

## A RAY OF LIGHT ON GIOVANNI DEL BIONDO AND NICCOLÒ DI TOMMASO

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The half-hour accorded me will barely give me time for a few brief demonstrations of two minor art-historical problems: the first concerning the early period of Giovanni del Biondo, the second the Florentine activity of Niccolò di Tommaso.

Measured by normal standards, Biondo was certainly not a great artist. During the period in which he exercised his profession, between 1356 and 1399<sup>1</sup>, he undoubtedly holds his own with the Bartolo di Fredi, the Spinello Aretinos and even perhaps the Andrea di Bonaiuti, although he would have to yield to contemporaries like Altichiero and Tommaso da Modena. He was beneath Vasari's notice altogether, and yet I should regard him a more inspired artist than Jacopo del Casentino, and his paintings generally as impressive as the gigantic indiscretions of Agnolo Gaddi, on both of whom Vasari lavishes precious space.

Sirén and Carlo Gamba were in 1906 the first to bestow Giovanni's name upon a small number of his panels<sup>2</sup>; but the genesis of his style is only now beginning to be known. About a generation ago I identified the two earliest of Giovanni's works: the laterals of the composite polyptych on the high altar of S. Croce<sup>3</sup>, and a Presentation with two saints in the Academy in Florence (No. 8462)<sup>4</sup>. Both are dated in Roman majuscules, one 1363, the other 1364, the earliest dates we possess for his hitherto identified works.

I believe these immediately to precede a group of paintings with which they closely share characteristics of style, and which were probably executed in the following order:

Florence, Acton Collection, Two Scenes from the Life of St. Benedict<sup>5</sup> (Figs. 1-2);

Altenburg, Staatliches Lindenau-Kunst-Museum, No. 22, St. Jerome (Fig. 3);

New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, No. 19, Christ and Virgin, Enthroned ;

Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Nos. 13, 15, Two lateral leaves of a triptych<sup>6</sup>, of which the New Haven panel was originally the centre, representing saints;

<sup>1</sup> Del Migliore in his *Giunte alle Vite de' Pittori del Vasari*, c. 76 (Cod. II. IV. 218, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale) was the first to mention the document of 1356 (Florence, Archivio di Stato, Provvisioni, vol. 43, c. 165), later quoted by Milanesi (Vasari, *Le Vite*, I, 1878, 669 n. 2). The date of Giovanni's death is inferred from the lists of the *Prestanza* in the Archivio di Stato, Florence. Whereas he appears as a tax-payer in May 1399 (Cod. 1758, *Quartiere di S. Giovanni*, *Gonf. Vaio*, unpag.), his heirs took over his tax in December of the same year (Cod. 1806, *Quartiere di S. Giovanni*, *Gonf. Vaio*, c. 55V). For further dates compare G. Poggi in *Rivista d'Arte*, V, 1907, 26 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Suida (*Florentinische Maler um die Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Straßburg, 1905, 45-48, 50) was the first to assemble a group of Giovanni's works under the designation "Meister des Rinuccini-Altars", an anonymous painter whom Sirén, on the basis of an inscription beneath the Madonna in the Pinacoteca in Siena, and Gamba on the basis of the Figline signature identified with Giovanni del Biondo (see *L'Arte*, IX, 1906, 322; and also *Rivista d'Arte*, V, 1907, 22).

<sup>3</sup> See Offner, *A Corpus of Florentine Painting*, New York, Sec. III, Vol. II, Pt. 1, 1930, p. XV n. 78 (with reproduction). Photographs Soprintendenza, Florence, 100448-100449.

The four Church Fathers were originally the laterals to a lost central panel. Their present position is wrong. The frontal figures, SS. Gregory and Jerome, were originally left and right of the missing central compartment, while SS. Ambrose and Augustine were the outer saints. This order is established by the fact that the symbols of the Evangelists above the saints would only then obey the proper order of the gospels, an order partly confirmed by the opening sentences in the open book of St. Ambrose drawn from Matthew I, 1 and in that of St. Augustine at extreme right from John I, 1. The date below St. Gregory would then be in the right position, to be followed possibly by a signature under the missing central panel.

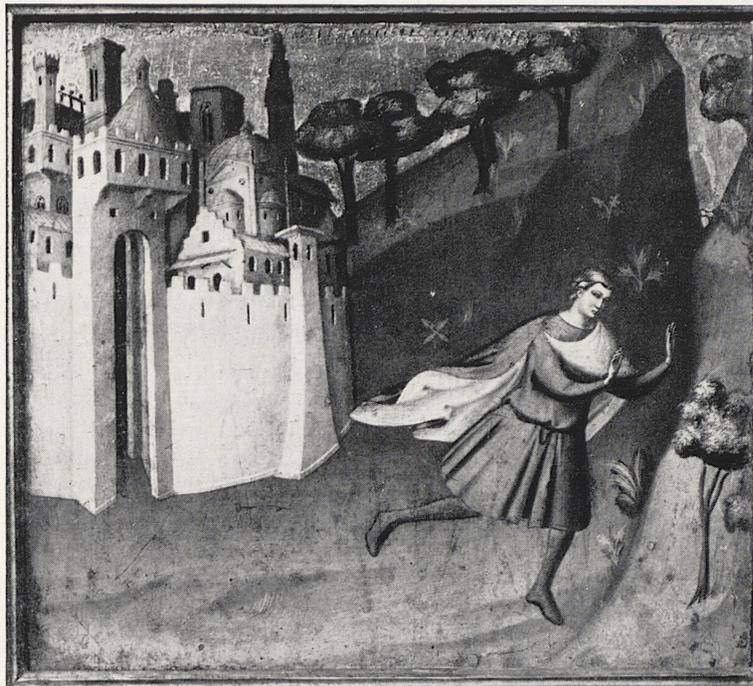
<sup>4</sup> See Offner, *Italian Primitives at Yale University*, New Haven, 1927, 18 (with reproduction).

<sup>5</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Offner in *Kaftal*, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting*, Florence, 1952, 148, 149, 172 (with reproductions and detailed descriptions).

<sup>6</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Offner in *Kaftal*, op. cit., 525, 533.

<sup>7</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Sirén in *Art in America*, IV, 1916, 215-216, who associates the Yale panel with its wings in the Vatican, Nos. 13, 15 (with reproductions).

<sup>8</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Sirén in *L'Arte*, IX, 1906, 322 (see also Note 7). But the panels were previously listed by Suida (op. cit., 50) as works of the "Meister des Rinuccini-Altars".



1 Giov. del Biondo, Scene from the Life of St. Benedict  
Florence, Acton Coll.

Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo (No. 90), St. Catherine<sup>9</sup> (the repainted lateral scenes, and the two saints, above, by another hand);

Florence, S. Felicità, Madonna and Child<sup>10</sup>;

Florence, Contini-Bonacossi Collection, Altar-frontal, St. John the Baptist and scenes from his life<sup>11</sup>;

Florence, S. Croce, Cappella Tosinchi, Polyptych, Madonna and Child, four Saints, dated 1372<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 4);

Richmond, Herbert Cook Collection (formerly), Triptych, Coronation of the Virgin, dated 1372<sup>1</sup>;

Fiesole, Museo Bandini, Triptych, Coronation of the Virgin, dated 1373<sup>14</sup>.

I am inclined to assign all these works to the same early period of the artist; for they are all bound together by common qualities, which are not to appear in such purity again. These are:

1. A firm and precise modelling.
2. A tendency towards geometricity, a tendency, i. e., to generalize natural forms.
3. Rapturous delight in pure colour.
4. A Nardesque lyricism that alternates with animal contentment.

These for the early period. But, from this moment, it is life, above all, that interests him: the sense of life free of the bonds of religion. Thus the content becomes secular and literary. At times his natural disposition, his very humour incline him to the extravagant and grotesque. In his later

<sup>9</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Van Marle, *Italian Schools of Painting*, III, 1924, 528 (with reproduction).

