

# An Altarpiece by Lippo Memmi Reconsidered

MICHAEL MALLORY

*Associate Professor of Art, Brooklyn College, City University of New York*

SOME YEARS AGO, Gertrude Coor and I, each unaware of the other's efforts, reconstructed in two separate studies a polyptych we both believed to be in large part by Lippo Memmi.<sup>1</sup> Regrettably, Coor's subsequent untimely death prevented us from discussing together this important work; to date, though, her published theories concerning it are frequently cited.<sup>2</sup> My purposes here are first to corroborate and supplement some of her opinions concerning aspects of the altarpiece's reconstruction, and second to present my own alternative views of its make-up and origin, which differ from hers in important ways.

Coor and I agree that the body of the polyptych comprised a central Madonna and Child (Figure 1), flanked by six laterals: St. John the Evangelist (Figure 2), St. Peter (Figure 3), St. Paul (Figure 4), St. John the Baptist (Figure 5), St. Louis of Toulouse (Figure 6), and St. Francis (Figure 7). My conclusions (as in many cases Coor's) are based on the following evidence: the overall and internal measurements of all these panels closely coincide (Figure 8). Here we must consider the fact that although the picture surfaces of these panels

are all in quite good condition, the shapes of the panels themselves, three excepted, have been disconcertingly altered. Only John the Evangelist, Louis of Toulouse, and Francis retain what must have been originally the shape of all; Peter, Paul, and John the Baptist are similarly cut down—in each case the area beneath the picture field and the decorated spandrels have been lost—and modern frames adorn the lower part of the Peter and Paul panels (the ogival moldings and cusps in all of the panels are original). The Madonna panel's shape has been even more radically altered; the original arched top was truncated (an ogival top has been approximated in modern restorations,<sup>3</sup> although its proportions, as Coor points out, are somewhat too squat), and the bottom of the panel has been extensively cropped. All of the figures' punchwork and drapery border designs, in addition, are interrelated. The punchwork and drapery border designs are sometimes exactly repeated in two or more of the panels—examples: the "butterfly" design surrounded by a quatrefoil in the halos of John the Evangelist and Paul (Figures 9, 10); the rosette in the halos of the Infant, John the

1. G. Coor, "Two Unknown Paintings by the Master of the Glorification of St. Thomas and Some Closely Related Works," *Pantheon* XIX (May–June, 1961) pp. 126–135; M. Mallory, *The Partial Reconstruction of an Altarpiece by Lippo Memmi*, M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1962 (research largely carried out at Yale University, 1959). Both studies cite earlier attributions and partial reconstructions.

2. Recent bibliography concerning parts of the altarpiece includes: C. Volpe, "Precisazioni sul 'Barna' e sul 'Maestro di Palazzo Venezia,'" *Arte antica e moderna* X (1960) pp. 150, 157

(Peter, Paul, and John the Baptist as Lippo Memmi); R. Oertel, *Frühe Italienisches Malerei in Altenburg* (Berlin, 1961) p. 76; F. R. Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, Italian Schools, XIII–XV Century* (London, 1966) p. 49 (John the Baptist as Lippo Memmi); and C. Seymour, Jr., *Early Italian Paintings in the Yale University Art Gallery* (New Haven, 1970) p. 90 (John the Evangelist as Barna [?]).

3. See I. Kunze, *Berichte aus den Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 59, (1938) pp. 26–33; the author illustrates the painting before restoration.



**FIGURE 1**  
 Madonna and Child, Lippo Memmi. Berlin-  
 Dahlem Museum, West Berlin



**FIGURE 2**  
 St. John the Evangelist, Lippo Memmi. Yale  
 University Art Gallery, New Haven



**FIGURE 3**  
St. Peter, Lippo Memmi and assistant. Louvre  
(photo: Archives Photographiques)



**FIGURE 4**  
St. Paul, Lippo Memmi. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Coudert Brothers, 88.3.99



FIGURE 5  
St. John the Baptist, Lippo Memmi. National Gallery of Art, Kress Collection, Washington, D.C.

Evangelist, Louis, and Francis (Figures 1, 2, 6, 7); the decorated border of John the Evangelist's cloak and Peter's collar (Figures 2, 3).

