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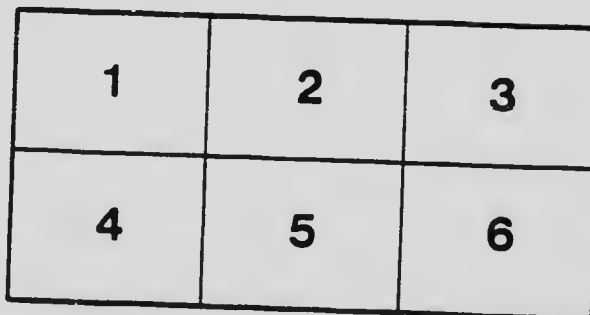
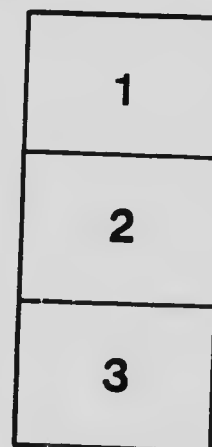
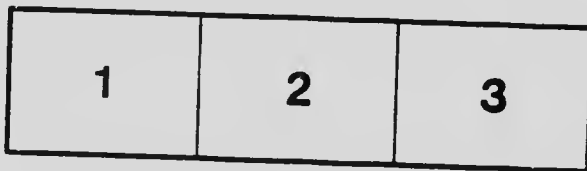
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PAINTERS OF THE XIV-XVI CEN-  
TURIES. WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
AND NOTES BY G. F. HILL

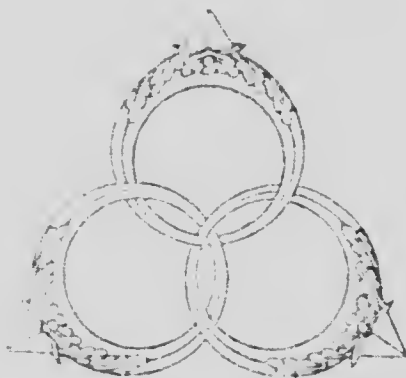
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**The badge on the cover has been designed by  
Mr. H. P. Horne after the well-known device  
- three rings - used by the early Medici.**



## INTRODUCTION

**F**ROM the earliest period of Christian art, the Adoration of the Magi has been a popular subject; indeed, among New Testament scenes, only the Annunciation and the Crucifixion surpass it in frequency of occurrence. The two latter subjects illustrate points of cardinal importance in Christian belief. But in the Adoration of the Magi the chief element was external to the religious meaning of the scene. There was that touch of romance which connexion with the East never fails to lend to a story. This Eastern connexion struck the fancy of those writers and book-illustrators of the Middle Ages who were on the look-out for analogies between the 'types' of the Old and New Testaments; and they found that the Adoration of the Magi was prefigured in the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon.

The picturesque possibilities of the scene of the Adoration were early realized and developed, until in the High Renaissance its religious character was obscured in a profusion of gorgeous pseudo-Oriental detail. Rich as the pageants are with which luring the Renaissance

## THE ADORATION

Italian, Netherlandish and German painters of the Adoration regale us, the eye sometimes turns with relief to the simple narratives of the earliest representations. Nothing could be more effective in its way than the sarcophagus of the exarch Isaac at San Vitale in Ravenna, where three men in Persian attire—'Phrygian' caps and breeches—advance hastily towards the Mother and Child. On the carved doors of Santa Sabina at Rome there is a somewhat similar scheme; but here the Virgin is seated on a throne raised upon steps, possibly as an indication of the high position accorded to her after the condemnation of the Nestorian heresy. The Persian dress—being used, as in ancient art, generically for Oriental—reminds us of the story that when Chosroes took Jerusalem he recognized his fellow-countrymen in the Magi in a mosaic upon the Church of the Nativity, and spared at least that work of art. Gradually more detail creeps in; by the sixth century it has become usual for an angel to introduce the kings, and Joseph also appears, in that subordinate position which he was always to occupy. About the same time we find the kings beginning to be distinguished in age; at any rate one of them may be beardless, the others bearded. It is not, however, until the twelfth century, at least in the west, that the kings are represented as crowned. The negro-

## OF THE MAGI

type for the youngest king does not appear before the Renaissance, and is then especially favoured by the Northern schools. All the essential elements of the scene may be found in the pulpit reliefs, at Pisa, Siena and Pistoia, by Niccolò Pisano and his school. Giovanni Pisano, in the most beautiful of these reliefs, that in the pulpit in Sant' Andrea at Pistoia, adds in the foreground, below the main scene, on the left, the angel warning the three kings not to return to Herod, and on the right the angel warning Joseph to arise and flee into Egypt.

