

Bilder, Frankfurt a.M. 1987, S. 33 (freundlicher Hinweis von Axel Klumpp).

⁵⁵ So auch Gardner (Anm. 1), S. 107, der für die Gestaltung der *Marienkrönung* als Mittelpunkt der Kapelle eine Abwesenheit Giotto's für unmöglich hält. Diese Überlegung ist für ihn mit ein Grund, die Freskierung der Wände in die Jahre 1333-34 zu setzen.

⁵⁶ Daß das Polyptychon in seinem Längenmaß am Ende nicht präzise der Altarplatte entsprach (die Predella steht seitlich um 4,5 cm über), mag mit dem ungewöhnlichen Thema zusammenhängen, das ja in der Tafelmalerei bisher nicht erprobt worden war.

Bildnachweis:

Soprintendenza, Florenz: Abb. 1. - Andrew Petryn, New Haven: Abb. 2-3. - Timken Art Gallery, San Diego: Abb. 4. - Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florenz: Abb. 5-6, 9-10. - Alick McLean, Princeton: Abb. 7-8, 12, 14-15. - KIF: Abb. 11, 13.

Roberta J.M. Olson: AN OLD MYSTERY SOLVED: THE 1487 PAYMENT DOCUMENT TO BOTTICELLI FOR A TONDO

With a newly discovered payment document, a long-standing mystery relating to a tondo by Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro Filipepi, 1440-1510), reputedly his *Madonna della Melagrana* in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, can now be solved. Not before Gaetano Milanesi's intriguing mention (without citing a specific documentary source) 118 years ago in his 1878 edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Vite* was the existence of any pertinent document actively suspected. In actuality, the mystery is even more ancient, dating back some 509 years to the commission of the tondo. In this note, I will present the document and briefly analyze its historical implications.

In 1878, Milanesi followed his mention of Botticelli's and Ghirlandaio's work in the Sala dell'Udienza near the Dogana in the Palazzo della Signoria (Palazzo Vecchio) with the statement that in 1487 Botticelli painted a tondo for the audience hall of the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera. In that unnumbered note to Vasari's life of Botticelli, he wrote *en passant*: "Nel 1487 dipinse un tondo per la Sala dell'Udienza del Magistrato de' Massai della Camera."¹ Milanesi cited no source for his claim.

In his unsurpassed 1908 monograph on the artist, Herbert Percy Horne connected Milanesi's statement with the artist's *Madonna della Melagrana*.² Horne concluded that Milanesi's omission of any reference to the subject of this picture, or to the price paid for it, would seem to show that he was not acquainted with the document in its original form, but rather had drawn his information from another source, such as the *Spogli* of Senator Carlo Strozzi or some later antiquary.³ Horne also quoted the 1675 inventory of the collection of Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici for the provenance of the *Madonna della Melagrana*.⁴ Further, he concluded that the tondo's original carved frame, which is decorated with fleurs-de-lis on a blue background, contained a device that "might be taken to show that it had been created for some office of the Republic".⁵ The lily or *giglio* was one of the civic symbols of Florence.⁶

In his 1978 monograph on Botticelli, Ronald W. Lightbown stated that he too had searched unsuccessfully for the document that served as Milanesi's source for the claim. He reiterated Horne's association of this notice with the *Madonna della Melagrana*, buttressed by the fact that the lilies carved on its original frame would have been appropriate for a work of art in a Florentine public office.⁷

After twenty-one years of intermittent searching in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, I located a payment document for the precise tondo Milanesi stated that Botticelli painted for the audience hall, the Sala dell'Udienza, of the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera. The entry dates from 18 February 1487 (transcribed in the old style 1486) and is one in a list of payments made that day recorded in the *Camera del Comune, Deliberazioni dei Provveditori o Massai di Camera e ufficiali di Banco*. It reads:

fol. 69r: Dicta Die XXVIII mensis februarii

fol. 69v: Sandro botticelli pictori £ trigintaduas. S. XVI. d. III p(ro) uno tondo virginis marie p(ro) audentia d(ict)i massarii £ 32 S 16 d 4.⁸



Sandro Botticelli, Madonna della Melagrana. Florence, Uffizi.

