2011

Priceless portals: the bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistery

Sarah P. Cambas

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/3932

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master’s Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
PRICELESS PORTALS: THE BRONZE DOORS OF THE FLORENTINE BAPTISTERY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in The School of Art

by
Sarah Portera Cambas
B.A., Rhodes College, 2008
May 2011
To
my terrific Husband,
for unwavering support, perpetual happiness, and selfless acts of kindness;
to my Mom and Dad, for teaching me patience in my passion and motivation;
and to my Mother-in-law and Father-in-law, for encouraging me, feeding me, and, above all,
for believing in me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to recognize and thank my incredible, one-of-a-kind husband for keeping me strong, sane, and unbelievably happy from the very beginning. I would also like to thank my Mom and Dad for steadfast support and encouragement from beginning to end. They were my rock throughout the entire process, and without them I would not be here today. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to Professor Mark Zucker, for his extraordinary words of wisdom, constructive criticisms, and remarkable stories. Additionally, I am very grateful for the advice and precious time devoted by my committee members, Professors Marchita Mauck and Matthew Savage, without whom I would not have been able to investigate the medieval portions of my research. Finally, I must offer my greatest appreciation to my fellow graduate colleague, Arrie Kain. Without her pleasant company, unparalleled friendship, and countless moments of laughter, I am certain I would not have made it through the eternal hours of driving. I will forever cherish our time together in one of two Volvos, and I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to meet such a remarkable person.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...........................................................................................................iii

ABSTRACT.............................................................................................................................v

CHAPTER
1. INTRODUCTION...............................................................................................................1
   History of the Florentine Baptistery................................................................. 1
   Medieval Bronze Doors.................................................................................... 3
   The Calimala Guild.............................................................................................. 9

2. THE SOUTH DOORS BY ANDREA PISANO.................................................................13

3. THE NORTH DOORS BY LORENZO GHIBERTI...................................................... 28

4. THE EAST DOORS BY LORENZO GHIBERTI............................................................ 44

BIBLIOGRAPHY....................................................................................................................62

VITA.......................................................................................................................................65
ABSTRACT

The Baptistery of San Giovanni represents a complex historical precedent for Italian Renaissance art. Located within the heart of Florence, across from the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in the Piazza del Duomo, the Baptistery holds three sets of gilded bronze doors spanning more than a century: the south set of doors by Andrea Pisano, and the north and east sets of doors by Lorenzo Ghiberti. The stylistic qualities and compositional sources of each door have been the subject of much discussion since their completion, and these are re-examined in this paper. Special attention is also devoted to the Arte di Calimala, the prominent Florentine guild that commissioned the doors and dictated repairs to and restorations of the Baptistery during the most notable period in its history. My thesis explores the significance of the patron for the meaning of the doors, as well as investigates the position of each door in its respective setting. By means of detailed analyses of comparable works and a historical interpretation of the individuals and organizations involved, I attempt to provide a fresh perspective on the sources and significance of the priceless bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistery.
Chapter 1—INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of this paper is to present a thorough examination of the three bronze portals of the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence. I will analyze each set of doors chronologically, beginning with the doors of Andrea Pisano, currently situated at the south side of the Baptistery. Considering the breadth of survey that will focus on the site across from the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, a brief historical synopsis of the building is essential to this discussion.

History of the Florentine Baptistery

The date of construction of the Baptistery of San Giovanni has been the subject of extensive discussion involving various scholars.¹ At any rate, it can be ascertained from documentary evidence that the Baptistery was in existence during the eleventh century, when the commissioning patron, the Calimala Guild of international merchants and cloth-finishers, was first organized and initiated a restoration of the structure.² The significance of this guild will be addressed in a later portion of this chapter. The Baptistery (fig. 1), dedicated to San Giovanni Battista, or St. John the Baptist, is a remarkable structure in its physical presence, as well as in its symbolic meaning. The octagonal shape of the building is enhanced by the geometrical patterning applied throughout, consisting of a simplified triumphal arch motif repeated on each side, and broken by a horizontal entablature above which rests a triple set of

¹ Franklin Toker, “A Baptistery below the Baptistery of Florence,” Art Bulletin 58, no. 2 (1976): 157, 2n, 5n convincingly argues in favor of a construction date between 500 and 900 CE for the first baptistery to occupy the site, and a later date, likely the mid- to late eleventh century, for the existing structure, which was presumably erected on the foundations of the original one. According to the fourteenth-century Cronica of Giovanni Villani, the building originated in ancient Roman times as a Temple of Mars. See also Cesare Fasola, The Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence and Its Marvelous Doors (Florence: ALF, 1948), 11.
² Edgcumbe Staley, The Guilds of Florence (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 518: “The restoration of the Baptistery of San Giovanni,—one of the most ancient churches in Florence, and originally a Temple of Mars,— was undertaken by the ‘Calimala’ Merchants, and a new building was completed in 1150, mainly at their expense.”
false windows. Corinthian capitals adorn columns on either side of each portal, a motif repeated with variations on the second story. The pattern creates a harmonious balance of vertical and horizontal elements, and an eight-sided pyramidal roof rises up from its top. Alternating white and green Prato marbles, a Romanesque design element that becomes a trademark of Florentine architecture,³ highlight the surface and reinforce its geometry. Notwithstanding the building’s medieval style and date of construction, its numerous classical elements evoke the ancient Roman temple that it may have replaced. Inside, mosaics dating from the mid-thirteenth to the early fourteenth century decorate the apse and ceiling. Following Byzantine and Venetian models, they exhibit conventional Italo-Byzantine figures in static poses, placed against flat, gold backgrounds. Even more than the exterior, however, the interior mimics classical architecture with fluted pilasters and columns beneath an imposing cornice.⁴ The floor has a marble inlay with complex geometric patterns dating to the early thirteenth century, some developing into zodiac motifs, suggesting an astronomical purpose behind the design.

Originally, an octagonal font stood in the middle of the Baptistery, the base of which is still

Figure 1. The Baptistery of San Giovanni, Florence, c.1059-1150

⁴ Ibid., 5.
visible, but it was removed in 1571 by Francesco I de’ Medici. Later additions to the exterior include sixteenth-century sculptures over each portal by Giovanni Francesco Rustici, Vincenzo Danti, and Andrea Sansovino.

The Baptistery provides a complex set of meanings that complements its imposing physical presence. One such meaning, of particular relevance for the bronze doors, centers on the building’s symbolism as a gateway to paradise or portal into heaven. According to Eloise Angiola, this symbolism is connected with the rite of baptism, the sacrament that washes away sin, admits the newly baptized into the Christian community, and symbolically opens the gateway to heaven for him or her.5 This concept is frequently seen in late medieval doors, which leads to the next section of this thesis.

Medieval Bronze Doors

The bronze doors of the Baptistery exhibit striking stylistic innovations that supersede all previous notions of portal design. It must be acknowledged, however, that they are also characterized by conventional motifs and compositional ideas inherited from the medieval past. Medieval doors were fashioned from a broad range of materials, including but not limited to bronze, brass, copper, and wood, and are considered to be adaptations of earlier Byzantine doors.6 Three major elements pervade the designs of Byzantine doors: hierarchy, symmetry, and the concept of the door as a gateway to paradise. These elements continue to play significant roles in the doors of the Florentine Baptistery.

---

6 Margaret Frazer, “Church Doors and the Gates of Paradise: Byzantine Doors in Italy,” Dumbarton Oaks Papers 27 (1973): 147-162. Frazer describes medieval Italian doors as Byzantine-inspired, or as Byzantine, freely interchanging the two terms: “They form,” she says, “the largest surviving body of Byzantine and Byzantine-inspired doors with figural decoration” (ibid., 147).
Since the sixteenth century, the epithet “Gates of Paradise” has been ascribed to Lorenzo Ghiberti’s East Doors of the Baptistery in Florence, allegedly nicknamed a century after their completion by Michelangelo Buonarroti. Whether or not Michelangelo really did give them their familiar nickname, this phraseology finds precedence in the Byzantine period. In general, cathedral doors serve a dual purpose: the entry of an individual into a sacred space both physically and spiritually. According to Margaret Frazer, sacred doors were created as a type of earthly substitute for the actual gates of paradise.7 The best-known bronze doors of the medieval period are those of St. Mary’s Cathedral in Hildesheim (fig. 2), commissioned by Bishop Bernward and carried out between 991 and 1022. Regarded as the first set of doors with

Figure 2. Bronze door of St. Mary’s Cathedral, Hildesheim, 991-1022

7 Ibid., 155.
historiated scenes since antiquity, they exhibit unprecedented three-dimensionality within a coherent narrative program. Each panel is cast as a single piece, displaying considerable skill and technological achievement, as well as stylistic creativity. The doors at Hildesheim focus on the fall and redemption of humanity, juxtaposing Old and New Testament scenes in narratives of Eve and the Virgin Mary on opposing leaves. This compositional arrangement makes it clear that the closing of the doors of paradise resulted from Eve’s original sin, while the Virgin Mary, the “new Eve,” represents the reopening of the doors of paradise as mankind is redeemed.

The doors of Monte Sant’Angelo in Italy (fig. 3), dedicated to St. Michael, have much in common with those of Hildesheim. Developed to illustrate a detailed narrative to spectators, twenty-four bronze panels depict acts from the Old and New Testaments, with St. Michael engaged in inspirational activities of the terrestrial world based on accounts in a series of encomia (written or spoken testimony). According to Frazer, the patron was restricted in the number of scenes available for portrayal, but he adamantly followed the encomia program. The panels include figures, architectural structures, and descriptive texts encouraging the viewer to model his or her life on that of St. Michael and thereby be guided into paradise. In essence, the doors exist as a conduit through which mortal and heaven are united, a recurring theme throughout medieval doors.

