

## Dedication to Giotto da Bardi

"Of arms I sing, and of the man." The man, Giotto di Bondone, in whose arms the brush has proven to be greatly mightier than the sword, and to my Professor Dr. Avigdor G. Poesq, who trusts that the brush is wielded by the artist's inner spirit, directed so, from on high.

Preface to the analysis and discussion of landscape and nature in the paintings of Giotto and the early Italian renaissance

European culture of the last two decades of the twelfth century and into the first two thirds of the fourteenth, reaches its long arm out to eight hundred years later, albeit the arms of war directed by (as we say here in Jerusalem) man's evil inclination has spattered a bloody patina over its cities and plains. The essence of this expression is not the art object itself, as some form of icon, but that through the work of art, we, the audience, are inspired to realize the tangible proof of man's capability to sing glorious antiphonal songs whose voices answer one another across the centuries, answering the ceaseless contrapuntal question, are we worthy of G-d's creation?.

To Giotto and his peers, the answer was, yes. To be worthy was not however, a permit to sit back on one's laurels. The artist was a creator and an inventor, but was an artisan as well who got paid daily wages. The master of a fresco workshop was paid according to the daily investment of time spent working on the painted wall itself. An estimate of these "giornata" would be drawn up into a contract along with perhaps some of the costly materials, such as ultramarine or gold leaf. A well known artist could demand a higher daily payment than a lesser known painter, but neither his creative talent nor the end product had a price.

Our exceptional artist, Giotto, during his lifetime of perhaps seventy years, began as a shepherd boy in Tuscany, to become an artist for the governing religious orders of his day, the ruling secular governments, the contemporary banking magnates, and kings. We shall focus on some of the surviving works painted in Franciscan and Dominican churches, and in the privately owned Scrovigni chapel. Sadly, the body of work executed for the king and queen of Naples during Giotto's sojourn there is not available for consideration. Sadly also, we must express our condemnation of those who saw fit to whitewash Giotto's work, so that even now, after considerable restoration, the damage done to the paintings impairs their impact on our appreciation.

I sincerely hope that this paper will serve as an open handed gesture to the department of humanities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

## GIOTTO and LANDSCAPE PAINTING

"The traveler passes the Fiesolan ridge, and all is changed. The country is on a sudden lonely....Giotto passed the first ten years of his life, a shepherd –boy, among these hills;..." The alphabet of seasonal change, vegetal growth, color in the grey of shadows, special divisions between mountain ridges and man's relationship to these phenomena were learned at the elementary school of life by our artist, Giotto. And, just by happenstance, the landscape of both the bible and the retreats of St. Francis, which were later to be the subject matter of Giotto's fresco paintings, are situated in similar natural settings. Thus, we have on the one hand evidence of the ease with which Giotto must have been able to depict landscape and nature, and on the other hand, we have Kenneth Clark who tells us that "Landscape had no part in the pictorial traditions of Florence." Enjoyment of visual beauty was a no, no. How is it then, that in 1272, Friar Ramon Llull of Palma de Mallorca, home town of Queen Sancia, wife of King Robert of Naples, wrote in his "de Como se Maravillan de Quanto Hacen los Pintores", that the artist should pay attention to what he sees in nature. He says that observation and subsequently memory of what has been seen, and furthermore, depiction of that which was observed in nature is extremely relevant to the painter. Then, we have St. Clare, who implores us to look at the natural life around us when we are walking and not to cut ourselves off from G-d's environment that surrounds us. Development is not a road leading direct to Rome without bypasses and detours. As late as 1339 when Petrarch, possibly right there at the Papal palace at Avignon, muses that having climbed the mountain, truth is to be found only within himself.

