

The *Bigallo Triptych*: A Document of Confraternal Charity in Fourteenth-Century Florence

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Summary: This article will attempt to place securely an important work of fourteenth-century Florentine painting by one of its greatest artists in its original social milieu and confraternal location, applying several methodologies to accomplish this. It takes up the challenge first by addressing the style of the painter and by reviewing an often overlooked aspect of his career. It then examines the object in question within the historical development of its form and general content, aided by comparison with others of its type and with reference to the theological climate in which such artworks appeared. Subsequently, following a more detailed exploration of its content, the paper considers the results of this inquiry in light of what later documents as well as additional works of art proceeding from the same Florentine ambience affirm. Such a multifaceted approach is mandatory here, for documentation of the painting is entirely lacking for the first 510 years of its existence. Barring future archival discoveries, absolute certainty about the fortunes of the painting during that time will remain elusive. But the present investigation along the lines proposed will allow us to determine that one of Florence's leading charitable confraternities was almost surely its original owner, and to unravel the meaning and purpose that the painting held for that organization's members and the persons who commissioned the object.

Bernardo Daddi: Style and Artworks in the Public Domain

Bernardo Daddi's *Bigallo Triptych*, a restored though generally well-preserved painting in tempera and gold leaf on three hinged wooden panels, presents an opportunity to test what can be deciphered of the origin and function of an artwork based mainly on the type of object that it is and the evidence provided by its pictorial content (figs. 1, 2). Here is what little we know of its history. Unsigned but bearing the date 1333 on its base, and absent from the few and imprecise early inventories of the conjoined

¹ This essay honours three inspirational, supportive, and professionally productive colleagues—Liana De Girolami Cheney, Charles Randall Mack, and John B. Nici—and is offered as a token of my respect for and gratitude toward them as well as our longstanding friendships. Aspects of this study were presented as papers at annual meetings of the Southeastern College Art Conference (Richmond, 1997; Birmingham, 2018), the Renaissance Society of America (New Orleans, 2018), and the South-Central Renaissance Conference (Atlanta, 2018).

buildings now housing the Museo del Bigallo in downtown Florence where it resides, the triptych was first mentioned in a note in Pietro Pillori's 1843 edition of Placido Landini's fundamental history of the Florentine Compagnia Maggiore di Santa Maria della Misericordia—initial occupant of the building that now houses the Bigallo Museum—originally published in 1779 (fig. 3). Pillori recorded its presence there in the “stanza del commissario,” attributed the painting to the great Giotto, and commented on its inscribed date and excellent condition.² Several subsequent nineteenth-century authors reattributed the triptych to Taddeo Gaddi, a pupil of Giotto, but since the 1904 establishment of the Bigallo Museum all writers with one exception shortly thereafter have given it to Bernardo Daddi, most of them claiming execution by the painter himself without workshop intervention.³

Daddi, generally believed to have been another of Giotto's pupils, is recognized as a key figure in early Italian painting. Despite his importance, the monographic literature on Bernardo Daddi and his extended line of followers is somewhat limited, no doubt the result of the lengthy treatment he and they received in a 1924 volume of Raimond van Marle's *Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, and then, beginning in the 1930s, in several authoritative tomes of Richard Offner's monumental *Corpus of Florentine Painting*, a series updated and continued decades later initially under the direction of Miklós Boskovits.⁴ Born around 1290 probably in or near Florence, when his trailblazing master presumably was executing his earliest works, Daddi first appears in the documents about 1320, named as an independent master in the ledger of the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries, to which painters in Florence then belonged. What seems to be his first surviving work is signed and dated 1328, a large triptych—then a relatively new form in Western art—for that city's church of Ognissanti, now displayed in the Galleria degli Uffizi. In 1339 he was elected a councillor of Florence's Compagnia di San Luca, a new

² Landini, *Istoria dell'oratorio*, 17 n. 2

³ Kiel, *Museo del Bigallo*, 117–118 and plates 9–16 (cat. no. 2); Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 170–183 (including pls. VII, VII.1–11). Claiming alternative authorship were Wilhelm Suida in 1906 (“Studien zur Trecentomalerei III,” 108–117; anonymous Master of the Bigallo Triptych), Offner himself in 1930 (*Corpus*, 1st ed., sec. 3, vol. 3, 34; Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, 2nd ed., sec. 3, vol. 3, 170; central panel by Daddi, wings largely by assistants), and John White in 1966 (*Art and Architecture*, 262; several painters involved); these contrary opinions along with other earlier references are recorded in the cited texts by Kiel and Offner/Boskovits.

⁴ Van Marle, *Italian Schools*, vol. 3, 348–405; and Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vols. 3–5 (1930, 1934, and 1947, respectively; 2nd eds. Florence, 1989, 1991, and 2001, respectively); Offner, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8 (New York, 1958); and Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 9 (Florence, 1984).

confraternity exclusively for painters that he helped found that same year. In August of 1348, trustees were chosen for two of his three sons, which has led scholars to assume that Daddi perished in the Black Death of that year, but the fact that his name appears in the ledger of the *compagnia* of Saint Luke as late as 1355 suggests that he survived that catastrophe, even if none of his securely dated paintings substantiates it.

Van Marle, Offner, and more recent scholars acknowledged Daddi's mastery as a story-teller, especially when working in compact dimensions in the tempera-on-panel medium. Downplaying somewhat the close relationship to Giotto and his revolutionary monumental style generally maintained by other art historians, Alastair Smart, for instance, praised Daddi's abilities in posing his typically "fragile" figures in a variety of positions to enhance their "tender intimacy of sentiment."⁵ The ornamental touches, sensitivity to pattern, brilliantly orchestrated colors—whether delicately pastel in tone or deeply saturated—and impeccable craftsmanship, according to Smart, John White, and others, are perfectly calibrated to Daddi's strength as an artist with a "penchant for narrative" represented on a restricted scale.⁶ These stylistic traits inevitably link the painter to Duccio, *caposcuola* of Florence's great rival Siena, and Duccio's presumed pupils—Daddi's Siennese contemporaries—to Simone Martini, for example, or, as van Marle pointed out, increasingly to Ambrogio Lorenzetti.⁷ So whereas Daddi's debt to the heroic character of the art of fellow Florentine Giotto may be clear in many of his compositions and in his early interest in bodily structure—the "forceful, precise, sculptural style and formal language" of his work, to use Robert Oertel's terms—it cannot disguise a tendency in his art, visible to a lesser degree even in that of Daddi's compatriot Maso di Banco as well, that became ever more evident as his career progressed: what Smart called his "daintiness" and "innocent charm" and what van Marle repeatedly referred to as his "spiritualized" figure types, their "greater elegance" the result of their flowing draperies and soft, even sad facial expressions, all elements of the Siennese style.⁸ While the *Bigallo Triptych* came fairly early in Daddi's career, in its size, narrative passages,

⁵ Smart, *The Dawn*, 72–75.

⁶ Smart, *The Dawn*, 73; and White, *Art and Architecture*, 261–265.

⁷ Van Marle, *Italian Schools*, vol. 3, 391–393. In addition to the precious character of Daddi's art that virtually all writers link to the Siennese style, Offner cited a series of pictorial motifs that Daddi borrowed from his Siennese contemporaries, singling out in particular Ambrogio's brother Pietro Lorenzetti, in his introductory essay in *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8 (1958), reprinted in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3 (1989); see pp. 30–32 therein.

⁸ Oertel, *Early Italian Painting*, 192. Oertel's phrasing suggests his belief that Daddi himself was Siennese. See Donati, *Taddeo Gaddi*, 13, 18, 35, for a perceived gentle sensibility in the art of Maso di Banco, described as "poetica" and "dolce e sfumato."

decorative qualities, and sweetness of emotion it clearly manifests the stylistic direction that his art was to take.

Two centuries after his death, Giorgio Vasari recalled that Daddi worked extensively in the public sphere, as both a citizen and an artist, a fact recently underscored by Andrew T.W. Johnson.⁹ In truth comprising a relatively small percentage of his and his followers' total body of work, necessarily many of these paintings are far larger in scale, and hence perhaps less successful than they are conspicuous. Documentation uncovered by Anna Padoa Rizzo and Paula Spilner testifies that Daddi's *San Pancrazio Polyptych* of 1337–44, most of it now in the Uffizi, was originally the high altarpiece of Florence Cathedral and so must be judged his most visible public commission.¹⁰ While Daddi executed a number of other major altarpieces for churches in and around Florence, surely his penultimate dated work, the *Orsanmichele Altarpiece* (fig. 4) would be a close second to the *San Pancrazio Polyptych*.¹¹ Completed in 1347, stylistically it is both a reminiscence of a late-thirteenth-century painting that burned in 1304 and its early-fourteenth-century replacement as well as a harbinger of the art famously associated by Millard Meiss with the period following the Black Death that swept through Tuscany a year later. Like its two predecessors and models, Daddi's enormous panel was the rallying point for the single wealthiest charitable confraternity in fourteenth-century Florence, the Compagnia della Madonna di Orsanmichele.¹² Contemporary chronicles and surviving documents establish that faithful supplicants flocked to venerate the Madonna of Orsanmichele as Daddi represented her, icon-like and still *in situ* in that sodality's chapel in the centre of Florence, asking her to grant all manner of favours and leaving sums of money both small and very large in return. Enriched by testamentary bequests and obligatory corporate and individual contributions, the confraternity then dispensed these funds or necessary commodities purchased with them, principally food and clothing, to the needy and to other beneficent institutions.

Another large public painting associated with Daddi but of a far different sort is linked to the *Orsanmichele Altarpiece* in two important ways.

⁹ Vasari, *Vite*, 544; and Johnson, "In Search of Bernardo Daddi and Civic Florence."

¹⁰ Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 231–293 (including pls. XIV, XIV.1–38, XV, XV.1–8); Padoa Rizzo, "Bernardo di Stefano Rosselli"; and Spilner, "The Case of the Missing Maestà" (cited in Lavin, *Santa Maria del Fiore*, 40–43).

¹¹ Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 312–323 (including pls. XVIII, XVIII.1–5).

¹² For the history of Orsanmichele see Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti*, 404–439, 896–902 (documents O and P); La Sorsa, *La Compagnia d'Or San Michele*; Levin, "Studies in the Imagery of Mercy," 278–299; Henderson, *Piety and Charity*; Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*; and Zervas, *Orsanmichele: Documents*. Daddi's altarpiece is among the most frequently reproduced and discussed Florentine artworks; here, see Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena*, esp. 45 n. 130, 53.

The *Allegory of Mercy* is a fresco painted in 1342 still in its original location on an interior wall of the Bigallo Museum, mentioned earlier as home to the *Bigallo Triptych* (fig. 5). First, Offner identified the anonymous artist responsible for it as a member of the circle of Bernardo Daddi, an attribution difficult to dispute and now universally accepted.¹³ The second thing that the *Allegory* shares with the *Orsanmichele Altarpiece* is its similar context.¹⁴ The imposing protagonist of the fresco, again presented in an icon-like manner, is a personification of the virtue Mercy: *Amor proximi*, neighbourly love, which is charity in its human form as manifested in righteous actions toward others and which leads to *Amor Dei*, the love of God, a higher charity that finds its reward in *Misericordia Domini*, the mercy of the Lord that is God's redemptive love for humankind, his gift of salvation to those who merit it especially through their performance of good works.¹⁵ Mercy personified presides over the city and citizenry of Florence, represented below and at her sides, respectively, in a graphically literal way. Clothed in a red mantle—a colour whose meaning is addressed below—that is adorned with miniature representations of the Corporal Works of Mercy enjoined by Christ Himself (Matt. 25:31–46, esp. vv. 35–36), she once served to inspire the former occupants of the Bigallo Museum, namely, the members of the well-endowed and influential Compagnia di Santa Maria del Bigallo, continually to carry out their own philanthropic mandate. Founded like the confraternity of Orsanmichele in the thirteenth century as a pious association that gathered to pray together, the Bigallo's mission of charity was not entirely dissimilar from that of nearby Orsanmichele but focused initially on supporting hospitals for the infirm and hospices for pilgrims and wayfarers, and then, following a government decree in the mid-sixteenth century, more broadly on the general welfare

¹³ Offner, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8, 159–163 (including pls. XLIII, XLIIIa–b and with earlier references), calling this painter a follower of the Assistant of Daddi. See also Kiel, *Museo del Bigallo*, 118–119 and pls. 17–22 (cat. no. 3, with earlier references).

¹⁴ In addition to the sources named in the previous note, the fullest discussions of the *Allegory of Mercy* include Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti*, 450–453; Levin, “Studies in the Imagery of Mercy,” chap. 1 and passim; Earenfight, “The Residence and Loggia,” chap. 4; Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*; Earenfight, “Catechism and *Confraternitas*”; Botana, *The Works of Mercy*, 166–184; Earenfight, “*Civitas Florenti[a]*”; Levin, “Death in Florence”; and Bent, *Public Painting*, 88–93. All of these sources reproduce the fresco.

¹⁵ For biblical and exegetical quotations and references to other scholarly literature on the theology of love see Levin, “Studies in the Imagery of Mercy,” 631–653 and accompanying notes; Levin, “The Iconography of Charity *Redux*,” esp. 121–123, 144–145 nn. 7 and 11; and Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, passim, esp. 24–25, 43–50, 53–58, 117 n. 14, 131–132 n. 56, 134–135 nn. 3–9, 136 n. 11, 141 n. 27.

of needy citizens including, pointedly, the care of homeless children.¹⁶ It is important to note, however, that the Bigallo confraternity arrived on these premises only in 1425, when it was temporarily merged with the property's original owner and early modern Florence's third major charitable society, the Compagnia Maggiore di Santa Maria della Misericordia, as intimated above. Dedicated, as were Orsanmichele and the Bigallo, to the mother of Christ, it was this reverent group, the Archconfraternity of Saint Mary of Mercy, known in shorthand Italian as the Misericordia, and not the Bigallo that in the fourteenth century bought, expanded, and used as its headquarters the contiguous structures now containing the collection of the Bigallo Museum, and this group that commissioned and first looked to the fresco of 1342 therein as its institutional centrepiece, reminding and motivating members to provide their own wide range of eleemosynary services substantiated by the archival record.¹⁷ The Misericordia ultimately ceded to the Bigallo both the fresco and the building complex that for a century the two associations shared when in 1523 or 1525, following legal separation in 1489—their union had been troubled from the beginning—they parted ways physically with the Misericordia's move to a new location close by.

Thus, on two occasions at least, Bernardo Daddi and his immediate following produced important works for large Florentine philanthropic confraternities: Orsanmichele and the Misericordia. The grand scale of these paintings is, however, fairly unusual within the *oeuvre* of Daddi and his followers, and not surprisingly, for the decorative qualities of his paintings, their chromatic subtleties, tender figural characterizations, and meticulous technique are much better suited to work on a lesser scale, as all scholars have acknowledged and as Daddi and the patrons who paid for his far more numerous small panels clearly realized. In particular, according to Hanna Kiel, Daddi himself was directly responsible not only for the *Bigallo Triptych* but for six other extant triptychs notably smaller than the Orsanmichele and Misericordia images, and the number swells

¹⁶ For the history of the Bigallo see Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti*, 1–60, 793–816 (documents A through L); Poggi, “La Compagnia del Bigallo”; Sichi, *Un’istituzione di beneficenza fiorentina*; François, *La Misericordia*; Saalman, *The Bigallo*; and Levin, “Studies in the Imagery of Mercy,” 313–330.

¹⁷ Though frequently erroneous and differing in their details, standard accounts of the history of the Misericordia include Landini/Pillori, *Istoria dell’oratorio*; Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti*, 440–482, 902–929 (documents Q through S); Bianchi, *La Compagnia della Misericordia di Firenze*; Poggi, “Bigallo,” esp. 192–197, 203–213, 225–230; Morini, *Documenti inediti*; François, *La Misericordia*; Torricelli, *La Misericordia di Firenze*; Levin, “Studies in the Imagery of Mercy,” 330–350; Niccolai, *Opere di carità a Firenze*, 25–48; Levin, “Advertising Charity,” esp. 217–219 and accompanying notes; Levin, “Lost Children”; Earenfight, “The Residence and Loggia,” 36–66, 118–130; Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, esp. chap. 6; and Levin, “Death in Florence.”

when one begins to count those by his pupils and imitators.¹⁸ One might ask, therefore, if any of these more intimate works, like their monumental counterparts, may have been created within the framework of contemporary confraternities. In particular, might the *Bigallo Triptych*, like the *Allegory of Mercy* in the same museum, have originated in the ambience of the Misericordia and simply passed to the Bigallo confraternity when the two groups were divorced, and from there centuries later entered the collection of the Bigallo Museum?

Triptychs: Form, Content, and Devotional Function

In fact, there are a number of reasons to believe that the *Bigallo Triptych* of 1333, the first among Daddi's surviving works of its type and limited size both chronologically and perhaps qualitatively—and a marked departure from his earlier *Ognissanti Triptych* noted previously—was commissioned and executed with the Misericordia in mind.¹⁹ Yet, at first there seems to be little that distinguishes it from his and his followers' other triptychs—or, for that matter, from the many produced in the workshops of other masters during the fourteenth century. To be sure, during the first half of the fourteenth century triptychs became so numerous in the circle of Bernardo Daddi that he is sometimes claimed as the inventor of the form. This is patently not the case, however, as a few survivors of Florentine provenance from the previous century prove, evidenced by a pair of examples from the late thirteenth century by the anonymous Master of San Gaggio.²⁰ Nor are its beginnings in Italy necessarily even Florentine, for thirteenth-cen-

¹⁸ Kiel, *Museo del Bigallo*, 117. Offner coined the term “miniaturist tendency,” followed by Boskovits and others, to describe the work of Daddi and other fourteenth-century Florentine artists specializing in small-scale panel paintings (e.g., see Offner's introductory essay in *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8, published in 1958 and reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see pp. 16, 19, 30 therein). Smart (*The Dawn*, 77) suggested “decorative tendency” as a more apt expression.

¹⁹ The *Ognissanti Triptych* of 1328, picturing the Madonna and Child flanked by Saints Matthias and Nicholas, is much larger, stylistically immature, and artistically inferior to the *Bigallo Triptych*, and for additional reasons set forth below it is excluded from consideration here. See Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 17–18 (from Offner's introductory essay of 1958 in *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8, reprinted here in 1989) and 110–121 (including pls. I, I.1–8).

²⁰ Offner's opinion in his 1958 essay introducing *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8 (reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 18 therein) that the triptych form did not appear in Florence prior to 1300 is incorrect. See Wilkins, “Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*,” 32; and Wilkins, “Opening the Doors,” 371, 386 nn. 7 and 10 (with earlier references and mention of two Florentine triptychs by the Magdalene Master of ca. 1270). For the triptychs by the Master of San Gaggio see Tartuferi, *La Pittura a Firenze*, 62, 107, and fig. 221 (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, ca. 1285); and 63, 108, and fig. 222 (formerly London, Agnew Collection, ca. 1295–1300).

tury examples exist from elsewhere in Tuscany, including Pisa and Lucca, their places of origin determined on the basis of style.²¹ Duccio of Siena was responsible in whole or in part for at least two hinged triptychs, each probably executed very early in the following century, while Daddi was still learning his trade, after which production burgeoned among Duccio's Siennese followers.²² Corresponding closely in date and often in form with the appearance of the small triptych in Italy are the ivory triptychs of Northern Europe, also hinged, generally even more diminutive and with a similar taste for figures and narratives in a lyrical style akin to that of Bernardo Daddi, who surely knew such objects.²³ Ultimately, of course, the small triptych in the West had predecessors among the luxury arts of the Byzantine East, some again of ivory, although their subject matter could be quite different.²⁴

²¹ For a triptych considered to be Pisan see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 367 and fig. 222 (Princeton University Art Museum, ca. 1250–75). Tartuferi (*La Pittura a Firenze*, 38, 83, and fig. 102) assigned the same painting to the Master of Santa Maria Primerana, whom he considered Florentine although likely trained by Giunta Pisano. For a triptych described as from Lucca see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 349 and fig. 12 (Cleveland Museum of Art, mid-thirteenth century).

²² White, *Duccio*, chap. 4 (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, figs. 19, 21, 24, 29a–b, dated ca. 1300; and London, National Gallery, figs. 20, 22, 23, 28a–b, dated ca. 1300; the captions for figs. 23 and 24 are reversed); and Stubblebine, *Duccio di Buoninsegna*, vol. 1, 68–71 and vol. 2, figs. 145–149 (Boston, dated ca. 1310–13), and vol. 1, 63–64 and vol. 2, figs. 128–130 (London, dated ca. 1310–13). White saw each triptych as a collaborative effort by Duccio and his assistants; Stubblebine viewed both as products of the master's shop.

²³ Wilkins, "Opening the Doors," 371. Many examples exist, with varied shapes, surface designs, and subject matters. Two well-known examples: German (Cologne), *Triptych of the Virgin and Child with Two Angels* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, ca. 1325–50; sometimes considered to be French); and English (probably Exeter), *Triptych with the Arms of Bishop John de Grandisson of Exeter*, featuring the Coronation of the Virgin and Crucifixion flanked by four saints (London, British Museum, ca. 1340–60). Peter Barnet, *Images in Ivory*, 85–86 and fig. VI–9, 188–189 (cat. no. 38, including reproduction), respectively. For metal triptychs from the north of Europe see the following note.

²⁴ See Wilkins, "Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*," 32, 39 n. 8 (with earlier references); and Wilkins, "Opening the Doors," 371, 386 n. 8 (with earlier references). Most famous among Byzantine ivory triptychs are the *Harbaville Triptych* (Paris, Musée du Louvre) and the *Triptych of Princess Anna* (London, British Museum), both from the late tenth century, for which see Talbot Rice, *Art of the Byzantine Era*, 77, 86–87, and figs. 64, 67, respectively. From the same period the Byzantines also employed the triptych form for metal reliquaries of the True Cross, some decorated with cloisonné enamel, including the two tiny examples set into the central panel of the *Stavelot Triptych* (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library), itself a work of Mosan art of the mid-twelfth century with champlevé enamels embellishing the open wings. The *Stavelot Triptych* helped to establish the taste for metal True Cross reliquary triptychs in that region. Voelkle, *The Stavelot Triptych*, esp. 9–12, 19–22.

In most ways the *Bigallo Triptych* is wholly conventional.²⁵ Fundamental to the standard triptych form, of course, is the tripartite structure with its obvious reference to customary Christian groupings of three, above all to the Holy Trinity. Frequently intended for private use by one or at most several individuals within the seclusion of a patron's home and while traveling, portability was evidently prized insofar as most painted triptychs are not only small but hinged, and so can be closed and easily packed, the wings acting as shutters to protect all decorated interior surfaces. Almost all of the earliest Italian examples alluded to above feature a Madonna and Child on the central panel with or without smaller full-length ancillary figures—soon these would come to include symmetrically arranged saints, angels, and occasionally kneeling donors—and on the wings (additional) standing secondary figures and/or narratives. Among the latter, the Nativity—often combined with the shepherds receiving news of the birth of Christ and/or their adoration of Him—and the Crucifixion quickly emerged as the preferred events depicted, left and right respectively, focusing attention on the beginning and end of Christ's mortal journey, his personal Alpha and Omega, as it were (cf. Rev. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13). Those scenes are commonly joined by the Annunciation, with Mary and Gabriel separated from one another in the cusps of the wings above. Whereas Italian triptych panels from the thirteenth century are usually rectangular, those of the fourteenth century are mostly arched in the pointed, Gothic manner and sometimes capped by gables. Often these objects display decorative wooden carpentry, including raised margins surrounding all three panels, crockets running along the upper edges and pinnacles atop the hinged borders between panels that extend their profile vertically toward Heaven, and occasionally arched moldings joined to the painted surfaces that act as auxiliary framing devices. Such ornamental additions doubtless enhanced not only a triptych's material value but also its sacred worth.²⁶ Furthermore, the arched contour of all peripheral and applied framing elements—whether defining the shape of a full panel or a section thereof—in each case creates a flattened niche-like space, a two-dimensional tabernacle in a sense, and must be viewed as a feature that

²⁵ See the introductory essay in Offner, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8, published in 1958 and reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see pp. 21–22 therein; Wilkins, “Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*,” 31–34; and Wilkins, “Opening the Doors,” 372, 387–388 n. 17.

²⁶ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 419–425. While material preciousness, according to Belting, had always been important to increase “the character of an inviolable treasure” of religious goods, by the end of the fourteenth century the “commodity and display value” began to eclipse piety as the true measure of worth (p. 424).

added sanctity to the narratives and figures surrounded and articulated in this manner.²⁷

If Daddi did not invent the small painted triptych, he nonetheless can rightly be said to have popularized it in fourteenth-century Italy. But, along with single-paneled sacred pictures of limited size, and similarly their twin-paneled kin (diptychs), what purpose did such objects serve? Why the dramatic increase in their appeal during the 1300s? A century earlier, expanding upon a venerable theological position, Dominican priest and grammarian John of Genoa (d. 1298) had written that works of art were meant to instruct, to remind, and especially to “excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.” To “excite feelings of devotion,” as Margaret Miles emphasized, by “engaging the emotions” and “affecting the will,” John of Genoa and others understood that “images could act as vehicles to focus concentration and effect vivid states of contemplative visionary experience.”²⁸ Thus, what today we call art was then a means to arrive at—to actualize—spiritual truth through reflection and prayer. Arguing along the same lines, Hans Belting pointed out the importance even to laypersons of meditation before an image, which had the result that “ordinary believers assured themselves of their participation in the ideal community of the [C]hurch. [...] Members of the laity,” Belting continued, “who earned their living in urban society practiced devotion in order to compensate for the holiness otherwise denied them, thus [like members of the clergy] also partaking in the life dedicated to God. [...] In this temporal piety the acquisition of a devotional image”—and a triptych commissioned for use by an express group of devotees, a family, or even a single individual is nothing if not that—“was an act of duty. In what we might describe as a domestic icon, owners acquired not only a tool for devotion but a certification of the pious disposition they were to attain. Images became visual proofs of an inner life.”²⁹

Moreover, along with the holy scenes and figures depicted on the panels of an object such as the *Bigallo Triptych*, even its collapsibility seems to have contributed to its prayerful purpose. David Wilkins pointed out that “The hinged wings add an element of intimacy” and added that the privacy of the work is “enhanced by the fact that it can be closed. But the most important reason for the hinged form is revealed by the emphasis that can be found in devotional literature, from St Bernard of Clairvaux onwards, on the importance of preparation for devotion; it was essential that one cleanse one’s soul, and empty out one’s mind prior to devotion.

²⁷ See Jones, “*Visio Divina?*,” 36, 50–51 n. 15; Levin, “The Canopy of Holiness”; and Guérin, “Meaningful Spectacles.”

²⁸ Miles, *Image as Insight*, 66; more broadly, see chap. 1 and pp. 64–75.

²⁹ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 411; see also 362.

The hinged triptych could be kept closed, to be opened only after penance and prayer made it appropriate to proceed to a higher devotional plane.”³⁰ Wilkins later elaborated on this idea, hypothesizing that touching a triptych in order to open and then close it “activated” it in time, and that those two actions defined what “would be the transformative moments [...] [turning] the devotional experience into a physical, tangible act.” Most often, too, the reverse sides of a triptych’s panels—together forming the exterior, front and back, of the object when closed—were painted with a simple decorative pattern devoid of narratives and figures, which only added to the “dramatic effect when the devotee opened the triptych [to reveal] the gold-backed, figurative interior.” Such a contrast must have intensified “the visual, emotional, and perhaps even mystical impact of this transition from closed to open, mundane to heavenly.”³¹ That said, however, the *Bigallo Triptych* stands as something of an exception because the back side of either wing presents not merely a decorative motif but a pair of saints in separate compartments one atop the other (fig. 2). Yet, each of those figures emerges from a dark background, creating a similarly powerful impression as the triptych is opened to reveal its glowing interior. Regardless, Wilkins went on to suggest that, when ajar, “the wings [of a triptych] were probably left at an angle to the central panel,” thereby defining a “sacred space” that would project outward to embrace the devotee meditating or praying before the images it contained, heightening further the whole experience that it offered to commune with the divine.³²

Introducing his own brief discussion of Bernardo Daddi’s small triptychs, including the early one in the Bigallo Museum, John White added a thoroughly prosaic observation, though one that should not be overlooked, when he recognized that while “Bernardo’s reputation rests on [...] an appreciation of the growing needs of personal devotion, [h]e so transformed the small-scale, portable tabernacle [...] that from being a relatively rare form it became the centre of an industry. [...] [Whereas] the demand for small altarpieces for personal use grows naturally from the century-long emphasis on the personal and human aspects of the divinity,” wrote White, “backed by the fervent emotionalism of contemporary preaching, on the one hand, [it was bolstered by] the continued creation of new wealth and the enlargement and diversification of the newly emergent middle classes in the great cities on the other. Like all successful innovations the new form greatly increased the strength of the demand it was designed to satisfy. The pattern that Daddi established was repeated

³⁰ Wilkins, “Bernardo Daddi’s *Triptych*,” 33.

³¹ Wilkins, “Opening the Doors,” 376.

³² Wilkins, “Opening the Doors,” 377.

in innumerable variations.”³³ Wilkins referred to this development even more bluntly as “mass produc[tion] for the marketplace.”³⁴

Returning to the numinous component of the triptych’s role in late-medieval piety, one must understand the efforts of Miles, Belting, and Wilkins to explain how religious imagery was intended to lead the faithful, especially laypersons, from the material world to a higher, more soulful realm, or at least some semblance of it—and in the process quite literally to alter their capacity to see—as reflections on a major shift in Western spirituality, the seeds of which were planted in the Gregorian reforms of the late eleventh century and whose roots then spread over the next two hundred years. Stressing the humanity of Jesus and the consequent belief in the efficacy of individuals to think and act for themselves and to use their innate potential to strive for perfection in this world, aspects of the age of affective piety, as it has been termed—replacing the more distant conceptual theology of the first Christian millennium—have been described by Gerhart Ladner, Carolyn Walker Bynum, and Anne Derbes among others.³⁵ Surely, just as the reduced scale and personalization of audience, not to mention the attention to detail and endearing sentiments, of Bernardo Daddi’s *Bigallo Triptych* and other such paintings were manifestations of this turn toward the more emotional, mindfully human side of Christianity, so too was the enthusiastic adoption by Daddi and his contemporaries of the new realism in Tuscan religious painting—the convincing representation on a two-dimensional surface of solid forms existing in space and the diminished stylization of physiognomies and fold patterns, both of them developments wrought mainly by Giotto a generation earlier—and so, likewise, was the proliferation in that era of beneficent institutions and charitable confraternities such as Orsanmichele, the Bigallo, and the Misericordia of Florence, formed by groups of individuals that coalesced largely to serve neighbours in need. Belting and Derbes, among many others, have also signaled the interchange and mutual support that existed between devotional images in the new style and the surging popularity of edifying texts that adduced biblical and saintly heroes as humble individuals, rendering them more accessible and present to living persons.³⁶ To cite Margaret Miles once again, “Fourteenth-century people wanted not only to worship but also to imitate, to speak and feel and act like their models.”³⁷

³³ White, *Art and Architecture*, 262.

³⁴ Wilkins, “Bernardo Daddi’s *Triptych*,” 34.

³⁵ Ladner, “The Life of the Mind,” 1–32; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*; and Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 16–24 and passim. The literature on late-medieval affective spirituality has grown exponentially in recent decades.

³⁶ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 411; and Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 21–23 and passim.

³⁷ Miles, *Image as Insight*, 73. See also Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 362.

To gauge the calibre of the *Bigallo Triptych*'s affective components, one might revisit the question of sources for the small triptychs of the fourteenth century, particularly those with the Madonna and Child dominating the central panel and narratives on the wings, which constitute the majority of the surviving examples. A large painting in Perugia, the *Triptych of the Franciscans* (ca. 1270) may represent an intermediary stage between, on one hand, the once-common shrine with pointed top containing the sculpted image of a saint or the Virgin, such as the shuttered tabernacle inside of which the now-freestanding *Madonna of the Camaldolese of Borgo San Sepolcro* of 1199, today in Berlin, was probably lodged, and the compact triptych of the fourteenth century on the other (fig. 6). Monumental in scale for maximum visibility and stylistically conservative, paintings comparable to the *Triptych of the Franciscans* (measuring 215 x 190 cm.; 84.65 x 74.80 in.), following the custom established earlier for shrines housing sculpted Madonnas or saints, had gabled contours and were mounted atop public church altars and closed by folding two hinged doors over the gilded central panel. These shutters were opened on important Church occasions to reveal not only the main image in the centre, but also carved or painted narratives pertaining to Mary and her Son, or the venerated saint, on the door interiors.³⁸ Bernardo Daddi's aforementioned *Ognissanti Triptych* of 1328, though lacking narrative vignettes and postdating the Perugian altarpiece by some six decades, perhaps has a place in this discussion also as a transitional step in the process, given its large size (145 x 198 cm.; 57.09 x 77.95 in.) and fixed wings indicating that it, too, was originally set upon a public church altar. The single half-figure of a saint on each of its side panels flanking the central Madonna and Child finds inexact parallels among smaller triptychs whose numbers were just then beginning to swell in earnest, where full-length secondary figures fill the wings or share space with narratives, as noted previously. Whether or not the progression from stately altar shrine encasing a sculpted image to prodigious church altarpiece, to diminutive triptych for smaller audiences is correct, the difference between the authoritative monument to Church doctrines on the mother of God epitomized by the *Triptych of the Franciscans*—overwhelming in

³⁸ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 377, 382–389, and figs. 229 (the triptych in Perugia, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria) and 233 (the sculpture from San Sepolcro; Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz). Paintings in Siena of the Madonna and Child by Guido da Siena, both with pointed tops like the Perugian triptych and both formerly with wings, are in the Pinacoteca Nazionale (from San Bernardino [formerly Santa Maria degli Angeli], Siena, commissioned in 1262 but painted later) and the Palazzo Pubblico (from San Domenico, Siena, dated 1271[?]). Early replicas of both exist. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 390–396, 596 n. 42. The tabernacle once containing the *Madonna and Child* in the Cathedral of Alatri (Lazio), a sculpture that like the one from San Sepolcro is made of wood and is of the *Sedes Sapientiae* type, still exists, according to Toesca, *Il Medioevo*, 863 and fig. 556.

size, publicly displayed, broadly conceived, and traditional in style—and the more personalized intimacy of the *Bigallo Triptych* is striking. In the latter, the more approachable, humane, affective side of medieval religiosity has clearly triumphed over the remote and abstract.

The *Bigallo Triptych*: Central Panel

Turning to the iconography of the *Bigallo Triptych*, the central panel featuring the Madonna and Child—here perched upon a throne with gables and pinnacles mirroring those of the triptych itself, as John White remarked—is a theme and placement inherited from this painting's progenitors, and one that was to remain far and away the most frequent subject for the central panels of small triptychs throughout the fourteenth century (fig. 1).³⁹ Dressed in a celestial blue mantle, Mary's well-known role as protector and intercessor before her Son and, by extension, his Father on behalf of supplicants praying for divine grace—that is, as defender of and intercessor for humankind and purveyor of God's mercy—was a concept fundamental to medieval Christianity.⁴⁰ Eyeing each other soulfully, the expansive, benign Virgin turns toward the Christ Child and raises an index finger as if asking something of Him while making the point that He direct his attention on high. Standing on her left knee and wearing his traditional red shift—the colour of charity—He responds by reaching lovingly for his mother's face with his right hand, a truly human baby unable to refuse her petition.⁴¹ With his left hand Jesus seems to search reflexively for Mary's breast, a quest imbued with meaning and fulfilled on the left wing of the triptych, as noted below. Above them is a trio of concentric pointed-arch relief moldings, the lowest of which forms a trefoil, evocative

³⁹ White, *Art and Architecture*, 262.

⁴⁰ Levin, "Studies in the Imagery of Mercy," chaps. 4–6; Levin, "Advertising Charity," 247–274, esp. 271–274 and accompanying notes (with relevant biblical passages indicated and earlier references); and Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, 21, 34, 36, 53–57, 65, 123 n. 17 (with earlier references), 135–136 nn. 10–11.

⁴¹ In his introductory essay of 1958 in *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8 (reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 18 therein), Offner overlooked the theological implications of these gestures, characterizing them as "childish impulsiveness checked by maternal warning." Earlier, in 1947, he had noted the frequency of the motif of Mary's raised finger within the Daddi workshop, recognizing the possibility of its differing meanings from one painting to another, both "half playful, half warning" and sometimes "with possibly more playful intent." Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 5, 342 and 483, respectively. For various exegetical and literary citations and earlier references concerning red as the colour of charity see Levin, "The Iconography of Charity *Redux*," 124–132, 137–141, esp. 128–129, 132, 137, and accompanying notes; Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, 34, 120–121 n. 8; and Levin, "Death in Florence," 573, 583 n. 14.

of the Trinity and reiterating the bottom edge of the painted canopy over Mary's throne. Hovering within a roundel in the gable of the central panel is the stern frontal figure of God the Father, or perhaps He is God the Son as an adult: owing to the doctrine of the Trinity it makes little difference, for they are but two aspects of the same divine being. The ultimate object of the Virgin's pointing finger below, He echoes that gesture by raising two fingers of his own in blessing, officially granting the request she has made to Him by way of her Infant.

Occupying a narrow intermediary realm forming an arch around the throne and defined by the second and third applied moldings of the central panel—Andrew Ladis called this element an “enframing fillet” and remarked on its Siennese derivation—fourteen overlapped haloed male figures of varying ages are stacked in two groups of seven turning inward toward one another.⁴² The two individuals most fully visible, standing on pedestals at the base of this cohort to either side, are Saint John the Baptist in his hair shirt and Saint Nicholas, the revered bishop of Myra in Asia Minor, dressed as such and identifiable thanks to an abraded inscription on his podium.⁴³ Like Jesus, both men wear red outer garments, as do several of their companions above. John's presence here to the right of the Madonna and Child, the traditional position of honour, surely localizes the original destination of the triptych to Florence insofar as he is that city's patron. John—Giovanni—may also have been the name of the male donor kneeling close to him at the foot of Mary's throne. Alternatively, Niccolò may have been the donor's name, although more likely Saint Nicholas is pictured here for another reason, suggested below. Whatever the motivation(s) for their appearance here, the pairing of these two saints occurs on several other occasions in paintings from the Daddi circle.⁴⁴

⁴² Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi*, 127. In his introduction of 1958 to *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8 (reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 20 therein), Offner traced the origin of this device to framing motifs of paintings from the previous century.

⁴³ For this inscription, rarely mentioned, see Offner's 1958 introductory essay in *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8, reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 20 therein; and Wilkins, “Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*,” 41 n. 19. The plinth beneath John the Baptist may once have borne an identifying inscription as well.

⁴⁴ While John the Baptist is easily recognizable from his hair shirt, Nicholas, most often an elderly man dressed as a bishop, is not. With certainty the two are paired in a triptych in Siena discussed below (Pinacoteca Nazionale, dated 1336). (In an intriguing deviation from that coupling, Nicholas is matched with John the Evangelist in a triptych in Edinburgh [National Gallery of Scotland, dated 1338].) The Baptist appears with an unidentified bishop saint, possibly Nicholas, on the surviving left wing of a diptych in Pasadena, Cal. (Norton Simon Museum of Art, ca. 1330–36), a dismembered triptych in Vatican City (Pinacoteca Vaticana, 1320s?), the surviving left wing of a diptych in Naples (Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, ca. 1326–28), a diptych in Florence (Galleria dell'Accademia delle Belle Arti, 1340s?), and the

Above John and Nicholas, the other twelve men have been identified, logically, as Christ's apostles, and indeed Saints Peter, James the Great, and Bartholomew are discernible through their attributes. But the fact that ten hold codices while two carry scrolls—unfortunately, the parchments unfurled by the pair at the top bear only meaningless stippling—suggests that these represent a mixed congregation of apostles and Old Testament prophets, a theologically justifiable proposition that recurs on countless occasions in art.⁴⁵

The presence of two lay donors, both in profile and hieratically tiny at the Virgin's feet, personalizes the central panel and the entire triptych. Surely a married couple, they kneel in prayer opposite one another. The husband at Mary's right in the position of honour is dressed in a dark robe, with headgear marking him as an individual of unknown professional distinction, while his wife, her head wimpled, wears a pale red gown offset by a swath of dark cloth running down her back. With the appearance of donors in the presence of holy figures, "a private salvation becomes [such a painting's] real subject matter," Belting wrote. When "private individuals are admitted to the main image[,] [t]he image fulfills the donors' expectations. It makes their private concern its own." Just what that particular concern was here that would aid them in attaining the salvation that they prayerfully seek is yet another matter to be addressed below. By physically including these two unnamed individuals practicing devotion, showing them "partaking in the life dedicated to God," Bernardo Daddi also provided them with the visual "certification of th[at] pious disposition they

surviving central panel of a triptych in Columbia, S.C. (Museum of Art, ca. 1335–40). Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 315–321 (Siena), 261–269 (Edinburgh), 59–62 (Pasadena), and 63–70 (Vatican City); Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 162–165 (Naples); Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 5, 199–208 (Florence); and Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 9, 364 (Columbia).

⁴⁵ Peter, second from the bottom at left, holds a key; James the Great at top left holds a walking staff and resembles Jesus, a possible transposition with James the Less, described in Gal. 1:19 as Christ's "brother"; and Bartholomew at top right holds the knife of his martyrdom. Wilkins ("Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*," 41 n. 19) misidentified all twelve as the apostles, even though already in 1958 Offner (*Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8, reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 20 therein) had identified the two figures with scrolls as prophets (justifiably but without explanation calling them Isaiah and Jeremiah), noting that the full complement of apostles is achieved with two of the four evangelists appearing in the spandrels of the opened wings, namely, Matthew and John, both of them also apostles (unlike Mark and Luke, who occupy the other two spandrels) and presumably not pictured a second time among the twelve figures in the arch above John the Baptist and Nicholas. See the discussion of the inner sides of the wings below. Boskovits (Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 170) followed Offner's interpretation and also singled out Peter, James, and Bartholomew among the apostles.

were to attain” that existed, as observed earlier, at the core of late-medieval affective lay piety.⁴⁶

The *Bigallo Triptych*: Four Saints

When not in use, all but the gable of the *Bigallo Triptych*’s central panel with the blessing Father/Son roundel was neatly covered by the two hinged side panels in their closed position. Occupying the outer surfaces of the wings are the four standing saints, partitioned off from one another, who materialize out of dusky backgrounds: Margaret of Antioch and Catherine of Alexandria above, a bishop and Christopher below (fig. 2). The two women turn slightly toward each other, their compartments merging to form a lunette. The male saints are set in two larger rectangular sections and likewise turn toward one another, each of them framed by an applied pointed-arch molding that matches the trefoil in relief over the enthroned Madonna and Child on the central panel. Trilobite ornamental motifs fill the arch spandrels.

The legends and miracles of this quartet as Bernardo Daddi and his patrons would have known them are recounted in the *Legenda aurea*, *The Golden Legend*, by the Dominican archbishop of Genoa Jacobus da Varagine (Jacopo da Varazze), the phenomenally popular compendium of saints’ lives written late in the thirteenth century. Margaret of Antioch, at the upper left, was a fifteen-year-old Christian virgin coveted for her beauty by a pagan prefect.⁴⁷ According to Jacobus’s account, she refused to deny her faith and countenance her suitor, for which she was tortured, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. While in jail the Devil appeared as “a hideous dragon” that attempted to devour her, only to have its stomach rupture thanks to the Cross that Margaret wielded from within; the beast lying helplessly beside her and the Cross in her right hand are her attributes in the *Bigallo Triptych*. The Devil returned as a young man, but Margaret, recognizing him for who he was, repulsed him. The next day she overcame further torture, converting five thousand stunned observers as a result. Then, before her beheading, she prayed especially for women in labour who invoke her name so that their children might be born without harm, just as she had emerged unscathed from the belly of the dragon.

Catherine of Alexandria, an erudite young princess, appears next to Saint Margaret carrying a martyr’s palm. *The Golden Legend* tells of her conversion to Christianity at age eighteen and of how she, like Margaret, defended both her faith and maidenhood before the Emperor Maxentius, who

⁴⁶ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 418 and 411, respectively.

⁴⁷ On Margaret of Antioch see Jacobus da Varagine, *Golden Legend*, 351–354.

was in Egypt conducting a persecution.⁴⁸ Catherine resisted a group of fifty pagan intellectuals brought to refute her and succeeded in converting them. Later, while enduring torture and starvation in prison, she was miraculously cared for by angels and a white dove. After an attempt to kill her using spiked wheels failed—one such wheel is her attribute here—Catherine was decapitated, but not before she implored Christ to grant mercy to those who invoke her memory, a request to which He assented, signaled by the fact that milk flowed from her body in place of her blood. It was also said that oil streaming from her remains could cure the crippled. The pairing of these two female saints on the *Bigallo Triptych* doors is one that, like the coupling of Saints John the Baptist and Nicholas on the central panel, occurs in a number of other paintings by Bernardo Daddi and his followers.⁴⁹

No particularized attribute is present for the bishop saint holding a book and a crozier at the lower left. He resembles generally the Saint Nicholas of the central panel, but it is unlikely that the same individual would appear twice in this work of limited size as an older man in clerical garb in non-narrative situations. If this is in fact Martin of Tours, as he is usually identified, a worshipper would immediately recall the famous story from the saint's younger days as a soldier when he shared his cloak with a beggar who turned out to be Christ Himself.⁵⁰ A catechumen since age twelve, immediately after that incident Martin accepted baptism. Two years

⁴⁸ On Catherine of Alexandria see Jacobus da Varagine, *Golden Legend*, 708–716.

⁴⁹ Though Margaret's father was a priest, both she and Catherine generally wear crowns. Margaret's other attributes are a dragon and/or a small Cross, while Catherine is usually accompanied by a spiked wheel and often a martyr's palm—in both cases as here. With certainty the two are paired in two of the predella panels of the dismembered *Gambier-Parry Polyptych* (Brussels, van Gelder Collection, and Strasbourg, Musée de la Ville, dated 1348), a disassembled triptych in Vatican City (Pinacoteca Vaticana, 1320s?; see note 44 above), a first triptych in Prague (Národní Galerie, ca. 1336), the surviving central panel of a triptych in Kansas City (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, late 1330s), a triptych in Minneapolis (Institute of Art, dated 1339), a second triptych in Prague (Národní Galerie, ca. 1340–45), and a diptych in Florence (Galleria dell'Accademia delle Belli Arti, 1340s?; see note 44 above). Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 340–349 (Brussels and Strasbourg); Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 63–70 (Vatican City), 87–91 (Prague 1), 297–300 (Kansas City), 301–304 (Minneapolis), and 377–380 (Prague 2); and Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 5, 199–208 (Florence). Other possible pairings of Margaret and Catherine include a triptych in Altenburg, Germany (Staatliches Lindenau-Kunst-Museum, ca. 1338–40), a triptych in Milan (Museo Poldi Pezzoli, 1340s?), a triptych in Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard University Art Museums, dated 1334), the surviving central panel of a triptych in Siena (Pinacoteca Nazionale, ca. 1336), and the lateral panels of the *Bandini-Bagnarelli Polyptych* in Fiesole (Museo Bandini, ca. 1350–75). Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 222–227 (Altenburg) and 364–368 (Milan); and Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 216–220 (Cambridge, Mass.), 443–447 (Siena), and 447–457 (Fiesole).

⁵⁰ On Martin of Tours see Jacobus da Varagine, *Golden Legend*, 663–674.

later he was jailed briefly when he publicly announced his Christianity and refused to exercise his military profession. Martin then took holy orders as a monk, was later ordained a bishop, and performed various miracles including the resurrection of a youth, an act that inspired pagan witnesses to convert. In death, according to *The Golden Legend*, his body, like Saint Catherine's, could cure the sick.

Adjacent to Martin is Saint Christopher, the Canaanite giant who, as related by Jacobus da Varagine, was told by a hermit to carry travelers across a treacherous river in order to please Christ.⁵¹ He did so, as represented on the triptych, palm-tree staff in hand, for a Child who became increasingly heavy in transit and then revealed Himself as Christ, informing Christopher that he had borne not only the weight of the whole world but that of its creator, too. After having embraced Christianity, comforted tortured Christians, and converted eight thousand men and hundreds of soldiers, Christopher—like Saints Margaret and Catherine—was imprisoned and beheaded, but not before telling the one-eyed king who had sentenced him that he could regain his sight by rubbing into his blinded eye the blood of his outsize victim.

What do these four saints share that might explain their combined presence as a discrete group in a work of art, and specifically on the *Bigallo Triptych*? Perhaps it is nothing other than that they may be the name-saints of members of the patrons' immediate families. More than that, however, their respective legends as summarized here do have certain things in common. All four individuals were imprisoned for their beliefs, all were eloquent in defending and attracting others to the Christian cause, and all gave help in some way to the infirm. But these are facts common to the lives of many revered saints. What may be more significant here may be that youthfulness played an important role in the story of each of the four saints represented on the triptych. Not only were the two female saints both in their teens during the culminating events of their lives, but the name of Saint Margaret provided aid to newborn children, while Saint Catherine's dead body dispensed milk, the food with which human life begins, as a sign of divine mercy toward her supplicants, who are thus implicitly likened to infants. Saint Martin performed his signal deed, clothing a beggar, while still a young soldier, and among his first acts as a bishop was the restoration of a boy's life. And Saint Christopher's distinctive action was to help the Christ Child ford a stream. Likely, therefore, beyond even the tender age of the first three when they proved their worthiness as Christians, it is the assistance proffered to children by all four saints, here visibly blessed by the Lord in the roundel above, that thematically justifies their joint presence on the *Bigallo Triptych* wings.

⁵¹ On Christopher see Jacobus da Varagine, *Golden Legend*, 377–382.

The *Bigallo Triptych*: Nativity and Crucifixion

Opening the *Bigallo Triptych* to reveal the enthroned Madonna and Child with holy men and donors on the central panel also renders visible the narratives filling most of the inner sides of the hinged wings, both with two scenes, one above the other (fig. 1). Each of the lower events is set within a rectangular compartment and unfolds against a gold-leaf background and beneath an applied pointed-arch molding of trefoil shape similar to those encountered elsewhere on the triptych. In the arch spandrels are, almost certainly, the four evangelists with unraveled scrolls—not the expected co-dices—upon their desks.⁵² The Nativity of Christ on the left shutter is here conflated with the visit of the two shepherds standing beside their flock in the right foreground, who have come to adore the Child. Eleven angels join them, haloed and kneeling in prayer in two opposing groups amid rocky outcrops beneath a shed roof that also covers the traditional ox and ass looking on from behind the empty manger. On the right panel is the Crucifixion, witnessed, as was customary, on the left by a staggering, emotionally spent Virgin Mary turning away and wringing her hands in grief, and on the right by a calmer, yet with furrowed brow clearly anguished John the Evangelist. They are joined here by a rapt and kneeling Saint Francis of Assisi, a frequently represented albeit anachronistic participant in the event during this era of Franciscan prestige and popularity. As pointed out earlier, the arrangement presented by this triptych when open—a Madonna and Child flanked by the Nativity and Crucifixion—was standard within fourteenth-century workshops, and the Daddi circle was no exception.

One element of the *Bigallo Triptych* Nativity is especially notable: Mary is nursing Christ. Art historians had long believed that the nursing Madonna in medieval Western art, as earlier in the East, developed as an iconic type, schematic in style, and that it was almost never employed in narrative scenes. Furthermore, even in the Byzantine sphere its frequency was thought to be a relatively late phenomenon, and mainly a provincial one. Only from the thirteenth century on, particularly in the West, did the nursing Madonna become more realistic in style, although mostly it remained isolated as an image of veneration rather than as part of a pictured event.⁵³ More recently, Anthony Cutler refined our understanding of the East-Christian origins of the type, demonstrating its popularity at a considerably earlier date in Byzantine court circles as well as in the provinces and, significantly, in narrative contexts in addition to iconic ones.⁵⁴

⁵² See note 45 above.

⁵³ Levin, "Studies in the Imagery of Mercy," 606–625 and accompanying notes with abundant earlier references.

⁵⁴ Cutler, "The Cult of the Galaktotrophousa."

Daddi's Nativity on the left wing of the *Bigallo Triptych* presents one of the earliest surviving examples in Italian art of the Madonna nursing the Christ Child in a narrative scene.⁵⁵ Beyond fulfilling the Infant's longing for his mother's breast on the central panel, its presence here does several things. First, by picturing such a humble act as giving suck, the artist engaged the worshipper's emotions, gratifying the then-current desire for affective piety by eliciting empathy for the Holy Family. Second, as hinted earlier, that act, accepted as proof of Christ's humanity, alluded to a long textual tradition specifically linking the Virgin's milk and breasts to her caring role as mediator before her Son, entreating Him on behalf of his mortal brethren. She was the vehicle for their petitions. It emphasized as well his consequent disposition compassionately to grant their pleas because as a human, nurtured like them on maternal milk, He understood their weaknesses. Yet, Christ's gift of divine grace was the reward not merely for the supplicants' devoutness toward Him and his identification with them, but also for their good works, their righteous behaviour toward others—including the needy served by charitable associations such as Orsanmichele, the Bigallo, and the Misericordia of Florence—and thus toward Jesus Himself: "Inasmuch as ye have done [a good work] unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," He proclaimed in Matt. 25:40. His benevolent acceptance of their prayers passed to them through Mary, who functioned at that point as the conduit for her Son's mercy.⁵⁶ Moreover, in the present work of art, surely the concept expressed

⁵⁵ Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena*, 147–148, 148 n. 64, where the innovation is traced possibly to Northern European Nativity scenes in manuscripts of the previous century and the description of the event in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, a popular Franciscan devotional tract. Meiss plausibly suggested that the Madonna of Humility image-type emerged from this narrative background. Thirteenth-century German manuscript illuminations of the Nativity are specified as the source in Shorr, *The Christ Child*, 77. Compositionally and for its location on the left wing, reiterations of the *Bigallo Triptych*'s Nativity occur in a number of other triptychs from the Daddi shop, including those in Altenburg, Germany (Staatliches Lindenau-Kunst-Museum, ca. 1338–40; see note 49 above), Milan (Museo Poldi Pezzoli, 1340s?; see note 49 above), Edinburgh (National Gallery of Scotland, dated 1338; see note 44 above), Berlin (Gemäldegalerie, ca. 1338), Siena (Pinacoteca Nazionale, dated 1336; see note 44 above, and discussed below), Paris (Musée du Louvre, ca. 1338–40), and Prague (second triptych, Národní Galerie, ca. 1340–45; see note 49 above). Of these, the Christ Child nurses only in the triptych in Berlin. However, the central panel of the second triptych in Prague presents "the sole representation in Daddi's shop of the enthroned Madonna giving suck to the Infant [...]" Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 222–227 (Altenburg) and 364–368 (Milan); and Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 261–266 (Edinburgh), 273–280 (Berlin), 315–321 (Siena), 323–327 (Paris), and 377–380 (Prague 2).

⁵⁶ In general, see note 40 above. More specifically in regard to Mary's power of intercession and the meaning attached to the Virgin's milk and breasts, see the discussions, exegetical and literary citations, and earlier references in Levin, "Studies in the Imagery of Mercy," 546–590,

here by means of the nursing Madonna was intended to recall to the worshipper the help offered by a second virgin, Saint Margaret of Antioch, to other newborn children, and the milk of divine mercy that issued from the body of yet another virgin, Saint Catherine of Alexandria—both of them pictured on the reverse sides of the triptych wings—analogs that no doubt ran in the opposite direction, too. Lastly, the motif of the Madonna nursing the infant Christ again evokes the more general theme introduced there of youth and its dependence on those who are older for succor and grace.

One by one, these ideas also inform the Crucifixion as it is represented on the inner side of the triptych's right wing, opposite the Nativity. Christ's humiliation on the Cross was a theological commonplace, and if there was one event in his life that established his humanity more firmly than his feeding at the Virgin's breast, this was it. By definition, therefore, images of the Crucifixion provoked an empathetic response in Christ's devout, equally mortal human flock, as well as feelings of pity, here enhanced by the heartsick expressions and poses of Mary and John standing at the foot of the Cross. The stimulus to affective piety in this depiction of the event is further augmented by the presence of Saint Francis: Franciscan theology was both a result of and an important contributor to that ardent yearning for the divine, rooted as it was in a deep attachment to this world, that was perhaps best exemplified in the saint's vehement devotion to Christ's Passion, which evidently led so many persons to follow in his path.⁵⁷ Indeed, the *poverello's* inclusion here, witnessing the Crucifixion,

606–631, 789–812, 842–862, and accompanying notes; Levin, "The Iconography of Charity *Redux*," 131, 153–154 n. 45; Levin, "Advertising Charity," 296 n. 83; and Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, 53–57, 83, 136–137 nn. 11–13.

⁵⁷ In his introduction of 1958 to *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8 (reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 20 therein), Offner rightly associated the "personal feeling" so important to the era's affective piety with "a personal faith" inherent in Franciscan spirituality, and then speculated that, for their portability and instances of subjectivity in their content, triptychs were "a peculiarly Franciscan form." While Offner's conjecture about a direct link between triptychs and Franciscanism is not provable, Franciscans—especially Francis himself—do appear with some regularity in diptychs and triptychs stemming from the Daddi circle. In addition to the *Bigallo Triptych*, examples include, among others, the surviving left wing of a diptych in Pasadena, Cal. (Norton Simon Museum of Art, ca. 1330–36; see note 44 above), a dismembered triptych in Vatican City (Pinacoteca Vaticana, 1320s?; see notes 44 and 49 above), the surviving right panel of a diptych formerly in Brussels (Stoclet Collection, present location unknown, late 1330s), the surviving central panel of a triptych in Kansas City (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, late 1330s; see note 49 above), the left wing of a triptych in Minneapolis (Institute of Art, dated 1339; see note 49 above), and a triptych in Berne (Kunstmuseum, ca. 1345). Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 59–62 (Pasadena), 63–70 (Vatican City), 245–247 (formerly Brussels), 297–300 (Kansas City), 301–304 (Minneapolis), and 411–415 (Berne).

suggests that one or both of the donors pictured on the triptych's central panel were Franciscan tertiaries. Seemingly relevant in this regard, too, the saint's commitment to good works, to demonstrations of *Amor proximi* as mandated by Christ—a theme generally overlooked by scholars—necessarily must have inspired persons affiliated with the Franciscan Third Order while reaffirming the dedication to philanthropic actions among those also belonging to charitable confraternities.⁵⁸

Beyond this, strikingly visible against the gold-leaf backdrop of the panel, the graphic rivulets of Christ's spurting red blood—the source of his mercy—were certainly intended to play a role in wringing the emotions of the worshipper. Reiterating the fact of Christ's humanity, one can plausibly argue that the quantity of his life-giving blood manifest in both painted and sculpted images of the Crucifixion increased measurably during the course of the fourteenth century, with Daddi's version of 1333 standing as an indication of things to come. Moreover, the Late Middle Ages produced no dearth of texts and images associating directly the spilling of Christ's substance with his nursing at his mother's breast, the healing and redemptive powers of their sacred blood and milk, respectively, stemming from very ancient and enduring beliefs.⁵⁹ Atop the Cross, above the superscription, is a curious vignette that enjoyed great currency in fourteenth-century painting: the Pelican in her Piety. Based on a conflation of biblical passages (Ps. 102:6, Matt. 23:37, Luke 13:34) and the ensuing exegetical tradition comparing Christ to a sorrowful but compassionate pelican that was blended with certain folkloric tales, the story of a mother bird pecking open her own breast to bestow life-restoring blood upon her offspring provided, besides an analogy to Christ's sacrifice, still another example of youths benefiting from the selfless aid of an elder.⁶⁰ Worth noting, too, is that this depiction of the adult Christ borne by the Cross rests back to back on the same panel of the triptych with the picture of the Christ Child borne on the shoulder of Saint Christopher while crossing a turbulent river. This symbolic juxtaposition, found on other panels emanating from the Daddi workshop and elsewhere, cannot be accidental, but in the present setting it

⁵⁸ In his 1958 introduction to *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8 (reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 20 therein), Offner credibly proposed that, due to Francis's appearance here, the (male) donor of the *Bigallo Triptych* "may have been a tertiary." For Francis's dedication to works of mercy see Levin, "Franciscan Influences on Charitable Practice at the Early Florentine Misericordia."

