

OLD IN NEW IN THE EARLY TRECENTO

by Bruce Cole

I saw Klara Steinweg on the day she left the Institut forever. We had discussed briefly some pictures and their attributions, and although she was obviously fatigued, her conversation was still full of the qualities that one so prized. She taught many, not in formal lectures but with quiet dialogues where one learned how important were patience, thoroughness and reflection for the study of Trecento painting. Though constantly very busy and working under the pressure of deadlines, she could always find time to help. She was as generous with her time as with her great store of knowledge about all aspects of fourteenth-century art. Those intellectually rich moments spent sitting with a learned, helpful and kind woman at her photograph-laden desk in the Corpus Office will be most treasured and sorely missed.

I

Erwin Panofsky has defined a fundamental difference between the view of the past held by the Renaissance and the periods of renaissance which preceded it.

In the Italian Renaissance the classical past began to be looked upon from a fixed distance; quite comparable to the 'distance between the eye and the object' in that most characteristic invention of this very Renaissance, focused perspective. As in focused perspective, this distance prohibited direct contact — owing to the interposition of an ideal 'projection plane' — but permitted a total and rationalized view. Such a distance is absent from both mediaeval renaissances.¹

The classical world ceased to be both a possession and a menace. It became instead the object of a passionate nostalgia which found its symbolic expression in the re-emergence — after fifteen centuries — of that enchanting vision, Arcady. Both mediaeval renaissances, regardless of the differences between the Carolingian *renovatio* and the 'revival of the twelfth century', were free from this nostalgia.²

Panofsky and others discovered the emergence of this new outlook on the past, the achievement of a "fixed distance", in the early years of the Quattrocento.³ Surely there can be little doubt that the first decades of the fifteenth century witnessed any number of monumental social and stylistic developments, including the mastery of the famed "focused perspective". But the stirrings of a consciously historical view of the past antedate such events by at least a hundred years. They occur not in the new Athens on the Arno of Brunelleschi, Donatello and Masaccio, but rather in the communal Siena and Florence of Duccio and Giotto. There seem to be no overt theoretical, literary or iconographical motivations for these developments, nor does the antique appear to have played any substantial role. Instead, they seem to hinge on the conception and development of a new and powerful pictorial style which sent numerous strong shock waves into the artistic ambience of the early fourteenth century. These destroyed the sturdiest pictorial bridges to the past, making a simple continuation of a very old and hal-

¹ E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art*, Stockholm, 1960, p. 108. — My thanks to my friend Professor Marvin Becker for many helpful conversations about this article.

² E. Panofsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-113.

³ The most important exposition of the fixed distance theory is found in *ibid.*, pp. 42-113. For literature on this problem see *ibid.*, pp. 5-6, n. 4.

lowed visual tradition all but impossible. Panofsky's claim that "a distance prohibited direct contact" can also be applied here.

In the first years of the fourteenth century artists and their patrons suddenly realized that the art of their time was new and fundamentally different from that which preceded it. This could not have been a comfortable feeling. The old associations, traditions and conventions of a sacred style were, in a very real sense, lost. Once this loss was fully understood there must have been a great sense of nostalgia, and the attempts of several artists of great genius to regain the magic of the ancient, holy images by means of a new stylistic idiom form one of the most interesting though overlooked moments of the Trecento.⁴

II

Today Giotto and, to some extent, Duccio are regarded as the major exponents of styles which broke decisively with their past.⁵ To present day eyes the process of slow but sure evolution of Tuscan art from a most decorative and iconic idiom toward a highly stylized but more humanly accessible style was ruptured by Giotto. Florentine painting was set on a new course, making a return to the old all but impossible. Historically, we feel that there is an unbridgeable gap between Giotto and his most immediate predecessors. Much the same is true of Duccio. While many formal motifs of the works of the Siennese master are clearly derived from the thirteenth century, his paintings are very new. Like Giotto, he created a new illusionism. His actors are no longer symbols made up of other highly stylized pictorial symbols but real people of flesh and blood who move in a world very like our own.

These stunning stylistic events of the early Trecento in Tuscany have been well described, but almost nothing has been said about the attitudes of the contemporaries of Giotto and Duccio.⁶ Were they, like us, aware of the new style? More basically, did these contemporaries have a sense of style? Did the artists themselves consciously realize that they were working in a new manner or did they think they were carrying on an unbroken pictorial tradition? Was there a feeling that the new was new and the old, old-fashioned? At first glance the answers to these questions might seem patently easy. But Medieval painting was dominated by the workshop system in which, as students, artists were not encouraged to be original and were often obliged to adjust their style to that of the master or head of the workshop.⁷ Therefore, one must be careful not simply to read romantic ideas of artistic originality back into the fourteenth century, for to do so may distort stylistic origin and development. It must always be kept in mind that there was a strong reverence for tradition which did not encourage the development of avant-garde art.

⁴ The problems caused by the impact of the new style have escaped extensive discussion. The immediate effect of Giotto's idiom in Florence can be documented by a survey of numerous contemporaries like Jacopo del Casentino who came under his strong influence in the very early fourteenth century. Followers of Duccio such as the Masters of Città di Castello and Badia a Isola occupy the same position in Siena. For the fullest visual documentation of this phenomenon see *Berenson, Pictures, Flor.*, I; *Berenson, Pictures, C. & N. It.*, II. For notes on the revival of interest in Duecento motifs during the mid-Trecento see *Millard Meiss, Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death*, New York, 1964, pp. 44-53.

