Anne Derbes

Ritual, Gender & Narrative in Late Medieval Italy

Fina Buzzacarini and the Baptistery of Padua

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Introduction

DAY-TRIPPING VISITORS TO PADUA typically pause at the town's obvious sights – the frescoes in the Arena Chapel by the great Florentine painter, Giotto; the basilica of Sant'Antonio, known as the Santo; perhaps the cathedral – before taking the return train to Venice. Relatively few make their way to a building whose frescoes may have been intended to rival Giotto's: the "very beautiful temple of St. John the Baptist" – that is, the local baptistery (Plan; Figs. 1, 2). Those who do are richly rewarded. A handsome exterior still reveals traces of earlier frescoes, though little of this decoration now remains. Inside, however, and comparatively well preserved, is an extraordinarily complex

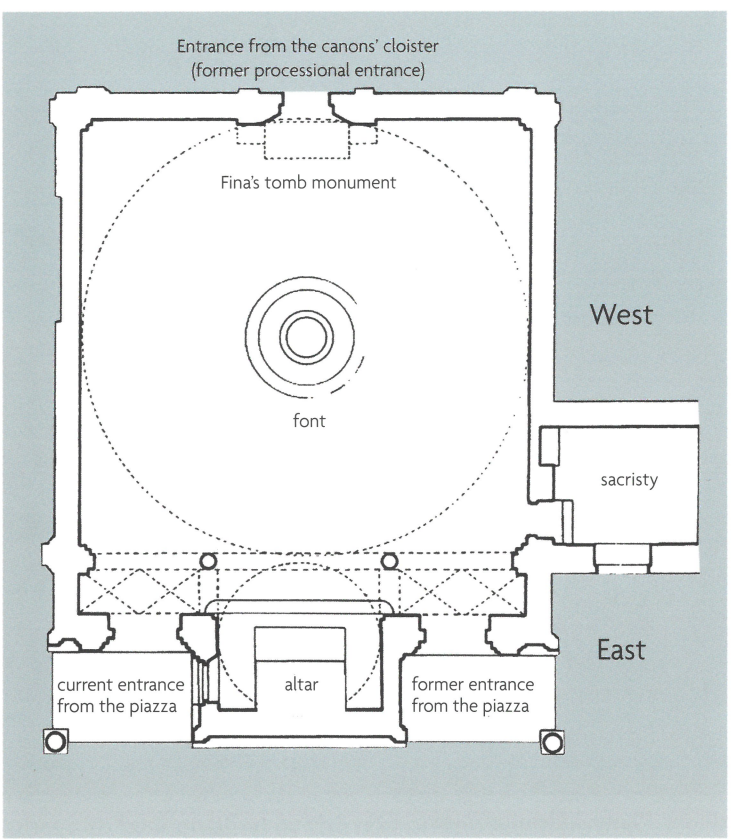


Fig. 1. Padua, baptistery, exterior. Photo: Valentino Pace.

Fig. 2. Padua, baptistery (left); Arco Vallaresso (center), formerly the entrance to the Carrara Reggia. Photo: Camelia Boban (Wikimedia Commons).

ensemble of images (Fig. 3), painted in the mid-1370s by another Florentine painter, Giusto de' Menabuoi (d. 1390/91).[3] Above, in the center of the "famous high dome," is a bust-length Christ; directly below, the Virgin stands, extending her arms in an orant gesture. Surrounding her, arranged in five concentric circles, are choirs of angels and scores of holy men and women, patriarchs and matriarchs from the Hebrew Bible and male and female saints – a dazzling, and dizzying, evocation of paradise.[4] The narrative cycle, covering the drum of the dome and the four walls below, encompasses all of salvation history. The drum depicts episodes from Genesis from the creation of the world through Joseph's rescue from the pit. Below the Genesis narratives, inscriptions provide relevant extracts from the scriptural text. In the pendentives, the four evangelists, each flanked by prophets, sit at desks; each prophet can be identified by the text on the scroll he holds.

LEFT: Fig. 3. Giusto de' Menabuoi. View of dome, drum, and top of east wall. Padua, baptistery, mid-1370s. Photo: © Genevra Kornbluth.

ABOVE: Fig. 4. Giusto de' Menabuoi. View of dome, drum, west wall, and north wall. Padua, baptistery, mid-1370s. Photo: Mauro Magliani.

The narrative program next moves to the New Testament scenes on the walls (Fig. 4). The south wall is largely given over to the life of John the Baptist, and on the other three, the Christological cycle unfolds, moving in three registers from the west wall to the north and to the east (Fig. 5). An enormous fresco of the Crucifixion dominates the east wall; at its base are three arches, the largest of which is centered and opens onto the apse (Fig. 6). The cycle concludes in the apse, with the Pentecost in the smaller dome that crowns the space. An unusually detailed cycle of the Apocalypse lines the surfaces of the apse: walls, soffits of arches, even embrasures of windows. On the altar, still *in situ*, is a richly gilded polyptych, also painted by Giusto, depicting the Virgin and Child, saints, and events from the life of John the Baptist.

Fig. 5. Giusto de' Menabuoi. View of east wall. Padua, baptistery, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

Visitors today who wander in from the piazza may feel awed by the splendor of the baptistery's interior, especially the kaleidoscopic power of the dome (Figs. 3, 4). But the contemporary viewer's experience, however vertiginous, pales in comparison with that of late medieval Paduans who gathered for the grand ceremonial of solemn baptism. Though today the interior is often still, the ritual, celebrated on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost, animated and activated the space, transforming it into the stage for an incantatory spectacle. On these occasions, the faithful processed from the cathedral into the baptistery behind a panoply of richly vested clerics, to the chanting of hymns, with candles ablaze, the scents of incense and chrism in the air; the ritual engaged all in an intensely multisensory experience. Late medieval theologians routinely stress that images spurred an emotional response far greater than that prompted by words; how much greater the power of ritual?[5] Images, words chanted and spoken, choreographed movements, shimmering vestments, wafting scents, and flickering light all worked together to envelop and transport congregants.[6] Thomas Aquinas attests to the potency of the solemn baptismal rite: "The other things which the Church observes in the [solemn] baptismal rite

Fig. 6. Giusto de' Menabuoi. View of east wall, apse, and altarpiece. Padua, baptistery, mid-1370s. Photo: © Genevra Kornbluth.

[are used]...to arouse the devotion of the faithful."[7] Even today, though the rite has been somewhat streamlined from its form in late medieval Italy, the essentials remain. At the Easter vigil, citizens and visitors, bearing candles and chanting litanies, still process behind the bishop and clergy from the cathedral and crowd into the baptistery for the consecration of the font and the baptism of catechumens. The incantatory power of the ritual lives on.

In a baptistery like Padua's, it was – and is – not merely the spectacle of solemn baptism that aroused the devotion of the faithful: the images deepened congregants' experience of the rite. The dome, with its brilliant hues and flashes of gold, likely conveyed something quite specific: the devout viewer, gazing up, saw a vision of heaven (Fig. 3). The idea of the dome as symbolic of heaven applies not only to baptisteries. It is a notion of great antiquity, implicit in any vaulted or domed church. In the Arena Chapel, for instance, the medallions of the vault enclose bust-length figures of Christ, the Virgin, John the Baptist, and prophets, all seen against a gold ground that suggests the radiance of paradise. But the concept of the dome of heaven was especially aptly used to refer to baptismal spaces, and was understood early in the history of Christianity.[8] In a vivid, almost ekphrastic passage, Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) addresses catechumens, and seems to describe the dome of a church: "Turn your mind's eye upward: picture the choirs of angels, and God, the Lord of all things... [and] the Thrones and Dominations celebrating the heavenly liturgy."[9] Cyril's injunction to his catechumens expresses a fundamental tenet of Christian dogma: just as the heavens opened to Christ after he was baptized in the River Jordan, baptism opens heaven to the pious Christian. Bonaventure states clearly: "It is said: *Heaven was opened*, and through this opening a great brightness appeared.... By the power of the baptism of Christ the door of heaven is opened to let in those baptized." The dome of Padua's baptistery – its "great brightness," its grand assembly of Christ, the Virgin, angels, and saints – thus offered, and still offers, an especially vibrant realization of an ancient idea: a theophany, a glimpse of transcendence, a revelation of the divine.

The shimmering golds of the dome are echoed on the west wall, where another celestial vision appears: centered on the wall and protruding from it is a great gold and white structure (Figs. 4, 7). On its cornice, a bust-length God the Father is flanked by two pairs of angels; below, amid a profusion of angels, the dove of the Holy Spirit, encircled in gold, descends with outstretched wings. This imposing structure is the tomb canopy of the patron: Fina Buzzacarini (d. 1378), Scardeone's "extremely wise and religious woman."[10] Fina was perhaps the richest woman in the city, as the opulence of the tomb canopy suggests, and the most prominent, for she was the consort of the lord of Padua, Francesco da Carrara (d. 1393), known as Francesco il Vecchio, and mother of their son and his heir, known as Francesco Novello (d. 1405). Though the tomb chest and the epitaph beneath it have disappeared, the fresco beneath the arch of the canopy is intact.[11] Escorted by John the Baptist and John the Evangelist, Fina kneels before the enthroned Virgin and Child as angels and saints welcome her into their company. Heaven has opened to Fina.

The baptistery thus served, and continues to serve, both as the baptismal church of Padua and as a mausoleum for Fina and her family.[12] Moreover, its fresco program, with narratives ranging from Genesis through the Apocalypse, from the first book of the Bible to the last, is one of very few comprehensive ensembles to survive from the trecento and one of the most ambitious fresco programs commissioned by a woman in central and northern Italy during the Middle Ages.[13] The sheer

numbers attest to the scale of this enterprise: excluding the angelic choirs, there are one hundred and eight holy personages in the dome; thirty-three narratives from Genesis; thirty-seven from the life of Mary, Christ, and John the Baptist; forty-three from the Apocalypse; four evangelists; eight prophets. The glittering tomb canopy only increases the sumptuousness of the interior – and the tally of holy men and women, for another eight saints, carved on the pilasters, adorn it, and six others are painted on the canopy's soffit. Add to the count the figures from the altarpiece: twelve episodes from the life of John the Baptist; two Christological images (the Baptism of Christ and the Man of Sorrows); and thirty-four saints.[14] The program is not only vast, but also decidedly idiosyncratic in its narrative choices and in the disposition of these choices on the walls of the baptistery. Among the subjects depicted here are several that can be found only rarely, if ever, in extant trecento mural painting, and throughout the program, even familiar themes are oddly rendered.

