

The background of the entire page is a reproduction of the painting 'The Starry Night' by the Dutch Impressionist painter J.M.W. Turner. The painting depicts a coastal town at night, with a prominent church spire in the foreground. The sky is filled with vibrant, swirling patterns of blue and yellow, representing a turbulent sea and a starry night sky. The overall style is characterized by visible, expressive brushstrokes and a rich, textured surface.

THE PAINTINGS THAT REVOLUTIONIZED ART

right Lorenzetti used texts to explain and enforce the messages of his artwork. Here a winged figure of Justice holds up a banner declaring that her "sovereignty" (the rule of Justice) enables people to farm their lands and travel in safety.

below Lorenzetti's "Good City" resembles real-life Siena in many ways. The cathedral in the upper left-hand corner has the same dome and tower as Siena's Duomo (Cathedral). Ambrosio also captured the diversity of Siena's population, depicting people in the garments of aristocrats, entertainers, shopkeepers, and laborers.



AMBROGIO LORENZETTI ALLEGORIES OF GOOD AND BAD GOVERNMENT

SECURI

118



SENCA PAURA OGNIOM FRMCO CAMINI.
ELAVORADO SEMINI CIASCUNO.
MENTRE CHE TAL COMUNO.
MANTERRA OVESTA TOONA I SIGNORIA.
CHEL ALEVATA AREI OGNI BALIA.



7

THE WILTON DIPTYCH

The origins, use, and even the iconography of *The Wilton Diptych* are obscure—even today it still presents a mystery. But one thing we know for certain: the kneeling king at the center of the image is Richard II of England, who can be recognized by his royal cloak, his brooch with the white hart, and his gold collar decorated with the seedpods of the broom plant.

The three saints depicted behind the king are also clearly identifiable: John the Baptist, standing closest to Richard II (r. 1377–1399), and acting as his patron saint, followed by two English saints, Edward the Confessor and Edmund the Martyr. They all point to the king, interceding on his behalf before the Virgin, who holds the Christ Child’s right foot, perhaps offering it to be kissed. The Christ Child himself turns to the king and the saints, his right hand raised in blessing. Eleven angels, dressed in the blue of the Virgin, surround the Madonna and Child. The predominant colors are gold and blue—precious materials, as blue pigment in particular was extremely expensive. It is not known who painted the image nor who commissioned it, though given its specific subject and its quality we can safely assume it was King Richard or someone close to him. What is clear is that *The Wilton Diptych* is a product of the so-called International or “Soft” Style of the Late Gothic period, which dominated art across Europe from the end of the 14th century onwards. It is characterized by particularly fine filigree depictions of delicate figures whose clothing is draped into soft folds, and who show refined facial features. The S-shaped curve of the figures’ posture, as in the case of the Virgin shown here, is also typical.

The practical format of the diptych (a painting formed of two hinged panels that can be closed shut) meant that the king could take it with him on his travels to use in his private devotions. However, it is not clear that Richard actually used the painting in this way: the fact that Richard II himself is at the center of the image was unusual for a classic devotional picture. The portrait of Richard shows him quite young, and so the altarpiece must date from between 1395 and 1399, that is, during the last five years of his reign. The king’s youthful appearance might possibly mean that this is a depiction of his accession to the throne, when he was only 11 years old. Another theory posits other reasons for Richard’s beardless state: in the 1360s the French, whose fashions influenced trends throughout Europe, abandoned the custom of wearing beards. Is the solution to the mystery ultimately just a question of fashion?

The title of this work relates to Wilton House near Salisbury, the country residence of the Earls of Pembroke, where it was kept before it was transferred to the National Gallery in 1929. It is believed that the artist who created the diptych was of English or French origin. At the end of the 14th century there was a lively Europe-wide cultural exchange of artists and artisans, who traveled from place to place, and whose work was reflected in the International or “Soft” Style. It is possible that this treasure was created by a French master working in England, though British scholars tend to ascribe it to an English painter.

"FOR EVERY MAN THAT BOLINGBROKE HATH PRESS'D
TO LIFT SHREWD STEEL AGAINST OUR GOLDEN CROWN,
GOD FOR HIS RICHARD HATH IN HEAVENLY PAY
A GLORIOUS ANGEL: THEN, IF ANGELS FIGHT,
WEAK MEN MUST FALL, FOR HEAVEN STILL GUARDS THE RIGHT."

Shakespeare, *Richard II*



8

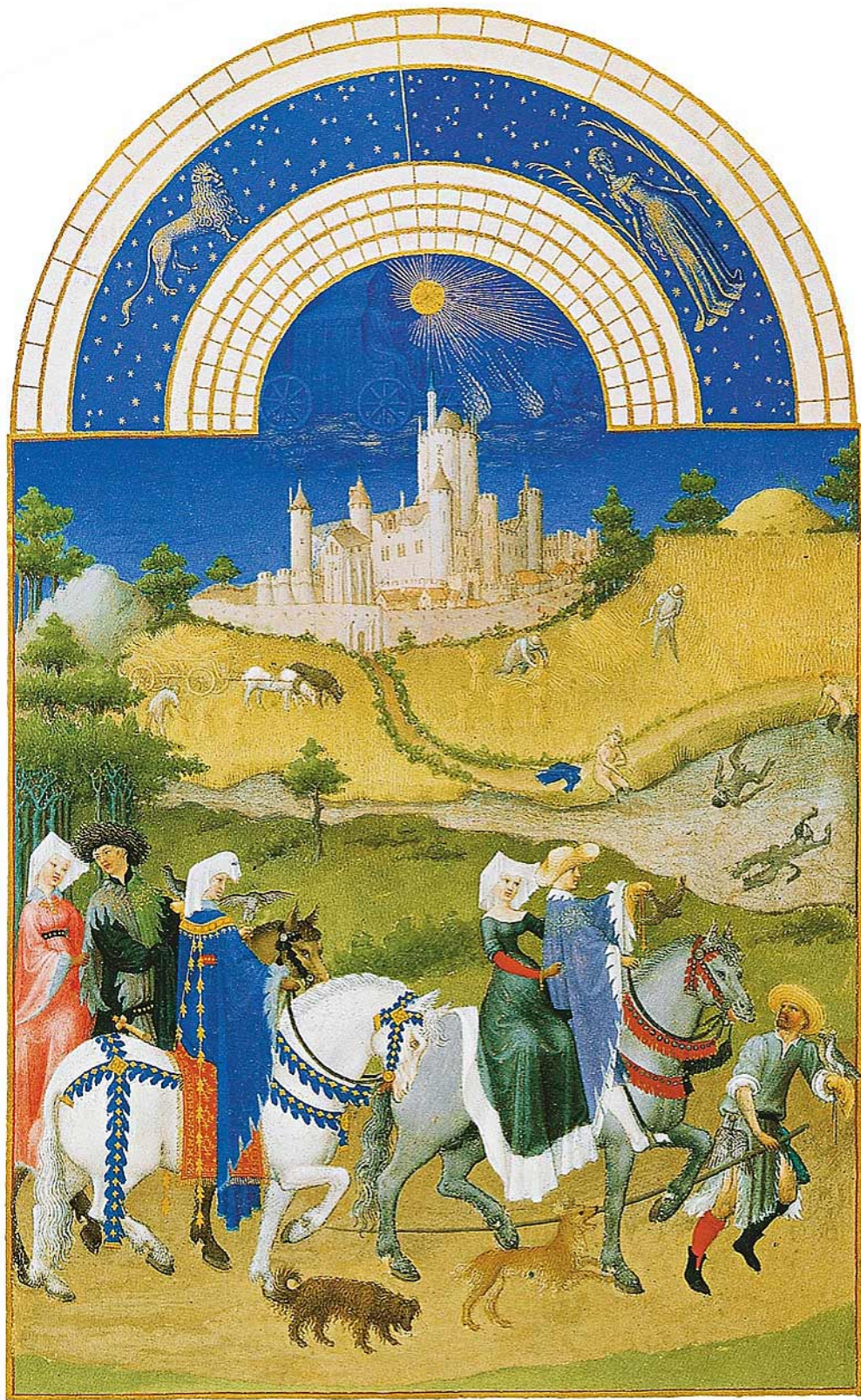
LIMBOURG BROTHERS

TRÈS RICHES HEURES OF JEAN, DUKE OF BERRY

Commissioned by Jean, Duke of Berry, the *Très Riches Heures*, a private book of prayers to be said at the liturgical hours, is one of the most famous and exquisite illuminated manuscripts of the 15th century. It was created by the Limbourg Brothers between 1412 and 1416, and is among the finest examples of French Gothic manuscript illumination.

