



Giotto and the Early Italian Renaissance
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Olive groves and cypress trees, pageants and festivals, peasants and popes, kings and princes, plotting and poisonings, magnificent palaces and highly painted churches – the Medici, Michelangelo and Machiavelli - are the exciting images aroused by the term Italian Renaissance.

The Renaissance was a period of exceptional growth and change - culturally, intellectually, economically and politically – that was reflected in the art and architecture of the time. This overview of Early Renaissance art will focus on painting but also touch on architecture and sculpture where relevant. Consideration of artworks, from early Italo-Byzantine examples to the late Trecento (1300s, ie 14th century), will convey the ‘Spirit of the Age’ and its relevance for future art and architecture. Discussion of the content, style and form of early Renaissance painting, as well as religious, classical and philosophical writings, will demonstrate the importance of the classical tradition and its revival in Renaissance Italy. Well-known examples will be referenced throughout, using images that are accessible in art galleries, such as the Renaissance collection in the Sainsbury wing at the National Gallery (NG), The Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) and major European galleries and venues in Florence (Uffizi, UF), Milan, Rome, Venice etc (and also on the internet).

The Purpose of Art History: Why Study History of Art?

Firstly, however, it is relevant to consider the study of history of art in general, after which the ‘Proto-Renaissance’ and the different styles and approaches by Giotto, his predecessors and successors, can be considered. The History of Art enables increased understanding of art works, helping us ‘to see’ rather than just ‘to look.’ The artistic elements are crucial: to consider style, form and materials, but the context and time and place of creation can also be vital for understanding a work’s deeper meaning. Art History covers not only the areas of aesthetics, art theory and art criticism but often requires knowledge of history, theology, astronomy, mathematics, literature, music, politics and economics. This is especially true in the Italian Renaissance, one of the most aesthetically pleasing but also most complex periods. Art History can help enormously in enhancing general knowledge about history, societies and cultures, their creativity and expertise, enabling you:

- not only to ‘look’ but, more importantly, ‘to see’
- to understand creative expressions of the past
- to gain (or increase) knowledge about the art of different cultures
- to appreciate cultural cross-currents and influences
- to interpret images and symbols
- to enrich your own thinking and ideas

Art, architecture and artefacts serve as a tangible link with the past and its social, religious, political and geographical contexts. At the same time it can help our appreciation of aesthetics,

style and taste, scale/proportion, harmony, good design (order, arrangement, beauty, proportion, symmetry, style) - and whether the object is functional as well as decorative? It is important to think about:

What is it? Who designed it? When and where was it made? What is it made of? Materials? Condition?
 Where is it now and how did it come to be there? What is its purpose? What is the subject/what is going on?
 How is it presented/organised? For whom was it made? What did it mean? What does it mean, to us, now?
 Is it effective overall? Does/did it serve its function? And relate to its context?

Historical Context: Changes from the Medieval Period

Detailed knowledge of the historical background to the Italian Renaissance is not essential but an outline of the historical context can really help to illuminate what happened in Italy at this time. Changes in art can be seen by the second half of the 13th century with the result that the art of this period can be viewed in an entirely new and different way. Italy became the centre for the development of the arts and the works of such masters as Cimabue (c 1250-1302), Giotto di Bondone (1267/76-1337), Duccio di Buoninsegna (1255/60-1318/19) and Simone Martini (1284-1344) are extremely significant, although they cannot be regarded as 'Renaissance' in the same way as the art of the 14th and 15th centuries in Italy. Italian art of the late Duecento (1200s) and early Trecento (1300s) cannot be categorized as medieval. As we shall see, the northern Gothic style had a some influence in Italy during this period, but it is misleading to talk simply about 'Italian Gothic' so the painting and sculpture of this period (c 1280s-1400) is often referred to as 'Proto-Renaissance.' Significant political, economic and social changes had taken place in Europe in general and in Italy in particular by the late 13th and early 14th century, which had a great influence on the art world. At the time, Italy was also a collection of largely independent city-states and this general situation should be borne in mind so that the art works can be viewed and understood in the context of the times in which they were created.

Economic Climate and Political Situation

There was great expansion in Europe during the 11th to 13th centuries when an economic boom took place. European commerce and industry became greatly concentrated in Italy which was also the centre of Europe for finance and credit. During the late medieval period, Italy was not so much a political unit as a cultural idea. An important factor was the growth of independent city states such as Florence and Siena. Although each centre would have a dominant Ducal or other family (eg The Medici of Florence, the Sforzas of Milan, Montefeltre of Urbino and Gonzagas of Mantua), strong city states developed their own feelings of civic pride and local rather than national patriotism. The expansion of Europe as a whole hinged on the overseas exploits of city states like Florence, Venice, Genoa and Pisa who traded across the then known world. Florence was the leading commercial centre of Europe, especially for the cloth industry and banking; Milan was a large agricultural centre; and Venice had a growing overseas empire. Factional conflict did occur between these Italian City States but the use of mercenary armies often meant that citizens were less directly involved, even during the internal conflicts between the Pope-supporting Guelphs and the rival (pro-Emperor) Ghibelline factions. Rival Popes vied for power and the Papacy was actually in exile in Avignon 1309-78, when Rome was almost abandoned.

However, changes in the arts are not just linked to these developments in the economy. The independence of nation states came to be reflected in the development of localised schools of art but, for example, Genoa was a foremost trading state and produced little of artistic merit. In addition, a large proportion of Italy remained agrarian like the rest of Europe. However, such developments did result in the increased wealth of the powerful Catholic Church, as well as the

rise of leisured middle and upper classes with time and money to spare on patronage of the arts. The Florentine Bardi and Peruzzi banking families, for example, financed great art works in a significant change in patronage which had previously been largely ecclesiastical. Although too early to be viewed as 'nationalism' there was also a growing movement towards the recognition of a common Italian, or rather Roman, heritage. This came to be reflected not only in art but also in the work of writers such as Dante (1265-1321), Petrarch (1304-1374) and Boccaccio (1313-1375) whose literary works were written in the Italian vernacular.