With Duccio and Giotto the great series of paintings begins. Giotto treats the subject with characteristic dignity and simplicity. From his time until the first quarter of the fifteenth century there is little change in the conception. But the painting by Gentile da Fabriano in the Academy at Florence marks an epoch. Less, we may believe, from a desire to emphasize the contrast between the lowly Child and the splendid king than out of mere love of pageantry and cheerful display, the retinue of the kings is expanded into a crowded procession reaching far into the distance. It would appear that this picture set the fashion for the pageant-treatment of the subject. Few, if any, artists henceforward dared to conceive it simply. Inevitably, also, contemporary portraits appear among the bystanders or even

## THE ADORATION

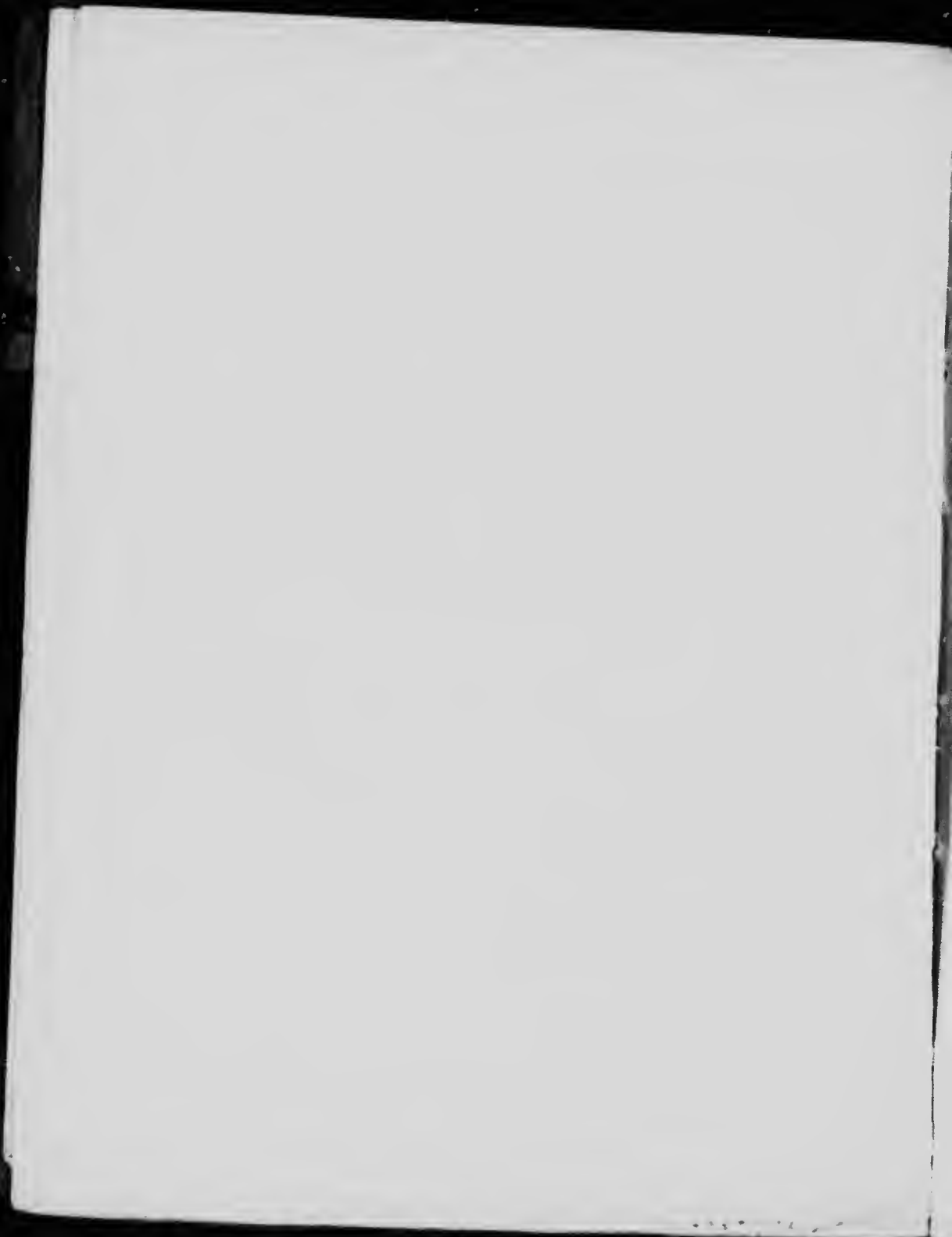
the Magi themselves. Benozzo Gozzoli's altar piece has disappeared from the Medici chapel in the Riccardi Palace at Florence, but one hardly misses it, knowing well that the real object of the frescoes, the glorification of the artist's patrons, is attained. Yet it is a measure of the greatness of Italian art that this inconsistency of aim does not affect us as insincerity; no such note is struck in the rendering of the subject until after the close of the fifteenth century.

