VISUAL CULTURE IN EARLY MODERNITY

The Realism of Piero della Francesca

Joost Keizer

An **Ashgate** Book

The Realism of Piero della Francesca

The fifteenth-century Italian artist Piero della Francesca painted a familiar world. Roads wind through hilly landscapes, run past farms, sheds, barns, and villages. This is the world in which Piero lived. At the same time, Piero's paintings depict a world that is distant. The subjects of his pictures are often Christian and that means that their setting is the Holy Land, a place Piero had never visited.

The Realism of Piero della Francesca studies this paradoxical aspect of Piero's art. It tells the story of an artist who could think of the local churches, palaces, and landscapes in and around his home town of Sansepolcro as miraculously built replicas of the monuments of Jerusalem. Piero's application of perspective, to which he devoted a long treatise, was meant to convince his contemporaries that his paintings report on things that Piero actually observed. Piero's methodical way of painting seems to have offered no room for his own fantasy. His art looks deliberately styleless.

This book uncovers a world in which painting needed to validate itself by cultivating the illusion that it reported on things observed instead of things imagined by the artist. Piero's painting claimed truth in a world of increasing uncertainties.

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Preface

The origin of this book lies in a class on early Renaissance art I taught at Yale in the fall of 2010. The small group of students brave enough to take a class taught by an unknown professor in a department full of seasoned teaching virtuosi asked some of the questions that inform the present book. A Griswold traveling grant from Yale contributed to funding a research trip to Italy in the summer of 2011, and a Morse Fellowship from the same institution funded a sabbatical leave in 2012, when I drafted a first version of the manuscript.

I presented aspects of my research at Columbia University (2010), at Yale (2011 and 2012), Princeton (2012), New York University (2012), the Freie Universität Berlin (2012), and the Universiteit Gent (2013). I would like to thank the audiences at those occasions for their questions and suggestions. In addition, I acknowledge the help and suggestions of Carol Armstrong, Peter Bell, Michael Cole, J.D. Connor, Machtelt Israëls, Jackie Jung, Bram Kempers, Rob Nelson, Alex Nemerov, Chris Wood, Sebastian Zeidler, and the two anonymous readers for the press. I would also like to thank my initial editor Erika Gaffney at Ashgate, the publishing house that accepted the project, for her trust in and enthusiasm for my project, as well as Allison Levy for accepting the book as part of the series Visual Culture in Early Modernity.

I have discussed some of the material in this book in two articles. In order to avoid repeated referencing I cite them here: "The Concept of Style in Early Renaissance Art," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 78 (2015): 370–85, and "Portrait and Imprint in Fifteenth-Century Italy," *Art History* 38.1 (January 2015): 11–37.

Introduction
Life and work

Most paintings by Piero della Francesca show a familiar world (Plate 1). Roads wind through hilly landscapes, run past farms, sheds, barns, and villages. The country is bare and rocky. Streams make their way through fields hemmed by trees, mirrored in the smooth, cold surface of the water. The land is tranquil, never daunting. It is cultivated and populated. It looks familiar. This is the upper Tiber valley, where Piero owned a farm. The roads are the paths Piero traveled. The town is Borgo Sansepolcro, where he grew up and spent most of his career.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, when Piero was painting, there was nothing new about depicting your own, familiar world. Paintings had been making biblical events take place on Italian soil for a century and half. The Sienese painter Duccio had started to paint contemporary Sienese architecture in the backgrounds of scenes from the life of Christ; for instance, in the *Maestà*, he included the high altar of Siena Cathedral. His pupil Pietro Lorenzetti later took the same cathedral as the setting for the presentation of Christ in the temple. And in the early fifteenth century, the Florentine painter Masaccio portrayed Saint Peter healing the maimed and crippled with his shadow in a Florentine street, with its medieval rusticated palaces and houses with their typical overhangs, *sporti*. But Piero della Francesca was more insistent and consistent than his predecessors and his contemporaries. The references to his own world and his own time were more precise and they occurred more regularly.

The world in Piero's paintings is small and local. Borgo San Sepolcro, now Sansepolcro, was a prosperous hamlet, a *borgo*. It lay on a crucial trade route between northern Italy and Rome. It prided itself on strong local traditions, even when the town was politically dependent on the larger papal state and city-states on the peninsula. It meant something to be from Sansepolcro. But in Piero's youth, there was no tradition of painters or sculptors, nowhere to train as a painter.[1] Done with his training elsewhere—presumably in Siena—Piero returned to Sansepolcro to become the town's first local artist. He never loosened the ties to his hometown, despite fulfilling commissions in larger artistic centers like Rimini, Ferrara, Urbino, Arezzo, Rome, and Florence. His stints abroad were short. Piero always returned to the house at the northern outskirts of Sansepolcro that he shared with his three brothers. He remained a local artist, a man tied to the soil on which he was born. Perhaps half of his oeuvre was meant for patrons in Sansepolcro. He made his first and last painting there. Piero "*dela terra nostra*," "from our soil," his fellow Sansepolcran, the mathematician Luca Pacioli, wrote.[2]

There is very little interpretive work done on this rhyming between Piero's life and his art—a life spent in the land that occupies half of his paintings. Perhaps most

modern scholars consider the local landscape as a symptom of the kind of provinciality they try to downplay. Some books grant Piero a central stage in the development of the Renaissance, putting an emphasis on the year he spent in Florence in 1439 assisting the painter Domenico Veneziano on frescos at the church of Sant' Egidio, now lost; that year, Piero became something of a Florentine painter.[3] Piero wrote a treatise on perspective whose intellectual scope, some Piero students feel, fits the humanist culture of Florence better than the intellectually moderate environment of the upper Tiber valley. In the Florence-centered accounts of Piero, the local landscapes in his paintings play a very limited role.

We have to look elsewhere for an interpretation of an artist's insistence on painting his own environment in pictures of biblical scenes that happened long ago and far away. I want to mention one influential interpretation here, Henry Thode's *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien*, published in 1885. Thode argued that artists began to paint their own lifeworld in response to Franciscan preaching and poetry.[4] Franciscan aesthetics emphasized presence rather than distance, a rhyming of the world of the viewer with the world of painting. Thode based his thesis on texts like the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, a fourteenth-century book once attributed to the Franciscan monk Saint Bonaventura, which compared the setting of the life of Christ to Tuscan towns and Tuscan landscapes.[5] Realistic paintings by artists like Giotto brought religion closer to the realm of experience of common people, the local farmers, and townsmen, whose world was small and intimate.

Thode's thesis was meant to replace the more common explanation that the new actuality in fourteenth-century art marked a rebirth of antique culture, aided by a small, elite group of humanists. No ancient painting had surfaced in the fourteenth century, but ancient sources taught people that ancient Greek artists like Apelles and Zeuxis had been extremely skilled in making artworks that imitated reality. This was an argument that Thode's book never completely managed to replace. Michael Baxandall, in his *Giotto and the Orators* of 1971, maintained that early Renaissance realism was a manner of depiction that was geared towards a very small, intellectual crowd of people.[6] After he had read most fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts on art written in Italy, Baxandall became convinced that the art of Giotto and his contemporaries, but also the paintings of fifteenth-century Flemish artists like Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, belonged to the Latin culture of the orators, or humanists, and not to the more local, vernacular culture Thode had proposed. The language in which fourteenth-century pictures spoke was as strange to the common viewer as the Ciceronian Latin Italian humanists were writing in. Early Renaissance realism did not depict a familiar world; it rather cultivated a small elite crowd of viewers who understood that what they were looking at was reviving an antique mode of representation. Baxandall cited the famous claim made by Petrarch in his testament of 1370 that "the ignorant do not understand the beauty" of a panel by Giotto in Petrarch's possession "but the masters of art are stunned by it."[7]

Today, the question of what constituted the Renaissance and where it began remains remarkably unresolved. This has partly to do with a division of the field between scholars who work on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and those who study the sixteenth century. Erwin Panofsky had argued in his *Renaissance and renascences* that the Renaissance only began in the late fifteenth century, when classical form began to match classical content. What happened before in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was perhaps a rebirth of something new but not a true rebirth of classical culture.

Only in the sixteenth century did art really change. Only then did artists realize that they were painting at an historical distance from the Middle Ages, that their art was truly different from what had come immediately before them.[8] This has left the art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries strangely undefined. Not that no work has been done on these centuries. Art historians have shown how Quattrocento artworks circulated as tokens of identity, religious change, court culture, and the rise of the bourgeoisie. Some of them do not treat artworks as art at all, or at least not in the way that a historian of sixteenth-century Italian art would treat artworks as self-reflective, self-consciously relating to the past, to the imagination of the artist, to poetry, music, and other disciplines.[9] Some historians of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century art explicate that the works of those centuries were "images" and not yet "art." Images were made to be used—for devotion, the brokering of power, the cementing of family ties—and their appreciation depended on how well they served that purpose. The person who ordered the work could be considered its maker as much as the actual artist.[10] "Painting was still too important to be left to the painters," wrote Michael Baxandall in 1972 about the fifteenth century in his influential *Painting and Experience*, his counterpart to *Giotto and the Orators*.[11]

The art of Piero della Francesca is now usually considered in the context of the religious confraternities and orders that commissioned his altarpieces, and the politics of the princes and counts at whose courts he worked. Social art history has restored life to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century painting by taking painting away from the painters and giving it back to the persons who used it. It has taught us that the contemporary life you see *in* the picture is not the life of the painter. It is the life of the society for whom it was made—the buzzing streets of Florence, the anxieties of the religious orders about their place in the catholic church, the gossip about families, friends, and neighbors. These studies have revolutionized the understanding of fifteenth-century art. We are now in a much better place to understand the practice of fifteenth-century artists in the context of the society in which they worked. Yet, these studies are no longer motivated by the question of what exactly constituted the Renaissance—the questions that fueled the study by Thode and Baxandall's first book. However much social art history has contributed to early Renaissance art, it shows very little interest in why paintings look the way they look.

Charles Dempsey has reintroduced the Renaissance to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Dempsey believed that art itself changed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that it changed because of the revival of letters. He does not mean the revival of the Ciceronian Latin that Baxandall studied in *Giotto and the Orators*, but the new vernacular texts that had arrived in Italy around 1300 with French troubadours and that were passionately embraced by Petrarch in his love poetry. The vernacular was the language of lived experience. And it was this language that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century painters adopted, from Giotto and Simone Martini to Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci. Pictures, like vernacular texts, were oriented towards the world in which their audience lived. In part, this is a revival of Thode's thesis, which, too, tried to shift attention away from classical Latin to the vernacular. But in contrast to Thode, Dempsey keeps religion at bay. For him, the revival of arts and letters was enough to account for the historical centrality of the Renaissance.[12]

According to Dempsey, art changed society, not the other way around. Paintings made people look at and understand the world in a different way. It brought about "a kind of psychological mutation" of society. Vernacular literature—think, for instance,

of Petrarch's evocations of Laura's beauty—offered a new norm for the experience of beauty, mainly female beauty. Simone Martini, in his *Maestà* at the Palazzo Comunale in Siena of 1315, depicted the Virgin according to the standards described in vernacular poetry, with blonde hair and almond-shaped eyes.[13] A human, albeit culturally determined, experience of beauty was now brought in line with the experience of art. Yet, it is still important to emphasize that Martini is not depicting an actual woman, not someone whom he had seen. He rather represented an idea of beauty described in contemporary texts but nowhere found in real-life experience. The whole point of Petrarch's sonnets about Laura was that her beauty could not really be found on earth. It could merely be evoked or painted. When the poet wrote that Simone Martini had made a portrait of Laura, he added that it could not have been painted on earth but only in heaven.[14] The experience of beauty in Martini's painting conformed to an imagined kind of beauty that Petrarch had formed in his mind. Some of Petrarch's contemporaries and successors in fact believed that Laura had never really existed.[15] Artists like Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci did not merely paint surface appearances, but rather tried to capture a particular essence of woman beauty, an essence at the core of her character and disposition.

Dempsey's Renaissance can therefore not fully account for the practice of Piero della Francesca. What Piero depicted in the backgrounds of his paintings was not a commonly shared, standard idea of living experience. He depicted a specific, personal, and intimate experience of reality. His is not an *idea* of experience. The reality in Piero's pictures is not normative; it is descriptive. It describes Piero's world.

In this book, I am offering a different definition of the Renaissance and of Piero's place in it. I argue that early Renaissance art proposed a new characterization of the relationship between an artist, his life, and his work. Artists' names started to be recorded in contemporary sources, and people became interested in the lives of individual painters and sculptors. In the early Renaissance, the biographies of artists mattered more than they had for centuries. And this new emphasis on authorship, I submit, went hand in hand with the depiction of life. My thesis is that this new relationship between artist and work had had less to do with opening art up to a broader public than with a new kind of intimacy between a painter and his painting—between life and work.

I am calling this relationship between work and life the realism of Piero della Francesca. I deliberately chose the term "realism" over the more current term "naturalism." Realism is derived from the Latin word *realitas*. And the root-word of *realitas* is *res*—thing.[16] Piero and some of his contemporaries believed that artworks—things—attached to reality in different way than, say, texts. To claim that a picture is realistic is also to make a claim about what constitutes painting vis-à-vis the other cultural disciplines. Throughout this book, I cite a variety of fifteenth-century authors—painters and non-painters—who claim a special relationship between art and the world in which it was made. Here I want to single out the work of Flavio Biondo, a man who moved in the same circles as Piero. Biondo used artworks as historical evidence, sometimes even to correct things he had read in ancient texts in his attempt to write a correct historical reconstruction of ancient Roman ways of life. Biondo knew that a Roman soldier wore his *armilla* on the left arm close to the shoulder because he had seen marble statues with an armilla in Rome. He had learned from ancient reliefs that the pantomimists (*Lydii*) included in ancient triumphs gestured wildly. He wrote that up until about 100 years ago women only covered their head when they were in mourning, in contrast to the women of Biondo's day, who all covered their head and shoulders

with a piece of fabric—something he had seen in paintings and mosaics. He refuted Pliny's claim that Etruscan rulers wore a golden crown during triumphal entries and that a servant accompanied them; some antique marbles clearly demonstrated that the person Pliny identified as a servant (*servus*) was in fact an allegory of Fortune. And if you wanted to know what the golden altar looked like that Moses wrote about in the Laws, then you had better look at the Arch of Titus rather than read the text in Josephus.[17]

Others, including artists, took the copula between art and life as something more specific. Take the elaborate mid-fifteenth-century account of the origin and definition of Renaissance art by Lorenzo Ghiberti, a goldsmith, sculptor, writer, and perhaps acquaintance of Piero. The passage that I will be quoting is at the beginning of the second book of Ghiberti's *Commentaries*, a text completed around 1450 that Piero knew.[18] The passage will be the focus of attention here and its implications will reverberate throughout this book, so I will quote it in its entirety, both in Italian and in translation:

> Cominciò l'arte della pictura a sormontare in Etruria in una villa allato alla città di Firenze la quale si chiamava Vespignano. Nacque uno fanciullo di mirabile ingegno il quale si ritraeva del naturale una pecora; in su passando Cimabue pictore per la strada a Bologna vide el fanciullo sedente in terra et disegnava in su una lastra una pecora. Prese grandissima amiratione del fanciullo, essendo di si pichola età fare tanto bene; domandò veggendo aver l'arte da natura, domandò il fanciullo come egli aveva nome. Rispose et disse: "per nome io son chiamato Giotto: el mio padre à nome Bondoni et sta in questa casa che e apresso," disse. Cimabue andò con Giotto al padre, aveva bellissima presentia, chiese al padre el fanciullo, el padre era poverissimo. Concedettegli el fanciullo a Cimabue menò seco Giotto et fu discepolo di Cimabue, tenea la maniera greca, in quella maniera ebbe in Etruria grandissima fama; fecesi Giotto grande nell'arte della pictura.
>
> Arrechò l'arte nuova, lasciò la rogeza de' Greci; sormontò excellentissimamente in Etruria. Et fecionsi egregiissime opere et spetialmente nella città di Firençe et in molti altri luoghi; et assai discepoli furono tutti dotti al pari delli antichi Greci. Vide Giotto nell'arte quello che gli altri non agiunsono. Arecò l'arte naturale ella gentileza con essa, non uscendo delle misure. Fu peritissimo in tutta l'arte, fu inventore et trovatore di tanta doctrina la quale era stata sepulta circa d'anni 600. Quando la natura vuole concedere alcuna cosa, la concede sanga veruna auaritia.
>
> The art of painting began to arise in Etruria in a village near the city of Florence which was called Vespignano. A boy of astonishing natural talent was born, who was drawing a sheep from nature, when the painter Cimabue, passing by on the road to Bologna, saw the boy sitting on the ground and drawing a sheep on a slab of stone. He was filled with great admiration for the boy who at such a young age could do so well. And seeing that the boy had natural talent, Cimabue asked him his name. The boy answered and said, "I am called Giotto. My father's name is Bondone and he lives in that house nearby." Thus he said to Cimabue. Cimabue went with Giotto to his father. Cimabue, who had a beautiful appearance, asked the father for the boy. The father was very poor, and he entrusted the boy to Cimabue. Cimabue took Giotto with him, and Giotto became the pupil of Cimabue. Cimabue held to the Greek manner with which he achieved great fame in Etruria. Giotto made himself great in the art of painting.

> He introduced the new art, abandoned the crudeness of the Greeks, and flourished most excellently in Etruria. And he executed most distinguished works, especially in the city of Florence and in many other places. And many of his pupils were as learned in theory as the ancient Greeks. Giotto saw in art that which the others did not understand. He introduced a natural art and [he introduced] grace with it. And he did not depart from measurements. He was expert in every aspect of art. He was the inventor and discoverer of much theoretical knowledge that had been buried for 600 years. When nature wishes to bestow something, she does it with abundance.[19]

For Ghiberti, the Renaissance was already old; a century and half, we would say, because Giotto was active around 1300, but Ghiberti was less clear about when exactly Cimabue discovered Giotto's talent. The theoretical knowledge the discovery of which he attributed to Giotto had been underground for "600 years." In the paragraph that precedes the one I am quoting, Ghiberti wrote that this knowledge had been lost since the times of the Emperor Constantine (r. 306–37) and Pope Sylvester (r. 314–35), or perhaps since the time of the first iconoclastic campaigns of Pope Gregory the Great (r. 590–604) (whom Ghiberti doesn't mention by name). In any case, he isn't very precise. Earlier he had also mentioned that the Greeks, this time referring to Byzantine artists, started to paint again after the churches had been blank or whitewashed for "600 years." He added that the Greeks started to decorate church buildings in the 382nd Olympiad, a way of computing time he adopted from Pliny, who dated the activity of some ancient artists according to Olympiads. Some modern scholars believed that the 382nd Olympiad accorded to a period of four years in the early twelfth century.[20] All of this would put Giotto's work somewhere in between the nineth and eleventh centuries, around the same time that the Byzantine artists started to revive the art of painting according to Ghiberti. Or perhaps Ghiberti believed that it was enough to say that painting in Tuscany was revived a long time ago, longer than a few generations and therefore of an immensurable depth.

But Ghiberti made an even more remarkable claim about the time when Giotto worked. He said that Giotto's art originated and flourished in Etruria, the ancient Etruscan kingdom that preceded the Roman Empire. Some people writing before Ghiberti evoked Etruria and Etruscan culture in order to say that Tuscan culture was older and therefore more venerable than the culture of ancient Roman culture.[21] It permitted Florence and its territories to have its own, indigenous culture. This is probably the reason why Ghiberti named the land of Giotto "Etruria." It made Giotto into a purely Tuscan artist, an indigenous man from the country who extracted the art of painting from the very soil on which Ghiberti was also working.

Note, too, that Ghiberti never said that Giotto revived ancient Roman painting. There is no word about Roman art in his account of the origins of the Renaissance. The theory that Giotto recovered and past on to his assistants was ancient Greek in origins, Ghiberti wrote. He nowhere claimed that Giotto revived an ancient style of painting, nor that Giotto imitated ancient artworks. Ghiberti's Giotto rather recuperated, while painting, deeply buried precepts and theories. Earlier authors on Giotto—writing about the artist had become something of a literary genre by Ghiberti's time, certainly because the painter had made an appearance in the much-glossed *Divina Comedia*—didn't say, either, that Giotto reintroduced a Roman style of painting. Some never even mentioned the Romans. Giovanni Boccaccio said around the middle of the

fourteenth century that Giotto gave art a new life by reorienting it towards nature.[22] Boccaccio knew that ancient Greek and Roman artists had excelled in the imitation of nature, appending that Giotto was slightly better.[23] But he never described Giotto's mode as a classically inspired style. Benvenuto da Imola, writing towards the end of the fourteenth century, also compared Giotto to ancient artists, concluding that he was not as skilled in imitating nature as his ancient predecessors.[24] Yet again, no word on style. Giovanni Villani, whose words on Giotto opened up the fifteenth-century reception of the artist, was the only author who explicitly said that Giotto revived Roman culture. Yet he is also saying that Giotto did not imitate a style of painting; Giotto rather imitated nature, like the ancient Roman artists had done, as you could read in Pliny.[25]

What Giotto introduced back then, according to Ghiberti, was a new kind of painting, not a new style. Realism is the antithesis of style, for art can only imitate nature successfully if it leaves out all traces of the artist's imagination, the artist's peculiar way of depicting things. Ghiberti carefully avoided the use of the word style—*maniera* in Italian—when he spoke of Giotto's art. Style was what marked the period in between ancient Greek painting and Giotto's birth. This was the period of the "*maniera greca*" (the Greek Style), a term that Ghiberti was one of the first writers to use and that became more current in the sixteenth century to describe non-realistic, medieval art. Giotto replaced the Greek maniera with a "new method" or "a new skill" (*l'arte nuova*). (I chose not to translate arte as art, but rather as "method" or "skill," because it is closer to the context in which Ghiberti mentioned Giotto, namely as the rediscoverer of an ancient practice and rule for painting; more about which in Chapter 1). Ghiberti understood Giotto's intervention in the history of art as the replacement of an existing style (arte) with what he called "the natural method [or skill]," *l'arte naturale*.[26] Giotto was reviving an ancient principle of painting, based on ancient rules, which allowed him to depict nature in an almost unaltered way.

There is very little evidence that Ghiberti and his contemporaries understood antique painting as a period style.[27] The term *all'antica*, "in the antique manner," which first surfaced around mid-fifteenth century, was exclusively used for antique architecture and (as I will argue in the final chapter) for the rectangular format of painting, but never to describe an antique style of depiction. It was not until the sixteenth century that the term surfaced in discussions of ancient painting.[28] Fifteenth-century sources rather mention qualities like "*suo naturale*" and "*suo similitudine*" as the key characteristics of ancient art.[29] And these were qualities that made the look of art dependent on reality, not the stylistic preferences of painters and sculptors. The ideology of art-making in late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century Italy prescribed that artists imitate nature, if not in practice, than at least in theory. Texts on art present a uniform culture of art in which the best artworks looked most like the reality they imitate. Around 1400, the Florentine artist Cennino Cennini recommended a whole generation of artists to always follow the lead of nature, even if every artist should learn his craft by first imitating the work of other artists.[30]

The actual look of things was, however, different. In theory, realism might suppress the development of individual style. In reality, it didn't. Nature provided a consistent model for imitation—a neutral, homogenous ground against which difference could be measured. It soon became clear that everyone imitated nature differently. With the new call for naturalism paradoxically came the awareness that every artist worked in his own style. A common ground started to point to individual differences.[31]

In the passage that precedes Cennini's recommendation to imitate nature, he advised the young apprentice to copy established masters, and in it, he claimed that every painter had his own style. "Proceeding thus day in and day out," Cennini continued, "it would be unnatural for you not to come close to his [the older master's] manner [*maniera*] and to his air [*aria*]."[32] Both maniera and aria might be translated as style, but they are not synonymous.[33] The word maniera, close to the Italian word *stile* or *stilo*, denotes an acquired kind of behavior, like a way of dressing or talking.[34] Close to the end of the fourteenth century, Francesco Buti wrote about poetry that in it "style is nothing else than a mode of saying, the which is divided into three sorts, that is high [style], middle [style] and low [style]," the three styles of writing in ancient rhetoric that conform to the kind of subject you speak of.[35] Petrarch said that he wrote in various styles depending on the subject under discussion, and Boccaccio claimed to have written his *Decameron* in "*istilo umilissimo e rimesso*," "a homely and simple style" fitting the vernacular stories he described.[36] In the *Convivio*, Dante wrote that pleasant subjects were to be discussed in what he called the "pleasant style," *soave stile*.[37] In all of these examples style was not a matter of choice but something prescribed by the subject under discussion. It was even considered the opposite of individual invention or fantasy. In grammar books of the time, style was discussed as something that could be acquired through diligent study and imitation of texts and was explicitly contrasted to individual invention or personal contribution.[38] The fourteenth-century poet Antonio Pucci wrote of Giotto's Campanile that it was built in "a good style," *bello stile*.[39] But Pucci was not saying that the tower was marked by Giotto's personal style. *Bello stile* here means a style fitting for its purpose; the cathedral's bell tower was built in a mode that was pleasing to look at, as if Giotto had picked a style from a range of styles already available to him. Dante's *bello stile* was derived from the style of Virgil, which Dante commentators in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries glossed as the "poetic" style as opposed to the "historical" style.[40]

The word *aria* instead described a relationship between an artist and his work that was natural, not acquired or learned. It was something individual and biological, a quality already present at birth. It is not so much a particular way of doing things but a way of being, which is how it is indeed sometimes translated. Poets thought that *aria* was specific to painters. When Petrarch tried to explain the relationship between a text and its model, he evoked the likeness between a father and a son, a likeness that was not an exact similarity but rather a "certain suggestion," "something subtle," a relationship between work and model "that our painters call air," *aria*.[41] When Ghiberti described the art of the ancient artist Parrhasios, a description indebted to Pliny, he wrote of a particular "measure" (*misure*) of his figures, of the way the head was attached to the shoulders, of the beautiful mouth and facial features, adding that "these are things that cannot be taught, and to give gracious air [*aria*], it is necessary that nature has bestowed it upon you."[42]

Aria belongs to man and it belongs to art, and the two cannot be separated. Leonardo da Vinci believed that painters were inclined to paint faces that resembled their own. An ugly painter painted ugly faces, "for often the figures resemble the master."[43] One commentator wrote that Dante noted the discrepancy between the ugly appearance of Giotto and his children and the beauty of his works, assuming that there was a correlation between the physical appearance of the artist and the appearance of the figures he paints. (To which Dante famously quoted the Roman writer Macrobius, "I conceive [*fingo*] in the dark and paint [*pingo*] in the light."[44]) The sculptor and

architectural theoretician Antonio Averlino, called Filarete, wrote in 1464 that the painter is known "by the style [*maniera*] of the figures he paints."[45] In all these examples, an artist's style mainly nestled in the figures he painted, binding the body of the painter to the body of the painted like a father to his son.

But there were artists who were believed to not paint in an individual style at all, instead advocating a pure kind of realism. When the Florentine priest and professor of rhetoric Cristoforo Landino recounted the names of the most famous Florentine artists in 1481, he said that Masaccio was different than the rest. There was nothing artificial about Masaccio's art; it was "*puro senza ornato*," pure without ornateness. Masaccio was exclusively devoted to "the imitation of reality," *del vero*. The term *ornato* described something added to reality, an artificial quality that could also be understood as a form of individual style.

Landino wrote that Masaccio was skilled in perspective, a praise that modern scholars reiterate.[46] The rigorous application of one-point perspective avoided the imprint of an individual artist's style. Consider the earliest written report about the invention of perspective, penned down in the 1480s by Antonio Manetti but situated in the years 1418–25. It relates of two experiments that the architect Filippo Brunelleschi conducted to exactly replicate the visible world. Brunelleschi's experiments resulted in two small paintings, both of which are now lost.[47] The first was a painting of the Florentine Baptistery, depicted from the steps of the Cathedral across from it, and the second a painting of the Piazza della Signoria, the main square in Florence on which the town hall was situated. The great novelty of the first painting, Manetti said, was that it managed to capture reality exactly as Brunelleschi had seen it. The painting depicted "reality as it is," *el proprio vero*.[48] In order to verify Brunelleschi's truth-claim, a viewer had to stand at the exact spot where Brunelleschi had painted his picture. (Or at least, where Brunelleschi claimed to have made the picture. In reality, he had probably painted it in his workshop on the basis of a detailed drawing he had made on the spot. It would take at least another century for paintings to be painted outdoors.[49]) The viewer would be invited to look through a hole Brunelleschi had drilled in the panel in the spot of the distance point, the point in the painting where the orthogonals—the lines running perpendicular to the picture plane—met, from the back of the panel, the bare wood pressed against his face with one hand. In the other hand, he would hold a mirror at an arm's-length distance from the panel. There, in the mirror, the viewer witnessed exactly what Brunelleschi saw.

But this was not all. Brunelleschi also wanted to make reality enter the picture. Rather than painting the sky above the Baptistery, he decided to cover it with burnished silver "so that the real sky and atmosphere [*l'aria e cieli naturali*] were reflected in it."[50] The other perspective panel that Brunelleschi made even had the sky cut out of the picture, so that the world outside the painting became part of the world inside the painting. Brunelleschi's perspective panels reversed the directionality of picture-making. Rather than the painter *making* a reality, the picture *absorbed* reality, unaltered by the artist who claimed responsibility for the painting.

Fifteenth-century people used the verb "*dimostrare*" to describe this directionality in painting. Dimostrare means "to show (*monstrare*) again (*di-*)." It described an act of repetition. The verb occurred more often in fifteenth-century accounts of perspective. Manetti used it do describe the effect of the burnished silver in Brunelleschi's perspective panel of the Florentine Baptistery. And in 1464, Filarete wrote that Brunelleschi had painted one of his perspective panels using a mirror, because the mirror

represented reality exactly as it was. Filarete believed that Brunelleschi was "working from what the mirror shows you again," *che nello specchio ti si dimostrare*.[51]

The effect of the mirror constituted something of a pure and first installment of realism in art, before artists started to paint in individual styles. "I used to tell me friends," Leon Battista Alberti wrote in *De pictura* in 1435,

> that the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus, who was turned into a flower; for as painting is the flower of all the arts, so that tale of Narcissus fits our purpose perfectly. What is painting but the act of embracing by means of the craft of art [*arte*] the surface of the pool?[52]

Ovid wrote that Narcissus, at first instance, took the mere reflection in the water for reality itself, not a mirror of his own appearance, but a beautiful man with its own, independent existence. What Narcissus saw was more beautiful than anything he had ever seen before. But then he discovered that the reflection was answering his own gestures. "Oh I am he. I am not deceived by my image," *Iste ego sum. Nec me mea fallit imago*.[53] The image (*imago*) looks exactly like what was there before the image, a "prior to" in terms both of space and of time. Alberti insisted that the task of the painter was merely to "embrace" the reflected image with the means of art. Alberti uses the verb "*amplector*" and in his own Italian translation "*abracciare*" to describe what painting does. Both the Latin and the Italian also mean "to encircle."[54] Alberti's account defines the art of painting as the encircling of a world that was already there *before the picture*. This is not a world imagined or invented, not a world affected by the intervention of the individual artist's style. The role of the artist was to mobilize his skill (*ars/arte*) to replicate a reality already there prior to the moment when an artist started painting.

This is the culture, I argue, to which Piero della Francesca belongs. Piero was perhaps the most important contributor to the art of perspective in the fifteenth century. He painted most of his works according to the rules he himself wrote down in his treatise *De Prospectiva Pingendi* (*On Painted Perspective*), the first treatise on perspective written by an artist. In Chapter 1, I will argue that the aim of the treatise was to found a kind of painting that received reality unchanged by the artist's style. Piero insisted that a painting did not *make* a new reality but that it showed—he used the word *dimostrare*—an a priori world. Here I want to emphasize that Piero also knew that this kind of painting was not what his contemporaries assumed painting to be. In the opening pages of the third book of his treatise, he launched into a passionate defense of perspective. "Many painters disparage perspective," he ranted, "because they do not understand the force of the lines and angles which are obtained from it . . . Therefore it seems to me that I should show how much this science is necessary to painting."[55]

But perhaps Piero's eccentric position best bespeaks Vasari's assessment of his legacy. Vasari had very little to say about Piero's paintings—even if some of Piero's key works could be found in Vasari's hometown of Arezzo—and instead highlighted his almost obsessive engagement with perspective.[56] It is my contention that Piero's treatise and the art that substantiated it were formulated as a passionate last call to make art imitate the world in which it was made, a last argument against personal style. Soon, Piero's project looked hopelessly naïve. The generation of artists after Piero mocked the comparison between painting and the mirror. Leonardo da Vinci said towards the

end of the fifteenth century that the painter who "who draws merely by practice and by eye, without any reason [*ragione*], is like a mirror which imitates every thing placed in front of it without being conscious of their being [*sanza cognitione d'esse*]."[57] And in 1564, the sculptor Benvenuto Cellini criticized the art of painting as an art that is "is no different from a tree or a person or something else being reflected in a stream"—words penned down in response perhaps to Alberti's story about Narcissus, but also suggestive of the reflections of country and man in the streams Piero painted.[58]

Piero might have been aiming for a kind of unadorned realism; yet this never made his paintings impersonal. His work belonged to him less for how they showed than for *what* they depicted. This was not an entirely exceptional way of thinking about the relationship between artist and work. Ghiberti's story about Cimabue's discovery of Giotto's talent presents art as something intimate and individual, the result of a particular life, while at the same time Ghiberti avoids saying that Giotto painted in an individual style. His story about the day of the discovery is detailed and precise. It sketches a particular lifeworld. The scene is a field just outside the small town of Vespignano, not too far from Florence, Ghiberti adds for those readers who had never heard of the hamlet. The encounter was a coincidence. Cimabue had never heard of the young boy. He was headed up the Apennine Mountains on his way to Bologna. Vespignano lies on the road leading North from Florence to Bologna. Giotto sat down, perhaps in the grass, when he was drawing. The subject of his drawing was a sheep, his material a slab of stone. And Ghiberti even recorded the exact words Giotto spoke in response to Cimabue's inquiry about his name, adding the name of his father and pointing—we imagine—to the little house where he and his father lived. The father was poor. Perhaps he was persuaded to take leave of his son because of the handsome appearance of the older painter.

The environment sketched by Ghiberti in his account of the encounter ended up in the first documented artwork Giotto made: A drawing of a sheep from his immediate environment. (Writers after Ghiberti imagined that Giotto was a shepherd, rendering the first work even more biographical.[59]) The work was ephemeral. Ghiberti made no mention of it surviving. But there were works by Giotto that depicted a similar kind of environment. Sheep, for instance, appear in many of the Arena Chapel frescos, probably intended by Giotto as props belonging to the worlds of Joachim and Christ—as indices of their isolation from the secular world of the city—but perhaps understood by Ghiberti as traces of the world of the artist. And maybe Leonardo added that Giotto was a goat keeper because these animals, too, appear in the same frescos. This would at least explain how Ghiberti or someone before him came up with the remarkable story about the meeting between Giotto and Cimabue.

Ghiberti was not right about Giotto's place of birth. Giotto was born in Florence and his father was not a poor man of the land, but a smith with some property close to the church of Santa Maria Novella. He and his family did own some real estate around the town of Vespignano, something Giovanni Boccaccio still remembered.[60] Other stories circulated about Giotto's apprenticeship, one, going back to the fourteenth century tells that Giotto's father had apprenticed his son in a Florentine wool shop and that the son, aware of his vocation and talent, would regularly sneak out to visit Cimabue's workshop.[61] Ghiberti's story about the rural origins of the father and son appealed more to the naturalism of the son's art—an art, like the son, born in nature—and therefore became more popular than the earlier explanation.[62]

The realism described in Ghiberti's story is not of a generic kind. It is rather an argument for a similarity or agreement between the specific life of an artist and the subject of his work. Giotto's world ended up in Giotto's paintings. In the course of the fourteenth century, the lifeworlds of artists became the subject of poems, novels, and proverbs. Artists became men of flesh and blood—people with families, children, friends, fears, and humor. Details from Giotto's life appeared in a variety of sources.[63] Giotto was ugly and his children were ugly, too, wrote Benvenuto da Imola.[64] He was witty, able to comment on matters of iconography and much else with learned men, reported an anonymous Dante commentator.[65] Boccaccio said that Giotto had a house in the Mugello, and didn't mind telling jokes to a judge who owned a house there, too, on a rainy day when the two were headed back to Florence.[66] And he was a friend of Dante, wrote Villani.[67] The lives of fifteenth-century artists were not less talked about than their fourteenth-century predecessors. The name of the sculptor Donatello surfaces in the least expected texts. He features in the novel *The Fat Woodcarver* (*La novella del Grasso Legnaiuolo*), where he and Brunelleschi are involved in making a woodcarver believe he has become someone else.[68] He appeared in a religious play about Nabucodonsor, a Babylonian king, who asks Donatello to sculpt a statue of gold. Donatello accepts the commission, but not before he claims to be too busy to fulfil the king's wishes. "I have to do the pulpit of Prato!" "I must also do the Dovizia for the market [in Florence] that is to be placed on the column, so right now I cannot take any more work."[69] These were actual commissions, lending a reality effect to the conversation Donatello had with the sixth-century-BC king. And then there is a list of seven Florentine sayings attributed to the sculptor. Some of them reveal his waspish character; others his wit; and two of them his preference for handsome apprentices.[70]

Today, biography is no longer considered a suitable format for art history. The narration of artists' lives is usually left to non-art historians, even when the writing of biographies is a genre we inherit from the early Renaissance.[71] Books that deal with artists' biographies, most notably Julius von Schlosser's *Kunstliteratur* (1896) and Ernst Kris's and Otto Kurz's *Die Legende vom Künstler* (1934), warn their readers not to trust early biographical anecdotes, like the ones about Giotto and Donatello.[72] Other authors point to classical precedents and treat biography as a purely literary genre that has little value for understanding the artworks themselves.[73] When modern art historians write about the life of an artist they carefully distinguish the life from the work. The life might serve the dating of artworks or the reconstruction of an artist's training; it is not allowed to intrude with what you see in the work.

There are probably good reasons to not always take contemporary biography seriously, if only because some, like Ghiberti's story about Giotto, do not correspond to the biographical details modern scholars find in contemporary documents. But I also feel that the separation of life from art has removed a sense of realism from early Renaissance art that was still felt by people in the fifteenth century. People looked at some artworks as deposits of the life of their makers. This, I argued above, is how Ghiberti looked at Giotto's art. And contemporary reports about the friendship between Giotto and Dante always point to Giotto's work in the Palazzo del Podestà in Florence, where the great painter had added a portrait of himself in the company of the great poet with the aid of mirrors—a painted testimony to two lives intersecting.[74]

This book argues that part of the world you see in Piero's paintings consists of his world. It is sometimes almost as if Piero could not help to have the place where he

was painting to enter the picture. His *Saint Jerome with a Donor* in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice includes a distant view on Sansepolcro and the rest of the landscape, too, looks like the Valle di Nocea around town. Remarkably, the painting was not made for a Sansepolcran patron, but for a Venetian man named Girolamo Amadi, whose name is inscribed in sixteenth-century handwriting at the bottom of the painting, perhaps added to the painting at a time when people started to forget who the man praying to Saint Jerome was.[75] The environment of the *Saint Jerome* does not conform to the lifeworld of the patron, like the Franciscan pictures Thode was writing about. It depicts the world of the painter, his hometown, where he was probably working and living at the time he was painting the picture.[76]

In the fifteenth century, the most explicitly realistic paintings often showed worlds that did not rhyme with the living environment of their public. Think of the large amount of Flemish painting on Italian soil, pictures that Piero and his contemporaries took as the measure of realistic art. Piero's friend, the painter Giovanni Santi, said that Jan van Eyck attended very closely to depicting reality, *il vero*, by which he meant experiential reality.[77] When the humanist Ciriaco d'Ancona was at the d'Este court in Ferrara in 1449, in the exact same year that Piero was also there, he was shown a *Descent from the Cross* by Rogier van der Weyden, now lost. Ciriaco was most mesmerized by the catalog of different things depicted in the painting, not just meadows and trees, but also things produced by van Eyck's culture: Garments, soldiers' cloaks in many colors, clothes with purple and gold, decorated porticoes and halls, and jewelry.[78] And in his biographies of famous men, Bartolomeo Fazio included a description of a picture of women taking a bath by van Eyck, gone but in Urbino by Piero's time. Fazio said that van Eyck's painting included a landscape punctuated by traces of van Eyck's world, "men, mountains, groves, hamlets and castles."[79] Santi, Ciriaco and Fazio were well traveled. They could not have mistaken the backgrounds of Flemish pictures for the kind of architecture they found around them in Ferrara or Urbino. Fifteenth-century Italian towns lacked the timber-framed houses you saw in Bruges and Brussels, and the Flemish dressed differently, too. The familiar subject of Rogier's *Descent from the Cross* took place in an environment that was familiar only to the painter who painted it, not an Italian public looking at it.

Santi, Ciriaco and Fazio did not describe the works by van Eyck and van der Weyden as examples of a Flemish style. Ciriaco described Jan van Eyck as Jan from Bruges and Rogier van der Weyden as Rogier from Brussels, but perhaps saying that was not much different than saying that Piero della Francesca was from Borgo Sansepolcro. Piero signed his name as "Piero from Borgo," and this is also how his name appeared in contemporary documents. Bartolomeo Fazio called van Eyck "Jan from Gaul" and van der Weyden "Rogier from Gaul," toponyms that described the area that bordered the Roman Empire in the North in ancient times and therefore fitting for the classical, Latin genre of *De viris illustribus* in which Fazio was writing. Gallia had no contemporary purchase in Fazio's time. It served him to say that the realism of Jan and Rogier resembled descriptions of ancient painting. Fazio in fact said that Jan van Eyck had learned color theories from reading Pliny and other ancient authors. He added that van der Weyden was van Eyck's countryman (*conterraneus*) and student, but he never mentioned that this led to the formation of a specific Gallic style. It was only in the sixteenth century, when concepts of regional styles and period styles started to become slowly ironed out, that the style of Michelangelo could be called "Italian" and that of the Flemish as "Flemish."[80] Before that, around the middle of the fifteenth century,

realism kept the boundaries between North and South down. What separated van Eyck from Piero was not *how* he painted but *what* he painted.

And so the scenery in Piero's paintings changed with the place where the paintings were made. The pictures with a view on Sansepolcro—the *Baptism*, the *Saint Jerome* in Venice, and the *Nativity* in London—were painted there. In the background of the *Finding of the True Cross* in Arezzo, you see a cityscape of that town. And then there is the enigmatic *Flagellation*, still in Urbino, the town where Piero painted it, which situates the flagellation of Christ in local, Urbinese architecture. The setting of the *Flagellation* is a special case. And that is one of the reasons why the work forms the center of my argument in the following four chapters. The architecture in the painting is not only topical; it is also punctual. Topical derives from the Latin *topica*, which means "of a place" or "local." The word punctual is related to the Latin *punctus*, "a pricking." A building that is punctual "pricks" itself to the time when it is made. It is dateable. The architecture of the *Flagellation* "belongs" to the 1460s, and I will argue in the third chapter that it insists on that belonging in a way that other fifteenth-century paintings usually do not. The consequence of this argument is that Piero's painting is remarkably of its time, not because it is depicted in a style that is meant to belong to a certain period, but because it depicts a world that is temporally specific. For in contrast to painting, I explain in the third chapter, architecture *was* understood in terms of period styles.

Chapter 3 can be read in tandem with Chapter 2, which studies the contemporary portraits in the painting, another figment of Piero's lifeworld. Chapter 1 tells of Piero's understanding of perspective, which, I argue, cultivates the illusion that his painting depicts a scene discovered rather than made or invented. Another way of describing the first three chapters is to say that they focus on the time *of* painting: The world that was there when Piero was painting and that became fixed inside Piero's pictures. The book concludes with a fourth chapter, which looks at what happened to Piero's picture *after* the time of painting, when it left Piero's workshop and entered the world at large. For most modern art historians, this is the privileged time of any painting, the moment a picture had been waiting for since the painter first put brush to panel. In Chapter 4, I tell a different story about the time after the work. Instead of claiming that Piero's work pointed forward, towards a (imagined) destination and audience, I argue that the work continued to aim backward, to the time when it was made and the place where it was painted. Piero's painting never drifted far from its painter.

Since so much of this book studies the intimacy between an artist, his work and his life, perhaps a short biographical outline is in order.[81]

Piero della Francesca was born around 1412 in the town of Borgo Sansepolcro, now Sansepolcro, a village located on the crossroads between Tuscany and Umbria. Sansepolcro was small yet prosperous. Piero descended from a relatively well-to-do local family. His father, Benedetto, was a wool merchant and tanner, continuing a family tradition that stretched back to the fourteenth century. Piero had three brothers, Francesco, Marco, and Antonio, with whom he lived in the ancestral house in Sansepolcro; the house still stands. Piero's surname—della Francesca—puzzled early biographers. Lacking proper surnames, fifteenth-century men were either named after their father, which in Piero's case would have amounted to Piero di Benedetto, or sometimes after a teacher or a place, like Leonardo da Vinci, from Vinci. Vasari thought that Piero was named after his mother, who had died when Piero was still young.[82] But the name of Piero's mother wasn't Francesca. It now turns out that the source of Piero's

matronymic "della Francesca" is one Francesca di Paolo di Giovanni, who married Benedetto di Francesco in the 1350s. The matronymic survived either because Francesca's husband had soon died after the marriage or because her son, Pietro, had married another Francesca. In the course of the fifteenth century, the patronymic name became dominant. It became a surname of sorts, befitting the relatively high social status of the family. Outside of Sansepolcro, Piero was known as "Piero from Borgo," which was also how he signed the works that were not intended for his hometown.

