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

Master of the Franciscan Crucifixes

Also known as
Borgo Crucifix Master
Umbrian, active 1260s and 1270s

BIOGRAPHY

In 1922, Osvald Sirén coined the conventional name for the painter, presumably Umbrian by origin and training. The Swedish art historian was the first to recognize the common authorship of a painted crucifix now in the Treasury of the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, two paintings of the same subject in Bologna, and the fragments *The Mourning Madonna* and *The Mourning Saint John* being discussed here.[1] To this first nucleus of works, Evelyn Sandberg-Vavalà some years later (1929) added the crucifix in the church of Santa Maria in Borgo at Bologna, now exhibited at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in that city; and three painted crucifixes, in the Fornari collection at Fabriano (now in Camerino in the possession of the Cassa di Risparmio di Macerata), the Pinacoteca of Faenza, and the Museo Civico (now Collezioni Comunali d'Arte) in Bologna.[2] This catalog, which still seems essentially coherent today,[3] continued to grow in the following decades but has often been divided into various groups under different conventional names. Thus, the two panels in the National Gallery of Art and another fragment with the bust of Christ, which probably belonged originally to the same work, are usually attributed to a Borgo Crucifix Master; the crucifix in Assisi and another crucifix painted on both sides now in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, to a Blue Crucifix Master; while the rest of the catalog, considered Bolognese or Umbrian in figurative culture, is attributed to one or the other of these masters or left in anonymity.[4] In recent years, however, scholars have reaffirmed the unity of the group originally linked together under the name of the Master of the Franciscan Crucifixes and have recognized the misleading character of the other proposed conventional names.[5]

The anonymous painter was probably trained in Assisi around 1255–1265, under the influence of such artists as the Master of Santa Chiara, author of the great painted crucifix in the church of Santa Chiara in the Umbrian town, datable to c. 1260,[6] and the Master of Saint Francis (Umbrian, active third quarter 13th century), responsible for the frescoes in the nave of the lower church of San Francesco and the design of some of the stained glass in the upper church.[7] But

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

he must also have been in contact with some local artists who followed in the footsteps of Giunta Pisano and who were then active in Spoleto and its environs, such as the Master of San Felice di Giano.[8] At a later stage in his career, the Master of the Franciscan Crucifixes, who (as far as we are able to judge) was almost always active for Franciscan churches and therefore was perhaps a member of that order, worked in the Marches and Emilia-Romagna, settling in Bologna, where he not only executed a number of painted crucifixes but also painted a fresco in the church of Santo Stefano and influenced the activity of local painters and miniaturists.[9]

[1] Osvald Sirén, *Toskanische Maler im xiii. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1922), 219–225. In proposing the name of Meister der Franziskaner-Kruzifixe, Sirén defined the figurative culture from which the artist sprang as Umbro-Pisan.

[2] Evelyn Sandberg-Vavalà excluded from her regrouping one of the crucifixes of San Francesco at Bologna, which she thought unclassifiable on account of its extensive overpainting, but she associated the portable cross in Smith College at Northampton, Massachusetts, with the paintings thus far included in the group. Eschewing the conventional name introduced by Sirén, Sandberg-Vavalà argued that the anonymous artist was Bolognese in origin and had gone to Assisi to work but later returned to his hometown. See Evelyn Sandberg-Vavalà, *La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della Passione* (Verona, 1929), 844–858.

[3] As Edward Garrison noted (1949), the only element alien to the catalog assembled by Evelyn Sandberg-Vavalà is the crucifix in the Collezioni Comunali in Bologna; Edward B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: An Illustrated Index* (Florence, 1949), 208.

[4] Edward B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: An Illustrated Index* (Florence, 1949), 13 (Blue Crucifix Master), 14 (Borgo Crucifix Master), 208, 209, 211 (Bolognese anonymous works), and 213 (Umbrian anonymous work); and subsequently by various other scholars.

