



Anthropology and aesthetics

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Authorship and image-making in the monument to Giotto in Florence Cathedral

ALEXANDER NAGEL

In 1490 the city of Florence, under the direction of its de facto ruler Lorenzo de' Medici, erected a monument to Giotto in Florence Cathedral (fig. 1). It shows a portrait of the artist by the sculptor Benedetto da Maiano and carries an epitaph composed by the renowned humanist Angelo Poliziano. Standing in one of the principal churches of Italy and associated with a major artist, a major humanist, and a major patron, the monument is also notable for being one of the earliest formal commemorations of a visual artist. It is a self-reflexive art-historical monument positioned very near to what most would consider the heart of the Italian Renaissance. And yet the work is surprisingly little known, probably because it remains difficult to read. The inscription speaks of Giotto as an author-inventor, as the one who brought naturalism (back) into painting, and as the artist who revived the expertise and art of antiquity. And yet, the portrait shows Giotto as a mosaicist, at work on an icon of Christ (fig. 2). That is, he is shown making a famously prototypically nonauthored image in a notoriously nonauthorial medium. This article aims not to resolve the contradiction but to contextualize it, to suggest that in presenting competing models of authorship the work was addressing a major issue of its time. Possibly the first art-historical monument ever erected, the work not only commemorates an artist but also focuses attention on what was at stake in the new form of commemoration, which is to say it focuses attention on the relationship of authorship, image-making, and attitudes toward the historicity of art. Are images to be seen as authored works or as bearers of referential content? Are artists technical transmitters or are they fiction-makers? Does an image belong to the time of its making or to the time of its prototype? These are some of the questions raised by the monument.

Figures of authorship

Here is a very literal translation of Poliziano's Latin inscription:

I AM HE THROUGH WHOM PAINTING, DEAD,
RETURNED TO LIFE

This article took form in the midst of work toward a book on Renaissance anachronism that is coauthored by Christopher Wood. This article would not have taken the shape it has without the tools we have developed together over years of collaborative discussion and research.

AND WHOSE HAND WAS AS SURE AS IT WAS ADEPT.
WHAT MY ART LACKED WAS LACKING IN NATURE
HERSELF.
TO NO ONE WAS IT GIVEN TO PAINT BETTER OR MORE.
DO YOU ADMIRE THE GREAT BELLTOWER RESOUNDING
WITH SACRED BRONZE?
THIS TOO ON THE BASIS OF MY MODEL HAS GROWN
TO THE STARS.
AFTER ALL, I AM GIOTTO. WHAT NEED WAS THERE TO
RELATE THESE THINGS?
THIS NAME HAS STOOD AS THE EQUAL TO ANY LONG
POEM.
DECEASED 1336. ERECTED BY THE CITIZENS 1490.¹

The words are spoken by Giotto himself: "Ille ego sum." The formula was well known in the epigrammatic tradition, and was especially frequent in those epigrams appended to *imagines*. The formula *ille ego sum*, for example, is used by Martial 9.53 in an epigram referred to the image on the tomb of a prematurely deceased charioteer.² Several other examples can be found in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*; all referred to tombs and monuments.³

1. Many thanks to Hérica Valladares and Caroline Elam for consulting on the translation. The original reads:

ILLE EGO SVM PER QVEM PICTVRA EXTINCTA REVIXIT
CVI QVAM RECTA MANVS TAM FVIT ET FACILIS
NATVRAE DEERAT NOSTRAE QVOD DEFVIT ARTI
PLVS LICVIT NVLLI PINGERE NEC MELIVS
MIRARIS TVRRIM EGREGIAM SACRO AERE SONANTEM
HAEC QVOQVE DEMODVLO CREVIT ADASTRA MEO
DENIQVE SVM IOTTVS QVID OPVS FVIT ILLA REFERRE
HOC NOMEN LONGI CARMINIS INSTAR ERAT
OB AN MCCCXXXVI CIVES POS B M MCCCCLXXX

Originally, the decess date read MCCCXX. It is still possible to see even in reproduction that when the date was corrected CONCVES was reduced to CIVES to make room for the extra numerals. Although the inscription says it was "erected by the citizens," this monument and several others to illustrious Florentine citizens erected in the cathedral at this time were conceived and promoted by Lorenzo de' Medici. See Doris Carl, "Il ritratto commemorativo di Giotto di Benedetto da Maiano nel Duomo di Firenze," in *Santa Maria del Fiore: The Cathedral and Its Sculpture*, ed. Margaret Haines (Fiesole, 2001), pp. 129–147.

2. Ille ego sum Scopus, clamosi Gloria Circi,
plausus, Roma, tui deliciaeque breves,
invida quem Lachesis raptum trieteride nona,
dum numerat palmas, credidit esse senem.

