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1400–1410

*The Cathedral and the City***Campanilism**

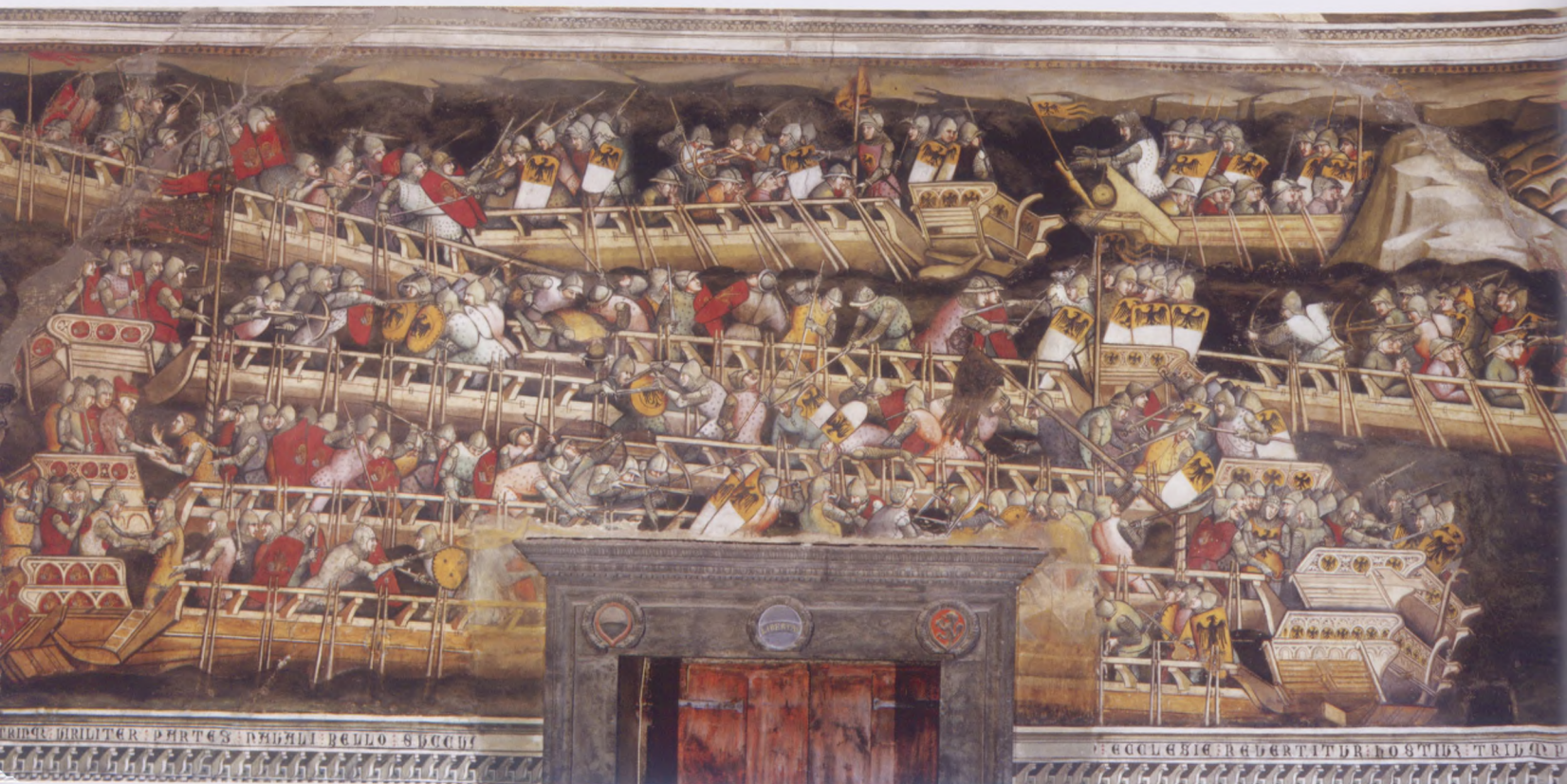
In 1400, Catholicism was the single Christian religion in Europe, and in principle it operated as a more centralizing organization than any European state. The head of the Church, as today, was the Pope, regarded as the successor of St. Peter, who had been given ruling authority by Christ himself. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, that authority had been damaged by a scandalous division (or “schism”), during which three separate individuals, based in different cities and supported by different European states, claimed to be Pope. The schism required localities to take sides, and provided them with an opportunity for self-assertion.