⁵ Giotto's style and its relation to the past are carefully discussed in *Robert Oertel's Early Italian Painting to 1400*, New York, 1968, pp. 50-82. See also the interesting article by *Kurt Bauch*, Die geschichtliche Bedeutung von Giottos Frühstil, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, 7, 1953, pp. 43-64. For Duccio see *Curt H. Weigelt, Duccio di Buoninsegna*, Leipzig, 1911 and *Cesare Brandi, Duccio*, Florence, 1951.

⁶ *Frederick Antal's* Marxist interpretations of Florentine stylistic change has been rightly challenged by *M. Meiss* in his *Art Bulletin* review. See *F. Antal, Florentine Painting and its Social Background*, London, 1947 and *M. Meiss, Art Bull.*, 31, 1949, pp. 143-150.

⁷ On the problem of the individual artist in the Trecento workshop see *Oertel*, op. cit., pp. 70-77 and „Wandmalerei und Zeichnung in Italien. Die Anfänge der Entwurfszeichnung und ihre monumentalen Vorstufen“, in: *Flor. Mitt.*, 5, 1940, pp. 217-314.

How then does one study the attitudes toward style in the early Trecento? How can we attempt to discover how the men of the first decades of the fourteenth century viewed the style of their time and of the past? There are at least three separate but interrelated approaches to the problem. The first, and most obvious, is an investigation of some of the literary sources of the period. These will reveal how several contemporaries viewed the formal development of the early Trecento. Secondly, there are some clear indications of attitudes toward the new style evident in the modernization of panels and the replacement of older paintings by new ones. And finally, there are the panels of the early Trecento artists themselves. The vast majority of these works shed no light on the problem, but there are three or four which reveal a surprising amount about the individual painter's historical attitudes toward his own style and toward the style of the past.

In the *Divine Comedy* of around 1310 Dante writes:

O vain renown of human enterprise,
Not lasting longer than the green on trees
Unless succeeded by an uncouth age!
In painting Cimabue thought to hold
The field; now Giotto is acclaimed by all
So that he has obscured the former's fame.⁸

These famous lines do not say, nor in any way imply, an awareness of the vast stylistic gulf between Cimabue and Giotto. They simply stand as an example of the fickleness of fate and fame. Nowhere in Dante's passage does one find an articulated consciousness of the fundamental differences between the two artists.

About fifty years after Dante, Boccaccio declares,

Thus he [Giotto] restored to light this art which for many centuries had been buried under the errors of some who painted in order to please the eyes of the ignorant rather than satisfy the intelligence of the experts, and he may rightly be called one of the lights in the glory of Florence.⁹

Here the concept of revival is operative. This implies the notion of a middle period between that which is being revived and the reviver. However, Boccaccio gives no indication of the vast formal break between the old and new.¹⁰ The old style, he says, is for the ignorant, the new for the wise. The differences between the two are described in intellectual rather than formal terms. The criticism is based on the intelligence of the patron, rather than on style.

It is only toward the very end of the fourteenth century that one finds an articulated awareness of the revolutionary change wrought by Giotto. Cennino Cennini declares that "he [Giotto] translated the art of painting from Greek into Latin and made it modern".¹¹ For Cennino the birthplace of modern art is found in the works of Giotto. As a painter it is from Giotto that he traces the evolution of the idiom in which he works. The modern or Latin style conceived by Giotto allows Cennino to see the Greek or Italo-Byzantine manner of pre-Giottesque artists such as Cimabue as old-fashioned. We have now arrived at a clear distinction between

⁸ *O vana gloria delle umane posse, | Com' poco verde in sulla cima dura, | Se non è giunta dall'etati grosse!* | *Credette Cimabue nella pittura | Tener lo campo, ed ora ha Giotto il grido, | Sì che la fama di colui oscura.* Purgatorio, XI, Translation from Panofsky, op. cit., p. 11.

⁹ *E per cio, avendo egli [Giotto] quella arte ritornata in luce, che molti secoli sotto gli error d'alcuni, che più a diletta gli occhi degl'ignoranti che a compiacere allo'ntelletto de savj dipignendo, era stata sepulta, meritamente una delle luci della fiorentina gloria dir si puote....* Decameron, VI, 5, Translation from Panofsky, p. 13.

¹⁰ For a most interesting view of Boccaccio and mediaeval tradition see *Vittore Branca*, Boccaccio mediaevale, Florence, 1956.

¹¹ *...il quale Giotto rimuto l'arte del dipingere di grecho in latino, e ridusse al moderno... Il libro dell'arte*, ed. Daniel V. Thompson, Jr., New Haven, 1932, I, p. 2.

old and new. Cennino is fully conscious of the unbridgeable gap which exists between his basically Giottesque vision and that of the old-fashioned style which he terms Greek. The chronological distance between himself and the old idiom is sensed by Cennino, and he views the past with a new-found historical perspective. In the Quattrocento this conception will become commonplace.¹²

Thus, by the end of the Trecento there was in Florence a full awareness that Giotto had brought about the birth of a new era of painting in the early years of the century. In Siena, the city of Duccio, the literary evidence is less revealing. One of our very few Siennese sources is the account of the procession which bore Duccio's great *Maestà* to the Duomo in 1311:

At this time the altarpiece for the high altar was finished, and the picture which was called the "Madonna with the large eyes", or Our Lady of Grace, that now hangs over the altar of St. Boniface, was taken down. Now this Our Lady was she who had hearkened to the people of Siena when the Florentines were routed at Monte Aperto, and her place was changed because the new one was made, which was far more beautiful and devout and larger....¹³

Like the passage from Dante, this description says nothing about a fundamental change between old and new. Nowhere is it claimed that Duccio's altarpiece is representative of a new stylistic order.¹⁴ But the narration does reveal that the *Madonna degli Occhi Grossi* or *Our Lady of Grace* was removed from the high altar of the Cathedral to make way for a new panel which was considered far more beautiful and devout.¹⁵ This is more important than it might seem at first glance. The old panel was a highly venerated image of the Virgin whose grace, it was believed, had saved the day and the freedom of the Siennese at Montaperti. She had given the city its greatest victory over its hated rival Florence, and until 1311 the panel sat on the high altar of the Duomo, the most holy spot in the most important church of the city.¹⁶ To remove this sacred image and replace it with the work of a contemporary was a striking vote of confidence for the new *Maestà* and its painter.