⁵⁹ See the discussions, exegetical and literary citations, and earlier references in Levin, "Studies in the Imagery of Mercy," chaps. 5–6, esp. 789–833, 842–862, and accompanying notes, and appendices C and D; and Levin, "Advertising Charity," 270–272 and accompanying notes.

⁶⁰ Levin, "Studies in the Imagery of Mercy," 862–874 and accompanying notes; and Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, 58–61, 65, 83, and accompanying notes.

no doubt also led worshippers to ponder yet again the notion of youthful reliance on caring and helpful adults.⁶¹

The *Bigallo Triptych*: A Miracle of Saint Nicholas and the Donors

Above the Nativity and Crucifixion scenes there is a two-part sequence representing a posthumous miracle of Saint Nicholas, bearded and wearing a mitre and red cope, calling to mind his other appearance on the *Bigallo Triptych* in the forefront of the male figures surrounding the central image of the enthroned Madonna and Child (fig. 1). The life of Saint Nicholas familiar to Bernardo Daddi and his patrons was actually a synthesis of the stories of two individuals: a fourth-century bishop of Myra on the south coast of Asia Minor and a sixth-century abbot of a monastery at nearby Sion.⁶² The absorption of the latter into the former likely occurred before the year 900, joining textual sources for each that go back to the sixth century. While veneration for Saint Nicholas began in the early Byzantine East, his cult in the West is nearly as old, dating from the seventh century. Reinforced by translations of his saga into Latin, it was widespread enough by the eleventh century to explain the seizure and transferal of the saint's remains from Myra to Bari in southern Italy at the hands of Norman merchants in 1087, giving birth to one of Europe's major pilgrimage destinations.

Frequently pictured in art ever since the end of Iconoclasm in 843, even today Saint Nicholas is widely invoked, and aspects of his legend tell us why. They recount how Nicholas calmed the seas, fed his human flock in time of famine, exorcized demons, and twice intervened to free unjustly imprisoned men from execution. In addition, Nicholas himself is said to

⁶¹ Such a pairing also occurs on the surviving right wing of a lost triptych in Settignano, near Florence (Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, ca. 1340), and a surviving wing of a lost triptych in Florence (Galleria dell'Accademia delle Belle Arti, 1340s?). In addition, the Crucifixion and Saint Christopher are juxtaposed on the inner sides of the wings of a triptych in Montauban, France (Musée Ingres, ca. 1336). Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 239–243, esp. 240 n. 1 (Settignano), 249–253 (Florence), and 439–441 (Montauban). Two other examples from outside the Daddi ambience wherein Christopher and the Crucifixion are matched in the latter manner, in Baltimore (Sienese or Florentine, Walters Art Museum, late fourteenth century) and Dijon (follower of Pietro Lorenzetti, Musée des Beaux-Arts, ca. 1340), are cited in Verdier, *The International Style*, 32–33 and pl. 12 (cat. no. 30, Baltimore). Verdier's sensible alternative suggestion was that the two images combined were regarded “as symbols of the two main sacraments of the Church: Baptism and the Eucharist,” which is to say the two sacraments instituted by Christ in the Bible.

⁶² For the cult and miracles of, and sources on, Saint Nicholas see Jacobus da Varagine, *Golden Legend*, 16–24; Thurston/Attwater, *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, 4:503–506; Gibson, “St. Nicholas of Myra,” 10:454; and Ševčenko, *Life of Saint Nicholas*, 18–27.

have been jailed for his faith, adopted staunchly anti-pagan and anti-heretical stances, and performed miraculous cures on the sick. In short, the righteous things that he did accord closely with certain actions taken by each of the four saints on the outer surfaces of the side panels of the *Bigallo Triptych*. His story also dovetails with portions of theirs on two specific points. Holy oil issuing from his bones was believed to “cure all illnesses,” as *The Golden Legend* puts it, recalling the healing powers of the corpses of Saints Catherine of Alexandria, Martin of Tours, and Christopher. And, like Martin, Saint Nicholas twice resurrected innocent boys.

In fact, the saint’s other efforts on behalf of youths—bringing to mind in general, too, those of Margaret of Antioch, Christopher, and metaphorically Catherine of Alexandria as well—were praised even more. First was Nicholas’s dowering of three girls so poor that their father was ready to force them into prostitution. Second is the story of Adeodatus, Latin for “god-given”; it is this tale that is summarized atop the inner sides of the shutters of the *Bigallo Triptych*. According to Jacobus da Varagine, Adeodatus was born to a rich couple through the intercession of the deceased Saint Nicholas. In thanks, the new father built a chapel to honour the saint. While still a boy, Adeodatus was seized by Agarenian tribesmen and enslaved by their king. The next year, while serving a cup to the king on the saint’s feast day, the lad tearfully recalled his parents. The king questioned him, then defied Saint Nicholas to rescue his slave, at which point a huge wind—the posthumous spirit of the holy man—destroyed the royal palace and carried the boy, cup in hand, to the chapel threshold, where his parents were celebrating the saint’s feast. *The Golden Legend* gives a brief alternative account as well, and therein, too, it is the deceased saint who saw to the child’s freedom and reunification with his parents.

As expected, an earlier, East-Christian version of this tale—in which the child is called Basil and his captor the Saracen emir—lies behind the Western adaptations. Nancy Ševčenko has catalogued six instances of the story’s appearance in Byzantine icon and fresco painting dating from the late twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, each different from the others, and each deviating in certain ways from Byzantine written accounts.⁶³ The earliest of these, for example, on a hagiographic icon at Mount Sinai, tells

⁶³ Ševčenko, *Life of Saint Nicholas*, 29–30 and pls. 3, 3.15–16 (cat. no. 3, Mount Sinai, Egypt, Monastery of Saint Catherine, icon, late twelfth century), 34–35 (cat. no. 10, Bojana, Bulgaria, St. Nicholas, fresco, 1259), 37–38 and pls. 14, 14.14–15 (cat. no. 14, Kakopéttria, Cyprus, Saint Nicholas [now Nicosia, Byzantine Museum], icon, second half of the thirteenth century), 50 and pl. 35.9 (cat. no. 35, Psača, Macedonia, Saint Nicholas, fresco, ca. 1366–71), 54–55 and pls. 40.10–11 (cat. no. 40, Ramača, Serbia, Saint Nicholas [now Saints Constantine and Helen], fresco, ca. 1392), and 59–60 and pl. 42 (cat. no. 42, Mount Sinai, Egypt, Monastery of Saint Catherine, icon, fifteenth century). For descriptions and discussion see Ševčenko, *Life of Saint Nicholas*, 143–148.

the story in two scenes below and to the left of the central figure of Saint Nicholas, showing the child's rescue and then his return to his parents. A later Cypriot icon from Kakopéttria limits the narrative to the boy's return, a single scene located on the right edge. It was at this time that the story appeared in Italian art, too.⁶⁴ Like its Byzantine counterparts, Bernardo Daddi's two-part narrative on the *Bigallo Triptych*, featuring Adeodatus's release and restoration to his parents, differs from its expected textual source—*The Golden Legend*—and is in some details actually closer to the Byzantine texts, such as in setting Adeodatus's homecoming not in the chapel but in his parents' dining room, and in the inclusion of a barking dog at their feet. More fundamental, however, and far more significant here, is simply the prominent, unusual role assigned to the legend, displacing the split Annunciation that most often occupies the cusps of the side panels of fourteenth-century triptychs, and also the quaint lyricism of style—the Daddesque character—used to express it, so in accord with that era's taste for affective piety.

These scenes of a child's restitution to his parents' home must have been meaningful in some way to the patrons who commissioned the object. A century ago Osvald Sirén proposed that the presence of the Saint Nicholas tale indicates that the *Bigallo Triptych* was a votive offering made by the two anonymous donors on the central panel for the safe return of a far-off son.⁶⁵ This explanation seems, however, too mild insofar as it ignores the abruptness and violence with which Adeodatus was torn from his parents. Expanding on Sirén's thought, Wilkins raised the possibility that the couple, kneeling in the common manner of supplicants, were, at the time of commission, in the midst of "some personal family emergency" and might represent parents of "a child or children who had been kidnapped, were lost, or were in some mortal danger." Wilkins, however, immediately dispelled that notion, maintaining that more likely the triptych was an ex-voto "made after the happy outcome of the parents' supplication [...] in fulfillment of a vow made during the crisis, or as [a] votive [offering] to the saint made after the trauma was over [...] in grateful thanksgiving." In support of this view, he then addressed the date 1333 written in Roman numerals on the base of the triptych that, if not altered and thus to be disregarded, as he claimed, has been partially repainted during a past

⁶⁴ Beyond the *Bigallo Triptych* and two copies of it discussed below, five further examples of the miracle in Italian art are cited in Ševčenko, *Life of Saint Nicholas*, 145–147 nn. 5–7 and 13: in Lucca (San Salvatore, façade architrave relief, second half of the twelfth century), Minuto (near Amalfi; Santissima Annunziata, crypt fresco, ca. 1200), Peccioli (near Pisa; San Verano, altarpiece, ca. 1270–80), Bari (Pinacoteca Provinciale [from Bisceglie, Santa Margherita], Apulian icon, late thirteenth century), and Assisi (San Francesco, Cappella del Sacramento, fresco, first quarter of the fourteenth century).

⁶⁵ Cited in Kiel, *Museo del Bigallo*, 118.

restoration. While concluding nonetheless on the basis of style that 1333 is at least close to the painting's date of execution, Wilkins contended that an inscribed date on an artwork of that era normally marks not (necessarily) the year of completion of the object but when the event that it celebrates occurred and/or when its patrons offered the piece, in this case as an ex-voto after the fact.⁶⁶ Countering his earlier belief that the *Bigallo Triptych* was meant for private observances, however, Wilkins subsequently made the important point that the appearance of donors here and elsewhere likely signals that a work of art "was intended [...] to be placed in a [...] public setting rather than [deployed] as an object for private devotion."⁶⁷ Lars Jones extended this idea and that of Belting regarding the donors' "private concern" with the observation that whereas "images bearing donors always assert the agendas of their donor-figure sponsors," whatever those may have been (proprietary, social, political, religious), only when an agenda is too personalized would such an object have been considered inappropriate for communal or corporate—including confraternal—display.⁶⁸

In the *Bigallo Triptych*, nothing establishes, nor does it preserve for us today, the identity of the donating couple, its presumed patrons, nor does it detail a unique family-specific event—harrowing or otherwise—that would have limited its status to that of a private ex-voto. Rather, while the donors are present and were perhaps recognizable to contemporaries, and while they may indeed have ordered the painting as an ex-voto following a particular experience, their individuality is downplayed and their personal history has been purposely suppressed. What is more plausible, therefore, is the possibility that the triptych was conceived not as a thanks offering for pieties of a private or strictly familial nature but for a somewhat more public location outside the patrons' home, informed by their particular concern(s) though in a manner general enough to appeal to a broader cohort of worshippers, and that it was presented to that group—if the inscribed date be true—in 1333 or shortly thereafter.

