

Now, Giovanni, I am altogether your servant here, and shall be so in deed. I have had fourteen florins from you, and I wrote to you that my expenses would come to thirty florins, and it comes to that much because the picture is rich in its ornament. I beg you to arrange with Martelli to be your agent in this work, and if I need something to speed the work along, I may go to him and it will be seen to. . . .

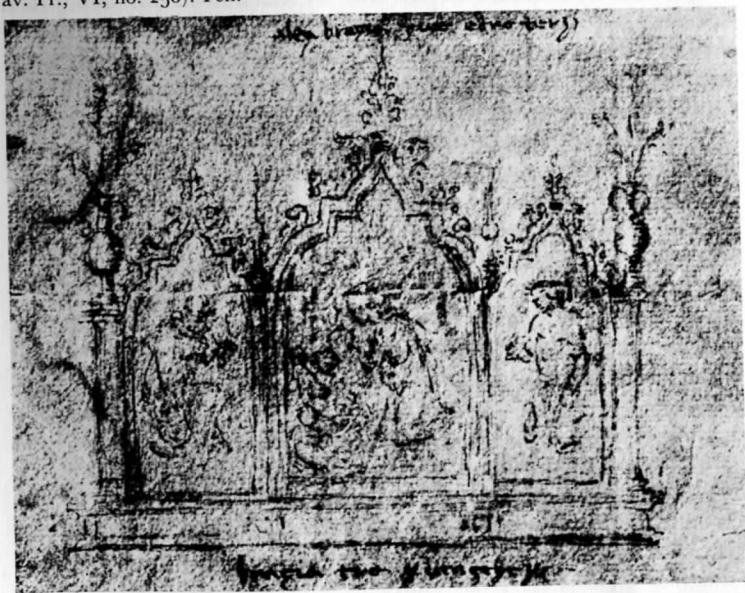
If you agree . . . to give me sixty florins to include materials, gold, gilding and painting, with Bartolomeo acting as I suggest, I will for my part, so as to cause you less trouble, have the picture finished completely by 20 August, with Bartolomeo as my guarantor . . . And to keep you informed, I send a drawing of how the triptych is made of wood, and with its height and breadth. Out of friendship to you I do not want to take more than the labour costs of 100 florins for this: I ask no more. I beg you to reply, because I am languishing here and want to leave Florence when I am finished. If I have presumed too much in writing to you, forgive me. I shall always do what you want in every respect, great and small.

Valeta. 20 July 1457.

Fra Filippo the painter, in Florence.

Underneath the letter Filippo Lippi provided a sketch of the triptych as planned (plate 1). Left to right, he sketched a St.

1. Filippo Lippi. *Sketch of an Altarpiece* (1457). Florence, Archivio di Stato (Med. av. Pr., VI, no. 258). Pen.



Bernard, an Adoration of the Child, and a St. Michael; the frame of the altarpiece, the point about which he is particularly asking approval, is drawn in a more finished way.

A distinction between 'public' and 'private' does not fit the functions of fifteenth-century painting very well. Private men's commissions often had very public roles, often in public places; an altarpiece or a fresco cycle in the side-chapel of a church is not private in any useful sense. A more relevant distinction is between commissions controlled by large corporate institutions like the offices of cathedral works and commissions from individual men or small groups of people: collective or communal undertakings on the one hand, personal initiatives on the other. The painter was typically, though not invariably, employed and controlled by an individual or small group.

It is important that this should have been so, because it means that he was usually exposed to a fairly direct relationship with a lay client—a private citizen, or the prior of a confraternity or monastery, or a prince, or a prince's officer; even in the most complex cases the painter normally worked for somebody identifiable, who had initiated the work, chosen an artist, had an end in view, and saw the picture through to completion. In this he differed from the sculptor, who often worked for large communal enterprises—as Donatello worked so long for the Wool Guild's administration of the Cathedral works in Florence—where lay control was less personal and probably very much less complete. The painter was more exposed than the sculptor, though in the nature of things clients' day-to-day interference is not usually recorded; Filippo Lippi's letter to Giovanni de' Medici is one of rather few cases where one can clearly sense the weight of the client's hand. But in what areas of the art did the client directly intervene?

There is a class of formal documents recording the bare bones of the relationship from which a painting came, written agreements about the main contractual obligations of each party. Several hundred of these survive, though the greater part refer to paintings that are now lost. Some are full-dress contracts drawn up by a notary, others are less elaborate *ricordi*, memoranda to be held by each side: the latter have less notarial rhetoric but still had some contractual weight. Both tended to the same range of clauses.