Of course we meet with attempts to vary the now traditional scheme. In the Byzantine period there had been representations, apparently of Syrian origin, in which the Virgin and Child occupied the middle of the composition, with the other figures grouped on either side. Symmetry of a kind at once similar and different occasionally appealed to later artists. Botticelli's tondo in the National Gallery is a good instance of fine and original variation on the traditional scheme. There is, again, in the Berlin Gallery a picture formerly attributed to the youthful Raphael, but now known to have been painted by Lo Spagna for an Abbat of Ferentillo near Spoleto. In it the Child lies on the ground in the middle of the picture; on the left are the kneeling Virgin, St. Joseph standing, and two adoring angels, not to mention the ox and ass; in fact an ordinary Adoration of the Child. But balancing this group on

## OF THE MAGI

the right are the three kings and a small suite. The composition is obviously an attempt to break with the hackneyed tradition,

A word may be permitted here about a curious detail in the story. The Golden Legend tells us that the star which appeared to the Magi had the form of a Child, over Whose head gleamed a Cross. Another version of the story, of Oriental origin, says that the star was really an angel; but since Balaam had prophesied that a star should arise out of Jacob, the star of the Magi was most readily identified with Christ Himself. Thus it is that we may find, instead of an ordinary star, a radiant Child carrying the Cross, or the adult Christ with the cruciform nimbus, or—as in some early Christian representations—merely the monogram of Christ's name in a circle. But in painting after the Middle Ages this detail becomes very rare, even rarer than that superficially analogous detail in the pictures of the Annunciation, in which a similar Child descends on a ray of light from God the Father to the Virgin.



## PLATES

1. Giotto. Arena Chapel, Padua.
2. Don Lorenzo Monaco. Uffizi, Florence.
3. Gentile da Fabriano. Accademia, Florence.
4. Masaccio. Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin.
5. Fra Angelico. Museo di San Marco, Florence.
6. Benozzo Gozzoli. Riccardi Palace, Florence.
7. Andrea Mantegna. Uffizi, Florence.
8. Sandro Botticelli. National Gallery, London.
9. Sandro Botticelli. Uffizi, Florence.
10. Gentile Bellini. Layard Collection, Venice.
11. Dom. Ghirlandajo. Ospedale degli Innocenti, Florence.
12. Leonardo da Vinci. Uffizi, Florence.

Numbers 1, 2, 10, and 12, pages 11, 13, 29, and 33 are after photographs by Alinari.

1. **GIOTTO.** Arena Chapel, Padua.