Byzantine doors predominantly follow a hierarchical scheme incorporating sacred figures, such as Christ, the Virgin, and saints in the uppermost registers; mortals, such as patrons and secular figures, in the middle registers; and animals, with or without vegetation, in the bottom registers. Hierarchical ordering from upper to lower registers is defined by David

---


9 As source for the doors, Frazer cites encomia from the sixth century written by Theodosius, Archbishop of Alexandria, and more complete examples from the ninth century by Pantaleon, chartophylax of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. See Frazer, “Church Doors and the Gates of Paradise,” 158.
Walsh as “cosmological hierarchy,” where each figure is part of a coherent iconographical system, its meaning defined according to its placement on the door.¹⁰

Figure 3. The bronze doors of Monte Sant’Angelo, Sanctuary of Michael, Monte Gargano, 1076

Most often inherent in the hierarchical approach is a balanced composition with symmetrical, or semi-symmetrical, parts. This intertwined system of hierarchy and symmetry provides an organized final product and clearly communicates the intended message to the viewer. The bronze doors of the Cathedral of Ravello, from 1179, are an example of such a combined arrangement (fig. 4). While the original sequence of panels on the doors at Ravello is unknown, the current organization may provide some understanding of the intended symmetry. At the summit of the door, Christ in Majesty appears seated on his throne within a mandorla in

the center of both the left and right leaves. Additionally, Christ is flanked on each leaf by split
panels of figures, each echoing the other in pose, size, and composition. Located at the highest
point on the door, Christ represents the beginning stage of cosmological hierarchy, with the
remainder of subjects subordinated to his position. In the next few registers, two narratives, the
*Deposition* and the *Harrowing of Hell*, are duplicated on the left and right leaves in the middle
columns. These scenes are exactly repeated from left to right leaf. Numerous seated saints flank
the central narratives, positioned in comparable frontal poses, with each attribute, be it a staff, a
scroll, or a cross, located towards the upper right of the panel.

![Figure 4. Barisanus of Trani, bronze doors at Cathedral of Ravello,
        top four registers of left and right valves, west portal, Ravello, 1179](image)

Registers further down display figures shooting bows and arrows, fighting, and on
horseback, the latter being organized on opposing valves with exactly symmetrical poses (fig. 5).
Some archers do not fit within the symmetrical system apparent throughout the door, which
may suggest reorganization or later additions to the door to supplement lost panels. The secular
activities of these figures confirm their lower placement on the door, appropriately below the
sacred subjects. Lastly, stylized vegetal and animal forms inhabit the lower two registers, clearly
subordinating them in the hierarchical system. Placed within a strict symmetrical order, these forms are the most ambiguous in meaning and purpose.

Figure 5. Detail of bronze doors at Cathedral of Ravello, central registers of left and right valves

Located in the borders surrounding each narrative scene is a geometrical pattern of looping, intersecting lines, recalling earlier Romanesque zoomorphic designs of metalwork and carving. It effortlessly extends into the right and left sides to create its own large central pattern of the same type, which develops into a wide border for the two door leaves. This effectively enhances the symmetrical ordering of the doors with a solid demonstration of repetitive patterning. Each space is utilized, with decorative patterns filling the negative spaces between the interlaced patterns, and with large, flowering, rounded and squared medallions breaking each panel section to create a dynamic texture of the surface. There is a sense of energy throughout the entire door, with no pause in movement from the bordering edges to the individual scenes. Analogous (though stylistically different) border decoration will become a prominent feature of Renaissance bronze doors, some of which also follow a similar pattern of symmetry and hierarchy. Undoubtedly, a systematic arrangement of compositional format pervades Medieval doors, thereby serving as precedent for the subsequent fourteenth and
fifteenth centuries. These basic concepts of design are manifested in the bronze doors of Andrea Pisano and Lorenzo Ghiberti.

The Calimala Guild

In the late Middle Ages, Florence witnessed the institution of a guild system that had originated with the “Corporations of Merchants and Artisans” in Rome. Called “colleges” or “schools,” these guild societies were professional institutions that provided training for men with similar occupations and interests. Eventually, guilds of all trades developed in Florence, including those of the bakers, tailors, doctors, stonemasons, smiths, shoemakers, and more. At the end of the thirteenth century, major and minor guilds were developing, as guilds of greater prestige and prosperity, including the Calimala, were distinguished from lesser ones. By the beginning of the fourteenth century, statutes were put in place to govern the leading organizations, which even called for a type of obligation towards patronage of religious monuments in the city. This obligation was inherent in the people and establishment of the city; according to Edgecumbe Staley, the “intimate union of religion and work was as natural as it was conventional . . . [and] manifested a sane view of the spiritual power in the republic of industry.” Thus, patronage was not merely recommended; it was intrinsic to the success of an organization within the flourishing city.

The Calimala Guild, or the Arte di Calimala, was one of the twelve greater guilds, or Arti Maggiori, and eventually rose to become the most powerful of them all. The name Calimala was adopted from that of the street on which its residences and offices were located, the Via di

12 Ibid., The Guilds of Florence, 517: “The Statutes of all the various Guilds in addition to a formal dedicatory preface, contain, in their opening entries, lists of pious-trusts undertaken by the Guilds with explicit directions how, where, and when, fitting observances are to be performed.”
13 Ibid., 517.
Calimala, whose name, in turn, derived from the Callis Maior (“Main Street”) of ancient Roman Florence. The guild’s activities involved the re-dressing and refinishing of foreign woven wool, in particular the weaving, cutting, folding, and dying of the cloth, which became a staple industry in Florence. Importation of finished fabrics from countries such as Spain and England would not have been profitable, but the Florentine merchants created a monopoly by importing the coarsely worked fabrics of Flanders, Holland, and Brabant. By shearing off outside layers, the initial rough quality of the wool was worked into a smooth, fine cloth that might then be manipulated into a finer state.\footnote{14}{See E. Dixon, “The Florentine Wool Trades in the Middle Ages: A Bibliographical Note,” \textit{Transactions of the Royal Historical Society} 12 (1898): 151-179.} Owing to the guild’s success in the woolen industry, it acquired great prestige, eventually placing its members in positions of influence in the Florentine commune.\footnote{15}{Between 1204 and 1216, Calimala guild members were involved in foreign policy of the commune, signing treaties with neighboring cities. See Staley, \textit{The Guilds of Florence}, 109.} Additionally, by the end of the thirteenth century, the guild had become chief controller of the wool trade across most of Europe. With power and prestige came financial success, and the guild was an active participant in the building and rebuilding of its native city, taking the lead in initiating important construction projects.\footnote{16}{Ibid, 517.} Moreover, the immense wealth introduced to Florence by the Arte di Calimala was advantageous for the entire community, providing funds for various public projects and a measure of prestige to otherwise insignificant guilds.\footnote{17}{Further details on the subject can be found in Dixon, “The Florentine Wool Trades in the Middle Ages,” 169.}

This brings us back to the medieval restoration of the original Baptistery and its subsequent projects, primarily at the guild’s expense. Twelfth-century documents link the Arte di Calimala with the upkeep and decoration of the Baptistery during this period, duties delegated to the guild by the commune and described as a sort of privilege.\footnote{18}{For further examination, see ibid., 161.} The expanding

\[\text{\footnotesize\textbf{Note:}}\]
relationship of the guild to the ruling bodies in Florence established a type of guild republicanism, founded on Florentine principles of humanism. The guilds became self-governing bodies devoted to corporate growth and, eventually, full participants in the operations of the city. By 1292, a political entity known as the Priors of the Guilds was created, officially merging the guilds with the commune and, ultimately, sharing with the commune the major responsibilities of governing the city.

In 1292, separate documents indicate the role of the guild in the repair and completion of the Baptistery. This included replacing old columns and worn stonework with brilliant marbles from the East, the costs of which were significantly higher than those of local stones available in the surrounding Tuscan region. By 1338, the Calimala guild had some twenty warehouses in the city filled with imported fabric exceeding 300,000 florins in value, according to Villani’s chronicle, an astronomical sum. Two years prior to this date, the bronze doors by Andrea Pisano were installed on the Baptistery—fundamental evidence of the guild’s lavish patronage, which only increased in the following century with the addition of Ghiberti’s two sets of doors. The Baptistery, then, developed over a thousand-year period from a center of religious life in Early Christian Florence to a cornerstone of Renaissance artistic excellence and achievement.

When Ghiberti’s second set of doors was installed on the Baptistery in 1452, the Calimala Guild was as prosperous as it had ever been. Shortly thereafter, however, the English Parliament, during the reign of Henry VII, passed a law prohibiting the export of unshorn cloths to foreign countries. Neighboring countries soon followed suit. Over the course of the

20 For further explanation, see ibid., 58.
following century, the Florentine economy suffered badly from these actions, and the fortunes of the Calimala guild were on the wane. Finally, after Grand Duke Cosimo de’ Medici issued an order forbidding the importation of foreign cloth, the guild suffered its demise.\textsuperscript{23} After nearly five hundred years of commercial, social, and political success, the Calimala guild came to an undramatic end. During its heyday, however, it was responsible for bringing into existence three of the most significant monuments of Florentine craftsmanship: the priceless portals of the Baptistery, to which the remainder of this thesis will be devoted.

