The panel, which to judge from its proportions and rectangular shape was probably originally the right shutter of a diptych, [1] shows the Crucifixion, with the kneeling Mary Magdalene clinging to the cross; to the left, Mary, Mother of Jesus, who swoons, supported by her arm on the shoulders of one of the holy women on one side and Saint John on the other; [2] and, to the right, the centurion, a Pharisee, and a third man, who witness the Crucifixion with arms and eyes raised and seem to speak to Christ on the cross. [3] To the sides of the cross, against the gold ground, small angels in flight gather the blood that flows from the Savior’s wounds.

Mentioned only perfunctorily by art historians, but in general linked to the name of Bernardo Daddi, the painting in the National Gallery of Art was first introduced to the literature by F. Mason Perkins (1911) as a “genuine, albeit rather weak little work” of this artist. [4] Later scholars confirmed the attribution until Richard Offner declassified the painting in 1930, inserting it among those erroneously attributed to the master. [5] Osvald Sirén (1917) compared the panel to similar versions of the Crucifixion painted by the artist, particularly those in the Galleria dell’Accademia and Museo Horne in Florence; he judged it an early work, [6] while Raimond Van Marle (1924) pointed out its affinity with the portable triptych in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena, dated 1336. [7] Lionello Venturi (1931), however, rejected Offner’s doubts about the autograph status of the Washington Crucifixion, and compared the painting with Bernardo’s portable triptych dated 1333 in the Museo del Bigallo in Florence; Venturi (1933) maintained that the work was actually superior in quality to the triptych in the Lindenau-Museum in Altenburg. [8] In which
Offner, by contrast, recognized Bernardo’s hand. Further, after Offner (1958) noted for the first time retouches in various parts of the panel and proposed a classification “close to the Master of S. Martino alla Palma,” opinions were divided: Bernard Berenson (1963), followed by Burton Fredericksen and Federico Zeri (1972), maintained the attribution to Bernardo, while the Gallery (1965, 1968, 1985) and Fern Rusk Shapley (1966) classified the painting as “attributed to Daddi,” and Wolfgang Kermer (1967) and later Shapley herself (1979) spoke of “Follower of Daddi.” [9] The present writer, after having cited the panel as a studio work by the artist (1984), has since 1989 expressed his conviction that it is a fully autograph work by Bernardo. [10] Ada Labriola (1999) also accepted this proposal, as did Laurence Kanter (in correspondence), who noted similarities to the so-called Master of San Martino alla Palma and pointed out the archaism of the frame carved in one with the panel support. [11]

The affinities noted by Offner between the Washington Crucifixion and the work of the Master of San Martino alla Palma are worth underlining, since they throw some light on Daddi’s beginnings and on the date of this painting. Thought in the past to be a follower of Bernardo, the Master of San Martino alla Palma is now recognized to have been at work not after, but at the same time as, Daddi’s initial phase and had probably begun his activity even earlier. [12] The very fact that he used freehand incisions with a graving tool, and not punch marks, to decorate the halos and ornamental borders of his paintings suggests that the Master’s œuvre did not extend beyond the third decade of the fourteenth century; it was only after that date that the use of decorations with punched motifs in the gold ground of panels began to spread rapidly in Florence. [13] In light of our present knowledge, the very real similarities to the Master of San Martino alla Palma that Offner observed in our painting would imply a relatively precocious date for it, which can be extended also to two other similar compositions from Bernardo’s early phase, one in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston [14] and the other, of which only two fragments are known today, divided between the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart and the Strossmayer Gallery in Zagreb [fig. 1]. [15] The affinities of all these paintings with those of the Master of San Martino alla Palma are undeniable, but the figures’ more elongated proportions, the more spacious but less rigorously calibrated structure of the compositions, and the figures’ restrained gestures and ponderous movements reveal a phase of particular attention to Giotto’sque models in the development of the young Daddi. [16] For his part, the Master of San Martino alla Palma, whom Offner called “a painter of a lyrical sweetness and bird-like volubility,” [17] never shows any signs of particular interest in Giotto’s figurative world. A motif like the
swooning Madonna, who is supported by one of the holy women and by Saint John and who seems to be falling forward, as in the panel discussed here and in the fragment in Zagreb, is absent from numerous other, presumably later versions of the Crucifixion painted by Bernardo. [18] The passage would seem to suggest that the panel belongs to a phase of youthful experimentation preceding the dated examples of 1333. Several stylistic data seem, in my view, to lead to the same conclusion. Admittedly, in the Washington Crucifixion we no longer find the rigidly static composition nor the ponderous forms that distinguish the figures in the phase of Daddi’s closest allegiance to Giottesque models, datable between 1315 and the early 1320s, such as the frescoes in the Pulci and Berardi chapel in Santa Croce in Florence. [19] Nor do we find in it the spontaneity and immediacy of communication that characterize the triptych in the Uffizi, Florence, dated 1328, and that would become increasingly evident in subsequent works by the artist. [20] The lack of punched motifs, as well as the use of pseudo-Kufic inscriptions in the marginal decoration of the painting in the Gallery, similarly suggests a dating prior to c. 1330, [21] perhaps within the first half of the third decade.

Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011)

March 21, 2016

COMPARATIVE FIGURES
NOTES


[2] In representations of the Crucifixion, when the cross is not flanked solely by the figures of the Virgin Mary and Saint John, arranged on either side of Christ, Mary and the holy women are represented (as they are here) to the left of the crucified Christ. The Gospels tell us that Christ on the cross was accompanied by Mary Magdalene (Matthew 27:56); by Mary, wife of Clopas (John 19:25); by Mary, mother of James and Joses (Mark 15:40); and by Salome (Mark 15:40), sometimes identified as the sister of the mother of
The centurion who recognizes the dying Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47) is a common element in Crucifixion iconography. But so too are onlookers with long beards and veiled heads, indicated as Jewish religious leaders, whom the Gospel narratives also attest to as being present at the Passion of Christ (Matthew 27:4; Mark 15:31; Luke 23:35).


[12] Writing about the Master of San Martino alla Palma in 1947, Richard Offner—the scholar who initiated and devoted greatest attention to the study of this artist—placed his output in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, considering him in essence a follower of Daddi: Richard Offner, A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century, sec. 3, vol. 5, Bernardo Daddi and His Circle, ed. Miklós Boskovits, Ada Labriola, and Martina Ingendaay Rodio, new ed. (Florence, 2001), 73–80. Only later did Luciano Bellosi point out that the art of this anonymous master must represent a "proto-Daddesque" episode, to be placed in the first decades of the century and to be related to the activity of the Master of the Codex of Saint George. The latter, the most manifestly gothicizing in style of Florentine artists of the period, is known to have been active in the years shortly after 1315; cf. Luciano Bellosi, Buffalmacco e il Trionfo della morte (Turin, 1974), 78; Luciano Bellosi, “Moda e cronologia: B) per la pittura di primo Trecento,” Prospektiva 11 (1977): 16–17; and Chiara Forzini, in Bonifacio viii e il suo tempo: Anno 1300 il primo Giubileo, ed. Marina Righetti Tosti-Croce (Milan, 2000), 151–152. The present writer has conjectured that the Master of San Martino alla Palma “received his training in the circle of Lippo di Benivieni around or soon after 1310 and...came into contact with Daddi only at a later stage”; Miklós Boskovits, A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century, sec. 3, vol. 9, The Miniaturist Tendency (Florence, 1984), 67.

[13] According to Erling S. Skaug, Punch Marks from Giotto to Fra Angelico: Attribution, Chronology, and Workshop Relationships in Tuscan Panel Painting with Particular Consideration to Florence, c. 1330–1430, 2 vols. (Oslo, 1994), 1:34–36, 78–80, the use of punch marks in the decoration of panel paintings in Florence caught on no earlier than the early 1330s, with few exceptions. This finding, however, should not be understood as a rigid terminus post quem; Skaug, in fact, established it only by considering...
securely dated paintings and without taking into account works such as Giotto’s crucifix in the Church of Ognissanti in Florence or the Pietà of Lippo di Benivieni in the Museo Civico of Pistoia, both undoubtedly earlier in date than 1330 and yet furnished with some, albeit partial, punched decoration. Cf. Giorgio Bonsanti, in Giotto: Bilancio critico di sessant’anni di studi e ricerche, ed. Angelo Tartuferi (Florence, 2000), 147–150; Miklós Boskovits, A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century, sec. 3, vol. 9, The Miniaturist Tendency (Florence, 1984), 174–175.


[16] Presumably the Giottesque models that influenced the artist during this phase were of the type of panels of the Crucifixion now in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (no. 1074 A) or that in Strasbourg (no. 167), both of uncertain date but generally placed in the more recent literature between the second and third decade. Cf., respectively, Angelo Tartuferi and Daniela Parenti, in Giotto: Bilancio critico di sessant’anni di studi e ricerche, ed. Angelo Tartuferi (Florence, 2000), 164–165, 170–173. In these works, Daddi would have ascertained a tendency to populate the compositions with slender-proportioned figures that express themselves with expansive gestures, though not devoid of elegance, and in dress characterized by delicate, close-set, and slightly curving folds. In this phase, too, the chiaroscuro contrasts in the modeling are attenuated, with effects that have led some scholars to assign the execution of a good part of the works produced in Giotto’s shop between c. 1315–1325 to a studio assistant variously identified under the conventional name “Parente di Giotto” or “Master of the Stefaneschi Altarpiece.”