Jean, Duke of Berry, loved jewels and works of art, including beautiful books. He owned other illuminated manuscripts, but the *Très Riches Heures* was his prized possession. The calendar pages at the beginning of the book are its best-known images today. Working in the early 15th century, the Limbourgs lived in a period in which the world, and how to portray it in art, were being intensively explored. They, more than other artists of the period, painted contemporary France as it had never been seen before. The images are full of details but also work together as a group. They also benefitted from a new form of patronage, with patrons such as the Duke asking for books that combined private devotion with artistic appreciation. For the first time, the patron appears in the calendar scenes, as well as the actual French countryside. There is a strong sense of the seasons of the year, of time and change, in the sacred stories as well as the calendar cycle. Part of the sense of reality comes from an attempt by the Limbourgs to use perspective, if a little inaccurately. Certainly the change of scale throughout the scenes helps make them seem more naturalistic, though still idealized. The world of the *Très Riches Heures* is a peaceful garden, safe and secure under a bright sun. Nevertheless, the calendar pages in particular represent a source, not only for art historians, but also for social historians. Here we can see the details of daily life in the early 15th century, of both the aristocracy and the working people: their clothing, tools, food, and furniture. Rarely had so much of contemporary life in France been so accurately portrayed. The scene for August, for example, is set at Étampes, which belonged to the Duke of Berry. The Château d'Étampes rises in the background, with its towers, chapel and other buildings. Peasants bind up the newly mown hay on the hills and some have cooled off by swimming in the River Juine. In the foreground, the nobility set out on their horses for a hunt, with a falconer leading the way. A sacred scene, the *Annunciation to the Shepherds*, while following the Bible description, also contains naturalistic details. The Shepherd's black-and-white dog rests at his feet, and his sheep graze on the hill. The buildings on the hill, while supposed to represent Bethlehem, are similar to actual buildings the Duke of Berry was fond of, possibly in Poitiers and Saint-Hilaire. The Limbourgs created highly original works that combined a feeling for the countryside, the common people as well as the courtiers, with classical allusions and religious iconography. With their rich details and their luminous, vibrant colors, the images speak to us even today.

The three **LIMBOURG BROTHERS** grew up in the town of Nijmegen in the Duchy of Guelders (now the Netherlands), and they were usually referred to as "German." Paul (Pol) and Jean worked for Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, for four years. By 1410 the three brothers, Paul, Herman and Jean, were at work for the Duke of Berry. The Duke must have held the brothers in high esteem, for there are records of gifts to them of jewels and money and he eventually gave Paul the title of *valet de chambre*. Documents mention the deaths of Paul, Herman and Jean together, and they may have died at the same time, in 1416, perhaps in an epidemic.



LIMBOURG BROTHERS

**TRÈS RICHES HEURES OF JEAN,
DUKE OF BERRY**

*August, 1412–1416, ink and pigment on vellum, 29 x 21 cm,
Musée Condé, Chantilly*



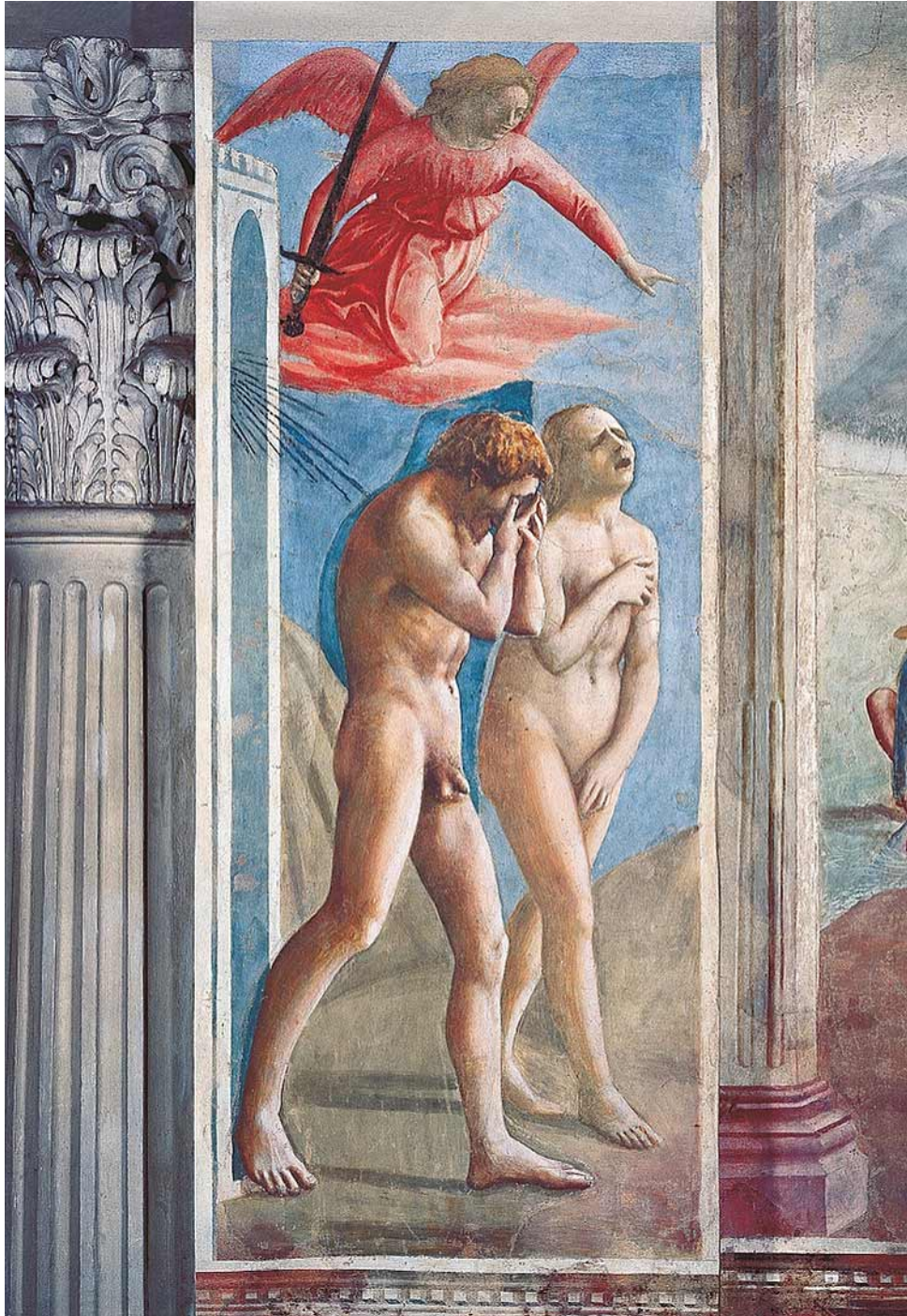
above While the nobility are off to hunt, the peasants are at work in the fields, but cool off from their labors in the nearby river. The Limbourgs observed the refraction of water and attempted to show it with the swimmers' bodies.

right *The Annunciation to the Shepherds*, from the *Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*, 1412–1416, ink and pigment on vellum, 29 x 21 cm, Musée Condé, Chantilly. The Limbourg Brothers depict a religious scene but bring in details from contemporary life, such as the clothes, the dog, the sheep grazing, and buildings that were probably based on places actually known to the Duke of Berry.