This entry informs us that Botticelli was paid in silver — 32 lire 16 soldi 4 denari — for a tondo of the Virgin Mary (the Child implied). The rather small amount of money implies that this was only a partial payment (especially if it were for the rather large *Madonna della Melagrana*). While we still do not know whether this was the actual document that Milanese based his claim on, or whether he consulted a secondary reference to it, the recorded payment assuredly concerns the same tondo he cited and is the original record.

According to Benedetto Varchi, in his Florentine history, the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera was a Magistracy of two citizens, who took account of all judicial sentences. It had the authority to compound them or to reduce any penalties it might deem reasonable, especially for the elderly. In addition, it had care of all public records of a certain date before its abolition by Duke Cosimo in 1533.⁹ According to Horne, who did not cite a source, the Magistracy had its court, or Sala dell'Udienza, in the Palazzo della Signoria.¹⁰ Without reference to their *udienza*, Uccelli claims this civic office was in the Palazzo del Podestà, while Varchi gives no location for it.¹¹

It is also significant to note that while the majority of tondi seem to have been commissioned as domestic devotional works with themes involving grace and salvation, there are a few known to have been positioned in public places, many of these in rooms associated with governing bodies or chambers of magistrates for the dispensation of justice. In these latter examples, the theme of justice would have been coupled with that of grace to imply that the administration of the particular brand of justice meted out in these rooms ultimately was adjudicated by God.¹² Botticelli's *Madonna della Melagrana*, encircled by a frame embellished with gilded lilies on a blue ground, may have held such a reference to justice and its frame to the civic symbolism that would have been appropriate for its setting.

In conclusion, the discovery of this payment document to Sandro Botticelli for a Madonna and Child tondo proves Milanese's unsubstantiated contention that the artist painted such a work for the audience hall of the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera. However, there is no way to determine whether Milanese saw this very document or someone else's distillation of its contents, as Horne had surmised. It thus solves another mystery which has nagged scholars of both Botticelli's work and late quattrocento Florentine painting. Further, it adds another piece of evidence to the rare documentary records about Renaissance tondi, indicating partial cost, location, and implicitly the function of the panel.

NOTES

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¹ Vasari-Milanese, vol. III, p. 322, after n. 3.

² Inv. no. 1607 in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, in tempera on panel with a 143.5 cm diameter and in its original frame. The back, which was partially visible in the museum during the 1980's, seems to consist of six panels placed on a support; it is about 8.9 cm thick. See Luciano Berti/Caterina Caneva (eds.), *Gli Uffizi: Catalogo generale*, Florence 1979, p. 178.

³ Herbert P. Horne, Alessandro Filipepi commonly called Sandro Botticelli painter of Florence, London 1908, pp. 153-155. He correctly listed Milanese's citation as on p. 322, note.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 353, document XXVII, ASF, Guardaroba, 826, fol. 77v, no. 379M: "Un Quadro in Tavola, tondo, Diametro di braccia 2 1/2 dipintoui la mad^{na} a sedere, con Banbino in Collo, con sei Angioli di piu che mezza figura uno de quali ha un giglio in mano, di mano del Botticelli, con ador(na)mento Intag^o e dorato inparte con fondo Turchino."

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

⁶ See Roberta J.M. Olson, *Studies in the later works of Sandro Botticelli*, Ph.D. diss., Princeton University 1976, pp. 283 f., for a discussion of civic imagery in the art of Botticelli. Cecchi states that the frame was executed by Giuliano da Maiano and his shop and compares it with other work in the Palazzo Vecchio executed by that shop c. 1487 (*Alessandro Cecchi, Les cadres ronds de la Renaissance florentine*, in: *Revue de l'art*, 76, 1987, p. 22, and *idem*, *La cornice fiorentina e senese. Storia e tecniche di*

restauro, Florence 1992, p. 14). *Maria Grazia Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto et al.*, La bottega di Giuliano e Benedetto da Maiano nel Rinascimento fiorentino, exh. Fiesole, cat. Florence 1994, pp. 87-88, maintain that the frame of Botticelli's *Madonna della Melagrana* resembles the ceilings of the Sala dell'Udienza (with its sculpture of Justice as part of the portal by the brothers Maiano) and the Sala dei Gigli of the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, and, therefore, believe it is characteristic of the late works of Giuliano da Maiano. See also *Wolfer A. Bulst*, Die sala grande des Palazzo Medici in Florenz, Rekonstruktion und Bedeutung, in: Piero de' Medici, «il Gottoso» (1416-1469): Kunst im Dienste der Mediceer, eds. *Andreas Beyer/Bruce Boucher*, Berlin 1993, pp. 109-111, for additional comments about the civic imagery of lilies on a blue background. On a general level, the lilies of the frame of Botticelli's *Madonna della Melagrana* allude to the purity of the Virgin, since the lily was part of her standard iconography. They also echo iconographic elements in the tondo, because the two outer angels, including the one on the left whose bodice banderole is inscribed with the words of the angel at the Annunciation *ave grazia plena*, hold lilies.

