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Uniselinus Europe Networking University

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January, 2022

I do hereby attest that I am the sole author of this thesis and that its contents are only the result of the readings and research I have done.

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Joyce Marie Hoffman

A CLOSER LOOK AT HALOS IN MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE ITALIAN ART

By

Joyce Marie Hoffman

A dissertation submitted to UniSelinus Europe Networking University

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Doctorate Degree in Philosophy of Art History

January, 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Thank you to Selinus University for making it possible to earn my degree remotely. It otherwise would never have been possible.

I am a second-generation Italian American who never met one of my grandmothers as she died before I was born. She never renounced her citizenship as an Italian and her life here in the United States was a tough one. I dedicate this paper to her memory and feel certain that wherever she is now, she is no doubt wearing the most beautiful halo.

ABSTRACT

Curiosity about the origins of halos used in Medieval and Renaissance Italian art has led scholars to hunt for their source from various religions throughout history. It is obvious that halos have been used in many cultural theosophical groups. What makes this paper different is that not only does it consider the religious connotations that existed in Italian art during the Medieval and Renaissance years, but the halo is also viewed apart from religious beliefs. This dissertation argues that the halo is an intuitive icon that has been embedded into the minds of humans by the constant presence of planetary phenomena. The celestial inhabitants seen from earth have influenced the intellect, culture, and religions of humanity from the earliest days our ancestors viewed them. Certain works of art are featured here to explore the techniques used to render halos in art as well as show how the halo acted as the genesis of individual artistic styles. The mandated codes of Christian logos depicted in art evolved as the religious and political powers manifested themselves and their dominance. These codes had a direct influence on art and the way halos were portrayed; this is explained in the following chapters. The nature of gold gilding that often was used to depict halos in art is explored in this paper. Gold and lapis lazuli are two key elements that convey luxury, power, and divinity in art of the Medieval and Renaissance years. Explanations of how the discoveries and communications between cultures influenced the art of halos will be revealed. I elucidate on the decline of halos in art and their eventual absence. Concluding observations will follow investigations and offer final impressions learned while researching and writing this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Halos in Italian Medieval and Renaissance art have often presented a compositional challenge for artists. They overlap each other, float above or appear to be attached physically to a person's head. At times they seem to slice directly through a head in a very awkward way. They must be important, however, to have been kept in the illustration at the cost of looking out-of-place or being cumbersome. If someone had never seen a halo in real life or in art these disks attached to person's heads would certainly need to be explained. Firstly, what is the significance of the halo and why is its inclusion important? Secondly, what does the halo add to the narrative of the painting that perhaps reveals a message that modern viewers would fail to see? Thirdly, how closely related are halos in art to the naturally occurring halos in our skies?

Once the viewer learns that the halo is a symbol that designates the one who is wearing it as someone who is an exemplar of a religious or leadership position, the narrative gains direction and purpose. The most important aspect of the halo is that it assigns a paragon of masterfulness in character and is a great distinction. Halos in art are only worn by civic leaders, religious martyrs, or the divine, and sometimes by successful warriors. It is demonstrated herein that halos worn by rulers of state are only portrayed in Christianity's Eastern Orthodox art due to the acceptance of equality between the head of state and the head of church. Both held the same amount of power, unlike the Western Christians' belief that the two are separate.

Because of the halo's adornment to the head, they are compared to the distinction that is given by the crown. Indeed, there is a great resemblance between halos and crowns in both appearance and purpose. Both have existed in history for several

centuries and both are worn on the head giving that part of our bodies more significance than the rest. They are a part of the uniform's insignia that alerts the viewers of who they are looking at and in what stature they stand.

This dissertation speaks about the significance of the halo when it is used in the art of the Italian Medieval and Renaissance periods. The belief that halos in art have always depicted something out of this world, something amazing, something sublime and magnificent is argued but with a unique perspective not yet written about. The reasoning behind including halos in Christian art is very similar to them being present in other religious arts. The fountainhead or primary source of the halo is from observations made by early humans. My argument is that halos are universal symbols of power and omniscience that are not dependent upon any theosophical concern. Because it is human nature to learn and gain knowledge to explain the unexplainable, halos, planets, and other cosmic bodies have been highlighted in religious art for centuries. Halos depicted in art are closely related to halos that occur naturally and the reasoning for making this statement will be supported with facts and images.

Halos have been featured in art from time immemorial. People ask, "In which culture was the first artistic halo encountered?" Does anyone know who in particular came up with the idea of a halo? What significance does a halo in art hold? How many religions make use of the halo as a part of their iconography? In fact, there is a paucity of books written about halos. However, a plethora of scholastic articles have been written about the meaning, the story, and the styles of halos. But very few have been able to definitively pin down where halos originated. To give an example of this problematic

topic, E. H. Ramsden wrote in his 1941 article written for *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*,

> "In view of the importance of the halo in art and considering the extensiveness of its use, it is curious to find so little agreement of opinion as to its origin and meaning, since it has been variously described as a symbol of the fire-worshippers of the East, as a decorative device, as a diadem, as a visible sign of the light and glory of God, as a protection from bird-droppings, as the disc of the sun and as the hvareno of the Persian."[1]

This dissertation argues a new and unique opinion about the origin of halos. The history of halos from ancient sources is addressed briefly but mostly this paper concentrates on their Medieval and Renaissance applications. Between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, the shapes and styles of halos noticeably evolved. They grew from simple, round circles into elaborately decorated crowns, lavished with finishing touches unique to certain artists. These changes were caused by several shifts in social, economic, religious, and artistic adjustments. The centuries discussed herein represent a prodigious amount of philosophical growth and self-awareness for humanity. In these years curiosity about our existential relationship with the cosmos piqued as scholars and religious leaders try to explain the meaning of life. The coexistence between religions and governments had a great deal of influence on art as they still do today. Information about the history surrounding the art discussed in this paper is provided to help explain the influences that shaped Medieval and Renaissance art in Italy. A portion of the paper will cover the use of gold because it is an essential ingredient used in depicting halos in

art. That includes the tools, certain techniques, and preparation for using gold and the substance of the commodity.

METHODS USED FOR GENERATING THIS THESIS

The greatest source for methodology used in creating this dissertation comes from the educational and entertaining information found in Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies; An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, (2001).[2] When using specific works of art within this paper, an interpretation of the art is done by identifying the situation and environment that existed when the art was produced and how the artist communicates its intended message. Art is always created with an intention to influence or impress the viewer. An artist creates from an internal need to express themselves. However, during the years discussed artists were not expressing from their hearts as much as they were illustrating a story or event. They also were creating art out of devotion to their religious beliefs. And, often, artists created what their patrons desired to advertise about themselves. This renders it mandatory to provide an explanation of what conditions existed at the time the art was commissioned.

The original location of the art is shared when it's known because many artworks have been separated from their intended venues which might interfere with understanding them. The details within art were often affected by the physical location of where they were viewed. If the light of a window shone on an altarpiece from the left for example, the shadows and source of light within the painting would coincide with that environmental phenomenon. It was also common to mimic an architectural characteristic within a painting. A wainscoting on a wall might be reproduced in the

painting to give it a three-dimensional effect. In some cases, we see art that is a part of the architecture because it has been applied directly to the vaulted ceiling or wall niche.

The political or dogmatic purpose of the art is reviewed to learn why it was commissioned. Much of the art of this period was commissioned by the church or a prominent family. The didactic quality of art has its roots in the theosophical doctrines or the political advertising of governments and wealthy patrons. Patriarchy is explained to help understand the purpose of the art and why it was commissioned. Art from centuries before our lives requires investigation. Art is loaded with hidden messages, outdated today but prominent when executed. Art historians are therefore required to be great sleuths that question what every element in the painting could possibly mean.

Another concept weighed in examining art pieces concerns the audience. How many people were intended to view this art? Was it created for personal use or for public? Personal books, antiphonies, books of hours and even furniture will affect the content of art as well as its size. The size will affect the cost. The cost will affect the quality of materials put into the art. The choice of the artist commissioned to create a piece of art can alter the way an audience is impressed. The overall composition of the art, the halos or the lack of halos and other artistic critical ideas are used to help readers understand the featured works. There are many hidden codes in Medieval and Renaissance art that can make it difficult for today's viewer to understand what they are looking at. Those will be revealed.

Halos that occur naturally and outside of the world of art will be discussed. The knowledge that humanity has gained since the time these art works were created makes it necessary to include some information of physics and meteorology. The connections

between science and the sacred are more than just coincidental. The purpose of this writing is not to make a scholarly statement about science but to include only as much as is needed to support its argument about halos. Studying some facts learned from modern science will help interpret the significance of halos as they were seen by our earliest ancestors and how their impressions influenced art.

During the Medieval and Renaissance periods artists had little freedom of expression. In fact, they were considered as craftspeople with skills comparable with those as varied as architects, mechanics, and furniture makers. There was a code of how to illustrate characters from Christian sources that dictated how artists portrayed them. Some artists featured were incredibly creative individuals and yet there were others for whom the act of painting was a method of expressing their religious devotion. Icon painting explains the use of art as a method for prayer and meditation. Art is physically and spiritually of the world it is created from, and it cannot be isolated from the events or environment that existed around the artist or the patron. Art reflects its contemporary surroundings but also has an internal, instinctive ingredient that originates from something primal or spiritual.

The paintings selected as examples supporting this paper's ideology demonstrate and explain the significance of these topics: halos in nature, halos as they were adopted by Christians from Paganist religious groups, halos in various shapes, halos as signifiers in iconography, halos and the influence of economy, the techniques used to create halos, and the ultimate decline of including halos in art. The selected art also demonstrates the influence of certain artists and their patrons because the powers of politics and social standards affected the way that halos were portrayed in Italian art.

The sources used for the research that went into this dissertation were limited to books, journals, articles, and online presentations that were found exclusively through the internet, interlibrary loans, or a privately owned book. Because the paper was researched and written during the Corona–19 Virus Pandemic, travel was restricted between the United States and Europe. Personal viewing of art in museums or the research done within libraries or churches where manuscripts and correspondence are kept were prohibited. A variety of resources helped to contribute to the research and are listed in the Bibliography. Information was also gathered from live or recorded presentations by the Horne Museum and the Medici Archive Project in Florence as well as the National Gallery of London.

NATURALLY OCCURRING HALOS

The very first halos witnessed on Earth were naturally occurring halos seen in the skies usually between dusk and dawn. The impact they must have had on primitive humans was no doubt awe-inspiring if not also frightening. How can these sources of light be explained without any knowledge of meteorology or physics? Common amongst many religions is the belief that the divine is a source of light or fire. Light itself takes on a powerful identity representing wisdom, strength, and grandness. Physically, halos need a source of light, energy, and geometry to exist. So far, scholarly writings about halos have been teleological in nature which means that the halos are assumed to be a tool used to promote religious context. This paper proposes that the true origin of halos in art comes from the influence of naturally occurring halos in nature.

Consider what the original source of light was on this Earth. Before campfires or lamps there was only the light of celestial bodies rotating in the skies. In our earliest

ancestors' environment, the major sources would be our sun or moon. At times even they were seen with a halo encircling them depending on the amount of moisture in the atmosphere. It is not a coincidence that religions worldwide equate divinity with a source of light. As it is in theosophy, so too is a source of light the origination of halos in the sky. The basic recipe to create a naturally occurring halo is first to have a source of light. The second ingredient needed is a path that the light will follow. If the path is destined to hit a target the light will be refracted or reflected by being bounced off the surface of ice crystals in the air.

Often, a six-sided crystal is the source of the reflection or refraction that causes halos. These atmospheric crystals combined with the angle of the sun, or the moon create halos in the skies that are either simple, multiple, or complex in nature. Keep in mind that the pollution and plethora of artificial light sources that exist today and which act as obstacles in viewing the heavenly bodies didn't exist centuries ago. It is odd that the six-sided crystal serves as the projection point of creating halos in the environment. The number 6 has significance for many mathematical and theosophical reasons. For example, Pythagoras designated it as a perfect number because the devising numbers (except for the number itself) when added together have the sum of the same number. 1 + 2 + 3 = 6. The bible gives the number significance because humans were created on the sixth day. But there is much more to the number. A hexagon is the most efficient shape that can fill a plane with equal size units without leaving wasted space. Consider a turtle's shell which is a shield born of hexagons. Bees make honeycombs and wasps create nests with the hexagonal shape. Dragonfly eyes are formed with hexagons. The

most predominant shape of a snowflake is the hexagon. And now, the James Webb Telescope has been launched into orbit with its myriad of golden, six-sided mirrors.

Both the sun and the moon appear to us as disks that travel across the skies in a measured path. They have the power to influence the tides, to nurture or destroy the crops, and affect travel, fishing, and irrigation. From the relationship that early humans had with these celestial bodies, it is easy to understand how the first cults and their rituals were centered around them. Objects of light in the sky were probably presumed to be divine and sacred. A quote to support this is from Donald L. Cyr's *The Crystal Veil, Avant–Garde Archaeology*,

> "Originally the sun and the moon were seen to be equipped with 'natural' halos. Subsequently, the pattern was bequeathed to sun gods, to moon goddesses, and to other sacred personages. In this manner, the halo acquired a sacred connotation."[3]

There are different types of naturally occurring halos beyond the circle or arc such as sundogs which sometimes feature a cross within a circle, multiple circular halos, pillar halos, halo vee pillars, multiple halo pillars and more. See figure 1. The circular halo, which is also called a twenty-two-degree halo, is formed when light enters one side of a columnar ice crystal and exits through a different side.

Figure 1. Light pillars in the night sky over Tyumen in Siberia, Tote Licht

Figure 2. Pillar Saints, Chartres, France

Variations in the amount of moisture in the air and the size and mobility of the ice crystals affect what the light pattern looks like. John Gage included experiments in his book *Color and Meaning* showing how the masking of three sides of a hexagonal crystal produced different light forms. When light is directed through the partially masked crystal it creates a partial rainbow or a triangular prism.[4] The naturally occurring sundog halo resembles the Cruciform halo in art due to its bright lights which form a cross within the circle.

Natural pillar halos are a phenomenon we find mimicked in art in the form of pillar saints. Pillar saints were the martyrs who sat for hours on a column or a pillar every day in an act of asceticism to demonstrate their religious devotion. See figure 2. Pillar halos are also evident in the gothic architecture of cathedrals which have columns that reach far above to the highest ceilings as if they are a link between heaven and Earth. The towering architecture of gothic cathedrals is intimidating and awe-inspiring. The physical architectural body of Christianity's meeting place commands respect from religious followers. See figure 3.

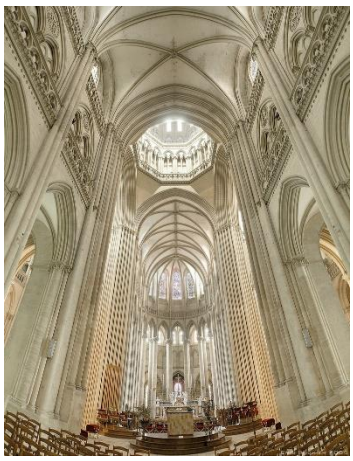

Figure 3. Interior, Cathedrale de Coutances, Manche, France

Whenever we witness a natural celestial phenomenon, it is easy to feel intimidated, and we see how very small we are compared to the rest of the cosmos. A bolt of lightning, the volume of thunder clapping, and the sensational scene of a speeding comet are sublime, terrifying, or even almighty. They wake us up and demand our attention. To possess these powers, one would be omniscient and that is how

religions revere their gods. The nature of light is to radiate, awaken, travel, or cut through the darkness. No wonder light is associated with wisdom.

Not only have the heavens provided examples of religious iconography but so too has the earth. After visiting the landscape at Sinai, Bissera V. Pentcheva wrote that he directly associated the landscape outside of the walls of Saint Catherine's Monastery with "the radiance of burnished gold haloes."[5] The mountains outside this monastery have been described as so luminous that they've taken on a metaphysical significance. Mountains are also icons in art. Because of their massiveness and steadfast nature, they can symbolize divinity. They are immobile, stable and, in some cases volcanic. Caves within mountains are often seen as wombs and the nativity is portrayed inside of a cave in early Christian art. Because humans have become more technically sophisticated and often are preoccupied by the day-to-day events in a city, it is easy to forget the majesty and power of Mother Nature. Reminding ourselves of the relationship our ancestors had with nature in simpler times makes it easier to feel her dominion.

Nestled in between the monumental mountains of Sinai is Saint Catherine's Monastery. A tremendous mosaic of Christ's Transformation is in the apse of the monastery's ceiling. The transformation of Christ is typically depicted in art with the most glorious attention to the metamorphosis by utilizing grandeur in size and light-reflecting materials. In this

Figure 4. Mosaic, St. Catherine's Apse, Sinai

case, the source of light comes from shiny tiles and gold leaf. Viewers are filled with awe by its size and its exquisite rendering. The tessellation of contrasting colors and the use of smalti tiles make the divine images sparkle. Smalti tiles are glass mixed with metal oxides to produce different colors. These individual pieces of enameled glass reflect light into different directions causing the image to shimmer and come alive even more so as the viewer moves beneath them. Gold leaf can be applied on top of these tiles to give off the radiant light associated with the spiritual nature of the scene depicted. See figure 4.