There are no completely typical contracts because there was no fixed form, even within one town. One agreement less untypical than many was between the Florentine painter, Domenico

Ghirlandaio, and the Prior of the Spedale degli Innocenti at Florence; it is the contract for the *Adoration of the Magi* (1488) still at the Spedale (plate 2):

Be it known and manifest to whoever sees or reads this document that, at the request of the reverend Messer Francesco di Giovanni Tesori, presently Prior of the Spedale degli Innocenti at Florence, and of Domenico di Tomaso di Curado [Ghirlandaio], painter, I, Fra Bernardo di Francesco of Florence, Jesuate Brother, have drawn up this document with my own hand as agreement contract and commission for an altar panel to go in the church of the abovesaid Spedale degli Innocenti with the agreements and stipulations stated below, namely:

That this day 23 October 1485 the said Francesco commits and entrusts to the said Domenico the painting of a panel which the said Francesco has had made and has provided; the which panel the said Domenico is to make good, that is, pay for; and he is to colour and paint the said panel all with his own hand in the manner shown in a drawing on paper with those figures and in that manner shown in it, in every particular according to what I, Fra Bernardo, think best; not departing from the manner and composition of the said drawing; and he must colour the panel at his own expense with good colours and with powdered gold on such ornaments as demand it, with any other expense incurred on the same panel, and the blue must be ultramarine of the value about four florins the ounce; and he must have made and delivered complete the said panel within thirty months from today; and he must receive as the price of the panel as here described (made at his, that is, the said Domenico's expense throughout) 115 large florins if it seems to me, the abovesaid Fra Bernardo, that it is worth it; and I can go to whoever I think best for an opinion on its value or workmanship, and if it does not seem to me worth the stated price, he shall receive as much less as I, Fra Bernardo, think right; and he must within the terms of the agreement paint the predella of the said panel as I, Fra Bernardo, think good; and he shall receive payment as follows—the said Messer Francesco must give the abovesaid Domenico three large florins every month, starting from 1 November 1485 and continuing after as is stated, every month three large florins. . . .

And if Domenico has not delivered the panel within the abovesaid period of time, he will be liable to a penalty of fifteen large florins; and correspondingly if Messer Francesco does not keep to the abovesaid monthly payments he will be liable to a penalty of the whole amount, that is, once the panel is finished he will have to pay complete and in full the balance of the sum due.

Both parties sign the agreement.

This contract contains the three main themes of such agreements: (i) it specifies what the painter is to paint, in this case through his commitment to an agreed drawing; (ii) it is explicit

