

Italian *by Design*: A “Bridge” Course in Language and Material Culture

Berkeley Language Center, Fellows Report

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Ubi enim non est lex, nec praevaricatio.

But where there is no law there is no transgression.

- St. Paul, *Romans*, 4:15

1. Rationale: Lost Alliances

People get excited today about things, the materials they are made of, and the ways they are designed, displayed, and displaced. Globalization is sharpening our curiosity about how things move and draw people across borders. The digital revolution seems to be provoking our nostalgia for materials and craftsmanship.¹ The technology sector is recognizing the indispensability of their design teams to profit margins and investing in forms of education and culture that will foster their excellence.² Works of literature, non-fiction, film, radio, and research are making objects increasingly exciting, complex, and accessible.³ ‘Design thinking’ – a problem-oriented, collaborative, and interdisciplinary model of learning with ties to the

¹ Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (*Things*): 1-22, esp. 16.

² Bary M. Katz, *Make It New: The History of Silicon Valley Design* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 2015).

³ A few examples among the many that could be mentioned here are Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (New York: Viking, 2011); Edmund De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family’s Century of Art and Loss* (New York: Faar, Strauss and Giroux, 2010); and *How I Built This*, NPR podcast, accessed 13 January 2017, <http://www.npr.org/podcasts/510313/how-i-built-this>.

corporate world – is appearing on college campuses in interdisciplinary learning centers, classroom activities, extension programs, and workshops for faculty and administrators.⁴

These shifts are invigorating at the same time as they are posing or at least framing in new ways certain threats to the humanities and to language programs specifically. In a lucid article that appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2015, Peter N. Miller discussed how the future-oriented rhetoric and practices of ‘design thinking’ today tend to lack any “sense that the past matters to the present” and that “libraries, archives, museums, the great repositories of the human past” might be “called upon for help”:

This puts a contradiction at the heart of design thinking, given the premise of a human-centered design practice, and the fact that we humans are sedimentary beings in whom the past lives on and helps shape our experience of the present.⁵

If ‘design thinking’ is going to enrich and not merely impoverish the liberal arts, Miller argues, this blind spot will need to be addressed.⁶ Many language instructors meanwhile feel that their programs are suffering from “the devaluation of the textual in favor of the oral and the visual; growing indifference and incapacity ... especially in the historical languages worldwide; the shallow presentism of scholarship, and even antipathy to the past as such.”⁷ This project developed out of a concern with the apparently antithetical relations today between historical scholarship and design, on the one hand, and between language pedagogy and material/visual cultural studies, on the other.⁸

⁴ See for example the d.school Institute of Design at Stanford University (<http://dschool.stanford.edu/>); UC Berkeley’s Arts + Design Arts Research Center (<http://arts.berkeley.edu/artdesign/>); and Dan Berrett, “Boston College, to Refresh its Aging Curriculum, Turns to Design Thinkers,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education Curriculum* (6 April, 2015). In 2017 there are course offerings in Design Thinking under different departmental umbrellas at MIT, Harvard, and Yale.

⁵ Peter N. Miller, “Is ‘Design Thinking’ the New Liberal Arts?” *The Chronicle Review*, 26 March 2015, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Is-Design-Thinking-the-New/228779/>. By the same author and in the same venue see also “How Objects Speak,” *The Chronicle Review*, 11 August 2014, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Objects-Speak/148177/>; and “A New Republic of Letters,” 3 April 2016, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/A-New-Republic-of-Letters/235899/>.

⁶ Miller and Michael Shanks offered a seminar to this end in 2014 as a collaboration between Stanford University and the Bard Graduate Center. See Michael Shanks, “Antiquarians and the Origins of Design Thinking,” accessed 14 January 2017, <http://www.mshanks.com/2014/09/18/antiquarians-and-the-origins-of-design-thinking/>.

⁷ Sheldon Pollock, “Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World,” *Critical Inquiry* 35.4 (*The Fate of Disciplines*): 931-961.

⁸ The Berkeley Language Center Professional Development Fellowship and the group that met there in Spring 2016 was essential to the realization of this project. I wish to thank personally Richard Kern, Mark Kaiser, Chika Shibahara, Rafael Vetromille-Castro, Lily Scott, Keith Budner, and Karen Møller for their help and stimulation.

Such relations that have been shaped by long-evolving cultural histories. The Romantic ideology of the artist-as-unfettered-genius and the avant-garde movements of the 20th century, at least, likely lie behind some of our commonplace ideas today about the arts as a realm of transgression and free-play, where rules are supposed to be broken, geographical and temporal boundaries crossed, received ideas challenged, and taboos broken.⁹ This makes the arts a natural bedfellow of innovation in our global and globalizing world. “The Arts, together with the creative design fields encourage risk and creativity,” according to UC Berkeley’s Arts+Design Initiative: “they teach collaboration and compassion; they join the conceptual with the pragmatic; they bring international cultures into bracing dialogue.”¹⁰

The birth of linguistics as a discipline, its separation from philology, and its allegiances with structuralism, anthropology, and nationalist agendas over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries have meanwhile furnished us with some by-now deeply familiar notions about national languages as synchronic systems of rules to be learned, words to be memorized, and conventions to be imitated.¹¹ To the extent that this model of language study can still be reflected in foreign language departments, especially where there is a marked gap between lower-division “language” study and upper-division “culture” study, we should probably forgive those who assume that language learning in college may soon be a thing of the past, sufficiently taken over by live translation apps and/or purely online learning.¹²

Different means of deconstructing these commonplaces, of teaching language on the basis of more complex notions of what language is, have been and are continually being developed, of course. In language pedagogy research and practice, recent initiatives around multimodality (teaching how meaning is made and interpreted across media), symbolic

⁹ See Anthony Julius, *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹⁰ “UC Berkeley Arts+Design Initiative FAQs,” accessed 3 December 2016, <http://arts.berkeley.edu/artdesign/>.

¹¹ Pollock, “Future Philology?,” esp. 945-950.

¹² See for example Rebecca Mead, “Learn Different: Silicon Valley Disrupts Education,” *The New Yorker*, 7 March 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/07/altschools-disrupted-education>. On this familiar problem of the separation of language and cultural study in college departments see the May 2007 Modern Language Association Report, “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World,” <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-OtherDocuments/Teaching-Enrollments-and-Programs/Foreign-Languages-and-Higher-Education-New-Structures-for-a-Changed-World>.

competence (teaching language as a mediator of power relations), and literacy (teaching the multiple discourses that operate between and within languages) are cases in point.¹³

This particular project takes inspiration from these initiatives as well as from a more distant context - the Italian Renaissance – which is the object of my academic research and which was, at its origins, a revolution in language pedagogy. It was undertaken by teachers of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew as foreign languages who assumed that the past was inherently valuable for the models and resources that it offered for (re)making the present and future.¹⁴ Many of their most successful students emerged with the assumption that verbal and visual/material languages were equally dignified and analogous engagements, which in turn enabled the accomplishments of some of the most iconic figures of the period (Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Niccolò Machiavelli, Galileo Galilei).¹⁵