There was no active community of painters in Sansepolcro before Piero. Local commissions were usually carried out by out-of-town artists, often from Siena. Piero was therefore trained somewhere else, although nobody knows exactly where and with whom. Considering the strong ties between Sansepolcro and Sienese painters, it is commonly assumed that Piero trained in Siena.

Piero was first documented as a painter in 1431, when he was painting candle poles that would be carried around in procession. A year later he was assisting the Sienese painter Antonio da Anghiari with work on the high altarpiece for the church of San Francesco in Sansepolcro. Piero continued to execute such minor work in his hometown until late 1438. In the fall of 1439, he is documented in Florence, where he was working with Domenico Veneziano on the fresco decoration of the church of Sant' Egidio, which is now destroyed.[83] The timing of Piero's stay in Florence was important. That year, the Council of Ferrara moved to Florence. The Greek Emperor and delegates made a lasting impression on him. He continued to use their clothing and facial types for ancient figures for the rest of his career, as we will see in the second chapter.

But Piero decided not to stay in Florence. He probably returned to Sansepolcro soon after work at Sant' Egidio was done. He was documented in his hometown in 1442, when he was deemed legible for the town's council. Piero's involvement in Sansepolcro's government indicates his strong ties to that town.

In the summer of 1445, Piero was commissioned to paint the altarpiece for the chapel of the Confraternity of Misericordia in Sansepolcro, the first major commission awarded to a local artist. Piero obliged himself to finish the altarpiece within three years, but work on it was delayed. In 1455, his patrons admonished him; he finally finished the altarpiece around 1460. Work on the *Misericordia Altarpiece* overlapped with a commission for an altarpiece dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, probably for the local church of San Giovanni Battista in Val d'Afra. Piero only produced the central panel of the latter altarpiece, now in London. The remaining panels and predella were commissioned from a Sienese artist around the middle of the fifteenth century.

The *Misericordia Altarpiece* and *Baptism* set a pattern of overlapping commissions that was to continue for the better part of Piero's career. In 1449, Piero interrupted both commissions to go to Ferrara, where he painted frescos of battle scenes in the church of Sant'Agostino, now lost. In Ferrara, Piero saw important examples of Flemish paintings, which made a lasting impression on him. In 1450, he painted a small picture of Saint Jerome, now in Berlin, which is signed and dated. And a year later he is documented in Rimini, where he was painting a fresco of Saint Sigismund inside the church of San Francesco. A second version of *Saint Jerome* was painted in Sansepolcro perhaps soon after Piero's return from Rimini.

The 1450s were an especially busy decade for Piero. Both the *Misericordia Altarpiece* and the *Baptism* still needed a lot of work. On top of that, he accepted to paint the fresco in Rimini, agreed to paint the choir chapel of San Francesco in Arezzo, and accepted the commission for two more large polyptychs, one for the church of

Sant'Antonio in Perugia and another for the monks of Sant'Agostino in Sansepolcro. The contract for the latter altarpiece allowed an eight-year completion time, an unusually long period, indicating that Piero's patrons were aware of the other commissions the artist had taken up. Even with all these commissions still unfinished, Piero accepted the invitation of Pope Nicholas V in 1458 to come to Rome and to contribute to the decorations of the papal apartments, work that is now gone. Piero was back in Sansepolcro by the fall of 1459, when his mother died. Around this time, he accepted to paint a fresco of the *Resurrection of Christ* inside Sansepolcro's town hall. Additional documents show that he remained in Sansepolcro until 1462, probably to finish the *Misericordia Altarpiece* and to paint the *Resurrection*.[84]

By the late 1460s, Piero had fulfilled most of the commissions he had accepted in the preceding decade. The Arezzo frescos were done by 1465, and he put the last finishing touches to the Sant'Agostino Altarpiece in the fall of 1469. A small fresco of Saint Julian in Sansepolcro and another of Mary Magdalene in the cathedral of Arezzo were finished, too.

Piero must have accepted the commission for the *Flagellation* in the late 1460s. The painting is not documented until the early eighteenth century, when it was in the newly built sacristy of the Duomo of Urbino. It is usually assumed that it was made for Urbino, almost certainly for Federico da Montefeltro, the count and later duke of Urbino. Vasari reported that Piero made some panels with small figures for the Montefeltro, and perhaps the *Flagellation* was one of these. Piero's contemporary, the mathematician Luca Pacioli, knew that the painter was a familiar of the ducal house, perhaps suggesting that Piero eventually moved to live at court.[85] Piero is documented in Urbino in the spring of 1469. A document of April 8 of that year records a payment to him, via the painter Giovanni Santi, for expenses made when Piero came to inspect a panel in the possession of the confraternity of the Corpus Domini in Urbino. The text of the document does not disclose whether Piero came to Urbino with the express purpose to see the panel or that he was in town and was then asked for his advice. The document uses the formula "*venuto a vedere*," "came to see," without indicating where Piero came from.[86] It seems far-fetched to assume that Piero had been brought in from Sansepolcro or Arezzo just to inspect the painting, in which case the confraternity could have just asked Giovanni Santi. It is more plausible to assume that Piero was in town, perhaps staying with Santi, and that he had just left by the time payment was due, which is why Santi and not Piero himself collected the money. Piero probably returned to Sansepolcro soon after he had expected the panel in Urbino to finish the Sant'Agostino altarpiece, which was almost certainly finished by November of 1469.

It is likely that Piero painted the *Flagellation* in the few years preceding 1469, which is when most scholars date the picture. An earlier date is less likely for the following reasons. A dating before 1450 is impossible on stylistic grounds. The 1450s would be possible, but are unlikely because Piero was occupied with so much other work. In theory, Piero's work could be dated between October 1454 and 1458. But that theory is difficult to maintain for two reasons. First, we will see in the third chapter that Piero re-used some of the portraits in the *Flagellation* from the Arezzo frescos. And it can be demonstrated that these portraits were painted during the second campaign in Arezzo, that is, between 1462 and 1465. Second, the *Flagellation* clearly shows that Piero had detailed knowledge of monuments in Rome, as will become clear in Chapter 3, and Piero only went to Rome in 1458. This leaves a timespan between 1465 and 1469 for Piero to have painted the *Flagellation*.

This means that the *Flagellation* was a relatively late work. Born around 1412, Piero must have been in his fifties when he painted it, towards the end of the expected lifespan of a fifteenth-century male. He would only die in 1492, at the age of around 80. But just a few works can be dated after the *Flagellation*. The *Double portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza*, the *Montefeltro Altarpiece*, and the *Senigallia Madonna* were all painted in the early 1470s in Urbino. And Piero probably also painted the *Williamstown Madonna* and the *Nativity* in that decade, the latter after he had returned to Sansepolcro.

In his biography of Piero, Vasari wrote that Piero became blind towards the end of his life.[87] The blindness was real, even when scholars now suspect that Piero only lost his sight very late in life, perhaps no earlier than 1490, two years before he died.[88] A man named Marco di Longaro, a maker of lanterns, reported in 1556 that in his youth he "would guide by the hand Master Piero di le Francesca, excellent painter, who had gone blind."[89]

Vasari decided to highlight Piero's contribution to mathematics, which a few earlier writers had also emphasized. According to him, Piero had written numerous mathematical treatises.[90] Three of these survive today: The *Trattato d'abaco* (Abacus Treatise), the *Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus* (Short Book on the Five Regular Bodies), and his book on painted perspective, the *De prospectiva pingendi*. There was a time when scholars liked to separate Piero's work as a painter from his mathematical work, even if the text of the treatise on perspective argues for the integration of the disciplines. They have tended to date the treatises to the 1480s, the last full decade of Piero's life, when he painted less or nothing at all. The dedication of the *Libellus* by Piero mentions that it was written "in extremo aetatis suae calculo," in extremely old age, when his days were running out. But according to fifteenth-century standards, Piero was already old by the 1470s, at the age of about sixty.[91] Piero students now point out that the artist's theoretical interest in (Greek) mathematics goes back to perhaps as early as the mid-fifteenth century. The treatises on regular bodies and perspective are of a complexity that suggests a long meditation over time, perhaps decades.[92] The spectacular recent discovery by James Banker of an illustrated edition of Archimedes in Piero's hand has reinforced the idea that Piero had already developed an interest in complex mathematics by the 1450s. Banker believes that Piero copied the manuscript around the time of his visit to Rome in 1458–9, or perhaps somewhat later, but not after the death of Francesco del Borgo in 1468.[93] J.V. Field has in fact pointed out that Piero started to compose his treatise on perspective around the same time, in the wake of his visit to Rome.[94] Piero was hence working on the *Flagellation* right around the time he was writing, or was starting to write, his mathematical treatises.

Throughout this book, passages from Piero's *De prospectiva pingendi* are cited. I do not claim, however, that Piero's *Flagellation* illustrates the precepts of the treatise. I rather submit that Piero's paintings show of their own accord, or, to borrow the words of Leonardo da Vinci, "painting does not speak, but rather demonstrates itself in itself," *per sè si dimostra*.[95]

Notes

1 James R. Banker, *The Culture of Sansepolcro During the Youth of Piero della Francesca* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).
2 Luca Pacioli, *De Divina proportione* (Venice: A. Paganius Paganius, 1509), fol. 33r.

3 Carlo Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, trans. Edward Farrelly (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 7–12. Against Roberto Longhi's emphasis on Piero's Sienese roots; see his Roberto Longhi, *Piero della Francesca* [1927], trans. Leonard Penlock (London and New York: Frederick Warne, 1930), 7–12.
4 Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (Berlin: Grote, 1885).
5 Bonaventura, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS. Ital. 115)*, trans. Isa Ragusa and ed. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).
6 Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).
7 Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Testament*, ed. and trans. Theodor Mommsen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 79–81.
8 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1972),
9 Consult the narrative from "image" to "art" sketched in Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: Beck, 1990).
10 Patricia Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), xii.
11 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 3.
12 Charles Dempsey, *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Also see his *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
13 Also consult C. Jean Campbell, *The Commonwealth of Nature: Art and Poetic Community in the Age of Dante* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 61–95.
14 Francesco Petrarca, *Le rime di Francesco Petrarca. Con saggio introduttivo e commento di Nicola Zingarelli* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1963), 577–8.
15 J.B. Trapp, "Petrarch's Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001): 55–192.
16 J.F. Courtine, "Realitas," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter and K. Gründer (Basel: Schwabe, 1992), 8: 178–81.
17 Biondo, *De Roma Triumphante . . . Historiarum ab inclinato Ro. Imperio, Decades III* (Basel: Hieron. Frobenium et Nicol. Episcopium, 1559), 215, 141, 198, 205, 214.
18 In his *De prospectiva pingendi*, Piero mentions a list of names of ancient artists, which goes back to Vitruvius. Piero's spelling and the addition of Apelles to the list suggest that he got it from Ghiberti; Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi*, ed. G. Nicco Fasola (Florence: Sansoni, 1942), 128–9; and Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Lorenzo Ghibertis Denkwürdigkeiten (I commentarii)*, ed. Julius von Schlosser (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1912), 7–8.
19 Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 35–6.
20 See von Schlosser's gloss in Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 2: 110 (arguing for 1157–61); Richard Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 357 (arguing for 1135–40).
21 Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica, Letteratura Italiana Einaudi*, CD–ROM, 1–44. For the Etruscan myth in Florentine thought, read Giovanni Cipriani, *Il mito etrusco nel rinascimento fiorentino* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1980), with some additions and correction in Erik Schoonhoven, "A Literary Invention: The Etruscan Myth in Early Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010): 459–71.
22 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron (Filocolo, Ameto, Fiammetta)*, ed. Enrico Bianchi (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1952), 439–40 (VI.5).
23 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Opere e versi, Corbaccio, Trattatello, in laude di Dante, prose Latine, epistole*, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Milan: Ricciardi, 1965), 937.
24 Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum Super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam* (Florence: Typis G Barbera, 1887), 3: 312–13.
25 Filippo Villani, "De Cimabue, Giocto, Maso, Stephano et Taddeo pictoribus," in *Il libro di Antonio Billi*, ed. Carl Frey (Berlin: Grote'sche, 1892), 73–4. And consult Ernst H.

Gombrich, "Giotto's Portrait of Dante?," *The Burlington Magazine* 121 (1979): 471–81, for the truth of Villani's claim.

26 Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 35–6.

27 *Pace* Ulrich Pfisterer, *Donatello und die Entdeckung der Stile, 1430–1445* (Munich: Hirmer, 2002), who argues that in the early fifteenth century an awareness of period styles took root. Pfisterer's work is a tour de force of philological research, but the texts he mentioned show an awareness of historical change in both literature and art, but they do not see style as the product of an era.

28 Ernst H. Gombrich, "The Style 'all'antica': Imitation and Assimilation," in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1966), 122–8, 153–4.

29 Dagobert Frey, "Apokryphe Liviusbildnisse der Renaissance," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 17 (1955): 160–2. Frey quotes a letter by Jacopo d'Altri of 1499, which is published by Armand Bachet, "Recherches de documents d'arts et d'histoire dans les archives de Mantoue," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 20 (1866): 488.

30 Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, ed. Franca Brunello (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1971), 27–8 (§§27–8).

31 David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.

32 Cennini, *Libro*, 3–5 (§1).

33 *Pace* David Summers, "Aria II: The Union of Image and Artist as an Aesthetic Ideal in Renaissance Art," *Artibus et historiae* 20 (1989): 15–31, who claims that the two words basically mean the same.

34 For fashion, see among others, Giovanni Boccaccio, *Das Ninfale Fiesolano Giovanni Boccaccios*, ed. Berthold Wiese (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1913), 47: "Fatti una vesta fatta in tale stile, / ch'ella sie larga e lunga insino a' piedi, / tutta ritratta ad atto feminile."

35 Francesco Buti, *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieria* (Pisa: Fratelli Nistri, 1858–62), 1: 43: "stilo non è altro, che modo di dire, lo quale si distingue in tre specie; cioè alto, mezzano et infimo."

36 Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere: Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), 1: 5 (1.1–8); Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 275 (IV, Introduction).

37 Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), 2: 253 (IV, canz.).

38 Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 345–8.

39 Antonio Pucci, "Centiloquio," in *Delle Poesie di Antonio Pucci, celebre versificatore Fiorentino del MCCC*, ed. Ildefonso di San Luigi (= *Delizie degli eruditi Toscani*, 4) (Florence: Gaetano Gambiagi, 1775), 119 (lines 83–4).

40 Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, 1: 87: "Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore, / tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi / lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore." Buti, *Commento*, 43: "stilo non è altro, che modo di dire, lo quale si distingue in tre specie; cioè alto, mezzano et infimo."

41 Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters: Rerum familiarum libri XVII—XXIV*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 301–2.

42 Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 22.

43 Leonardo da Vinci, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Jean-Paul Richter (New York: Phaidon, 1970), 1: 119 (§20), 1: 342–3: "spesso le figure somigliano il maestro."

44 Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, 3: 312–13. Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, ed. Jacob Willis (Leipzich: Teubneri, 1963), 137–8.

45 Antonio Averlino, *Trattato di Architettura*, ed. Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1972), 1: 28.

46 Cristoforo Landino, *Scritti critice e teorici*, ed. Roberto Cardini (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974), 1: 124. I have more to say about Landino's qualifications in the first chapter.

47 For Brunelleschi's experiment, see Alessandro Parronchi, *Studi su la dolce Prospettiva* (Milan: A. Martello, 1964), 226–95; Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Basic, 1976), 143–52; Martin Kemp, "Science, Non Science and Nonsense: The Interpretation of Brunelleschi's Perspective," *Art History* 1 (1978): 134–61; Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to*

Seurat (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 11–15; Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 89–164; Stefano Boraso, *Brunelleschi 1420. Il paradigma prospettico di Filippo di Ser Brunellescho: il "caso" delle tavole sperimentali ottico-prospettiche* (Padua: Edizioni Libreria Progetto, 1999).

48 Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi*, ed. and trans. Howard Saalman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 42–6.

49 Perhaps Albrecht Altdorfer was the first painter to paint *en plein air*; see Christopher S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (London: Reaktion, 1993).

50 Manetti, *Life of Brunelleschi*, 44–5.

51 Filarete, *Trattato*, fol. 178r. (Book XXIII). Hubert Damisch wrote about the difference between the work of a painting and the work of the mirror as a difference between "*mostrare*" and "*dimostrare*." He suggested that painting—including pictures constructed according to the rules of one-point perspective—can never really achieve the kind of doubling that a mirror achieves, even if this was what writers like Filarete and Manetti suggested. Painting always shows on its own accord. Damisch is, of course, correct. Pictures show things not previously there. But what pictures like Piero's at least *try* to convey is a sense of "doubling." Whether or not this was an impossible, or perhaps just naïve, project is beyond the scope of this book. Damisch, *Origin of Perspective*, 96–7.

52 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture: The Latin Texts of De pictura and De statua*, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 63. The story was Alberti's own invention; Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: Ein Beitrag zur Begriffsgeschichte der älteren Kunsttheorie* (Leipzich: Teubner, 1924), 93.

53 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 3.453.

54 *Vocabolaria degli Accademici della Crusca*, 5th edn. (Florence: Cellini, 1863), 1: 42.

55 Piero, *De prospectiva*, 128–9.

56 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1966–71), 3: 257–67.

57 Leonardo, *Literary Works*, 1: 119 (§20). For the dating of the note, see *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci: Commentary*, ed. Carlo Pedretti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1: 114–15.

58 Benvenuto Cellini, "Paragone," in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento: Fra manierismo e Controriforma*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Bari: Laterza, 1960–2), 1: 81.

59 Leonardo, *Literary Works*, 1: 371–2 (§660), exchanging sheep for goats.

60 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 440 (VI, 5). For the documents, see Michael Viktor Schwarz and Pia Theis, "Giotto's Father: Old Stories and New Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* 141 (1999): 676–7.

61 Anonimo Fiorentino, *Commento alla Divina Commedia d'Anonimo Fiorentino del Secolo XIV*, ed. P. Fanfani (Bologna: G. Romagnoli, 1868), 2: 187ff.

62 Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 73–4.

63 For Giotto's appearance in literary sources, see Enid T. Falaschi, "Giotto: The Literary Legend," *Italian Studies* 27 (1972): 1–27.

64 Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum Super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, 3: 312–13.

65 Anonimo Fiorentino, *Commento*, 2: 187ff.

66 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 439–40 (VI, 5).

67 Villani, "De Cimabue," 73–4.

68 Antonio Manetti, *La novella del Grasso Legnaiuolo*, ed. Antonio Lanza (Florence: Vallecchi, 1989). The story survives in its main form in Manetti's text, but there are early-fifteenth-century editions and Manetti himself says that he did not invent the story.

69 The story is published in Hans Semper, *Donatello, seine Zeit und Schule* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1875), 321–22.

70 Albert Wesselski, *Angelo Polizianos Tagebuch (1477–1479): Mit vierhundert Schwänken und Schnurren aus den Tagen Lorenzos des Grossmächtigen und seiner Vorfahren* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1929), 27, 118–19, 168, 186.

71 The first collection of artists' biographies is Filippo Villani, *De origine civitatis Florentiae et eiusdem famosis civibus* [1381–2], published as *Philippi Villani Liber de civitatis Florentiae famosis civibus*, ed. G. C. Galletti (Florence: Mazzoni, 1847).

72 Julius von Schlosser, *Die Kunstliteratur: Ein Handbuch zur Quellenkunde der Neueren Kunstgeschichte* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1924); Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).
73 Catherine Soussloff's *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) is more concerned with the genre of biography than with the relationship between art and life.
74 Villani, "De Cimabue," 73–4.
75 For Amadi, see Eugenio Battisti, *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1971), vol. 2, 59–61; and Anna Pizzati, "The Family of Girolamo Amadi: A Luchese Silk Merchant in Venice," in *Piero della Francesca: Personal Encounters*, ed. Keith Christiansen (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 59–71.
76 There is no documentation of a trip by Piero to Venice, except for Luca Pacioli's claim in the early sixteenth century that Piero had been to Venice; Luca Pacioli, *Summa de arithmetica, geometria, proportioni et proportionalità* (Venice: Paganinus de Paganinis, 1494), fol. 2r. Pacioli was trying to argue for Piero's cosmopolitism, which is perhaps why he included a reference to Venice. He was writing his book in Venice, as is clear from his phrasing "*qui in Vinegia*."
77 Giovanni Santi, *Cronaca*, ed. Heinrich Holtzinger (Stuttgart: Wilhelm Hohlhammer, 1893), 189.
78 For the original Latin text, see *Le muse e il principe: Arte di corte nel Rinascimento padano*, ed. Alessandra Mottola Molfino and Mauro Natale (Modena: F.C. Panini, 1991), 1: 326.
79 For the Latin text, see Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 166.
80 Francisco de Holanda, *Da pintura antiga. Introdcução e notas de Angel González Garcia* (Lisbon: Impr. Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1983), 235–6.
81 Unless otherwise indicated, I used the following books and articles for Piero's biography: James R. Banker, "Piero della Francesca's S. Agostino Altar-Piece: Some New Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* 129 (1987): 645–51; Banker, "Un documento inedito del 1432 sull'attività di Piero della Francesca per la chiesa di San Francesco in Borgo S Sepolcro," *Rivista d'arte* 6 (1990): 245–7; Banker, "Piero della Francesca as Assistant to Antonio d'Anghiari in the 1430s: Some Unpublished Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* 135 (1993): 16–21; Banker, "The Altarpiece of the Confraternity of Santa Maria della Misericordia in Borgo Sansepolcro," in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 21–35; Banker, *Culture of Sansepolcro*; Frank Dabell, "Antonio d'Anghiari e gli inizi di Piero della Francesca," *Paragone* 417 (1984): 71–94; Vittoria Garibaldi, *Piero della Francesca: Il Polittico di Sant'Antonio* (Perugia: Electa and Editori Umbri, 1993). James Banker's *Piero della Francesca: Artist & Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) is now indispensable for any student of Piero.
82 Vasari, *Vite*, 3: 258.
83 For the document showing Piero's presence in Florence, see Battisti, *Piero della Francesca*, 2: 219 (doc. 15).
84 Battisti, *Piero della Francesca*, 2: 224 (doc. 60); 2: 225 (doc. 73).
85 Pacioli, *Summa*, fol. 2r. Pacioli's suggestion was taken up by Vasari, *Vite*, 3: 258. Vasari confused Federico da Montefeltro with his son, Guidobaldo.
86 Libro B della Venerabile Confraternita del Corpus Domini ad Urbino, fol. 51 [April 8, 1469]: "Eadem 8 daprile bolognini dieci detti contanti a Giohanni de Santa da Colbordole per fare le spese a maestro Piero dal Borgo chera venuto a vedere la taula per farla a conto del fraternita in questo . . . 52 y . . . 10 denari." Battisti, *Piero della Francesca*, 2: 228 (doc. 95). Some scholars assume that Piero visited Urbino for the first time in 1469, for instance Bernd Roeck, *Mörder, Maler und Mäzene: Piero della Francescas "Geißelung": Eine kunsthistorische Kriminalgeschichte* (Munich: Beck, 2006), 142–56.
87 Vasari, *Vite*, 3: 266.
88 James Banker, "Contributi alla cronologia della vita e delle opera di Piero della Francesca," *Arte Cristiana* 92 (2004): 248–58.
89 Riccordi di Berto degli Alberti [1556], published by Giustiniano degli Azzi in *Gli archivi della Storia d'Italia* 4 (1915): 100.
90 Vasari, *Vite*, 3: 257–67.
91 Philip Sohm, *The Artist Grows Old: The Aging of Art and Artists in Italy, 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

92 E. Gamba and V. Montebelli. "La geometria nel 'Trattato d'abaco' e nel 'Libellus de quinqu corporibus regularibus' di Piero della Francesca: Raffronto critico," in *Piero della Francesca tra arte e scienza*, ed. Marisa Dalai Emiliani (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 266.
93 James R. Banker, "A Manuscript of the Works of Archimedes in the Hand of Piero della Francesca," *The Burlington Magazine* 147 (2005): 165–9.
94 J.V. Field, "Alberti, the Abacus and Piero della Francesca's Proof of Perspective," *Renaissance Studies* 11 (1997): 61–88.
95 Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo da Vinci's "Paragone": A Critical Interpretation With a New Edition of The text in the "Codex Urbinas"*, ed. Claire J. Farago (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 285–7 (§46).

1 Before the work

Point of view

In the center of a courtyard, Christ stands tied to a column, the smallest person depicted in the whole painting (Plate 2). Two men flagellate him. They are both painted with their right arms raised, perfectly mirrored, one placed with his back to you, the other depicted in three-quarter view. You imagine that the blows of their whips will hit Christ simultaneously. To the left sits Pilate, the Roman consul who ordered Christ to be flagellated. Pictured in profile, he is placed on a podium, from where he watches the scene from close by. You see another man from the back, walking away from you, partly obscuring the flagellator on the left. The space between you and the narrative is meticulously mapped out by evenly spaced tiles. Seven rows of red tiles, a broad band of white marble, and another eight rows of red tiles measure the distance that separates you from the edge of the courtyard. Traverse another three-quarters of that interval and you arrive at Christ's column.

The room occupied by these five men only makes up half of the picture surface. The right half of the painting is dominated by three standing figures, placed close to you, in front, even, of the first strip of white marble. Standing in an outdoor environment, closed off in the back by some buildings, behind which arises the top of a tree, they are engaged in a dialogue of sorts. The man on the left, depicted in quarter view, is speaking. His mouth is half opened and his left hand gestures. The other two listen, perhaps. But it is difficult to think of them as being engaged in a conversation, for they avoid eye contact. Each of them stands isolated from the two others, a sense of isolation that repeats their separation from the scene unfolding in the background—the scene, which, from the perspective it was painted, takes second place.

Piero stuck to the basic format of Flagellation scenes, dividing the picture up in two groups, the first consisting of Christ, the flagellators, Pilate, and a man sometimes identified as Herod, and a second group made up of the bystanders who had brought Christ in front of Pilate. In some images, Pilate consults with the bystanders; in others, they comment on the event of the flagellation. And then there are pictures, like Piero's, in which they show a complete lack of involvement. But the way Piero foregrounded the presence of the bystanders was unprecedented.[1]

The apparent randomness of the picture's point of view, privileging the bystanders over the main plot, informs other parts of the picture, too. Note how close to the left edge of the painting a column, neatly aligned with the border of the frame, has part of its capital cut off by the picture's edge, indicating that the painting's perspective is placed just a centimeter or so too far to the right to show the whole column.[2] If the

picture's point of view would have been displaced by that centimeter you would have also been able to see the whole of Pilate's chair, which now has the tips of its legs cut off by the column in front of it. The chair's carefully avoiding overlap reveals that the coincidence of the picture's perspective is at the heart of the picture's meaning. The cut-offs are just too studied to be the result of some glitch during the painting process.

Such studied coincidence also informs the depiction of the man with the turban. Seen from the rear, he is caught in paint at the moment when he reveals least about himself or his place in the story the painting enacts.[3] Many Renaissance paintings show figures from the back—bystanders, mourners, and other auxiliary figures.[4] But their position rarely interferes with their capacity to "tell" a story. The figure of Christ in Andrea Mantegna's *Christ Entering Limbo* (Fig. 1.1), perhaps the period's most well known *Rückenfigur*, simply responds to the logic of the picture's orientation and probes no investigation into Christ's motives. Piero's figure is different. He is gesturing like the bearded man in the foreground, perhaps in the direction of the flagellation, contributing to the picture's narrative without revealing what exactly he is contributing. You don't know if he has his mouth opened, like the bearded foreground figure. He escapes the control a painter would usually have over his painting, placing his figures in the service of a narrative like a stage director. His placement disturbs the symmetry enacted by the two flagellators, their arms raised by Piero in perfect simultaneity like you only see in pictures. He partly screens the left scourger, with his turban completely covering the flagellator's right forearm, leaving the hand clutching the whip to hover unconnected in space. Uninvited by this scene of symmetry, the turbaned man's position is displaced. Or better, he is displaced in a *painted* world, a world directed by the painter. In your world—the contingent world of lived experience—his position would invite no comment. In painting, a painter was expected to organize the world in such a way that a story, often biblical, was told in a clear way. Leon Battista Alberti heeded to the then dominant ideology of image making when he wrote, in 1435, that "everything the people in the painting do among themselves, or perform in relation to the spectators, must fit together to represent and explain the scene [*historia*]."[5] Piero's painting ignores that advice. The *Flagellation* is not ordering a narrative. In some parts, including the man seen from the back, it seems to be imitating the volatility of reality itself.

The man with the turban has turned his back to you in what is perhaps the most absorbed gesture in the history of fifteenth-century painting. He is entirely unaware of your presence in front of the painting. The other figures, too, pretend that they are unaware of the fact that they are placed there for a viewer. None of them acknowledges your presence. They are too absorbed in what happens inside the picture. Christ stares to a corner in the courtroom, the two flagellators concentrate on flagellating him. Pilate watches. The three figures in the foreground converse among themselves without interacting with the viewer. This lack of interaction with a presumed viewer in front of the picture is what sets Piero's work apart from earlier depictions of the same subject, which usually included a figure looking for contact with you. Alberti had recommended the fifteenth-century painter to make his work respond to a spectator in front of it, defining the artwork as a composition oriented outwards, towards the viewer. He recommended that the painter include a figure in the painting who addressed the viewer and explained to him or her in the clearest possible way what was happening inside the picture.[6] Alberti's idea of a picture responds to the person in front of it, as if the painted figures are actors who seek contact with their audience. Alberti calls the audience of painting "*spectatores*" (spectators), as if he is writing about actors and

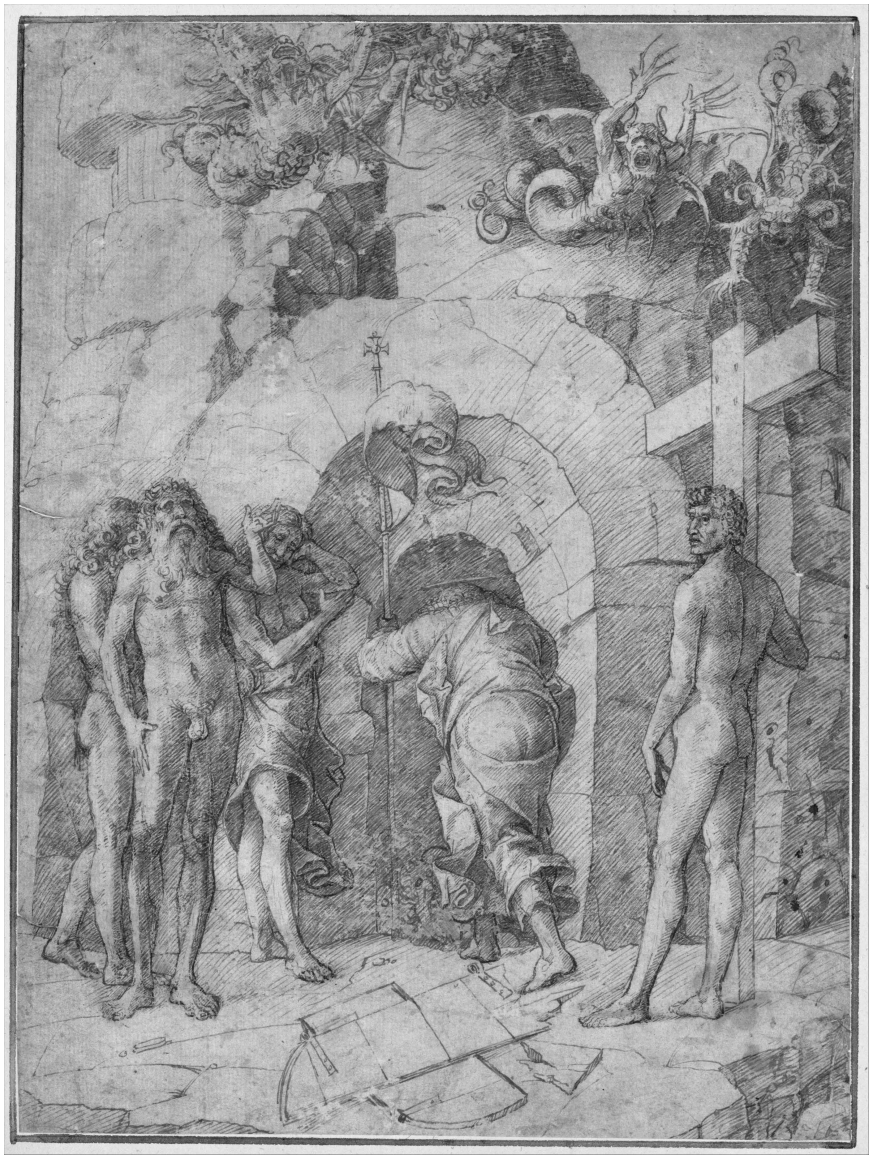

Figure 1.1 After Andrea Mantegna, *Christ descending into Limbo*, ca. 1450, 26.9 × 20 cm, ink and wash on paper. New York City, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection. Artwork in the Public Domain.

their audience. When he recommends the inclusion of a figure pointing the spectators to important aspects in the painting, he is thinking about theater, too.[7]

The *Flagellation* rather cultivates the impression that this was a scene discovered by chance, a spectacle witnessed rather than made. Piero was somehow telling you that the narrative was there before he made the image instead of saying that the image ordered or "made" the narrative.

This is a paradoxical claim to make for a painter, at least at first instance. Paintings are emphatically made things, pigments applied to a piece of wood according to a set of decisions made by the painter. A discovery is the opposite of something manufactured.[8] To discover is to find something the production of which you do not claim responsibility for, like the discovery of DNA's double helix. A part of Piero's picture insists on the fact that it is manufactured, made by hand. Inscribed with Roman capitals on the first step of Pilate's podium are the words "The work of Piero of Borgo Sansepolcro" (*opvs petri debvrgo s[an]c[t]i sepvlcri*) (Fig. 1.2). The letters perfectly fit between the column on the left and the left ankle of the man seen from the back. Note especially how the *O* of "opus" just avoids touching the column in front of it and how, at the end of the inscription, the full stop is placed exactly in between the *I* and the left ankle of the man standing with his back towards you. There is no off-site or out of sight at the spot where the origins of coincidence is located, where this scene of flagellation is reduced to its moment of making. Yet even if these letters explicate the fact that the painting is an object made by hands, a work (*opus*), Piero also cultivated the illusion that its letters had already been there before he painted the picture. They are carved in the first step of Pilate's podium, in ancient Roman letters, like the ancient inscriptions Piero and his contemporaries found on fragments of Roman buildings. (I have more to say about the style of these letters in Chapter 3.)

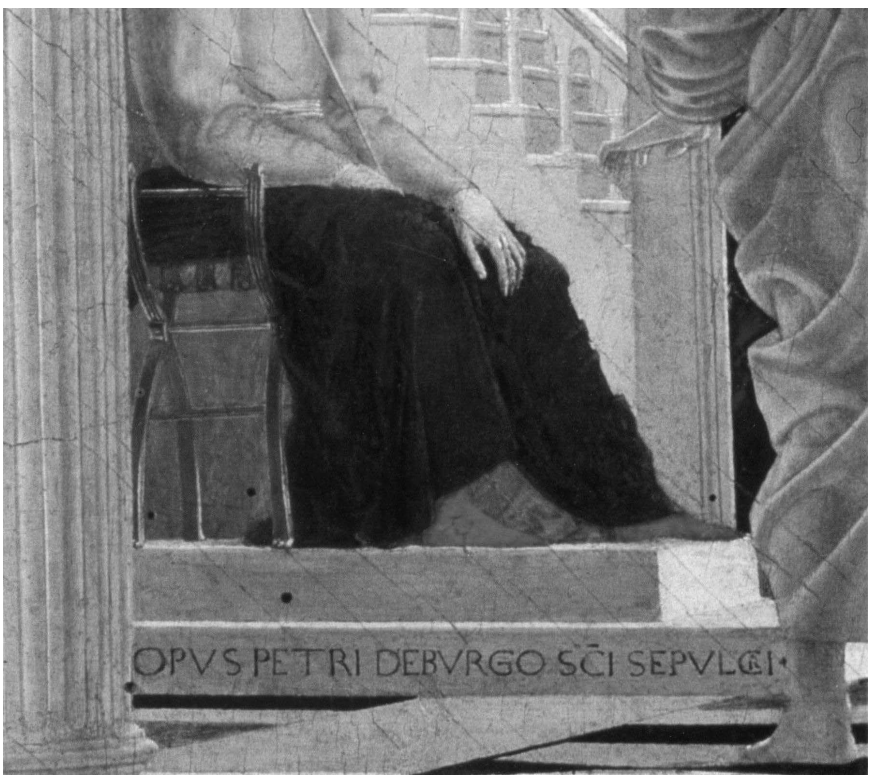

Figure 1.2 Detail of Plate 2.

Space/surface

Piero carefully planned his suggestion of coincidence. He exactly measured the position of the figures and the perspective of the architecture and the floor.[9] Perspective lines are visible in the rows of tiles, cornices, roofs, and other architectural elements. In 1953, the architectural historian Rudolph Wittkower and the painter and teacher of perspective B. A. R. Carter published two measured drawings of the picture's plan and elevation, later elaborated upon by Marilyn Aronberg Lavin.[10] The Wittkower–Carter reconstruction not only proved that the scale of Piero's figures and the architecture precisely conforms to their position; it also revealed that the orthogonals meet in one point just left of the colonnade, at the level of the right flagellator's hips (Fig. 1.3). This point, called the distance or vanishing point, marks the geometrical center of the painting. Yet it is placed on a bare piece of wall.

The placement of the vanishing point in such an inconspicuous place is highly eccentric. Piero knew that this point coincided with the center of vision. It was the place in the picture that offered the clearest view to anyone in front of it. "The eye," Piero wrote in his treatise on perspective,

> is round and from the intersection of two little nerves which cross one another, the visual force [*virtù visiva*] comes to the center of the crystalline humor, and from that the rays depart and extend in straight lines, passing through one quarter of the circle of the eye, so that this part subtends a right angle at the center [of the picture].

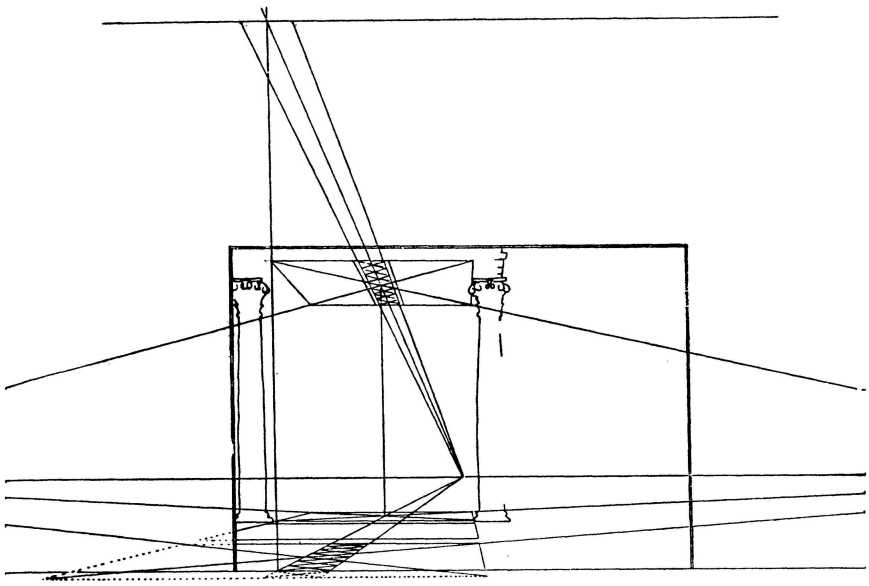

Figure 1.3 B. A. R. Carter, The perspective of Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation*, 1953, dimensions unknown. Published in R. Wittkower and B. A. R. Carter, "The Perspective of Piero della Francesca's 'Flagellation'," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 299 (fig. 4). With permission from the Warburg Institute.

He then goes on to say that the ray intersecting with the image at a right angle "is of the greatest strength that the eye opposite from it can see."[11] "In order for the eye to receive the things opposite from it in the easiest way, it is necessary to represent things under a lesser angle than a right one." All things depicted under a greater angle will not be seen well.[12]

Before Piero, Alberti had already said that the viewer's gaze was the strongest in the distance point, and after him Leonardo da Vinci held the same opinion.[13] This is why fifteenth-century painters used the vanishing point to impose a sense of hierarchy on the picture. The majority of painters placed the most important figure in their painting in that point. This is where, for instance, Masaccio painted Christ's face in the *Tribute Money*, finished around 1426, and where Leonardo, in the *Last Supper*, pinned the head of Christ. In both these examples, perspective functions less to suggest a three-dimensional space than to order the flat picture surface. It seems as if Masaccio and Leonardo did not place their figures in space *after* they had constructed the space of their pictures; they rather organized perspective around the figures, not as a means to represent space but as a way to divide the picture between important and subordinate parts.[14] This kind of perspective does the seeing for you. It objectifies experience and orders the picture as meaning.[15]

The word perspective is derived from the Latin *prospectiva*, which literally means "seeing through." You look at a two-dimensional picture surface, but you see through that surface into depth as if you are looking at a space that extends from the space you stand in. But Rebecca Zorach has reminded us that, contrary to this definition, Renaissance artists usually employed perspective as a way to order the surface of painting, not to articulate three-dimensional space. And this ordering gave meaning to the picture.[16] Note, for example, that Alberti's *De pictura* (1435), sometimes treated as the first Renaissance defense of perspective, in fact does not use the term *perspectiva* at all.[17] Alberti was less occupied with the construction of a three-dimensional space in which the figures could be placed than with ordering the two-dimensional picture plane. He probably never thought of perspective as a way to suggest space but rather as a part of *circumscriptio*—the fixing of contours—and *compositio*—of placing the figures on the picture's two-dimensional plane. His primary concern was surface. "Let me tell you what I do when I am painting," Alberti wrote,

> First of all, on the surface [*in superficie*] on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject-matter [historia] to be painted is seen.[18]

Alberti's rectangle does not frame a world already in existence. It instead serves as a flat field whose surface can be filled by two-dimensional forms. These flat forms become three-dimensional figures only at a later stage. Begin with the outlines, Alberti admonished, and then give the figures shadow and color. The primary purpose of *circumscriptio* and *compositio* was to organize the painting in such a way that its meaning, that is, its capacity to illustrate a story, came across as clearly as possible.[19] Much later, in 1504, Pomponio Gaurico took perspective again as a means to systematize subject-matter. Because perspective marshaled the number and place of figures, it secured "subject-matter's intelligibility."[20]

This is not how Piero della Francesca thought of perspective. In the *Flagellation*, Piero's lines and distance point do not order the picture's subject, like Alberti had advised

and fifteenth-century painters had put to practice. It did little to clarify subject-matter. The point from which the *Flagellation* was painted renders Christ the smallest person in the whole picture, and he is placed off-center. Piero's perspective merely shows you where the figures are, not how you should read the narrative.

In his treatise on perspective, Piero put a new emphasis on the space of the painting and the position of the figures and architecture in it. He even said that only in pictures you could experience space properly. You could not possibly gauge the exact position of objects in real space. In his treatise on perspective, Piero distinguished between looking at a picture and looking at the non-painted world. He believed that we experience the world according to the so-called intromission theory, which had been invented some 500 years before Piero's time by Abu Ali al-Hasen (*965*–ca. 1040), known in the West as Alhazen.[21] Alhazen described that the eyes see because they receive the light reflected from objects, which is how we still understand sight. Piero explained in his treatise on perspective that objects submit rays (Piero called them "lines") that the eye takes in. He wrote about "the lines that depart from the edge of the object and go in the direction of the eye."[22] But this is not how you look at a picture, he added. The experience of painting works exactly the other way around. Rather than the eye receiving objects in the form of light, the eye emits rays that "touch" the object. Piero wrote of the "visual force" (*virtù visiva*) from which rays (*raggi*) depart in straight lines and meet the picture plane at a right angle. He also said that within the limits of the picture plane "the eye traces [*descrive*] with its rays [*raggi*] the things according to their proportions and is able to judge their measurements [*mesura*] within it."[23] It is because painting reverses the eye's way of perceiving the world that you can measure depth and space in a painting.

Why is Piero making this distinction between ordinary looking and looking at a painting?

