

# Grifo di Tancredi

Italian, active 1271 - 1303 (or possibly 1328)

---

## BIOGRAPHY

Grifo must have been active in the profession of painter by 1271: in that year, he rented a workshop in Volterra together with Filippo di Jacopo. Therefore, his birth date probably should be placed before rather than after 1250. The same artist is likely the “Grifo di Tancredi” who was paid for work on painting the Fontana Maggiore in Perugia in 1281. By 1295, when he hired an apprentice for his shop, he had secured his residence in Florence. His enrollment in the Florentine painters’ guild can be placed in the period between 1297 and 1312. In 1303 he executed a now lost painting in the Palazzo Vecchio, commemorating a political event of the day. It seems unlikely that he can be identified with the Grifo, son of the late Tancredi da Montegonzi, cited in a document of 1328,[1] although it cannot be excluded, given the relative scarcity of the name. The fragmentary inscription on a portable triptych in the collection of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres and now on loan to the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh, conjecturally integrated as “...H[oc] OP[us] Q[uod] FEC[it] M[agister] GRIF[us] FL[orentinus],”[2] has enabled a small group of works hitherto assembled by Roberto Longhi (1974) under the conventional name of Master of San Gaggio to be attributed to the painter.[3] Grifo probably had been trained under the prolific artist strongly rooted in the traditions of pre-Cimabuesque Florentine painting known under the conventional name of the Magdalen Master. The two seem to have worked together in some enterprises.[4] Cimabue’s influence was to prove decisive in Grifo’s more advanced phase. In such late works as the *Maestà* from the monastery of San Gaggio near Florence (now in the Galleria dell’Accademia), Grifo seems to have been swayed by the influence of the Master of Santa Cecilia, recently identified with Gaddo Gaddi, head of an important workshop and one of the protagonists of fourteenth-century painting in Florence.[5]

Grifo di Tancredi is sometimes considered one of the first followers of Giotto (Florentine, c. 1265 - 1337), but his art exemplifies an alternative approach to that of his great contemporary. He started out from the lessons of Cimabue but developed further, aiming at an art of solemn and realistic composure, capable of expressing complex emotions. Sometimes he shows himself able to confer monumentality on his scenes, as in the fragmentary frescoes in the chapel of San Giacomo at

Castelpulci. His paintings in general do not lack the narrative clarity and the classical spirit that distinguish the works of Giotto, but he never achieved Giotto's volumetric richness or mastery of perspective; the settings of Grifo's narrative scenes reveal his difficulty in creating optically convincing settings around his figures.

[1] The person cited in the document renounced the rights of patronage he had in the church of San Cresci at Monteficalli (now Montefioralle at Greve in Chianti), near Florence; cf. Giovanni Lami, *Sanctae ecclesiae Florentinae monumenta: Quibus notitiae innumerae ad omnigenam Etruriae aliarumque regionum historiam spectantes continentur*, 4 vols. (Florence, 1758), 1:599 n. It would have been unusual for a painter to have enjoyed such rights. For further documentary information on Grifo di Tancredi, see Angelo Tartuferi, "Grifo di Tancredi," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 83 vols. (Rome, 1960–2015), 59(2002):397.

[2] Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde*, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 122, thus expanded the abbreviations of the surviving part of the inscription. More recent scholarship generally accepted this proposed reading of the inscription; cf. Nicolas Barker, Hugh Brigstocke, and Timothy Clifford, *A Poet in Paradise: Lord Lindsay and Christian Art*, ed. Aidan Weston-Lewis (Edinburgh, 2000), 34.

[3] Roberto Longhi, "Giudizio sul Duecento (1948)," in *Edizione delle opere complete di Roberto Longhi*, 14 vols. (Florence, 1961–1984), 7(1974):14–15 and 44, gathered a number of paintings under the name of "Maestro di San Gaggio": the altarpiece with the Maestà and four saints in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence (no. 6115); the polyptych now divided between the National Gallery of Art and the Musée de Chambéry; and the triptych divided between Christ Church Gallery in Oxford and the heirs of the Sessa collection formerly in Milan. For the altarpiece in the Accademia, see Angelo Tartuferi, in *Dipinti*, vol. 1, *Dal Duecento a Giovanni da Milano*, Cataloghi della Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze, ed. Miklós Boskovits and Angelo Tartuferi (Florence, 2003), 94–98; and for further additions to the catalog, see Angelo Tartuferi, "Grifo di Tancredi," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 83 vols. (Rome, 1960–2015), 59(2002):397–399. For the panel at Oxford, see J. Byam Shaw, *Paintings by Old Masters at Christ Church Oxford* (London, 1967), 29.

[4] Grifo painted the stories of Christ to the sides of a half-length Madonna and Child, now in the Timken Art Gallery in San Diego; see Laurence B. Kanter, in

*Timken Museum of Art: European Works of Art, American Paintings and Russian Icons in the Putnam Foundation Collection* (San Diego, 1996), 35–41. The present writer has conjectured that the two artists also worked side by side in the fragmentary *Maestà* in the church of San Remigio in Florence. See also Ada Labriola, “Lo stato degli studi su Cimabue e un libro recente,” *Arte cristiana* 88 (2000): 352 n. 51.

[5] On the Master of Santa Cecilia, cf. Richard Offner and Miklós Boskovits, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 1, *The St. Cecilia Master and His Circle*, new ed. (Florence, 1986), 21–148. For the master’s identification with Gaddo Gaddi, see Monica Bietti, “Gaddo Gaddi: Un’ipotesi,” *Arte cristiana* 71 (1983): 49–52; Miklós Boskovits, “Un nome per il maestro del Trittico Horne,” *Saggi e memorie di storia dell’arte* 27 (2003): 57–70.

Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011)

March 21, 2016

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1960     *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*. Edited by Alberto Maria Ghisalberti. 79+ vols. Rome, 1960+: 59(2002):387-399.
- 1992     Chiodo, Sonia. “Grifo di Tancredi.” In *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon: die bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker* Edited by Günther Meissner. 83+ vols, Munich and Leipzig, 1983+: 62(2009):129-131.
- 1999     Bagemihl, Rolf. “Some Thoughts About Grifo di Tancredi of Florence and a Little-Known Panel at Volterra.” *Arte Cristiana* 87 (1999): 413-426.
- 2016     Boskovits, Miklós. *Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. The Systematic Catalogue of the National Gallery of Art*. Washington, 2016: 176.

**To cite:** Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011), “Grifo di Tancredi,” *Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/constituent/38613> (accessed April 24, 2024).