\textsuperscript{23} Staley, \textit{The Guilds of Florence}, 137-8.
Chapter 2—THE SOUTH DOORS BY ANDREA PISANO

In the year 1330, when Florence was at the height of her economic power, Andrea Pisano began work on a pair of bronze doors for the east portal of the Baptistery of San Giovanni (fig. 6).24 Currently situated at the south side of the building, these doors were commissioned by the Arte di Calimala, after a decision was made in 1329 to replace a pre-existing wooden set.25 By the early thirteenth century, nearby cities such as Pisa, Lucca, and Siena all boasted bronze doors, yet Florence still remained without such a conspicuous display of wealth and skill. In addition to the wooden doors at the Baptistery, the Cathedral had doors lacking any sculptural ornament, and as Clark appropriately suggests, this state of affairs must have been unacceptable for the ruling Florentine body.26 Calimala documents from 1329 describe the planning process by means of which the guild endeavored to find the best available designer and bronze caster for the new set of Baptistery doors.27 According to these documents, the guild sent a representative, a certain Piero di Iacopo, to study the doors of the Cathedral of Pisa, and then to Venice, a city famous for its bronze and metalwork casting, to seek out a craftsmen for casting the doors in metallo o ottone (“metal or brass”).28 Clearly, the guild wished to

24 Andrea’s doors were originally installed on the east side of the Baptistery, facing the Cathedral. However, upon completion of Lorenzo Ghiberti’s first set of doors, Andrea’s were moved to the south, where they remain today, and Ghiberti’s replaced them on the east. In 1452, the completion of Ghiberti’s second set of doors, the so-called Gates of Paradise, then forced the relocation of his first set to the north portal; since then, the Gates of Paradise have occupied the eastern location. This constant shifting of locations obviously reflects a desire to place the most recently completed set of doors at the most privileged position on the building.  
25 In 1322, it was agreed by the city fathers that the doors should be more embellished, at which point they elected to cover them with bronze. In 1329, however, before this action was carried out, the decision was made to replace them with full bronze doors. For a complete description of these circumstances, see Kenneth Clark, The Florence Baptistery Doors (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 7-24.  
26 Ibid., 7.  
27 The documents are quoted in modernized language by Anita F. Moskowitz, The Sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 198: “Si delibera che le porte della chiesa di S. Giovanni si faccino di metallo o ottone, più belle che si può, e che Piero d’Iacopo vadia a Pisa a vedere quelle che sono in detta città e le ritragga, e dipoi vadia a Venezia a cercare di maestro che le faccia, e trovandolo, che lui deva esser il maestro a lavorare la forma di detta porta di metallo etc.”  
28 In fact, Andrea’s doors are made of a brass alloy consisting of 76% copper, 22% zinc, and 2% tin; ibid., 177.
Figure 6. Andrea Pisano, bronze doors of the Baptistery of San Giovanni, South Portal, Florence, 1330-36
display its wealth and prestige by sponsoring the best that art and craftsmanship could devise.29 The doors of the Cathedral of Pisa (fig. 7) display some of the most technically advanced bronze casting of the second half of the twelfth century, but by 1330 they were woefully outmoded in style. Following the conventional model of medieval bronze doors, they establish a sense of symmetry with corresponding panels on either valve, particularly in the palm trees and figures in the upper and lowermost rectangular registers. The doors include twenty narrative panels between these registers, which have little symmetrical correlation of the kind previously seen in

![Figure 7. Bonanno Pisano, doors for the Portal of San Ranieri, Pisa Cathedral, Pisa, c. 1185](image)

the door at Monte Sant’Angelo. Nor is it clear that a clear system of hierarchy is involved. Nevertheless, the doors provided a precedent of sorts for Andrea Pisano’s design. In view of the Calimala’s documented interest in the doors of Pisa Cathedral, not to mention Andrea’s own Pisan background, the circumstance is hardly surprising.

In January of 1330, Andrea Pisano, named *maestro delle porte* in the pertinent document, began working on the doors. Born in Pontedera, a small town under the control of Pisa, Andrea was trained as a goldsmith and sculptor, likely by the Pistoian goldsmith Andrea di Jacopo d’Ognabene. An inscription on the upper edge of the framework of the doors designates his home town as Pisa, as well as giving the date of the commission: ANDREAS : VGOLINI : NINI : DE : PISIS : ME : FECIT : A : D : M:CCC:XXX (fig. 8). The doors were in the process of design for approximately one year and nine months, at which point the bronze casting team began the lengthy process of casting. After nearly six years of finishing work, the doors were installed on June 20, 1336, in time for the festival of San Giovanni, celebrated annually on June 24th. Andrea Pisano then moved across the piazza to work on the Campanile, originally begun by Giotto and continued by Andrea after his Giotto’s death in 1337.

Andrea Pisano’s bronze doors demonstrate a significant change from previous designs in their harmonious balance of line and form, combined with a highly sophisticated technique of metalworking. They are composed of two leaves of vertical columns divided into seven rows, for

---

31 For a more complete analysis of the documentation and specific dates and times of production, see ibid., 7-8.
32 Giotto was *capomaestro* of the Cathedral of Florence from 1334-1337, a role subsequently assumed by Andrea. The two artists presumably worked together on various projects during their time together at the Cathedral and Baptistery.
a grand total of twenty-eight scenes, with the top twenty panels displaying narratives of the life of St. John the Baptist, while the lower two horizontal rows depict enthroned Virtues. The doors are meant to be read in the manner of a book—from left to right and top to bottom down the left valve, and then from left to right and top to bottom on the right—an arrangement suggesting that the valves were frequently kept open. The scenes are loosely grouped according to their settings, with five taking place in landscapes clustered together in the middle registers of the left valve, and the remaining scenes, predominantly architectural, positioned everywhere else.

As previously noted, the doors were originally situated on the east side of the Baptistery, facing the Cathedral. On certain liturgical occasions, the doors of both buildings were opened and a procession of catechumens, defined as Christian converts under instruction before baptism, would pass from the Cathedral to the Baptistery to be baptized.33 This demonstrates an important purpose of the commission and leads to the next topic of discussion, the subject of the door narratives. The theme of the twenty narrative panels is the life of St. John the Baptist, the patron of all baptisteries and, just as importantly, the patron saint of Florence. The subjects comprise all of the major Gospel stories that include the Baptist and create a sense of narrative tension from beginning to end. Andrea organized the panels according to a methodical system of narrative composition, focusing on the two principal aspects of St. John’s life: as prophet and as martyr. The left valve of the door includes episodes pertaining to the preaching and public life of St. John, while the right valve focuses on scenes of his martyrdom and the subsequent events of his life, appropriately balancing the two subjects between two door valves.

Each story is enclosed within a quatrefoil frame, a four-leaf-clover-like form that originated in French architectural decoration during the first half of the thirteenth century (e.g.,

at Amiens Cathedral, 1222-35) and subsequently evolved into a more complex shape, where each lobe alternates with the angle of a square (e.g., at Noyon Cathedral, ca. 1240).34 Andrea’s quatrefoils belong to the latter type, which became fashionable in Italy after appearing in the borders of Giotto’s frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel (ca. 1305).35 However, in contrast to Giotto’s quatrefoils, which enclose large half-length figures of saints, Andrea’s surround narrative scenes with a number of small-scale, full-length figures. Except for the scenes that take place in landscapes, Andrea adopted a standardized composition, usually featuring some sort of architectural structure enclosing a small group of figures, which juts out in front of a solid, blank, impenetrable background. In addition, the architectural structures usually rest upon horizontal platforms or ledges that extend across the entire width of the quatrefoil and serve as supports for the figures.

Consistently applied throughout the panels, these principles are exemplified in the scene of *Salome Presenting the Baptist’s Head to Herodias* (fig. 9). Here Andrea played with the notion of the platform as a three-dimensional entity by designing Salome’s drapery so that it overlaps the horizontal ledge. The drapery itself is distinctive in style, as can also be seen in the panels representing *The Feast of Herod* (fig. 10), *Zacharias Stricken Dumb, Confronting People* (fig. 11), and *The Baptist Carried to the Tomb* (fig. 12). It is characterized by restrained, curvilinear patterns of folds that establish a rhythm of movement from the figures to the surrounding quatrefoils, which seem to mimic not only the flowing rhythms of the drapery, but also the slightly curving figures themselves. All of this can be closely paralleled in contemporary French Gothic art: in the famous statue of the *Virgin of Paris*, for example, or the miniature grisaille figures in Jean Pucelle’s *Hours of Jeanne d’Evreux* (1325-28). The constant flow and movement of the drapery

34 Moskowitz, *The Sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano*, 141.
35 For illustrations, see Giuseppe Basile, *Giotto: The Arena Chapel Frescoes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), pls. 362-63 and 365-67. It may be noted that Giotto also used the simpler four-lobed form elsewhere in the Scrovegni Chapel; see illustrations in ibid., pls. 364 and 368-75.
implies a weighty presence of the figures, even varying from one figure to the next to suggest a sense of realism. For example, Herodias (in *Salome Presenting the Baptist’s Head*) is far more grounded, seated high up on the throne, with drapery weighing the body down on all sides and gathering at the base, according to gravitational laws. In addition, the shift in weights may
imply the significance of one figure over another and concurrently leads the eye from one scene to the next. This concept, of course, relies on the location of each panel. For instance, *Salome Presenting* is appropriately placed on the far right of the right-hand valve of the doors to signify the end of the sequence, emphasized by the vertical architectural structure rising on the right, as well as the weighty figure of Herodias. These two visual cues serve to impede the eye in its natural desire to move to the next narrative.

In some respects, the scene to its left, *The Feast of Herod* (fig. 10), is more unusual in design. Here Andrea did away with the architecture altogether. Instead, he suggested an interior space by employing what may be called a curtain-rod motif (also used in the nearby *Dance of Salome*, which has the same setting), as a curtain behind the table hangs from a rod that we imagine to be fastened to a wall directly behind it. In so doing, he created an early example of what Erwin Panofsky dubbed an “interior by implication,” where the presence of an interior space is merely “implied” by an architectural component and/or a piece of furniture. The scene also features other niceties of design. Here and elsewhere among the panels of the doors, including the scenes of *Salome Presenting* (fig. 9), *Zacharias Stricken Dumb* (fig. 11), and *The Baptist Carried to the Tomb* (fig. 12), we note how the compositions adhere to an implied rectangular frame within the quatrefoil, which is established by the inward-pointing angles of the multi-lobed framework. These points, then, occasionally become visual cues to isolate or emphasize key elements in the scene, as witnessed in the presentation of John’s head in the *Feast of Herod*, where two intruding points serve to frame the kneeling figure and help to emphasize the head of John the Baptist in his hands.

