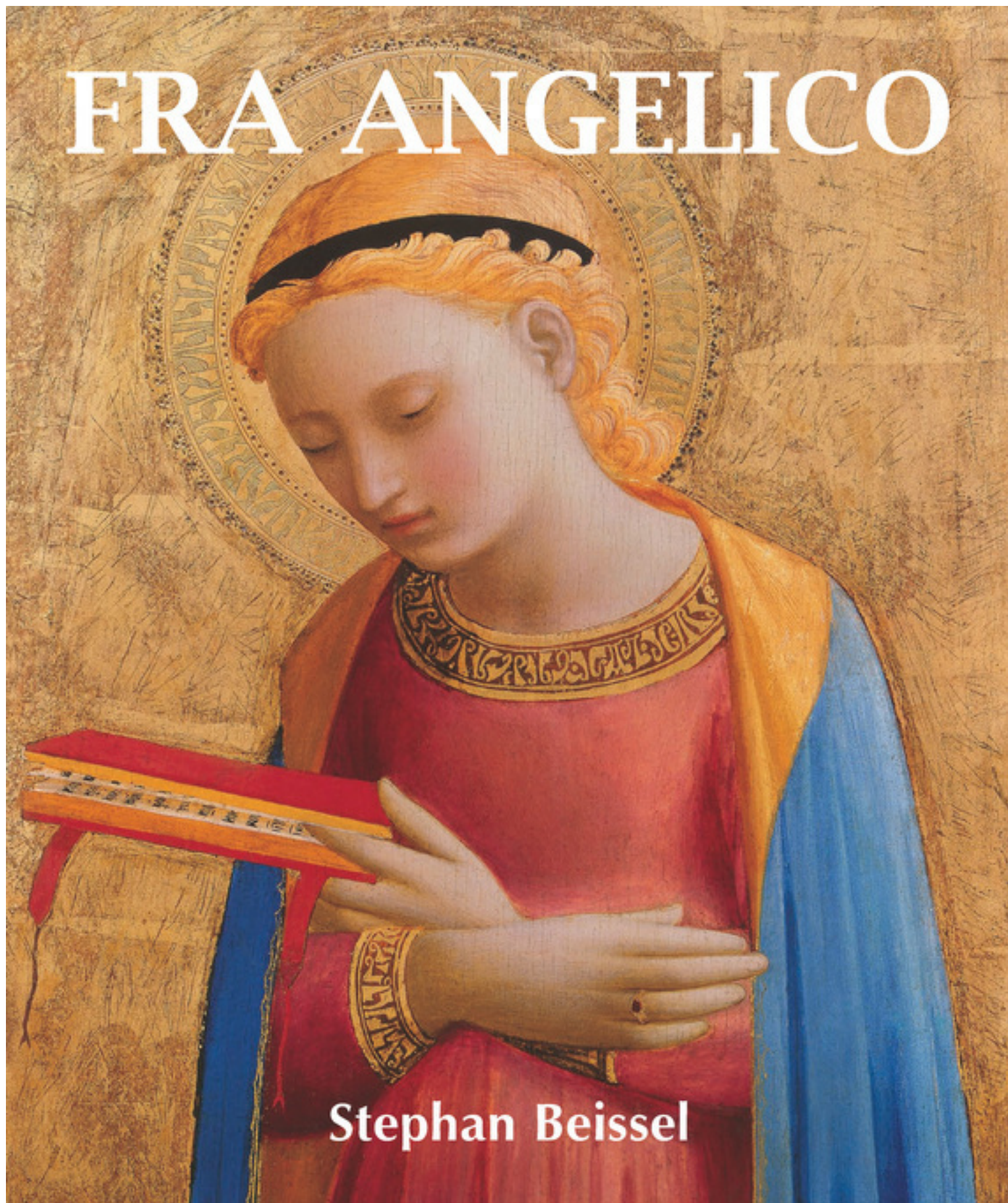


FRA ANGELICO



Stephan Beissel

Temporis

Stephan Beissel

Fra Angelico

«Parkstone International Publishing»

Beissel S.

Fra Angelico / S. Beissel — «Parkstone International Publishing», — (Temporis)

ISBN 978-1-78042-984-7

Secluded within cloister walls, a painter and a monk, and brother of the order of the Dominicans, Angelico devoted his life to religious paintings. Little is known of his early life except that he was born at Vicchio, in the broad fertile valley of the Mugello, not far from Florence, that his name was Guido de Pietro, and that he passed his youth in Florence, probably in some botteggha, for at twenty he was recognised as a painter. In 1418 he entered in a Dominican convent in Fiesole with his brother. They were welcomed by the monks and, after a year's novitiate, admitted to the brotherhood, Guido taking the name by which he was known for the rest of his life, Fra Giovanni da Fiesole; for the title of Angelico, the "Angel," or Il Beato, "The Blessed," was conferred on him after his death. Henceforth he became an example of two personalities in one man: he was all in all a painter, but also a devout monk; his subjects were always religious ones and represented in a deeply religious spirit, yet his devotion as a monk was no greater than his absorption as an artist. Consequently, though his life was secluded within the walls of the monastery, he kept in touch with the art movements of his time and continually developed as a painter. His early work shows that he had learned of the illuminators who inherited the Byzantine traditions, and had been affected by the simple religious feeling of Giotto's work. Also influenced by Lorenzo Monaco and the Sienese School, he painted under the patronage of Cosimo de Medici. Then he began to learn of that brilliant band of sculptors and architects who were enriching Florence by their genius. Ghiberti was executing his pictures in bronze upon the doors of the Baptistery; Donatello, his famous statue of St. George and the dancing children around the organ-gallery in the Cathedral; and Luca della Robbia was at work upon his frieze of children, singing, dancing and playing upon instruments. Moreover, Masaccio had

revealed the dignity of form in painting. Through these artists the beauty of the human form and of its life and movement was being manifested to the Florentines and to the other cities. Angelico caught the enthusiasm and gave increasing reality of life and movement to his figures.

ISBN 978-1-78042-984-7

© Beissel S.

© Parkstone International Publishing

Содержание

Fra Angelico's Early Training and his Work in Cortona and Perugia	7
Stay and Work in Fiesole	33
Fra Angelico's Stay in Florence, and his Murals at the Convento di San Marco	67
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	72

Stephan Beissel

Fra Angelico

© Parkstone Press International, New York, USA

© Confidential Concepts, Worldwide, USA

Image-Bar www.image-bar.com

Fra Angelico's Early Training and his Work in Cortona and Perugia



1. Annunciatory Angel, 1450–1455. Tempera and gold on wood panel, 33 × 27 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.



2. The Annunciation (depicted in an historiated initial “R”, detail from a missal), c. 1423. Biblioteca del convento di San Marco, Florence.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Dominican convent of Fiesole had a lively intellectual atmosphere. The convent was founded in 1406 by the Blessed Giovanni di Dominici Bacchini, (who later became the Archbishop of Ragusa and, in 1419, a cardinal,) in order to reestablish the former discipline and strictness of the Dominican order in the spirit of Saint Dominic. Members of the observant monasteries were expected to consecrate themselves to the saving of souls not only through study, science, and preaching, but also through applied artistic labour. Exiled from Venice, Giovanni arrived in Città di Castello near Arezzo in 1399. From there he was summoned to preach in the cathedral of Florence for Lent. San Lapo Mazzei wrote to a friend after hearing one of Giovanni’s sermons, and summarized his impressions in the following terms, “I was at Santa Liparata (the cathedral) where a Dominican friar was supposed to preach, and where he did indeed preach. I assure you that I have never heard a sermon like it, nor been so moved by so much eloquence... Everyone cried or seemed to be struck dumb and in a stupor

listening to the pure Truth... He spoke of the Incarnation of God in a manner that ripped the soul from one's body, compelling everyone present to chase after him."¹

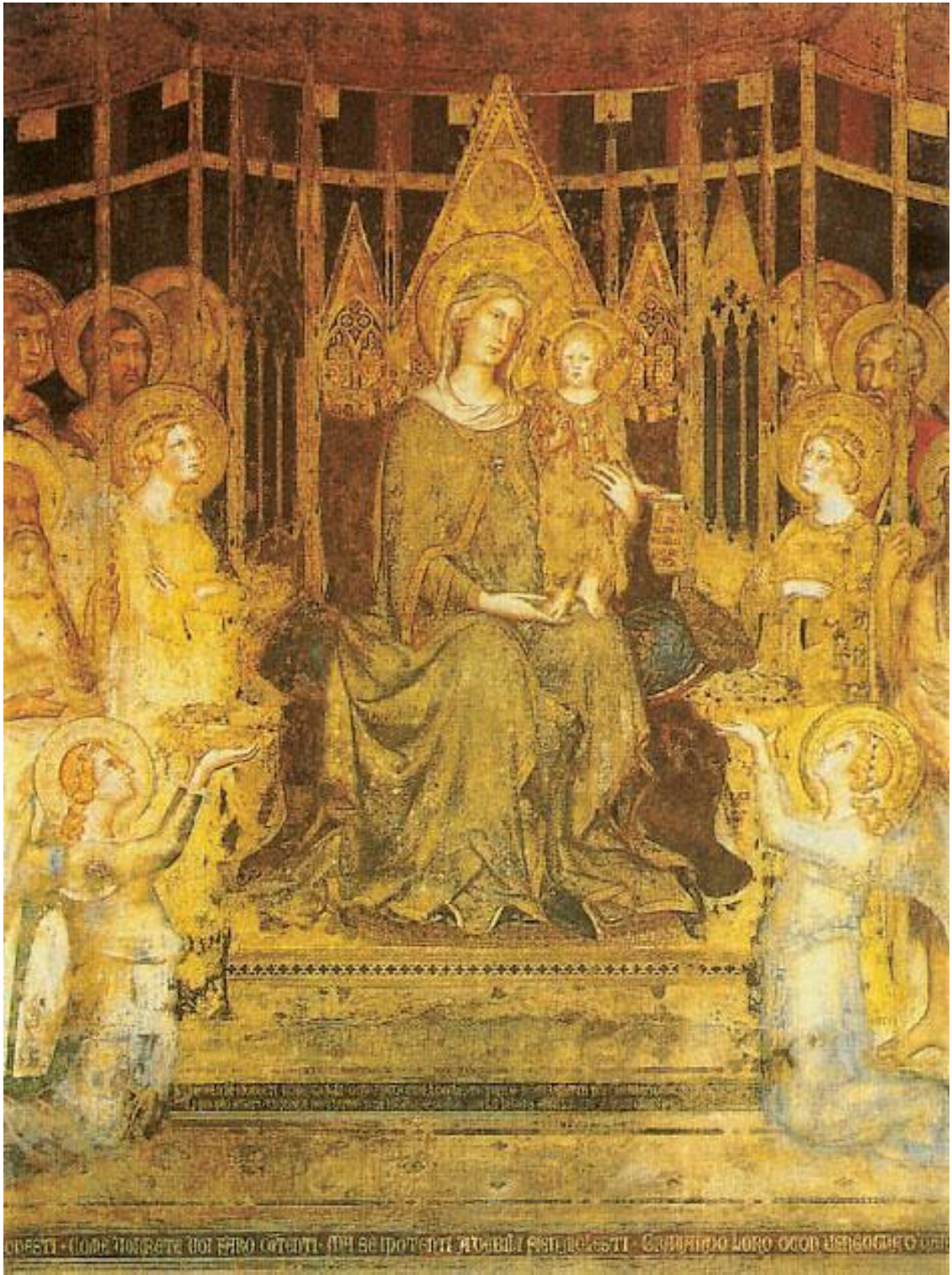
Day by day, the morals of the populace purified, and the Dominici's influence grew. In 1405, the Bishop of Fiesole gave him the land needed to build a convent and a church, and their construction was begun immediately. In 1406, religious zeal entered the establishment in the form of thirteen monks. Soon, many of the most fervent novices came to the convent in hopes of entering the Order. In 1405, the sixteen-year-old Antoninus, who would later become the bishop of Florence, († 1459), presented himself to Dominici. When asked about the nature of his studies, Antoninus showed a marked preference for canon law. Dominici responded that in the Dominican Order, novices were only admitted to this sort of study if they had already learned the *Decretum Gratiani* by heart. "Go then my son," said Dominici, "And learn them. Once you know it, you can ask for admission in complete confidence."²

The young Antoninus left and returned. Once Antoninus was admitted to the Order, the Father Superior sent him to Cortona, where the Blessed Lorenzo di Ripafratta had directed the novitiates of the Observant Dominicans since 1409. In 1408, two brothers knocked on the door of Fiesole's convent, also requesting admission. The elder of the two, Guido (Guidolino), was twenty-one years old. The younger was only eighteen. Their father, Pietro, lived in village near the fortified castle of Vicchio, situated between Dicomano and Borgo San Lorenzo in the Tuscan region of Mugello, not far from where Giotto was born. Undoubtedly, these young men were also asked about their previous education, and were only admitted into the house of the Observant Dominicans once they had proven their aptitude. It so happened that the older brother had real talent as a painter, and that the younger brother was a calligrapher. At that time, Dominici was no longer in Fiesole, for in 1406, the Republic of Florence had entrusted him with a mission to Rome. Once Dominici arrived in the Eternal City, Pope Gregory XII became very attached to him. On May 12, 1409, he made Dominici a cardinal. Dominici's successor in Fiesole gave a warm welcome to the two hopeful Dominicans; he gave them habits and named the elder Fra Giovanni (Petri del Mugello) and the younger Fra Benedetto (Petri del Mugello). He then sent them to Cortona, where as novices they were to live a life of penitence and prayer for one year. In order to understand the novitiate and the spirit that would later drive Fra Giovanni (Angelico), this passage by Dominici seems particularly apt: "I do not consider to be a good novice he who always walks with lowered eyes, who recites a long series of Psalms, who never makes mistakes when singing in the choir, who is silent and lives in peace with his brothers; nor he who loves his cell and chastises his body with discipline, who often fasts and carefully avoids contact with the outside world, giving himself over to the habits of ascetic life, and viewed by the beginners as saintliness itself. All of this is not enough. I consider a good novice to be he who perfectly, and with all of his strength, carries out the legitimate will of his superiors." Rösler adds, "The complete renunciation of the world and oneself, the fulfillment of all of the rule's prescriptions, the active and fervent love of God and one's neighbor with one's eyes always fixed on the model left by Jesus, the active desire for union with Christ; these are the foundations of a perfect life in the footsteps of Saint Dominic."³

¹ Rösler, *Cardinal Johannes Dominici O. Pr.*, p. 47.