Giotto, a Florentine, without a "school" of landscape painting there, was not actually situated as a master in a working studio in Florence until about 1320 when we know that he became a member of the doctors, pharmacists and painters guild. During his periods of professional creative production, he was exposed, and certainly open to the styles from Padua, Assisi, Rome, Naples and Sienna. How much Spanish, Catalan and Aragonese influence and inspiration served him, we cannot know. However, in 1229 Tuscany helped Catalonia, in Palma de Mallorca, as well as on the rest of the island, to defend itself against the moors. The seeds of culture and friendship may have borne fruit during Giotto's five year stay at the royal residence in Naples. Unfortunately his works there are lost.

Giotto paints volume and light in a new way. He is an innovator. Nature, as well as the other components of a picture are now, by Giotto, painted in a way never before seen in the visual arts. Volume and light, sky blue, and even subjective perspective belong to him.

The paintings that we have selected as examples of the depiction of nature and landscape in the art of Giotto are, all of them, landscapes in the sense that they are backdrops for the narrative of either the life of St Francis, Jesus or Mary. The land, trees, mountains and sky, etc. are essential to the telling of the story, yielding yet another level to the tales in that their spiritual illuminatory effects are transmitted by way of pictorial light. Daylight, the reddish blue light of the sky during the wintry full moons, light pursuing oncoming mists, intensified in its blueness before the ultimate silver opacity, and ofcourse, the sun. We present the halo of Jesus in the Arena Chapel "Kiss of Judas" as the sun rising in the east. Notice that the frame is placed low and to the right of the chapel and compare it in your imagination to the position that the sun takes at the end of a day, on the, so called, horizon. The horizon and the perspective eye level are one and the same, here. The beams extend out from the halo. They are the lances, some even tipped with the fire of a ray. And it is not far from theological doctrine for Giotto to have done this. The rays of the sun, what are also lances, have become fiery extensions of Judas's halo. This, in Church dogma is symbolic of the power of Jesus's love even for his betrayer. This concept is reiterated by painting the cloak of Judas in ..... yellow. Huge and round, as is the sun. Judas is cloaked in the warmth and love of the betrayed master, becoming the sun itself at the moment of betrayal, the moment that Giotto has depicted. St. Francis, who has been a spiritual light to our artist, writes in his "Canticle of the Sun", his praises to the sun. I quote,

"Praised, O my Lord, with all your creatures be,  
most especially master brother sun,  
who dawns for us, and You through him give light:  
and fair is he and shining with mighty luminescence,  
and carries, O most High, a glimpse of what You are.  
..."

Were that I was in front of the chapel watching the sun travel around the day to receive the fullness of Giotto's intent. Our eyes scan the chapel. We see it. There, to the left, third frame over, Resurrection and dawn. Night in the Crucifixion to the left. Illuminated, "chandelieric" angels who light up the sky of the Pieta night of the slightly waning full moon. At the end of the long night, after the scene of the sleeping Roman guards, the female moon stands on the morning horizon. Christ is risen as the sun pushes under the horizon just under the top frame of the painting. Day is born.

This also is landscape. The cycle of the "giornata".

Morning prayers, "O Lord let me be an instrument of your faith." The ultramarine blue ceiling is read as out of doors. And as we turn around to leave the chapel the painted images remind us to have a good day, to be good during the day.

It is the artist himself who gave me the clues to this discovery. Since he employs consecutive motion in several pictures, why not consecutive hours as well? (It has been mentioned in class that in the painting of "Jesus Entering Jerusalem", on the upper left hand wall of the Arena Chapel, second frame before the apse, there are three figures who are executing one action. One figure is wearing a coat that is being removed by the second figure and laid down on the path before Jesus by the third. Three characters, one cloak, three moments in consecutive motion. Time passing.

The above examples of nature and landscape that I have outlined, are here submitted declaring that Giotto saw life in terms of , not merely narrative but location of narrative as well. The Earth and its details, including the sky above, were not fearful entities nor forbidden fruit to Giotto. They were objects of beauty and sometimes awe. They were to be experienced directly or indirectly (in Platonic shadow form), through art.