3. Several examples, all beginning with *ille ego* or *ille ego sum*, have been collected by Edward Brandt, "Zum Aeneis-Prooemium," *Philologus* 83 (1928):331–335. See also Antonio La Penna, "Ille ego qui quondam e i raccordi editoriali nell'antichità," *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 78 (1985):76–91.

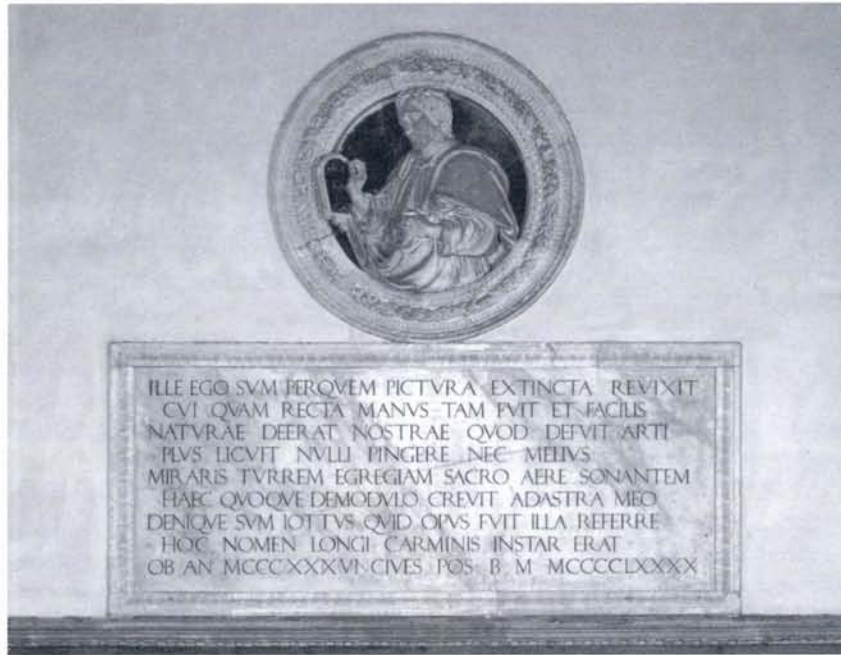


Figure 1. Benedetto da Maiano and Angelo Poliziano, monument to Giotto, 1490. Duomo, Florence, Italy. Photo: Nicolo Orsi Battaglini/Art Resource, N.Y.

But Poliziano's epigram is more than an application of this tradition. The speaker of the lines is not just any commemorated person but specifically an author claiming responsibility for his work. The epigram adopts a well-known device, known as the *sphragis*, or seal of authentication, in which the author of a poem directly addresses his audience to give autobiographical information and proclaim his accomplishments. A sort of embedded signature, both belonging to the poem and branding it as if from the exterior, the device was not a late literary development but was used already by Theognis, that is, at an early phase in the history of committing poetry to writing. It has been argued, even, that it is a corollary of the move from orality to literacy: The *sphragis* proclaimed what was most clearly expected in committing poetry to writing, namely a new notion of textual stability and literary property.⁴ The *sphragis*, in that case, arose with writing. It is not surprising, therefore, to find it invoked whenever notions of authorship are newly at stake.

To take a few examples that would have been known to Poliziano, Ovid introduces a *sphragis* at book 4, verse

8 of the *Tristia*, in which he addresses the posthumous reader and describes his birthplace and his work as a poet of love.⁵ He includes another at the end of book 2 of the *Ars Amatoria* in which he encourages the lover to use the weapons he has provided and enjoins him to inscribe on his trophies (!) the words "Ovid was my master."⁶ Perhaps the best-known example was to be

5. Ille ego qui fuerim, tenerorum lusor amorum,
quem legis, ut noris, accipe posteritas.
Sulmo mihi patria est, gelidis uberrimus undis,
milia, qui novies distat ab Urbe decem.

Gerhard Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel: Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance* (Munich, 2002), p. ix, proposes another Ovidian reference, the "Iste ego sum" uttered by Narcissus on recognizing himself in his reflection (*Met.* III, 463), a reference Wolf associates with Alberti's famous identification of Narcissus as the founder of the art of painting, which is here "mit einer christologischen Ursprungsmythe geknüpft." While my analysis does not exclude this reading, the widespread presence of the "ille ego sum" formula in other contexts suggests a wider literary framework, one in which questions of authorship are consistently brought to bear on the arena of image production.

6. arma dedi uobis: dederat Vulcanus Achilli;
uincite muneribus, uicit ut ille, datis.
sed quicumque meo superarit Amazona ferro,
inscribat spoliis 'Naso magister erat.'

4. Louise Pratt, "The Seal of Theognis, Writing, and Oral Poetry," *The American Journal of Philology* 116 (1995):171-184.



