Siena

ROMAN PILGRIMAGE IN THE HOLY YEAR OF 1450

In the Holy Year of 1450, most European pilgrims approached Rome from the north, on the ancient Roman road known as the Via Flaminia. They entered at the fortified gate by the eleventh-century church of Santa Maria del Popolo, and from there could continue into the heart of the old city along the Via Lata (now known as the Corso). The Via Lata ran as far as the Capitoline Hill, the seat of Rome's municipal government; a building housing the magistrates known as the Conservators and another that served as a palace for an officer called the Senator were in 1450 being restored at the initiative of Pope Nicolas V himself. The pilgrims' principal objective was to obtain spiritual benefit in the form of **indulgences** (remission of sins and the punishment due to them in **Purgatory**) by visiting sacred sites, mostly associated with the great Early Christian churches (known as basilicas) founded under the first Christian emperor, Constantine; there were numerous other holy sites and "marvels" of the ancient city to see along the route. To visit San Lorenzo fuori le Mura ("outside the walls") to the east, or San Paolo fuori le Mura to the south, pilgrims had to pass through vast uninhabited tracts, neighborhoods from the ancient city that had in the Middle Ages been given over to farming or turned into feudal strongholds of Rome's baronial families. A body of early guidebooks known as "Marvels of Rome" relayed the experience through pilgrims' eyes. These sources described the various saints' relics and miracles of Christian Rome along with popular stories conveying the mixed fear and admiration that still attached to the remains of the pagan city.

Following its return to Rome in 1420, the papacy had collaborated with the civic government to improve the city's tattered infrastructure and to restore its venerable churches. In 1450, however, most of Rome's streets were still haphazard passages between buildings erected randomly over the centuries. The ancient Via Lata was one of very few streets that was both straight and paved. Another was the Via Recta, which ran west toward the Tiber and to one of the few means of crossing it, the Ponte Sant'Angelo. Passing the fortress of Sant'Angelo, originally the mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian, the pilgrim traversed the neighborhood known as the Borgo and reached the Vatican and the basilica of

6.49
Masolino, *Founding of Santa Maria Maggiore*, c. 1425–28. Panel, 57 x 30" (144.5 x 76 cm). Capodimonte Museum, Naples

St. Peter's, recently the focus of the Pope's most ambitious renovation projects, and the main seat of papal ceremony – pilgrims would have sought to attend a papal blessing, as they do today. To the south, near the site of St. Peter's martyrdom at San Pietro in Montorio, was the basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, embellished with spectacular mosaics in the late thirteenth century. Heading back north and across the river, visitors could take the so-called Via Papalis or, further on, the Via del Pellegrino, which led to the lively downtown market area known as the Campo dei Fiori. Passing the old Forum, used as a grazing ground for cattle, and the Colosseum, then venturing further to the south east, they could visit the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, founded by St. Helen, the mother of Constantine: it preserved relics of blood-soaked earth from the Holy Land and a miraculous mosaic of the Dead Christ commemorating a vision of Pope Gregory the Great.

Perhaps the most important site along the route was St. John Lateran, officially the cathedral of the city of Rome and the symbol of the transfer of authority from the empire to the papacy. The Lateran basilica, built on the site of an imperial palace, was also the site of the "Holy of Holies," a chapel containing some of the most sacred relics in Christendom, including the Acheiropoeta, a miraculous portrait of Christ "not made by human hand." Many of the relics were supposed to have been brought to Rome by Emperor Titus following his destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. Like Santa Croce, the chapel represented Rome's claim to have surpassed Jerusalem as the holiest city on earth. In the Lateran Baptistery pilgrims could visit a porphyry basin in which Constantine himself was allegedly baptized. Nearby, raised on columns and plinths, were an assortment of ancient sculptures that commemorated the pagan and imperial origins of the city and its surrender to Christianity: among these were fragments of a colossal statue of Constantine; a bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius believed to represent the first Christian emperor (*see* fig. 5.15); a bronze she-wolf associated with the twins Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome who were raised by a wolf in the wilds; and the *Spinario*, or "Thorn Puller" (*see* fig. 2.12), described in *The Marvels* as an idol.

St. John Lateran was still a focus for a great procession every Holy Thursday expressing the unity of the papacy with Rome's clergy and its people; although restored under Martin V, since the return of the papacy the Lateran had been eclipsed as a focus of papal patronage by St. Peter's, and by Santa Maria Maggiore to the north. This church, especially promoted by Martin's family, the Colonna, was the most important in Christendom dedicated to the Virgin Mary: among its chief relics were the cradle of the Christ Child and an icon known as the Salus Populi Romani ("Welfare of the Roman People"), expressing the privileged relation of the city of Rome to the Virgin (fig. 6.50). In 1427 the Colonna invited Masaccio and Masolino from Florence to execute a double-sided altarpiece showing the *Assumption of the Virgin* on one face, with the basilica's foundation legend on the other (fig. 6.49): a miraculous fall of snow in August, sent by the Virgin in 352 CE to indicate to Pope Liberius the site of the new basilica in her honor.

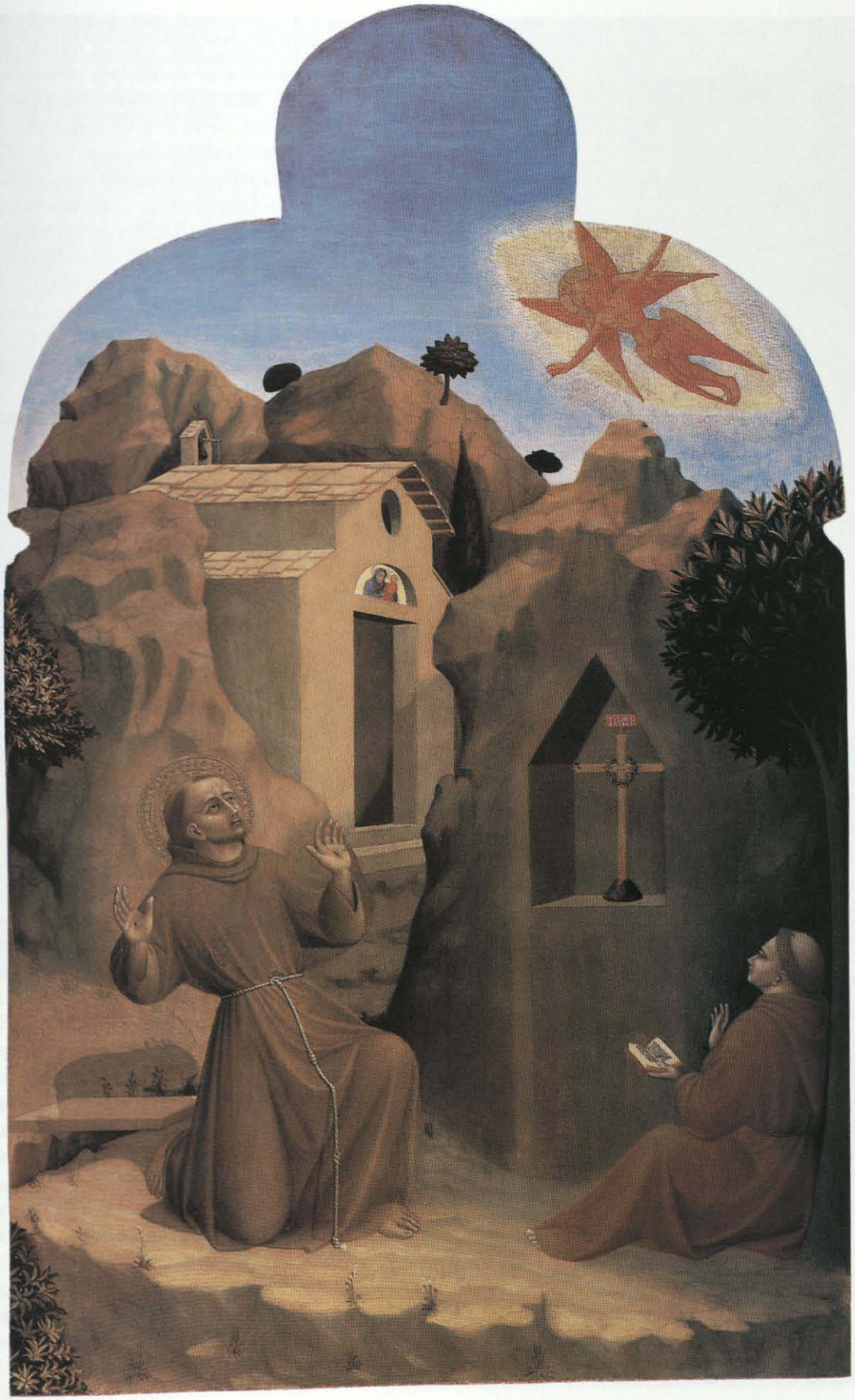
6.50
Icon of the Salus Populi Romani, fifth century CE (?). Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome

6.51
Sassetta, *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, 1437–44. Tempera on panel, 80¾ x 48" (179 x 58 cm). Berenson Collection, Villa i Tatti, Florence

idiom consistent with art from the time of Duccio. In 1444 Sassetta (1392–1450/51), the city's longest-established and most successful artist, completed a large double-sided polyptych for the Franciscan church in Borgo San Sepolcro, a town in the mountainous eastern frontier of Tuscany. The front of the altarpiece (fig. 6.47) depicted the Virgin and Child with a court of angels, an iconography reminiscent of Duccio's similarly double-sided *Maestà* (*see* figs. 1.32–1.33); saints Anthony of Padua, John the Evangelist, Augustine, and the local *beato* Rainiero originally appeared on flanking panels. The gold ground and linear flattening of three-dimensional forms to assert the picture surface likewise proclaim the vitality and authority of the tradition of Duccio. Yet such conservatism could also be a stimulus to innovation, especially at the level of pictorial meaning. On the side facing the choir (fig. 6.51), primarily visible to the Franciscan friars, Sassetta painted a remarkable image of St. Francis in ecstasy, levitating over a lake as he tramples on the Vices of Luxury (a woman with a mirror reclining on a pig), Vainglory (a warrior with a lion), and Avarice (a nun squeezing a purse in a vice). The virtuous counterparts of these vices appear around Francis's head: Chastity (in white), Obedience (with a yoke), and Poverty (in a patched Franciscan habit). The rigorous symmetry of the saint in a mandorla of seraphim (a symbol normally used only for Christ and the Virgin) and the almost circular geometry of his head, surrounded by a flaming halo, blatantly assert Francis's divine and messianic nature.This reinforces a controversial claim maintained by some members of the Order that Francis, more than any other saint, was an "alter Christus," another Christ. The complex was dismembered in 1752, but a widely accepted reconstruction places the depiction of Christ's Passion in a series of predella panels below, underscoring the identification. Flanking the central altar panel were eight scenes of the life of St. Francis, arranged in two tiers (again in a format similar to one that Duccio had employed). Yet in these narrative scenes Sassetta adopts an idiom more reminiscent of Fra Angelico or Pisanello: in its handling of space and consistent fall of light, his *Stigmatization of St. Francis* (fig. 6.52) bears comparison with Domenico Veneziano's contemporary version in the St. Lucy altarpiece (*see* fig. 6.12).

The Vatican Papacy and the Embellishment of St. Peter's

Rome in the 1440s was a politically troubled city, and Pope Eugenius IV spent little time there. Nonetheless, he followed his predecessor Martin V's example by residing primarily at the Vatican palace, and by his embellishment of St. Peter's, where he was crowned and eventually buried. The relation of St. Peter's and the Vatican – a ruler's residence with a great pilgrimage church attached – paralleled that of the Doge's Palace and San Marco in Venice, and established a model for the Medici in their coupling of family palace with a major sacred site: Eugenius was well aware of what the Medici were doing at San Lorenzo. In 1438 he ordained that St. Peter's should have its own



6.52
Sassetta, *The Stigmatization of St. Francis*, completed 1444. Tempera on panel, 34¼ x 20¾" (87 x 52.5 cm). National Gallery, London

6.53
Filarete, doors of Old St. Peter's, completed 1445.
Silver-gilt bronze, 20'8" x 11'9" (6.3 x 3.58 m).
St. Peter's, Rome

set of monumental bronze doors (fig. 6.53), a commission that was to take a dozen years to complete. Romans and visitors alike would have seen the doors as an emulation of those on the Pantheon, an ancient temple that had come to serve as a Christian church. The sculptor, known as Filarete (*c.* 1400–1469), was a Florentine, and he would have known the contemporary works of Ghiberti and Donatello. However, he seems to have resisted making anything that would resemble the doors of Florence's baptistery or the San Lorenzo sacristy. Filarete combined different forms of relief to create a hierarchy of visual information. Four large panels present Christ, the Virgin, and Saints Peter and Paul. At top right Peter gives the keys of the Church – designating supreme authority – to Eugenius, a charged theme in a period when councils of clergy and Roman political factions defied the Pope's decrees and sought to depose him. Two square panels below depict the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, Rome's patron saints. The smaller reliefs between these panels depict the recent diplomatic and political successes of Eugenius's fragile papacy, including the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1439 and the Pope's crowning of Emperor Sigismund in 1433.

The frontally displayed figures in the largest panels are rigid and utterly devoid of the weight shift characteristic of Donatello's figurative sculpture; Filarete seems to be evoking a style from eras past, that visible in early Christian sarcophagi and Byzantine ivories. The narrative reliefs (fig. 6.54) are notable for their avoidance of linear perspective, arranging elements of the story across the panel without regard for disparity of scale. If there is a principle of unity, it is more topographic than illusionistic. Peter was said to have been crucified "inter duas metas," that is, between the pyramid of Gaius Cestius and another pyramid that no longer survives. Filarete placed depictions of the two monuments in the lower corners and the Crucifixion itself on a hill between and above these, across the River Tiber – almost certainly the site on the Janiculum marked by the church of San Pietro in Montorio. The mode of rendering itself derives from surviving ancient reliefs, such as those on the column of Trajan. Filarete deliberately created a Roman style, drawing on the traditions of art in the city, and appropriate for a sacred site like St. Peter's.

In a treatise on architecture he would write some years later, Filarete proved highly critical of Donatello: "If you have apostles to do, don't make them seem like fencers, as Donatello did in San Lorenzo in Florence, that is, in the sacristy in the bronze doors." As Filarete saw it, Donatello had sought to display his own art before thinking about the appropriateness of his sculpture to its place. It is a critique that parallels the attack on "curiosities" by Fra Antonino with which we began this chapter: Filar-

6.54
Filarete, doors of Old St. Peter's, detail: *Martyrdom of St. Peter*

ete had an artist's sense of style as a communicative and expressive instrument, but was clearly concerned by the degree to which meaning can be perverted by the pursuit of novelty and the demonstration of virtuosity. For all of this, "curiosities" have an assigned place in Filarete's doors: visitors to St. Peter's who looked closely at the rich acanthus borders that surround the reliefs might have been surprised to discover figures from the pagan fables of the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) and other poets, frequently erotic and violent in character (fig. 6.55): Europa, Hercules, Ganymede, Narcissus, Jason and Medea, Pan and Syrinx. Once again, the very nature of the sacred and the profane emerges through their juxtaposition – as if the integrity of each as a category was necessitated by the proximity of the other.

6.55
Filarete, doors of Old St. Peter's, detail: *Abductions of Europa and Proserpina*

7

1450–1460
Rome and Other Romes

7 1450–1460
Rome and Other Romes

The Model City

In 1411, the Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras wrote an extended comparison between the city of Rome, where Emperor John VIII had sent him on a diplomatic mission, and Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine empire. His lively verbal portrait of the papal city concentrates on its famous pagan and Christian sites, its status as a living witness to the staggering military power and cultural authority of the ancient Romans, and its testimony to the ultimate triumph of Christianity over paganism. Proceeding in this vein, Manuel prepared his reader for the real point of his oration. "I think that our city is superior," he wrote, "for many things were made, and still exist, in Constantinople, that Rome does not have." While Rome had no real predecessors and satisfied itself by outdoing other cities:

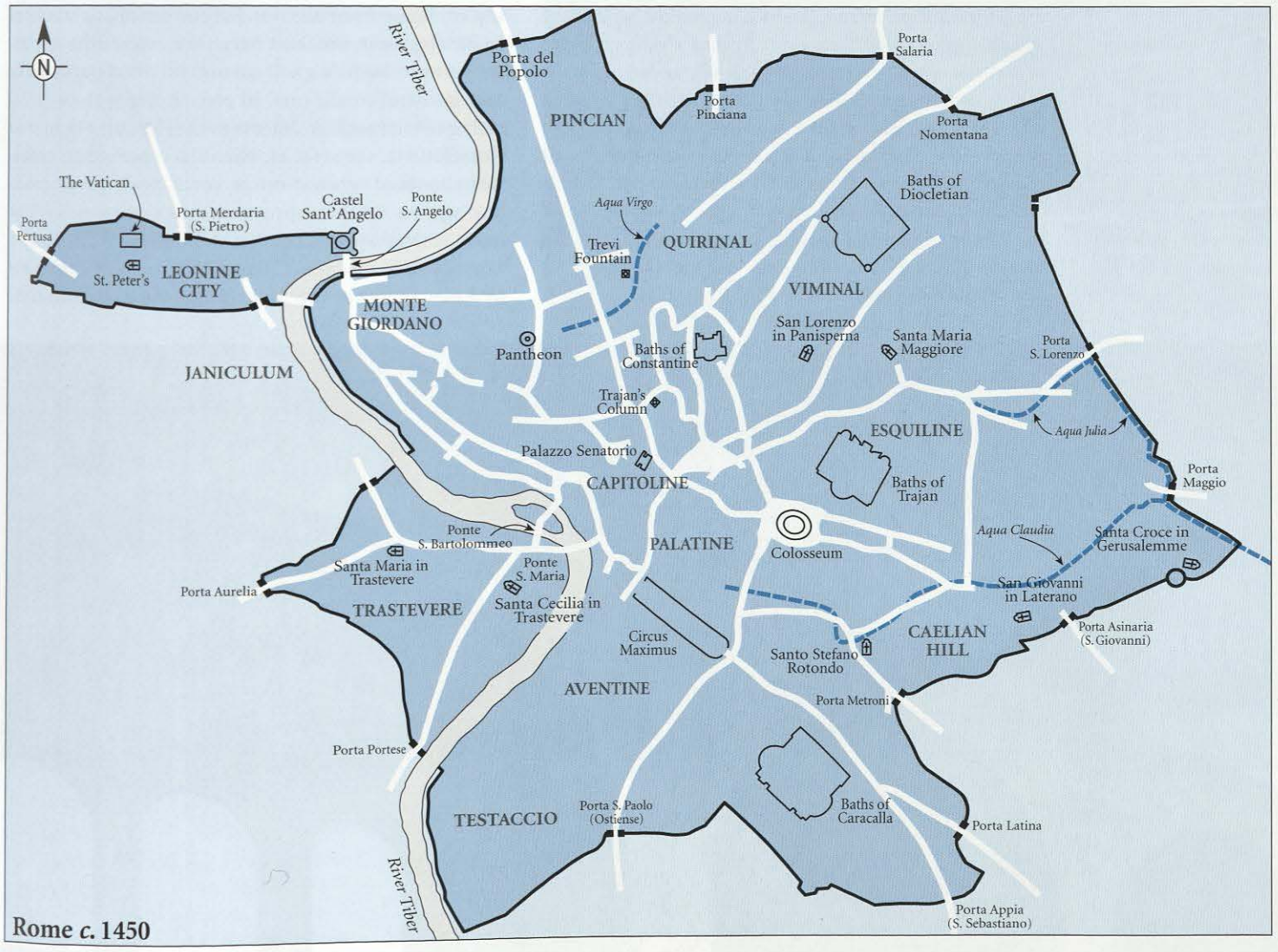
> Constantinople looked at this model as an archetype (for that is how Rome is correctly seen), brought many things to greater perfection and splendor. The works of men competing with others can progress to greater beauty.

Unlike many of his Italian contemporaries, Manuel believed that the preceding centuries had witnessed a history of progress and innovation rather than one of decline and decay. Whereas the ruins of Rome filled such Italians as the poets Petrarch and Dante with despair, since they were a reminder of an Italian greatness that could never exist again, Manuel saw Rome as an "archetype," a model to be imitated and surpassed.

To Manuel, "Rome" was as much an idea as an actual place. It signified the idea of the Center, the nucleus of a well-ordered, disciplined, and hierarchically organized authority. If the world could be conceived as a body, then Rome was its head, the *caput mundi*. That role, however, did not need to be played by the actual city of the Colosseum and the Pantheon. Like the so-called Holy Roman emperors of northern Europe, the Byzantine emperors claimed to be the true heirs of the authority of the Caesars, and they regarded the place where they resided as the true *caput mundi*, the "new Rome."

Manuel wrote during the Schism, when rulers in different cities claimed to be Pope. After Martin V had established Rome as the papacy's uncontested seat in 1420, he and his successors began seriously to pursue the objective of restoring that city to a state that would physically embody its status. Inspired in part by Petrarch, who had given voice to the hope that the depopulated and disorderly shadow of the universal capital might rise again to a semblance of its former glory, the popes' rhetoricians and image-makers portrayed them as natural successors of the Caesars. The reasons were practical as well as symbolic: thousands of pilgrims converged on Rome every year to revere the relics (miracle-working remains) of St. Peter, the Apostles, and countless other saints. The Pope's authority rested on his being clearly associated with the means by which Christians obtained their salvation, and the Rome pilgrimage and its related rituals were of key importance. By staying in Rome, the popes could cultivate their association with St. Peter, to whom, they maintained, Christ had passed authority to oversee all of Christianity. They could also advance claims founded on the legend of the Donation of Constantine, which asserted that the first Christian emperor (*r.* 306–337) had divided imperial power with the popes, leaving them in possession of Rome and the West when he withdrew to the Eastern capital he founded and named after himself.

These pursuits were not uncomplicated. In 1440, the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla (1406–1457) had proved, sensationally, that the key historical document attesting to the Donation was a forgery. This discovery, presented to the world in the form of a passionate treatise that became a model of modern **philology**, threatened the papacy's temporal claims. Then there was the city of Rome itself, which presented its own obstacles to the exercise of papal authority. Crowded with pilgrims and lacking an adequate infrastructure of paved roads, water, and bridges, Rome was chaotic, squalid, and difficult to govern. It was dominated by aristocratic factions that entered frequently into open conflict with one another, refusing to acknowledge papal overlordship and seeking to control papal elections through family members in the College of Cardinals. Opponents of papal rule saw in cities like Florence or Venice a living example of Republicanism, the form of popular government that had operated in



Rome *c.* 1450

Rome *c.* 1450, including the projects commissioned by Nicholas V

Rome itself before Augustus established the first imperial dynasty at the end of the first century BCE. This inspired humanistically trained militants like Stefano Porcari, who led an uprising against Pope Nicholas V in 1453.

In theory, the territories directly subject to the papacy included not only the city but also a large portion of the central Italian peninsula. Over the preceding two centuries, however, the real reach of papal authority had been compromised by the feudal practice of appointing "Papal Vicars" among the local aristocracy, several of whom, such as the Malatesta of Rimini, the Montefeltro of Urbino, and the Este of Ferrara, succeeded in establishing dynasties with the prerogatives of ruling princes, who acknowledged only the nominal sovereignty of the papacy. South of the Papal States, the vast Kingdom of Naples had been conquered by the Spaniard King Alfonso of Aragon in 1443. Although he posed as a defender of the Church and maintained an uneasy alliance with the papacy, Alfonso intended to extend his rule throughout central Italy and into Lombardy.

Architecture and Urbanism under Nicholas V

This situation lay behind Pope Nicholas V's determination to make the refurbishment of Rome an official aspect of papal policy. Nicholas (*r.* 1447–55) declared 1450 to be a Holy Year or Jubilee – a time in which pilgrims to Rome could secure special "indulgences". The prospect of as many as one million pilgrims – well over ten times the native population of the city – descending on Rome from all over Europe served as a stimulus to development, not least because it exposed the disparity between Rome's spiritual and historical importance and its actual conditions. In consultation with city officials and with such architects as the Florentine Bernardo Rossellino (*c.* 1409–1464), Nicholas conceived an ambitious series of renovation projects. Newly paved roads and squares would improve circulation in the city. The main arterial streets, the Via del Pellegrino ("Pilgrim's Way") and Via Papalis ("Papal Way"), would culminate in a new square at the River Tiber, where a refurbished

7.1
Basilica of Maxentius (Basilica of Constantine), Rome, 308–312 CE. View showing concrete vaulting

bridge (Ponte Sant'Angelo) would conduct travelers to the papal fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo. The network of streets would facilitate access by pilgrims, while also making the tangle of ruins and haphazard medieval construction more penetrable by the forces of law and order. The densely populated neighborhood between the Castel and St. Peter's, known as the Borgo, was to be razed and rebuilt. Three broad, straight new streets lined by elegant porticos would afford access to St. Peter's and the Vatican Palace, expressing at the same time the social hierarchy of the Roman mercantile community: the bankers and luxury cloth merchants would have the central street, while artisans of the "middling" and "lowest" condition would each have one of the others. By collaborating with Roman civic officials, Nicholas hoped to persuade the Romans of the benefits of papal overlordship.

Nicholas, like several other fifteenth-century rulers, may have had some expertise as an architect, and he is credited with rebuilding his own palace when he served as bishop of Bologna. In Rome he devoted particular attention to St. Peter's (*see* fig. 1.13), the home of the relics of the first Pope and the site at which the popes had one of their two main residences. The worn fabric of St. Peter's itself was to be restored and partly rebuilt to accommodate greater numbers of pilgrims and Rome's enormous population of clergy during its ceremonies. It would have a new deep choir behind the main altar and an extended transept, with a central dome over the tomb of the Apostle; round windows, or ***oculi***, in the dome would admit a flood of light to the transept and choir, evoking the glory of God. All of this would necessitate the replacement of St. Peter's wooden ceiling with masonry vaults, a transformation that would make the building even more lofty and imposing, recalling surviving ancient imperial structures, such as the basilica of Maxentius (fig. 7.1) and the Pantheon (fig. 7.2). A new piazza in front of the basilica was to be adorned with an obelisk, originally erected by Augustus at a site further to the west, accompanied by bronze statues of Christ and the Four Evangelists. The papal secretary Gianozzo Manetti, our source for much of this information, compared the St. Peter's project to the Ark of Noah, since it was similarly intended as a vessel of human salvation, as well as to the Temple of Solomon, the Parthenon, and the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

Nicholas was aware that in undertaking such works, he ran the risk of violating the moralizing strictures against vainglory that had long been a staple of meditations on the ruins of Rome. Manetti ascribed to the Pope a long deathbed speech that justified his policy of conspicuous display:

7.2
The Pantheon, Rome, 126 CE. Interior. The figures in the tabernacles and some of the surface features were added after 1500.

To create solid and stable convictions in the minds of the uncultured masses, there must be something that appeals to the eye: a popular faith, sustained only by doctrines, will never be anything but feeble and vacillating. But if the authority of the Holy See were visibly displayed in majestic buildings, imperishable memorials and witnesses seemingly planted by the hand of god Himself, belief would grow and strengthen like a tradition from one generation to another, and all the world would accept and revere it. Noble edifices combining taste and beauty with imposing proportions would immensely conduce to the exaltation of the chair of St. Peter.

If we had been able to accomplish all that we wished, our successors would find themselves more

> respected by all Christian nations, and would be able to dwell in Rome with greater security from internal and external foes. Thus [we do this] not out of ostentation, or ambition, nor a vainglorious desire of immortalizing our name, but for the exaltation of the power of the Holy See throughout Christendom, and in order that future Popes should no longer be in danger of being driven away, taken prisoner, and besieged, and otherwise oppressed.

As the speech suggests, this was a crisis-ridden decade. The later years of Nicholas V's papacy were beset by a series of disasters, the most traumatic of which was the 1453 fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. In the wake of this, the goal of giving Rome the appearance of splendor and permanence acquired a kind of sacred and moral urgency. The preservation and embellishment of Rome was a response to a new awareness of the fragility of what had seemed permanent and timeless.

7.3
Fra Angelico, *The Legends of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence: Ordination of St. Lawrence*, completed 1448. Fresco. Chapel of Nicholas V, Vatican Palace

Nicholas's resources did not match his ambitions. He was, very deliberately, planning and building on an imperial scale, and he gave less attention to practical considerations than to the calculation of a magnificent effect. Only a few of his initiatives were carried out. At a corner in Rome known as the "trivium" (literally, "the crossing of three streets"), he built a fountain in the form of a triumphal arch. This addition, the "Trevi" fountain, replaced in the eighteenth century by Nicola Salvi's crowd pleaser, was one of the first new public waterworks introduced into Rome since antiquity. At the center of the city, Nicholas contributed to the restoration of the government buildings on the Capitoline Hill. Reinforcing the city's Christian as well as pagan past, the Pope additionally restored churches associated with the early martyrs, including Santo Stefano Rotondo and San Lorenzo fuori le Mura.

