

**The Goodhart Ducciesque Master's Birmingham Polyptych
and Siense Altarpiece Practices**

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The Kress altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child with a Bishop Saint, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and an Unidentified Saint* (Figure 1) is an excellent example of an early Sienese polyptych. The painting, now in the Birmingham Museum of Art, is consistently assigned to a relatively minor follower of Duccio known as the “Goodhart Ducciesque Master,” but is otherwise generally understudied. An examination of the scholarship and a comparison to other early Trecento polyptychs is particularly helpful to reconstruct the painting and begin to consider its original context.

The Birmingham altarpiece also bears a striking resemblance—hitherto noted only in museum files—to a dossal by Manfredino da Pistoia in the Acton collection depicting the *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and Dionysius* (Figure 2). Technical study of the Acton dossal and a consideration of the potential connection between it and the Birmingham polyptych raise interesting questions about altarpiece practices between the late 13th and the early 14th century in Italy. Beyond questions of iconography, the link between the two paintings allows for an examination of the potential implications of both *modo e forma* commissions requiring an artist to closely follow an earlier model, and the Sienese practice in the early Trecento of stylistically updating earlier altarpieces that already within a few decades had become obsolete. The connection between the two paintings also enables some preliminary consideration of possible churches in Siena and its environs that could have originally commissioned either or both of these altarpieces, which opens avenues for further study and archival research.

Historiography and Attribution

Richard Offner was the first scholar to start assembling a corpus that later formed the basis of the Goodhart Ducciesque Master's oeuvre. In a 1940 catalogue entry on a *Madonna and Child with the Annunciation and the Nativity* (Figure 3) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harry B. Wehle notes that "R. Offner (verbally, 1940) considers it a work by the painter of a Madonna in the Goodhart collection, New York."¹ The painting Offner refers to—a *Madonna and Child with Donors* (Figure 4)—later entered the Lehman collection, and thus is now also held by the Metropolitan Museum.

The first publication of the Birmingham polyptych, a catalogue entry by Wilhelm Suida from 1952, did not yet connect the painting to Offner's Goodhart panel, assigning it instead to an anonymous follower of Duccio. Suida did however suggest several paintings which he believed to be by the same hand: a *Madonna and Child* in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (now attributed to Ugolino di Nerio), an unidentified painting formerly in the Platt collection, and "a painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art" (possibly the *Madonna and Child with the Annunciation and the Nativity* that Offner associated with the Goodhart panel, though Suida's text does not specify).² Suida further proposed that the Birmingham altarpiece would likely have originally resembled a painting by Duccio in the museum of Siena, presumably Polyptych no. 28.³ He loosely identified the figures flanking the Virgin and Child as a Bishop Saint, St. John the Baptist, Saint Michael the Archangel, and an Apostle.⁴

The name "Goodhart Ducciesque Master" was first introduced in the mid-1950s by Dorothy Shorr and Gertrude Coor-Achenbach; at this point, the Birmingham altarpiece also began to be consistently associated with the two smaller paintings in the Metropolitan Museum.

Shorr's 1954 volume on *The Christ Child in Devotional Images* includes two paintings attributed to a "Goodhart Ducciesque Master"—the Met's *Madonna and Child with the Annunciation and the Nativity* and the Birmingham altarpiece—and she notes that the name originated from a third panel originally in the Goodhart collection.⁵ She does not, however, provide any specific arguments to support this attribution, preferring instead to focus on cataloguing the different modes of representing Christ.

In a footnote to a 1955 article on Ugolino di Nerio, Coor-Achenbach outlines Offner and Shorr's earlier attributions to the Goodhart Master, notably the Birmingham altarpiece and the two panels in the Metropolitan Museum. She also suggests an addition to the Goodhart Master's oeuvre—an altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child with Saints Marcellinus, Lawrence, Leonhard, and Augustine Martyr* from Monterongriffoli (Figure 5)—and argues that the entire corpus reflects the influence of Ugolino di Nerio. Given her focus on Ugolino, it is perhaps unsurprising that she sees the Birmingham altarpiece as the Goodhart Master's most accomplished work, a claim she justifies by observing that the polyptych effectively melds Ugolino's style with that of Simone Martini.⁶ More interestingly, she tentatively identifies the rightmost figure in the Birmingham altarpiece as Dionysius the Areopagite, though she does not provide an explanation for her identification.⁷

Although the Birmingham panel only appears briefly in both Shorr and Coor-Achenbach, these two sources nonetheless shaped the subsequent discourse on the Goodhart Master. While some scholars object to Coor-Achenbach's attribution of the Monterongriffoli altarpiece, none to my knowledge have contested that the Goodhart Master painted the Birmingham polyptych.⁸ Indeed, Suida's revised catalogue of Kress paintings in the Birmingham Museum from 1959 changes the attribution to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master, reflecting the work of Shorr and

Coor-Achenbach.⁹ He also tentatively accepts Coor-Achenbach's proposal that the rightmost saint is Dionysius the Areopagite, and follows this with an additional suggestion that the bishop saint might be Augustine, based on a comparison to Duccio's Polyptych 28 where the figure is named.¹⁰ Interestingly, while subsequent scholars repeat Coor-Achenbach's identification of the rightmost saint as Dionysius the Areopagite, Suida's identification of the bishop as Augustine is abandoned.¹¹

The association of the Birmingham panel with the Goodhart corpus is convincing, especially given its strong visual similarities to the two panels in the Metropolitan Museum (Figures 3 and 4). The figures of Mary and Christ share a striking resemblance across the three paintings. In all of the images, Mary's head is tilted toward her son, with her face turned slightly away so that she looks out at the viewer from the corner of her eye. Her thin almond eyes, the starkly shadowed planes of her brow where it curves into her long nose, and her small mouth defined by a deep shadow just below it, are strikingly consistent between the three paintings. These features are very similar to Duccio and his workshop (see for instance Figures 6 and 7) which is unsurprising for one of his early Sieneese followers. The Goodhart Master, however, paints the Virgin with a more elongated face, an effect heightened by his system of modeling: the shadow of Mary's mantle at the proper right side of her face, the gradual shading indicating her chin and jawline, and the pink blush just to the side of each of her nostrils. The Virgin's drapery is also a distinguishing feature. Whereas Mary's veil extends past the edge of her mantle in rippling folds in Duccio's works, the Goodhart Master fully frames her head with her blue mantle.

The figure of Christ is also very consistent between the Birmingham altarpiece and the *Madonna and Child with the Annunciation and the Nativity* (Figure 3). He seems to hover above

Mary's arms, unlike the weighty presence of the infant in Duccio's paintings. Christ has the same curls, pink drapery, and partly-bared torso as the child in Duccio's *Maestà*, but his hairline recedes to sharp points at the sides of his face, and the modeling of his chest is distinctly visible. Despite this suggestion of musculature, both the Met panel and the Birmingham altarpiece also give the suggestion of babyish rolls of fat at Christ's neck and forearms. The infant raises his proper right hand to hold his mother's drapery, while his left rests by his side, holding a rose in the Met painting, and a bird in the Birmingham altarpiece.¹² The angle of Christ's body is slightly different in the two paintings—in the altarpiece, the child sits upright, and seems to look at his mother rather than into space—but otherwise the two paintings are strikingly alike.

Given these compelling visual links between the Goodhart Master's paintings, subsequent scholarship focuses primarily on further expanding the artist's oeuvre, and on trying to determine particular trends within it. In a 1966 catalogue of Kress paintings, Fern Rusk Shapley discusses the Birmingham panel within the context of this newly-established corpus, echoing Coor-Achenbach's claim that it is the most sophisticated of these paintings.¹³ By contrast, James H. Stubblebine's 1979 volume on *Duccio di Buoninsegna and his School* proposes instead that the Goodhart Master was primarily a miniaturist, and claims that although the Birmingham altarpiece is often seen as the painter's masterpiece, it in fact reveals a stiffness in the figures as a result of the artist's difficulty with working on a larger scale.¹⁴

This analysis grows out of Stubblebine's expansion of the corpus attributed to the Goodhart Master—he adds several small-scale works to the painter's oeuvre, and accepts the Monterongriffoli altarpiece as another instance of the artist's struggle to create monumental figures.¹⁵ Federico Zeri in 1980 furthers this argument, proposing that the detail and small scale of these paintings might suggest that the Goodhart Master was trained as a manuscript

illuminator, though his monumental works (including the Birmingham altarpiece) suggest the influence of Simone Martini.¹⁶ Luciano Cateni again echoes the idea of the Goodhart Master as miniaturist in an 1986 article, noting that aside from the two large altarpieces at Birmingham and Monterongriffoli, most of the painter's work consists of small-scale Maestà images.¹⁷

The only major scholarship focusing exclusively on the Birmingham altarpiece is a 2006 essay by Jennifer Sherman. Writing as a conservator, her essay provides an art historical introduction and a close technical study of the polyptych, giving a thorough discussion of the altarpiece's materials, condition, and restoration history. Her contribution also situates the altarpiece within a history of conservation from the 19th and 20th centuries, positing the involvement of the notable Sienese restorer Icilio Federico Ioni.¹⁸

Technical Study and Reconstruction

Shearman's article is particularly helpful to reconstruct the original appearance of the altarpiece, as her work indicates the presence of an original silver ground, and she provides technical information about the panel structure. This evidence, in conjunction with comparisons to other early Sienese polyptychs, provides a clearer picture of how the Goodhart Master's polyptych might have looked to early viewers.