² *Acta S.S.*, May 2, vol. I, 320 sq. Note f. (new edition).

³ Rösler, *Cardinal Johannes Dominici O. Pr.*, p. 5. 32. De Rubeis, *De Rebus congregationis s. t. B. Jacobi Salomonii, in provincia S. Dominicus Venetiarum erectæ, Ordinis Prædicatorum, commentarius historicus* (Venetiis, 1751), pp. 56 sq.



3. Simone Martini, Maestà (detail), 1317. Fresco. Sala del Mappamondo, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.



4. Duccio di Buoninsegna, Maestà (detail). Tempera on wood panel, 370 × 450 cm. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.



5. The Coronation of the Virgin, c. 1420. Tempera on wood panel, 28.3 × 38.4 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.



6. The Ascension (one of 35 paintings for the Silver Treasury of Santissima Annunziata), c. 1450. Tempera on wood panel, 39 × 39 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

The life and work of Fra Giovanni prove that the teachings of his novitiate always served as his rule. Consequently, he completed the first period of his monastic education with success. A beautiful anecdote from Vasari reveals just how much Fra Angelico, even in old age, kept a novice's simplicity and candor. Pope Nicholas V held Fra Giovanni in high esteem, and finding the artist tired, almost exhausted by his work, offered him a dish of meat to restore his energy. Unfortunately, this took place on a day when the Dominicans of the recent Reform were forbidden from eating meat. The artist thanked the sovereign Pontiff, and excused himself due to the rule of his Order, which did not allow him to eat such food without the authorisation of his superior. He had forgotten that an offer made by the Pope implied permission from the highest authority and rendered his superior superfluous. This story attests to the extreme conscientiousness of Fra Giovanni. Vasari gives another example of his submission: "He was never angry with his fellow Dominicans; he responded with great affability to all who asked for his work, requesting they first come to an agreement with his superiors. For him, good will was not a weakness." He did not work or act without the permission of his superiors, and all that he received for his work went into

their hands. In studying the life of this artist, it is necessary to never forget the severe discipline of his novitiate, which alone allowed him to understand and estimate his works in all their value. The natural goodness of Fra Angelico and the mystical tendencies of his century are not enough to explain his images. “Without Dominici, there would have been no Dominican convent in Fiesole, probably no San Marco in Florence, and perhaps no Fra Angelico.”⁴

After their novitiate, the two brothers pronounced the vows that would perpetually tie them to the Dominican Order in Cortona. In 1408, they returned for some time to Fiesole, but in 1409 all the monks were forced to leave the convent and its picturesque setting. Dominici, and his followers in the Observant Dominican Order refused to recognise Pope Alexander V, who had been irregularly elected by the Council of Pisa. The Dominicans wanted to remain faithful to Gregory XII, the true leader of the Church with whom they had already sided against Benedict XIII. The Bishop of Fiesole, a member of the Council of Pisa and faithful to Alexander V, forced the monks into exile and confiscated their possessions. Most of the friars of Fiesole found refuge in the neighboring Dominican convent of Foligno where they stayed until 1414, when an outbreak of plague forced them to flee again, this time reestablishing themselves in Cortona. It is, nevertheless, possible that the Friars Petri del Mugello went to Cortona not long after taking their vows in order to study philosophy and theology with the other young monks (including Fra Antoninus), in preparation to be ordained as priests. Nothing is known of their stay in Cortona during this period, but it is probable that they lived there, with short interruptions, during the eleven years from 1407 to 1418. Fra Benedetto pursued his studies in theology and philosophy further than Giovanni, and his progress allowed him to become a long-standing sub prior in Florence, which, according to the rules of the Order, was only possible for theologians and preachers of merit. His elder brother, Giovanni, followed the desires of his superiors and did not dwell long on his studies. His undeniable talent allowed him to be admitted to the priesthood after a short period of preparation, after which he consecrated himself entirely to art. This must have met with little opposition, given that Dominici was a great admirer of painting. Dominici's letters reveal that he not only wrote beautiful books, ornamenting the initial letters, but that he encouraged the monks of Corpus Domini in Venice to create and paint manuscripts. In his eyes, the arts and sciences were effective means of seeking and spreading the Faith. It was with his paintbrush that Fra Angelico was to preach the truth, as other Dominicans would do with their quills, or from the heights of their pulpits. The exile from Florence was, in reality, a providential blessing. In Florence, with its community of artists branching off in new directions, it is doubtful that the young monk would have so firmly maintained and developed the serious and pious tendencies that corresponded with the aspirations of his soul. His exile led him to one of Italy's most conservative religious centres. He lived between Siena and Assisi, about sixty kilometres from both of these towns. The road to Assisi passed through Perugia, and a visit to this town, with its many Dominican establishments, would have been simple. Angelico doubtlessly visited and revisited Siena, whose churches and monuments were resplendent with examples of the city's admirable school of painting. At the gates of the city, suggestive frescoes greeted the wandering monk. Who better than Angelico was prepared by the aspirations of his soul to contemplate and venerate this serious and powerful Virgin, the “Madonna of the Large Eyes,” (*La Maestà*) which a century before (1310) was carried in a solemn procession to the cathedral where she shone ever after on the main altar? Today, this grandiose painting has unfortunately been moved from the cathedral to the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. In it, Duccio di Buoninsegna combined the accumulated achievements of the painters and miniaturists of Italy and the Byzantine Empire. On the front of the altarpiece appears Mary, majestic upon her throne, holding the Holy Infant,

⁴ Rösler, *Cardinal Johannes Dominici O. Pr.*, p. 63.

surrounded by twenty angels and the figures of ten saints. Half-length paintings of the apostles were framed by the niches of the altar's predella and are today placed above the principal painting.⁵



7. The Flight into Egypt (one of 35 paintings for the Silver Treasury of Santissima Annunziata), c. 1450. Tempera on wood panel, 39 × 39 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

The reverse side of this altarpiece presents twenty scenes from the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ, as well as eighteen scenes from the lives of Jesus and Mary in the predella. Though the influence of tradition and the imitation of Greek artists is noticeable in many of the individual scenes, the altarpiece as a whole is treated with true liberty and shows a markedly Italian influence. The eight angels that immediately surround the Virgin's throne, lean in and contemplate the holy Child at the centre of the composition with indulgence, abandon, and love. They are no

⁵ In the translation of *Geschichte der italienischen Malerei* by Crowe and Cavalcaselle, Jordan says (II, p. 214): "In the foreground kneel the four bishops, Savinus and Ansanun, Crescentinus and Victor, the patron saints of the city, in adoration before the majesty of Mary." In reality, it is one bishop and three martyrs who kneel. They are not in "adoration" of Mary, but of Christ.

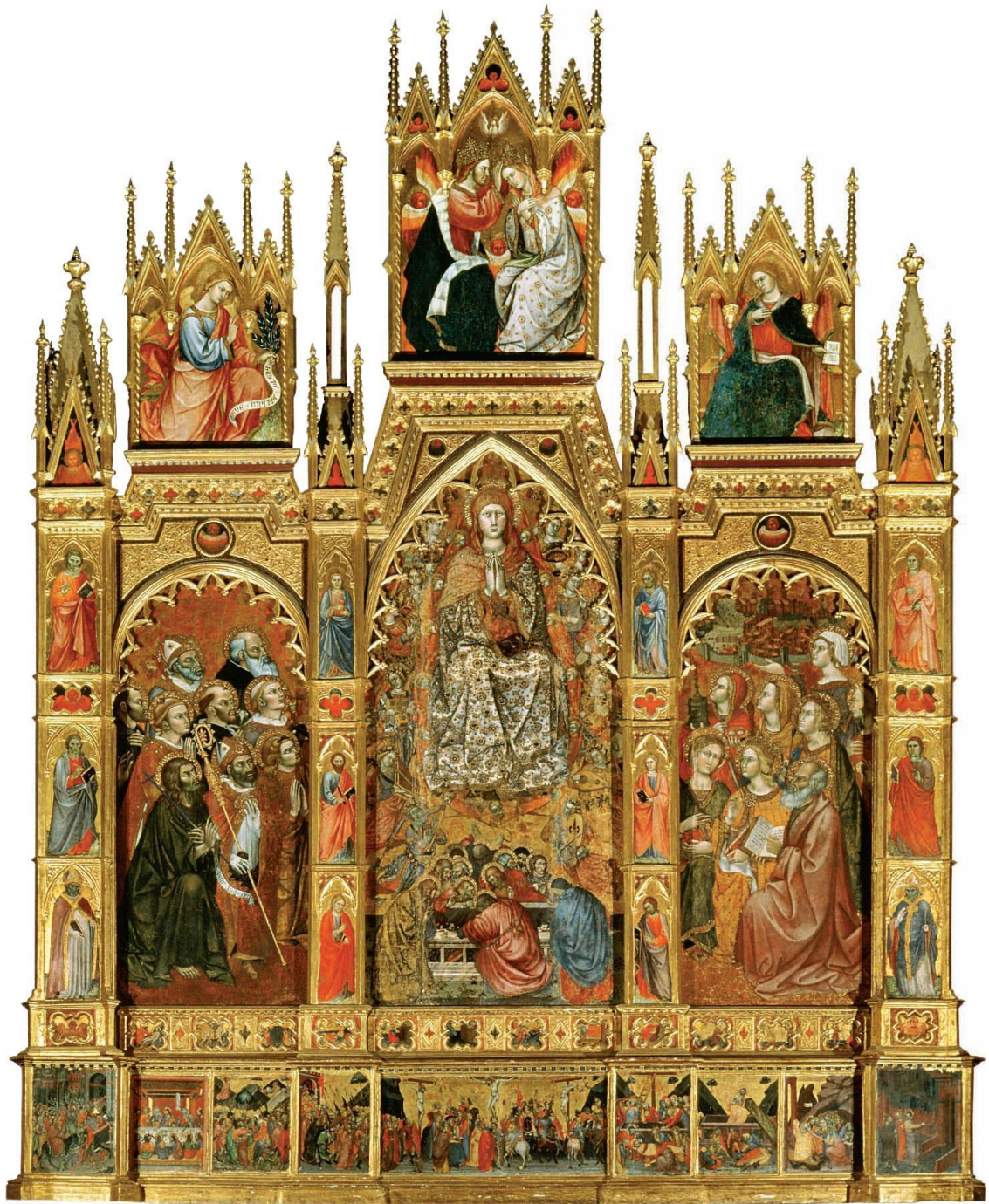
longer the solemn and respectful Byzantine attendants to the throne, but are rather the friends and intimate companions of the Lord and his Holy Mother.

This painting was of great importance to Fra Giovanni, because it shows so many scenes from the life of Christ and Mary, and because it is entirely penetrated by traditional ideas and techniques. In the same way that the best ancient Greek and Roman artists won renown by perfecting and ennobling long-consecrated and generally admitted types, the best Italian artists of the fifteenth century still remained faithful to the fundamental forms of traditional iconography. It was not that they wanted to strictly follow established concepts, but rather that they did not readily break from these traditions without serious motives and consideration. It was only the artists of the sixteenth century that wished to do away with the old forms in a destructive outburst of unmeasured individualism. It is important to study how Fra Angelico assimilated traditional techniques, to what degree he transformed them, and to know how these changes were related to his character and the proposed purpose of his works. He clearly studied the most significant paintings of Duccio, and was influenced by them when he painted the same subjects, though he never copied Duccio slavishly.

Though Fra Angelico might have examined the mature work of Duccio with deference, he probably preferred the large fresco Simone Martini painted for Siena's Palazzo Pubblico in 1317 (*Maestà*). Here again the enthroned Virgin is surrounded by angels and saints, yet the painting breathes with more freshness and freedom. Angelico would have been less attracted to the Ambrogio Lorenzetti's famous allegories in the same building. Angelico was probably not charmed by works of this nature, where speculation seeks to ally itself with emotional fantasy. But he certainly must have admired the still powerful frescoes representing the Death of Mary, her Funeral and her Assumption, that Taddeo di Bartolo had recently finished in the proud Palace of the Republic.

A painting currently held in Munich and attributed to Bartolo (circa 1401), shows the Assumption of the Holy Virgin (*The Assumption*). It contains elements that would be seen later in Fra Angelico's paintings of the Coronation of Mary. A choir of angels singing and playing various musical instruments surrounds the Virgin, while other celestial messengers sound long trumpets in a call to rejoice.