37 Andrea’s devotion to “invisible” rectangular frames has been suggested as a natural reaction to his transformation of Giotto’s rectangular painted scenes into sculptural equivalents with quatrefoil frames. For additional commentary, see Moskowitz, *The Sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano*, 18-19.
In general, Andrea’s designs are characterized by clarity and simplicity. In order to make the scenes easily legible, he focused on a small number of figures in simplified settings, while eliminating extraneous details. Such narrative simplification recalls the style of Giotto. While the content of the scenes probably stemmed from several different literary accounts—Jacopo de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*, the Pseudo-Bonaventura’s *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, and an anonymous *Vita of St. John the Baptist*—their style is fundamentally Giottesque. Especially relevant were Giotto’s recently completed frescoes in the Peruzzi Chapel at Santa Croce (1320s), some of which also depict scenes from the life of John the Baptist. Most striking, perhaps, are the compositional relationships between Andrea’s *Birth and Naming of the Baptist* (figs. 13 and 14) with Giotto’s fresco depicting the same two subjects (fig. 15). In fact, similarities to Giotto’s frescoes can be discovered in almost every panel on the doors, excluding the scenes of *Zacharias Stricken Dumb* and *The Baptist Carried to the Tomb*, neither of which has a known precedent.

Although Andrea’s panels do certainly recall Giotto’s frescoes in the Peruzzi Chapel, I believe that the latter’s frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua can also be considered a viable source for Andrea, although their subject matter is completely unrelated, and Andrea is unlikely to have known them first-hand. In each of the 20 narrative reliefs, Andrea created what seem to be conscious participants in the events they are enacting—figures that are deeply absorbed in the action of their particular scene. Andrea communicated effectively through a variety of facial expressions, as well as through gestures and poses, which he varied from one figure to the next according to his or her significance in the narrative. One especially moving

38 Ibid., 18-19.
39 For an extended discussion of these resemblances, see Falk and Lányi, “The Genesis of Andrea Pisano’s Bronze Doors,” 132-53; less convincingly, Falk and Lányi also suggest the Italo-Byzantine mosaics on the interior of the Baptistery as sources for Andrea’s designs.
40 Moskowitz, *The Sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano*, [17], suggests that Andrea turned directly to the Gospel account of Luke I: 11-22 to develop these images.
example is the *Burial of St. John* (fig. 16), where the massive, heavily draped figures bend down in sorrow over the body of the saint, communicating a sense of despair through their poses and expressions. A similar sensibility appears in Giotto’s celebrated *Lamentation* in the Scrovegni Chapel (fig. 17), with its weighty, grief-stricken mourners reacting to the death of Christ. In addition, Andrea’s *Visitation* (fig. 18) vividly recalls Giotto’s *Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate* (fig. 19). The difference in subject matter notwithstanding, an obvious relationship
exists in the similarly composed figures embracing one another in front of a round-arched structure to the right, which angles into space in identical fashion. In both cases, moreover, the curving form of the figural group is echoed by the arch, or vice versa.
There is, of course, no problem with the hypothesis that Andrea studied Giotto’s frescoes in the Peruzzi Chapel, since Santa Croce is only a ten-minute walk from the Baptistery. Could he, however, also have studied Giotto’s frescoes during a hypothetical sojourn in Padua? Of course it is possible that he did, although I have already noted the unlikelihood of such a scenario, given the substantial distance that separates Florence from Padua, as well as the need to cross the Apennine Mountains between the two cities. Instead of postulating an otherwise undocumented trip to northern Italy, I think it more likely that Giotto’s designs were made known to Andrea through the medium of drawings on paper or parchment. Although no contemporary drawings after Giotto’s Paduan frescoes are extant, a small number of highly finished drawings from the first half of the Trecento do exist. There is, for example, a well-known sheet in the Louvre depicting the *Presentation of the Virgin*, by or after Taddeo Gaddi, which corresponds to Taddeo’s fresco in the Baroncelli Chapel of Santa Croce (ca. 1328-30). Even more to the point is a large (21.5 x 33.4 cm.) pen on parchment drawing of the *Visitation*, now in the Uffizi, by a follower of Giotto (fig. 20), which clearly derives from a Giottesque fresco in the Lower Church of San Francesco at Assisi (fig. 21). Although there is no direct relationship between this composition and that of Andrea’s *Visitation* on the Baptistery doors, the existence of such a drawing is noteworthy. I suggest that others of the same type, preserving entire compositions from the Scrovegni Chapel, were brought back to Florence by Giotto and shared with Andrea Pisano.

To conclude this chapter, we turn briefly to a set of panels that has thus far been ignored: the eight Virtues that occupy the two lowermost registers of the doors (figs. 6 and 22).

---

41 Maria Fossi Todorow, *I Disegni dei maestri: l’Italia dalle origini a Pisanello* (Milan: Fratelli Fabbri, 1970), pl. IV; ibid., 81, Fossi Todorow calls it a preparatory study for the fresco.
42 Ibid., 64, fig. 3, and 87, with an attribution to an anonymous Florentine.
The Virtues are customarily presented in a group of seven, which in turn is usually divided into a group of four Cardinal Virtues (Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, and Prudence) and a group of three Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity). In order to accommodate a format requiring eight figures, however, Andrea provided an additional Virtue, that of Humility.

Located at the bottom two registers of the doors, the Virtues serve as a physical and spiritual foundation for the narrative scenes situated above, and appropriately so, since they allude to the ideals by which John the Baptist was thought to have lived his life. These graceful but
monumental figures are organized in a slight but noticeable symmetrical arrangement, with those at both ends facing inward. By and large, their iconography is conventional. They are seated female figures, labeled with their names, and carrying standard attributes: Faith, for example, holds a cross and a chalice, Fortitude a mace and a shield, Justice a sword and scales. One interesting iconographic element that usually goes unnoticed is the hexagonal haloes adorning their heads, which seem all the more unusual in that haloes are largely absent from the twenty narrative scenes. Although the Scrovegni Chapel also includes a cycle of Virtues, Giotto’s personifications are characterized quite differently from Andrea’s, and none of them is haloed. Giotto, then, did not serve as Andrea’s source of inspiration, but there is no need to suppose that Andrea needed one, either for the figures in general or their haloes. As Mark Zucker has shown, polygonal haloes are standard attributes of the Virtues. Although, Zucker observes, “instances of the halo-less variety are numerous, . . . the preponderance of cases where the principle of polygonal shape does pertain is impressive, and we find it applied consistently in Italian cycles of Virtues—especially, but by no means exclusively, in Florence—from Andrea Pisano to Andrea del Sarto.”

When Andrea Pisano’s bronze gates were installed in the portal facing the Cathedral in 1336, ordinary Florentine citizens, no less than members of the Calimala Guild, would have had good reason to feel proud. After all, the new doors arguably represented the greatest sculptural project in the history of the city, and there must have been optimistic expectations that such magnificence would continue unabated. No one could have predicted that the opposite would transpire, as Florence in the 1340s was ravaged by a series of calamities: bank and crop failures, famines, political unrest, and, worst of all, the arrival of the Black Death

---

44 Ibid., 63. Zucker lists no fewer than 27 examples in Appendix I, 69-70; it may or may not be significant that the only two examples earlier than Andrea’s are in paintings by followers of Giotto.
toward the end of the decade—the great plague that would carry off almost one half of the city’s population and put an end to grandiose artistic projects like that of the Baptistery doors. To be sure, large-scale sculptural projects continued to be produced sporadically, Orcagna’s huge marble tabernacle in Orsanmichele (ca. 1355-59) being the most conspicuous example. There were, however, no expensive projects in bronze for the rest of the Trecento in Florence, and no projects of any kind at all at the Baptistery. The next chapter in the artistic history of the Baptistery, as well as the next chapter in the history of Florentine bronze sculpture, would have to await the opening years of the fifteenth century.
Chapter 3—THE NORTH DOORS BY LORENZO Ghiberti

In the winter of 1400-01, the Arte di Calimala announced a competition for the design of a second set of Baptistery doors in fulfillment of a project begun nearly eighty years earlier with Andrea Pisano’s bronze doors. The original intention of the guild was to embellish the two remaining portals in a manner analogous to the first. Examination of the North Doors (fig. 23), which were executed by Lorenzo Ghiberti between 1403 and 1424, demonstrate the degree to which Ghiberti adhered to the program established by his fourteenth-century predecessor. However, comparison of the two sets of doors also reveals the ways in which he departed from the format of Andrea Pisano’s doors and modified the style of the individual panels.

Lorenzo di Bartoluccio Ghiberti (1378-1455) was born in Florence and trained as a goldsmith, but of course he is principally known as a sculptor in bronze. In addition, he was also the author of a chronicle called I Commentarii (The Commentaries), which includes texts about artists of the ancient world, a capsule history of Italian art of the fourteenth century, and, most importantly, Ghiberti’s own autobiography, the first ever written by any artist. Here he provides a detailed and often pretentious review of his career, the majority of which he spent in his native town. Here he was responsible for three monumental bronze figures at Orsanmichele, most notably the statues of St. John the Baptist for the Calimala (fig. 24) and

---

45 Documents of 1338-39 include references to preparatory drawings for at least one additional door to accompany Andrea’s door. Although the calamities described at the end of the preceding chapter put a halt to these plans, they were revived at the end of the fourteenth century and remained in effect even in the face of another plague, which killed some 30,000 Florentines in the summer of 1400. For a summary of this situation, including references to relevant documents, see Richard Krautheimer, in collaboration with Trude Krautheimer-Hess, Lorenzo Ghiberti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956; second printing, with corrections and a new preface, 1970), 33-34.

46 For English translations of the autobiographical portion of the Commentarii, see ibid., 12-15; or, with the addition of Ghiberti’s capsule biographies of other Italian artists, Creighton E. Gilbert, Italian Art, 1400-1500: Sources and Documents (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 75-88.
Figure 23. Lorenzo Ghiberti, bronze doors of the
Baptistery of San Giovanni, North Portal,
Florence, 1403-1424
St. Matthew for the prominent Cambio Guild of bankers and money changers. These achievements notwithstanding, Ghiberti’s contemporary and posthumous reputation rests mainly on his two sets of bronze doors.

