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*Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*

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Giovanni Baronzio
Italian, active c. 1320 - 1350

# *The Birth, Naming, and Circumcision of Saint John the Baptist*

c. 1335

tempera on panel
painted surface: 46.4 × 38.3 cm (18 1/4 × 15 1/16 in.)
overall: 48.8 × 40.7 cm (19 3/16 × 16 in.)
framed: 55.7 x 48.1 x 5.1 cm (21 15/16 x 18 15/16 x 2 in.)
Inscription: on the sheet on which Zacharias is writing: NOMEN / E[S]T IO / HA[NN]ES (The name is John)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.68

**ENTRY**

This panel, along with its two companions The Baptism of Christ and Madonna and Child with Five Angels, are fragments of a dismantled altarpiece whose original provenance is unknown but which was presumably commissioned for the high altar of a church dedicated to the Baptist in Emilia Romagna or, perhaps, in the Marche. [1] Keith Christiansen (1982) [2] proposed a reconstruction of the altar [fig. 1] (see also Reconstruction) as follows: four stories of the Baptist would have accompanied, on either side, the central *Madonna and Child with Five Angels* also in the National Gallery of Art; to the upper left, *Annunciation of the Birth of the Baptist* [fig. 2] formerly in the Street collection in Bath, [3] flanked by *Birth, Naming, and Circumcision of the Baptist* now in the Gallery. The lower register on the same side would have consisted of *Young Baptist Led by an Angel into the Wilderness* [fig. 3], now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, [4] and *The Baptist Interrogated by the Pharisees* [fig. 4], of which only a fragment survives, in the Seattle Art Museum. [5]


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The upper register on the right side would have consisted of *The Baptism of Christ* in the Gallery and *The Baptist Sends His Disciples to Christ* [fig. 5], formerly in the Street collection in Bath. [6] Two more panels formed the lower register on the same side: *Feast of Herod* [fig. 6], now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Robert Lehman Collection) in New York, [7] flanked by *The Baptist's Descent into Limbo* [fig. 7], formerly in the collection of Charles Loeser in Florence, its whereabouts now unknown. [8] A possible argument against Christiansen's reconstruction, as Laurence Kanter has informed me (in correspondence), is the fact that the vertically grained wood of the central Madonna (see Madonna and Child with Five Angels) seems to exclude its common origin with the panels representing the stories of the Baptist, which are painted on panels with horizontal grain. Kanter considers the possibility of two different altarpieces or one double-sided altarpiece. These proposals are interesting, but all the fragments share a common author, their dimensions are comparable, and similarity of pictorial conduct makes the hypothesis of a single-sided panel more likely after all. Complete disappearance (except for the Madonna) of the paintings on the back of a double-sided altarpiece would also seem rather unlikely. And for an altarpiece as large as two meters or more, instead of a single wooden support, the use of three panels was preferred. On the whole, Christiansen's hypothesis is likely to be correct.

The altarpiece of Saint John the Baptist had evidently been dismantled by the first half of the nineteenth century, for by the 1840s fragments of it had begun to emerge on the art market. [9] Adolfo Venturi (1906) was the first to attempt to classify more precisely the *Baptism of Christ* and the other two fragments then in the Sterbini collection in Rome. [10] Venturi recognized Bolognese influences deriving from the activity of Giotto (Florentine, c. 1265 - 1337) in that city. He suggested that the artist might have been someone like Jacopo di Paolo, active in Bologna from the close of the thirteenth century. A few years later Osvald Sirén (1916), unfamiliar, it seems, with Venturi's publication, asserted the common origin of the *Birth, Naming, and Circumcision of the Baptist*; *Annunciation of the Baptist's Birth*; *The Baptist Sends His Disciples to Christ*; and *Feast of Herod*. [11] He correctly attributed them to Giovanni Baronzio, the master who had signed and dated (1345) the altarpiece now in the Galleria Nazionale in Urbino. The great Swedish art historian erred, however, in thinking that the panel of Saint John the Baptist Enthroned in Christ Church Gallery in Oxford stood in the center of the altarpiece. This painting is clearly Florentine, even if its proposed attribution to Lippo di Benivieni remains under discussion. [12] Sirén's proposal, indeed, convinced few scholars. [13] Later contributions to the problem accepted instead


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the proposal of Richard Offner (1924), who recognized in *Madonna and Child with Five Angels* the work of an anonymous painter from the Romagna, to whom he attributed the stories of the Baptist. [14] Raimond van Marle (1924) also placed the attribution to Giovanni Baronzio in doubt. He preferred to classify *The Baptism of Christ* and its companion panel now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana as works of the "Cavallinesque Riminese school." [15] Lehman (1928), on the other hand, retained the attribution to Giovanni Baronzio and, in his analysis of *Feast of Herod*, linked it with the fragment depicting the Baptism. [16] Both Lionello Venturi (1931, 1933) and Bernard Berenson (1932, 1936) also assigned to Giovanni Baronzio the panels they recognized as forming part of the same series. [17] Other art historians and catalogers followed suit. [18] Doubts then grew about Giovanni's authorship: the fragments were assigned instead to an ad hoc Master of the Life of Saint John the Baptist. This opinion prevailed in the literature of the following decades; it was also expressed in the catalogs of the Gallery and repeated in more recent publications. [19] Since 1987, however, the attribution to Giovanni Baronzio has been reinstated, and reinforced with fresh arguments, both for the group of panels that concerns us here and for other paintings that had in the past been attributed to the artist; scholars have increasingly supported this suggestion. [20]

