



Giotto the Painter

Life

With a Collection of the Documents
and Texts up to Vasari and an Appendix
of Sources on the Arena Chapel

Michael Viktor Schwarz
and Pia Theis



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ABBREVIATIONS

- ASF – Archivio di Stato di Firenze
ASP – Archivio di Stato di Padova
ASV – Archivio di Stato di Venezia
BAV – Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
BCP – Biblioteca Civica di Padova
BNCF – Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze
BNF – Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
DizBI – Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, vol. 1 et seqq., Rome 1960 et seqq.
(<http://www.treccani.it/biografico/>)
EncDantesca – Enciclopedia Dantesca, ed. U. Bosco, 6 vols., Rome 1970–1975
(http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/elenco-opere/Enciclopedia_Dantesca)
NA – Notarile Antecosimiano

TRANSLATIONS

- The Bible. Authorized King James Version. With an introduction and notes by R. Caroll and St. Prickett, Oxford 1998
Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Most Eminent Painters Sculptors & Architects, trans. G. du C. de Vere, 10 vols., London 1912–14

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of art historical writing in Italy and at the beginning of post-antique art historiography in Europe, there was already a belief in Giotto's special role. With some justification, one can even say that the concept of art history arose from the idea of Giotto's role. This work aims to explore empirically this role in three steps: *Life*, *Works*, and *Survival*.

The first volume has not been written quite voluntarily. The insight that a separate volume about Giotto's biography was necessary came slowly. Initially it was clear that a re-examination of the primary sources concerning the man was indispensable if serious work should be continued on the artist. Only when Pia Theiss, who shouldered this task, had made a number of new finds in the Florentine State Archives (numbering almost one hundred in the end), did a volume of its own become inevitable.

Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether it makes any sense to recount Giotto's life: are we continuing a literary form that became trivial with romantic epics such as Herman Grimm's *Leben Michelangelos* (1860–63, English 1865) keeping alive a frivolous obsession with genius and greatness?¹ There are three arguments to the contrary:

The first argument can be developed using a thought experiment: suppose no paintings by Giotto had been preserved and there was no documentation about the appearance of the works. But there was still Giorgio Vasari's text on Giotto, which assigned him a key role in the development of visual media in Western culture and there was a consensus to take Vasari seriously in his evaluation. If so, would a critical biography based on all available sources be welcome or not? Here one can only say yes. But since Giotto's achievements are handed down visibly and paintings are preserved, should his life suddenly become irrelevant?

Moreover, it is from the knowledge and criticism of the historical and especially of the biographical tradition, that the most objective arguments can be expected regarding the authorship and chronology of the works believed to be by Giotto. Without an investigation of Giotto's life there is no valid investigation of his oeuvre. Both would remain legends. Such a legendary life could be nothing but a filling out of the (simplistic) narrative about the path of the pre-modern artist from artisan to virtuoso, just as the legendary oeuvre would be nothing but a filling out of a (misleading) narrative about Italian painting around 1300 as the discovery of nature.

For the second argument, I would like to refer to Michel Foucault (and indirectly to

1 W. Schlink, Hermann Grimm (1828–1901): Epigone und Vorläufer, in: *Aspekte der Romantik*, ed. J. Osinski and F. Saure. Schriften der Brüder Grimm-Gesellschaft, N. F. 32, Kassel 2001, pp. 73–93.

Friedrich Nietzsche): Foucault's idea is that history is the most effective antidote to the belief in the essence.² Essence in the present case means what is attributed to Giotto as being his nature and from which the nature of his art is derived: nothing that can be learned, nothing that changes, but a stable, numinous quality, whose authentic emanation is Giotto's artistic production. Such a formulation sounds un-enlightened and it is. Nevertheless, this idea is behind many scholarly deliberations, and especially behind some of those that lay claim to truth and empiricism. I refer only to the article *Giotto, non-Giotto* by Richard Offner with its famous footnote four, in which the author sought to transform belief in essence into a theory of style criticism and thus *kunstreligion* into empiricism.³

One could argue that knowing that the artist led a middle-class life (middle-class by both contemporary and historical standards) and successfully invested his hard-earned money – while two of his sons treated their ministry, procured by their father, more as a job than as a vocation (at least that is how their brother clergymen would have seen it) – does not prevent anyone from seeing in any of the numerous Giottesque panels in museums on both sides of the Atlantic the legacy of a superhuman. The goal is not to interfere in the art experiences of those hungry for meaning, but rather to question whether the discipline of art history is interested in a historical Giotto. This means a Giotto whose achievements can be explained as those of an intelligence continually formed by social and educational experiences, in the course of solving specific tasks under specific conditions. For such an image, this volume will present tesserae; others – the more important ones – are to be added in the second volume. And by presenting these materials, it is claimed that it is possible, beyond an essentialist attitude, to discuss and fundamentally understand his momentous achievements. At the same time, it must be maintained that art history is not connoisseurship for the sake of connoisseurship, but the history of the development of our visual culture.

Finally, the third argument is the simplest one. Giotto, with now almost 150 known primary sources, is probably one of the best documented personalities from 14th century Italy aside from those distinguished by money, lineage, or as secular or spiritual dignitaries. Giotto's existence could be described as ordinary, as long as he had no brush in his hand. It is a profile that has been interesting for historians for several decades under slo-

2 M. Foucault, Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire, in: *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, Paris 1971, pp. 145–172. English: Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, in: M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays*, ed. D.F. Bouchard, Ithaca 1977, pp. 139–164.