Figure 24. Ghiberti, St. John the Baptist, 1412-16, Orsanmichele

According to Ghiberti’s own testimony, the Baptistery competition included seven artists in the final stages, all of whom were from the region of Tuscany: Simone da Colle, Niccolò di Luca Spinelli, Francesco di Valdambrino, Niccolò di Piero Lamberti, Jacopo della Quercia, Filippo Brunelleschi, and the ultimate victor, Lorenzo Ghiberti himself. The delegated task was the completion of a bronze relief depicting the Sacrifice of Isaac, a subject chosen to best display each artist’s skill. As Vasari put it some 150 years later, each panel would have to include “scenery, nudes, draped figures and animals and the use of full, half and shallow relief.”47 The only surviving competition panels are those of Ghiberti and Brunelleschi, which have been

47 Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 39, also noting that a reliable earlier source, the so-called Anonimo Magliabechiano, refers to “many figures, old and young, animals, mountains and trees.”
subjects of much scholarly discussion, debate over their relative merits, and various conjectures as to why Ghiberti was ultimately chosen over Brunelleschi. Brunelleschi separated the narrative into two horizontal sections, the lower register subordinated to the larger upper tier (fig. 25). The angel rushes in from the top left lobe and abruptly halts Abraham’s sacrifice of his Son. Forcibly, and somewhat awkwardly, pushed down upon the foreshortened altar, Isaac conveys a sense of fragility and horror through his pose and expression. The nearby ram bends its neck sharply away from the scene, teetering on the undersized mountainside. In the bottom register, beneath the dramatic event, two oblivious servants jut out from the picture plane, flanking the figure of an ass that stretches its neck to drink from a spring. Brunelleschi covered the surface with figures and objects, but gave little sense of recession into space. Additionally, almost every figure was conceived in the round, requiring a great deal of bronze, and had to be attached to the background with metal pegs. Technically, therefore, Brunelleschi’s relief was rather crude, as well as being unreasonably expensive.

Figure 25. Brunelleschi, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, competition panel, 1401
Ghiberti’s relief (fig. 26), on the other hand, utilizes far less bronze. The entire panel was cast in one complete piece, except for the figure of Isaac, Abraham’s hand, and a small piece of rock, creating a strong yet lightweight final product. In addition, Ghiberti gave far more attention to the finishing of the bronze surface, even differentiating wrinkles on a figure’s face from smooth skin. Here in his earliest work, he showed his technical proficiency and his ability to combine figures, objects, animals, and landscape in a unified setting. Rather than dividing the panel horizontally, as Brunelleschi did, Ghiberti composed the scene with a more subtle and spatially convincing diagonal division. In contrast to his adversary, he chose to represent the moment before the angel stops Abraham, rather than showing the action itself. This enhances the tension in the narrative, as the viewer anticipates the impending climax. Ghiberti devoted great care to each individual figure, such as the elegant nude Isaac, in his classically inspired, idealized form, so different in style from Brunelleschi’s scrawny naked boy. Abraham’s drapery flutters gracefully above his raised right arm, and the curve of his body, accompanied by swinging folds of drapery, creates a fluid rhythm that remains a hallmark of Ghiberti’s style.

Figure 26. Ghiberti, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, competition panel, 1401
throughout his career. The rocky landscape leads the eye from the upper left, where the ram rests comfortably at the top of the mountain, down to the bottom right, where the base of the altar, decorated with classical motifs, sits atop a piece of drapery (Isaac’s discarded robe) enriched with undulating, curvilinear folds. Finally, the two servants at the left are skillfully integrated into the overall design; though separated from the main event, they seem to comment or reflect upon it by their gestures and facial expressions.

Between the end of the competition and the start of the project in 1403, it was decided that the new set of bronze doors would grace the eastern portal, facing the Cathedral, thereby necessitating the relocation Andrea’s doors from the east to their current location on the south side of the building. It may be recalled that in their original position, Andrea’s doors were likely kept open to accommodate processions leading from the Cathedral to the Baptistery; thus it was only logical that their narratives were arranged to be read from top to bottom on the left, and again from top to bottom on the right. Once Andrea’s doors were moved to the south portal, however, this arrangement no longer had a functional purpose. Oddly enough, the arrangement of panels on Ghiberti’s doors presupposes a normal state of closure, since the narratives are read from left to right across both valves, beginning at lower left (on the third register down from the bottom) with the Annunciation (fig. 27). The viewer is then required to read the scenes from this point to the right, across both valves, moving upward from row to row, and ending at the extreme right top panel with the Pentecost (fig. 28). An advantage of this sequence is that the viewer begins the first scene at eye level—near the very place, in fact, where Ghiberti placed his self-portrait (fig. 29) and his signature: \textit{OPVS · LAVRENTII · FLORENTINI ·} (fig. 30). Nevertheless, the shift in sequence raises the question of whether the doors were normally kept open or closed. Owing to lack of evidence, the question remains unanswerable, though we may speculate that the traditional use of the eastern portal for the
symbolic entering and leaving of the Baptistery may have decreased in the early fifteenth century, or perhaps was switched to a different portal.

Figure 27. Annunciation, North Doors

Figure 28. Pentecost, North Doors

Figure 29. Ghiberti’s Self-Portrait, North Doors

Figure 30. Ghiberti’s Signature, North Doors
Although the North Doors were originally intended to portray stories from the Old Testament—indeed, the Sacrifice of Isaac panel was originally part of the program—the theme was changed to the New Testament when the project actually began. Likely in response to stipulations of the Arte di Calimala, the format of Ghiberti’s doors parallels that of Andrea Pisano’s. Both doors include twenty-eight quatrefoil panels. The top five rows of Andrea’s consist of twenty sequential narratives representing the life of John the Baptist; on Ghiberti’s, they show key episodes in the life of Christ. In both cases, these scenes are placed above two rows of seated figures: eight Virtues on the bottom two registers of the South Doors; the four Evangelists and the four Fathers or Doctors of the Church on the North Doors.

Border decoration has become richer and more elaborate on Ghiberti’s doors. Andrea employed rows of static, repetitious geometrical forms, punctuated by lion’s heads in each corner. Ghiberti substituted dense strips of naturalistic leaves, plants, insects, snails, and amphibians, punctuated in the corners by 28 fist-sized heads of youthful and aging figures emerging from miniature quatrefoils. Although these figures cannot be identified, they are usually assumed to represent prophets, an assumption that may be untenable because of the sheer number of them, as well as the fact that they include the aforementioned portrait of the artist himself (fig. 29). Whatever or whoever they represent, each head is different from the others, each twists and turns in a different direction, and some even seem to look in acknowledgement toward an adjacent scene. The surrounding outer jamb, finally, is covered with graceful, highly naturalistic foliage of flowers and plants, interspersed with a number of animals (fig. 31). As Krautheimer showed, precedents for Ghiberti’s borders of flora and fauna can be found in French Gothic architectural sculpture (carved capitals and string courses), as

48 Ghiberti himself refers only to “a great number of human heads” in his Commentarii; Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 13.
well as the marginal decoration of French and Lombard manuscripts (fig. 32). Later in this chapter, it will also be suggested that French Gothic manuscript illumination may also have been instrumental in Ghiberti’s adoption of the so-called International Gothic style, a style of which he and Lorenzo Monaco were the major exponents in early fifteenth-century Florence.

Figure 31. Ghiberti, Outer Frame, North Doors, 1400-1424

Although Ghiberti followed Andrea in framing his reliefs with Gothic quatrefoils, he displayed a new sensibility in dealing with the quatrefoils in relationship to the figures contained within them. While Andrea regularly utilized the angles of the quatrefoil as a means to highlight meaningful details of various scenes, he generally failed to take account of the framework in designing the scenes as a whole. Rather, as we have seen, his compositions adhere to an implied (or “invisible”) rectangular frame within the quatrefoil. Ghiberti, on the other hand, not only took advantage of both the angles and the lobes of the quatrefoil, turning them into key

49 Ibid., 61.
elements in his designs; he also used them to enhance aspects of the stories themselves. In *The Crucifixion* (fig. 33), for example, he carefully positioned the top of the cross in the uppermost triangle of the quatrefoil and placed the horizontal cross-beam tangent to the points. Christ’s body hangs heavily from the cross in response to gravity; his head is fully three-dimensional and hangs forward, pulling away from the surface. Grief-stricken angels on either side of Christ react to his death, the angel to the right tearing his clothes from his body in a traditional gesture of grief and mourning. The rounded lobes of the upper quatrefoil continue the curvature of the angels’ bodies and echo the curvature of Christ’s arms. Seated on the rocks below, the mourning figures of Mary and John mimic the flanking lobes in their arching backs and curvilinear draperies. Ghiberti followed a similar pattern in *The Resurrection* (fig. 34), where Christ’s head fits into the upper triangle, trees and shrubbery fit into the upper lobes, and the figures below are artfully adapted to the surrounding framework. Although this sort of visual thinking plays little or no role in Andrea’s doors, we should nevertheless bear in mind that both artists took essentially the same approach to the medium of relief sculpture, conceiving of the background as a solid, opaque surface in front of which figures and elements of landscape or
architecture project. Three-dimensionality of form is literally three-dimensional; little or no attention is paid to space *per se*, and there is seldom if ever any sense of looking through the frames as though they were windows, a hallmark of Renaissance design.

The way in which Ghiberti adapted his images to their quatrefoil frames is not unique in early Quattrocento Florentine art. Lorenzo Monaco, his counterpart in painting, used similar principles of design in his painted quatrefoil scenes. A case in point is the *Nativity* (fig. 35) from the predella of the *Coronation of the Virgin* altarpiece, completed in 1414. Here, Lorenzo slotted the broad rooftop of the manger into the triangle at the crown of the quatrefoil, while the sloping left and right sides of the manger run parallel to the upper segments of the triangles on either side of the scene. As Ghiberti did in the *Crucifixion*, moreover, Lorenzo Monaco used the curving lobes at the bottom of the quatrefoil to echo the form of Joseph at the right, his drapery billowing out around him in curvilinear motion. The Virgin’s drapery follows a similar pattern to the left, echoing the curving shape of the lower left lobe.