When cleaning the painting, Sherman found silver fragments across the panels, and further elemental analysis with a scanning electron microscope revealed that the panels originally had a silver ground. This marks a major technical discovery, as silver grounds are prone to tarnishing and discoloration, and thus are rarely seen in surviving panels—indeed, it is more

common to see paintings with a re-gilded background, as seems to be the case with the Birmingham altarpiece.¹⁹ Based on the surprising quality but inconsistent craquelure of the ornately-punched haloes, Sherman proposes that the original silver ground was removed and some of the gesso of the haloes was scraped out; then, a skilled restorer re-gessoed the haloes, gilded the panels, and redid the punchwork. In consultation with the conservator Mario Modestini, Sherman suggests that this restoration was likely carried out by the skilled Sieneese restorer Icilio Federico Ioni, as few others could match his talent for gilding and replicating Trecento punchwork.²⁰ Based on this information, Sherman created a digitally re-colored image of how the panel might have appeared with its original silver ground (Figure 8).²¹

If Sherman is correct that the background was completely regilded, it is also possible that the saints were originally named, and that this information has since been lost. A comparison to similar altarpieces from the same circle—such as Polyptych 28, attributed to Duccio and his workshop (Figure 6), or the Monterongriffoli altarpiece (Figure 5)—might provide a model of how such inscriptions could originally have appeared.²² A notable distinction between these paintings and the Birmingham polyptych, however, is that the wings of the Archangel Michael block off the space where inscriptions are situated in the other two altarpieces. It also seems surprising that a restorer skilled enough to replicate 14th century punchwork would not copy the original inscriptions onto the regilded background, but it is possible that these were sufficiently damaged by the time of the restoration to be unreadable or barely visible.

In addition to her suggestion that the altarpiece originally had a silver ground, Sherman also provides some information about the panels' construction, which is helpful to re-envision the original frame of this early polyptych. As with many early 14th century polyptychs, each panel is composed of a single plank, and the individual panels were joined with dowels, as

attested in early X-radiographs. These original dowel holes are no longer visible—Sherman suggests that this is the result of a restoration sometime after the altarpiece entered the Kress collection in 1941, when the panels were thinned and cradled, a common practice to minimize the potential damage caused by warping wood. The dowel holes reveal that the figures of the bishop saint and St. John were originally linked, as were the Archangel Michael and the figure sometimes identified as Saint Dionysius, but there is no evidence of dowel holes connecting to the central panel.²³ This technical information can also be confirmed visually: both the bishop saint and the figure thought to be Dionysius tilt slightly towards the central panel, and their positions could not be reversed without destroying the coherence of the group of saints. Both the body and the gaze of John the Baptist are also strongly angled inward, a position that would be nonsensical were he placed elsewhere in the altarpiece.

Finally, Sherman also notes the possibility that the altarpiece once included triangular gables above each panel, as was common for Sienese polyptychs in the early Trecento.²⁴ Here again Polyptych 28 (Figure 6) and the Monterongriffoli altarpiece (Figure 5) may provide useful visual models of the Birmingham altarpiece's original appearance, though Polyptych 28 is missing most of its frame. Nonetheless, both of these altarpieces include gables with angels or saints, including a central gable of the blessing Christ. It is likely that the Birmingham altarpiece once had similar gables—indeed, individual figures of angels in triangular gables have been associated with the Goodhart Master, though the attributions are not certain, and it seems relatively unlikely that they originally came from the Birmingham.²⁵ The altarpiece likely also originally had a fairly simple frame with colonnettes supporting arches around each individual panel, as does the Monterongriffoli altarpiece.²⁶

Earlier Models and Iconography

A reconstruction of the original appearance of the Birmingham polyptych must consider the broader context of Sienese altarpieces, especially as the early 14th century marks a period of significant change in the structure and appearance of the altarpiece. The single-panel dossal, the dominant form of the late 13th century, began to be supplanted by the polyptych, with half-length saints depicted on panels and increasingly elaborate architectonic frames.²⁷ Duccio seems to have pioneered this change in Siena—altarpieces like his Polyptych 28 (Figure 6) retain the same half-length saints of the earlier dossal, but now on five separate panels. By the 1320s, Simone Martini expanded this five-paneled polyptych with gables to a seven-paneled altarpiece with multiple registers, allowing him to include a plethora of additional figures.²⁸ The Birmingham polyptych seems to fall in the middle phase of this expansion, which makes a date between 1310 and the early 1320s seem the most plausible.

This shift from dossal to polyptych is particularly important for understanding the Birmingham altarpiece. The loose identification of the saints makes it likely that the polyptych is somehow connected to an earlier dossal held in the Acton Collection of the Villa La Pietra in Florence, which depicts the *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas, John the Baptist, Michael, and Dionysius* (Figure 2). The dossal is attributed to the painter Manfredino da Pistoia, who was active in Pistoia and Genoa in the 1280s and 1290s. A connection between these altarpieces is suggested in the Villa La Pietra's museum files, but to my knowledge has not been published.²⁹

The paintings are, in fact, of almost precisely the same scale. The Acton dossal, which retains its original engaged frame with the addition of a modern molding around the edges,

measures 205.5 centimeters in width, 90 centimeters in height at the peak of the central gable, and 59.5 centimeters in height at the sides.³⁰ The Birmingham altarpiece is now encased in a modern frame, but the individual panels of saints each measure approximately 35.6 centimeters in width and 61.3 centimeters in height, while the central Madonna and Child measures 39.5 centimeters in width and 76.2 centimeters in height. Comparing the height of the lateral sections—59.5cm for the dossal, 61.3cm for the polyptych—reveals that the figures of the saints are very close to the same size.

The surviving dimensions of the Birmingham altarpiece do not account for its original frame, which would likely have resulted in an altarpiece of almost exactly the same width as the Acton dossal. As noted above, the overall structure of the polyptych probably resembled Duccio's *Polyptych 28* (though only part of the frame survives) or the Monterongriffoli altarpiece, with arched spandrels and pinnacles above each panel, and space between each saint for engaged columns. It is unclear whether the Birmingham panels were cut down at the sides—Sherman was unable to examine the edges, as they are covered by thin strips of wood—but placing the panels edge-to-edge would result in columns obscuring part of the wrist or hand of multiple figures, notably the bishop, the archangel Michael, and the Virgin Mary.³¹ A more plausible reconstruction would situate the panels slightly further apart, with engaged columns covering the gap, and possibly a narrow frame box around the edges, as with the Monterongriffoli altarpiece. These adjustments and framing elements would make the Birmingham altarpiece just over two meters wide, precisely like the Acton dossal.³²

Even more compelling is the choice and placement of saints: both panels include a bishop, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and an elderly (likely early Christian) saint. Indeed, it seems plausible that the comparison between these two paintings prompted Coor-

Achenbach to identify the rightmost saint in the Birmingham altarpiece as Dionysius. There are very few conclusive representations of the saint in this period, and the figure from the Acton dossal is George Kaftal's primary example for the iconography of Dionysius.³³ It is, however, perplexing that she does not identify the bishop as St. Nicholas, as Kaftal includes another detail of the Acton dossal in his entry on Nicholas.³⁴ It is possible that Coor-Achenbach proposed the identification of Dionysius based on the parallel to the Acton dossal, but that she thought the Goodhart Master could all too easily have changed the identity of the bishop saint, who does share a far closer resemblance to the figure of St. Augustine in Polyptych 28, as indeed Suida later noted.³⁵

An iconographic comparison between the Acton dossal and the Birmingham altarpiece, however, must take into account the fact that the current inscriptions of the Acton dossal are not original, and most likely date to the 17th century. Recent technical study indicates that there are two distinct layers of inscriptions, and infrared reflectography reveals at least partial letterforms from the earlier inscriptions for Saints Nicholas, John the Baptist, and Dionysius. While these earlier inscriptions are mostly impossible to decipher, the letters "TEUS" are visible in the infrared images of the rightmost saint (Figure 9), currently labeled as "DIONISIUS."³⁶ As these letters appear on the second half of the banner, it seems most likely that they form the end of the name "Matteus," suggesting that this figure may have been identified as Saint Matthew before being renamed as Saint Dionysius. Importantly, the earlier inscriptions may or may not be original to the panel, and further technical study would be needed to date them more conclusively.