Altarpieces in the elongated horizontal form of thirteenth-century dossals, approximately one meter (or a little more) in height and two and a half meters in width, such as the dismantled altarpiece of the Baptist being discussed here, are rare in Tuscany in the fourteenth century, but must have been fairly common in a region like Emilia Romagna. [21] They usually showed the Madonna and Child Enthroned (or, more rarely, a story of Christ) at the center flanked by saints or biblical or legendary narrative scenes. An extended cycle of stories of the Baptist comparable to that of our altarpiece has only survived in Emilia Romagna in the field of mural paintings, more particularly in those of the dome of the baptistery of Parma. [22] Our altarpiece dedicated to Saint John the Baptist is unusual in its iconographic program: it lacks scenes usually included in cycles of the Baptist, such as the Visitation, the *Ecce Agnus Dei*, the Dance of Salome, or the Burial of the Baptist, while it includes such rare episodes as Saint John the Baptist Praying in the Wilderness or the Baptist's Descent into Limbo. [23] Nor did the artist hesitate to introduce into the individual episodes motifs that diverge from the usual iconography. [24] As regards the panels in the Gallery (as seen in this panel), it is unusual for the episode of the Washing of the Infant Saint John, often placed in the foreground with an intentional allusion to the theme of baptism, to be dispensed with, as it is here; it is replaced instead by the scene in the background, more


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homely than symbolic in tone, of two handmaids wrapping the newborn child in swaddling cloths. The Naming of the Baptist, which often represents a self-sufficient scene, is here inserted in the scene of the Birth, and indeed placed in the foreground and combined to the far right with the episode of the Circumcision of the recalcitrant child. [25] On the other hand, in *The Baptism of Christ*, the painter remains faithful to the tradition of representing Christ submerged up to his hips in the water of the Jordan, the Baptist placed to the left, standing on the rocky banks of the river, and two angels holding Christ's clothes to the right. In the upper part of the panel the heavens open, and we catch a glimpse of the half-length figure of God the Father blessing. [26] A motif of archaizing character that gradually disappeared in the fourteenth century is that of John imposing his hand on Christ instead of pouring water over his head. [27]

With regard to the *Madonna and Child*, a motif for which the painters of Rimini had a special predilection was the cloth of honor supported by angels behind the Virgin's throne [fig. 8]. On the other hand, the motif of the child grasping his mother's veil—an allusion to the Passion [28]—is more widespread in fourteenth-century painting in Tuscany than in Emilia Romagna. The miniature lions on the throne armrests allude to the throne of Solomon, while the enormous locust in the hand of the child reminds us of the diet—locusts and wild honey—on which the Baptist lived during his years in the wilderness. [29]

The precision in representing the insect [30] attests to the artist's acute interest in various aspects and curiosities of daily life. Here as elsewhere in his paintings, he consciously participated in the more naturalistic and descriptive tendencies of Gothic art. The pursuit of naturalistic detail—in costume, in attributes, in setting—distinguished an innovative current in Italian painting in the second quarter of the fourteenth century that sought to disassociate itself from the solemn and classicizing manner of previous decades. Additional proof of this interest are the elaborate architectural settings of many of the episodes of the Baptist's legend (as in the temple porch in *Birth of the Baptist*, with its cantilevered upper floor and Gothic double-lancet windows), the attention devoted to characterizing the protagonists' states of mind, and, not least, the costumes worn, in particular in *Feast of Herod*. Peculiarities of fashion in turn provide useful clues for pinpointing the date of the altarpiece. [31] Other features of the *Madonna and Child*, such as the use of chrysography and the sharp proportional difference between the figures of Mary and the angels, might at first sight appear retrograde. More careful observation shows that the artist used gilded highlights not in the Byzantine


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manner but to accentuate the volumetric relief of the forms below the precious garments and to enliven the sweeping folds of the drapery. The motif of angels peering out from behind the cloth of honor as if playing hide-and-seek is itself an indication of the merry, make-believe spirit that animates the gothicizing artistic current of the time.

Several clues confirm the attribution of our panels to Giovanni Baronzio. First, there are clear analogies between the fragments of the altarpiece of Saint John and other works generally attributed to the artist, such as the solemn mantle-clad men to the right of our *Birth of the Baptist* and those of *Christ before Pilate* now in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, or the peculiar, splayed-leg pose of the Baptist in the baptism scene that recurs in the figure of Adam in *Descent of Christ into Limbo*, also in the Gemäldegalerie. [32] The facial features also coincide: characterized by drooping heads, squared forms, high foreheads, eyes reduced to narrow slits, flattened noses, powerful chins, rounded jaws, they are found in all the works of the artist. The incised decoration of the gold ground is also an important clue for associating our panels with Giovanni Baronzio. [33]

As for the date of our dismantled altarpiece, it may be placed in or shortly before the mid-fourth decade of the fourteenth century, on the basis of comparisons with the artist's only signed and dated work. [34] A motif like the swirling and zigzagging folds of the mantle as it falls to the ground is rendered in a very similar way both in the Madonna in Washington and in the altarpiece in Urbino. The latter, however, is likely to be the later of the two, as a number of features make clear. Evidence of its modernity includes the wider décolleté of Mary's dress than that of the Virgin in Washington, and the fact that her head is covered with a transparent veil, enabling us to glimpse her elaborate and modish hairstyle with two braids raised and knotted together over the crown of her head. Abandoning the usual position of Christ in the Virgin's lap, Giovanni Baronzio represents him instead standing on the ground and gesturing insistently to be restored to his mother's arms. No such liberties are found in the Gallery Madonna, which is characterized by softer modeling and by an absence of the delicate and incisive contours that delineate the forms of the faces and hands in the Urbino Madonna and Child. In observing the stories of the Baptist, moreover, we cannot fail to notice the absence of the stiff and formal reserve of the conduct that distinguishes the narrative scenes of the altarpiece dated 1345: the protagonists of the Nativity and of the Baptism in the Gallery are squatter in proportions but more natural and spontaneous in the way they express themselves with gestures. The attitude of the


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man who observes Zacharias writing the name of John on a sheet of paper reveals all too clearly the disapproval of those present in the choice of this name, underlined by the narrative in Luke's Gospel. [35] The energetic pose of the Baptist, bending forward as far as he can to place his hand on the head of Jesus, immersed in the waters of Jordan, is a powerful expression of his zeal and the profound consciousness he has of his role.

