NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

Lippo Memmi
Sienese, active 1317/1347

Madonna and Child with Donor

1325/1330

tempera on panel
painted surface: 50.8 × 23.5 cm (20 × 9 1/4 in.)
overall: 51.5 × 24.2 × 0.5 cm (20 1/4 × 9 1/2 × 3/16 in.)
framed: 70 x 36.2 x 5.1 cm (27 9/16 x 14 1/4 x 2 in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.11

ENTRY

The painting's iconography is based on the type of the *Hodegetria* Virgin.[1] It presents, however, a modernized version of this formula, in keeping with the "humanized" faith and sensibility of the time; instead of presenting her son to the observer as in the Byzantine model, Mary's right hand touches his breast, thus indicating him as the predestined sacrificial lamb. As if to confirm this destiny, the child draws his mother's hand towards him with his left hand. The gesture of his other hand, outstretched and grasping the Madonna's veil, can be interpreted as a further reference to his Passion and death.[2]

The painting probably was originally the left wing of a diptych. The half-length Madonna and Child frequently was combined with a representation of the Crucifixion, with or without the kneeling donor. In our panel, the donor, an unidentified prelate, is seen kneeling to the left of the Madonna; his position on the far left of the composition itself suggests that the panel was intended as a pendant to a matching panel to the right. In any case, the image was intended for the donor's private devotion.[3]

Ever since its first public appearance at the London exhibition of Sienese painting in 1904, this panel has been recognized as a work by Lippo Memmi. The attribution

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to the fourteenth-century Sienese master has seldom been placed in doubt since that time.[4] If the painting's attribution can be considered perfectly convincing, its date is open to question; the art historical literature has expressed various views on the dating. The date usually proposed for our *Madonna and Child* is c. 1330, but some authorities have pushed this either backward to the 1320s or forward to 1335.[5] The lack of any securely dated works by the artist before 1333 (apart, of course, from the great fresco of the Maestà in San Gimignano dated 1317, which hardly lends itself to stylistic comparison with small panels like ours) justifies this lack of certainty. It should be said, however, that the identification of Lippo with the so-called Master of the Triumph of Saint Thomas—that is, the master of the painting of the same name in the church of Santa Caterina at Pisa—has been revived and has begun to gain ground. If, as various clues suggest, this proposal is likely to be correct,[6] a further chronological point of reference for Lippo's career would thus be obtained, for the Santa Caterina panel must have been painted in close proximity to the canonization of Thomas Aquinas in 1323. Another fact that should be borne in mind, in reflecting on the chronological sequence of Lippo's works is a gradual enrichment of technique, particularly the tendency to pass "from a pictorial treatment of luminous and two-dimensional effect to a softer, more atmospheric, more richly charged modeling, also involving a more three-dimensional effect."[7] Some art historians have viewed this change primarily as a consequence of Lippo's adjustment to the manner of Simone Martini (Sienese, active from 1315; died 1344), but it would be more correct to speak of his gradual espousal of the ideals of Gothic elegance, not simply his dependence on his brother-in-law's stylistic development.[8] The various punch marks used to decorate this painting include several that can also be recognized in paintings attributed to Simone and executed in the period between 1320 and 1333, or even later. Some of these punches recur in the *Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas* and in other panels attributable to the Pisan phase of Lippo's activity, hence executed in the period 1320/1325.[9]

Given these observations, a date for the National Gallery of Art's Madonna of slightly later than the *Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas* can be supported with some confidence. This conclusion is also reinforced by stylistic considerations, for the clear-cut and energetic design of the Pisan painting is still exempt from such features as the accomplished curvilinear rhythms and delicate chiaroscuro modeling proposed in the painting being discussed here. A *terminus ante quem*, on the other hand, is provided by the Madonna [fig. 1] in Berlin (Gemäldegalerie) dated 1333: its more elongated, aristocratic proportions and more spacious and

