





FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN ALTARPIECES

by Keith Christiansen

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Readers of Edith Wharton may recall the protagonist of *False Dawn*, Lewis Raycie, the son of a wealthy New Yorker who is sent to Europe by his father to buy Old Master paintings for the Raycie gallery. During his travels Lewis meets up with the critic John Ruskin, under whose tutelage he purchases works by such little-appreciated painters as Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Fra Angelico, and Carpaccio. When Mr. Raycie sees the small tempera-and-gold pictures that his son has brought home, he is outraged. "That pack of bones and mummers' finery," he shrieks. "Why, let alone the rest, there's not a full-bodied female among them." He dies a year later, his health destroyed by the shock of his son's gullibility. Lewis, however, opens a gallery of Christian art, which is received first with ridicule and then with complete apathy. Only two generations later is it realized what a treasure Lewis had acquired.

Farfetched though this story may seem, Lewis Raycie was in fact patterned on a fascinating individual, Thomas Jefferson Bryan (1800–1870), the earliest serious collector of Old Master works in New York. The story of his collection, whose real novelty was a group of twenty fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian pictures, is indicative of the general disregard for early Italian paintings prevalent in the United States through the nineteenth century. The Bryan Gallery of Christian Art opened on the corner of Broadway and 13th Street in 1853, and after years of public neglect, its contents were donated to the New-York Historical Society in 1867. This was three years before the Metropolitan Museum was incorporated and thirteen years before it opened its doors on Fifth Avenue. Among Bryan's early Italian works were several of true distinction, including the great *Madonna and Child with Four Saints* by the mid-fourteenth-century Florentine Nardo di Cione, which is, happily, now on long-term loan to the Metropolitan.

The first group of early Italian pictures to enter the Metropolitan came not from an American but from an Italian collection. In 1888 the law firm of Coudert Brothers donated a number of objects and paintings that had belonged to a former client in Florence, and through this gift the Museum came into the possession of Lippo Memmi's *Saint Paul*. The Metropolitan only began an earnest effort to purchase comparable

works after 1905. By that date many of the greatest masterpieces of Gothic and early Renaissance painting had found permanent homes in the museums of Europe, a fact that makes the acquisition in 1911 of so outstanding a work as Giotto's *Epiphany* all the more remarkable. Other pictures came to the Museum as a result of the generosity of its patrons. *Saint Andrew* by Simone Martini was part of the collection of George Blumenthal, who was president of the Metropolitan from 1933 until his death in 1941; the painting hung in the palatial setting of the Vélez Blanco Patio when it was part of his house on Park Avenue and 70th Street. Two companion panels, the *Madonna and Child* illustrated on the cover of this publication and a figure of Saint Ansanus, were purchased early in this century by Philip Lehman and came to the Museum in 1975 as part of The Robert Lehman Collection. Other outstanding works were given by Maitland Fuller Griggs, an avid collector of Italian paintings, and Irma Strauss. So the prejudices that Edith Wharton described really were reversed—primarily through the writings of Bernard Berenson, who knew George Blumenthal and Philip and Robert Lehman and whose advice was sought from time to time by the Metropolitan.

Though the collection of fourteenth-century Italian paintings in the Metropolitan is now one of the most notable in the United States, almost all of the pictures are single panels from large altarpieces and were never intended to be seen separately. Anyone who has been fortunate enough to see such an altarpiece decorating the church or chapel for which it was created, the flickering light of candles giving life to its gold background, will appreciate just how much the individual panels lose through their isolation. This publication was written by Keith Christiansen, Associate Curator in the Department of European Paintings, to redress this false impression—at least for the mind's eye—by reconstructing the altarpieces to which some of the most important of the Museum's fourteenth-century Italian paintings originally belonged.

Philippe de Montebello
Director

Cover: detail of Simone Martini,
Madonna and Child (figure 31)

Inside front cover: detail of Bartolo
di Fredi, *Adoration of the Shepherds*
(figure 36)

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INTRODUCTION

In the fourteenth century in Italy an artist could expect to undertake a variety of tasks that ranged from designing embroideries for church vestments to decorating the walls of a chapel or palace with large, complex narrative murals. However, the bulk of his activity was likely to center on the production of altarpieces. Some of these were small in scale, consisting of two or three individual panels hinged together so that they could be folded and carried from place to place; they were essentially private works of art with a fairly extensive market, and they were produced in great quantities. Others consisted of only a single panel, usually of the Madonna and Child, and these, too, were suitable decoration for a small

private chapel or a room in a palace. But the most demanding were large, complex polyptychs that were made to order for the altar of a particular chapel or church.

The only example of this type in the paintings galleries of the Metropolitan is by the Sienese artist Giovanni di Paolo (figure 1). Though it dates from the fifteenth rather than the fourteenth century, the altarpiece has a typically Gothic format. It shows at the center the Madonna and Child seated on a bench covered with a brocade cloth of honor while two music-making angels kneel before them; at the sides life-size figures of Saints Monica, Augustine, John the Baptist, and Nicholas of Tolentino stand on a pavement



1. Painted in 1454 by Giovanni di Paolo, this altarpiece is exceptional for being nearly intact. The spiral colonnettes and moldings between the individual compartments are modern, but the gilt area decorated with a raised floral motif above the arches is original. As in Lippo Vanni's frescoed polyptych (figure 8), there would have been a row of smaller, pointed panels above the larger ones, and a predella below. The smaller panels may be identified with the series of the Four Evangelists and Christ Blessing in the Chiaramonte Bordonaro collec-

tion in Palermo (figure 2), which is contemporary and of the requisite dimensions and employs the same tooled haloes. Two panels showing miracles of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino (in the John G. Johnson Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna) are sometimes identified as coming from the predella, but their exceptional height would create an unusually tall, narrow altarpiece. Saint Nicholas of Tolentino, who was canonized in 1446, is shown

at the extreme right wearing the black habit and leather belt of the Augustinian order. The two saints at the left of the Madonna and Child are Augustine and his mother, Monica. 83½ × 99½ inches. Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931, The Friedsam Collection (32.100.76)

of richly veined green marble. Though the fictive space of this altarpiece is continuous, the work is actually composed of five separate wood panels that are joined together. Each panel has been built up at the top and bottom to create a projecting Gothic arch, and the aggregate impression is of an arcade beneath which are placed freestanding painted statues. One of the notable features of this work is the relation of the silhouettes of the saints to the profile of the frame: the manner in which, to take just one example, the curve of Saint Monica's shoulder at the extreme left echoes that of the projecting leaves of the capitals. Indeed, the frame is integral to the conception of the altarpiece, and in

this respect the work differs profoundly from later paintings, where a rectangular panel or canvas was conceived and painted prior to framing.

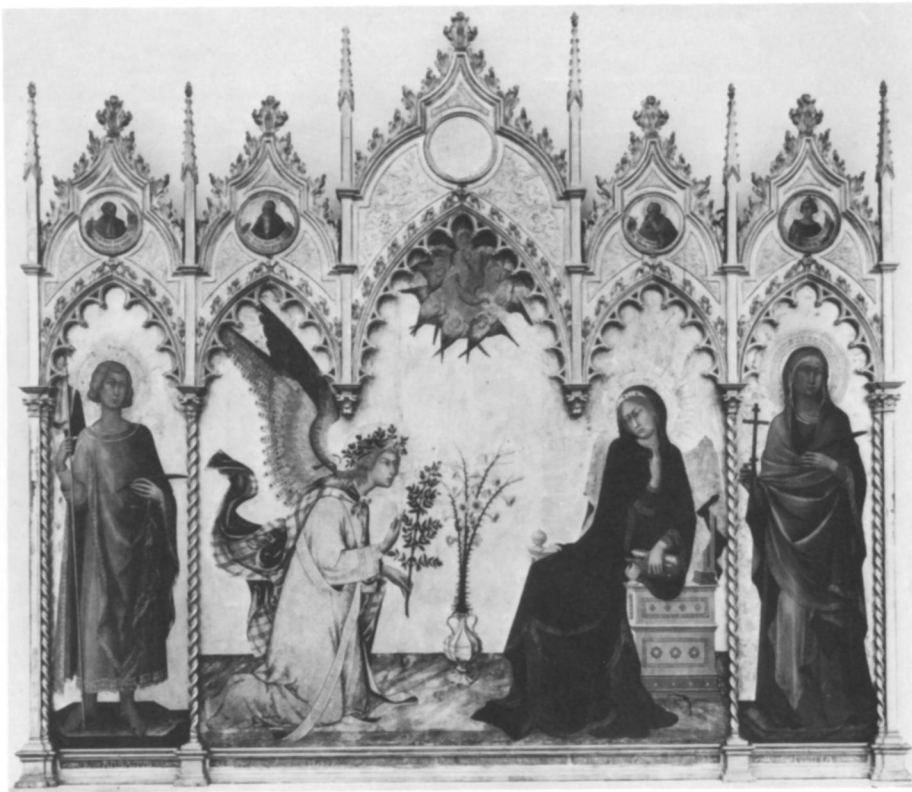
Like a number of other Gothic altarpieces, this polyptych was probably intended to include a series of smaller panels above the main ones—perhaps the Four Evangelists and the figure of Christ Blessing in the Chiaramonte Bordonaro collection in Palermo (figure 2)—as well as a base, known as the predella, that would have been decorated with scenes from the life of one or more saints. There would also have been finials rising from each capital between the arches—the molding in these areas is, in fact, modern—and these would have masked the abrupt



2. Though these five panels of the *Four Evangelists and Christ Blessing* have been framed as an independent altarpiece, there can be no doubt that originally they were the pinnacles of one of Giovanni di Paolo's large polyptychs—quite possibly the one in the Museum's collection. In accordance with their high placement the lecterns are portrayed as though viewed from below and the figure of Christ is shown with downcast eyes. Chiaramonte Bordonaro collection, Palermo

change in height between the center and side panels. The entire altarpiece would have been framed by large, buttressing piers.

Though most Gothic altarpieces depicted a Madonna and Child with saints, they were by no means limited to this arrangement. Some had at their center a narrative subject and were flanked by full-length saints, such as Simone Martini's *Annunciation with Saints Ansanus and Massimas* (figure 3), painted in 1333 for the Cathedral of Siena and now in the Uffizi, or Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Presentation in the Temple* (figure 4), dated 1342, which originally had lateral figures of Saints Crescentius and Michael. Still others showed a figure of a saint or the Madonna and



3. Simone Martini executed his *Annunciation*, one of the great masterpieces of Italian Gothic painting, in collaboration with his brother-in-law, Lippo Memmi, for a side altar of the Cathedral of Siena in 1333. It illustrates a passage from the Gospel of Luke (1:29) where it is recounted that when the Virgin saw the angel arrive in her chamber, "she was troubled at his saying, and considered in her mind what manner of greeting this should be." Simone's ability to describe emotion was unsurpassed, and his picture was to remain the most extreme and refined interpretation of the theme for better than a century. Especially beautiful is the manner in which the pose of the figures has been calculated in relation to the

shape of the central panel: the way the angel's wings fill the left-hand arch while his head is bent forward into the central field, and the way the Virgin's recoiling posture is emphasized by framing her head between the two capitals of the right-hand arch. Originally this tripartite division was even more emphatic, for in place of the elaborate, curved tympana of the present, nineteenth-century frame, there were probably simple, straight gables. The lateral figures show Saint Ansanus, the patron of Siena, and probably his godmother, Massima.
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



4. Like Simone Martini's *Annunciation*, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Presentation in the Temple*, dated 1342, was painted for the Cathedral of Siena, and it also had lateral panels of standing saints, now lost. The frame of the central panel is original, and its conception is as novel as the church interior that it surrounds. The side elements are conceived as buttressing pillars, their lower halves ornamented with feigned mosaics and their upper portions with Gothic windows. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

Child flanked by narrative scenes, and sometimes the altarpiece was painted on both sides so that the faithful were presented with one image while the monks or clergy seated in the choir saw another. The most famous example of this type was Duccio's *Maestà* (figure 5), which on June 9, 1311, was carried from his studio outside the Porta a Stalloreggi in Siena to the cathedral amid a great procession of clergy, city officials, and citizens.

What these altarpieces had in common was an elaborate carpentry frame that unified the disparate parts in an architectural setting. There were colonnettes (those on the Giovanni di Paolo altarpiece are modern replacements), pinnacles,

crockets, and piers serving as buttresses—the whole repertory of Gothic architecture. When complete, many of these altarpieces vied in complexity with the porches and facades of Gothic churches. Inevitably, when Gothic architecture fell out of favor, these altarpieces were replaced or altered to conform with current taste. Sometimes the old frame was removed and the pointed shape of the panels adjusted so that they fit a rectangular frame with classical detailing—this is what happened with an altarpiece by Taddeo Gaddi in the Museum's collection (figure 6), whose original polyptych form has been disguised by the late fifteenth-century addition of prophets to the spandrels. But more frequently the out-



