The image of Mary seated on the ground (*humus*) accentuates the humility of the mother of Jesus, obedient *ancilla Domini* (Lk 1:38). The child’s gesture, both arms raised to his mother’s breast, alludes, in turn, to another theme: the suckling of her child, a very ancient aspect of Marian iconography. In the medieval interpretation, at a time when the Virgin was often considered the symbol of the Church, the motif also alluded to the spiritual nourishment offered by the Church to the faithful. [1] As is common in paintings of the period, the stars painted on Mary’s shoulders allude to the popular etymology of her name. [2] The composition—as it is developed here—presumably was based on a famous model that perhaps had originated in the shop of Bernardo Daddi (active by 1320, died probably 1348). [3] It enjoyed considerable success in Florentine painting of the second half of the fourteenth century and even later: numerous versions of the composition are known, many of which apparently derive directly from this image in the Gallery. [4] This painting, therefore, must have been prominently displayed in a church of the city, and familiar to devotees.

Osvald Sirén (1917) published the panel as an autograph work of Andrea Orcagna, with a dating around 1350. [5] The proposal was widely accepted in the art historical literature, though Richard Offner initially stated (see Lehman 1928), that it...
was the work of an assistant to the artist. [6] Bernard Berenson also at first proposed an attribution to Orcagna (Lehman 1928), but later (1931, 1932, 1936) suggested that the master executed the painting in collaboration with the youthful Jacopo di Cione, Orcagna's brother. [7] The attribution to Jacopo himself was suggested by Hans Dietrich Gronau (1932, 1933); Frederick Antal (1948); Offner (in Shorr 1954 and Offner 1962), though the same scholar in 1965 and 1967 detected the collaboration of assistants in the work; Mirella Levi d’Ancona (1957); Klara Steinweg (1957–1959 and Offner and Steinweg 1969); Miklós Boskovits (1962, 1967, 1975); Alessandro Parronchi (1964); Luisa Marcucci (1965); Barbara Klesse (1967 with admission of workshop assistance); Carl Huter (1970); Marvin Eisenberg (1989); Barbara Deimling (1991, 2000, 2001, 2009); Paul Joannides (1993); Erling Skaug (1994); Mojmir S. Frinta (1998); Daniela Parenti (2001); Costanza Baldini (2003); Angelo Tartuferi (2003, 2004); Carl B. Strehlke (2004); and in Galleria dell’Accademia 2010. [8] However, the painting entered the Kress Collection (NGA 1945) as a joint work by Orcagna and Jacopo, probably at Berenson’s suggestion, [9] and this proposal met with wide support: it was accepted by Millard Meiss (1951); Berenson (1963); NGA (1965, 1968, 1985); Fern Rusk Shapley (1966, but in 1979 she attributed the painting to Jacopo alone, or to Jacopo and his workshop); Deborah Strom (1980); Perri Lee Roberts (1993); Marilena Tamassia (1995); and Gaudenz Freuler (1994, 1997). [10] More recently, the proposal by Pietro Toesca (1951) and Michel Laclotte (1956), who both considered the painting a product of the shop of Andrea Orcagna, has met with some favor, though modified by some to suggest it is substantially an autograph work by Orcagna (Laclotte and Mognetti 1976; Padoa Rizzo 1981; Kreytenberg 1990, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000; Franci 2002; Laclotte and Moench 2005; Freuler 2006). [11]

