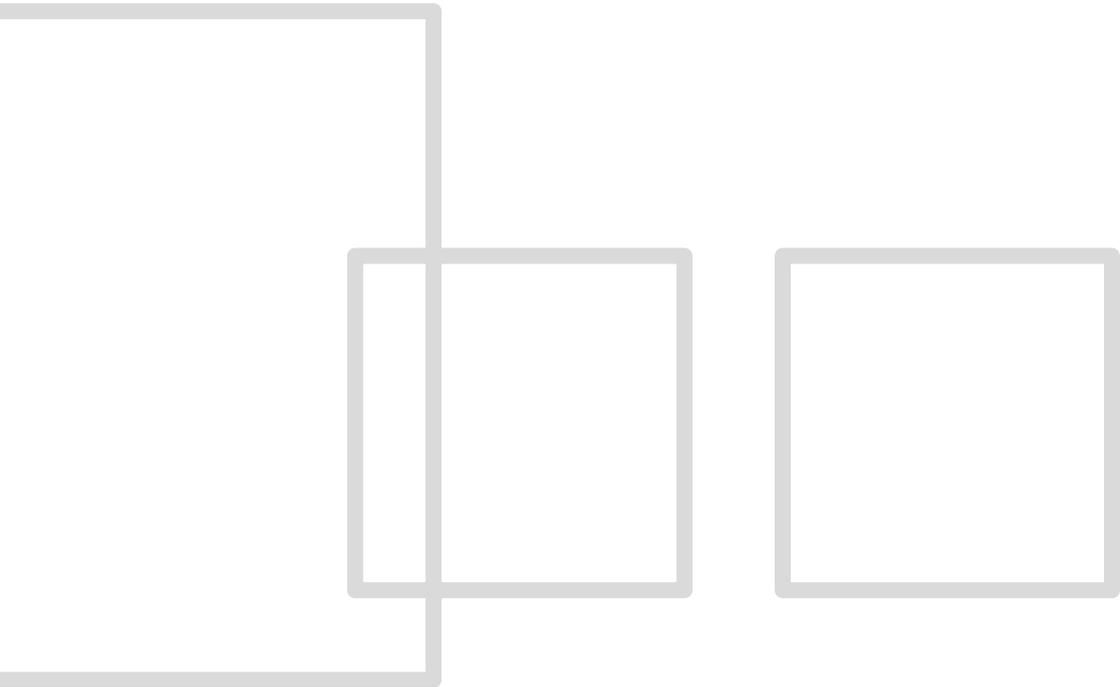




# The Survival of the Trecento in the Fifteenth Century

Edited by Louise Bourdua





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*This issue of Predella comprises six essays that explore how artists and patrons interacted with the Trecento during the fifteenth century, dealing both with subject matter and style. Some authors have interpreted the insistence on the Trecento as a deliberate choice of models by patrons and painters. In other cases, however, the relationship with the previous century could be more complex and difficult to unravel. Overall, the survival of the Trecento questions the more traditional and widely accepted historiographic caesurae, in particular regarding the origins of the Renaissance in the Quattrocento and the extent of its break with the late Middle Ages.*

This issue of Predella comprises six essays that explore how artists and patrons interacted with the Trecento during the fifteenth century. The project began with a dedicated session at the Renaissance Society of America's annual conference in 2012 enriched by Machtelt Israels' response and grew over the years to encompass research on northern Italy from Tuscany to the Tyrol.

The original brief was to consider how Trecento art in particular was 'received' during the Renaissance and consequently the call used the term 'reception'. Colleagues responded by undertaking a visual quest and by re-reading fundamental studies written by Erwin Panofsky, Johann Huizinga, Ernst Gombrich and Jacques Le Goff. Consequently, their essays use a multitude of expressions beyond 'reception' (particularly in the essays by Joanne Anderson, Fabio Massaccesi and Zuleika Murat), and it seemed appropriate to rephrase this thematic section to the 'survival' of the trecento. This may appear an odd choice but what I had in mind was Jean Seznec's brilliant book *La survivance des dieux antiques (The Survival of the Pagan Gods)*<sup>1</sup>. Seznec himself had felt the need to explain his title in his introduction as follows: «As the Middle Ages and the Renaissance come to be better known, the traditional antithesis between them grows less marked». Although he was thinking more about the iconographic survival of the mythological tradition than style, his words echo the findings of our authors who judiciously opted for descriptors such as 'relaunch', 'revival', 'after life', 'persistence', 'resistance' and the – cultural, historical, and art-historical – concept of 'continuity'.

