The painting shows the Madonna seated frontally on an elaborate, curved, two-tier, wooden throne of circular plan. [1] She is supporting the blessing Christ child on her left arm according to the iconographic tradition of the Hodegetria. [2] Mary is wearing a red mantle over an azure dress. The child is dressed in a salmon-colored tunic and blue mantle; he holds a red scroll in his left hand, supporting it on his lap. [3] In the upper corners of the panel, at the height of the Virgin's head, two medallions contain busts of two archangels [fig. 1] [fig. 2], with their garments surmounted by loroi and with scepters and spheres in their hands. [4]

It was Bernard Berenson (1921) who recognized the common authorship of this work and Enthroned Madonna and Child and who concluded—though admitting he had no specialized knowledge of art of this cultural area—that they were probably works executed in Constantinople around 1200. [5] These conclusions retain their authority and continue to stir debate. Of the various alternative proposals
expressed thus far, only those that have considered them the products of a thirteenth-century Roman or Venetian painter have been definitively abandoned. [6] Berenson’s opinion of the purely Byzantine figurative culture of the two panels still commands wide support, [7] even though the dating of the paintings is in general placed slightly later, c. 1250 or within the second half of the thirteenth century. [8] George Martin Richter’s view that the master who painted them was a Greek active at the time of the Norman kings in Sicily remains isolated. [9] But a Sicilian origin is still supported by those scholars who follow the opinion of Viktor Lazarev that the Kahn and Mellon Madonnas were painted in Sicily during the last quarter of the thirteenth century, by artists who had come from Byzantium or by their local disciples. [10] Some authorities on Byzantine art doubt, however, that the two Madonnas in the National Gallery of Art could have been executed by masters of Byzantine origin. [11] In their view, also endorsed by some experts of Italian medieval painting, the characteristics of the two panels presuppose patrons with liturgical needs, iconographic precedents, and cultural traditions consistent with those of the Latin West. Further, they have asserted that the two paintings probably were executed in Tuscany. [12] Other scholars have supported the thesis that the two panels were painted in Cyprus or in Thessaloniki. [13]

Opinions thus vary widely regarding the cultural origin of this painting and the Enthroned Madonna and Child, but significant convergences can be ascertained on some points. It seems generally recognized, for example, that the Kahn Madonna is the earlier of the two images and that it was painted by an artist trained in Byzantium, although possibly at work far from his homeland, and for patrons of Western culture. The close stylistic affinities between the two panels are also commonly recognized, even if the Mellon Madonna is often indicated as the work of a different hand. In more recent years, however, various scholars have again proposed their common authorship. [14]

The sudden appearance of the two panels in tandem and their common provenance from a small Spanish town have been considered strange; [15] indeed, their alleged provenance from a church in Calahorra is authenticated, as far as I know, by no document. On the other hand, the fact that at least in 1912 the two paintings were reported together on the Madrid art market supports a Spanish provenance or at least makes it probable that they were purchased in Spain, perhaps even from the same owner. It would seem strange, in any case, to invent a provenance from Calahorra for paintings allegedly executed by Cimabue or by Cavallini. Various reasons have been adduced to cast doubt on whether both
panels could have been executed by the same artist. Roger Fry was the first to emphasize the different structure and pictorial treatment of the two thrones. [16] Many years later, Hans Belting cited the results of technical examinations by Ann Hoenigswald in support of his thesis that “most of the analogies which link the Mellon Madonna to the Kahn Madonna must...be interpreted as a deliberate attempt by the artist of the former to imitate the latter or a similar work.” [17] Several scholars have accepted Belting’s conclusions, although it is fair to say that, in order to exclude the use of different technical procedures by the same painter, one would first need the evidence of systematic analyses—hitherto unavailable—of the pictorial technique of a particular painter in various phases of his career. How can we exclude a priori the possibility of an artist having developed, or having experimented with, new solutions, or different technical procedures, in the course of his career? [18] While we may freely admit that there are some technical differences in the execution of the two Madonnas in the Gallery, we cannot infer from this that they are the work of different hands. Still less can any such conviction dispense us from a careful stylistic analysis of the two images.

