

Master of the Washington Coronation

Italian, active first third 14th century

BIOGRAPHY

Michelangelo Muraro first coined the conventional name for this artist in 1969 and gathered under it a group of paintings previously attributed in the main to Paolo Veneziano (Venetian, active 1333 - 1358).[1] Muraro also conjectured that the anonymous master might be identifiable with Marco, brother of Paolo, who, according to a document of 1335, must have been a highly esteemed painter at this time, though none of his works have come down to us under his name. However, judging from his stylistic characteristics, the anonymous Master of the Washington Coronation must have belonged to a generation preceding that of Paolo and his brother. Fulvio Zuliani's (1979) proposal, identifying the anonymous master instead with Martino, father of the two brothers and also a painter, cannot be excluded.[2] Unfortunately, none of the works of Martino da Venezia have come down to us, and his identification with the Master of the Washington Coronation therefore remains pure conjecture. Yet the existence of some link between the artistic formation of Paolo Veneziano and the Master of the Washington Coronation seems probable, even if it remains uncertain whether the link in question were one of kinship or apprenticeship, or mere influence.

What can be maintained with some certainty is that the name-piece of the group—the panel discussed here, with a date of 1324—indicates the phase of the painter's full maturity, although his career must have begun well beforehand, probably even going back to the final years of the thirteenth century. Works such as the Madonna no. 7212 in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow or the cycle of frescoes in the church of San Zan Degolà in Venice (although the latter attribution is still disputed) must date to the years around 1300 and testify to the fact that the artist had already established a reputation by the turn of the century. We can conclude, therefore, that the Master of the Washington Coronation was an exponent of the generation whose greatest representatives were Giotto (Florentine, c. 1265 - 1337) and Pietro Cavallini in central Italy.

Though probably trained in his hometown in contact with artists such as the Master of the Cappella Dotto, or the anonymous master of the altar-frontal in the basilica of San Giusto in Trieste,[3] he shows particular susceptibility to the classicizing

tendencies of the so-called Palaeologan Renaissance. The period of his activity, during which he accepted in an ever more pronounced manner the ideals of courtly elegance and rhythmic complexity of the Western Gothic, extended to the third decade of the fourteenth century or shortly after. Apart from satisfying the artistic needs of his own city, the Master of the Washington Coronation produced works for various other cities in the Veneto (such as Caorle, where he painted an iconostasis),^[4] or those of northern Emilia or the Dalmatian coast culturally linked to Venice, such as Forlì or Split (Spalato).^[5]

[1] Cf. Michelangelo Muraro, *Paolo da Venezia* (Milan, 1969), 29–32. Viktor Nikiti Lazarev, “Review of *La pittura veneziana del Trecento* by R. Pallucchini,” *The Art Bulletin* 48 (1966): 120–121, linked the Washington Coronation with a group of other paintings and attributed them to an anonymous artist more archaic in style than Paolo and conjectured that he might have been Paolo’s master.

[2] Fulvio Zuliani, “Tommaso da Modena,” in *Tomaso da Modena: Catalogo*, ed. Luigi Menegazzi (Treviso, 1979), 77–79.

[3] Commenting on the panel in Trieste, Rodolfo Pallucchini (1964) spoke of an anonymous work of “fundamental byzantinism” influenced by Paolo Veneziano. The dating to the second quarter of the fourteenth century that Pallucchini suggested (and that Michelangelo Muraro [1965] accepted) seems to me too late: the painting might, I believe, still fall into the latter years of the thirteenth century and reveals the influence not of Paolo but of Palaeologan art. See Rodolfo Pallucchini, ed., *La pittura veneziana del Trecento* (Venice, 1964), 67 and figs. 225–226; Michelangelo Muraro, *Paolo da Venezia* (Milan, 1969), 141. For the Master of the Cappella Dotto, see Giovanni Valagussa, “Il Maestro della Cappella Dotto,” in *Pittura a Milano dall’Alto Medioevo al Tardogotico*, ed. Mina Gregori (Milan, 1997), 199–200.

[4] On the panels that originally formed part of the iconostasis in the cathedral of Caorle and sometimes are cited under the name of the Master of Caorle, see Mauro Lucco, “Maestro di Caorle,” in *La Pittura nel Veneto: Il Trecento*, ed. Mauro Lucco, 2 vols. (Milan, 1992), 2:537; Carla Travi, “Il Maestro del trittico di Santa Chiara: Appunti per la pittura veneta di primo Trecento,” *Arte cristiana* 80 (1992): 96 n. 57; Carla Travi, “Su una recente storia della pittura del Veneto nel Trecento,” *Arte cristiana* 82 (1994): 70–72.

[5] Examples are the *Crucifixion* in the Serbian Orthodox church at Split and the fragments with figures of saints in the Pinacoteca of Forlì. See, respectively, Kruno Prijatelj, “Nota su una *Crocifissione* vicina a Paolo Veneziano a Split (Spalato),” *Arte veneta* 40 (1986): 148–150; and Giovanni Valagussa, “Prima di Giotto,” in *Il Trecento riminese: Maestri e botteghe tra Romagna e Marche*, ed. Daniele Benati (Milan, 1995), 77–78.

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