The period that elapsed between the execution of the dismantled altarpiece of the Baptist and the panel now in Urbino cannot have been brief, but its duration is difficult to gauge given the lack of other securely datable works by Baronzio. A probable *terminus post quem* could be offered by the dossal now divided between the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica di Palazzo Barberini in Rome and the collection of the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Rimini; according to a plausible recent proposal, the dossal must have been commissioned for the high altar of the Franciscan church of Villa Verucchio and must date to c. 1330. [36] The essential immobility of the individual compositions contained in this altarpiece, the rudimentary architectural backdrops, and the strongly simplified drawing that still recalls models of Pietro da Rimini suggest that this is an early work of Giovanni Baronzio. The putative Villa Verucchio dossal, which Cesare Brandi compared with the stories of the Baptist, [37] resembles the fragments being discussed here, especially in its delicate modeling, sharp chiaroscuro, and facial characteristics, but it can be assumed to belong to an earlier creative phase in the career of Giovanni Baronzio. The most probable date for the panels in the Gallery therefore would seem to be c. 1335.

Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011)

March 21, 2016

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**COMPARATIVE FIGURES**


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**fig. 1** Reconstruction of a dispersed altarpiece by Giovanni Baronzio as proposed by Keith Christiansen (color images are NGA objects): a. *Annunciation of the Birth of the Baptist* (fig. 2); b. *The Birth, Naming, and Circumcision of Saint John the Baptist*; c. *Young Baptist Led by an Angel into the Wilderness* (fig. 3); d. *The Baptist Interrogated by the Pharisees* (fig. 4); e. *Madonna and Child with Five Angels*; f. *The Baptism of Christ*; g. *The Baptist Sends His Disciples to Christ* (fig. 5); h. *Feast of Herod* (fig. 6); i. *The Baptist's Descent into Limbo* (fig. 7)

**fig. 2** Giovanni Baronzio, *Annunciation of the Birth of the Baptist*, c. 1335, tempera on panel, now lost, formerly in the Street collection, Bath


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**fig. 3** Giovanni Baronzio, *Young Baptist Led by an Angel into the Wilderness*, c. 1335, tempera on panel, Pinacoteca Vaticana. Image: Scala/Art Resource, NY

**fig. 4** Giovanni Baronzio, *The Baptist Interrogated by the Pharisees*, c. 1335, wood transferred to Masonite, Seattle Art Museum, Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image: Eduardo Calderon


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**fig. 5** Giovanni Baronzio, *The Baptist Sends His Disciples to Christ*, c. 1335, tempera on panel, now lost, formerly in the Street collection, Bath

**fig. 6** Giovanni Baronzio, *Feast of Herod*, c. 1335, tempera on panel, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection


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**fig. 7** Giovanni Baronzio, *The Baptist's Descent into Limbo*, c. 1335, tempera on panel, now lost, formerly in the Charles Loeser collection, Florence

**fig. 8** Detail of upper section, Giovanni Baronzio, *Madonna and Child with Five Angels*, c. 1335, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection


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## RECONSTRUCTION

Click on any panel in the altarpiece reconstruction below to see an enlarged version of the image. Color reproductions in the reconstruction indicate panels in the National Gallery of Art collection.

Reconstruction of a dispersed altarpiece by Giovanni Baronzio as proposed by Keith Christiansen (1982)

a. *Annunciation of the Birth of the Baptist* (Entry fig. 2)
b. The Birth, Naming, and Circumcision of Saint John the Baptist
c. *Young Baptist Led by an Angel into the Wilderness* (Entry fig. 3)
d. *The Baptist Interrogated by the Pharisees* (Entry fig. 4)
e. Madonna and Child with Five Angels
f. The Baptism of Christ
g. *The Baptist Sends His Disciples to Christ* (Entry fig. 5)
h. *Feast of Herod* (Entry fig. 6)
i. *The Baptist's Descent into Limbo* (Entry fig. 7)

## NOTES

[1] In the infrequent cases in which their original destination is known, horizontal dossals come from churches and altars dedicated to the saint whose legend they illustrate; cf. Edward B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting: An Illustrated Index* (Florence, 1949), 140–144; Miklós


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Boskovits, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting*, sec. 1, vol. 1, *The Origins of Florentine Painting, 1100–1270* (Florence 1993), 300, 538, 632. Fourteenth-century Riminese painters also frequently painted works for Marchigian churches.

[2] Keith Christiansen, "Fourteenth–Century Italian Altarpieces," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 40 (1982): 42–45.

[3] Cf. Provenance note 1. The panel's measurements given in *Art Treasures of the West Country* (Bristol, 1937) are 19 x 15 in. (48.2 x 38.1 cm).

[4] Cf. *The Baptism of Christ*, Provenance note 1, *and Francesco Rossi, Catalogo della Pinacoteca Vaticana*, vol. 3 *Il Trecento: Umbria, Marche, Italia del Nord* (Vatican City, 1994), 113–118. The panel measures 47.8 x 40.5 cm.

