

Italian
Paintings
in the
Walters
Art Gallery



By FEDERICO ZERI

SCHOOL OF SPOLETO

I. *The Mourning Virgin* (Inv. no. 37.1155) PLATE I and FRONTISPIECE

This panel representing the Virgin Mary, her left hand raised to her cheek in grief, must have appeared on the left side of the central portion or apron of a large crucifix. Facing the Virgin on the right was the mourning St. John the Evangelist.

The style is that of the School of Spoleto during the late twelfth and early decades of the thirteenth century. The proportions of the figure, the handling of the Virgin's features, and the rendering of her garments are very close to the work of Alberto di Sotio (or "Sotii"), a painter known through a signed crucifix of 1187 in the Cathedral at Spoleto. Frescoes in the church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Spoleto have also been rightly attributed to him. These betray the same artistic background as the Walters fragment, and stylistic elements of Roman, Byzantine and northern European origin are combined and interpreted in the same individual way. In spite of such strong affinities, however, it is not possible at this time to ascribe the Walters fragment to Alberto's own hand, and it seems more reasonable to place it within his immediate following, near the end of the twelfth century. However, when more is known about Alberto's development the fragment might prove to be his, perhaps in his later phase. It has also been suggested that the work be given to another painter of Spoleto known through a crucifix signed Petrus Pictor and dated 1242 or 1243 in the church of Sant'Antonio at Campi, near Norcia. But this attribution is unlikely as Petrus' style is much later and much inferior to that of the Walters panel.

The Walters fragment, like Alberto's signed crucifix, is painted on parchment attached to a wood support. The four rounded depressions on the left suggest a pattern that ran along the border of the entire crucifix. Such a border may be seen in the crucifix in Spoleto, as well as in other examples of the Umbrian School of the thirteenth century.

Inscribed on the rectangular strip near the Virgin's feet: s[C]A M[ARIA].

REFERENCES: E. Sandberg-Valalà (*La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della passione*, 1929, p. 627, fig. 409) calls this painting a fragment from the central portion of an Umbrian cross, compares it with ruined crosses at Vallo di Nera and in the Museum at Spoleto, attributes it to the School of Spoleto, and observes similarities with Alberto di Sotio and Petrus; *idem* (in *JWAG*, 2, 1939, pp. 9 ff., figs. 1, 2) tentatively ascribes it to Alberto di Sotio, compares it with his signed cross of 1187 in the Cathedral of Spoleto, and calls it a fragment from the center of a large crucifix. She calls attention to the unusual clear blues of the Virgin's robe and notes that this type of coloring is to be found in some early works of the Schools of Spoleto and Siena // Walters Art Gallery, *Handbook of the Collection*, 1936, ill. p. 110 // G. M. Richter (in *JWAG*, 3, 1940, pp. 85 ff., fig. 3) rejects the attribution to Alberto, calls it a work of the School of Spoleto, and tentatively ascribes it to Pietro da Spoleto on the grounds of its coloring and drapery style, dating it between 1230 and 1240 // E. B. Garrison (*Italian Romanesque Panel Painting*, 1949, pp. 31, 219, no. 597, ill.) considers it a fragment from the apron of a crucifix, attributes it to the School of Spoleto, and dates it in the late twelfth or the early thirteenth century // D. Rosen (in *JWAG*, 13-14, 1950-51, pp. 50 f., figs.

11-13, before and after cleaning) discusses the preservation of the wooden support through the method of wax impregnation // F. Zeri, in *Apollo*, 84, 1966, ill. p. 442.

Wood, vertical grain. Gold ground, tooled halo. Modern gilded molding.

Measurements: Over-all, $35\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{7}{8}$ in. (89.0 × 29.0 cm.). Painted surface, $33\frac{1}{4} \times 9\frac{3}{8}$ in. (84.5 × 24.5 cm.). Original panel, greatest height, $33\frac{3}{4}$ in. (85.8 cm.); greatest width, $10\frac{1}{4}$ in. (26.0 cm.). Thickness, $1\frac{1}{16}$ in. (4.3 cm.), except where the wood has been undercut near the top and the thickness is 1 in. (2.5 cm.).

Condition: Because of its fragmentary condition, the panel preserved a most irregular shape which has now been squared off by new wood inserts at the top and along the lower left side. The painting is on parchment which had buckled and become detached because of disintegration of the wood support; areas of the paint layer were loose or missing. Transposition to a new support was out of the question because of the circular depressions to the left of the Virgin which follow corresponding depressions in the wood support. In order to retain this integral

part of the composition, the wood was consolidated by impregnating it with beeswax. The buckled parchment was firmly reattached and the loose paint particles were laid down. Cleaning of the surface in 1935 revealed hitherto unsuspected boldness of design and brilliance of color. A large loss in the lower portion of the blue mantle was inpainted. The peripheral areas of loss, which were extensive, were filled with gesso and inpainted in a manner which leaves the restorations distinguishable from the original. The painting was framed with a new gilded molding.