3 R. Offner, Giotto, non-Giotto, *The Burlington Magazine* 74, 1939, pp. 259–268 and 75, 1939, pp. 96–113. Reprint: R. Offner, *A Discerning Eye. Essays on Early Italian Painting by Richard Offner*, ed. A. Ladis, University Park 1998, pp. 61–68.

gans such as History of Mentalities or Micro-History.⁴ Accordingly, the discipline of Art History can offer a special object of study to the mother discipline of History in the form of the source-based Giotto.

From the perspective of art historians, however, it would be naive to write the biography as if he were an average person. Giotto's eminent reputation and the dissolution of the man into a mythical artist figure with messianic features cannot be ignored. A dialectical process of forgetting and remembering has to be taken into account: to the extent that Giotto ascends as a historical figure, as a "figure of memory" (as Jan Assman puts it), the memories of his biography disappear and the "figure of history" vanishes⁵ – or more precisely, the "figure of the past" (a notion that escapes the ambivalence of the term history, which means both past past and remembered past). The critical moment is probably the text by the Florentine sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti from the mid-15th century (2.1.4).⁶ Giotto's life is largely neglected here, but, on the other hand, a memory of the corpus of his works is fixed and equipped with passages for a new mythical narrative of his life, determined by the exceptional role of the artist: I refer especially to a famous story, which probably is among the most exuberant compilations in world literature. In it, the reader learns how the shepherd boy Giotto draws a sheep instead of blowing a Pan flute, when the painter Cimabue comes along the road and "discovers" him, already an artist with nothing left to learn.

However, Ghiberti is not the author who passed on the "figure of memory" he had created to the modern age. His very imperfect, in fact experimental, text had virtually no distribution. Although some knew of its existence and were able to consult it (2.1.7, 8) and some details from it were passed on orally through unknown channels (2.3.10, 2.9.1), it had only one reader who contributed to the dissemination of the information contained in it as a whole, and that was Vasari about a century later. His Giotto text, which was embedded in a very extensive biographical enterprise, is the one that reached the modern age (namely in two versions: 2.1.9 and 10). And Vasari not only passed on and popularized the figure of memory, but he expanded, perfected and updated it and made it credible.

Ghiberti and Vasari stand like watchmen before the historical Giotto. Without them, the memory of his existence would probably have evaporated, and an artist named

4 J. Le Goff, Les mentalités. Une histoire ambiguë, in: *Faire de l'histoire, vol. 3: Nouveaux objets*, ed. J. Le Goff und P. Nora, Paris (2) 1986, pp. 76–41. C. Ginzburg, E. Grendi, and J. Revel, Sulla microstoria, *Quaderni storici*, N. S. 86, 1994, pp. 511–575.

5 The opposition between the "figure of memory" as a creation of tradition and the "figure of history" as a fact in a bygone present is taken from: J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Cambridge, Ma. 1997, pp. 18, 47 and passim.

6 The signatures inserted in the text, consisting of three numbers separated by dots, are references to the source texts printed in the apparatus.

Giotto, known from three signatures (I.6.2), would be a topic at best for specialists in early Florentine panel painting. At the same time, Giotto's person is virtually invisible in Ghiberti's and Vasari's texts, obscured by the ideas that have been formed about him. In order to equip us for this problem the source collection in this volume, in addition to the materials we need to write about the historical Giotto, also contains a documentation of the discourse on which Ghiberti and Vasari erected their literary monuments to Giotto. The texts not only serve to reconstruct the historical Giotto but also to deconstruct the Giotto imagined by the Renaissance.

Of course, this is not possible without a critical attitude towards the sources. No text speaks for itself, let alone biographical, panegyric, theoretical, poetic, or documentary ones from the 13th to the 16th century; they speak from their different contexts. In addition, they have subjected to various historical readings that have overlapped over time and generated new texts. This is how those of Ghiberti and Vasari came into being. Thus, whoever critically examines these two must proceed in the same way with the material on which they are based. The sources for the two chapters in this volume, one dealing with the deconstruction and one dealing with the reconstruction of Giotto's biography, were all evaluated for their origins and validity before being used. The comments added to the source texts explain this in each case.

Finally, it should be pointed out, that the interest in Giotto's historical biography dates back centuries and by no means begins in the twentieth century with writers interested in source criticism, such as Lionello Venturi, Peter Murray, Creighton Gilbert, and Irene Hueck, on whose shoulders we stand. Paradoxically, it began to develop out of the hope of an affirmation of the Florentine Late Renaissance image of Giotto. If Vasari's *Vite* of 1568 definitively modelled the mythical figure that underlies the Giotto of modernity and thus of art history, then one must add that the biographical enterprise that followed started the process of finding the historical reality behind the legend. This refers to the work, *Notizie de' Professori del Disegno da Cimabue in qua*, by Filippo Baldinucci, whose first volume appeared in 1681 in Florence. A new edition with comments by Domenico Maria Manni came out in 1767. Modern art history generally has used the edition by Ferdinando Ranalli (Florence 1845), which was reprinted (Florence 1974), but did not reproduce Baldinucci's text correctly.⁷

Baldinucci was the first Giotto biographer not only to work on the basis of narrative tradition (whether it be oral as in Ghiberti or written as in Vasari), but also to exploit the