Such a desire for the new and dissatisfaction with the old prompted the Siennese to remodel a number of important altarpieces dating from the last half of the Duecento. The most famous is Guido da Siena's large *Madonna* in the Palazzo Pubblico (Fig. 1).¹⁷ Sometime in the very early Trecento, probably shortly after the completion of Duccio's *Maestà* in 1311, a talented Duccesque painter was commissioned to repaint almost totally the panel which was then only about thirty years old. There was little attempt to save anything of the original picture, and the tempera of the faces was actually scraped off the wood.¹⁸ The repaint remained intact until only very recently.¹⁹

¹² For a survey of the early Renaissance view of the past see *Paul Frankl*, *The Gothic*, Princeton, 1960, pp. 237-260.

¹³ The entire account of the procession is found in *Elizabeth G. Holt*, *A Documentary History of Art*, I, Garden City, N. Y., 1957, pp. 134-136.

¹⁴ Physically the broad panel with its predella-like base must have appeared strikingly new. Its impact can be seen on Simone's own Palazzo Pubblico *Maestà* of 1315.

¹⁵ There has been considerable debate about the identification of the panel which the *Maestà* replaced. The two leading candidates are the Guidesque *Madonna del Voto* in the Duomo in Siena and the *Madonna and Child* (no. 22) in the Opera dell Duomo, Siena. But what is really important for us is the replacement of a venerated old image by a new panel. For the literature on the problem see *C. Brandi*, op. cit., pp. 120-124; *Edward B. Garrison*, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Italian Painting*, IV, I, Florence, 1960, pp. 5-22; *James H. Stubblebine*, *Guido da Siena*, Princeton, 1964, pp. 72-75.

¹⁶ For some historical accounts of Montaperti see *Garrison*, pp. 23-58.

¹⁷ *Stubblebine*, pp. 30-42. The panel was originally made for the high altar of the Siennese church of San Domenico.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*



1 Guido da Siena, Madonna and Child. Siena. Palazzo Pubblico.

Another example of early fourteenth-century repainting is found in the church of S. Maria dei Servi in Siena, the signed and dated (1261) *Madonna del Bordone* (Fig. 2) by the Florentine painter Coppo di Marcovaldo.²⁰ Coppo, who may have been captured in the aforementioned battle of Montaperti, seems to have influenced the course of Siennese painting with this then very modern Madonna.²¹ But sometime during the first decades of the fourteenth century this panel, like Guido's Palazzo Pubblico *Madonna*, was altered by a very gifted artist from the close circle of Duccio who repainted the faces.

The Palazzo Pubblico *Madonna* and the *Madonna del Bordone* are very large panels. They were placed in prominent locations and were important monuments in the development of Siennese Duecento painting. That they should have been reworked after the triumph of Duccio's *Maestà* is testimony to the contemporary impact of the new style. It has been claimed that the repainting of Coppo's *Madonna* shows "how deeply ingrained the belief in the stylistic improvement of the arts already was in certain ecclesiastical circles in the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Siena".²² It seems to me, however, that our paintings show something far deeper and more fundamental. They are among the earliest examples of the conscious awareness of the differences between two stylistic eras. They clearly reveal that the Siennese were dissatisfied with these important, but by then old-fashioned pictures. The very action of repainting such panels documents nothing less than the birth of the concept of the new.

Unfortunately, the rate of survival of Duecento and Trecento panels has not been high. One suspects, but cannot prove, that many other cases of this type of modernization were to be found in early fourteenth-century Siena. Only one Florentine example exists.²³ But there are several other paintings of the first decades of the Trecento which enlarge our knowledge of this phenomenon.

One of the most fascinating is Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Madonna and Child* from the church of Sant'Angelo in the small town of Vico L'Abate right outside Florence (Fig. 3). The panel dated 1319 was discovered only a half century ago.²⁴ Although not documented, it has been unanimously attributed to Ambrogio and is usually regarded as his first known work. However, there has been no agreement on the stylistic sources of the painting or, indeed, on the for-

²⁰ For a good general survey of Coppo's career see *Oertel*, *Painting*, pp. 41-42. On the *Madonna del Bordone* see *E. Garrison*, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting. An Illustrated Index*, Florence, 1949, no. 1.

²¹ *Oertel*, *Painting*, pp. 41-42 and *John White*, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1250-1400*, (Pelican Hist.), Harmondsworth, 1966, pp. 112-113.

²² *White*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

²³ A layer of Trecento repaint at one time covered the head of a Saint Luke attributed to the Florentine Master of the Magdalen. This panel in the Accademia of Florence is illustrated in: *Pittura italiana del Duecento e Trecento. Catalogo della Mostra Giottesca di Firenze*, Florence, 1943, pp. 232-233. For photographs of the panel during various stages of cleaning see *Ugo Procacci*, *Restauri a dipinti della Toscana*, in: *Boll. d'Arte*, 29, 1935-36, p. 365. A discussion of a reworked Siennese panel is found in *Carmen Gomez-Moreno, Elizabeth H. Jones, Arthur K. Wheelock and M. Meiss*, *A Siennese St. Dominic Modernized Twice in the Thirteenth Century*, in: *Art Bull.*, 51, 1969, pp. 363-366.