At St. Peter's, Nicholas saw the start of the work, though his modifications were swept away by later popes with grander ideas. More lasting were his additions to the Vatican, the neighboring residence of the papal court. Here Nicholas provided new gardens and courtyards and a three-storey residential wing; he also took care to extend the palace's defensive fortifications. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, finally, Nicholas made an urgent effort to save the cultural heritage of Greek and Latin Europe from obliteration. He charged the scholars in his employment with the salvaging of Greek books that had been dispersed by plunderers or by refugees, many of whom were arriving in Italy, and he thus founded the Vatican Library, still today one of the world's great research libraries.

Fra Angelico at the Vatican

As a scholar, Nicholas was committed to assessing the validity of textual sources and historical evidence. He was particularly interested in the cult of the saints, and sponsored a movement in the Church to rewrite their lives according to the criteria of classical historians. In contrast to *The Golden Legend*, an enormously popular late thirteenth-century anthology featuring gruesome sufferings and outlandish miracles, the humanist writers whom Nicholas supported treated the saints above all as inspiring examples of virtue. His role as a patron of literature was in this respect closely related to his other enterprises. The chief surviving figural work commissioned by Nicholas is the cycle of frescoes devoted to the lives of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence that Fra Angelico executed for the Pope's new chapel in the

7.4
Fra Angelico, *The Legends of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence: Sixtus Entrusts Treasure*, completed 1450. Fresco. Chapel of Nicholas V, Vatican Palace

Vatican between 1448 and 1450 (figs. 7.3–7.6). The two saints were objects of particular scholarly and devotional interest to Nicholas. In 1447, he had ordered an inquiry into the authenticity of relics, purported to be the remains of Stephen and Lawrence (the patron saints, respectively, of architects and of libraries), in the basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura; he also renovated the main Roman churches dedicated to both of these saints.

Fra Angelico, in his mid fifties and with only a few more years to live, appealed to the Pope for several reasons: he represented the very best qualities of modern Florentine painting, his services were in high demand throughout central Italy, and he was in addition a Dominican friar, acquainted with the principles of theology and preaching. He had already decorated a chapel in the Vatican for the previous Pope, Eugenius IV, with scenes of the *Last Judgment*. Fra Angelico tells the stories of Lawrence and Stephen through episodes selected to emphasize a particular virtue, either of the saint himself or of the early Christian Church – concerns that were close to Nicholas. The Lawrence cycle begins with his ordination as deacon by Pope Sixtus II (*see* fig. 7.3). The following scene (*see* fig. 7.4) shows the Pope consigning the treasures of the Church to Lawrence as the soldiers of the pagan Roman emperor Valerian prepare to break down the door. In the next scene (*see* fig. 7.5), Lawrence distributes the treasure to the poor of Rome (thus implying that the Church, as a temporal power ruled by just government, provides for the needs of its population). Here, Lawrence epitomizes the virtue of Charity: his scarlet mantle is adorned with golden tongues of flame, alluding to the fires of Charity as well as to his impending martyrdom. Interrogated by Valerian, who insists on his handing over the treasure, Lawrence retorts with pious wit that the people are the treasures of the Church. He is imprisoned (his halo gleams in the dark of the prison as he converts his jailor) and then put to death by being roasted alive on a grill.

What most distinguishes these frescoes from Fra Angelico's earlier work at the convent church of San Marco in Florence (*see* figs. 6.4–6.8) is the importance of the architectural settings, which offer a symbolic commentary on the action and anticipate the antique splendor that Nicholas hoped to restore to Rome's sacred sites. These settings work to invest the early Christian buildings of the city as sites of memory, even as tangible links to the heroes of Christian antiquity that those buildings commemorate. Although the historical

7.5
Fra Angelico, *The Legends of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence: Distribution of the Treasures*, completed 1450. Fresco. Chapel of Nicholas V, Vatican Palace

7.6
Fra Angelico, *The Legends of St. Stephen and St. Lawrence: St. Stephen Preaching*, completed 1450. Chapel of Nicholas V, Vatican Palace

episodes themselves took place in Jerusalem, Fra Angelico's St. Peter ordains the deacon Stephen in a structure clearly supposed to evoke the basilica later founded in his name by Constantine, a church that Nicholas had rebuilt. The soldiers who come to arrest Lawrence gather at the door of the Lateran (*see* fig. 7.4), a papal residence built long after the saint's time; the soldiers' actions probably refer to the ceremonial opening of a bricked-up door at the basilica during a Holy Year. In the *Distribution of the Treasures* (*see* fig. 7.5), Lawrence is pointedly aligned with the apse and altar of another Christian basilica, which stands for the Church in general but more specifically evokes the basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura. The message of these frescoes is about the special relation between saints and sites that operates in the city of Rome, whereby relics sanctify the structures that house them.

Another important theme of the two saints' lives as conceived by Fra Angelico and Nicholas is the power of oration and its impact on the hearer. Much of the very restrained action depicted in the scenes is a rendering of speech through gestures of the hands and the expressions of speakers and listeners. The paintings dwell on the various ways in which words can constitute actions: it is through the pronouncement of words, for instance, that the boys Stephen and Lawrence are raised to a junior level of the priesthood. Lawrence, famed for his verbal dexterity, taunts Emperor Valerian over his hunger for material treasure. As a preacher, Stephen commands the power of language to spread the Christian faith (fig. 7.7). Before his martyrdom by stoning, he rebukes the Jewish elders for their idolatrous faith in the material fabric of the temple: "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands, as saith the prophet. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will you build me? Saith the Lord" (Acts 7:48–49). Given Nicholas's investment in building, this might seem heavily ironic. Contemporary viewers, however, would have understood the magnificent buildings of Christian Rome as sites of sacred memory, not theaters of worldly pomp. And as we have seen, Nicholas in his deathbed speech ultimately articulated a more pragmatic justification for his undertakings.

The Courts of Naples and Rimini

Rulers beyond Rome, who saw the Pope's temporal power as encroaching on or compromising their own, found means of expressing resistance. While it might look like an expression of conformity with papal example, the visual style of the princely regimes conveyed strikingly different ambitions. Works of art that symbolized loyalty to an idea of Rome, to the central authority of the Pope or the emperor, could also signify the desire to replace that authority. Rulers like Sigismondo Malatesta of Rimini and King Alfonso of Naples could appropriate the image of Rome for their own ends, even to the extent of challenging the papacy's bid to reserve the image of "Rome" for itself.

Alfonso Looks North

The kingdom of Naples had been ruled since 1250 by a French royal dynasty, the House of Anjou (collectively, the Angevins), but in 1443, after nearly a decade of war, Alfonso V, King of Aragon and Sicily, took control. Alfonso, who settled permanently in his new territory, was then faced with the problems of all conquering powers: the need to implant a new bureaucracy and military loyal to him, while convincing his new subjects and the older aristocracy, through justice as well as force, of his legitimacy. Despite massive expenditure on armies, fortresses, and public works, Alfonso and his successors never fully achieved this. The most powerful figures around the new king were Spanish-speaking Aragonese, while the French and Italian barons, who ruled over virtually autonomous rural fiefdoms throughout the kingdom, remained for the most part uninvolved and uncooperative.

The other Italian powers were unnerved by Alfonso's imperial ambitions, which became apparent when he attempted to annex Milan during its brief republican regime of 1447–50, and when he went to war with Milan's new ruler, Francesco Sforza, in 1450–53. The Este princes of Ferrara moved quickly to recognize Alfonso's rule and to ally themselves with him. The marquess Leonello d'Este married Alfonso's illegitimate daughter Maria of Aragon in 1444, an occasion commemorated in a medal by Pisanello (*c.* 1394–1455; fig. 7.7) bearing the legend GE R AR (*gener regis aragonensis*, "son-in-law of the King of Aragon"), a somewhat muted recognition of Alfonso's status. Pope Nicholas V also cultivated Alfonso, as finally did the Florentines after 1450.

Aware that Italian rulers now routinely employed humanists as secretaries, diplomats, and literary apologists, Alfonso sought to outdo all others in his patronage of men of letters: among those on his payroll was the humanist Lorenzo Valla (*see* p. 176), which signaled a far from complacent relation to the authority of the Pope. The various Latin biographies of Alfonso, commissioned as propaganda for Aragonese rule, were modeled on the lives of Roman emperors, especially those like Hadrian who had been born in Spain. These biographies emphasize Alfonso's prodigious gifts to followers and to men of letters, along with the king's rather theatrical piety, his preference for dressing in sober black clothing, and his seeming aversion to extravagant display. Alfonso's scattering of money was supposed to win support and to convince the world of his unlimited wealth, but the king seemed to present it almost in terms of a Christian contempt for the goods of fortune. A reputation for luxury could damage the image of a ruler like Alfonso: wealth and spending needed to be justified.

7.7
Pisanello, Portrait medal of Leonello d'Este, obverse, 1444. Bronze, diameter 4" (10.1 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London

7.8
Pisanello, Portrait medal of Leonello d'Este, reverse, 1444. Bronze, diameter 4" (10.1 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. **The lion, representing Leonello, is taught to sing by Cupid. Leonello, in other words, cultivates civilized arts like poetry through love of the Neapolitan princess he married in 1444. Leonello did in fact write love poetry.**

RIGHT TOP AND CENTER

7.9 and 7.10

Pisanello, medal of Alfonso of Aragon, obverse (top) and reverse (center), 1449. Cast bronze, diameter 4 3/8" (11 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London

FAR RIGHT

7.11

Workshop of Pisanello, design, probably for the entrance facade of the Castel Nuovo, Naples, *c.* 1450. Pen and ink and brown wash over black chalk on parchment, 12 1/4 x 6 3/8" (31.1 x 16.2 cm). Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

By commissioning bronze medals, Alfonso was imitating the patronage of his son-in-law Leonello d'Este and other Italian princes. The king's medals, however, were much larger in format and conveyed much grander political ambitions. In one example from 1449, Alfonso's portrait (fig. 7.9), flanked by a helmet and a crown, is captioned at the base *Triumphator et Pacificus* ("the conqueror and the bringer of peace"). Another inscription, at the top, associates Alfonso's name with the epithet *divus*, which in antiquity had been reserved for deified Roman emperors. The imperial theme also dominates the reverse (fig. 7.10): here, Alfonso's aquiline profile is echoed by an eagle, which takes up an idea from the ancient Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder: the eagle proved its nobility and its regal supremacy among other birds by offering its prey to them. The caption in this case reads *Liberalitas*

Alfonso's artistic patronage suggests a policy of emulating Italian rulers to the north, while at the same time displaying the wider European reaches of his power. Tapestries, paintings, and other valuable objects from France, Burgundy, Provence, and the Spanish kingdoms, including panel paintings by Jan Van Eyck and hangings designed by Rogier Van der Weyden, flooded into Naples. The court supported some of the earliest Italian artists to work with oil-based paints; Niccolò Colantonio (*c.* 1420–*c.* 1470) was the most noted exponent. Artists worked on Alfonso's behalf to promote Naples as the center of a Mediterranean empire. The Medici sent a triptych by Fra Filippo Lippi in 1457; Pisanello, drawn by one of the largest salaries yet paid to an artist, left the courts of northern Italy to work for Alfonso in 1448–49. He may have been based primarily in Naples until his death in Rome in 1455.

OPPOSITE

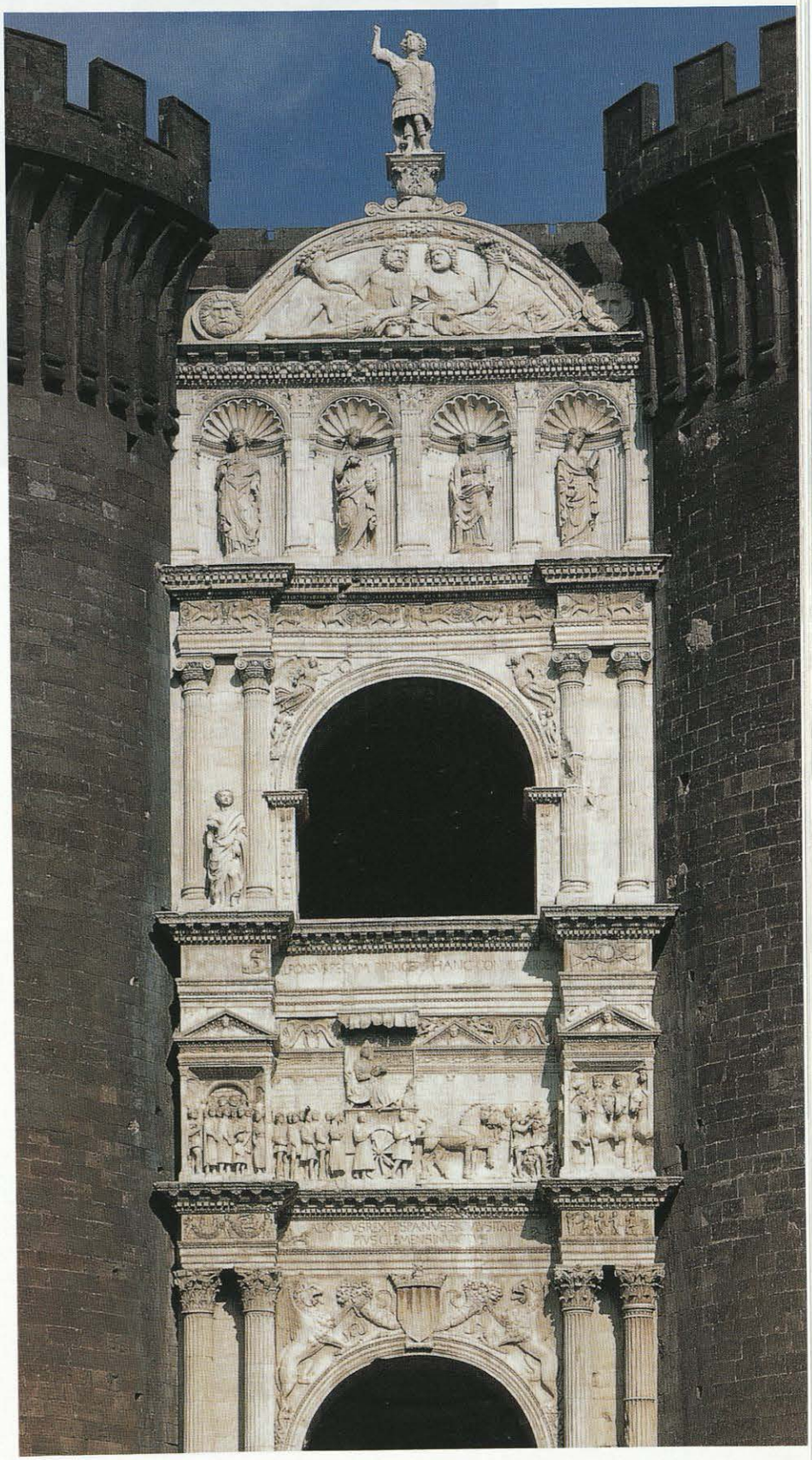
7.12

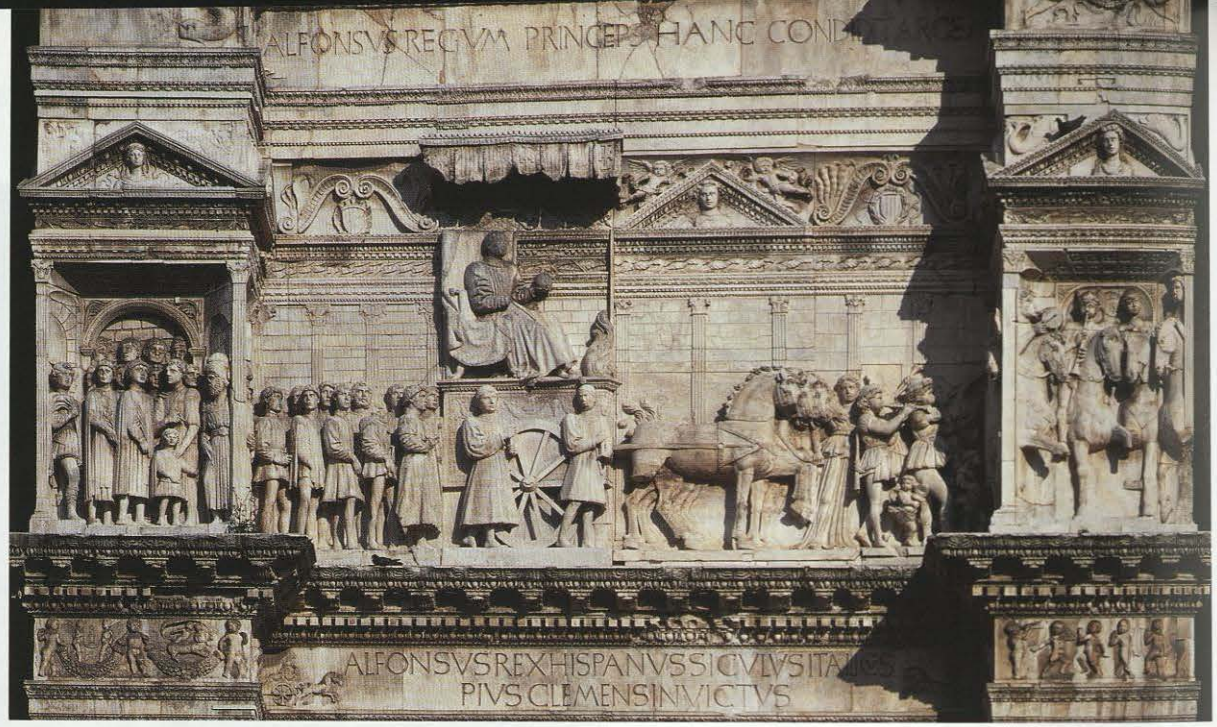
Pietro da Milano, Francesco Laurana, and others, triumphal arch at entrance of Castel Nuovo, 1453–58 and 1465–71. Castel Nuovo, Naples

Augusta ("imperial generosity"). By adopting an eagle as a device on the reverse of a medal, Alfonso was explicitly evoking the heraldic eagle on the coinage of the modern Holy Roman Emperors.

Pisanello appears to have been a consultant on Alfonso's most important architectural project. A design for a triumphal entry way (fig. 7.11), originating from the artist's workshop, probably served as an early project for the entrance facade of the Castel Nuovo. Alfonso had almost entirely rebuilt the castle, an Angevin foundation, as a state-of the-art fortress designed to withstand artillery fire, possibly sacrificing a chapel decorated by Giotto in the process. Inside, Spanish masons, working in a rich Gothic style, outfitted magnificent chambers, most notably the Hall of the Barons, the star-shaped rib vault of which covered a 90-foot span. While these spaces followed the style of the Spanish courts, the entrance facade, which was built under the direction of the Lombard mason Pietro da Milano, was a hybrid response to Italian practice. The Pisanello project resembles a Roman triumphal arch that has been translated into the language of Gothic. Classical pilasters jostle with spiky pinnacles and heraldic displays of arms; fragile-looking paired spiral colonnettes replace the columns that support the projecting **entablature** blocks on most Roman arches, and the arch itself is pointed. The effect is that of a temporary structure erected for a tournament. The Gothic elements would have reminded Alfonso's subjects of the local monuments of the House of Anjou, emphasizing the continuity between the Angevin and Aragonese regimes. The vertical structure of the arch, with the climactic equestrian statue of the king, would in particular have recalled the tomb of Ladislao IV (*see* fig. 4.2).

The final built version of the arch (mostly constructed 1453–58, completed 1465–71) abandons the encrusted Gothic ornament for elements much more in line with contemporary architecture in Rome and Florence, again pointing to Alfonso's emulation of rulers to the north (fig. 7.12). The result, however, is utterly unique, as noteworthy for its differences from as for its similarities to Roman architecture. The paired river gods in the uppermost pediment evoke the colossal statues on the Roman Capitol, the very center of the empire and fountainhead of its authority, which Pope Nicholas V had begun to restore just a few years before. The frieze showing Alfonso entering the city of Naples as conqueror (fig. 7.13), similarly, alludes to the well-known ancient triumphal relief on the Arch of Titus. Yet the sculptors have produced no complacent evocation of this. In the Naples relief, unlike its prototype in Rome, the figures under the **pedimented** arches move along the axis of depth and against the plane of the relief, evoking an imaginary procession through the Aragonese arch itself. The frieze, moreover, casts in





7.13
The Triumphal Cortege (detail from the triumphal arch at entrance of Castel Nuovo), 1455–58. Castel Nuovo, Naples

permanent form the actual triumph held for Alfonso in Naples in 1443, in which an actor playing Julius Caesar appeared as an archetype of the imperial victor, implicitly welcoming the king as his successor. The procession, finally, has a distinctly courtly quality, inasmuch as it draws not only on Roman imperial themes but also on the medieval legends of King Arthur. Its image of a flaming throne refers to the magical Siege Perilous, a chair at the Round Table destined to be occupied by Sir Galahad, the purest of Christian Knights: the throne consumed all others who sat on it in flames. Galahad was the discoverer of the Holy Grail, the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper and long sought by Arthur's knights. Alfonso, in fact, claimed to own this legendary treasure, which he kept in its own chapel in faraway Valencia. As a Caesar-Galahad, Alfonso asserted a sacred charisma and divine authority rivaling that claimed by any modern Pope or emperor.

7.14
Leon Battista Alberti, Matteo de' Pasti, and others, San Francesco ("Tempio Malatestiano"), Rimini, exterior, 1447–60, facade designed 1450. The present building, heavily damaged by bombing in 1944, is largely a reconstruction.

The "Tempio" of Rimini

A comparably courtly appropriation of Rome emerged around the warrior prince Sigismondo Malatesta (1417–1468) of Rimini, whose ambitious personal imagery and lavish building seems far more vastly out of proportion to his actual power. Alfonso and Malatesta were in fact enemies, since Malatesta had broken his contracted service with the king in the war against Milan in 1447 and joined forces with Venice. Having distinguished himself as a general in the field against Alfonso, Sigismondo in 1450 received special privileges from Pope Nicholas, among them the legitimation of his children by his mistress Isotta, and confirmation of his Papal Vicariate. This is the reason he had the year 1450 inscribed on the most distinctive monument of his patronage, the church of San Francesco of Rimini (fig. 7.14) – also known, following the inscription on the foundation medal, as the "temple" of Rimini or "Tempio Malatestiano" (fig. 7.16). In recognition of Sigismondo's service as captain general of the Church, in 1452 Nicholas V granted an indulgence to all those who visited the Chapel of St. Sigismund in San Francesco, and he endowed the chapel with "innumerable relics and privileges."

Only a few years later, Sigismondo secured the undying hatred of another Pope, Pius II (1458–1464), who excommunicated him in 1459 and had him burned in effigy in Rome. In his memoirs, Pius conveyed a grudg-

ing regard for the prince's military skill and intelligence, but complained about his faithlessness and his personal excesses. Sigismondo, Pius wrote, was "the worst scoundrel, the disgrace of Italy, and the infamy of our times." "As a *condottiere* he broke his word to everybody – the Milanese, the Sienese, the Papacy, and Alfonso of Aragon – who waged a long and devastating war against him." "He had a thorough knowledge of history and no slight acquaintance with philosophy. Whatever he attempted he seemed born for, but the evil part of his character had the upper hand. He was such a slave to avarice that he was ready not only to plunder but to steal. His lust was so unbridled that he violated his own daughters and his sons in law. He outdid all barbarians in cruelty."

In 1462 Sigismondo obtained from Pius the rare distinction of being "canonized to hell." This extraordinary defamation helped give rise to a romantic myth of Sigismondo as a warrior-aesthete, sensual and cruel, who lived to gratify his lusts and ambitions, even to the extent of defying the political status quo and religious orthodoxy. Pius's comments on the restoration of San Francesco, which he took as further confirmation of Malatesta's depravity, have left us with the image of a Renaissance neo-pagan: "He built the noble temple of Rimini in honor of St. Francis, although it looks much more like a pagan work erected not for Christians but for the cult of infidel demons. And in this he erected the tomb of his concubine with gorgeous marble and workmanship, adding the inscription in the pagan manner: DIVE ISOTTE SACRUM ['sacred to holy Isotta' or 'to the goddess Isotta']." Pius was evidently well informed about Sigismondo's patronage, though this highly negative image requires qualification. In the fifteenth century, orthodoxy in religious belief was far less rigid than it became a century later, and there were few fixed rules or principles regarding how a Christian church ought to look. There are, to be sure, signs that even by the standards of the time Sigismondo may have overstepped a limit. His transgression, however, had a good deal to do with his implicit challenge to the idea of Papal Rome as a universal authority. Sigismondo liked to identify himself with Scipio Africanus (235–183 BCE), the great Roman general who defended Rome against the Carthaginian forces led by Hannibal. Yet the elephants that appear throughout the church of San Francesco as a symbol of Fortitude also invite the opposite reading: that Sigismondo really was a kind of Hannibal. The Roman historian Livy tells us that this most formidable adversary of Rome advanced with his army on the backs of African elephants.

The church of San Francesco was the traditional burial site of the Malatesta family. Sigismondo had begun a new chapel dedicated to his name saint, St. Sigismund, in 1447, while Isotta obtained papal authorization to renovate the flanking Chapel of the Angels. By 1449, Sigismondo had conceived a grand project for the exterior transformation of San Francesco, literally encasing the older Gothic structure in new facades of white marble, imitating Roman architecture. For this, Sigismondo consulted with Leon Battista Alberti, who supplied designs and advice from Rome. On site, the sculptor Matteo de'Pasti directed building operations, while the Florentine Agostino di Duccio (1418–*c.* 1481), a former pupil of Donatello, provided much of the extraordinary interior sculptural decoration.

7.15
San Francesco, Rimini. View through arcades, showing tracery of original windows.

The design drew attention to the idea of renovation or renewal: Gothic tracery windows are still visible through the classical arcades of the facades to the north and south (fig. 7.15). The arched openings form deep recesses containing sepulchers for distinguished members of the Malatesta court (or in one controversial case, of the Greek humanist and neo-pagan Gemisthos Plethon, who had revived the worship of the ancient gods on the island of Mistra). The incomplete main facade takes its tripartite organization from the triumphal arches of imperial Rome, which Alberti knew to have been erected in honor of the emperor's victories. Such elements as the massive triangular pediment that dominates the horizontal organization of the facade, along with the engaged Corinthian columns placed on a raised base, the entablature projecting over each column, and the medallions, were adopted from a Roman source much closer at hand: the so-called Arch of Augustus in the town of Rimini itself. The foundation medal (*see* fig. 7.16) also informs us that the original plan of San Francesco called for a massive dome over the crossing, a form that might have looked modern to those who knew Florence Cathedral, but one that would also have invariably recalled the Pantheon in Rome. Apart from the cherub heads in the

7.16
Matteo dei Pasti, Foundation Medal for San Francesco, Rimini, 1450. Bronze, diameter 1⅝" (4 cm). British Museum, London

Corinthian capitals, there is little to tell us that we are looking at a Christian church here: the triumphal arch and Pantheon references, along with the classically styled sepulchers on the other facades, evoke worldly ideas of fame, as does the inscription in honor of Sigismondo himself. He had plundered the porphyry and serpentine used for revetment from the early Christian basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe near Ravenna, as its abbot complained in August 1450.

For all of this, devotional considerations seem to have determined the form of San Francesco's facade. The arch above the central portal was conceived to hold the remains of a saintly member of the Malatesta family – the pious Galeotto Roberto, brother of Sigismondo (his name is the Italian form of "Galahad"). As a final act of humility, Galeotto Roberto had requested that he be interred in the ground outside the church. His tomb soon became a place of local pilgrimage and a site of miracles. Alberti's new design for the facade elevated Galeotto Roberto's remains to a new and more prominent location, thus protecting and glorifying the relics while respecting his wish to be buried outside the church. The arrangement then became the generating principle for the remainder of the entire exterior design, with its series of sepulchers under arches.

The church has not abandoned the sacred. Rather, as in Rome itself, the sacred has been made to work very pointedly on behalf of the local ruler. This is especially apparent in the Chapel of St. Sigismund. This chapel contained holy relics, and an indulgence was granted to those who visited them. Its reuse of materials from the "most holy" fabric of Sant'Apollinare in Classe added to the chapel's accumulation of sacred capital. In 1451, the painter Piero della Francesca (*c.* 1415–1492), then working as an itinerant master, added a monumental fresco to the wall (fig. 7.17). In it, Sigismondo kneels before his name saint, the seventh-century Burgundian king St. Sigismund. The arrangement recorded the patron's devotion and obligation to heavenly authority, but it also had political implications: Malatesta had received the saint's name only in 1433, when he added the syllable "Si" to his own name of Gismondo, thereby also identifying himself with the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, who in that year had conferred on him a knighthood. The knighthood gave him a legitimacy he did not have by birth, but it also made him an imperial vassal, loosening the feudal ties that bound him exclusively to the Holy See. It is thus not accidental that St. Sigismund here bears the features of the late emperor himself.