The essays do grapple with the two issues of subject matter and style. Gabriele Fattorini's work, for instance, focuses on the persistence of the theme of the *Assumption* in Siena. Beginning with an image invented in the Trecento and depicted on one of the city gates, it was repainted, then renewed and finally replaced in the sixteenth century and is only known through the writings of Bernardino da Siena. Through a meticulous investigation of technical and scientific analysis and a close reading of art historical criticism such as Ghiberti or Vasari, Fattorini brings to the surface 'lost' works or buried trecento layers. The result enables the reader to retrace how the Trecento model survived despite sustained campaigns of repainting to maintain and preserve the miraculous and/or as a result of specific contractual obligations.

Padua comes to the fore in Paolo di Simone's essay on the theme of illustrious men (*uomini famosi*) and the triumphs of Caesar in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and Andrea Mantegna's reliance on Jacopo Davanzo's lost frescoes on this theme resonates with Zuleika Murat's own essay, as we will see below. But the legacy of the genre stemmed from wider areas, and di Simone's essay touches, amongst other things, on the unknowable sources such as the numerous lost fresco cycles from the Trecento, including the stories of Attila in Milan, and Christine de Pisan's famous painted room of the deeds of the great, modeled on fourteenth-century Lombard and Veneto mural cycles.

Joanne Anderson's contribution is solidly anchored in the north and centres on a little known fresco cycle in Seefeld in the Tyrol, demonstrating how Trecento models from both north and south of the Alps were sought after even in remote and relatively isolated regions. The Paduan painter Guariento di Arpo, who grew up with Giotto's Arena Chapel in his gaze, emerges as a key source some seventy years after the execution of his cycle of the life of Saints Philip, James the Less and Augustine of Hippo in the Eremitani. Indeed, Guariento furnished the anonymous northern master of Seefeld with novel architectural settings to convey the passage of time. Aside from this discovery, her essay reminds us that fourteenth-century miracles, relics and reliquaries also had a significant impact on later cults and their subsequent depictions. The survival of the 'whole' Trecento should therefore come under closer scrutiny.

By turning our attention to Rome as does Gerardo da Simone, we discover that its two most noteworthy fifteenth-century painters, Lorenzo da Viterbo and Antoniazio Romano, were no different from their northern cousins. They too relied

on the Trecento for perspectival tricks and iconographic schemes, but whereas the first painter opted for Siena as a model, the second relied on Florence, and particularly the earlier part of the century.

Like Seznec, some of our authors have interpreted the deliberate insistence on the Trecento by patrons and painters as persistence. The patrons are deemed to be critically important for the choice of models (of materials, composition or typologies), particularly in the essays of Fabio Massaccesi and Zuleika Murat. The works they address in Padua and Bologna are remarkable for their complex fictive architectonic spaces, which are evidently more intricate than Seefeld. Whilst in Padua the spatial experiments are appreciated by jurists, politicians, diplomats, poets and possibly the Augustinian Hermits, in the Bolognese case study we are indebted to the intervention of the local Franciscans. Such diversity suggests to me that the interest in the Trecento could be fairly mainstream.

Patterns do emerge as to what fourteenth-century features were particularly attractive and occasionally we discover why. In Padua as Murat reminds us, Michele Savonarola praised no fewer than five Trecento painters' use of perspective: Giotto, Guariento, Giusto de' Menabuoi, Altichiero and Jacopo Avanzi. In other cases, however, the relationship with the previous century could be quite complex and the motives more difficult to unravel. During the remodelling of an altarpiece for the chapel of the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena (as Gabriele Fattorini informs us) a predella by Sano di Pietro was commissioned to complement a pentaptych by Simone Martini. We do not know whether Sano was chosen precisely because his trademark look would not create a disjuncture with the companion piece, or whether the upper 'older' areas were valued for devotional reasons.

Overall, these essays confirm that numerous fifteenth-century artists and patrons did not hesitate to look back to the Trecento and even earlier, to what was projected from Giorgio Vasari onward as a distant age not worthy of attention. This survival questions the more traditional and widely accepted historiographic *caesurae*, in particular regarding the origins of the Renaissance in the Quattrocento and the extent of its break with the previous century. Moreover, the authors challenge the notion that a revival of the Trecento during the fifteenth century was incompatible with antiquarianism. It is hoped that these six essays will encourage further research on the survival and reception of the Trecento in other territories and historical moments.

- 1 J. Seznec, *La survivance des dieux antiques. Essai sur le rôle de la tradition mythologique dans l'humanisme et dans l'art de la Renaissance*, London, 1940; revised edition translated as *The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, New York, 1953.