The name change raises broader questions about the identity of the figures in both the Acton dossal and the Birmingham altarpiece. An iconographic comparison between these two

paintings not only strengthens the relationship between the two altarpieces, but also suggests the figures' potential receptivity to being renamed by later viewers. Working in the early 14th century, the Goodhart Master seems to have been aware of the Acton dossal and responsive to the visual choices Manfredino made some three or four decades earlier.

In both paintings, the leftmost saint is clearly identifiable as a bishop. Manfredino paints the figure wearing red robes and a low miter, holding a book. While it is unclear whether the inscription necessarily echoes an earlier identification of the saint as Nicholas, as the underlayer is not sufficiently legible, it is certainly plausible that the later inscription follows an older tradition of identifying the figure as Nicholas. The Goodhart Master selects a different color scheme: the bishop wears an ornately patterned blue mantle held in place by a sizeable brooch, and holds a crozier in addition to his book. As noted above, the patterned blue robe is much more reminiscent of Saint Augustine from Duccio's Polyptych 28, but it is possible that this difference is motivated by a desire to follow Duccio's artistic model rather than by a change in the actual identity of the saint.³⁷

The second saint is incontrovertibly recognizable as John the Baptist by his curly hair, full beard, and the furs he wears under his mantle. Manfredino's painting includes his reed cross as an additional identifying attribute, while the Goodhart Master instead depicts a scroll reading, "ECCE AGNUS DEI. / ECCE QUI TOLLIS PECCATA M[UN]DI" (Behold the Lamb of God. Behold he who removes the sins of the world.). Interestingly, Manfredino's John the Baptist looks out at the viewer: his gaze and gesture toward the central Madonna and Child carry the same message as the Goodhart Master's scroll, reminding the viewer of his role as the last prophet pointing the way to Christ. Instead of gesturing, the Goodhart Master's John the Baptist holds his proper right hand before his torso, his middle and ring fingers touching his thumb.³⁸

The third saint is also easily recognizable: his wings and diadem clearly indicate that he is an archangel. Manfredino depicts Saint Michael in a tunic with an ornate collar and an antique-style blue mantle over one shoulder, while the Goodhart Master's archangel wears a ribboned and belted green tunic underneath a cloak fastened at the chest. The Goodhart Master also introduces the incontrovertible iconographic element of the sword, indicating Michael's role in the apocalypse, an attribute absent from Manfredino's painting. This choice to clarify the iconography of the archangel seems significant, especially as the overpainted inscriptions of Manfredino's dossal and the regilding of the Birmingham altarpiece raise the question of whether or not the saints were originally named in either or both images. If neither painting had original inscriptions, it is possible that the Goodhart Master sought to clarify or perhaps even to change the archangel's identity by providing him with a clear attribute. Alternatively, if only Manfredino's painting had an inscription, the Goodhart Master might have found it necessary to add an additional iconographic element given the absence of a visible name.

The question of iconographic clarity becomes even more perplexing with the final saint. Manfredino depicts this figure as an elderly man with a long, curling beard and a receding hairline. His garb—a pink mantle over a blue tunic—and the book he holds might suggest that he is an apostolic or early Christian saint, as opposed to the bishop saint who is shown in contemporary liturgical vestments. The Goodhart Master similarly depicts an elderly figure with a grayish white beard and hair, gazing out of the image and holding up his proper right hand. Although this figure is not balding, he too has a marked tuft of hair at the center of his forehead, like his counterpart in Manfredino's painting. The Goodhart Master's saint also wears generic antique-style clothing, his green mantle covering all but the upper edge of his tunic. Rather than

a book, he holds a scroll, possibly meant to also reaffirm his status as an early Christian figure: tunic and mantle predate liturgical robes, scrolls predate books.

Though the identity of the final saint would have been known to early viewers—perhaps he was a titular saint of the church or the altar where the painting was displayed, or the name saint of a notable patron—the iconographic cues are insufficient to go beyond recognizing this figure as an early Christian saint. If the Goodhart Master added Saint Michael's sword for the purposes of iconographic clarity, no such alteration seems to have been made to the rightmost saint. Any number of possibilities remain: the two paintings might depict the same saint or represent two different early Christian figures, and the saint's identification in either or both of these paintings may have been changed over time, even before the Goodhart Master painted the Birmingham altarpiece.

A comparison of the two iterations of the Madonna and Child strengthens the connection between the two images, as the Goodhart Master seems to be selectively following and modifying Manfredino's earlier example. The central figures in both paintings are in a relatively similar pose: Mary holds Christ in her proper left arm, tilting her head down toward him but looking out at the viewer, and the Christ Child sits in a three-quarter profile, his torso bare and his lower half covered by drapery.

There are, however, important distinctions. In Manfredino's painting, Christ holds a fold of drapery in his left fist, and his right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing. This is a particularly adult Christ: in addition to his gesture, he is also shown with a surprisingly muscular torso bared by the pink cape tied around his shoulders, which grants him the appearance of an ancient hero. A small loop of Christ's pink mantle slips through the Virgin's fingers as she supports him, and her right hand is raised in a relaxed gesture (the same gesture as John the

Baptist and the Archangel Michael) indicating toward Christ. The Goodhart Master is also interested in gesture and drapery—Christ clutches the neck of Mary’s mantle with his proper right hand, but his left holds a goldfinch, an iconographic element that seems to have originated with Duccio in Siena, and is generally understood to reference the Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ.³⁹ Mary’s hands are inactive, one resting just below Christ’s feet, and the other beside the drapery hanging from his thigh, and indeed it is unclear how she supports Christ. Manfredino’s Madonna gestures toward her son as he blesses; the Goodhart Master’s Virgin simultaneously enfolds and offers her child to the viewer.

Christ’s bare torso is an intriguing point of comparison, as it is unclear whether this element is taken directly from Manfredino’s painting, or is filtered through a specifically Siennese and Ducciesque visual idiom. In the 1280s when Manfredino was active, showing a semi-nude Christ was relatively rare. There is one close comparison to Manfredino’s painting, a retable of the *Madonna and Child with Four Saints, the Crucifixion, and the Flagellation* attributed to Grifo di Tancredi (Figure 10). Grifo’s Christ is shown wearing the same pink mantle tied about his shoulders and baring his torso, and here again a loop of drapery protrudes between Mary’s index and middle fingers.⁴⁰

Duccio, however, seems to popularize the figure of Christ with a nude torso, and indeed by the early Trecento it appears to be more common among paintings by his followers.⁴¹ The Monterongriffoli altarpiece (Figure 5), usually attributed either to the Goodhart Master or to a follower, and the Goodhart Master’s *Madonna and Child with the Annunciation and Nativity* (Figure 3) both show Christ with a bare torso, though in these paintings he holds Mary’s veil rather than her mantle. It is unclear, then, how closely the Goodhart Master followed Manfredino’s precedent: did he choose to show a semi-nude Christ because of Manfredino’s

example, or because of his own local tradition? Further, did Manfredino (and perhaps also Grifo di Tancredi) help to introduce the figure of Christ with a nude torso in Tuscany, or were their pictorial experiments coeval with Duccio's interest in the semi-nude Christ?

In any case, Duccio clearly plays a role in the stylistic differences between the Acton dossal and the Birmingham altarpiece. Manfredino is often categorized as a Byzantinizing painter: both the Madonna and the Angel are indebted to Byzantinizing models, as is the linear modeling of the figures (especially in their hair and facial features), the relatively dark flesh tones, and the sharply schematic folds of drapery.⁴² Some of these elements remain in the Birmingham altarpiece, such as the darker flesh tones of the Bishop, John the Baptist, and the rightmost saint, but even these figures have rosy cheeks, and seem to have been inflected by Duccio's artistic example. In the Birmingham altarpiece, faces, bodies, and drapery are modeled through gradual shading rather than line, which also creates a greater sense of depth: the archangel's wings are clearly behind him in shadow, and Mary seems to recede behind her mantle as she holds Christ out in front of her.

Connections: Replication and Replacement

The connection between the Acton dossal and the Birmingham altarpiece is tentative, but compelling. Admittedly, as very few early Italian panel paintings survive, it is difficult to be certain whether there were many other similar altarpieces, and whether these two paintings only coincidentally resemble each other.⁴³ Nevertheless, based on comparisons to surviving altarpieces from this period, the correspondences in both size and in the particular saints depicted

are striking. If the two paintings are indeed connected, it is worth raising the question of how they may have been linked.