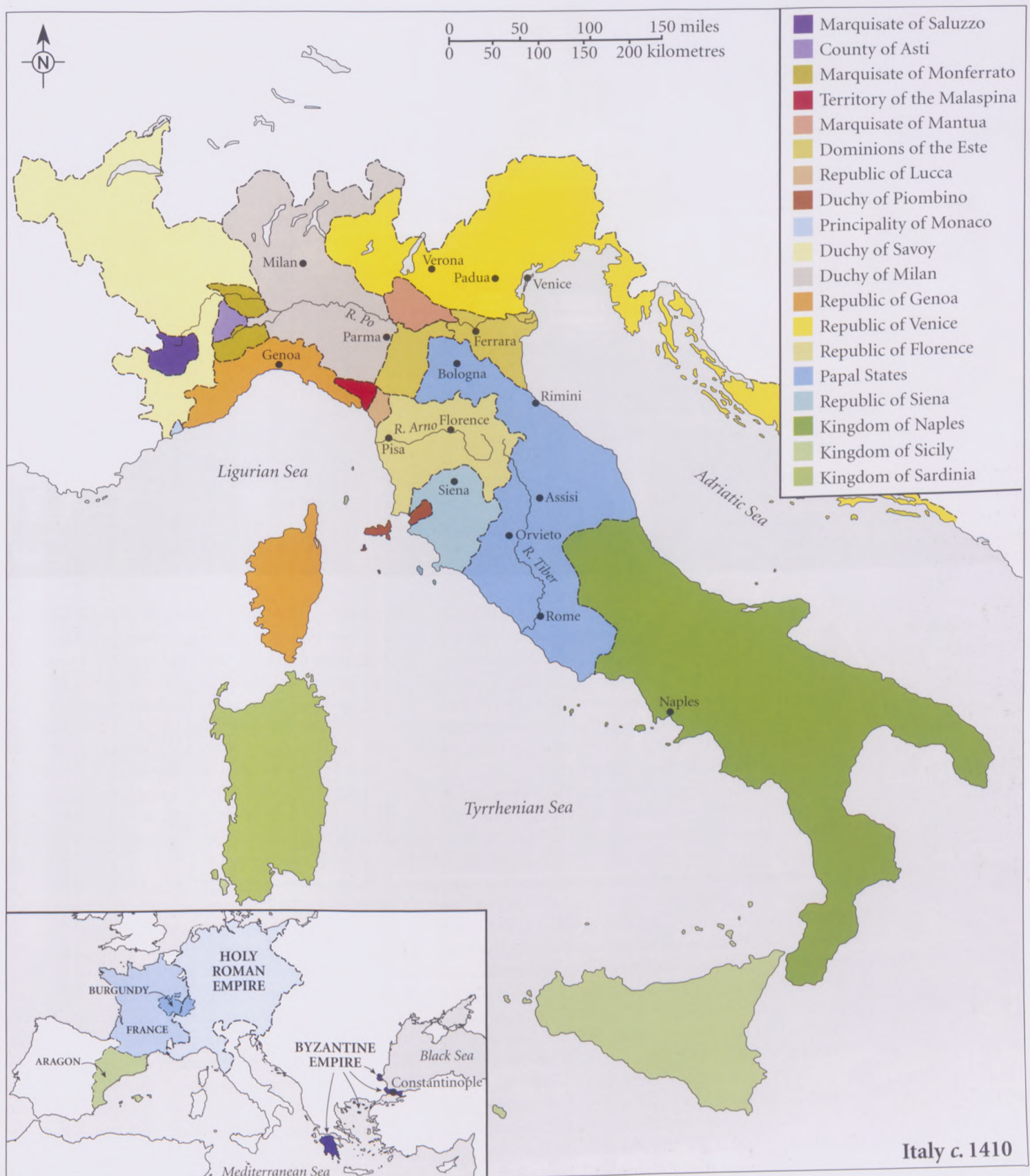
We see this, for example, in the frescoes that the government of Siena commissioned in 1407 from Spinello Aretino (c. 1350–1410; fig. 2.1), the respected and prolific

painter from Arezzo who had worked in Florence for the Alberti family thirty years before. It is perhaps unexpected to find an elaborate depiction of the life of a Pope in a government building. Yet the new decorations in the Palazzo Pubblico allowed the Sienese to take advantage of the Church’s crisis and promoted their city by celebrating the life of a citizen, Rolando Bandinelli Paparoni (1160–1216), who had risen to be one of the most politically effective European leaders of recent centuries. Spinello depicted Paparoni’s election as Pope Alexander III, his expulsion from Rome at the hands of Frederick Barbarossa’s imperial troops, the Pope’s subsequent collaboration with Venice to curtail the advance of imperial power in Italy, his return to Rome, and the emperor’s ultimate submission: the climactic image is the spectacular, panoramic battle of Punta San Salvatore, noteworthy as a lone surviving example of the battle paintings that

2.1

Spinello Aretino, *Scenes from the Life of Alexander III*, 1407. Fresco. Hall of the Priors, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena







2.2
Siena Cathedral with
surrounding town

once adorned many seats of urban government in Italy, including the Doge's palace in Venice and the palace of the Della Scala lords in Verona. The cycle ignores the real fragmentation that characterized the Church in 1407 so as to exalt Siena itself and proclaim it the equal of more powerful states like Venice. Siena clearly wished not to be seen simply as an ally of the papacy, but as the mother of Popes, and a world leader in its own right.

The location of the frescoes in the Sienese republic's city hall reinforced the close working relationship between governing bodies without the town. It was in this palace, as we saw in the previous chapter, that elected representatives met. Siena also, however, served as one of the Church's administrative districts, called dioceses, and thus provided a home to the bishop who presided over it. In Siena as elsewhere the bishop occupied a palace in the city center, though his real seat was in the church where he officially conducted instruction and worship. The Latin word for this seat was "cathedra," and the church that held it was consequently called the "cathedral" (in Italian, "*duomo*," from the Latin word for "house").

Italy's cathedrals, like those elsewhere in Europe, nearly always bore signs of the bishop's presence, including prominent tombs and other commemorative monuments. Still, the function of a cathedral was to serve the flock no less than the shepherd. Even when built on

the periphery of an older town, cathedrals became centers in their own right, offering a covered space sufficient to hold most of the populace and typically a large outdoor square as well. Most had long construction histories, replacing other consecrated structures on sites of historic significance; Siena's cathedral (fig. 2.2) replaced an earlier building dating to the ninth century CE that was believed to have stood on the site of a Roman temple dedicated to Minerva. Like the cathedrals elsewhere, it reinforced myths about the town's most ancient origins, one factor that motivated its use of Roman-style columns and other classicizing motifs.