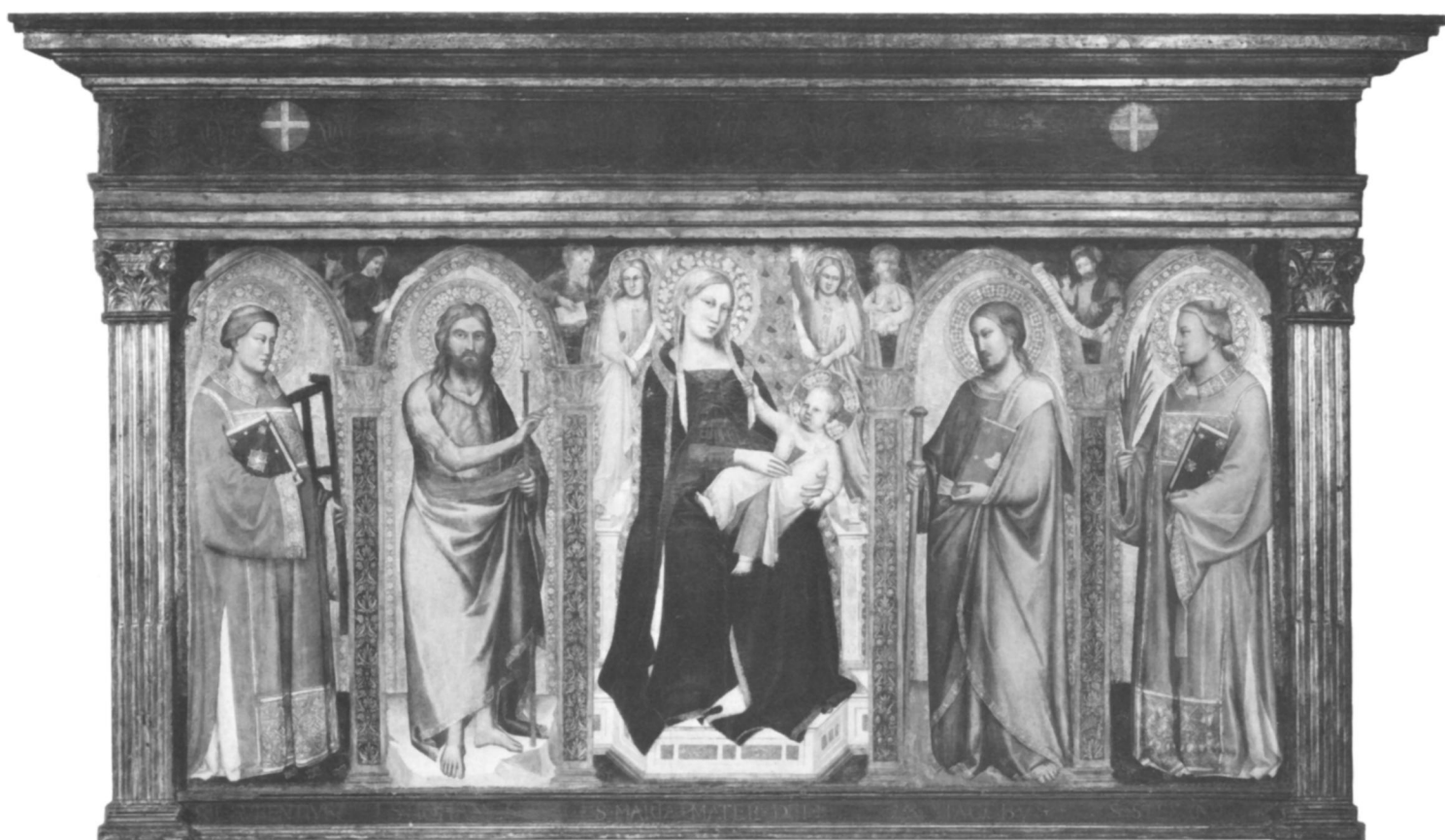
5. Completed in 1311 for the high altar of the Cathedral of Siena, Duccio's *Maestà* was probably the most complex and awe-inspiring Gothic altarpiece ever produced. It shows on the front the Virgin and Child Enthroned in Majesty (hence the name *Maestà*), surrounded by angels and saints. Above, arched frames (now lost) separated half-length figures of apostles, and above these were two further rows of pointed panels, one showing scenes from the life of the Virgin and the other half-length figures of angels. Below was a predella with scenes from the youth of Christ. The reverse side contained a series

of over forty other scenes from the life of Christ. In its rich and subtle use of color and the tremulous beauty of the figures, this work remained the keystone of painting in Siena for the next two centuries. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena

moded Gothic altarpiece was simply discarded, cut up, and sold. The history of Duccio's *Maestà* presents a typical case. In 1506 it was moved from its central position on the high altar of the Siena cathedral to a subordinate location against a wall in the transept. Then, in 1771, it was sawn apart. The two largest pieces were used to decorate altars near the choir, while the smaller ones seem to have been placed in the sacristy, whence a number were sold to private collectors: one of the scenes from the predella is now in the Frick Collection, and two more are in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. From a small, painted book cover of 1483 it is possible to acquire some idea of the appearance of the altarpiece,

with the small scenes separated by gilt moldings and colonnettes and the top crowned with gilt pinnacles, but of this framework virtually nothing remains.

The size and complexity of these altarpieces had, of course, to be carefully planned to accord with the intended setting. The factor of height and breadth, conditioned by the actual width of the altar and the architecture of the chapel, had to be considered, as did the factor of light, which was most frequently augmented by candles: in the case of Duccio's *Maestà* the front and back were illuminated by candles held by small carved and gilt angels. One of the rare records of the sorts of demands that confronted the artist con-



6. In the 1568 edition of his *Lives of the Painters* Giorgio Vasari mentions an altarpiece by Taddeo Gaddi in the church of Santo Stefano in Florence. This work has been tentatively identified as the altarpiece by Taddeo in the Museum, which in fact shows Saint Stephen dressed as a deacon, holding a palm and book, with the rock of his martyrdom wedged into his head. However, this provenance cannot be proven. What is clear is that sometime in the last quarter of the fifteenth century the original Gothic polyptych form of the altarpiece was modified to conform to Renaissance taste. The

fourteenth-century frame was dismantled, the central panel was cut down, and the area between the spandrels was filled to obtain a rectangular picture field. Classical pilasters and prophets were painted to camouflage these changes and a Renaissance frame was added. This unhappy solution imposed a unified space that was clearly contrary to Taddeo's intentions, and it introduced a frame all out of proportion to the figures it encloses. 43¼ × 90⅞ inches. Rogers Fund, 1910 (10.97)

cerns the production of the altarpiece for the high altar of the Pieve di Santa Maria in Arezzo (figure 7). On April 17, 1320, Pietro Lorenzetti agreed to undertake the commission; he had, according to Vasari, already decorated the tribune of the church with scenes from the life of the Virgin. He was to paint the Virgin Mary and Child at the center of the altarpiece and four figures of saints at the sides. Additionally, there were to be prophets and other saints—these were painted in a second tier of smaller panels—“according,” the contract read, “to the wish of the lord Bishop,” Guido Tarlati. The altarpiece was to be six braccia long (about nine and one-half feet). There were to be two columns or piers decorated with six

figures flanking the main panels, and these were to be one-half braccia in width (just under one foot). In executing the altarpiece, Pietro was to use the best available gold (the quantity of 100 leaves per florin is specified) and fine silver, and in painting the figures of the main panels he was to employ only the best ultramarine blue.

In the case of Pietro’s altarpiece it seems fairly clear from the existing documents that he not only painted the individual panels but also designed the overall structure. This dual role was not always the rule, however. Sometimes the artist was responsible only for painting the panels of an altarpiece constructed by someone else—usually a carpenter—and he therefore had to

7. Pietro Lorenzetti’s earliest documented work is the altarpiece he painted in 1320 for the Pieve di Santa Maria in Arezzo. Like so many Gothic altarpieces, it has lost its framing elements—not only the colonnettes and moldings that originally separated the various figures or the finials that adorned the uppermost panels, but also the piers that flanked the whole altarpiece and the predella. Despite these losses it is still possible to appreciate the manner in which Pietro has linked figure to figure through a variety of poses and expressive gestures. The altarpiece has been conceived as if it were the arcade of a Gothic church filled with sculpted figures. Indeed, there can be little doubt that Pietro had in mind one of Giovanni Pisano’s marble groups of the Madonna and Child when he created his own very moving and tightly knit composition for the central panel. Pieve di Santa Maria, Arezzo



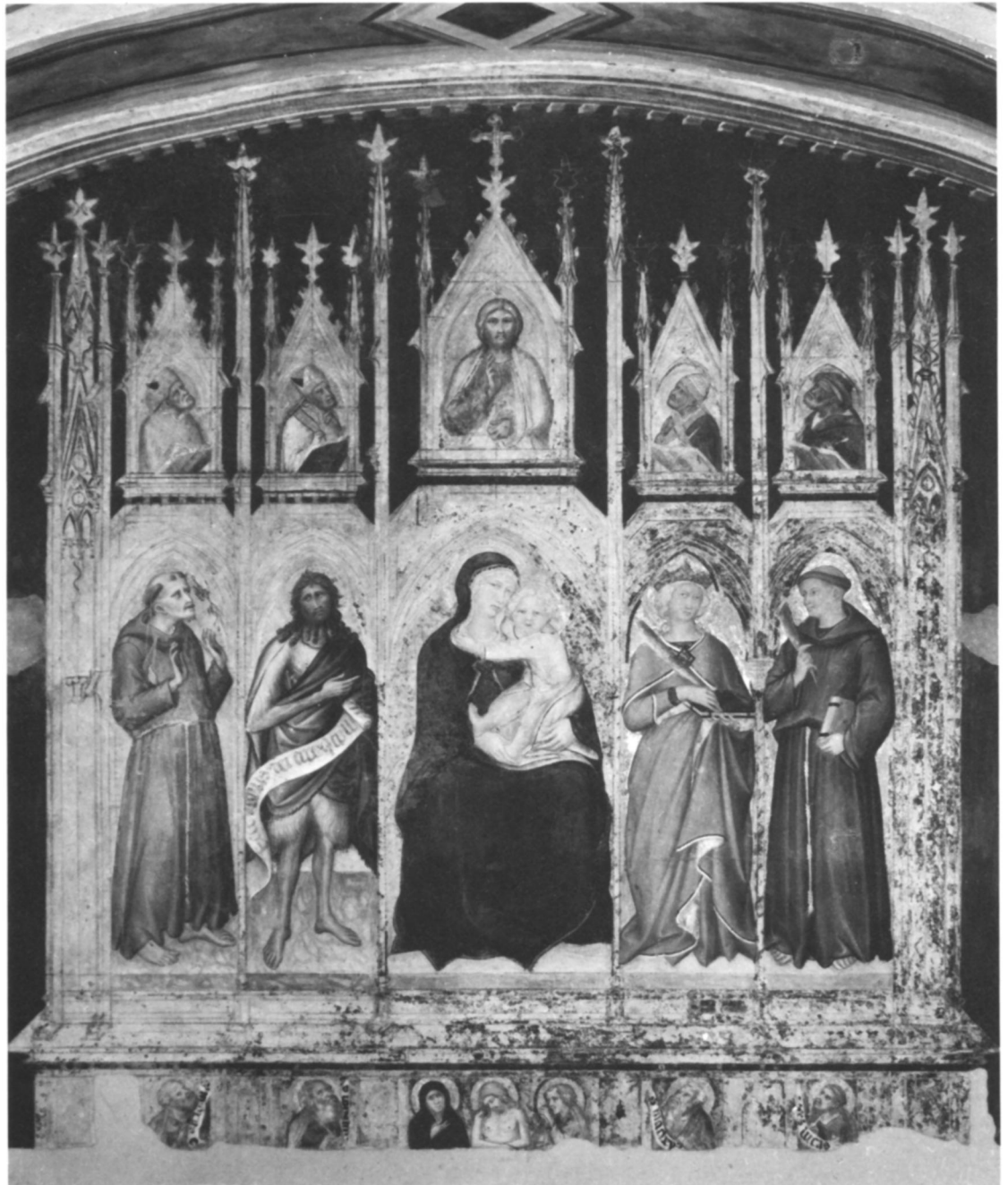
accommodate himself to a preconceived structure. There can be little doubt, however, that every painter had to have at least a working knowledge of architectural design if the structure and figurative content of the altarpiece were to enhance each other. It is important to recall that a number of fourteenth-century painters either practiced architecture or gave advice on large architectural projects. In 1334 Giotto was made *capomaestro* (master builder) of the cathedral of Florence, in 1341 Lippo Memmi was called upon to design the crown of the Torre della Mangia of the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena, and in 1358 Orcagna was made *capomaestro* of the cathedral of Orvieto. Small wonder that through-

out the fourteenth century the evolution of altarpieces parallels that of architecture.

Only a handful of these altarpieces have survived intact. Sometimes, as in Orcagna's great altarpiece commissioned in 1354 for the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, a frame of recent date seems to follow fairly closely the original one (Orcagna's is known from drawings). And occasionally, as in Lippo Vanni's frescoed altarpiece of about 1370 in the church of San Francesco in Siena (figure 8), it is possible to get a reasonably complete idea of the delicacy the structural parts could attain and the relation the figures bore to the frame. But generally, even where most of the painted panels of an altarpiece

8. Throughout the fourteenth century the largest expense in commissioning an altarpiece was for the carpentry and materials, not the painter's labors. A cheaper alternative was to commission an altarpiece in which the carpentry was simulated in fresco, such as this one, painted by Lippo Vanni for the church of San Francesco at Siena around 1370. It is from such a fresco that we can most keenly appreciate the carpentry of now lost or drastically altered altarpieces, with their frequently exuberant detailing. It is also easier to understand how such altarpieces, which derived their forms from contemporary architecture, would have been censured by later critics like Vasari, who in his *Lives* of 1568 wrote: "[In] the buildings of those days with their deformed parts—pilasters, columns, bases, capitals, and cornices . . . there is nothing that has either order or good countenance." Vasari himself was personally responsible for removing and dismantling numerous Gothic altarpieces.

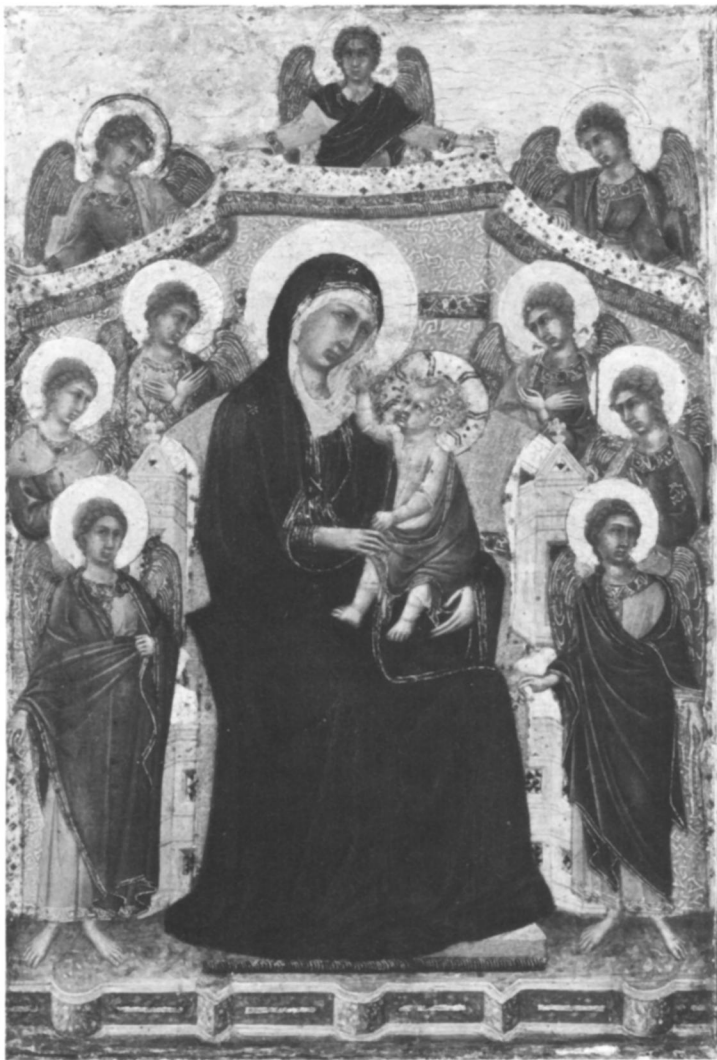
Lippo Vanni's figures, like those of Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti, are emotionally charged and conceived in active postures. Moreover, the artist has so increased their size in relation to the frame that at various points the silhouette of each figure is broken, accentuating the physical tension. San Francesco, Siena



have survived—as with Pietro Lorenzetti’s Arezzo polyptych—a good part of the frame has been altered or lost, and an effort of mental reconstruction is necessary if we are to appreciate the full subtlety of the work.