As for the dating of our panel, its attribution, even partial, to Orcagna implies that it was completed by or not much later than 1368, the year of the artist’s death. Sirén (1917) dated the painting to c. 1350, and Raimond van Marle (1924) substantially accepted the proposal. Gronau (1932), though he too supported an attribution to Jacopo, dated the painting c. 1360–1370. Presumably Berenson (1936) had a similar dating in mind when classifying the panel as a youthful work by Jacopo. So did Meiss (1951), who defined the painting as “probably designed by Orcagna and partly executed by Jacopo di Cione.” [12] Levi d’Ancona (1957) suggested a date of 1360–1365 for the painting; the National Gallery of Art (1965) catalog, c. 1360. Steinweg (1957–1959), in turn, dated the panel to after the death of Orcagna in 1368, and Shapley (1966) to 1370. [13] Some scholars who have argued in favor of Jacopo’s authorship have suggested a dating as late as 1370–1380. Offner and
Steinweg (1965) dated the panel c. 1380, followed by Klesse (1967) and Carl Huter (1970). Huter detected in the painting, unconvincingly, a reflection of the vision of the Nativity of Our Lord attributed to Saint Birgitta (Bridget) of Sweden during her journey to the Holy Land. Reconsidering her earlier opinion, Steinweg (Offner and Steinweg 1965) called the panel “Jacopo di Cione’s latest work.” She was followed by Shapley (1979), according to whom it was painted “perhaps as late as the 1380s,” while Boskovits (1975) proposed a date of c. 1370–1375. [14] The question is complicated by the problems relating to the reconstruction of the youthful activity of Jacopo di Cione, [15] and also by the poor condition of the former Stoclet Madonna, which, with its date of 1362, represents the only secure chronological point of reference for the artist’s initial phase. [16]

The hypothesis that the panel is an autograph work by Orcagna clearly would need to be verified by comparing it with authenticated works of this artist, or works generally recognized as by his hand, in particular the polyptych in the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, Florence, signed and dated 1357; the fresco of the Crucifixion in Santa Marta a Montughi (Florence); [17] the triptych in the Rijksmuseum at Amsterdam, dated 1350; [18] and the polyptych in the Galleria dell’Accademia, [19] Florence, probably dating to 1353. These paintings illustrate the main stages in Orcagna’s career in the years preceding the altarpiece of 1357. His last stylistic phase, in turn, is attested by the frescoes in the former refectory of Santo Spirito in Florence, now Fondazione Salvatore Romano, [20] and the Pentecost triptych in the Galleria dell’Accademia. [21] The presence of the master in the Fondazione Romano frescoes and the Accademia triptych is often judged partial, but even if the involvement of assistants can freely be admitted, especially in the fresco of large dimensions, Andrea’s direct intervention is undoubtedly revealed in various parts of the cycle. [22]

The stylistic features that distinguish the art of Orcagna in the last two decades of his life emerge from a comparative assessment of the above-cited paintings. They document his gradual transition from ample, softly modeled and majestic forms, defined by sharp contours, chiaroscuro effects of great delicacy, and a predilection for the abstract purity of large sweeping expanses of color, to a quite different manner. His late works are characterized indeed by a more marked, even at times brutal, accentuation of the three-dimensionality of bodies. Apparently, after the experience of realizing the sculptures for the tabernacle of Orsanmichele (1352–1360), Orcagna was intent on reproducing in his paintings a two-dimensional simulation of the effect of reliefs that stand out clearly, with smooth and lustrous
surfaces, from a monochromatic, enamel-like ground. His narrative scenes are characterized by an extreme reduction to essentials in composition and by the predominant role of the human figure, whose plasticity is accentuated by being delineated, as if contre-jour, against the gold ground.

The artist of the Madonna in the Gallery, however, does not seem to have aimed at results of this kind. The delicate passages of chiaroscuro confer softness on the flesh parts, while the gradual darkening of the varicolored marble floor on which Mary is sitting subtly accentuates its extension into depth. [23] In particular the foreshortened prayer book in the foreground and the undulating lower hem of the Virgin’s mantle are painted with a deliberate illusionistic effect: the latter in particular projects beyond the front edge of the marble floor that defines the frame of the image, and thus seems to extend into the real space of the spectator. Such illusionistic effects are, as far as his generally recognized works show, alien to Orcagna’s repertoire. In the Gallery panel, moreover, there is no trace of the metallic hardness and sheen of forms. Nor does the drapery show any of the angular folds with deep, sharp-edged undercutting that are usually found in Andrea’s paintings, especially in those dating to the seventh decade, such as the abovementioned triptych of the Pentecost or the triptych of Saint Matthew in the Uffizi, Florence, a work begun by the artist but completed by a workshop assistant after Orcagna’s death in 1368. [24] Only some secondary passages, such as the fluttering angels in the central panel of the Pentecost altarpiece (of which Jacopo’s partial execution has been proposed), [25] recall the more fluid drawing and more relaxed emotional climate of the Gallery panel.