## Trecento Receptions in Early Renaissance Paduan Art. The Ovetari Chapel and its Models. Revival or Persistence?

*This essay is devoted to a peculiar case of Trecento Receptions in Early Renaissance art: the Ovetari Chapel in the Church of the Eremitani in Padua. Its painted decoration was commissioned in 1448 to four artists (Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Alemagna, Nicolò Pizolo and Andrea Mantegna), two of them being asked to follow specific models that dated back to the Trecento.*

*Taking into account the documents and setting them in the backdrop of Quattrocento Padua, the author investigates the meaning of such a reception, arguing that it should be interpreted in the sense of the persistence of qualities that were still perceived to be valid rather than as a mere revival of an older style.*

### Introduction

The theme of the volume and my essay require some introductory considerations that can help to contextualize the issue of reception and to clarify the method I have adopted. In fact, we are dealing with historical categories (*Trecento*, *Early Renaissance*) that were created subsequently, and whose boundaries, both in respect to chronology and meaning, are hardly precise in their definition. The effectiveness of these categories is based on the verifiable existence of a definite distinction, or an evident gap between them. However, in the last few years scholars have tended to ascribe diminishing reliability to the existence of such a disparity. According to Jacques Le Goff, for instance, «when one confronts the deeper layers of history, continuities become apparent that make it impossible to arrive at a periodization»<sup>1</sup>.

Le Goff's idea provides a useful starting point for an interpretation of the frescoes of the Ovetari chapel in the church of the Eremitani in Padua. I will engage with the notion of *continuity* rather than *caesura*, and my interpretation of the term "reception" will be in the sense of *persistence* rather than *revival*. The frescoes were commissioned in 1448 from a team of four painters, and are considered to be amongst the first Renaissance works in the city. Yet they demonstrate an evident continuity with both the Trecento and many important paintings executed in that century. Such a continuity was explicitly pursued by the patrons, and also independently desired by the painters involved in the commission. Through an

Paolo di Simone

**«Gente di ferro e di valore armata».  
Postille al tema degli *Uomini Illustri*,  
e qualche riflessione marginale  
sulla pittura profana  
tra Medioevo e Rinascimento**

*The cult of the past is a very common topos not only in the humanistic Quattrocento but also in the Middle Ages, and it represents a strong propaganda tool in profane art associated with astronomical and moralistic allegories, frequent in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This essay investigates some profane themes - linked with contemporary literature - in court art between the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. In particular, it deals with secular cycles of Illustrious Men and Triumphs, following continuity and transformations from older evidence (often lost) to their presence in proto-humanistic contexts in Italy before the Quattrocento, when these typical themes are documented everywhere. Furthermore, it discusses the relationships between images, words and memory; and the propagation of Illustrious Genealogies in the late Trecento.*

«Car quant on voit peinte une estoire, ou de Troies ou d'autre,  
on voit les fais des pseudommes ki cha en ariere furent,  
ausi com s'il fussent present»  
(Richard de Fournival, *Bestiaire d'amours*)

Alla visione tetra di un Medioevo adagiato in un orizzonte di tenebre – cupo affresco neogotico intriso di inquietudini sepolte tra le rovine del maniero di una Otranto nordica, fredda e piovosa, groviglio di vie senza fine percorse dal brivido ossessivo di tamburi battuti, a turbare la deforme oscurità squarciata a tratti da bagliori di roghi e violenze – continua tuttavia a contrapporsi, nei più persistenti luoghi comuni, l'opposta immagine di un'età di mezzo idilliaca, dove al suono di canti sublimi, e sullo sfondo in azzurro e oro interrotto dal profilo di castelli e cattedrali, si svolgono – nel disvelarsi di arazzi dai vividi colori, o di miniature il cui intatto splendore minerale stupisce ogni volta ci si trovi a violare per un istante il silenzio di un manoscritto – le gesta diversamente gloriose di santi e cavalieri; un'immagine, questa, basata di certo sul modo in cui l'uomo di quei secoli amava autorappresentarsi, ma in definitiva fin troppo rassicurante, e contro la quale, negli anni Sessanta del XX secolo, Jacques Le Goff prendeva con chiarezza posizione:

se mi si permetterà di dare un consiglio assai grossolano, dirò al lettore che, di fronte a queste tentazioni di un'evasione verso un Medioevo trasfigurato, chieda onestamente a se stesso se gli piacerebbe, per virtù del mago Merlino o di Oberon, essere trasportato in quel tempo e viverci. Pensi il lettore che la gente del Medioevo, e qui si può dire, senza timore di