2. Domenico Ghirlandaio. *Adoration of the Magi* (1488). Florence, Spedale degli Innocenti. Panel.



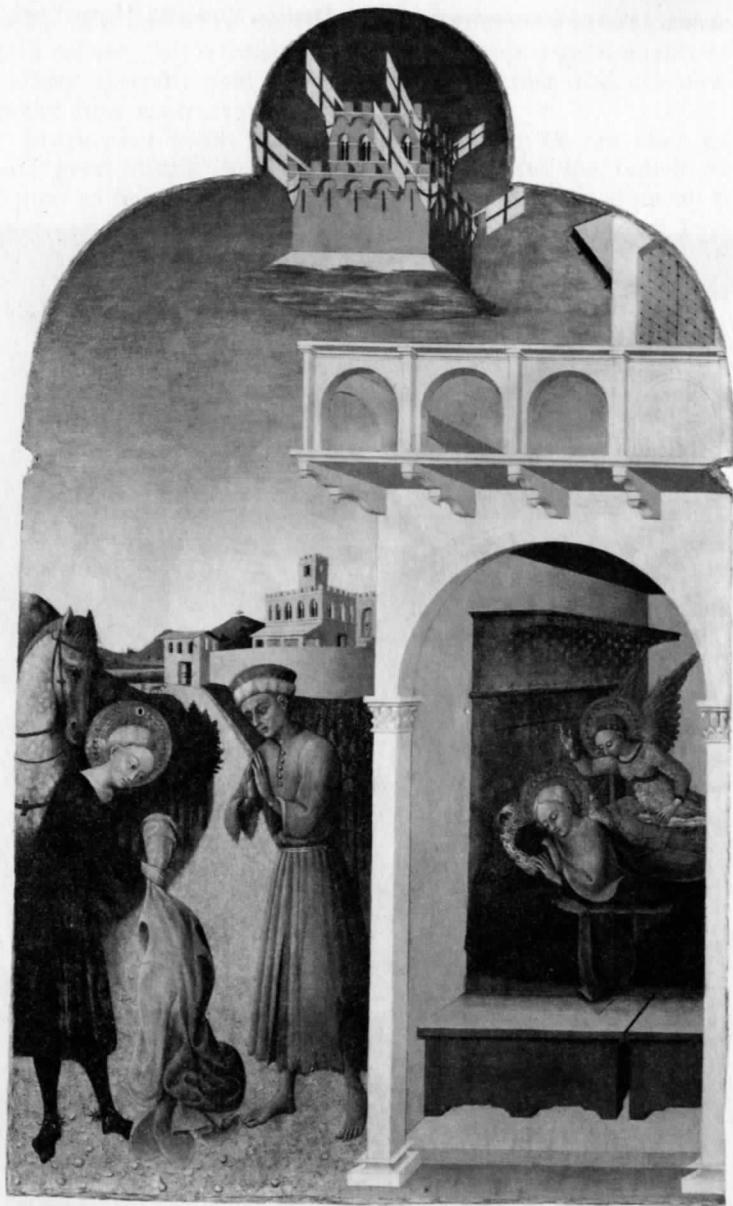
about how and when the client is to pay, and when the painter is to deliver; (iii) it insists on the painter using a good quality of colours, specially gold and ultramarine. Details and exactness varied from contract to contract.

Instructions about the subject of a picture do not often go into great detail. A few contracts enumerate the individual figures to be represented, but the commitment to a drawing is more usual and was clearly more effective: words do not lend themselves to very clear indication of the sorts of figure wanted. The commitment was usually a serious one. Fra Angelico's altarpiece of 1433 for the Linen-maker's Guild at Florence was of this kind (plate 3); in view of the sanctity of his life the matter of price was exceptionally entrusted to his conscience—190 florins or however much less he considers proper—but, saintliness only trusted so far, he is bound not to deviate from his drawing. Around the drawing there would have been discussion between the two sides. In 1469 Pietro Calzetta contracted to paint frescoes in the Gattamelata chapel of S. Antonio at Padua, and the stages by which agreement would be reached are clearly stated in the contract. The donor's representative, Antonfrancesco de' Dotti, is to state the subjects to be painted; Calzetta will agree to these subjects; he will produce a design (*designum cum fantasia seu instoria*) and give it to Antonfrancesco; on the basis of this Antonfrancesco will give further instructions on the painting and finally decide whether the finished product is acceptable. If there was difficulty in describing the sort of finish wanted, this could often be done by reference to another picture: for example, Neri di Bicci of Florence undertook in 1454 to colour and finish an altarpiece in S. Trinita after the same fashion as the altarpiece he had made for a Carlo Benizi in S. Felicità in 1453.

Payment was usually in the form of one inclusive sum paid in instalments, as in Ghirlandaio's case, but sometimes the painter's expenses were distinguished from his labour. A client might provide the costlier pigments and pay the painter for his time and skill: when Filippino Lippi painted the life of St. Thomas in S. Maria sopra Minerva at Rome (1488–93) Cardinal Caraffa gave him 2,000 ducats for his personal part and paid for his assistants and the ultramarine separately. In any case the two headings of expenses and of the painter's labour were the basis for calculating payment: as Neri de Bicci noted, he was paid 'for gold and for applying it and for colours and for my workmanship.' The sum agreed in a contract was not quite inflexible, and

3. Fra Angelico. *Tabernacle of the Linen-makers* (1433). Florence, Museo di S. Marco. Panel.





4. Stefano di Giovanni, called Sassetta. *St. Francis Giving his Cloak to a Poor Soldier* (1437/44). London, National Gallery. Panel.

if a painter found himself making a loss on a contract he could usually renegotiate: in the event Ghirlandaio, who had undertaken to provide a predella for the Innocenti altarpiece under the original 115 florins, got a supplementary seven florins for this. If the painter and client could not agree on the final sum, professional painters could act as arbitrators, but usually matters did not come to this point.