Coor and I also agree that the majority of the polptych's panels are by Lippo Memmi; I believe John the Evangelist, John the Baptist, Paul, the Madonna, and the head of Peter to be among Memmi's finest productions. These panels' style is characterized by a blend of line and volume that together creates a delicate balance between surface and depth, a gentle pastel coloring, and a fine mixture of naturalistic and abstract effects. Only the lesser degree of physical and mental animation in these superbly painted figures separates them from comparable works by Memmi's genial brother-in-law, Simone Martini. I further conclude that Memmi's polptych was executed at the high point of his career, around 1330 (Coor dates it toward the "middle or during the later part" of the third decade of the century), some years later than his earliest and most severe paintings but before the departure of Simone Martini for Avignon, after which we lose track of Memmi's activities. For me, the Madonna strongly recalls Memmi's early signed Madonna and Child of about 1319 in the church of the Servi in Siena,<sup>4</sup> but the slightly looser organization of forms, the more relaxed poses, and the freer treatment of the drapery in the Berlin Madonna and Child indicate a more evolved style and suggest that about a decade separates the two works. A parallel stylistic evolution is to be seen in other of Memmi's later works, such as the small portable diptych whose signed Madonna is also in Berlin<sup>5</sup> and whose pendant, a John the Baptist, has turned up recently and bears the date 1333.<sup>6</sup> Again, the tight, abstract curves and the severity of the early Servi Madonna have in the small Berlin Madonna become less pronounced, and the latter's companion, John the Baptist, although severely rubbed, corresponds closely in facial type and treatment of drapery and decorative design to the saints of our altar-

4. R. Van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools . . .* (The Hague, 1924) II, pl. facing p. 260. Coor, "Two Unknown Paintings," p. 130, dates the Servi Madonna in the early 1320s; H. Hager, *Die Anfänge des Italienischen Altarbildes* (Munich, 1962) p. 199, note 157, cites a document stating that Memmi's painting was put in place in 1319.

5. Van Marle, *Development* II, fig. 168.

6. Wadsworth Atheneum, catalogue: *An Exhibition of Italian Panels and Manuscripts from the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries in Honor of Richard Offner* (Hartford, 1965), no. 24.



FIGURE 6

St. Louis of Toulouse, shop of Lippo Memmi. Gallery, Siena (photo: Frick Art Reference Library)



FIGURE 7

St. Francis, shop of Lippo Memmi. Gallery, Siena (photo: Frick Art Reference Library)



FIGURE 8  
Key to polyptych's dimensions (in centimeters)

	JOHN THE EVANGELIST	PAUL	PETER	JOHN THE BAPTIST	LOUIS	FRANCIS	MADONNA
A-B	37.5	39	39	37.9	39	38.5	
A-C	40	41	41	40.5	41	41	
C-B	40	41.5	41.5	40.5	41	41	
C-D	88.8	89	88	89.5	90.9	91	77 (original portion)
E-F	42.7	42	43	42	44.5	44.2	55
Top of Panel	22.9				23	23	
Width of decorated band of halo	4.5	4.5	4	4.5	4	4	
X-D					98.5	98.5	
X-Y	1.05 meter				1.05 meter	1.05 meter	



piece. Memmi's most elaborately decorative Madonna, in Altenburg, is by this reasoning a still later work than our polyptych. Some caution must be exercised when comparing the figures on our polyptych to those of Memmi's other autograph dated works; his collaborative role in the Uffizi Annunciation (1333) has not, and perhaps cannot, be isolated, and the documented participation of his father, Memmo di Filipuccio, in the San Gimignano Maestà (1317) complicates our judgment of this important painting. Even taking into account the problematic nature of these two works, our panels more closely relate to the style of the Annunciation (compare the two flanking saints, Ansanus and Giulita) than to the Maestà, where the standing saints seem far more archaic in treatment.

Considering only Memmi's polyptych panels that we have so far discussed, I draw certain conclusions concerning the polyptych as a whole. Its design and iconography were dependent on two of Simone's important altarpieces, the polyptychs at Pisa (1319?) and Orvieto (1320).<sup>7</sup> Both of Simone's altarpieces were