7.17
Piero della Francesca, *St. Sigismund Venerated by Sigismondo Malatesta*, 1451. Detached fresco and tempera, 8'5⅝" x 11'4⅜" (2.5 x 3.4 m). San Francesco, Rimini

Sigismondo is shown as subordinate to the saint, but he is nonetheless centrally placed, his back aligned with the axis of the pictorial field. His centrality is underlined by the fact that a third "Sigismund" appears in the painting: the roundel shows the great fortress known as the Castel Sismondo. Paired greyhounds and paired pilasters, together with the receding marble panels of the floor, convey a sense of lucid symmetry and timeless monumental order. These are qualities specially associated with Piero della Francesca, but the fresco would once have testified to qualities that are less appreciated in this artist's work: in its original, undamaged state, it was among Piero's most sumptuous paintings. The rich colors and ornamental detail of the tapestry hangings in the background, together with the gilded embroideries of Sigismondo's cape, would have provided an effect

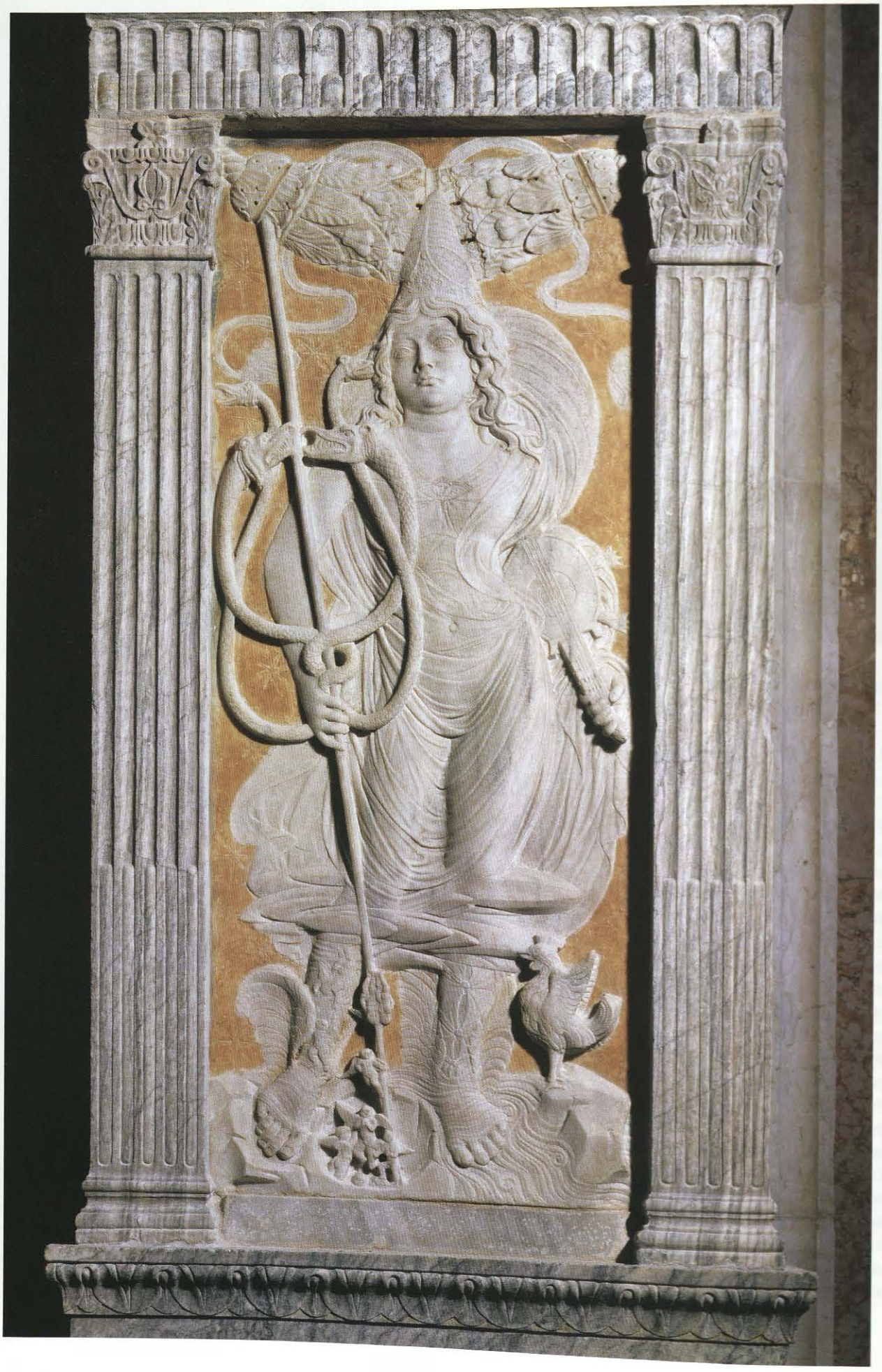
7.18
San Francesco, Rimini. Interior

of splendor unequaled in Piero's other paintings, and a glimpse of the luxury of Sigismondo's court.

Agostino di Duccio and the Sculptural Decoration of the Tempio

The chapel was but one of a series newly outfitted for the interior of San Francesco. Together they boast an elaborate sculptural program that is unique in Renaissance architecture (fig. 7.18). Magnificent coats of arms with simulated hangings painted in blue and gold adorn the sarcophagi of Isotta and the Malatesta ancestors, while spectacular reliefs by Agostino di Duccio and his shop divide the pilasters of each chapel's arched entrance. Each chapel is dedicated to a saint, yet has its own theme devoted to a different area of secular knowledge: one of Sigismondo's goals was to put the erudite culture of the Riminese court on display, and in an appropriate "antique" style. Some chapel decorations were the product of humanist research. In determining how to represent sibyls (ancient pagan prophetesses) in the Chapel of the Madonna dell'Aqua, the poet Basinio da Parma wrote to Rome enquiring about the painted cycle of the sibyls in the palace of Cardinal Orsini. The Nine Muses in the Chapel of St. Augustine were based on a learned program drawn up by the humanist Guarino of Verona in 1447, to guide painters decorating the study

7.19
Matteo de'Pasti (architecture) and Agostino di Duccio (sculptures), relief representing the moon. Chapel of St. Jerome (Chapel of the Planets), San Francesco, Rimini



7.20
Agostino di Duccio, *Mercury*, 1450s. Marble relief. Chapel of St. Jerome, San Francesco, Rimini

of Leonello d'Este (*see* p. 204). The Chapel of St. Jerome (fig. 7.19), now often called Chapel of the Planets on account of its representations of planetary gods and signs of the Zodiac, gives a good example of the way the design process worked.

Over the previous centuries, the conventions for representing the ancient gods in Greek and Roman art had largely been forgotten. Medieval artists, when they wished to depict ancient deities, showed them in contemporary dress, or they turned to handbooks by Christian writers who described gods without reference to ancient art, and in terms that no ancient Greek or Roman would have recognized. To be sure, the figures that Agostino carved in the Chapel of St. Jerome still have little to do with ancient images of the same characters. For these, though, Basinio, who had composed a Latin poem on astrology, informed himself by reading an eclectic array of ancient and medieval sources. In the case of *Mercury* (fig. 7.20), Basinio was careful to base his description on a true classical source – the *Aeneid* (Bk. IV, ll. 238–46) of Virgil, which describes the god putting on his "golden shoes, which carry him upborne on wings over seas and land, swift as the gale. [With his wand] he calls pale ghosts from Orcus and sends others down to gloomy Tartarus, gives or takes away sleep or seals eyes in death; relying on this, he drives the winds and skims the stormy clouds." The lute and the cockerel in the relief come from a medieval source, but the Virgilian details are all here as well. Agostino himself, moreover, has clearly studied surviving examples of Roman relief sculpture. His mitred and androgynous figure of Mercury suggests that he may have based his figure on images of Egyptian or Persian divinities who were worshiped in late imperial Rome, such as Serapis or Mithras.

Part of Agostino's achievement was his translation of the sometimes cumbersome directions he received into harmonious, flowing forms, making the highly literary and abstruse figures intelligible and memorable. The billowing lines of transparent drapery and hair and the delicate silhouettes infuse each figure with a pulsing energy. The effects of airy transparency and flowing movement, which have been compared to the look of water flowing over stone, suggest that Agostino was attempting to portray a kind of immaterial being. (The sibyls, being mortal women, have far greater three-dimensional presence.) The images remind us that the planet gods were sometimes conceived in terms of airy spirits or demons who could influence persons and things on earth. They visualize the art of antiquity in terms very different from what is often conceived as "the classical": forms like those of Nicola Pisano or Masaccio, which emphasize qualities of gravity and weighty monumentality. What the Tempio as a whole offers is a kind of alternative version of antiquity, one that consciously differed from the kinds of antique revival being promoted in Florence (for example, in Rossellino's Leonardo Bruni tomb, *see* fig. 6.17), the city from which Agostino hailed.

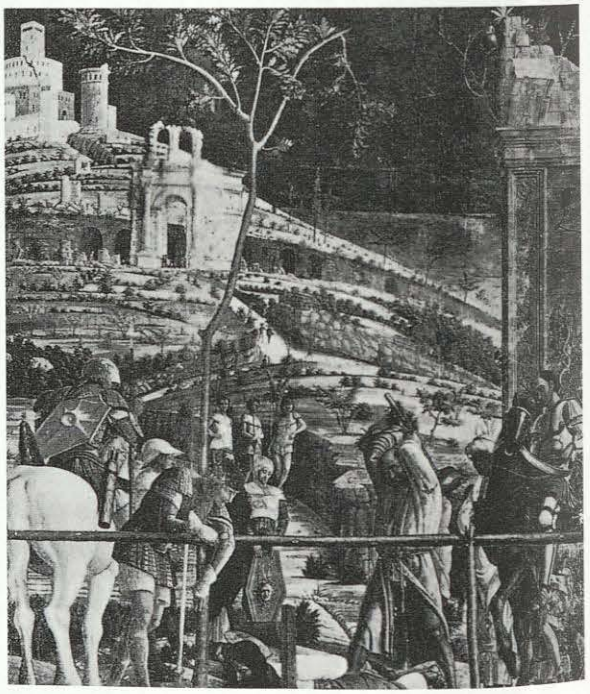
Padua

Andrea Mantegna's Beginnings

The reinvention of Rome in different centers of Italy advanced local claims and participated in larger political conflicts, but it also served the interests of the artist. One of the period's most influential inventions of antiquity was dramatically unveiled by a young painter, Andrea Mantegna (*c.* 1431–1506), in Padua around 1457, in the church of the Augustinian Hermits (*Eremitani*). Mantegna had begun work on the funerary chapel of the wealthy Antonio Ovetari as part of a team assigned to produce frescoes devoted to two martyr saints, St. James and St. Christopher. With the death of two of the other painters (Mantegna's bitter rival Niccolo Pizzolo and the Venetian-based Giovanni d'Allemagna, who had been hired with his partner Antonio Vivarini), he emerged as the dominant personality on the commission, able to impose his style on the artists who remained. The frescoes would set a powerful new standard for a modern art that claimed to imitate or to revive the art of the ancients, one that artists of the later fifteenth century would have to reckon with.

7.21
Andrea Mantegna, *The Trial of St. James*, 1455. Ovetari Chapel, Church of the Eremitani, Padua. Destroyed 1944

By comparison with Fra Angelico's Roman frescoes (*see* figs. 7.3–7.6), which also presented martyr saints in settings that drew from contemporary revivals of antiquity, Mantegna's architecture towers over the human figures. While Fra Angelico's backdrops recall the Florentine architecture of Brunelleschi, Mantegna aimed to represent more plausible ancient buildings: *The Trial of St. James* (fig. 7.21) takes place against a very Roman-looking triumphal arch, while the great arched gateway in *St. James Led to His Execution* (fig. 7.22) shows Mantegna's study of the ancient arch in Verona widely believed to have been the work of Vitruvius (*see* fig. 1.6). The painted arch is no slavish copy of the heavily damaged stone structure; it comes across rather as a restoration or even improvement of the original. Mantegna has carefully incorporated elements from other ancient monuments, such as a Roman arch at Pula in Istria, which he could have studied in drawings belonging to his father-in-law, the Venetian painter Jacopo Bellini. The proportions and the poses of Mantegna's figures, along with their grim expressions, evoke ancient statuary and sculptural relief – he also made a conspicuous homage to Donatello's *St. George* (*see* fig. 3.7) in *St. James Led to Execution* – and he attempted to provide a historically convincing depiction of costume, weapons, and armor. Mantegna visualizes antiquity in emphatically martial terms, as dominion established through overwhelming military power. The central drama in his treatment of the subject is the ultimate triumph of the Christian martyrs despite the crushing force of empire. In the *Trial*, the arch frames the defiant saint and alludes to his own impending exaltation, just as the relief with the scene of sacrifice evokes the greater self-sacrifice of martyrdom (*see* fig. 7.21). As in the case of Fra Angelico's martyr cycle (*see* figs. 7.3–7.6), architecture serves as a kind of commentary on the story; but whereas Fra Angelico's buildings stood for the mar-



LEFT

7.22

Andrea Mantegna, *St. James Led to His Execution*, 1455. Fresco. Ovetari Chapel, Church of the Eremitani, Padua. Destroyed 1944

ABOVE

7.23

Andrea Mantegna, *The Martyrdom of St. James*, 1455. Fresco. Ovetari Chapel, Church of the Eremitani, Padua. Destroyed 1944

tyrs themselves and their future cults in the churches of Rome, Mantegna drew out the tension between the pagan splendors of antiquity and the spiritual triumph of early Christianity. Mantegna seeks here to establish his reputation through his superior command of an antique style, one that surpasses the surviving works of antiquity itself. The antiquity Mantegna creates, however, looks repressive and threatening.

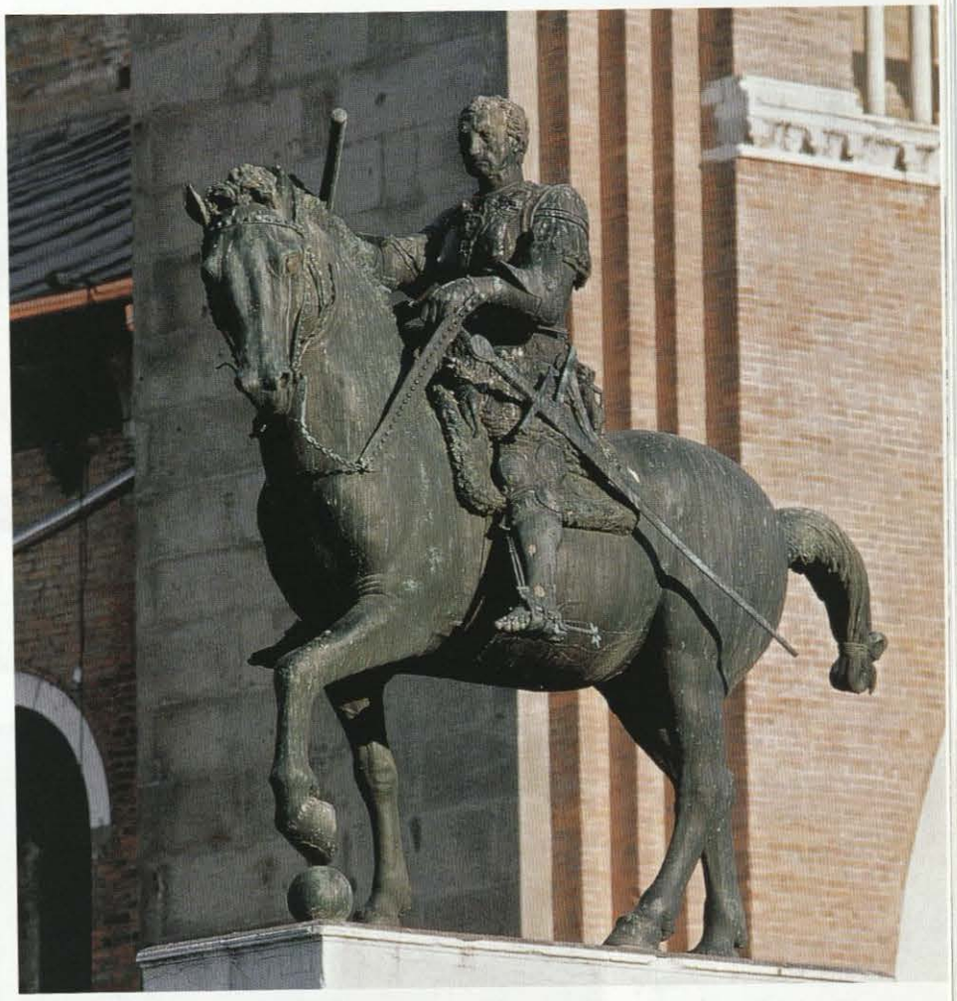
Although Mantegna's figures are restrained and full of gravitas, the treatment of space invests the narrative with tragedy and terror. In *St. James Led to His Execution*, the painter employs a worm's-eye, or *sotto in su*, perspective, so that we appear to witness the action from a point of view below the figure's feet; the architecture looms dizzyingly over our heads. In *The Martyrdom of St. James* (fig. 7.23), Mantegna foreshortens the figure of the saint so that it appears, horrifyingly, that his head will drop into our space. The ancient city in the background incorporates ruins from a previous era, as if pointing to the fact that this material splendor will itself one day pass away.

Donatello's *Gattamelata*

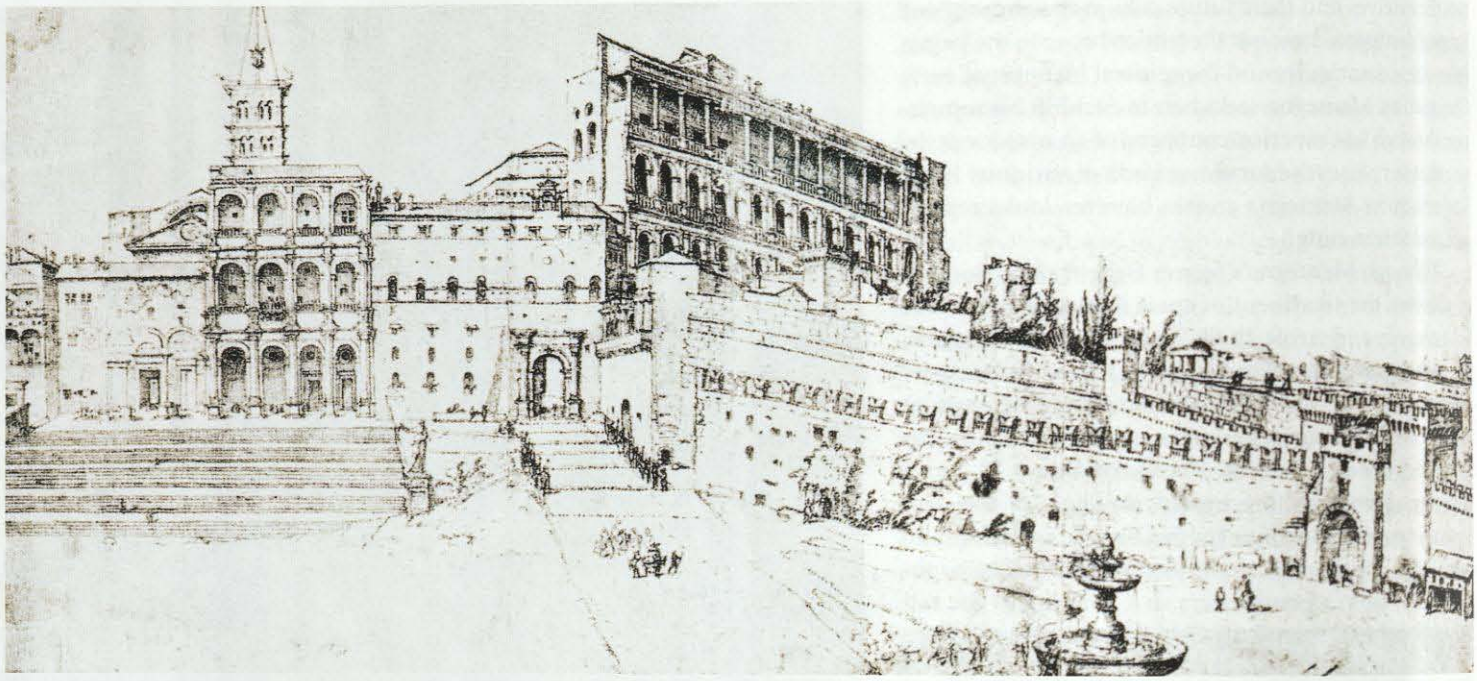
Mantegna's impressive antique style, with its archeological references and its tragic or epic character, would have had a particular impact in fifteenth-century Padua. Not only was the city proud of its Roman heritage, but it promoted the legend that it had been founded by the Trojan general Antenor, a story that made Padua out to be even older than Rome. Padua was the birthplace of Livy, the premier Roman historian, and there was great excitement when his bones were allegedly rediscovered there in 1413. The city supported one of the oldest and most distinguished universities in Europe, and Petrarch had resided in and near Padua in his later years. Yet Padua had also been made subject to a modern imperialist power from 1404, when the Venetian state drove out the last ruler of the Carrara dynasty and occupied the city; Venetians occupied most of the important administrative positions in the civic government and in the clergy.

Among the visible signs of Venetian rule was one of the great masterpieces of early Renaissance sculpture, Donatello's (*c.* 1386–1466) equestrian monument to the mercenary Erasmo da Narni (1370–1443), nicknamed Gattamelata ("Honeyed Cat") (fig. 7.24). Gattamelata had been the Paduan commander of the forces carving out a Venetian territorial empire as the Ottomans advanced and the city's overseas influence dwindled. As a general, he fell far short of his employers' expectations, but following his death he became useful as a symbol. The statue, executed between 1447 and 1453, originated as a private commission by Gattamelata's widow and son, but the prominent location outside the great Franciscan pilgrimage church of the Santo required the approval of the Venetian state. The statue to some extent followed a local funerary type, echoing for example the Della Scala tombs in Verona (*see* fig. 1.5). More explicitly, it recreated the Marcus Aurelius statue in Rome, then generally believed to depict the emperor Constantine (*see* fig. 5.15). The *Gattamelata* would thus have worked not only as a cenotaph, but also as an embodiment of Venetian statehood and imperial aspirations. Along with the idea of empire, the sculpture also expresses "Venice." The best-known monumental bronzes in all of northern Italy were the horses taken as spoils during the Sack of Constantinople in 1204 and displayed subsequently on the facade of the Venetian basilica of San Marco as victory trophies.

Donatello conceived the warrior's lion-like features and grim expression so that they would be legible from the piazza below. The armor, a fantastic hybrid of modern and Roman military dress, bristles with decorative reliefs in the form of winged spirits, a Medusa head, and cat faces (a pun on Gattamelata's name), enabling the statue to be read as both ancient and modern: on the



7.24
Donatello, Equestrian Monument to Gattamelata, 1447–53. Bronze, *c.* 11′ (3.4 m). Piazza del Santo, Padua



ABOVE

7.25

Francesco del Borgo, Benediction Loggia, Old St. Peter's, 1460s, as shown at the left in a drawing of *c.* 1533 by Maerten van Heemskerck.

Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna

RIGHT

7.26

The Colosseum, Rome, 80 CE

one hand, the warrior exemplified the military virtue of fortitude; on the other, he offered a sober warning about recent history, as well as an assertion that Paduan talent and virtue now contributed to the might of Venice.

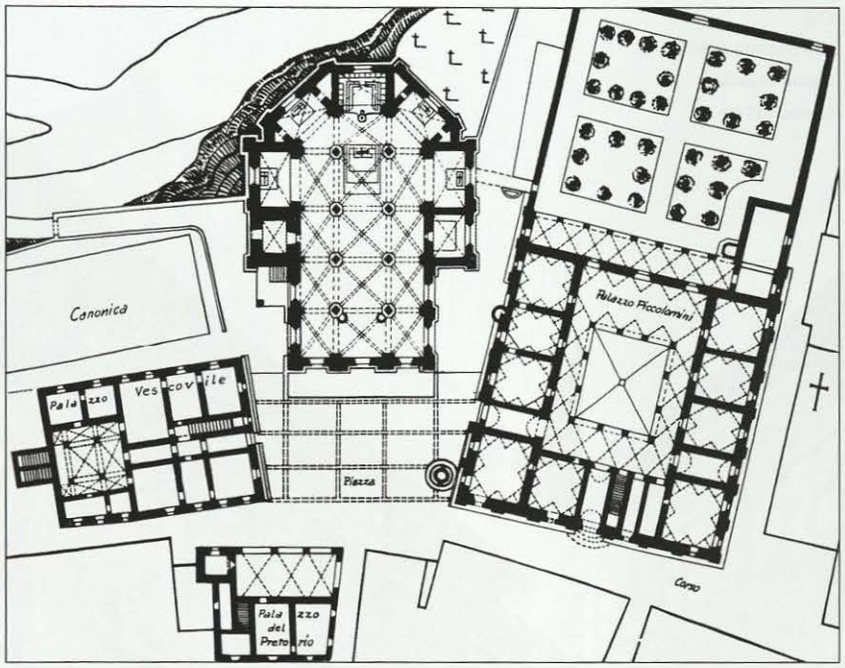
Pius II: Rome and Pienza

Renaissance popes were of course aware that other powers in Italy were using art and architecture to produce competing claims to be the Center, to become the new Rome despite their limited power or resources. By the end of the 1450s, the papacy began responding to the creation of alternative Romes in Rimini, Naples, Padua, Florence, and elsewhere. During the short reign of the Spanish Pope Calixtus III (*r.* 1455–58), the architectural projects of his predecessor Nicholas V had been suspended, and all papal energies and revenues were invested in the cause of a crusade against the Ottomans. Pius II, however, resurrected the project to renovate St. Peter's. His architect Francesco del Borgo (*c.* 1425–1468) added the Benediction Loggia to the main facade, along with a new piazza in front of the basilica and a flight of marble steps (fig. 7.25). The Benediction Loggia was conceived as a magnificent setting for the papal blessing that pilgrims assembled in the piazza received on important feast days. Its design, with three arcaded storeys, is particularly significant as an adaptation of Roman imperial architecture to the ceremonial and ideological needs of the church. The source of the design is the Roman Colosseum (fig. 7.26), the lower three storeys of which likewise featured arcades, each articulated by a different classical order: plain and solid Doric on the lowest level, followed by the more ornamental Ionic and climaxing with Corinthian, the richest order of all.

Pius built more ambitiously outside of Rome, where he spent a great deal of his pontificate, especially in the hill town of Corsignano near Siena. The Pope, in collaboration with the sculptor-architect Bernardo Rossellino, conceived a plan to transform the city where he had been born, imposing symmetry and hierarchy onto a tangled, rambling medieval settlement and renaming the city Pienza in honor of himself (fig. 7.27). An area of level ground was cleared for the central piazza and the most

important buildings, the irregularities of the uneven hilltop site determining its trapezoidal plan. The inlaid pavement focused attention on the new cathedral, dramatically located at the edge of a cliff by the open sky. To the right was Palazzo Piccolomini, for the Pope's family (fig. 7.28). The bishop's palace is to the left, while the palace of the Podestà (the magistrate in charge of law and order) closes off the cathedral.

