

# Confraternal Self-Imaging in Marian Art at the Museo del Bigallo in Florence

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The small complex of structures on the Piazza del Duomo in Florence known as the Museo del Bigallo houses one of the city's lesser known collections of painting and sculpture.<sup>1</sup> Open only sporadically in recent years, the museum has never been among the more popular destinations for visitors to the Tuscan capital, scholarly or casual. The buildings themselves have been studied by architectural historians, and the works of art displayed within have all been catalogued.<sup>2</sup> In addition, two recently published documents have revealed the former presence of an important fourteenth-century fresco cycle that included ten scenes of the Virgin Mary.<sup>3</sup> They covered portions of the currently whitewashed walls on the ground-floor level, against which the museum's collection is now displayed. Their loss is unfortunate for a number of reasons, not least because these paintings probably demonstrated the inventive powers of their creator, Jacopo di Cione—a major figure in Florentine late-Trecento art—at the moment he emerged as an independent master and before his ingenuity began to flag. More than that, however, they point to the curious fact that, to date, there has been no attempt to understand—as far as one can—what would seem to be the underlying assumption tying together a large percentage of the collection. This study seeks to establish the pre-eminent role of the Virgin Mary among the paintings and sculptures here, a circumstance that cannot be accidental given the narrow provenance and focused purpose of these works. For the Museo del Bigallo is not a gallery composed of broadly varied objects acquired here and there purely on the basis of quality and/or visual interest. Rather, it is an accumulated institutional collection consisting of works of art expressly reflecting the pious motivations and activities of the dedicated individuals who over many years met on the premises and created the collection.

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- 2 For the architectural history, see Howard Saalman, *The Bigallo: The Oratory and Residence of the Compagnia del Bigallo e della Misericordia in Florence* (New York: New York University Press for the College Art Association of America, 1969); and the review of this book by Marvin Trachtenberg published in *Art Bulletin* 53 (1971): 521–23. References to the two catalogues of the museum's collection appear in the text and notes below.
- 3 William R. Levin, "A Lost Fresco Cycle by Nardo and Jacopo di Cione at the Misericordia in Florence," *Burlington Magazine* 141, no. 1151 (February 1999): 75–80.

Originally the Museo del Bigallo functioned as the headquarters of the Compagnia di Santa Maria della Misericordia, an influential lay charitable association in Florence probably founded in the thirteenth century. The contiguous buildings comprising it were erected in two stages during the fourteenth century in close proximity to the Cathedral complex.<sup>4</sup> Today greatly altered, the residence, used mainly for the company's business affairs, sits on property purchased by the confraternity in 1321–22 from a member of the Adimari family. Just after mid-century, a certain Giovanni di Albizo Pellegrini donated to the Misericordia the adjacent corner lot, where the Via dei Calzaiuoli (formerly the Corso degli Adimari) runs into the Piazza del Duomo. Thanks to further testamentary bequests that flowed in as a result of the recent Black Death, the company was able to construct an oratory and loggia on this site. Devotional activities primarily celebrating the Virgin Mary as company patroness took place in the oratory, which consists of two bays, each capped by a quadripartite vault. The single-bayed loggia, open on two sides and similarly covered, served as a symbol of the confraternity's philanthropic mission and as the place where, it is believed, one of its principal charitable endeavours periodically took place: the uniting of foundlings and orphans with natural or adoptive parents.<sup>5</sup> It is the interior walls of the oratory and loggia that once were decorated with Jacopo di Cione's Marian fresco cycle as a visual supplement to the prayers of the company brethren. That today the museum bears the name "Bigallo" reflects the fact that in 1425 the Misericordia was merged with the Compagnia Maggiore di Santa Maria del Bigallo. Established, according to tradition, by the early Dominican St. Peter Martyr in the thirteenth century, the Bigallo was another large benevolent institution that maintained hospitals and hospices in Florence and its environs. When the companies were definitively separated a century after their unification, it was the Bigallo that retained control of the building complex previously shared by the two groups, while the Misericordia relocated close by.

All paintings and sculptures inside the Museo del Bigallo and attached to its exterior date from the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, but by far the greatest number belong to the Trecento and Quattrocento. Not surprisingly, given the

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4 On the early history of the Misericordia, including the acquisition and significance of its centrally located site, see most recently William R. Levin, "Advertising Charity in the Trecento: The Public Decorations of the Misericordia in Florence," *Studies in Iconography* 17 (1996): 215–309, esp. 217–19 and accompanying notes; and Phillip J. Earenfight, "The Residence and Loggia della Misericordia ("Il Bigallo"): Art and Architecture of Confraternal Piety, Charity, and Virtue in Late Medieval Florence" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1999). Saalman (*The Bigallo*, 10, 44–45 [docs. 1–3]) among others (see Levin, "Advertising Charity," 278 n. 6) has transcribed the two documents concerning the acquisition of property; Earenfight provides the fullest discussion of them.

5 On the work of the Misericordia with parentless children and the role in this activity played by the loggia, see Levin, "Advertising Charity," 221–34, 242–44, 246–47, 267, 275–77; and idem, "'Lost Children,' a Working Mother, and the Progress of an Artist at the Florentine Misericordia in the Trecento," *Publications of the Medieval Association of the Midwest* 6 (forthcoming 1999).

dedication of both the Misericordia and the Bigallo companies to Christ's mother, regarded as the perfect embodiment of *Amor proximi*—neighbourly love—and therefore an exemplar for both, the Virgin Mary is, along with her Son, the subject in a majority of the works of art in the collection.<sup>6</sup> The fundamental article jointly authored by Giovanni Poggi, I. B. Supino, and Corrado Ricci that initially presented the contents of the museum was published at the time it was organized in 1904.<sup>7</sup> The authors were able to provide indications and in some instances documentation concerning the origins of some of these objects featuring Mary, and of others, too, but the degree of certainty behind their pronouncements necessarily varied according to the data available. For example, they catalogued as Bigallo commissions a well-known mid-thirteenth-century *croce dipinta* picturing the Virgin twice, as well as a panel of a century later painted on both surfaces with the Madonna and Child and saints in the cusp on one side.<sup>8</sup> In each case, the authors' affirmation of Bigallo patronage is irrefutable, albeit based solely on intrinsic evidence. In the former, that evidence was supplied by the rooster (*gallo*) at the foot of the crucified Christ, which appeared for centuries thereafter on the company's heraldic device. On the latter occasion, the authors' proof resided in both the lengthy recounting of the establishment of and pardons granted to the Bigallo confraternity written on one side of the panel and, opposite this, below the aforementioned Madonna, in the representation of the presumed company founder St. Peter Martyr investing the institution's first captains with banners. For neither object, however, could the three historians specify an original location. In contrast, they uncovered ample documentation for a trio of small and seldom-noted fourteenth-century statues representing the Madonna and Child flanked by SS. Peter Martyr and Lucy, both secondary patrons of the Bigallo.<sup>9</sup> All three sculptures are now set within tabernacles on the exterior of the loggia, above the northern arch. Unequivocally, the records reveal that originally these

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6 Mary's role as paragon and purveyor of merciful love among humans traces back to the Patristic Age, when she was first credited as being the chief mediator between Christ and His sinful human brethren. The basis of her power in this regard lay in her motherhood of God in His human aspect. Theological references to this effect are countless. Especially worth noting in connection with this is the similarity—and even the interchangeability—of the image of the Nursing Madonna and closely related types that establish her maternity of Christ on the one hand, and the personification of the virtue Charity with one or more nurslings on the other. On the first half of this equation, see Levin, "Advertising Charity," 242–43, 296 n. 83 (with additional references); on the second half, see Max Seidel, "Ubera matris: Die vielgeschichtige Bedeutung eines Symbols in der mittelalterlichen Kunst," *Städte Jahrbuch*, n.s., 6 (1977): 79; and Nancy Rash Fabbri and Nina Rutenberg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context," *Art Bulletin* 63 (1981): 398–99, 401.

7 Giovanni Poggi, I[gino] B[envenuto] Supino, and Corrado Ricci, "La Compagnia del Bigallo," *Rivista d'arte* 2 (1904): 189–244, esp. 203–25 (the partially illustrated catalogue) and 225–44 (the register of documents).