7 For the Giotto-Vita: First edition 1681, vol. 1 pp. 44–55; Ed. Manni 1767, vol. 1 pp. 107–151; Ed. Ranalli 1845, vol. 1 pp. 102–132. Please note the edition *Opere di Filippo Baldinucci*, ed. D. M. Manni, vol. 4, Milan 1811, pp. 129–175. In the following we quote from the edition of 1845, because it is the most accessible. Where it has errors or where letter accuracy is at stake, the *editio princeps* of 1681 is used.

primary sources – relicts of the past such as contracts, lists of payment, or lists of members of guilds or brotherhoods. The fact that Vasari came across the name of Giotto's son Francesco sometime between 1550 and 1568 in the book of the Confraternity of St. Luke (1.3.5) was, by contrast, a coincidence with which the author could not do anything (2.1.10 [p. 130]). Baldinucci's main interest was the reconstruction of a family history. In his work he printed the latter in the form of a pedigree,⁸ which covers five generations but is unreliable in the generations of Giotto's grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Abstracts of documents are assigned to each name, which are suitable for proving the person's existence (25 in total). Inserted into the text and "preprepared" according to the author's requirements, there is also a Giotto-related text from Rome (2.2.5), in which another primary source, an entry from the necrology of St. Peter's, is embedded (1.4.5). In the preface, titled *Apologia*, which defends Vasari's Florence-centered world view against Carlo Cesare Malvasia and his Bolognese impositions,⁹ and among much narrative material on Giotto (Dante, Boccaccio, etc.) the important Florentine government decree of 1334 can also be found (1.5.2).

On the one hand, one can call Baldinucci a Vasari continuator: he retains the infancy legend according to Ghiberti, a narratively linked catalogue of works, and anecdotes – material mainly provided and prepared by Vasari. On the other hand, there is a new method of confirming the facts by means of first-hand documents. The 28 documents that Baldinucci published in 1681 are the basis of the collection of primary sources presented here under 1. Fame is determined by the selection of memories; it is therefore also a form of oblivion. In Vasari, Giotto is at the peak of both fame and oblivion. In Baldinucci, the peak of oblivion has been passed.

As an appendix, we present a corpus of sources that do not contain Giotto's name and only indirectly contribute to the knowledge of his life and work. These are the sources on the Arena Chapel in Padua that will prove useful in the second volume. After the Paduan nobleman, architect, and art scholar, Pietro Selvatico, had anchored the Arena Chapel murals in the consciousness of the educated world as the perhaps most important complex of works by our painter in 1836, Antonio Tolomei presented a first collection of sources in 1880 that shed light on the history of the site, the building, and the foundation.¹⁰ Tolomei's finds from the 11th to the 16th century form the core of the two different collections presented 128 years later, one by Laura Jacobus, the other in the German edition of the present work.

8 At least in the first edition Florence 1681 (mostly at p. 44). In all later editions the family tree is dissolved to a kind of list.

9 Cf. E. Grasman, *All'ombra del Vasari*, Florence 2000, pp. 21–66.

10 P. Selvatico, *Sulla cappellina degli Scrovegni nell'Arena di Padova e sui freschi di Giotto in essa dipinti*, Padua 1836. A. Tolomei, *La chiesa di Giotto nell'Arena di Padova*, Padua 1880, pp. 27–46.

GIOTTO'S LIFE AND WORK IN Ghiberti AND Vasari

Lorenzo Ghiberti († 1455) must have completed the second book of his *Commentarii* in 1447/48 (for the arguments see 2.1.4). It begins with a report on the destruction of images by the Christians, which is said to have taken place from the time of Emperor Constantine and describes the decline of the arts, since they were no longer required, conjuring up the bleak prospect of a time completely without pictures; it allegedly persisted for six hundred years. Then, supposedly, the “Greeks” (today one would speak of Byzantines) resumed the production of images. It is important for the author to emphasize how primitive their art was in contrast to that of the “Ancients”, which he had treated in the first book. (“tanto quanto gl’antichi furon periti, tanto erano in questa età grossi e rozi.”¹¹) Thereafter, and virtually seamlessly, the section on Giotto begins (2.1.4). This is followed by a series of paragraphs about individual artists. It is those painters and sculptors who represent for Ghiberti the epoch after the new beginning embodied by Giotto and thus lead to the art of his own time. Finally, with the personal memories of the author the second book (but not the complete work) ends.

The position of his appearance in the text alone assigns Giotto a key historical role. This role was by no means new: It had already been written for the painter by Filippo Villani in the late 14th century (2.1.3). In Ghiberti’s time it had become a historical-philosophical *topos*. The humanists Enea Silvio Piccolomini and Matteo Palmieri, for example, make the artist appear as the protagonists of a cultural turn, one that affected both literature, and political culture (2.6.5, 2.3.7). Accordingly, the evaluation that Giotto receives from Ghiberti does not necessarily derive from the encounter of the sculptor-humanist with the works of the painter, but corresponds rather to the consensus in mid-15th century Central Italy and was ultimately based on what had proved to be an enduring invention of the mid-14th century: I refer to Petrarch’s interpretation of the post-antique centuries as an empty, dark, cold, even illegitimate in-between time, which two generations later was called the Middle Ages and believed to be triumphantly overcome by men like Giotto.¹²

Ghiberti’s Giotto passage is quoted below in translation and annotated with a view to Vasari’s Giotto *Vita*, which in both its 1550 and its 1568 version relies on Ghiberti (2.1.9, 10). A comparison to the *Libro di Antonio Billi* has also been included (2.1.6). The latter source, named after an early owner of one of the two preserved copies, is a collection of notes on individual artists. Its unknown author recorded what the Florentines of the early sixteenth century told him. It is thus a codification of oral tradition similar to that

11 Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I Commentarii*, ed. L. Bertoli, Florence 1998, p. 83.