Figure 2. Benedetto da Maiano, portrait from the monument to Giotto, 1490. Duomo, Florence, Italy. Photo: Nicolo Orsi Battaglini/Art Resource, N.Y.

found in the opening to the *Aeneid* as transmitted by Donatus and Servius:

I am he [*Ille ego*] who once tuned my song on a slender reed,
then, leaving the woodland,
constrained the neighboring fields to serve the husbandmen,
however grasping—
a work welcome to farmers: but now of Mars's bristling. . . .⁷

The verses are now generally considered to be spurious later additions, and modern editions of the poem begin with the famous next line: *Arma virumque cano*.⁸ The

ecce, rogant tenerae, sibi dem praecepta, puellae:
uos eritis chartae proxima cura meae!

Other examples can be found in Horace's *Epistulae* 1.20.20; in Propertius's *Elegiae* 1.1, 1.22, and 3.4; and in Ovid's *Amores* 3.15.

7. Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus avena/
carmen, et egressus silvis vicina coegi
ut quamvis avido parerent arva colono,
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis

English quoted from Virgil, *Works*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass., 1916), vol. 2, p. 241.

8. Resoundingly rejected by R. G. Austin, "Ille Ego Qui Quondam. . .," *The Classical Quarterly* 18 (1968):107–115, the verses were defended by P. A. Hansen, "Ille Ego Qui Quondam . . . Once Again," *The Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972):139–149.

fifteenth-century editions of the poem, however, carried the incipit beginning with the words *Ille ego*.⁹ Apart from the obviously similar opening, these famous verses form an especially strong parallel to the Giotto inscription in that they offer an account of the author's corpus in more than one genre, just as the Giotto epitaph describes the artist's work both as painter and as architect.

Poliziano thus combines the two traditions: the "speaking" epigram attached to an image and the *sphragis* of the author proclaiming his works.¹⁰ In making this combination, he was anticipated by Martial, who in epigram 186 of book 14 alludes to an epigram attached to a portrait of Virgil at the head of one of his manuscripts.¹¹ Martial offers his own version of the idea in the opening of book 9, where he offers an epigram that is not included in the book (*quod extra ordinem paginarum est*) and which he says was requested by his protector Stertinius Avitus. Inside the epigram is embedded another—a sort of *sphragis*—to be appended to Martial's portrait in Avitus's library.¹² The unusual status of both this epigram and of the *Aeneid* incipit—framing devices, both inside and outside the corpus—would have recommended them especially to Poliziano's attention.

9. There is some shifting, however. The Bologna 1485 edition of the *Opera* gives the "ille ego" incipit as part of Servius's preface, but starts the poem proper with "Arma virumque cano." The Nuremberg edition of 1492 of the *Opera* with Cristoforo Landino's commentary gives the "Ille ego" incipit as part of Servius's commentary, but then gives the verses again at the bottom of folio LXXVIIv, followed by the "Arma virumque cano" incipit with a large initial at the head of f. LXXIX r. This way, the "Ille ego" verses stand at the beginning at the poem and yet the "Arma virumque cano" verses still stand at the head of the page—a reasonable compromise obtained through formatting. In the Venetian 1493 edition of the *Opera*, the "Ille ego" incipit is given a proper position at the beginning of the poem and at the top of the page.

10. The five other drafts for this epigram, all in the third person, do not offer this combination. See Angelo Poliziano, *Prose Volgari Inedite e Poesie Latine e Greche Edite e Inedite*, ed. Isidoro del Lungo (Florence, 1867), pp. 156–159.

11. Martial 14:186: "Vergilius in membranis. Quam brevis immensum cepit membrana Maronem! / Ipsius vultus prima tabella gerit." On the basis of this epigram Brandt (see note 3, p. 335), suggested that the apocryphal incipit of the *Aeneid* was itself originally placed as an epigram beneath a portrait of Virgil on the frontispiece to a manuscript copy and then through manuscript transmission was erroneously attached to the beginning of the poem.

12. "Have, mi Torani, frater carissime. Epigramma, quod extra ordinem paginarum est, ad Stertinium clarissimum virum scripsimus, qui imaginem meam ponere in bibliotheca sua voluit. De quo scribendum tibi putavi, ne ignores Avitus iste quis vocaretur. Vale et para hospitium.

Note, licet nolis, sublimi pectore vates,
cui referet serus praemia digna cinis,

The combination of *sphragis* and speaking epigram was especially well chosen for an epigram celebrating a painter. As we have seen, the speaking epigram was used especially in association with images. The insistent present tense of the image opens a rift between the now of the moment of the utterance and the then of the speaking subject's life, and thus violates normal temporal rules. The represented person speaks about the past but, strangely, from the present. Giotto recalls his achievements postmortem, from the position of the retrospective monument, as if he has awakened from the dead to speak his own epitaph. All images implicitly perform this magical double function, presenting something that is past and making it address the present. It is the sort of feature that a "word person" such as Poliziano would want to insist on in celebrating a painter.