The two altarpieces are chronologically separated by less than half a century—Manfredino is attested in Pistoia in 1280 and in Genoa in 1292, while the Goodhart Master is thought to have been active between about 1310 and 1325.⁴⁴ Given that the Goodhart Master appears to have worked exclusively in Siena and its environs, the most reasonable way for the painter to have seen Manfredino's *dossal* is if it was located in a Siennese church. Though Manfredino is only documented in Pistoia and in Genoa, some scholars have speculated on stylistic grounds that he may have worked with Cimabue on the frescoes for San Francesco in Assisi.⁴⁵ If this is the case, it is possible that he could have passed through or near Siena on his trip south, and completed a commission for an altarpiece in or around the city. Even if he did not go to Assisi, Manfredino seems to have traveled and worked elsewhere in Tuscany after leaving his native city and before settling in Genoa.⁴⁶ Research in the archives in Siena, and in parish archives in nearby towns, would be particularly useful to see if there is any documentation of Manfredino's presence.

Two particular practices operating in early Trecento Siena might explain the commission of a second and highly similar altarpiece only a few decades after an earlier panel was completed. The first is the *modo e forma* commission, when a patron requested an image modeled on an earlier example. There is some fluidity in these *modo e forma* commissions, and over time the painter seems to have increasingly gained more control over the carpenter who created the panel, but it is unclear the degree of creativity allowed to painters in the early 14th century.⁴⁷ A Siennese example of a relatively direct copy is the replica of Duccio's *Maestà* for

Massa Marittima. Duccio's monumental altarpiece most likely had to be modified to fit the slightly smaller altar at Massa, but the painting was nonetheless comparable in scale.⁴⁸

A similar process may have been at work in the commission of the Goodhart Master's polyptych, though there are two particular elements which make this seem to be an incomplete explanation. The first is structure: although by the 1310s, the dossal format had fallen out of fashion in Siena in favor of the polyptych, material structure was nonetheless an important element of early *modo e forma* commissions, so an explanation is needed for the choice to shift from dossal to polyptych.⁴⁹ Perhaps the Goodhart Master was given the dossal as a model for the pictorial scheme, while the commission specified a different model for the carpenter involved in making the panels. The choice to retain the same (or at least very similar) saints is also surprising. It is understandable for Massa Marittima to commission a replica of the *Maestà*—as arguably the most innovative and imposing painting of its time, possessing a copy would grant prestige. The patron and the town also had close ties to Siena, so the inclusion of Sienese saints would not be a major concern, especially given the vast and varied holy court surrounding the Madonna and Child and the narrative scenes from the lives of Mary and Christ.

In an altarpiece with only four flanking saints, however, it seems likely that these were chosen for their specific importance to the patron or the original church. It is here that the question of iconographic fluidity arises: did the iconographic ambiguity of Manfredino's bishop saint, archangel, and early Christian saint appeal to a later patron, who was thus able to modify the identity of these figures to suit a different context? If not, why might the same set of saints have resonated for a new patron and a different church, as (unlike the saints in the *Maestà* for Massa Marittima) these figures do not seem to have transferable civic associations?

These questions open an alternative possibility to explain the Goodhart Master's painting, which is that it could have been commissioned to replace the earlier Acton dossal on the same altar. There is a precedent in early Trecento Siena of updating images that had become stylistically obsolete. This could occur in different forms, sometimes by overpainting and essentially modernizing a more old-fashioned image, and in other cases by replacing the original with a new painting that substituted for the old. These kinds of alterations and substitutions might occur even if the earlier painting was only a half-century old, and the earlier painting could still be preserved—one such case is Duccio's *Maestà*, which in 1311 replaced Guido da Siena's *Madonna del Voto* from the 1260s.⁵⁰

This explanation might explain several aspects of the Birmingham altarpiece. If it were for the same altar as Manfredino's earlier dossal, it would make sense for it to include the same grouping of saints, especially if they were the titular saints of the altar or the church, or if these saints were associated with a particular guild or confraternity involved in the maintenance of an altar. The desire for a modern-looking altarpiece to promote devotion without the distraction of seeming "old-fashioned" would also explain both the structural and stylistic changes.⁵¹ The most distinctively Duecento features of Manfredino's altarpiece are its dossal structure and the Byzantinizing figures, so commissioning a polyptych by an artist working in Duccio's modern manner would specifically address concerns about stylistic obsolescence.

Replacing a low horizontal dossal with an early Trecento polyptych would also serve to make the altar appear more monumental—if the Goodhart Master's altarpiece did originally have pinnacles like the Monterongriffoli altarpiece, the resulting height and additional framing elements would have been far more visually impressive than a low dossal. It is worth returning here to Jennifer Sherman's suggestion that the painting may originally have had a silver ground

(Figure 8), as this would have been seen as less precious than the gold ground of the Acton dossal. Sherman notes that silver was a cheaper alternative and was often later replaced with gold when a parish could raise more funds.⁵²

Despite Sherman's observations on the coloristic unity of the panel with its cool tones and silver ground, it is also possible that silver might have been glazed to emulate gold, making it consequently appear more valuable.⁵³ Alternatively, if the panel did have an unglazed silver ground, it is worth considering why a patron might decide to replace an older altarpiece with one that was materially less precious but stylistically more modern. The idea of valuing the artist's skill over the use of luxury materials like gold and lapis is generally understood to arise only in the 15th century, so it would be surprising to see this already in the early Trecento, especially with a relatively minor follower of Duccio rather than a major artist.⁵⁴ Even if we see this as a case of valuing stylistic modernity over precious materials, this seems to be an insufficient explanation. Sherman's suggestion that silver might later be replaced when finances allowed is also possible, but this still does not resolve the initial choice to display a visibly less costly altarpiece than the earlier dossal until the new altarpiece could be gilded.

Another possibility is that the limitation of material splendor was precisely the objective. If the Birmingham altarpiece was painted for a Mendicant context, the use of silver rather than a more expensive gold ground might be connected to an investment in poverty. While commissioning a new altarpiece would certainly be expensive, having it decorated with silver is an undeniably cheaper option, and it would also visually signify to contemporary viewers that expenses were, in fact, spared. Sherman notes that further study of silver-ground altarpieces is needed; further study would also be useful to determine whether there is any consistent connection to Mendicant patronage.⁵⁵

The link between the Acton dossal and the Birmingham altarpiece also helps to explain why the Goodhart Master, a relatively minor painter who seems to have been better known for small-scale works, might have been commissioned to paint a large altarpiece. Whether the polyptych was a *modo e forma* commission or a stylistic update, the Goodhart Master would have had a clear visual model to work from. The structure of the altarpiece was usually contracted to a skilled carpenter, and the design was likely already established by the Acton dossal, so the comparatively limited task of (re)creating the earlier group of sacred figures could be assigned to a lesser-known artist working in a Ducciesque style.

Sieneese Church Contexts: Speculation and Implications

The probable link between the Acton dossal and the Birmingham altarpiece also provides a basis for some preliminary investigation about where either or both of the altarpieces might have been originally located. As noted above, Manfredino is only documented in Pistoia and Genoa, but he seems to have worked elsewhere in Tuscany, while the Goodhart Master seems to have worked exclusively in Siena and its environs. Siena, then, is the most logical point of origin for both altarpieces. While substantial additional research would be needed to determine the specific churches or altars where these paintings were originally situated (if indeed any documentation survives), it is nonetheless possible to outline some initial speculations and avenues for further study. I discuss here a few potential criteria to identify potential locations, and posit a brief list of churches worth further investigation.

Chronology is an obvious initial factor to consider—if the paintings were for the same altar, the church must date no later than 1280. Even if the Birmingham altarpiece was a *modo e forma* commission for another church, the building cannot date later than 1310. Another chronological factor to consider is restoration: an early church that was renovated in the 1310s might be a particularly strong candidate, as it would suggest an interest in visual and material renewal during this period.

Saintly dedications are also a worthwhile avenue of study. Churches dedicated to a bishop saint (whether Nicholas or another figure, if the identification on the Acton dossal is not original, or if the Goodhart Master changed the identity of the bishop), John the Baptist, the Virgin, the Archangel Michael, or perhaps even Dionysius or an apostolic saint such as Matthew, might be more likely to commission a painting showing these figures. Several notes of caution are worth addressing here. The first is the uncertainty of the identifications: while the iconography of John the Baptist, the Virgin, and the Archangel Michael is fairly conclusive, the two lateral saints are less distinctive. As the central figures of the altarpiece are generally those of the greatest importance, it does seem more likely that John or Michael reflect the *titulus* of the church, but they might instead be the titular saints of a subsidiary altar, or be associated with a patron rather than a church. Churches or altars dedicated to any of these saints (especially those whose identity is only speculative) can only be listed as preliminary options to investigate further.