12 K. Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca: Ein Intellektueller im Europa des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Munich and Vienna 2003, pp. 749–752.

of Ghiberti, but without any literary or narrative ambition, and at the same time a voice independent of Ghiberti.¹³ Vasari also made use of it. The following is the beginning of Ghiberti's text:¹⁴

THE INFANCY ACCORDING TO Ghiberti

The art of painting began to rise in Etruria, in a village near the city of Florence which was called Vespignano. A child was born of marvelous talent. He was drawing a sheep from life. While passing by on the way to Bologna, the painter Cimabue saw the child seated on the ground drawing a sheep on a stone. He felt great admiration for the child, who did so well at such a young age. Seeing that he had a natural talent for art, he asked the child his name. He replied and said: I am called Giotto by name; my father is named Bondoni and lives in this house which is close by. Cimabue went with Giotto to his father, was wellcomed, and asked the father who was very poor, for the child. He gave the child to Cimabue, who took Giotto with him, and Giotto was the pupil of Cimabue, who adhered to the Greek manner and in this style enjoyed very great fame in Etruria. Giotto became great in the art of painting.

In addition to the name of the father, from this story only Giotto's connection with Vespignano (a cluster of farms next to the small town Vicchio di Mugello in the upper Sieve valley about 20 kilometers north of Florence) can be verified using primary sources, and only for the second half of his life (1.1.17). During Ghiberti's time, it was known that Giotto had property in the Mugello, since Boccaccio mentions this in one of the novellas of the *Decameron* (2.4.3). Therefore, it was perhaps from the Boccaccio-passage that Ghiberti's contemporary, St. Antonin of Florence, in his *World Chronicle*, could similarly say that the artist "emerged from the fields of the Mugello" (2.1.5). Since Ghiberti names Vespignano, it is clear, however, that he was not referring to Boccaccio, but to another, most likely oral, tradition.

As for the teacher-pupil relationship between Cimabue and Giotto, Ghiberti (and later the author of Billi's *Libro*) probably took this information from a widespread and authoritative commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the so-called *Falso Boccaccio* of the late 14th century (2.5.6). The less well-known and slightly younger commentary by the *Anonimo Fiorentino* also mentions Giotto as a pupil of Cimabue and tells a long story about

¹³ W. Kallab, *Vasaristudien*, Vienna and Leipzig 1908, pp. 148–157 and 166–178.

¹⁴ The arrangement of the text in four paragraphs follows Schlosser: *Denkwürdigkeiten des Florentinischen Bildhauers Lorenzo Ghiberti*, ed. J. von Schlosser, Berlin 1920, pp. 51–55.

this – albeit a very different one from Ghiberti (2.5.7). In Dante’s text and in the older commentaries on his poem, and, indeed, in the very detailed and accurate commentary by Christoforo Landino, written in 1480/81, nothing points to a teacher-pupil relationship (2.5.1–5 and 9). There is no more said about the connection between Cimabue and Giotto than in Dante’s text, namely, that the younger man finally surpassed the older in terms of applause. The idea of a teacher-pupil relationship was thus *opinio communis* neither in the century before nor in the century after Ghiberti.¹⁵ It was generally believed only from the mid-16th century after Vasari’s first editing of the story was available.

As far as Bondone’s humble existence is concerned („el padre era poverissimo“), it seems that a nameless grandfather of Ghiberti was the origin of the claim. According to the details that Ghiberti had to give on 29 April 1444 before the Florentine City Council on his family, his maternal grandfather was a „lavoratore di Val di Sieve“.¹⁶ He had thus spent a meager life in the Mugello or in the immediately adjacent lower Sieve Valley. We are dealing with what Jan Assmann calls dislodged memory:¹⁷ In the person of Giotto’s father, Ghiberti remembers what was told to him about his grandfather. This offered the opportunity to outwit the Florentine establishment, which was apparently reluctant to see grandsons of farm workers among their ranks, but counted the son of a farm worker, if Giotto had been one, among their heroes.

The core of Ghiberti’s plot is that little Giotto draws an animal: Here the author probably took up a story that the Milanese humanist Uberto Decembrio told in his treatise *De Republica*, written between 1400 and 1404, about an artist and older contemporary of Ghiberti:¹⁸ “I knew Michelino da Besozzo – the outstanding painter of our time – as a little

15 So it is not accurate when among others, Boskovits stated in 2000 that the early sources unanimously speak of Giotto as Cimabue’s disciple: DizBI s.v. Giotto di Bondone (M. Boskovits). The facts have already been clarified by Schlosser: J. von Schlosser, *Lorenzo Ghibertis Denkwürdigkeiten. Prolegomena zu einer künftigen Ausgabe*, Vienna 1910 (Sonderabdruck aus dem kunstgeschichtlichen Jahrbuch der k.k. Zentral-Kommission für Kunst- und historische Denkmale), pp. 1–107, esp. 14–23 (reprinted in: J. Schlosser, *Präludien. Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Berlin 1927, pp. 248–261).