Of the fourteenth-century Italian paintings on exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum a number are wings of small portable diptychs and triptychs. Two panels in the Lehman Collection by the Master of Monte Oliveto, one showing the Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels and the other the Crucifixion (figures 9 and 10), were originally hinged together to form a folding diptych, and the *Madonna and Child with Saints and Angels* by Lippo Memmi (figure 11)

probably also had a companion panel that showed the Crucifixion (figure 12). Two rare examples of single panels are Paolo di Giovanni Fei’s beautiful *Madonna and Child*, which still has its original tooled frame ornamented with painted glass medallions (figure 13), and the small pax with the head of Christ attributed to Niccolò di Tomasso (figure 14). But the majority of the pictures, whether they show half-length saints, the Madonna and Child, or scenes from the life of a saint, are parts of altarpieces, whose structures to a large extent determined their appearance. What did these altarpieces look like?



9, 10. A modest follower of Duccio, the Master of Monte Oliveto seems to have specialized in small-scale, portable paintings like the present ones, which were originally hinged to form a diptych. This scale suited the miniaturist technique and fine detailing in gold of his best work. Again and again this anonymous artist reverted to compositions by Duccio; here the Crucifixion derives from a painting in the Museum of

Fine Arts in Boston from Duccio’s workshop that was itself the center of a portable triptych, while the figures of the Madonna and Child Enthroned are loosely based on those of the *Maestà*. Each panel $15 \times 10\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.1, 2)



11, 12. Despite its small scale, the painting at the upper left ranks among Lippo Memmi's most refined and beautiful creations. It shows the Madonna, her body positioned obliquely in relation to the picture plane, holding the Christ Child, who wears a transparent blouse and offers his mother a small rose. To either side stand diminutive figures of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Francis, while along the

sides of the gable are the nine choirs of the Celestial Hierarchy holding their attributes: (from lower left to top to lower right) angels with wands; principalities with branches of lilies; powers with staffs; cherubim with books; six winged seraphim; thrones with faldstools; dominions with censers; archangels with swords; and virtues with girdles. The frame of this exquisite painting is largely new,



and the molding that separates the predella with half-length saints from the main scene is a modern insertion. If this molding were removed and the predella rejoined to the main scene, the panel would have the same dimensions as a Crucifixion (upper right; location unknown) formerly in the Richard von Kaufmann collection in Berlin; there can indeed be no reasonable doubt that the two are wings of the

same diptych, in which the lyrical beauty of the Virgin and Child amidst the Heavenly Host was contrasted to the tragic mood of the Crucifixion. The diptych was probably painted late in Lippo Memmi's career, perhaps about 1350. 26¼ × 13 inches. Bequest of Maitland F. Griggs, 1943, Maitland F. Griggs Collection (43.98.6)



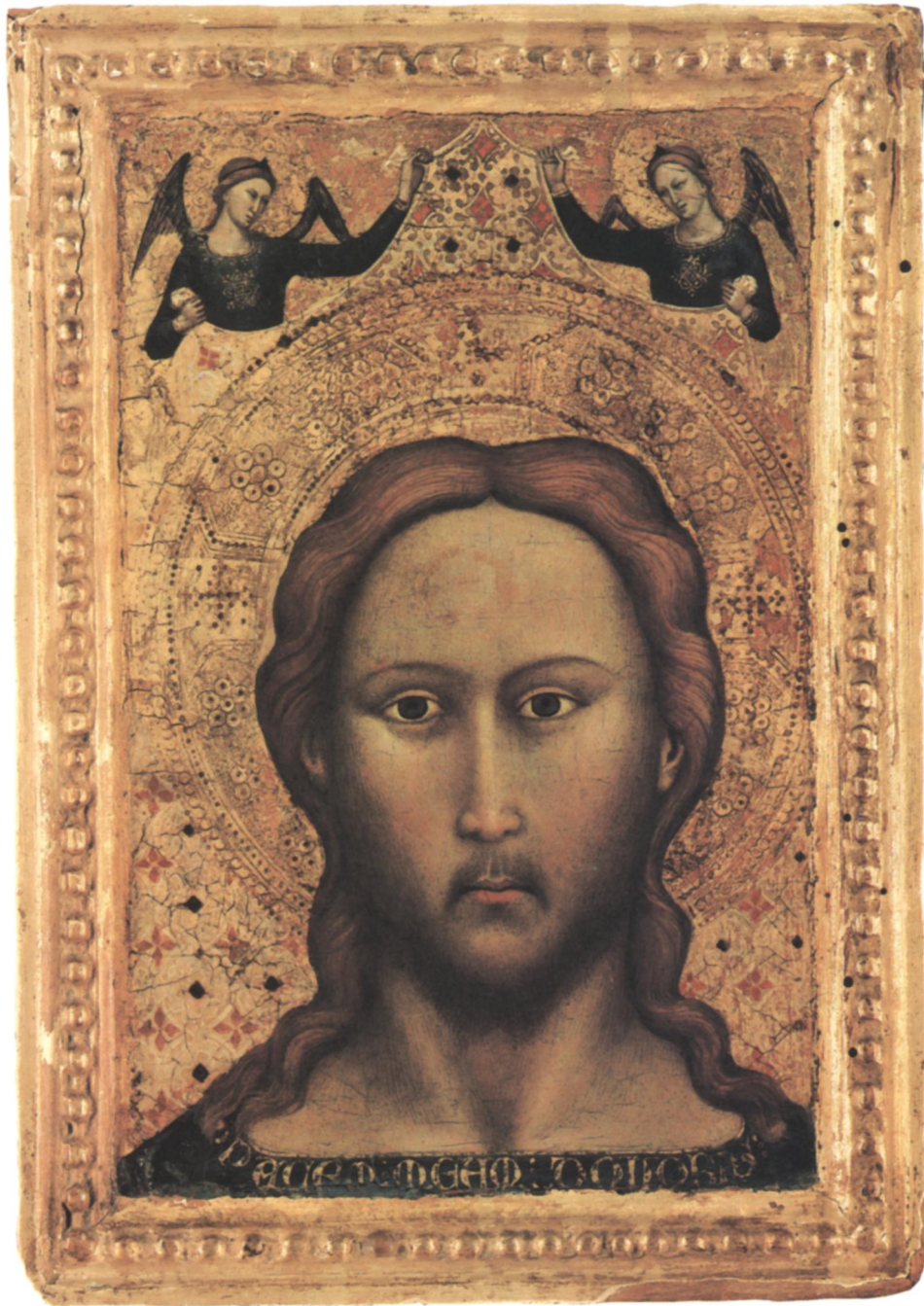
13. Some of the most appealing images of the fourteenth century are based on the theme of the Virgin nursing her Child—the Madonna del Latte. The great innovator of this genre was Ambrogio Lorenzetti, whose Madonna del Latte in the Palazzo Arcivescovile in Siena is unsurpassed in its vivid treatment. Paolo di Giovanni Fei's remarkable painting in the Museum—in which the solemn Virgin is portrayed frontally, while the feet, the right leg and arm, and the head of the lively-posed Christ Child are aligned along a diagonal that crosses her torso—probably derives from a lost painting by Ambrogio, though the Virgin's displaced breast is a peculiarity of Fei's imagination. For both the tactility of the forms and the uncompromisingly regular brushwork with which they are described, this is an exceptional picture. It was probably painted fairly early in Fei's career, about 1380, when he was most influenced by Ambrogio's work.

Almost as remarkable as its conception is its almost-perfect state of preservation (though the blue of the Madonna's ermine-lined cloak has, as is usual, darkened) and the survival of the original frame, which is decorated with raised floral patterns, cabochon jewels, and glass medallions in verre églomisé showing the angel and the Virgin of the Annunciation (details, above left and right) and various saints. In the execution of these medallions, the glass was first backed with gold and then engraved and painted. The engraving was done with a freedom that is in marked contrast to Fei's painting technique.

34 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.190.13)



14. It is probable that this picture attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso, which is in its original though regilt frame, was painted not as a small, portable altarpiece, but to serve as a pax—a tablet used in passing the kiss of peace during the mass. Such tablets were employed with increasing frequency in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and although they were commonly made of metal, a few painted panels are known. Especially appropriate to this liturgical function is the Latin inscription, "My peace I give unto You" (John 14:27), on the collar of Christ's blue robe, which underscores the intense, hieratic quality of his frontally viewed face shown against a patterned cloth held by two diminutive angels. The pax dates from about 1370. 11 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Gift of The Jack and Belle Linsky Foundation, 1981 (1981.365.2)



The earliest fragment in the Metropolitan is a small panel in the Lehman Collection that dates from the thirteenth century (figure 15). It shows two apostles, one in front of the other, standing beneath an arch supported by porphyry columns with blue foliated capitals and yellow bases. A faint inscription on the arch identifies the two saints as Simon and Bartholomew. There can be no doubt that the painting is a fragment: the columns have been sliced in half, and in each of the spandrels there is one-half of a circular recess with an abstract floral motif which, on analogy with other thirteenth-century paintings, originally would have been filled with a glass or crystal medallion. Five additional fragments (figure 16) obviously from the same altarpiece are known. Four of these show a single apostle standing beneath an arch, and the fifth shows a figure of Saint Francis turned to the right. The foliated capitals in the six fragments match up, and it is apparent they were painted on a single horizontal panel with Saint Francis at the left and Saint Peter at the right extremities and the apostles between grouped in pairs. Logic dictates that this is only half of the original altarpiece, which would have shown all twelve apostles grouped around a central image, perhaps an enthroned Christ. This arrangement is more common to sculpted than to painted altarpieces, but one with a similar format, dated 1333, is in the Städelches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt.

The Frankfurt altarpiece was double-sided, and so might have been the altarpiece to which *Saints Simon and Bartholomew* belonged: in the Galleria Nazionale at Perugia there exist two scenes of the Passion of Christ as well as a standing figure of Saint Anthony of Padua that demonstrably formed an altarpiece of measurements virtually identical to those of the series of apostles and could have made up the recto.

What is peculiar to the present panels is the appearance of Saint Francis among the apostles, but in the thirteenth century, Saint Francis was seen as their heir, in part because of his literal

interpretation of Christ's charge of poverty to them, recounted in Mark 6:7–13. It is his presence in one of the divisions that necessitated showing two apostles rather than one on the Lehman panel, and it is his presence that assures us that the altarpiece was intended for a Franciscan church. This fact is not surprising, for the author of these panels is an anonymous artist who seems to have been principally employed by Franciscans in and around Assisi. He painted a large rectangular panel with Saint Francis and two angels for the Portiuncula chapel near Assisi (his name derives from this work), he painted a large crucifix, dated 1272, for San Francesco al Prato in Perugia, and he covered the walls of the nave of the lower church of San Francesco at Assisi with scenes from the life of Saint Francis and the Passion of Christ.

The two scenes of the Passion of Christ at Perugia are known to have come from San Francesco al Prato, and on the whole it is more likely that the altarpiece was painted for this church than for San Francesco at Assisi, though the latter is usually cited as the original location. Indeed, the iconography of the altarpiece—with its scenes from the Passion of Christ, its standing figures of prophets and saints, and its central image showing the Madonna and Child on one side and the apostles, Saint Francis, and Christ Enthroned on the other—would have been redundant in the context of the lower church at Assisi, where some of the scenes are repeated.

When the Lehman panel was painted, probably about 1272, Gothic was still a new style in Italy. The early Gothic church of San Francesco at Assisi was not consecrated until 1253, and Giovanni Pisano's full-blown Gothic design for the facade of the Cathedral of Siena dates from after 1284, so it is not surprising that the form of the altarpiece was extremely simple. The frame would have consisted of a flat molding, possibly decorated with glass medallions, and it would have formed an unadorned peak at the center, over the figure of Christ.

15. An artist of considerable narrative gifts and expressive power, the Master of Saint Francis was the leading local painter in Umbria in the second half of the thirteenth century. The Lehman picture, which is a fragment of a long, low altarpiece (or dossal), shows the Apostles Bartholomew and Simon. This is the only compartment of the altarpiece containing two apostles rather than one, and to minimize this difference the figures stand one in front of the other so that their silhouettes overlap and their feet form a symmetrical shape. The linear patterning of the beards, fingers, and drapery and the beautifully contrasting colors are typical of this anonymous artist. 18¾ x 8¾ inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.104)





16. The altarpiece to which the Lehman Saints Simon and Bartholomew belonged originally showed the twelve apostles and Saint Francis beneath a series of arches. This sort of arrangement, with the figures clad in togas, holding books or scrolls, and grouped in pairs as if in dispute with each other, derives from Early Christian sarcophagi. Only six compartments, all from the left-hand side of the altarpiece, survive. At the center was probably an enthroned Christ. The frame would have been quite simple, consisting of a flat molding with painted glass medallions. It is probable that this unusually long

altarpiece (over twelve feet) was painted on both sides. It dates from about 1270 and seems to have been designed for the high altar of San Francesco al Prato in Perugia. Left to right: Saint Francis (Galleria Nazionale, Perugia); Saints Simon and Bartholomew (figure 15); Saint James Major, Saint John the Evangelist (National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection); Saint Matthew (Galleria Nazionale, Perugia); Saint Peter (Private Collection)





17, 18. First cut down and then enlarged on the right to obtain a symmetrical shape, this picture is obviously a fragment of a much larger composition that may have resembled the painting of the Madonna and Child in the church of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna (below), plausibly attributed to Cimabue, where the Christ Child has a similar striding stance. The Museum's picture is by an anonymous Florentine painter whose name, the Master of the Magdalen, derives from a painting in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence that shows Saint Mary Magdalen flanked by eight scenes of

her life. The artist seems to have had an extremely busy workshop in the second half of the thirteenth century. The present picture ranks among his best work, and if its relation to the picture in Santa Maria dei Servi is more than casual, it would date much later in his career than usually thought—at the very end of the thirteenth century.