Religious and Spiritual Life

St Francis of Assisi died in 1226 and was canonised almost immediately, in 1228. The immense popularity of his humane approach to Christianity and clerical teaching led to significant changes in attitude towards religious belief and feeling - and these new ideas and intellectual pressures led, in turn, to cultural changes in thirteenth-century Italy. The official split with the eastern Orthodox Church in 1054, and increasingly humane approach to religion became evident in Western Europe, given impetus by the work of St Francis. Rather than a ritual dedicated to a remote and awesome deity, Christianity came to dwell more and more on the human aspects of Christ, his mother the Virgin Mary, and the human interest of the Saints. The Franciscan religious revival and popularity of the teachings of St Francis led to the founding of the Church as Assisi in 1228, where changed attitudes were reflected in the increased use of church painting, especially in a narrative role. St Francis, who created the first Christmas crib with its associations with people's way of life, stressed the idea of nature as a manifestation of divine beauty and goodness. This formed a significant contrast with the previous emphasis on the spiritual world and the unimportance of the ephemera of life on earth, as had been a major focus of Byzantine and medieval art. The humane and realistic approach of the fresco cycle of St Francis as Assisi thus contrasts tremendously with the previous 'Italo-Byzantine' style.

Intellectual Pressures

At the same time as this human element was being introduced into the interpretation of the Christian story, the concept of 'Humanism' itself was gradually being taken up in European philosophy and thought in general. This intellectual study (focussed on rational and questioning enquiry) combined with a passion for antiquity and the classical heritage of Rome, was to influence Italian culture for many generations. Both art and literature mark a movement from the transcendental, symbolic and spiritual to an approach that was more human and rational. Classical influences from ancient Greek and Roman philosophy (especially Aristotle), which had previously been dismissed as unacceptable because it was pagan (non-Christian), became more marked as their value became recognised. Writers like Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) tried to integrate the ancient teaching with Christianity. A spirit of free enquiry and a generally more 'scientific' approach was also linked with increasing interest in the natural world and its observation. Education flourished through the monasteries and universities were also developing at this time, such as the Universities of Bologna (founded 1088), Padua (founded 1222) and Rome (1303), along with the increasingly accurate studies of the physical sciences. Early encyclopaedias were drawn up and, for example, revival of the writings of Galen (a second century Roman medical writer) led to the study of anatomy (mostly using animals, since human anatomy classes and dissections were not legalised until 1429). Such activities became significant for the art world as well as for medical studies.

Artists, Architects and Sculptors

The role and status of artists also underwent significant change at this time. In the medieval period, what are now considered 'art works' were largely produced by anonymous craftsmen (mostly monks) according to strict rules laid down by their religious superiors. Plagiarism was unknown since there were specific ways in which Christ, the saints and biblical stories and events of the Old and New Testaments had to be depicted. The role of artist/craftsman developed into a

semi-professional one where individuality, both in content (iconography) and style was increasingly expressed. The organisation of lay persons as artists, affiliated to guilds and workshops rather than religious institutions, stems from this period, leading to the emergence of the known names of individual artists as opposed to the general anonymity of the medieval period. This was linked to the elevation of status from craftsman to artist and the concept of personal individual achievement, reputation, or even fame, increased. It was reflected in the literature of the period, such as personal references to artists and their works in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (written c 1308-20) – or later in the 16th century in the writings of Giorgio Vasari, arguably the first art historian, in his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550, enlarged 1568). This trend foreshadowed the role of the artist in the 'modern' sense, as a recognisable personality with awareness of the aesthetic values of the art works created and individual skills.

Changes in Patronage

The late 12th and early 13th centuries in Italy also witnessed the beginning of a marked change in the character of the patronage of the arts. This gradually became less exclusively ecclesiastical in nature, with an increasing number of patrons (both individuals and secular organisations) from outside the church. It should be remembered however that religion was still the major factor in everyday life and the prime influence on art in Western Europe. Even if the church itself was not the main patron, lay patronage was often related to religious needs and functions, for example in the donation of buildings or artworks in order to ensure the passage of the donor to heaven. Ecclesiastical patronage was paramount in the Byzantine and medieval periods, when the main sources of finance for art and architecture were the great religious institutions. By the 13th century, however, it was frequently at the instigation of individuals that large artworks and schemes were produced and decorated, such as altarpieces or church frescoes, particularly individual chapels. Whilst this may have stemmed from individual piety, it was more often than not linked with the patron's hopes for salvation through good works or as atonement for sins committed. The creation of monumental schemes of golden and mosaic decoration as in the Byzantine tradition had become too expensive for the Western Church. Fresco, a method of painting on wet plaster, was a less expensive, quicker means of decorating churches and chapels with visual images. The use of decorated altarpieces also particularly lent itself to private sponsorship. Painted images could provide information on the stories and meanings in the scriptures as 'the Bible of the illiterate.' A notable example of this was the Scrovegni Chapel at Padua, decorated with frescoes by Giotto. This was built at the expense of Enrico Scrovegni as atonement for the sin of usury (money lending at high rates of interest) practised by his family. The figure of Scrovegni is seen in Giotto's fresco of the *Last Judgment* (1305), literally offering the chapel as a means of procuring his salvation – declaring that he built 'in honour and reverence of the Virgin Mother of God ... and in honour of the good city state and commune of Padua, and for the salvation of his soul and those of his family past and present.'