![Figure 35. Lorenzo Monaco, *Nativity*, from the predella of the *Coronation of the Virgin* altarpiece, 1414](image)

Reference to the Virgin’s drapery leads us to consider more general stylistic analogies between Lorenzo Ghiberti and Lorenzo Monaco. Throughout the North Doors (and in the
contemporary statue of *John the Baptist* at Orsanmichele), Ghiberti clothed his figures in expressive, flowing garments with undulating borders that weave ceaselessly throughout each panel. At the same time, the viewer always perceives the existence of a body beneath the rich, abundant draperies. Andrea Pisano had displayed a somewhat similar sensibility, but Ghiberti’s figures are more three-dimensional than Andrea’s, and his draperies are much fuller and more extravagant in the curvilinearity. Both Andrea Pisano and Lorenzo Ghiberti can rightly be considered late Gothic artists, but an evolution of the late Gothic style between the 1330s and the first two decades of the fifteenth century is nonetheless clear. The same may be said about the relationship between paintings of the 1330s—those by Simone Martini, for example, an artist often cited as Lorenzo Monaco’s forerunner—and paintings by Lorenzo himself. As Ghiberti is to Andrea Pisano, Lorenzo Monaco is to Simone Martini. To put it another way, the two Lorenzos were each other’s “opposite numbers” in the arts of painting and sculpture. We see this again by comparing Ghiberti’s *Adoration of the Magi* on the North Doors (fig. 36) with Lorenzo Monaco’s contemporary *Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 37). In the *Adoration*, the Virgin’s drapery flows along, responding to the crevices and protrusions of her limbs, then breaks into a meandering curvilinear pattern as it gathers on the ground below her. To her left, the eldest magus kneels on the ground, his drapery responding to his low center of gravity and gathering in multiple folds at his feet. Additional figures crowd together at the left of the scene, each wearing a garment that swoops across the body in heavy, weighted folds, simultaneously revealing the knees that slightly bend beneath the cloth. Lorenzo Monaco displayed a comparable movement of line and sinuous patterning in the *Coronation*, where extravagantly curving draperies envelop the figures without ever obscuring their fully three-dimensional bodies. Clearly these two artists, working in the same place at the same time, albeit in different
media, looked closely at each other’s work and, presumably, exchanged ideas, just as Giotto and Andrea Pisano did three generations earlier.

As noted above, Lorenzo Ghiberti and Lorenzo Monaco were the major Florentine exponents of the International Gothic Style, a style associated more with small-scale northern European courtly art than with the monumental painting and sculpture of a central Italian republic such as Florence. Nevertheless, directly or indirectly, the two Lorenzos must have had been influenced by French, Franco-Flemish, and/or German art of the International Gothic Style. In his Commentarii, Ghiberti even lavishes praise on a certain Master Gusmin, an otherwise unknown artist from Cologne whom he describes as a “most excellent talent” who did “many works in gold . . . executed very finely, with every care and precision.”

According to Ghiberti, who claims to have seen “many figures cast from” those of Gusmin, this artist “had a very elegant air in his work”—words that could just as easily be applied to Ghiberti’s own work on the North Doors. Since nothing by Master Gusmin is known, Krautheimer argued in

---

50 Translation from the Commentarii by Gilbert, Italian Art, 1400-1500, 82.
51 Ibid. For an extended discussion of the shadowy Master Gusmin, see Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 62-67
favor of French illuminated manuscripts and tapestries as likely inspirations for Ghiberti.\textsuperscript{52} Given the portability of manuscripts, the opinion carries conviction. The sort of thing he had in mind can be exemplified by a page from the \textit{Gotha Missal} manuscript (c. 1375) by Jean Bondol (fig. 38). Without suggesting that Ghiberti was familiar with this particular work, we can still note how Bondol’s naturalistic, firmly modeled figure of Christ, swathed in soft, richly curving draperies, can be paralleled in any number of figures on the North Doors, especially the seated Evangelists and Church Fathers (fig. 39).

The doors were cast using the lost-wax process, after which they were gilded by a method of mixing gold dust and mercury, and heated in a large furnace.\textsuperscript{53} Upon completion, they apparently weighed a hefty 34,000 pounds.\textsuperscript{54} The process of assembling them took approximately one year, from March 1423 to April of the following year, and they were

---

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 59-61.
\textsuperscript{53} Clark, \textit{The Florence Baptistery Doors}, 96.
\textsuperscript{54} Ghiberti himself makes this claim in the \textit{Commentarii}; Krautheimer, \textit{Lorenzo Ghiberti}, 13.
installed on the east portal of San Giovanni on April 19, 1424. The jambs, however, were
designed only in 1423 and probably not cast until after the installation.55

Although the fame of the North Doors was subsequently eclipsed by that of the Gates of
Paradise, in their own time they represented an unqualified success for both the patron and the
artist. For the Arte di Calimala, they may be considered a form of “showing off” during a
period of unlimited success in the wool market both locally and abroad. As the demand for
finished cloths from Florence increased, so too did the prices of incoming cloths, which in turn
raised the purchase price of outgoing finished products.56 The amount of money paid to
Ghiberti is further illustration of the guild’s success, his annual wages roughly matching those of
a branch manager of the Medici bank.57 Throughout the two decades of work on the North
Doors, Ghiberti earned a sum of twenty-two thousand florins, an amount that equaled the
annual defense budget for the city of Florence.58

During this time, the city was enjoying a period of great prosperity marked by other
noteworthy artistic projects. Over the course of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, more
than a dozen large statues were installed on the outside of Orsanmichele, including figures by
Donatello, Nanni di Banco, and of course Ghiberti himself. In the immediate vicinity of the
Baptistery, ambitious sculptural projects were under way on the façade of the Cathedral and in
niches of the adjacent Campanile. What set Ghiberti’s works apart from the others, however,
was his use of bronze, a medium so expensive that only the wealthiest patrons could afford it.59

When the North Doors were unveiled in the mid-1420s, both Ghiberti and his Calimala

55 Ibid., 112, for the dates and citation of documents.
57 Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 7.
58 Ibid., 7-8, for a detailed analysis of the amounts paid according to Ghiberti’s tax declarations.
59 In this context, it may be noted that only three of the new statues at Orsanmichele were made of bronze: St. John
the Baptist for the Calimala guild, St. Matthew for the Cambio (bankers and money changers), and St. Stephen for the
Lana (producers of local wool). All three statues are by Ghiberti, and the guilds involved were the wealthiest in the
city.
patrons would have had good reason to feel satisfied. The former had produced a work that set
a new standard of artistic achievement in Florence, while the latter could take pride in having
sponsored a noble adornment to the city, made in honor of its patron saint and standing as a
tribute to its own wealth and power.
CHAPTER 4—THE EAST DOORS BY LORENZO GHIBERTI

In January of 1425, an official contract was confirmed between Lorenzo Ghiberti and the Arte di Calimala for a third set of doors for the Baptistery of San Giovanni, which, upon completion in 1452, were placed on the east side of the building, facing the Cathedral.60 Ghiberti was named *maestro eccellente* in the contract,61 demonstrating the guild’s satisfaction with his just-completed North Doors. The new doors eventually acquired a semi-legendary fame. According to Vasari, “one day Michelangelo Buonarroti stopped to look at the work, and on being asked his opinion he said, they are so beautiful that they are worthy of being the gates of Paradise”—“Elle son tanto belle ch’elle starebbon bene alle porte del Paradiso.”62 It is purportedly this remark that gave rise to the famous epithet, the Gates of Paradise.

The East Doors (fig. 40) clearly demonstrate a shift in format from the North Doors, with a reduction of the previous twenty-eight narratives to a set of ten large panels. However, the original program for the East Doors was analogous to that of the first two sets.63 This is known from a letter of June 21, 1424, wherein the Arte di Calimala invited Leonardo Bruni, Chancellor of Florentine Republic and a leading humanist of the period, to provide input regarding the layout. Bruni’s design (fig. 41) has been preserved, and it includes twenty individual narratives in the top five registers, reading from left to right across both wings, and supported by two rows of prophets on the bottom two registers. The proposal for twenty-eight panels, plainly patterned after the South and North Doors, may even have been followed at the outset of the new project. This can be discerned from the back of the door, which contains

---

60 Thus Ghiberti’s previous set of doors was relegated to the north side of the Baptistery, where they have remained ever since.
Figure 40. Lorenzo Ghiberti, bronze doors of the
Baptistery of San Giovanni, the “Gates of Paradise,”
East Portal, Florence, 1424-52
twenty-four empty panels and was likely intended to be the front of the door. But Ghiberti objected to Bruni’s plan and opted for a design of his own, comprising ten large panels, five on each wing. He did away with the bottom rows of seated figures seen in the Virtues of the South Doors, and the Evangelists and Fathers of the Church of the North Doors. In addition, the partially gilt bronze panels of the North Doors have been transformed into a fully gilded surface, arousing amazement in the viewer with the abundance of radiant gold and, once again, flaunting the wealth and status of the Arte di Calimala.

![Table 4.5: Summary of Leonardo Bruni’s programme for the Gates of Paradise (after Krautheimer)](image)

**Figure 41. Leonardo Bruni, plan for the East Doors of the Baptistery (after Krautheimer), 15th century**

The East Doors revive the original Old Testament subject matter of the North Doors, and the decision to incorporate several narratives within each of the ten panels presented its

---

64 Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, 164.
65 Each panel measures 73 square centimeters—remarkably similar to the size of Ghiberti’s two reliefs on the Siena Baptistmal Font, which measure 79 square centimeters. The latter were completed in 1427, only one year after Ghiberti began the modeling of the door panels, indicating a close correlation between the two projects, as outlined by Jules Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Donatello* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 228.
own set of problems. Since panel space could no longer be devoted to individual figures; prophets and other symbolic figures essential to the program were moved to the frame. In addition, each panel had to accommodate a wealth of figures participating in several interrelated events, which forced Ghiberti to think carefully about how to organize the narratives. One example is the David panel (fig. 42), which has often been criticized for its allegedly chaotic arrangement. This crowded scene represents a sort of organized chaos, as the foreground is filled with three episodes that are difficult to disentangle. On the right, Israelite soldiers engage in battle with Philistines, while King Saul rides in from the left, accompanied by a mass of Israelites, to celebrate the triumph. Between them is the main event: David’s slaying of Goliath—a fitting choice, as Beck has noted, given that the young, triumphant David was considered a symbolical representative of Florence during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The layering of multiple crowds of figures gives a sense of continuous space in the relatively low relief narrative. Saul stands on his chariot, elevated high above the Israelite army, while the city of Jerusalem is represented above and behind him. An additional group of figures appears in the background, sandwiched between the city and two mountaintops that appear to occupy the middle ground of the relief. Fighting soldiers are stacked one on top of the other and intensify the moment, as David presses the sword into Goliath’s neck. All told, there are so many figures appearing in repetitive patterns that it seems impossible to count them. A similar crowding appears in the Solomon panel (fig. 43), which, though more clearly organized than the David panel, also shows an abundant number of figures throughout the space in multiple groups. Clearly proud of these achievements, Ghiberti boasted, in his Commentarii, that “in some stories I placed a hundred figures, in some less and in some more.”

