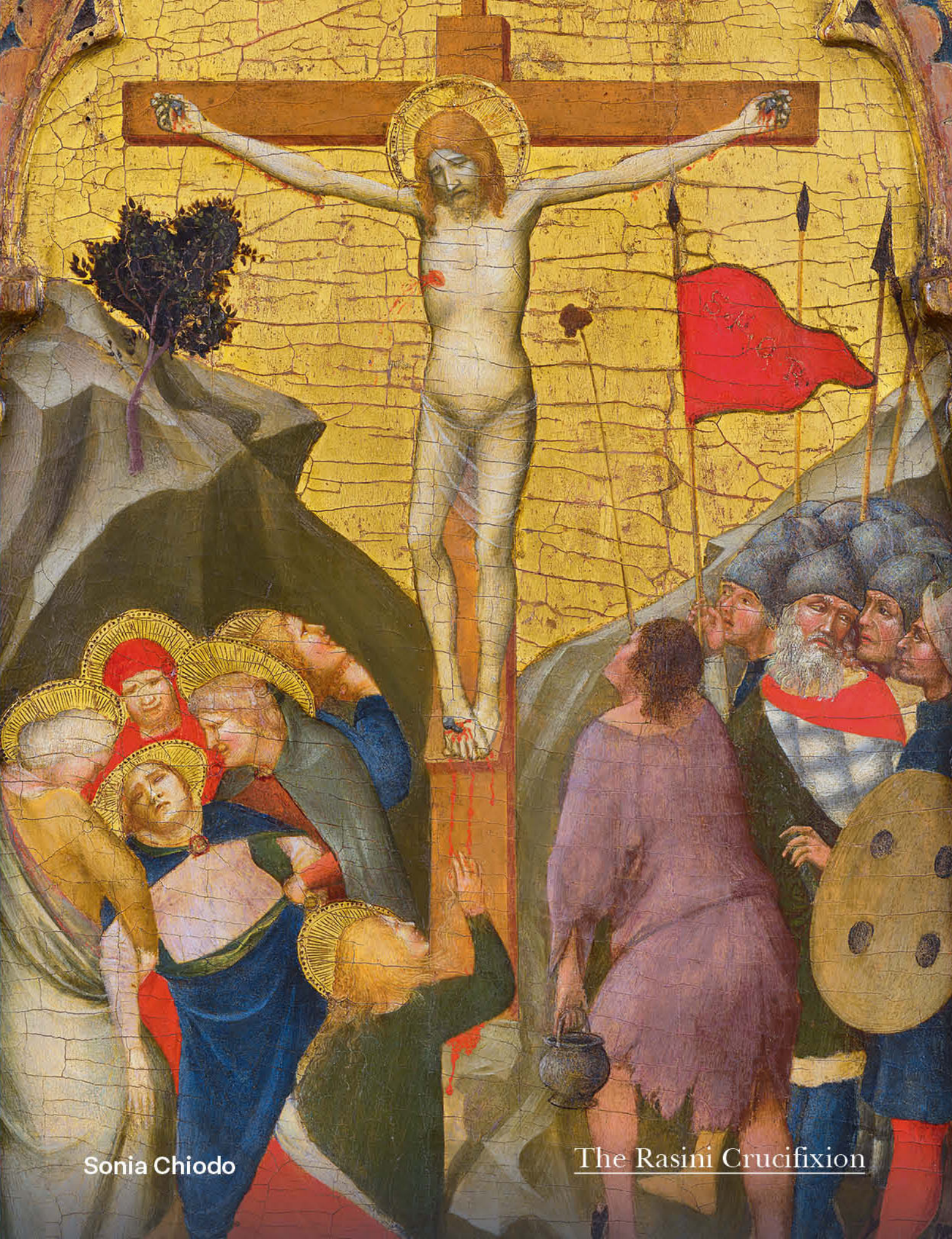

Sonia Chiodo

The Rasini Crucifixion

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Catalogue edited by
Ferdinando Corberi

Trinity Fine Art
Old Master Paintings and Sculpture

The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion (Altichiero da Zevio?)
(active in Lombardy and the Veneto in the third quarter of the 14th century)

Crucifixion

Tempera on panel, gold ground,
27.4 x 22.3 cm (painted surface 24 x 19.5 cm)

Provenance:
Stefano Bardini (1836 – 1922), Florence;
Carlo Alberto Foresti (1878-1944), Milan, ?-before 1934;
Switzerland, 1934;
Giovanni Rasini (1892 – 1952), Milan, 1934 – 1952;
heirs of Giovanni Rasini, 1952 – the present day.

Exhibited:
Mostra giottesca, Florence 1937.
Da Altichiero a Pisanello, Verona 1958.

Literature:
Mostra giottesca, Bergamo 1937, p. 60 no. 177;
L. Coletti, *La mostra giottesca*, in "Bollettino d'arte", 1937-38, pp. 49-72, esp. p. 66;
W. Suida, *Giotto-Ausstellung in Florenz*, in "Pantheon", 1937 pp. 347-350;
L. Ragghianti, *Notizie e letture*, in "La Critica d'arte", V, 1940, 23, p. VIII;
G. Sinibaldi, G. Brunetti, *Pittura italiana del Duecento e Trecento* (catalogue of the *Mostra giottesca* in Florence in 1937), Florence 1943, entry no. 193, p. 599;
L. Magagnato, in *Da Altichiero a Pisanello*, ed. L. Magagnato, Verona 1958, pp. 5-6, cat. 5;
M. T. Cuppini, *Turone di Maxio da Camenago*, in "Bollettino d'arte", vol. 51, 1966, p. 41;
R. Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del Trecento*, Venice – Rome 1964, p. 141;
Bollettino d'arte vol. 51, 1966, p. 41
G. L. Mellini, *Elogio della pittura veronese del primo Trecento*, in *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Federico Zeri*, 1, 1984, pp. 46-54.
G. L. Mellini, *Elogio della pittura veronese del primo trecento (1981): poscritto 1994*, in "Labyrintos", XIII, 1994, 25/26, pp. 99-127, esp. p. 126;
M. Lucco, *Turone di Maxio*, in *La pittura nel Veneto. Il Trecento*, ed. M. Lucco, Milan 1992, pp. 551-552;
M. Boskovits, *Su Giusto de Menabuoi e sul giottismo in Italia Settentrionale*, in *Studi di Storia dell'Arte in onore di Mina Gregori*, Milan 1994, p. 34;
A De Marchi, in *Trecento. Pittori gotici a Bolzano*, ed. A. De Marchi, Trento 2000, p. 75, no. 82;
T. Franco, in *Trecento. Pittori gotici a Bolzano*, ed. A. De Marchi, Trento 2000, p. 168;
M. Ibsen, *Sistemi decorativi nell'Alto Garda*, in *Chiese dell'Alto Garda Bresciano, Vescovi, Eremiti, Monasteri, Territorio tra Tardoantico e Romanico*, ed. G. P. Brogiolo, M. Ibsen, V. Gheroldi, A. Colecchia, in "Documenti di Archeologia", 31, 2003, pp. 57-93, esp. pp. 76-77 (ill.)
A. De Marchi, in *Pinacoteca Ambrosiana*, ed. L. Caramel, Milan 2005, p. 139;
D. Benati, *Jacopo Avanzi e Altichiero a Padova*, in *Il secolo di Giotto nel Veneto*, ed. G. Valenzano, F. Toniolo, Venice 2007, pp. 385-415, esp. p. 389, (fig. 2);
S. Chiodo, in *Giovanni da Milano. Capolavori del Gotico fra Lombardia e Toscana*, ed. D. Parenti, Firenze 2008, pp. 156-158, cat. 5;
F. Piccoli, *Altichiero e la pittura a Verona nella tarda età scaligera*, Sommacampagna 2010, pp. 53-56;
T. Franco, *Turone*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 97, Rome 2020 [www.treccani.it].

Sonia Chiodo

The Rasini Crucifixion

I. Echoes of Giotto in 14th century painting in northern Italy.

Figurative culture in the Po Valley hinterland was deeply marked from the very first years of the 14th century by Giotto's presence in Padua, or rather by the profound impression made by the modernity of his vision, initially in the frescoes of Enrico Scrovegni's chapel at the Eremitani church and then in those he painted in the Franciscans' basilica[1]. Northern Italian painters were to take their measure of his figures' solid monumentality and the foreshortening of his painted architectural settings throughout the 14th century, thus not only in Padua but also in Verona with the intense activity of the Master of the Redeemer and his workshop, and in Mantua where the work of the rare Master of the Bonacolsi Chapel is imbued with Giotto's style[2]. Echoes of Giotto's earlier style also reached Lombardy via other routes, stretching as far as Brescia, Bergamo and Como, while towards the middle of the century a new and more modern version of the great Florentine master's naturalism, grafted onto older forms with absolutely unique results, spread out from Milan, where Giotto was summoned by Azzone Visconti in 1336 and where a number of his followers were to find further opportunities for work[3]. These few lines paint a picture of an extraordinarily lively moment in the history of art, matched in the field of literature by decades equally as splendid, marked by the indelible traces left by the men of letters and thinkers who frequented the courts of the northern Italian princes, first and foremost Dante Alighieri who was welcomed to Verona by the Scaligers in the early years of his long exile. But it was not simply a matter of exceptional figures such as Dante. In northern Italy, as in Florence and in Avignon, literary culture fed on the recovery and circulation of texts on the part of enthusiastic readers and professional writers who played a crucial role in the dissemination of ancient and modern works. For the purposes of the topic we are about to address, it is worth mentioning a notary named Benzo of Alessandria, who was employed at the Visconti court in