The claim is made occasionally that modern restoration drastically altered the Mellon Madonna. A comparison of photographs taken c. 1920 with those taken in more recent times proves indeed that modern conservation measures have been extensive. Yet many parts of the painting that are still clearly legible disclose close resemblances with *Enthroned Madonna and Child*. The affinities concern not only the formal treatment of such details as the faces of the two images of Mary [fig. 3] [fig. 4] or the delicately poetic interpretation of the main personages, but also the high, sustained qualitative level of the execution of both panels, the skilful use of chrysography to articulate and give relief to the bodies, [19] and some peculiar incongruities in the perspective of the thrones. In the Kahn Madonna the artist proposes a rectangular wooden throne with a very elaborate structure and tries to make it illusionistically credible, not only by the three-dimensional modeling of the individual components but also by making the right rear leg visible through the perforations. But he fails to remove incongruities in perspective: while the throne itself is seen from the left, the four legs are represented as if seen from the other side. In the Mellon Madonna, apart from the painter's difficulty in convincingly rendering the foreshortening of the circular seat, it may be noted once again that the two front legs are seen from opposite directions: one from the left, the other from the right. It is difficult to think that all this is merely the consequence of the painter’s effort to follow his model, not least because the Mellon Madonna is decidedly not a copy of the other. The two images are in fact different in type and
perhaps also in function. Their common provenance seems to suggest that they were executed for the same patron but belong to two different phases of the artist’s career and were intended to satisfy different needs. [20]

Of the comparisons hitherto proposed, the one indicated by Otto Demus, of the Madonna of the Deesis in the southern gallery of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul [fig. 5], a mosaic probably executed immediately after the Byzantine reconquest of Constantinople in 1261, [21] seems particularly significant in support of the Constantinopolitan culture of the artist of the two paintings. However, other images too, whether in the form of frescoes, panels, or miniatures, [22] seem to suggest a similar origin of the two Madonnas, the execution of which is unlikely to have been much later than the Deesis in Hagia Sophia. None of the works hitherto compared with the Byzantine panels in the Gallery in fact seems so close to them as this mosaic in Hagia Sophia, both in facial type and in the extreme delicacy of the modeling; this close kinship represents, in my view, the confirmation—despite frequent denials—of the common authorship of the two paintings. [23]

It is understandable that some decorative forms used in the panels—for example, the elaborate incised decoration of the halos of the Kahn Madonna and the type of throne—should have suggested the artist’s contact with Tuscan figurative culture. But closer analysis will show that the decorative motifs of the halos, [24] as well as the wooden thrones of the Washington paintings, are well known in Byzantine art. The genre of the Madonna and Child Enthroned on a monumental scale, particularly popular in thirteenth-century Tuscany, was also well known in contemporary central and southern Italian painting and in that of the Venetian and Adriatic area. [25] Influenced, in its realistic elements, by icons imported from the various centers of Byzantine art and by products of so-called Crusader art, [26] these large images were at times commissioned from artists of Byzantine origin and training: this seems to me the case of the Madonna in the Basilica of San Nicola at Bari. [27] It seems plausible to suggest a similar origin for the Kahn and Mellon Madonnas, though these are distinguished from the icon in Bari by the particular accomplishment of their execution and by their stylistic kinship with works having at least a probable Constantinopolitan origin. In conclusion, therefore, while admitting that the origin of these paintings will probably long remain a bone of contention, the present state of our knowledge suggests that they were produced in a workshop culturally bound to Constantinople in years not long before or not long after 1261, the presumed date of the image they most closely resemble, the mosaic in Hagia Sophia.
COMPARATIVE FIGURES