Given these loose criteria, a number of churches in and around Siena are worth considering and might merit deeper archival research. One potential option is the church of San Domenico, which has a documented history of stylistic renovation. Guido da Siena's *Maestà*, originally painted for San Domenico around 1270, was selectively overpainted circa 1310: the

faces of the Madonna and the angels and the flesh of the infant Christ were redone in a Ducciesque style, essentially updating the painting so that it resembled other Trecento works. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood suggest that this “modernization” is motivated not by aesthetic concerns or a need to repair material damage, but by a desire for the painting to function as an effective and current devotional image, rather than distracting devotees by its stylistic obsolescence.⁵⁶ This would provide a strong precedent for a similar choice to replace Manfredino’s Byzantinizing dossal from the 1280s with a newer altarpiece by a follower of Duccio.

As noted earlier, the use of silver ground and the choice to commission a painting from a lesser-known artist (whose work might then be less costly) might also suggest a Mendicant investment in poverty. Both the dossal and polyptych do include a relatively unusual set of saints for a Dominican context, where depictions of Dominican saints alongside the apostles Peter and Paul were more common, but this does not necessarily preclude the possibility that either or both altarpieces could have been made for San Domenico.⁵⁷ It does, however, require an alternative explanation for the unusual choice of saints, and it might suggest that the rightmost saint should indeed be identified as Dionysius. In the thirteenth century, a number of Dominicans wrote about Dionysius: in addition to being listed in the Dominican bishop Jacobus of Voragine’s *Golden Legend*, both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas also wrote commentaries on Dionysius’s writings.⁵⁸

Although an earlier inscription on the Acton dossal seems to suggest that the figure was identified as Matthew at some point in the painting’s early history, it is unclear whether this inscription is original.⁵⁹ One possible explanation could be that the rightmost figure of both altarpieces originally represented Dionysius: if the Acton dossal was replaced by the

Birmingham polyptych and moved to a different location, inscriptions could have been added at this juncture to clarify and change the identity of the saints, who might have been unrecognizable or irrelevant in a new context. If this is the case, the later inscription labeling the figure as Dionysius should then be understood not as an error or alteration, but as a return to the original identity of the saint. While this is wholly hypothetical, such speculation about the ongoing use of these paintings can be useful to consider how changes in function or display might have motivated some of the overpainting and restoration of the Acton dossal. Further study of early images of Dionysius would also be helpful, as depictions of this saint seem to be rare in the 13th and 14th centuries.

If the two altarpieces were not painted for a Dominican context, the particular choice of saints might suggest other Sieneese churches. The most promising of these—though still uncertain—is the late 13th century church of San Niccolò del Carmine, especially given that the bishop in at least the Acton dossal can be identified as St. Nicholas.

Vittorio Lusini's study of the church indicates that the first certain documentation of the Carmelites on the site dates to 1256, when the monks began to construct a church and convent. Donations of bricks in the 1260s suggest that construction was underway, and based on a donation of money from 1298, Lusini posits that the church was most likely completed before that date.⁶⁰ It is unclear, however, whether construction might have ended before the likely date of Manfredino's dossal (the 1280s, or perhaps the very early 1290s before his arrival in Genoa). The early history and appearance of the church are also uncertain, as a result of a series of renovations, enlargements, and reconstructions from the 14th to the 16th centuries.⁶¹ It was, however, rectangular, without a transept, with four altars that may have been present in the original construction and traces of frescoes from the first half of the 14th century.⁶²

Although this chronology is loose, it could potentially fit well with a demand for an original altarpiece sometime in the last decades of the 13th century and a subsequent push for a replacement in the early 14th century. A close examination of the archives might help to solidify these dates, but some preliminary hypotheses can nonetheless be suggested. If the construction of San Niccolò was not sufficiently advanced by the later 1280s to require an altarpiece, the church could not have housed Manfredino's dossal. However, if the dossal was in another Sienese church at the time, it could have served as the model for a *modo e forma* commission to the Goodhart Master. As Joanna Cannon notes, the Carmelites did not have recently canonized saints to depict in their altarpieces, and consequently favored tradition over modernization, generally favoring Byzantinizing images of the half-length Madonna and Child.⁶³ The dossal's Byzantinizing style could have caught the attention of the Carmelites as a model.

If the church was finished by the 1280s, Manfredino could have painted his dossal for San Niccolò. The half-length Madonna and Child and the Byzantinizing figures would have suited the Carmelites' tastes, and the altarpiece does include the church's titular saint, Nicholas.⁶⁴ By the 16th century, the Carmine also had an altar dedicated to the Archangel Michael—while it is unclear how old this dedication was, it would be an avenue worth pursuing further, as it would provide another connection between the church and the saints depicted in both the dossal and the Birmingham polyptych.⁶⁵

This would leave two explanations of how the Birmingham altarpiece might be connected to the earlier dossal. The first, again, would be a *modo e forma* commission for another church. If this is the case, it might be worth considering whether other Carmelite patrons in the region might have wanted their own version of the dossal. Alternatively, the Carmelites could have commissioned the Birmingham altarpiece as part of a larger project of renovating their church

and commissioning new paintings in the first few decades of the Trecento. Although the idea of replacing the Acton dossal with a modern polyptych initially seems to contradict Cannon's arguments about the traditionalism of Carmelite patronage, it nonetheless can still plausibly be connected to a larger interplay between preservation and modernization attested in San Niccolò itself.

Although much of the original church is lost, Lusini notes that surviving fragments of painting found below a subsequent layer of intonaco suggest that considerable sections of the interior were frescoed. Based on the small surviving section of a fresco of the Madonna and Child (Figure 11), he dates this decoration loosely to the first half of the Trecento, situating it between Simone Martini and the Lorenzetti.⁶⁶ He further notes that Pietro Lorenzetti was commissioned to paint an altarpiece for the Carmine—a document from 1329 notes that the friars had commissioned a major polyptych from Lorenzetti, but were unable to afford the 50 florins that it cost, and had to seek financial assistance from the Council of Nine.⁶⁷

Although the loose dating of the frescoes again makes it challenging to determine whether renovations occurred around the same time that the Birmingham polyptych was painted, Lusini's comparison to Simone Martini and the Lorenzetti would allow for a date as early as the mid-1310s or the start of the 1320s. Stylistically, as well, the frescoed Madonna recalls the same visual elements that appear in Duccio and the Goodhart Master: the tilt of the Virgin's head, the curve of brow into nose, the dark shadows and angular juncture where the flat plane of her forehead meets the deeply recessed eye socket, the elongated nose and small mouth, the overall modeling and shading of the face and jaw, and even the ripple of drapery at the proper left of the Virgin's head. These formal elements are already left behind in Pietro Lorenzetti's 1329 altarpiece, which may well suggest an early date for the fresco.

This early dating would then provide a compelling explanation for the choice to commission an updated altarpiece, as the Acton dossal would have seemed old-fashioned and visually distracting compared to the newer fresco decoration. Though the friars' poverty might seem to preclude such an expense, it might also explain the less costly silver ground of the Birmingham altarpiece. Indeed, the fact that they chose to commission a major altarpiece from Pietro Lorenzetti despite their lack of funds suggests a strong desire to have new and pictorially innovative altarpieces in their church. Careful archival research would be necessary to determine the plausibility of this theory, but if it proves to be the case, it might shed further light on the patronage and artistic sensibilities of the Carmelite order.

The survival of Manfredino's dossal, especially if it was replaced less than half a century after it was first painted, suggests a very particular understanding of the function of religious images. Commissioning a newer-looking altarpiece indicates not only a recognition of stylistic difference and obsolescence, but also an awareness of the broader practice across other Sienese churches and monastic orders of repainting or replacing older images. While the *Madonna del Voto* that Duccio's *Maestà* replaced was kept for its agency as an intercessor, the choice to preserve Manfredino's dossal could instead have been motivated by an interest in Byzantinizing painting. While the dossal might no longer have suited the new decoration of the church, it would still have been of value to a group of friars with an interest in old images, and could have been kept elsewhere in the convent.

Although compelling, this possibility and the others listed above currently remain speculative, so it is also worth noting some additional churches which might have housed one or both of the altarpieces. Given the presence of John the Baptist and the Archangel Michael in the positions of honor, the altarpieces could have been associated with the Baptistery (though here

again, further research would be needed to determine baptismal practices in Siena prior to the construction of the current Baptistery), or with the church of San Michele in Donato.