The device Poliziano uses to do this insisting is the *sphragis*. In literary texts, as we have seen, it comes as a highly visual moment, an authorial self-portrait in which the author reveals himself and brands his text with a proprietary mark. This effect assumes a special force in the case of a visual artist. What is implicit in the speaking epigram—that the image makes the dead person speak in the present—is made explicit by the *sphragis*, in which the artist-author gives an account of his work. In Poliziano's epigram for Giotto, the account begins, suitably, with a resurrection motif: "I am he through whom painting, dead, returned to life."

The *sphragis* and the speaking epigram may come as highly image-like moments within a text, but they are still classic literary devices. This epigram, applying the devices to a painter, must go one step further. As if to dramatize still further the difference between the visual artist and the writer, it has the impatient painter *interrupt* his own epigram: "After all, I am Giotto. What need is there to relate these things? This name has stood as the equal to any long poem." The gesture stages a topos of word-and-image confrontations: The image that renders words superfluous. Within the linguistic context of the epigram, the name IOTTUS is a stand-in for the word-trumping image, a parallel brought home by the use of the word INSTAR, which resonates with references to visual modeling. In fact, the name "Iottus" is painted on

some of the painter's works and thus as brand or logo functions both as word and image.

This is only to dramatize the basic fact about this physical epitaph inscribed in marble, namely that it is itself in an intermediary category, both word and image. The epigram thus takes as its subject a basic fact about monument-making, which is that it is the event by which a name is transformed into an image: Through the monument Giotto becomes GIOTTO. Only the names of the greatest artists assume this kind of iconic force, capable—like the painter's works themselves—of summoning a whole series of images and a whole history before one's eyes. Beyond extolling his various achievements, the monument celebrates and confirms above all the collection of these achievements under the artist's name. It celebrates the fact that a quasi-literary notion of *authorship* has been transferred to the work of a visual artist.

Figures of image-making

Or one might see it another way. The ingenuity expended in applying the devices of literary (self) commemoration to a visual artist is an implicit acknowledgment that such a transfer is not a simple thing. Turning to the portrait of the artist above, we find that it is a complicated matter, indeed. Whereas the inscription celebrates Giotto's work as painter and architect, the relief shows the artist with his right hand raised, and yet between his thumb and forefinger, where one expects to find a brush, there is a mosaic cube. Moreover, he is shown at work on an icon of Christ.¹³ There was no image-type more detached from association with an author than the face of Christ. Celebrated in the inscription as the great author and founder, in the portrait Giotto is shown working on an image that, famously, had no author.¹⁴ This demands some explanation.

13. Doris Carl, *Benedetto da Maiano: A Florentine Sculptor at the Threshold of the High Renaissance* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 149, also notes the discrepancy between Poliziano's text and the portrayal of Giotto as a mosaicist.

14. In emphasizing this tension, my reading proceeds from different premises than that offered in some comments on the monument by Jeffrey Hamburger in *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998), p. 321. Here is his passage on the Giotto monument in its entirety: "The archetypal artist works in the archaic medium of mosaic on the archetypal image, the face of Christ. Rather than God making man in his own image, it is now the divinely inspired artist who fashions an image of the Divinity itself."

hoc tibi sub nostra breve carmen imagine vivat,
quam non obscuris iungis, Avite, viris:
'Ille ego sum nulli nugarum laude secundus
quem non miraris, sed - puto -, lector, amas.
Miores maiora sonent: mihi parva locuto
sufficit in vestras saepe redire manus."

The depiction of Giotto as mosaicist may be seen as a reference to Giotto's authorship of the Navicella mosaic in St. Peter's, the only "modern" work cited by Alberti in his treatise *On Painting*.¹⁵ Giotto was not only the first great modern painter; he was also the last great artist with a living connection to antiquity, and turning him into a master of the art of mosaic confirmed this linking role. In the words of the theorist Antonio Filarete:

This art [mosaic], as is said, is lost, and from Giotto until now has been rarely used. He did some: in Rome one can see by his hand the *nave* in St. Peter's in Rome. And a certain Roman Pietro Cavallini also made works in the art in his time, and he was a very good master. I have also seen it done in a small panel in Venice, which came from Greece, done very solemnly and with very minute pieces, which they say are made of egg shells.¹⁶

I would like to point out the arc of this passage. Filarete's discussion of mural mosaics concludes with the description of a mosaic icon imported from Greece. Likewise, in the Florence Cathedral monument Giotto, the master of the *Navicella*, is shown at work