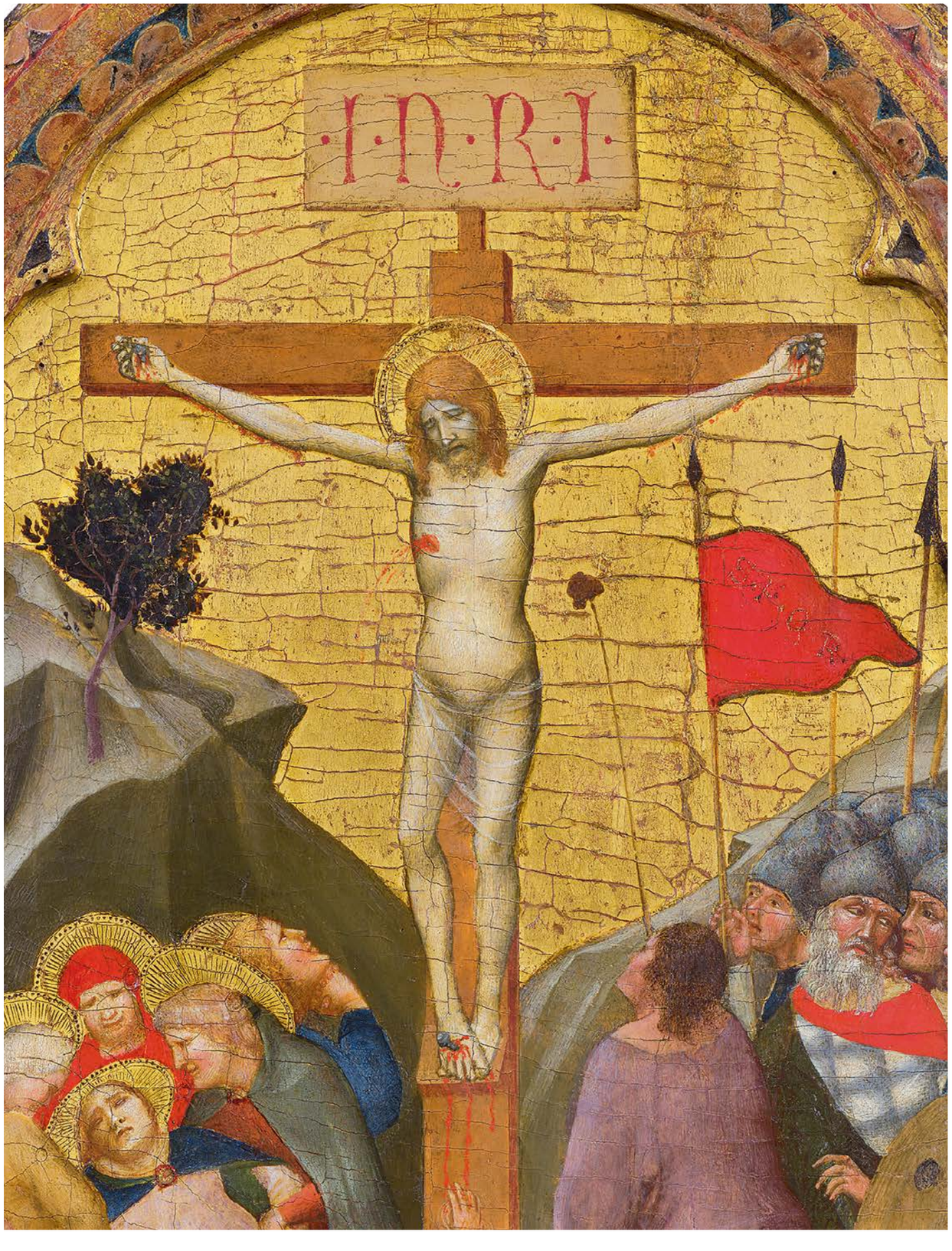


Fig. 1 (opposite): *The Rasini Crucifixion*, detail

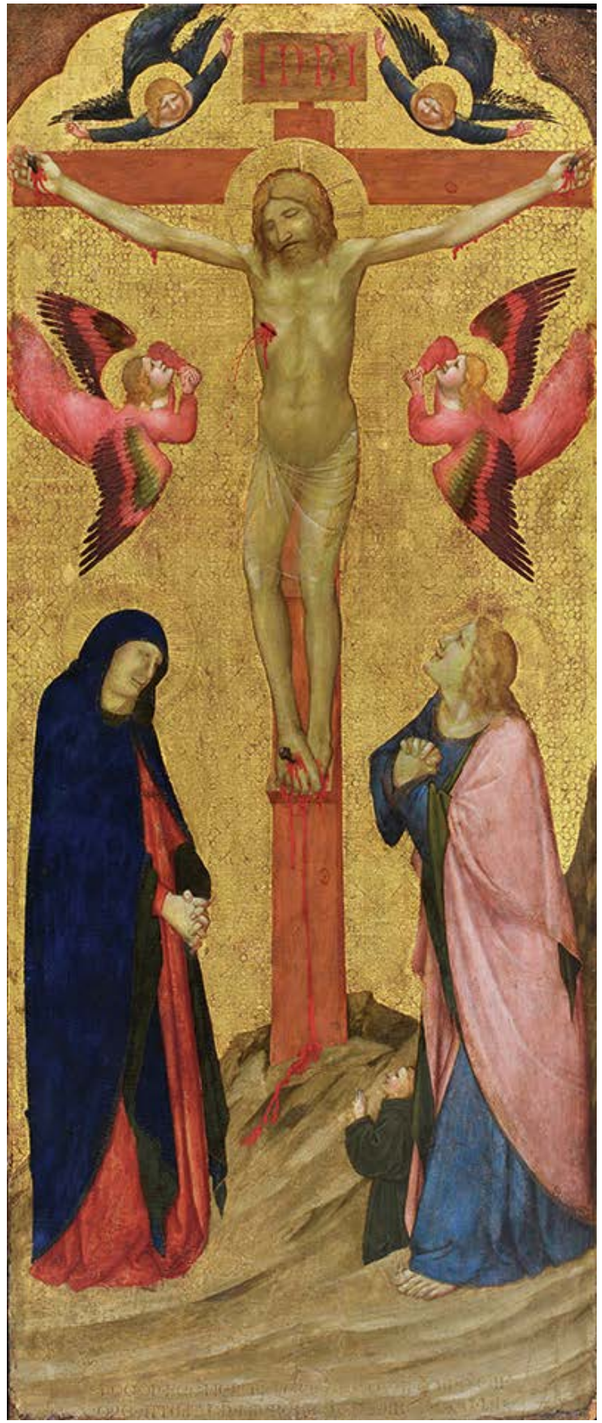
Fig. 2: *The Rasini Crucifixion*: Photograph published in 1943

Milan from at least 1311, but who by 1322 had moved to the Scaligers' chancery in Verona, a concrete example of the close and unbroken relations between the two cities. This, well before (and independently of) the far more celebrated and significant case of Francesco Petrarch, whose movements in and after the middle of the century we find it hard to follow between Verona, where in 1345 he "discovered" Cicero's letters *ad Familiares*, thought lost[4], the court of the da Carrara in Padua, then Milan, Venice and finally Padua again[5]. In the meantime, we should not forget that the Visconti were becoming increasingly powerful and that they were preparing to expand the borders of their domain eastwards, resulting in their subjection of Padua and Verona in 1388, and then southwards, even reaching out as far as to threaten Florence itself.

These few bare and undoubtedly incomplete lines are, however, the necessary premise if we are to paint a broad picture of the context in which the elusive personality of the artist who painted the panel with the *Crucifixion* once owned by Giovanni Rasini worked. The Master of the Rasini *Crucifixion*, a provisional name though still the most useful way of referring to him, is a product of that world, of the mutual influences and exchanges which the above lines imply and which explain, in part at least, the difficulty in finding a single, comprehensive key for interpreting his figurative style.

II. The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion: a provisional name for a mysterious protagonist

The critical history of the Rasini *Crucifixion* begins in 1937 when it was shown at an exhibition of Giotto's work in Florence, curated by Giulia Brunetti and Giulia Sinibaldi. The select catalogue published to tie in with the exhibition lists the painting as a work of the "school of Giotto", specifying that the curators' attention had been drawn to it by Antonio Morassi[6]. In the extended version of it, published by the same authors in 1943, the attribution has become more specific, mentioning a Giottesque painter from northern Italy and recording the hypotheses formulated in a number of reviews of the exhibition[7]. The painting attracted the attention, in particular, of Luigi Coletti[8], Wilhelm Suida[9] and Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti[10], in whose opinions we already find all the themes around which the subsequent critical debate was to revolve. Suida in fact detected a link with Giottesque culture in Padua; Coletti was the first to point to a link with Veronese circles and, in particular, with the figure of Altichiero da Zevio; while Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti was the first to identify a close affinity with a *Crucifixion* dated 1351 that entered the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1938, and from that moment the two paintings' connection has not been seriously questioned, thus indissolubly linking the critical fate of both (fig. 3). The name of Turone di Maxio da Cavenago, a painter working in Verona during the second half of the 14th century, was only aired later, in the context of Wilhelm Reinhold Valentiner's work on the collections in the Detroit museum[11]. In fact, in the two catalogues that he compiled the *Crucifixion* of 1351 is quite



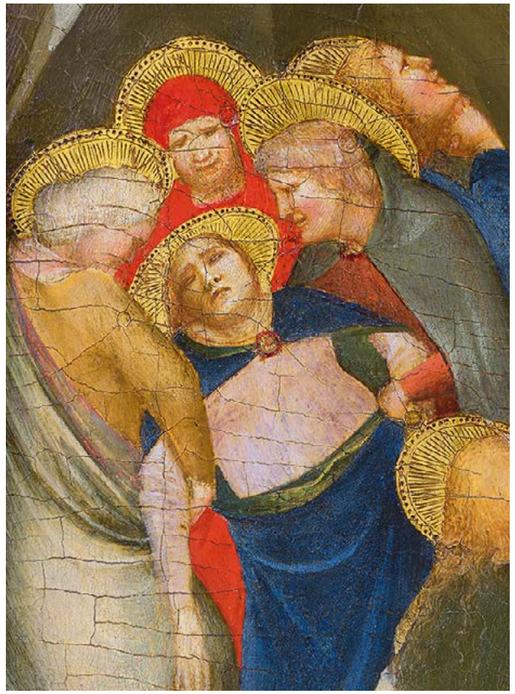
simply classified as the work of Turone, an attribution which Rodolfo Pallucchini subsequently took up, yet with caution, taking care to avoid adopting a firm position on it[12].

