

= The Tribute Money ( Masaccio ) =

The Tribute Money is a fresco by the Italian renaissance painter Masaccio , located in the Brancacci Chapel of the basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine , Florence , and completed by his senior collaborator , Masolino . Painted in the 1420s , it is widely considered among Masaccio 's best work , and a vital part of the development of renaissance art .

The painting is part of a cycle on the life of Saint Peter , and describes a scene from the Gospel of Matthew , in which Jesus directs Peter to find a coin in the mouth of a fish in order to pay the temple tax . It owes its importance in particular to its revolutionary use of perspective and chiaroscuro . The Tribute Money suffered great damage in the centuries after its creation , until the chapel went through a thorough restoration in the 1980s .

= = The Brancacci Chapel = =

The Brancacci Chapel , in the basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine , was founded around 1366 / 7 by Piero di Piovichese Brancacci . The chapel passed to Piero 's nephew , Felice Brancacci , who some time between 1423 and 1425 commissioned the painter Masolino to decorate the walls with a series of frescoes from the life of Saint Peter . Peter was the name @-@ saint of the founder , and the patron saint of the Brancacci family , but the choice also reflected support for the Roman papacy during the Great Schism .

At some point Masolino was joined by another artist , the eighteen years younger Masaccio . Masolino eventually left , either for Hungary in 1425 or for Rome in 1427 , leaving the completion of the chapel to Masaccio . In 1427 or 28 , before the chapel was completed , Masaccio joined Masolino in Rome . Only in the 1480s was the work finished , by Filippino Lippi . The Tribute Money , though , is considered Masaccio 's work entirely .

Over the centuries the frescoes were greatly altered and damaged . In 1746 the upper levels were painted over by the artist Vincenzo Meucci , covering up most of Masolino 's work . Then , in 1771 , the church was ruined by fire . The Brancacci Chapel , though structurally undamaged by the fire , suffered great damages to its frescoes . It was not until the years 1981 @-@ 1990 that a full @-@ scale restoration of the chapel was undertaken , restoring the frescoes to approximately their original state . The paintings had suffered some irreparable damage though , particularly the parts that were painted a secco : in The Tribute Money , the leaves on the trees were gone , while Christ 's robe had lost much of its original azure brilliance .

= = Subject matter = =

The scene depicted in The Tribute Money is drawn from Matthew 17 : 24 ? 27 :

24 . And when they were come to Capernaum , they that received tribute money came to Peter , and said , Doth not your master pay tribute ? 25 . He saith , Yes . And when he was come into the house , Jesus prevented him , saying , What thinkest thou , Simon ? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute ? of their own children , or of strangers ? 26 . Peter saith unto him , Of strangers . Jesus saith unto him , Then are the children free . 27 . Notwithstanding , lest we should offend them , go thou to the sea , and cast an hook , and take up the fish that first cometh up ; and when thou hast opened his mouth , thou shalt find a piece of money : that take , and give unto them for me and thee .

The story is only found in Matthew , who was himself a tax collector according to Matthew 9 : 9 @-@ 13 . The passage has been used as a Christian justification for the legitimacy of secular authority , and is often seen in conjunction with another passage , the " render unto Caesar ... " story . In Matthew 22 : 15 ? 22 , a group of Pharisees try to trick Christ into incriminating himself , by asking if it is " lawful to give tribute unto Caesar , or not . " Pointing out Caesar 's image on the coin , he replies " Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar 's ; and unto God the things that are God 's . "

## = = Composition = =

The painting diverges somewhat from the biblical story , in that the tax collector confronts the whole group of Christ and the disciples , and the entire scene takes place outdoors . The story is told in three parts that do not occur sequentially , but the narrative logic is still maintained , through compositional devices . The central scene is that of the tax collector demanding the tribute . The head of Christ is the vanishing point of the painting , drawing the eyes of the spectator there . Both Christ and Peter then point to the left hand part of the painting , where the next scene takes place in the middle background : Peter taking the money out of the mouth of the fish . The final scene ? where Peter pays the tax collector ? is at the right , set apart by the framework of an architectural structure .

This work maintains a heavy importance in the Art History world , as it is widely believed to be the first painting , since the fall of Rome ( ca . 476 A.D. ) , to use Scientific Linear One Point Perspective , or , all the orthogonals point to one vanishing point , in this case , Christ . Also , it is one of the first paintings that does away with the use of a head @-@ cluster . A technique employed by earlier Proto @-@ Renaissance artists , such as Giotto or Duccio . If you were to walk into the painting , you could walk around Jesus Christ , in the semicircle created , and back out the painting again with ease .

Christ and the disciples are placed in a semicircle , reflecting the shape of the chapel 's apse . The tax collector , on the other hand , stands outside the holy space . While the group of holy men are dressed almost entirely in robes of pastel pink and blue , the official wears a shorter tunic of a striking vermilion . The colour adds to the impertinence expressed through his gestures . Another way contrast is achieved is in the way ? both in the central scene and on the right ? the tax collector 's postures are copying almost exactly those of Peter , only seen from the opposite angle . This gives a three @-@ dimensional quality to the figures , allowing the spectator to view them from all sides .

## = = Style = =

Masaccio is often compared to contemporaries like Donatello and Brunelleschi as a pioneer of the renaissance , particularly for his use of single @-@ point perspective . One technique that was unique to Masaccio , however , was the use of atmospheric , or aerial perspective . Both the mountains in the background , and the figure of Peter on the left are dimmer and paler than the objects in the foreground , creating an illusion of depth . This technique was known in ancient Rome , but was considered lost until reinvented by Masaccio .

Masaccio 's use of light was also revolutionary . While earlier artists like Giotto had applied a flat , neutral light from an unidentifiable source , Masaccio 's light emanated from a specific location outside the picture , casting the figures in light and shadow . This created a chiaroscuro effect , sculpting the bodies into three @-@ dimensional shapes .

Masaccio is often justly praised for the variety of his facial depictions . In the case of this painting the accolade is somewhat diminished , however , by the fact that the work was unfinished at the time of his death , and the heads of Jesus and St Peter were painted by his senior collaborator Masolino da Panicale , ( who painted the corresponding perspective work on the other side of the Chapel , " Healing of the Cripple and Raising of Tabitha " ) .

## = = Interpretations = =

Several theories have been proposed as to why this specific subject ? not a very common theme in art history ? was chosen . One suggestion sees the painting as a justification for the so @-@ called catasto of 1427 ; a new form of income tax . This is not a very likely explanation , however , as Brancacci would stand to lose from the new taxation , and would probably rather have been among its opponents . A more probable explanation links the painting to Pope Martin V 's 1423 agreement that the Florentine church be subjected to state tax . The money found in the fish 's mouth can also

be seen as an expression of how Florence 's wealth came from the sea . Felice Brancacci , a silk merchant involved in Mediterranean trade , was also a member of the city 's Board of Maritime Consuls .

Central to an understanding of the painting , as well as the entire series , is the relationship the Brancaccis and the city of Florence had with the papacy in Rome . Florence was at the time at war with Milan , and needed the support of the Pope . The Brancacci frescos must therefore be seen in the context of a pro @-@ papal policy , and as an attempt to legitimise the Roman see through its association with Saint Peter ? the first bishop of Rome , and first pope .

In the story , Peter is clearly singled out among the disciples , and his strong connection with Christ can be seen in Christ 's words " for me and thee " . Peter appears a majestic and energetic figure when he is with Christ and when he performs his work , in contrast to the diminutive shape on the left . This all points forward to his apostolic role as Christ 's vicar on earth . As such The Tribute Money represents a transitional scene in the chapel ; in doing Christ 's bidding Peter goes from being a disciple to being the master .

Only two of the disciples can be identified with any degree of certainty : Peter with his iconographic grey hair and beard , and blue and yellow attire , and John ; the young beardless man standing next to Christ . John 's head is reminiscent of Roman sculptures , and it is reflected in the very similar face of another disciple on the right . The person next to this disciple is assumed to be Judas , whose dark and sinister face mirrors that of the tax collector . It has been speculated ? first by Vasari ? that the face on the far right is a self @-@ portrait of Masaccio himself , as Thomas .