The way Piero imagined people looked at painting is now known as the extramission theory. This theory had been current in Europe since the fourth century, and owed its popularity to the fact that it perfectly accounted for the subordinate role of sight in understanding the world. With its idea of a ray emitted from the eye, the extramission theory placed the agency of vision in the body, and Christian Platonists had argued that the body was unstable and unreliable. Seeing was a subjective endeavor incapable of grasping truth. It therefore comes as no surprise that the introduction of Alhazen's theory of vision in the West came with the reintroduction of Aristotelian thought, which placed a greater emphasis on knowledge gained through the senses. The thirteenth-century scholastic philosopher and Franciscan friar Roger Bacon is usually credited with the growing popularity of Alhazen's theory of vision in Western Europe. By Piero's time, the intromission theory counted as the dominant theory about vision.[24]

There were some in the fifteenth century who doubted the truth of the intromission theory. And they were not just Neoplatonists. The problem with the intromission theory was that it was unclear about where exactly the objects submitting rays were in space. The eye received the light radiating from objects without fully knowing the exact position of the light source. The fifteenth-century philosopher Lorenzo Valla therefore argued that the intromission theory could not be correct. Listen to this passage in his *Dialectical Disputations*, a book finished around the middle of the fifteenth century:

> Nor are colors and shapes carried to vision by help of brightness, but come to the eye as though to a mirror. For thereby those images are perceived in the eye which

> the eye itself does not see in itself but it sees what it discerns not in the air (for in which part of the air?) but in its own place, better or worse according to its own powers of projecting its gaze, and not without the help of brightness.[25]

Valla preferred the old-fashioned extramission theory, which allowed the eye to see the objects directly, in their proper place. If it were true, as Alhazen said, that the eye only saw the light of the object then we would not know *where* the object radiating light was.[26] We would see the world as a blurred cacophony of light, making its impression on the eye without any concern for where exactly the light came from. You only saw an image or a reflection of the world, not the things themselves. Piero accepted the intromission theory and its limitations. And that is why, he argued, man needed painting. Looking at a painting somehow physically changed the working of the eye. Only then, the eye emits rather than receives a force or ray. This made it possible for man to know where objects are in space. In painting, all objects are fixed in their own position, a position whose distance to the person in front of the painting can be measured, as if a painting were not flat but deep. Without painting "one could not understand how much the things foreshorten, that is, one could not represent them."[27] Only within the boundaries of the picture plane can space really be measured by the eye.

This is a baffling statement. Piero's definition of painting makes the rest of the world look spatially undefined. The world *is* three-dimensional but the eye measures it in two dimensions. Only in painting can man understand the world as it is, in its full three dimensions. For Piero, painting is about position and site. His defense of perspective therefore rests on a completely different premise than contemporary perspectivists, who rather emphasized the surface of painting. Piero proposed a new value for painting in society. Painting offered an exclusive path to knowing the truth about the world we live in.

Piero invented a new term to describe this particular status of painting vis-à-vis reality: *termine*. The word *termine* literally means "that which marks the limits of." It marks the limits of the picture plane, the frame if you will. In the case of the *Flagellation*, these limits are arbitrary; the frame randomly cuts off a reality that the picture claims was there before the picture was made. Hubert Damisch wrote that Piero introduced the concept of the termine as a critique of Alberti's metaphor of the window to define a painting.[28] A window is inclusive: It can be glanced through from different angles, each angle revealing information that cannot be attained from a straight perspective. What *seems* out of sight *is* not out of sight, for a window allows for a mobile eye. Looking through a window allows *you* to order the world you are looking at, including what you like to include, what you find important. Alberti's metaphor of the window, then, is not much different than his description of the act of painting. Like a window sill, the frame in Alberti's definition does not cut off; it rather serves as a given within which a world can be depicted—some things included, others left out, all at the will of the painter, like the viewer through a window can decide what he wants and does not want to see. Piero's *termine*, on the other hand, fixes the things in their proper place—*not* where they were placed by the painter, but where they *are* in reality. It is the task of painting, Piero added, to clarify the space we live in.

Scienzia

Piero's *De prospectiva pingendi* is divided into three books, each containing a great number of examples to depict increasingly complex objects from a fixed perspective.

Rather than using optical theories, as one would expect from a treatise on perspective, Piero predominantly used mathematics. Calculus and geometry provided him with a method to depict everything in its correct dimensions and recessions. Some problems are illustrated with drawings, with small numbers indicating the recession of lines in exact mathematical terms.

Piero was an expert in mathematics, lauded by his contemporaries as one of the century's best mathematicians. By the time he had come to write his treatise on perspective, he had already written two mathematical works, the *Trattato d'abaco* [Abacus Treatise] and the *Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus* [Short Book on the Five Regular Bodies]. These were instruction manuals for future merchants to calculate weights and volumes, etc., even if Piero's copies present examples of a mathematical complexity that far exceeds the needs of commerce.[29] Piero read quite widely in mathematics. He had consulted the popular thirteenth-century schoolbooks written by Leonardo Pisano, called Fibonacci, which had introduced Arabic numerals and methods of computation to Western Europe.[30] And he had read the classical mathematical treatises by Euclid and Archimedes.

Archimedes particularly captured his imagination. The Greek mathematician's works had been translated from Greek into Latin in the early 1450s by Jacopo da Cremona on the instigation of Pope Nicholas V. By the early 1460s, only a few manuscript copies of the Latin translation were in circulation. One was in the possession of Nicholas of Cusa; another was held by the German mathematician Regiomantus (Johannes Müller); Cardinal Bessarion possessed a third copy. Before the manuscript left Rome, it was copied by Piero della Francesca's friend and townsman, the mathematician Francesco del Borgo.[31] Francesco's copy lacks Archimedes's proem to Book 1 and his commentaries on Eutocius.[32] A while ago, James Banker discovered that Piero copied the Archimedes manuscript prepared by Francesco del Borgo. Piero's own copy, now in the Biblioteca Riccardiana in Florence (accession number: Ricc.Lat.106), has 82 folios of Archimedes' text, in Latin, and includes 225 geometrical figures by Piero's hand. The figures show that he perfectly understood Archimedes's complicated Latin text, which puts him on par with the most learned fifteenth-century mathematicians and ranks him among a handful of Renaissance artists who could read Latin.[33]

Piero students have sometimes interpreted his interest in mathematics as an effort to raise the status of painting to a liberal art, like Alberti had tried to do in *De pictura*. In Piero's time, arithmetic and geometry formed part of the Quadrivium, and painting did not. And this was reason enough for some to disparage painting as a mere manual craft. Other scholars have considered Piero's perspective and mathematics primarily as a contribution to the history of science.[34] To raise the status of painting was undoubtedly one of Piero's aims. But his interest in mathematics was not primarily fed by the esteem mathematics purportedly held at the time, nor was it entirely motivated by a wish to promote painting to a liberal art. He believed that mathematics was able to change painting, not just its status in society but also what a picture did *as a picture*. This becomes clear from a long discursive passage at the beginning of the third book of *De prospectiva pingendi*, in which Piero tried to explain why painting needed mathematics. It is an unusual passage in fifteenth-century art theory, written by a painter defending his own particular method. It therefore deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

> Many painters disparage perspective because they do not understand the force of the lines and angles which are obtained from it; with which every outline and delineation is drawn in correct proportion. Therefore it seems to me that

> I should show how much this science [*questa scientia*] is necessary to painting [*alla pittura*]. I say that perspective literally means, so to say, things seen at a distance, represented as enclosed within given limits [*termini*, that is the boarders of the picture plane] and in proportion [*proportione*] according to the quantity of their distances, without which nothing can be degraded correctly. And because painting is nothing if not representations [*dimostrationi*] of surfaces and bodies degraded or magnified on the picture plane [*termine*], placed like the real things seen by the eye [*le cose vere vedute da l'occhio*] as subtending different angles on the said limit [*termine*], and because for any quantity some part of it is nearer the eye than another, and the nearer part always presents itself as subtending a greater angle than the further one at the assigned limits [*termini*], and since it is not possible for the intellect to judge for itself of their size, that is the size of the nearer part and the size of the further one, so I say it is necessary [to employ] perspective, which distinguishes all quantities proportionately, as a true method [*vera scientia*], representing [*dimostrando*] the degradation and magnification of all quantities by means of lines.
>
> By following this [practice] many ancient painters acquired lasting fame. Such as Aristomenes of Thasos, Policles, Apelles, Andron Ephesii, Theo Magnes, Zeuxis, and many others. And although many have received praise without perspective, it is given by those who have not taken account of what is the virtue of the method [*la virtù de l'arte*], with mistaken judgment. And I lay down the rules as one zealous to promote the good name of the method in our time [*la gloria de l'arte et di questa età*] also, and as one who presumes to dare to write this little piece on perspective as it regards painting.[35]

There was once a time, Piero wrote, when perspective painters were more esteemed than painters less versed in perspective. Piero borrowed his list of ancient artists from Ghiberti, who, in turn had taken it from Vitruvius. Ghiberti had added the name of Apelles, an addition that Piero adopted. (Vitruvius ironically mentioned that the artists were underappreciated in their times, which I think demonstrates that Piero had read Ghiberti and not Vitruvius.[36]) There is no mention in this passage, or anywhere else in the treatise, of the Liberal Arts and a wish for painting to be part of it. Nor is there any mention here, or in the other two treatises on mathematics, of the esteem of mathematics in and of itself. What Piero is saying instead is that the kind of painting that is based on mathematically informed perspective is better than other kinds of painting. Piero assumed that fellow painters were probably little inclined to follow his advice. This is why he added the list of ancient painters, knowing that his contemporaries attached great value to their antique predecessors. He never said that modern perspective was a revival of ancient practice, nor that his contemporaries should adopt perspective only because ancient artists had used it.

Piero's used the word "*scientia*" for the art of perspective in the passage quoted above, as well as on a few other occasions in the treatise.[37] *Scientia*, or *scienzia*, could mean different things in the fifteenth century. Sometimes it simply meant skill.[38] At other times, it could refer to faculties, disciplines, professions, or a theory.[39] The art of carpentry was as much a *scienzia* as the art of mathematics. The term had therefore little to do with our modern use of the word "science" as a description of a handful of academic disciplines. For Piero, the word meant something like "method" or "rule." Perspective is "a true method," *vera scientia*, that is, it is the only path to the representation of three-dimensional forms on a two-dimensional plane. Lorenzo Ghiberti

used the term in a similar way. In his discussion of sight, Ghiberti wrote that perception was by itself unable to distinguish objects from one another. The mind received sense perceptions through the eye and only recognized what they were with the help of a *scienza acquistata*, that is, an acquired method that ordered perceptions as cognition.[40] Such a method was necessary for an art bent on the imitation of reality, Piero and Ghiberti believed. They also thought that the ancients had possessed a similar method, even if their treatises had all been lost. There was simply no other way in which ancient artists could have made such lifelike art.[41]

In the passage quoted above, Piero speaks of *la virtù de l'arte* and *la gloria de l'arte et di questa età*. The word arte has sometimes been rendered "art," with all its connotations of originality and inspiration.[42] But in the fifteenth century, *arte*, in common with its Latin equivalent *ars*, meant skill, craft, profession, theory, treatise, or method. Its meaning was therefore close to that of *scienzia*. *Ars* was a competence that could be acquired through rule. It was therefore contrasted to *ingenium*, which referred to innate talent.[43] Ghiberti used the word "*arte*" consistently to refer to the skill of making things. The skill of modeling with loam (*creta*) was an *arte*, for instance.[44] Piero thought of *arte* as a method that was consistent and systematic; it was a way of doing things that could be repeated by anyone who had acquired its rules.

Piero's perspective imagined a kind of painting that left no room for stylistic differences between one painting and another, even when they were produced by wildly different artists. In his dream scenario of every painter following strict mathematical rules, the idiosyncrasies of individual painters were leveled, allowing for little differences in personal styles. Piero's treatise proposed a world of painting of a strikingly uniform kind. And mathematics secured this uniformity. An art of numbers and certainties, math was the exact counterpart of properties usually associated with art, like inspiration, invention, imagination and unrepeatability. Leonardo da Vinci, for instance, said that painting was *unlike* mathematics because, in essence, painting could not be taught, whereas mathematics could. This was why, according to Leonardo, painting was a unique expression of an individual artist's talent. "Painting alone remains noble, it alone honors its author and remains precious and unique and never bears children equal to itself."[45] The calculus and geometry that Piero taught in his treatise shifted attention away from imagination, fantasy and talent towards acquired skills, replication and repeatability. Whereas Leonardo located the origins of a painting in the artist's imagination, Piero located it in the visible world, which the artist, with the help of perspective, claimed to be replicating or repeating, with a clarity unmatched by our own experience of the world.

The laborious process involved in making a perspectival picture, outlined in Piero's treatise in no less than 58 paragraphs, remained invisible in the actual work of art, which conveyed the impression that it represented reality all at once, with no traces of manufacture. Piero's perspective aims to present the made as the discovered, the imagined as the found. Perspective holds a middle ground between manufacture and discovery, between the arbitrariness of human making and the methodical of a scientific discovery. Another way of saying this is that perspective "black-boxes" the "madeness" of art. It disguises the process by which the end result was achieved. The term "black-boxing" comes from a book by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar about the sociology of modern science.[46] Latour and Woolgar show how modern science hides the means by which a result was arrived at in order to make the made seem like the discovered. People walk into a laboratory, clean tubes, write down test results, order new equipment, go to lunch—all human labor that is hidden in the academic

articles that publish the results of that labor. In that sense, Piero's art is like science, but only in Latour's and Woolgar's disenchanted definition of science. Piero's paintings are intensely labored constructs that cultivate the illusion that they are not.

When speaking of the picture surface, Piero wrote that on it the painter could represent (dimostrare) the things observed. As I wrote in the Introduction, the verb "*dimostrare*" means "to show (*monstrare*) again (*di-*)." It points to a definition of painting as repetition. Painting repeats a world already there; it does not show a world invented by the painter. In the Introduction, I observed that fifteenth-century people compared the repetitive effect of realistic painting to the work of a mirror. The mirror simply receives the world and reflects it, shows it again. Lorenzo Valla said that objects are "carried" to vision as if they are brought to a mirror, which throws reality back at you unchanged. Alberti likened the art of painting to discovery. Narcissus discovered painting when he realized that the reflection he saw in the pool was his own.[47]

There is not a single fifteenth-century painter more interested in the mirroring qualities of water than Piero della Francesca. In the *Baptism*, perhaps one of Piero's earliest surviving works, the world you see depicted is reflected in the water—water with no wrinkles, with a surface as smooth as a mirror (Plate 3). The top of the hills stretching out behind Christ, a cloud, and the yellow and red robes of the figures who stand by the bent of the river double in the river Jordan. The reflections thematize the work of painting as Piero defined it, which is perhaps why he liked to paint bodies of water so much.

The artist's presence

Piero pretended that he never took on the role of stage director that Alberti had recommended for the painter. The figures in the *Flagellation* are not actors answering to a plot Piero set out. They rather insist on a certain autonomy, avoiding contact with whomever stands before the painting. One of them, the man with the turban, turns his back to you, something an actor would never do.

The aloofness of the figures points to a lack of interference on the part of the painter. This is at least how the Dutch humanist Rudolf Agricola (1443–85) understood realism in painting. Agricola had worked at the court of Ferrara between 1475 and 1479, where he wrote his book *De inventione dialectica* [On the Dialectics of Invention]. Agricola said that "in painting most things are very pleasing because of the imitation alone and we admire not so much the subject-matter [*res*] which is shown in the painting as the skill of the imitator." A painter simply imitated what was in front of him. The matching between a picture and its model could be so impressive that the painter did not need to invent. And this, he added, was what set the painter apart from the writer. "When in a literary composition," Agricola argued

> the composition succeeds in making the subject-matter seem not reported but rather performed [*non dici sed agi*], through a sort of insubstantial image, the mind of the hearer establishes itself as though in the midst of the action and its upheavals. This should also be attributed to language since it comes about through the power of language and not as a result of the nature of the reality [described] [*rerum natura*].[48]

Agricola uses the Latin verbs *dicere* for reporting and *agere* for performing. To report (*dicere*) was to imitate reality exactly how it was; and this is what a painter should do

according to Agricola. A writer, Agricola had learned from Quintilian, needed to add something to his report. The word *agere* meant "to act" or "to perform."

Agricola introduced the difference between reporting and performing because he was concerned with the authorship of images and texts, as opposed to their subject-matter. In painting, authorship comes naturally. The realism of Renaissance pictures forced appreciation and praise of the artist's skill. The better images imitated reality, the more the artist was praised for his skill. The performative aspect Agricola introduced for writing was also meant to draw attention to the person of the writer. In late medieval theories of authorship, the word author (*auctor*) was sometimes traced back to its root word *agere*, to perform.[49] The etymology of the word auctor helped to shape the modern definition of authorship. In earlier theories of authorship, the derivation of auctor from *auctaritas* was emphasized. An author was an authority to be believed and trusted. But when authorship began to be traced back to the verb *agere* around 1300, an author acquired more leeway and freedom to add things to the reality he was describing. By the fifteenth century, this culminated in a culture that allowed a text to be understood as the result of an individual author's decisions.[50]

Agricola used the *Institutio Oratoria* by the first-century rhetorician Quintilian to think about the relationship between an author and his work. Quintilian wrote about different styles of rhetoric, each employed for a specific occasion or subject, in order to improve the persuasive capacities of the orator.[51] Agricola used Quintilian's work to explain an essential difference between texts and images. Images could do without Quintilian's stylistic categories. The pure imitation of nature Agricola attributed to painters had nothing to do with the culture of adding to reality he associated with writing.

Leon Battista Alberti had done the opposite. He adopted Quintilian's advice that the orator needed to change reality in order to persuade his public for his discussion of painting. Alberti believed that modern artists should never imitate reality as it was. The origins of painting lay in a perfect, unaltered embrace of reality, when Narcissus discovered his mirror image in a pool of water, but modern artists, Alberti admonished, should move beyond a simple imitation of reality. Alberti advised the painter to select the best parts from nature and never depict it as he had found it. "The painter," wrote the humanist

> should be attentive not only to the likeness [*similtudinem*] of things but also and especially to beauty [*pulchritudinem*] . . . Therefore excellent parts should all be selected from the most beautiful bodies, and every effort should be made to perceive, understand and express beauty.[52]

It was an explicit aim of Alberti's treatise on painting to move painting closer to writing and to raise the status of painting to the liberal arts. Alberti's advice would lead to a kind of painting that puts more emphasis on the decisions of the painter, from the organization the composition to the invention of new standards of beauty. What you find in the kind of painting defended by Alberti, you cannot find in reality. Agricola's words, on the other hand, reinstall a traditional separation between text and image. According to Agricola, text added and ordered reality, images replicated it.

Quintilian's rhetorical categories provided fifteenth-century authors with a model to understand the complicated subject of the imitation of reality in painting. In 1481, Cristoforo Landino included a short history of fifteenth-century Florentine art in the

preface to his *Commentary on Dante's Divina Comedia*, from which I have already quoted his words on Masaccio in the Introduction. Landino used Quintilian to make sense of the different styles of Florentine painters and the way they imitated reality. Here I want to draw closer attention to Landino's text, which is why I am quoting his words on the Florentine painters in full:

> Masaccio was a very good imitator of nature [*imitatore di natura*], with great and comprehensive three-dimensional modeling [*rilievo*], a good composer [*componitore*] and pure [*puro*], without ornateness [*ornato*], because he devoted himself only to the imitation of reality [*all'imitatione del vero*], and to the three-dimensional modeling [*rilievo*] of his figures. He was certainly as good and skilled in perspective as anyone else at that time, and of great ease [*facilita*] in working, being very young, as he died at the age of 26. Fra Filippo Lippi was graceful [*gratioso*] and ornate [*ornato*] and exceedingly skillful; he was very good at compositions [*compositioni*] and at variety, at coloring [*colorire*], three-dimensional modeling [*rilievo*], and very much at ornateness [*ornamenti*] of every kind, whether imitated after the real [*dal vero*] or invented. Andrea [del Castagno] was a great draftsman [*disegnatore*, also translatable as "designer"] and of great three-dimensional modeling [*rilievo*]; he was a lover of the difficulties of the discipline [of painting] [*dell'arte*] and of foreshortenings, lively and very prompt [*prompto*], and of great ease [*facile*] in working. Paolo Uccello was a good composer [*componitore*] and varied, a great master of animals and landscapes, artful [*artificioso*] in foreshortening because he knew perspective well. Fra Angelico was blithe [*vezzoso*], devout [*divoto*], very ornate [*ornato*], and endowed with the greatest ease at working [*facilita*].[53]

These painters were all contemporaries. Masaccio (1401–28), Filippo Lippi (ca. 1406–69), Paolo Uccello (1397–1475), and Fra Angelico (ca. 1395–1455) were half a generation older than Piero (born around 1412); Castagno (ca. 1421–57) was slightly younger than the painter from Sansepolcro. Landino distinguished Masaccio's art from the rest of the painters he mentioned. His paintings are *puro, senza ornato*, whereas the others all added something to their imitation of nature. Castagno loved all things difficult, and the others painted in a style that adored reality with ornaments. It made reality look graceful (*gratioso*), prompt (*prompto*), blithe (*vezzoso*), devout (*divoto*), or ornate (*ornato*).

Ornato is a key term. It is a quality that both Filippo Lippi and Fra Angelico possessed and that Landino said Masaccio deliberately steered clear from. It is derived from the ancient rhetorical term *ornatus*.[54] In rhetoric, the term refers to the embellishment of a speech. It does not merely point to the overwhelming effect of eloquence but also to the process of making a speech.[55] Quintilian, for instance, wrote that *ornatus* was

> something that is superadded [*plus est*] to what is merely lucid and acceptable. It consists firstly in forming a clear conception of what we wish to say, secondly in giving this adequate expression, and thirdly in lending it additional brilliance, a process which may correctly be termed embellishment.
>
> (*Institutio Oratoria* 8, III, 61)

This is the same passage in Quintilian on which Rudolf Agricola based his distinction between reported reality, which he associated with painters, and performed reality,

which he attributed to a successful speech. And it is also the passage that Alberti had in mind when he defended a theatrical definition of painting in *De pictura*. *Ornatus* is something that added to the mere reporting of the facts.

Landino's text also shows how difficult it was to distinguish between reported and performed reality in painting. Filippo Lippi used ornaments both of a fictive kind (*ficti*) and ornaments that imitated reality (*dal vero*). The result was a picture that looked real but did not conform to an actual reality. What you see in Lippi's painting lacked a stable referent in reality. Lippi's idea of painting conformed to Alberti's advice to the painter to select elements from nature and to order them in a new way. For Landino's Lippi, a beautiful picture consisted of a composite of different aspects observed from nature that in reality could never have been observed in the same constellation.

Masaccio stands apart from the other painters. According to Landino, he depicted things in the exact same constellation that he had found them, as difficult as this is to believe in the case of a painter of mainly Biblical subjects. Of all the painters Landino mentioned, Masaccio was the only artist who "devoted himself exclusively to the imitation of reality," *all'imitatione del vero*. *Vero* could be both translated as truth and as reality. Boccaccio wrote that Giotto's realism was able to make the depicted seem like the truth or reality, "*quello credendo esser vero che era dipinto*."[56] Manetti said that Brunelleschi had depicted "reality as it is," *el proprio vero*, in his perspective panel of the Florentine Baptistery.[57] And Giovanni Santi knew about Jan van Eyck that he had perfected the study of reality, *il vero*. Both artists of contemporary events—Brunelleschi—and painters of Biblical pictures—Giotto, Masaccio, and van Eyck—were believed to have imitated reality as they had found it. The distinction we make today between the representation of historical events and contemporary subjects in our assessment of realism did not count for the contemporaries of Piero della Francesca. Pictures of biblical events imitated contemporary reality as much as, say, a portrait of a contemporary. Chapters 2 and 3 will study this theory of time in painting in greater detail.

Masaccio's purchase on veracity lay in its restraint, in a disciplined withholding from ornament. That restraint was intimately bound up with Masaccio's skills in modeling the three-dimensional form of his figures, for which Landino used the term *rilievo*, meaning relief. And it also had something to do with the way he used perspective. Masaccio shared his skills in perspective with Uccello, but note how Landino distinguished between the two different artists' use of it. Uccello deliberately sought the difficulties of foreshortening. He employed perspective for its own sake, endowing his pictures with an artificial effect, something *artificioso*. In Masaccio's art, perspective was a means to draw attention away from artifice. He rather defined the picture as a three-dimensional space, drawing attention away from the picture's flat, ornamented surface.[58] Masaccio did not emphasize the painting as an object; he rather stressed what the picture showed or projected: Three-dimensional forms, each positioned in their proper place. What counted was *what* Masaccio showed, not *how* he showed it.

Piero shared an interest in perspective with Masaccio. Perhaps he even traveled all the way to Pisa to see Masaccio's altarpiece in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine there. He copied Masaccio's Christ in his own Crucifixion panel topping the *Misericordia Altarpiece*, and he must have looked closely at Masaccio's Trinity fresco at Santa Maria Novella in Florence, still brand new when Piero resided in the city in 1439, just over a decade after Masaccio's death.[59] In his treatise on perspective, Piero

argued for a similar unadorned representation of reality, a kind of painting that drew attention to space rather than surface. When Vasari described the angel in Piero's nocturnal *Annunciation to Constantine* at San Francesco in Arezzo, he wrote that Piero "makes us recognize, in this darkness, the importance of imitating things as they truly are [*le cose vere*] and to always copy them from the thing proper."[60]

Artist and work

Looking at Piero's art gives the impression of looking at an impersonal world, a world devoid of movement and emotion. The three figures in the foreground of the *Flagellation* speak, it seems, but speech is implicated by extremely limited means. The man on the left has his mouth half-opened and his left hand gestures. The other two men listen, yet they avoid eye contact with the speaker. Each of them stands isolated from the two others. Their bodies do not register the kind of gestures one would expect in a discussion.

Such isolation and alienation are hallmarks of Piero's art. In the fresco of the *Death of Adam* at San Francesco in Arezzo, Adam forecasts his own death to Eve and their daughter and sons (Fig. 1.4). Adam gestures with his right hand, a speech act similar to the one the bearded man is making with his left hand in the *Flagellation*. Note, however, how Adam avoids contact with his family. He is not looking at them; his gaze is vacant. His wife and children show no response to Adam's words. Only one son, probably Seth, stares in the direction of his father; he absorbs Adam's words with no visible emotion. The other son, seen from the back, leans on a shepherd's stick. The daughter feels nothing, it seems. Eve, supporting Adam from behind, has a vacant look on her face.

I am not the first to comment on the methodical aspect of Piero's art. Bernard Berenson, in his remarkable book *Piero della Francesca, or: The Ineloquent in Art*, published in 1954, made a case for the strange, anti-personal aspect of Piero's paintings. "One is almost compelled to conclude," Berenson wrote, "that Piero was not interested in human beings as living animals, sentient and acting. For him they were existences in three dimensions whom perchance he would have gladly exchanged for pillars, and arches, capitals, entablatures and facets of walls."

Berenson is saying that Piero cared more for space—the domain of pillars, arches, capitals, entablatures and walls—than figures. He then reveals the rationale behind this expressionless art in an anecdote he tells about an encounter with Oscar Wilde around the turn of the nineteenth century:

> I am reminded that one day, nearly sixty years ago, Oscar Wilde and I were lunching together. I asked what he had been doing the forenoon, and he told me that he had been sitting to a painter who was making a map, a landscape of his face. He was so speaking in derision, and I was in "expressivistic" years. Now I would say, "If only! What can an artist do better than portray you as a great landscape painter presents skies and rocks and trees."[61]

A map is different than a painting because a map measures according to a fixed method its object of representation (the land). A map does not express, it simply lays out the three-dimensional world in two dimensions with accurate measurements.

This methodical aspect of Piero's art has contributed to the idea that Piero's style changed remarkably little over the fifty years or so of the painter's activity.[62] It is

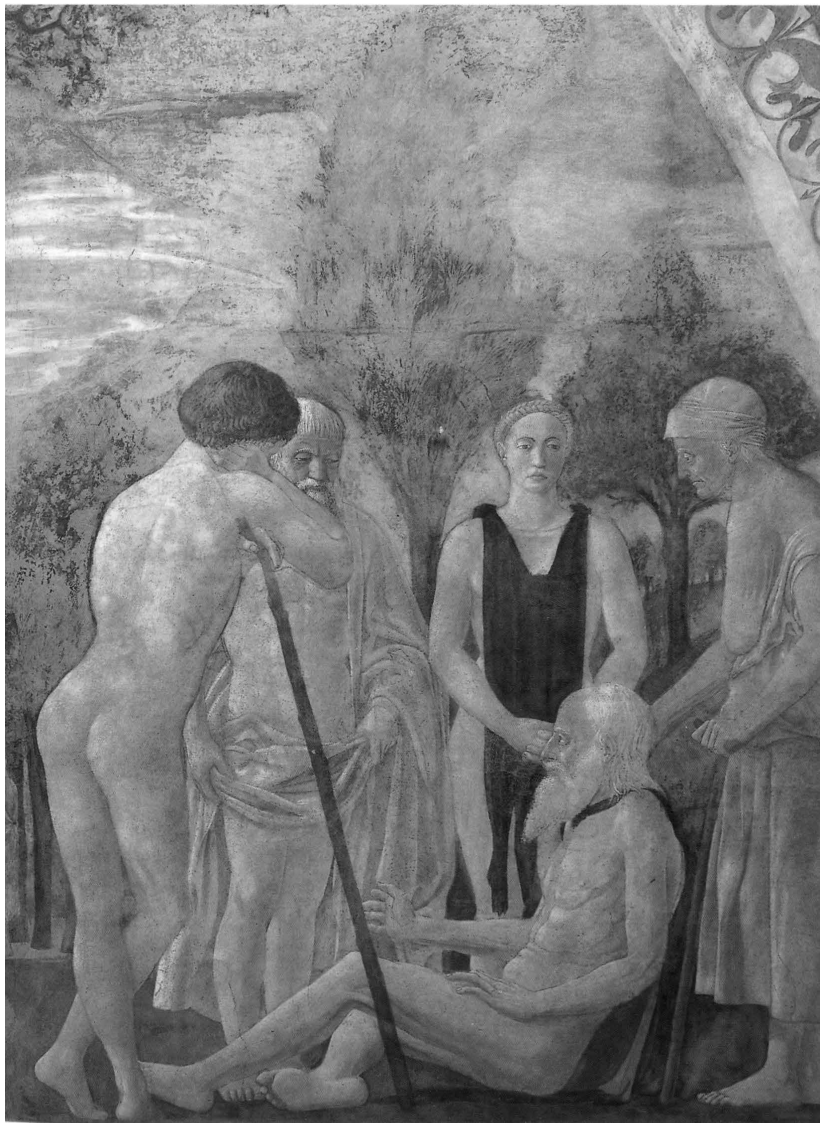

Figure 1.4 Piero della Francesca, *Death of Adam* (detail), before 1466, dimensions unknown. Arezzo: San Francesco. Artwork in the Public Domain.

almost as if the images duplicate themselves, with very little intervention of the artist who made them.[63] All of this makes it very difficult to date Piero's pictures if there is not documentary evidence at hand.

The apparent lack of stylistic change in Piero's oeuvre is the result of his methodical approach to art-making, the appliance of a method, only trusted to paper later in life, that tried to filter out personal style. This, however, does not mean that there is no change in Piero della Francesca. What changes is the world we see in Piero's pictures,

and the world changes with the place where a picture was made. Piero's insistence on an almost impersonal, formulaic representation did not lead to an impersonal kind of art. It was rather intimate, bound to his life and biography, absorbing the landscape, architecture, and sometimes even people he saw in the towns where he made his art.

Notes

1 There is one exception. In Jacopo Bellini's Louvre sketchbook, there are two drawings of the flagellation that also foreground the bystanders. It is, however, almost certain that Piero had not seen Jacopo's drawings. Piero probably never traveled to Venice.
2 The picture has not been cropped; see Cesare Brandi, "Restauri a Piero della Francesca," *Bollettino d'arte* 39 (1954): 241–58.
3 At least four scholars identify him as Herod: Paul Running, "Letter to the Editor," *The Art Bulletin* 35 (1953): 86; Joseph Hoffman, "Piero della Francesca's 'Flagellation': A Reading From Jewish History," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 44 (1981): 340–57; Fabrizio Lollini, "Una possibile connotazione antiebraica della 'Flagellazione' die Piero della Francesca," *Bollettino d'arte* 65 (1991): 6; Maurizio Calvesi, "La Flagellazione nel quadro storico del convegno di Mantova e dei progetti di Mattia Corvino," in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 1995), 115–16. Turbaned men often appear among the bystanders in scenes of the Flagellation.
4 Leon Battista Alberti recalled a painting by Timantes of Cyprus of the Immolation of Iphigenia in which the girl's father was depicted from the back because his despair was beyond depiction; Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture: The Latin Texts of* De pictura *and* De statua, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 83. For the *Rückenfigur*, M. Koch, *Die Rückenfigur im Bild: Von der Antike bis zu Giotto* (Recklinghausen: Bongers, 1965).
5 Alberti, *On Painting*, 82–3.
6 Alberti, *On Painting*, 83.
7 Alberti, *On Painting*, 80–3.
8 Joseph Leo Koerner, "Factura," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 36 (1999): 5–19.
9 That the *Flagellation* is the only painting in Piero's oeuvre whose perspective can be reconstructed on mathematical grounds usually goes unnoticed; but see Judith V. Field, *Piero della Francesca: A Mathematician's Art* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 174–81.
10 Rudolf Wittkower and B. A. R. Carter, "The Perspective of Piero della Francesca's 'Flagellation'," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 292–303; Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: The Triumph of Christian Glory," *The Art Bulletin* 50 (1968), plate 2. The only two irregularities, not noted by Wittkower and Carter, in the perspective scheme are the central marble strip, which is slightly too narrow, and the house on the extreme right, which defies mathematical interpretation; it comes out unusually small and narrow. See Field, *Piero della Francesca*, 176–7.
11 Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi*, ed. G. Nicco Fasola (Florence: Sansoni, 1942), 98: "il qual e occhio dico essere tondo, et da la intersegatione de doi nervicini che se incrociano vene la virtù visiva al cintro de l'umore cristallino, et da quello sa partano I raggi et stendonse derictamente, devidendo la quarta parte del circulo de l'occhio; sicommo o posto fanno recto terminano nel puncto. F. et nel puncto. G., dico dunque che la linea. FG. sia la magiore quantità che l'occhio oposto a quella possa vedere." Trans. in Michael Baxandall, "Piero della Francesca's *The Resurrection of Christ*', in *Words for Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 152.
12 Piero, *De prospectiva*, 99: "aciò che l'occhio receva più facilemente le cose a lui opposte bisogna che se rapresentino socto minore angolo che il recto." For this passage, consult Judith V. Field, "Piero della Francesca's Treatment of Edge Distortion," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986): 66–89.
13 Alberti, *On Painting*, 42–5, 54–7; and Leonardo da Vinci, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Jean-Paul Richter, 3rd edn. (New York: Phaidon, 1970), 1: 324 (§536), among others.

14 For perspective and the organization of the picture surface in Leonardo's *Last Supper*, see Leo Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).
15 Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
16 Rebecca Zorach, *The Passionate Triangle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
17 Thomas Puttfarken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400–1800* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 69–70.
18 Alberti, *On Painting*, 54–5.
19 Thomas Frangenberg, *Der Betrachter: Studien zur florentinischen Kunstliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Mann, 1990), 29.
20 Pomponio Gaurico, *De Sculptura*, ed. Heinrich Brockhaus (Leipzich: Brockhaus, 1886), 200: "Constat enim tota hec in universum perspectiva, dispositione, ut intelligamus quacunque ratione spectetur, quantum ab alio aliud distare aut cohaerere debeat quot necessariae sint ad illam rem significandam personae, ne aut numero confundatur, aut raritate deficiat intellectio."
21 Cf. M. Gerard Simon, "Optique et perspective: Ptolémée, Alhazen, Alberti," *Revue d'histoire des sciences* 54 (2001): 325–50.
22 Piero, *De prospectiva*, 64. And in another passage: "La quarta sono le linee, le quali s'apresentano da l'estremità de la cosa e terminano nell'occhio, infra le quail l'ochio le receve e discerne."
23 Piero, *De prospectiva*, 64–5.
24 For the reception of Arabic thought in the medieval west, see Andreas Speer and Lydia Wegener (eds.), *Wissen über Grenzen: Arabisches Wissen und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Berlin: Gruyter, 2006).
25 Lorenzo Valla, *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, ed. Gianni Zippel (Padua: Antenore, 1982), 155: 17–156: 10. For a translation, see Charles Trinkaus, "Lorenzo Valla's Anti-Aristotelian Natural Philosophy," *I Tatti Studies* 5 (1993): 302.
26 See the discussion in Lodi Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense: Lorenzo Valla's Humanist Critique of Scholastic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 139–51.
27 Piero, *De prospectiva*, 64–5.
28 Hubert Damisch, "Du tableau comme 'terme' ", in *Piero della Francesca tra arte e scienza*, ed. Marisa Dalai Emiliani and Valter Curzi (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 375–83.
29 For Piero's treatises, see Margaret Daly Davies, *Piero della Francesca's Mathematical Treatises: The "Trattato d'abaco" and "Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus"* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1977); and J.V. Field, "A Mathematician's Art," in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 177–97.
30 For the history of medieval mathematics and Piero's relation to them, see Moritz Cantori, *Vorlesungen über Geschichte der Mathematik*, 2nd edn. (Leipzich: B.G. Teubner, 1892), vol. 2.
31 For the relation between Piero and Francesco, see James Banker, "Piero della Francesco, il fratello Don Francesco di Benedetto e Francesco del Borgo," *Prospettiva* 68 (1992): 54–6.
32 See Cosimo Stornajolo, *Codices Urbinates latini* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1902), 1: 245. Cited in *Archimedes in the Middle Ages, III: The Fate of the Medieval Archimedes, 1300 to 1565: Part III, The Medieval Archimedes in the Renaissance, 1450–1565*, ed. Marshall Clagett (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 323, 330–1.
33 James R. Banker, "A Manuscript of the Works of Archimedes in the Hand of Piero della Francesca," *The Burlington Magazine* 147 (2005): 165–9.
34 Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); and J.V. Field, *The Invention of Infinity: Mathematics and Art in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The scholarship of Kemp and Field is part of a more widespread tendency of Renaissance scholars, most notably Ernst Gombrich, to raise the alleged scientific aspect of naturalism to a dogmatic neo-positivism. For a critique, see Robert Williams, "Italian Renaissance Art and the Systematicity of Representation," *Rinascimento* 43 (2003): 309–32.

35 Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva*, 128–9:

> Molti dipintori biasiamano la prospective, perchè non intendano la forza de le linee et degli angoli, che da essa se producano: con li quail commensuramente onni contorno e lineamento se descrive. Perhò me pare de dovere mostrare quanto questa scientia sia necessaria alla pictura. Dico che la prospectiva sono nel nome suo commo dire cose vedute da lunghi, rapresentate socto certi dati termini con proportione, secondo la qualità de le distancie loro, senza de la quale non se po è se non dimostrationi de superficie et de corpi degradati o acresciuti nel termine, posti secondo che le cose vere vedute da l'occhio socto diversi angoli s'apresentano nel dicto termine, et però che d'onni quantità una parte è sempre a l'ochio più propinqua che l'altra, et la più propinqua s'apresenta sempre socto magiore angolo che la più remota nei termini assegnati, et non posendo giudicare da sè lo intellecto la loro mesura, cioè quanto sia la più propinqua et quanto sia la più remota, però dico essere necessaria la prospectiva, la quale discerne tucte le quantità proportionalmente commo vera scientia, dimostrando il degradare et acrescere de onni quantità per forza de linee.
>
> La quale seguitando, molti antichi dipinctori aquistaro perpetua laude. Commo Aristomenes Thasius, Polides, Apello, Andramides, Nitheo, Zeusis, et molti altri. Et benchè a molti senza prospective sia dato laude, è data da quelli che non ano notitia de la virtù de l'arte con falso giuditio. Et imperò commo zelante de la gloria de l'arte et di questa età, commo presuntuoso ho preso ardire scrivere questa particella de prospective apartinente alla pictura, facendone commo dissi nel primo tre libri.

I have slightly altered the translation of this passage in Judith V. Field, *Piero della Francesca: A Mathematician's Art* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 162–3.

36 See Field, *Piero della Francesca,* 75. The list is in Vitruvius, Book III, Introduction. For Ghiberti's list, see Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Lorenzo Ghibertis Denkwürdigkeiten (I commentarii*), ed. Julius von Schlosser (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1912), 7–8.

37 One of the other instances is Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva*, 96–7 (Libro I, Par. XXX).

38 For instance, the contract with the carpenter Bartolomeo Angelo for the frame of Sassetta's Sansepolcro altarpiece mentions that Bartolomeo promised to execute the frame "*ex certa scientia*." James R. Banker, "The Program for the Sassetta Altarpiece in the Church of S. Francesco in Borgo S. Sepolcro," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4 (1991): 47.

39 James A. Weisheipl, "The Nature, Scope and Classification of the Sciences', in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. D.C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 461–82. See James Ackerman, "Ars Since Scientia Nihil Est: Gothic Theory of Architecture at the Cathedral of Milan," *The Art Bulletin* 31 (1949): 84–111, for *scientia* as a theory.

40 Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 99, 125–6.

41 Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 35:

> Dunche al tempo di Constantino imperadore et di Silvestro papa sormontò su la fede Christiana. Ebbe la ydolatria grandissima persecutione in modo tale, tutte le statue e le picture furon disfatte et lacerate di tanta nobilità et anticha et perfetta dignità et così si consumaron colle statue et picture et vilumi et comentarii et liniamenti et regole davano amaestramento a tanta et egregia et gentile arte.

It was left to Giotto, Ghiberti added a few folios down, to rediscover "all that knowledge [*doctrina*] which had been buried for around 600 years." Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 36.

42 For instance, Field, *Piero della Francesca*, 163.

43 For *ars* and *ingenium* in the fifteenth century, see Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 15–17.

44 Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 10: "Questa arte trovata da Lisistrato prima non si truova mai essere stato in uso."

45 Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo da Vinci's "Paragone": A Critical Interpretation With a New Edition of The text in the "Codex Urbinas"*, ed. Claire J. Farago (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 187–91 (§8).

46 Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Facts* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979).

47 Alberti, *On Painting*, 63.
48 Rudolph Agricola, *De inventione dialectica libri tres = Drei Bücher über die Inventio dialectica: Auf der Grundlage der Edition von Alardus von Amsterdam (1539)*, ed. and trans. Lothar Mundt (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 396–7. Trans. in Peter Mack, "Agricola's Use of the Comparison between Writing and the Visual Arts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 174.
49 A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Wildwood, 1988), 10–12; Albert Russel Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
50 David Quint, *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).
51 Agricola's emphasis on persuasion as opposed to reporting comes from Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, IV, ii, 63; VIII, iii, 62–3.
52 Alberti, *On Painting*, 99. This is an ancient topos, as Alberti knew. Both Pliny and Cicero famously told about the Greek painter Zeuxis who combined the features of the five maidens of Croton into one beautiful woman. For Alberti's indebtedness to Quintilian, see Caroline van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17–30.
53 Cristoforo Landino, *Scritti critice e teorici*, ed. Roberto Cardini (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974), 1: 124:

> Fu Masaccio optimo imitatore di natura, di gran rilievo universale, buono componitore et puro sanza ornato, perche solo si decte all'imitatione del vero, et al rilievo delle figure: fu certo buono et prospectivo quanto altro di quegli tempi, et di gran facilita nel fare, essendo ben giovane, che mori d'anni ventisei. Fu fra Philippo gratioso et ornato et artificioso sopra modo: valse molto nelle compositioni et varieta, nel colorire, nel rilievo, negli' ornamenti d'ogni sorte, maxime o imitati dal vero o ficti. Andreino fu grande designatore e dig ran rilievo, amatore della difficultà dell'arte e di scorci, vivo e pronto molto e assai facile nel fare. Paolo Uccello buono componitore e vario, gran maestro d'animali e di paesi, artificioso negli scorci perché intese bene di prospettiva. Fra Giovanni Angelico e vezoso e divoto e ornato molto con grandissima facilità.

I have slightly altered the translation in Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 118.
54 There is considerable disagreement about the origins of Landino's term "*puro senza ornato*." André Chastel believed that Landino got it from Alberti and Ficino; Chastel, *Marsile Ficin e l'art* (Geneva: Droz, 1954), 182–3. Riccardo Cardini traced the term back to Bocaccio and Villani; Cardini, *La critica del Landino* (Florence: Sansoni, 1973), 2: 155. And Peter Murray and Michael Baxandall recognized Alberti's voice in Landino's words; Murray, "Cristoforo Landino," *The Burlington Magazine* 95 (1953): 392; Baxandall, "Alberti and Cristoforo Landino: The Practical Criticism of Painting," in *Convegno internazionale indetto del V centenario di Leon Battista Alberti* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), 145, 153. Here, I side with Hellmut Wohl's argument that Landino's qualification of Masaccio's work should not only be considered in relation to the revival of Ciceronian rhetoric, but also in the context of what Landino says about Lippi, Angelico and del Castagno, that is, as a stylistic restraint; Hellmut Wohl, *The Aesthetics of Italian Renaissance Art: A Reconsideration of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 58–9.
55 For this point, see Caroline van Eck, "Review of *Paper Palaces: The Rise of the Architectural Treatise in the Renaissance*, ed. V. Hart and P. Hicks; A.A. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture*; H. Wohl, *The Aesthetics of Italian Renaissance Art: A Reconsideration of Style*," *The Art Bulletin* 83 (2001): 146–50.
56 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron (Filocolo, Ameto, Fiammetta)*, ed. Enrico Bianchi (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1952), 439–40 (VI.5).
57 Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi*, ed. and trans. Howard Saalman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 42–6.
58 For the dichotomy between *ornato* and perspective, see Hellmut Wohl, *The Aesthetics of Renaissance Art: A Reconsideration of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

59 Roberto Longhi once wrote about the importance of Masaccio's art for Piero della Francesca. Longhi wrote:

> For our young painter, as for his contemporaries, Masaccio had proved an unutterable revelation of a new naturalness, which, although it was itself almost entirely free from stylistic principles of any kind, was yet capable of generating them, like nature herself, in infinite variety
>
> (Longhi, *Piero della Francesca*, 17)

Longhi's stylistic flourishes are perhaps not the air we breathe any more. But his assessment of Masaccio's importance for Piero as a kind of unadorned realism at least resonates with what Landino had written about Masaccio's style during Piero's lifetime.