15. One of Poliziano's drafts for this epigram, indeed, invokes the *Navicella* "variis compacta lapillis"; see Poliziano (note 10), p. 159. For its mention by Alberti, see Leon Battista Alberti, *De Pictura*, ed. Cecil Grayson (Rome, 1980), bk. 2, ch. 43. Strangely, Alberti forgets that it is a mosaic altogether, calling it the "nave dipinta a Roma" by "nostro toscano dipintore Giotto." Nonetheless, others very clearly saw the work as an instance of Giotto's expertise in the mosaic art. Filarete's account of it is discussed below. In 1606, Pierleone Casella set Giotto's work in mosaic higher than his work in painting; see also Ernst Gombrich, "An Early Seventeenth-Century Canon of Artistic Excellence: Pierleone Casella's *Elogia Illustrium Artificum* of 1606," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987):224–232, here p. 229: "On canvas and on panels he excelled others in constructing a scene. But with coloured tesserae Giotto adorns the twin brides and conducts them to his dwelling." Many thanks to Carolina Mangone for this reference.

16. Antonio Filarete, *Trattato di Architettura*, ed. Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi (Milan, 1972), vol. 2, pp. 671–672: "Questa arte, come è detto, è perduta, ché da Giotto in qu poco s'è usata. Lui ne fe': solo a Roma se ne vede di sua mano la nave di Santo Pietro. E uno Piero Cavallino romano ancora lui ne lavorò ne' suoi tempi, il quale era bonissimo maestro. Honne veduto ancora in tavola piccola in Vinegia, fatta molto solennemente, e molto minuti, i quali dicono essere fatti di guscia d'uova." The misidentification of the materials appears to have been common at the time; according to Vasari, in the early fourteenth century, Gaddo Gaddi made small mosaic panels with tesserae made of egg shells. See Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini, with comments by Paola Barocchi. 8 vols. (Florence, 1966), vol. 2, p. 83: "per che datosi a fare piccole tavolette di musaico, ne condusse alcune di guscia d'uova con diligenza e pazienza incredibile, come si può fra l'altre vedere in alcune che ancor oggi sono nel tempio di S. Giovanni di Firenze."

on a mosaic icon of Christ. Among the icons collected in Europe, icons in mosaic, especially the kind of micromosaic described by Filarete, were especially prized. Only fifty Byzantine micromosaics survive, and almost all the surviving examples are in the West, suggesting that they were an especially coveted export item.¹⁷

In the wake of the Fall of Constantinople, such icons were imported, collected, and promoted by prominent—and interconnected—personages all over Italy and Europe. In 1457, twenty-three mosaic icons and thirteen painted and sculpted icons were listed in the collection of Pietro Barbo, later Pope Paul II, none of which has been identified.¹⁸ Cardinal Bessarion donated seven mosaic icons to St. Peter's in 1462 and 1467.¹⁹ Upon the death of Paul II in 1471, several icons passed to Cardinal Francesco d'Este, who also commissioned copies of Greek manuscripts borrowed from Bessarion.²⁰ Another portion of Barbo's collection passed to Lorenzo de' Medici. These may or may not have included the eleven mosaic icons listed in the inventory of 1492.²¹ Of these, the only one that can now be traced to Lorenzo's collection is, as it happens, a bust of Christ, now in the Bargello Museum (fig. 3).

There were good reasons for this preference for mosaic. For one, the mosaic medium itself was strongly branded as antique. Ancient painting had barely survived, and there was almost no sense of what it looked like.²² Ancient mosaics, on the other hand, could easily be seen first-hand; they were the expected form for two-dimensional images from antiquity. This may in part explain why the mosaic icons imported from Greek lands, though in fact relatively late Byzantine productions, were consistently given venerable ancient

17. Eugène Müntz, "Les mosaïques byzantines portatives," *Bulletin Monumental* 52 (1886): 223–240. Italo Furlan, *Le icone bizantine a mosaico* (Milan, 1979) and Ame Effenburger, "Images of Personal Devotion: Miniature Mosaic and Steatite Icons," in *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York, 2004), pp. 209–214.

18. Eugène Müntz, *Les arts à la cour des papes pendant le 15 et le 16 siècle*. 3 vols. (Zürich and New York, 1983), vol. 2, pp. 202–205.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 298–304.

20. D. S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and His Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444–83)* (London, 1992), p. 164, cat. 598.

21. *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Marco Spallanzani and Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà (Florence, 1992), pp. 27, 47–48, and p. 80. See also Laurie Fusco and Gino Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici: Collector and Antiquarian* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), p. 74.

22. Hetty Joyce, "Grasping at Shadows: Ancient Paintings in Renaissance and Baroque Rome," *Art Bulletin* 74 (1992):219–246.



