

*Scenes from the Life of Virgin*, ca. 1480–90  
Guidoccio Cozzarelli (Guidoccio di Giovanni di Marco Cozzarelli)  
Egg tempera on cradled wood panel  
26<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 21<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (68 × 54 cm)  
Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida  
61.022.000 (K-1286)

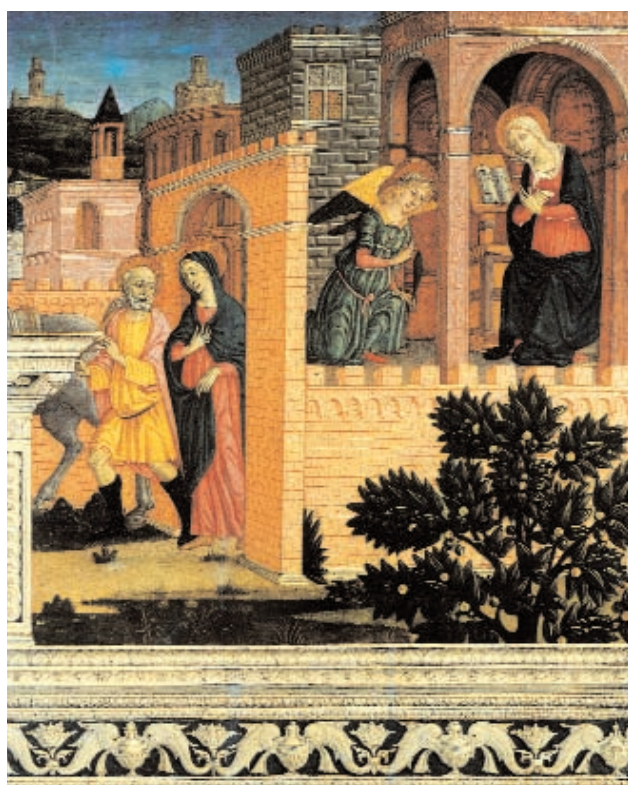


FIG. 1. *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin*, before cleaning and restoration.



FIG. 2. *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin* (fig. 1), after cleaning and restoration.

## Guidoccio Cozzarelli's *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin*

*Dianne Dwyer Modestini*

**T**HIS UNUSUAL COMPOSITION WAS EXHIBITED in “Painting in Renaissance Siena” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1988; on that occasion a number of intriguing questions were raised about its original context. In 1990 the painting was cleaned and restored at the Conservation Center in New York (figs. 1 and 2). As Laurence Kanter noted in the exhibition catalogue, the grain of the wood is vertical, so the painting could not have belonged to a predella but was most likely part of an altarpiece although no related fragments have as yet come to light.<sup>1</sup> The restoration did not yield any information about its position in the altarpiece as all four edges have been cut and narrow wood strips were added to all sides. The fragment is made up of two planks, that on the right measuring approximately 30 cm, a reasonable size for a full board. Taking into consideration the elements of its composition, it could be posited that it belonged on the right edge of an altarpiece.

The painting is generally slightly worn; certain passages, especially the details of the brickwork in the townscape, were freely reinforced during an old restoration.<sup>2</sup> Despite the wear, the fragment is essentially in good condition for a work of this period, and there can be no question that the foreground architecture is of a piece with the rest. In his catalogue entry Kanter proposed that it was a modern restoration disguising the original appearance as it was recorded in a photograph of the painting while it belonged to R. Langton Douglas.<sup>3</sup> As Shapley notes in the Kress catalogue, “the stylized dolphin and vase border at the bottom is unusual in a panel painting but

would be normal in a miniature of the period. Close parallels are offered in some of Cozzarelli's illuminations of 1480–81, now in the Piccolomini Library."<sup>4</sup> This set of choir books (under discussion are three separate books containing five illustrations by Cozzarelli) was originally commissioned for the Ospedale della Scala from Guidoccio Cozzarelli and Bernardino di Michele Cignoni and includes Antiphonaries 6E, 15Q and 26R with five miniatures by Cozzarelli illustrating the story of *Isaac and Jacob*, the *Assumption*, the *Birth of Saint John the Baptist*, the *Nativity of the Virgin* and *A Bishop Leading a Procession into a Church*.<sup>5</sup> (Antiphonary 7G incorporates a signed illustration of *Moses and the Burning Bush* by Cignoni whose work consistently demonstrates a hand less refined than Cozzarelli's and a predilection for a different set of decorative motifs.<sup>6</sup>) The border design of dolphins as well as the central column terminating in a dolphin frieze in the page *Isaac Blessing Jacob* (fig. 3) are related to the architectural details in our painting as are similar motifs decorating the border of the *Bishop Leading a Procession into a Church* (fig. 4), while similar treatment of the architecture is seen in two *cassone* panels by Cozzarelli, *The Return of Ulysses* in the Musée de Cluny and *The Legend of Cloelia* in the Metropolitan Museum.