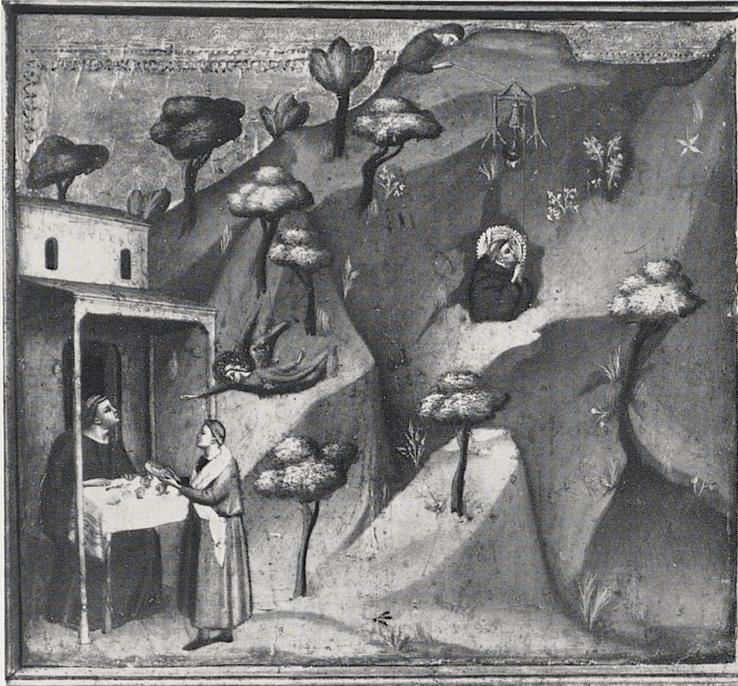
<sup>10</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Gamba in *Rivista d'Arte*, V, 1907, 24. Reproduced in Offner, *Italian Primitives at Yale University*, New Haven, 1927, Fig. 9B.

<sup>11</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by E. Sandberg Vavalà, *La Croce Dipinta Italiana*, Verona, 1929, 474, No. 73; published by Berenson in *Dedalo*, XI, 1930-1931, 1289-1290.

<sup>12</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Gamba in *Rivista d'Arte*, V, 1907, 22; mentioned by Suida (*op. cit.*, 50) as work of the "Meister des Rinuccini-Altars". Photographs Brogi, Florence.

<sup>13</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Sirén in *L'Arte*, IX, 1906, 322; reproduced in T. Borenius, *Catalogue of the Paintings in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook*, London, I, 1913, Pl. 12.

<sup>14</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Gamba in *Rivista d'Arte*, V, 1907, 22; anticipated by Suida's attribution to the "Meister des Rinuccini-Altars" (*op. cit.*, 50). Reproduced in O. H. Giglioli, *Fiesole, Catalogo delle Cose d'Arte e di Antichità d'Italia*, Roma, 1933, 214.



2 Giov. del Biondo, *Scene from the Life of St. Benedict*  
Florence, Acton Coll.

periods he prefers casual and transitory action; his drawing becomes looser and the form loses its former monumentality.

Now, I believe to have found another youthful work by Giovanni, which adds two important factors to what we already know about his early style:

1. It is the only painting in fresco by our master.
2. It provides us with the earliest presumable date for him.

This work is the series that occupies the lowest tier on three walls of the choir of the Church of S. Francesco in Castelfiorentino<sup>15</sup> and represents from left to right four scenes:

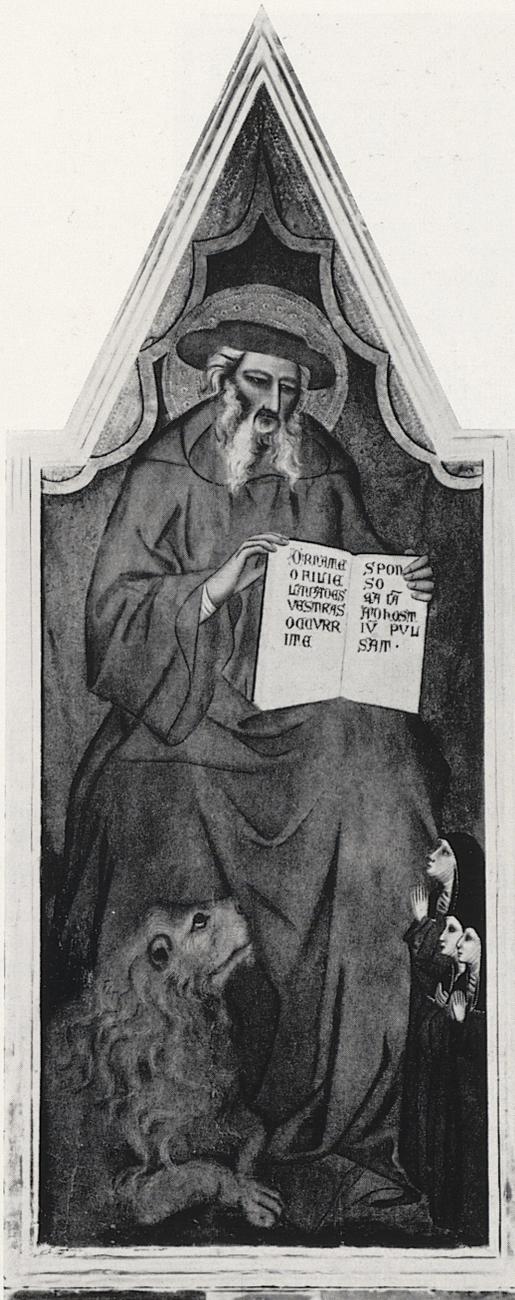
1. The Obsequies of St. Francis (Figs. 6, 12, 13);
2. His Stigmatization (Fig. 5);
3. The Martyrdom of St. Paul (Fig. 7);
4. The Crucifixion of St. Peter (Figs. 8, 10, 11).

As part of a larger cycle that extended to the upper walls, the left wall and a band left of the choir window originally showed scenes of the life of St. Francis, while the band right of the same

<sup>15</sup> Photographs Brogi, Florence.

The frescoes were recovered from whitewash in 1893 and attributed to the "scuola giottesca" (see *Miscellanea Storica della Valdelsa, Castelfiorentino*, I, 1893, 109). For reports of the restoration, finished on June 30, 1894, consult *Miscellanea Storica della Valdelsa, Castelfiorentino*, II, 1894, 80 and Luigi del Moro in *Atti per la Conservazione dei Monumenti della Toscana compiuti dal 1 luglio 1893 al 30 giugno 1894*, Firenze, 1895, 57-58. The Florentine authorities plan to check the utter destruction of the frescoes by a prompt restoration.

Del Moro sees in the Franciscan scenes the "maniera di Giotto o di Taddeo Gaddi", whereas in the other two he distinguishes a "maniera più larga e più colorita". To Carocci (*Miscellanea Storica della Valdelsa, Castelfiorentino*, III, 1895, 193) they recall the "maniera degli scolari di Giotto e dei Gaddi". Thereafter they are consistently regarded Giottesque (see M. Cioni in *Arte e Storia*, XXIV, 1905, 54; M. Cioni, *La Valdelsa*, Firenze, 1911, 187; "Catalogo Generale dei Monumenti e degli Oggetti d'Arte del Regno. Provincia di Firenze, Comune di Castelfiorentino, Chiesa di S. Francesco", No. 6, 4, Inventory - MS. in Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Soprintendenza; O. Pogni in *Miscellanea Storica della Valdelsa, Castelfiorentino*, XLVI, 1938, 42).



3 Giov. del Biondo, St. Jerome  
Altenburg, Museum

tempted the spiritual vineyard of the human soul with his snares (see Friedrich Lauchert, *Geschichte des Physiologus*, Straßburg, 1889, 18). We find the hedgehog again in the Stigmatization (Fig. 9), and in the Ascension of the Magdalen in Giov. del Biondo's altarpiece in the Rinuccini Chapel in S. Croce (Photograph Soprintendenza, Florence, 100452).