"TOMMASO OF FLORENCE, NICKNAMED MASACCIO,
SHOWED BY HIS PERFECT WORKS HOW THOSE
WHO TAKE FOR THEIR STANDARD ANYONE BUT NATURE,
THE MISTRESS OF ALL MASTERS, WEARY THEMSELVES IN VAIN."

Leonardo da Vinci



9

MASACCIO

FRESCOES IN THE BRANCACCI CHAPEL

The frescoes in Florence’s Brancacci Chapel represent one of the most famous collaborations in the history of art. Two great painters, Masaccio and Masolino, worked closely together on the project. Yet their differing styles reveal the turbulent changes that were shaking up the art world in the early 1400s. Masolino’s refined images retain echoes of the medieval Gothic past, but the work of young Masaccio helped Florence move boldly forward into the Renaissance.

The Brancacci Chapel forms part of the transept in Florence’s church of Santa Maria del Carmine. It received its name from its long-time patron family, the Brancacci. In 1423 Felice Brancacci commissioned a cycle of frescoes on the life of Saint Peter to adorn his chapel. Ultimately, the commission was awarded to two independent artists who were working together: an established middle-aged painter named Masolino da Panicale and a 21-year-old wunderkind called Masaccio.

Masolino and Masaccio likely developed the plan for their fresco cycle together, and they shared the work equally—an unusual arrangement for the time. What remains of their paintings today shows the dramatic revolution that was taking place in Florentine art during the early 1400s. Masolino’s paintings reflect the more conservative, fashionable style of the day. His delicately modeled figures adopt restrained poses and facial expressions. Thus his pictures’ dramatic impact is sacrificed in order to preserve a sense of decorum and refinement. Masaccio, on the other hand, approached his work from a very different perspective. He was familiar with the most progressive Renaissance art of the time. Sculptors such as Donatello were depicting human bodies and emotions in daringly realistic ways. Masaccio had begun exploring similar ideas in paint; ideas he would use in the Brancacci chapel.

In his *Saint Peter Healing the Sick with His Shadow*, Masaccio depicts two beggars—one lame and one elderly—with unflinching realism. The desperate facial expression of the lame man and the shivering, half naked body of the elderly man contrast markedly with the solemn figure of Saint Peter. In a larger-scale painting called *The Tribute Money*, Masaccio creates another radical image using his knowledge of perspective. Here the story of Saint Peter and the tax collector is set against a vast mountain landscape, one of the first to display an accurate sense of space and natural atmosphere. But the most remarkable of Masaccio’s frescoes is generally considered to be his *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*. In it the artist portrays Adam and Eve’s grief with shocking directness.

Later Renaissance artists, including Michelangelo, would study Masaccio’s images closely, and European art in general would incorporate Masaccio’s mastery of space, anatomy, and human expression.

MASACCIO was born Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone in 1401 in San Giovanni Valdarno, a small Tuscan village about 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Florence. Masaccio likely studied in Florence, as he joined the painters guild there in 1422. Around this time he began working collaboratively with Masolino da Panicale (c. 1383– c. 1447), first on altarpieces and then on the Brancacci Chapel. Masaccio possibly acquired his nickname (“Big” or “Clumsy” Tom) to distinguish him from Masolino (“Little Tom”). Though unfinished, Masaccio’s work on the Brancacci Chapel made a strong impression in Florence, and he soon received more commissions. The most famous of these was the *Holy Trinity* fresco in the church of Santa Maria Novella, which shows the artist’s mastery of linear perspective and human anatomy. Masaccio died in 1428 in Rome.



previous page In the remarkable *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, Adam buries his face in his hands while Eve appears to shriek in pain. Masaccio further emphasizes his character's plight through the bold modeling of their naked bodies, the dramatic shadows on the barren landscape, and the ominous hovering angel that directs the couple out of Eden.

left Masaccio, frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, 1423–1427 and later, overall dimensions of chapel: 5.68 m wide x 6.84 m deep, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence

right To better understand how revolutionary Masaccio's *Expulsion* was, we can compare it with Masolino's image of Adam and Eve on the opposite wall of the chapel. The latter's *Temptation of Adam and Eve*, though gracefully painted, has none of the emotional power of Masaccio's work.



10

JAN VAN EYCK

THE ARNOLFINI PORTRAIT

One of Jan van Eyck's most famous works, this double portrait very probably depicts the Italian merchant Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini and his wife, who lived in Bruges. However, whether this is actually a wedding picture, as has often been accepted, cannot be substantiated. Nevertheless, details such as the couple's gestures appear to hint at a meaning that is hidden, at least from the modern viewer.

In the early 15th century, a completely new kind of painting was emerging in the Burgundian Netherlands, one characterized by a focus on depicting reality. Up till then, the subject of a painting had been set against unreal, abstract backgrounds, and with little regard for relationships of space, scale, or time. By contrast, Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* locates his subjects in the realistic interior space of a closely observed bourgeois house. And when the artist wanted to introduce a spiritual aspect to the painting, it was not allowed to disturb the scene's natural appearance: so the image of Saint Margaret fighting off the dragon could no longer just appear in the Arnolfini's well-appointed interior, and so it was turned into a carving on the bedpost, and the traditional hound, a symbol of fidelity, appears as a lapdog.

From the fabrics and fur trimming of the clothes to the wooden window frame and the bull's-eye windowpanes—everything is depicted using a degree of detailed realism that makes objects seem almost tangible. It was only the introduction of oil paints, which unlike tempera can be applied in many transparent layers one on top of the other, that made this particularly subtle representation of details and surface effects possible, creating an image that is luminous, intensely colored, precise, and without visible brushstrokes. Van Eyck used this technique to represent the natural light that enters through the window, which gently illuminates the facial features of his subjects, casts soft shadows on their bodies, and reflects off the smooth metal of the chandelier. The painting's realism goes ever further. On the far wall a mirror shows what cannot actually be seen in the picture: in front of the depicted couple—more or less in the position of the viewer—two people are standing in a doorway. In the reflection, which renders everything with utmost precision, though distorted by the convex curve of the round mirror, van Eyck not only shows his mastery of three dimensions, he also plays with this, further demonstrating his technical—and intellectual—brilliance. This self-confidence is also expressed in the prominent position of his Latin signature, written in Burgundian script above the mirror: “Jan van Eyck was here 1434.”

JAN VAN EYCK was born c. 1390 in Maaseik (in present-day Belgium). From 1422 to 1424 he was working in The Hague for Count John of Holland, and in 1425 he was made court painter to the Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy (r. 1419–1467), then one of the most culturally important courts in Europe. He lived and worked in Lille 1425–1429, and in Bruges from 1430. He was greatly valued by Philip the Good, who also sent him on diplomatic missions. Such was his skill in using oil paints that he achieved international acclaim and was (incorrectly) credited with the invention of oil painting. He died in 1441 in Bruges.