To a certain extent the Palazzo Piccolomini represents an extension of the architecture that the Pope had commissioned in Rome. Its three stories are articulated by the sequence of **classical Orders** as they appeared on the facade of the Colosseum and in the Benediction Loggia (*see* fig. 7.25). The building seems entirely Roman in spirit – even down to the decoration of its basement with a kind of *opus reticulatum* (a diamond pattern of brickwork that the ancients had used) – and a marked departure from the kind of modern palace design that Michelozzo was producing in Florence (*see* figs. 6.20 and 6.22). Around the same time, however – the exact dating is uncertain – the merchant Giovanni Rucellai was



ABOVE

7.27

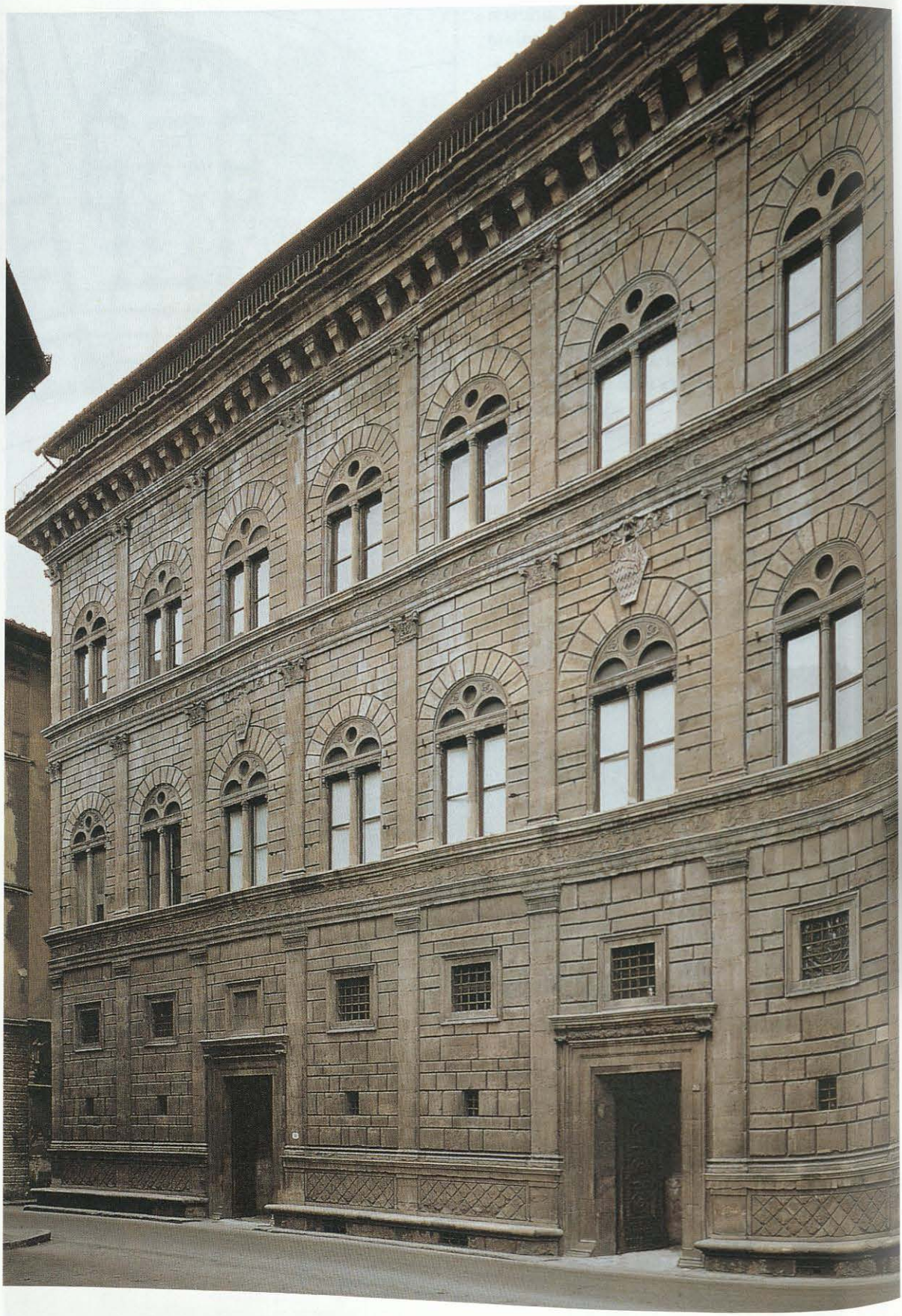
Plan of the cathedral square in Pienza (Corsignano), as redesigned by Bernardo Rossellino, 1459–62

LEFT

7.28

Bernardo Rossellino, Palazzo Piccolomini, Pienza, 1459–62

7.29
Leon Battista Alberti,
Palazzo Rucellai,
Florence, 1460s



7.30
Bernardo Rossellino, facade of Pienza Cathedral, 1459–62

having his own palace in Florence built according to a nearly identical design (fig. 7.29), probably under the direction of Alberti. So which came first? Scholars disagree, but it seems unlikely that Pius II, who viewed the Florentines with condescension and suspicion, would have settled for a mere copy of a merchant's dwelling. The Rucellai palace, furthermore, looks like a more refined or improved version of the Pienza design, relieving the overall rustication with smooth pilaster strips.

Pienza Cathedral is also markedly different from previous fifteenth-century church designs. Although the facade is vertical in orientation (fig. 7.30), there is also a subtle horizontal division into three parts, and here again we find the "Colosseum theme." More striking, though, is the fact that its three interior divisions are all of the same height (fig. 7.31), such that the facade also seems to respond to the proportions of a square. Similar proportions are apparent in the facade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, also designed by Alberti for the Rucellai and begun in 1458 (fig. 7.32). This departs from the same artist's design for San Francesco at Rimini (*see* fig. 7.14), which gave greater emphasis to the higher central

element corresponding to the nave. The squaring of the facade allows a more thorough amalgamation of the two components of classical architecture most favored by all the patrons we have been considering – the pedimented temple front and the triumphal arch.

As at Rimini, so in Pienza, there is little sense that we are looking at the facade of a church. Rather than indicating the holy figure to whom the church is dedicated, the pediment bears only the coat of arms of Pius II himself. As it happens, Pius wrote about his intentions, informing us that when he planned a building with the aisles and nave all of the same height he had a specific type of Christian architecture in mind: the so-called "hall churches" he had seen in central Europe during his years as ambassador at the imperial court in Vienna. The lofty and light-filled interior uses a Gothic system of rib vaults springing from piers, and the pointed windows have Gothic tracery, which by the 1450s was more characteristic of northern than of central Italian architecture. "As you enter the middle door," Pius wrote:

> the entire church with its chapels and altars is visible and remarkable for the clarity and brilliance of the whole edifice. There are three naves [*navati centrale*], as they are called. The middle one is wider. All are the same height.... It makes the church more graceful and lighter.... Every chapel has a high and broad window cunningly wrought with little columns and stone flowers and filled with the glass called crystal. At the ends of the naves are four similar windows which, when the sun shines, admit so much light that the worshipers think they are not in a house of stone but of glass.

Was Pius II here deliberately insisting on the "Christian" character of his building, as distinct from the "pagan" look of his enemy Sigismondo Malatesta's church of San Francesco in Rimini? Certainly the four altarpieces that Pius commissioned from the leading artists of Siena are archaic in character by Florentine standards: although they employ the Brunelleschian rectangular support and *all'antica* pedimented frame, the gold leaf and the emphasis on surface pattern over illusionistic space evoke the great tradition of Sienese religious art (fig. 7.33). The Pope must have liked their otherworldly character and mystical effect.

Alberti on Architecture

Many of the buildings discussed in this chapter have been connected with the influence of Alberti, even if his direct involvement can be established only in the cases of San Francesco in Rimini and Santa Maria Novella in

7.32
Leonbattista Alberti, facade of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, begun 1458. Alberti worked with the existing facade, retaining the Gothic pointed arches in the ground storey as well as the rose window above, and adopting the building's scheme of green and white marble revetment for his own additions.

OPPOSITE
7.31
Bernardo Rossellino, Pienza Cathedral, 1459–62. Interior

7.33
Matteo di Giovanni, *Virgin and Child with Saints*, altarpiece for Pienza Cathedral, *c.* 1460

Florence. It is often stated that Alberti's treatise *On Architecture* (completed 1452), which would become one of his most widely read works, was produced for Nicholas V as part of the project to restore and embellish the city of Rome, and some passages do indeed seem informed by the place in which Alberti was living and working: he refers, for instance, to the difficulty of governing a city built on hills, divided by a river. Alberti himself, however, stated that he wrote the treatise at the behest of Meliaduse d'Este, the brother of Prince Leonello d'Este of

Ferrara. It was not the Pope himself, but the cultivated minor princes of Italy, with their passion for antiquity and their emulation of Rome, that Alberti had in mind. Like the building projects of poets and princes, Alberti's treatise reminds us that the revival of Roman architecture was about more than antiquarian taste: it represented a will to shape consciousness, to make the ascent of certain political interests seem natural, that anticipates the modern concept of ideology: "Thucydides did well to praise the ancients who had the vision to adorn the cities with such a rich variety of buildings as to give the impression of having far greater power than they really had."

When Alberti demanded that the social order be articulated through building and through planning, and that private building enterprises be subordinate to those of the ruler, he was expressing something that the papacy and most other governing powers in Italy took for granted: Alberti did not so much present a new vision for architecture as provide an elegant and systematic formulation of these ideas. There should be "no arches, no towers should stand along the roads through the town." The whole town should be planned "to give the one with supreme power sole possession of all the highest structures." Perhaps the most striking aspect of the treatise, especially in light of the papal projects in Rome and Pienza, is its emphasis on the total environment of the city, an organic composition where individual parts would relate to one another: the citadel should adjoin the palace; the senators should be downtown, near the main religious sites. Private houses and palaces should relate to public space through the provision of a portico. Alberti even extends the principles of centralized town planning into the private sphere, comparing the family house to the organization of the wider urban fabric. Just as noisy and malodorous trades, such as butchering, should be kept away from the homes of the rich, so in a house "the prattling and noisy hordes of children and housemaids should be kept well away from the men, as should the servants with their uncleanliness."

Alberti's systematic approach to ancient principles of design in the form of the classical Orders also seems to respond to current trends. For the most part, his interests were practical and archeological, governed by his concern to understand the scarcely intelligible technical vocabulary in the treatise on architecture by the Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius (*c.* 80–*c.* 15 BCE), "an author of unquestioned experience, but one whose writings have been so corrupted by time that there are many omissions and many shortcomings." In this task, ancient buildings acquired the same kind of authority as ancient texts: "No building of the ancients attracted praise, wherever it might be, but I immediately examined it carefully, to see what I could learn from it." Such study is reflected in San Francesco in Rimini, which draws on elements of a local Roman arch, and at Santa Maria Novella, where the main portal is modeled on the Pantheon. Alberti adheres for the most part to a typology of ancient buildings, even when no clear counterpart existed in the present. He provided instructions for "temples," which clearly correspond to modern churches, but also prescriptions for basilicas, amphitheaters, and circuses. He called for the hierarchy and distinction of building types to be articulated through appropriate ornament, which usually means the classical Orders; "temples dedicated to Venus, Diana, the Muses, Nymphs, and other more delicate goddess must take on the slenderness of a virgin and the flowery tenderness of youth ... buildings to Hercules, Mars, and other great gods must impose authority by their solemnity, rather than charm by their grace."

More strangely, Alberti suggests that images of male "gods" (or saints) might not be appropriate in "temples" to female "gods." Here, Alberti's concern with consistency and decorum exhibits a degree of authoritarian control at the most minute level of detail. On the other hand, his ideas of what is appropriate derive from pagan antiquity, and he believed that the imagery of the ancient gods could find a legitimate place even in a Christian sacred space. Such values clearly underlie the design of San Francesco in Rimini, as does his judgment that sculptural reliefs and detached panel paintings are preferable to fresco paintings on the walls of churches. The function of images in "temples," according to Alberti, is primarily to inspire respect and awe, and to this end he also maintained that churches were legitimate sites for displaying images of famous men: "effigies of those worthy of mankind's praise, and deserving to be commemorated along with the gods, should be set up and displayed in sacred places, so that future generations, when paying their respects, might, in their zest for glory, be incited to follow such example." The comments recall the rise of such secular memorials as Uccello's Hawkwood Monument (fig. 5.12) and Rossellino's Bruni Tomb (*see* fig. 6.17), as well as several works we have seen in this chapter: for example, Donatello's *Gattamelata* (*see* fig. 7.24), and Piero's votive fresco of Sigismondo Malatesta (*see* fig. 7.17). Yet Alberti's remarks also apply to the new use of saints' lives to provide inspiring examples of virtue, such as Fra Angelico's Vatican cycle for Nicholas V (*see* figs. 7.3–7.6) and Mantegna's Padua frescoes (*see* figs. 7.21–7.23). For Alberti, as for many of the rulers examined in this chapter, Rome and its art offered a reproducible experience of classical form and social order, realizable in pagan or in Christianized terms, and to a degree that might outstrip any ancient precedent.

1460–1470 & *Courtly Values*

8 1460–1470
Courtly Values

What Is Court Art?

The first chapter of this book distinguished the art that characterized *signorie*, governments run by a local lord, from that sponsored by *comuni*, or republican towns. The distinction helps introduce another category that is essential for understanding both patterns of patronage and the aspirations of artists themselves in and after the later fifteenth century: the art of the courts. When we refer to "court art," we mean the distinctive objects and media, typical subject matter, and modes of production associated with princely households. In this context, painting and sculpture become but two relatively modest forms of luxury expenditure, alongside tapestry and embroidered textile hangings (usually imported), objects fashioned from ivory and precious metal, fine ceramics and glassware, engraved gems both ancient and modern, and illuminated books. And referring to "court art" is also a way of escaping the temptation of looking for a particular *style* characteristic of courts in general as opposed to such city republics as Florence or Venice. If anything, the courts of fifteenth-century Italy shared a desire to have the best of everything, which meant art in a range of styles, whether Florentine, Venetian, French, or Netherlandish.

In some respects, it might seem that such an artist as Pisanello (*see* chapters 5 and 7), who moved between the courts of Ferrara, Mantua, Rimini, and Naples, responded to a particularly courtly predilection for splendid materials, virtuoso workmanship, and an overall emphasis on the decorative, just as his typical subject matter (chivalric legends, warrior saints, the devices on his portrait medals) reflected an aristocratic interest in heraldry and the warrior ethics of chivalry and antiquity. Yet the courts were interested also in artistic qualities often assumed to be distinctively "Florentine." One of the pre-eminent court artists of the mid fifteenth century was Piero della Francesca, who worked in Rimini (*see* fig. 7.17), Urbino, and Ferrara (see below). Piero's command of geometry, perspective, and the architectural vocabulary of Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti seems if anything more Florentine than the interests of his contemporaries working in that city. Many of the leading Florentine, Sienese, and Venetian artists supplied art for courts. And while the paintings and sculptures of Brunelleschi, Masaccio, and Donatello have sometimes been seen as patriotic Florentine reactions to the internationalism (and hence also the courtly connections) of Lorenzo Ghiberti and Gentile da Fabriano, Florentine patrons continued to demand the rich ornament, naturalistic detail, and idealized figures characteristic of art produced in Paris, Prague, Bruges, or Naples, along with imported luxuries, such as tapestry. This is true of the Medici in particular: Piero de' Medici ordered a set of tapestries from Antwerp in 1448, while also acquiring Netherlandish oil paintings and commissioning luxurious illuminated manuscripts.

Ferrara and the Court of Borso d'Este

Ferrara is a good example of a princely court that recruited non-local artists – Pisanello among them – as well as selectively encouraging native talent. The ruling family, the Este, had come to power as a warlord clan in the early fourteenth century, and in the 1400s two of its rulers served as *condottieri* for larger states. However, Leonello d'Este (1407–1450), who ruled from 1441 to 1450, and his half-brother Borso (1413–1471), who succeeded him, sought to promote the family through diplomacy and through the beautification of the city, spending lavishly on building. Piero della Francesca's work at Ferrara is known only from a mention by Giorgio Vasari: the very sparse account indicates that the artist decorated "many chambers" in the palace of the Este rulers, as well as a chapel in the church of Sant'Agostino, during the reign of Borso d'Este. Unfortunately, not a trace of either project survives (two later panels from the mid sixteenth century now in London's National Gallery and Baltimore's Walters Art Museum are sometimes identified as partial copies of the palace frescoes). There is, however, independent evidence for the impact of Piero's work in Ferrara, in the form of a panel now preserved in Berlin (fig. 8.1). The figure of a standing woman with foot extended and a hoe over her shoulder is characteristic of Piero; a slightly later example from his work is the similarly posed male figure in his Arezzo frescoes from *c.* 1455–60 (*see* fig. 8.34).

8.1
Angelo of Siena (?), *The Muse Polyhymnia*, 1450.
Oil and tempera on panel, 46 x 27¾" (116.5 x 70.5 cm). Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

Perhaps surprisingly, the figure represents Polyhymnia, one of the nine Muses venerated in antiquity as goddesses of the arts. Most classical authorities considered Polyhymnia to be the Muse of sacred song; her conversion into a gardener was the doing of the court humanist Guarino of Verona (1374–1460), the preeminent classical scholar of northern Italy, who ran a Latin prep school at Ferrara and taught at its university. Like his humanist colleagues in Florence and elsewhere, Guarino's approach to classical literature was governed by a sense of its universal value, its status as a precious survivor from a lost civilization vastly superior to the present in which he lived. At the same time Guarino recognized that the classical era itself had a history with its own upheavals and declines, and that ancient authorities did not speak with one voice. The very multiplicity of the ancient world meant that moderns were not bound to one single way of reading or understanding or indeed of imitating the culture of antiquity. When in 1447 Guarino drew up a list of instructions for Leonello d'Este on how the nine Muses should be painted, he insisted that there was more than one option and adapted his recommendation to the needs of the present: Guarino had studied Greek with Manuel Chrysoloras (*c.* 1350–1415) in Constantinople, and he knew that one late antique tradition of Greek scholarship had understood several of the Muses to be not just representatives of poetry, music, and the liberal arts, but also as the principals of agriculture and the cultivation of gardens. Leonello, a passionate reader and writer of poetry, would have welcomed this demonstration that the goddesses of poetry could designate such useful knowledge, especially since the Este were engaged in large-scale projects to drain the marshes of the Po valley, making it fertile and productive.

Painters of *cassoni* and *spalliere* sometimes illustrated stories from the ancient Roman poet Ovid, but Guarino's intervention resulted in the first humanist mythological paintings – the first paintings, that is, with new poetic inventions informed by the most advanced scholarship. Alberti in the 1430s had called for painters to take directions from literary men and recommended several learned and elegant mythological subjects, but the Muses of Ferrara are the earliest to be documented and the earliest to survive, at least in part. The panels (*see* fig. 8.1) were initially to be executed by Angelo da Siena (?–1456), who enjoyed a professional role more typical of artists at courts than in such cities as Florence. Angelo was more than a contracted employee receiving a one-off commission. He had a special status as the favored artist of the prince, a relationship governed by ritual protocols of devoted service. Borso d'Este, who, as noted, succeeded his half-brother Leonello in 1450, undertook to pay Angelo's living expenses in return for an annual gift of a painted flower.

Angelo's death in 1456 required the Este to find other talent. Rather than following their former practice of engaging a nomadic celebrity, such as Pisanello, from elsewhere, they now favored the local painter Cosmè Tura (1429–1495), giving him numerous commissions over the following thirty years. Tura would soon have a considerable reputation, more than likely enhanced by a special standing with the Este. Contemporary writers referred

8.2
After Cosmè Tura, *Lamentation, c.* 1475. Tapestry, 3'5" x 6'6½" (9.8 x 1.92 m). Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland

8.3
Cosmè Tura, *The Muse Calliope*, 1460. Oil and tempera on panel, 46 x 28" (116.2 x 71.1 cm). National Gallery, London

to him repeatedly as "extremely noble," a highly unusual designation for an artist whose father was a shoemaker, and an indication that even in such an aristocratic environment nobility could in a few cases be grounded in merit rather than lineage.

Tura completed (and partially repainted) the cycle of Muses begun by Angelo da Siena, which were to adorn a study in the suburban palace of Belfiore. Around 1470, he also headed a team of artists who decorated a sumptuous domed chapel for Borso d'Este in another residence, of which no trace survives. Beyond these two commissions and several portraits, however, Tura made no documented, surviving paintings for the court. (His altarpieces, in every case where the patron is known, were made for other clients in the city.) This suggests that Tura's more important function at court was to coordinate a "house style" in everything from metalwork to embroidery to wall painting, supplying drawings and overseeing their realization: an example is the tapestry altar frontal of the *Lamentation* (fig. 8.2), preserved in two versions that point to a single original design. In such works as this, Tura employed a sculptural hardness and an emphatic linearity, ideal for translation into patterns for decorative arts. A flowing, sometimes jagged contour describes wiry and elegantly emaciated bodies, as well as complex and fanciful drapery that clings to the figures like glittering metal foil. A fantastic golden table service made in Venice from Tura's designs does not survive, but its appearance might be imagined from the best-preserved of the Muse panels he completed for Borso. *Calliope* (fig. 8.3) sits on a throne adorned with three pairs of dragon-like golden dolphins studded with rubies and pearls. The Muse herself designates poetry through an unrelenting emphasis on the principle of artifice – in the elaborate textiles of her costume, in the cosmetic effects of her curled hair and plucked eyebrows, and in the calculated mannerisms of her posture and averted gaze.

Borso, who adorned himself and his retinue (male as well as female) to similarly dazzling effect, must have had a taste for such luxurious display. At the same time, the ornamental profusion and even the eroticism of Tura's figure conform with the ideas of contemporary humanists, who did not imagine the ancient world as a place of sober, Ciceronian restraint, but as one where knowledge and linguistic sophistication might be linked to pleasure. The ancients allowed experiences that the Judaeo-Christian tradition regarded as worldly and corrupting. Guarino's younger followers were particularly distinguished for their imitations of the explicitly erotic and sometimes outrightly provocative Latin love lyrics of Ovid, Catullus, and Propertius.

Astrological Imagery in the Palazzo Schifanoia

The so-called Hall of the Months in the Palazzo Schifanoia (figs. 8.4–8.6) illustrated similar interests on a monumental scale. The most sophisticated of the painters involved with this cycle of murals was Francesco del

8.4
Hall of the Months, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara, with frescoes by Francesco del Cossa and others

OPPOSITE

8.5

Francesco del Cossa, Aries (the month of March), 1469. Fresco. Hall of the Months, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara

LEFT

8.6

Francesco del Cossa, Taurus (the month of April), 1469. Fresco. Hall of the Months, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara

Cossa (1436–1478), who complained in a letter to Borso about receiving the same flat fee as the other less diligent and talented painters working by his side. It may be that the artists were all expected to follow designs that Tura, the court's chief painter, had provided: this would explain the wage structure. Most of the painters – but not Cossa – worked in a simpler version of Tura's craggy linear manner.

These frescoes are the oldest surviving decorative cycle devoted to the occupations of a prince and his court, although they constitute only a tiny fragment of the extensive frescoed interiors that the Este rulers

8.7
Cosmè Tura, *Annunciation*, 1468. Oil and tempera on panel, each panel 13'6" x 5'6½" (4.13 x 1.69 m). Museo del Opera del Duomo, Ferrara

commissioned from the fourteenth century onward. (Most of them were destroyed by an earthquake in 1570 or by the papal government that ran the city from 1598.) Scenes of court life, each framed by Corinthian pilasters and devoted to a month of the year, appear in the lower zones of twelve bays. The upper zones depict the zodiac sign for the month, and a pagan god associated with the sign. Borso adheres more or less to the same routine in each month: holding audience, dispensing justice, or rewarding followers (including a figure thought to represent a court jester). His entourage consists of individuals evidently portrayed from life, but now no longer identifiable. Each scene takes place in a palace or loggia that opens onto a landscape, where we see Borso for a second (and sometimes a third) time, riding from the palace or city into the country, engaging in the courtly pastime of hunting while peasants till the land or tend the vines. Throughout the twelve bays, some of the profile images of Borso derive from the same cartoon, which ensures his recognizability and reinforces the sense that he is ubiquitous – and hence all-powerful – throughout his dominions. The room served as a large antechamber where petitioners and ambassadors would have waited for audience with the prince, and it presented the duke not

just as a willful human being with luxurious tastes, but also as the embodiment of the virtues necessary for governing states: in the court scene for March (*see* fig. 8.5), he appears under a profile portrait of himself, inscribed with the word IUSTICIA (Justice).

Borso, indeed, had his image transmitted and repeated like a religious icon throughout Ferrara. Citizens professed their loyalty by erecting a bronze statue of the prince in the main square of the city; a nearby gallows underscored his identification with Justice. Pope Pius II disdainfully remarked of Borso that "the Ferrarese worship him almost as a god" and clearly regarded the ruler cult as a form of idolatry. His long attack on Borso in his memoirs (the same text in which he condemned Sigismondo Malatesta in Rimini) criticizes him particularly for his vainglorious self-presentation, his reliance on astrology, and his predilection for hunting – all the aspects of Borso that the frescoes emphasize. Yet his self-imaging made a better impression on Pius's successor Paul II, who appointed Borso the first Duke of Ferrara in 1471 (following the payment of a hefty fee).

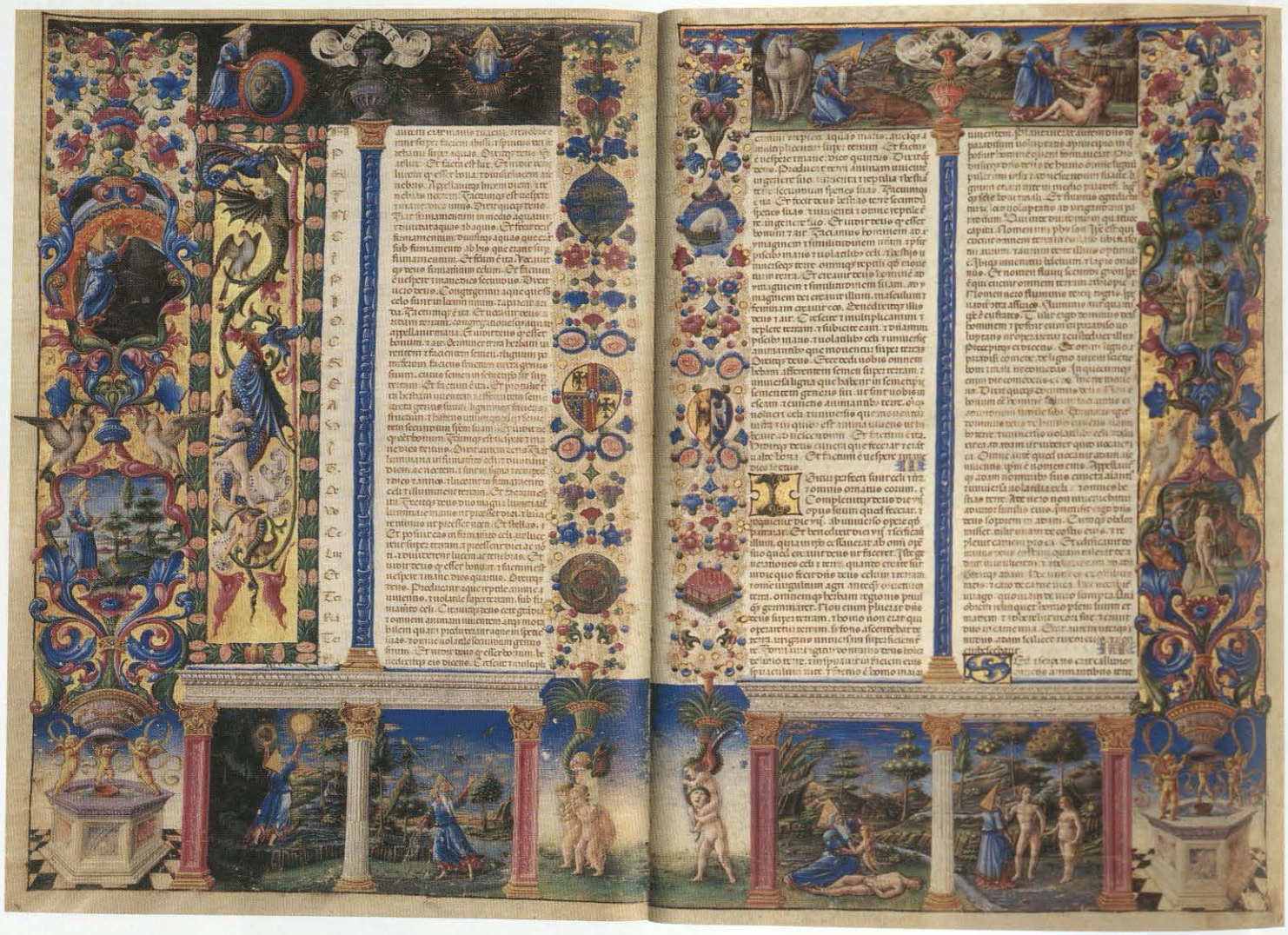
The upper tier of each bay of the Hall of Months shows a landscape with a triumphal car. All twelve gods of Olympus appear in triumph, and the figures in the surrounding landscape provide a "court" for each god, consisting of those whom the divinity specially protects, or figures from myths in which he or she appears. Sometimes there are parallels between the heavenly court and the earthly court of Borso: unicorns, the symbols of chastity and a device of the allegedly celibate prince, draw the chariot of Minerva (*see* fig. 8.5). Venus subjugates the warrior Mars, who kneels before her in chains (*see* fig. 8.6), a reminder that Borso styled himself as the promoter of peace between the Italian powers.