In his earlier discussion Wilkins commented on the *Bigallo Triptych*'s unusually ample dimensions (90 x 82 cm.; 35.43 x 32.28 in.) that differentiate it from other small triptychs, and thus implicitly its greater weight; in fact, the substantial base beneath the central panel carrying the date was perhaps judged to be necessary to ensure the object's stability. He also remarked on this triptych's "unusual richness of framework" (albeit without mentioning that both the framework and painted surfaces have been

⁶⁶ Wilkins, "Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*," 36–37. Boskovits, following Offner (in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 170), also noted the repainting of the final characters of the inscription such that "[o]ne cannot exclude that the original date has been tampered with."

⁶⁷ Wilkins, "Opening the Doors," 372.

⁶⁸ Jones, "*Visio Divina?*," 37, 52 n. 24; and Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 418.

restored), which would include its tall pinnacles rising above pier-like supports with hinges between the panels and the ornamental arched moldings fastened to the larger painted surfaces, indicating that such features would render a work like this quite fragile. That the surfaces intended to close off and protect the sumptuous interior of the triptych—the outer sides of the wings—bear delicately painted figures of saints rather than merely a decorative pattern only adds to the susceptibility of the object to damage (fig. 2). All of these material factors signal the likelihood that neither a domestic setting nor portability to accommodate travel were considerations of the patrons when they gave the commission to Bernardo Daddi.⁶⁹ Instead, they tend to confirm that this triptych was made to reside in a fixed semipublic space to impress, honour, and inspire an audience wider than the patrons and their family.

These physical characteristics, then, help to provide context for the *Bigallo Triptych*, joining the many thematic elements surveyed here that include the painting's various allusions to divine aid afforded to vulnerable youths, evident especially in the two Saint Nicholas scenes whose extraordinary presence in this setting hints at an unfortunate contemporary incident or circumstance; the importance accorded to the resolution of that situation consistent with the appearance of a prominently inscribed date; and the introduction of donors, whatever their exact motivation may have been, appealing to a Madonna and her Son whose humanity and receptiveness to their plea is indicated both iconographically and stylistically with as much emphasis as possible, consonant with then-current religious sentiments and aspirations. Together, these features suggest that the painting is an early reflection of one of the great societal problems of its era and the humane efforts made to ameliorate it: the surfeit of orphans as well as foundlings—youths abandoned by desperate parents too poor, too sick, or in other ways too threatened to keep them—and the ensuing formation of charitable foundations in early modern Florence and other urban centres to care for them. Of course, a couple wealthy enough to pay for an ornate masterpiece like the *Bigallo Triptych* would have had no need to part with a child and avail themselves of this kind of help. Far more likely, the kneeling benefactors commissioned the painting as a generous gift to such an institution, a meaningful focal point for the devotions of its members, in order to register their approval of its good work. Conceivable therefore, too, is the prospect that one or both of them were affiliated with that body and committed to its philanthropic enterprise, participating in its beneficent undertakings on behalf of disinherited youths and winning

⁶⁹ Wilkins, "Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*," 34–36; largely reiterated for triptychs in general in Wilkins, "Opening the Doors," 372. On the restoration of the triptych, likely undertaken during the first half of the nineteenth century and not considered by Pillori in 1843 (see note 2 above), see Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3, 170.

for themselves God's favour and, ultimately, salvation as a reward for their dedication and energy.

The Misericordia, Parentless Children, and Other Triptychs

Archival documents beginning in 1368 uncovered, published, and discussed elsewhere by the present author verify that the Archconfraternity of Saint Mary of Mercy—the Misericordia—original occupant of the Bigallo Museum to which Bernardo Daddi's triptych belongs, was one of the few Florentine philanthropic organizations that, amid its various charitable endeavours, lodged, fed, and clothed abandoned and orphaned children in the confraternity's headquarters, cared for them when they were ill, undoubtedly engaged wet-nurses for the infants among them, properly buried those innocents who did not survive, and sought to restore those who did to their parents or find new homes for them.⁷⁰ Drawing from this set of related undertakings—each a manifestation of the period's inclination toward affective piety—the latter action in particular was proclaimed publicly (and the others implied) in a damaged fresco of 1386 by Ambrogio di Baldese and Niccolò di Pietro Gerini once on the building exterior and, like the *Bigallo Triptych*, now inside the museum.⁷¹ In that painting, two members of the Misericordia wear the red mantles donned during the fourteenth century by brethren while engaged in official confraternity business, including appropriately the performance of acts of charity, and recalling the clothing of the Christ Child, John the Baptist, Saint Nicholas, and the female donor in the *Bigallo Triptych*, as well as that of the personified virtue in the *Allegory of Mercy* (figs. 1, 5). The two men in the fresco are accepting helpless children into their custody and then transferring them to women who will care for them, be they their natural or adoptive mothers.

The Baldese-Gerini painting of 1386 is but the latest of five works of art from the fourteenth century associated with the Florentine Misericordia that reflect the confraternity's services for the benefit of parentless children.⁷² The others in this group include two personifications of the virtue

⁷⁰ Levin, "Lost Children," 37–40, 46–55, accompanying notes, and 83–84 (documents 1–5). See also Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, 67–69, 71–73, 78, and accompanying notes; and Levin, "Death in Florence," 579, 588 n. 47.

⁷¹ Kiel, *Museo del Bigallo*, 120–121 and pls. 42–48 (cat. no. 8); Levin, "Advertising Charity," 221–233, 275, accompanying notes, and figs. 3–4; Levin, "Lost Children," 40–46, accompanying notes, and figs. 2–3; Earenfight, "The Residence and Loggia," chap. 7 and figs. 135–138; Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, 34, 67–69, 71–73, 78, accompanying notes, and fig. 10; and Bent, *Public Painting*, 93–96, accompanying notes, pl. 12, and fig. 35. All sources named include earlier references.

⁷² Levin, "Art as Confraternal Documentation" (with earlier references).

Charity and a pair of images of the Madonna and Child. Significantly, all four earlier pieces predate 1368, the year when written documentation of those activities commences, leading to the conclusion that the Misericordia was involved in this work nearly a half-century earlier than previously believed.

Bernardo Daddi's *Bigallo Triptych* now joins that group of artworks as further proof. Although it went unrecorded until 1843, when it was seen in its present location, this is not surprising because, as stated previously, there exist few inventories of the early offices of the Misericordia or, for that matter, of the possessions of the Bigallo confraternity that merged temporarily with it in the fifteenth century and displaced it in the sixteenth, and such records as do exist are unspecific and notoriously difficult to interpret.⁷³ Logic backed by internal evidence suggests, however, that the *Bigallo Triptych* remains today in the setting for which it was painted, the former seat of the Misericordia, a witness to that institution's work with homeless children decades before written accounts substantiate it.⁷⁴ And if, like the Daddesque *Allegory of Mercy* fresco from a decade later and the Baldese-Gerini painting, it passed from the Misericordia to the Bigallo confraternity (and ultimately to the Bigallo Museum) along with the buildings housing it, that, too, is understandable, and not only because, like the Misericordia, the Bigallo looked to the Virgin Mary, protagonist of the triptych, as its protector. More important, when in 1541 the Bigallo was transformed into a supervisory body as the government magistracy that exercised a commanding role over the administration of all public charity in Florence, it was officially handed the task of looking after foundlings and orphans, a service that the two confraternities had shared following their merger in 1425, and one that in fact may have passed fully if informally to the Bigallo at the time of their legal separation in 1489.⁷⁵ As a result, in carrying out that ministry the *Bigallo Triptych* would have remained as applicable to its new corporate owner as it had been to its old one.

⁷³ Periodic archival inventories for the Misericordia-Bigallo headquarters exist, including those recorded in 1436, 1441, 1446, 1453, 1576, and 1584, after which published guidebooks of Florence with inventory-like descriptions of the premises began to appear. See Saalman, *The Bigallo*, 27 n. 58, 29.

⁷⁴ If accurate, this conclusion corrects previous assertions that the triptych was made for the Bigallo confraternity. See Offner's introduction of 1958 in *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 8, reprinted in 1989 in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 3; see p. 21 therein; and White, *Art and Architecture*, 262. The present author formerly entertained this possibility as well: see Levin, "Confraternal Self-Imaging," 8–9, 8 n. 22.

⁷⁵ Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti*, 22, 27–60, 802–816 (documents F through L); Saalman, *The Bigallo*, 25, 25 n. 52, 49–50 (document 9i); Levin, "Advertising Charity," 283–284 n. 28, 285–286 n. 39 (with earlier references); Levin, "Lost Children," 48, 73 n. 48 (with earlier references); and Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy*, 68–69, 148 n. 4 (with earlier references).

Two other Florentine triptychs from the fourteenth century closely reflect the content and iconography of what is usually considered their prototype at the Museo del Bigallo and likely have a derivation in common with it. Offner attributed the one now in the Pinacoteca in Siena and dated 1336 on its base, its painted surfaces badly deteriorated, to the close following of Bernardo Daddi.⁷⁶ Compared with the *Bigallo Triptych*, it is somewhat smaller (80 x 75 cm.; 31.5 x 29.53 in.), lacks the pinnacles that once surely crowned the hinged piers separating the panels, and its surface ornamentation and applied moldings are more austere. There are differences of detail, too: the enthroned Mary and Christ are posed frontally, with minimal interaction; flanking them, Peter and Paul are the only saints joining John the Baptist and a bishop in a dark blue vestment without specific attributes identified by scholars as Nicholas, and here they are accompanied by sixteen angels, all of them aligned not within a separate enframing arch but in stacked horizontal registers to either side of the throne; Mary Magdalene replaces Saint Francis in the Crucifixion scene; and the outer sides of the wings show traces of a split Annunciation above and two now-unidentifiable saints below. Though as in the *Bigallo Triptych* the Baptist and the reputed Saint Nicholas occupy the foreground of the central panel with the blessing Father/Son looming within a roundel in the gable above, and the two-part narrative of Nicholas (here clad in a red cope) and Adeodatus appears atop the inner sides of the wings, there are no supplicating donors, and the Virgin does not nurse her Child in the Nativity scene. Still, the correspondences between the Siena and Bigallo paintings clearly outweigh their differences.

Closer still to the *Bigallo Triptych* is the painting by Taddeo Gaddi today in Berlin, signed and dated 1334, though individual figures, narrative details, and colours are more overtly expressive in some ways than those of Daddi, typical especially of Gaddi's early period (figs. 7, 8).⁷⁷ While in better condition than the *Siena Triptych*, its painted surfaces have

⁷⁶ Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 315–321 (including pls. XLI, XLI.1–3); and Torriti, *La Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena*, 228–229 (cat. no. 60, including figs. 268–270).