16 R. Krautheimer, *Ghiberti*, Princeton 1956, p. 3 and doc. 120 (pp. 391–394).

17 J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Cambridge, Ma. 1997, p. 39.

18 Uberto Decembrio, *De Republica* (Milan, Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, ms. B 123 sup., fol. 97v.): “Michaelem papiensem nostri temporis pictorem eximium puerulum novi, quem ad artem illam adeo natura formaverat ut prius loqui inciperet aviculas et minutas animalium formas ita subtiliter et proprie designabat, ab illius artis periti artifices mirarentur, qualis nunc magister exceverit opus docet, nullum reor sibi esse consimlie.” Quoted after: U. Pfisterer, *Erste Werke und Autopoiesis. Der Topos künstlerischer Frühbegabung im 16. Jahrhundert*, in: *Visuelle Topoi. Erfindung und tradiertes Wissen in den Künsten der italienischen Renaissance*,

boy whom nature had shaped so much for the arts, that even before he began to speak, he began to draw ants and small animals so finely and accurately that even experienced artists were astonished." The seemingly arbitrary transfiguration of the ant into a sheep proves, under closer consideration, to be a thoughtful measure, since it opens up a different context. The theme of the child prodigy in this way coincides with a poor and rural origin. In addition, the motif that he cares for sheep, brings the little Giotto from the real Mugello to the "poetic world" (Ernst A. Schmidt) and "spiritual landscape" (Bruno Snell) of the Arcadia of the pastoral poetry, which was rediscovered in Italian early humanism.¹⁹ It was also an opportunity to establish a connection to the Florentine tradition of Dante. Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante* presents the poet as the national hero of the Florentines and upgrades the story of his birth accordingly. Before going into labour, his mother is said to have dreamt that she saw the child as a shepherd plucking berries from a laurel tree. The figure of the shepherd was interpreted by Boccaccio as follows: a spiritual leader who increased the wisdom of Antiquity through his own literary creations; in short, a (proto-) humanist conforming to the self-perception of a Boccaccio or Petrarch.²⁰

Ghiberti's account of Giotto's childhood was a resounding success in spite of its minimal historical content, and, through Vasari's 1568 adaptation, it has shaped the idea of Giotto's beginnings until today. It has even provided a model for other artists' biographies.²¹ This success doubtlessly has much to do with its bucolic subtext, but also with what the story provides, in an unobtrusive way, ideologically and art-theoretically. First, it describes the existence of the painter (similar to that of the poet) as presuppositionless. "Poeta nascitur non fit," goes an aphorism, which was probably formulated in the early Middle Ages, although the early modern era could only believe that it originated from ancient poetology (Horace, Cicero).²² In Ghiberti's and probably already in Giotto's time, visual artists came mostly from artisan families. As sculptors or painters, they continued domestic traditions in a sophisticated form. This is exactly what the *Anonimo Fiorentino*

ed. U. Pfisterer and M. Seidel, Munich and Berlin 2003, pp. 263–302, esp. 266. Jenni first pointed to the art theoretical relevance of the narrative: U. Jenni, *Der Beginn des Naturstudiums. Eine Legende vom zeichnenden Hirtenknaben*, in: *Von der Macht der Bilder*, ed. E. Ullmann, Leipzig 1983, pp. 129–135.

19 W. Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Antropology*, Baltimore 1993, p. 31 with references to the texts of Schmidt and Snell. See also: K. Krautter, *Die Renaissance der Bukolik in der lateinischen Literatur des XIV. Jahrhunderts: Von Dante bis Petrarca*, Munich 1983.

20 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, ed. L. Sasso, Milan 1995, pp. 12 and 79.

21 E. Kris and O. Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, New Haven and London 1979, pp. 30–38.

22 W. Ringler, *Poeta nascitur non fit: Some Notes on the History of an Aphorism*, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2, 1941, pp. 497–504.

told half a century before Ghiberti about Giotto's youth: Giotto moved from the workshop of a wool weaver, where his father had placed him, to that of Cimabue and thus from one apprenticeship to another (2.5.7). Against this background, it becomes clear that the choice of a poor peasant as Giotto's father was also a decision directed against an image of the artist that had his origins in craft and in favor of an image within which Florentine intellectual circles had been working for decades.²³ A few years before Ghiberti, Leon Battista Alberti, the most important thinker in the field of fine arts, had adopted a work by Giotto, the colossal Navicella mosaic in Rome, as a means of expressing these new ideas (2.3.8). By separating the Giotto family from the urban economy, Ghiberti placed him in a utopian Quattrocento art world.

