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Giotto vs. Antiquity: Some possible approach*

Giotto vs. la Antigüedad: enfoques factibles

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Abstract
The topic "Giotto and Antiquity" counts countless contributions, and it is to be considered one of the most important issues on which we discuss when studying the artist, both monographically or in relation to the culture, and specifically the visual culture of his time.
My article will start from what is already known and discussed, but with a substantial premise: the Antique, for Giotto, is never an antiquarian passion or a sophisticated whim for elites. It is rather one of the aspects of Giotto's "realism." Giotto has a heightened attention to the memories and visual evidence of the Antique, and in it he seems to look for models – that we might call 'moral' – that serve him to create his own expressive keys. We do not know where he got his knowledge of ancient painting: what we know today of the great painting of ancient Rome is generally the result of seventeenth/eighteenth/nineteenth century

* Working for the talk at the conference, and now writing for the proceedings, I once more realize how vast is this question, how impossible it is to treat it without involving into this discussion not only Antiquity, but the visual and cultural world which was Giotto's – thus, the whole fabric of Antique and Modern, of past and present, as not only Giotto, but many of his contemporaries experienced, Nicola Pisano and Arnolfo among others. Therefore, the text I present here is certainly not intended as a comprehensive discussion of this vast subject matter, but it is shaped in relation to a question: which was the Antique landscape Giotto experienced, which works he did know and study, how did he understand and 'use' them. I hope it will not sound too one-sided and unsatisfactory. My essay should have many more images to give a clearer idea of my point of view; I am sorry for this, *forza maggiore*. I owe the good English of this text to Neal Putt, and I thank him very much. I also thank Mirko Santanicchia for his help in Assisi.

rediscoveries; but it is clear that the landscape of medieval Rome – which Giotto knew from a very young age – between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries must have included far more survivals than today. In ancient painting, Giotto sought patterns of illusiveness and transfiguration of space: walls that disappear, planes that multiply infinitely, false depths. But the monumentality of the figures in ancient *megalographiae* also provided him with great suggestions, as is already evident in the two scenes of Isaac in Assisi. In sculpture, on the other hand, the artist seems to have sought patterns of *gravitas* and a new, more powerful figural presence of his characters, as is particularly clear in the personifications of the Virtues and Vices at the Scrovegni Chapel.
My aim will therefore be to analyze these different modalities, in the knowledge that this kind of study can still provide much insight into Giotto's visual world and culture. It can also add something to our knowledge of the ancient world, which we will look at through the eyes of an artist *circa* 1300.

Keywords: Giotto; Antiquity; illusionism; realism; Roman painting; Roman sculpture; Rome

Resumen
El tema «Giotto y la Antigüedad» cuenta con innumerables aportaciones, y debe considerarse una de las cuestiones más importantes sobre las que debatimos al estudiar al artista, tanto monográficamente como en relación con la cultura, y en concreto con la cultura visual de su tiempo.
Este estudio partirá de lo ya conocido y discutido, pero con una premisa sustancial: la Antigüedad, para Giotto, nunca es una pasión anticuaria o un sofisticado capricho de élites. Es más bien uno de los aspectos del «realismo» de Giotto. Giotto estuvo muy atento a los recuerdos y a los testimonios visuales de la Antigüedad, y en ella parece haber buscado modelos –que podríamos llamar «morales»– que le sirvieron para crear sus propias claves expresivas. No sabemos de dónde sacó su conocimiento de la pintura antigua: lo que hoy conocemos de la gran pintura de la Roma antigua es en general el resultado de redescubrimientos de los siglos xvii/xviii/xix; pero está claro que el paisaje de la Roma medieval –que Giotto conoció desde muy joven– entre finales del siglo xiii y principios del xiv debió de incluir muchas más supervivencias que hoy. En la pintura antigua, Giotto buscaba patrones de ilusión y transfiguración del espacio: muros que desaparecen, planos que se multiplican infinitamente y falsas profundidades. Pero la monumentalidad de las figuras de las megalografías antiguas también le proporcionaba grandes sugestiones, como ya es evidente en las dos escenas de Isaac en Asís. En la escultura, en cambio, el artista parece haber buscado patrones de *gravitas* y una nueva presencia figural más poderosa de sus personajes, como queda particularmente claro en las personificaciones de las Virtudes y los Vicios de la Capilla Scrovegni.
Mi objetivo será, por tanto, analizar estas diferentes modalidades, sabiendo que este tipo de estudio puede aportar todavía muchos datos sobre el mundo visual y la cultura de Giotto. También puede aportar algo a nuestro conocimiento del mundo antiguo, que contemplaremos a través de los ojos de un artista de hacia 1300.

Palabras clave: Giotto; Antigüedad; ilusionismo; realismo; pintura romana; escultura romana; Roma.

For Giotto, what was Antiquity? What works, monuments, paintings, sculptures, objects did he know and which ones did he choose to use in his approach to painting; how can we, today, identify and recognise these borrowings, we who are so much further away from Antiquity, and therefore suffering the loss of – or in some cases having gained – so much with respect to the panorama he knew? What did it mean, in his time and for Giotto as an artist, to 'use', 'cite', 'copy' an ancient work or element? In essence, why did Giotto look to the past and how could he, at the same time, be very modern and indeed revolutionary, precisely because of and through its lessons?

One could pose no end of questions, and indeed numerous studies have tried to answer some of them, over a good 75 years. The great part discusses Assisi and Padua, and the majority approach seems very clear. Scholars have generally gone in search of the debt to the ornamental repertoires of Antiquity in Giotto's work, often discovering that many of the motifs in question had somehow survived, filtered into the language and repertoires of medieval artists – especially, and for obvious reasons, of medieval Rome – but that Giotto, while presumably making use of this continuity of tradition, did so with a profoundly changed regard. He is seen to reuse the motifs in absolutely new ways, flanked with robust injections of further models, images and details, both faithfully reflected and radically rethought and re-imagined. All this with such variety and mastery that, while it is necessary to accept that he couldn't have known the 'sensational survivors' of Antiquity, as we now view them – Pompeii, to state the most obvious case – we must also imagine that Giotto was familiar with monuments and works that have not been handed down to us, irreparably blinding our own possibilities of knowledge.

Tracing the state of studies on 'Giotto and Antiquity' would be an arduous and certainly verbose undertaking. The 'obligatory' names – Hanno-Walther Kruft, Rachel Meoli Toulmin, Janetta Rebold Benton, Francesca Flores d'Arcais – will, however, be of limited use in the investigation that we shall attempt here.[1] Their studies, of founding character, moreover inseparable from the non-monographic works dealing with specific questions on

[1] Hanno-Walther Kruft, "Giotto e l'Antico", in *Giotto e il suo tempo*, proceedings of the congress (Assisi-Padua-Florence 1967), Rome, 1971, pp. 169-176; Rachel Meoli Toulmin, "L'ornamento nella pittura di Giotto con particolare riferimento alla cappella degli Scrovegni", *Ibid.* pp. 177-189; Janetta Rebold Benton, "Some Ancient Mural Motifs in Italian Painting around 1300", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 48 (1985), 2, pp. 151-176; Francesca Flores d'Arcais, "Elementi decorativi di ispirazione classica nelle architetture dipinte della cappella degli Scrovegni", in D. Lenzi (ed.), *Arti a confronto. Scritti in onore di Anna Maria Matteucci*, Bologna, 2004, pp. 25-28; Alessandro Tomei, "Giotto e l'antico", in A. C. Quintavalle (ed.), *Medioevo: il tempo degli antichi*, proceedings of the international conference of studies (Parma, 24-28 September 2003), Milan, 2006, pp. 557-564 (the latter with observations that go beyond the 'ornamental' problem).

[2] Christian Adolf Isermeyer, *Rahmengliederung und Bildfolge in der Wandmalerei bei Giotto und den Florentiner Malern des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen, 1937; John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, London, 1957; Decio Gioseffi, *Giotto architetto*, Milan, 1963; Hans Belting, *Die Oberkirche von San Francesco in Assisi*, Berlin, 1977. I note two other studies, however, which in terms of method and objectives differ from those just cited, and have been precious to me in more than one respect: Maria Monica Donato, "Memorie degli artisti, memoria dell'antico: intorno alle firme di Giotto, e altri", in Quintavalle (ed.), *Medioevo: il tempo degli antichi*, pp. 522-546; Francesco Benelli, *The architecture in Giotto's paintings*, Cambridge (Mass.), 2012. Finally, I add my own Serena Romano, *La O di Giotto*, Milan, 2008, in which I attempted an investigation into the world of ancient (and modern) sculpture as a source of models for Giotto's painting, a theme generally neglected in the aforementioned studies, and central to the present essay.