²⁴ The panel, which is now in the Museo Arcivescovile di Cestello, Florence, was first published in *Giacomino De Nicola, Il soggiorno fiorentino di Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, in: *Boll. d'Arte*, N.S. 2, 1922-23, pp. 49-58. For bibliography up to 1943 see *Mostra Giottesca*, p. 603. For important recent literature see *George Rowley*, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, I, Princeton, 1958, pp. 27-35; *Enzo Carli*, *I Lorenzetti*, Milan, 1960, pp. 22-29; *Hellmut Hager*, *Die Anfänge des italienischen Altarbildes*, Munich, 1962, p. 148; *White*, pp. 244-245; *Eve Borsook*, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, Florence, 1966, pp. 3-4, 26; *Omaggio a Giotto*, Florence, 1967, pp. 24-25. The panel was cleaned in 1937. It is in good condition with the exception of the repainted blue of the Madonna's robes. However, *Procacci*, *loc. cit.*, pp. 375-376, states that it appears as though the mantle of the Madonna was striped with gold. Such use of gold stripes would have been very old-fashioned and quite indicative of Ambrogio's highly conscious archaism. It is worth noting that on the small panels of the *Maestà* Duccio uses the ancient practice of gold striping only on "supernatural" figures. For instance, Christ, with the exception of the *Transfiguration* does not appear with gold-striped robes until the *Descent into Limbo*. Duccio must have felt that it was necessary to retain this tradition and Ambrogio seems to have carefully revived it on the Vico L'Abate *Madonna*.



2 Coppo di Marcovaldo, Madonna del Bordone. Siena, S. Maria dei Servi.

mation of the young artist. Several scholars have claimed to see a strong influence of Giotto in the ponderous forms of the two figures.²⁵ One has denied any influence from the Florentine²⁶, while another has glimpsed the impact of Duccio.²⁷ One brave critic has frankly admitted the difficulty of the problem.²⁸ It may be helpful to recall that very great painters like Ambrogio mask their stylistic influence more successfully than lesser artistic personalities and that we are here dealing with a complex and subtle creative mechanism, the description of which is not particularly aided by oversimplified generalizations. To look for one-to-one borrowing in either stylistic or iconographic motifs would be to misunderstand the painter. I think that it is here sufficient to say that without Giotto and Duccio, Ambrogio would have developed very differently. He was, after all, born in Siena where in his youth he came into contact with the very famous panels of Duccio.²⁹ He also worked in Florence, and while in the Arno city must have very carefully studied the paintings of the already fabled Giotto.³⁰ But by 1319 Ambrogio was very much his own man with a fully formed, almost seamless style. The contradicting critical views of the Vico L'Abate panel make this clear.

Several art historians have commented on the archaic shape of the panel and the *retardataire* Madonna type.³¹ Surprisingly, no one has devoted more than a few lines to these aspects of the painting. Why should a young artist beginning his career in the revolutionary years of the early Trecento paint an archaic Madonna on a very old-fashioned panel shape? The only explanation set forth so far is that Ambrogio was commissioned to make a new painting which duplicated an old venerated miraculous image.³² The patron, it is argued by implication, wished the painter to come as close to the older work as possible and thus to preserve some of its traditional holiness in the copy.³³ We will shortly explore this suggestion, but first let us consider more closely the formal and iconographic aspects of the work.

The over-all shape of the panel and the carpentry of its frame moldings are undoubtedly original. The gabled rectangle was a popular Duecento type and numerous examples of Madonna panels of this shape survive³⁴, but it was already quite old-fashioned by 1319.³⁵ If one searches for a thirteenth-century prototype for Ambrogio's panel he soon finds that while there are a number of Madonnas in gabled rectangles, none has exactly this over-all shape. Some have an inscribed arch, others a gable which springs from the outer lateral limits of the top of the panel.³⁶ However, unlike the Vico L'Abate *Madonna*, none has a gable whose sides begin not at the outer limits of the panel, but about a quarter of the way toward the center of the painting. Similar moldings and molding profiles are also not found on the older paintings. Thus, while the Vico l'Abate panel has a rectangular shape and a gable, two common features of Due-

²⁵ *De Nicola*, p. 57; *Mostra Giottesca*, p. 603; *Laura Neagle Tampieri*, *Osservazioni sulla Madonna di Vico L'Abate di Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, in: *Studi in onore di Matteo Marangoni*, Florence, 1957, pp. 146-151.

²⁶ *Borsook*, p. 139.

²⁷ *C. Weigelt*, *Sieneese Painting of the Trecento*, Florence, 1930, pp. 45-46.

²⁸ *Carli*, p. 22.

²⁹ For the known dates of Ambrogio's career see *Mostra Giottesca*, p. 603.

³⁰ For Ambrogio in Florence see *De Nicola*, pp. 52-57.

³¹ *Evelyn Sandberg Vavalà*, *Sieneese Studies*, Florence, 1952, p. 135; *White*, p. 244.

³² *Borsook*, pp. 3-4. *Ibid.*, p. 3, says of the patently archaic features of the work, „Gli arcaismi che vi si possono riscontrare non hanno probabilmente niente a che fare con una predilezione del pittore per una maniera di dipingere ormai fuori moda“.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

³⁴ *Garrison*, Index, pp. 78-85.

³⁵ Very *retardataire* painters like Jacopo del Casentino or the St. Cecilia Master were still producing such panels. See the latter's *St. Cecilia and Scenes from Her Life*, Uffizi, Florence, and *Madonna and Child with Saints*, S. Margherita a Montici, Florence, illustrated in *Berenson*, *Pictures*, Flor., figs. 88 and 89. We have very few panels of this type from the more *avant-garde* painters like Maso or Bernardo Daddi.