It is in fact in the oeuvre of Jacopo di Cione that our panel finds its closest affinities, in particular with the polyptych painted between 1370 and 1371 for the Florentine church of San Pier Maggiore and with the Florentine Pala della Zecca (now in the Galleria dell’Accademia) for which Jacopo received final payment in 1373. [26] Close relatives of the face of Mary in the Gallery panel seem to me that of the crowned Virgin in the Pala della Zecca [fig. 1] and that of the Madonna of Humility, also now in the Galleria dell’Accademia. [27] The Christ child, in turn, is closely akin to counterparts both in the latter panel and in the versions of the Madonna and Child in the church of Santi Apostoli in Florence and in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. [28] The tiered angels in the upper part of our painting [fig. 2] are almost identical to those in the two gabled panels from the San Pier Maggiore altarpiece [fig. 3], now in the National Gallery in London. The analogies can also be extended to the blessing God the Father [fig. 4], who recalls the Christ in the Pala della Zecca.
[fig. 5] and some of the saints, too, in the polyptych of San Pier Maggiore [fig. 6]. In most of these images the modeling is now impoverished as a result of repeated, over-energetic cleaning, but the fluency of design, spaciousness of composition, and the artist's ever greater attention to three-dimensional effects confirm the attribution of the painting to Jacopo. Typical of Jacopo di Cione, in addition, are such details as Mary’s tapering fingers and the mood of subtle languor that characterizes her face. The pursuit of gracefulness of pose and the delicate chiaroscuro in the modeling strongly suggest that the Gallery panel belongs to a phase preceding the artist's output in the 1380s [30] and was probably produced in the years c. 1370/1375, probably closer to the second of these dates.

Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011)
March 21, 2016
fig. 1 Detail of Mary, Jacopo di Cione, *Coronation of the Virgin (Pala della Zecca)*, 1373, tempera on panel, Galleria dell'Academia, Florence. © Scala/Art Resource, NY

fig. 2 Detail of angels, Jacopo di Cione, *Madonna and Child with God the Father Blessing and Angels*, c. 1370/1375, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
fig. 3 Detail of angels in adoration, Jacopo di Cione, San Pier Maggiore altarpiece, 1370–1371, tempera on panel, National Gallery, London. © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY

fig. 4 Detail of God the Father, Jacopo di Cione, Madonna and Child with God the Father Blessing and Angels, c. 1370/1375, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
fig. 5 Detail of Jesus, Jacopo di Cione, Coronation of the Virgin (Pala della Zecca), 1373, tempera on panel, Galleria dell’Academia, Florence. © Scala/Art Resource, NY

NOTES

[1] On the question, see E. Morsbach, “Lactans (Maria Lactans),” in Marienlexikon, eds. Remigius Bäumer and Leo Scheffczyk, 6 vols. (St. Ottilien, 1991), 3:701–703. That the suckling of the child has a wider significance than the maternity of Mary is revealed not only by the circumstance that the child mainly directs his gaze towards the spectator but also by the inscription MATER OMNIUM (mother of all) on a Madonna of Humility attributed to Roberto d’Oderisio in the church of San Domenico Maggiore in Naples. Cf. Pierluigi Leone De Castris, Arte di corte nella Napoli angioina (Florence, 1986), 377 and fig. 63.