7. Illus., G. Paccagnini, *Simone Martini* (Milan, n.d.) pp. 106, 119-121.



FIGURE 9  
St. John the Evangelist, detail of Figure 2

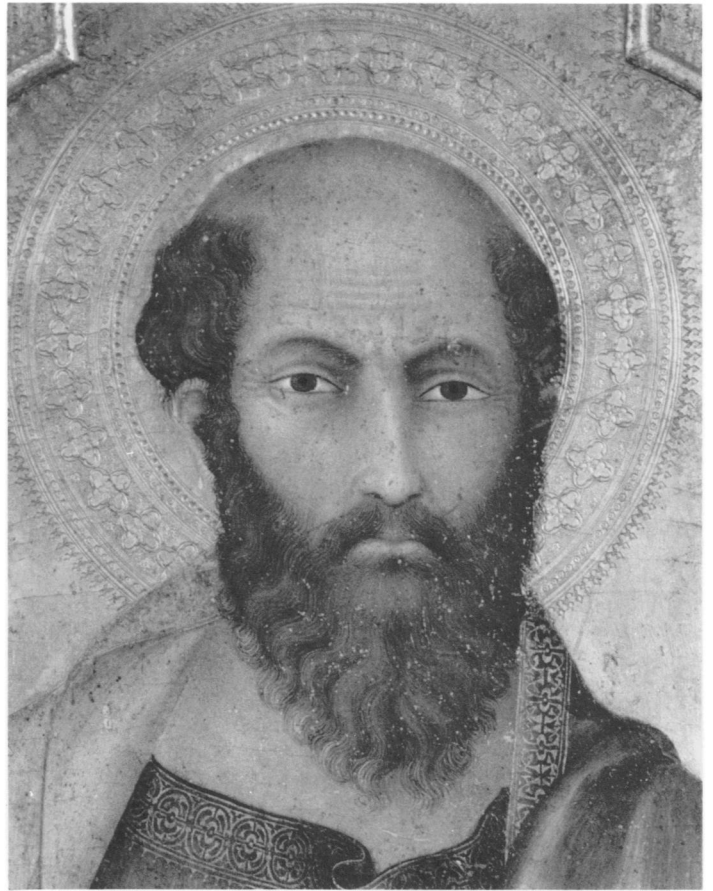


FIGURE 10  
St. Paul, detail of Figure 4

heptptychs,<sup>8</sup> as was Memmi's, and the Gothic ogival arches with cusps that Simone introduced in the Orvieto polyptych were repeated. Memmi's figures are more naturalistic in appearance and more richly ornamental in dress than those in Simone's two altarpieces (this relationship is particularly apparent among their Madonnas), an indication that though by different hands, the former work is somewhat later than the other two.<sup>9</sup> Simone's two polyptychs were commissioned by the Dominicans, and although both have at one time been dismantled, at least the Pisa altarpiece seems to be complete and accurately reconstructed. In

8. That two panels are missing from the Orvieto polyptych is indicated by the poses of the extant saints; Peter, Mary Magdalen, and Dominic face the Virgin to the right while only Paul looks to he left.

this work the major saints are disposed in pairs around the Virgin in the center—John the Baptist and John the Evangelist closest to her, Mary Magdalen and Catherine (the titular saint) next, and, as terminals, Dominic and Peter Martyr, who firmly fix the work's Dominican context. This arrangement of the main panels appears to be closely related to the scheme in the Orvieto polyptych where Peter and Paul, frequent pendants like the two Johns, probably appeared at either side of the altarpiece while the surviving panels of Mary Magdalen and Dominic were in all likelihood correspondingly balanced by representations of a fe-

9. Similarly, Memmi's polyptych is undoubtedly somewhat later than his own (recently cleaned) polyptych from San Casciana Alta near Pisa (*Mostra del restauro* [Pisa, 1971] pp. 22–25), whose design and style are closely related to Simone's Pisa polyptych.

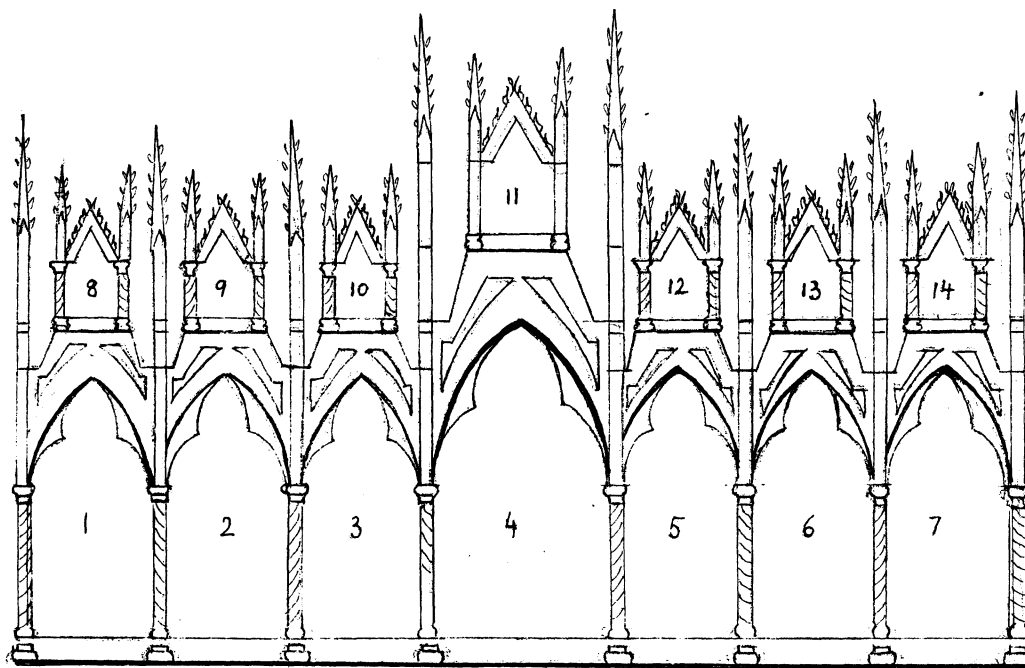


FIGURE 11

Reconstruction of polyptych:

- |                                       |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. St. Louis of Toulouse (Figure 6)   | 8. St. Elizabeth (Figure 19)         |
| 2. St. Paul (Figure 4)                | 9. St. Mary Magdalen (Figure 17)     |
| 3. St. John the Baptist (Figure 5)    | 10. St. Clare (Figure 18)            |
| 4. Madonna and Child (Figure 1)       | 11. Crucifixion (?), Redeemer (?)    |
| 5. St. John the Evangelist (Figure 2) | 12. Male saint                       |
| 6. St. Peter (Figure 3)               | 13. St. Anthony of Padua (Figure 15) |
| 7. St. Francis (Figure 7)             | 14. St. Agnes (Figure 16)            |

male saint (Catherine?) and Peter Martyr or another important Dominican.<sup>10</sup> The figures of Memmi's altarpiece were in all likelihood disposed in a similar way, with John the Baptist and John the Evangelist to the left and right of the Virgin, Paul and Peter as the adjacent panels, and finally Louis of Toulouse and Francis at the extremities, corresponding to Dominic and Peter Martyr in the Pisa polyptych (Figure 10).<sup>11</sup>

Thus far, my remarks concerning Memmi's polyptych

do not differ in any essential points from Coor's more summary discussion of the work. However, I find unconvincing her reconstruction of the subsidiary parts of the altarpiece and misleading her conclusions concerning the polyptych as a whole. The original shapes of the main panels indicate that pinnacles rested directly over each, as must have been the case in Simone Orvieto's polyptych. Coor believed that she had discovered three of these pinnacles: a Blessing Christ in

10. Trasmundo Monaldeschi, Bishop of Sovana and commissioner of the altarpiece (P. Bacci, *Fonti e commenti per la storia dell'arte senese* [Siena, 1944] p. 119), appears with the Magdalen; this may indicate that this panel and its missing pendant flanked the Virgin in the original ordering of the polyptych.

11. Coor, "Two Unknown Paintings," p. 131, sees an identical arrangement and while she does not refer specifically to Simone's polyptychs as models for Memmi's work, there can be little doubt that she too considered this relationship. Shapley, *Samuel H. Kress Collection*, p. 49, gives the same arrangement.



Douai (Figure 12) and two Hermit Saints in Altenburg (Figures 13, 14).<sup>12</sup> She recognized that these works were not by Memmi himself and, following Millard Meiss in the case of the Douai Christ, correctly attributed them all to the so-called “Master of the Glorification of St. Thomas,” a thus-far nameless painter whose masterpiece—whence his designation—is a large panel in the church of Santa Caterina in Pisa, and whose career and style are known largely through

12. The dimensions of the panels: Blessing Christ, picture surface 52 x 33 cm.; Hermit Saint facing left, panel 57.8 x 26 cm., picture surface 39 x 20.2 cm.; Hermit Saint facing right, panel 57.5 x 26 cm., picture surface 38.8 x 20 cm.

FIGURE 12

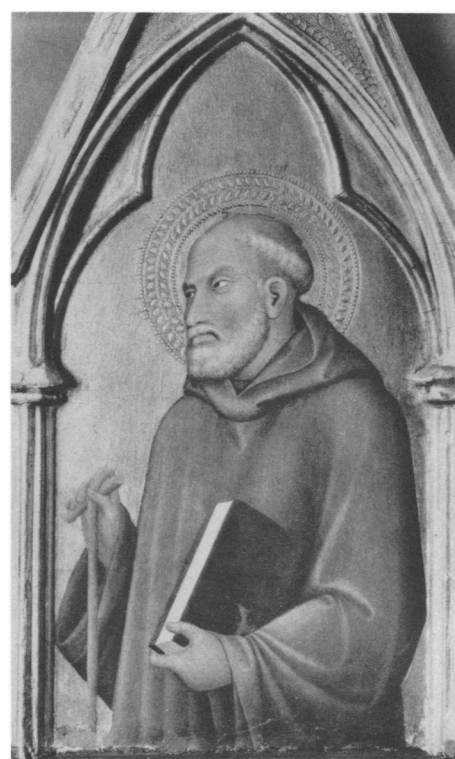
Blessing Christ, St. Thomas Master. Gallery, Douai, France

