

**The Painted Image as Papal Propaganda in Pope
Boniface VIII's Struggle against Philip the Fair
and the Colonna)**

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Introduction

The career of Ambrogio "Giotto" di Bondone is shrouded in mystery. This pre-Renaissance master is credited with having revolutionized the world of art, yet few of his works can be dated with any certainty. Two works in particular - both products of a stay in Rome - have occasioned much debate. The subject of Giotto's Lateran Palace frescoes, only a fragment of which remain, has never been agreed upon absolutely (fig. 1, 2). Art historians have quibbled for decades over the placement of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* in Giotto's career (fig. 3, 4). It is traditionally dated to the 1330s or 1340s, although some art historians insist that it is the product of a young master still developing his skill and style. The various dates assigned to the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* span some forty years.

In attempting to untangle the snarled web of evidence and interpretation that has grown up around these two paintings, one must pay particular attention to the identity of the patrons. The thirteenth century was not an age of "art for art's sake." Art was commissioned with an agenda, to fulfill a specific purpose or purposes. While the ostensible reason may have been quite practical - such as the simple need to decorate a space - the ulterior motives were often political. The patrons of these two works of Giotto were Pope Boniface VIII and Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi, who, in addition to their ecclesiastical occupations, were deeply involved in European politics.

As Sarel Eimerl has noted, Boniface VIII was "not a man of endearing charm."¹ Although recent scholars, such as Robert Brentano and Brian Tierney, interpret this controversial pope's actions more objectively, Boniface VIII, bishop of the Roman See from Christmas Eve 1294 until his humiliating defeat and death on 12 October 1303, traditionally is held as one of the most notorious popes in history. He is remembered for his pomposity and his unscrupulous ambition. Not satisfied with the spiritual power afforded him as Supreme Pontiff, it is said, Boniface VIII sought temporal dominion as well. He challenged the authority of King Philip IV of France and is often denounced for having persecuted the Colonna family of Rome in a nepotistic coup d'etat. If Boniface was an unholy pontiff, he was made to seem even more so by comparison to his predecessor in office, the pious hermit-pope Celestine V (5 July - 13 December 1294). Boniface VIII, say many historians, was responsible for the decline of the medieval papacy, which had reached the acme of its strength at the commencement of his pontificate. According to Philip Schaff, Boniface "was arrogant without being strong, bold without being sagacious, high-spirited without possessing the wisdom to discern the signs of the times."² Such was the character of Boniface VIII according to most historical accounts.

Historians are not alone in their condemnation of Boniface; he also faced harsh criticism from his contemporaries.

¹ Sarel Eimerl, *The World of Giotto* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1967) 103.

² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910) 11.

The poetry of Jacopone da Todi, for example, embodied the fears of the extremist circle of Spiritual Franciscans to which he belonged. Jacopone wrote numerous censorious verses about the pope, portraying Boniface as a tyrant who used brutish force to ensure adherence to his will.³ Jacopone paints a bleak picture of the fate of Christendom under the guidance of Boniface VIII: the world can only fall into ruin with such a corrupt pontiff at its head.⁴ This group of Spirituels denounced Pope Boniface for his worldliness and mourned the loss of Celestine V, whose famous piety was more in keeping with their vision of the Church. The more radical Spirituels, such as Jacopone, even questioned the legality of Celestine's unprecedented abdication and Boniface's subsequent accession.

Withering though his verses may have been, Jacopone da Todi was neither Boniface's most prolific enemy, nor his most dangerous. Philip IV, nicknamed "the Fair" for his reputed good looks, openly challenged the universality of papal authority and would come to accuse the pope of temporal ambition, moral corruption, and ruthless disregard for the souls he shepherded. Meanwhile, the Colonna family of Rome, following the lead of the extremist Spirituels, publicly denied the legitimacy of Boniface's papacy.

It was in this political context that Boniface and Cardinal Stefaneschi commissioned the Lateran Frescoes and the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, respectively. Faced with escalating resistance to his papacy, Boniface was clearly in need of

³ See attached poem #1.

⁴ See attached poem #2.

highly-visible positive propaganda. This paper will argue that Boniface VIII - with the aid of his close associate and nephew, Cardinal Stefaneschi - fought back by means of artistic patronage; in commissioning the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* and the Lateran frescoes, Boniface and Stefaneschi both waged a vendetta of propaganda against the Colonna dissenters and advertised the legality of universal papal authority.

The Dispute with Philip IV

Boniface's quarrel with Philip the Fair began, as quarrels so often do, over the issue of taxation. England and France were at war, and wars cost money. In order to finance their aggressions, both Philip and Edward I of England made use of the notion of a "just war," for, as Tierney has noted, "it was considered proper for the clergy to contribute to the expenses" of such a cause.¹ By deeming one's aggressions a "just war," one might obtain the papal permission required to tax the clergy within one's kingdom. The need for papal approval had been established by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, but had been ignored by kings and popes alike for years.² The situation which arose in 1296 - in which two kings claimed to be fighting a "just war" against each other, and therefore levied taxes on the clergy in their respective kingdoms - gave Boniface the perfect opportunity to reassert his papal right of approval, for if Philip and Edward were fighting each other, they could not both be fighting a "just war."

This reassertion came in the form of the bull *Clericis Laicos*. Issued in February of 1296, *Clericis Laicos* demanded that kings respect the right of the pope to approve all clerical taxation. This was nothing new; it was a papal right established almost a century earlier at Lateran IV. The troublesome aspect of the bull was that it demonstrated

¹ Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300* (reprint Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 173.

² *Ibid.*

Boniface's determination to enforce his will: *Clericis Laicos* promised deposition and excommunication for any cleric paying taxes to the king with out papal approval. In other words, Boniface was demanding that the French and English clergy disobey their kings.

It should be mentioned here that there was more at stake in the dispute between Boniface and Philip than the vast egos of the two rulers. In *Clericis Laicos*, Boniface had asserted the universality of the Church. Philip the Fair had begun to dream of a "centralized nation state."³ True sovereignty, however, could not exist as long as some outside power - namely, the pope - had authority over anyone within the king's territories. Boniface, on the other hand, would insist that French clerics, although they might reside in France, must answer to the pope, not the king. Boniface believed in a Church which knew no borders within Christendom.

Philip the Fair, however, bristled at the thought of being compelled to ask permission to run his own kingdom. He had inherited the French crown at the height of its power, and found himself well positioned to challenge what he viewed as the secular interference of the pope.⁴ Thus, he banned the export of all "precious metals, precious stones, and all forms of negotiable currency."⁵ By halting the export of these goods, Philip made it impossible for Boniface to collect the taxes he himself levied on French clerics. He had turned the tables on

³ Ibid. 172.

⁴ Michael Kulikowski, class lecture, History 329, Washington and Lee University, 17 March 1999.

⁵ Tierney 174.

the pope; if Philip could not collect taxes from the French clergy, then neither could Boniface. Boniface's reply was, at first, indignation and defiance, but when he began to run out of money in February of 1297, Boniface had to start back-pedaling.⁶

Philip did not find Boniface's initial concessions sufficient and sent his chief minister, Peter Flotte, to Italy to confront the pope.⁷ By the time Flotte arrived in the summer of 1297, Boniface had more urgent problems: the Colonna family had begun to question the legality of his papacy. Such allegations, while certainly a personal affront to Boniface, seriously undermined his assertions of universal papal authority. The doubts surrounding the legality of Boniface VIII's pontificate gave Philip yet another excuse to push the envelope of national sovereignty; if Boniface was not truly the pope, then Philip was under no obligation to obey him. Moreover, as we shall soon see, the Colonna were trying to gain French sympathy for their cause. Boniface could not afford such an alliance. He realized that he would need to resolve his differences with France in order to defeat the Colonna and protect his own position. Without some agreement in place, he knew, Philip would surely lend the strength of his armies to the Colonna cause.

In July 1297, Boniface issued the bull *Etsi de Statu*, conceding that in the case of "some dangerous emergency," in which there was no time to consult the pope, the king might

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

lawfully tax the clergy.⁸ What constituted such an emergency was at the discretion of the king. It was, in other words, a complete capitulation. These concessions "culminated on 11 August with the canonization of St. Louis," Philip's grandfather.⁹ Boniface had appeased the French monarch (albeit only temporarily), but he had not forgotten the wounds Philip's stubbornness had inflicted on his pride. For now, Boniface could devote himself to solving the more pressing problem created by the Colonna: the defense of his papacy and of his honor.

⁸ Tierney 178.

⁹ T. S. R. Boase, *Boniface VIII* (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1933) 174.

Della Famiglia: Honor and Kinship in Italy

...let me say what has always seemed to me the most important thing in anyone's life. It is one thing without which no enterprise deserves praise or has real value. No authority or dignity can be maintained without it. It is the ultimate source of all the splendor our work may have, the most beautiful and shining part of our life now and our life hereafter, the most lasting and eternal part - I speak of honor. Honor remains ever the best teacher of virtue, the loyal companion of our good name, the kind sister of right conduct, and the most pious mother of calm and blessed peace.¹

These are the words of Leon Battista Alberti in his didactic *I Libri Della Famiglia*. Honor, according to Alberti, is one of three states necessary to one's happiness.² He stresses the interconnectedness of an individual's happiness and that of the individual's family. A man who leads a life of vice ensures for himself a life of sorrow - an unpleasant situation, indeed, which is only exacerbated by the sadness and dishonor he brings upon his family. But a man who achieves happiness through an honorable life "will obtain the happiness of [his] family also."³

Alberti places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of consulting the family's interests at all times. He says that wealth is one of four things "necessary to bring about and to preserve contentment in a family."⁴ And in choosing a career by which to amass this great wealth, one must again have the family welfare at heart. He instructs young men setting out to make their fortune to consider their various career options and then

¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri Della Famiglia*, trans. Renée Neu Watkins (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969) 149.

² Ibid. 138. (others are contentment and freedom from "any want")

³ Ibid. 136.

to "steer first for the one that has more honor attached to it and that is more useful to yourself and your family."⁵ As Robert Brentano has noted, "religious connections" were especially desirable, for they "enhanced respectability" and became "a sort of banner of unity" beneath which kinsmen might share both pride and familial ambition.⁶ Thus, an ecclesiastical career was both honorable and lucrative for one's family.

Alberti reveals something of the Italian notion of kinship when he exhorts his young sons, Battista and Carlo, to "remember and exalt with pride the glory which truly belongs to our family ... [and] eagerly to pursue ... the dignity, authority, fame, and glory of our house ... [and] to maintain and, when possible, to increase those virtues which we would be ashamed not to perpetuate in ourselves."⁷ Here, he betrays a sense of the collective honor shared by all of the Alberti and which all are bound by their common blood to preserve and protect. It is an honor which transcends time - stretching back as far as memory and extending into the future as far as it is guarded by its inheritors.

As Alberti's writings suggest, kinship was extremely important in fourteenth-century Italy.⁸ It was the mechanism by

⁴ Ibid. 141.

⁵ Ibid. 138. On the previous page, Alberti points out that, conveniently, a man with "numerous relatives" has an excellent chance at finding a career in which he "might do extremely well."

⁶ Robert Brentano, *Rome Before Avignon* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974) 204.

⁷ Alberti 143.

⁸ Although Alberti was writing nearly a century and a half after the events discussed in this paper, the sentiments he expresses about

which both political advancement and protection from enemies were carried out. According to Christiane Klapish-Zuber, "justice by and large remained in the hands of the offended party or victim and his family."⁹ Her description of fourteenth-century Florence is somewhat reminiscent of the vigilante justice of the legendary Old West. One's family was responsible for "seeking an equal or superior counteroffensive, negotiating adequate compensation for the damages incurred, reestablishing the honor of both parties, and restoring peace."¹⁰ Kinship groups filled the roles of police, advocate, judge, jury, executioner, and diplomat. From Dale Kent we learn that kinsmen fought together in times of adversity and moved politically according to their blood ties.¹¹ Such a situation naturally engendered "solidarity in the defense of each individual's reputation, the accumulated result of which was collective honor."¹² And kinsmen saw it as their duty to protect the honor of their consanguinity.

As kinship played such a vital role in the medieval Italian's life, it was of great importance to know who one counted among one's kin. The Church established guidelines for determining kinship, but there existed also a secular method which encompassed a wider range of kin. In practice, the

kinship and honor were demonstrably present - as we shall see - in fourteenth-century Italy.

⁹ Christiane Klapish-Zuber, "Kinship and Politics in Fourteenth-century Florence," *The Family in Italy: From Antiquity to the Present*, eds. David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 215.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dale Kent, *The Rise of the Medici: Faction in Florence, 1426-1434* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 189-197.

¹² Ibid. 208.

systems were manipulated to the advantage of the person using them, whether to claim kinship or to deny it. As Dale Kent says, to the Renaissance Italian, "the word 'family' could mean anything from his household, through his own immediate line of descent, to the entire lineage of which he was a part."¹³ The lines of kinship were blurred, and for good reason. If it was possible to claim a politically advantageous person as a relative, one did so - even if it required creative reckoning - for, as we have seen, "acknowledgment of kinship entailed obligations."¹⁴ By claiming someone as your kinsman you bound yourself to protect his honor and expected him to do the same for you.

Kinship and Roman Politics

The nobility of Rome was no exception to this kinship model.¹⁵ In Brentano's description, we see the blood-thirsty extent to which the protection of kin was taken. He describes the Roman aristocrats "in their towers 'built and fashioned amid brawls and tumult' from which they could 'hurl stones on one another with the savage rage of uncouth Lapithae.'"¹⁶ He describes these Romans, moreover, as taking pleasure in the mayhem their blood feuds created:

¹³ Ibid. 192.

¹⁴ Klapish-Zuber 209-215 for whole paragraph; p. 208 for quote.

¹⁵ As Julius Kirshner explains, "the Florentine case exemplifies general trends" in the social behavior of fourteenth-century Italians, thus what Klapish-Zuber says of Florentine families may be used as a frame of reference for discussion of contemporary Roman kinship. (Julius Kirshner, "Introduction to Part Two," *The Family in Italy: From Antiquity to the Present*, eds. David I Kertzer and Richard P. Saller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 149.

¹⁶ Brentano 173.

These noble Romans were brutal, bloody, avaricious clusters of men and women, organized in "families," bent on the destruction of their enemies, upon conquest and the acquisition of riches, and perhaps upon enjoying the pure delights of passionate disorder.¹⁷

This turbulent image of thirteenth-century Rome is a far cry indeed from the dream of Rome as the cornerstone of classical culture and the seat of good government.

Brentano goes on to explain, however, that the chaotic relations of the Roman elite were only superficial; under the surface, these nobles were much more calculating than their violent tempers might suggest. "Their acquisition of property," he says, "was ... smooth, planned, intelligent" - the coolly-enacted strategy of empire-building.¹⁸

Indeed, much of the importance of kinship seems to have revolved around land, and - more importantly - the income it created. In every source discussing thirteenth-century Italian kinship, one finds an extensive record of familial holdings. Romans, like all Italians, were busy buying land, inheriting land, acquiring land through marriage, and seeking office in strategic locations. Rome and its environs were divided into various neighborhoods or regions, each "dominated" by the various noble families of the city; it was from these lands that the great families amassed their riches.¹⁹ And no family had positioned itself better than the wealthy and well-situated Colonna, the "first family of thirteenth-century Rome."²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 202.

²⁰ Ibid. 179.

It is no secret that the Caetani family, while certainly prosperous, did not move in the same elite circles as the Colonna until one of their own, Benedetto, was elected Pope Boniface VIII. Having "attained the tiara, he was the year's great success;" the ascendancy of the Caetani was ensured.²¹ This family, until recently only marginally noble, could now join the ranks of Rome's most notable families. With a pope in the family, the Caetani had achieved the ultimate "religious connection."²² They could expect to enjoy considerable social, political, and financial gain from the professional success of their kinsman.

Boniface indeed used the power of his office to advance his family's interests. We see the new pope

promoting the bishop of Conza as a bribe or reward for his help in the extension of Caetani holdings; distorting a pious form to permit the bishop and chapter of Anagni to alienate to a Caetani; toying with the senatorial offer to a Caetani who was being kept for better office; planning perhaps a central Italian state for his nephew Pietro.²³

Such unabashed nepotism would doubtless be frowned upon today, but, as Brentano tells us, in thirteenth-century Rome, it was not only accepted, but expected. Recall Alberti's admonition to young men to choose a career which would bring both honor and wealth to the family - what career could be more honorable or more opportune for one's family than the papacy? Brentano suggests that, in this way, Boniface was, to a degree, a "tool" of the Caetani to increase their fortune and reputation.²⁴

²¹ Ibid. 169.

²² See p. 10.

²³ Brentano 160.

²⁴ Ibid. 163.

Furthermore, he notes, "almost all of [the noble Roman families] rose to power through ... a family pope, or a pope related by marriage, or a pope who made family cardinals."²⁵ Thus, the favors Boniface granted his kinsman would have come as no surprise to Rome's elite, most of whom owed their own positions of power to similar papal partiality.

Although Boniface's nepotism may have been part and parcel of Roman kinship practices, this does not mean it was appreciated by those families who were replaced by the well-connected Caetani. The Colonna, whose supremacy was now threatened, certainly did not join the Caetani in a celebration of their fortunate blood ties with the pope. Quite the contrary, the Colonna would meet the rise of these *arrivistes* nobles with a fierce resistance which would strike at the very heart of the Caetani claims.

²⁵ Ibid. 209.

The Dispute with the Colonna

The events of 3 May 1297 sparked a crisis which resulted in heated debate, slanderous decrees, excommunications, battle, bloodshed, exile, and the casting of a lingering shadow on Boniface VIII and the papacy itself. On this day, a band headed by Stefano Colonna seized the personal treasure of Boniface VIII as it was being transported from Anagni to Rome.¹ This episode brought to a head the tensions which had been mounting between the Colonna and the pope for two years.

At the commencement of his pontificate on Christmas Eve 1294, Boniface VIII enjoyed a reasonably cordial relationship with the Colonna. Indeed, the two Colonna Cardinals, Jacopo and Pietro, had cast their votes in favor of his election. What exactly caused them to change their opinion of the new pope is unclear, but the origin of the Colonna hostility towards Boniface likely lies in the pope's demonstrated ambition for the Caetani to eclipse the Colonna as the foremost family of Rome.

When Boniface assumed the papacy in 1294, the Colonna were unquestionably the "first family of ... Rome."² Boniface, as we have seen, wasted no time in trying to change that. The shamelessly nepotistic pope sought to replace the Colonna with his own family, the Caetani. This plan was enacted by Boniface, making use of his nephews, in several ways - through land purchase, through marriage, and through the assumption of secular or ecclesiastical office - but the scheme basically

¹ Boase 170, 164.

² Brentano 179.

revolved around land, and specifically the revenues it produced. The Caetani, under the guidance and protection of their papal kinsman, were busily snatching up claims to strategically placed territory. As Boniface's definitive biographer, T. S. R. Boase, has written, "the aim of Caetani expansion was to link Caserta with Rome by a line of castles along the two main routes."³ The trouble arose when Caetani ambition collided with Colonna holdings.