60 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1966–71), 3: 262.

61 Bernard Berenson, *Piero della Francesca, or: The Ineloquent in Art* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1954), 5, 21.

62 Creighton Gilbert, *Change in Piero della Francesca* (Locus Valley: J.J. Augustin, 1968). The aim of Gilbert's book was to point out that there was in fact change in Piero's oeuvre, but that the artist himself aimed to suppress that change by making his output as consistent as possible.

63 This is in part the result of Piero's re-use of cartoons, the preparatory drawings employed to transfer a design to a panel or wall. In some of his paintings, Piero developed a highly expedient working method. The angels in the *Madonna del Parto* in Monterchi were made from the same cartoon, which he simply used in reverse for the second angel. For this painting and its technique, see *Il restauro della Madonna del Parto di Piero della Francesca*, ed. Guido Botticelli (Poggibonsi: Lalli, 1994). In addition, he used the same drawing of the head of Saint John, now in the Frick Collection in New York, which once formed part of the Sant' Agostino altarpiece, for both King Chosroes and God the Father in the Arezzo cycle. And Saint John the Baptist in the Brera Altarpiece was made with the same cartoon as the Augustinian nun in the Frick Collection. Piero re-used his cartoons irrespective of medium (fresco or panel painting), with no regard to the identity of his figures (Saint John the Evangelist, the evil Byzantine tyrant Chosroes, or God the Father), and with no regard of gender. Each of these figures, moreover, is painted on a different scale. Other fifteenth-century artists rescaled their cartoons. Piero's rescaling is, however, so exact that it rather implies the use of a mathematical model that applied percentages in order to enlarge and diminish cartoons. For Piero's rescaling practices, see Roberto Bellucci and Cecilia Frosinini, "Piero della Francesca's Process: Panel Painting Techniques," in *Painting Techniques: History, Materials and Studio Practice*, ed. Ashok Roy and Perry Smith (London: The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1991), 89–93.

2 The time of the work

Contemporaries

Some people believed that in Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation*, the left side of the painting depicts a scene in first-century Jerusalem and the right side a gathering in fifteenth-century Urbino. Early eighteenth-century sources identify the three men in the foreground as contemporaries of the painter. An inventory of the sacristy of Urbino Cathedral, where Piero's painting was displayed since the opening years of the Ottocento, describes the work: 'The Flagellation of Our Lord against the column, and set apart our most serene highnesses the Dukes Oddantonio, Federico and Guidobaldo; by Pietro from Borgo.'[1]

Oddantonio, Federico and Guidobaldo were the three fifteenth-century dukes of Urbino. The inventory mentions them in chronological order. Oddantonio da Montefeltro was the first duke. Born in 1427, he was raised to the duchy in 1443, at the age of sixteen.[2] The young man was an unpopular ruler, better known for his exuberant lifestyle than for his just government. He was considered a tyrant, not a lofty prince. On a warm summer night in 1444, he was murdered in the Ducal Palace in Urbino. Within days of the assassination, Federico da Montefeltro succeeded him, first as count and later as duke of Urbino. Federico was Oddantonio's half-brother. By far the most well known of the three, if only for his architectural patronage and his library, he commissioned his portrait and that of his wife Battista Sforza in the early 1470s from Piero. And modern scholars assume that he commissioned Piero to paint the *Flagellation*, too, in the late 1460s, as I argued in the Introduction. Federico died in 1482, after which the duchy of Urbino passed on to his son Guidobaldo, born in 1472 and the third person mentioned in the inventory. Guidobaldo had no children, and after his death in 1508, the Duchy of Urbino passed to the della Rovere family.

The identification of the three men must have been common knowledge in early eighteenth-century Urbino. It even entered the otherwise dry, formulaic description of a notary. Two more texts from the eighteenth century identify the same men but in a different order.[3] One of them adds that Piero had painted the men from life.[4] When the German artist Johann Anton Ramboux (1790–1866) drew a copy of Piero's *Flagellation*, he scribbled the name of Oddantonio above Piero's blond youngster, the name of Guidobaldo above the bearded man on the left, and he identified the bald man on the right as Federico. Perhaps Ramboux was told about the identity of the three figures by a local who accompanied him on his visit to the sacristy. But it is more likely that the identification could be read on the painting's frame, perhaps on a piece of paper attached to it. Frames sometimes contained the kind of information that would easily

be forgotten, like the name of a sitter in a portrait.[5] That frame is now lost, but it was still there in the early nineteenth century. The German painter and art historian Johann David Passavant reported that there was a text close to the three foreground figures, almost certainly on the frame. (Passavant did not mention where exactly the text was; he just said that it was "near" [*dabei*] the three foreground figures.[6] There is no trace on the painting itself of such a text and it had already disappeared by the end of the nineteenth century, probably because it was written on a piece of paper attached to the frame.[7]) Passavant wrote that the text read "*Convenerunt in unum*," the three opening words of Acts 4:26: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ." Ramboux had seen the same text, and he added the word *tres* at the beginning of the text, making the inscription to bear on the three foreground figures only.[8] Perhaps their identification was written on the same piece of paper as the quote from Acts 4.

The identification of the young man in the center as Oddantonio goes back further than the eighteenth century. In 1587, Ferdinand of Tirol commissioned a portrait of the deceased duke from an unknown artist, who took the youngster in Piero's painting as his model (Fig. 2.1).[9] No fifteenth-century portraits of Oddantonio survive, but other portraits agree about the identification. There is another late sixteenth-century portrait of Oddantonio, now in Urbania, and a slightly later portrait in the same collection in Urbania also harks back to Piero's example.[10] A seventeenth-century copy by Camilla Guerrieri (1628–after 1664) in the Museo Civico in Pesaro of another, lost sixteenth-century portrait of Oddantonio, too, resembles the man in Piero's picture.[11]

There are, however, a few problems with the identification of the three as the dukes of Urbino. In a published account of 1822, the Urbinese Luigi Pungileoni pointed out that Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, identified as the bearded man on the left, had been born in 1472, too late to be included in Piero's painting.[12] The identification of Federico with the bearded man on the left is also unlikely. The duke's unmistakeable features—his right eye and the upper part of his nose missing after the tip of his opponent's sword had slid behind his visor during a dual in 1450—had been immortalized in numerous portraits, among them Piero's double portrait in the Uffizi (Plate 4). None of these portraits even closely resembles the man in Piero's *Flagellation*. It seems likely that the identification of Federico and Guidobaldo has a late seventeenth-century or perhaps even an early eighteenth-century pedigree. The frame that contained the text "*Tres convenerunt in unum*" dates to 1707. It is not the original fifteenth-century piece of carpentry. A previously unpublished document, dated December 4 of that year, records a payment by the canons of the cathedral for the replacement of the existing frame with a new one.[13] We learn from the document that the painting had just been brought to the new sacristy of the church, where objects with no fixed place in the cathedral or elsewhere were displayed on an elaborate piece of new furniture. The text of the document does not reveal why the picture needed a new frame. Perhaps the old frame was either considered too badly damaged or out of fashion.[14]

And then there is the problem that the portraits in the *Flagellation* are not unique. The same men appear in earlier paintings by Piero. The bearded man stands among the retinue of Heraclius in the scene of *Heraclius Entering Jerusalem* at Arezzo (Plate 5), and he reappears as a soldier attending the execution of Chosroes in the same fresco cycle (Plate 6).[15] The bald man on the right comes out of the *Misericordia Altarpiece*, finished in the early 1460s, where he sits under the Virgin's robe on the left, also in profile.[16] He appears a second time among the men attending to the execution of

Figure 2.1 Anonymous artist, *Portrait of Oddantonio da Montefeltro*, 1587, dimensions unknown. Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum. Artwork in the Public Domain.

Chosroes at Arezzo, painted somewhat later. And the curly-haired youngster borrowed his features from two identical angels in the *Baptism*, perhaps done as early as the late 1430s (Plate 3), which seems to rule out the possibility that the central figure was Oddantonio, still a boy when Piero painted the angels.[17]

All of which has led some scholars to discredit the idea that there are portraits in Piero's *Flagellation*. Ernst Gombrich and others take the bystanders as biblical figures and deny the picture the sort of contemporaneity read into it since the sixteenth century.[18] Creighton Gilbert added that there is in fact nothing contemporary about the three foreground figures. In Piero's time, men did not wear beards, like the man on the left; they never appeared bare-headed in paintings, like the bald man on the right; or with bare feet, like the youngster in the middle.[19]

I partly side with Gombrich and Gilbert. The figures in the foreground are not much different than the bystanders in other pictures of the Christ's flagellation, like

the predella panel from the Sassetta workshop that Piero probably got the asymmetrical composition from (Fig. 2.2). These were the Jews who according to the Gospel of John had brought Christ in. Long before Piero, painters had brought in some variation in the group, introducing Arabs and other non-Christians to the group. The identification of the foreground figures as Piero's contemporaries was sparked in part by their compositional prominence. They dwarf Christ, the flagellators, Pilate, and the turbaned man sometimes identified as Herod. Their pictorial primacy conveys the impression that they are important and therefore cannot be set aside as anonymous. Yet, in the first chapter I pointed out that the foregrounding of what in other Flagellation pictures were just bystanders was the effect of the argument Piero tried to make about perspective: That it was the position of the figures in three-dimensional space, rather than their place on the surface of the painting, that counted. The three figures take up more picture-surface than the rest of the figures in a painting whose purpose it was to downplay the importance other artists had attached to that same surface. For Piero, the flat plane did not count as an argument for prominence or hierarchy.

Further in defense of Creighton Gilbert, the perspective of the *Flagellation* does not introduce a temporal divide between the left and right sides of the pictures, like the eighteenth-century sources said. But the arguments Gilbert introduced against that divide—that there are no contemporary portraits in the *Flagellation*—differ from mine. There are portraits in Piero's painting, but they are not confined to the right, "secular" side of the picture. Nor does Piero's use of portraits rule out that his figures

Figure 2.2 Sassetta(?), *Flagellation*, 1440s, dimensions unknown. Rome: Pinacoteca Vaticana. Photo: Author.

were also biblical characters—men belonging to the time of Christ, even when Piero used contemporary models.

Pilate and his double

The figure of Pilate, in the left half of the painting, is a portrait of a contemporary, the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaeologus (1392–1448).[20] John was the emperor of the Byzantine Empire from 1425 to his death in 1448. In 1438, Pope Eugene IV invited him to Italy to talk about the pope's wish to heal the schism between the Greek and Latin Churches. John and his large retinue of Byzantine dignitaries met Eugene in Ferrara that year for the first installment of the meeting. And in 1439, he and many others traveled south to Florence to avoid an outbreak of the plague in Ferrara. The meeting between John and Eugene is now known as the Council of Ferrara and Florence.[21] The Council initially looked successful, but the fall of Constantinople in 1453, five years after John Palaeologus's death, destroyed all prospects to heal the schism. What remained in Italy was the memory of the Byzantine emperor and his entourage, as well as descriptions, drawings, paintings, and medals documenting the faces and fashion of the most important Byzantines. And one or two Byzantines decided to stay behind in Italy, like the enigmatic scholar and cardinal Basilios Bessarion.

Piero must have seen the Byzantine emperor in Florence, where he was working at the time of the Council with Domenico Veneziano. He never forgot what Palaeologus and the men in his retinue looked like. He probably recorded the emperor's features and clothing in drawings, although none of Piero's drawings survive. In 1438, when the council was still in Ferrara, Pisanello had made a series of drawings of the Byzantines, some in preparation for a medal commemorating Palaeologus's visit to Italy, and others out of pure curiosity, it seems. The profile portrait of Pisanello's medal is identical to Piero's Pilate, including the emperor's hat and beard (Fig. 2.3).

The figure of Palaeologus and the Byzantine men who accompanied him to the Council of Florence and Ferrara enjoyed a remarkable historical status in fifteenth-century Italy. They drew the interest of all people interested in the classical past. The Italian humanist Flavio Biondo had witnessed the Greek delegates, either in Ferrara (where his family home stood) or in Florence. Biondo was particularly struck by the appearance of the Patriarch of Constantinople, not only old in age but also ancient looking. In the old man's dress, Biondo recognized the fashion of the ancient Salii, a college of priests dedicated to Mars by the Roman Emperor Numa. He wrote:

> The sacred Salii were dressed in robes of the finest and most subtle silk and the color [of their robes] was cerulean, but intersected with bright white curls, as one can see being used by the Patriarch of Constantinople today.[22]

Another contemporary recorded that the Greek Patriarch was "a man of great antiquity," *huomo antichissimo*, not referring to his age—in which case, he would have simply written *vecchissimo*—but to his antiquated appearance.[23] For both men, the Patriarch constituted something of a living trace of a person from antiquity, a person who looked antiquated and who dressed in the fashion of ancient priests. The logic of this way of thinking was explained by another witness of the Council, the fifteenth-century Florentine book trader Vespasiano da Bisticci. Vespasiano believed that "in fifteen hundred years or more, the Greeks have never changed their dress: they wore

Figure 2.3 Pisanello, *John VIII Palaeologus*, 1439, diameter 10.1 cm. New York City, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Artwork in the Public Domain.

the same dress in those times as they had been wearing at said moment [during the Council of Florence]." He knew this because of some ancient reliefs that he had perhaps seen drawings of, "in a place called the fields of Philippi, where there are many stories of marble, in which men are dressed in the Greek manner [*alla greca*], in the same manner as they are still dressed."[24]

Piero did not think of the Byzantine emperor as a second Pilate. He wasn't saying that the Byzantine Emperor was as evil as the Roman prefect who ordered Christ's flagellation. He had already used the portrait of the emperor for the figure of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, in the *Battle of Constantine and Maxentius* in Arezzo, including the cone-shaped hat, to which he had added a small crown (Fig. 2.4).[25] Nor was Piero the only fifteenth-century artists who used Palaeologus's features for an

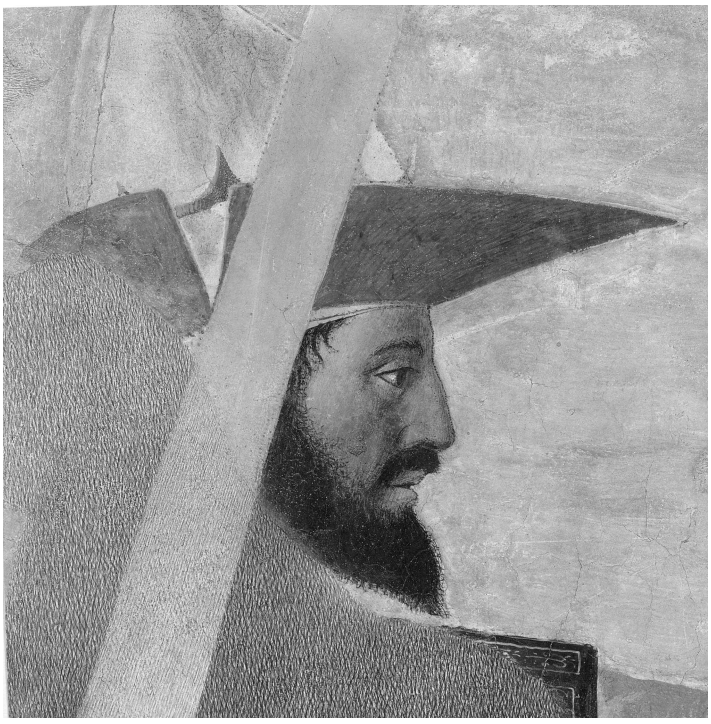

Figure 2.4 Piero della Francesca, *Battle of Constantine* (detail), before 1466, dimensions unknown. Arezzo: San Francesco. Artwork in the Public Domain.

ancient figure. The emperor's portrait lent itself to a wild variety of ancient people, not only Greek philosophers and statesmen, but also Carolingian characters.[26] A mid-fifteenth-century Ferrarese illuminator used his features for both Theseus, the mythical founder of Athens, and Lysander, the Spartan admiral who defeated the Athenians.[27] And in another fifteenth-century Ferrarese manuscript, a portrait of the Byzantine emperor is used for the Carolingian Emperor Charlemagne.[28]

These theories about the historical status of people like the Byzantine emperor allowed fifteenth-century artists to paint contemporary subjects in their biblical works. There is no tension in Piero's painting between the depiction of a past event and using contemporary portraits. Piero's Byzantine model blurs the distinction between the present and the past; it permitted a pure kind of realism in depictions of distant and past events.

This theory about time informed the right side of Piero's painting, too. Carlo Ginzburg was accurate in claiming that at least the bearded man on the left and the bald man on the right look like contemporary portraits. Their faces are individualized and their clothing is contemporary.[29] Ginzburg did not accept the earlier identification of the men as the three dukes of Urbino and instead proposed different individuals—an interpretation that led him to believe that the right side of the painting depicted a recent historical event. While avoiding Ginzburg's splitting of the image in two different times—the one belonging to the life of Christ and the other to the life of Piero—I do want to follow his suggestion that we take the portraits seriously.

Take the bearded man on the left. Piero was explicit about the fact that the man did not come from the Italian peninsula. He wears a pointed beard, unlike any of Piero's Italian contemporaries. Such a beard was known as a Greek, or Byzantine, beard in the fifteenth century, "*barba al modo greco*."[30] His dress, with its sleeves worn like a sling and the long cape draped over his back, is also Greek. It appears in a Ferrarese drawing of some of the Byzantine delegates who came to the Italian peninsula on the occasion of the Council, as well as in a drawing by Pisanello of the men in Palaeologus's entourage, now in the Louvre. The high, circular, fur-covered hat, too, was an item worn by the men in John Palaeologus's court when it traveled through Italy. In Filarete's bronze relief of *John Palaeologus Departing for the Orient* on the doors of Saint Peter's (1445), some men wear both the headdress and the Greek-style robe that Piero's bearded man is also wearing (Fig. 2.5).

It is possible that Piero based the man's features on a specific individual, perhaps on those of the Greek Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72), as Carlo Ginzburg suggested. Piero's portrait conforms to the main features of known portraits of the cardinal: The deeply sunken eye-sockets; the heavy eyelids; the prominent, slightly arched nose with its deeply indented nostrils; the full lips, with their corners lowered; and the forked beard. Bessarion represented something of a living trace of the ancient

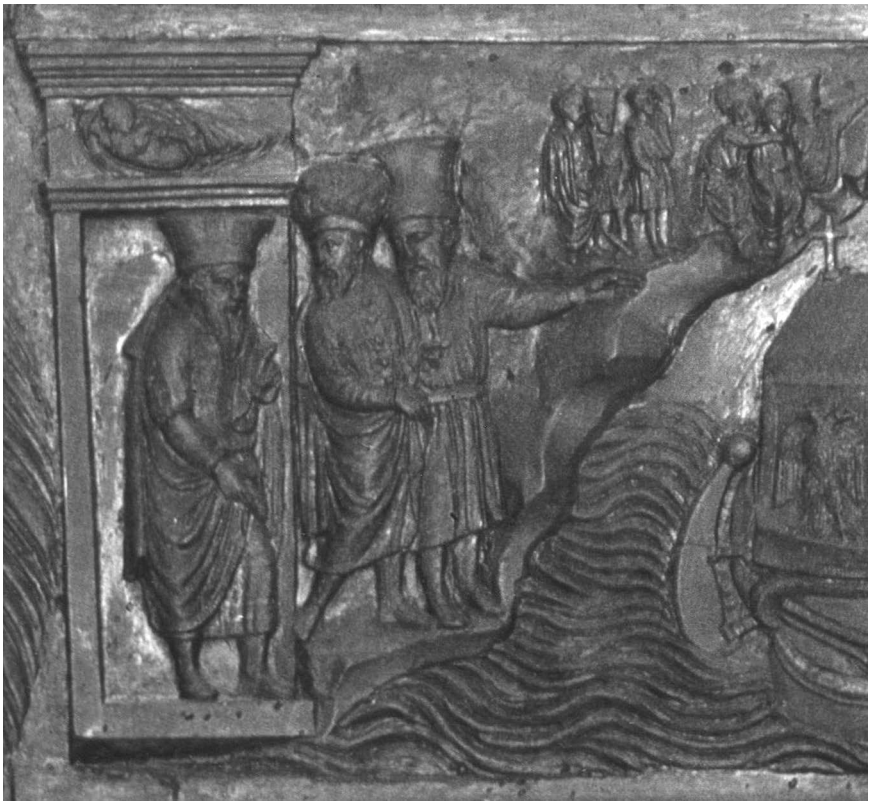

Figure 2.5 Antonio Averlino (Il Filarete), *John VIII Palaeologus Departing Constantinople*, 1445, dimensions unknown. Rome: Saint Peter's. Photo: Author.

Greek world in Italy. He had come to Italy in 1438 to attend the Council as an advisor for his emperor, and after a short sojourn back to Constantinople in 1439, he settled in Italy, where he died in 1472 after a successful ecclesiastical career. Raised to the cardinalate in December 1439, Bessarion was the most famous Greek on Italian soil. He was an astute theologian and his immense learning made him one of the most sought-after scholars in fifteenth-century Italy. He was a regular at the court of Urbino, tutor to the Montefeltro children, a friend of Flavio Biondo, and he moved in the same court circles as Piero della Francesca.[31] After Bessarion's death, Federico da Montefeltro included a miniature of him by the Spanish painter Alonso Berruguete in the series of famous men in the famous *studiolo*, accompanied by a dedicatory inscription that reads "*amico sapientissimo optimoque*," "our best and most learned man."

Bessarion was both familiar and strange, a central figure in the Roman *curia* and a familiar at Federico's court as well as a man from the distant Byzantine Empire. He was a man, who shared his vast knowledge with his Italian contemporaries but never tried to look like an Italian. Contemporaries repeatedly stressed his Greek descent and Greek appearance.[32] Some of Bessarion's colleagues in the Roman *curia* disliked the fact that the Greek cardinal still wore a beard. Western canon law had prohibited priests from wearing a beard since the eleventh century. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, the later Pope Pius II, related an incident in the papal conclave of 1455, when the French cardinal of Avignon, Alain de Coëtivy, successfully stopped Bessarion from becoming the next pope. "So we'll give the Latin Church to a Greek pope, will we?," Coëtivy spoke. "We'll put a neophyte at the head of the book? Bessarion hasn't even shaved his beard [*Nodum barbam rasit*], and he's going to be our head?"[33]

Like Palaeologus, the Greek cardinal became a model for pictures of ancient men, not just Greeks but any man of ancient decent. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, the Venetian painter Vittore Carpaccio painted a canvas with the Vision of Saint Augustine, in which he endowed the church father with the features of Bessarion, an identification that was made explicit by placing Bessarion's coat of arms in the seal that is attached to the podium.[34] Augustine came from the same "Greek" world from where John Palaeologus and Cardinal Bessarion also came. The painting is not a tribute to Bessarion, who had been dead for about twenty years when it was painted. Carpaccio simply believed that the features of Augustine had somehow been preserved in the likeness of some dignified Greeks, including the Byzantine Cardinal from Constantinople.

Some of Piero's contemporaries might have been reminded of Bessarion when they looked at the bearded man in the *Flagellation*. But Piero never intended the figure to exclusively be a portrait of Bessarion. He is neither depicted as a Basilian monk nor as a cardinal. The remarkable hat that Piero's figure is wearing makes no appearance in known portraits of Bessarion. Piero rather borrowed the headdress from other Greeks he had seen in Florence. He had used the hat earlier in his oeuvre. In the *Exaltation of the Cross* at Arezzo, a Byzantine man in the entourage of Heraclius wears one, and a man on the right in the *Proving of the True Cross* wears a similar hat, now executed in light brown. The same hat, in gray, is worn by a native of Jerusalem, presumably a Jew, in the *Exaltation of the Cross*. Apparently, Piero did not think of the hat as an accessory that exclusively belonged to a Greek, but rather as an item that pointed to a generic kind of antiquity, both to the Greek world from where Bessarion came and the Jewish population in Jerusalem.

The same counts for other pieces of clothing and accessories in the *Flagellation*. The hat Pilate wears in the *Flagellation* was known as a Greek hat at the time. Palaeologus wore one, which Vespasiano da Bisticci described as a "*cappelletto alla greca, che v'era in sulla punta una bellissima gioia*." But Piero put it on the hat of a Roman citizen—twice, in fact, because Constantine wears the hat, too. And then one of the flagellators in the *Flagellation* wears one, too. Piero also said that a Byzantine bystander in the *Exaltation of the Cross* owned a similar hat; that Queen Helena, a native of Rome, wore one; that some of the women from the court of the Queen of Sheba, who came from eastern Africa, had one; and that at least one citizen from Jerusalem, in the *Proving of the True Cross*, had a taste for similar fashion. Piero had encountered the hat among the retinue of the Greeks at the occasion of the Council of Ferrara-Florence. Around 1440, the Ferrarese artist Bono da Ferrara had put a similar hat on the head of Saint Jerome, probably after he had seen the Greek delegates visiting Ferrara in 1438.[35] For Piero and others, the hat denoted a generic ancientness, not a specific religious conviction or nationality. Piero was not an ethnographer.[36] He saw the costumes and customs of the Byzantines as ancient, as representative of a time when apparently all peoples wore the same kind of fashion.

From the bearded man, I move two figures to the right, to the bald man. Everything about him looks contemporary. There are the particular, detailed features of his face, which cultivate the illusion that he was a figure painted from life. He is going bald; he has quite small ears, brown eyes and moderate eyebrows; his nose seems straight, although the tip of it is missing because of a chip of paint that has been lost; his lips are rather pale, the same color as his complexion; he has a chubby chin and neck, the excess flesh of which starts to wrinkle just above his collar and in his neck. His hair is cut short and trimmed by his neck and temples. This was how Italian nobles cut their hair. One of the supplicants in the *Misericordia Altarpiece* and a witness to the *Execution of Chosroes at Arezzo* have the same cut. A bronze bust in Berlin sometimes identified as a portrait of Ludovico Gonzaga (and once thought to be the same man as the man in Piero's picture) has short hair with a shaved neck and temples.[37] And a medal by Pisanello of Gonzaga shows the same hairstyle. The cut seems to have been in fashion at the North Italian courts as well as in Arezzo, but not in Florence.

Piero's figure is modeled on a contemporary man of some nobility, although it is impossible to know who exactly he was.[38] His leather boots, or *calzoni*, were fashionable in the Italy of Piero's time. His richly decorated brocade robe ranks him among the contemporary European nobility. Such robes were made in Italy, where its specific pomegranate-like pattern was known as *griccia*.[39] Brocade garments are more usually associated with Flanders, because fifteenth-century Flemish painters excelled in imitating the fabric in paint.[40] Painters believed that the kind of garment Piero's bald man wears belonged to two different times at once. They believed that it revived the fashion of the first century AD. In his *Entombment of Christ*, painted around 1450 for a Florentine patron, Rogier van der Weyden dressed the figure of Joseph of Arimathea in an elaborate brocade coat that resembles the piece of clothing Piero's man is wearing (Fig. 2.6). And in the Netherlandish *Sforza Triptych*, which Piero almost certainly saw in Ferrara, Saint Barbara wears a similar gown. Barbara was a princess from Egypt; Joseph a rich man from Jerusalem and a member of Jewish Sanhedrin. If you wanted to know about ancient dress, these pictures show, than you could look at what contemporary counts, dukes, and other nobles were wearing.

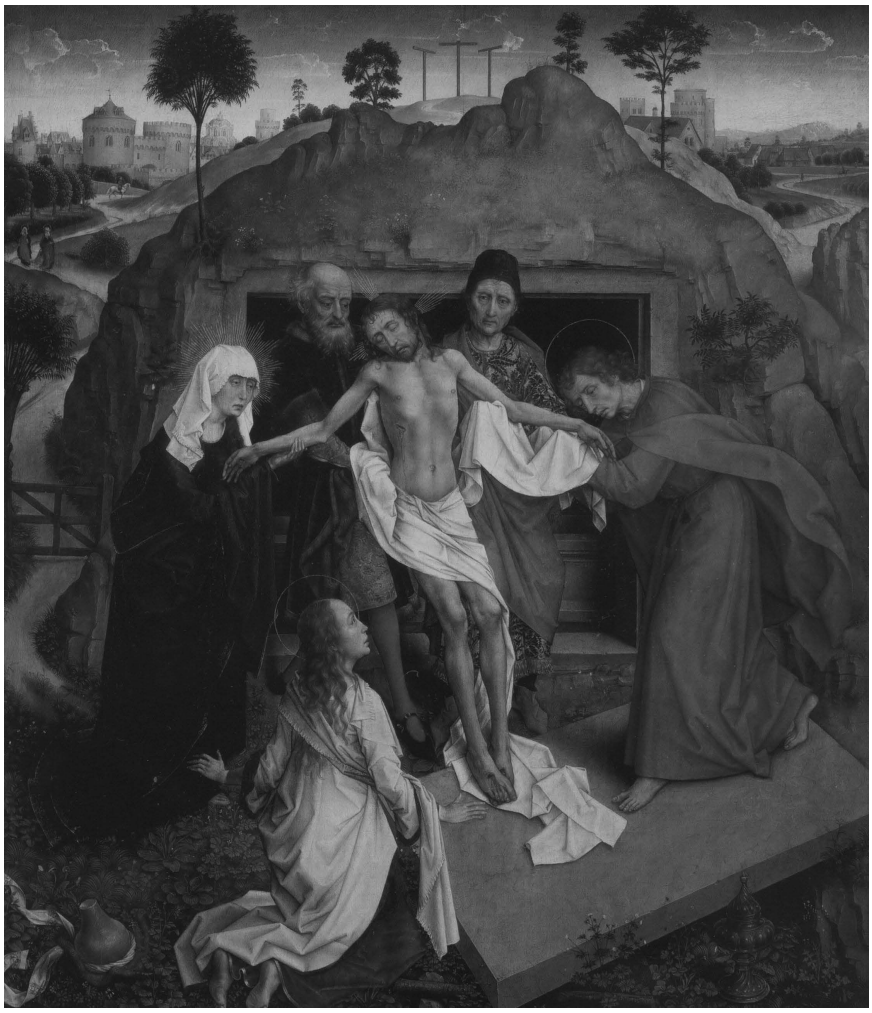

Figure 2.6 Rogier van der Weyden, *Lamentation*, ca. 1450, 96 × 110 cm. Florence: Galleria degli Uffizi. Photo: Author.

Flavio Biondo said something similar in writing. He wrote that the current fashion for brocade garments went back to at least the third century BCE, when it was revived in the Asian world. "In Asia," he wrote, "King Attalus was the first who rediscovered the practice of weaving with gold, which is why these garments were subsequently called Attalicis. Now they are called brocade."[41] Biondo's argument about the origins of brocade garments is typical for the fifteenth century. Nobody really knew when and where expensive and rare garments originated. What they knew for certain was that they came from the east—the Far East, in the case of brocade garments—and that they were very old—older than the dynasty of Attalus, whom Biondo merely credited with a revival of the practice of weaving with gold.

This leaves us with the figure in the red dress and blond hair standing between the bald and bearded men. Once, in the sixteenth century, the only man believed to be a contemporary of Piero, he is now considered the least likely candidate. Piero is less precise about his individual features. His long, blond and curly hair is the same hair that Piero used for the angels in the earlier *Baptism*. Angels are anonymous figures, except for a few individuals mentioned in the Bible, like Gabriel and Michael. The point of their existence is that they transport messages between God and individuals without intervening with the message. Angels have no individuality or agency. That is why Piero painted the three angels in the *Baptism* with the same features. The young man in the *Flagellation* wears the same costume as these figures.[42] And like them, his feet are bare.

Bare feet used to be a way of saying that a figure is not a contemporary of the painter. In the *Raising of the Son of Theophilus*, Masaccio included many contemporary portraits, not just of friends and family of the patron, but portraits of himself and his peers as well.[43] But he made sure that you could distinguish between contemporaries and biblical figures. Saint Peter, the main protagonist of the narrative, has bare feet. In the other frescos in the Brancacci Chapel, the same distinction is made. Feet served Masaccio to keep the two temporalities in his paintings clearly separated. Piero was less convinced by that separation. Figures with footwear include the angel in the Arezzo Annunciation, one of the angels in the *Montefeltro Altarpiece* (where the saints have bare feet), some saints in the *Misericordia Altarpiece*, the Mary Magdalene at the cathedral in Arezzo. In the *Sant'Agostino Altarpiece*, Saint Augustine, Saint Michael, and Saint Nicholas of Tolentino wear shoes, but Saint John the Evangelist does not. In the *Flagellation*, Pilate wears shoes, but the turbaned man, Christ and the flagellators do not. If feet used to be a way for painters to differentiate between the different temporalities in the painting, then Piero disturbed the separation between contemporary and ancient figures. The whole point of the crimson-dressed man was to soften the distinction between present-dayness and pastness, between here and there.

Model and work

Some contemporaries qualified better than others to serve as models for ancient figures. In his fresco of *Sigismondo Malatesta in Prayer before Saint Sigismund* in Rimini, Piero took the modern Emperor Sigismund as a model for the saint, who had died in 524 CE (Plate 7). Saint Sigismund, depicted in three-quarter view on the left, had been the king of Burgundy until he retreated into a monastery after he had strangled his son. Sigismund of Luxemburg was the Holy Roman Emperor between 1433 and his death in 1437.[44] The emperor had stayed in Rimini in September 1433, when he was on his way back home to Hungary from Rome, where Pope Martin V had crowned him Holy Roman Emperor. On September 3, he knighted Sigismondo Malatesta, whom Piero depicted in prayer to his name saint.[45] Piero probably never saw the Emperor. Their paths nearly crossed on a few occasions. The Emperor lodged in Siena from July 1432 to April 1433 when he was on his way to Rome, yet, Piero, with strong ties to Siena, was in Sansepolcro during these months.[46] The emperor's prolonged stay in Siena, necessitated by the refusal of Florence to house him, left a trace in documents, poetry and artworks, including an image of him enthroned in the floor of the city's cathedral.[47] Pisanello, expert in the depiction of foreign dignitaries, made at least two drawings of him, possibly in preparation for a painting. One

carefully recorded the emperor's facial features; another reproduced the Emperor with his fur hat (Fig. 2.7), the same hat that Piero also painted at Rimini.[48] Painted portraits circulated in Italy in the years following the visit, so Piero had ample opportunity to learn about Sigismund's features and his remarkable clothing and hats.

The emperor's features were not employed exclusively for images of his sacred namesake.[49] Masolino used the features of the Emperor, whom he had served in Hungary in the 1410s and early 1420s, for the figure of Saint John the Evangelist in his Santa Maria Maggiore Altarpiece.[50] And he used a portrait of him again in his

Figure 2.7 Pisanello, *Saint Sigismund*, 1438, 31.5 × 20.9 cm. Paris: Musée du Louvre (inv. 2479r). Artwork in the Public Domain.

fresco of *Saint Catherine's Dispute with the Pagan Doctors* at San Clemente in Rome (ca. 1428–30), this time for the Roman Emperor Maxentius (ca. 278–312 CE), who even wears Sigismund's beautiful hat.[51] Nor are examples confined to pictures by Italian artists. In about 1433, the Swiss artist Konrad Witz used the emperor's portrait for an image of King David.[52] And around the same time, Jan van Eyck painted the prophet Zacharias as Sigismund, again including the emperor's hat.

There is a fifteenth-century source that tries to explain why Sigismund served as such a perfect model for all kinds of sacred men. In his *Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Zeitalters Kaiser Sigismunds*, Eberhard Windecke explained the tradition as follows:

> [The Emperor Sigismund] also was a beautiful man and lord, well-spoken and clever [*vernünftig*] . . . and he was often depicted because of his beautiful features. You will find him depicted in the apse of the church of Our Lady as one of the three Magi and in the apse of the church of the grey brothers [i.e. the Franciscans] in the likeness of King David.[53]

The images that Windecke mentions are no longer extant, but it is interesting to note that he not only knew a portrait of Sigismund as one of the Magi, but also a picture of Sigismund as David, like the picture by Witz mentioned above.

Beauty, Windecke implied, was a feature Emperor Sigismund shared with such figures as King David, the older Magus, and, as the surviving portraits show, with other saints, prophets, and ancient emperors as well. If silent on the precise features of most Old and New Testament figures, beauty is a feature that the Bible consistently points out: Christ was beautiful, and so were David, his sons, Esther, Leah, Solomon, and many others. A beautiful appearance was something many believed the emperors of Europe shared with sacred men. It was a sign of their dignity or ancient pedigree. In his memoir of the Council of Florence, Vespasiano da Bisticci said that John Palaeologus was "a beautiful man."[54]

Beauty was an important function of typology, the idea that events and persons do not belong to one historical moment only but are prefigured in earlier moments and persons.[55] A long tradition of biblical exegesis, for instance, finds the Incarnation of God in Christ prefigured in Old Testament invocations of beauty. The passage "Thou art beautiful above the sons of men" in Psalm 44:3 was interpreted as a reference to the coming of Christ, the most beautiful son of men.[56] There are numerous other instances in the Bible and the Apocrypha where beautiful men assume the features of others. In the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla, Christ appeared with the features of Paul before Thecla just before her execution.[57]

The idea that one person prefigured another could best be expressed in images. Moses, traditionally understood as a *typus Christi*, appears in the guise of Christ on fourteenth-century wooden doors of Santa Sabina in Rome, to mention one early example.[58] Such resemblances become even more obvious and meaningful in later images that invest more energy in physiognomic detail. In Perugino's frescos of *Moses's Journey into Egypt and the Circumcision of his Son Eliezer* and *The Baptism of Christ* for the Sistine Chapel, Moses and Christ share the exact same features.[59] And some images stretched the idea of typology to include contemporaries. In Pinturicchio's *Encounter between Eleonora of Toledo and Emperor Frederic III* in the Libreria Piccolomini in the Cathedral of Siena, the emperor shares his features, including the

long curly hair and beard, with those of Saint John the Baptist in the scene of *Saint John in the Desert* in Pinturicchio's Chapel of Saint John, also at the Sienese Duomo.

The ruling houses of Western Europe habitually traced their ancestry back to ancient men and women—some to saints, others to mythological characters. By the fifteenth century, their ancestry came to be imagined in elaborately decorated family trees, some including portraits.[60] A manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris of 1403 contains an illustrated genealogy of the Visconti family, rulers of Milan, which traces the origins of the family back to Anchises, the husband of Venus. It then moves down on the page and up in time from Aeneas, the couple's son, to Ascanius and a whole array of mythological figures to end, at the top, with the early fifteenth-century members. Each family member, from Anchises to Filippo Maria is illustrated with a portrait.[61] The artist responsible for the portraits, Michelino da Besozzo, imagined that the current members of family resembled the ancient, mythological ones. He creates resemblances across the generations. He makes it possible to imagine that Filippo Visconti looked like Aeneas. It is this possibility that artists like Piero capitalized on portraying ancient personages in the guise of their contemporaries.

Contact

There used to be a time, an early fourteenth-century Dominican preacher said, when the making of icons was an act of portraiture. The earliest Christian painters were realists, close observers of reality. Preaching at the Florentine church of Santa Maria Novella in 1305, Fra Giordano da Rivalto advised his public to look at paintings so that they could learn about the lives of Christ and other biblical figures. "To begin with," he said,

> all paintings were made by the disciples [of Christ]. In order to provide the maximum amount of information, the first saints were painted exactly as they were, showing their appearance, their circumstances and the way they were . . . The disciples made these painting as to give the clearest notice of the fact; that is, these paintings, and especially the old ones [*l'antiche*], which originally came from Greece, are of great authority [*autoritade*]. Because there came to live many saints in that place who portrayed such things.

The paintings Fra Giordano talked about were Byzantine icons that had been imported to Italy since the seventh century. These pictures owed their authority to the fact that they were realistic portraits. The Apostles did not add anything to their report. They exclusively aimed at reporting what they saw and offered information that could not be gleaned from books. But the imitation of reality was not sustainable as a faithful method. The painting saints died and new generations of painters could only produce Christian images by copying the ones already in existence. Otherwise, the likeness of Christ and the others could not be sustained. The preacher added that these early icons were "copied by the whole world [*diederne copia al mondo*], from which was drawn great authority [*autorità*], such as one draws from books."[62] After the lives of the Apostles, the imitation of nature ceded place to the imitation of existing artworks in order to not disturb the authority of the original portraits. In Fra Giordano's time, the most lifelike portraits of Christ and the saints were the ones that most faithfully copied other paintings.

By the fifteenth century, this model of one picture copying another was no longer sustainable. People demanded pictures to imitate nature, not other artworks. Lorenzo Ghiberti, Leonardo da Vinci, and others wrote that Giotto changed art for once and for all when he started to take reality and not the pictures by others as his model.[63] Fifteenth-century people imagined that mimesis was a basic human inclination. Alberti believed that with the birth of religion, man started to paint their gods in man's own likeness. He quoted the Greek hermetic philosopher Trismegistus words to bring his point home: "Man, mindful of his nature and origin, represented the Gods in his own likeness," *deos ex sui vultus similitudine figuravit*.[64] It is not religion that determines the way people behave, but it is the human condition that determines the way people deal with religion.

The call for realism was perceived as a call for being contemporary. Early in the fifteenth century, artists had already started to take contemporary models for sacred figures. Donatello, for instance, seemed to have asked random people to sit for the sacred figures he sculpted. His reliquary bust of *San Rossore* in Pisa is clearly based on a contemporary portrait.[65] And Vasari reported about Donatello's *Crucifix* in the Florentine church of Santa Croce, made around 1412, that his friend Filippo Brunelleschi thought that it looked like a "ploughman."[66]

Around the middle of the fifteenth century, the genres of icon and portrait started to get confused. Some fifteenth-century artists treated religious images as portraits by making the format of their images dependent on that of the portrait. Take the paintings by Antonello da Messina, a slightly younger contemporary of Piero, who was born in Messina, on the island of Sicily, and trained in Naples between 1445 and 1455. At the end of the 1450s, Antonello traveled to the mainland, probably to Tuscany, where he looked at the work of Fra Angelico and Piero della Francesca. And scholars speculate that he had the opportunity to see Piero's work again in the late 1460s.[67] A painting of the Madonna in Como, perhaps Antonello's earliest picture, looks like a contemporary portrait.[68] The Virgin is depicted in three-quarter view, as a head-and-shoulders portrait, and she is looking out of the picture. The precision with which Antonello has recorded her physical features is remarkable. He painstakingly copied his model's long nose with its slightly tilting tip, her thin lips, and the wrinkles under her eyes. Small wonder that the early nineteenth-century inventory of the Pinacoteca Civica in Como recorded the paintings as "A portrait of a Nun."[69] Only the halo, incised into the gold background, identifies her as a saint, and an inscription at the bottom that reads "*Ave Maria gr[ati]a plena*" clarifies that she is the Virgin of the Annunciation. Antonello would repeat this practice over the course of his entire career. But he constantly used different models. His *Madonna and Child* in London (the *Salting Madonna*), dated in the 1460s, is modeled on a Sicilian woman in her early twenties whose features have nothing in common with the much older woman depicted in the Como picture. Selecting a different model for every new commission, Antonello defied the possibility of consensus over what the Virgin had looked like. His pictures of the Virgin owned their authority to the fact that they had a referent in reality, not to their similarity to other paintings of Mary. This completely subverted the system championed by Fra Giordano, who argued that the imitation of existing paintings transmitted the true likeness of sacred figures and thereby created an agreement of what Mary looked like.

Some of Antonello's pictures of Christ even cultivate the illusion that Christ sat for the painter at a specific moment in time. His *Ecce Homo* in New York shows Christ gazing out of the picture with his mouth half-opened, and again as a head-and-shoulders

portrayal that resembles contemporary portraits. The parapet behind which he stands was a regular feature in Antonello's portraits, for instance in his *Portrait of a Man* in Turin (Fig. 2.8). The *cartellino* stuck to the painted stone in the portrait of Christ carries the text "*[1470] Antonellus Mess[i]nus me pinxit*" (the year has faded, but is recorded in nineteenth-century accounts of the picture).[70] It is Christ himself, with his mouth half-opened, who speaks the words "Antonello painted me in the year 1470," as if the Son of God sat for the painter at some point that year.