The pagan gods appear here, as they often had elsewhere, as courtly knights and ladies, yet their features are also fully in line with contemporary classical scholarship. The humanist Pellegrino Prisciani (1435–1510) based the program on a Latin astrological poem, the *Astronomicon* by the Roman Marcus Manilius (*fl.* first century CE), which uniquely associated the gods of the Greco-Roman Pantheon with the months of the year; this is why Vulcan, Hestia, Ceres, and Minerva, who are not planet gods, all appear. Each sign of the zodiac constitutes 30 degrees of a circular band of stars known as the "encliptic." Stellar demons known as "decans" governed subordinate regions of 10 degrees. Under Aries, the dark-skinned man in white torn garments is a decan (*see* fig. 8.5). One medieval source, a text on magic and astrology known as *Picatrix*, describes this as "the form of a black man, agitated and large of body with red eyes and holding a cutting axe in his hand, girded about with white cloth . . . And this is a [heavenly] sign of strength, high rank, and wealth without difference." The same text describes the first decan of Taurus (April) as "A woman with curly hair, with a single child dressed in clothes resembling flame, and she is dressed in similar clothes. And this is a sign for plowing and working the earth, for sciences, geometry, sowing seeds, and making things." The frescoes represent an attempt to create images according to what was believed to be the most ancient form of knowledge, the magical science of the heavens.

The pagan gods appear elsewhere in Ferrarese art in the 1460s, and sometimes in a form more directly reminiscent of their appearance in ancient art. In the background of an *Annunciation* painted by Tura in 1468 on the canvas shutters for the organ of the cathedral (fig. 8.7), gods representing the eight planetary spheres appear as dynamic nudes, reacting to the incarnation of the true god with animated dismay. Here Tura imitates the art of antiquity, which for him entailed an inventive rendering of the body in terms of weight shift; the style of the classical figures contrasts pointedly with that chosen for the Virgin and the angel. Venus, who adopts a spiraling double twist, appears to snarl down at the Virgin, herself completely absorbed in a book as the Holy Spirit hovers at her ear. It is not clear that she even sees Gabriel, whose form is mysteriously echoed in the sphinx-like rock formation in the landscape beyond, just as his gesture of greeting repeats that of the pagan messenger god Mercury in the left-hand relief almost completely eclipsed by his wing. The gods of paganism here represent the antithesis of the Christian religion. Yet as planet gods, they are also able to signify the will of the supreme god, heralding the very event that brings about their downfall.

Borso's Bible

Borso's most distinguished commission was his illuminated Bible, a massive two-volume set with jeweled covers that accompanied him on state visits and was shown to guests at his court. He sought to have the most beautiful and magnificent book imaginable; the expenditure that went into it amounted to well over twice the cost of the frescoes in Palazzo Schifanoia. Between 1455 and 1461, a team headed by Taddeo Crivelli and Francesco de' Rossi illuminated the more than six hundred leaves with remarkably varied combinations of text, framed miniatures, and decorative borders. Among the most elaborate are the openings for Genesis (fig. 8.8), where the episodes of Creation appear among the unfurling leaves of a magical vine that springs from an urn precariously supported by golden putti over a baptismal font. The font was one of Borso's heraldic devices; other emblems, among them the *diamante* (diamond) and the unicorn, appear



8.8
Taddeo Crivelli, opening of Genesis, Bible of Borso d'Este. Each folio 14¾ x 10½" (37.5 x 26.5 cm). Biblioteca Estense, Modena

along with Este coats of arms on the inner borders. The combinations of flora and fauna, like the whimsical dragons and acrobatic nudes, manifest an exuberant creative energy, reinforcing the scriptural text where the spoken word of God gives rise to the profusion of the world and the cosmos.

The Sforza Court in Milan

Filarete

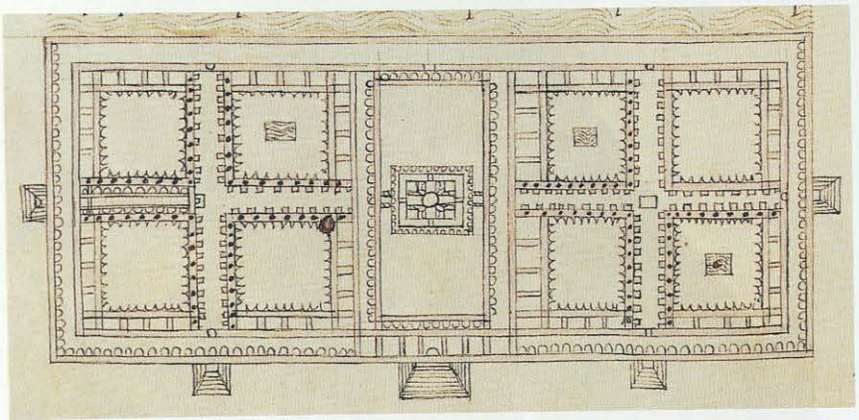
It was easy to idealize the role of the court artist. The position normally entailed the receipt of a salary and other benefits from a prince, and some measure of status – an artist might be designated a "familiar" of a ruler, part of an inner household of specially favored courtiers and servants. The architect and sculptor Filarete (*c.* 1400–1469; ***see*** p. 172), who took up residence in Milan in 1451 following an inglorious end to his Roman career (he was banished for trying to steal relics in 1447), made a self-portrait medal around 1460 to create the impression that he had a privileged relation to Duke Francesco Sforza (figs. 8.9–8.10). The reverse, inscribed *Ut sol auget apes sic nobis comoda princeps* ("As the sun helps the bee, so to us is the favor of the prince"), shows the sculptor at work beside a beehive in a hollow tree, from which a stream of honey flows. In actuality, Filarete was one of many court artists who found that princely service was all too often its own reward. Princes could be unpredictable, or excessively demanding; they were also notoriously dismissive of the obligations that went with the mercantile world of the contract and the market, and often neglected to settle their bills. They frequently viewed what compensation they did offer as a gift rather than an obligation. (When Francesco del Cossa pressed Borso d'Este for an additional payment toward his part of the Hall of the Months frescoes, he diplomatically suggested that he would regard this as a gift and not as the settling of a debt.)

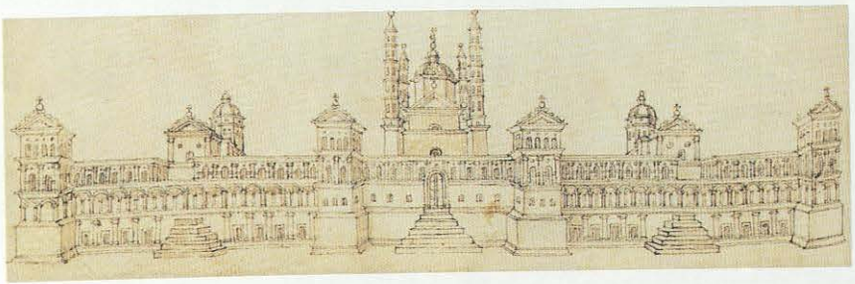
The Sforza, newly established as the ruling family of Milan, were often casual in their treatment of employees. Members of the family did take an interest in individual artists, sending one to Bruges to study with Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–1464) and another to learn from

LEFT

8.9 and 8.10

Filarete, Self-portrait medal, obverse (above) and reverse (below). Gabinetto Numismatico, Milan





TOP AND ABOVE

8.11

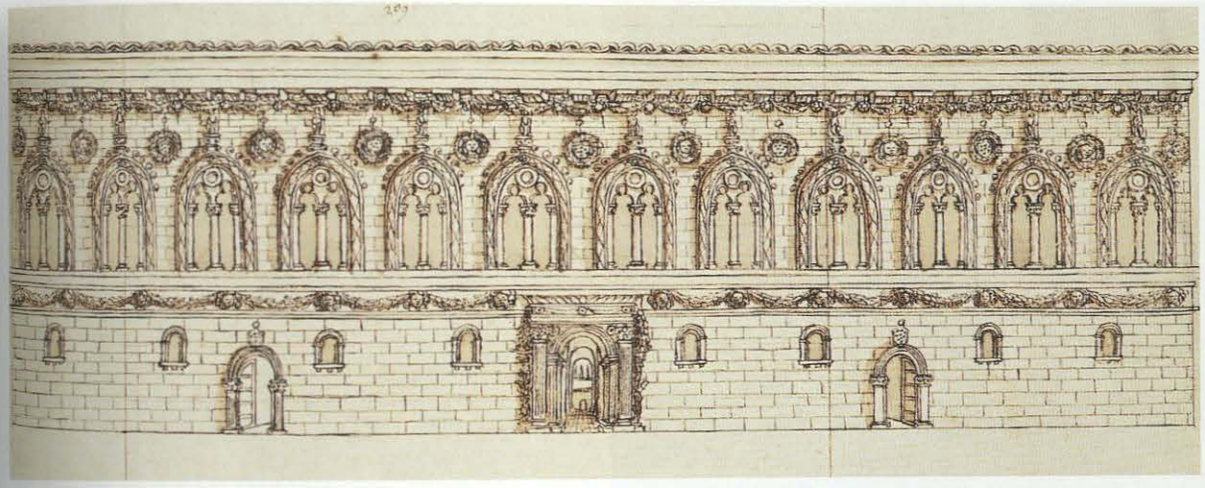
Filarete, Ospedale Maggiore, from *Treatise on Architecture*, 1465. Pen and ink on paper. Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence. **The illustration shows drawings from Book XI, fol. 82v (top) and fol. 83v (bottom).**

Tura in Ferrara, but most artists at the Milanese court enjoyed little distinction and less financial reward. They usually joined teams engaged to work quickly, and with scant recognition of individual merits. Filarete's move to Milan happened largely at the instigation of Piero de' Medici; the appointment allowed the Sforza and Medici to express close ties of alliance, while serving a larger Medici policy of promoting Florentine artistic expertise abroad. Filarete himself cultivated the role of the learned architect able to guide the prince in the principles of building in the new Florentine style. In his *Treatise on Architecture*, composed for the Sforza but ultimately dedicated to Piero de' Medici in 1465, he wrote proudly of the dependency of princes on their architects. Much of the work consists of fictional dialogues between Francesco Sforza and Filarete, emphasizing their intimacy. The book envisions the building of an ideal city in completely centralized form, named Sforzinda in honor of the prince, with buildings based on projects that Filarete had conceived for the Sforza. Chief among these was the Great Hospital of Milan, on which Filarete worked from 1456 to 1465. The corresponding drawings in Filarete's treatise (fig. 8.11) show a colossal three-storey building, its horizontal expanse divided by pavilions and with a domed and towered church at its center. The modular plan repeats a basic element, organizing a 5 x 2 grid of identical squares into two Greek crosses (crosses with arms of equal length) on either side of a central block. The arms of the cross house the hospital wards, and the intervening spaces form a series of courtyards, with abundant provision of water to the rear of the building.

Although the hospital draws from such Tuscan models as Brunelleschi's Innocenti (*see* fig. 3.13), the design and the principles of functional organization it represents are unprecedented. For centuries, hospitals opened their doors both to those needing medical care and to the homeless, the elderly, orphans, and war refugees, who were often housed together regardless of their particular needs. The Milan hospital classified and separated its patients, with different accommodations for males and females, young and old, and further segregation of patients with infectious illnesses. Laundry rooms, latrines, and internal plumbing manifested a new emphasis on hygiene.

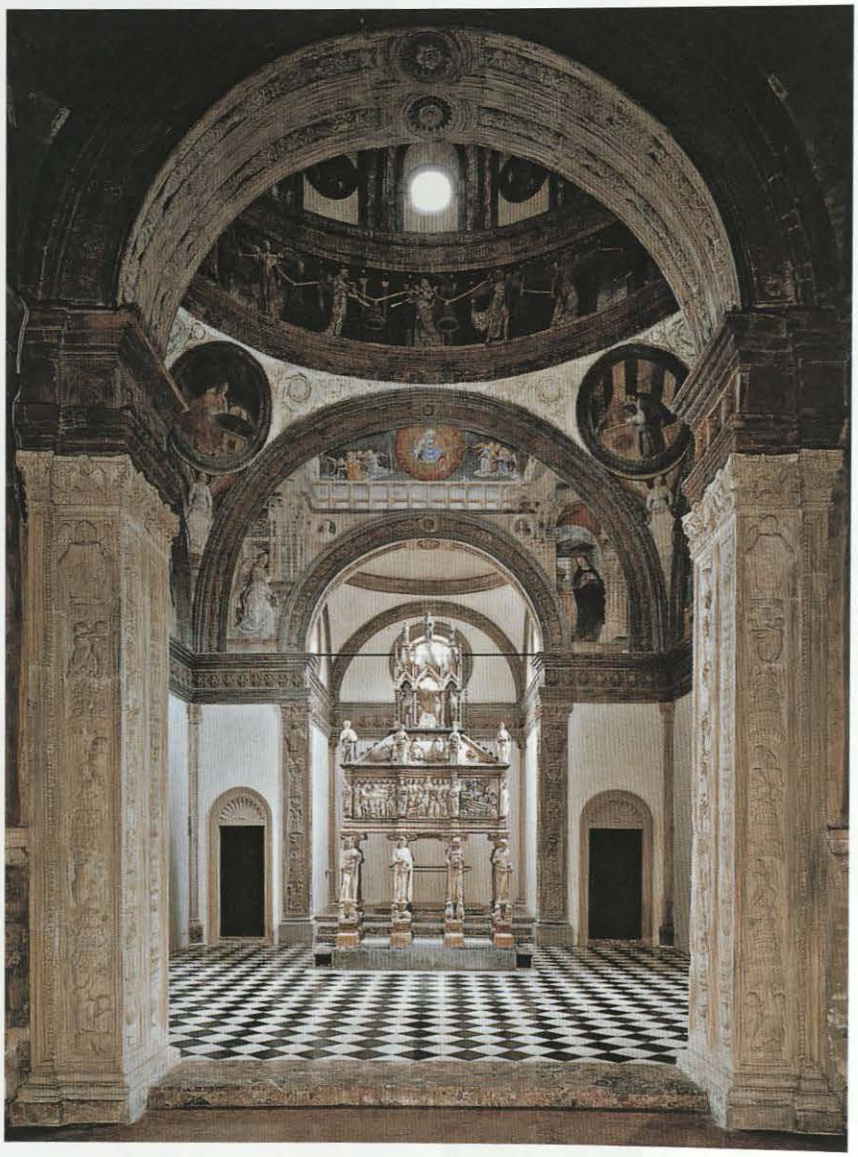
ABOVE
8.12
Filarete, Ospedale Maggiore, Milan (fifteenth-century portion)

Only the plan and first storey were built according to Filarete's directions. A board of overseers, divided by political factionalism, constantly challenged and subverted ducal authority. In 1461, with construction under way, local experts and their noble patrons criticized Filarete's design. The architect was dropped from the works and not even Sforza's intervention could reinstate him. Filarete's architecture seems also to have met resistance for its foreign character. The facade as finally built (fig. 8.12) features the kind of Gothic ornament that Filarete openly disparaged in his treatise, where he attributed it to the influence of goldsmiths on architectural design: "They made buildings in this same manner, because these forms seemed beautiful in their own work, but they also have more to do with their own work than with architecture." In a remark that would have gone over much better in Florence than in Milan, he added that such "modes and customs" came "from across the Alps, from the Germans and the French," and that "for this reason ancient usage was lost." Comments like this represent a kind of stylistic absolutism, one that showed Filarete's friction with the local culture. He wrote that the Medici Bank in Milan (fig. 8.13) was "not in the Milanese manner but as is used today in Florence, that is, in the antique style." It is true that the bank (*c.* 1463), now known only from a surviving portal and from Filarete's drawing, incorporates elements of the "Florentine" style used by Brunelleschi, Michelozzo, and Rossellino. The basic form of the building echoes Michelozzo's design for the Medici Palace (*see* figs. 6.20 and 6.22). Yet the bank is a hybrid, its facade encrusted with tracery and its windows topped with the cusped arches that Filarete associated with the over-precious "little tabernacles and incense boats" of the Gothic style. The portal (fig. 8.14) has an



8.13
Medici Bank, Milan, facade, *c.* 1465, as shown in Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture.* Pen and ink on paper. Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence. **Detail from Book XXV, fol. 192r.**

8.14
Unknown architect, portal from the Medici Bank in Milan. Castello Sforzesco, Milan



ABOVE

8.15

Portinari Chapel, Sant'Eustorgio, Milan, *c.* 1468. Interior

OPPOSITE

8.16

Vincenzo Foppa, *St. Peter Martyr and the Idol*, 1468. Fresco. Portinari Chapel, Sant'Eustorgio, Milan

elegant Corinthian order framing an arch, yet the richly carved spandrels with their portraits of Duke Francesco Sforza and his wife Bianca Maria Visconti, and the ostentatious frieze with putti bearing the Sforza-Visconti coat of arms, signal a Milanese adaptation or translation of the Florentine-Roman vocabulary. The vertical tiers of figurative sculpture framing the door, with putti, cornucopia, female Virtues, and warrior figures, might recall Florentine humanist tombs by Rossellino and others, but they would never have appeared in a Florentine civic or commercial context. The Medici Bank of Milan, then, signals not so much an imposition of Florentine taste on local norms as an attempt to produce a work that is both Florentine and Milanese, both Medici and Sforza.

The Portinari Chapel

The bank's manager, the Florentine Pigello Portinari, was aware of the power of art to forge cultural bridges. His own funerary chapel at the Milanese church of Sant'Eustorgio (fig. 8.15), adapted from the design of Brunelleschi's Old Sacristy (*see* fig. 4.11), is no simple gesture of "Florentinization"; like the bank, it signals a process of translation and adaptation. Once again, Gothic tracery appears in the windows, instead of the Old Sacristy's severe arches. The umbrella dome is raised now upon a drum, on which a frieze of stucco angels bearing garlands and cornucopia designates the "heavenly" zone of the chapel.

Unlike the plain expanses of wall in its Florentine model, the zones above the Corinthian frieze in the Portinari Chapel are decorated with richly colored frescoes of the Life of St. Peter Martyr (the Dominican saint whose remains are preserved in the church) by the Brescian painter Vincenzo Foppa (*c.* 1430–*c.* 1515). Foppa, an accomplished perspectivist, used painted architecture to extend the space of the chapel with elaborate urban vistas. The approach recalls other north Italian practitioners of the modern manner, such as Jacopo Bellini (*see* p. 125), who had himself worked in Foppa's home town of Brescia. The roundels in the spandrels, depicting the four Doctors of the Church, draw not on Donatello's *stucco tondi* in the Old Sacristy but on the treatment of the same subject by the rivals Andrea Mantegna and Niccolo Pizzolo in the Ovetari Chapel in Padua, from the previous decade (*see* figs. 7.21–7.23). In addition, illusion is a thematic concern of the frescoes: in one scene by Foppa (fig. 8.16), the saint exorcizes a demonically animated statue of the Virgin that had been working spurious miracles. The "inauthentic" manifestation of the Virgin here contrasts with the accompanying scenes of the Annunciation on the chancel arch and the Assumption on the facing wall.

Courtly Imitation

Through Portinari's influence, Foppa was appointed "familiar" in the household of Duke Francesco's successor Galeazzo Maria Sforza, yet none of his major surviving works can be connected with the court. There instead we find him working in partnership with other painters on large-scale projects where the priorities were speedy execution and stylistic uniformity. Foppa belonged to the team of artists that produced a massive reliquary altarpiece for the chapel in the new Sforza castle of Milan. Most of the castle's rooms repeated Sforza and Visconti heraldic motifs in gold and azure. Insistence on continuity with the Visconti regime was a matter of some urgency to Francesco, since his own claim to succession depended on his marriage to an illegitimate daughter of the last duke. When Francesco's successor Galeazzo Maria had the castle chapel decorated a few years later by another group of artists headed by Bonifacio Bembo (*fl.* 1447–1477), the style employed (fig. 8.17) emphasized continuity with the Visconti era in its deliberate avoidance of Foppa's characteristic manner. Here we are still in the world of Pisanello and Gentile da Fabriano, with its simulation of rich materials, its emphasis on decorated surfaces, and its suspension of spatial illusion. The entire scheme probably imitated an earlier fifteenth-century decoration in a Visconti residence.

Galeazzo provides a striking example of the power of court painting to govern even social conduct and manners. Not only did he commission elaborate frescoes depicting himself and his courtiers hunting and feasting, just as the Visconti court had in decorations from the

8.17
Bonifacio Bembo and others, ceiling frescoes in the Chapel of Castello Sforzesco, Milan, 1473

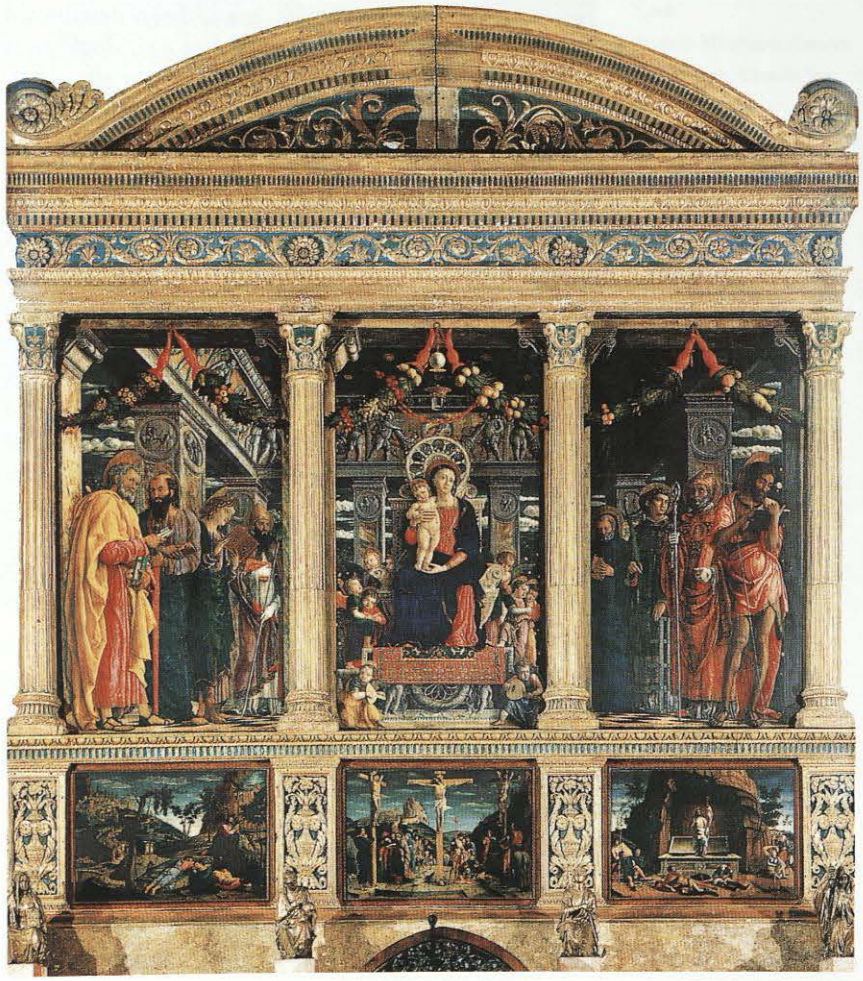
late 1300s; he also compelled the men and women of his court to adopt the hairstyles and forms of dress featured in these earlier paintings. According to one Florentine ambassador's report from 1470, "A wild passion for greyhounds has come over the Duke and he thinks of nothing else.... He has painted the Duke Giovan Galeaz [Visconti] with greyhounds around him in every *storia* in the *sala* of the Castle here, and he continues to imitate it, and from this I believe comes his desire." The perception was that Galeazzo Maria's very enthusiasm for hunting followed a logic of ritual imitation, one guaranteed by the pictures on his walls.

Mantegna, Alberti, and the Gonzaga Court

In one remarkable decorated chamber in the castle of the Prince of Mantua, Andrea Mantegna (*c.* 1431–1506) not only concentrated and intensified all the features of courtly secular painting we have seen in the much larger cycles in Ferrara and Milan, but he also produced a meditation on the principles of "Renaissance" painting itself.

Mantegna had come to Mantua from Padua in 1460 after a prolonged period of wrangling about his salary and his prospective status as an employee of the ruling Gonzaga family. One of the delays was due to an uncompleted commission (also in 1460) for a monumental altarpiece for the abbey church of San Zeno in Verona (fig. 8.18), ordered by the abbey's Venetian administrator, Gregorio Correr. The work is often compared to Donatello's *Santo* altarpiece in Padua (*see* fig. 6.41), which Mantegna certainly knew well: the frame of the San Zeno altarpiece, a triple-arched portico, gives illusionistic access to a continuous architectural space, viewed from below, that recedes into depth. The Virgin and Child with a heavenly court of contemplative saints occupy a classical temple, which is otherwise strangely free of Christian imagery. Adorning it are reliefs of cupids with garlands and *tondi*, along with roundels showing subjects from pagan mythology. In the three meticulously rendered panels that form the predella, Mantegna created an imaginary itinerary around the city of Jerusalem. His landscape panoramas with shifting views of Jerusalem reflect his close study of paintings imported from the Netherlands.

By now established as one of the most renowned painters in Italy, Mantegna could command the best terms. He held out for nothing less than aristocratic honors from the Gonzaga. In addition to a salary, a house, and living expenses for six people, he received a coat of arms, with the promise that "these are the least of the rewards you will get from us." In 1468 Mantegna traveled to Ferrara, where Borso d'Este was entertaining the Emperor Frederick III, and purchased the title of Count Palatine. In many respects, the Gonzaga needed Mantegna as much as he needed them: the ruler Ludovico (*r.* 1444–78), raised as a professional soldier, had obtained several commissions in the service of the Sforza of Milan. Yet Gonzaga had also received a humanist education and was fully aware that culture would enhance the reputation of his small state as much as soldiering.



8.18
Andrea Mantegna, San Zeno altarpiece, 1460. Tempera on panel, height 7'2½" (2.2 m). San Zeno, Verona

Mantegna's Camera Picta

According to the terms of his employment, Mantegna would work exclusively for the prince. If other elite clients wanted a painting by Mantegna, they had to petition Ludovico. Few such requests met with success, however, given Mantegna's insistence on working at his own pace, and his unwillingness to satisfy any but the most important clients – such as the Pope and Lorenzo de' Medici. Mantegna also managed to avoid many of the more mundane duties of court artists, such as the painting of shields and parade banners and the decoration of

furniture and statuary. By 1465, it had been determined that the artist would invest his energies in a single great work that would show his skills to their best advantage. This was the decoration of a cube-shaped room in the prince's apartment: located in a restricted and private part of the castle at Mantua, it combined the functions of a bedchamber, a private study, and a reception space. A group portrait of the marquess Ludovico, his wife Barbara of Brandenburg, their children, and various members of the court appears above our eye level on the fireplace wall (fig. 8.19). On the adjacent wall, male members of the Gonzaga family gather with other princes in an open-air setting, the horses and dogs evoking the hunting scenes that are so characteristic of this kind of palace decoration (*see* figs. 8.5–8.6). Yet we encounter these scenes through a painted arcade adorned by swags, and with curtains that flutter in the open air: it is as if Mantegna has placed us inside the temple-like space of his San Zeno altarpiece. An exquisitely decorated vault rises from the painted pilasters, with illusionistic *stucco* decorations of cupids holding garlands around portraits of the first eight Roman emperors: an oculus opens above our heads with a glimpse of blue sky, while "live" cupids besport themselves on the ledge (fig. 8.20).

In one sense, the Camera Picta (Painted Chamber) belongs to the same genre as the portraits that filled the residences of the Este and the Sforza. Yet Mantegna concentrated resources, working slowly and meticulously, rendering the portraits with astonishing descriptive naturalism and adding intricate patterns to the vault. (He used a slow-drying, oil-based technique rather than traditional *fresco*.) The room draws attention to the unique abilities of the individual who made it, and Mantegna, in fact, proclaimed his authorship in a Latin inscription above one of the doorways: *For the illustrious Ludovico, second marquis of Mantua, a prince most excellent and of a faith most unbroken, and for the illustrious Barbara, his spouse, glory beyond compare of women, their Andrea Mantegna of Padua completed this poor work to do them honor in the year 1474.* The Gonzaga residences contained many "painted chambers," but only this one was simply designated as "*the* Painted Chamber," as if it were the last word in decorations of its kind. For Ludovico Gonzaga, Mantegna's performance offered an alternative to an endless repetitive display of the princely image throughout the castle: this room, made marvelous by art, is privileged and distinguished as the space of the prince's image. The fresco enacts the idea of restricted access to the prince, of "insiders" and "outsiders," by separating the zone with the Gonzaga family from that of the stairway, where two courtiers delay the admission of others (fig. 8.19). Ludovico himself used the space in an almost ritualistic way, receiving the most important guests while seated in front of his own portrait on the wall, on at least one occasion in the company of his wife and daughters. Such staged appearances can be seen as a profession of sincerity and trustworthiness: visitors, seeing that the frescoes showed the Gonzaga without flattery, would have had visual evidence of the family's good faith.