<sup>17</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Gamba in *Rivista d'Arte*, V, 1907, 22; previously listed by Suida (*op. cit.*, 50) as work of the "Meister des Rinuccini-Altars" (with reproduction).

<sup>18</sup> There are a number of other such hands to be found among his early works.

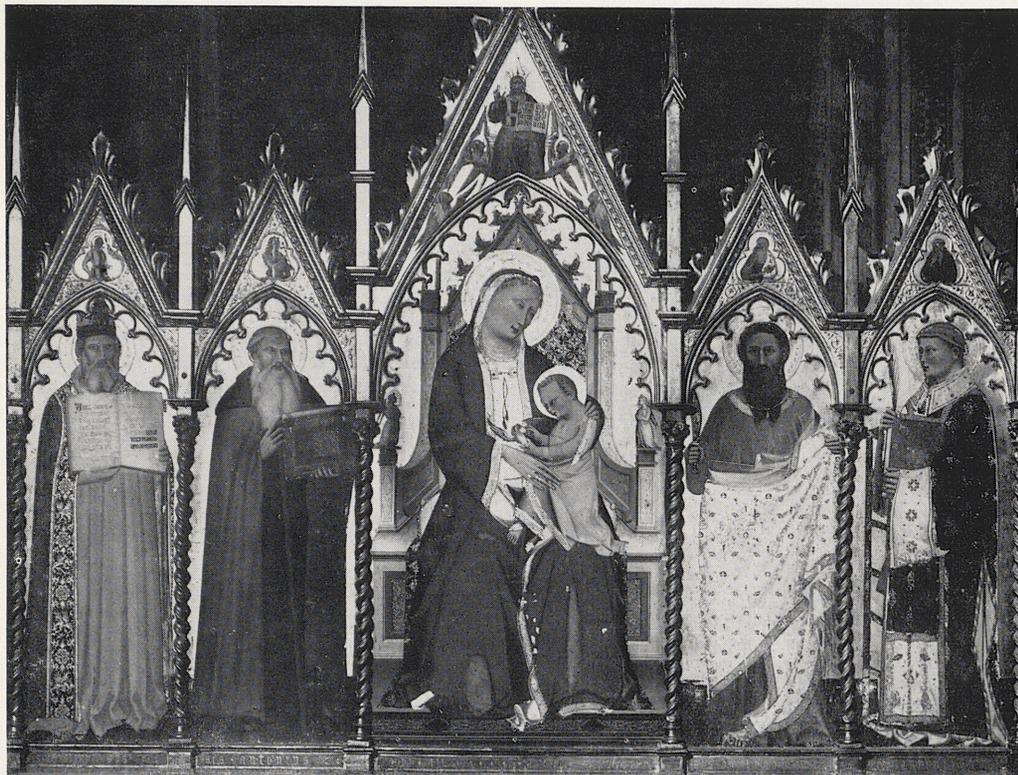
window and the right wall were probably covered with scenes from the lives of SS. Paul and Peter. The upper limits and considerable areas of the lowest tier have lost most of their pristine colour and, here and there, also the intonaco.

I shall limit my discussion to specific and salient correspondences between these frescoes and Giovanni's acknowledged paintings, on the assumption that the genius that permeates a work reveals and communicates itself more clearly in certain parts of it than in others.

The scene that is the best preserved is that of the Stigmatization (Fig. 5). It is also the richest in episodes, as if the artist wished to persuade us that the varied processes of nature were as dear to God as the Stigmatization was solemn. Giovanni's humor scattered throughout the scene lingers over the little family of hedgehogs<sup>16</sup> at the right, to suggest the comic that is inherent in rigid order when out of place. There is a striking affinity between St. Francis here and the Stigmatization in the predella of Giovanni's altarpiece in the Rinuccini Chapel in S. Croce (dated 1379)<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 9) and the second of the two scenes from the life of St. Benedict in the Acton Collection (Fig. 2), an affinity that would induce me to classify the three paintings under the same name and period.

Thus the head of the greybeard standing at the left in the Crucifixion of St. Peter has the same mould as that of the Joseph in the 1364 triptych at the Accademia (Fig. 10), and the two long-fingered hands still preserved on the same side of the fresco are identical with the hand of the Baptist in the same triptych<sup>18</sup> (Fig. 11). The long rectilinear lid, the eye and its setting of the monk left in the Obsequies of St. Francis (Fig. 12) are identical with those of the Joseph we have just mentioned. Again, the monks' heads on extreme right of the Castelfiorentino Obsequies (Fig. 13) resemble in their bony structure the St. Lawrence in the Tosinghi

<sup>16</sup> Of course the primary reason for the representation of the hedgehog was its current symbolic meaning. In the middle ages, this animal was regarded the embodiment of evil here represented as retreating before the personification of Virtue. As the hedgehog destroyed the vine, so the devil



4 Giov. del Biondo, Polyptych, Florence, S. Croce, Tosinghi Chapel

polyptych of 1372 (Fig. 4). The insistence on bulk is not native to Giovanni del Biondo. We meet it occasionally as, e. g., in the deacons Eugenius and Crescentius in Biondo's panel of St. Zenobius in the Florentine Cathedral<sup>19</sup>. It derives from Orcagna; partly, no doubt, from the Giottesque precedent for the composition of the Obsequies of St. Francis in S. Croce<sup>20</sup>.

Happily we possess a likely basis for inferring the epoch in which the frescoes in Castelfiorentino were painted. And that is a date upon a polyptych recorded by Giacomini in his "Vita di S. Verdiana" of 1692<sup>21</sup>. He speaks of it as in the Church of S. Sofia in Castelfiorentino, and as signed and dated: "Giovanni Biondi fiorentino dipinse l'anno MCCCLX." The above polyptych is lost, but the Convento di S. Francesco where the frescoes just described are to be found, is mentioned as "contiguo a S. Sofia". What is more likely, therefore, than that the frescoes were painted on the same occasion as the polyptych of 1360? That these are early has been proved by their affinities to those early works listed at the beginning of this paper; a fact also confirmed by Orcagnesque traces. But Orcagna's influence appears most clearly in the Church Fathers in S. Croce dated 1363<sup>3</sup>. The frontal posture of two of these derives from such archaistic precedent as the Baptist of the Strozzi polyptych<sup>22</sup>. If we compare Biondo's Gregory in S. Croce with this Baptist, we shall find him very similar, save that the pupil has exaggerated the weight of the head and overemphasized the wrinkles around the eyes. The same Orcagnesque influence holds for the haloes of Giovanni's Church Fathers. They show the same structure and the same system of clear flat pattern against a semi-dark ground

<sup>19</sup> First attributed to Giov. del Biondo by Gamba in *Rivista d'Arte*, V, 1907, 22; mentioned by Suida (*op. cit.*, 50) as work of the "Meister des Rinuccini-Altars" (with reproduction).

<sup>20</sup> Reproduced in Van Marle, *op. cit.*, III, 134-135.

<sup>21</sup> See L. Giacomini, *La Vita di S. Verdiana*, Firenze, 1692, 323.

<sup>22</sup> Reproduced in Van Marle, *op. cit.*, III, between 458 and 459.