Left: $29\frac{1}{2} \times 18\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Gift of Irma N. Straus, 1964 (64.189.1). Below: Santa Maria dei Servi, Bologna

The only other thirteenth-century fragment on exhibit at the Metropolitan is a much-cut-down Madonna with part of the Christ Child, painted in the last quarter of the century by a Florentine artist known as the Master of the Magdalen (figure 17). It was not unusual to salvage the principal part of a venerated image that had been damaged and to create a new setting for it. This may have been done to the present work, where an addition has been made on the right side to give the present symmetrical shape resembling a keyhole. There are traces of a cloth of honor behind the Virgin, and it is probable that the panel originally was quite large and showed an enthroned Virgin and Child with angels much like the Madonna and Child in Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna (figure 18), which may have provided the model for the striding pose that the Child evidently had. The simple shape of the panel—originally a gabled rectangle—would have been complemented by an equally simple frame.



19. A work of great delicacy and coloristic splendor, this picture of the Last Supper comes from the predella of Ugolino di Nerio's polyptych for the high altar of Santa Croce in Florence. As described in the Gospels, the twelve apostles are gathered in a room for their Passover meal. The table has been set with platters of lamb, fruit, and glasses of wine. Christ, who is shown at the left with Saint John asleep on his bosom, has just announced that one of the disciples will betray him, and he hands Judas a morsel of bread to indicate that he is the traitor; Judas is the only figure shown without a halo. Saint

Peter, to Christ's left, raises one hand in astonishment while perplexity and consternation can be read in the faces of the other apostles.

Though Ugolino was in many respects Duccio's most faithful follower, he preferred more intense, contrasting colors that underscore the higher-keyed emotional pitch of the stories he represented. 15 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.7)



20. When this drawing of Ugolino di Nerio's altarpiece was made, between 1785 and 1789, the polyp-tych had long since been removed from its position on the high altar of Santa Croce and was being stored in a dormitory of the church. Several of the panels, including the central Madonna and Child, had been damaged, and it seems probable that various portions of the frame had also been lost or altered. Certainly the odd, triangular-shaped panel with a pelican above the ruined Crucifixion is a replacement for a taller one that probably showed God the Father Blessing. There may also have been

piers flanking the altarpiece. Nonetheless, taken together with the remaining pieces (see figures 19 and 21), the drawing gives a remarkably complete idea of its original appearance. Even for its time, this was an extraordinarily elaborate altarpiece. The strip that divides the main panels from those above is decorated with connected quatrefoils that alternately show heads and a geometric pattern, and though the molded pilasters that separate the pairs of saints in the intermediate story repeat the form of the massive, octagonal piers in the nave of Santa Croce, the arches they support are far

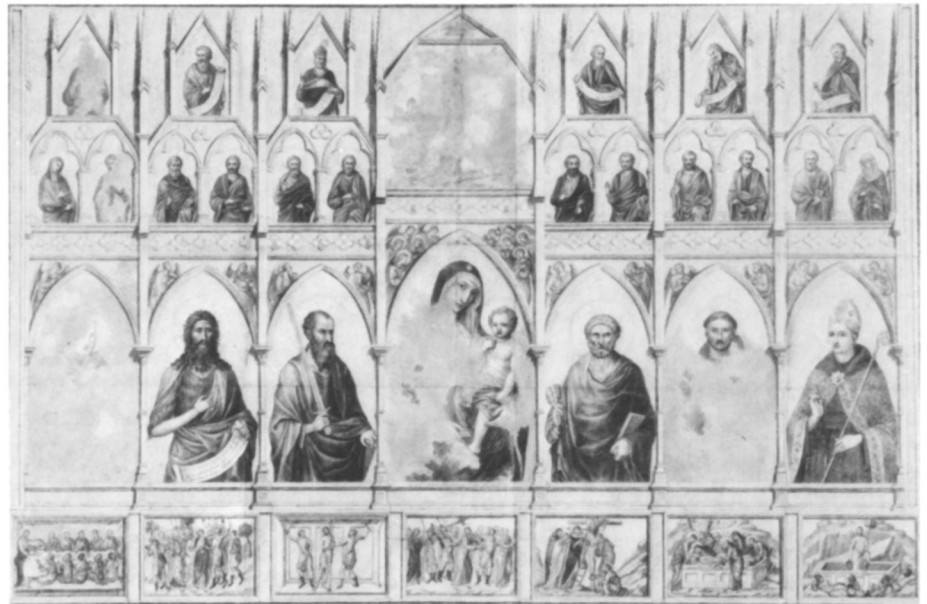
more ornate than the simple ones of the church. In its delicate, High Gothic detailing, the frame of the altarpiece resembles the church's multistory, elegantly carved rood screen, which, though destroyed, is known from a fourteenth-century drawing. The rood screen was built in the 1330s, and Ugolino's altarpiece may have been contemporary.

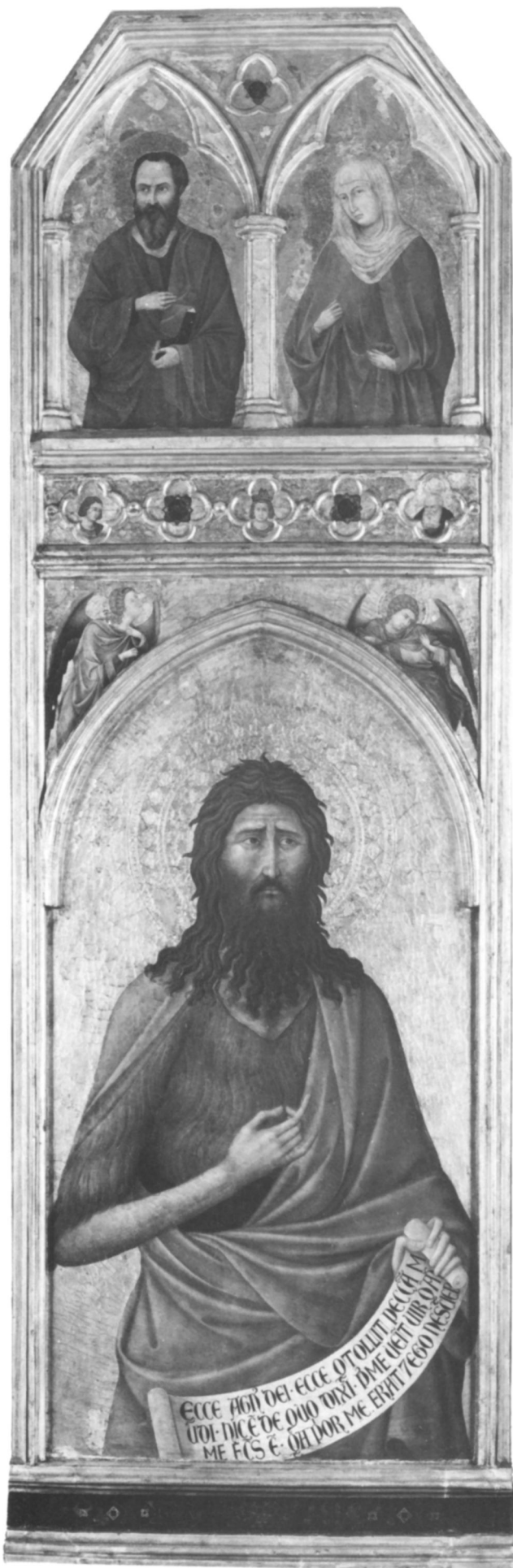
Soon after this drawing was made the altarpiece was dismantled, its structural members discarded, and the better-preserved paintings sold to the English collector William Young Ottley. In addition to the Lehman Last Supper,

various panels are preserved in the National Gallery, London, the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin-Dahlem, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Biblioteca Vaticana

The other fragments at the Metropolitan date from after 1300, and the altarpieces of which they formed parts were consequently of a more elaborate character. One, *The Last Supper* in the Lehman Collection by Ugolino di Nerio (figure 19), came from a multistory altarpiece that stood on the high altar of Santa Croce in Florence until about 1566, when it was replaced by a ciborium designed by Vasari. The altarpiece, still intact, was seen by the Sienese historian Guglielmo della Valle in the upper dormitory of the monastery prior to 1785, and shortly thereafter a sketch of it (figure 20) was made for inclusion in Séroux d'Agincourt's *L'Histoire de l'art*. Della Valle describes the altarpiece as "of a bulk and height that correspond in a fashion to the church and the altar for which it had to serve. It is full of many and varied large and small figures of incredible workmanship. . . . The great frame of the altarpiece is rich with ornaments. The figures are separated from each other by small pyramids and more or less pointed frames." Composed of four stories, the altarpiece rose to a height of over ten feet. There were seven main panels of the Madonna and Child flanked by saints (see figure 21), a predella with seven scenes from the Passion of Christ, pinnacles with three prophets to either side of the Crucifixion, and an intermediate story containing saints and apostles. There may also have been large piers at either side, and these would have impinged on the predella, accounting for the small triangular indentations—now filled—at the bottom left of the Lehman painting and the bottom right of another predella scene, *The Resurrection* in the National Gallery in London.

Ugolino received the commission for this altarpiece sometime after 1320. And as della Valle's description implies, foremost in the artist's mind must have been the enormous size of the polygonal apse of Santa Croce (figure 22), with its pointed entrance arch and series of tall lanceolate windows. By this date Ugolino may already





21. Only three of the main panels from Ugolino di Nerio's altarpiece for Santa Croce survive. Of these, the Saint John the Baptist is perhaps the most distinguished. He is shown with ascetic but elegant features, his hair disheveled, and beneath his cloak he wears a shirt of camel hair. The scroll he holds is inscribed with verses from John 1:29–31. In the spandrels above him are two angels, and the half-length figures in the upper tier are Saints Mathias and Clare. Although the frames are original, except for the outer molding, the two smaller saints seem to have stood not over the figure of Saint John the Baptist

but over that of Saint Anthony of Padua, and it is for this reason that they face in the opposite direction from Saint John. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin-Dahlem

have completed the high altarpiece for the rival Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella, and this fact cannot have escaped the Franciscans. But the determining factor in giving the commission of the Santa Croce altarpiece to this Sienese artist must have been his status as the most faithful of Duccio's pupils: he, better than anyone else, could produce an altarpiece comparable in its splendor to the *Maestà* of the Siena cathedral. It is indeed clear that the design of several individual figures, including the Madonna and Child, and the composition of three narrative scenes derive from the *Maestà*. However, in each case details have been altered to conform with the new position of the individual panels in the altarpiece. In Duccio's *Maestà* the narrative scenes on the back were intended to be read up and down, while in the Santa Croce altarpiece they were part of a predella and were read from left to right. In *The Last Supper*, Ugolino has moved Christ from a central position to the left, where he initiates the narration, and the apostles have been arranged accordingly. Similar changes can be found throughout the altarpiece. The most significant change, of course, was not in the pictorial content but in the transformation of the simple, open field of Duccio's *Maestà* into a complex Gothic structure that when seen from the nave of the Gothic church would have appeared singularly harmonious with the elaborate design of the apse.

22. One of the largest and most richly decorated Mendicant churches in Italy, Santa Croce had its origin in a small house set up by Saint Francis in 1211–12. By 1225 a church had been constructed, and this church, in turn, was enlarged or rebuilt by 1252. Such was the popularity and growth of the Franciscan order that scarcely three decades later plans were under way for the present structure, the foundations of which were laid in 1295. The architect who envisaged the simple, basilican church with a wooden roof and the elegant, five-sided vaulted apse flanked by chapels may have

been Arnolfo di Cambio, who was also employed in designing the Florentine cathedral. Construction began at the east end, with the apse and chapels, and by 1310 the roofing of this area seems to have been completed. Decoration of the chapels, including the two by Giotto immediately to the right of the choir, was carried out over the next three decades, but the choir itself was frescoed by Agnolo Gaddi only toward the end of the fourteenth century and the church was not consecrated until 1442. Like Ugolino di Nerio's polyptych for the high altar, the frescoed decoration employs an architectural

framework: spiral columns and arches decorated with crockets that frame the upper windows; a feigned-marble revetment; and an integration into this scheme of the rectangular picture fields by means of their painted borders. Originally the view from the nave of the choir and transepts was partly obstructed by a multistoried rood screen. This, along with Ugolino's altarpiece, was removed by Vasari in 1566. The present polyptych on the high altar was set up about 1869 and is composed of fragments of unrelated altarpieces.



23. When Lippo Memmi painted this panel of Saint Paul, which belonged to a large seven-part polyptych (figure 25), he was working closely with Simone Martini, whom he assisted on the altarpiece of the Annunciation for the Cathedral of Siena (figure 3). Despite this association, Lippo was an artist of distinct individuality. His drawing is tighter and less descriptive than Simone's, and he preferred more subdued, less sumptuous colors. Although he never achieved Simone's range of expression, his figures have a forthright, determined quality and are animated by a nervous energy. Especially characteristic of Lippo's work is Saint Paul's deeply furrowed brow, his intent gaze, and the elegant but insecure grip he has on the four Epistles, the first of which is inscribed "To the Romans." 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 inches. Gift of Coudert Brothers, 1888 (88.3.99)



24. Saint Clare was among Saint Francis's earliest followers and was the founder of the Poor Clares, whose habit she wears. The panel is from the same altarpiece as the Saint Paul: it may, indeed, have stood directly above the latter. The oil lamp is viewed from below and the book tilted outward, to conform with the painting's high place-

ment. The Saint Clare, though somewhat damaged, is among the finest of the panels from the altarpiece and is probably by Lippo Memmi himself. The tabernacle frame with spiral colonnettes is modern. 19 x 8 inches. Gift of Irma N. Straus, 1964 (64.189.2)

Two panels by Lippo Memmi showing half-length saints (figures 23 and 24) derive from a demonstrably simpler polyptych. They are parts of a double-story altarpiece in which the seven main panels with a Madonna and Child at the center were surmounted by a series of smaller panels (figure 25). There may also have been a predella. The larger of the two panels in the Metropolitan shows Saint Paul holding in one hand the sword with which he was beheaded and in the other four of his Epistles—the first is addressed “To the Romans.” He stands beneath a trilobe Gothic arch that is inscribed beneath a plain pointed one. We know from the original frames of the two saints from the altarpiece now in Siena (*Saint Francis* and *Saint Louis of Toulouse*) that above the pointed arch was a further extension decorated in fine tooling on a silver ground. Above this sat the panels with smaller saints, including the Museum’s panel (now in an imitation Gothic tabernacle frame of recent date), which shows Saint Clare wearing the habit of a Poor Clare and holding a book and a flaming lamp. The underside of the lamp is prominently displayed, and the book is tilted outward in accordance with the panel’s high placement in the altarpiece. The polyptych dates from about 1330 and seems to have been painted for the church of San Francesco at Colle di Val d’Elsa, midway between Florence and Siena, since the two panels now in Siena were still in the church prior to 1867.