8 Ibid., 215 and 220–22, respectively, with reproductions on 216 and 220 (a detail).

9 Ibid., 191–93, 230–32 (docs. II, 1).

figures decorated the former residence of the Bigallo company several blocks away, which was subsequently demolished. The deduction of Poggi *et al.* that only following the merger of the confraternities in 1425 were they transferred to their present location—once the property of the Misericordia exclusively—was borne out decades later thanks to an ensuing archival discovery.<sup>10</sup> The authors of the 1904 article also knew of a lost triptych painted in 1416 by Mariotto di Nardo featuring the Virgin and Child between the Dominican St. Peter Martyr and the Florentine patron saint John the Baptist that forms an interesting parallel to the three statuettes on the loggia exterior.<sup>11</sup> An archival notice testifies to its execution for the oratory attached to that same early Bigallo residence, but an inventory of 1453 mentions it as in the nearby oratory of the consolidated Misericordia-Bigallo company, and another of 1576 confirms that it was still there in what by then had become the seat of the Bigallo alone. Subsequently removed, this triptych resurfaced at an auction in Paris in 1987.<sup>12</sup>

Surviving documents left no doubt in the minds of Poggi and his co-authors as to the authorship and original location of two other sculpted Marian images at the Museo del Bigallo, each far more renowned than the middle statuette above the northern loggia arch just mentioned. Alberto Arnoldi supplied life-size figures of the Madonna and Child flanked by two candle-bearing angels for the oratory altar, and also carved the exterior relief of Mary and the infant Christ filling the lunette above the portal on the north facade of the oratory, commissions executed from 1359 to 1364 and in 1361, respectively.<sup>13</sup> In both cases the finished works remain *in situ* today, but while Poggi, Supino, and Ricci understood the vicissitudes of ownership of the building complex, curiously the second-named scholar referred to Arnoldi's three freestanding figures as made "for the altar of the chapel of the Bigallo."<sup>14</sup> Of course, in the mid Trecento the oratory was in the sole possession of the Misericordia, and it was that company which employed the sculptor on both occasions. Less grievously, but somewhat misleadingly, Poggi

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10 The statues were moved on 18 March 1445 (modern style). See Saalman, *The Bigallo*, 19, 54 (doc. 15).

11 Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, "Bigallo," 192, 192 n. 2, 233–34 (docs. II,3). For the more recent history of the triptych, see Ugo Procacci, "L'affresco dell'Oratorio del Bigallo ed il suo maestro," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 17 (1973): 320, 320–21 n. 38 and fig. 6.

12 A brief report of the triptych's reappearance was published in the 26 November 1987 edition of the Florentine newspaper *La Nazione*. I wish to thank Signora Clementina Campodonico Nardelli for bringing this notice to my attention.

13 Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, "Bigallo," 193–95, 210–13, 226–28 (docs. I,2 and I,3, respectively), with reproductions facing 212 and on 213. These documents and other transcriptions of them are noted in Levin, "Advertising Charity," 242, 251–53 and accompanying notes. See also n. 17 below. Jacopo di Cione's ten wall scenes from the life of the Virgin (see above), completed in 1370, complemented Arnoldi's Madonna and Child altarpiece sculpture, acting like a gigantic series of predella panels but fanning out to either side of the confraternal cult image rather than providing it support from below.

14 Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, "Bigallo," 212–13.

failed to emphasize that Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's three predella panels and the tabernacle they adorn, made in 1515 to house Arnoldi's altarpiece sculptures, were not, strictly speaking, either Bigallo or Misericordia commissions.<sup>15</sup> On a single panel located just below Arnoldi's Madonna and Child is figured a Madonna of Mercy set between smaller scenes of the Nativity and the Flight into Egypt. Beneath Arnoldi's two flanking angel statues are represented on the other predella panels the death of St. Peter Martyr to the left and the apocryphal Tobit and his son Tobias burying a cadaver to the right. Although the Misericordia and Bigallo companies had been formally separated in 1489, they continued to share the residence and oratory until at least 1523.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while Ghirlandaio's central panel presents three scenes, all of which appropriately feature Mary, patroness of both societies, the panel with Peter Martyr alludes specifically to the Bigallo—again, he was believed to be its founder—while that with the scene of burial surely refers to the Misericordia insofar as Tobit was that confraternity's secondary patron, and burial of the dead was an office pertaining to the Misericordia in particular, especially after that confraternity's re-establishment as a legally independent entity.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Ghirlandaio must have enjoyed the sponsorship of both groups in what may have been their final collaborative action. As proof, the combined arms of the two companies appear twice on the tabernacle, carved in relief and separating the three predella panels one from another.