Humans who witnessed astronomical events without the scientific comprehension of meteorology or physics have interpreted them as religious events. How else could such extraordinary things happen? Those occasions have been documented in both text and in art during the years covered in this paper. In 1561 a celestial phenomenon over Nuremberg occurred that startled the inhabitants. It occurred between 4 and 5 a.m. which is a likely hour to view atmospheric phenomena. One of the citizens was an artist who produced a broadsheet illustrating what looked like a battle in the sky. See figure 5. In 1535 multiple sun dog halos were observed over Stockholm prompting Urban Mälare to paint an oil on panel composition describing what was witnessed. The original painting has been lost but another artist, Jacob Elbfas, in 1636 made a copy of the painting which today is in Storkyrkan, Stockholm. See figure 6. The original painting was created during the Protestant Reformation in Sweden when halos had almost disappeared in Christian art.

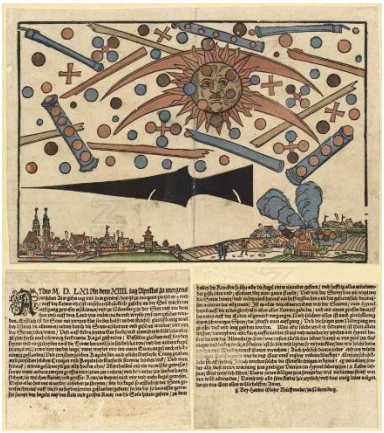

Figure 5. Broadsheet of Phenomenon over Nuremberg

Figure 6. Jacob Elbfas' Vädersoltavlan

Natural occurring events in the environment have shaped iconic art and the omnipotence of these sights have been embedded into what C. G. Jung called the "collective consciousness." These are shapes that are universally recognized, often only revealed to us whilst dreaming. The shapes found in the heavens are a natural and likely ingredient for the collective consciousness. They have helped to form a graphic language that we can all share on a primary level. Consider the fact that Medieval and Renaissance citizens followed planetary influence every day by watching their horoscopes. The study of planets and the way that they moved was in its infancy then. But we will see many pieces of art that contain icons of stars, suns, moons and planets as well as the halos.

Another type of natural occurring halo exists. Synesthesia is a condition in some people who experience more than one sensory mode at the same time. This could mean that a color comes to mind when a synesthete hears certain music. Or seeing a yellow object makes the synesthete taste a lemon. Two modes of senses are active at the same time. According to an article titled *Emotionally Mediated Synaesthesia,* written by Jamie Ward, "Faces and some objects can also often appear to have visual halos or "auras" which are coloured, and projected around them."[6] In a case like this the halos are only seen by people with the unique ability to cross sensory modes. When a person sees another's halo it is called an emotional synesthesia which is a kind of cross-wiring happening in the brain. These people can see others' energy around the face or the entire body because their brain is set up to enable it. There's a source of light that comes

from the person's energy and there is also a path of neuro sensors that have crossed at an angle which results in seeing the energy as a halo. Again, a physical cause has manifested the halo.

CHRISTIAN ADAPTATION OF THE PAGAN HALO

It's a common belief that halos were already in existence before Christianity. They have been found in Egyptian, Asian, Pagan, Roman and Greek art. Many Christian icons were borrowed from Pagans selectively as the need arose. As Paganism was challenged by Christianity its popularity declined. With the fall of the Roman Empire, which was partially due to the new religion's pervasiveness, the persecution of Christians also ceased. Between the fourth and twelfth centuries Christianity was woven into liturgic and political power at all echelons of society. While still threatened with persecution, the Christian adaptation of icons was a gradual process. The hidden meanings behind Christian icons were understood only by the clerical minds that used them. Early examples include the shepherd, the ship or an anchor. Many icons show a boat full of the disciples being guided by Jesus. Or one might see Jesus rescuing Peter from the sea back onto the ship. "Come with me and I will make you fishers of men." Going further back into history we see that the boat was also used as the Sun God Ra's vessel in Egyptian theosophy and called a solar barque.

The study of art history requires that scholars understand the semiotics hidden within art. Erwin Panofsky defined three levels of symbols in his book, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*: pre-iconographic, iconographic, and intrinsic iconological. Each level gives the icon more in-depth meaning. The primary level for the halo would be the halos witnessed in the skies which makes them pre-iconographic icons. Perhaps found in

prehistoric wall art or on bronze disks, these ancient halos in art represented a part of nature that viewers globally recognized and understood. Halos found in Paganistic art are the secondary format which gives the halo a conventional status. By Panofsky's definition this makes the halo iconographic. It represents something sacred in nature that has an omniscient power. In Christian art the halo becomes a sacred icon that represents something so powerful that no human can see or understand it. The halo acquires more significance which elevates it to Panofsky's third level. The halo is now called an intrinsic symbol and designated iconological due to the complexity of the symbol's meaning. Rather than coming from earthly reality it is derived from the unknown.[7]

The Christian doctrines included a hierarchy of importance for halos that were separated into a complex diagram. This was originally written by an early philosopher named Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite who lived in the late fifth or early sixth century. Like the Jewish Kabbalistic Tree of Life, Dionysius' list included angels, saints, prophets and others listed in the order of their importance. It also clarified the attributes of each character and how they were dressed, if they had a beard, and even what the shape of the beard looked like. It is generally accepted that the Greek or Pagan Sun god, Helios, was the original template used for what modeled Christ's appearance in art. The sun stands out as a primary source of heat and light and appears in many religions. What Dionysius proclaimed was that the hierarchy in heaven dispersed heat and light from top to bottom of the ladder of iconic characters. Angels are at the bottom of the hierarchy and the farthest away from the light. At the top are the seraphim and cherubim the closest any entity can be to the ultimate source of light and heat.

Dionysius also spoke about perfection and how perfection was something that could not increase or decrease because perfection was constant. The comparison of this thought to the nature of a circle is interesting. The halo is usually seen as a circle. Circles have been described as the perfect shape due to the constant path of its circumference. Artists were instructed to use a compass to design halos in their art. Within *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourna* which was compiled in the 1760s, a section was dedicated to the making of halos. Artists were advised to start with a pair of compasses and use thread to measure the path of rays emitting from the halo. His recipes and methods are like reading Cennino Cennini's *Craftsman's Handbook*.

Members within the early Christian church reinterpreted borrowed Pagan icons as they were addressed to their own religion. They were graphic representations of divinity, the unknown or unseeable. Using icons that already existed but giving them a new meaning like those of the halo, a dove, or a fish were inconspicuous as they were almost indistinguishable from Pagan icons. When Paganism did fade away Christians felt free to claim these icons overtly as a part of their new identity. Through centuries of changes and reinterpretations of Christian ideological structure the symbols became distinguishable as Christian signs.

The Roman emperor, Constantine (306–337) converted to Christianity in 312 AD and he renamed his capitol of Byzantium, an ancient Greek city, to Constantinople which today is called Istanbul. With his graces the religion spread and propagated with monuments and artifacts decorated with the new Christian symbols. During the fourth century halos became prolific as they matched so well with the description of Christ as a source of light and wisdom. Gradually, the Christian church found a way to co-exist with

political powers and gained a comfortable apportionment of stature. With the endorsement of that echelon, art became an educational method of teaching the new ideology to those who could not read. As a didactic vehicle, art was able to portray what the church considered ethical ideals. Examples of proper behavior and righteous moral decisions were illustrated on walls and paintings that the common lay people observed while in church. Still a religion in its infancy, Christianity evolved over centuries to build its appearance and power.

Light, already associated with the splendid, was also assigned as the definition of good in general. Light parallels with splendor. The light of the unknown wisdom was commensurate with strength and power. An anecdote relating to light is from the bible in the story of how Moses attained his attribution of the horns. It has been argued that the misinterpretation may have occurred during the translation from Hebrew to Latin. Moses returned from Mount Sinai after encountering God, whose light was so powerful that he could not look upon it. Correctly interpreted, the text said of Moses "the skin of his face shone." But the misinterpreted words came across as though his face had flames on either side which resembled horns. His exposure to God's light was overwhelming by the heat it emitted. Let us think about the implications of this phenomenon. If the light can burn somebody it can be used as a method of controlling by teaching or punishing. This gives the spiritual deity a physical consequential energy. "Do not get too close to the sun" is the saying that comes to mind. With this, the church could then fortify their message to the congregation of how a misdirected individual could catch the wrath of a god or other authority if not careful. By this, divine light has been given an igneous nature.

For the church to communicate with illiterate people, icons were carefully chosen to avoid misinformation. It was essential that they clearly define the theological dogma and assist in establishing how a model character would behave. By contrast, the illustrations would also show the outcomes of misbehavior. The church's doctrines were constantly being revised and reinterpreted by scholars and church leaders. As scholasticism molded the power of the secular and the clerical, rules of conduct evolved to fit their reasonings. Art also evolved to adapt to the updated philosophies. Regarding halos in art, there are only rare exceptions where they did not adhere to the current codes of the church. Communication was much slower than it is today. For example, it was possible that an illustrator living in a remote monastery might have mistakenly given an angel the cruciform halo because he hadn't learned yet that it was only intended for Christ's depiction.

SHAPES OF HALOS

Basically, halos are circular with some exceptions. Circular halos can range from a solid fill with no trim or garnishment to one that seems to have three dimensions and is loaded with adornments. The round halo is in general awarded to all angels. Certain additional characteristics may be offered to an elite group of characters as will be shown. Halos in their truest form are much like a ring and often have light rays stretching outwardly. Circles are widely regarded as perfect shapes that have no beginning or end and therefore make an excellent symbol of the unexplainable. They are usually a source of light but can also be constructed of flowers or precious stones. Initially, artists were advised of how to construct a halo from its shape to its color. Eventually they independently employed unique methods of distinguishing their halos from others. This

decision could also be based upon the desires of the patron. But, overall, halos are round.

Unless, that is, they are triangular. The triangular halo is reserved for God and/or the Holy Trinity, but the triangle has been important to many ancient religions. The importance of it lies in its shape which has a stabilizing character by its broad base. The two remaining sides are balanced upward to a point giving it a reference to ascension. As seen in this leaf from *The Antiphonal of Cardinal Bessarion,* c. 1455-61, the initial E is shown with God wearing a triangular halo. See figure 7. The pictorial image of God has his bust protruding through a heavenly blue scarf that encircles him. Golden rays emanate from his head in the shape of a star. The golden triangle behind his head almost becomes a new arm of the star. King David, kneeling on earth in a barren landscape, has been crowned, and holds his hand up to God offering his soul in the shape of a tiny human. His other hand rests on his harp.

Figure 7. Franco dei Russi, Initial E: David Lifting up His Soul to God, Ferrara, Italy

Knowing that the page is 28 x 20 ¼ inches total, the area of the initial's illustration is very small. To operate within a small space, and to have the ability to create depth and texture with shadows and highlights, shows that this artist, or illuminator, was highly skilled. The colors are saturated, and upon close inspection of the digital replication, the texture of the gold areas seems crinkly. The thin lines of the rays, the halo and crown all seem to be of a bumpy nature rather than smooth. This may be due to the degradation of age or perhaps an *assiste* was used by a skillful illustrator.

The *assist* or *assiste* is also called a shell gold which originates from the fact that it was mixed and stored in a seashell.[8] It is a mixture of gum Arabic and pieces of fractured gold leaf. Using an *assist* makes it easier to produce thin lines of emphasis for small or precise areas.

Decorating the pages of an antiphonal would require a steady hand. These books are an example of combining function with beauty. They were small enough to be held by hand. They contained musical chants used in church services by two choirs who would sing refrains back and forth to each other. In this case Cardinal Bessarion could read in his book what the appropriate refrain for his choir would be in response to the other choir. This is called an antiphony, or antiphonal singing; it is a tradition borrowed from the Jewish faith and is quite beautiful to listen to.

And then there are the famous square halos. Sometimes these are found in mosaics and icons from the earlier Christian arts. It is commonly believed that these halos are reserved for people who are still alive and living an exemplary life. In fact, the square halo on a living person has aided historians in dating art pieces. People who lived an exemplary life might be canonized after their death. Once they are established as a Saint the portrait with the square halo acts as a reference for placing the image into the "before death" category on a timeline. In San Marco di Campidoglio, Rome, a mosaic portrays Pope Gregory IV standing with a square halo. Perhaps he was included in this composition as a way of saying thank you for being the responsible donor

Figure 8. Saint Gregory IV, San Marco di Campidoglio, Rome, Italy

of the funding that went into refurbishing this church. The fact that the saint standing next to him has his hand on Pope Gregory's shoulder further emphasizes how much his money was appreciated as this gesture is highly unusual. See figure 8.

Halos with six sides are not as often seen in art but they are used for depicting the Virtues, especially in allegorical paintings. An interesting example is shown in the frescos depicting Saint Frances' vows to obey the three virtues of poverty, obedience, and chastity painted in Assisi by Giotto. According to Saint Bonaventura, Saint Francis was the angel of the Sixth Seal during the Apocalypse. (There is that number six again.) When it was time for the Sixth Seal to be broken it was commanded that the earth and seas be destroyed. But Saint Francis stepped in and insisted that they should not be destroyed until he had had the time to seal all the servants of God on their foreheads. Here is a detail from the Allegory of Obedience. See figure 9.

Figure 9. Giotto Bondone, Allegory of Obedience (detail), 1320, Fresco Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi

Another word to describe a halo is nimbus which is exactly what a true naturally occurring halo is in our atmosphere. When the nimbus or halo encompasses the person's entire body, it is called a *mandorla* or an aureole. The hierarchy of religious art has dictated that *mandorla*s are reserved for the portrayal of Jesus, God, the Holy Trinity, or the Virgin Mary. They have been used in ancient art and by several cultures. The word *mandorla* means almond or

Figure 10. Joyce Hoffman, Vesica Piscis, 2021

almond-shaped in Italian. This almond-shaped graphic may have its tips at either end in pointed or rounded angles, but the shape is distinctly that of a vesica piscis. This shape is the result of two concentric circles that overlap at their center points on each other's edge. See figure 10. The interior formed from the two circles is almond shaped and if the outer lines of the circles are removed except for the lower curves the shape is of another Christian symbol, the fish. *Mandorla*s can also be depicted in a circular or star shape, but always indicate a moment of being in a glorified or advanced state of existence. The moment of a glorified state refers to the transfiguration of a body converting into a spirit. Typically, the transfiguration of Christ or Mary will show one of them enveloped within the whole-body *mandorla*. God and the Holy Trinity are already in a heightened state and therefore are often shown within an all-encompassing nimbus.

One can draw a parallel between the transfiguration of leaving behind a body and elevating into the new form of a soul or spirit and the way that light changes into a new shape in nature when it encounters the flat side of a six-sided crystal. Once the light bounces off it becomes something altogether different. A new phenomenon occurs from a geometric genesis. A natural halo, pillar halo or rainbows are accidents in a way that is generated by atmospheric transfigurations.

Halos became the distinguishing attributes that revealed the level of divinity the person wearing it possessed. In addition to a simple halo being awarded to someone of merit a crown might also be included in art. Although it isn't found often, the presence of a crown was very important. It showed whether the persons wearing them had one of the three required qualifications necessary to earn a crown. Crowns are added to halos if one or more of these preconditions have been met: death from being a martyr, living a

life that was chaste, or performing the task of preaching the word of the gospels during their life. With one or more of these three preconditions accomplished artistic renderings of the saints would include their earned crown(s). The crowns are found located somewhere near the halo. They were either attached to the halo, floating above the halo, or being held by angels above the person's halo. The importance of differentiating a common halo with halos that have crowns was emphasized by Edwin Hall and Horst Uhr in 1978 when they challenged art historians with a paper titled *Aureola and Fructus: Distinctions of Beatitude in Scholastic Thought and the Meaning of Some Crowns in Early Flemish Painting*.[9] The problem lies in the semantics when describing halos as aureoles. Their paper argues that the hierarchy of the Medieval man's mind here on earth was commensurate with the hierarchical structure of heaven. The authors quoted from Paul the Deacon who referenced "three fruits as the three crowns won by John the Baptist as virgin, preacher, and martyr." They stated that scholastic writers need to be careful to observe and mention the difference between these two terms. Because the word *aurea* refers to a golden crown it should only be used to speak of the three preconditions of insignia that go above and beyond the status of the halo. Aureole is the word that refers to a halo or a body nimbus such as a *mandorla*. However, they stressed that *Aureola* or *aurea* represent specifically the extra rewards given to those who suffered one or more of the three preconditions. See figure 11. Halos required their own space, and two or three crowns included in the composition were cumbersome. Eventually the crowns were minimized, and it was not uncommon to award one crown that represented more than one of the preconditions.

Figure 11. Baldini, Saint Dominic with Saints Peter and Paul, 1460s-1480s, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary

The earliest halos that appeared in Christian art or sculpture were worn only by Jesus or God. Many of these early halos were found on decorated sarcophagi which would be used and stored without any Pagan audience. These plain, unadorned circles modestly referred to the Christian's adaptation. During the more decorative years of portraying halos, text was, at times, incorporated into their design. It began as a basic shape but eventually bloomed into the *pièce de resistance* in art. It traveled from modesty to a fashionable elegance and back again to the simple circle. All of this is due to the tastes of the times from which it is created. But the halo is still a circle. The circle has been described as the representation of eternity because it has no beginning or end. Because of its circumference it can be associated with the inclusive protection awarded to those who live within it. It has also been considered a shield which again suggests protection to those beneath or behind it.