The Scrovegni Chapel was begun in 1303 and consecrated in 1305. Giotto's frescoes may have been begun before the consecration, but it is unlikely that they were finished so early as 1305. Though they precede his masterpieces in the Peruzzi Chapel in S. Croce at Florence, they show his style already mature. His later works are perhaps more intensely dramatic, but already in these he reveals himself as the greatest master of religious narrative art, producing the maximum of effect with the simplest of materials and never sacrificing dignity to the picturesque.



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2. DON LORENZO MONACO. Uffizi,  
Florence.

Don Lorenzo's period of activity corresponds with the first quarter of the fifteenth century; for we hear of him as active from 1399 to 1422. He belongs, however, in everything but date, to the previous century; conception and technique are those of the late trecento, and, what is more, of an illuminator of manuscripts rather than of a painter of panels or frescoes; and, since he came to Florence from Siena, it is not surprising that traces of Siennese influence have been discerned in his work.



3. GENTILE DA FABRIANO. Accademia delle Belle Arti, Florence.

This panel was painted by Gentile for Santa Trinità in Florence, and is signed and dated May 1423. It is the first of the pictures of the subject in the modern style. We see signs of the same tendency, to overlay the religious event with the social ceremony, in the painting of the same subject done three years later by Masaccio, but there the attendant circumstances are still kept in hand, and do not distract from the central subject. The delight of this picture is in the rich costumes and the profusion of cheerful detail; one notes the boy unfastening the youngest King's spurs or the two apes riding in the procession. Yet the scene in the left foreground can be taken by itself and lacks nothing in sincerity; it is not true that the subject has lost its religious character. Gentile da Fabriano died in 1428.

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4. MASACCIO (Tommaso di Ser Giovanni).  
Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin.

The revival of the Florentine School of painting at the beginning of the fifteenth century was due in the greatest degree to Masaccio, who in his brief life (1401-1428) roused it from the comparative stagnation in which it had remained since Giotto. This little panel and another - with the martyrdoms of St. Peter and St. John the Baptist -, also at Berlin, are from the predella of an altar-piece painted in 1426 for the Carmelite Church at Pisa. Slight as it is, it is characteristic of the master, especially in the group of the youngest King and the two cloaked men behind him.

They illustrate a remark of Vasari's which seems to mean that owing to his skill in posing and foreshortening his figures seem really-practically for the first time in the history of Italian painting - to stand upon the ground and not as it were on tip-toe or in the air. We may note the horse foreshortened from behind, afterwards so favourite a cliché in the work of various artists of the fifteenth century.

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5. FRA ANGELICO. Museo di San Marco, Florence.

This Adoration occupies the lower portion of a panel, with an Annunciation above it, in Cell 34 of the old Monastery. All the admirable qualities which previous generations found to praise in Fra Angelico's work - sweetness, purity, devoutness, cheerfulness of colouring - are present, as are the weaknesses, especially the flatness, the bodilessness and lack of structure, which the good painter would doubtless have been the first to admit. The picture presumably belongs to the period 1437 - 1445. Born in 1387, Fra Angelico lived until 1455; yet in technique and ideas, like Don Lorenzo Monaco, he is a survival of the pre-Masaccio period; a comparison of the way in which his figures stand 'in the air' with the firm poses of Masaccio is enough to show this.



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6. **BENOZZO GOZZOLI.** Riccardi Palace, Florence.

Benozzo, who was born in 1420 and died in 1497, executed the famous frescoes in the chapel of what was then the Medici Palace in 1459. The altar-piece, which represented the termination of the procession and the Adoration of the Kings, is no longer there. The various stages of the procession that remain represent the ultimate development, so far as picturesque detail could go, of the social side of the subject. Nothing more elaborate than these scenes and this landscape, nothing more topical than the portraits - all too flattering - of Medici or Paleologi disguised as Magi, was to be done hereafter; and nothing more amusing, for the treatment of the subject by other artists of the fifteenth century, though it often shows an undiminished pleasure in the picturesque, is much more serious.



7. ANDREA MANTEGNA. Uffizi, Florence.  
Central Panel of a Triptych, of which the wings represent the Ascension and Circumcision. The picture belongs to Mantegna's Mantuan period, which began at the end of 1450, and it may have been painted early in that period, about 1464. The treatment of the subject is comparatively simple as regards the procession, which consists of a comparatively small number of people. Characteristic of Mantegna is the glory of cherubs surrounding the Virgin, and the way in which they are detached against the sombre shadows of the cave.