Fig. 7. Workshop of Andriolo de' Santi (attr.). Tomb canopy of Fina Buzzacarini. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Fina Buzzacarini presented to the Virgin, Child, and saints. Padua, baptistery, west wall, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

In addition to the fresco program, the altarpiece and the tomb monument, this enormous undertaking also included architectural interventions: windows were enlarged (on the south and east walls), added (one on the south wall of the apse), and sealed off (one in the drum, and perhaps one on the east wall); a door was closed (on the south wall); a sacristy was added on the north. The dome may have been altered as well.[15] To plan such an extensive project and see it through to completion surely required a considerable investment of time.[16] Two early writers state that the baptistery was finished in 1376, and most contemporary scholars place its completion around this date or a year or two after.[17] The planning had probably started by 1373, followed by the structural changes to the building and the design, construction, and installation of the tomb canopy. The canopy was in place before the painting was finished, for the Infancy cycle continues on its outer walls, and the votive fresco of Fina before the Virgin and saints extends onto the soffit of the canopy's arch (Fig. 7). In early fall of 1373, Giusto was at work on a small funerary chapel in the church of the Eremitani; he likely turned in earnest to the baptistery not long after finishing it.[18] If the time involved was considerable, so too were the costs; the financial outlay must have been substantial.[19] Among the materials used in the fresco cycle were the costliest available, the markers of greatest status: ultramarine and gold leaf – the latter, according to the conservation scientist Fabio Frezzato, "in great quantities." Ultramarine was apparently too great a luxury even for the richest man in Padua, Enrico Scrovegni: conservators have found no evidence of its use in the Arena Chapel.[20]

Despite the evident ambitions of the project, despite the richness, the complexity, and, at times, the strangeness of the interior, the baptistery has been almost as overlooked by scholars as it is by tourists. Traditional studies include a monograph on Giusto's oeuvre by Sergio Bettini from 1944, a second monograph by Bettini in 1960 focusing on the baptistery, and a dissertation on Giusto by Bradley Delaney from 1972. In 1989 Anna Maria Spiazzi edited a volume of essays on the baptistery with valuable contributions by Claudio Bellinati, Benjamin Kohl, and Spiazzi herself, among others. More recently Cordelia Warr and Kohl published important articles that examine the baptistery contextually, especially in light of its patronage; Catherine King took a similar approach in a brief but cogent analysis. But no book-length treatment of the baptistery has been published in any language for decades.[21] This study is intended, in part, to fill the lacuna. It is not, however, meant as a traditional monograph. It focuses instead on the baptistery as it functioned in the life of a late medieval town, and as its images responded to and participated in the rite enacted here, echoing the language of chants and readings, and mirroring both the ritual actions of the officiating clerics and the experiences of catechumens and their families as they took part in the ritual. It focuses as well on the baptistery as a sustained expression of the interests and aspirations – temporal as well as eternal – of its patron, Fina Buzzacarini. Even today, the baptistery bears the imprint of Fina: throughout the program are signs of a powerful woman who succeeded in imposing her will on this sacred space.

Baptisteries and Baptism in Late Medieval Italy

The scholarly neglect of the monument on which Fina Buzzacarini lavished such resources may stem in part from a tendency to disparage the art of the later trecento, which is still perceived as inferior to that which preceded and followed it.[22] In Padua in particular, the Arena Chapel cast a long shadow, shrouding other local monuments in relative obscurity. Perhaps contributing too is a widespread tendency to underestimate the importance of a baptistery in the life of a late medieval Italian town. Baptism – the opening of heaven to the catechumen – was, and is, understood as a transformative event in the life of a Christian: the rite of initiation into the Church, in which the individual passes from a state of sin to a state of grace. In the *Sacramentary of Gelasius*, from the seventh century, the celebrant addresses catechumens: "And so, dearly beloved, we transform you from the *old man into the new* [Eph. 4:22]: from *carnal* you begin to be *spiritual*, from *earthly* to be *heavenly* [Cor. 15:44ff]."[23] As the liturgist William Durandus (d. 1296) states, baptism is a sacrament of necessity: "without it no one can be saved."[24] In late medieval Italy, on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost, the sacrament was not a private matter but public: a great celebratory ritual, drawing throngs from the town and neighboring villages. In Padua, families from both the city and the *contado* attended the service, and because the diocese comprised almost 400 towns and villages in addition to the city proper, these ceremonies took place on a grand scale.[25] In the course of the fourteenth century, concerns about infant mortality led to a gradual shift from communal baptism twice a year to individual baptism immediately after birth; only infants born a week or so before each feast were to be baptized at its vigil. Despite the change, in Padua the sacrament continued to be celebrated with all customary pomp at the Easter and Pentecost vigils. In 1403, six priests were prepared to administer baptism on Holy Saturday, suggesting a sizable number of babies in need of the sacrament.[26]

Even beyond the baptismal rite itself, the baptistery played an important role in Paduan ritual life. On every Sunday of Lent, clergy and laity processed from the cathedral into the baptistery, with prayers said and chanted at the font. On Easter morning, Mass included a procession to the baptistery for a lengthy rite with the singing of multiple chants and the censing of the font; all returned later that day, at Vespers, for further prayers, chants, and incense. Similar processions to the baptistery took place into Easter week, on the vigil of the Purification of the Virgin, and on the feast of the Ascension.[27] On Palm Sunday, at least on occasion, the bishop led clergy and congregants to the baptistery. The clergy staged liturgical dramas, in part, at the baptistery: annual enactments of the Annunciation and the Presentation in the Temple began at the cathedral, then moved to the baptistery before returning to the cathedral.[28] The baptistery also was the site of observances on the feast day of John the Baptist.[29]

Further, in late medieval Italian towns more generally, baptisteries' functions extended beyond the sacramental: a town's baptistery represented the *umbilicus urbis*, an architectural expression of civic identity and pride.[30] It was on the occasion of their baptism that babies were formally inscribed in a town's records. The baptistery might house official documents and spoils of battle, even the town's war chariot; local elections might be held there. Particularly significant, given the endemic civil strife typical of late medieval Italian towns, is the understanding of the baptistery as a site promoting concord within the citizenry. The ritual itself, and especially the huge communal

baptisms, encouraged cohesiveness and solidarity. Any rite in which a group comes together to participate might foster a sense of commonality, *communitas*; in a discussion of medieval ritual, Miri Rubin points to ritual's capacity to generate "intense awareness of being bound together in a community of shared experience, shared humanity."[31] Baptism in particular had long been seen as a sacrament that fostered harmony, effacing divisions among disparate groups. The notion is rooted in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians 4:3–5, which calls on new Christians to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism." In his epistle to the Galatians 3:26–29, Paul also stresses the oneness, the kinship, of all whom had been baptized:

> For you are all the children of God by faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you be Christ's, then are you the seed of Abraham, heirs according to the promise.[32]

Paul alludes to a familial bond linking baptized Christians ("you are all the children of God...then are you the seed of Abraham"), and exegetes repeatedly invoke the language of birth and generation in describing the rite. Not only does baptism represent rebirth, but the font represents the maternal womb of the Church (*uterus Ecclesiae*),[33] the parturient site that creates new Christians: all are, in a sense, siblings.

In communal Italy, then, the baptistery became a site rich in civic and political associations. At the local baptistery, feuding factions were expected to come together for the common good. In the late twelfth century, the bishop of one northern Italian town, Reggio Emilia, established a "confraternita della Pace" at the baptistery to foster harmony among townspeople.[34] The Florentine chronicler Dino Compagni (d. 1324) describes a local crisis in 1301 in which he summoned the citizenry to the baptistery and urged them to disregard their differences. He appealed to their shared origins, their fraternal bond:

> Dear and worthy citizens, who have all alike received sacred baptism at this font, reason compels and binds you to love one another like dear brothers...Set aside... enmities and make peace among yourselves....On this sacred font, where you received holy baptism, swear a good and perfect peace among yourselves.[35]

In 1343, a baptismal church, or *pieve*, that of San Miniato al Tedesco, was the site where representatives of the warring cities of Florence and Pisa met to make peace. A chronicle describing the early days of the Ciompi revolt (1378–1382) in Florence reports that "a decree ordered everyone to go to the [baptistery of] San Giovanni to accompany the members of our Signoria and to hear a mass for peace."[36] In Padua, too, the communal experience of baptism was associated with civic harmony. In a sermon Anthony of Padua (d. 1231) reminds his listeners of the obligation to love their neighbors, citing their common baptism:

> We are all buried together with him by baptism into death....Just as Christ rose from the dead, appeared to his disciples, and turned their sadness into joy, so we should rise from dead works to the glory of the Father, and rejoice with our neighbors, and walk with them in newness of life. What else is newness of life, if not love for our neighbor?[37]

Thus, at least in theory, at least temporarily, the baptismal ritual might meld townspeople – people at times more given to discord than to concord – into a cohesive whole; they might set aside differences to gather together, celebrating the initiation of little catechumens not only into civic records but into the Christian fold. In Padua's baptistery, the throng of holy figures above, encircling Christ and the Virgin in serene harmony, collectively served as a celestial model of comity for the earthly community encircling the font below (Fig. 3). And in Padua as elsewhere, the baptismal chant *In die resurrectionis* was sung on Easter Sunday. Its opening verses attest to the spirit of communal assembly that accompanied the rite: "On the day of my resurrection, the Lord says, alleluia, I will convene the people and call together the kingdoms."[38]

In trecento Padua as in other Italian cities, increasing numbers of babies born outside of the traditional seasons were baptized not in the solemn rite but individually. Though the entire community no longer took part in these individual baptisms, the liturgy continued to promote harmony among townspeople: just before admitting catechumens to the baptistery, the celebrant enjoined them to love their neighbors.[39] Further, the events were seldom private. They, too, prompted celebrations, at times quite conspicuous ones. The family, godparents, and friends – often crowds of them, elegantly dressed, bearing gifts and banners – would assemble to process together to the font, and after the service, to share a rich meal.[40] The festivities at times grew so flamboyant that towns passed sumptuary laws to control excessive pageantry. These laws imposed caps on the number of godparents, the cost of items purchased for the baptism itself, the cost of the gifts offered, and the cost of the post-baptismal feast. Giovanni Dominici (d. 1419), writing to a Florentine woman around 1405, cautions against such display, and in condemning the spectacle offers a glimpse of it: "If you are [devout in the faith], you will not seek pomp in the baptism, many gilded vestments, banners and streamers and gold embroidered mantles. A crowd of relatives and multitudes of sinful companions will be set aside; and you will invite several devoted men and women...."[41] Thus, despite the gradual move to individual baptism, in late medieval Italy the sacrament constituted not only a liturgical rite but also a highly public rite of passage – arguably the most meaningful rite in the life of a medieval Christian.[42]

Given a baptistery's centrality in urban life and its semiotic potency as a civic symbol, it is unsurprising that many towns in northern Italy spent lavishly on their baptismal churches in the later Middle Ages. While the "baptistery building boom," to use Augustine Thompson's fitting term, began in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the construction and embellishment of baptismal churches continued into the fourteenth century and beyond, despite the disruptions of the Black Death, and despite the gradual shift to individual baptism.[43] Siena, Lucca, Pistoia, and Bergamo constructed new baptisteries during the trecento.[44] Other towns spent huge sums ornamenting existing structures: the Florence baptistery was equipped with the splendid bronze doors of Andrea Pisano (1330–1336), a new font, 1370, and an ornate altar, in gilded silver and enamel, begun in

1377.[45] Work on the Pisa baptistery continued throughout the fourteenth century, as records of payments to masons, ironworkers, painters and other artisans attest.[46] In Parma, the baptistery's exterior was embellished in 1307 and in 1321; some of the frescoes in the interior also date to the trecento.[47] Closer to Padua, the baptistery of San Marco in Venice was adorned with new mosaics in the mid-fourteenth century.[48] San Gimignano's Collegiata – the town's *pieve* or baptismal church – was extensively frescoed in the course of the trecento and into the quattrocento.[49] The New Testament fresco cycle, now generally attributed to Lippo Memmi, was executed first, about 1340; the Old Testament cycle, by Bartolo di Fredi, is signed and dated 1367. In 1378, a new font was installed.[50] Even as late as the quattrocento, new baptisteries were constructed and existing ones richly equipped.[51] The opulence of baptisteries in late medieval and early modern Italy, the ongoing campaigns to embellish them, and the vast sums invested in them attest to the continuing cultural import of these buildings.