- ⁷ *Ronald W. Lightbown*, Sandro Botticelli, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1978, vol. II, pp. 65-66. He mistakenly cites Milanese's statement as in n. 3 and concludes that Milanese had taken the information from a secondary source which contained a copying error. He also cites variations of the tondo, as do *Horne* (n. 3), p. 155, and *Gabriele Mandel*, The complete paintings of Botticelli, New York 1967, p. 99, no. 89.
- ⁸ ASF, Camera del Comune, Deliberazioni dei Provveditori o Massai di Camera e ufficiali di Banco, 56, fols. 69r and v.
- ⁹ *Benedetto Varchi*, *Storia Fiorentina*, Florence 1858, vol. III, lib. XIV, cap. X, p. 47, echoed in *Giovan Battista Uccelli*, Il Palazzo del Podestà, Florence 1865, p. 111.
- ¹⁰ *Horne* (n. 3), p. 154. He may have relied on Milanese's note about the tondo for the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera, which follows his discussion of work by Botticelli and Ghirlandaio in the Sala dell'Udienza of the Palazzo Vecchio, and he may have interpolated that the Udienza of the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera was in the same building.
- ¹¹ *Uccelli* (n. 9), p. 111, and *Varchi* (n. 9), p. 47. *Nicolai Rubinstein*, Government, architecture, and imagery in the civic palace of the Florentine Republic, Oxford 1995, n. 184, p. 66, cites Uccelli as the authority for the location of the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera. I thank especially Caroline Elam and Nicolai Rubinstein for corroborating this location. Furthermore, a document of 1478, while it does not mention their *udienza* per se records items ordered for a chapel and a torture chamber for the Massai della Camera in the Palazzo del Podestà (ASF, Archivio della Repubblica, Operai di Palazzo dal 1478 al 1484, fol. 75r). I thank Virginia Budny for this citation.
- ¹² See *Roberta J.M. Olson*, Lost and partially found: The Florentine Tondo, a significant art form, in documents of the Renaissance, in: *Artibus et historiae*, 27, 1993, pp. 31-65, which notes how the concept of justice may be related to the tondo format and discusses other tondi in civic and judicial contexts, and *eadem*, The Florentine Tondo: The Renaissance ideal of the perfect form, forthcoming. One of these is Sebastiano Mainardi's frescoed tondo in the Chapel of the Palazzo del Podestà. In quattrocento Florence, the equation of God, the circle, and justice continued Platonic ideas; for example, Marsilio Ficino in *De amore*, II, i, wrote: "God is goodness, beauty, and justice; beginning, middle, and end" (*Marsilio Ficino*, Commentary on Plato's Symposium on love, trans. S.R. Jayne, Dallas 1985, p. 45). The association is echoed in the *Rota sacra romana*, the Roman Catholic tribunal for judging cases brought before the Holy See. Its name derives from the circular table used first by the judges when the papacy was in Avignon (see *F.L. Cross/E.A. Livingstone* [eds.], The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church, London 1974, p. 1205). Botticelli's tondo may have implied that the Madonna's heavenly realm, symbolized by the perfection of the circle, not only brought grace and salvation but also presided over the transaction of justice, in this case by the Magistrato de' Massai della Camera. Further, it may have had a protective civic function, ensuring justice as well as grace for those who governed or judged correctly in service of the city. An analogous rather than exact correspondence is found in the large fresco by Simone Martini of the Madonna, Child, and Saints (*Maestà*) in the Sienese Palazzo Pubblico — which is admittedly different since the Madonna was the patron saint of Siena — and in other works discussed in *Olson* (n. 12), forthcoming.

Photo Credit:

Alinari, Florence.