The pleasant and graceful Coronation of Mary in Siena's town hall, which now most brings to mind Fra Angelico's work, was painted in 1445 by Sano di Pietro, and did not exist at the time of Fra Angelico's visit. Sano di Pietro, born in 1406 († 1481), was an only child at the time, and could not have had any contact with Fra Giovanni. If Angelico was probably taken by the works of Simone Martini, he also would have warmed at the sight of Pietro's paintings depicting the life of Saint Martin at the Church of San Francesco of Assisi. Yet for Angelico, as for all of the church's visitors, these paintings would have paled in comparison to the masterpieces of Giotto. Giotto's works prove that it is not the number of motifs that creates a positive effect, but rather, the clear thoughts presented with a limited means of expression. Giotto's compositions would have confirmed the tastes of an artist in search of precise lines, pure colours, and clear thoughts.



8. Taddeo di Bartolo, The Assumption (triptych), 1401. Tempera on wood panel, 420 × 525 cm. Duomo, Montepulciano.



9. Ottaviano Nelli di Martino, Madonna del Belvedere, 1404. Tempera on stone. Santa Maria Nuova, Gubbio.



10. The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Four Angels (central panel of Guidalotti polyptych), c. 1437. Tempera on wood panel, 130 × 77 cm. Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia.

Not far from Cortona can be found the town of Gubbio, where in 1404, Ottaviano Nelli († 1414) had just painted the fresco, *Madonna del Belvedere*. All of Fra Giovanni's favorite hues are already found here. Behind the enthroned Mother of God hover two angels holding a robe of honour. Above them, God, the Holy Father, is surrounded by a glory of angels holding the crown destined for Mary's head. On each side at the bottom of the painting stands a tall angel, one with a lute, one with a violin. In the upper reaches, two small angels play the organ and harp. Mary's feet rest on a round cushion, and she holds the Child, who rests on her right knee, in both hands. She leans devotedly toward him, asking for the benediction of the donor's wife, kneeling to the right. An angel with the same attitude seems to commend the donor's wife to the Madonna. Behind this group rises a tall saint holding a palm frond and a book. The donor kneels to the other side, under the patronage of the hermit Saint Anthony, who is also painted with large proportions, extending his left hand towards the head of his protégé.

"This masterpiece of Ottaviano, a simple assembly of human figures of different proportions juxtaposed on an azure background, gives the joyous impression of a miniature. The superb colour choices are sometimes limited, but their brilliant hues produce an effect that is not at all artificial. The figures, outlined by extremely pure contours, apart from their extremities, are immaterial apparitions dressed in diaphanous clothing that seems to have been woven from spider webs, scattered with flowers, and ornamented with borders of foliage. A few of the faces, particularly Saint Anthony and his protégé, have a calm and solemn look, while Mary and her holy Son welcome the viewer with an expression of lovable serenity. The whole is achieved with care and an irreproachable conscience."⁶

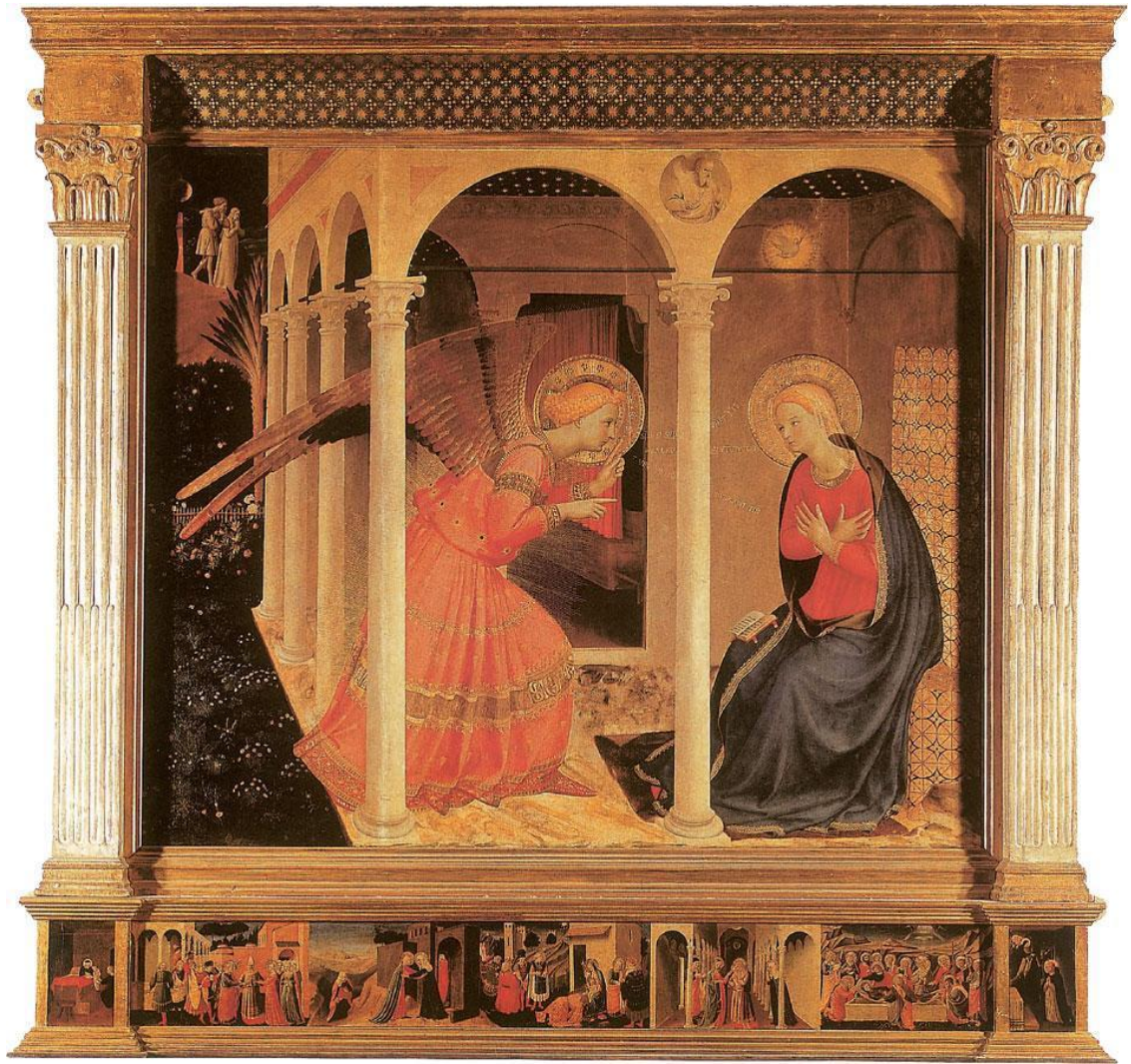
In that period, Gubbio was rich with such paintings. The painter Martino, Ottaviano's father, was already working in the town by 1385, surrounded by a circle of artists who followed the same techniques, as well as Ottaviano's grandfather, the sculptor Mattiolo. A connection between Fra Giovanni and Ottaviano Nelli seems even more likely, because Ottaviano's brother, Tomasuccio worked for the Dominicans in Gubbio. Nevertheless, one must remember Förster's very apt remark that, "The art of Fra Angelico has such originality and personality that it could not be derived from another artist. This art is one with the human nature it serves to express. It developed under the beneficial influence of traditional art in general, art which could be found throughout the entire land."⁷

⁶ Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *Geschichte*, IV, I, 98.

⁷ Förster, *Geschichte*, vol. III, p. 191.



11. Virgin and Child Enthroned, with Four Saints John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Mark and Mary Magdalene (Cortona triptych), c. 1437. Tempera on wood panel, 218 × 240 cm. Museo Diocesano, Cortona.



12. The Annunciation (Cortona altarpiece with predella), c. 1432–1434. Tempera on wood panel, 175 × 180 cm. Museo Diocesano, Cortona.



13. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, c. 1445. Tempera on wood panel, 175 × 183 cm. San Lorenzo, Florence.

Only four of Fra Angelico's paintings, executed in Cortona between 1407 and 1418, can be seen as early works with some degree of certainty. The most important of these is a painting created for his Order's church (San Domenico) in Cortona, today placed in a chapel near the main altar. Marchese considers it to be one of his fellow Dominican's best works, and other authors have expressed themselves similarly. Judgments of this nature prove the difficulty in establishing the chronology of Fra Angelico's works using critical evaluations. With other masters, it is possible to establish successive periods, and often, their best work dates from a period later in their careers. Here is a painting from the beginning of Fra Giovanni's career that could be considered perfect in its genre. It should be remembered that the artist was born in 1378, took his vows in Cortona at the age of twenty-two, and lived in that town until he was thirty-one. In general, progress in Angelico's work can only be found in details like the perspective of the background, the style of the architecture, and the costumes.

In the centre of *The Cortona Altarpiece* Mary is seated on her throne, wearing a blue cloak that almost entirely covers her red gown. The nude Christ Child on her knees holds a deep red rose. To each side of Mary, two angels bring baskets of flowers of shimmering colours. At the foot of the throne, bouquets of roses bloom in magnificent vases. In a separate compartment to the right appear the figures of Saint Mary Magdalene, and Saint Mark. To the left are found Saint John the Baptist, and Saint John the Evangelist. The Crucifixion, with Mary and Saint John, can be seen in

the arch above the central painting. In the arches above the four saints can be seen the characters of the Annunciation.

“At the sight of this painting, one cannot help being struck by an impression of springtime freshness. One feels the beating of the young artist’s heart, happy with his creation, and with him, one is elevated to heights of celestial enchantment. Above all, it is the infant Jesus who seems to glow with the light of the morning star, followed by the pairs of angels who fascinate with the softness of their celestial smiles. The predella is also inundated with a beauty one cannot help but admire. The states of the different characters’ souls are expressed with a very delicate feeling. Where he wishes to express the suffering of those mourning the death of Saint Dominic, Angelico pours out his heart with the plentiful treasures of his compassion. He clearly sheds tears of personal mourning in this painting.”⁸

⁸ Förster, *Geschichte*, vol. III, p. 195.



14. Annunciatory Angel, c. 1424. Tempera and gold on wood panel, 18.1 × 13.5 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.



15. Virgin Annunciate, c. 1424. Tempera and gold on wood panel, 18.1 × 17.8 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

The predella of the altarpiece shows eight scenes from the life of Saint Dominic. It is separated by six dividers between which are seen the figures of saints. Today it is placed in the baptistry near the cathedral (Oratorio del Gesu). Another altarpiece from San Domenico, an *Annunciation* was also placed in this location. Mary is seated in a loggia, and has dropped onto her lap the open book she was reading. She humbly crosses her hands across her chest in deference. Gabriel has rapidly entered the loggia. Extending his hands before him, he indicates with his right hand, Mary, the object of his mission, and raises his left hand, to remind that the mission was received from Heaven. A banner that comes from his mouth contains the words of the Hail Mary (*Ave Maria*,) and a dove descends towards Mary. In the background, Adam and Eve can be seen, driven from Paradise, as a contrast to the mystery of the Incarnation. The predella is composed of six scenes from the life of Mary (the Nativity, the Wedding, the Visitation, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation in the Temple, and the Death and Funeral of Mary) and her apparition to Saint Reginald.

It is possible that this last composition work was part of the Cortona Altarpiece's predella. It is more skillfully painted than the Annunciation, which should be considered a first attempt.⁹ Above the entrance of San Domenico, Fra Giovanni painted the Madonna and Child between Saint Dominic and Saint Peter Martyr, and the four Evangelists in the vault.

The Dominican church in Perugia once possessed a large altarpiece by Fra Angelico (*Mary and Child Flanked by Angels Holding Baskets of Flowers*). Few towns show the contrasts and changes brought with the passage of time as Perugia does. Its church, San Domenico, was built in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and then altered to such a great degree in the seventeenth century that its primitive origins are barely visible. The altarpiece was broken up, but the majority of its panels are now found in the Pinoteca Vannucci, whose collection was created with the spoils of the town's churches and convents placed on the second floor of the massive and robust Palazzo Pubblico. It is true that historians and researchers rejoice in the accumulated resources, the documents, and artworks of Italy's libraries and museums. Their collections undoubtedly facilitate the consultation of these materials, often very admirably, but this does not diminish or atone the injustice of the church's losses. Marchese saw fragments of the altarpiece when they were still in the town's Dominican convent. He considers them to be the first fruits of the master's work, countering Rio's opinion that they were painted around 1450. In reality, the paintings of the Perugia Altarpiece are so similar to those of Cortona that it is logical to assign them to the same period.

As in Cortona, angels holding a basket of flowers stand on both sides of Mary's throne (Illustration). In the outer panels stand the large figures of saints. Two other angels contemplate the scene from behind the throne's pillars, and on the ground before the throne are three vases of flowers. Here again, the holy Child standing on his Mother's knee, holds a rose just taken from one of the baskets offered by the angels. In the side tympanums above the altarpiece, Angelico again painted the two characters of the Annunciation, while the predella contains scenes from the legend of Saint Nicholas (*Saint Nicholas Saving Three Men Condemned to Execution and The Death of Saint Nicholas*, and *The Birth of Saint Nicholas, His Vocation, The Gift to Three Young Girls*). Two of these paintings are now located in the museum of Perugia, and two others are in the Vatican. The small images of twelve saints, painted on the frame, have suffered considerably, and half of them are destroyed.

⁹ A similar *Annunciation*, with Adam and Eve in the background is found at the Museo del Prado in Madrid. The predella is divided in five parts, which illustrate different scenes from the life of Mary.



16. Virgin Annunciate, 1450–1455. Tempera and gold on wood panel, 33 × 27 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.