FIGURE 13

Hermit Saint, St. Thomas Master. Lindenau Museum, Altenburg, German Democratic Republic

FIGURE 14

Hermit Saint, St. Thomas Master. Lindenau Museum



Meiss's scholarship.<sup>13</sup> Coor concluded that this master was a member of Memmi's shop at the time our polyptych was painted and adduced evidence that our work, with the Douai Christ and Altenburg hermits as pinnacles, was the altarpiece, now lost but mentioned by Vasari and others, for San Paolo a Ripa d'Arno in Pisa. Coor's theory tallies with Meiss's view of the presumed Pisan St. Thomas Master; his stylistic ties to the art of Lippo Memmi and Simone Martini (Meiss and Coor both stressed this relationship) could be plausibly explained if he actually worked in Memmi's shop, and even Memmi's conjectured activities in Pisa, based on Vasari's report of a rather extensive list of works by him, including frescoes, to be seen in that city, would be in part documented.<sup>14</sup>

My own view as to what constitutes the St. Thomas Master's oeuvre and what is the nature and development of his style and his chronology will be dealt with more extensively elsewhere. Here let me state in advance my conclusions pertinent to the present study, for they provide the basis on which I reject Coor's reconstruction and ingenious theory concerning the supposed joint authorship of Memmi's polyptych. In my opinion, three major works, datable on stylistic grounds, can be attributed to the St. Thomas Master: a Madonna of Mercy in the Cathedral of Orvieto of 1325–30, not previously ascribed to him;<sup>15</sup> a dispersed polyptych of 1335–40, about which there are still reconstruction problems; and the panel depicting the Glorification

of St. Thomas of 1340–45, until now the St. Thomas Master's most famous painting. How then could the St. Thomas Master's pinnacles in Douai and Altenburg have belonged with Memmi's polyptych? For one thing, Memmi was painting his polyptych at about the same time that the St. Thomas Master was an independent master with his own shop, working on the Orvieto Madonna. For another, the pinnacles in question would appear to originate with the St. Thomas Master's own dispersed polyptych of 1335–40.

Returning to our present task of reconstructing Lippo Memmi's polyptych, stylistic considerations indicate to me that the St. Thomas Master's and Memmi's fragments do not have a common origin. The St. Thomas Master's treatment of the features and hands of his pinnacle figures surpasses Memmi's in sensitivity; a flicker of movement animates the manicured blessing hand of the otherwise static Douai Christ whereas the hands of Memmi's saints tend toward formula and are generally inexpressive. Also, the impact of the St. Thomas Master's three stern pinnacle figures is quite different from Memmi's images, which, with the exception of Peter, appear less severe. This relationship of pinnacles to laterals is the opposite from what we might expect, for often in trecento altarpieces subsidiary figures are not only relatively the freest in treatment but the lightest in sentiment as well. The St. Thomas Master's three pinnacles, with their consummate skill of execution and highly developed, independent aesthetic, would not seem to be the products of a lesser artist in Memmi's shop, nor even those of an extremely gifted but youthful apprentice, as Coor would have us believe; in either case we would expect to find a style more subservient to Memmi's. The St. Thomas Master would have to have been at the very least a collaborator—an artist of equal or even superior ability and vision. While such a relationship is possible, it is difficult to imagine. One wonders, for example, why the St. Thomas Master, with his clearly demonstrated gifts, would have carried out only the pinnacles of the altarpiece, assuming that he was the author of the remainder of the series that would be called for in such a large polyptych. More damaging to Coor's argument is the fact that among known collaborative works of the period from leading shops, none shows so clearly divergent hands and aesthetic preferences as do the small and large panels of this supposed ensemble.

13. M. Meiss, "The Problem of Francesco Traini," *The Art Bulletin* XV (1933) pp. 97–173, in particular 106–116; "Primitifs italiens à l'orangerie," *La revue des arts* VI, p. 148; *Illustrated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy* I (Princeton, 1969) p. 69.

14. A few recent critics have seen Memmi's hand in Simone's Pisa polyptych, and Memmi's small Madonna and Child in Berlin is inscribed on the back "Insegni Campo Santo di Pisa," which may indicate that he worked there. More instructive for establishing Memmi's activity in Pisa is his San Niccolo polyptych.