As the centuries progressed more varieties of halos became available to distinguish more characters in Christian art's narratives. Scalloped halos and scroll-shaped halos appear in art, but these are more of an experiment in graphic expression rather than a prescribed or long-lasting standard. The Virgin Mary's halo often includes stars as attributes associated with her. The meaning of the stars comes from Revelation

12:1 where she is crowned with twelve stars, and in many artworks, there is at least one star attached to her garments.

Regardless of the shape of the halo, it represents power, virtue, or strength just as crowns or hats define a person's level of importance in military or civic uniforms. The halo is an insignia awarded to those who have performed admirably, shown great courage and/or exercised extraordinary wisdom. For a human, the location of reasoning, awareness and imagination is associated with the head. It is the only body part where not only the brain exists but all five senses as well.

Figure 12. Domenico di Michelino, Dante's Poem, 1465

Notice in the artwork of *Dante's Poem* that the poet has been crowned with a wreath of laurel leaves. See figure 12. Originally worn by Apollo the Sun god, laurel leaves are considered cleansing and sacred. All one needs to do is smell the freshly crushed leaves of a Bay Laurel to understand these inert qualities. Here Dante is crowned with the highest honor given to a poet. It is also particularly interesting to find no rays of light coming from a halo but rather from the book that Dante has written. In his hand he holds the unique portrayal of a piece of art as the source of light. In this way the importance of Dante's *Divine Comedy* has been revealed and it is still held in high regard by people all around the world.

Thus far we've seen how many shapes and variations occur in the halo's hierarchy in Christian art. Italy has given us the greatest diversity for shapes and styles. In other European countries the halos are almost always simple circles or rings. To wear a crown or a halo on our heads is the cherry on top of the ice cream. To emphasize the importance of the human head wearing a crown or halo, Adolphe Napoléon Didron said "The body, divested of the head, is a plant without a flower, a column without a capital, a nameless and formless object."[10] The halo shines with sovereignty. Standards developed by Pseudo Dionysius included the hierarchy of angels. Angels are at the bottom of the hierarchy of holy spirits; they are awarded a simple halo. Codes prescribe the appearance of the awards worn in heaven. Sometimes saints earn extra iconography such as a crown. Added to the basic halo these awards further elevate the importance of the person within the hierarchy. Saints have attributes associated with them and at times artists have included these symbols within the halos they wear. Distinctive shapes and styles of halos are reserved for certain characters. Only Jesus or God wear the

Cruciform halo in art. The cruciform includes the cross upon which Christ was killed and the style of halo strongly resembles a sundog halo. See figure 13.

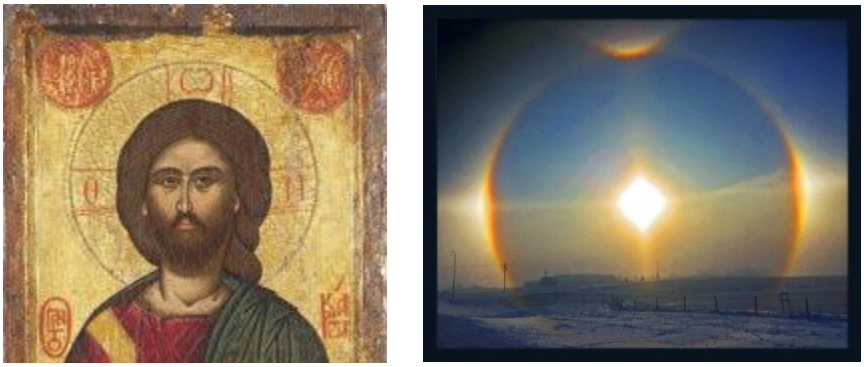

Figure 13. Example of Cruciform Halo and Sun Dog Halo

THE SCHISM BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN CHRISTIAN ART

At this point it is important to add that icon painting, which is like creating wall or canvas paintings, is unique because of its purpose. Again, it's a matter of semantics that needs to be addressed. There is a difference between religious art and icon painting. This dissertation uses the word icon several times referring to graphic symbols, but icons as paintings refer to an art form that has a meditative nature. An icon is a tablet made from wood which is prepared and painted using standards that were prescribed long before the Christian schism. The original process to prepare and create a religious icon is still practiced today around the world in both Eastern and Western Christian faiths. There are some differences between the Eastern and Western Christian religions that influence icon paintings and religious art. The differences are due to the schism that caused their separation.

Changing opinions and reinterpreting the meanings of scriptures continued for several hundred years in early Christianity. These various reasonings each affected art and icons. In 692 AD the Council of Trullo decided that the church approved and

encouraged artists to use human figures to represent Christ rather than substitute his body with that of a lamb. Until this time it was common to see a lamb adorned with a halo. Even with this ordinance from the church contentious arguments about how divinity should be represented in art continued.

The iconoclastic period began in the eighth century when religious authorities of the Orthodox church declared that icons should be destroyed and frescos containing icons be whitewashed to cover the images. The ban on icons was related to another religious decree on how to interpret messages from the bible or other Christian writings. During the iconoclastic period paintings were deliberately destroyed by those who believed that they were the graven images of idolization forbidden by the Ten Commandments. The church interpreted and reinterpreted how art should portray Christian stories. In this period of struggle between Byzantine and Carolingian traditions, two forces of theological reasoning confronted each other.

It was in 1054 that the Great Schism was manifested in Christianity. Leading up to the eleventh century there were several points of differentiation over political and theosophical issues. The most notable difference between the resulting Western and Eastern divide was about leadership. The West considered the head of church and the head of state to be two separate entities, whereas the East viewed the head of state as equal to the head of the church. After contentious bickering between the two regions, Christianity eventually split into two factors and the artistic change is evident from this point on. For example, an emperor wearing a halo will only be found in Eastern Christian art because they view the church and the state equally. There are other differences that have been alluded to but seem questionable. For one, there is a differing

opinion amongst some icon painters of whether the adult Christ portrayed in art should or should not wear a halo depending upon the stage of his life being illustrated. The toggling event is the moment of his baptism. This idea is nearly moot since most nativities show Christ with a halo. Another possible differentiation comes from the opinion of whether saints from the Old Testament should be adorned with a halo. Between the crucifixion and resurrection, Christ visited Hell and granted salvation to the righteous souls. Known as the Harrowing of Hell or, *Anastasis* which is Greek for resurrection, the point of contention is whether these souls were released from Hell at the time they were recognized as good or innocent. The issue seems insipid and a minor difference of opinion, but the constantly changing decrees and questioning of how to portray religious paintings was an agitating issue that contributed to the split.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN ICON PAINTING AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS PAINTING

Both Western and Eastern artists begin the creation of an icon painting with a prayer which infuses the painting with the spirit of the saints being illustrated. In a way, icons are more personalized than Christian art in general because they serve as a gateway for the artist and the saints to communicate. Icons are similar in purpose to a portable altarpiece. They provide a physical tool to focus on during prayer. Many, but not all icons are portraits of saints with a full-frontal view to allow a direct face-to-face communication. The landscapes are purposely created with reversed perspective. This helps to achieve a disorienting environment which emphasizes that the picture is of an unknown, and unrealistic space. It is the holy land and the prominence of the saint

pictured is the highest in the hierarchy of land, architecture or personae. Halos are often gilded in gold or painted in a bright, light color.

Religious art on the other hand, was used to demonstrate the church's dogma. Stories were told through paintings on walls and canvas to educate illiterate people. Compositions became more complicated with stories containing a timeline from beginning to end. The individuals within the scenes needed to interact with each other, which forced the artists to use profiles and three-quarter poses. To further engage the intended viewers, religious paintings over time adopted the use of a familiar or local background. The story's lesson would have more impact if it included the viewer's neighborhood rather than a foreign place that had never been seen before. Clothing worn by characters in religious art also change from the original story's period to something that would be identifiable for contemporary viewers. These techniques are like clever modern advertising with the intention that the local viewers could see themselves in the pictorial situation. Because of its didactic nature religious art was susceptible to the inclusion of political influences.

MEDIEVAL HIERARCHY

The first ten centuries of Christianity were tumultuous as the population adjusted to new powers in both civic and religious leadership. The fall of the Roman empire resulted in calamitous shifts for cultures that forced changes at all levels of societies. The loss of Roman control left everything in a state of doubt and questioning, "Who is in control?" The mass anxiety would not end until the infancy of Christianity could mature and find a way to coexist with the new forms of power. As the dust settled into acceptable political and religious relationships, new civic codes and canons were

established. Contrasting with the frenetic changes made in politics, economy, wars, and religious divisions, the Medieval era was extremely disciplined. Art and life's daily rituals became organized by the clock quite literally. Prayers were performed around the clock. Feasts and ceremonies were married to the calendar throughout the year. The way people worked, ate, studied, worshiped was done by a prescribed, orderly process. Life became more manageable by sticking to a planned pattern or routine.

Medieval formality was restrictive, but ironically, it lent itself to the construction of artistic styles in writing, music, and painting. Dances, songs, and poetry were composed with a deliberate plan for rhythmic beats. It was a mathematical process of repeating lines, steps or notes with a change in pace, and repeat again. In multiple art forms artists were not encouraged to develop personal expression or style. Instead, they were to construct a piece of music, a poem or a painting in a prescribed method. Unintentionally, the formality helped create a new form of artistic expression. Because the artist had little personal decisions to make about composition, content, or color, she or he was able to pour themselves into the practice of painting and repainting a story, allowing them to focus on techniques. The confidence that artists gained with practice eventually begot individual styles. This is evident in later Medieval art and most notably seen in the stylization of halos. The abundance of artistic styles we now have was honed by the regimental restrictions of Medieval orderliness.

Ideas about integrating mathematics, balance, and harmony into everyday life manufactured a closer look at personal behavior and how it was measured. Proverbs and riddles became fashionable and finding solutions to puzzles was popular. These musings acted as signs or reminders of life's lessons. It is typical to find hidden messages,

proverbs, allegories and symbols in Medieval and Renaissance art. Also, art was as it is today a mode of advertising. The civic and clerical leaders encouraged constituents to fit into their programs. Acceptable behavior, good and bad influences, and consequences of falling out of step were taught through art. Umberto Eco explained that "Art was not expression, but construction, an operation aiming at a certain result."[11]

Homes, towns and fortresses were constructed upon geometric patterns. The cathedrals had awesome tall pillars and arcs above the congregation that made the physical space within daunting. A person who stands inside of a Medieval church or cathedral will immediately feel how small they are in comparison. Cities were built with tall walls around them somewhat like a circle. Those reinforced circumferences shielded citizens from foreigners or menacing beasts living in the surrounding forests. The halo's primary shape, the circle, fits into the new Medieval emphasis on balance and harmony. Saint Augustine believed that the circle was the most beautiful shape because it lacked any distracting angles that would interfere with the continuous flow of the circumference.[12] In the nineteenth century, Vassily Kandinsky considered the shape of the circle as "a link with the cosmic."[13] The circle, like the halo, offers protection within its circumference.

Construction and labor are important aspects of locating buildings in the proximity of necessities. A church needs to be central to bring in the community. Agriculture and husbandry need to have access to the practical requirements of the community's economy. Most painters featured in this paper were using the tempera method of mixing pigments with egg yolks, so having a poulterer near the workshop was convenient. Other suppliers used by the workshop were necessary for the supply of

wood for frames and panels, an apothecary to supply pigments, and farms as a source of goat skin vellum. Art grew into a commodity that stimulated the economy for several trades working in conjunction. Though the church was still the primary client for artists, a new kind of client was on the horizon.

PAINTERS' WORKSHOPS

A painter's workshop or *bottega* was responsible for many of the stages necessary in creating a work of art, from construction to sales. The process of creating a painting followed a long trail of consecutive stages. Consider the elements that make up the pigments. They were created out of gems, earth, vegetation, animals, and metals. Painted art was typically applied to a panel of wood, metal or on vellum until canvas became available. Using vellum required that the skin be stretched, cured, scraped, and sized with rabbit skin glue. The livestock industry was an integral part of the artists' suppliers not only for skins but for eggs used to bind pigments. Wooden panels and altarpieces required preparation by first cutting, fitting, and constructing them. Then they went through a process of sanding, scraping, and coating with gesso. Both, canvases and wooden panels required multiple coats of gesso to achieve the smooth, white base to which the pigments would be applied. If gold was going to be used another ingredient was added after the gesso. Red clay bole was painted on the areas that would have the gold leaf applied. Then the gold was buffed and burnished with an agate stone or an animal's tooth to procure the required glassy smooth finish. Applying gold to the painting was done by an expert like a goldsmith, or sometimes it was executed by the master painter overseeing the entire project. Each workshop had its own selection of tools used for stamping or punching the gold that filled the halos, requiring the need for

another relationship between painters and metal workers. Mojmir Frinta has suggested that "The punches were probably cast in metal from an intaglio matrix and possibly finished with the file. Thus, their characteristics and minute imperfections can be recognized in macrophotographs …"[14] Because of this construction of punches Frinta believed that they were mass produced and readily available. This is probably true to an extent. But, what kind of metal is he speaking about? In an article titled "The St. Victor Altarpiece in Siena Cathedral: A Reconstruction," the authors believe that the punch tools were made of steel and the designs were engraved by hand, therefore making each creation unique and impossible to recreate.[15] To further confuse the issue, according to the 21st Century Renaissance Printmaker website, the use of metal cut as Frinta suggests was not developed until the 1450s. Their site explains that copper was the metal used originally.[16] It is also possible that punches were made from terracotta molds. Norman Muller suggests that the first use of the metal punch tool was by Simone Martini in 1319 when he worked on a Polyptych in Pisa.[17] What it comes down to is, what was available at the time and place the paintings were created?

Painters and goldsmiths were members of separate guilds. In Florence, painters joined the Arte dei Medici e Speziali which was a guild that included physicians and apothecaries. The apothecary was the source for powdered elements like pigments, so it was logical to include the painters within this companion guild. The goldsmiths belonged to the Arte della Seta, the silk workers guild. That too was a complementary match because gold thread was used in creating fabrics. Gold and silver spun into the thread of fabrics for tailored fashions was popular for a while. Also, an important artistic medium to engage the use of metal in fabric was the weaving of tapestries. The designs

for tapestries were created by artists. Their cartoons or drafts were then sent to a weaving shop where the tapestries were constructed. During the Medieval and Renaissance years not only were the artists' workshops busy but the halo was becoming all-pervasive.

The workflow could be interrupted by several factors including the plague. In 1425 Lorenzo Ghiberti's workshop fell behind on a project for the Siena Baptistery. He wrote in a letter that the reason for the delay was that he had to escape the city due to the plague. Erling Skaug believed that the plague made "notable irregularities in the punch work after the Black Death [and] can be interpreted as structural disturbances in the workshop patterns in Florence and Siena.[18]" Much as the COVID pandemic today has interrupted commercial and economic situations, losing a metal worker to the plague would influence artists and their art. Other factors posed challenges to the workflow. When work was sparse it behooved artists to stick with each other either by joining guilds or forming collaborative relationships among shops. These working relationships were called *compagne*.[19] *Compagne* were either composed of artists who already had existing complementary relationships with each other or because they had a family relationship.

A workshop that took on more varieties of projects would be able to keep afloat during difficult times. Smaller jobs could keep the shop busy. Creating *cassoni*, the small dowry chests commonly given as wedding presents were always beautifully decorated with painted scenes. Nearly every momentous event in a family's life required a festivity and in return the invited came carrying a gift. A popular item to buy for families expecting a baby was a birth bowl which was a large decoratively painted bowl.

During slow times an artist's workshop could be sustained by producing icon paintings which were in demand for personal and traveling prayer purposes as well as wedding gifts. Books of hours, illustrated manuscripts, and other ephemera were more possibilities of printed materials that would need the touch of an artist. These might also include graduals and antiphonaries containing chants used in mass. Eventually the printing press would launch artists' work into the reproduceable format that increased the distribution of their work. They were employed not only for painting but for designing a stairway, a church, or a window. Artists were also called upon to create colorful and whimsical entertainment decorating the streets and interiors for pageants and feasts.

Obviously, keeping versatile awarded more opportunities for an artist's business, but their reputation also relied upon how closely they could stick to a schedule. Contracts specified the dates that the artwork was expected to be finished. To assure that jobs would be finished in a timely matter, workshops could lean on each other for carrying on a project while someone was indisposed. With so many aspects required in creating projects several apprentices were hired. Governed by the painters' guild an apprenticeship was usually required to last nine years. Within those workshops they gained the training that could be used in a variety of future potential employment opportunities. Sometimes their artistic skills would eventually eclipse the talents of the masters and they would leave to begin their own workshops. Interestingly, there is an exhibit in Paris as this paper is being written that delves into the *bottega* of Botticelli. It will be there until January 24th in 2022. (See *https://www.musee-jacquemart-andre.com/en/botticelli*.)