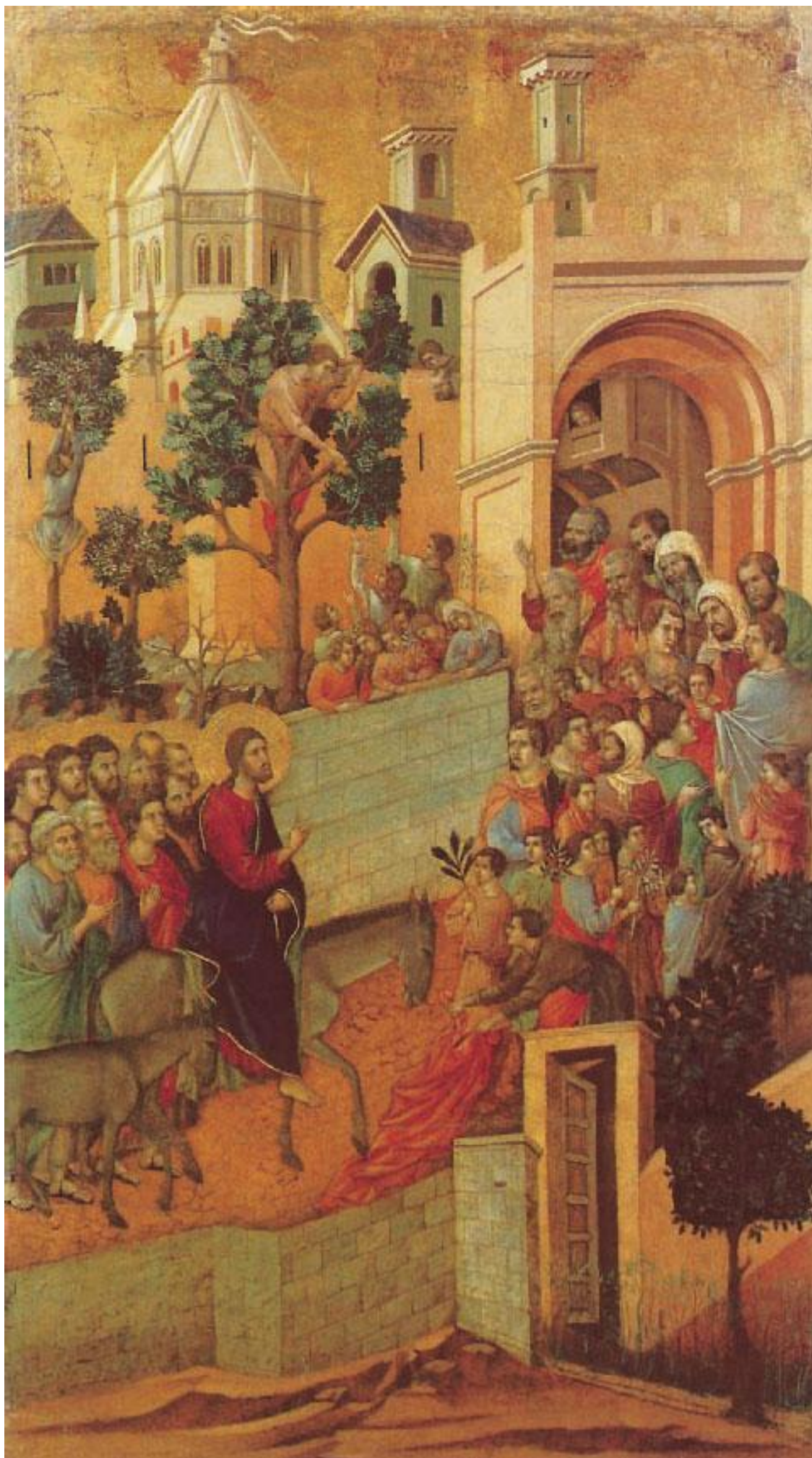
17. Christ Entering Jerusalem (one of 35 paintings for the Silver Treasury of Santissima Annunziata), c. 1450. Tempera on wood panel, 39 × 39 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

When studying these paintings it is important to remember that Fra Giovanni was an equally talented and remarkable muralist. This is proof that Fra Angelico was not an illuminator who gradually took on larger works. His superiors would have used a miniaturist to illustrate choir-books.

Later, they might have only temporarily asked Angelico to illustrate manuscripts, but no work of this genre can be attributed to him with certainty. It will soon be seen that even though he possessed a naturally delicate technique, he was not a miniaturist. It can be concluded that his true calling started and stayed with larger paintings. It is true that the conscientious finish of his paintings, particularly his predella paintings, which are often reminiscent of miniatures, has easily led scholars to draw erroneous conclusions. It is a small leap to affirm that a painter capable of treating small details with such love and precision must have also created works destined to be examined as closely as the images of precious manuscripts. But opinions of this nature are usually based on studies of paintings from recent centuries. It is too often forgotten that the great masters of the Middle Ages were accustomed to finishing their paintings down to the minute details, and

that the paintings themselves were often of exceptionally reduced dimensions. Those who see a miniaturist in Fra Giovanni, based on the precious delicacy of his predella paintings, ought to draw the same conclusion from Duccio's paintings. On the reverse side of his *Maestà* altarpieces and their predellas (*Christ Entering Jerusalem*) the scale of Duccio's work is much smaller than that of the characters portrayed on the front of the altarpieces. They ought go even further, and classify nearly all of the Italian masters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as miniaturists.

In terms of technique, painting on parchment was considerably different from painting on panels or plaster. Miniaturists formed, with calligraphers, a group that was completely distinct from that of painters. This question will be brought up again in deciding whether Fra Benedetto was a miniaturist, and whether he helped his brother paint murals and altarpieces.



18. Duccio di Buoninsegna, Christ Entering Jerusalem (detail of the Maestà altarpiece), 1308–1311. Tempera on wood panel, 100 × 57 cm. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.



19. Birth of Saint Nicholas, His Vocation, The Gift to Three Young Girls (first panel of “Scenes of the Life of Saint Nicholas”, predella from the polyptych of San Domenico of Perugia), c. 1437. Tempera on wood panel, 34 × 60 cm. Pinacoteca, Vatican.

Stay and Work in Fiesole



20. The Virgin of Humility, c. 1436–1438. Tempera on wood panel, 74 × 61 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



21. Bernardo Daddi, *The Virgin and Child in Majesty Surrounded by Angels and Saints* (San Pancrazio polyptych), 1336–1340. Tempera on wood panel, central panel 165 × 85 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

On January 22, 1414, Cardinal Dominici solemnly joined the Council of Constance, and on July 4, he presided, as Pope Gregory XII's delegate, at the Council's opening. Gregory XII's abdication and the election of Martin V put an end to the schism that had divided the Church, and also ended the exile of Fra Giovanni del Mugello and his fellow Dominican friars from Fiesole. The energetic intervention of the influential Cardinal Dominici caused the Bishop of Fiesole to return the convent he had taken from the Dominicans.

In 1418, the Dominicans joyously returned to their cherished home, where Fra Angelico would spend the next 18 years of his life. The monastery had been built on the mountainside where the Etruscans once founded ancient Fiesole, a picturesque site that dominated the Arno valley. In Roman times, new inhabitants established themselves on the plain. Florence grew imperceptibly until the time of Fra Angelico, the height of its power. This prosperity was due to Cosimo de' Medici, who was given the title of "Founding Father" by the town council. An imposing cathedral was erected in the centre of Florence and was consecrated by Pope Eugene IV.

Beginning in 1421, Brunelleschi worked on its dome, and in 1439 the monument was witness to the solemnities of the great Council of the Union. Next to the cathedral, a bell tower started by Giotto in 1334 was finished with a colourful three-dimensional decoration. Before the bell tower stands the ancient baptistry. Its marvelous North Doors were started in 1403 by Ghiberti, and the third and most beautiful set of doors had been under construction since 1425 (*The Gate of Paradise*). Inside the church, Donatello collaborated with Michelozzo on the monumental tomb erected by Cosimo de' Medici in memory of Pope John XXII, who died in 1419.

Behind the cathedral, and dominating the countryside, rose the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, begun by la Signoria. In 1432, Michelozzo built a magnificently ornamented, colonnaded courtyard in the donjon-crowned Palazzo.

Situated between the Cathedral and the Palazzo Vecchio, the Or san Michele Chapel (St Michael in Orto) was finished in 1412. At that time, the facade of this edifice was decorated with a series of slightly larger than life-sized statues of the patron saints of the town's guilds. These superb statues were the work of the sculptors Donatello, Ghiberti, and Michelozzo. Around 1350, Andrea Orcagna and his colleague Bernardo Daddi erected inside the chapel a precious marble altar topped by a ciborium.

From his convent in Fiesole, Fra Angelico could see Florence's Santa Maria Novella, a church with three naves begun in 1278 by the Preaching Friars Fra Sisto and Fra Ristoro, known as the best Italian architects of their time. On more than one occasion, Fra Angelico must have prayed in the Rucellai family chapel before the great Madonna by Cimabue (*The Santa Trinità Madonna*) that was carried and triumphantly placed this sanctuary, to the people's acclaim, in 1280. In the chapel across the transept, that of the rich Strozzi family, he must have frequently felt enlightened at the sight of the fresco painted by Giotto's disciples. He not only studied these paintings, but also borrowed many images from them, especially from the paintings of Paradise and Hell, created by Andrea and Bernardo Orcagna in the middle of the fourteenth century (the altarpiece *Christ in Glory Among the Saints* or *The Last Judgment*).

In the church's *Chiostro Verde* (green cloister) the primitively fresh colouring and intense effect sought by Angelico can be seen in the green camaieu murals of scenes from the Old Testament. In the Spanish chapel (Capellone degli Spanguoli) are found the resplendent riches and brilliant colours of works depicting the Passion and Glorification of Christ, the Legends of Saint Dominic, and Saint Peter Martyr, as well as "The Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas." These works must have spoken to the heart of the young monk. It is possible that Simone Martini painted

part of these paintings around 1330, but they probably interested Angelico less, for they already show the influence of the same movement that Lorenzetti (*Presentation in the Temple*) followed with his allegories painted in Siena. The young Angelico had no taste for passionate and bustling scenes, clashing contrasts, and spiritual allusions. The exact representation of men, the material things of daily life, and terrestrial struggles and agitation did not interest him. A sincerely religious painter, he wished, above all, to remain faithful to the teachings of Lorenzo de Ripaffata, an associate of Dominici who instructed Angelico during his novitiate. Angelico found his inspiration in meditation, his pious familiarity with prayer, in Christ, Mary, and the locally venerated saints. His best and most emotional works were conceived during his contemplation. It was for this reason that he loved to meditate upon the celebrated and reputedly miraculous image of the Visitation in the church of the Holy Annunciation, Santissima Annunziata. He felt attracted to this painting by a deep love for the Mother of God that conformed to the spirit of the Dominican order. His most beautiful paintings are devoted to Mary.

To the left of the Duomo, the young artist witnessed the construction of Santa Croce, the powerful church of the Franciscan Order. Started for the Franciscans by Arnolfo di Cambio in 1294, it was not finished until 1442. In its chapels, Giotto painted the Coronation of the Virgin, the lives of the two Saint Johns, and the Legend of Saint Francis, (*The Legend of Saint Francis, Saint Francis Preaching to Pope Honorius III*). Bernardo Daddi, Taddeo and Agnolo Gaddi decorated three other chapels in Santa Croce with frescoes. Even today, what remains of these partially destroyed and faded paintings seizes the viewer with the beauty of their lines, the simplicity of their composition, and the gentle harmony of their colouring.



22. Cenni di Pepo, known as Cimabue, The Santa Trinità Madonna, c. 1280. Tempera on wood panel, 385 × 223 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



23. Giotto di Bondone, Maestà (The Madonna of Ognissanti), 1305–1310. Tempera on wood panel, 325 × 204 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

The smaller part of Florence was built across the Arno on its left bank. Here was found the large church of the Carmelites, Santa Maria del Carmine. In its cloister and chapel of the Brancacci family are paintings once attributed to Masolino and his student Masaccio (1423 and 1428), but which are probably the work of Masaccio alone, (*Saint Peter Healing the Cripple and Tabitha Resurrected*, and *The Tribute Money*).

If Masolino really had a hand in part of these paintings, Fra Angelico would have surely paid him a visit during his work, for it is believed that like Masolino, Fra Angelico was a student of Gherardo Starnina († after 1406, Florence). It seems equally probable that he would have seen Masaccio at work, although Angelico was more successful in capturing the essence of saintliness and was less preoccupied than Masaccio by external reality, the appearance of life, and perspective. Behind Santa Maria del Carmine rises a hill, whose summit is crowned by the scintillating marble edifice of Italy's most elegant Romanesque monument, San Miniato al Monte. Its three naves are divided by twelve columns partially composed of ancient materials and are covered by an exposed-beam construction whose twelfth century decorative painting is unique. In the sacristy, Spinello Aretino painted eight paired compositions showing a series of bustling and dramatic groups from the life of Saint Benedict. The same artist decorated the Dominican Farmacia de Santa Maria Novella with frescoes depicting the story of the Passion, and was even called to Siena for other work. Aretino's mysticism is so similar to that of Fra Angelico, that Angelico must have known Aretino's work and captured the intimate emotion that reigns over it.

In the beautiful Gothic church of Santa Trinità built around 1250 by Nicolo Pisano on the right bank of the Arno, Fra Giovanni surely contemplated with genuine love, the altarpiece of the Bartholini Chapel, painted by Don Lorenzo Monaco († 1425), "the most beautiful and best-preserved altarpiece" by this monk of the Camaldolese order. An intimate friendship attached him to Fra Angelico. The old Camaldolese monk was more related to Giotto and his school than the young Fra Angelico, who, despite his mystical tendencies, was passionate about a more living art and revealed himself to me more apt in taking advantage of the progress made by his contemporaries. To be convinced of this, it suffices to follow the artist and his work. As in Cortona, Fra Giovanni must have given the first fruits of his labour in Fiesole to his convent. On one of the refectory walls he painted a life-sized Crucifixion with the figures of the Virgin and Saint Dominic, (*The Calvary*).