**fig. 1** Detail of left medallion with archangel, Byzantine thirteenth century (possibly from Constantinople), *Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne*, c. 1260/1280, tempera on linden, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

**fig. 2** Detail of right medallion with archangel, Byzantine thirteenth century (possibly from Constantinople), *Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne*, c. 1260/1280, tempera on linden, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection
fig. 3 Detail of Madonna’s face, Byzantine thirteenth century (possibly from Constantinople), *Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne*, c. 1260/1280, tempera on linden, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

fig. 4 Detail of Madonna’s face, Byzantine thirteenth century (possibly from Constantinople), *Enthroned Madonna and Child*, c. 1250/1275, tempera on poplar, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mrs. Otto H. Kahn
NOTES


Osvald Sirén, “A Picture by Pietro Cavallini,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 32 (1918): 44–47, attributed the Kahn Madonna alone to Pietro Cavallini. But since then only Raimond van Marle (1921, 1923, 1932) continued to support the hypothesis that the artist of the two paintings was Roman and associated with a cosmatesque workshop, though Walter Felicetti-Liebenfels (1956) also admitted the possibility that the two panels might have been produced auf römischen Boden. Edward Garrison (1949), on the other hand, did not exclude the possibility that the paintings could have been Venetian in origin. See Raimond van Marle, *La peinture romaine au Moyen-Age* (Strasbourg, 1921), 227–228; Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, vol. 1, *From the 6th until the End of the 13th Century* (The Hague, 1923), 503–505; Raimond van Marle, *Le scuole della pittura italiana*, vol. 1, *Dal vi alla fine del XIII secolo* (The Hague, 1932), 519–523; Walter Felicetti-Liebenfels, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Ikonenmalerei* (Olten, Lausanne, 1956), 61; Edward B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: An Illustrated Index* (Florence, 1949), 44, 48.


[8] Subsequent to van Marle 1921, the great majority of art historians accepted this time span for the execution of the two paintings; only Duveen Pictures 1941 and NGA 1941 gave the date as early thirteenth century or, as in Demus 1958, as the first half of the century. John Walker (1963) reaffirmed the Berensonian date of c. 1200. See Raimond van Marle, La peinture romaine au Moyen-Age (Strasbourg, 1921), 227–228; Duveen Brothers, Duveen Pictures in Public Collections of America (New York, 1941), no. 1; National Gallery of Art, Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture (Washington, DC, 1941), 31; Otto Demus, “Zwei Konstantinopler Marienikonen des 13. Jahrhunderts,” Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft 7 (1958): 87–104; John Walker, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (New York, 1963), 64, 65, 297.


[12] Sergio Bettini (1954) proposed that the artist of both panels was a Florentine mosaicist who had been trained in a Byzantine milieu. Though he considered both panels to have been produced in Constantinople, James H. Stubblebine (1966) detected in them the influence of Duccio. Belting (“Introduzione,” 1982) first proposed that the two paintings were executed in Italy, under the influence of Cimabue and Duccio; later that year (“The ‘Byzantine’ Madonnas”) he conjectured that the Kahn Madonna probably had been executed in the area of Pisa, whereas the Mellon Madonna was the work of a local imitator. Hendrik W. van Os, Dillian Gordon, and Hayden B.J. Maginnis accepted this opinion. Joseph Polzer (1999 and 2002), on the basis of the incised decoration of the halos of the Kahn Madonna, which he thought was derived from the halo ornament of Tuscan paintings of the final


specified, as his source for these doubts. Robin Cormack mentioned these
dvots, presumably found in the Garrison archive, now in the Courtauld
stitute in London, during an apparently unpublished lecture given at
Dumbarton Oaks in 1979. In essence, Belting claimed, “the dealer
Weissberger had fabricated this provenance,” i.e., from Calahorra. What
Belting asserted as a certainty is, however, it seems to me, no more than a
suspicion, although often accepted by other scholars, e.g., Jaroslav Folda,
“The Kahn and Mellon Madonnas: Icon or Altarpiece?” in Byzantine East,
Mouriki (Princeton, 1995), 503; Rebecca W. Corrie, “The Kahn and Mellon
Madonnas and Their Place in the History of the Virgin and Child Enthroned,”
in Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium,
ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2005), 293.