"WE WILL NOWHERE BE ABLE TO FIND
HIS EQUAL IN ART AND SCIENCE."

Duke Philip the Good on Jan van Eyck



JAN VAN EYCK THE ARNOLFINI PORTRAIT

1434, oil on oak wood, 82.2 x 60 cm,
The National Gallery, London

11

ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN

DESCENT FROM THE CROSS

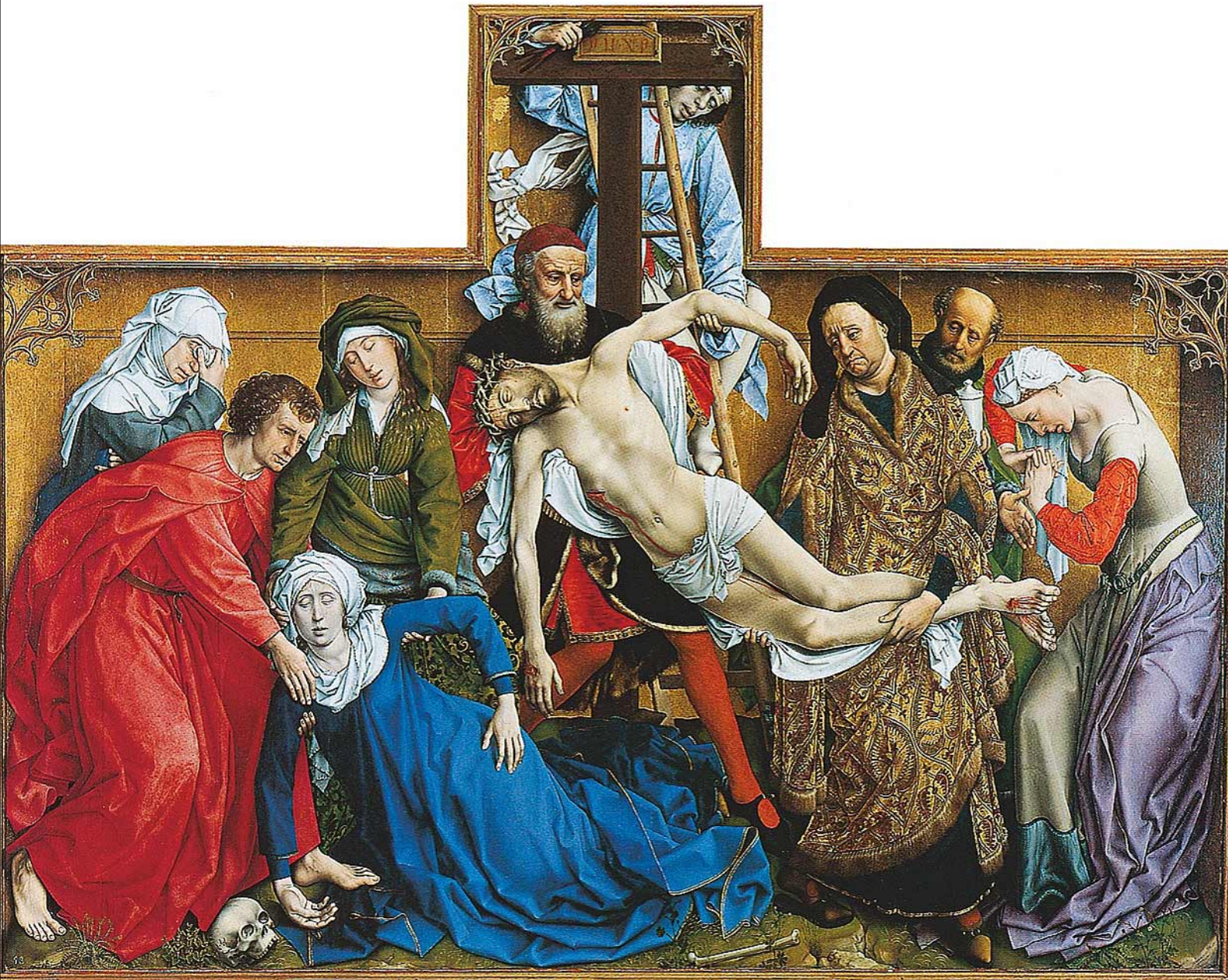
The *Descent from the Cross* by Rogier van der Weyden is possibly the most influential Netherlandish painting of the Crucifixion of Christ. Van der Weyden was known for the individuality of his portraits, as well as the drama of his religious subjects. They are considered some of the finest works of Netherlandish art.

The *Descent from the Cross* was commissioned by the Crossbowmen's Guild of Louvain for the church of Notre-Dame-hors-les-murs about 1435. Small crossbows can be seen in the side spandrels as a reference to the Guild. The figures appear within a shallow, gilded wooden frame with tracery in the corners. Van der Weyden created the scene as if it were a "Schnitzaltar," a scene of carved, polychromed figures set in a gilded shrine. These figures bear no resemblance to statues, however, but appear to be living characters, almost a *tableau vivant* or figures on a stage. What sets van der Weyden's *Descent* apart from the work of his contemporaries is his ability to depict movement and emotions. The two curved outer figures of Saint John and Mary Magdalene form a sort of parenthesis that contains the scene. The parallel curves formed by the bodies of Christ and Mary, as she faints with sorrow, bring out their relationship in a pose not used before. Van der Weyden depicted emotions as no previous Netherlandish painter had. Feelings of sorrow, loss, and grieving are clearly evoked. He also allowed the donors to participate directly in sacred scenes. Although painted early in his career, his *Descent* is remarkable for the sense of energy flowing through the figures, as expressed through their gestures and garments. It creates a rhythm moving through the work, a feature that had not been seen before in Netherlandish painting. Although the space is narrow, van der Weyden built many layers into the composition, from Christ and Mary in the front to the man on the ladder at the back. The painting remained in Louvain until around 1548, when Mary of Hungary, sister of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, acquired it in exchange for a copy by Michael Coxcie and "an organ." It initially hung in Mary's castle at Binche. It passed from Mary to her nephew, Philip II of Spain, and was eventually displayed in the Escorial. In 1939, it was transferred to the Prado Museum, in Madrid, where it remains.

ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN was born in 1399 or 1400 in Tournai, now in Belgium. Nothing is known of his youth, but he married Elisabeth Goffaerts, from Brussels, in 1427. The following year he entered the workshop of painter Robert Campin (c. 1375–1444) and left as "Master Rogier" on August 1, 1432. He was successful from the outset and eventually settled in Brussels as the City Painter. He received commissions from as far away as Spain and Italy. He was also, apparently, considered a man of integrity and was often requested to arbitrate disputes between other painters and their clients. He died in 1464 in Brussels, a successful and admired artist.

"IT WAS THE BEST PICTURE IN THE WHOLE CASTLE AND EVEN, I BELIEVE,
IN THE WHOLE WORLD, FOR I HAVE SEEN IN THESE PARTS MANY GOOD PAINTINGS
BUT NONE THAT EQUALED THIS IN TRUTH TO NATURE OR DEVOUTNESS.
ALL THOSE WHO HAVE SEEN IT WERE OF THE SAME OPINION."

Spanish courtier Vicente Álvarez, 1551



12

KONRAD WITZ

THE MIRACULOUS DRAFT OF FISHES

Konrad Witz was the first artist in the German-speaking world to combine native traditions with innovations emerging from Netherlandish painting. In his realistic compositions he broke away from the idealizing forms of representation characteristic of the Late Gothic International or “Soft” Style.