Patronage by secular institutions gradually increased, sponsored by the rising city states and communes. Governments of the various political units of which Italy was composed frequently raised monuments to the glory and honour of their cities and leaders. For example, the project to give Siena the largest cathedral in Italy was only a shadow of the original plan, whereas the continuous enlargement of the *Palazzo Pubblico* in Siena progressed in leaps and bounds 1299-1310. In Florence, a statute of 1322 declared that schemes at the churches of Sta Maria Novella and Sta Croce were 'for the benefit of souls and the decorum of the city.' The glorification of lay institutions is also evident at the *Or San Michele* (from 1337), a grandiose corn exchange in the middle of Florence with elaborate sculptural decoration. These schemes reflect the ideals of civic society and morality, demonstrating the secularisation of religious themes.

Stylistic Cross-Currents (Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, Classical)

Situated as it is in a central position in Europe, Italy lay at the crossroads of many stylistic trends and cross currents that were to have formative influence on the styles of the Italian Renaissance.

From 1200, at least four styles were in evidence: Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic and the Classical.

Byzantine. By the 13th century, although still confined by strict conventions, Byzantine art was moving towards greater realism in the arrangement of space, and the depiction of figures with naturalistic draperies. Its influence in the west had been evident since the time of the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century and churches and mosaics at Ravenna are some of the earliest examples of 'Italo-Byzantine' art and architecture. The impact increased after the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade which caused an influx of Byzantine art into Italy, as portable icons and artefacts were carried back and Byzantine artists and craftsmen moved west. The Italo-Byzantine style (a dilution of the more spiritual mid-Byzantine style) is demonstrated in *The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Narrative Scenes* (c 1262) by Margarito di Arezzo (NG). The work is also significant as an early example of a signed work, reflecting the artist's pride in his achievement.

When considering the differences between Byzantine art and the early Renaissance it is very important not to be prejudiced in favour of Italian Renaissance painting. Vasari disliked what he called the 'clumsy, awkward style' of the Byzantines, with its static, two-dimensional figures and golden backgrounds. He saw the history of art in Italy as one of continuous progression from the work of Giotto, followed by the Quattrocento artists, then Leonardo and Raphael, and culminating in the works of Michelangelo - Vasari's hero. Byzantine and medieval art was more spiritual and symbolic and should not be criticised for not achieving what it was not trying to do. Non-representational, stylized art (whether Byzantine or by Picasso or the Cubists!) is not more backward or primitive than naturalistic art. It is simply different.

Romanesque. Works by Coppo di Marcovaldo (*Last Judgment*, mid 13th-century mosaic on the interior of the dome of the Baptistery in Florence) and Guido da Siena (*St Peter Enthroned*, after 1270) also assume an Italo-Byzantine stylistic approach. This can also share some common elements with Romanesque art, although the typical Celtic-Germanic forms of spirals, interlacing patterns and Nordic 'beasties' as evident in Romanesque sculpture decoration of churches and illuminated manuscripts, do not feature greatly south of the Alps.

Gothic. Whilst the existence of a true 'Italian Gothic' style has been much discussed, Gothic elements can be seen in Italian Trecento painting. Influences deriving from French Gothic that held sway in the 11th and early 12th century (Amiens, Rheims) were due to the great importance of the popular pilgrimage routes across Europe, often heading for Rome. The Gothic approach to bodily form, expression and gesture marks a move away from stylized Romanesque art, and changes were taking place in France at the same time as the revival of painting in Tuscany. Artists like Giovanni Pisano and (later) Simone Martini in Siena, were influenced by the slender Gothic figures, and Gothic linearity and detailing appear on Italian pulpits and altarpieces. French conquests in Italy and the presence of French Cistercian monks in Tuscany increased French influence as panel painting also developed, partly derived from Byzantine portable icons and partly because the sculptural programmes of the great Gothic Cathedrals left less space for wall paintings. In 1310, the Synod of Trier officially decreed that a picture or image was to stand on or behind every altar 'to instruct, admonish and decorate'.

Classical. It has been debated whether the Classical style and the influence of Roman antiquity ever completely disappeared after the fall of the Roman Empire. For example, Roman features are evident in the façade of the Church of San Miniato al Monte in Florence (1018) - and the façade and columns of the Baptistery in Florence (1059-1128) were so classical in design that in medieval times the building was believed to be ancient. An

increased interest in all things classical took place from the 13th century, both in intellectual activity and in the arts. The classical style in art and architecture was particularly influential, as can be seen in the approach of sculptors Nicola and Giovanni Pisano. Classical influences were often limited to the inclusion of specific motifs or isolated copying of ancient designs and ornamentations. It was not until the Quattrocento (1400s/fifteenth century) that a deeper interest and involvement in the classical heritage resulted in a truer interpretation and recreation of the classical approach.

Painting of the late Duecento and Trecento in Italy

The different Gothic and Italo-Byzantine styles and approaches at the end of the Duecento (1200s) and beginning of the Trecento (1300s) thus provided the background to the early or 'Proto' Renaissance at a time when Italy was a focus of economic as well as artistic cross currents from the Eastern Byzantine and Northern Gothic areas. The ancient heritage of Rome also underpinned the formation of the new style that evolved through the work of artists like Cimabue and Cavallini and in the cycles of frescoes at Assisi. In the frescoes by Giotto in the Scrovegni (or 'Arena') Chapel, Padua, the revival of the classical tradition in art is dramatically displayed as Giotto creates three-dimensional space on two-dimensional surfaces - to be filled by naturalistic figures showing human emotions and gestures in a way hardly attempted since classical times. Specific ancient Roman influence can be seen in the frescoes of Cavallini and the sculptures of the Pisani (father and son), while the Sienese School is exemplified by the more linear and sinuous Gothic approach of artists like Duccio and Simone Martini. The gradual rise of secular subjects, portraiture and landscape also took place at this time, as seen in works by the Lorenzetti brothers, whilst the effects of the Black Death (1348) on artistic production provide the context for second half of the 14th century.