[16] Roger Fry, “Mr Berenson on Medieval Painting,” The Burlington Magazine
[Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne, in comparison with the Kahn
Madonna] seems to be more Byzantine...particularly in the purely linear
treatment of the throne.”

[17] Belting’s later scholarship was published alongside a paper by Ann
Hoenigswald (1982), who listed various disparities she observed in the
respective techniques of the two paintings. In the Kahn Madonna, “the flesh
tones seem to have been built upon an underlying green tone which
provides the deepest shadows. This is not apparent...in the Mellon panel,
where the shadow was mixed into the flesh tone.” Moreover, “the shadow
formed by the folds of the blue robe on the Kahn Madonna is implied by the
chrysography.... In the Mellon panel, however, there is a two-toned system
of a lighter and darker blue juxtaposed with gold outline.” According to
Hoenigswald, therefore, the “comparisons of technique...are strong
indications that the panels were not the work of the same artist.” Hans
Belting, “Introduzione,” in Il medio oriente e l'occidente nell'arte del XIII
secolo, Atti del XXIV congresso internazionale di storia dell'arte, September
10–18, 1979, ed. Hans Belting (Bologna, 1982), 4–5; Hans Belting, “The
‘Byzantine’ Madonnas: New Facts about Their Italian Origin and Some

[18] We do not have at our disposal sufficient data to determine whether, and to
what degree, the technique of a painter of this period could alter in the
course of years or decades.

[19] Though observing differences between the chrysography of the Kahn
Madonna and the Mellon Madonna (in which he detected an “etwas kühlen
Klassizismus” [a somewhat cool classicism], 91), Otto Demus justly
emphasized that both were characterized by a “Formverständnis”

[20] Reflecting on the different functions of the two Madonnas in the National Gallery of Art, Jaroslav Folda (1995) conjectured that the Kahn Madonna was intended as a large processional icon, whereas the other panel might have been “one wing of a large diptych for private or public use.” Folda also confirmed these hypotheses in later contributions, specifying (2002) that the Kahn Madonna “can be easily understood as a large processional icon that could have been placed on a proskynetarion or positioned behind an altar in a Latin church.” Victor M. Schmidt (1996) accepted this proposal, though he did not exclude that the Mellon Madonna might originally have been a self-standing icon. According to Rebecca Corrie (2005), “a panel such as the Mellon Madonna might have been made for private devotion, or even as part of an iconostasis perhaps,” while the Kahn Madonna, in view of its considerable size, “could have functioned in a pair of despotic icons.”


