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Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

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Andrea di Bartolo
Sienese, active from 1389 - died 1428

Madonna of Humility, The Blessing Christ, Two Angels, and a Donor [obverse]

c. 1380/1390

tempera on panel
painted surface: 28.4 × 17 cm (11 3/16 × 6 11/16 in.)
overall: 30 × 18.6 × 0.8 cm (11 13/16 × 7 5/16 × 5/16 in.)
framed: 52.1 x 34.3 x 7.6 cm (20 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 3 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.20.a

ENTRY

The painting belongs to an uncommon genre of Byzantine origin of devotional icons painted on both sides. [1] It is a simplified version of the portable diptych in which, as in the example discussed here, the Madonna and Child was usually represented on the obverse, and Christ on the Cross on the reverse. [2] The peculiarity here, however, is the presentation of the Virgin according to the iconographic type of the Madonna of Humility: Mary is humbly seated on the ground instead of on a throne. Yet at the same time she is venerated as Queen of Heaven by two angels who flank her in flight, and blessed from above by the half-length figure of Christ, who appears in a trefoil, surrounded by seraphim. [3] On the reverse of the panel is an isolated image of Christ on the Cross, unattended by the usual figures of mourners, soldiers, or onlookers who allude to the event of the Crucifixion. That the image was intended as a panel for private devotion is

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underlined by the presence of the minuscule figure of the female donor kneeling in front of the Madonna to the right; some scholars have identified her as a nun. [4]

At the time of the panel's first emergence in Florence in the 1920s, art historians expressed rather disparate views about it. Roberto Longhi, in a manuscript expertise probably dating to the years 1925–1930, [5] considered the image of the Madonna likely a work of a close follower of Simone Martini (Sienese, active from 1315; died 1344), identifiable with Lippo Memmi (Sienese, active 1317/1347) or with Simone's brother Donato, whereas that of Christ on the Cross on the reverse seemed to him a later addition by a painter close to Paolo di Giovanni Fei (Sienese, c. 1335/1345 - 1411) dating to the final years of the Trecento. [6] In 1934, similar expertises were sought from other leading art historians of the time. F. Mason Perkins, followed by Giuseppe Fiocco and Wilhelm Suida, attributed it to Andrea di Bartolo; Bernard Berenson also accepted this attribution. For his part Adolfo Venturi came to the conclusion that it was an autograph work of Simone Martini, while Raimond van Marle spoke of a "close follower" of Simone, probably identifiable with his brother Donato. [7] The catalogs of the National Gallery of Art (1941, 1959) accepted Longhi's proposal. [8] In a polemical article (unpublished), Richard Offner contradicted this, preferring to leave the panel in anonymity. [9] George Martin Richter (1941) also rejected Lippo Memmi's hand, arguing for an attribution to Andrea di Vanni (Sienese, c. 1330 - 1413) in a youthful phase, when he was still working in Lippo's shop. [10] Charles Seymour and Hanns Swarzenski (1946) also placed the attribution to Lippo in doubt. [11] Nonetheless, Andrea di Bartolo's responsibility for the execution of both sides of the painting was gradually recognized, beginning with Millard Meiss (1936, 1951), followed by the catalogs of the Gallery (1965, 1985) and Fern Rusk Shapley (1966). [12] All the more recent contributions to the literature accepted this attribution, with the exception of Gaudenz Freuler (2009), who considered the image of the Madonna of Humility as executed by Bartolo di Fredi, possibly assisted by his son Andrea di Bartolo. [13]

The date of the painting, however, has given rise to considerable divergence of opinion. It was thought to have been executed by Memmi as early as c. 1330–1340 in the first catalog of the Gallery (1941). [14] But in the later catalogs of 1965 and 1975 and in Shapley 1966 it was dated to c. 1415. [15] In the meantime Meiss (1951) supported a dating to c. 1400, while Hendrik W. van Os (1969, 1974) offered the view that it must have been painted before the end of the fourteenth century. [16] Shapley (1979), returning to the question, concluded that "the date may be in the 1380s." [17] For his part Creighton E. Gilbert (1984) seems to have favored a later

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dating: around 1394. [18] Freuler (1987), van Os (1989, 1990), and Daniele Benati (1999) accepted this hypothesis, as well as Gilbert's suggestion that the painting was commissioned by the Dominicans of the monastery of Corpus Domini in Venice, consecrated in 1394, and connected its execution to that year. [19] In 1994, however, van Os seemed to have abandoned this position, preferring a dating to c. 1415. [20] Bearing in mind that the connection of the panel with the Dominican nuns of Venice is purely conjectural and seems contradicted by the fact that the donor in our panel is not dressed in the habit of that order, [21] the *terminus a quo* of 1394 should now be excluded from discussion of our panel.