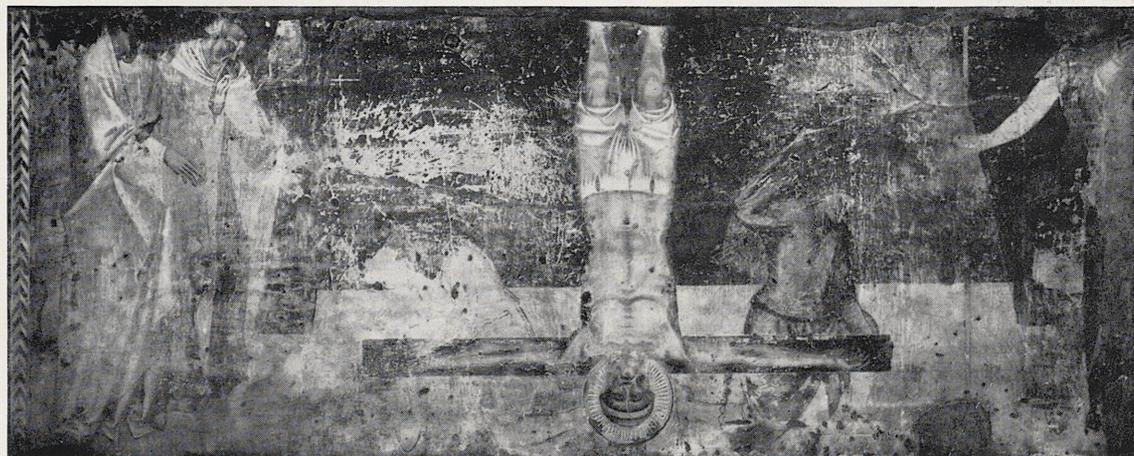
5 Giov. del Biondo, Stigmatization, Castelfiorentino, S. Francesco



6 Giov. del Biondo, Obsequies of St. Francis, Castelfiorentino, S. Francesco



7 Giov. del Biondo, Martyrdom of St. Paul, Castelfiorentino, S. Francesco



8 Giov. del Biondo, Martyrdom of St. Peter, Castelfiorentino, S. Francesco



9 Giov. del Biondo, Stigmatization  
Florence, S. Croce, Rinuccini Chapel

as close to Nardo. Thus we shall discover very similar form and the same particulars, such as hair and ears, in, e. g., St. Augustine in S. Croce<sup>23</sup> and in a bishop, third row right, of Nardo's Paradise<sup>23</sup>, or again in the Virgin of the Presentation of 1364<sup>4</sup> and Nardo's lovely angel playing the harp in the fifth row left of the same fresco<sup>24</sup>, who boast the same firm flesh and the same fine hatching.

<sup>23</sup> Reproduced in Van Marle, *op. cit.*, III, 461; photograph Brogi, Florence.

<sup>24</sup> Photograph Brogi, Florence, 11193 g.

worked in tiny discs as the Strozzi altarpiece. Again, the profile of the high priest in Giovanni's Presentation in the Florentine Academy<sup>4</sup> and Orcagna's Peter share the same mask, displaying the same hard, high polish on the bulges, the same graduated hollows, and the same formula for the foreshortening of the eye. The long-fingered hands with the sharp knuckles, as we saw them in the Crucifixion of St. Peter in Castelfiorentino (Fig. 10), hark back to such example as the next to the last figure on the right in the Death of Henry II in Orcagna's Strozzi predella (Fig. 14).

But if Giovanni's shapes derive largely from Orcagna, he was by taste, temperament and technique



10 Giov. del Biondo, Details from St. Peter's Martyrdom, Castelfiorentino, and from the Triptych, Florence, Academy, No. 8462



11 Giov. del Biondo, Details from St. Peter's Martyrdom, Castelfiorentino, and from the Triptych, Florence, Academy, No. 8462

But there is another way that leads to the same conclusion. The ceiling medallions<sup>25</sup>, but especially the full-length Church Fathers in the intrados of the arch of the Strozzi Chapel<sup>26</sup>, are in Giovanni del Biondo's manner. Judging by the variety of styles in the frescoes, Nardo had several assistants to help him. One of them I believe to have been Giovanni.

If Giovanni himself did not paint these figures, his drawings were used. This becomes clear when we confront the St. Jerome in the Strozzi Chapel with the St. Jerome in the S. Croce polyptych (Fig. 15); or the St. Augustine in the same chapel with the St. Gregory in S. Croce (Fig. 16). Barring a certain indecision or timidity, which may be due to Biondo's youth, the formula is the same. In fact the quality of the Biondesque figures cannot be differently explained. And indeed this view would accord with the



12 Giov. del Biondo, Detail from the Obsequies of St. Francis, Castelfiorentino

<sup>25</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas repeated in the four medallions, in each case with two Virtues. Photographs Soprintendenza, Florence, 66096, 49913-49916. The decoration of the vault has never been associated with Giovanni del Biondo. Suida (op. cit., 26) sees in it characteristics of Jacopo di Cione's style, while Berenson (*Italian Pictures of the Renaissance*, Oxford, 1932, 274) makes it an early effort of Jacopo di Cione.

<sup>26</sup> Left, above, St. Jerome, below, St. Augustine; right, above, St. Gregory, below, St. Ambrose. Photographs Soprintendenza, Florence, 66079-66082. As for these figures Suida (op. cit., 20) gives them to an assistant of Nardo; Berenson on the other hand regards St. Augustine a product jointly of Giov. del Biondo and Nardo (op. cit., 1932, p. 241). Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*, Princeton, 1951, 16, 16 n. 18, attributes St. Jerome and probably St. Gregory to Giovanni del Biondo around 1356; but he is less certain regarding St. Augustine and St. Ambrose.



13 Giov. del Biondo, Detail from the Obsequies of St. Francis, Castelfiorentino

probable date of the frescoed decoration of the Strozzi Chapel, if it has any relation – as it must in reason – to the execution of Orcagna’s altarpiece painted between 1354 and 1357. Giovanni del Biondo’s acquisition of the citizenship of Florence at this period, i. e., in 1356<sup>27</sup>, may be connected with his activity in the chapel. For all these reasons one may presume he was still young at this time, and that his contribution to the Strozzi frescoes marks an early stage of a craft, seen ripening four years later in Castelfiorentino.

My second theme has grown out of my identification of two frescoes of a slightly later period. The first of these is scarcely noticed in art-historical literature, but when mentioned is credited to the fourteenth or earlier fifteenth century, or to the school of Giotto, or, more recently, to the studio of Orcagna<sup>28</sup>. It is a fresco that adorns a street-tabernacle at the corner of Via del Sole and Via delle Belle Donne in Florence (Fig. 17), of which Carocci says in 1895 “che abbia sofferto per cagione dell’ umidità e qualche vecchio e inopportuno restauro”. The site was known in the fifteenth century as the Canto di S. Sisto<sup>29</sup> and, according to some, there was an oratory here until the thirteenth century<sup>30</sup>. A Pozzo di S. Sisto is referred to already in 1326 according to Manni<sup>29</sup>. Today, sixty years

<sup>27</sup> See Note 1.

<sup>28</sup> For the attribution of the fresco to the fourteenth century see E. G. Bacciotti in *Il Fiorentino Istruito per l’Anno 1854*, Firenze, 1854, 34–35. For the attribution to the earlier fifteenth century see Carocci in *Catalogo Generale dei Monumenti e degli Oggetti d’Arte del Regno. Provincia di Firenze, Comune di Firenze, Via del Sole*, 1895 (MS. in Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze, Soprintendenza) and the inventory “Comune di Firenze, Uffizio Belle Arti e Antichità, Via del Sole, Tabernacolo di S. Sisto”, c. 1935 (MS. in Palazzo Vecchio, Firenze, Repartizione Antichità e Belle Arti). For the attribution to the school of Giotto see Guida di Firenze e suoi Contorni, 6th Ed., Firenze, Bettini, 1871, 213. Toesca (*Il Trecento*, Torino, 1951, 637 n. 157) attributes it to the studio of Orcagna. First attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso by Offner (see Kaftal, op. cit., 1012). Photographs Brogi, Florence.

<sup>29</sup> See Domenico M. Manni, *Delle Antiche Terme di Firenze*, Firenze, 1751, 56.

<sup>30</sup> See inventory “Comune di Firenze, Uffizio Belle Arti e Antichità, Via del Sole, Tabernacolo di S. Sisto”, c. 1935 (MS. in Palazzo Vecchio, Firenze, Repartizione Antichità e Belle Arti).

after Carocci, the damage and repairs cannot disguise the hand of Niccolò di Tommaso. But in the following analysis and demonstration we must bear in mind that the painting has lost its purity, its innocence of colour, and that what we now see is chiefly evidence of the hardihood of classical technique, which refuses to be suppressed.