Alternatively, the altarpieces could also have been painted not for a church in Siena itself, but in the surrounding countryside. Especially if the Monterongriffoli altarpiece was indeed painted by the Goodhart Master, it would attest to his involvement in painting altarpieces for small towns in the countryside near Siena. If the Birmingham altarpiece was not painted to replace the Acton dossal but as a *modo e forma* commission, the towns around Siena interested in emulating the art of the city might be a promising place to look. Additional research would be needed to determine whether the kind of stylistic updating that occurred in major urban churches was also practiced in the surrounding countryside.

One final option is that either or both of the altarpieces could have been painted for a *pieve*, or parish church with its own baptistery, as this would explain the presence of John the Baptist.⁶⁸ A preliminary look at the Sienese countryside indicates that there are at least two Duecento *pievi* dedicated to the Archangel Michael—one at Sant’Angelo in Colle documented as early as 1212, and another at Montepertuso documented from 1214.⁶⁹ There are also a number of *pievi* dedicated to Mary or to John the Baptist, which might also reasonably have housed one of these paintings. Further research would be necessary to uncover more reliable information about these *pievi* and other churches in the province. Annalisa Coppolaro-Nowell’s 2013 volume on *Chiese, pievi e segreti sulle colline di Siena* (available only in Italian libraries) would likely provide further information, and visits to potential churches and parish archives might also prove fruitful.

Preliminary Conclusions and Further Research

An examination of the existing scholarship about the attribution and reconstruction of the Birmingham polyptych provides a general picture of the altarpiece, making it possible to situate the painting within a broader Sieneese context. The polyptych's similarities to Manfredino da Pistoia's earlier Acton dossal—the comparable scale of the two paintings, the uncertain identity but similar iconography of the saints, and the Sieneese practices of both *modo e forma* commissions and stylistic renovations of older altarpieces—suggest a plausible connection between the two works.

In terms of provenance and an understanding of regional schools in the late Duecento and early Trecento, positing a link between these two altarpieces might elucidate Manfredino's currently little-known career. Documents attest to Manfredino's presence in Pistoia in 1280 and in Genoa in 1292-1293, but if indeed the Acton dossal was painted for a church in or near Siena, it is possible that further documentation of the artist could be found also in Sieneese archives.⁷⁰ This might shed light on the links between Florentine and Sieneese artistic practice in the late 14th century, and about artistic mobility during this early period.

The connection between these paintings also points to a need for further archival research to attempt to determine the original location and the precise link between these two altarpieces. While this essay lists a number of speculative possibilities worth investigating further, the church of San Niccolò in Carmine particularly merits further study. The identity of the saints—which could potentially be clarified further through additional technical examination of the inscriptions on the Acton dossal—might also help to generate a comprehensive list of possible churches. Such a list would include churches in Siena and nearby towns whose *tituli* include a bishop saint

(possibly Nicholas), John the Baptist, the Virgin, the Archangel Michael, or an early Christian saint (possibly Dionysius or Matthew); but it should also include *pievi* in the surrounding countryside, especially those with relevant dedications. Looking specifically for a *modo e forma* commission or documents about a replacement altarpiece from circa 1310-1320 might also narrow the search.

Alternatively, provenance could also be studied through the lens of collection history. While the Acton archives are unavailable and no earlier provenance for the dossal is known, the painting must have entered the Acton collection sometime between 1903 and 1925.⁷¹ The Birmingham altarpiece entered the Kress collection in 1941, and was previously owned by Count Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi in Florence.⁷² A note by F. Mason Perkins on the back of a photograph in the Kress file indicates that prior to this, the painting “long remained, comparatively unheeded, in the seclusion of an ancient Tuscan villa.”⁷³ While it seems unlikely that either painting could independently be traced to a previous owner, it might be possible to see whether the Actons had any contact with Contini-Bonacossi, or to consider broader patterns of collecting Siennese paintings in the late 19th and early 20th century as a means of investigating how the two altarpieces could have arrived in Florence.

¹ Harry B. Wehle, *A Catalogue of Italian, Spanish, and Byzantine Paintings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1940): 72.

² Wilhelm Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection: Birmingham Museum of Art* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1952), 15. I currently do not have access to the Italian edition of Van Marle, which is the reference Suida provides (*Le Scuole della pittura italiana*, vol. II, fig. 94 p. 141). Working from the English edition (Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, Volume 1, [Springer, 1923]), the only painting of the *Madonna and Child* in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston which appears in the correct section of Van Marle is fig. 99 p. 148, now assigned to Ugolino di Nerio (see <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31548>).

³ Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection*, 1952, 15. Note that the uncertainty in identifying the painting is again due to the fact that I do not have access to the Italian edition of Van Marle which Suida references (vol II, fig. 45 p. 70). My identification of the painting as Duccio’s *Polyptych 28* is based again on the Springer English edition of Van Marle, where the polyptych is listed as figs. 41 and 42, pp. 69-70.

⁴ Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection*, 1952, 15.

⁵ Dorothy Shorr, *The Christ Child in Devotional Images in Italy during the XIV Century* (New York: G. Wittenborn, 1954), pp. 152, 154, and figs. 23 Siena 7 and 23 Siena 8.

⁶ Coor-Achenbach, “Contributions to the Study of Ugolino di Nerio’s Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 37 (1955): n. 57 pp. 163-64.

⁷ Coor-Achenbach, “Contributions to the Study,” note 57 p. 164.

⁸ John Pope-Hennessy accepts the attribution of the Birmingham Altarpiece to the Goodhart Master, but rejects Coor’s other additions to the corpus (see John Pope-Hennessy, *The Robert Lehman Collection: Italian Paintings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), 6). Larry Kanter, *Italian Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, Volume 1 (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1994), 81, also thinks that the Monterongriffoli altarpiece is derivative of the Goodhart Master painted by a less skilled artist.

⁹ Compare Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection*, 1952, 14-15, to Wilhelm Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection: Birmingham Museum of Art* (Birmingham: Museum of Art, 1959), 10-12.

¹⁰ Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection* 1959, 11.

¹¹ See Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools XIII-XV Century* (London: Phaidon Press, 1966), 19; James H. Stubblebine, *Duccio di Buoninsegna and his School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 106-07; and Jennifer Sherman, “A New Leaf: Recent Technical Discoveries in the Goodhart Ducciesque Master’s *Madonna and Child with Four Saints*,” in *Studying and Conserving Paintings: Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection* (London: Archetype Publications, in association with The Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, 2006), 66. Other sources which list the painting do not name or attempt to identify the saints.

¹² On this iconography and its variants, see Shorr, *The Christ Child*, especially pp. 110-15 for the flower, pp. 172-74 for the bird, and pp. 152-55 for Christ’s interest in drapery.

¹³ Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Kress Collection*, 18.

¹⁴ Stubblebine, *Duccio di Buoninsegna*, 106-10.

¹⁵ As the Monterongriffoli altarpiece still retains its original pinnacles, it would be a particularly useful case study to test Stubblebine’s hypothesis by comparing the smaller-scale pinnacle figures to the larger figures of the main panels. Further study of the Monterongriffoli altarpiece—including higher-resolution photographs, direct observation, and technical analysis—would be particularly helpful both to clarify the relationship between the two altarpieces, and to better understand the original appearance of the Birmingham altarpiece, which would also likely have once included such pinnacles.

¹⁶ Federico Zeri, *Italian Paintings: Sieneese and Central Italian Schools* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980) 43.

¹⁷ Luciani Cateni, “Appunti sul ‘Goodhart Master’.” *Prospettiva* 45 (1986): 66.

¹⁸ Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 71-74.

¹⁹ Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 69-71.

²⁰ Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 71-74.

²¹ See Sherman, “A New Leaf,” fig. 12 p. 71.

²² As noted above, Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection*, 1959, 11 proposes the comparison to Polyptych 28.

²³ Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 66. I am relying here on Sherman’s article, as these x-radiographs are not included in the digital Kress file (available at <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/3585>), and not all of her observations are included in the scanned conservation reports by Alan Burroughs and Mario Modestini. Further information and direct access to the early x-radiographs would be useful to better reconstruct the original structure of the altarpiece. It would be especially helpful to know whether the absence of visible dowel holes connecting to the central panel might suggest that it has been cut down at the sides (a possibility Sherman does not raise), whether these holes were obscured by the insect damage Sherman notes in the reports from the 1941 restoration, or whether the central panel might have been connected to the flanking saints in a different manner (for instance, whether a particular frame structure might have held it in place).

²⁴ Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 66. Further technical information here would be particularly interesting—Sherman bases this suggestion on the fact that Sieneese polyptychs from the early Trecento often had such gables, but she does not include any additional information about how this impacts the construction of an altarpiece. It would be particularly intriguing to have access to technical studies of other altarpieces such as Polyptych 28, which retains its original gables, to know whether it was common practice for gables to be made from a separate plank of wood, or whether they were usually part of the same panel as the larger saint below. Sherman does not provide information about the edges of the panels of the Birmingham altarpiece—for example, whether they were trimmed at any point—though she does note that the original edges are hidden by thin wood strips that were later glued around each panel.