Cimabue (Cenni di Pepi) c. 1250 – 1302

'Once Cimabue thought to hold the field/in painting. Giotto's all the rage today', wrote Dante in his *Divina Commedia* (*Purgatory* XI 94-95). It was perhaps Cimabue's misfortune that he had successors of the stature of Giotto and Duccio, especially since he had the reputation of being proud and haughty where his work was concerned. In fact, Vasari relates how Cimabue, while travelling near Florence, came upon the ten-year-old Giotto drawing pictures of his sheep on a rock. As a result, Giotto seems to have become Cimabue's apprentice. Cimabue's importance, nevertheless, should not be underestimated. Many of his works have been altered or destroyed, or were of uncertain attribution, since it was not normally the practice for artists to sign their works. The *Sta Trinita Madonna* c.1280 (UF) is recognised as being by Cimabue and shows that he was one of the first great painters to draw away from the Italo-Byzantine style, rendering a more humane approach with softer expressions and a more lifelike appearance. Rich and majestic Byzantine effects are fused with the gentle gestures and softer draperies of Mary and the Christ Child. The weight and solidity of the throne, with its Gothic ornament, mark an early attempt to use perspective to convey three-dimensionality and space. The existence of the body is evident beneath the folds of material falling across her knee and Christ is far more child-like than Byzantine counterparts.

A number of frescoes of the Upper Church of St Francis at Assisi, including a *Crucifixion* (1280-83), are also generally accepted as by Cimabue, and his approach here also differs from the stylised medieval or Italo-Byzantine interpretation. He attempts instead to reproduce the scene as it might have occurred, with crowds of milling figures. The narrative details of the scene are built up in a skilfully organised composition to great dramatic effect. Excitement, sorrow and grief are expressed by the outstretched limbs and fluttering draperies. Cimabue's later *Crucifix* (1287-88) reveals a similarly intense feeling with a naturalistic approach to the substance and weight of the S-shaped torso and limbs. Christ's hair falls gently over the left shoulder and the realistic depiction of diaphanous drapery reveals form beneath. Cimabue's treatment of the *Crucifix* can be compared with earlier Italo-Byzantine works, for example those by Coppo di Marcovaldo or of the

Pisan School. The influence of Franciscanism humanised the suffering of Christ in His role as the link between humankind and God. The intense feeling and expression in Cimabue's work can be regarded as an indispensable preliminary stage to the more realistic and dramatic art of Giotto.

Cavallini and the Roman School

Stylistic evidence reveals that Giotto was as much, if not more, influenced by the work of Roman artists such as Cavallini, (active 1273-1308), who may also lay a valid claim to being an influence on Giotto. Cavallini produced fresco cycles and mosaics in a classical style, forming a link between the antique tradition and the revived forms introduced principally by Giotto. The mosaics of Sta Maria in Trastevere (1291) and the more certain fragmentary fresco of *The Last Judgment* in St. Cecilia in Rome are regarded as his major works. Sculptural conventions (such as three-dimensional modelling of form) are used to achieve a solid and life-like quality in the figures. There is a distinct break with Byzantine tradition in the rendering of forms and drapery. Modelling in light and shade, rather than the use of linear conventions, gives a sense of plastic form as Roman, toga-clad figures reveal a link with the Antique or Early Christian style. Whether Giotto was indeed a pupil of Cimabue, more influenced by his Florentine style than the Roman style of Cavallini, remains under discussion. We know he visited Rome and Naples, and the painting of Tuscany and Rome were very much interrelated at this time, as is shown by the problems of attribution of the frescoes of the Church of St. Francis at Assisi.

Giotto and Assisi

Controversy over the authorship of the various frescoes in the Franciscan Basilica at Assisi has led to the conclusion that different artists were responsible for different frescoes. Contemporary and later sources, such as Ghiberti and Vasari, were often unclear as to which paintings they were discussing, where they were situated, or whether they were in the Upper or Lower Church. Regardless of authorship, these frescoes clearly reveal important and far-reaching changes and are thus extremely significant. The artists responsible for the paintings are generally accepted as follows:

- **Upper Church** - Cimabue and followers (c. 1270's) were responsible for now faded works in the upper registers. The 'Master of the Isaac Cycle' (c. 1290's) was named for the scenes focussed on Isaac, while The 'Master of the St. Francis Cycle' (quite probably a young Giotto) was credited with the frescoes depicting St Francis (1297- c.1305). The Master of St. Cecilia (as in the St. Cecilia altarpiece in the Uffizi) painted the last three scenes of St. Francis.
- **Lower Church** – Apart from Cimabue's *Madonna and Child (with St Francis)*, the paintings here are mainly later in date and include work by Simone Martini (*Life of St. Martin*, c 1322-6) and Pietro Lorenzetti.

Some experts consider that the 'Isaac Master' was, in fact, Cavallini; others have suggested Giotto. But perhaps the most extensive discussion revolves around the authorship of the *St. Francis Legend*. It is really in this series that the hieratic and symbolic medieval Italo-Byzantine style gives way to a new naturalism and humanity in the telling of a Saint's life-story, hence the cycle has been proposed as the early work of Giotto himself. Contemporaries recorded that Giotto was working in the Basilica at Assisi, and the tradition that Giotto painted the St. Francis legend can be traced back to the second edition of Vasari's *Lives* (1568). Nowadays, virtually all Italian scholars agree that the frescoes are the early work of Giotto, but other specialists sometimes allocate them as by 'The Master of the St. Francis Cycle'. What is clear is that this mature cycle of frescoes, painted in the mid 1290's, represents a carefully planned scheme that is one of the major achievements of early Renaissance painting in Italy. Their importance is in no way diminished if they were not painted by Giotto.

