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Maestro di Figline/Master of the Fogg Pietà

Active during first three or four decades of fourteenth century

St. Francis and St. Philip

Third or fourth decade fourteenth century

Tempera and Gold Leaf on panel

Overall dimensions: St. Francis: 96.8 x 37.2 cm., St. Philip: 96.5 x 36.7 cm.

Dimensions of painted surface: St. Francis: 94.4 x 35.4 cm. St. Philip: 94.0 x 34.8 cm.

Worcester Massachusetts, Worcester Art Museum, accession numbers 1923.19 (St. Francis) and 1923.18 (St. Philip)

Inscription on scroll of St. Francis: Ego eni(m) / stigmata / domini n/ostri yh(es)u / xpi in cor/pore me/o porto / gratia d(omi)ni / n(ost)ri yh(es)u xp(i) / cum spiri/tu vestro (Galatians 6: 17-18 abbreviated)

Previously exhibited: *Mostra Giottesca*, Florence 1937.

Cleaned ca. 1923 (Offner 1927, p. 50); cleaned 1953 (Museum conservation file); conserved and cleaned 1977 (Muller 1983).

These two panels are the work of a major but enigmatic artist, known as the Master of the Fogg Pietà (Offner 1926/27) or the Maestro di Figline (Coletti 1937) in reference to two of the finest works in his small surviving oeuvre. The two saints form part of a larger ensemble (discussed below). St. Francis is identified by his Franciscan habit and stigmata, referred to in the inscription on the scroll that he reads. His dark-haired, bearded companion, a bare-footed apostle carrying a large codex in his right hand, and a wooden processional cross with long metal ferrule in his left hand, has been plausibly identified as St. Philip (Offner 1926/27; Kaftal 1952, col. 841). He wears a greyish-violet mantle, lined with orangey-red, and a vivid green tunic, both decorated with sinuous gold-patterned borders that emphasise the elaborate folds. Both saints set their broad, emphatically articulated feet on finely-painted pink marbled plinths.

Provenance

The two panels came to the Worcester Art Museum from the sale of the Umberto G. Bellini della Stella Collection, Rome, held in New York, 10-11 May 1923 (catalogued as Taddeo di Bartolo, with St. Philip identified as 'St. Juan' [Metropolitan Art and Auction Galleries 1923, lots 198 and 199]). The first record of the two panels, together with two others of St. James Major and St. Peter, is as lot 677 in the sale of the Joachim Ferroni Collection, Rome, 21 April 1909 (p. 64 and plate IV). Although the panels are misattributed (as Umbrian School, Fifteenth Century) and misidentified (as Sts. Paul, Anthony, John and Roche) the catalogue illustration confirms them as the two Worcester panels, together with their two companions now in a private collection in Rome. The Ferroni Collection catalogue lists them as from the Nevin Collection, but they do not appear in the catalogue of the sale of the Reverend Robert J. Nevin's estate in Rome in 1907, and were presumably sold to Ferroni by Nevin, who acted as a dealer as well as collector of art and antiquities – and rector of St. Paul's Within-the-Walls, Rome – at some time before Nevin's death in 1906 (Rice Millon 1982, pp. 32, 63-64, 82-83). Tracing the paintings before they entered Nevin's collection is problematic: the core of his works came from purchase of the Caccialupi collection in Macerata (*Catalogo della vendita Nevin* 1907, p. 8), but the 1870 catalogue of what was left of the Caccialupi collection by that date does not include the Worcester panels (Raffaelli, *Catalogo Caccialupi* 1870). Miklòs Boskovits has convincingly proposed, instead, a link with the Ranghiasi Collection in Gubbio. Among the many drawings made by Johann Anton Ramboux in Italy in the early nineteenth century is one of the Fogg Pietà, considered to belong to the same ensemble as the Worcester panels (see below) and drawn next to a painting known to have been in the Ranghiasi collection. The manuscript catalogue of the collection, compiled in

1877, includes a panel that corresponds exactly, in subject matter and dimensions, with the Fogg panel (Toscano 1971, p. 147; Boskovits 1984, pp. 329-30).