Some help in establishing the panel's date can, however, be derived from an analysis of its punched decoration, undertaken by Mojmir S. Frinta (1998). [22] This scholar identified the presence in our panel of some punches already used in paintings produced in the shop of Bartolo di Fredi, as well as in youthful paintings by Andrea: I refer in particular to the polyptych in the museum at Buonconvento, probably dating to 1397, [23] and various paintings that art historians have unanimously assigned to Andrea's initial phase. [24] But especially significant to me are the stylistic affinities with works by Bartolo dating to the mid-1380s or shortly after, in which signs of Andrea's assistance can, I believe, be glimpsed: *Adoration of the Magi*, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena, to which the *Adoration of the Cross* now divided between the museums of Altenburg and Charlottesville formerly belonged, [25] and *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, probably part of the polyptych executed by Bartolo's shop for the church of Sant'Agostino at San Gimignano in 1388. [26] In these paintings the harsher features of Bartolo's style are softened, the swirling calligraphy is attenuated, and the emotional tensions give way to a rather somnolent tranquility which—in conjunction with the close morphological affinities—suggests Andrea's participation. The Christ on the Cross of the reverse, though more hasty in execution, recalls the similar passage in the *Adoration of the Cross*, no. 50 in the Lindenau-Museum in Altenburg, of which it seems indeed a simplified version. The Madonna of Humility of the obverse, on the other hand, with its minute, exquisitely chased detailing, reveals close affinities especially with the figures of the mothers in the *Massacre* in Baltimore, [27] suggesting it was a work realized by Andrea, when he was still working in his father's shop.

It may be added that the composition of the *Madonna of Humility* evidently enjoyed considerable success. The artist replicated it many times. [28] The example in the Gallery is likely to be one of the earliest, together with the signed

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version published by Berenson, its whereabouts now unknown. [29] In the later versions the figure of Mary seems to expand to fill the painted surface, which is enclosed within an arch decorated on the inside with cusping and sometimes with figures of the Angel of the Annunciation and the Virgin Annunciate placed in medallions in the two upper corners. [30] At the same time, the gold-tooled carpet that covers the floor is replaced by a flowering meadow; the design becomes more simplified, while the line of the hem of the Virgin's cloak is wavier; and an increased number of angels surround the protagonists. [31] Such late Gothic developments, however, are characteristic of far later phases in the artist's career. Here he is still strongly influenced by the figurative formulae of his father. This is evident both in the painting's ornamental decoration and in its stylistic features, both indebted to Trecento models.

Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011)

March 21, 2016

NOTES

[1] See Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Bilateral Icons," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Aleksandr Petrovich Kazhdan (New York, 1980), 2:980.

[2] This type of panel, painted on both sides, is exemplified by no. 1062B in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, a work by Francesco di Vannuccio, though there the two sides are reversed: *Christ on the Cross Flanked by Mourners and Devotees* is painted on what can be considered the obverse, while *Madonna and Child with Saints*, painted on glass, is on the reverse; Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde*, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 35–37. According to Laurence Kanter's plausible hypothesis (written communication), the Washington panel was originally a reliquary, accompanied on the obverse by roundels containing relics.

[3] While the presence of angels in adoration alludes to the theme of the *regina coeli*, the image of the *Christus Logos* probably refers to that of the Incarnation; cf. Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton, 1951), 153–154; Hendrik W. van Os, *Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der sienesischen Malerei: 1300–1450* (The Hague, 1969), 120–121.

[4] Creighton Gilbert (1984) identified the donor as a Dominican nun. From this he inferred that the painting was commissioned by a monastery of this order; various scholars accepted his argument, but Victor Schmidt (2005)

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refuted it, rightly pointing out the impossibility of recognizing a member of the Dominican order in a lady "wearing a long, white headdress which also functions as a cloak." The figure can more plausibly be identified as a matron or widow. See Creighton E. Gilbert, "Tuscan Observants and Painters in Venice, ca. 1400," in *Interpretazioni veneziane: Studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Michelangelo Muraro*, ed. David Rosand (Venice, 1984), 109–120; Victor M. Schmidt, *Painted Piety: Panel Paintings for Personal Devotion in Tuscany, 1250–1400* (Florence, 2005), 265 n. 82.

[5] Roberto Longhi, who had been a consultant of Contini at least since the early 1920s, presumably wrote his expertise, in Italian, immediately after Contini's purchase of the panel c. 1925.