²⁵ Kanter, *Italian Paintings*, 81-83, lists two such pinnacles, one [in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston](#), and another in the Frick Art Museum in Pittsburgh (now attributed [on the museum’s website](#) to the Master of Sansepolcro). Kanter’s catalogue provides a brief note on the condition of the Boston panel, noting that the right gable has been

trimmed; he does not however comment on whether the sides have also been cut down. Such information would help to determine the original dimensions of the panel—the current width of 17cm is far too narrow for it to sit on top of one of the saints from the Birmingham altarpiece, as these panels are each 34.6cm in width, but if the Boston gable were originally triangular, these dimensions might be closer. Alternatively, if this non-triangular form is original, it is more reminiscent of the gables on Duccio's Polyptych 48, which might suggest that they belong to a more elaborate altarpiece structure. This would mean either that the Goodhart Master was involved in painting another (now lost) polyptych with more registers; or, if the gable is associated with the Birmingham Altarpiece, that this polyptych should be reconstructed with an additional smaller register of saints. If this gable were originally associated with the Birmingham altarpiece, it would also be important to question why the Goodhart Master chose to paint an angel with instruments of the Passion (the column and whip of the Flagellation), as this iconography would suggest an overall program invested in the death of Christ—see below on the iconography of Christ with a bird.

²⁶ Further technical information would be needed to determine whether the frame of the Monterongriffoli altarpiece is original, but it certainly falls within the realm of what an early 14th century Sieneese frame might have looked like—see for example Joanna Cannon, “Simone Martini, the Dominicans and the Early Sieneese Polyptych,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982): 81, esp. n. 95.

²⁷ For a discussion of Sieneese altarpiece forms in the late 13th and early 14th century, see Edward B. Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting* (Florence: Olschki, 1949), 168; Christa Gardner von Teuffel, “The Buttressed Altarpiece: A Forgotten Aspect of Tuscan Fourteenth Century Altarpiece Design,” *Jarbuch der Berliner Museen* 21 (1979) 21-65, especially p. 43; and Cannon, “Simone Martini,” 78-82. For an overview of altarpiece development, see Alexander Nagel, “Altarpiece (Definition and History),” *The Dictionary of Art* (London: MacMillan, 1996), 707-13.

²⁸ Cannon, “Simone Martini,” 82.

²⁹ Unpublished museum files at the Villa La Pietra

³⁰ Thanks to Kim Frost for her technical study of the painting, to be discussed further below. These measurements do not include the modern molding, so they reflect the original dimensions of the dossal.

³¹ Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 66.

³² Positing a frame box of 12cm on either side, with a centimeter of space between each panel, would result in a width of exactly 205.5 centimeters, the same as the Acton dossal. These numbers are speculative, and would require measurements of other surviving Sieneese frames from the early Trecento, but they nonetheless seem plausible.

³³ George Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting* (Florence: Sansoni, 1952) 307-08, fig. 352. Kaftal's book was first published in 1952, with an introduction by Richard Offner, Coor-Achenbach's advisor at the Institute of Fine Arts. It seems quite plausible that Coor-Achenbach would have consulted this volume while conducting research for her 1955 article on Ugolino di Nerio—she could have seen the Acton dossal here, and been struck by the similar grouping of saints.

³⁴ Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints*, 755-56, fig. 827.

³⁵ Suida, *The Samuel H. Kress Collection*, 1959, 11.

³⁶ Many thanks to Kim Frost for her careful and thorough technical analysis. For more detailed information, see her technical entry on the Acton Dossal, and our collaborative essay on the painting (both unpublished).

³⁷ Suida identifies the figure in the Birmingham altarpiece as Augustine—see note 10 above, Suida, *The Samuel H Kress Collection*, 1959, 11.

³⁸ Further study of the language of gestures in the early 14th century might indicate a particular significance to this gesture.

³⁹ See Dorothy Shorr, *The Christ Child in Devotional Images*, 172.

⁴⁰ For this comparison, see Luiz C. Marques, *La peinture du Duecento en Italie Centrale* (Paris: Picard, 1987), 205-06, who poignantly compares the Christ Child to the “petits héros de bandes dessinées” [the little heroes in comic strips]. For Marques, who dates the Acton dossal strikingly early, to the 1270s, and the retable to the early 1280s, Manfredino's panel negotiates between the more monumental painting of Cimabue and the miniaturism of the Master of San Gaggio (now identified as Grifo di Tancredi). Marques also notes the mobility of miniatures and small paintings, which potentially explains how Manfredino might have known this composition. He additionally lists a third comparison where the Christ Child is shown with the same cloak (see Marques, figure 261 p207), though here the figure is fully clothed.

⁴¹ Dorothy Shorr does not include the nude torso as a particular category in her volume on *The Christ Child in Devotional Images*, but she does in passing list the nude torso as a Ducciesque feature (see Shorr, *The Christ Child*, 61). See also Stubblebine, *Duccio di Buoninsegna and his School*, for a catalogue of the works of Duccio's followers.

- ⁴² See Alessandro Conti, “Appunti Pistoiesi,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* 1 (1971): 116-18.
- ⁴³ Edward B. Garrison, “Note on the Survival of Thirteenth-Century Panel Paintings in Italy,” *The Art Bulletin* 54 (1972): 140.
- ⁴⁴ For transcriptions of documents and a more thorough discussion of the written evidence of Manfredino’s activity, see Pèleo Bacci, *Documenti toscani per la storia dell’arte*, Volume 1 (Florence: Gonnelli, 1910), 95-101; see also Clario Di Fabio, “Gli affreschi di Manfredino da Pistoia nella chiesa di Nostra Signora del Carmine a Genova: Gli affreschi di Manfredino e altri documenti genovesi di cultura figurativa ‘assistiate,’” *Bollettino d’arte* 96 (2011): 105-07; and Conti, “Appunti Pistoiesi,” 116-19, who provides a typical interpretation. On the Goodhart Master, see Stubblebine, *Duccio di Buoninsegna*, 106.
- ⁴⁵ Conti, “Appunti Pistoiesi,” 118-9; Di Fabio, “Gli affreschi di Manfredino,” 106.
- ⁴⁶ Di Fabio, “Gli affreschi di Manfredino,” 106.
- ⁴⁷ Cecilia Cavalca, “La pala d’altare.” In *L’arte rinascimentale nel contesto*, edited by Edoardo Villata (Milan: Jaca, 2015), 314-15.
- ⁴⁸ See Gardner von Teuffel, “The Buttressed Altarpiece,” 40-41. There seems to be some debate on whether the painting should be attributed to Duccio or an anonymous copyist; see Francesco Arcangeli, “La *Maestà* di Duccio a Massa Marittima,” *Paragone* 249 (1970): 4-14.
- ⁴⁹ On the dossal versus the polyptych in early Trecento Siena, see Garrison, *Italian Romanesque Panel Painting*, 168. On the importance of carpenters in early commissions, see Cavalca, “La pala d’altare,” 314-15.
- ⁵⁰ Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 78-80.
- ⁵¹ This is the explanation that Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 78-80, posit for the practice of updating old-fashioned altarpieces.
- ⁵² See notes 19-21 above—Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 69-74.
- ⁵³ Sherman, “A New Leaf,” 70-71.
- ⁵⁴ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 14-23.
- ⁵⁵ See the appendix from Sherman, “A New Leaf,” p. 75, which provides a preliminary list of silver-ground panels and flags the area for further study.
- ⁵⁶ See Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 75-83.
- ⁵⁷ Julian Gardner, “Altars, Altarpieces, and Art History,” in *Italian Altarpieces, 1250-1550: Function and Design*, edited by Eve Borsook and Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 17, notes the popularity of Peter and Paul in Mendicant altarpieces. For their general popularity and specific associations to the Dominicans, see Joanna Cannon, “Simone Martini and the Dominicans,” 79.
- ⁵⁸ See Jacobus of Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 622; and David Burrell and Isabelle Moulin, “Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius,” *Modern Theology* 24 (2008): 633-49.
- ⁵⁹ See note 37 above, on the technical study of the Acton dossal.
- ⁶⁰ Vittorio Lusini, *La chiesa di S. Niccolò del Carmine in Siena* (Siena: Pontificia S. Bernardino, 1907), 6-7.
- ⁶¹ Lusini, *La chiesa di S. Niccolò*, 7-8.
- ⁶² Lusini, *La chiesa di S. Niccolò*, 11-13.
- ⁶³ Joanna Cannon, “The Creation, Meaning, and Audience of the Early Siennese Polyptych: Evidence from the Friars” in *Italian Altarpieces, 1250-1550: Function and Design*, edited by Eve Borsook and Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 50-52.
- ⁶⁴ Further technical study would be needed to confirm that the earlier inscription for St. Nicholas does not identify this figure as a different saint, as with Dionysius; however, limited imaging does not suggest that his identity changed.
- ⁶⁵ Lusini, *La chiesa di S. Niccolò*, 36-40 notes that the Sani family renovated the altarpiece in the 16th century and commissioned Domenico Beccafumi to paint an altarpiece of *Saint Michael Defeating the Rebel Angels*. A close study of the documents of this renovation could potentially provide further information, as Lusini only notes that when the altar was renovated again in the 17th century, nothing remained of the original decoration (see n. 1 p. 40).
- ⁶⁶ Lusini, *La chiesa di S. Niccolò*, 12-13.
- ⁶⁷ Lusini, *La chiesa di S. Niccolò*, 17-18.
- ⁶⁸ A very preliminary list of *pievi* in the province of Siena exists through Wikipedia: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Pievi_della_provincia_di_Siena. A more reliable source would be Annalisa Coppolaro-Nowell, *Chiese, pievi e segreti sulle colline di Siena* (Monteriggioni: Edizioni Il Leccio, 2013), but this appears to only be available at the KHI in Florence, and the Hertziana and the Biblioteca Nazionale in Rome.