The building's appearance set it apart. At Siena, as at Orvieto and other hill towns, the cathedral stood at one of the region's highest topographical points and loomed over the surrounding neighborhoods. In most Italian cities, cathedrals were the tallest structures around, and they came into view from miles away. The skyscrapers of their day, such buildings were feats of engineering, though their height had symbolic and even practical functions as well, manifesting by virtue of their size the protection of the saints to whom they were dedicated. Whereas the towns' other buildings were largely made of wood, brick, and humble stone, the surfaces of cathedrals, inside and out, displayed expensive marbles and other precious materials. To enter a cathedral was to escape the mun-

dane world for a preview of paradise. **Campanili**, or bell towers, adjacent yet also independent, soared still higher than the cathedrals themselves, ensuring that they could not only be seen but also heard anywhere in the city.

The Cathedrals of Florence and Milan

Chapter 1 referred to some distinguishing hallmarks of seignorial and communal patronage (see pp. 18–26). Cathedrals, however, tend to work against such classifications, as the cases of Florence and Milan illustrate. Florence's cathedral, founded in 1296, shows that the town was fully aware of what other nearby communes were up to: Orvieto had begun building its new cathedral over ten years earlier, in 1285, the same year that Siena furnished its duomo with a new lower facade; Gros-

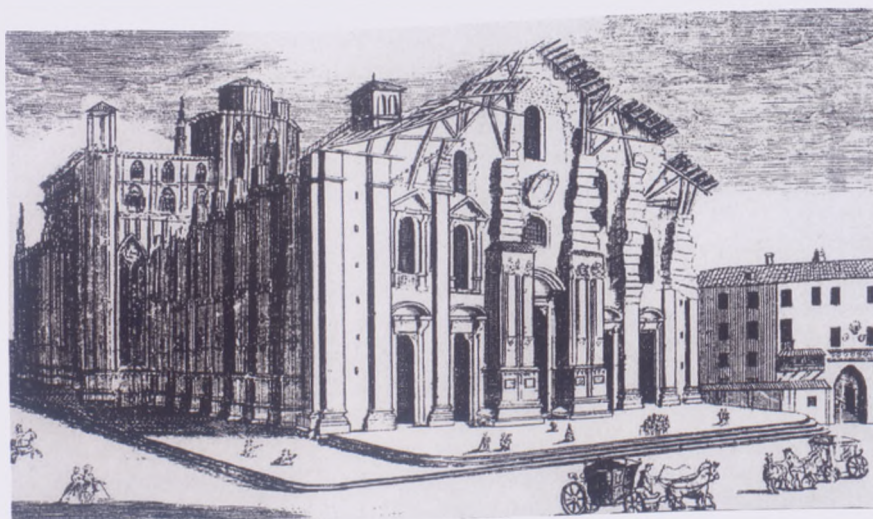
seto began erecting a new cathedral in 1294, the year that nearby Florence committed to building its own. In that city, **guilds** – corporate monopolies that controlled the practice of various trades and dominated city governments – oversaw construction of what all expected to serve as an image of the city; committees of townspeople made the major design decisions, turning to locals for ideas and technical expertise. The architecture of Florence's cathedral was as “democratic” as any from the period could be, and urbanistically, too, it constituted a new center, with streets radiating outwards from it rather than crossing in a grid. This itself declared the building to be a place for general congregation, and its wide nave allowed it to accommodate large gatherings.

The broad communal involvement also resulted in an indecisiveness that slowed progress: seven decades

2.3

Florence Cathedral, begun 1296 after a design by Arnolfo di Cambio. View from the south, showing to the left the campanile designed by Giotto.





ABOVE

2.4

Milan Cathedral, begun 1386. This engraving of c. 1745 by Marc' Antonio dal Re gives a sense of the building's appearance before the extensive nineteenth-century additions.

RIGHT

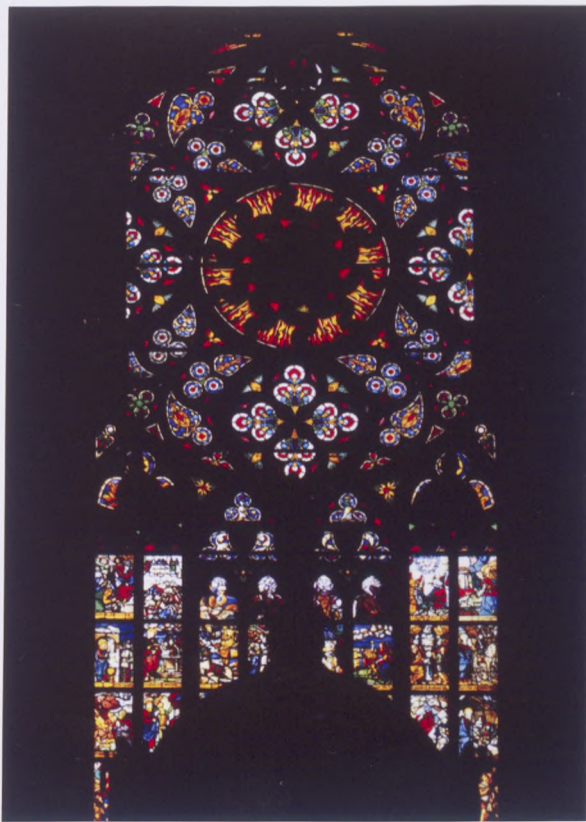
2.5

Interior of Milan Cathedral



after the architect and sculptor Arnolfo di Cambio (c. 1245–1301/10) laid the building's foundation stones, the structure had advanced so little that it was still possible to consider newly proposed models for its most basic design. The crawling pace of construction may help to explain why, in the intervening years, both patrons and builders directed their energies elsewhere: a colossal campanile (fig. 2.3), designed by Giotto, was built even before the final plans for the cathedral itself were settled. At least one completed noble structure, the Florentines hoped, would impress visitors from other places.