Among Witz’s surviving paintings this one, originally part of an altarpiece dedicated to Saint Peter in Geneva Cathedral, depicts the Miraculous Draft of Fishes. This is not only a striking interpretation of this biblical subject, it is also one of the first true landscape paintings of the early modern era. Witz shows the story of the Apostles whose unsuccessful fishing trip at night on the Sea of Galilee turns into a huge catch of fish through their unexpected encounter with the Risen Christ (Gospel of John 21:1–14). The right-hand side of the painting is dominated by the monumental figure of Christ wearing red robes, who appears to float above the shallow water of the lake. On the left, three Disciples are hauling a heavy, full net into the boat. Dressed in blue, Saint Peter is helping them, simultaneously turning in astonishment and surprise towards Christ. But Witz also paints Saint Peter a second time: hands outstretched in front of him, he swims excitedly away from the boat towards the figure of Christ, whom he has recognized, and who stands motionless on the surface of the lake.

From the look of the harbor warehouses and the city walls in the background, we can see that Witz painted the landscape surrounding Lake Geneva with almost topographical accuracy: this is a landscape populated with tiny people working in the fields and meadows on the fertile mountain slopes. The striking, pointed silhouette of the mountain known as Le Môle, together with the mountain chain of Chamonix with Mont Blanc in the distance, is part of a superb panorama of the Swiss landscape that forms the backdrop to this biblical scene. And in the foreground too there are remarkable examples of Witz’s interest in depicting reality in precise detail, for instance in the closely observed water plants, in the air bubbles that form around the submerged rocks near the shore, and even in the reflections on the calm surface of the lake. The sharp outlines of the Apostles, and the charismatic, almost chiseled figure of Christ seem to have been grafted on to the landscape, which reaches seamlessly into the distance, rather than being incorporated into the setting. However, this does not detract from a vivid representation of the landscape around Geneva that has abandoned all the constraints of late medieval forms of representation.

KONRAD WITZ was born in 1400–1410 in Rottweil am Neckar, Germany. He was admitted to the Basel painters’ guild “Zum Himmel” in 1434, and in 1435 became a citizen of the city. It is not known for certain if he was active in Constance before this, but in any case his name appears in the Constance tax records for the years 1418–1444. He created around 20 paintings, mostly during the time of the Council of Basel (1431–1449). His earliest surviving work is the *Heilspiegel Altarpiece*, which was commissioned by the Augustinian monastery of Saint Leonhard in Basel. Only 12 known paintings by Witz survive, and their realistic style of depiction shows the early influence of Netherlandish art. He died c. 1446 in Basel or Geneva.

"THIS WORK WAS PAINTED BY
MASTER CONRADUS SAPIENTIS
OF BASEL IN 1444"

Inscription on the original frame of the painting



"THE DEPICTION OF HUMAN FACES IN THE ALTARPIECE IN
COLOGNE CATHEDRAL EMERGES AS THE MOST ADMIRABLE,
IN SO FAR AS IT CAN BE SEEN AS THE AXIS OF ART HISTORY
FROM THE LOWER RHINE REGION."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe on the *Madonna of the Rose Bower*



13

STEFAN LOCHNER

MADONNA OF THE ROSE BOWER

Stefan Lochner is the outstanding master of the late medieval group of painters known as the Cologne School. His altarpieces and devotional images display the very beginnings of a style that sought to depict the physical presence of things in space. However, his paintings are still characterized by figures whose importance is denoted by their scale, a symbolic form of pictorial geometry, and by an attention to detail influenced by Netherlandish painting.

Because of the compositional harmony and the technical brilliance of his altarpieces, Stefan Lochner's fame spread far beyond the city of Cologne. His *Madonna of the Rose Bower*, a devotional image for a merchant's house or perhaps a monk's cell, was probably both his last work and also the highpoint of his artistic career.

In the top corners of this private devotional image, two angels draw back a gold-embroidered red curtain to reveal a girlishly young Madonna, who is sitting outdoors on a lush carpet of plants in front of a low, semi-circular wall topped with plants, the Christ Child on her lap. Behind her, red roses and white lilies grow up a trellis set against a richly stippled gold background; these are symbols of love and of the Passion of Christ, as well as of the Madonna's virginity.

In the foreground on each side, angels playing music, along with angels who are leaning over the low wall, frame the figure of the Madonna, who appears as the Queen of Heaven in her richly draped, outspread blue mantle, her sumptuous brooch and crown set with pearls and precious stones. Her halo just touches the circle of the domain from which God the Father, actually the smallest figure in the scene, and visible in the center of the top edge of the picture, sends the dove of the Holy Spirit down to earth. The Christ Child on the Virgin's lap holds an apple in his left hand, while an angel offers him another apple from a brimming bowl, a reference to Christ's significance as the "New Adam," the Savior of mankind.

With his luminous, subtly harmonious use of color, and a rendering that is at once elegant and precise, Lochner skilfully combined the dominant tradition of the International or "Soft" Style with the new realistic style of detailed representation that originated in the Netherlands.

STEFAN LOCHNER was born in 1410 in Meersburg am Bodensee (?). Little is known of his education and his years spent traveling. It is highly probable that he spent time in the Netherlands in the circle of Jan van Eyck, and in Westphalia, where Conrad von Soest (c. 1370–after 1422) was active. In June 1442, "Master Steffen" was paid for his work on decorations for the visit of Emperor Friedrich III (r. 1440–1493). In October 1442, he bought a house, which was sold again in 1444 to finance new acquisitions. In 1447 he became a town councilor in Cologne. The entry for his second year as a councilor, beginning in December 1450, is marked with a cross, indicating that he died in 1451 in Cologne.

14

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA
FLAGELLATION OF CHRIST

Along with Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, the *Flagellation of Christ* by Piero della Francesca ranks among the most enigmatic works of the Renaissance. Art historians have spent countless hours developing theories to identify the painting's figures and to determine its hidden meaning. Piero's work is a complex allegory, with the artist using linear perspective—a newly developed technique in his day—to give the image a captivating and mysterious quality.

Piero della Francesca grew up in the small northern Italian hill town of Borgo Santo Sepolcro. Yet he would become one of the most cosmopolitan painters of his day, studying and working in Florence, Rimini, Urbino, Ferrara, and Rome. Renaissance artists like Piero immersed themselves in Humanism. This involved the study of anatomy, mathematics, spatial perspective, and ancient Greek and Roman culture. Piero became familiar with the works of the architect Leon Battista Alberti, who was designing elegant palaces and churches based on ancient theories of proportion, and who elaborated his influential theory of linear perspective in his treatise *Della Pittura* (On Painting) of 1436. Piero also studied the expressive, naturalistic paintings of Masaccio in Florence, as well as imported artworks by Rogier van der Weyden and other Flemish masters. These latter artists, whose oil paintings were being collected by Italian patrons, became famous for their rich colors and for their incredible attention to detail, capturing with minutest precision the textures of plants, clothing, and human skin. Piero della Francesca would combine all of these influences to produce one of the most striking painting styles of the 1400s.