The art of portraiture taught painters to rethink the relationship between realism and the making of religious images. Before Antonello, Jan van Eyck painted several versions of a Salvator Mundi, which survive only in copies.[71] The copies adopt the frontal format of early Byzantine icons of Christ, the kind of pictures Fra Giordano described. But the picture is painted as if it were a portrait of a contemporary done on the spot. Both surviving copies come with precise dates inscribed on them. The picture in Bruges carries the date January 30, 1440, and the one in Berlin, January 31, 1438. Such precise dates appear more often on religious paintings. In some cases, they document the completion of work, in others, the moment a work was placed on

Figure 2.8 Antonello da Messina, *Portrait of a Man*, 1476, 36.5 × 27.5 cm. Turin: Museo Civico. Artwork in the Public Domain. Photo: Author.

an altar, while other dates coordinated the completion of a painting with an important religious holiday. In the case of van Eyck, the inscriptions cultivate the illusion that the painting registers the coming-together of an artist and his subject on one specific day, as if Christ sat for the painting. The copy in Berlin states that van Eyck "made and completed" the painting on January 31, "*Johannes de ecyk me fecit et complevit*. Van Eyck borrowed this illusion from his portraits. His earlier *Portrait of a Man* in the National Gallery, London (probably a self-portrait) denied the painting's long process of production by simply claiming "Johannes van Eyck made me on 21 October 1433."[72]

The format of the independent portrait, still relatively new in Italy by the time Piero was painting, soon became a measure for realism in art. At least in theory, the art of portraiture was an art of exact replication. It cultivated the illusion that an artwork was an imprint of a person's physical appearance, an exact replication done in an instant, on a specific day. In Italian, a portrait was known as a "*ritratto*," from the verb "*rittrare*."[73] *Rittrare* literally means "to retrace," to reproduce with no further authorial intervention. Another word for portrait in the fifteenth century was "counterfeit," the term we now use for a forgery. Versions of the word in Latin, English, Dutch, Italian, and French were used to denote a portrait. The noun associated the making of portraits with imprinting, with copying a model without changing anything. "*Contraffare*" or "*conterfeien*" is derived from a conjunction of the Latin words "*contra*" (over against, or face to face) and "*factum*" (made). To make something against is to relate the newly made object "face to face" with an existing person or object. Isabella d'Este employed the word when she complained about the difficulty of finding portrait painters in 1493, that is, "painters who can perfectly counterfeit the natural face," *contrafaciano el vulto naturale*.[74]

Most founding stories about portraiture stress the lack of authorial intervention in making a portrait. They imagine an art that arose automatically from its model, outside the material constraints of painting and completely free from artistic invention. There was the story about the *sudarium*, the sweat cloth on which Christ's likeness was miraculously imprinted after Veronica had wiped his face with it when he was on his way to Calvary.[75] There was the tale in Pliny about the daughter of the potter from Sykon, who traced the shadow of the man she loved directly on the wall and who regarded the shadow as a spontaneously generated portrait.[76] Alberti imagined the birth of portraiture as the birth of an authorless, spontaneously generated image. Narcissus, the inventor of painting, saw his image reflected exactly how he was. The task of painting, Alberti added, was merely to frame that reflection, not to change anything. "What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?"[77]

To claim that a portrait is exactly replicating the face of a sitter was more easily said than done. Many of Piero's contemporaries expected artworks to rely on the artist's imagination, others believed that artists added things to their imitation of reality, as I pointed out in the last chapter. But there were ways to insist on replication. One of them was to fold the ear of the sitter at its stop. Look at the ear of the bald man in Piero's *Flagellation* (Fig. 2.9). It is folded by something that is not depicted in the painting. Folded ears are an indication that a portrait was made by using some technique of casting. To cast someone's face in plaster was a common way of making portraits in clay, both of the living and the dead. Cennino Cennini wrote on this technique. He said that in order to protect the hair against the wet plaster, a piece of

Figure 2.9 Detail of Plate 2.

cloth would be wrapped over the hair. There were two ways to do this. The first was to wrap the cotton over the tip of the ears, causing them to be pressed tightly against the head; the second was to wrap the cloth behind the ears, which made them stick out.[78] A terracotta portrait of a member from the Florentine Capponi family, probably made around 1500 and now at the Victoria and Albert Museum, was made from a mold—the face and neck—and partly modeled by the artist himself—the shoulders and the hair.[79] Note how the ears are flat against the skull for no apparent reason. It could be argued that the maker of the Capponi bust did not correct the stuck-out ears

for matters of expediency or economy. But the same cannot be argued for painters who based their portraits on a cast. It would have been easy for a painter to correct the ear. Piero's pupil, Luca Signorelli, depicted a donor, dressed for the grave, with remarkable sticking-out ears (Fig. 2.10). There is no headdress that could account for the ears. And around 1450, Andrea Mantegna flattened the left ear of a man in a portrait in Milan (Fig. 2.11). Mantegna's sitter is wearing a cap, but it sits too high to flatten the ear.

Now, most surviving death masks from the fifteenth century do not include the ears. Their cavities made them too difficult to cast. What artists like Piero, Mantegna, and Signorelli were aiming for was not so much a literal translation of the cast in paint. The flattened ears rather served to keep visible the process or technique through which a faithful replication of a face was attained.[80] The ear points to the process of replication, not to the actual replica. Piero's flat ear declares his faithfulness to replication in a culture that included people like Alberti writing that the modern painter should not

Figure 2.10 Luca Signorelli, *Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist and a Donor*, ca. 1491–94, 102 × 87 cm. Paris: Musée Jacquemart-André. Artwork in the Public Domain.

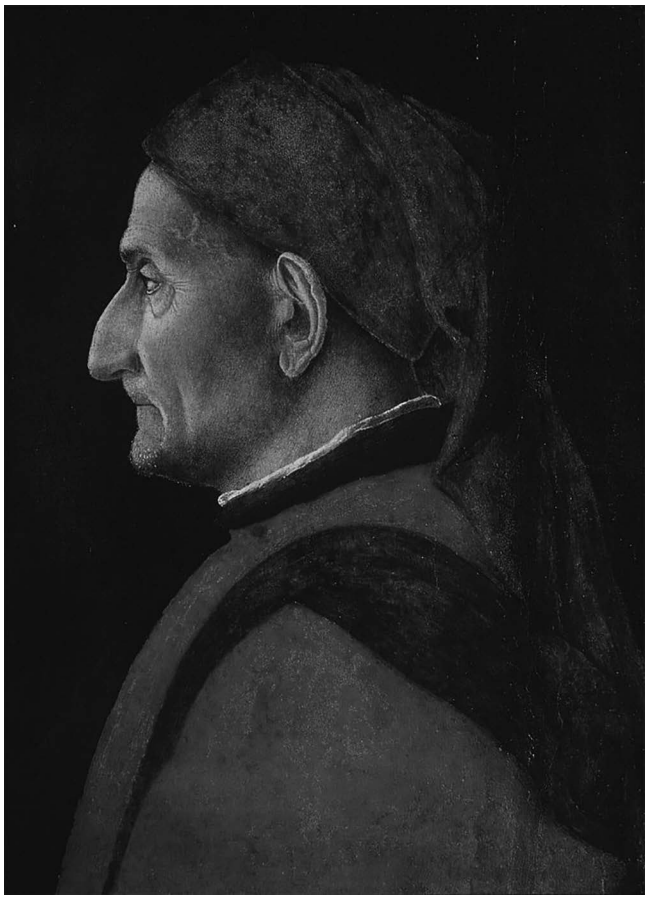

Figure 2.11 Andrea Mantegna, *Portrait of a Man*, ca. 1450, 32.2 × 28.8 cm. Milan: Museo Poldi Pezzoli. Photo: Author.

only attend to the imitation of reality but also to beauty, selecting different parts from a body and reorder them on a panel as a new, more beautiful body—a body with no stable referent in reality.[81] Even if, in reality, Piero changed things about his model, he left the ear visible as a sign of the portrait's reproductive function. It is inserted into the enlivened portrait as a trace of his art's dedication to realism.

Vero

The making of portraits of contemporaries is a logical outcome of the emphasis on realistic representation in Italian Renaissance culture. Artists began to incorporate portraits in their pictures right around the moment when people started to emphasize the realism of painting in the fourteenth century. Supplicants entered religious pictures around 1300 and it did not take artists too long to incorporate portraits of their contemporaries among the audiences of Christian miracles.

But it took until the early fifteenth century for the independent format of the portrait to be made on Italian soil. The late arrival of the portrait in the Renaissance, and the modest number of fifteenth-century portraits that survive, surprised Jakob Burckhardt, who had defined individuality as the founding principle of Renaissance culture. If the Renaissance marked the appearance of the individual out of the corporate identity and anonymity of the Middle Ages, then the portrait should have been the period's most defining format. Burckhardt was not entirely sure what had held back Renaissance culture from indulging in the art of portraiture. He guessed that there was some undefined "custom that decides, and custom was not favorable in Italy to the portrait of the individual in a domestic setting."[82]

Today, students of the Renaissance no longer believe that this period witnessed the birth of modern individuality. Historians of the Middle Ages have taught them that models of individuality long preceded the fifteenth century.[83] And social historians have demonstrated a strong sense of corporate identity in Renaissance cities like Florence.[84] At the same time, art historians have started to emphasize the centrality of the portrait in Renaissance culture, notwithstanding the modest number of surviving portraits. Some of them point to the large amount of portraits in less durable or less expensive media documented in contemporary sources and now lost or forgotten.[85] The examples cited above, too, signal the importance of portraiture as a genre, both in written records like Alberti and for religious pictures like Jan van Eyck's, Antonello da Messina's, and Piero's. Now that the birth of individuality can no longer be counted as an argument for the importance of portraiture in the Renaissance, we need to come up with a new explanation. Here, I want to mention Martin Warnke's convincing thesis that the making of portraits is not due to some extra-artistic pressure like the rise of the individual, but is rather a logical consequence of pictorial realism itself. "The portrait," said Warnke, "is not evidence for a mode of being but for a mode of representation."[86]

That mode of representation helped determine the way people look at reality. Portraiture, I add to Warnke's thesis, was capable of shaping a mode of being. The double temporality that authors like Flavio Biondo, Vespasiano da Bisticci, and others attributed to Byzantine men in writing had long been common in the art of painting. The examples of Masolino, Witz, and van Eyck using the features of Emperor Sigismund for a variety of ancient men predate written reports by more than a decade. When these men saw the Byzantines and their entourage in Ferrara, Florence, or elsewhere, they repeated what painters had already taught them: These men are the living traces of ancient peoples. Pictures like Piero's told you that you can experience history—whether Greek, Roman, or sacred—in the present. These men treated time as if there was no difference between now and then. The appearance of John VIII Palaeologus on the Italian peninsula in 1438 and 1439, as well as the fame of important Greek ecclesiastics like Bessarion, endowed a picture like Piero's with a remarkable actuality.

The use of models muddles the distinction between reality and art.[87] The model occupies two worlds, both the world of painting and the real world we live in. He or she not only makes pictures look realistic; the model also makes reality look like representation. Being a model makes you lose part of your own individuality, like a famous actor unable to stop people from confusing him with the role that made him famous. The model exists before the work, but forever loses some of his or her identity after the model has been absorbed in a painting. The moment John Palaeologus entered pictures like Piero's, it became difficult for people to think of him as exclusively John,

a man of the Greek Orthodox faith, born in Constantinople on December 18, 1392. Florentine and Ferrarese witnesses saw him as a substitute for an ancient man. Some men better qualified as models than others. The demand for lifelike pictures trained artists to look at reality with an eye to painting. Leonardo da Vinci kept notes on suitable models for various subjects. A page in the Codex Forster II[1] has various scribbles on suitable candidates for pictures, a Count Giovanni ("the one with the Cardinal of Mortaro") who could serve for Christ, and a Giovannina with a fantastic face who could model for an unspecified subject.[88] Piero, too, carefully selected his models—an Emperor, a Byzantine prelate, an Italian noble.

Piero's contemporaries saw no conflict between the imitation of contemporary reality and the depiction of ancient events. The distinction we make today between naturalism, which describes the imitation of something not-real as if it were imitated from reality, and realism, which exclusively imitates contemporary reality, was not made in the fifteenth century.[89] *Quattrocento* people used the term *vero* when they described realistic images of both contemporary and biblical subjects. *Vero* can mean both truth and reality. Boccaccio wrote that Giotto's realism was able to make the depicted seem like the truth or reality, "*quello credendo esser vero che era dipinto*."[90] Cristoforo Landino said of Masaccio's art—which almost exclusively consisted of non-contemporary, biblical events—that the artist exclusively attended to the representation of reality, *vero*. And Manetti said that in his perspective panel of the Florentine Baptistery, Brunelleschi depicted "reality as it is," *el proprio vero*.[91] Fifteenth-century realism allowed for the imitation of immediately experienced reality without undermining the truthfulness of the depicted subject, even if that subject was from long ago and far away.

Notes

1 Biblioteca Universitaria di Urbino, Fondo del Comune, Ms. 93 (Miscellanea), fol. 224r: "La Flagellazione di N^{o} Sig.^{re} alla Colonna, con disparte li nostro Ser:^{mi} Duchi Oddo Ant^{o}, Federico, e Gui'Ub^{o}; di Pietro dell' Borgo." Cited in Enrico Ferdinando Londei, "La scena della 'Flagellazione' di Piero della Francesca: La sua identificazione con on luogo di Urbino del Quattrocento," *Bollettino d'arte* 65 (1991): 29.

2 For Oddantonio, see Gino Franceschini, "Notizie su Oddantonio da Montefeltro, primo Duca d'Urbino (20 febbraio 1443–22 luglio 1444)," *Atti e Memorie della Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Marche* 4 (1946): 83–103.

3 One of them is untraceable. It was credited to Pier Girolamo Vernaccia (1672–1746) in L. Pungileoni, *Elogio storico di Giovanni Santi* (Urbino: Guerrini, 1822), 75.

4 Biblioteca Universitaria di Urbino, Fondo del Comune, Ms. 93 (Miscellanea), fol. 386r.; cited in Londei, "La scena della 'Flagellazione'," 49, n3.

5 Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 65–7; Timothy J. Newbery, George Bisacca, and Laurence Kanter, *Italian Renaissance Frames* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), for more examples.

6 Johann David Passavant, *Raphael von Urbino und sein Vater, Giovanni Santi* (Leipzich: F.A. Brockhaus, 1839), 1: 433.

7 Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcasselle, *The New History of Painting in Italy* (London: John Murray, 1864), 2: 546.

8 The text has sometimes been interpreted as referring to all of the figures in Piero's painting, including Pilate and the man seen from the back, sometimes identified as Herod; Creighton E. Gilbert, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: The Figures in the Foreground," *The Art Bulletin* 53 (1971): 41–51.

9 The inscription on the Vienna painting reads: Otto Antonius Urbini Dux I. Hans Graber, *Piero della Francesca* (Basel: Schwabe, 1922), 27, was the first to connect the portrait with

Piero's picture. For the painting, see "Die Porträtsammlung des Erzherzogs Ferdinand von Tirol," *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 13 (1893): 39; 17 (1896): 269–70.

10 For the Urbania portrait and the engraving, see Cecil H. Clough, "Art as Power in the Decoration of the Study of an Italian Renaissance Prince: The Case of Federico da Montefeltro," *Artibus et historiae* 51 (2005): 19–50.

11 Claudio Giardini and Maria Rosaria Valazzi, *Pesaro. Museo Civic—Pinacoteca* (Bologna: Calderini, 1996), 41 (Fig. 77).

12 Pungileoni, *Elogio storico*, 75–6.

13 Archivio Capitolare, Urbino, Risoluzioni Capitolari, 1716–1725, 6. The document is unknown to most Piero scholars. A reference to it was, however, published by Giuseppe Cucco, *Urbino; Museo Albani*, with introductory notes by Franco Negroni (Bologna: Calderini, 1984), 51.

14 For reframing practices in the eighteenth century, see Newbery, *et al*., *Renaissance Frames*.

15 Gilbert, "Figures in the Foreground," 46, pointed to the man's appearance in Piero's *Heraclius Enters Jerusalem*.

16 This was first pointed out by Creighton Gilbert, "On Subject and Not-Subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures," *The Art Bulletin* 34 (1952): 208, followed by Carlo Ginzburg, *The Enigma of Piero: Piero della Francesca: The Baptism, the Arezzo Cycle, the Flagellation*, London, 1985, 123–5. Carlo Bertelli said that he is the same man as the supplicant in Piero's Venice *Saint Jerome*, but the likeness is less convincing; see Carlo Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, trans. Edward Farrelly (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 117. Piero was quite precise about painting likenesses. A couple of figures in the *Battle of Heraclius* show a generic resemblance to the bearded man in the *Flagellation*; yet they are not exactly similar to that man, like the man in the *Flagellation*.

17 Gilbert, "Subject and Not-Subject," 208.

18 Ernst H. Gombrich, "Review of Kenneth Clark, *Piero della Francesca*," *The Burlington Magazine* 94 (1952): 176–7. And see his "The Repentance of Judas in Piero della Francesca's 'Flagellation of Christ'," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22 (1959): 172, for a note on the missing coins. And Gilbert, "Figures in the Foreground," 46, already pointed to the man's appearance in Piero's *Heraclius Enters Jerusalem*. Ludovico Borgo has insisted that an obscure Hebrew text could furnish an identification of the three foreground figures as the specific members of the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem's highest court at the time of Christ; Ludovico Borgo, "New Questions for Piero's 'Flagellation'," *The Burlington Magazine* 121 (1979): 546–53.

19 Gilbert, "Figures in the Foreground." Earlier, Gilbert had argued that the three foreground figures were just bystanders; Gilbert, "Subject and Not-Subject," 208–9.

20 First pointed out by Jean Babelon, "Jean Paleologus et Ponce Pilate," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 4 (1930): 365–75. For an interpretation, see Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: An Historical Interpretation," *Storia dell'arte* 28 (1976): 217–33. *Pace* Kempers, *Kunst, Macht en Mecenaat: Het Beroep van schilder in sociale verhoudingen, 1250–1600* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1987), 263–6, who believes that he is Herod.

21 For the Council, see Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).

22 Flavio Biondo, *De Roma Triumphante . . . Historiarum ab inclinato Ro. Imperio, Decades III* (Basel: Hieron. Frobenium et Nicol. Episcopium, 1559), 215: "Vestes uerò quibus Salij in pompa utebantur, subtili simpliciquibus ferico ceruleo fuere colore, condidioribus uirgulis intertextis, quibus Constantinopolitanum patriarcham uti uidemus."

23 Domenico Boninsegni, *Storia della città di Firenze dall'anno 1410 al 1460 . . .* (Florence: Andini, 1637), 70.

24 Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di uomini illustri del secolo xv*, ed. Angelo Mai (Florence, 1859), 14–15:

> I greci, in anni mille cinquecento o più, non hanno mai mutato habito: quello medesimo habito avevano in quello tempo, ch'eglino avevano avuto nel tempo detto; come si veda ancora in Grecia nel luogo si chiama i campi Filippi, dove sono molto storie di marmo, drentovi uomini vestiti alla greca, nel modo che erano allora.

25 The hat already occurred earlier in Italian painting. For examples, see Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431–1600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 180.
26 Fabrizio Lollini, "Una possibile connotazione antiebraica della 'Flagellazione' die Piero della Francesca," *Bollettino d'arte* 65 (1991), 9–10.
27 Lollini, "Bologna, Ferrara, Cesena: i corali del Bessarione tra circuiti umanistici e percorsi di artisti," in *I corali miniati del Quattrocento nella Biblioteca Malatestiana* (Milan: Fabbri, 1989), 9–36.
28 Lollini, *Corali miniati*, 101.
29 Ginzburg, *Enigma of Piero*, 52 (for the quote on likeness), 123–54 (for the identifications).
30 Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite*, 14.
31 For Bessarion, see Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann: Funde und Forschungen* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1967); and John Monfasani, *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy: Cardinal Bessarion and other Émigrés* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995). Bessarion was in Urbino in 1453, for example, to attend to the upbringing of Federico's children, together with the Greek Cardinal Bessarion; see the letter by Biondo in Biondo Flavio, *Scritti inediti e rari*, ed. B. Nogara (Rome: Tipografia poliglotta Vaticana, 1927), 175–6. For the date of the visit, see L. Michelini Tocci, "Ottavio Ubaldini della Carda e una inedita testimonanzia sulla battaglia di Varna," in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant* (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1964), 7: 103.

    Piero and Biondo moved in the same circles. The humanist had started his professional career in the papal *curia* in 1433, but in the 1440s he began to spend more time away from Rome at his family home in Ferrara; L. Colini-Baldeschi, "Flavio Biondo segretario del vescovo G. Vitelleschi legato delle Marca anconitana," *Rivista delle biblioteche e degli archivi* 10 (1899): 123–5. Piero was in Ferrara from around 1447 until 1449, where he painted frescos at the church of Sant' Agostino; see Eugenio Battisti, *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1971), 1: 45. Vasari mentions that Piero worked in Ferrara for Borso d'Este; Vasari, *Vite*, 3: 259. It is possible that the two met there. And perhaps they met again in Urbino, where Piero spent a significant part of his career. He was there in 1453. On another occasion, Biondo had looked at some antiquities in Urbino, which he reported about in his *Roma Triumphans*; Biondo, *De Roma Triumphante*, 193.
32 For instance, Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite*, 145.
33 Pius II, *Commentaries*, ed. and trans. Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 140–1 (1.28.5).
34 This was pointed out by Professor Branca in Zygmunt Wazbinski, "Portrait d'un amateur d'art de la renaissance," *Arte veneta* 22 (1968): 21, 28nt5. For conclusive evidence for the identification, see Patricia Fortini Brown, "Sant' Agostino nello studio di Carpaccio: Un ritratto nel ritratto," in *Bessarione e l'Umanesimo*, ed. Gianfranco Fiaccadori (Naples: Vivarium, 1994), 303–19.
35 The painting is London, National Gallery, inv. NG771. For an illustration, see *Pisanello: Painter to the Renaissance Court*, ed. Luke Syson and Dillian Gordon (London: National Gallery, 2001), 204 (ill. 5.12).
36 It has sometimes been claimed that Piero's pictures represent an ethnologically and religiously "correct" representation of ancient dress, for instance, by Francesca Chieli, *La grecità antica e bizantina nell'opera di Piero della Francesca* (Florence: Alinea, 1993).
37 For the bust, see Hermann Grimm, "Italienische Portraitbüsten des Quattrocento," *Preussische Jahrbücher* 51 (1883): 407–8. For the connection with Piero's figure, consult Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca: The Flagellation* (New York: Viking, 1972), 53–60.
38 Ginzburg believed he was Giovanni Bacci, the patron of the Arezzo cycle, where Piero included him as a witnesses to the execution of Chosroes; Ginzburg, *Enigma of Piero*, 47–101.
39 Bert W. Meijer, "Piero and the North," in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, 143–59.
40 Mark Lewis Evans, "Northern Painters and Italian Art, 15th and 16th Centuries" (PhD dissertation, University of East Anglia, 1983), 1: 12–13.
41 Flavio Biondo, *De Roma Triumphante . . . Historiarum ab inclinato Ro. Imperio, Decades III* (Basel: Hieron. Frobenium et Nicol. Episcopium, 1559), 198.
42 It is possible that Piero rescaled the drawing or cartoon he used for the earlier *Baptism* and reused it in reverse for the *Flagellation*. For Piero's rescaling practices, see Bellucci and

Frosinini, "Piero della Francesca's Process: Panel Painting Techniques," in *Painting Techniques: History, Materials and Studio Practice*, ed. Ashok Roy and Perry Smith (London: The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1991), 89–93.

43 See the classic article by Peter Meller, "La Capella Brancacci: Problemi ritrattistici ed iconografici," *Acropoli* 3 (1960–1): 186–227; 4: 1960–1, 273–312.

44 Degenhart, "Un'opera di Pisanello: Il ritratto dell'imperatore Sigismondo a Vienna," *Arte figurative* 2 (1946): 184, was the first to identify the portrait. For Sigismund's biography, see Jörg K. Hoensch, *Kaiser Sigismund: Herrscher an der Schwelle zur Neuzeit, 1368–1437* (Munich: Beck, 1996).

45 Marcha di Marco Battagli da Rimini, "Continuato Cronice Dominorum de Malatesta di Tobia Borghi, Veronese (1358–1448)," ed. A.F. Massera, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores: Raccola degli storici Italiani*, ed. L.A. Muratori (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1912–13), 14.3: 89–90. Some art historians interpret the likeness politically, against whom consult Carlo Bertelli's arguments in his *Piero della Francesca*, 66–7, and my arguments below.

46 For Piero's presence in Sansepolcro, see James Banker, "Piero della Francesca as Assistant to Antonio d'Anghiari in the 1430s: Some Unpublished Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* 135 (1993): 16–21.

47 Compare Fabrizio Nevola, *Siena: Constructing the Renaissance City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 29–45. Piccolomini's *Historia de duobus amantibus* is situated in Siena at the time of Sigismund's stay.

48 The drawing with the hat is Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins, 2479.

49 For the portraits of Sigismund, see Bertalan Kéry, *Kaiser Sigismund: Ikonographie* (Vienna and Munich: Schroll, 1972). And for the Italian portraits, see Vilmos Tátrai, "Die Darstellung Sigismunds von Luxemburg in der Italienischen Kunst seiner Zeit," in *Sigismundus: Rex et Imperator. Kunst und Kultur zur Zeit Sigismunds von Luxemburg, 1387–1437*, ed. Imre Takács (Mainz: Zabern, 2006), 143–52. And for even more examples, consult Polleross, *Das sakrale Identifikationsporträt: Ein höfischer Bildtypus vom 13. Bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Worms: Werner, 1988), 1: 180–2, 223, 225, 239, 244.

50 Vasari recognized the features of Sigismund in the main panel of the altarpiece; Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1966–71), 3: 128. But he probably confused the panel with the side panel now in Philadelphia; see Allan Braham, "The Emperor Sigismund and the Santa Maria Maggiore Altar-Piece," *The Burlington Magazine* 122 (1980): 106–12. Sigismund stands next to Saint Martin of Tours, whose face resembles a portrait of pope Martin V.

51 For the identification, see Lajos Vayer, "Analecta Iconographica Masoliniana," *Acta Historiae Artium* 11 (1965): 217–18, and his "Problemi iconologici della pittura del Quattrocento (Cicli di affreschi di Masolino da Panicale)," *Acta Historiae Artium* 31 (1985): 17–20, who also less convincingly identifies a figure in *Saint Catherine Rejecting Idolatry* as Sigismund. Cf. Paul Joannides, *Masaccio and Masolino: A Complete Catalogue* (London: Phaidon, 1993), 405, who rejected the identification because he found it improbable that Masolino would identify Sigismund with the "pagan tyrant" Maxentius.

52 Konrad Witz, *Abisai, Sibbechai, and Benaja Bringing Water to King David*, ca. 1433–4, part of the *Heilspiegelaltar*, Basel, Kunstmuseum.

53 Eberhard Windecke, *Eberhard Windeckes Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Zeitalters Kaiser Sigismunds*, ed. W. Altmann (Berlin, 1893), 417ff.:

> Item also du vor gelesen hast von keiser Sigemont, der do Ungerscher and Behemscher konig waz, durch den und bi sinen ziten vil wonders bescheen ist, die nit halp hieinne beschreiben und gezeichnet stont, der was also ein schoner herre und fürste, wol redende und vernünftig; und was nieman, den er du hiess, sunder alle ere, und wart an maningen enden angemolet umb siner schooner angesicht willen; und vindest in ouch gemolt in unser lieben frouwen greten cruzgang an der heiligen drier konige stat eines und zu unser frouwen brüder im cruzgang gemolet an koning Davides stat, do der narre für in brocht wart Simei; do vindest du sin ebenbilde gemolet zu Menz.

Windecke's "frouen brüder" should probably read "grauen brüder," that is, the Franciscan order. Windecke's manuscript only survives in a copy, and the copyist must have introduced the error; see Kéry, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 157.

54 Vespasiano da Bistici, *Vite*, 14.
55 Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Paolo Valesio (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 11–76; Friedrich Ohly, "Ausserbildlisch Typologisches zwischen Cicero, Ambrosius und Aelred von Rievaulx (1976)," and his "Halbbiblische und ausserbiblische Typologie (1976)," reprinted in his *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 1977), 338–400.
56 See Gerhard Wolf, "Christ in Beauty and Pain: Concepts of Body and Image in an Age of Transition (Late Middle Ages and Renaissance)," in *Art of Interpreting*, ed. Susan C. Scott (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 165 and 171.
57 *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*, ed. R.A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet (Leipzich: Apud Hermannum Mendelssohn, 1891), 1: 250. Cited in Gilbert Dagron, "Holy images and likeness," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 28–9.
58 Cf. John iii. 14: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up," referring to the crucifixion.
59 For the frescos, see Leopold D. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel Before Michelangelo: Religious Imagery and Papal Primacy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), who remarkably enough does not comment upon the visual typology at work in the comparison between Moses and Christ.
60 For ancestry in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance, read Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *l'Ombre des ancêtres: Essai sur l'imaginaire médiéval de la parenté* (Paris: Fayard, 2000). For family trees, her "The Genesis of the Family Tree," *I Tatti Studies* 4 (1991): 105–29.
61 The manuscript is Piero da Castelletto, *Elogio funebre di Gian Galeazzo Visconti*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. Lat. 5888, with the genealogy depicted on fols. 7r–12v. For an illustration, see *Arte Lombarda dai Visconti agli Sforza* (Milan: Silvana, 1958), plate LXIV.
62 Enrico Narducci, *Prediche inedite del B. Giordano Rivalto* (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1867), 170–1:

> Faceano i santi quelle dipinture per dare più chiara notizia alle genti del fatto; sicchè queste dipinture, e spezialmente l'antiche, che vennono di Grecia anticamente, sono di tropo grande autoritade, perocchè là entro conversaro molti santi che ritrassero le dette cose, e diederne copia al mondo, delle quali si trae autorità grande, sicomme si tra di libri."

63 Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Lorenzo Ghibertis Denkwürdigkeiten (I commentarii)*, ed. Julius von Schlosser (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1912), 35–6; Leonardo da Vinci, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Jean-Paul Richter (New York: Phaidon, 1970), 1: 371–2 (§660).
64 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture: The Latin Texts of* De pictura *and* De statua, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 62–3; The reference is to Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, *De divinis institutionibus*, 2, 10, 3–15.
65 Its inclusion as the opening piece in a recent exhibition on fifteenth-century portraiture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York indicates that modern curators now consider it a portrait, too.
66 Vasari, *Vite*, 3: 144–5.
67 Gioacchino Barbera, *Antonello da Messina: Sicily's Renaissance Master* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 20, 51. For the rapport between Antonello da Messina and Piero della Francesca, see Roberto Longhi, "Piero della Francesca e lo sviluppo della pittura veneziana," *L'Arte* 17 (1914): 189–221; and Creighton Gilbert, *Change in Piero della Francesca* (Locus Valley: J. J. Augustin, 1968), 49–51.
68 The attribution to Antonello is not completely certain. For the picture, see *Antonello da Messina: l'Opera completa*, ed. Mauro Lucco (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2006), 126.
69 Gabriele Mandel, *L'opera completa di Antonello da Messina* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1967), 86: "Ritratto di Monaca."
70 Lucco, *Antonello da Messina*, 166–8.
71 For the rapport between Antonello da Messina and Flemish art, see Bernard Aikema, *Heilige Hieronymus in het studeervertrek, of: Hoe Vlaams is Antonello da Messina* (Nijmegen: Nijmegen University Press, 2000).
72 "*Joh[ann]es. de. eyck. me. fecit. an[n]o. M° CCCC°. 35. 21. octobris.*'
73 For contemporary terms for portraiture, see Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits*, 1.
74 Alessandro Luzio, *La galleria dei Gonzaga venduta all'Inghilterra nel 1628–28* (Milan: L.F. Cogliati, 1913), 155.

75 On the *acheiropoetos*, see Edwyn Robert Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image Worship in Ancient Paganism and Christianity* (London: Allen & Unwin), 1940, 79; E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 112–15; Joel Snyder, "What Happens by Itself in Photography?," in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer, and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 361–73; *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa), 1998; and Wolf, *Schleir und Spiegel: Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance* (Munich: W. Fink, 2002). And for the incorporation of the notion of the *acheiropoetos* in a modern conception of the image, see Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 80–125.

76 Pliny the Elder, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*, ed. E. Sellers and trans. K. Jex-Blake (London: Macmillan, 1896), 174 (Book 35, §151). Lorenzo Ghiberti and Leonardo da Vinci repeated the story as a commonplace known to artists of Piero's time; Ghiberti, *Commentarii*, 8; Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, ed. and trans. Philip McMahom (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), c. 49v. (§98).

77 Alberti, *On Painting*, 63.

78 Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, ed. Franco Brunello (Vicenza, 1982), 199–200 (§182). Cennini also said that the ears should not be cast, but this advice was obviously not always followed.

79 John Pope-Hennessy, *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1964), 1: 211–12.

80 For this point, consult Peter Dent, "Chellini's Ears and the Diagnosis of Technique," in *"Una insalata di più erbe": A Festschrift for Patricia Rubin*, ed. Jim Harris, Scott Nethersole, and Per Rumberg (London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2011), 138–50.

81 Alberti, *On Painting*, 99. And see above, Chapter 1.

82 Jacob Burckhardt, "Die Anfänge der neuern Porträtmalerei," in *Kulturgeschichtliche Vorträge*, ed. Rudolf Marx (Leipzich: Kröner, 1929), 225. Notwithstanding Burckhardt's claim, some students of Renaissance portraiture still believe that a new awareness of individuality provoked the rise of the portrait. In his widely read *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (1979), John Pope-Hennessy wrote that "it is sometimes said that the Renaissance vision of man's self-sufficient nature marks the beginning of the modern world. Undoubtedly it marks the beginning of the modern portrait"; John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1966), 3. At least one reviewer of this book stressed that "the portrait is indeed the best illustration of the Burckhardtian definition of the Renaissance as the rediscovery of the world and of man"; Creighton Gilbert, "Review of John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*," *The Burlington Magazine* 110 (1968): 285. And as recently as 1985, Gottfried Boehm claimed that "the independent portrait could only appear once the human being had learned to understand itself and account for itself as individual"; Gottfried Boehm, *Bildnis und Individuum. Über den Ursprung der Porträtmalerei in der italienischen Renaissance* (Munich: Prestel, 1985), 31.

83 See, among others, Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 101; Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept," *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 1509, 1528–9; and Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 82–109.

84 See the review essay by F.W. Kent, "Individuals and Families as Patrons of Culture in Quattrocento Florence," in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 171–92.

85 Patricia Rubin, "Understanding Renaissance Portraiture," in *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, ed. Keith Christiansen and Stefan Weppelman (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 2–25.

86 Martin Warnke, "Individuality as Argument: Piero della Francesca's Portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino," in *Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 83

87 Wendy Steiner, *The Real Real Thing: The Model in the Mirror of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
88 Leonardo, *Literary Works*, 347 (§667), 425 (§1403).
89 For the distinction, consult David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.
90 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 439–40 (VI.6).
91 Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi*, ed. and trans. Howard Saalman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 42–6.

Plate 1 Piero della Francesca, *Nativity*, 1470–75s, 124.4 × 122.6 cm, tempera or oil on panel. London: National Gallery. Artwork in the Public Domain. Photo: Author.

Plate 2 Piero della Francesca, *Flagellation*, 1460s, 58.4 × 81.5 cm, tempera or oil on panel. Urbino: Galleria Nazionale delle Marche. Artwork in the Public Domain. Photo: Author.

Plate 3 Piero della Francesca, *Baptism of Christ*, 1440, 167 × 116 cm. London: National Gallery. Artwork in the Public Domain. Photo: Author.

Plate 4 Piero della Francesca, *Double Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza*, early 1470s, 84 × 66 cm. Florence: Galleria degli Uffizi. Photo: Author.

Plate 5 Piero della Francesca, *Heraclius entering Jerusalem* (detail), before 1466, dimensions unknown. Arezzo: San Francesco. Artwork in the Public Domain.

Plate 6 Piero della Francesca, *Execution of Chosroes* (detail), before 1466, dimensions unknown. Arezzo: San Francesco. Artwork in the Public Domain.

Plate 7 Piero della Francesca, *Sigismondo Malatesta in Prayer before Saint Sigismund*, 1451, 257 × 345 cm. Rimini: San Francesco. Artwork in the Public Domain.

Plate 8 Piero della Francesca, *Montefeltro Altarpiece*, early 1470s, 251 × 172 cm. Milan: Pinacoteca di Brera. Photo: Author.

3 The site in the work

The distance to Jerusalem

Christ was flagellated around the year 33 at the court of Pilate in Jerusalem, a place Piero had never visited. The Bible only offers sparse information on the event and its location. The Gospel of John mentions that Christ was brought to Pilate's headquarters in the early morning and after some consultation with the Jews who had brought Christ in, the prefect decided that he would have him flagellated and not killed before he released him back into the custody of the Jews. The gospel adds that Christ was scourged inside the judgment hall of Pilate's court (John 18:28). There is no mention of the architecture of Pilate's palace, let alone of the specific structure of the judgment hall where the flagellation took place. As a rule, the Bible offered very little information about what the Holy Land and its inhabitants looked like.[1] Later Bible commentaries added almost nothing to the environment in which Christ was whipped, appending merely that he was stripped of his clothes.[2]

Some information about the site of Pilate's court entered Italy through travel reports from pilgrims. Stories circulated about the size, color, and material of Christ's column, for example. According to one traveler, the column was "large . . . and in color carnation porphyry."[3] Artists incorporated such information in their pictures. An early fourteenth-century fresco by the workshop of Pietro Lorenzetti in the Lower Church of Assisi shows a large, pinkish column. But whereas things like color and size could quite easily be reported about, the exact style of Jerusalem's architecture could not. Badges with images of the Holy Sepulcher and other important shrines in Jerusalem had offered some visual clues about the city's urban topography, but did not furnish the kind of architectural information Piero needed.[4] By the time Piero was painting the *Flagellation*, just after the middle of the fifteenth century, there were no prints with information about the architecture of the Holy Land, at least, not that we know of. This would change after the publication in 1483 of Bernard von Breidenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*, which was illustrated with woodcuts by Erhard Reuwich.[5] Reuwich's illustrations were not entirely correct representations of Jerusalem's landmarks, but they did install some kind of consensus about what Jerusalem looked like, judging by the fact that many artists followed Reuwich's prints in their images of Biblical episodes.[6]

Drawings, pilgrim badges, and descriptions by pilgrims merely offered information about what contemporary Jerusalem looked like, not about the face of the city at the time of Christ. Jerusalem had been conquered and re-conquered several times after Christ's death, and the city had changed dramatically because of it. Piero and his

contemporaries were aware of this. The loss of the Holy City in the eleventh century and the subsequent destruction of some of its Christian sites made a big impression on everyone in the Latin West. It not only provoked plans among the European kings and the pope to mount a crusade in order to retake Jerusalem; it also led to the Council of Florence and Ferrara that brought the Greek delegates to the Italian peninsula. And it provoked artists and others to think and imagine what Christ's Jerusalem looked like.

Jerusalem built from the ground up

Some of Piero's contemporaries imagined first-century Jerusalem as a city in ruins, a remarkable patchwork of different architectural styles: Classical Roman architecture, mixed with actual architectural monuments from Jerusalem, like the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.[7] This is what Andrea Mantegna said the Holy City looked like. In the *Agony in the Garden*, which formed part of the predella panel of his San Zanobi altarpiece of 1457–9 (Fig. 3.1), Mantegna depicted the Temple of the Jews as an antique Roman building, citing both the Colosseum and the Pantheon. Perhaps artists thought that buildings like the Colosseum and the Pantheon had been built there by the Romans during the Latin domination of the Holy Land. Or maybe they believed that the monuments in Rome had been copied after ancient buildings in Jerusalem. In any case, Mantegna was not alone in thinking that a building like the Pantheon existed in Jerusalem. In an illuminated manuscript of Augustine's *City of God* of 1459, the illuminator Niccolò Polani included it in his view of the Holy City.[8] Mantegna also maintained that the Roman parts of the city were already in a

Figure 3.1 Andrea Mantegna, *Agony in the Garden*, 1458–60, 62.9 × 80 cm, tempera on panel. London: National Gallery. Artwork in the Public Domain. Photo: Author.

state of ruins by Christ's time, not just in the *Agony in the Garden*, but in many of his other pictures, too. The buildings in Mantegna's paintings resemble the state of Roman architecture in Mantegna's time—crumbled, half underground and overgrown by plants. Perhaps Mantegna's preference for depicting decayed Roman architecture had something to do with his insistence on the temporal distance between his own time and that of Christ. In the fifteenth century, the ruin was a figure for distance. It pointed to the impossibility of knowing exactly what ancient architecture looked like when it was whole.

Piero agreed with Mantegna that the architecture of Jerusalem resembled ancient Roman buildings. But he also believed that Pilate's court was still intact by the year 33. There is not a trace of decay in the *Flagellation*. The courtyard of Pilate's palace has large, fluted columns that hold up a coffered ceiling. There are two doors in the rear wall of the building: the one on the right is closed and the one on the left is open. Through the open door you see a staircase that leads up to the second story of the palace, not shown in Piero's picture. The rear wall is clad with two large marble revetments. And the floor has a geometric black-and-white pattern. The courthouse is imbedded in a larger urban structure. It borders on a square with at least one more house and a bell tower. The tree arising behind the middle foreground figure belongs to a garden that perhaps stretches behind the palace; the garden wall has a richly decorated pattern.

Piero borrowed the general layout of Pilate's court from other artists. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century paintings of the Flagellation argue that Pilate's court consisted of an open space adjacent to a square. They also claim that the Jewish spectators did not enter the court, a claim justified by the biblical story. This produced the decentralized composition that also structures Piero's painting. Fourteenth-century painters in Siena, where Piero might have received his earliest training, were the first to insist on the asymmetry.[9] Closer to Piero in time, a predella from the workshop of the Sienese painter Sassetta, who worked in Sansepolcro during Piero's youth, shows the same layout as in Piero's painting, but depicts it in reverse (Fig. 2.5).[10]

Some specific architectural elements came from other paintings, too, rather than from real buildings. The red and green marble revetments of the back wall are too big to realize in reality.[11] Bernardo Rossellino's tomb of Leonardo Bruni in Santa Croce, Florence, which predates Piero's picture by more than a decade, has them, but the revetments are much smaller than Piero's. Masaccio articulated the back wall in his fresco of the *Raising of the Son of Theophilus* with alternating marble slabs. And Piero himself had used them, too, both before and after he painted the *Flagellation*. They are in his fresco in Rimini (1451), in some of the buildings in the Arezzo frescos, in the panels of the *Sant'Agostino Altarpiece*, and in the later *Montefeltro Altarpiece*.

The inlaid floor of the *Flagellation*, with its checkerboard pattern and large disk in the center, has precedents in actual cosmati floors in the early Christian churches on the Italian peninsula, which Piero and his contemporaries perhaps held for antique floors.[12] But they also occur in many pictures of Piero's time. Piero's former associate Domenico Veneziano included an inlaid floor in his Saint Lucy Altarpiece of 1440–4, shown from a low perspective, like Piero's floor. And there were some artists who believed that Pilate's court had been outfitted with a similar floor. The Sienese artist Vecchietta's *Flagellation* in the cathedral of Siena has an inlaid floor with a large disk on which Christ stands.

Piero replaced the Gothic building in Sassetta's predella panel—with its slender columns and barrel vault—with a building that replicates the classicizing architecture of his own time. The style of Piero's architecture was modern and specific. Piero's columns are fluted and they have gables (the fillings that extend from the bottom to half-way up the column). Gable-fluted columns were rare in the architecture of Piero's time. Brunelleschi never employed them, and his student Niccolò Michelozzo used them only once, in the portal of the Sacristy at Santa Trinità in Florence. The entrance portal to the church of San Pancrazio in Florence, designed by Alberti, has gable-fluted columns, but these were only finished in the late 1460s, probably too late for Piero to cite them in the *Flagellation*.[13] It is likely that the columns at Santa Trinità and San Pancrazio go back to the Florentine Baptistery, which has one fluted column with gables in its interior. It has been suggested that Piero remembered the column inside the Florentine Baptistery when he was painting the *Flagellation* some twenty years later.[14]

But it is unlikely that the court of Pilate in Piero's *Flagellation* represents a distant memory of the Florentine Baptistery, or any of the Florentine examples cited above. A prominent example of a gable-fluted column is included in the architecture of Urbino, the town where Piero painted the picture. Maso di Bartolomeo's entrance portal to the church of San Domenico, just across from the Palazzo Ducale, has two of these columns (Fig. 3.2).[15] The entrance was built between 1451 and 1455, and was therefore finished by the time Piero began his painting.[16] It not only includes a gable-fluted column, it also has a coffered ceiling that comes remarkably close to the one Piero choose for Pilate's court. Piero even copied the doorframes in the picture's rear wall from Maso's portal, including the spectacularly projecting cornice and the band of floral motifs that sits in between the doorframes and the cornice.