The lower part of the tabernacle is occupied by a sort of *Maestà*, in which the pope, St. Sixtus II<sup>31</sup>, appears under a silk baldachin piously guarded by four angels, recalling Siennese composition and Siennese mood. Above is a Crucifixion with SS. Dominic and Francis, and in the thickness of the wall, left, the Baptist, right, St. Catherine. The medallions in the intrados of the arch are barely decipherable.

The mood and postures of the lower angels (Fig. 18) recur in the angels of the central part of a triptych formerly in the Gualino Collection, now in the Italian Embassy in London<sup>32</sup>, while the right angel repeats those of Rebecca in the Deception of Isaac (Fig. 19) in the Convento del T in Pistoia and of the seated Eve (Fig. 20), also there, who seems suspended between waking and sleep<sup>33</sup>. The pope, although sadly repainted, is in type and style akin to St. Anthony the Abbot by Niccolò, dated 1371, now in the Museo di S. Martino at Naples<sup>34</sup> (Fig. 21). Both greybeards show the characteristic bone in the face, the heavy lid, and the parallel widely-spaced hair-fibres peculiar to Niccolò alone.

The St. Catherine (Fig. 22) with her high forehead and hair parted in the middle, invites comparison with the Madonna of the Galleria delle Oblate, now in Careggi (near Florence)<sup>35</sup> (Fig. 24). They both display the same right hand with the characteristic long unfunctional thumb resting along the length of the hand. But note that these two figures are painted in different techniques, and that they are in totally different states of conservation. Or let us confront the St. Catherine with a Virgin which in 1927 was in the Paris Market<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 23).

The same heads and same hands reappear in a fresco of the Madonna<sup>37</sup> at present in the right



14 Orcagna, Detail from the Death of Henry II Florence, S. Maria Novella

<sup>31</sup> Although rare in Florence, the appearance of pope Sixtus II should not be surprising, as his relics were claimed to exist in the Cathedral, in S. Maria degli Angeli and in the Badia (see Lodovico Antonio Giambono, *Diario Sacro e Guida Perpetua per Visitare le Chiese della Città di Firenze*, Firenze, 1700, 426). In fact we find a nearly contemporary representation in the Corale 2 (c. 129V) in the Laurenziana, completed for S. Maria degli Angeli in 1378 (see D'Ancona, *La Miniatura Fiorentina*, II, 1914, 126).

<sup>32</sup> First attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso by Berenson (op. cit., 1932, p. 398); reproduced in L. Venturi, *La Collezione Gualino*, Torino-Roma, 1926, PL. VII.

<sup>33</sup> First attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso by Offner in *Art in America*, XIII, 1925, 21 et seq. and in *Studies in Florentine Painting*, New York, 1927, 109 et seq. (with reproductions).

<sup>34</sup> The only signed and dated painting by Niccolò di Tommaso. It seems recently to have been admirably restored by the Soprintendenza in Naples (Photographs Soprintendenza, Naples, 4869-4870, 4887-4888).

<sup>35</sup> First attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso by E. Sandberg Vavalà in *Art in America*, XV, 1927, 273 et seq. (with reproduction).

<sup>36</sup> The tabernacle here published for the first time was sold to America by M. d'Atri, Paris, in 1928. It represents: in the centre, the Madonna and Child, SS. Catherine, Bartholomew, Paul, Lucy and two angels; at left, the Coronation of the Virgin with saints; at right, Christ on Cross with the Virgin, SS. John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalen; above, Annunciation.

<sup>37</sup> For the iconography of the Madonna del Parto here represented see Offner, *A Corpus of Florentine Painting*, New York, Sec. III, Vol. V, 1947, 28 n. 1.



15 Giov. del Biondo (assisted), St. Jerome, Florence. S. Maria Novella – Biondo, St. Jerome, Florence, S. Croce

transept of S. Lorenzo (Fig. 25), recently restored under Ugo Procacci's acute direction<sup>38</sup>, and traditionally known as "La Madonna dei Chierici"<sup>39</sup>. This has recently been published by Dr. Baldini under the name of Nardo di Cione<sup>40</sup>. I have for years conjectured its actual painter, and

<sup>38</sup> The upper part of our fresco was visible through an oval cut in the altarpiece representing the Visitation by Agostino Veracini in the Cappella Medici (first chapel right) in S. Lorenzo. The fresco was brought in the thirties to the Uffizi and scrupulously restored by Leonetto Tintori, and c. 1953 returned to S. Lorenzo where it may now be seen in the Cappella Stenone.

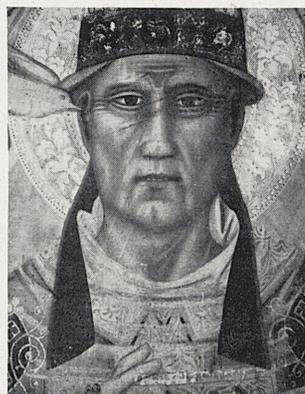
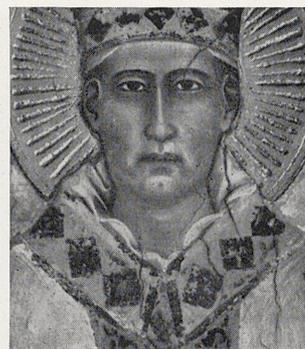
It gets scarce mention in the literature. Fantozzi (*Nuova Guida di Firenze*, Firenze, 1842, 471) speaks only of an "ovato"; the *Guida d'Italia del Touring Club Italiano*, Italia Centrale, II, 2nd Ed., 1929, 154 of the "Madonna dei Chierici, della fine del sec. XII, ma ridipinta", whereas the 3rd Ed., 1937, 247 and the 4th Ed., 1950, 225 attribute the fragment to Maso di Banco. W. Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz*, Frankfurt a. M., II, 1941, 494 only refers to an oval votive panel. Photographs Soprintendenza, Florence, 67 (Giani), 68725, 69309–69310.

<sup>39</sup> The name "Madonna dei Chierici" may be explained by the fact that in the chapel a mass was celebrated by "nostri Chierici" in accordance with a "decreto capitolare" dating back to October 9, 1462 (see Domenico Moreni, *Delle Tre Suntuose Cappelle Medicee di S. Lorenzo*, Firenze, 1813, 261).

<sup>40</sup> See *Bollettino d'Arte*, XL, 1955, 79–81.

although it was still covered with repaint, I attributed it, with unwarranted hesitation, to Niccolò di Tommaso, in 1947<sup>41</sup>. The S. Lorenzo fresco boasts a rich warm flesh and ample forms, but every feature in the Catherine of the tabernacle (Fig. 22) and this Virgin is similar, from the hand holding the drapery to the heavy chin, the expression of the mouth, the nose, but chiefly the eye that rests intently on the object of its gaze, and around which hovers a thin veil of shadow. But it is, above all, the tonality that corresponds in these works.

If my conviction that Niccolò is responsible for the above two frescoes, clearly painted on Florentine soil, is justified, then his activity in Florence is now for the first time established by the existence of concrete works executed there in competition with local artists. There are, moreover, at least seven panels by Niccolò in Florentine institutions and collections today that were almost certainly painted in that region<sup>42</sup>. (Several works by a Pistoiese compatriot, Cristiani, are still in Florence or were once in the Florentine Market<sup>43</sup>.) That he enjoyed a secure local reputation we might have suspected from two facts of considerable weight: that he witnessed Nardo's will in 1365, and that he was consulted with several others by the Operai del Duomo in 1366 and 1367<sup>44</sup>. The former record simply corroborates the close artistic connection between Niccolò and Nardo to which their works amply testify. One has only to compare the seated Eve of the Convento del T (Fig. 20) with the two principals in the



<sup>41</sup> See Offner, *A Corpus of Florentine Painting*, New York, Sec. III, Vol. V, 1947, 28 n. 1.