It was common for families to increase the employment pool by hiring from their own relatives. Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti were well known brothers with their own workshop in Siena. Jacopo, Andrea, Matteo and Nardo di Cione were another group of family artists living in Florence. A collaborative artists' workshop belonging to Simone Martini and his brother-in-law, Lippo Memmi will be featured now by studying their joint work effort on *The Annunciation*. See figure 14.

SIMONE MARTINI

Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, *The Annunciation with Saints Ansanus and Margaret*, 1314-1317, Uffizi, Florence.

This altarpiece encapsulates the quality of craft and skill that went into creating it as well as showing the reverence for the nature of the story being depicted. It stands out from other masterpieces in Medieval and Renaissance art for several reasons. Magnificent in both size and style this creation can easily be distinguished as an indisputably extraordinary example of Sienese art. The entire piece's dimensions are 120 by 104 in. It was commissioned as part of a series of altars to be installed in Siena's Cathedral in the transept dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The interior of the Siena Cathedral is replete with colors, stripes, geometric shapes, and other works of art, which are fierce competitors against which this piece must call attention to itself. The cathedral is voluminous in size and with only few windows the art depends on the light of candles. Indeed, many works of art have been damaged by centuries of smoke and dust. However, in its time the predominance of gold leaf would have created a shiny, shimmering spectacle and anybody walking by would be astonished by its sheer elegance.

What strikes me first when looking at this scintillating work of art is the protective cluster of seraphim located in the center, largest arch. They are the guardians of the Holy Trinity and each of them is wearing a halo. Their form is what separates and balances the composition into two halves. Above them is a shiny round *tondo*, or circular painting of gilded smooth gold. It looks like a halo, but it is probably there representing the Holy Trinity in the unending circumference and perfect shape of a circle. Directly beneath the tondo, the cluster is centered at the tallest horizontal line where one can see the Holy Trinity in the shape of a dove. The dove is wearing a halo and rays of golden light are aimed at the Virgin which directs our gazes toward her and below. The light implies the direct communication from God to Mary.

Figure 14 Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, Annunciation with Saints Ansanus and Margaret, 1317-1314, Uffizi, Florence, Italy

The altarpiece shows the story of *The Annunciation* and it captures the very first moment of the encounter between Gabriel and the Virgin Mary. Above the four protagonists are four *tondos* set into the frame depicting Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Daniel, each holding a scroll with script exclaiming the mystery of the event. The overall sculptural shape of the altarpiece uses a typically gothic style with high reaching pillars and spiraling columns. These constructions separate the side panels from the primary and central narration. The central panel contains three niches. The largest in the center includes the iconic symbol for Mary, the white lilies of chastity. They stand prominently yet stay in the background in a vase on the floor below. This is the area that focuses on the main story being told. Four arcades frame each of the four characters portrayed. The dove is often found in religious art expressing innocence and beauty. It also acts as a messenger. The presence of the seraphim angels gives validity to the words of Gabriel at this mysterious moment. The carpentry of these niches and columns sits upon the painted panels which gives it a three-dimensional effect. That, and the life-size characters makes this altarpiece compelling to study. The construction of the frame is considerable in size and importance and possibly was the costliest part of making the altarpiece.

The gothic pillars often seen in Medieval architecture mirror the naturally occurring pillar halos which stretch from earth into the heavens above. Distinctive pointed arches separating the characters have beautifully scalloped fringes and the entire background is gilded gold. The *tondos* are surrounded by swirling designs of vegetation within their borders which may have been traced from a pattern book. Each constructed niche is framed with gilded leaves that curl like flames. Each of the four

tondos with portraits have what looks like a stippled background. By tapping several pit marks into the gold, a shadowy recessed area is created which draws the portraits forward. By contrast the central, larger tondo has a smooth, shiny complexion and it resembles the sun in the sky.

Gabriel is crowned with the leaves of an olive tree, a branch of which he holds in his hand. The olive tree is thought to be regenerative and fertile because it reappears after being burned by fire by sending out new shoots. Is it possible that Gabriel offers her the branch as a condolence for the inevitable future of her son? He also wears a halo filled with punch marks and tapped around the circumference. The marbleized painted slabs of flooring and the solidity of the Virgin's throne add weight and emphasize the separation of the event from the two saints on either side.

The altarpiece was also created to honor Saint Ansanus who was decapitated in 304 CE for preaching the gospels in Siena. He occupies the left panel of the altarpiece, holding a palm frond in one hand as a symbol of his martyrdom and a staff with the flag of Siena in the other hand. He died as a young boy at the age of twelve, and here the artists have presented him as a beardless young man. This full-length portrait of St. Ansanus resembles a half-length portrait painted by Simone Martini in 1326. He was one of Siena's respected saints. The altarpiece, created by both Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, has both of their names as well as the date inscribed on the bottom of the frame. The current frame was added in the nineteenth century, but their names were also included in the original frame that still exists beneath the newer one. This altarpiece was removed from Siena in 1799 by the Grand Duke Peter Leopold in exchange for art done by Luca Giordano from Florence. The trade was probably made

because of the duke's desire to possess something more modern, but the loss hardly seems to have benefited Siena. Today *The Annunciation* is housed in the Uffizi in Florence. Art historians in general believe that the painter in charge of the altarpiece was Simone Martini with the side panels and the rounded *tondos* having been painted by Lippo Memmi, Martini's brother-in-law. The figure represented in the right panel has been difficult to pinpoint exactly to which female saint it might be. It's likely that the person is either Saint Maxima who was the mother of Ansanus, or Saint Margaret.

The immediacy of the event is shown by Gabriel's flowing cape that has not yet been settled by gravity. The text that springs from his mouth is destined to reach Mary's ear. It was created by painting the raised text with extra gesso or bole before the gold and paint were added. The text becomes alive as it transmits the words "*Ave Gratia Plena Dominus Tecum*." (Hail Mary, full of grace, the lord is with thee.) And what is Mary's response? She indicates an unwillingness to believe or take part in what the angel proposes. She uses her right hand to tighten the closure of her cape as if to protect herself from Gabriel's words. She was reading, as is evident by the book in her left hand that was shut so quickly, she had no time to remove her fingers. The tilting head shows her doubts about the proposition, but over all there is a tenderness that links both characters. The startling nature of being visited by an Archangel has been portrayed by Martini with a great touch of sentiment. The scene is not as frightening as it could have been portrayed. Instead, there is a softness due in part to the sinuous lines of his wings and the printed words that flows to her chair. They are gracefully engaged and bonded with each other despite the distance between them. The Gothic rules of hierarchy have been utilized without compromising the tenderness of the story.

The fabrics used to clothe the characters of Gabriel and the Virgin Mary are unique. The Virgin's costume is consistent with the prescribed colors she is known to wear, but the hems have tiny, densely painted details of intricate geometric patterns. These are no doubt influenced by Mongol patterns. She wears the obligatory star on her shoulder as dictated by Christian iconic code. The Archangel Gabriel wears a tartan cape which may seem unusual and foreign to modern viewers. The fabric is in fact Mongolian and many Italian artists were aware of these textiles. This may be due to the event of the Jubilee of 1300. Among the guests in Rome for the Jubilee of Pope Boniface VIII were one hundred Mongols dressed in their customary fabrics.[20] Gabriel's wings, like his clothing, are of a warm burnished color. There is no space left unadorned with details except the smooth golden background.

Let us not forget the halos. Each character has been awarded with a circular halo with a border around its edge. Floral stamping adorns the interiors of the halos and, in the case of the four featured characters, they are further expressed with rays of light emitting from them. The halos of the two saints show rays in even lengths. Gabriel and Mary have longer rays alternatively extending out from the shorter rays. It is commonly agreed that this workshop was at the forefront of tooled halos. If Martini was not the first artist to use punches and stamps for gilding, he was probably at least the greatest influence on other artists to use the technique. The amount of skill, concern and imaginative energy put into creating this piece is above and beyond the standard for works of art. This is a collaboration of genius and love coming from a successful, conscientious workshop with high standards for their artistic and craftsmanship talents.

ARTISTS AND PATRONS

How did artists gain their followings? The easiest way to view art was by attending church. There was an abundance of wall art, altarpieces and sculptures decorating the interiors and exteriors of churches and public buildings. The audience in these locations would include all levels of society. Throughout the eleventh to fourteenth centuries most art was commissioned by religious entities. These were usually monasteries and churches. Other secular patrons would likely be publicly positioned persons wanting to promote their reputation through art. Wealthy individuals purchased space within the churches to provide special seating for their families. It was customary to decorate each of these chapels with art and it's not surprising that the art became a competitive display. Chapels adorned with art were openly viewed by people walking up and down the aisles. In a sense, they were a public portfolio on display to any person looking for a skilled artist. Someone interested in commissioning an artist could also seek recommendations from others.

Privately commissioned art made for the homes of the well-to-do was as common then as it is today. Merchants and bankers in the community prided themselves as being culturally and intellectually progressive. Investing in fine art was a method of promoting themselves. In-home collections displayed at private festivities gave admiring visitors a chance to view prospective artists that they may choose from. At this highest level of society, the guests came from all over the world, and an artist's recognition could be spread across many borders very quickly. Written correspondence was the common mode of communication in these years. If they were not literate, they employed a scribe to write their notes. Proud clients recommended artists to their family and friends and

sometimes art was commissioned as a political gift sent to a rival to stabilize the diplomatic terms.

During the Medieval and Renaissance years the contracts between artists and clients were based upon several details such as the size of the piece to be created and the time that was needed to finish it. Cost was determined by the quality of the pigments used and the type of tools used to create the art. To obtain the best quality of skills, the contract might include the request for only the hand of the master painter to be used. Otherwise, it was common that the lead artist would paint only the major characters and leave the background or supporting images for one or more of the apprentices in the shop. Tools and supplies were costs that had to be accounted for and as the trade developed contracts became more specific about who would provide the paints or gold leaf.

LAPIS LAZULI AND GOLD

Constantinople was sacked by the Crusaders in 1204. Many beautiful artifacts were stolen and found their way to Italian soil. Some of the stolen art contained lustrous and sparkling gold-ground panels which greatly influenced Italian Medieval art. Lapis lazuli and gold were the two most expensive elements used in painting, both of which came from countries as far away as Afghanistan and Africa. For this reason, a contract included specifications about the areas that would receive the most expensive gold and lapis blue. Less important areas were painted with more economic pigments. A very popular character in religious art is the Virgin Mary. Her character was so revered that the best lapis pigment was used for her robes. A lower grade of lapis would be used for the sky, the river or another saint's costume.

Factors that affected the pricing of lapis included the fact that it could only be mined during the part of the year when its mountainous home was not covered in snow. It also required being transported through steep and rough terrains. As with any business or trade, the quality of the lapis had to be judged before purchasing it. One needed to be able to scrutinize the source selling the product as well as to detect how pure the commodity was. These same discrepancies happened within the gold market where cutting inferior metals into the gold was not always easily seen. However, in 1252 both Florence and Genoa minted gold coins that must have been the standard for measuring what pure gold was. Pounding a single coin of pure gold could result in 100 to 150 sheets of gold leaf. Obviously, a higher purity of gold resulted in better luster and longer lasting gold leaf. For a time, lapis lazuli was more expensive than gold.

The purest most exceptional blue pigment was created from grinding lapis lazuli into a powder. Heavy iron, hand-cranked grinders like modern coffee bean grinders pulverized the lapis. They would chew and grate the beautiful blue substance into the fine powder needed for making a pigment. The unadulterated source of this blue supersedes any other blue pigment known to artists during the Medieval and Renaissance eras. The Wilton Diptych is included next as an example of how exquisite and heavenly the power of lapis can be. The person who created this lavish composition is unknown, as is its intended location. The diptych was created for Richard II, which possibly means that it was created in England or northern France. I include it as an example of Italian paintings' influence on other cultures in the defining of halos in art. See figure 15.

THE WILTON DIPTYCH

Wilton Diptych, 1377-1399, National Gallery, London

The current home of this small diptych is in the National Gallery in London. It was commissioned and used as a private, portable altarpiece that would be seen by the client only or persons who were close to him. In this case, Richard II kneels at the bottom of the left panel. His ownership of this diptych is conspicuous through the details of the stag which he identified with and adopted as his emblem. The composition has two separate scenes that come together beautifully by the complementary dominant colors of either side. The golden left reflects off the luxurious blue on the right.

In this diptych it appears that Richard has handed over the standard flag with the red cross to the Virgin and child as is evident by his open hands and arms. The child seems to be gesturing favorably and smiling toward Richard who is flanked by his favorite saints. They stand behind him acknowledging their bond to both Richard's devotion as a Catholic as well as his power of rulership as king of England. The saints stand by pointing their hands toward him. Their attributes are readily seen. The wild-haired John the Baptist holds a lamb, the Confessor, Edward, holds

Figure 15 Wilton Diptych, 1377-1399, National Gallery, London, England

a ring, and Edmund carries with him the arrow that killed him. Both Edward and Edmund wear beautiful, jeweled crowns and sumptuous fabrics. In this formal composition the three saints are presenting Richard to the Holy family as a form of their endorsement. In the background of the left panel, aside from a patch of woods near Richard's face, the space is completely gold stamped with a pattern. Richard appears as a young man with no beard, although the date of this painting's creation is thought to be later in his life. Richard was made a king at the tender age of ten which may explain his youthful face. He wears pearls on his crown, his collar, and his brooch. Edmund and Edward also have pearls in their crowns. It's probable that these two are not just saints but that they double in their meaning or identity with two of Richard's family members, both having been a king with the same names. The fabric of Richard's clothing is permeated with his emblem the stag painted in feathery tiny strokes of gold. Every character in this painting is wearing Richard's badge as a gesture of support.

The right panel is filled with angels dressed in the luxurious lapis blue that dominates the composition. Their wings are intricately painted with delicate strokes of egg tempera. Even the diapered gold background behind the angels does not supersede the intensity of the blue. At the bottom of the right panel are realistic renditions of flowers and grasses that are reminiscent of later paintings by Botticelli. Each angel is crowned with a garland of flowers. The Virgin's halo is radiant and almost appears to be three-dimensional. Christ's halo has a border made from a chain of thorns and the other three halos by comparison are quite modest. Christ is wrapped in a golden blanket that vibrates off the lapis blue as the Virgin holds one of his feet in her hand. This piece is approximately 20 by 14 ½ in. and it shows that expense was not a concern. Even the

supporting characters' gowns are decorated with sublime gold. The art is dazzling, and it combines both religious and political content as Richard II gains the favor of the Holy members.

The supply of lapis and gold was subject to world trade and hostile invasions that could slow down or cease the supply. For example, during the eighth century the Muslims conquered parts of Spain and North Africa, which depleted the gold supply forcing goldsmiths to seek alluvial gold found in the Rhine. Most of the gold during this blockade came from pounding of already existing gold coins. The gold route was restored in the early thirteenth century.[21] The lapis mines in north-eastern Afghanistan were only accessible for five months of the year; the winters were so harsh that the path leading to them needed to be rebuilt each spring.[22]

Gold has many beneficial properties that makes it desirable to work with. It is the most enduring, yet malleable metal known. It can be blended with other elements to provide a less expensive solution for gilding as well as for creating different tones, such as adding copper to achieve a redder, deeper gold. On the contrary, two hazardous ingredients for art are silver, which will tarnish, and white lead, which will flake away with age. It would be difficult to find another element that conveys the qualities of sacredness and power that gold does. It is a logical selection to employ when an artist needs to depict a source of divine light. Its color and luminance worked well in religious paintings. The nature of gold was commensurate with the significance of the halo.

Sometimes an icon painting would have the entire background covered with a large field of gold leaf. The higher the level of glory being depicted, the more the painting was garnished in glorious gold. To differentiate golden halos from a golden

background the artist could either include a dark, painted outline around the halo or use gilding techniques such as burnishing or tool punching. The halo's form could be brought forward or dropped back depending on what the artist hoped to achieve. A method of adding raised mounds of gesso and bole can form a border of shadow and light to separate the areas. Glittering effects within the halo could be achieved by stamping patterns in them. The light offered in an otherwise dark building with only a few windows meant that art was viewed by candlelight. It was necessary for the artist to know in advance where the art would be displayed. Knowing where the candles were, the artist would then be able to choose the techniques necessary to work with the source of light. With that knowledge the shimmering of the gold would flicker, glimmer and dance.

Orthodox icon painting survives as an art form today with the same principles applied that were established centuries ago. The gold leaf is still easily obtained but the methods of creating them have changed. Because halos and gold leaf are inseparable, a brief explanation of the role of gold beaters follows.

GOLDBEATING

According to an article written by Erla Zwingle in the *Craftsmanship Magazine* titled "The World's Last Goldbeater," the last goldbeater known is Marino Menegazzo from Venice. At the time the article was written in 2014 Menegazzo was still working in the same studio Titian lived and practiced in. He spends hours beating the gold while his wife and daughter work in a separate room cutting and preparing the flattened gold and packaging them for artists. Menegazzo has tried unsuccessfully to find someone to apprentice with him. His desire was to find a new person who would take over the

business. But admittedly it's a tough job. After so many years of working with the metal, he believes that gold has got a soul of its own.

