



Byzantine 13th Century

# *Enthroned Madonna and Child*

c. 1250/1275

tempera on poplar panel

painted surface: 124.8 x 70.8 cm (49 1/8 x 27 7/8 in.)

overall: 130.7 x 77.1 cm (51 7/16 x 30 3/8 in.)

framed: 130.5 x 77 x 6 cm (51 3/8 x 30 5/16 x 2 3/8 in.)

Gift of Mrs. Otto H. Kahn 1949.7.1

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## ENTRY

The painting shows the Virgin seated on an elaborate wooden throne with openwork decoration. She supports the blessing Christ child on her left arm, according to the iconographic tradition of the *Hodegetria*.<sup>[1]</sup> Mary [fig. 1] is wearing a purple dress and a deep blue mantle highlighted with brilliant chrysography. Bearing a scroll in his left hand, the child [fig. 2] is wearing a red tunic fastened around his waist with a blue fabric belt supported by straps that encircle his shoulders. This motif perhaps alludes to his sacerdotal dignity.<sup>[2]</sup> In the upper corners of the panel, at the level of the Virgin's head, are two circular medallions containing busts of archangels [fig. 3], each wearing a garment decorated with a *loros* and with scepter and sphere in hand.<sup>[3]</sup>

Art historians have held sharply different views on not only the attribution of the painting but also its origin and even its function. Apart from Osvald Sirén's attribution to Pietro Cavallini (1918),<sup>[4]</sup> the critical debate that developed after its first appearance at a sale in New York in 1915 (where it was cataloged under the name of Cimabue) almost always considered the painting together with *Madonna and Child on a Curved Throne*. For a discussion of the problems surrounding both panels and some further proposals, see the catalog entry for the latter painting.

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**COMPARATIVE FIGURES**



**fig. 1** Detail of Madonna, 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



**fig. 2** Detail of Christ, 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



**fig. 3** Detail of archangel, 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

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## NOTES

- [1] On the iconography of the Hodegetria, cf. Gregor Martin Lechner, “Maria,” in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. Klaus Wesse, 7 vols. (Stuttgart, 2005), 6:59–71. On the cult of the image, see also Christine Angelidi and Titos Papamastorakis, “The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Hodegon Monastery,” in *The Mother of God: The Representation of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan and London, 2000), 373–387.
- [2] While the motif of the scroll alluding to Christ as the Word of God (Jn 1:1) appears frequently, that of the Christ child with a belted waist is less common; cf. Klaus Wessel, “Buchrolle,” in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. Klaus Wessel, 7 vols. (Stuttgart, 1966), 1:784–795. The belt could possibly allude to the liturgical dress of the oriental church; cf. Athanasios Papas, “Liturgische Gewänder,” in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. Klaus Wessel, 7 vols. (Stuttgart, 1995), 5:750–752. Hans Belting, “The ‘Byzantine’ Madonnas: New Facts about Their Italian Origin and Some

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Observations on Duccio,” *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982): 10, interpreted the motif more functionally as the “belt for carrying the Child.”

[3] These are among the symbols of the power of the Byzantine emperor, which subsequently became attributes in the representation of angels; cf. D. I. Pallas, “Himmelsmächte, Erzengel und Engel,” in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, ed. Klaus Wessel, 7 vols. (Stuttgart, 1978), 3:26–32, 35–40.

[4] Osvald Sirén, “A Picture by Pietro Cavallini,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 32 (1918): 44–47.

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### TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a three-member poplar panel [1] with the grain running vertically. Thinned and cradled during an undocumented treatment,[2] the panel is still set in part of its original engaged frame, which has probably been reduced from its original width. The studs decorating the frame molding are original, although they have been overpainted. The white gesso ground [3] is applied over a fabric that covers not only the painted surface but also the engaged frame.[4] The gold leaf was laid over an orange bole. Incised lines were used to outline the figures, and a green underpainting is visible in the flesh tones. The incised decoration of the halos apparently was executed freehand, and the additional decoration of the halos was created by dripping a resinous material onto the gold, as opposed to punchwork. The panel has a convex warp. A vertical crack runs from the top of the painting to the Virgin’s nose. Two additional cracks appear on the left side of the panel, running through the bust of the angel on the left. The join of the two boards on the right side, passing through the face of the angel, has opened from the top to the bottom. Worm tunneling is evident both on the surface of the panel and in the x-radiographs. The painting is in a generally fair state, although there is inpainting in the various small losses in the gilding overlaying the damages of the wooden support, as well as some lacunae in the Virgin’s cloak. The head and dress of the angel to the right and the area of gold ground above the Virgin’s head are also inpainted. In addition, the inpainting extends to the cloak covering the Madonna’s head.