A comparison of Berlinghieri's version of *St Francis's Sermon to the Birds* with the fresco by The Master of the St. Francis at once demonstrates the innovation of the latter. In the *St Francis Altarpiece* (1235) by Bonaventura Berlinghieri (1210-87), painted only a few years after the Saint's death, the figures are stylised and linear as they are applied on a flat surface, parallel to the spectator, standing on lines almost like narrow shelves and typical of earlier medieval compositions. There is little attempt to deny the two-dimensional surface on which the figures are painted and their size relates to symbolic importance. Human figures are more stereotyped and only slightly displaced from the frontal view. The birds are all shown in profile and buildings are flat, almost like 'cut-out' stage scenery.

By contrast, in the fresco at Assisi, the scene depicted is a three-dimensional world. Naturalistic figures and objects are more firmly placed on a 'believable' surface. Thus a spacious world is created, inhabited by life-like, voluminous bodies that have freedom of movement. Figures here (including the birds themselves) vary in positioning, some being placed obliquely. The size of figures in the frescoes varies according to their placement in the landscape (not symbolic importance) and the naturalistic effects in the St. Francis cycle (the face and right arm of St. Francis) are achieved by modelling in light and shade. Colouring is subtle and as closely related as possible to natural variations. In many of the Assisi frescoes a sense of architectural depth is achieved by making 'orthogonal' lines converge, shrinking the size of distant objects or overlapping them, as in the fresco of *St Francis's Renunciation of Worldly Goods*. This follows on from the work of earlier artists like Cimabue who drew away from the medieval approach with depth being either shallow or receding haphazardly into space. Cimabue's paintings often show an attempt to organise space, though orthogonals may diverge from the centre of the painting. Compared with earlier frescoes, such as the Isaac cycle, the St Francis cycle at Assisi shows a far greater attempt to organise pictorial space by means of architectural frameworks with direct observation and imitation of the natural world (that led eventually to the use of one-point perspective).

As well as the depiction of space and bodily form showing an interest in the human side of the narrative, there is also a much greater feeling of emotion and drama in the narrative cycle of St. Francis at Assisi. Faces are individualised; figures gesture and move in space; they relate to one another and invite the spectator to participate. This contrasts with the earlier tradition where figures are conventional and do not express movement, emotion or gesture. Even an incident like the sermon to the birds was formerly portrayed in a symbolic way. By contrast, at Assisi the aim is to capture a specific moment in the story of the Saint's life with all its emotion and realism. Many of the features were developed in later works by Giotto, which is partly why the St. Francis Cycle has long been regarded as an example of his earliest work.

Giotto di Bondone (1267/77 - 1337)

A supreme artist and draughtsman, Giotto was heralded by Vasari as the instigator of the 'rebirth' of the art of painting in Italy. As Vasari put it, '*It was Giotto alone who, by God's favour, rescued and restored art*'. Vasari also brought the character of Giotto to life, relating a humorous story of how he painted a fly on a portrait that was so realistic that Cimabue tried to brush it off. Vasari also related the famous story of Giotto's 'O'. When Pope Benedict XI sent a messenger to ask Giotto for examples of his work to show his skills, Giotto swiftly and simply drew a perfect circle to be taken back to the Pope. The messenger thought he was making a fool of them but when he described how Giotto had drawn a perfect circle in a single movement of his wrist (without the aid of a pair of compasses), his immense skill was recognised immediately by the Pope and courtiers. Giotto was thus already recognised by his contemporaries (including Dante) as the leading artist of his day and certainly the revolutionary ideas expressed in his painting dominated the art of central Italy for many generations. Giotto became a legend and hero in his own time and his work influenced such artists as Masaccio and even Michelangelo.

Giotto's paintings are notable for their clear, straightforward solutions to basic problems such as the representation of space and the depiction of the volume, structure and solidity of three-dimensional forms (in particular the human body). As in the frescoes at Assisi, a concentration on dramatic effects became an effective compositional means to express the spiritual message of the events depicted. Great psychological feelings are conveyed in his interpretation of Scriptural stories and this approach to the portrayal of dramatic scenes is fundamental to subsequent art styles. His work does not represent a complete break with tradition, but his basically narrative and naturalistic approach does contrast with Byzantine abstract spiritualism and symbolism. It is possible that Giotto was influenced by Roman traditions and actual classical remains, including sculptural works that had the advantage of being three-dimensional by definition. His great understanding and experience combined with a natural talent and the use of dramatic gesture and facial expressions, in a way not practised since classical antiquity. As Vasari said, Giotto '*was the first to express emotions so that in his pictures one can discern expressions of fear, hate, anger or love*'. Giotto's paintings related more to the visible world, whereas Byzantine and medieval art related to the spiritual.