The issue was subsequently addressed by Gian Lorenzo Mellini in an essay reappraising Veronese painting of the first half of the 14th century, in which he notes the similarities but also some differences between Detroit and Rasini *Crucifixions*; subsequently, firmly attributing the latter to Altichiero's youthful period, c. 1360, for the earlier work in Detroit he

Figs. 3,4: The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion: *Crucifixion*, Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts; *Christ the Man of Sorrows and the Pious Women*, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana.

suggests an execution by a Veronese painter, yet distinct from Turone[13]. Later Mauro Lucco, in a sweeping analysis of 14th century painting in the Veneto, stresses the two pictures' Veronese temperament, but, on the other hand, pointed out that a correct classification of them does not lie in attributing one or the other to the young Altichiero or to Turone but in recognising the autonomy of their author in the context of figurative culture in the Po Valley area, fuelled by the experience of the Giottesque painters in Milan[14].

In a situation that can only be described as a "critical deadlock", Miklós Boskovits, in the wake of a substantial series of essays on Lombard painting from the 12th century to the height of the Quattrocento, threw his heart over the obstacle and, in attempting to reconstruct the earliest traces of the Lombard Giottesque painters (with the Florentine painter Giusto de' Menabuoi heading the list) toward the middle of the 14th century. He detected, in fact, in the Detroit *Crucifixion*, in an ivory diptych with *Christ the Man of Sorrows and the Pious Women* now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana (fig. 4) and in the Rasini *Crucifixion* the premises for the astonishing vision of mankind that Altichiero, who was born in Verona but whose cultural roots lay in the Po Valley, was to deploy in Verona and Padua from the end of the 1360s onwards[15]. In the comparisons that he presented on a page which, in my view, is still a paragon of methodology today, Boskovits backed up his proposal by setting details of the two *Crucifixions* (Detroit and Rasini) alongside details of the *Crucifixions* that Altichiero frescoed in Padua more than two decades later, highlighting affinities that it would be difficult to ignore (figs. 5-8). Scholars gave his proposal a somewhat chilly reception. John Richards does not even take the two *Crucifixions* (that of Detroit and the Rasini) into consideration in his monographic work on Altichiero[16]. Andrea De Marchi, on his part, while acknowledging that the foreshortening of the haloes bolsters the theory of a link with Altichiero's work, forcefully argues in favour of attributing the Rasini *Crucifixion* to the Veronese painter Turone, putting forward the name of the Florentine painter Giottino for the Ambrosiana diptych[17]. The attribution to Altichiero, on the other hand, was reiterated and argued by the present writer on the occasion of an exhibition devoted to Giovanni da Milano, where the Detroit *Crucifixion* and the Ambrosiana diptych were both attributed to Altichiero, while underscoring the existence of some doubt "giustificato dalla considerevole distanza tra i numeri più antichi del maestro veronese e il gruppo formato dalla Crocifissione di Detroit del 1351, dal dittico Ambrosiana e dalla Crocifissione Rasini"[18]. The difficulty in opting conclusively for one or other hypothesis is underscored by Daniele Benati, who has prudently suggested maintaining this figure's



Figs. 5-8 (opposite): The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion, *Christ the Man of Sorrows and the Pious Women* (detail), Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana;
The Rasini Crucifixion (detail);
Altichiero da Zevio, *Crucifixion* (detail), Padua, Basilica di Sant'Antonio;
Altichiero da Zevio, *Crucifixion* (detail), Padua, Oratorio di San Giorgio.

separate identity and calling him the Master of the Rasini Crucifixion. Finally, the whole issue has been summarised and discussed at great length in a recent, throughly documented and exhaustive monograph dedicated to Altichiero and 14th century Veronese painting by Fausta Piccoli, in a chapter exploring Altichiero's early years[19]. Embarking on a formal analysis of the two *Crucifixions*, Piccoli detects profound similarities with Lombard figurative culture, in particular with the frescoes in the Abbey of Viboldone, and concludes by excluding them from the panorama of painting in Verona which, she says, was "somewhat depressing" before 1351 and pointing out that "no one in Verona was then capable of such lofty expression", so the panels must be by an artist who is neither Turone nor Altichiero (under whom Turone may well have trained). Tiziana Franco, in a recent biography of Altichiero, points out that the Detroit and Rasini *Crucifixions*, while revealing similarities with Turone's figurative style, are nonetheless of a higher quality than work known to be by his hand, thus leaving a question mark hanging over their true paternity[20].

In conclusion, indecision, reasonable doubt and all due caution aside, everyone agrees in acknowledging the lofty quality of the Denver *Crucifixion* and of the *Crucifixion* unquestionably by the same hand that once belonged to Giovanni Rasini, and everyone likewise agrees that the two works are a product of the lessons imparted by Giotto's pupils in Lombardy around the middle of the 14th century, the life force that was to spawn the great season of northern Italian Neo-Giottoism which unfolded between Verona and Padua and whose undisputed leading lights were Altichiero da Zevio and Giusto de' Menabuoi.

III. Iconography, function, style.

Christ's crucifixion is set in a rocky landscape in which the figures move in a narrow space occupied on the right by Christ and the Pious Women and on the left by Roman soldiers. The scene is agitated and each character's role is clearly defined. The Virgin faints in the arms of three Pious Women, while Mary Magdalen kneels at the foot of the cross, her arms outstretched to collect Christ's blood (fig. 9). The number of grieving women at the foot of the cross in the painting does not match what we read in the Gospels. According to St. John, there were three Pious Women: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen" (John 19:25-27). Thus the two additional figures introduced by the artist who painted the Rasini *Crucifixion* do not appear in Scripture, unless we take it that one of them is another of Jesus's disciples, (Mary) Salome, mentioned by St. Mark (Mark 15:40) and St. Matthew (Matt. 27:56) without any additional details. Mary Magdalen, at any rate, would appear to have been depicted twice, at the foot of the cross and behind Mary, where the figure whose head is covered in a red mantle has features traditionally associated with the Magdalen. Mary Magdalen's dual presence is an unusual element but it may refer, on the one hand, to her role as a witness to Christ's crucifixion as described in the Gospel of St. John, and on the other, to her role as a symbol of mankind repentant, receiving redemption from original sin and the prospect of eternal salvation through Christ's blood. The other figure behind Mary, dressed in blue with his hands joined and his gaze directed at Jesus on the cross is probably John, here shown in a seemingly secondary position and yet the only apostle to have witnessed Christ's sacrifice, thus a figure of the utmost importance in terms of iconographical content. Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalen and (Mary) Salome seem barely able to support the weight of Jesus's mother, who has fainted, crushed by the unbearable burden of her grief. Far from being a mere narrative feature, the theme of Mary's fainting has a deep theological significance. Medieval exegetes identified the grief suffered by Mary at the foot of the cross as the mark of her participation in that cross's redeeming mission. Mary is, with Christ, mankind's "co-redeemer". John, portrayed with her at the foot of the cross, represents mankind whom Christ has taken under his protective wing[21]. On the other side, on Christ's left, we see a crowd of soldiers, but one in particular emerges in the foreground, the tormenter shown from behind in what is a unique and extraordinarily effective compositional device (fig. 10). He is a lout, brutal in his bulk and graceless in his movements as he turns his back on the observer and raises towards Christ's face a stick on the end of which sits a sponge soaked in the vinegar he carries in a bucket held in his left hand ("And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down" – Mark 15:36), the final act in a series of affronts to which the dying Christ is subjected and in which medieval exegetes discerned the fulfilment of the prophesy in the Book of Psalms ("In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" – Ps. 69:21-22). Vinegar was the final torment that Christ was to suffer before breathing his last. Immediately thereafter a Roman centurion recognised his divinity, exclaiming: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). It is with this detail that we can probably associate the soldier with a white beard in the foreground, his mantle lined with vair to indicate his hierarchical superiority among the soldiers (fig. 10). And finally, the scene is dominated by the figure of Christ in the

Figs. 9, 10 (previous pages): *The Rasini Crucifixion*, details

Fig. 11: *The Rasini Crucifixion*, detail

empty space defined by sloping rocks on either side, his diaphanous body stained with the blood flowing copiously from the wound in his side and from the holes where his hands and feet have been pierced by large nails.