In Lippo Memmi’s altarpiece the figures have been conceived as complementary pairs. Saints Louis of Toulouse and Francis both turn inward, and in each figure, one hand is raised while the other is parallel to the bottom edge of the panel. Saints Paul and Peter are shown frontally; and Saint Paul holds the sword in his right hand and the Epistles in his left, while Saint Peter holds the keys in his right hand and a book in his left. In each of the panels the saints are aligned along the vertical axis. This predilection for formal arrangement and repetition of gestures was typical of Lippo Memmi’s work throughout his career.



25. The earliest surviving example of a seven-panel altarpiece (or heptptych) was painted by Simone Martini in 1319 for the church of Santa Caterina in Pisa. Lippo Memmi must have had that work in mind when, around 1330, he was commissioned by a Franciscan church—probably San Francesco at Colle di Val d'Elsa—to paint the altarpiece reconstructed below. In some respects he simplified Simone's scheme by eliminating an intermediary story between the main panels and the pinnacles, but he also gave his work a more pronounced Gothic appearance by making the panels taller and

narrower, by bringing the molded, trefoil arches to an emphatic point, and by giving the altarpiece a more broken silhouette. Originally, there would have been finials rising between each of the main panels with shorter ones flanking the pinnacles and, doubtless, two buttressing piers, one to either side.

Throughout the Middle Ages painting was a profession that was frequently passed from father to son and could evolve into a family enterprise. Lippo Memmi's father and brother were both painters; moreover, in 1324 Lippo's sister married Simone Martini, with whom Lippo was to collaborate. It is there-

fore not surprising that this large altarpiece was the product of collaboration and that close examination reveals differences among the parts. It is largely owing to the variation among the panels that the reconstruction of the altarpiece is a recent achievement. The association of all the main panels, based on their similarity of design, dimensions, and tooling, was first proposed in 1961 and the pinnacles first suggested in 1974. Even this reconstruction remains to some extent conjectural. It is not certain that the fragmentary Madonna and Child belongs to the altarpiece, and though the order of the larger

figures can be convincingly established, that of the smaller figures cannot.

Pinnacles, left to right: Saint Dorothy (Museo Poldi-Pezzoli, Milan); Saint Clare (figure 24); Saint Anthony of Padua (Collection of The Frick Art Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania); Mary Magdalen (Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence); Saint Agnes (Collection of The Frick Art Museum, Pittsburgh). Main panels: Saint Louis of Toulouse (Pinacoteca, Siena); Saint Paul (figure 23); Saint John the Baptist (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection); Madonna and



Child (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin-Dahlem); Saint John the Evangelist (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, Bequest of Maitland F. Griggs, B.A. 1896); Saint Peter (Louvre, Paris, photo courtesy Réunion des musées nationaux); Saint Francis (Pinacoteca, Siena).



26. Of Giotto's pupils and followers only Maso di Banco approached painting with a seriousness and sobriety comparable to the master's own. In this painting of the thirteenth-century Franciscan Saint Anthony of Padua, Maso has focused attention on the pensive gaze of the figure and on the seemingly unconscious, protective manner in which he holds his book by simplifying the silhouette to an exceptional degree; by avoiding treatment of the drapery folds as decorative patterns; and by emphasizing the solidity of the forms. Whereas in so many fourteenth-century pictures the gold back-

ground reads as a decorative embellishment, here, by virtue of the delicacy of the modeling and the suggestion of a soft light, the gold takes on an almost atmospheric quality. But as remarkable as Saint Anthony is in isolation, much of its impact depends on its being seen in conjunction with the other panels that made up the altarpiece from which it comes (figure 27).

29 1/4 x 16 inches. Bequest of Maitland F. Griggs, 1943, Maitland F. Griggs Collection (43.98.13)

The altarpiece by Maso di Banco to which the Museum's Saint Anthony of Padua (figure 26) belonged is of an altogether different order. The polyptych may have consisted of only one row of five simply arched panels, above which there would have been gables and finials (figure 27). Four of these panels were owned by the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin: the Saint Anthony was sold in 1926; the center panel, a beautiful Madonna and Child, is now in the Staatliche Museen at Berlin-Dahlem; and two further lateral panels of Saints John the Baptist and Anthony Abbot were destroyed in World War II. The novelty of this altarpiece resided not in the details of its apparently spartan frame but in Maso's freedom from the restrictions it imposed. None of the figures is strictly aligned along a vertical axis, and the figure of Saint Anthony of Padua has been conceived in terms of its relation to the central panel, toward which he gazes. His torso is turned obliquely, in response to the pose of the Virgin, and whereas her body is well to the left of center, Saint Anthony's is displaced to the right. Maso interpreted the frame as an open loggia that marked off the space behind at regular intervals. This was a concept that seems to have evolved out of his contemporary frescoes in the Bardi di Vernio Chapel in Santa Croce (see figure 28), where the figures and the architectural setting are frequently conceived in counterpoint. Typical also of Maso is the careful definition of the planes of the head of Saint Anthony and the way the cubic mass of the book is suggested by the placement of his hands. It is because of the figure's intended relation to the Madonna and Child and its marked displacement to the right that, in the Museum's galleries, Saint Anthony of Padua registers so markedly as a fragment.





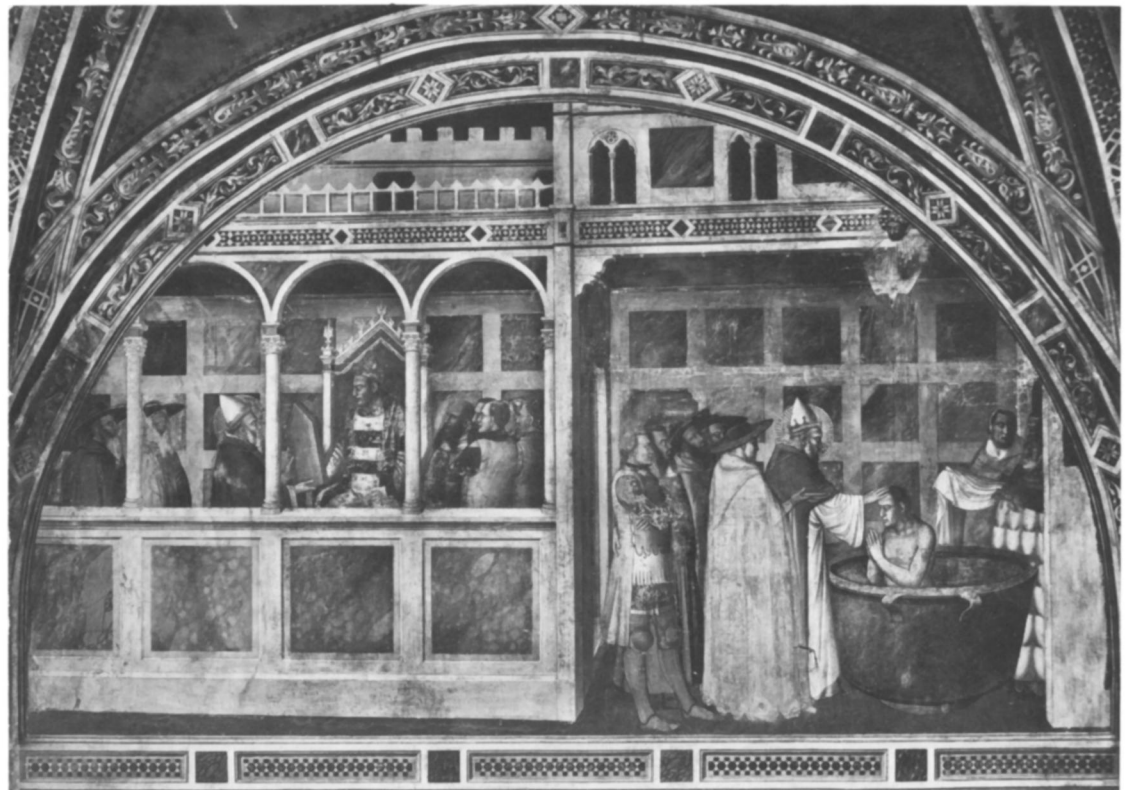
27. Only two altarpieces by Maso di Banco survive. The earlier of the two is in the church of Santo Spirito in Florence and the other, of which four panels are known but only two survive, is reconstructed here. The frame of the present one seems to have been quite unusual. Departing from traditional practice, Maso has left an unadorned strip between the tooled vertical borders of the gold ground and the edge of the panels. This suggests that the five panels abutted against each other and were separated by freestanding colonnettes, thereby enhancing the effect

of a unified space behind a loggia. To an unusual degree the Madonna and Child are the compositional and emotional focus of the altarpiece. The right hand of the Virgin and that of Saint Anthony of Padua are placed along parallel diagonals, as is the scroll of Saint John the Baptist and the left foot of the Christ Child, and the oblique position of Saint Anthony corresponds to that of the Virgin.

Left to right: Saint John the Baptist (destroyed; formerly Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin); Madonna and Child (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin-Dahlem); Saint Anthony

of Padua (figure 26); Saint Anthony Abbot (destroyed; formerly Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Berlin). All photos except Saint Anthony of Padua courtesy of Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

28. Legend has it that while he was afflicted with leprosy, the emperor Constantine had a dream in which Saints Peter and Paul appeared and instructed him to send for Sylvester, the bishop of Rome. When he arrived, Sylvester brought with him a portrait of the two saints, whom Constantine recognized from the dream, and the bishop counseled the emperor to be baptized. The baptism cured the leprosy. On the left of this fresco by Maso di Banco, Sylvester is showing the portrait of Saints Peter and Paul to Constantine, seated in an inner chamber of his palace. To the right the emperor is being baptized. One of the most original features of this fresco from the Bardi di Vernio Chapel in Santa Croce is the way the figures at the left are not centered beneath the arcade but placed off-axis to establish a counterpoint to the architecture and give the scene an effect of greater immediacy. Bardi di Vernio Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence



29. In the middle years of the fourteenth century, painting in Florence was dominated by Andrea di Cione (better known as Orcagna) and his brother Nardo. Andrea was not only a painter but also an architect and sculptor of distinction, and not surprisingly, his paintings are organized with the structural logic of an architect and show a sculptor's feeling for form. Nardo, by contrast, was exclusively a painter, and although he worked alongside Andrea in the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, his work is characterized by a delicacy and innate feeling for color foreign to Andrea's work. Nardo's altarpiece

illustrated here was probably painted in the mid-1350s, and in both the scale of the figures and the manner in which they fill the arched space of the panel it is comparable to his frescoes in the Strozzi Chapel. Unusually beautiful is the depiction of the Christ Child (detail, right), whose nakedness is scarcely concealed by the transparent veil the Virgin holds in front of him. The bird in his left hand is a goldfinch, symbol of Christ's Passion.

Three of the saints portrayed—John the Baptist in the left foreground, and Zenobius and Reparata in the background—are patrons of Florence. This fact, coupled

with the tall, narrow shape of the painting, suggests that it may have adorned one of the pillars of the nave of the cathedral in Florence. The present frame dates from the nineteenth century, and the original one would have had a large gable decorated with the bust-length figure of Christ Blessing formerly in the Artaud de Montor collection and known from an engraving (figure 30).

88½ × 49 inches. Lent by the New-York Historical Society, The Bryan Collection



In Florentine painting a line of descent may be traced from the work of Giotto through that of his pupil Maso to that of Andrea di Cione, better known as Orcagna. It is Orcagna's younger brother, Nardo, who is the author of what bids to be by far the greatest painting in America from the middle years of the fourteenth century: the altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child with Four Saints*, on loan from the Bryan Collection of the New-York Historical Society (figure 29). This is a large panel—it measures over six feet in height and three feet in width—and it is fragmentary only in the sense that it has lost its original frame, which included in the gable a bust of Christ Blessing that was reproduced in an engraving (figure 30) made when the picture was in the Artaud de Montor collection in the early nineteenth century. The present frame seems to date from the middle of the nineteenth century and differs from the original in its lack of architectural elements. The original frame would certainly have included at the sides pilasters crowned with finials.

Not all altarpieces were placed on altars in chapels. Some, having the tall, narrow dimensions of this painting, were hung on pillars in the naves of large churches or on the walls of public buildings. We know, for example, that a large panel by Nardo of the *Madonna and Child*, dated 1356, hung in a room of the *Gabella de' Contratti* in Florence. Of the four saints shown in the present work, Saint John the Baptist in the left foreground and Saints Zenobius and Reparata in the background are patrons of Florence. Saint Reparata was, additionally, the titular saint of the cathedral of Florence, which also housed the relics of Saint Zenobius. On the basis of these facts it has been suggested that the *Madonna and Child with Four Saints* may originally have decorated one of the large composite pillars of the Florentine cathedral.

When Nardo painted this work he had already completed the enormous fresco cycle in the Strozzi





30. This image of the Blessing Christ, known only from an engraving, stood above the Madonna and Child with Four Saints from the New-York Historical Society (figure 29).

Chapel of Santa Maria Novella, for which his famous brother painted the altarpiece. It is Orcagna's influence that informs the structure of the New-York Historical Society panel, where the angled placement of Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist marks off the foreground; the frontal pose of the Virgin with her ample, rectangular lap defines a middle space; and Saints Zenobius and Reparata establish the distance in front of the cloth of honor. The rotating movement of the Christ Child and the sensuous beauty of the Virgin, her right hand elegantly raised along a horizontal at two-thirds the height of the panel, are conceived in contrast to this rigidly architectural scheme.

Another, though far from common, type of altarpiece produced in the fourteenth century was composed of a number of individually framed panels that were hinged together in such a way that they could be folded together and the altarpiece moved from place to place. Three of the most beautiful half-length figures in the Metropolitan, a Madonna and Child and a Saint Ansanus in the Lehman Collection (figures 31 and 32) and a Saint Andrew in the paintings galleries (figure 33), came from this type of altarpiece (see figure 34). Whereas in stationary polyptychs the central panel was invariably larger than the lateral panels, here all of them have the same dimensions, and whereas fourteenth-century panels of this size are generally arched, here the picture field is rectangular, as in the small diptych by the Master of Monte Oliveto (figures 9 and 10). The frames—that on the *Saint Andrew* is original while the others are either copies or heavily restored originals—have the same tooled and pigmented decoration on all sides and would be inappropriate for anything other than a folding altarpiece. Though this work was intended to be portable and was not necessarily conceived for a particular altar or chapel, it must nevertheless have been painted for a communal body rather than a private individual, as the figure of Saint Ansanus at the far left holds the black and white flag of the city of Siena just as he does in Simone Martini's altarpiece of the Annunciation (figure 3).