'Giotto and Antiquity' – from Isermeyer to Gioseffi, from White to Belting[2] – have not entered the field that I will address here, and within which I hope to determine two 'points' that I consider crucial, while on the ornamental repertories already much investigated, I will avoid comment.

To preface everything, two observations.

The first is my conviction that Giotto is never an antiquarian: he is not a collector of motifs, he has no interest in fashions or elitist pleasures and, in fact, what he does is hardly comparable to the work of other painters. If he cites, copies or uses ancient motifs, he does so because he feels an essential need for them: and this is a foundational necessity, nothing to do with the 'ornamental', and instead much to do with the construction of meaning in his works.

The second observation – not surprisingly very much linked to the first – is that the 'use' of Antiquity, of which we will see a few examples, suggests a knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the ancient works Giotto turned to, which is indeed anachronistic, because it is extraordinarily advanced compared to the dominant modes of medieval culture. It reveals familiarity and understanding, but also great liberty in judgement. Giotto understood and used his models; he would adhere to them morally, but also break away freely. He joins, in this, his fellow artists of a century later, and yet we must not confuse his specific attitude by calling it 'pre-Renaissance', 'proto-Renaissance', or, in short, by latching his gigantic episode onto subsequent ones, just because our idea of the phases of Western culture requires homologation or simplification of sequential events. It is a 'use' that seeks – but this is the thesis to be demonstrated – a moral consonance with episodes and languages of that distant and largely vanished world, seeming to take in their essentials without bothering to judge, confine, or even demonise them: it is a use that is ancient and modern, as has often been said, and very free.[3]

The construction of meaning

In addressing this point, we must first admit that the problem of 'Giotto and Antiquity' is just one aspect of an even larger issue, that of Giotto's 'realism', an observation that should be evident but in fact remains partially cloudy. What 'realism' means is indeed unclear: it seems clearer if one uses this term and concept in contrasting Giotto's paintings with the visual rules of previous times, or even with his celebrated contemporaries such as Simone Martini, who shares with Giotto the appreciation of Francesco Petrarca, while still remaining an artist difficult to label as 'realist'.[4]

The twentieth century, not only in Italy, studied and 'used' Giotto within the framework of its own artistic, formal and critical trends: the obvious citation is *Valori Plastici*, but it is impossible not to think of Mark Rothko, who adored Giotto, had him in the family tree of

[3] Julian Gardner, "Giotto: First of the moderns or last of the ancients?", *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 44 (1991), pp. 63-78.

[4] In the vast literature on this point, see among others Peter Seiler, "Petrarcas kritische Distanz zur skulpturalen Bildniskunst seiner Zeit", in Renate L. Colella et al. (ed.), *Pratum Romanum. Richard Krautheimer zum 100. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden, 1997, pp. 299-324; and Marcello Ciccuto, *Figure di Petrarca: Giotto, Simone Martini, Franco Bolognese*, Naples, 1991.

his own formal and critical reflections, and wrote "Nothing therefore can be a greater traduction of the truth and of all values than the placing of the mantle of Giotto ....upon the shoulders of these confectioners."[5] This means that, for Rothko, the 'realism' of Giotto coincides with the rational rendering of volumes, and is an expression of *gravitas*, taking the word in both physical and metaphorical senses.

Critics have also spoken of 'realism' precisely in relation to the antique or antiquarian elements of Giotto's painting. The list could be long, with many internal nuances: not all examples have the same value, and each of them would require specific and thorough analysis and evaluation. I have chosen only one, because it seems very clear precisely about what I would like to show in this section concerning the 'construction of meaning'. I refer to the *Homage of a Simple Man* (Fig. 1), the frame beginning the narrative of Francis' story in the Upper Church of Assisi. As is well known, the narrative runs along the right wall towards the inner façade and then along the left wall,[6] framed by a false architecture of spiral columns and architraves, composing a kind of theatrical stage. The first fresco is itself constructed in a highly theatrical way. The action takes place in the foreground; we see four very well-dressed citizens, two on the right and two on the left, openly viewing and commenting on the event. On the left, Francis still dressed as a young, wealthy layman (but already provided with a halo) enters the scene by placing his foot on the mantle which another almost prostrate figure spreads before him. A triad of buildings appears as a backdrop: on the right a house with two floors of terraces, on the left a more luxurious mansion with ornate Gothic windows and a tower. Perfectly framed in the centre of the scene is an ancient temple with a pediment and a portico supported by five columns; three more can be seen on the left side. The ancient structure is the so-called Temple of Minerva, a first-century BC building still standing in Piazza del Comune, the centre of Assisi. It was converted into a church as early as the Early Middle Ages and during the thirteenth century used – significantly – as the seat of the commune and the tribunal, and on the lower floor, as a prison.[7]

[5] For *Valori Plastici*, see my *O di Giotto*, pp. 11-12, with previous bibliography, and more recently Alessandra Tiddia (ed.), *Giotto e il Novecento*, exhibition catalogue, Genua, 2022, especially the essay by Daniela Ferrari, "«Mi sento un Giotto dei miei tempi": Carrà e la «terribilità serrata in legge cubica»", pp. 75-83. The quotation is from Mark Rothko, *The Artist's Reality* (written in 1940-41), New York, 2004, pp. 115-116.

[6] As has been well explained by Bruno Zanardi, *Il cantiere di Giotto*, Milan, 1996, this scene, the first in the narrative order, was the last to be painted, presumably because in order to do so, it was necessary to remove a screen whose corbels still emerge from the frescos of this panel and the one opposite, the *Liberation of Pietro d'Alife*; both are rightly considered collateral to Giotto's 'autography'. The circumstance retains some mystery, but in my opinion has no impact on the reasoning we are conducting here, as the painting is integral to what has always seemed a very rigorous programming of contents and symbolic correspondences in the visual discourse of the basilica, including what was entrusted to Cimabue and the Northern masters in the transepts and apse, the Old and New Testament cycles in the nave, and the Franciscan series in the lower register: a scheme established in broad outline and then detailed step-by-step, as it was painted. On these themes, of a bibliography too extensive to cite in full: Serena Romano, *La basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi. Pittori, botteghe, strategie narrative*; Donal Cooper, Janet Robson, *The Making of Assisi: the Pope, the Franciscans and the Paintings of the Basilica*, New Haven, 2013; Chiara Frugoni, *Quale Francesco? Il messaggio nascosto negli affreschi della basilica superiore ad Assisi*, Turin, 2015.

[7] Very important are the observations of Benelli, *The architecture,* pp. 40-50, also very attentive to ancient models; Frugoni, *Quale Francesco?*, pp. 216-220; see also Maria José Strazzulla, «Assisi romana», *Atti dell'Accademia Properziana del Subasio*, s. 3, 10 (1985), pp. 1-101; Giuseppe Abate, "La medievale 'Piazza Grande' di Assisi", *Ibidem*, 11 (1986), pp. 3-187.

Framed at the centre of the narrative space, in full view because all the characters are grouped at the sides, the ancient temple is thus the protagonist of the scene, and indeed it is realistic, so much so that exists to this very day (Fig. 2).[8]

But why does Giotto use it? My answer is not new. In that fresco, Giotto wanted to ensure the *recognisable* portrait of the city – Assisi – which, around 1290, no one would ever deny being the *true* scene of the apparition of St Francis, as Bonaventura wrote in the *Legenda*.[9] The scene of the *Homage* follows the scheme of the *Entrance into Jerusalem*. There, Jesus Christ accepts his mission (which will lead him to death) and begins his public life. Here, Francis (who is not an apostle or a martyr, but a new and contemporary saint) likewise accepts his mission, entering into public life in his own city, being recognised by his citizens who understand his providential presence. Thus, already in the first step of his story Francis acts as a modern replica of Christ; but while modelling himself after Him, he acts in a different landscape and with deliberate indices of difference, for in the Franciscan (and, specifically, Bonaventurian) creed, every human being must accept Christ as his own model, knowing, however, that He will always remain an unattainable model. Francis does not escape this hierarchy, although he, through the event of the stigmata, will become the wax in which the miraculous seal is imprinted, a kind of relic by contact, like no saint before him.[10] Francis thus becomes a *unicum*: the closest human being to Christ of all humankind, including the saints and martyrs of the early Christian era. And this uniqueness is not produced in Jerusalem or Rome, but in Assisi: a humble and unknown small town in Umbria.

Fig 1. Assisi, St. Francis Upper Church, nave, right wall. *The Homage of a Simple Man*. Photo Diller

Fig 2. Assisi, square of the Commune. The Temple of Minerva. Photo: M. Barrios

[8] Giotto painted five columns, however, not the six of the true temple front. Benelli, *The architecture*, p. 44, discusses the issue and brings the *Anaglypha Traiani* into the discussion.