[22] “Selbst wenn die Deesis der Hagia Sophia das einzige erhaltene Konstantinopler Werk dieser Epoche wäre”—rightly observed Demus—“müsste die Konfrontation mit ihr genügen, um den hauptstädtischen
Ursprung der Kahn- wie der Mellon-Madonna zweifelsfrei darzutun” (Even if the Deesis of Hagia Sophia were the only surviving Constantinopolitan work of the period, a comparison with the Kahn and Mellon Madonnas would be enough to unequivocally confirm their origins in the capital). Otto Demus, “Zwei Konstantinopler Marienikon en des 13. Jahrhunderts,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 7 (1958): 97. However, the same scholar listed some other similar works, including the frescoes in the Saint Demetrios Cathedral in Vladimir, Russia (1194–1199), in which he saw the work of both Constantinopolitan masters and their Russian disciples as a kind of anticipation of some aspects of the art developed in the first decades of the thirteenth century. For his part, Hans Belting (1982) cited the Madonna of the Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos and some other later icons dating to the fourteenth century, though it is fair to say that these reveal a stylistic phase a good deal more advanced than the panels in the National Gallery of Art; Hans Belting, “The ’Byzantine’ Madonnas: New Facts about Their Italian Origin and Some Observations on Duccio,” *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982): 10–11. Jaroslav Folda (1995) proposed that “the Mellon Madonna master must have seen a Byzantine example such as that in Paris, Bibl. Nat. ms. gr. 54” and thus used as his model the miniatures of an evangelistary; Jaroslav Folda, “The Kahn and Mellon Madonnas: Icon or Altarpiece?” in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. Doula Mouriki (Princeton, 1995), 504. But, in his view, the image in the Gallery especially had close affinities with some Crusader panel paintings in Cyprus (Madonna and Child and Saint Nicholas with some scenes from his life, both in the Byzantine Museum at Nicosia). For other analogous paintings and miniatures, see Rebecca W. Corrie, “The Kahn and Mellon Madonnas and Their Place in the History of the Virgin and Child Enthroned,” in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2005), 293–303. The present writer finds significant affinities between the two Washington panels and some icons preserved in the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai. These paintings are of uncertain provenance, but they can be assumed to have been executed in the second half of the thirteenth century and in Constantinople, to judge from their very sustained quality of execution and accomplished pictorial technique: I refer in particular to the Archangel Michael, the Archangel Gabriel, and a half-length Madonna in Prayer. See, respectively, Konstantinos A. Manafis, ed., *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine* (Athens, 1990), 170, pl. 41; Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New Haven, 2004), 384–385, no. 240; Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land: From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187–1291* (Cambridge, 2005), 222, fig. 126.

[23] Following Fry 1931 and D’Ancona 1935, the proposition that the two Madonnas might have been produced in the same workshop was explicitly


TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The wooden support consists of two linden (tiglio) boards with vertically aligned grain. The panel has been thinned, and three horizontal battens have been attached to its back. Wooden margins at the top and two sides show that an engaged frame may have formed part of its original structure. The gilding is modern, laid over a red bole with gesso and fabric discontinuous from that beneath the rest of the painting. Although the technique of execution is essentially similar in this painting and in the Kahn Madonna, some discrepancies have been observed in the painting procedure; Ann Hoenigswald (1982) considered this evidence of “a difference in the training or traditions of the artists” who painted them. The painted surface has been extensively damaged along the crackle lines and is generally worn and considerably inpainted. Inpainting can also be observed in particular in the faces, in the child’s hair, in the acorn-shaped decorations at the top of the throne, in the chrysography of the draperies, in the borders and red ground of the medallions, in the green ground plane at the foot of the throne, and along the join between the two boards forming the support (which runs vertically between the figure of the Christ child and the face of the angel to the right). A first treatment of the painting c. 1920, probably including restoration of the wooden support, must have been followed by a further treatment, shortly before 1928.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] The NGA scientific research department analyzed a sample of the wood, using optical microscopy, and found it to be linden (report dated December 26, 1985, NGA conservation files).

[2] Cross-sections of the gilded area and the painted area were analyzed using
light microscopy and scanning electron microscopy to compare the preparatory layers. A layer of glue was found beneath the gilded areas, which is unusual and further indicates that the gold has been replaced. The NGA scientific research department performed the analysis (report dated January 6, 2006, NGA conservation files).