The Scrovegni (or 'Arena') Chapel, Padua (built in the early 1300s), is a small building, with a wealth of frescoes documented as being by Giotto from c 1305. The relation of the frescoes to the architecture of the chapel is significant for its use of wall surfaces and vaults and the way the paintings are arranged in registers relating to the architectural setting. Thirty scenes of the *Life of the Virgin* and the *Life and Passion of Christ* read spirally round the church, carefully linked in a continuous narrative, almost like a modern 'comic strip'. The frescoes show the three-dimensionality of figures arranged in a believable space; a preoccupation with the human form, modelled in light and shade; the use of drapery to accentuate bodily form; and the facial expressions and gestures of the figures, whose poses, movements and actions (especially the eyes) enhance the narrative elements. The repetition of the theme of meetings and partings (with embraces) adds to the reality of the scenes, presented almost as the 'Bible of the illiterate', and demonstrate Giotto's insight into the human condition. In scenes such as *Joachim and the Shepherds*, Joachim (father of Mary) comes over as a distinct personality with feelings and emotions. Giotto's psychological insight into the narrative and the characters' reactions is clearly evident in his series on the *Life of Christ*. In scenes like *The Nativity*, *The Flight into Egypt*, *The Betrayal* and *The Lamentation*, the use of facial expression and gesture are used to great effect to express the emotion and drama of these scenes. Giotto's *Adoration of the Magi*, portrays the Star of Bethlehem as a comet, showing his interest in current scientific developments as well [Halley's comet appeared in 1301, next due in 2061]. The *Last Judgment* is situated on the west wall, whilst personifications of the virtues and vices such as Charity (*Caritas*) and the secular 'Justice' are arranged on the lowest level. Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* (1310, UF) also reflects this new approach towards the visible world. His late works in the Bardi and Peruzzi chapels at Sta Croce (are less well preserved, but his Campanile (bell tower of the Duomo, 1334 stands as a great monument to him.

The Byzantine, medieval and classical artistic cross-currents in Italy in the late 13th century have already been examined, but it can also be argued that, with his repeated use of oriental-type slanted 'almond shaped eyes' and other Eastern elements, Giotto may have been influenced by art-works from farther afield. Giotto's *St Stephen* (c 1320-30, Florence) and his *Virgin and Child* (c 1320-25, Washington) appear to have Arabic and Mongol script and patterns on the hems of their robes and the movement of trade goods including art and artefacts did spread in both directions along the Silk Routes - with an exchange of ideas between Mongol/Tibetan/Nepalese art and Proto-Renaissance works from Italy. The written script known as Phags Pa (after its inventor) can be seen in a number of Italian paintings of this time (see Giotto's *Crucifixion*, 1330, Louvre), although its use had diminished by the later 14th century. Such influences are not confined to Giotto's works, as shown by the inclusion of Mongol warriors in frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

The Sieneese School

During the 12th and 13th centuries, Siena, like Florence, owed much of its wealth to banking. An easily defensible hill-top town, Siena possessed great riches and a wealthy, leisured class who could enjoy the benefits of such prosperity. The city flourished in particular from 1287-1355, ruled by an oligarchy of both merchants and nobles. It is possible to distinguish between Trecento art in Siena and Florence, since a separate school in Siena developed its own distinctive lyrical style. Elements of the Italo-Byzantine traditions became fused with Gothic influence from the north in the work of early masters like Guido da Siena (mentioned already) and Duccio. Noted for its technical excellence and rich colour, the Siennese style reveals Gothic elements in its linear and graceful approach, a striking contrast to the heavier, more sculptural styles of Rome and Florence. The contrast between the two styles can be seen through a comparison between Giotto's monumental and dramatic works, and the work of Duccio where the figures are depicted in a lyrical, almost musical, way. Giotto's figures are treated as individual personalities who interact with one another whilst Duccio relied on the power of lines and surface in contrast to Giotto's sense of volume.

Duccio di Buoninsegna

Duccio's art is indicative of a transition from Byzantine to Gothic considered in an Italian context. Evidence for the direct transfer of stylistic influence from the Gothic north into Italy remains inconclusive, and Italian Gothic is thus best considered as rather different from its northern counterpart. Duccio's *Maestà* (meaning 'Majesty' - ie an enthroned Madonna) is a reflection of medieval concepts of religion and art which remained a pervasive force during Duccio's documented career as a Siennese painter (active c 1278 - 1318). Duccio was responsible for several *Madonnas*, as well as the massive *Maestà* altarpiece, his only signed and documented work. This original, double-sided, altarpiece was made of up many separate scenes and figures and was over five metres high. It was dismantled in 1711 and attempts have been made to determine what it originally looked like. Some fifty-eight individual panels survive. The majority are located in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Siena but others have been dispersed in Europe and the USA, with three (*Annunciation*, *Healing of Blind Man*, *Transfiguration*) now in London (NG).

The *Maestà* altarpiece was created for the Duomo of Siena, recounting in remarkable detail the *Life and Passion of Christ*, and the *Life of the Virgin*, with a large panel of the *Virgin Enthroned*. It was not only an expression of religious fervour, but also of quite remarkable civic, political and social ideas. It is a complex work, and much more than straightforward Biblical illustration. Sophisticated themes and messages between different panels, demonstrate Duccio's approach to the subject-matter and use of images to convey religious meaning. The central message of the *Maestà* is that of redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, as depicted in the Biblical events. Stylistically, the panels of the altarpiece are examples of Duccio's successful merging of tradition and innovation. In accordance with medieval tradition, Duccio's figures are generally too large for their architectural settings, showing the religious hierarchy. The Madonna for example is much larger than the surrounding figures, demonstrating her status. Duccio's use of gold backgrounds is another Byzantinising device and contributes an otherworldly effect to the panel. Other aspects of Duccio's style influenced by older traditions are the appearance of the same figure twice in one scene (ie depicting two events separated in time, but in the same physical setting); floating, elongated figures and a Byzantine style treatment of mountains and trees, as seen in the *Nativity*. However, despite this adherence to earlier traditions, Duccio devised his own style. His innovative approach is shown by his interpretation of Biblical characters, as the Apostles are consistent across different panels in their costumes and facial features. His convincing creation of inhabitable architectural space and faithful concentration on naturalistic detail, is shown in *The Entry into Jerusalem* (with the lovely touch of the figure up in the tree).