8.19
Andrea Mantegna, Camera Picta, 1466–75. Castello San Giorgio, Mantua

8.20
Andrea Mantegna, Camera Picta: Vault. Castello San Giorgio, Mantua

What is especially new about the Camera is the way in which the entire decoration responds to the presence of a beholder. In the court scene (*see* fig. 8.19), Ludovico – having evidently just read a letter – turns to address a servant or secretary. Ludovico is clearly transacting business, but an outsider cannot determine whether he is attending to routine affairs of state or whether something more momentous has happened. The Gonzaga seem to act with reserve, both toward one another and the viewer. Yet this reinforces the sense that they are conscious of being looked at, doing their utmost to avoid our gaze. Only the female dwarf haughtily glowers down at us, as if to insinuate that we are hardly worth their attention. And then, looking up, this uneasy feeling of being excluded assumes a more mischievous dimension. From the oculus several ladies smile down knowingly, as if a humiliating joke is about to occur at our expense. One of the foreshortened cupids dangles a piece of fruit over our heads, while one of the women rests her hand on a beam that barely supports a planter containing an orange tree.

The Camera is a work of political art: it documents the status and ambitions of the Gonzaga family. The picture excluded Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza, a potentially serious breach of protocol since the Sforza were the chief employers of the Gonzaga military forces, and the duke noted with displeasure that while leaving out his portrait, the artist had included the Holy Roman Emperor and the King of Denmark, "two of the worst men in the world." These sovereigns, who represented more honorable and ennobling connections than the upstart Sforza dynasty, turn up in the scene that has come to be called *The Meeting*, where Ludovico greets his son Francesco, who had been made a cardinal in 1461 at the age of seventeen (fig. 8.21). Francesco, embodying a highly advantageous connection to the papal court, receives special distinction here as the only full-length figure represented frontally. He stands amidst an array of princely profiles, reminiscent of the official likenesses on portrait medals, with his father Ludovico to his right and his eldest brother Federico to the far left, while he holds his younger brother (also called Ludovico) by the hand. Yet the illustrious political connections from beyond the Alps, the king (the man in black to Federico's right) and emperor (facing Federico, in profile), would have been identifiable only from their

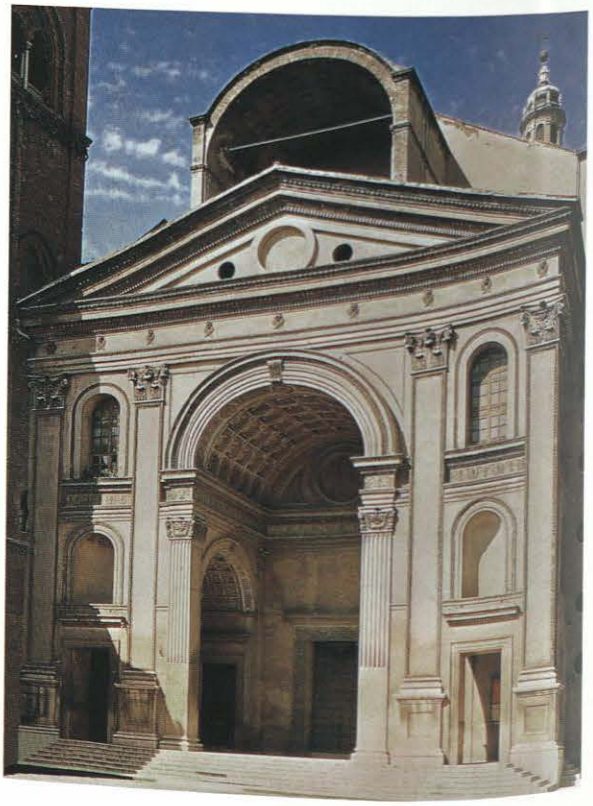
8.21
Andrea Mantegna, *Dedicatory inscription* and *The Meeting*. Fresco. Camera Picta, Castello San Giorgio, Mantua

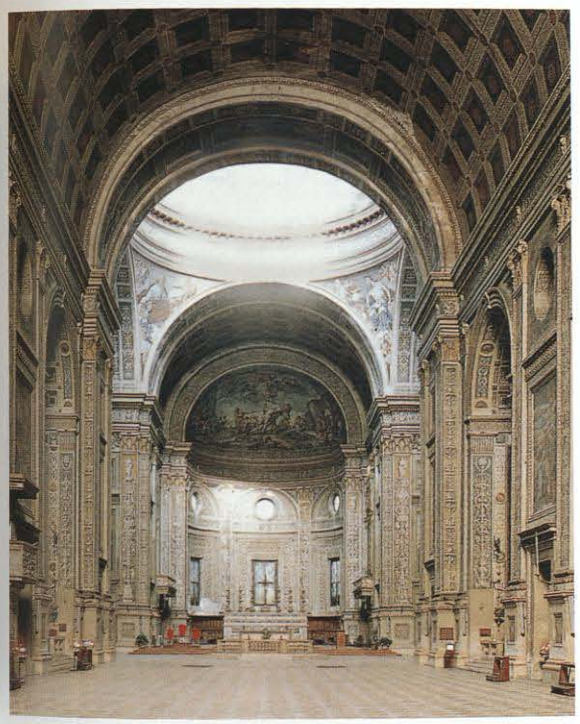
RIGHT
8.22
Leon Battista Alberti, facade of Sant'Andrea, Mantua, begun 1470

portraits; they are given no special prominence through royal or imperial insignia. It is as if "vertical" connections of feudal dependency have become "horizontal" connections of family and friendship. (Ludovico could claim kinship with both monarchs through his noble German wife.) Thus the landscape representing the city of Rome in the *Meeting* scene, like the roundels with the portraits of emperors, is deliberately ambiguous in its reference: it could show the Gonzaga to be feudal subjects of the Holy Roman Emperor, the new Caesar, or it could represent the Gonzaga connection to papal Rome through the cardinal. Finally, however, it could represent the fantasy of imperial status on the part of the Gonzaga themselves, where Mantua – through the cultural and military distinction won by its rulers – becomes a "New Rome." One tiny but important detail reinforces this insinuation: over the gate to the "Rome" in the background of the "Meeting" appears the same Gonzaga coat of arms that adorns the overdoor on the facing wall in the Camera Picta.

Alberti in Mantua

The Gonzaga additionally emulated Rome through the services of another important connection: Leon Battista Alberti. In the previous decade Ludovico had commissioned Alberti to add a monumental circular choir to the church of Santissima Annunziata in Florence as a votive offering on a princely scale to the church's miraculous image. The gesture was also a clear bid to secure Gonzaga recognition abroad, and an expression of friendship with the Medici. Of two churches built by Alberti in Mantua, the more notable is Sant'Andrea, designed in 1470 to provide a magnificent and capacious setting for a highly important relic, the blood of Christ. As had been





8.23
Leon Battista Alberti and Luca Fancelli, Sant'Andrea, Mantua, begun 1470. Interior

the case with the church of San Francesco in Rimini (*see* figs. 7.14–7.15), Alberti mainly supplied designs and advice from Rome, while the Gonzaga architect Luca Fancelli directed the building work on site.

Alberti here truly brought Rome to Mantua, in a building without equal elsewhere in Italy for its inventive adaptation of ancient types. The facade (fig. 8.22), like those of Pienza Cathedral (*see* fig. 7.30) and Santa Maria Novella in Florence, combines the triumphal arch with the temple front, now with much greater emphasis on the arch: the colossal Corinthian pilasters on bases recall the engaged columns on the arches of Septimius Severus or Constantine in Rome. The great central arch, with its deep recession and its **coffering**, offers a bold sculptural contrast to the more delicate and relief-like treatment of the facade. The facade's tripartite form, moreover, announces the organization of the interior (fig. 8.23). Unusually, Alberti's church has no aisles: the vault is supported on massive piers, between which is a series of chapels mostly with their own coffered **barrel vaulting**. Again, Alberti has unified interior and exterior by repeating the triumphal arch theme of the main facade – Corinthian pilasters and three-storey minor bays with smaller doorways frame the large coffered recesses of the chapels. The design recalls the ancient basilicas and baths of Rome: the huge (60 foot) coffered barrel vault is the largest constructed in Italy since the fourth century CE. The culmination of the church in a luminous domed crossing realizes elements that were planned but never executed for St. Peter's in Rome.

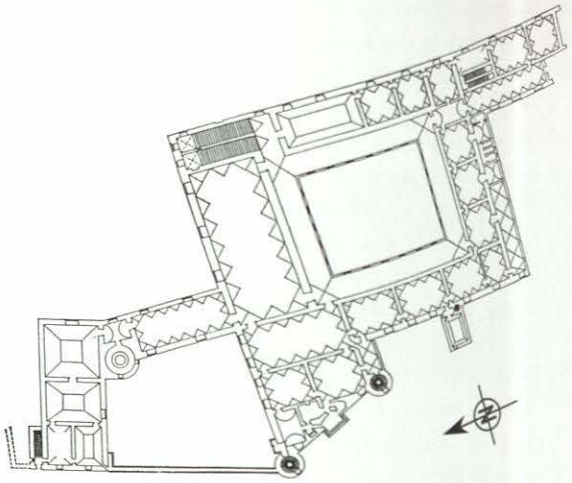
Urbino: The Palace of Federico da Montefeltro

The Este, the Gonzaga, and the Malatesta (*see* p. 196) dynasties all owed their political good fortune and economic survival to the profession of soldiering. Princes who fought for money took special pains to assume the trappings of chivalry and noble martial arts; many professed a sincere interest in the military heroes of antiquity, such as Scipio Africanus and Julius Caesar, and took up the study of Roman history. The fathers of Ludovico Gonzaga and Borso d'Este ensured that their sons were not just good soldiers but also gained a solid humanist education: this would have meant at least the ability to read Latin, although Ludovico had deeper scholarly interests and wrote Latin poetry. One of Ludovico's boyhood classmates in Mantua was a young prince of the Montefeltro family, papal vicars of a mountainous and largely barren fief in the eastern Papal States, centered on the town of Urbino. Federico da Montefeltro (1422–1482) would soon prove to be the most renowned captain of his age, combining fearsome efficiency with a reputation for loyalty and dependability – qualities his arch-rival and neighbor Sigismondo Malatesta (1417–1468) notoriously lacked. Since most of the Italian powers finally found it expedient to pay Montefeltro not to fight, he rapidly amassed vast wealth, which he invested in the architectural embellishment of his small state.

Contemporaries regarded the palace of Urbino, begun in 1447 and mostly completed in the 1470s, as one of the wonders of Italy: they admired its engineering, its noble architecture, and the refinement of the scholars and nobles found there. They credited Federico himself with a substantial role in the design, though a document of 1468 records that he had given a Dalmatian architect named Luciano Laurana (*c.* 1420–1479) full authority to direct building operations. The palace, which straddles an entire hillside (figs. 8.24 and 8.26), dominated the view of Urbino from the western approach road. The turreted central element suggests a fortress, but the defensive theme is more symbolic than actual. Two delicate towers framing a four-storey, single-bay loggia designate the core of the palace, the apartment of Count Federico (he would be made Duke of Urbino in 1474), containing his chapel, his studiolo, and, in emulation of the Este, a little Temple of the Muses. The tower and loggia theme recalls the Arca Aragonese of the Castel Nuovo in Naples (*see* fig. 7.12), but its main function is to afford views of the valley; there is no access to the palace from here. The building is entered on the town side, which presents a facade reminiscent of the recently built palaces of Florence and Rome (*see* fig. 7.30). The central portal leads

to Laurana's great courtyard (fig. 8.25), which in its breadth and luminous elegance suggests a grand urban space rather than its closed-in, shaft-like counterparts in Florence (*see* fig. 6.22). Laurana certainly knew Florentine architecture: the loggia is a variant on Brunelleschi's Innocenti (*see* fig. 3.13), adapted with an eye to visual refinement. Whereas Brunelleschi, for instance, had merely wrapped a copy of the Innocenti loggia around four sides of a square, Laurana devoted special attention to the corners, here replacing columns with L-shaped piers, thus providing a sense of containment and stability to each of the four facades. An inscription in elegant Latin majuscules runs around the frieze: "Federico, Duke of Urbino, Count of Montefeltro and Castel Durante, builder of the palace, undefeated in war, the just, clement and liberal prince."

The courtyard provided access to Federico's famous library, a collection of nearly one thousand sumptuously bound and illuminated manuscripts, some of them produced in Florence and others in a local scriptorium. Federico's ambition was to equal or even surpass the great libraries of the world, and his envoys requested catalogues from the Vatican, the Medici Palace, and Oxford



TOP LEFT

8.24

Luciano Laurana, Francesco di Giorgio, and others, Ducal Palace, Urbino, 1450s–80s. View from western approach

LEFT

8.25

Luciano Laurana, courtyard, Ducal Palace, Urbino, 1465–79

ABOVE

8.26

Luciano Laurana, Francesco di Giorgio, and others, Ducal Palace, Urbino. Plan

8.27
Francesco de' Russi (?), opening of the Gospel according to St. Luke, 1474–82. Manuscript on parchment, 16 x 10" (40.5 x 25.6 cm). Vatican Library

University, among other collections. This was very much a humanist library, with most of the volumes in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and only about seventy in the vernacular. Although they represented most of the great theologians, the majority of the books concern philosophy, history, and poetry. Two massive Bibles decorated by Florentine and Ferrarese illuminators were clearly intended to rival that of Borso d'Este in Ferrara; the *St. Luke* (fig. 8.27) strongly recalls the style of Cosmè Tura (*see* fig. 8.3). By contrast with the Ferrarese Bible, however, the Montefeltro volumes employ a form of italic script devised for the transcription of classical Latin texts.

Given the importance of fresco decoration at Milan, Ferrara, and Mantua, it is striking that Federico seems not to have commissioned any for his own palace at Urbino. Simple white walls offset the marble framed portals with *intarsia* doors. Federico did occasionally have the walls hung with tapestries, the most princely of media: in 1476, he would commission a set of eleven pieces from Jean Grenier of Tournai representing the war of Troy. Isabella d'Este, the marchioness of Mantua and the great arbiter of aristocratic taste, singled out Federico's tapestries and embroidered hangings for particular praise, as did Federico's Florentine biographer and book supplier Vespasiano da Bisticci. More generally, the palace of Urbino became the exemplary princely dwelling: it provided the basis for the ambitious new palaces of Ercole d'Este (Borso's successor as Duke of Ferrara in 1471), and both Lorenzo de' Medici, and Ludovico Gonzaga's heir, Federico, wrote to request drawings of the building. Decades later, in 1518, the highly influential *Book of the Courtier* by the Mantuan nobleman Baldassare Castiglione still celebrated not only the palace but also the brilliant circle of gentlemen and ladies, artists, and musicians that the Montefeltro family entertained there. Long after the 1470s, as a consequence, Urbino's elegant, witty, and humane courtly society remained the model for civilized manners and behavior for the whole of Europe.

Courtly Values in Cities without Courts

Florence: Chapel Decorations in the Medici Palace

A court was not just a political institution, the household and administration of a prince. The word "court" and its derivatives in English to this day – "courteous," "courtship," even "court of law" – connote virtuous and gracious conduct, of an authority founded on manners and the observance of ceremonial protocols. The aesthetic and moral ideals of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio were those of the courts where the three great poets spent much of their time, even as the ideologues of Florentine republicanism tried to reground those ideals in the classical authority of the Roman philosopher, statesman, and political theorist Cicero. Courts defined an essence of civilization to which republics were still beholden, and the Medici sought to manifest that essence.

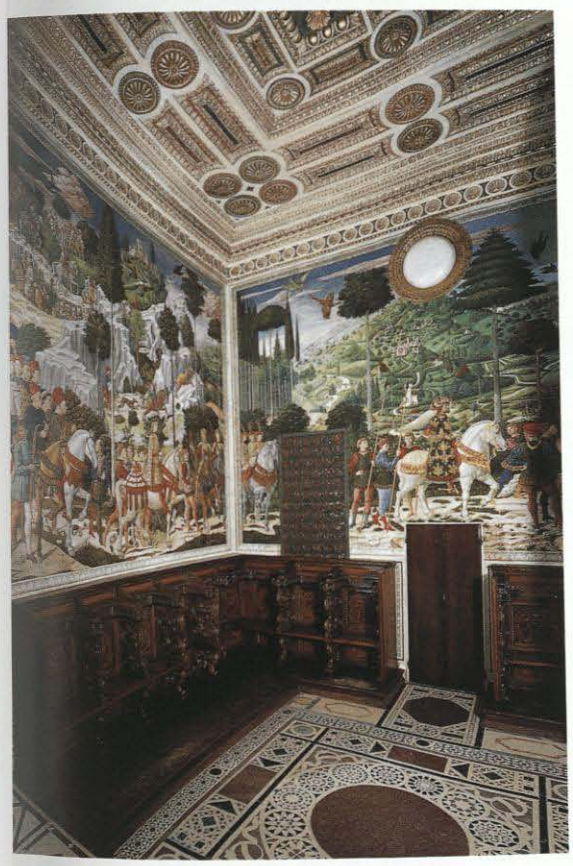
We have seen that the Medici family, though not nobles themselves, erected buildings and decorated chapels of an expense that the princely rulers of Europe hardly rivaled. The patrons and artists may both have associated the proportionality, clearly ordered composition, and ornamental restraint in these works with particular social values: gravity, dignity, the cultivation of ancient virtue, and "Tuscan" simplicity. Yet when Piero de' Medici (1416–1469; *r.* 1464–69) became head of the family in Florence, and commissioned Fra Angelico's assistant Benozzo Gozzoli (*c.* 1421–1497) to decorate the chapel of the family palace in 1459, the family adopted an art of luxurious display that deliberately echoed the work of Gentile da Fabriano a generation earlier (*see* fig. 4.3), as well as recent work by Pisanello (*see* fig. 5.2).

The east and west walls of the chapel show the procession of the Magi in a landscape that rises up the wall as much as it recedes in depth, recalling the tapestry effect

8.28
Benozzo Gozzoli, *Procession of the Magi* (detail), 1459. Fresco. Chapel of the Medici Palace, Florence. Among the Magi and their entourage are portraits of the principal male members of the Medici family and several of their allies from the princely families of Italy.

of Pisanello's Arthurian cycle; huntsmen pursue deer with their dogs and leopards, details reminiscent of Pisanello's "modelbook" naturalism (*see* p. 116). While the procession winds its way through the highly artificial-looking rock formations, the majority of the figures are packed into the foreground and stacked so that every face is visible (figs. 8.28 and 8.29). For the Medici and their entourage in 1460, these faces were undoubtedly there to be recognized. Gozzoli portrayed himself near the apex of the left-hand group, his name emblazoned in gold letters on his red cap. Cosimo, the white-haired elder in black, rides a mule, a mount he favored in real life as a calculated sign of humility. His son Piero, the patron of the cycle, appears to his left in black and gold brocade, and the black bowman who walks alongside Cosimo may also be a historical person. The young man on the white horse nearby is the young heir to the Dukedom of Milan, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who had made a state visit to Florence in 1459. Directly to Galeazzo's right is Sigismondo Malatesta of Rimini, who had last been to Florence in 1436, when the members of the great houses of Italy had assembled for the papal consecration of the cathedral. In the picture the Medici escort real princes in the train of one Magus, the crowned youth on the white horse who turns his head to look in the direction of the viewer. Though he may not physically resemble any living being, that figure is an idealized representation of Piero's son Lorenzo, only ten years old in 1459 but already being groomed as future head of the family. The laurel that frames his head and the orange that appears nearby (*lauro* and *arancio*) pun on the name "Lorenzo" (*Laurentius* in Latin).

The frescoes reflect the Medici's sense of themselves as both Florentine citizens and implicit dynastic rulers, peers to the princes of Italy. The Malatesta and the Sforza had been important military allies of both the city and the Medici family, while in addition Piero nurtured good relations with the Este of Ferrara and the Gonzaga

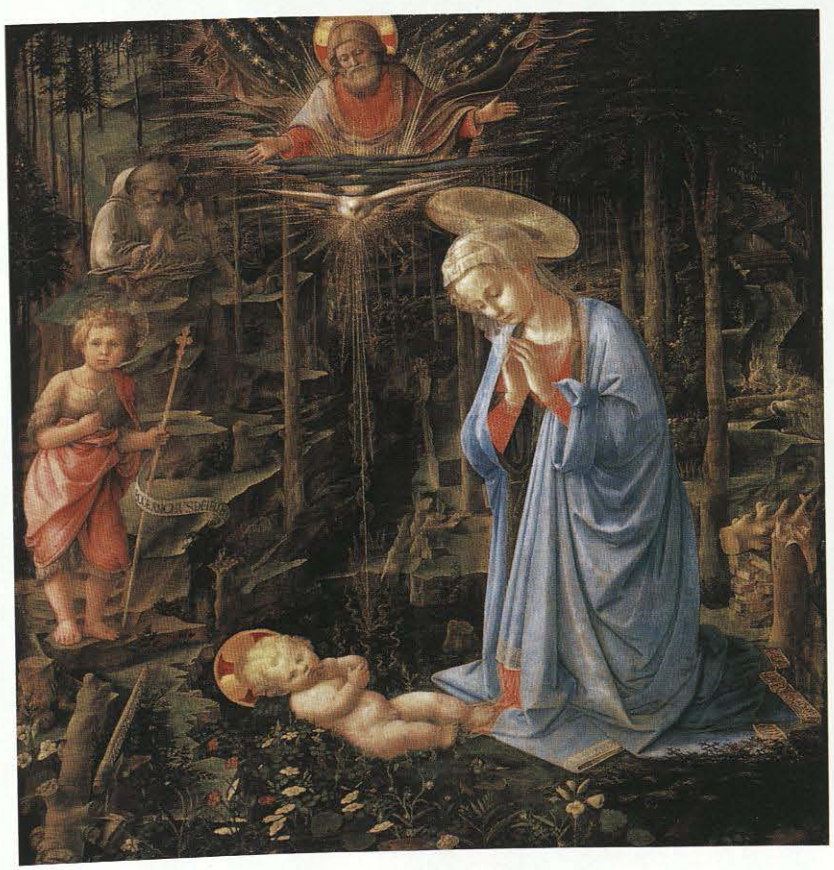


8.29
Benozzo Gozzoli, *Procession of the Magi*, chapel of the Medici Palace, Florence, 1459. Fresco

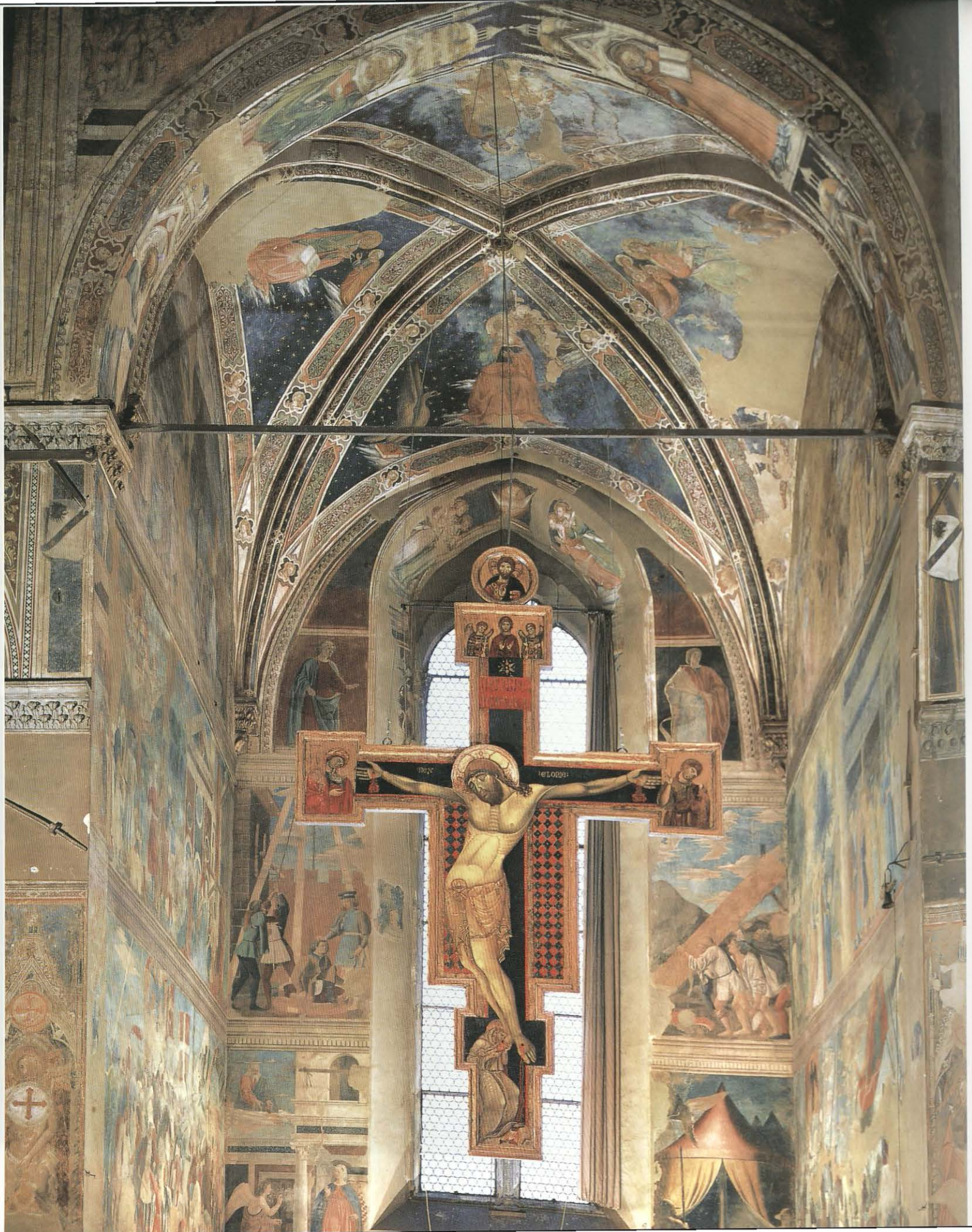
of Mantua. The man with the dagger walking in front of Piero's horse wears a tunic adorned with the *diamante*. A play on the words for "lover of God," as well as "diamond," the *diamante* was a princely heraldic sign that Piero shared with the Este rulers of Ferrara, who had granted him the right to use the device. As we have seen, the Medici also participated in the annual Epiphany procession of the Magi, a ritual that this cycle of frescoes clearly commemorates. Yet the destination of this procession is not the convent of San Marco with its representation of the Nativity, but the altar in the chapel of the Medici Palace itself.