Ghirlandaio's contract insists on the painter using a good quality of colours and particularly of ultramarine. The contracts' general anxiety about the quality of blue pigment as well as of gold was reasonable. After gold and silver, ultramarine was the most expensive and difficult colour the painter used. There were cheap and dear grades and there were even cheaper substitutes, generally referred to as German blue. (Ultramarine was made from powdered lapis lazuli expensively imported from the Levant; the powder was soaked several times to draw off the colour and the first yield—a rich violet blue—was the best and most expensive. German blue was just carbonate of copper; it was less splendid in its colour and, much more seriously, unstable in use, particularly in fresco.) To avoid being let down about blues, clients specified ultramarine; more prudent clients stipulated a particular grade—ultramarine at one or two or four florins an ounce. The painters and their public were alert to all this and the exotic and dangerous character of ultramarine was a means of accent that we, for whom dark blue is probably no more striking than scarlet or vermilion, are liable to miss. We can follow well enough when it is used simply to pick out the principal figure of Christ or Mary in a biblical scene, but the interesting uses are more subtle than this. In Sassetta's panel of *St. Francis Giving his Cloak to a Poor Soldier* (plate 4) the gown St. Francis gives away is an ultramarine gown. In Masaccio's expensively pigmented *Crucifixion*, the vital narrative gesture of St. John's right arm is an ultramarine gesture. And so on. Even beyond this the contracts point to a sophistication about blues, a capacity to discriminate between one and another, with which our own culture does not equip us. In 1408 Gherardo Starnina contracted to paint in S. Stefano at Empoli frescoes, now lost, of the *Life of the Virgin*. The contract is meticulous about blue: the ultramarine used for Mary is to be of the quality of two florins to the ounce, while for the rest of the picture ultramarine at one florin to the ounce will do. Importance is registered with a violet tinge.

Of course, not all artists worked within institutions of this kind; in particular, some artists worked for princes who paid them a

salary. Mantegna, who worked from 1460 until his death in 1506 for the Gonzaga Marquises of Mantua, is a well documented case and Lodovico Gonzaga's offer to him in April 1458 is very clear: 'I intend to give you fifteen ducats monthly as salary, to provide lodgings where you can live comfortably with your family, to give you enough grain each year to cover generously the feeding of six mouths, and also the firewood you need for your own use. . . .' Mantegna, after much hesitation, accepted and in return for his salary not only painted frescoes and panels for the Gonzagas (plate 5), but filled other functions as well. Lodovico Gonzaga to Mantegna, 1469:

I desire that you see to drawing two guinea-fowl from the life, one cock and one hen, and send them to me here, since I want to have them woven by my tapesters: you can have a look at the guinea-fowl in the garden at Mantua.

Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to Lodovico Gonzaga, 1472:

. . . I beg you to order Andrea Mantegna . . . to come and stay with me [at Foligno]. With him I shall entertain myself by showing him my engraved gems, figures of bronze and other fine antiques; we will study and discuss them together.

Duke of Milan to Federico Gonzaga, 1480:

I am sending you some designs for pictures which I beg you to have painted by your Andrea Mantegna, the famous painter . . .

Federico Gonzaga to Duke of Milan, 1480:

I received the design you sent and urged Andrea Mantegna to turn it into a finished form. He says it is more a book illuminator's job than his, because he is not used to painting little figures. He would do much better a Madonna or something, a foot or a foot and half long, say, if you are willing . . .

Lancillotto de Andreasis to Federico Gonzaga, 1483:

I have bargained with the goldsmith Gian Marco Cavalli about making the bowls and beakers after Andrea Mantegna's design. Gian Marco asks three lire, ten soldi for the bowls and one and a half lire for the beakers . . . I am sending you the design made by Mantegna for the flask, so that you can judge the shape before it is begun.

In practice Mantegna's position was not quite as tidy as Gonzaga's offer proposed. His salary was not always regularly paid; on the other hand, he was given occasional privileges and gifts of land

5. Andrea Mantegna. *Marchese Lodovico Gonzaga Greeting his Son Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga* (1474). Mantua, Palazzo Ducale, Camera degli Sposi. Fresco.



or money, and fees from outside patrons. But Mantegna's position was unusual among the great Quattrocento painters; even those who produced paintings for princes were more commonly paid for a piece of work than as permanent salaried retainers. It was the commercial practice expounded in the contracts, and seen at its clearest in Florence, that set the tone of Quattrocento patronage.