To the Colonna nervousness over the encroachments of the upstart Caetani, we may add Boniface's alliance with the Orsini family, the enemies of the Colonna and distant relatives of the pope. Boniface's first appointments to the curia had included two Orsini, but no Colonna.⁴ The Colonna already had two cardinals in the family - both of whom had voted to elect Boniface - but this rank was trumped by the Caetani claim: as Brentano tells us, "'My uncle is a cardinal' is the device of strength in thirteenth-century Rome; 'My uncle is the pope' is the device of victory."⁵ Thus, these appointments would have been both an affront and a clear threat to the Colonna.

It is in the context of the alliance between Boniface and the Orsini and the strategic land-lust of the Caetani that we must view the incident of the seized treasure. The Colonna were no doubt annoyed by the growing warmth between Boniface and their enemies, the Orsini. Nor could they have been pleased by the papal sponsorship of the recent real estate ventures of the Caetani. In any event, by Easter of 1295, the Colonna had begun

³ Boase 161.

⁴ Ibid. 122.

to harbor hostile feelings toward Boniface, which culminated in the theft of his treasure on 3 May 1297.

The Colonna seem to have been specifically concerned by the encircling purchases made by the pope's nephew Pietro around the Colonna town of Ninfa. The "full dominion and jurisdiction" over Ninfa had been granted to Cardinal Pietro Colonna in 1295.⁶ Boniface's pontificate, however, had allowed Pietro Caetani to purchase - among other territories - "the forest of Ninfa for 3,000 [florins]." ⁷ The Caetani were beginning to close in. The purchase of the forest of Ninfa, it would seem, was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. The papal treasure was, in fact, seized as it passed the gates of Ninfa.⁸

Even before Stefano Colonna's attack brought their animosity out into the open, the Colonna had been working secretly with Boniface's opponents. Starting in 1296, the Colonna acted as inflammatory spies for Philip IV of France, maintained furtive communication with Frederick of Sicily during his dispute with Boniface, and joined extremist Spiritual Franciscans in claiming that Boniface did not hold the papal office legitimately.⁹

⁵ Ibid. 164. Brentano, 185.

⁶ Boase 164.

⁷ Ibid. 163.

⁸ Ibid. 164. Boase further asserts that the treasure being transported to Rome was "beyond doubt" the money intended to pay for the purchase of the forest of Ninfa. It is interesting to consider, also, that the pope's sudden need for such a large sum of money (roughly 200,000 florins, Boase tells us) may have been connected to his dispute with France. The treasure was being transported in May of 1297, two months before Boniface would issue the bull *Etsi de Statu*, appeasing Philip IV and renewing the flow of French church money to Rome.

⁹ Thomas Oestreich, "Pope Boniface VIII," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913. [Online.] Available: <http://www.knight.org/advent/cathen/02662a.html> [1997].

This group of Spirituals had been a thorn in Boniface's side since the first year of his pontificate.¹⁰ Boniface was particularly vulnerable to such an attack on his papal legitimacy because his predecessor, Celestine V, had abdicated. Papal abdication was unprecedented. The pope was, after all, thought to be the spiritual descendant of St. Peter, and the legality of such an action was clearly debatable. The Colonna had introduced this question to the French, specifically to the French universities, whose specialty was legalistic debate.¹¹ The matter was subsequently argued at the University of Paris, "and, though there does not seem to have been any formal conclave or decision, general opinion was against its legality."¹²

Boniface suspected the Colonna of shady dealings.¹³ It was during the dispute over *Clericis Laicos* that Boniface had become aware of the Colonna's dangerous connections.¹⁴ The pope realized that the Colonna were in communication with his enemies; thus "the plundering of the treasure was a mere looked-for occasion" to draw the hushed controversy out into the open and punish the rebellious Colonna for their disloyalty.¹⁵

The pope's reply to the theft of his treasure was swift. The Colonna were "to appear before him in consistory [on 7 May 1297], 'to hear what it pleased him to say, and to answer what

¹⁰ Boase 167.

¹¹ Ibid. 170. Kulikowski, 22 March 1999.

¹² Boase 170.

¹³ Oestreich, see web-site.

¹⁴ Boase 165.

¹⁵ Ibid. 164.

he wished to know, whether he was pope or not.'"¹⁶ Here, Boniface seems to refer to the doubts raised by the Colonna in French minds and to the debates at the University of Paris. The Colonna armed themselves with the shaky resolution of these debates.

Boniface, however, was unimpressed by their rebuttal. He demanded the return of his treasure and the arrest of Stefano Colonna. He further asserted that their three great strongholds of Zagarolo, Palestrina, and Colonna were held illegally by the Colonna cardinals, who (Boniface claimed) had defrauded their kinsmen of these, their rightful properties. As Brentano says, the pope "wooded some Colonna to help him against others; he wanted some Colonna to look dispossessed ..., so that he might seem a Colonna protector in destroying other Colonna."¹⁷ In laying claim to these lands, Boniface not only won the loyalty of the disenfranchised Colonna, but also acquired "the necessary link to complete the Caetani chain and leave them without a rival in the Campagna."¹⁸

Ignoring the pope's mandate, the Colonna retreated to the safety of one of their castles, where they drew up the first of three documents in defiance of Boniface. The result was the Colonna's "first manifesto against the pope."¹⁹ By publicly questioning his legitimacy, they hoped to preempt the "strong action" they believed Boniface was preparing to take against

¹⁶ Ibid. 170.

¹⁷ Brentano 206.

¹⁸ Boase 171.

¹⁹ Ibid.

them.²⁰ "We do not believe that you are lawful pope," they said, demanding that Boniface's power be suspended until the matter of his legitimacy had been cleared up.²¹ Again, they based their case on the dubious results of the Paris debates. On 10 May - at the very same time Boniface was in consistory excommunicating the two rebellious Colonna cardinals and eliminating them from the college - the Colonna distributed their finished document by tacking it to the doors of various churches throughout Rome. A copy was also placed, quite pointedly, on the altar of St. Peter's Basilica.

Boniface responded to their charges by actively rallying popular support amongst the Roman people. He denounced the Colonna as dangerous traitors who had conspired with his enemies and declared himself protector of Rome and Roman interests. The Colonna by now had returned his treasure grudgingly, but staunchly refused to "surrender Stefano [Colonna] into the hands of his notorious enemy."²² In their second manifesto, issued on 16 May, the Colonna not only insistently reiterated their complaint against the pope, but also raised the stakes, inserting the "charge of '[Boniface's] entrance by *fraud* into the papacy.'"²³

Sometime in the following month the Colonna issued their third, and most scathing, manifesto against Boniface, "meant as an appeal to the opinion of Christendom."²⁴ In it, they claimed once more that Boniface's pontificate was not only illegitimate,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid. 172.

²³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

but that he had somehow fooled Celestine into abdicating the papal throne in 1294.²⁵ The Colonna further alleged that Boniface had imprisoned and then murdered the ex-pope in order to avoid discovery.²⁶ The Colonna also bemoaned the fact that - according to them - the treasure they had seized and restored "had been amassed 'from the tears of poor prelates and clerks and illicit extortions from the church.'"²⁷ Finally, they asserted that the pope's true motivation for wanting Stefano imprisoned was not to punish him for the theft of the treasure, but so that the Colonna "should confess him as true pope."²⁸ In other words, they claimed that Boniface was trying to kidnap their kinsman so that the Colonna might be forced to ransom him by confession.

As their quarrel escalated and confrontation became inevitable, both Boniface and the Colonna sent out delegates to seek aid and shore up support. The Colonna sent a copy of their third manifesto with James of Sta. Sabina to Philip IV. The

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rumors would circulate later that Boniface - by means of a speaking-tube cleverly hidden under Celestine's pillow - had visited the hermit-pope in the guise of the angel Gabriel and, thus "disguised," had counseled Celestine to resign. (Eimerl 103.)

²⁶ Seven hundred years later, Boniface still has not been cleared absolutely of Celestine's murder! Historian Philip Schaff tells us that Boniface's opponents "exhibited a nail which they declared the unscrupulous pope had ordered driven into Celestine's head." (Schaff 11.) Interestingly, a modern cleric, Rev. Quirino Salomone, believes he has proof that the hermit-pope was killed in just this manner. Apparently a CT scan performed on Celestine's skull over a decade ago revealed "a half-inch hole in the left temple." In keeping with the mystery which shrouds Celestine's death, the results of this CT scan remained unknown until Salomone discovered them in 1998. Salomone currently is writing a book in which he argues that the pope was murdered. (The Associated Press. "Thirteenth-century pope was murdered, monk says." *The Seattle Times* 21 August 1998. <http://www.seattle-times.com/news/nation-world/html98/pope_082198.html>)

²⁷ Boase 172.

²⁸ Ibid.

outcome of this meeting must forever remain a mystery, for on the way home the Colonna messenger was captured by "papal emissaries at Lyons, was imprisoned and died there, and was buried in his fetters in unconsecrated ground."²⁹ Unrelenting, the Colonna sent a second messenger, who was warmly received by the French. No definite agreement was reached, however, as the French were about to begin negotiations with Boniface.

The pope, who had been in Orvieto since June of 1297, realized that he would need to come to terms with the French in order to ward off the Colonna attack on his papal legitimacy. Boniface knew that if he did not supplicate Philip, not only would he soon be confronted by the combined forces of the Colonna and the French, but he would face further challenges to his universal authority from Philip. Thus, it will be remembered, in July of 1297, Boniface issued the bull *Etsi de Statu*, which made sweeping concessions to the French king. The Colonna delegate traveled to France only to be disappointed; Boniface's - albeit temporary - reconciliation with Philip meant that the Colonna could expect no support from the French at this time.

With the French dispute on hold, Boniface could turn his full attention to the Colonna. Between the months of June and August 1297, Boniface drafted a "pronouncement in his favor,"³⁰ which seems to be an almost direct refutation of the third Colonna manifesto. It declares that Celestine abdicated of his own free will, that Boniface's election had been canonical, and

²⁹ Ibid. 173.

³⁰ Ibid. 174.

that the Colonna cardinals had both voted for his election and recognized him as pope. Boniface adds that the Colonna were "not so much schismatics as madmen."³¹ The document was signed by all but two of the cardinals. Of the two whose signatures do not appear, one was absent and the other was either absent or abstained as "a staunch Celestinian."³² Of those who did sign, two were known critics of Boniface (both of whom were conveniently dead by the close of the year). This document and the numerous signatures upon it - especially those of his critics - demonstrate that, as of the summer of 1297 at least, Boniface's legitimacy was not yet widely questioned, "that the doubts about Celestine's renunciation were a later product after the event."³³ Apparently only the Colonna and their allies were troubled by the recent papal succession at this time.

Nonetheless, on 17 August 1297 civil war broke out in the Patrimony. From his remote court in Orvieto, Boniface threatened excommunication for anyone taking up the Colonna cause. By the time the pope returned to Rome in late November of 1297, one Colonna fortress had been taken, but the main three fortresses of Zagarolo, Palestrina, and Colonna - the three which Boniface had tried before to seize as reparation for the capture of his treasure - held fast. Finding the "temporary assistance from friendly cities" insufficient to take the well-defended castles, "on 14 December [1297] Boniface proclaimed full crusading privileges for all who took part in the war

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

against his enemies."³⁴ Boniface had, in essence, used his position as pope to draw all of Christendom into the blood feud between the Colonna and the Caetani. The Colonna had the strength of the influence of their family name; they had the strength of strategically located hilltop castles; they may even have had the strength of fighting on the side of the truth. But the Caetani had the ultimate weapon: they had a pope. Invested with the authority to grant remission of sins for participation in a Holy War and the authority to excommunicate his enemies, Boniface controlled the fate of every soul in Christendom, and the Colonna "were his heretics."³⁵ It is no surprise, then, that by July of 1298 the castle of Colonna fell.

The main focus of the fighting was now turned to Palestrina, the most important of the Colonna holdings, for it was both their headquarters and the hideout of the Franciscan dissenters. "It was a town of myth and ancient memories," famed for its antique landmarks.³⁶ Boniface was much maligned by his enemies for the utter destruction of these monuments to the classical heritage of Rome upon the taking of the city in September 1298. Indeed, "Boniface was extraordinarily violent and vile in his hate-filled effort to break [the Colonna] completely."³⁷ Contemporary accounts of the pope's having torn down the Colonna monuments and sown salt in Palestrina seem beneath the dignity of the papal office, but are reminiscent of the brutality with which Roman families settled their

³⁴ Ibid. 177.

³⁵ Brentano 181.

³⁶ Boase 179.

³⁷ Brentano 181.

grievances.³⁸ Boniface's severity, in any event, brought an end to the struggle; the Colonna surrendered.

In late September the defeated Colonna went before Boniface, hardly dreaming of mercy from their formidable and unforgiving foe. Boase paints a dramatic picture of their arrival before the pope: Boniface

received them sitting on a throne before the gates, "wearing the papal crown which none but the true pope can wear"; and there they knelt and kissed his feet, and "with contrite heart and humility of spirit" recognized him as lawful pontiff, and themselves as sinners, unworthy of grace. The sentence was given: the cardinals must renounce all their former offices, their seals were broken, and they were bade to reside in Tivoli till further order: Stefano Colonna, whose action had provoked the struggle, must make a pilgrimage to Compostela: their castles and possessions passed into the pope's hands.³⁹

The pope had succeeded in crushing the only remaining obstacle to the rise of the Caetani to predominance in the Campagna. Boniface's judgment on the Colonna was effective from the moment of its pronouncement, but it was not made official until 13 July of the following year. By this time, however, the Colonna were out of papal reach, having fled to various points throughout Italy, Sicily, and France on 3 July 1299. Nonetheless, Boniface and the Caetani were, at last, triumphant.

³⁸ Ibid. 173, 181.

³⁹ Boase 181.

Seeing is Believing: Papal Propaganda, Part I
The Stefaneschi Altarpiece

The *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* - so named for its patron, Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi - is attributed with some authority to Giotto and once held a position of honor in Old St. Peter's Basilica.¹ It is a double-sided triptych, originally housed in a gold-encrusted Gothic frame. On one side, St. Peter is enthroned in the central panel, flanked by angels, saints, and the kneeling Cardinal Stefaneschi, clad in ecclesiastical robes (fig. 3). The side panels are divided in half, each section containing an iconic figure of a saint. This side also at one time included a predella, of which only one panel remains today. The surviving panel contains three half-portraits of holy figures. On the reverse is a similar depiction of Christ enthroned in the central panel (fig. 4). The patron again kneels before the throne - this time wearing the simple clothing of a canon - accompanied by a host of angels, more numerous than those attending Peter. The side panels flanking Christ contain narrative scenes depicting the martyrdom of Rome's two patron saints. To the left is the crucifixion of St. Peter, and to the right, the beheading of St. Paul. The predella of the Christ side remains intact; it contains a depiction of the Virgin enthroned with the Christ child in her lap, flanked by two angels and a row of full-length portraits of various saints

¹ The attribution is made on the basis of a necrology which specifies the patron, the artist, and the price of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*. See Julian Gardner, *Patrons, Painters and Saints* (Brookfield, Vermont: Variorum, 1993) 57-58.

(fig. 5). This, however, is essentially the extent of agreement on the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* among art historical circles. Two issues, in particular, are much disputed: its date and its subject.

The Stefaneschi Altarpiece Relative to Giotto's Other Works

The composition of the central panels on either side immediately reminds one of Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* (fig. 6). Patterned marble decorates each throne, and the artist has employed a similar palette for all three. The thrones are Gothic in form, including delicate colonnettes and gablelike peaks at the back, embellished with finials. The structure of the steps of the *Ognissanti Madonna* also echoes that of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*. The architecture of the thrones of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, like the throne in which the Virgin of the *Ognissanti Madonna* sits, renders a clear definition of the space in which the scene takes place.

This is especially true of Christ's throne. Like the *Ognissanti* throne, it is fictively constructed with a pseudo "side wall" formed of a thin, twisting column and a gabled arch. Perpendicular to the picture plane, these three-dimensional additions to the throne recede into the background, enhancing the illusion of space. The angelic faces seen peering between the column and the backs of the thrones add to this effect, further demonstrating Giotto's mastery of artistic *legerdemain*. The figures within the thrones, too, are similar in the

weightiness of their bulky bodies and the way in which drapery stretches across their massive knees, revealing their forms.

The positioning of the figures surrounding the enthroned Christ of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* is also comparable to that of the *Ognissanti Madonna*. They are arranged in a similar pattern which envelops the throne: the figures in the foreground kneel, and those behind them rise progressively in height as they move deeper into the picture plane. The *Ognissanti Madonna*, however, employs these receding figures more effectively in the definition of space. Whereas the faces in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* are all carefully displayed, those in the *Ognissanti* are allowed to overlap. The result is that the *Ognissanti Madonna* has a more realistic appearance, as groups of figures cluster around a throne, receding naturalistically into the space it creates. The faces and shoulders of the background figures in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, on the other hand, are seen in their entirety and seem, therefore, to hover, creating a flatter space.

Thus, one can deduce that the Giotto of the *Ognissanti Madonna* is more concerned with the realistic depiction of bodies and spaces than with the visibility of all figures and is more trusting of the viewer to "fill in the blanks" than the Giotto of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*. This seems to suggest that the *Ognissanti Madonna* of c. 1310, as the product of a more confident, highly-developed master, may well have come later in Giotto's career.

Certain other figures in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* seem comparable to other known works of Giotto in their physical forms, their gestures, and their features. The figures of St. Peter and Christ enthroned, as has been said, are stock characters of the Giottesque. The two depictions of Stefaneschi, as well as the saint and angel who, respectively, complement his position in the composition, can be seen again, in somewhat altered form, in the kneeling figures of Enrico Scrovegni and the monk presenting a model of the Arena chapel in Giotto's *Last Judgment* for that same chapel (fig. 7).

The previous observations support the attribution of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* to Giotto. However, one must also deal with discrepancies in the work. The depiction of the human form is in many places inconsistent. Whereas the previously discussed figures are clearly the product of Giotto's hand, many others lack the quality of his understanding of anatomy. The faces of the iconic saints on the panels flanking St. Peter betray an awkwardness uncharacteristic of Giotto. The faces of the angels on both sides (with the exception of the one kneeling across from Stefaneschi) suggest a similar lack of skill. The iconic St. Paul assumes a pose of particularly unconvincing *contrapposto*. St. George, standing behind the kneeling Stefaneschi, is thin and spindly, unlike Giotto's characteristically brawny figures. This distinction is clearly seen in comparison to the massive figure of St. Peter beside whom he stands.

The figures in the predella panel beneath the enthroned Christ are also clearly by the hand of an assistant (fig. 5). The Virgin Mary at the center sits in a curved throne, typical of the Byzantine style of painting, and holds a seemingly weightless Christ child (fig. 8). Although the angels flanking Mary appear to be imitative of Giotto's ample forms, their disproportionately tiny hands and inexpertly painted faces point to a less practiced artist. The nimbed figure to the far right stands in an exaggerated and implausible *contrapposto*, betraying a decided awkwardness in the employment of the naturalistic Giottesque style.