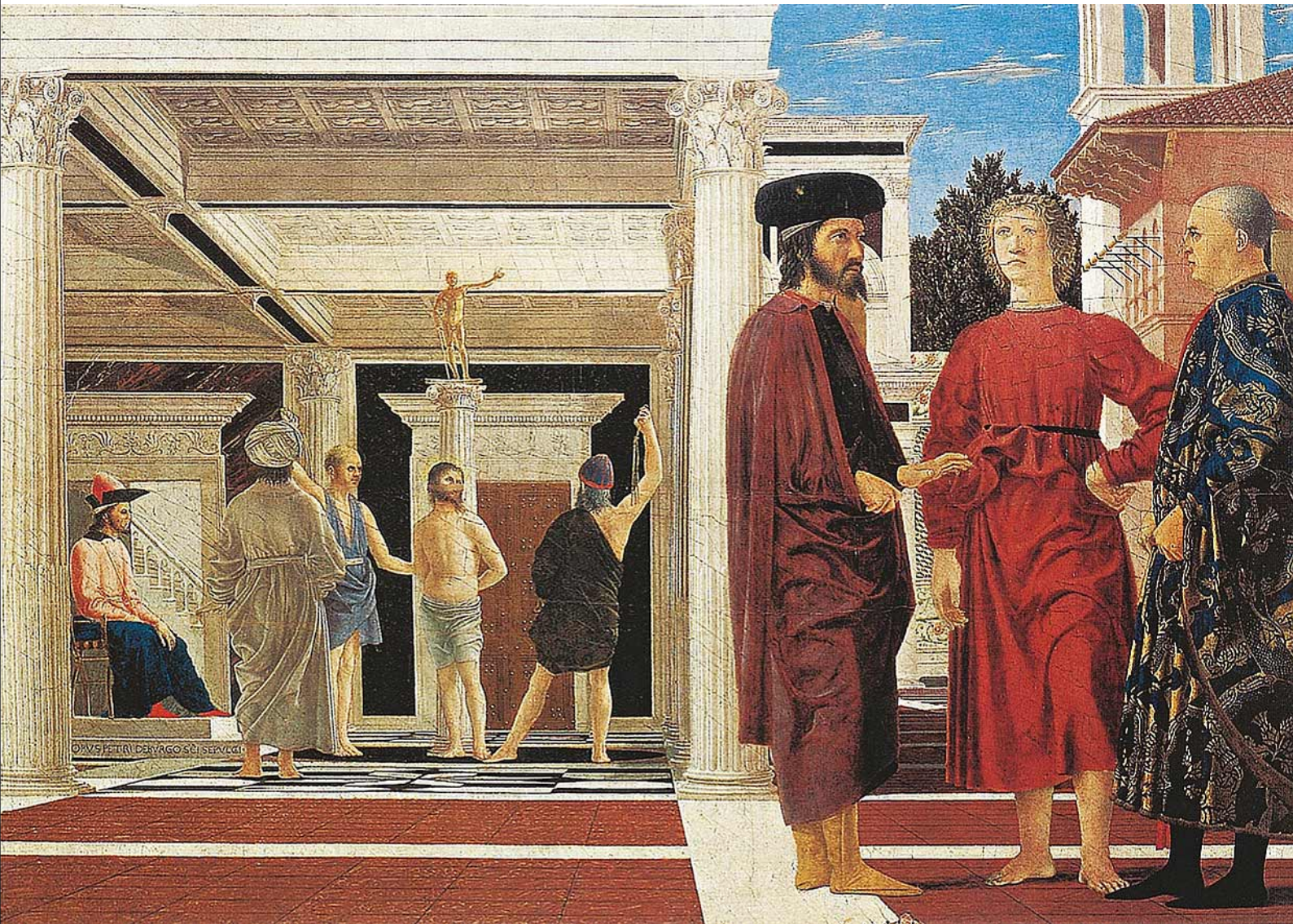
A work that perfectly exemplifies Piero's art is his *Flagellation*. He created the painting around 1460 while in Urbino at the court of Federico da Montefeltro. On the surface, Piero's image displays all the technical elements that he had mastered as an artist. His admiration for Alberti's architecture is shown in the elegant, classical-style temple—its columns receding subtly into the distance to create a convincing sense of space. The precisely rendered clothing and architectural details reflect the influence of Netherlandish art, while the golden sculpture on top of the column reveals a keen interest in the effects of light. Piero fuses these elements into an image that is difficult to interpret. The left-hand scene depicts the Flagellation of Christ before he is crucified. Yet Piero sets this brutal story in the most serene of classical environments. He also places it well in the background, juxtaposing it against the three elegantly dressed men in the right foreground. This strange spatial arrangement gives the work a unsettling, dreamlike quality, and it suggests to the viewer that the people and actions being displayed are allegorical.

Piero's subtle visual puzzle was largely ignored for many centuries after his death. But in the early 20th century, its mysterious nature and sophisticated use of space and light became admired by artists, art historians, and writers.

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA was born c. 1415 in Borgo Santo Sepolcro (now Sansepolcro), near Arezzo in northern Tuscany. Historians believe he was apprenticed to Antonio d'Anghiari, a painter working in Santo Sepolcro, during the 1430s. Piero earned one of his earliest commissions in Florence, where he was able to see and study the works of Masaccio, Donatello, and other early Renaissance masters. Over the course of his career, he worked for some of the most powerful men in Italy, including Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta in Rimini and Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino. Piero created masterful small works for these local rulers, including the *Flagellation* and several portraits. His grandest commission, however, was the cycle of frescoes he painted for the cathedral at Arezzo in the 1450s. He died in 1492 in Borgo Santo Sepolcro.

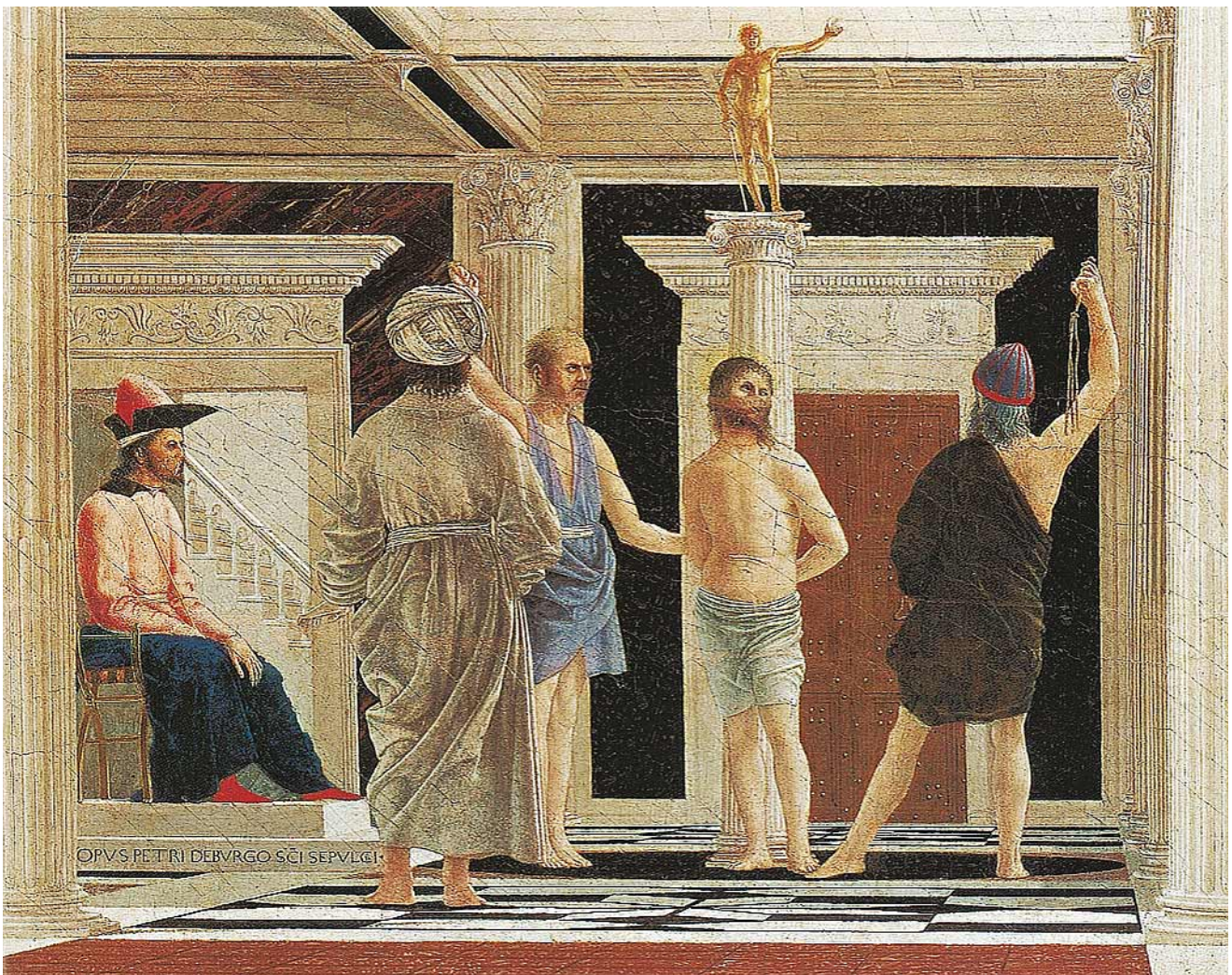
"... A MYSTERIOUS UNION OF MATHEMATICS AND PAINTING."