But let us return for a moment to the angels in the Pieta painting in Padua. We have mentioned that Giotto was paid by the number of days required to complete a fresco. Naturally, a large expanse of blue sky (as has been noted in class by our professor) could easily have been executed by an apprentice. Looking at the photo of a detail of the angels however, it must be noted that the sky around each flying cherub has haptic significance. The daily gessoed area in this case would necessarily include the sky directly around the angel painted on that day. You cannot ever stop painting precisely at the end of a form. This might lead to cracking and the moisture of the next days work would impair the painting of the day before. All daily work must end in an area that can be continued with the same paint. In this case, blue. So, the artists who paints the angel's amazingly beautiful face, logically speaking, paints the ultramarine sky around the cherub as well. The blue, however, is freely smeared, brushed, painted or expressed. Call it what you will. It reveals the spiritual energy of the artist, his handwriting. It is no less haptic painting than a Corot sky. Of arms I sing, and of the hand. The artist's hand. The purveyor of spiritual action. We cross eight hundred years to find that Giotto is "modern". Painting, is painting, is painting, is painting.

What color to put on your brush and how to apply the brush to the painting surface are the material intermediary means between the artist's imagination and the object made.

Here the hand of the artist works in simultaneous rapidity, with his mind. This is fulfillment of years of professional preparation. Mastery brings with it joy. Joy supercedes self-criticism. Freedom in the act of painting, uniting the artist, in his essence, with the artist of his future, of today. The centuries come together. The act of painting, whether by Giotto or Soutine, is the same act. It is the same profession. There, in front of the creative inventor is the blank page, the canvas or the wall. He breaks the space with his first brushstroke. He begins the painting.

The earth is a vast warm shade broken into with animals and foliage. The sky is a vast cool shade broken into with clouds or stars, angels and sometimes even rays from the sun. A form may extend from above or below the horizon, such as the crucifix or a flying person rising to heaven, but one frame joining another is unusual. We are not, after all, discussing triptychs, in which the horizon may continue from one panel to another. These separate scenes that Giotto has submitted to us, as I have mentioned above, are visually continuous as well as narratively so. Brother Augustine (ah, how he is painted) is transferring his position to a time begun in the former frame and concluded in the time space of the present. The artist juggles time configuration and object placement. Time stopped and time moving are united, as they are in real life. Moments and minutes.

Speak of the devil. It is the ugly as well as the beautiful that is marvelous in Giotto. Let's take a peek at the black landscape of Hell. Black, the absence of light. In colloquial Hebrew we say "choshech mitzraim", which means not only the darkness of ancient Egypt, when the plagues sent by Moses covered the sky, but it also refers to the darkness of our (the Jewish people) lives which were mentally as well as spiritually enslaved.

Israel Gutman writes that "People, through the artist, can share in the artist's divine gift, for the artist is the final arbiter of what beauty is."

Ellen Lapidus

Page one second wind

Kenneth Clark, and now John Ruskin. What does this artist-writer Ellen Lapidus, want from us, we art historians, critics and aestheticians?

John Ruskin, in his lovely book on the Paduan frescoes informs us, assuredly, that "ofcourse" the characters in the trees in the "Entry Into Jerusalem" have climbed into palm trees. O quote precisely, "...they are, ofcourse, breaking off branches of palm." My observations, sadly, contradict this historical legacy.

First of all, it is quite plausible that the "they" should be the singular form, he.

We have seen consecutive action before. In this very painting the man with the coat over his head is a representation of an earlier moment just before his coat is laid down on the ground, is removed from the man's person. So, assuming, back to the climbers, that these two figures who are dressed exactly alike and have exactly the same haircuts, are actually one actor in this drama, who is he? It has been assumed that these figures who have climbed what Giotto painted as a tree (described in an Israeli guide book for observing trees and bushes) that populates the Ako valley, is a palm tree. There are no palm fronds being laid down on the ground. Not in Giotto. Not in Duccio's "Entry Into Jerusalem". Not in Pietro Lorenzetti. Even in Greco-Byzantine models this tree is painted as the "Eleagnus angustifolia". Could this figure in the tree be emblematic in that it is symbolic, to be understood only by the initiated?