The composition of the narrative side panels is Giottesque, down to the characteristic communicative glances between participants and expressive faces of on-lookers. The execution, however, is not equal to the level of skill associated with Giotto. The mysterious tree atop the hexagonal pyramid in *The Crucifixion of Peter* bends to fit within the frame, rather than allowing the frame to overlap it (fig. 9). The result is the flattening of space. Consequently, the background is brought rushing to the foreground level of the frame. The round building on the hilltop of *The Martyrdom of Paul* is also uncharacteristic of Giotto, who traditionally employs rectilinear buildings which facilitate the definition of space (fig. 10). The landscape on which the building sits, while similar to those Giotto generally creates, is smoother; it has fewer crags and sharp angles than one would expect from Giotto. It also lacks the variety of foliage typical of

Giotto's work. These differences can be seen clearly by comparison with the *Flight into Egypt* in the Arena Chapel (fig. 11). And in comparison to Giotto's depiction of the sleeping Joachim also in the Arena Chapel, the beheaded body of St. Paul reads as a shapeless blob under pink and orange draperies (fig. 12). This artist clearly does not equal Giotto in his mastery of revelation of clothed form. On the whole, the figures in these two panels are more ungainly, less sure, and painted with less skill than those definitely attributed to Giotto.

It is instructive, also, to compare the pairs of angels which hover in these two scenes, for not only do they not appear to come from the hand of Giotto, they do not even appear to come from the same hand. The two sets of angels have been painted with different techniques. The pair above Peter is confusing in their definition of space; one cannot tell if their tapering legs are intended to recede into space or are to be read as parallel to the picture plane. Their legs are also poorly defined; one cannot tell which leg is where. The angels above Paul, however, appear more imitative of Giotto's method, for their draperies seem to vanish into thin air as they approach their feet. Thus they seem, to some degree, to materialize from the golden background. Clearly, these angels were painted by two artists with differing visual conceptions of the supernatural.

It is further enlightening to compare these depictions of angels to that of Giotto in the *Crucifixion* scene of the Arena Chapel (fig. 13). Giotto's angels are proportionally small and

stubby, cherub-like. Those of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, however, have adult, human proportions. The Arena Chapel angels dart in a variety of directions, and in every case Giotto convincingly employs the technique of foreshortening. There is no variety of positioning in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*; the angels float in primarily horizontal postures, and the authors of these angels do not use foreshortening. Giotto paints the arms, faces, and chests of his angels with sharp, distinct strokes. These portions of the angels' bodies jump forth in fleshy reality. Beyond this point, however, their bodies fade through feathery lightness into nothingness. In the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, the bodies of the angels are depicted with consistent clarity. The figures then fade either suddenly (as in the Paul panel) or not at all (as in the Peter panel). In the Arena Chapel, then, Giotto displays a more highly-developed mastery of the depiction of the ethereal form.

Two important inferences can be made on the basis of these clear divergences of technique. First, the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* seems to have been a product of Giotto's early career, before his style was fully developed and perfected. This, however, is an insufficient explanation of the discrepancies of the altarpiece, for the Arena Chapel frescoes were done in the first decade of the fourteenth century - also early in his career - and clearly exhibit the level of skill which customarily is associated with Giotto. The other possible explanation is that the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* was done largely by his assistants. If coupled with the theory that this was an

early work of Giotto, a compelling argument can be made: that Giotto, as a young master, had only begun imparting his technique to his assistants. Their skill of imitation was not yet sufficiently developed to convincingly mimic that of their teacher.

This explanation naturally raises an important question: why would Giotto entrust the majority of the painting of an altarpiece destined to adorn the high altar of the most important church in Western Christendom to unskilled assistants? The only answer can be that Giotto was simultaneously occupied with an equally important commission. Giotto did, in fact receive an important commission in Rome early in his career: he was called by none other than Pope Boniface VIII to execute three monumental frescoes for the new portico of the Lateran Palace in the late 1290s.² A commission from the pope would certainly be a project of sufficient importance to hold the attention of the young master away from his work for Cardinal Stefaneschi. This evidence would tend to suggest a contemporaneous date in the late 1290s for the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*.

Having established a rough time frame for this work based primarily on formal elements, perhaps the proposed date of execution can be confirmed by examining contextual evidence.

² A later chapter will be devoted to discussion of these frescoes.

"Why decide to commission an altarpiece at all?"

As art historian Julian Gardner says, before attempting to establish a date for the work, "first the question must be posed, why decide to commission an altarpiece at all?"³ Gardner sees an event of 1284 as the motivation for the commission. In that year, he says, a chronicle reports "that the baldachin over the altar in St. Peter's had suddenly collapsed, destroying the icons standing upon it."⁴ For the next ten years, due either to papal absence from Rome or apathy toward it, "there were few funds to redecorate the Vatican."⁵ He characterizes Stefaneschi as an opportunistic young cardinal who seized upon the need to replace the lost icons with some other venerable image. For Gardner, the purpose of "the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* was [to be] a 'substitute' in the most immediate sense for the destroyed icons."⁶

Bram Kempers and Sible de Blaauw, however, clash with Gardner over the placement of the work. They quickly discredit Gardner's theory of "substitution" by pointing out that Gardner misread the chronicle. As they understand it, "the collapse ..., had apparently left the ciborium almost unscathed," and not, therefore, in need of replacement.⁷ Indeed, Kempers and de Blaauw question whether an altarpiece for the high altar of St. Peter's would have been deemed appropriate by contemporaries at

³ Gardner 64.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. 65.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bram Kempers and Sible de Blaauw, "Jacopo Stefaneschi, Patron and Liturgist: A New Hypothesis Regarding the Date, Iconography, Authorship

all. Gardner argues that the *Liber Pontificalis* establishes a clear precedent for the placement of "images" on the high altar "for centuries."⁸ Kempers and de Blaauw, on the other hand, point to many other churches in Rome - including Stefaneschi's own church of S. Giorgio in Velabro - which followed the *versus populum* arrangement of St. Peter's, but make no mention of altarpieces. They further remark upon the scarcity of canopied altars, such as the one in St. Peter's, "which had also been fitted with retables."⁹ In their opinion, the placement of an altarpiece on the high altar of St. Peter's would have been an "anomaly."

The purpose of the altarpiece, according to Kempers and de Blaauw, was to adorn the altar of Stefaneschi's funerary chapel in the nave of St. Peter's (fig. 14). The chapel, dedicated to SS. Lawrence and George, was founded in accordance with a codicil added by Stefaneschi to his will in 1329."¹⁰ The commissioning of a chapel generally entailed providing it with all the furnishings, as well. These included the altar, the altarpiece, liturgical vestments, altar cloths, and objects (such as a chalice) used in performing the Eucharist. Indeed, we find Stefaneschi doing just that. Kempers and de Blaauw tell us that in 1336, Stefaneschi was preparing to provide for his chapel, for he purchased "precious liturgical vestments" from the estate of a recently deceased cardinal.¹¹ A "modest revival"

and Function of His Altarpiece for Old St. Peter's," *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 47 (1987): 107, note 57.

⁸ Gardner 78-79.

⁹ Kempers and de Blaauw 94-95.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 89.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 90-91.

of artistic patronage in Rome, as evidenced by Cavallini's return, strengthens their argument that Giotto would have been commissioned by Stefaneschi at such a late date to decorate an altar in the abandoned papal city.¹²

There are, however, a number of problems with their proposal. First of all, the codicil makes no mention of an altarpiece.¹³ It focuses solely on the foundation of the funerary chapel and is silent regarding its decoration. Second, other traditional documentation is lacking. Typically, the act of founding a funerary chapel "comprised various steps: a last will, a codicil, a foundation act, a contract with an artist, payments made to craftsmen and sometimes an entry in a necrology."¹⁴ Both Stefaneschi's will and his codicil, initiating the foundation, survive. So, too, does the necrology, on the authority of which we can attribute the altarpiece to Giotto's hand and Stefaneschi's purse.¹⁵ None of the other documents, however, remain.¹⁶ Without the foundation act, the contract made with Giotto, and records of payments made to craftsmen, it cannot be proven absolutely that the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* was commissioned as part of the Stefaneschi funerary chapel.

¹² Ibid. 91.

¹³ Ibid. 89.

¹⁴ Ibid. 90.

¹⁵ The necrology - which credits Cardinal Stefaneschi with commissioning an altarpiece from Giotto - is given in Gardner 57-58.

¹⁶ Kempers and de Blaauw 90.

Placement of the Stefaneschi Altarpiece

Kempers and de Blaauw begin their dismantling of Gardner's theory of the location of the altarpiece with a point on which all three art historians agree, namely that "the altar block stood so near the edge of the apse platform that mass could be celebrated only from behind the altar, *versus populum*."¹⁷ The altar stood in the apse of the basilica and was not accessible from all sides, as it is today in the new St. Peter's (fig. 15). It was covered by a canopy and situated near the front edge of a platform which extended to the back of the apse, covering the enshrined remains of St. Peter below. As Kempers and de Blaauw explain, it would have been impossible for the celebrant to have performed the mass at the front of the high altar, for there was only about a meter of floor space between the front edge of the platform and the face of the altar, and this was blocked on either side by the canopy columns.¹⁸ Thus, it has been concluded by these scholars and others that the celebrant must have stood behind the altar, facing the faithful in the nave, when performing the Eucharistic ritual.

The placement of an altarpiece nearly three meters tall creates obvious impediments to an altar *versus populum* - specifically, the obstruction of the celebrant from the view of the *populum*. Gardner solves this problem simply, by pointing out the portability of "an altarpiece the size of the

¹⁷ Ibid. 93.

¹⁸ Ibid. 93.

Stefaneschi triptych."¹⁹ On the rare occasions when the high altar was used to celebrate the Eucharist, the altarpiece must have been moved out of the way, allowing the important visual communion to take place.²⁰ This was, apparently, not a new dilemma, for, as Gardner says, "the problem of celebrants facing altarpieces ... had already occupied the attention of medieval liturgists," to include Cardinal Stefaneschi.²¹ Such an ongoing debate would tend to suggest that, despite the obstruction they created, altarpieces were nonetheless being placed on *versus populum* altars. Stefaneschi's involvement in the debate only strengthens Gardner's argument.

Kempers and de Blaauw, by contrast, find it "strange to remove 'the most important panel painting in Christendom' at the very moment when the altar was fulfilling its prime function."²² They struggle with the notion that a patron would have commissioned such a momentous work from "the chief artist of the day" merely to adorn the high altar between uses and "to be removed at the most glorious moments of its existence."²³

Gardner's argument is a strong one, however, and stands up to the questioning of Kempers and de Blaauw. Particularly helpful is his allusion to Stefaneschi's own musings on the

¹⁹ Gardner 79.

²⁰ Ibid. 78, Gardner describes the use of the altarpiece as rare. Although they claim later (p. 96) that the altar "was regularly used ... as the center of public liturgy," Kempers and de Blaauw list only thirteen such regular "station masses" during the year, as well as "occasional festivals, such as the consecrations of newly-elected popes or the coronations of emperors," during which the altarpiece would need to be moved, p. 95. Gardner, 79, suggests the removal of the altarpiece.

²¹ Gardner 79.

²² Kempers and de Blaauw 93.

²³ Ibid.

subject. Furthermore, Gardner's reference to the rarity of "the use of the high altar in papal ceremonies in the later Middle Ages,"²⁴ could explain Stefaneschi's willingness to allow the altarpiece to be dislodged at these "most glorious moments." If the mass (and ceremonies on other relevant feast days) was celebrated here infrequently, the altarpiece was consequently on display for clerics and pilgrims in all its glory the majority of the time. Kempers and de Blaauw manage to raise questions regarding Gardner's hypothesis, but they do not provide any palpable evidence contrary to the possible temporary displacement of the altarpiece from the high altar.

If we suppose for a moment that the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* was, in fact, an early work of Giotto and was completed in the later years of the thirteenth century, another case can be made for its placement on the high altar of St. Peter's. The central image of the altarpiece - St. Peter enthroned - acted as a visual stand-in for the absent pontiff, whose seat was on the other side of Rome at St. John Lateran. It reminded the viewer of the divinely ordained authority which the pope inherited from St. Peter. Such a function would have been especially useful in the Jubilee year of 1300, when untold numbers of pilgrims visited the shrine of St. Peter below the high altar.²⁵ Stefaneschi certainly could not have complained that his grand commission was receiving less than due exposure.

Kempers and de Blaauw, however, disagree with the "purely devotional function of the altarpiece, for the benefit of the

²⁴ Gardner 78.

pilgrims who thronged into the basilica to venerate Peter's tomb."²⁶ They describe the pilgrim's approach: the penitent would have walked down the nave to the center of "the raised presbytery," just below the high altar, where he/she "kissed the grill" which afforded them a glimpse of the enshrined remains of St. Peter below.²⁷ (Conveniently, a coffer was also located here, to catch the monetary manifestation of the pilgrim's spiritual enthusiasm.) From this vantage point, the pilgrim might easily have viewed the altarpiece.

Their first argument against the devotional function of the altarpiece regards its size in relation to that of the basilica. To them, an altarpiece which was 2.60 m. wide by 2.70 m. tall "must have made a poor impression" framed as it was by an apse 22.34 m. in height and 17.87 m. in width.²⁸ First of all, this is a matter of opinion and not substantiated by any concrete evidence. Secondly, as the authors themselves concede, an altarpiece of such dimensions would have fit quite neatly into the allotted space.²⁹ The artist commissioned to decorate the high altar would have found himself restricted to the pre-imposed limits of the width of the altar and the height of the canopy.³⁰ Thus, any altarpiece in this location could not help

²⁵ Paul Hetherington, *Medieval Rome: A Portrait of the City and its Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 78.

²⁶ Kempers and de Blaauw 97.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. An amazing coincidence, indeed, if - as they suggest - the Stefaneschi altarpiece was intended for some other location.

³⁰ Gardner 64 also mentions this.

but be somewhat dwarfed by its surroundings.³¹ The *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, after all, was one of the largest of its day.

Kempers and de Blaauw point out, secondly, that if the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* was placed on the high altar, "the pilgrims would only see the supposedly secondary Peter side of the retable."³² If the altarpiece functioned solely as a devotional image for pilgrims venerating the relics of St. Peter, they argue, a double-sided altarpiece would be superfluous, as pilgrims would only see its front. The use of the altarpiece as a devotional image, however, does not exclude the possibility of other functions. Gardner suggests that the decoration of the rear of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* provided a "'royal' or privileged viewpoint."³³ The "large-scale" figures of the Petrine side could be seen by those approaching from the nave, while the more detailed narrative which faced the apse was reserved for the chapter of St. Peter's, seated in the choir stalls in the apse.³⁴ Gardner further supports this theory by reminding the reader of Duccio's *Maestà*, a double-sided altarpiece which functioned in just this manner in the Sienese Duomo.³⁵

Kempers and de Blaauw furthermore find the subject matter of the apse mosaic, "showing the enthroned savior flanked by the apostles SS. Peter and Paul," to be "altogether more edifying

³¹ Although, from the vantage-point of the pilgrim directly beneath the altar, it must have loomed large enough, standing at 5.20 m. from the nave floor "to its highest pinnacle." (quote and measurement from Kempers and de Blaauw 97.)

³² Ibid.

³³ Gardner 61.

³⁴ Gardner 63.

³⁵ Ibid.

for the approaching pilgrims" than that of the Petrine side of the Stefaneschi altarpiece (fig. 16).³⁶ Such an "edifying" composition, in fact, appears on the reverse of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*. As Gardner points out, to have depicted Christ enthroned, attended by the patron saints of Rome, would have been merely to repeat a theme already displayed in monumental form in the apse.³⁷ There seems little value in such a duplication.

There would, however, have been a great deal of value in the image of St. Peter enthroned. It would have been, first of all, a sort of headstone to the entombed relics of the saint below. In this capacity, it would function as an image upon which to meditate as the pilgrim approached the shrine. Second, as mentioned above, it would have underscored the notion of St. Peter as "the rock" upon which Christ's church was built. The image of Peter enthroned in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* is undeniably authoritative. He holds the keys to heaven and hell in his left hand while blessing the viewer with his right. Such an image reminds the viewer of the universal authority of the pope - Peter's spiritual descendant - over all the souls of Christendom: an appropriate image indeed for the altarpiece behind which sat the *cathedra* of St. Peter himself.

A visual reminder of the pope's Petrine descent and divinely-ordained universal authority also would have been particularly appropriate to Boniface's pontificate. Recall the struggle between Boniface and Philip IV for authority over the

³⁶ Kempers and de Blaauw 97.

French clergy. In the fixed countenance and majestic figure of St. Peter in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, we glimpse the unwavering self-assurance which is mirrored by Boniface's final words to Philip on the matter of universal papal authority: "We declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff."³⁸

In comparing the contrasting hypotheses of Julian Gardner and Kempers and de Blaauw concerning the original placement of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, one must conclude that - although they make a compelling argument - Kempers and de Blaauw do not succeed in debunking Gardner's theory beyond a reasonable doubt. If, then, it was possible that the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* originally occupied a position of greatest honor on the high altar of St. Peter's, it is no longer necessary to relocate it to the altar of Stefaneschi's funerary chapel along the nave of the basilica. And if the altarpiece was not located on this lesser altar, its placement no longer necessitates a *terminus post quem* date in the 1320s or 30s.

If the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* was commissioned neither to replace the lost icons of the damaged baldachin, nor to furnish the cardinal's funerary chapel, we are still left with the important question of its purpose. If it was, in fact, an "anomaly," as Kempers and de Blaauw suggest, one immediately

³⁷ Gardner 61.

³⁸ Tierney 189. This phrase comes from the bull *Unam Sanctam*, issued by Boniface VIII in November of 1302. This notorious document was to be the pope's final - and strongest - written assertion of the universality of papal authority.

wonders what might have caused such a breach of custom. Since the location of the altarpiece alone cannot reveal its date and function, perhaps its iconography - particularly that surrounding a key figure - can.

Iconography and purpose

The figures in the upper panels of the Petrine side are readily identifiable (fig. 3). The names of the iconic saints who flank the main panel are written in the border beneath their feet. St. Peter is easily recognized by the keys he holds. Stefaneschi, the kneeling patron who offers his commission to the first bishop of Rome, and St. George, the patron saint of Stefaneschi's titular church, are likewise understood without difficulty. The identities of the standing and kneeling figures mirroring Stefaneschi and St. George, however, baffle art historians. Kempers and de Blaauw see the identification of the figure who kneels opposite Stefaneschi as essential to dating the work. Indeed, this mysterious saint may be the key not only to the date of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, but to its purpose, as well.