The *Rasini Crucifixion* was probably the central piece of a small painted panel intended for private devotion which included either closing wings or fixed side pieces. The wood has been cut along the edges (eliminating the pinnacle), pared down and glued to horizontal and vertical cross-pieces ("parqueted") to contain the movement of the wood. This means that it is now impossible to identify any trace of the elements that once linked it to its side pieces. The support had already been cut before the painting was shown at the *Mostra giottesca* in 1937. Between 1937 and 1943 the painting was restored because photographs of that event show a motif of small arches along the upper edge of the panel, no longer visible in a photograph printed in the extended version of the *Mostra giottesca* catalogue published in 1943 (fig. 2). This is the operation probably referred to in a note in Giovanni Rasini's diary relating to restoration performed by Mauro Pelliccioli, who did an enormous amount of work for the leading collectors and art dealers of his day both in Milan and elsewhere. The decoration was rendered visible once again in the course of recent restoration (2023). It consists of a row of small arches incised in

Fig. 12: Lorenzo Veneziano, *The Madonna of Humility with Saints Mark and John the Evangelist* (detail), London, National Gallery

the gold of the frame's moulding using a blue colour (fig. 11). This kind of decoration was commonplace in the Veneto, as we can see from a number of comparisons, for instance with the polyptych that Paolo Veneziano painted for the church of San Giacomo Maggiore in Bologna, but also with the work of Lorenzo Veneziano, including the *Madonna of Humility with St. Mark and St. John the Baptist* (London, National Gallery) (fig. 12)[22]. The rediscovered legibility of these details on the original wooden structure allows us to engage in sounder considerations regarding the work's original aspect. On the left and right, we can clearly detect the start of a pinnacle that formed the work's original apex, possibly with a figurative element such as a bust of God the Father in the centre. On the other hand, the support's relatively slender proportions and, above all, the "crowded" feel of the narrative allow us to rule out the suggestion that the painting was itself the top part of a polyptych, as we can see for example in Lorenzo Veneziano's work in Vicenza Cathedral (1367). This, because in such cases the story of Christ's crucifixion invariably has a "mystic" quality, with the figures of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist grieving at the foot of the cross, without any hint of a landscape or of other figures. The blatantly narrative nature of the version painted in the Rasini picture, on the other hand, is compatible with its function as the central element of a small portable altar, very probably accompanied

Fig. 13: Lorenzo Veneziano, *Crucifixion and four saints* (central panel), *Annunciation, Thronus gratiae, St. Anne with the Virgin and the Child, Baptism of Christ, Conversion of Saint Paul, Saints Antony of Padua, Anthony the Abbot, Louis of Toulouse* (wings), Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza Museo Nacional

by two fixed side panels with figures of saints or other scenes from the life of Christ. Similar pieces were commonplace in the Veneto in the third quarter of the 14th century, as we can see from comparisons with work attributed to Guariento of Padua or to Lorenzo Veneziano as a young man including, in particular, his triptych now in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection in Madrid (fig. 13)[23].

And finally, it was probably during Pelliccioli's restoration that the support was pared down and parqueted in accordance with the restoration methods commonly adopted at the time and the surface was completed

Fig. 14: *The Rasini Crucifixion*, detail

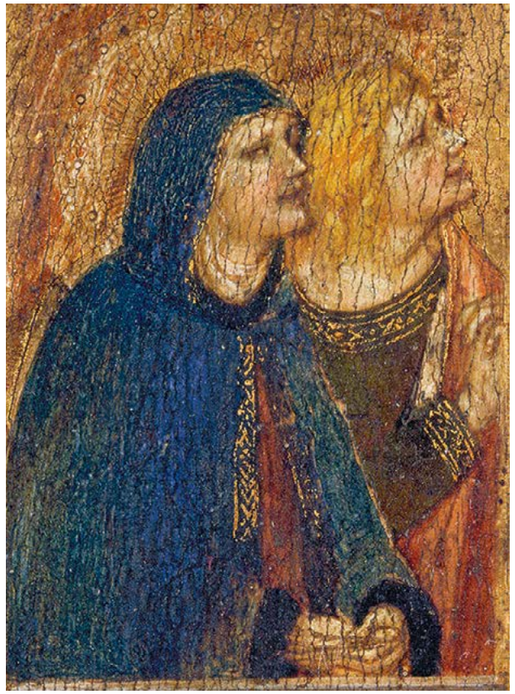
with retouching in various points. Beneath the retouching, which was eliminated in the course of the recent restoration, the vair lining of the cloak worn by the figure on the far right of the scene talking to one of the centurions was recovered. On the same occasion it became clear that the original painting extends onto the thickness of the frame, which was thus integrated into the painted surface. This highly unusual feature confirms the superb quality of the artist's creativity and love of experiment, and bears out the contention that the panel must come from a small portable altar designed for individual devotion in a private context, given that it would serve no purpose if the piece were not designed to be seen from close up (fig. 14).

Thus in a seemingly small space, the story of Christ's crucifixion takes on the mood of an intensely poetic narrative in which every detail, far from being included by chance, is a deliberate part of a pattern revealing the painter's intention to imbue his images with the profound significance of the event on which the universal Church is founded from both a human and a theological standpoint. The stylistic sources on which the artist shows that he has drawn can be identified first and foremost in the work of Giotto's pupils active in Lombardy from the 1330s on, for instance

in the church of San Gottardo in Corte, in Chiaravalle, in Viboldone and elsewhere, as scholars have repeatedly underlined. It is from these examples that the master of the Rasini *Crucifixion* derives the freedom with which he stages the devastating grief that causes the Virgin's flesh to pale and her limbs to slump, while Christ's body soars above her, unmarked by suffering, its silhouette delicately and sensitively following the swell of his muscles and the folds of his flesh, with the light carefully underscoring its volumes. The same sensitivity to naturalism appears to have guided the artist's hand in his depiction of the restless tree upper left, its knotty, agitated branches peeping through the thick foliage (fig. 15). But then, he shows us that he expanded the horizon of his models to include the earliest instance of Giotto's style in northern Italy, drawing inspiration directly from Giotto's frescoes in Padua for the foreshortened haloes which were peculiar to the latter's Paduan period and which were to become one of the Giottesque features most frequently adopted by artists from the Po Valley. And lastly, one cannot help but detect echoes of the Bolognese painters' style in the crowded scene and, above all, in the brutal character of the figure seen from behind in the foreground offering Jesus a sponge soaked in vinegar.

But who is this mysterious, elusive artist? First of all, we need to bring together all the firm data that we have for him. Stylistic evidence suggests that we may now take it as read that the same artist painted the *Crucifixion* under discussion here, the *Crucifixion* now in Detroit (fig. 3) and the Ambrosiana diptych (fig. 4), on the basis of the absolutely identical way in which he handles the volumes of his figures and sets them in space, of their identical fisiognomic features and of the singular manner in which he foreshortens his haloes. In the ivory diptych in the Ambrosiana the two grieving women could well be the sisters of the Mourners in Detroit and Rasini *Crucifixions* (figs. 16, 17, 18) and the crucified Christ is also remarkably close to his counterpart in those two paintings (figs. 19-20), and lastly, the haloes in the Ambrosiana diptych are foreshortened in the same way as they are in Detroit and in the Rasini *Crucifixion*. The range of influences detectable in this painter's style point to his being a travelling artist. The Ambrosiana diptych's naturalism is at once extremely tender and very modern, capable of bewitching the observer, aside from the condition of the painted surface, with such sophisticated details as the transparent veil of the shroud hanging over the edge of the tomb, the extremely clever foreshortening of the Pious Women's faces or Mary Magdalen's dishevelled reddish blond locks, and it cannot be understood without positing the artist's familiarity with the Giottesque painters working in Milan in the 1340s and '50s. In the left-hand leaf, the