To return to the contracts, though one can generalize this far about them, their details vary a great deal from case to case; and, what is more interesting, there are gradual changes of emphasis in the course of the century. What was very important in 1410 was sometimes less important in 1490: what 1410 had not specially concerned itself with sometimes demanded an explicit commitment in 1490. Two of these shifts of emphasis—one towards less insistence, the other towards more—are very important, and one of the keys to the Quattrocento lies in recognizing that they are associated in an inverse relationship. While precious pigments become less prominent, a demand for pictorial skill becomes more so.

3. As the century progressed contracts became less eloquent than before about gold and ultramarine. They are still commonly mentioned and the grade of ultramarine may even be specified in terms of florins to the ounce—nobody could want the blue to flake off their picture—but they are less and less the centre of attention and the gold is increasingly intended for the frame. Starnina's undertaking of 1408 about different grades of blue for different parts of the picture is very much of his moment: there is nothing quite like it in the second half of the century. This lessening preoccupation with the precious pigments is quite consistent with the paintings as we see them now. It seems that clients were becoming less anxious to flaunt sheer opulence of material before the public than they had previously been.

It would be futile to try to account for this sort of development simply within the history of art. The diminishing role of gold in paintings is part of a general movement in western Europe at this time towards a kind of selective inhibition about display, and this shows itself in many other kinds of behaviour too. It was just as conspicuous in the client's clothes, for instance, which were abandoning gilt fabrics and gaudy hues for the restrained black of Burgundy. This was a fashion with elusive moral overtones; the atmosphere of the mid-century is caught very well in an anecdote told about King Alfonso of Naples by the Florentine bookseller Vespasiano da Bisticci:

There was a Sienese ambassador at Naples who was, as the Sienese tend to be, very grand. Now King Alfonso usually dressed in black, with just a buckle in his cap and a gold chain round his neck; he did not use brocades or silk clothes much. This ambassador however dressed in gold brocade, very rich, and when he came to see the King he always wore this gold brocade. Among his own people the King often made fun of these brocade clothes. One day he said, laughing to one of his gentlemen, 'I think we should change the colour of that brocade.' So he arranged to give audience one day in a mean little room, summoned all the ambassadors, and also arranged with some of his own people that in the throng everyone should jostle against the Sienese ambassador and rub against his brocade. And on the day it was so handled and rubbed, not just by the other ambassadors, but by the King himself, that when they came out of the room no-one could help laughing when they saw the brocade, because it was crimson now, with the pile all crushed and the gold fallen off it, just yellow silk left: it looked the ugliest rag in the world. When he saw him go out of the room with his brocade all ruined and messed, the King could not stop laughing. . . .

The general shift away from gilt splendour must have had very complex and discrete sources indeed—a frightening social mobility with its problem of dissociating oneself from the flashy new rich; the acute physical shortage of gold in the fifteenth century; a classical distaste for sensuous licence now seeping out from neo-Ciceronian humanism, reinforcing the more accessible sorts of Christian asceticism; in the case of dress, obscure technical reasons for the best qualities of Dutch cloth being black anyway; above all, perhaps, the sheer rhythm of fashionable reaction. Many such factors must have coincided here. And the inhibition is not part of a comprehensive shift away from public opulence: it was selective. Philippe le Bon of Burgundy and Alfonso of Naples were as lush as ever—if not more so—in many other facets of their public lives. Even within the limitation of black costume one could be as conspicuously expensive as before, cutting the finest Netherlandish fabrics wastefully on the cross. The orientation of display shifted—one direction inhibited, another developed—and display itself went on.

The case of painting was similar. As the conspicuous consumption of gold and ultramarine became less important in the contracts, its place was filled by references to an equally conspicuous consumption of something else—skill. To see how this was so—how skill could be the natural alternative to precious pigment, and how skill could be clearly understood as a conspicuous index of consumption—one must return to the money of painting.

A distinction between the value of precious material on the

one hand and the value of skilful working of materials on the other is now rather critical to the argument. It is a distinction that is not alien to us, is indeed fully comprehensible, though it is not usually central to our own thinking about pictures. In the early Renaissance, however, it was *the* centre. The dichotomy between quality of material and quality of skill was the most consistently and prominently recurring motif in everybody's discussion of painting and sculpture, and this is true whether the discussion is ascetic, deploring public enjoyment of works of art, or affirmative, as in texts of art theory. At one extreme one finds the figure of Reason using it to condemn the effect on us of works of art in Petrarch's dialogue *Physic against Fortune*: 'it is the *preciousness*, as I suppose, and not the *art* that pleases you.'