Duccio's *Madonnas* reveal the same sophisticated balance between tradition and innovation. In his large-scale *Rucellai Madonna* (1285-86, UF), Duccio's sensitive and sinuous treatment of line differs from the more angular, stylised approach of his Italo-Byzantine predecessors, as figures appear moulded in space, with brilliant blues, reds and golds. In the London *Triptych of the Virgin*

and *Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea* (1300, NG), he retained traditional poses and compositions, but his interpretation is more emotional. The new human awareness is expressed in the childlike manner in which Christ reaches out to touch the Virgin's cheek, and in the tender protectiveness of the Madonna. Duccio's art demonstrates his own creativity as well as service to the Church and State and this transition from artisan to artist can also be discerned in the art of his contemporaries.

The similarities and differences between the different periods and schools can be seen by comparing the three great *Madonnas* by Cimabue (1280), Duccio (1285) and Giotto (1300-05) in terms of approach to subject, space, architectural setting, modelling of figures, naturalism and detailing. They hang together in the Uffizi Gallery.

Simone Martini (c. 1285-1344)

The work of Simone Martini is characterised by its almost tapestry-like effect typical of the Sienese school. Possibly a pupil of Duccio, Simone Martini was influenced by French Gothic, developing the decorative use of outline and surface patterning. He also used rich colour and gold effects. Simone's large fresco of the *Maestà* (1315) emphasises decorative elements (Gothic canopy, gables and tracery) producing a rich brocade-like effect. The tall and slender Madonna is seated on an elaborate Gothic throne, slightly turned to the right to direct interest to the Child standing on her left knee. There is an emphasis on verticals in the composition, accentuated by the canopy and the closely packed figures. The throne of the Queen of Heaven, a delicate Gothic structure, stands beneath an airy baldachin supported by slender vertical posts. The figure of the Madonna herself, with fleur-de-lis crown and wide, gold-embroidered cloak, appears to be based on a Gothic model, probably of northern France. Slender and proud, and displayed in richly plastic draperies with linear folds, she sits in truly royal state, conforming to the courtly ideal celebrated at that time, with less resemblance to medieval and Byzantine tradition. A large retinue of angels and saints surrounds the throne in a well-composed semicircle while the four patron saints of Siena kneel in the front. Although a religious subject, this fresco in the Palazzo Pubblico at Siena reveals a secular, worldly content. Elegant and charming court life is reflected in the religious scene as the Virgin is depicted as Queen of Siena, patron of the city. The inscription indicates an element of civic propaganda, as she addresses the members of the Council Chamber where the fresco is situated: 'love justice you who rule the earth' and 'The angelic flowers of roses and lilies with which the heavenly meadow is decked delight me no more than good counsel'. On the opposite wall, Simone's *Equestrian Portrait of Guidoriccio da Fogliano* symbolises the armed strength of the Commune as well as secular pomp and grandeur.

The main qualities of Simone's *Annunciation*, 1333, again lie in its rich patterning and jewel-like colour, within a Gothic framework and yet showing the naturalistic effects in the lilies and fluttering drapery. The Virgin is richly painted in a rather flat, curvilinear silhouette, but there is a subtle psychological insight in the subtle half-attraction, half-withdrawal (fear?) of the Virgin towards the angel Gabriel - a reflection of 'Gothic sway' in Sienese Trecento art. In 1340-41, Simone Martini followed the Papal Court to Avignon in France and his work became a link between Italy and North Europe as he influenced French 14th-century art. His style may be viewed as a foretaste of International Gothic, essentially a court art that was refined, aristocratic and elegant and much influenced by French culture, costume and fashion. Although he mainly worked in Republican Siena, Simone Martini was in a strange way a quintessential court artist.

Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti (both active c. 1319/20-1348)

The brothers Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti were also working in Siena in the first part of the 14th century. Pietro's painting style shows the influence of the two main streams of Florentine and Sienese painting. The Florentine interest in emotions is reflected in the playful Christ-child, but the Sienese delight in visual effects, decorative detail and brilliant colour is also evident. His earliest documented work, the large *Altarpiece at Arezzo*, shows traces of influence from Duccio and also

the sculptors Nicola and Giovanni Pisano. Pietro Lorenzetti's frescoes in the lower church at Assisi, such as the *Deposition*, reflect an interest in Giotto's monumental style used to depict the emotional scene. His *Last Supper* (1320s) demonstrates increasing understanding of the setting, in a difficult hexagonal space, and there is a new realism in the portrayal of the genre scene of servants at their household tasks in the adjoining room. The influences of Giotto and the Florentine and Roman styles are evident alongside the Gothic delicacy of Siena.

Where Pietro depicted a range of human emotions, his brother Ambrogio (probably the younger of the two) demonstrates the secular aspect of Sienese painting. His *Allegory of Good Government* (1338-39), was painted for the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. Here the theological virtues of *Faith, Hope and Charity* are depicted alongside the political virtues of *Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance and Punitive Justice*. The symbol of Romulus and Remus and the she-wolf over the city gate was a classical Roman motif adopted by the city of Siena. In the adjacent *Effects of Good Government in the City and in the Countryside*, panoramic views are depicted of town and country life, with areas receding into depth, reflecting secular interest in the life of the commune and surrounding area. These are some of the earliest, most significant examples of interest in landscape for its own sake. Merchants, traders and builders are seen at work in the City as the people gather for market. In the countryside, nobles are hawking and hunting while peasants are working in the fields (according to the labours of the months).