[5] Venturi linked the panel, with a provenance from the Sterbini collection (cf. *The Baptism of Christ*, Provenance *note 1) and then on the art market (Galleria Sangiorgi) in Rome, with the series of episodes from the life of the Baptist. See Lionello Venturi, Pitture italiane in America* (Milan, 1931), no. 92; Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, trans. Countess Vanden Heuvel and Charles Marriott, 3 vols. (New York and Milan, 1933), 1: no. 113. Acquired for the Samuel H. Kress Collection in 1936, it has been in the Seattle Art Museum (It 37/M 394 L1.1) since 1952. It measures 23.8 x 18.4 cm.

[6] Cf. Provenance note 1. *Art Treasures of the West Country* (Bristol, 1937) gives its measurements as 17 x 15 in (43.2 x 40.6 cm).

[7] Purchased by Philip Lehman from the Galerie Trotti in Paris in 1921, the panel was donated by Robert Lehman to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1975 (no. 1975.1.103). See John Pope-Hennessy and Laurence B. Kanter, *The Robert Lehman Collection*, vol. 1, *Italian Paintings* (New York, 1987), 86–88. The painting had already been introduced to the art historical literature by Osvald Sirén, who had seen it on the art market in Paris; Osvald Sirén, "Giuliano, Pietro and Giovanni da Rimini," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 29 (1916): 320. Pope-Hennessy and Kanter identified the coat of arms on the reverse of the panel as that of the Agnelli dei Malerbi family and suggested that "the panel may have been preserved in the Agnelli collection in Rome or in the Casa Malerbi at Lugo (Ravenna)." A possible connection between the presumed provenance from Lugo (Ravenna) and the life and interests of Luigi Malerbi (1776–1843), *canonico*, musician, and collector from that little town, has also been surmised. See Anna Tambini, in *Il Trecento riminese: Maestri e botteghe tra Romagna e Marche*, ed. Daniele Benati (Milan, 1995), 264, but without convincing evidence.

[8] This panel formed part of the Sterbini collection in 1906 (cf. *The Baptism of Christ*, Provenance note 1*) but was probably acquired shortly after by Charles Loeser (1865–1928) for his Florentine collection. In 1926, however,*


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*the painting was auctioned in Florence; it was attributed in the sale catalog to the "scuola dell'Orcagna." See Impresa Vendita Cesare Galardelli: Catalogo della Vendita di Arte Antica di proprietà del Sig. L. M. Banti*, Florence, April, 14–16, 1926, lot 220. Wilhelm Suida stated that the panel had been the property of Mrs. R. Calnan. Wilhelm Suida, *Paintings and Sculpture from the Kress Collection acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation 1945–1951* (Washington, DC, 1951), 36. The painting's measurements are unknown.

[9] Cf. *The Baptism of Christ*, Provenance note 1.

[10] Adolfo Venturi, *La Galleria Sterbini in Roma: Saggio illustrativo* (Rome, 1906), 48–53.

[11] Osvald Sirén, "Giuliano, Pietro and Giovanni da Rimini," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 29 (1916): 320.

[12] The panel (no. 6), which Richard Offner assigned to the Florentine "following of the St. Cecilia Master," has also been attributed to Buffalmacco and, by the present writer, to Lippo di Benivieni. In any case the more recent literature generally has recognized it as the work of a Florentine artist. See 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), 178–180. It has further been shown that it used to belong to the church of Santa Maria degli Ughi in Florence.

[13] Osvald Sirén and Maurice Brockwell repeated the view that *Saint John the Baptist Enthroned* now in Oxford belonged with the dispersed series of stories of the same saint, and Robert Lehman and L. Venturi accepted this premise. See Osvald Sirén and Maurice W. Brockwell, *Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of Italian Primitives* (New York, 1917), 181; Robert Lehman, *The Philip Lehman Collection, New York* (Paris, 1928), no. 74; Lionello Venturi, *Pitture italiane in America* (Milan, 1931), no. 94; Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, trans. Countess Vanden Heuvel and Charles Marriott, 3 vols. (New York and Milan, 1933), 1: no. 116, repro. Raimond van Marle, "Contributo allo studio della scuola pittorica del Trecento a Rimini," *Rassegna Municipale Rimini* 4 (1935): 8–15, expressed uncertainty about the proposal, which has since been abandoned by everyone.

[14] It is worth recalling that Robert Lehman (1928), commenting on *Decollation of the Baptist and Presentation of His Head*, cited Richard Offner's verbal opinion, evidently pronounced some years previously, in favor of Giovanni Baronzio's authorship. Robert Lehman, *The Philip Lehman Collection, New York* (Paris, 1928), no. 74. But by 1924 Offner had changed his mind. He then argued that the Lehman panel and the other two stories of the Baptist formerly in the Pratt collection had been painted around 1340 by the


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anonymous master of the Kahn Madonna. Richard Offner, "A Remarkable Exhibition of Italian Paintings," *The Arts* 5 (1924): 245.

[15] Raimond Van Marle gathered under this loose definition various artists' works, some of which have more recently been recognized as the work of Giovanni Baronzio. Apart from the two stories of the Baptist mentioned in the text, they include the stories of Christ now in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica di Palazzo Barberini in Rome, the six small panels with stories of Christ in the Accademia in Venice, and *Adoration of the Magi* now in the Courtauld Institute Art Gallery in London. See Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, vol. 4, *The Local Schools of North Italy of the 14th Century* (The Hague, 1924), 288.

[16] Robert Lehman and following him some other authors cited an otherwise unspecified story of the Baptist in the Ryerson collection in Chicago that allegedly formed part of the same series. Robert Lehman, *The Philip Lehman Collection, New York* (Paris, 1928), no. 74. But the fact that this painting was not among those that entered the Art Institute of Chicago from the Ryerson collection suggests the claim is based on a misunderstanding.