The goldbeating craft originated from Byzantium masters who came to Venice around 1000 AD.[23] A person employed as a goldbeater was called a *battiloro*. Used in a myriad of crafts and arts, gold leaf became a big industry with offshoots including stamps, hammers, and other related tools and ingredients for its application. Today gold leaves are .1 micron thick which is thinner than a strand of hair. Gold can be applied to many types of surfaces such as glass, leather, or wood. The pounded and cut leaves are typically sandwiched between slips of paper in little books, called *libretti*. According to Bruce Cole, the leaves were about "8.5 centimeters square and weighed half a troy grain."[24] (8.5 centimeters = 3.35 inches, and half a troy grain = 0.00114286 ounce.) The artist purchased processed gold leaf in *libretti* full of square leaves stacked between sheets of paper made of silk, straw, bamboo, or rice paper.

Before the finished *libretti* are produced the goldbeater starts by melting the gold in a crucible, then running the resulting *ingot* through rollers to create a long ribbon of gold. This process is called annealing which changes the granular form of gold to make it tougher yet ironically more pliable. During the Medieval and Renaissance periods the hammering was done by hand. Menegazzo places the gold into a tilt-hammer initially and then finishes by hand-hammering. But he is unique, and most of the gold leaf today is machine-hammered in a factory. Four equal amounts of leaf are slipped between mylar sheets and placed in leather sleeves before being beaten. The process is laborious. The goldbeater pounds a mallet three times in the center of the gold, turns it 90 degrees to the right, three more strikes, another 90 degrees to the right, and so on. The leaves

will flatten and expand outward. The art of physically hand-beating gold is a dying craft and the process is being converted into mechanical assembly line methods.

It was the fickleness of fashion that caused the use of gold to decrease in popularity by the mid-fifteenth century. This is illustrated by a funny but brutish story told by Vespasiano da Bisticci. He was a well-known humanist and bookstore owner in fifteenth century Florence. His story was of King Alfonso of Naples who typically wore black with minimal décor, as was the new trend in clothing. He made fun of a Sienese ambassador's old-fashioned and gaudy gold brocade fabrics. The ambassador was very proud of his dazzling clothing. Expecting the ambassador that day, King Alfonso planned with his courtly participants to jostle and bump repeatedly against the Sienese's body during their meeting. They did so much so that they rubbed the gold off his cloak! As it was with fashion so too it became favorable to eliminate gold from paintings and relegate it to the gilding of frames. However, frames were sometimes more valuable than the art within them. They were interchangeable and could be reused or sold. In some cases, the framing was so complex and integrated with the panels held within them that the carpenter was paid more than the artist.[25] As stated before, the use of gold or flashy colors went out of style in clothing and in general they were considered gaudy. While gold lost its status, black became the preferred authoritative color. As Michael Baxandall mentioned, the irony of replacing gold thread and brocaded fabric with black dyed fabric was that it was just as expensive or possibly more costly to reach the level of blackness desired.[26] But the trend dictated during the late fifteenth century was that fashion should be less conspicuous. The changes in styles and preference are evident in the

appearance of halos. Before leaving the topic of gold leaf the next work of art will show more of the techniques used by artists with gilding. See figure 16.

NICCOLÒ DI TOMMASO

Niccolò di Tommaso, *Annunciation Triptych*, 1337, (center) Saint Bridget's Vision of the Nativity, (base) Virgin and Child, (left wing) Annunciate Angel and Saints Anthony Abbot, Catherine of Alexandria, Nicholas of Bari, and James Major, (right wing) Virgin Annunciate and the Crucifixion, Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

This triptych is included for the many examples it gives of techniques that have been discussed so far. It is an ambitious project that has a multitude of personae within it. Additionally challenging is the fact that the overall size is so small. When open it measures 35 ½ x 27 in. When closed it measures 35 ½ x 16 ¼ in. It had to be small enough to be carried and used as a portable altarpiece for personal prayer. The story told within the triptych's central panel is based on the vision that St. Bridget of Sweden had while she was visiting Bethlehem for a pilgrimage on March 13, 1372. Her vision was dictated to secretaries and translated into Latin. In her vision she witnessed the birth of Christ. Bridget died the next year, but her story spread quickly in Europe and by 1391 she had been canonized. This painting portrays Bridget in the lower central panel in black and white attire showing her pilgrim's canteen hanging behind her. She wears a halo with a dark background illuminated with thin golden rays.

In the left wing are four saints: Anthony Abbot, Catherine of Alexandria wearing a crown, Nicholas of Bari, and James Major. Above them kneels the archangel Gabriel who gazes down at the central panel's events. Scholars have suggested that the original owner of this triptych was Nicola Orsini which coincides with the inclusion of his name saint Nicolas of Bari in the side panel. The right wing shows Mary in grief, Mary

Magdalene, and John the Evangelist at the base of Christ's cross. Above them is the Virgin Annunciate kneeling at a lectern.

Bridget's description of her vision is graphically portrayed exactly as she told it. A choir of angels sings and plays musical instruments above and within the gothic arch. They either hold their hands in a sign of prayer or of devotion by crossing their hands over their chests. Goldleaf has been applied to the background areas giving even the dark interior of the cave a warm glowing aura. Beneath the singing angels two cherubim and two seraphim are floating in the center. From their mouths are words on raised mordant gilding saying from the left "Glory to God in the highest" and from the right "And on earth peace to men of good will." From the mouth of the Virgin are the words "Come my God, my Lord, my Son." According to Bridget's vision she saw Mary in the cave alone after Joseph left her with one candle and went to tend the animals in the manger. Mary was preparing to give birth. She removed her shoes and outer clothing and began praying. Bridget saw Christ being born with such a

Figure 16 Niccolò di Tommaso, Annunciation Triptych, 1337, Saint Bridget's Vision of the Nativity, Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

shocking light emanating from both he and Mary that the candle was dimmed by comparison. The moment is depicted in this painting by enveloping the mother and child with their individual *mandorla*s that show piercing rays of light shining in all directions. There is a floral motif seen in most of the halos except for the kneeling Bridget. In the central panel Mary's halo contains the words, "This is my beloved Son." Mary's halo is punched with a variation of the floral motif. John the Evangelist's halo is adorned with the same design that decorates the borders of the side panels although smaller. This supports the idea that sets of tools were purchased in shapes of different sizes by artists.

Several times while doing the research for this paper charts of punch patterns have been found. All one needs to do is closely study the halos found in art of these years to see the repeated designs. There is an amazingly large selection of patterns based upon designs found in nature such as flowers, blossoms, buds, stems, vines, and leaves. Diamond shaped lozenges, quatrefoils, tear drops, and trees are commonly found in halos, in backgrounds or in the designs of fabrics. Clusters of circles have been designed and all these patterns come in various sizes. Occasionally a similar design will show up between different artists' workshops, but usually not. To see a large array of punches, see *Italian Paintings, 1250 – 1450*, of the John G. Johnson collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Appendix II shows samples of punch designs attributed to different artists. See figure 17.

HALOS IN THEIR GLORY

The fourteenth century nurtured the finest and most inventive halos ever created. Styles between artists' workshops instigated the production and evolution of new halo designs. It was a time for the halo to come to the forefront. The number of details within the gilded emphases was piqued into a generation of stylistic art. As a result, artists and their workshops began to show individual expressions. Rather than the simple, plain halo of the past it is now dressed in ornate and fashionable patterns of fine filigree. Like rose windows, halos became vehicles for artists to show off their skills. The use of geometric and arabesque designs on painted fabric and in halos is the influence of artistic trends in the new studies of mathematics and geometry. It also illustrates the influence of exotic cultures on Italian art. The effluence of repeated tiny, dense patterns was tedious.

Figure 17 Punch Patterns

Hand incised gilding in smaller areas was done by pressing a pen-like tool into the soft skin of the gold. For larger areas stamps and punches were tapped with a mallet. The shapes at the end of the tooling hammers were custom-made according to the artist's desire and a set could be ordered in different sizes of a single pattern. Tool patterns became distinguishable between workshops. Details examined within halos have been helpful in properly attributing paintings to the correct artist as well as to determine the correct date of the work's creation. It was not yet common to sign art, and dates were

not always recorded. Without a copy of the contract many artworks have been attributed to the wrong artists. Recent papers have been written in the last thirty years that reveal the multitude of information that can be honed from studying the details found in the décor used within halos. Even with the evidence of a contract to identify an artist it has been shown that some works of art were more likely created by a collaboration of different artists. This is due to the knowledge of the ownership of distinct punches that are associated with a workshop. There have been cases where it was discovered that punch marks were altered through the process of restoration. Without being able to replicate the original punch another was used. This kind of discrimination wouldn't have been noticed if not for the recent emphasis on the importance of tooling and the identification of artists' workshops with specific patterns. Andrea di Cione and his brothers formed an art workshop that produced exquisitely detailed halos. He is better

Figure 18 Andrea Orcagna, Strozzi Altarpiece, 1354-1357, Capella Strozzi, Basilica of Our Lady, Florence, Italy

known as Andrea Orcagna and he was commissioned by Palla Strozzi, one of Florence's most powerful banking executives, to create an altarpiece. See figure 18.

ANDREA ORCAGNA

Andrea Orcagna, *Strozzi Altarpiece*, 1354-1357, (From left to right) Saint Michael, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, the crowned Virgin Mary in a Dominican habit who presents her protégé Saint Thomas Aquinas to him, God, Saint Peter (kneeling), John the Baptist. The two on the far right are Saint Lawrence and Saint Paul, Capella Strozzi, Basilica of Our Lady, Florence

The magnitude and detailed ornamentation of this altarpiece are quite commanding, and many characters are depicted. The painting has a gothic construction of carved and shaped wood placed on top of the characters. It is evident that this Florentine art was influenced by the Sienese workshop of Simone Martini as it has a similar structural framing to Martini's *The Annunciation*. Extensively gilded in gold the altarpiece has a three-dimensional architecture. The five arched areas are lavishly decorated with pinnacles of carved, gilded wood, punched areas, and hexagonal shapes filled with four angels in blue and red. A busy stream of red, green, and gold lozenges separates the architectural borders from the arcaded areas of golden floral patterns. The central arch is the largest, and two rounded shoulders are added to its pointed top turning it into a magnificent crown. Each of the individual panels and towers is decorated with carved foliage growing from the edges. The scalloping of the wooden frames surrounding the characters casts a shadow on them. The *mise en sène* appears from under the architectural frame which protrudes and acts as the stage's proscenium. Within the five arched arcades are the following characters: at the far left are Saint Michael and Saint Catherine. Saint Michael is in his armored attire with gothic finishes of gargoyle faces at his knees and shoulders. He stands on top of a beast, the dragon,

who represents the devil. He wears a small diadem on his head in addition to his elaborately punched halo. As a martyr, Saint Catherine has earned a crown to add to her beautifully punched halo. She holds the palm frond of martyrdom and leans against her wheel of torture.

Following Saint Catherine's gaze to the next panel is a scene featuring the Holy Mother and Saint Thomas Aquinas kneeling beside her. She wears a halo stamped with chains of laurel leaves which have floral motifs punched at measured spots in between. Mary wears an impressive crown with the usual attribute of a star on her cloak. She rests one hand on Thomas' shoulder while the other hand reaches toward Christ to offer Thomas favorably to him. Thomas' halo has pointed floral punches circling around. There are several different stamp patterns used in the composition, ranging from simple dots to more elaborate geometric patterns. The Cruciform halo of Christ is of course the largest and it commands more attention. He, too, wears a crown of martyrdom but the fill in his halo is unique. Instead of alternating motifs Orcagna created Christ's halo entirely out of a pointed floral design in between the cruciform shape. Additionally, Christ has a full body *mandorla* surrounding him, protected by a shield of Seraphim. On his right, Christ hands a book to Saint Thomas Aquinas and a key to heaven is offered to Peter on his left. Peter is dressed in his familiar iconic yellow cloak as he kneels beneath Christ and in front of Saint John the Baptist, who is looking directly at us. Saint John is as usual depicted with wild, curly hair. His halo is full of laurel leaves.

On the far right the final panel presents Saint Lawrence standing with the grill that he was burnt on while he holds his palm frond. Next to him stands Saint Paul holding his sword, the word of God. Their halos have the familiar punch patterns like

the other saints. The integration of characters is more natural than most paintings of the same period. The hierarchical separations are less pronounced, and the image is more of a communal composition. Only a few of the characters are wearing clothing with patterned fabric. The carpeted flooring beneath the figures is a deep red with golden *fleur de lis*. At the base of the altarpiece are three different stories including, from left to right: the Mass of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Christ saving Peter from drowning, and the saving of the soul of Emperor Henry II. This is an unusual scene to be depicted in art. It is probable that Strozzi requested that this scene be included because of his family's banking business. It is not by coincidence that Henry II was guilty of usury.[29] This demonstrates how patrons depended upon their contributed art for the forgiving of, or indulgence of the church and to verify their innocence. The entire creation is adorned with tessellated and filigreed areas of curling lines. The overall impression it gives is spectacular.

CONTINENTAL TRAVEL AND TRADE

The Medici started a trend with their passion for collecting ancient artifacts such as coins, statues, medallions, fragments of architecture, and gems from around the world. Their collections represent acquisitions made over the several years they ruled as the leaders of Florence. Lorenzo the Magnificent had an obsession for collecting valuable texts. His adopted family of scholars helped to translate works by Plato, Aristotle and other ancient writings from around the world. He also was well educated and did his own writing of poetry. Because of his insatiable appetite for learning and collecting, other powerful families of Florence followed in his fashion. To keep up with

the leading family they acquired their own artefacts to show off their money and erudition.

Studioli or small studios became stylish in well-to-do households to contain intellectual curiosities. Among other rare and beautiful items collected were ancient books. Mentioned in a 1512 inventory of Lorenzo Medici were copies of Dante, Petrarch, and Bocacaccio.[27] Each of these three poets were born in Florence which greatly boosted Tuscany's prestige. People with wealth were able to enjoy discovering and comparing cultures from around the world in both contemporary and historic terms.

By the end of the fifteenth century artists were no longer employed solely by religious institutions and the content of their art reflected a wider range of interests. These stimulating global discoveries were so popular that those who could afford it would send a staff member to points of trade. Wherever there was a busy shipping port there were shoppers representing their employers. An example is Fabio Biondi, an Italian who was appointed by Pope Sixtus V as Patriarch of Jerusalem. Biondi was stationed for a while in Lisbon, Portugal to oversee the Vatican's revenues. One of the tasks he was afforded was to keep an eye on the shipping news and use his own judgment about acquiring merchandise for the Pope, cardinals or other collectors in the Vatican and around Rome.[28] Some of the acquired items were inanimate and others could be rare animals, all of which were occasionally incorporated into commissioned art. Later in this paper a rare bird from as far away as Australia will appear mysteriously in a painting by Andrea Mantegna.

By 1485 Europe had achieved a transcontinental economy that, through trade, exposed people in vastly different cultures to each other's styles in art, food, languages,

animals, and architecture. A lot of attention was placed on the shipping news for ships coming home with goods from around the world. Cities located on the coasts of Italy had the advantage of a shipping trade to boost their economies and establish the eventual middle-class lifestyle. Landlocked cities were sometimes compelled to invade and take over towns with access via seaports which was what happened when the Florentines invaded Pisa. The city most associated with culture and art during the Renaissance finally gained access to the world-wide water trade. Travel cards and money issued to travelers printed in foreign languages became common enough that artists were able to study their exotic curlicue fonts. Everyone in the upper class of society was exposed to the articles imported from around the world. Count among those citizens the artists who worked for the elite. Mongol text was used in Italian art, including more than one of the featured paintings in this dissertation. The use of pseudo text shows a direct influence on European artists by foreign encounters in the same way that the opening of Japan caused Impressionist artists to introduce the flat perspective of Asian art.

A popular way to depict fabrics, halos and backgrounds was to mimic Arabic and other texts from foreign cultures. An interesting story about foreign text in halos comes from an article written by Vera-Simone Schulz in which she discusses the uproar caused by a 1998 article published in the Italian newspaper *L'Unità*.[30] The article reveals the discovery of Islamic text found within the halo of the Virgin in Masaccio's *Enthroned Madonna and Child Surrounded by Angels and Saints*. The article created a turmoil amongst art scholars over the thought that a Christian painting contained Islamic text. After investigating it was found that yes, there was Arabic text in the painting. Furthermore, they found that other art by Italian artists also included such text. The

inclusion of the foreign language in Masaccio's painting was probably intentional as it was commissioned by Italian ambassadors who were on their way to al-Qähira, Cairo. The text was in Manluk, the language spoken there, and the inscription was for the protection of the donors of the triptych while they were visiting the Muslim countries. An Oriental language expert named Rudolf Sellheim claimed that after 1421 Pisa, Livorno and Porto Pisano were seized from the Genoese by the city of Florence which allowed her to engage in world trade directly by sea. With increased access to artifacts imported from foreign areas Italian artists were exposed to cultural text and symbols. They incorporated the exotic text, sometimes unintentionally backwards, into halos and hems of clothing. This is called pseudo-text and the effect gained was a lavishly curlicue geometric filling to further emphasize halos. The next piece of art will feature some of the pseudo-text used by artists during the Medieval and Renaissance periods. See figure 19.