Fig. 15 (opposite): *The Rasini Crucifixion*, detail

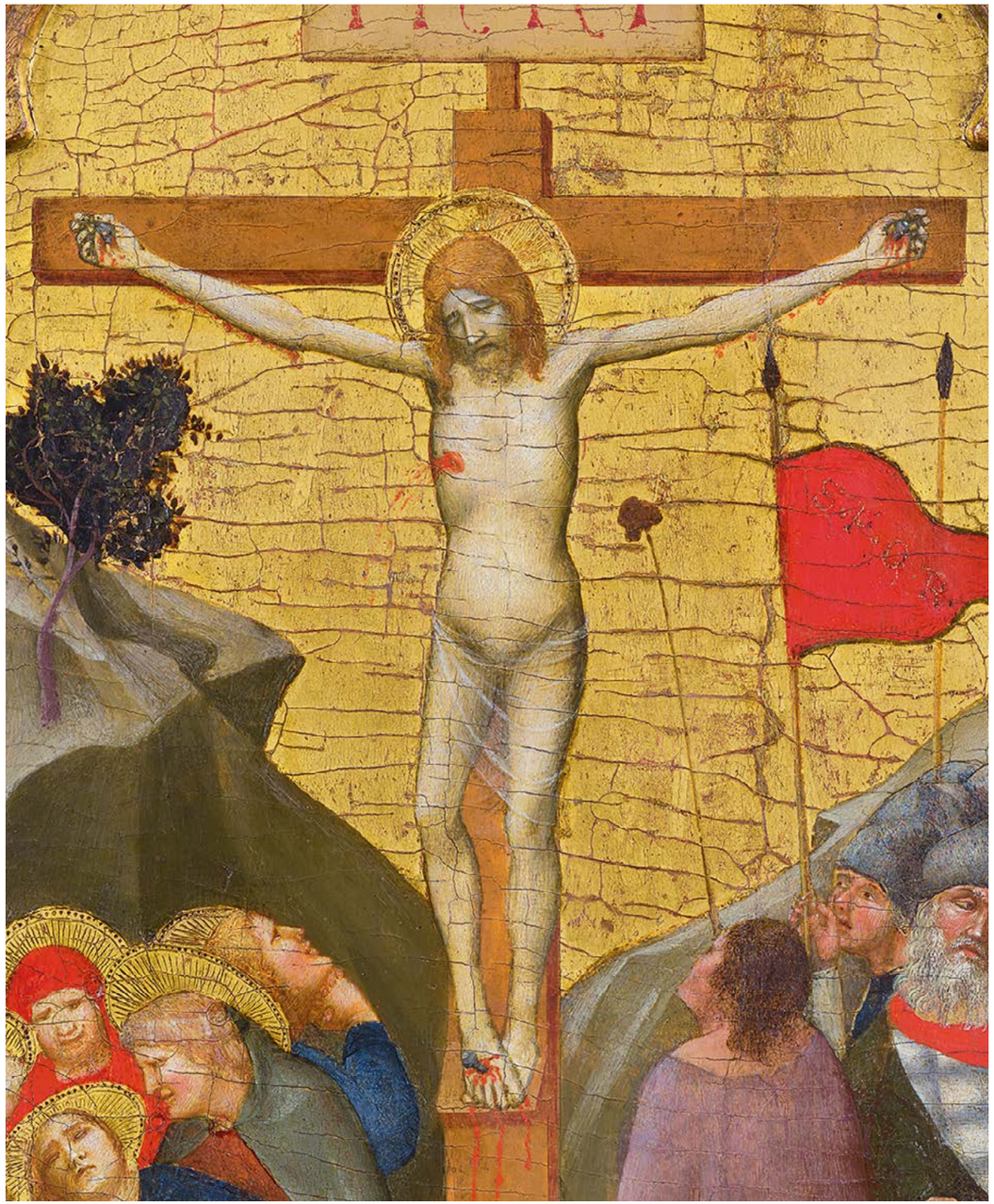


Figs. 16-17: The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion, *Christ the Man of Sorrows and the Pious Women* (detail), Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana;
The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion, *Crucifixion* (detail), Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts

idea of having the saint's hand rest on the edge of the polylobe as though it were a window is both brilliant and of Giottesque inspiration (fig. 21). Yet though the painter organises the tiny ivory diptych's decoration as though it were an illumination in relation to the adornments' composition and type, as we can see from a comparison with Blanche of Savoy's *Book of Hours* in Munich, (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 23215) illuminated by Giovanni di Benedetto da Como, c. 1375, his talent for monumental painting shines through in the way the figures of the Pious Women occupy all the space allotted to them, indeed so much so that the space seems almost at pains to contain them. The unavoidable model for this exasperated naturalism is the *Crucifixion* in the church of San Gottardo in Corte in Milan (fig. 22), dated by the most recent scholarship with reasonable certainty to 1339–40 and initially attributed by Luigi Coletti and then by Luciano Bellosi to the Florentine painter Giottino during a youthful spell in Lombardy, thus an unavoidable starting point for the construction of a visual repertoire for the artist who painted the Ambrosiana diptych, probably in the 1340s, upstream of the Detroit *Crucifixion*, as suggested also by a comparison of the figures of the Pious Women[24].

Fig. 18: *The Rasini Crucifixion*, detail

Equally Giottesque are the models echoed in the *Crucifixion* mentioned above, not only in the haloes but also in the angels diving down in headlong flight on the sides of the upper arm of the cross, a detail also found, again, in Giotto's *Crucifixion* in Padua and in the *Crucifixion* now in Berlin (Gemäldegalerie) (figs. 23-24)[25]. An innovative feature of this work is the "carpet" decoration of the gold ground with a floral and geometrical motif partly incised and partly produced with an awl, of which there is no trace in Giotto's work but which was a peculiar feature of the work of 14th century painters from Rimini, with which the painter of the Detroit *Crucifixion* was clearly somehow familiar. It is common knowledge that the artists of Rimini had been working since the earliest years of the 14th century not only along the Adriatic coast but also in Bologna and in Lombardy, where echoes of their style have been detected in a *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* still in the church of San Francesco in Brescia and even in the Val di Ledro, north of Lake Garda, where documents record the presence of a painter from Rimini named Puscennino da Bustigello in 1323[26]. The possibility that our painter may also have come into contact with this culture in the Brescia area is far from remote, given that the Detroit *Crucifixion* is highly likely to have

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Figs. 19, 20 (previous pages): *The Rasini Crucifixion* (detail); The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion, *Crucifixion* (detail), Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts

Fig. 21: The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion, *Christ the Man of Sorrows and the Pious Women* (detail), Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana

been painted for a church in that city, as we can tell from the inscription in gilded letters at the foot of the cross, which reads: Hoc opus fecit fieri frater Lanfranchino de Valenzano cui opere attulit domina Marcha de Ugonibus MCCCLI (Brother Lanfranchino from Valenzano caused this work to be made, a work offered by domina Marcha degli Ugoni). The Ugoni, Marcha's family, had in fact been one of this city's leading families since at least the 12th century and Valenzano, Lanfranchino's village, was a small fortified settlement a few miles from Brescia[27]. Miklós Boskovits, the first to dwell on Lanfranchino da Valenzano's identity, arguing that he was a Franciscan friar, suggested that the painting may have come from a polyptych painted for a Franciscan church in the Brescia area, possibly the church of Gargnano sul Garda[28]. Yet his suggestion does not point our search in the right direction because the habit that Lanfranchino is wearing is not the brown habit of the Friars Minor but that of the Hermits of St. Augustine, comprising a black cowl held at the waist by a belt which, in this instance, we cannot see but whose presence can easily be surmised beneath the billowing fabric[29]. Thus the picture was part of a polyptych commissioned by an Augustinian friar as execution of domina

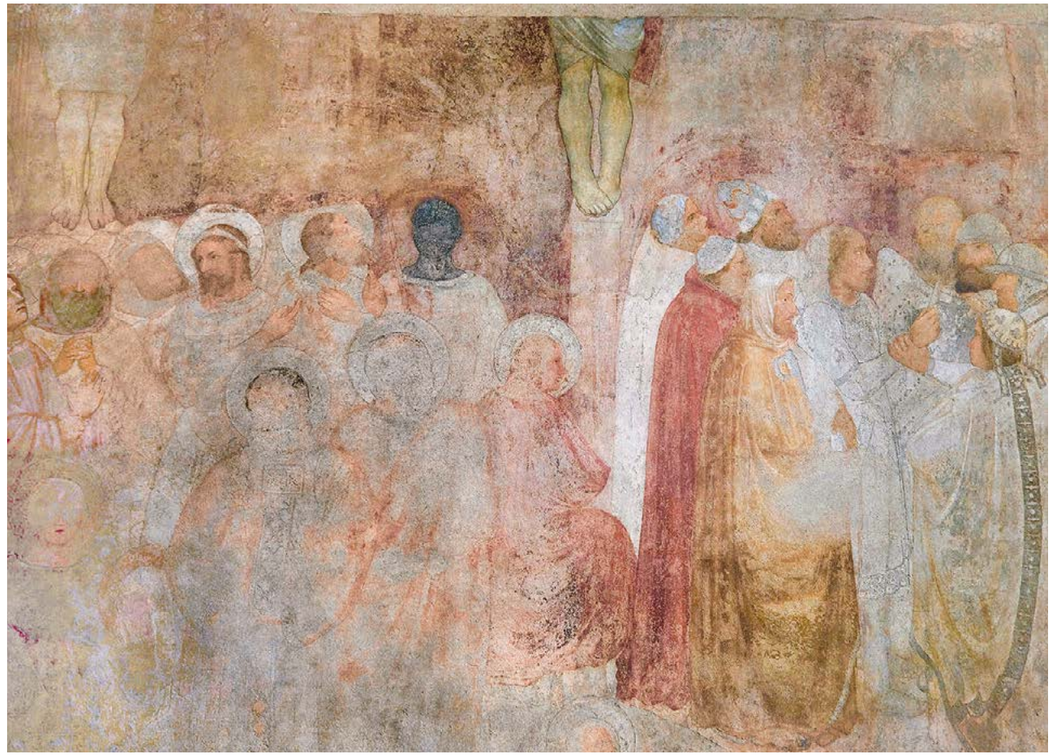


Fig. 22: Giottino, *Crucifixion* (detail), Milan, San Gottardo in Corte

Marcha's testamentary disposition, for these friars' convent in Brescia, dedicated to St. Barnabas, or for another Augustinian community in the neighhourhood. The Augustinians first came to Brescia in the 13th century, and towards the end of that century the Bishop Berardo Maggi – a member of one of the city's leading families – promoted the construction of a new church for them[30]. The convent of San Barnaba was the object of substantial bequests in the course of the 14th century, becoming easily as wealthy as the city's Franciscan and Dominican communities, but unfortunately, its extremely rich art heritage was dispersed when the Napoleonic government dissolved the religious institutions. At that time the Augustinian complex with all its fixtures and fittings was bought by private individuals who promptly sold off the moveables and turned the church into a warehouse[31]. But the Ugoni family spawned numerous branches with settlements of a feudal nature in the area between Brescia and Verona, and given that unfortunately geneological sources usually tend to overlook female descendants, as things stand today we do not know where Domina Marcha intended the panel now in Detroit to go, while the other panels completing the work with figures of saints on the