## **Giovanni da Modena and the Relaunch of the Vita-Panel in the Quattrocento**

*This paper investigates a little known group of fifteenth-century vita retables from Bologna, taking as its starting point the painting of Saint Bernardino da Siena, executed by Giovanni da Modena in 1451, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale of Bologna. The painter took as model a well established but much older form, that of the vita retable, to exploit to the full the saint's life. How binding was such a thirteenth- and fourteenth-century prototype on the painter called to depict the recently canonized saint? And were there specific reasons behind the use of such models? New archival discoveries shed light on these questions in addition to the function and patronage of Giovanni da Modena's Bernardino da Siena.*

This essay focuses on an unusual aspect of the reception of medieval elements in the early Renaissance, pointing at the evolution of the hagiographic altarpiece. However, the area under consideration is not Florence, but Bologna, where, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, a different Renaissance developed, based on other premises but engendered by partly similar instances. In fact, I will focus on Giovanni Falloppi da Modena, an artist who updated his paintings to the latest fashions and consequently had a key role in all late Gothic painting in Northern Italy<sup>1</sup>. I am interested in demonstrating not just the mere persistence of the vita retable form, of which I will show examples later, but also the originality with which Giovanni da Modena approached this typology, rethinking it according to marked proto-Renaissance interests.

### *Part I. A Problem of Categories*

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance are semantically complex historiographic categories that have become laden with meaning according to points of view and time. Reviewing a famous book, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* by Huizinga, Jacques Le Goff observed that «when one descends into the deep layers of history, continuities are what one sees [...]»; and concluded that «at this level of depth, it is impossible to arrive at a classification according to periods»<sup>2</sup>. Le Goff clearly identifies the problem with which we must come to terms. And nevertheless,

## Mary Magdalen and the Imagery of Redemption: Reception and Revival in Fifteenth-Century Tyrol

*In 1384 a host miracle occurred in the Alpine church of Sankt Oswald in Seefeld. The perpetrator was publicly humiliated and forced to repent for his sins, but the legend of his affront was to have lasting legacy in the visual culture of the church. While certain artworks have received critical attention for their retranslation of events, a fifteenth-century mural cycle depicting the life of Mary Magdalen, Christianity's most perfect penitent, in the choir has been overlooked. This article analyses the cycle's reception of local history and the importance of the Trecento visual strategies revived for particular effect. In doing so, it accords the seemingly archaic paintings an active role in the framing of the miracle for patron, parish and pilgrims attracted by the power of divine transformation and the promise of redemption.*

On 25 March 1384, Maundy Thursday and feast day of the Annunciation, a host miracle took place in the church of Sankt Oswald, Seefeld in Tyrol (fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. Local knight Oswald Milser demanded the largest wafer during Communion at the high altar, as public symbol of his political and social authority. The serving priest could only oblige such arrogance but when the consecrated bread came into contact with Milser's tongue it began to bleed: a punishment for his attitude of affront to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist<sup>2</sup>. Legend has it that Milser sank dramatically into the stone floor up to his knees. He then grabbed the high altar for support, but its surface became as pliant as wax, trapping his hands. The sculpted tympanum of the main portal of the church (1468-72) captures the turning point in the tale, when the priest removed the bloody host from Milser's mouth and returned its preserved form to the paten (fig. 2)<sup>3</sup>. The knight's vassal gives a shoulder of support but also rather amusingly, raises the hemline of his master's tunic to reveal the still impounded legs. Humiliated but crucially humbled after this divine intervention, Milser retreated to nearby Stams Abbey, a Cistercian and pilgrimage foundation, where he was to repent and commit the rest of his days to the service of God<sup>4</sup>.

The sculptural relief above the portal and Jörg Kölderer's c. 1500-2 epitaph panel painted for Emperor Maximilian I, which still hangs in the choir of the church and includes Latin and German accounts of the miracle in its lower section, inevitably garner attention in the critical and popular literature (fig. 3)<sup>5</sup>. They stand as lasting testaments of artistic endeavor and high-ranking patronage made

## The use of Trecento sources in Antoniazio Romano and Lorenzo da Viterbo

*Lorenzo da Viterbo and Antoniazio Romano were the two greatest local painters of the fifteenth century in the region of Rome. Despite their stature, their fame and scholarly fortune has been much inferior to their merits, compared to other contemporary artists. Not surprisingly, the use of fourteenth-century sources by Antoniazio and Lorenzo has gone so far unnoticed: while Lorenzo mainly looked at Sienese models, Antoniazio showed a preference towards Florence. This essay analyses the complex references to Trecento examples, which affect both composition and meaning, especially in Antoniazio's decoration of cardinal Bessarion's chapel in the Roman church of SS. Apostoli (1464-65) and in Lorenzo's frescoes in the Mazzatosta chapel, in the church of S. Maria della Verità at Viterbo. The influence of Tuscan sources offers a strong clue in favour of a sojourn of both painters in that region over the 1460s (Lorenzo will be documented in Florence in 1473), and of a fruitful experience of Tuscan monuments and artists.*