The right half of Piero's painting also resembles buildings from Piero's time. The pinkish house and the bell tower, of which you cannot see the top, are reminiscent of the communal architecture in Central Italy. A similar constellation already appeared in Piero's fresco of the *Verification of the True Cross* at San Francesco in Arezzo, a scene Piero had located in the hills around Arezzo, as a view of the town in the background makes clear. The pink house in the *Flagellation* is of a particular Tuscan example, not only its color, but also the quotidian detail of the horizontal bar running in front of its façade, which could hold expensive silk banners with coats of arms. The pavement of the square, consisting of bricks alternating with bands of white marble, is similar to that of actual squares in Urbino, some of which still survive. The courtyard of the Palazzo Ducale, for instance, is paved in the same way as the piazza in the *Flagellation* (Fig. 3.3). The scenery in the painting is suggestive enough of fifteenth-century Urbino that it has invited at least one scholar to look for its real setting in town, as if Piero painted his picture en plein air, like Brunelleschi had suggested in his perspectival paintings.[17]

At first instance, Piero's insistence on the contemporaneity of his painted architecture could simply be read as an indifference towards the real architecture of Pilate's court in the first century. Or perhaps it was a kind of homage to Federico da Montefeltro, who almost certainly commissioned both the painting and the real architecture referenced in it. But other parts of the picture show that Piero made a real effort to get the architecture of Pilate's court "right." The flight of steps behind Pilate's seat is a unique feature among Flagellation scenes at the time. The stairs had been reported about in some apocryphal sources. Christ had allegedly trodden the steps three times

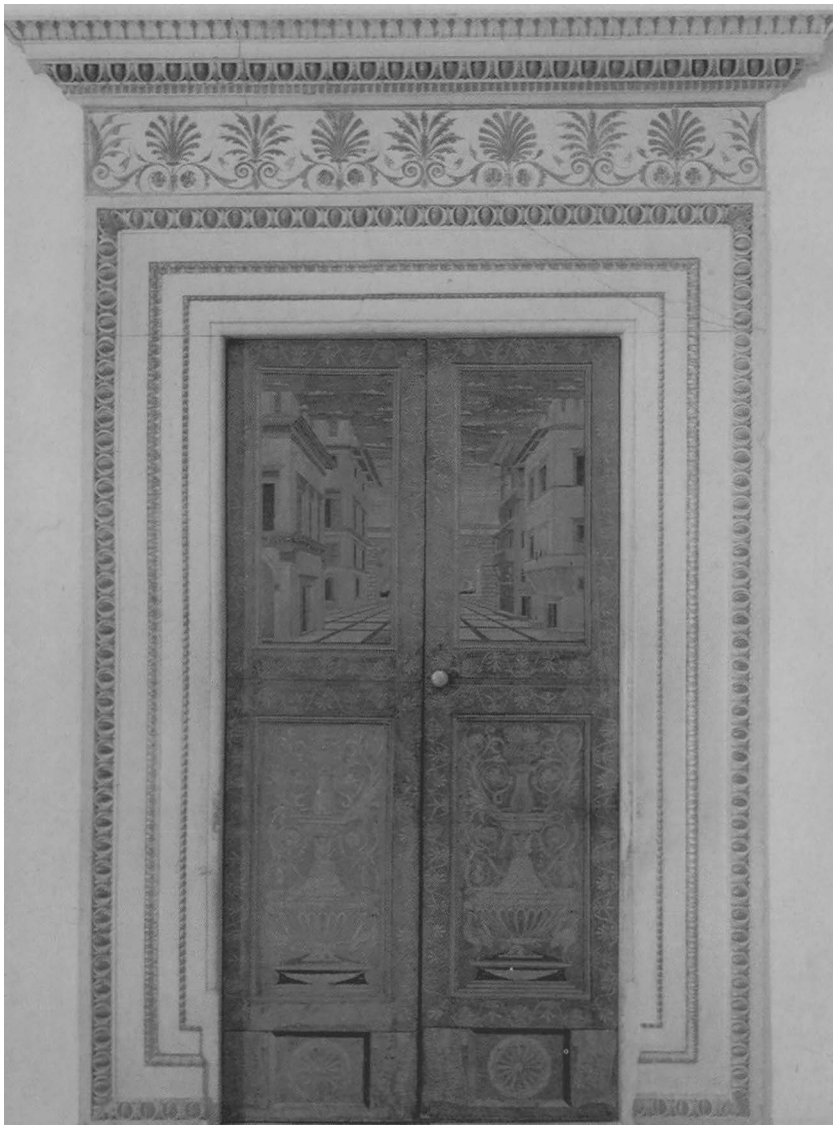

Figure 3.2 Maso di Bartolomeo, *Portal of San Domenico*, 1452–59. Urbino. Photo: Author.

before he was flagellated. But more important than these textual sources was the fact that a flight of twenty-eight steps at the Lateran Palace in Rome, then known as the Scala Pilati and now called the Scala Santa, was believed to have come from the prefect's house. There was some confusion about how the stairs had arrived in Rome. Some thought that Vespasian and Titus had imported them, but the majority believed that Helena, Constantine's mother, had brought the steps to the Lateran in the fourth century.[18] Piero had worked in Rome between 1458 and 1459, on which occasion he must have seen the steps.[19]

Figure 3.3 Courtyard Palazzo Ducale, Urbino. Photo: Author.

The statue of a sun god, illuminating the ceiling and suggesting the kind of animated, possessed idols of Christ's time, was pieced together from fragments at the Lateran. Outside the Lateran palace were two giant fragments of a gilded statue that were described by a contemporary as "a giant's head in bronze and an arm with a bronze ball." We now know that these are fragments of a Roman statue of Constantine, but in Piero's time people agreed that they were parts of a sun god that once stood inside the Temple of the Sun in Jerusalem.[20] Most people believed that Helena had brought the fragments to Rome. Piero probably thought that the Scala Santa and the fragments of the solar statue, visible in Rome within a few feet from one another, had once formed part of the same building complex in Jerusalem. In the fifteenth century, the Lateran basilica was the most venerable church in Rome; it was considered older and more important than Saint Peter's.[21] It was assigned primacy among the Roman churches because it was believed to have incorporated parts of ancient monuments. A Florentine banker noted around the middle of the fifteenth century that the church was built on the spot where Constantine's palace once stood, and he added that it still contained some doorframes from the palace. One of the doors in the choir, believed to have come from Jerusalem, was the one Christ had passed through. Fifteenth-century pilgrims received an incredible amount of indulgences if they repeated Christ's passage. The Scala Santa led from the square of San Giovanni in front of the church to the Sancta Sanctorum, which contained a portrait of Christ painted by Saint Luke. And then the table at which Christ had his last supper was at the Lateran, too.[22]

Piero's imitation of local, contemporary Urbinian architecture was paradoxically part of the same logic that informed the belief that some stairs and fragments of a statue of Constantine in Rome came from Jerusalem. The fact that many Christian monuments in Jerusalem had been destroyed, together with the increasing inaccessibility of Jerusalem for Christians after it had been conquered by the Turks in 1187, incited people in Italy and elsewhere to rebuild the city's monuments on local soil, as substitutes for the destroyed or otherwise inaccessible Holy Land monuments. The city became a site imagined at home rather than visited abroad.[23] By the mid-fifteenth century, many Italian towns declared themselves a "New Jerusalem." Rome and other cities had become substitute destinations for pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The humanist Nikolaus Muffel reported in 1452 that Pope Boniface had said that

> if a man wanted to go to the Holy Sepulcher but lacked the means, and he went instead to Saint Peter's and to Saint John in the Lateran . . . he would have made his penance as though he had gone to Jerusalem and to the Holy Sepulcher.[24]

Around the same time, Pope Nicholas V rebuilt Saint Peter's as a substitute for the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, with Peter's tomb placed off-center.[25]

The first half of the fifteenth century was also the time when foundation myths started to circulate that identified long-existing local buildings as instantiations of buildings from Jerusalem. This is when we find the first written account of the remarkable transfer of the Holy House from the Holy Land to Loreto by angels.[26] Another, very early example of such a legend is the official foundation document of Borgo San Sepolcro, Piero's hometown. First recorded between 1418 and 1419, it is a typical fabrication of the times—new, but claiming to be copying some older document. The document mentions that long ago, two pilgrims, Egidio and Arcano, had halted in the Valle di Nocea for the night. They had brought a stone relic of the Holy Sepulcher with them. At night, God directed them to build an oratory and to dedicate it to San Leonardo. The oratory was soon joined by a monastery, which went by the titulus of San Sepolcro, Holy Sepulcher. An account of 1454 of the foundation reported that the abbey of Sansepolcro was modeled exactly after the Holy Sepulcher, which, it pointed out, had been destroyed by the infidels in 1012.[27] And it added that "our new church was built in the image of the destroyed church, as though it had arisen from the materials of that church as its foundation."[28]

The abbey in Sansepolcro shows no resemblance to the Church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem (Fig. 3.4 and Fig. 3.5). It is not a measured reconstruction of the original building. The abbey just repeats local architectural traditions. Christa Gardner von Teuffel pointed out that its status as a replica was merely secured by the repetition of its titulus, by repeating the name of the church.[29] Identity was passed on not by morphological likeness but by name, as Richard Krautheimer had argued long ago for medieval architecture.[30] The fifteenth-century account of Sansepolcro's foundation is, however, explicit about the fact that its abbey did not just adopt the *name* of the Holy Sepulcher, but that it consisted of the exact same materials. "Our new church was built in the image of the destroyed church, as though it had arisen from the materials of that church as its foundation." There is no explanation of how this happened.

The fifteenth-century myth about Sansepolcro is of a different sort than earlier instances of churches that claimed to be exactly replicating Holy Land monuments. Perhaps the most spectacular replica of Jerusalem architecture is the church of Santo

Figure 3.4 Abbey Sansepolcro, eleventh century. Sansepolcro. Photo: Author.

Stefano in Bologna, built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the immediate wake of the Turkish conquest of the Holy City. According to a twelfth-century legend, Saint Petronius, the Bishop of Bologna, had founded the complex in the fifth century and modeled the convent buildings exactly after the holy sites that the bishop had visited in Jerusalem. In order to substantiate that claim, the eleventh-century builders worked with a layout and the exact measurements of the buildings in Jerusalem. The whole complex of Santo Stefano approximated the experience of a pilgrim in Jerusalem. It included an arcaded courtyard that was known since the fourteenth century as the

Figure 3.5 Anastasis, fourth century. Jerusalem. Photo: Author.

"Cortile di Pilato." A basin inside the courtyard was believed to be the one Pilate had used to wash his hands. And in the center of the courtyard stood a copy of the column of the flagellation.[31] The courtyard allowed access to a room in the upper church known in Piero's time as the "Casa di Pilato." It was connected to the courtyard by a stairway called the Scala Santa. Inside the room was a stone seat from which Pilate had passed his judgment, as well as a marker that indicated where Christ stood in front of him.[32]

The abbey of Sansepolcro did not answer to the plan of the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, nor did it have the exact same measurements as its purported prototype. There is no indication that the abbey was already considered a modern copy of the original building when it was built in the eleventh century. The foundation document, even when it claimed to be copying an older text, is a typical product of the fifteenth century. In reality, Sansepolcro's abbey was further removed from anything in Jerusalem than the complex in Bologna. Yet, the fifteenth-century citizens of Sansepolcro still claimed it to be a perfect replica. The old building in Jerusalem had miraculously resurrected itself out of its ashes, like the Holy House had been carried to Loreto by angels. The abbey was not considered a replica, like the Santo Stefano complex, but the actual, original building. The belief that the abbey exactly resembled local architecture in and around Sansepolcro made nobody doubt the truth of the foundation narrative. It rather installed the idea in Piero and others that the whole town of Sansepolcro resembled Jerusalem. One of the city's fifteenth-century chroniclers in fact mentioned that with the "old" Jerusalem having been destroyed, the town of Sansepolcro could simply be called "the New Jerusalem."[33] This explains why the town so often appeared in the background of Piero's biblical paintings. The *Baptism* included a view

of Sansepolcro, even adding topographically correct information about the road and bridge that lead to it.[34] And the village appears again in his *Saint Jerome* now in Venice (around 1465) and the *Adoration of the Christ Child* in London (1470–5).

Modern architecture

There is a conceptual difference between the background of Piero's *Baptism*, with its view of Sansepolcro in the background, and the architectural scenery of the *Flagellation*. Piero knew that the architecture of Sansepolcro was old. The year 1012, the year of the Temple's destruction, continually popped up in documents as the birth date of Sansepolcro's architecture. Piero's views on Sansepolcro are depictions of an architectural style at least four centuries old. And perhaps this was old enough to think of the architecture as really old, say, a millennium-and-a-half. The *Flagellation*, on the other hand, was quoting contemporary building styles. And Piero knew that it was fresh, that the mortar had hardly dried.

At the moment Piero was painting the *Flagellation*, the old Montefeltro Palace was undergoing a massive rebuilding campaign. Federico was joining the smaller separate buildings on the square and merging them into one large complex—a city in and of itself. The new palace's architecture continued the style of the architecture of San Domenico's new entrance. Perhaps Piero's painting provided a sort of transitioning point between the church and the ducal palace. Some scholars even suggested that the painter had been responsible for the later building campaigns of the Palazzo, the campaign that commenced around 1468, hence by the end of the period in which I date the *Flagellation*.[35] The similarities between the architecture of the painting and the real architecture of the palace are striking. The doorframes in the rear wall of Pilate's palace reappear on the ground floor and the piano nobile of the Palazzo Ducale (Fig. 3.6). The floral patterns over Pilate's doors are repeated on the chimneypiece in the Sala degli Affreschi, dating to the late 1460s, and over one of the doors in the duchess apartment at the Palazzo Ducale, built in the early 1470s. The gable-fluted columns of Piero's painting reappear on the terrace of Federico's apartment, which was built shortly after Piero finished the *Flagellation*.

With the architecture of Federico's palace nearing completion, Piero's painting became increasingly anchored in the times of Federico da Montefeltro's Urbino. The ducal palace had been constructed in several phases and it had incorporated medieval buildings whose irregularities are still visible today. Construction had been underway since the early 1450s, at least; by that time, chimneypieces had been installed in some of the rooms, and at least one room had already been decorated with frescos. But the slow coming of the building remained a well-kept secret. City chronicles preferred instead to think of the palace as built in an instant. A chronicler said in 1474 that Federico started building his palace in 1468 (instead of 1450).[36] Another reported that it was begun in the year when Federico fought against Roberto Malatesta and Francesco Sforza died, both events that date to 1466.[37] And a long inscription that runs along the frieze of the palace courtyard, probably composed between 1474 and 1476 anchors the architecture's "moment" in recent military history.[38]

This stress on the instantaneous in architecture was new. Architecture was built over long periods of time and it registered the duration of the construction: breaks in the building's style, changes of plan, changes in patronage.[39] The new way of thinking about architecture, with its emphasis on stylistic unity, was developed by architects close to Piero. One of them was Leon Battista Alberti. Piero and Alberti perhaps met

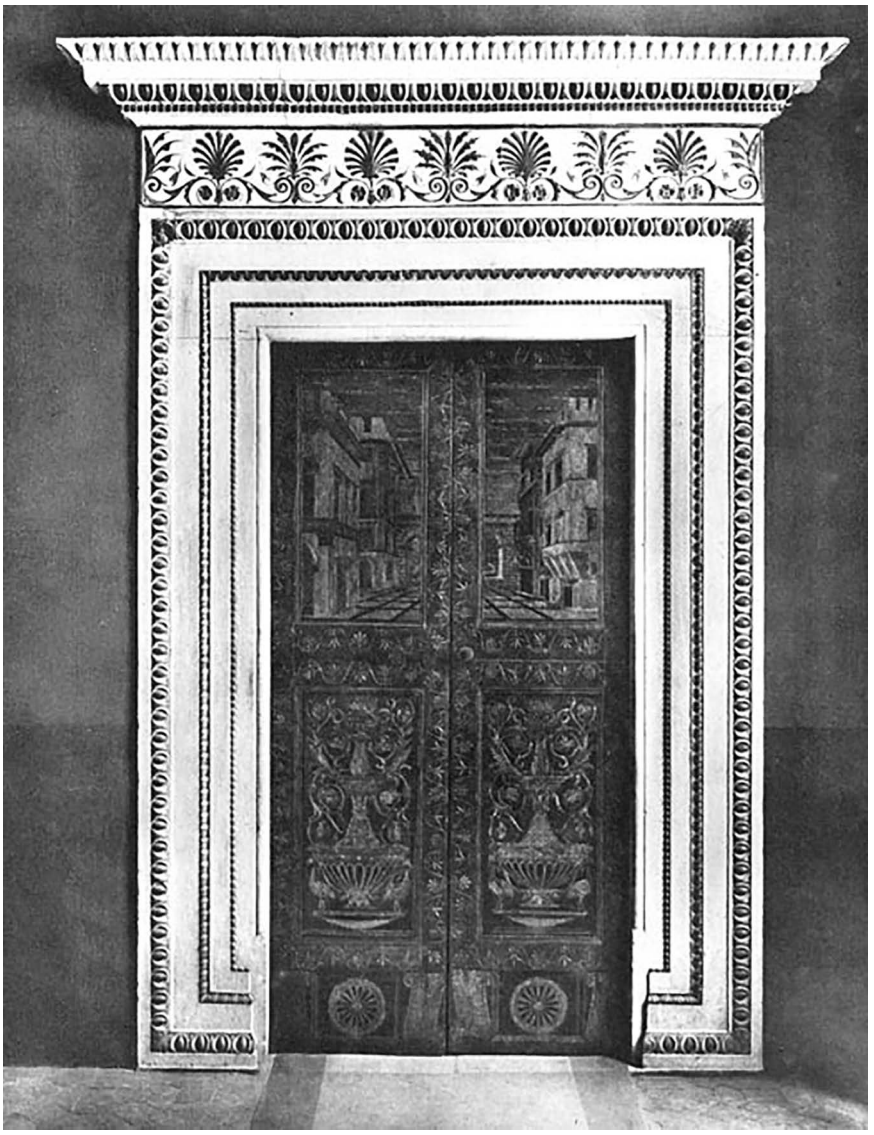

Figure 3.6 Francesco di Giorgio(?), Door to room IX. Urbino: Palazzo Ducale, Piano Nobile. Artwork in the Public Domain. Photo: Author.

in 1439, when they were both in Florence.[40] Piero seems to have read Alberti's *De pictura*, probably around that time. Maybe they met again in the 1470s in Urbino, but there is no conclusive evidence for any contact in between.[41] In the early 1450s, both men worked at the church of San Francesco in Rimini (now known as the Tempio Malatestiano) which Sigismondo Malatesta, the ruler of Rimini, was rebuilding. But they worked there in succession. In 1451, Piero painted his fresco of *Saint Sigismund* over the entrance door inside the Chapel of the Relics and it is possible that

he was involved with designing parts of the church's interior around the same time.[42] Around 1453 or 1454, Alberti became involved with a project to cover the exterior of the thirteenth-century Franciscan church with a veneer that was meant to convey the impression that the church had been built *ex novo* in one year. Alberti produced a shell of Istrian stone, for the most part pillaged from ancient monuments around Rimini, that completely hid the old, brick church from view. He conceived of it as a self-sufficient building that enveloped the existing church, like a façade behind which the old church lured. Writing from Rome to Matteo de' Pasti, the architect who was overseeing Alberti's work in Rimini, Alberti urged Matteo to "remember that I told you this façade [*faccia*] has to be an independent structure [*opera da per sé*], because these widths and heights of the chapels [on the north and south sides of the church] worry me."[43] The independence of Alberti's "façade" allowed him to avoid having to deal with the irregularities of a church built over time and to cultivate the illusion that San Francesco had been built in an instant.

A Greek inscription on the west wall of Alberti's veneer makes clear that the building owes its existence to a vow made by its patron, Sigismondo Malatesta, and a Latin inscription on the façade dates the vow to the year 1450. The building as a whole conveys the impression that it had not been constructed in phases—brick-by-brick with original plans changing as building went along and problems arose, an old building replacing an existing building, including its irregular, temporally informed plan—but all at once, answering to an unchanged design by Alberti whose origins, the inscription said, could be dated to the year 1450. Alberti's impression was convincing. Some of his contemporaries, even local chroniclers, believed that Malatesta had built the church from the ground up.[44] The church of San Francesco in fact dated from the thirteenth century, and Sigismondo never demolished the old Franciscan structure. Its thirteenth-century walls are visible behind Alberti's veneer.

Malatesta's interventions predate the year 1450. He first became involved with San Francesco in 1447 or even earlier.[45] A local chronicler reported that the bishop of Rimini had blessed the foundation stone of the chapel of Saint Sigismund on October 31, 1447.[46] Work on the Chapel of Isotta, Sigismondo's mistress, was also part of this early building campaign. An inscription on the tomb in the chapel records the date 1446, the year in which Isotta conceived her first child.[47] Remarkably enough, this inscription was later covered up by a text that bears the date 1450. In fact, the year 1450 appears everywhere in the church, cultivating the illusion that the whole building was built and finished in that one year. And a medal by Matteo de' Pasti, which probably dates from some time after 1450, advertised the year 1450 as the moment the Tempio was erected.[48]

Alberti's architecture substantiated instantaneity. He said that the veneer he built around the church was in his own style, even when the inscription on the façade made clear that the architect had to share authorship with his patron, whose name is only mentioned there. One of the builders wrote to the patron in 1454 that there was no reason to divert from "the style [*stile*] of the aforementioned Battista."[49] This was a new way of thinking about architecture. According to more traditional architectural theory, buildings had to replicate other buildings without registering the individual style of the architect. Architects were supposed to suppress their individual preferences and inclinations in order to allow tradition and history to dictate form. "If they [buildings] were all built by one [man]," the architectural theoretician Antonio Averlino (called Filarete) asked, "[would they be alike] as one who writes or paints is

known by the letters he makes?" To which he answered a regretful *no*.[50] The Dutch humanist Rudolf subscribed to the same view. The authorship of a building can more easily be attributed to the patron of the building than to the architect, a situation he contrasted to painting.[51] Style is what makes it possible to see a building or artwork as the product of a specific moment or a specific place. It traces back the origins of a building to an individual whose way of doing things is informed by the time and place in which he lives.

And yet, Alberti's claim that the architecture of the Tempio Malatestiano belonged to the year 1450 and was marked by his own personal style did not contradict the belief that it was also the most ancient architecture imaginable. The Tempio Malatestiano was the first fifteenth-century building to be completely based on an ancient prototype.[52] It is closely dependent on the Arch of Augustus (ca. 27 BCE) nearby in Rimini (Fig. 3.7). Alberti not only exactly adopted the structure of the arch; he also imitated its ornaments and materials: The Istrian stone that Sigismondo Malatesta had pillaged from ancient monuments around town.

The capitals were the only feature Alberti decided not to copy. The arch has Corinthian capitals and the capitals on Alberti's church are of the Composite order, combining the Corinthian acanthus and the Ionic volute.[53] This is the first time that Composite capitals had been adopted since Antiquity.[54] Alberti had spent some time thinking about their historical status. In his *De re aedificatoria* (1462), he named the Composite order "Italic," in order "to distinguish it from foreign imports."[55] In essence, Alberti's "Italic" order is little more than a new name for Vitruvius's Tuscan order.[56] Vitruvius saw the Tuscan order as a slight variation of the Doric, with the same proportions (1:7). But Alberti reversed the historical development of the Orders prescribed by Vitruvius. Rather than having the Composite order follow the Doric order, Alberti argued that if the Tuscan order (Vitruvius's Composite) was close to the Doric, then it must have *preceded* that order in time. Alberti does not further elaborate on the difference between the Tuscan/Italic capital and the Doric capital, probably because by his time, the Doric order had not achieved the prominence it was to receive in the sixteenth century with Bramante. It is even likely that Alberti did not distinguish too much between Doric and Tuscan/Italic.[57] The lack of precision about the exact form of the Doric order allowed him to conclude that the Etruscans had arrived at a form of Doric long before the Greeks.[58]

Other architectural treatises renamed Alberti's Italic Order the Tuscan Order in the wake of Alberti's book. In a first version of his architectural treatise written in the late 1470s, when he was working in Urbino on the Palazzo Ducale, the Sienese architect Francesco di Giorgio Martini added "toscani" to his account of the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders, attributing slightly more slender proportions to the column (1:9) than Alberti and Vitruvius had done.[59] The majority of architectural treatises written after Alberti and before Serlio described Alberti's Italic order as "Tuscan."

Alberti believed that the most novel architecture could stand in for the most ancient and distant building styles. In the 1460s, he was commissioned by the wealthy banker Giovanni Rucellai to produce a copy of the Holy Sepulcher. The building was to be placed inside a chapel of the church of San Pancrazio in Florence. Alberti's building was to resemble the building in Jerusalem. Even when a letter by Rucellai to his mother that mentions him dispatching some engineers to Jerusalem in order to provide him with "the correct design and measurements" of the Holy Sepulcher is probably a later forgery, an inscription on Alberti's sepulcher reports that it was made "*adi*[*n*]*star*

Figure 3.7 Arch of Augustus, 27 BCE. Rimini. Photo: Author.

iherosolimitani sepulchri," in the fashion of the sepulcher of Jerusalem.[60] The Latin conjunction "ad instar" could mean both "just like" or "exactly like." The building in San Pancrazio roughly conforms to the original building. It is a rectangular structure that ends in a round apse (even if the original's apse is polygonal); it is decorated with ten columns and a cornice; it has an aedicula consisting of a dome carried by columns on top of its roof; and inside the structure, Christ's grave is placed to the right, just like in the prototype in Jerusalem. A floor slab placed just behind the apse could be lifted to gain access to a crypt beneath. An inscription on the slab records that it marks the

place where the body of Christ was placed for cleansing and embalming before the entombment. This means that Rucellai wished to copy part of the cult qualities of the original place. But the measurements of Alberti's building show that it is almost half the size of the prototype; Alberti's structure measures 4.10 × 2.25 m and the building in Jerusalem 8.30 × 5.50 m. The deviating measurements probably have something to do with fitting the new structure to the measurements of the Rucellai Chapel, whose foundations predate Rucellai's commission to Alberti.[61]

The architecture of the building does not resemble contemporary descriptions, drawings or replicas of the original sepulcher in Jerusalem. The Rucellai version lacks a plinth and does not have arched recesses between the pilasters. The ornamentation is entirely different. According to Ludwig Heydenreich, Alberti's architecture was an attempt to reconstruct the Ur-building of the Holy Sepulcher, the Constantinian structure that predated late medieval alterations. According to Heydenreich, Alberti and other historically aware humanists realized that the building they saw in contemporary drawings and learned about from pilgrims did not resemble the architecture of the Constantinian epoch. Heydenreich called Alberti's building "eine Idealnachbildung," an ideal replica. But if Alberti's Holy Sepulcher is a sort of reconstruction by proxy of the original building, then it replaces the current building in Jerusalem with something that still resembles contemporary, local architecture. Its architecture looks more like the nearby façade of Santa Maria Novella, also designed by Alberti. The marble plates have the Rucellai emblems and coat of arms on them, and it has the name of its patron and the date of its completion, 1467, written on it in large Roman capitals, as part of the same inscription that also claims the structure as a copy of the prototype in Jerusalem. The building is not just an anonymous replica; it is also the product of 1467 and Alberti's style.

The modernity of Alberti's buildings does not conflict with the claim that they were also old, Ur-buildings of sorts. Filarete included an account of this paradoxical status of the temporality of mid-fifteenth-century architecture in his architectural treatise. An architectural historian as well as a sculptor, Filarete knew Piero, whose name he mentioned among a handful of living artists worthy of giving commissions to (the others were Filippo Lippi, Andrea Mantegna, Cosmé Tura, Vincezo Foppa and Cristofano and Geremia da Cremona).[62] "I freely praise anyone," Filarete wrote

> who follows the antique practice and style [*la pratica e maniera antica*]. I bless the soul of Filippo di ser Brunellesco, a Florentine citizen, a famous and most worthy architect, a most subtle follower of Daedalus, who revived in our city of Florence the antique way of building [*modo antico dello edificare*]. As a result no other manner but the antique [*altra maniera . . . se non l'antica*] is used today for churches and for public and private buildings. To prove that this is true, it can be seen that private citizens who have either a church [*chiesa*] or a house built all turn to this usage [*usanza*], as for example the remodeled house in the Via Contrada that is called the Via della Vigna [i.e. the Palazzo Rucellai designed by Alberti]. The entire façade [is] composed of dressed stone [*pietre lavorate*] and completely built in the antique style [*modo antico*]. This is encouraging to anyone who investigates and searches out antique custom [*modo antico*] and modes of construction in architecture. If it were not the most beautiful and useful [*utile*] [fashion], it would not be used in Florence, as I said above. Moreover, the lord of Mantua, who is most learned, would not use it if it were not as I have said. The

> proof of this [is in] a house that he had built at one of his castles on the Po [probably a reference to the palace at Revere on the Po near Mantua, begun in 1455].
>
> I beg everyone to abandon modern usage [*usanza moderna*]. Do no let yourself be advised by masters who hold to such bad practice [*questa tale praticaccia*]. Cursed be he who discovered it! I think that only barbaric people [*gente barbara*] could have brought it into Italy. I will give you an example. [There is the same comparison] between ancient and modern architecture [*antico al moderno*] [as there is] in literature. That is [there is the same difference] between the speech of Cicero or Virgil and that used thirty or forty years ago. Today it has been brought back to better usage [*usanza*] than had prevailed in past times [*questi tempi passati*]—during at least several hundred years—for today one speaks in prose with ornate language.[63]

Filarete contrasted the antique style of building (*maniera antica* or *modo antico*) with modern usage (*usanza moderna*). And he added that his own time had moved beyond the "modern." He drew the line between modern and his own "post-modern" era with Brunelleschi, that is, at some point in the 1420s. This was also when people started to revive the language of Cicero and Virgil, "thirty or forty years ago." Writing in 1464, Filarete viewed the history of architecture as a development in three stages. The first was antiquity, the second "modernity," and the third his own, "post-modern" time. What Filarete called the modern manner is what we today would call "Gothic." It was a mode of building that had prevailed for "at least several hundred years." In a later passage of the book, Filarete explained that the modern manner had been brought to Italy by the "barbarians" from the North, mainly from France and Germany.[64] He had little to say about what the modern manner of building looked like, except that it featured pointed arches.

Filarete had more to report on the morphology of antique architecture. He knew that ancient buildings usually featured round arches and that they had square doors without a pediment, like the doors in Piero's *Flagellation*.[65] But Filarete's definition of the antique style of building was not so much based on what he knew about actual antique architecture; it was rather formulated *ex negativo*, as a style of building that looked different than Gothic buildings. The arches were round because they could not be pointed, the doors were rectangular to contrast them with doors with a pediment. Filarete did not arrive at an antique mode of building by matter of reconstruction. He instead imagined the form of antique architecture by moving beyond more recent building practices. That move resulted in a new kind of architecture whose difference from recent buildings styles allowed Filarete to say that it was also old. Filarete's *maniera antica* was understood as something both modern and ancient.

Piero's contemporaries did not always distinguish between ancient and contemporary modes of building. In his account of the antique Roman house in his *Roma triumphans* of 1459, Flavio Biondo gave examples of modern rather than antique houses.[66] And reading the treatises by Alberti (1462), Filarete (1464) and Francesco di Giorgio Martini (early 1470s), it is often unclear whether the authors are speaking about ancient buildings or contemporary ones.[67] Alberti called Christian churches "temples." He believed that the modern church developed out of the ancient temple rather than the early Christian basilica, as a modern architectural historian would say. Alberti did not consider the basilica (*basilicam*) a worthy model for the modern church. He believed that the early Christian basilicas were repurposed Roman

judgment halls.[68] Judgment halls were smaller and lower than temples, because a court building was less worthy than the temple of the gods. Alberti's aim was to restore the modern church to the status of the ancient temple, name and all.

The modern Christian church even had to be decorated in ancient fashion. After he cited Cicero's words on keeping the temple as empty as possible, Alberti went on to recommend the same practice for the modern church. In common with the ancient temple, the church should have stucco, "according to the practice of the ancients," porticos for the representation of great actions, and statues rather than pictures, "unless they be such excellent ones as those two, for which Caesar the Dictator gave ninety talents, or fourteen hundred of our crowns, in order to adorn the Temple of Venus his progenitor"; and it needed inscriptions, because

> we read that in the Capitol there were tables of brass whereon were inscribed the laws by which the Empire was to be governed; which, when the temple was destroyed by fire, were restored by the Emperor Vespasian, to the number of three thousand. We are told that at the entrance of the Temple of Apollo at Delos there were verses engraved, containing several compositions of herbs proper to be used as remedies against all sorts of poisons. Thus I should think it would be proper among us, by way of inscription, to have such precepts as may make us more just, more modest, more useful, more adorned with all the Virtues, and acceptable in the sight of God.

For Alberti, the newest-looking architecture recommended itself most favorably for the depiction of the deepest past.

Urbino circa 1450

And so it was with the architecture Piero depicted in the *Flagellation*.[69] When contemporaries described the new architecture of Federico da Montefeltro's palace, they noted that it was both recent and ancient. In the preface to a series of bound architectural and mechanical drawings dedicated to Federico, Francesco di Giorgio compared Montefeltro's patronage of architecture to that of Augustus, presenting the city of Urbino as a new Rome.[70] In 1466 or 1469, around the time Piero was working on the *Flagellation*, Federico's talent for building palaces was compared to Vitruvius's talent.[71] In the mid-1470s, the poet Giovanni Sulpizio said of the Palazzo Ducale that it was a "rival to Caesar's."[72] And later, Giovanni Santi—perhaps Piero's closest acquaintance in Urbino—considered the palace as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, comparing it to ancient Egyptian buildings, among other things.[73] These sources make clear that the architecture of Federico's palace does not evoke a historically specific era. Comparisons range over the full breath of antiquity, and they even include Egyptian architecture. The new architecture of Federico's court somehow represented the oldest thinkable modes of building, even if people disagreed about how far back it stretched and to which specific region it referred.

Some of Piero's contemporaries thought that the architecture of the Montefeltro Palace resembled the old, destroyed architecture of ancient Jerusalem. Fra Carnevale's *Presentation in the Temple*, commissioned in 1467 for the church of Santa Maria della Bella in Urbino, depicts the architecture of the Temple in the style of Federico's Urbino (Fig. 3.8). The temple architecture is modeled on the portal of San Domenico,

Figure 3.8 Fra Carnevale, *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, 1467, 146.4 × 96.5. Boston, MA: Museum of Fine Arts. Artwork in the Public Domain. Photo: Author.

which Piero had also used in his painting.[74] Fra Carnevale placed a column in front of an engaged pilaster and exactly copied the stone architecture's capitals. In his *Birth of the Virgin*, which was part of the same commission for Santa Maria della Bella, he incorporated the windows of the Palazzo Ducale and the Montefeltro coat of arms, even registering the difference between the heraldic eagles of the 1450s, painted in the roundel on the left, and the later eagles in motion with spread wings in Federico's apartments. Involved both with the design of architecture and making of Biblical

paintings, Fra Carnevale was trained to think about the temporality of architecture as double.

When Piero copied the style of the San Domenico portal, he decided not to follow the order of the capitals. With the exception of the Ionic column against which Christ is being flagellated, the columns of Pilate's court are of the Composite order, the type Alberti would have called "Italic" and later theorists "Tuscan." Piero arrived at this specific kind of capital by adding a second layer of acanthus leaves and the double amount of volutes to the capitals of the San Domenico portal.[75] His contact with architects like Matteo de' Pasti and Maso di Bartolommeo makes it highly probable that Piero was aware of the historical status of this kind of Composite capital: A recent invention by Alberti that claimed at the same time to be the oldest possible order.

A similar way of thinking informs the lettering of Piero's signature (Fig. 1.2). Their xylography was of relatively recent origins and at the same time imitated an old script. Around the middle of the fifteenth century, Italian humanists became increasingly interested in the style of ancient letterforms. In addition to documenting the historical information they found in ancient inscriptions, they began to catalogue ancient letterforms, a project culminating in Felice Feliciano's handbook of 1460.[76] Renaissance artists like Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Andrea Mantegna, and Piero della Francesca had helped to imagine what the oldest letters looked like.[77] The squared Roman capital that Piero used in the *Flagellation* had made an earlier appearance in Rimini just after 1450, in the long inscriptions on the façade of the Tempio Malatestiano. It was a free adaptation of the letters found in the bronze inscription on the Pantheon.[78] And the same letter appeared in Piero's fresco of *Sigismondo Malatesta Praying to Saint Sigismund*, painted in 1451. Carlo Bertelli even suggested that Piero had designed the new letterform; it at least appeared at an earlier date than Alberti's involvement with the Tempio.[79] Piero's invention or not, everyone agreed that the new form represented ancient Roman script.

Architecture/painting

The architecture in Piero's painting does what the painting itself avoids. It insists on being done in a specific style. And it also claims that this architectural mode should be understood as a revival of an antique style of building. Erwin Panofsky once noted that fifteenth-century sources on painting never really talk about the realism of fifteenth-century art in terms of a revival of an antique style. This distinguished the reception of painting from sculpture and architecture, which *were* described in terms of a revival of an antique style of representation.[80] People recognized that an architect like Brunelleschi was imitating classical architecture and they claimed that the sculptor Donatello was a "great imitator of the ancients."[81] But about a painter like Masaccio, they only said that he was very skilled in the imitation of nature. Panofsky did not say why he thought this was the case. He merely submitted that the Renaissance came late to painting, long after Masaccio's death, around the time when Piero was making his last pictures, with Andrea Mantegna's antiquarian understanding.

More recently, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood endorsed the idea that fifteenth-century painting was not understood in terms of style. And they came up with a model that explains the lack in the fifteenth century of a strong concept of style. Style is what makes the artwork evoke a specific moment and place. Nagel and Wood submitted that fifteenth-century people looked at artifacts—not just paintings and

statues, but also at buildings—as substitutes for older objects and buildings. Even if the older things never existed or were considered lost, then the new work somehow still claimed to be a replica of the old work. This means that most artifacts adhered to a double temporality: They were both of the time of their production and of the time of the artifact they substituted for. Nagel and Wood added that Renaissance substitution was not just a continuation of the medieval practice of copying, say, what Fra Giordano said about fourteenth-century artists exactly replicating the first, true images of Christ (see Chapter 2). The fifteenth century allowed for the co-existence of replication—or the fiction of replication—with a performative logic within one and the same image. The performative mode bound the artwork or building to the instant when it was made. What makes the Renaissance special is that it produced an artwork that thematized its own, double temporality. This capacity to reflect on its own status is what defines the new image *as artwork* and what distinguishes it from a medieval conception of imagery. The sole purpose of the artwork is to create fictions, or hypotheses about reality and about itself.[82]

My thesis partly intersects with that of Nagel and Wood. I, too, argue that in the fifteenth century, performativity gained importance. I would even argue that there was a concept of style in place that permitted the understanding of an artwork as the performance of a singular artist. The Introduction gathered sources around the concept of *aria*, a term that described a biological, unavoidable relationship between artist and work that comes close to our modern concept of style. I further pointed out that this new emphasis on style existed in a dialectical relationship with realism. Realism is not a style. It is not punctual. Piero designed his rigid method of perspective to cultivate the impression that art replicated reality unmediated. All the work that went into painting remained invisible in the painting. In this system, the old replication theory of one picture copying another is replaced by the model of a picture replicating reality. The ethos of replication was kept alive, the model the artist replicated changed.

The sense that realism is an act of replication informs Cennino Cennini's treatise. Cennini recommended the making of life-casts as an ideal model for the imitation of nature. Under the heading "What the use is of casting [*l'improntare*] from nature [*di naturale*]," Cennini wrote:

> I want to acquaint you with something else [than the technique of painting] which is very useful and gets you great honor in design [*disegno*], for retracing [*ritrarre*] and making things similar [*simigliare*] to nature, that is, what they call imprinting [*imprentare*].

Cennini associated the imprint with the imitation of nature, not with the copying of earlier artworks. And he explains the technique of casting not only as an expedient way of making images, but also as a contribution to the artistic culture of imitating nature, as a form of realism.[83] To make an image that claims to be replicating nature comes with a necessary avoidance of personal style and intervention. A painting produced under the conditions of realism attempts to overcome the fact that it is a made thing in order not to destroy the illusion that it replicates the phenomenal world.

Architecture does not imitate nature, but culture. Filarete regretted that buildings lacked the architect's style. The look of a building instead responded to the buildings around it, underneath it, over it. It replicated existing styles and suppressed the intervention of the architect's imagination (*fantasia*). Alberti and Filarete argued against

this traditional way of understanding architecture. Alberti instead tried to invent a kind of architecture that *was* marked by a personal style. It was this new understanding of architecture that also informed the buildings in Urbino that Piero used as the setting for his *Flagellation*. The architecture Piero painted answered to the architect's hand. It looked decidedly modern and of its time, a claim, I argued above, that did not contradict the belief that it was also ancient. What made both claims possible was that the new architecture looked different than its immediate environment. It was what made it punctual, what pricked a building to its moment. The new kind of architecture was punctual in a way that realistic painting was not. Its architecture renders the *Flagellation* dateable and local. It affixes the picture to Piero's world, to the town of Urbino where Piero was living and working at the time he was making the painting.

Notes

1 See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: A. Francke, 1946).
2 For instance, Bonaventura, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS. Ital. 115)*, trans. Isa Ragusa and ed. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 328–9.
3 Niccolò di Poggibonsi da Poggibonsi, "Libro d'Oltramare," in *Pellegrini scrittori: Viaggiatori toscani del Trecento in Terrascanta*, ed. A. Lanza and M. Troncarelli (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1990), 47–8. See Hayden Maginnis, "Places Beyond the Seas: Trecento Images of Jerusalem," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 13 (1994): 5.
4 For images of Jerusalem, see I.Q. van Regteren Altena, "Hidden Records of the Holy Sepulchre," in *Essays Presented to Rudolf Wittkower on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Douglas Fraser and Howard Hibbard (London: Phaidon, 1967), 17–21.
5 For the woodcuts, see Hugh Davies, *Bernhard von Breydenbach and His Journey to the Holy Land 1483–4: A Bibliography* (London: Haantjens Dekker and Gumbert, 1911); Elisabeth Geck, *Die Reise ins Heilige Land: Ein Reisebricht aus dem Jahre 1483* (Wiesbaden: Pressler, 1961); and Eric Marshall White, "The Woodcuts in Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio* and the Limits of Fifteenth-Century Empiricism," in *Seven Perspectives on the Woodcut: Presentations from a Heavenly Craft Symposium and Exhibition*, ed. Daniel De Simone (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2008), 88–91.
6 For a few examples, see David R. Marshall, "Carpaccio, Saint Steven, and the Topography of Jerusalem," *The Art Bulletin* 66 (1984): 610–20.
7 Carol Herselle Krinsky, "Representations of the Temple of Jerusalem before 1500," *Journal of the Warbrug and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 1–19.
8 For more examples of such images, see Cathleen A. Fleck, "Linking Jerusalem and Rome in the Fourteenth Century: The Italian Bible of Anti-Pope Clement VII," in *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezalel Narkiss on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Bianca Kühnel (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Art, 1998), 431–52.
9 For the sources of Piero's composition, see Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: The Triumph of Christian Glory," *The Art Bulletin* 50 (1968): 321–42. For Piero's possible training in Siena, see Roberto Longhi, *Piero della Francesca* [1927], trans. Leonard Penlock (London and New York: Frederick Warne, 1930), 7–12; and James R. Banker, *The Culture of Sansepolcro During the Youth of Piero della Francesca* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 192–4.
10 See Creighton E. Gilbert, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation: The Figures in the Foreground," *The Art Bulletin* 53 (1971): 49. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "Piero della Francesca's Flagellation," 323, n16, had already pointed to the panel, but Gilbert emphasized its importance.
11 Christine Smith, "Piero's Painted Architecture: Analysis of his Vocabulary," in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 223–53.