³⁶ For rectangular Madonna panels with an inscribed arch see *Garrison*, Index, pp. 78-84.



3 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Vico l'Abate Madonna. Florence, Museo Arcivescovile di Cestello.

cento paintings, it combines them in a manner unknown to the thirteenth century. In other words, two of the most characteristic features of the older types are used in a most uncharacteristic way.

The spatial composition of the panel is extremely interesting, and reveals quite clearly Ambrogio's desire to imitate carefully several fundamental principles of Duecento art. From the bottom to the top of the panel there is a progressive recession into space. The frame encloses a spatial spectrum which runs from the flat inscription-covered surface below the Virgin's feet to the considerable void existing between the back of the marble throne and the fronts of the forcefully protruding arms and seat. This recession into space is skillfully and convincingly constructed. However, closer examination shows that the artist carefully introduced several features designed to mask or partially negate the highly sophisticated backward movement. The massive frame with its complicated moldings acts as a heavy space-flattening bracket on every side of the painted surface. It fights for our attention while constantly pulling our eyes out of the illusionistic depth within its borders. The flat, highly decorative Cosmatesque inlay on the front and back of the throne creates around the body and head of the Virgin a visual static which is in basic conflict with the carefully constructed depth of the throne and the bulk of its occupant.

Now once the spatial concepts of the Vico L'Abate *Madonna* are analyzed it becomes evident that there is strong friction between the illusionistic representation of space and the desire for a decorative, flat surface. Why should this be? Why should Ambrogio feel compelled to keep deep fictive space in check? Could it possibly be that he was trying to obtain the very limited spatial quality of an earlier *Madonna* type such as, for instance, Coppo's *Madonna del Bordone* (Fig. 2)? In that painting there is an attempt to portray a certain very limited amount of spatial depth. The front of the throne is obviously farther forward than the back. The pillows are halfway between. There is, however, little disturbance of the basic frontality of the major figure. The Virgin moves in space more laterally than backward and forward. Ambrogio knew and recognized that the considerable spatial volumes which he created were in fundamental conflict with his own frontal *Madonna*, and he took a number of subtly brilliant steps to hold them within bounds. This is an excellent example of the painter's total understanding of the basic nature of the older type and a clear illustration of his desire to duplicate several of its most powerful effects. This would have been impossible had not Ambrogio been most conscious of the vast differences between his personal idiom and that of the mid-Duecento.

Interestingly enough, Ambrogio did not attempt to reproduce the bowed, slightly three-quarter face or the soft turn of the *Madonna's* body found in works of Coppo. Instead, his carefully centered Virgin is seen *en face*. The gently elevated left knee and the movemented outline of the left leg are the only parts of the over-all design which suggest a diagonal movement into space. In its basic frontality the Vico L'Abate *Madonna* is very far from the highly articulated Virgins painted by Duccio or Giotto, but still quite distant from the yet earlier though lively *Madonnas* of Coppo or his Siennese counterpart, Guido da Siena.³⁷ To find such a starkly frontal figure one must return almost to the first half of the Duecento. There are a number of Tuscan *Madonna* panels from around mid-century, most in arcuated rectangles, which contain equally hieratic figures.³⁸ One of the best preserved is in the Acton Collection, Florence (Fig. 4). It has been attributed to the so-called Bigallo Master and can be dated c. 1245-1255.³⁹ Here are the frontal face, the stolid, almost immobile torso and the taut silhouette.

³⁷ A discussion of the older *Madonna* types and their relation with the Vico L'Abate panel is found in Rowley, p. 28.

³⁸ See Garrison, Index, Nos. 216, 219, 220, 222, 228, 234, 235.

³⁹ For the Acton *Madonna* see Mostra Giottesca, p. 173.



4 Bigallo Master, *Madonna and Child*. Florence, Acton Collection.

In both form and spirit the Acton figure is quite like the Virgin from Vico l'Abate. However, the impression given by Ambrogio's Madonna is more stable and powerful. There is less linear agitation in the basic shapes of the drapery. The head is not as tilted. Once the fundamental affinities of these two figures are recognized one realizes that Ambrogio has skipped over the Madonnas of two generations of his Tuscan forerunners to base his image on a type which has its origins in the first half of the thirteenth century. But he did not slavishly copy the older type. Rather, he has supercharged the awesomely hieratic and immobile quality of the old image by a new adjustment of basic form.

Ambrogio's majestic Madonna serves as a wonderful foil for the figure of the infant Christ. The child tries to squirm out of his mother's firm grasp. His feet kick the material of his cover tight while his tiny right hand struggles to free itself from the drapery. The wildly curvilinear outline of the body plays tellingly against the quiet shape of the mother's bulky torso. Concurrent with these strong physical opposites of rest and movement are the powerful psychological implications apparent in the faces. The solemn, almost foreboding expression of the Virgin makes strong contrast to her lively, but ill-fated young son.

One would suspect that, like most Trecento types, Ambrogio's child has a prototype, but this turns out not to be the case.⁴⁰ This vigorous baby is a Lorenzettian invention which makes its earliest appearance in the Vico L'Abate panel. Its most famous variant is to be found in Ambrogio's later *Madonna del Latte* in S. Francesco, Siena.⁴¹ Why, one might ask, did the artist introduce this highly personal and innovative child into a panel which has so many clearly conscious references to traditional painting of the Duecento? Moreover, why has he rejected the traditional blessing, fully frontal Christ usually associated with such a hieratic Duecento Madonna type? The answer to these questions is not entirely clear. Perhaps Ambrogio wished to heighten the drama of the Madonna by using the child to create a visual discordance. Perhaps he felt the need to relieve the prominent horizontal and vertical elements of Virgin, throne and frame, by the diagonal thrust of the infant's body and gestures. In any case, these very considerations plus the lack of prototype clearly document the painter's freedom from dependence on older types for the child. We now see that Ambrogio chose not only the ancient Madonna but a very new and personal treatment of the child. We observe a process of highly conscious selectivity in action. The artist picks and chooses from past styles. He discards what he does not want and substantially modifies that which he wishes to retain.