GIOTTO DI BONDONE

Giotto Bondone, *Madonna and Child*, 1310-1315, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

There are many remarkable aspects in this lusciously colored painting by the great Giotto di Bondone. A native of Florence, Giotto was admired in his own time by his fellow citizens who recognized his genius. Giotto kept busy producing frescos, altarpieces, and paintings for private- and church-commissioned art. On the side, he also ran a business renting out looms. He was incredibly productive, and his paintings can be found in many Italian cities. He represents the bridge between the Medieval and Renaissance periods. The art he studied and initially produced was of the Medieval hierarchical art style. Yet his unique flair for using subtle shadows and highlights always

made his art different from other contemporary artists. He took painting a step further by breathing life into his characters, giving them volume and emotions, and recognizable characteristics. Like the way that workshops expressed their unique styles to produce elaborate halos with signature punch patterns, Giotto's painting style shows the emergence of individualistic independence that breaks away from the hierarchy of Christian representation in art. It starts off subtly, but during the fifteenth century art becomes more available to private collectors who appreciate originality from artists.

Figure 19 Giotto Bondone, Madonna and Child, 1310-1315, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., USA

Some of the characters in Giotto's art have barrel-like figures that were probably realistic portrayals of people he knew rather than drawing from a consistent pattern or caricature template. Pattern books were available to artists and illuminators of manuscripts. Religious art that depicted characters as real people has up to this point been unusual. He also mastered the ability to show expressions that give his scenes emotional impact. There is no other kiss in the history of art that shows as

much love as his illustration in the Scrovegni Chapel of *Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate* (1305).

The *Madonna with Child* was done between the 1320s and 1330s. It is unknown if this painting was intended to be in the Santa Croce or the Ognissanti churches in Florence. Thus, the original location and audience are unknown. Mother Mary is portrayed with dignity and strength. She stands firmly with confidence and is no longer a frightened young woman as when she encountered Gabriel during the Annunciation. In one hand she holds a white rose which has been used often in art as one of her symbols of purity. In her left arm she supports her son who is grasping one of her fingers. This is a typical thing to see a child do, but it makes the portrait very tender. The child Jesus touches the white rose that she holds as if to further demonstrate their love for each other. She looks out into the distance while Jesus's gaze is on the white rose.

The motifs depicting the star shape on her cloak have the basic elements of a flower or even the sacred geometric pattern known as the "Flower of Life." This icon has circles overlapping circles which eventually create a floral design found in several cultures' art. Giotto has used a tool to stamp an image of an oak leaf in Christ's Cruciform halo. He has also hand painted, small floral or star-shaped graphics to emphasize the cross. Simple, tiny punches are used to form the perimeters of the halos. Christ's halo has an internal circle from which the three bars of the cross diagonally branch out. Within Mary's halo is a pattern that resembles a grill made of a serpentine back-and-forth shape in one direction, then rotated ninety degrees to make a loose weave. In fact, upon closer examination one can see that he used two elongated oval stamps in a vertical position, and then laced them with two identical shapes in a

horizontal position. These woven grids are repeated around her halo with very finely detailed leafy flourishes in between each grid. Those must have been done by a tool to create such precisely formed repetitive patterns. Compare the smoothness of the grids with the coarseness of the repeated single punch used to make the perimeter. The punches look as if they were done by hand following the path originally made by a compass. The likelihood of a human who could create a perfect circle without a tool is almost impossible. If it could be done, it would be by accident, much like a halo in nature caused by the accidental conjunction of light on a path that reflects off the side of a crystal.

Within the hems of Mary's garment are pseudo-Mongol patterns serving as decorative finishing touches. Arabic text used in art like this is called pseudo-Kufic. Those patterns are also found in the small diadem at the top of her forehead. The border that forms the arched frame contains more of these pseudo-texts. It was common for Giotto and his workshop to combine Arabic and the Mongolian Phags-pa script in paintings.[31] Mary's halo is so large that it occludes a part of the frame of the composition's arched top.

The boldest part of this art is in the bright, fresh fabric colors. The cloak she wears is a rich, deep teal green with swooshes of bright reds, greens and yellows shown in the lining. The pinkish coral skin tones bounce off the deep teal due to their complementary relationship in colors. This small, simple work of art is successful in delivering a picture of tenderness and dignity that breaks some of the barriers of gothic art's predictable flatness and extreme glorification using excessive gold. The slight

imbalance between Mary's halo and the center of the arch is a tool that gives the viewer a more personal and less formal positioning. Such is the genius of Giotto.

ASTROLOGY AND MYTHOLOGY

Medieval and Renaissance people were fascinated by ancient philosophies and mythologies. Anything and everything related to the ancient societies was revered, collected, and studied. Although the philosophies behind the pre-Christian cultures conflicted with the church's conventions, they continued to gain momentum. The curious students of philosophies came from all over the world. In the Italian cities of Siena, Florence and Padua the scholarly campuses were prominently supported by patrons with political power. An abundance of poets, mathematicians, philosophers, and artists orbited around their schools and ruling families like planets around the sun. The revived interest in ancient Greek and Roman art and philosophy intellectually piqued several scholars. It was a time to explore the relationship between humans and the cosmos. What is our destiny and how much freedom do humans have to control their fate? Mythology provided stories that served as allegories for depicting virtues and vices in art. The stars and planets were assigned unique personalities with characteristics that exemplified human nature. Greek and Roman gods served as symbols and personifications of planets that helped to illustrate the conditions of humanity.

As hard as it is to believe today, astrology and astronomy went together with Christianity for centuries. Patrons wanted their astrological aspects included in the art they commissioned. The personification of planets as gods offered the opportunity for a patron to describe himself with the pictorial strengths of Roman and Greek heroes. By identifying with the struggles and accomplishments of mythological characters they

assumed the same traits in themselves. Patrons had their chambers painted with frescoes based on their date of birth. They displayed themselves with their astrological strengths and favorable aspects. Today, astrology might seem to be in juxtaposition with Christianity. How can Christianity, astrology and mythology coincide without aggravating each other? How do science and faith concur with each other gracefully? Many poets and scholars discussed and attempted to find the ways in which the differing elements could coexist. How palatable could science and myth be for the unquestioning Christian devotee?

A popular Florence scholar, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1493), respected astrology and did quite a bit to promote it. Although at times he vacillated about the legitimacy of astrology, overall, he was certain that it was a part of nature and a product of God. He considered the planets and the study of their effects on humans as an energy that existed in nature. His vacillation may have been from having such an inquiring mind. However, he was accused of heresy by the church in 1489 for supporting astrology.[33] Being excommunicated from the church or even facing the possibility of torture can be quite influential. Ficino also defied the concept of predestination as he believed that a soul could choose her own path. What arose from the Renaissance mind was a peculiar thing. The ideas of self-determination and self-consciousness were new elements with a great deal of power. In astrology the stars present at the time of birth determined the characteristics and temperaments of the person born under them. The challenge for humans was to understand and acknowledge their shortcomings and rise above them. If people can steer themselves to higher achievements on their own volition, they acknowledge that they have a choice as well as the opportunity to change their lives.

A Swiss physician named Parcelsus (1493-1541) considered philosophy a key component for a medical career. Not only did he believe that philosophy was important for practicing doctors, but he also considered a knowledge of astronomy as a necessity.[32] See figure 20. This is an illustration from a book that was published in 1410 called *Mandeville's Travels*. It shows astrologers watching the skies with then state-of-the-art technical devices. A few men in front are writing with sticks in what might be a foreign language. The artist of this illustration is unknown but referred to as the *Master of the Mandeville Travels*. Again, art is inseparable from its environment. Italian artists were very aware of the interest in astronomy and astrology. Perhaps they too consulted their charts daily. Mythology was popular in Renaissance art and literature, so having a knowledge of the characters and stories was a requisite for artists.

Figure 20 Master of the Mandeville, Astronomers on Mount Athos, 1400

How could faithful Christian followers also be enamored of an ancient mythological god? This was really rocking the proverbial boat, and yet they coexisted. How was the halo to muster up to the romantic images of Roman and Greek mythology? A famous example of mythology in Renaissance art is in the work possibly commissioned by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco Medici from one of their family's favorite artists, Sandro Botticelli. In *La Primavera* there is no halo seen. The entire narrative lacks any piece of Christian logos. This is the beginning of the halo's disappearance in

art history. However, it is not because the Catholic faith was waning but due to a powerful passion for learning about science and nature.

Florence was blessed in that she had several well-known native writers like Dante and Boccaccio as well as having their wealth of scholars and scientists surrounding the Medici family. *Studium generale* or Medieval universities were established in Padua to promote further studies. The Carrera family boasted the University of Padua which pulled scholars in from around the world. Many instructors from Bologna's University gravitated to Padua to join the so-called Paduan four nations of studies. These groups were based upon the humanists and literature coming from four regions: French/British, German, Italian and Provençal/Spain. Local art reflected their studies and the passion for astrology. For example, in 1344, Jacopo Dondi installed an astronomical clock in the tower of the Reggia in Padua. The clock has been replaced but the original clock included the hours, days, months, and moon phases.[36] This shows how important keeping track of the planets was. Their impact on human life was powerful. See figure 21.

Figure 21 Giusto de Menabuoi, The Creation, 1375-1376, Padua Baptistry, Padua, Italy

GIUSTO DE MENABUOI

Giusto de Menabuoi, *The Creation*, 1375-1376, Padua Baptistry, Padua

This fresco, *The Creation of the World*, is painted onto the ceiling in the Paduan Baptistery. Under the rule of the Carrara family, Padua encouraged scholars to congregate and discuss

many subjects including astronomy, astrology, and literature. They met regularly at the *Reggia Carrarese,* or Carrara Royal Palace. In a typically Italian Renaissance manner, philosophy was expressed visually through art. This group commissioned Menabuoi to create The *Creation of the World*. It was the first of a series of frescos created to represent the Old Testament of the Bible. Reading from left to right; God the Son is seated on the support of a cloud of seraphim and cherubim. They are the creatures who are closest in hierarchy to God. But notice that two of these characters are wearing halos seemingly in front of their faces! God's halo is patterned modestly; he sits upon his cloud gesturing commands to orchestrate the creation of the world. The entire scene is curtailed to the curved space within an architectural barrel vault in the ceiling. A large, golden circle and a heavenly blue background represent the celestial space in which the world is born. earth is presented as a flat, perfect circle with concentric circles and bands enveloping it.

The continents have vague, fluid-like shapes that are unfamiliar to today's viewers. Here they are arranged as though they were ingredients in a pot of stew being stirred directly within the middle of the colored bands. In the yolk of the circle is the representation of earth and water. The first colored band is blue to represent air; it contains eight stars being the planets and the sun. The next band is red to represent fire. Now we have the four elements established. The four elements are recognized in this piece as are the planets. During this period medicine was still associated with tempers or elements like air, water, fire and earth. Those properties were easily married with astrology's identification of planets and signs controlling specific body parts. In the realm of science this added validity to astrology and astronomy and the intellectuals

strived to find ways of incorporating them into Christianity. From the white band to the black band are the seven then known planets that were believed to circulate around the earth. The deep purplish band has a miniature golden sun to represent *Sol*. The deep blue band that surrounds the world contains the zodiac signs.

Astrology was popular not only with the secular population but also with members of the church. It was not uncommon to consult the astrological chart before making an important decision. In fact, Pope Julius II chose the date of his coronation based on his astrological chart. Pope Leo X made sure that the Roman University included at least one expert in Astrology.[34] If one types in Google, "pope" and "astrology" you will be astonished to find how many members of the Vatican not only believed in astrology but decorated their chambers with art illustrating the precise moment they were born. Astrology is commonly found in Medieval and Renaissance art. For more information see Emily Urban's "Depicting the Heavens: The Use of Astrology in the Frescoes of Renaissance Rome."[35]

The planets have been observed for centuries but the science of astronomy challenged the church's premise of God's creating the earth. Galileo was arrested by the church for questioning the genesis of earth. The church was adamant that the sun orbited around the earth as it was written in the scriptures. Period! And yet, popes, bishops and cardinals enjoyed identifying themselves with the houses and planets of the heavens. No doubt that this was one more element that leads to the Reformation.

The planetary influence on artistic development came in a multitude of ways dealing with both content and technique in art. Secular interests and the study of nature became realized in art by using true-to-life renditions of plants, animals, portraits and

architectural spaces. Rather than use generalized features to stand in for persons' forms a quest for realism begins. For instance, to keep alive the memory of family members funerary monuments and sculptures described the person's features accurately.

RENAISSANCE SELF-DESTINY

Humanistic beliefs included the idea that humans can achieve perfection or at least happiness within their lifetime. This differs with the Christian requirement of standing in judgement after death, before being deemed worthy of heaven. The afterlife was a serious concern for Christians who wanted to be certain that they would be judged favorably at the gates to heaven. Poverty, famine, war, and the plague were causes for fear, but perhaps what was feared most was what happened after death. As much as people enjoyed reading their horoscopes, they also felt the fear of facing a future in hell. Mythology was entertaining for showing examples of consequences and rewards, but its nature was contemporary and not something that was carried on after death. It described life's lessons rather than offering something as final and uncompromising as purgatory. It was already mentioned that the Medieval and Renaissance years stressed the importance of ethics and morality. Many stories of good and bad behavior are represented in art. Reminders of accounting for life's sins were ubiquitous. In churches the last wall to walk past before exiting usually had the visual message illustrating the Last Judgment. *Memento Mori* paintings were a common theme that showed the vanity of valuing material comforts during life and served as reminders of how short life can be. Like a perfect bubble, another circular shape, you can shine and float for only a fleeting moment in history. The purpose during life was to prepare yourself for the inevitable future transfiguration and assure yourself a pleasant afterlife. However, if you

couldn't discipline yourself to behave admirably you could avoid the wrath of God by paying the church for your indulgences.

This was a lucrative practice for the church to play on citizens' fears by making them pay either in cash or with donated art that glorified the Christian dogma. Often, the donor was a wealthy man who had committed the sin of usury in doing business or engaging in other more personal indulgent misconduct. The art was commissioned for a public place like their private chapel inside a church. This art would demonstrate how truly pious he was and absolve him of sin so he could avoid purgatory. Donating money and art to public places was an ideal way to keep the family name in a respectable position and show the validity of their devotion. It benefited the donor to include their image in the wall art or altarpiece. That way the public viewers would recognize them and associate their caricatures with generosity and religious adherence. People who are not afraid of judgment in the afterlife were likely to question other religious disciplines so the church made the most of keeping them scared.

Many beautiful architectural monuments, palaces, towers, libraries and churches were constructed by powerful families. Their wealth was ostentatiously spent and displayed to beautify their cities and command respect from citizens. The creation of public and religious buildings was seemingly done for the benefit of the public but more importantly for the posterity of the powers behind the construction. One of the greatest contributors to cultural richness came from the Medici family of Florence. They were not recognized as a royal family until 1569 when Cosimo was given the title of Duke. However, they had assumed the honor of royalty by taking control of Florence and her businesses after creating the Medici bank in 1397 and steadfastly growing in power. It

was extremely imperative that they make a stamp in the landscape that kept their family name in the forefront then and forever in the future. They invested in many public and private architectural marvels. Their salvation in afterlife may also have been acquired by inserting four Medici men into the Vatican, each one a pope. Luckily for humanity the family also provided for the public by supporting the arts with grandiose buildings, sculptures, plays and many cultural gifts that we still enjoy today.

Keeping tabs on the Christian flock was trickier during the Renaissance than it was in the Medieval years. The yawning curiosity of Renaissance scholars introduced ideas that did indeed step on the toes of the Christian ideology. In art the halos will be one of the first victims of iconography to be lost. The respect for naturalistic scenery and promotion of sciences became more important. The next artwork has halos that are so transparent they allow the background to show through them. See figure 22.

ALLESANDRO BOTTICELLI

Allesandro Botticelli, *The Bardi Madonna* or *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist*, 1485, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

Madonna with Saints has been chosen for this paper because it represents not only the work of a fine artist who is well known around the world and throughout history but, because it is a prime example of the halo's decline in significance. The halos are still visible, however they have become transparent and plain, as if their existence is just to suggest a loyalty to tradition. They are less conspicuously appointed and without the substance of gold. Also, Christ is not wearing the standard Cruciform cross. In the plentitude of vegetation included in this painting there are no items in the background to even suggest the cross in his halo. There are two references to the cross directly center

at top and bottom of the composition that keep the inevitable future episode in the viewer's memory. One appears to be a framed portrait and the other a green cross made of pliable leaves. The painting was commissioned to honor the family's burial chapel of Giovanni d'Agnolo Bardi within the Santo Spirito church in Florence. Bardi was a banker with a passion for music. He was a member of a group of musical theorists in Florence. Botticelli shows his inciteful brilliance by making the background of this painting sway as though it moves to a song.

Although the most recognizable and famous paintings done by this artist are of Greek mythology, *La Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus*, Allesandro Botticelli remained a devout Christian. During the time that this painting was commissioned, the Medici family had invited Girolamo Savonarola to Florence because he was a popular preacher with a flair for persuasive speeches. Eventually, Savonarola went to the extreme in preaching his belief that the wealthy rulers, including the Medici, were not living a pious life but one of extravagance and conspicuous consumption. It turned bad for the Medici family who went into exile temporarily after the city erupted into chaos resulting from Savonarola's propaganda. Botticelli, although a friend of the Medici family, continued to be awed by the priest's fiery speeches. His later years were devoted to making religious themes in his paintings.