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8. SANDRO BOTTICELLI. National Gallery, London.

This panel, formerly attributed to Filippino Lippi, is now more generally regarded as an early work of Botticelli, painted while the influence of his master, Fra Filippo, was still entirely dominant, some time in the sixties of the fifteenth century. The Adoration of the Shepherds is alluded to by the two figures on the extreme right. The composition is interesting: the force of the action increases in intensity as we move away from the quiet group on the right, until beyond the ruined walls which bound the central scene on the left we find a confused and agitated crowd. In the foreground here stands a court dwarf; farther back in the procession a free fight with axe and sword is going on. The extreme portions on right and left have been omitted in the reproduction for lack of space.

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THE GREAT EASTERN DISASTER. A scene in the crowded quarters of a train car during the disaster. The photograph shows a dense crowd of people, many of whom appear to be in distress or suffering. The lighting is very dark, emphasizing the somber and chaotic atmosphere of the event.

9. SANDRO BOTTICELLI. Uffizi, Florence.  
This Adoration was painted about 1478 for S. Maria Novella, where it was placed over an altar of the Three Kings just inside the main entrance. The picture is of importance as marking the first stage of Botticelli's mature manner. Two at least of the three Kings are Medici portraits. The eldest is Cosimo the Elder; the one kneeling with his back to the spectator, in right profile, is not, as Vasari says, Giuliano-Cosimo's grandson and brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent-, but, as Mr. Horne has shown, Cosimo's son, Piero il Gottoso; and the third, according to Vasari, is Giovanni, son of Cosimo. This Giovanni, however, was born in 1421 and died in 1461. If, then, Vasari is right, the portrait is posthumous; but it bears little resemblance to the medallic portrait (also posthumous) of Giovanni, or to Mino da Fiesole's bust of him. What is more, this identification does not appear in the first edition of Vasari's Lives. It may, therefore, be dismissed as one of the many 'improvements' with which the second edition was adorned. Vasari lays stress on the excellence of the portrait of Cosimo - which we may grant - and (a less pertinent criticism) on the devotion and reverence in the attitudes and expressions of the three Kings. He is more felicitous in his praise of the beauty of the many heads in the picture.



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10. **GENTILE BELLINI.** Collection of the late Lady Layard, Venice.

This picture, which is believed to have been formerly in the Church of San Bartolommeo at Vicenza, belongs to the period immediately succeeding Gentile's return from Constantinople, whither he went in September 1479, to return at the end of the next year. Although Venice was in such close touch with the East that it was not necessary to leave it in order to get Oriental colour, we may surely see here the effect of the visit to Constantinople in the costumes. It has been remarked that the picture reminds us much of Carpaccio, and suggested that Carpaccio may even have been one of the two assistants who attended Bellini to Constantinople.

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ii. DOMENICO GHIRLANDAJO. Ospedale degli Innocenti, Florence.

This panel is a fine example of this popular painter's highly accomplished and pleasing, but not very intellectual narrative style. It is dated (on the arch) 1488, and thus belongs to the time when he was engaged on his most famous work, the frescoes in S. Maria Novella (1486-1490). The background shows the Massacre of the Innocents on the left, and the Annunciation to the Shepherds on the right. The fourth from the right of the figures in the distance to the left of the Virgin is said to be a portrait of the artist. The hand of assistants is probably responsible for certain portions of the work; thus the background with the Massacre of the Innocents has been attributed to Bartolommeo di Giovanni.