The origins of Milan's cathedral (figs. 2.4–2.5), by contrast, date to almost a century later, in 1386, when Gian Galeazzo Visconti (1351–1402) consolidated his control of the city (he became the first Duke of Milan in 1395). In 1385 Visconti had deposed, imprisoned, and ultimately



FAR LEFT

2.6

Tracery windows in Milan Cathedral

LEFT

2.7

Top of the Carelli *guglia* of Milan Cathedral, with statue of St. George by Giorgio Solari, completed 1404

mately poisoned the previous ruler, his uncle Bernabò Visconti; construction on the building began one year later, under the supervision of Gian Galeazzo's cousin, Archbishop Antonio da Saluzzo. The Visconti, who wanted contemporaries to measure them by international standards, called in French and German master builders to provide designs and oversee construction, giving the church a northern European look that later additions would amplify. The relative belatedness of the building meant that all involved had seen what the Florentines were already making – an airy interior interrupted only by the massive supports necessary to hold up the vaulting and the great dome – yet the Visconti and their masons favored a different kind of building, with a series of narrow bays running from the entrance to the brightly illuminated altar wall and thinner, taller piers between (fig. 2.5). The windows themselves featured stained glass, framed by tracery, or decorated stonework, one of the most impressive features of northern European cathedrals, but highly unusual in the Italian peninsula (fig. 2.6). By comparison with Florence Cathedral, with its massive internal supports and broad expanses of solid wall, Milan's designers sought an effect common among the cathedrals of northern Europe, replacing large areas of wall with screens of colored glass.

The most distinctive exterior feature of Milan Cathedral in the fifteenth century was not a bell tower, but a “guglia,” or spire (fig. 2.7), paid for by a merchant named Marco Carelli who donated funds in 1391. Support-

ing a statue of the warrior saint George and conceived in part as a commemorative monument, this had more in common with the Della Scala tombs in Verona (see p. 20) – a city Gian Galeazzo had conquered a few years before – than with Giotto's campanile in Florence. The individualist origins of the cathedral also helped shape its fate. When the plague killed Gian Galeazzo in 1402, work came largely to a halt. Nearly all the defining exterior features of the building that we see today are eighteenth- and nineteenth-century additions.

Competition at Florence Cathedral

Cathedrals provided a focus for urban artistic activities. In many cities, the cathedral works controlled the importation and distribution of marble and other materials. Sometimes a cathedral even provided workspace for artists. This situation regularly led to competition, and at several levels. Towns, as we have seen, closely watched what their neighbors were up to. Guilds strove to outdo one another in sponsoring conspicuous embellishments to the structure of their cathedral. And artists themselves, recognizing that an assignment at the cathedral was their best opportunity for public exposure, worked against others to secure commissions.

The Florentines had built their *duomo*, like most others in Italy, over an earlier church, in this case the eleventh-century Santa Reparata. The one ancient



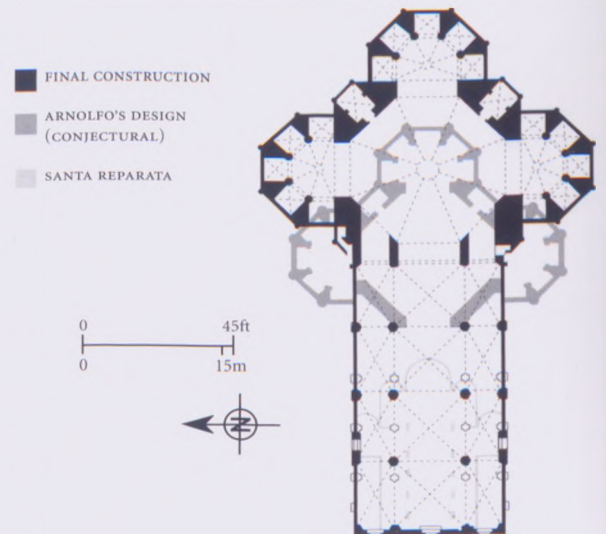
Florence 1400

RIGHT
2.8
Plan of Florence Cathedral

OPPOSITE
2.9
Baptistry (San Giovanni), Florence. The building may have been founded as early as the fourth century but was heavily renovated in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries with the addition of white and green marble revetment and columns salvaged from ancient Roman buildings (*spolia*).

structure the Florentines opted to retain, however, was the baptistry (fig. 2.9). The standing architecture of this building had been consecrated in 1059, though the Florentines believed it to be still older, originating as an ancient pagan temple dedicated to the Roman god of war, Mars. That imagined history lent it an authority to which the site's subsequent buildings nodded. Arnolfo di Cambio had proposed an octagonal crossing for the cathedral, essentially inscribing the baptistry's distinctive form into its plan, and this was one element of his design that survived subsequent reconsiderations. Giotto and his successors saw that both the Campanile and the cathedral itself received a variegated skin of green and white marble *revetment* (marble facing) like that of the baptistry. And those responsible for the cathedral looked for ways to give it, too, more ancient roots.

The Republic's instructions to Giotto in 1334 were to build something "so magnificent in its height and







ABOVE LEFT

2.10

Filippo Brunelleschi, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401–03. Bronze with gilding, 21 x 17½" (53 x 44 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence



ABOVE RIGHT

2.11

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401–03. Bronze with gilding, 17¼ x 15" (45 x 38 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

workmanship that it shall surpass anything of the kind produced by the Greeks and the Romans in the time of their greatest power." The patrons of the campanile demanded something daunting in scale, and we can assume that Arnolfo's earlier employers had the same expectations. This did not, however, preclude careful attention to ratios, and the church's dimensions, in fact, aligned it with another model. The plan of the cathedral (fig. 2.8) repeated the square that formed the crossing so as to generate a nave six units in length, a transept two units wide; the dome was three units high. This matched the dimensions of Solomon's Temple, as given in the first book of Kings (6:2): "And the house, which King Solomon built to the Lord, was threescore cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth, and thirty cubits in height" (i.e., 60 x 20 x 30). The reference to antiquity in this instance was not an attempt to recapture the look of ancient forms but rather to follow what contemporaries would have understood as a set of divinely sanctioned proportions, as if the cathedral were a realization of God's own design. So important were the ratios that the Flemish composer Guillaume Dufay (1397–1474) would incorporate them into the motet (a short choral composition) he wrote for the new dedication of the building on 25 March 1436.

