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It was only in the second half of the thirteenth century that an Italian sculptor began to emulate the example of the French masters and to study the methods of classical sculpture in order to represent nature more convincingly. This artist was Nicola Pisano who worked in the great seaport and trading centre of Pisa. Fig. 132 shows one of the reliefs of a pulpit he completed in 1266. At first it is not quite easy to see what subject is represented because Pisano followed the medieval practice of combining various stories within one frame. Thus the left corner of the relief is taken up with the group of the Annunciation and the middle with the Birth of Christ. The Virgin is lying on a bedstead, St. Joseph is crouching in a corner, and two servants are engaged in bathing the Child. They seem to be jostled about by a herd of sheep, but these really belong to a third scene—the story of the Annunciation to the Shepherds which is represented in the right-hand corner where the Christ-child appears once more in the manger. But if the scene appears a little crowded and confusing the sculptor has nevertheless contrived to give each episode its proper place and its vivid details. One can see how he enjoyed such touches of observation as the goat in the right-hand corner scratching its head with its hoof; and one realizes how much he owed to the study of classical sculpture when one looks at his treatment of garments and folds. Like the master of Strasbourg who worked a generation before him (Fig. 128), or like the master of Naumburg who may have been about his age, Nicola Pisano had learned the methods of the ancients to show the forms of the body under the drapery and to make his figures look both dignified and convincing.

Italian painters were even slower than Italian sculptors in responding to the new spirit of the Gothic masters. Italian cities such as Venice were in close contact with the Byzantine Empire and Italian craftsmen looked to Constantinople rather than to Paris for inspiration and guidance. In the thirteenth century Italian churches were still decorated with solemn mosaics in the "Greek manner".

It might have seemed as if this adherence to the conservative style of the East would prevent all change, and indeed the change was long delayed. But when it came, towards the end of the thirteenth century, it was this firm grounding in the Byzantine tradition which enabled Italian art not only to catch up with the achievements of the northern cathedral sculptors but to revolutionize the whole art of painting.

We must not forget that the sculptor who aims at reproducing nature has an easier task than the painter who sets himself a similar aim. The sculptor need not worry about creating an illusion of depth through foreshortening or through modelling in light and shade. His statue stands in real space and in real light. Thus the sculptors of Strasbourg or Naumburg could reach a degree of lifelikeness which no thirteenth-century painting could match. For we remember that northern painting had given up all pretence of creating an illusion of reality. Its principles of arrangement and of story-telling were governed by quite different aims.

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It was Byzantine art that ultimately allowed the Italians to leap the barrier that separates sculpture from painting. For all its rigidity Byzantine art had preserved more of the discoveries of the Hellenistic painters than had survived the picture-writing of the dark ages in the West. We remember how many of these achievements still lay hidden, as it were, under the frozen solemnity of a Byzantine painting like p. 93, Fig. 85; how the face is modelled in light and shade and how the throne and the footstool show a correct understanding of the principles of foreshortening. With methods of this kind a genius who broke the spell of Byzantine conservatism could venture out into a new world and translate the lifelike figures of Gothic sculpture into painting. This genius Italian art found in the Florentine painter Giotto di Bondone (1266?–1337).

It is usual to start a new chapter with Giotto; the Italians were convinced that an entirely new epoch of art had begun with the appearance of that great painter. We shall see that they were right. But for all that, it may be useful to remember that in real history there are no new chapters and no new beginnings and that it detracts nothing from Giotto's greatness if we realize that his methods owe much to the Byzantine masters, and his aims and outlook to the great sculptors of the northern cathedrals.

Giotto's most famous works are wall-paintings or *frescos* (so called because they must be painted on the wall while the plaster is still *fresh*, that is, wet). In or about the year 1306 he covered the walls of a *small church in Padua* in northern Italy with stories from the life of the Virgin and of Christ. Underneath he painted personifications of virtues and vices such as had sometimes been placed on the porches of northern cathedrals.