Figure 3. Christ Pantocrator, twelfth century. Mosaic. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy. Photo: Nicolo Orsi Battaglini/Art Resource, N.Y.

provenances by their European owners.²³ There is at least one document in which the “antiquity” of the icons from Greece was explicitly affirmed: Cardinal Jacopo Ammanati, in a letter of about 1470 describing the collection of Pietro Barbo, noted “images of saints of ancient workmanship brought from Greece, which they call icons.”²⁴

23. See Anthony Cutler, “From Loot to Scholarship: Changing Modes in the Italian Response to Byzantine Artifacts, ca. 1200–1750,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995):237–268, esp. p. 251: “It is reasonable to suppose that princes of the Roman church preferred overtly Christian artifacts, but it is also necessary to recall that these same works were prized because, in the fifteenth century, they were already regarded as antiquities.”

24. Müntz (see note 18), vol. 2, pp. 131–132, note 4, here p. 132: “imagines sanctorum operis antiqui ex Graecia allatas, quas illi iconas vocant.”

An even more important fact about mosaics was that at a structural level they embodied a different modality for images, one that is less time-sensitive than painting. Mosaics were painting translated into hardened, durable form, as if painting needed to undergo some such conversion in order to survive through the ages. In painting, the minerals are finely ground and mixed with a medium, resulting in a fluid application that exactly registers the movement of the artist’s hand. In mosaic, the material building blocks of the image remain integral, introducing a remove between author and image. Mosaic lifted images away from the real-time activity of their production. Moreover, pieces of the mosaic could be replaced over time, and often were, without damaging the image’s referential functions. Vasari nicely expressed this difference by recourse to a metaphor of continual reignition:

Mosaic is the most durable painting there is; whereas ordinary painting is extinguished with time (*col tempo si spegne*) this kind of painting, in being continuously produced is reignited (*nello stare fatta di continuo s’accende*). And whereas painting on its own is consumed, mosaic due to its long life can almost be called eternal.²⁵

By 1490 it had become commonplace to describe mosaic as a lost technique in the West.²⁶ This was more than a poignant instance of a lost arena of expertise. The important point was that mosaic embodied a mechanism by which images could resist time; that was how these “ancient” images had survived at all and could now be admired. The arrival of the Greek icons thus aroused in their Western viewers the concern that their art at a structural level may have lost this time-resistant capacity. Lorenzo de’ Medici was not content simply to collect the Greek icons, but tried to jumpstart a mosaic revival in late fifteenth-century Florence. He directed two sets of brothers, Domenico and Davide Ghirlandaio and Monte and Gherardo di Giovanni, to learn and practice

25. Introduction to the *Lives*, ch. 29: *Del mosaico de’ vetri, et a quello che si conosce il buono e lodato* (Vasari [see note 16], vol. 1, p. 148): “E certo è che il mosaico è la più durabile pittura che sia, imperò che l’altra col tempo si spegne e questa nello stare fatta di continuo s’accende, et inoltre la pittura manca e si consuma per se medesima, ove il mosaico per la sua lunghissima vita si può quasi chiamare eterno.” See also in the life of Ghirlandaio, see *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 494: “Usava dire Domenico la pittura essere il disegno, e la vera pittura per la eternità essere il mosaico.”

26. See Carlo Bertelli, “Rinascimento del Mosaico,” in *Il Mosaico*, ed. Carlo Bertelli (Milan, 1997), pp. 225–232, esp. p. 232, where he quotes a document from the Florence Baptistery records stating that Baldovinetti was rehired successively, in 1487, 1489, 1490, 1491, to be conservator of mosaics there “non si trovando chi sappia altri.”

the craft.²⁷ Indeed, Lorenzo had plans to decorate the interior of Brunelleschi's cupola with mosaics.²⁸ In 1490, he contracted Domenico Ghirlandaio and Gherardo di Giovanni to provide mosaic decoration for the chapel of St. Zenobius, patron saint of Florence, also in Florence Cathedral. The effort did not get very far, however, yielding little more than a test panel of St. Zenobius, now in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo of Florence (fig. 4).²⁹

Lorenzo's mosaic revival was thus focused on the Cathedral, giving us the immediate context for the Giotto monument, also in the Cathedral. Giotto is cast by the monument in a double role, as the master still in touch with the mosaic art of antiquity and as the originator of the current revival. The role is similar to that given to Giotto by the fifteenth-century physician Michele Savonarola, who speaks of Giotto as "the first to make from *ancient and mosaic* images modern ones, in marvelous fashion" (emphasis mine).³⁰ In the monument, Giotto is shown at work on an icon, a mosaic bust of Christ—an image in the general family of the one owned by Lorenzo de' Medici (fig. 3). But images of the holy face carried associations above all with the most famous nonauthored image of all, the towel on which Christ's face had been "mechanically" impressed, a legendary image that came down in the form of the Mandyllion in the East and the Veronica in the West and was transmitted through a whole series of icon panels.³¹