[9] This episode opens the *Legenda*: *Fonti francescane*, Padova-Assisi, 1983, ch. I, 1, p. 840.

[10] Julian Gardner, *Giotto and His Public. Three Paradigms of Patronage*, Cambridge-London, 2011, ch. 1, "Giotto at Pisa. The Stigmatisation for San Francesco", pp. 19-45. Still important Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate*, Turin, 1993.

The 'portrait' of the Temple is thus a visual tool: it helps to identify the 'real' place of the event, and is a strategy establishing familiarity for those who were the first users of the basilica and its pictorial message, namely the citizens of Assisi. They did not need to read texts promulgated by the Franciscan leaders, above all Bonaventure's *Legenda*, which provides the essential core to the Giottesque cycle. They owned local memories, knew oral traditions; memories of family and friendships linked to the places and landscapes of the city and its surroundings, where the events had taken place. Francis, whose sanctity and afterlife were bound to grow incredibly vast, and who was to appear as a new apostle capable of renewing the glorious beginnings of the Church, differed from the apostles of the early Christian era, in belonging to a precise geographic and identitarian landscape that becomes his stable feature: up to today this still holds true, with myth and miracles almost always set in central Italian villages and hills, dense with everyday people and characters.

Using ancient temple pediments in martyrdom scenes to connote the pagan power of the evil emperor is a compositional solution not unknown to medieval Roman painting: see for instance the seventeenth-century watercolour documenting *Paul being beaten*, formerly at St Paul's Outside the Walls.[11] However, the strength of Giotto's fidelity to reality speaks a different language; the antique building, as Giotto represents it, recalls other possible visual suggestions, such as those of the two Trajan reliefs now in the Capitol – to which we will return.[12] It must be stressed that the iconographic themes of the ancient reliefs in question – the first representing Trajan departing for war (*Profectio*, Fig. 11), the second being the sacrifice by the emperor (*Sacrificium*, Fig. 12) – are not neutral in relation to that of the Franciscan scene: perhaps Giotto was aware of this? This aspect opens up further discussion about the degree to which Giotto – and who knows, more broadly, people of his times – understood the themes of ancient art.

But while the Temple of Minerva fixes with certainty the place of the event and casts the Christological model of the Entrance into Jerusalem into the present, it also historicises it. The Temple does not constitute just any presence, it is not a detail in a scrupulous urban description; it brings its precious antiquity to Giotto's narrative, a mark of nobility for Assisi, which through that antiquity rises to a role in history, quite different from that of a simple small provincial village. Francis is a modern, contemporary hero, but his story is already shaping itself as supra-historical, an arc that starts in the past, includes the present and will last into the future; and also the ancient monument shows itself in the whole span of its diachronic existence, since Giotto updated the image of the temple, adding a Cosmatesque frieze and a tympanum with angels, thus Christian elements. We do not know whether these

[11] For the watercolor (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. lat. 4406, f. 102), Stephan Waetzoldt, *Die Kopien des 17. Jahrhunderts nach Mosaiken und Wandmalereien in Rom*, Vienna-Munich, 1964, p. 60, no. 643. Frugoni, *Quale Francesco?*, pp. 216-220, evokes the connection with the Cimabuesque *Healing of the lame* in the right transept of the basilica; Benelli, *The architecture*, p. 224 footnote 148, also recalls the scene of the *Arrest of St Lawrence* in the portico of St Lawrence Outside the Walls in Rome, late thirteenth century. These painted temples have five columns. I hesitate to comment more definitively at this time.

[12] These are – as will be discussed later – some Trajan reliefs that were dismantled from one or more of the honorary arches and reused in the Arch of Constantine. See in the meantime Eugenio La Rocca, *Rilievi storici capitolini*, Rome, 1986.

Fig 3. Assisi, St. Francis Upper Church, nave, left wall. *The Liberation of Pietro d'Alife*. Photo: Diller

features really existed or if Giotto added them to stress the Christian use of a pagan building; he also registered the windows overlooking the portico, which were the result of the medieval transformation of the interior space as a prison. Next to the temple stands the grand palazzo with rich Gothic windows and a tower: another *real* feature, since this is the Palazzo del Capitano, with the Torre del Popolo, both extant today. Chiara Frugoni is right to notice that on the opposite basilical wall, exactly opposite the *Homage*, the *Liberation of Pietro d'Alife* (Fig. 3) appears as the last scene of the cycle: the miracle takes place in Rome, and the fresco includes a gigantic helical column, sculpted in the manner of the Trajan Column, emerging from a round building where the prisoner was kept – thus, a prison, exactly like the Temple of Minerva.[13] A parallelism is constructed between Assisi and Rome, their Antique heritage underscoring the historical and providential mission of the two cities; with an allusion to the founding principles of Franciscanism, since we must remember that the basilica itself was founded on the so-called 'Inferno', the place of burial for condemned criminals.[14]

[13] Frugoni, *Quale Francesco*, p. 220. That the kneeling bishop in the *Liberation* is actually Antonio Colonna bishop of Tivoli is a fascinating hypothesis that has been questioned (Guido Tigler, "Il conflitto tra Bonifacio VIII e i Colonna e la cronologia di Giotto", *Commentari d'arte* 19/20 (2014), pp. 5-25) but also further articulated (Paul Binski, "The patronage and date of the legend of St Francis in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi", *The Burlington Magazine* 151 (2009), 1279, pp. 663-665; Cooper, Robson, *The Making of Assisi*, p. 148). An earlier "monographic" study on this fresco is Ruth Wolff, "La 'Liberazione dell'eretico Pietro': considerazioni su un affresco nella Chiesa Superiore di San Francesco ad Assisi", *Arte cristiana* 84 (1996), pp. 361-373.

[14] The issue is well known: briefly, Elvio Lunghi, *La Basilica di San Francesco di Assisi*, Florence, 1996, p. 8. It was the area outside the walls where executions took place; the land was donated on 29 March 1228 by Simone di Pucciarello to Brother Elia.

Giotto, sculpture, and the Roman landscape

I. Now, however, let us move on to another point of my intervention, one as mentioned less touched upon in the studies, and concerning a different kind of attitude on Giotto's part: indeed, a whole new range of possibilities and reflections. It is no longer a question of 'quotations' of ancient monuments portrayed in a fresco, charged with meaning in relation to the story told, but of Antiquity as a store of teachings, in the field of visuality and compositional systems as well as – I would like to say above all – as grounding for a new moral and expressive direction. In this new field, and even more clearly than in the case of pictorial models, we can glimpse in Giotto an ability to understand Antiquity, which perhaps goes beyond – or does not need to understand – the iconographic detail or the single narration, but grasps the profound nucleus of his model, and does not lower the artist to simply imitate or replicate it, but instead leads to introjection, in a sort of dialogue at a distance that I do not seem to glimpse in any other episode of the Italian (nor I would say, European) Middle Ages.

This world that was already far away from him but certainly widely present in Italian cities with monuments, remains or ruins, Giotto could have observed at many different sites thanks to his highly 'international' career, engaged in different places and cities with increasingly dense itineraries, as a true *star*. However, the most generous reservoir could only have been Rome: to this day the largest open-air store of Antiquity.

It is not a question here of taking up the (gigantic) question of the hierarchies of Italian culture, of the 'primacy' of Florence and the role of Rome even in the field that concerns us here, the artistic one, inseparable from the literary one that in fact guided the establishment of the forementioned hierarchies.[15] The construction of the figure of Giotto, as it results from very early sources when he was still alive, was Florence-centric, and on this there is little to discuss: certainly Dante, Boccaccio, the *novellieri*, Lorenzo Ghiberti and Giorgio Vasari were Tuscan, and Tuscan was their point of view; Giotto's belonging and self-consciousness were specifically Florentine, he signed himself *pictor populi sanctae Mariae Novellae* all his life, and always returned to his home near Santa Maria Novella.[16]

However, Vasari's (and before him, Ghiberti's) narrative – Giotto as a child of the country, magically and providentially trained directly by Nature as an artist, but soon provided with the talent-scout Cimabue who became almost his putative father on the model of St Joseph – is today balanced by the increasing recognition of the role of Rome, of its leading culture agglomerated around the papal court, and of the Roman landscape as a memory in stone and an immense album available for those able to view it.[17] Cimabue, negated the role of master by

[15] A bibliography would be impossible. The opening triad consists of Dante-Petrarch-Boccaccio, but Giotto soon joins them as 'founder' of Italian visual culture, coupled with Dante, the two brought together at the threshold of the Scrovegni Chapel.