15. Illus., Van Marle, *Development*, fig. 165 (as Lippo Memmi). The Orvieto Madonna's inscription informs us that a "Lippus de Sena" was its painter. Understandably, this Lippus has been most often identified as Lippo Memmi, Siena's best known painter of this name (Lippo Vanni has also been considered). Lippo Memmi's hand, however, is nowhere to be seen in the Orvieto Madonna, and the painting is demonstrably a work by the St. Thomas Master and shop. I conclude, then, that the "Lippus" of the Orvieto Madonna and the St. Thomas Master, heretofore anonymous, are one, an identification that has implications for the oeuvre of the St. Thomas Master and Lippo Memmi that go beyond the scope of this paper.

Simone Martini's and Lippo Memmi's Annunciation of 1333, and Niccolo di Ser Sozzo Tegliacci's and Luca di Tomme's polyptych of 1362, the most famous and pertinent examples, exhibit no comparable variance of style; in at least the former case otherwise distinguishable hands seem impossible to disentangle when joined in a single project.

It is true that Memmi had the help of at least one assistant in the execution of this altarpiece. The somewhat wooden Francis and Louis are distinguishable from the other large figures, and their uninspired and occasionally heavy-handed painter cannot be the artist of the finely drawn Douai Christ and Altenburg hermits, as Coor seems to imply (compare the hands of Francis and Christ or the heads of Louis and the hermits). The composition and characterization of Francis and Louis resemble Memmi's figures far more closely than the pinnacles do (Coor suggests, probably correctly, that they were designed by Memmi), and their execution reveals a less skilled and distinctive hand than that of the St. Thomas Master. (Peter's drapery also seems to have been left entirely to an assistant for, as Coor again points out, it is flat and weak compared with the other figures.) This sort of intervention of assistants' hands in a large commission like Memmi's is not surprising—it was a common practice of the time—and the results are quite different from those we would expect from a collaborative effort by two skilled masters.

Another objection to Coor's theory of joint authorship arises when we examine the decorative features of Memmi's and the St. Thomas Master's panels. The whole polyptych as she envisioned it would have had to be painted and assembled in the same shop within a short period of time,<sup>16</sup> so that we would expect to find the decorative embellishments and tooling to be consistent throughout. This is not the case. A number of

inconsistencies can be cited: the cusps of the small panels are decorated with a flower and leaf design surrounded by four rosettes, while the corresponding areas in the larger works are decorated by more extensive and finely wrought punched designs of a different pattern; a small, punchwork pattern decorates the upper arched borders of the picture surface in the laterals and a corresponding pattern is repeated around the outer circumference of the halos of the large saints, and these designs are absent in the pinnacles—the juncture of frame and panel, when decorated at all in the small panels, is punched with a rosette pattern while the halos terminate with a sequence of rings and dots; a pattern of five colored dots embellishes the three visible areas of the cross-nimbus of the blessing Christ while there is no color at all in the profuse decoration of the Infant's halo in Memmi's Berlin Madonna, nor does the floral pattern that is lightly peened into the gold surface of the triangular gable in the Douai Christ panel appear on the large works. All these differences are minor, but it should be noted that such inconsistencies in assembled or reconstructable polyptychs by Simone Martini or his circle do not exist. On the contrary, embellishments secondary to the painted images are repeated with little change from panel to panel, large and small.

Having presented the evidence against associating the Douai Christ and the Altenburg hermits with Memmi's polyptych, I would like to propose as the missing pinnacles a series of six small panels of half-length saints: St. Anthony of Padua (Figure 15), St. Agnes (Figure 16), St. Mary Magdalen (Figure 17), St. Clare (Figure 18), St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Figure 19), and a male saint whose location is unknown to me.<sup>17</sup> These panels of similar dimensions would fit over the six large saints in our altarpiece, leaving only a figure to crown the Madonna in the center—in all

16. Coor, "Two Unknown Paintings," p. 132, allows for "more than a year" to have elapsed between the execution of the body of the polyptych and the pinnacles, but she offers no explanation for this surprisingly long period.

17. Dimensions of the pinnacles: Anthony, with frame 63.3 x 24.6 cm., without frame 40.8 x 19.8 cm.; Agnes, with frame 63.3 x 24 cm., without frame 40.8 x 19.1 cm.; Mary Magdalen, with frame 51 x 24.6 cm., without frame 40.9 x 19.8 cm.; Clare with frame 63.3 x 24 cm., without frame 38 x 19 cm.; Elizabeth, with frame 50 x 19.5 cm., without frame 41 x 17.5 cm. For the male saint, as identified by F. Zeri, see Wadsworth Atheneum catalogue, nos.