A Madonna of Humility painted on the back of Bernardo Daddi’s Gambier Parry polyptych dated 1348, and now in the Courtauld Institute Art Gallery in London, is the earliest known version of the iconographic theme in Florentine painting. See Frederick Antal, Florentine Painting and Its Social Background: The Bourgeois Republic before Cosimo de’ Medici’s Advent to Power, XIV and XV Centuries (London, 1948), 181. The composition of the London painting is close to that of the panel being discussed here; it suggests that the model, now lost, for Jacopo’s panel can be traced to Daddi’s shop. The fundamental study of the iconography of the Madonna of Humility remains that of Millard Meiss, “The Madonna of Humility,” The Art Bulletin 18 (1936): 435–464; Millard Meiss, Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death (Princeton, 1951), 132–156; see also Gregor Martin Lechner, “Umiltà,” in Marienlexikon, eds. Remigius Bäumer and Leo Scheffczyk, 6 vols. (St. Ottilien, 1994), 6:512–515. Contrary to what Meiss suggested (1936) and what virtually all the subsequent literature endorsed, the iconography of the Madonna of Humility originated not c. 1340 but sometime earlier, and probably at Avignon, where it was familiar even before the arrival of Simone Martini (Sienese, active from 1315; died 1344) in that city in 1335. See Joseph Polzer, “Concerning the Origin of the Virgin of Humility Theme,” Racar 27 (2000): 1–31; and Miklós Boskovits, ed., Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 83.


[9] See note 7 above.


[16] Comparing the photograph of the painting taken on the occasion of its sale (Sotheby’s, London, June 30, 1965, lot 20) with that illustrated by Gert Kreytenberg (2000), it is apparent that the Stoclet Madonna had in the meantime been subjected to the “embellishment” of a restoration that had altered its original character. Cf. Miklós Boskovits, *Pittura fiorentina alla vigilia del Rinascimento, 1370–1400* (Florence, 1975), pl. 48; and Gert Kreytenberg, *Orcagna, Andrea di Cione: Ein universeller Künstler der Gotik in Florenz* (Mainz, 2000), pl. 46. Nevertheless, its stylistic character is sufficiently apparent to be able confidently to affirm for it an attribution to Jacopo di Cione.


[23] The spatial device of the gradual darkening of the floor could be called pseudo-perspective; it is of the kind prescribed in Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell’arte*, ed. Fabio Frezzato (Vicenza, 2003), chap. LXXXV, 127, to suggest distance: “E’ quando ài da fare le montagne che paiano più a lunghi, più fa’ scuri i tuoi colori; et quando le fai dimostrare più appresso, fa’ i colori più chiari” (And when you need to make mountains that appear farther away, make your colors darker; and when you need to show them closer, make your colors lighter). As the editor of the treatise pointed out (Cennini 2003, 222–223 n. 100), some modern commentators consider this rule the result of a mistaken description, but in fact it was a practice that Trecento painters frequently followed.

[24] As is well known, the commission of the Uffizi triptych was transferred from Andrea to Jacopo di Cione in 1368, “essendo malato detto Andrea” (the said Andrea being ill). Cf. Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 3, *Jacopo di Cione* (New York, 1965), 17–26; Gert Kreytenberg, *Orcagna, Andrea di Cione: Ein universeller Künstler der Gotik in Florenz* (Mainz, 2000), 166–169. I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere that the painting was completed not by Jacopo but by one of his assistants, the Master Ashmolean Predella; in any case, there can be no doubt that Orcagna himself was responsible for the design of the whole work and also for the painting of the central figure. See Miklós Boskovits, *Pittura fiorentina alla vigilia del Rinascimento, 1370–1400* (Florence, 1975), 51.


[26] Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of
PROVENANCE


[1] Osvald Sirén (1917) cites the painting as formerly belonging to a Florentine art dealer; the terminus post quem for Lehman’s purchase might be 1911, the year in which he began his activity as a collector. Robert Lehman, The Philip Lehman Collection, New York: Paintings, Paris, 1928: Introduction, n.p.

[2] Lehman 1928, no. 5. The bill of sale between Robert Lehman and the Kress Foundation was signed on September 19, 1943.