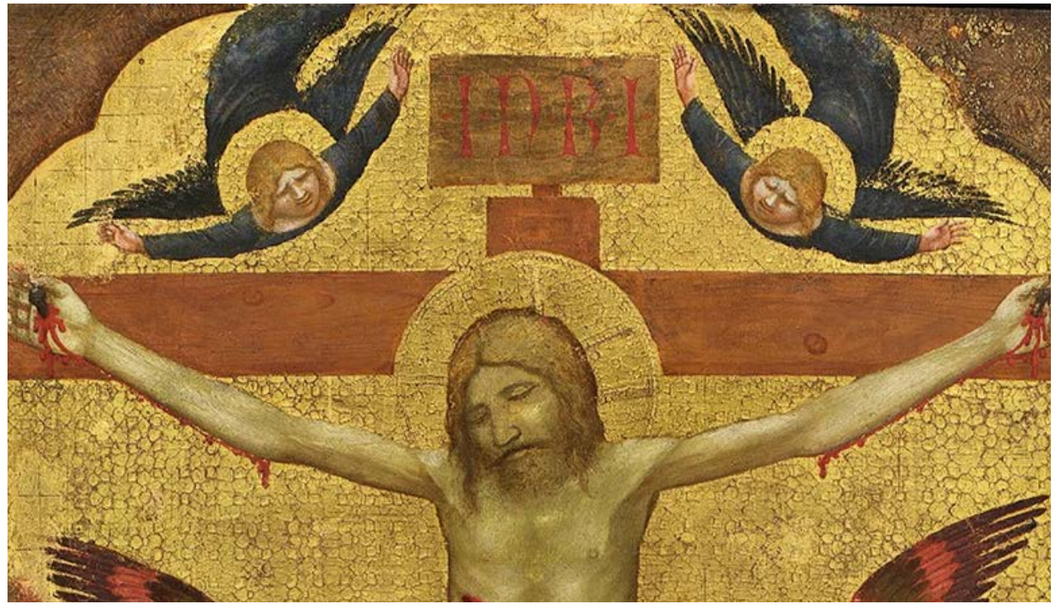
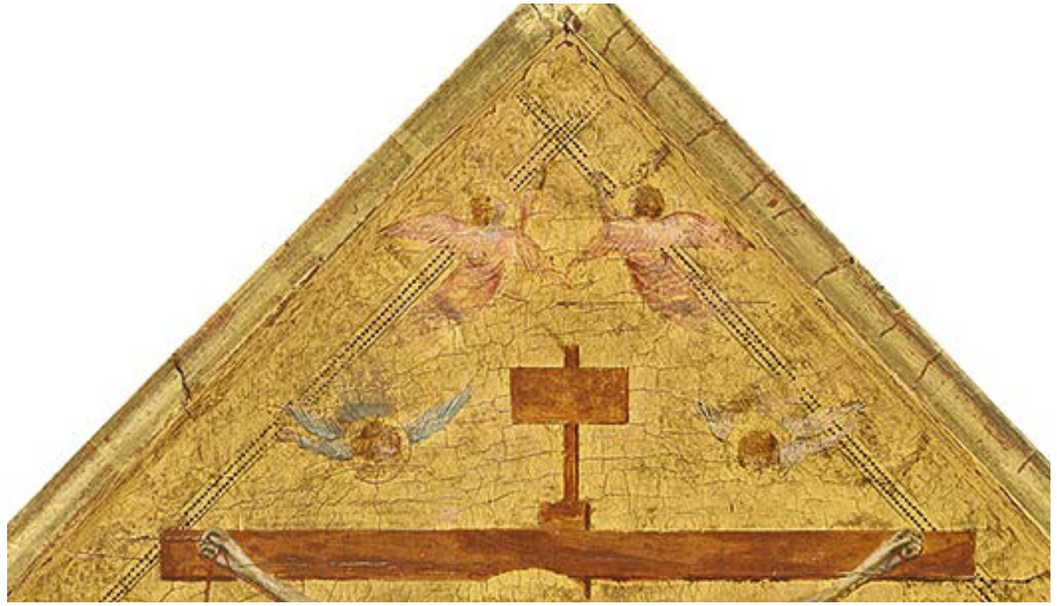


Fig. 23: The Master of the Rasini Crucifixion, *Crucifixion* (detail), Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts

sides and in the upper register and a predella with stories below, have been dispersed and may well have been lost for ever.

The Rasini *Crucifixion*, which is unquestionably by the same hand, followed shortly after, because we can see that the artist's Giottesque culture had developed to include a more dramatic, excited vein hinting at contact with the figurative style of the Bolognese painters, even though the narrative settles on an intense and delicately heart-rending tone. Numerous clues suggest that the painter moved in the 1350s to Verona, where the Rasini *Crucifixion* has numerous very close matches – indeed so close that, as we have seen, it has been attributed on several occasions to Turone di Maxio da Cavenago, Verona's most important painter in the third quarter of the 14th century. The documents that mention him from 1356 onwards tell us that he came from the region of Milan and he therefore had the opportunity to draw inspiration from the same sources as the painter of the Rasini *Crucifixion*[32]. Thus his career appears to coincide with the latter's life path. But then, in the *Polyptych of the Holy Trinity* (Verona, Museo di Castelvecchio) which Turone signed and dated in 1360, the figures are frozen, motionless within their outline that sharply defines their profiles and features, in contrast to the soft forms that merge with the atmosphere in the Detroit and Rasini pictures. Similarly, the *Crucifixion* that Turone frescoed in the lunette of the side door in the church of San Fermo Maggiore in Verona in 1363 (fig. 27)



is crowded like the Rasini *Crucifixion* and displays the same division between the "good figures" on Christ's right and the "evil figures" on his left, but the figures seem lost in the crowd, whilst Mary's body remains stiff in the arms of the Pious Women. A stylistic point closer to that of the group comprising the Detroit and Rasini *Crucifixions* can be detected in a fragmentary frescoed *Crucifixion* in the Dominican church of San Pietro Martire (also known as San Giorgetto) (fig. 26), also attributed to Turone, where Christ's slender body stands out against the cross, delineated with a trembling outline and ivory tone that leave us in no doubt regarding the two painters' contact with one another in a situation yet to be clarified. I say 'two painters' because despite these similarities, in my view we can rule out the inclusion of the three works examined hitherto in Turone di Maxio's catalogue. His style bears a close kinship with that of his colleague, but it remains confined in the frozen realm of a citation, incapable of generating innovative solutions in its own right. One has but to look, for example, at the Pious Woman on the far left or the brute with the sponge soaked in vinegar in the foreground. In the Pious Woman the pose is highly original: the figure is shown from behind as she supports the fainting Virgin, passing her arm over Mary's shoulder. I have found nothing comparable to this totally new solution, or indeed to the "secular" note of the figure's soft mass of hair held in a light-coloured veil while the mantle falls on her shoulders leaving her head bare. And the same can be

Figs. 24, 25: Giotto di Bondone, *Crucifixion*, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

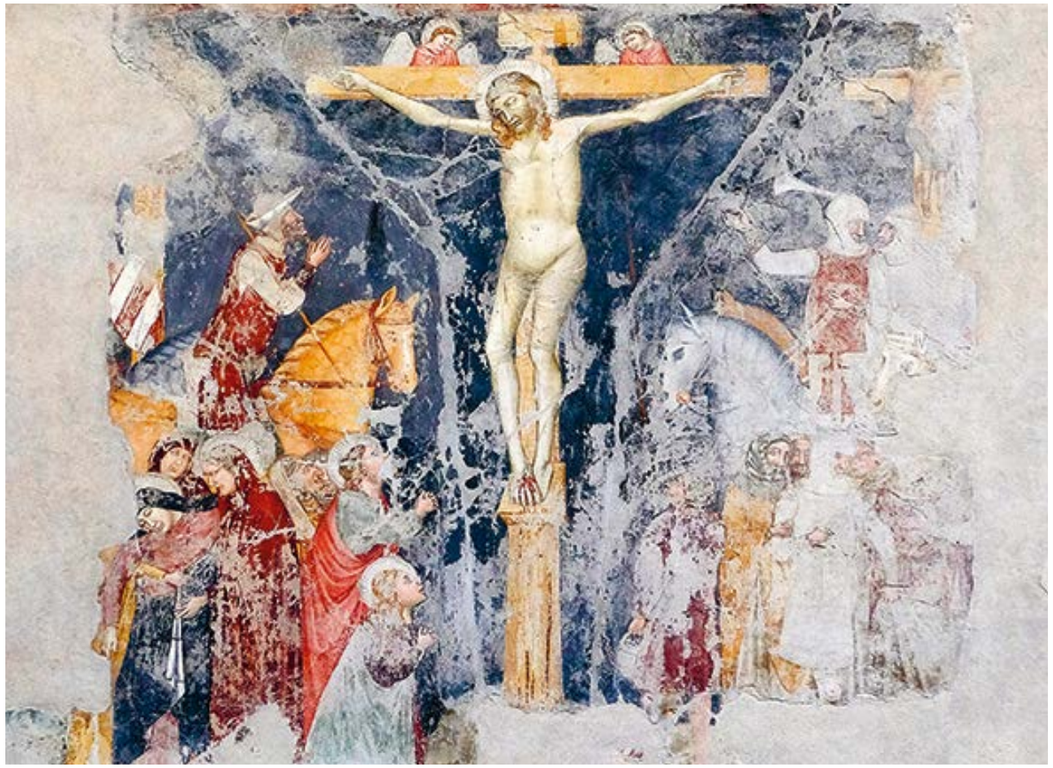


Fig. 26: Turone di Maxio, *Crucifixion* (detail), Verona, San Pietro Martire

said of the tormentor, shown in the Rasini *Crucifixion* as he thrusts himself forward to reach Christ's lips with his vinegar-soaked sponge, while in the San Pietro Martire fresco he is also depicted from behind holding a bucket, but he is as still as a statue. The intensity of these passages justifies Miklós Boskovits's attempt to identify these paintings – the Ambrosiana triptych and the two *Crucifixions* – as the earliest work of Altichiero da Zevio. He was convinced of this, despite the difficulties involved in evaluating comparisons with a work so different in both technique and size as Altichiero's *Crucifixion* in the Basilica of Sant'Antonio in Padua. On the other hand, this in no way diminshes the value of the comparison, which reveals in both the large- and small-scale works, on the one hand the artist's determination to convey the devastating depth of the grief of a mother who has just lost her son, and on the other, the way they share in such details as the arm hanging limply by the Virgin's side after she has fainted, the foreshortened clouds and the crushed folds of the flesh on the body whose volumes are swollen byw the light. Having said that, an attribution *sic et simpliciter* to Altichiero is by no means devoid of pitfalls. Unfortunately we have no definitely dated work by Altichiero before the