Such turn-of-the-century lack of precision concerning the altarpiece statues and their Renaissance-era enframement and predella reappeared in the catalogue section of Hanna Kiel's more thorough volume on the Museo del Bigallo, published in 1977. This is especially surprising because her introductory essay reported correctly the chronology of ownership of the building complex, the facts of the two Arnoldi commissions, and the existence of the combined arms on the base of the tabernacle.<sup>18</sup> Kiel did endorse the earlier authors' opinions on the

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15 Ibid., 197, 229–30 (docs. I,5). The tabernacle with predella panels of 1515, in presentation and style fully of the High Renaissance, fashionably supplanted the original altarpiece arrangement that was contemporaneous with Arnoldi's statues. On the earlier composition, see Gert Kreytenberg, "Die trecenteske Dekoration der Stirnwand im Oratorio del Bigallo," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 20 (1976): 397–403; followed by Levin, "Advertising Charity," 253–56 and accompanying notes; and idem, "A Lost Fresco Cycle," 76.

16 See Levin, "Advertising Charity," 280 n. 14, in which minor and here inconsequential discrepancies over the exact dates are noted.

17 On the importance of burying the dead to the refounded Misericordia, see *ibid.* Dedication to this good work in particular was written into the new statutes of the confraternity, published in full in Ugo Morini, *Documenti inediti o poco noti per la storia della Misericordia di Firenze (1240–1525)* (Florence: Venerabile Arciconfraternita [della Misericordia], 1940), 59–72 (doc. 23, dating these statutes to 1490).

18 Hanna Kiel, *Il Museo del Bigallo a Firenze*, Gallerie e musei di Firenze, directed by Ugo Procacci (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1977), 3–6 (the introductory essay), 123–24 (cat. nos. 22–24: Ghirlandaio's predella panels of 1515, left to right), 125–26 (cat. nos. 31–33: Arnoldi's Madonna and Child and the two angels of 1359–64), 128 (cat. no. 41: the

Bigallo origins of other Marian works of art in the museum, including the *croce dipinta*, the two-sided panel, the trio of sculptures set within tabernacles on the exterior of the loggia, and the triptych by Mariotto di Nardo.<sup>19</sup> Without explanation she also claimed that a statuette in the museum representing the Madonna and Child, which she attributed to Arnoldi, was “of Bigallo provenance.”<sup>20</sup>

Like her predecessors, however, Kiel failed to offer suggestions concerning the original ownership or location of other transportable paintings and sculptures in the Museo del Bigallo, with or without a Marian iconography. Instead, she limited herself to paraphrasing the words of Poggi and Ricci, that “the works of art [were] property of the Bigallo, which until [1904] were dispersed and little known,” and that they “were collected from various offices and institutions dependent upon the Bigallo.”<sup>21</sup> Kiel’s reticence, and that of the earlier scholars, was probably due to the lack of sufficient documentation revealing anything about the early histories of those works of art, including thirteen additional paintings and sculptures in the museum that prominently figure the Madonna or, where she is now absent, strongly imply her former presence. Potentially, any of them may have entered into the possession of the Bigallo company at any time prior to 1904.

To be sure, a quartet of these Marian objects which predate the moment in 1425 when the Misericordia and the Bigallo were joined could have been made for either confraternity, subsequently passing into the hands of the combined institution and then winding up in the possession of the Bigallo—and hence the museum—after the union of the two companies was dissolved.<sup>22</sup> Stylistic considerations dictate that eight more of the thirteen were executed during the years of the confraternal consolidation, from 1425 to c. 1523, and thus, like the

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tabernacle of 1515, again noting the combined coat of arms, yet repeating the error concerning the patronage of this tabernacle and the altarpiece statues). Kiel’s volume provides reproductions of all works of art in the museum, including those mentioned earlier in this article, keyed to their individual catalogue numbers.

19 Ibid., 117 (cat. no. 1: the *croce dipinta*); 3, 5, 119–20 (cat. no. 5: the two-sided panel); 3, 5 (the three exterior sculptures); for references to the triptych by Mariotto di Nardo, including its documentation in inventories other than those mentioned earlier, see 3, 5, 121 (cat. no. 11).

20 Ibid., 125 (cat. no. 30).

21 Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, “Bigallo,” 202 (Poggi), 215 (Ricci); and Kiel, *Bigallo*, 6.