The problem of two stories. One person in two moments...and actually two people as well. One person is (as a compromise I am inclined to admit) throwing down palms that aren't actually painted. The other possibility is that "he" is Brother Giles. The same Brother Giles who climbed trees and threw down nuts. The same Brother Giles who went, of all places in the Holy land, to Ako. The same Brother Giles who was especially loved by St. Francis. A painting to honor the pilgrim, who like Jesus, made aliyah. Ofcourse, I am going out on a limb by making these undocumented assumptions. A beautiful limb, a branch, an arm. Of limbs I sing and of the man, the man Brother Giles, the man Giotto.

(see notes to pages 100,101,102 in biograpgy.....and in Ruskin p. 129,130 and bottom of p.117, St Clare's council about trees)

Furthermore, if we look carefully, as Giotto did when he looked at trees, we see that in "The Bridal Procession", in the Arena Chapel, a huge fig leaf, a standard symbol of fertility, blows out from a balcony aperture parelling the painted musical sound from the musicians' pipes. The damage in the painted sky perhaps was symbolic sound in the shape of repeated fig leaves. M This we see that objects of nature, such as leaves and trees, are used by our artist as "go-betweens" or connections toward understanding, revelation, illuminating the viewers' minds to G-d's intention. This awards nature a high level in the hierarchy of things of this world.

Well, now I have submitted the cartoon. My most honored and revered patron has given approval of my outline. Next, we shall transfer the cartoon to the wall. Only then can we begin to paint, to sing. Of arms I sing and of the man, as did William Blake and Eugene Delacroix. Singing of Dante and Virgil, the heroes of modern individualism. (see fig. ? and fig. ?)

Let's go to hell with ourselves. Let's get dirty and ugly. I present the Giotto, "Last Judgement" as Platonic in concept. See the only light source. It comes from above and outside. It is oscillating between being up and far away, and being in verticality. The horizontal cut of the top of this shape is at the same time, a horizon and a simple line of separation. Look again. See the forms of nature, mountainous rocks, paths (nativit-y) and yes, light. This light is outside and way far above the horrors of hell-depicted. We reach for it, only to fall again into the abyss. We are bedded with monsters and pain. However, the entire lunette, including the triple window which is the trinity itself, is designed as a celestial landscape unfolded by two angels alongside the larger sun and the smaller moon atop, to the left and right of the window arch. In the absence of light we have an absence of color. How much more does our dear Giotto's white head covering stand out in this muted world! There he is, waiting on line behind the bearded man. Waiting for the last judgement.

And look! St. John, the favorite of Jesus, has the same haircut as the actor whom I claim to be Brother Giles, the favorite of St. Francis. In the "Lamentation" the colors are rich and strong because there is supra-abundant light. The angels in the sky are as ten brilliant lights in the sky. Below, on Earth, are eight halos illuminating everything. Eighteen lights of traditional splendor. Enthusiastic brush strokes by Giotto's very hand. Haptic. Haptic. Haptic. And, to understand my case, notice the hand in the center of the painting. The cupped hand, upward gesturing, replaces the leaf and links us to G-d. To the believer in the power of art, color can heal the suffering soul. This subject, the lamenting before faith returns, needs color to keep us out of the dark hall of despair. Giotto knew this, used this, and bequeathed this gift to us. Halleluah!

(p. 162 and p. 163, not reflected light but separated local color) Barasch p.159 of text Lomazzo, discusses the hierarchy of colors in the 16<sup>th</sup> c.)

also: Poussin and "Invenzione" composition, quiet standing separately in color.