Let us now return to the suggestion that the archaizing features of the Vico L'Abate *Madonna* result from the patron's wish to duplicate an old and highly venerated painting. If so, we have a clear indication of the conscious desire to recreate the types and forms of an ancient image. Indeed, if this were the situation it represents one of the first known examples of a clear stylistic distinction between past and present, and such an act could therefore be of great historical interest. But the patron would only have furnished Ambrogio with a model, or told the painter what kind of panel he wanted. He was not responsible for the artist's handling of the formal aspects of the painting. The frame, the treatment of space, the lively child and the wonderful over-all formal effects of the painting must be credited to Ambrogio alone. We have already seen that the Vico L'Abate panel does not have a prototype. It utilizes the general forms and feelings of mid-Duecento works to create certain effects, but it is a very contemporary work of art. No one would for a moment confuse it with a thirteenth-century panel. Thus, the original impetus for the generic type may have come from the commissioner's longing for an ancient and holy Madonna panel, but Ambrogio's clear understanding of the differences between old and new made it impossible for him simply to duplicate. From the Duecento he drew stylistic inspiration, but not style. He was able to obtain the psychological content of a thirteenth-century Madonna panel without a detailed imitation of the formal devices used to create that content. He gave his patron a very modern work of art, full of the spirit of a dead past. And this is probably exactly what the man wanted.

⁴⁰ *Carli*, p. 22, has suggested that the Vico L'Abate baby is based on the Christ in the *Presentation in the Temple* on Nicola Pisano's Siena pulpit. While there is an interesting similarity I doubt if Ambrogio had Nicola's figure in mind. Aside from the reversed position there are numerous differences between the two figures. For an illustration of the Siena relief see *E. Carli*, *Il pulpito di Siena*, Bergamo, 1943, pls. 42, 43.

⁴¹ For the *Madonna del Latte* see *Dorothy C. Shorr*, *The Christ Child in Devotional Images*, New York, 1954, Type 10. It is interesting to note that the Vico L'Abate *Madonna* does not seem to appear in *Shorr's* useful study, perhaps because it cannot be fitted into any traditional type.

Another indication of a patron's conscious desire to evoke an old holy image may be observed in a work by Ambrogio's countryman and contemporary, Simone Martini. Very early in his career, around 1317, Simone was commissioned to paint a large panel with the figures of *St. Louis of Toulouse and Robert of Anjou*, with a predella of five scenes from the Saint's legend (Fig. 5).⁴² This work, now in the Capodimonte Gallery, Naples, has rightly been called "a great dynastic icon"⁴³ for its major purpose was forcefully to demonstrate the legitimacy of Robert, brother of Louis. Louis, who had renounced his right to the crown of Naples and Sicily to become a Franciscan in 1296 was succeeded to the throne by Robert.⁴⁴ There were advanced, however, a number of serious doubts as to the legitimacy of this succession.⁴⁵ Simone's panel was intended to reveal the groundlessness and injustice of such doubts.

The panel, a rectangle with truncated gable, has no exact prototype. Around the edge of the painted surface is a frame containing the lilies of the house of Anjou. The frontal Saint sits centered on a low throne whose arms and seat have been completely covered by a large piece of decorative drapery.⁴⁶ Above his mitre fly two angels in the act of placing the saintly diadem upon his head. In the right corner kneels Robert, awaiting the earthly crown held by Louis. The message is more than obvious! Louis is crowned by two heavenly messengers while he places the secular crown which he renounced on the head of his brother, the rightful heir. The actions are simple, their meaning crystal clear.

There appear to be no other representations of full-length frontally seated Saints on gabled rectangles from either the Duecento or Trecento. In fact, I know only three examples of this figure type on altarpieces from the entire thirteenth century.⁴⁷ It is, on the other hand, very common to find full-length seated depictions of Christ and the Virgin on rectangular panels throughout the greater part of the Duecento. Both are usually frontal and often sit on low, covered thrones.⁴⁸

Thus, around 1317 a figure like the *Louis of Toulouse* was quite unusual. The starkly frontal position and very uncommon seated pose, usually reserved for Christ, must have seemed quite archaic to eyes accustomed to the stylistic innovations of the first decade and a half of the Trecento. An added stimulus to this impression of archaism derives from the gabled rectangular shape of the panel which, as we know from the similarly shaped Vico L'Abate *Madonna*, is based on Duecento types.

⁴² For the *Louis of Toulouse* panel and Simone's stay in Naples see *Ottavio Morisani*, *Pittura del Trecento in Napoli*, Naples, 1947, pp. 51-59; *Giovanni Paccagnini*, *Simone Martini*, Milan, 1955, pp. 105-106.

⁴³ *White*, p. 234. The panel was originally in San Lorenzo Maggiore. See also *Bruno Molajoli*, *Capodimonte*. *Catalogo del museo e gallerie nazionali*, Naples, 1964, p. 32.

⁴⁴ For the life of Louis see *M. R. Toynbee*, *St. Louis of Toulouse and the Process of Canonisation in the Fourteenth Century*, Manchester, 1929.

⁴⁵ On Louis' renunciation of the rights of primogeniture see *Toynbee*, pp. 100-109. For the claims leveled against Robert's ascension to the throne see *Romolo Caggese*, *Roberto d'Angiò, re di Sicilia*, in: *Enciclopedia italiana*, XXIX, p. 512.