Furthermore, the story describes Giotto's artistic beginnings as those of a naturalist. This becomes particularly clear when one reads how Leonardo da Vinci, in his unfinished treatise on painting, reformulated the narrative of Giotto's youth in order to make this aspect of its significance explicit (2.3.11):²⁴ Giotto "being born in the mountains and in solitude inhabited only by goats and such beasts, and being guided by nature to his art, began to draw all the animals which were to be found in the country, and in such a manner that after much study he excelled not only all the masters of his time but all those of many bygone ages." Indeed, Ghiberti says nothing about a training given to Giotto by Cimabue who rather attests him that he must "aver l'arte da natura". Therefore, Giotto is spared the dead-end of the *Maniera greca*. According to Pliny's *Natural History*, which, as Book I of the *Commentarii* proves, belonged to Ghiberti's readings, Lysippus, the great naturalist of antiquity, was believed "not to have been the pupil of anybody." Instead, he had taught "that it was Nature herself, not an artist, whom we ought to imitate" (XXXIV, 19).²⁵ At the same time, Ghiberti was recalling Boccaccio's image of Giotto. By drawing on a long tradition in the praise of artists, Boccaccio had stated that nature had never produced anything that Giotto "would not have been able to imitate with his pencil or brush so well, and draw it so like, as to deceive people's sense of sight by making them imagine that to be the very thing itself which was only the painting" (2.4.3).²⁶

Ghiberti's *Commentarii* is characterised by combination of old historiographical models with new ideas of art theory.²⁷ What is reported about Giotto's childhood is, so to

23 P. Burke, *Die Renaissance in Italien. Sozialgeschichte einer Kultur zwischen Tradition und Erfindung*, Munich 1988, pp. 54–59; M. Haines, *Artisan Family Strategies: Proposals for Research on the Families of Florentine Artists*, in: *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, ed. G. Ciapelli and P.L. Rubin, Cambridge, Ma. 2000, pp. 163–175.

24 Translation after: *Giotto in Perspective*, ed. L. Schneider, Englewood Cliffs 1974, p. 43.

25 Pliny, *Natural History*, ed. H. Rackham, vol. 9, London 1952, p. 172.

26 M. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators. Humanist observers of painting in Italy and the discovery of pictorial composition*, Oxford 1971, pp. 51–53 and 74–75.

27 R. Krautheimer, *Die Anfänge der Kunstgeschichtsschreibung in Italien*, in: id., *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur europäischen Kunstgeschichte*, Cologne 1988, pp. 277–298.

speak, the centerpiece that not only bridges Book I and Book II – ancient and contemporary art practice – but also narratively links the two levels of representation, history and theory. Since Giotto had already been well-established as a figure of literary fiction by Boccaccio (2.4.3), Sacchetti (2.4.6), and others (2.5.5, 7), the status of his infancy between biography, novella and parable, may even have been believed by Ghiberti to be self-evident. Anyone who assumed the narrative not to be true in the factual sense came closer to understanding its programmatic content.

The subsequent characterization of Giotto's art, which is said not only to be committed to the observation of nature, but also to be graceful and regular, draws on the ideal of the modern artist, who, by studying nature supposedly follows the rules of Antiquity:

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He brought about the new art; he left behind the crudeness of the Greeks; he became pre-eminent in Etruria by his great excellence. And very fine works were made especially in the city of Florence and in many other places. And his many pupils were just as gifted as the ancient Greeks. Giotto saw in art that which the others did not achieve. He brought about natural art and grace with it, without giving up measure. He was very skilled in all art and was the inventor and discoverer of much knowledge which had been buried for around six hundred years. When nature wishes to grant something, it grants without any avarice. This man was talented in all things: He worked on the wall, in oil, and on the panel. He worked in mosaic the ship of Saint Peter in Rome, and painted with his own hands the chapel and the panel of Saint Peter's in Rome. He painted with excellence the hall of the famous men for King Robert. In Naples he painted in the Castello dell'Uovo. He painted, that is to say by his hand, in the church of the Arena in Padua; an Earthly Glory is by his hand. And in the Palazzo della Parte is a history of the Christian faith, and many other things were in this palace. He painted in the church of Assisi, in the Order of the Brothers Minor, almost all the lower part. He painted in Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi. In Santa Maria Minerva in Rome a crucifix with a panel.

The fact that Giotto was not a specialist, but a generalist of painting, is used by Ghiberti to indicate Giotto's distinguished position. The mention of oil painting ("lavorò a olio"), a technique that was just beginning to establish itself in Italy during Ghiberti's time,²⁸

28 F. Ames-Lewis, Sources and documents for the use of the oil medium in Fifteenth-century

shows how much Giotto's contemporary relevance stands in the foreground. Nevertheless, a painter who was writing about himself would probably not have dared to make this statement.

Ghiberti's list does not order Giotto's works according to a chronological sequence, a *curriculum operum* in analogy to *curriculum vitae*, but rather arranges them topographically. In the section quoted above, the enumeration begins with what the author knew about works outside Florence.²⁹ Presumably the data are based on locally existing traditions, which the writer, who had travelled in Italy, had gathered in person, at least in Rome and Padua, but probably also in Assisi.

As far as the works included from St. Peter's in Rome are concerned, the Navicella mosaic ("the ship of Saint Peter") and the so-called Stefaneschi Altarpiece ("the panel of Saint Peter's") are confirmed as Giotto's by a primary source, the necrology of the Vatican Basilica (I.4.5). The patron whose salvation was to benefit Giotto's art was the canon of St. Peter's and Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi (vol. 2 pp. 225–252 and 467–495). According to the necrology, he also paid for the decoration of a space in St. Peter's, called the "tribuna" which almost certainly corresponds to the "cappella" Ghiberti mentioned before the altarpiece. But where the necrology refers to the "tribuna", Giotto's name does not appear. By contrast, in Billi's book (2.I.6), whose compiler collected information seventy years after Ghiberti, the "tribuna" is recorded as part of Giotto's Roman activity („He went to Rome and painted the Tribuna in St. Peter's and a ship and other admirable things"). This speaks for a stable local tradition concerning Giotto's activity in the "tribuna" or "cappella" of the Vatican Basilica (vol. 2 pp. 413–416).