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refined compositional layout indicate the artist's gradual adoption of a fully gothicizing manner. From these considerations, therefore, a date for the Washington Madonna in the period 1325/1330 can be deduced—a date that also holds good, in all probability, for a painting particularly close in style, namely the polyptych formerly in the church of San Niccolò at Casciana Alta, near Pisa.[10] Despite some archaizing aspects (such as the round-arched upper termination of the panels of the main register), the altarpiece seems, in its figural style, to belong to the same phase as our panel. Mary [fig. 2] is more lissome in physique and assumes a more composed and elegant pose than in previous paintings by Lippo, while the curly-headed child [fig. 3], who opens his lips to pronounce words of blessing, would seem closely akin to the idea proposed in the Gallery panel [fig. 4]. The fact that the face of Saint Thomas is more subtly naturalistic in its modeling than that of the same saint in the undated Pisan panel (c. 1323) suggests a slightly later date.

Lippo, we may infer, embarked on a new stylistic phase in the years around 1325. This led him not only to dedicate ever-growing attention to reserved elegance of pose but also to refine his technique. He now tried to accentuate the realistic effects of his images. His efforts in this direction are testified by the acutely characterized portrait of the donor [fig. 5] in the Washington Madonna: the flaccid, unshaven features show evident signs of old age and poor health. But no less subtle and acute an observation is shown in the treatment of the child's close-fitting blouse that wrinkles and puckers under the firm touch of Mary's finger.

Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011)

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Lippo Memmi, *Madonna and Child*, 1333, tempera on panel, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Image: bpk, Berlin/Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin/Joerg P. Anders/Art Resource, NY

fig. 2 Lippo Memmi, *Madonna and Child*, tempera on panel, Museo Nazionale, Pisa. Image courtesy of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici Paesaggistici Storici Artistici ed Etnoantropologici per le Province de Pisa e Livorno

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fig. 3 Detail of Christ, Lippo Memmi, *Madonna and Child*, tempera on panel, Museo Nazionale, Pisa. Image courtesy of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici Paesaggistici Storici Artistici ed Etnoantropologici per le Province de Pisa e Livorno

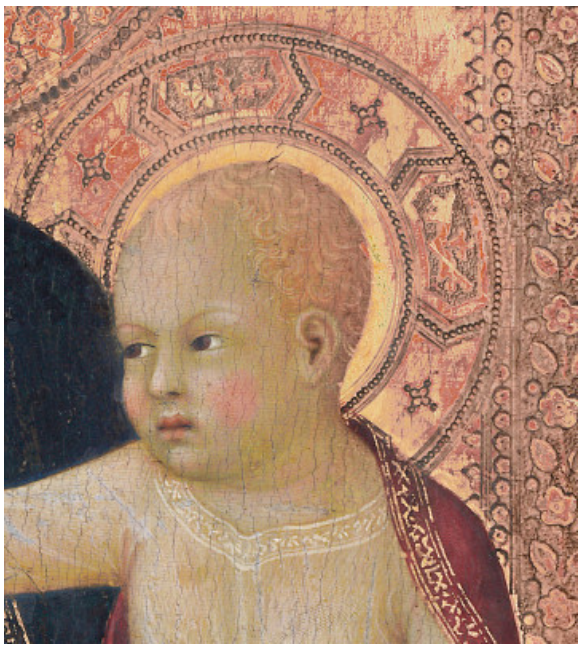

fig. 4 Detail of Christ, Lippo Memmi, *Madonna and Child with Donor*, 1325/1330, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

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fig. 5 Detail of donor, Lippo Memmi, *Madonna and Child with Donor*, 1325/1330, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

NOTES

[1] See Christine Angelidi and Titos Papamastorakis, "The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Hodegon Monastery," in *The Mother of God: The Representation of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan and

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London, 2000), 373–387.

[2] On the motif of the child drawing the Virgin's hand towards himself and its possible significance, cf. Dorothy C. Shorr, *The Christ Child in Devotional Images in Italy during the XIV Century* (New York, 1954), 168–169. See also Shorr 1954, 116–117, on the significance of the veil on which the child concentrates his attention.