25, 26. The six panels were cited prior to the Wadsworth Atheneum exhibition: Van Marle, *Development* II, pp. 260 (Elizabeth as Lippo Memmi); B. Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance* (London, 1932) pp. 359 ("Dorothy" [Elizabeth] as Lippo Memmi), 360 (Mary Magdalen as Lippo Memmi), 588 (Agnes and Anthony as Lippo Vanni), all as Lippo Vanni in the 1968 edition (Anthony and Agnes incorrectly as in New Haven); F. M. Perkins, *Rassegna d'arte senese* XIII (1920) pp. 115–116 (Elizabeth as Lippo Memmi). A record of Richard Offner's attributions of some of these works is in the Frick Art Reference Library (Anthony and Agnes as School of Simone Martini; Mary Magdalen as Simone Martini;

FIGURE 15

St. Anthony of Padua, Lippo Memmi. Helen Clay Frick Foundation, Pittsburgh (photo: Frick Art Reference Library)



FIGURE 16

St. Agnes, shop of Lippo Memmi. Helen Clay Frick Foundation (photo: Frick Art Reference Library)

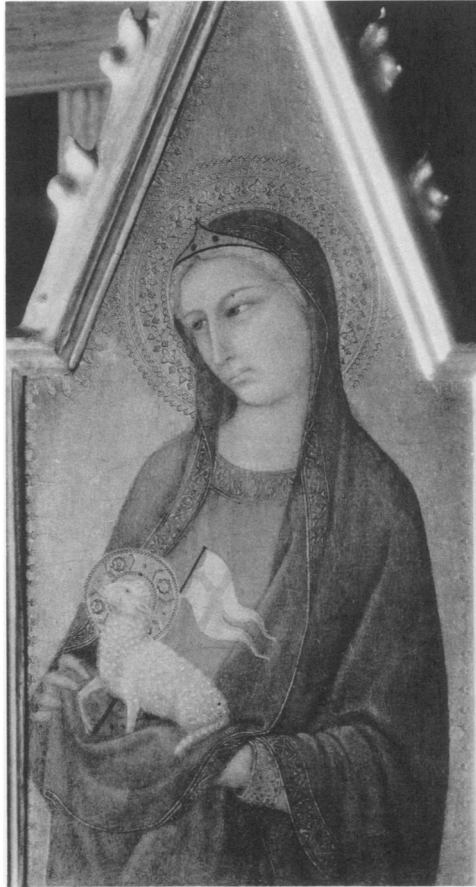


FIGURE 18

St. Clare, shop of Lippo Memmi. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Irwin Straus, 64.189.2



likelihood a blessing Christ. The identified pinnacles vary both in condition and with regard to the degree

Mary Magdalen as Simone Martini; Clare as Simone Martini or Lippo Memmi). The Wadsworth Atheneum catalogue which inexplicably attributes five of the panels to Lippo Vanni and one (Clare) to Lippo Memmi, asserts that Federico Zeri has reassembled them all as wings of a "small travelling altarpiece." Such an arrangement would be unusual in Sienese works of the period, and there is no indication from the panels that I have inspected that they were joined in any way.

of participation of assistants, but the creative mind of Lippo Memmi is seen in all of them. They are composed in broad, curving patterns, resembling the structure of the large saints of the polyptych, while their pastel tonality recalls the latter as well as other works by Memmi. The finest pinnacle—Anthony of Padua—can be attributed to Memmi himself and, even in its somewhat rubbed condition, it shows marked similarities in both general conception and particular features (especially the eyes, ears, and hands) to the best crea-



FIGURE 17  
St. Mary Magdalen, Lippo Memmi. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

tions of Memmi's altarpiece, particularly to John the Evangelist, Paul, and the Madonna; even the weaker lateral of Francis, while surpassed in sensitivity of treatment by the Anthony pinnacle, compares closely to it compositionally and in general handling of the drapery. Mary Magdalen is only slightly less striking; her finely expressive, almost oriental features are complementary in beauty and feeling to the Madonna's, and



FIGURE 19  
St. Elizabeth of Hungary, shop of Lippo Memmi. G. Devoto Falk collection, Milan

she balances her ointment jar with the same ease and grace of the larger figure of Paul bearing his epistles to the Romans. The three other pinnacles illustrated—Agnes, Clare, and Elizabeth—are by assistants whose harder and more exaggerated treatment, however, does not obscure the fact that their compositions are consonant with the others in our altarpiece. Agnes, though more rubbed, seems to be by the painter of



FIGURE 20

Fresco of a polyptych, Lippo Vanni. San Francesco, Siena (photo: Alinari)



Louis of Toulouse and Francis (compare Figures 6, 7, 16).

Nonstylistic evidence is persuasive in identifying these six small panels as our pinnacles. The punchwork designs around the periphery of the large panels are repeated exactly in the small panels, and similarly the halo patterns of the pinnacles and the large figures of the altarpiece resemble each other very closely; in many cases the same punches seem to have been employed in both small and large works (compare Anthony and John the Baptist), and the decorated drapery borders of Agnes and Mary Magdalen resemble schemes used in the larger figures (compare especially the collar and robe of Paul and the collar of John the Evangelist).