<sup>42</sup> The following works of Niccolò di Tommaso were certainly painted in Florence: Careggi (Florence), Convento delle Oblate, Madonna and Child, four saints; in the predella, the dead Christ with saints (see Note 35); Florence, Accademia delle Belle Arti, No. 8580, Central part of a tabernacle, Coronation of the Virgin (from the convent of S. Domenico di Fiesole). First attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso by Offner in *Art in America*, XIII, 1925, 26 (with reproduction);

Florence, Museo dell'Opera di S. Croce, No. 18, Madonna and Child; in the predella, the dead Christ with saints. For the first attribution to Niccolò di Tommaso see L. Coletti, *I Primitivi*, Novara, II, 1946, p. LIV. Photograph Brogi, Florence, 22080.

It is possible that the following panels were painted and acquired in Florence:

Florence, Museo Bardini, Raccolta Corsi, No. 16, Tabernacle, Madonna and Child, eight saints, two angels; Lamentation under the Cross; Christ on Cross with the Virgin, SS. John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalen; above, Annunciation. It is here attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso for the first time, Photograph Reali, Florence;

Florence, Fondazione Horne, Nos. 75, 76, Two lateral leaves of a polyptych, St. John the Evangelist; St. Paul. First attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso by Offner in *Art in America*, XIII, 1925, 31–32 (with reproduction);

Florence, Acton Collection, Central part of a polyptych, Madonna and Child with a kneeling donor. For the first time here attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso;

Florence, Private Collection, Central part of a tabernacle, Madonna and Child, ten saints, four angels; above, Christ, blessing. For the first time here attributed to Niccolò di Tommaso (shop). Photograph *Corpus of Florentine Painting*, New York.

<sup>43</sup> The following works of Giovanni di Bartolommeo Cristiani were certainly executed in Florence:

Florence, S. Ambrogio (originally street-tabernacle in Via Michelangelo Buonarroti), Madonna and Child, two saints, a donor. First attributed to Cristiani by Berenson in *Dedalo*, XI, 1931, 1309–1310 (with reproduction);

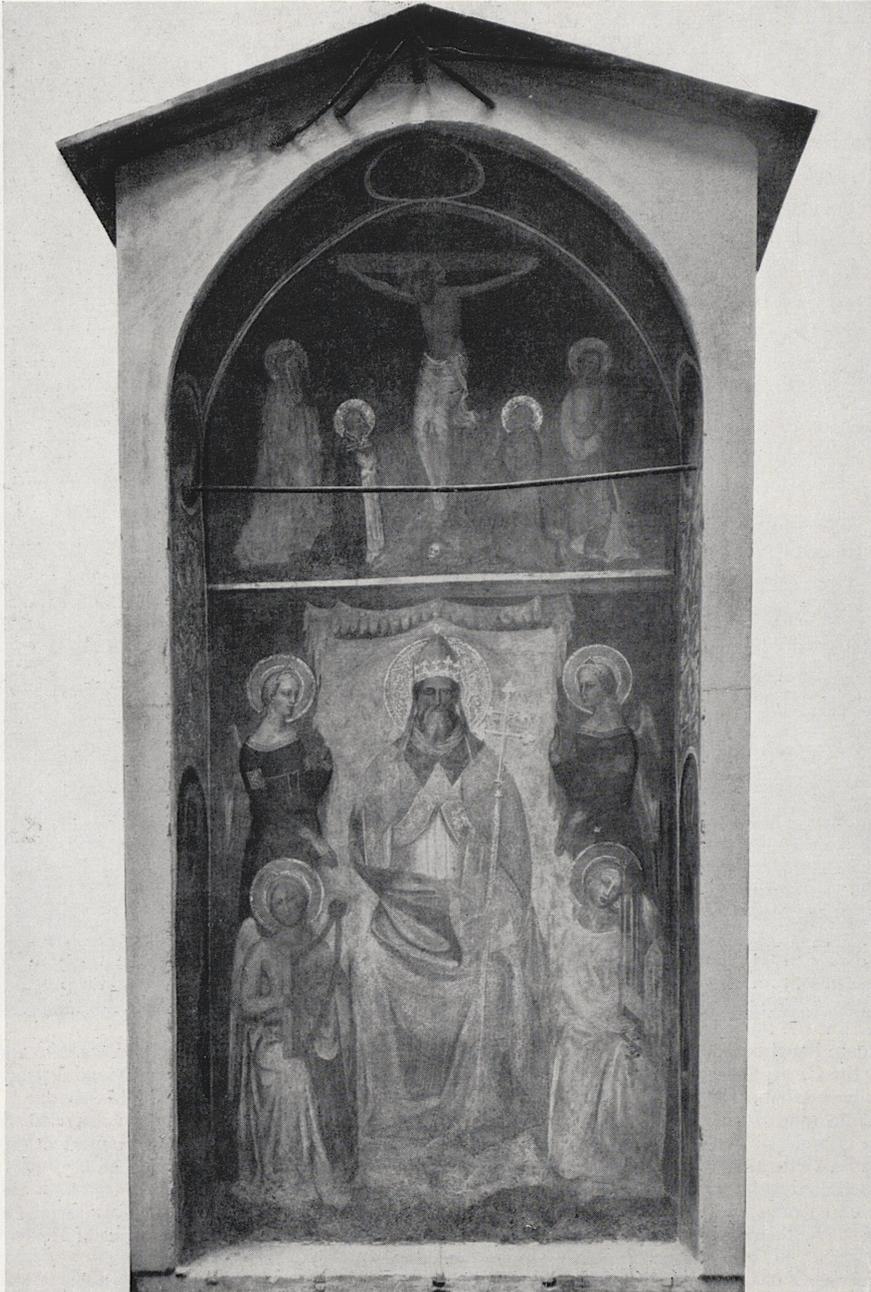
Pistoia, Museo Civico, No. 27, Central part of a polyptych, Madonna and Child, six angels (signed JOHES BAR . . .). The panel comes from the convent of S. Lucia (S. Lucia di Camporeggi) in Via S. Gallo, Florence (now destroyed), according to "Inventario Generale dei Dipinti dei Magazzini della R. Galleria degli Uffizi, Volume unico dei dipinti di 2a Categoria", 1881, No. 209 (MS. in Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Soprintendenza). Photograph Brogi, Florence.

The Florentine provenance of the following panel may be assumed with relative certainty:

Florence, Acton Collection, Triptych, Madonna and Child, four angels; four saints. First attributed to Cristiani by Offner in *Van Marle*, op. cit., V, 1925, 305 (with reproduction).

<sup>44</sup> For the date of 1365 see Milanese, *Nuovi Documenti per la Storia dell'Arte Toscana*, Roma, 1893, 58, No. 77. For the dates of 1366 and 1367 see C. Guasti, *S. Maria del Fiore*, Firenze, 1887, 167, 168, 178, 187, 188.

16 Giov. del Biondo (assisted),  
St. Augustine, Florence,  
S. Maria Novella –  
Biondo, St. Gregory,  
Florence, S. Croce (details)



17 Niccolò di Tommaso, Fresco in a Street-tabernacle, Florence

Paradise by Nardo in the Cappella Strozzi<sup>45</sup>, or the angel playing the organ in the tabernacle of S. Sisto (Fig. 18) with the angel playing the viola below the Virgin in the same Strozzi Chapel fresco<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> Reproduced in Van Marle, *op. cit.*, III, 462.

<sup>46</sup> Photograph Brogi, Florence, 11195.