Women's Patronage in Carrara Padua

The baptistery of Padua is, then, one of many such buildings that served as both a spiritual and a civic center of an Italian town. But it is unique in the circumstances of its patronage: no other baptismal church was so extensively reworked and decorated at the behest of a woman. Though Fina's funding of a project as splendid as this one suggests uncommon ambition, and uncommon resources, she was not exceptional in initiating works of art. In the later Middle Ages, throughout western Europe and beyond, queens, nuns, widows, and at times married women sponsored artistic commissions in almost every imaginable medium. The richness and range of these commissions is suggested by Therese Martin's edited collection, *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, a two-volume opus comprising twenty-four essays on a remarkable array of topics. In her incisive introduction, Martin argues that women who sponsored works were themselves creators of art in an important sense – one that I shall argue applies well to Fina Buzzacarini and the baptistery of Padua.[52] But notwithstanding the considerable contributions of this collection and earlier volumes on the theme, female patrons from duecento and trecento Italy often escape notice: *Reassessing the Roles* includes a single essay on an Italian, an abbess active in the early twelfth century.[53] Specialists in Italian art have also explored women's patronage, but these scholars, too, tend to minimize the duecento and trecento, concentrating instead on the Renaissance proper.[54] While several art historians have written valuable articles that focus on specific individuals or groups of female patrons during the trecento, book-length studies remain rare.[55] In their insightful essay on female patrons in the Veneto, Zuleika Murat and Giovanna Valenzano aptly characterize them as "donne dimenticate," forgotten women.[56]

Despite the spotty and scattered nature of the evidence, despite the losses of the names of female patrons or the works that they sponsored, a great many "forgotten women" commissioned works of art throughout late medieval Italy. Most pertinent here is Carrara Padua and its environs, where a

number of major paintings by leading artists of the day were initiated and funded by women. One suggestive example is an enormous altarpiece (Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum), dated 1344 and ascribed to Guariento di Arpo, an artist favored by the Carrara. It features a central image of the Coronation of the Virgin with six smaller narrative panels on either side; in the last, depicting the Last Judgment, the Virgin grasps the hand of a veiled woman who is thought to be the donor.[57] Other works were unambiguously commissioned by women, some of whom eschewed patronal modesty to claim conspicuous credit. Maria Bovolini engaged Guariento to paint a towering crucifix, some thirteen feet high, for San Francesco, Bassano del Grappa, north of Padua. The cross depicts Maria kneeling at the base, opposite her coat of arms; an inscription declares that she emulates Helena, the finder of the True Cross, and that she dedicated the cross herself: "sancxit hanc ip[s]a[m]."[58] Traversina Cortelliero, a widow, commissioned a funerary chapel in the church of the Eremitani for her son, Tebaldo (d. 1370), who had served Francesco il Vecchio as a judge and diplomat. As Fina would not long after, Traversina chose Giusto de' Menabuoi as the artist.[59] Still another prominent woman was also closely involved with a grand funerary chapel in Padua in the early 1370s: Caterina dei Francesi, wife of Bonifacio Lupi, a man of immense wealth and influence within the Carrara entourage. The chapel, in the Santo, occupies the south transept.[60] Bonifacio initiated the commission in 1372, but Caterina supervised it from October 1, 1374 to the end of July 1375.[61] The frescoes themselves, painted by Altichiero and probably executed between 1377 and 1379, may signal Caterina's role as vividly as the documents, for her portrait appears several times in the program.[62]

Paduan women at times also collaborated in sponsoring major commissions. Two elite women joined forces to fund a pair of altarpieces for San Benedetto, one for its high altar and the other for its altar of St. John the Evangelist; a third woman – Fina Buzzacarini's sister Anna, abbess of San Benedetto – initiated the commission and paid for the transportation and installation of the two works.[63] Anna commissioned other altarpieces and tabernacles for San Benedetto, and, in 1394, frescoes for the abbey's chapel of St. Louis of Toulouse; it was Fina who had the chapel constructed.[64] Anna, too, publicly proclaimed both her role and her sister's in the commission: an inscription of 1394 still preserved in San Benedetto states that Fina built the chapel and that Anna ordered its frescoes.[65] Still another who claimed credit for a commission is Valburga da Carrara (d. 1405), abbess of Sant'Agata and daughter of Francesco Novello. A plaque originally in Sant'Agata attests to her patronage: "The noble and distinguished lady, Lady Valburga, daughter of the most illustrious prince and lord, Lord Francesco da Carrara of Padua and Treviso, and most dignified abbess of the monastery, had this work [*hoc opus*] made, July 15, 1400." Though we do not know what the work was, we can assume that Valburga sought recognition for commissioning it.[66] Women also chose to record other pious donations, small in scale but costly. The left panel of a diptych by Tomaso da Modena, *c.*1355–58, possibly from Sant'Antonino dell'Arcella in Padua, depicts a Clarissan nun with St. James Major and St. Anthony of Padua; she kneels and presents a gold, pearl-studded reliquary to holy recipient(s), probably the Virgin and Child, in the now-lost right panel. The processional cross that Anthony displays may also have been her gift, as Robert Gibbs has suggested.[67] Though the nun's name does not survive, she is considerably larger in scale than Maria Bovolini or the anonymous woman in the Norton Simon altarpiece; she, too, presumably wished to be recognized for her generosity.[68]

Examples like these demonstrate that Fina cannot be considered exceptional in the fact of her patronage, only in the grandeur and complexity of the program she funded. The thornier matter is the question of agency: if a woman sponsored the production of a work, especially one on the scale of Padua's baptistery, to what extent would she have exercised control over it? Some of the examples just discussed suggest that the woman, or women, initiating the project had some authority in shaping the final product. But the degree of any patron's agency is difficult to determine. In late medieval Italy, even male patrons who funded work in a sacred space rarely had absolute control over their commissions. For instance, anyone seeking to establish a family chapel in a mendicant church would have had to negotiate a range of issues with the resident order. Into the quattrocento, male patrons – including those as wealthy and powerful as the Medici – cannot be considered independent actors; some scholars use the term "shared agency" to acknowledge the intricacies inherent in commissioning a fresco program.[69]

Fina Buzzacarini and the Baptistery of Padua

The case of the baptistery is still more complex, for both Francesco and the reigning bishop would have had to approve the proposal to renovate it. The bishop had jurisdiction over the sacred space of the baptistery, and must have authorized the plan. This study considers the possible motivations of each man in supporting the idea, and the presence of each is felt, to varying extents, in the interior. But it is Fina, who commissioned and funded the work, whose presence is felt most insistently. A central goal of this study is to marshal the evidence, both textual and visual, of Fina's close engagement with the project. Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that the baptistery was a space purposefully chosen by her and one singularly apt for her needs, its images alluding to themes of central importance to her. Anna Maria Spiazzi, Cordelia Warr, Catherine King, and Benjamin Kohl have already proposed that Fina played some role in shaping the baptistery's program. I argue that their insights can be extended to encompass the scope of the interior. Just as Maria Bovolini, Anna Buzzacarini, and Valburga da Carrara proclaimed their responsibility for the works that they funded, so too, only slightly less overtly, did Fina Buzzacarini.

At the same time, the program is profoundly baptismal in ways that have not been addressed. While one might expect some correspondence between the rite enacted here and the images that line its walls, the baptismal resonance of the program suffuses the space. Thus a second aim of this study is to consider the ways in which the images work in conjunction with the sacrament, evoking both the ritual that was performed here and baptismal theology and exegesis. Despite certain changes, the essentials of the rite remained constant. One finds much consistency, too, in exegetical texts on the sacrament. Beginning with scriptural texts and continuing with biblical commentaries and glosses, tracts and sermons, themes and at times specific language about the sacrament recur from earliest Christianity into the trecento and beyond. These themes, often refracted through the liturgy, take visual form in the drum and on the walls of the baptistery. In fact, the imagery in baptismal churches

is often site-specific in ways that have not been generally acknowledged. In the baptistery of Padua and in similar sites – the baptisteries of Parma, Pisa, and Florence; that of San Marco in Venice; the *pieve* of San Gimignano, and into the quattrocento, the baptistery of Siena – the leading artists of the day worked to embellish the interiors and at times the exteriors of the buildings. The splendid results have drawn the attention of art historians who have offered compelling studies of these structures and the works within. At times, though, in these studies, the *raison d'être* of these buildings – the primary (though not sole) reason for their very existence – seems almost incidental. Scholars of early Christianity have greatly enlarged our understanding of the interplay between imagery, ritual, and theology in baptismal churches, and some specialists in later Italian art have discussed aspects of a baptistery's program that allude to the sacrament.[70] As valuable as these contributions are, they do not exhaust the extraordinary richness of the topic. Using Padua's baptistery as a case study, I consider the complexity of a baptismal space, suggesting the multiple ways that its interior constructs a dialogue between image, theology, and rite.

Any baptistery in late medieval Italy, then, would have served two functions, both sacramental and civic. To these, the baptistery of Padua adds a third dimension, the commemorative: the huge tomb canopy, framing the votive portrait of Fina, forcibly reminds the viewer of the person responsible for the commission (Figs. 4, 7). All three functions inform the interior, and the program invites multiple readings, but the strands interconnect at many points and are at times inseparable. Fina likely chose the baptistery, at least in part, because both its sacramental function and its civic importance intersected significantly with her own interests.

Who was the woman responsible for this building, and how did the commission come about? The first chapter surveys what we know of Fina's life and family. Contemporary chroniclers, prolix on the deeds of Francesco il Vecchio and Francesco Novello, fall almost silent on the subject of Fina – despite her status as one of the most important patrons of the day. They do, however, discuss the crisis at court that arose when Fina gave birth to three daughters but not to a son: only after fourteen years of marriage did she finally deliver the requisite heir. Archival records shed light not only on her commercial transactions but also on her increasing autonomy within the Carrara court; some documents explicitly indicate her control of her money. We hear her voice most clearly in her will, where she issues directives, grants generous bequests to women, and orders anyone unhappy with her decisions to be quiet. The picture of Fina that emerges in these documents, especially in her will, accords with the painted portraits of her in the baptistery. Her tomb monument attests to her ambitions: it is modeled on those of Carrara lords, and in its votive portrait (Fig. 7) she claims the privileged position on the right of the Virgin and Child. Still bolder are the portraits of Fina in the fresco program, where she inserts herself, literally, into the sacred narrative.

The second chapter examines the circumstances that set the stage for the baptistery's renovation, exploring considerations – among them, political, religious, and commemorative – that were likely weighed early in the process. Baptisteries were traditionally prized as burial places, but few people in trecento Italy managed the feat of arranging their interment in one – and no other family succeeded in commandeering a city's baptistery as their mausoleum. The chapter considers how and why the plan took shape. Fina may have been particularly drawn to the baptistery as a site for her mausoleum: many female donors gave to baptisteries in late medieval Italy. Both women's active participation in

the rite and the maternal metaphors so often used to describe the font (*uterus Ecclesiae*) may have made these sacred spaces especially resonant for women.