In view of the subject-matter of the Worcester and related panels, together with the fact that our artist's surviving works are almost exclusively for Franciscan churches, including Santa Croce in Florence, Carlo Volpe proposed that the ensemble was painted for the Cappella Giugni in that church, dedicated to the Apostles (Volpe 1973, pp. 19-20). Boskovits argued instead that since the bulk of the Ranghiasi collection came from churches in and around Gubbio or were of Umbrian origin, and moreover the Nevin Collection included many works from Umbria and the Marche, the ensemble might rather have been painted for a Franciscan church in Gubbio or Assisi (Boskovits 1984, pp. 65, 329-30; Scarpellini in *Francesco d'Assisi. Storia e Arte* 1982, p. 113, concurs).

Attribution

The attribution of the Worcester panels to the artist responsible for the Pietà in the Fogg Art Museum, the Virgin and Child Enthroned in the Collegiata di Santa Maria in Figline Valdarno, the Crucifix in the Cappella Maggiore of Santa Croce, Florence, and a panel of God the Father now in the Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon, was first proposed by Richard Offner (1926/1927) and has been universally accepted (e.g. Volpe 1973; *Un pittore del Trecento* 1980; Muller 1983; Boskovits 1984). Further works have also been proposed for the artist's oeuvre, including panels grouped with the Worcester paintings (listed below), stained glass and frescoes in Santa Croce, Florence (above the Bardi and Tosinghi-Spinelli chapels respectively) and in the Basilica of San Francesco at Assisi (sacristy fresco and several lower church chapel windows), and a fresco of the Stigmatization in Santa Maria in Arce at Rocca Sant'Angelo (Graziani 1943; Bologna 1956; Offner 1956, with further bibliography; Scarpellini 1969; *Un pittore del Trecento* 1980; Boskovits, 1984 with further bibliography). Giuseppe Marchini developed the link with Umbrian stained glass by identifying our artist with the glazier and painter Giovanni di Bonino of Assisi, documented (1325-45) as having worked on the windows of the apse of Orvieto Cathedral and mosaics on the façade of Perugia Cathedral (Marchini 1969, 1971). This proposal has not been generally accepted (rejected by Bellosi [who supports a Florentine origin for the artist] in *Un pittore del Trecento* 1980, pp. 12-13; Boskovits 1984, pp. 62-63, 66; Conti, in *Un pittore del Trecento* 1980, pp. 23-27 and in *Capolavori a Figline* 1985, p. 60; Leone de Castris 2003, pp. 85, 90; but accepted by Sgarbi 1984; Todini 1986, p. 395). Boskovits considered that the Maestro di Figline and Giovanni di Bonino could have 'stemmed from the same source'.

The localisation, training and dating of the artist

The nature of the artist's relations to Giotto and to Florence are unresolved questions. Offner characterised him as profoundly Florentine and radically Giottesque (1927, pp. 49, 52, 53) but subsequently allowed that '[his] sources still remain enigmatic' and that 'he may be regarded [as] the most heterodox among his Florentine contemporaries' (1956, pp. x, xi). Following the association of the master with fresco and stained glass in and around Assisi attention turned to his relation with Giotto's work in San Francesco, especially in the Lower Church, and to his possible Umbrian origins (Graziani 1943; Bologna 1956; Scarpellini 1969; Schlegel 1971, p. 167; Volpe 1973; Bellosi, in *Un pittore del Trecento* 1980, p. 12; Boskovits 1984, esp. pp. 61-64; Leone De Castris 2003, p. 85). The influence of Simone Martini, when both artists were working at Assisi and possibly collaborating on the glass for the St. Martin Chapel ca. 1312 to ca. 1317, is widely accepted (Coletti 1937; Graziani 1943; Offner 1956, p. xi; Boskovits 1984; Previtali 1985, p. 22; Leone De Castris 2003, pp. 85, 90, 156-57, with a summary of opinions on the St. Martin Chapel glass). The suggestion of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's influence, made by Coletti and Offner (Coletti 1937; Offner 1956, pp. xi and 75), was subsequently supported by Muller, with reference to the carpentry, workshop methods and decorative techniques of the Worcester panels (1983, pp. 283, 287).