Fig. 133 shows Giotto's figure of Faith, a matron with a cross in one hand, a scroll in the other. It is easy to see the similarity of this noble figure to the works of the Gothic sculptors. But this is no statue. It is a painting which gives the illusion of a statue in the round. We see the foreshortening of the arm, the modelling of the face and neck, the deep shadows in the flowing folds of the drapery. Nothing like this had been done for a thousand years. **Giotto had rediscovered the art of creating the illusion of depth on a flat surface.**

For Giotto this discovery was not only a trick to be displayed for its own sake. It enabled him to change the whole conception of painting. Instead of using the methods of picture writing he could create the illusion as if the sacred story were happening before our very eyes. For this it was no longer sufficient to look at older representations of the same scene and adapt these time-honoured models to a new use. He rather followed the advice of the friars who exhorted the people in their sermons to visualize in their mind, when reading the Bible and the legends of the Saints, what it must have looked like when a carpenter's family fled to Egypt or when the Lord was nailed to the cross. He did not rest till he had thought it all out

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134. GIOTTO: *The Mourning of Christ*, Wallpainting in the Cappella dell' Arena in Padua. Probably completed in 1306

afresh: how would a man stand, how would he act, how would he move, if he took part in such an event? Moreover, how would such a gesture or movement present itself to our eyes?

We can best gauge the extent of this revolution if we compare one of Giotto's frescoes from Padua (Fig. 134) with a similar theme in the thirteenth-century miniature in Fig. 130. The subject is the mourning over the dead body of Christ, with the Virgin embracing her son for the last time. In the miniature, as we remember, the artist was not interested in representing the scene as it might have happened. He varied the size of the figures so as to fit them well into the page, and if we try to imagine the space between the figures in the foreground and St. John in the background—with Christ and the Virgin in between—we realize how everything is squeezed together, and how little the artist cared about space. It is the same indifference to the real place where the scene is happening which led Nicola Pisano to represent different episodes within one frame. Giotto's method is completely different. Painting, for him, is more than a substitute for the written word.

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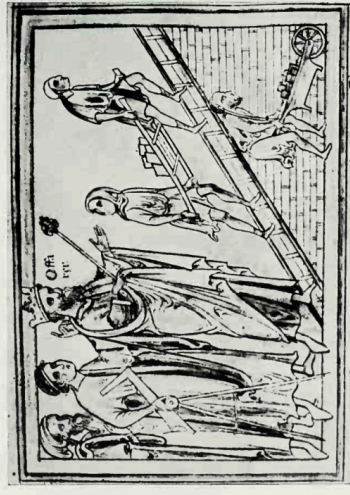
135- Detail of Fig. 134

We seem to witness the real event as if it were enacted on a stage. Compare the conventional gesture of the mourning St. John in the miniature with the passionate movement of St. John in Giotto's painting as he bends forward, his arms extended sideways. If we try here to imagine the distance between the cowering figures in the foreground and St. John, we immediately feel that there is air and space between them, and that they can all move. These figures in the foreground show how entirely new Giotto's art was in every respect. We remember that early Christian art had reverted to the old Oriental idea that to tell a story clearly every figure had to be shown completely, almost as was done in Egyptian art. Giotto abandoned these ideas. He did not need such simple devices. He shows us so convincingly how each figure reflects the grief of the tragic scene that we sense the same grief in the cowering figures whose faces are hidden from us.

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Giotto's fame spread far and wide. The people of Florence were proud of him. They were interested in his life, and told anecdotes about his wit and dexterity. This, too, was rather a new thing. Nothing quite like it had happened before. Of course, there had been masters who had enjoyed general esteem, and been recommended from monastery to monastery, or from bishop to bishop. But, on the whole, people did not think it necessary to preserve the names of these masters for posterity. They thought of them as we think of a good cabinet-maker or tailor. Even the artists themselves were not much interested in acquiring fame or notoriety. Very often they did not even sign their work. We do not know the names of the masters who made the sculptures of Chartres, of Strasbourg or Naumburg. No doubt they were appreciated in their time, but they gave the honour to the cathedral for which they worked. In this respect too, the Florentine painter Giotto begins an entirely new chapter in the history of art. From his day onwards the history of art, first in Italy and then in other countries also, is the history of the great artists.



136. The King and his architect (with compass and ruler) visiting the building site of a cathedral (King Offa or St. Alban). From an English manuscript of the Life of St. Alban probably painted by MATTHEW PARIS about 1260. Dublin, Trinity College

Bottom dock area containing various application icons: a smiley face, a rocket, a calendar showing '13 GEN', a document with a red notification, a speech bubble with '1', a WhatsApp icon, a compass, a Chrome icon, a book icon, a magnifying glass, a presentation screen, a bar chart, a calendar, a speech bubble with '3', a rocket, a smiley face, a trash can, a person silhouette, a video call icon, a PDF icon, and a WhatsApp icon.