Vasari, following Ghiberti and Billi's book, names the Navicella, the Stefaneschi Altarpiece and the "tribuna" as Giotto's works. When he revised the second edition (1568), he understood the "tribuna" to be nothing other than the choir of Old Saint Peter's. This gave him the opportunity to add information on a cycle of paintings, which he had seen there („Five Scenes from the Life of Christ"), but has been lost since 1592 due to the demolition of the western parts of the church. Elsewhere, however, Vasari refers to these pictures as works of Giotto's pupil Stefano.³⁰ Vasari also gives information about the patronage and price of the "tribuna" paintings and the altarpiece, which is, however, inaccurate (as can be checked in the necrology, I.4.5): neither did Giotto receive 600 ducats

Italian painting, in: *Cultural exchange between the Low Countries and Italy, 1400–1530*, ed. I. Alexander-Skipnes, Turnhout 2007, pp. 47–62.

29 In addition to the annotations to Ghiberti, Billi, and Vasari, the following book was particularly useful: P. Murray, *An Index of Attributions made in Tuscan Sources before Vasari*, Florence 1959.

30 Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568, Testo*, ed. R. Bettarini, vol. 2, Florence 1967, p. 136.

as remuneration, nor was a pope Benedict the patron (whether Benedict XII, as Vasari says in the edition of 1550, nor Benedict IX as he says in the edition of 1568, nor Benedict XI whom Vasari apparently meant). Vasari's reference to a pope of this name probably goes back to the inaccurate reading of a passage in Albertini's guide to the city of Rome of 1510 (2.7.6) and thus indirectly to Platina's papal history (2.2.4).

As for the works in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, cited by Ghiberti, there is nothing relevant preserved in the church, nor does Giotto's name appear in earlier sources. Billi's book does not mention the works. Vasari takes over what Ghiberti cites.

After the presentation of the Roman works, Ghiberti reports on two complexes of frescos in Naples (a "hall of the famous men", paintings in the „Castel dell'Uovo“). Giotto's activity for King Robert the Wise is evidenced by an impressive series of primary sources (1.2.1–7). Contrary to what is expected given Ghiberti's text, the documents do not refer to the Castel dell'Uovo, but to the residence castle, the Castel Nuovo; those who do not know Naples easily confuse these palaces. In the Castel Nuovo, according to documents from the years 1329 to 1333, the painter decorated two chapels and left an altarpiece (1.2.3 and 7). Only fragments of the painting of one of the chapels have been preserved (vol. 2 pp. 451–452). In this castle (or elsewhere in Naples) there was also perhaps the hall with images of famous men mentioned by Ghiberti.³¹ That they originated from Giotto, however, is made questionable by Petrarch's silence on the matter, who was familiar with Naples as well as its royal court and was generally interested in Giotto's works (2.7.2, vol. 3, pp. 51–54).

Billi's book also mentions two work complexes left by Giotto in Naples, but they are different. The one piece of information that he records need not be followed up on since the Incoronata church named in the book was not founded before 1373.³² By contrast, the construction of Santa Chiara began in 1310, and another source from the 16th century reports Giotto's activity there³³ (2.6.6, vol. 2 pp. 452–453). Moreover, one version of Billi's

31 The existence of the hall seems to be attested by a series of sonnets first published by Giuseppe de Blasiis: G. de Blasiis, *Immagini di Uomini famosi in una sala di Castelnuovo, Napoli Nobilissima* 9, 1900, pp. 65–67. A copy (Florence, Laurenziana Rediano 184, fol. 124r) bears the headline: “Sonetti composti per [...] Il quale essendo nella sala del re Roberto a Napoli vide dipinti questi famosi huomini. E lui fè a ciaschuno il suo sonetto chome qui apresso.” In addition, the sonnet on Samson contains a hint that it is not the real hero but an image in a “sala bella” that is sung about.

32 F. Nicolini, *L'arte Napoletana del Rinascimento e la Lettera di P. Summonte a M. A. Michiel*, Naples 1925, p. 190.

33 The name Giotto, however, does not seem to have occurred in the substantial source material handed down for this church but destroyed in 1943: H.W. Schulz, *Denkmäler der Kunst des Mittelalters in Unteritalien*, ed. F. von Quast, Dresden 1860, vol. 3, pp. 58–69 and G. dell'Aja, *Per la storia del monastero di Santa Chiara in Napoli*, Naples 1992.

book records that Giotto and the poet Dante met in Santa Chiara, while the other notes that they worked there together on images of the Apocalypse. Before Billi's *Libro*, the much-read Dante commentator Benvenuto da Imola reported on an encounter between Dante and Giotto (2.5.5). The author of the *Libro* probably adopted the framework of the story from him. Benvenuto's report itself, however, is a collage of motifs, and in his telling the two men met in Padua, rather than Naples.

Vasari adopted both Ghiberti's and Billi's record of Neapolitan works. According to Vasari, it was said in the city that Dante had assisted Giotto in the planning of a fresco programme for Santa Chiara (vol. 3 pp. 50–51).