24. The Blessed Dominicans, 1423–1424. Tempera on wood panel, 31.8 × 21.9 cm. The National Gallery, London.



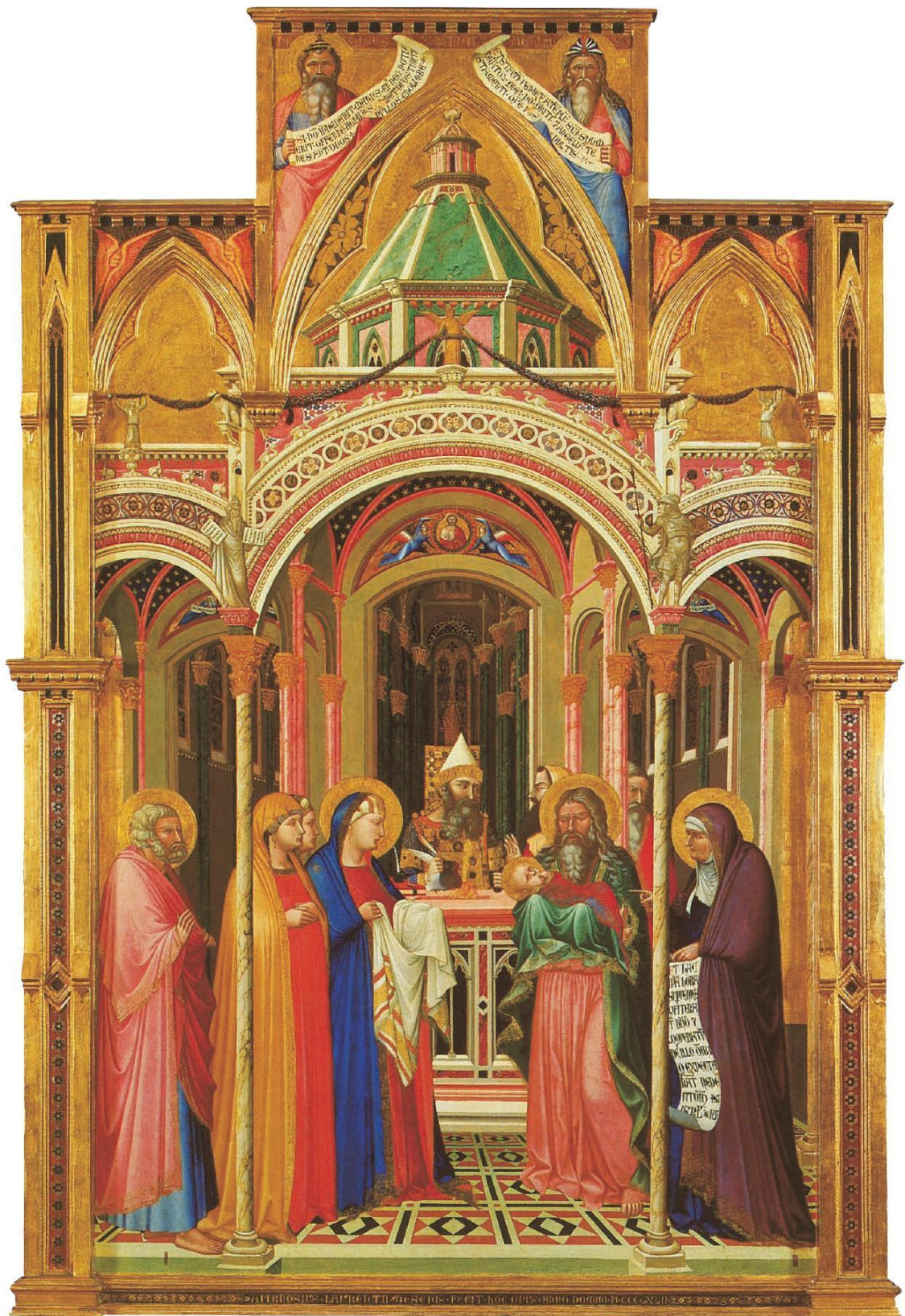
25. The Blessed Dominicans, 1423–1424. Tempera on wood panel, 31.6 × 21.9 cm. The National Gallery, London.

According to Marchese, the figure of Saint Dominic, kneeling at the foot of the Cross seems to have been added later. The painting was “restored” in 1566 by Francesco Mariani. His contemporaries applauded this restoration, seeing it as an improvement. Later critics revised this

judgment. Following contemporary tastes, the restorer wanted to give more relief to the contours and replaced the delicate nuances of the original work with vigorous hues.

When the French Revolution caused the monks to flee, the refectory was turned into an orangery, to the noticeable detriment of the paintings. Recently, the *Calvary* was sold for the price of 40,000 francs, (others say 50,000 liras), detached from the wall, and transported to the Louvre in Paris. A second fresco, (*Madonna and Child with Saints Dominic and Thomas Aquinas*) once found in the chapter room of the same convent met the same fate. This time, it was a Russian of quality who bought the work for 46,00 liras. Although it suffered considerably due to a restoration undertaken in the 1840's, this painting can be counted among the master's best works. Like the Perugia Altarpiece, it pictures the Infant Jesus standing on the knees of Mary, a veil only covering him very lightly. Next to the Mother of God, Saint Dominic and Saint Thomas Aquinas hold open books. The simplicity of the subject brought the painter to treat each detail with particular care. Rarely did Angelico put more expression into the faces, or more accuracy in his drawing. Unfortunately, some parts of the draperies and the lower portion of the painting show damage from humidity and clumsy retouching.

The Coronation of the Virgin, painted for the convent of San Domenico da Fiesole, was taken away in 1812, and has remained in the Louvre. An Annunciation from the convent was sold in 1611 for the sum of 1,500 ducats and a copy of the work. The copy is currently found in the Franciscan church at Monte-Carlo near San Giovanni di Valdarno, while the original is thought to be in Madrid. The painting created for the main altar of San Domenico in Fiesole (*San Domenico Altarpiece, The Virgin Enthroned with Eight Angels between Saints Thomas Aquinas, Barnabas, Dominic, and Peter Martyr*) was modified in 1501 by Lorenzo di Credi. The figurines which ornamented the two pilasters on each side of the central panel were sold along with the predella to Nicola Tacchinardi of Rome, who in turn sold them to Valentini, the Prussian consul to Rome. The predella shows Christ rising to Heaven and holding the banner of the Resurrection surrounded by more than 250 patriarchs, prophets, and saints from the New Testament. Today, this painting is one of the jewels in the collection of the National Gallery in London (Illustration 1, 2, 3) The predella was replaced in Fiesole with a poor copy. The main panel of the altarpiece shows the Holy Virgin enthroned between the prince of the Apostles and Saint Thomas Aquinas on one side, and Saint Dominic and Saint Peter Martyr on the other. Adoring angels surround the divine Infant.



26. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, The Presentation in the Temple, 1327–1332. Tempera on wood panel, 257 × 138 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



27. Agnolo Gaddi, *The Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angels, Saint Benedict, Saint Peter, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Minias*. Tempera on wood panel, 222 × 290 cm. Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

The Louvre also possesses a painting from San Girolamo di Fiesole (Villa Ricasoli), which was first sold to the Marquise Campana in 1852. Many connoisseurs attribute this work to Fra Angelico, a claim contested by many. Here again, the Holy Virgin is enthroned and flanked by six saints.

After painting the altarpiece in Cortona for the Dominican friars in Perugia, Angelico surely could not resist the insistence of the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella. It was the Florentine Fra Giovanni Massi († 1430) who, having gained Angelico's affection through his exemplary piety and love of silence, was charged with expressing his community's desire to own one of master Fra Giovanni Angelico's admirable creations. Masi owned many saintly relics for which he commissioned four little shrines to be placed on the altar. The four small shrines were in the form of the period's altarpieces, were 42–60 cm high, and 25–29 cm wide, and crowned by pointed arches (ogives). Fra Angelico decorated these reliquaries with paintings. One of them is lost, and the three others were religiously conserved at Santa Maria Novella for four centuries. During the last despoilment of Italy's convents, they were transported to the Museo di San Marco. The first of these reliquaries, is ornamented with a *Coronation of the Virgin*, and its predella, an *Adoration of the Christ Child*, shows ten characters presented as half-figures. To the two sides of the scene, the artist painted standing angels, while six other angels dance around Mary, the Infant, and Saint Joseph.

The second reliquary is divided into two parts, and shows *The Annunciation* above and *The Adoration of the Magi* below. In the predella on the pedestal, the Madonna is surrounded by saints, the majority of whom are martyr saints whose relics are kept inside the reliquary. The third reliquary's (*Madonna and Child*, also known as "*Madonna della Stella*") sculpture is more elaborate than the others, and is framed by twisted columns supporting an ogee arch ornamented

with rich and elegant foliage. The gilded pedestal is decorated with ornamentation reminiscent of filigree, and the half-figures of Saint Dominic, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Peter Martyr. These saints are probably pictured because Giovanni Masi had placed their relics in this reliquary. The upper part of the reliquary shows Mary, filled with devotion, love and tenderness. She holds the Christ Child, who is covered in a long robe, in her right arm, pressing his small face against her cheek. In the lower part of the frame are vases of flowers between two angel musicians. Above them are two angels with censers, and above these, four cherubs in adoration before the Infant Jesus. The bust of the celestial Father surrounded by clouds is painted in the peak of the arch. The second two reliquaries are superior to the first, and are ravishing in their tiny proportions. They have been remarkably conserved, which has spared them from being retouched. They are examples of a consummate art, the work of a master capable of filling the smallest frame with scenes composed of many characters, with grandiose and celestial imagery.

A decorated Easter candle painted by Fra Giovanni for Fra Masi, perhaps depicting the Resurrection, has been lost. His frescoes at Santa Maria Novella showing Saint Dominic, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Saint Peter Martyr, as well as the smaller works painted in the Chapel of the Coronation of the Holy Virgin, were destroyed during the course of alterations to the church's structure. Many paintings created by Giotto's students were also lost during this period.

In 1433, Fra Giovanni painted the renowned Madonna with angel musicians (Linaiuoli triptych, pp.58, 198) for the hemp merchants' guild. During the same period, he finished three paintings for the Carthusian monks in Florence: an *Enthroned Madonna Surrounded by Saints Lawrence, Mary Magdalene, Zenobius, Benedict, and a Choir of Angels*; another *Madonna with Two Saints*, singled out by Vasari for the beauty of the ultramarine blue which Angelico used painting it; and a *Coronation of the Virgin*.

The painting for the monks of San Pietro, today found in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, must be dated before 1436, along with the banner of the Compagnia di Santa Maria della Croce al Tempio, the tertiary order of the Dominicans. The principal subject of this work is the *Deposition of Christ*. In 1786, it was placed in the Accademia delle Belle Arti, today known as the Galleria Antica e Moderna. The same gallery owns an important work from this period, *The Santa Trinità Altarpiece*. This painting comes from the church of Santa Trinità in Florence, which belongs to the Vallumbrosan Order. Since it was Don Lorenzo Monaco († 1425) who painted the three scenes in the tympanums (the Resurrection, The Three Marys' at Christ's Tomb, and Christ's Apparition Before Mary Magdalene) the date of Fra Angelico's admirable panel must be pushed forward to 1425 at the latest. This work was not finished just before 1445, as Rio and Förster assure. Rio's claim of seeing the portrait of the architect Michelozzo in this painting is completely discredited by this revised date.

Three inscriptions on the lower edge of the frame declare the painter's intentions. The middle section reads, "*Estimatus sum cum descendentibus in lacum*," "I was among those who descended into the pit." (Psalms 87:5)

According to the most competent critics, the body of Christ is admirably rendered and still shows the signs of his suffering and cruel treatment, while conserving all of its beauty. Thanks to the hands supporting him, he almost escapes death's rigidity. He forms a diagonal line in front of the cross. Nicodemus holds him in his hands, and his feet descend to Mary Magdalene. Kneeling on the earth, she stretches to receive them, devotedly lifting her head to kiss Christ's feet, her hands covered by a transparent veil. A second diagonal line is formed by the arms of the holy body and the placement of Joseph of Arimathea, who stands on a ladder facing Nicodemus. He still holds Christ's arms, but is about to let them go. Saint John holds Christ's sacred body. In the foreground below kneels a young man wearing a crown. He beats his chest and seems to say, "He died for me, for my sins." Two men, visible between Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea, hold the body of Christ from behind to help Nicodemus and Saint John, letting their precious burden gently slide

to the ground. Though the viewer is conscious of the weight and inertia of the dead body, it does not lose any of its dignity. It is not the laws of gravity, of push and pull that prevail in this ensemble, but rather the tender care attending to the sanctuary of divinity. The ground is not a sterile wasteland, littered with the abandoned bones of corruption, but is covered by buds and flowers, for the blood of Jesus Christ has atoned the Earth of its sins. Only the mountains in the background are still arid and denuded, for the good news has not yet spread across the land.



28. The Martyrdom of Saints Cosmas and Damian, c.1440. Tempera on wood panel, 37.3 × 41.6 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



29. Saint Stephen Preaching and Saint Stephen Addressing the Sanhedrins, 1447–1449. Fresco. Cappella Niccolina, Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican.



