The Oltrarno and the Renaissance

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Special Problems in Art/Art History Capstone

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Please refer to the illustrations included at the back of this paper. I have also provided a useful timeline of the major events, art, and people discussed in this paper. You can access it at:

zaworadesign.com/timeline
(best viewed in 3D mode)

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I. INTRODUCTION

When we are engrossed in processing the voluminous amount of historical texts, articles, and academic papers required to write an essay, it can be possible to lose sight of the notion that along with the facts, dates, and theories, these are the stories of people. Occasionally though, an account may compel our minds to drift, to envision what it was like at that moment in time. Let's begin with one such story. In 1422, three close friends, who would become famous for their contributions to Renaissance art and architecture, were together in a square in one of Florence's most impoverished districts, an area called the Oltrarno. Oltrarno translates to "Beyond the Arno" and was a community with an intriguing history and a somewhat rebellious populous. The three friends stand together outside of the convent of Santa Maria del Carmine to witness the festivities of the church's re-consecration. Still, they also stand together at a pivotal period in art and world history. So, how and why are these influential individuals here? What brought them to this neighborhood beyond the Arno? The reasons are transparent and will be explored in this paper as we will examine:

1. The Oltrarno's storied history and its close relationship to the Mendicants which created the opportunity for artistic patronage.
2. The Mendicant Order of Augustinians in the Oltrarno was exceptionally receptive to Humanism and built a necessary bridge between pagan Humanism and Christianity.
3. Explore how the area's insulation from the city center created a unique culture that provided fertile ground for free thought, rebellion, and exploration of the arts.
4. The rise of the *cult of purgatory* displayed through family chapel acquisition created the opportunity for and influenced artistic commissions.

5. Through an analysis of chapel artwork, demonstrate how Humanism, Augustinian theology, and the local politics of the Oltrarno influenced artists who then created extraordinary and groundbreaking images that embodied the restored dignity of the Renaissance man.

By way of a thorough examination of the five points listed above, this paper will argue that the Oltrarno district held a unique sociological mix and promoted progressive ideas and innovations that elevated the dignity of man during the critical periods of the 14th and 15th centuries.

II. THE RISE OF THE MENDICANTS

Understanding the importance of the Oltrarno as a creative and philosophical bedrock of the Renaissance in Florence, we need to understand the history of the religious orders that established their homes south of the city. Europe's Mendicant Orders had an enormous impact on the visual arts and larger society during the late middle ages, through the renaissance, and beyond. The five Mendicant Orders, Franciscan, Dominican, Servite, Carmelite, and Augustinians, worked to serve the communities where they reside, teaching, preaching, and providing for the spiritual life of their neighbors. Many were—and still are—urban organizations living close to some of the poorest members in society.

With expanding urbanization, the Mendicant Orders "swept over Italy with more force than elsewhere. With it the demand for liturgical apparatus began to soar, stimulating the productive forces that created the religious art of the Renaissance."[1] As the Mendicants spread throughout Europe, they became a complex information network in structure. "There were regular opportunities for the exchange of ideas, such as visitations, diplomatic missions, consistories,

[1] Goldthwaite, Richard A. *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010: 88

conclaves and chapter meetings, and once the business of the day had been concluded artistic commissions would rank high on the agenda. The interlocking lines of communication between the friars at various levels within the order provided the dynamics of a system of patronage that reached out in all directions."[2] The rise of these religious groups in the middle ages brought about philosophical and artistic changes that acted as catalysts for the Renaissance.

The Mendicant patronage of the visual arts served a practical function both educational and devotional. "Images existed to remind the faithful of the saints and doctrines of the Church, and encourage proper responses to them."[3] The Franciscans changed the entire function of art, "Before Francis, art had been symbolic and conventional, aiming for clarity through repetition and recognition; after him, artworks needed to evoke real, even individual, experiences and responses to a now-recognizable world."[4] The Franciscans were interested in the world around them, the world as God's creation, and they encouraged artists to represent nature in their work. The cycles of frescos on display at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi are a testament to this renewed naturalism. The Franciscans would inspire the other Mendicant orders to commission works for their sacred spaces, even when image creation was at odds with the writings of the Order's patron saint. For example, "Augustine dismissed the representational image as the reproduction of a phenomena that themselves merely reflected the divine: … the beautiful designs that are born in our minds and find expression through clever hands derive from that Beauty which transcends all minds, the Beauty to which my mind aspires day and night."[5] Regardless of their namesake's writings, the Augustinians were fervent patrons of the arts.

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[2] Kempers, Bram. *Painting, Power and Patronage*. London: Penguin Books, 1994: 34

[3] Louise Bourdua and Anne Dunlop, "Introduction: the Augustinians, the Mendicant Orders, and Early-Renaissance Art," in *Art and the Augustinian Order in Early Renaissance Italy* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2016: 7

[4] Bourdua and Dunlop, "Introduction: the Augustinians" 4

[5] Antonia Fondaras, "Saint Augustine, the Augustinian Hermits, and the Convent of Santo Spirito," *Augustinian Art and Meditation in Renaissance Florence*, 2020: 28, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004419896_003.

Mendicant societies were established even before the area of the Oltrarno grew in population. In Tuscany, numerous hermetic religious groups dedicated to various saints began to move closer to urban areas to locate their orders amongst the growing populations, following the trail blazed by the Franciscans before them. With papal support the smaller Tuscan groups were joined under Saint Augustine of Hippo and a single superior. With this Great Union, the Augustinians were officially established in Italy. The Mendicant Orders and their churches served as the spiritual and often social centers of Early Renaissance citizens in the Oltrarno. Their religious community and its buildings played a fundamental role in the local community's lives from birth to death. The Mendicant Orders' served as examples of how one should practice devotion to God, the Saints, and those less fortunate in society. The Orders were the vessels of charity during plagues, war, and financial hardship. The monks' vows of poverty and their reliance on public support for their existence endeared them to the local population. Through their support of the monastery, by building projects, chapels, or church decoration, the parish lay members hoped to endear themselves to God.

The Carmelite convent of Santa Maria del Carmine in the Oltrarno was dedicated to helping Christ's poor. The convent was properly located for such endeavors as its neighbors were largely poor and working-class artisans. It is evident that the convent of the Carmine held particular importance as a center of neighborhood charity. The decorative programs and chapel artwork would reflect the values of this poor and working-class community. "The fabric of the Carmine and its decoration was largely the result of collaboration between neighbors. Although patronage of chapels and large donations were restricted to the wealthiest of the neighborhood ... poorer people could, and did, contribute to the appearance of their local church."[6]

[6] Burke, Jill. "Visualizing Neighborhood in Renaissance Florence." *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 5, 707

In contrast to the Carmine, the Augustinian order in the Oltrarno, Santo Spirito, had church membership that included many of the wealthiest and influential citizens of the Oltrarno. Santo Spirito would become the area's principal religious community and identify its district within Florence; serving as a spiritual, educational, and theological hub. Santo Spirito would be known for its dynamic clergy who would preach from the square on holy days. Their mastery of oration and theology was an essential aspect of the Augustinian Order. The Studium at Santo Spirito offered university-level courses in theology and provided an intense training program for Augustinian scholars. The library at Santo Spirito held a famous collection of classical and religious documents. Outstanding scholars taught and learned at Santo Spirito, and it provided a space for exchanging ideas and scholarship from throughout the known world. "Santo Spirito was an institution with multiple contending identities, a mendicant foundation ministering to and patronized by its quartiere (quarter), a religious center that counted among the most important in Florence, a sophisticated and cosmopolitan seat of higher learning, and a community of resident friars who lived under the rules of clausura (cloistered living) and privileged contemplation according to the eremitical ideal of their order." [7]

III. THE ROOTS OF HUMANISM

A controversial result of the free exchange of ideas at Santo Spirito was the emergence of Humanism among the Augustinians at Santo Spirito. While the Augustinians embraced ancient writings, the conservative Dominican Monk Girolamo Savonarola became a particular opponent of this fusion of ancient pagan scholarship into a Christian world. Humanism in Italy originated from a small group of scholars in Padua who studied ancient texts and applied the ancients'

[7] Antonia Fondaras, "Saint Augustine, the Augustinian Hermits, and the Convent of Santo Spirito," *Augustinian Art and Meditation in Renaissance Florence*, 2020: 45, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004419896_003.

knowledge to their scholarship. One of these Italian scholars, often referred to as the Father of Humanism, Francesco Petrarca, or Petrarch, was famous for his rediscovery of Cicero's writings as well as authoring numerous Humanist poems and tracts. Petrarch traveled throughout Europe, helping to further spread Humanist ideas. Perhaps the connection between the tenants of Humanism and the Augustinians was not so controversial considering that Petrarch embraced the works of St. Augustine, using them as a model for his daily life. Petrarch had young protégé in Augustinian monk Luigi Marsili, a member of the Santo Spirito community and St. Augustine became a saintly mentor for Petrarch as he carried a small copy of the Saint's *Confessions* throughout his life. Petrarch was introduced to the writings of St. Augustine by Augustinian hermit Dennis of Borgo "who directed Petrarch to the works of St. Augustine, made him see the dangerous course of his past life and understand ever more clearly that beside ancient pagan literature there existed a no less important literature of Christian antiquity in which the works of St. Augustine deserved a special place."[8] Through the discovery of St. Augustine's writings, Petrarch developed a mindset of self-improvement through nightly reflection, reviewing the day's work and noting ineffective or wasted time. Petrarch applied this self-reflection to improving mainly academic pursuits in reading and writing. Petrarch developed a state of mind in study through rigorous discipline in an attempt to identify his *true self*. The idea of Petrarch's *selfhood* is also found throughout his writings. For example, in book two of *Secretum*, a character, Augustinus —named for Petrarch's mentor St. Augustine—claims that Humanist practices "should not be a means of acquiring knowledge but rather should shape one's way of life."[9] While the idea of Humanist self-pride and self-care may seem out of place in late-

[8] Arbesmann, Rudolph. "A Pioneering Work in Augustinian Iconography." *Recherches Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 4 (1966): 32, https://doi.org/10.1484/j.ra.5.102213

[9] Zak, Gur. "Humanism as a Way of Life: Leon Battista Alberti and the Legacy of Petrarch." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 17, no. 2 (2014): 220, https://doi.org/10.1086/678250

medieval religious societies, this was not the case with the Augustinians. They built their order on a contemplative, Neoplatonic tradition. St. Augustine believed "each human person is a repository of the image of God and thus potentially godlike."[10] Petrarch also believed that caring for the soul was an essential task of the philosopher. Viewing life through the lens of Humanism, man was no longer bound by medieval views of inferiority, early Renaissance citizens of Florence found a renewed sense of human self-value and pride, supported at the church at Santo Spirito.

Italian poet and friend of Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, would lay the foundation of Humanism in Florence with talks at Santo Spirito that began in the 1360s. The talks were regular Humanist gatherings to debate a randomly selected topic posted on a column or wall. Boccaccio would eventually leave his vast collection of manuscripts to Santo Spirito's library. Petrarch's protégé Luigi Marsili would continue the talks through the 1380s with a group that included one of the influential pre-Medician political figures and renowned Humanist scholar, Coluccio Salutati. Also present was Salutati's predecessor as Chancellor of Florence Leonardo Bruni, as was Niccolò de' Niccoli, part of the inner circle of Cosimo de' Medici. It is significant to this paper's argument regarding the importance of this institution that the attendees at Santo Spirito reached the highest offices and most powerful families in the Republic of Florence and it would be the Medici endorsement of Humanism that mainstreamed the movement. Niccoli also provides a link between the humanists at Santo Spirito and early Renaissance artists, "Ghilberti, Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Luca Della Robbia were all friends of that first great patrician bibliophile and collector of antiquities, Niccolò de' Niccoli and of the humanist Alberti."[11]

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[10] Antonia Fondaras, "Saint Augustine, the Augustinian Hermits, and the Convent of Santo Spirito," *Augustinian Art and Meditation in Renaissance Florence*, 2020: 20, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004419896_003

[11] Goldthwaite, Richard A. *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006: 419.