For all of the building's novelty, in other words, it also presented itself as the fulfillment of an earlier plan.

And this way of thinking about sacred art, as an attempt to carry through something previously foreshadowed or prescribed, bears more broadly on the cathedral precinct. Catholic theologians often construed the characters and events of the Old Testament as "prefigurations" (foreshadowings) of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints who followed them, and the theme of prophecy had exceptional importance at Florence Cathedral, since John the Baptist, the great prophet to whom the baptistery itself was dedicated, was also the city's patron saint.

Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, and the Commission for the Baptistry Doors

The city's luxury cloth importers belonged to the "Calimela," Florence's most powerful guild, and the Calimela was charged with overseeing the baptistery's decoration. Its members recognized that the most impressive features of the building's exterior were the bronze doors that the sculptor and architect Andrea Pisano (c. 1270/90–c. 1348/9) had carried out for the east entrance between 1330 and 1336, showing scenes from the life of John the Baptist. And in 1401 the guild held a competition for the production of a sequel to what Andrea had made. Artists who wished to enter had to produce a single panel that embodied their vision for the new door. It had to show the Sacrifice of Isaac, the episode from Genesis

wherein God commands Abraham to kill his own son Isaac, then intervenes at the last moment by allowing him to slaughter a ram instead. (Catholics understood the scene to foretell God's sacrifice of his own son on the Cross.) For the sake of continuity, participants had to work with a frame of the same size and shape (a *quatrefoil*, or diamond with projecting lobes) that Andrea had used for his south-entrance panels, and to sculpt the Abraham and Isaac story within that form. The fact that two surviving competition panels include the same number of figures and very similar background elements, finally, suggests that even these things were stipulated from the outset.

As a prospective commission, the new doors would have been hard to pass up, for they would essentially guarantee the winner a decade's worth of steady work while also promising maximum visibility for his products. Seven artists ultimately submitted panels, of which two survive (figs. 2.10–2.11). Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) approached the problem by designing individual characters in widely varying poses, then placing these in the subfields suggested by the assigned shape: an angel in the upper left arc, a ram in the projecting angle below that, servants at lower left and right. His attention to the challenging medieval frame manifests itself especially in details such as the pose of the horse and the contours of the cliff behind Abraham, though the artist also attempted to incorporate elements that looked to a more distant past. He sets his Isaac, for example, on an altar with a relief carved on the side; Brunelleschi may actually have seen ancient stone altars and imagined their ritual function, though here the device works also as a pedestal, making Isaac himself look like a statue. The figure at the lower left, rather than paying attention to the central event, seems preoccupied with the base of his foot. This has little to do with the central narrative, but it makes an unmistakable reference to the *Spinario* (*The Thorn Puller*) (fig. 2.12) in Rome, from the first century BCE, one of the most famous surviving statues from the ancient world.

Brunelleschi's biographer Antonio Manetti reported that the competition resulted in a draw, but that Brunelleschi refused the option of working in collaboration with his rival. Ghiberti himself, on the other hand, reported in his *Commentaries* that he won the contest outright. If this was indeed the case, it is easy to see why.

Brunelleschi, the son of a local notary, had entered the world of sculpture as an outsider. Ghiberti, by contrast, had trained in a typical late medieval workshop, the son and student of another goldsmith; eventually he would pass the craft on to his own sons, who remained in the same profession. In the previous chapter, we looked at Ghiberti's enterprise as an author, which was unusual for an artist in his time. In addition to writing an

important early art-historical and theoretical text, however, he also proved himself to be the most innovative metalworker of his day. Whereas Brunelleschi produced his relief by casting seven small objects, then soldering these together, Ghiberti made his scene as a single piece, attaching only Abraham's hand and a section of the rock. Thin and hollow at the back, his relief weighed less than Brunelleschi's, making it easier for the installers to handle, and it required less bronze, making it less costly. Beyond the economics, the judges of the competition may simply have liked the look of his relief better. Whereas Brunelleschi's secondary figures of animals and servants, with their vigorous and difficult poses, all jostle for our attention, Ghiberti produced a harmonious and easily legible composition organized around flowing curves. If Brunelleschi advertised his knowledge of ancient sculpture by quoting the *Spinario* in the lower margin, Ghiberti adopted the thorn puller's delicate anatomy (though not his distinctive pose) for Isaac himself; the victim here charms the viewer in a way that Brunelleschi's wretched, screaming child does not. The awarding of commissions to those who demonstrated an ability to fuse technical innovation with beauty would recur throughout the early history of the site.



2.12
The Thorn Puller
("Spinario"), first century
BCE. Bronze, height 28³/₄"
(73 cm). Capitoline
Museum, Rome





scene in which she starred had her dancing seductively before her stepfather. Ghiberti, by contrast, lent a graceful twist even to the suffering Christ of the *Flagellation* (fig. 2.17). In the *Baptism of Christ* (fig. 2.15), Christ's suavely curving body is symmetrically framed by sweeping arcs, formed to his right by draperies of attending angels, and on our right by John's elastically outstretched right arm and extended right leg. Posture and movement both enrich the narrative and display a modern artfulness, learned in part from the study of what the figures in ancient sculptures did. More willing than Andrea to crowd his panels, Ghiberti also set figures in different states of motion against one another, inviting the viewer to compare them (fig. 2.18). And here, as in the competition relief, Ghiberti exhibits the subtle drama of his storytelling. Mary, standing on the right, discovers the twelve-year-old Christ, who had been missing for three days, disputing with the Jewish elders in the temple. Her commanding presence disrupts the symmetrical arrangement of Christ and his interlocutors; as her gaze locks with Christ, she points to herself in a gesture of maternal reproach. It is impossible to mistake the words she is speaking: "Why have you treated us like this?" (Luke 2:48).