[6] Longhi, in his letter to Contini, declared that the *Madonna of Humility* "è senza dubbio una vera e propria gemma della pittura senese della prima metà del Trecento al seguito immediato di Simone Martini" ("is without a doubt a true and proper gem of Sienese painting of the first half of the thirteenth century in the immediate following of Simone Martini"). The painting, in his view, had been painted by the same hand as the panel with a similar Madonna of Humility in the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Muzeen zu Berlin (no. 1072), then attributed to Lippo Memmi, or to Simone's little-known brother, Donato Martini. According to Longhi, the image of Christ on the Cross on the back of the panel was painted by an entirely different hand, some forty years after the Madonna.

[7] See copies of the expertises in the NGA curatorial files. Only Wilhelm Suida's is dated, to August 1935.

[8] National Gallery of Art, *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1941), 133–134; National Gallery of Art, *Paintings and Sculpture from the Samuel H. Kress Collection* (Washington, DC, 1959), 34 repro.

[9] Richard Offner's long article, written on the occasion of the opening of the National Gallery of Art, only got as far as galley proofs (in August 1941) but was never in fact published. Copies of the proofs are kept in the archive of the Corpus of Florentine Painting, Florence. Commenting on cat. 1, Offner wrote, "The attribution to Lippo can only be accounted a piece of ingenuous wishfulness. The panel is not by Lippo simply because it shares none of his essential artistic characteristics.... It lacks...any suggestion of Lippo's facade-like, immobilized composition.... How vague...are the bases of attribution may be judged from the wide discrepancy of opinion on the authorship... between Lippo and Donato (the latter being as shadowy a figure as is known to art history)...and Andrea di Bartolo. I should incline to agree with the tendency of the latter opinion, if it implied a later dating than Lippo's, but one must stand resolutely against the attribution."

[10] George Martin Richter, "The New National Gallery in Washington," *The*

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Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 78 (1941): 177.

[11] Charles Seymour and Hanns Swarzenski, "A Madonna of Humility and Quercia's Early Style," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, no. 30 (1946): 139.

[12] Millard Meiss, "The Madonna of Humility," *The Art Bulletin* 18 (1936): 437, n. 8; Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton, 1951), 22–23, n. 34; National Gallery of Art, *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1965), 7; National Gallery of Art, *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue* (Washington, DC, 1985), 18; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XIII–XV Century* (London, 1966), 66, 67.

[13] After the delivery of the present text to the Gallery, I realized with pleasure that Gaudenz Freuler, in *La collezione Salini: Dipinti, sculture e oreficerie dei secoli XII, XIII, XIV e XV*, ed. Luciano Bellosi, 2 vols. (Florence, 2009), 1:252, also considered Madonna of Humility, The Blessing Christ, Two Angels, and a Donor [obverse] a painting executed not later than the 1390s. On the other hand, I am unable to see in it any trace of Bartolo's hand, even if the young Andrea was evidently influenced by his father's style.

[14] National Gallery of Art, *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1941), 133–134.

[15] National Gallery of Art, *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1965), 7; National Gallery of Art, *European Paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue* (Washington, DC, 1975), 10; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XIII–XV Century* (London, 1966), 67.

[16] Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton, 1951), 22–23, n. 34; Hendrik W. van Os, *Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der sienesischen Malerei: 1300–1450* (The Hague, 1969), 18, 120, 187; Hendrik W. van Os, "Andrea di Bartolo's Madonna of Humility," *M: A Quarterly Review of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts* 6, no. 3 (1974): 21, 25.

[17] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:3.

[18] Gilbert believed that the woman represented as donor was a Dominican nun, who appeared in "an 'undress' costume, without the outer elements worn in public," that is, the black mantle. "Hence it is very attractive to suggest [he continued] that the Washington panels [the images painted on obverse and reverse] are the survivors of the very set blessed by Cardinal Dominici in 1394, at the [consecration of the] new observant convent in Venice." Creighton E. Gilbert, "Tuscan Observants and Painters in Venice, ca. 1400," in *Interpretazioni veneziane: Studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Michelangelo Muraro*, ed. David Rosand (Venice, 1984), 114–116. Some later

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authors considered this hypothesis, advanced by the scholar "with caution," almost a demonstrable fact.

[19] Gaudenz Freuler, "Andrea di Bartolo, Fra Tommaso d'Antonio Cafarini, and Sienese Dominicans in Venice," *The Art Bulletin* 69 (1987): 577; Hendrik W. van Os et al., eds., *The Early Sienese Paintings in Holland*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Florence, 1989), 29, 32; Hendrik W. van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces 1215–1460: Form, Content, Function*, vol. 2, *1344–1460* (Groningen, 1990), 76; Daniele Benati, in *Da Bernardo Daddi a Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Maria Pia Mannini (Florence, 1999), 56.