Leon Battista Alberti, whose writings on the arts and architecture, such as *Della pittura* became an invaluable resource for Renaissance artists. The Petrarchan tradition played a central role in the writing and daily life of Alberti. Where Petrarch only found virtue in improvements to writing and scholarship and applied his self-reflections to those particular subjects. Alberti did not limit his daily self-improvement to tasks of reading and writing; he strongly valued experience. His writings establish a conflict between experience and book learning which he saw as different paths to creativity and knowledge. Alberti would review his conduct in all aspects of life, his walk, his speech, even horsemanship. Alberti would repeatedly check and practice such tasks over and over. As Alberti put it, the goal of these obsessive self-examinations is to receive "the good will of good men." Alberti meditated on the things he experienced and challenged himself to improve his mental and physical weaknesses. He wanted to train himself to become "a perfect embodiment of society's etiquettes, a work of art that is pleasing to all."[12] Alberti's version of Humanist self-care is important because it demonstrates a change to what was a more Social Humanist movement. While Petrarch emphasized intellect and writing as the most righteous path to his fellow man's respect, Alberti understood the importance of experience and social standing. To Alberti, self-image mattered in your work and the city square, it reflects the Augustinian godlike dignity that many sought to achieve.

"The Humanists offered Europe a new focus for study, a new approach to problems, and a new style in which people could express themselves."[13] Santo Spirito acts as a microcosm of Europe's more significant Humanist Social Movement. It begins with a few academics' ideas and soon expands into a cultural action that permeates Italy and Europe for centuries. Not all

[12] Zak, Gur. "Humanism as a Way of Life: Leon Battista Alberti and the Legacy of Petrarch." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 17, no. 2 (2014): 238 https://doi.org/10.1086/678250

[13] Maxson, Brian. *The Humanist World of Renaissance Florence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017: 1

people interested in Humanism were necessarily looking for a deep scholarly quest, and they rarely wrote original works. These social or "amateur" Humanists wanted to understand the orations and prose and apply Humanist teaching to their daily lives. They added Humanism to their children's studies, revived ancient themes in the arts, and like Alberti, strove to present themselves to others as learned members of the community, to receive the "good will of good men." Humanism was significant social capital in Renaissance Florence and manifested itself in desire for glory, familial and neighborhood pride, and immortality through religious and artistic patronage. This paper does not intend to discuss the entire Humanist tradition of Santo Spirito but hopes to illustrate a foundational and sustained relationship between Humanist scholars and the Augustinian Order at Santo Spirito.

IV. EXPLORING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

As discussed earlier in this paper, the Oltrarno saw the addition of the Mendicant churches and an explosion of population in the early 1300s and became a place of constant urban renewal during the later 14th and early 15th centuries. In 1333 a third set of city walls were erected to include the Oltrarno into Florence's larger city. For administrative purposes, in 1343, officials divided Renaissance Florence into quarters; Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce, Santo Spirito, and San Giovanni. The quarters then split into smaller wards called gonfalone. As with Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce, the Santo Spirito quarter was named for the area's largest Mendicant church. Likewise, the defined geographic regions of the gonfaloni were related to the individual parish churches within the larger districts. The gonfaloni of the Oltrarno were Drago Verde, Ferza, Nicchio, and Scala. These smaller gonfaloni communities created social unity for the people living there especially in the poorer wards such as Drago. As this paper will establish

through this next section, the demographics of the gonfaloni will play a large part in the churches people patronize and art commissioned for their interior. This paper will survey the patronage and artworks within Santo Spirito, (see figure 1) which lies in the Ferza (the Whip) as well as Santa Maria del Carmine, located in the gonfalone of Drago Verde (Green Dragon). Interestingly, surviving to this day in the Santo Spirito quarter is a marker that defines the line between Drago and Ferza, a simply carved plaque that uses the imagery of a whip and dragon divided by a vertical line. This is likely the only ward boundary maker (figure 2) of this type that remains in Florence.

The gonfalone of Drago Verde was by far the poorest district in Santo Spirito. The Drago was closely tied to the parish San Frediano, one of Florence's oldest parishes, recorded as far back as 1071. The people of Drago identify with the history of the parish and the legends of its founder. The large population of poor people in Drago also shared a tight connection with the charitable Carmelite monks of Santa Maria del Carmine. Drago was the home of many working-class artisans, especially those of the wool industry, as well as servants, laborers, and craftsmen. It was also the home to Florence's ceramic industry as the objectional smells and fire hazards of pottery making were not fit for the city center. Despite their lower-level occupations and often unknown family lineage, the people of the Drago were still capable of wielding significant influence in art and politics through their craftsman guilds and confraternal organizations.

In contrast to the Drago's poor, the gonfaloni of Nicchio, Ferza, and Scala were home to many of the wealthiest families in the Oltrarno. The families of Nasi, Frescobaldi, Corbinelli, Ridolfi, and others wielded power within their respective district. Much of the urban renewal in infrastructure and palace construction was due to these wealthy families. They also controlled Santo Spirito's Opera, maintaining a hold on the finances and approval for building and

decorating projects. Through their patronage, these families attempted to demonstrate the importance of their lineage, establish their immortality, and the importance of their social standing and self-image. They also controlled the district's visual culture, something the more impoverished population had little say in but had to share as a part of their everyday lives.

The Oltrarno also held a negative reputation. "Citizens like Dante and Giovanni Villani regarded new zones like the Oltrarno, with their assortment of base tradespeople and new men from the countryside, with distaste."[14] Only the central city was the proper place for civic life where nearly all critical civic and religious events would happen. The Oltrarno and Drago in particular "…were regarded to some degree as a breeding ground for unrest. For their part, the inhabitants of the Oltrarno seem to have responded to this perception with a feisty sense of independence."[15] The people of the Drago were at the center of many revolts during the late 14th century and early 15th century that culminated with the Drago's alignment with the Alberti family in a plot to storm the Palazzo Signoria, hold the priors' families hostage, and kill the oligarch Gino Capponi at his palace. Ultimately, the plan failed, and the Alberti were expelled from Florence, the Oltrarno of course added to its reputation as a place of sedition.

Despite the negative bias of a few elite citizens, the neighborhoods of the Oltrarno, even Drago, were home to some of the wealthiest families in Florence. They held a renewed Humanist spirit of personal, religious, and civic pride, especially for the neighborhoods in which they reside. This was particularly true in the period before the Medici brought the Oltrarno under their control. The citizens demonstrated their civic pride in the construction and decoration of their most revered spaces. At Santo Spirito, this renewed spirit was reflected in the uniformity and

[14] Eckstein, Nicholas A. "The District of the Green Dragon: Neighbourhood Life and Social Change in Renaissance Florence." Publisher: Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki (January 1, 1995): 6
[15] Eckstein, Nicholas A. "The District of the Green Dragon," 11

harmony of its architecture. At Santa Maria del Carmine, the Drago's artisan culture and close connection to painters, goldsmiths, and other artists—themselves citizens of the Drago—provided the opportunity for innovation in art. The citizens of the Drago held a particular sensitivity to understanding visual language demonstrated in the works they commissioned.

Santo Spirito and Santa Maria del Carmine are but a 5-minute walk apart, despite their close proximity, the parishioners and patrons of these two respective churches were quite different. The detailed records of the confraternal societies provide an excellent cross-section of each parish's membership. Santo Spirito drew membership from across Ferza, Nicchio, and Scala but almost none from Drago. Patronage of Santo Spirito was a symbol of status within the entire Oltrarno, while at Santa Maria del Carmine, it appears to reflect neighborhood unity. The monks at the Carmine provided for the poorest members of the Drago in times of need and for those living in the Drago, that could be any individual. Santa Maria del Carmine was woven into the fabric of Drago Verde society, hosted essential feast days, religious plays, memorial masses, housed important relics, and provided a proper burial for the poorest members of the gonfalone. The two opposing religious institutions reflect the demographics of the population of the Oltrarno so well. As we close on this section, intended to provide a needed perspective of the Oltrarno region, we can now explore the dynamics of family chapels. To the citizens of the Oltrarno providing a worthy space for their family in the church was a meaningful gesture for their name's prosperity in this world and the next.

V. FAMILY CHAPELS: A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

As outlined in the first part of this paper, the demographics of the Oltrarno held a unique blend of artisans and scholars, wealthy and poor. Given the Oltrarno's unique artistic culture, we

should expect that artwork created for patrons living in this district would be innovative. Patrons had much control in the process and could outline in detail, within the artist's contract, the parameters of the work of art they were paying for. "The painter was typically, though not invariably, employed and controlled by an individual or small group."[16] To better understand the works of art created during the Early Renaissance, we need to understand the influence of the patrons, the Opera, and the church leaders. "In fact, most church art was privately commissioned and privately owned, and the local churches had a large degree of local autonomy. Even the chapels themselves, which contained most of the art, remained private property until modern times."[17] The patrons were commissioning privately owned works for public benefit. This art elevated their family, confraternity, or guild's name in their district's most prominent space, the church. Chapels and the works within were not simply an artistic display; they were a show of power and status. "In generating this material culture, the dead served the living on this side of life as well as beyond the grave, for their continuing presence in the physical objects not only reminded survivors of their spiritual duty but also enhanced the worldly prestige of their families."[18] Another motive of the patron was to create a more secure afterlife, providing penance for their sins. Renaissance authority Richard A. Goldthwaite refers to this obsession as the *cult of purgatory*. Patrons spent so lavishly on their family chapels, to the point where Savonarola complained "that he could not convince wealthy men in Florence to give 10 florins to the poor, but they would give 100 florins just to put their coat of arms on a chapel."[19]

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[16] Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988: 5

[17] Nelson, Jonathan Katz, and Richard Zeckhauser. "A Renaissance Instrument to Support Nonprofits: The Sale of Private Chapels in Florentine Churches," 2002: 2, https://doi.org/10.3386/w9173

[18] Goldthwaite, Richard A. *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010: 122

[19] Nelson, Jonathan Katz, and Richard Zeckhauser. "A Renaissance Instrument to Support Nonprofits: The Sale of Private Chapels in Florentine Churches," 2002: 32, https://doi.org/10.3386/w9173

Chapels sales financed the Renaissance churches. The Mendicant societies and the churches were expensive to maintain, and chapel sales generated income. Chapels also provided income for clergy paid to perform funerals, burials, and memorial masses. A fee-based system existed to provide a certain number of masses for a person after their death and then again on their death anniversary. Essentially, Renaissance churches became mass and funeral businesses, and as demand expanded, they would require more priests. "Many churches brought in outside priests on a contract basis to perform post mortem commemorations. This practice became so widespread that an official decree in 1517 condemned clergy who neglected duties at their own churches in order to celebrate masses at other institutions for pay."[20] This expansion created the need for larger churches, as well as expanded convents. The chapels became the funding for the building projects as well as the long-term care of the clergy. The adorned churches also created a beautiful decorative space for the clergy to perform their duties and such magnificent religious buildings also helped recruit members to their order.