From Naples Ghiberti moves on to Padua and comes back to fairly familiar ground. His statement that Giotto had painted the Arena Chapel in Padua can be confirmed by the chronicle of Riccobaldo Ferrarese and by the mention of a detail of the murals in a poem by Francesco da Barberino, both of which could have been written only a few years after Giotto's activity in Padua (2.2.1, 2.4.1, vol. 2 p. 33). However, Ghiberti did not draw from these sources, but as, in Rome, most likely from an oral tradition. The identification of "Earthly Glory" ("gloria mundana") is apparently based on his own observation. Where (in the Arena Chapel or in Padua) the image with this mysteriously characterized theme is supposed to have been is unclear. Vasari adopted the information on the image from the *Commentarii* without reflection (vol. 3 pp. 52–53). He has neither seen the Arena Chapel nor any other Paduan work by Giotto, and therefore gives only an incomplete paraphrase of Ghiberti's words in his *Vite*. Based on the reading of Vasari (whether the version of 1550 or the version of 1568), no one could expect that the decoration of the Arena Chapel in Padua might belong to Giotto's most important works.

Ghiberti's statement that Giotto was also active in the Palazzo della Ragione is confirmed as historically correct by the *Visio Egidii*, i.e. the second part of the Paduan Chronicle of Giovanni da Nono, written around 1319 (2.7.1, vol. 2 pp. 182–186). This source also proves that Ghiberti means the Paduan communal palace. Giovanni da Nono says that Giotto decorated the vault above the hall of the Palazzo with an astrological cycle. But the chronicler who was familiar with the place knew nothing about an image of "the history of the Christian faith" which, according to Ghiberti, was located there. This is not surprising, because the palace had burnt down in 1420 and nothing of Giotto's paintings on the wooden vault (a spectacular construction built shortly after 1306) would have survived when Ghiberti visited Padua in 1424 during his journey to Venice.³⁴ What can be found today in the Salone of the Palazzo della Ragione, and what may have existed in whole or in part in 1424, is an astrological-allegorical-theological program. Vasari does not mention the Paduan Palace and transfers the „history of the Christian faith“ to the Palazzo della Parte Guelfa in Florence (2.1.9, 10).

34 J. von Schlosser, *Leben und Meinungen des Florentiner Bildners Lorenzo Ghiberti*, Basel 1941, p. 42.

In the Florence section of Ghiberti's catalogue of works there is a supplement to the Padua section about works in the Santo (San Antonio) (see below). This piece of information is verifiable: The "ecclesia Minorum ... Padue" is also mentioned in the list of Riccobaldo Ferrarese (2.2.1). Vasari follows Ghiberti (vol. 2 pp. 181–182).

After the Padua section, Ghiberti reveals what he has learned about Giotto's activity in Assisi. The phrase concerning the double church of San Francesco has given rise to endless discussions: Giotto is said to have painted "quasi tutta la parte di sotto".³⁵ Does the author want to say by this that Giotto painted in the lower church, namely in the Mary Magdalene chapel, the Saint Nicholas chapel, the northern transept and on the vault of the crossing? These are the frescos that can be considered as executed by Giotto and, taken together, could be described by a sympathetic author as "almost the entire lower church". Or is it to say that he painted the lower wall of the nave of the upper church and was the master of the St. Francis cycle (vol. 2 pp. 297–372)? A third possibility is that "parte di sotto" means the end of the nave towards the entrance in the upper church.³⁶ "The lower part" would certainly designate this zone from a cleric's perspective, and who, other than a member of the convent, could have been Ghiberti's informant in Assisi? In this case, a group of frescoes that cautious art historians call the work of the "Isaac Master" would be introduced as Giotto's (vol. 2 pp. 190–225).

The problem cannot be solved using the mention of Assisi in Billi's book. This is not least because the Billi passage includes the activity of Cimabue and thus reflects information of some complexity: "He began to acquire fame through the great painting in San Francesco in Assisi which Cimabue had begun."

Nor can it be solved using Vasari's texts. In the 1550 edition he replaced Ghiberti's "quasi tutta la parte di sotto" with "tutta la chiesa dalla banda di sotto" thus probably giving only a paraphrase. Vasari had the opportunity to visit the church in 1563³⁷ and the 1568 edition of the *Vite* lists both the St. Francis cycle and large parts of the decoration in the lower church as Giotto's works. For this claim, Vasari need not have used any other sources than Ghiberti and Billi. He may simply have transformed an undecidable "either ... or ..." into a generous "not only ... but also ..."³⁸ with the consequence that Vasari's readers for a long time approached Giotto via Assisi rather than Padua. In addition, Vasari

35 A. Smart, Ghiberti's 'quasi tutta la parte di sotto' and Vasari's Attributions to Giotto at Assisi, *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 7, 1963, pp. 3–24.

36 Chr. K. Fengler, *Ghiberti's Second Commentary. The Translation and Interpretation of a Fundamental Renaissance Treatise of Art*, Ph. D. University of Wisconsin 1974, p. 103.

37 Kallab, *Vasaristudien*, p. 112.

38 P. Scarpellini, La decorazione pittorica della Chiesa Superiore nelle fonti fiorentine e nella tradizione assisana fino agli inizi del diciassettesimo secolo, in: *Il cantiere pittorico della Basilica Superiore di San Francesco in Assisi*, ed. G. Basile und P. Magro, Assisi 2001, pp. 311–328.