[17] Lionello Venturi, *Pitture italiane in America* (Milan, 1931), no. 92, 94; Lionello Venturi, *Italian Paintings in America*, trans. Countess Vanden Heuvel and Charles Marriott, 3 vols. (New York and Milan, 1933), 1: no. 113, 116. Among the works attributed to Giovanni Baronzio, Bernard Berenson listed the Kahn Madonna, the Lehman Feast of Herod, the Pratt Birth of the Baptist, and the Angel Leading the Baptist into the Wilderness in the Pinacoteca Vaticana. To these panels he later added the Baptism of Christ in the Kress collection. See Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: A List of the Principal Artists and Their Works with an Index of Places* (Oxford, 1932), 43–45; Bernard Berenson, *Pitture italiane del rinascimento: Catalogo dei principali artisti e delle loro opere con un indice dei luoghi*, trans. Emilio Cecchi (Milan, 1936), 37–39.

[18] *Guida della Pinacoteca Vaticana*, Musei e Gallerie Pontificie (Vatican City, 1933), 54; *An Exhibition of Italian Paintings Lent by Mr. Samuel H. Kress of New York to the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences* (1935), 32; Alfred M. Frankfurter, "Fine Italian Paintings from Kress Exhibition," *Art News* 32 (1934): 8–9; Alfred M. Frankfurter, "Medieval Style in Painting," *Art News* 38 (1940): 14; Alfred M. Frankfurter, "On the Italian Renaissance Painters in the National Gallery," *Art News* 40 (1941): 17; Alfred M. Frankfurter, "How Modern the Renaissance," *Art News* 45 (1947): 17; *Arts of the Middle Ages: A Loan Exhibition* (Boston, 1940), 20; National Gallery of Art, *Book of Illustrations* (Washington, DC, 1941), 60, 238; National Gallery of Art, *Preliminary Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1941), 13; National Gallery of Art, *Paintings and Sculpture from the Kress Collection* (Washington, DC, 1945), 9, 10; "The New Kress Gift to the National Gallery, Washington," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 86,


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no. 504 (1945): 55; Robert Langton Douglas, "Recent Additions to the Kress Collection," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 88 (1946): 84; *Italian Paintings* (New York, 1947), no. 37; Herbert Friedmann, "The Iconography of the Madonna and Child by Giovanni Baronzio in the Kress Collection, National Gallery, Washington," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 35 (1949): 345–352; Pietro Toesca, *Il Trecento*, Storia dell'arte italiana 2 (Turin, 1951), 730–731 (as "maniera di Baronzio"); Ugo Galetti and Ettore Camesasca, *Enciclopedia della pittura italiana*, 3 vols. (Milan, 1951), 1:209; Edward Fowles, *Memories of Duveen Brothers* (London, 1976), 124–125.

[19] See Cesare Brandi, "Conclusioni su alcuni discussi problemi della pittura riminese del Trecento," *Critica d'arte* 1 (1936): 236–237; Wilhelm Suida, *Paintings and Sculpture from the Kress Collection Acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1945–1951* (Washington, DC, 1951), 36; *Exposition de la Collection Lehman de New York* (Paris, 1957), 31–32; John Walker,*National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC* (New York, 1963), 297; National Gallery of Art, *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1965), 86; National Gallery of Art, *European Paintings and Sculpture: Illustrations* (Washington, DC, 1968), 75; National Gallery of Art, *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue* (Washington, DC, 1985), 254–255; Carlo Volpe, *La pittura riminese del Trecento* (Milan, 1965), 38–39; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools, XIII–XV Century* (London, 1966), 68–69; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:316–318; Brigitte Klesse, *Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Bern, 1967), 64; Charles Seymour, *Early Italian Paintings in the Yale University Art Gallery* (New Haven and London, 1970), 108; Hanna Kiel, "Review of Antologia di dipinti di cinque secoli, Circolo delle Stampe, Palazzo Serbelloni,"*Pantheon* 29 (1971): 345; Burton B. Fredericksen and Federico Zeri, *Census of Pre-Nineteenth-Century Italian Paintings in North American Public Collections* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 130; George Szabó, *The Robert Lehman Collection: A Guide* (New York, 1975), 25; George Kaftal and Fabio Bisogni, *Saints in Italian Art*, vol. 3, *Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy* (Florence, 1978), 512, 514, 520; Fulvio Zuliani, "Tommaso da Modena," in *Tomaso da Modena: Catalogo*, ed. Luigi Menegazzi (Treviso, 1979), 105 n. 9; Keith Christiansen, "Fourteenth-Century Italian Altarpieces," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 40 (1982): 42–45; Antonio Corbara, "Il ciclo francescano di Francesco da Rimini," *Romagna arte e storia* 4, no. 12 (1984): 59 ("Maestro del Battista"); Andrea Bacchi, "Maestro della Vita del Battista," in *La Pittura in Italia: Il Duecento e il Trecento*, ed. Enrico Castelnuovo, 2 vols. (Milan, 1986), 2:611; Daniele Benati, "Pittura del Trecento in Emilia Romagna," in *La Pittura in Italia: Il Duecento e il Trecento*, ed. Enrico Castelnuovo, 2 vols. (Milan, 1986), 1:208; John Pope-Hennessy and Laurence B. Kanter, *The Robert Lehman Collection*, vol. 1, *Italian*