We have no dated works by the master. Offner placed his activity ca. 1320 to ca. 1360, but subsequent scholars have argued that his career began ca. 1310 or earlier, with the Assisi sacristy fresco as his first known work (Graziani 1943; Volpe 1973; Bellosi, in *Un pittore del Trecento* 1980, pp. 11, 13; Boskovits 1984, pp. 60-63, 66; Leone De Castris 2003, pp. 90 and 156 with further bibliography). The building chronology of Santa Croce, and the inclusion of St. Louis of Toulouse (canonised 1317) in the stained glass and crucifix attributed to the artist there, suggest that he was probably in Florence ca. 1320 (Boskovits 1984, p. 64). Boskovits (pp. 65-66) proposes that the Rocca Sant'Angelo Stigmatisation and the ensemble to which the Worcester panels belong were executed on his return to Umbria towards the end of his career, before 1330. Muller (1983) dates the Worcester panels later, ca. 1340, through comparison with motif punches used by Pietro Lorenzetti around that date. The technique of freehand incised patterns, reserved against a granulated background, and the repertoire of geometrical shapes, may point, instead, to the influence of Lippo Memmi and Simone Martini, in their work from ca. 1320 (Polzer 1983; Boskovits 1984, p. 65; Cannon forthcoming).

The Ensemble

Volpe (1973) proposed that the two Worcester panels, and the panels of St. Peter and St. James Major also from the Ferroni Collection (now in a private collection in Rome), belonged together with a group of panels assembled by Offner (1956 p. 84, note 1) (Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Pietà ; London, Courtauld Gallery, St. Lawrence; Rome, Private Collection, St. Cosmas or Damian and Bishop Saint) forming parts of a five-panel polyptych with predella, together with smaller gable panels now in 's Heerenbergh, C. J. H. Van Heek Collection (Saint Paul and Saint Lucy); Parma, Magnani-Rocca Foundation (Saint John the Baptist); and Avignon, Musée du Petit Palais (God the Father). The photomontage provided by Boskovits (1984, pl. CLVI) accepted all Volpe's proposals apart from the Avignon panel. Technical examination has confirmed some aspects of this reconstruction and opened up further possibilities. Muller (1983) showed that the dowels that had connected the Worcester panels to adjacent planks occurred only on the right side of St. Francis and the left side of St. Philip, confirming that they occupied the outer left and right ends of the altarpiece respectively. The unusual thinness of the Worcester panels (ca. 1.8 cm), and the slicing of the connecting dowels from the St Francis panel implies that they are the carefully dismembered remnants of thicker panels originally painted on both sides and that the whole ensemble may once have been a double-sided altarpiece (a conclusion noted by Muller, subsequent to his article, in unpublished communications.) Unpublished study at the Courtauld Institute of the wood grain visible on the relevant X-radiographs confirms that the Fogg Pietà and Courtauld St. Lawrence were cut from the same plank. A discovery by Dillian Gordon (hitherto unpublished save for a passing mention in Laclotte and Moench 2005, p. 134) adds to, and further complicates, the situation: a panel of a second bishop saint in a private collection (on long-term loan to the Courtauld Gallery) matches the other predella panels in shape, decoration and the physical condition of the panel support and was probably cut from the same plank as the Fogg Pietà and Courtauld St. Lawrence. The bishop is most unlikely to fill the one remaining space in the predella of the current reconstruction since he would not then form a pendant to the Rome bishop saint and would be turning his back on the Pietà. It is therefore possible that the original ensemble was a seven-panelled polyptych, with a correspondingly wider predella, and/or that the predella was originally double-sided.

Further study of the Maestro di Figline/Master of the Fogg Pietà

Following Muller's discoveries, further technical study of the Worcester panels is currently being carried out by Rita Albertson, Philip Klausmeyer and Winifred Murray at the Worcester Art Museum as part of a wider project to study as many as possible of the panels connected with the same ensemble, together with other key works associated with the artist. This is a collaboration between the relevant institutions and owners, based at the Courtauld Institute, in partnership with

the Harvard Art Museums, the Worcester Art Museum, the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence and the Instituut Collectie Nederland, Amsterdam. It is hoped that consideration of the artist's technique will throw new light on his training, working procedures and the coherence and chronology of his oeuvre.