At the other extreme Alberti uses it in his treatise *On painting* to argue for the painter representing even golden objects not with gold itself but through a skilful application of yellow and white pigments:

There are painters who use much gold in their pictures (plate 6), because they think it gives them majesty: I do not praise this. Even if you were painting Virgil's Dido—with her gold quiver, her golden hair fastened with a gold clasp, purple dress with a gold girdle, the reins and all her horse's trappings of gold—even then I would not want you to use any gold, because to represent the glitter of gold with plain colours brings the craftsman more admiration and praise.

One could multiply instances almost indefinitely, the most heterogeneous opinions being united only by their dependence on the same dichotomy between material and skill.

But intellectual concepts are one thing and crass practice is something else: the action of one on the other is usually difficult to demonstrate because it is not likely to be direct or simple. What gave Petrarch's and Alberti's distinction its special charge and geared it immediately into the dimension of practical business was that the same distinction was the whole basis of costing a picture, as indeed any manufacture. One paid for a picture under these same two headings, matter and skill, material and labour, as Giovanni d'Agnolo de' Bardi paid Botticelli for an altarpiece (plate 7) to go in the family chapel at S. Spirito:

Wednesday 3 August 1485:

At the chapel at S. Spirito seventy-eight florins fifteen soldi in payment of seventy-five gold florins in gold, paid to Sandro Botticelli on his reckoning, as follows—two florins for ultramarine, thirty-eight florins for

gold and preparation of the panel, and thirty-five florins for his brush [*pel suo pennello*].

There was a neat and unusual equivalence between the values of the theoretical and the practical. On the one hand, ultramarine, gold for painting with and for the frame, timber for the panel (material); on the other Botticelli's brush (labour and skill).

4. There were various ways for the discerning client to switch his funds from gold to 'brush'. For example, behind the figures in his picture he could specify landscapes instead of gilding:

The painter also undertakes to paint in the empty part of the pictures (plate 8)—or more precisely on the ground behind the figures—landscapes and skies [*paese et aiere*] and all other grounds too where colour is put: except for the frames, to which gold is to be applied. . . .

(Pinturicchio at S. Maria de' Fossi, Perugia. 1495)

A contract might even itemize what the client had in mind for his landscapes. When Ghirlandaio contracted in 1485 to paint frescoes for Giovanni Tornabuoni in the choir of S. Maria

6. Antonio Vivarini. *Epiphany* (about 1440). Berlin, Staatliche Museen. Panel.





7. Botticelli. *The Virgin and Child* (1485). Berlin, Staatliche Museen. Panel.

Novella at Florence he agreed to include 'figures, buildings, castles, cities, mountains, hills, plains, rocks, costumes, animals, birds, and beasts of every kind.' Such a demand ensured an expenditure of labour, if not skill.

There was another and more sure means of becoming an expensive purchaser of skill, already gaining ground in the middle of the century: this was the very great relative difference,

in any manufacture, in the value of the master's and the assistants' time within each workshop. We can see that with the painters this difference was substantial. For instance, in 1447 Fra Angelico was in Rome painting frescoes for the new Pope Nicholas V. His work was paid for not with the comprehensive figure usual in commissions from private men or small secular groups but on the basis of his and three assistants' time, materials being provided. An entry from the Vatican accounts will show the four men's respective rates:

23 May 1447.

To Fra Giovanni di Pietro of the Dominican Order, painter working on the chapel of St. Peter, on 23 May, forty-three ducats twenty-seven soldi, towards his allowance of 200 ducats per annum, for the period 13 March to the end of May . . .

43 florins 27 soldi

To Benozzo da Leso, painter of Florence working in the abovesaid chapel, on the same day eighteen florins twelve soldi towards his allowance of seven florins the month for the period 13 March to the end of May . . .

18 florins 12 soldi

To Giovanni d'Antonio della Checa, painter in the same chapel, on the same day two ducats forty-two soldi, towards two and two-fifths

8. Bernardino Pinturicchio. *St. Augustine and the Child*, from the Pala di S. Maria de' Fossi (1495). Perugia, Galleria. Panel.



months at one florin the month, for the period up to the end of May . . .

2 florins 42 soldi

To Giacomo d'Antonio da Poli, painter in the same chapel, on 23 May, three florins, his allowance for three months to run up to the end of May at the rate of one florin the month . . .