How could this constellation - historicity, innovation, language, and the arts – be brought together within a single “language” class today? The desirability of trying, in my view, comes from the likelihood that the study of language, of the past, and of the texts and objects that past generations have left to us will have a shared fate: The more the past in two and three dimensions is considered a foreign country, the more both foreign language education *and* material cultural studies will become a thing of the past. An allied approach could help to ensure that there remains space in college to engage with what and how other people, distant from us in space and/or in time, communicate(d) and innovate(d). Even when the justification of higher education no longer rests on ‘humanist’ interests in the past, the nation, and/or the formation of individuals for their own sake, future-oriented, global, and economic goals will still have a stake in the

¹³ See Frank Serafini, *Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014); Claire Kramsch, “From Communicative to Symbolic Competence,” *Modern Language Journal* 90.2 (2006): 249-52; and Rick Kern, *Literacy and Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Scholarship on Renaissance ‘humanist’ pedagogy presents, naturally, a more contested, nuanced, and evolving picture than is appropriate to give here. Some classic treatments of the subject are Eugenio Garin, *L’educazione umanistica in Italia: testi scelti e illustrate* (Bari: Laterza, 1949); and Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ On some of the essential coordinates of the analogy between verbal and visual languages in the Renaissance see Christopher Braider, “The Paradoxical Sisterhood: *Ut pictura poesis*,” *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol.3 *The Renaissance*, edited by Glyn P. Norton, 168-175 (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Although the currency of the analogy is generally thought to have faded by the eighteenth-century, arguably it was still in play in 19th century Germany when discussions around *Bildung* (in which the word for picture, *bild*, and for making things, *bilden*, are layered) helped to reconstruct the modern university on the basis of the humanities. For some new considerations of *Bildung* from the perspective of language pedagogy see the special issue edited by Claire Kramsch, *L2 Journal* 7.4 (2015).

enterprise to approach design thinking as a historically and globally diverse set of practices and attitudes, in order for design thinking (that is, innovative thinking) itself to be made new. What such an enterprise could look like in practice was the guiding question of this project; and the result is the following blueprint for an advanced Italian “language” course called “Italian by Design: Time and Space, Rule and Transgression.”

2. Course Overview: Italian by Design

“Italian by Design” aims to make visible for students connections between history and innovation and between language and the arts. It was created with UC Berkeley’s Italian program in mind and positioned at the bridge between the lower division and upper division components of the Italian major that is commonly a difficult juncture for both teachers and students. Two courses are offered by Berkeley’s Italian department at this juncture, one emphasizing speaking and listening and the other emphasizing reading and writing skills; and this class is intended to serve the latter requirement. It also aims to reinforce connections on campus between Italian Studies and other departments by attracting students who may not be prospective Italian majors but who may be interested in applying their Italian language skills (acquired in the 1-4 language sequence) to other majors and fields such as the History of Art, Architecture, History, and Global Urban Humanities. In these multiple senses, the course aims to act as a “bridge”.

The syllabus is organized into six parts (Appendix 1). A short introductory unit announces the course themes with an activity in which students are presented with and asked to describe in the target language a small selection of maps, of and including the Italian peninsula, from a variety of historical periods and contexts. What does the map show and not show? What does it label and leave unlabeled? When might it have been produced? Who might have produced it and to what end(s)? This is a conscious departure from the “Map of Italy” that nearly invariably (and not coincidentally) appears at the front of most lower-division language textbooks. The broadest implication of this activity is that we are shifting away from a synchronic and *a priori* notion of “Italy” and “Italian” to a perspective in which Italian spaces are constructed and positioned in time, by people, and with the languages (both visual and verbal) that they have inherited, learned, and (re)invented.

The main part of the course is divided into four units, each lasting three weeks. In each unit the class virtually “visits” a particular site on the Italian peninsula and considers selected objects there alongside a primary text associated with the same objects and/or space.

In the first unit students examine a few objects from the Capitoline Museums in Rome. Paired with a short reading from the imperial poet Ovid, these situate us at the *capitolium* (summit, citadel, head) of the Roman Empire (Fig.1). In the second unit students visit the Cathedral of Saint George in Ferrara and read the medieval legend of Saint George, to whom the city and the cathedral were dedicated in the twelfth century (Fig.2). The third unit takes us to an outdoor exhibition space and some of the objects displayed there – at the so-called Loggia ‘dei Lanzi’ in Florence – created when that city was aiming to rival Rome’s cultural hegemony, during the Renaissance (Fig.3). The primary text for this unit is a selection from the 16th century autobiography of a local sculptor whose works were displayed in the Loggia, Benvenuto Cellini. The fourth unit takes students to the site where an extraordinary American woman chose to house her collection of modernist art after WWII, the Peggy Guggenheim Villa in Venice (Fig.4). Looking at the villa and a small selection of objects in its collection, the primary reading comes from Guggenheim’s own reflections on her enterprise.

Each unit is an opportunity to look at, describe, learn about, and interpret in the target language specific material objects from Italy’s Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, and twentieth-century history, respectively. For help “reading” these objects, the class relies on each other and on some secondary textual sources - guides for tourists (written and audio guides), museum catalogues, and/or scholarly texts. As students engage with the objects and with these different kinds of texts (primary and secondary) side-by-side, they repeatedly ask and answer questions about: their perceptions (What do we see here?); the “grammatical” structures and rules that seem to be governing what we are seeing (What codes and conventions, recurring patterns and motifs, are at play?); and the ways that these structures may have been modified and even transgressed in the objects’ design for specific purposes (What is innovative here and/or why were certain creative decisions made?).¹⁶

Cumulatively students receive a reduced and speculative historical survey of Italian culture, which precisely because of its selective and speculative nature allows time for students

¹⁶ For this tripartite distinction between “perceptual”, “structural”, and “ideological” modes of seeing and responding to material/visual culture see Serafini, *Reading the Visual*, 43.

to experience and interpret (in a way that is not possible during the historical survey in English of Italian culture, for example) the kinds of worldviews and creative choices that produced some of the the historical stratifications that typify Italian urban landscapes (and distinguishes them a great deal from American ones).

The conclusion to the course is a field-trip – in this case to a location in San Francisco (Saint Mary’s Cathedral; Fig.5) - in which students practice the skills and extend the knowledge that has been built throughout.

Two intersecting thematic threads link the units and activities together. The first is “space and time” in relation to human design: How do texts and objects contribute to (re)constructing the coordinates of space and time for their users?¹⁷ (i.e. How does a certain building or story help to define the center of a city, or to define a particular city as “central”? How can a statue, painting, or narrative organize the passing of time for a given community?) The second theme is “rule and transgression”: How do both language and material forms enforce rules (grammars, structures, conventions) and offer opportunities for their makers to break these rules purposefully and creatively? How does this “room for creativity” explain why and how material and verbal languages change over time?

¹⁷ This question is also an occasion to reassess one of the commonplace distinctions between visual and verbal arts since the Enlightenment, i.e. that the former properly deals in the dimension of space and the latter in the dimension of time. The approach taken here is consonant with the premise that “works of art, like all other objects of human experience, are structures in space-time, and that the interesting problem is to comprehend a particular spatial-temporal construction, not to label it as temporal or spatial”: See W.T.J. Mitchell, “The Politics of Genre: Space and Time in Lessing’s *Laocoon*,” *Representations* 6 (Spring 2984): 98-115, here 104.



Figure 1. Unit 1, Capitoline Museums, Rome.



Figure 2. Unit 2, Cathedral of St. George, Ferrara.

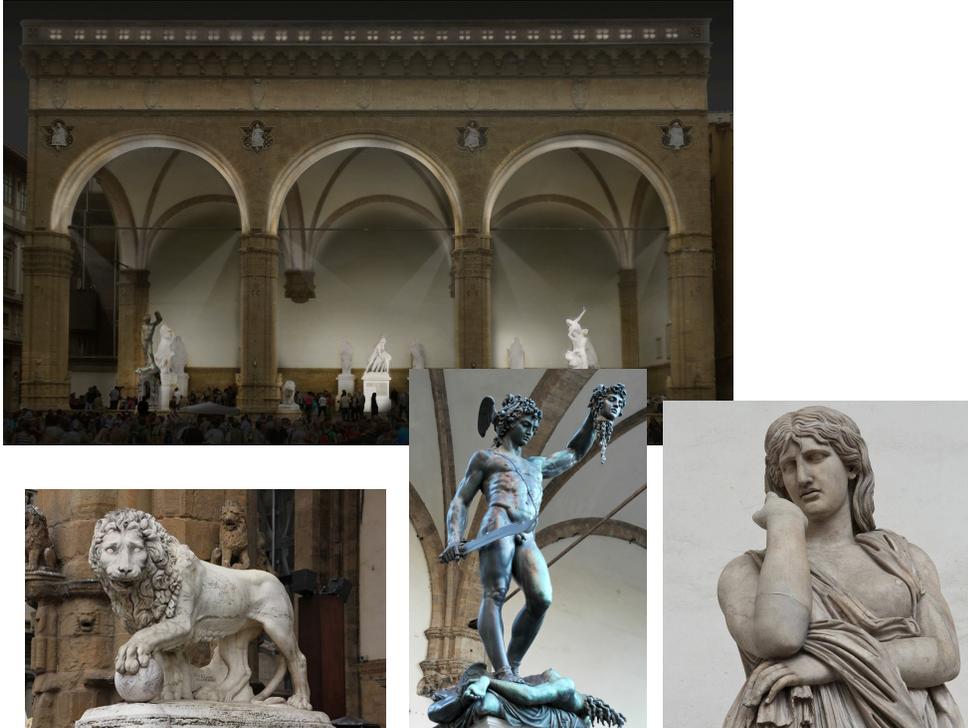


Figure 3. Unit 3, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence.



Figure 4. Unit 4, Peggy Guggenheim Villa, Venice.

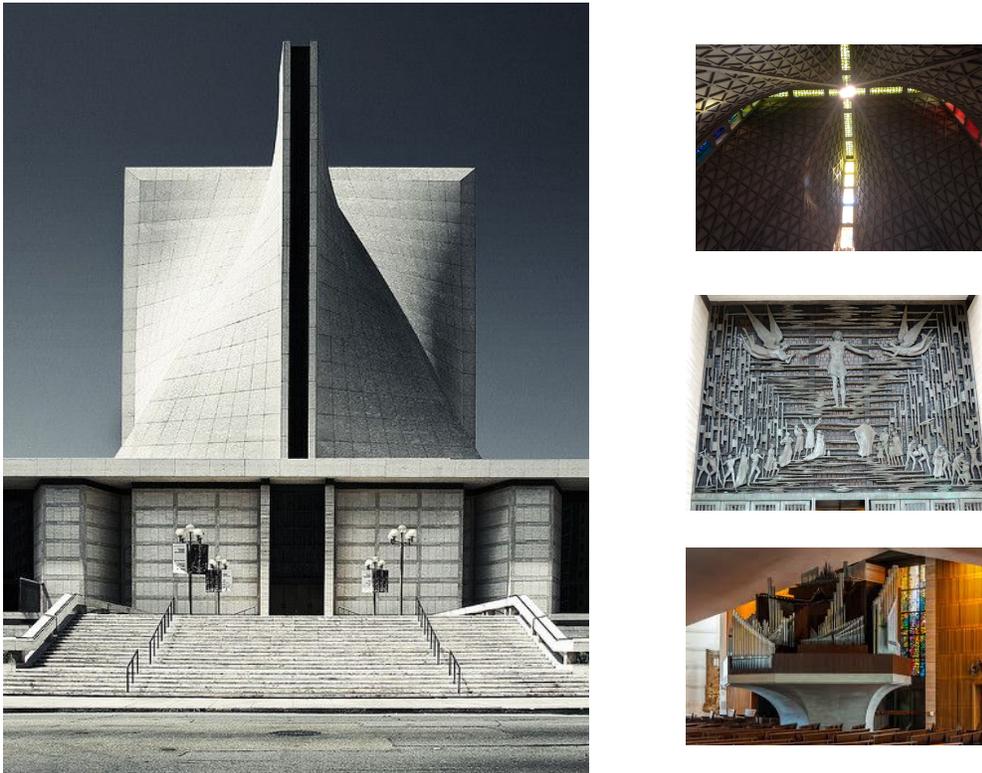


Figure 5. Conclusion, Saint Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco.

3. Unit Plan: The Cathedral of Saint George, Ferrara (Unit 2)

Ferrara is a small city located north-east of Bologna and south-west of Venice, surrounded by flat agricultural land, and flanked by the Po' river. Its well-preserved cathedral was first built during the twelfth century as the city was beginning to govern itself as an independent commune under the authority and protection of the Church of Rome and the local bishop. The building was dedicated to the martyr-knight, George, who was chosen as the city's patron saint. Once built, it came to mark the city's geographic, religious, and civic center, and in many respects still does (Fig.6).

In "Italian by Design" students' task for the three weeks they spend here is to speculate about and articulate in Italian how some of the coordinates of space and time were imagined and constructed by the people who contributed to designing this space. While I've just oriented the reader of this essay by using some very broad geographical and chronological coordinates, in other words, students here are asked to think about how the building's creators oriented

themselves and their audience in space and in time. This is intended as both a conceptual and a linguistic challenge.

In the unit's first week, students look closely at the Cathedral and seek to describe what they see. The class is divided into three groups, each of which is responsible for looking at one object carefully. One group looks closely at the cathedral's well-preserved façade (Fig.7); a second group looks at a series of statuettes that were originally arranged around its side door (or "pilgrim's" door, *la porta dei pellegrini*) (Fig.8); and a third group works with a set of painted covers for the cathedral's massive organ, which represent a scene from the life of Saint George and the scene of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary (Fig.9 and 10). By the end of the week, the groups are responsible for guiding the rest of the class through what they have observed in these objects with oral presentations.

Since we are not physically in Ferrara, some technological support is required. A number of images from a range of angles and resolutions, and from both online and print sources (scanned online), can be placed by the instructor into galleries in the online image sharing platform *Pinterest* (Fig.11). This is an easy-to-use and free website that allows for the creation and sharing of image galleries that students can not only access but also annotate, rearrange, and add to on their own from their own devices.

The first class meeting is dedicated to looking at these objects following the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) method that has started to make its way into many museum-based educational programs and into Berkeley language classes as well in recent years.¹⁸ What do you see here? What do you see that makes you say that? What else do you see? These are the questions that students are asked to discuss in groups, in the target language, while informally taking notes. They are encouraged to provide any information at all about what they observe, from single words to fully formed sentences.

On the cathedral's façade, for example, students will see and be able to articulate basic colors (white, pink, grey), materials (marble, wood), figures (a horse, a man, the baby Jesus, a knight, angels), structural elements (windows, doors, balconies), and more, from the bank of vocabulary they already possess. The student group working on the statuettes can identify some of the figures (man, goat, grapes, lobster, fruit, tree, horse), the actions they are involved in

¹⁸ See Karen Møller, "Cultural Literacy Through Art," *Berkeley Language Center*, 6 July 2016: <http://blc.berkeley.edu/2016/07/06/cultural-literacy-through-art/>; and Philip Yenawine, *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning Across School Disciplines* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

(walking, making wine, picking fruit), and may also guess how/why these figurines were arranged on the cathedral's door. The student group working on the organ covers identifies some of the colors and iconographical elements of these incredible paintings of St. George (a man on a horse, a dragon, a woman, a gold sky, a tree, etc.) and of the Annunciation (an angel, a woman, a halo, a quarrel, a mountain, a squirrel, etc.). The goal here is that the images/objects push students both to draw on their pre-existing linguistic resources and to articulate, with circumlocution and even gestures, what they can see but not precisely say yet in the target language. The teacher can assure students that, even in one's native language, describing these centuries-old objects is no easy feat!

The homework assignment for this first class diverges from the Visual Thinking Strategies method. Each group is assigned two secondary readings, taken from tourist guidebooks and/or museum catalogues, which describe in different registers of "expert" discourse the objects that they have been looking at and describing on their own. For example, the first group here receives a simple guide to the cathedral's façade written for Italian schoolchildren as well as a more complex guide written for native-speaking adults (from the more erudite "Red Guide" series, the *Guide Rosse*) (Appendix 1).

The instructions for this reading assignment are not to fully decipher the texts or grasp completely what the "experts" have written or determined about the cathedral. Instead, students are to use these readings instrumentally to help sharpen and articulate what they have already seen and noticed, what they want to understand further, and what they will share with the class about their assigned object(s) during the group oral presentations that conclude the week. As a worksheet to accompany the readings, which can be shared by group-members as a Google Doc, students are provided with five different kinds of information to look for and note down as they read: Iconography (What is represented?); Style (How is it represented?); Materials (What materials are used?); Structure (How is the object organized?); and Facts (When was it made? By whom?). This is the kind of information students will be aiming to convey in their presentations at the end of the week.

Besides the explicit goal of preparing students to become "guides" to their classmates through their presentations, this reading assignment has multiple goals. One is to allow the (historically and geographically foreign) object and the (linguistically foreign) text to mutually support comprehension of the other. The idea is to create a context in which "close reading" of

image and text becomes an aid to understanding, rather than a difficult and/or mysterious task that students are asked to perform. The student group responsible for the cathedral's façade, for example, will find the following sentence in their reading as they look to articulate its "structure": "È divisa in tre scomparti terminate a cuspidi uguali, sostenuti da una galleria a doppie colonnette, ed il campo di mezzo è fiancheggiato da due grandi pilastri" [It is divided into three sections that terminate in equal points, sustained by a double-columned gallery, and the middle section is framed by two large pillars]. Although this is a linguistically difficult sentence on its own, it becomes quite comprehensible alongside the image of the façade itself, which is divided into three sections, etc.

Another goal of this reading assignment is to help students acquire new vocabulary belonging to technical and/or specific domains of discourse, both for the intrinsic value of this vocabulary (especially for prospective art historians and historians) and/or for the process that such acquisition entails. The student group responsible for the statuettes here, for example, finds phrases like the following in their reading assignment - "Nella lunetta sopra il portale centrale, troviamo *S. Giorgio che uccide il drago*" [In the lunette above the central doors, we find Saint George who slays the dragon] – in which familiar terms are modified to into more technical terms (*luna* becomes *lunetta*, *porta* becomes *portale*) (Fig.12). Students reading about the statuettes for "iconography" and "style" similarly find sentences like "[l]e formelle esprimono le varie opere dello agricoltore durante il corso dell'anno" [the statuettes express the various works of the farmer over the course of the year] and "il colore anima, elettrizzandola, ogni cosa" [color animates each thing, electrifying it], in which a more formal (academic) register of the language is presented than they will be accustomed to (Fig.13). Students also find in these readings technical adjectival descriptions of art-historical style, such as Gothic, Romanesque, and Renaissance, and can use the images/objects to begin to deduce what kinds of visual forms these words refer to.

A final aim of this reading assignment is to give students practice in task-oriented reading (here, reading is undertaken to better understand and explain a particular object) and in reading texts that may be too difficult (and even unnecessary) to "translate" fully. These skills are important for upper division courses in Italian as well as for confronting authentic texts independently in the target language (i.e. for scholarly research in other disciplines, during travel in Italy etc.).

At this point of the unit (Class 2) students have another class to re-group and discuss their findings. They are also asked some new questions that introduce issues of ideology to their engagement with and between language and material culture. The group observing the façade is asked to think about why there are scenes of hell and punishment on one side and scenes of prayer and blessedness on the other side. Which scene is on the “left” (*la sinistra*) and which is on the “right” (*la destra*) and from whose perspective? (Figures of punishment are in fact on the “right” from the perspective of observers of the façade but on the “left” both from the perspective of those who are inside the church’s walls and from the perspective of Christ and the Virgin Mary who look out from the façade’s central balcony) (Fig.14). This question leads students to think about how the figures of sin receive their ideologically “sinister” aspect when viewers are physically aligned with the Holy Family and/or inside the physical space of the church. It is one example of the connections that can be discovered between language, design, and ideology in this unit. It is also an example of how the church’s artificers have sought to (re)position their audience with their design choices.

Alternatively or additionally, this group (or the whole class) may be asked to translate the inscription found on the central door of the cathedral’s façade from its 12th century vernacular into modern Italian: “*Li mile, cento trenta cenque nato / Fo questo templo a San Gogio donato / Da Glelmo ciptadin per so amore / E tua fo l’opra Nicolao scoltore*” [In one thousand one hundred and thirty five, this temple was born, donated to San Giorgio by Guglielmo, a citizen, out of love. And it was the work of Nicolao the sculptor]. Where would the differences (i.e. in word order and orthography) lie between this older vernacular and its modern counterpart? This activity introduces students to the historicity of the Italian language, which is typically not addressed in prior levels of the language curriculum (Fig.15).

Similar kinds of questions are provided to all the groups to consider, both in class and for homework. To the second group, for example: Why might an a open-air “calendar” have been constructed on the side-door (or “pilgrim’s door”) of the Cathedral, and with such down-to-earth scenes as wine-making, fruit-picking, harvesting grain, and going to war? Why might the inscription over this door be written in Latin instead of the vernacular: “*Artificem gnarum qui sulpselit hec Nicolaum Huc concurrentes laudent per secula gentes*” [May the people who gather here though the centuries praise Niccolò, the skilled artificer who sculpted these figures]?

Student presentations conclude this phase of the unit (Class 3). They are meant to be informal and students are asked to rely on the image galleries themselves as memory aids rather than written notes. They will aim to touch on the five kinds of information that were looked for in the readings (Iconography; Style; Materials; Structure; Facts) and may also touch on the interpretative questions opened up afterwards. This task asks students to integrate some of the new technical terminology they have learned with the language they are already comfortable using orally.

The next phase of the unit (Classes 4-6) is dedicated to close reading of a “primary” text. This gives students a deeper experience of the objects they have just described and allows them to practice a different kind of reading. For this unit the primary text recounts the legendary life of Saint George, the patron saint of the Cathedral and a prominent iconographic element of each of the objects associated with it which we are focusing on. The text itself comes from the most popular narrative “calendar” of medieval Italy, which recounts one saint’s life for each day of the year: the *Legenda aurea (Golden Legend)*, written by the bishop of the nearby commune of Genova.

The assigned reading in Italian includes a two-page excerpt from the preface to the “calendar,” explaining how this author has described and given meaning to the annual passing of time for his Christian community. In addition students are assigned the legend of Saint George to read from this larger collection. This tells of George’s early career as a soldier of the Roman Empire; his slaying of a dragon in Libya to save a small city and its princess from poverty and terror; and finally his death, under the Roman Emperor Diocletian (3rd century AD) when he refuses to renounce his Christian faith. The text of the legend, given here in modern Italian, is not more difficult than the readings that intermediate language students (Italian 3 and 4) are assigned. It is also short, taking up just six pages of a standard pocketbook edition, which allows students to read slowly and carefully, differently from the way they were reading the guidebooks and art-historical descriptions earlier.

The way that the teacher can guide this reading is flexible. On a linguistic level, students can be asked to trace how and why the narrative uses so many different forms of the past tense, and/or how and why it switches between direct discourse and third person narration. This is an opportunity to reinforce these difficult grammatical points - the different past tenses, their construction, their uses; direct and indirect speech – and to connect grammar with meaning.

Another activity is to compare the verbal narrative to our objects (our organ covers and bass-reliefs on the facade) representing Saint George. The story specifies that George's shield bears the image of the cross, but the painter of the organ covers has left the cross out, showing us only the reverse side of the shield. Why might he have made this choice? A similarity between text and painting, on the other hand, is that both the narrator (by calling George "blessed") and the painter (by giving him a halo) seem to suggest that George is a holy figure as he is slaying the dragon – before he has been martyred. Why might this be the case? From what perspective – what temporal perspective, specifically – is George holy *before* he has completed the actions that define his life as a saint? Are there any visual clues in the painting to tell us that George's act of courage takes place in Libya? Does the pear tree have in the painting correspond to any specific detail in the story? (It doesn't, just like the little squirrel above Mary's head doesn't correspond to any details of the story of the Annunciation!). Could it be related to the fruit trees and fruit picking scenes on the sculpted calendar on the pilgrim's door? Pursuing these kinds of questions can reinforce again the skill of "close reading" and multimodal reading, appreciating how both verbal and visual languages tell stories in similar and in different ways.

A third activity that can be done with this primary reading assignment involves its history as a text in translation. Students can be presented with a few sentences from the original Latin version of the saint's life and from one of its 13th century translations into the Italian vernacular, in addition to the full modern Italian text they already have. As a class, a single sentence from each version can be compared and students asked to speculate on why the text would have been written first in Latin and why it would have been translated into the vernacular, a question which would in turn shed light on the inscriptions in both languages that appear on the facade of our Cathedral. The discussion could be one of the first occasions for some students, depending on their backgrounds and majors, to consider the relationship between Latin and Italian, and by extension between Rome, the Roman Empire, and "Italy" (Fig.16). The text itself reflects on this relationship, as it describes how a Roman soldier (*tribunus*) becomes a Christian saint (*santo*) and knight (*cavaliere*). The activity helps students connect linguistic change not only with historical change, in other words, but also with ideological change and creative choices.

An optional reading in English may also be assigned at this time to enrich the primary text and introduce students to reading across languages for research purposes.

At the end of the reading week, finally, students are ready to use George's legend to reflect back how the cathedral creatively constructs time and space: How might the figure of Saint George have helped the church to constitute the "center" of the city and the city itself as a "center"? Who, among those who commissioned, made, and/or used the Cathedral in medieval Ferrara might have "identified" with the figure of Saint George, given that George was a Roman soldier who lived almost a thousand years earlier?

The last part of the unit (Classes 7-9) is dedicated to a writing assignment that students confront as a process with stages for brainstorming, organizing, and editing throughout the week. The assignment rehearses and combines the skills practiced earlier in the unit: Close looking and reading, interpretation, comparison, and conjecture. The individual and collective (Google doc) notes are used as banks of words, linguistic constructions, and ideas. Examples of the kinds of questions that can prompt student writing here include:

- What did the Cathedral "teach" its medieval users about their place in the world or in time? Compare and contrast one or two different measures of time and/or space on the cathedral.
- How did the site send different messages about time and space to different users (i.e. a pilgrim, a knight, a farmer)? Imagine how two different users may have interpreted a single element of the cathedral differently.
- Compare the construction of space and/or time in Imperial Rome and in Medieval Ferrara by comparing one object from each location/unit. What, if anything, did the designers in Ferrara use and/or change with respect to the the Roman model (Unit 1)?

4. Conclusions

The teaching ideas presented here are intended for the first iteration of a specific Italian language course, on the one hand, and as examples of an interdisciplinary approach that could be transferred to other levels and languages. The specific objects, text, and contexts represent, in large part, my own idiosyncratic interests and experiences in Italy and could well be changed. In terms of methodology two of the objections that could be raised include the large margin for speculation (and thus historical error) and the complexity of the topics being posed to language learners (leading perhaps to many linguistic errors). While I take both seriously, my experience as a language student turned researcher has been that conjecture and curiosity are closely tied and that there remains space in a multi-year holistic language program for courses that (like immersion experiences) strengthen students' language skills by stretching them.

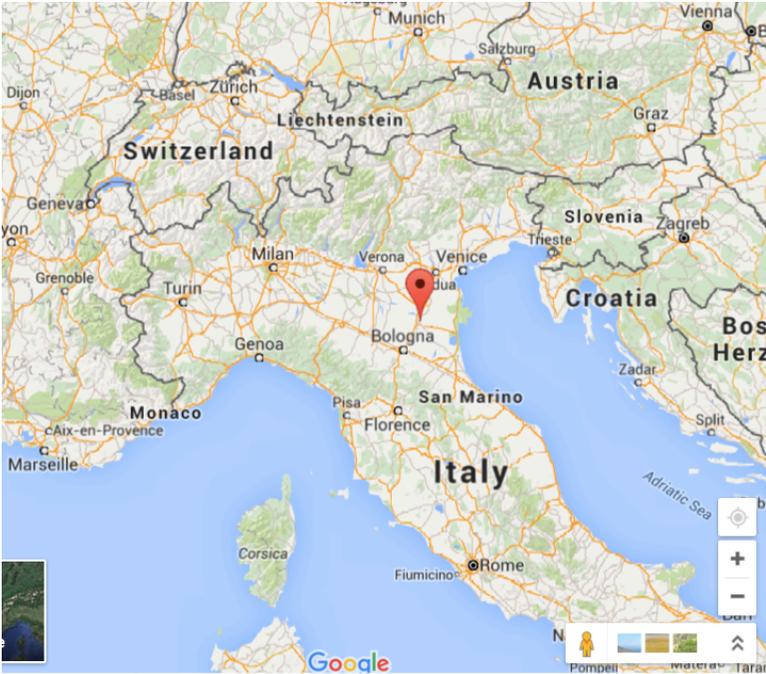


Figure 6. Finding Ferrara's Cathedral



Figure 7. Object Group 1: La facciata / the façade. Full view.



Fig 8. Object Group 2. Le statuette dei mesi / The statuettes of the months. La mese di luglio / The month of July.



Figure 9. Object Group 3: *Le ante d'organo / The organ covers. Saint George Slaying the Dragon.*



Figure 10. Object Group 3 Le ante d'organo / The organ covers. Annunciation

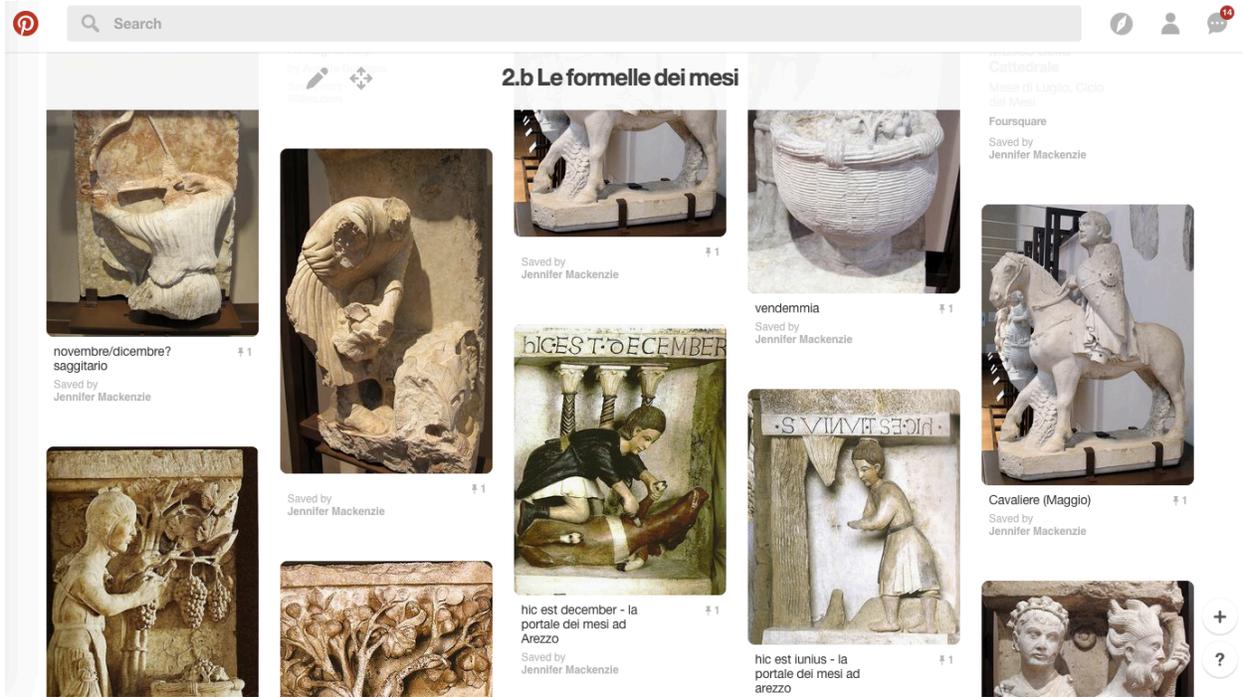


Figure 11. Object gallery on Pinterest, here shown for the statuettes of the months, Group 2.

“Nella lunetta sopra il portale centrale, troviamo S. Giorgio che uccide il drago”

[In the lunette above the central doors, we find Saint George who slays the dragon].

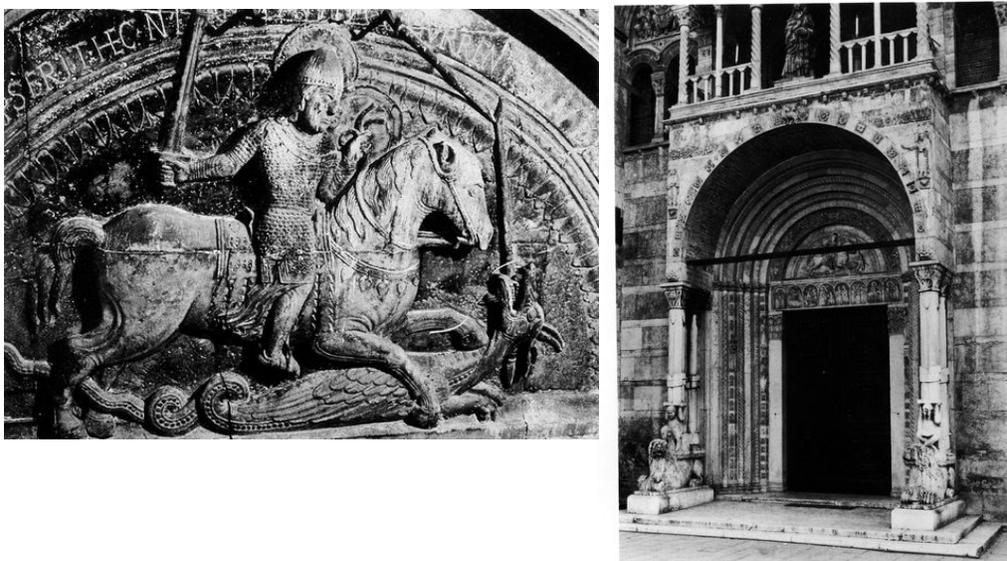


Figure 12. “Close reading” between (secondary) text and image.

Le ante d'organo di Cosmè Tura
Giovanni Sassu

Sono poche le opere che possono vantare, con la forza e la pregnanza che le ante d'organo di Tura possiedono, un significato storico e un valore simbolico tale da averle trasformate in vere e proprie icone di un'epoca se non, addirittura, in emblema di un'intera città.

Non vi è infatti pubblicazione, sia essa di natura scientifica o turistica, che non rechi in bella mostra almeno un'immagine del *San Giorgio e il drago* di Cosmè Tura. Le ragioni di un simile successo sono da ricercarsi certamente nella dispersione e distruzione di buona parte del patrimonio emense a seguito delle ben note vicende legate alla Devoluzione (1598): in questa prospettiva, le ante d'organo costituiscono una delle poche testimonianze sopravvissute di un'epoca cruciale per lo sviluppo della cultura figurativa in area centro-settentrionale¹. Ma spiegare una simile popolarità solo con l'aver avuto in sorte di essere, assieme a Schifanoia, praticamente l'unica opera di grande rilievo ancora a Ferrara appare operazione sin troppo riduttiva.

Come più volte è stato rimarcato, in queste tele si può riconoscere per intero il mondo tormentato, esplosivo e dinamico del più grande fra i pittori del Quattrocento ferrarese. Una sorta di sintesi dell'universo turiano: architrave, anche per la certezza cronologica che esse offrono, per qualsiasi ricostruzione stilistica del percorso del poliedrico artista di corte di Borso e Ercole I d'Este.