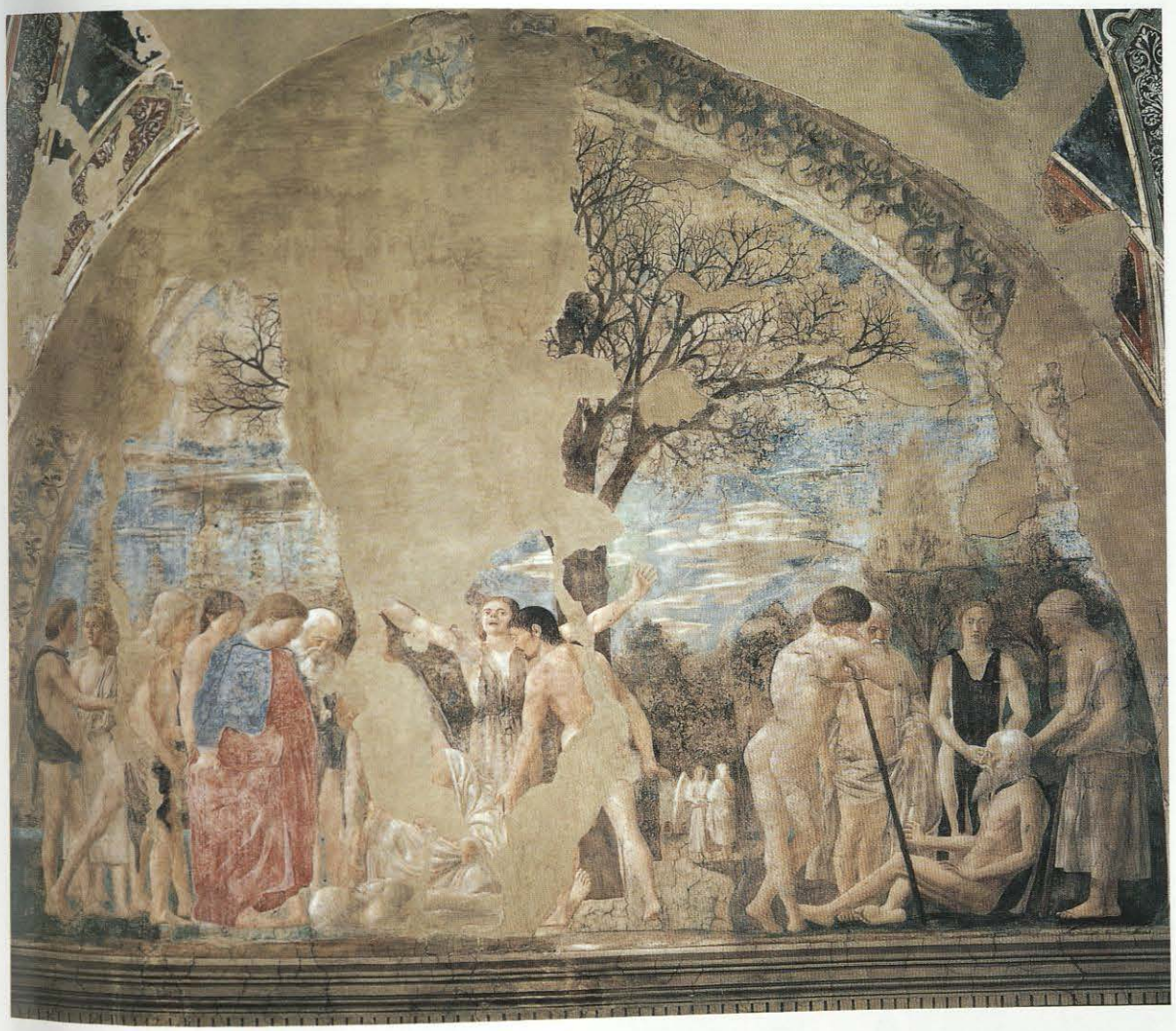
There could be no clearer expression of the connections between palace and church that we explored in the last chapter than the spectacle of priests saying Mass in this private home. In 1460 Fra Filippo Lippi (*c.* 1406–1469) supplied the altarpiece (fig. 8.30), which has to do less with the Epiphany in Luke's Gospel than with the manifestation of the Divine in the local world. Gozzoli painted a host of adoring angels in a paradise-like landscape on the walls adjacent to the altarpiece. In the latter, however, the setting has shifted to the heart of a woodland, a solitary clearing with rocks and tree stumps. The artist's signature appears on the handle of an axe, in sharp foreshortening in the left foreground. And rather than depicting St. Joseph and the ox and ass from the stable of Bethlehem, Lippi includes the young hermit St. John the Baptist and the twelfth-century French saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Both John and Bernard contemplate the human and divine generation of Christ, the subject of many of Bernard's sermons. Heavenly light rendered in gold passes from God through the Holy Spirit to the Child who lies on the ground, while the figure of the Virgin nearby makes clear that the incarnation of Christ occurred through the flesh of the Virgin no less than through the procession of the Spirit.

The two saints, popular throughout the Christian world, carried a particularly Florentine resonance: the government of Florence observed Bernard's feast day, 20 August, and Bernard himself figured in the preeminent Florentine literary classic, the *Divine Comedy* (1308–21) of Dante; in the final canto, he presents the poet to the vision of the Virgin herself. John the Baptist was the city's patron saint. Here, he appears not as the bearded hermit that Lorenzo Ghiberti had cast for the city's baptistery in *c.* 1410 (*see* fig. 3.3), but as a child, a change that reflected the devotional interest of Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Piero de' Medici's wife. Like Gozzoli, that is, Lippi appropriated themes and images from the cultural and religious life of the city but gave them a distinctive Medici cast. The altarpiece in particular became a kind of Medici icon, and gave rise to a host of imitations and



8.30
Fra Filippo Lippi, *Adoration of the Christ Child*, 1460. Tempera on panel, 50 x 45⅝" (1.27 x 1.16 m), Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. A replica now occupies the original site of the painting, on the altar of the chapel in the Medici Palace.





8.32
Piero della Francesca, *Story of the True Cross: The Death of Adam*, c. 1455–60. Fresco. Cappella Maggiore, San Francesco, Arezzo

direct copies by other artists, some of them produced using cartoons traced from the original. In this use of art to connect the private and public spheres, the Medici resemble their allies at the courts of Italy.

The Medici never overtly claimed to be dynastic rulers, which would have been risky in a republic that had sent families like the Alberti and the Strozzi into exile for their alleged princely aspirations. Still, their authority in Florence and their recognition as favored courtiers or even peers by princes elsewhere made their house and retinue hard to distinguish from any other Italian court. Especially when conducting business away from home, the Medici could quietly count on equal or greater political and financial authority with those princes at whose "service" they placed themselves. Yet circumspection was necessary: when Galeazzo Maria Sforza made a return visit to Florence in 1471, now as Duke of Milan, and headed a retinue of one thousand courtiers adorned in velvet and cloth of gold, with many bearing falcons on their wrists, Florentines were both astonished and appalled.

Arezzo: Piero della Francesca's *Story of the True Cross*

The frescoes that Piero della Francesca completed around 1460 in the Florentine subject city of Arezzo (fig. 8.31) further exemplify the centrality of the court as an imaginary social ideal even in a non-courtly context: the artist who had worked for Italian princes now produced a romantic evocation of the kings, knights, and chivalry for a non-princely patron. The cycle, commissioned by a member of the Bacci family for the choir of the town's Franciscan church, is based on episodes from one of the most colorful sections of Jacopo da Voragine's *Golden Legend* (*see* p. 180), although amplified, in humanist fashion, with the inclusion of material from more authoritative late antique historians. The "Story of the True Cross" features many royal figures from the Bible and from Christian history: wonders and feats of chivalry abound, and Christian kings and knights do battle with pagans and heretical eastern rulers. Though set in the distant past, the story is permeated with

OPPOSITE
8.31
Piero della Francesca, *Story of the True Cross*, fresco cycle, c. 1455–60. Cappella Maggiore, San Francesco, Arezzo

8.33
Piero della Francesca, *Story of the True Cross: The Queen of Sheba Adoring the True Cross and Meeting with Solomon, c.* 1455–60. Fresco. Cappella Maggiore, San Francesco, Arezzo

8.34
Piero della Francesca, *Story of the True Cross: Vision of Constantine, c.* 1455–60. Fresco. Cappella Maggiore, San Francesco, Arezzo

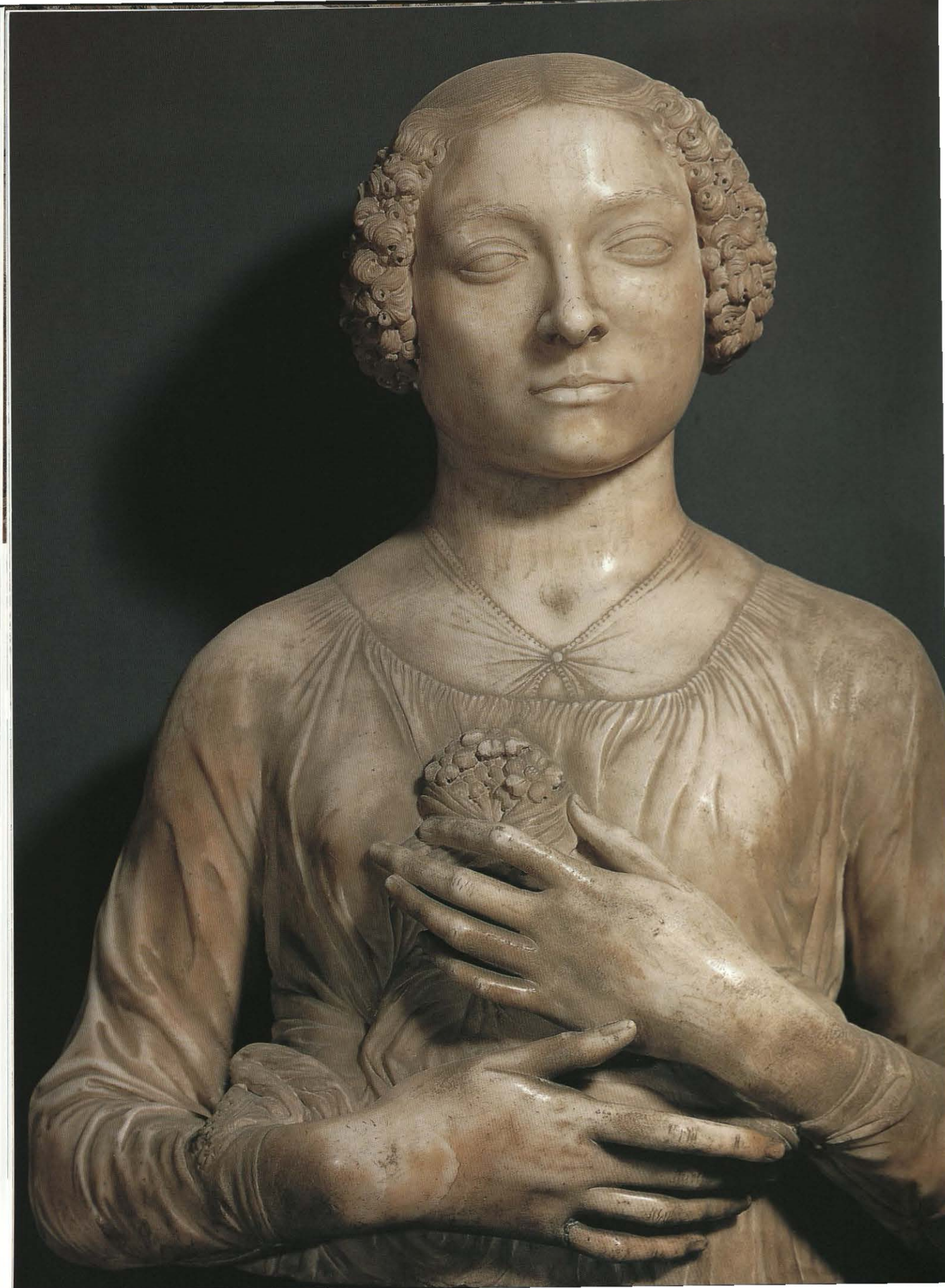
references to crusade, a cause long preached by the Franciscans and the focus of renewed discussion with the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The narrative begins with the death of Adam amongst his numerous kin (fig. 8.32). From his grave springs the tree from which the wood of Christ's cross will be drawn. Long before the Crucifixion, however, King Solomon attempted to use the tree as material for his palace: the wood miraculously changed its size, refusing to be incorporated into the architecture, so Solomon cast it across the river to serve as a bridge. Piero depicts the episode where the wise Queen of Sheba, en route to visit Solomon, recognizes that the wood is holy, and refuses to place her foot upon it, kneeling down to venerate it instead (fig. 8.33). On the right, in a separate scene, the same queen bows before Solomon himself. Piero lends a ritualistic formality to the event, in part through calculated repetitions. One female figure rendered in profile appears in three different incarnations: Piero used the same cartoon twice in the left-hand scene, flipping it for the corresponding figure in the scene on the right. Subsequent scenes from the Christian era show the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine (fig. 8.34), greatest of all Christian rulers, through a vision of the cross, his victory over his rival Maxentius, and his mother Helena's retrieval and authentication of the relic (fig. 8.35) after its concealment by the Jews (a Jew named Judas reveals the hiding place under torture). The authentication scene thematically and compositionally echoes that of Sheba on the opposite wall. Helena, to the left, looks on as three crosses – that of Jesus and those of the thieves crucified at his side – emerge from the ground; to the right, the true cross miraculously identifies itself by resurrecting a dead man. Viewed from the rear with arms extended, the nude

8.35
Piero della Francesca, *Story of the True Cross: The Discovery and Authentication of the True Cross, c.* 1460. Fresco. Cappella Maggiore, San Francesco, Arezzo

8.36
Piero della Francesca, *Story of the True Cross: Battle of Heraclius and Chosroes,* 1460. Fresco. Cappella Maggiore, San Francesco, Arezzo

figure of the resurrected man completes Piero's circular formation of figures before a basilica, strongly reminiscent of the cathedral recently erected in nearby Pienza.

Piero repeats the cross in various scenes throughout the cycle, foreshortening it at a range of angles in relation to the picture plane. Even when the cross itself does not appear, the painter constantly places stress on cross-like vertical elements – the supporting post of Constantine's tent, the scaffold on which Judas is tortured, the banners and weapons that appear in the climactic battle scenes on each wall: Constantine's defeat of Maxentius and the Byzantine emperor Heraclius's defeat of the Persian king Chosroes (fig. 8.36). The violence of the scene, in which a semi-nude warrior engages in combat alongside others in fifteenth-century armor, is implied but curiously understated. Like Paolo Uccello's battle scenes from thirty years earlier (*see* fig. 5.9), the concern with geometry and perspective has instilled a paradoxical sense of order, as if this were a ritual rather than an episode from history. The chivalric accents of the banners, and the invocation of Christian sovereignty, may have carried a political undertone: before its domination by Florence, which annexed the city in 1384, Arezzo had long placed itself under the protection of the Holy Roman Emperor. The scene of King Chosroes's decapitation would inevitably have prompted beholders to consider the distinctions between just and unjust rulers, and the merits of a political order centered on the rule of a virtuous and heroic individual. Such a manipulation of the symbols of imperial authority was a constant theme in the imagery of the courts.



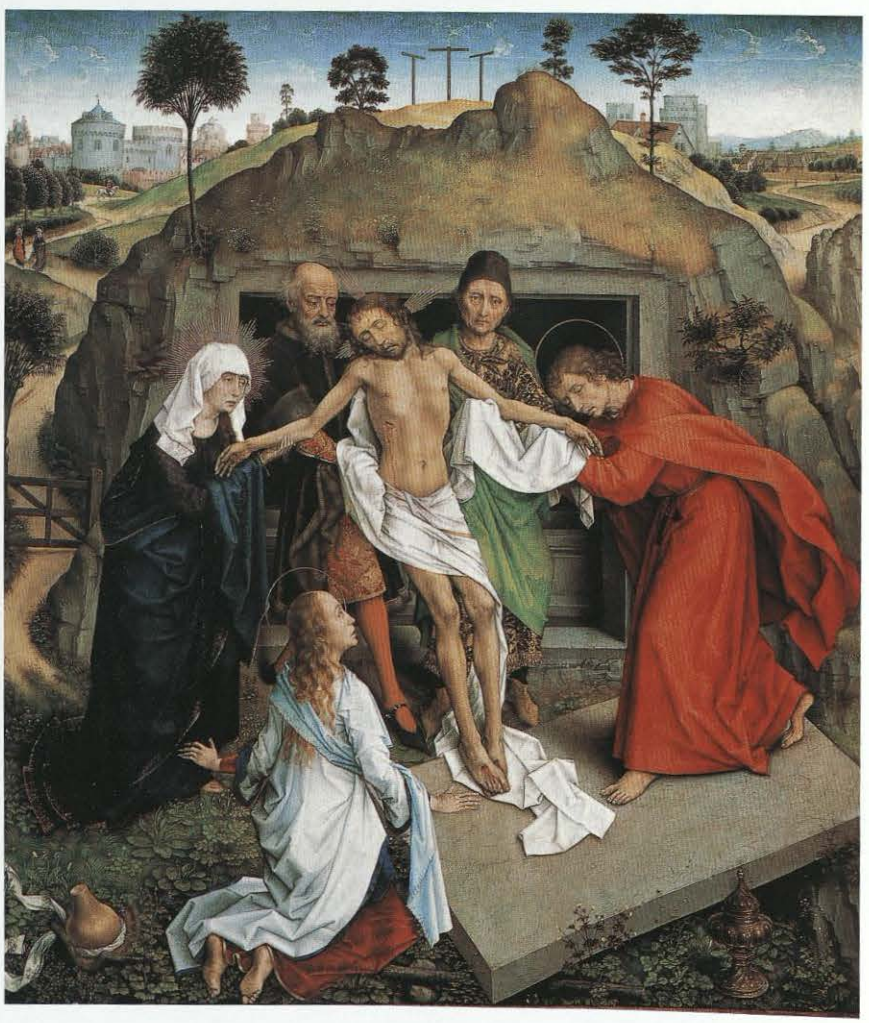
9

1470–1480

What Is Naturalism?

9 1470–1480
What Is Naturalism?

A fifteenth-century painter or sculptor, asked to identify the primary achievement of the art of his time, would probably have pointed to his contemporaries' new ability to describe the visible world. Part of the appeal of linear perspective, for example, was its promise to capture how objects looked from a given point of view. Drawings allowed artists to import things they had witnessed in the out-of-doors into panels and frescoes. And the newly popular genre of the portrait called on artists to render specific faces that they saw before them. In their writings on art, Leon Battista Alberti and Cennino Cennini both encouraged painters to "follow nature," and fifteenth-century paintings and sculptures are still commonly characterized as signaling an interest in "naturalism." But what exactly does it mean to say that an artwork from this moment is "naturalistic"? Was this, as Giorgio Vasari presented it later, primarily an advance in understanding, artists having arrived at "a more beautiful knowledge of muscles, better proportion, and more judgment"? Was "nature" a factor of subject matter itself, as exemplified for example in Pisanello's horses, dogs, and birds? Or was it a reflection of a broader mentality, as the historian Jakob Burckhardt suggested 150 years ago when writing of the Renaissance "discovery of the world and of man," a discovery characterized by a new objective investigation of human and physical nature, which led learned elites to assemble rare plant collections in gardens and exotic animals in menageries? Today, it is not easy to imagine what naturalism looked like in a pre-photographic world, what its hallmarks were, what qualities might have competed to earn that label. But by the 1470s the world of art offered a number of possible answers.



9.1
Rogier van der Weyden, *Entombment*, *c.* 1450. Oil on panel, 43⅜ x 37⅞" (110 x 96 cm). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

The Flemish Manner

The Portuguese artist and writer Francisco de Holanda attributed to Michelangelo the view that "in Flanders," a collection of territories subsequently absorbed into what is now Belgium and northern France:

> they paint with a view to external exactness...they paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many on that.

For Holanda (who purported to represent Michelangelo's own thoughts), it was possible to associate the pictorial qualities that seemed most to mark an interest in nature with a regional manner, rather than simply with an eye for detail or a skill in rendering it. Holanda's remarks, written in the middle years of the sixteenth century, may well have seemed outdated to his contemporaries: by that point, the most ambitious Flemings, and Holanda himself, were journeying to Rome, studying antiquities, and

9.2
Hugo van der Goes, Portinari altarpiece (open), *c.* 1476. Oil on panel, center 8'3½" x 10' (2.5 x 3.1 m), wings each 8'3½" x 4'7½" (2.5 x 1.4 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

trying to learn the methods of modern Italians. Still, the remark preserves what must long have seemed both to Flemish and Italian artists a basic difference between the two cultures' pictorial approaches to the world.

The confrontation, of course, depended on contact, and this had been occasioned by the economic, professional, and familial networks that had come to bind the Italian peninsula with the Flemish provinces. The Burgundian court had long provided a model for its central and north Italian counterparts, and *condottieri* who sought to refashion themselves as chivalrous and cultivated princes sponsored pageants and surrounded themselves with trappings that imitated those of the north. One consequence of the invention of the printing press around 1450 was an increased demand for, and soon an increased supply of, paper; with this, drawings began to circulate in greater numbers. Ambassadors brought gifts between the regions: Florence and Venice were major early production sites for illustrated books, while Flanders was Europe's center for tapestry production. Eventually these patterns of exchange allowed for collaborative undertakings. From at least the middle of the fifteenth century, Italian artists were sending designs north to weavers, who would send back the expensive and highly treasured finished hangings. Artists began to travel, too; as we saw in chapter 8, the Sforza of Milan sent one of theirs to study with Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–1464) in Brussels. Rogier himself seems to have come to Rome for the jubilee of 1450; certainly works by him were to be seen at Ferrara and elsewhere. Among these is the *Entombment* (fig. 9.1), now in the Uffizi; the early history of the painting remains obscure, but by 1492 it was on the altar of the chapel of the Medici Villa at Careggi, near Florence.

The Medici and Bruges

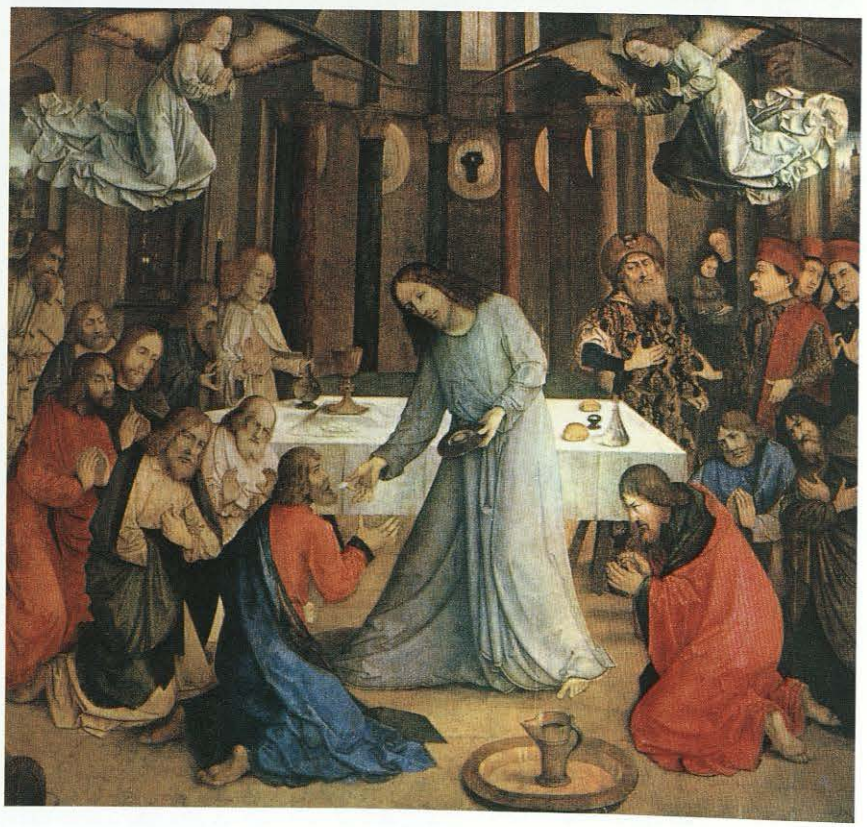
That Milan and Ferrara had close connections to the north reflects the internationalism of the court circuit. Yet republics, too, could cultivate broad geographical networks. The Flemish city of Bruges, for example, was home to a major branch of the Medici bank, and this required the presence of Italian agents who could oversee it. One of these, a supervisor named Angelo Tani, commissioned a grand *Last Judgment* from the esteemed local painter Hans Memling (*c.* 1435–1494) and attempted to send it to Florence by ship in 1473. The ship was attacked by pirates, who made off with the painting; today it hangs in a gallery in Gdańsk, Poland. Better fortunes befell a series of works commissioned by the chief of the Medici bank in Bruges, Tommaso Portinari, who had Hugo van der Goes (*c.* 1440–1482) paint a colossal triptych showing the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (fig. 9.2), as well as some portraits of his family. When the Portinari returned to Florence, the works were given to Santa Maria Nuova, a hospital founded by one of Portinari's ancestors.

The folding triptych form is characteristically northern: Italian clients imported them (usually smaller examples) but Italian artists almost never attempted the format. In the wings of the triptych, members of the donor's family kneel before their patron saints; the differences in the figures' scale show that Hugo and his patron preferred to indicate the relative importance of the characters rather than their relative positions in space. Some Florentines must have found the central panel, in which the Virgin and Joseph adore the Christ Child in the company of angels and shepherds, to be surprisingly disjunctive: the wooden structure at

the right seems too small to hold those who kneel below it; the massive Corinthian column, a traditional symbol of the Virgin, has nothing to do with the rest of the rustic architecture; and the flowers at the center bottom do not quite seem to follow the steep incline of the ground, as if they have been placed on the frame as offerings rather than into the virtual space. Whereas Alberti would have had the painter standardize a system of internal measure, and then compose the *historia*, Hugo seems to work from the detail outward, and it is easy to imagine that Tommaso Portinari would have appreciated the painter's specificity in rendering the golden threads of the cloths the angels wear, the straw on the ground, and the stonework on the out-of-place modern building (presumably a church) in the background. The point of the painting is its characters' exemplary absorption in the sight of the Christ Child, and the artist rewards viewers who observe his painting with the same attentiveness that its characters employ when looking at the object of their own affection.

The Court of Urbino

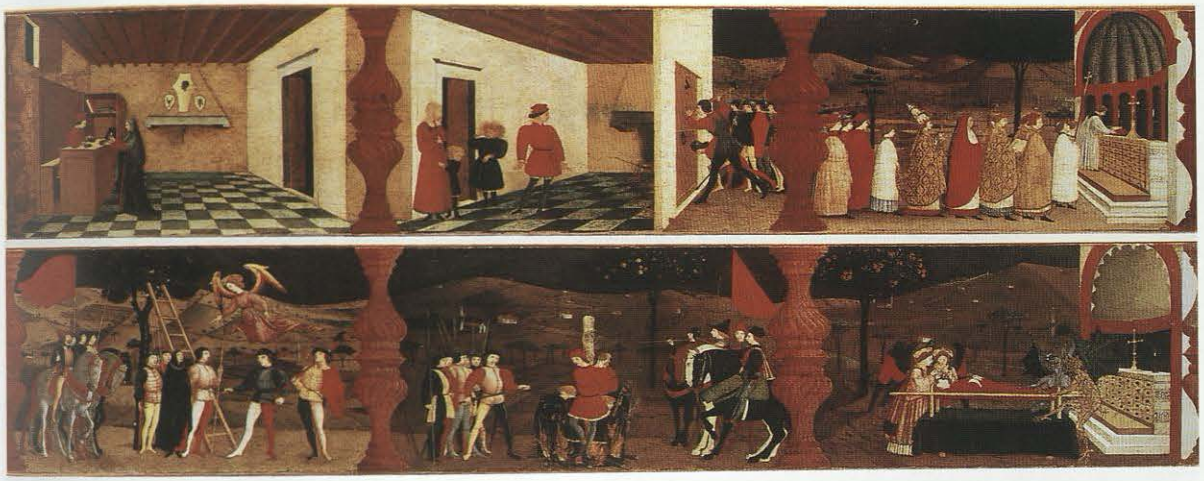
Italian patrons preferred to import works by Netherlandish artists: only a few actually offered long-term employment in Italy itself. Perhaps the most notable example of a successful arrangement of this kind was Joos van Ghent's stay from 1473 to 1475 at the court of Urbino, the center of a small state ruled by Duke Federico II da Montefeltro (*see* p. 223). Joos's single documented work in the city is the 1473–74 altarpiece he painted for the subsequently destroyed church of Corpus Domini, showing the Communion of the Apostles (fig. 9.3).



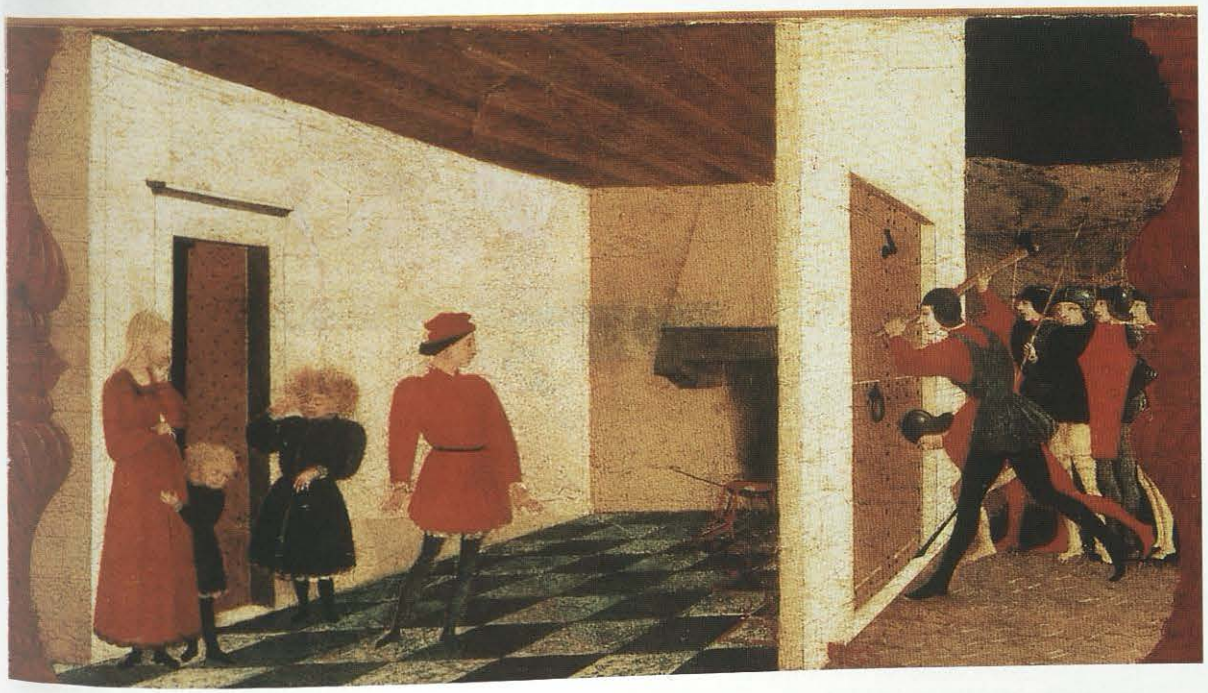
9.3
Joos van Ghent, *The Institution of the Eucharist*, 1474. Oil on panel, 10'2" x 10'11¾" (3.1 x 3.35 m). Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino

The church was dedicated to the Eucharist, the wine and wafer consumed during the ceremony of communion, and Joos's altarpiece shows the institution of that sacrament, when Christ, anticipating his impending death, gave his followers bread, saying "Take and eat; this is my body." In the picture, eleven of the Apostles prepare to consume the wafer; Judas is singled out by his near exclusion at the back left, by the bag of money he holds, and by his yellow garment (Jews were forced to wear this color in many parts of Quattrocento Europe). Already these details suggest that the picture does not aim just to capture a historical scene, and the setting suggests different temporal registers. The curved colonnaded wall in the background identifies the depicted space as the apse end of a church, and this implies that the table occupies the space of the altar itself. What the picture actually shows, that is, is Christ's introduction of the very ritual that would have been repeated at altar tables like the one that would have stood in front of Joos's painting, illuminated by candles like the one held by an Apostle. The dress of the characters at the back right identifies them as Joos's contemporaries, and the man in profile with the red sash is recognizable as Duke Federico. The fact that the duke places his hand on the arm of the bearded man to his right suggests that that figure, too, is a contemporary. The turban has led most scholars to conclude he is a visitor from the east, and it has been plausibly suggested that he represents a Spanish Jew named Isaac who converted to Christianity while on a diplomatic mission to Rome from the ruler of Persia in 1472, during which he visited Urbino.