[20] Hendrik W. van Os et al., *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300–1500*, trans. Michael Hoyle (London, 1994), 74.

[21] See note 4 above.

[22] Mojmir Svatopluk Frinta, *Punched Decoration on Late Medieval Panel and Miniature Painting* (Prague, 1998), 44, 48, 224, 230, 351, 479.

[23] Sources mention the fragmentary polyptych now in the Museo d'arte sacra della Val d'Arbia at Buonconvento as an altarpiece signed by Andrea di Bartolo and also furnished with a fragmentary date that could still be deciphered in the second half of the nineteenth century as 1397; Serena Padovani, in Serena Padovani and Bruno Santi, *Buonconvento, museo d'arte sacra della Val d'Arbia* (Genoa, 1981), 23–25. There is now no trace of the inscription, but the proposed reading of the date is quite compatible with the stylistic features of the work.

[24] We may cite as paintings belonging to Andrea's debut the Stories of Saint Galgano now divided between the Museo Nazionale in Pisa and the National Gallery in Dublin; the altarpiece in Buonconvento (see above note 23); and the portable triptychs in the Pinacoteca Nazionale of Siena and the National Gallery in Prague. See, respectively, Enzo Carli, *Il Museo di Pisa* (Pisa, 1974), 61–62; Homan Potterton, *Illustrated Summary Catalogue of Paintings* (Dublin, 1981), 6; Piero Torriti, *La Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena*, vol. 1, *I dipinti dal XII al XV secolo* (Genoa, 1977), 203; Olga Pujmanová, *Italienische Tafelbilder des Trecento in der Nationalgalerie Prag* (Berlin, 1984), pl. 20.

[25] Wolfgang Loseries, in *Maestri senesi e toscani nel Lindenau–Museum di Altenburg*, ed. Miklós Boskovits and JohannesTripps (Siena, 2008), 66–72.

[26] Gaudenz Freuler, *Bartolo di Fredi Cini: Ein Beitrag zur sienesischen Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Disentis, 1994), 260–272.

[27] Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, no. 37.1018; Federico Zeri, *Italian Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery*, ed. Ursula E.M. Cracken, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1976), 1:48–50.

[28] Hendrik W. van Os, *Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der sienesischen*

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Malerei: 1300–1450 (The Hague, 1969), 187–188, figs. 62–74, cited and reproduced several versions of the composition. One of them, however, formerly belonging to the Stoclet collection in Brussels (fig. 66), is of dubious authenticity.

[29] Bernard Berenson, "Lost Sienese Trecento Paintings, 4," *International Studio* 98, no. 404 (1931): 30–31.

[30] As in the panel signed by Andrea, formerly in the Ehrich Gallery in New York. See Hendrik W. van Os, *Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der sienesischen Malerei: 1300–1450* (The Hague, 1969), fig. 67.

[31] Hendrik W. van Os, *Marias Demut und Verherrlichung in der sienesischen Malerei: 1300–1450* (The Hague, 1969), figs. 62, 63, as well as the panel formerly with Moretti in Florence: Daniele Benati, in *Da Bernardo Daddi a Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Maria Pia Mannini (Florence, 1999), 56–61.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support (contrary to Shapley 1966, 1979) is a single piece of wood, with a vertical grain and about 1 cm thick, painted on both sides. [1] The panel has a slight convex warp relative to the obverse. It has been cut down along its upper edge. The top of the original gable is truncated, and in order to make the outer shape rectangular, triangular insets were added on both sides (approximately 1.5 cm on the top and 3 cm on the vertical edge on the left, and 1 cm along the top and 2 cm on the vertical edge on the right, as seen from the front). The original engaged frame has been lost and replaced by a modern one.

The painting was executed on the usual gesso ground, over which a thin red bole was applied in the gilded areas of the obverse. The reverse was silver gilt. [2] An old photograph [fig. 1] [3] shows that the painted surface on the obverse ended approximately 1 cm from the lateral and lower edges and that the unpainted area at the sides of the gable was at that time gessoed. A later photo, probably from c. 1940/1941, proves that in the meantime the upper corners had been regilded. [4] On the reverse the painted area extends to the edges of the panel. The x-radiograph [fig. 2] shows impressions of three roundels on each side of the gable, the upper pair cropped in half at the top of the panel. This is evidence that the panel functioned as a reliquary, containing in its now lost engaged frame seven circular cavities (allowing for one cut off at the top of the gable) to receive relics. No underdrawing was found during an infrared examination (Vidicon), [5] but incised lines mark the placement of the principal figures. A green undermodeling is

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visible beneath the flesh of the figures on both the obverse and the reverse. The painted surface of the obverse is fairly well preserved, with some inpainting in the donor's robe; some small, scattered paint losses; and some abrasion in the Madonna's robe. On the reverse the silver gilded area is heavily rubbed and the image itself is damaged by scratches, paint losses, and wormholes.

