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OUT OF THE DARK: ASTRONOMY AS UNIFYING THREAD FOR CULTURES.



Visit in Assisi

Giotto and the Comet

Authors: Italian students participating to the Erasmus+ project

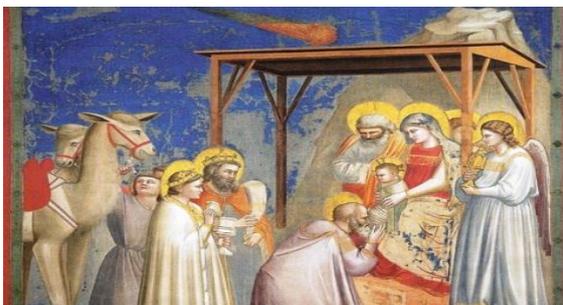
Introduction

The medieval city of Assisi is the birthplace of **St. Francis**, considered as “the new sun” and founder of the homonymous Religious Order of the Franciscans; it was added to the **UNESCO World Heritage list** in 2000.

The **Basilica of St. Francis** brings together a number of masterpieces of creative human genius, and is an extraordinary example of the type of architectonic complexity that has significantly influenced the development of art and architecture. The complex is formed by two superimposed and independent churches.

The Upper basilica is famous all over the world for its beautiful frescoes painted in the late 1290s by Giotto and his School. Twenty-eight panels of the most extraordinarily intense, blue background, they depict scenes from the life of St. Francis, in a narration that is moving and alive.

Giotto, was the first painter to paint a star, a comet which looked very realistic, so it is thought that he had seen a comet and could render it as it really was; he was also the first artist who represented the sky in a realistic way. In October 1301 comet Halley had been seen in the skies of Europe. The comet was described with "great rays of fumes behind." No doubt, Giotto had seen it and remembered it well enough to paint his visual experience as the star of Bethlehem for the "Adoration of the Magi." Giotto gave us the first unambiguous portrait of a comet which must have been Halley, since no other comet was recorded between 1301 and 1305.



Giotto: "Adoration of the Magi" and the Comet (Scrovegni Chapel in Padua)



Giotto: "Ecstasy of St Francis" (Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi).

Materials

Internet to look up information about S. Francis and Giotto, the Halley comet.



Introduction to Assisi by the Italian students and guided visit of the Saint Francis' Basilica.



Procedure/Method

Once arrived in Assisi the students were divided in small mixed groups in order to visit the Basilica following the Italian students who guided them.

Results

The students visited an important city in Umbria that was the birthplace of Saint Francis, patron of the nation, they could see medieval buildings, churches and discovered the frescoes technique. They learned about Giotto who was the first artist who represented a natural spangled blue sky, while his contemporary artists were still linked to the Byzantine tradition where the sky (or transcendental world) was represented with gold.

They also learned about Eremo delle Carceri (not visited because of the lack of time) which is the place where Saint Francis and his followers retired to pray and meditate.

It is a place of peace and serenity where you can stay next to the sky and, at the same time, next to nature: the presence of Saint Francis can be seen and feel. While you're walking through the paths you can meet three statues, one of S. Francis laying down to admire and contemplate "his brother sun and

its creatures”, one of Friar Leo bending down and drawing the constellations and Friar Ginepro who is admiring with wonder the brightness of the polar star.

Conclusions

It is always important to visit the most representative cities of the country where the exchange takes place because it reveals the history, the religion, the art and the way of living of its population. Assisi is set at only 40 km from Gualdo Tadino and it would have been a real sin not to visit it!

Saint Francis of Assisi was also the writer of the Canticle of the Sun, also known as Laudes Creaturarum (Praise of the Creatures) a religious song written in an Umbrian dialect and translated into many languages. It is believed to be among the first works of literature, if not the first, written in the Italian language. The Canticle of the Sun he thanks God for such creations as "Brother Fire" and "Sister Water".

Bibliography

Wikipedia:Giotto and the Comet Halley

Blog: Out of the Dark

Facebook page: @R.Casimiri