The real protagonist of the altarpiece is not any of these characters, though, but the host (consecrated bread) itself. This was already the subject of a predella that Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) had painted in the previous decade, over which Joos's altar was to be placed. Its panels showed a sequence of episodes relating to a Jewish pawnbroker who promises to return the items a Christian woman has given up in his shop in exchange for a consecrated host (fig. 9.4). The Jew, having persuaded the woman to collaborate, then tries in vain to destroy the host by cooking it, at which point it bleeds (fig. 9.5), the Jew is arrested, and he and his entire family are burned at the stake. The Christian woman, by contrast, is freed through divine intervention, and in Uccello's final panel receives communion just before her death.



9.4
Paolo Uccello, predella to Joos van Ghent, *Institution of the Eucharist*, 1467–68. Tempera on panel, 16⅝"x 142" (42 x 361 cm). Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. The sequence shows: a woman selling the Host to a Jewish merchant; the Host miraculously beginning to bleed as the Jew attempts to burn it and townspeople attack his door; the reconsecration of the recovered Host; an angelic apparition as the thief is about to be put to death; the Jewish merchant and his family burnt at the stake; angels and demons contesting possession of the woman's soul.



9.5
Paolo Uccello, *Miracle of the Desecrated Host*. Detail of predella. Tempera on panel. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino

Joos's approach to the altarpiece resonated in various ways with Uccello's scenes. Giving Judas a bag of money accords with the predella's own anti-semitic stereotype; there the pawnbroker is portrayed as a usurer, while in the altarpiece Joos reminds viewers that Judas was willing to sell out Christ himself. In the predella, a procession celebrates the host's survival and precedes the Jewish family's execution; Urbino's own annual procession of the host was a primary responsibility of the confraternity associated with the church. The presence of Isaac, whom Duke Federico directs to the altar, would have underscored both the continuing redemptive power of the Eucharist and the continuing religious conflicts between the Christian world and its neighbors. It was on the day of Corpus Christi (the feast honoring the Eucharist) in 1472 that Pope Sixtus IV had launched the latest crusade against the Turks, with Urbino's support and with the Persian Sultan as an ally.

The close thematic connections between the altarpiece and the predella, though, might also make it seem surprising that it was to Joos, of all painters, that the confraternity of Corpus Domini turned for its commission. The square format of the panel followed the modern Italian preference; like Hugo, Joos covered the large surface (now damaged) using an exactingly detailed oil technique. And although for recent Italian viewers the regular shape would have reinforced Alberti's idea of the picture as a window through which the beholder looked at a virtual space, unified in measure, and whereas Uccello took every opportunity to display his skills at rendering complicated

9.6
Piero della Francesca, Diptych with portraits of Battista Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro, *c.* 1472. Oil on panel, each panel 18⅝ x 13⅛" (47 x 33 cm). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

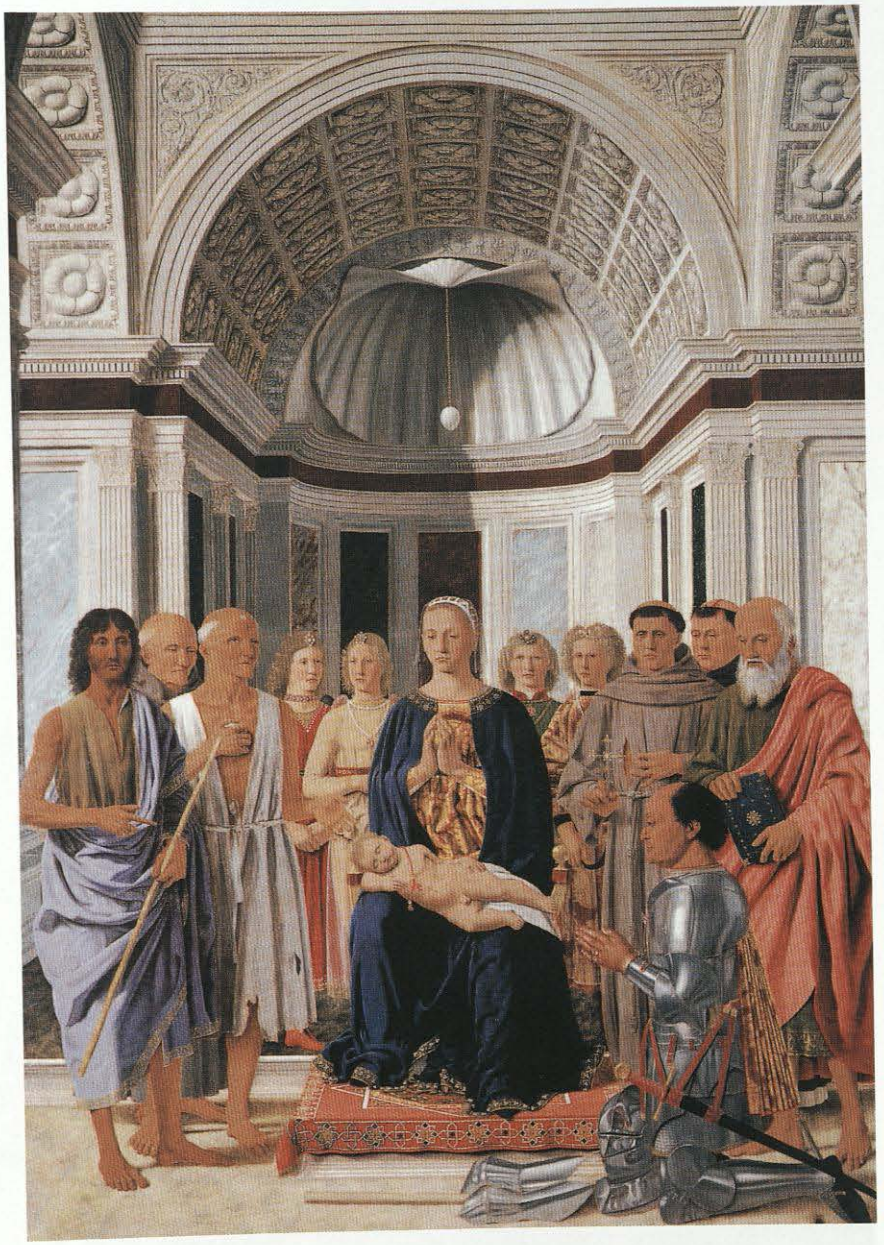
perspectival schemes (*see* figs. 5.9 and 5.10), Joos ignored these conventions. The characters are not scaled in a way that lets their relative placement in the room be easily read. Drapery, rather than indicating an anatomy beneath, gathers in bunches to decorative effect. The orthogonals do not converge consistently. The painter does not submit bodies to any kind of canon, and even the architecture seems measureless, with modern round arches accompanying slim Gothic columns, stacked, against all the classical rules, directly on top of one another.

The patrons could presumably have found someone to paint them an altarpiece in the manner of Uccello, had they wanted one; apparently, they did not. The kind of naturalism that had guided Italian painting for the previous two decades, one grounded in the laws of optics, was less useful to their purposes than what a Flemish painter could now distinctively offer. Joos did not focus his efforts on rendering volumes, but he was a master at capturing the varying qualities of precious materials: the gilded bronze **paten** (plate for the host) that Christ holds just below the site where a spear would soon pierce his side ("this is my body"); the chalice and the carafe for wine on the table; the ewer and basin on the ground for the washing of feet. Though the duke and the ambassador are confined to the background, the fine clothes they wear manifest their importance. And though the space itself does not cohere geometrically, the colored marbles of the columns at the back and the finely described glass panes of the windows between them lend the interior an otherworldly aura.

Italian Responses: Piero della Francesca

Urbino is a relatively isolated hill town, and as such the impact of Joos's painting would have been limited. A number of Italians, however, seem to have picked up immediately on the attractions of these new Flemish models. In the very years Joos worked for Duke Federico da Montefeltro, Piero della Francesca carried out a diptych portrait of the duke and duchess (fig. 9.6). Both the subtle modeling of Duke Federico's face and the rendering of the lustrous jewels in the portrait of his duchess, Battista Sforza, show an attempt to replicate the effects Piero could witness in pictures like Joos's. Even the combination of a profile view with a panoramic landscape depended on a format that had been developed recently by painters in Bruges: Piero could have studied a panel by Jan Van Eyck (*c.* 1389–1441) at the court of Urbino, which according to the humanist Bartolomeo Facio showed a bathing woman with a panoramic landscape including "minute figures of men, groves, hamlets, and castles carried out with such skill you would believe one was fifty miles distant from another."

Piero also painted a great altarpiece for the same patron, showing Federico in prayer before the Virgin and saints (fig. 9.7). As a Fleming would, he made a point of capturing the gleaming armor of the warrior duke and the gold and scarlet brocade of the Virgin's gown; the duke's hands, moreover, are rendered with a descriptive finesse never equaled in Piero's other paintings, indicating that for this passage Piero went so far as to seek the intervention of another artist trained in Flanders. The Montefeltro altarpiece would never be mistaken for a Flemish panel, however: the lightness of the palette and the play of brilliant light across white marble recall the painting of Piero's teacher Domenico Veneziano. Piero's interest in perspective and ideal geometry are manifest in the carefully planned architecture (reminiscent of Rossellino's tomb of Leonardo Bruni; *see* fig. 6.17) and the geometric abstraction of the figures. The heads of the Virgin and the angels echo the form of the ostrich egg (a symbol of resurrection) suspended in the apse. With a calculated ambiguity reminiscent of Andrea del Castagno at Sant'Apollonia in Florence (*see* fig. 6.16), Piero initially invites us to think that the group is positioned in the apse; closer inspection of the shift in floor level (and indeed the proportions of the egg) indicates in fact that the Virgin, saints, and donor are in the crossing of a church with light streaming from a dome overhead. The ambiguity creates mystery, a suspicion that all is not what it seems. If this is naturalism, it is of a higher order, and not limited to the rendering of appearances.



9.7
Piero della Francesca, *Madonna and Child with Saints, Angels, and Federico da Montefeltro* (Montefeltro Altarpiece), 1474. Oil and tempera on panel, *c.* 8'2" x 5'7" (2.5 x 1.72 m). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

Oil Painting

Joos's and Hugo's paintings differed from most of those made by their central Italian contemporaries in the early 1470s in that both were painted in oil. A century later, oil was the standard medium of Italian painting, though even then the historically minded would have associated it with Flemish origins. According to Vasari's influential account, oil painting had been invented accidentally by Jan Van Eyck, who was looking for a new kind of varnish. Florentine merchants then sent one of Van Eyck's paintings to Naples, where it was seen by the Sicilian painter Antonello da Messina (*c.* 1430–1479). Antonello was so impressed that he traveled to Flanders in order to study directly with Van Eyck. Having learned the technique, Antonello returned first to Messina then to Venice, where he introduced the method to other painters, notably Domenico Veneziano.

As it turns out, virtually all of these assertions were wrong: Van Eyck used oils to particularly impressive effect, but he was not the first to paint with the medium and cannot be credited with its invention. Antonello could not have studied with Van Eyck, who had died in 1441 when the Sicilian was only about eleven, and painters in Venice were using oil before Antonello's stay there in 1475–76. Still, the myth does point to a number of underlying truths. The presence of Flemish paintings was a significant factor in the spread of oil painting in Italy. Naples did indeed play an important role in the transmission, and one of the earliest experimenters there, Niccolò Colantonio, was Antonello da Messina's teacher. Though a number of Italian painters had painted with oil as early as the 1450s – Cosmè Tura's *Calliope* (*see* fig. 8.3) employs oil, as does Filippo Lippi's altarpiece for the Medici Chapel (*see* fig. 6.9), and Piero della Francesca had been

combining tempera painting with oil glazes – the activities of Antonello in Venice and of Joos in Urbino, as well as the arrival of the Hugo paintings in Florence, made the 1470s and 1480s a watershed for the peninsula.

By the end of the century, there were few painters who had not mastered the oil technique, with Venetians in particular demonstrating all that it could do. Oil offered a number of advantages over tempera, the egg-based medium that it supplanted. Egg dries quickly, and as a binder for pigments it does not lend itself to broad application. Painters who used tempera made their pictures in much the way they made drawings, placing tight, regular parallel hatchings on a surface of gesso that had been smoothed to a glassy finish; they modeled forms by gradually shifting through a range of tones in neighboring strokes. Because the medium has to be applied thinly and evenly, paintings in tempera have a regular, flat surface; because tempera is opaque, painters applied colors next to, rather than on top of, one another. One consequence of this was that tempera pigments remained largely true to the mineral powders from which they were derived, lending the pictures made from them a brightness that ensured their legibility in candle-lit church and palace interiors.

Oil, by contrast, took hours, even days, to dry. This made it possible to lay in one color and then, while it was still wet, work with another beside the first, or to blend the two together. It was an approach that increased the chromatic range of the picture; whereas tempera painters were restricted to what they had mixed and laid out on the palette in advance, oil painters could create new tones on the palette or even directly on the surface of the picture. Tonal fields did not need to remain separate, so transitions between represented forms could be much more gradual. Because oil is translucent, it also allowed what was beneath it to show through, and thin glazes, laid one atop the other, could produce a new variety of coloristic effects. Because the consistency of the medium was itself adjustable, finally, painters in oil had more control over the application per se, and they could vary the size and movements of their brushes depending on the look they wished to achieve. Tempera paintings tend to have smooth, even skins, but oil could give texture to the surface of a painting.

Antonello da Messina and Giovanni Bellini: Light as Actor

Antonello's *Pietà* (fig. 9.8) in the Museo Correr, Venice, probably painted *c.* 1475 while the artist was in that city, has lost much of its original surface and thus provides unintended insight into the way an artist might work with oil. Brown underpainting laid in the light and dark areas – the contrast, for example, between the enshadowed right shoulder of Christ and the brighter face of the angel beside it. In the same tones, the artist might establish the initial modeling of other forms. Onto this, the painter would add other layers of pigment, usually building from dark grounds to bright highlights, as visible in the sky that shifts from blue to white toward the horizon, or in the right side of Christ's torso and right arm, where a raking light brings out the contours of his skin, stretched over bones, muscles, and veins. Individual brushstrokes throughout illustrate how the artist might change the way he handles his instrument when describing the feather on a wing as opposed to the leaf on a distant tree. And even in its damaged condition, the painting shows Antonello's overriding interest in light's role as the primary condition for visibility.

These interests are still more evident in Antonello's *Annunciate Virgin* (fig. 9.9), painted in Sicily *c.* 1476 in the years immediately before or after his trip to Venice. Conventionally, images of the Annunciation showed an angel arriving from the left to greet the Virgin seen in profile or three-quarter view. In Antonello's picture, by contrast, the only indications that it is in fact the Annunciation that we see are the setting, the Virgin's attributes – Gabriel nearly always finds her reading a devotional book at a lectern – and her gesture. In more conventional versions of the scene, the Virgin's movements convey fear at the miraculous event that has overtaken her, or humble

OPPOSITE

9.8

Antonello da Messina, *Angel Pietà (Dead Christ with Angels)*, *c.* 1475. Oil on panel, 57 x 33½" (145 x 85 cm). Museo Correr, Venice

LEFT

9.9

Antonello da Messina, *Annunciate Virgin*, *c.* 1476. Oil on panel, 17¾ x 13⅝" (45 x 34.5 cm). Galleria Nazionale della Sicilia, Palermo

ICON AND NARRATIVE

Medieval commentators distinguished between two categories of picture: "*historiae* to learn from and *imagines* to adore," in the words of Pope Gregory the Great. *Imagines*, or icons, provided for devotional focus, placing Christ, the Virgin, or a saint at the center of the picture, facing the beholder, to facilitate the reception of prayer and suggest readiness for response. They did not on the whole correspond to Biblical or other texts but instead duplicated earlier, prototypical pictures, some of which were believed to have miraculous origins. *Historiae* generally consisted of multi-figure compositions, usually narrative, and were familiar from manuscript illuminations, murals, and other artworks that related sacred stories and saints' lives.

By the fifteenth century, changes in the private devotional lives of Italian patrons and collectors placed new pressures on the boundary between the iconic and the narrative. The most widely read book in this period, after the Bible itself, was the *Imitation of Christ* (*c.* 1418) by the Flemish theologian Thomas à Kempis. Thomas encouraged his readers not to look for sophisticated symbolism in religious narratives, but to practice what came to be called the *devotio moderna* (literally, "modern devotion"), immersing themselves emotionally in the stories and connecting imaginatively with the protagonists. In Italy, the Venetian cleric Ludovico Barbo in his *Method of Prayer and Meditation* from around 1440 and Niccolo d'Osimo in his *Garden of Prayer* of 1454, followed Thomas's example and similarly directed readers to envision themselves participating in sacred narratives. Meditative practices of this sort eroded the boundary between relational images of venerated individuals and mere illustrations; interactions between the two categories became an engine for pictorial novelty. Formerly iconic subjects like the Virgin and Child became a basis for inventive variations, as painters and sculptors rethought the ways in which a mother and child might interact, or placed the pair in new settings. In the other direction, artists "zoomed in" on the actors from traditional narrative subjects, inviting close attention to a character in particular dramatic circumstances. With Antonello da Messina's *Annunciate Virgin*, we seem not to be watching a repeat performance of Gabriel's arrival but to enter into Mary's bedchamber ourselves, at the very moment of Christ's conception. And even in a public work, such as the crowning image of Giovanni Bellini's *Coronation* altarpiece (***see*** fig. 9.10), the *Pièta* ceases to be a formal exhibition of Christ's body and instead makes the viewer part of the grief-stricken circle that surrounds the dead savior.

devotion before God; here, her expression is more reflective and her thought harder to infer, though the gesture reads as a *reaction*, her lifted right hand acknowledging something happening before her, her eyes turned modestly away. What Antonello has done, in short, is rotated the conventional composition by ninety degrees, not just showing the Virgin from the front but also implying that the angel stands before her, in the company of the painting's viewer and probably slightly to his or her left – or so, at least, the illumination would seem to imply, shining onto Mary from somewhere in front of the picture.

If, with earlier Annunciations, we seem to be watching a performance, Antonello puts us in Mary's bedchamber, at the very moment when Christ was conceived. It is a remarkable change, one that depends on the alignment of a new spirituality and a new technology – the subject all but depends upon the new oil medium, for it is the use of oil that allows the light to be so specific, the figure to be so present. Only with oil could Antonello so gradually have modeled from the deep blue of the drapery up to the white highlights, these applied by dragging a nearly dry brush down along the folds, blending pigments to allow

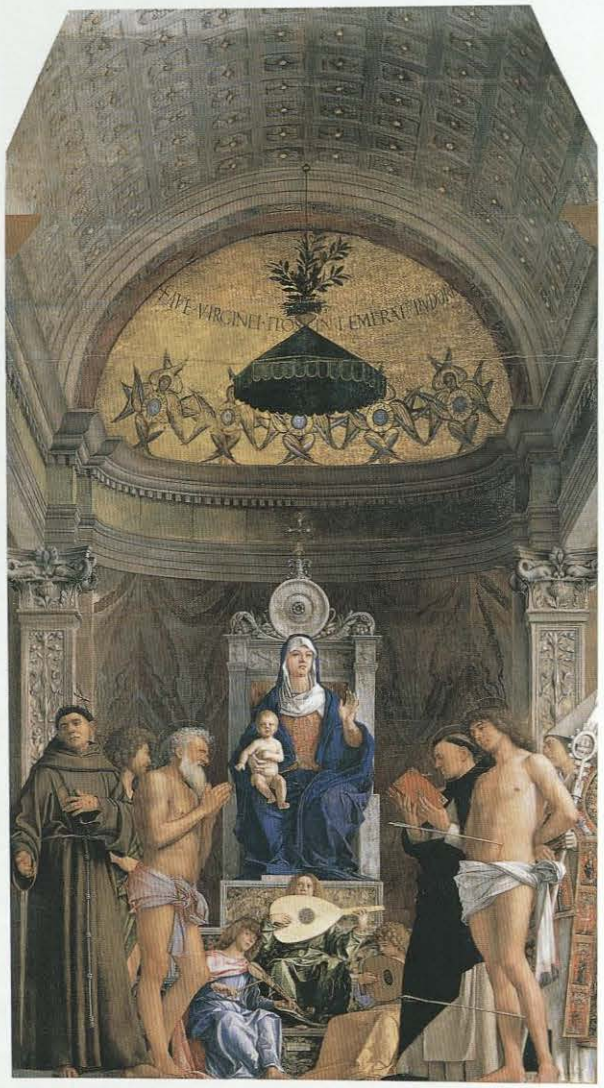
the dramatic transition from the shadow around the Virgin's left cheek to the reflection on the tip of her nose.

That Vasari was not completely wrong about the impact Antonello had in Venice is most immediately discernible in the work of Giovanni Bellini (after 1430–1516). The son of Jacopo Bellini and the brother-in-law of Andrea Mantegna, Giovanni would have been attuned to the most modern trends around him; even before Antonello's arrival in the city he was experimenting with oil, and with the single-panel ***pala***. A spectacular early example is the *Coronation* altarpiece (fig. 9.10) that Bellini most probably produced between 1474 and 1476 for the church of San Francesco in Pesaro on the Adriatic coast (and near Urbino); it originally included not only the main panel, the predella, and smaller images of saints on the frame, but also a surmounting element known as a *cimasa*. The *pala* was relatively new in Venice, where Antonello counted among those pioneering the format around 1475, but in nearby Urbino we have seen that Joos van Ghent produced a large single-panel altarpiece in 1473–74 (*see* fig. 9.3), and Piero della Francesca had completed one for Federico da Montefeltro, possibly in the same year (*see* fig. 9.7).

Bellini probably never went to Pesaro (we do not know that he ever left Venice), and if he knew the Piero and the Joos paintings it was likely only by reputation. Intentionally or not, however, the work he produced would have astonished patrons who were hoping for something that would hold its own beside these artists. The command of perspective demonstrated in the marble pavement and the contemplative stillness of the group of standing saints are remarkably close to Piero in his Montefeltro altarpiece. The use of transparent layers of oil glazing achieves both a degree of coloristic intensity and a unifying golden luminosity that are unparalleled in other surviving paintings, whether Flemish or Italian, on this scale. Bellini betrays his ambitions with his self-conscious use of Alberti's "painting-as-window" theme: he refers to the rectangular frame of the altarpiece not only with the marble double throne, but also with the unusual opening in its back. The "window" in the throne frames the heads of Christ and the Virgin, and then it provides a view onto the hilly landscape beyond, bathed in sunshine. This setting departs from all of the earlier *Coronations* we have seen, in which painters tended to depict an otherworldly event accompanied by the hosts of Paradise. The radiant beauty of the earth here appeals to the experience of the beholder: the vista (which Bellini almost surely painted from imagination) becomes a metaphor for, rather than an image of, the heavenly. Like Antonello (*see* fig. 9.9), Bellini uses light to reinforce religious meaning: Christ receives the fullest illumination, which serves to associate him visually with the Holy Spirit appearing over the throne. The light that plays on the Virgin's upper body reflects the gleaming white and gold of Christ's garments, underscoring his identity as all-powerful God and his transformation of the Virgin into the Queen of Heaven. The regal but tender Virgin, for her part, provides a poetic echo of the Magdalene's tragic *Anointing of Christ* in the *cimasa*; this adaptation of the Pietà theme indicates Bellini's close study of Antonello's *Dead Christ* paintings (*see* fig. 9.8).

Bellini's altarpiece for the church of San Giobbe was one of the first paintings in Venice to set a *sacra conversazione* in a church interior (his earlier altarpiece for

9.10
Giovanni Bellini, *Coronation of the Virgin* (Pesaro altarpiece), *c.* 1474–76. Oil on panel. Lower panels, Museo Civico, Pesaro. *Cimasa*, Pinacoteca Vatican. **The photograph reunites the now separate pieces.**



9.11
Giovanni Bellini, San Giobbe Altarpiece, *c.* 1478.
Oil on panel, 15'4" x 8'4" (4.71 x 2.58 m). Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

SS. Giovanni de Paolo, or a now very damaged work by Antonello for San Cassiano, may have been the first), as if its characters have come to life in the familiar world of the fifteenth-century worshiper (fig. 9.11). The idea may have come from Flemish paintings like that of Joos van Ghent in Urbino (*see* fig. 9.3), though one thing that sets Bellini's picture apart from these is the low point of view: his Virgin and saints are personages that the churchgoer literally looks up to. Bellini's blurring of contours lends the painting an airy atmosphere uncommon in the more crystalline paintings of the north. Where he competes with the Flemish tradition, however, whether directly or through such mediators as Antonello, is in the way he uses oil to specify the materiality of the things he portrays: the inlaid tiles of gold and glass that constitute the mosaic, the watery patterns in the stone behind the Virgin's throne, the changing tones of the shot silk in the angel's drapery, and the weaving in St. Louis's cape. In all of this, Bellini, like Antonello, looks for ways to make light the real actor in the scene, whether in its reflections off the gold architectural decorations or in the modeling of the two nearly nude bodies.

The Bellini painting that may be most indebted to Antonello is the *St. Francis* (fig. 9.12) he painted for the government official Zuan Michiel, probably just before 1480. Unusually for a religious image, it treats its material as an opportunity for poetic invention, offering an entirely new subject, which in this case concerns sacred poetry. Contemporaries would have expected to see the moment when Francis, having withdrawn into the wilderness, is brought into ecstatic conformity with Christ, with a seraph in the sky shooting rays into the saint's hands, feet, and side as he himself assumed the pose of his crucified model (*see* figs. 6.12 and 6.51–6.52). Bellini's Francis, however, is more contemplative than this; having walked a few steps from a prayer book, he seems to be experiencing a more inward kind of ecstasy. The painter invites viewers to compare his scene to more conventional representations of the stigmatization, and he also merges this episode with another, familiar from Franciscan texts but never before pictured, when the saint composed a canticle in praise of the sun, the moon, and the earth and its plants and flowers, invoking the marvelous works of divine creation. Bellini gives most of his panel over to an extraordinary landscape, full of carefully individualized plants and animals. Each of these could have had an esoteric meaning to one versed in Franciscan theology, but they also simply demonstrate Francis's heightened awareness of the plenitude of the physical world. Most remarkable of all is the picture's light, originating from a break in the clouds at the upper left and brightening the laurel tree that bends toward it. As in Antonello's painting of the *Annunciate Virgin* (*see* fig. 9.9), the light here takes over the role traditionally given to the fiery angel, illuminating Francis rather than wounding him. Yet the substitution only underscores the possibility that the miracle here is the natural world, revealed as if by the sun itself in the painting's most impressive passages: the golden glow on Francis's sackcloth, for instance, or the bright faces of the strange rock formations. The natural luster of oil allows Bellini to suffuse the whole painting with a kind of glow, and the transparency of the medium lets him lay thin shadows over the parts he wishes to keep more veiled.

Life Study

Antonello's *Pietà* (*see* fig. 9.8) ostensibly shows Christ sitting on the edge of his tomb, yet this tomb is placed implausibly at the center of a landscape. Landscape was a