3 florins

The annual rate for each of the four, keep excluded, would therefore be:

Fra Angelico	200 florins	} 108 florins
Benozzo Gozzoli	84 florins	
Giovanni della Checha	12 florins	
Jacomo da Poli	12 florins	

When the team moved to Orvieto later in the year they got the same rates, except for Giovanni della Checha whose pay doubled from one to two florins the month. Clearly much money could be spent on skill if a disproportionate amount of a painting—disproportionate not by our standards but by theirs—were done by the master of a shop in place of his assistants.

It was this that happened. The contract for Piero della Francesca's *Madonna della Misericordia* (plate 9):

11 June 1445.

Pietro di Luca, Prior, . . . [and seven others] in the behalf and name of the Fraternity and Members of S. Maria della Misericordia have committed to Piero di Benedetto, painter, the making and painting of a panel in the oratory and church of the said Fraternity, of the same form as the panel which is there now, with all the material for it and all the costs and expenses of the complete furnishing and preparation of its painting assembly and erection in the said oratory: with those images figures and ornaments stated and agreed with the abovesaid Prior and advisor or their successors in office and with the other abovesaid officers of the Fraternity; to be gilded with fine gold and coloured with fine colours, and specially with ultramarine blue: with this condition, that the said Piero should be bound to make good any defect the said panel shall develop or show with the passing of time through failure of material or of Piero himself, up to a limit of ten years. For all this they have agreed to pay 150 florins, at the rate of five lire five soldi the florin. Of which they have undertaken to give him on demand fifty florins now and the balance when the panel is finished. And the said Piero has undertaken to make paint decorate and assemble the said panel in the same breadth height and shape as the wooden panel there at present, and to deliver it complete assembled and set in place within the next three years; and that no painter may put his hand to the brush other than Piero himself.

This was a panel painting; for large scale fresco commissions the demand could be softened. When Filippino Lippi contracted in

9. Piero della Francesca. *Madonna della Misericordia* (1445/62). San Sepolcro, Galleria. Panel.



1487 to paint frescoes in the Strozzi chapel of S. Maria Novella he undertook that the work should be ‘. . . all from his own hand, and particularly the figures’ (*tutto di sua mano, e massime le figure*): the clause may be a little illogical, but the implication is obvious—that the figures, more important and difficult than architectural backgrounds, should have a relatively large component of

10. Luca Signorelli. *The Doctors of the Church* (1499/1500). Orvieto, Cathedral, Cappella di S. Brizio. Fresco.



Filippino's personal handiwork in them. There is a precise and realistic clause in Signorelli's contract of 1499 for frescoes in Orvieto Cathedral (plate 10):

The said master Luca is bound and promises to paint [1] all the figures to be done on the said vault, and [2] especially *the faces and all the parts of the figures from the middle of each figure upwards*, and [3] that no painting should be done on it without Luca himself being present. . . . And it is agreed [4] that all the mixing of colours should be done by the said master Luca himself. . . .

This was one interpretation of how far a master should personally intervene in the carrying out of his designs, on a very large-scale fresco undertaking. And in general the intention of the later contracts is clear: the client will confer lustre on his picture not with gold but with mastery, the hand of the master himself.

By the middle of the century the expensiveness of pictorial skill was very well known. When St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, discussed in his *Summa Theologica* the art of goldsmiths and their proper payment, he used the painters as an example of payment relative to individual skill: 'The goldsmith who endows his works with better skill should be paid more. As is the case in the art of painting, where a great master will demand much more pay—two or three times more—than an unskilled man for making the same type of figure.'

The fifteenth-century client seems to have made his opulent gestures more and more by becoming a conspicuous buyer of skill. Not all clients did so: the pattern described here is a perceptible drift in fifteenth-century contracts, not a norm with which they all comply. Borso d'Este was not the only princely primitive out of touch with the decent commercial practice of Florence and Sansepolcro. But there were enough enlightened buyers of skill, spurred on by an increasingly articulate sense of the artists' individuality, to make the public attitude to painters very different in 1490 from what it had been in 1410.

5. We have come this far with the documents: There were various ways of diverting funds from material to skill: one might direct that a panel have representational rather than gilt backgrounds; more radically, one could demand and pay for a relatively high proportion of the great master's expensive personal attention. For the picture still to make a handsome impression this expensive skill must manifest itself clearly to the beholder. In what specific characters it did this, what were recognized as hallmarks