The book next turns to the baptistery as a site for the performance of the liturgy. Chapter 3 opens with a close examination of the ritual in late medieval Italy. As ancient baptismal liturgies make clear, the Easter vigil marks a transition, a *pascha*, from darkness to light, from sin to grace. Both the grand solemn rite on Holy Saturday and the individual rite make this transition manifest. When the sacrament was individually administered, pre-baptismal rites took place before the door of the cathedral or baptistery, at the threshold of the church, *in ecclesie limine* – literally a liminal site, singularly appropriate for the catechumenate, an inherently liminal state.[71] Once inside baptismal churches, the catechumens and their families were surrounded by images that evoked, and at times mirrored, their ritual experiences. The remainder of Chapter 3, and Chapters 4 and 5, examine the Padua program in detail, with an analysis of the narratives from Genesis through the Apocalypse and their likely valences in the context of ritual and exegesis – valences revealed by the many curious choices of theme and composition. Often the interior's idiosyncrasies can be read as purposeful allusions to the sacrament enacted here.

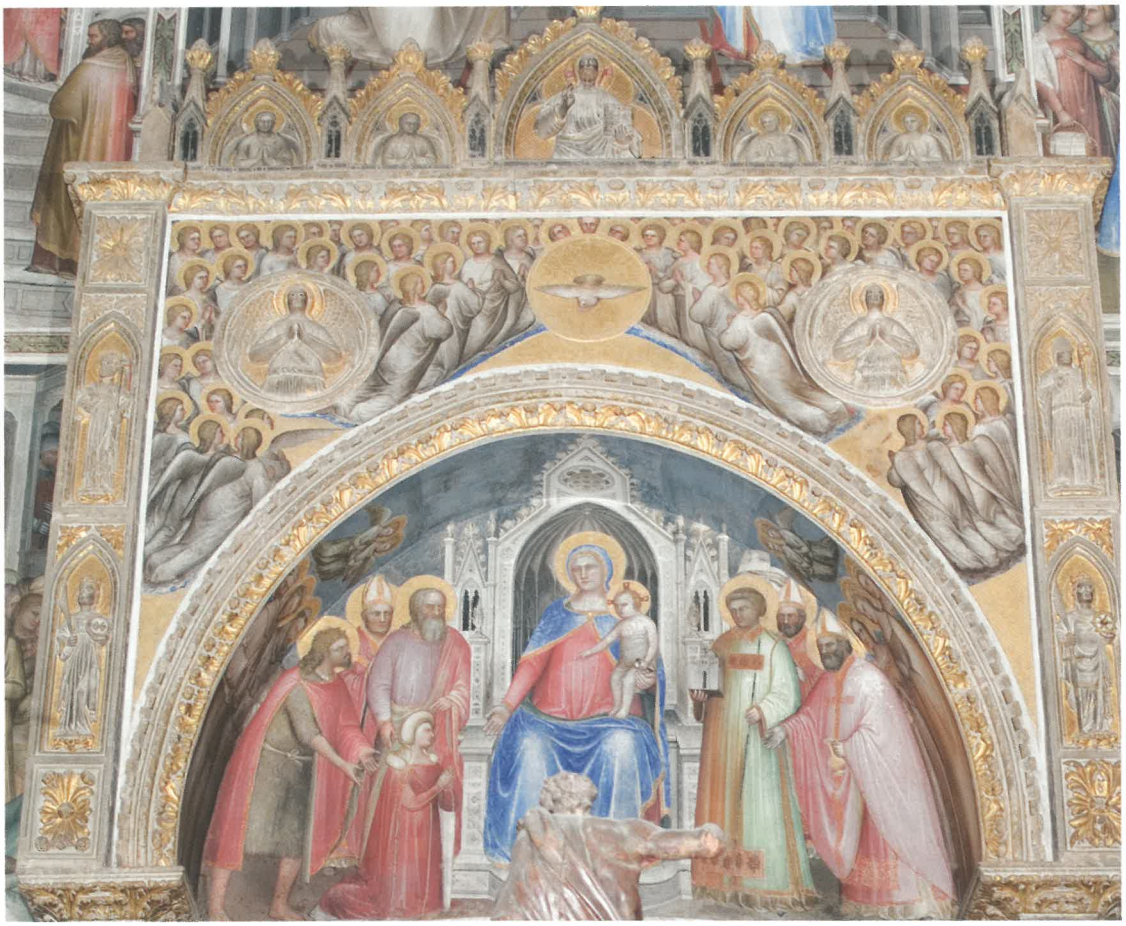
Chapter 6 moves from the sacramental to the individual, returning the focus to Fina, reexamining questions of gender and agency, and arguing for a deeply, and at times surprisingly, personal dimension to the baptistery's pictorial program. Women appear in unexpected numbers and in unfamiliar roles; in many narratives they no longer play bit parts but emerge as protagonists in the Christian drama. Virtuous wives – among them figures seldom seen in trecento frescoes, like the wife of Noah and the wife of Pilate – move from the sidelines to center stage, participating actively in salvation history. Virtuous mothers are still more significant here. As Cordelia Warr has stressed, a central event of Fina's life was her long-awaited success in bearing a male heir, and the images celebrate fecundity, especially that of holy women who, at times miraculously, bore sons: Sarah, Rachel, and Elizabeth, as well as the Virgin Mary. Further, embedded in the dense layers of the program is a visual dialectic opposing virtuous mothers with those who were seen as sexually transgressive – the latter perhaps a coded reference to Francesco il Vecchio's many mistresses. The wife of Noah is contrasted with the wife of Lot; the Apocalyptic Woman, who gave birth to a son born to rule, is juxtaposed with the Whore of Babylon; and, most audaciously, Fina herself is antithetically paired with the adulterous Herodias.

The baptistery, then, stands as Fina's response to the silencing of the chroniclers. Here, she created a counter-narrative, one that asserts her stature in the dynasty, celebrating at once her patronal munificence and her own fruitful womb. The commissioning of the baptistery was itself a generative act: she gave birth both to the Carrara heir and to this space. The Conclusion takes up the question of the program's gestation. It seems most likely that it emerged over time, through a collaborative process, as Fina consulted with others – her sister Anna and the poet Petrarch probably among them. Whoever might have weighed in on one aspect or another of the plans for the baptistery, I argue that for the most part, the ultimate decisions were largely hers. In this commission, she succeeded in asserting her autonomy with uncommon boldness: the baptistery is a document as personal, and as revealing, as her will, and as carefully considered a legacy.

CHAPTER 3

Narrative, Ritual, Exegesis: The Genesis Cycle

THE SUMPTUOUS TOMB CANOPY and the portrait of Fina that it frames announce the patron's primacy, signaling her wealth and her aspirations (Fig. 34). The canopy and portrait also convey another message: they announce that baptism is a central theme of the program. At the center of the canopy, encircled by gold, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove – a clear reference to the biblical description of his appearance at Christ's baptism. As if to reinforce the point, the dove –



its wings outstretched, its tail fanned – is almost identical to the dove in the fresco depicting the baptism of Christ (Fig. 35). That fresco is centered on the baptistery's south wall as the canopy and votive portrait are centered on the west, and in both canopy and fresco, directly above the dove is a frontal, bust-length image of God the Father. The fresco below the tomb canopy, where the Virgin, Child, and saints welcome Fina to paradise, also alerts the viewer to the baptismal function of the space. Bracketing the composition are John the Baptist on the left and Padua's first bishop, Prosdocimus, on the right. Prosdocimus leans toward Fina, beckoning her with his right arm and holding a ewer in his left (Fig. 36). The ewer – a long-necked pitcher with a lip, a handle, and a round body – is the liturgical vessel used to administer baptism in trecento Padua; it identifies Prosdocimus not only here but in other local depictions.[1] The attribute is apt, for Prosdocimus's *vita* informs us that the bishop baptized an "innumerable multitude of men and women," and a local author, writing in 1605, concurs: "battezzò la Città tutta."[2] The saint appears three more times in the baptistery, each time holding a similar vessel: in the dome, where he is identified by inscription; in the predella of the polytych in the apse, and in a fresco in the sacristy, where he and St. Justina flank the Man of Sorrows. Throughout the program we will encounter similar ewers and related vessels – often with water pouring forth.

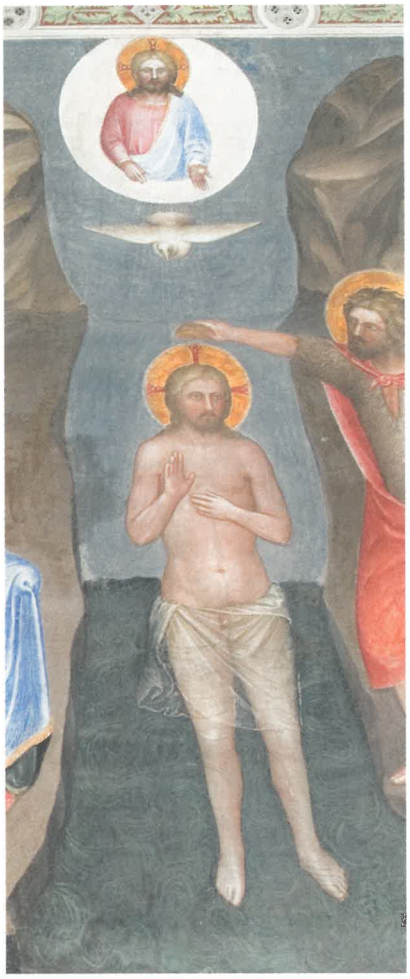


Fig. 35. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Baptism of Christ, detail. Padua, baptistery, south wall, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

In the votive portrait (Fig. 34), Prosdocimus is almost the mirror image of John the Baptist: compare the placement of the two saints; their stances, bending in conformity with the curvature of the niche; and their gestures, with extended arms. The image thus asserts that Prosdocimus is a Paduan successor to John, an *alter Ioannes*, like him a baptizer of multitudes.[3] It reminds viewers of baptism's critical importance for all who, like Fina, seek entrance to paradise. It reminds viewers as well of the bishop's ancient role in performing the rite; the inclusion of the two other bishop saints here, one on either side of the Virgin and Child, underscores the episcopal presence in this baptismal church.

The tomb canopy and votive portrait, then, encapsulate the dual roles of the baptistery: the structure stands as a memorial to celebrate Fina as patron and civic benefactor and as a stage to celebrate the Christian rite of initiation. But the interior functions as more than a stage. Its images work in concert with the rite, mirroring ritual actions, echoing ritual chants; together, rites and images – and even architecture, as I will argue – generate meaning. The baptismal ritual was carefully choreographed; so too are the baptistery's images. This chapter and the next two turn to the narrative program – first Genesis, then the New Testament, and finally the Apocalypse – to examine

Fig. 36. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Fina Buzzacarini presented to the Virgin, Child, and saints, detail: Daniel with model of the city, bishop saint, Prosdocimus with ewer. Padua, baptistery, west wall, mid-1370s. Photo: Valentino Pace.

this pictorial choreography. In multiple ways, the images can be read in the context of the rite. They allude to baptismal liturgies, to baptismal theology and exegesis, and at times to the experiences of those who gathered to observe and participate in the ritual. To set these carefully calibrated images into their ritual and exegetical contexts, this chapter opens with an overview of the sacrament as performed in late medieval Italy and in Padua more specifically.