---

67 Ibid., 44, Beck claims that the city closely recalls Florence, but resemblances are actually rather minimal.
68 Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 14.
According to Fasola, the consuls of the Arte di Calimala gave Ghiberti complete freedom of design so that the door could be “as rich and ornate, as perfect and beautiful, as can be imagined.”69 This may have been the key to unleashing the stylistic genius of the esteemed goldsmith. In a dramatic transformation from his previous doors, he combined multiple narratives within each panel, producing a total of thirty-seven scenes throughout the ten panels. This practice of showing several episodes of the same story taking place within a single space, usually termed “continuous narrative,” is more prevalent in Early Renaissance art than is commonly believed. It appears, for example, in a prominent contemporary painting that may have been a source of inspiration for Ghiberti: Masaccio’s famous *Tribute Money* in the Brancacci Chapel (fig. 44), of ca. 1427, which depicts three distinct events occurring simultaneously. Ghiberti went even further than Masaccio, occasionally including as many as six events in a single panel.

---

69 Fasola, *The Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence and Its Marvelous Doors*, 11. In his *Commentarii*, Ghiberti himself claimed that he was “given a free hand to execute it in whatever way I thought it would turn out most perfect and most ornate and richest”; Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, 14.
The East Doors read like the pages of a book: left to right across the two wings, beginning at the top left with the Genesis cycle and concluding at the bottom right with the story of Solomon and Sheba. Oddly enough, this arrangement differs from the sequence of scenes in both previous sets of doors, while sharing elements in common with both of them. Like Andrea Pisano’s doors, the scenes on the Gates of Paradise begin at the upper left and end at the lower right; unlike the Gates of Paradise, however, Andrea’s doors need to be read on each wing separately. Ghiberti’s own North Doors begin at the lower left and end at the upper right; like the North Doors, however, we read the narratives of the Gates of Paradise straight across both valves, suggesting that the latter were normally kept closed. To be sure, these differing schemes were established at different points in time across nearly a century, during the regimes of three different groups of guild officers. Nevertheless, one remains somewhat at a loss to explain the lack of a standardized program.

In contrast to the North Doors, the panels of the East Doors may have been cast at one time, rather than in separate batches. Accepting this hypothesis introduces a subject of great

---

70 Documents state that by April 4, 1436 or 1437, all of the reliefs had been cast. I agree with Krautheimer’s suggestion (ibid., 165) that all reliefs were cast at once, considering that the timeframe for the workshop to complete the panels was condensed by the Calimala guild; moreover, casting all of the reliefs within a few days is more economical and efficient than casting them separately at various intervals, reducing the laborious process and preserving expensive materials.
controversy: the order in which the panels were designed. In a previous study of the Gates of Paradise, I argued in favor of the simultaneous completion of the panels, according to Ghiberti’s intention for each relief to be seen according to its position on the doors. This process determined the design of each panel, as well as dictated the compositional arrangement of the panels relative to one another. In the interest of greater visibility, Ghiberti placed lower-relief panels at the bottom of the doors and higher-relief panels at the top, clearly taking the viewer’s eye level into consideration.71 He highlighted this strategy in his Commentarii: “There were ten stories,” he writes, “all in architectural settings [casamenti] in the relation with which the eye measures them, and real to such a degree that if one stands far from them they seem to stand out in high relief.”72 Following the principle of visibility, Ghiberti often exaggerated the depth of relief in the first plane, or immediate foreground, accentuating the most important components of the scene. The lowermost register of the doors, located slightly below eye level, contains the scenes of David and Solomon (figs. 42-43), which are depicted in the lowest relief. Clearly, they were meant to be viewed at close hand, perhaps by bending down to get a better view. The central register, located somewhat above eye level, contains the Isaac and Joseph panels, both of which exhibit a skillful system of recession with their architectural components, likely influenced by Brunelleschi’s recent discovery of one-point perspective. The viewer has the impression of looking through complex architectural spaces into the distance, beyond the first plane and into a deep background. Here, moreover, at a point just above normal eye level, Ghiberti placed his self-portrait and his signature—LAVRENTII · CIONIS · DE · GHIBERTIS (fig. 45)—precisely as he did on the North Doors. Finally, the uppermost registers of the doors, which include the scenes of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, and Abraham, are

71 Sarah Hampton Portera, “Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise: The Order of Panel Completion” (paper presented at the annual proceedings of the National Conference of Undergraduate Research, Salisbury, Maryland, April 2008), 309-316.
72 Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 14.
rendered in the highest relief, with their figures projecting out strongly toward the viewer. This technique compensates for the location of the panels at the highest point on the door, a considerable distance above eye level.

Figure 45. Ghiberti’s Self-portrait (top) and signature (bottom), East Doors

Although the quatrefoil frames utilized so brilliantly on the North Doors were abandoned, Ghiberti successfully met the challenges presented by the square format of the panels on the Gates of Paradise and the need to include multiple scenes in each of them. Here he incorporated a new technique of multiple levels of relief in order to highlight or subordinate portions of the narrative. The scene of *Cain and Abel* (fig. 46), which comprises six separate episodes, is a case in point. Beginning at the top left, in the distant background, Adam and Eve are rendered in shallow relief, along with their young children, Cain and Abel. The shallow relief, as well as the spatial distance, distinguishes the event as belonging to the remote past and clearly differentiates it from the high-relief figures in the foreground. Directly across the panel in the background, Cain and Abel are once more rendered in shallow relief as they offer sacrifices upon two foreshortened altars, while God appears above them, surrounded by wisps
of clouds. Both scenes belong to the distant past of Cain and Abel’s lives, and so are subordinated to subsequent events. In the middle ground, in somewhat higher relief, appears the scene of Cain killing Abel, where Ghiberti added a note of tension by showing Cain just before the climactic moment of clubbing his brother to death. Ghiberti, we recall, utilized a similar strategy in his competition relief, depicting the tense moment immediately before the angel stops Abraham from sacrificing his son. Finally, in the foreground, figures belonging to the present, rather than the past, jut outward in very high relief, as Cain is seen plowing with oxen at the left and gesturing upward toward God at the right. The lower ledge supporting the scene projects outward and also slants sharply downward for greater visibility from the ground. Throughout the panel, Ghiberti established three distinct zones of foreground, middle ground, and background, each distinguished by its relatively high, middle, or low relief.

A similar process is applied to the Adam and Eve panel (fig. 47), where Ghiberti employed different levels of relief to indicate the most significant elements of the narrative. Also located in the uppermost register of the doors, the panel illustrates escalating levels of relief from the
background to the foreground. At the far left, the Temptation of Adam and Eve is rendered in the shallowest relief. Nearby, however, two large trees press forward in higher relief, almost developing into three dimensions, in order to separate the Temptation from other depicted events. The gradual loss of detail towards the back plane represents the increased distance from the foreground scene. A series of arcs beginning at the lower left of the panel leads the eye from one event to the next. The eye naturally follows the curve from the Creation of Adam in the left foreground, up to the image of God surrounded by angels and clouds, and back down to Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise at the lower right. Ghiberti chose to focus on the Creation of Adam, the Creation of Eve, and the Expulsion from Paradise—reading from left to right across the foreground—as the major events of the Genesis cycle, rendering them in the highest relief. Again, a distinct separation of background, middle ground, and foreground is evident, which concurrently highlights different points in time. On the far right side of the panel, Eve’s nearly freestanding body presses out towards the viewer. Once more, a rocky ledge supports the figures, projecting forward and slanting downward to provide a solid stage for the scene.

Figure 47. *Adam and Eve* panel
The figures in the foreground of the *Adam and Eve* relief are rendered with a degree of naturalism not previously seen in the North Doors. On the far left, God bends toward Adam, his head and neck bowed down like those of an elderly man. Adam supports his weight with his right hand, and his skin sags—a natural response of the physical body to the effort to stand up. Similar effects are found throughout the doors, as Ghiberti departs from the International Gothic style of the North Doors in the second half of his career. Rhythmic, swaying figures garbed in elegant, curvilinear draperies have evolved into naturalistic forms, such as the aforementioned figure of Adam or those of Cain and his team of oxen in the adjacent panel. Gothic prototypes have shifted to classical prototypes that exhibit naturalistic features, gestures, and poses. Additionally, the small-scale, doll’s-house-like architectural props of the North Doors have evolved into grandiose perspectival constructions, partly because Ghiberti had more room to work with in each panel of the Gates of Paradise, but also because he was avidly keeping abreast with the latest developments in Florentine perspective. This is best exemplified in the *Isaac* panel (fig. 48), which represents a masterful interpretation of single-point perspective,
with an architectural structure that fills the entire panel. A colossal hall with wide arches, tall pilasters, and a simplified cornice soars above the scenes below and compartmentalizes the various events by breaking them into sections. The arcading creates deep recesses of space that lead nowhere, but serve effectively to frame each episode in the story. The viewer looks up through each arcade, though it is not clear whether we are looking into an interior or an exterior space. A tiled floor recedes into the distance, and, following the laws of one-point perspective, multiple orthogonals converge toward a single vanishing point in the center of the panel. Rather than functioning in the manner of a stage prop, as seen throughout the North Doors, the architecture in the Gates of Paradise has become a major component of the design, while serving to clarify the narrative.