⁴⁶ The feet and paw indicate that the cloth covers two lions' heads which must have served as arm rests. The nearly identical throne, uncovered, may be seen in a *Gigliato* of Louis's brother, Robert of Anjou. On the coin Robert sits frontally on the throne while holding a scepter in his right hand, an orb in the left. For an illustration of the coin see *Caggese*, p. 513. The same throne appears again in the seated statue of Charles of Anjou attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio and now in the Capitoline Museum, Rome. The throne must have been that of the king of Sicily and it is interesting to note that in Simone's painting Louis sits on it, although he was never king. However, in the Naples panel the throne is covered and this is probably meant to demonstrate that Louis, like Robert, was rightful heir to the throne. For the statue of Charles see *Valerio Mariani*, *Arnolfo di Cambio*, Rome, 1943, pp. 8-9 and pls. 8, 9.

⁴⁷ *Garrison*, Index, Nos. 44 (*St. Nicholas Enthroned*, S. Maria Assunta, Scandriglia), 363 (*St. Zenobius Enthroned*, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence), 375 (*St. John the Baptist Enthroned*, Siena).

⁴⁸ See, for example, *ibid.*, (*Madonna*) Nos. 216, 219, 220, 223, 228, 331; (*Christ*) Nos. 288, 289, 290, 292.



5 Simone Martini, *St. Louis of Toulouse and his Brother Robert*. Naples, Museo e Galleria di Capodimonte.



6 Bonaventura Berlinghieri, *St. Francis and Scenes from his Life*. Pescia, S. Francesco.

Why then do these archaizing elements appear in a work by one of the most innovative followers of Duccio? To find an answer to this question one must return to the dynastic and political purpose of the picture: the desire to powerfully depict Robert as the rightful heir to the throne. This is achieved by the drama of simple action, but is heightened, I would suggest, by the way in which the shape of the panel and the size and position of its principal image partake of several of the sacred traditions of a past age. These motifs must have awakened old, magical associations and by so doing invested the panel and its message with an overwhelming power.

The painting contains the extant first example of a detached predella.⁴⁹ It is very interesting to remember that the dossal, one of the most common altarpieces of the 13th century, often depicted a full-length standing Saint surrounded by scenes from his life in separate compartments.⁵⁰ An early example of this type is Bonaventura Berlinghieri's *St. Francis* of 1235 in S. Francesco, Pescia (Fig. 6).⁵¹ The Saint stands in the center of the gabled rectangle, flanked by two angels and by six scenes from his life. The primary source of this compositional arrangement may well have been the storiated cross on which the crucified Christ is surrounded by scenes from the Passion. Francis was often compared with Christ, and such a parallel could originally have prompted a borrowing from the Crucifix type.⁵² Like the *St. Francis* dossal, Simone's *St. Louis of Toulouse* also contains a full-length figure, two angels and scenes from the life of the Saint. But unlike the older work the small stories of the St. Louis legend appear on a detached predella. Might the reason for their placement be that the heavy and highly symbolic heraldic frame of Anjou lilies eliminated the possibility of any scenes flanking the figure of Louis and that these traditional features of the old dossal type were therefore set on the bottom of the panel? If so, the conception of the *Louis of Toulouse* panel would be very like that of the Vico L'Abate *Madonna*. Both are based on highly traditional and sacred altarpiece types, but each artist has arranged the elements of these older works in a totally different manner to create a panel which provokes old associations in a new way. Each painter used his knowledge of the difference between his own idiom and that of the past in a cunning and most conscious fashion, and by so doing sharply reveals his highly developed historical awareness.

Thus far we have been concerned only with paintings which document the artist's ability to see style in historical terms. But the overt desire to modernize paintings or the arrangement of old forms into new contents must not be thought of as typical of the early Trecento. By far the overwhelming number of artists painted exclusively in the modern idiom initiated by Giotto and Duccio. They were not in the least concerned or perhaps not even aware of the great chasm between their work and that of the past. An example will illustrate this point.

In the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence, there is a processional standard with a half-length figure of St. Agatha which can be dated c. 1275 (Fig. 7). Around 1320 someone commissioned an exact copy of the *St. Agatha* panel from a close follower of Jacopo del Casentino (Fig. 8).⁵³ When the copy was finished it was attached to the back of the old panel. Both halves thus formed a double-faced standard for use in processions.

What the Trecento artist did was make a faithful reproduction of the major motifs of the old panel. He painted a three-quarter-length frontal figure blessing with the left hand and holding a cross in the right. He carefully imitated the silhouette of the body and the robe covering it. Even the inscription was reproduced exactly. Only in the extension of the decorative border around the neck did the painter move away from his prototype. But while he was extremely careful to duplicate the motifs of the model, he did not in any way attempt to partake of its highly formalized and abstractly beautiful style. The copy is strictly modern, and the model is recognizable only through the borrowed motifs. In no way has the painter attempted to adjust his style to the image. Compare, for instance, the two left hands of the Saint

⁴⁹ For the predella scenes see *Paccagnini*, pp. 105-106.

⁵⁰ *Garrison*, Index, pp. 139-156.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, No. 402.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵³ For the bibliography and illustrations of both panels see *Mostra Giottesca*, pp. 242-243. Another interesting example of the reproduction of an older painting is Bernardo Daddi's Orsanmichele panel. For this see *Werner Cohn*, *La seconda immagine della Loggia di Orsanmichele*, in: *Boll. d'Arte*, 42, 1957, pp. 335-338 and *B. Cole*, *On an Early Florentine Fresco*, in: *Gaz. B.-A.*, VI^e sér., 80, 1972, pp. 91-96.