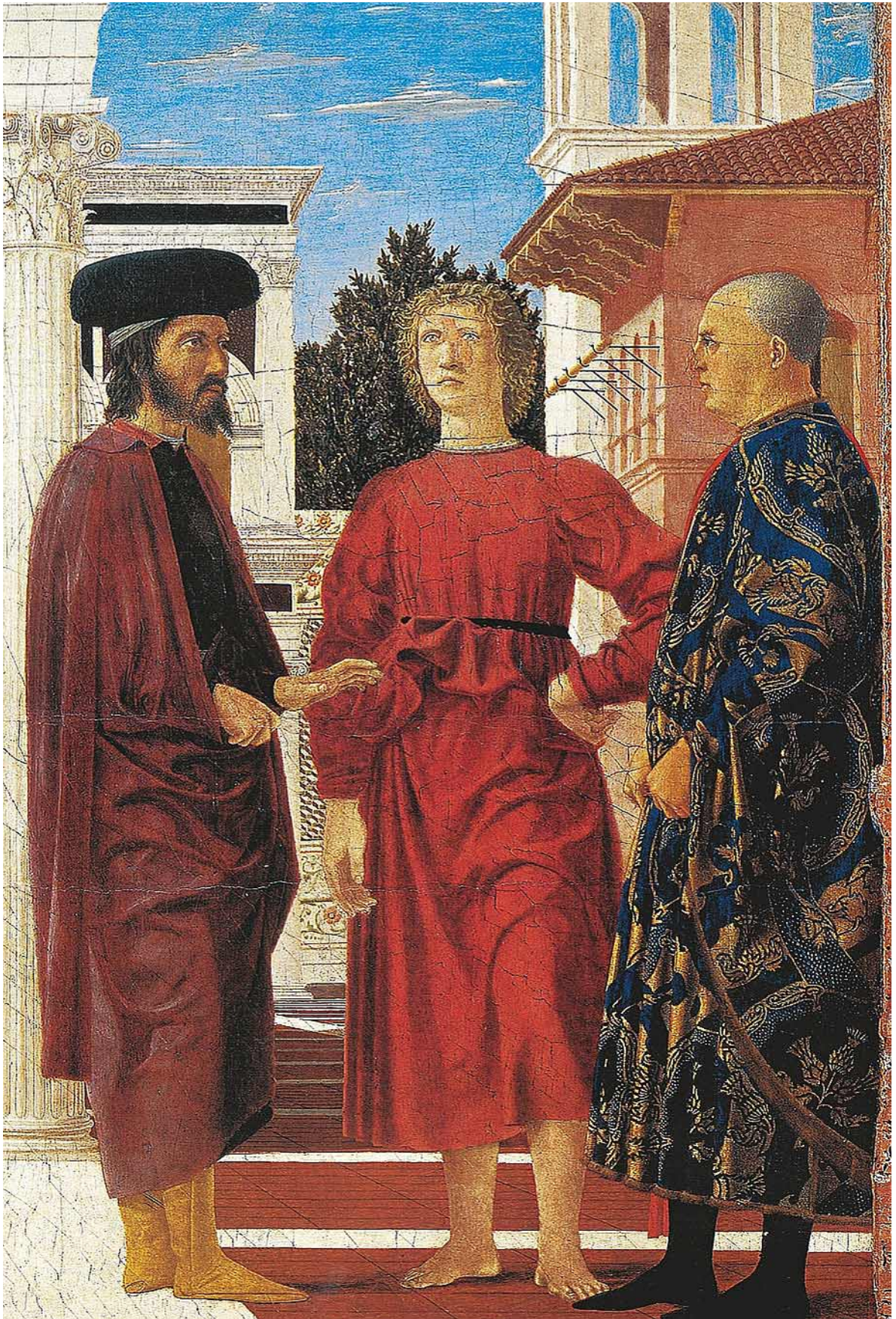
Roberto Longhi on the *Flagellation*



below Piero depicts the Flagellation of Christ in a strangely unemotional way. The characters seem to perform their actions as if rehearsing for a play. According to British art historian Kenneth Clark, the seated figure here represents both Pontius Pilate and John VIII Palaeologus, one of the last Byzantine emperors of Constantinople. When Piero created the work, Christian Constantinople had recently fallen to the Muslim Ottoman Turks. The *Flagellation*, Clark argued, symbolizes the struggles that Christianity was undergoing at that time.

right Piero displayed his talent for rendering fine detail in the elegant silk damask clothes of the figure on the right.





PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA FLAGELLATION OF CHRIST

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PETRUS CHRISTUS
PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL

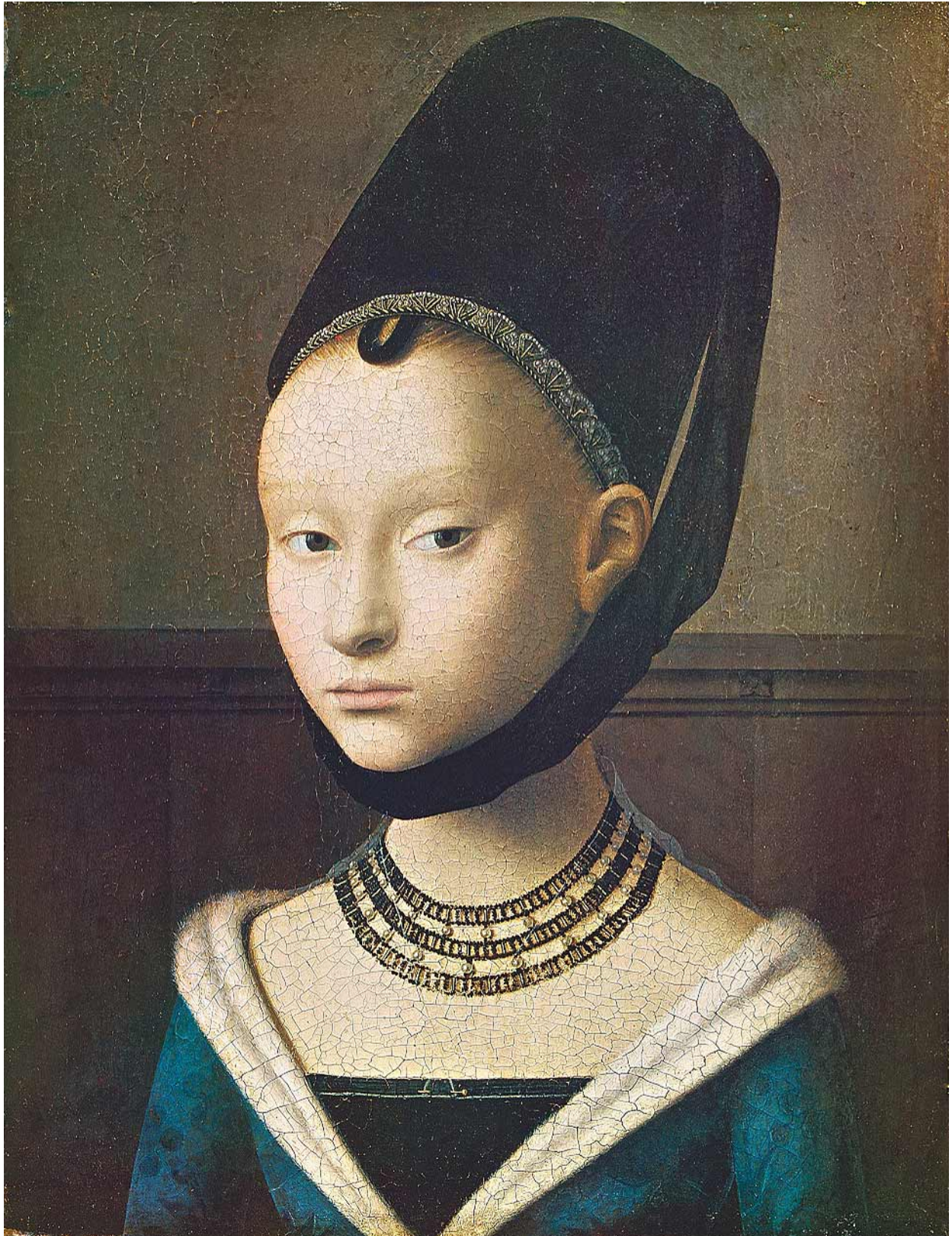
Petrus Christus made portraits, as well as religious subject, more human and accessible. He simplified compositions, making them more readable, and although his ability to create the sumptuous images of his Netherlandish predecessors was somewhat lacking, he moved the art of portraiture towards greater realism and psychological insight.

The *Portrait of Young Girl* was one of the last works of Petrus Christus, painted around 1470. Tradition says the sitter was a daughter of John Talbot, 2nd Earl of Shrewsbury, possibly Anne or Margaret, but this cannot be proved. The family may have traveled to Bruges, home of Petrus Christus, to attend the wedding of Margaret of York to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, in 1468. Bruges was a thriving commercial center by 1440 and local businessmen, foreign merchants, and bankers were potential clients for portraits. Whoever she may be, the young sitter is dressed in expensive, elegant clothes and jewelry. She looks out at a slight angle, creating a subtle relationship between her and the viewer. With her pale skin, almond-shaped eyes, and slightly petulant mouth, the girl appears to be self-aware but reserved. Her eyes are not quite in alignment, which adds to her expression—she makes the viewer want to know who she is and what she’s thinking. In a development new to portraiture in the Netherlands, Christus set his model not against the traditional dark background, but in a real interior. She is framed by architecture, a wooden dado below with a wall above. Not only has Christus depicted real objects, he has also depicted them casting real shadows. The girl looks as though she might be sitting in her own home, rather than isolated against a flat, dark space, as in the portraits of Jan van Eyck or Rogier van der Weyden. Not much is known of the whereabouts of the painting until it was acquired by the Medici family in Florence and listed in an inventory as “a small panel painted with the head of a French Lady, colored in oil, the work of Pietro Cresci from Bruges.” The Medici did not appear overly concerned about the identity of the sitter, and were probably more interested in the painting for its artistic qualities than the significance of the person depicted. The painting entered the Prussian royal collection in 1821 and is now in the Gemäldegalerie of the Staatliche Museen, in Berlin.

Very little is known of the life of **PETRUS CHRISTUS**. He was born c. 1410/1420 in Baerle-Duc (Baarle-Hertog), in what is now Belgium. Nothing is known of his early years or training, but on July 6, 1444, it is recorded that he applied for citizenship at the burgher’s lodge in Bruges. He also had to become a member of the local painters’ guild in order to work as a painter in Bruges. He died in 1475 or 1476 in Bruges.

"A POLISHED PEARL, ALMOST OPALESCENT,
LYING ON A CUSHION OF BLACK VELVET."

Joel Upton



PETRUS CHRISTUS PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL

c. 1470, oil on oak panel, 29 x 23 cm,
Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

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PAOLO UCCELLO

SAINT GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

The story of *George and the Dragon* appears in the medieval collection of religious stories known as *The Golden Legend*, which relates how Saint George rescued a fair maiden and liberated a town by defeating a dragon. This ancient struggle between good and evil was often represented in medieval art to symbolize the victory of the Church over infidels.

This painting depicts a celebrated episode in the legend of Saint George, in which a dragon terrorizes a pagan town. With one blow George, on horseback, triumphs over the beast, frees the princess, who was to be sacrificed, and converts the town to Christianity. While we can clearly identify George through his armor, his horse, and his lance, Uccello's painting is free from overt religious symbolism—for example, George's saintly halo is missing. Uccello departed from traditional forms of representation in order to tell the story in a more realistic and dynamic way: the princess and the dragon might be drawn rather statically, but Uccello depicts George in mid-action, his horse leaping forwards and his lance bearing down on the dragon's jaws from a great height. Uccello's manipulation of perspective emphasizes the sense of power as George attacks. The wild storm behind the saint, as well as the rebelliously rearing forehead of the horse with its neck arching into a wave, intensify the impression of diagonal movement from top to bottom. Behind George, the lance points up towards storm clouds that create a "halo" above the knight; and at the lance's other, lower end, the bloodied creature bellows in front of its angular, dark grotto, a symbol of the Underworld. The distant town is positioned exactly in the middle of the image, behind the lance, and between the dragon's head and the storm. Uccello's manipulation of foreground and background, of diagonals and vanishing points, creates the impression of a unity of space underscored by carefully calculated foreshortening. In this way, he makes the space appear three-dimensional, its linear perspective indicated on the ground in the geometrical patches of grass.

According to the legend, when the battle was over the princess put her girle on the monster to lead it through the town. But Uccello foregrounds a non-chronological representation which gives the scene greater expressiveness. The resulting highly imaginative world inspired Cubists and Surrealists in equal measure, and it was they who were the first to rediscover Uccello's work in modern times.

Paolo di Dono, better known as **UCCELLO** ("Bird," after his apparent fondness for depicting birds), was born in 1397 in Florence. He trained alongside Donatello as a painter, sculptor, and architect under the Florentine master Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455). In 1425 he began a series of major religious commissions that took him to several Italian cities. He was one of the pioneers of linear perspective, the development of which had a great influence on the early Italian Renaissance. He mastered this technique while working on his frescos for the dome of Florence cathedral and on a series of paintings, including a set of three paintings, *The Battle of San Romano* (London, Florence, Paris). According to legend, he became obsessed with complicated geometrical systems involving perspective, finally dying (it is claimed) of exhaustion through overwork. He died in 1475 in Florence.

"HE LEFT ... A WIFE, WHO WAS WONT TO SAY
THAT PAOLO WOULD STAY IN HIS STUDY ALL NIGHT,
SEEKING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF PERSPECTIVE,
AND THAT WHEN SHE CALLED HIM TO COME TO BED,
HE WOULD SAY: 'OH, WHAT A SWEET THING IS THIS PERSPECTIVE!'"

Giorgio Vasari