[3] Cf. Wolfgang Kermer, *Studien zum Diptychon in der sakralen Malerei: Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Düsseldorf, 1967), 83–89. On the genre of diptychs during this period, see Victor M. Schmidt, *Painted Piety: Panel Paintings for Personal Devotion in Tuscany, 1250–1400* (Florence, 2005), 31–71; on the figures of devotees kneeling in prayer, see 107–140.

[4] George Martin Richter (1941) was alone in conjecturing an attribution of the painting to Andrea di Vanni (Sienese, c. 1330 - 1413), though specifying that it must have been produced in the workshop of Lippo Memmi. Rainer Brandl (1985) believed the attribution to Lippo unjustified; he insisted on its stylistic affinities with the paintings of Simone Martini (Sienese, active from 1315; died 1344) in Assisi and Orvieto. See George Martin Richter, "The New National Gallery in Washington," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 78 (1941): 177; Rainer Brandl, *Die Tafelbilder des Simone Martini: Ein Beitrag zur Kunst Sienas im Trecento* (Frankfurt am Main; and New York, 1985), 85 n. 1.

[5] Scholars who have proposed a dating to the 1320s are: Joseph Polzer (1971), Carlo Volpe (1982), Rainer Brandl (1985), and Eliot W. Rowlands (1996). Those supporting a dating to c. 1330 or shortly after are: Cristina De Benedictis (1974, 1979), Giovanna Damiani (1985), Miklós Boskovits (1986, 1988), Pierluigi Leone de Castris (2003), and Sabina Spannocchi (2009). The date 1335 or after was suggested in the catalogs of the National Gallery of Art (1941, 1965, 1985), as well as by Fern Rusk Shapley (1979), Serenella Castri (1992), De Benedictis (1996), and Meryle Secrest (2004). See Joseph Polzer, "Observations on Known Paintings and a New Altarpiece by Francesco Traini," *Pantheon* 29 (1971): 386–387; Carlo Volpe, in *Il gotico a Siena: Miniature, pitture, oreficerie, oggetti d'arte* (Florence, 1982), 186; Rainer Brandl, *Die Tafelbilder des Simone Martini: Ein Beitrag zur Kunst Sienas im Trecento* (Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1985), 85 n. 1; Eliot W. Rowlands, *The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Italian Paintings, 1300–1800* (Kansas City, MO, 1996), 36, 38; Cristina De Benedictis, "A proposito di un libro su Buffalmacco," *Antichità viva* 13, no. 2 (1974): 8–9; Cristina De Benedictis, *La pittura senese 1330–1370* (Florence, 1979), 21, 93; Giovanna Damiani, in *Simone Martini e "chompagni,"* ed. Alessandro Bagnoli and Luciano Bellosi (Florence, 1985), 92; Miklós Boskovits, "Sul trittico di Simone Martini e di Lippo Memmi," *Arte cristiana* 74 (1986): 76 n. 33; Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei:*

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Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 78, 81; Pierluigi Leone De Castris, *Simone Martini* (Milan, 2003), 181, 283; Sabina Spannocchi, "Lippo e Tederigo Memmi," in *La Collegiata di San Gimignano*, vol. 2, *L'architettura, i cicli pittorici murali e i loro restauri*, ed. Alessandro Bagnoli (Siena, 2009), 452; National Gallery of Art, *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1941), 133; National Gallery of Art, *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1965), 89; National Gallery of Art, *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue* (Washington, DC, 1985), 230, 251; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:330–331; Serenella Castri, "Memmi, Lippo (Lippo di Memmo di Filippuccio)," in *Dizionario della pittura e dei pittori*, ed. Enrico Castelnuovo and Bruno Toscano, 6 vols. (Turin, 1992), 3:581; Cristina De Benedictis, "Lippo Memmi," in *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, 12 vols. (Rome, 1996), 7:735; Meryle Secrest, *Duveen: A Life in Art* (New York, 2004), 458.