The Baptismal Rite in Late Medieval Italy

By the trecento, in most Italian cities and towns, the sacrament of baptism took place in roughly the same way: despite minor local variations, almost all followed the Roman rite as found in the *Pontificale romanum*.[4] The pontifical contains both the rite for Holy Saturday, which includes solemn baptism for infants born within the sanctioned dates, and the individual rite for all others.[5] Much more detailed is Durandus's *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, which presents, in book 6, chapter 83, an exhaustive account of the Holy Saturday ceremonial according to the Roman rite.[6] We have as well a local source from the later thirteenth century, the *Liber ordinarius Ecclesie paduane*. As the name implies, it is an ordinal – a kind of manual for the clergy, covering the rites for the liturgical year, and providing directions for unusually complex rites such as that of Holy Saturday.[7] Despite the adoption of the Roman pontifical in Padua a few decades later, the *Liber ordinarius* remains a valuable guide to the ritual life of the city – much of which would be retained, or modified only slightly, during the trecento. Here I summarize the pre-baptismal preparations, the rite as performed at the Easter vigil, and the rite for individual baptism, with details to come when relevant in the analysis of the frescoes.

In late medieval Italy, before the mandate to baptize without delay, preparations for baptism began in the third week of Lent and continued in subsequent weeks until the sacrament was administered on Holy Saturday. A vestige of ancient practice, these preparatory rites, or "scrutinies," began at the cathedral with the enrolling of the baby in the town register.[8] Two days later, families returned to the cathedral with their infants; a priest breathed on each catechumen's face; made the sign of the cross on the forehead of each; said prayers of exorcism; and placed salt – "the salt of wisdom" in liturgical texts – in the mouth of each infant.[9] The seventh scrutiny was also the occasion of the *Effeta* (or *Aperituri*): the cleric touched the nose and ears of the catechumens with saliva, stating "*Effeta*, quod est adaperire" (that is, be opened).[10] Both the words and gestures imitate those of Christ as he healed a deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:32–35). As Ambrose explains, the priest performs these actions "so that you [the catechumen] might be open to the word and to the homily of the priest."[11] With the catechumens' ears now ritually opened, they were ready to receive the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. A cleric recited each, thus impressing on them, through their parents and godparents, the central tenets of the faith.[12]

Holy Saturday marked the day of solemn baptism itself. The rite took place during the Easter vigil, perhaps the most dramatic service of the liturgical year; in late medieval Padua, it began in the afternoon.[13] The bishop and other clergy processed into the cathedral, bearing candles, a cross and censer; behind them came an acolyte with the great paschal candle, at that point unlit. Next, as

the infant to the font, where the priest chanted a final exorcistic prayer and performed the *Effeta.*[27] After further prayers, the priest baptized the baby. The ritual concluded with the vesting in white and giving of the candle.

The *ordo* for Holy Saturday describes the traditional triple immersion of catechumens as the celebrant invoked the Trinity, and the practice continued in northern Italy into the early trecento. Gradually, however, immersion gave way to pouring the baptismal water on the infant's head, a method known as infusion or affusion, or merely sprinkling it – aspersion. The mandate to baptize immediately after birth may have contributed to the change in the mode of administering the sacrament: while a robust six-month-old might fare well enough after full immersion, such treatment could pose a risk to a fragile, slippery newborn.[28] The alternate method – holding the baby upright as water is poured over its head – was manifestly less risky.[29] By the fifteenth century, a Roman ritual produced in Venice used the verb *aspergere,* to sprinkle, in describing the ritual action.[30]

Most of the details of the baptismal rite just discussed are ancient: the prayers, readings, ritual actions, and attendant customs can largely be traced to early Christianity, and many persist even today. But understanding the rite as enacted in late medieval Italy is critical to understanding the program of the Padua baptistery – and those of other baptismal churches, among them the ones in Parma, Pisa, Florence, Venice, San Gimignano, and Siena, all of which will at times offer pertinent comparisons. The interior of the Padua baptistery is saturated with baptismal imagery: prayers and readings, ritual actions and customs repeatedly find visual echoes on its walls. Just as they participate in the liturgy, the narratives participate in baptismal theology: they depict themes that offer pictorial glosses on the rite, evoking typological parallels drawn by medieval exegetes. While some of the allusions to the sacrament seem obscure, most were homiletic tropes, staples of baptismal sermons. The compositions are at times strategically sited to respond to others, each amplifying the meaning of the other. At times, too, the frescoes remind us of the civic and political resonance of the baptistery as embodiment of *communitas,* of local pride and solidarity. But most of the images point, in one way or another, to the sacrament celebrated here.

Genesis, in which the beginning of everything is described, stands for baptismal innocence...

Anthony of Padua, sermon for the seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Patristic and medieval exegetes, mining scriptural texts for figures of baptism, found a motherlode in the Hebrew Bible, especially its first book. In explicating the events recounted in Genesis, the *Glossa ordinaria* refers repeatedly to baptism – by my count thirty-seven times. Anthony of Padua informs us that "Genesis, in which the beginning of everything is described, stands for baptismal innocence by which we are reborn according to the new man."[31] The creation story is, of course, central to salvation history and thus to baptismal theology: from earliest Christianity, baptism was understood as the sacrament through which paradise, lost by Adam and Eve, might be regained. The Genesis narrative, though relatively uncommon in extant trecento narrative programs, thus receives detailed treatment in other baptismal churches, among them the baptistery of Florence and the *pieve* of San

Gimignano.[32] In Padua, the cycle is particularly extensive, with thirty-three episodes from Genesis in the drum.[33]

The cycle's organization may strike the viewer as idiosyncratic (Fig. 37). Broad decorative bands inset with delicate geometric shapes divide the drum into segments or compartments, at times suggesting chapters – e.g., the life of Noah; the life of Abraham – but not always; further, the segments vary greatly in size. The largest and last segment opens with the Sacrifice of Isaac and closes somewhat abruptly with the extraction of Joseph from the pit; the segment is further subdivided by narrow strips that separate the first four episodes from the rest. The narrative, too,

Fig. 37. Giusto de' Menabuoi. View of dome and drum. Padua, baptistery, mid-1370s. Photo: Genevra Kornbluth.

advances in unexpected ways. In some segments, it moves across two zones that unfold from left to right along the upper zone, then continue again left to right, on the lower. In others, episodes zigzag from top to bottom. Only one segment is given over to a single episode: the first, depicting the Creation of the World.

The Creation of the World: World Maps, Astrology and Baptism

Directly under the central image of Christ and Virgin, the Creation spans the full height of the drum (Fig. 38). Against a glittering expanse of gold, God is borne aloft by a bevy of angels.[34] He raises his right hand in blessing; with his left, he summons forth the cosmos, here represented as a *mappamundi*, or world map.[35] The world's land masses, oceans and seas are carefully delineated: the boot of Italy; the Mediterranean Sea, the North Sea, the Red Sea, rivers. Around the earth are nine concentric bands indicating the four elements (air, fire, earth, water), the planets, the sun and moon, and finally, in the largest outer band, as the fixed stars, the signs of the zodiac.

To judge from surviving trecento frescoes, the inclusion of a *mappamundi* in the Creation is unusual. It is not, however, unprecedented: a similar map stands for the cosmos in Bartolo di Fredi's fresco of 1367 in San Gimignano (Fig. 39). Bartolo's general composition anticipates Giusto's in multiple ways. In both images, God sits to the left, his right hand raised over the cosmos; in both seraphim (again, in Padua, a reference to the patron?) and cherubim serve as an angelic throne; in both a wide band containing the signs of the zodiac surrounds the map; in both a titulus beneath the image identifies the subject. But Bartolo's map is smaller and more schematic than Giusto's; it does not approach Giusto's in its cartographic specificity. Anna Maria Spiazzi has rightly associated Giusto's map with the intellectual milieu of Carrara Padua: Jacopo Dondi dall'Orologio (d. 1359), a physician and scientist whose talents included cartography, and Petrarch, himself a connoisseur of maps, were both favorites at the Carrara court.[36]

Suggestive, too, is the contrast in the inscriptions beneath the two images. At San Gimignano the inscription is in the vernacular, and is merely descriptive: it reads "come Dio creo el mondo." In the baptistery, by contrast, the inscription is a Latin verse from Genesis 1:1–2:

> In principio creavit Deus celum et terram. Terra autem erat inanis et vacua, et tenebrae erant super faciem abyssi [37]
>
> In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

Fig. 38. Giusto de' Menabuoi, Creation of the World. Padua, baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

Fig. 39. Bartolo di Fredi, Creation of the World. San Gimignano, Collegiata, 1367. Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

The baptistery's designers, unlike those in San Gimignano, apparently assumed that at least some congregants possessed sufficient Latin to read the scriptural text. Perhaps some recognized the inscription as the opening of the first reading of the Easter vigil, read in the cathedral on Holy Saturday before the congregation processed to the baptistery. The reading continues with Genesis 1:2: "and the spirit of God was borne upon the waters" – a verse all would hear echoed in the baptistery itself: as he consecrated the font, the bishop invoked "God whose spirit was at the beginning of the world borne upon the waters."[38] From earliest Christianity into late medieval Italy, exegetes glossing Genesis 1:2 associated it with baptism.[39] The meticulously painted bodies of water in the *mappamundi* thus seem to complete the verse from Genesis that begins in the inscription. Of these bodies, the Red Sea, immediately recognizable here, is especially relevant to baptismal exegesis and to baptismal liturgies. Medieval theologians had long interpreted the passage of the Israelites through its waters (Ex. 14:15–15:1) as a type of baptism; the fourth reading for the Easter vigil recounts the crossing of the Red Sea, and in Padua and elsewhere, chants intoned at the vigil refer to it as well.[40]

The baptismal allusions in this image extend beyond the *mappamundi* to the zodiacal signs around its rim. Though the twelve signs do not appear often in extant trecento wall painting,[41] in Padua there had long been a keen interest in astrology, one that continued at the Carrara court.[42] The upper walls of the Salone in Padua's town hall, the Palazzo della Ragione, are covered with a complex program that includes the labors of the month, personifications of the planets, and the signs of the zodiac.[43] In the baptistery, the signs are quite conspicuous, and their pale forms are silhouetted against a dark blue ground, further enhancing their legibility.[44] Closest to God and his angelic entourage are Aquarius, the water-carrier, at the upper left, and just below, Pisces, the fish (Figs. 30, 38). Their placement is unusual; more typically the two are on the right.[45] In a miniature in a late trecento Bible from Padua – a manuscript that will be cited often, for its painters modeled a number of compositions on Giusto's – the Creation follows the fresco closely, but rotates the signs, dislodging Aquarius and Pisces from their privileged place.[46] In the baptistery fresco, the primacy of Aquarius and Pisces likely stems from their obvious association with water. Baptismal theology had long interpreted fish as the faithful, unable to survive without the water of baptism. A sermon ascribed to Augustine explicates the first reading of the Easter vigil, Genesis 1, using such language; Durandus draws on the same metaphor, as does Anthony of Padua.[47] Some exegetes gloss the zodiacal signs more specifically, and understand Aquarius, Pisces, or both in the context of the sacrament. Instructing neophytes, Zeno of Verona (d. 371) considers the signs of the zodiac a suitable topic for new Christians. He explains that the paired fish of Pisces signify the Jews and the Gentiles: "two peoples who, living in the water of baptism, are sealed by one sign into one people of Christ," and that Aquarius, "flowing forth with the stream of salvation," blots out all sins.[48] Bede (d. 735) likewise identifies the zodiacal signs with scriptural personages: thus Aries, the ram, denotes Abraham; Pisces denotes Jonah; Aquarius signifies John the Baptist, "because he baptized the Savior in the River Jordan."[49] For Zeno and more explicitly for Bede, then, Aquarius is a kind of astral equivalent of John the Baptist. While theologically sophisticated viewers likely recognized the sacramental references here, any attentive congregant might have grasped the significance of Aquarius: the jug that he holds resembles Prosdocimus's ewer (Fig. 36), and as he bends, water flows from it, reminding viewers of the sacrament as administered in trecento Padua.[50] A Christological interpretation of the zodiacal signs may have been more widely familiar, for they appear at times in other Italian baptisteries.[51]