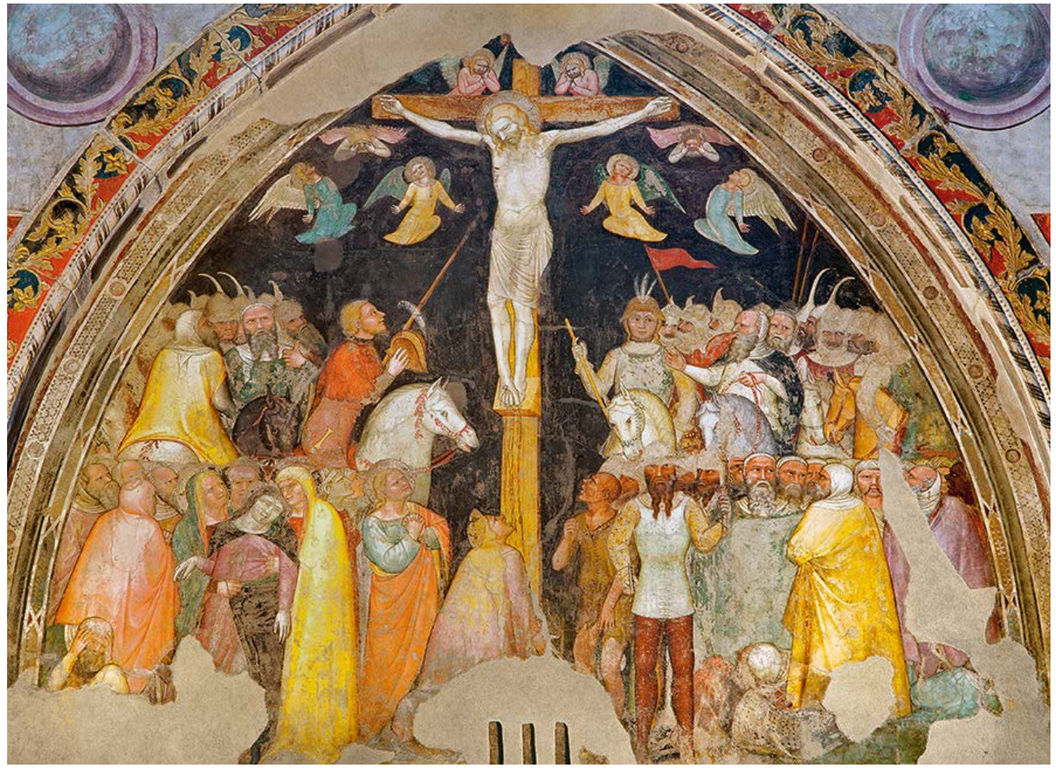


Fig. 27: Turone di Maxio, *Crucifixion*, Verona, San Fermo

fresco in the Cavalli Chapel in Sant'Anastasia in Verona, dated 1369, while the only surviving part of his decoration in the great hall of Cansignorio della Scala's palace, painted in 1364, are some extremely fine profiles set in medallions (Verona, Museo degli affreschi staccati) that reveal an explicit and conscious echo of the Classical world, of which there is no trace in the Rasini *Crucifixion* or in the other two works associated with it. But then, fifteen years of which we know absolutely nothing elapsed between the Detroit *Crucifixion* painted in 1351, and Altichiero's first confirmed work, namely the classicising busts in Cansignorio's palace. If those works are indeed Altichiero's "prehistory", then we need to surmise that between the end of that decade and some time around the mid-1360s his interests and training were redirected towards the study of Classicism, probably through contact with intellectual circles. Prudence therefore counsels that we maintain the distinction between the young Altichiero and the painter responsible for the Ambrosiana diptych, the Detroit *Crucifixion*, and the Rasini *Crucifixion*, while confirming that that painter remains the figure closest to Altichiero from both a painterly and an intellectual standpoint.