Careless ignorance, political intrigue, recent religious dogma and, let's not forget, money were all influential in the decision to cover the Giotto frescoes with a marble wall tomb and new paint. Whitewashed forever! I surmise that the socio-politico upheavals of the time pushed aside the original patrons of Santa Croce. However, we cannot use the excuse that the church needed the revenue. Why didn't She simply sell a new chapel to the new patrons. Recent religious dogma, or perhaps not so recent or new, but old ideas that had been superceded other ones, 'til now, came forward. It is unlikely the the Giotto paintings were whitewashed because they were not understood or appreciated. Quite the opposite, it is because they were repulsive in the philosophy of the beholders that one could even imagine destroying them. Who would even want to remember that the apparition of Brother Augustine had ever happened? Well, the

mason who worked on the wall would. Not by sheer coincidence was the tomb placed on the old fresco so that the faces of the brothers, the hand painted work of Giotto himself, remain intact. The negative space left in the composition after restoration, shows the sculptured sleeping sarcophagus. (see fig. ?) And also, the figure of St. Augustine is saved in its entirety. (see fig.?)

The former supposition is an underscoring of the precept that neither carelessness nor ignorance were the misguided motives of the whitewash, even the laborer knew better.

Bruce Cole, in his book "Giotto and Florentine Painting 1280-1375" is one of the few references we have to the whitewash. Writers don't feel the need to belabor the point. Cole states that aestheticism, taste, stylistic fashion were the motivation for the destruction. (footnote "nadir")

Brother Augustine looks out at us, over eight hundred years of culture, from the right hand side of the Bardi chapel. If you didn't tell me I could believe it was a Picasso. How much can we moderns tolerate? How much cultural whitewash or patina can we bear before we tear our garments and tear out our hair. Giotto whitewashed!

Botticelli painted over! Rembrandt cut down in size! Duccio divided up! Ribera, forget it! Not only the works themselves, the very idea of the importance of art has been destroyed. We who care at all are the exceptional few.

So let's let the cat out of the bag. Let's tell the secret of secrets about Mr. Bondone. The empty space in the center of many of the paintings is the indescribable G-d in His contracted essence. Nothing. Even the little hand of G-d sometimes seen high up in the sky is now thought to be a "later addition". (p.83,84,Palchetti)

The "FATHER" of modern painting fills our hungry souls. We have achieved our goal. We are reverent children. St. Francis lived and imitation of Christ. Giotto lived an imitation of G-d's creation of the world, as does every authentic artist. What is landscape after all but the call of Ezekiel to look upon the hills and prophesize.

End of section called "second wind"

Page one of coda

Suppose that a landscape may be expressed visually in its cosmic beginnings. This expression must rely upon philosophical discovery rather than physical observation. Void and fullness thereof. Contraction and release, over and over again, until we actually do see trees and rocks and paths along the way. Let us take a look at some of the visual material that Giotto has handed down to us, and search for proof of the former supposition.



Suppose that a landscape may be expressed visually in its cosmic beginnings. This expression must rely upon philosophical discovery rather than physical observation. Void and fullness thereof. Void and fullness thereof. Contraction and release over and over again until we actually do see trees and rocks and paths along the way. Let us take a look at some of the visual material that Giotto has handed down to us and search for proof of the former supposition. We will be examining landscape in terms of the ideological or philosophical intended message of our "landscape" artist. All form is to be put aside in place of content. The attributes of form such as color, composition, story line, haptic painterlyness and drawing are all being thrown to the wind for the sake of finding the abstract spiritual content in the paintings of Giotto. Had his professional skills been the end and all that he had to offer, he surely would not have been more than a master juggler or trapeze artist, performing for kings, bankers and popes/ This deeper quality that Giotto had was that he was able to find a material way to depict the immaterial. Time, before and after the given moment, oh, we have talked about this. Now, however, it is present time, invisible actuality, swift and unseen, that is given tangibility through color, line, shading and composition.