12 Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 185–94.
13 Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca: The Flagellation* (London: Penguin, 1972), 41–2, had argued that Piero based his columns on Alberti's.
14 Smith, "Piero's Painted Architecture."
15 Maria Grazia Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto, "La Flagellazione di Urbino: Un'opera d'arte e la sua leggenda," in *Piero e Urbino, Piero e le corti rinascimentali*, ed. Paolo dal Poggetto (Venice: Marsilio, 1992), 115–16.
16 See Janez Höffler, "Maso di Bartolomeo e la sua cerchia a Urbino: Il portale di San Domenico e il primo Palazzo di Federico da Montefeltro," in *Michelozzo: Scultore e architetto (1396–1472)*, ed. Gabriele Morolli (Florence: Centro Di, 1998), 249–55.
17 Enrico Ferdinando Londei, "La scena della 'Flagellazione' di Piero della Francesca: La sua identificazione con on luogo di Urbino del Quattrocento," *Bollettino d'arte* 65 (1991): 29–66.
18 For the Scala Santa, see Mario Cemparani and Tito Amodei, *La Scala Santa* (Rome: Istituti Nazionale di Studi Romani, 1989); and Laura Donadono, *La Scala Santa a San Giovanni in Laterano* (Rome: Quasar, 2000).
19 For Piero's Roman itinerary, see Eugenio Battisti, *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1971), 2: 224 (docs. 58–9. For Piero and the Lateran Scala Santa, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Enigma of Piero: Piero della Francesca: The Baptism, the Arezzo Cycle, the Flagellation* (London: Verso, 1985), 127–8.
20 K. Krast, "Das Silbermedaillon Constantins des Grossen mit dem Christusmonogramm auf dem Helm," *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* 5–6 (1954–5): 177–8.
21 For San Giovanni in Laterano, see Pieter Cornelius Claussen, *Die Kirchen der Stadt Rom im Mittelalter 1050–1300*, vol. 2 (S. Giovanni in Laterano) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008).
22 Giovanni Rucellai, *Giovanni Rucellai e il suo Zibaldone*, ed. Alessandro Perosa (London: Warburg Institute, 1960), 1: 70–2.
23 One fifteenth-century Franciscan friar called this local experience of the places Christ visited in Jerusalem "*memoria locale*," the mapping of the memory of Christ's passion onto one's local town; Lina Bolzoni, *La rete delle immagini. Predicazione in volgare dalle origini a Bernardino da Siena* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), 194–5. And consult the range of remarkable articles by Michele Bacci: "Portolano sacro santuario e imagini sacre lungo le rotte di navigazione del mediterraneo tra tardo medioevo e prima età moderna," in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf (Rome: L'Erma, 2004), 223–48; and his "Performed Topographies and Topomimetic Piety: Imaginative Sacred Spaces in Medieval Italy," in *Spatial Icons: Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. Alexei Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), 101–18.
24 Nikolaus Muffel, *Beschreibung der Stadt Rome* [1452], ed. Wilhelm Vogt (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1876), 9–10.
25 As emphasized by Marie Tanner, *Jerusalem on the Hill: Rome and the Vision of St. Peter's in the Renaissance* (London and Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 149.
26 Giacomo Ricci, *Virginis Mariae Loretae historia*, ed. Giuseppe Santarelli (Loreto: Congregazione Universale della Santa Casa, 1987).
27 Auctore Anonimo ad Nicolaum quintum pontificem maximum, "Commentariolus historicus de origine et progresso civiatis Burgi S. Sepulcri ab anno 937 ad annum 1441" (= Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 66.25). Published in Mario Sensi, "Arcano e Gilio, santi pellegrini fondatori di Sansepolcro," in *Vie di pellegrinaggio medievale attraverso l'alta valle del Tevere*, ed. Enzo Mattesini (Città di Castello: Petruzzi, 1998), 49–50.
28 Sensi, "Arcano e Gilio," 49.
29 Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "Niccolò di Segna, Sassetta, Piero della Francesca and Perugino: Cult and Continuity at Sansepolcro," *Städel-Jahrbuch* 17 (1999): 163–208.
30 Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography' of Medieval Architecture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1–33.
31 Francesco Lanzoni, *San Petronio, Vescovo di Bologna nella storia e nella legenda* (Rome: Pustet, 1907), 141–2.
32 N. Gargano, *Devotione indulgentie e cose mirabili le quale sono in la ecclesia de Sancto Stephano de Bologna dicta Hierusalem* (Bologna, 1520). Cited in Robert G. Ousterhout, "The Church of Santo Stefano: A 'Jerusalem' in Bologna," *Gesta* 20 (1981): 320, n48.

33 Alessandro Goracci, "Breve istoria dell'origine e fondazione della città del Borgo di San Sepolcro," in Filippo Villani, *Le vite d'uomini illustri fiorentini* (Florence: Coen, 1847), 158.
34 Longhi, *Piero della Francesca*, 34. For the dating of the *Baptism*, see Banker, *Culture of Sansepolcro*, 239–47.
35 For the dating of the various building stages of the Palazzo Ducale, see Pasquale Rotondi, *Il Palazzo Ducale di Urbino: La sua architettura e la sua decorazione* (London: Tiranti, 1969). Mario Salmi, *Piero della Francesca e il Palazzo Ducale di Urbino* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1945), held Piero as the architect.
36 Filippo de Lignamine, "Continuatio Chronici Ricobaldini [1474]," in *Corpus Historicum Medii Aevi*, ed. Johann Georg von Eccard (Leipzich: Apud Jo. Frid. Gleditschii B. Fil., 1723), 2: 1312.
37 Porcellio de' Pandoni, "Feltria," in August Schmarsow, *Melozzo da Forlì* (Berlin: Spemann, 1886), 75–6.
38 For the date of the inscription, see J. Hofler, *Der Palazzo Ducale in Urbino unter den Montefeltro (1378–1508)* (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 2004), 175, n106.
39 Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building in Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
40 Franco Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti* (Milan: Electa, 1975), 376, for Alberti's presence in Florence during the Council.
41 Smith, "Piero's Painted Architecture."
42 Charles Mitchell, "Il Tempio Malatestiano," *Studi Malatestiani*, ed. Philip J. Jones *et al.* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1978), 77. For the attribution of the architecture to Piero, see P. G. Pasini, "Piero della Francesca nel Tempio Malatestiano," in *Piero della Francesca a Rimini. L'affresco nel Tempio Malatestiano*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin *et al.* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1984), 111; Carlo Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, trans. Edward Farrelly (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 70–2; Hope, "Early History," 1992, 91.
43 Cecile Grayson, *Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano: An Autograph Letter from Leon Battista Alberti to Matteo de' Pasti* (New York,: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1957), 17.
44 Roberto Valturio, *De re militari* (Paris: Wechel, 1534), fol. 382.
45 For a reconstruction of the building campaigns, see Charles Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 51–154.
46 A. F. Masèra (ed.), *Cronache Malatestiane dei secoli X IV e XV* (= *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, xv, 2) (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1924), 121.
47 For a reproduction of the inscription, see Corradi Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano* (Milan and Rome: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1924), figs. 534, 535.
48 Matteo de' Pasti's medal was not among a large group of medals found behind the left pier in the Chapel of Saint Sigismund that was dismantled in 1948. The pier had been installed in 1450, and it is unlikely that Matteo's medal would not have been part of the dedication ceremony that involved placing the medals there. See Hope, "Early History," 93.
49 Ricci, *Tempio Malatestiano*, 589.
50 Antonio Averlino (Il Filarete), *Trattato di Architettura*, ed. Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1972), 1: 28: "Che se uno tutte le fabricasse, come colui che scrive o uno che dipigne fa che le sue lettere si conoscono, e così colui che dipigne la sua maniera delle figure si cognosce, e così d'ogni facultà si cognosce lo stile di ciascheduno; ma questa è altra practica, nonostante che ognuno pura dicaria o tanto o quanto, benché si conosca essere fatta per una mano." Trans. in *Filarete's Treatise on Architecture: Being the Treatise of Antonio di Piero Averlino, known as Filarete* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 1: 12.
51 Rudolph Agricola, *De inventione dialectica libri tres = Drei Bücher über die Inventio dialectica: Auf der Grundlage der Edition von Alardus von Amsterdam (1539)*, ed. and trans. Lothar Mundt (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 101, 553–5, 559. The discussion on architecture is studied in Michael Baxandall, "Rudolph Agricola on patrons efficient and patrons final: A renaissance discrimination," *The Burlington Magazine* 124 (1982): 424–5. Yet Baxandall does to distinguish between the art of building and the art of painting, which Agricola explicitly does.

52 This is a point emphasized by Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath, "Artists and Humanists," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161–88.
53 For the Rimini capital, see Howard Burns, "Leon Battista Alberti," in *Storia dell'architettura italiana. Il Quattrocento*, ed. F. P. Fiore (Milan: Electa, 1998), 132
54 See John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 154.
55 Leon Battista Alberti, *L'architettura [De re aedificatoria]*, ed. and trans. Giovanno Orlandi with an Introduction and Notes by Paolo Portoghesi (Milan: Il polifilo, 1966), 2: 565 (Book VII, Chapter 6, fol. 177v.)
56 Onians, *Bearers of Meaning*, 35.
57 Caroline Elam, " 'Tuscan Dispositions': Michelangelo's Florentine Architectural Vocabulary and its Reception," *Renaissance Studies* 19 (2005): 70.
58 Alberti, *L'architettura*, 2: 562–8 (Book VII, Ch. VI, fols. 117r–118r). This was noted by Alina Payne, "Vasari's Architecture and the Origins of Historicizing Art," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 40 (2001): 60.
59 Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Trattati di architettura ingegneria e arte militare*, ed. Corrado Maltese (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1967), 24.
60 For the letter, see Ludwig H. Heydenreich, "Die Cappella Rucellai von San Pancrazio in Florenz," in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Millard Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 1: 219. F.W. Kent pointed out that the letter was a forgery; see F.W. Kent, "The Letter Genuine and Spurious of Giovanni Rucellai," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 342–9.
61 Robert Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 110.
62 Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*, 116 (Book 9, fol. 67r.).
63 Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, 227–9; Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*, 102 (Book 8, fol. 59r.).
64 Filarete, *Trattato*, 382; Filarete, *Treatise*, 176 (Book 13, fols. 110r–v.).
65 Filarete, *Treatise*, 102–3 (Book 8, fols. 59v.–60r.).
66 Biondo, *De Roma Triumphante . . . Historiarum ab inclinato Ro. Imperio, Decades III* (Basel: Hieron. Frobenium et Nicol. Episcopium, 1559), Book 9.
67 This was noted by Georgia Clarke, *Roman House – Renaissance Palace: Inventing Antiquity in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 100–3.
68 Alberti, *L'architettura*, 2: 633 (Book VII, Chapter 14, fol. 130v.).
69 Carlo Bertelli, in an otherwise strong reading of the architecture in Piero's painting, submitted that the place Piero painted was not the Jerusalem of Christ's life, but the city as it had been rebuilt by Hadrian in the second century after it had been destroyed at the hands of Titus half a century earlier, an argument that served to define Piero as something of a modern archaeologist able to "reconstruct" an ancient building style; Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, 118–20. In what follows, I do not attribute a modern archaeological agenda to Piero's picture. Instead, I try to situate Piero's painted architecture in mid-fifteenth-century debates about the temporality of modern and ancient architecture.
70 It is British Library, MS 197.B21, published in A.E. Popham and P. Pouncey, *Drawings in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1950), 33.
71 Luigi Michelini Tocci, "I due manoscritti urbinati dei privilegi dei Montefeltro," *La Bibliofilia* 60 (1958): 224, 237–8.
72 B. Pecci, "Contributi per la storia degli umanisti del Lazio. Antonio Volsco – Giovanni Sulpizio – Novidio Fracco – Martino Filetico," *Archivio storico romano di storia patria* 13 (1890): 458–60.
73 Giovanni Santi, *Cronaca*, ed. Heinrich Holtzinger (Stuttgart: Wilhelm Hohlhammer, 1893), 119.
74 See the excellent discussion in Matteo Ceriana, "Fra Carnevale and the Practice of Architecture," in *From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 97–135.
75 João Basto, "The Composite Capitals in Piero's *Flagellation*," in *Piero della Francesca tra arte e scienza*, ed. Marisa Dalai Emiliani (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 77–94. The capitals in

the *Flagellation* vary upon a more standard capital in Piero's oeuvre, a species with two rows of acanthus leaves and only two volutes on either side that appears in the Arezzo frescos and in a diagram in Piero's treatise.

76 For the epigraphic tradition in the fifteenth century, starting with Cyriaco d'Ancona, see Ernst Ziebarth, "Cyriacus von Ancona als Begründer der Inschriftenforschung," *Neue Jahrbuch für das klassische Altertum Geschichte und Deutsche Litteratur* 9 (1902): 214–26; and Margherita Guarducci, "Ciriaco e l'epigrafia," in *Ciriaco d'Ancona e la cultura antiquaria dell'umanesimo*, ed. Gianfranco Paci and Sergio Sconocchia (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 1992), 169–72.

77 See Millard Meiss, "Toward a More Comprehensive Renaissance Palaeography," *The Art Bulletin* 42 (1960): 97–112; and Christine Sperling, "Artistic Lettering and the Progress of the Antique Revival in the Quattrocento," PhD dissertation (Brown University, 1985).

78 Giovanni Mardersteig, "Leon Battista Alberti e la rinascita del carattere lapidario romano nel Quattrocento," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 2 (1959): 285–307.

79 Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, 67.

80 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and renascences in Western Art* (New York, 1972), 1–41, 162–210.

81 Cristoforo Landino, *Scritti critice e teorici*, ed. Roberto Cardini (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974), 1: 125: "grande imitatore degli antichi."

82 Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone, 2010).

83 Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, ed. Franca Brunello (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), 198 (§ 181).

4 After the work

Viewers, first and second

The first viewer of a painting was the painter. This is a common assumption, but when art historians talk about the viewer, they usually mean someone other than the artist: An historical man or woman who looked at the painting after it had left the artist's workshop. The focus on this secondary viewer has become so well integrated in current art historical praxis that it comes as something of a surprise that it is of remarkably recent origins. It can be traced back to an essay of 1959 by Leo Steinberg on the Cerasi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo. Steinberg argued that the two canvases by Caravaggio of 1601 on the sidewalls of the chapel anticipate the cramped viewing circumstance in the chapel. When Caravaggio was painting, he was thinking ahead; he was trying to forget about his own place in front of the canvas in his studio and imagined what viewers other than himself would experience inside the chapel for which he was making these paintings.[1] John Shearman later dedicated a whole book to the viewers of art, in which he argued that the emphasis on the later viewing circumstances of the artwork was what set the Renaissance apart from earlier periods. Shearman even suggested that the invention of one-point perspective in the early fifteenth century responded to the need of a more viewer-oriented art. Perspective made the space in the picture continuous with the space in front of it, where the viewer stood.[2]

But I am going to submit here that the popularity of research on the spectatorship of Renaissance paintings is in large part due to Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, published in 1972.[3] Baxandall argued that fifteenth-century people looked differently at painting than we do today. He called this historically determined way of looking the period eye. And the task of the modern art historian, Baxandall said, was to embody the ways of seeing of a fifteenth-century beholder. Hardly the first to argue that viewing is historically specific, nobody had been more specific and determinate about whom exactly the fifteenth-century viewer was: "a church-going business man, with a taste for dancing." The life of this man consisted of the transaction of business, dancing, praying, gesturing, and speaking. And he brought all of these experiences to the experience of painting. For Piero's art, with its strongly modeled three-dimensional forms, the man would bring his experience in gauging the volume of barrels.[4] (Baxandall did not consider the possibility that people with no experience in gauging, like most fifteenth-century women, also looked at Piero's paintings.) The merit of Baxandall's book was that it restored something quotidian to the experience of painting, an everydayness that made both art and history understandable for a public beyond the

art history classroom. A Quattrocento man had very little understanding of art itself; he had no interest in how the art he commissioned related to earlier art. And Baxandall's book implied that a modern, non-specialist viewer did not need that expertise either.

Baxandall could have only made this claim for the fifteenth century. A year before the publication of *Painting and Experience*, he published his first book, the no less eccentric *Giotto and the Orators*.[5] In it, Baxandall defended the thesis that fourteenth- and some early fifteenth-century art could only be understood by a small group of people, the humanist observers who formed the subject of his book. *Painting and Experience* tried to rescue fifteenth-century art from the hold of this elite art culture in which painting could only be understood by artists and a handful of sophisticated men. The fifteenth century offered a breathing space from the highly intellectual responses to art in the fourteenth century and the abstruse theorizing of art in the sixteenth century, a century in Italian culture that Baxandall never devoted any specific scholarly work to.

Baxandall's emphasis on the life and needs of the patron came at the cost of the artist. *Painting and Experience* leaves the artist very little agency and leeway. The artist simply answered the pressing needs of the devout businessman who liked to dance. "Painting was still too important to be left to the painters," Baxandall claimed early in the book.[6]

This claim cannot be entirely correct. To be sure, most artworks were made on commission. The contracts artists signed with their patrons contained stipulations about formats, materials, location, and sometimes subject-matter.[7] There is evidence that artists and patrons also talked about what an artwork could look like;[8] and in some cases, a contract stipulated that the new work should copy an existing painting.[9] But it is also clear that the worlds of the painter and the patron were divided.[10] Fifteenth-century artists were not always thinking about the patron's experience and expectations when they were making pictures. Leonardo da Vinci, for instance, noted that his fifteenth-century predecessors did not care about the viewpoint of later viewers when they painted pictures in perspective. Painters on panel often forgot that the vanishing point of their perspective constructions needed to conform to the gaze of the viewer (*il riguardatore*). Most artists painted their pictures from their own viewpoint, without taking into account the destination of the picture, where it would be viewed in completely different circumstances by another person than the painter.[11] That is also why Leonardo disapproved of the common practice of decorating chapels with more than one scene stacked upon the other, like Piero della Francesca's Arezzo frescos, with each scene having its own distant point. Such frescos responded to the viewpoint of the painter on the scaffolding, not to that of a viewer on the chapel's floor.[12]

Some of Piero's early works anticipate Leonardo's criticism. The faint indications of perspective in his *Misericordia Altarpiece*—the edges of the red carpet on which the Madonna and supplicants stand—meet around the height of the Virgin's eyes, some 45 cm from the bottom of the panel. With the height of Piero's predella panel, which measures 22.5 cm, and another 2.5 cm to account for the original frame, the distance point would have measured about 70 cm from the altar table on which it stood. There were no standard measurements for an altar block, but most Italian altars were about 90 to 100 cm in height. When Piero's work stood on the altar, then, the distance from the ground to the distance point of the perspective construction would have measured about 160 cm. This height roughly conforms to the eye-level of a person in the fifteenth century. Alberti wrote that an average man measured three braccia, which

corresponds to 174 cm.[13] At that ratio, the distance between the top of a man's head and his eyes measures 9 cm, placing a man's sight some 165 cm from the ground, only 5 cm higher than the height of Piero's distance point. It seems that Piero took the point of view of the priest officiating mass, with his face towards Piero's panel, as the organizing principle of the central panel, anchoring the work in the space for which it was made. The lighting in the polyptych also responds to its destination. Light enters the picture from the right, where a window lit the oratory.[14] In the two polyptychs that followed the *Misericordia Altarpiece*, Piero again related their perspective construction to the site of the church. The vanishing points of the Sant'Agostino and Perugia altarpieces both conform to the height of a priest performing mass in front of the image.

But later in life, Piero discontinued the practice of making the distance point conform to the perspective of a later viewer. He stopped thinking ahead. Take the *Montefeltro Altarpiece*, commissioned around 1474 by Federico da Montefeltro, who sits kneeling on the right side of the picture, and now in the collection of the Brera in Milan (Plate 8). The picture's vanishing point falls just below the Virgin's downcast eyes, at about 115 cm from the bottom of the painting.[15] The distance point comes about 50 cm short of the height of the gaze of a fifteenth-century person.[16] The painting therefore needs to be lifted about half a meter from the ground for the gaze of the viewer to intersect with the distance point at a right angle. This is about the height of the lowest sport of a painter's easel in the fifteenth century. An early sixteenth-century drawing in the British Museum shows Saint Luke painting the Virgin behind an easel with adjustable sports, the lowest of which sits a little bit higher than the saint's kneecap, some 50 cm or so from the ground. This means that the perspective of Piero's painting conforms to the viewpoint from which Piero had painted it, not to the perspective a later viewer in front of the painting. Rather than making the picture point forward to its destination, Piero made his altarpiece point back to its moment of making, when it still stood on an easel in the painter's workshop.

On the shoulder plate of Federico da Montefeltro's armor is a reflection of the space in front of the painting (Fig. 4.1). The reflection shows an arched window that penetrates a white, grayish wall. The window is placed close to the corner of a room, because the strip of wall to its left abruptly changes color to a dark gray, to suggest that the oblique wall catches less light than the one with the window. I take a diagonal stroke of white paint running from left to right in the lower left corner of Federico's shoulder plate as an indication of the floor. This would place the arched window not too far from the ground, yet still far enough to discount it as a door. The space seen in Federico's armor does not look like an extension of the space depicted in the painting. The light fall in the painting is different from the light fall of the space reflected in the armor.[17] And it is difficult to imagine an arched window set in a plastered wall as part of the kind of architecture that you see depicted in the picture. The church architecture in the painting is contemporary; it combines features of four contemporary architects, including Alberti, Luciano Laurana, Francesco di Giorgio, and the early Bramante, even if it cannot be likened to any particular existing church.[18] It is unthinkable that such architecture would include an arched window not too far from the ground, let alone in the façade. The kind of modern church architecture that Piero depicts in the painting would presumably have had rectangular, *all'antica* windows and doorframes, rather than arched ones. Arched apertures belong to a more traditional and quotidian kind of architecture—to houses, shops, and workshops. I submit that the reflection

Figure 4.1 Detail of Plate 8.

in the painting is a reflection of the site where the painting was *painted*, that is, the workshop Piero used when he painted the picture in Urbino.[19] This would conform to the perspective construction of the painting, which places it on an easel in Piero's workshop.

Similar reflections occurred in earlier Flemish paintings, some of which Piero knew intimately.[20] Jan van Eyck's *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini (?) and his Wife* of 1434 has a mirror hanging off the back wall, which, in addition to the interior and a rear view of the couple, shows two men, one dressed in blue, the other in red, standing in the door opening in front of the painting (Fig. 4.2). One of them is probably van Eyck himself. A portrait in London, almost certainly a self-portrait, shows a similar man with a red turban. The reflection shows that you, as a later viewer, stand in the position where the painter once stood, and you are invited to embody the position of the painter. Van Eyck radicalized that sense of embodiment in his *Madonna with Canon*

Figure 4.2 Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini portrait*, 1434, 82.2 × 60 cm. London: National Gallery. Artwork in the Public Domain.

van der Paele in Bruges, a picture that is conceptually close to Piero's.[21] The buckler strapped to Saint George's back reflects the image of a man with a red turban, like the man in the London self-portrait, standing next to an easel, pausing to observe the scene he is painting. The reflection brings the moment of viewing back to the moment of painting. In front of the painting, you stand in the place of the painter painting. Van Eyck also claimed that he painted the Virgin, saints and the canon on the spot. He painted himself standing in a space that is continuous with the space inside the

painting; the windows reflected in George's armor are of the same style as the windows you see in the painting. Piero, on the other hand, was less concerned with the *moment* than with the *place* of painting. What you see reflected is not Piero painting his picture, but the space where the picture was made. And that space is different from the space depicted in the painting. Piero's perspective pointed backward, to the world of the painter and to the moment when he was painting.

Piero made a similar argument in his treatise on perspective. The *De prospectiva pingendi* reads as a manual for fellow artists. It is a text that focuses on the intricacies of painting when you're painting. Its tone is instructive. Instead of addressing the reader in the formal "*voi*," s/he is addressed in the familiar "*tu*," as a fellow-painter.[22] Instructive rather than discursive, the treatise demands from its reader to embody the artist and the problem faced when depicting three-dimensional forms on a two-dimensional picture plane. The work's intended reader, however, was not just the fellow-painter, or perhaps not at all. Most of the surviving copies bear a Latin title that suggests a learned audience; and there even circulated Latin copies of the treatise. Federico da Montefeltro kept a copy in Italian with a Latin title in his library, with a dedication to him. It was shelved next to Piero's *Libellus de Quinque Corporibus Regularibus*. The *De prospectiva pingendi* demands from its readers, among them the Duke of Urbino, to learn how to think from the painter's perspective. It introduces the viewer of paintings—a viewer who is *not* a painter—to the intricacies of the painter's craft in the hope that painting becomes intelligible *as painting*.

A similar hope informs other fifteenth-century treatises on art. The fifteenth century alone produced at least three separate treatises on the art of painting: Cennino Cennini's *Il libro dell'arte* (ca. 1400, perhaps best translated as "The Book on Method," rather than the modern English title, *The Craftsman's Handbook*), Alberti's *De pictura* (1436), and Piero's *De prospectiva pingendi*, in addition to works on sculpture and architecture that also include theories of painting. The aim of all three was to introduce non-painters to the culture of painters. Cennini's *Libro* provides a manual for painting, full of recipes and practical advice, seemingly addressed to an exclusive audience of painters. But Cennini's book was clearly aimed at the culture of patrons. Himself a painter, Cennini wrote the book in Padua in humanist circles from whom he borrowed the theories of imitation described in the treatise.[23] The text of the *Libro* was copied in Florence in 1437 and bound in a volume with literary texts, almost certainly not by an artist. And then there is information in the treatise that would be superfluous for a painter. For instance, Cennini wrote that reading his manual was not enough to become a painter; you also needed to study with a master. This would have been advice that no real painter needed. Cennini does not disclose the reason for writing the treatise, nor does he say anything about his intended public. But in the second chapter, he praises those who turn their attention to art out of love (*amore*) and noble intentions (*gentileza*).[24] In Chapter 145, Cennini claimed that panel painting could be practiced by a *gentil huomo*, even when the man wore silk.[25] And this strongly suggests that the treatise was made for art lovers, patrons, and amateurs. Cennini's *Libro* familiarized those with no intention to become professional painters with the technical aspects of painting.[26]

Alberti's treatise is different from Cennini's. It is less technical and its aim is to defend and introduce a novel idea of painting. Whereas Cennini spent many paragraphs on the application of gold and the preparation of panels and walls for painting, Alberti advised against the use of golden backgrounds. His main concern was the

rectangular, empty picture plane. In traditional paintings with a gold background, the place of the figures would be fixed by the gold that enveloped them and the often-tapering shape of the panels that made up late medieval Italian polyptychs. The new, empty picture field is often described as a liberation for painters, but it also provided new challenges. It was important for patrons to understand those challenges. And part of the aim of *De pictura* was to facilitate that understanding. "First of all, on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want," Alberti wrote about the initial steps of tackling the blank surface.[27] I pointed out in the first chapter that he did not so much recommend perspective as a way to render accurately a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface as a means to structure the subject of the painting by structuring its surface in an intelligible way. Alberti's advice was not always very useful for a practicing artist. *De pictura* is a handbook for well-informed amateurs and patrons. Baxandall pointed out that Alberti took his structure for filling the rectangular picture field—from surface, to member, to body, to picture or narrative—was derived from the structure of the Ciceronian periodic sentence—word, phrase, clause, period.[28] This clever identity between writing classical Latin and composing pictures allowed Alberti to introduce the difficulties of a new kind of painting to learned patrons using a structure familiar to them. Alberti hoped to familiarize patrons by making the relationship between patron and painter comparable to that between patron and poet.[29] The poet does not work on commission, but offers his work to the patron, who, when he likes the work, adopts him in his circle.[30] This system worked in the realm of poetry because patrons were familiar with writing and poetry, things they would have learned in school. Alberti realized that you could only appreciate painting if you knew something about painting.

The culture implied by Cennini's, Alberti's, and Piero's treatises is different than the culture described by Baxandall in *Painting and Experience*. For Baxandall, a patron could appreciate painting by importing experience *external to the art of painting* to looking at a picture, whereas fifteenth-century theoreticians tried to export experience *internal to painting* to the culture of patrons. The culture proposed by Baxandall believes that pictures are realistic because they conform to the way patrons experienced the world, whereas the culture defended by Piero and his contemporaries makes pictures relate to the world of painters. For them, pictures point back to their moment and place of making. Painters invited their public to imagine what it must be like to be a painter, to be faced with the technical problems of making a painting, the empty picture field, or the imitation of real space. And whereas Cennini's *Libro* documented a status quo in painting, Alberti and Piero wrote with an agenda in mind to reform the status quo. And they wrote to get their patrons on board. In the case of Piero's treatise, this meant the introduction of a new and more rigorous system of perspective.

The fifteenth-century emphasis on the origins of painting in and around the body of the painter coincided with the moment when artists started to include self-portraits in their pictures.[31] It is no coincidence that one of the earliest and most explicit self-portraits was painted by one of the most devoted painters of perspective. Masaccio included his own portrait among the other contemporary portraits in the fresco of *The Throne of Saint Peter*, painted in the Brancacci Chapel around 1426. He stands to the right of the throne in a door opening from where he looks out of the picture at you in front of the painting (Fig. 4.3). Masaccio depicted himself as he saw himself looking in a mirror when he was making his self-portrait. He almost certainly made a drawing of himself, which he then used for his fresco.[32] I assume that what you are looking at

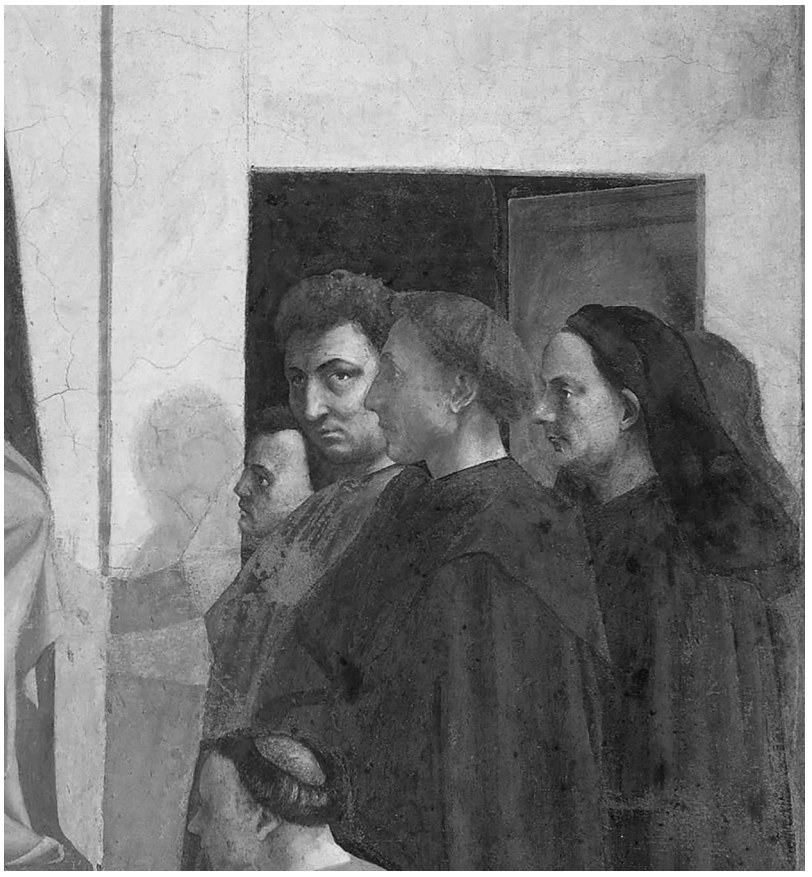

Figure 4.3 Masaccio, *The Raising of the Son of Theophilus* (detail), around 1426. Florence: Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel. Artwork in the Public Domain.

in the fresco is a mirror image. I imagine the mirror to the artist's right and his sheet of paper in front of him. The sheet was lying in a horizontal position, perhaps on a table. Masaccio's head is slightly bent towards the sheet. When he looked in the mirror to his right he did not raise his head. He looked up in the mirror without moving his head, as you can still see in the painted portrait. The inclination of Masaccio's head is similar to a much later self-portrait by Henri Fantin-Latour, who drew himself with a sketchbook in his hands, slightly bent over and looking up (Fig. 4.4).[33] Masaccio preserved the downward inclination of his head when he transferred his drawing to the fresco. His self-portrait brings you back to the moment when it was made, head over paper in the workshop.

Piero painted numerous self-portraits.[34] Vasari used an early self-portrait as frontispiece for his Life of Piero, perhaps derived from the Sant' Egidio frescos, that shows the artist at the age of around twenty. A second portrait appeared in the Ferrara frescos, painted before 1450, and now lost; in the London copy of the frescos, Piero appears on the extreme left. Piero painted himself a third time in the *Misericordia Altarpiece* as

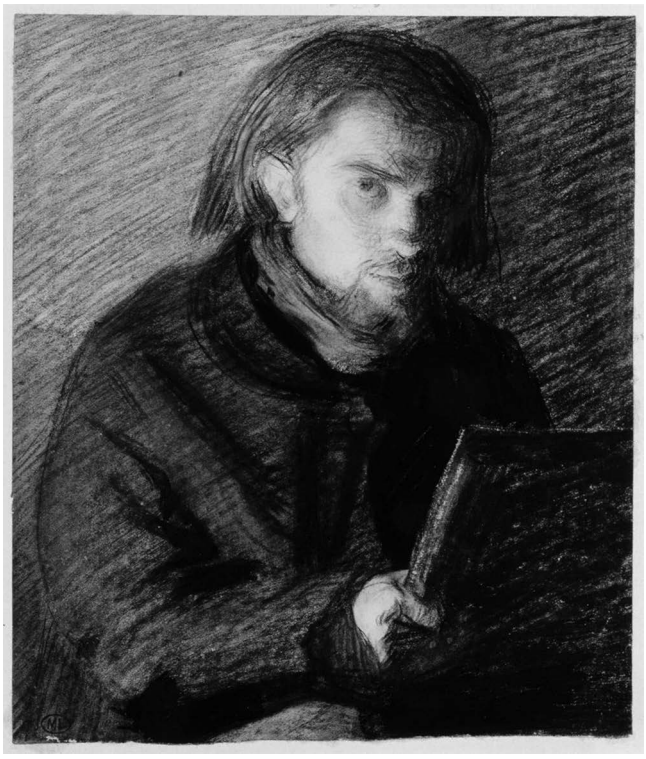

Figure 4.4 Henri Fantin Latour, *Self-portrait*, around 1860, 21.5 × 21 cm. Paris: Musée du Louvre. Artwork in the Public Domain.

one of the donors protected under the Virgin's robe, as the third person from the left, looking up at the Virgin. And then he painted himself asleep against Christ's sepulcher in the *Resurrection* at Sansepolcro. Piero was present in his paintings as a model for a variety of figures—twice for a soldier (in Ferrara and Sansepolcro) and once or twice as himself (once in Florence, perhaps, and once in Sansepolcro). Unlike Masaccio, he never pictured himself in the act of depicting himself. Piero's body is rather submerged in the reality of the painting. He is model and painter at the same time. The self-portraits blur the distinction between painting and reality—Piero's reality.

The site for painting

It is perhaps more common today to think about the destination of artworks than about their origins. What separates pre-modern from modern artworks is their site-specificity. Painters and sculptors know about the location of their works. And they know about their function. Altarpieces were made to clarify the dedication of an altar and to incite devotion, portraits were made to commemorate a dear one, battle scenes to document a military victory, banners to be carried around in procession, and so on. We are particularly determined to know the site and function of religious pictures. Art historians still debate whether the earliest pictures of Saint Francis were meant to be

memorial tables or altarpieces.[35] A similar debate inform later pictures, like Jan van Eyck's *Madonna with Canon van der Paele*.[36]

Without documentary evidence, it sometimes proves difficult to ascertain the function of a religious artwork, let alone its destination. The form and format of the objects themselves not always help. Take Piero's *Montefeltro Altarpiece*. The modern title of the work suggests certainty about its function as a painting that stood on an altar. The painting also looks like an altarpiece. The Virgin sits enthroned with the Christ child in her lap in the center of the composition, flanked by saints and angels. In the right foreground, Federico da Montefeltro kneels in prayer. A sixteenth-century drawing shows the painting on the high altar of the church of San Bernardino, just outside Urbino (Fig. 4.5). There you see that the picture once had a frame topped by an elaborate cornice that echoes the entablature of the real church. You also note that it has a base. But the picture could not have been made for San Bernardino, which was only built after Federico da Montefeltro's death in 1482 as a replacement of the old Montefeltro mausoleum at the same site, some ten years after Piero had begun his altarpiece. The church was not finished until 1496.[37] San Bernardino, the church's patron saint, does appear among the saints gathered around the Virgin and child, but he stand in an inconspicuous place, squeezed in between Saint John the Baptist and Saint Jerome, on the left, in an inconspicuous place. The lighting in Piero's altarpiece comes from the left, whereas the light in the actual church comes from the right, as you see in the Uffizi drawing.[38] It seems more reasonable to assume that Federico da Montefeltro commissioned the painting before he knew exactly on which altar it would be placed. This was not uncommon for artworks at the time.[39] It appears, then, that Piero's painting was made as an altarpiece with no fixed altar in mind. It is not unthinkable that it grew out of an ad hoc commission. The presence of the kneeling Federico da Montefeltro in full armor suggests that the picture was commissioned to redeem a vow Federico had made. And redemption usually had to be quick.[40] This means that Piero's picture was perhaps not commissioned for a specific site at all. For at least some time, and at least for Piero, the origins of the picture mattered more than its destination.

A similar confusion about function and destination surrounds the *Flagellation*. There is no doubt that the picture originated with Piero della Francesca, as the inscription in it makes clear, but there is no consensus about its destination or function. The architecture in the painting ties it to Urbino, as everyone since the sixteenth century has emphasized. Yet there is no trace of its exact whereabouts until the early eighteenth century, when it entered the sacristy of the Cathedral of Urbino, across from its present location inside the Palazzo Ducale. The sacristy had just been built, as part of a giant eighteenth-century campaign to restructure and redecorate the church. One of the new sacristy's purposes was to store objects that had been spread over the cathedral during the past few centuries and that had no fixed place. An elaborate piece of furniture, which no longer survives, had been commissioned to store and display these works. It was on this occasion that Piero's picture received a new frame.

It is unlikely that the painting had been commissioned for a site inside the cathedral. If it had been, it would have probably had a fixed location and would therefore not have qualified for placement inside the new sacristy, a storehouse for homeless objects. Piero's picture might have well come from another place of storage inside the church, like the old sacristy. It was not uncommon to store artworks without a fixed location inside a sacristy.[41] Most scholars assume that the picture was made for the Palazzo

Figure 4.5 Anonymous early sixteenth-century draftsman, *Interior of San Bernardino*, early sixteenth century, dimensions unknown. Florence: Galleria degli Uffizi. Artwork in the Public Domain.

Ducale, although there is no agreement about its exact destination inside the palace, let alone its function. The work was not mentioned in the 1599 inventory of the ducal collections, nor was it included in the local chronicler Bernardino Baldi's description of the palace of 1587. This perhaps suggests that the painting had already left the

Montefeltro collection by the early sixteenth century, when the Duchy of Urbino, including the Palazzo Ducale, passed into the hands of the della Rovere family.[42]

Much speculation about the original location of the *Flagellation* has to do with a lack of clarity about its function. Piero's painting measures 81 cm in width and 58 cm in height. Its oblong format places the painting outside any current category of religious pictures. It is too small to be an altarpiece. And its iconography seems to exclude that possibility, too. The scourging of Christ does not appear as the main subject of an altarpiece until the sixteenth century and Piero's composition is too unfocussed and decentralized to serve on a fifteenth-century altar.[43] The iconography of the Flagellation sometimes appears on smaller paintings for personal devotion.[44] But again, devotional panels usually have the protagonists in the center and render them at a considerable size.

The subject does appear quite often on predellas, as part of scenes of the Passion. Piero's own *Misericordia Altarpiece* has a predella panel with the flagellation, painted by Piero's pupil Giuliano Amadei. And I pointed out earlier that Piero remembered looking at Sienese predella panels when he was painting the *Flagellation*. He borrowed the asymmetrical composition from a predella panel by the workshop of Sassetta. The oblong format of Piero's painting in fact approximates a predella panel's format. And yet, there are two main reasons why Piero's picture probably never formed part of a predella. The first is that it is too large. The second is that it includes a signature. Artists rarely ever signed on a predella panel. The signature, in combination with the panel's relatively large format, therefore suggests that the panel was conceived as an independent picture. Vasari indeed wrote about Piero's activity in Urbino that he produced paintings with small figures for the court.[45] It is reasonable to assume that the *Flagellation* was one of those paintings.

The *Flagellation* sits somewhere in between the size of a predella panel and that of a *spalliera*. *Spalliere* are rather large paintings, sometimes almost 2 m long, of a horizontal format. They were installed in the wooden armature over a bench or daybed as a shoulder (*spalla*).[46] They usually had scenes from mythology or history painted on them. But there are also three surviving paintings of so-called ideal cities, one in Baltimore, one in Urbino, and one in Berlin. The Baltimore and Urbino panels have a provenance from Urbino, where they had probably been part of the furnishing of the Montefeltro palace; and the Berlin version probably comes from Urbino, too. All three panels show almost empty squares with classical buildings on either side, usually ordered according to a rigid symmetry.[47] The panel in Berlin still has part of the wooden framework that would have attached it to a bed. The other two panels show signs of trimming. It is easy to see the similarities between Piero's *Flagellation* and the ideal city panels. The ratio of height to width is almost the same, and they all show architecture painted with a rigid perspective construction. The makers of these pictures, one of them probably Fra Carnevale, were familiar with Piero's *Flagellation*, about a decade or so older than the ideal cities. And Piero seems to have inspired similar cityscapes in inlaid wood in Sansepolcro. Some late fifteenth-century choir benches from the church of San Francesco in Sansepolcro, now at the Museo Civico, contain intarsia perspective scenes in their backrest that recall the *Flagellation*. But again, the measurements of Piero's painting do not conform to the size of any known *spalliera*. It is almost half the size.

It has sometimes been suggested that Piero's *Flagellation* had also been part of a piece of furniture. But this is unlikely. The panel shows no signs of trimming, like the

spalliere paintings in Baltimore and Urbino. It is more likely that Piero's painting was a self-contained, perhaps even portable painting that was kept by the Duke of Urbino.

Tabula

The uncertainty about the function and original destination of the *Flagellation* does not suggest that the panel was a secular work of art. Its subject is Christian and therefore defines it as a religious work. The remarkable format of the picture rather suggests that we should relax our strict functional categories for religious artworks. Rather than pointing to the categories Piero's picture does not belong to, I would like to determine a more generic category of images to which it does belong: a panel painting, that is, a picture that consists of pigments applied to a piece of wood.

Piero's contemporaries would have qualified the *Flagellation* as a "*tabula*" (in Latin), "*tavola*" (in Italian), or "*quadro*" (again in Italian). These terms mark the broad category of "panel painting" (although *quadro* could also refer to a fresco or drawing). Piero's documented panel paintings are consistently described as *tavole*, or *tabulae*.[48] And Vasari called Piero's pictures for the Montefeltro court "*quadri*."[49] *Tabula* means plank or board, or an object made out of planks, including a picture. It describes the (flat) material of wood out of which a panel picture was made in order to distinguish it from statuary, murals, and paintings done on fabric. The word *quadro* means rectangle. This term only became accepted in the second half of the fifteenth century, when the rectangular format became the norm for painting on panel.[50]

By Piero's time, painting on panel was relatively new. Sculpture in marble, clay and wood, mural painting, tapestries and mosaics were much older. Painters on Italian soil only started to paint on panel in the early thirteenth century, when the oldest pictures of Saint Francis are dated. By that time, the majority of panel pictures consisted of icons imported from the Byzantine world since the seventh century. These pictures were nomadic. People knew that they had traveled from far; the distance they voyaged contributed to their enigma. People speculated about the origins of these pictures, not just about where they came from, but also how and by whom they were made. Most people believed that they had been painted by Christ's Apostles, some of whom had come to live in the Greek world. The icons were important because they carried realistic, contemporary renderings of Christ and the saints. They provided "the maximum amount of information," to quote the Dominican monk Fra Giordano (see Chapter 2). Christ and the saints "were painted exactly as they were, showing their appearance, their circumstances and the way they were." And: "The disciples made these painting as to give the clearest notice of the fact."[51] The conviction that these pictures came from the Holy Land, or were believed to have come from there, lend them authority. The pictures captured the physical appearance of Christ and the circumstances in which he lived in an incomparable way; not even books were able to offer the kind of information contained in these icons.

The mobility of Byzantine icons set them apart from most existing church art on the Italian peninsula, which mainly consisted of mosaics and richly decorated baldachins and façades. Church altars went without altarpieces until the early thirteenth century.[52] Byzantine images were relatively small because they needed to be mobile. They were usually attached to roodscreens inside the church, from which they were removed on special occasions, when they were carried around in procession. When Italian artists started to paint on panel, they domesticated the format by making

it site-specific. The earliest Italian panel pictures were altarpieces that were much larger than their Byzantine ancestors. An altarpiece was a typically Western phenomenon. Altarpieces were fixed to the altar, the imagery they carried was specific to the church whose altar they adored, and altarpieces were much more visible than the icons in Byzantine churches, which were only shown to the public on special occasions. Visibility seemed to have mattered most. Strictly speaking, an altar did not need an altarpiece at all.[53] Canon law merely prescribed relics, a cross, and candles to be placed on the altar. The altar's dedication—its titulus—could be inscribed in the stone of the altar table; you did not need a picture of the saint to clarify it, except perhaps the illiterate. Most altarpieces go far beyond merely clarifying the titulus. They added a great deal more saints than necessary. And they started to indulge in visual excess. The earliest single-panel altarpieces were soon joined by an ever-growing amount of side panels, predella panels, pictures in the pinnacles, above and under the main picture. By the late fourteenth century, the majority of high altars of churches in Siena, Florence and smaller towns like Borgo Sansepolcro were adorned by enormous polyptychs.[54] The polyptych did not grow out of a change in liturgical needs, which basically remained the same from the Trecento to the Cinquecento.[55] Its prominence was rather motivated by a certain want for large and elaborate paintings. These paintings were site-specific in a dramatic way, too heavy to be removed. They were anchored to the church floor by buttresses dropping down the sides of the altar table. They were elaborate architectural structures that copied the real architecture of the church. Their construction, with a large central panel flanked by slightly smaller side-panels, followed the plan of the church, with its nave and aisles; the shape of the panels, topped by an arched pediment, mirrored the church nave and lower aisles; the columns of the altarpiece repeated the columns separating the nave from the aisles. Within a century of its introduction to the Italian peninsula, the religious panel picture had moved from mobility to site-specificity.