⁶⁹ The Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo at Sant'Angelo in Colle, Montalcino, is briefly listed on Wikipedia ([https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieve_di_San_Michele_Arcangelo_\(Sant%27Angelo_in_Colle\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieve_di_San_Michele_Arcangelo_(Sant%27Angelo_in_Colle))) and on an Italian site, La scheda di Toscana (<http://web.rete.toscana.it/Fede/luogo.jsp?identificativo=1596&lingua=italiano>). The Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo at Montepertuso is again noted both on Wikipedia ([https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieve_di_San_Michele_Arcangelo_\(Montepertuso\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieve_di_San_Michele_Arcangelo_(Montepertuso))) and La scheda di Toscana (<http://web.rete.toscana.it/Fede/luogo.jsp?identificativo=2415&lingua=italiano>). The series *I luoghi della fede* published by Mondadori may also provide additional information and help to create a comprehensive list of potential churches where either or both of the altarpieces may have been displayed, but a thorough search of these volumes exceeds the current scope of this project.

⁷⁰ See note 45 above—the known documents are discussed in Bacci, *Documenti toscani*, 95-101; Di Fabio, “Gli affreschi di Manfredino,” 105-07; and Conti, “Appunti Pistoiesi,” 116-19.

⁷¹ The Actons began collecting after 1903, and the dossier was first published by Van Marle in 1925, who already listed it as being in the Acton collection. See Raimond Van Marle, *Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, Volume V (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1925), 441. On the Acton collection, see <https://lapietra.nyu.edu/section/collection/>.

⁷² See Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Kress Collection*, 18; and the Birmingham Museum's online catalogue entry: <https://www.artsbma.org/collection/madonna-and-christ-child-with-a-bishop-saint-saint-john-the-baptist-saint-michael-and-an-unidentified-saint/>.

⁷³ For a digital copy of this file, see <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/3585>.



Figure 1. Goodhart Ducciesque Master, *Madonna and Child with a Bishop Saint, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and an Unidentified Saint*, c. 1310-early 1320s. From: <https://www.artsbma.org/collection/madonna-and-christ-child-with-a-bishop-saint-saint-john-the-baptist-saint-michael-and-an-unidentified-saint/>.



Figure 2. Manfredino da Pistoia, *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and Dionysius*, c. 1280s. Photo courtesy of Francesca Baldry and the Villa La Pietra; author photoshop to remove modern engaged molding.



Figure 3. Goodhart Ducciesque Master, *Madonna and Child with the Annunciation and the Nativity*, c. 1310-1315. From: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436537>.



Figure 4. Goodhart Ducciesque Master (artist named for this panel, formerly in the Goodhart collection), *Madonna and Child with Donors*, c. 1315-30. From: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/458964>.



Figure 5. Attributed to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master or a follower, *Madonna and Child with Saints Marcellinus, Lawrence, Leonhard, and Augustine Martyr*, c. 1310s-1320s, Monterongriffoli. From: <https://provincedesienne.com/2018/12/16/maestro-della-maesta-gondi-madonna-col-bambino-san-marcellino-san-laurentino-san-leonardo-santagostino-martire/>.



Figure 6. Duccio and workshop, *Madonna and Child with Saints Augustine, Paul, Peter, and Dominic* (Polyptych No. 28), c. 1300-1305. From: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/duccio/various/7poly28.html.



Figure 7. Duccio, *Maestà* (front), 1308-1311. From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duccio_maesta1021.jpg.



Figure 8. Goodhart Ducciesque Master, *Madonna and Child with a Bishop Saint, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and an Unidentified Saint*, c. 1310-early 1320s, digitally recolored by Jennifer Sherman. From: Jennifer Sherman, "A New Leaf: Recent Technical Discoveries in the Goodhart Ducciesque Master's *Madonna and Child with Four Saints*," in *Studying and Conserving Paintings: Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection* (London: Archetype Publications, in association with The Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, 2006), fig. 12 p. 71.



Figure 9. Detail of infrared photography, Manfredino da Pistoia, *Madonna and Child with Saints Nicholas, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and Dionysius*, c. 1280s. Photo courtesy of Kim Frost.



Figure 10. Grifo di Tancredi, *Madonna and Child with Four Saints, the Crucifixion, and the Flagellation*, c. 1270s or 1280s. From: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grifo di tancredi - Tabernacle de Berlin \(inv. N1047\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grifo_di_tancredi_-_Tabernacle_de_Berlin_(inv._N1047).jpg).



Figure 11. Anonymous, fragmentary fresco of the Madonna and Child from San Niccolò del Carmine, Siena, first half of the 14th century. From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Siena,_San_Niccol%C3%B2_del_Carmine,_interno,_frammenti_di_affreschi_del_xiv_secolo.jpg?uselang=it.

Chronological Bibliography of References to the Birmingham Altarpiece

- Suida, W. E. *The Samuel H. Kress Collection: Birmingham Museum of Art*. Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1952. (See pp. 14-15—attributes the painting to a follower of Duccio, Sienese School, c. 1320; identifies the saints as a Bishop, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and an Apostle.)
- Shorr, Dorothy. *The Christ Child in Devotional Images in Italy during the XIV Century*. New York: G. Wittenborn, 1954. (See pp. 152, 154, and fig. 23 Siena 8 p. 156—first source to attribute the painting to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master.)
- Coor-Achenbach, Gertrude. “Contributions to the Study of Ugolino di Nerio’s Art.” *The Art Bulletin* 37 (1955): 153-65. (See pp.163-64 n. 57, and fig. 19—attributes the painting to the Goodhart Master, as a follower of Ugolino di Nerio, dated c. 1320; identifies the saints as a Bishop, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and Dionysius the Areopagite (?).)
- Suida, W. E. *The Samuel H. Kress Collection: Birmingham Museum of Art*. Birmingham: Birmingham Museum of Art, 1959. (See pp. 10-12—attributes the painting to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master, c. 1320; identifies the saints as a Bishop (probably Augustine), John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and Dionysius the Areopagite (?).)
- Rusk Shapley, Fern. *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: Italian Schools XIII-XV Century*. London: Phaidon Press, 1966. (See p. 19 and fig. 40—attributes the painting to the Master of the Goodhart Madonna, dated to the 1320s; identifies the saints as a bishop, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and possibly Dionysius the Areopagite.)
- Stubblebine, James H. *Duccio di Buoninsegna and his School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. (See pp. 106-07, vol. I, and figs. 254-55, vol. II—attributes the painting to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master, dated c. 1310-1315; identifies the saints as an unknown bishop, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and Dionysius the Areopagite.)
- Zeri, Federico. *Italian Paintings: Sienese and Central Italian Schools*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980. (See pp. 43, 44—attributes the painting to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master.)
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- Pope-Hennessy, John. *Italian Paintings in the Robert Lehman Collection*. New York and Princeton: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, 1987. (See p. 6—attributes the painting to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master.)
- Sherman, Jennifer. “A New Leaf: Recent Technical Discoveries in the Goodhart Ducciesque Master’s *Madonna and Child with Four Saints*.” In *Studying and Conserving Paintings: Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection*. London: Archetype Publications,

in association with The Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, 2006, 64-76. (See entire essay—attributes the painting to the Goodhart Ducciesque Master, active c. 1310-1330; identifies the saints as an unidentified bishop, John the Baptist, the Archangel Michael, and possibly Dionysius the Areopagite).