If Ghiberti’s style of the North Doors found its counterpart in the paintings of Lorenzo Monaco, executed during the first quarter of the Quattrocento, his style of the Gates of Paradise is approximately equivalent to that of Fra Angelico in the second quarter of the century. Thus, for example, Angelico’s *Washing of the Feet* (fig. 49), now in the Museo di San Marco, from a well-known series of panels designed to decorate the doors of a silver chest, demonstrates a perspectival technique comparable to what we have just seen in Ghiberti’s *Isaac*. Angelico’s painting features a four-sided colonnade that employs one-point perspective to create a cloister-like space that is as complex, yet as clear as the architectural space created by Ghiberti in the *Isaac* panel. There is no question of influence between one artist and the other; rather, we are dealing with artistic affinities of the kind encountered not only between early Ghiberti and Lorenzo Monaco, but also between Andrea Pisano and Giotto. Similar analogies exist between Ghiberti’s *Solomon* panel (fig. 43) and Fra Angelico’s grandiose *Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 50) from San Domenico in Fiesole, now in the Louvre, which features similar groups
of overlapping figures, comparable architectural elements, and an analogous composition with a crowd of figures in the foreground pierced by a wedge of space.

Figure 49. Fra Angelico, *Washing of the Feet*, Museo di San Marco, early 1450s

Figure 50. Fra Angelico, *Coronation of the Virgin* from San Domenico in Fiesole, 1430-32

Though it would be foolhardy to push such analogies too far, it is known that the two artists collaborated on the Linaiuoli tabernacle in 1431,73 indicating a relationship between them that would have likely prompted the exchange of ideas. One more example may suffice. The *Deposition* or *Descent from the Cross* (fig. 51), commissioned around 1430 by Palla Strozzi for his funerary chapel in Santa Trinita, has much in common with various scenes on the Gates of Paradise. Not unlike Ghiberti, Fra Angelico establishes three distinct levels of space: an expansive sky and walled city in the background, a screen of trees in the middle ground, and the scene of the Deposition with accompanying figures in the foreground. Additionally, the landscape elements of Fra Angelico and Ghiberti are similar, especially the trees. Not only do they often assume similar stylized shapes, but the soft, overlapping mountain range viewed

through a row of trees at the right side of Angelico’s *Deposition* finds a close counterpart in the background of Ghiberti’s *Abraham* panel (fig. 52) on the Gates of Paradise.

Figure 51. Fra Angelico, *Deposition, or Descent from the Cross*, with detail of trees, 1430

Figure 52. Ghiberti, *Abraham* panel, with detail of trees
The East Doors were designed and modeled in a matter of eight or nine years, a rapid course of execution if we consider that modeling did not begin until almost 1428, and that the doors were cast by 1436. There remained the time-consuming process of “chasing” and “finishing,” which was carried out over the next ten years. The last phase of the project included the application of this process to the twenty-four pieces of the frieze, the twenty-four heads, and the architrave, cornice, threshold, and jambs, all of which began in 1448. The internal framework is elaborately composed of male and female heads—presumably prophets and sibyls—alternating with full-length figures of additional prophets and sibyls, as well as various Old Testament characters, standing in classical shell niches on the verticals sections. Ghiberti paid special attention to the niche figures, some of which can be identified by their attributes, and most of which are markedly classical in style. For example, the identity of Samson (fig. 53) is easily established by his muscular nude body, the jawbone of an ass that he holds in his right hand, and the column on which he leans in a subtle contrapposto pose. The four recumbent figures on the upper and lower sections of the two wings likely represent “the first and second parents of mankind”: Adam and Eve above, Noah and his wife Puarpheba below. Not coincidentally, Eve (fig. 54) appears directly over the narrative panel of Adam and Eve, while Adam (fig. 55) is situated above the story of Cain and Abel. The outer door jamb is adorned with reliefs representing candelabra filled with leaves, fruits, flowers, and animals. At the very top a gilded eagle, symbol of the Arte di Calimala, graces the center of the lintel. All panels, niche figures, and heads were in place by April 2, 1452.

---

74 Finishing is defined in bronze-casting terms as the smoothing of the bronze surface after casting, which is often coarse from metal remnants, a result of the lost-wax method; the process also included gilding the surface with mercury amalgam to produce gilt bronze. See Annmaria Giusti, The Gates of Paradise, Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Renaissance Masterpiece, ed. Gary M. Radke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 101.
75 Beck, The Baptistery Doors, Florence, 41.
76 Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 172.
77 Beck, The Baptistery Doors, Florence, 42.
78 The jamb included collaboration with Vittorio Ghiberti, one of Lorenzo’s sons. See Fasola, The Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence and Its Marvelous Doors, 13.
At the beginning of the commission for the East Doors, Ghiberti’s workshop was crowded with projects for numerous sites, including the bronze jambs and architrave for the North Doors, the Siena font plaques, and the St. Stephen statue at Orsanmichele, each of which was in progress up until 1428. Interestingly enough, Ghiberti’s contract with the Calimala guild followed the same pattern as previously determined for his first commission: he

---

79 Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti, 162.
was not allowed to take other commissions while working on the doors, and his salary remained the same at 200 florins per year.80

A dramatic transformation took place between the installation of Andrea Pisano’s doors in 1338 and that of the Gates of Paradise 122 years later, one that documents an evolution from the Gothic to a full-fledged Italian Renaissance style. Andrea’s stately but static figures gave way to Ghiberti’s fully naturalistic ones, inspired by the art of Classical Antiquity. As we have seen, each set of doors was originally intended for the east side of the Baptistery—the principal side of the building, facing the Cathedral. One of the first great landmarks in the history of Florentine sculpture, Andrea Pisano’s doors were a fitting embellishment of the main entrance to the city’s chief architectural monument. In Ghiberti’s words, after all, Andrea was a “bonissimo” master.81 With Ghiberti’s first set of doors, the site acquired still greater significance, a significance heralded by the competition sponsored by the Calimala at the dawn of the fifteenth century. The North Doors exhibit a clear and obvious likeness to the South Doors and have a similar format. The foremost element that distinguishes them is the more highly developed style in which Ghiberti worked: not just a late Gothic style, but the International Gothic style, which Ghiberti pushed to its limits. Ghiberti’s second set of doors, the Gates of Paradise, represent a turning point in the history of Renaissance sculpture and the culmination of a project begun more than a century before. Commissioned by the leading

80 Ibid., 163, Krautheimer mentions that the Calimala guild experienced some financial difficulties during this period, incurring expenses beyond the annual budget. Ghiberti’s tax declarations of 1431 and 1433 indicate that he advanced funds to the guild to accommodate their financial struggle.
81 Beck, The Baptistery Doors, Florence, 8.
Florentine guild, the third and last set of doors became a source of public admiration and local pride, a dual role they continue to play to this day.

One may not easily pass by the Baptistery of San Giovanni without taking notice of the three monumental sets of doors gracing the north, east, and south portals. The Baptistery itself represents an amalgamation of sacred and secular traditions, but to think of it independently of the three bronze doors is unreasonable, if not impossible, considering their intertwined history. Bearing in mind that the decoration of the portals may or may not have been planned in detail from the start, it is extraordinary that such an extensive program remained alive for more than a century. That it did so testifies to the power, the prestige, and the directorial capacity of the Arte di Calimala, which, notwithstanding periodic changes in membership, remained steadfast in its patronage throughout the years. When new officers take over leadership positions in almost any organization, they seldom move forward with a program begun prior to their own election. That the consuls of the Arte di Calimala did so is a tribute to their farsightedness and an achievement to be celebrated, just as we celebrate the achievements of the artists whom they hired to fulfill their aspirations.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Sarah Hampton Portera Cambas was born in November of 1985 in West Point, Mississippi, a small, southern town in the northeast part of the state. After graduating from Indian Springs High School in Birmingham, Alabama, Sarah Hampton embarked upon her first trip abroad with her senior class to enjoy a two-week exploration of Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan, Pisa, and Zurich. It was here that she came to realize her passion for art and the Italian language, food, and wine. Several months later she began her freshman year of college at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Beginning her studies in Italian and art history, Sarah Hampton also initiated with Chi Omega Sorority. She soon came to find that she dearly missed the comfort and benefit of a small-school atmosphere, at which point she made the decision to transfer to Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, to begin her sophomore year. Sarah Hampton felt at home at Rhodes and immersed herself in the challenging academic environment, the Chi Omega community, and the flourishing art center of Memphis. She kept herself busy in her courses, fascinated with painting, photography, sculpture, the Italian language, and most especially, Italian Renaissance art. One particular professor made a strong impression with his passion and rich understanding of the subject. This professor ultimately assisted her with the publication of her senior thesis on Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise. Fortuitously, she would later encounter a similarly inspiring professor of Italian Renaissance art in her near future at Louisiana State University. It was also at Rhodes that she met her best friend and soon-to-be life partner, Brice Cambas, who provided a positive, forward-looking attitude and kept her confident and focused throughout her college career.

Upon completion of her Bachelor of Arts degree in art history, Sarah Hampton looked forward with excitement to beginning a career. After tireless but unsuccessful efforts to secure a position in an art-related field, she moved to Washington, D.C., and compromised with a job in
event coordinating. Before long, however, the distance between Brice in New Orleans and Sarah Hampton in Washington took its toll, and in January of 2009 Brice proposed to Sarah Hampton. While making the decision to move to New Orleans, Sarah Hampton also decided that her career interests were firmly planted within the field of art. Soon after being accepted into LSU’s graduate art history program, Sarah Hampton began the next step in life. Mr. and Mrs. Brice Michael Cambas were married in 2009, in the heart of the French Quarter in New Orleans, as Sarah Hampton began her first year of graduate school. During her studies, she has developed a deeper understanding of the many artworks that impressed her on that fateful trip nearly seven years earlier. Her passion resides in the field of early Italian Renaissance sculpture. As well, she perpetually reserves a small place in her heart for an inspirational and talented goldsmith by the name of Lorenzo Ghiberti.