Ma a scoprire la storia di questo capolavoro si scopre che il valore civico che il *San Giorgio* ha assunto nel corso del Novecento, accompagna l'opera sin dalla sua creazione, dalla sua commissione. Le tele dipinte da Tura prima del giugno del 1469 facevano parte infatti di un'opera, il nuovo organo rinascimentale della Cattedrale, il cui incarico di realizzazione vide riuniti il 27 aprile 1465, le sue accurate alle dire, le autorità religiose, quelle civili e quelle ducali della città². Il contratto è redatto nella residenza del vescovo Lorenzo Roverella che è quindi da considerarsi se non il committente, quanto meno l'elemento propulsivo di tale iniziativa. Nelle intenzioni dei committenti il nuovo strumento doveva rappresentare un inedito standard per la costruzione di analoghi congegni musicali in territorio non solo ferrarese. E per costruire questo "nuovo monumento" le autorità cittadine si riuniscono con una certa solennità: il vescovo è accompagnato da due canonici del Capitolo della Cattedrale, sono presenti poi il giudice dei Dodici Savi Antonio Sandro, Pietro de' Lardi, massaro della Cattedrale, Bartolomeo degli Carrì per il Comune, mentre in rappresentanza di Borso d'Este vi è Filippo Bendedè: uno schieramento più

completo di tutte le autorità civili e religiose si era visto poche volte³ come giustamente sottolinea Adriano Cavicchi⁴. La corte ducale mette a disposizione quali consulenti musicali i due musicisti modenesi Costantino Tantini e Gaspare «ab organo», figlio di Nicola Trombetta, quest'ultimo nobile per la bella lastra sepolcrale conservata al Museo Civico di Modena e realizzata probabilmente su disegno di Francesco del Cossa⁵. Il contratto è stipulato con l'organarium magistro Giovanni da Mercatello, il compenso fissato in 460 ducati d'oro da saldarsi in tre rate. Mercatello, frate francescano documentato a Ferrara già nel 1456, è al tempo fra i più ricercati organari del nord Italia, attivo – come consulente o come fabbricatore – a Bergamo (1455, Santa Maria Maggiore), a Firenze (1456-61, Santa Maria Novella) e a Modena (1461-63, Duomo).

Le spese delle materie prime (il legno, ad esempio) sono a carico dell'artigiano. Seppur non nominato nel contratto, Mercatello – troppo spesso ricordato come unico autore e che di fatto scompare dai documenti successivi forse perché deceduto – è coadiuvato dal marangone Gaspare da Firenze, che di fatto porterà a termine l'opera entro il 15 luglio del 1468, quando lo strumento viene testato e giudicato «bono et laudevole» da Costantino Tantini e da Guidogiovanni Coltellini, organaro della Cattedrale.

Il coinvolgimento in prima persona di Roverella e dei musicisti di corte conferma l'importanza di questa commissione e il ruolo tutt'altro che marginale che la musica occupava nella vita religiosa della Cattedrale e della città, come attesa – per altre vie – l'episodio del prestito dell'organo di corte al Capitolo durante la Pasqua del 1463, al fine di sopprimere ai malfunzionamenti dello strumento antico, testimonianza dell'esigenza di realizzarne uno nuovo.

L'ultimazione dello strumento dà il via alla realizzazione degli sportelli di chiusura, già previsti nel contratto seppur senza indicazioni iconografiche. Il 2 giugno del 1469, Cosmè Tura viene saldato da Pietro de' Lardi, per conto della Cattedrale, come riportava un documento disperso ma citatissimo: «MCCCCLXVIII. Et a die II iugno, L. cento undese in per lei facti boni a m(a)istro Cosmè del Tura depintore per sua manufactura de haver depinto da tutti dui i laci le porte de l'organo novo del vescovado d'accordo cum lui in duc(ati) quaranta octo da sol(di) 55 d(enari) 6 l'uno, che pigliano deto precio et posto deto m(a)istro Cosmè creditore in questo c. 47: L. CXI ad 4^o».

A questa data, pertanto, l'opera può ben dirsi del tutto com-

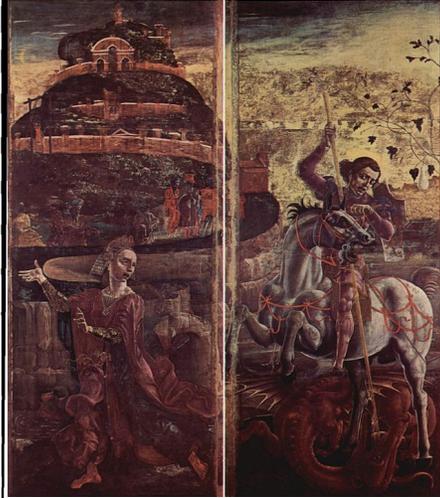


Figure 13. Reading academic prose in the target language with images for support.



Figure 14. Façade, detail. Scenes of damnation.

<i>Li mile cento trenta cenque nato</i>	Prepositions
<i>Fo questo templo a San Gogio donato</i>	Word order
<i>Da Glelmo ciptadin per so amore</i>	Orthography
<i>E tua fo l'opra Nicolao scolptore</i>	

Nato nel millecentotrentacinque, questo tempio fu donato a San Giorgio da Guglielmo cittadino per suo amore, e tutta fu l'opera di Nicolao lo scultore.

In [the year] one thousand one hundred and thirty five, this temple was born, donated to San Giorgio by Guglielmo, a citizen, out of love. It was the work of Niccolò the sculptor.

Figure 15. Translating between medieval and modern Italian.

Georgius tribunus genere Cappadox pervenit quadam vice in provinciam Libye in civitatem que dicitur Silena.

Corco fo nobel homo de Capadocia. Questui andando una fia pervene a la provincia de Lidia en una çita che fi apelà Silena.

Il tribuno Giorgio era originario della Cappadocia. Giunse una volta nella provincia di Libia, in una città chiamata Silena.

George the soldier was originally from Cappadocia. One day he came to a city called Silena in the province of Libya.

Figure 16. Texts in translation. Saint George's life between Latin, Medieval, and Modern Italian.

Appendix 1: Activity and Reading Schedule

INTRODUCTION – MAPPING ‘ITALY’

Week 1: In-Class Activity

- *Imago italiae: The Making of Italy in the History of Cartography from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. Reality, Image, and Imagination from the Codices of Claudius Ptolemy to the Atlante of Giovanni Antonio Magini*, edited by Luciano Lago (Trieste: EUT, 2002), selected maps.
- J.B. Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, Power,” *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, edited by J.B. Harley and Paul Laxton (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 51-83.

FIRST VISIT – I MUSEI CAPITOLINI, ROMA

Week 2. Looking & Describing, Functional Reading, Presentations

Group 1 (Piazza Capitolino):

- Giuseppe Lugli e Emilio Lavagnino, “Campidoglio,” *Enciclopedia Treccani* (1930)
- “Cenno Storico,” “Piazza Venezia e Campidoglio,” *Roma e Dintorni* (Milan: Settima Edizione, 1977), 11-13, 79-89 (selections).

Group 2 (Statua equestre di Marco Aurelio; Lupa capitolina):

- Calcani, G., “Monumento Equestre,” *Enciclopedia dell’Arte Antica* (1995)
- “Statua equestre di Marco Aurelio” (museicapitolini.org)
- “Lupa Capitolina” (museicapitolini.org)
- *Audioguida a misura di bambino: La nascita di Roma: Romolo, Remo, e la Lupa* (museicapitolini.org).