[6] Traditionally attributed to Francesco Traini, the panel in the Pisan church of Santa Caterina was later reduced to anonymity by the creation of an eponymous Master of the Triumph of Saint Thomas by Millard Meiss, "The Problem of Francesco Traini," *The Art Bulletin* 15 (1933): 97–173, an artist perhaps identifiable with "Barna," according to Hermann Beenken, "Notizien und Nachrichten. Malerei: Italien 14 Jahrundert," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (1934): 73. It was then reattributed, albeit cautiously, to Lippo Memmi by Luigi Coletti, *I Primitivi*, vol. 2, *I senesi e i giotteschi* (Novara, 1946), xxx, lxv n. 90. Long ignored in the art historical literature, this hypothesis was resuscitated and reinforced in more recent years by Antonio Caleca, "Tre polittici di Lippo Memmi, un'ipotesi sul Barna e la bottega di Simone e Lippo, 1," *Critica d'arte* 41 (1976): 49–59; Antonio Caleca, "Tre polittici di Lippo Memmi, un'ipotesi sul Barna e la bottega di Simone e Lippo, 2," *Critica d'arte* 42 (1977): 55–80; Miklós Boskovits, "Il gotico senese rivisitato: Proposte e commenti su una mostra," *Arte cristiana* 71 (1983): 264; Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde*, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 75, 202; Luciano Bellosi, in *Simone Martini e "chompagni,"* ed. Alessandro Bagnoli and Luciano Bellosi (Florence, 1985), 94–98; Giovanni Previtali, "Introduzione ai problemi della bottega di Simone Martini," in *Simone Martini: Atti del convegno; Siena, March 27–29, 1985*, ed. Luciano Bellosi (Florence, 1988), 153, 156; Joseph Polzer, "The Triumph of Thomas Panel in Santa Caterina, Pisa: Meaning and Date," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 37 (1993): 29–70; Cristina De Benedictis, "Lippo Memmi," in *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, 12 vols. (Rome, 1996), 7:732.

[7] Cf. Luciano Bellosi, in *Simone Martini e "chompagni,"* ed. Alessandro Bagnoli and Luciano Bellosi (Florence, 1985), 100. Hitherto, Lippo's stylistic development had often been interpreted merely as a gradual approximation

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of Simone's style. For example, Bonnie Apgar Bennett wrote, "Lippo Memmi's artistic career into the 1320s can be most accurately characterized as a progressive acceptance of Simone's style." Bonnie Apgar Bennett, *Lippo Memmi, Simone Martini's "fratello in arte": The Image Revealed by His Documented Works* (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1977), 114.

[8] The two artists must have worked in partnership since the second decade, as implied by their presence during the same years in various Tuscan and Umbrian towns. At San Gimignano, Lippo signed the fresco of the Maestà in 1317, and Simone painted one of his youthful altarpieces. Cf. Cristina De Benedictis, in *Simone Martini e "chompagni,"* ed. Alessandro Bagnoli and Luciano Bellosi (Florence, 1985), 47–50; and Dillian Gordon, "Simone Martini's Altarpiece for S. Agostino, San Gimignano," *The Burlington Magazine* 133 (1991): 771. In Pisa, Lippo painted his Triumph of Saint Thomas in the church of Santa Caterina not long after Simone's polyptych in the same church (1319–1320); and in Orvieto, Simone executed polyptychs in part preserved in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in the town, and Lippo was commissioned to paint his *Madonna dei raccomandati* for the cathedral.

[9] Mojmir S. Frinta (1998) stated that the punches used in the decoration of the Gallery's painting also appeared in works by Simone Martini, such as the youthful polyptych now divided among the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (punch 16 a, according to Frinta's enumeration); the polyptych in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Orvieto; the Annunciation in the Uffizi, Florence (Frinta's I 70); the polyptych in Pisa dating to 1319–1320; and the folding Orsini altarpiece, now divided among the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, and the Musée du Louvre, Paris. See Mojmir Svatopluk Frinta, *Punched Decoration on Late Medieval Panel and Miniature Painting* (Prague, 1998), 310–311, 321, 487–488; and, for the Orsini altarpiece, Pierluigi Leone De Castris, *Simone Martini* (Milan, 2003), 362–363.

[10] Cf. Antonino Caleca, *Mostra del restauro di opere delle province di Pisa e Livorno* (Pisa, 1971), 22–25; Joanna Cannon, "Simone Martini, the Dominicans and the Early Sienese Polyptych," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 45 (1982): 85–86. The close stylistic affinity between the polyptych of Casciana Alta and the panel in Washington was already pointed out by Cristina De Benedictis, "A proposito di un libro su Buffalmacco," *Antichità viva* 13, no. 2 (1974): 8–9; Carlo Volpe, *Il gotico a Siena: Miniature, pitture, oreficerie, oggetti d'arte* (Florence, 1982), 186; Angelo Tartuferi, "Appunti su Simone Martini e 'chompagni,'" *Arte cristiana* 74 (1986): 85, 91–92 n. 29; and Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde*, trans. Erich Schleier

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(Berlin, 1988), 78.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The panel is composed of a single piece of wood trimmed along the lower edge. At some point in the painting's history, the original triangular gable was cut just above the Virgin's halo. The gable was reconstructed with modern wood during an undocumented restoration, probably conducted in 1927–1928.[1] The wooden support was thinned to 5 mm and cradled, and the vertical edges covered by strips of modern wood, probably at the same time that the gable was added. The modern replacement of the missing top of the gable (c. 12–16 cm) has been gilded and its border decorated with punches that imitate the original ones along the vertical edges of the panel. The painting was executed on a white gesso ground, with gilding over a layer of red bole in the ground behind the figures. A green imprimatura can be seen under the flesh tones. The paint was applied in thin layers with little texture except for a discernible thickness in the Virgin's blue cloak. A split about 6 cm long runs upwards from the center of the lower edge of the panel. There is a loss in the gilding at the upper left edge, and another loss is visible in the lower left corner. There is inpainting in the Virgin's cloak and in the child's robe, as well as in some scratches in the faces.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] A photograph (Braun & C., Paris, no. 29710), probably taken on the occasion of the London exhibition in 1904, shows the painting in the same condition (with the gable cut and the major losses only roughly inpainted) as in the reproduction in Robert Langton Douglas's note (1927) published on the occasion of the sale of the Benson collection. The painting presumably was restored soon after its acquisition by Duveen Brothers, Inc., whose policy was to restore paintings immediately, and sometimes rather drastically, after their acquisition. See Robert Langton Douglas, "I dipinti senesi della Collezione Benson passati da Londra in America," *Rassegna d'arte senese e del costume* 1, no. 5 (1927): 103 repro; Meryle Secrest, *Duveen: A Life in Art* (New York, 2004), 334.

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PROVENANCE

Private collection, Paris; purchased c. 1896 through (Thos. Agnew and Sons, Ltd., London) by Robert Henry [1850–1929] and Evelyn Holford [1856–1943] Benson, London and Buckhurst Park, Surrey;[1] sold 1927 with the entire Benson collection to (Duveen Brothers, Inc., London, New York, and Paris);[2] purchased 15 December 1936 by The Andrew W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh;[3] gift 1937 to NGA.

[1] According to Peter Wake, grandson of Robert Benson (letter, Wake to Anna Voris, 2 February 1976, in NGA curatorial files), based on Benson's own handwritten records the painting was "bought in Paris about 1896 through Agnew."

[2] Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 206, box 351, folders 2 and 3, and reel 207, box 352, folders 1 and 2 (copies in NGA curatorial files). See also Robert Langton Douglas, "I dipinti senesi della Collezione Benson passati da Londra in America," *Rassegna d'Arte Senese e del Costume* 1/5, no. 3 (May-June 1927): 99-105; Frank E. Washburn Freund, "Die Sammlung Benson," *Der Cicerone* 19 (1927): 495-502; Edward Fowles, *Memories of Duveen Brothers*, London, 1976: 183-184.

[3] The original invoice for a large group of objects purchased from Duveen Brothers, Inc. by the Mellon Trust is in NGA archives (Records of The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, subject files, box 2; copy in NGA curatorial files).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1904 Exhibition of Pictures of the School of Siena, Burlington Fine Arts Club, London, 1904, no. 19.

1927 Loan Exhibition of the Benson Collection of Old Italian Masters, City of Manchester Art Gallery, 1927, no. 101.

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no. 5 (1927): repro. 103.

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