Like most Gothic polyptychs the present altarpiece was the product of a workshop, and its creation involved a degree of collaboration. The right two wings are executed with a delicacy and variety of brushwork that contrast with the more schematic technique employed in the *Madonna and Child* and the *Saint Ansanus*. For example, much of the subtlety of the marvelously drawn hands of the Saint Andrew is lost in those of the Madonna. Yet all of the panels were manifestly conceived by the same artist. Despite an old

31. Our ability to reconstruct the activity of a fourteenth-century artist depends upon two kinds of information: the signatures and dates that occasionally appear on paintings; and such documents as a contract or notice of payment for a work of art. Only in rare cases does biographical information emerge, and our understanding of the artist's personality and its bearing on his work necessarily remains highly conjectural. Despite his widespread fame—he was knighted in 1317 and is known to have been a friend of Petrarch—Simone Martini is no exception. There is, for example, no documentary evidence for him between 1333 and 1340 and no dated work between the Annunciation of 1333 (figure 3) in the Uffizi and the small painting of 1342 showing the Holy Family (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). It is therefore not surprising that this painting of the Madonna and Child has long puzzled critics, for though the figure types are Simone's, there is no exact parallel in his work for their volumetric treatment and the remarkable dynamic pose of the Child. However, at least two of the companion panels (see figure 34) are demonstrably painted by Simone, and the Madonna and Child would therefore seem to document an unexpected facet of his career. Its conception may be seen as evolving out of the dramatically complex Annunciation of 1333, which it would therefore postdate. 22½ × 15⅞ inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.12)



32. Of noble Roman birth, Saint Ansanus was raised a Christian. He was beheaded near Siena by order of Diocletian for proselytizing, and it was in Siena that his cult grew. He is shown here as the patron saint of the city, holding its white and black banner in one hand and the palm of martyrdom in the other. Though the figure of the saint is well preserved, in the past, for some reason, the gold background was scraped down and the halo ineptly repainted, depriving the picture of the resonance Simone Martini originally intended it to have. (This was also done to the companion Saint Peter.) 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.13)



33. No Trecento painter possessed a greater descriptive ability or a more refined technique than Simone Martini. Both of these qualities have been brought to bear in this picture of Saint Andrew, of whom Jacopo da Voragine, the thirteenth-century author of *The Golden Legend*, says, "He was beautiful in his life, responsive in his wise teaching, virile in suffering, and esteemed by all for his manly virtues." Especially remarkable is the rich patterning of the folds of the pink cloak modeled in green, and the marvelously drawn hands. The saint is identified by the traces of an inscription to the left and right of his head.

22½ × 14⅞ inches. Gift of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.100.23)



attribution to Lippo Vanni, the artist is more likely to have been Simone Martini. Typical of Simone is the rich patterning of the drapery and the manner in which the book held by Saint Peter rests on the frame and leans inward while that held by Saint Luke is open and projects beyond the frame. And though the Madonna and Child seem to have been painted not by Simone but by a gifted assistant, the conception, with the Child drawing the Virgin's veil across his body protectively, is remarkable. Especially beautiful are the manner in which the Virgin's body is turned so that her right shoulder and arm are on the same plane as the left foot and arm of the Child; the alignment of the Christ's left foot and arm along

two parallel diagonals; and the conjunction of the Virgin's halo with the cruciform nimbus of the Child. It is an image as carefully planned and as radical in its description of emotions as Simone's great *Annunciation* in the Uffizi.

34. The altarpiece to which the Madonna and Child and Saint Ansanus in the Lehman Collection and the Saint Andrew in the paintings galleries belonged was composed of five individually framed pictures hinged together so that the altarpiece could be collapsed and easily transported. The simple, rectangular shape of each of the panels was complemented by an elegant but simple frame: that on the Saint Andrew, though separated from the panel and slightly cut down, is original and the others are either copies or reworked originals. Despite the fact that it was intended to be portable, the altarpiece measured about seven feet in length and must have been an important commission.

In addition to the Museum's panels, the altarpiece included figures of Saint Peter, who holds the keys of the gate of heaven, and Saint Luke, shown with his attribute, the ox. Left to right: Saint Ansanus (figure 32); Saint Peter (Private Collection); Madonna and Child (figure 31); Saint Andrew (figure 33); Saint Luke (J. P. Getty Museum, Malibu, California)







35, 36. *The Meditations on the Life of Christ*, written in the thirteenth century, describes how, after the birth of Jesus, Mary "knelt to adore Him and to render thanks to God, saying 'I thank you, most Holy Father . . . and I adore you . . . Son of the living God. . . .'" This passage is the subject of the *Cloisters* altarpiece (below), which may be part of a polyptych seen in the cloisters of the convent of San Domenico in San Gimignano in 1802. The polyptych included lateral panels of the Four Evangelists surmounted by pinnacles, one of which showed the Virgin Annunciate, and a predella. A related altarpiece in

the church of Santi Fiora e Lucilla in Torrita, south of Siena (figure 39), gives some idea of its original appearance. It is possible that the Virgin Annunciate in the Yale Art Gallery (left)—which seems to be contemporary, is framed similarly, and employs the same tooling—is one of the pinnacles.

Left: Yale University Art Gallery, Bequest of Maitland F. Griggs, B.A. 1896. Below: $69\frac{1}{8} \times 45\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The Cloisters Collection, 1925 (25.120.288)

36, detail. Such early sources as the apocryphal *Proto-Evangelium* and *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew* describe the birth of Christ as taking place in a cave rather than in a stable. Like most fourteenth-century Italian painters, Bartolo di Fredi remained faithful to these sources, though he has also provided a tiled overhang as protection for the Holy Family. A detail of great charm is the manner in which the Christ Child eyes the not especially benign ox and ass, as though He were only too well aware that He is lying in their manger.



The polyptych with a central image of the Madonna and Child flanked by saints may have been the most common format for altarpieces, but it was not the only one. By a curious coincidence, the Metropolitan owns two large narrative panels by Bartolo di Fredi. One, at The Cloisters, shows the Adoration of the Shepherds and has much of its original gilt gesso molding at the top still intact (figure 36). The other, in the Lehman Collection, is a cut-down panel showing the Adoration of the Magi (figure 37), the upper portion of which is in the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Dijon and shows the Journey of the Magi (figure 38). Both appear to have been the center panels of large altarpieces. The original appearance of the Cloisters panel can be partly deduced from the remains of a triptych in the church of Santi Fiora e Lucilla in Torrita, south of Siena, in which the center panel again depicts the Adoration of the Shepherds and two lateral wings show standing saints (figure 39). There is, indeed, the possibility that the Cloisters panel formed part of an altarpiece seen in 1802 by the Sienese art historian Ettore Romagnoli in the cloisters of the convent of San Domenico in San Gimignano. He described it as "a Nativity of Our Lord. At the sides are the Four Evangelists; above the Virgin of the Annunciation [figure 35], the Coronation of the Virgin, the Baptism of the Saviour; in the predella Saint John the Evangelist with two other saints. At the base is written Bartholus M[agister] Fredi. 1374." According to this description there would have been five main panels, each surmounted by a pinnacle containing an episode from the life of the Virgin and Christ—the Coronation would normally have been at the center—and the predella perhaps showed miracles from the life of Saint John the Evangelist, though this is not clear. In any event, it is evident that like the altarpiece Romagnoli described, the Cloisters painting was originally crowned by a large pinnacle, and the work arguably dates from the 1370s—several years after Bartolo had





37, 38. Bartolo di Fredi's Adoration of the Magi in the Lehman Collection (left) is a fragment in two senses. Like the Cloisters Adoration of the Shepherds (figure 36), it was the center panel of a polyptych, the lateral panels of which probably showed standing saints. Additionally, its upper, pointed portion has been cut off. The absent piece of the painting, which shows the Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem, is now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Dijon (below): the missing legs of the figures and dog along its lower border can be seen along the upper edge of the Lehman picture. Strange though

such a mutilation may seem, Sassetta's famous little Journey of the Magi in the Museum is the result of a similar act, obviously performed to obtain two salable pictures.

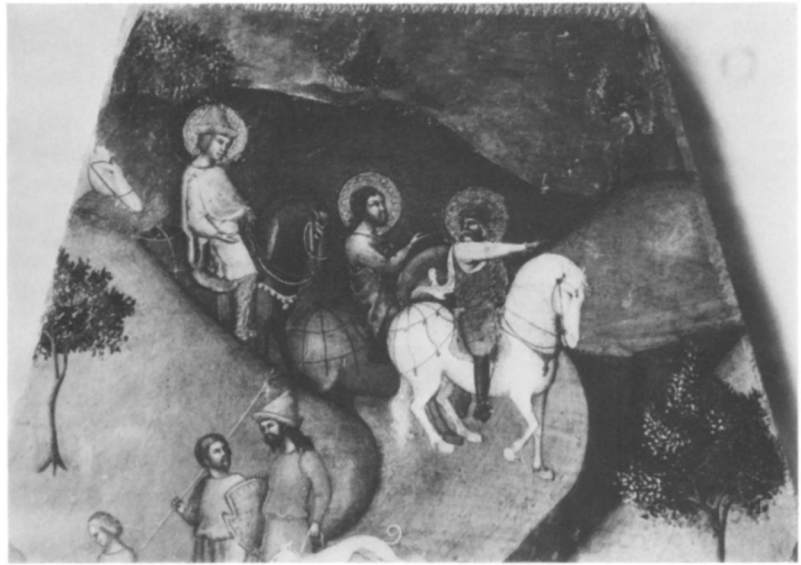
The Lehman picture was painted more than a decade later than the Cloisters picture, and during that interval Bartolo di Fredi had brightened his palette considerably and aimed for greater elegance and refinement.

Left: $78\frac{3}{4} \times 47\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.16). Below: Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon

completed his fresco cycle of the Old Testament in the Collegiata at San Gimignano.

In aesthetic terms Bartolo di Fredi was not a great artist, but in the third quarter of the fourteenth century he seems to have been one of the most popular in Siena, and he was one of the few who had an extensive career as a mural painter. It was from his activity as a fresco painter that Bartolo evolved the facile but pleasing style of the Cloisters picture, which is notable not for the casual manner in which it is composed but for the coarse realism of its details. By the time he painted *The Adoration of the Magi*, perhaps a decade later, his style had become somewhat diluted through contact with more refined artists, and despite its beauties of color and design, the Lehman picture is in many respects a bland reinterpretation of *The Adoration of the Magi* in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena.

39. Bartolo di Fredi based at least two altarpieces on the Cloisters Adoration of the Shepherds, but only this one at Torrita preserves two of the lateral panels with figures of Saints Augustine and Anthony Abbot. Santi Fiora e Lucilla, Torrita



40. Three consecutive events from the life of Saint John the Baptist are united in this panel of the Feast of Herod. In the right foreground Salome performs a dance before Herod, while to the left she presents the head of Saint John to her scheming mother. In front of the adjacent structure, whose crenellation identifies it as a prison, Saint John is beheaded. It is the straightforward, almost naïve approach to narration that constitutes the charm of this picture, from which any hint of tragedy has been eliminated. 17¹/₁₆ × 19¹/₂ inches. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.103)

The majority of fourteenth-century paintings at the Metropolitan Museum are Florentine and Sienese. This is as it should be, for either directly or indirectly these two Tuscan centers influenced the course of painting throughout Italy. In Rimini, on the coast of the Adriatic, the frescoes in San Francesco at Assisi and Giotto's work at Padua and in Rimini itself were determining influences that significantly altered the figural style of a whole school of painting. The formats of the altarpieces, however, evolved along purely local lines and frequently reflect a conservative outlook. Although the Riminese panel of the banquet of Herod (figure 40) in the Lehman Collection may have been painted as late as 1330–40,

the altarpiece of which it formed a part (figure 41) seems to have had the simple rectangular shape of a thirteenth-century altar frontal or dossal. In the center was almost certainly the elegant *Madonna and Child with Angels* now in the National Gallery in Washington, and to either side of the Virgin were probably distributed eight scenes of the life of Saint John the Baptist in two superimposed rows. A notable feature of this altarpiece would have been the irregular pattern of the divisions imposed by the greater width of the Lehman scene. Though somewhat unorthodox, this casual approach to organization is also found in Riminese fresco cycles. The larger format of the Lehman picture was, of course,



dictated by the nature of the story depicted and by the desire to unite three separate episodes. Two of these take place before the delicately described palace, from which a rich cloth of honor hangs. On the right a diminutive Salome dances before Herod, who, judging from the attitudes of his advisers, seems to be reflecting on the reward he will grant the young girl. On the left Salome presents the charger bearing the head of John the Baptist to her mother, Herodias. Abutting against the palace is a buff-colored prison where an executioner is dealing the final blow to Saint John. It is indicative of the outlook of this gifted anonymous artist, who is known as the Master of the Life of Saint John the Baptist,

that the same raised hand is employed by one of Herod's advisers to express concern and by the women to either side of Herodias to express surprise and horror.

40, detail. One of the most attractive features of Riminese painting is the manner in which patterns are created by scratching away the surface pigment with a stylus, in an amazingly free manner, to reveal an underlying layer of silver. The dress of Herodias as well as the patterns on the cloth hanging behind the figures have been created in this fashion. Equally beautiful and characteristic of Riminese painting is the subdued, almost smoky quality of the colors, which contrasts with the more brilliant palette of Florentine painters.