Rules of composition were not as formalized in the thirteen hundreds as they were to become in the high renaissance. However, even a Byzantine artist knew that the center of a panel was reserved for the central characters in their most central action. That the best, strongest, most brilliant and expensive colors were to be used for the center of the composition, leaving paler, and smaller images for the wayside. Later Leonardo was to write that the farther away an object, the hazier it is to be colored. "Further away" to an early renaissance painter, even though it did not refer to spacial distance, could not ever be presented in the powerful center. It is laughable to imagine any painting, from any period of time, in which the main features are in the periphery. And yet we often describe a Giotto composition, as for example in the "St. Francis Ridding Himself of Worldly Goods", as divided on the left and right hand sides of the rectangle. St. Francis, and his cloth merchant father, in the opposing halves of the painting The center, however, is bare. Many of the Giotto compositions frame a centrally empty sky area, above the horizon line, with mountainous rocks or architecture to the extreme right and left hand sides of the rectangle. (not to mention, etc. may be a footnote of my own.)

The renaissance concept for creating good design consisted of two diagonals crossing the painting in a big X, with a large circle cutting half way through the four quarters of the diagonals. A seated figure or the crucifix would be in the very center of the painting but around this center figures, through their colorful robes, or gesturing limbs, would compose a circle amidst an ex. Giotto's paintings do not anticipate this method. Giotto's paintings are turbulently active in their stillness. Something is happening that we cannot pinpoint. We are involved in a moment of change. We are breathing before we speak. Closing in within ourselves and opening out again. Contracting to the infinite silence before becoming aware of the explosion of color and light, present at one and the same time before our very eyes.

Another, even stranger example of the reduction of the center to nothing, is seen in the painting of the "Betrayal", in the Arena chapel. The figures here are centrally

located. Their backs, however, face inward. The folds of the capes in the middle of the picture are even darkest where they meet, at the half division of the rectangle. The darkness gives an illusion of depth. The distant unspecified something in its obscurity, is in this case, not a heavenly G-d of goodness and light, but the evil devil, who appears behind Judas, to the left.

The aforementioned is the exact same, but the other side of the coin, so to speak, when soon after Judas gives the giveaway signal in a "Kiss". Here, the cloak again, is the central subject, though it is round and full, and light since it is in close contact with divine goodness.

We can go on giving examples which will either prove the point or stretch the point. What is relevant to us, is whether this is reasonably to be considered landscape and nature, or not. Is the depiction of a rock, painted and visualized in the mind of the artist, from an older "model" any more "landscape" than the attempt to depict the expansion and contraction of the world in its natural breathing, life flowing, perpetual state of existence? Landscape painting has come to mean a painting in which a view is shown to us. This perversion of the meaning of landscape has come about in part because the art critic, historian and aestheticist does not say that the living world of rocks, and sea and even the living atoms in a cloak, are constantly in change, even more so when being observed, as modern physics has taught us.

Aguste Rodin declared that "Anyone who observes nature can see that it has a consciousness of its own."

I, myself, while painting, have encountered the play of light that was truly "play" from the invisible forces of nature, which we Jews understand to be the unique and supreme G-d, Baruch Hoo.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that, for Giotto, landscape was a mysterious and unknowable as it had been to his Byzantine forerunners. The difference being that landscape was no longer to be seen and to be described as a forbidding, magical and unwelcoming world, but as a part of G-d's sacred and beautiful gift to us, to use for our betterment.

Giotto was not a hired performer of painted roundness and brilliant light. He was a thinking man. He read the new ideas of the time. He certainly read that new ideas that were available at the king of Naples and Aragon's court, King Robert's. And, by the way, wasn't Moses de Leon, at this very juncture in time, from Aragon! Giotto not only read, but conversed with the best, and most well known minds of the time. He was admired by thinking men, from Boccaccio to Dante. Thinking women as well, for the woman who inaugurated the sisters of St. Clare, Queen Sancia, Robert's wife, was a cultured and educated woman who commissioned works of art and participated in their development and execution. It is said, that she ordered a great deal of work from Giotto while he lived in her castle.