Of course, not all religious artworks of the fourteenth century were altarpieces. There were, for example, banners that would be carried around on feast days. And there was a large amount of painted panels meant for personal devotion and therefore painted on a much smaller scale. Some of these were meant to travel.[56] But what is striking about these small-scale, portable works is their structural dependence on large polyptychs. Most works for personal devotion and many surviving banners adopt the tripartite division of polyptychs and, therefore, the architectural specificity of the late medieval church. For example, a late fourteenth-century work by the Sienese artist Francesco Vannuccio, that was designed for personal devotion and later turned into a processional standard, shows Christ flanked by the Virgin, Saint John, a bishop and a donor on one side, and the Virgin enthroned among saints on the other, and makes the composition of the figures follow the shape of the panel and frame, with the large Crucifixion in the center "nave" and the saints and donors in the adjacent "aisles." The format of the large polyptych proved just too dominant to escape its form, even in the case of a mobile work of art. By the late fourteenth century, most religious panel pictures produced in Italy pointed back to the shape of the altarpiece.

In the fifteenth century, the Italian altarpiece began to change. In some places, site-specific polyptychs began to be removed from the altar. In southern Tuscany, a handful of altarpieces was replaced by a ciborium for the holy sacrament.[57] The polyptych came under pressure. In 1459, Pope Pius II allowed nothing else on the altar of the Cathedral of Pienza than a cross; he considered the light that fell on the altar through

the chancel window as a new, immaterial altarpiece of sorts.[58] By the 1420s, the architect Filippo Brunelleschi had already begun to design church buildings in Florence and Pisa that did not allow altarpieces on the altar.[59] Brunelleschi's Barbadori Chapel at Santa Felicita in Florence, his Old Sacristy at San Lorenzo, the Pazzi Chapel behind Santa Maria Novella, and the tribune altars at Florence Cathedral all had altars without altarpieces. Brunelleschi's cleansing of the Renaissance altar was not exclusively informed by a new classical aesthetics, as is sometimes thought. It was, rather, informed by liturgical needs. One of the aims of Brunelleschi's unadorned altars was to allow the priest to celebrate mass *ad populum*, standing behind the altar with his face towards the congregation, "in contrast to current practice," a contemporary added when he described the celebration of mass at Brunelleschi's church of Santo Spirito in Florence.[60]

The removal of altarpieces from their altars was a retrospective gesture. The Early Christian churches had no altarpieces. And fifteenth-century people were aware of this. Leon Battista Alberti wrote in *De re aedificatoria* (1462) that Early Christians made use of a single, unadorned altar at which they celebrated mass once a day. The altar contained nothing else than a single candelabrum, a practice that Alberti recommended for the contemporary, over-decorated church.[61] Men like Alberti and Brunelleschi imagined this moment in early Christianity to largely overlap in time with the Roman antique world, from which they took so much of their architectural forms. There was very little tension in their thought between the classicism of their architecture and the kind of restorative thought of people like Piccolomini who wanted to remove the altarpiece for religious purposes. Brunelleschi's classically inspired altars, with a mensa carried by four Ionic columns like the altar in the Bardori Chapel, did not point to pagan antiquity, but to an (imagined) early-Christian past that overlapped with Roman antiquity.[62]

The makers of altarpieces quickly responded to the cleansing efforts of Brunelleschi and others, introducing a much tidier and independent picture format than the polyptych. The new type was a single, rectangular panel painting, the kind of altarpiece that art historians today call the *pala*. The development of the *pala* matters a great deal to modern art history, because it is believed to have been a step towards the modern, rectangular gallery picture.[63] It is not entirely clear where and with whom the format originated. A plan of 1434 for the rebuilding of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence is usually taken as the origins of the new format. The plan mentions that the altarpieces inside the church should consist of a "rectangular panel, without floral motifs on its frame, painted in an honorable manner" (tabula quadrata et sine civoriis, picta honorabiliter).[64]

Artists believed that the new, rectangular altarpiece revived an old, antique format. The Florentine painter Neri di Bicci consistently referred to the *pala* as "*all'antica*" to differentiate it from the richly decorated polyptychs that he also made. In 1455, he recorded "una tavola d'altare . . . quadra, al'anticha, chon predella da pie', cholonne a chanali da lato e architrave, fregia, chornicione e foglia di sopra" (an altarpiece . . . square, in the antique manner, with a predella at the bottom, fluted columns on the sides, and an architrave, a frieze, and cornice with leaves on top). In 1471, he described his own high altarpiece for San Pietro in Ruoti Valdambra near Arezzo as "una tavola d'altare fatta al'anticha, quadra" (an altarpiece made in the antique manner, square). The altarpiece, with its frame executed by Giuliano da Maiano, is still in situ. And in 1454, he logged a "tavola d'altare quadrata al'anticha" (an altarpiece squared in the antique manner).[65]

No ancient Roman panel pictures (or any painting for that matter) survived in the fifteenth century. (Ancient sources report about paintings done on wood, but so far none have been discovered.) It therefore comes as something of a surprise to modern art historians that fifteenth-century figures such as Neri di Bicci believed some of their pictures to be reviving an ancient, antique format. For that reason, it is usually assumed that Neri's use of the word "*all'antica*" refers to the new kind of frame of the Renaissance *pala*, with classicizing fluted pilasters carrying an architrave and cornice.[66] And it is certainly correct that the straight top of the *pala* could have been associated with antique architecture. The rectangular doors at the Ospedale digli Innocenti, for example, were described as *all'antica*.[67] But what also made the new altarpiece antique-looking was the rectangular format itself, and not just its frame. Filarete wrote that "doors can be quadrangular and also half-round. The ancients, however, for the most part used the rectangle, and in private buildings we never find anything but rectangular."[68]

We might think that no ancient Roman panel painting survived in Piero's day. Piero and his contemporaries believed it did, however. They were convinced that what we now call Byzantine icons were in fact antique paintings. Even the icons of relatively recent production were thought to date from the first century CE.[69] A fifteenth-century Roman cardinal called the icons in the collection of Pietro Barbo (Pope Paul II) "images of saints of ancient workmanship [*operis antiqui*] brought from Greece."[70] In the early fourteenth century, Fra Giordano had already described them as *antiche*. At first instance, the perception of Byzantine icons as antique contrasts with the declared old-fashioned style of these pictures. Ghiberti called their style the *maniera greca*, a style in painting that Giotto triumphantly replaced with realistic art. But the format of Byzantine icons perfectly conformed to what fifteenth-century people expected from the format of antique painting. Most of these icons were rectangular in shape. The earliest Italian responses to Byzantine icons still adopted the rectangular format, for instance, the Strauss Madonna in New York and the Kahn Madonna of ca. 1270 in Washington.[71] Later in the thirteenth century, Italian artists added a pediment, imitating the form of gable-shaped tabernacles housing three-dimensional Madonna statues.[72] And the added pediment would soon be integrated into the picture, of which Cimabue's *Madonna and Child* in the Uffizi is an early example. Looking back from the middle of the fifteenth century, the history of panel painting looked like a development towards an ever more complicated picture format. From that perspective, the "modern" format of the Renaissance *pala* was a revival of an old format—a format that in the fifteenth century was considered old enough to pass for an antiquity. When Neri di Bicci called the new kind of altarpiece as being in "the antique manner," he was probably thinking of the format of ancient icons.

The Renaissance *pala* not only repeated the rectangular form of the Byzantine icon; it also rehearsed its lack of site-specificity. The new format was smaller than the polyptych. It therefore was easier to move, witnessing the faith of some of the earliest Renaissance *pale*, which changed churches within decades of their making.[73] But structurally, too, the *pala* was less site-specific. Its rectangular form no longer answered to the architecture of the church. It had a separate frame, which, in most cases, was attached to the picture after the paint had dried.[74]

This inaugurated a completely new way of thinking about the design of a painting. Polyptychs had been conceived from the outside in, as it were. The architecture of the church determined the shape of the frame, which, in turn, prescribed the position of the figures—"trapped" inside the tall tapering panels and enveloped by the gold

background, which was applied before the figures were painted. The *pala*, on the other hand, was conceived from the inside out. Painting began with filling a blank, rectangular field. No frame and no architecture had imposed an order on it. The artist determined the order of the picture, and for Alberti, as I pointed out above, this meant a controlled application of circumscription and composition, in whose service perspective also stood.

The *quadro* provoked a new way of thinking about the way a picture related to its environment. No longer echoing the real architecture of the church, it was more independent, more self-contained. Rather than responding to the setting where it was placed, it carried its own environment with it. This, Leonardo da Vinci wrote towards the end of the fifteenth century, was what defined painting *as painting*. It was what set it apart from sculpture. Statues were dependent on their environment, on the amount of light that shone on them, for example, whereas a painter determined his own light source inside the painting. In the case of statuary, the environment of the workshop needed to anticipate the environment of the statue's destination; in painting's case, the environment of the workshop was carried *with the painting* to its destination.[75] This was what the new definition of painting had in common with the ancient icon. Icons borrowed their authority from the place where they were made and the authority of the person who made them. Icons absorbed their environment, the time and place of Christ's existence.

It is easy to confuse the trajectory of Italian panel painting—from simple panel paintings, to elaborate polyptychs, and back to a simple, rectangular format—as a kind of modernization process. After all, the Renaissance *pala* prefigures the modern picture. The pala is relatively mobile, site-unspecific and rectangular, like a modern piece of canvas. The words used in various European languages for wood or panel painting now simply denote Painting. The modern French *tableau* is derived from the Latin word *tabula*, but *tableau* no longer describes the quality of wood or plank denoted by its Latin root-word but all pictures, including those on canvas. And in modern Italian, the word *quadro* simply means picture, because paintings are today assumed to be rectangular. It is even possible to look at Piero's oeuvre as a slow process of emancipation and modernization.[76] Piero's first altarpieces were giant, site-specific polyptychs. The later *Montefeltro Altarpiece*, although still an altarpiece, was less certain about its destination. It therefore put more emphasis on where it came from than where it was going.

Michael Fried has done much to define what constituted a modern idea of painting. In his *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting & Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980), Fried traced back the modern idea of painting to the French *tableau*. He wrote about the *tableau* that it was marked by a sense of unprecedented internal unity, the illusion that the image existed independent of anything outside of its frame, be it architecture or spectator. This was established, Fried said, in mid-eighteenth-century French art through the notion of absorption. The term absorption described the impression that the figures in the painting are oblivious to anything outside of the picture. Their actions are motivated by a source inside the painting.[77] The primary effect of this sense of absorption was that it ignored the presence of the viewer in front of the picture. In a later book on Caravaggio, Fried pushed back this illusion of absorption to the late sixteenth century.[78]

In 1993, between the publication of Fried's work on eighteenth-century French art and his study of Caravaggio (published in 2010), Victor Stoichita published a book under the title *L'Instauration du tableau: Métapeinture à laube des temps modernes*

(The Establishment of the Tableau: Meta-Painting at the Dawn of the Modern Age) in which he argued that the modern notion of the *tableau* was first recognized and indeed thematized in sixteenth-century art from Northern Europe and Spain.[79] Stoichita framed a set of features of this "self-aware," modern picture that partly overlap with the terms set by Fried. Stoichita put emphasis on framing devices, both within the picture—door- and windowframes and fictive doors and windows—and of the picture itself—the actual frame placed around the image. The modern gallery picture was enveloped by a new kind of frame, which arbitrarily related to the picture it was framing and therefore established a certain freedom from the picture's location, a self-containment that Fried would associate with the sense of absorption in slightly later Italian pictures. An extreme consequence of freedom and absorption, Stoichita concluded, was that, in some cases, the (religious) subject of a picture would be relegated to the background. This way, modern pictures thematized their own liberation from the traditional creed of Christian images to instruct the illiterate. Slowly pushing the Christian subject out of the frame, they opened up the way to an art that took the making and status of art as its subject of representation.

Stoichita (and Fried by implication) associate the rise (or existence) of the portable, self-contained artwork with the historical moment of the Reformation, when, in the North, pictures were taken off the altar and artists started to produce easel pictures for the open market.[80] These new pictures were made with no fixed destination in mind. They were considerably more mobile than the church art they replaced.[81] Owned by private persons rather than institutions like the Church, the life of the new picture depended on the contingencies of the life of its owner, which often meant that a picture would be taken off the wall and would change possession within decades of its production, after its owner had died or gone bankrupt.

The narrative sketched by Fried and Stoichita is complicated by Piero's *Flagellation*, an Italian picture produced half a century before the Reformation. The painting fits their criteria well. Piero's picture is relatively mobile; it refuses to be pushed in a functional category of images other than "panel painting with a religious subject"; and the work asserts an arbitrary relation to its (lost) frame by introducing seemingly coincidental cut-offs. Its main subject—the flagellation of Christ—is pushed to the background, although this hardly counts as an argument for secularization. Most importantly, the painting calls attention to an extreme sense of self-containment. The figures in the painting are fully absorbed in what happens within the frame. No figure seeks contact with a person—you—in front of the picture. All of them are unaware of your presence.

To be sure, Piero was aware that he was painting in an age in which the art of painting was undergoing rapid change. The tone of the discursive passages in *De prospectiva pingendi* participates in efforts to reform painting from within. The *Flagellation* is unthinkable without the development of the Renaissance *pala*. But Piero's was not entirely an effort to make the picture modern. He was also looking back. He looked back to the time when panel painting was considerably more mobile. For us, that time was the beginning of painting on panel in Italy, say the early thirteenth century. But for Piero and his contemporaries, panel painting was antique—it was classical. The modern secularization narrative loses sight of the preoccupation in the fifteenth century with looking back. All efforts at modernization developed against the background of a revival of the past—a past better imagined than reconstructed. Piero's definition of painting is not "early-modern." It is Renaissance.

Intimacy

Imagine Piero painting the *Flagellation*. The math has been done, perhaps a plan of Pilate's court and the square has been drawn. The panel has been prepared for painting, nicely straightened and covered with a slick layer of white ground. Some of the perspective lines have been drawn with chalk and the contours of at least one figure—the extraordinary man with a turban—have been pounded onto the white ground using a pricked cartoon. The dark dots of the ground charcoal are still visible in the man's turban. The figures in the painting are small, much smaller than most of the figures Piero was used to painting. He had to move his eyes close to the picture surface. His elbow is bent and still, his shoulder frozen. The brush only follows the movements of the wrist and fingers as Piero paints eyes, mouth, hair, some capitals. His concentration becomes more intense when he is painting Pilate's chair. Make sure that its left side hides behind the pillar! And then, when he has to paint the pillar, he carefully avoids it touching the frame, which, it seems, had already been attached to the painting before Piero started to paint. The paint forms a ridge—the so-called beard—where it runs up against the place where the frame once was. Perhaps the most difficult part was painting that narrow strip between the left pillar and the frame, where Piero tells you that Pilate's court extends to the left.

Here, painting was intimate. Whatever the noise and activity in the room—a studio?—in Urbino where Piero painted his picture, work demanded a devoted relationship between the painter and his work. It demanded a certain identity between what was inside the picture and who was in front of it. The world in which Piero moved when he was making this picture looked like the world inside the picture. Imagine him passing by the architecture of the portal of San Domenico at night on his way to a tavern for dinner, walking the square in front of the Palazzo Ducale that so much resembles the paving outside Pilate's court. Imagine him thinking about a way to make the past familiar, to bring history in line with the present, to make Jerusalem look like his world.

The *Flagellation* is personal, not just because of how it depicts, but also for what it represented. For Piero, perspective was not so much a way to open the picture up to the wider world of the viewer as it was a means to establish an intimacy between himself and his work. And it was Piero's hope that viewers after him would sense that intimacy. Like the familiar "*tu*" in Piero's treatise, Piero's paintings invite you to step in the footsteps of the painter, to become him in his world for a while. Wherever or whenever you look at Piero's painting, you feel that it depicts his world—a feeling that informed the earliest reception of the picture. Piero cultivated the illusion that the painting repeats our common experience of the world, an experience that is not ordered as neatly as pictures are, with the important things in the center and depicted on a larger scale. You arrive on the scene unannounced. Nobody notices your presence. But then, on the first step of Pilate's throne, you notice a prior presence. Piero carved his letters in neat Roman capitals in stone, as if he had kneeled there by Pilate's first step. This picture is not depicting *your* experience.[82] It is depicting Piero's. It is only in the place where the picture is defined as a work with an author that something inside the picture acknowledges a person in front of it. The lettering defies the studied contingency of the picture's point of view. Fitted neatly between the column on the left and the left leg of the man with the turban, it anticipates a person in front of the picture, at any time, in any place. It is there for you.

Notes

1 Leo Steinberg, "Observations in the Cerasi Chapel," *The Art Bulletin* 41 (1959): 183–90.
2 John Shearman, *"Only Connect": Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
3 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).
4 Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 86–8.
5 Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971).
6 Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 3.
7 Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2005).
8 For instance, in his proposal for the iconographic program for the Gates of Paradise for the Florentine Baptister, the humanist Leonardo Bruni says that he likes to discuss the details of the program later with the artist; see Richard Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 372 (doc. 52).
9 For these, see Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art*, 221–50.
10 For this claim, consult Charles Hope, "Artists, Patrons and Advisors in the Italian Renaissance," in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 323–8; and Creighton Gilbert, "What Did the Renaissance Patron Buy?," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 392–450.
11 Leonardo da Vinci, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Jean-Paul Richter (New York: Phaidon, 1970), 1: 325–6 (§543).
12 Leonardo, *Literary Works*, 1: 345 (§542).
13 Alberti, *On Painting*, 56.
14 Ronald Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca* (New York: Abbeville, 1992), 33. When choosing the direction of light in their paintings, Renaissance artists usually considered the direction of light in the space for which they made their painting; see Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings," *The Art Bulletin* 27 (1945): 175–81.
15 For the dating of the altarpiece, see Millard Meiss, "Ovum Struthionis: Symbol and Allusion in Piero della Francesca's Montefeltro altarpiece," in *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, ed. Dorothy Eugenia Miner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 92–101.
16 It has sometimes been said that the painting was cropped, but this argument rests on a misinterpretation of the picture's restoration report. For a correct interpretation, see Filippo Trevisani, "Struttura e pittura: I maestri legnaiuoli grossi e Piero della Francesca per la carpenteria della pala di San Bernardino," in *La Pala di San Bernardino: Nuovi studi oltre il restauro*, ed. Emanuela Daffra and Pinin Brambilla Barcilon (Florence: Centro Di, 1997), 31–83.
17 For the inconsistencies between the direction of light in the picture and the direction of light reflected in the armor, see Martin Kemp, "New Light on Old Theories: Piero's Studies of the Transmission of Light," in *Piero della Francesca, tra arte e scienza*, ed. Marisa Dalai Emiliani (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 33–45.
18 The contemporaneity of Piero's architecture has been emphasized by Christine Smith, "Piero's Painted Architecture: Analysis of his Vocabulary', in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, 223–53. Many of the picture's architectural elements have close parallels in Alberti's Sant'Andrea in Mantua: piers (rather than columns), a domed crossing, and a coffered barrel vault before the apse. The lower parts of the walls have framed marble panels that are separated by pilasters, which, in turn, support an entablature, except in the hemicycle of the apse. The connection between Piero's picture and Alberti's church has been pointed out by Kenneth Clark, *Piero della Francecsa* (London: Phaidon, 1951), 48–9. However, Alberti died in 1472, before Piero painted the altarpiece, so the painter could not have consulted with the architect. Some of the architecture's structural elements in Piero's painting have close parallels with the Cathedral of Urbino, which was designed by Francesco di Giorgio in 1482 and partially collapsed after an earthquake in 1789. The Cathedral had nave piers with strong projecting cornices, a domed crossing, and a barrel vault before the apse.

Yet again, the date of the cathedral poses difficulties. Francesco di Giorgio only arrived in Urbino in November 1477, after the altarpiece had been commissioned from Piero, and Piero is documented in Sansepolcro between 1474 and 1478. It is also impossible that Piero based his painted architecture on the church of San Bernardino, which was only built in the 1480s. And its architecture bears little resemblance with that of the altarpiece. The Cappella del Perdone at the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino has sometimes been suggested as a source of inspiration; the Cappella cannot, however, be dated more exactly than ca. 1474–ca. 1495, hence too late to have offered a model for Piero. Others have proposed relations between the altarpiece and Bramante, who was in Urbino between 1469 and 1471; see, for instance, Eugenio Battisti, "Piero and Paccioli ad Urbino," in *Studi Bramanteschi: Atti del Congresso Internazionale* (Rome: De Luca, 1974), 267–82; and Ugolini, *La Pala dei Montefeltro: Una porta per il mausoleo dinastico di Federico* (Pesaro: Nobili, 1985). Finally, relations have been drawn with Federico's plans for a mausoleum at Palazzo Ducale, with Luciano Laurana's loggia façade for the same palace, and with the architecture of Santa Maria Nuova at Orciaro di Pesaro, perhaps built in the 1480s by Baccio Pontelli; see Ugolini, *Pala di Montefeltro*, 36–9; and Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca*, 250.

19 The carpentry of Piero's panel is typical for Urbino at the time; see Filippo Trevisani, "Struttura e pittura, 31–83.

20 Piero could not have seen the two specific examples that I cite below, but he might have seen similar Northern pictures that reflect the world in front of them. There are several post-Eyckian examples with mirrors that survive today: the Master of Flémalle's *Werl Triptych* in the Prado; Hans Memling's portrait diptych at the Art Institute in Chicago; Memling's *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych* in the Groeningemuseum, Bruges; and Petrus Christus's *Portrait of a Goldsmith* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. For the tradition of mirrors and reflective surfaces in paintings, see Jan Bialostocki, "Man and Mirror in Painting: Reality and Transcendence," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, ed. Irving Lavin (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 1: 61–72. A lost van Eyck painting of two women taking a bath that included a mirror could be found in Urbino in the fifteenth century; it was owned by Ottaviano Ubaldini della Carda, Federico's nephew and his principal counselor at court. The Italian humanist Bartolomeo Fazio had seen it around the mid-fifteenth century. Fazio was particularly captured by its mirror. He wrote that of one of the women, van Eyck had "only shown the face and breast but has then represented the hind parts of her body in a mirror painted on the wall opposite, so that you may see her back as well as her breast." "Almost nothing," Fazio reiterated, "is more wonderful in this work than the mirror painted in the picture, in which you see whatever is represented as in a real mirror." Quoted in Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 107, 166. Fazio does not say that the mirror included a reflection of the space in front of it, but, knowing van Eyck's use of the mirror, it probably did.

21 The reflection was first discovered by David G. Carter, "Reflections in the Armor in the Canon van der Paele Madonna," *The Art Bulletin* 36 (1954): 60–2.

22 Judith V. Field, "A Mathematician's Art," in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), 177–97. Its tone is comparable to the other two treatises Piero wrote, the *Trattato dell'Abaco* (*Abacus Treatise*) and the *Libellus de Quinque Corporibus Regularibus* (*Short Book on the Five Regular Bodies*).

23 Andrea Bolland, "Art and Humanism in Early Renaissance Padua: Cennini, Vergerio and Petrarch on Imitation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (1996): 469–87.

24 Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, ed. Franco Brunello (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), 5–6 (§2).

25 Cennini, *Libro*, 148–50 (§145).

26 Victor M. Schmidt, "Hypothese zu Funktion und Publikum von Cenninis *Libro dell'Arte*," in *"Fantasie und Handwerk." Cennino Cennini und die Tradition der toskanischen Malerei von Giotto bis Lorenzo Monaco*, ed. Wolf-Dietrich Löhr and Stefan Weppleman (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2008), 147–51; and Ulrich Pfisterer, "Cennino Cennini und die Idee des Kunstliebhabers," in *Grammatik der Kunstgeschichte*, ed. Hubert Locher and

Peter Schneemann (Zurich: Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstgeschichte, 2009), 95–117. There are indeed some indications that fifteenth-century laypeople were interested in the technical aspects of painting. Recipes were copied by people who were not painters. Around Cennini's time, Giovanni Alcherio started to collect recipes for painting. See Bianca Silvia Tossati Soldano, "La 'Tabula de vocabulis sinonimis et equivocis colorum,' ms. lat. 6741 della Bibliothèque Nationale di Parigi in relazione a Giovanni Alcherio," *ACME* 34 (1983): 129–87.

27 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture: The Latin Texts of* De pictura *and* De statua, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 93.

28 Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 129–35.

29 Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Renaissance* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

30 For the fifteenth-century system of patronage in the culture of poets, see the excellent work by Susanna de Beer, *The Poetics of Patronage: Poetry as Self-Advancement in Giannantonio Campano* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

31 For a social interpretation of the rise of self-portraiture, see Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

32 Kurt Steinbart, *Masaccio* (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1948), 65–6.

33 For a remarkable analysis of self-portraits in the act of portrayal, see Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 7–37.

34 For an overview and analysis, see Eugenio Battisti, *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1971), 1: 34, 460–1; 2: 105 (Figs. 2–5).

35 For the insecurity about their function, see Henk Van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces, 1215–1460: Form, Content, Function* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1984–90), 21–6; and Klaus Krüger, *Der frühe Bildkult des Franciscus in Italien: Gestalt- und Funktionswandel des Tafelbildes in 13. Und 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Manni, 1992), 69–73.

36 Douglas Brine, "Jan van Eyck, Canon Joris van der Paele, and the Art of Commemoration," *The Art Bulletin* 96 (2014): 265–87.

37 For the dating of the church, see Pasquale Rotondi, "Quando fu construita la chiesa di San Bernardino in Urbino?," *Belle arti* 1 (1948): 191–202; Howard Burns, "Progetti di Francesco di Giorgio per i conventi di San Bernardino e Santa Chiara a Urbino," in *Studi Bramanteschi: Atti del Congresso internazionale*, (s.l., 1974), 293–311; and Burns, "San Bernardino a Urbino," in *Francesco di Giorgio architetto*, ed. Fracesco Paolo Fiore and Manfredo Tafuri (Milan: Electa, 1993), 230–44. Piero's painting was documented in the eighteenth century as still standing on the main altar of the church of San Bernardino; see Luigi Lanzi, *La storia pittorica della Italia inferiore* [1792], 2nd edn. (Bassano: Remondini, 1809), 20.

Lightbown, among others, still claims that Piero painted the *Montefeltro Altarpiece* for the church of San Bernardino; see *Piero della Francesca*, 245–55. Millard Meiss with Theodore G. Jones, "Once Again Piero della Francesca's Montefeltro Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 48 (1966): 203–6, believed that Piero's painting had originally been made for the church of San Donato, which the new church of San Bernardino replaced. The painting would then naturally have passed from the old church to the new building. Donato, bishop of Arezzo, is, to be sure, not represented, but Meiss pointed out that around 1474 the church had a dual patronage. When Federico died in 1482, his body had initially been laid in state at San Donato; see James Dennistoun, *Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino* (London and New York: John Lane,1909), 1: 269nt1; Bernardino Baldi, *Della vita e de' fatti di Federigo di Montefeltro, Duca di Urbino* (Rome: Perego Salvioni, 1824), 3: 271; and Giovanni Santi, *Federigo da Montefeltro, Duca di Urbino*, ed. Heinrich Holtzinger (Stuttgart: Wilhelm Hohlhammer, 1893), 207. This must have been a temporary arrangement. By 1512. the duke's body was recorded as being in a vault at San Bernardino; see the chronicle MS. Urb. Lat. 490, cc. 138–9, in the Vatican Library; cited in Cecil H. Clough, "Piero della Francesca: Some Problems of his Art and Chronology," *Apollo* 91.2 (1970): 278–89. It is possible, however, that Piero's picture was installed on the altar of San Bernardino before the church was properly finished; for this suggestion, see Burns, "San Bernardino." If Piero's picture was made for San Donato, then it would have replaced an existing altarpiece painted by Antonio Alberti

da Ferrara in 1439. Other art historians believe that it is unlikely that Piero's altarpiece would have replaced Alberti's, which was not even four decades old by the time Piero's painting was finished. Alternative proposals include the Cappella Ducale in Urbino, which might have been located at San Francesco in Urbino, or perhaps the chapel of Santissima Concezione at the Palazzo Ducale; see, among others, John Shearman, "The Logic and Realism of Piero della Francesca," in *Festschrift Ulrich Middeldorf*, ed. Antje Kosegarten and Peter Tigler (Berlin, 1968), 1: 180–6; followed by Fert Sangiorgi, "Ipotesi sulla collocazione originaria della Pala di Brera," *Commentari* 24 (1973): 211–16. And still others located the picture in other places inside Federico's palazzo, for instance, in the Cappella del Perdone, which was built on the palace's ground floor around 1467–72, a date that would conform to the accepted dating of Piero's altarpiece; for instance, Clough, "Piero della Francesca."

38 For the incongruity between the picture's direction of lighting and that inside San Bernardino, see Field, *Piero della Francesca*, 239–42, with elaborate calculations of the angle of light in the altarpiece. Field concludes that the direction of light in the painting suggests looking in a direction between west and north-east (see her Appendix 9).

39 The large body of memorial panels that could be found in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century churches had often been made for a different purpose; see Douglas Brine, "Evidence for the Forms and Usage of Early Netherlandish Memorial Paintings," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 71 (2008): 139–68.

40 Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* (1496) is a good example of an Italian *ex voto* painting. For the culture of the *ex voto* in fifteenth-century Europe, see Hugo van der Velden, *The Donor's Image: Gerard Loyet and the Votive Portraits of Charles the Bold* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

41 The frame and panels of Piero's *Sant'Agostino Altarpiece* had been stored in the sacristy of Sant'Agostino in Sansepolcro for at least three years when Piero signed his commission on October 4, 1454; Gaetano Milanesi, "Documenti inediti dell'arte toscana dal XII al XVI secolo, raccolti e annotati," *Il Buonarroti* 2 (1885): 141. The frame and panels mentioned in Piero's contract were purchased for the Augustinians by the patron of Piero's altarpiece, Agnilo di Giovanni di Simone, in 1451; Andrea di Lorenzo (ed.), *Il politico agostiniano di Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Museo Poldi Pezzoli, 1999), CD-ROM.

42 This omission was pointed out by Carlo Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, trans. Edward Farrelly (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 115. Some art historians assume that an entry in Michel de Montaigne's sixteenth-century travel journal that mentions a picture at the Palazzo Ducale including a portrait of Oddantonio da Montefeltro refers to the *Flagellation*; Michel de Montaigne, *Journal de voyage*, ed. Fausta Garavini (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 258.

43 The only fifteenth-century exception is the *Flagellation* by Piero's pupil Luca Signorelli, painted in the 1480s and now in the Brera in Milan; for the picture, see Thom Henry, *The Life and Art of Luca Signorelli* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 47–50.

44 Here is a sampling of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century panel paintings for individual devotion that have the Flagellation as their subject: Dalmasio, *Flagellation*, ca. 1360, Seattle Art Museum, Kress Collection; Master of San Martino, *Flagellation*, ca. 1340, Doris Ulmann Galleries, Brera College, Brera, KY; anonymous Sicilian artist, *Flagellation*, late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, formerly in the Severino Spinello Collection, Florence.

45 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1966–71), 3: 258.

46 On the category of the *spalliere*, see Anne B. Barriault, *Spalliera Paintings of Renaissance Tuscany: Fables of Poets for Patrician Homes* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). It is not entirely clear whether all *spalliere* paintings were actually part of furniture. Botticelli's *Primavera* might have been hung, like a tapestry. For more examples, see Dennis Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 79–82.

47 For the pictures, see Philip Joshua Jacks, "The Renaissance Prospettiva: Perspectives of the Ideal City," in *The Cambridge Companion to Piero della Francesca*, ed. Jeryldene M. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 115–33.

48 For example, Vasari called Piero's Saint Augustine Altarpiece, now dispersed over collections in New York, London, Milan, and Lisbon, "la tavola dello altare maggiore"; Vasari,

Vite, 3: 261. The same altarpiece is termed "*tabula*" in a document of October 4, 1454, recording Piero's commission; Millard Meiss, "A Documented Altarpiece by Piero della Francesca," *The Art Bulletin* 23 (1941): 67 (Appendix 2): "tabulam ec-clesie et altaris maioris ecclesie." And the same term is used for that altarpiece in the testament of Angelo di Giovanni di Simone da San Sepolcro of August 3, 1459; James Banker, "Piero della Francesca's S. Agostino Altar-Piece: Some New Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* 129 (1987), 650 (doc. 3): "tabula altaris maioris."

49 Vasari, *Vite*, 3: 258.

50 When, on April 3, 1497, Isabella d'Este enquired with Lorenzo da Pavia about Perugino's availability to contribute a painting to her *studiolo*, she wrote about "*una quadro per el nostro studio.*" See Clifford M. Brown, with the collaboration of Anna Maria Lorenzoni, *Isabella d'Este and Lorenzo da Pavia: Documents for the History of Art and Culture in Renaissance Mantua* (Geneva: Droz, 1982), 42–3 (doc. 2). And in a letter to Perugino himself, written after he had accepted to work for her, Isabella informed the painter that "if it appears to you that there are too many figures for one painting [*per uno quadro*], it is left to you to reduce them as seems fitting." See Fiorenzo Canuti, *Il Perugino* (Siena: Editrice d'Arte "La Diana," 1931), 2: 212–13. The 1498 inventory of the Medici palace consistently labeled paintings "*quadri*," including Botticelli's *Primavera*, which is called "*uno quadro di lignamo*," a picture on wood; John Shearman, "The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici," *The Burlington Magazine* 117 (1975): 25 (no. 38).

51 Enrico Narducci, *Prediche inedite del B. Giordano Rivalto* (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1867), 170–1.

52 Sible de Blaauw, "Das Hochaltarretable in Rom bis 1500: Das Altarbild als Kategorie der litrugischen Anlage," *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 55 (1996): 83–110.

53 For doubts about the category of the altarpiece altogether, see Paul Hills, "The Renaissance Altarpiece: A Valid Category?," in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 34–48. Altarpieces were in fact never defined as a neat functional category in the period. They were neither obligatory nor necessary for the celebration of mass. See Edmund Bishop, *Liturgica Historica: Papers on the Liturgy and Religious Life of the Western Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), 31. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) proscribed the up-keep of the altar in detail, certainly codifying long-existing practice. It prescribes that the altar needed to possess a cross and two candles for the better reading of the text of the office; see Julian Gardner, "Altars, Altarpieces, and Art History: Legislation and Usage," in *Italian Altarpieces: Function and Design 1250–1550*, ed. Eve Borsook and Fiorella Superbi Giofredi (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 5–40. One of the rare sources of information on the use of altarpieces is contained in Durand's *Constitutiones et Instructiones*, which enjoyed an immense authority in Piero's Italy; see Richard Trexler, *Synodal Law in Florence and Fiesole, 1306–1518* (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1971). Durand said that for an altarpiece to be placed on an altar, the altar needed to be fixed, and preferably it needed to be made of stone. Importantly, the altar needed to contain relics; see Nicole Hermann-Mascard, *Les reliques des Saints, Formation costumière d'un droit* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1975), 147ff., 158ff.; M. Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979). Cf. Kees van der Ploeg, "How Liturgical is a Medieval Altarpiece?," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor M. Schmidt (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2003), 115. An altar needed to possess a titulus, which could be indicated either by an inscription or by an image; Michel Andrieu, *Le Pontifical romain au moyen-âge*, 3, *Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1940), 457. The titulus could be a person, a mystery (the Annunciation), or an object (the Holy Sepulcher); Michel André, *Dictionnaire de Droit Canonique,: et des sciences en connexion avec le droit canon* (Paris: Hippolyte Walzer, 1888), 7: col. 1277. Many altarpieces fulfilled their basic function of identifying the titulus with little success. You would, for instance, not immediately know that the church of San Bernardino near Urbino was entitled to that saint when you looked at the *Montefeltro Altarpiece*, where Bernardino stands in an unsuspicious place. In addition, there is quite a large body of church art that ended up in a church without having been made for it.

54 The earliest polyptychs were made by artists working on commission for Dominican and Franciscan churches in the opening years of the fourteenth century. Mendicant orders depended on alms and therefore needed large artworks that drew the attention of pilgrims and other believers expected to donate money to the order; see Joanna Canon, "Simone Martini, the Dominicans and the Early Sienese Polyptych," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982): 69–93. Polyptychs first developed in width, with separate panels joined side by side by a horizontal slat, but by the second half of the Trecento, its structure had grown enormously in height, sometimes rising about 2 m above the altar. Perhaps the rise of the polyptych prompted the broadening of altar tables in the fourteenth century; see Gardner, "Altars, Altarpieces, and Art History."

55 For artistic contracts in the period, see Hannelore Glasser, "Artists' Contracts of the Early Renaissance," PhD dissertation (Columbia University, 1965); James R. Banker, "The Program for the Sassetta Altarpiece in the Church of S. Francesco in Borgo S. Sepolcro," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 4 (1991): 11–58; Annabel Thomas, *The Painter's Practice in Renaissance Tuscany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "Clerics and Contracts: Fra Angelico, Neroccio, Ghirlandaio and Others: Legal Procedures and the Renaissance High Altarpiece in Central Italy," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 62 (1999): 190–208; and O'Malley, *Business of Art*.

56 For these, see Victor M. Schmidt, *Painted Piety: Panel Paintings for Personal Devotion in Tuscany, 1250–1400* (Florence: Centro Di, 2005).

57 See Hans Caspary, *Das Sakramentstabernakel in Italian bis zum Konzil von Trent: Gestalt, Ikonographie, und Symbolik, kultische Funktion* (Munich: Uni-Dr., 1965).

58 See Henk van Os, "Painting in a house of glass: The altarpiece of Pienza," *Simiolus* 17 (1987): 195–217.

59 For Brunelleschi's reform of the Christian altar, see Victor M. Schmidt, "Filippo Brunelleschi e il problema della tavola d'altare," *Arte Cristiana* 80 (1992): 451–61. It will become clear below that I do not fully agree with the dichotomy between "medieval" altarpiece and "modern," classical architecture that Schmidt sets up. Paatz already pointed out that Brunelleschi tried to revive the paleochristian habit of celebrating mass versus populum; Walter and Elisabeth Paatz, *Kirchen von Florenz: Ein kunstgeschichtliches Handbuch* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1940–54), 7: 178–97nt81.

60 Antonio Billi, *Il libro di Antonio Billi*, ed. Fabio Benedettucci (Rome: De Rubeis, 1991), 135–36.

61 Leon Battista Alberti, *L'architettura [De re aedificatoria]*, ed. and trans. Giovanno Orlandi, intro. and notes Paolo Portoghesi (Milan: Il polifilo, 1966), 626–29 (Book 7, Chapter 13).

62 For the classicism of Brunelleschi's altars, see R. Niccoli, "Su alcuni recenti sagge eseguiti alla brunelleschiana Cappella Barbadori in Santa Felicità," in *Atti del 1° congresso nazionale di storia dell'architettura* (Florence: Sansoni, 1938), 139–46; Gabriele Morolli, "Gli arredi del Brunelleschi," in *Brunelleschi*, ed. Morolli *et al*. (Rome: Officina Ed., 1979), 191–92.

63 The word *pala* is a modern term, as William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven, CT and London: 1993), 107, reminded us. For a recent assessment of the pala literature, see Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "Lorenzo Monaco, Filippo Lippi und Filippo Brunelleschi: Die Erfindung der Renaissance Pala," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 45 (1982): 1–30; and Gardner von Teuffel, "From Polyptych to Pala: Some Structural Considerations," in *La pittura nel XIV e XV secolo*, ed. Henk van Os and J.R.J. van Asperen de Boer (Bologna: Editrice Clueb, 1983), 323–44. For the *pala* and the modern gallery picture, see Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

64 Jeffrey Ruda, "A 1434 Building Programme for San Lorenzo in Florence," *The Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978): 358–61; and Howard Saalman, "San Lorenzo: The 1434 Chapel Project," *The Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978): 360–64.

65 Neri di Bicci, *Le Ricordanze (10 marzo 1453–24 aprile 1475)*, ed. Bruno Santi (Pisa: Marlin, 1976), 33 (no. 64), 371 (no. 696), 399 (no. 747), 14–15 (no. 28).

66 Gardner von Teuffel, "Lorenzo Monaco, Filippo Lippi und Filippo Brunelleschi."

67 Manuel Cardoso Mendes and Giovanni Dallai, "Nuove indagine sullo Spedale degli Innocenti in Firenze," *Commentari* 17 (1966): 101 (doc. XIV); and Howard Burns,

"Quattrocento Architecture and the Antique: Some Problems," in *Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 500–1500*, ed. Robert Ralph Bolgar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 283–87.

68 Antonio Averlino (Il Filarete), *Treatise on Architecture*, ed. and trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 1: 103 (Book VII, fol. 60r.).

69 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, "What Counted as an Antiquity in the Renaissance?," in *Renaissance Medievalisms*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 53–74.

70 Eugène Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes pendant le XVe et le XVIe siècle: Recueil de documents inédits tirés des archives et des bibliothèques romaines* (Paris: E. Thorin, 1878), 2: 132.

71 For the argument that these were Tuscan pictures rather than Byzantine ones imported to Italy, see Hans Belting, "The 'Byzantine Madonnas': New Facts About their Origins and Some Observations on Duccio," *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982): 7–22.

72 See Krüger, *Frühe Bildkult*, 98–99, 172.

73 To mention one example, Fra Angelico's Annalena Altarpiece, which was commissioned in the early 1430s for the Medici Chapel at San Lorenzo, was removed from that altar to the convent of the Annalena in 1452; see Hood, *Fra Angelico*, 100–07.

74 See, for example, Neri di Bicci, *Ricordanze*, 33 (no. 64), recording an agreement with Giuliano da Maiano on September 1, 1455; two days later, Giuliano delivered the frame, a "*quadro*." For this and other examples, see Gardner von Teuffel, "From Polyptych to Pala."

75 Leonardo, *Literary Works*, 1: 94 (§38).

76 Some art historians look at Piero's oeuvre as a process of modernization; consult the remarks in Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca*, 32–33; and Bertelli, *Piero della Francesca*, 30–31.

77 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting & Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 31.

78 Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

79 Victor Stoichita, *L'instauration du tableau: Métapeinture à l'aube des Temps modernes* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1993). Stoichita's book has been translated into English and published under the title *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), a title that ignores the term "*tableau*," which is central to the original French edition.

80 On the relationship between the dawn of the *tableau* and the rise of capitalism in early-modern Europe, see Hubert Damisch, "The Trickery of the Picture," in *Das Bild nach dem letzten Bild—The Picture after the Last Picture* (Vienna: Galerie Metropol im Verlag der W. König, 1991), 80.

81 Amy Powell, "Painting as Blur: Landscapes in Paintings of the Dutch Interior," *Oxford Art Journal* 33 (2010): 143–66.

82 On the idea that pictures can depict the historical experience of someone else by insisting on coincidence, see Frank R. Ankersmit, *De historische ervaring* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1993).

Conclusion

What made fifteenth-century art special, at least according to contemporary texts about art, was that it imitated reality. For mid-century writers like Lorenzo Ghiberti, the Renaissance consisted of a return to nature. This return was not considered a style. Ghiberti called it a "natural art," which he contrasted to the "Greek style" (*maniera*). But the cultural agreement that artists should exclusively imitate nature also made people aware that everyone imitated nature differently. There is something subjective about every artwork. That subjectivity eventually came to be understood in terms of personal style.

Piero's art developed against the background of this dialectics between realism and style. His interest in perspective was partly fueled by his wish to introduce a purer kind of realism, a way of imitating reality that served as an alternative to individual style. His methodical approach to painting, as it was outlined in his treatise on perspective, cultivated the illusion that the *Flagellation* depicted a scene that was not made but discovered. It looked like something you would stumble upon by coincidence. Piero's perspective did not order the world for you, as perspective did in paintings by other artists. The spurious cut-offs and the remarkable place of the painting's distance point on a bare piece of wall conveyed the impression that Piero depicted a scene that was there before the painting. This also meant that Piero's realism was precise; it is Piero's world that we see in his paintings.

The realism of Piero was a rendering of contemporary reality, even in the case of the *Flagellation*, a painting that depicted a past and distant event. Piero used portraits and contemporary clothing in the *Flagellation*. But he selected his models and the fashion he used with care. The men whose facial features he used and the clothing they and others wore were considered contemporary versions of a centuries-old culture. That culture was not specific—it wasn't Jewish or Arabic—but more generically "ancient." There is no tension in Piero's painting between the depiction of contemporary reality and the claim that the painting is also a rendering of first-century Jerusalem.

The architecture in the background makes a similar claim. It is local and recent. It consists of the elements of recent architecture in Urbino. Architecture used to be dateless and timeless, but this thinking about the temporality of building changed around the middle of the fifteenth century. The architecture in Piero's painting is emphatically of his time. And Piero's contemporaries were aware of its contemporaneity. This new architecture looked modern because it was designed in contrast to more recent building styles. It was different than Gothic architecture, and that difference registered as a proximity to antique modes of building. The most recent building styles were also imagined to be the oldest. Piero's painting is dated to a specific time and place, not

because of the style of the painting itself, but because of the style of the architecture depicted in it.

It has sometimes been said that the realism of fifteenth-century paintings was meant to better embed them in the location for which they were made. Artists were constantly anticipating the viewers of their work, and these viewers were people who knew very little about painting. The fifteenth-century practice of writing treatises on art, however, points to a wish to acquaint the public of painting with the origins of painting: The difficulties of making a picture, from the grinding of colors to the construction of perspective, and the challenge of painting without a gold background. These treatises invited the public to look back and to consider how and where a painting was made. Some of Piero's paintings reaffirm this thinking about origins. The *Flagellation* points back to the moment when it was made, when it stood at an arm-length's distance from the body of the artist. Piero's paintings are the result of an intimate relationship between an artist and his work. And it was Piero's hope that his public would experience some of that intimacy.

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