Finally, Giusto's inventive image of the Creation also conveys something of the civic and political resonance of a baptistery – resonance both for local residents and for the Carrara regime. The prominent signs of the zodiac perhaps reminded the citizenry of the zodiacal figures in the Salone, but the closest visual parallel was nearer at hand. The signs circling the cosmos resemble the signs once circling Ubertino da Carrara's astrological clock installed in the tower at the entrance of the Reggia – a stone's throw from the baptistery (Fig. 2). The clock was so celebrated that its inventor, the multi-talented Jacopo Dondi, was thenceforth known as Dondi dall'Orologio. Giusto's apparent allusion to the marvelous clock must have pleased local viewers who took pride in the city's intellectuals and their achievements, as well as the Carrara, who, through Ubertino, could claim credit for its creation.[52]

The *mappamundi* too may have had significance beyond the liturgical. Rulers had long coveted and displayed *mappaemundi*, perhaps as signs of their territorial ambitions. In the trecento, painted maps had appeared in spaces like a loggia of the Rialto market in Venice and probably in the Doge's Palace,

Fig. 40. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Creation of Adam, Creation of Eve, Temptation of Adam and Eve, Expulsion from the Garden of Paradise. Padua, baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

as well as in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena.[53] In both the Rialto market and the Palazzo Pubblico, the maps were embedded in a matrix of martial imagery, contributing to the visual rhetoric of military might. The *pieve* of San Gimignano may adopt its *mappamundi* from a secular context: Bartolo di Fredi's map (Fig. 39) is sometimes said to derive from the one in the Palazzo Pubblico.[54] Both in San Gimignano and in Padua, the maps perhaps evoked the global dominion of Christendom, much as the baptistery of San Marco depicts the apostles baptizing converts in distant realms.[55] Given the trophies and war chariots on display in other baptisteries,[56] and given the martial context of the Sienese map from which it perhaps derived, the San Gimignano map may also have suggested the town's own military ambitions. In the Padua baptistery, the *mappamundi* may be a further signal of the town's, and the regime's, cultural and military rivalry with Venice – a rivalry especially heated with the outbreak of war in 1372. As already noted, earlier Carrara lords appropriated tomb imagery from the doges; the Padua baptistery, with both architecture and frescoes evoking San Marco, multiplies such appropriations. The map of the Creation may also function ideologically, for the best cartographers in northern Italy then lived and worked in Venice, and the Padua map's precise rendering of coastlines, rivers, and seas suggests that Giusto had access to a Venetian map.[57] Just as the doges might own and display a sophisticated *mappamundi*, so too, the Creation seems to assert, did the Carrara.

Fig. 41. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Creation of Adam, Creation of Eve, detail. Padua, Baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel: *Look with favor upon sinners....Restore the innocence which Adam lost in Paradise.*

Prayer at the blessing of the font, Ambrosian Manual[58]

The Genesis cycle continues with the story of Adam and Eve and their sons, Cain and Abel (Fig. 40). The creation of the first man and first woman opens the narrative. In a rocky landscape, God bends over Adam; below, in a grassy patch of meadow, he lifts Eve from Adam's recumbent body (Figs. 40, 41). The fresco's appropriateness to a baptismal church is obvious: it depicts the pristine, prelapsarian state of Adam and Eve to which baptism might restore sinners. The prayer over the font, recited below, explicitly reminds congregants of their ancestral parents' initial purity: "here may the nature which was founded in [God's] image be restored to the honor of its origin and cleansed from the filth of age."[59] The liturgist Sicardus of Cremona, glossing the first reading for Holy Saturday, is still more explicit: "Let us make man in our image and likeness; male and female he created them. Then the priest prays that he will restore the image, which he created for men, to the catechumens."[60]

If the Creation of Adam and Creation of Eve are logical inclusions in a baptismal space, the theme has been rendered in a way that heightens its pertinence to the site. Here, the act of creating Adam seems to require physical exertion: with one hand on Adam's head and the other on his torso, God

shapes him as one might model clay, giving him form – just as the inscription below, from Genesis 2:7, states:

> Formavit igitur Dominus Deus hominem de limo terrae, et inspiravit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitae.
>
> And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life.

Both inscription and image thus focus specifically on the forming of Adam – a subject seen infrequently in late medieval Italian art. Most often, God does not touch Adam, but instead calls him into being simply by blessing him or gesturing to him. Perhaps the most pertinent local example is a quatrefoil by Giotto in the Arena Chapel, where God merely raises a hand in blessing.[61] In the baptistery, the image seems to respond to the inscription, too, in that Adam's body is a pallid, bloodless beige, the color of the surrounding rocks and presumably the color of the slime of the earth. Only in the Creation of Eve, below, is his skin a warmer tone, like Eve's.[62] Most relevant to the site is the second part of the inscription, "et inspiravit in faciem ejus spiraculum vitae," for the words *inspiravit* and *spiraculum* immediately evoke the Holy Spirit; like *spiritum*, *spiraculum* means breath. This correspondence did not escape exegetes. Isidore of Seville (d. 636), in a commentary on Genesis, draws the connection: "*God formed the man from the slime of the earth....And he breathed into his face the breath of life*, undoubtedly, the infusion of the Holy Spirit."[63] In a sermon on the seven articles of faith, Anthony of Padua glosses the days of creation: "On the sixth day God said: *Let us make man to our image and likeness....And he breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul* [Gen. 1:26; Gen. 2:7]. The sixth article is the sending of the Holy Spirit."[64] Other exegetes associate the passage more specifically with baptism.[65] As discussed above, the celebrant had long breathed into the face of the catechumen as a standard part of the Roman rite – and the breathing was understood to invoke the Holy Spirit. The Roman pontifical directs the priest to say to each child: "Receive the Holy Spirit through this breath [*per insufflationem*]."[66] The liturgical language derives from John 20:21–22, when Christ meets with his apostles after the Resurrection: "He said therefore to them again: Peace be to you....When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Spirit." As Augustine and others observe, the language of this passage is close to that of Genesis 2:7.[67]

While the inscription below the fresco may have prompted literate viewers to think of the ritual breathing on catechumens, God's specific gestures perhaps reminded most congregants of the rite. Here God places one hand on Adam's head, the other on his chest (Fig. 41). Both gestures are unusual in depictions of the Creation of Adam; both are baptismal. The first is an ancient gesture of baptism, described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:17, 8:19, 19:6) and seen repeatedly in early representations of the rite.[68] In late medieval Italy, the gesture appears at times, as in the allegory of chastity in the vault of the Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi; there, two angels baptize a man, one placing a hand on his head much as God places his hand on Adam.[69] During the fourteenth century, as discussed, the celebrant poured or sprinkled water on the catechumen's head, and representations

of the sacrament follow suit – but the ancient hand-laying gesture persisted in other moments of the rite. Early liturgical texts specify it at several points of the ritual,[70] and in the Roman rite that was used in fourteenth-century Padua, the phrase "ponit manum super caput" (he places his hand on the head [of the catechumen]) or variants recur three times: at the threshold of the church, just before the blessing of the salt; inside, near the font, before the reciting of the Creed; and again before the final exorcism.[71] The gesture thus punctuates significant phases of the rite. God's second action, placing his hand on Adam's chest, is also unusual in trecento Creation iconography, and it, too, resembles a ritual gesture: as the *Liber ordinarius* describes, and as the Roman pontifical repeats, just before the catechumens renounce Satan they are anointed on the chest: "in pectore."[72] Occasionally other depictions of the Creation of Adam likewise derive from Genesis 2:7: "God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life." In a mosaic from the Creation cupola in San Marco, God is also shown forming Adam (now a dark, muddy brown), but there, he grips Adam's arm with both hands; the mosaic has none of the baptismal connotations of Giusto's fresco.[73] In the *pieve* of San Gimignano, though God does not touch Adam, he explicitly breathes upon him: fine rays from God's mouth beam down to Adam's face, clearly representing the "breath of life" of Genesis 2:7 and alluding to the similar moment in the baptismal ritual.[74]

Below the figure of God intently modeling the body of Adam, he is shown a second time, lifting Eve from the torso of her sleeping mate.[75] Eve's creation from Adam's side figures repeatedly in baptismal exegesis, for it had long been likened to the creation of the Church from Christ's side, pierced by the lance at the Crucifixion; the water that flowed from his wound is routinely identified with baptismal water.[76] Sicardus of Cremona, explicating the liturgy for Holy Saturday, writes:

> The Lord instituted baptism when he brought forth from his side blood and water, which he afterwards established as if by law, saying: "Unless a man is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The Lord was baptized in his passion,...in which the flow of blood and water poured forth, and it washed the whole body, which is the Church, and washed it whiter than snow. Thus the Church was born from the side of Christ, just as Eve was created from the side of Adam.[77]

In a sermon for the Easter octave, Anthony imagines Christ's words to his apostles in the post-resurrection appearance in which he displays his wounds: "Here is the side from which you, the faithful, my Church, were born, as Eve was created from the side of Adam. This side was opened by the lance, so that it might open for you the gate of paradise, closed by the cherubim and the flaming sword."[78] Given this rich vein of exegetical thought, it is likely not a coincidence that the piercing of Christ's side at the Crucifixion is depicted below and to the left of the Creation of Adam and Eve (Fig. 42). References to the institutional Church, Ecclesia, will recur often in the baptistery's program; baptism marks the initiation of the catechumen into the Church, which promises the hope of salvation to its members. That promise may be implied here (Fig. 41), for God grasps Eve's wrists with both hands as he raises her from Adam's side. As with Adam's creation, in late medieval Italy God often merely raises a hand in blessing to summon her forth.[79] God's stance may have been a prompt to viewers to link this image with a fresco below and to the right, the Descent into Limbo,

where Adam and Eve appear a second time (Fig. 42). Christ's bending, reaching form there, as he takes Adam's hand to return him to paradise, is close to God's in the Creation of Eve. Even the flinty landscape that arches, cave-like, above Eve resembles the rocky hellmouth in the Descent into Limbo.[80]

The Temptation and Expulsion of Adam and Eve follows, extending the full height of the drum (Figs. 31, 40). Here the lush, sun-dappled Garden of Eden is on luxuriant display. The inscription below and to the left, from Genesis 2:15, alludes to its splendor:

> Tulit ergo Dominus Deus hominem, et posuit eum in paradiso voluptatis, ut operaretur, et custodiret illum.
>
> And the Lord God took man, and put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it, and to keep it.