Among the issues for further investigation are the following. The unusual flesh painting of the Worcester panels has been noted by Muller (1983, pp. 286-87): the customary greenish under layer of *terra verde* or *verdaccio* is omitted, and facial modelling is achieved through mixing some carbon black with the final layers of pink flesh paint, combined with some yellow glazing to create shadows in the eye socket and around the nose and jaw. The same technique has been identified in other works by our master. This provides an interesting parallel with Giotto's flesh painting as identified in the Pentecost in the National Gallery, London (Bomford et al. 1989, p. 71) and in the San Felice in Piazza Crucifix (Bellucci e Frosinini 2002), in which the green underlayer is also omitted. This practice, derided by Cennino Cennini (chapter LXVII), perhaps indicates an initial training in fresco (or stained glass) rather than panel painting. (See Bellosi, in *Un pittore del Trecento* 1980, p. 14 for remarks on the possible significance of stained glass painting for our artist's technique.)

X-radiographs of the Worcester panels and other works by our artist reveal the practice described by Cennini (chapter CXL) as *ritagliare* in which the border between figure and gold background is marked by a broad contour of lead white (probably in a size medium) applied after gilding and before painting of the figure is begun. This procedure, found in less emphatic form in other artists (e.g. Pietro Lorenzetti, Bartolomeo Bulgarini [Steinhoff 2006, pp. 183, 185, fig. 79]), may be intended to improve adherence of pigment over gold leaf or simply to strengthen the visual outline of figures (Skaug 1994, vol. I, pp. 13, 53, with comments by Muller) and was evidently known in Florence by Cennini's time.

As mentioned above, the halo decoration of the Worcester panels resembles in some respects the works of Lippo Memmi and Simone Martini from the 1320s in visual effect rather than technical refinement. Similarly, the broad hems of St. Philip's mantle and tunic recall the mordant gilded borders of these artists but are executed, instead, with a layer of pigment applied over water gilding, the areas of gold leaf left visible stippled with a simple dot punch and decorated, occasionally, with spots of red glaze. This procedure is effective if viewed from a distance, but rather imprecise in execution. The use of stippled and glazed water gilding rather than mordant gilding for decorative borders is occasionally found in the work of Lippo Memmi and Simone Martini (e.g. Virgin and Child from S. Francesco, Orvieto; Annunciation of 1333, Florence, Uffizi [Cannon forthcoming]). The overpainting and revealing of the gold leaf replicates the effect of sgraffito, as found in the Martini/Memmi circle from the Uffizi Annunciation of 1333 onwards (Muller 1988). This suggests our master's continuing study of Memmi and Martini's work but, at the same time, his lack of detailed training in the techniques of executing panels within a Sienese workshop.

Technical examination can also reveal more about our artists's status and audience. Offner's proposal that he was closely connected with the Franciscan Order and might himself have been a friar (1956, pp. x, 76, 95) has been supported by others (Scarpellini 1969, p. 225; Boskovits 1984, p. 61). The scroll held by the Worcester St. Francis suggests a creative and well-informed interest in Franciscan iconography: most unusually, the inscription is presented upside down, for the saint himself to see, but it is still very clearly legible, and marked with the punctuation for texts intended to be read aloud. Francis, staring intently at the scroll, is reading out a verse from Galatians (6:17-18) the epistle reading for his feast. The carefully arranged positioning of each finger, and of the bend in the scroll, reveal the upper half of the words he has just finished reading out: 'cum spiritu vestro'. Every friar seeing this image would know the final words of the verse that Francis would now be pronouncing, and which invite their active participation: 'fratres. Amen'. Comparison of the X-radiograph and infra-red images of the scroll confirm the care with which this effect was contrived: the first two lines at the top of the scroll

were initially ruled, allowing for a full-height line of text in each row, but then the ruling was painted out (presumably in white lead) and repositioned so as to allow for the carefully-executed, half-obscured line of text, disappearing over the fold at the top of the scroll.

Further study of the carpentry of the Worcester paintings and related panels during the current project may clarify, as noted above, whether they originally formed part of a double-sided altarpiece. If so, it must have been made for a high altar rather than a side chapel and would take its place in an important tradition of double-sided works for Franciscan churches in Umbria and Eastern Tuscany, stretching from the Maestro di San Francesco's work for San Francesco al Prato, Perugia, to Sassetta's Sansepolcro altarpiece (Gordon 1982; Solberg 1992; Cooper 2000, with further bibliography; *Sassetta's Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece* forthcoming).

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