The baptistery doors' story of Christ's life and death runs from left to right and – more surprisingly – from bottom to top. This suggests that the viewer is to move up into the story from the panels below, which show the four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), who had authored the Gospels narrating Christ's life, and four of the chief Church Fathers who had interpreted these.



OPPOSITE

2.15

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Baptism of Christ*, from the north doors of the Florence Baptistery, c. 1416–19. Bronze with gilding

FAR LEFT

2.16

Andrea Pisano, *Feast of Herod*, from the south doors of the Florence Baptistery, 1330–36. Bronze with gilding

LEFT, ABOVE

2.17

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Flagellation of Christ*, from the north doors of the Florence Baptistery, c. 1416–19. Bronze with gilding



LEFT, BELOW

2.18

Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Finding of Christ in the Temple*, from the north doors of the Florence Baptistery, c. 1416–19. Bronze with gilding

The decision to give each of the quatrefoils in the lower two rows over to a single seated figure followed Andrea's example, though Ghiberti may also have had a more integrated understanding of the overall program.

When the sculptor and architect Lorenzo Maitani (1255–1330), nearly a century before, undertook the energetic marble reliefs he made for the facade of Orvieto Cathedral (fig. 2.19), he adopted a comparable arrangement. The figures at the bottom of Maitani's picture field, which the viewer encountered at eye level, represented



2.19

Lorenzo Maitani, marble
reliefs from the pier to the
right of the main portal of
Orvieto Cathedral, 1310–30

OPPOSITE

2.20

Lorenzo Ghiberti, self-
portrait (detail from the
north doors of the Florence
Baptistery), c. 1416–19.
Bronze with gilding

representing prophets. Perhaps they, like John the Baptist himself, foretell the narrative that Ghiberti fulfills with his panels. Or perhaps they simply play the part of commentators, looking around and “speaking” about what the goldsmith produced.

Among the heads Ghiberti included one of the first Italian self-portraits (fig. 2.20). The cloth covering Ghiberti’s hair may simply be the normal protective gear that sculptors wore in the studio, but it also gives the artist an exotic look, as though he were from the same distant oriental lands as the characters he depicts.

Marble Sculpture for the Cathedral: Nanni di Banco and Donatello

Bronze was among the most expensive materials used for early Renaissance sculpture, and the decision to dedicate it to the production of doors shows how important such thresholds were. The decoration of the facade of Florence’s cathedral under Arnolfo di Cambio had stopped soon after it began, but not before the area around the main doors had been completed (fig. 2.21). This was not only a crucial passageway between the secular world of the city and the sacred interior of the cathedral; it was also a ceremonial site in its own right, one where citizens gathered for festivals and holy days, and one that the bishop could use for public dealings with the city.

The long, straight street that terminated at the cathedral from the north, moreover, ran not up to the doors facing the baptistery, but rather up to one around the corner, colloquially called the “Porta della Mandorla” (fig. 2.22) or the “Almond Door” after the almond-shaped aureole that surrounds the Virgin in the relief above. The door itself had been under way since 1391, but in 1406 a sculptor named Nanni di Banco (1384/90–1421) was brought in to complete the ensemble that included vines,

prophets, and the foliate motifs that grew up from them framed the individual stories as fulfillments of what the prophets had written. Ghiberti added vegetation around his panels as well; more surprising, though, is his decision to substitute human heads for the leonine motifs that Andrea Pisano had used in his earlier doors. In making these, the goldsmith seems to have drawn on ancient portraits: one head resembles surviving figures of Socrates, another Julius Caesar. Most, however, resist naming, and seem there in order to enliven the overall composition through their mutual interaction and their engagement with the beholder rather than to depict any specific group of individuals. Do they indeed have identities at all? Some of the bearded faces follow the conventions for





ABOVE LEFT

2.21

Bernardo Poccetti, facade of Florence Cathedral, c. 1587. Ink on paper. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence.

The drawing records the appearance of the building before the removal of the original sculptures and the addition of the nineteenth-century facade.



ABOVE RIGHT

2.22

Nanni di Banco, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1414–22. Gable above the Porta della Mandorla, Florence Cathedral

half-length angels, and a nude figure of the hero Hercules, leaning on a club. Florentine legend made Hercules out to be the founder of the city, and from the late Middle Ages he had featured on the city's seal; his presence on the door announced the building's importance as a civic no less than a religious site and returned to the idea of its own ancient foundations.

Working with Nanni was a twenty-year-old sculptor named Donatello (c. 1386–1466). Nanni, like Ghiberti, had come from a family workshop; Donatello, like Brunelleschi, had entered the trade from outside. His father, a laborer in the city's wool industry, no doubt had connections to the guild that commissioned the baptistery doors and may have helped get him into Ghiberti's studio. There the boy had probably been performing menial tasks and studying his art when he received commissions in 1406 to carve two small prophets for Nanni's door-frame. Clearly he made an impression, for two years later he secured a more significant assignment: to work with Nanni on a series of prophets for the buttresses over the cathedral choir.