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*Paintings* (New York, 1987), 86; Pier Giorgio Pasini, *La pittura riminese del Trecento* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, 1990), 124, 125, 127; Fabrizio Mancinelli, "I dipinti della Pinacoteca dall'XI al XV secolo," in *Pinacoteca Vaticana: Nella pittura l'espressione del messaggio divino nella luce la radice della creazione pittorica*, ed. Umberto Baldini (Milan, 1992), 162–163; Francesco Rossi, *Catalogo della Pinacoteca Vaticana*, vol. 3, *Il Trecento: Umbria, Marche, Italia del Nord* (Vatican City, 1994), 113–118; Katharine Baetjer, *European Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art by Artists Born before 1865: A Summary Catalogue* (New York, 1995), 110; Mojmir Svatopluk Frinta, *Punched Decoration on Late Medieval Panel and Miniature Painting* (Prague, 1998), 152, 164; Michel Laclotte and Esther Moench, *Peinture italienne: Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon* (Paris, 2005), 63.

[20] See Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde*, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 15–18; Miklós Boskovits, "Per la storia della pittura tra la Romagna e le Marche ai primi del '300," *Arte cristiana* 81 (1993): 168–169; Daniele Benati, "Baronzio, Giovanni," in *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, 12 vols. (Rome, 1992), 3:121; Daniele Benati, "Disegno del Trecento riminese," in *Il Trecento riminese: Maestri e botteghe tra Romagna e Marche*, ed. Daniele Benati (Milan, 1995), 47, 55, 56 n. 3; Daniele Benati, "Il Dossale Corvisieri nel percorso di Giovanni Baronzio," *L'Arco* 4(2006): 27; Daniele Benati, "Giovanni Baronzio nella pittura riminese del Trecento," in *Giovanni Baronzio e la pittura a Rimini nel Trecento*, ed. Daniele Ferrara (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, 2008), 31; Christian Hornig, "Baronzio Giovanni," in *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon: Die bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, ed. Günter Meißner, 87 vols. (Munich, 1993), 7:135; Alessandro Marchi, "La pittura della prima metà del Trecento nelle Marche: Presenze riminesi, pittori 'stanieri' e pittori locali," in *Il Trecento riminese: Maestri e botteghe tra Romagna e Marche*, ed. Daniele Benati (Milan, 1995), 112–123; Anna Tambini, "In margine alla pittura riminese del Trecento,"*Studi romagnoli* 47 (1996): 466 ("attribuiti a Giovanni Baronzio"); Giovanna Ragionieri, "Baronzio, Giovanni," in *La pittura in Europa: Il dizionario dei pittori*, ed. Carlo Pirovano, 3 vols. (Milan, 2002), 1:53.

[21] Altarpieces of this type and of similar size originally must have included Giovanni da Rimini's *Madonna and Child with Saints* in the Museo Correr in Venice (apparently a triptych but, as the horizontal grain of the wood shows, originally a type of dossal enriched with gables); Pietro da Rimini's fragmentary panel *Christ, the Madonna, and Saints* now in the Denver Art Museum; Francesco da Rimini's similar altarpiece now dismantled and dispersed among the Cini Collection in Venice and museums in Lausanne and Barcelona; Giovanni Baronzio's stories of Christ divided between the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica di Palazzo Barberini in Rome and the


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Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio in Rimini; and Giovanni Baronzio's still intact altarpieces of this type in the Galleria Nazionale in Urbino and in the church of San Francesco at Mercatello. We may also recall the early fourteenth-century dossal of an anonymous master in the Museo Civico at Reggio Emilia, cf. Carlo Volpe, *La pittura riminese del Trecento* (Milan, 1965), figs. 64, 78, 159–163, 208, 210, 198, 206, 315, and some Bolognese examples, such as the dossals by the Pseudo Jacopino in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, for which see Jadranka Bentini, Gian Piero Cammarota, and Daniela Scaglietti Kelescian, eds., *Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, catalogo generale*, vol. 1, *Dal Duecento a Francesco Francia* (Venice, 2004), 78–83. In rare cases, horizontal dossals even larger in size than the abovementioned were produced, such as that by Giuliano da Rimini in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston (164 × 300 cm).

[22] See Véronique Rouchon Mouilleron, "Le pitture duecentesche del Battistero di Parma: Iconografia e organizzazione spaziale," in *Battistero di Parma*, vol. 2, *La decorazione pittorica* (Milan, 1993), 34–116.

[23] On the episode of the Child Saint John the Baptist Praying, see Isle Falk, *Studien zu Andrea Pisano* (PhD diss., University of Zurich, 1940), 128; Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "Giovannino Battista: A Study in Renaissance Religious Symbolism," *The Art Bulletin* 37 (1955): 88–89 and n. 27. The rare motif of the Baptist's Descent into Limbo recurs in dossal no. 14 of the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena, which was cataloged by Piero Torriti as the work of a "Maestro senese–bizantino" but should probably be attributed to Gilio di Pietro. Cf. Piero Torriti, *La Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena*, vol. 1, *I dipinti dal XII al XV secolo* (Genoa, 1977), 44–45; Miklós Boskovits, "Sulle tracce di un grande pittore toscano di metà Duecento," *Arte cristiana* 98 (2010): 241–246. Based on the account in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, this is evidently a version of the more familiar iconography of Christ's Descent into Limbo (*Anastasis*), in which the Baptist, easily recognizable, often appears among the Fathers awaiting the Savior's arrival; cf. Elisabeth Lucchesi Palli, "Höllenfahrt Christi," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum and Günter Bandmann, 8 vols. (Rome, 1970), 2:325.