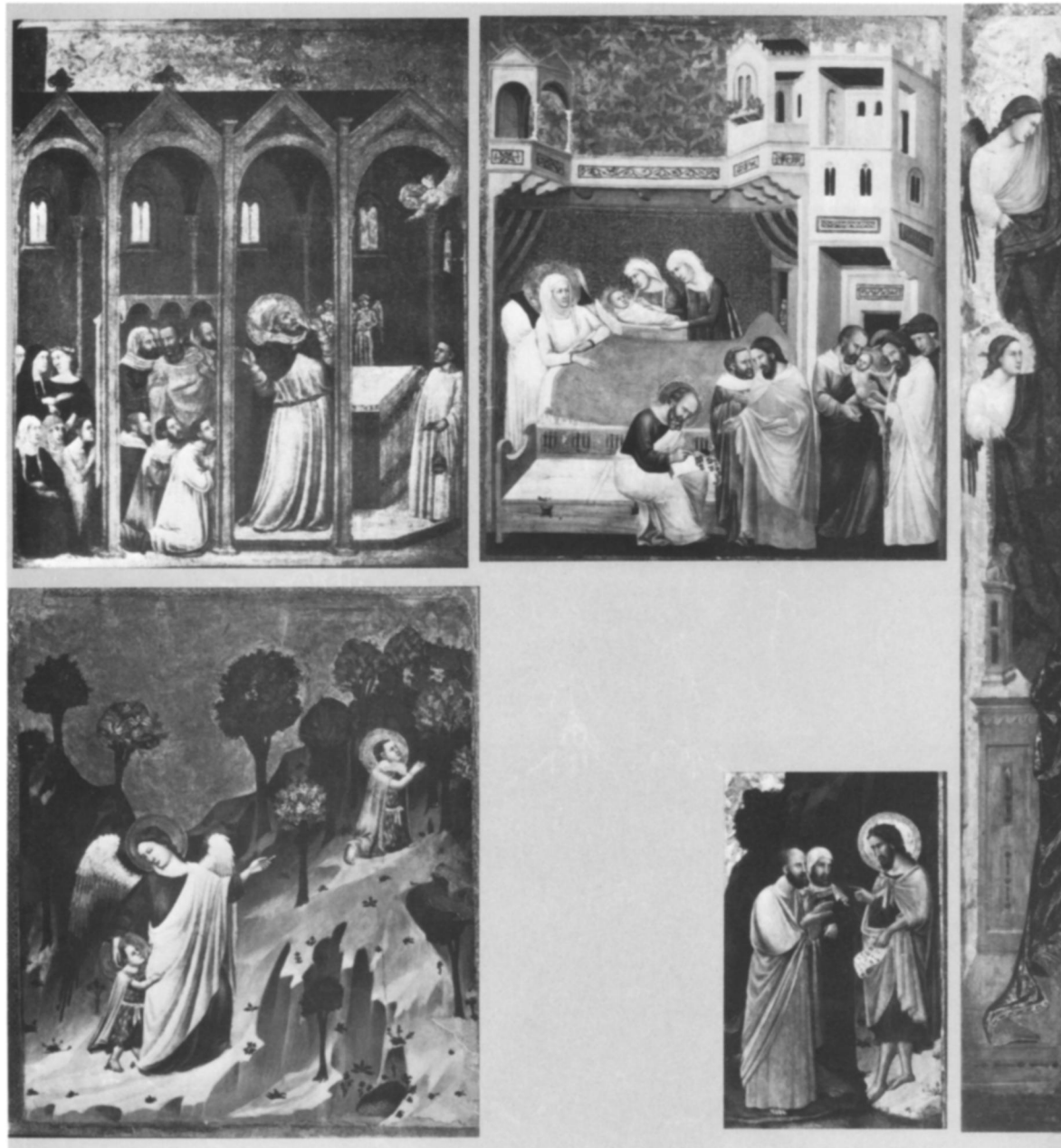
41. Though the altarpiece to which *The Feast of Herod* belonged was painted toward the middle of the century—about 1340—its large, rectangular format is characteristic of thirteenth-century dossals. The advantage of this shape lay in the flexibility it allowed the artist in determining the size of the individual scenes. This is especially apparent in the larger size of *The Feast of Herod*, which was dictated by the complexity of its subject. Various theories have been advanced about the original number of scenes. Through an error of identification it has been thought that nine—not eight—scenes sur-

vive, and it has also been suggested that the series may originally have numbered thirteen. It is, however, difficult to imagine what further episodes from John the Baptist's life could have been shown on these additional five panels, since several of the extant panels show more than one episode and the present group is perfectly coherent. The narrative begins in the upper left, where an angel suddenly appears to a startled Zaccharias, who was officiating in the synagogue while "the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the time of incense" (Luke 1:10), and announces that his aged wife,

Elizabeth, will give birth to a son. In the adjacent scene two nursemaids bring the newborn John to Elizabeth, who is shown resting in bed. To the right an obviously unhappy John is circumcised while, in answer to the query of two relatives, Zaccharias writes on a piece of paper, "His name is John." In the touching scene in the lower left, an angel appears to the infant John and directs him into the wilderness, where the future prophet kneels and prays in isolation. Immediately adjacent to this scene two episodes were probably shown: Saint John preaching the repentance of sins to the Jews, and Saint John disput-

ing with the Pharisees. Only a fragment of the latter survives. To the right of the Madonna and Child is the Baptism of Christ, and in the upper right is a scene—heretofore unpublished—of, at the left, Saint John in prison instructing two disciples to ascertain whether or not Jesus really was the Messiah, and, to the right, the two apostles confronting Christ. In the lower tier is the Feast of Herod and, in the lower right, Saint John in limbo announcing the coming of Christ. The subject of this scene is taken from the apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*.

It has been argued that the central image of this engaging narra-



tive should show Saint John the Baptist, but this is almost certainly incorrect. The Madonna and Child at the National Gallery is exactly the requisite height, and the background is decorated with the same freely incised decoration of leaves found in the eight lateral panels. Moreover, the Christ Child holds a marvelously drawn grasshopper, which is sometimes explained as a symbol of converted paganism but is more likely a reference to the locusts on which Saint John is said to have lived in the wilderness. Left to right, top row: Annunciation to Zaccharias (Private Collection); Birth of Saint John, Madonna and

Child, Baptism of Christ (National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection); Saint John in Prison (Private Collection). Lower row: Saint John in the Wilderness (Pinacoteca Vaticana); Saint John and the Pharisees (Seattle Museum of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection); The Feast of Herod (figure 40); Saint John in Limbo (Private Collection)



In the Italian region of the Marches it was Allegretto Nuzi who acquainted local artists with the achievements of Florentine painters. Listed in the painters' association of Florence in 1346, he would have been a contemporary of Orcagna and Nardo di Cione, who, along with Bernardo Daddi, most influenced him. By 1354 he had returned to his native city, Fabriano, in the company of an artist perhaps identifiable as Puccio di Simone. There his chief pupil was Francescuccio Ghissi. Ghissi is principally known as a painter of Madonnas whose compositions depend on those of his teacher, but he, not Nuzi, is the more likely author of an altarpiece of which three narrative scenes are on exhibit in the paint-

ings galleries (figures 42–44). Like the altarpiece by the Master of the Life of Saint John the Baptist, Ghissi's (figure 45) had a large central image—*The Crucifixion*, now in the Art Institute of Chicago—flanked by two superimposed rows of eight scenes from the life of Saint John the Evangelist. And although there were molded arches dividing the panel into five vertical fields, the presence of either a saint or seraph in each of the spandrels proves that there were no elaborate pilasters topped by finials. The frame may have consisted of a rather plain surround.

It could not be maintained that Ghissi was an original artist—the *Crucifixion* in the present work derives directly from Nuzi—but his approach to



42. To the left, Satheus, who has just been resurrected by Saint John, tells two former disciples, Acteus and Eugenius, "of the glory of Paradise and of the pains of Hell which he had just seen with his own eyes." Astounded by his words, Acteus and Eugenius return to Saint John, offer their riches, and beg forgiveness. The apostle tells them to do penance for thirty days.

The scene, by the Marchigian artist Francescuccio Ghissi, is from the same series as figures 43 and 44. It is consistent with Ghissi's childlike approach to narration that Paradise is shown as an enormous disc in the sky emanating gold rays. 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Gift of Mrs. W. Murray Crane, 1969 (69.280.2)

43. "When Saint John had preached throughout Asia," Jacopo da Voragine writes, "the idolators dragged him to the temple of Diana, and tried to force him to offer sacrifice Then the saint proposed this alternative to them: . . . if by calling on Diana, they succeeded in overthrowing the church of Christ, he would offer sacrifice to Diana; but if on the contrary, by calling upon Christ, he destroyed the temple of Diana, they would have to believe in Christ. . . . John then ordered out of the temple all who were within and when he prayed, the temple fell to the ground, and the statue of Diana was reduced to dust." Ghissi is faithful to Voragine's text in all but one detail: the statue is not of Diana but of Mars or Jupiter. 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Gift of Mrs. W. Murray Crane, 1969 (69.280.3)

44. The Golden Legend tells how one day Saint John the Evangelist encountered the funeral cortege of Satheus, a young man who had died thirty days after his marriage. At the entreaties of the young man's widow and mother, Saint John revived him. In this picture, the widow and the mother are shown on either side of the funeral bier as Satheus, bound for burial, raises his head in response to the saint's command. The spectators are grouped at the sides so that John's outstretched arm and the upraised hand of one of the spectators are isolated against the

gold background. Ghissi is not noted for his originality, and a composition as remarkable as this one may be presumed to derive from a prototype by another artist, in this instance Giotto's fresco of the Raising of Drusiana in the Peruzzi Chapel of Santa Croce. Whether Ghissi knew this fresco directly or, as seems more likely, derived the composition from his teacher, Allegretto Nuzi, cannot be demonstrated. Whichever the case, a comparison of Ghissi's scene with Giotto's emphasizes the degree to which the somber, serious mood of the latter has been re-

placed by Ghissi's fairy-tale charm. 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Gift of Mrs. W. Murray Crane, 1969 (69.280.1)



45. Like the altarpiece by the Master of the Life of Saint John the Baptist (figure 41), this work by Francesco Ghissi had a simple, rectangular profile. However, the shape of the individual scenes was determined by a series of five molded arches that were originally supported by pilasters, and this gave the work an updated, more architectural appearance. There would also have been a horizontal molding to separate the upper scenes from the lower ones.

The narrative of Saint John the Evangelist's life seems to have been taken from Jacopo da Voragine's *Golden Legend*. In the upper-left scene Saint John resuscitates Drusiana, a devoted friend, outside the walls of Ephesus. Next to this the philosopher Crato displays his abhorrence of worldly goods by smashing diamonds. Saint John reproved Crato, noting that the rejected riches should have been used to benefit the poor, and thereupon restored the gems. At the bottom left is shown how two converts, Acteus and Eugenius, came to regret the loss of their wealth and asked Saint John to restore it to them. Next to this is Saint John the Evangelist raising Sathesus to life (figure 44). Then, in the two upper-right scenes, Saint John is depicted with the repentant Acteus and Eugenius (figure 42), and causing a pagan temple to collapse (figure 43). In the sole surviving scene from the bottom-right tier Saint John drinks, unharmed, the poison that had already killed two men. The lost scene probably showed either Saint John baptizing the high priest Aristodemus or the funeral of Saint John.

The Crucifixion might seem out of place in this altarpiece, but it was at the Crucifixion that Christ's special affection for Saint John was manifested, when he declared that henceforth John should take His place as the Virgin's son. Among the saints in the spandrels are Saint John in the cauldron of boiling oil, Saint Francis, and Saint Louis of Toulouse.

Left to right, upper row: The Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, Samuel H. Kress Collection; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Samuel H. Kress Collection; The Art Institute of Chicago; figure 42; figure 43. Lower row: North Carolina Museum of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection; figure 44; North Carolina Museum of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection

narration has a directness and simplicity that complement perfectly Jacopo da Voragine's *Golden Legend*, which was probably the textual source for the scenes of Saint John the Evangelist. In the upper-left scene Saint John encounters the funeral cortege of the disciple Drusiana outside a higgledy-piggledy Ephesus. Raising his hand, the apostle cries, "Drusiana, my Master Jesus Christ raises thee to life! Arise, go into thy house and prepare my repast!" At these words the diminutive figure of Drusiana sits upright on her bier, her hands clasped in response to Saint John. The next four scenes recount the story of two young men who, having witnessed Saint John miraculously repair diamonds that had been

smashed by the philosopher Crato, convert, give away their riches, and then repent of their action. In the lower-left scene, Saint John has rocks and reeds brought to him, which he transforms into diamonds and gold for the two lapsed disciples, while in the adjacent scene he raises a young man to life in their presence. The resurrected man thereupon tells the two "that they had lost everlasting palaces, built of precious stones, filled with marvellous light, furnished with delicate viands, and replete with everlasting joys and delights," and the two, not surprisingly, return to the saint. These events are shown in the arched scene to the right of the Crucifixion. In the last two extant scenes Saint John destroys a pagan



temple through prayer and then drinks, unharmed, the poison that had killed two men. Throughout there is a use of gesture to underline the meaning of each event. Where, for example, the resurrected young man tells the two former disciples of the treasures of eternal life they have lost, his right hand is extended toward them and his left is raised to the blue disc of heaven, and their wonder is expressed by the upraised arms of the one and the manner in which the other clasps his companion. When, in the same scene, they return to Saint John, their humility is expressed by their kneeling posture and the outstretched hand filled with jewels. Only one of these scenes, however, rises above this charming level, and

that is the depiction of Saint John raising the young man, Satheus, to life. Only here is there a fairly consistent description of space with figures grouped in compact masses, and only here does the central gold void register as a dramatic device. The reason for the exceptional character of this scene is that the composition derives from Giotto's fresco of the Raising of Drusiana in the Peruzzi Chapel of Santa Croce. Ghissi is not likely to have known this fresco firsthand, but Nuzi did, and it is probable that this remarkable little scene follows a design Nuzi himself had adopted from Giotto's fresco.



46. Giotto was unquestionably the most famous artist of his day, and his influence dominated painting in the first half of the century in a way comparable to Michelangelo's two hundred years later. He is mentioned in the *Divine Comedy* as the leading painter of the day and was the subject of one of the novelle of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. There was, indeed, scarcely a major political figure in Italy who did not employ Giotto in some capacity. For Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi he oversaw the execution of the high altarpiece for Saint Peter's in Rome; in 1328 he began work for Robert of Anjou in Naples; and

several years later he was sent by the commune of Florence to work for Azzone Visconti in Milan. To comply with these numerous commissions Giotto developed a large workshop that was able, if necessary, to function with a minimum of his own intervention. This arrangement freed Giotto to give close attention to a relatively small number of works, including the series to which the Museum's panel of the Epiphany belonged.

Of modest dimensions, the Museum's panel is characterized by a clear organization of space—the hill has been divided into a series of plateaus, and the stable is

viewed as though seen from slightly to the right of center—and a concern for simplified shapes that set it apart from the majority of the works produced in the fourteenth century. Petrarch probably was alluding to such features when he described a picture by Giotto that he owned as having a beauty that "was not understood by the ignorant but that stupefied those instructed in the arts." Though the design of this work and the painting of such figures as the Magi are doubtless by Giotto, a shop assistant was probably employed in the execution of such details as the ox or the drapery of Joseph. The star

with a tail is a modern addition; traces of the original star are visible just above and to the left of the present one.

17³/₄ × 17¹/₄ inches. John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1911 (11.126.1)

Though the layout of these narrative altarpieces resembles that of fresco cycles, the diminutive size of the individual scenes and the brilliance of the requisite gold background created a different set of demands in which delicacy, refinement, and decorativeness counted for more than effects of monumentality, breadth, and simplicity. One of the very few small fourteenth-century paintings to which this distinction does not pertain is *The Epiphany* in the paintings galleries (figure 46). The economic means by which the setting of this picture is described and the monumental bearing of the figures, whose contours have been simplified as though they were life-size rather than nine inches tall, are departures from normal practice. Equally exceptional is the clarity with which the composition is organized. The space is divided into four distinct areas: the foreground, occupied by the three Magi, Saint Joseph, and the goats and sheep; the plateau with the manger, the ox, and the ass; the raised area occupied by the stable, the Virgin, and the dog; and the notional plateau behind the hillock on which the shepherds presumably stand. And the stable is portrayed as though seen from below and slightly to the right—even the braces at the corners conform to this viewpoint. In the fourteenth century there was only one artist whose work was conceived along such lines, and that was Giotto.