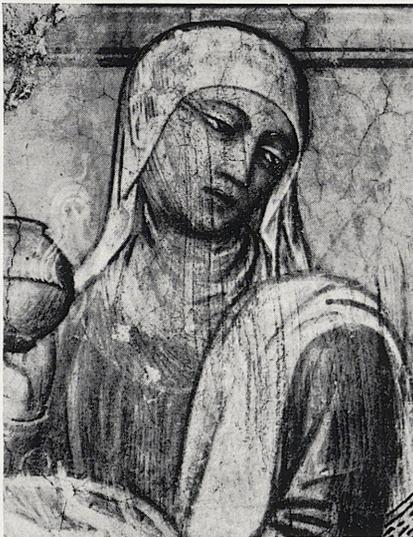
But if Niccolò was acknowledged and active in Florence, his cycle at the Convento del T, Pistoia, and the three fresco-fragments belonging to a Sig. Baldi Papini, formerly in Pistoia<sup>47</sup>, bear witness to his having worked over a considerable period there. It is interesting to note, however, that both, his Florentine and his Pistoiese paintings, are of a gentleness of feeling, and a pallor, peculiar to Pistoiese painting as a whole. In fact, Niccolò, despite his Florentine affinities, adheres so closely to an indigenous Pistoiese tradition that it is in Pistoia itself we must seek his origins. And as we should expect, his Pistoiese Convento del T frescoes<sup>33</sup> cited above are among his earliest works. It is in these, chiefly, that he invests his narrative with a poetry, proper to the school, a school still neglected and ill-understood, which translates the monumental motifs of the Church into the profane graces of a *Dolce Stil Nuovo*.

<sup>47</sup> Now in the villa La Costaglia (near Poggio a Caiano). These fragments, representing two heads of bearded saints and two heads of angels, were found on the floor of the Palazzo Tolomei in Pistoia when acquired by the Baldi Papini family. Of the fragments which have not hitherto been associated with Niccolò di Tommaso, A. Chiappelli published two heads (see *Pagine d'Antica Arte Fiorentina*, Firenze, 1905, 22-24). Photographs Piero Calosci, Pistoia.



18 Niccolò di Tommaso, Angel from the Street-tabernacle, Florence

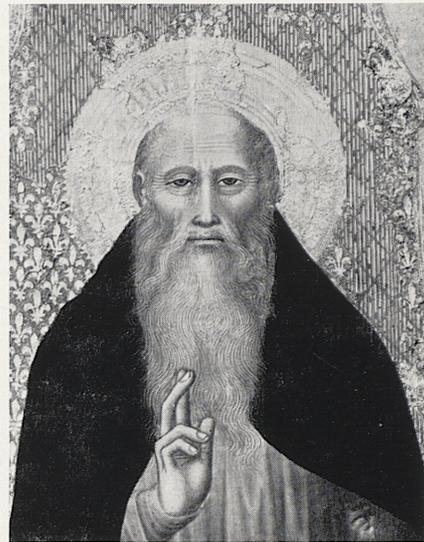
Fiorentina, Firenze, 1905, 22-24). Photographs Piero Calosci, Pistoia.



19 Niccolò di Tommaso, Rebecca Pistoia, Convento del T (detail)



20 Niccolò di Tommaso, Eve Pistoia, Convento del T (detail)



21 Niccolò di Tommaso, St. Sixtus II from the Street-tabernacle, Florence – St. Anthony Abbot, Naples, Museo di S. Martino (details)

*Alphabetical List of the Works of Giovanni del Biondo*  
(apart from the early works of the master mentioned above)

For full commentary, critical apparatus and reproductions see *A Corpus of Florentine Painting*, New York, Section IV, in preparation.

The works painted in Giovanni del Biondo's style can seldom be attributed to the master without qualification, because the variations among them are not due so much to changes of development as – partly at least – to different phases of his Protean artistic character; but chiefly to the large participation of assistants.

Altenburg, Lindenau-Kunst-Museum, No. 32, St. John the Evangelist, three-quarter length (restored); Amsterdam, Lanz Collection (formerly), Fragment, St. Stephen, half-length (belonging as lateral leaf to the Madonna in the Galerie Scheidwimmer, Munich); Arezzo, Pinacoteca Comunale, Madonna and Child with two angels (destroyed during war); Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, No. 719, Five saints; Berlin, Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, store-room, No. III. 32, Three predella-scenes, Pietà; Crucifixion of St. Andrew; Legend of St. Julian; Buffalo (N. Y.), Albright Art Gallery, Two fragments, Annunciation; Detroit, Institute of Arts, Nos. 29.315, 29.316, Two panels, Annunciation (originally belonging to the polyptych in San Giovanni Valdarno); Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland, No. 973, Madonna and Child with four angels (workshop); Figline Valdarno, S. Francesco, Madonna and Child (signed and dated 1392); Florence, Cathedral, St. Zenobius; S. Croce, Cappella Bardi di Vernio, Triptych, St. John Gualbertus; four scenes from his life (workshop); Cappella Rinuccini, Polyptych, Madonna and Child; saints (dated 1379); Accademia delle Belle Arti, No. 8606, Polyptych, Annunciation; saints; Galleria degli Uffizi, No. 444, St. John the Evangelist; Galleria degli Uffizi, store-room, No. 6104, Two panels, Annunciation (destroyed during war); Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Nos. 84–86, Triptych, Martyrdom of St. Sebastian; four scenes from his life; Annunciation; Museo Stibbert, No. 10333, Madonna and Child with four saints (workshop); Ospedale degli Innocenti, Museum, No. 122, Triptych, Annunciation; two saints; Banti Collection (formerly), Crucifix (questionable); Branch Collection (formerly), Madonna and Child, half-length; Crucifixion, above; A. Grassi Collection (formerly), Crucifixion; Market, Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine and St. John the Baptist (workshop; repainted); Pini Collection (formerly), Madonna del Latte with saints and angels; Annunciation, below (The latter scene today in the National Gallery, Washington); Private Collection, Lamentation (ruined); Private Collection (formerly), Crucifixion (workshop); Tolentino Collection (formerly), Madonna of Humility with four angels and God the Father (workshop);

Gazzada (Varese), Cagnola Collection, Madonna and Child with saints and angels; Annunciation, below;

Genoa, Gnecco Collection (formerly), Crucifix (questionable);

Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, No. 124, Coronation of the Virgin (workshop);

London, Buckingham Palace. No. 224, Two panels, Annunciation; Colville Collection, Christ in tomb; Mr. F. Matthiesen (formerly), Two panels, Annunciation; Savile Gallery (formerly), Fragments, Annunciation (questionable);

Milan, Bonomi Collection (formerly), St. Dominic, three-quarter length;

Montreal, Museum of Fine Arts, Madonna and Child with angels (workshop);

Munich, Galerie Scheidwimmer, Fragment, Madonna and Child (restored);

New Orleans, The Isaac Delgado Museum, No. 101, Madonna del Latte, three-quarter length (workshop; repainted);

New York, Bak Collection, St. Francis and St. Catherine; R. Hurd Collection (formerly), Madonna and Child, half-length; Kress Collection, Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine; Weitzner Collection (formerly), Crucifixion;

Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana, No. 14, Madonna and Child, standing, with saints and angels; Nino Pirrotta Collection, St. Andrew; St. Anthony Abbot (workshop), (belonging as lateral leaves to the Figline Madonna);

Romena, S. Pietro, Two panels, Madonna and Child with saints and angels; three saints (workshop, once dated 1386);

San Domenico di Fiesole, Lucas Collection (formerly), Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine (workshop; dated 1389);

San Donato in Poggio, Parish Church, Two panels, Coronation of the Virgin; St. Thomas Aquinas (dated 1375; restored);

San Donnino a Brozzi, Pieve, Triptych (only the lateral leaves with saints and the predella; the Madonna and Child, once in Arezzo, formed originally the central part of the triptych) (workshop);

San Felice a Ema, Parish house, Madonna and Child, three-quarter length, with donors (dated 1387);

San Giovanni Valdarno, Museo Comunale, Polyptych, Coronation of the Virgin; saints; Two panels, Christ in tomb; God the Father;

Sarasota, Ringling Museum, No. 132, Madonna and Child with saints and angels (workshop);

Scarperia, Sant' Agata, Madonna and Child; St. Agatha; St. Lucy; three-quarter length;

Siena, Pinacoteca, No. 584, Madonna and Child, three-quarter length (signed and dated 1377);

Solicciano, S. Pietro, Madonna of Humility;

Stockholm, University Museum, St. Paul (restored);

Vienna, Dorotheum (1933), Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels (workshop; restored);

Washington, D. C., National Gallery, No. 486, Predella-scene, Annunciation (restored) (part of the panel, once in the Pini Collection, Florence);

Whereabouts Unknown, St. Francis with SS. Anthony of Padua and Louis of Toulouse;

Wiesbaden, O. Henkell Collection (formerly), Polyptych, Madonna and Child; four saints; three-quarter length (workshop);

Worcester (U.S.A.), F. C. Smith Collection (formerly), Two panels, Two Sacraments.