30. The Death of Saint Francis (predella), 1428–1429. Oil on poplar panel, 29 × 70 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

The choice of colours, their hues and distribution is implemented with great care. Mary Magdalene and the man kneeling across from her wear red. The body of Christ, in amber highlights bordering on brown, harmonises perfectly with the cinnabar of Mary Magdalene's gown. Saint John, as well as the two men visible between Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea, wear blue. The clothing of Nicodemus, as well as the tunic beneath Joseph's robe across from him, is a pure purple. Joseph's outer robe is a somber green, and completes the symphony of colours in the upper part of the painting, echoing the jewel-like flowers in the grass below the cross. It should be kept in mind

that the general appearance of the painting lost some of its intensity after a restoration undertaken by Francesco Acciai in 1841. Nevertheless, the harmony of the whole remains excellent.

The female saints are grouped together to the right. Mary raises her almost contorted hands, her expression veiled with sadness, waiting for the mortal body of her son to be placed in her lap. She kneels near Magdalene who respectfully touches the Savior's holy feet. As can be seen in the illustration, the group occupied in taking Jesus from the cross creates a downward movement towards Mary. The fact that the place she is seated is slightly elevated and that the other women saints, divided into two groups, are standing, creates a difference of level between the Holy Mother and the other saints, and clearly marks the movement toward Mary. Two women hold out the shroud destined to receive the holy, Crucified body. One of them, seen standing in a corner enveloped in an ample violet cloak that exposes only her profile, seems particularly beautiful and expressive. The inscription on this side perfectly expresses the sadness that fills the women, "*Plangent eum quasi unigenitum, quia inocens,*" "They mourn him like a firstborn, for, innocent, he was immolated." (Zacharias, 12:10)



31. Masolino da Panicale, Death of the Virgin, 1428. Tempera on wood panel, 19.7 × 48.4 cm. Pinacoteca, Vatican.

The inscription to the left reads, "*Ecce quomodo moritur justus, et nemo percepit corde.*" (Isaiah 57:1) The words, "See how the just dies," seem to come from the character, clearly of high standing, who raises the crown of thorns in his right hand, and shows two long and sharp nails to an old man with his left hand. Two spectators in the depths of the painting contemplate the body of the holy Victim with sadness.

The background of the landscape, trees and buildings, are treated summarily, naively perhaps, but with the necessary care and detail. The fading of the tints in the distance could have been better graduated, more shrouded in shadow, but as they are, the distant planes of the landscape throw the principal groups of the composition into harmonious relief. The sense of unity is emphasized by the groups of three angels to each side who hover above the men and women, weeping and relating to their pain. In this painting, as in his other works, Fra Angelico conforms to the Italian tastes of his time by decorating each side of the frame with three full length figures and the busts of two saints, among them Saint Michael, Saint Peter, and Saint Louis of Toulouse. Saint Dominic and Saint John Gualbert, represent the two Orders (Dominican and Vallumbrosan) who worked in brotherhood in the service of the same Master.



32. The Calvary, c. 1440–1445. Fresco, 435 × 260 cm (restored in 1566 by Francesco Mariani). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

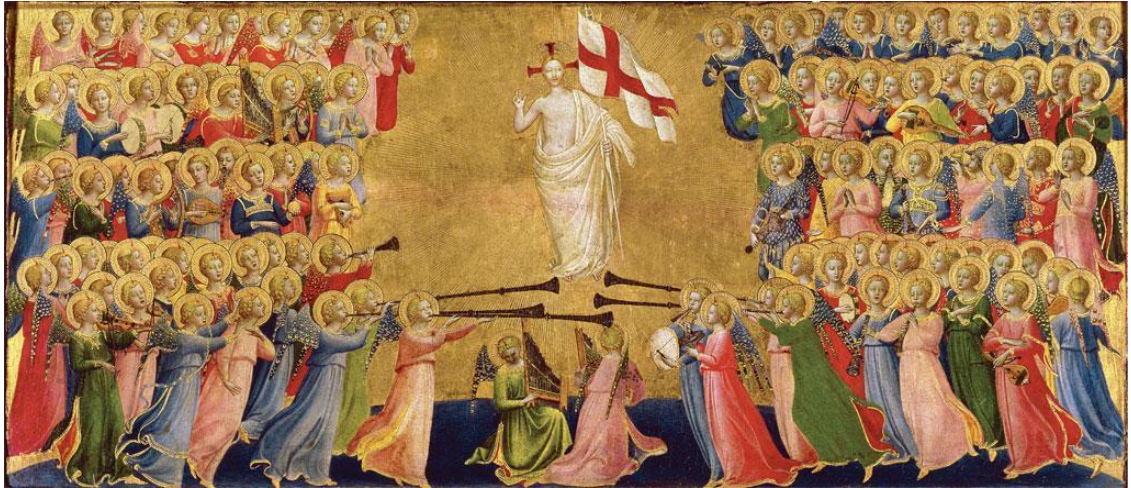
Förster rightly remarks that, of all the old Italian painters, Fra Giovanni Angelico is perhaps the last that one would expect to successfully surmount the difficulties of the theme he treats in this painting: the feat of painting the drama of the descent from the cross, emphasizing at once the material weight of the body and the bitter pain of the characters in the scene. Yet, the artist, his temperament so removed from a naturalist outlook, victoriously accomplishes this task. His *Deposition from the Cross* is superior to the others painted before, and even afterwards, including Daniele da Volterra's famous frecoes in Trinità dei Monti. In his work, Angelico manages to surpass his natural lyricism to achieve all of the drama's expressive power. Without weighing us down with the physical energy expended in the scene, he arrestingly places us in the middle of its dramatic action. While making us witness to great suffering, he tempers this suffering with the sublime and expressive beauty. The presence of greatness and saintliness is so striking that any feeling of pain eventually melts into reconciliation and resigned sadness. To this can be added the sweet and lifelike movement, the intense pain without softness, and in such a way that contemplating the work appeases and calms the soul.

The clarity of its motives, the beauty of its lines, the harmony of its oppositions, and the subtle transitions emphasize this impression.¹⁰ Montalembert remarks, "The day that Fra Angelico painted this, he must have felt such an overabundant love of God, such immense and ardent contrition. How he must have meditated and wept on the suffering of our divine Master in the depths of his cell! Each brushstroke, each emphasized line seems filled with the regret and love from the depths of his soul. What poignant preaching from a painting! Where others see just a work of art, I sense I have drawn ineffable consolations and profound instruction."¹¹

The master's merits are even more striking if one compares this *Deposition from the Cross* with the *Deploration of Christ* of the Brotherhood of Santa Croce del Tempio, (*The Deploration of Christ*), mentioned earlier in this chapter. In the earlier work he still seems to follow the path of Giotto's oldest disciples. In the *Deposition from the Cross* of Santa Trinità however, he innovates by establishing a happy equilibrium between what seem to be mutually exclusive qualities: the truthful imitation of nature, the rules of balance, and the expression of faith. In the earlier painting Christ's lifeless body is stiff and immobile; in the later painting it is the object of multiple actions rendering it movement. In the earlier painting there is one group of figures and one feeling expressed; in the later work of art there are three groups showing many different actions and expressions. In *The Deploration of Christ* of Santa Croce del Tempio the cross rises vertically, its crossbar touching the upper edge of the frame. The city wall extending in the distance seems to correspond with the monotony of a single grouping. The three groups in *The Deposition from the Cross* of Santa Trinità call for a varied background. In the two works, Mary Magdalene kisses Christ's feet, but the crown of thorns and nails abandoned on the ground in one are the object of religious devotion in the other. The way in which the men show and contemplate them clearly reveals what they are saying. In *The Deploration* of Santa Croce del Tempio nearly everybody is kneeling or seated, in *The Deposition* of Santa Trinità the figures are found in a variety of positions. In the following chapter, we will discuss *The Deposition* and *Lamentations* of San Marco.

¹⁰ Förster, *Geschichte*, vol. III, p. 209.

¹¹ Montalembert, *Du Vandalisme*, p. 97.



33. Christ Glorified in the Court of Heaven (predella of the altarpiece of San Domenico in Fiesole), 1423–1424. Tempera on wood panel, 31.7 × 73 cm. The National Gallery, London.



34. Madonna and Child with Saints Dominic and Thomas Aquinas, 1424–1430. Fresco, 196 × 187 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St Peterburg.

The same subject is treated with more simplicity in the thirty-five compositions painted on eight panels that formed the doors of the treasury at the Santissima Annunziata in Florence

(Illustration) which are found today in the Galleria dell'Accademia. Rio dates this work after 1450 due to the portrait of Michelozzi that he claims to see. The generally shared opinion is that these panels were painted in Fiesole, and therefore before 1436. The best paintings in this group are: *The Annunciation*, *The Adoration of the Magi*, *The Flight into Egypt*, *The Resurrection of Lazarus*, *The Payment of Judas*, *The Prayer in Gethsemane*, and *Christ at the Column*. The panel showing *The Marriage at Cana*, *The Baptism of Christ*, and *The Transfiguration*, cannot be considered the work of Fra Angelico. Even *The Deposition*, *The Ascension*, and *The Last Judgment* should probably be attributed to his students, though the entire cycle forms an ensemble.

The border of each of these paintings shows a text from the Old Testament above and a text from the Gospels below. The influence of the tradition that inspired “The Poor Man’s Bible” (*Biblia Pauperum*) is visible in these paintings, and it would be useful to briefly examine them and their inscriptions from the point of view of Christian iconography.

1. A sort of preface, this composition represents faith’s written sources and brings together ancient prototypes. Three concentric circles are painted in a square frame. This layout results in four sections: the area outside of the circles and a large wheel enclosing a second smaller wheel. Inside the smaller wheel are the authors of the New Testament: the four Apostles who wrote the Epistles holding banners upon which texts are written, and between them, the four Evangelists. Each of the Evangelists holds a book to his chest, and has his evangelical symbol in the place of his head. In the larger wheel, Angelico painted twelve authors of the Old Testament. At the top is Moses between David and King Solomon, followed by the four “major Prophets” and five of the “minor Prophets”. Jonas is characterised by a fish he holds in his hand. In the bottom corners outside of the wheels are Ezekiel to the left, and Saint Gregory the Great to the right. Between them spreads a banner, which reads *Flumen Chobar*, for it was on the banks of the Chobar River that the prophet Ezekiel saw the four evangelical animals. In the upper corners of the painting are texts taken from the Book of Ezekiel (1:4) and the homilies of Saint Gregory on Ekekiel’s vision. (See *Hom. 2 et 3 in Ezechiel*, Opoera ed. Cong. S. Mauri, 1705, I.)



35. Madonna and Child, Angels and Saints Thomas Aquinas, Barnabas, Dominic and Peter Martyr (triptych of Fiesole), c. 1426. Tempera on wood panel, 212 × 237 cm. San Domenico, Fiesole.



36. Zanobi Strozzi (attributed to), Adoration of the Magi, c.1433–1434. Tempera on poplar panel, 19 × 47.4 cm. The National Gallery, London.



37. Saint Mark and Saint Peter (shutters closed of the Linaiuoli triptych), 1433. Tempera on wood panel, 260 × 330 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

2. The cycle itself truly begins with the Annunciation. Mary and the angel kneel on the ground. The Angel, drawn rather dryly, has striped wings. The perspective in this place where the mystery is carried out is clearly indicated by the view through the open door in the centre of the composition.

3. Mary and Joseph kneel before the Christ Child. In the background, an ox and an ass seem to look on, poking their heads through the doorway. The shepherds can be seen approaching from the right, while above, six kneeling angels sing praises to God the Father with their gazes fixed heavenwards.

4. With extremely characteristic imagery, the Circumcision shows the fulfillment of the law.

5. The Presentation of Christ in the Temple. This scene takes place in a temple with a Gothic styled central section, and Renaissance architecture to the sides. In the centre of the composition, Simeon holds the swaddled Christ. Mary extends her arms, for she passed Christ to Simeon only to take him back again. Behind her, Joseph approaches with doves, while behind Simeon, Anne stands with her hands clasped together.

6. The Magi accompanied by a considerable entourage. They adore the Christ Child before a thatched cottage, and one of the Magi kisses Christ's feet.

7. The Flight into Egypt. This painting in the style of Giotto is impressive for its clarity and the simplicity of its lines, though the Virgin on a donkey's back is poorly rendered. Joseph walks behind her holding a canteen and a basket of provisions in the manner that rural Italians still go off to work today. Angelico's attempt to differentiate between the various types of trees merits notice.

8. Massacre of the Innocents. The mothers' intense pain contrasts with the calm of the soldiers. One soldier lets a woman scratch his face without resistance. Another mother, half-kneeling, throws her hands in the air, mourning her dead child, whose corpse leans against her. A third flees, screaming with her mouth wide open. Other women seek salvation through flight, while one of them is stretched out on the ground alongside her child's corpse.

9. Jesus calmly seated amongst the doctors. To the left are Mary and Joseph. Mary calls to her son. Here again, the architecture is Gothic, whereas the typical architecture in Angelico's paintings is early Renaissance.



38. The Annunciation and The Adoration of the Magi (superior part of the reliquary); Madonna Surrounded by the Saints (pedestal) whose relics are found in the reliquary, before 1434. Tempera and gold on wood panel, 84 × 50 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.