A current view maintains that except for the very large painting of the Madonna and Child in the Uffizi, Giotto painted only frescoes, but this notion runs counter to what we know of artistic practice in the fourteenth century, and it runs counter to what early sources record of Giotto's activity. A substantial number of pictures and altarpieces that were quite apparently produced in his workshop exist, and of these, roughly ten reflect in varying degrees Giotto's participation. In some, like the altarpiece from Santa Maria degli Angeli, Bologna, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale of that city, or the altarpiece in the Baroncelli Chapel of Santa Croce in Florence,

Giotto may be presumed to have laid in the design and then left the execution to his pupils: this is the obvious explanation for the appearance of his signature on both works. In others, such as the altarpiece from the Church of the Badia, now in the Uffizi, or the dispersed altarpiece whose central panel is in the National Gallery, Washington, and whose lateral panels are in the Museo Horne, Florence, and the Musée Jacquemart-André at Chaalis, Giotto may be held responsible not only for the design but also for much of the execution. The Museum's panel belongs to this second category. It is difficult to conceive who other than Giotto himself could have painted the three solemn figures of the Magi, their faces modeled in broad planes and the folds of their drapery arranged so as to define the position of their arms and shoulders. The tentative modeling of the cloaks of Saint Joseph and the Virgin, on the other hand, are the products of an assistant.

The Museum's picture is part of a series including six other known scenes (see figure 48), all roughly the same size and with the gold laid on the same unusual greenish preparation: *The Presentation in the Temple*, now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston; *The Last Supper*, *The Crucifixion*, and *The Descent into Limbo*, in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich; *The Entombment*, in the Harvard Center for Renaissance Studies in Florence; and *The Pentecost*, in the National Gallery in London. It is a curious group. There are two scenes from the childhood of Christ and four that recount his Passion, and the fact that such traditional scenes as the Annunciation and the Resurrection do not figure among these has led some students to conclude that the series is incomplete. While there is no proof that this is not so, there are parallels for the present grouping, and it is significant that three of the extant scenes show events that preceded the Crucifixion while three show events that followed it.



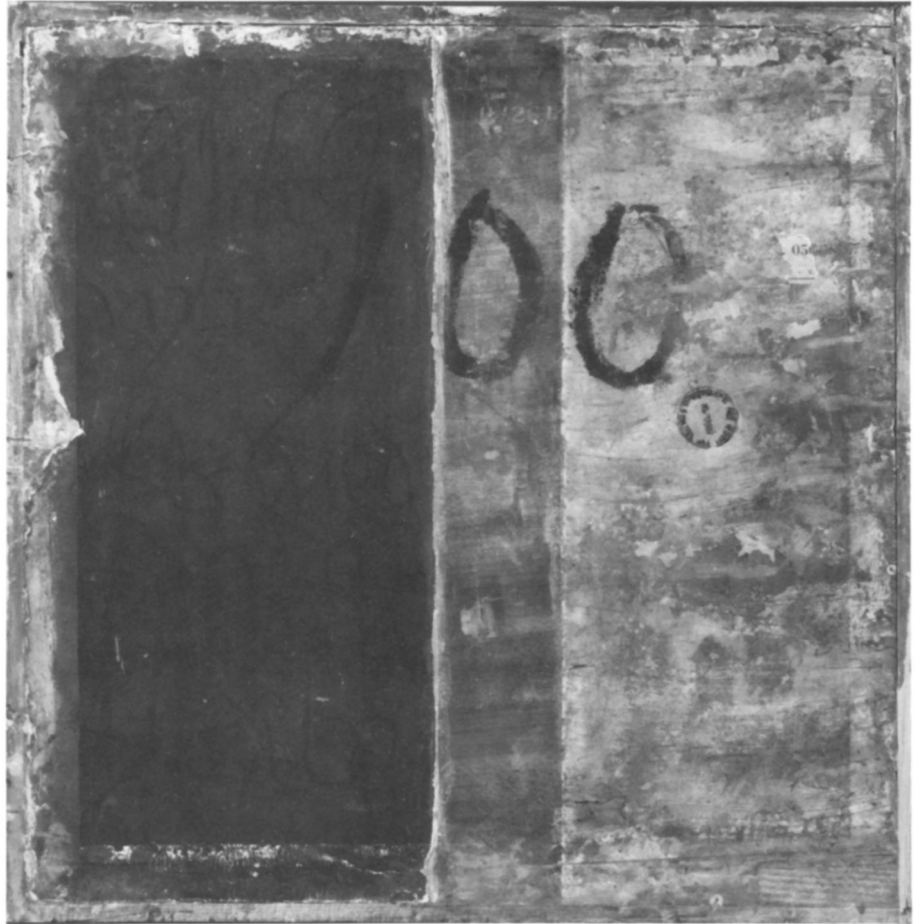
46, detail: The revolutionary changes that took place in painting during the early years of the fourteenth century were preceded by a large body of Franciscan devotional literature, the most famous example being the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, in which the reader is urged to visualize the events of Christ's life in concrete terms, as though they were contemporary. This approach seems to underlie Giotto's conception of the eldest magus as having removed his crown in respect and impetuously falling to his knees before the Christ Child to lift Him from the manger. There is no liter-

ary source for this depiction, which Giotto has made the compositional and dramatic focus of the painting.



47. The individual parts of altarpieces were bound together by wooden braces, known as battens, which were nailed to the backs of the panels. Traces of such battens are visible on the back of The Epiphany as well as on four of the other scenes from the same series. In every case they run in a vertical direction but do not align with each other. To either side of the batten on The Epiphany the panel was gessoed and painted with an imitation-porphphy decoration that has been partly obliterated by graffiti, some in a fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century hand.

Assuming that the group is complete, what can one state of its original context? A number of theories have been advanced. One posits that the panels were parts of a piece of ecclesiastical furniture and may have decorated the doors of a sacristy cupboard. However, if this had been true, the panels would have been arranged in superimposed rows—either two rows of four panels each or three of three—which the present number simply does not permit. Moreover, on the gessoed backs of five of the panels there are traces of wooden braces, known as battens (see figure 47), which, while they run in a vertical direction, do not seem to align and therefore cannot have bound the present panels together. There is, finally, the fact that a number of panels making up a series by Giotto's pupil, Taddeo Gaddi, which are known to have formed the doors of a sacristy cupboard in Santa Croce, are encased in elaborate quatrefoil frames. The absence of such frames or their trace on the picture field is yet another piece of negative evidence. A more viable theory suggests that the panels formed either some kind of independent altarpiece or the predella of an altarpiece. Three observations support this view. First, the pictures are painted on poplar panels with the grain of the wood running in a horizontal direction, as is characteristic of scenes from a predella. Second, along one or both of the vertical edges of most of the scenes are strips of gold that must originally have separated the panels from each other (the strips are not visible in all of the photographs). And third, along the left vertical edge of the Museum's picture and (possibly) the right edge of the London picture are traces of a raised surface where a frame originally joined the panel. Taken together, this evidence would seem to indicate that the series was painted on a long horizontal panel contained in a single molding or frame with gold strips separating the individual scenes. Although the square shape of each scene is unusual for a predella, a parallel exists in the



48. The series of paintings to which the Museum's Epiphany (figure 46) belongs seems to have formed the predella of an altarpiece, though what the superstructure looked like is a matter of conjecture. The scenes would have been separated by thin strips of gold, remnants of which are visible along the vertical edges of most of the panels.

Though only two of the scenes show events from the childhood of Christ while the other four relate to the Passion, Giotto seems to have created intentional visual links between the various scenes. A notable example of this is the way in

which Mary is shown fainting at the left in The Crucifixion and The Entombment. Less obvious is the way the bent posture of Simeon in The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple is mirrored by that of Christ in The Descent into Limbo and the gesture of Mary reaching for her Child in the former is repeated by an old woman reaching for Christ in the latter. More conspicuous, perhaps, is the manner in which the table and the balcony supported by consoles in The Last Supper divide the scene horizontally in precisely the same fashion as the background plateau and the marble sarcophagus in The En-

tombment. Such a rich, allusive use of motifs was typical of Giotto's mural decorations, and it underscores the fact that whether he was painting a large-scale mural or a small, narrative panel painting, the same principles were brought to bear.

Left to right: The Epiphany (figure 46); The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston); The Last Supper, The Crucifixion (Alte Pinakothek, Munich); The Entombment (Berenson Collection, Florence, Reproduced by permission of the President and Fellows of Harvard College); The De-

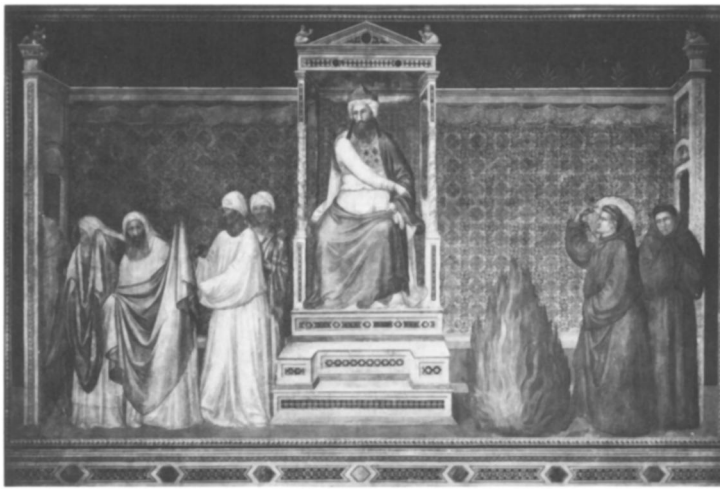
scent into Limbo (Alte Pinakothek, Munich); Pentecost (The National Gallery, London, reproduced by Courtesy of the Trustees)



altarpiece showing Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata, now in the Louvre, that was designed by Giotto for the church of San Francesco in Pisa.

Clearly, if these scenes formed the predella of an altarpiece, it must have been a work of some importance, and we would expect it to be identifiable as one of the altarpieces mentioned by early writers. Unfortunately, such descriptions as are available are very cursory. However, two clues present themselves. The first has to do with a general observation that the only altarpieces Giotto seems to have had a direct hand in executing were destined for Florentine churches; those commissioned for other cities seem to have been consigned to pupils in his workshop. The second clue is that in the scene of the Crucifixion a man and a woman in contemporary dress are shown to the right of the cross while Saint Francis is shown embracing Christ's feet to the left. The man and the woman are obviously portraits of the donors of the altarpiece, and, were they identifiable, the provenance of the panels could be established. The presence of Saint Francis probably indicates that the series was commissioned for a Franciscan church. This is of some importance, for among the altarpieces Giotto is said to have painted for Florentine churches, only four were done for a Franciscan establishment—Santa Croce. Three of these have been plausibly identified. One is still in situ in the

Baroncelli Chapel; one, from the Peruzzi Chapel, is in the North Carolina Museum of Art at Raleigh; and the third, from the Pulci-Berardi Chapel, is divided among the National Gallery, Washington, the Museo Horne, Florence, and Chaâlis. The width of these altarpieces is comparable to that of the series in question, and it therefore seems possible that the Metropolitan's *Epiphany* formed part of an altarpiece for the Bardi Chapel, which was frescoed with scenes from the life of Saint Francis by Giotto and his workshop. It is true that in the 1568 edition of the *Lives* Vasari mentions a Crucifixion by Ugolino di Nerio on the altar of the chapel, but by that date the rood screen of Santa Croce as well as many of the altarpieces had been dismantled and moved about, and it seems more likely that Giotto, having decorated the chapel with frescoes, also painted its altarpiece. There was, moreover, a tradition of paralleling the life of Saint Francis with that of Christ, so it may not be a coincidence that just as there are seven scenes in the present series, so the chapel was decorated with seven scenes from the life of Saint Francis: three to each lateral wall and one, of Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata, over the entrance arch. This would not be the only case where the subject of the narrative panels of an altarpiece was conceived to complement that of the murals in the same chapel; but it would be one of the rare



49. At the court of the sultan in Egypt, Saint Francis proposed that both he and the sultan's priests walk through fire to test the validity of their faith. Upon hearing the saint's words, an aged priest made a hurried exit. In Giotto's fresco from the Bardi Chapel in Santa Croce, the enthroned sultan's commanding gesture has been made the focus of the composition to point up the contrast between the resolution of Saint Francis, shown about to enter the fire at the right with his timorous companion, Illuminatus, and the hasty retreat of the magnificently garbed priests, their arms raised in protest and

humiliation. No other fourteenth-century artist was capable of both distilling the dramatic content of such a story into a few meaningful gestures and maintaining a solemn dignity. Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence



instances in which the same principles that governed the design of the large-scale murals were applied to the panels. When, for example, interiors are portrayed in the frescoes, they tend to be viewed straight on, as in the panels of the Last Supper and the Pentecost, rather than from an angle. And if the Museum's panel is compared to the fresco of Saint Francis Walking Through Fire (figure 49), which was painted entirely by Giotto, it will be found that a purposeful use of gesture and a beautiful, ponderous rhythm linking the groups of figures are common to both. In these respects a deliberate effort has been made to negate the limitations imposed by the dimensions of the panel.

Theories have a logic of their own that may or may not bear on historical truth, and in this case we are dealing with a theory, not a probability. Nevertheless, the problems of reconstruction posed by the Museum's panel are indicative of the complexities raised by most paintings from altarpieces, for few fragments now in museums have a demonstrable provenance, and their original setting is a matter of informed speculation. This fact should not inhibit our enjoyment of them. An altarpiece, like a Gothic cathedral, was far more impressive than its parts, but such was the care and thought that governed its creation that even in isolation these fragments are able to convey something of the whole.

All works are tempera and gold on wood, unless otherwise noted. In the measurements height precedes width, and dimensions include frame, where shown.

Notes

- p. 8 The contract for Pietro Lorenzetti's altarpiece in Arezzo is transcribed by S. Borghesi and E. Banchi, *Nuovi documenti per la storia dell'arte senese*, Siena, 1898, pp. 10 ff.
- p. 21 G. della Valle, *Lettere sanesi*, vol. 2, Rome, 1785, p. 202.
- p. 38 E. Romagnoli, *Biografia cronologica de' bellartisti senesi*, c. 1830 (reprinted Florence, 1976), vol. 3, p. 129.

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Inside back cover: detail of Giotto, The Epiphany (figure 46)

Back cover: detail of Master of the Life of Saint John the Baptist, The Feast of Herod (figure 40)