22 These four earliest Marian images are: the famous triptych of 1333 securely attributed to Bernardo Daddi, an unattributed statuette in wood of Tuscan manufacture carved c. 1370, a pair of triptych wings from c. 1400 picturing the Annunciation and two saints—which likely flanked a now-missing central panel featuring the Madonna and Child—given to Lorenzo di Bicci, and a Madonna of Humility from the first years of the fifteenth century issuing from the workshop of Mariotto di Nardo. Respectively, they are mentioned or discussed in Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, “Bigallo,” 224–25 (reproduced on 224 and facing page), 214, 218, 219; and in Kiel, *Bigallo*, 117–18 (cat. no. 2), 127 (cat. no. 35), 121 (cat. no. 10), 121 (cat. no. 11). The attributions here are those of Kiel. The author is preparing a separate study of the triptych by Daddi.

Ghirlandaio predella, might have been products of joint sponsorship that remained with the Bigallo after the two companies again went their separate ways.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, it must be admitted that any or all of these dozen artworks, including the first group of four, originally may have had nothing to do with either society, that at some unknown date decades or even centuries later they became the property of the Bigallo through donation or purchase from private sources simply because they featured the company patroness. Only the latest of these thirteen undocumented Marian images now in the Museo del Bigallo manifestly post-dates the period of confraternal union.<sup>24</sup> For that reason, it more likely represents a commission by or for the Bigallo in particular, although here again the date alone does not exclude the possibility that it came to that institution only subsequently.

Three of the thirteen problematic Marian artworks in the museum, however, including that latest one and two earlier pieces from the period of consolidation, possess internal evidence at least pointing in the direction of specific confraternal patronage. First, a large altarpiece of about 1490, ascribed to the so-called *Alunno di Benozzo*, represents an enthroned Madonna and Child with six saints and a pair of angels (Fig. 1). It is a standard composition of the popular *sacra conversazione* type. The small figure genuflecting in the right foreground who carries her eyes on a saucer is identifiable as St. Lucy. Her presence among the aforementioned trio of fourteenth-century statuettes that originally adorned the early Bigallo residence is a reminder that St. Lucy had long been a secondary protectress of the Bigallo company. But a host of archival documents establish that St. Lucy was venerated by the Misericordia,

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23 The eight objects featuring the Virgin datable to the period 1425–c. 1523 include: a Madonna of Humility of the second half of the Quattrocento from the shop of Neri di Bicci, another Madonna of Humility with two angels of c. 1460 given to Domenico di Michelino, a half-length Madonna and Child of c. 1470 by the Master of San Miniato, Jacopo di Sellaio's *tondo* of about a decade later with a Madonna of Humility surrounded by two angels and St. Peter Martyr and Tobit (see the following discussion), an altarpiece of c. 1490 ascribed to the *Alunno di Benozzo* presenting the Madonna and Child enthroned among six saints and two angels (again, see the subsequent discussion), a contemporaneous half-length Madonna and Child proceeding from the school of Botticelli, another *tondo* of the same period attributed to the Master of the Johnson Magdalen with a Madonna of Humility flanked by a pair of angels and venerated by the infant John the Baptist, and a Tuscan polychromed terracotta *tondo* of the late fifteenth century figuring the Nativity. Respectively, these are mentioned or discussed in Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, "Bigallo," 219, 218–19 (reproduced on 219), 217 (reproduced on 217), 223–24 (reproduced on 223), 222–23, 215, 222, 214; and in Kiel, *Bigallo*, 121 (cat. no. 12), 122 (cat. no. 16), 122 (cat. no. 17), 123 (cat. no. 18), 123 (cat. no. 19), 123 (cat. no. 20), 123 (cat. no. 21), 127 (cat. no. 37). The attributions here and in the following discussion are those of Kiel.

24 This last Marian image presents a Madonna in Heaven encircled by angels with a male child and a female child, dated c. 1570 and attributed by Kiel and other recent scholars to Carlo Portelli (see the following discussion). Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, "Bigallo," 217; and Kiel, *Bigallo*, 124 (cat. no. 26).