[24] For example, *Annunciation to Zacharias*, formerly in the Street collection in Bath, is very unusual in iconography. It takes place in a Romanesque church packed with worshippers, and the priest is kneeling before the altar as if celebrating Mass. The iconography adopted in the other former Street panel is equally rare. Here, in the scene in which the disciples are sent by John to interrogate Christ, instead of the miracles performed by Christ we see a group of believers sitting on the ground and listening to the Savior's words. Also rare is the twofold presence of Salome in *Feast of Herod*, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: in one she is dancing, and in the other she is presenting the decapitated head of the Baptist on a charger to


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the banqueters.

[25] The episode of the Circumcision, if shown at all, substitutes either the scene of the Birth of the Baptist, as in the relief on the façade of San Giovanni in Venere at Fossacesia (Chieti), or that of the Naming of the Baptist, as in the reliefs of the cathedral of Auxerre. See Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, *Abruzzen und Molise: Kunst und Geschichte, Römische Forschungen der Bibliotheca Hertziana* (Munich, 1983), 175–176; Camille Enlart, "La sculpture des portails de la cathédrale d'Auxerre du XIIIe à la fin du XIVe siècle," *Congres archeologique de France* 74 (1907): pl. between 602 and 603.

[26] On the iconography of the Baptism of Christ, see Gabriel Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome (Paris, 1916), 170–215; Gertrud Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, 6 vols. (Gütersloh, 1966–1990), 1:137–152.

[27] On placing the hand on the person being baptized, cf. U. Miekle, "Taufe, Taufszenen," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, eds. Engelbert Kirschbaum and Günter Bandmann, 8 vols. (Rome, 1972), 2:244–247; and, more generally, Lucien De Bruyne, "L'imposition des mains dans l'art chrétien ancien," *Rivista d'archeologia cristiana* 20 (1943): 113–278. Baptism by infusion—that is, by the pouring of water over the neophyte's head—is usually represented from the fourteenth century onward.

[28] See Dorothy C. Shorr, *The Christ Child in Devotional Images in Italy during the XIV Century* (New York, 1954), 116–117.

[29] With reference to Proverbs 30:27 ("the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank"), Herbert Friedmann explained that in medieval thought, locusts were sometimes considered symbols of converted pagans. See Herbert Friedmann, "The Iconography of the Madonna and Child by Giovanni Baronzio in the Kress Collection, National Gallery, Washington," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 35 (1949): 345–352. But in the case of the altarpiece being discussed here, in which the Madonna and Child is flanked by stories of the Baptist, the locust in the Christ child's hand presumably was intended to allude, more prosaically, to the food on which the Baptist lived in the wilderness of Judea (cf. Mt 3:4; Mk 1:6). As for the figures of lions on the throne, in medieval theology Mary was considered the personification of wisdom, seated on the throne of Solomon, in which (1 Kings 10:19) "two lions stood beside the stays" (i.e., beside the armrests). Cf. also Gregor Martin Lechner, "Sedes Sapientiae," in *Marienlexikon*, ed. Remigius Bäumer and Leo Scheffczyk, 6 vols. (St. Ottilien, 1994), 6:113–118.

[30] Herbert Friedmann, "The Iconography of the Madonna and Child by Giovanni Baronzio in the Kress Collection, National Gallery, Washington,"


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*Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 35 (1949): 350, underlined this aspect.

[31] A very important aspect of women's dress of the period, the depth and width of the décolleté, is exemplified by the dresses in *Feast of Herod* (but also by the dress of Mary herself in the Washington Madonna). This wider and deeper neckline reflects a fashion that spread in the 1330s; cf. Luciano Bellosi, "Moda e cronologia: A) gli affreschi della Basilica Inferiore di Assisi,"*Prospettiva* 10 (1977): 21–31. Details such as the length of the dresses of the courtiers portrayed in the foreground in front of Herod's table, or the length of their caps with side flaps, also reflect a phase of the development of fourteenth-century court fashion that precedes that illustrated by Giovanni Baronzio in the altarpiece dated 1345 in the Galleria Nazionale in Urbino. Bellosi's studies are useful in elucidating these aspects. Luciano Bellosi, *Buffalmacco e il Trionfo della morte* (Turin, 1974) 41–54. The details of dress I have cited, to which others can be added, therefore suggest a date for our panels in the 1330s.

[32] For the five fragments with stories of Christ in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (no. 1110), cf. Carlo Volpe, *La pittura riminese del Trecento* (Milan, 1965), 86 and fig. 280 (as Master of the Parry Adoration); Miklós Boskovits, ed., *Frühe italienische Malerei: Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Katalog der Gemälde*, trans. Erich Schleier (Berlin, 1988), 15–18 and figs. 15–20 (as Giovanni Baronzio).

[33] As Brigitte Klesse has shown, the ornamental motifs incised in the gold ground in the Gallery's panels depicting stories of the Baptist recur in the abovementioned panels in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, in the fragments belonging to the same series now in the Accademia in Venice (no. 26), and in the altarpiece signed by Giovanni and dated 1345 in the Galleria Nazionale in Urbino; Brigitte Klesse, *Seidenstoffe in der italienischen Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Bern, 1967), 281.

[34] For the altarpiece *Madonna and Child with Angels and Saints and Stories of Christ* in Urbino's Galleria Nazionale (no. 125), cf. Carlo Volpe, *La pittura riminese del Trecento* (Milan, 1965), 82; Pier Giorgio Pasini, *La pittura riminese del Trecento* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, 1990), 141–143.

[35] The Gospel narrative (Lk 1:59–63) explains that Elizabeth's kinsfolk and neighbors had suggested the boy be called Zacharias like his father and not John, as indicated by the angel at the time of the Annunciation (Lk 1:13: "and you shall call his name John"), objecting: "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name."