[28] Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century, sec. 4, vol. 3, Jacopo di Cione (New York, 1965), pls. IX–IX¹ and XII–XX¹. The second of the two paintings, already given to Jacopo by Bernard Berenson, Offner, and other scholars, was described as “circle of Jacopo di Cione” in the volume of the Corpus devoted to this master, again on Steinweg’s initiative.

[29] I refer in particular to the images of Saint James Major (with the pilgrim’s staff) and Saint Julian (with the sword) in the right lateral of the polyptych. See Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century, sec. 4, vol. 3, Jacopo di Cione (New York, 1965), pl. III10.

[30] Apart from the triptych formerly in the Fischel collection in Vienna and dated 1379, and the main figures of the polyptych in the church of Santi Apostoli in Florence, which bears the date 1383, another painting dated to the same year may also be mentioned here, namely the Madonna in the church of Sant’Agata di Mugello in Scarperia. See Miklós Boskovits, Pittura fiorentina alla vigilia del Rinascimento, 1370–1400 (Florence, 1975), pl. 53 and fig. 119; and Lia Brunori, “Il patrimonio artistico,” in Scarperia: Storia, arte, artigianato (Florence, 1990), 47–50.
Foundation for three paintings, including Madonna and Child with Angels, is dated 15 September 1943 (copy in NGA curatorial files). The documents concerning the 1943 sale indicate that Philip Lehman’s son Robert Lehman (1892-1963) was the owner of the paintings, but it is not clear in the Lehman Collection archives at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, whether Robert made the sale for his father or on his own behalf. See Laurence Kanter’s e-mail of 6 May 2011, about ownership of the Lehman collection, in NGA curatorial files.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1917 Loan Exhibition of Italian Primitives, F. Kleinberger Galleries, New York, 1917, no. 5, repro.

1946 Recent Additions to the Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1946.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is constructed with several (probably five) planks of wood with vertical grain. The painted surface is surrounded by unpainted edges, originally covered by the now lost engaged frame. The panel has been thinned down to its present thickness of 0.6 cm, backed by an additional panel, and cradled by Stephen Pichetto in 1944. It has suffered from worm damage in the past. The painting was executed on a white gesso ground that was covered by a red bole preparation in the parts to be gilded. The outlines of the figures were demarcated with incised lines. The artist used warm, brown green underpaint in the flesh tones, and the paint was built up with smooth striations. The decorative borders of the Madonna’s clothing were created by mordant gilding.

Pichetto removed a discolored varnish during his treatment in 1944. Mario Modestini removed the varnish again and inpainted the panel in 1962. [1] Old photographs, [2] as well as the photo taken during restoration in 1962, show damage to the paint surface deriving from cracking along the joins between the panels. A vertical join runs through the right wrist of God the Father, the Virgin’s forehead and left hand, and the child’s right wrist. There are paint losses along this join and along checks passing through the faces and necks of the angels on the
right, as well as in the extreme right edge of the Madonna’s cloak and in the gold ground. A horizontal scratch through the dove of the Holy Spirit and the faces of the lower pair of angels on the left has also caused minor damage. The losses were inpainted in 1962, when a now somewhat discolored varnish was applied to the paint layer. Apart from the abovementioned damage, the painting is in reasonably good condition.

TECHNICAL NOTES


[2] Richard Offner and Steinweg seem to have used an earlier photograph for their reproduction in the *Corpus* volume of 1965 than the photograph reproduced by Robert Lehman (1928). The painting appears to have been treated during the time period between the two photos. Lehman’s photograph presumably was taken when the painting was still in the art market. The condition of the panel remains essentially the same in the photograph used by Lehman and the photographs taken prior to Pichetto’s treatment in 1944. Cf. Richard Offner and Klara Steinweg, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 3, *Jacopo di Cione* (New York, 1965), pls. X–X3; Robert Lehman, *The Philip Lehman Collection, New York* (Paris, 1928), no. 5.

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