Lorenzo da Viterbo and Antoniazio Romano were the two greatest native painters of the fifteenth century in the region of Rome. Despite this, their name is hardly known today to non specialists, and this is even more true in non-Italian literature. I will not dare compare their status to that of the greatest masters of the century, Piero della Francesca and Andrea Mantegna; but certainly their position is not inferior to that of much better known artists, such as Benozzo Gozzoli and Domenico Ghirlandaio, whose fortune in the past and present is by contrast internationally wide.

The first, obvious reason for such a situation is the silence of ancient sources. Vasari mentions only in passing "Antonio detto Antoniazio romano" in the life of Filippino Lippi, as one of the two painters, together with the mysterious "Lanzilago padovano", in charge of evaluating Filippino's frescoes in the Carafa Chapel, in the church of S. Maria sopra Minerva<sup>1</sup>. The appearance of Lorenzo da Viterbo's name in the art-historical literature, after a couple of mentions by local historians of Viterbo in the eighteenth century, dates as late as the early nineteenth century (thanks to Séroux d'Agincourt, Rumohr, Rosini and Minardi)<sup>2</sup>. A proper critical appreciation of both our heroes belongs entirely to the twentieth century and it is chiefly the merit of Adolfo Venturi and Roberto Longhi: Venturi praised them within what he called the Roman school of painting, started by Piero and including Melozzo da Forlì and the Master of the Gardner Annunciation (later identified by Zeri with Piermatteo d'Amelia)<sup>3</sup>. Longhi highlighted Lorenzo's and Antoniazio's

**Sano di Pietro e una replica  
dell'Assunta di Camollia  
di Simone Martini**

*A devotional panel of the Assumption painted by Sano di Pietro (Siena, 1405-1481) in the 1470s, and which almost a century ago was in the prestigious collection of Charles Loeser (Florence), has recently reappeared on the art market. The settlement of the painting follows the example of a lost Assumption conceived by Simone Martini for the Antiporto di Camollia (the northern entrance to the city wall of Siena): a Trecento image which enjoyed particular success in the Siennese art of the 15th century, also because it was beloved by the famous preacher Saint Bernardino, who asked Sassetta for a sort of copy to stay in his church of the Osservanza (later Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum; destroyed in 1945). The recurrence of the small Assumption offers the occasion to summarise the interest of the most important Siennese painters of the Quattrocento for Simone Martini's Assunta di Camollia. Sano di Pietro was a leading figure of this typical phenomenon of reception of the Trecento in the Renaissance; as the paper explains, during his long career he painted in fact at least five versions of the theme in devotional panels and altarpieces.*

Grazie a una buona sedimentazione di studi, è ben noto che, nei primi anni trenta del Trecento, Simone Martini dovette delineare, sul fronte dell'Antiporto di Camollia a Siena, una grandiosa immagine dell'Assunzione della Vergine, che il trasferimento ad Avignone gli impedì di ultimare con i colori. Il geniale maestro volle rinnovare la tradizionale iconografia dell'Assunta in senso veristico e dinamico, collocando Maria al centro di una affollata turba angelica ordinata in più registri, che ai piedi della Vergine andava a disporsi a cerchio, dando sia il senso dello spazio, che quello del movimento ascensionale della protagonista della storia. A questa straordinaria invenzione, al soggetto connesso con l'*advocata Senensium* e la sua principale festività civica e all'ubicazione sul prospetto di uno dei luoghi simbolici della città, l'immagine martiniana – che intorno al 1360 fu colorata verosimilmente da Bartolomeo Bulgarini – dovette la sua enorme fama, ben attestata dalle molte repliche trecentesche e quattrocentesche; queste permettono di intendere l'originale assetto di un dipinto che non è giunto fino a noi, perché sostituito alla fine del Cinquecento da una nuova Assunta di Alessandro Casolani, che oggi si conserva in stato frammentario, insieme con i lacerti degli emblemi araldici delle contrade senesi visibili nel portico, frutto di un successivo rifacimento di Giuseppe Nicola Nasini (1699). La pittura martiniana fu peraltro oggetto della devozione del giovane Bernardino da Siena, che nelle prediche l'avrebbe quindi richiamata come immagine esemplare, rilanciandone così la fortuna; e per l'altare della primitiva chiesa bernardiniana dell'Osservanza,

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