Group 3 (Erocle in bronzo dorato; lo ‘Spinario’; Venere di Prassilite)

- “Cenno Storico,” “Piazza Venezia e Campidoglio,” *Roma e Dintorni* (Milan: Settima Edizione, 1977), 11-13, 79-89 (selections).

Week 3. Close Reading and Interpreting, An Emperor’s Apotheosis

- “Publius Ovidius Naso,” *Enciclopedia Treccani*.
- Publio Ovidio Nasone, *Metamorfosi*, edited by Piero Bernardini Marzolla (Einaudi, 1994), 5-6, 641-647 (dual language text in Latin and Italian).

Week 4. Writing Assignment

SECOND VISIT – CATTEDRALE DI SAN GIORGIO, FERRARA

Week 5: Looking & Describing, Functional Reading, Presentations

Group 1 [The cathedral's façade]:

- “Ferrara,” “La Cattedrale,” “Il Museo della Cattedrale,” in *Guida d'Italia: Ferrara, Ravenna, Rimini e Montefeltro* (Milano: Touring Club Italiano, 1997), 32-35.
- Vittorio Felisati, *Guida della Basilica Cattedrale di Ferrara* (Rovigo: Istituto Padano di Arti Grafiche di Rovigo, 1967), 7-14.

Group 2 [Statuettes of the Months]:

- “Ferrara,” “Il Museo della Cattedrale,” in *Guida d'Italia: Ferrara, Ravenna, Rimini e Montefeltro* (Milano: Touring Club Italiano, 1997), 32-35.
- Guido Tigler, “Le sculture provenienti dalla Porta dei Mesi,” in *Il Museo della Cattedrale di Ferrara: Catalogo generale*, edited by Berenice Giovannucci Vigi (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1989), 56-82.
- Vittorio Felisati, *Guida della Basilica Cattedrale di Ferrara* (Rovigo: Istituto Padano di Arti Grafiche di Rovigo, 1967), 64-68.

Group 3 [Cosmè Tura's Organ Covers; Saint George Slaying the Dragon]:

- “Ferrara,” “Il Museo della Cattedrale,” in *Guida d'Italia: Ferrara, Ravenna, Rimini e Montefeltro* (Milano: Touring Club Italiano, 1997), 32-35.
- Giovanni Sassu, “Le ante d'organo di Cosmè Tura,” in *Il Museo della Cattedrale di Ferrara: Catalogo generale*, edited by Berenice Giovannucci Vigi (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1989), 118-125.

Week 6. Reading, *The Life of a Saint*

- Jacopo da Varazze, “San Giorgio,” *Legenda Aurea*, edited by Alessandro e Luchetta Vitale Brovarone (Torno: Einaudi, 1995), 325-331.
- (Optional) Jacques Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time: Jacobus de Voragine and the Golden Legend* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), selections.

In-class Reading (for reading & translation activities)

- Iacopo da Varazze, “Prologus” and “De Sancto Georgio,” *Legenda Aurea sive Legende Sanctorum*, edited by Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Florence: Sismel, 1998), selections from 3-10 and 391-398.
- Iacopo da Varazze, “Vita di San Giorgio,” *Le Vite di Santi di codice Magliabechiano XXXVIII.110 della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze: Un leggendario volgare trecentesco italiano settentrionale*, edited by Zeno Verlati (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2009), selections from 214-216.

Week 7: Writing Assignment

THIRD VISIT – LOGGIA ‘DEI LANZI’, FIRENZE

Week 8. Looking & Describing, Functional Reading, Presentations

Group 1 (La loggia):

- “Loggia,” “Lanzi,” *Enciclopedia Treccani online*

- Teofilo Gautier, “La loggia dei Lanzi,” *Splendore di Firenze*, edited by Arrigo Pecchioli e Piero Bargellini (Rome: Edizione d’Italia, 1968), selections
- Marco Calafati, “24 giugno 1637: La Loggia dei Lanzi è per la prima volta utilizzata come spazio monumentale” (selections).

Group 2 (I virtù cardinali; l’iscrizione per il calendario di 1750):

- Delio Cantimori, “Virtù,” *Enciclopedia italiana* (1937)
- Marcello Verga, “1° gennaio 1750: la riforma del capodanno fiorentino,” (selections; <http://www.storiadifirenze.org/?p=2991>)
- Silvia Boniciani, “Il calendario Fiorentino”.

Group 3 (Cellini’s Perseus and the Lions):

- “Perseo,” *Enciclopedia Treccani Online*
- Marco Calafati, “27 aprile 1554: L’inaugurazione del Perseo di Benvenuto Cellini.”
- “Loggia dei Lanzi,” *Firenze e dintorni* (Touring Club Italiano, 1974).

Week 9. Reading & Interpreting: The Autobiography of a Florentine Artist.

- Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita*, edited by Ettore Comeasca (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985), p.38-64 (Cronologia della Vita e delle Opere) and 81-87.
- (Optional) Margaret A Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini: Sexuality, Masculinity, and Artistic Identity in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), selections (“Life and Works”, “Criminal Acts and Literary Practice,” “Cellini’s Poetics I: The Vita”).

Week 10. Writing Assignment

FOURTH VISIT - VILLA PEGGY GUGGENHEIM, VENEZIA

Week 11. Looking & Describing, Functional Reading, Presentations

Group 1 (La villa e il suo giardino):

- “Peggy Guggenheim,” (www.guggenheim-venice.it/).

Group 2 (De Chirico, *La torre rossa*, 1919; Carrà, *Manifestazione interventista*, 1914):

- “Giorgio de Chirico,” “Carlo Carrà” (www.guggenheim-venice.it/).
- “Pittura metafisica,” *Enciclopedia Treccani*.

Group 3 (Marini, *L’angelo della città*, 1950; Giacomo Balla, *Velocità astratta + rumore*, 1913-14):

- “Giacomo Balla,” “Marino Marini” (www.guggenheim-venice.it/).

Week 12. Reading, Futurist Manifestos and Peggy Guggenheim’s Collection

- Peggy Guggenheim, *Una collezionista ricorda* (Venezia: Cavallino, 1956), selections.
- (Optional) Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini, “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters,” and “Futurist Painting: The Technical Manifesto,” *Futurism: An Anthology*, edited by Lawrence S. Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Whittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 62-67.

- Peggy Guggenheim, “Introduction,” in *Invitation to Venice* by Michelangelo Murano, (New York: Trident Press, 1963), 7-12.

In-Class (Documentary):

- *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict* (Documentary, 2015).

Week 13. Writing Assignment

CONCLUSION – SAINT MARY’S CATHEDRAL, SAN FRANCISCO

Week 15. Field Trip (111 Gough Street, San Francisco), Preparatory Reading, Final Discussion, Student Digital Photography Exhibit

- Sergio Pace, “Saint Mary’s Cathedral (1963-71),” *Pier Luigi Nervi: Architettura come sfida*, edited by Carlo Olmo and Cristina Chiorino, (Milano: Silvana Editore, 2010), 186-191 (selections; dual language text in English and Italian).
- Roberto Einaudi, “Pier Luigi Nervi: lezioni romane (1959-60),” in *La Lezione di Pier Luigi Nervi*, edited by Annalisa Trentin and Tomaso Trombetti (Milan-Turin: Mondadori, 2010), 63-160 (selections; dual language text in English and Italian).