[4] The reproductions that Berenson published in 1921 illustrate the painting in different states. The plate showing the whole image proves its damaged condition, with numerous small lacunae, especially along the edges. This was evidently the painting’s condition at the time it appeared on the Madrid art market in 1912. The detail with the bust of the Madonna and Child, however, documents the result of a subsequent treatment evidently conducted shortly before the publication. On this occasion the gold ground was renewed (leaving the halos without decoration), the faces were retouched, and the decoration on the back of the throne reconstructed. Possibly this was the restoration mentioned in the Duveen Brothers Records on January 3, 1920, according to the information collected in 1986 by Katherine Baetjer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, when the Duveen papers were held by that institution (cf. her letter to Jaroslav Folda of September 16, 1985; copy in NGA curatorial files). By the mid-1920s, by which time Carl Hamilton had returned the painting to Duveen Brothers (see Provenance, note 4), a decision had been made to subject it to a more thorough restoration; it was then that the painting acquired the appearance it still has. The second intervention must have been realized sometime before 1928, for in that year Emilio Cecchi reproduced it in its newly restored state.
(1921): 284-304), and then repeated in the subsequent literature, has sometimes been doubted, but, according to NGA systematic catalogue author Miklós Boskovits, not on any good grounds. (See also the provenance for NGA 1949.7.1.) Writing from Madrid, Dereppe brought the painting to the attention of Duveen Brothers in a letter of 25 May 1918; he commented that he believed it to be by Pietro Cavallini and compared it to the Kahn painting (NGA 1949.7.1) that he had seen in New York. He said the painting at that time was actually with the Goya critic Aureliano de Beruete y Moret; Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 212, box 357, folder 7; copies in NGA curatorial files.

[2] Generally (see Fern Rusk Shapley, Catalogue of the Italian Paintings, 2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1979: 1:96), first Carl Hamilton, and then Duveen Brothers, Inc., are cited as the owners of the painting, but this order needs to be reversed. It is well known that the majority of Hamilton’s paintings came from Duveen. According to Meryle Secrest (Duveen. A Life in Art, New York, 2004: 421, though she confuses the Kahn and Hamilton Madonnas, both with a provenance from Calahorra), Hamilton agreed to purchase NGA 1937.1.1 from Duveen Brothers (who had evidently offered the painting to him) in 1919. This is corroborated by the information on the provenance of the painting collected by Katherine Baetjer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, when the Duveen papers were held by that institution. She reports (in her letter to Jaroslav Folda of 16 September 1985; copy in the NGA curatorial files) that the Mellon Madonna “was purchased ... for the Paris branch of Duveen ... on 11 September 1919, as a work of Cavallino.” Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reels 8–11, boxes 17–26 (New York Stock Books); reels 36 and 37, boxes 105–109 (Paris Stock Books); reel 422 (the X-book, 1910–1927).

[3] Berenson (1921) reported that the panel was in the Hamilton collection; evidently it was one of the paintings from Duveen Brothers with which “Hamilton was furnishing his [New York] city apartment...on credit” (see Edward Fowles, Memories of Duveen Brothers, London, 1976: 127-129). Indeed, Hamilton refers to the painting as in his possession when he writes to Joseph Duveen on 21 December 1921, enclosing Stephen Pichetto’s translation of Berenson 1921; Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 161, box 306 (copy in NGA curatorial files).
[4] In 1921 Hamilton declared he was unable to pay for the paintings furnished to him on credit by Duveen Brothers, Inc., and returned them, at least in large part (Fowles 1976: 127-129). The panel continued to be cited in the literature for many years as belonging to Hamilton, but it must have been returned to the dealer at least by 1923, when it re-appeared in Duveen’s New York stock books (see the letter of Katherine Baetjer cited in note 2). It was during these years that the painting must have been subjected to a new restoration, the result of which is illustrated by the reproduction in Emilio Cecchi, Trecentisti senesi, Rome, 1928: 12. In the English edition of his study (Studies in Medieval Painting, New Haven, 1930: 4-16), Berenson described the panel as having previously belonged to the Hamilton collection.

[5] The original bill of sale is in Records of The A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Subject Files, Box 2, Gallery Archives, NGA; copy in NGA curatorial files. The provenance “from a convent in Calahorra, Spain” (see note 1) is given on the invoice.

EXHIBITION HISTORY


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**Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne**

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Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne
© National Gallery of Art, Washington


fig. 4.