The identification of this figure and of his standing companion occasions yet another debate between Gardner and Kempers and de Blaauw. Gardner argues against the earlier identification of the kneeling figure by art historian Martin Gosebruch as Pope Celestine V (fig. 17).³⁹ His main objection to such an identification is that the kneeling saint wears the

³⁹ Gardner 86.

cloak of a hermit, not the robes of a pope. Gardner interprets this figure as St. Augustine of Hippo, whose place in ecclesiastical history would explain both his garb and the book he holds, and the standing figure as Gregory the Great, who was "a powerful advocate of the Petrine supremacy" and whose writings were based largely on those of Augustine.⁴⁰

Kempers and de Blaauw, however, are not convinced by Gardner's argument and consequently revive the identification of the kneeling saint as Celestine V. They point to this figure's similarity to depictions of Celestine V in Stefaneschi's *Opus Metricum*. They also cleverly explain away the disparity between the figure's noble mitre and humble robes. Since Celestine was remembered for his eremitic piety, and not his papal prowess, it is only fitting, they say, to portray him thus. Furthermore, since Celestine abdicated the papal office, it is appropriate that he should be seen here wearing a bishop's mitre, rather than the pontifical tiara.⁴¹

It is important to recognize that the identification of this figure as Celestine goes a long way towards establishing a date for the altarpiece. The kneeling figure is nimbed, and is, therefore, a saint. Celestine V was not canonized until May 1313. Thus, if this figure is so identified, the altarpiece cannot have been executed prior to this date.⁴² Such a date would place the commission during the Avignonese papacy. This in itself is problematic, and these issues will be discussed shortly.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 87.

⁴¹ Kempers and de Blaauw 87.

Kempers and de Blaauw strengthen their argument by relating the altarpiece to Stefaneschi's literary career. He began writing in 1295 with the first volume of his *Opus Metricum*, which was devoted to the life of Celestine V. In 1298 a biography of Boniface VIII was appended to this volume. The second volume of the work was devoted to the grandiose coronation of Pope Boniface VIII, in which "Stefaneschi underlines the glorious image of the papacy as represented by Boniface VIII."⁴³ Stefaneschi added a third volume in 1313, in celebration of the canonization of Celestine V. This volume accordingly was devoted to the miracles and canonization ceremony of the new saint. Stefaneschi also finds occasion within the text to make frequent reference to the new pope, Clement V. And this was not all. Kempers and de Blaauw also tell us:

The two existing volumes were revised: new material was added and a number of corrections made. The new version reflects the drastically changed situation: Boniface VIII has been phased out while Clement V, and particularly Celestine, are in the ascendant in the *Opus Metricum*.⁴⁴

Stefaneschi was no sentimental fool. He was endowed with enough political savvy to realize that his new French superiors would not find his glorification of Boniface the least bit endearing. Thus, he made the changes necessary to gain their favor.

Kempers and de Blaauw see the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* as an extension of the cardinal's efforts to salvage his own career. If the kneeling figure is identified as the pious and humble

⁴² Gardner 86.

⁴³ Kempers and de Blaauw 84.

Celestine V, it follows that the figure standing behind him - according to Kempers and de Blaauw - must somehow represent Clement V, the French pope who added Celestine to the roll of saints. "A direct portrayal of this pope," however, "was out of the question," for Clement V was not himself a saint.⁴⁵ This technicality could be skirted, and often was, by making reference to a living pope through his papal namesake. Clement I made an appropriate addition to an altarpiece whose central image was St. Peter, for "Clement was considered the successor of Peter and ... was the first pope to champion the apostolic succession."⁴⁶ His presence in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* would also conveniently honor the reigning Pope Clement V.

There is, however, one glaring problem with the otherwise convincing hypothesis of Kempers and de Blaauw. Kempers describes Stefaneschi as "a pragmatist" who, when faced with the irksome move of the papacy to Avignon and the rise of French monarchical power over ecclesiastical affairs, made political lemonade out of the lemons he had been handed. He attempted to curry favor with the new French regime by altering and adding to his *Opus Metricum* to flatter French egos. However, if Stefaneschi was so eager to please his new French superiors, why would he commission an altarpiece to sit in a church in Rome? Such an action would undermine his obsequious literary efforts. Surely, French clergymen would be annoyed by his decoration of not only an Italian church, but that which symbolized the former Roman Papacy. Second, the commissioning of the

⁴⁴ Ibid. 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 88.

Stefaneschi Altarpiece was clearly an act of self-promotion, for the patron appears prominently on both sides of the work. If Stefaneschi was interested in propagandizing himself, why would he do so in a place where it would never be seen by those whose opinions mattered most? Pope Clement V - whom Kempers and de Blaauw argue Stefaneschi's commission honored - and the pro-French cardinals were firmly entrenched in Avignon and had no intentions of making a pilgrimage to Rome. They would never have seen the cardinal's grand commission. In short, it makes no political sense for Stefaneschi to have commissioned the altarpiece during the Avignonese period. Stefaneschi was too shrewd to make such a blunder.

One of Kempers and de Blaauw's main objections to an early date is the requisite youth of its patron. They find fault with the notion that this altarpiece could "belong to [Stefaneschi's] career in Rome," for, they argue, the young cardinal had not yet gained sufficient influence for so "prestigious" a commission as the decoration of the high altar of the most important church in Christendom.⁴⁷ They further assert that an altarpiece which includes two depictions of Stefaneschi, but none of Boniface VIII, "is contrary to all conventions in patronage of the times,"⁴⁸ for Stefaneschi was still too young and relatively unimportant for such a bold commission. Indeed, they find it "inconceivable that in the hierarchy of patronage existing around 1300 Boniface VIII should have abolished this tradition [of papal reservation of the right to decorate the high altar]

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 84-85, 87; that is, before 1306.

and have yielded to a minor cardinal-deacon the honour of occupying the very centre of this sanctuary."⁴⁹

Unless, of course, that cardinal-deacon was Boniface's nephew, for the pope was notorious - among other things - for his shameless nepotism. Jacopo Caetani Stefaneschi was, as his name would suggest, a distant nephew of Boniface VIII.⁵⁰ Furthermore, his mother, Perna, was a member of the Orsini family, whose preferential treatment by the pope, we recall, so unnerved the Colonna.⁵¹ Cardinal Stefaneschi, moreover, "maintained a consistently anti-French position" and was "early a bitter and outspoken opponent of the Colonna cardinals."⁵² He harshly denounced the Colonna treachery in his *Opus Metricum*, begun around 1296.⁵³ Cardinal Stefaneschi was defending the honor of the Caetani and their pope. Both Boniface VIII and Stefaneschi, it would seem, were making use of the system of "creative reckoning," mentioned earlier, in determining their relationship. Their actions denote a sense of obligation to each other and to their "collective honor." Stefaneschi's bond of kinship to the pope, and his demonstrated commitment to the Caetani honor, could explain Boniface's willingness to bend the rules of patronage for St. Peter's.

Despite the unrelenting contention of Kempers and de Blaauw, further physical evidence of the bond between the pope and the young cardinal exists. In their own article, Kempers

⁴⁸ Ibid. 84.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 98.

⁵⁰ Eimerl 1967) 102.

⁵¹ Gardner 67.

⁵² Ibid. 68.

⁵³ Ibid. note 64. Kempers and de Blaauw 86.

and de Blaauw tell us of the fresco commissioned by Boniface VIII in the late 1290s for the Lateran Palace, in the composition of which young, unimportant Stefaneschi is not only included, but is actually depicted *beside* the pope.⁵⁴ Such a representation is clearly indicative of a special tie between the two. This evidence of partiality, in addition to Stefaneschi's kinship to Boniface, would tend to suggest that Stefaneschi held a position of some esteem in the eyes of the pope as early as the 1290s. It does not seem at all far-fetched that Stefaneschi would be granted permission to decorate the high altar of St. Peter's at this point in his career.

If the altarpiece was commissioned before the "Babylonian Captivity," we can no longer accept Kempers and de Blaauw's identification of the two mysterious figures to the left of the enthroned St. Peter as Celestine V and Clement I. Who, then, might these figures represent? Kempers and de Blaauw, as we have seen, suggest the possibility of "a reference to [Pope Clement V] via Clement I"⁵⁵ in Giotto's composition. If a reference may be made to Clement V via his namesake, cannot a reference be made to any pope by the same technique? In their effort to prove a later date, Kempers and de Blaauw overlook an intriguing - and perhaps more plausible - possibility: that the kneeling figure may be the eighth-century St. Boniface, who in turn might represent no less a figure than Pope Boniface VIII.

⁵⁴ Kempers and de Blaauw 85.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 88.

The Two Bonifaces

Born "Winfrid," the man destined to become St. Boniface was an eighth-century churchman from Wessex, England.⁵⁶ His hagiographer, Willibald, describes the young saint as a studious and dutiful Benedictine: Winfrid was an eager scholar, a patient teacher, a hard worker, and, above all, one who had "learned to submit."⁵⁷ "In this way," says Willibald, "he was an example to all both in word, deed, faith, and purity."⁵⁸

Despite his obvious ecclesiastical acumen, Boniface was not interested in rising through the ranks of the clergy. He felt a calling to spread the Word of God to non-believers, and he placed his divine mission before personal prestige. A man of extreme humility and obedience, Boniface accepted ecclesiastical office only with reluctance, "tactfully declin[ing]" pleas made by the brothers of his monastery at Nursling and by Archbishop Willibrord of Frisia to assume office, saying that his duty as a missionary was more important.⁵⁹ In fact, he only finally accepted the title of bishop when it was thrust upon him by Pope Gregory II.

Gregory, upon hearing of Boniface's missionary deeds, called the future saint to Rome and there asked him for a verbal

⁵⁶ The analysis in this paper is based on St. Boniface as portrayed by Willibald, for this is the story which would have been known to ecclesiastics of Boniface VIII's time. The character and actions of the saint would immediately spring to their minds upon hearing the name "Boniface." The complete *Life of St. Boniface* can be found in: Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, eds., *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) 107-140. All information concerning the life of the saint comes from this source.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 113.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 114.

account of his works and his beliefs. Boniface's native language, however, was Anglo-Saxon, and although he read and wrote the ecclesiastical language of Latin well, he feared he would be unable to convey his thoughts accurately in spoken Latin. Thus he asked for (and was granted) permission to deliver his confession in written form. When the saint went humbly before Gregory II to hear the papal opinion of his confession, "Gregory quickly raised him from the ground ... [and] invited him to sit at his side."⁶⁰ The Pope was delighted with the missionary's composition and on its basis promoted the reluctant, but obedient, Boniface to the office of bishop. Only "because he dared not contradict so great a bishop of the Apostolic See, [Boniface] consented, that is, obeyed."⁶¹ Thus, on 30 November, the feast day of St. Andrew, humble Winfrid was ordained bishop and given the name of "Boniface" by Pope Gregory II.⁶²

Details in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* suggest that the enigmatic kneeling figure is, in fact, St. Boniface as portrayed by Willibald (fig. 17). As Kempers and de Blaauw point out, the figure "wears a hermit's cloak and at the same time is depicted as an ecclesiastical of high rank, recognizable by his mitre."⁶³ Kempers and de Blaauw use this observation to argue the figure's identification as the canonized Celestine V, based on the fact

⁵⁹ Ibid. 119.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 125.

⁶¹ Ibid. 125-126. Emphasis added.

⁶² The name "Boniface" means, literally, "doer of good deeds." See note 37, p. 126 of the *Life*. Although Willibald's text does not specify whether the ordaining pope was Gregory II or his successor, Gregory III, the editor's note (#37 on p. 126) dates St. Boniface's elevation to 722 or 723, placing it within the pontificate of Gregory II.

that he was "venerated more as a hermit than on account of his papal dignity and that he abdicated the papacy."⁶⁴ Yet, St. Boniface was also remembered for his accomplishments as a monk, and he placed such great value on his missionary duty that he twice refused promotion that he might continue his work. His ultimate elevation to the post of bishop, in addition to his eremitic past, would necessitate his depiction as a nimbed figure clad in hermit's robes and bishop's mitre. The large text held by the kneeling saint is also telling, for one of St. Boniface's attributes is the book.⁶⁵ Finally, St. Andrew's appearance in the side panel of the altarpiece, immediately beside the kneeling figure, is also suggestive: St. Boniface was ordained on 30 November, the feast day of St. Andrew.

While we can, of course, never know exactly why Benedetto Caetani chose the papal name of "Boniface," it is instructive to imagine what his thoughts may have been. Considering the great controversy surrounding his papal legitimacy, "Boniface" was a politically appropriate name for him to have chosen. The allusion to St. Boniface may have been a subtle effort to suggest that Celestine V somehow had a hand in, or at least consented to, Boniface VIII's elevation and that Boniface VIII, too, was merely obeying dutifully.⁶⁶ It may, therefore, be viewed as an attempt to gloss over Boniface VIII's true

⁶³ Kempers and de Blaauw 87.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Francis Mershman, "St. Boniface," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, transcribed Michael C. Tinkler, 1913. [Online.] Available: <http://www.knight.org/advent/cathen/02656a.html> [1996.]

⁶⁶ And is especially interesting considering Boniface VIII's future imprisonment of Celestine. (P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Chronicle of the*

arrogance and ambition. Recall, also, that St. Boniface was elevated on the basis of his good works, profession of faith, and merit. Thus, Benedetto Caetani may have attempted to legitimize his claim to the papacy by linking himself to the qualities and worth of office associated with the name "Boniface."

Giotto and Stefaneschi not only would have followed protocol by inserting a reference to Boniface VIII in the guise of his namesake into the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, but also would have propagated the legitimacy of the pope.⁶⁷ The appearance of St. Boniface in the altarpiece for the high altar of St. Peter's both allegorically honored the reigning Pope Boniface VIII and (more importantly) underscored the positive associations of his name, asking the viewer to see the controversial Boniface VIII as a spiritual descendant of his namesake.

Boniface VIII was a pope desperately in need of image-management, and the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, as we shall see, was an attempt to do just that. But Boniface VIII could not manage his image alone. In order to be truly convincing, the reference had to come from someone else. If a propagandizing altarpiece was to be commissioned, the approbation it contained certainly would be more persuasive coming from a source other than the subject of its praise.

Enter Jacopo Stefaneschi, who had good reason to defend the honor of his benefactor. As kinsmen, an affront to Boniface

Popes: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Papacy from St. Peter to the Present (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997) 124.)

was an affront to Stefaneschi, and Stefaneschi was obliged by his consanguinity to aid in his uncle's defense. After all, Uncle Boniface had done Stefaneschi the great favor of ordaining him and appears to have granted him the considerable privilege of a commission for the high altar of St. Peter's. (Not to mention the fact that, as the pope's nephew, the success of Stefaneschi's future was dependent upon Boniface VIII's good name.) As a man of the cloth, Stefaneschi could hardly hurl stones from a tower on his uncle's behalf. Thus, he defended the family honor against the Colonna allegations as only a wealthy Cardinal could - he waged a vendetta of propaganda.

The altarpiece appears to contain a reference to St. Boniface's elevation to bishop, which, as has been discussed, allusively underscores the legitimacy of Boniface VIII's position. The kneeling figure which has here been identified as St. Boniface offers a book to the enthroned Peter, an extremely significant element in the legend of the English cleric. St. Boniface parallels Stefaneschi, who kneels opposite him, holding a model of the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*. In depicting the miniature altarpiece offered by Stefaneschi, the artist denotes the sanctity of the object by covering the donor's hands with a cloth; it is too holy to be touched by mere human hands (fig. 18). Given this artistic device, one would expect any and all holy offerings to be similarly draped. However, the book offered by St. Boniface is not covered, as the figure's fingers clearly curl around the manuscript. This would suggest that the

⁶⁷ As Kempers and de Blaauw say: "a direct portrayal of [a living] pope was out of the question, because he himself did not belong to the host

text he holds is not a truly sacred object. What could the significance of such an offering possibly be?

The story of St. Boniface's elevation to the office of bishop suggests an interpretation. Boniface gave Pope Gregory his written confession, which so moved the pope that he invited Boniface to "sit at his side" and join the ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It is this scene to which Boniface's offering in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* may refer. Boniface appears to be depicted both offering the confession which resulted in his elevation and appearing at the side of the pontiff, represented by Peter. Through this composition, the virtues of humility and obedience associated with his papal name could be attributed once more to Boniface VIII, and his succession to the papacy made to appear to be both the will of his predecessor and based on his merits as a man of high standing.

It follows that the standing figure behind St. Boniface can be identified as the canonized Pope Gregory II, the pontiff responsible for Boniface's elevation.⁶⁸ As Kempers and de Blaauw

of saints" (p. 88).

⁶⁸ Gardner's identification of this figure as Gregory the Great is also compelling. Like St. Boniface, Pope Gregory I, or "Gregory the Great," accepted his ecclesiastical office with modesty and "initial reluctance." And like Pope Boniface VIII, Gregory butted heads with a temporal ruler (the Emperor Maurice) over papal involvement in secular affairs. (Maxwell-Stuart 48-49) Gregory the Great is remembered, also, for his redefinition of the authority of the Roman See. (See Graham Nicholson. (1998, March). "The Understanding of Papal Supremacy as revealed in the Letters of Pope Gregory the Great." Access: *History* [Online]. 1.2. Available: (http://www.uq.edu.au/access_history/One/gregory.html) [1999, 1 March].) His extensive writings betray his belief that, as the successor of St. Peter, the pope is the supreme spiritual authority on earth; it was an authority which "extended" not only over the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but "over kings and even over Emperors." (See also Nicholson. Boniface VIII would remind Philip IV of just this fact in the coming years with the bulls *Ausculata Fili* and

note, this figure probably was "included not only for compositional, but also for iconographic symmetry."⁶⁹ Exact iconographic symmetry was impossible, but it comes close. St. George (behind Stefaneschi) was the patron saint of Stefaneschi's titular church of San Giorgio in Velabro. But St. Boniface was ordained bishop without a see, so an exact mirror of this relationship was out of the question: without a titular church, he could have no titular patron saint to which to refer. Let us assume, then, that the iconographic symmetry was based on the relationship between St. Boniface and Gregory II. Their connection, as we have seen, was that Gregory ordained St. Boniface bishop. An exact reflection of this relationship was likewise impossible. The pope responsible for Stefaneschi's elevation was Boniface VIII. But he is already represented in the person of St. Boniface. Thus, Giotto had to create the symmetry through a clever and indirect reference. The artist may be referring to Stefaneschi's ordination with the figure of George, whose status as titular patron saint recalls Stefaneschi's ordination, thereby creating an implied symmetry.

The gestures of SS. George, Gregory, Boniface, and Cardinal Stefaneschi, furthermore, complete the reference made in this panel. St. George has his right hand on Stefaneschi's shoulder and with the left gestures towards St. Peter, as if presenting this humble patron for the saint's approval. St. Gregory, on the other hand, appears to hold a book under his left arm (perhaps another reference to Boniface's confession and

the notorious *Unam Sanctam*.) Such a reference in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* would certainly have been timely.

subsequent elevation)⁷⁰ and gestures over the kneeling Boniface's head in blessing, as if conferring something upon him. The language of gesture is here employed to underscore the narrative. The significance of Gregory's gesture is reinforced by his gaze: although he gestures towards Boniface, he looks at Peter. His elevation, then, comes not just from Pope Gregory II, but from divine ordinance. Just as St. Boniface is intended to make the viewer think of Boniface VIII, the figure of Gregory II asks to be compared to Celestine V. Thus, we see not only Gregory II conferring the dignity of ecclesiastical office upon St. Boniface, but Celestine V condoning the elevation of Boniface VIII to the papacy.

