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A NEW DEVOTIONAL PANEL TYPE IN  
FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

by

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A small Sienese panel in Christ Church Library, Oxford, arouses special interest by reason of its unique shape and iconography (*fig. 1*).<sup>1</sup> In a central compartment the Madonna and Child are seated upon a throne, accompanied by six angels. A small female figure kneels at their feet, and the Child leans slightly forward to bless her. A tall, narrow compartment at the left contains a Crucifixion, a similar compartment at the right a Stigmatization of St. Francis. The central compartment is rectangular, while the flanking compartments have their upper contours in outwardly descending curves. Over the Madonna's head is an arched molding, and in the spandrels between it and the outer frame are some crowded, half-obliterated figures.

The work is Ducciesque and was probably executed shortly after 1300.<sup>2</sup> Its height is a little over fourteen inches, its overall width about eighteen (0,367 x 0,443 cms.), and it thus manifestly belongs to a class of portable panels that were ordered or bought to serve in private devotions.<sup>3</sup> Such panels were owned by laity, clergy and religious alike and were set up or hung in homes, monastery cells and other appropriate places. They might also be carried upon voyages, when they would often be exposed to greater than ordinary wear. Although some were merely single panels, there is evidence in their proportionate survival that diptychs and tabernacles were preferred for the protection they afforded the paintings.<sup>4</sup> It is hardly necessary to recall that diptych leaves were fastened face to face, while tabernacle shutters closed over the central panels, and that the principal paintings were on the interior surfaces. The Oxford panel was obviously a tabernacle, for the Crucifixion and Stigmatization are hinged to the central rectangle and may be folded over it.

a later Cionese work — and several other panels may, in all probability, be connected with them.

The first of the tabernacles is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (No. 32.100.70), from the Michael Friedsam Collection (*fig. 19*).<sup>84</sup> The kneeling figures are a monk and a nun, each recommended by a saint. The Stigmatization and Crucifixion in the shutters are balanced against each other as in Oxford and may be given the same significance.<sup>85</sup> The Annunciation is in the shutter tips, Gabriel on the left, Mary on the right. This splitting of the scene goes back at least to the eleventh century, in various positions;<sup>86</sup> it occurs in the spandrels of Italian tabernacles throughout the thirteenth century, appears in the pinnacles for the first time in the giant tabernacle in the Gallery of Perugia (No. 877) of the end of the thirteenth century, and becomes a favorite device of Daddi and his school. It might, therefore, be that mere formal convenience or tradition sufficiently explains its presence, but as a well-established symbol for the Incarnation, in this particular context it certainly proclaims its significance as an annunciation of redemption.<sup>87</sup>

The second Daddesque tabernacle was in the Oskar Bondy Collection, Vienna (*fig. 20*).<sup>88</sup> It resembles the foregoing in its use of the Adoration motif, the Crucifixion in the right shutter and the Annunciation in the pinnacles. The kneeling couple consists of a monk and a nun. The two saints in the left shutter, replacing the Stigmatization, are, like St. Francis but with less specific connotations, to be taken as intercessors to whom prayers for aid in obtaining salvation might be addressed.

The latest tabernacle of the group, of the end of the fourteenth century, was in the Larderel Collection, Livorno (*fig. 21*).<sup>89</sup> Here, the more sophisticated treatment of space demanded by the taste of the period has led to a diagonal placing of the Madonna and saints, and this renews in a striking manner the resemblance to the Adoration scene, which, in much earlier periods, was similarly turned. A kneeling couple, perhaps children, are recommended by a bishop saint, possibly St. Louis of

Toulouse. The Stigmatization and Crucifixion are to be interpreted as before. The relation of the Descent into Limbo with thoughts of salvation is obvious, nor is it difficult to understand the role of the Resurrection. They are, in fact, examples of the illustration of paradigms for the resurrection of the devotee to eternal life.<sup>90</sup>

In these works, as in the Oxford tabernacle, the icons and the subsidiary scenes join in assuring us of the particular concern of their owners. In several other panels the imputation of such a concern is less certain, for in the absence of scenes it is dependent upon their analogy with the icons of the foregoing group. The earliest among these panels is the small Madonna Enthroned in the Pinacoteca in Siena, by Duccio di Buoninsegna, which is either a diptych wing or the center panel of a tabernacle, more probably the former (*fig. 22*).<sup>91</sup> Three Franciscan monks are kneeling at the Madonna's feet, and while the Child blesses them in the familiar manner, she, with a sweep of her mantle usual to the Madonna of Misericordia, extends her protection to them. They recall more vividly than the other commissioner figures the allusion to the three Kings — formally, since they are three and since their regularly related positions are a development from those of the Kings in certain Adorations;<sup>92</sup> conceptually, since the monks portrayed must have been familiar with St. Bonaventura's writings on the Epiphany. That they are not merely in adoration but actually in supplication is plainly indicated by the tense gestures of their imploring hands, and reason for considering the possibility of supplication specifically for salvation lies in the Misericordia gesture of the Madonna, which, related to her intercessory powers, often alludes directly to salvation.<sup>93</sup>

This panel is followed, at least in the age of its stylistic traditions, by a gabled tabernacle center-panel in the Museum of Budapest (No. 41), from the ambience of the S. Cecilia Master, probably painted between 1330 and 1335 (*fig. 23*).<sup>94</sup> The kneeling figures are two, male and female. They are recommended by St. John the Baptist, conceivably the patron of the former, whose aid in obtaining favorable judgment is thus