TECHNICAL COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Archival photograph, c. 1927, Andrea di Bartolo, *Madonna of Humility, the Blessing Christ, Two Angels, and a Donor*, c. 1380/1390, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image: Fondazione Roberto Longhi, Florence

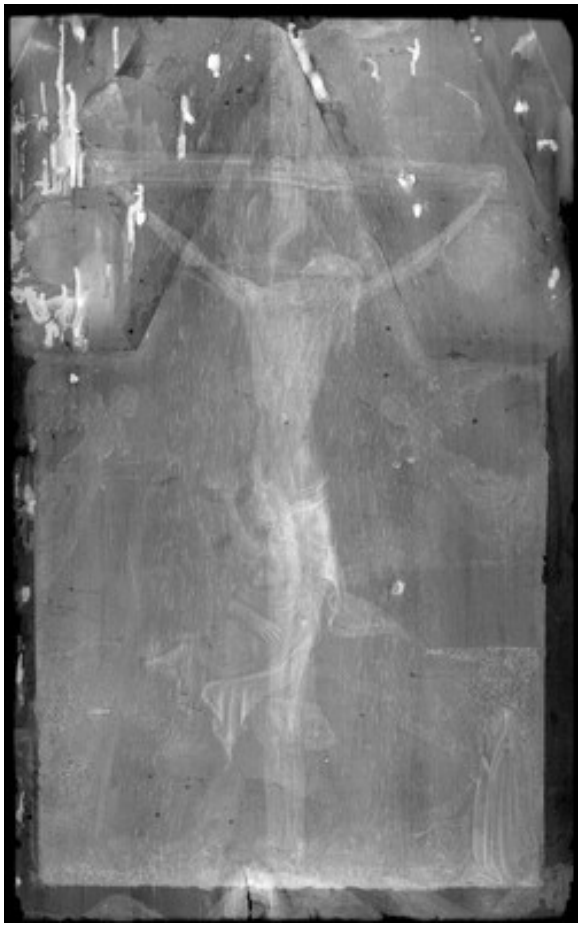

fig. 2 X-radiograph, Andrea di Bartolo, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1415, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

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TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Stephen Pichetto examined this picture in 1940 in response to a request made to him by the Gallery's then chief curator, John Walker. Pichetto was the restorer for the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and he was specifically asked to clear up whether the *Madonna of Humility* and the *Christ on the Cross* were painted on the same panel. Pichetto's notes indicate that he determined that the support was one piece of wood, painted on both sides. (Walker's letter of October 1940 and Pichetto's documentation are in NGA curatorial files.) It is unclear why Fern Rusk Shapley stated that the paintings were executed on separate panels. See Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XIII–XV Century* (London, 1966), 66, 67; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:3–4. The painting was examined again in 1988, 2008, and 2011, and it was consistently determined to be one panel; see report dated August 31, 1988, in NGA conservation files.

[2] Using x-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF), the NGA scientific research department analyzed the gilding, and it was found to be silver (see forthcoming report in NGA conservation files).

[3] This photo, probably taken sometime before the acquisition of the painting by Samuel H. Kress in 1927 (see Provenance), belonged to Roberto Longhi and is now in the archive of the Fondazione Roberto Longhi in Florence.

[4] During his 1940 examination of the painting, Pichetto removed the modern engaged frame and made sketches of the placement of the image on its wooden support, indicating also the pieces of new wood added to the panel in the upper corners (see NGA curatorial files).

[5] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Hamamatsu c/1000-03 Vidicon camera.

PROVENANCE

Private collection, Italy, c. 1920.[1] (Alessandro Contini, Rome [from 1930, Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi]); sold October 1927 to Samuel H. Kress [1863-1955], New York;[2] transferred 1929 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York; gift 1939 to NGA.

[1] In his expertise dated 8 August 1934, commissioned from him by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation (copy in the NGA curatorial files), F. Mason Perkins states that he had seen the painting for the first time in an Italian private collection fifteen years

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earlier.

[2] The bill of sale for sculpture, maiolica, furniture, antique velvet, and several paintings, including a "Madonna and Child by Lippo Memmi...given to Donato Martini by some experts," is dated 5 October 1927 (copy in NGA curatorial files).

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