[16] See the crucial volume by Michael Viktor Schwarz, Pia Theis, *Giottus Pictor*. Bd. 1, *Giottos Leben*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar, 2004, in which the archival documentation (researched above all in Florentine archives) was brought together, adding many documents to those already known and thus making available an extraordinary wealth of information. I have tried to use them to construct a sort of 'narrative' of what is known about Giotto's life, Serena Romano, "Giotto XXI secolo", in Serena Romano, Pietro Petraroia, *Giotto, l'Italia*, exhibition catalogue (Milan, Palazzo Reale, 2 September 2015-10 January 2016), Milan, 2015, pp. 14-31.

some scholars but clearly showing formative influence on Giotto, may have been the conduit to Rome: as is well known, Cimabue is documented in Rome in 1272 acting as witness to a notarial deed concerning a community of Damianite nuns – i.e. Franciscan Poor Clares – as these pass to the Augustinian rule of San Sisto Vecchio, that is becoming Dominican nuns.[18] The person presiding over the act was Ottobono Fieschi, the future Pope Adrian V: one of the men of most advanced culture and broadest contacts in all of Europe, and a member of a family that had already counted a pope – Sinibaldo, Innocent IV, another political genius, diplomat, and leading intellectual – and was ramified and influential in Italy and well beyond.[19] That Ottobono would call Cimabue as witness cannot be taken as anything but indicative of a relationship of trust, and almost certain proof that Cimabue was in Rome to work, perhaps for the nuns in question or for Ottobono himself, or his family or someone close; moreover, the date of the document is very close to the date of Cimabue's painting of the cross for the Church of St Dominic in Arezzo, while a few years later we find the painter active in the apse and transept of the Basilica of Assisi.[20] Cimabue was thus well placed with Dominicans and Franciscans. However misguided and erroneous it may have been to attempt to designate him as author of the Sancta Sanctorum frescos, the hypothesis of the painter's Roman activity remains entirely legitimate.[21] This enhances his profile as an artist, and a true premise for what would later be Giotto's extraordinary radiance; and once again it demonstrates how fragile and prejudicial are the representations of artistic events in terms of 'schools' divided by borders; let us also recall the case of Giunta Pisano in Rome only slightly earlier, in 1239.[22]

Giotto as a boy or very young man may therefore have had contact with the most elite of Roman circles, especially those of the cardinals; and through them he may have had access to the most venerable and also recent masterpieces of the Roman Middle Ages, such as the

[17] Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I commentarii (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, II, I, 333)*, Lorenzo Bartoli (ed.), Florence, 1998, p. 82; Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, Rosanna Bettarini (ed.), Paola Barocchi, (comm.) vol. II, Florence, 1967, pp. 96-97. On the culture at the court of the popes, I limit myself to referring to the numerous pioneering studies by Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, including the essays collected in *Medicina e scienza della natura alla corte dei papi e nel Duecento*, Spoleto, 1991.

[18] Rome, Archivio di Santa Maria Maggiore, A 45, 18 June 1272: published by Eugenio Battisti, *Cimabue*, Milan, 1963, p. 93. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti did not accept Cimabue as the artist's master in *Arte in Italia.* Vol. III, *Dal secolo xii al secolo xiii*, Florence, 1969, p. 1008.

[19] Battisti had not fully grasped the value of Ottobono Fieschi's presence, at the time of publishing the document, but I believe I was right to give the circumstance the utmost prominence (Romano, *La O*, pp. 121-122). Julian Gardner, "The artistic patronage of the Fieschi family", in Arturo C. Quintavalle (ed), *Le vie del Medioevo*, proceedings of the conference (Parma, 28 September-1 October 1998), Milan, 2000, pp. 309-318.

[20] Luciano Bellosi, *Cimabue*, Milan, 1998.

[21] The attribution of the Sancta Sanctorum was proposed by Luciano Bellosi ("Il maestro del Sancta Sanctorum", in Marco Bona Castellotti, Laura Laureati (ed.), *Scritti in onore di Giuliano Briganti*, Milan, 1990, pp. 21-36) but the restoration of the frescoes soon afterwards disproved it.

[22] Cesare Verani, "Giunta Pisano ha soggiornato a Roma?", *L'Arte* n.s., 23 (1958), pp. 241-242. The documentation is again a notarial deed, performed at the Roman basilica of San Clemente and witnessed by Giunta's son, Leonardo, already a cleric, and one of his pupils, Giovanni. The proposal that Giunta himself had relations with Rome and was there, perhaps to work, is widely accepted. Angelo Tartuferi, *Giunta Pisano*, Florence, 1996, p. 9; Andreina Draghi, *Gli affreschi dell'Aula gotica nel Monastero dei Santi Quattro Coronati. Una storia ritrovata*, Geneva-Milan, 2006, p. 89.

Sancta Sanctorum, a very modern point of Roman pictorial language, which in the portrait of Nicholas III, and in that of the chapel which the pope offers to Christ, constitutes in my opinion an ineradicable precedent for the other 'double' portrait, that of Enrico Scrovegni who, in Padua, offers *his* chapel to the Virgin.[23] Then there is the other document – 8 December 1313 – in which Giotto awards power of attorney to a certain Benedetto, so as to recover his possessions (including a bed, sheets and blankets) left with a certain Filippa da Rieti, domiciled at the Torre dei Conti in Rome where the painter had lived for an unspecified period of time, which in the writer's opinion is to be linked with his commitment, long and distributed in various stages over time, to the works in St Peter's.[24] Immense gaps have yet to be filled: but Giotto's familiarity with the Urbe cannot be doubted, certainly distributed over time but begun very early, in any case before he began his adventure in Padua.

II. It is in Padua, in fact, that the signs of knowledge of Antiquity – specifically, of a precise group of works certainly identifiable with Rome, because they still exist and were definitely known in the Middle Ages – mark a new and different peak. The experiences surfacing in the Assisi frescoes seem surpassed and flanked by new ones, touching the artist's sensibilities and for him, seeming to open up brand new possibilities.

The further revolutionary fact is that not only is the artist's reaction to ancient models completely unprecedented with respect to medieval culture, but also that it is achieved with respect to a more difficult *medium*. So not the friezes, the frames, the details, which certainly imply a new observation of pre-medieval works, but which had nevertheless enjoyed a tradition, at least partial, in the repertoires of the medieval workshops, mainly Roman. Taking the images documenting the lost mosaics of the dome of the Mausoleum of Constantina (4th century), the frescoes of the lower church of St Clement (late 11th century), the *Months* of the Gothic Hall of the Santi Quattro Coronati (1240s) and observing all these along with the frescoes of the Sancta Sanctorum (1277-1280), we see how, without any possibility of error, there is a continuity of motifs: the narrative fields that span the wall as if opening between curtains, the false curtains themselves, which we then realise are actually dolphins crossing their very long tails; the vases, the vine-shoots elegantly ascending – altogether a continuity spanning ten centuries, yet still fresh and recognisable to the observing artist.[25] On the other

[23] Serena Romano, "Il Sancta Sanctorum: gli affreschi", in *Sancta Sanctorum*, Milan, 1995, pp. 38-125.

[24] Firenze, Archivio di Stato, NA 9569, f. 34r: Schwarz, Theis, *Giottus Pictor,* p. 105. On the Vatican building site, long discounted in studies, Serena Romano, *Apogeo e fine del Medioevo 1288-1431* (Corpus della pittura medievale a Roma, vol. VI), Milan, 2017, pp. 244-263 and 281-289. I am personally skeptical about the dating of the *Navicella* around or even before the year 1300 (Miklos Boskovits, "Giotto a Roma", *Arte* Cristiana, 88 (2000), pp. 171-180), which is often taken for granted even in popular literature. To me, Boskovits' stylistic dating of the mosaic as we know it today seems very bold. I would feel more comfortable placing the mosaic in relation with the above-mentioned document of 1313, which indicates Giotto's recent stay in Rome - and a stay in Rome would have been unavoidable, to produce 16 meters of mosaic - but also given that by this time he had already returned to Florence, active, in my opinion, for the Peruzzi. The painterly touches perhaps still perceptible in the unfortunate mosaic and its copies could accord with this possibility and perhaps show some points of contact with the Peruzzi murals.