7 Florentine, c. 1275, St. Agatha. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.



8 Follower of Jacopo del Casentino, St. Agatha. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.

or the treatment of the eyes. How different is this process from the Vico L'Abate *Madonna* or the *Louis of Toulouse*. It is as if the artist of the copy were not even aware of the historical and stylistic qualities of the Duecento panel. Indeed, he probably was not, for he made a most careful translation without any sense of the original's idiom. The two panels afford unique documentation of an attitude diametrically opposed to that of the conscious comprehension of lost styles evidenced by Simone and Ambrogio, by the patrons of the *Maestà*, by the anonymous repainters of the Madonnas of Guido and Coppo, and by Cennino Cennini.

Toward the end of his career, probably around 1330, Jacopo del Casentino himself painted for the church of S. Miniato al Monte a gabled dossal with the standing figure of St. Minias surrounded by scenes from his life (Fig. 9).⁵⁴ This panel is, in type, Duegentesque and finds its obvious prototype in works like Bonaventura Berlinghieri's Pescia altarpiece (Fig. 6) which is signed and dated 1235, a whole century before Jacopo's painting.⁵⁵ The shape of the panels, the position of the central figures, and the location of the surrounding scenes is almost identical.

Although Jacopo's dossal belongs to a very old tradition it was painted in an ambience which had just undergone one of the most traumatic stylistic changes in the history of western art. By 1330 Giotto had nearly completed all his major works, Maso di Banco was a mature painter, and the Lorenzetti brothers were, with Simone Martini, the major artistic forces in Siena.

⁵⁴ For the San Miniato panel see *Offner*, Corpus, III, 2, 2, Berlin, 1930, pp. 132-133.

⁵⁵ *Garrison*, Index, No, 402.

There can be no doubt that Jacopo was aware of these developments, for his style shows any number of strong and important contacts with the Giottesque idiom, even if we can be fairly certain that he received his first training outside of Florence. But what surprises us about the S. Miniato altarpiece is the uncomfortable grafting of the newly found Giottesque idiom onto the old iconographic type. Here, as in the two *St. Agathas* in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, it seems that, unlike Ambrogio or Simone, the artist had little or no sense of stylistic history. For him the past was still living in the present, the old tradition alive and unbroken. Jacopo del Casentino and several other artists of the early Trecento represent the other side of the coin. For them the old associations remained vital and could be evoked by the simple act of copying old types. They did not need to archaize, for they had lost nothing.

III

The conscious utilization of a dead past by several important artists and their patrons during the early Trecento reveals the enormous impact of the new idioms of Giotto and Duccio. The stylistic rupture caused by the monumental developments in Florence and Siena forced a number of painters of great talent to realize that they were forever cut off from the comfortable visual traditions of their immediate past. Now this heritage could be only partially regained by carefully utilizing old and sacred types formed entirely in the new visual language. Such an archaizing process is thus a most valuable index to the contemporary intellectual climate of the early decades of the fourteenth century.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this attitude toward the past was the unique property of the first years of the Trecento. In a brilliant article Otto Demus has revealed that an ancient style was cunningly revived to aid in the construction of a fictive historical past in Duecento Venice⁵⁶, and there can be little doubt that other areas and other times witnessed similar intellectual movements which, in turn, produced like categories of visual experience. In fact, from our knowledge of the Tuscan developments of the early Trecento we should stand alerted to the possible roles of archaism during the entire history of art. Stylistic evolution seldom proceeds in a straight line. Often it weaves, turns or is deflected, but at times it circles, doubling back upon itself, trying to return to where it had been previously. But as the circling of the early Trecento demonstrated, such a return is impossible and other directions must be sought. In the case of the period with which we have been dealing those directions were not at all clear, for the art of Tuscany was poised between the spent onrush of the new and the devastation of the old. It was at this very moment that artists groped for the paths that would eventually lead to the Renaissance.

⁵⁶ O. Demus, *A Renaissance of Early Christian Art in Thirteenth Century Venice*, in: *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.*, Princeton, 1954, pp. 348-361.



9 Jacopo del Casentino, St. Minias and Scenes from his Life. Florence, S. Miniato al Monte.

RIASSUNTO

Gli ultimi anni del Duecento e i primi del Trecento furono testimoni di numerosi avvenimenti destinati ad avere grande influenza sulla cultura dell'Europa occidentale. Non ultimo lo sviluppo di un linguaggio pittorico che spezzò le antiche limitazioni „iconiche“ dell'arte medioevale italiana. Questo avvenimento si verificò in Toscana ed il suo maggiore esponente fu naturalmente Giotto. D'importanza minore, ma sempre notevole, anche Duccio figurò fra le forze promotrici di questo cambiamento.

Molto è stato scritto sugli eventi stilistici di questo periodo cruciale, ma poco si è detto sulle reazioni del contemporanei di Giotto e di Duccio. Questo articolo, attraverso un'analisi di alcune fonti letterarie e visive del periodo, tenta di investigare sull'atteggiamento di alcuni uomini del Trecento di fronte agli eventi che turbinarono loro intorno. Questo studio dimostra che un certo numero di artisti e di autori riconobbe che si era verificato un cambiamento di base e che un ritorno al linguaggio della vecchia arte era chiaramente impossibile. Un numero ristretto di pittori di grande talento lo rivela nelle opere tentando di usare le antiche forme al servizio del nuovo stile. Altri artisti, in pratica la grande maggioranza, non prestano alcuna attenzione alla frattura avvenuta e continuano a lavorare in quello che considerano lo stile moderno. Attraverso lo studio di testi e pannelli della prima decade del quattordicesimo secolo in Toscana, emerge il quadro di una cultura figurativa situata fra due epoche, ciascuna di grande importanza, ma profondamente diverse l'una dall'altra.

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