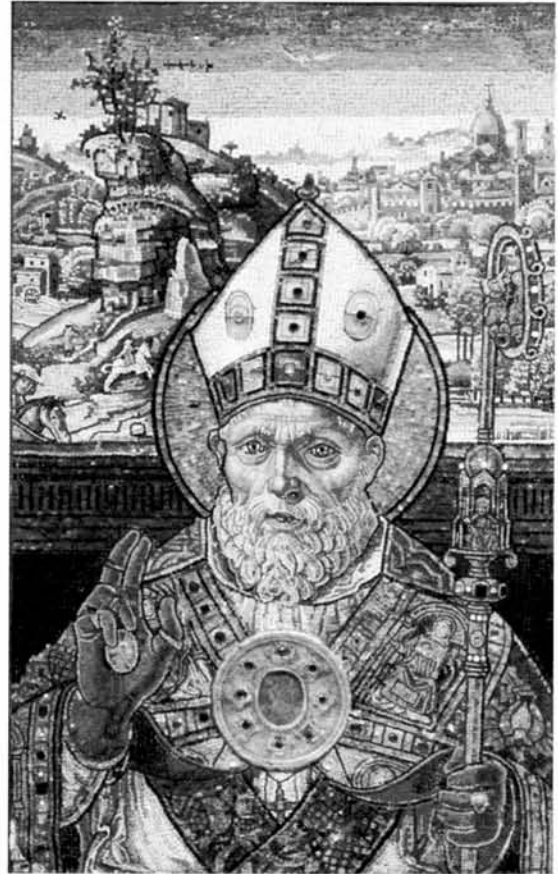


Figure 4. Monte and Gherardo di Giovanni, *St. Zenobius*, 1505. Mosaic. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence, Italy. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, N.Y.

27. On the Lorenzo-driven mosaic revival, see Ruth Wedgwood Kennedy, *Alessio Baldovinetti* (New Haven, 1938), p. 191; Werner Haftmann, "Ein Mosaik der Ghirlandaio Werkstatt aus dem Besitz des Lorenzo Magnifico," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 7 (1940):97–107; André Chastel, "Une mosaïque Florentine du XVe siècle au Musée de Cluny," in *Fables Formes Figures* (Paris, 1978) vol. 1, pp. 349–356; and Bertelli. (See note 26.)

28. In the *Life* of Baldovinetti, Vasari (see note 16, vol. 3, pp. 317–318) reports the following exchange between Lorenzo de' Medici and Graffione, a pupil of Baldovinetti: "Dicono che il magnifico Lorenzo de' Medici ragionando un di col Graffione, che era un stravagante cervello, gli disse: 'Io voglio far fare di musaico e di stucchi tutti gli spigoli della cupola di dentro'; e che il Graffione rispose: 'Voi non ci avete maestri'; a che replicò Lorenzo: 'Noi abbiam tanti danari che ne faremo'; il Graffione subitamente soggiunse: 'Eh, Lorenzo, i danari non fanno i maestri, ma i maestri fanno i danari.'"

29. Only the ribs in the vaults were completed. See Margaret Haines, "Il principio di 'mirabilissime cose': i mosaici per la volta della cappella di San Zanobi," in *La difficile eredità: architettura a Firenze dalla Repubblica all'assedio*, ed. M. Dezzi Bardeschi (Florence, 1994), pp. 38–55.

30. *Commentariolus de laudibus Patavii*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (Milan: 1738), vol. XXIV, col. 1169: "Zotum Florentinum, qui primus ex antiquis et musaicis figuris modernas mirum in modum configuravit."

31. See Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*. 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1899). Excellent recent

accounts of the various traditions can be found in *Il Volto di Cristo*, eds. Giovanni Morello and Gerhard Wolf (Milan, 2000), chs. 2 and 3. See also Gerhard Wolf, "From Mandyllion to Veronica: Picturing the 'Disembodied' Face Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. Herbert Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Bologna, 1998), pp. 153–179. It should not be forgotten that one of the most authoritative busts of Christ was the mosaic in the apse of the Lateran church in Rome, where Giotto had once worked. The reference to the tradition of the "holy artist" is also made on the level of compositional type. Marco Collareta has pointed out that Benedetto's portrait of Giotto is modeled on the painting of *St. Luke Painting the Virgin* by Neri di Bicci, now in Pescia, a work Benedetto had already used as a model in his relief of St. Luke for the Holy House of Loreto (see Marco Collareta, "Le Luci della Fiorentina Gloria," *Artista* 3 [1991]:136–143, here p. 139). Carl believes that the portrait is primarily modeled on Benozzo Gozzoli's portrait of Giotto in the main chapel of San Francesco at Montefalco where he is shown as a painter (see Carl [note 13], p. 147, fig. 79).



