#Andrea di Cione and/or Nardo di Cione, \*Expulsion of the Duke of Athens\*, ca. 1345-1347#

##Palazzo Vecchio (ex-Stinche)##

No one is precisely sure who painted one of the most interesting civic pictures of the entire Florentine Trecento. Noted by chroniclers centuries after its production inside the old Debtors’ prison – the so-called [Stinche](insert link) – no documentation of its commission or completion has survived. The seemingly circular painting, now in the collection of the Palazzo Vecchio, represents allegorically the [siege and exile of Walter of Brienne](insert link), the infamous [Duke of Athens](insert link), who governed Florence as a quasi-dictator from September 1342 until his ouster in early August 1343. Adhering closely to the tenets of \*pitture infammate\*, or pictures of defamation, the image was intended to humiliate the condemned long after any physical or financial punishments had been meted out. With luck, a well-painted \*pittura infammata\* would last for generations, thus besmirching the reputation of the subject in perpetuity: it was considered a particularly painful punishment by those upon whom it was inflicted.

The picture’s core features the seated figure of Saint Anne, who appears here as a heavenly advocate due to the rather coincidental fact that the Florentines initiated their revolt against Brienne on July 26, her feast day. Anne plucks a banner from a kneeling knight to her right while holding her left hand over a remarkably accurate representation of the [Palazzo della Signoria](insert link), the architectural seat of the Florentine Republic and a civic symbol of liberty throughout the city. Cradling in his hands a demonic figure, Walter skulks away from the throne he has just vacated, driven from it by a militant angel who wings toward him from above. Broken weapons, a tattered flag, and a book litter the ground at the disgraced leader’s feet. This picture both celebrates the victory of the Florentines over a master they despised and mocks that adversary for his cowardly flight from justice.

If we are to place this fresco in the Debtors’ prison of the Stinche, a building destroyed in the late nineteenth century and thus unavailable for examination, we must question why it was that this image of political defamation was installed in a zone designated for local residents who had failed to pay their debts to creditors. While it is true that political and military prisoners were occasionally held within the Stinche’s cells, the fresco’s function instead appears to have been to confront local men (and some women) who could not settle their accounts. One wonders whether fourteenth-century Florentines equated severe debt with political treachery, sedition, or rebellion, which might explain the reasons for placing this image inside this particular prison (as opposed to the one in the [Bargello](insert link), which was usually reserved for violent criminals and enemies of the state).

Few have attempted to establish authorship of this painting based on stylistic grounds. Bernardo Daddi has been connected to its design, as have his followers Andrea and Nardo di Cione. Indeed, Walter’s rather rigid, even stilted pose places the image in the period of the mid-1340s or ‘50s, while the formal representation of draperies in Anne’s garments seems to conform to the pictures in the [Strozzi Chapel](insert link) of [S. Maria Novella](insert link) that are known to have been produced by the Cione brothers in the 1350s. But our interest in connecting Andrea and Nardo to this picture also revolves around the ingenuity of its subject and composition, something that these two painters seemed to excel at.

Irrespective of authorship, the \*Expulsion of the Duke of Athens\* surprises us with its chronicle-like condemnation of a Bad Guy who got caught doing Bad-Guy Things, and then paid the price that all Bad Guys pay when they mess with Florence. It’s really quite a remarkable picture.

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