Identifying these panels as the missing pinnacles of Memmi's polyptych gives us a clearer picture of its design. Judging from Mary Magdalen, whose frame seems to be for the most part original,<sup>18</sup> both larger and smaller panels were flanked by matching spiral columns, approximating the scheme in Simone's Pisa polyptych where, however, it is the laterals and predellas that are flanked by columns. Over each of these columns, large and small, would have soared decorative finials resembling in design and placement those of the fresco-polyptych of standing saints in San Francesco in Siena, attributed to Lippo Vanni (compare Figures 16, 20). While the size and design of Memmi's polyptych would easily have allowed for a predella, none can be linked to it with certainty at this time.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, we must consider the provenance of our reconstructed polyptych. There is no documentation for it, but secondary sources indicate at least two possible origins for the commission. Vasari records an altarpiece on the high altar of San Paolo a Ripa d'Arno in Pisa, which he claims was signed by Lippo Memmi and which, according to his description, contained along with a Madonna three of the saints depicted on our altarpiece. Coor, and originally I, believed that San Paolo was the source of our dispersed polyptych; Coor confirmed this identification by tracing the iconography and provenance of the Altenburg hermits and the Douai Christ, which she believed to be its pinnacles, to San Paolo. However, as I earlier summarized, I now believe that the Altenburg hermits and the Douai Christ were the pinnacles of the St. Thomas Master's

dispersed polyptych. Because it depicted the same three saints described by Vasari, and for other reasons, it is probable that it was the altarpiece for San Paolo.

Now let us consider the other likely source for Memmi's altarpiece. In the nineteenth century, Brogi inventoried Louis and Francis, our terminal panels, in the large thirteenth-century church of San Francesco in Colle di Val d'Elsa, whence they were later transferred to the Siena Gallery.<sup>20</sup> This evidence, considered with the Franciscan program of our polyptych, which becomes all the more apparent with the addition of its proper pinnacles (Anthony, Elizabeth, and Clare are important Franciscans), makes San Francesco a very

18. According to Anne Booth, curatorial assistant at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, the columns that flank the Magdalen are of gilded gesso and may be modern while the rest of the frame is original. In any case, the present scheme must reflect very closely the original design.

19. A series of ten apostles, today divided among the Lehman Collection, the Washington National Gallery, and the former Stocklet collection, are possible candidates for the predella of which they would have made up the major part. The dimensions of each extant panel (29.3 x 21.5 cm.) would allow two apostles to fit beneath each of the laterals, assuming that some of the latter have been slightly shaved down and that only a narrow frame originally separated each of the predella panels. The fact that Peter, the principal apostle, and Paul and John the Evangelist, who are often included as apostles, are missing from this series of small figures could be seen as evidence to link them to our altarpiece, for these saints already appear as laterals, and the repetition of figures in the same altarpiece is rare (compare Duccio's *Maestà*, whose apostle series includes the same figures as these and is completed by Peter and Paul or John the Evangelist in the body of the altarpiece). In any case we would have to assume that part of the predella is lost, in all probability the central area under the Madonna and possibly a flanking panel in either wing. Although there is a notable similarity in the punchwork of these small panels and the rest of Memmi's polyptych, and stylistic comparisons of a convincing sort can be drawn, I hesitate to claim that these figures were once a part of our altarpiece. Decorative detailing in works by Simone and his shop such as the polyptych in the Gardner collection, the fragments of the polyptych in Cambridge, or especially the polyptych in Orvieto, also compare very closely to the small apostles (the dimensions of the wing panels in Orvieto, 94 x 48.5 cm., and the iconography of the polyptych as we know it suggest that it may be the altarpiece to which this predella belongs). Most important, the very Simonese character of the apostles makes them difficult to reconcile with the other parts of Memmi's altarpiece.

20. F. Brogi, *Inventario generale degli oggetti d'arte della provincia di Siena* (Siena, 1897) p. 158 (the inventory of San Francesco was made in 1865). Also see C. Brandi, *La regia pinacoteca di Siena* (Rome, 1933) pp. 198–200. The other panels of the polyptych have been in private collections for many years.

likely source for the commission. Circumstances under which the brothers of that church would look to a leading painter of nearby Siena for their altarpiece are not difficult to envision, nor is it surprising that Lippo Memmi would turn for inspiration to the large heptaptychs that his brother-in-law, Simone, had painted nearly a decade earlier at Pisa and Orvieto, for the other great mendicant order, the Dominicans.

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