Figure 5. Mandylyon, date unknown. Vatican City, Musei Vaticani. Photo: Musei Vaticani.

The icon of Christ in the Giotto monument makes a distinct reference to this tradition: It shows the curious pointed pattern of hair and beard that is characteristic of Mandylyon images, such as the Mandylyon now in the Vatican (fig. 5). In the fifteenth century, this icon was in the Roman church of San Silvestro in Capite. The Roman church of San Silvestro was an important one for Florentines, as it held the head of the Florence's patron Saint John the Baptist.³²

32. For an account of the reliquary altar for this church, a project for which Piero Soderini, former gonfalonier of the Republic, requested the participation of Michelangelo in 1518, and on the Florentine

In translating the image into mosaic, Giotto is shown to be a relay between this "antiquity" and the present. When working in the tradition of the Mandylyon the icon is, logically speaking, never made but always restored. Giotto did not physically produce the piece of stone or glass he holds in his hand and he did not invent the image before him; instead, he will expertly patch the remaining tesserae in, and thus ensure the faithful transmission of the original and authorless Christian *imago*.

Presentation and representation

All of this is powerfully reinforced by the fact that the image of Christ on which Giotto works is not merely a rendering of a mosaic "safely" incorporated into the fiction. It is itself a mosaic; on close inspection one can clearly see the tesserae (fig. 6). It is shown to be unfinished at the top, in keeping with the portrayal of the artist with his hand raised in demonstration of his manual activity. The mosaic *is* what it purports to be and so has a special anachronic force, breaking through the temporal layers that make up the monument. It is, in the first instance, a signal example of the mosaic revival promoted by Lorenzo around 1490, one that should be added to the small corpus of the newly revived art produced at this time.³³ But it is also shown to be of the time of Giotto, who conspicuously holds one of the tesserae that would complete it. And it also reports back, as we have seen, to the originary portrait of Christ. It belongs to each of these times simultaneously. It stitches through time, pulling together the different points in the temporal fabric until they meet.

Giotto is not, therefore, merely commemorated as the restorer of ancient art; he is celebrated as the restorer of art's capacity to make past present, the author who restored authorless authority. As the first

associations of this church in general, see William E. Wallace, "Friends and Relics at San Silvestro in Capite, Rome," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30 (1999):419-439.

33. Thus raising the next question: Who made it? It is quite crude and thus cannot be ascribed to Monte and Gherardo, whose Saint Zenobius panel in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo shows greater smoothness and compactness (fig. 4). Nor can it be attributed to the Ghirlandaio brothers, whose *St. Peter* in the Louvre reveals a sophisticated capacity for quasi-pictorial effects. On the other hand, the crudeness may itself be a rhetorical feature, a mark of archaic authenticity. It may also be coarse for purposes of legibility, given how high the monument is on the façade wall (my thanks to Jeffrey Hamburger for suggesting this point). In any case, it is possible that it was done by Benedetto da Maiano himself for this monument.



Figure 6. Benedetto da Maiano, detail of the portrait from the monument to Giotto, 1490. Duomo, Florence, Italy. Photo: Nicolo Orsi Battaglini/Art Resource, N.Y.

one conception has now succeeded the other, but rather shows how one comes into being in relation to the other. An emergent notion of artistic authorship frames and defines a prior model of image-making against which it defines itself.³⁴

34. This idea, developed in collaboration with Christopher Wood in our co-authored article, "Towards a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," *Art Bulletin* 87 (2005):403–432, esp. p. 430, is further elaborated in our forthcoming book, *Anachronic Renaissance*.

line of the inscription says: "I am he *through whom* painting returned to life." Painting is the subject of the sentence, while Giotto functions as a sort of medium. The monument both instantiates and at the same time stages—one might almost say, *explains*—a modality of image-making. The mosaic icon of Christ is now framed off as a category of religious image, a symbol of a whole conception of image-making.

Giotto is celebrated here as the consummate innovator and promoter of naturalism. He is commemorated because he stood out, because he made a difference, because (it is now recognized) he stands at the beginning of something. And yet he is shown patching together the image of the Holy Face, an image that was invented by no one and that exists through replication. It is an open contradiction. It can be ignored—and, largely, it has been—but if it is acknowledged then it must be accepted as a paradox, a flinty touchstone on which a culture lays out some of its basic premises. The monument does not merely commemorate an artist but invents the category of civic artist-commemoration, and thus addresses fundamental questions about artistic authorship, about the historical life of images, and about the significance of art as a fact of cultural-political importance. In a basic sense the monument stages a contest of two different, even opposing, conceptions of the image and of authorship: the work of art as the invention of the artist and the work of art as a node of cultural transmission. More precisely, it invents the contest. It does not proclaim that