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## TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] The NGA scientific research department analyzed a cross-section of the wood from the panel and found it to be poplar (report in NGA conservation files dated December 24, 1985).
- [2] The state of the painting in 1915 is illustrated in the sale catalog published in that year, which shows it unrestored, except for the loss in the gold ground above the Virgin's head. Sometime between 1915 and 1917, before it was sold to Otto Kahn, New York, the work evidently was restored. The various reproductions published from 1917 on show it much darkened by dust and opacified varnishes but without paint color losses and presumably already cradled. Judging from the reproduction given by Walter Felicetti-Liebenfels in 1956, the picture may have been cleaned again sometime later; Walter Felicetti-Liebenfels, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Ikonmalerei* (Olten, Lausanne, 1956), 61, pl. 64. Unfortunately, no documentation of these operations is available.
- [3] The NGA painting and scientific research departments analyzed the ground using polarized light microscopy (PLM) and found it to be calcium sulfate. At the same time, the pigments were also analyzed using PLM, x-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF), and microchemical tests. The results of this analysis were published in Ann Hoenigswald, "The 'Byzantine' Madonnas: Technical Investigation," *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982): 25–31.
- [4] The NGA scientific research department analyzed a cross-section of the wood from the frame and found it to be fir (report in NGA conservation files dated December 24, 1985).
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## PROVENANCE

Said to have come from a church, or convent, in Calahorra (province of La Rioja, Spain);<sup>[1]</sup> (art market, Madrid), in 1912. (Herbert P. Weissberger, Madrid).<sup>[2]</sup> (Emile Pares, Madrid, Paris, and New York); (his sale, Anderson Galleries, New York, 18-19 February 1915, 2nd day, no. 306, as by Giovanni Cimabue); (Emile Pares, Madrid, Paris, and New York);<sup>[3]</sup> sold 26 November 1915 to (F. Kleinberger & Co., New York).<sup>[4]</sup> Otto Kahn [1867-1934], New York, by 1917;<sup>[5]</sup> by inheritance to his widow, Addie Wolff Kahn [d. 1949], New York;<sup>[6]</sup> gift 1949 to NGA. [1] The provenance was first published as "from the Cathedral of Calahara, Spain" in the 1915 sale catalog of the Emile Pares collection, and it is repeated with various modifications in the subsequent literature. Although the Spanish provenance has sometimes been



doubted, NGA Systematic Catalogue author, the late Miklòs Boskovits, did not see any firm basis for such an allegation. He asked why should such an apparently unlikely provenance be fabricated for a painting considered to be, as was the Kahn *Madonna*, the work of an Italian artist, Cimabue or Cavallini. Boskovits considered speculations like those put forward by August Mayer (“Correspondence,” *Art in America* 12 [1924]: 234-235) and James Stubblebine (“Two Byzantine Madonnas from Calahorra Spain,” *The Art Bulletin* 48 [1966]: 379-381), linking the arrival of NGA 1949.7.1 and its companion-piece (NGA 1937.1.1) to Spain with the story of Anna Constance, widow of the emperor John III Ducas Vatatzes (who lived in Valencia since 1269 and died there in 1313), to be, for the time being, idle. There could be various other ways to explain the presence of the two paintings at Calahorra (see Otto Demus, “Zwei Konstantinopler Marienikonen des 13. Jahrhunderts,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 7 [1958]: 93-94); the provenance should, according to Boskovits, be considered valid until demonstrated otherwise. As Rolf Bagemihl wrote to David Alan Brown (letter of July 1992, in NGA curatorial files): “There has been a confusion and deprecation of the Calahorra provenance, but Parès[sic] was a serious collector and it might be profitable to have some research done on his collection, and right in Calahorra.” [2] In 1949 Edward B. Garrison (*Italian Romanesque Panel Painting*, Florence, 1949: 44, no. 23) included Madrid and Weissberger (Garrison spelled the name Weissburger) in his provenance of the painting, without including any dates. In 1982 Hans Belting (“The ‘Byzantine’ Madonnas: New Facts about their Italian Origins and Some Observations on Duccio,” *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982): 7, 21 n. 2) wrote that the painting had come on the art market in Madrid in 1912, and that it was Weissberger who claimed the painting had come from Calahorra. However, according to Belting, Robin Cormack found in Edward B. Garrison’s papers (at the Courtauld Institute, London) the information that Weissberger had fabricated the Calahorra provenance, information that Cormack referred to in a lecture given at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington in 1979. [3] The purchaser at the Pares sale is recorded as G.W. Arnold in an annotated copy of the sale catalogue in the NGA Library, as well as in a report on the sale in *American Art News* (27 February 1915): 7. Arnold is also given as the purchaser of other lots. However, there is a Pares invoice for the sale of the painting to Kleinberger later in the year (see note 4), so perhaps Arnold was buying for Pares, and the painting was actually bought in. Indeed, Osvald Sirén writes about the sale: “Somehow none of the New York collectors or dealers at that time seems to have grasped the artistic and historical importance of the work; the bidding was very slow, and the original

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purchaser retained his treasure. When I came to New York about a year later [early 1916] the picture was in the hands of a well known dealer..." ("A Picture by Pietro Cavallini," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 32, no. 179 [February 1918]: 45). [4] The Pares invoice for the sale to Kleinberger describes the painting as "Vierge[sic] sur paureau garanti du 13th siecle. provenant de la Cathédrale de Calahorra" (Kleinberger files in the Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 251, box 396, folder 5; copy in NGA curatorial files). [5] Kahn owned the painting by the time he lent it to an exhibition at Kleinberger Galleries that was on view in November 1917. It has not yet been determined when and from whom Kahn purchased the painting, although it was possibly from Kleinberger. [6] Although Duveen Brothers asked at least in 1941 what price Mrs. Kahn would accept for the painting, she specifically told them it was not for sale and that it was not to be shown to anyone (the dealer was storing the painting for her); Duveen Brothers Records, accession number 960015, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles: reel 328, box 473, folder 2; copies in NGA curatorial files.

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### EXHIBITION HISTORY

1917 Loan Exhibition of Italian Primitives, F. Kleinberger Galleries, New York, 1917, no. 69, repro., as The Madonna and Child by Pietro Cavallini.

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