Florentine painters of the early Trecento mainly represented the motif of the fainting Mary in such a way that the swooning Virgin, held up in the arms of one of the Marys and Saint John, can barely stand upright; she turns to the left with bowed head, as if she can no longer bear the sight of her dying son. See Evelyn Sandberg-Vavalà, *La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della Passione* (Verona, 1929), 148–151. We find her in this pose in the various versions of the Crucifixion painted by Giotto (Florentine, c. 1265 - 1337) and also in those by Bernardo Daddi, with the exception of those in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and that formerly in a private collection in Brussels; in these latter examples, the Madonna seems to be falling not forward but backward, assuming a pose very different from the more composed attitude usually shown in similar representations, including the panels in Washington and Zagreb. See Richard Offner and Miklós Boskovits, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 4, *Bernardo Daddi, His Shop and Following*, new ed. (Florence, 1991), pls. 17 and 31.


For triptych no. 3073 in the Uffizi, Florence, see Richard Offner, Miklós Boskovits, and Enrica Neri Lusanna, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 3, *The Works of Bernardo Daddi*, new ed. (Florence, 1989), 110–121. Other works belonging to the same phase and probably slightly later than the Gallery Crucifixion might include, for example, the Lucarelli polyptych in the Church of San Martino in Radda, in Chianti; the Madonna Enthroned in the Church of San Pietro in Lecore (Signa, near Florence); and the dismantled portable triptych in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, no. 177–177b. Cf. Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3,
TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a single wooden panel [1] with vertical grain, whose frame was carved as one with the panel. The panel and the frame were prepared with a fabric interlayer on which the gesso ground was applied. The gesso was then covered with a layer of red bole in the area to be gilded. The interface between the painted and gilded areas was demarcated by incising. Single point punches and incised patterns were used to create the halos and to decorate the gilding along the outside edge of the pictorial surface. The paint was applied with the small, discrete brushstrokes typical of tempera technique and with green underpaint in the flesh areas. Remnants of silver leaf are evident in the helmet and boots of the centurion on the right side.

The support has been damaged by woodworm in the past, as is apparent in the x-radiographs. To address this insecurity and a history of blistering, Stephen Pichetto cradled the panel in 1944. The gilding, bole, and gesso have been lost along the outer edges of the frame. The painted surface is generally worn, with many inpainted losses along the edges of figures, where the paint covers the edges of...
the gold leaf background. The gilded background is well preserved, but the mordant gilding on the decorative borders of the garments survives only in remnants. The silver leaf of the centurion’s helmet and boots, also present only as remnants, has tarnished to black. All shadowed areas in the faces of Christ, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin have been reinforced with transparent dark glazes, and the bridge of Christ’s nose and the shadows of his legs have been reconstructed. Inpainted losses and highlights can be seen in the profile of the Pharisee on the right side. The angels’ faces have been reconstructed and their wings generously inpainted. The garments of the Virgin are very worn. According to records in the NGa conservation files, Stephen Pichetto performed a “slight cleaning,” inpainted losses, and revarnished the painting at the time of the cradling in 1944. [2] The varnish is glossy and slightly yellow.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] The NGA scientific research department analyzed the wood and found it to be poplar (report dated January 1990 in NGA conservation files).

[2] See record in NGA conservation files. Apparently the painted surface was not significantly treated on this occasion; a “slight cleaning” could refer to a grime cleaning, a reduction of varnish, or a partial varnish removal.

PROVENANCE


[2] Dan Fellows Platt Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University, New Jersey: box 2, folder 23, call number C0860. The painting was lent by Platt to the Loan Exhibition of Italian Primitives at F Kleinberger Galleries, New York, in November 1917.
[3] Copies of the documents recording the sale are in NGA curatorial files; the painting was one of six purchased from the Platt estate and is listed as “Attributed to Bernardo Daddi.” See also The Kress Collection Digital Archive, https://kress.nga.gov/Detail(objects/2120.

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EXHIBITION HISTORY

1915 Loan Exhibition of Italian Primitive Paintings, Fogg Museum of Art, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1915, unnumbered checklist.

1917 Loan Exhibition of Italian Primitives, F. Kleinberger Galleries, New York, 1917, no. 3, repro., as Christ on the Cross by Bernardo Daddi.

1939 Masterpieces of Art. European Paintings and Sculpture from 1300-1800, New York World's Fair, May-October 1939, no. 72, repro.


1946 Recent Additions to the Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1946, no. 795.

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INSCRIPTION FOOTNOTES


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