Kanter suggested that the Coral Gables fragment and *The Birth of the Virgin*, illustrated by van Marle while it was in the collection of the Baron Michele Lazzaroni (obviously much repainted by Verzetta, Lazzaroni's restorer,<sup>7</sup> and later offered for sale by the Galleria Gilberto Algranti, May 5–30, 1971) might be part of the same composition. Kanter's notion is appealing not only because of the markedly similar figure types but also because of the similar treatment of the incised halo of Saint Joseph in our picture and that of Saint Elizabeth in the ex-Lazzaroni painting. If however, as recorded, the Lazzaroni panel measures 67 × 58 cm, then the Coral Gables painting's dimensions, 68 × 54 cm, make this association problematic since there is a notable difference in the scale of the figures—nearly twice as large in the painting formerly in the Lazzaroni Collection in which the figures occupy most of the composition.



FIG. 3. *Isaac Blessing Jacob*, Guidoccio Cozzarelli, tempera on parchment, Biblioteca Piccolomini, Siena.

A curious anomaly in *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin* is the relationship of the existing architecture to a larger composition. It has been suggested, presumably by comparison with Cozzarelli's Pannilini altarpiece *Madonna and Child with Saints Simon and Thaddeus* in San Bernardino in Sinalunga<sup>8</sup> where the Madonna appears seated on a carved throne placed in front of a dolphin-decorated frieze, that the monumental frieze and pilaster in the Coral Gables painting formed part of a similar throne.<sup>9</sup> This enticing hypothesis is difficult to sustain since the pilaster sits directly on top of the frieze and in the same plane, while the frieze must continue to complete the dolphin-vase-dolphin motif. It is impossible to imagine how these two elements could become the arms of a presumed throne and would exclude standing saints whose heads would project above the frieze as in the Sinalunga Altarpiece. With the existing information it is only possible to conjecture how these architectural elements developed in the lost altarpiece, but it is more likely that they formed part of an architectural background, a palace or urban scene. This would imply that the principal subject of the altarpiece was not a Madonna and



FIG. 4. *Bishop Leading a Procession into a Church*, Guidoccio Cozzarelli, tempera on parchment, Biblioteca Piccolomini, Siena.

Child but another episode connected with the life of the Virgin, and not a Nativity or Adoration of the Magi which are depicted in rustic settings.

A curious aspect of the painting's technique is worth noting. Both Cozzarelli and his master, Matteo di Giovanni, often used the method of making a complete underpainting in *grisaille* and finishing the painting by glazing over the monochrome rendering with washes of semi-transparent color. The gray appearance of the heads in many of their works is due to the removal in a past cleaning of the delicate pink final layer. In the Coral Gables fragment the final glaze had been much abraded, and an attempt to suggest it was made during the restoration. The worn *affreschi* in the former dining hall or *cenacolo* of Sant'Agostino in Monticiano attributed to Cozzarelli by Cesare Brandi in 1931 demonstrate the artist's affinity for monochrome painting.<sup>10</sup>

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## NOTES

1. K. Christiansen, L. Kanter and C.B. Strehlke, *Painting in Renaissance Siena, 1420–1500* (exhib. cat.). New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988, pp. 283–5.
2. The provenance is from Fern Rusk Shapley, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, Vol. 1: Italian Schools, XIII–XV Century* (London, Phaidon, 1966), p. 159. The supposition about the date of the removal of the restoration is my own. Dr. Friedrich Lippmann, Berlin (sold, Rudolph Lepke, Berlin, Nov. 26–27, 1912, catalogue by M.J. Friedländer, No. 35, as Domenico Cozzarelli, bought by Kleinberger); R.L. Douglas, London (purchased, 1922)—exhibited: “Antiquities and Works of Art,” Olympia, London, July 19–August 1, 1928, no. x-21, as Guidoccio Cozzarelli; London market; Contini-Bonacossi, Florence; Kress acquisition, 1939. The misleading classical ruin must have been removed during a restoration done between 1928 and 1939, possibly in Florence by one of Contini-Bonacossi's restorers, before its purchase by Samuel H. Kress.
3. Exhibition Olympia, London, July 19–August 1, 1928, no. x-21.
4. Shapley 1966 (cited in note 2).
5. Raimond Van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, Vol. xvi. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1937, pp. 368–9.
6. Mario Cignoni, *Bernardino Cignoni, Maestro Miniatore del Rinascimento (Casole d'Elsa 1448/9–Siena 1496)*. Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1996.
7. Van Marle 1937 (cited in note 5), p. 365.
8. Ludwig Pardekooper, “Due famiglie rivali e due pale di Guidoccio Cozzarelli per Sinalunga,” *Prospettiva*, No. 72 (October 1993), pp. 51–65.
9. Shapley 1966 (cited in note 2).
10. *The Crucifixion, The Carrying of the Cross, and The Deposition* (three paintings) attributed to Guidoccio Cozzarelli by Cesare Brandi in 1931, are painted with white and yellow earth monochrome. The background, as Brandi points out, is a red similar to a bole preparation, and the only other color is the red blood flowing from Christ's wounds. Originally published in *Daedalo*, and reprinted in *Lecceto e gli Eremiti Agostiniani in Terra di Siena* (Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 1990), pp. 315–27.

## PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

Figs. 1 and 2, p. 128. Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL, Samuel H. Kress Collection (61.022.000).