One of the strongest characteristics in this painting is the freshness of the vegetation and the outdoor environment of a garden. The garden in art has had the implied meaning of being a protected and pure area. The trees and shrubbery behind the characters are woven into niches that replace the typical architectural spaces of interiors. The characters' natural and casual postures show the use of harmony between

proportion and perspective. Italian artists idealized the appearances of characters unlike the Northern European artists who revealed all the details, even if they were not pretty. Instead, as seen in this composition, characters are portrayed as if they were a god or goddess with perfectly ideal shapes and colors.

Mary's halo almost takes on the shape of a woven basket as its transparency does not totally block out the view of the palms behind her. There is so much going on in this painting with many accurate renditions of plants, that the fact that Mary is nursing Jesus almost goes unnoticed. The background is busy and intertwined to the point that it takes on an architectural form of a wall with vaulted ceilings. This is called pleaching when the stems and leaves are woven together. There are familiar iconic symbols viewers are used to seeing such as the lilies for Mary, the bowl at St. John the Baptist's feet for baptisms, and the quill and ink pot in Saint John the Evangelist's hands. Such exquisite hands they each have! Behind Saint John the Evangelist is his attributed Eagle. Each adult has very plain clothes but with some decorative hems. The fabric's folds are boldly expressed with large brush

Figure 22 Allesandro Botticelli, The Bardi Madonna or Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, 1485, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

strokes of shades and highlights. The expression on Saint John's face is handsomely etched with wisdom and strength while the mother and child have very smooth, young faces. The background is so dense that the people pop forward toward the viewer, but the halos have lost their dominant presence.

The altarpiece has a shelf running behind the characters from left to right that was possibly painted to fit within the church's architecture so that the image was incorporated into its physical surroundings. It was common for an altarpiece to be integrated with a church's overall scenery and decoration. There are shadows that would indicate that the painting was set in its environment with a source of light coming from the left. The frame has been lost and the piece is no longer situated in the church, so it is impossible to know. Also on the shelf are vases with ribbons of text around them that take words from the Hebrew Ecclesiasticus written between 200 and 175 BCE. The words refer to the lyrics sung by Wisdom in which she offers fruits and liquids to all who are in need. Considering this, the Madonna of Santo Spirito is offering more than just nourishment for her child but also wisdom.[37]

At the time this painting was created, the most erudite scholars were debating over topics such as music, literature, dance, poetry, sciences, philosophy, magic, and the metaphysical. Serious discussions about God, nature, the cosmos, and how they interpenetrated with each other was like the opening of Pandora's box. The study of humanities was able to coexist with the Catholic church, but the fierceness of Savonarola's words conflicted with the scholars' patrons. He was such a persuasive speaker that he held his listeners in a trance-like obedience. It wasn't that he disagreed with the scholars because they tried to incorporate their reasonings within the Christian

philosophy. However, in his own words came the warning for their wealthy patrons. He said, "I am the hailstones that will smash the skulls of those who will not take cover."[38] His disdain for showy opulence was also directed at the Vatican. Savonarola became popular with the public, and they too scrutinized the excessive behavior inside the Christian leadership. One reaction was the impetus for several offshoots of religious orders. All levels of society were about to be challenged over what some claimed to be a conspicuous consumption of material goods.

Already the Franciscans and Dominicans had formed off-shoots of Catholic practices. Their mendicant ways influenced Christian art by promoting themes of charity, poverty and the teachings of Christ. These two early-to-break from the Vatican's indulgent practices were distinct yet complementary factions. Both Franciscans and Dominicans strived for teaching fellow love, for not partaking in creature comforts and for learning more about the ways of Christ.

The appearance of wealth was scrutinized in both private and religious lives. Behavior was being held up to the light and watched closely. Eventually Savonarola would incite the riotous Bonfire of the Vanities in Florence. Certainly, the move toward modesty in appearance would have an influence on the amount of gold used to create a halo. Halos became modest and stopped drawing attention to themselves. The next artwork keeps halos subdued and unobtrusive. See figure 23.

FRA ANGELICO

Fra Angelico, *The Transfiguration*, 1440-1442, San Marco Church, Cell 6

Among the greatest gifts bequeathed to humanity were Fra Angelico's paintings on the walls of the monks' cells and the meeting rooms in San Marco's monastery in

Florence. This Dominican monk's art is recognizable to many people, as he has been very popular in the history of art. Tiny cells were furnished to monks who lived in San Marco, each with its own fresco painted on a wall and one small niche to hold a candle. In Cell 6 the *Transfiguration* is depicted in a simple, naturalistic style that reflects the movement towards lessening the formal gothic style and emphasizes beauty and harmony. The halo is far less decorative than seen in the Medieval years. It has become a simple circle with etched lines within the circumference to infer rays of light. The halo of Christ is the standard Cruciform halo with stylized bars extending from an inner circle that is not quite centered with Christ's head. The inner circle is slightly higher than his head and the top bar of the cruciform does not reach his body. Perhaps this is because he is looking downward. This means that the halo has gained a freedom since the Medieval years when halos were seemingly attached to the heads. Now there was space between the heads and the halos that allowed independent movement. However, the other halos are portrayed as flat and perpendicular to the viewer regardless of the position the saints' heads are facing. They've lost the luster and glorious detail of the Medieval art that had fallen out of fashion. This is a toned-down illustration of a glorious moment of solemnity. The body of Christ has been transformed and rising within a *mandorla* that coruscates such intensity that mortals cannot stand the brightness. They hold up their arms to protect their eyes. Dominic's halo has been awarded a special star in place of a crown. Another icon fades away.

Figure 23 Fra Angelico, The Transfiguration, 1440-1442, San Marco Church, Cell 6, Florence, Italy

The face of each person within this composition are unique and realistic. At the top and left of Christ is the head of Moses with the attributed bull horns represented as though they are wisps of clouds. Mary's beautifully proportioned face is respectful of the moment, she is the only person who can tolerate the light emitted without shielding her eyes. Elijah is to the right of Christ just above Saint Dominic. The outstretched arms are suggestive of the cross Christ died on. The narrative unfolds with only a few naturalistic details. Emphasis is on placing forms in a realistic manner through proper perspective, beautiful characteristics, and a balanced composition. There is no gold used in this fresco, but illumination is still present by virtue of the use of pigments for highlighting. Some of the simplest, most beautifully colored, and most impressive images have been painted by this Dominican monk, Fra Angelico.

REFORMATION AND THE PROTESTANT MOVEMENT

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Christian churches adopted a tolerance to the writings of antiquities and the planetary influences on earthly inhabitants.

Scholars like Petrarch in Padua (although born in Florence) influenced art and politics with his references to antiquities and secular themes which the Carrara family supported. The interest in empirical, astrological and astronomical issues waned and waxed. These fluctuations affected the type of commissions patrons were paying for. In Florence the Medici family's support of the humanities fell under the scourge of Savonarola. His dominant lectures challenged the Catholic church about engaging in Pagan-like beliefs. In Germany more challenges to the Papal power emerged.

In 1517 Martin Luther challenged the Christian church by posting his *Ninety-Five Theses* at Wittenberg, Germany, citing the indulgences being sold. Reports of scandalous behavior in the church brought about the Protestant split away from the Catholic Vatican. As already mentioned, Northern European art had stopped including halos. If halos were included at all they were often formed by coincidental recognition of shapes from the background behind characters. It could be a fire screen or an archway behind the person that filled in for the halos. Consider *The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* where there are no halos, not even on the head of the angel. Done in 1480, the painting denotes the importance of those who are wearing crowns or a wreath; Catherine's implied halo is a part of the brocade of the fabric behind her. Again, to compare Christian Italian art with Northern Christian art see Robert Campin's 1432 *Merode Altarpiece* triptych where there is not one halo included in the scenes depicted around the annunciation.

ANDREA MANTEGNA

Andrea Mantegna, *The Madonna of Victory*, 1496, The Louvre, Paris

Although halos were becoming dimmer and slimmer, in 1495 they were still being used in Italian art as is shown in Andrea Mantegna's *Madonna of Victory*. See figure 24. This painting commemorates a small victory won by Francesco Gonzaga. Invasions from foreign countries were a constant threat to Italy, and Gonzaga was acting as a *condotierro* when he was called to halt the progression of France's King Charles VIII. Gonzaga's interference was celebrated in Mantua with this beautiful painting.

Francesco II Gonzaga was a Mantuan member of the famous Gonzaga family. He was married to Isabella d'Este who has possibly eclipsed her husband's reputation in history for her amazing impact on cultural arts and politics. Her name was associated with art patronage, setting trends in women's fashions and as an overall supreme specimen of womanhood.

The French army was attempting to conquer regions in Italy but had failed. They were in the act of retreating to recoup their supplies when Francesco served as the general who went to Fornovo and stopped their retreat. Although the French eventually prevailed, Francesco did succeed in temporarily preventing the French army from exiting as they had wished to. In appreciation to the Virgin Mary for his success in battle, Francesco decided that a church should be built and decorated in commemoration of the interception received from Saint Mary. The Santa Maria della Vittoria church was built and within it was placed this all-inclusive and intricate composition. Today the painting is housed in the Louvre in Paris.

Francesco asked that the painting include not only the Madonna, but figures representing martial saints to endorse his bravery and victory. The two saints were Archangel Michael and Saint George. Both are in soldiers' attire with faint rings around their heads. More prominent than halos, the two hold their identifying symbols, Michael's sword, and Saint George's broken lance. The tip of the lance was famously broken off when he killed the dragon. Behind Michael stands Mantua's attributed Saint Andrew with his cross. Behind Saint George is Saint Longinus, another soldier wearing a plumed helmet and holding a tall staff.

Figure 24 Andrea Mantegna, The Madonna of Victory, 1496, The Louvre, Paris, France

Mantegna portrayed Francesco with a smiling, grateful face, making direct eye contact with the Madonna. She has obviously offered her protection by including him underneath her cape and placing her hand above his head. Because of this favorable gesture she leans toward Francesco allowing viewers to see more of the beautifully

detailed mandala behind her. This mandala serves as a secondary halo for her. Below her cape is a young Saint John the Baptist holding a cross. Kneeling on the ground beside him is his mother, Saint Elizabeth.

What has happened to the halo in Renaissance art? Symbols and scenery are intricately depicted yet the halos are humble. The arched bower framing the group is laden with fruits, vegetables, and birds as if it was a Christmas tree. Strands of beads made of marbles and precious stones are draped across the composition. The entire painting is filled with symbols and details, but the halos are minimal at best. A cluster of coral is suspended above like a hanging pyx, but it likely represents the blood of Christ. The coral not only resembles the shape of a heart, but its stems appear to be the valves that supply the blood.

One of the birds sitting on the pergola is a sulfur-crested cockatoo which may have been imported from Australia. This may seem too far a distance for the ability of world trade in 1496. However, a technical study done by Julia Brandt, et al. provides proof of the shipping trade between South America and Europe that had been established in the sixteenth century as early as 1550. Her study focuses on the method of shipping educational supplies to reductions in Paraguay established by Jesuits.[39] Reductions were settlements in South America established by the Jesuits to spread their religious ideas to the indigenous people. The spice trade was already flourishing by the time this altarpiece was painted. Routes via land or sea were connecting Western Europe with Eastern Asia and reaching as far as Northern Australia. The journey could be completed from Australia to Asia and then from Eastern Mediterranean countries to

Venice or Sicily. It would be a harrowing journey for animals but the concern for animals' rights would not appear until the nineteenth century.

The Medieval peoples' adoption of enforcing extreme protocols to unify their chaotic social structure was being shaken down by the Renaissance era's advocacy for free will. The scholars of the Platonic Academy discussed and tried to integrate various cultures' ideologies that would be able to co-exist with Christian dogma. However, the result was a new schism formed over the issue of free will. Philosophical curiosity opened many gates in different directions that led to alternative ways of reasoning. The strong base that existed in Medieval times was born out of a feudal, agrarian system. By the mid-fifteenth century commercial enterprises across the seas were offering individual merchants a degree of self-determination. Competition increased in both the social and theological realms. It became more obvious that there was a double standard in both areas. The atmosphere of free will fostered the culmination of questioning and criticizing Christian dogma in theory as well as in the physical behavior observed within the church's clergy.

The Renaissance person was freer in both time and ruminations to consider humans' relationship with nature and the cosmos. Art reflected these changes through realistic perspective in architectural portrayals and atmospheric depth used in landscapes. The marvels of what the eye could see were much more important than the biblical stories narrated in paintings. Characters were more likely to be dressed in contemporary costumes and exist in realistic, familiar locations.

There were several times when the Catholic church was accused of moralistic indignities and often a counter scourge occurred to rectify the situation. The

enforcement of dogmas was stepped up for a while to give back the image of properness. Art suffered at times during these periods as the dogma offered by the church controlled how sacred images were portrayed. A secular movement in painting grew during the late sixteenth century in the genre of portraiture. Many personal court artists executed portraits of family members throughout the lives of wealthy and powerful people. Even the inclusion of animals in art was tested by the Inquisition because of what could be considered symbolism with multiple intentions, some of which were not suitable. Often portraits of women have a small dog seated in their laps. Although the dog was long believed to be a symbol of loyalty, during these counter scourges the church enforced heavier codes of conduct[40].

However, by this time in history artists are being admired for their skills and secular art is prominent. Admiring a painting of a family member or an allegorical story was popular. The trend was for a contemporary appreciation of what could be called 'modern art' of the Renaissance. Biblical images began to assume current environments and attitudes. The next artwork will demonstrate the use of local architecture and contemporary clothing used in Italian art when illustrating a story from another time and another country. See figure 25.

LEONARDO DA VINCI

Leonardo da Vinci, *The Benois Madonna*, 1478, The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida

The Italian Renaissance explored the ideals of beauty in the forms and rhythms of literature, music, and art. Of course, the matter of perspective and naturalism was stressed in both art and architecture, and the artists' skills became a mathematical challenge. Horizons and viewpoints in composition were as important, if not more

important, than old fashioned iconography. The greatest example of art as a science is seen in Leonardo da Vinci. His lifelong study of the motions of winds and currents of water made his backgrounds very realistic. He observed the changes in colors in relation to distance and used *sfumato* technique to add subtle shading that gave a two-dimensional piece of art the appearance of being three-dimensional. His careful exploration of anatomy allowed him to render human bodies in both grotesque and godlike perfection. Nothing was accidental in his compositions. Many artists were aware of Alberti's writing on perspective; the Italian art scene was dominated by horizons, radii and vanishing points. Certainly, the circle is involved in creating the perspective rays that shoot from a single point in the art's composition. Artists' skills were now at their best drafting abilities. It is due largely to this quest for realism and adherence to perspective that the halo became optional. If the patron still valued the icon and wanted it to be included, by this time

Figure 25 Leonardo da Vinci, The Benois Madonna, 1478, The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida, USA

the artists used their own judgement to decide the extent of the halo's presence. Here is how da Vinci chose to represent halos in the *Benoit Madonna* or *Madonna and Child*.

This portrait of the *Madonna and Child* is a realistically rendered personification in contemporary scenery. The Madonna seems so young that pregnancy would be dubious but, who cares? This was the immaculate conception after all. Without the halos the viewer might think it was a sister and brother portrait. Much about Leonardo da Vinci's genius has been discussed for centuries. But viewing this painting up close reveals a lot of techniques and hidden codes that might otherwise go unnoticed. Obviously, the halos are minimally portrayed and look like golden rings above their heads. There is a slightly fuzzy area nearest the edges that suggests an inner glow of gold rather than the typical outward emission of light rays. They are painted, not gilded. It's unlikely that Leonardo da Vinci would allow a halo or any religious icon to interfere with realism. To him art was a science.

Mary's hair is a golden orange with lightly painted drops of red paint to give a warm luster to her head. Her braided hair is almost as fine and tapered as a frond of a fern and her round face appears very childlike. Another unique feature seldom found in Medieval, or Renaissance art is the smile, especially one that shows teeth. Her grin is wide and full of joy as she looks at her baby's face and dangles a flower in front of him. Naturally, the child wants to hold on and inspect this flower. The museum's website describes the flower as a bitter cress that is shaped like a cross signifying the upcoming death.[41] This is not evident to me, and I do not concur that the flower looks like a cross. In her other hand, behind the child's back is a clump of more cress with no blossoms. The sprig that she chooses to show him is the one with the blossoms which is the most

delightful sight. The background is minimally detailed, but clearly, they sit in a room with a contemporary vaulted ceiling. The window's wooden door hinged to the wall is open allowing daylight to become a source of light that affects the composition. There must be another source of light from above and toward the viewer. This light brings out the details of the folds of fabric she wears and illuminates the child's skin. Her brooch has fifteen pearls around it. The glossy domed shape inside the pearls has a slight highlight on it and if viewed up close appears to have a red dot on the left and almost suggests that the painter's image is being reflected. A light from above shines down on a square shape that could easily be a painting placed on an easel. It requires a high-definition image to see these details. There are steps leading up to the window which reveals only a gray sky with none of the usual atmospheric landscapes that da Vinci often employed. The composition shows at least three-quarters of Mary, yet viewers' eyes are held between the two halos that hold the focus on the two faces, and again between the brooch and flowers. The composition captures the precious moment of playfulness and privacy.