[25] For the cases cited, Simone Piazza in Maria Andaloro, *L'orizzonte tardoantico e le nuove immagini 312-468* (Corpus della pittura medievale a Roma, vol. I), Milan, 2006, pp. 72-78; Serena Romano, *Riforma e tradizione 1049-1198* (Corpus of Medieval Painting in Rome, vol. IV), Milan, 2006, pp. 129-150; Draghi, *Gli affreschi*; Romano, "Il Sancta Sanctorum".

hand, any inspiration from the language of sculpture seems very rare and difficult through the Middle Ages. Certainly the mistrust towards representation 'in the round', i.e. towards three-dimensional anthropomorphism, may have weighed in this sense: the artist who created statues could risk perceiving himself as a Creator of the human being, in obvious comparison with the first book of Genesis. Giotto countered this risk with the most intellectual of remedies, because he was not a sculptor but a painter, and therefore worked through metaphors, through conceptual abstraction, through two-dimensional overturning: purifying passages, so to speak, a mental stage quite different from the simple and banal imitation of a technique and a material; we will return to this aspect in closing, regarding the *Vices* and *Virtues* skirting the Paduan chapel.

However, the point I would like to make here is that Giotto did appeal to ancient sculpture, with reference to a specific class of ancient works and specific places of possible knowledge[26]. A class of works that offered precise characteristics, and which became a sort of schoolbook, an exercise manual, a guiding pool of innovation and experimentation: once again, a selective and conscious *gaze* on the part of the artist, which also informs us of the 'landscape' in which Giotto moved, which he came to know, and which as a newcomer he did not perceive as a normal everyday presence, but as a striking revelation, a new pool of possibilities.

We are in the 'archaeological' triangle of Rome, the one that extends from the Forum of Caesar to that of Nerva, then flanks a straight stretch of Via Lata – the most aristocratic quarter of the Roman Middle Ages – and arrives at Campo Marzio: the *Show Area*, to use Krautheimer's definition.[27] In the space of a few hundred metres, as in an open-air museum, there appeared the Colosseum and the ancient temples transformed as Christian churches, the imperial triumphal arches, the honorary columns, and then the Augustan monuments, at risk in the lower area of Campo Marzio. For centuries, after the end of the Empire, what is now the '*Parco Archeologico*' – a name well befitting a context where ancient memories today descend almost to the level of a Disneyland – had been the day-to-day world of the citizenry of early medieval Rome: a public space, still luxurious and elitist, but then gradually amputated of its referents and becoming a built space that no longer belonged to anyone. Next it was occupied by newly powerful – but perhaps more mediocre – people, whose names were *de Imiza, Kaloleo*, *de balneo Miccino*, and who inserted themselves amidst those grandiose ruins in cobbled-together houses and shops (Fig. 4), as occupants or landlords: nesting among imperial marbles yet with we-know-not-what perceptions of these.[28]

[26] Here I should like to remember the recent and excellent study by Klaus Krüger, *Giottos Figuren*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2023, focusing on the fake sculptures of the Vices and Virtues in the Scrovegni Chapel, with a deep conceptualization and many new and useful remarks concerning the use of models, also sculptural, by Giotto.

[27] I refer to Hendrik Dey, *The Making of Medieval Rome. A New Profile of the City, 400-1420*, Cambridge, 2021, which highlights the survival of ancient architecture and public spaces in a medieval Rome in which the original 'owners' (i.e. the ancient State, the Empire with its responsible magistracies) no longer existed. For the definition of the *Show Area*, Richard Krautheimer, *Rome. Profile of a city 312-1308*, Princeton, 1980, pp. 12-13; Dey, *The Making*, p. 30 and passim.

[28] Dey, *The Making*, pp. 237 ff., on the basis of the many studies by Roberto Meneghini and Riccardo Santangeli Valenzani, especially Roberto Meneghini, Riccardo Santangeli Valenzani, *Roma nell'altomedioevo. Topografia e urbanistica della città dal v al x secolo*, Rome 2004, and Riccardo Santangeli Valenzani, "L'insediamento aristocratico

Fig. 4
Reconstruction of the Foro di Nerva during the 10th century. Photo: Roma, Sovraintendenza Capitolina

Giotto, then, found a vast panorama with a great range of possibilities, yet very clearly his prehensile gaze fell first of all on the ancient *public* works: those pompous and representative ones, so many of which were preserved and in view during the Middle Ages, sometimes emerging in the liturgical texts of medieval Rome, or in the fable-like transfigurations of the *Mirabilia*, but clearly familiar to citizens and visitors from afar. Giotto snubs some of them, so to speak. Take, for example, the Trajan Column, always in view throughout the Middle Ages and considered a precious heritage to be protected at all costs – we recall the document of the Commune of Rome of 1164, which imposed the death penalty on anyone who damaged the column.[29] Many intelligent studies – Brilliant, for one – have well described the non-intelligibility of the stories depicted, composed of a crowd of small figures, immersed in a flow wrapping upward, in which the eye can barely catch a rhythm, relying on the relief of this or that head or detail punctuating the sculpted surface, but nevertheless becoming, as the gaze continues upwards, increasingly eloquent in their magnificent whole and increasingly less comprehensible in the single detail.[30]

In this mode, Giotto is clearly not interested, although the painter who flanks and replaces him in the final scene of the Assisi cycle paints a helical-historiated column in the

a Roma nel IX-X secolo", in Manuel Royo, Etienne Hubert, Agnès Bérenger (éd), *«Rome des quartiers»: des Vici aux Rioni. Cadres institutionnels, pratiques sociales, et requalifications entre Antiquité et époque moderne*, Acts of the international colloquium at the Sorbonne (20-21 May 2005), Paris, 2008, pp. 229-245.

[29] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio di Santa Maria in Via Lata, cass. 317, n.1: Franco Bartoloni, *Codice diplomatico del Senato Romano dal MCXLIV al MCCCXLVII*, Rome, 1948, note 18; Ingrid Baumgärtner, "Rombeherrschung und Romerneuerung. Die Römische Kommune im 12. Jahrhundert", *Quellen und Forschungen aus Römischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 69 (1989), pp. 27-79, with the earlier municipal document of 1119 containing a similar anathema for anyone who damaged the Column of Marcus Aurelius.

[30] Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art. The Use of Gesture to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage*, New Haven, 1963.

Liberation of Pietro d'Alife (Fig. 3): the portrait is evocative, but the features of the Trajan sculpture remain secondary compared to the verbal and figurative games – column/Column, homage to Pope Nicholas IV/to the Roman family with which he was inextricably linked – and the desire to create the grafting of the column united with a prison below, of which there is no documentary evidence.[31]

If not the famous spiral, what does fascinate Giotto is the icastic and didactic language of the large marble panels, made especially in imperial Rome to adorn public monuments, celebrating the deeds of emperors: but even in this sort of discovery his gaze is selective, and yet his choice almost allows us trace his routes, his walks to discover antiquities, as seen a century later when Brunelleschi, Donatello, Poggio Bracciolini and Lorenzo Ghiberti strolled the centre of Rome.[32]

Some of the ancient monumental presences in the area had perhaps already disappeared. The most obvious example is the Ara Pacis, buried as early as late antiquity. The doubt that the disappearance was total remains, if we consider that around 1280 on the site of the altar, Cardinal Hugo of Evesham built his residence, which in 1427 passed to another cardinal, La Rochetaille. Perhaps some fragments of the Ara emerged in the process of excavating the palace foundations? Studies have raised the possibility, but without evidence, as the first certain testimony continues to be the 1536 engraving of the frieze by Agostino Veneziano.[33] However, the representational system to which the celebrated altar processions belong (Fig. 5) – with none of the many others surviving in ancient monuments appearing to me so suggestive – is difficult to eliminate from the conception of at least two of the Paduan frescoes, namely the *Wedding Procession* of the Virgin, and the *Road to Calvary* (Fig. 6): the alignment of the figures, their forming in dynamic groups, the *allure* of movement along a foreground occupied by the main characters and with receding secondary planes containing the outline figures – all these compositional solutions, non-existent in pre-Giottesque painting and also in the Assisi cycle, are an absolute novelty.

However – to show how Giotto's 'gaze' is not reducible to rigid categories – I reiterate a detail that might seem minimal, and which instead is to my eyes spectacular: precisely in the *Road to Calvary*, Christ is preceded in his passage by two figures, seeming to lead the procession. One looks ahead, making towards the goal, the other appears with his back to us and

[31] Irene Hueck, "Frühe Arbeiten des Simone Martini", *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst*, s. 3, 19 (1968), pp. 29-60; Frugoni, *Quale Francesco?*, pp. 405-418.

[32] Romano, *Apogeo*, pp. 24-25; Maria Beltramini, Laura Cavazzini, "Il viaggio a Roma di Brunelleschi e Donatello nel racconto delle fonti", in Walter Angelelli, Serena Romano, *La linea d'ombra. Roma 1378-1420*, Rome, 2019, pp. 425-441. From the writings of the cited authors, and from other chronicles noted in the bibliography, it is evident how the passage from the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century was one of the most damaging moments for the ancient remains of the city.