If this hypothesis is correct, the artist has created a spiritual lineage which can be traced from Peter to Gregory to St. Boniface, and allegorically from Peter to Celestine to Boniface VIII. This is the final piece of the propagandistic puzzle for Boniface VIII's legitimacy, arguing that his right to the papacy comes not just from the College of Cardinals and the consent of Celestine V, but from the Supreme Pontiff, Peter, himself. And it was located - symbolically, no doubt - on the very altar upon which the Colonna had placed their first manifesto against Boniface's legitimacy.

⁶⁹ Kempers and de Blaauw 88.

⁷⁰ Or a reference to the writings of Gregory the Great, if Gardner's hypothesis is correct.

Seeing is Believing: Papal Propaganda, Part II
The Lateran Frescoes

The summer of 1297 was a busy one for Pope Boniface VIII. The diplomatic crisis with France resulted in embarrassing concessions made to Philip IV in July, and the pope's domestic problems with the Colonna erupted into armed conflict in August. Sometime during this turbulent year, Boniface also embarked on a building project. He commissioned a new portico, the *pulpitum Bonifacii*, for the Lateran Palace. Giotto subsequently was commissioned, as we have seen, to decorate Boniface's addition with three large frescoes, two of which were lost completely in 1586, when the portico was torn down. These depicted the baptism of Constantine and the foundation of the Lateran basilica, respectively.¹ Ironically, it is the subject matter of the fresco that remains - at least in part - which is a mystery.

Only a fragment of this third of Giotto's Lateran frescoes withstood the fickle artistic predilection of popes (fig. 1). Thanks to a watercolor copy, however, we can recreate the composition of the original (fig.2). The rectangular picture plane is dominated by an architectural form which "[divides the composition] into two zones."² The building depicted here is, in fact, the very portico on which Giotto's frescoes were

¹ Francesca Flores D'Arcais, *Giotto*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995) 110. The author recounts both the controversy regarding Giotto's authorship of the frescoes and the general scholarly agreement on this attribution following the fresco's restoration in 1952, when "the splendor of its colors and the classical severity of its composition" were revealed.

² *Ibid.*

executed, and the roof of the portico forms the dividing line between the two zones. The rectilinear structure of the portico appears to have been rendered in the "precise perspective" typical of Giottesque architectural representation.³ In the upper zone, the pope stands with three other ecclesiastical figures beneath an ornate canopy.⁴ On the balcony of the Lateran Palace, to either side of the canopy, are carefully ordered rows of "church dignitaries."⁵ The canopied projection is supported in the lower zone by three classical columns. The wall of the portico is pierced by three doors, formed of rounded Roman arches. A throng of people has gathered before the portico, on foot and on horseback, to hear the pope; they are depicted in a manner typical of Giotto, manifesting their psychology through various postures and facial expressions. There can be no question as to the identification of the pope in this fresco: the Caetani coat of arms is emblazoned across the portico and the balcony on which the churchmen stand, alternating with symbols of the papacy, such as the keys of St. Peter and the parasol.

In 1881, the fresco was identified as *Boniface VIII Proclaiming the Jubilee*, and this identification has been generally accepted by subsequent art historians.⁶ Accordingly, the fresco cycle has been dated to c. 1300, the year of the

³ Ibid. 112.

⁴ According to the watercolor copy, only two figures keep the pope company beneath the canopy, however, in the fragment of the original, a third figure is discerned to the far right, between the columns.

⁵ D'Arcais 112.

⁶ Ibid. 110.

Jubilee. Recently, however, the traditional subject and date of the frescoes has been challenged.

The Lateran Frescoes as Defense of Boniface's Legitimacy

Art historian Silvia Maddalo has two primary objections to the identification of this scene as the proclamation of the Jubilee. First, the Jubilee appears to have been sanctioned only belatedly. The bull which made it official was not promulgated until 22 February 1300, though pilgrims had flocked to Rome as early as 1299.⁷ Due to the apparent haste with which the Jubilee was called, Maddalo argues that there was not enough time for the pope to have commissioned, and Giotto to have executed, a fresco cycle for the pilgrims to see.⁸ The one weakness of this argument is that a fresco of Boniface proclaiming the Jubilee does not presuppose that the fresco must have been completed in time for the actual Jubilee.⁹ A fresco of this subject could just as easily have been commissioned after the fact, in recognition and celebration of the remarkable success of Boniface's Jubilee. Such a scenario is, perhaps, more plausible. A fresco cycle - especially when executed by an artist as popular as Giotto - was expensive. It would have been foolish of Boniface to have made such an investment to commemorate his pioneering Jubilee before he knew it would prove so very popular. And Boniface was no fool.

⁷ Hetherington 78.

⁸ Silvia Maddalo, "Bonifacio VIII e Jacopo Stefaneschi: Ipotesi di Lettura dell'Affresco della Loggia Lateranese," *Studi Romani: Rivista Trimestrale dell'Istituto di Studi Romani* 31 (1983): 133.

Maddalo bases her argument, secondly, on the specified pilgrimage routes of the Jubilee. Pilgrims were required to visit certain holy sites throughout Rome, but the Lateran Palace was not one of them.¹⁰ She alleges that it would make no sense for Boniface to lavish money on artistic commissions - even for the papal palace - which fell outside of the pilgrimage route. However, the Lateran Palace, even if not a pilgrimage site, would have been a prime tourist attraction. In addition to housing the Holy See, the Lateran Palace was only feet away from the *Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius*, which was thought throughout the Middle Ages to be a statue of the great Constantine (fig. 19).¹¹ Thus, the Lateran Palace, and any frescoes which may have adorned it, certainly would have been viewed by the hordes of Jubilee pilgrims.

Despite the debatable nature of her objections to the identification of this fresco as *Boniface VIII Proclaiming the Jubilee*, Maddalo's alternative hypothesis is particularly intriguing. Her identification of the figures beneath the papal canopy is essential to her argument (fig. 1). To the right of the pope, according to Maddalo, is Matteo Rosso Orsini, a respected churchman who was instrumental in both Celestine's decision to abdicate and Boniface's subsequent elevation to the papal office. He is, literally, the pope's right-hand man.¹² Maddalo identifies the figure to the left of Boniface as the

⁹ Although it does seem unlikely that the walls of the portico would have been left to stand bare for the three years between the structure's completion in 1297 and the Jubilee in 1300.

¹⁰ Maddalo 136.

¹¹ Hetherington 34, 44.

¹² Maddalo 144, 147.

young Cardinal Stefaneschi, who holds a document of some sort. Finally, the barely-visible figure seen in profile at the far right is identified as Celestine V.

In his unadorned hermit's robes and bare head, Celestine, she argues, is giving up the papal office and passing it to his successor, Boniface.¹³ On the basis of these identifications, Maddalo asserts that the scene depicts the coronation of Boniface VIII on 23 January 1295, for this was the moment when the transfer of power from Celestine to Boniface at last was made official.¹⁴ Giotto appears to have taken great care to paint the features of Celestine into a pleasant expression. His wrinkled cheeks creased by a faint smile, this lately-abdicated pontiff seems to be registering his consent to and approval of the elevation of Boniface VIII. Moreover, this figure's depiction at the periphery of the papal canopy is no accident; Celestine literally has stepped aside to make way for the new pope. On the basis of this reading, Maddalo believes that the pope's dispute with the Colonna over the legality of papal abdication was the motivating factor behind the iconographic program of this fresco.¹⁵

The hypothesis worked out by Maddalo certainly conforms to contemporary events. Stefaneschi's appearance in the fresco supports her identification of the scene as Boniface's coronation, for Stefaneschi, you will recall, composed a detailed account of this elaborate ceremony in his *Opus Metricum*. Second, the Lateran portico was completed in 1297.

¹³ Ibid. 145-146.

¹⁴ Ibid. 141-142.

Thus, the frescoes which adorned it would have been commissioned, it seems likely, on the heels of the Colonna manifestos against Boniface.¹⁶ The image of Boniface receiving his office from Celestine looks, as Maddalo observes, to be a direct refutation of the Colonna allegations. The Lateran frescoes, then, may have functioned in much the same way as the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*. Indeed, Maddalo tells us that the young cardinal was an active participant in the design of the iconographic program of the fresco cycle.¹⁷ She believes that the frescoes and the altarpiece for St. Peter's were part of the same propagandistic program.

Maddalo's theory that the Lateran frescoes were commissioned primarily as anti-Colonna propaganda must be accepted with caution, for, however compelling, it is based on only a small portion of the entire composition. What of the two groups of churchmen which flank the papal canopy? What of the crowd gathered below? What of the *Baptism of Constantine* and the *Foundation of the Lateran Basilica*? Surely these images were not included as a mere backdrop to the true message of the fresco cycle. Maddalo alludes to a more comprehensive iconographic program promoting papal supremacy as established by the Donation of Constantine, but fails to give this possibility due weight in her overall thesis.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid. 147.

¹⁶ These were issued, it will be remembered, in May and June of 1297.

¹⁷ Maddalo 144.

¹⁸ Ibid. 139.

The Lateran Frescoes as Defense of Papal Supremacy

The Donation of Constantine was an eighth-century forgery based on a fifth-century legend.¹⁹ Upon being baptized by Pope Silvester, so the story goes, Constantine was miraculously cured of leprosy. In return, the grateful emperor was said to have "relinquished his rule over Rome to the pope."²⁰ Sometime in the latter half of the eighth century, this legend was transformed by "some enterprising cleric of the Roman curia" into the fraudulent document known as the Donation of Constantine.²¹ The result of the cleric's imposture was "taken to be a grant from the emperor ... of imperial power, the Lateran Palace and rule over Rome, Italy and the Western world" to Silvester and his successors.²² Until the fifteenth century, when the fraudulence of the Donation of Constantine was proved, popes were "entirely convinced of their right to rule Rome" on the basis of what they believed to be a perfectly legitimate document.²³

The subjects of the two lost Lateran frescoes strongly suggest an allusion to the Donation of Constantine. The *Baptism of Constantine* referred to the miracle which had inspired the generous gift of the first Christian emperor. The *Foundation of the Lateran Basilica* likewise made reference to the imperial benefaction: not only was St. John Lateran the product of "the first age of church building under Constantine," it was also

¹⁹ Tierney 18.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Maxwell-Stuart 27. See also English translation of the Donation of Constantine in Tierney 21-22. The document is insistent that all succeeding pontiffs should inherit the benefits of the donation.

²³ Tierney 18.

linked to the Lateran Palace, which had been part of the donation.²⁴

The troublesome fresco which Maddalo identifies as the *Coronation of Boniface VIII* has been labeled by many art historians as the pope's "appeal" to the forged donation.²⁵ Charles Mitchell calls attention to the image of the parasol which figures prominently into the fresco's design (fig. 2). Two painted parasols adorn the balcony on which the two groups of churchmen stand, and a third parasol is held aloft behind the group on the left. The repetition of this image is significant, Mitchell says, "for the parasol, an oriental mark of sovereignty unusual in papal iconography, was one of the imperial insignia supposed to have been given by Constantine to Pope Silvester."²⁶ Mitchell moreover argues that Giotto based the parasol's design on that of a parasol in a fresco painted for another Roman church some fifty years before the Lateran cycle.²⁷ This fresco, easily identified as none other than the *Donation of Constantine*, depicts the emperor bestowing the symbols of office upon Silvester (fig. 20). One of these symbols is a large parasol, which is thrust towards the pope by an imperial attendant.

A close reading of the actual document strongly suggests that the *Donation of Constantine* was the inspiration for much of the iconography of Giotto's fresco. "To blessed Silvester, ...

²⁴ Hetherington 35.

²⁵ Charles Mitchell, "The Lateran Fresco of Boniface VIII," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14 (1951): 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. This fresco, Mitchell tells us, is found in the chapel of St. Silvester in the church of SS. Quattro Coronati.

supreme pontiff and universal pope of the city of Rome, and to the pontiffs, his successors, who to the end of the world shall sit in the seat of blessed Peter" the Emperor Constantine grants, first of all, his "imperial Lateran Palace, which is superior to and excels all palaces in the whole world."²⁸ Giotto's scene is set unmistakably at the front door of this donated palace.

"The diadem," continues the forged donation, "which is the crown of our head" is given to Silvester and his successors along with "the mitre."²⁹ As Mitchell notes, the double crown worn by Boniface in this fresco is a pointed reference to this phrase: "the jeweled band or diadem was the symbol of the spiritual authority assumed by Silvester, while the gold crown - the crown of Rome - was the symbol of temporal dominion."³⁰

Likewise the "superhumeral, that is, the stole which usually surrounds our imperial neck; and the purple cloak and the scarlet tunic and all the imperial robes" were added to this fraudulent list of papal inheritance.³¹ Giotto has, in fact, depicted Pope Boniface VIII clad not in the papal pallium, as one might expect, but in a decidedly imperial cloak. The viewer cannot fail to observe the similarity of these papal vestments to the Constantinian garb described by the donation.

In the two groups flanking the papal canopy, further references to the Donation of Constantine may be discerned. Silvester and his successors were entitled to military

²⁸ Tierney 21.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Mitchell 3.

³¹ Tierney 21.

protection by this document, for it specified that to the pope was granted "also the rank of commanders of the imperial cavalry."³² The "ranged halberds of the papal guard," arrayed behind the rows of churchmen, towering above their heads, seem to allude to this phrase.³³ The donation, furthermore, decrees that "the clergy ... serving the same most holy Roman Church" be respected as senators, "patricians, and consuls" and that they "be adorned as are the imperial officers."³⁴ The clergy here depicted have, indeed, assumed the dignified air of an imperial court.

In addition to numerous references specific to the Donation of Constantine, the fresco is rife with imperial imagery. Mitchell hypothesizes that, in his painted representation of the Lateran Palace, Giotto altered the architecture of the balcony to resemble that of a fourth-century relief of the Emperor Theodosius (fig. 21).³⁵ In the relief, Theodosius appears beneath a flat canopy, attended by imperial officials and soldiers arranged in a composition which closely mirrors that employed by Giotto in his fresco. Thus, according to Mitchell's theory, the viewer is confronted not only by an image of Pope Boniface VIII, surrounded by the ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but also by that of the ruler of Rome,

³² Ibid.

³³ Quote from Mitchell 2.

³⁴ Tierney 21-22.

³⁵ Mitchell 4-5. Mitchell explains, on the basis of drawings made of Boniface's portico, that the original structure was not covered by a flat canopy - as we see in Giotto's fresco - but "by cusped Gothic arches." (See fig. 22) He believes that the discrepancy is the result of Giotto's effort to refer to the relief of Theodosius.

surrounded by his officials, and protected by the formidable imperial army.

Giotto has, furthermore, combined the secular imagery of the relief with the religious setting of the fresco. Before the rows of halberds in the background of Giotto's painting are wielded symbols of the Church and the papacy, the cross and the parasol. Thus, the pope is backed not only by the armed authority of the papal guard, but also by divine authority.

Giotto has used architectural space, also, to define the figures which occupy it. The fresco, it will be remembered, may be divided into distinct "zones": the lower zone, beneath the dividing line of the portico roof, and the upper zone of the balcony. The lower zone, peopled by the laity, is the mundane, secular world, while the upper zone, inhabited only by churchmen, is reserved for religious officials. Giotto has employed elevation - as artists had for centuries - to denote sanctity.

Giotto's composition, furthermore, separates the ordered realm of the Church from a chaotic world below. The ecclesiastical constituency has filed neatly onto the balcony: it is carefully organized, with four clerics on the front row on either side of the canopy. No one is crowded; instead, the churchmen stand shoulder to shoulder, each occupying a definite space. The laity below, on the other hand, are not so precisely arranged. There is no organization to their composition, and they seem to jockey for position - some are packed tightly together, others stand almost alone - as they strain to see the pope.

Thus, elevation also may be equated with authority, or, to be more specific, with divinely-ordained authority.³⁶ The laity in the lower zone are inferior - in spirit and in fact - to the clergy above. Among this secular crowd is a pair of figures on horseback. The crowns they wear suggest that they are monarchs. Despite their royalty, these figures have been placed in the disordered zone of the mundane, which is under papal authority. This fresco seems to argue that, although kings may hold sway over the common laity, in the eyes of the Church, a king is not superior to the laymen he governs. Considering the concessions Boniface had recently been forced to make to Philip the Fair - in essence allowing the king to tax French clerics - this is a powerful image, indeed.³⁷

The painted architecture of Giotto's fresco, and, therefore, of the actual portico itself, make a further case for divinely-ordained papal authority.³⁸ The canopied projection on which Boniface stands is supported by three large columns. The use of a central column seems odd, for it blocks the main palace door. Moreover, it seems unnecessary, for the balcony is small and would certainly be amply supported by the two corner

³⁶ If, as Maddalo says, this scene can be read as the passing of the papacy from Celestine to Boniface, a third zone can be perceived beneath the canopy. Celestine's apparent retreat from the cover of the canopy can be interpreted as his simultaneous retreat from the authority of the papal office.

³⁷ Recall that the bull *Etsi de Statu* made these concessions official in July of 1297 (the year in which the portico was erected). It is also worth noting that in the fresco the laity on foot - the common-folk - look not to the king, but to the pope.

³⁸ Although Giotto was merely copying a preexisting iconographic program in painting the architecture of the Lateran portico, these elements are relevant to this thesis. As Mitchell pointed out, Giotto took liberties in his depiction of the portico. Thus, the artist's decision to mimic certain iconographic references of the portico's architecture is

columns. Perhaps the seemingly superfluous column was included for purely iconographic reasons. The third column of the Lateran portico immediately reminds the viewer of the Trinity. Thus, when Boniface appears beneath the canopy, he is supported not just by three stout marble columns, but by the divine authority of the Holy Trinity.

The three arched doorways, perceived behind the columns, underscore this Trinitarian reference and may, moreover, be an indirect reference to the Donation of Constantine. The lower half of the portico, below the balcony, seems to resemble a Roman triumphal arch. This design was often incorporated into church architecture as a symbol of Christianity's triumph over paganism. Closer examination of Lateran fresco, however, reveals the possibility of a more specific reference. The doors of the portico are not of equal size; the flanking arches are of the same dimensions, but the central arch is of greater height and width. The design of the "triumphal arch" of the Lateran portico appears to mirror none other than the Arch of Constantine (fig. 23).³⁹ Thus, Giotto may be attempting to remind the viewer of Constantine, the great benefactor of the Roman See, on the wall of the very palace he had donated to the papacy until the end of time.

On the basis of such plentiful iconographic references, it would seem that Mitchell is correct to embrace the traditional

significant. Giotto - or his patron - must have felt such imagery would complement the imagery of the fresco.