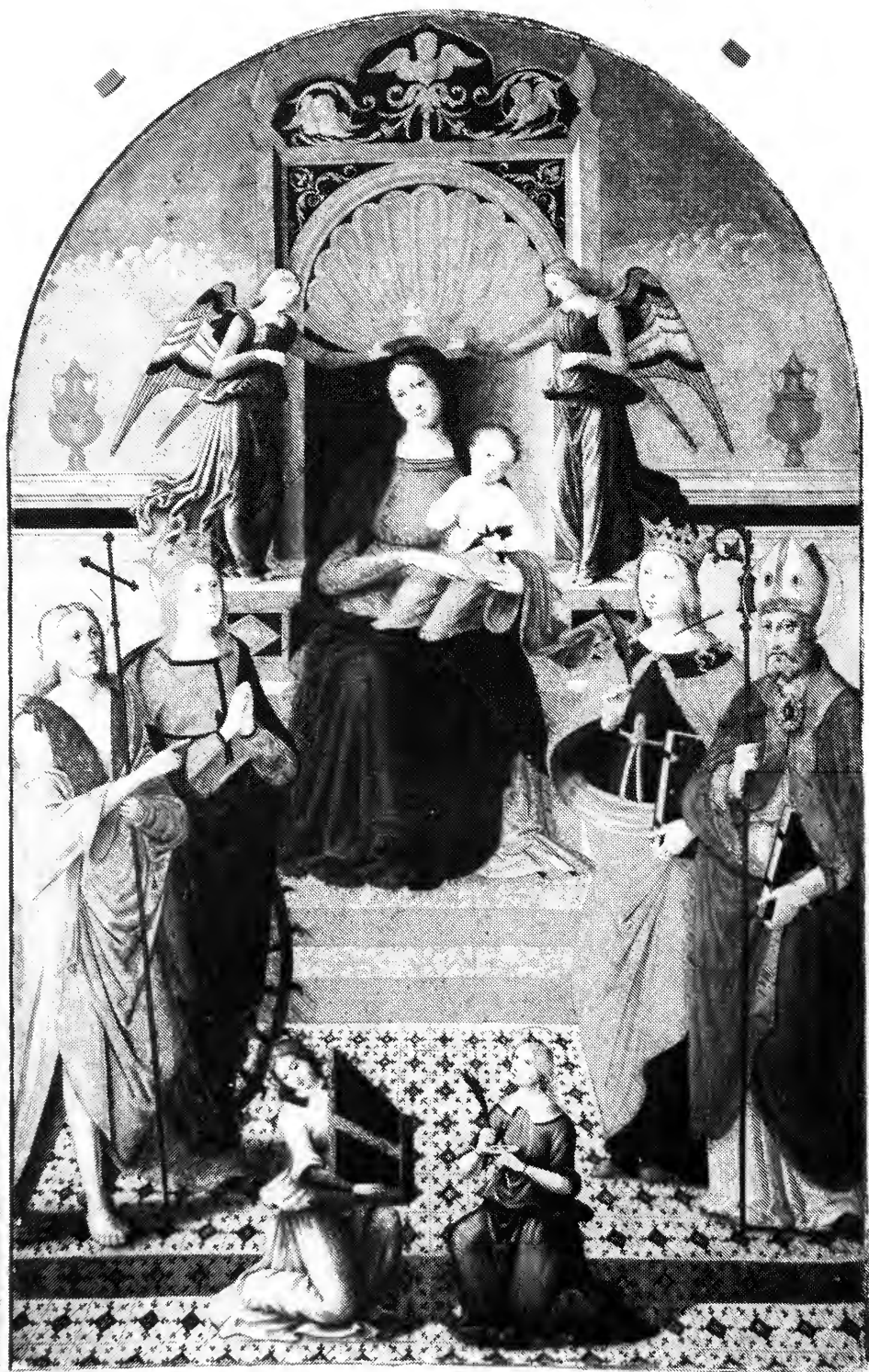


Figure 1. Alunno di Benozzo, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Six Saints and Two Angels*, c. 1490, Museo del Bigallo, Florence. (Photo: Archivio Fotografico Electa, Milan)



.00, well before its merger with the Bigallo.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this may help to explain the evident welcome that those Bigallo sculptures received when they followed the Bigallo brethren themselves to the Misericordia, as suggested by their conspicuous placement facing the Piazza del Duomo above the northern loggia arch. Using analogous logic, while the selection process for the other five saints surrounding the Virgin and Child in the Alunno di Benozzo's panel remains unexplained, the presence and prominent position of St. Lucy (despite her diminutive size), so close to that of an actual worshipper similarly kneeling at the foot of this altarpiece, provides circumstantial evidence that this late-quattrocento painting was a joint commission of the two companies.