[33] Salvatore Settis, "Die Ara Pacis", in *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik*, exhibition catalogue (Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, 7 June-14 August 1988), Mainz, 1988, pp. 400-425, part. 402; Jean-Charles Balty, "Jean Cousin et l'*Ara pacis*", in Nicole Blanc, André Buisson (éd.), *Imago Antiquitatis. Religions et iconographie du monde romain. Mélanges offerts à Robert Turcan*, Paris, 1999, on Tellus; and Serena Romano, "Rome et l'Antique: XI^{e}-XII^{e} siècles. Remarques, souvenirs, considérations éparses", *Les cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 39 (2008), pp. 23-30, on the subject of the headband with acanthus whorls in the mosaic of St Clement in Rome.

Fig. 5 Rome, Ara Pacis, procession. Photo: from O. Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, Milan, 2006, p. 75

Fig. 6 Padua, Scrovegni chapel. Giotto, *Andata al Calvario*. Photo: Ghiraldini, Padova, Musei Civici

turning towards Christ, as if to ensure he is following. If one considers the iconographic tradition, we should think that the character with his back turned would be pulling Christ with a rope: but of this, even allowing for the damage to the pictorial layer, I cannot discern any trace.[34] So the two characters seem to be there to mark movement, to communicate the idea of moving on, so much so that the more distant character even has his face cut in half, as if he portrayed in the act of leaving the frame, to use a cinematic concept. Both seem to move as if embarking on an ascent, and in fact beneath their feet the rocky path begins climbing: as though the story were being told along a frieze that rises and turns, as in helical columns.

[34] On the iconography of the *Kreuztragung*, Gertrud Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, Bd. 2, *Die Passion Christi*, Gütersloh, 1968, pp. 88-93.

In a brand new way with respect to Assisi, the mode of the ascending sculpted frieze is thus suggested here: only from sculpture could it be derived.

III. Even if we accept an Ara Pacis buried and invisible in Giotto's time, there still remains absolute certainty about the visibility of a series of other ancient sculptures through the Middle Ages: works somewhat later than the Augustan era but even more fertile as picks for a new conception of space and the actors of representation.

These are all datable between the later times of Hadrian and the threshold of those of Antoninus Pius, centring on Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. We know many of them as reliefs created to adorn public monuments celebrating the deeds of the new emperors, and as such displayed on the honorary arches that marked the triumphs and the taking possession of the empire by the new powerful. As is well known, since triumphal arches were 'objects' to be realised in great haste, older arches were often demolished, disassembling the reliefs that adorned them and reusing them for the new ones. Needless to say, this process was not purely utilitarian, and the panels reused would be chosen for appropriate thematic consonances, contributing to the construction of meaning and also guaranteeing the continuity of virtues between one emperor and the next, with the predecessor the model of the successor.[35]

Honorary arches dotted the medieval city: the *Mirabilia* and *Ordines Romani* mention them, so do medieval travel and pilgrimage literature and the liturgical texts of the Roman Middle Ages, and archaeology informs of many others. The Middle Ages regarded them with respect and perhaps a little fear, ghosts of a distant past, no longer loquacious but still imposing, alongside the other vestiges of Antiquity: the walls, gates, temples, baths, and so on.[36] Some of them even enter medieval liturgical itineraries and take on a symbolic value, somewhere between exorcism and admiration. A great deal of attention has recently been paid to the Arch of Titus, considering its symbolic role in the pontifical processions and papal *adventus*, and hypothesising that the Scrovegni Chapel itself represents, in its architectural forms and decorative apparatus, a sort of avatar of the arch, an ideal replica conceived in relation to and following a circumstance that remains hypothetical, however, namely that Enrico Scrovegni and Giotto himself were in Rome in the Jubilee year of 1300.[37] According to

[35] See further on in the text, and footnotes 39-40.

[36] For the texts of the *Mirabilia*, Roberto Valentini, Giuseppe Zucchetti, *Codice topografico della città di Roma*, vol. III, Rome, 1946.

[37] This was essentially the thesis of Henrike Christiane Lange, *Giotto's Arena Chapel and the Triumph of Humility*, Cambridge, 2023, especially pp. 53-109, which is based on recent studies on the Arch of Titus (in particular, Stephen Fine (ed.), *The Arch of Titus: From Jerusalem to Rome - and back*, Leiden-Boston 2021), and others related to Roman processional liturgies (such as Susan Twyman, *Papal Ceremonial at Rome in the Twelfth Century*, London, 2002) and the Jewish-Roman relationship, moreover a fashionable topic (Marie Thérèse Champagne, Ra'anan S. Boustan, "Walking in the Shadows of the Past: The Jewish Experience of Rome in the Twelfth Century", in Louis I. Hamilton, Stefano Riccioni (ed.), *Rome Re-Imagined: Twelfth-Century Jews, Christians and Muslims Encounter the Eternal City*, Leiden, 2011, pp. 52-82, and Marie-Thérèse Champagne, "Pagan Rome in the Service of the Church: Christian Perceptions of the Arch of Titus in the Middle Ages", in Fine (ed.), *The Arch of Titus*, pp. 63-74. I would like to point out that Henrike Lange, in his reasoning, takes for granted data that are not at all certain, writing «Giotto was employed in Rome in the 1290s and in 1300" (p.34); "Most of the characters, including Giotto himself, are documented [sic] as having participated on the event [the Jubilee]"(p. 52); "Giotto's confirmed presence as papal painter [sic] from circa 1295/97 to 1300 is one of few documented facts about Giotto's Roman period" (p. 53). All

this hypothesis, the inclusion of the arches in the Christian and papal itineraries would have strong meaning concerning the victory of Christianity over paganism, combined in the Arch of Titus with an anti-Jewish accentuation arising from the memory of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem and the transport of the sacred Jewish relics to Rome, as narrated by the reliefs on the arch itself. Similarly, the chapel in Padua – as evidenced by the well-known but lost epigraph of consecration – was built on an ancient site whose malign character it amends through transformation as a Christian context.[38] Fascinating as this hypothesis may be, I cannot identify a strict citational mode of the Titus arch in the Paduan chapel, nor does the distribution of the figurative apparatuses appear to me to be truly comparable; it was not, in my opinion, the Arch of Titus that 'taught' Giotto the most.

What really fascinated him, it seems to me, was what we could call the 'realism' of the Trajan and Aurelian sculpture, a realism – and here we return to one of the themes we began from – that is most evident in the official reliefs celebrating the emperor's virtues and affixing them high on arches, set against the Roman sky.[39] These are the virtues – *justitia*, *virtus militaris, liberalitas, pietas* – at once civil and religious; the emperor, who is also *Pontifex Maximus*, is shown performing them, accompanied by other characters and objects bearing significance. Each character is large in size, portrayed in a naturalistic, convincing manner; gestures are solemn but calm.[40] They appear, in a word, 'real', and obviously this 'truth' is the instrument of propaganda and political persuasion; an idealised and magniloquent 'realism'.

Certainly not by chance, the examples that in the writer's opinion are the most intriguing in relation to the frescoes in Padua are exactly those most certainly endowed with a long, diachronic history of existence, use and reuse within the heart of the city. These are the eight reliefs detached from an Aurelian arch and repurposed in that of Constantine;[41] three others, probably not detached from the same structure but similar in size and thematic categories, were hung in the space adjacent to the Curia, which was used for related functions, probably judicial; and they remained there even when the Curia was converted into a church – St Hadrian's – and the adjacent space into another church, St Martina, separated from St Hadrian's by a further space, as evidenced by the drawing of Antonio da Sangallo.[42] Fifteenth-sixteenth century testimonies ascertain that not only the three reliefs we know today

this is far from being "documented" and risks to appear a *raccourci* to a coveted but not solid arrival point. Many of the author's other observations are truly stimulating - such as those on the reflections that the polychromy of ancient sculptures can be perceived and reflected in Giotto's frescoes, or the remarks about the "fake walls" in the chapel – and I am sorry to disagree on such a central point of her book: but I cannot succeed to look at the Scrovegni Chapel as a 'copy' of the Arch of Titus.

[38] This is the epigraph as recorded by Scardeone in 1560 ("*Hic locus, antiquo de nomine dictus Arena.... Ut loca plena mail, in res convertat honestas...*"): Romano, *La O*, p. 161.

[39] An exhaustive bibliography is impossible here; I merely refer to La Rocca, *Reliefs*; Inez Scott Ryberg, *Panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius*, New York, 1967.

[40] Essential on the 'languages' of Roman art: Tonio Hölscher, *Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System*, Heidelberg, 1967.

[41] Hans-Peter L'Orange, *Der Spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens*, Berlin, 1939, t. 1, pp. 52-102.