³⁹ The similarity, while questionable in the watercolor copy of the Lateran fresco, is seen readily in a sixteenth-century sketch of the portico (fig. 22). The artist who copied Giotto's fresco may not have adhered precisely to the master's dimensions.

reading of the fresco cycle as an assertion of papal authority granted by the Donation of Constantine. There also seems to be an effort to justify the power of the papacy on the basis of divine ordinance. It must be stressed, however, that Boniface VIII, through this artistic program, was not making new claims to temporal hegemony. Quite the contrary, he was attempting to remind the viewer of the legal precedent for papal supremacy.

The Lateran Frescoes as Evidence

As an expert in both canon and civil law, Boniface was well aware of the need to back any declaration with sufficient evidence.⁴⁰ Boniface's own writings illustrate this point. It will be remembered that the bull *Clericis Laicos* was merely a reassertion of a papal privilege - the right to approve the taxation of clerics - established by Lateran IV. Even his most notorious bull, *Unam Sanctam* of 1302, stood on firm legal ground. Although subsequently "regarded ... as a dangerous novelty, an unprecedented attempt at a usurpation of temporal power by the papacy," the bull, notes Brian Tierney, is "almost entirely a patchwork of extracts from earlier sources."⁴¹ What is perhaps its most damning passage - "We declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff" - is, in fact, taken from Thomas Aquinas's *On the Errors of the Schismatic Greeks*.⁴²

⁴⁰ Oestreich, see web-site.

⁴¹ Tierney 182.

⁴² Ibid.

It would seem that Boniface VIII employed a similar tactic in commissioning the Lateran frescoes. Arrayed before the viewer is a virtual encyclopedia of precedent for the enduring universal authority of the pope; the central image of Boniface VIII is framed by abundant iconographic evidence to support his claims. The fresco identified by Maddalo as the *Coronation of Boniface VIII* appears, thus, to be an illustration of the world order as laid out by the Donation of Constantine. The clever pope seems to have chosen his documentation according to the site of his commission. The Donation of Constantine was the ideal proof, for the frescoes were to be painted on the walls of the palace which formed part of the forged donation. The presence in the adjoining piazza of the equestrian monument then thought to be a representation of Constantine himself also would have underscored the legal message of the cycle.

If the frescoes are, in fact, intended to be read as iconographic validation for papal authority, one question in particular remains. What would have inspired Boniface to go to such elaborate lengths to defend his position?

The timing of the commission is surely significant. As early as February of 1297, Boniface had begun to recant the resolute stand he had taken in *Clericis Laicos* against secular interference in the Church. If the portico of the Lateran Palace was completed in this same year, Boniface must have been still smarting from his defeat when he commissioned the fresco cycle. Perhaps the iconographic program of the Lateran frescoes is intended as a confirmation of Boniface's continued faith "in

the extreme doctrine of papal authority," regardless of any concessions he might have been forced to make due to economic constraints and domestic troubles.⁴³

The Lateran Frescoes as Rebuttal

In light of this hypothesis, one specific detail of the fresco merits further consideration. In Giotto's depiction, Boniface VIII looks at the figure identified as Stefaneschi and gestures toward him with his right hand (fig. 1). Stefaneschi holds a scroll, which he appears to have unfurled only moments ago - perhaps cued by the pope's raised hand - as the bottom edge is still tightly curled. The paper is not parallel to the picture plane, but is slightly angled toward the viewer's left. Stefaneschi wears a solemn, almost, disapproving expression. His large, dark eyes are focused unmistakably on the lower left corner of the picture plane. He looks toward the crowd below the balcony, to the pope's right. Lest the viewer carelessly overlook the direction of the cardinal's gaze, Giotto has painted Stefaneschi's tonsured head in an almost exaggerated tilt. Tracing his line of vision, one finds that Stefaneschi's intense stare is fixed on the group of monarchs below (fig. 2). The monarchs, in turn, respond to the presentation of the document: two look up, absorbing its contents, while the third turns to his royal companions, his brow apparently furrowed in displeasure.⁴⁴

⁴³ Quote from Tierney 172.

⁴⁴ If the watercolor copy of the fresco depicts this figure's features accurately, that is.

As in the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece*, Giotto has engaged the language of gesture. The viewer follows the gaze of the pope (whose raised hand seems to be the signal which initiates the action) over to Stefaneschi (who presents the paper) and then down to the monarchs below (who seem to absorb the contents of the proffered document). The intensity of Stefaneschi's stare and the emphasis placed on its direction tend to suggest that the group of kings, specifically, is the intended audience of this papal document.

The scroll which Cardinal Stefaneschi aims at the royal cluster bears the inscription: BONIFACIUS EPS. SERVUS SERVORUM DEI AD PERPETUAM REI MEMORIAM.⁴⁵ "Boniface, Bishop, servant of the servants of God," the scroll begins. This papal epithet was coined by the humble St. Gregory the Great in the sixth century and was frequently adopted by subsequent popes as a phrase of "self-description" in the opening line of papal bulls.⁴⁶ Thus, we can deduce that the scroll presented by Stefaneschi in the fresco is, in fact, a bull being promulgated by Boniface.

The precise wording varies, but, traditionally, the format of the address of papal bulls seems to be as follows: "Bishop X, servant of the servants of God, to person(s) Y, greetings and the apostolic blessing." The scroll depicted in the Lateran fresco deviates slightly from this pattern: "Boniface, Bishop, servant of the servants of God, for the perpetual record of the matter." This exact variation of the model seems to be used only rarely, but it is the sentence which Boniface employs to

⁴⁵ Mitchell 3.

⁴⁶ Maxwell-Stuart 51.

open the bull *Clericis Laicos*.⁴⁷ Could the scroll of the Lateran fresco be a reference to the bull whose decree had so recently been rescinded?

Such an identification of the document would have intriguing implications for the interpretation of Boniface's artistic program. *Clericis Laicos* addressed an issue specific to rulers. The identification of the painted bull as *Clericis Laicos*, rather than that proclaiming the Jubilee, certainly would explain the singling out of kings as the object of the pope's message, as well as the apparent displeasure with which this group receives it.

This hypothesis, furthermore, explains Boniface's need to propagandize so insistently the legal precedent for papal supremacy. Boniface had been forced to annul the strident assertion of *Clericis Laicos* by his exhausted treasury and the threat of Colonna accusations. If the painted bull is read as *Clericis Laicos*, the iconographic program of the fresco seems to be a pointed reminder that Boniface's concessions were not an admission of wrong-doing. The pope had every right to demand that kings seek papal approval before taxing the clergy. Boniface has surrounded himself with iconographic evidence of the propriety of papal supremacy. Despite his surrender to Philip, the fresco seems to argue, the pope remains firm in his belief in the universal authority of the Holy See and continues

⁴⁷ Tierney 175. This phrase was also used by Innocent IV, interestingly, to open his bull deposing Frederick II. Innocent IV (17 July 1245) Bull Deposing the Emperor Frederick II. *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* [Online]. Available: <http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum13.html>.

to challenge the king to prove otherwise. The fresco, thus interpreted, not only backs the claims made by *Clericis Laicos*, but also exhibits the eternal defiance of the pontiff, compensating in some measure for the embarrassment of being forced to surrender temporarily to the French king.⁴⁸

The allusion to the Donation of Constantine may have other implications for the interpretation of this fresco, for it specifically grants to Pope Silvester and his successors "all provinces, palaces and districts of the city of Rome."⁴⁹ Here we must return to Maddalo's observation that the fresco carries a message for the Colonna. The Caetani coat of arms, you will recall, figures prominently in Giotto's composition; in fact, it appears no less than thirteen times. These shields are depicted alternately with symbols of the papacy; Boniface's message is unmistakable: the Roman See is held by a Caetani. Thus, the fresco - in addition to arguing Celestine's legal and willing abdication - may be reminding the Colonna that the Caetani pope had "power and sway" over all Roman lands as bequeathed by the Donation of Constantine. This would have been a resonant argument indeed, considering that Boniface's dispute with the Colonna was born of Caetani encroachment on Colonna territories.

⁴⁸ It is also possible that the painted document is intended to represent any bull promulgated by the pope. The fresco cycle could have been a reaction to *Clericis Laicos* without making specific reference to that emasculated decree. By limiting the depiction of the bull to its opening lines, Giotto may be suggesting that any and all bulls promulgated by the Holy See are backed by divine ordinance and the Donation of Constantine. Viewed thus, the Lateran Frescoes take on the appearance of a sort of visual papal bull; be it known, they seem to say, that "Boniface Bishop, servant of the servants of God," decrees - "for the perpetual record of the matter" - the eternal universality of the Roman Church and its Pontiff.

⁴⁹ Tierney 22.

Giotto's frescoes for the Lateran Palace appear to answer all the complaints, Philip's and the Colonna's, made against Boniface VIII. It seems a plausible hypothesis that they were commissioned upon the completion of the portico in 1297 for just this purpose. In designing the Lateran frescoes, Boniface VIII and Giotto may well have devised an iconographic scheme which functioned as both a lawyerly program of visual evidence of papal privilege and - much like the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* - a vendetta of propaganda against the Colonna dissenters.

Conclusion

At first glance, the only apparent similarities between the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* and the remaining Lateran fresco is their inclusion of Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi and their attribution to Giotto. Neither their subjects nor their functions seem remotely connected to one another. It has been an art historical tendency, in fact, to date them some thirty or forty years apart. On the basis of the evidence presented in the previous chapters, however, it seems possible that - as Maddalo observed - these two works may well have shared both iconography and purpose.

The Lateran frescoes seem to contain a message for both the Colonna and the French. Through the figure of Celestine V, this fresco seems to argue against the Colonna accusation that Boniface usurped the papacy. Celestine has stepped voluntarily into the background, smilingly passing on his office to Boniface. Relying heavily upon references to the Donation of Constantine, this lawyerly program also appears to be evidence in favor of the universality of papal authority. Boniface's recent struggle with Philip over *Clericis Laicos* - and the pope's ultimate surrender due to financial and political pressures - would have been reason enough for Boniface to commission such an artistic program. It would have served as a prominent visual reinforcement of his defiance of secular rulers who denied the supremacy of the pope.

The completion of Boniface's new portico for the Lateran Palace coincided, quite suggestively, with the beginning of open animosity between the pope and the Colonna and with Boniface's forced concession to Philip the Fair over the issue of the taxation of French clerics. Presumably, then, the commission for Giotto's fresco cycle was given in the midst of these potentially ruinous disputes. The iconography of the fresco traditionally known as *Boniface VIII Proclaiming the Jubilee* strongly suggests that this cycle was commissioned for the express purpose of combating these attacks on the universality of the Church and on Boniface, personally.

Similarly, the *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* may be an attempt to legitimize Boniface VIII's claim to the papacy by likening him to his papal namesake, St. Boniface. This eighth-century saint was renowned for his humility, piety and reluctance to rise through the ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy - quite the opposite of Boniface VIII's reputation. The *Stefaneschi Altarpiece* appears to portray Boniface VIII as dutiful, rather than deceitful, in his assumption of the papacy. The role of divine ordinance and Petrine succession in the election of the pope is underscored by Giotto's use of gesture.

As the pope's kinsman, Cardinal Stefaneschi was obliged to aid in Boniface's defense, both for the sake of his uncle's honor and to preserve his own reputation. When the Colonna placed their first manifesto on the altar of St. Peter's - declaring before God and all of Christendom that they did not believe Boniface to be the true pope - it was an affront to both

Stefaneschi and Boniface. It may be that Stefaneschi, moved by the Colonna attack, conceived of a "reply" to their assertions in the form of a propagandizing altarpiece. He then may have commissioned Giotto - who was, perhaps, already in Rome working on the Lateran frescoes - to execute this artistic rebuttal.

Thus, it seems possible that the Lateran frescoes and the Stefaneschi Altarpiece functioned together as part of a single propagandistic campaign. Their iconographic programs certainly seem complementary. In commissioning these two paintings, the patrons may well have been simultaneously advertising the legality of universal papal authority and waging a vendetta of propaganda against the Colonna. Both churchmen and kinsmen, Pope Boniface VIII and Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi may well have sought to restore the family honor, as well as that of the papacy, through the persuasive power of the painted image.

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Jacopone poem #1

O Pope Boniface,
 You're merry in your day,
But will it quite so merry be,
 When it comes to going away?

Is all your cleverness enough,
 The world to dominate?
What this year brings triumphant in,
 Next year will dissipate.
You may with bit and bridle,
 Make a restive horse stand still:
But the world's course is not guided
 According to your will.¹

Jacopone poem #2

I see the world a shattered heap
 Hastening its ruin to fulfill,
As doth a mad man frenzied leap,
 Nor is there medicine for his ill.²

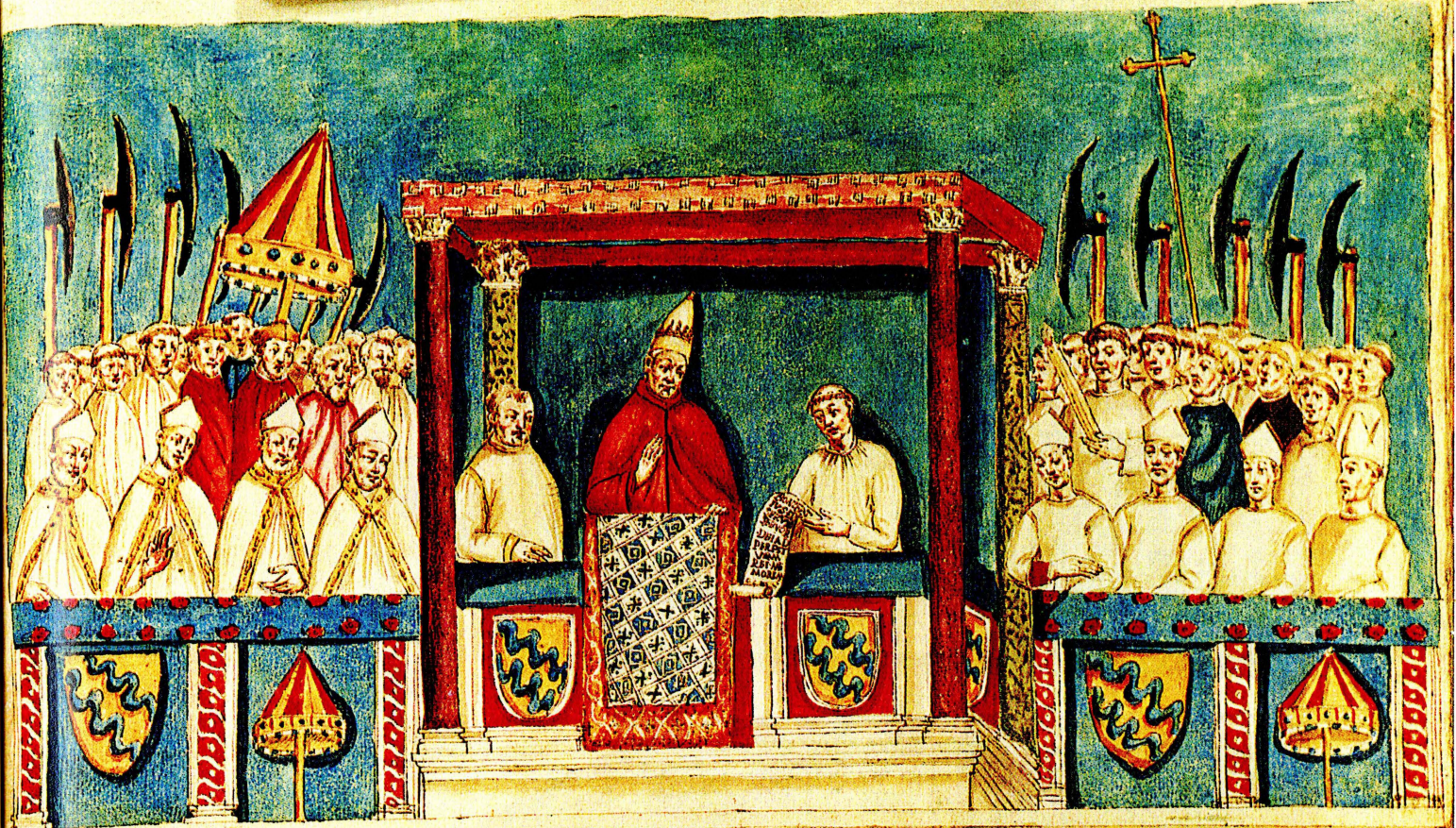
¹ Boase 169.

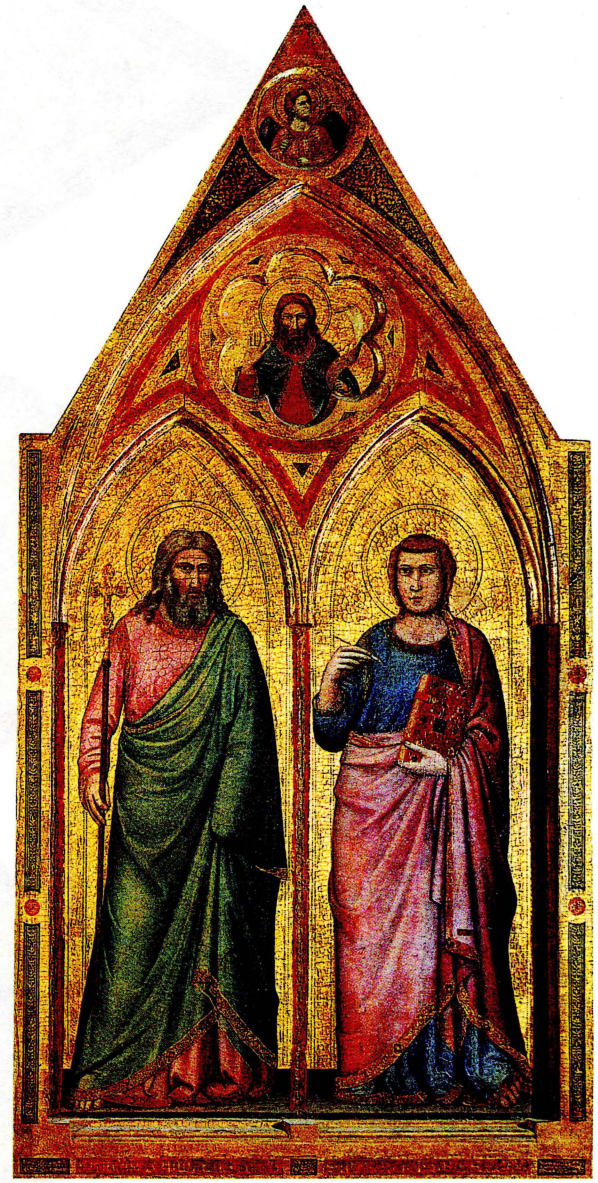
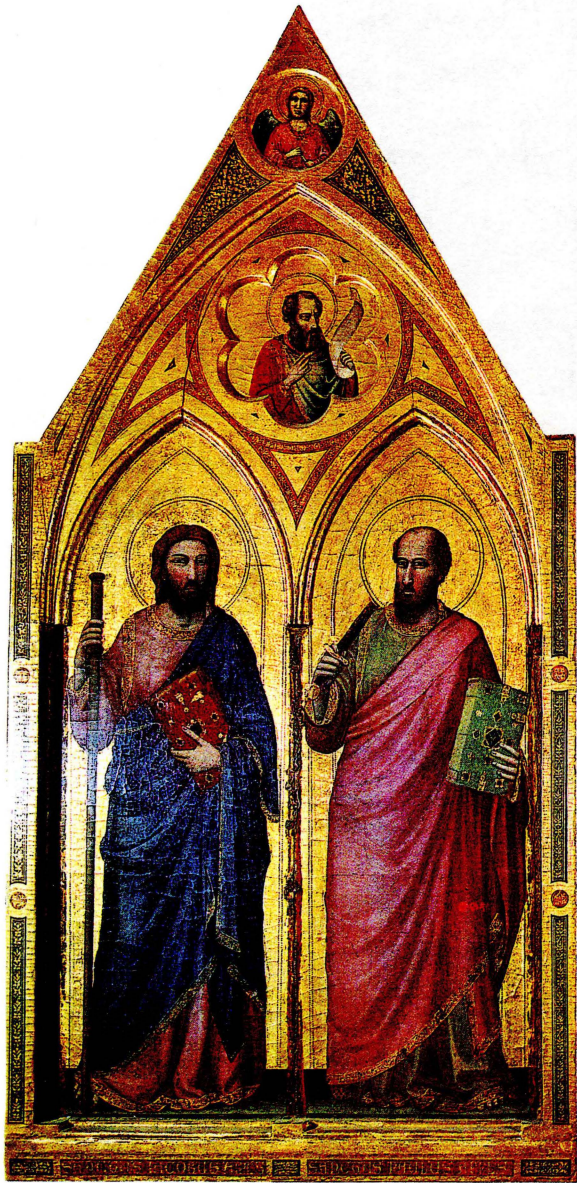
² Ibid.