⁷⁷ Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi*, 41–43, 127–129 (cat. no. 7, including pls. 7–1, 7–2); and Boskovits, *Frühe italienische Malerei*, 47–52 and figs. 82–92 (cat. no. 22). Ladis most fully described Gaddi's early style in his chap. 2. For Gaddi's artistic development see also Donati, *Taddeo Gaddi*, passim (accurately noting on p. 35 “che l'opera del Daddi servi da guida [...] all'operetta di Taddeo”); White, *Art and Architecture*, 266–269 (and describing on p. 263 Gaddi's Berlin painting as “a straightforward copy of Daddi's Bigallo tabernacle”); Oertel, *Early Italian Painting*, 188–192 (maintaining on p. 192 that Daddi's *Bigallo Triptych* “was reproduced [...] by Taddeo Gaddi, correct to the last detail,” though calling the Berlin painting in n. 80 on p. 358 simply “a free copy”); and Smart, *The Dawn*, 78–84 (and referring on pp. 73–74 to Gaddi's painting as “a more or less exact copy” of Daddi's triptych, which mistakenly the author located in the Bargello in Florence).

suffered, surely in part the result of a thorough past dismemberment of the triptych's side panels, although restorers most recently have successfully filled in lacunae and reintegrated the severed fragments, carefully repositioning them according to their original appearance. Lost, however, are the gable of the central panel probably with the blessing Father/Son in a roundel, the outermost borders around all three panels, and, judging by the measurements of individual portions of the whole, the two pinnacles formerly resting on pillars with hinges.⁷⁸ The *Berlin Triptych* manifests other differences from Daddi's Florentine triptych as well: even taking into account the missing central gable, peripheral framework, and pinnacles, it is notably smaller (62 x 60 cm.; 24.41 x 23.62 in.); heavy twisted columns carry the trefoil molding of the central panel; the enthroned Mary and Christ do interrelate but in a less demonstrative manner; the Franciscan Saint Louis of Toulouse substitutes Saint Nicholas at the right forefront of saints and prophets filling the arched band surrounding the Madonna and Child; again the Magdalene supplants Saint Francis in the Crucifixion; backgrounds on the reverse sides of the wings are silvered rather than painted dark; and the outer face of the left wing features Christ standing between and wrapping his arms around the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist—youngest of the Apostles—as He commends them to one another (John 19:26–27) in place of a solitary Saint Martin.

While the impact of Franciscanism is somewhat mitigated in Gaddi's triptych compared with Daddi's version in the Bigallo—it disappears entirely in the *Siena Triptych*—more importantly, the tale of Saint Nicholas and Adeodatus in two scenes, the two petitioning donors, the nursing Virgin in the Nativity, and three of the saints on the outer sides of the wings are retained. Superseding the fourth, the tableau of Christ with Mary and “the disciple [...] whom He loved” articulates better than does Saint Martin, renowned though he was for his miraculous resurrection of a boy, the goal at the core of the Misericordia's commitment to ensure the well-being of helpless youths (fig. 8). By staging this episode in a setting that is ambiguous—not at Calvary, with Jesus hanging from the Cross, as related in the Gospel—Gaddi translated into everyday terms the biblical account of a mother about to lose one child who is then assigned

⁷⁸ For a full condition report and details of the restoration campaigns, the most recent of which occurred in 1983, see Boskovits, *Frühe italienische Malerei*, 47–52 (cat. no. 22). Necessarily none of the other sources cited in the preceding note, all predating 1983, include current information. Only Boskovits (pp. 48–49) suggested a now-absent central gable along with an outer framework, while White (*Art and Architecture*, 263), followed by Wilkins (“Bernardo Daddi's *Triptych*,” 36), pointedly seemed to deny that the triptych possessed a gable and pinnacles. Regarding the missing pinnacles proposed here, however, contrast Ladis's pre-restoration photograph of the triptych in closed position (*Taddeo Gaddi*, pl. 7–2) with that of Boskovits (fig. 83).

another (“Woman, behold thy son!”), even as that disoriented and disconsolate second child finds a new home with the dutiful woman who will care for him in the first child’s stead (“Behold thy mother!”).⁷⁹ And by clothing Christ in the red mantle of charity and of the fourteenth-century Misericordia brethren, the artist portrayed the event as a sad but reassuring metaphor for the grim situation and the uplifting response to it—abandonment or orphanhood remedied by adoption—that occurred repeatedly in contemporary Florence, with the Misericordia standing literally at its centre.⁸⁰

Critics have attempted to define the relationship between these two important Florentine artists, both emanating from the ambience of Giotto, weighing in on whether Daddi gave impetus to Gaddi, or if the two were collaborators, or even speculating that they purposely avoided one another professionally.⁸¹ The triptychs in the Bigallo Museum and Berlin are touchstones of this discussion, of course, and scholars have also wondered whether here, at least, the two artists were each working from some common model—by Giotto himself, or by the ostensibly younger Maso di Banco, another Giotto pupil.⁸² These questions are unanswerable. But pointing to certain iconographical elements that the *Berlin Triptych* shares with the Bigallo painting, Andrew Ladis asked rhetorically, “Is it coincidental that a lost child is the recurring subject of [Gaddi’s] triptych, and recovery the constant hope?” before “suggest[ing] the possibility that [this]

⁷⁹ Ladis (*Taddeo Gaddi*, 43) specified that Christ’s pronouncement to his mother “once issued from his lips in gold” on the surface of the panel. Boskovits (*Frühe italienische Malerei*, 49) noted only the inscription’s fragmentary condition in gold letters on a slanted line upon the figures of Mary and Jesus.

⁸⁰ Similarly, Gaddi dressed in red his Saints Margaret and (partially) Christopher also pictured on the outer sides of the wings, and likewise Saint Nicholas in the two narrative scenes on the inner sides of the shutters. Additionally, the Christ Child and John the Baptist on the central panel are clad in reddish garments. Most significantly, perhaps, Gaddi’s male donor wears a red mantle.

⁸¹ For example, White (*Art and Architecture*, 268) and Smart (*The Dawn*, 78, 84) suggested that Daddi influenced Gaddi (see further Boskovits, *Frühe italienische Malerei*, 50, for a list of scholars sharing this opinion); Boskovits in 1988 (*Frühe italienische Malerei*, 50) proposed a collaborative relationship between the two (countering or exceeding opinions expressed in Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi*, 150–151, 151 n. 2 [cat. no. 14], 210 [cat. no. 41], and 216 [cat. no. 46]); and then in 2001 Boskovits (introductory essay in Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 5, 12), while still admitting the possibility of their occasional collaboration as in the case of the two triptychs under discussion here, intriguingly postulated that contemporary painters such as Daddi and Gaddi engaged in “precise agreements [...] to regulate the competition of the Florentine shops” in order to control the separate markets for panel paintings and frescoes, respectively.

⁸² For the names of scholars holding these two views see Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi*, 127; and more fully Boskovits, *Frühe italienische Malerei*, 50.

triptych was commissioned by parents bereft of a son.”⁸³ As with Sirén’s hypothesis concerning the *Bigallo Triptych*, a modification of Ladis’s theory about the Berlin painting may be in order. Taddeo Gaddi’s triptych, and the one associated with Bernardo Daddi in Siena, too, while both works of Florentine art from the 1330s, resemble their presumed exemplar in the Bigallo Museum in yet another way: they lack early provenances.⁸⁴ It may be safest to conclude, therefore, that like Daddi’s masterpiece still in Florence, both were commissioned by local persons of substance untroubled by the absence of young members of their own households, but deeply touched by the prevailing spirit of affective piety and profoundly concerned with the plight of unfortunate young compatriots who had been either orphaned or voluntarily abandoned by their own parents. Perhaps the triptychs in Siena and Berlin, then, like the one in Florence, are to be counted among the artworks constituting the oldest surviving pieces of evidence for what we know from later archival sources was, early on, an important part of the charitable mission of the Florentine confraternity of the Misericordia, the care of homeless children. In consideration of the conspicuous placement probably reserved for Daddi’s triptych that was almost surely their model, it seems likely that the other two were either earmarked for secondary chambers within the Misericordia’s offices—perhaps one of them was stationed in the quarters occupied by its youthful wards—or ordered and paid for by members of the confraternity for private devotions at home.

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⁸³ Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi*, 43.

⁸⁴ Gaddi’s triptych came to light in 1821 and 1823, when it entered the Berlin Gemäldegalerie in pieces. Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi*, 127; and Boskovits, *Frühe italienische Malerei*, 49. The triptych by a Daddi follower was undocumented prior to its entry into the Siena Pinacoteca in 1946. Offner/Boskovits, *Corpus*, sec. 3, vol. 4, 316.

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Fig. 1. Bernardo Daddi, *Bigallo Triptych*, open position, Museo del Bigallo, Florence, 1333. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY).



Fig. 2. Bernardo Daddi, *Bigallo Triptych*, closed position, Museo del Bigallo, Florence, 1333. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY).



Fig. 3. Early headquarters of the Archconfraternity of Saint Mary of Mercy (loggia, oratory, and residence), now the Museo del Bigallo, Florence, 1321–22ff. (Photo: Author).



Fig. 4. Bernardo Daddi, *Orsanmichele Altarpiece*, Orsanmichele, Florence, 1347.
(Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY).

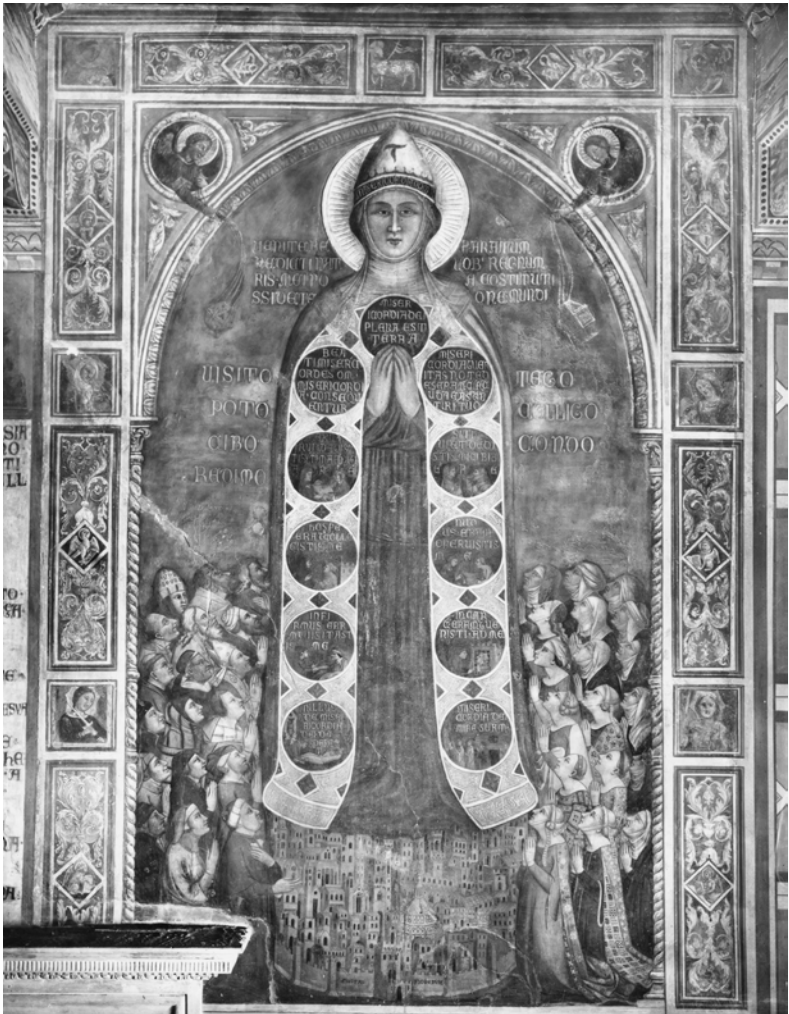


Fig. 5. Circle of Bernardo Daddi, *Allegory of Mercy*, Museo del Bigallo, Florence, 1342. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY).



Fig. 6. Master of the Triptych of Perugia, *Triptych of the Franciscans*, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia, ca. 1270. (Photo: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY).



Fig. 7. Taddeo Gaddi, *Berlin Triptych*, open position, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 1334. (Photo: bpk Bildagentur/Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany/Jörg P. Anders/Art Resource, NY).



Fig. 8. Taddeo Gaddi, *Berlin Triptych*, closed position, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 1334. (Photo: bpk Bildagentur/Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany/Jörg P. Anders/Art Resource, NY).