Giotto was an early humanist who like the humanists based his paintings on literature or other written material. This in no way should be misconstrued to mean that he

illustrated textual matter. He read. He Thought. He discussed. He thought again. And he painted as he opinioned, however disguised from the dangerous ideological opponents.

Eight hundred years have changed little. We are still humanists. The authentic artist today is an intellectual, a thinker who expresses his thoughts as well as his feelings in paint, clay or architectural form. He is whitewashed over during his lifetime by the competing limitedly creative antagonists. Yet we have had, during my lifetime, the haptic work of Willem de Kooning and the esoteric works of Salvador Dali.

May the creative impulse of man continue to be supported by the ultimate patron, the almighty G-d.

February 20, 2007

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Ellen Lapidus (student)

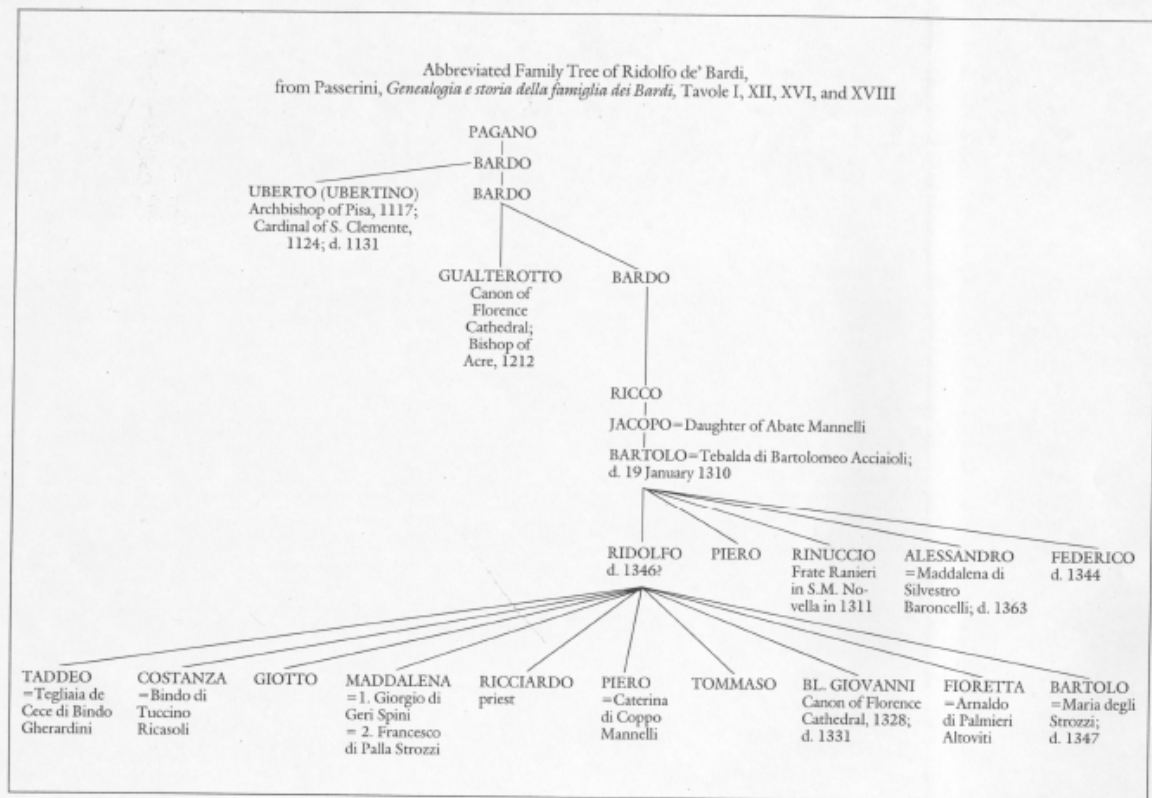


FIG. 47. Family tree of Ridolfo di Bartolo de' Bardi