[5] Miklós Boskovits (2000) emphasized that Santa Maria in Borgo was not the original site of the painted crucifix now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna and that the blue pigment used in painted crucifixes was a very widespread iconographic tradition in the thirteenth century. See Miklós Boskovits, in *Duecento: Forme e colori del Medioevo a Bologna*, ed. Massimo Medica and Stefano Tumidei (Venice, 2000), 186. See also Silvia Giorgi, in *Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna,*

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

catalogo generale, vol. 1, *Dal Duecento a Francesco Francia*, ed. Jadranka Bentini, Gian Piero Cammarota, and Daniela Scaglietti Kelescian (Venice, 2004), 41–44; Anna Tambini, *Storia delle arti figurative a Faenza*, vol. 1, *Le origini* (Faenza, 2006), 74–82.

[6] See Elvio Lunghi, "Maestro di Santa Chiara," in *La Pittura in Italia: Il Duecento e il Trecento*, ed. Enrico Castelnuovo, 2 vols. (Milan, 1986), 2:610–611.

[7] See Elvio Lunghi, "Maestro di San Francesco," in *La Pittura in Italia: Il Duecento e il Trecento*, ed. Enrico Castelnuovo, 2 vols. (Milan, 1986), 2:624–625; for the artist's designs for stained glass, see Frank Martin and Gerhard Ruf, *Die Glasmalereien von San Francesco in Assisi: Entstehung und Entwicklung einer Gattung in Italien* (Regensburg, 1997), 53–78.

[8] See Giordana Benazzi, in *Dipinti, sculture e ceramiche della Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria: Studi e restauri*, ed. Caterina Bon Valsassina and Vittoria Garibaldi (Florence, 1994), 66–67.

[9] See Miklós Boskovits, in *Duecento: Forme e colori del Medioevo a Bologna*, ed. Massimo Medica and Stefano Tumidei (Venice, 2000), 196–197; Massimo Medica, "La città dei libri e dei miniatori," in *Duecento: Forme e colori del Medioevo a Bologna*, ed. Massimo Medica and Stefano Tumidei (Venice, 2000), 125.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1922 Sirén, Osvald. *Toskanische Maler im XIII. Jahrhundert*. Berlin, 1922: 219-225.

1929 Vavalà, Evelyn Sandberg. *La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della Passione*. Verona, 1929: 844-858.

1949 Garrison, Edward B. *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: an Illustrated Index*. Florence, 1949: 13, 14, 208, 209, 211, 213.

1986 Lunghi, Elvio. "Maestro dei Crocifissi Blu." In *La Pittura in Italia. Il Duecento e il Trecento*. Edited by Enrico Castelnuovo. 2 vols. Milan, 1986: 2:596.

© National Gallery of Art, Washington

2000 Vannucchi, Giovanni, Miklós Boskovits, and Silvia Giorgio. In *Duecento: forme e colori del Medioevo a Bologna*. Edited by Massimo Medica and Stefano Tumidei. Exh. cat. Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna. Venice, 2000: 186-203.

2002 Giorgio, Silvia. "Maestro dei Crocifissi Francescani." In *La pittura in Europa. Il Dizionario dei pittori*. Edited by Carlo Pirovano. 3 vols. Milan, 2002: 2:534.

2004 Giorgio, Silvia. In Pinacoteca Nazionale (Bologna). *Catalogo generale*. Vol. 1 (of 5), *Dal Duecento a Francesco Francia*. Edited by Jadranka Bentini, Gian Piero Cammarota, and Daniela Scaglietti Kelescian. Venice, 2004: 41-44.

2006 Tambini, Anna. *Storia delle arti figurative a Faenza*. Vol. 1 (of 4), *Le origini*. Faenza, 2006: 74-82.

To cite: "Master of the Franciscan Crucifixes," *Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, NGA Online Editions, http://purl.org/nga/collection/constituent/1693 (accessed December 21, 2016).

© National Gallery of Art, Washington