



## CRYPT

Initiated in order to recover and reuse the space used by the Oratory of Santi Giovannino e Gennaro, the work commissioned by the Opera della Metropolitana in 1999 was extended to the area under the choir of the cathedral, unexpectedly revealing a large room decorated with a fresco cycle painted around 1280 by a group of artists active in Siena in the second half of the thirteenth century which included Guido da Siena, Dietisalvi di Speme, Guido di Graziano, and Rinaldo da Siena. The innovative freshness and extraordinary quality of these images, brought to light again after more than seven centuries, significantly broadens our knowledge of thirteenth-century wall painting and provides fundamental evidence of the genesis and development of the Siennese school of painting.

The cycle is distinguished by its brightly colored images, which cover not only the walls frescoed with scenes, but also the columns, pilasters, capitals, and corbels, whose entire surface is decorated with geometric and vegetable motifs. The illustrations unfold in two registers: above are scenes from the Old Testament and below, scenes from the New. The representation of the drama of Christ's Passion is especially touching, with the three grand scenes of The Crucifixion, The Deposition from the Cross, and The Deposition in the Tomb on the back wall.

But the results of this discovery are not limited solely to its figurative aspects. The discoveries are equally interesting from the architectural and archeological viewpoints, which interact in perfect harmony with the achievements in painting. The structural elements, which are extensively decorated even now, offer a new, unprecedented picture of painted architecture. What is more, the uncovering of other architectural elements besides this room, for instance the foundations of the apse of the earlier church, which were revealed during the digging of a drain along the wall that holds the scenes of the Crucifixion and the Deposition, throw valuable light on the phases of construction of the cathedral and on numerous problems still unsolved today.