Nanni's first contribution to that cycle was a figure that usually goes by the name *Isaiah* (fig. 2.23), the Hebrew author of the eponymous Old Testament book. Artists conventionally showed Isaiah holding a scroll



with the words “Behold the virgin will conceive and bear a child,” a phrase that would have linked him to the Virgin Mary and to the cathedral’s dedication. Nanni’s own version of the figure, nevertheless, shows a surprisingly physical writer. His swung hip nods to the graceful poses that the goldsmith Ghiberti was beginning to incorporate into his doors, but the stockier proportions immediately differentiate Nanni’s invention from the goldsmith’s designs. Another surprise is the relative youthfulness of the prophet: wanting nothing to do with the wrinkles and hair that marked the wisdom of age, Nanni carved a smooth, beardless face; *Isaiah*’s clenched right hand – perhaps now missing the attribute it once held – adds to the figure’s air of toughness.

Nanni must have been making his statue in coordination with Donatello, who in 1408 was assigned to produce a *David* (fig. 2.24). David’s status as a prophet depended on the traditional belief that he had authored the Psalms, a group of Old Testament songs. Donatello’s statue, however, holds neither the scroll that identifies the other figures in the group nor the harp a psalmist would play. The only hint, in fact, that the depicted figure produced words of any kind is his ivy crown, an ornament sometimes worn by poets, though in context this looks more like a reward for his victory over Goliath, the giant whom David slew and whose head appears at his feet. The statue, with its body-hugging leather, long neck, and apparent awareness of being seen, presages the sculptures of beautiful young men for which Donatello would become famous. Yet the figure is also swaggeringly militaristic and tough, even more explicitly so than Nanni’s.

Neither Nanni’s nor Donatello’s statue ever reached its intended destination. The patrons eventually brought Nanni’s *Isaiah* inside Florence Cathedral, where it remained until the twentieth century. Donatello’s *David*, by contrast, was turned over in 1416 to the government of the city, which erected it in Florence’s Palazzo dei Priori, on a pedestal bearing a dedication “to the fatherland, still struggling mightily against terrible enemies,” and an invocation to “let God lend his help.” The inscription seems to refer to the city’s war with Milan, a context that helps explain the curious circumstances of the original commission: the patrons, in asking Nanni and Donatello to carve their figures, were moving forward with the ornamental elements surrounding the dome of Florence’s cathedral even before they were quite sure how the dome itself would be constructed. Donatello’s *David*, in particular, seems to have been intended for a position that faced north – in other words, toward Milan – the same direction in which the *Hercules* on the Porta della Mandorla looked. The patrons may well have hoped that the statues would have talismanic effects, channeling divine protection to the city over which they stood, though



those patrons were certainly also aware that Milan had its own cathedral under way in the same years, with its own warrior saint, George, rising high above.

Jacopo della Quercia and the Fonte Gaia

The sculptures at Florence Cathedral, conceived in competition with Milan, encouraged their own rivals elsewhere. Lorenzo Ghiberti, in the third book of his *Commentaries*, wrote that the Sienese discovered a sculpture of Venus inscribed with the name of the ancient Greek sculptor Lysippus (fourth century BCE) and placed it on top of their fountain. One citizen of the town, however, complained that the statue was encouraging idolatry

2.24
Donatello, *David*, 1408–09.
Marble, height 6'3"
(1.91 m) including base.
Museo Nazionale del
Bargello, Florence

OPPOSITE BELOW

2.23
Nanni di Banco, *Isaiah*,
1408. Marble, height 6'4"
(1.93 m). Museo dell'Opera
del Duomo, Florence

and cursing the Siennese army; he convinced the city council not just to take down the statue but to bury it across the border in Florentine territory, where it could bring misfortune to Siena's enemies instead. The comment reinforces the impression that Renaissance artists and patrons attributed much more power to sculpture than we do today; the idea that you could do things with sculptures that would literally advance your military prospects helps explain why the Florentines thought to position Nanni's and Donatello's prophet figures as they did. At the same time, there is perhaps a whiff of superiority in Ghiberti's story (just as there is in his account of Duccio's painting the *Maestà*; see chapter 1, p. 37), as though the ignorant Siennese could not appreciate antiquity in the way that Florentines did. He reports that he knew the statue from a drawing made of it by the "great painter" Ambrogio Lorenzetti, as though to distinguish the interests of artists from those of the superstitious. As we saw in chapter 1 (see p. 10), moreover, Ghiberti's *Commentaries* blamed a similar fear of idols for the destruction of ancient art in the first place.