The choice of this verse may be significant, for the "paradise of pleasure" was often glossed as a reference to the Church. Anthony of Padua, in a sermon on the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul, writes: "*God took Adam...and put him in the paradise of pleasure* (the Church)."[81] Thus the garden, first glimpsed in the Creation of Adam and Eve (Fig. 40), and Eve's creation from Adam's side may both allude to Ecclesia. In the Temptation (Figs. 31, 40), the couple stands, symmetrically posed, toe to toe; each has a hand on the forbidden fruit. Though images of this episode sometimes show the couple in profile or three-quarter view, here Adam and Eve almost face the viewer; their frontality and comparative isolation draw attention to them and thus to this critical moment in salvation history. Late medieval Paduans were well aware of the link between the Genesis narrative, Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and baptism: the *Exultet*, sung at the Easter vigil not long before the procession to the baptistery, twice refers to Adam's fall.[82]

Above and to the right, God reproves the guilty pair; this episode occupies less space compositionally, for the Expulsion, directly below, overlaps it, cropping both Eve's right foot and Adam's calf (Fig. 43). The accompanying inscription cites Genesis 3:19:

> In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptua es, quia pulvis [es et in pulverem reverteris].
>
> In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust [thou art, and into dust thou shalt return].

Though Eve gestures to the serpent (Figs. 40, 43), the creature is almost indiscernible; her pointing finger directs us instead to the massive gate of paradise below, through which the avenging angel, sword in hand, drives the guilty pair. An imposing structure that emphatically separates the verdant garden from the barren land outside, the gate is seemingly constructed of the same stone that forms the bands subdividing the drum; it is capped with a cornice and has a corresponding strip at its base. While the gate appears at times in duecento and trecento images of the Expulsion, it is often

Fig. 42. Giusto de' Menabuoi. View of drum and east wall, showing the Creation of Eve above and to the left of the Descent into Limbo. Padua, baptistery, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

absent.[83] Perhaps its frequent omission should not be surprising, for there is no mention of a gate in the scriptural account of the Expulsion; Genesis 3:23–24 states simply: "And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure....And he cast out Adam." The phrase "gate of heaven" (*porta coeli*) appears only once in Genesis, at 28:17, when Jacob awakes from his dream and states: "This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven." To be sure, a gate or gates as the entrance to paradise is implied in other scriptural passages; for instance, the Apocalypse refers to the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12–13). But more specific references to the gate(s) or door of paradise, opened by the sacrament, occur in baptismal liturgies. In the *Sacramentary of Gelasius*, a cleric announces the first scrutiny with these words: "let us meet so that the heavenly mystery, when...the door to the heavenly kingdom is opened, may be perfectly performed," and the first prayers over the catechumen beseech God: "open to them, O Lord, the door of your religion."[84] The metaphor recurs

Fig. 43. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Expulsion from the Garden of Paradise; Cain and Abel; Lamech; Death of Adam. Padua, baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

repeatedly in early baptismal homilies and tracts and persists into late medieval Italy. Anthony of Padua, in a sermon for the sixth Sunday after Pentecost, writes: "All we who are baptized in Christ Jesus...are cleansed in his death, that is, in his blood....Jesus Christ...was willing to open his side so as to...open the gates of paradise to those exiled." [85]

Thomas Aquinas discusses the opening of the gates through baptism at some length.[86] Bonaventure does as well.[87] Unsurprisingly, then, the versions of the Expulsion in the baptistery of Florence and in the *pieve* of San Gimignano both feature gates. In the Last Judgment in the Florence baptistery, the archangel Michael escorts eager souls of the elect to the gate of paradise as another angel opens its door to admit another of the elect.[88] Ghiberti's celebrated east doors of the Florence baptistery themselves function as the gates of paradise, as Eloise Angiola has persuasively argued.[89]

Baptismal, too, are the short tunics that Adam and Eve wear in the Expulsion (Fig. 43, lower left). Despite the biblical reference to the "garments of skins" that God made for the pair after the fall (Gen. 3:21), duecento and trecento painters typically represent the two as nude when they are driven from paradise.[90] The decision to clothe the two in the baptistery thus raises questions, and

Fig. 44. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Cain and Abel. Padua, baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

their specific garb is particularly suggestive: they wear short tunics that appear to be white that has been streaked with grey, as if soiled. The Cain and Abel narrative, to which the inscription below directs attention, clarifies these choices.[91] Immediately to the right of the Expulsion, Cain murders his brother. Above is the event that triggered Cain's fratricidal rage, the brothers offering their sacrifices to God; in the upper right, God confronts Cain and curses him. Giusto has carefully distinguished the condition of the brothers' tunics (Fig. 44): whereas Cain's is a greyish shade, similar to his parents', Abel's is a glistening white. The distinction between the soiled tunics and the pure white one (clearer here than in the murder scene below, owing to the condition of the fresco) seems obvious enough, and becomes still more obvious in the context of the sacrament. As noted, from early Christianity into late medieval Italy and beyond, neophytes were given white baptismal garments, signaling the purity of their newly cleansed state. The practice presumably originated in scriptural passages that use metaphors of clothing to denote spiritual status.[92] Especially pertinent to the baptistery's Expulsion is Revelation 3:4, a reference to the people of Sardis who "have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with [God] in white." Glossing this passage and others, exegetes repeatedly contrast the pristine baptismal garment of the virtuous Christian with the sullied clothing of the sinner.[93] The metaphor was well known in late medieval Padua. Anthony of Padua seems to have been particularly fond of it, for he referred twice to the sinner who "soils the robe of his baptismal innocence," to the "defiling of the robe of innocence," and to the "filthy garments" of the sinner.[94] Congregants gazing at the grayish tunics of the sinners in the baptistery's drum likely had no difficulty grasping their relevance.

A closer look at the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel reveals a final curious feature. Giusto depicts both brothers offering what appear to be bundles of grain; normally Abel offers the lamb specified by the biblical text (Gen. 4:4). Unusually, too, their offerings are here shown aflame, and both brothers hold their burning sheaves in their bare hands.[95] Here, the flames begin to consume Cain's sheaf, which falls ominously in his direction; Abel's sheaf remains upright, miraculously unscathed by the fire.

This curious iconography stems from a conflation of the Genesis tale with the eschatological parable of the cockle in Matthew 13:24–40. The parable draws a distinction between the cockle, a weedy plant, and "good seed" that produces wheat; the cockle seed, sewn by "an enemy" into a field of wheat, at harvest is bundled and burned, whereas the wheat is gathered and stored. Christ explains that the good seed are the elect, the cockle the damned, and the harvest the end of the world. Perhaps significantly, the conflation of the two passages has, in part, a northern Italian pedigree: Peter Chrysologus (d. *c.*450), bishop of Ravenna, associates the bundles of cockle with Cain's offering.[96] In Giusto's fresco, then, the blazing sheaf that topples toward Cain makes vividly clear the fiery fate of the sinner who soils his baptismal robe; only the unsullied, like Abel, will reach the heavenly kingdom.

[...]

Jacob, Isaac and Rebecca: Benediction and "the birth of regeneration"

The final segment of the drum depicts twelve episodes, beginning with the Sacrifice of Isaac, discussed above, and concluding with the rescue of Joseph from the pit (Fig. 55). Jacob, son of Isaac and father of Joseph, appears in nine of the twelve. Though Jacob is the third of the patriarchs whose names are invoked in the baptismal rite, the inclusion of so many episodes from his life is not typical of baptismal churches, even those with extensive Genesis cycles.[198] The expansive treatment of Jacob here may be associated, in part, with local ritual practice. In Padua, on each Sunday in Lent, the clergy and congregation processed to the baptistery, and as they did, the cantor and choir chanted

Fig. 55. Giusto de' Menabuoi. View of dome and drum: life of Isaac; life of Jacob; life of Joseph. Padua, baptistery, mid-1370s. Photo: Valentino Pace.

Fig. 56. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Sacrifice of Isaac; Isaac Sends Esau to Hunt; Isaac Blesses Jacob; Esau Returns from the Hunt. Padua, baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Julia Miller.

two responsories. On the second Sunday and again on the third Sunday, both responsories featured Jacob: on the second Sunday, *Dum dormiret Iacob* (While Jacob slept), on Jacob's dream of the ladder, and *Cum audisset Iacob* (When Jacob had heard), on learning that Esau was approaching (Gen. 32:5); on the third, *Videns Iacob vestimenta* (Jacob, seeing the garments) and *Lamentabatur Iacob* (Jacob grieved), both on Jacob's sorrow on hearing of Joseph's apparent death.[199] Anthony's sermons also attest to the patriarch's importance on these two days: his sermon for the second Sunday in Lent includes a lengthy disquisition on Jacob's ladder, and for the third Sunday, on the casting of Joseph into the dry pit.[200] While the four responsories were sung on these two Sundays elsewhere, in Padua these chants accompanied the procession to the baptistery, where congregants, gazing up, would have seen the lengthy narrative featuring Jacob and his family.[201]

The first three Jacob episodes form a cycle within a cycle, depicting the ruse through which Jacob secures Isaac's blessing with the help of his mother, Rebecca (Gen. 27; Fig. 56). The three scenes take place in the aging patriarch's bedchamber, an elegant interior with a Gothic window at the center of the rear wall. The patriarch sits in a wooden bed equipped with a small cupboard that serves as a bedside table. In the first of the three episodes, at the upper right, Rebecca appears to the left, peering from a doorway, as Isaac sends Esau to hunt for venison in exchange for the blessing. Next (Fig. 57) she emerges from the door, platter in hand, as Isaac blesses Jacob, disguised as his brother. The cupboard is now covered with a white cloth, on which are a carafe of wine (Gen. 27:25), a bowl, a glass, and other small items. Finally, Esau returns (Fig. 58) and falls on his knees to petition his father; the top of cupboard has been cleared, the carafe and glass returned to a cupboard shelf.

Fig. 57. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Isaac Blesses Jacob. Padua, baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Julia Miller.

Fig. 58. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Esau Returns from the Hunt. Padua, baptistery, drum, mid-1370s. Photo: Julia Miller.

The Holy Women at the Tomb: Image, Liturgy, Performance

Across from the Transfiguration is the Holy Women at the Tomb (Figs. 100, 106). There, an angel clad in white (cf. Matt. 28:3, Mark 16:5, John 20:12) perches on the empty sepulcher, and, addressing the women who have come to anoint Christ's body, holds up a now-abandoned grave cloth found in the tomb. Closest to the angel is Mary Magdalen, wearing her usual red gown and mantle. Shielding her eyes – according to Luke 24:4, the angel's garments glistened – she leans over, placing one hand on the tomb, to peer inside in search of the body (as noted by John 20:11: she "looked into the sepulcher"). Two other women stand to the right. Behind them, partially concealed, is a second angel (Luke 24:4; John 20:12), raising his hand in speech. Below the tomb are four soldiers who respond dramatically to the sight. Matthew (28:4) writes that "the guards were struck with terror, and became as dead men." Giusto's soldiers are certainly terror-struck, but hardly motionless; one seizes his sword and the others gesticulate wildly. As in the pairing of the Flight into Egypt and Descent into Limbo, Giusto

Fig. 106. Giusto de' Menabuoi. Holy Women at the Tomb. Padua, baptistery, east wall, mid-1370s. Photo: Diocesi di Padova, Ufficio beni culturali, Archivio fotografico.

encourages viewers to consider this image's consonance with the Transfiguration (Fig. 105): both frescoes depict a dazzling, and terrifying, vision, an apparition in white; the frightened, sprawling, gesturing apostles on the left anticipate the frightened, sprawling, gesturing guards on the right.[204] Thematically, the Transfiguration is logically paired with the visit of the Holy Women as figure and fulfillment: the first event promised the "glorious resurrection"; the women discover that it has come to pass.