It gets more and more difficult to find halos in religious European art after the sixteenth century. Mostly found in Italian art, they are no longer necessary to identify the characters in the (by then popular) religious stories. The Northern countries had already begun to omit them completely before the end of the fifteenth century. Naturalism and balance used to depict proper perspective made the halo too tedious to be included. The next piece of art is unique if for no other reason than because it was created by a woman. It also further shows the halo's evolution toward a simple ring. See figure 26.

PLAUTILLA NELLI

Plautilla Nelli, *The Last Supper*, 1568, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Nelli was a nun in the Santa Catarina di Cafaggio convent in Florence where this painting of *The Last Supper* was originally displayed. It stayed there until the 19th century when the convent closed. It was placed into storage and forgotten about for four hundred and fifty years. Luckily, during the 1990s it was rediscovered. It then entered a four year long restorative endeavor to bring its luster and crispness back to life. Gratitude for its resurrection is deserved by the Advancing Women Artists Foundation, led by Jane Fortune. In 2019 the restored art was reintroduced to the public and it is now housed in the Santa Maria Novella Museum Refectory in Florence. Nelli was a self-taught artist, but her skills were quite advanced by the time she painted *The Last Supper*. It's well documented how difficult it was for a woman to gain the skills and make a living as an artist. Nevertheless, she started a workshop within the convent for women to learn the trade of painting which eventually allowed them to raise their own money. Ironically it all came around full circle since the painting was resuscitated and displayed by an all-women team in Florence. The damage to the painting was extensive, but today we can see its original beauty and skill.

Without knowing the specifics of lighting in the convent it is difficult to guess at how ambient light would affect this painting. At such a large size it probably was hung at a level high enough that allowed people to see it from across a large room like the refectory or dining hall where it was located. What is evident in this painting is that Nelli was a confident painter who was comfortable at drawing and painting realistically. Her lines are strong, and the colors are bright. She uses shades and lights to render her

scenes and characters in a natural manner. These are life-sized characters and when viewing the painting it is easy to feel as if you are a part of it. The crisp lines of the unfolded tablecloth show us that the artist was intimately familiar with the washing, drying, and folding of the linens as well as with unfolding and spreading them out before a meal. Anatomy was not a subject that women could study but her depictions of fingers and toes, most difficult to achieve, have been included without trying to hide them away.

The halos are painted to look like they are made of silver. By 1568 it was no longer necessary nor desired to portray divinity in gold. The halos are barely suggested

Figure 26 Plautilla Nelli, The Last Supper, 1568, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Italy

with modest thin lines and so humble that they are almost unnoticed. There is no utilization of decoration within these halos. A simple ring floats around all except Judas who sits discretely holding his bag of coins just below table level. Christ still has the Cruciform halo decorated in an unassuming design. The halos are formed to center behind the top of each head in different angles that correspond to the position of their faces. Almost as lightly painted as the dust of chalk, the halos are barely there and appear somewhat like a fading rainbow. The composition is very long and allows each character a certain amount of space afforded to him only. That enables viewers to study and communicate with each of them one at a time.

In the next example of religious Italian artwork, a questionable halo will be shown. Is it just a realistic feature in the background or does it also represent and act as a substitute for a halo? See figure 27.

MICHELANGELO MERISI DA CARAVAGGIO

Caravaggio, *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, The National Gallery, London, England

This paper's final spectrum of Medieval through Renaissance halos featured in art will be devoted to the genius of Caravaggio. He has disembarked from the formal protocol of religious art more than any artist up to his time. In his rascally nature he flips off the art world and the church establishment by changing the rules to serve his style. His characters are obviously chosen from real life; their features show no respect for the historic codes of religious iconography or symbolism. His models were found in

Figure 27 Caravaggio, The Supper at Emmaus, 1601, The National Gallery, London, England

his contemporary life and were a part of his own environment, which means that his models were off the streets. Not often did Caravaggio portray saints with halos. And when he did adorn them with this sign of dignity, they were barely visible. Within the collective examples of Caravaggio's art that include halos the one painting that is focused on herein is only a faint suggestion of a halo. This is because it's not clear whether it was meant to stand in for a halo or if it simply seems that way. It appears as a dark shadow on the wall. The only occurrences of black halos or missing halos have typically been used when referring to Judas. This paper argues that the shadow is also a reference to a halo. It frames Christ's head and gives it authority.

Caravaggio did more than one version of the *Supper at Emmaus*. His first painting featured here is more powerful than the second. Its power comes from the tension, depth of field, and the literally *on edge* details included. If the viewer stands back and looks at the overall composition, a rectangle with a dark background is filled with four characters and a busy table of food. The cast includes the two pilgrims who were walking to Emmaus on the third day after the crucifixion. They did not recognize the resurrected Christ, but they suggested that they dine together. Christ is in the center and an unsuspecting waiter stands by staring at the phenomenon in front of him. Christ and the servant are foremost in the center, yet only Christ is actively gesturing. Behind Christ is the shadow of the waiter's head but it is positioned exactly where a halo would have been put behind Christ's head. The shadow provides a method of showing Christ's divinity in a very subtle and dark manner. He is at this point no longer incarnate. This is the moment before his character will completely disappear, as if he had never been there at all. The waiter has no idea that he is looking at the risen Christ. The two pilgrims are

just recognizing the fantastic and miraculous vision in front of them. The pilgrims represent the surprise element in the story, displaying their emotions through body language. Caravaggio has cleverly punched through the flatness of two-dimensional painting by using chiaroscuro. On the left, the pilgrim grasps the arms of his chair, about to stand up. The white patch of shirt showing through a hole in his jacket brightly stands out as the closest part of his body to the viewers. The white tablecloth cuts horizontally across the darkness of the receding table until it meets the white cloth on the other pilgrim's lap. From that source of light, the eyes will jump up to the pilgrim's outstretched and strongly foreshadowed hand. The basket of fruit is on the edge of the table; it seems likely that one of the shocked pilgrims is going to upset the table and spill the basket's contents on the floor. The many details Caravaggio employs compel our eyes to study them up close, but they compete with the stronger impact suggested by the shadows and lights. The details are exquisite in the light refracted from the water pitcher, and the blanched shell worn by the pilgrim is rendered realistically. This shell is perhaps the only traditional icon found in this painting. In this case it represents pilgrims.

NOTABLE HALOS

Caravaggio's shadowy halo seems probable to some of us, but that is due to our knowledge of halos and art history. Those of us who have studied religious art are aware of their significance. Without this knowledge another person would not have noticed the implied halo. This paper has concentrated on halos of Italian Medieval and Renaissance art. However, more remarkable halos were discovered while doing research for this

paper that I'd like to include for comparison as well as to commend them. Not each one represents the Italian Medieval or Renaissance focus of the dissertation, but they are worth mentioning. They are included here due to their uniqueness.

Figure 28 Judas Walks Away from His Halo, artist and location unknown.

The first one included is thought-provoking yet its whereabouts and artist are unknown. See figure 28. It is from a copy of a copy of someone's personal photo on Facebook. It was sent to me in an email from an icon painter I know in Denver, Colorado. The information that could be found leads me to believe that this fresco is located somewhere in Romania and was painted in recent years if not 2020 or 2021, but I cannot be sure. In fact, it is obvious from this picture that the wall painting has not been finished. Swatches of colors are still below the painting where the artist has set up the tools. Items on the table have yet to be painted in. The disciples are on their way to a feast in this circular wall painting. Judas is seen walking in the opposite direction toward a door. He has a small demon on his shoulder. As he leaves the scene, his halo has been abandoned, still suspended in the air where he left it. Very interesting!

The second painting is believed to be of Saint Jude holding a club. According to the website *CanadianArtOnline.com,* the painting is possibly done by a German artist, painted on copper and from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. My feeling is that it's from the sixteenth century. The unique and unexplainable extra halo he wears merits mentioning. See figure 29. Contact was made with Gene Canning from said website inquiring about the whereabouts of this painting or any other information that could be

gleaned of it. He told me that he found the piece online, purchased the mysterious painting and cleaned it up. At first, the painting was very dark and hard to distinguish any details. After its cleaning it was obvious that the person in this portrait was holding a club which is usually attributed to Saint Jude. He saw what looked like a halo and with more cleaning discovered the double halo.

The third halo painting was painted by a Spanish painter, Fernando Yañéz de la Almedina, and titled *Head of Christ*, done in 1506. In this painting the Cruciform halo has been stylized so it resembles a clover. See figure 30.

Figure 29 St. Jude, artist unknown, possibly 17th century, possibly in Texas, USA

Figure 30 Fernando Yáñez de la Almedina, Head of Christ, ca. 1506, The Met, New York, New York, USA

There is one more merit-earning halo that I'd like to include. This painting does fall within the limits of the paper's focus. Circa 1472-74, Francesco del Cossa painted his version of *The Annunciation* with a totally unique halo. The Virgin's halo is represented as many were during these years, simple and wispy. However, Gabriel wears his halo as a soldier would wear a helmet. See figure 31. It seems to be strapped around his head. There was an interesting and entertaining presentation done by Dr. Richard Stemp online recently. Focusing on del Cosssa's painting he revealed many hidden symbols. He also showed how the art form of drama influenced the painting. Stemp is not only an art historian but a thespian as well. He pointed out that feasts and festivities in Italy were opportunities for arts and artists of all kinds. Music, dancing, parades, costumes, plays and props decorated plazas and streets for entertainment on feast days. Perhaps it is due to his interest in the performing arts that he noticed that Gabriel's halo looks like what would have been worn by an actor in the 1470s. This is another example of how the environment and art are interconnected.

Figure 31 Francesco del Cossa, The Annunciation, 1472-74

CONCLUSION

So, what has been discovered about the halo from this dissertation's research? Halos have been stylized to mirror the contemporary fashion from which they were created. The source of their origin is not from a particular theory, religious group or culture. Instead, they have been ubiquitous throughout the centuries since before the dawning of humanity. Halos in religious art are descendants from the natural celestial bodies we see encircling earth each day and night. The Greeks believed that planets traveled in circular paths around our earth. It was a circular path because they also believed that the shape of a circle represented perfection. The first geocentric solar system was drawn by Heraclides (330 BC) with seven perfectly round planets and our sun. Images of the celestial bodies are found in ancient humans' art located on stone walls and bronze disks. The most important god must have been the Sun god that blessed this earth with warmth and light. It was a natural conversion into Pagan and then Christian art; no one group of people can claim to have originated the halo.

The prominence of halos was certainly at its highest during the Medieval and Renaissance years. More attention was afforded the halo within the Sienese and Florentine art workshops in the early fifteenth century than ever before or after. Indeed, Italian art lavished the most detail and glory on halos with the use of gold and punch tools. The ideology of the young Christian faith was burgeoning during these times and the halo was a lovingly appointed icon of great respect. It became a mandatory inclusion for artistic expression of divinity and for an example of a humans' most refined behavior. The halo achieved in art exactly what it represented in narration. It became

the crowning glory that shone as the head of emphasis and relevance in visual description.

With the passion for learning mathematics, perspective and balance, artists during the Medieval and Renaissance periods struggled to include the heavy adornment of lavish halos. Instead, their focus turned to realistic yet idealized anatomy and archetypal presentations of humans in beautiful backgrounds and contemporary costumes. Art stepped away from the hierarchical requirements for representing Christian stories. It was more important to illustrate the natural landscapes and impressive architecture that flourished in Renaissance Italy as beautifully as was possible. Even though they paled and dimmed halos hung on as long as they could. They appeared as shiny rings or were playfully suggested through vegetation. They may have been implied simply as gauzy lights around heads. Later, after the Reformation, there was a brief rebound and surge of classical religious art that gave the halo a chance to shine again. But halos were no longer what they used to be.

They are still gilded in gold in the antique stylized icon painting that continues to be practiced today. Even though they are always stunning and glistening, the frequency of which we see them is restricted to the realms of religious homes and buildings or museums. Their audiences are limited and more often it is easier to find halos in the sky.

The significance of a halo has always been profound. It was an icon of supreme mastery whether it be in scholarly, bravery or sacred concepts. It forced viewers to acknowledge something special about the character of the person who wore it. Does a halo have any impact on our minds today? Of course, if they are viewed in a church, they will likely have a connection with the viewer's faith. If they are viewed in a museum,

they are quickly categorized into historical concepts showing that the artwork is of another time and location. Or, in other words and to the point, halos are outdated. Without having a reference to what it denotes, the viewer will not recognize the relevance of a halo. However, today around the world, it would be difficult to find a person who cannot associated the halo with religious dignity. Even if halos are no longer included in art, we still have had enough exposure to beautiful Italian religious art to know what they mean.

They clearly make a statement about the head as much as a crown does. But the association with theosophy isn't innately obvious unless the viewer has a prior knowledge of that particular cult or religion that's being illustrated. The background and experiences that individuals grow up with influence the impact that halos in art make on us.

Halos appear in Eastern and Western Christian art; the techniques used to create them are similar. However, the difference between icon painting and religious art is a difference of intent and purpose. Both styles have used the same hierarchy of codes that dictated the shapes and nuances of the halos. Halos are icons of a complex nature because they imply many distinguishing attributes. When we see a crown above or near a halo, we know that the person under the nimbus is more than an angel. She or he has earned extra recognition for having achieved one, two or three of the prescribed preconditions for crowning. Martyrdom, chastity and teaching were each awarded a crown.

Today halos are an old-fashioned concept. Our world has changed since the halo was appreciated. How do we recognize wisdom, power, or exceptionalism today? Social

media certainly has logos of various kinds. There are political, musical, and commercial icons we recognize every day. One can even go online to find sources of vector artwork available within the theme of religious icons. However, most of the icons available are not of halos. You will find a plethora of crosses, flames, doves, and fish but very few halos.

This paper has shown how the true predecessor of the Christian halo in art was a product of nature. The simple equation of adding a source of light and applying the light to a path and then adding the side of a crystal to bounce off, results in the creation of a halo. Planets are round for a reason, probably due to gravity and motion. The fact that humans have been watching the skies for as long as we have existed shows that a circle of light in the sky is captivating. Heavenly bodies are mysterious, powerful and omnipotent. The eternal and infinite circle can be a protective perimeter and a container of vast energy. Our awe and fear of nature continues today especially as we face the changing global climate.

It has taken thousands of years for humans to define and reinterpret a circle of light so that it can be assimilated according to the evolution of our minds. Much has already been learned and there will be more to learn. Before writing this thesis, I thought that the dark ages were equivalent to the Medieval years. I learned instead that the darkest period for humanity was what happened before the Medieval years. The quest for order over chaos initiated several patterned and measured disciplines. The safety and assurance gained from hierarchical structure allowed curious minds to eventually step out of the box. The Medieval mind was constructed as though it was a ladder that reached from the earth into the heavens. Each wrung of the ladder allowed

humanity to climb up a level to rise above the chaotic barbaric years. This anagogical method was constructed by people who challenged old beliefs and exercised intellectual passions. With every pull upward a broader perspective has been gained and, hopefully, it will continue.

The severity of the hierarchy made it possible for the blossoming of ideas that followed. The freshness and curiosity of the Renaissance offered many beautiful options in all aspects of life. With so many intellectual diversions it isn't a surprise that halos both flourished and then declined. The world was a new and fascinating territory to explore theosophically, intellectually and politically. Finding a way to believe in both reason and religion was the challenge. Today, our world is cynical and critical of faith-based doctrines. Halos are now at best, innocent and ingenuous items. The beautiful, golden rings of radiance, patterns, and strengths have no purpose in art anymore. As a subject, however, halos have been well worth studying. Modern humanity should be grateful that artists included them in artwork that we can enjoy centuries afterward. It is important to acknowledge that halos in the religious art of Medieval and Renaissance cultures are originally from the natural world and cosmic phenomena. They are, simply put, a member of our cosmic genetics. Humans have been maturing and learning steadily with the accompaniment of celestial bodies. The suns, stars, moons and planets have molded our environment as well as our art. I pray that humans will take better care of the earth before making more mistakes on our neighboring planets.

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Figure 12. Domenico di Michelino, *Dante's Poem*, 1465, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Comedy.

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Figure 17. Punch Patterns

Figure. 18. Andrea Orcagna, *Strozzi Altarpiece*, 1354-1357, (From left to right) Saint Michael, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, the crowned Virgin Mary in a Dominican habit who presents her protégé Saint Thomas Aquinas to him, God, Saint Peter (kneeling), John the Baptist. The two on the far right are Saint Lawrence and Saint Paul, Capella Strozzi, Basilica of Our Lady, Florence, Italy, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:8_Andrea_di_Cione_Orcagna,_Strozzi_Altarpiece._1354-57,_Santa_Maria_Novella,_Florence.jpeg.

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Figure 28. *Judas Walks Away from His Halo*, artist and location unknown.

Figure 29. *St. Jude*, artist unknown, possibly 17th century, http://www.canadianartonline.com/recently-sold-paintings/17th-century-on-painting/details-on-17th-century/background-regarding-saint.html.

Figure 30. Fernando Yáñez de la Almedina, Head of Christ, ca. 1506, The Met, New York, New York, USA, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/641257

Figure 31. Francesco del Cossa, The Annunciation, 1472-74