More assuredly, the presence of the Dominican St. Peter Martyr with cloven head and the blind Tobit flanking a Madonna of Humility with two angels in a *tondo* by Jacopo di Sellaio of a decade earlier bears witness to the confraternal union then still in effect (Fig. 2). The positioning of these secondary patrons of the Bigallo and the Misericordia, respectively, to the left and right of their shared main protectress, makes this panel a devotional prototype for Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's chiefly narrative predella of 1515 for the oratory altarpiece. But as for the Alunno di Benozzo's *sacra conversazione* and, in fact, all thirteen of the enigmatic Marian images at the Museo del Bigallo, the original location of Sellaio's *tondo* remains a quandary. It may have been placed inside any one of the numerous hospitals and hospices supervised by the federated companies.

Finally, the very latest of the Marian works of art in the Museo del Bigallo depicts a Madonna in Heaven with angels adored by a male child and a female child (Fig. 3). Painted about 1570 and now attributed to Carlo Portelli, its iconography establishes beyond reasonable doubt what its date alone does not: that it was a Bigallo commission. For in 1541, not many years after all lingering aspects of the confraternal merger were eradicated, the Bigallo was reorganized and officially appointed to oversee the care of parentless children in Florence, superseding the Misericordia and other such institutions in that capacity.<sup>26</sup>

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25 In the Florentine archives there is a document dated 9 January 1365 (Florentine style) recounting how the Camaldulensian monks of San Salvatore in Florence petitioned the Misericordia to include their church among the possible venues where the company celebrated annually the Mass for abandoned children on the Feast of St. Lucy. Quoted and discussed in Luigi Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti di beneficenza e d'istruzione elementare gratuita della città di Firenze* (Florence: Tipografia Le Monnier, 1853), 458–59, 902–03 (doc. Q); and in Levin, “Lost Children” (forthcoming). The confraternity engaged in other activities, too, each year on St. Lucy's Day during the fourteenth century, as revealed in archival records to be discussed by the author in another future study.

26 The responsibility of the Bigallo for foundlings and orphans may in fact go back to 1489, when the union of the Misericordia and the Bigallo was legally dissolved. For the role of the Bigallo with parentless children, see the contemporary discussions in Ferdinando Leopoldo Del Migliore, *Firenze città nobilissima* (Florence: Nella Stamp[eria] della Stella, 1684), 78–79; and Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine*, vol. 7 (Florence: Nella Stamperia di Pietro Gaetano Viviani, 1758), 272–77. See also Passerini,



Figure 2. Jacopo di Sellaio, *Madonna of Humility with St. Peter Martyr, Tobit, and Two Angels*, c. 1480, Museo del Bigallo, Florence. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, New York)

Almost certainly, the two children in the painting venerating the heavenly Virgin, patroness of the Bigallo, represent the city's foundlings and orphans.<sup>28</sup> In support of this reading, the young girl in the painting holds a rosary, a devotional aid propagated by the Dominicans in particular, which recalls the legendary establishment of the Bigallo by St. Peter Martyr. With Portelli's canvas,

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28 Regarding these children, Kiel (*Bigallo*, 124 [cat. no. 26]) arrived at the same conclusion. Noteworthy is the fact that the pendant to this painting, also in the Museo del Bigallo, depicts Charity personified as a young woman with three nurslings before her and, at her back, a youth. He, like the two children in Portelli's first painting, is probably to be identified as a foundling or orphan. This latter canvas is mentioned briefly in Poggi, Supino, and Ricci, "Bigallo," 217; and in Kiel, *Bigallo*, 124 (cat. no. 27).



Figure 3. Carlo Portelli, *Madonna in Heaven with Angels Adored by Two Children*, c. 1570, Museo del Bigallo, Florence.

legendary establishment of the Bigallo by St. Peter Martyr. With Portelli's canvas, however, this sort of analysis of the Marian objects in the Museo del Bigallo ends. Although further archival research may clarify the origins of the remaining Marian pieces, the works of art themselves offer no further clues on account of the simplicity and conventionality of their imagery.

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