Notes

[1] For a summary of Giotto's Paduan following see at least D. Banzato, *L'impronta di Giotto e lo sviluppo della pittura del Trecento a Padova*, in *Giotto e il Trecento. "Il più Sovrano Maestro stato in dipintura"*, exhibition catalogue ed. by A. Tomei, Milan 2009, I, pp. 143-155.
[2] Giorgio Vasari's story that Giotto painted in Cansignorio's palace in Verona (G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori, nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed. R. Bettarini, commentary by P. Barocchi, Florence 1966-1997, vol. I, p. 126), is generally considered implausible on the strength of the fact that 14th century Veronese painters' knowledge of Giotto's style appears to be mediated by the style of the Master of the Redeemer rather than direct (see in particular A. De Marchi, *Il momento sperimentale. La prima diffusione del giottismo*, in *Tr3cento. Pittori gotici a Bolzano*, ed. A. De Marchi, T. Franco, S. Spada Pintarelli, Bolzano 2000, pp. 47-65, esp. 59-60 and F. Piccoli, *Dentro e fuori la corte: note sulle pitture trecentesche nel palazzo di Cangrande della Scala a Verona*, in *Arte di corte in Italia del Nord. Programmi, modelli, artisti (1330-1402 ca.)*, ed. S. Romano, D. Zaru, Rome 2013, pp. 147-170). Ettore Napione, on the other hand, argues that he is reliable (*Gli affreschi trecenteschi della Torre del Capitanio e la pittura di corte nei palazzi scaligeri: le storie dal Ab urbe condita di Tito Livio*, in *La Torre del Capitanio*, Verona 2009, pp. 39-69, esp. pp. 65-69). For painting in Mantua in the early 14th century, see S. L'Occaso, *Per la pittura del Trecento a Mantova e la Crocifissione di palazzo ducale*, in "Arte lombarda", n.s. No. 140 (1), 2004, pp. 46- 56 and S. L'Occaso, *La pittura a Mantova tra Bonacolsi e Gonzaga (1300-1330 ca.)*, in *Arte di corte in Italia del Nord. Programmi, modelli, artisti (1330-1402 ca.)*, ed. S. Romano, D. Zaru, Rome 2013, pp. 11-35.
[3] There is a vast amount of literature on the dissemination of Giotto's style in Lombardy and it should be considered from different standpoints: the dissemination of Giotto's earliest style (for which, see A. De Marchi, *Rayonnement assisiate lungo la via Francigena*, in *L'artista girovago. Forestieri, avventurieri, emigranti e missionari nell'arte del Trecento in Italia del Nord*, ed. S. Romano and D. Cerutti, Rome 2012, pp. 11-46) and the most hotly debated issue concerning the work of Giotto and his followers in Milan from the 1330s onwards. In this connection, see not only Pietro Toesca's crucial work (*La pittura e la miniatura nella Lombardia dai più antichi monumenti alla metà del Quattrocento*, Milan 1912 (reprinted Turin 1987 pp. 88-110) but also the essays by Roberto Longhi,*Aspetti dell'antica arte lombarda*, in "Paragone", IX, 1958, 101, pp. 3-25 and by M. Gregori, *Presenza di Giusto de' Menabuoi a Viboldone*, in "Paragone", 25, 1974, No. 293, pp. 3-20; B. Zanardi, *Da Stefano fiorentino a Puccio Capanna*, in "Storia dell'Arte", XXXII-XXXIV, 1978, pp. 115-127; L. Castelfranchi Vegas, *Presenze toscane nella pittura lombarda della prima metà del Trecento*, in "Prospettiva", LIII-LIV, 1988-1989, pp. 153-163; L. Bellosi, Giottino e la pittura di filiazione giottesca intorno alla metà del Trecento, in "Prospettiva", 101, 2001, pp. 19-40; C. Travi, *Per Stefano fiorentino: problemi di pittura tra Lombardia e Toscana intorno alla metà del Trecento*, in "Arte Cristiana", XCI, 2003, pp. 157-180; M. Boskovits, *Ancora su Stefano fiorentino (e su qualche altro fatto pittorico di Firenze verso la metà del Trecento*, in "Arte Cristiana", XCI, 2003, pp. 173-177; M. Gregori, *Stefano fiorentino: itinerario da Assisi a Chiaravalle*, in *Un poema cistercense. Affreschi giotteschi a Chiaravalle Milanese*, ed. S. Bandera, Milan 2010, pp. 11-30; G. Ravalli, *Rileggere Ghiberti: Stefano fiorentino, Orcagna e altri fatti pittorici a Santa Maria Novella*, in *Ricerche a Santa Maria Novella. Gli affreschi ritrovati di Bruno, Stefano e gli altri*, ed. A. Bisceglia, Florence 2016, pp. 145- 171. For Giottino's fresco in San Gottardo in Corte in Milan see the recent data acquired by Marco Rossi in C. Cairati and M. Rossi, *Il palazzo di Azzone Visconti, ora Palazzo Reale*, in *Le residenze viscontee*, ed. S. Romano and M. Rossi, Cinisello Balsamo 2023, pp. 66-125, esp. pp. 82-87.
[4] G. B. C. Giuliari, *Francesco Petrarca e la sua scoperta delle epistole di M. Tullio Cicerone in Verona*, in "Archivio Storico Italiano", s. III, vol. 23, No. 92, 1876, pp. 348-363.
[5] For Benzo da Alessandria and classical culture in Milan see M. Petoletti, *La memoria dell'antico nella Milano trecentesca*, in *Arte di corte in Italia del Nord. Programmi, modelli, artisti (1330-1402 ca.)*, ed. S. Romano, D. Zaru, Rome 2013, pp. 195-210, esp. pp. 200-201.
[6] *Mostra giottesca*, Bergamo 1937, p. 60 no. 177. The painting had recently entered the collection of the Milanese banker Giovanni Rasini, who had bought it in Switzerland in 1934, according to a temporary import licence issued on 20 July of that year. A precious diary kept by Rasini mentions that it previously belonged to the antique dealer Foresti who, in turn, had it from Stefano Bardini in Florence: "45. Scuola di Giotto. Crocefissione: tavola a sesto fondo oro, ex raccolta Bardini di Firenze che da quella passò dall'antiquario Foresti. Ripulito da M. Pelliccioli. Expertise W. Suida che lo attribuisce a Giotto stesso, per lire 60.000." (45. School of Giotto. Crucifixion: arched gold ground panel, ex-Bardini collection in Florence, thence to antique dealer Foresti. Cleaned by M. Pelliccioli. Expertise W. Suida who gives it to Giotto himself, for lire 60,000.) The antique dealer mentioned is Carlo Alberto Foresti, who worked in Milan in the second quarter of the last century and was in touch with the elite scholars and collectors of the period (see E. Landi, *The Antiquarian Carlo Alberto Foresti of Carpi, a Correspondent of Bernard Berenson. Unknown Documents for the History of a Dispersed Collection, in Bernard Berenson. Formation and Heritage*, ed. J. Connors and L. A. Waldman, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 2014, pp. 309-330, esp. p. 321). He may have had it from his father Pietro Foresti, an important collector who is known to have been in touch with Stefano Bardini. See *Alle origini del museo 1914-2004. La donazione Foresti nelle collezioni di Carpi, comune di Carpi*, ed. Manuela Rossi, Carpi 2004. The painting cannot be identified among Pietro Foresti's pictures presented for sale in 1914 (*Galleria Lino Pesaro, Catalogue de la Galerie et du Musée appartenants à le chevalier P. Foresti de Carpi*, Milan, 1914).
[7] G. Sinibaldi, G. Brunetti, *Pittura italiana del Duecento e Trecento* (catalogue of the *Mostra giottesca* in Florence in 1937), Florence 1943, entry no. 193, p. 599.
[8] L. Coletti, *La mostra giottesca*, in "Bollettino d'arte", 1937-38, pp. 49-72, esp. p. 66.
[9] W. Suida, *Giotto-Ausstellung in Florenz*, in "Pantheon", 1937 pp. 347-350.
[10] L. Ragghianti, *Notizie e letture*, in "La Critica d'arte", V, 1940, 23, p. VIII.
[11] See, in addition to *Detroit Season's Acquisitions*, in "Art News" XXXVI, 1938, July, pp. 12, 22 documenting the painting's purchase by the museum, also W. R. Valentiner, *A Crucifixion of the Giotto School*, in "Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts", XVII, 1938, 8, p.70 and fig. on p. 65 and W. R. Valentiner, *Italian Gothic Painter, Guide VI.*, Detroit 1944, p. 50 fig. 22.
[12] R. Pallucchini, *La pittura veneziana del Trecento*, Venice-Rome, 1964, p. 141, fig. 436.
[13] G. L. Mellini, *Elogio della pittura veronese de primo Trecento*, in *Scritti de Storia dell'Arte in onore di Federico Zeri*, vol. 2. Milan, 1984, pp. 46-54, esp. p. 49.
[14] M. Lucco, *Turone di Maxio*, in *La pittura nel Veneto. Il Trecento*, ed. M. Lucco, Milan 1992, pp. 551-552.
[15] M. Boskovits, *Su Giusto de Menabuoi e sul giottismo in Italia Settentrionale*, in *Studi di Storia dell'Arte in onore di Mina Gregori*, Milan 1994, pp. 26-34, esp. p. 34.
[16] In fact Richards seems to be unaware of the essay penned by Miklós Boskovits in 1994, which he does not mention; on the other hand, painting a broad picture of the circumstances surrounding Altichiero's formative years, he puts the greatest emphasis on his ties with the figurative culture of the Giottesque painters working in Lombardy, clearly reflecting his own vision (J. Richards, *Altichiero: an artist and his patrons in the Italian Trecento*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 21, esp. 33-34).
[17] A De Marchi, in *Tr3cento. Pittori gotici a Bolzano*, ed. A. De Marchi, Trento 2000, p. 75, no. 82 and A. De Marchi, in *Pinacoteca Ambrosiana*, ed. L. Caramel, Milan 2005, p. 139 (as "pre-Turone" work).
[18] S. Chiodo, in *Giovanni da Milano. Capolavori del Gotico fra Lombardia e Toscana*, ed. D. Parenti, Florence 2008, pp. 156-158, cat. 5 (trad.: "justified by the considerable distance between the Veronese master's earliest works and the group comprising the Detroit *Crucifixion* of 1351, the Ambrosiana diptych and the Rasini *Crucifixion*").
[19] F. Piccoli, *Altichiero e la pittura a Verona nella tarda età scaligera*, Sommacampagna 2010, pp. 53-56.
[20] T. Franco, *Turone*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 97, Rome 2020 [www.treccani.it]
[21] T. M. Bartolomei, *Le relazioni tra Maria e la Chiesa*, in "Divus Thomas", vol. 67, 1964, no. 4, pp. 415-443.
[22] See C. Guarnieri, *Lorenzo Veneziano*, Cinisello Balsamo 2006, pp. 152-153, 207.
[23] For this issue see A. De Marchi, *Polyptyques vénitiens. Anamnèse d'une identité méconnue*, in *Autour de Lorenzo Veneziano. Fragments de polyptyques vénitiens du XIVe siècle*, exhibition catalogue ed. A. De Marchi, C. Guarnieri, Cinisello Balsamo 2005, pp. 13-43 and C. Guarnieri, *Lorenzo Veneziano*, Cinisello Balsamo 2006, pp. 87-91, 179, 216.
[24] L. Coletti, *Contributo al problema Maso-Giottino*, in "Emporium" 96, 1942, pp. 461-478; L. Bellosi, *Giottino e la pittura di filiazione giottesca intorno alla metà del Trecento*, in "Prospettiva", 121/124, 2006, pp. 347-368.
[25] M. Boskovits, *Gemäldegalerie Berlin, Frühe Italienische Malerei*, Berlin 1989, pp. 62-64.
[26] A. De Marchi, *Il momento sperimentale. La prima diffusione del giottismo*, in *Il Tr3cento*, Bolzano 2000, p. 55 and R. Taglietti, *Aspetti della decorazione pittorica di San Francesco a Brescia*, in "Brixia sacra", serie 3, 16, 2011, issues 1-2, pp. 173-187, esp. p. 182.
[27] The Ugoni family was one of Brescia's oldest and noblest families, although its history in the 14th century is so uncertain that it is difficult accurately to reconstruct the line of descent between the 13th century and 15th century branches (see https://www.enciclopediabresciana.it, vol. XX, Ugoni, family). In the 14th century it appears to have been thrown out of the government of the city, of which Azzone Visconti became the overlord in 1337. In the 1349 Luchino Vistconti entrusted the city's governance to Bernabò. See G. Zanetti, *Le signorie (1313-1426)*, in *Storia di Brescia*, ed. G. Treccani degli Alfieri, Rome 1963, pp. 840-849.
[28] M. Boskovits, *Su Giusto de Menabuoi e sul giottismo in Italia Settentrionale*, in *Studi di Storia dell'Arte in onore di Mina Gregori*, Milan 1994, pp. 26-34, esp. p. 34
[29] B. Rano, *Agostiniani*, in *La sostanza dell'effimero. Gli abiti degli ordini religiosi in Occidente*, Rome 2000, pp. 378-380.
[30] For the Augustinian community's origins see G. Cossandi, *Gli insediamenti degli ordini mendicanti e i nuovi aspetti della vita religiosa tra XIII e XIV secolo*, in *A servizio del Vangelo Il cammino storico dell'evangelizzazione a Brescia. I, L'età antica e medievale*, Brescia 2010, pp. 436-482, esp. 446-449.
[31] For the history of San Barnaba see G. Panazza, *Il convento agostiniano di San Barnaba a Brescia e gli affreschi della libreria*, Brescia 1990. This study on the presentation of the restoration of the paintings that adorned the convent library also contains useful information on the church's former liturgical fixtures and fittings. For figurative art in 14th century Brescia, see G. Panazza, *La pittura e la miniatura nel secolo XIV*, in *Storia di Brescia*, ed. G. Treccani degli Alfieri, Rome 1963, pp. 929-960.
[32] M. T. Cuppini, *Turone di Maxio da Camenago*, in "Bollettino d'arte", ser. 5, 51, 1966, pp. 33-42, esp. p. 41 note 12. See also T. Franco, *Turone*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 97, Rome 2020 (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/turone, consulted on 21 February 2023).

Colour separation:
Pixel Studio, Bresso (Milan)

Printed in February 2024 by:
Gally Thierry Stampa, Milan

ISBN: 978-1-9999889-7-5

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