[42] On the reliefs, Maria Laura Cafiero in La Rocca, *Rilievi*, pp. 38-44, with provenance from the *Arcus Panis Aurei.* Romano, *La O,* pp.203-205; the drawing is Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto dei disegni, no. 1143.

were preserved in St Martina: Poggio Bracciolini and Francesco Albertini define it as decorated '*undique*' – everywhere – by ancient sculptures.[43] St Martina hosted judicial functions throughout the Middle Ages. Although we cannot be certain, it is likely that the original civil and political destination of the two buildings exerted influence, facilitating the acclimatisation of the sculptures and their official and solemn subjects in contexts that gradually acquired different meanings and functions. In fact it seems they were peacefully accepted within buildings consecrated to Christian worship, where Giotto could certainly see them – perhaps even more readily than the eight panels reinstalled high on the Arch of Constantine. As is well known, in 1515 Leon X then had the reliefs dismantled from St Martina and taken to the Campidoglio, where they rest today: since 1572 mounted on the walls of the first landing of the Palazzo dei Conservatori.[44] Two further reliefs appear on the walls of the second landing – the *Institutio alimentaria* and the *Apotheosis of Sabina* – from a further arch, originally connected with the funeral spaces of Empress Sabina: but these are less generative to Giottesque language.[45] Two further panels also appear important: these were originally on the arch in Via di Pietra, were displaced in Palazzo Sciarra, and are now separate, one – the *Adventus* of Hadrian – at the Palazzo dei Conservatori, the other – the *Supplicatio* – at Villa Torlonia.[46]

The study – I have no other possible terms – of this phase of Roman sculpture allowed Giotto to break out of the compositional systems we see in operation in Assisi, already so revolutionary in themselves. The Assisi schemes are very well studied: for instance, characters arranged in the foreground as if on a theatrical *stage* (the *Gift of the mantle*), or figures and architecture arranged around a central void (the *Renunciation of worldly goods*, the *Expulsion of the devils from Arezzo*) or the inhabited interior, the fourth side of which tends to encompass the observer (the *Confirmation of the rule*, the *Death of Francis*, the *Verification of the stigmata*); variations on the themes are obviously many. A few years later, at the Scrovegni there is the turning point, always intended – so it seems – towards a greater significance, conciseness, and calm drama in the construction of the space and in the rendering of the action, as well as maximum concentration in the *gesture* in which the action takes place and which becomes the formal and conceptual focus both of the iconographic scheme and of the entire content.

This is seen in the *Sacrifice* from St Martina (Fig. 7), juxtaposed with the Paduan *Arrest of Christ* (Fig. 8). For this same scene, a few years earlier in Assisi, in the span immediately preceding Giotto's appearance in the two stories of Isaac, the so-called Maestro della Cattura had constructed a mighty bipartite scheme, with the central group of Christ and Judas – both larger than all the other characters – and crowds on either side: Giotto had certainly observed this well.[47] In Padua, however, he reflects on how the ancient *Sacrifice* is otherwise

[43] Romano, *The O*, p. 204.

[44] Cafiero in La Rocca, *Rilievi*, pp. 38-44.

[45] They come from the Arch of Portugal, extant into the 17th century. Marina Bertoletti in La Rocca, *Rilievi*, pp. 21-23.

[46] Cafiero in La Rocca, *Rilievi*, p. 12-16, with the many vicissitudes of the *Adventus* in which the heads of Marcus Aurelius and (today) Hadrian have alternated, and which in 1595 and the following years underwent heavy interventions in which the arms and hands of the central group were remade.

[47] On the Maestro della Cattura, Alessandro Tomei, *Jacobus Torriti pictor. Una vicenda figurativa del tardo Duecento romano*, Rome, 1990, esp. pp. 65-66.

Fig. 7 Rome, palazzo dei Conservatori. Sacrificium from Santa Martina (from E. La Rocca (ed), *L'età dell'equilibrio*, Roma, 2012)

Fig. 8 Padua, Scrovegni chapel. Giotto, *The Arrest of Christ*. Photo: Ghiraldini, Padova, Musei Civici

structured, and does likewise in his *Arrest*. Above, the sky, occupied by the torches and spears of the soldiers, echoes the partitioning of the crowd into two blocks, a major one including Christ, the other of bystanders and soldiers; in the *Sacrifice*, the buildings realised in an atmospheric flattening set out a background in two 'stages', the major one a temple pediment coinciding with the figure of the priest-emperor, the other occupied by a building seen from the side, with a combat of children against animals atop. The lower half of the relief, on the other hand, taught Giotto how to form an ovoid space by means of the converging positions of the figures, all oriented towards the centre where the narration of *action* takes place: the narrative *climax* is represented as a solemn clustering, closed on itself, and the figure of Christ seems to be the *doubling* of that of Marcus Aurelius, both *priestly* in their sacrifice. A similar narrative and formal synthesis also develops in the *Adventus* (Fig. 9), where the intertwining of arms and hands brings a greater plastic emergence exactly where the action takes place – Hadrian meets the personification of Rome and the Senate who offer him the orb of power[48] – so that the eye cannot mistake the 'point' of the story, just as Giotto does similarly (think of the *Marriage of the Virgin*) using the positions of his outline characters in three-quarter view and in profile to 'close' the central, significant core of the narrative.

At other times, however, the scheme varies and becomes more complicated: Giotto also seems to react to the different timbre of the reliefs from St Martina compared to those on the Arch of Constantine, and although certainly untouched by the problems of modern

[48] As mentioned in footnote 45, it is precisely this point that was affected by the sixteenth-seventeenth century reconstruction; however, I doubt that the restoration has greatly distorted the original design.

Fig. 9 Rome, palazzo dei Conservatori. Hadrian's Adventus from palazzo Sciarra (from E. La Rocca (ed), *L'età dell'equilibrio*, Roma, 2012)

philology, he identifies the different solutions and adapts them.[49] Looking at the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* (Fig. 10), one of the most innovative scenes of the entire cycle in Padua, compared to one of the reliefs still on the arch, the *Profectio* (Fig. 11), or *Departure of the Emperor*, it is difficult not to wonder whether Giotto would have worked on the same idea of the diagonal running through the entire composition and establishing the dynamic *allure* of the subject. The 'action' is emphasised by the plastic prominence of the figure of the emperor, and by the embracing couple, Joachim and Anna, rendered pictorially in foreground. The background is ensured, in the relief, by the hint of a triumphal arch flattened and placed diagonally behind the emperor, just as the monumental arch, perhaps that of Rimini, is portrayed diagonally – this one also ancient, although with Gothic battlements, as for the Temple of Minerva in Assisi.[50] Or again, in the *Expulsion of the money-changers from the temple* (Fig. 12), the painter has aligned the scene in front of a complicated and Gothic 'backdrop', but then added, largely *a secco*, a whole series of details – the goats exiting towards left, the cage with birds placed on the ground and the other held by the character in grey, the sheep and the ram moving rightward – which obey the same compositional *rationale* as the objects sculpted in the *Lustratio* (Fig. 13) of the Arch of Constantine and suggest a similar mental association with the objects brought for sacrificial offering (reduced, in the Christian context, to merchandise).

[49] I will not go into the arguments about the provenance of the two groups of reliefs from the same arch, or from two different arches. Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli ("Un problema di Arte Romana: il Maestro delle imprese di Traiano", *Le Arti*, 2 (1938-1939), IV, pp. 325-334: this was his inaugural lecture at the University of Florence in January 1939, and has been republished several times, in *Storicità dell'arte classica,* Florence, 1950, pp. 211-228, and as an autonomous dossier, Milan, 2003) left the question open, noting the stylistic leap between the two groups but not excluding that in the same original arch the two groups could have coexisted, the eight more mature ones being the result of the grafting of models and style that he traced back to the influence of the sculptor of the frieze from Ephesus, now in Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Personally, I believe it would be very strange for the Constantinian rearrangers to have had such philological sensitivity that they chose among the reliefs of the same arch precisely those that were stylistically homogeneous. The solution of two separate arches certainly seems the most logical. In any case, this specific problem has no impact on Giotto's reception.

[50] Perhaps the Arch of Augustus in Rimini: Romano, *La O*, pp. 188 and 201.