[36] It is Massimo Medica who observed that the two surviving fragments are similar in subject and iconography to those preserved in the church of San Francesco a Villa Verucchio until the mid-nineteenth century. The same scholar also assumed that, since this church was completed in 1324, the altarpiece for its high altar would have been commissioned and installed not many years later. Massimo Medica, "Una proposta per la provenienza del


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*Dossale* di Baronzio: La chiesa francescana di Villa Verucchio," *L'Arco* 4 (2006): 13–16. The dating of c. 1330–1335 that Daniel Ferrara suggested for the dossal is too late, in my opinion. Cf. Daniele Ferrara, ed., *Giovanni Baronzio e la pittura a Rimini nel Trecento* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, 2008), 108–115.

[37] Cesare Brandi, ed., *Mostra della pittura riminese del Trecento* (Rimini, 1935), xxiii, who considered the Madonna in the Gallery and the stories of the Baptist as works by an anonymous Riminese master, compared them with the stories of Christ now in the Galleria Nazionale of Palazzo Barberini, Rome, though the latter are said to be more closely linked to the traditions of painting in Rimini.

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**TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

The support is a single piece of horizontally grained wood that has been thinned to approximately 2 cm and cradled. The x-radiographs show that pieces of fabric were applied to the panel before it was covered with gesso. The areas to be gilded were prepared with red bole. Lines marking major contours in the figures and architecture were inscribed and then reinforced with dark paint in the early stages of painting. Gold and silver leaf were identified in several decorative details on the architecture and in the brocade cloth behind the bed, but only gold leaf was found in the background. [1]

The panel was cut from an altarpiece along the ornamental gold leaf border separating it from the other scenes; at the left edge, the ornamental border is truncated. The panel has suffered some worm damage in the past. The painted surface is fairly well preserved, but inpainting along several old scratches has discolored, and there is a fair amount of inpainting in the body and in the blanket covering Saint Elizabeth's bed, in the group of women behind it, and in the lower part of the robes of the figures in the foreground. Much of the gold of the ornamental border along the lower edge is modern, and a 1 cm-wide strip above it is heavily inpainted. The painting was "cradled, restored, and varnished" by Stephen Pichetto in 1947 and "cleaned, restored, and varnished" by Mario Modestini in 1950. [2] Archival x-radiographs show an earlier cradle, indicating that the painting had been cradled before Stephen Pichetto worked on it. The surface film is now dull and discolored.

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**TECHNICAL NOTES**

[1] The NGA scientific research department identified gold and silver leaf using x-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF) (see report dated February 16, 2000, in NGA conservation files).

[2] Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:318.

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**PROVENANCE**

Possibly commissioned as part of the high altarpiece of a church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist in Emilia Romagna or in the Marche, Italy. George Edmund Street [1824-1881], London, by 1880;[1] probably by inheritance to his son, Arthur Edmund Street [1855-1938], Bath. Harold Irving Pratt [1877-1939], New York, by 1917.[2] (Wildenstein & Co., Inc., London, New York and Paris); sold 1947 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation;[3] gift 1952 to NGA.

[1] The painting must have been acquired by Street, the English Gothic Revival architect, together with two other fragments from the same dismantled altarpiece: the *Annunciation of the Baptist's Birth* and the *Baptist Sending His Disciples to Christ*. In addition to the Gallery's painting, these two panels were also exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1880 (nos. 231 and 234). Both were presented anew at an exhibition in Bristol in 1937 as the property of Street's son in Bath. But since then all trace of them has been lost: it is possible these two were destroyed in a bombardment that struck the Street family's house during World War II; see Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting. Sec. III, vol. V, The Fourteenth Century. Bernardo Daddi and his circle* (Brattleboro, 1947), 2nd edition: Miklós Boskovits, assisted by Ada Labriola and Martina Ingedaay Rodio, Florence, 2001: 472, citing information provided by Federico Zeri. The date of Street's acquisition of the panels is uncertain; perhaps it occurred between the dates of the first and second edition of his book *Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages. Notes of a Tour in the North of Italy*, London, 1855 (*Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages. Notes of Tours in the North of Italy*, London, 1874). In the first edition the author shows little interest in painting, but in the preface to the second he recalls his many visits to Italy and draws the reader's attention to the publication of James Archer


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Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A New History of Painting in Italy from the Second to the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1864-1871.

[2] Exactly when the panel passed into the collection of Pratt, the American oil industrialist and philanthropist, is also uncertain. Reports of this collection are found from 1909 onward (see Edward Fowles, *Memories of Duveen Brothers*, London, 1976: 33). Pratt lent the painting to a 1917 exhibition at Kleinberger Galleries in New York, from whom he possibly acquired it. By the time of the 1947 exhibition of Italian paintings at Wildenstein's in New York, it was no longer in the Pratt collection: the catalogue lists the owner as Wildenstein.

[3] The bill of sale (copy in NGA curatorial files) from Wildenstein & Co. to the Kress Foundation for thirteen paintings and one tapestry room is dated 30 October 1947; payment was made in installments. The painting is described as by Giovanni Baronzio da Rimini.

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**EXHIBITION HISTORY**

1880 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy, London, 1880, no. 228, as *Birth of St. John the Baptist* by an unknown artist.

1917 A Loan Exhibition of Italian Paintings, Kleinberger Galleries, New York, 1917, no. 70, repro., as by Giovanni Baronzio.

1947 Italian Paintings, Wildenstein & Co., Inc., New York, 1947, no. 37, repro., as by Giovanni Baronzio.

1995 Il Trecento Riminese: Maestri e botteghe tra Romagna e Marche, Museo della Città, Rimini, Italy, 1995-1996, no. 51, repro.

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