39. Virgin and Child (Madonna della Stella) (shrine containing the relics of the Saints Dominic, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Martyr), 1434. Tempera on wood panel, 84 × 51 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

10. The Marriage at Cana. Two men are seated at a table next to the groom, along with Mary and Jesus. Jesus extends his hand towards the jugs on the table into which a serving man is pouring water. The texts written on the frame read, "*Haurietis aquam et vertetur in sanguinem*," (Exodus 4) "*Vox Domini intonuit super aguas*." (Psalm 18)

11. At the Baptism, all of the characters have long curls. "*Descendit et lavit se septies in Jordane*." (III Kings) "*Venit Jesus et baptizatus est a Joanne in Jordane*." (Mark 1:9)

12. The Transfiguration. "*Et repleta erat gloria domus Domini*." *Ezech. XLIII c.* (Ezekiel 43) "*Transfiguratus est ante eos*." *Matth. XVII c.* (Matthew 17)

13. In this cycle of Christ's public life, only the Resurrection of Lazarus and the Transfiguration are pictured. Here, there is a beautiful contrast between the Jew who holds his nose because the corpse "already stinks," and the sisters piously kneeling before the Lord, oblivious to the miracle being carried out. The apostles are astonished to see Lazarus approaching with his hands clasped together. Two different acts are represented simultaneously with infinite artfulness and without any apparent contradiction. "*Educam vos de sepulcris, populus meus*." (Ezekiel 37)

14. Jesus entering Jerusalem. Christ, astride a donkey, raises his right hand to bless the onlookers. The Apostles follow him, holding palm fronds, while the Jews, also carrying palms, precede Jesus. One Jew lays his cloak on the ground before the Messiah. (Zacharias 9:9)

15. At the Last Supper, Jesus is seated at a table with eleven of his disciples, one of whom brings a plate of food. "*Agnus eiusdem anni immaculatum faciet sacrificium*." *Ezech. XLVI c.* (Ezekiel 44) "*Paraverunt Pascha et cum esset hora discubuit Jesus et duodecim discipuli*." (Luke 22)

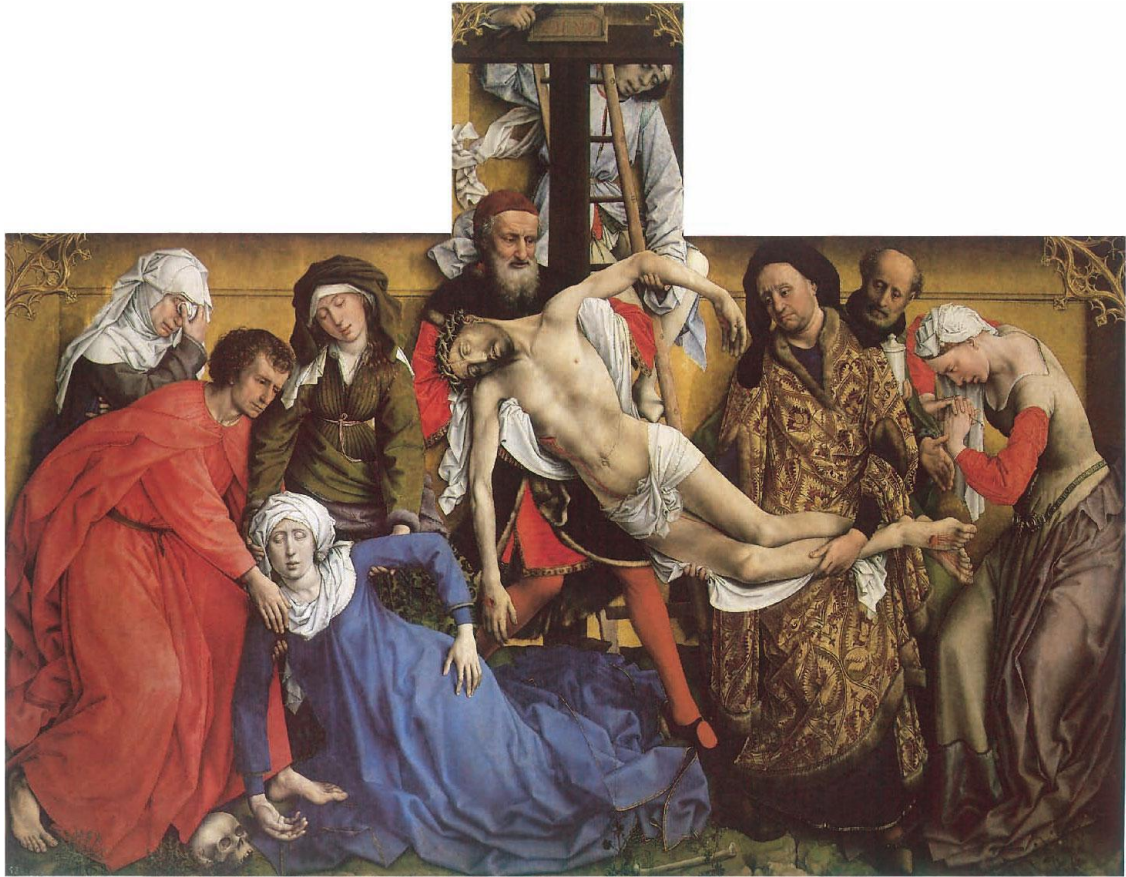
16. Eleven Apostles are seated in a circle, and the twelfth brings them water. In the centre, Jesus kneels before Peter, who makes a gesture of denial. One of the Apostles, seated in the foreground, unties the laces of his shoe, while another removes his hose. Most of them contemplate their Master with a surprised expression on their faces. (Isaias 1:16)

17. In the depths of the Cenacle, a deep and vaulted hall supported by two columns, six Apostles can be seen seated behind a long table. The others have risen from their stools, but many of them are still before the table. Three of them kneel before the wall at the left, three others to the right. The Savior stands before the Apostles to the right to give them the consecrated Host.

18. A pharisee pays Judas, who still wears a halo, extending his hand with the promised silver. Six terrified and astonished Jews look on. This is a beautiful painting, full of characteristic figures. "*Appenderunt mercedem meam triginta argenteos*." (Zacharias 11) "*Quid vultis mihi dare et ego tradam illum. At illi constituerunt ei XXX argenteos*." (Matthew 27)



40. The Deposition (altarpiece of Santa Trinità at Florence, the three scenes in the tympanums have been depicted by Lorenzo Monaco), c. 1437–1440. Tempera on wood panel, 176 × 185 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.



41. Rogier van der Weyden, *Descent from the Cross*, c. 1435. Oil on wood panel, 220 × 262 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

19. A Christ of reduced proportions prays in the depths of the Garden of Gethsemane. An angel approaches and three Apostles of larger proportions sleep in the foreground. (Isaias 41:10); (Luke 22:43)

20. Judas kisses Christ. To his right stand three Apostles, while the Pharisees and soldiers lie on the ground. (Psalms 40:10); (Matthew 26:49)

21. Jesus is arrested. Peter tranquilly cuts off the ear of Malchus, an action accomplished without drama. (Ezekiel 3:25); (Matthew 26:57)

22. The Savior stands before Caiaphus with calm dignity. (Micheas 5:1); (John 18:22)

23. The Flagellation of Christ. Christ is beaten with rods by two men, with no spectators, in a room whose ceiling is supported by a single column. Christ, full of pain and patience, looks at his torturers. "*Ego in flagella paratus sum et dolor meus in conspectu tuo semper.*" (Psalm 37)

24. Jesus, seated and surrounded by four torturers, is beaten and mocked. Three servants look on, while two men stand outside the door. Here, Christ's blindfold is not transparent. (Isaias 50:6)

25. Jesus carrying his cross turns towards Mary who is kept from approaching him by two executioners. Two other executioners walk ahead of Christ.

26. Jesus' clothes are taken by two Roman soldiers, who share them. There is little movement in this composition. (Isaias 53:7); (John 19:17)

27. Jesus, dead on the cross. Mary, John, and three women weep to his right. Three soldiers, kneel, worshiping the Lord, while five Pharisees and soldiers look on with emotion. No taunting takes place; no enemies are present. Two men, holding lance and sponge, stand contemplating near the cross. A deep and painful peace rules over the entire composition. "It is finished."

28. Jesus advances on a cloud towards Limbo. Satan lies crushed by the knocked down door. Adam and Eve, clothed, advance towards the Redeemer, followed by Abraham, David and others. *A. CVI, 14*; (Apocalypse 5:9)

29. The body of Christ, lies before the sepulcher and is surrounded by seven women and three men. In the foreground can be seen the nails and the crown of thorns resting on a piece of cloth. A sad calm fills this work. (Isaias 11:10); (Luke 23:53).

30. Five women approach the tomb of Christ. Two of them look into the mausoleum and see an angel sitting. Three other women stand slightly behind them.

31. The Ascension. Only the edge of Christ's robes is visible in the upper part of this painting as He rises to Heaven. In the lower part of the work, the Virgin Mary and the eleven apostles kneel in a circle. Two angels stand to the sides. (Psalms 17:11); (Mark 16:19).

32. The Pentecost. The Virgin is seated inside of a house surrounded by twelve apostles and thirteen disciples, with only the busts of the figures visible. Two groups of men are in front of the house, one group of two, and one group of three. (Joel 2:28); (Acts 2:4).

33. In the centre of the composition, Christ places a crown on his holy Mother's head. Angels and saints who fill the foreground surround them. Most of them direct their gazes beyond the scene. The grouping is a bit crowded, and the figures do not possess the desired life or variety. Only the group in the centre is excellent. The inscriptions do not seem to have a connection with the scene. "*Vidi Dominum sedentem super solium et elevatum et plena domus maiestate eius.*" (Isaias 6) "*Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus et habitavit cum eis et ipsi populus eius erunt et ipse Deus eorum.*" (Apocalypse 21).

34. The Last Judgment. See Chapter 5

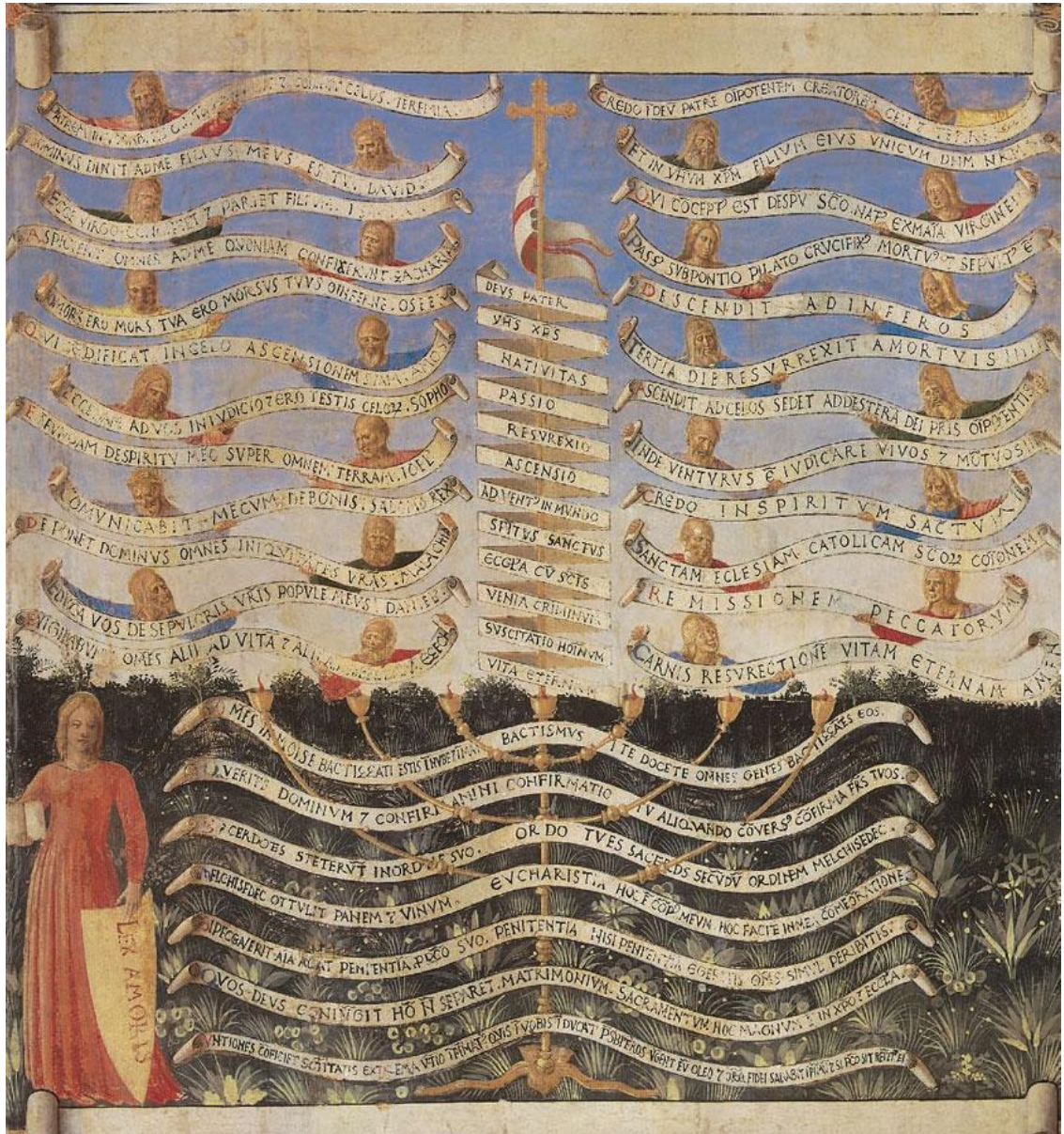
35. The last picture closes the cycle and corresponds with the first. Where the first painting depicted the sources of God's written word, this painting illustrates the Apostle's Creed and the Seven Sacraments. In the lower part of the painting is a seven-branched candlestick symbolizing the Old Testament set in a field of colourful flowers. Seven banners with the seven Sacraments written upon them emerge from the candlestick. Each of these banners is found between two texts related to the particular Sacrament, one taken from the Old Testament, and one taken from the New Testament. To the left, the church is portrayed by the figure of a woman holding an open book. Above the banners and emerging from the candelabra in the centre of the composition is a cross. Around this cross winds a strip of cloth upon which are written twelve words, each of which is connected to one of the articles from the Apostles' Creed (the *Credo*). The Apostles themselves can be seen to the right, each holding a banner with one of the articles of the *Credo*. To the left, are twelve of the prophets with similar banners, upon which are written texts that correspond to each of the *Credo*'s articles (Illustration).