Exhibited: Wildenstein, New York, 1967, "Treasures of the Walters Art Gallery," cat. no. 24, attributed to Alberto di Sotio.

Provenance: Don Marcello Massarenti, Rome (Cat. 1881, no. 5, and Cat. 1897, no. 12, as Margaritone d'Arezzo). Acquired with the Massarenti collection in 1903.

SCHOOL OF FLORENCE

2. *Crucifix* (Inv. no 37.710) PLATE 2

This painted cross shows the dead Christ and, in the terminals at left and right, the mourning Virgin and St. John the Evangelist. We can assume from study of similar crucifixes that a disc, perhaps representing the Redeemer blessing, must have been attached to the top of the cross. The shaft that extended below the feet of Christ is also missing.

Both the iconography and the style of this crucifix indicate the strong influence of Cimabue. While the figure of St. John and the rendering of Christ's arms, legs and loincloth refer to Cimabue's crucifix in the church of Santa Croce in Florence, other elements, such as the figure of the Virgin and the modeling of Christ's torso, would seem to be related to the much earlier crucifix in the church of San Domenico at Arezzo. The latter is usually believed to have been painted by the young Cimabue while still under the influence of Coppo di Marcovaldo. It seems likely that the Walters crucifix was executed by a minor painter in Florence during the late 1280s; however, the possibility that it originated in a provincial town between Florence and Arezzo is not to be discarded completely.

The inscription is reconstructed from traces of the original on the *cimasa*: IHS.NACARE | NVS. REX. IV | DEORVM.

ITALIAN PAINTINGS IN THE WALTERS ART GALLERY

By FEDERICO ZERI, with Condition Notes by Elisabeth C. G. Packard. Edited by Ursula E. McCracken. Published by the Trustees, Baltimore, 1976. Two volumes: xx + 650 pp., 503 halftones on 299 plates; eight color illustrations. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (27 × 19.5 cm.). Cloth bound. Artist, subject and location indices included. \$75.00

The Italian paintings in the Walters Art Gallery are of unusual interest and rarity. The some 475 works included in this catalogue date from the late twelfth to the eighteenth century and constitute one of the most comprehensive collections to be found in the United States. Over the last ten years these paintings have been the subject of intensive study by the distinguished art historian, Federico Zeri, who has catalogued the great collections in Rome of the Spada and the Pallavicini Galleries, and in New York, of the Metropolitan Museum. In many cases, Dr. Zeri has been successful in identifying panels which relate to works in the Walters collection, often reconstructing the original make-up of an altarpiece, predella or cassone frontal.

Most of the Italian paintings in the Gallery were acquired in 1902 when Henry Walters purchased the collection of Don Marcello Massarenti, under-almoner to the Holy See. While many of the earlier paintings were published by Bernard Berenson in his *Lists*, the collection as a whole has remained relatively unknown. Included in the group is the oldest Italian painting in America, a fragment of a large cross from the late twelfth century showing the Mourning Madonna (reproduced on the cover of this prospectus). Major masters of every period are represented, such as Lorenzo Monaco, Fra Filippo Lippi, Pinturicchio, Raphael, Veronese, Tiepolo and Francesco Guardi. An extraordinary group of Tuscan mannerists includes works by Santi di Tito, Pontormo, Bronzino, Rosso Fiorentino and Giorgio Vasari. Of the baroque paintings one might single out works by Domenico Fetti, Bernardo Strozzi, Alessandro Turchi, and Baciccio. Dr. Zeri's studies of the eighteenth-century pictures have disclosed an unsuspected wealth of material, especially of the Roman School. In the collection, *vedute* by Panini and formal portraits by Pompeo Batoni are complemented by more intimate works of the period by Michele Rocca, Pietro Longhi and others.

The technical examination and cleaning of the paintings in the Walters Conservation Laboratory has brought to light much fascinating data which is recorded in the condition notes accompanying every catalogue entry. Each entry includes a short biography of the artist, a discussion of the subject and style of the painting, and a comprehensive history of the critical discussion surrounding each work.

Every painting is illustrated in this two-volume catalogue which is also provided with an index of artists, a subject index and a location index. Representing the most advanced scholarship in the field, this catalogue is an indispensable reference work for those interested in the history of Italian painting.

Design by Klaus Gemming, New Haven, Connecticut

Order from Museum Store, Walters Art Gallery, 600 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201. Payment is required with your order.