The individual chapel owners were expected to provide all necessary objects required for mass; a crucifix, chalices, candlesticks, bells, missals, and vestments for the priest. Chapel owners would spare no expense on such items. The patrons would also incorporate their coat of arms into the space as self-promotion. "Savonarola himself fumed that donors had their symbols placed "on the back of vestments, so that when the priest stands at the altar, the arms can be seen well by all the people."[21] All this individualism in décor could be a cause concern, after all, the church is a communal space to glorify God, serve the religious organization, and honor their patron saints. Churches also represented the neighborhoods and citizens of their districts, not just the tastes of a group of individuals. To avoid a visual free-for-all in chapel design, the Opera,

[20] Nelson, Zeckhauser. "Nonprofits," 30
[21] iBid 33-34

formed of prominent members of the local community (as well as clergy) would oversee chapel sales and decoration with the goal of unity through conformity.

An excellent example of design taking an organized approach to uniformity in chapel design is Brunelleschi's architectural design for Santo Spirito's interior (figure 3). "Altarpieces placed in the new church were designed for it. Uniform size and shape, they accorded with the repetitious array of identical chapels, in the form of niches, that surround the interior."[22] The Chapels were highly organized and identical units that surround the periphery of the nave and transepts. "Initially it would seem to suggest that community access to the privatized space of the family chapels was greater in the newer church . . . Brunelleschi's plan was socially equalizing in intent."[23] When all chapels are identical in design, the chapel's decoration and its position related to the high altar at the crossing becomes critical to its value.

"Brunelleschi's intransigent approach to design, which in its full geometrical rigor and formal austerity perhaps accorded with or even paid homage to the stern intellectualism of the Augustinian order. Indeed, the monastery of Santo Spirito had long enjoyed a reputation as a major center of Florentine learned culture."[24] Brunelleschi's design based in the order of geometry and its relationship of shapes, order, and perspective demonstrate a "true wisdom in relation to the mere mastery of human sciences, among which, as is well known, the arts of design, including painting and architecture, had recently found an acknowledged place in "the Renaissance system of the arts."[25] Brunelleschi's church interior solved the issue of chapel uniformity and created a space that embodies the Humanist ideals of the Mendicant order .

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[22] Burroughs, Charles. "Greening Brunelleschi: Botticelli at Santo Spirito." *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics* (2004): 240, https://doi.org/10.1086/resv45n1ms20167630.
[23] Burke, Jill. "Visualizing Neighborhood in Renaissance Florence." *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 5 (2006): 699. https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144206287094.
[24] Burroughs, Charles. "Greening Brunelleschi: Botticelli at Santo Spirito." *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics* (2004): 239
[25] Burroughs, "Greening Brunelleschi". 240

VI. POWER ON DISPLAY: CHAPEL ACQUIREMENT & ADORNMENT

Although the Augustinians utilized Santo Spirito, it was a communal church. It was beneficial to the Mendicant societies to avoid outright ownership of their churches due to the enormous cost of maintaining and operating such large structures. The construction of Santo Spirito provides a wealth of information about the process of building and outfitting a Renaissance period church. As communal property, with business leaders serving on its Opera, it is not surprising that Santo Spirito maintained detailed records of transactions and budgets. Scholars have scoured these records looking into materials and labor spending to piece together the timeline and process used to construct Santo Spirito. These same records provide a wealth of information about chapel sales as well.

Before an architectural plan could be drafted in building the new Santo Spirito, the clergy at Santo Spirito needed to appoint members of the church Opera. The first Opera of the 1430s held eight operai, this was reduced to five members by 1445 with appointments that included members of the elite Frescobaldi, Capponi and Benino families. "The Opera was the works committee responsible for the administrative, financial, logistic, and artistic aspects of a building project. Its members, or operai, were elected or appointed from the leading guilds of the city and/or families of a quartiere either by members of the religious order or by the parishioners of a particular church."[26] Their influence in political circles could help "facilitate the appropriation of public funding for their very own neighborhood building projects."[27] For example, Santo Spirito faced a funding issue and, as a result, a stagnation in the building process in the late 1430s, this was resolved by acquiring funding from a salt tax. It seems as the republic struggles through

[26] Ruggiero, Rocky, *Brunelleschi's Basilica: the Building of Santo Spirito in Florence*. Roma: Viella, 2020: 32
[27] Ruggiero, Rocky. "*Brunelleschi's Basilica*" 32

wars or financial shortfalls, the building project slows as a result. The political maneuvering of Opera members helped to keep local project moving. The five Opera members were also connected within the business community of the district and played a large role in recalling debts owed to the Opera and organizing the financial aspects of the project. The Opera also needed to appoint a *provveditore*, who was a project manager in charge of most aspects of the actual building project including making payments. By giving authority to one person it eliminates the micro-management and delays that can occur in committees.

The influential figures who made up the Opera volunteered to serve their communal church with the added benefit, that as members, they would generally get the first choice in chapel distribution. "As the operai, they could exercise their power on a national level by championing the cause of communal funding for their church in the traditionally parsimonious councils of Palazzo Signoria, and then enjoy the spoils of victory on a local level with the acquisition of the rights of patronage over privileged chapels in their quarter church."[28] Church records confirm that the first chapels sold, those close to the crossing, went to Stoldo Frescobaldi. Other important families such as the Nasi, Cappioni and Bertini families also claimed their choice chapel locations early in the building process. Interestingly the Opera may have gifted one of the most important chapels (as far as its location) to Luca Pitti to gain favor with Cosimo de Medici (Pitti was a close advisor to the Medici).

Pitti's chapel was an exception, generally, chapels were acquired through a financial purchase. Not unlike large purchases made today, the Opera had a finance payment system to purchase a chapel. Patrons could put down 100 florins and pay 50 florins a year until the entire 500 florins were paid in full. The payment plan system was eventually altered by the opera as

[28] iBid 30-31

their leniency led to late or non-payment. Sometimes if a family was not keeping up with payments, they could lose their rights to the chapel. Such a default in payment occurred with the Bardi Chapel, in which two different owners defaulted on paying, and the Opera re-sold the chapel. While the chapel remained within the family bloodline, it proves that the Opera could revoke status when the patron was not fulfilling their end of the bargain.

As discussed earlier in this paper, Brunelleschi equalized all of the chapels in the crossing around the high alter, "Brunelleschi's "centralized basilica" design for the church was a veritable patron's conundrum."[29] The equality of the chapel design pushed patrons to purchase multiple chapels or lavishly adorn the chapels to demonstrate their family's importance. Adding to the uniformity, later modifications of Brunelleschi's original chapel plan (figure 3) eliminated the exterior projecting chapels in favor of a more practical and cost-effective flat outer wall, the external chapels now designated by a single window and the family coat of arms. (figure 3) "The chapels at Santo Spirito together formed a microcosm of the elite community of the three gonfaloni of the quarter, showing which individuals and families deserved the most respect and consideration."[30] "Through this external display, a patron was now able to not only signal himself and his family amongst the other chapel owners within the church, but also amongst the citizens within his quartiere, and even further still, amongst those monuments that defined the city's very urban fabric."[31] So, if a personage such as Lorenzo di Medici were to visit Santo Spirito, he could easily recognize the families who matter in the district.

In the Drago, wealthy families who could easily afford chapels in Santo Spirito instead chose to keep their patronage with in their gonfalone. "In other words, while the gonfaloni of Nicchio,

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[29] Ruggiero, Rocky, and Fabrizio Nevola. "Santo Spirito in Florence: Brunelleschi, the Opera, the Quartiere, and the Cantiere," 129

[30] Burke, Jill. *Changing Patrons: Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. 76

[31] Ruggiero, Rocky, and Fabrizio Nevola. "Santo Spirito in Florence" 131

Ferza and Scala accepted and exploited the new church of Santo Spirito for its intended role, that is, a church that represented the entire quarter, Drago's intense sense of neighborhood identity had created an estranged relationship between the ward and the church."[32] In the smaller and less wealthy district of the Drago families could be represented though a collective or corporate patronage. A group of families or perhaps members of a confraternity or guild could pool their resources to display collections of family crests within a chapel. In a neighborhood based on community, this seems like a natural option to patronize your church.

As outlined in the preceding sections of this paper, we established the members of the Drago Verde, as artisans, had a unique connection to the arts and the Drago was noteworthy for its large population of artists and craftsmen. For example, Fra. Filippo Lippi was an orphan raised by the Carmelites in the Drago, and the Pollaiuolo Brothers were born into one of the poorest sections of the neighborhood. "The careers of artists like Neri di Bicci, Giuliano di Arrigo (Pesello), Francesco di Stefano (Pesellino), and others are also one of the most important pieces of evidence of the Drago's local culture."[33] "A tightly-knit group of painters from a relatively underprivileged area came to establish a dominant position in the Corso degli Adimari, the address for many of Florence's artistic workshops."[34] While the artists worked in the city center, they were bound by their shared background, neighborhood, and church patronage. Records indicate these local artists also served as members of the guilds and church confraternities in the Drago, where they received contracts for commissioned artwork.

The process of contracting an artist shows an interesting change in dynamics during this period time and reinforces the importance of how humanism was influencing the status of the

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[32] iBid 125

[33] Eckstein, Nicholas A. "The District of the Green Dragon: Neighbourhood Life and Social Change in Renaissance Florence." Publisher: Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki (January 1, 1995): 41

[34] Eckstein, Nicholas A. "The District of the Green Dragon" 42

artist. Renaissance artist contracts were often detailed documents that recorded all aspects of the artist's job. According to Braxendall, contracts contained three main themes of agreement: What the painter is supposed to paint as well as a required drawing, the amount the patron must pay, and when the painting is due to be completed by the artist. The details of these three main themes can vary from negligible to explicit detail. For example, clients could specify the amount of brushwork the panel required, by specifying a landscaped background versus a less detailed setting, a higher cost for artistic skill was worth the price.

In contracts patrons could dictate the subjects and materials used in the painting, and historically patrons seemed to value the importance of using rich pigments such as gold and ultramarine. However, over time contracts demonstrates that patrons started to put less emphasis on the expensive materials and more on the artist's talent. The shift in taste may reflect people "dissociating oneself from the flash new rich; the acute physical shortage of gold in the fifteenth century; a classical distaste for sensuous license now sweeping out from neo-Ciceronian humanism."[35] Humanists such as Alberti placed precedence on human ability over expensive materials, when discussing mixing colors to achieve gold he wrote, "I would not want to use any gold, because to represent the glitter of gold with plain colours brings the craftsman more admiration and praise."[36] Human ability was now favored, and acquiring art from the most well-known and talented artists was essential in creating objects for family chapels. Better to pay a known talent to make a small panel than have a large altarpiece using expensive materials from an unknown hand. "As the conspicuous consumption of gold and ultramarine became less important in the contracts, its place was filled by references to an equally conspicuous

[35] Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1988. 15
[36] Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* 16

consumption of something else—skill."[37] For proof let's examine a record for a payment made to Sandro Botticelli to see just how patrons itemized artistic talent in the designation of costs:

> "At the chapel at S. Spirito seventy-eight florins fifteen soldi in payment of seventy-five gold florins in gold, paid to Sandro Botticelli on his reckoning, as follows—two florins for ultramarine, thirty-eight florins for gold and preparation of the panel, and thirty-five florins for his brush."

The payment record above for *Virgin and Child Enthroned* or simply the *Bardi Altarpiece* (figure 4) created by Sandro Botticelli around 1484 demonstrates how the artist's "brush" was worth nearly as much as the materials (panel, frame, and pigments).

We leave this section of the paper with a better understanding of why families spent to obtain their family chapels in prominent locations and with the highest quality adornments. The altarpiece was the showpiece of the chapel and patrons would commission the best artists available to paint these panels. Chapel altarpieces are easily compared side-by-side to those of other artists—a motivation for any artist to take their work to a new level. Botticelli's *Bardi Altarpiece* is impressive in its details and the artist seemed to take a special interest in creating his best work. As we will see when we examine the *Bardi Altarpiece* the Augustinians' at Santo Spirito would inspire a work by Botticelli that weaves beauty with wisdom, theology, painterly skill, and Augustinian logic.

VII. THE INTELLECTUAL NOURISHMENT OF THE BARDI ALTARPIECE

It is not surprising that the record for payment to Botticelli from the patron Giovanni de' Bardi still exists, Bardi was a banker after all. Bardi had just returned from England where he tended to the banking affairs of the Medici and was now looking to re-establish himself, and

[37] iBid 16

family name, in his home town of Florence. It was Giovanni de' Bardi who acquired his chapel at Santo Spirito after the previous donors defaulted on their payments. Likely through word-of-mouth, or perhaps his Medici connections, Bardi selected Sandro Botticelli for the centerpiece of his family chapel.

The *Bardi Altarpiece,* now located in Berlin, features the Virgin enthroned, attempting to nurse the Christ Child who is seated on her lap. They are positioned between St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, the patron Saints of Giovanni de' Bardi. St. John the Baptist interacts with the viewer directing their eye to the Virgin and Child, his baptismal bowl at his feet. A scroll on his crucifix reads "behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." St. John the Evangelist is recording the moment pen pressed between his fingers, book of scripture in hand. Behind the evangelist is his symbol, an eagle. The artist placed the figures in a grove with foliage that divides the background into three sections. There are an abundance of Fruit and blossoms from every season in this grove. In the foreground there is an urn and small framed image of the crucifixion. Viewers may compare the bodies of two images of Christ, the healthy, happy, and robust child versus the emaciated, tortured, and crucified adult.

The Blessed Mother nursing, or Madonna lactans, was not an uncommon subject for depictions of the Virgin and Child. "If the bodies of Mary and of Christ are made of the same substance, and if breast milk and blood are identical in nature, then the Virgin's milk and Christ's blood must be one and the same. Mary's milk may thus stand for her son's blood and her nursing may symbolize Christ's gift of that blood for the salvation of humanity."[38] However in this scene, the child is not actually interested in nursing; he is distracted, focusing on the person viewing the painting. In plain interpretation the nursing could

[38] Fondaras, A.. "Decorating the House of Wisdom: Four Altarpieces from the Church of Santo Spirito in Florence" (1485-1500)." (2011). 120.

be an association of the Virgin as intercessor. Still, inscriptions within the image potentially point to a more profound meaning, they recall the *Book of Ecclesiasticus* and a song by Wisdom, "Come to me you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits ... Those of you who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more ... and those who work with me will not sin. Botticelli has actually depicted many of the plants specifically mentioned in the passage and has lavished much attention on the botanical description of this lush garden."[39] Botticelli did not select the passages for these inscriptions; they were more than likely the formal choices of the Augustinian clergy. There are multiple levels of meaning in the connection of Wisdom, nourishment, and Madonna lactans in this work as Wisdom is intrinsically connected to St. Augustine. In the painting the Madonna holds her nipple between her fingers as she attempts to nourishes the Christ child, likewise St. John the Evangelist grips his pen in much the same manner, preparing our nourishment of wisdom through scripture. A straightforward interpretation would be, the painting is inviting the viewer into a garden of spiritual and intellectual nourishment.

Botticelli does not use masonry architecture in the garden as is common in other scenes of this type where artists would reflect the architectural setting of the altarpiece. Instead for the *Bardi Altarpiece* Botticelli has depicted three niches of arched foliage. Although untraditional the three niches do visually form a triptych which adhere to its purpose as an altarpiece. The arches upon first observation, may seem to echo the repetitive Renaissance architecture of Brunelleschi, however "the effect of the vegetative niches is to close off any suggestions of a perspectival view."[40] Is Botticelli critiquing, or at least questioning the uniformity of

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[39] Blume, Andrew C. "Giovanni De' Bardi and Sandro Botticelli in Santo Spirito." *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 37 (1995): 178. https://doi.org/10.2307/4125946.

[40] Burroughs, Charles. "Greening Brunelleschi: Botticelli at Santo Spirito." *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics* 45 (2004): 250 https://doi.org/10.1086/resv45n1ms20167630.

Renaissance architecture used in sacred spaces and the appropriateness of this type of architecture in religious worship? This painting was created after Botticelli's return from Rome and his Sistine Chapel commission and his renewed interest in classical themes. Botticelli was creating, *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* around this same time. It was suggested by Charles Burroughs that the Romans used greenery to embellish their architecture for religious festivals and ancient Greeks used greenery at religious sites. Botticelli's arches are also slightly pointed, connecting them to the Gothic. "Botticelli confronts Brunelleschi's rigorous and reductive organization of uniform elements with a resonant green and subtly gothic abundance."[41] It is also interesting that Botticelli removes any indication of perspectival painting, by covering the background with foliage he is covering up a horizon line or vanishing point. It seems for Botticelli "a more profound concern was the issue of the appropriate vehicle for the representation of sacred narrative. Rejecting the pictorial sign that through illusionism dissembles its own status as sign, Botticelli developed a mode of painting that closes off the effect of distance, i.e., of spatial illusion, but heightens the drama of the narrative by projecting it forward as if into the beholder."[42] Botticelli made the same decision in *Primavera*, these choices must have been intentional and perhaps related to the world before the perspectival Renaissance art and architecture. "The rejection of Albertian perspective in Botticelli's religious paintings of the early 1490s was surely not, or at least not only, a matter of aesthetic preference. On one level, the contrast between Botticelli's variant modes of painting in this period may have involved a distinction of genre, separating images for public consumption from those intended for initiates only, a distinction that would soon be dissolved in the Florence of Savonarola."[43] While we can

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[41] Burroughs, Charles. "Greening Brunelleschi: Botticelli at Santo Spirito." 239

[42] Burroughs, Charles. "The Altar and the City: Botticelli's "Mannerism" and the Reform of Sacred Art." *Artibus Et Historiae* 18, no. 36 (1997): 9-40. doi:10.2307/1483596.

[43] Burroughs, Charles. "The Altar and the City: Botticelli's "Mannerism" p.14-15

only speculate as to Botticelli's choice to cover up the perspectival aspects of his painting, the growing religious fervor surrounding Savonarola at the time could have factored into the choices made when depicting the divine at Santo Spirito. It was Botticelli who was reported to have burned some of his own paintings in Savonarola's Bonfires of the Vanity. "According to some critics, the pala Bardi marks a watershed in Botticelli's oeuvre, adumbrating the shift to the conspicuously pietistic archaism evident in his later religious paintings." A more crucial aspect of Botticelli's "archaism," if it is indeed that, involves the absence, perhaps abandonment, of Brunelleschian/Albertian perspective in his great religious paintings of the following decade."[44]

VIII. THE RENEWED DIGNITY OF THE BRANCACCI CHAPEL

As we continue evaluating the importance of the Oltrarno on the Renaissance, it is imperative to its case to consider the artwork at Santa Maria del Carmine, the famous Brancacci Chapel frescos (figure 5). Details concerning patronage of the chapel are murky due to the many years, and multiple artists needed to complete the cycle. Still, it was more than likely a Florentine named Felice Brancacci who originally commissioned the paintings for the chapel purchased by his ancestor Piero Brancacci. The fresco series was started by Tommaso di Cristoforo Fini (Masolino) and Tommaso di Giovanni di Simone (Masaccio) left unfinished and completed in 1483–84 by Filippino Lippi. The paintings recall various stories from the life of Saint Peter in two horizontal registers with additional images on architectural elements within the space. Masolino painted *The Temptation of Adam and Eve*, *Peter's Calling*, and *St. Peter Preaching*. Masaccio's hand is credited for *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, *The Tribute Money*, *Baptism of the Neophytes*, *St. Peter Healing the Sick with His Shadow*, *The Distribution*

[44] Burroughs, Charles. "Greening Brunelleschi: Botticelli at Santo Spirito." *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics* 45 (2004): 250 https://doi.org/10.1086/resv45n1ms20167630.

of Alms and Death of Ananias. Masaccio and Masolino are thought by some art historians to have collaborated on *Healing of the Cripple and Raising of Tabitha,* Masaccio possibly adding to background details. *Raising of the Son of Theophilus and St. Peter Enthroned* was started by Masaccio and finished by Filippino Lippi. Lippi also painted *St. Paul Visiting St. Peter in Prison, St. Peter Freed from Prison, Disputation with Simon Magus and Crucifixion of Peter*.

These frescos are important as they represent an essential transition into Renaissance painting. Sculpture as an artform had begun its renaissance through the works of Donatello. The Renaissance in architecture was also well underway in the capable hands of Brunelleschi. Painting would be the last art form to make its transition. Before the re-discovery of Pompeii, Late-Medieval painters did not have ancient examples to look to for inspiration, this lack of classical models required artists to figure things out on their own. It is imperative to note how these three influential masters—Donatello, Brunelleschi, and Masaccio—who pushed humanity forward were familiar faces within the Oltrarno. Filippino Lippi, also had close ties to the Drago, his artist father, the monk Fra. Filippo Lippi (who also trained Botticelli) was raised by the friars in Santa Maria del Carmine.

Let's recall our three influential friends who we left standing outside of Santa Maria del Carmine in our introduction. "On April 19, 1422, the old church of the Carmelites, having been radically repaired and reconstructed, was solemnly rededicated with a processional service. This procession young Masaccio was to paint in the cloister in monochrome fresco."[45] The fresco, now lost, called the *Sagra* (figure 6) commemorated the day by recording a large group image and contained the portraits of the clergy, dignitaries, and the most important families of the

[45] Jr., Frank Jewett. "The Problem of the Brancacci Chapel Historically Considered." *The Art Bulletin* 26, no. 3 (1944): 174. https://doi.org/10.2307/3046951.

Oltrarno. The three figures alluded to in this paper's introduction were Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Masaccio who were all present (with Masolino) for the event. Masaccio included their portraits in the painting of the festivities as well. Masaccio, Donatello, and Brunelleschi were close friends, the two older artists took Masaccio under their wing and their work likely inspired one another. Masaccio created the first paintings using linear perspective, a technique probably developed with the help of Brunelleschi. The *Sagra* was considered an exceptional painting for its detailed portraiture and use of perspective. What we know of the painting has survived through studies by later artists, including Michelangelo Buonarroti. Masaccio's friends Donatello and Brunelleschi would also show their faces in the Brancacci chapel series as well (Masaccio added them as characters).

In the Brancacci Chapel, we can see the transition to Renaissance painting before our very eyes. The elder Masolino's work is painted in the International Gothic style using less-natural figures who seem to float in their space and have an artificial quality to their appearance. Unnatural and over-dramatization in figural poses and expressions mark Masolino's frescoes. The work of the younger Masaccio demonstrates attention to naturalism, his paintings focus on reality. Masaccio's subjects are grounded with realistic cast shadows that interact with the natural light sources in the chapel. He has carefully studied human anatomy and how light and shadow fall upon a figure. His characters are individuals with realistic expressions that relate to their feelings. Masaccio's paintings also include fantastic, mountainous landscapes and impressive background structures that recede to the horizon line via linear perspective.

Masaccio's painting of the *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (figure 7) perfectly illustrates his understanding of naturalism; the figures are rendered in such fantastic detail. Light and shadow defining each muscle of the body with accurate anatomical correctness. Their

expressions of shame, remorse, and despair are recognizable human reactions to tragedy. To better understand the leap forward Masaccio has taken, we do not even need to leave the chapel but simply turn our head to Masolino's depiction of the *Temptation of Adam and Eve* (figure 7). In this painting Adam and Eve almost float in their space with a plastic-like quality to their features, with little attempt at accurate anatomical details. Masolino seems to avoid accurately rendering their nudity.

We can also compare two disabled individuals in this chapel to grasp how groundbreakingly different Masaccio's art has become. Observing the disabled figure in Masaccio's *St. Peter Healing with His Shadow* (figure 8), his legs withered from his infliction; he supports his body by resting his arms on a stand. This person is based on someone Masaccio encountered and represents the harshest aspects of life, perhaps he encountered him right outside of Santa Maria del Carmine in the Drago. When we look to Masolino's disabled figure in the *Healing of the Cripple and Raising Tabitha* (figure 8), the stark reality is just not found. Masolino's figure seems to be a sanitized, cleaned-up version of reality.

In Masaccio's artwork naturalism is woven into nearly every scene he paints (see figure 9), in the unpolished wrinkles found on the faces of his characters, to minute details such as the bare-bottomed child in *The Distribution of Alms and Death of Ananias.* The soaking wet and freezing figures with dripping hair in the *Baptism of the Neophytes* are particularly astounding, Masaccio capturing the subtle details of the human form, their emotion, and their shivering physiology. Even details such as representing the apostles walking in bare feet added to the psychological implications of the subject matter and likely related to poverty and penance, "the clearest way to

portray Christ like rejection of this world, evangelical exaltation of poverty, and humiliation of the flesh was to represent an individual bare foot."[46]

Masaccio elevated naturalism in painting his figures but as detailed and accurate as they are, they would be less convincing if they did not exist within a dimensional space. Masaccio's use of a system of linear perspective, likely developed from Brunelleschi's work in architectural renderings, creates the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. Anyone who has studied basic drawing understands the importance of linear perspective in maintaining this dimensional space. If objects in the scene break from the system, the entire illusion breaks down. Masaccio also used this system to dissolve walls in his *Holy Trinity* located in Santa Maria Novella. In the Brancacci Chapel, Masaccio masterfully creates the illusion of depth while also directing the vanishing point to lead the viewer's eye within the composition. In *The Tribute Money*, (figure 10) if we follow the lines of perspective from the buildings on the composition's right, the lines lead our eyes directly to Christ within the group of figures in the central scene. Gone are the doll house looking structures of the past, we now have a tangible space for the figures to reside. It is a masterful use of a developing technology in art, and the artist makes the most of it; even the halos conform to perspective in Masaccio's illusionistic world.

The Tribute Money gets emphasis within the chapel by way of its location and scale and there is much to understand as to why the artist and patron singled out this particular scene and why it was composed in such a way. The story of *The Tribute Money* is based on the *Book of Matthew* 17:24. In the text, Jesus and his disciples face a confrontation with a tax collector at Capernaum. Jesus commands Peter to catch a fish, and inside of its mouth are two coins, the correct amount to pay the tax. Traditionally the emphasis of this scene was always on the miracle of the coins

[46] Pestilli, Livio. "Apostolic Bare Feet In Masaccio's 'Tribute Money': Early Christian and Medieval Sources." *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 26, no. 1 (2006): 10. https://doi.org/10.1086/sou.26.1.23207957.

inside of the mouth of a fish; not so with Masaccio's *The Tribute Money*. Here we find three scenes within one panel; the central scene features Christ and his disciples—Christ commanding Peter to catch a fish. To the left of the central scene, we find Peter gathering the fish, and to the right Peter is paying the tax.

Peter being present three times within one scene is unusual for Masaccio. It was an antiquated technique to represent a person multiple times within a single composition, Masaccio was interested in realism, he pushed art forward; why would he step backward and use a dated approach to tell this story? The progression in time is likewise incorrect. We should expect a left-to-right narrative, but we move through time in an unorthodox way, Peter is catching the fish before being commanded to catch it. Likely there is a deeper meaning to the choices made in Masaccio's painting. Once again, it will be the Augustinians where we will need to look to for a possible interpretation.

Anthony Mahlo also explored a theory for the choices made in *The Tribute Money*. Mahlo points out that a chapel dedicated to the life of Peter omits the *Giving of the Keys* and *Feed My Sheep* stories. "Their absence is striking and requires an explanation. Clearly, by the early Quattrocento the depiction of St. Peter's life on such a grandiose and splendid scale could not have separated from the history of the Papacy itself."[47] *The Tribute Money* was composed during the time of the antipopes and when the papacy was returning to Rome. Corruption and excess were common in the clergy's higher levels; perhaps the fresco cycles' focus on preaching, healing, and Christ's authority was a reaction to a papacy that had lost its way. In *The Tribute Money*, Peter obediently follows the command of Christ and follows the laws of man by paying the taxes due.

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[47] Molho, Anthony. "The Brancacci Chapel: Studies in Its Iconography and History." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977): 53. https://doi.org/10.2307/750991.

Taxes are another interesting part of this story, in the mid-1420's Florence imposed taxes on churches to support their multiple war efforts. Taxing the church forced clergy into excessive debt and sometimes bankruptcy. The moral implications of such taxes were a debated topic. It seems if we look at the scene though this lens, Christ is commanding Peter to pay the state what is due. It is Peter, who represents all of the disciples (the church), who pays the tax for all of the members. *The Tribute Money* could be a commentary about the church's role in supporting the aims of the republic through taxation.

Returning to the issue of the left-to-right sequencing of *The Tribute Money*, one possible interpretation for this was suggested by Charles Carmen and it concerns the Augustinian Humanist concept of a man's ability to acquire the dignity of God's likeness. Carmen points to the entire sequence of frescos as telling the story of Peter's redemption through his willingness to follow Christ's way. "Masaccio's arrangement highlights both Christ's authority and Peter's will, an emphasis that may reflect Augustinianism."[48] In St. Augustine's *Confessions* he writes:

> "there are three times, past, present, and future. Perhaps it might be said rightly that there are three times: a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future. For these three do *coexist* somehow in the soul, for otherwise I could not see them. The time *present of things past* is memory; the time *present of things present* is direct experience; the time *present of things future* is expectation."[49]

So potentially the central Peter is experiencing the "*present of present things*," meaning his immediate need to obey Christ. The left image of Peter gathering the fish requires him to forget his past, his logical memories, those that create doubt in the impossible task he is asked to perform or his "*present of past things*." The image to the right fulfills Peter's transformation. He

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[48] Carman, Charles. "Masaccio's 'Tribute Money': An Early Reflection of the Dignity of Man." *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 8, no. 1 (1988): 8. https://doi.org/10.1086/sou.8.1.23202518.

[49] Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. The Confessions of Saint Augustine. Book XI

has been obedient to Christ, met his expectations, and is now upright and transformed, Peter's "*present of future things.*" Peter is a man who remains obedient to the commands of Jesus, ignores his past doubts, and is now renewed and closer to God's dignity. Later frescos by Masaccio in the chapel corroborate this transformative dignity. Observing Peter in the scene where he heals with his shadow (figure 11), Peter walks with a renewed dignity, he almost appears modeled from a Renaissance Merchant, walking with an entourage through the streets of Florence. We also find Peter enthroned (figure 12) after raising the son of Theophilus. Peter is respected and dignified because of his acts, his faith, and obedience to God, his healing of the sick and raising of the dead, not simply because Jesus handed him the keys to the kingdom of heaven. "Such is Augustine's image of dignity, and also that of the Renaissance. From Masaccio to Leonardo, Alberti to Pico, Kepler to Galileo, one can trace the development of the notion of man's dignity from the belief that the truth of man's God likeness resides in his ability to know God and His universe to the successive scientific discoveries confirming that ability."[50]

IX. CONCLUSION

The quote above from Charles Carmen's paper was intentionally selected to close this paper. The unique artistic and intellectual culture of this area and its isolation from the city proper seemed to have attracted, and accepted, the free exchange of ideas. With a leading religious order that was receptive to these ideas, they blossomed into a renewed godlike dignity of man. To use a modern term, the people of the Oltrarno were somewhat like "early adopters." We have come full-circle from our introduction, where it stated that it is easy to lose sight of the stories of real people when writing about the complexities of history. If we flashback one last time to that

[50] Carman, Charles. "Masaccio's 'Tribute Money': An Early Reflection of the Dignity of Man." *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 8, no. 1 (1988): 11. https://doi.org/10.1086/sou.8.1.23202518.

spring day standing in the piazza near the Carmine, we can now better understand what would draw those artists to this area . . . they belonged there. The Oltrarno was the location where, through Masaccio, Renaissance painting was born and where countless generations of Florentine artists would come to study his work. A place where patrons sought out the talents of the greatest artists and architects of their time. Finally, the Oltrarno was a place of interesting stories of interesting people, too many to record in one paper, but most were essential to the Renaissance in Florence.

Note: In the early stages of determining a topic for this paper, a Venn diagram (figure 13) was created. It intended to help maintain focus on the more significant concepts of the Oltrarno and its relationship to critical aspects of the Renaissance. This simple diagram visualizes how the Oltrarno was a hub of Renaissance art, architecture, and intellectual activity during the early Renaissance that directly or indirectly influenced some of the most important people in Florence. I thought it would be interesting to include.

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Writings of St. Augustine were referenced in many of the articles and books used throughout this paper. Considering the enormous influence that the Augustinians had on the Oltrarno area it was important to have access to the writings of their mentor saint. *Confessions* was especially important in the sections of this paper related to Humanism but also in relation to Masaccio's paintings at Santa Maria del Carmine.

Arbesmann, Rudolph. "A Pioneering Work in Augustinian Iconography."
Recherches Augustiniennes et Patristiques 4 (1966): 27–36 https://doi.org/10.1484/j.ra.5.102213
Article that provides a general history of the Augustinians as well as examines the iconography of artwork commissioned for their churches. Of particular importance to this paper, this article connected the Humanism of Petrarch to St. Augustine's through Augustinian Denis of Borgo.

Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. Oxford, UK:
Oxford University Press, 1988.
A precise but informative read on the history of Renaissance patronage as well as artistic styles and categories by one of the most important art historians of the 20th century. While the entire book was excellent, the opening sections related to the process of artistic patronage and contracts during the Renaissance were especially helpful to my research. *Painting and Experience* served as an extraordinary resource for establishing a general overview of the relationships between patron and artist with particular useful information related to artist contracts during the Renaissance.

Blume, Andrew C. "Giovanni De' Bardi and Sandro Botticelli in Santo Spirito."
Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen 37 (1995): 169. https://doi.org/10.2307/4125946.
Article by Harvard professor and Kress Fellow at *Villa I Tatti*, provides a general history of the creation of the *Virgin and Child Enthroned (The Bardi Alterpiece)* by artist Sandro Botticelli. Blume provides a history of the Bardi family including the patron Giovanni de' Bardi. The paper also establishes an understanding of the Madonna lactans, drawing connections between the nursing Madonna and Augustinian ideas of wisdom as nourishment. Suffice to say this article was valuable to the survey of Botticelli's *Bardi Altarpiece* and the accepted theories for the iconographies used in the painting.

Bourdua, Louise, and Anne Dunlop. *Art and the Augustinian Order in Early Renaissance Italy*.
Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2016.
History of the Mendicant Orders with special attention to the Augustinians by Ann Dunlop, Art Chair of Melbourne University and another Harvard *Villa I Tatti* Fellow. Dunlop's article was essential in building my understanding of the history and development of the Mendicants in Italy (and the rest of Europe). From the Great Union to Fra Filippo Lippi the book provided a detailed and accurate history of the Augustinians as well as the other Mendicant orders. This book was the first place my research started and led me to a better understanding of the importance of these orders in Italy. I referenced this book often throughout the first sections of this paper.

Burke, Jill. *Changing Patrons: Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence*.
University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.
University of Edinburgh's Jill Burke examines the histories of two important families who established their homes and patronage in the Oltrarno. A more detailed expansion of the history she provides in the article *Visualizing Neighborhood in Renaissance Florence.* The book concentrates on the Nasi and Del Pugliese families and their patronage in Florence. The book was useful as the Nasi and Del Pugliese families were patrons of Santo Spirito and Santa Maria del Carmine. The chapters related to this patronage were helpful in building an understanding of the motives for families to acquire chapels. Obviously, this book was very helpful in the entire first half of this paper, especially the chapter on chapel sales and the patrons who acquired chapels at both churches.

Burke, Jill. “Visualizing Neighborhood in Renaissance Florence.” *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. (2006): 693–710. https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144206287094.
Article by Jill Burke that summarizes the people, churches, and neighborhoods of the Oltrarno (Drago Verde, Ferza, Nicchio, and Scala). This article was important in establishing a general historical overview of the Oltrarno, it was a short history of the district of Santo Spirito and the gonfaloni. This article led me to the Nicholas Eckstein book *The District of the Green Dragon* which was so very critical to numerous aspects of this paper.

Burroughs, Charles. “The Altar and the City: Botticelli's “Mannerism” and the Reform of Sacred Art.” *Artibus Et Historiae* 18, no. 36 (1997): 9-40. doi:10.2307/1483596.
Charles Burroughs is the interim chair of Classics at Case Western University. While this Burroughs article was interesting to read and more of an overview of Mannerism as it related to Botticelli and other artists of his era. The section on the *Bardi Altarpiece* was intriguing and led be to the other Burroughs article (below) which was wider in its breadth and detail. Still, I did pull a quote from the concise overview concerning the rejection of perspective in Botticelli’s works.

Burroughs, Charles. “Greening Brunelleschi: Botticelli at Santo Spirito.” *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics* 45 (2004): 239–55. https://doi.org/10.1086/resv45n1ms20167630.
Article that establishes an alternative interpretation to the iconography in the *Bardi Altarpiece.* Burroughs argues for the importance of Botticelli’s use of “green architecture” in the painting. I also learned of Botticelli’s covering up of perspectival aspects in his paintings through this article. Burroughs presents support for this choice as commentary on Renaissance architecture in religious spaces. Needless to say, this article was helpful in writing the survey of the Botticelli’s altarpiece and also provided some excellent information concerning the Augustinians, Brunelleschi, and the architectural choices at Santo Spirito.

Carman, Charles. “Masaccio’s ‘Tribute Money’: An Early Reflection of the Dignity of Man.” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 8, no. 1 (1988): 7–12. https://doi.org/10.1086/sou.8.1.23202518.
Charles Carman Examines the Brancacci Chapel frescos with special attention to Masaccio’s Tribute Money. He searches the chapel frescos for connections to the Augustinian theological ideas about the dignity of man and Humanism. This paper was an excellent resource for exploring some of the choices made by Masaccio in The Tribute Money and played a large part in the last sections of the paper. I chose to finish with a quote from this article because I thought it summarized the importance of dignity in relation to Renaissance innovation. Charles Carman was a chair at University of Buffalo’s Art History Department.

Eckstein, Nicholas A. “The District of the Green Dragon: Neighbourhood Life and Social Change in Renaissance Florence.” Publisher: Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki (January 1, 1995)
Nicholas Eckstein’s detailed history of the Oltrarno and the Green Dragon (Drago Verde) district. This book is a source often cited in the works of Burke, Bourdua, and other scholarly articles related to the Oltrarno. This source was difficult to locate but so critically important throughout the writing of this paper. Nicholas Eckstein was also a fellow in the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies at *Villa I Tatti* and is a Senior Lecturer at The University of Sydney.

Eckstein, Nicholas A. “The Widows’ Might: Women’s Identity and Devotion in the Brancacci Chapel.” *Oxford Art Journal* 28, no. 1 (2005): 99–118. https://doi.org/10.1093/oaj/kci015.
At one period of time the Brancacci Chapel was used as a chapel for a women’s confraternity. This article discusses the role that women may have played in the paintings at the Brancacci Chapel.

Fondaras, Antonia [VNV]. *Augustinian Art and Meditation in Renaissance Florence: the Choir Altarpieces of Santo Spirito 1480-1510*. Leiden: Brill, 2020.
It seems it is typical for art historians to expand their thesis work into a book, and University of Maryland’s Antonia Fondaras is no exception. The text expands on *Decorating the House of Wisdom* referenced below taking on in more detail the topics covered in the thesis. The most important aspect of this text for my paper was a chapter on Saint Augustine, the Augustinian Hermits, and the Convent of Santo Spirito. This chapter provided a highly informative history of the Augustinians, the church of Santo Spirito, Studium, and the life of Saint Augustine. Of vital importance to my research was the chapter’s information related to St. Augustine and the human potential to be

godlike. This theme was important as it becomes the bridge that connects many elements throughout this paper. From St. Augustine to Petrarch to Masaccio this paper stresses the importance of a change in the dignity of man that was occurring in the Early Renaissance and especially in the Oltrarno.

Fondaras, A.. "Decorating the House of Wisdom: Four Altarpieces from the Church of Santo Spirito in Florence" (1485-1500)." (2011).
Thesis provides a history of the Augustinian Order with specific information related to the history of Santo Spirito in the Oltrarno. This document also provides a detailed and through examination of the numerous potential interpretations of the iconography within Sandro Botticelli's *Bardi Altarpiece*.

Goldthwaite, Richard A. *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.
Richard Goldthwaite is an almost legendary historical expert regarding Florentine economic issues during the Renaissance. This book while a bit heavy for this paper was still an essential reference. Along with *Wealth and Demand for Art in Italy* provided excellent references throughout this project.

Goldthwaite, Richard A. *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
A less formal but still highly detailed examination of the Florentine economy especially as related to artistic patronage. This book along with *The Building of Renaissance Florence* provided excellent references throughout this project from Mendicants to chapel sales and beyond, Goldthwaite's books were an asset in clarifying and verifying details in this paper.

Jr., Frank Jewett. "The Problem of the Brancacci Chapel Historically Considered." *The Art Bulletin* 26, no. 3 (1944): 175. https://doi.org/10.2307/3046951.
American art critic and professor Frank Jewett provides a detailed historical timeline of the paintings of the Brancacci Chapel as they relate to Masolino and Masaccio. This article confronts some accepted theories, mostly Vasari's, concerning the attributions and timing of the paintings at the chapel. It was an interesting read and very detailed history which was valuable when researching for the last chapter of this paper.

Kempers, Bram. *Painting, Power and Patronage*. London: Penguin Books, 1994.
The distinguished University of Amsterdam Professor Bram Kempers' book that is referenced by numerous art historians in their work. This book was another valuable resource, like Goldthwaite's, that I referenced on just about every aspect of this paper but especially for the opening sections related to the Mendicants and those related to patronage.

Maxson, Brian. *The Humanist World of Renaissance Florence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
Book concerning the development of Petrarchan Humanism and its influence on Humanists scholars, this text gives special emphasis to the development of the amateur or Social Humanist movement in Renaissance Italy. This text was useful to my research in connecting Petrarch to Santo Spirito and the ideas in the art of the district. I also needed to gain a basic understanding of Humanism which this text help to provide.

Molho, Anthony. "The Brancacci Chapel: Studies in Its Iconography and History." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977): 50. https://doi.org/10.2307/750991.
Article presents a history of the Brancacci Chapel, Felice Brancacci, and a chronology of the creation of the frescoes. Presents a theory related to the iconography of the chapel artwork and its relation to the Papacy and taxation that I presented in the last chapter of this paper.

Nelson, Jonathan Katz, and Richard Zeckhauser. "A Renaissance Instrument to Support Nonprofits: The Jonathan Katz and Sale of Private Chapels in Florentine Churches," 2002. https://doi.org/10.3386/w9173.
Jonathan Katz Nelson, Syracuse Univeristy and Richard Zeckhauser, Harvard university authored this paper on

Chapels as non-profits. The paper explores the business of Mendicant churches during the Renaissance and relates this system to modern day non-profits. Paper covers some of the same material as Goldthwaite, Kempers, and Baxandall concerning chapel sales, patronage, and commerce but provides interesting sociological information as well.

Pestilli, Livio. "Apostolic Bare Feet In Masaccio's 'Tribute Money': Early Christian and Medieval Sources." *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 26, no. 1 (2006): 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1086/sou.26.1.23207957.
Article discusses the importance of the use of bare feet in Masaccio's Tribute Money and its importance as a symbol of poverty, divinity, penitence, and protest. Article provided some additional important ideas for interpreting the Tribute Money.

Ruggiero, Rocky. *Brunelleschi's Basilica: the Building of Santo Spirito in Florence*. Roma: Viella, 2020.
Rocky Ruggiero's detailed analysis of Santo Spirito provided so much information for this paper. This book discusses every detail of the building of Santo Spirito from the formation of the Opera to the dates of construction (which Ruggiero pushed back from the historically accepted date). I found this book interesting to read and useful when researching chapel sales and the Opera of Santo Spirito, but it also proved useful when researching the neighborhoods. This book expands upon his dissertation (below) providing a more reader-friendly version of the events that led to the construction of this amazing church.

Ruggiero, Rocky, and Fabrizio Nevola. "Santo Spirito in Florence: Brunelleschi, the Opera, the Quartiere, and the Cantiere"
During the research for his master's from Syracuse University, Ruggiero became the first to translate Opera notes from Santo Spirito that proved to be a new and valuable resource. Using his master's work as a foundation he expanded it into this doctoral dissertation. The paper chronicles the entire process of building a Renaissance church. This paper also directed me to the book listed in the previous citation.

Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. London: G. Bell & Sons, 1914.
Original source material and essential to review for any Renaissance related paper. I have owned this book for years and while some art historians seem to look at Vasari's stories with a skeptical eye, he is constantly quoted in their work. It is hard to write about any important artist from the Renaissance without reviewing or making reference to the *Lives* by Vasari. I just found that it is a good idea to check what is accepted by art historians to separate the truth from the tall tales.

Zak, Gur. "Humanism as a Way of Life: Leon Battista Alberti and the Legacy of Petrarch." *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 17, no. 2 (2014): 217–40. https://doi.org/10.1086/678250.
Professor of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University Gur Zak's article that examines the history of Humanism with a focus on self-care and human dignity. The article follows Humanist thought from Petrarch to Alberti. Demonstrates how Augustinian ideas of self-improvement and daily reflection motivated actions of early Humanist writers. This article was important to my research as it connected the dots between Petrarch and Alberti and established that Alberti's version of humanism reflected the larger social Humanist movement of the Renaissance.

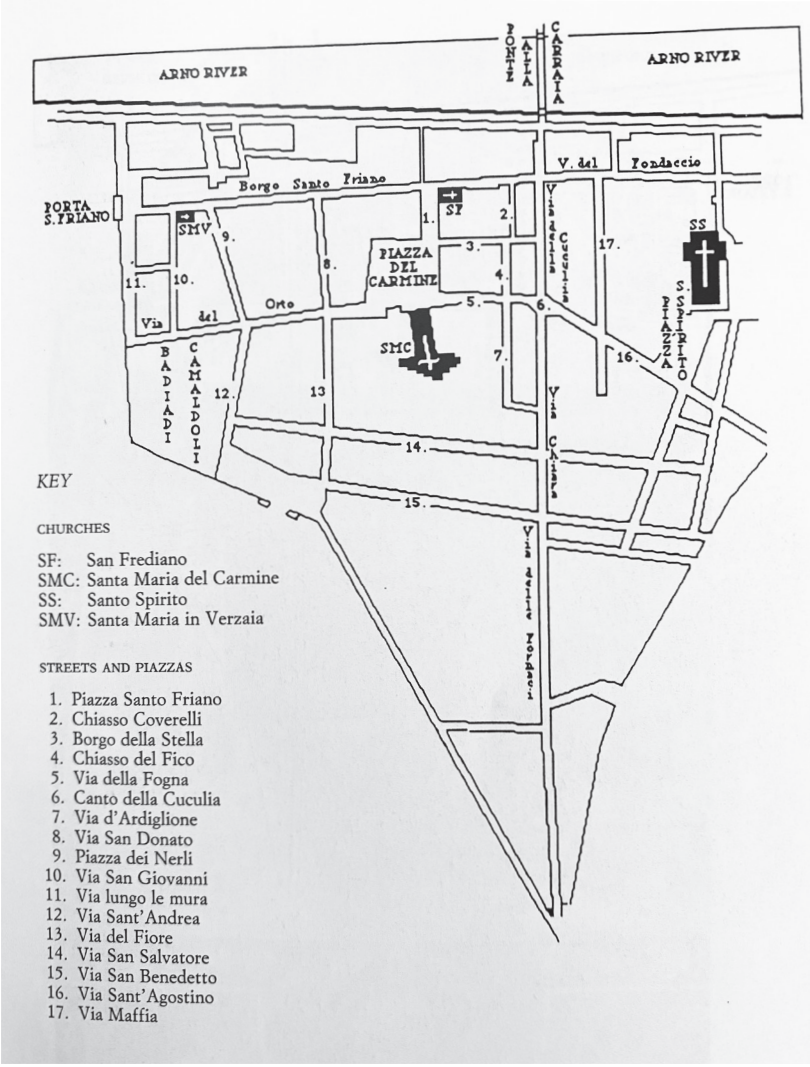


Figure 1 - Oltrarno Map

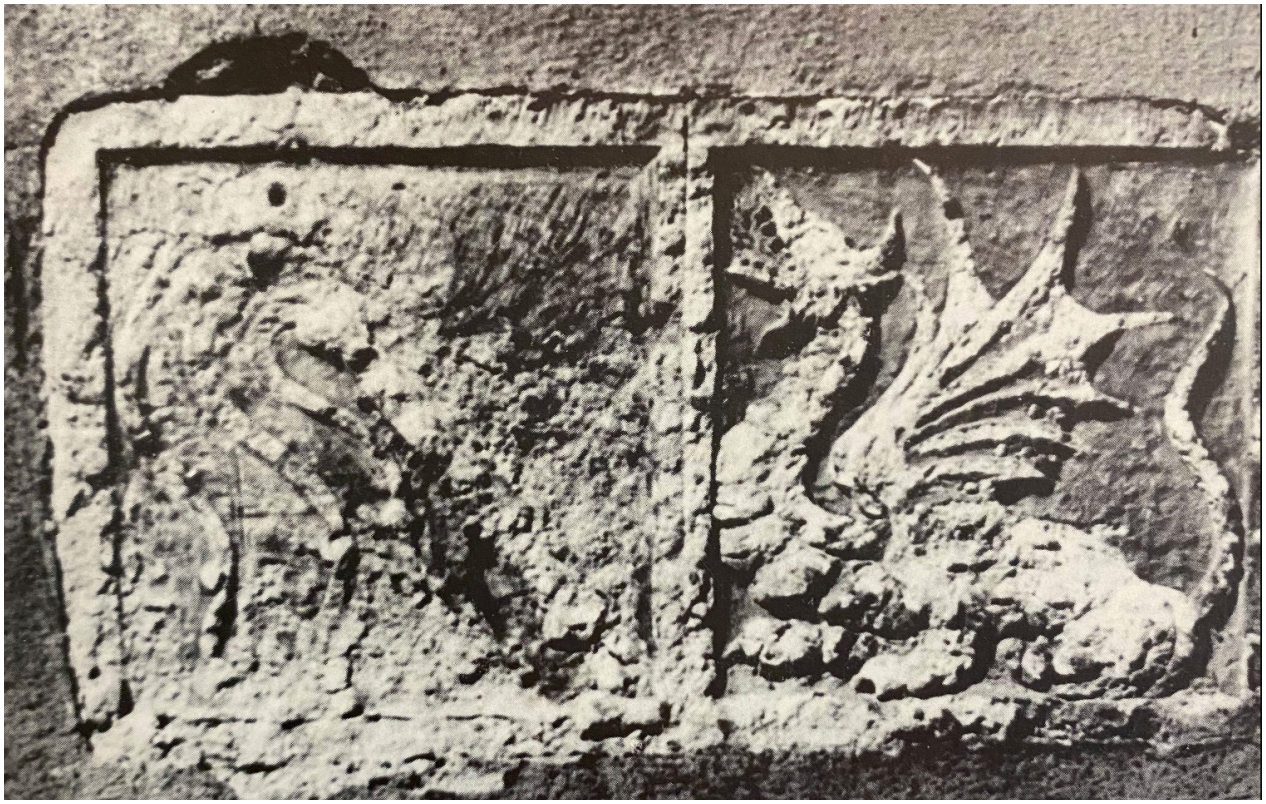
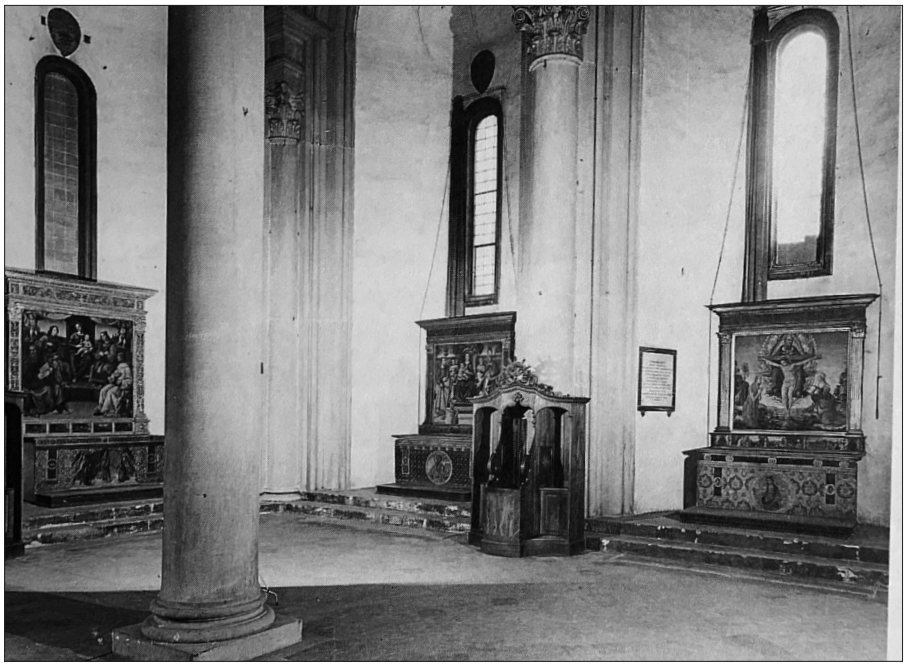


Figure 2 - Boundary Marker





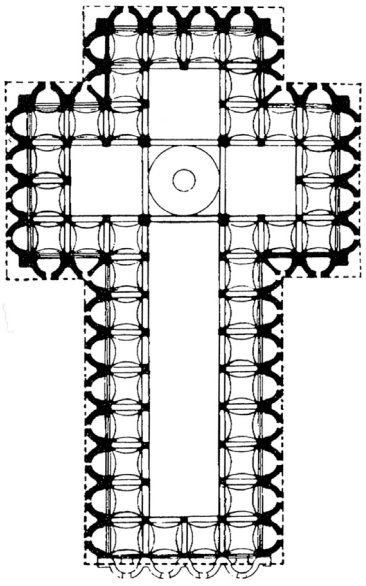
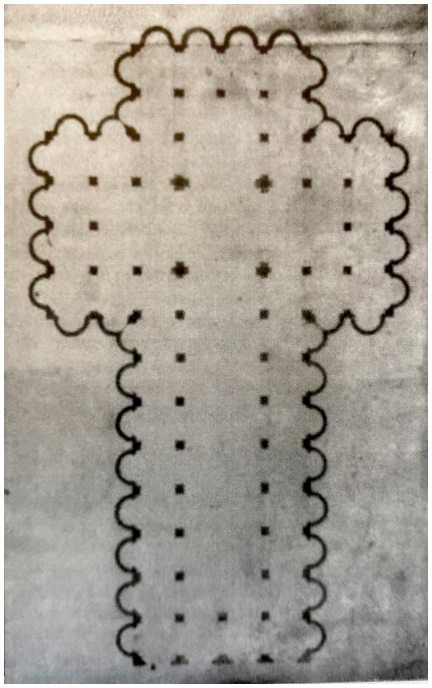
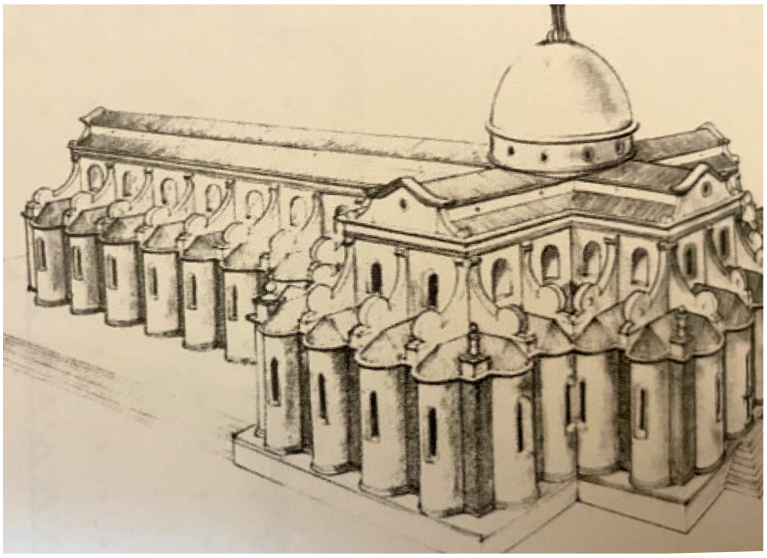




Figure 3 - (from top) Sketch of Santo Spirito, Photo of Santo Spirito's Interior, Chapels configuaration of the interior, Chapels Exterior with Coat of Arms, Revised Ground Plan vs Original Plan, Illustration of how Brunelleschi's Santo Spirito Could Have Looked.

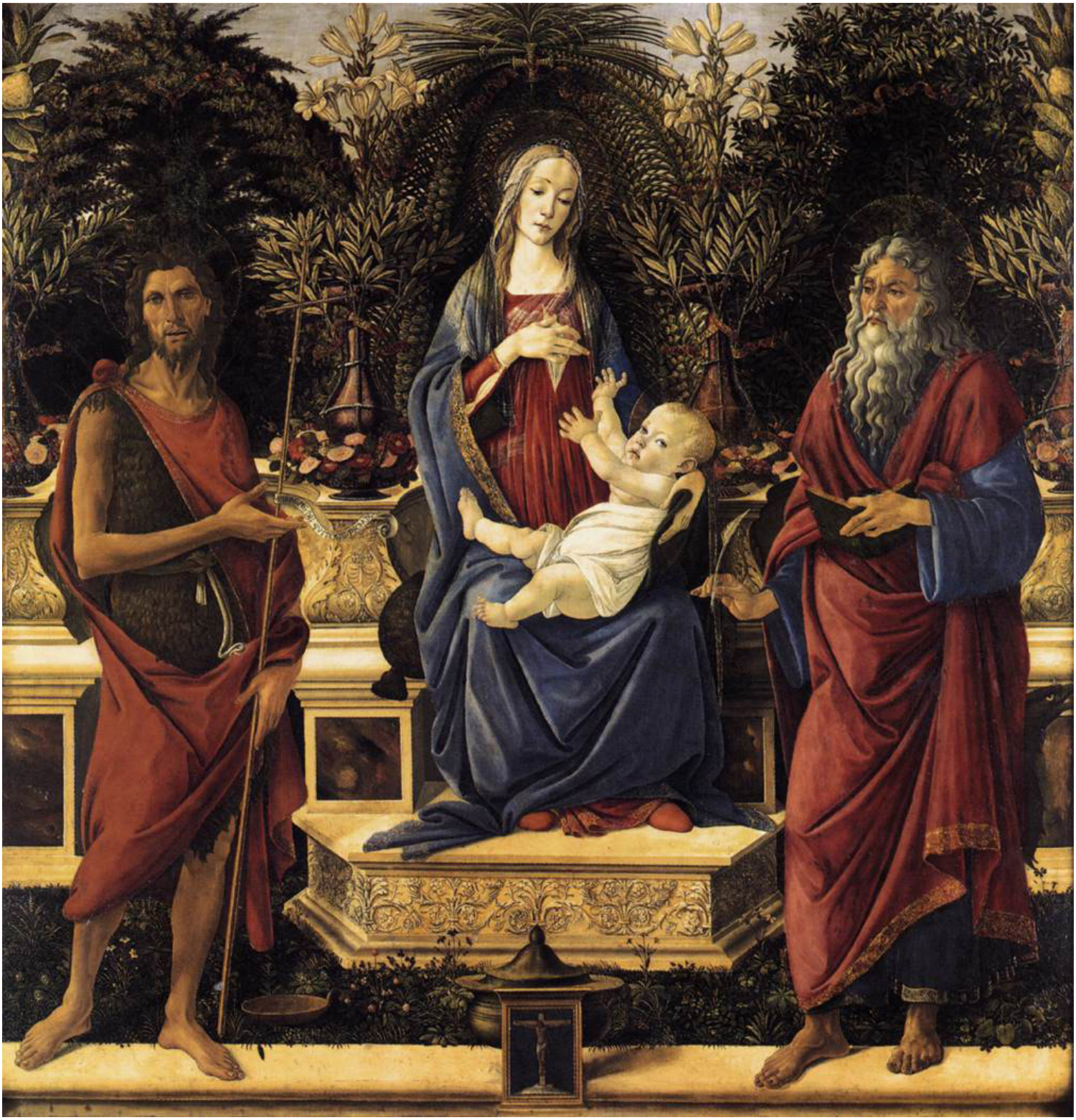


Figure 4 - *Bardi Altarpiece*, Sandro Botticelli

2 Masaccio,
The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden
(lefthand pilaster)

1 Masolino,
The Temptation of Adam and Eve
(righthand pilaster)

3 Masaccio,
The Tribute Money

4 Masolino,
St. Peter Preaching

5 Masaccio,
Baptism of the Neophytes

6 Masolino,
The Healing of the Cripple and the Raising of Tabitha

7 Masaccio,
The Distribution of Alms and the Death of Ananias

8 Masaccio,
St. Peter Healing the Sick with his Shadow

9 Filippino Lippi,
St. Paul Visiting St. Peter in Prison

10 Masaccio e Filippino Lippi,
The Raising of the Son of Theophilus and St. Peter Enthroned

11 Filippino Lippi,
St. Peter Being Freed from Prison

12 Filippino Lippi,
The Disputation of St. Peter and St. Paul with Simon Magus and the Crucifixion of St. Peter

Figure 5 - Paintings in the Brancacci Chapel

Figure 6 - *The Sagra* by Masaccio and a study by Michelangelo

Figure 7 - Adam & Eve by Masaccio (left) vs. Masolino (right)

Figure 8 - Masaccio (left) vs. Masolino (right)

Figure 9 - Masaccio Naturalism in Brancacci Chapel

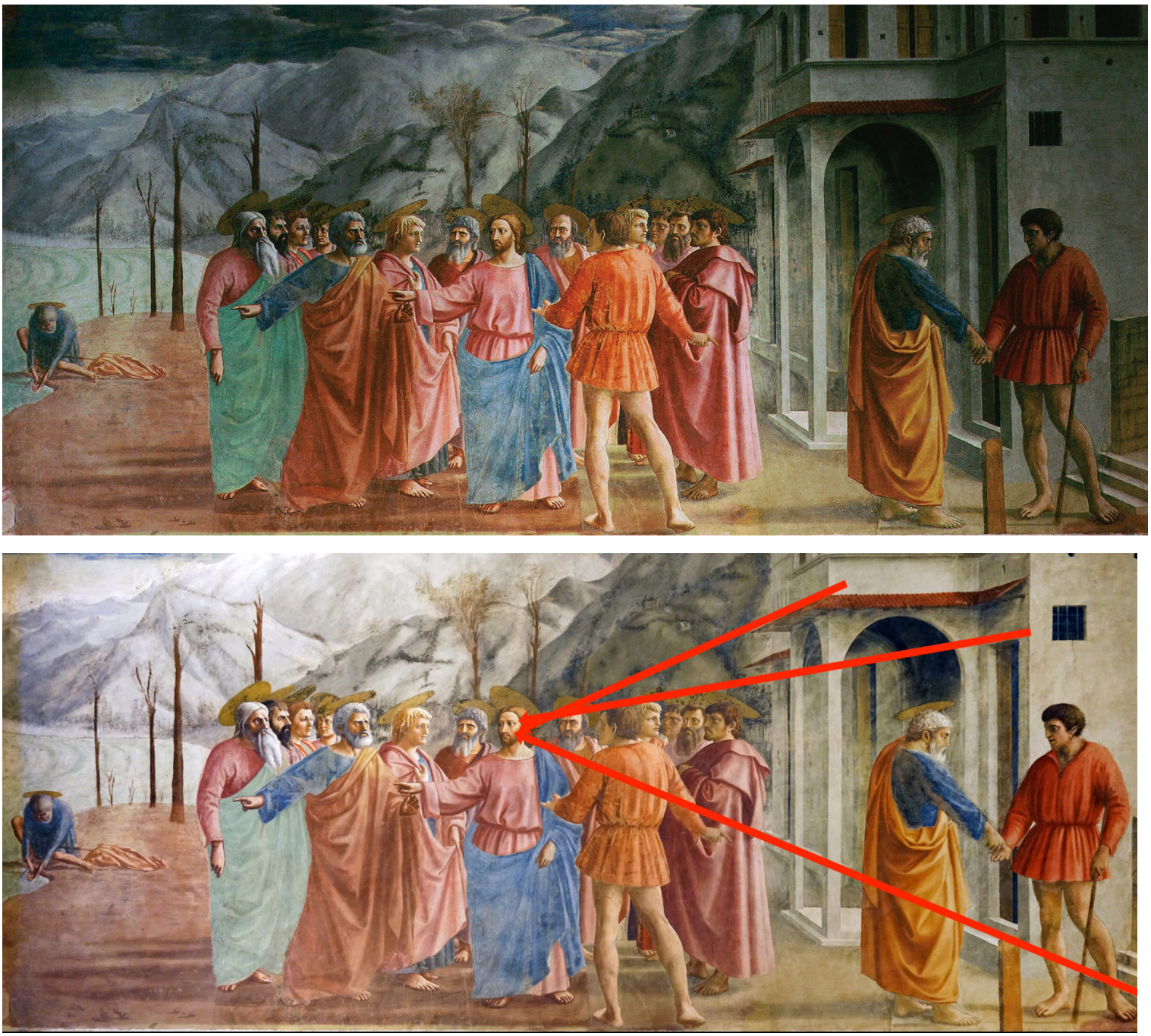
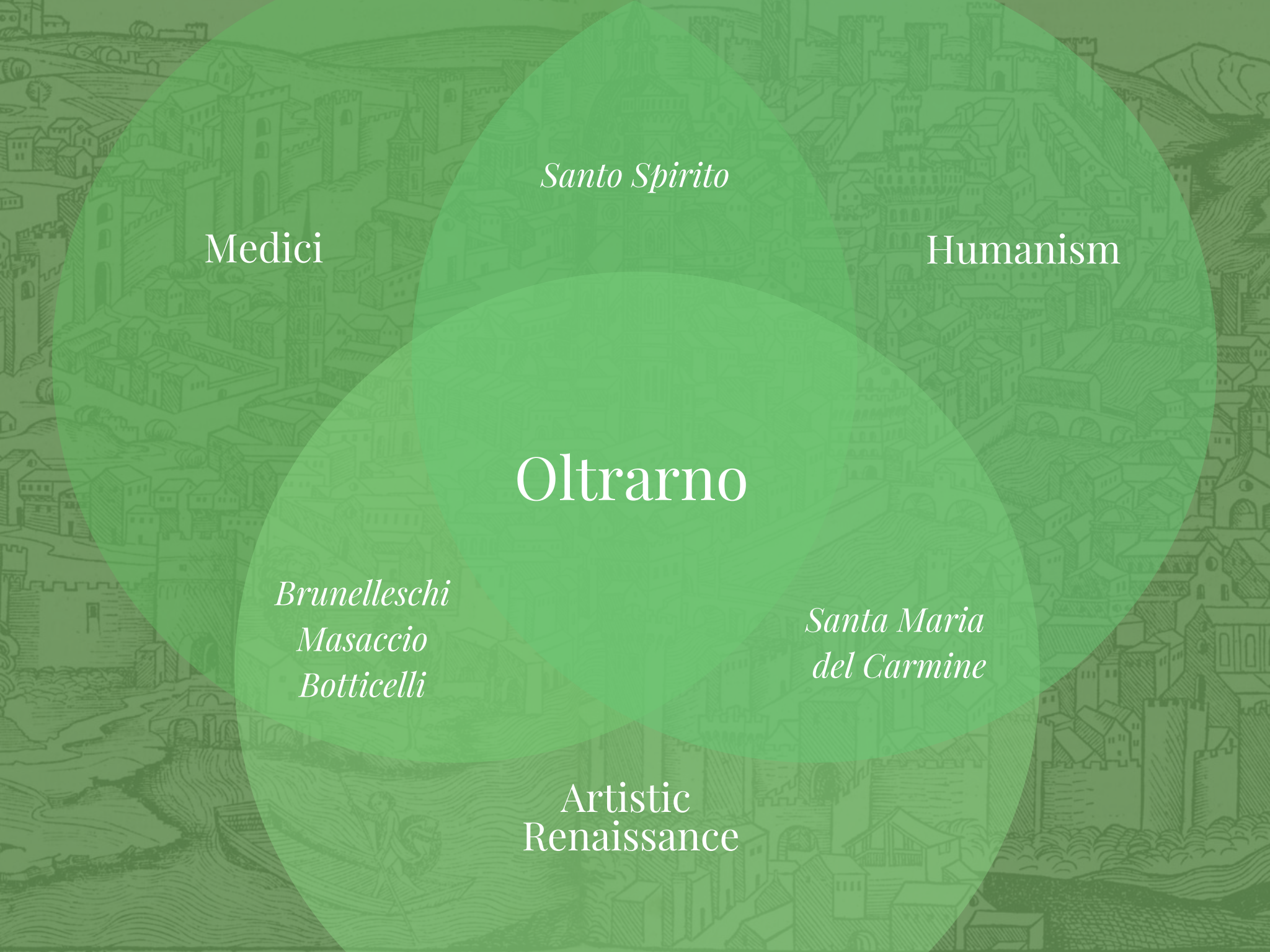


Figure 10 - *The Tribute Money* by Masaccio and perspective lines.

Figure 11 - *Peter Heals with His Shadow* by Masaccio

Figure 12 - *Peter Enthroned* by Masaccio


Santo Spirito
Medici
Humanism
Oltrarno
Brunelleschi
Masaccio
Botticelli
Santa Maria
del Carmine
Artistic
Renaissance