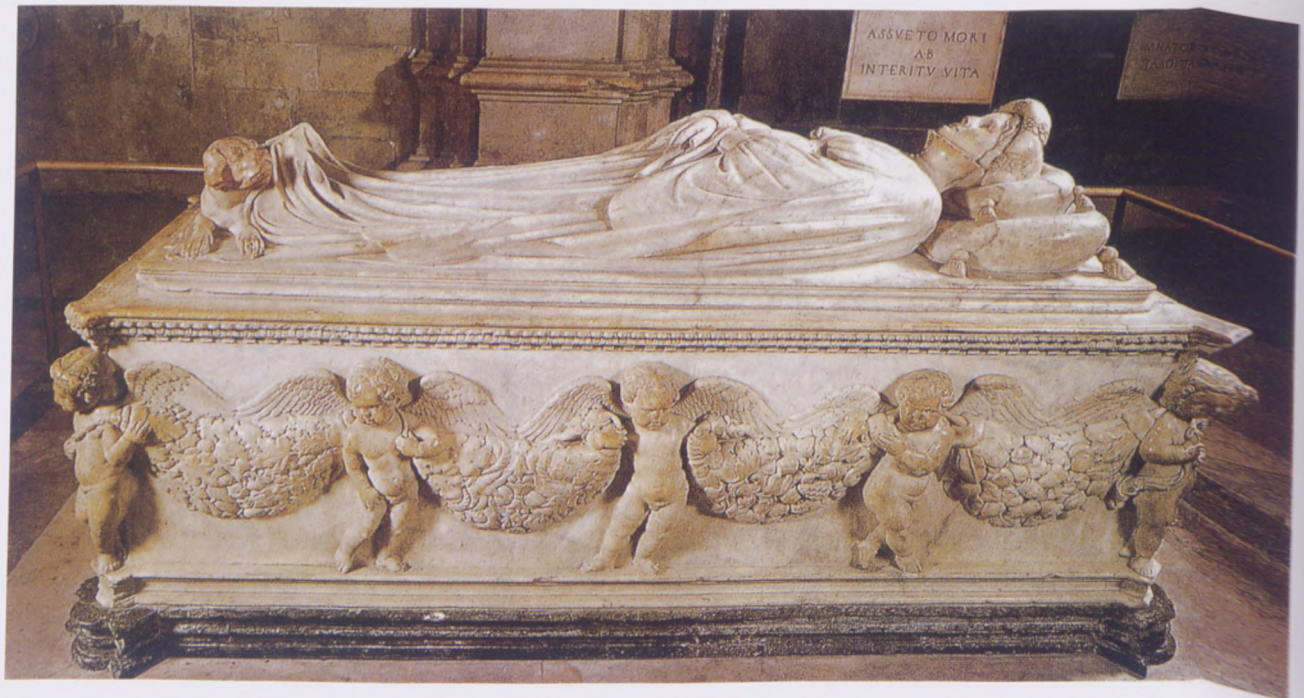
In fact, Ghiberti's actual contemporaries in Siena were nothing like those of his story. While he was at work on the north doors of Florence's baptistery, they were commissioning new sculptures for the very fountain on which, to follow Ghiberti, they had erected the fearful image of Venus. The best Siennese sculptor of the moment was Jacopo della Quercia (c. 1374–1438), a goldsmith who had entered the competition for Florence's baptistery doors in 1401, along with Ghiberti and Brunelleschi. After losing the competition to Ghiberti, Jacopo

spent several years working in Ferrara, to the north, though the Siennese probably knew him best from the tomb sculpture that Paolo Guinigi, the Lord of Lucca, had asked him to make of his wife, Ilaria del Carretto, after her death in 1405 (fig. 2.25). Originally produced for a monastery, the exquisite portrait presents Ilaria in courtly finery, her head cushioned on pillows, a dog at her feet. Jacopo's treatment combines a sense of volume comparable to the work of Donatello and Ghiberti with a delicacy of line that responded to Italian aristocratic taste for ornamental flourish and refined detail. The rest of the monument that we see today is a late nineteenth-century reconstruction, and the children bearing garlands that adorn the sarcophagus below – a self-conscious revival of the mythical figure of Eros (or Cupid, the god of love) in Roman funerary art – probably date to a later period than the effigy itself. Still, nothing suggests that the tomb ever included any explicit Christian symbolism, and the Guinigi coat of arms, added to one end of the sarcophagus, reminds viewers that houses of religion such as monasteries (or cathedrals) could be sites for dynastic patronage. Long after the statue was made, the Luccese moved it into their own cathedral, where it remains today; by then it was possible to ignore the monument's political function and to celebrate it as evidence of the city's historic artistic achievement.

The Siennese, in hiring Jacopo, probably did so in the recognition that no other native of the city – and few elsewhere – had established comparable skills in marble carving. In 1408, the same city council that Ghiberti had accused of expelling the earlier idolatrous sculp-

2.25

Jacopo della Quercia,
tomb of Ilaria del Carretto,
1406, Marble, length of
figure 6'10" (2.1 m). Lucca
Cathedral





ture commissioned Jacopo to replace the original Fonte Gaia fountain in the *campo*, or square, before the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, with a new group of reliefs and free-standing figures. Exposed for centuries to the elements, these have not survived well, but a drawing (fig. 2.26) of 1409 by Jacopo gives a sense of the way the fountain would originally have appeared, with Virtues flanking the Virgin and Child in fictive niches, mythical Roman figures standing on parapets (fig. 2.27), a wolf, a dog, and a monkey. Civic fountains in this period were rare, and the technological achievement of bringing fresh water into the middle of the town surpassed anything the Florentines had achieved. Few public sculptures of any kind, moreover, featured such non-Christian subjects as the two largely nude female figures.

These represented Rhea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus, and Acca Laurentia, the woman who raised them after Rhea's execution. (The wolf must be the animal that, to follow the myths, nursed the twins.) The ancient Roman historian Livy (59 BCE–CE 17) had represented Rhea as a descendant of the mythical Aeneas,

who, like Romulus and Remus, was also best known for his role in the founding of Rome. To place these statues before Siena's city hall was to assert Siena's connections with antiquity to the same degree that the Florentines, in tracing the origins of their baptistery, had asserted their own. The Sienese may even have aimed to bring Mars, god of war, into the dispute, since the Florentines claimed that their baptistery had been his temple and the Sienese saw Rhea as his daughter.

The Fonte Gaia, made for one of the city's great gathering places, addressed not just the local population but the larger community of Italian states. It shows us that just as the builders of Florence Cathedral looked north to Milan, so did the Florentine products have their own centrifugal effect, shaping the sensibilities of artists who subsequently went elsewhere, as well as the goals of rival towns. Jacopo may have lost the competition for the Florence baptistery doors, but in gaining employ from Florence's enemies, he could engage a similar set of concerns, even participate in Siena's contestation of Florence's proudest claims.

ABOVE LEFT

2.26

Jacopo della Quercia, drawing for the Fonte Gaia, 1409. Pen and ink on parchment, $7\frac{7}{8} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ " (19.9 x 21.4 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

ABOVE RIGHT

2.27

Jacopo della Quercia, *Rhea Silvia*, from the Fonte Gaia, c. 1410. Marble, height 5'4" (1.63 m.). Santa Maria Della Scala, Siena