Fig. 10 Padua, Scrovegni chapel. Giotto, *The Meeting at the Golden Gate*. Photo: Ghiraldini, Padova, Musei Civici

Fig. 11 Rome, Arch of Costantine. Emperor's *Profectio*. Photo: Roma, Sovraintendenza Capitolina

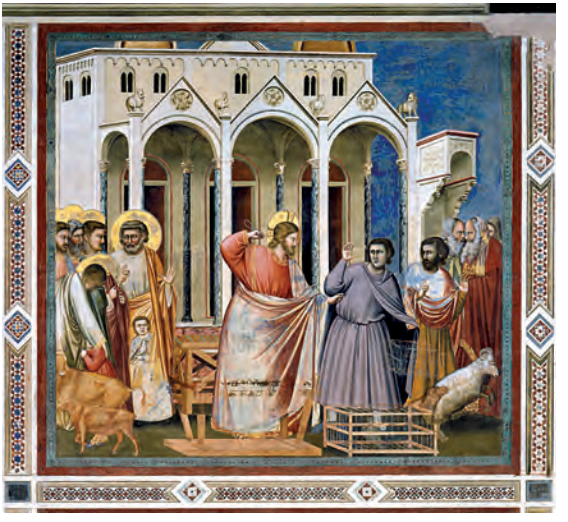

Fig. 12 Padua, Scrovegni chapel. Giotto, *Expulsion of the money-changers from the temple*. Photo: Ghiraldini, Padova, Musei Civici

Fig. 13 Rome, Arch of Costantine. *Lustratio*. Photo: Roma, Sovraintendenza Capitolina

The examples could truly be many, and equally, the proposed comparisons cannot be exclusive: Giotto's imagination resembles Picasso's, as an omnivorous ability to capture cues and solutions that – in this way unlike Picasso – have at their centre the ancient *album* of the great Roman past. Let us add one last example, that of the *Adoration of the magi* (Fig.

14), another absolute masterpiece of the Paduan series. Giotto composes the space here with a further and differently revolutionary course, a sort of spiral with its point of arrival in the figure of the Child and formed by figures placed in full or three-quarter profile with respect to the background plane, as in the forementioned *Profectio.* In both – and unlike in the more static *Sacrifice* – the action seems to wrap around, bordered by the two figures of the magi and the emperor placed in profile/three quarters, functioning almost as a backdrop. The semi-recumbent River and the kneeling magi seem mutually referential, while the Holy Family and the angel-assistants are placed diagonally, accompanied by the canopy that sets off their space and assonates with the triumphal arch, also placed diagonally to suggest a three-dimensional space. In the *Adoration*, moreover, the figure of the squire holding the camel's bridle appears – already extensively noted in the studies – and is a precise quotation of the Dioscuri of Montecavallo (Fig. 15), seen from below as rendered by the gaze of the painter, who contemplated them from below. And unforgettable is the study by Monica Donato, who years ago showed how the "signatures" that appeared on the pedestals – *Opus Fidiae*, *Opus Praxitelis* – were transposed in the *Mirabilia* and thus known in the Middle Ages along with the two hyper-celebrated statues, always in view from antiquity to the present[51]. Giotto echoed them in his own signature: changing the medieval typology of the inscriptions (*fieri fecit...*) into the more self-conscious and proud *Opus Iocti Florentini.*[52] And Donato herself very

Fig. 14 Padua, Scrovegni chapel. Giotto, *Adoration of the magi*. Photo: Ghiraldini, Padova, Musei Civici

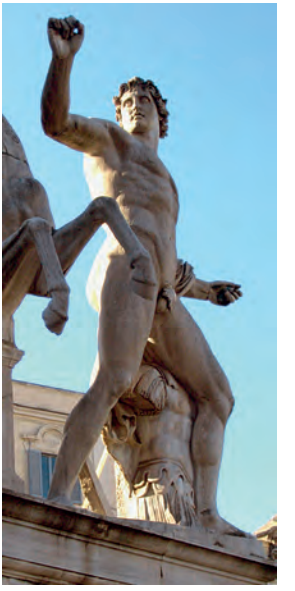

Fig. 15 Rome, Quirinale square. *The Dioscuri* (part.). Photo: author

[51] It is well known that they could not have been proper "signatures", but they were understood like that: see Donato, "Memorie degli artisti", p. 328, with the reference to Benzo of Alba (†1089), MGH SS, XI, p. 621, 4.

[52] Donato, "Memorie degli artisti", sp. pp. 528-530.

appropriately pointed out how in the *Mirabilia* the pair of two young men with horses had been read in a Christological key, that is, as the *principes potentes* bowing to the *true* king, to Christ: thus, the same thematic nucleus of the *Adoration.*[53]

IV. In conclusion, and aware of how much more needs to be said on a problem so vast as 'Giotto and Antiquity', I would however like to mention an issue relating to what I noted earlier about Giotto's intellectual transposition, capturing suggestions from three-dimensional works and translating them into pictorial language: a mode that is somewhat different from what we have just seen. While in fact the reliefs had functioned for him as a book of possibilities of which, without certainty, we have hypothesised that he had intuited the original content and also wished to partially transpose its moral and communicative charge, with this last example it seems to me that we can see an even more integral 'translation' procedure, because perhaps facilitated by the medieval 'filter', of an ancient model into one of his modern inventions. These are his imitation marbles with the *Vices* and *Virtues*, inspired by the *Nationes*, i.e. the personifications of the peoples subjugated by and allied with Rome.[54] Once again those were numerous in the urban landscape: one remains *in situ* in the temple of the Forum of Nerva, but this was certainly not an isolated figure as it appears today, rather part of a choreography. The *Nationes* in fact functioned in groups, set in series along the flanks of temples and by their presence guaranteeing the 'safety' of Rome: a concept maintained in medieval fables, when female personifications were believed to defend the Capitol and warn of dangers with their bells, in what was a nobler version of the legend of the geese.[55]

Figuratively speaking, the series of *Nationes* were alternated with mirrored marbles: like the series of *Virtues* and *Vices* at the Scrovegni (Fig. 16) They were placed at the top, crowning the elevations, as in the temple of the Forum of Nerva (Fig. 17), although it has also been hypothesised that in other cases they would have been placed at the bottom, on the outside, encircling the perimeter of a temple, notably the ones from the destroyed Hadrianeum, whose columns still survive in the Piazza di Pietra.[56] Disassembled and dispersed, examples of the *Nationes* exist in various museums, as well as on the façade of Villa Medici; a long series is found in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitoline, and many other series are documented in the drawings of the Vatican codices.[57] Dupérac's sixteenth-century engraving attests that at least some had been reused in the plinth on the sides of the Pantheon.[58]

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[53] *Ibidem*, p. 529.

[54] Romano, *La O*, pp. 216-228, with attention to the fact that the genealogical tree of this invention involves Gothic concepts and models, on which I have no opportunity to dwell here, but which are structural in Giotto's culture and imagination: it would be anti-historical to think that his creativity depended solely on the 'bridge' with Antiquity.

[55] *Ibid*. The blatant 'resemblance' of the *Fides* to the Pyrrhusian people personified on the attic of the Temple of Minerva temple in the Forum of Nerva had already been noted by Selma Pfeiffenberg, *The Iconology of Giotto's Virtues and Vices*, PhD thesis at Bryn Mawr College, 1966, a pioneering work that unfortunately the author never continued or published. However, Pfeiffenberg did not realise that the comparison must be established with the entire class of *Nationes*, and not with a single image.

[56] Marina Sapelli, *Provinciae Fideles. Il fregio del Tempio di Adriano in Campo Marzio*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, Palazzo Massimo 1999), Rome, 1999.

[57] Vatican Apostolic Library, Vat. lat. 4333.

[58] Sapelli, *Provinciae*, p. 79. The engraving is from 1575.

Fig. 16 Padua, Scrovegni chapel. Giotto, *Fides, Caritas and fake marbles*. Photo: Ghiraldini, Padova, Musei Civici

Fig. 17 Rome, Forum of Nerva, Temple of Minerva. *The Natio of the Pirusti*. Photo: author

A view of their current state convinces of the similarities: in the alternation of mirrored marbles and figures, in the mode of silhouetting statues against a background, and above all in the overall impression of a symbolic but realistic series of 'living' beings encircling a space, as it must have been for the Hadrianic temple. An intriguing hypothesis is that these female personifications had been installed there not only for the preciousness of the material or even the hasty reinforcement of a wall, but because the sense of a kind of guard had survived, in defence of a space now dedicated to the Virgin: Santa Maria ad Martyres.[59] But that is where Giotto saw them; a few metres away from the Ara Pacis, at the end of a walk that had led him from the *Show Area* to Campo Marzio. And then he left for Padua.

[59] Sible de Blaauw, "Das Pantheon als christlicher Tempel", in M. Jordan-Ruwe, U. Real (ed), *Bild- und Formensprache der spätantiken Kunst. Hugo Brandenburg zum 65. Geburtstag* (Boreas, vol. 17), Berlin, 1994, pp. 13-26; Erik Thunø, "The Pantheon in the Middle Ages", in Tod A. Marder, Mark Wilson Jones (ed), *The Pantheon from Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 231-254.