

**JACOPO DI CIONE**

Italian, act. 1365–98

Madonna and Child with Saints, 1391

Tempera and gold on panels; central panel:

53 3/4 × 27 in., side panels: 49 × 24 in.

(136.5 × 68.6 cm. and 124.5 × 61 cm.)

Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1928 (2834)

Italy during the fourteenth century was alive with artistic activity, and Florence was a thriving center enjoying economic expansion, political stability, and artistic achievement. Jacopo di Cione, a member of a Florentine family of artists that included his brothers Nardo and Andrea (called Orcagna), is credited with creating this panel painting, which once hung in the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence.

This is a devotional painting of the Virgin Mary and Christ enthroned, with Mary depicted as the Mother of God, a common theme in Christian art. Here Christ, although the size of a child, seems to embody the entire Trinity, a concept corroborated by the goldfinch, the symbol of his Passion, in his left hand, and the blessing gesture of his right hand. Generally recognized by their attributes, the figures on the side panels have traditionally been identified as St. Anthony, St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. John the Evangelist, and St. Gregory. Other research indicates that the images may depict St. Amata, St. Concordia, St. Andrea, and St. Marco Papa, whose relics are in San Lorenzo.

Artists of the late fourteenth century in Italy fell heir to the accepted practices of late Gothic art styles as well as

to the innovations brought about by notable pre-Renaissance artists, such as Cimabue, Duccio, and Giotto. Giotto had successfully experimented with creating a convincing illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. It is apparent that Jacopo was deeply influenced by Giotto; in the *Madonna and Child with Saints* Jacopo attempts to create perspective, particularly in the floor tiles in the central panel, the shading of the angels' robes, and the overlapping forms of the saints and the angels. One senses the volume of the bodies, the flow and fullness of the clothing, and a bold attempt to model the faces, in both the youthfulness of Mary and the agedness of Pope Gregory. This panel painting shows the lavish use of gold leaf so popular in the dark, candlelit churches of the time. Close scrutiny reveals hundreds of tiny brushstrokes built up to shape faces, clothing, and other elements. This work exemplifies the experiments and successes during a critical epoch in the history of Western painting. LLG



JACOPO DI CIONE

Italy, active 1365–1398

***Madonna and Child with Saints*, 1391**

Tempera, gilding on wood panel

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1928 (2834)

In this devotional painting of the Virgin Mary and Christ enthroned, Mary is depicted as the Mother of God, a common theme in Christian art. Christ, although the size of a child, seems to embody the entire Trinity, a concept corroborated by the goldfinch, the symbol of his Passion, in his left hand, and the blessing gesture of his right hand. Jacopo di Cione was deeply influenced by the advances in pictorial naturalism of other Italian artists such as Giotto and Duccio. He attempted to create a sense of linear perspective, particularly along the floor tiles of the central panel, and suggest the mass and volume of the figures through the delicate tonal modeling of their faces and robes.

Madonna and Child with SS. Anthony of Egypt, Italy
Catherine of Alexandria, John the Evangelist Florentine School
and Gregory (#2834) 1391
Gift of Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, 1928
triptych, tempera with gold on wood panels

ARTIST: "Jacopo di Cione, active c. 1368-1398. He was probably the youngest of 3 brothers, the other 2 known as Andrea Orcagna and Nardo di Cione. The brothers collaborated, and no extant painting is documented as the work of Jacopo alone. Both he and Nardo obviously followed the style of their elder brother, Andrea."
Fern Rusk Shapley, Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, Italian Schools XIII-XV C., Phaidon Press, London, p.33.

The first 40 years of the 14th C. in Florence had been years of unprecedented prosperity, political stability and artistic activity. Painters developed a more naturalistic style with human values reflected in religious images and a wider range of intellectual and emotional awareness. In the work of Giotto, traditional themes are interpreted in new, intensely human ways, where the interaction of people becomes real and emotionally moving, in comparison with the stiffer, more iconic images of medieval art.

From about 1340 on, Florentine society was shaken by a series of disastrous events. Internal and external political difficulties combined with the failure of the banks to produce a severe depression. Crop failures were closely followed by the appearance of the Black Death (bubonic plague); by September of 1348, more than half of the populace of Florence had perished.

The painting of the last half of the 14th C. reflects these profound social changes, in a turn towards a more intensely religious art and in a significant departure from Giotto's more humanistic style. It is from this conservative trend that Jacopo di Cione comes. For a detailed discussion of this period see Millard Meiss, Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death, Princeton University Press.