Illustrations

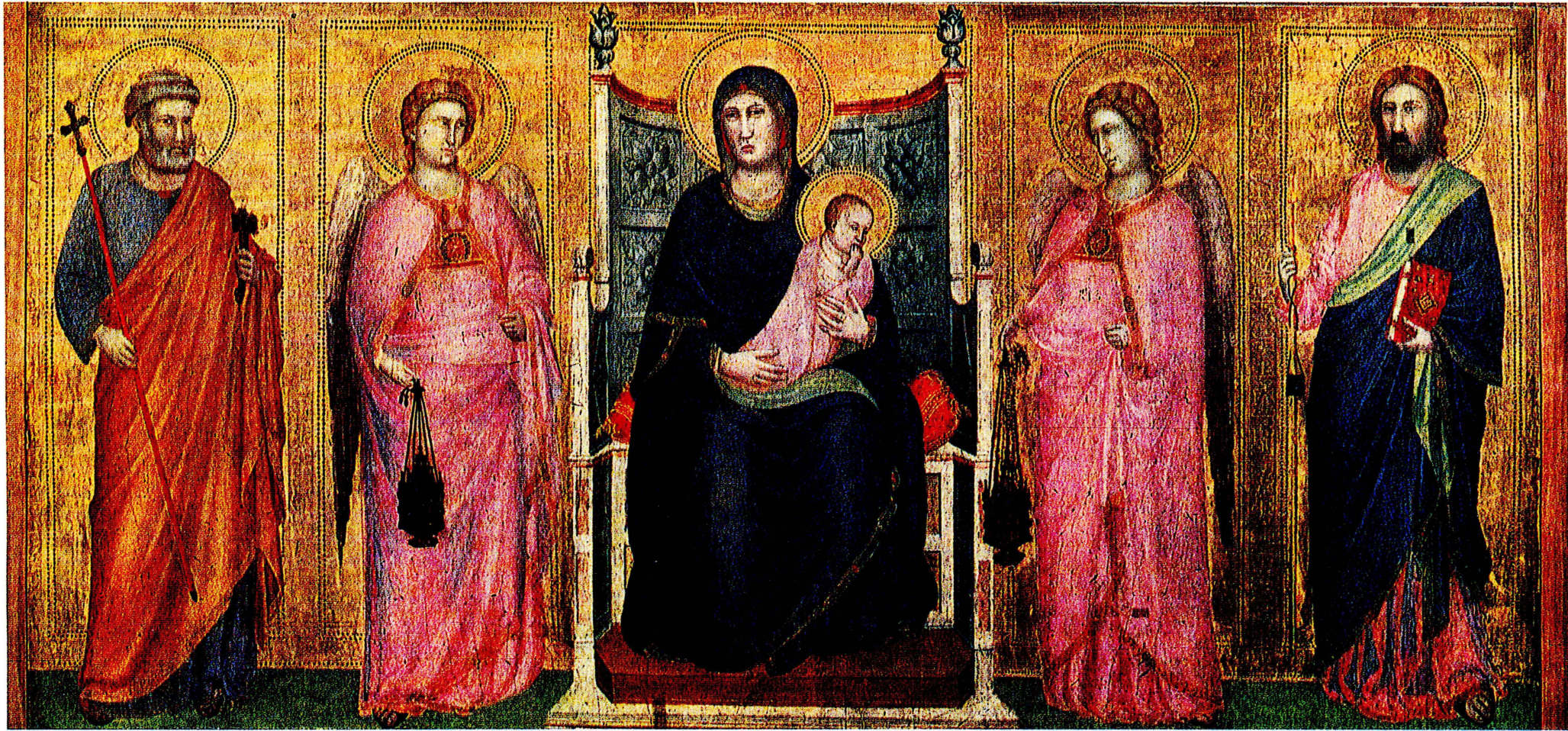


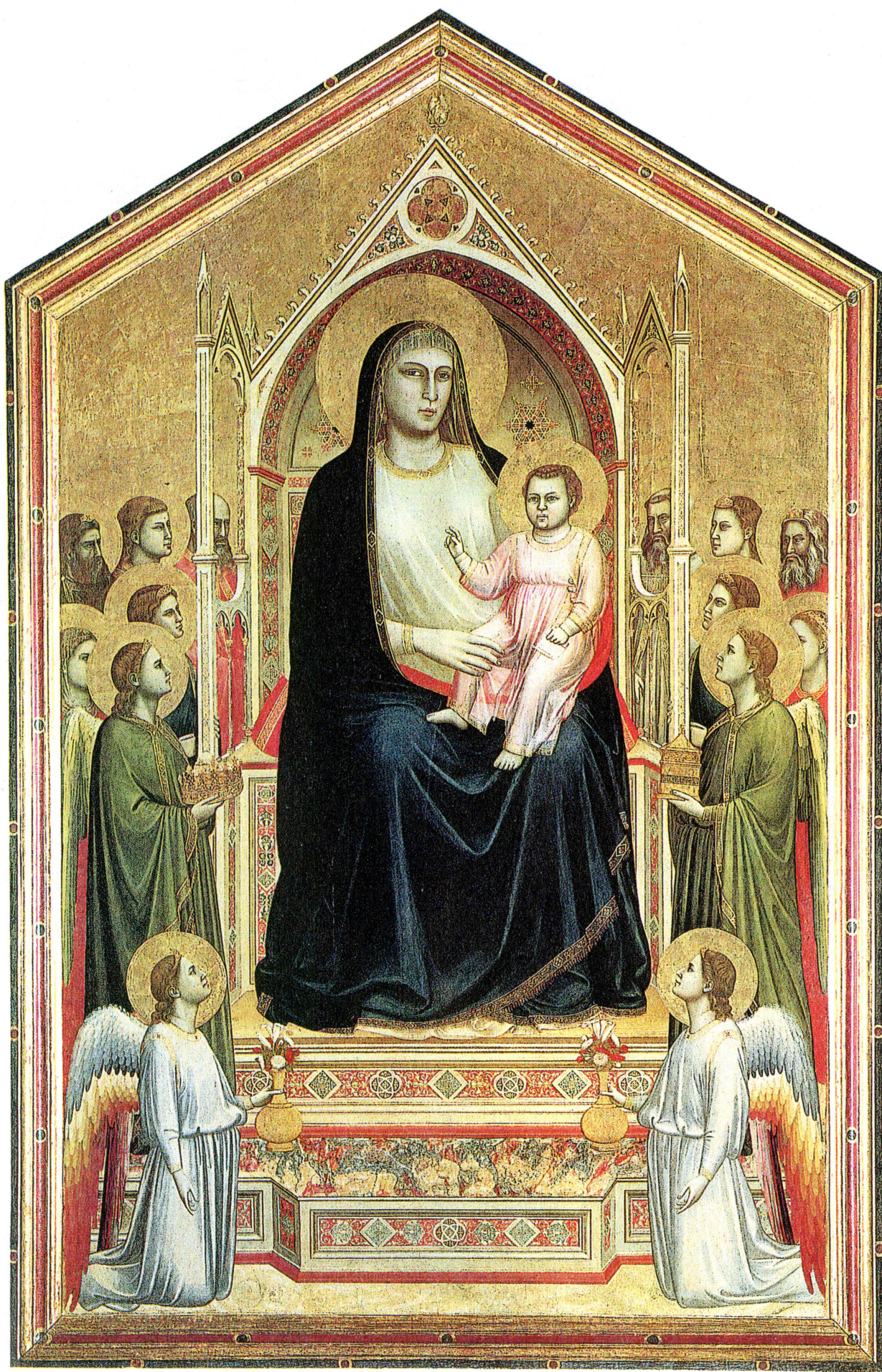
Giotto. BONIFACE VIII
PROCLAIMING THE JUBILEE.







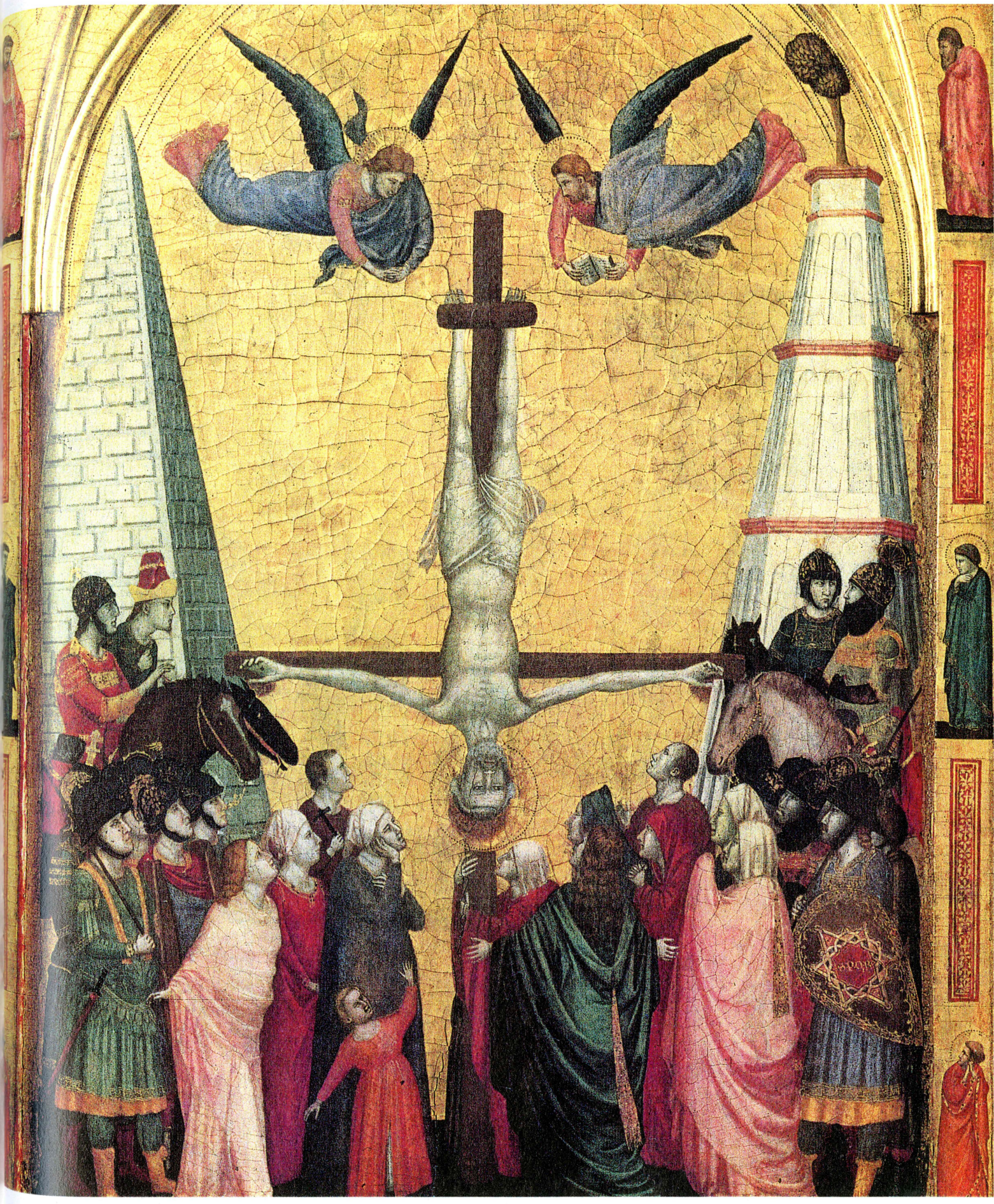








Colorplate 25. *Virgin and Child Enthroned*
(The Mellon Madonna). Icon, $32\frac{1}{8} \times 19\frac{3}{8}$ ". c. 1290.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Andrew W.
Mellon Collection

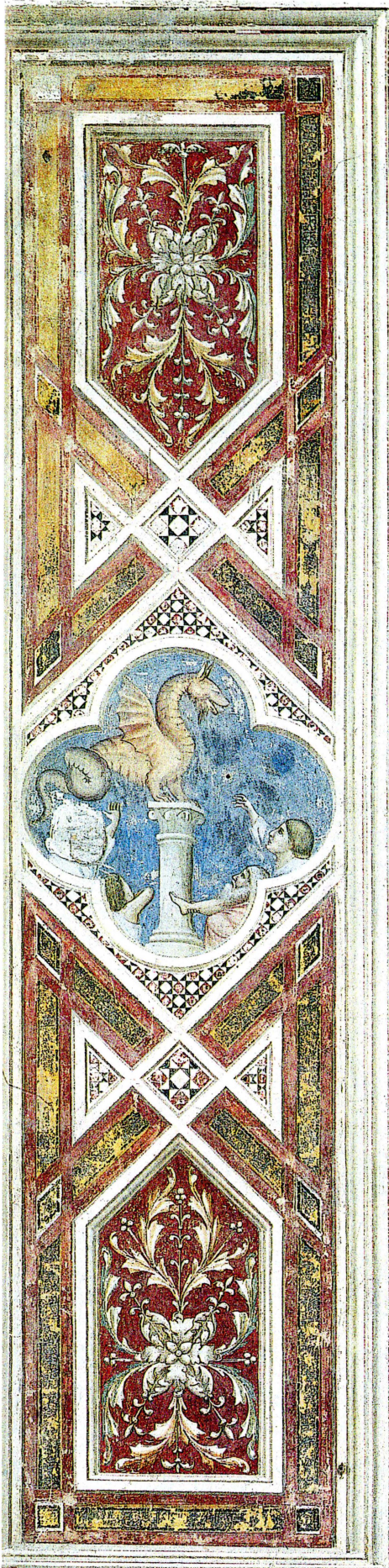


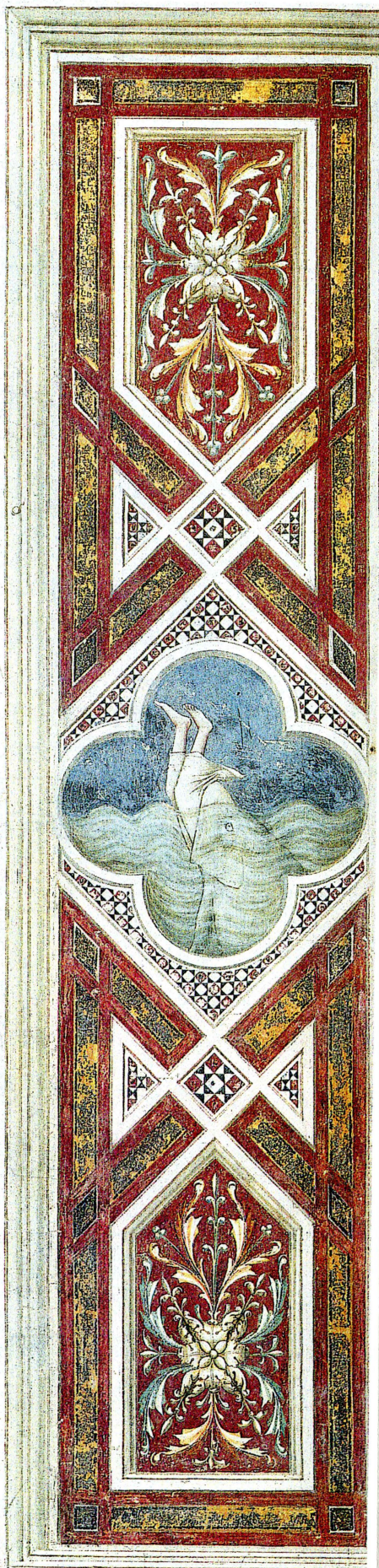
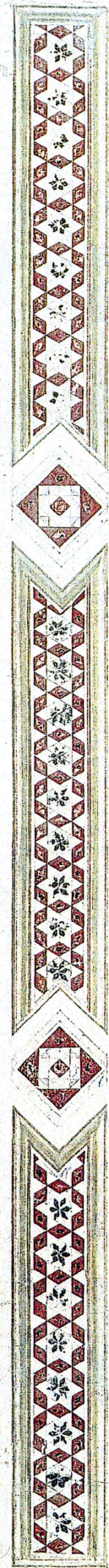






The Vision of Joachim (scene 5)





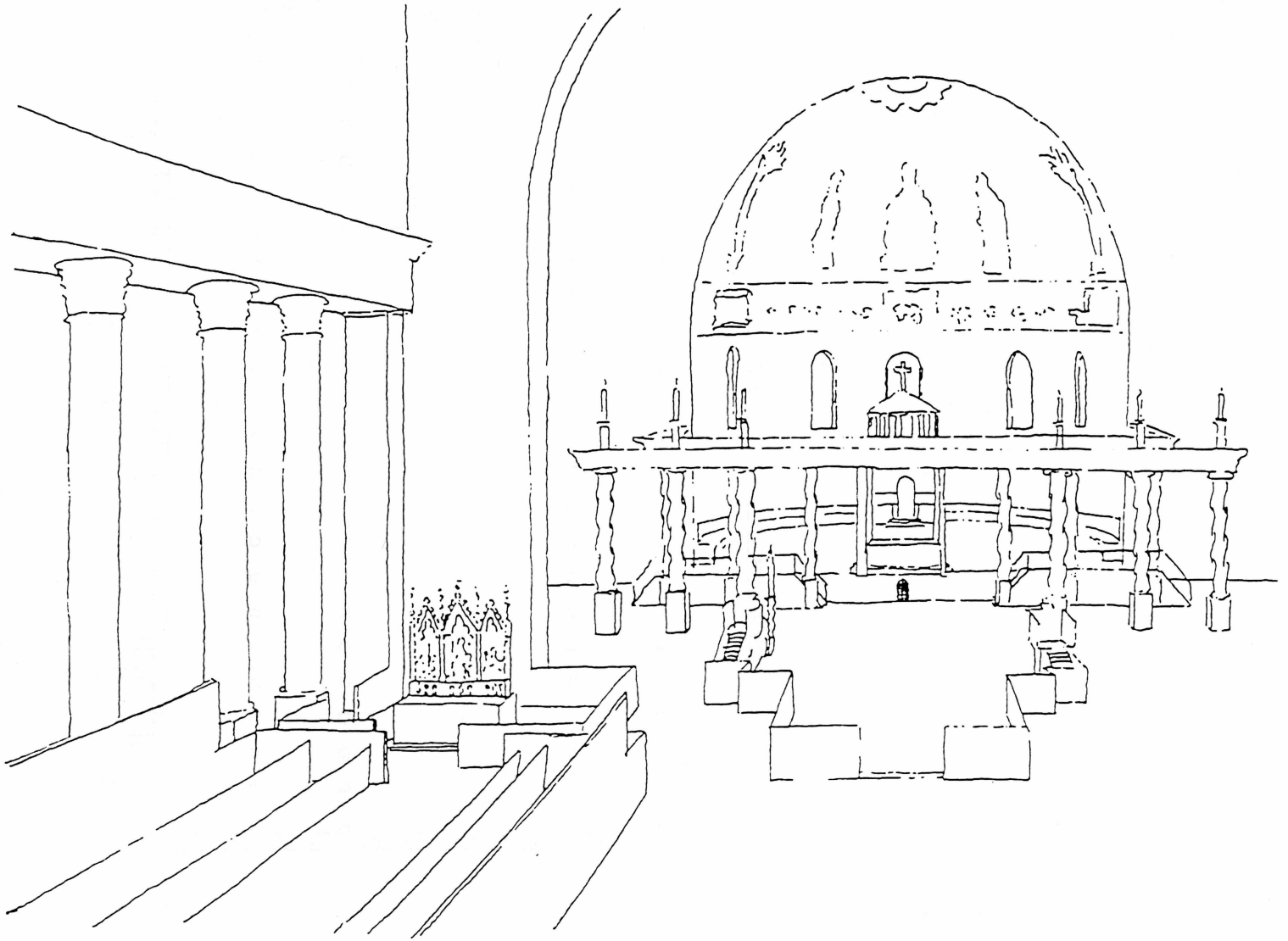


Fig. 2. Old Saint Peter's. Reconstruction of the western part of the basilica as of 1350.