42. The Lamentation over the Dead Christ (altarpiece of Santa Croce del Tiempo), 1436–1441. Tempera on wood panel, 105 × 164 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.



43. Nine of the thirty-five paintings on panels for the doors of the Silver Treasury (Armadio degli Argenti) of Santissima Annunziata in Florence (detail), c. 1450. Tempera on wood panel, each painting: 39 × 39 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

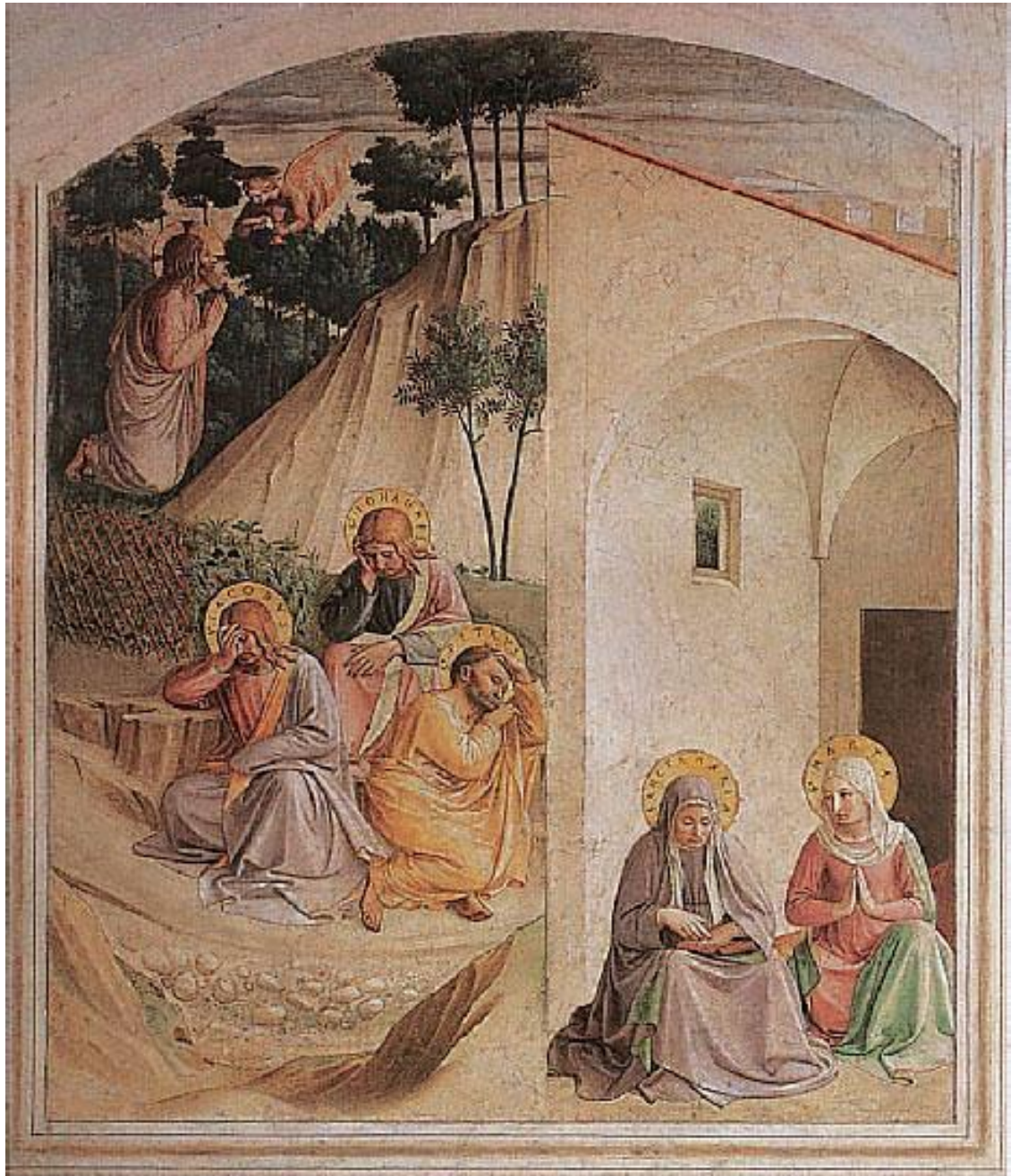


44. The Law of Love (Lex Amoris) (the last of the thirty-five paintings for the Silver Treasury of Santissima Annunziata), c. 1450. Tempera on wood panel, 39 × 39 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

Fra Angelico's Stay in Florence, and his Murals at the Convento di San Marco



45. The Annunciation (cell 3), c. 1440–1441. Fresco, 190 × 164 cm. Convento di San Marco, Florence.



46. The Agony in the Garden and Martha and Mary Praying (cell 34), c. 1442. Fresco, 177 × 147 cm. Convento di San Marco, Florence.

In 1436, Fra Angelico left his convent in Fiesole to go to the convent of San Marco in Florence. Here, elevated cloisters flooded with light surrounded the square courtyard. To the left of the entrance rose the church, and doors that opened across from the entryway gave access to the sacristy, the second floor, and the chapter room. A vast refectory stretched along the third side of the courtyard, and on the fourth side, were the rooms once reserved for the convent's guests, with the entrance to the monastery in the corner.

The works that Fra Angelico left here are particularly important. They mark a high point in the history of art, and are also the essence of Angelico's work. In the lunette above the door of the first room for those to whom the Dominicans offered their hospitality, Fra Angelico painted three life-size figures. (*Christ with Two Dominicans Resembling the Disciples of Emmaus*, or *Christ Being Received as a Pilgrim*) Christ is in the centre, his face framed by the long and curly hair that

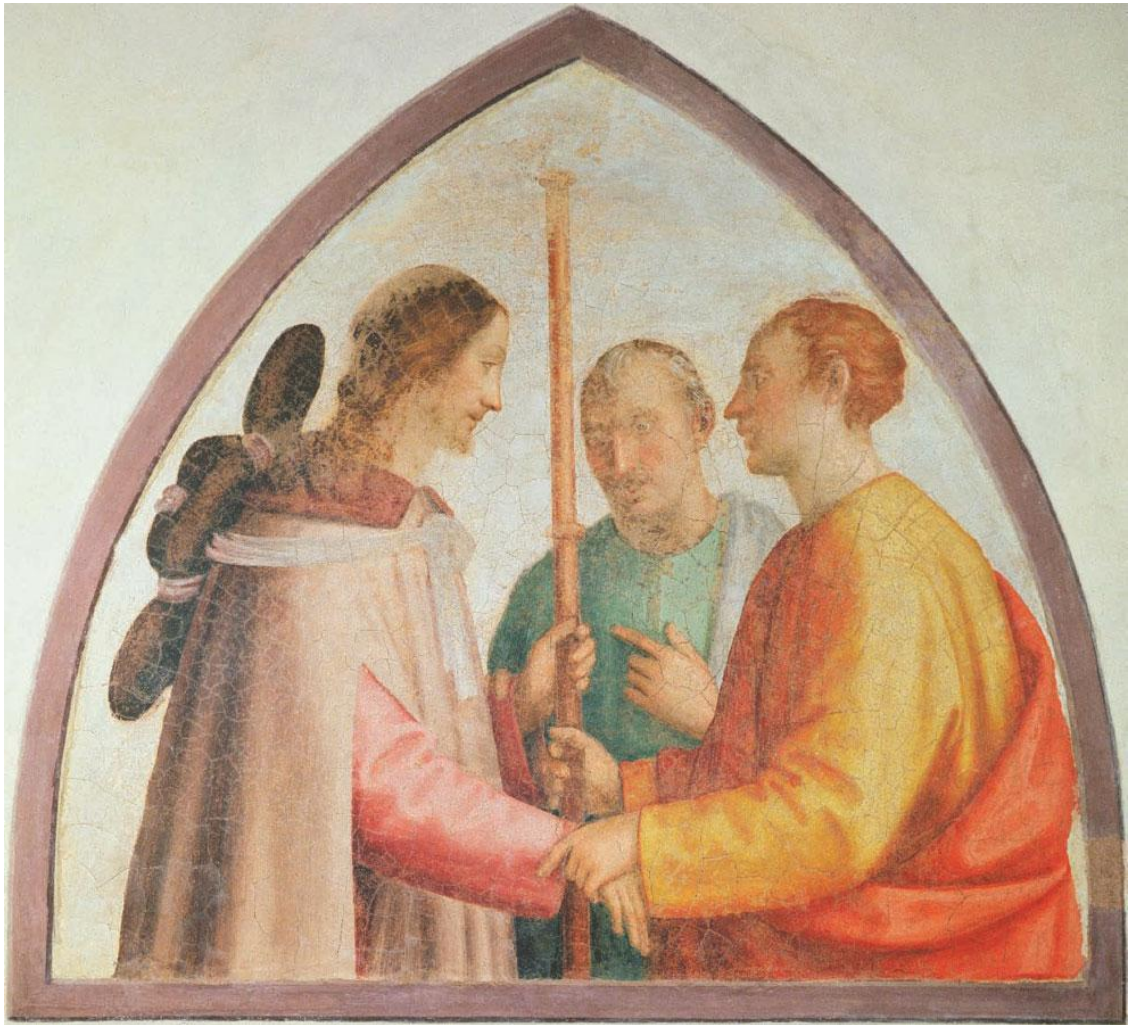
falls down his back. He has a rather large beard, a pilgrim's staff in his hand, and is poorly dressed in a garment worn ragged by travel. Two Dominican friars welcome him. The first, a prior, takes the right hand of the Lord in his own, while gripping the left arm of Christ with his left hand. The monk that accompanies him adds his entreaties to those of his prior with an expressive gesture. They resemble the disciples of Emmaus, and encourage the Lord to accept their house's hospitality. Their hands are eloquent and their eyes seem to convey an emotional request, at once serious and gentle, to the pilgrim.

It is interesting to note how much this painting differs from the fellow Dominican Fra Bartolomeo's conception of the same subject painted above the door of the second guest room (*Christ with Two Disciples of Emmaus resembling Father Nicholas Scomberg and Father Santi Paganini*). Bartolomeo dresses the two disciples of Emmaus in their traditional garments, but paints one with the features of Father Nicholas Scomberg, the German prior of San Marco beginning in 1506, and the other with the features of his predecessor, Father Santi Paganini. Here, one grasps the difference between these two famous painters from the same religious order. Fra Angelico idealises through generalisation. He paints the disciples of Emmaus as Dominican monks, and seems to palpably express the thought, "In each of our guests we see Jesus Christ himself, and we will welcome them as the disciples of Emmaus welcomed the Lord." In contrast, Fra Bartolomeo naturalises and individualises. He gives the disciples the features of living and well-known personalities, just as Ghirlandaio, in his painting of the birth of Mary at Santa Maria Novella, painted the women visiting Saint Anne with the faces of specific Florentine women known for their beauty (*The Birth of Mary*). Fra Bartolomeo borrowed from tradition, and borrowed from Fra Angelico the good idea of painting the disciples of Emmaus above the door of a guest room. Yet he lost the expressive energy found in the work of his precursor by portraying the disciples in the traditional garb of the characters in the Biblical story.¹² Today, this painting is on the second floor in the cell of Savonarola, who converted Fra Bartolomeo, causing him to leave his dissipated life and join the Dominican Order.

¹² In the guide to San Marco, Professor Fred Rodoni summarises the remarks we have just presented in the following terms, "Nelle mura di questo con vento è impressa la storia monumentale dei più gloriosi tempi dell' arte fiorentina. L'Angelico chiude e riassum l'antica Scuola toscana del risorgimento: Frate Barolomeo della Porta rappresenta la Scuola moderna. Il primo il pittore dell' idea, il secondo quella della forma. Grande ambidue e ornamento di questo bellissimo Cenobio che illustraono colla lora, dimora e coi loro dipinti."



47. Christ with Two Dominicans Resembling the Disciples of Emmaus (lunette over the door of the east entrance to the hospice), 1440–1442. Fresco, 108 × 145 cm. Convento di San Marco, Florence.



48. Fra Bartolomeo, Christ with Two Disciples of Emmaus Resembling Father Nicholas Scomberg and Father Santi Paganini (lunette over the door of Savonarola's cell). Fresco. Convento di San Marco, Florence.

In a series of four half figures painted by Fra Angelico in the lunettes above the other doors, the stranger, fraternally welcomed into the convent, is reminded that the colonnades of the cloister are a sacred place. He sees Saint Dominic, holding the book of rules and discipline, rules that establish the necessity of a life of penitence, followed by Saint Thomas, the light of the Order. Above the door of the sacristy, the guest saw Saint Peter Martyr, a serious character holding his finger to his lips, commanding silence in the cloister, and particularly, in the sacristy (*Saint Peter Martyr Enjoining Silence*).¹³ Above a fifth door, the Lord rises from the tomb and shows the wounds on his hands, recalling the Stations of the Cross and the victory of the Resurrection.

¹³ Above a door in the cloister of Badia in Florence, Fra Angelico painted a picture of *Saint Benedict* similar to this one. (Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. II, p. 514, annotation I)

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.