22 Niccolò di Tommaso  
St. Catherine from the Street-tabernacle, Florence

*Alphabetical List of the Works  
of Niccolò di Tommaso*

For full commentary, critical apparatus  
and reproductions see *A Corpus of Florentine Painting*,  
New York, Section IV, in preparation.



23

24



- Ajaccio, Musée Fesch, Triptych, Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine; two saints;  
Baltimore (Maryland), Walters Art Gallery, No. 718, Tabernacle;  
Besançon, Musée Willemot, Two tabernacle shutters, Six saints; Crucifixion;  
Blockley (Worcestershire), Northwick Park, Captain E. G. Spencer-Churchill, Madonna and Child with saints and angels;  
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, No. 37.409, Madonna of Humility and predella;  
Cambridge (Mass.), Fogg Art Museum, G. L. Winthrop Bequest, No. 1939.103, Madonna and Child with saints and angels;  
Careggi, Convento delle Oblate, Madonna and Child with saints and predella (Fig. 24);  
Dusseldorf, Herr Peter Cremer, Crucifixion (damaged);  
Empoli, Collegiata di S. Andrea, Gallery, No. 3, Crucifixion;  
Florence, S. Lorenzo, Fresco, Madonna del Parto (Fig. 25);  
Accademia delle Belle Arti, No. 8580, Coronation of the Virgin; Museo Bardini, Corsi Collection, No. 16, Tabernacle (damaged); Museo dell'Opera di S. Croce, No. 18, Madonna and Child, three-quarter length and predella; Fondazione Horne, Nos. 75, 76, Two saints (belonging as lateral leaves to the Ajaccio triptych); Acton Collection, Madonna and Child with a donor; Private Collection, Central part of a tabernacle, Madonna and Child with ten saints and four angels (workshop); Via delle Belle Donne – Via del Sole, Street-tabernacle, Fresco, St. Sixtus II with saints and angels; above, Crucifixion (Figs. 17–18, 21–22);  
Germany, Private Collection, Tabernacle, Madonna and Child with saints; two scenes; above, Christ; Annunciation;  
Italy, Private Collection, Madonna and Child, standing, with SS. Anthony Abbot and Catherine, kneeling (restored);  
Konopiště, Castle, No. 17.119, Coronation of the Virgin;  
Laghorn, Larderel Collection, Last Judgment;  
Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Inv. No. 1728, Madonna and Child, three-quarter length;  
London, Italian Embassy, Triptych, Madonna and Child with angels; two saints;  
Lugano, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madonna and Child with saints and angels; above, whole figure of Christ;

23 Niccolò di Tommaso, Central part of a tabernacle  
Paris, Market (formerly)

24 Niccolò di Tommaso, Madonna  
Careggi, Convento delle Oblate (detail)



25 Niccolò di Tommaso, Fresco, Madonna  
Florence, S. Lorenzo (detail)

Lyons, Musée de la Ville, No. 984, Tabernacle;

Naples, Museo di S. Martino, Triptych, St. Anthony Abbot with angels; four saints (signed and dated 1371) (Fig. 21);

New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, No. 1937.200, Predella-scene with Last Supper; Griggs Bequest, No. 1943.235, St. James Major, three-quarter length; No. 1943.236, St. Bridget's Vision of the Nativity;

New York, Metropolitan Museum, Cloisters, Man of Sorrows; Salomon Collection (formerly), Tabernacle, Crucifixion; four saints and Annunciation (workshop); B. Albert Stern Collection (formerly), Tabernacle, Madonna and Child with saints; two scenes; above, Annunciation (restored);

Paris, M. d'Atri (formerly), Tabernacle, Madonna and Child with four saints and two angels; two scenes and Annunciation (Fig. 23); M. C. Mori (formerly), Predella with three scenes from the Passion; M. Pardo,

- Tabernacle, Madonna and Child with four angels; on each shutter six saints and an angel; predella with Pietà; Sig. Francesco Pospisil, Central part of a tabernacle, Madonna and Child with SS. Andrew and Catherine (workshop; restored);
- Parma, Congregazione di S. Filippo Neri, Pinacoteca Stuard, Lamentation (largely repainted);
- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Museum, John G. Johnson Collection, No. 120, Tabernacle, St. Bridget's Vision of the Nativity; four saints; Crucifixion; above, Annunciation;
- Pistoia, Convento del T, Frescoes from the Old Testament etc. (partly damaged) (Figs. 19-20); Pistoia (formerly), Baldi Papini collection, Fresco-fragments, Two heads of bearded saints and two heads of angels (now Villa La Costaglia, near Poggio a Caiano);
- Poughkeepsie (New York), Vassar College, Art Gallery, Crucifixion;
- Prague, Gesellschaft der Patriotischen Kunstfreunde in Böhmen (formerly), Madonna and Child (restored);
- Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Nos. 137, 219, Tabernacle, St. Bridget's Vision of the Nativity; four saints; Principe Fabrizio Massimo, Descent from the Cross; Private Collection, Central part of a tabernacle, Madonna and Child, four saints;
- Toledo (Ohio), The Toledo Museum of Art, Mrs. E. Drummond Libbey Bequest, Madonna of Humility with six saints (workshop; restored);
- Vienna (formerly), Lanckoroński Collection, Madonna and Child with saints and angels.

*Alphabetical List of the Works of Giovanni di Bartolommeo Cristiani*

For full commentary, critical apparatus and reproductions see *A Corpus of Florentine Painting*, New York, Section IV, in preparation.

- Amiens, Musée de Picardie, Predella-scene, Four saints (questionable);
- Biella, Conte Oreste Rivetti, Triptych, Madonna and Child; two saints (signed and originally dated 1390; from S. Niccolò a Montemurlo);
- Crespina, S. Michele, Madonna and Child with six angels;
- Fiesole, Museo Bandini, St. Dominic; St. Bartholomew;
- Florence, S. Ambrogio, Madonna and Child with two saints and a donor; Acton Collection, Triptych, Madonna and Child with four angels; four saints;
- Moscow, Museum of Fine Arts, No. 176, Madonna and Child with four angels;
- New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, Griggs Bequest, No. 1943.215, St. Lucy with six angels;
- New York, Metropolitan Museum, No. L 881-1, Four scenes from the life of St. Lucy; Ehrich Galleries (formerly), Christ, blessing, in a mandorla;
- Pistoia, S. Domenico, Fresco-fragments, *left wall*, A Dominican granting absolution, and three Dominican saints with inscriptions; *left wall* (on the fifth altar covered by an altarpiece), God the Father in a mandorla with saints and angels, at left; S. Francesco, *1st chapel at right of the choir*, Frescoes (ruined), Three scenes from the life of St. Louis of Toulouse and three scenes from the life of St. Anthony of Padua (verbally attributed by Ugo Procacci); *over the door leading to the sacristy*, Lunette, Madonna and Child, half-length; *Sacristy*, Frescoes, Stigmatization of St. Francis; on the opposite wall, Nativity; Crucifixion; Pietà; S. Giovanni Fuorcivitas, St. John the Evangelist; eight scenes from his life (signed and dated 1370); Casa Landini (ex-Palazzo Vescovile), Fresco, Crucifixion; Museo Civico, No. 22, A young apostle, three-quarter length; No. 27, Madonna and Child with six angels (signed);
- Settignano, Alfredo Geri Collection (formerly), Triptych, Madonna and Child; four saints (close to the master); Vincigliata, Castello (formerly), St. Lucy; St. Paul.