As Paul insists (Romans 6:3–5), just as Christ rose from the dead, so too will all who are baptized. At the Easter vigil, before solemn baptism, the *Exultet* and other chants proclaimed Christ's resurrection. In Padua, at Vespers on Easter Sunday, the bishop, clergy, and congregants processed to the baptistery; there, at the font, several chants celebrated the risen Christ.[205] The baptistery does not, however, depict Christ's resurrection per se, only the women's discovery of it (Fig. 106). In a sense, it is a conservative choice. The women's visit to the tomb, implicitly signifying the resurrection but not explicitly representing it, is an ancient subject, seen very early in Christian art; it persisted in Italy through the duecento and at times into the trecento. In the dome of the Florence baptistery, it concludes the Christological cycle.[206] In the late thirteenth century and over the course of the fourteenth century, images of the risen Christ, standing triumphant on top of or near the tomb, or appearing to Mary Magdalen in the *Noli me tangere*, became increasingly popular, sometimes coexisting with the older narrative and sometimes supplanting it.[207] In the Arena Chapel, Giotto retained traditional elements of the women's visit – the sepulcher, the angels, and the sleeping soldiers –but dropped the group of women, substituting the *Noli me tangere*. Other painters working in the region would either follow suit or dispense with the women entirely.[208] The *pieve* of San Gimignano depicts the Resurrection proper, with the risen Christ standing atop the sepulcher; neither the women's visit nor the *Noli* appears.[209] Thus the decision in the baptistery to focus attention on the women's encounter with the angel and to exclude Christ himself seems at first an eccentric choice, out of the iconographic mainstream of the trecento.

It is local ritual practice that, in part, explains the choice: the women's visit to the tomb was enacted annually inside the cathedral, on Easter Sunday. The liturgical drama, usually called the *Visitatio sepulchri*, was staged widely, but in some Italian towns, the apostles visited as well; in Padua, the drama features only the women.[210] Further, distinctive aspects of the baptistery fresco reveal a particularly close association between it and the drama as it was performed in Padua. Thanks to the *Liber ordinarius* and an inventory of the cathedral of Padua, dated 1359, we are well informed about the performance. The *Liber ordinarius* specifies the stage set, many of the props, and the dramatis personae, spelling out both dialogue and actions. The parts of the two angels and the three Marys were played by choristers, appropriately dressed. The angels waited at the tomb, which had been erected near the altar of St. Daniel, as the three Marys approached. As the text describes, the women inspected both the grave cloth or *pallium* and the tomb itself: "The Marys, carefully lifting the *pallium* and peering into the sepulcher from side to side and not finding the body of Christ, accept the *pallium* as proof of Christ's resurrection....Raising the *pallium* they sing *Surrexit Dominus de sepulcro.*" When asked what she has seen, Mary Magdalen responded: "I have seen the sepulcher of the living Christ and the glory of his rising." Next, indicating the angels and the *pallium*, she continued: "Angels attesting, the *sudarium* and [grave] clothes."[211]

Much of this corresponds closely to the baptistery fresco. Some aspects of the fresco, though scripturally based, are uncommon in late medieval Italian painting. Generally, one angel suffices to explain the empty tomb to the women; Giusto, like Giotto before him, includes two angels, as in the liturgical drama. More unusual is Mary Magdalen's intense scrutiny of the sepulcher; when the women appear, they more often either recoil in fear from the angel or converse with him.[212] Still rarer is the compositional attention to the *pallium*. Though in the fresco it is the angel rather than one of the women who displays it, medieval Italian painters often leave out the cloth entirely. When it does appear, it is typically a minor element, perhaps draped over the side of the tomb, as in Duccio's panel from the *Maestà*; the cloth is seldom held up for our scrutiny by either an angel or one of the women.[213] Here, then, it is almost surely a reference to the liturgical drama enacted in the cathedral, next door to the baptistery. Still another element – more difficult to spot, but equally telling – would have been recognized by attentive local viewers. The second angel, whose body is partially concealed by the Holy Woman in front of him, carries a leafy stalk that can only be a lily; its foliage is very close to that of the lily carried by Gabriel in the Annunciation on the west wall. The *Liber ordinarus* informs us that the angels at the tomb held lilies in their hands: "liliis in manibus." Finally, though the small ointment jars that two of the women hold are often seen in depictions of the Visit to the Tomb, these, too, also correspond to the drama, for an inventory from the cathedral lists three ivory boxes ("cassitule de ebore") that were carried by the Marys on the feast of the Resurrection.[214] All of these aspects of the fresco – the pair of angels, Mary Magdalen's peering into the tomb, the display of the grave cloth, the angel's lily, and the ointment jars – point again to the baptistery's interconnections of ritual and image, collapsing the distance between sacred history, local liturgical practice, and visual narrative. The lengthy ritual performed at the baptistery on Easter Sunday would have given congregants ample time to take in the details of the fresco, and to note their relevance.

Pilate washing his hands represents the people cleansed by baptism

Candidus of Fulda, *Opusculum de passione Domini*[215]

[...]

Conclusion

THE PADUA BAPTISTERY IS A COMPLEX SPACE, both architecturally and programmatically, and its frescoes invite interpretation from a number of vantage points. I have tried to show that the visual program is site-specific, that it is rich in references to the baptismal ritual as enacted in late medieval Padua and to baptismal theology. I have argued, too, that in many respects, it is patron-specific, that gender inflects the baptistery's images especially in ways that seem tailored to Fina Buzzacarini's life. These thematic strands are not necessarily distinct, however; instead they are often interlaced. Ritual and gender come together in the very choice of the baptistery as the site of Fina's mausoleum. Baptisteries were sacred spaces in which women moved from the margins to the center: a woman's presence at the font – unimaginable at the altar – was routine in late medieval Italy. For Fina specifically, the baptistery, with the opportunity to honor not only John but also his mother, was a singularly apt commemorative site. The example of Elizabeth's late-in-life delivery of a son served to remind viewers of Fina's similar achievement. Throughout the program, themes that prompt a sacramental reading also prompt a gendered reading. Many highlight the agency of pious women – especially those who in their motherhood resemble Fina. The flood is an ancient figure of baptism; in the baptistery, featured along with Noah is his wife, represented as virtuous, dignified, and decisive. The Miracle of the Rods, as the *Glossa ordinaria* explains, attests to the potency of baptismal water. But the image as depicted here also attests to women's participation in salvation history: Rachel and Leah join with Jacob to execute the plan to leave Laban. The Massacre of the Innocents, baptized by blood, alludes unambiguously to the sacrament in the white garments of the young victims. Equally unambiguous is their mothers' heroism in resisting the soldiers. The Trial of Pilate depicts the prefect washing his hands with a ewer that closely resembles the liturgical vessel used in the rite; the adjoining fresco depicts his wife as a noble figure who boldly interrupts the trial in an attempt to save Christ's life. The Apocalyptic Woman is often cited in baptismal exegesis as a figure of the Church, giving birth to new Christians through the sacrament; she is equally relevant to Fina, who like the Woman gave birth to a son destined to rule. Female anti-exemplars, women pointedly juxtaposed with Fina, figure here as well. Two narrative cycles that are highly appropriate for a baptistery – the life of John the Baptist and the Apocalypse cycle – also offered the opportunity to comment on women who committed adultery with rulers, and to make their malevolence indelibly clear.

How might this intricately layered ensemble of images have come into existence? The scope and ambitions of the program suggest a deliberative process that developed over time. I have argued that Fina largely exercised control over the design of the program, and she could have easily supervised its execution: the main entrance to the Reggia was a one-minute walk from the door of the baptistery (Fig. 2). But she surely consulted others about the project, probably soliciting ideas from several sources. The theological sophistication of the interior suggests that a scholar deeply knowledgeable about biblical exegesis played an advisory role. Bishop Raimondo Ganimberti might appear to be a candidate; Kohl has already proposed that the program was a cooperative venture between Fina and the bishop. An episcopal presence is obvious in the donor portrait, where Prosdocimus is conspicuously featured and two other local bishops form part of the saintly company; the three bishop saints appear again in the dome, just behind John the Baptist. Perhaps the unusual emphasis on the apostles in the New Testament narratives appealed to the bishop's understanding of himself as successor to the twelve. But Ganimberti did not arrive in Padua until late March, 1374; by that date the planning of the program was probably finished or nearly so, and the work itself was likely underway.[1] It is possible that Ganimberti inserted himself into the process after the painting had started, perhaps requesting that one composition or another be altered, but short of analysis by conservation scientists, this must remain a matter of conjecture.[2] For whatever reason, Fina's will seems to indicate some animosity toward Ganimberti: she bequeaths £1000 for a dowry, but insists that "the said £1000 can and must, in no way, come into the hands of the Lord Bishop of Padua."[3]

In any case, the bishop of Padua was not the only person at Fina's disposal who would have been conversant with exegetical tradition. Another may have been Fina's sister Anna, the Benedictine abbess, who is described in her epitaph as "peragendis docta virago" (a learned virago in her accomplishments). The phrase implies both her erudition and her executive ability, comparable to a man's.[4] Though San Benedetto's library does not survive, some religious women had access to enormous libraries, with the largest numbering as many as 500 volumes.[5] The complex diction of the inscription in San Benedetto, in which Anna lauds her sister, presupposes a highly educated author – perhaps a "docta virago."[6] As the inscription attests, Fina and Anna were demonstrably close. Fina's many gifts to San Benedetto, the first-hand account of San Benedetto's chaplain, and the portraits of Anna in the baptistery narratives (Figs. 8, 9, 17) confirm the sisters' enduring bond. Catherine King has already proposed that Anna and Fina "might have played some part in developing" the commission.[7] If aspects of the program suggest a deeply personal dimension, as I have argued, Anna might well have helped Fina formulate the visual expression of her concerns. Perhaps the attention to pairs of sisters in the program – Rachel and Leah, Mary Iacobi and Mary Salome – appealed to the two Buzzacarini women. Leah and Rachel had long been understood as figuring the active life and contemplative life respectively, making them especially apt models for Fina and Anna.[8]

[...]

But while Fina surely discussed her plans for the baptistery with others, the last word regarding most decisions about the space and its program was almost certainly hers. The images align so strongly and so consistently with Fina's interests that it is difficult to explain them otherwise. The virtuous women in the baptistery's narratives are seen behaving in ways that accord with the portrait of Fina that emerges from her will. They are pious to be sure, but they are neither passive nor submissive. These images remind us of Fina's voice in the will, where she emerges as an authoritative woman not unlike Pilate's wife- a woman accustomed to power, to issuing commands. Both in her will and inside the baptistery, Fina's voice, silenced by the chroniclers and muffled even by some scholars, speaks clearly enough for an attentive visitor to take note. The baptistery's frescoes depict two figures, Zacharias and the woman in the Miracles of Christ, whose mute voice is restored. One goal of this book is to restore Fina's.