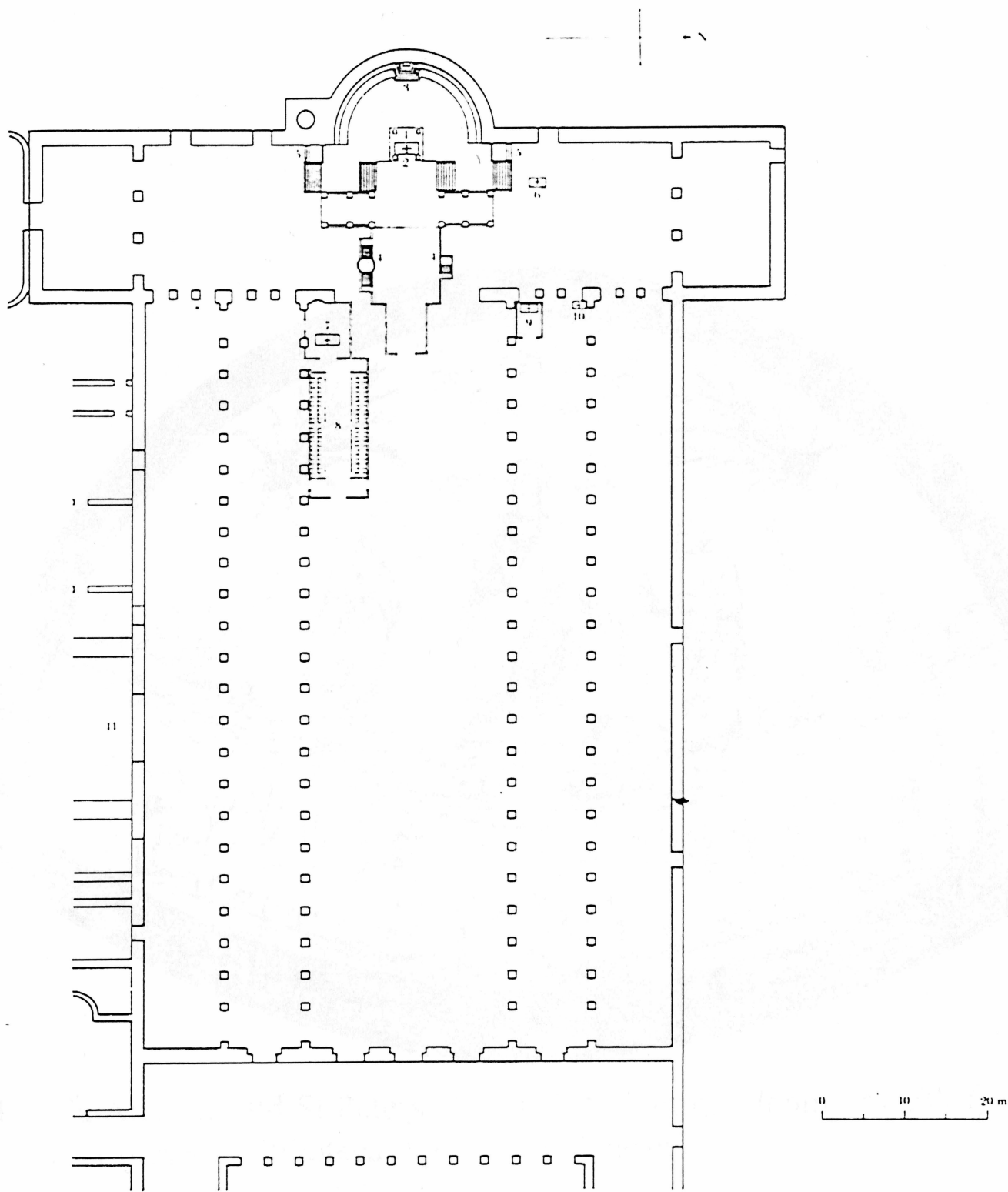


Fig. 1. Old Saint Peter's. Reconstructed ground plan with relevant elements of liturgical arrangement as of 1350.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. High altar | 7. Choir altar or altar S. Maria de | 11. Canon's choir of Sixtus IV |
| 2. Confessio | Cancellis | (1479) |
| 3. Cathedra | 8. Canon's choir | N.B. The thin lines on the left |
| 4. Amboes | 9. Chapel of SS. Lawrence and | indicate the 15th century annex |
| 5. Entrances to crypt | George | buildings |
| 6. Altar De ossibus apostolorum | 10. St. James altar | |

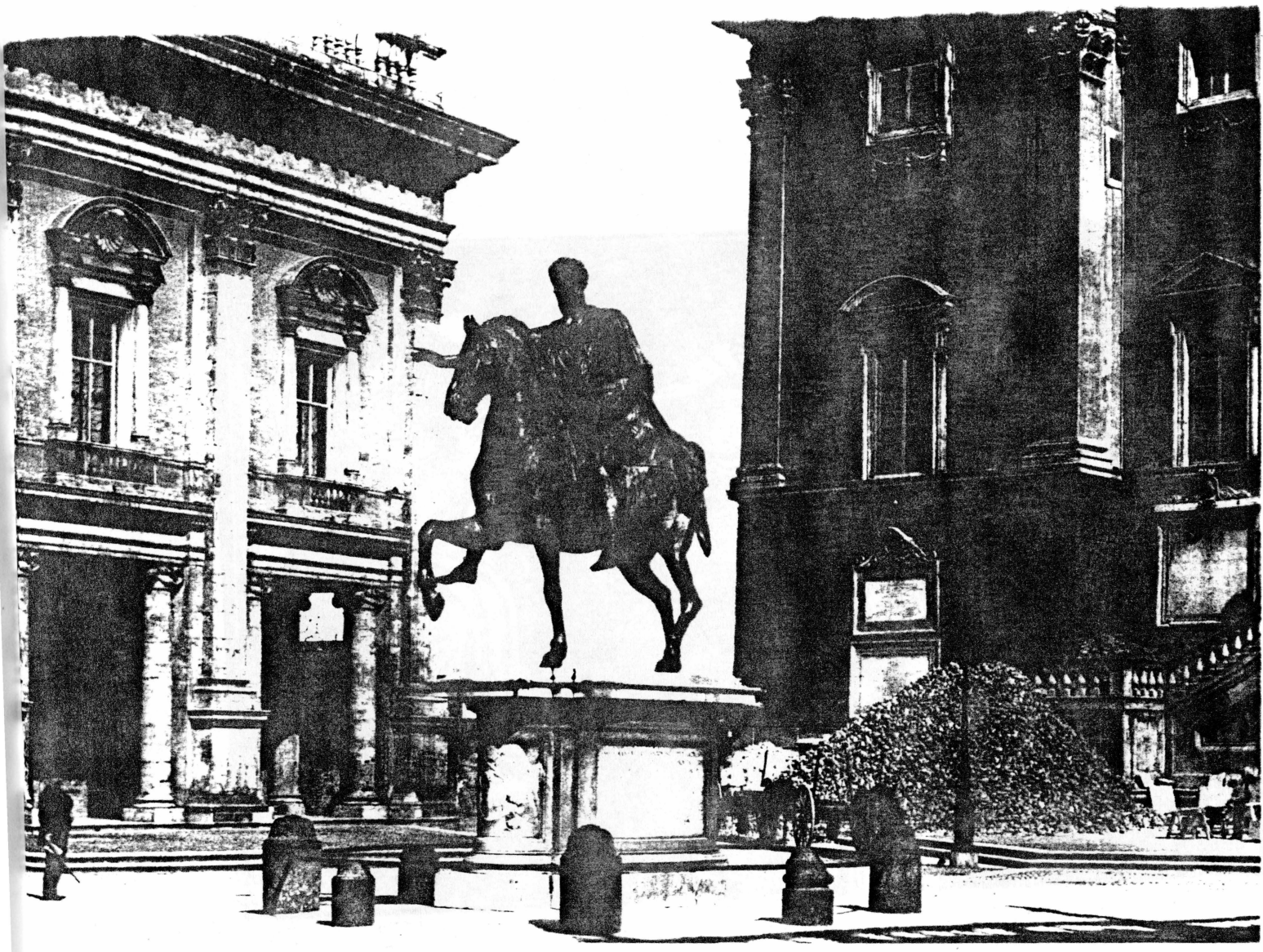


Pl. 10a-Apse of Old St Peters. Archivio S. Pietro, Album, fol. 50r (p.61).
 Photo: Courtesy Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

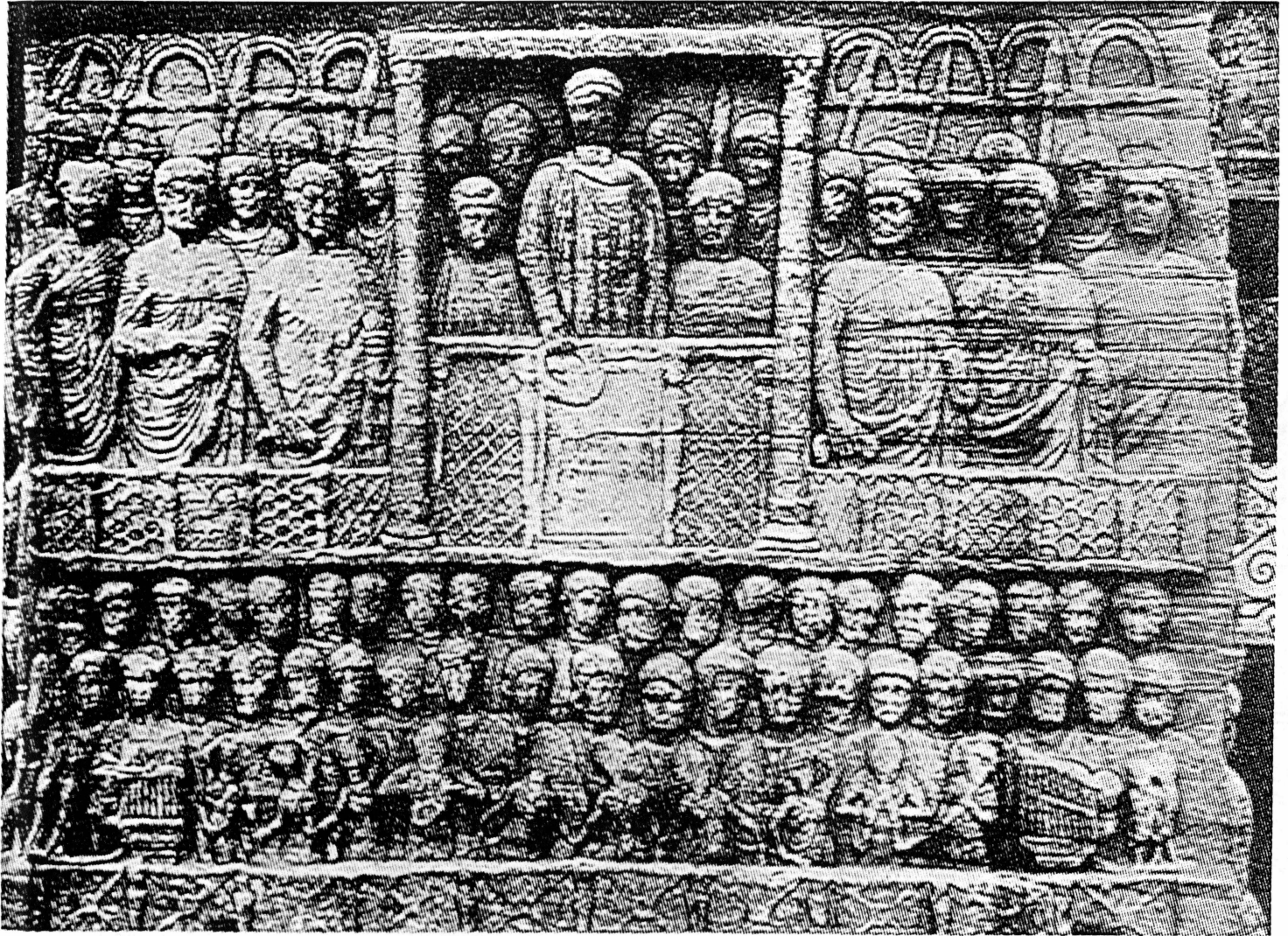


Pl. 18c-Stefaneschi Altarpiece. Kneeling Saint (p.86)
Photo: Gall. Mus. Vaticani.

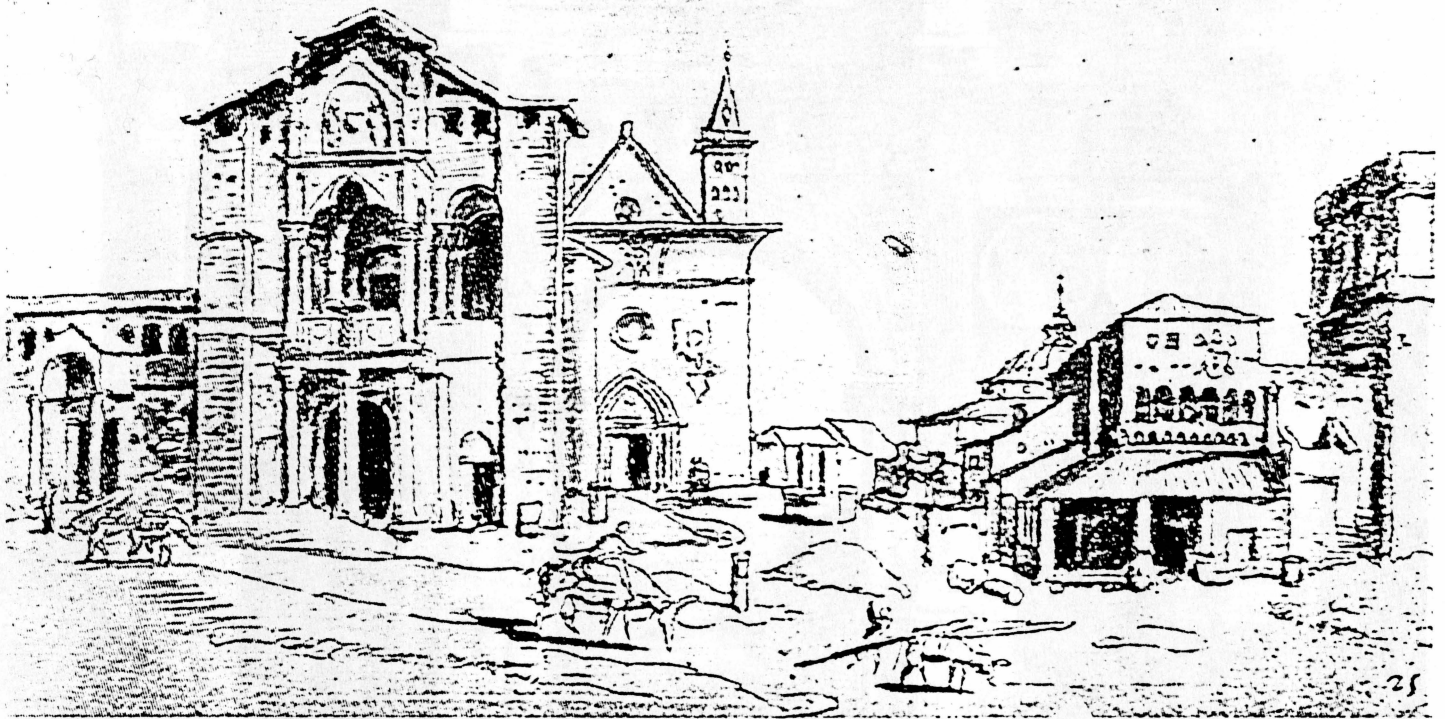








b—Emperor Theodosius, Relief, 4th cent., Constantinople (*p.* 5)



a—Marten van Heemskerck, Drawing from Roman Sketchbooks, 1532-6, Kupferstichkabinet, Berlin (pp. 4, 5)



IMPERIA EST ET CONSTANTINO MAXIMO
PRAEAVGVSTO S P Q R
VOTIS INSTINCTV DIVINITATIS
MAGNITVDINE CVM EXERCITVS
TAM DETRANSGADANDE OMNIBVS
FACTIONE VNICE TEMPORE IVS
REM PVBLICAM VLTIVSESTABV
ARCVM TRIVMPHALIS IN SIGNEM DICAV