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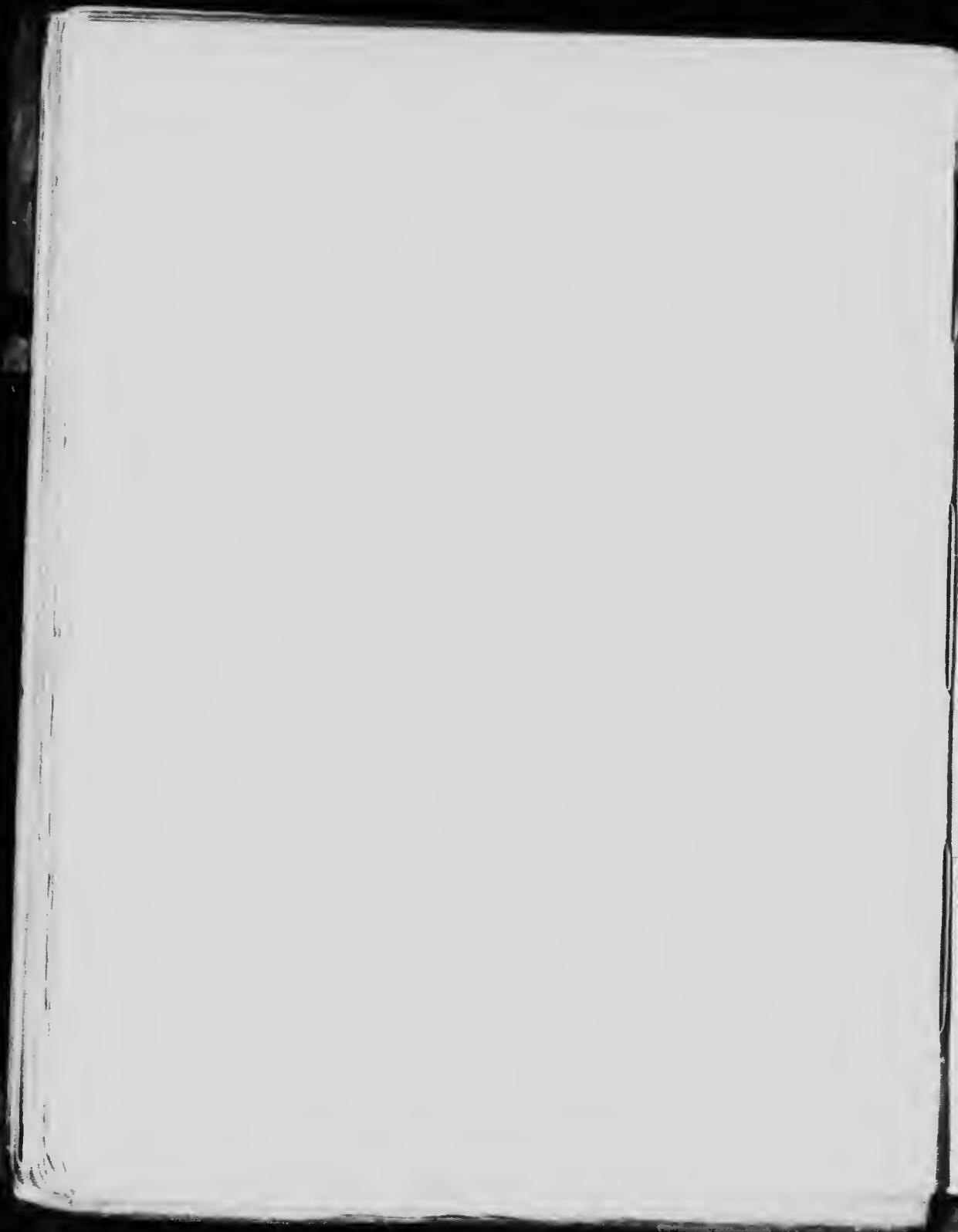
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12. LEONARDO DA VINCI. Uffizi, Florence.

This extraordinary cartoon, which seems to belong to the years round 1500, has in it the materials for a dozen different pictures; that may be the reason for its having remained unfinished. In its present condition, in which, as has been said, the figures emerge as out of a mist, the fine pyramidal composition with the three Kings at the base and the Virgin and Child at the summit has perhaps more effect than it would have if the subsidiary groups—such as the intensely interested spectators on the right, or the riders on fiery horses, not to speak of the battle in the background—had been worked out. No other painter of the same subject has attempted to do more than tell the story, with more or less embroidering of externals. But Leonardo gives us the impression that the subject—like all others that he treated—has been removed from its ordinary significance and absorbed into some larger mystery, of which he alone has the key.

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