SUBJECT: The Madonna with Child, seated on a bolster cushion before a richly ornamented cloth backdrop, and attended by 6 angels. The Child holds a small bird, a symbolic reference to the Passion, and raises his right hand in a gesture of blessing. At Mary's feet rests a vase of lilies, symbol of her purity.

In the left panel, St. Anthony of Egypt is identified by his monk's cloak and cowl, and his tonsured head. Born in Upper Egypt he lived A.D. 251-356 and is generally regarded as the father of monasticism.

Madonna and Child with SS. Anthony of Egypt,
Catherine of Alexandria, John the Evangelist
and Gregory (#2834)

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He carries a book and a stick with a T-shaped handle, usually believed to represent a crutch, as a reference to the medieval monk's duty of helping the crippled.

In this same panel, St. Catherine of Alexandria holds a book, symbol of her great learning, and a palm, attribute of martyrs. She is here dressed as a medieval nun. See card on French limestone St. Catherine (#3717.1)

In the right panel, St. John the Evangelist is shown as a grey-bearded older man. The book is a reference to his writings, and the cross to his presence at the Crucifixion.

St. Gregory appears in elaborate papal vestments, wearing the papal tiara and ^{carrying} the crook-shaped pastoral staff. His gloved hands bear 2 rings and an open book with the abbreviated Latin inscription "I believe in one God, the Father omnipotent, maker of Heaven and Earth." Pope Gregory is known as one of the 4 western Fathers of the Church; he also established the form of the Roman liturgy and its music (Gregorian Chant).

James Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art, Harper and Row, N.Y., 1974. At the bottom of the center panel is an inscription reading "Anno Domini 1391," the year of the painting's execution.

MEDIUM:

Altar

triptych in tempera with gold on wood panels, mounted in a Gothic frame. Surface abraded and cracked throughout, with much of the gold decoration worn through. Punch designs (tooling) used for haloes and ornamental fabric backdrop.

STYLE: Jacopo di Cione's painting style, like that of his brothers and other Florentine painters of the third quarter of the 14th C., is a curious blend of Giottesque influence with older, more medieval elements. The figures suggest his familiarity with those of Giotto, in their weightiness, the extensive use of modeling and distinct shadows, and the falls of drapery which imply form and roundness. These figures, however, are placed in a flattened, very medieval space: a celestial gold background with an elaborately decorative curtain, the pattern of which makes no concessions to folds.

While Jacopo has taken care to individuate the major figures, they are quite lacking in the vitality and energy of Giotto's. Frozen in a symmetrical arrangement, all turn toward the center with a sameness of expression, communicating spiritually with the Madonna and Child but

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Madonna and Child with SS. Anthony of Egypt,
Catherine of Alexandria, John the Evangelist
and Gregory (#2834)

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not with each other. This trend towards ^{hieratic} religious imagery is typical of the conservative taste of Jacopo's contemporaries. Most of Jacopo's work shows an interest in elaborate decorative backdrops, seen here in the rich pattern of birds, leaves and flowers. It is interesting to note his use of the painted floor tiles. While the center tiles are in exaggerated perspective, the others are in reverse perspective: i.e. the lines diverge rather than converge. In effect, he uses the tiles as a 2-D decorative device: they serve to frame the vase of lilies and point towards the Madonna as center of interest.

Note the hierarchical scale, with the least important figures of the angels being the smallest.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: Compare with other Madonna and Child paintings, tracing the development of:

1. the relationship between Mother and Child
2. the physical form of the Child
3. space

What devices does the artist use to direct your eye to the center of interest?

Point out other representations of St. Catherine and St. John the Evangelist in the galleries. Discuss the use of symbols to tell stories and to identify the saints.

Jacopo di Cione (Italian, c. 1325–c. 1398)

Madonna and Child with Saints, 1391

Tempera and gilding on panel

Gift of Anna Rice Cooke, 1928 (2834)

In this devotional painting, Christ is depicted as the King of Heaven with the Virgin Mary acts as a his throne for Christ, who is depicted as the King of Heaven. Christ, resembling more a grownsmall man rather than an infant child, he offers a blessing with his right hand and holds a goldfinch, the symbol of his sufferingPassion, in his left. Like other 14th-century artists, Jacopo di Cione, like other 14th-century Italian artists, was influenced by the the advances in pictorial naturalism that occurred throughout his lifetime. This work demonstrates shows the artist'shis attempt atawareness of linear perspective—, particularly along the floor tiles of the central panel—, ands well as his interest in modeling figures with a sense of mass and volume, both of which help the composition to appear moresuggest three-dimensional in the composition.