Sculpture: Nicola and Giovanni Pisano

Turning to sculpture, alongside the main focus on painting, the work of the father and son sculptors Nicola and Giovanni Pisano is important for its long-lasting influence on sculpture in Italy and Trecento Art in general. The Gothic sculpture of the great French cathedrals had flourished since the early 12th century but, due to the influence of classical, antique forms, it differed in Italy, having much more classical influence. In portraying three-dimensional figures and settings, sculpture also has an advantage over painting since it is already three-dimensional by definition. The art of the Pisani, particularly the four great Pulpits they created, illustrate a merging of Gothic features and classical forms to create a new sculptural style.

The first major work by Nicola was the *Pisa Baptistery Pulpit* (1260) which differs from Romanesque sculpture based on simplified and stylised figures clothed in flat linear drapery in shallow relief. By contrast, the expressiveness and invention of Nicola's art was derived largely from the antique, including his interest in ancient Roman sarcophagi at Pisa. Although some earlier sculptors had employed classical motifs, Nicola's approach to the antique differed since he aimed to create an authentic classical style, rather than simply using classical motifs in what were essentially medieval designs. The *Pisa Baptistery Pulpit* is formed as a hexagon supported by seven columns, with large-scale narrative panels in the upper part and figures at the angles (such as the very classical *Fortitude/Hercules*). In contrast to flat, traditional Romanesque figures, Nicola's have classical proportions that are naturalistic, rounded and given weight by deep undercutting and voluminous drapery. Nicola also uses spatial illusion and natural rendering of the human form as a way to enrich the content and meaning of the scenes he portrays (as in the *Nativity*, 1260). Following this, Nicola was commissioned to create a *Pulpit at Siena Cathedral* (1265), an even more ambitious project that further integrated Christian iconography with the classical style (as in the *Crucifixion*), making him a key forerunner of the classical revival in the early Renaissance.

Nicola's son, Giovanni Pisano, initially worked in conjunction with his father, but developed as an independent artist with his own style. He drew on the classical influence of his father, but used a much more expressive approach. Perhaps Giovanni's most significant work was his designs for the façade of Siena Cathedral. Statues placed high above the entrance level needed to be visible and clearly individualised in a sophisticated intellectual programme which additionally gave movement and drama to the architectural façade. The statues are now in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Siena and at eye-level they appear distorted, but they were deliberately created in this

way since, as originally placed, they leaned forwards from their settings high on the façade of the Cathedral. The dramatic figures include *David, Solomon, Daniel, Joshua* and *Plato* (1285) - particularly significant as the inclusion of a pagan philosopher. The bust of Haggai can be seen in the V&A. The facial expressions and gestures convey a sense of the figures' meaning and purpose. Giovanni was also responsible for the construction of the *Pulpit at Sant'Andrea Pistoia* (1297-1301) and the *Pulpit in the Cathedral at Pisa* (1302-10), which again show a more dramatic approach (as in the *Massacre of the Innocents, Pistoia*). His style became much more lively and elaborate compared with the classicism of his father and he moved away from his father's approach, gaining a reputation as leading sculptor without whose work Quattrocento sculpture may well have not developed as it did. Henry Moore, referring to Giovanni's statues for the facade of Siena Cathedral, called him 'the first modern sculptor'.

Painting in Florence and Siena in the Late Trecento

In 1348 the terrible plague known as the Black Death spread over Europe with devastating effect. Italy was badly hit and both Florence and Siena lost approximately half of their populations. The impact was immense. The economic and social upheaval caused by the plague was accompanied by a change in spiritual outlook and a different attitude towards death, whose horrors were depicted as seldom before. The plague caused two types of reaction: either an almost hysterical rush into the arms of the Church, in the hope that piety would avert further evil; or a materialist attitude, reflected in the philosophy 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die'. Both attitudes were reflected in art.

The naturalistic style of Giotto had been practised (or copied) by his followers, including Taddeo Gaddi (d. 1366), Bernardo Daddi (c. 1290-1350) and Maso di Banco (active c 1335-50) who form an important group known as the Giotteschi. After the Black Death, however, a religious fervour viewing the plague as punishment for sins marked a return to an earlier medieval style. A spiritual, abstract approach to God as a remote, awesome figure in an almost Byzantine manner was again reflected in art. Terror and gratitude on the part of the survivors often stimulated patronage, and works of art again stressed the awesomeness of the divine, in contrast to Giotto's emphasis on the human element. The works of Andrea Orcagna, for example, such as the *Strozzi Altarpiece, Sta Maria Novella Florence* (1354-57), reflect a more austere approach in which symbolism and the gold background play an important part.

Other paintings of the period reflect the fear of plague and death, with particularly morbid subject matter. For example, Andrea Orcagna's brother Nardo di Cione was responsible for the *Last Judgment (Hell)* (1354-57) in the *Strozzi Chapel, St. Maria Novella, Florence*. Another example is the large series of frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa featuring *The Triumph of Death (or The Encounter of the Three Living and Three Dead)* by Francesco Traini (or attributed by some to Buffalmacco). The fresco shows the idyllic life of a fashionable hunting party who are suddenly awakened to the threat of ever-present death in the discovery of three corpses. The virtues of a life of piety are extolled in a background scene of the hermit. Such works reflect a horror such as might have been inspired by the 'Hell on Earth' of the Black Death. The terrifying scenes of death depicted in late Trecento art were in significant contrast to the former approach to death. The earlier implication had been that death was merely release from a transient existence and thus had lost its proverbial 'sting'. The experience of the plague told otherwise.

Immense changes again took place around the year 1400, but the work of these artists from the late Duecento (1200s) and Trecento (1300s) provided a basis for the flowering of the Renaissance in the Quattrocento, as well as the sophisticated developments of the 'High Renaissance' by Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael.