

IN SEARCH OF GIOTTO

Background Notes

Dr Antonia Whitley - 10 January 2018



Self-Portrait (?) from the Peruzzi Chapel, Florence

In Boccaccio's fifth tale on the 6th day, devoted to those who being provoked by some verbal pleasantry, have returned like for like, Giotto is portrayed not as a buffoon, but as a wit whose quick mind is matched against a lawyer's, the jurist Messer Forese da Rabatta. Messer Forese remarks upon Giotto's disreputable appearance: 'Giotto supposing we were to meet some stranger who had never seen you before, do you think that he would believe that you were the greatest painter in the world?' Giotto answers: 'Sir, I think he would believe it if, after taking a look at you, he gave you credit for knowing your ABCs.' The last word is Giotto's!



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Some Dates for Giotto's artistic career from various sources

1266/7? Giotto's birth (based on Villani's *Cronica*) stating he was 70 when he died in 1337

1305 Recorded in Florence in the parish of Santa Maria Novella

1306 'Erection of a new vault for the Palazzo della Ragione, Padua which is frescoed by Giotto'. Testified by various chroniclers

1312 Riccuccio di Puccio leaves money to light a lamp under a cross in Santa Maria Novella, Florence 'painted by the illustrious painter Giotto di Bondone' and a panel in the Dominican church of Prato by 'the superior painter, Giotto'

c.1312 Francesco da Barberino's *I Documenti d'amore* describes 'the figure of Envy' in the Arena Chapel as Giotto's work

1313 Riccobaldo of Ferrara's *Compilatio Cronologica*, states Giotto worked in the Franciscan churches of Assisi, Rimini and Padua as well as the Palazzo della Ragione and the Arena chapel in Padua.

1314, Recorded in Florence; ditto 1320

1326, May; Dowry for his second daughter, Chiara

1328-34 Giotto is in the employ of King Robert of Anjou, Naples

April 12, 1334 Giotto named 'Capomaestro' (Chief of works) in Florence for the commune and the Cathedral

1335 According to Giovanni Villani, Giotto is in Milan working for Duke Azzone Visconti

1336/1337 January - According to Villani, Giotto dies in Florence and is buried in the Cathedral

1343, July 10 - An entry in the necrology in St Peter's Rome stating that Cardinal Giacomo Gaetano Stefaneschi paid for the high altarpiece and for the facade mosaic, both by Giotto

Selected short bibliography (including some of the sources I refer to)

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Giotto or Giotteschi?

There are questions and problems posed by Giotto's sizeable workshop, his willingness to both allow members of that shop wide latitude and to put his name to works that in essence were near autonomous productions of assistants and associates.

The matter is considerably more complex than simple disagreement over the relative chronology of the works associated with him.

What follows are further arguments put forward by Bruno Zanardi to refute that the St Francis Cycle in the Upper Church at Assisi could be attributed to Giotto:

1. Stylistically the legend is presented very differently to Giotto's work. His profound expression of human nature, a feature at the Arena Chapel is not found in the Legend of St Francis at Assisi; instead we detect lively naturalism and narrative charm.
2. The architectural framing of scenes does not conform to the framing used by Giotto either at Padua, nor in the Bardi and Peruzzi Chapels in Florence. In these 3 venues, the decorative borders were flat.
3. The use of perspective at Padua differs from that at Assisi: there, the perspective of the main scenes is related to the centre of the nave while at Assisi, the perspective is inconsistent across the scenes.
4. Giotto, both at Padua and in Florence, places more emphasis on humans and less on landscape than what is seen in the St Francis cycle.

Names of Roman artists identified by Zanardi as having painted the St Francis cycle

Pietro Cavallini, d. 1330

Filippo Rusuti, c.1255-1325

Jacopo Torriti, 13C/14C



St Francis Cycle, Upper Basilica, Assisi above and
Arena Chapel Padua below



Lorenzo de' Medici had Angelo Poliziano compose the following epitaph, in 1490, to be engraved near the monument erected to Giotto, in the Cathedral. It speaks of Giotto as an artist and designer, one who brought naturalism back into painting.



I am he, through whom painting, dead, returned to life.

And whose hand was as sure as it was adept.

What my skill lacked, was lacking in Nature herself.

To no one was it given to paint better or more.

Do you admire the great tower, resounding with sacred bronze?

This too on the basis of my model has reached the stars.

But I am Giotto; why relate these deeds?

My name alone is worth a long-drawn ode.

For your notes



**Maestà painted for the church of Ognissanti, Florence
by Giotto, tempera on panel c.1310**